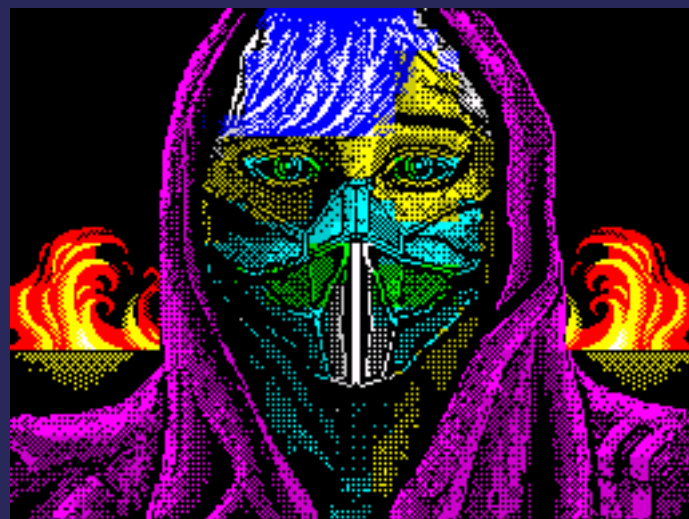# Al's SPECTRUM

Annual 2021

Spec-Art

Andy Green - Back To The Future - Leonardo da Vinci

Blogerator - Too late...

Trixs - Spy

Shuran33 - In The Red Towel

MCH - ZXmas

Craig Howard - Jetpac RX

Editorial

2020 has been a difficult year for everyone, due to the global Covid-19 pandemic that dramatically affected the lives of the world's population. Although they have been involved in this occurrence, too, Spectrum fans were at least able to console themselves with the scene dedicated to their favorite platform, a scene that kept on being quite lively, even more than in 2019. Therefore, even more so after the positive reception met in 2020, I decided to compose and publish an Annual for 2021 as well.

The intention is always, first of all, to present my personal selection of games from all those released for the Spectrum last year. Each one is reviewed and presented with a brief critical judgment. A bit like a "Michelin guide", where all the titles here mentioned are recommended to play or at least to try, with a rating stemming from their features in terms of technical aspects, playability, depth, imagination and so on. Putting this "anthology" together for the 2021 Annual was even more challenging than last year, because the quantity and quality of the releases were such as to imply an arduous choice. Therefore, it was inevitable to raise the number of titles to be included.

Hence the significantly increased number of pages - 52 against 32 - compared to the previous Annual.

But 2020 for the Spectrum scene has also been the year of the definitive affirmation of the Next. The fully assembled machines were delivered and a second campaign on Kickstarter, conducted in a shorter time than the first, managed to raise almost two million pounds from more than 5,000 backers. These are numbers that could hardly have been imagined for such a "niche" project. The first games and applications taking full advantage of the considerable resources made available by the 21st century Spectrum are beginning to appear, and only time will tell how far we shall go.

The 2021 Annual continues with a glimpse of the *Power Up! Action Pack,* a collection of games distributed on a Dandanator cartridge, and an interview with Jose "Boriel" Rodriguez, creator of the ZX Basic, which is becoming more and more popular among developers.

Like the previous one, this Annual ends with a "behind the scenes" feature about the titles I released in 2020, namely *Funky Fungus Reloaded* and *Ad Lunam Plus,* and the anticipations of my projects for 2021.

Enjoy the reading!

Messina, February 2021

Alessandro Grussu

Contents

REVIEWS RATINGS

★ **TRY IT:** keep it into consideration.

★★ **PLAY IT:** start with it, and if you like it, keep going at it.

★★★ **DON'T MISS IT:** give priority to these.

★★★★ **MASTERPIECE:** the best that can be wished for.

GAME OF THE YEAR:
the most impressive title among those released in the year. Essential!

COSMIC PAYBACK ★★★★
John Connolly
Languages: English, Spanish

Earth, year 2562. An alien invasion has deprived the planet of all its gold reserves, bringing not only the economy but also the production of electronic devices to its knees. To solve the problem, a search module is quickly assembled and sent to Amalthea, a satellite of Jupiter, where a large amount of gold has been found. The module is conceived as a sphere capable of absorbing the deposits of the precious metal by bouncing on them. You will then have to guide it along fifteen zones of increasing complexity in order to recover the gold for the benefit of all mankind.

The premise is just a pretext to introduce *Cosmic Payback,* a game where in fact you are not dealing with metals or mines, but with a three-dimensional landscape composed of squares of different appearance, smoothly flowing under your eyes while you control an incessantly bouncing sphere. At the same time, you should be careful not to go beyond the limits of the playing area, nor to touch a type of square that makes you lose a life. Along the way, your task will be to collect all the squares of "gold" – indicated by a flashing checkered pattern – scattered around each level, and then reach the exit. You will find teleporters, moving platforms, switches to negotiate otherwise impassable passages, surfaces that disappear when the sphere bounces on them, and more. The first levels are rather linear, but soon they become wider and more complex, and as a consequence, carrying out your mission becomes more and more difficult. Luckily, you can restart the game from an already reached level through a system of identification codes. There is also an "arcade" mode, with endless lives, but it does not give points.

Cosmic Payback is very reminiscent of historical titles such as *Trailblazer* and *Impossaball,* where the player controls a bouncing ball in a three-dimensional scrolling space, with the not insignificant difference that the scenery here flows in eight directions, not just horizontally or vertically. The technical realization is flawless: the playing area moves without a hitch (especially noticeable is the transition effect when activating the teleporter) and the inertial control of the sphere is very accurate. Pleasant tunes play during the action when playing on the 128K models. As a game in itself, *Cosmic Payback* is as immediate to pick up as it is difficult to quit: the increasing complexity of the levels pushes the player to try and try again, until the desired goal is reached.

Cosmic Payback can easily be mistaken for the work of some particularly unconventional master of the past – the name that comes to my mind mostly is Pete Cooke – and instead it is, a truly surprising fact for the writer, the work of a 18-year-old youngster who learned to code in Z80 Assembly for pleasure. Besides being an excellent game in itself, it is also a breath of fresh air in the context of Spectrum homebrew productions, which too often tends to reiterate the usual two or three basic formulas. Without any doubt, one of the best titles of the last few years.

YOYO'S GREAT ADVENTURE ★★
Rafal Miazga
Language: English

Prolific Polish author Rafal Miazga is back with a dynamic adventure, a genre he already tried in the past *(Skyscraper Of Doom, Streets Of Doom),* this time structured as a clone of the venerable *Dizzy.* The background story is nothing particular: Yoyo, a strange round being, is struck by a lightning bolt that suddenly displaces him from his own world, where everyone is cheerful and happy, to pre-Christian Poland. He will then have to perform several tasks in order to return to his own dimension.

The setting is the most interesting aspect of *Yoyo.* Rafal populated the game world with characters inspired by the myths and legends of his country, not failing to provide links to Wikipedia and other websites for those who want to know more. As for the rest, *Yoyo* can be played without too much difficulty: puzzles are obvious enough and you do not risk to lose lives very much. Personally I would have preferred to be able to talk more than once with the characters after they give the details on what to do or look for, because sometimes it might be confusing to keep track of the various tasks to perform and a reminder wouldn't be bad. The fact that you have to restart the game from the first location every time Yoyo loses one of his lives is a bit annoying.

From a technical point of view, the game shows colorful but rather schematic graphics; on 128K you can hear a nice melody playing along, otherwise sound is not very present.

Ultimately, *Yoyo* is a good *Dizzy* without Dizzy, with an original setting as its main feature. It will certainly appeal to all fans of the genre, while for everyone else it could be, due to its not very high difficulty, a good introduction.

RUSSIAN RAILWAY MAGNATE ★★
Andrew771 [Andrej Sharin]
Languages: English, Russian

Strategy/management games are not very popular with retro players. On the one hand, we live in an era dominated by instant gratification, where the average attention span is short and people are not very willing to "work hard" to get something. On the other hand, most of the "retro" world is made up of individuals who have to divide themselves between work, family, etc. so they don't have much time to dedicate to video games, especially those requiring commitment, perseverance, planning, decision making. Therefore, the vast majority

of the new titles are fast and immediate arcade games (often even quick to complete), and for those who want more, there isn't much to choose from. Thankfully, *Russian Railway Magnate* makes it possible to effectively fill this gap.

The player impersonates a railroad tycoon competing with other two, played by the computer. You can choose between nine figures of Russian railway transport history from different times, ranging from the first half of the 19th century to the present day. The goal is to connect as many cities of the Russian Empire as possible to your railway network and prevent others from doing so, eventually becoming a monopolist.

Game action is performed on a large scrolling map of Russia, where cities, railway lines, forests and rivers are

schematically depicted, and is turn-based. Each turn, you place a part of a railway track, always starting from an already existing one or from a city connected to your network.

In fact, building and maintaining a network costs a lot, and to earn money, you need cities. Each city gives you an income depending on the amount of cargo in it, as well as the tariff for transportation, which it's your task to set. When a city is connected to rail lines belonging to more than one tycoon, the income it generates gets assigned to the tycoon who sets the lowest tariff. If tariffs are the same, the income is divided equally between the three tycoons.

Playing as Kaganovich (mainly because he and Witte were the only characters in the game I ever heard of), I won not only by blocking the opponents' expansion in my network, but also by keeping an eye on their tariffs, so that by lowering mine of 1 each turn, the income from contested cities went always into my pockets. I also noticed that the computer seems to go as low as possible, then raises the tariff back to 30 each time. A sort of attrition war, but it helped me in the long run.

In the end, the game shows itself to be actually simpler than it sounds: basically, you need to connect cities in the most efficient way to avoid wild expenses, and try not to
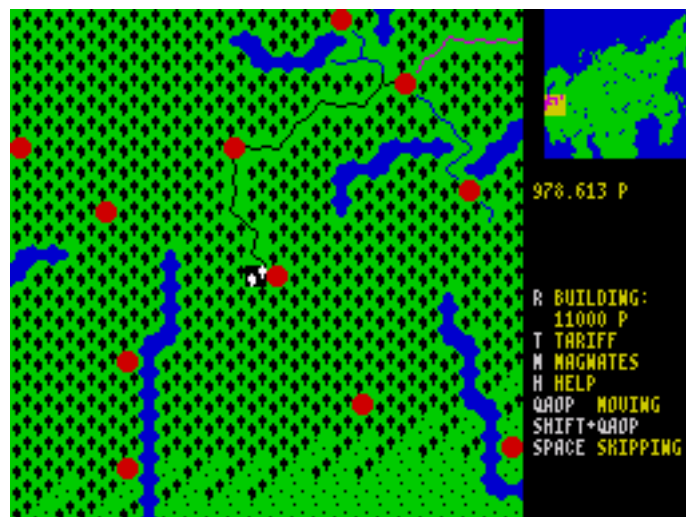
be cornered by your adversaries. Meanwhile, you should remember that since you cannot cross your opponents' lines, you should be careful not to be cut off, but you could also do the same to them, forcing them to build more convoluted paths, so that their maintenance expenses become higher.

A feature I miss is the possibility of assigning the other tycoons to human players as a hot-seat multiplayer mode. *Russian Railway Magnate* is nonetheless absorbing and challenging: we definitely need more titles like this one.

COLORISTIC ZX ★★
Daniel Krautwurst/Martin Borik
Language: English
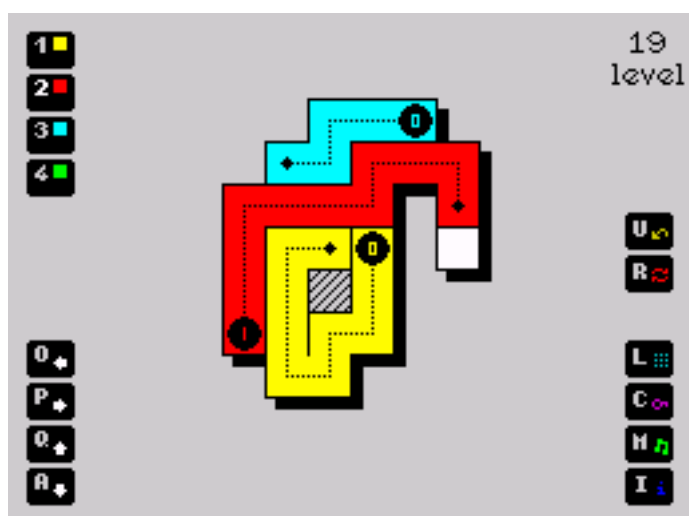
Like many other puzzles, *Coloristic ZX* requires to perform a simple task under increasingly difficult conditions. In each of the 80 levels you have to color all the squares of a scheme, starting from a certain location. At the

beginning, as usual, levels flow quickly, allowing the player to become familiar with the basic concept: there is only one color and no obstacles appear.

Going on, the first difficulties come: multiple starting locations of different colors – there can be up to four – each with its number of squares to color; one-way squares; squares that must be colored only in a fixed color; schemes with entry and exit points connected together; and so on.

If you realize you made a mistake, just press R to start the level over. Each level can also be recalled by pressing C and entering an alphanumeric code of 8 elements. This code is shown to the player at the end of the relevant level.

The Spectrum conversion of a title for mobile devices, *Coloristic ZX* is a good brainteaser with a minimal design, which due to its immediacy will also appeal to those who usually do not pay much attention to this type of games.

ALIEN GIRL ★★

Javier Fopiani, Greenwebsevilla [Antonio Pérez]
Languages: English, Spanish
Notes: authored with MK1; complete version for sale (128K-only, digital distribution)

Aliana, the first hybrid between human and xenomorph from the planet Atlas, has begun her personal war against the two races. With the only help of Alma, her navigation system, Aliana has three goals. First, 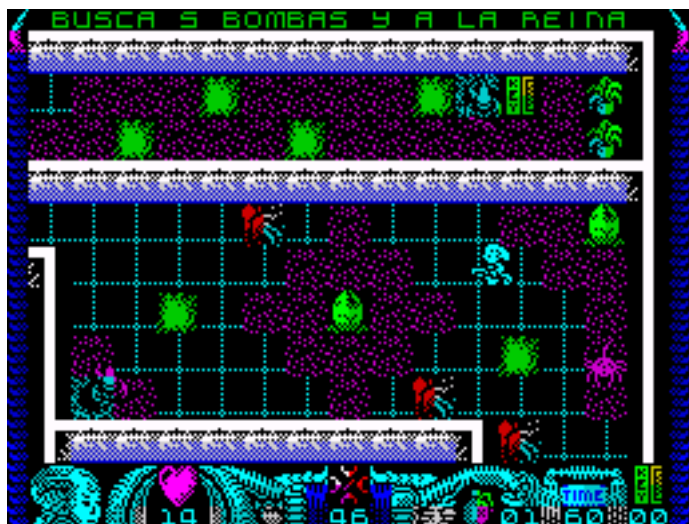she has to cleanse the alien research center, where humans were slaughtered by aliens. Then she must attack the xenomorph colony on the planet Acheron. Finally, she has to take over the spaceship *Decoud,* used by humans to transport alien life forms, and destroy the Alien Queen once and for all.

Each of the three objectives corresponds to one of the three levels in which *Alien Girl,* a shooter/maze game created by Javier Fopiani with the Churrera MK1, is divided. Acting as the "half-breed" Aliana, you will have to make your way by spraying bullets around three levels, collecting keycards to open doors leading to the various sections and bombs to place at the end of the path, after which you must return to the starting point within 60 seconds. Sometimes you will get stuck in a screen until you eliminate a certain number of enemies, which are constantly flowing; blocks can be moved in order to slow them down, or stop them. At the end of the third level, the alien queen will have to be destroyed with your rifle as you won't have any bomb at your disposal.

Clearly inspired by the movie franchise inaugurated by Ridley Scott more than forty years ago, *Alien Girl* has been carefully crafted: the intermission and endgame screens, Greenwebsevilla's music score and, above all, the size of the game world and the continuous, non-stop combat action are its strengths. Sprites are nice – I liked

Aliana in particular – but settings do not look equally well done, with some dubious color choices, especially in the second level, and they also tend to a certain uniformity. The main criticism, however, is an excessive linearity: levels follow a distinct "find the object/look for the key/open the door/repeat" pattern, somewhat mitigated in the third level, where Aliana also has to operate some terminals. A diversification between the tasks to perform in the levels or a greater complexity in their layout would have given more depth to the game.

You can freely download a demo version of *Alien Girl* for the 48K, including the first and second level. The complete game, with AY music, digitized speech and in-game screens, can be purchased as a digital download from the author's page on the *itch.io* website. In addition to the game you will receive a manual in PDF format, some development images, background music in both AY and live recorded format and even two videos, a presentation trailer and a "making of" where the author himself shows the process that led to the creation of the game. You can then receive, at a minimum cost of two euros, much more besides the game itself, which, again, is made with care and fun to play despite its limitations.

THE WITCH ★★
Serranito
Languages: English, Spanish
Note: authored with AGD

If just by looking at the screenshot published on this page you get the impression that you have already seen this

game, you are not wrong. *The Witch* is in fact a remake of the classic *Cauldron* from Palace, made with Arcade Game Designer. Compared to the original, sprites are somewhat slower, the map is slightly smaller and has a more linear structure, and most of the screens in the platform-based part have been simplified. On the 128K, some background tunes – at times too lively for the game's "dark" setting – play along while the player-controlled witch wanders around. Apart from that, the goal is always the same: you must find the ingredients of a magic potion that will allow the protagonist to become the queen of witches. The small simplifications make *The Witch* a tad less arduous than *Cauldron,* which was already quite challenging. If you loved the old Palace classic, you will also love this new version; if you didn't… well, try it anyway, you might change your mind.

LA RELIQUIA ★★
Angel Colaso
Languages: English, Spanish
Note: authored with Multi-Platform AGD

In 1533, a monk returns to the monastery of St. Camillus after a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Unfortunately, he has the unpleasant surprise of finding the place haunted by hostile presences, while his brothers have disappeared. Acting as the cleric, you have to collect a series of objects – rosaries, crucifixes etc. – in order to open the way to the relic kept in the monastery, the only weapon able of defeating the forces of evil. However, it won't be an easy task: the only defense against monsters are the player's reflexes, since you can only avoid them.
La Reliquia (*The Relic* in the English translation) is a rather large platform/collect-em-up title (it includes about 40 full-screen locations). The difficulty level is not very hard at the beginning, but becomes more taxing as you proceed. There are also adventure elements, some of which are pretty unusual, for example the "leap of faith" recalling a well-known scene from *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade* (but be careful, it's a trap!). Carrying objects to certain locations will allow you to unlock other sections of the game world, up to the final confrontation. Throughout the game, the main problem will be to avoid the countless hazards that will make you lose a life when touched.

Angel Colaso's debut is interesting: while following the typical stylistic features of the genre, the game shows some original and curious features. Graphics are functional, although the screens look rather schematic, while on the 128K some AY music can be heard during the game, including two compositions by Aleksandr Lihoded. If these are the beginnings, let's look forward to try other productions from Angel.

DEVWILL TOO ZX ★
Amaweks [Paulo Villalva]
Languages: English, Portuguese
Notes: authored with Multi-Platform AGD; for sale (digital distribution)

Devwill Too ZX is the Spectrum conversion of a title the author made for the Sega Megadrive. It is a platform game where you play as a Homunculus, a strange artificial being, locked inside a large labyrinth consisting of caves, tunnels, rooms and so on. Its goal is to escape and find an answer to the fundamental question: who am I and where do I come from? To advance to otherwise

unreachable parts of the game world, the Homunculus must find two objects: one enables it to break blocks with the horn on its forehead, the other to perform a double jump. Jumping also allows it to get rid of the strange creatures, deadly when touched, roaming the various locations.

The most striking aspect, just at first glance, of *Devwill Too ZX* is the graphic style: stylized, unusual and very colorful. The environments are reasonably varied too. In addition, on the 128K, pleasant tunes play as the Homunculus moves around. Technically the game is then really noteworthy. However, it also shows some flaws. Several screens have been "recycled" in order to expand the game world, and this can cause disorientation, as well as giving a not pleasant feeling of "been there". In addition, enemies are not particularly noticeable for either their appearance or the danger they pose to the Homunculus. Despite this, *Devwill Too ZX* is interesting and well worth the small price asked by its author to download it from his page on the *itch.io* website.

GODKILLER 2 EXILE (NEW TIMELINE EDITION) ★★
Apsis/Neil Parsons [Ignacio Prini Garcia]
Language: English
Note: authored with MK2

The new edition of the *Godkiller* saga, inaugurated last year, continues with this second chapter where the protagonist, after opening the portal of Mnar, finds himself inside the City of Dis, where the damned souls suffer eternal torments. The Godkiller's powers are denied in this place beyond space and time, so he will have to search for some objects scattered here and there in order to regain his powers and escape the City for the final battle: 15 lost souls, enclosed within spheres of astral energy, to set free; the Chronolion, an artifact that allows him to leave the atemporal dimension where the City is located; a torch burning with the fire of the Styx, the infernal river; and a tablet bearing runic inscriptions. When the Godkiller is in possession of these items, he will be able to cross the portal located at the far north of the City.

In order to temporarily neutralize the enemies, since they regenerate every time you come back to the various game screens, you can launch energy projectiles.
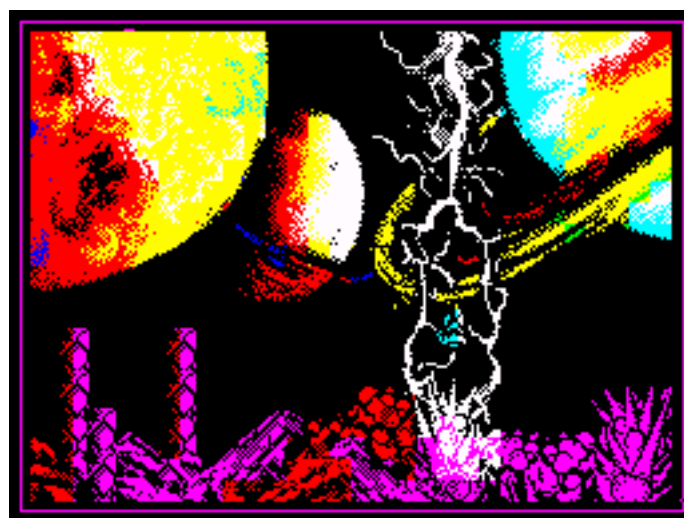
Contrarily to the first 2015 version, you do not have an infinite supply: scattered around the playing area there are some heaps of 20 shots each. Ambrosia amphoras that give the Godkiller two lives when picked up are still

there. It is then necessary to pay close attention to the doors that can be opened with the keys: it might happen to waste a key to open an unnecessary door, that can be bypassed (it is located in the south-east part of the map near the Chronolion), with the risk of putting the player in a situation where there is no way to proceed and you have to start the game over. Honestly, it would have been better not to insert such a trap in the game.

Anyway, this restyling of *Godkiller II* is pleasant to look at, thanks to its more detailed and colorful graphics than the previous version, as well as to listen to – the background music, still composed by Neil Parsons, adds atmosphere – and above all to play. A classic, high quality labyrinth game. Now let's wait for the third and final chapter!

WUDANG ★★
Ariel Ruiz
Languages: English, Spanish
Nota: written in BASIC

Year 1281. Kublai Khan, grandson of Genghis, emperor of China and founder of the Yüan dynasty, began a persecution against the local Taoist religion, in favor of Buddhism, imported from India a few centuries earlier. Taoist writings are burned, and monks are forced to convert to Buddhism on pain of death. On the Wudang Mountains, the Temple of the Purple Cloud is turned into a Buddhist temple; only one of the monks refuses the forced conversion and for this he is incarcerated in the dungeons of the complex, awaiting execution. His friend Qi Wen Wei, a skilled swordsman, forgoes an escape to safe lands to free him.

This is the premise of *Wudang,* the latest work by Ariel Ruiz, author of such masterpieces as *Escuela De Ladrones, Carlos Michelis* and *Redshift*. The player, in the role of Qi

Wen Wei, must run through the temple complex, facing the numerous guards, also armed with swords, patrolling the place. In combat, Qi Wen Wei can parry and attack: learning the coordination between attack and defense is essential, if you do not want to see your *qi* – vital energy, according to Taoist doctrine – drop to zero, which causes the game to end. By defeating guards and Wu wizards, capable of firing magic balls, either your qi returns to its maximum value, or you get a key (there are six in all) to open the doors of its corresponding color.

The maximum qi value at the beginning is 9; you can increase it by two every time you complete one of the two sub-games in Wudang. The first is a sort of *Breakout* played with two bamboo sticks instead of the usual bat: you must eliminate all the colored bricks, taking care not

to hit the "demons" (two red bricks) as this makes a bar at the bottom of the screen decrease, and when the bar is completely gone, you have to start over. The second is a visual puzzle, in which you must push three mice along some platforms, until they reach a container, bearing in mind that each of them starts from a box of a certain color, and when a mouse touches an obstacle of that color, it disappears.

Wudang is entirely programmed in BASIC, but the speed and smoothness of the sprite movements are amazing; it's a little programming miracle. As a game itself, it is pretty straightforward, and once you learn how to defend and counterattack, taking down enemies will become almost automatic, even on the highest difficulty level (there are three). Besides, the sub-games add a nice diversion. The graphic aspect is a bit simple but overall pleasant, while sound is limited to a beeper tune and a few short blips. In a nutshell, *Wudang* is a good action/exploration title, not particularly original maybe, but fun and crafted with care.

MARSMARE ALIENATION (128K) ★★★
Drunk Fly [Evgenija Zapolnova, Nikolai Zapolnov, Evgenij Rogulin, Oleg Nikitin]
Languages: English, Russian, Spanish
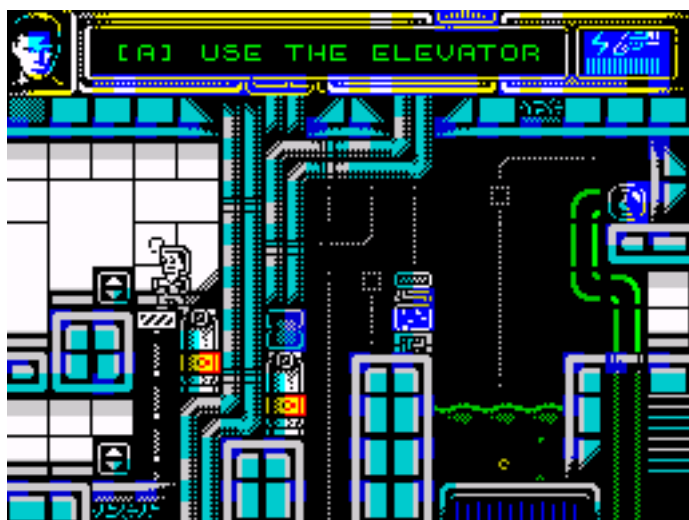
Marsmare Alienation is a pure action title, with a traditional flavor starting from the plot, narrated by a nice animated introduction. On a quiet July night, the inhabitant of a house in the middle of a forest is kidnapped by some evil extraterrestrials and taken to their base on Mars. It is easy to imagine that your aim will be to get the poor soul back home, facing the alien hordes.

The game is a classic platform/shooter: first you must get hold of a laser gun, not only to take down the enemies, but also to disable the numerous force fields barring the sections of the base, by shooting their generators. The gun has only 16 rounds, but luckily there is no shortage of ammunition to find. Along the way you will then have to find 20 crystals and 25 units of fuel needed to start a UFO placed on the surface of the planet, necessary in order to return to Earth. The last section takes place outside the base, so you will also need a spacesuit equipped with a jetpack before exiting from there. By pressing the "M" key, a window with a map showing the already visited areas will appear on the screen – very useful for finding your way through the base. There are also several checkpoints to activate; when the main character loses all his energy, the game restarts from the last one reached.

Technically speaking, *Marsmare Alienation* is first class; it is a pleasure to see and hear. The playing area takes up almost the entire size of the screen, backdrops are colorful and well drawn, but not cluttered with details, so as to avoid sprites getting confused with them. Sprites, in turn, move rapidly – the main character, in particular, walks maybe a little too fast – and smoothly. The AY soundtrack is pleasant and underlines the unfolding of the game action adequately. On the other hand, *Marsmare Alienation* reminds of a large number of already seen titles, from *Dan Dare* onwards. Gameplay is based on a well-known and tested formula, without touches of particular originality. The fact that in order to proceed we must find and destroy the generators, as well as the part where the main character moves in the spacesuit, makes the game less linear, but not that much. Ultimately, it's an "old tale", albeit very well told.
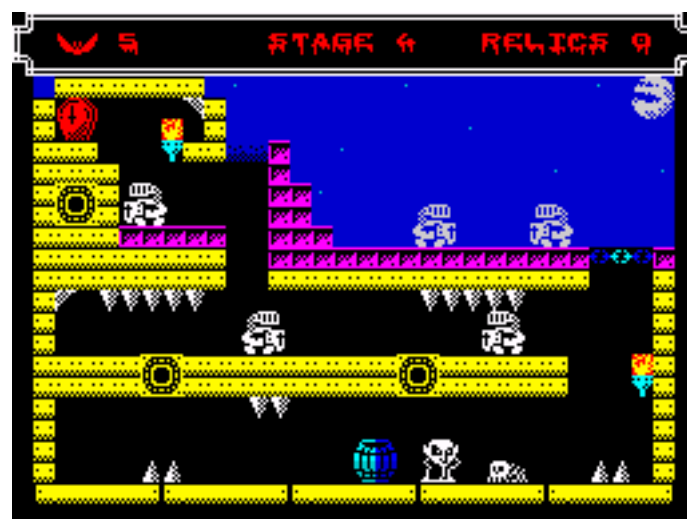
VAMPIRE VENGEANCE ★ ★ ★
Ariel Endaraues
Language: English
Note: authored with AGD

A long time ago, a strong army of knights attacked the residence of the evil vampire Count Orlack, aiming to put and end to his reign of terror. The battle was bloody, but in the end the attackers prevailed and stormed the castle. Surrounded, Orlack turned into a bat and fled. Now he returns, with only one purpose: vengeance.

In *Vampire Vengeance,* you guide Orlack through 30 screens full of enemies of various kinds and hazards such as spikes, icy and slippery platforms, acid pools and more. Orlack can walk, or fly when turning into a bat. If he is in human form, he can attack enemies by sucking their blood until they die. In some screens you must also collect "relics", which appear as chalices. After eliminating the enemies and collecting the relics, a coffin opens, giving access to the next screen.

Vampire Vengeance reinvents the traditional single-screen platformer scheme with a challenging gameplay, where attention and timing skills are required, especially when Orlack attacks an enemy, as he remains stationary and vulnerable for a few seconds, and due to the necessity of alternating between the human and bat forms according to the circumstances. Graphics are functional: cute cartoonisth sprites – Orlack in particular looks like a "super deformed" version of the famous Nosferatu played by Max Schreck in the 1922 movie by F.W. Murnau of the same name – move on stylized but colorful and uncluttered backdrops. In addition to the sound effects, pleasant tunes for the AY chip play along on the 128K.

This game is the confirmation that was to be expected from Ariel Endaraues. Made with care, with a variety of elements and a challenging but not frustrating action, *Vampire Vengeance* is one of the best titles programmed with AGD ever.

MANIC PANIC ★ ★
Norman Sword
Language: English

Clones of *Manic Miner* are a dime a dozen on the Spectrum (even this writer made one!), so they must necessarily possess some remarkable quality in order to distinguish themselves from the crowd. *Manic Panic* is one of these, for various reasons.

First of all, it does not use the original game engine or a derivative of it, which allows it to introduce many new features. For example: sprites now are "masked"; the playing area size can range from a simple "window" to the entire screen; enemies can be as little as 4 pixels high and collide with each other without causing Willy to lose a life (a bug affecting the original code); there can be multiple conveyor belts on a single screen, even in opposite directions to each other.

But the most important innovation is the presence of six game modes, one of which, Ace, is activated after at least one of the others is completed. These are: Training, Normal, Expert, Lantern and Torch. Differences range from the amount of air available to Willy, to the behavior of nasties – whether contact with them only decreases Willy's amount of air or causes him to lose a life, as in the original game –, up to the last two, in which caves are shrouded in partial or complete darkness and Willy must rely on the beam of light, which can also be directed up or down if Willy stands still, projected by the torch placed on his helmet to illuminate the path. In particular, in Torch mode air does not decrease when Willy is immobile. Control precision is fundamental in this type of games, and certainly there are no disappointments here: Willy moves smoother and faster than in *Manic Miner* thanks to the new code.

Ultimately, the new features of *Manic Panic* are such and

so many that I believe it will be appealing even to those who are overcome by nausea just by hearing about *Manic Miner* and the like.

PATASLOCAS ★★
Beyker Soft [Sergio Vaquer Montes, Igor Errazkin, Jorge Del Llano]
Language: English
Note: written in BASIC

Pataslocas is a low-life thief who also tried, without much luck, to become a boxer. One night, fate seems to turn on his side: he manages to steal a large sum from a bank, but is frightened by the distant sound of a siren (later it will turn out to be a false alarm). Stricken by panic, he throws the loot into the sewer manholes to hide it. He then dives into the tunnels beneath the city to retrieve the bags of money, without even imagining the risks he is about to face.

The player acts as the eponymous protagonist in a platform game divided into five levels, each one consisting of four screens. In each level you must find four money bags, then reach the exit. In addition to the labyrinthine structure of the levels and the presence of many types of dangers, such as bats, nails on the ground, rats, flooded areas and so on, you must collect some icons which allow you to perform some basic actions, required to proceed within the game. In fact, at the beginning of each level, Pataslocas can only move left and right. Icons increase his abilities, for example by enabling him to jump or to operate elevators. As if that were not enough, time is against you, as Pataslocas is going to die suffocated by the poisonous sewage fumes. Collecting an oxygen tank will give him all the air he needs to avoid such an unglorious demise.

Pataslocas is a platform/collect-em-up title with some puzzle elements. To negotiate the not very large, but intricate levels, it will be necessary to make use of all the skills that the character can acquire through the appropriate icons and understand which ones to use in order to overcome the obstacles that stand between you and your goal.

Featuring nice and colorful graphics, *Pataslocas* lets itself be played quite well, requiring a certain effort from the player in order to complete it. Being entirely programmed in BASIC, however, it is sometimes rather slow and this is particularly noticeable in an action game. However, the "thinking" aspect makes it stand out from the mass of similar titles and provides its most important quality.

DUNGEONS OF GOMILANDIA ★★★
RetroWorks
Language: English

Dungeons Of Gomilandia is the sequel to *Gommy Defensor Medieval,* also produced in 2009 by Retroworks. In the previous game, the protagonist Gommy – a sort of anthropomorphic potato – defended the castle of Gomilandia from a horde of monstrous invaders, throwing stones on their heads from the battlements; it was in fact an updated version of the ancient *Siege,* created in 1983 for the Spectrum 16K by a then unknown Mike Singleton.

Having accomplished the feat, Gommy rushes into the throne room to tell the good news to the king, but with dismay he realizes that a skeleton is sitting on the throne and that the enemies, while he was busy throwing stones, had already entered the castle. The poor soul is then captured and thrown into the dungeons of Gomilandia, where Justice herself offers him a chance to escape.
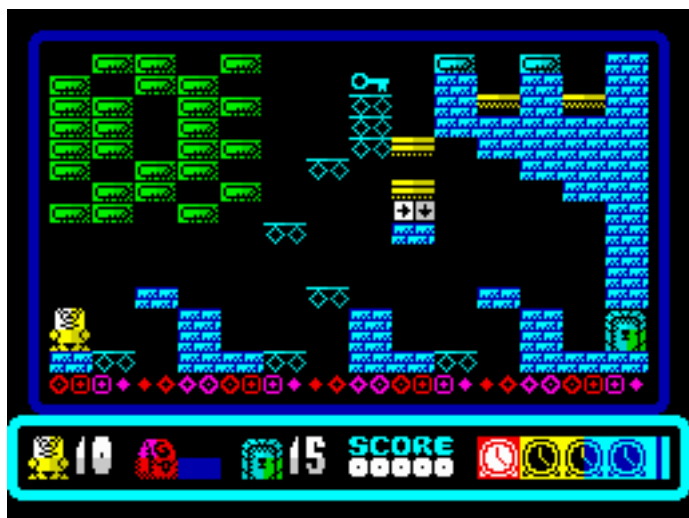
Each of the 54 rooms the dungeon is divided into contains a key and a door that gives access to the next room. Within a tight time limit, Gommy has to collect the key and reach the door; if he fails, he will lose a life. To do this, he must use blocks as a sort of ladder; he can only carry one at a time, and cannot climb them if the pile is higher than a single block. During the adventure, other types of blocks appear: some can be used as moving platforms to move horizontally and vertically, others quickly crumble when Gommy walks upon them, others are fixed, therefore they cannot be taken, or are deadly to the touch. Even falling from a height of more than two blocks will cost Gommy a life.

Dungeons Of Gomilandia is a first-rate puzzle game. Graphics are mostly basic, but clean and colorful, without a hint of "color clash"; besides, the character's expressions are particularly funny. Sound is made of beeper effects and tunes and underlines the game action effectively. The 54 levels are all very different from each other and of increasing difficulty, and this means they will be able to hold the player's attention for a long time. However, the game's authors wisely thought of assigning a code to each one of them, so that it is possible, through a dedicated option in the start menu, to restart after the "Game Over" from an already reached level. There is even an "arcade" mode, where the time limit is removed, but no points are scored.

Finally, as further proof of the care the game was made with, there is the lovely user manual, which tells the background story through a really nice comic strip. There is no denying: *Dungeons Of Gomilandia* is a real "gem"!

RED RAID THE BEGINNING ★★★★

ZX-Bitles [Sergey Yakimovich, Alexey Krivtsov, Yaroslav Yakimovich]
Languages: English, German, Italian, Spanish
Note: authored with ZX BASIC

A character who recently joined the ranks of a mysterious mercenary organization must face some tests to prove he is worthy of being part of it. He must infiltrate an enemy base, getting rid of the guards that populate it, and at the same time searching for Daisy, his pet rabbit, who lost herself, coincidentally, right there. This is the premise of *Red Raid The Beginning,* a platform game that features an interesting blend of action and thinking.

Each individual screen represents a level. Stairs, platforms and other elements make up the place, teething with enemies ready to bump you off unceremoniously. To hit them you can use your feet, with a well-aimed kick, or shoot with your pistol, although ammunition is limited. Fortunately, there is no shortage of bullets and energy supplies, which you can also find by searching the bodies of downed enemies. These, in turn, won't just stay there while you attack them: they will return fire and kick you as well.

To negotiate the levels, however, you also need to rely on your wits. Kicking boulders into pools of water will help you not to fall into them; if necessary, a boulder can also be used to crush an enemy standing below you. The game also includes "achievements" activated in certain situations, for example when you shoot an enemy three times in a row in the head, or after pushing an enemy into water or lava with a kick. *Red Raid The Beginning* therefore shows a hybrid formula: a distinct arcade component and the configuration of the various screens, which pushes you to avoid traps and not to expose yourself unnecessarily to counterattack. In the second part, there is also a subgame: besides eliminating enemies, you must hack some terminals, and to do this you have to copy a scheme consisting of nine characters (a simple task, actually). Hacking a terminal will bring up a ladder or open a passage needed to advance.

Graphically, the game looks pretty good. Sprites and backdrops are rather stylized, but animations are convincing; the absence of "color clash" despite the variety of colors used is noticeable. Sound is minimal, with a beeper melody in the start menu and some effects during the action.

Red Raid The Beginning reinvents in an original way an extremely popular genre on the Spectrum, i.e. platform games. The mix of arcade and puzzle works greatly, it is taxing and the three levels of difficulty enhance its longevity: even the easiest one is anything but a cakewalk, so don't expect to finish it in an afternoon! It should be highlighted that several of the screens can be solved in more than a way, and running around guns blazing often causes your adventure to end prematurely. Finally, you won't need a 128K to enjoy all of this, since the game has been designed to run on the 48K.

BONNIE AND CLYDE ★

Zosya
Language: English

Bonnie and Clyde – inspired by the historic criminal duo of the 1930s – are two white kittens whose aim is to steal the money placed on the game's 80 screens and guarded by a gang of black cats. Of the two, the player controls only Clyde, while Bonnie stands at the top of the screen throwing Clyde some objects, useful or necessary to complete the task.

On each screen there are platforms, coins to collect and doors from which enemies come out. Clyde must collect all the coins first; once this is done, a safe appears, which Clyde must blow up with Bonnie's dynamite. When the safe is open, a money sack and a ladder appear, so that Clyde can reach Bonnie, thus ending the screen. Strangely, you don't need to collect the loot to get past the screen. To complicate matters, enemy cats intervene, which can take from Clyde one of his nine lives (traditionally, in Italy cats have two less!) both by touching and shooting him. Clyde can return fire, but ammo is limited, as is the time available to complete the screen. Luckily, Bonnie drops random bonuses like ammo, an hourglass to reset the time to maximum, or even a disguise that for a few seconds camouflages Clyde as a rival gang member.

There is not much else to report: apart from the backgrounds, which offer a certain variety, screens substantially differ only in the arrangement of platforms. Enemies are always the same and in the end gameplay tends to revolve around the same pattern over and over again. A somewhat disorienting fact, noticeable for example on screen 11, is that Clyde can reach a high position without jumping from a platform but by moving sideways and remaining adherent to a wall while jumping continuously in the air. Does he have some hidden plungers, perhaps?

Graphically *Bonnie And Clyde* is decent but nothing special: sprites are somewhat sketchy, while backgrounds are colorful and not overly detailed, which is perhaps a good thing since when they are, sprites tend to become less visible. Audio is represented by some beeper sound effects and a rendition of Scott Joplin's notorious *The Entertainer* on the home screen, but on the 128K you can hear AY tunes such as *Maple Leaf Rag,* also by Joplin. Ultimately, *Bonnie And Clyde* is a simple, straightforward, but neither very varied nor very deep action game. Good for "casual" players.
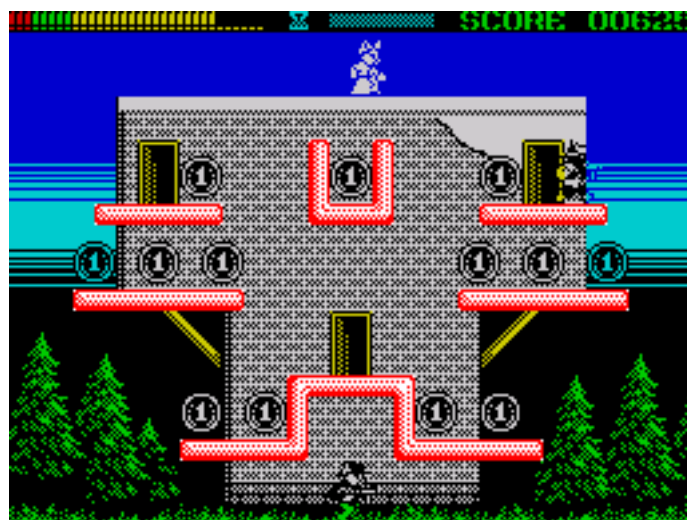
FEDERATION Z ★ ★

Furillo Productions
Languages: English, Spanish
Note: authored with MK1

The protagonist of *Federation Z* is Koji Bakuto, a great fan of *Zazinger-M,* a Japanese animated series about mega-robots (does it remind you of anything?) and a non-playing character in *Moon's Fandom Festival,* by the same author. In fact, the game is part of the same narrative universe, or rather "Mooniverse", taking its name from Moon, the likeable retrocomputing fan also seen in *Moon And The Pirates,* reviewed in the last Annual.

Federation Z moves the story into space. The Zork Federation is a group of planets expanding into the so-called Omega sector. Koji, aboard his A9K-2 starship, is hired to carry out seven missions in the service of General Zork, head of the Federation, who briefs him about the tasks to perform from time to time.

First, Koji must fly through the Omega sector and reach the central spaceport. Space is large, and a coordinate system helps you to navigate it: keeping track of interesting places becomes then indispensable. In addition, through hyperspace, Koji can set a place to return to almost instantly later, which is very advantageous. Spaceships of a hostile alien species roam the sector, and if Koji meets one of them, a subgame

begins: a kind of reverse tug-of-war, the purpose of which is to get the enemy ship away from his own, by repeatedly pressing the Fire key. Some enemies are rather weak, others are stronger, and if they collide with Koji's ship, they will take away some of its energy, which is essential to move. Energy decreases while flying and due to impacts with meteorites or projectiles from defensive satellites, which can all be eliminated by firing at them with the laser cannon, which shots are also limited.

Missions include the collection of minerals from comets – there are four types, and each comet provides only one

type – and reconnaissance of planets abandoned due to the hostile aliens' invasion. Defeating enemies, as well as selling minerals in the Ufomart chain shops, allows you to obtain credits, the Federation's currency. Credits, in turn, are used to purchase energy and ammunition, or improvements for the ship, for example the mining
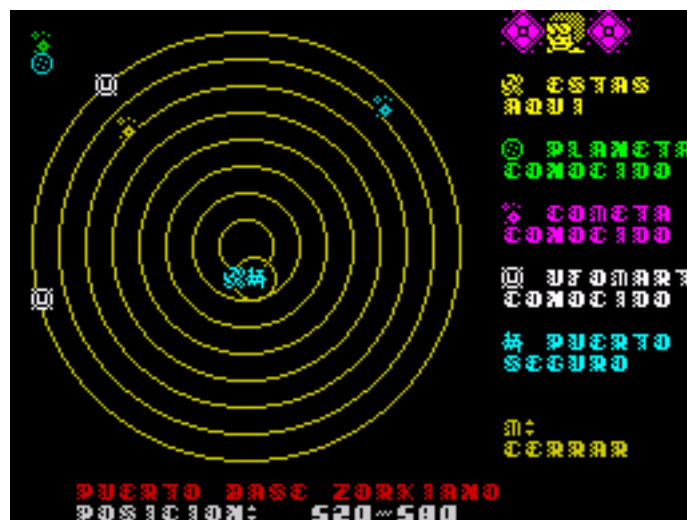
module that allows you to extract minerals from comets, or the nauta-finder, needed to understand if the lost astronauts you can meet in the sector are real castaways to save or enemy traps.

Federation Z is ultimately a sort of "light" *Elite,* an interesting mix of arcade, adventure and management. It is true that in the long run the subgame is repetitive, and you soon realize that it is easier to avoid meteorites and satellites, rather than fight them. Despite this, the variety of missions to complete is wide enough to hold the player's attention, which is the most important feature in this genre of games, much more than the graphical and sound aspects, both rather basic in *Federation Z.* Finally, it is worth underlining that the game was created with the Churrera MK1, another example of an uncommon use of this tool, almost exclusively employed for platform or maze titles.

SPRINGBOT ★
Andy Farrell
Language: English
Note: authored with AGDx

Springbot represents Andy Farrell's debut. For his first work, made with the AGD Labs' modified version of AGD Andy chose a classic platform/collect-em-up scheme. While guiding a spring-powered robot, you have to jump around, avoiding fixed and moving dangers and collecting various objects from screen to screen.

The most notable features are the detailed and pleasant graphic style and the composition of the screens, which often requires a good degree of precision and timing in both movement and jumps in order not to lose one of the robot's three "lives".

Apart from this, there is not much else to say, but as a start, *Springbot* is surely promising. Let's wait to see more from its author.
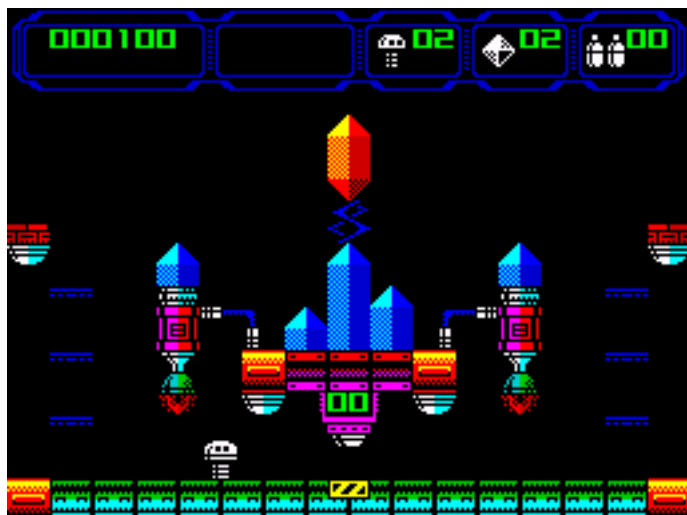
ISHIDO II - LEGACY OF THE WHITE CRANE ★★
FanZiX [Robert Mezei, David Willis]
Languages: English, Hungarian

More than a sequel, as the "II" in the title would seem to suggest, this is a new revised and expanded version of *Ishido The Way Of Stones,* made by the same author in 2015, and conversion of a game designed by Michael Feinberg and published by Accolade for various platforms in 1990.

Feinberg presented *Ishido* as if it were an ancient means of meditation in use for centuries among Chinese Taoist monks of the White Crane School. The original edition included even a 20-page booklet entitled *The Legend Of Ishido,* written by himself, telling the story of a mendicant monk who made the game known by taking it with him "one misty spring morning in 1989". Of course, this is pure literary fiction, aiming to adorn *Ishido* with an exotic atmosphere.
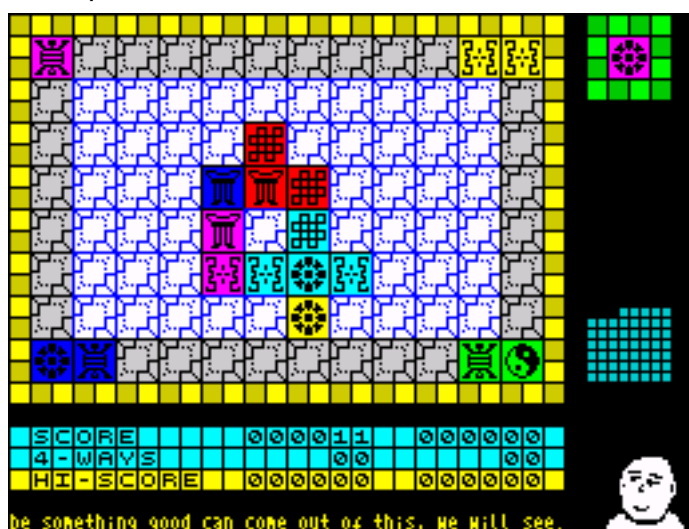

The game consists of 36 pairs of rectangular stones of 6 different colors; each one bears one of 6 different symbols, for a total of 72 stones. The aim is to place as many stones as possible on a board of 96 spaces, trying to accumulate points. The stones must be placed one at a time and always adjacent – not diagonally – to another stone, provided that the two stones have at least one attribute, color or symbol, in common. To be placed between two other stones, a stone must have the color of one and the symbol of the other.

A particularly important and rare combination is the 4-Way, i.e. a stone placed in the midst of four arranged in a cross: in this case, the stone must have the color of two of them and the symbol of the other two. All combinations give points, but only when the stones are placed on the inside of the board: the outer edge does not give points,

but stones can be placed there to begin a combination. The 4-Way, besides the maximum score, assigns a progressive bonus and increases scores for the other combinations.

You can play alone or in pairs with the computer, represented by Dalgon, the monk of the story, displayed at the bottom right, who "speaks" through a scrolling text placed at the lower edge of the screen. Dalgon comments on the player's moves and, in solo mode only, can give suggestions, up to a maximum of five.

Compared to the first version of five years ago, this new *Ishido* has significantly improved in sound and presentation; on the 128K, background music composed by David Willis is heard; the game begins with a presentation where the initial screen appears progressively while Dalgon "tells" the legend of Ishido; on the other hand, the stones sets and board styles remained unchanged. The basic algorithm has also been revised, so that pauses of even a few seconds due to the calculation of legitimate moves for the player are no longer noticed, even when many stones lie on the board. Also, you can now control the game with a Kempston or Sinclair joystick, however – and this is a step backwards from the old *Ishido* – you can no longer redefine the keys.

Ishido II Legacy Of The White Crane represents then, like its predecessor, an enjoyable diversion from the plethora of action titles (platforms, shooters, etc.) that make up the vast majority of "new" Spectrum games. The new features, while not altering its substance, are an improvement capable of making a game already interesting in itself more attractive for all those looking for something more "meditative".
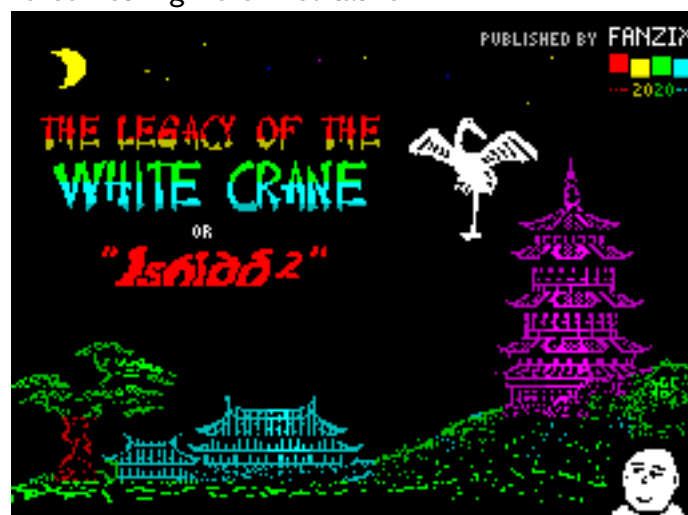
DIZZY VIII - WONDERFUL DIZZY (128K) ★★★★

Andrew Oliver, Philip Oliver, Evgeniy Barskiy, Dmitri Ponomaryov, Oleg Origin, Jarrod Bentley, Alexander Filyanov, Marco Antonio Del Campo, Sergey Kosov
Language: English

Honestly, I am not a huge fan of *Dizzy* games. When the first instalment of the saga appeared in the second half of 1987, I had already been a Spectrum user for three and a half years, and at the time the only game in the series I experienced was just that. Italy had since a couple of years become practically a Commodore colony, and finding Spectrum owners around, especially in an average-sized Southern city, was very difficult (not to mention the Amstrad or MSX which were almost unknown). Luckily, from the pages of *Sinclair User,* found by chance in May of that year in a newsstand in the city center that sold foreign magazines, I learned of what was happening across the Channel.

The only way to get new games – apart from mail order, which was very limited anyway, unless you ordered them from British distributors, which in an era when the Web did not exist and payments were carried out through postal order was a long and complicated affair – were the (in)famous tape magazines, and it was on one of them that in September 1988 I had the opportunity to experience the first *Dizzy,* with the fake title of *Bump!.* I liked it a lot: the mix between arcade and adventure worked well, and even if it wasn't up to the level of Magic Knight games – which I still consider as the highest example of this genre on the Spectrum – it seemed quite solid, above the average of budget titles.

I became acquainted with all the other titles in the series, including arcade derivatives and official *(Seymour)* and unofficial clones, only almost a decade later, when I discovered Spectrum emulation on the PC. They seemed decent to me, but none impressed me that much, as they basically rehashed the first episode's basic formula, with a few new features, like the supporting cast of the Yolkfolk. For this reason, in my videogaming memories the little egg-face does not hold the same importance as other characters such as Horace, Miner

Willy, Wally Week, the *Atic Atac* trio, Sabreman, Jetman, the *Ant Attack* boy and girl, Magic Knight etc. Moreover, Dizzy has his own share of detractors; there are those who could never stand it, for one reason or another. But although I don't particularly love it, I am not among them, so that, when three years ago a group of fans created a remake of the seventh and final chapter, *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy,* I found it to be excellent. So did the famous Oliver Twins, authors of countless titles from the early period of Code Masters, when it dominated the market for budget 8-bit computer games. Therefore, they designed the eighth official chapter of the Dizzy saga, inspired by the *Wizard of Oz* story, while the same authors of the Crystal Kingdom Dizzy remake took care of its production. The end result is *Dizzy 8 - Wonderful Dizzy,* released for free on 18 December 2020.

The story follows loosely that of *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* by Frank L. Baum. Incidentally, I had to look for it on the Internet because it is not very familiar to me (it is not as popular in Italy as it is in Anglo-Saxon countries),

discovering, among other things, that the book which was turned into the famous 1939 movie by Victor Fleming starring a very young Judy Garland, not yet, alas, devastated by alcohol and barbiturates, is only the first of a series including fourteen novels. Throughout the game, Dizzy and the Yolkfolk take on the roles of various characters from the book: Dorothy is played by Dizzy (with his trademark red boots taking the place of the well-known slippers), Pogie is Toto, Denzil is the Tin Man, Daisy is the Good Witch of the North, Grand Dizzy is Tik Tok and so on.

One day, a tornado hits the hut where Dizzy lives with his pet Pogie. The hut flies up and finally lands on the mysterious land of Oz, instantly crushing the evil Witch

of the East (Dizzy killing someone? Wow!). The other wicked witch, the one from the West, appears on the scene and takes Pogie away with her. From now on, Dizzy will have two concerns: finding Pogie and returning to his dimension. All the clues seem to lead to the mysterious Wizard of Oz, who lives in the Emerald Castle, beyond a field of poppies with the unpleasant characteristic of making Dizzy fall asleep forever, making him lose a life. A reference to opiate drugs, maybe? As a matter of fact, dangers do not lack: crows, snakes, flying monkeys and so on. What's worse, in all these years Dizzy has not yet learned to swim, so if he falls into water, even in a small stream, he will instantly drown. At least he finally admitted to be a kleptomaniac, when talking with Dozy/Scarecrow for the first time.

As in the other games in the series, Dizzy can carry a maximum of three items, and to use them, or give them to someone else, he must select them from a menu that appears by pressing Fire. Puzzles are not very difficult to

deal with, and only in one particular case I had to refer to the story told in the book. Here too, anyway, Dizzy/Dorothy will have to take out the Witch of the West to make the Wizard of Oz, or rather he who passes himself off as such as in the novel, help him and his three friends Tin Man, Scarecrow and Cowardly Lion to solve their predicaments. Dialogues between Dizzy and the other characters also contain references to the contemporary world, which at times make Dizzy bewildered, since for the most part he appears to be stuck in the early 90s; for example, he doesn't understand what Pirate Blackbeard – who happens to live in "Pirate Bay", by the way – means when he says he can find what he needs on the "dark web". There are also coins to collect, 99 to be precise, and they will be needed right at the end of the game (actually there are 100, as the Oliver Twins themselves revealed a few days after the release; one is hidden into a secret location). Generally, they are pretty easy to find, but looking for one in particular made me scratch my head quite a bit, before the intuition that allowed me to recover it.

From a technical and above all graphic point of view, it was legitimate to expect a first-class work from the authors of the *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy* remake, and *Wonderful Dizzy* does not disappoint, far from it: settings are detailed and rich in colors, with notable differences between one part of the game world and the other, so that the player is suggested the idea of a miniature universe with its specific components, from the darkness of the forest surrounding the Western witch's castle to the magnificence of the Emerald and Ruby Castles. Sprites move smoothly, and Dizzy responds to the player's inputs with remarkable precision, even if the usual rolling means that special attention must be paid when jumping. Sound consists of the usual effects and various pleasant tunes, heard at the beginning, during the game and at the end.

So what can be said about this new official chapter of the series, 28 years after *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*? Personally, I must admit that I had not been so absorbed by the vicissitudes of the eggy character since a very long time. I played it to the conclusion with great interest and pleasure. I think we have to be grateful to everyone involved in its production for making it available to the enthusiasts' community for free.

If I have to find a defect, common to this genre of games anyway, is having to walk continuously from one location to another, even when they are very distant from each other (the so-called backtracking), to carry out the necessary tasks in order to proceed with the adventure, and the fact that a little too many times we have to turn to Rosie, the character on the bridge who speaks in rhymes, to obtain useful objects by solving her riddles, which are actually simple enough. Of course, if you loathe Dizzy, or if you just don't like arcade adventures,

Wonderful Dizzy will hardly make you change your mind. For everyone else, however, it is an experience not to be missed.
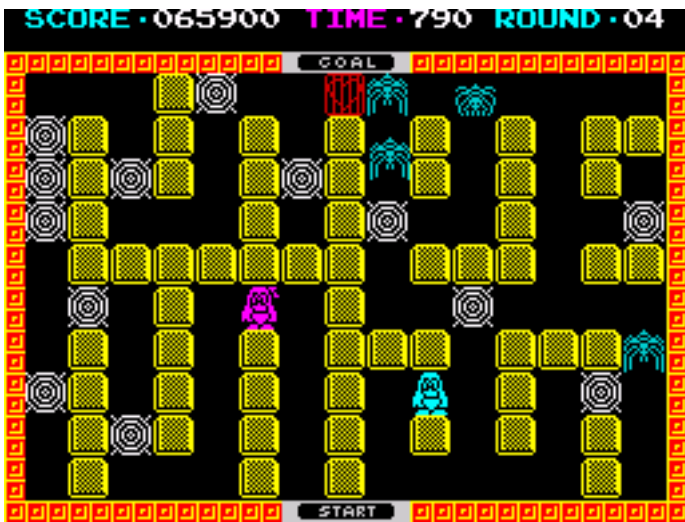

BINARY LAND ★★
Joflof
Language: English
Notes: authored with ZX BASIC; "mini" version for the 16K

Binary Land, originally released on the MSX in 1984, is a game which goal is simply to score as many points as possible throughout its 100 screens. In each screen, structured like a labyrinth, the player moves a male penguin, Gurin, and a female one, Malof, simultaneously. Depending on which of the two the player chooses to control at the beginning, the other will move in the opposite direction. Each level begins with the two cute protagonists placed at the bottom of the screen, and to proceed to the next you must take them to opposite sides of the exit, located at the top.

As it could be expected, levels are populated by enemies with a lethal touch; initially it will be spiders, which you can kill with an insecticide spray that also allows you to get rid of the cobwebs, where each of the two penguins risks getting stuck if the other does not intervene to save him or her. Later you will face wandering flames appear and an annoying bird able to fly over the walls that make up the labyrinth and swap Gurin and Malof between them if he comes into contact with one of them. As if that were not enough, the exit must be reached within a time limit, or you will lose a life.

From time to time some icons will appear on the screen. Most of them give bonus points; one bearing the image of a whale makes Gurin and Malof faster and more invulnerable for a short time. Besides, if the two characters cross each other 17 times in a row they give birth to a little penguin (!), invincible and able to defeat all the baddies.

Like many titles from the early 1980s, *Binary Land* is very simple but fun and with some unusual touches, such as the need to control two characters at the same time. On the other hand, there is not so much variety: after the first 30 screens you will have seen more or less everything the game has to offer. Despite this, it is pleasant and immediate to play.

Finally, it should be noted that the author created a "miniature" version of *Binary Land* for the 16K Spectrum!

TRANSYLVANIAN CASTLE ★

Fitosoft
Languages: English, Spanish
Note: authored with ZX BASIC

Transylvanian Castle is an adventure/exploration game inspired by the famous story narrated in Bram Stoker's *Dracula,* and by those titles of the same genre, often programmed in BASIC, which were popular in the early 1980s.

The plot goes as usual: Doctor Van Helsing, an expert in the occult, travels to Transylvania to investigate some mysterious disappearances of local people, which seem to be connected to Count Dracula, a strange character living in a castle located in an isolated place. Van Helsing enters the castle, but the heavy front door suddenly closes behind him. In order to get out, he will have to fight against strange creatures, defeat Dracula himself and find the key to the door. All within three days, otherwise the curse permeating the castle will take his life.

Van Helsing is controlled with the keyboard and may carry up to three items. These might be weapons of various strengths, a ring and a shield for protection, food or potions to recover lost energy. Weapons can be equipped in the right hand and protections in the left, thus increasing the character's attack and defense.

In the castle rooms you can find, randomly arranged at game start, common enemies and special enemies. The former are different in strength and resistance and can be attacked with bare hands or one of the common weapons, and among them there is also a purple tentacle: a reference to *Maniac Mansion* or *Day Of The Tentacle,* perhaps? The latter can only be killed with special weapons, different for each one of them: for example, the hammer and stake are used against Dracula. Killed enemies also give a certain amount of gold coins, which only purpose is to provide the player with a sort of score. However, given the totally random placement of monsters, it may happen that from the

start you are surrounded by too much powerful enemies, so that Van Helsing succumbs immediately or almost. It would have been better to modify the algorithm in order to insert the weaker enemies and at least one weapon in the rooms near to the entrance, so as not to have to be forced to face the stronger ones immediately and just with your fists.

The author writes at the end of the manual: "This game is not original, nor does it pretend to be. It was conceived and designed to pay tribute to the wonderful 80's, their games, their music, their series and especially Chris Dorrell, designer and programmer of video games for 8 Bit computers and author of 2 magnificent games that are among my favorites, *The Oracle's Cave* and *The Runes of Zendos*". In fact, *Transylvanian Castle* has an extremely simple appearance, like a title of almost forty years ago: a

small window at the top right schematically depicts the action, while the rest shows the characteristics of the player, the objects, a map of the rooms visited so far and information relating to the progress of the game. Everything happens in an equally simple way – you enter a room, attack its occupant, and if you stay alive, take the object stored there, until you find the key, kill Dracula and go back to the initial room. All of this while time flows inesorably.

There are neither other goals to achieve, nor skills to upgrade, nor non-playing characters to interact with: *Transylvanian Castle* is all there. A "light" title, then, but worth of interest, especially if you like the genre, and different from the majority of this year's homebrew productions.

BLACK AND WHITE (128K) ★★★
Pat Morita Team [Antonio J. Pérez, Jarlaxe]
Language: English
Note: authored with MK2

Black And White is a game that gives a nod to the coin-op platform/collect-em-up coin-ops of the 1980s. You play not only as one but as two characters, the twin magician girls Candel and Alice, one in white and the other in black.

The king of Kalela entrusted them with the task of guarding the kingdom's treasure, but after a clumsy spell cast for fun, the two girls "merged" with each other and a magical storm made the treasure diamonds scatter far and wide. To be forgiven, Candel and Alice must recover all the diamonds.

On each screen, you control one of the two protagonists at a time. With their magic they must break blocks corresponding to their own color and stun the numerous enemies – blobs, crabs, skeletons, bats etc. – which populate the six sections the game world is divided into. When the magic charge runs out, Candel and Alice must touch a magical crystal to restore it, but this will cause the characters to switch between them, so if you are white, you will become black, and vice versa.

Made with care, from the graphics of both sprites and backdrops, to the sound, with tunes reminiscent of games of several decades ago, *Black And White* is a nice and fun variation on the platform/collect-em-up theme: the fact that you must necessarily change from a girl the other to be able to pass the levels and be careful not to run out of magic while facing the enemies, gives the game an edge. It is also varied and deep; the levels have been conceived so as not to give an impression of *deja-vu* and the six game worlds, with a total of 64 screens, will keep the player busy for a long time.

TRISTAM ISLAND (128K) ★★★
Hugo Labrande
Language: English
Notes: for sale; partial demo version freely downloadable

A solo flight over the Atlantic Ocean risks turning into tragedy when an engine failure causes the plane to crash. Fortunately, the pilot is saved, and lands on a tiny island, which seems to have been inhabited until recently. What mysteries is this remote dot in the middle of the sea hiding? And how can you go back home?

In this text adventure, the player takes on the role of the unfortunate protagonist. *Tristam Island* was developed with the Z3 "story system" originally designed by Infocom for its famous titles – the *Zork* trilogy, *The Lurking Horror, Hitchiker's Guide To The Galaxy, A Mind Forever Voyaging, Bureaucracy* and more – and it is openly inspired by them. The descriptions for locations and objects are long and detailed, as well as the comments on the player's actions, and help create a truly engaging environment. Puzzles are clear enough in general, but some require a certain amount of creative thinking (what can a fishing net be used for, other than fishing?). During about the first third of the game, you have to find a way to get to the top of the island, and in this phase you often have go back and forth from one side of it to the other, which is a bit annoying, especially when considering that

you cannot carry more than three items at a time and some, such as the matches, the only item in the inventory at the beginning, cannot be dropped before actually using them. The "real" adventure, however, begins as soon as you reach the abandoned settlement located on a plateau in the center of the island. In the course of the adventure, you also meet a large albatross, which seems to be gifted with a particular intelligence: will he help you?

The game can be purchased on the author's page on the *itch.io* website, but if you want to try it first, you can download a free demo version that ends when you reach the plateau. The Spectrum version is available both in ready-to-use ZXZVM format and in CP/M Plus format for use with the Locomotive interpreter (also for sale), faster and easier to read than the previous one. In addition, the digital download includes versions of the game for many other platforms, ranging from the C64 to Windows 32 and 64 bit to the Oric Atmos, and the plain Z3 story file for use with a ZVM interpreter of your choice.

Tristam Island is definitely recommendable to all text adventures fans, not only experts, thanks to its relative accessibility: it is atmospheric and enjoyable, and will keep you hooked to the screen. For everyone else, it might be a good introduction to the genre, but I suggest trying the demo version before you buy it.

BLOCK Z ★
Raymond Russell, SpectrumNez
Language: English

Block Z is a puzzle made up with 50 screens. Each one of them hosts a pattern consisting of several types of blocks. There are: fixed blocks, indicated by a dot; movable blocks, bearing an arrow that indicates the direction in which they move when the player selects them and presses the Fire key; and finally, blocks which cannot be operated in any way, which purpose is to define the playing area.

Some blocks of the second type follow a straight line until they hit an obstacle; others, marked by an "angled" (clockwise or anticlockwise) arrow, make a 90° turn when they hit a first obstacle, then stop at the second. If one of these blocks touches another or two horizontally or vertically, they all vanish. The aim of the game is therefore to make all the blocks of the first two types disappear within a time limit.

The aim is to make all the blocks of the first two types disappear. When the blocks are even in number, they must be put together in pairs, while if they are odd, at least three of them must disappear at once. This indication is valuable, since the time to solve the patterns is limited. Five times during the game, you can start the pattern all over again; if you cannot solve the scheme, the game ends. You can restart from the last screen you

reached, but your score will drop down to zero.

Block Z is a basic but ingenious puzzle. The core idea is extremely simple and the realization is straightforward: just yellow blocks, moving one character at a time. Sound is limited to a few effects on the 48K, while some AY tunes can be heard on the 128K. A password system to resume the game from any of the levels, as well as a diversification of difficulty levels based on the speed of time would have been welcome, but as it is, *Block Z* is a noteworthy title anyway.
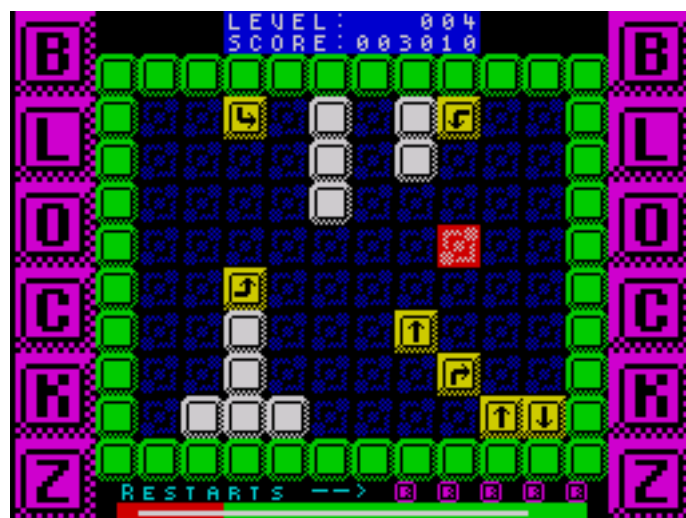
DUCKSTROMA ★
Ultranarwhal
Language: English
Note: authored with AGD

Aura is a female duck working as a courier (hopefully with a regular contract and at least the minimum legal salary for her job). Her current assignment is noticeably complex: she has to deliver 8 floppy disks to a customer. The disks are scattered across 20 platform screens, populated by not-so-friendly beings, whose touch

makes Aura lose one of her three lives. Luckily, our friend can bounce on their heads to get rid of most of them, at least until she re-enters the screen. In addition to this, since flight is not her best ability, in order to reach some very high spots she must lay some peculiar eggs: after a few seconds, they explode (!), allowing Aura, if she is close to them, to take a good leap. Other places are protected by barriers that disappear at the flip of a switch.

Duckstroma, like many other titles of this genre created with AGD, is neither very long nor particularly demanding, but it can boast, in addition to the curious explosive eggs feature, a good technical realization. The main character's sprite is really pretty, while the others look a bit sketchy; backdrops are somewhat rough but very colorful, and each screen has quite a different layout from the others. A special mention goes to Shiru (Aleksandr Semyonov)'s "Spring Came" tune that plays during the game on the 128K: it's one of the nicest and catchiest background music I ever heard in a recent production for the Spectrum.

KRPAT ★ ★
Peter Macej
Language: Slovak

If Lucifer was a rebel angel, Krpat is a nice little devil who rebelled against him because he kidnapped his beloved witch Frndolina. He must then find seven keys to open his way to the prince of the underworld, whom he must eventually defeat in a duel. To defend himself from the Lucifer's minions, Krpat shoots fireballs: some enemies are easy to eliminate, others are much tougher, and you will need to be very careful when approaching them.

The game, which takes its name from the protagonist, is a typical platform/action title, made unique by graphics reminiscent of some productions from the Nick Bruty/David Perry duo, such as *Savage* or *Dan Dare III:* very large and colorful sprites move quickly on equally colorful backdrops.

Behind *Krpat* there is a curious story: it was programmed between 1994 and 1995 on the Didaktik M, one of the Czechoslovakian clones of the Spectrum, but its author, then only a teenager, kept it in the drawer until now. Too bad, because this is a title that, although not very original,

is really well made and pleasant to look at and play, which deserved to enter the history of the games of the post-commercial era of the Spectrum since then. Better late than never, anyway!

H.E.R.O. RETURNS ★
Gusvision
Language: English

The game is a tribute to Activision's ancient *H.E.R.O. - Helicopter Emergency Rescue Operation,* originally released for the Atari 2600 and converted to the Spectrum as well. Your task will be to rescue the miners trapped inside a set of caves full of traps. To do this, you have a "unicopter", i.e. a propeller mounted on a backpack, four sticks of dynamite to make way and an arc gun with a very limited range, useful for getting rid of crabs, bats, snakes and other perilous beasts. However, you are defenseless against the crocodiles that occasionally come out of water pools, and you should equally be careful of burning lava walls. You also should care not to destroy the lanterns placed in some screen, to avoid being plunged into the darkness. In addition to this, the unicopter's energy is limited, so you cannot waste your time by just wandering around.

The game world is made up with sixteen levels, which become larger and more intricate as you proceed into the game. You have four lives, and you can start over from the last screen reached when you lose all of them, but just once per game.

As in the original, graphics and sound are minimalist to say the least, but completing the mission requires uncommon commitment and timing. You will have to sweat a lot before you can reach the end!

CODE-112 ★
Antonio Román, Ariel Endaraues, Javier P.
Languages: English, Spanish
Note: authored with AGDx

In a quiet village, people have recently disappeared. Rumor has it that this fact is connected with the recent establishment of a mysterious "social engineering research center". The last to disappear is a 6-year-old girl. His brother Sami decides to sneak into the building in search of her.

In *Code-112* you guide Sami through six screens viewed from above. In each one of them, he must pick up a floppy disk and insert it into a terminal to obtain a code to unlock the door leading to the next screen. Your task is made difficult by the presence of guardian robots patrolling rooms and corridors; they get alarmed if Sami stands too close to them. Sami can push carts to block certain passages, in order to hinder the robots. He also has to pay attention to energy barriers, circular blades and surveillance cameras (the latter can be deactivated).

Code-112 is an example of a rare genre on the Spectrum, a mix of action and adventure with a "stealth" gameplay. Graphics and sound are not bad, with some peculiarities such as the lamps splashing light when a sprite passes near them, but the predominantly dark colors (black on blue) become tiresome after a while. Guardian robots often position themselves in such a way that it is very difficult to try to divert their attention in order to pass, and this can be frustrating. But the major limitation of the game is its brevity: just six screens. Nothwithstanding this, it generates interest due to the attempt to create something different from the usual types of games developed with AGD.

MAGICABLE ★ ★
Packobilly [Francisco Urbaneja]
Language: English
Note: authored with AGDx

Occult powers have seized the sixteen Dark Talismans, kept in the Cauldron of Providence, and scattered them throughout the kingdom of Arnaroth, throwing it into chaos. Four of them ended up in the Haunted Forest, four in the Scary Dungeon, four in the Cursed Castle and four in the Doomed Cavern. The elderly wizard Able is the only one able to recover the Talismans and place them again into the Cauldron, one after the other while respecting the original sequence. Unfortunately, his magic is now weak, and not all of the evil creatures haunting the realm will be affected.

The player, in the role of Able, must therefore proceed through the four areas which compose the world of *MagicAble,* paying close attention to the enemies, and collecting four Talismans in each of the four areas following a precise order. This is the first peculiarity of a rather unique platform/collect-em-up game. In fact, each Talisman bears a Roman numeral from 1 to 4, so you must collect and bring the first, second and so on, one after the other, to the Cauldron, placed at the center of the map. The first setting that opens, when Able touches the Cauldron at the beginning of the game, is the Forest; the others become accessible as you bring the four talismans back to their destination.

Another unusual feature is that Able is not free to jump whenever he wants to, but he can only do it when he stands on the magenta magic stones. This means that the road to reach a Talisman will often be different from that which leads back to the Cauldron, as Able, for example, will have to reach a point in a high position and then drop down and follow another path. All this adds to *MagicAble* a strategy layer not common in titles of this

genre, and increases its depth. As if that were not enough, the kingdom of Arnaroth is populated by hostile presences, which Able must avoid, as they take a life from him whenever he collides with them. Some enemies can be temporarily stunned with a spell, which takes a few seconds to recharge, and, in addition to that, bounces instead of going in a straight line, so if the timing is not correct, it might miss its target, exposing Able to the risk of getting hit.

Graphically *MagicAble* is fair, but sometimes the sprites, not being "masked", blend in with the scenery. Sound is limited to a tune in the initial menu and some effects. But its peculiarities reveal how much its author, who recently entered the "retro" Spectrum scene, tries to go beyond the classic schemes of this kind of games. And in such a crowded genre, this certainly should not be underestimated. This means *MagicAble* surely can't go unnoticed!

WHITE JAGUAR ★
Romancha
Language: English

Personally I am pleased to see a game set in the Wild West arrive on the Spectrum – my favorite remains the legendary *Gunfright* by Ultimate –, especially if you play as a Native American, or "Indian" as they commonly (and improperly) known. As the valiant warrior Wahken you must free your territory from the presence of the Buffalo Kings, a dangerous species of hybrids with the head of a

buffalo and a human body. Other hostile creatures hindering the main character are carnivorous plants, birds of prey and a sort of huge porcupines. Wahken can throw axes against his enemies, but they are not infinite; by collecting certain icons, he will gain three axes more. Besides, hitting enemies is made less easy by the fact that the axes do not follow a straight path and tend to fall

fall downwards, as they would do in reality.

White Jaguar is a platform game that is as unusual in its setting as it is traditional in its substance. Gameplay is not very varied, since all you have to do is eliminate the Buffalo Kings in the about twenty screens of the game world.

Screen design makes your task arduous – apart from the enemies, you must be careful of platforms that appear and disappear, wells, sharp points, stalactites suddenly falling from above. With only three lives at your disposal, one gets the impression that the particularly high difficulty level is a way to make the game seem larger and deeper than it is.

It is true that *White Jaguar* stands out for its noticeable technical qualities: backgrounds are colorful and detailed – perhaps too much, since sometimes the sprites tend to become hard to spot – and Wahken moves convincingly enough. On the 128K, an "Indian" melody can be heard in the background. All of this helps make the game more interesting than average and worthy of mention amidst the flood of similar titles.

HELL YEAH ★ ★
Andy Precious
Language: English

A run-and-gun game with large and colorful sprites, *Hell Yeah* is the debut work of an author who stated he learned Z80 Assembly only recently. Hard to believe, as *Hell Yeah* seems like everything but the effort of an "absolute beginner". Large and colorful sprites move quickly through four levels filled with enemies of many kinds. There is no shortage of upgrades and other types of weapons, in addition to the default fire, not very powerful but with infinite ammunition. Along the way you will have to destroy some bosses and mini-bosses in order to proceed; you must also avoid just going forward and shooting, because the enemy hordes arrive tight and fast, and if you are not careful where you put your feet, jumping in order to avoid sharp spikes, pools of lava or incendiary bullets, you will not go far.

The baddies, however, are not very lethal per se; it is their continuous flow that makes the game challenging, especially at the highest difficulty level (there are three). In some places there are hidden platforms that only appear when you jump on them: memorizing their location is vital. Fortunately, if all of your lives are lost, it is possible to resume the game by starting over from the beginning of the last level reached, while your score will be reset.

Technically speaking, the style of sprites and backgrounds is rather simplified, but the colors and action speed compensate for that. As for sound, instead, there is not much. The game loads the levels one by one from tape, even on the 128K; it would have been better, in this case, to avoid multi-load. Anyway, level data takes a short time to load.

The greatest limitation of the game, however, are its straightforwardness and brevity: once you memorize the path, and the enemies' and bosses' behavior, you will be able, with some patience, to run through all four levels. Taking this into account, *Hell Yeah* is a convincing debut like few others; let's see what will come next from its author.

NEADEITAL ★★★★
Matt Birch
Language: English
Notes: for sale; proceeds will be donated to the Motor Neurone Disease Association

Strange metal shapes flew over the land to the mountains...

An ancient legend tells that before the human race another lineage of sentient beings lived on Earth, the Nephilim. They lived in symbiosis with nature, and through shamanic rites they were able to obtain extraordinary powers from the four fundamental elements of the world, which they called Neadeital.

Their peaceful existence was severely put to the test when a civilization from outer space invaded their land, using terrible weapons that brought death and destruction. Okikuy, the leader of the Nephilim, went north with her warriors to help those who had been

attacked, but the warriors were slain and Okikuy's traces were lost. The witch-shamans have assigned the young warrior Lelak the mission of finding her and bring her back to their camp. However, as will be seen not long after the start, finding Okikuy will only be the first in a long series of quests to tackle.

Neadeital is a dynamic adventure that explicitly recalls the two Gargoyle Games classics *Tir Na Nog* and *Dun Darach,* in turn inspired by the stories of the mythical Celtic hero Cuchulainn. Lelak, represented by a large and well animated sprite, moves quickly in the center of the screen; the action is always seen from the side, so a compass at the bottom left helps to understand in which direction he is heading. In the background, you see the

Sun rising and setting, the Moon shining on the water, and the landscape changes depending on the point of view. The effect is really nice to look at, but it is not just for scenery, as some actions must be performed at a certain time.

Lelak can interact with non-player characters to get directions on what he needs to do, or ask boatmen to ferry him to the location where another one of them is. Some cryptic clues come from the descriptions of the dreams he has when he retires into a tent to sleep. Tents also serve to "save" the position: if he is hit by an enemy, Lelak will resume moving from the last one he visited.

To proceed, you need objects and blessings, one for each element. The former can be found along the way, and some can also be crafted from others by placing them on special altars: when all the necessary objects have been placed there, the new object will appear. The latter are activated when certain tasks are completed and are granted by touching menhirs bearing the symbol of an element. For example, in order to cross a lake, Lelak must bring a certain object to a shaman, so that he will receive the water blessing, with can be employed to freeze the lake water into ice that can be walked upon.

"Atmospheric" is an overused adjective maybe, but it absolutely fits *Neadeital*. From the very first minutes of the game it is difficult not to be captured by the charm of its setting, from kneeled shamans praying in dark caves

caves to mysterious drones that emit deadly rays. The graphic aspect is certainly evocative, but creating an atmosphere is not just a matter of aesthetics. In *Neadeital* you find yourself immersed in a vast and deep environment, full of quests to try, places to discover and

characters to interact with, and every result achieved pushes you to keep going on. Of course, that means it is not one of those games you should give a spin to every now and then. It requires time and dedication, but this is precisely where its greatest quality lies: making the player feel part of a world.

Neadeital was initially offered as a prize for the Kickstarter campaign of the new edition of *Crash* magazine, but was later put up for sale in digital format for charity. All proceeds from sales will in fact be donated to the Motor Neurone Disease Association, a British society for the assistance of people affected by those illnesses. By purchasing it, then, you will be doing a favor not only to yourselves, but also to many people who suffer. For this reason, it can be said that *Neadeital* is worth twice its price.

RUN! ★
Roman Cikryt
Language: English

In a dystopian future, where TV driven by artificial intelligence propagates the one and only truth, someone rebels and decides to flee. But the defenders of the system notice and chase him.

The story is just as simple as the game: in *Run!* the character runs from left to right, stopping when facing an obstacle. You guide the protagonist towards freedom,
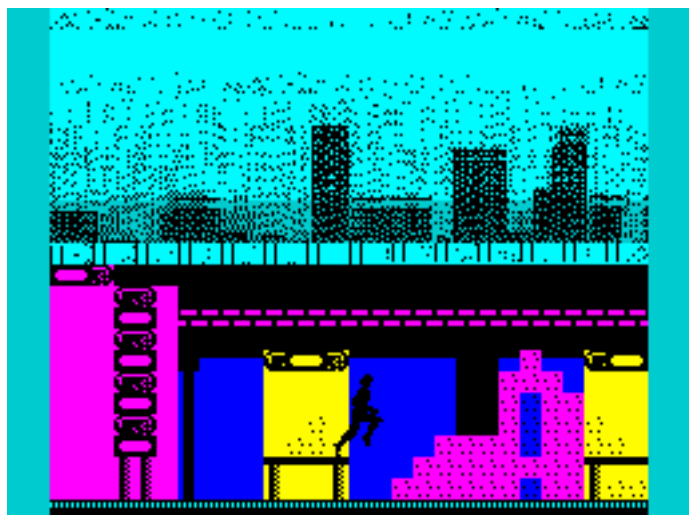
controlling him with just two keys, or joystick movements: one for jumping and grabbing, one for sliding under obstacles. As in the urban running discipline called *parkour,* your alter ego tries to reach the end of the level by running and jumping on crates, walls, desks, cranes and more. A guard follows him relentlessly, taking advantage of your mistakes and hesitations. If he reaches you, the chase is over and you must restart the level.

Run!, despite the simplicity of its gameplay, requires a good amount of coordination and choice of time on the part of the player from the very beginning. The tension due to the presence of the guard is almost palpable while playing, and in order to negotiate the various levels, it is essential to memorize the sequence of the obstacles. Even when jumping you have to be very careful, because small advances or delays are enough to plunge into an abyss and immediately put an end to the escape attempt.

Graphics are colorful but rather rough, and the sound, apart from AY music that can be heard on the 128K, is almost absent. Despite this, *Run!* is quite engaging and pretty unique.

ALCHEMIST II - THE DUNGEONS ★
Francesco Forte
Languages: English, Italian
Note: authored with AGD

The Alchemist of the historical Imagine arcade adventure returns 37 years later. Once again, his mission is to destroy an evil sorcerer by means of a magic formula divided into four pieces. These must be obtained from as many objects scattered around the game world. Another analogy with the original is the presence of spells to cast when holding the relative book, and weapons to defeat the many enemies. Some of them guard certain passages and can only be eliminated by a particular weapon (a la *Underwurlde*). The most important spell, able to restore vital energy, is obtained by mixing three other objects together, so your first concern should be to carry out this task.

This "unofficial" sequel to *Alchemist* is authored with AGD, thus it does not have the most notable feature of the first title, namely the very large sprites, although otherwise it imitates its graphic style quite faithfully. The maze of corridors the Alchemist wanders through is large and not entirely linear, so a map would be really useful. Another noteworthy aspect is that items (not weapons) change locations from time to time, so don't expect to

always find them in the same place. Avoiding enemies is sometimes impossible due to the narrow spaces. Their touch causes the Alchemist's vital energy to drop very quickly; with only one life available, this results often in an abrupt end to the game, which can lead to frustration. Nonetheless, *Alchemist II* is an interesting adventure and exploration game with a distinct "retro" look.

RESTLESS ANDRE ★
Jaime Grilo, Pedro Pimenta
Languages: English, Portuguese
Note: authored with AGDx

maze/collect-em-up game. To move from one screen to the following one, as usual, Andre must collect all the flashing "modules" and head towards the exit, avoiding anything that moves, and on some screens even barriers lethal to the touch. Andre begins his quest by swimming, then continues aboard a car, a helicopter and even a space capsule.

Originality is not the strong point of *Restless Andre,* but the game stands out for the varied and colorful graphic style, the nice AY music and the dedication required to the player to complete the various screens, as it is necessary to carefully study the movements of the other sprites in order not to collide with them, but at the same time without standing there thinking for too long, because they could reach Andre. A pleasant variation on a well known theme.

Rather than restless, the eponymous Andre is reckless, as he gets into trouble in each of the 19 screens of this

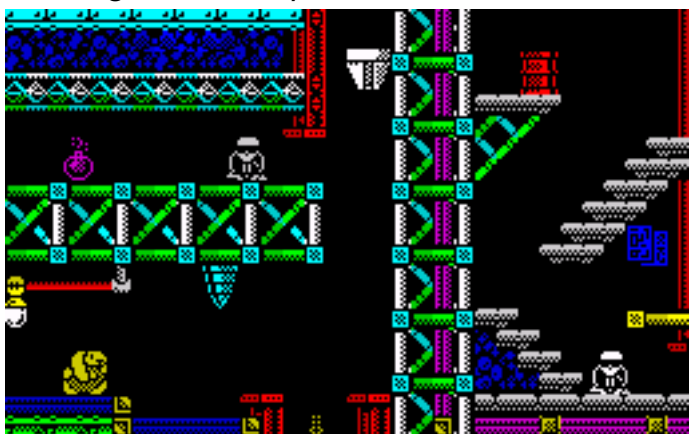# TWENTY FOUR HOUR PARSLEY PEOPLE ★ ★ ★

Minilop [Bruce Groves, Mike Richmond]
Languages: English, Portuguese, Spanish
Notes: authored with Multi-Platform AGD; the first two episodes are freely downloadable; complete version for sale (digital distribution)

The story behind this game is truly bizarre. Cocoa is a parsley-loving rabbit who has built a time machine. To make it more efficient, he goes back to 1899 to ask the great inventor Nikola Tesla for advice. Unfortunately, he not only ends up in the middle of a meteor shower, but discovers that Tesla is being harassed by some mysterious secret agents, who want to get their hands on his inventions. Cocoa offers to help Tesla, from whom he receives a strange megaphone-like device. During the game you will discover its different uses, first of all bouncing bullets fired by enemies back to their sender.

Twenty Four Hours Parsley People is divided into three episodes that can be played immediately, although the game manual recommends following the order in which they are told. In the first, Cocoa must save Tesla and his laboratory from the assault of the baddies; in the second, he infiltrates the underground base of the secret agents to find the blueprint of one of Tesla's inventions they have stolen; finally, in the third you must recover some of

Tesla's inventions before they are taken away and free Kolman, the inventor's assistant, who has been taken prisoner by the enemies.

All three episodes are structured following a platforms-and-ladders scheme, but besides finding objects or people, Cocoa must also use the environments to his advantage. In fact, on some screens there are machines to operate in order to open passages or get rid of particularly annoying enemies. In the third episode Cocoa is also able to fly thanks to the device Tesla gave him. Normally I don't like having to use two different controls for Up and Jump, but here the division actually makes sense, since there are times when Cocoa has to operate a machine, for example a magnet, by moving it up and down, and should he jump at the same time, doing it would become practically impossible.

Graphically, the game stands out for its style full of details and colors, even if screens are sometimes cluttered with elements and "color clash" becomes inevitable in these cases. Sound effects are the default and somewhat unpleasant AGD ones; I would have liked some custom sounds instead. However, you can hear some nice AY music when playing on a 128K.

Twenty Four Hours Parsley People is a large arcade adventure, with plenty of surprises and unusual touches, and the ability to fly in the third episode adds a new dimension to the gameplay. The first two episodes can be downloaded for free from the author's page on the *itch.io* website, but I am sure that after trying them you will be more than willing to pay a small price to purchase the full version.

DELTA'S SHADOW (128K) ★★★★

Sanchez Crew [Alexander Udotov, Evgeniy Sukhomlin, Evgeniy Rogulin, Oleg Nikitin]
Languages: English, Polish, Russian, Spanish
Notes: for sale; freely downloadable demo version; available in digital or physical format, both including the Next version

Delta's Shadow, the new work of the famous Sanchez group, was released on Christmas day 2020, after several anticipations throughout the year, and also in the past one. It is inspired by the *Power Blade* series, produced by Taito almost 30 years ago for the Nintendo NES. The setting is not particularly original: in the 22nd century, humanity finally found peace and harmony by entrusting the management of all hard work to a gigantic mainframe called the "Master Computer". One bad day, extraterrestrial secret agents broke into the Delta Foundation, which took care of the maintenance of the Master Computer, and put it out of action. Nova, the Delta security chief, managed to expose the plot and defeat the invaders.
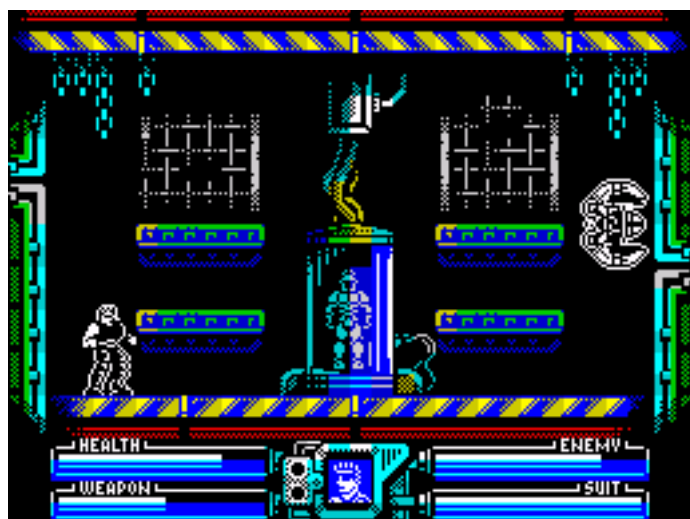
Years later, the Trigon Corporation takes control of the Master Computer, but Nova and his partner Jacqueline discover that behind it there are the same aliens. It will again be Nova's task to save the Earth from this threat. In every game level, Nova enters one of the Trigon buildings, with the aim of reaching the center and planting a bomb to blow it up. Succeeding in the enterprise is not at all granted, not only due to the presence of many guardian robots of various types – some fly, others crawl, others swim – and dangers such as turrets, conveyor belts and circular blades, but also for the environmental design. Each building is divided into various sections, all very large – we are talking about at least 20 screens per section – and with a maze-like structure, where it is not easy to find your way around.

Delta's Shadow is essentially, like its NES antecedents, a platforms-and-ladder action game, where the player controls Nova and, during an intermission, Jacqueline. Nova can jump, go up and down ladders, swim in parts submerged by water and slide to slip into narrow passages. To defend himself from the hordes of robots trying to stop him, he uses the Power Blade, a sort of boomerang that can be launched in any direction. The

Power Blade has a limited charge, which can be restored by collecting appropriate icons; the same goes for Nova's health. Other icons bearing the symbol of a star give additional information about the game world, available from the main menu. If Nova loses all its energy, he will start over from the beginning of the current section.

In the depths of the Trigon buildings there are laboratories where suits are kept. These can give Nova special abilities. To get hold of a suit, Nova must defeat the robot boss guarding it. The first suit enables Nova to climb walls, the second to move easily in the water, and
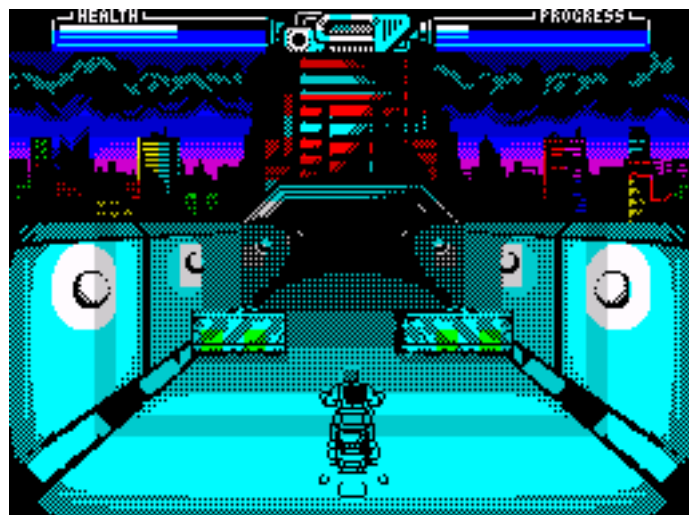
so on. Suits are also equipped with a powerful energy weapon. Like the Power Blade, suits are activated by a charge that runs out with use and must be restored by collecting icons with the symbol of a battery.
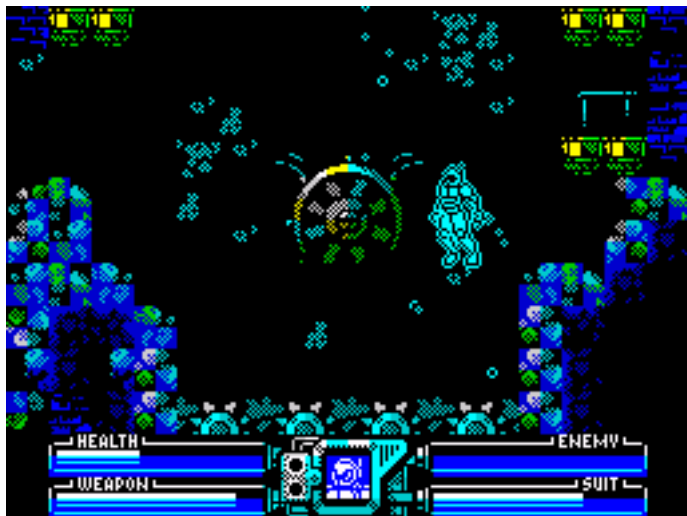
Jacqueline, as previously mentioned, comes into play in the middle of the game. She must hack a number of terminals at Trigon's headquarters. Against the guards patrolling the place, she has a stun gun and an invisibility device at her disposal. Hacking the terminals also has the effect of activating elevators to access the various parts of the building, up to the terrace on the ninth floor, where a helicopter arrives to take her away.

There are two difficulty levels, Easy and Hard. The second differs from the first for the presence of a driving sub-game, where you control Nova speeding on a sort of magnetic levitation motorcycle: in fact, to reach each Trigon building, he must run through a path full of obstacles. This is the weakest part of the game, as it
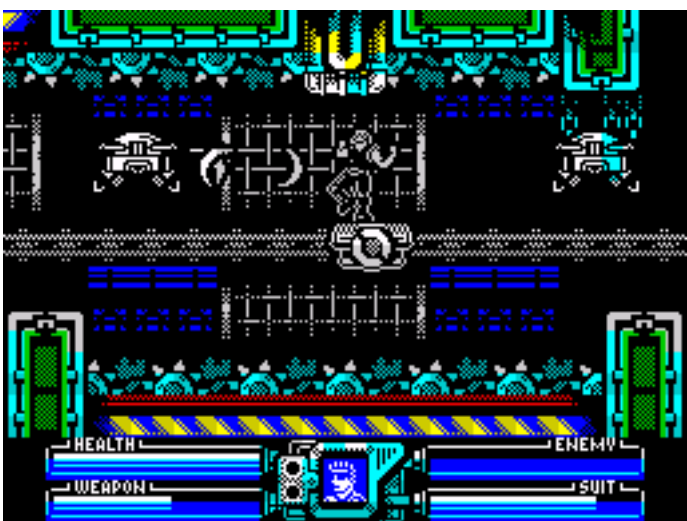
comes down to a simple memory exercise about the arrangement of obstacles, and since you cannot slow down or speed up the bike, you just have to try to dodge them as quickly as possible, which can become

frustrating. Also, while on Easy Nova starts each section with maximum health, on Hard he will start with the amount of health left at the end of the previous section, and if that amount is small, it is easy to understand that proceeding in the mission will be quite arduous.

Has the long wait for *Delta's Shadow* been rewarded? Let's say right away that we are experiencing an extraordinary title, a real blockbuster. The game is a real joy for both eyes and ears: graphics, animations and sound are truly first class, and above all varied. Nova moves convincingly, and the enemy robots' sprites are no exception. There are no "recycled" scenarios, but each section has a distinct appearance, different from the others. There are about twenty audio tracks and they make the game action more atmospheric.


Furthermore, *Delta's Shadow* is vast and requires dedication. As seen before, sections are large and not very linear. It takes time to master Nova's actions and learn how to strategically exploit the suits' special abilities. Underwater, movements are slowed down and if you are not careful you risk crashing into enemies or circular blades. There are also secret areas, revealed by firing at certain walls, where useful icons are hidden. The part where you play as Jacqueline is a pleasant diversion that "breaks up" the narrative flow and adds further depth.

Of course, this means that *Delta's Shadow* cannot entirely fit in the RAM of a single Spectrum. It is distributed on a 640 KB TR-DOS disk image, in order to store all the necessary data, which are loaded when needed. On a real Spectrum, the game can only be loaded from a DivIDE interface and derivates equipped with the ESXDOS operating system. The presence of so many graphic details, then, is the reason for differentiating the detail level into low, medium and high: only the first mode is default for an "ordinary" Spectrum, while by running *Delta's Shadow* through an emulator

capable of increasing the processor frequency (for example SpecEmu), you can enable the extra details. These consist of some background animations, like spinning fans, and pieces of robots or debris that detach on impact from the Power Blade. In any case, these are all side aspects, which compromise neither the overall impression, nor the playability.
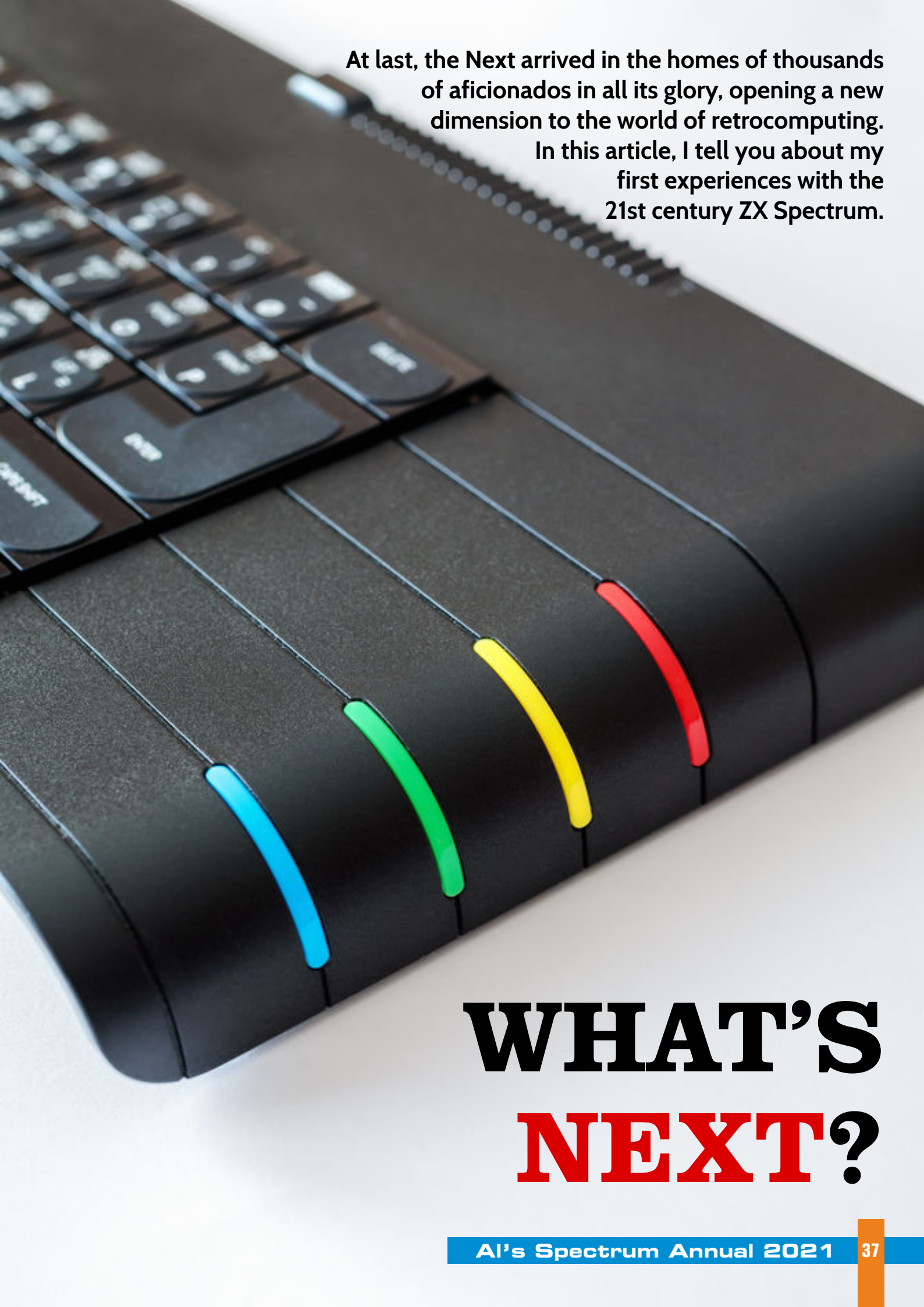
The less convincing aspects are the driving part and the presence of two separate controls for climbing ladders and jumping, something that always bothered me. I would have rather liked to be able to assign the same key to the Up and Jump controls. Are they serious flaws? Certainly not; the perfect game does not exist, after all.
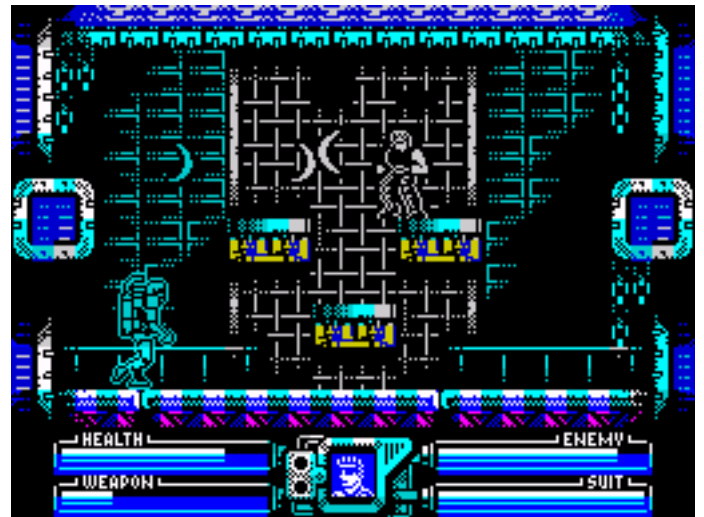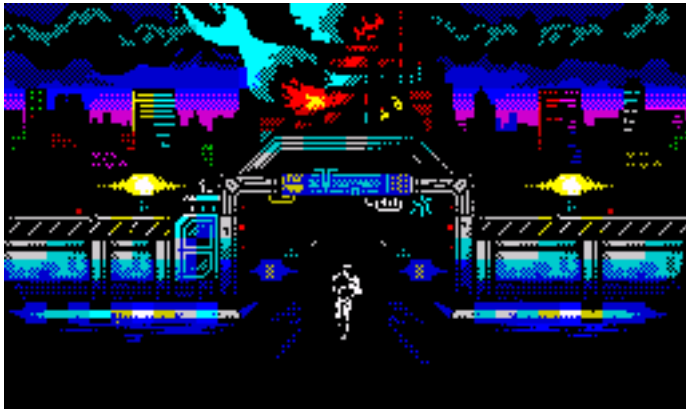
That said, *Delta's Shadow* is a simply unmissable title, combining a truly professional technical realization with an intense and lasting involvement for the player. It is worth much more than the 5 euros of minimum asked price for the digital download, and what's more, in addition to it, you also receive the equally excellent version for the Next and one for Windows, which combines the Spectrum and Next versions together. As a consequence, *Delta's Shadow* fully deserves my personal Game of the Year 2020 award.

Art by Petr Polyakov

At last, the Next arrived in the homes of thousands of aficionados in all its glory, opening a new dimension to the world of retrocomputing. In this article, I tell you about my first experiences with the 21st century ZX Spectrum.

WHAT'S NEXT?

WHAT'S NEXT?

2020 for Spectrum fans was, above all, the year of the Next. After the delivery of the "bare" motherboards, which already took place at the end of 2017, the machines sponsored by the Kickstarter campaign three years earlier were delivered to their patrons, who were thus able to put their hands upon what is first and foremost the outcome of a common passion.

The Next project was born as an evolution of TBBlue, a motherboard based on the TK95 Brazilian clone of the Spectrum, designed by Victor Trucco and Fabio Belavenuto. Together with Henrique Olifiers, also Brazilian but living in the United Kingdom, they - initially almost as a joke - planned to turn the TBBlue into a whole remake of the Spectrum. For this reason, they contacted Rick Dickinson, the great designer responsible for the unmistakable physical appearance of all Sinclair-branded computers from the ZX80 to the Spectrum 128 and the QL. At the beginning of 2016, the design stage of the new home computer began. The fundraising campaign started in April 2017 with an initial goal of 250,000 pounds, which was reached after about 36 hours. Eventually £ 723,390 would be raised from 3,113 supporters.

The enthusiastic reception of the Next prompted the developers – who unfortunately lost Dickinson; sadly, he passed away in April 2018 – to organize a second campaign on Kickstarter, which was even more successful than the first, accumulating the astounding sum of 1,847,106 pounds given by 5,236 backers.

In this article I will not dwell, if not briefly, on the most technical details. Rather, I intend to give an account of my initial experience with the Next and the impressions I got from it.

THE EXTERIOR

The Next takes up the lines and proportions of the 128, the last of the Spectrum series designed by Dickinson, so that it places itself along an ideal continuity line, already from this point of view. The plastic casing is assembled with care: the keyboard layout fully retains the appearance of the Plus and 128, with keywords and symbols engraved in white at the top of each key. It is is more comfortable to the touch than the original, both in typing and in gaming, since the keys offer less resistance to pressure and are almost flat, rather than concave, without the sharp edges of the old ones. You can always use a PS/2 keyboard, or a USB one equipped with an adapter, thanks to the connector on the back. A mouse

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Processor: Z80 at 3,5 MHz with "turbo" modes at 7, 14 and 28 MHz
Memory: 1 Mb RAM (internally expandable to 2 Mb)
Video: 256 e 512 colors modes, resolutions 256x192 and 640x256
Video output: RGB, VGA, HDMI, 50 and 60 Hz
Auxiliary hardware: Hardware sprites, DMA, Copper, enhanced ULA, Tilemap, Layer2
Storage: SD card slot, compatible with the DivMMC protocol
Audio: 9 channels through 3 AY-3-8912 stereo chips, plus 2 8-bit DAC
Joystick: 2 ports, compatible with Cursor, Kempston and Interface 2
PS/2: Mouse with Kempston emulation, or external keyboard
Features: Multiface functionality for memory access, saves, cheats etc.
Tape support: Combined MIC/EAR input/output for tape loading and saving
Expansion: Original external bus port and expansion port for internal accelerator
Accelerator (optional): Graphic processor/CPU at 1 Ghz with 512 Mb RAM
Network: Wi-Fi module
Extra: Real-time clock
Operating system: NextZXOS and NextBasic with expanded command set

may also be connected to it, for use within programs compatible with the Kempston mouse.

The undeniable elegance of the whole is further revealed in the group of four colored plastic arches, placed on the right side, echoing the red-yellow-green-blue four-color stripe, associated with the Spectrum since its first appearance, almost forty years ago. An apparently decorative element, its function is precisely to emphasize the lineage from the original series. It is worth remembering that during the prototype construction phase, the red arch had to be ordered from the manufacturer twice, because the first one came out of a color nuance more similar to orange, too different from that of the previous Spectrums. This gives an idea of the care taken by its creators in transposing the Next from an abstract drawing to a real object, even in the smallest details. Worth noting is also the rounded "Sinclair" logo; I would have left it as it was before, but so be it.

The rear of the machine shows a series of connectors; besides the already mentioned PS/2 input, there are the VGA/RGB and HDMI video outputs, the stereo audio output, the combined EAR/MIC port to hook the Next to a tape recorder (for both loading and saving), two USB

Mini-A ports and the multi-purpose bus, protected by a cover.

THE VIDEO MODES

The Next, although beautiful to look at, is not an ornament or a piece of furniture: it is a machine made to be used. What happens when you connect it to a monitor?

Video outputs are RGB, VGA and HDMI at 50 and 60 Hz. The best image quality can be achieved with HDMI: pixels appear clearly distinct from each other, colors are bright and without "smudging", and elements on the screen move smoothly. However, this setting has the drawback of not displaying the multicolor correctly, that is, the effect obtained with the Bifrost and Nirvana graphic routines and others. The problem, as explained by the developers of the Next, is due to the peculiarities of the HDMI architecture, which is more complex than VGA, and is not easy to solve. It is not a critical flaw – after all, multicolor only appears in a small number of games and demos – but if you want to run on the Next some software where these routines are implemented, you

have to "fall back" on VGA output. The image quality in this case is not in the same league of HDMI, although it is superior to that of RGB/SCART.

VGA modes are numbered from 0 to 6 and can, like HDMI, be run at 50 or 60Hz. For a faithful recreation of the Spectrum, however, VGA 0 at 50Hz is the best option, as the others result in an increase in the internal clock frequency, which shows itself in a very noticeable way as the upward shift of audio frequencies. In other words, sounds are transposed up by a semitone at each change of mode. In any case, you need to arm yourself with a certain amount of patience and check which mode ensures the greatest degree of compatibility with the monitor, especially when it has an aspect ratio different from the 4:3 of the traditional Spectrum video image. If you don't like the picture looking "squashed" on a 16:9 or similar screen, you will have to tinker with the monitor settings until you get the desidered image. Besides, the VGA connector, unlike HDMI, does not carry the audio signal, so to in order to hear the sounds produced by the computer you will need a 3.5 stereo jack cable to connect the Audio Out port of the Next to an external speaker (the same should be done if your monitor does not come with in-built speakers).

Unlike historical Spectrums, the Next allows you to manipulate the screen through four layers numbered from 0 to 3. Each of them has different characteristics: level 0 has the same characteristics of the standard resolution of the Spectrum, while the others, through various combinations, allow to reach a maximum resolution of 640x256. Up to 256 colors can be displayed simultaneously on the screen, from a total of 512 available. Another new feature is the presence of a dedicated memory area for sprites. These have a size of 16x16, and up to a maximum of 64 of them can be

Warhawk
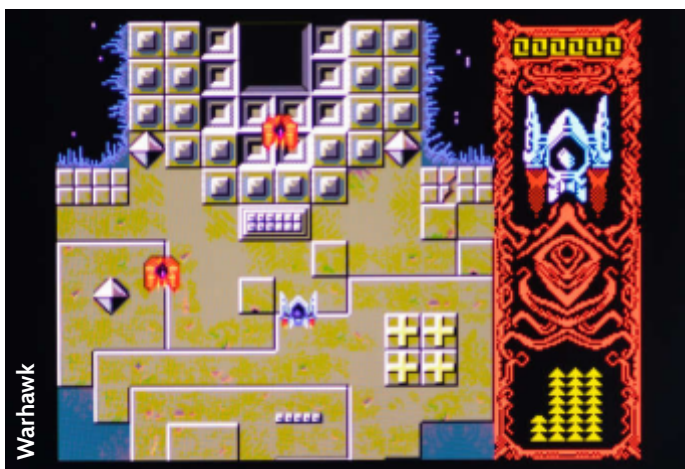
displayed on the screen simultaneously. Everything would already be manageable from BASIC, but it is a very complex architecture, so much so that the user manual dedicates three chapters to it. Unfortunately, the description, at least to the writer, appears too often

convoluted and unclear. A "for dummies" guide on this subject would be welcome. In any case, some games released for the platform (see below) give an idea of the great capabilities of this system.

MULTIPLE PERSONALITY

The Next can take on different "personalities" thanks to the internal architecture based on FPGA (Field Programmable Gate Array). It is, in very simple terms, a set of circuits that can be arranged and connected to each other in real time, in order to faithfully reproduce the operation of multiple platforms. In this case, they are the historical Spectrum models, including the 128 Investronica, and others such as the Microdigital Brazilian clones (not surprising, given the developers' origins), or


Montana Mike

alternative ROMs for the 48K such as the GOSH Wonderful. There is also a setting that enables the timing of the clones manufactured in the old USSR. Therefore, it is not a mere emulation. For those who, like myself, are almost totally ignorant of electronic engineering, this possibility of "impersonating" different machines is, to paraphrase Arthur C. Clarke, little less than magic. Beyond the remarkable charm of being able to handle an "exotic" machine without resorting to emulation on the PC, for a developer there is the undisputed advantage of being able to test the compatibility of their software even with these platforms, which although less common still maintain their own user base.

The Next operating system is stored on an SD card supplied with the computer. The card is also necessary for updating the firmware and hosting the software you wish to run on it. In practice, everything you want to "feed" to the machine goes through this SD card, or another containing the system files essential for booting. Only once the Next has been started you can employ the 3.5 jack connector for loading from tape (and also for saving, since it combines the functionality of EAR and MIC), for

an even more "retro" experience. Among the "personalities", there is the 128 with a DivMMC, which makes it possible to copy the ESXDOS operating system to the SD card. This feature is particularly useful if you own a DivMMC interface and want to run games, demos, applications, etc., already arranged for use with that device, on the Next.

Dweebs Drop
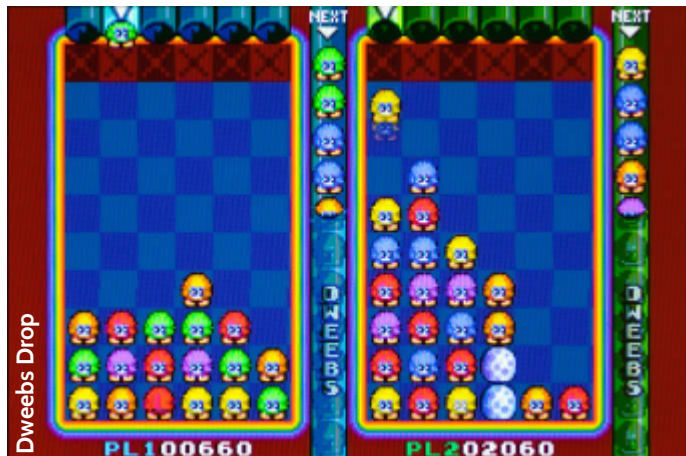
The "accelerated" Next includes an additional card with a graphics coprocessor, a Wi-Fi module and a real-time clock, designed to be implemented as part of its main personality. At the moment, however, these additional parts do not seem to have been used that much. Let's wait and see.

SHALL WE PLAY?

The graphics and sound capabilities of the Next have already been put to the test by a series of games of various kinds. They are mostly arcade titles, but there is no shortage of other genres. Most of the ones I had the opportunity to try so far are good enough, but not very original. For example: *Montana Mike,* a platform-and-ladders game clearly inspired by *Rick Dangerous; Bubblegum Bros,* a platformer very reminiscent of *Bubble*

Delta's Shadow
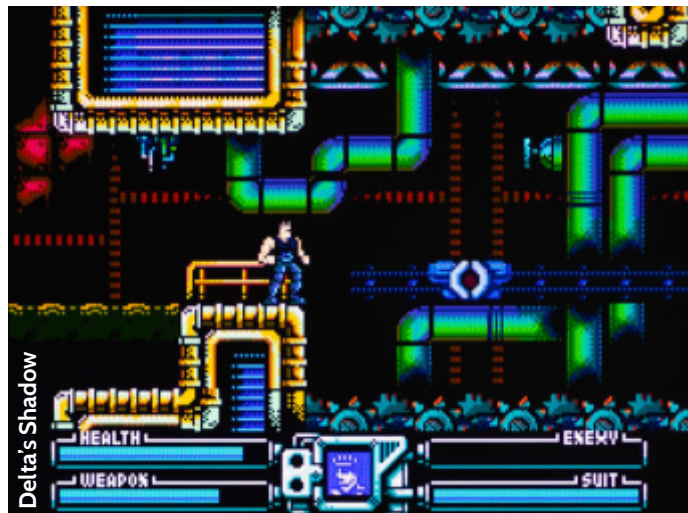
Bobble; Dungeonette, a clone of *Atic Atac; Warhawk,* a vertically scrolling shooter; *Angry Bloaters,* a kind of *Bomberman; Dweebs Drop,* a hybrid between *Tetris* and *Candy Crush.*

Exceptions are the Next versions of two games released on the Spectrum as well and reviewed in this Annual: the excellent Infocom-style text adventure *Tristam Island,* and *Delta's Shadow,* which on the Next is as engaging and thrilling as on its "little brother", while the technical execution fully shows what the new machine is capable of, from the full-color graphics, to the smoothness of sprite movements, resulting from a skillful use of dedicated hardware, up to the sound making excellent use of the nine AY channels available. It can be said that *Delta's Shadow* is the first "real" game conceived with the Next in mind.

Cuadragon Next

Among the titles currently under development, *Cuadragon Next* looks promising: a dynamic adventure with touches of roleplaying, programmed in ZX Basic.

THE FINAL JUDGMENT

In light of what we have seen so far, when faced with the question: "but then, was it worth it to invest in the 'physical' Next, and to wait so long for it?", my answer is a loud and clear "yes". The Next is aesthetically magnificent, has a number of hardware features of enormous potential and has opened a new chapter in the history of retrocomputing. It is the Spectrum that, perhaps, we could have seen in our homes as early as the final years of the 1980s, if Uncle Clive hadn't got carried away by that sustainable mobility affair (a good idea in itself, and well in advance on the times, but turned into reality with an inadequate technology and too much hurry, alas). Be that as it may, the Next is here and is beginning to show what it is able to do. May it inspire a new generation of enthusiasts and retroprogrammers!

POWER UP! ACTION PACK

The *Power Up! Action Pack* project was started in 2019 by the Play On Retro group, with the aim of reviving the era of computer game compilations of the 1980s. Instead of cassettes or floppy disks, *Power Up! Action Pack* is distributed on a rather peculiar medium: the Dandanator Mini.

It is a cartridge with a storage capacity of 512 Kbytes, which must be inserted into the multi-purpose edge


connector on the back of the Spectrum to instantly load files in SNA, Z80 or TAP format through a special menu that appears upon connection. There are no jumpers or switches to configure: the Dandanator Mini is "plug and play" and fully compatible with all historical Spectrums, the Next and even with several clones, such as the Microdigital TK90 and 95, the CZ Spectrum, the Timex Sinclair 2048 and 2068, the Didaktik M and the Harlequin series. In addition, the Dandanator Mini is also available in a version for the Amstrad CPC range and is a free project: the schematics and the list of necessary components can be downloaded from the official website: *www.dandare.es*

Back to the *Power Up! Action Pack,* this is the list of games:

Black & White, Booty Black Edition (a retouched version of *Booty The Remake*), *Car Wars, Cómeme El Chip, Funky Fungus Reloaded* (made by me specifically for this project and covered in this Annual in the feature *Behind the Scenes*), *Manic Pietro, Ninjakul II, Old Tower, Red Planet.* This is a truly remarkable selection in terms of quality and quantity, which will offer hours of fun to fans who want to run games on their real machines, but by using a contemporary device.

The compilation's packaging is made with plasticized cardboard, like those of the past, and includes, in addition to the cartridge, a rich set of items: a full-color user manual with the instructions for the games and the presentations of the project by Iván Sanchez and Felipe Monge; a postcard bearing a hologram; an audio CD of music composed by Beyker (Sergio Vaquer Montez) for various Spectrum games released between 2006 and 2019; finally, a little witch in polymer clay.

For any other information, you can contact Play On Retro through their official website: *www.playonretro.com*

FACE TO FACE WITH…
JOSE "BORIEL" RODRIGUEZ

Jose Rodriguez Rosa, also known under the pseudonym of Boriel, is the author of ZX Basic, a utility for Windows, Linux and Macintosh started as a simple BASIC compiler for the Spectrum, which over time has turned into a real new programming language, integrating and enhancing the old Sinclair BASIC with a new syntax and a more modern structure: for example, it does not require line numbers and includes instructions and functions typical of other BASIC "dialects" and other languages. In this interview, Jose tells us about himself and reveals the origins and future perspectives of his "creation".

Photo: Jose Rodriguez
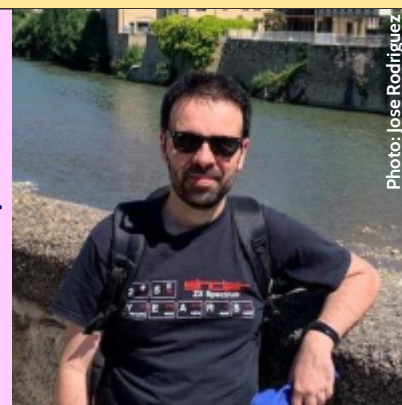
Tell us a little about yourself: who you are, what you do in life…

My name is Jose, but for historical reasons I have chosen the pseudonym of Boriel. He is a character I invented to play tabletop RPGs. He is a magician similar to Gandalf or Bobbin Threadbare (the protagonist of *Loom*).

How did you get started with the Spectrum?

I started, like almost everyone, as a child. I was already into computer science before I actually got a computer. I also learned a bit of BASIC by reading *Mi Computer* magazine (which I believe is currently stored in PDF Online). I was writing programs with a pen on a notebook, and I wanted to have a computer. By chance, my father noticed an offer for the employees of the company he worked for, and it was a ZX Spectrum. And so I got my first computer. I didn't really know what to do with it. When the message "© 1982 Sinclair Research Ltd" appeared, and was deleted by pressing a key, I did not know how to make it reappear and I turned off the computer. The next day they told me that I had been talking in a dream all night. I jokingly said that BASIC was such a thing!
It came with a batch of 6 games (the Psion set, with the Horace saga, *Chess, Chequered Flag* etc.). Some of my mates got it with the Ultimate games, and I thought they had been luckier, but that's actually because their collection came with the 16K, while mine included some 48K-only titles. It took me a week to buy a cassette deck and learn how to load games. When my father saw them, he liked them and he said: "Now I will save a lot of money,

because you will no longer go to the arcades, but stay in and play at home". He wasn't wrong.

What motivated you to create ZX Basic?

As I gained experience with the computer, I became more interested in programming than in games. BASIC was obviously a simple language, waiting to be used. *MicroHobby* magazine (which we all remember fondly) was another wonder that thrilled us every week, with its crazy ideas, algorithm explanations and tutorials. I have never seen anything like it. Perhaps today, in an era where there is so much information available on the Web, they are no longer as surprising as they were in those times.
I learned BASIC, made some games and played others. I also created a small interpreter for a programming language where each command was made up with three letters… and I tortured the oldest of my sisters by teaching it to her, but she enjoyed it (she has a degree in mathematics today). Despite its expressive strength, Sinclair BASIC was very slow. When I read the speed comparisons of the different BASICs of the time, the Spectrum one turned out to be the worst. I started learning Assembly with a horrible book and some great tutorials from *MicroHobby,* using a very limited assembler called *Ultraviolet,* obtained through piracy (they were very hard to find in those days).

Although I had programmed a portion of a game, I never got to do anything else. The point is that I had always wondered: "Why doesn't anyone make a 'converter' from BASIC to machine code?" Time passed, and the

golden age of the ZX Spectrum went by with it. The PC and University arrived, I studied computer engineering and found the answer: I discovered compilers and how to create them, and they became my passion.

One day, I came across the first ZX Spectrum emulator and played *Manic Miner.* I felt a great sense of nostalgia, and started talking about it with various friends. Then came the "retro" mania and in a forum I proposed that idea... and finally, it became reality!

Are you satisfied with the reception with which ZX Basic has been met so far?

I have to say I was surprised. I was thinking of creating a minimal BASIC subset (IF-THEN, LET, POKE, GOTO and if anything GOSUB). This is the minimum to be able to create something compilable and have users do the rest. It was more of a "proof of concept". The thing is, it got a warm welcome and people started asking me for more features. I also liked programming compilers, so everybody benefited from that.

People find it hard to believe, but since 2010 I have been revising ZX Basic to make it a multi-target compiler, i.e. for different platforms, not only for the ZX Spectrum or the Z80, but also for the PC or Javascript. The fact is that I have applied more changes (code reafactoring), but I would say that creating a compiler for an 8-bit system was more difficult than for the PC. Testing is challenging - each version of ZX Basic undergoes nearly 2000 validation tests before release.

Programming for Sinclair (to maintain compatibility) blocks the path to more innovative ideas and slows development. The natural evolution would be to change the language to make it more generic and independent from the platform. This implies a lower compatibility of the syntax with Sinclair BASIC, as it would be more generic, but it could be compiled for many platforms. Imagine your program running into Javascript in a browser. It is likely that the project will be bifurcated into two programs in the future.

Have you ever thought of making something yourself to show the public the potential of ZX Basic? A game, a utility, a demo...

Yes. I would like to make a game, but I'm ambitious. I'm not good at drawing graphics (strangely, I was better at it when I was younger), It would take a long time and I don't have any. I wish I could create a game to tell a story and,

of course, teach people how, in my opinion, certain things should be done with the compiler.

What do you think of the Next?

I had reservations at first, but it seems like a great idea. It revived the passion: the "retro" community was always the same, revolving around the same computers and the same types of games. It was as if there was not much more to say, only to remember. Now it is possible to talk again about a machine to exploit, for playing games, or even to dedicate magazines to. If something like this came out in the late 1980s, it would have been a hit.

What do you think, in general, of the "retro-mania" that has been rampant for years? Is it just a fad like many others, or is there something deeper behind it?

I think it's more than just a fad. These pass. But the imprint microcomputers have left on us, I believe, will last forever. It would be like the fans of some franchise (Star Wars, Star Trek, etc.). This will never end, or at least not in our generation.

Is there anything you would like to say to the readers of the Annual?

I would say thank you for their interest and for reading this interview, and thank you, Alessandro, for your awesome work (with this Annual and with your games!!). I hope that future versions of ZX Basic will keep on being appreciated.

Thanks to you for your time!

Several kinds of games have been authored with ZX Basic throughout the years: arcades, puzzles, strategy, simulations and even text adventures. Besides Red Raid The Beginning, Binary Land, Ad Lunam, Ad Lunam Plus, Cuadragon Next *and* Italia 1944, *mentioned elsewhere in this Annual, here are some other examples.*
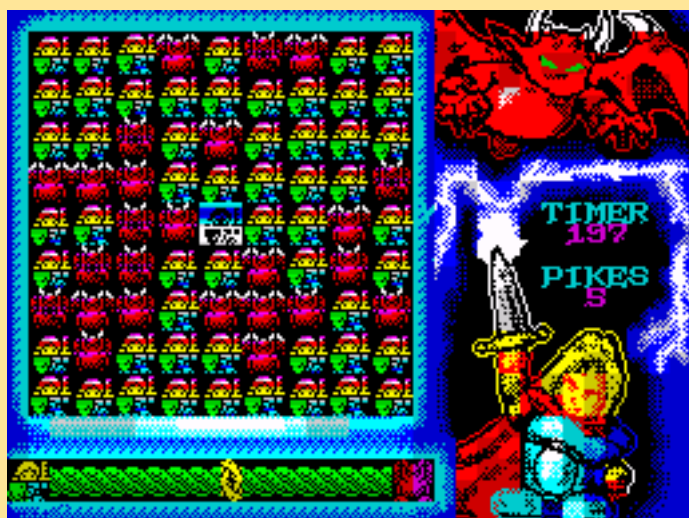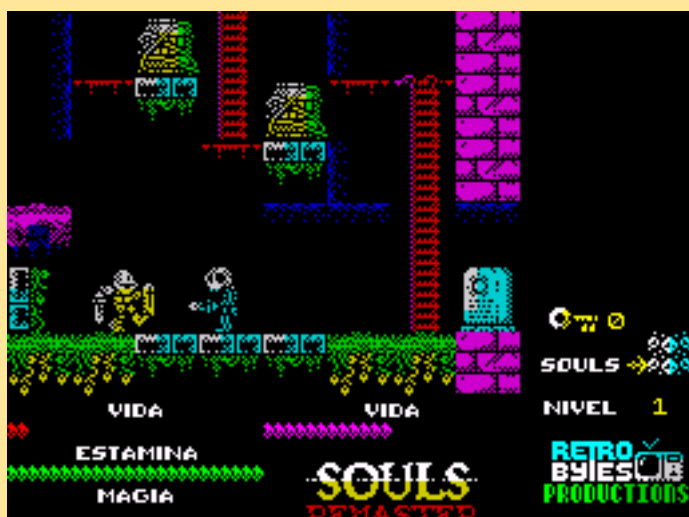

Knights & Demons DX - Kabuto Factory
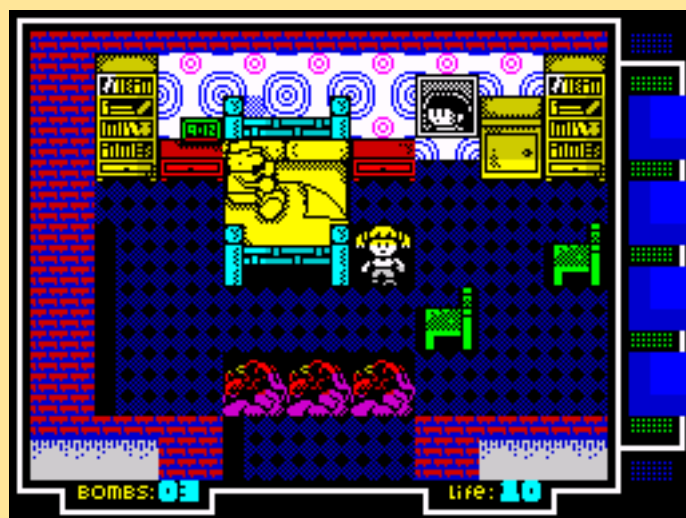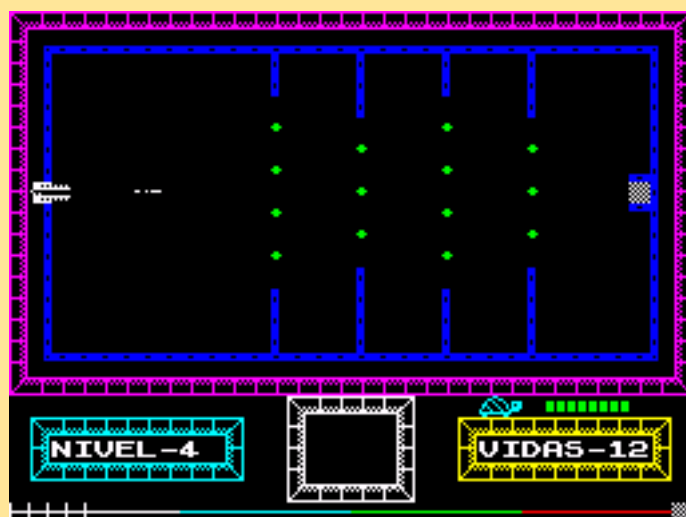

Maritrini F.M.S. En: Las etc. - Mojon Twins
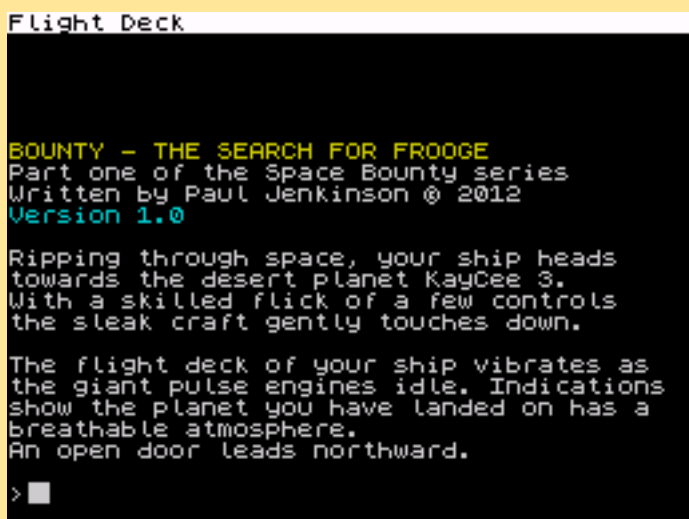
Bounty The Search For Frooge - P. Jenkinson

Earthraid - LCD

Souls Remaster - Alxinho

Strela - J.B.G.V.

FUNKY FUNGUS RELOADED

When *Funky Fungus* first appeared on Easter 2013, it represented my attempt to create something reminiscent of old single-screen platform coin-ops where you have to eliminate all enemies to access the next screen. For the time, this was a significant advance – it was the first multi-level game for 128K made with Arcade Games Designer; each level, called "world", was in fact a single game put together with this tool. It was my first game introduced by a presentation, too. The reception was pretty good: the most appreciated features were the sprites' graphic style and the wide variety of the screens, which made the game an arcade with a touch of puzzle, since each screen requires a different tactic to be negoriated. In some of them you


must start at once, in others you have to be patient and wait for the right moment to move.

The main criticism, on the other hand, was focused on the excessive difficulty, which was also noticed by those who had played my two previous titles, *Lost In My Spectrum* and *Apulija-13*. I had not yet learned how to calibrate this aspect well, and since I do not like games that can be finished in an afternoon, I made them arduous to say the least. Then there was the fact that early versions of AGD handled collision detection in a rather inaccurate way, and every so often Funky lost a life

BEHIND THE SCENES

in a situation where, without this inconvenience, this would not have happened. Finally, the very first version used the M: disk or RAM Disk to store the four worlds, but this made it incompatible with DivIDE type interfaces. Therefore, I released a revised version a few months later, which included an Assembly routine, developed after several attempts and an exchange of ideas on the World Of Spectrum forum. The routine, which I have used in all my games for 128K since then, keeps levels in the memory banks (in compressed form to make them stay within the limit of 16 Kb), from where it recalls them as needed, all in USR 0 mode to ensure compatibility with
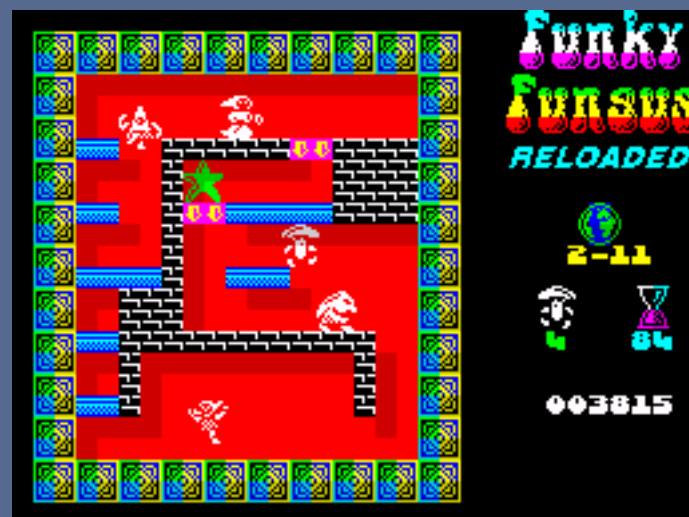

the DivIDE. Other revisions concerned sprites and minimum collision distance; although improved, it was still not as precise as I intended.

Funky Fungus continued to seem to me, despite the improvements, a "diamond in the rough", a potential not fully expressed. Being not yet completely satisfied with the result, I considered the possibility of revising it further, but I began to dedicate myself to *Cousin Horace,* an even more ambitious project, and left it aside for a long time.

Almost six years later, in March 2019, Felipe Monge contacted me about the *Power Up! Action Pack* project, the collection of recent games to be released on the Dandanator cartridge (see page 42), and asked me if I was interested in contributing to it.

That was an opportunity to dust off *Funky Fungus* and relaunch it in style. I had the two *Sophia* games under my belt; they both enjoyed a very good reception, and I would have used the experience they allowed me to gather to finalize what had been left to do such a long time before. To emphasize the differences from the original game, I added *Reloaded* to the title. The changes, extensions and improvements that separate the two
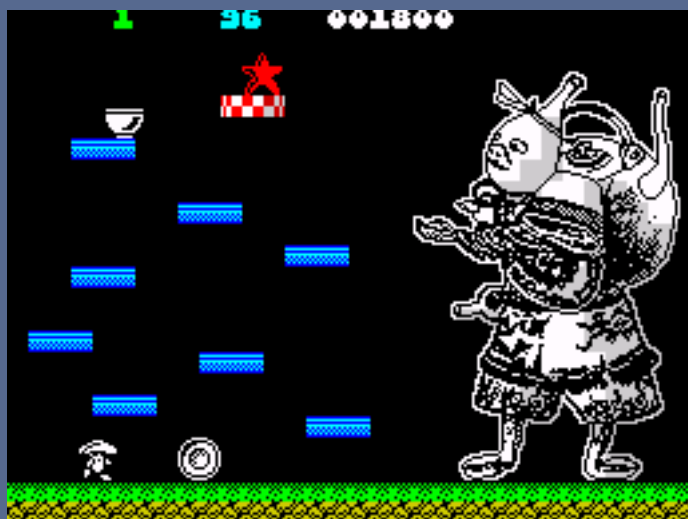
games are really many: the new user interface entirely coded in Assembly, eight more screens, background music inspired by the masters of funk/jazz from the 60s-70s, flashing and bigger stars, more accurate collision detection, redesigned enemies, the death animation for Funky, the codes for replaying each world, the high score table...

Initially I thought of distributing *Reloaded* only after the

release of *Power Up! Action Pack,* but the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic had the effect of slowing down that project, and since Easter was approaching, I wanted to take advantage of it to launch the game right in occasion of that holiday, as I had done seven years earlier for the old *Funky Fungus.* Felipe kindly agreed, and so it was that on Sunday, 12 April 2020, Funky Fungus returned to the screens, bolder than before.

As I previously did with *Lost In My Spectrum* and *Apulija-13,* I was oriented to withdraw from the archives of World Of Spectrum and Spectrum Computing the old version of *Funky Fungus* as well, as I wanted users to play only *Reloaded.* It was Arnau Jess who suggested me not to eliminate the possibility of downloading the old *Funky Fungus,* so that players would realize the extent of the changes made in *Reloaded.* So I did, although at the time of release I made it clear that this was the *Funky Fungus* I would have made seven years before, had I at my disposal the means and experience that I had now.

For this reason, I wish players to focus on *Reloaded,* rather than the previous one, which has a purely historical value.
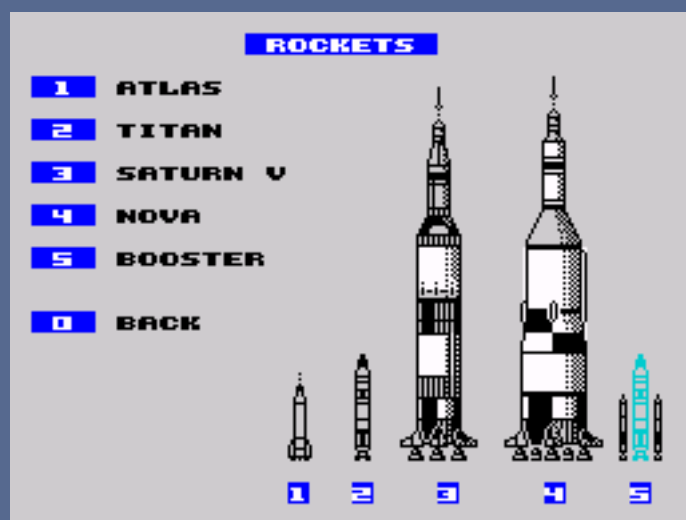

Funky Fungus as seen by Eloy Zeta

AD LUNAM PLUS

To celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing, I released *Ad Lunam,* a "proof of concept" aiming to bring an adaptation of *Buzz Aldrin's Race Into Space* to the Spectrum (you can find the details in the last Annual). The game, having to run on the 48K, was very limited in its presentation, like the strategy/management titles of the early 1980s. So I promised myself to create an expanded version for the 128K Spectrums, in which I would insert graphics, animations and AY music to give it a more attractive look, without sacrificing any of the original idea and gameplay. Naturally, this posed the problem of dividing the game into distinct portions to be stored across the memory banks and retrieved from there when needed, making sure to reserve a fixed area for the variables, so as not to alter their values while

passing from a section to another. Fortunately, the managerial nature of the game, characterized by well-defined sectors - research and development, mission planning, facilities builiding etc. - made this task easier.
In *Ad Lunam Plus* I worked mainly on graphics, trying to reproduce the appearance of the various spacecraft as faithfully as possible: rockets, in particular, are represented to scale, and this required a greater effort in designing them. Even more difficult to create were the numerous portraits of the protagonists of the space race, starting with those who open the game with the choice between the USA and the USSR, that is Werner von Braun and Sergei Korolev, to continue with the pilots - now properly differentiated between "astronauts" and "cosmonauts" - and the final screens. Thanks to a patient work of digitization and finish, they came out looking enough like the originals, and constitute the graphic part I am most satisfied with.

The most notable addition, however, is the mission control room, with its associated animations. Inspired by that of Accolade's *Apollo 18,* it is the most imaginative part of the game, as in the early years of space exploration they were much smaller and simpler structures, without the large monitoring screens that would enter in use only towards the end of the 1960s. Due to memory limitations, I created something hybrid: the tower-shaped launch pad is typically American, but

during manned missions you can see the digitization of a famous photo of Gagarin aboard the Vostok 1, with a Sokol type helmet on his head. For the same reason, the suits of the astronauts/cosmonauts seen on spacewalks and when the flag is planted on the Moon were designed in a "neutral" way, i.e. without making them look like anything real in particular, even though their appearance is pretty much credible for the time. Likewise, the buildings – some of them inspired by graphic elements seen in *Raid Over Moscow* – are the same for both sides.

I wished to use historical images for the end-of-game screens. For this reason, I ran into quite a few difficulties for that of the US player, as I wanted to employ some photo taken from one of the Apollo 11 ticker tape parades. Unfortunately, the resolution of the majority of the pictures I was able to find by searching on the Web
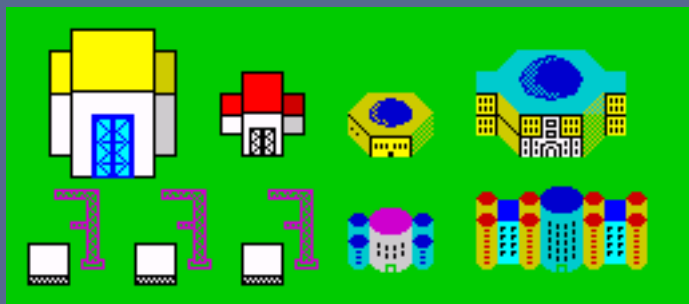
was too low. Others looked better, but the astronauts, being photographed from a distance, appeared too small and did not look good when the images were converted to the Spectrum's graphic format. In the end, I decided to use a photo from the front page of the 14 August 1969 issue of the *New York Times:* I cropped the main image and set it upright. After some tweaking, I obtained a good enough result to fit into the game. For the USSR final picture, on the other hand, the choice was quite easy: the lovely photo of a triumphant Khrushchev with Titov,
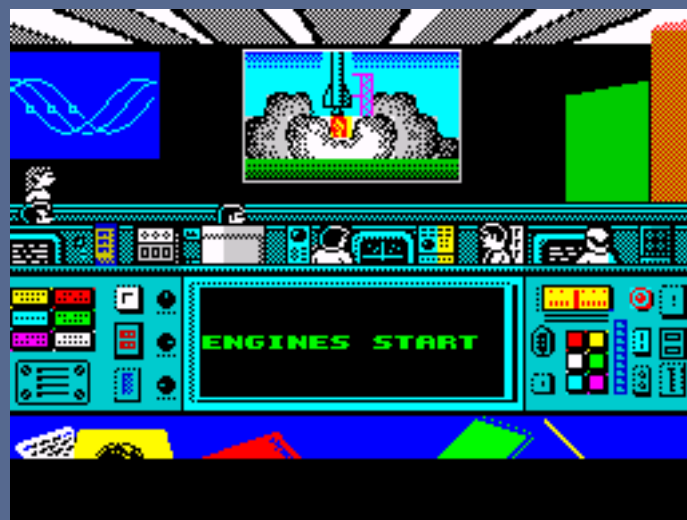
Gagarin, Tereshkova and Bykovsky on the top of Lenin's mausoleum in Moscow lent itself magnificently as the crowning glory of such a colossal undertaking.

As for music, in addition to the national anthems played at the time of choosing the player's country and after a milestone has been achieved, I chose two marches for the end-of-game scenes: *The Washington Post March* by John Philip Sousa for the USA and of Semyon Aleksandrovich Chernetsky's *Slava Rodine* for the USSR.

Then, *Ad Lunam Plus* was released in the summer of 2020 and after some partial revisions it took on its final form. It is the game I am most proud of: it is the most complex I have created to this day, and one of the largest projects made so far for the Spectrum with ZX Basic. As I did with *Ad Lunam,* I distributed it with the source code, so that the more curious can know how I made it, and why not, get inspired to do something similar. There is a tremendous lack of this kind of games in the Spectrum's homebrew scene, and I hope others will see *Ad Lunam* and *Ad Lunam Plus* as an incentive to try to fill this void themselves.

WHAT NOW?

The game announced in the last Annual is becoming a reality. Now it has a name: *Italia 1944,* a blend of adventure, strategy and role-playing entirely controlled through icon-based menus. It is a project in which I tried to put into practice two distinct ideas I had been reflecting on for years, namely a dynamic adventure set in Nazi-occupied Italy during World War II and an icon-based game system. Of the two parts, the first (top left) is complete and has already been successfully tested from start to finish. As for the second (top right), I am working on designing the graphic representations for the locations. Then, the testing phase will begin.

The cassette release of *Sophia* and *Sophia II* by Bitmap Soft, which already has another production of mine, the five-chapter multi-game *Cousin Horace,* in its collection, is in the pipeline. *Sophia* (below, the cassette inlay) and *Sophia II* both come with an exclusive bonus level, specifically created for this edition. Check their website at *www.bitmapsoft.co.uk*
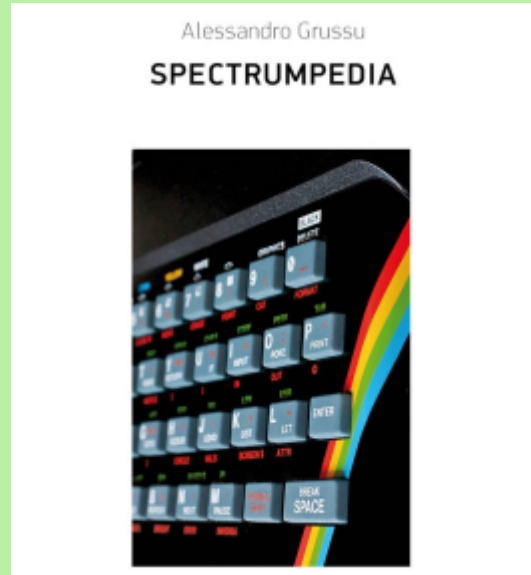
2022 will mark the fortieth anniversary of the first appearance of the Spectrum. Consequently, I plan to update the **Spectrumpedia** to include the changes that have occurred within the Spectrum scene since the book was published, more than eight years ago. At the same time, I hope to be able to resume the English translation and start the Spanish one, but for these tasks I will need the kind help of some volunteers. You know how to find me, so don't hesitate!

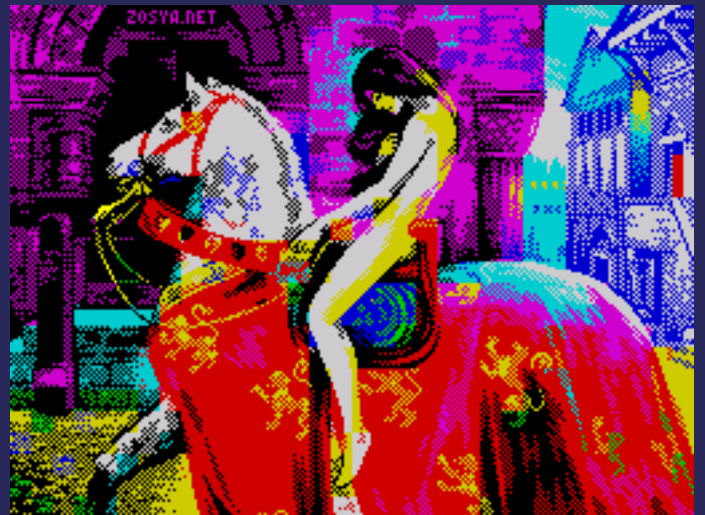# Spec-Art
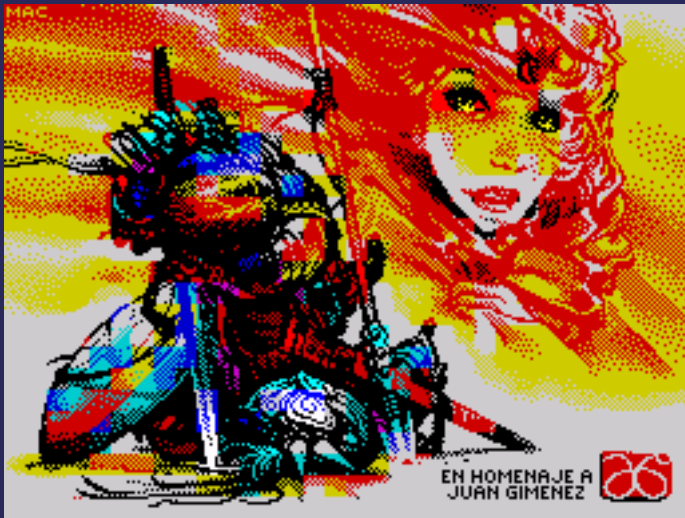
MAC - Lo Prohibido

r0bat - Vasilissa

Pupets - A hundred years from now

Joe Vondayl - First Love

Chris Graham - A-Team

Zosya Entertainment - Lady Godiva