

Issue 2

C64 BLAST

FREE COMMODORE 64 FANZINE

BLUEMAX REVIEW

BEN DAGLISH INTERVIEW

GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS REVIEW

NODES OF YESOD REVIEW

...AND MUCH MORE



C64 BLAST

EDITORIAL



Hi and welcome to the 2nd edition of C64 Blast. Sorry it's been a few months since issue one, but I like to take my time with the magazine so it remains a pleasure rather than a chore. I've been lucky to have an article written this month by my Dad Andrew Wheatley, the man responsible for introducing me to the exciting world of computers at such an early age. I hope you enjoy his review of Bluemax, a favourite game enjoyed by many C64 enthusiasts. We also have another exclusive interview, this time it's the legendary musician Ben Daglish, who most cite as one of the best ever C64 tunesmiths. I hope you enjoy this edition's content. Any comments, photos or articles welcome, email me at philjohnwheatley@gmail.com

All the best, Phil

This issue and future editions: www.theretrogamesnews.com/c64

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GAME: Ghosts 'n' Goblins

PUBLISHER: Elite

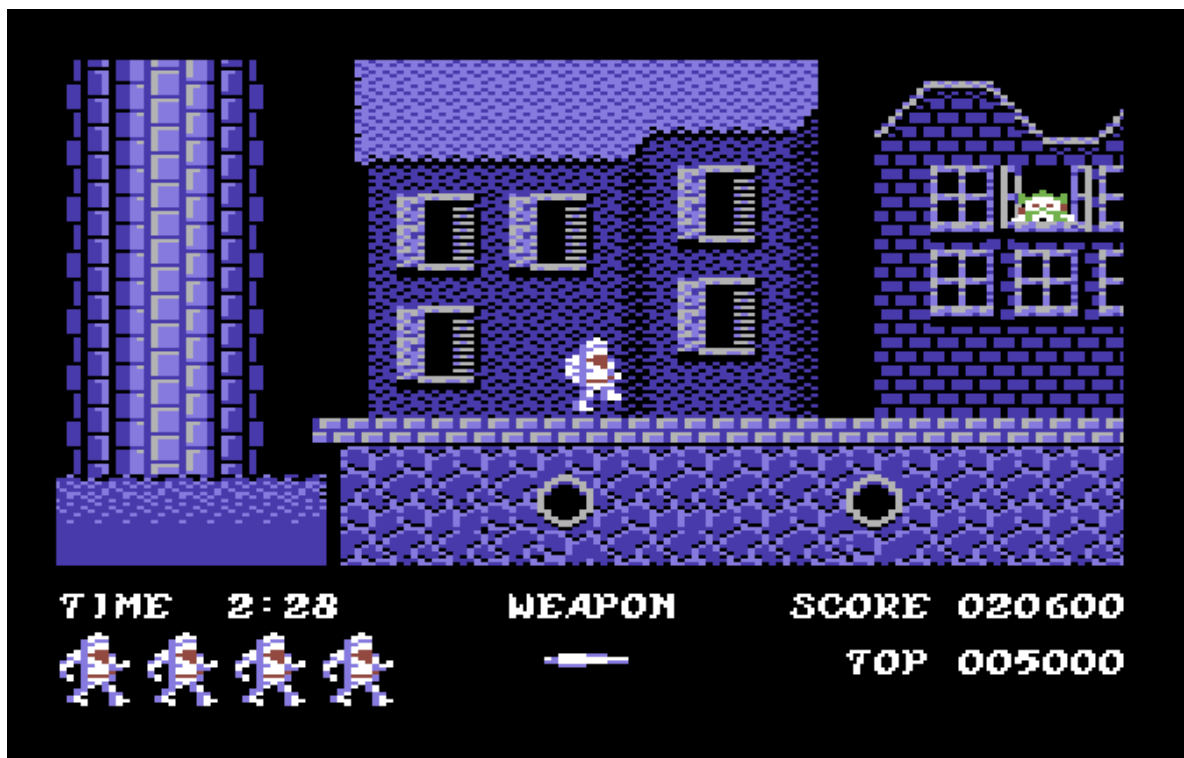
RELEASED: 1986

Ghosts 'n' Goblins is a game that many people over a certain age will remember. I first played the coin-op version in an arcade in Bournemouth (a seaside town in the UK) in 1985, it was a great experience albeit a short one. The reason being is it was rock hard! So I was very happy when it was released for the Commodore 64 a year later, a conversion which stayed as faithful to the original as technically possible.

The arcade version, created by Capcom, was a pretty big game boasting big, colourful sprites,

which unfortunately was a bit too much for the Commodore 64 to handle. So they had the choice of cutting down on graphics, or removing some of levels, they chose the latter. However, you still got the main stages; the graveyard, forest, ice palace, moving platforms, the fire bridge and the final caves.

You play a suited and booted Sir Arthur who was thrown straight into the action within a graveyard. As you walked through the creepy setting, you were confronted by Zombies which sprang out of the ground unannounced, which you would have to shoot with your trusty lance. If you were lucky, you could pick up a knife which was much faster. However, you also



had to be careful not to pick up the flaming torch which was even slower than the lance, and far less accurate.

If you managed to cross the tricky river section, then you had to kill the Ghoul guarding the entrance to the ice palace. If you managed to get this far, you were doing well but trickier challenges awaited you inside. Once in the palace, you had to leap onto moving platforms while trying not to plummet to your death below. This was made more difficult by the numerous winged creatures which would constantly fly at you from random directions.

At the other side of this level was a haunted house which you had to scale while keeping trolls and hawks at bay. Timing and patience was crucial to get

through this stage, but also an element of luck as the hawks appear at a level which made them hard to shoot or jump over.

Beyond this was a level that can only be described as 'floating platforms'. This level was a true test of patience as one mistimed jump would result in losing one of your precious lives. It was one of those levels that required a few attempts to get right, making sure you made a mental note of where the platforms appeared from in order to complete it





successfully next time.

If you managed to get through this then you had to cross a fiery bridge which for me was one of the most exciting sections of the game. You felt a real sense of danger as you tried to get across without being singed by 10 foot flames leaping from the inferno below, not to mention the usual onslaught from ghastly ghouls. This level also captured the essence of the original arcade version very well with the use of large, colourful sprites.

Once past the fire bridge, you made your way into the final cave which you had to battle through and finally confront the demon before holding your beloved again. Even though you didn't have to pay for each game on the C64, it took a serious amount of

practice to get this far, in fact, it took me years!

The game came is complete with some eerie music throughout written by Mark Cooksey, who later went on to write music for the Gameboy, SNES and PC. In contrast, there is a light hearted ditty in the high-score section before heading straight back into the action for your next bout. This game continues to live on in the form of portable consoles and mobile phones and is still very playable and challenging to this day.

In the unlikely event that this game isn't challenging enough for you, then check out its sequel Ghouls 'n' Ghosts, a game so tough, it has the ability to turn the brains of mere mortals into mush.



Rating: 96%

Please note, there is now a new version of this game which has updated graphics and includes all the levels from the arcade. You can find it here:

<http://csdb.dk/release/?id=139257>

...or search Google for Ghosts N Goblins Arcade C64.

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GAME: Blue Max

PUBLISHER: Synapse / US Gold

RELEASED: 1983

REVIEWED BY: Andrew Wheatley

Blue Max is a video game written by Bob Polin. In various formats it was published by Synapse Software and US Gold in 1983, for the Commodore 64 and Atari 8-bit platforms.

Later available for the ZX Spectrum. In 1987 it was available in a cartridge for the Atari XEGS.

My game play was with the Commodore 64 version.

Based on the WW1 "Sopwith Camel" bi-plane, the object of the

game is that you are the pilot on a mission to fly through enemy territory to eventually destroy three heavily defended bunkers, deep within the defended city.

The game opens with the theme music of Rule Britannia, with selections for different control settings for gravity, pilot control and difficulty levels, selected by use of "F" controls. Once selected the scene opens with your plane standing on the runway.

To take off you must allow the speed to reach 100mph, otherwise you will crash on take-off.

The first area consists of a river with enemy ships on it, on the left, with grassy area with tanks



to the right. There are a number of indicators throughout the game showing damage to (M) manoeuvrability, (B) bombs, (F) fuel (G) guns.

If hit by enemy fire these are affected but are replenished when next landing to refuel.

During refuelling, you can take off manually or wait for the full refuel (and if indicated) repair.

When landing, use the shadow of your plane to help guide you onto the runway. Try to land on the right hand side, as later at later stages, enemy planes passing over will drop bombs on you while you are refuelling etc.

When you land your plane to refuel / repair, ensure you land quickly to make sure you stop

before the end of your hanger on the left, otherwise you will not reach 100mph to take-off, before the end of the runway.

When in flight, look for an up or down arrow on the bottom right of the screen, to indicate level correction needed to shoot down an enemy plane when they appear. (Letter P indicates when a plane is approaching, from ahead or behind).

When you are at the correct level to shoot, a blue band appears



across the bottom of the screen.

There are buildings, tanks, vehicles, ships and bridges to bomb and the value of these targets increases when they are blue or marked with a flashing blue cross.

A number of these various targets must be destroyed in order to advance to the next level.

On the next levels the graphics show land & roads and enemy airfields to attack.

During the stages there are friendly airfields to refuel etc. when coming up these are indicated by a large letter "L" on the bottom of the screen.

As in all war scenarios, the enemy will try to destroy you by ground fire & planes. An audible sound signifies you are hit and will indicate damage, as previously

mentioned.

You can also be damaged by colliding with the ground, as in real aircraft.

On the final screen you see tall building either side of your flight path.

You must bomb the three white bunkers. When you have achieved that, you are automatically landed and the Rule Britannia theme is played.

All in all, the flight control and combat is realistic and needs a certain amount of practice to reach the ultimate accolade "Flying Tigers".

By Andrew Wheatley 2017

Rating 93%



Ben Daglish

This issue we had the pleasure of interviewing Ben Daglish, who is a true legend in the computer music scene. He composed the music for The Last Ninja, 720 °, Gauntlett and more. Read on...

C64BLAST: What was your first exposure to video gaming and computers in general?

BEN: I “won” a BBC for my school (to be honest, they were throwing them at schools with any excuse they could find), so I was allowed to play around with it. Through that, I met Tony Crowther, who was already writing games for the Vic20, and had started on the C64, and was introduced to the burgeoning world of “home-brew” games.

C64BLAST: How did the marriage of computers and composing come about for you?

BEN: Again, simply through Tony. He knew I was a musician, so asked me originally to arrange some existing tunes for 3 voices – the Death March etc. – and then asked me to come up with something original – so I did, and never stopped.

C64BLAST: Considering you were in your early 20s when you were having your big hits, was it difficult to keep your feet on the ground and get the work done?



BEN: Not really – it was great fun doing the trade shows etc., but to be honest, although some tunes may have been “hits”, that was for a very small proportion of the population – I never had the problem of being recognised in the supermarket or whatever!

C64BLAST: What was the actual process, did you get to work alongside the developers creating the games, or were you just sent a brief and then you locked yourself in a room with your keyboard?

BEN: Originally, the latter (and of course, I used a computer keyboard exclusively – I never compose on a piano-type keyboard). Later on, when I was working for Gremlin, I was next door to the developers, so of course I worked a lot closer with

them – something I preferred really.



C64BLAST: How long would it take to compose a tune for a game, and what was a typical day like?

BEN: Generally, a couple of days, depending on requirements. I tended to knock out a 3 minute tune once per day, so a complete "suite" for a game, with SFX etc. as well, would take roughly a week. A typical day consisted of rolling out of bed, typing away for 8 hours, and then spending the rest of the time till bed playing games :)

C64BLAST: Was there any rivalry, albeit friendly with the other composers, I assume you had to fight for the work for the big titles?

BEN: Actually, not at all. At the time, there was only really myself, Rob Hubbard and Dave Whittaker working freelance, whilst Martin Galway was full-time at Ocean, and there was plenty of work, so we all just waited for the phone to ring. I think the only rivalry was a purely professional

one, in terms of quality of music and cleverness of sound routines.

C64BLAST: Nowadays, there is no limit to what music you can create on a PC, what were the challenges of composing music with only 3 channels to play with?

BEN: Mate – I could write an essay. In fact, I'm sure I have by now, over the years. The challenges were exactly what you'd imagine – I wanted an orchestra, and had 3 sawtooth/square waves. The main thing it taught me was to rely on strength of melody and arrangement, rather than relying on "texture".

C64BLAST: Do you have any hobbies outside of music, how do you kill spare time, if you have any?



BEN: As a father of 3, I only really have time for my two main loves – programming and music, both of which I'm lucky enough to do professionally, but I dabble in all sorts of strange things at different times, from making maps of 16th Century London through Ultimate Frisbee to Inuit string games. I suspect I get bored easily... :)

C64BLAST: I understand you're a fan of the late Ronnie Hazlehurst, composer of TV hits like Only Fools and Horses, tell us more, did he influence your writing style?

BEN: I often suspect my love of a good tune comes from a lot of Ronnie's work – he wrote a hook like no other, and completely understood the "tricks of the trade" where "bespoke" composition is concerned.

C64BLAST: You have made a great career from music, despite advice from parents nationwide telling their kids to stay away from the Arts. What would your advice be to those wanting to pursue something off the beaten track?

BEN: My personal advice has to be "do it". I ditched a maths degree to become a musician, and my two eldest look like they're headed for a career in the Arts as well. If you have something to contribute, the World needs it.

C64BLAST: Thank you very much Ben for a great interview!





GAME: Nodes of Yesod

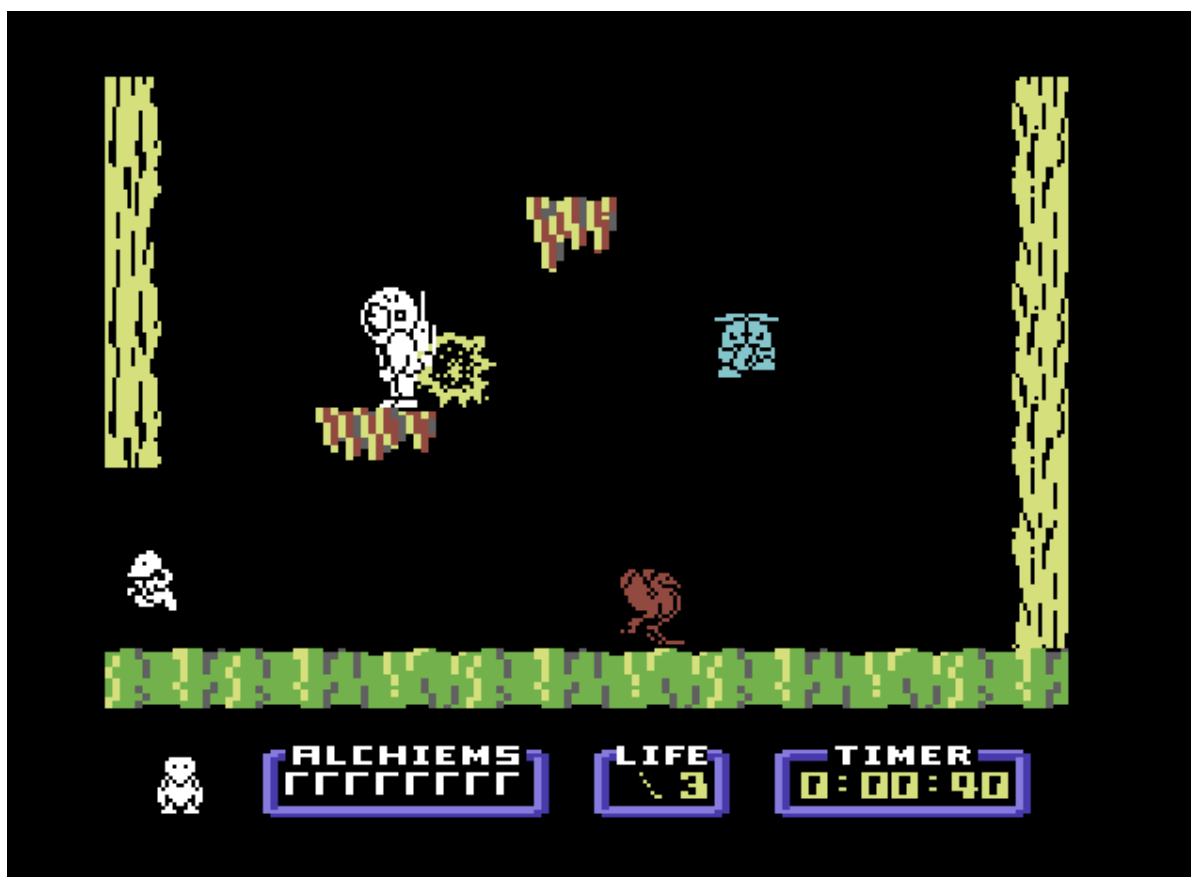
PUBLISHER: Odin

RELEASED: 1985

As the years pass by, this lesser known gem is becoming a bit of a cult classic. The game was first released in 1985 by Odin Computer Graphics, a software house which was enjoying the fact people thought they were a sister company of Ultimate Play the Game. It was easy to see why because the packaging and artwork were similar, and the graphics also resembled that of the Ultimate's later titles.

The game was available on a variety of systems such as the C64, Amstrad CPC, the ZX Spectrum (48k/128k) and the rare Elan Enterprise 64. It's worth noting that the 128k version of the Spectrum game had better quality music over the 48k, and also included synthesised speech. The music was composed by Fred Gray who was also responsible for the music in Shadowfire, and the similarities can be heard which isn't such a bad thing.

Onto the plot. Some strange signals have been intercepted from the Moon, and an astronaut by the name of Charlie Fotheringham-Grunes has been



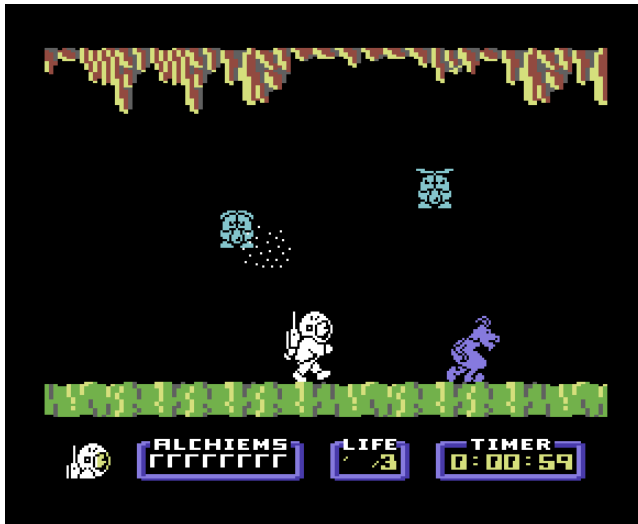
given the task of locating the exact location of the signal's source. Charlie's eccentric surname was in fact an amalgamation of the lead developer's surnames; Stuart Fotheringham and Colin Grunes.

Once you landed on the moon, the first thing you had to do was capture one of the local friendly moles, and once under your command, the mole would happily burrow through the Moon surface, giving you access to the underground complex. Once below ground, you were faced with a series of rooms, caverns and wind tunnels. Traveling around whilst trying not to fall to your death would be tricky enough, but was made even more

dangerous by the many weird inhabitants that got in your way.

Thankfully you don't die instantly when you touch a meanie, however your life force would quickly deplete if you got caught in a tangle with one. You also had lives which could be replenished with spacemen symbols dotted around the network. However, your main focus was on collecting





a series of Alchiems which ultimately would lead you to the final destination, the Monolith from which the signals are coming from.

What gives this game a great replay factor, is the Alchiems are found in a different location each time you play. With that said, there are certain rooms where you are more likely to find them. Already the difficulty factor is racking up, but there is one further problem...the red kleptomaniac spaceman. He will appear at random times in the game and steal one of your Alchiems. He is quite difficult to avoid, however you can drop a limited number of gravity sticks which will temporarily root him to the spot.

Occasionally you would come to areas that appear to have no logical way out, at this point it was worth grabbing your mole (that sounds wrong) and directing him to the wall's perimeter, if you

were lucky he will find a weak spot and tunnel his way through. This was quite a unique feature in 1985!

Another great addition to the game was the wind tunnels. You could either slowly descend to the bottom, or you can wave your arms frantically to float back to the surface. Make sure you are facing the correct direction though when moving up, otherwise you may find yourself taking a much quicker route to the bottom again!

Once you had collected all the Alchiems in the correct order and have found your way to the Monolith, you have completed the game, something I still haven't achieved nearly 30 years on.

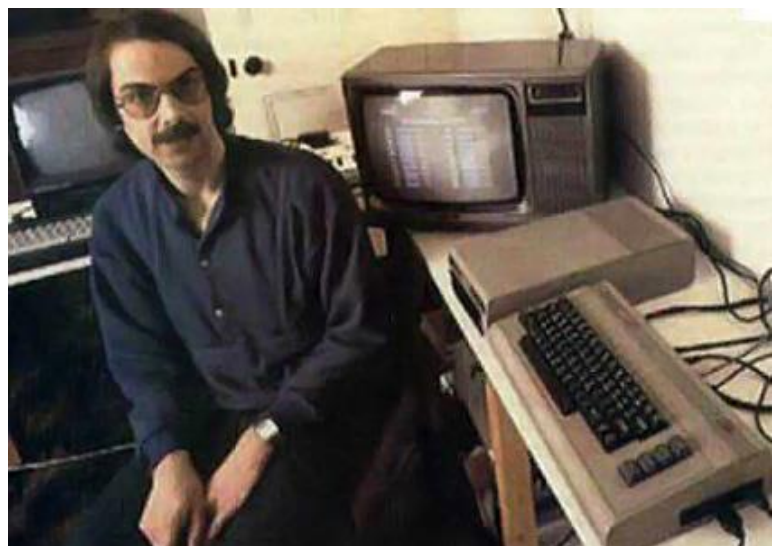
In 2010, there was an anniversary edition created for iOS devices, which sported updated graphics and an orchestral version of the music but all still in keeping with the original.

This game has truly stood the test of time and really worth checking out, especially if you are a fan of other games by Odin or Ultimate Play the Game titles.

Rating 94%

This Issue's C64 Legend – Rob Hubbard

If you had a Commodore 64 in the 80s, then there is no doubt you spent as many hours listening to Rob's music as playing the games themselves. Commando, Monty on the Run, Thing on a Spring, Master of Magic, One Man and his droid, Sanxion...the list goes on!





GAME: Thrust

PUBLISHER: Firebird

RELEASED: 1986

Most people, me included might think this game made its debut on the C64 and ZX Spectrum. However, it also had an earlier release on the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron as a full priced title.

The original came out in 1986 for the Beeb and the Electron at the price of £7.95. Maybe this was a bit steep for the time, which is possibly why it was more popular on the C64 at the budget price of

£1.99. It was released under the Firebird label and this is the version that most people remember.

As well as the C64 and Speccy versions, the game was also ported to the Commodore 16; Amstrad CPC; Atari 2600; Vectrex and the Atari ST. Curiously it didn't make it to the Amiga.

One of the first things to hit you with the C64 version is the awesome (albeit slightly whacky) soundtrack by music legend Rob Hubbard. At first glance you think that the graphics are rather limited. I can remember lowering my expectations of the game having seen them, especially



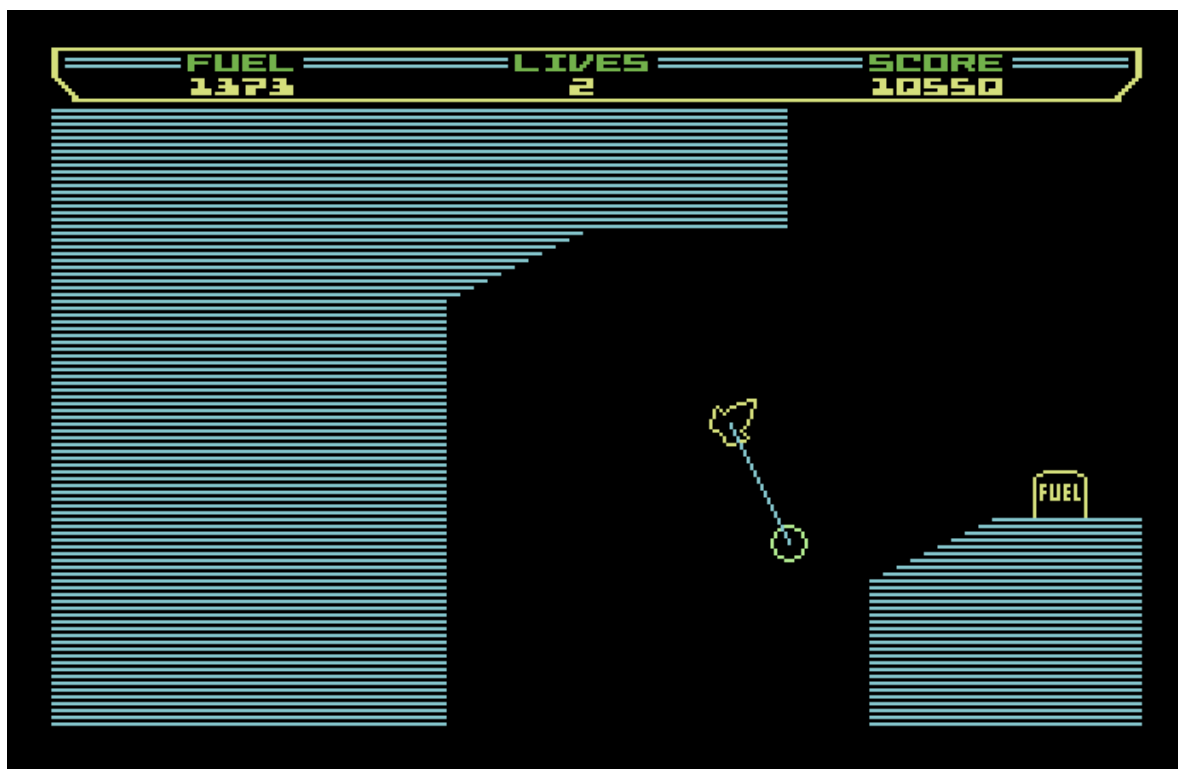
considering the low price, but I was wrong to judge it so quickly.

As soon as the game starts, the player finds themselves plummeting to the planet's surface due to the strong gravitational pull. A quick fumble of the controls reveals to the player that the ship handles in a similar way to the one in Asteroids, but with the addition of gravity. It also reminded me of Jupiter Lander somewhat.

The object of the game seemed pretty simple at first, the player needed to position their ship above an orb, activate a tractor beam to pull the orb off its docking bay and then fly the orb into space.

However, in order to get full point from the level, the player needed to shoot a nearby power station a

sufficient number of times to cause the planet to explode soon after their departure from the surface. As the ship became difficult to control due to the heavy orb swinging at the end of the ship's transportation cable, it was wise to shoot the power station a few times before proceeding with the mission. Overcook it though and the player would have to flee before the planet blew up. This would result in a much lower score and was essentially defeating the object of the game. To make things more difficult, each planet would have its own defence system in the form of gun turrets which would take pot shots at you. They could however be temporarily disabled by shooting the power station a few times.



To aid your situation, your ship was equipped with an accurate laser as well as a shield (note that using the shield would use up valuable fuel, so it was wise to use it sparingly). Thankfully, fuel could be picked up by hovering over a fuel pod and using the tractor beam to absorb it.

The first planet was pretty easy as everything the player needs to negotiate is above ground. However as one progressed through the levels, there was a need to go deeper into each planet's underground caverns.

Some tunnels are quite a tight squeeze, and occasionally the player would have to shoot control buttons to open sliding doors to access the next cavern. As mentioned before, the visuals were basic but it was the physics

of the game that made it appealing and addictive.

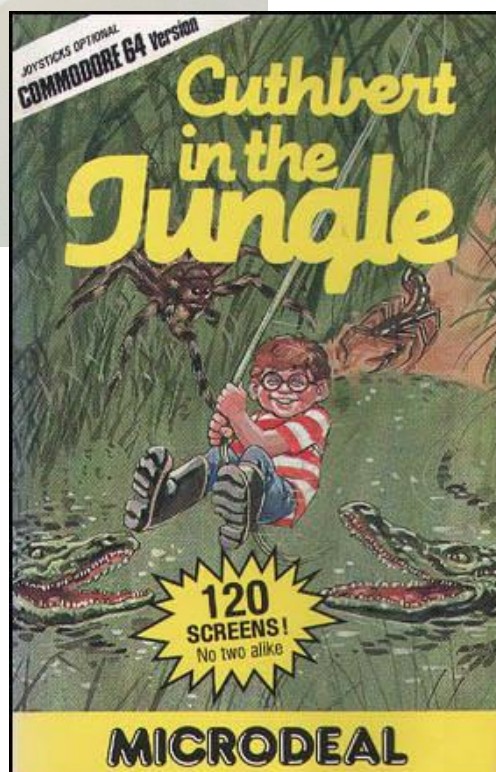
If you completed all 6 levels then you would have to repeat the process but with the gravity pulling in the opposite direction than it did when playing first time around. Complete these levels and the player would then have to negotiate invisible walls, which could only be exposed whilst the ship's shield was activated.

This is one of those games which feels as fresh today as it did back then; the gameplay is simple but fun and would no doubt would lend itself to a modern device with tilt control such as a tablet.

Rating 94%

Microdeal Members Club – Free Gift

As you may have already read in this edition's review of Cuthbert in the Jungle, Microdeal used to run their own newsletter which gave news about up and coming games as well as special deals on existing ones. When you joined, you received a free badge of the company's mascot, which I still have to this day! I wonder how many more still exist...





GAME: Cuthbert in the Jungle

PUBLISHER: Microdeal

RELEASED: 1983

Cuthbert in the Jungle came out in 1983, which made it one of the first games I ever played on the C64. It was originally brought out on the Dragon 32, and proved to be a good clone of David Crane's Pitfall, so it was only natural it made it onto the Commodore. Of course back in the 80s, Intellectual Property wasn't really an issue, hence why you could get away with ripping off other games, and few did it

better than Microdeal. In fact, they built a business around it.

As well as the Pitfall clone, they made Donkey King (couldn't even be bothered to disguise the name for that one), Cuthbert in Space (essentially a Jetpac clone), Cuthbert in the Mines (a Frogger type game), Cuthbert Goes Digging (a Space Panic clone)...and the list goes on. Oh well, the best ideas are stolen.

I have to say though, at the time I thought Cuthbert's jungle outing was a great one, it played very smoothly and was challenging enough without being frustrating. A speech bubble on the cassette inlay cover claimed that there



were “over 120 screens, no two alike”. Well, as a kid I was determined to find two screens that were alike, and it didn’t take long to find many that were identical, but it didn’t matter.

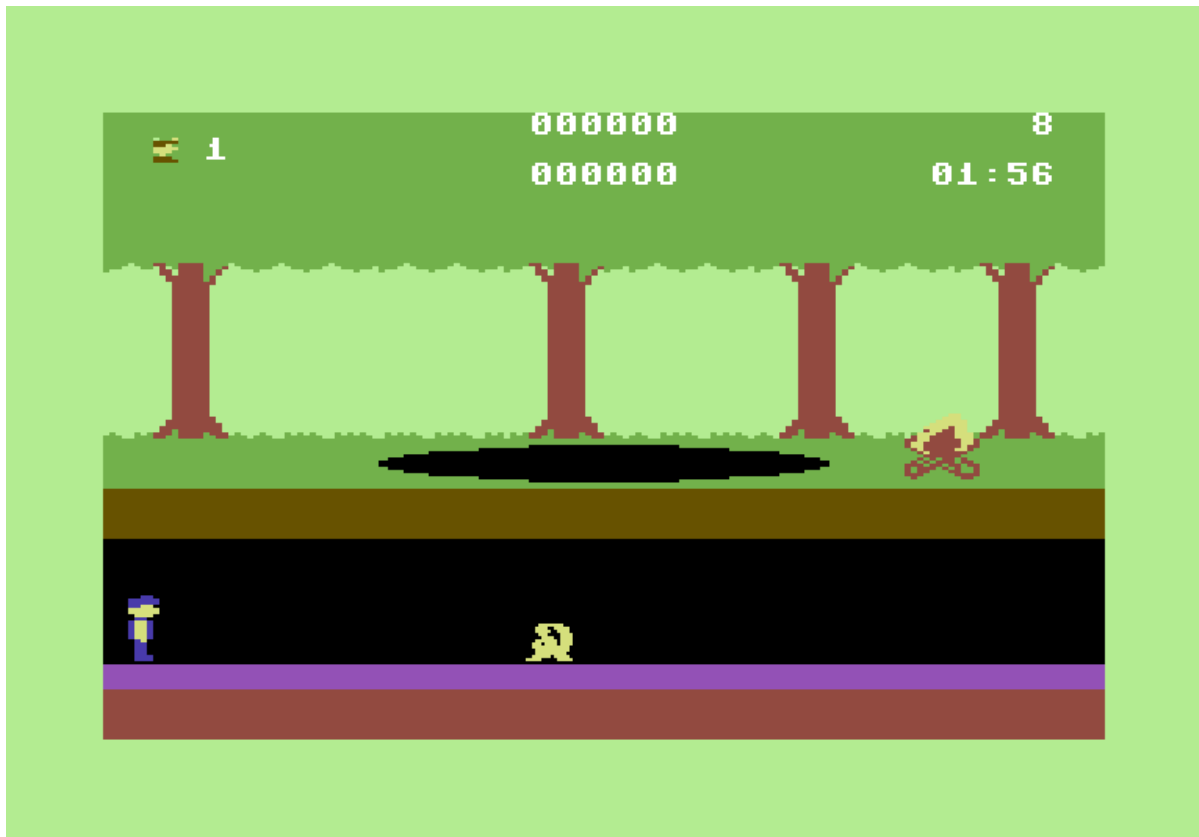
One thing that did seem a bit strange was the fact that if you wanted to see what the last screen looked like, on the first screen you could just walk left and it would take you straight to the last screen of the game. Very odd.

Considering it was an early title, it had plenty to keep you interested. You would gain points by simply making your way across each screen, but these points would be deducted if you ran into barrels, which made a

change from just instantly being killed. The first major obstacle was having to avoid expansive holes that would appear on the ground. A well timed run was the only way to get past these. If you were lucky, some of levels had swinging ropes which you could grab and swing Tarzan style to safety.

My favourite screens were the ones that contained the crocodiles in pits. Obviously inspired by the scene from Live and Let Die, you had to time it well so that you could jump on their heads without falling into their jaws.

As you progressed through the jungle, the screens added other obstacles at the end of the pits such as fires and poisonous



snakes. However, you could often take a slightly easier route by running through the underground tunnel, making sure you leaped over the scorpion. However, eventually you would come across a wall which would force you to backtrack and head up the ladder to the upper lair.

The music suited the game well and would play a ditty as you ran across the screen. As soon as you stopped, the music would start from the beginning again, which in a strange way encouraged you to try and make your way across the screen in one take. The title music was also very good and adventurous sounding.

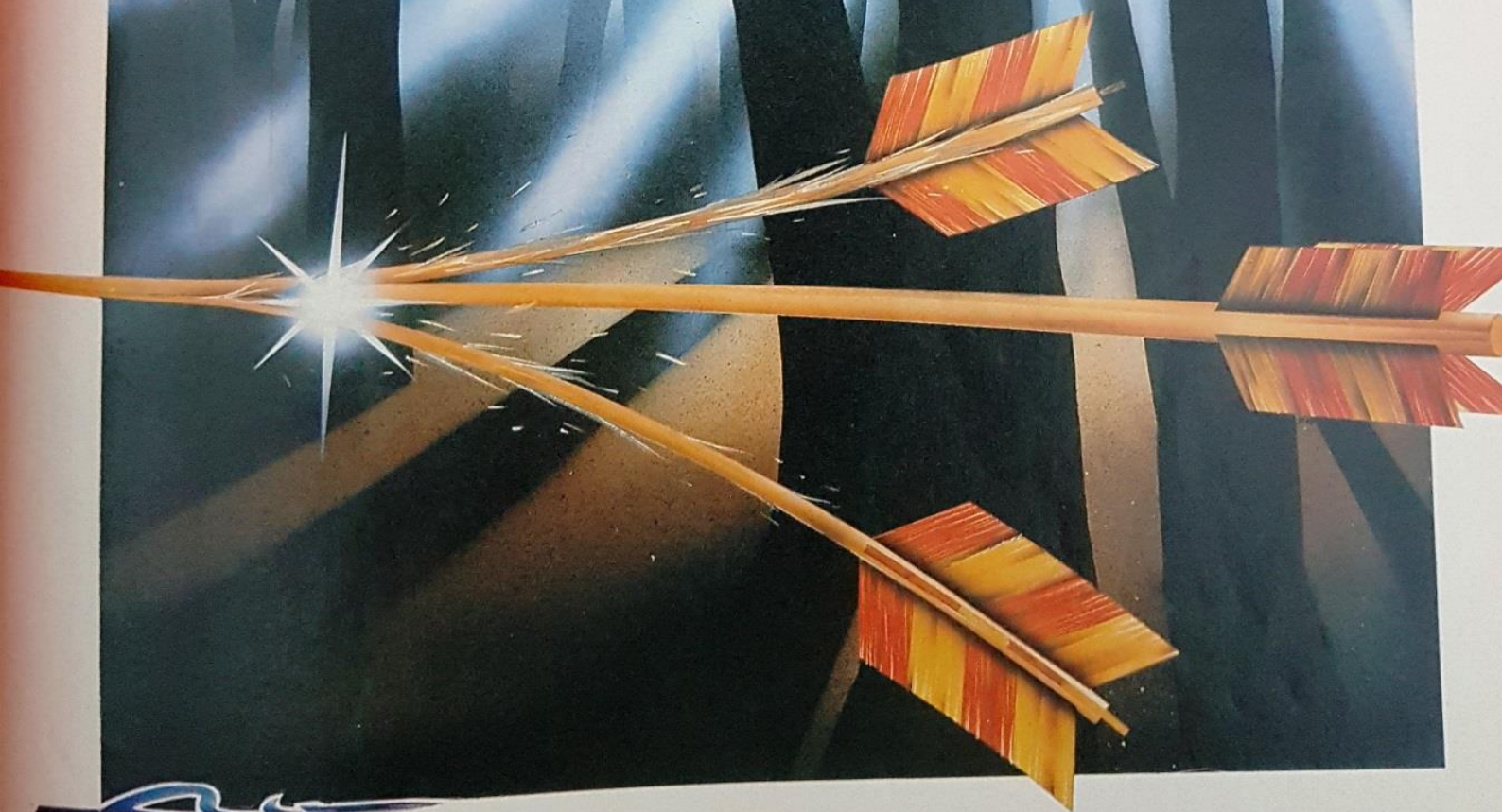
The artwork for cassette cover was great and Cuthbert was a likeable character. I even ended up joining the "Cuthbert Club" (address based in Truro, where the software house was based), which had a quarterly newsletter sent in the post, along with a free badge and special deals on games. However, I was a bit miffed when I read in their final letter that they thought the Dragon 32 was a better machine and would concentrate their efforts on that system instead.

That aside, this game still provides a few minutes of fun, so if you like platformers, or anything similar to Pitfall, then this is well worth a try.

Rating 85%

£9.95

robin of the wood



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GAME: Bangkok Knights

PUBLISHER: System 3

RELEASED: 1988

System 3 had made quite a name for themselves on the C64 by creating fantastic, fighting related games. Most people will cite IK+ for example as one of the best 'one on one' (or one on two) Karate games, and Last Ninja blends martial with action adventure perfectly.

For some reason, Bangkok Knights is a lesser known product, but it was certainly an ambitious one. At the time, having such huge sprites that

moved quickly with colourful scrolling backgrounds was almost unheard of. Something of this nature would only normally be seen in the arcades.

There was a price to pay though for having such draw dropping graphics, and that was the dreaded multi-load. However, being able to fight on the edge of a cliff one moment, and then in a busy street market the next, the developers could be forgiven for trying to squeeze as much as possible into the beloved 64.

Talking of frantic, as soon as the game began, you were likely to get your arse kicked within the first few seconds if you didn't know what you were doing. This



often lead to you rushing in on your second go with legs and arms flying, only to realise that if you did that too much, your power bar would deplete making your blows ineffective.

What seemed to work best therefore was ducking in and out of the action while landing well timed blows to the head and body; either with your feet, fists, knees or elbows...anything goes! To execute the moves, you hold down the fire button, and then move the joystick in various directions. Depending on whether you have the control set to easy mode or not, then computer can choose the best move for you at the time.

Not only are each of the characters completely different, but they also have special moves. There is a comedic moment where one of them swings their arm in a windmill fashion, and if it lands on your head, you get reduced to a concertina with feet!

The only criticism I would have with this game is after a while, it can turn into a button smashing affair, making the action feel a bit repetitive, but that's not to say it isn't challenging. Some of the opponents are very tough indeed!

Between each bout, you were treated to a dolled up lady bearing a sign with the round number on it. I'm not sure how politically correct that is these



days, but it surely was a sign of the times (no pun intended).

As you climbed to the top of the ranks, you eventually found yourself in the middle of a stadium, fighting in front of paying customers. Getting to this stage gave you a sense of achievement having worked your way up from fighting the locals in the village.

The music isn't bad either, written by the Legendary Rob Hubbard. It's not a tune that is sighted as one of his best, but it does fit the frantic style of the game quite nicely.

If you've not had the chance to play this one, then give it a go, and hopefully you'll get to appreciate how technically

difficult this was to pull off at the time. It certainly sits well with the best of the Beat 'Em Ups from this era.

Rating 92%



C64 BLAST

CLOSING THOUGHTS

Thanks for tuning into issue 2, and issue 3 is already in the planning stages which should include a review of The Eidolon, Bomb Jack and Pyjamarama, plus an exclusive interview with Roger Kean.

If you're into the C64 and other related retro goodness, then you'll love this resources below, all of which I read and have bought from.

See you next edition! Cheers,

Phil www.theretrogamesnews.com/c64 (this issue and future editions)

RESOURCES – CHECK 'EM OUT!

CHRIS WILKINS <https://fusionretrobooks.com/>

Amazing retro books covering the C64, Spectrum, Amiga and more. Also look out for his C64 Group on Facebook, search on Facebook for "The story of the Commodore 64 in Pixels"

FREEZE 64 <http://www.c64endings.freeolamail.com/freeze64/freeze64.htm>

A great fanzine on the subject of C64 pokes, hints and maps.

RESET 64 <http://reset.cbm8bit.com/>

Long established C64 fanzine, a fantastic read and also has the option of cover disks.

OLIVER FREY ART <http://www.oliverfreyart.com/>

Legendary artist who created the covers of Zzap!64, Crash, Amtix as well as computer game covers, comics and more.

Commodore 64 Fan App

<https://apps.appmachine.com/commodore64fanapp>

A brilliant, free C64 app which links you to commodore resources.

RETROGAMER <http://www.retrogamer.net/> Who doesn't love this mag!?

C64 Brain <https://www.youtube.com/user/SeetheTruth4Yourself> YouTuber