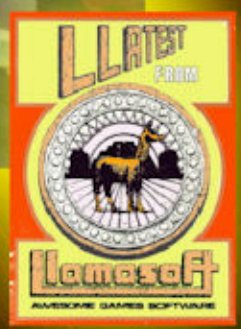
Retrovision Presents Jeff Minter's

Nature of the Beast

the LLamasoft Newsletter



Retrovision

Issues 1 to 10

the Nature of the Beast

the LLAMASOFT newsletter

First Hairy Issue...June 1984

1: What is this anyway?

You may well ask. In fact we thought it would be a good idea to do some kind of newsletter in order to keep track of high scores in games, warn you about any new releases and generally give out interesting bits of info about whatever comes into my head at the time. We don't intend to lay any heavy advertising on you, we assume that if you're reading this you'll have made your own conclusions about the games.

If you beat any of the scores we're going to give later in this newsletter, write in with details and we'll update the list whenever I get round to doing another one of these.

2: New Releases

SHEEP IN SPACE - my most recent release for the C64. This is loosely based around a Defender-style scrolling planetary surface. The difference is that we have two surfaces, one at the base of the screen in traditional fashion, and one inverted at the

base of the screen in traditional fashion, and one inverted at the top. The sheep flies in the space between the two planets, and may land in fields on either planet to graze when the stomach status becomes uncomfortable. Speed is controlled in a unique manner, being dependant upon your height above the planetary surfaces. Flying close to either 'ground' slows you down (handy for landings), whilst flying in the centre of the screen equidistant from the surfaces gives maximum velocity. Your mission, should you decide to accept it, is to rid your planets of the various nasties inhabiting them. To this end you can fire Bonios of Doom (well that's what they look like!) at your various assailants. These weapons are attracted by the gravity of the planets, and this must be taken into account when you aim.

Just to make life unpleasant, several of these nasties gang up to steal energy from your power stations. Glowing with the energy, they race to charge up their Planetbuster gun, which if allowed to reach full charge, will blow up your planet. You should therefore give priority to the destruction of Charge Carriers.

There is a large 'cast of characters' introduced gradually during the first 21 levels, and a total of 48 levels of difficulty. The game is quite complex to learn, but rewarding to play well, requiring not only accurate blasting but also a certain amount of strategic planning as you attempt to keep your planet intact and your sheep alive.

If you like a challenging and different blast, this is a good one to have. If you're looking to play Defender though, don't get this, because although at first glance it looks a little like the Williams classic, the gameplay and strategy is totally different. If you want to play Defender get Alligata's Guardian, which is a pretty good clone.

METAGALACTIC LLAMAS BATTLE AT THE EDGE OF TIME is a C64 conversion of my original Vic20 game with the same bizarre name. Programmed by Aaron Liddiment, a friend of mine who'll be doing some more Llamasoft conversions later, the game has been improved with better graphics and given a fancy intro page and high score table. Two-player mode is also available on the new version.

For those who haven't seen the Vic version of the game, it is an unusual variation of the 'shoot-em-up' variety. Under your command is a llama at the bottom of the screen. You cause this to move left and right with your joystick, and by pressing the FIRE button you can make the beast spit. Moving the stick up and down controls a horizontal force field in the upper portion of the screen. By bouncing expectoration off the walls and the force field you can plug the nasty Arachnids (well actually

spiders) which descend on threads from the top of the screen. If left unzapped, these eventually drop off their webs and land, mutating into weevils and crawling towards you in a disgusting manner. Zapping the Weevils requires clever spit-deflection.

This game gets harder in a simple way. more of the same, but faster. Don't get this if you want the variety of lifeforms you had in Revenge. If you want a simple but oddly compulsive zap, do try this. It's fun.

ATTACK OF THE MUTANT CAMELS is now available on the Atari. This is my first Atari game for some time, and I'm very pleased with the result. All the features of the C64 original are there, plus a few extras, and the whole is played out over one of the most beautiful backdrops I've ever seen on a game. I'm not just blowing my own trumpet here, do get a look at the game if you can. The Atari's tremendous colour capability enabled me to get a lovely 'sunset' effect which will knock your eyeballs out.

Gameplay is improved over the C64 original, with totally smooth scrolling and full ship inertia added, plus some nice 'Robotron-style' explosion effects. The game is still the simple 'laser the camels and jump to lightspeed' job, simple yet addictive, and fits into any of the Atari models. The Ataris have been neglected by all in England with the exception of people like English and Starcade, which is a shame because they have amazing potential for game design. Watch this space for future developments!

3: Game Development Tools

I often get asked what kind of development systems I use to write the games, so I'm going to run through the various stuff I use during the creation of a game.

I certainly do not subscribe to the 'we've got a Sage IV and 300 programmers' school of thought which seems so common with the large, breadhead software houses. I really prefer to work on the target machine; I don't really care if it takes longer because I never work to deadlines anyway.

On the C64 I've been using the Commodore Assembler/Editor package, disk-based on a pair of 4040 twin drives interfaced through an Interpod interface. I use the 4040s because my 1541 really can't stand the constant hammering which repeated assemblies give the drives. The 4040s are built like tanks and never go down, but they are very SLOW!!! I'm just now starting to use a new system, assembling on an Apple II

which has faster 'drives, and shoving the 'code into the '64 for test and debug. It's the slow speed of the drives which drove me to the Apple rather than any deficiencies in the AE package, which has its quirks but usually works.

For graphics I use SPED and CHRED, utilities provided on the Commodore development disk. These are straightforward sprite and character editors. For debug I use the old Commodore ML monitor, of which I have various copies at various addresses.

On the Atari I use the MAC/65 assembler cartridge in my 800, coupled with two 810 drives. MAC/65 is very fast and also has a nice debugger. If you choose addresses carefully you can run your object code without harming your source, which is nice, because you can just flick back and forth between the two, editing and re-assembling in a few seconds.

Also essential to program development are the following: my laser audio and video systems, the fridge in the corner with all the Coke in it, a daily run, the Tempest machine and the Star Wars cockpit machine, not being interrupted by the telephone, and Star Raiders on the Atari.

4: About the Author.

I'll keep this bit brief, 'cos I don't want to give the impression that I get a kick out of writing about myself. But for those who are interested, a brief summary follows:

Jeff Minter: about 6 foot 1, hairy, University drop-out, into camels, llamas, sheep & goats. Started to teach myself games design and programming between A-levels at 6th form. Likes Python and 'The Young Ones' (favourite character Neil). Into

Floyd, Genesis, Roger Waters, Steve Hillage, Rush, Camel, Led Zep,

Marillion, more Pink Floyd, and more which I'll probably kick myself later for not putting in. Favourite video game Star Raiders on the Atari. Dislikes current heavy commercialisation of the games scene, and 'competitive' attitude of some software firms. (I'm no more competing with anyone than Floyd are with, say, Genesis or Marillion). Enjoyed University despite getting the boot, and miss the social life (being a programmer is like being a hermit!). Really quite an average human being and not a silicon whizz-kid at all (thank God!). Reads Fat Freddie's Cat and tons of science fiction. Writes weird video games.

5: Future Projects

I have just started a new C64 game about which I can't say much at the moment for obvious reasons, except that I hope to have a proto at least running in time for the PCW show in September, and I'd really like to have it finished before I go on holiday to Peru. I'm giving up left/right scrolling for a bit, 'cos suddenly it seems that every C64 programmer and his dog are doing the smooth scroll bit, and I'm peeved off with it. The resulting game should appeal to anyone with a taste for the bizarre. Maybe I'll leak some more details closer to completion time! Meanwhile rest assured that the Apple is getting a good pounding every day, I'm swearing when the bugs creep in, and the cat is warming its arse on the disk drives- usual work conditions for me!

6: High Scores.

Gridrunner	.....501,880 level 18	Iain Fenton
Hell Gate	.....480,000 level 19	Me!!
Revenge	.....2,000,000+	unknown
Laser Zone	120,000	M. Spall
Attack	135,248	Iain Fenton
Sheep/Space	1,173,913	Steve Kellet

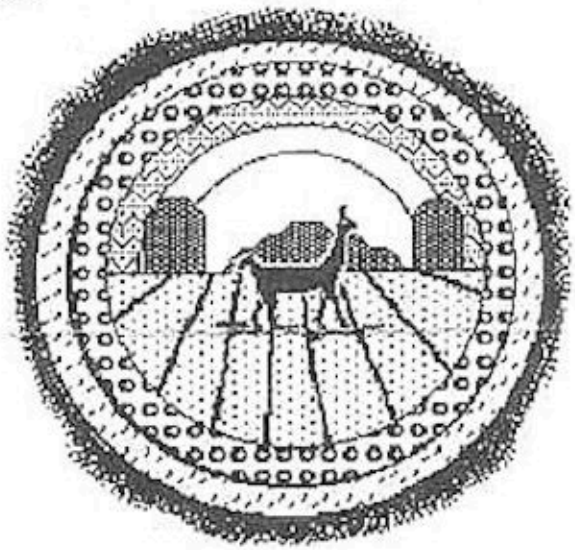
Doubtless these are all out of date by now, so let us know your

best. We've heard of level 15 being reached on Hover Bovver but don't know the score!! Also does anyone have a legitimate MATRIX score??

7: Whatever...

Learning Machine Code... I used PROGRAMMING THE 6502 by Rodnay Zaks as a good 6502 book, and used the VIC and 64 Programmers Reference Guides for each machine. The VIC REVEALED is also good for VIC20 owners. On the Atari, DE RE ATARI is expensive but essential. Treat yourself to a good assembler and a disk drive if you're serious about doing a lot of code.

Good Games not by the Beast... Alligata's GUARDIAN is a brilliant Defender... Rabbit do the best Scramble... ENCOUNTER by Novagen is Battlezone but better... Task Set stuff usually good, my faves are Pipeline and Gyropod... Quicksilva's BOOGABOO is nice, really weird... FLIGHT SIM II- expensive but very good... Anirog Time Pilot is a good copy of the arcade one... Alligata LOCO is a good arcade copy, very pretty but a touch repetitive, buy it for the Jean-Michel Jarre... More of these next time..rest assured these are good, they're the ones I dig out when I need a rest from my own!



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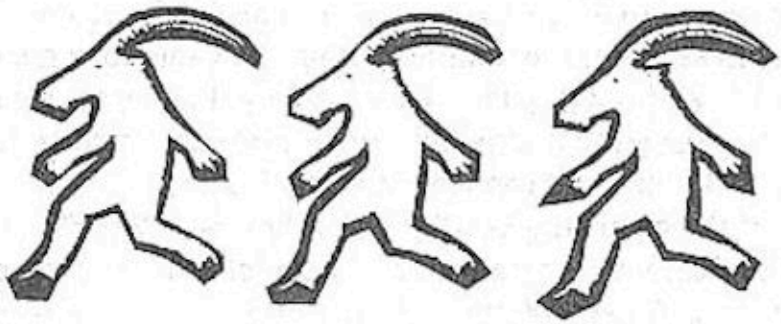
Correspondence, high scores, large sums of money, marriage proposals etc. should be sent to us here at 49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley, Hants RG26 6BN. Special greetings from Yak the Hairy to the 3 Toed Sloth... Rory will feature in the next one... 'Ta' to whoever sent me that anonymous disk... and hairy greetings to all fans of our beastly games.

the Nature of the Beast



the LLAMASOFT newsletter

Second Shaggy Issue...September 1984

1: ANCIPITAL: the latest C64 game

I have now completed the C64 project I mentioned in the last newsletter. The resultant 50-odd K of program and data will be released at the PCW show in London this month.

It is difficult to categorize this game. You might call it an arcade adventure, but the very word adventure' tends to put off hardened arcade blast freaks. Certainly, there are elements of adventure in the game (you need a map to play best, you collect things) but there is even more 'arcade' stuff than there was in Revenge.

The basic idea behind the game came from watching stuff like Atic Atac and Sabre Wulf. Both these games feature large maps and plenty of action, but there doesn't seem to be a great variety of actual attackers; seldom more than about 20-odd different hostiles throughout the whole game.

What I set out to do was create a large map, with doors and keys in the manner of an adventure, but to present in each room a completely different attack wave in the manner of Revenge. The waves should be more complex than the Revenge ones, should appeal to zap'em nuts and rather than the standard knight/explorer/detective adventure scenario, I wanted psychedelic surrealism and general out-to-lunchness.

The resultant game I like to call a 'progressive arcade game' rather than an adventure. There are 100 rooms laid out in a 10x10 grid, and six keys (which look like camels) open up various walls within the map. There are goats to collect which give you special powers. There is plenty gravity (I do love pseudo-grav routines!) in 4 planes, so you can run and jump on the walls and ceiling. I wrote a Phil Collins module so each room has its own distinctive drum rhythm backing. Even the firing noise changes from room to room. The waves themselves are created by a more advanced core module than that used in Revenge, and subsequently have more variety.

Some are pure shoot-em-up, whereas others require a little thought. Pressing 'H' whilst in a room pauses the game and displays three lines of Help text if you can't figure out what to do. There is a starry background for no other reason than to look good, and some freaky strobo effects. You get plenty of lives, and opportunities within the game to win some more. Doubtless if I lived in Liverpool I'd start calling it a Megagame but you know I don't go for all that hype bit. I just think it's a nice original chunk of kilobytes that you won't conquer in five minutes.

The star of the game, the Key Figure, is the Ancipital. Those of you who have Sheep in Space will recognize the Ancipital as that harassed-looking little half-man, half-goat creature which scuttles across the planetary surface, and which you did your best to Bonio. He actually originated from my reading of Brian Aldiss's **Helliconia** stories, which are ace (read them for more background on the ancipital race). The poor creatures are always getting killed and enslaved, shot, speared, drowned and chucked off cliffs by the humans, so I thought I'd make them the heroes in this latest game.

If there is any single specific villain in the game it must be Rory the Vicious Guinea Pig who has been known to savage an Ancipital to death. He crops up throughout the game in such attack waves as **Rory on the Attack, Rory Plays Guitar, Rory on a CND March** and several more. Never has a cuter-looking sprite been so vicious. I'm sure he'll soon be your favourite Ancipital enemy!

My best to date is 89% and about 3.6 million (it says less in the instructions, but I've played more games since then). We're also making use of the new **Novaload** audio-visual fast loader, which is more interesting than our old Turbo system.

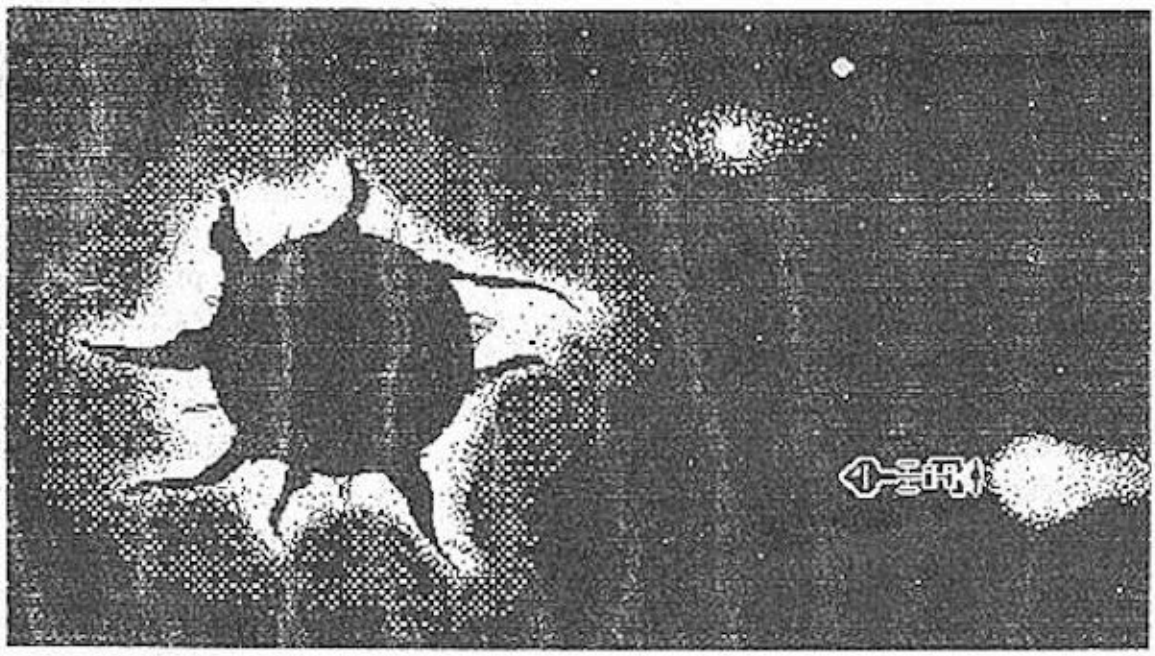
Anyway if you want a good heavy blast, but also a nice bit of strategy and forward planning, then **Ancipital** is a pretty good bet. Be warned, though: as with a lot of my games, you won't pick it up in five minutes. Learning to function well under the 4-gravity system will take you a little time.....

2: ATARI gets HOVER BOVVER

We now have the conversion of **Hover Bovver** running on 32k and over ATARI machines. The character graphics and 'feel' of the game are virtually identical to the C64 version, but you haven't got a multicoloured neighbour due to limitations of PMG. Still, there are advantages, such as 4-channel sound instead of only 3, and some very colourful hi-score and intro screens thanks to Atari's unsurpassed colour generation. Everything is there, from the 'English Country Garden' theme to the sounds of dog barks and mower noise.

I must say that the more I see and work with Atari, the more I like it. The potential of the machine is enormous, and the colour effects knock out your eyeballs! At the moment Atari owners are a rare but dedicated

breed, and there isn't a lot of good, cheap software about. However, due to recent developments this may all change soon; **Jack Tramiel** has just taken over Atari, and also Atari have a new graphics chip, MARIE, which makes GTIA seem tame. Reports from the American press, where the new chip has been seen in the **7800** video game from Atari, say that the new chip is capable of generating **unlimited** (get that!!) **sprites**... With potential like that, if built into a low-cost 64k micro (which Tramiel is very likely to do, to compete directly with the C64) no sane game designer is going to be able to resist it! Imagine **Revenge of the Mutant Camels** done using, say, 80 sprites plus all of Atari's amazing colours..... ATARI owners may be the obscure ones now, but in a year's time maybe things will be different!



3: This

Some of you have asked how this newsletter was produced. I use an Apple Macintosh micro to produce the whole thing. The text is laid out using the Macwrite utility, and the pictures are drawn using Macpaint. This graphics program is so good that even I can produce reasonable graphics using it, and I can't draw at all well using paper! Macpaint allows you to use pencil, paintbrush or spraygun, cut shapes out and move them around, add text, and generally do just about anything with a picture you want. Pictures can then be 'stuck into' the word-processor text wherever you want them. Once complete the whole is sent to the Imagewriter printer, and then the whole lot is reproduced exactly as it came off the printer. The Mac is very easy and enjoyable to work with; pity that the graphics aren't in colour too!

4: Stick of Joy

I often get asked which joysticks I would recommend to players of my games. Joysticks are, like games, very much a matter of individual taste. My own personal favourite is the **Competetion-Pro**, the one with two FIRE buttons. Although it's not the most comfortable joystick, it is very sensitive and above all, it lasts! I usually take these sticks to shows where they receive a really heavy pounding, and out of the five or six I've had for over a year, the only one that no longer works is the one which was chewed up by the dog.

For those who like a tabletop joystick as opposed to a hand-held, the **Fire Command** is pretty good. This has a large heavy metal base with the stick in the middle and two FIRE buttons, one each for left- and right-handers. I find this good for out-and-out blasters like AMC and Matrix, and also for the extended pounding of a game of Decathlon.

Also worthy of mention are the **Arcade**, which performs much like the Competition-Pro but with a single centrally-located FIRE button. The **Quickshot *II*** is quite fun if you stick it down to a table and play one-handed (the two FIRE buttons are operated by the hand grasping the stick). You can switch in a Rapid-Fire option which allows you to **totally annihilate** games which normally require repeated button presses, such as **Defender** and **Vanguard** on the Atari, and **Caverns of Mars** and **Abductor** on the Vic. This stick feels very chunky and 'macho', but it does get wrenched around when stuck to the table and I wonder how long it would last - after a couple of weeks mine started to creak ominously!

If you're rich and like **Gridrunner**, **Matrix** or Atari **Missile Command** then you might like the Wico **Trackball**. This is strong and ideally suited to the aforementioned games, but unfortunately it's quite expensive.

Joysticks are still primarily a matter of personal preference. The best way to choose a joystick is to try the ones on people's stands at computer shows - there's usually a fair selection. Make sure the one you choose will last under heavy stress! I'm going to make sure it gets a good pounding in all my games!

5: High Scores

Gridrunner.....620,600 level 20 Iain Fenton
Matrix.....229722 level 18 Paul Dudley
Hell Gate.....690,163 level 18 Paul Dudley
Metagalactic Llamas 170,000 level 17 A. Liddiment

Revenge.....2,600,000 A. Jones
Sheep in Space.....1,375,000 Tom Burton

These scores are those which have changed since last issue. I've heard of a new 'Sheep' score reaching level 27 but I can't remember the number! Please **send in** High Scores; we keep them in a file and it's easier for me to check them all. Whilst I'm at it, I'll add this to give you all a little something to aim for:

Ancipital.....3,570,000 89% Jeff Minter!!!

6: Hairy Happenings

Now that **Ancipital** is finished, plans are afoot in my skull for the next C64 offering. I may well have to squeeze in an MSX version of Gridrunner first, since I've been promising to do some MSX for a long time, and it looks like I'll be doing my own conversions to the new machine.

Once again I'll be experimenting with new designs, gameplay and control modes. It's too easy for programmers to turn out a 'chart hit' game these days: give it simple controls, pretty-pretty graphics, smooth scrolling and a nice soft tune and you can't fail. The trouble with this approach is that it doesn't advance the art of games design at all. I like to pick a theme or control mode with which I'd like to experiment, and build a game around it. In Sheep In Space it was speed control by vertical position, and with Ancipital the key theme is 'multiple gravity'. You risk being slagged by the casual reviewer who, if he can't play a game within 5 minutes, considers it to be rubbish, but I as a player am getting fed up with the tired old 'up=up, down=down, left=left, right=right, button=jump/Fire' control system. I like a game I have to learn, not just another re-run of the Manic Miner, Defender, Scramble, Space Invaders etc. crowd with nice music and soft graphics. I like games that are **hard, interesting, different and/or funny.**

I have the seeds of at least 5 C64 game designs lying around; I'm tinkering with one at the moment, but I won't decide which one to go for until I've come back from Peru. You never know, 2 weeks in the Andes may inspire some freaky new game idea. Whatever it is, it won't be soft, and that's a **promise**!

After having completed my first game using the Apple development system, I must say I'm very pleased with it. I've just dug out the MSX and I'm now waiting to get hold of a disk drive so I can write that Gridrunner... My Interpod just blew up and so my 4040's are down, it's back to the old 1541... During the writing of Ancipital I took delivery of Williams' amazing

Defender/STARGATE machine.. this has to be the meanest game around, but it is totally amazing fun to play, and the graphics would blow you away. The most intensely satisfying feeling in all of video gaming comes when you arrive at Pod Intersect 00 and press the SMART BOMB button... the whole game slows right down and there's bits of Pod everywhere!!! It's really ace to sit in a darkened room, blasting out some heavy music and freaking out on the Stargate. Speaking of rock, my ears are still ringing from last night when I went to see **DIO**.. a really good concert, Egyptian theme, shame there weren't any Mutant Camels!

7: Pods 'n' Swarmers...

Various bitz you might find interesting...I've played a few more games since last issue, and I'll once again recommend the games of others which I've played and enjoyed. Those of you who wanted Rabbit's **Scramble** mentioned in the last issue, don't despair because Rabbit went bust; the programmer of the Scramble is improving the game (and it was ace already!) and the improved version will be available on a new label, **Mushroomsoft.** Andy Walker of Taskset sent me a copy of their new one, **Poster Paster.** It is excellent fun to play, witty and superbly programmed and probably the best Taskset game to date. Don't miss it... Out of the new flood of Olympics games, I've seen Activision's Decathlon and Ocean's Decathlon. I preferred Activision's, because although the Ocean one has better background graphics and music, the Activision one has much larger, excellently animated running figures. For those with disk drives Epyx's Summer Games has really ace graphics. Parker Bros. **Gyruss** is expensive, but plays just like the real thing and has the best soundtrack I've come across. Beeb owners are lucky to have **Frak** by Aardvark, and I'd like to see a C64 version of this amusing game featuring a yoyo-toting caveman! **Quicksilva** are bringing out **Ant Attack** for the 64; I've seen the Spectrum version which was good if a little jerky. Hopefully they'll have used the smooth scroll and sprites of the C64; if they have it should be well worth a look for the unusual 3D-effect graphic display.

I'll finish now until next time, the lure of the STARGATE is strong... Do send in high scores or anything you think we'll find interesting. Maybe I'll give out some details of my next game then, who knows... I'll be very interested to hear how people get on with Ancipital.. I think it'll be a while before anyone manages 100%!

Send high scores or any correspondance to us here at 49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley, Hants RG26 6BN. The Hairy One will be especially interested in your reactions to the Ancipital! Until next time, may your ears be filled with Pink Floyd and your life with hairy ungulates!!

the Nature of the Beast

the LLAMASOFT newsletter

Third Furry Issue

1: What's New Here in Hairy City

We are just starting to get responses from people who are getting to grips with Ancipital. Most people are finding it as difficult as I intended, but there have so far been a couple of master blasters who have done the lot. Wow, you guys- that's really hot going because I've only ever got 89% myself and I know what's in all the rooms!!! The thing is, I always eventually get beat at my own games. Try as I might to make progress so difficult and obscure that surely only I, the programmer, could possibly get anywhere, you dedicated zap-fiends come along and cheerfully blast me off the face of planet Earth. It's good to think that you like the games enough to become so expert on them!

We've no actual new games to release this issue (gimme a chance, I haven't been back from Peru long!) but something new for the '64 is well under way (of which more later). Those of you owning disk drives can now get disk copies of Hover Bovver, Revenge, Sheep and Ancip for £9.50 each. I'm sorry they're dearer, but since there aren't as many disk as tape owners we don't make disks in such large quantities as tapes, so the production costs are higher.

I've also set in train (and I'm **not** talking British Rail here) events which should eventually yield 'Ancipital' running on the Spectrum and the

Amstrad. Lest all you '64 and Atari hackers cry out in horror at the very mention of the black-Frisbee-with-rubber-protrusions-all-over-it, don't worry. I'm not taking time off from real machines to do it, a mate of mine is a supremo Z80 hacker who was involved in one of the very few good arcade games ever to reach the dead fleshburger, that game being Atarisoft Robotron. The conversion should take a couple of months and may shed a little light into the benighted lives of those poor souls living under the shadow of the Rubber Keys of Doom.

Some people have found the Main Bug in Ancipital... you can stand sideways on certain walls. This is only mildly amusing at the time and can be downright dangerous. Try it at your peril! You can get it if you stand on the bottom and go *very* close to the left-hand wall. Once you get there jump up, and if you were close enough you'll be standing upside-down on nothing. I could always claim that he's hanging onto the left-hand wall with his toenails, but what's the point? I'll offer a prize of a copy of my new game (when it's finished!) to the person who sends me the best excuse for this bug. The entries will be judged on how well they fit in with the rest of the game, deviousness of the logic by which the excuse is worked out, and how convincing the excuse is, but mainly on which makes me laugh the most when I read it. I'll print the winning excuse next Beast, and it will become the Official Excuse for the Bug in Ancipital. The winner will receive a special copy of my new game which will proclaim *him/her/it* as the winner of the Grand Excuse Competition during the Novaload.

2: The Lland of the Llama

Quite a few of you have written in to ask (often amongst other things) what it was like in Peru. The answer to that can only be **totally far out and amazing**. Looking back now it's all a bit unreal. I walked knackered out of the PCW show and took the tube to Heathrow. 20 odd hours later I stumbled off the plane zapped out of my head by jetlag and after stashing my bag set off to wander 'round the streets of Peru's capital, Lima. Everywhere I looked I could see llama stuff... shops selling llama rugs, llama pictures, models of llamas, postcards with llamas on them, silver llamas, llama jumpers by the zillion. After a couple of days we left Lima to tour some of the rest of the country, and at each new place my mind would be blown all over again. There are some truly incredible places there... like the Colca Valley, twice as deep as the Grand Canyon and containing villages which haven't been visited for 400 years... or Puno on the shores of Lake Titicaca, at 12000 feet the highest navigable lake in the world, upon which a whole village floats on a man-made reed raft. (Also in Puno, and the last thing I expected: walking down the street I heard the sounds of zapping coming from a darkened doorway, and upon entering I found a roomful of Peruvian kids blasting away in an arcade. The machines were about a year old and the kids very competent, they found it

very amusing to beat the pants off the 'gringo'!)

The Inca ruins were impressive, too... huge blocks of stone weighing hundreds of tons placed together without cement so that even today you can't put a knife between them, and with edges so sharp and clean that you'd think they'd been cut out with a laser rather than by a people who didn't even posess the wheel.

The climax to the tour, and the final assault on my already totally freaked-out mind, was a visit to the lost Inca city of Machu Picchu. This stands perched on a mountain peak with dizzying drops all around. It is reached from the railway station by a road which zig-zags up the mountain for six miles. The whole place has an aura of power about it. I got up early one morning and hiked up Huayna Picchu, a mountain spire which rises a good 1000 feet above the ruins. You emerge finally, up a ladder, onto a small circle of rocks at the summit. There you just sit for an hour and quietly *freak*. Near vertical drops all around, and a view down through the clouds that was, truely, awesome. Wow. I didn't *ever* want to come down. I was high in all senses of the word!

And of course, everywhere you went, there were llamas. Herds of them seen from the train, Peruvian women leading them through the streets, or just wandering through the ruins. They were often accompanied by alpacas, which are like sheep built on a llama framework, woollier and not having quite such long legs or necks as the llama, and not quite such a funny little tail. They were almost without exception good-natured beasts, quite contrary to popular belief, and allowed you to get to grips with them in no uncertain terms! I even picked up a baby alpaca at one time. The exception was an old alpaca outside our hotel at Puno who was distinguished by his ability to spit with great accuracy from any angle. The local people were amused when I became the first tourist they'd ever seen to actually **spit back** at an alpaca!

The people were also good-natured and friendly, and I'm determined to learn a bit more Spanish before I go back next year! All I knew were phrases like 'another Inca Kola please', 'more llamas', and 'I haven't got a guitar'.

The whole trip was totally ace, anyway, and all thanxx to you game freaks who buy my games! Ta! At least you know I'm doing something worthwhile with the loot rather than coming the breadhead bit and buying a Rolls or a Porche. Believe me, I'd rather do a trip like that than have a **fleet** of Rollses!

3: Wot No Beasties?

I have had letters from many of you beast freaks who have had difficulty getting copies of the latest games. With both Sheep and Ancipital people were unable to get the game weeks after release; some weren't even aware that they'd been launched yet!

The reason for this is, I'm afraid, the commercialisation of the

games market. A year or two ago, if you wrote a good game, the shops (generally run by computer nuts themselves) saw that it was good and ordered accordingly. Good software prospered; bad software bombed.

Then people like Boots and Smiths started to become interested, and large distributors sprang into existence. This was fine for a while; the distributors bought the good stuff and supplied the chainstores, making it easier for you to get the games.

Unfortunately, this is where the trouble started. Large companies saw that they could sell lots of stuff if they could get it into the chain stores. They started to churn out games like there was no tomorrow, giving not a thought to originality or quality, only to market share. The distributors now no longer bought games on the basis of quality. They bought the games with the most hype behind them. Charts (compiled in the early days by computer enthusiasts in computer shops) now showed not which games were best (difficult to say anyway, since games are very much a matter of taste) but who had the best marketing behind them.

That's basically the way it is today. Too many people are trying to make too much money out of the industry. Companies talk of 'megagames' and advertise products far before they're ready, and often originality is sacrificed just so that a more 'marketable' product (like as not another flippin' ladders and ramps job) can be released. Chart hyping occurs; sometimes distributors (who compile the charts) actually own software houses (who then feature highly in those charts). The whole scene has become really heavy and commercial. All those breadheads trying to make a million pounds and never mind the games. It's **disgusting**.

The upshot of all this is that you'll often find it difficult to get hold of, say, Ancipital or perhaps the latest Taskset job simply because the distributors have bought 'Oh-God-Manic-Willy-Part-2311' because 'Megagame Software Inc' are backing it with 12 zillion full-colour adverts in the computer press.

You should fight back. You lot buying my games aren't interested in hype. You know a good game by now and will still be playing when the hype bubble bursts and the industry returns to some sort of equilibrium. In the meantime, **don't take it lying down**. If you can't get hold of one of my games, or have had difficulty in the past, you can write to the buyers of the two main distributors and complain bitterly that you don't want to be the victim of their hype game and that it was their fault you couldn't get hold of Ancipital/Sheep/whatever. If enough of you hassle these guys maybe they'll take some notice. Remember, when the boom is over and the breadheads have moved on to something more lucrative, you'll be the ones still buying games from the software distributors and keeping them in business.

The people to complain to are **Clive Digby-Jones, Websters Software Ltd., Curzon House, Midleton Estate, Guildford, Surrey** and **Neil Johnson, Microdealer U.K., 29 Burrowfield, Welwyn Garden City, Herts.**

4: Any Net Hackers Out There?

I must admit to having become something of a Compunet junkie. I like the idea of electronic communication with a lot of C64 loonies via the Net, often as not at about 1a.m. in the morning because you don't want to run a massive phone bill.

At the moment there aren't that many users on there but those who are seem quite keen. You can send mail and leave messages or even programs there for people to try. You can buy games if you want to, and there'll soon be stuff up there like MUD, the Multi-User Dungeon, which should be fun! I've already put up a free game for people to take, it's nice to be able to try out weird ideas without worrying if they'll sell! I'd also like to set up a Hairy Game Helpline screen where anyone having problems with one of my games could leave messages like "how the hell do I get past Escape-CND in Ancipital", and "what's the cheat mode in Revenge" to which I (or indeed anyone else who wanted to) could offer advice. This newsletter will shortly be uploaded onto Compunet too! If any of you are already on the Net, why not mail me and let me know you're out there? My user I.D. is LLAMA (well what else did you expect???).

5: What's Going On 'Ere Then??

The good news for C64 zappers who like my games is that I have decided on my next project. It wasn't any of the ideas I mentioned last issue, but it was in fact an idea I got whilst listening to Pink Floyd on a bus in Peru. I'm well up with the coding with most of the core module written, and I spent today putting in the tune data. The Baughurst Piano Wizard has surpassed himself this time- the music sounds really nice. The game itself once again revolves around an unusual and untried idea. The controls are a little more conventional than Ancipital, but there's something else I'm trying out this time. The emphasis is on making the game a real pleasure to play, and making it challenging enough for the most expert zappers. **Guaranteed no ladders and ramps!!!** And just in case any of you were wondering, yes, the main character is extremely hairy!

My Tempest machine has blown up!! When turned on all I get is a lot of loud and nasty humming! This is deeply upsetting and I'll have to get an engineer in. I've now scored over 6 million on Star Wars and I've increased the difficulty to maximum and made the machine stingier on dishing out extra shields, to maintain the challenge. Star Gate is as difficult as ever, though! My top score is only 111,000 and perhaps I should practise more.

Some excellent new CD's have come out, The Wall and Meddle by Pink Floyd, Duke and Three Sides Live from Genesis, Led Zep 4 and much more good stuff besides. All this hi-fi heaven can only inspire me to greater heights of game design (or maybe depths of depravity is a more apt description)...

I've also had in some truly amazing ATARI games. You know when you see 3D mountains in a flight simulator they're usually wire-frame things that you can see through? None too convincing, right? Well there's this Atari game called Behind Jaggi Lines which generates solid 3D mountains which actually **look** like mountains. It uses a branch of maths called fractals, and believe me it's good. **This** maths hurts when you fly into it. The game itself involves rescuing pilots down in this mountainous terrain and blasting hostile laser turrets. Nothing beats the simple pleasure of flying 'round the mountains at a scale speed of Mach 3.5 blasting up the laser turrets... I hope this comes over to the C64 soon!

Deep Purple have released an album! I can't believe it! It's really pretty good too, if you like that kind of music (which I do!). Something else to sustain me through the long hours of hacking ahead....

6: High Scores Update

Hell Gate.....947,243 level 20 Chad MacAlastair
Revenge.....7,945,200 Chad MacAlastair
Matrix.....294,400 level 19 President Apocalypse
Sheep in Space ...2,450,000 l. 41 Tom Burton
A.M.C.....235,521 Robert Grace
Ancipital hi score 14,201,400 99% Chad MacA.
Ancipital hi % 6,081,545 100% G.Penn

I'll try to keep these updated every issue. Wow!! Some people really know how to score on Ancipital, and I'm in awe of some of the percentages returned. Some of these people had better give ME lessons! It's a hard life when the only time I can be best at my own games is before I release them!

Keep on blasting those games anyway and achieving new high scores. I'd be interested to hear any opinions on the games- do you prefer a straight blast like Hell Gate, or a freaky one like Revenge, or something you've got to think about a bit like Ancipital?

7: Some Good Reviews...

During the past few months we've come across some things that I'm sure you'll find amusing. Reviews are at the best of times mostly a reflection of the reviewers' own taste in games. A good reviewer can, however, make valid criticism of a game and no designer minds reading fair and constructive criticism.

Unfortunately, many reviewers these days are given a stack of tapes and told to review them in, say, an afternoon. Thus they spend about 5 minutes on each game (if that), probably don't get to read the instructions and get no real idea of what's going on. This results in some pretty bizarre things being said about the game, and at worst can lead to an unfavourable review which is totally unjustified.

To prove my point, here are a few examples that I've seen recently...

1) **Home Computer Weekly** had the kindness to assure prospective Sheep in Space buyers that **extra fuel** could be obtained by **colliding with the aliens in Free Space**. Well that's news to me, I thought you had to land and eat grass! But no, the ground has other uses apparently, because the same reviewer then goes on to state that **flying through the air** is a faster way to get around the planet than **walking on the ground**... Actually this is true; flying is in fact 100% faster than walking on the ground, because walking on the ground has the following drawbacks: zero velocity, stasis, progression rate of zero pixels per second, infinite transit time from point A to point B, definite static tendencies, unwillingness of sheep's little legs to move, tendency to eat if landed on grass, tendency to explode if landed on anything else...

2) **TV Gamer** assured anyone interested in Atari A.M.C. that the background shading effects were **just colours** and that the graphics weren't even a **fraction of what could be achieved on even the 16k ATARI**... O.K, if these guys were really on the ball maybe you could believe them but then maybe **Page 6**, a specialist Atari magazine who make it their business to look at all Atari releases for both 16k and other machines, are more qualified to pass such sweeping judgements, and in their own review of A.M.C. they reached **precisely the opposite conclusion**.....

3) **Your Computer** started off an Ancipital review extremely well by boldly stating that the game has **81 rooms**. It states about four times in the Ancipital instructions that the game has 100 rooms, and makes references to the 10x10 layout. The same reviewer then proceeds to opine that there's **nothing really original** in the game. I think I can tell you exactly what happened... **a)** Reviewer opens Ancipital box. Loads game, feels instructions are too much to read. Has quick glance at map sheet. Notes room numbering 0-9 on each axis and makes elementary mistake of

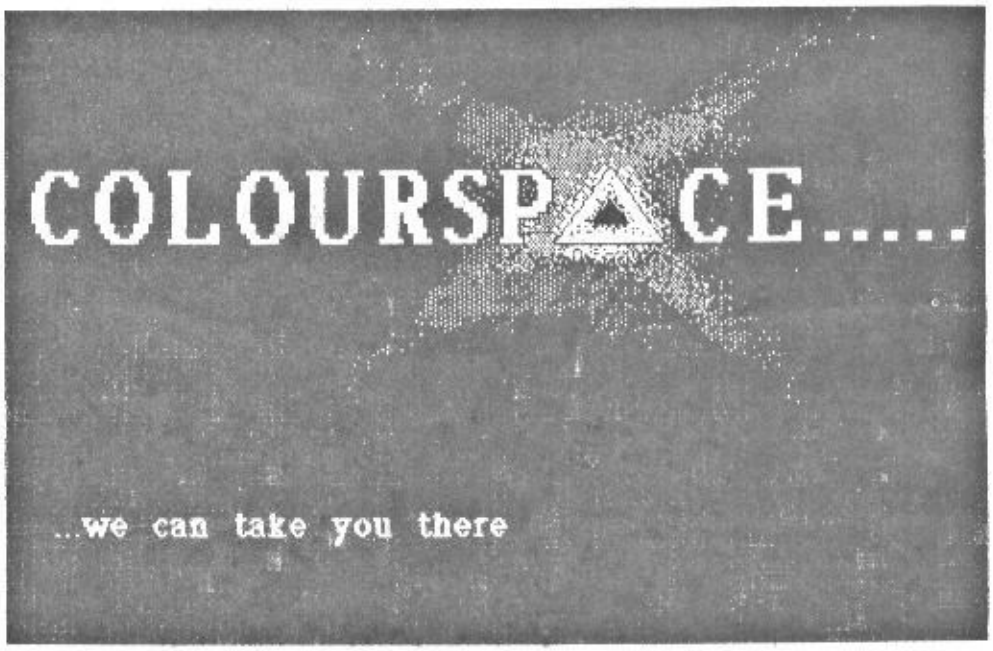
assuming that the range 0-9 is 9 units, not 10. Therefore multiplies 9X9 and arrives at 81 for the number of rooms. **b)** Game finishes loading and the reviewer presses FIRE to start. He starts zapping and thinks 'another shoot'em'up'. Maybe he gets lucky and inverts onto the roof, but doesn't get to stand on the wall because not having read the instructions he doesn't know how to jump-turn. After a while he gets the bottom door open and falls through to the next room. Messes around for a bit, maybe goes down to the Rory room, then gives up. Probably watches the attract mode a couple of times then writes his review. Concludes there's not much original because (a) he always walks on the roof where he comes from; (b) he never managed to walk on the walls because he couldn't jump-turn; (c) he never got to any of the puzzle screens and assumes it's all zapping; (d) he never saw the Help screens because he didn't read the instructions; (e) he's probably into a different style of games anyway.

My point is that reviewers should do the job properly or not at all. By 'properly' I mean actually taking the time to learn a game thoroughly, spending several hours at the very least on each game. The whole idea of saying that any game is 'better' than any other is pretty stupid beyond a certain point, anyway. Once a certain technical standard is assured and the game is bug- and glitch-free, anything else is purely personal opinion. It's like asking a Gary Numan fan to review Led Zep's Stairway to Heaven. So the whole bit about 'Jet Set Willy is better than Super Pipeline', say, is meaningless. Both games are well programmed, and JSW is better than SP **but only to a platform game player**- anyone into Taskset stuff would reach the opposite conclusion. So my plea to reviewers is to take time to learn the games, and don't attempt to review stuff which is too far out of line with your own likes. My advice to the rest of you is: **Don't** believe any review which says 'game X is better than game Y' unless game Y is obviously incompetently written. **Don't ever** believe advertising. **Insist** on seeing a demo before you buy if you're at all unsure that you'll like a game.

Quickly, my picks for this month: **Space Taxi**, Muse, disk, C64: amusing Lunar Lander variant... **Elite**, Acronsfot, Beeb: a thinking man's Star Raiders... **Boulder Dash**, C64/Atari, First Star, very simple idea well-executed and quite addictive... **Bruce Lee**, Atari/64, can't remember who by, nice kung fu game and I like the mooing cow screen... **Rocket Roger**, C64, unholy union of Jetpac and Son of Blagger, but unlike the latter the gameplay in this is far from soft, coded by the author of **Guardian**... **Toy Bizarre**, Activision, strange and original jumping game.. More next time and full report on my new game... keep on zapping!

Any feedback you have on anything to do with the newsletter or the games you can send to us here at 49 Mount Pleasant, Tadley, Hants RG26 6BN. Yak the Hairy likes to receive communication from like-minded entities! More lunacy soon.. and wherever you are, whatever you do, think of camels... (or goats, sheep,llamas,yaks, whatever...)

the Nature of the Beast



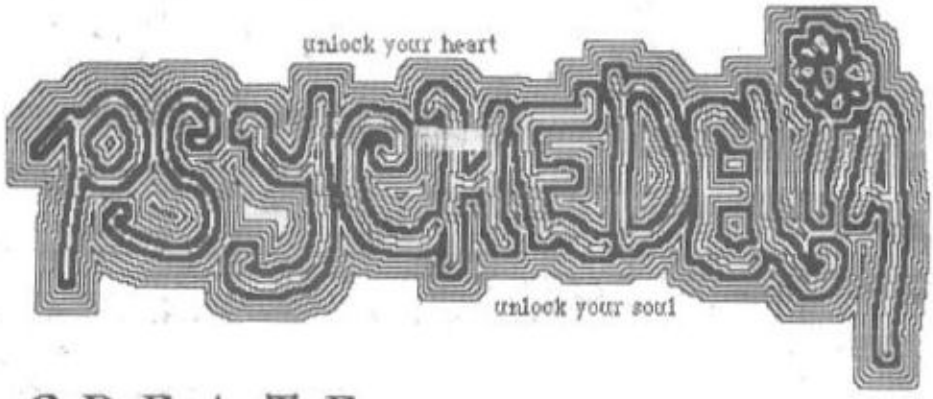
the LLAMASOFT newsletter

Fourth Fleecy Issue

1: What's Been Going On?

Plenty! Many things have happened since my return from the Many-Llama'd Land. The occurrences I have to relate will hopefully please you as much as they have me... My next game should be out in February, probably towards the end 'cos tape duplication takes a bit of time. So far most of the 'code is complete and there's only a couple of weeks' work left to do on it. You'd get it earlier except for the fact that I have arranged to satisfy a strange and unnatural urge I have to slide down mountains at high speeds with strange long things on my feet, whilst listening to my Walkman blasting out some good stuff. I'll be spending two weeks in Italy doing just that, granted sufficient snow (and with recent weather conditions that should be assured, Italy's just had its heaviest snowfall for 20 years, yak yak yak). On my return to the UK a good week's solid codestorming should see the game finished. Then I can get down to writing Psychedelia on the Atari (sensory overload time!!!). Until then I'm looking forward to hacking down the slopes at Mach 8 and listening to something psyche-wrenchingly good at apocalyptic levels of volume on the Walkman.... there's a well-stocked arcade near the hotel too, if I fancy an apres-ski blast!

Rory say.....



CREATE

PSYCHEDELIA. This is what all the delay's been for. I was quite peacefully doing the new game when this idea which had been kicking around my skull awhile started beating loudly on the braincells. I'd long imagined some kind of light synthesiser I'd like to see at a gig or a party, something with which you could visualise the very feel of a good piece of music. I didn't imagine I could ever put such a concept successfully onto a home micro, but one Sunday I got back from running and decided to have a little tinker on my '64. An algorithm was in my head, it came from God knows where, it was just there, complete. Maybe my subconscious made it. Maybe my brain was leaking 3 months into the future. I coded it up, assembled, SYSed in, picked up the joystick and blew my brains out.

I played with it. Then I put on some Dave Gilmour and turned off the light and played and PLAYED with it. In a state of near-total freakout, I 'phoned a mate to come over, I wanted to see if it was just me... It wasn't. HE played with it and we had the Dave Gilmour again.... We needed a third opinion. We met another mate, went to the pub, came back, loaded up and turned up the CD. We finally summoned the willpower to shutdown at about half-four in the morning...

I dropped the game I was working on and spent the next two weeks coding like a demon. I have never worked so hard at anything in my life, nor have I ever wanted anything so much as I wanted to complete the light synth. I finished versions on the C64, Vic and C16.

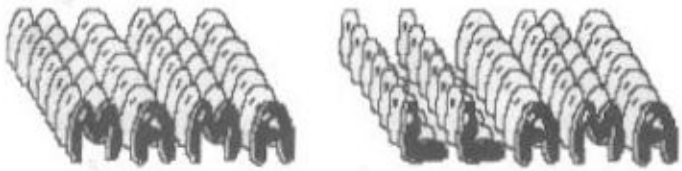
I won't try and describe Psychedelia - I can't relate it to anything - except to say it is a **light synthesiser**. You do it, preferably, to music. You control colourflows and lightforms, and like a synthesiser you can change all the pattern generation parameters, store them away on presets, program a sequencer, edit lightforms, record input for later playback, save your favourite settings to tape (on the C64 version) and have a solid total freakout.

We've found that there are a few people who can't get behind Psychedelia, but they're not many. The easiest rule of thumb is how a given person responds to music. If you just have music as a background noise

while you're doing something, maybe you won't get into PSYCH. If, however, you're the sort of person who plays music just to listen to and freak out to, then you'll love PSYCH. If you really get into your music, so heavy you can feel it, then PSYCH is right in your brainsync. Just **try** it. There's no score, no bullets, no levels, no objective. You can't do badly but you can get very, very good. Since I wrote it I need at least one session a day, preferably late night with all the lights off, the CD laying something earthshattering on me, display on the big-screen TV. Just stand there and get in sync with the music, lose myself in colourspace.

PSYCHEDELIA is for me the fulfillment of a personal dream, and in my opinion the best thing I've ever written. What you see on your '64 just might be the first small step into a new fusion of colour/sonics... The best is yet to come, and maybe I'll be one of the first to get there...

Rory say.....



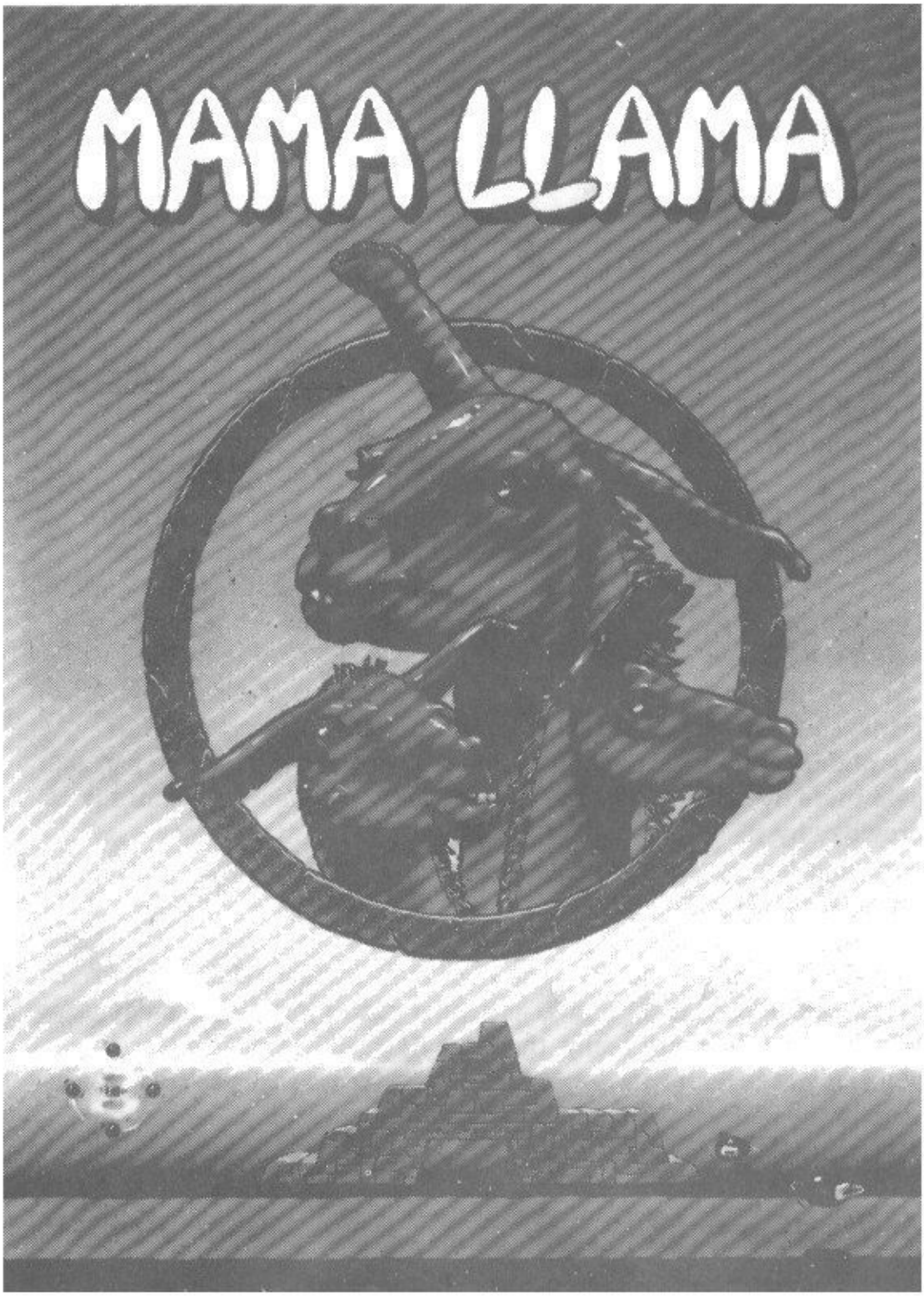
DESTROY!!!!!!!

Mama Llama is the new game of which I have been writing, which was initially dreamed up whilst I was listening to Pink Floyd on a bus in Peru and observing the local beasties. It was originally going to be just a nice scrolling shoot'em'up with the only novel feature being that you controlled three beasts at once throughout the action. However, as Rory say, All Things Mutate and so did this game.

It all started to change a bit when I'd got the coremodules written. You all know by now just how much I dig grav FX and inertials. I designed the CM so that just **everything** was inertial- you've got a real job to force an object to go in a straight line, and even then it has inertia- and it looked like it was working just fine. The aliens flowed beautifully, describing such nice curves that you might even think I knew more maths than how to count up to F. Unfortunately I had problems. Bullets, you see, go in straight lines. The aliens did not. Unlike most games, where the alien paths are satisfyingly straight and predictable and easy to intersect with your straight-line bullets, the aliens in ML go in crazy loops. Normal bullets just didn't play well in the game- so scrub bullets and implement the inertial killdroid (a new killsystem, an inertial one for an inertial game!!). With the new system installed I was happier... but I wanted to change the game more so I turned to the wave structure.

So far, multi-wave games seem to be done in sequential order of waves (like Revenge, start at level 1 and try to get to level 42) or in map-style like Ancipital. I didn't want sequential waves, too boring, and I'd just used the map structure in Ancip and didn't want to fall into the Ultimate trap of getting into an arcade-adventure monomania. Random waves didn't appeal, you'd not got enough control... so eventually I decided to do a completely amorphous wave structure. There's no first wave, no last wave and no 'correct' order. The wave select mode is quite nice, a bit like a 2D Rubik cube really, and there'll be a few nice strategic elements to the gameplay (like the antiGenesis and retroGenesis devices) to add to the interest. I can tell you now that there are 100 possible waves played out over five different planets, four different gravities (although not all at once like Ancip!) and that you're going to be seeing quite a lot of the new rising megastar of the Yak's experimental gamesystems.... **Rory the Savage Guinea Pig** is back and he's more savage than EVER!! You'll find the crazed

MAMA LLAMA



Peruvian rodent turning up in all manner of places in ML, just wait&see..

The game's not quite finished yet (as I write this I've done 90 waves and I'm going to put in the last 10 tomorrow, then the day after that I hyperspace for Italy in the morning and I'll do the last bits of coding immediately I get back) but everything's on the beam, and you should see results in February.

2: The Grand Excuse Competition

First of all, thanxx to everyone who sent stuff in for me to read, I had a good giggle at some of the entries. There was one, however, which stood out clear ahead of the rest- I was most impressed, the style was just pure Douglas Adams (and I'm sure that you've all realised that the Guide has long been a Guide to me, if you see what I mean) and quite ingenious. Although the full story is too long for me to put in here (I'm not a megatypist) the key points are as follows:

"Using fiendishly clever and sophisticated Theta-ray Synapse Image Intensifiers, the Zzyaxians produced the Ancipital version of black suspenders and stockings, a famous phagor wanton known as Shnn Dhrr Lyrr..... This image was then projected onto the wall of the chamber in which the hapless phagor battled with the black Zzyaxian forces.

Fortunately, most of the ancipitals were made of sterner stuff, and managed to ignore this sexual spectacle, but some... succumbed to temptation and flung themselves into the necessary position to partake, held there by sheer will-power and the Magnetto-boots thoughtfully provided by their Terran allies. The disappointment on discovering that the lascivious lady was a mere holographic image was too much for the courageous phagor, his grip slackened and his end was swift."

There, you see- not a bug at all but yet another fiendish Zzyaxian psychodisorientation scheme! The sender of this ingenious and amusing plan (well totally crazy really, that's why I liked it) was one Marion Warden, but unfortunately I didn't get an address so if you're out there- send in the address (NOT in Hex, please) so I can send off a copy of ML once it's finished.

3: WhaNexxt?

Now that I'm getting to the end of Mama Llama you'll doubtless want to know what I'll be doing next. Imminent after ML is the implementation of a PSY system on the Atari. This will be very much a second-generation system with many additional features over the '64 version, due mainly to the display-list nature of the Atari screen and all the possibilities that implies, and taking advantage of the huge colour pallette available to that

machine. I'll really enjoy doing that, and all the while my brain is considering new ideas and concepts for games so that I can hit the '64 as soon as I've stopped Atari-ing. Look out for Rory, 'cos I like the character so much I'll probably be using him in his own game sometime soon. I'm going to make him the hero next time round, because so far he's always been the villain!

We also have PSY running on the Spectrum (it works quite well, too, good and fast) so we can literally light up the lives of Clive's teeming hordes. The chap who converted PSY to the squishboard is also converting to MSX and Amstrad formats, and with my own Atari conversion too, we'll be able to PSYCH out a lot of people. Atari have promised me one of their new 16-bitters Real Soon Now, and with the extra speed and the 512-colour pallette this should be set to blow out a few brains once I get it running the lightsynth. On both old and new Ataris I'll be using an extended colourspace, so look out for quite a few extra features.

4: High Score Update

(I was just thinking: why can't the Mac have presets like Psychedelia? It's a pain to have to select Bold, Underline, 18-point every time I get to a heading, then change back after... how about it, Apple???)

I'm not going to put down all the scores this time, I'll just print updates to any which have been beaten and print a full list every third or fourth Beast. Anyway, here goes:

Metagalactic etc..... 282,177 l. 27 Saul Metzstein
Abductor..... 47,500 'Garfield' McDonald
Hell Gate ..... 1,210,793 Chad MacAlastair
Revenge..... 10,111,247 Chad MacAlastair
Matrix..... 323,000 President Apocalypse
'Cippy hi score 21,801,357 99% Chad MacAlastair
'Cippy highest 100% 6,500,000 Tom Burton

This Chad MacAlastair must be doing some really heavy blasting, and Tom Burton is extending his SHEEPish talents to the realms of 'Cippy's battle... at least I can be sure that no-one's going to send in any high-scores for PSYCHEDELIA! (Are they???) I've had some brilliant scores on Mama Llama but that might have something to do with the fact that (a) I designed all the waves in it, (b) I hacked the score routine, (c) you can't die yet anyway, and (d) Rory's being kind to me 'cos I didn't eat any guinea pigs in

Peru.

5: A Brief History of the Zzyaxian Empire

Some people have written in asking for the complete background of the Terran battle against the Zzyaxians, so I'll give you a brief history of the battle and the circumstances leading to it.

First indications of something amiss came when the Earth government funded the construction in space of huge orbiting solar-power stations. These were placed in a geosynchronous orbit and the power was beamed down to Earth receivers in the form of microwaves. The receivers fed the power thus obtained into the Terran grid for use by us. Malfunctions in the Grids (as the lattice-shaped collectors were known) turned out upon investigation to be caused by hostile droids of extraterrestrial origin. The crack Gridrunner squadrons were formed to rid the Grids of this menace, and they succeeded, or so it seemed. The ten years after the Grid Wars were peaceful except for a single incidence of hostile droneships attempting to abduct scientists from a Terran research base, but luckily that base housed the then-experimental ProtoNeutrino SuperHyperConductive Blamm Blamm K'pow Photon Cannon which was used to good effect in warding off the attackers. There were also a number of unexplained UFO sightings over Egypt which no-one really seemed too worried about....

The peace was shattered in the next ten years: the Droids returned to the Grids and displayed their first use of psychodisorientation, a characteristic Zzyaxian tactic, by deploying strange cameloid creatures against the Matrix squadrons which were sent into battle. Terran analysts failed to make the connection between the dromedary nature of these strange assailants and the UFO sightings over Egypt, and so were caught totally and terribly by surprise when the now-legendary Attack of the Mutant Camels was unleashed to ravage the planet..... The huge neutronium-shielded beasts wreaked havoc upon the Earth until they were finally halted by the valiant efforts of the Terran pilots sent against them in their tiny but lethally-equipped fighter craft.

Following that battle, we learned, through our first tentative interstellar contacts, the evil nature of the entities who were our foe. The combined might of the empires of Zzyax and Irata enslaved the sentient races of half the Galaxy. Earth, in pushing out towards the stars, had brought itself to the attention of the Evil Overlords who responded in the manner to which they were accustomed... with blasters blazing. We'd managed to resist them so far, though, and they weren't too pleased.....

Meanwhile, Terran science was being advanced in the urgency of war. Soon we had developed our own enhanced MetaBeasts, genetically-modified animals capable of rational thought, meaningful relationships, the ability to appreciate Pink Floyd and Genesis, score over 100,000,000 on Star Gate and as often as not, spit laser bolts. Armed thus, and riding in ships equipped with our recently-perfected Interstellar Overdrive (the basic mathematics

of which were derived from a harmonic analysis of an early Pink Floyd track) we set out to free the Galaxy of the blight which enslaved half its people.

Where the Zzyaxians popped out of hypertunnels near the Earth, we constructed Laser Zones and later Hell Gates to blast them as they materialised. Our telepathic MetaGoats contacted the abducted Terran camels being held on a Zzyaxian research world, and having convinced the camels of their loyalty to Terra, initiated a rebellion by the dromedaries which caught the Zzyaxians completely unawares and destroyed their complete research post on that planet. The battle at Sothis B led to the development of the Battle Sheepoid and the liberation of a number of Ancipital creatures, later to become our allies. Our farthest outposts were defended by Metabeasts descended from Andean camelids... and so we defended Terra (so that humans like Gordon Bennet could mow their lawns in peace) and even now, the Terran Confederation aided by the resistance movements upon countless worlds gathers its strength for an onslaught upon the black world of Zzyax Prime....

Who knows when that final assault may come, or what form it will take? Will the Mutant Camels finally be reunited with the Humans, man and beast joined in battle against the foe? Will the Metagalactic Llamas turn their lasers on the Zzyaxian slime-creepers?

Watch this hyperspace.....

6: Bits and PC's

Well, me Tempest's still down!!! I'm gonna suffer withdrawal soon but I haven't lost my touch, as a quick blast in the Las Vegas in London confirmed. Must get it done, though, when I get back from Italia. While I was in London that day I went to an amusement-trade exhibition in Olympia, it was pretty good... played the conversion of the Star Wars game, it's called The Empire Strikes Back and there are four phases... Probots on the Ice Planet Hoth, which you blast before they can shoot their messages off to ol' Darth; Imperial Walkers, which are fun to bring down with ropes, and which were the original influence for my Mutant Camels (although I quite fancied the Taun-Tauns in that film too); then more TIE fighters just like in Star Wars; then an asteroid shower to negotiate. Not bad, but the hit of the show had to be Marble Madness, a game for Atari's new System One convertible arcade system. You control a marble rolling around some lovely 3-d tracks past various nasties. Pretty graphics, 8-channel sound (!) and above all original and well designed. If that's a typical System One game then the Llama Llab might just be able to accommodate one more arcade machine Real Soon Now.....

I've got problems in the Llab, too, from a new addition to my already large collection of furry creatures... Following the untimely and much lamented passing of the PC (Privileged Cat, the one who used to warm his arse on my disk drives) we have acquired a Siamese kitten with the given

name of Stormtrooper but who I refer to as Gremlin, on account of his disproportionately large ears and mischievous habits much like the creatures in Spielberg's film. He's already eaten off the Reset button which used to dangle from my Apple interface, and tends to stroll around on keyboards and behind my hi-fi. He's got a howl like a banshee too which he uses to good effect. People on the 'phone have been convinced that the unearthly howling was either human (they thought it was a baby) or else of completely extra-terrestrial origin....

I got lotsa good new stuff here too, an amazing huge-screen TV I got to Psychedeleise on (in the dark! with loud music! WHAT a trip!!!) and these incredible stools which look EXACTLY like sheep and are really comfortable to sit on. I've also partaken of the new Sony CD player which is so small I refuse to beleive that it really exists... look out for me in the Summer on me funny bike, cruising around listening to Floyd on me portable CD... My Star Gate score is up now, to 148-odd thousand, and I've got to the great bit in the Firebomber Showdown where you can nail SIX pods at once with a single Smart Bomb....

Thanxx to all of you who sent me Christmas cards, much appreciated and brightened up the Llab no end. I also enjoy reading all the letters you send in, sorry if I can't reply in person to every one but I'm sure you'd prefer that I wrote more games rather than letters... but do let me know what you think of the stuff, especially PSYCHEDELIA, I want to see if it turns you on like it does me!

Following the crash of PCG magazine, a number of new ones are starting up, and it looks like I'll have a regular column in one or two of them, so watch out for 'Rory Say' in the near future. I quite enjoy writing in English instead of 6502 now and again! If any of you go Netwise on the near future drop me a byte or two.

Audio playlist this month: U2 Live under a Blood Red Sky; Talkingheads (Stop Making Sense) GREAT Psychedelia music; Jean-Michel Jarre's amazing new one ZOOLOOK; for playing a good blast'em, try Iron Maiden's Powerslave, or else some Dio (my Stargate high score was set under Dio); for Psychedelia try Saucerful of Secrets (Floyd), Los Endos, Dukes Travels/Dukes End, Supper's Ready (Genesis), Green (Steve Hillage and use preset #2!!).... I'm recording a few Psych freakouts on video tapes, come along to the shows to see it in action and listen to some good sounds too!

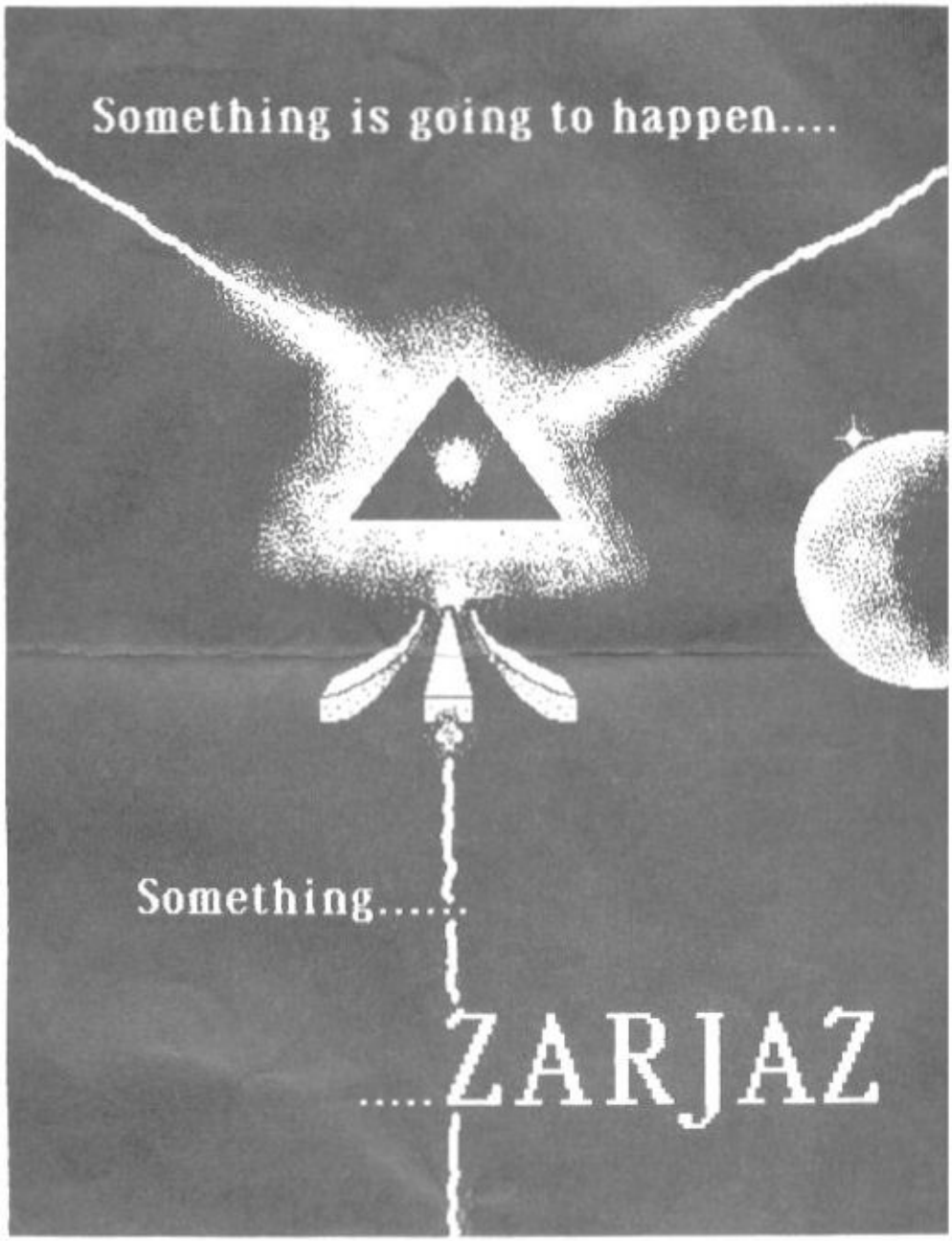
Video gamewise I've been a little PSYCHed out recently to play many games on my '64, but Impossible Mission is a must if only for the AAAAaaaaarrrggghhhh!! you get when your little man falls down a hole. The new Task Set one looks quite passable too. Watch out for some really wicked political characterisations in a forthcoming Taskset release soon... Anyway, Peace and Good Vibes be with you all, may the Beast be with you until next time and long may you ride the colourSpace Vortexx.....

Rory say: My earthly incarnation may be terminated but within the GameSystem I live FOREVER..... The Yak greets all especially-brainsynced entities beyond the Vortexx... maybe I'll let you all sign my cast, when I get back from ski-ing with a broken leg... Ride the Colourflow. Catch the Lightform..

the Nature of the Beast

The LLAMASOFT Newsletter

Fifth Fluffy Issue (Psychedelic Special)



Atari: Rainbow Rising

COLOURSPACE: SILICON RAINBOW ON ATARI

YAK GOES TO HANOVER– NEW ATARI AND COMMODORE MICROS PRODDED AROUND

1: Colourspace is Curved

If I had got together with a hardware manufacturer to design a video controller expressly to do Psychedelia on, I'd have probably ended up with something like the ANTIC chip built into the Atari computers. I've just finished my third Atari machine code program ever, and the more I do the more the system astonishes me. The things you can **do** with that thing are just terminally weird!!!

The Atari version of Psychedelia is now completed. Believe me, if you thought the Commodore one was good, this'll blast your brains out. I've fallen in love with the whole thing all over again, can't stop doing it, it's amazing. The idea is the same as Psychedelia, but now you've got all the Atari colours available, you can **curve** the screen, reflect it with hardware, interlace it, even change the resolution **as the program is running**. Each colour within the colourflow can be made dynamic, oscillating with a definable amplitude and frequency, and by offsetting each step of the flow you get the most amazing bands of metallic fire rippling up and down the entire lightform. If you really want to burn your brains you can kick in the stroboscopics, amazing in a dark room, variable-frequency slices of hi-energy photons to really freak you out. You can even do it simultaneously with another entity by using the Dual Joystick mode. There are 80 presets in the Atari version, and 16 user-definable lightforms. There is even the ability to draw pictures on the screen and have all the patterns flow **behind** them, and you can redraw the picture anywhere on the screen with a single keypress, in whatever mode of symmetry you require. The RECORD option has been improved to keep track of all the keyboard operations you do as well as the joystick input. There is a tape LOAD and SAVE option to save parameters or motion, just as on the Commodore.

All in all, Atari COLOURSPACE (that's what we call it) is the next step along the road of the PSYCHEDELIA concept. That such large advances have been possible without having to go to more powerful and more expensive computer systems is due to the amazing, zarjaz design of the Atari hardware. That **screen** is just amazing. OK, so the player missiles aren't a lot of cop when compared to Commodore Sprites, but they're better than none at all, and once you've come to know the Ways of the Display List and you realise that if you want a particular screen, no matter how weird, all you have to do is tell ANTIC to build it.... well after that any other type of screen just seems plain Stone-Age. And people are still buying Spectrums instead of Ataris.... oh well, so it goes, I suppose.

We'll be giving demos of both Commodore and Atari lightsynths at the Commodore show in June, so people can see the next stage of the idea at work, and can speculate on what I'll do when I get hold of an Amiga (or a 520ST for that matter).

Watch it, though... so far I've shown the Atari Colourspace to three Commodore Psychedelia junkies, and now they're all in search of the cheap 800....

2: I Have Seen The Future...

As it worked out, the completion of Colourspace co-incided with the huge Hanover Fair, and as it turned out I was invited to demonstrate Colourspace on the Atari stand, running on the new 130XE (which is an 800XL with an extra 64k available to bank switch, and a really zarjaz keyboard, very nice).

More to the point, it meant the opportunity (with the co-operation of the Atari staff) to sit down for a half-hour after the show had closed one day, and play about with the Atari 520ST. It is really, amazingly good. I saw it running Forth and doing mega-fast graphics. I used GEM to open & close files and felt immediately at home- it's just like the ol' Mac here. You can even pull-down a little window from the top of the screen, containing a game of Breakout to play if you get bored with whatever you're doing. The screen is most impressive, the "lo-res" screen is in fact 320x200 odd in a choice of 16 different colours per pixel out of a palette of 512 (!). From the demos I saw it looks like precise video timing is possible, too: there were a couple of the good old Atari rainbows about (old Atari hands will know what I mean) and one or two displays of the entire 512-colour range which must have been done with some kind of raster interrupt.

The machine was also to be seen running off a neat little hard disk (the prototype I saw was encased in a 1050 box) which provided several example pictures loading almost instantaneously. We were also to have been treated to a demo of the CD-ROM system but unfortunately it didn't turn up. One of the prototype-STs broke down and it was taken apart so that we could all see it's innards. It's really neat, no enormous kluges anywhere, the only thing which seems not yet finalised is the Gem OS. This will initially be provided on disk until all the bugs are out, then it'll go into ROM. For this reason the first ST's will all be 520's. (Rather large amounts of the RAM of a 130ST would be taken up by a non-ROM OS. I know 'cos I have the same problem with my 128k Macintosh!).

Atari don't have any definite plans for games as yet, but they're keen for independant houses to develop stuff for it, and I for one will be, starting with 16-bit Colourspace. The price is gonna be around £450 for the base unit an' 512 K, and a disk'll cost around £150 and be of the 3.5in Sony drive type. It seems expensive, but get this: there are plenty of disk based Beeb owners out there, and a disk-based ST will cost about the same as a disk-based Beeb... what would you rather have? 32k... or 512k? 6502 or 68000? Acorn DFS... or GEM?

The only negative thing I can possibly think of is that the sound, for such a megamachine, isn't intense amounts of cop.. it's using one of those old AY-series PSG's such as you find in all the MSX machines and the Vectrex. OK, it's not bad, just a 3-sound-plus-1-noise-channel bog standard cheapie, but I'd have liked something mega-powerful and preferably stereo. Rumours abound that later ST's will have the suffix M and will carry Atari's new and powerful 8-channel synth chip. I hope so...

Commodore were also there with plenty of 128's to play with. The

keyboard is very nice indeed, and the Commodore 64 Compatible mode seems to be just that: totally compatible with all existing C64 software. The 128 seems to be 3 different machines in a single box: your good ol' 64, the Commodore 128 itself running Basic 7.0, and a CP/M 80-column business machine.

The 128 mode is quite nice, the extended Basic containing the disk commands plus all the graphic commands which some of us oldsters first encountered on the Vic Super Expander. You can get 80 column text too, and an increased resolution of 640x200 in hi-res. (I'm not sure if this res-doubling also applies to multicolour mode but it'd be nice if it did). Lots of bytes are available to BASIC too, not as much gets eaten as on the C64. An exciting possibility is the configuring of the top 64k as a Ramdisk, and indeed some keywords have been included in the BASIC for this, but when I tried STASH (a Ramdisk reserved word) all I got was ?UNIMPLEMENTED COMMAND ERROR. Probably needs an extra ROM ir something.

Where the 128 will score is in having lots of C64 software already around, most of which can be xverted to use the extra RAM. All your old games will run OK. The 128 was also demonstrating the ability to run 2 monitors at once, quite useful for business I suppose but not many gamesters are rich enough to have 2 monitors. Commodore's new monitor, 1901 or something, looks pretty zarjaz too, but also looks expensive.

I'm still not sure how much Commodore are gonna sell the 128 for. It can't be too close to the ST (unless Commodore hope that the initial lack of software for ST, and all the C64 progs for 128, will carry it). They're gonna **have** to go for the business market, 'cos all the games on the 128 are sure as anything going to be xverted C64 stuff. Gamesters really wanting an 8-bit 2x64k machine would be better off with the 130XE methinks; they'd not be paying for a CPM option they'd probably not use. The 128 will be quite nice for people developing '64 progs, but I figure if your average weirdo on the street is gonna pay over a couple of hundred for a machine he's gonna want something special. Cheap, the 128 would be great. Much over £300 and I dunno, for that much bread something has gotta be **hot**...

Another amazing thing I saw at Hanover, all those German pirates at work! You know how German pirates circulate cracked progs on disk from all over the world, well there they were, all lined up on the Commodore stand with boxes & boxes of disks, copy programs running, directories being compared, swaps made. I saw several of my own progs change hand, plus just about anything you can think of, English or American. The latest seemed to be some Stateside thing called G.I.Joe which just about every Commodore owner who had a disk on them had copied before leaving the show. I talked to some of the pirates, they see nothing wrong in what they do. It is done without malice, 'cracking' is just a hobby, they usually don't even play the games anyway. Even one of the Commodore employees swapped stuff enthusiastically with the pirates, turning down the monitor so that other Commodore staff couldn't see the Di/Sector menu running. 'Copying Forbidden' said all the notices around the stand, but no-one took

any notice at all...The Amiga, by the way, was nowhere to be seen, nor was it mentioned in any literature...

The Fair was very interesting to see: everything was there from computers to locomotives, visitors ranged from businessmen to punks and hippies. It was also really big (I think someone said you could fit 32 Earls Courts into the exhibition grounds). My conclusions? I think that Commodore supremacy may be short-lived: in the new dawn of affordable 16-bit power and large amounts of memory, I see a rainbow rising, an Atari rainbow. Uncle Clive is wrong about the ST: it exists, it works, it is very nearly finished and it's going to blast the QL into a rather large crater in the ground. Gameswise, I think the C64 and Atari 8-bits are the best, and for those who can afford the luxury, the Atari ST gives you 512k, a 68000, a Mac-type OS, 512 colours and (once I've got my ST) a really zarjaz version of Colourspace. Mark my words: Atari are back from the dead in a big way...

Playin' Games

I been doing a lot of this recently (but don't I always??). There's quite a nice new shoot-'em'up coming out from Activision soon, good for those who like a good difficult zap. I hear rumours about a mega-amazing version of Crystal Castles on the '64... I've long been a fan of the unusual surreal 3-D Pacman-type game in the arcades, so a good xversion will be gratefully received. Marble Madness is in the arcades now. It is really excellent- it was designed by Mark Cerny, who was mentioned in 'The Winners Guide to Video Games' as being the first human to score over a million on Defender and who's now putting his games experience to good use in Atari's design department. If all his games are as good as 'MM' then we can expect great things in future... I must put in a plug here for '3D Star Strike' at the moment only available for Speccy & Amstroid, but hopefully soon on the 6502. It's a version of Star Wars, and it works brilliantly. I wouldn't have thought it possible to reproduce the Great Game on any micro never mind the benighted rubberchips, but it's all there, towers, trench and all. (Apparently the Amstrad one has stereo blasting, too). The guys who wrote it are a really together bunch of guys, too. The Speccy version is **actually worth digging out your Spectrum for**.

I love the 3-D sequence in the new Activision game (I think it's called Genie of the Lamps or something). The bit where you're flying down the tunnel of light is excellently done and reminiscent of the bit in Tac-Scan where your fleet goes down the warp tunnel. (Do you remember Tac-Scan? That was a real blast-and-a-half that one, old SEGA colour vector-scan game with some really heavy sonixx).

I've seen the new Ultimate '64 stuff, and it's technically excellent (apart from the odd raster-interrupt mistiming in Karnath which causes the status panel to glitch) and of course the reviewers drool, but... I dunno, somehow there is something of humanity lacking in Ultimate's stuff. They're almost too good, like someone told an android 'Here are the parameters for a chart

hit game; produce several'. They tend to follow established and successful formats and are **without exception** brilliantly programmed, but I don't get any personality coming across in the game, no-one behind the creation to empathise with. You never meet their programmers, they're unapproachable, when they go to the awards ceremonies they only send down the girl who answers the 'phone. Programming a game isn't just an exercise in satisfying mass-market demands; for me, it's an act of creation containing elements of my own personality, and aimed at people who go for an unusual style. True you can sell more games if you conform but then you're not really expressing yourself.

Oh yeah, Mama's really been stirring it up amongst the reviewers. Mama is well wacky and quite difficult to learn, introduces several new gameplay elements and is (I think) my best game (as opposed to PSYCH the non-game) yet. Mama is something you **have** to approach with an open mind and the willingness to take time learning. Anything so freaked out and unusual was bound to produce a mixed bag of reviews: we've had everything from raves down to rude dismissals. There were varying reasons: many reviewers can't devote the kind of time necessary to learning such a game, some were already well into the Llamastyle of game and loved it, others seemed to loathe me, my games and anything remotely to do with llamas. My prize for 'Wally Review of the Month' must surely go to Commodore User. Their reviewer mentioned virtually nothing of the game's actual mechanics, and the entire basis for his criticism seemed to be that he didn't agree with my tastes in music...(write what you like chum, but if you like Led Zep and Genesis then whatever it is I'll hate it!). Controversy, it's marvellous, but at least I'm doing something different enough to shake'em a little bit. They can say what they like, if I didn't like Mama it would never have got released. It's like acid rock in the 60's, you know, weird experimental stuff that was definitely not chart music but at least they were trying to **advance** music, go beyond established boundaries. That's what I'm trying to do with games; that's what resulted in Mama and Psych/Colourspace.

I still feel that review rating systems need looking at. At the moment all the reviewers tend to put in a lot of subjective stuff which would vary widely from one reviewer to another, even from day to day. I think the worst culprits for this are PCN, where they have a large 'tick' or 'cross' by each review. This smacks far too much of 'playing God'... if I was on such a panel, for example, I'd be biased against ladders & platforms games, 'cos they're my own personal pet hates. Someone else might enjoy them, though, so it's not down to me to say 'no, don't buy this': that's just my **opinion**, a fact that isn't stressed enough in the majority of reviews.

No, the best way to do a review, I think, would be to give ratings for quantifiable things like graphics, sonic effects, complexity of play, depth of play, technical competence etc., and then allow the reviewer to express an **opinion** if he must, clearly indicated as such. That would avoid the sort of schizophrenic gamut of varying opinions that Mama ended up with, and which I'm sure plagues other designers too.. The one thing reviews

shouldn't try to say is 'buy this it's zarjaz' or 'don't buy this it's awful' After all one person may hate a game whereas another person might think it's zarjaz. If the second person read a review written by the first person he'd get totally the wrong idea, y'see? It'd be okay to say 'don't buy this because it's terribly bugged and crashes a lot', but definitely wrong to say 'don't buy this 'cos I don't like the style'. Opinions are for swapping with your mates, **not** for publishing as buy-directives in magazines.

Anyway, I can now give you **my** opinion on the 'Empire Strikes Back' convesion for the Star Wars machine, 'cos I've just got it! It's even more of a blast than 'Star Wars', the Probots on the first wave are very enthusiastic about the fireballs. The best wave is undoubtedly the second wave, the Imperial Walkers... You ever want to play Attack of the Mutant Camels in 3-D? Well this is it, you can zoom all around the camels, either shooting them in the red eye or firing ropes out which tangle round their legs, bringing them crashing down with a satisfying crump. You even get 'trick flying' bonus points for flying between their legs. As in AMC of old there's a scanner at the top of the screen showing the camels' progress towards the Rebel Base; when they reach the right-hand edge then it's "Prepare for the jump to lightspeed!" and you're into wave 3, a TIE fighter battle amongst the stars just like Wave 1 of the Star Wars game, but much more vicious. Once through these you hear the voice of C3PO informing you of the unlikely odds for surviving the asteroid shower which rushes towards you. (Difficult bit this. Those asteroids are hard to dodge). According to my (American) conversion kit manual there should be TIEs in amongst the asteroids but I've not seen any yet, maybe that's on higher waves than I've yet achieved. After the asteroids it's back round again for more of the same.

To say the action is 'fast' is an understatement. This game is mean and powerful, and to survive it's blast, blast, blast all the way. I got the xversion boards down from London and fitted them yesterday afternoon, and now my arms, wrists and trigger fingers are really knackered. The speech synthesis, as with Star Wars, is excellent; C3PO sounds really worried all the time, Darth is menacing, threatening 'He will join us, or die!' and the Emperor's there, 'the son of Skywalker must NOT become a Jedi...' and of course Obi-Wan warns of the dangers of the Dark Side (and I don't think he's talking Pink Floyd either!).

There's JEDI bonuses to be earned, too, which give you the power of the Force for about 20 seconds, during which all enemy shots are rendered harmless. The game also has the ol' Tempest hook of allowing you to start on the highest wave you reached, but only if you play again immediately. Kept me in the booth for eons & would have cost me a fortune in 10p's if I'd had to pay!

Anyway if you liked Star Wars then you're gonna LOVE this one. Definitely a case for nipping down the nearest arcade & checking their Star Wars machines to see if they've been converted. Maybe the boys at Realtime can get on the beam & produce a version of 'Empire' as good as that Star Strike....

4: High Score update

These are just a few updates; the full list will be in the next issue. We now have an official Hover Bovver hi-score, and 'Cippy is still being worked on relentlessly. I still hold the Mama Llama hi-CF, no-one's beaten me yet that I've heard from. So the updates are as follows:

Ancipital new hi score=33,572,956 with 100%
(David Hall)
Hover Bovver official best=169,636 lawn 16
(M.J.Robinson)
Metagalactic Llamas hi score=457,143 on level 41
(Stephen Browning)

Oh yeah, can anyone who got a copy of Syncro off either the Net or out of the magazine beat my best (I've forgotten the score except that it was >5k, but what I'm really interested in is how far people are getting).

Syncro- reached Level 5 Round 2
(Yak)

Pull your fingers out and let's see someone really crack Mama Llama. Normally my own best scores are beaten a few weeks after the game comes out, but Mama seems to be holding you off pretty well, I'm still the best (yak yak). Thing is, I usually get beaten fairly quickly 'cos I don't have time to play the game a lot once it's done, in defence of my own score. Mama I'm still pretty good at though, 'cos it's one of the few games I play regularly on my Commodore. (I play a lot of stuff once or twice, but only a tiny percentage of my game stash is regularly used).

5: Bitz

(which reminds me: don't those Bitz bars just taste **amazing???** You know, it's half 2 in the morning, you've been watching a video or something and suddenly: **munchies**. You rush to the fridge and grab a Coke and a cold Bitz bar.... Nothing better for when you get those raving Munchies...)

Since last Beast I've managed to revisit Egypt for a spot more camel research.. went out past the Pyramids and into the desert on a camel, preceded by this Arab bloke on a horse, after about an hour you figure you're out in the middle of nowhere and you're starting to think "hey wow,

this is really zarjaz, just like **Dune**", but then you come over a sand dune and there's an old Arab guy sitting on the sand with a bucket full of bottles of Pepsi, rather spoils the illusion... It's weird, the whole area around Giza and the pyramids is geared to ensuring that the tourist and his Egyptian pounds are soon parted. Nonetheless, the place is really interesting, the lightshow around the Pyramids at night is good and would be even better to the accompaniment of Dark Side or Steve Hillage's Rainbow Dome Musick. And there are **lots** of camels.

Back in the UK, we now have Psychedelia versions ready for the MSX and Amstrad micros as well as my Atari version. Speaking of MSX, I've been playing around with Yamaha's MSX CX5M with the music keyboard. This device contains a really zarjaz 8-channel polyphonic synthesiser which is just amazing fun to play around with. What I'm really interested in is getting hold of an Atari XEM micro (the same as an XE but with Atari's new sound synth chip in, and a MIDI port) and connecting it to the MIDI out of the Yamaha synth. Then, with a little tweaking to Atari Colourspace, you'd have a system whereby playing at the music keyboard both generated sound and simultaneously operated Colourspace... trouble is, there's some doubt whether the XEM computer will ever appear now. I might have to wait and use the MIDI on the 520ST.

I'm now standing by to start my next C64 game I've already got the title and design worked out, so now I'm just going to start coding and see what happens. I'm hoping to demo a subgame or 2 at the Commodore show in June, so if you want a preview come along. Watch out for a brainblastingly good hi-res loading piccy on the new one, too... we've never had loading piccies before, for the very good reason that I can't draw to save me life, but this one we got lined up is brilliant.

The ski-ing in Italy was really good, although I knackered both my hands fairly severely after ploughing in at a fair rate of knots following an abortive and unintentional attempt at ski-jumping. There was even a Defender machine in one of the restaurants halfway up the mountain which was good for a fix once in a while, the Italians were useless at it, too, allowing me to command the hi-score table. The Italians were also well freaked out by my long hair, I don't think they get much out there, and I was known to all the lift attendants as either 'Jesus Christ' or 'Frank Zappa'! I still reckon there'd be scope for a really good ski-ing game, not one of your boring 'get through the gates without missing any, as fast as you can' types, but something more along the lines of 'scream down the mountain at mach 8, accompanied by heavy rock music, earning bonus points for wiping out other skiers, knocking people off the ski lifts, and especially large bonuses for taking out entire ski school classes'. You could call it Gordon Bennet Gets Piste and use the same character from Hover Bovver.

You might have seen my bit in Zzap 64 by now. The mag is OK, not brilliant, it's a bit too much like CRASH for me, reviews reading like they were written BY 12-year-olds FOR 12-year-olds (although they haven't yet sunk to Crash's depths of describing stuff as "brill") and they do rather come across as the sort of people who're so amazingly primitive that they

still believe in charts. Still, there's room for improvement, maybe I'll be able to subvert them from the inside (although I doubt it). Nonetheless you do get a nice lot of screen piccys, and as long as you take the reviews with a pinch of salt (the reviewers are mutant) the whole thing's not too bad I suppose. Although I still preferred the old PCG.

6: Some Zarjaz Things To Do

Go and see 2010 at the cinema. It's really ace and there are some really good special FX. There's a great sequence with an apparently joystick-controlled probe which would make a great video game.

Score a CF of over 200 on Mama. I'd really like to see this done - I've had 192 but can't crack that 200.

Go down your local arcade and see if the Star Wars have been converted. You'll like it a lot if they have.

Read Brian Aldiss' Helliconia stories. The last one 'Helliconia Winter' has just come out and, like the others, it's really brilliant. These and the 'Dune' series are some of the best SF I've ever read.

Be at Knebworth on June 22nd.

Get hold of a cheap Atari 800. There are old '800s going for ludicrously low prices, and it'd be worth having one just to play Jaggi Lines, Star Raiders and Colourspace (if you're into Psych).

Fly between the camels' legs. Extended playing has revealed that this is the key to getting big scores on The Empire Strikes Back.

Learn 68000. You may need it some day.

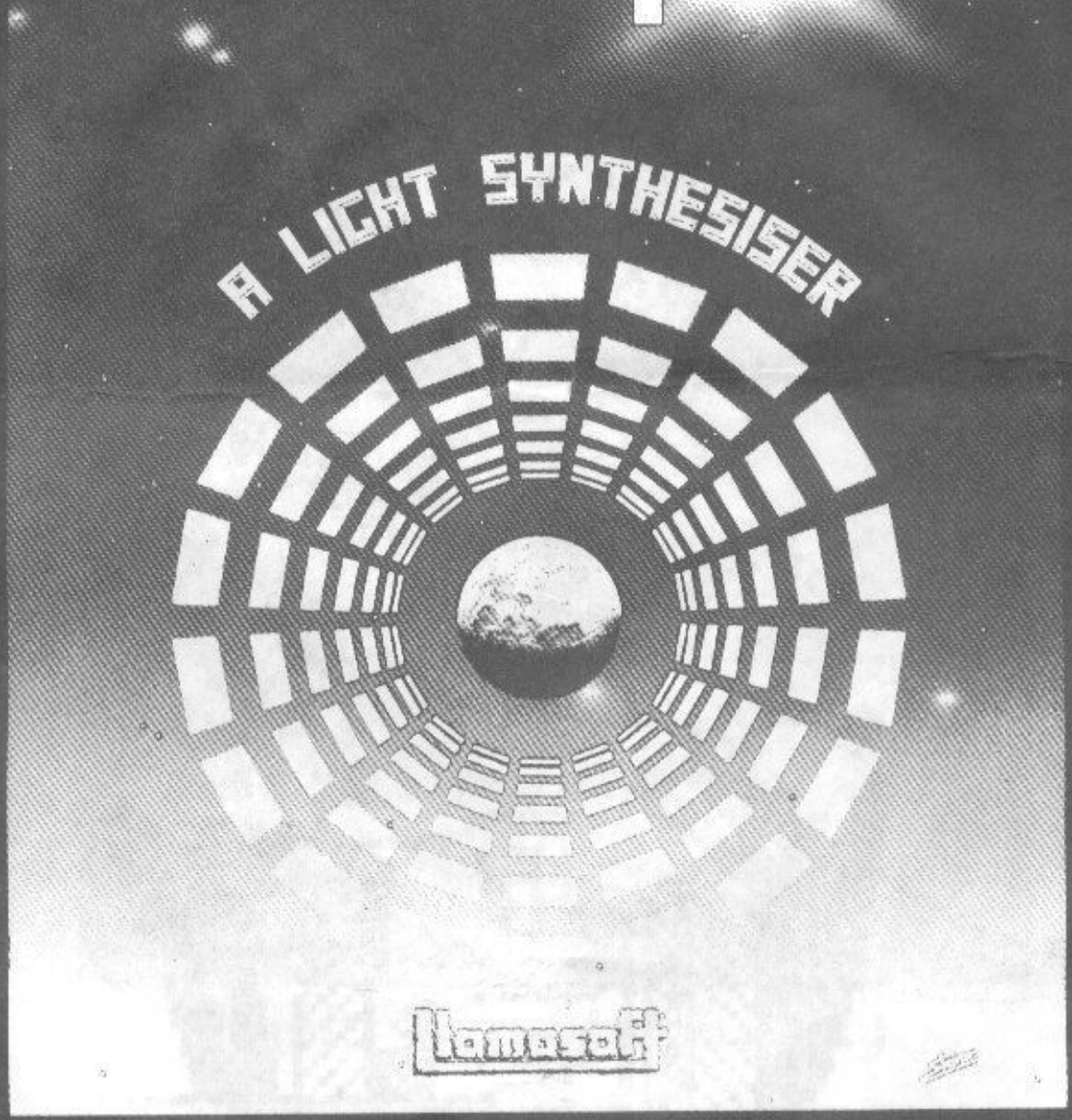
Watch 'The Flip Side of Dominick Hide' if you can get hold of a video from someone (If you saw it when it was on TV, watch it again).

Listen to 'Stargazer' at apocalyptic volumes. You will not regret it at all.

Look for rainbows. You might find yourself in Colourspace....

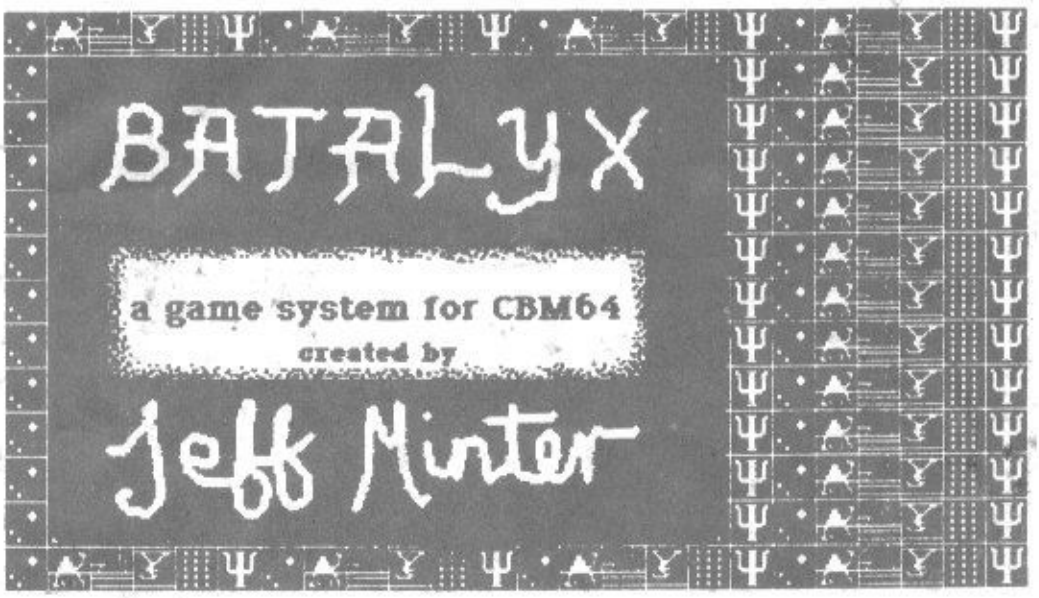
Keep those lasers blazin' till next time... the new game should be a lot of fun, turn up to the Commodore show an' try out the first subgame, I'd be interested to hear any comments... I have a request to mention someone called Fat Fil in the newsletter.. any relation to Fat Freddie? Does anyone out there have a video of "Another Flip for Dominick"? If so, can we borrow it please, we need to see it!!! Anyone else have any ideas for Zarjaz Things To Do? Must finish now, stay sheepish and irridescent, contact me on the Net (either Compu- or Synchronistic).....

colourspace



ATARI

The Nature of the BEAST



Sixth Shaggy Submission... Controversy Issue

BATALYX: The Raid on ZZYAX PRIME.... completed at last!
ATARI 520 ST: YAK learns the Way of the Exploding 68000...
AMIGA: YAK gets hooves-on' test of the megamachine...

1: BATALYX is finished..

After about four months' work I've finally done my '64 game BATALYX. A lot of the early design ideas for this one came while I was on holiday earlier this year. What I wanted was a break from my 100-wave-type of game that I've been doing a lot of recently, and I had the idea of doing six separate games, each of which could be played as a game in its own right, and then integrate all of them together into a multi-game package. I liked the idea of being able to go from one game to the next at will, without any restraints of 'you can't do level x until all of level y is done'.

Once BATALYX play is started, you can at any time jump between the six sub-games; the computer keeps track of where you were within each game, and restores your position when you re-enter. You have unlimited lives within the games; at the start of play you choose how long a game you want (from 5 mins. up to around 1.5 hours). You can then play until you run out of time or you terminate play.

Within each level there are goals to be achieved, yeilding points and 'Completion Icon' symbols. These should be taken into account as a measure of skilful play just as much as the points score. There are five icons, and so far in my best game I managed to get four-and-three-quarters of the icons.

The game has 5 different levels of play each with their own hi-scores a bit like the 5 game-states of Mama Llama. The six sub-games have themes as follows:

Subgame 1: Hallucin-O-Bomblets. This is a rather strange Asteroid-derivitive, I suppose. You control a circular rotating ship thingy (looking a bit like the KillDroid in Mama). By leaning your stick you can fire bullets which act as reaction mass and move your ship. So you have to fire where you DON'T want to go..... There are 16 different hostile types to blast.

Subgame 2: AMC II. For all of those who'd like to see AMC re-worked up to more modern standards. Featuring 2 bullets each for you and the beasties, a smooth-scrolling background instead of the chunk-rez, up to 3 camels attacking on screen at once, and camels that jump and squat, and an improved scanner. I had to put this in - I did enjoy writing AMC in those early days, and had a hankering to bring it up to date.

Subgame 3: The Activation of Iridis Base. This is probably the most abstract of the six. It's basically a reaction-game with a couple of weird features. There are some nice perspective-effect sphere trails, and a nice Dark-Side-of-the-Moon-album-cover-effect when the Base is activated.

Subgame 4: Cippy on the Run featuring everybody's favourite man/goat hybrid looking as harassed as ever, attempting to cover every surface on a dual-planet structure à la Sheep in Space, whilst under the influence of some more of my gravity and inertia routines. There are some nice psychedelic Bonus Run sequences every two levels as well. Blasting is to be had too, there are grey spheres which tend to ricochet about and upset the structure of the surfaces, with unpredictable results for the Horned Hero.

Subgame 5: Syncro II being a bit of a follow-on from Syncro 1 which some of you may have come across on the Net or in Commodore Horizons. This is a geometric, abstract sort of puzzle which calls for a bit of thought as well as being pretty nifty on the stick. It also contains a bit of musical experimentation I've been playing around with. Use of the joystick in the game causes modification of a simple chord. The effects are weird and not entirely bad. Sometimes you find yourself drifting off playing around with the sonics and forget about the game!

Subgame 6: Psychedelia ...well I was going to put in a PAUSE mode, but I thought it'd be much more interesting if, instead of freezing the screen, I let the player relax with a spot of PSYCHEDELIA. This subset contains commands to change symmetry, speed, and screen colours, and is nice to drop into after a spot of hectic battle in the other phases.

Those are the elements, then. The game will be available on both disk and tape. Look out for a secret message hidden within the game, and a zarjaz hi-res title screen drawn by Mo Warden, the winner of the Official

Ancipital Excuse competition a while back.

2: Controversy...

It seems that our friends at ZZAP got a bit, er, flustered shall we say, by my spot of criticism last issue. I don't really see why they got so upset, 'cos the criticism wasn't even totally damning, and it was only published in Nature anyway, which is circulated only to Llama fans and not widely enough to dent Zzap's reputation I'm sure. Anyway, ZZAP's rather OTT response tends to prove what I was criticising them for in the first place- but I'm sure they'll get over it.

My column- which was banished from Zzap after the aforementioned incident- is now being published in Commodore Horizons, along with the 'code for Syncro II which I did for them. I have given BATALYX to C&VG for them to have a pre-release look at, so look out for the first review of the game to come from them.

3: After Batalyx....?

Now BATALYX is done, I'm in the process of putting COLORSPACE onto my Atari 520 ST. I've only had a colour monitor for a short while, Atari's video output is a touch nonstandard. I borrowed a monitor for a while off Atari, then Microvitec sent down a CUB monitor set up specially to work on the ST, and this is now running happily. COLOURSPACE's core routines are just starting to come together, symmetry, priority, pattern-logic and that sort of stuff. It's my first dip into the world of 68000, and my first ever program in the ST, so I'm finding it pretty interesting and great fun. Colour on the ST is very sharp and vivid. The program looks like having a resolution of 160 pixels across by 100 down, mouse-control rather than joystick, and (I hope) foreground and background 'overlay' graphics to run your patterns over. I'm trying a slight modification of the colour algorithm too.

The ST will be my focus for a while, but I also have a new game idea for the '64 just taking shape nicely at the moment. I should also be getting my hands on AMIGA fairly shortly and Colourspace will have to get written for that machine too. That should REALLY be fun- I already know 68000 code so I'll just be able to dive straight in and start making those lovely graphics chips work for their living....

We've also got a conversion on the way, Colourspace for the Beeb no less, on a rez. of 80 pixels across. We're also putting together a compilation tape of games called YAK'S PROGRESS, which will contain 8 games showing the progress of Llama stuff from AMC through to Ancipital. We figure this to be a good intro to the Way of the Beast for those who have not tried Llama games in the past and who are perhaps a little daunted by something as complex as Mama Llama. The compilation lets them get their heads into that state in easy stages.

4: PCW '85...

As I write this I've just come back from PCW '85, where I saw some

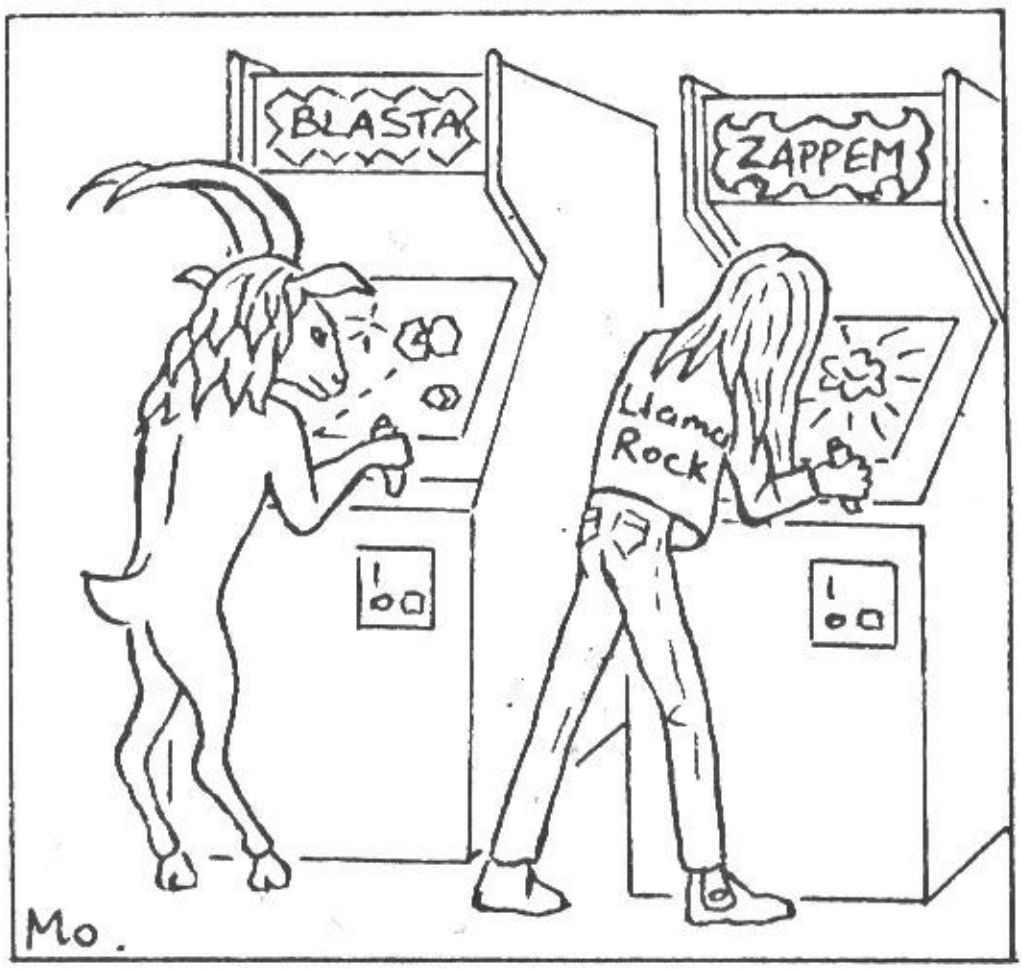
quite interesting stuff... we were there, running BATALYX over the entire show period on three '64s, it was never left unplayed which is very promising. I got to do COLOURSPACE on Ariola's giant Video Wall, that was really zarjaz! The computer graphics were mixed with pop videos in real time, and the effects were really ace!! We had crowds of people stopping to stare at the resultant video show... there's a lot of potential in the Psych/ Colourspace idea for that sort of thing, and it's still my ambition to go behind people like Genesis or Floyd using such a system... I also got to demo BATALYX on the Wall, too; that was great, the little Ancipital was about three feet high on that giant screen, and the sonix were MEGALOUD just like they should be!

Also at PCW I got my first hands-on go of the AMIGA. I got into a demo on the METACOMCO stand on the first day (thanks to Guy Kewney getting me in), and I also was invited to one of Commodore's official demos for journalists and software developers. AMIGA is totally mindblowing. It is without doubt the best micro I have ever seen. It can play music like any musical instrument you care to name. All you do is record the sound of your choice into the machine and it'll then play that sound at any pitch. In terms of graphics, the system has dedicated chips for animation, 4096 colours and absolutely blinding speed (AMIGA draws filled polygons faster than a lot of systems plot pixels). One demo we were shown had a 32-colour display of city streets with animated robots walking around on them; the robots weren't sprites but BOBs (Blitter Objects); bit-images drawn directly to the screen bitmap by the Blitter (Bit Manipulator I think that stands for). All priority stuff and background restoration was looked after by the machine. You could pick up the mouse and move the window in which this scene was displayed- and the animation continued even while the screen was moving... Another demo had a bouncing, rotating ball - itself about half the screen high - bouncing around on the screen, and a loud booming noise (created by one of AMIGA's designers hitting a garage door with a foam baseball bat) being generated- in stereo- at each bounce. The AMIGA can also speak perfectly clearly in both male and female voices; run loads of programs all at the same time in different windows; mix TV images with its own graphics... it'd be easier to make a list of what it COULDN'T do... As for games, there'll be plenty of those; I flew a half-finished version of a flight simulator (written by the same author as the original IBM one), and there was no trace of the jerkiness usually associated with such programs, just excellent, solid 3D graphics. The jet noise in the program was ace, and someone said that it had been created by just going to an airport and recording the real thing. Electronic Arts in America already have AMIGA systems and are working on stuff like the Pinball Construction Set and Skyfox, and also Marble Madness; the resolution of the AMIGA version promises to be as good as the original arcade machine; I'm not going to buy MM as I was once thinking of doing, 'coz I should be getting an AMIGA soon, and I'll play it on there... Firebird

also have some machines here in the UK and are working on a title called STARGLIDER, a 3D Elite-style game but with solid 3D rather than wireframe. I shall be producing for the AMIGA too.

Atari ST owners look set to get some decent games, too. STARGLIDER mentioned above is being converted to the ST as well as AMIGA; Lucasfilm are doing RESCUE ON FRACTALUS; Atari are working on STAR RAIDERS II (drool drool); and I saw the beginnings of some nice stuff on demo at PCW: English Software had a nice PolePosition on demo, as well as some 3D spaceship routines like in ELITE but solid; that old Imagine project called BANDERSNATCH looks like surfacing on the ST, half the old Liverpudlian team were there with a fairly advanced version of the game which they plan to release for ST, Amiga and Macintosh, and which has some nice animation of the main character, a behelmeted spaceman who's pretty nifty with a sword. Someone was running a still-screen of JOUST which you couldn't tell from the arcade version. I demoed my own COLOURSPACE in an early stage of development (COLOURSPACE with a mouse is just beyond belief. The curves are just AMAAAAZZING!).

Loads of people seem to think that AMIGA threatens ST. Maybe in the high-end business area it does, but not in the home market. People coming up to 16bits from their 64s and Ataris are not going to be able to fork out the grand-plus for the AMIGA, zarjaz though it is.



What they can do, however, is get an excellent entry-level 68000 system in the Atari 260 STD; this is planned by Atari to cost about £400, and include a single floppy and have 256k of RAM. All the graphics, etc. are exactly as for the 520 ST. You can run it thru a normal TV or get a monitor if you need the extra clarity. The AMIGA, however, is definitely THE micro if you're rich. It is the machine for creative people. Musicians and artists will be using AMIGA- odds on you'll see one on Top of the Pops before too long. If you're in a company, you can justify its expense by using it as a business tool- it'll run lots of business stuff megafast- then nip it home and immerse yourself in Marble Madness and Starglider and Colourspace to your hearts content...

So Amiga and ST don't really conflict on the home level. Most home users can only dream of AMIGA, but they can go and get Atari's machine which is still pretty brilliant by comparison with what we've got at the moment, and is really zarjaz value for money.

5: **New Games**

In the arcades, some of the more recent releases are worth a mention: there's a really cute platform game that runs on the Atari System One machines (of Marble Madness fame). Called Pack Rat, it's about a cute little rat who runs about over various nicely-detailed screens collecting bottles, jewels and other objects whilst pursued by various hostiles. He can stun these pursuers by throwing stuff at them, and he does a little jig with his ratty nose in the air when he successfully brings all the objects back to his nest. The music is excellent- the sound synthesiser in that System One is really impressive.

There's also a new Pole Position-type game I had my first go of the other day. Called Hang On, it is a fairly standard PolePos type except for one thing- the game is mounted upon a lifesize model of a motorcycle with the screen between the handlebars. You control the game by leaning the whole machine over in the direction you want to turn! Quite weird at first but you soon get the hang of it.

Fans of that Commando game in the arcades, the one where you're a soldier and you battle your way thru enemy lines, would be well advised to get a look at Alligata's Who Dares Wins. Written by Steve Evans, one of the best 64 hackers about (he did Guardian, Alligata's ace Defender clone, and Rocket Roger, which was good but very very hard), the game is a close copy of the original and has excellent sprite handling routines; Evans has developed some really nice dynamic-raster-interrupt routines which he used in Guardian to get lots of stuff on screen at once, and Who Dares Wins features plenty of action too. Highly recommended if you don't mind the fact that the images being blown away aren't abstract alien shapes, but little human forms....

Speaking of Defender, Guardian has finally been eclipsed by Dropzone as Best Defender Clone in my opinion. What makes Dropzone especially enjoyable is the solid planet surface, the megazarjaz explosion when you get boffed, and the sheer speed of the action. There are one or two twists

to the action which make the gameplay a little different from Defender, but not enough to worry about. The sonixx are ace too, deep and menacing like all good Defenders should be. The only thing better than this is my Stargate machine.

I'd love to see a really good clone of Star Force, too. That's a pure blast'em'up from the arcades, with some very pretty scrolling backgrounds and plenty of mayhem. They've got one down Southampton Ice Rink and when I'm too knackered from skating around I'll often knock off for a few blasts of Star Force.

Whilst I'm still on about games I'd better mention Hyper Sports. The game itself is pretty good, licensed from Konami it's pretty faithful to the real thing, with six events covering swimming, shooting, vaulting, triple jump, weight lifting and archery. What makes it, however, is the loading music. It's wonderful. Put it thru your stereo and have a listen. They could almost release it as a single! There's quite a nice rendering of Vangelis' Chariots of Fire theme within the game, as well. No medal ceremony though, I guess with six events and all that music they were running a little tight on memory. Nice if you like the sports games, worth it for the loading music! I've also had a brief look at Summer Games 2, not enough to give a valid opinion, but what I saw looks good; watching the little guy throwing the javelin was just like seeing it on the box! The animation looks really zarjaz. And there are some beasties in it, horses in fact, so it can't be bad!

New from Activision soon is Coriolis Rift from Lucasfilm. I saw this briefly at PCW running on an Atari and despite my efforts to hassle Activision for a copy they weren't giving (ah well, you can but try)... It uses similar fractal landscape generation to Fractalus and you sit in a tank driving over green mountains. Much more I cannot say cos I only had a brief look in passing, but it looks good. If it's half as good as the last two Lucas games on the Atari it'll be worth having. I saw Fractalus running on the '64, it's not quite as smooth as the Atari version but not too bad nonetheless. Activision have even been quoting me in their adverts, they didn't even ask me, cheeky....

All in all, then, there are still plenty of good games being put out for the '64, and the future looks bright for both the new Atari ST and the Amiga, as far as games are concerned. The arcades are a little slow to get any really exciting stuff in, but hopefully with games as good as Marble Madness being produced this should change for the better. I've also heard of 'simulator-type' arcade games being produced in America; games mounted on hydraulics which actually move the game booth about in response to the player's control motions. That would be really good and make it worthwhile going down the arcades again- part of the reason for the current arcade game slump is that people can stay home and play games on their micros- but unless you're mega-rich and have lots of space, I can't imagine hydraulically-activated games ever being installed for home use! When you go down the arcade, it should be to play stuff that's not even remotely possible at home.

6: An Announcement and a little Hype

First the announcement. We are moving the Beast mailing list over to the Sirius at the moment. We would like all those who wish to continue to receive the newsletter to write and tell us so, please; those not replying we'll assume to have lost interest, or blown up their computers or whatever. This should hopefully stop people getting multiple copies too- some people have complained of getting 4 or 5 issues!

Now the hype. We have a few of the following titles at reduced prices:

Disks: Six Quid Each for the '64...

***Ancipital

***Hover Bovver

***Revenge of the Mutant Camels

Tapes: Two Quid Fifty for the '64

***LaserZone

***Matrix

***Gridrunner

***Hellgate

***Metagalactic Llamas

***Attack of the Mutant Camels

Vic-20 Tapes: Two Quid Each (#=unexpanded)

***Abductor#

***LaserZone

***Matrix

***Gridrunner#

***Hellgate

***Metagalactic Llamas#

We also have T-shirts available in Llamasoft (black with round logo) and Mama Llama/Psychedelia (Mama on front, Psych on back) designs; price is £2.50 each, state size when ordering pleez.

I am sorry to introduce a heavy, breadhead, hyping ADVERT into the mag but us programmers, we got to earn a living see, and if I didn't do this I'd have to open up my lab as an arcade and start charging everyone 10p a go to play the games, and then I'd never get any peace to get my work done and there'd be no zarjaz Colourspace on the ST and that wouldn't do at all. (Not a bad excuse huh?)

Los Endos

Almost finished this issue now. I'm legging it to Greece for a little horizontal activity of the solar nature next week. I figure I've earned it, all that 68000-learning and all those late nites on the Net have taken their toll and after our non-summer I could use a little sun. Rest assured that I'll be thinking about my new projects for both '64 and ST, and lusting after an Amiga which I should receive shortly after I get back. I'm also trying to set up a little ski-ing for myself this Christmas along with a couple of guys from the Net and Tony Crowther, which could be a good laugh all round.

Now a plug for the Laserium in London. Since being turned on to it during the Commodore show, I have been a regular visitor to the Planetarium for the nightly laser shows. They're really zarjaz. Basically they're what I've been trying to get at with Psych and Colourspace, except that instead of a couple of hundred quidsworth of hardware, this show uses 100 grandsworth of laserlightsynth projected into a dome. The effect is stunning and if you're ever in London don't miss it. As from the 26th Sept there are two shows, Laser FX which is a selection of tracks including works by Jean-Michel Jarre, the Art of Noise, ZZ Top, Tangerine Dream, the Eurythmics and Mick Jagger to name but a few. The other show is a Led Zep show which ought to be zarjaz, I haven't seen it yet 'coz it doesn't start till the 26th and I shall be in Corfu and unable to cop the first night, worse luck. I have faith in the laserist. The show will be zarjaz. The Laserium costs £2.95 to get in (reductions fur students), and the shows run at 6pm, 7.30 pm and 9pm each night. The Planetarium is right by Baker Street tube. PSYCH-heads: this one's not to be missed...

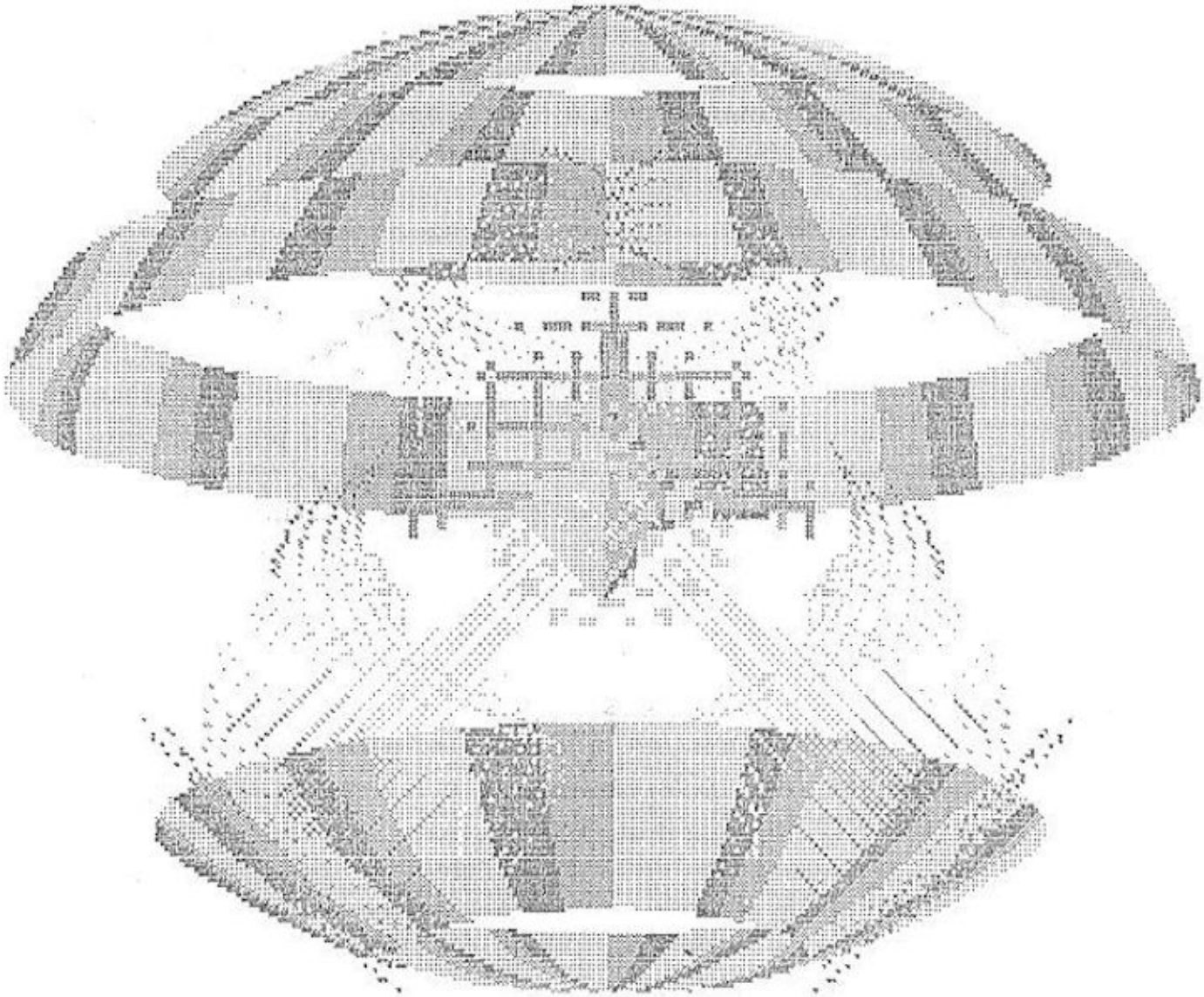
Anyway that's it for this issue. Commodorians, don't worry about all this Amiga and ST stuff, I won't desert you, there will be a new '64 project starting soon. I would like to do more Atari stuff too if I get the time. We'll see- at the moment EVERYONE wants me to write for THEIR particular machine and I don't know if I'm coming or going! Still I am a Commodore bod at heart, and I do enjoy pluggin' the 64...

I hope you all enjoy BATALYX as much as I enjoyed writing it. Get modems if you can afford it and go on line to Compunet, it's really zarjaz. Lots of good Commodorebashers out there. Read Cerebus the Aardvark stories. Come to the October Commodore show and join us for a blast. Pray that the Amiga gets a lot cheaper. Watch Max Headroom. Go to Peru. If you can't manage that just go to a zoo and meditate on camels and llamas whilst listening to Incantations on your Walkman. Get all five icons. Listen to Tomita. Drink Newcastle Brown. Stay up all night on the Net.

This newsletter was brought to you by me sitting up half the night and typing. Thanxx to everyone who'se taken the trouble to write to me. I'm sorry if the newsletter seems a bit irregular in its delivery times, you see it's usually only produced when I've just finished a project and if I spend a long time on any one thing it gets held up. Plus I've been finding it very hard to cope with my Ince Kola withdrawal symptoms. I'm afraid Coke is no substitute for the REAL real thing.....

BATALYX
lomasoft
Steinar

the Nature of the Beast.....



Yakspeak the Eighth

zarjaz colourspace launch
new amiga stuff
spindizzy
iridis alpha

1: The Lights in the Dome...

As I hinted at the end of the last issue, we did a rather special launch for the Atari ST version of Colourspace. I thought it'd be a really neat thing to do if we hired out the Laserium, and did the launch in there. Eventually the idea turned into proper plans, and on the evening of the 10th Feb we went into the Dome with 2 gigantic video systems, each 8 feet by 6, and a lightshow worked out for five excellent tracks. Despite early hassles setting the rig up (the Atari wouldn't talk to the Barco projection systems) the show was great fun; first I did a forty-minute set, then there was adjournment for beer, then a 20-minute laser show (to Genesis), then more beer, then we finished off with a Colourspace/Laser duette to Stairway to Heaven. Well cool I can tell you...

The ST 'Space is now finished, packaged and in full production. We took our first batch to the Atari Show at Hammersmith, where I gave demonstrations on the hour, every hour, using my own projection system against one wall of the stand. We had crowds 3 deep round the stand all day, decent music, and we were just about cleaned out of ST Colourspace by the end of it. I was encouraged to see so much enthusiasm...

2: Ahead, Warp Factor 5

With my first 68000 project successfully completed (whew!), I have blown the dust off my '64 rig, fired up the 128 that I bought at the Horizons show, booted the assembler and got down to my next '64 game. The title of the game is to be **Iridis-Alpha**, the name coming from a tie-in with the Iridis-Base construction of subgame 3 in Batalyx. The scam this time is that once Iridis Base had been activated, Humanoid forces discovered there a message capsule containing the co-ordinates of Iridis-Alpha, the long-deserted homeworld of the Iridians, an ancient and peaceful race who were possessed of a marvellous technology far in advance of any that Humankind possessed, and doubtless pretty nifty against the Zzyaxians if we could get hold of it. Unfortunately, the Iridians, evolving spontaneously into beings of pure colour one day, decided that their new forms would look nicer against a backdrop of interstellar nebulae, and left their homeworld deserted. Unfortunate for you, that is, because, not wanting the barbaric races populating the Universe at that time to spoil their old planet, they installed lots of nasty and distinctly high-tech defences to discourage casual visitors. (Peaceful they might have been; dumb they were not).

Not least problematic of these defences is the **bi-existentialistic** field that pervades Iridis-Alpha, permitting the planet to exist in two reality states at one time. (And that's two reality states out of a possible five). All five reality-states are possessed of numerous levels of sophisticated defences for you to blast (or at least they will be when I finish writing the alien driver module). Your display shows both realities at once; one is quite straightforward, but unfortunately the other one is inverted, scrolls

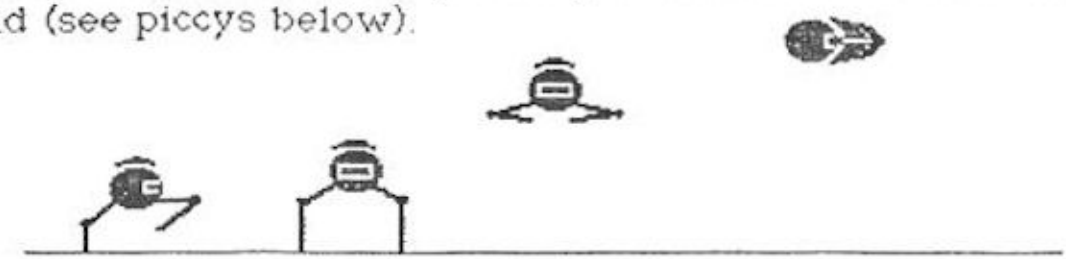
in the opposite direction, and has mirrored controls. As you battle you can transfer from one reality to the other at will, and also collect up energy that you have to deliver to the deactivation system (which is reached by a distinctly weird route. Heavily defended of course).

To aid you in all this mayhem you have under your control a distinctly cute little robot that can walk along the surface of the planet (in a very spider-like manner too, I might add); leap over obstacles with much waving of legs, even take off and become a fast fighter with a suitably loud and lethal laser cannon. As for transferring the energy, my only advice to you is that you practise your Batalyx Phase One and your Marble Madness, and perhaps you'll be OK.

The code is coming along fine, I'm using the 128 to assemble on and running it on the '64, a bit slower than the Apple rig I used to use, but the 128 has more memory. I'll finish it in maybe a couple of months, but I hope to have a little demo ready at least in time for the Commodore show. I did quite a lot of the work for it in France, I popped back to La Plagne for a spot more ski-ing and took a 128 with me this time in order to do a little coding in between ski-ing and the bar. The ski-ing was ace, lots more snow than last time, and some really nice weather, sun and amazing cloud formations and Jean-Michel Jarre on the day I had the Transcendental Chairlift Ride... amazing! Mind you, there was the odd blizzard and one day of really wet horrible snow, one run and you were soaked and you had to stand on a gradient of more than 45 degrees before you'd move the snow was that sticky. But for the most part the snow was ideal and I had a great time, **and** got some work done so I needn't feel too guilty about it. Guinness was £3 a pint though. Heavy.

I read a French computer mag while I was out there, **Tilt** it was called, sort of like the French equivalent of C&VG. It had a review of Batalyx in it, from what I could decipher they seemed to like it, anyway they did a really ace cartoon of a big, gormless grinning camel all over the page which looked great. The French gamers seem a keen bunch, still into the Mattel and Coleco systems quite heavily but a healthy C64 band, but the main machine in France at the moment is without doubt the Amstrad. French chipheads are Amstrad-crazy. In a single newsagent I counted five Amstrad magazines, two Apple and **no** Commodore ones at all! A couple years back the Oric was all the rage in France, and now the Amstrad. Mind you they are displaying a healthy interest in the new Atari STs (but then who isnt?)

Anyway to return to the subject of Iridis-Alpha, I have this problem... the little robot thingy is so cute we think it should get a nice cute name like R2-D2 or something. Trouble is, I can't think of any, so if anyone suggests a decent one and I decide to use it I'll give them a free copy of I-A as soon as it is finished. To give you inspiration I have illustrated the offending droid (see piccys below).



3: What's New

Aside from Iridis, I have a couple of other new bits and pieces coming out.... remember Matrix? Of course you do... not much flashy graphics or mega-tunes, just a raw blast, a little dated by today's standards but still fun. Thing is, a mate of mine has just done a conversion of it onto C-16, and the conversion actually plays better than the original... it blasts like crazy! The day I got it I sat up until half-3 just giving 'em hell, and the following night me and a mate repeated the experience on the Barco this time. It doesn't look that flashy but it sure has one hell of a hook. We'll be releasing the C-16 Matrix, and another conversion, of Laser Zone, at the Commodore show in May.

On the Amiga front I have had a little luck, still no Marble Madness yet, but I have an almost-finished version of Commodore's forthcoming **Musicraft** program that does an awesome Axel-F demo (especially good hooked into the stereo). There's an amazing synth module with all the different sorts of controls that you might find on a Moog, and with which a complete novice can soon be creating some excellent effects. There's a library of example effects too, some of which are well Pink Floyd I can tell you.

Also, I was up at Ariola the other day and managed to tax three Amiga programs from them, EA stuff that they'll be distributing in England. EA stuff is just about the only truly finished leisure software for the Amiga that I've ever seen (apart from Psygnosis's Brataccas). I already have DPaint, a truly amazing art package that really shows the power of the Amiga; and the three programs I got last week are **One-on-One, Archon** and **Seven Cities of Gold**. They are all titles that have previously been on release for C64 and Atari, but the Amiga versions are obviously better in most respects. **One-on-One** is a basketball simulation, not of a full game but of two famous American players playing one-on-one, sort of a mini-game for two. The gameplay didn't captivate me, probably because I know next to nothing about basketball and can't appreciate the subtleties that are doubtless incorporated in the action. However, one feature that everyone can appreciate is the marvellous sampled sonix. The basketball bounces with an authentic sound, but best of all there are digitised crowd noises that really add to the atmosphere: if you listen carefully you can actually hear people selling hot-dogs, cold beer and ice-cold Coke! **Archon** you may be familiar with from the C64, it's a sort of chess-type strategy game where players must do arcade-style battle to capture opponent's pieces. The game is excellent (I have become quite an addict) and once again the sonix are great: phoenixes burst into roaring fireballs, trolls roll huge boulders from speaker to speaker in stereo, and bowmen's arrows are accompanied by an amusing 'twang'. The third game, **Seven Cities of Gold**, I have only glanced at as yet, but it is an adventure-type game done with graphics and many action sequences in which you play the part of a Spanish Conquistador discovering the New World. You sail away, discover what you may, and then return to Spain and the pub to recount your tale

(and save the game). The game's origins (it was originally for Atari) are obvious in that the graphics were ported across rather than designed for the Amiga; nonetheless if you like this kind of game it seems quite good. Written by the same team who did **Mule**. Still no sign of Marble Madness, but after talking to Ariola I get the impression that we should look out for its first appearence at the Commodore show. I hope so, they better hurry up or else someone'll bring out an Amiga or ST version of Spindizzy....

4: Battles

I've been doing a fair bit of battling recently, and I'll tell you about some of the best... I finally made my escape from Targ in Novagen's excellent **Mercenary**, it took me about three days' solid play, but it was good fun. I like the style of the game, which is strictly speaking an adventure, but thanks to Paul Woakes' excellent 3-D routines you can see the world you're adventuring in and actually move around in it and relate to objects in it. Beats the old textual 'you are in a large hangar. there is a spaceship here' approach-- must be good if it can get a hardened arcader like me Adventuring for three days solid.

Of course, I have been playing Matrix on the C16, and for those who wish to challenge me, I have attained Level 20 and scored 304,146 points **without cheating**. Anyway, if you cheat in this version it puts 'Cheat' up next to your score in the score table to let everyone know how you got it. I've been doing quite a bit of Archon, thanx to the new Amiga version, but I'm afraid that on the second level I still usually end up as Dragon-fodder. My advice to Archonists is: never be without a Unicorn.

I have some excellent news for starved Marble Madness freaks, namely a game called **Spindizzy**. Forget Gyroscope, because Spindizzy blows it clean away. You are a little inverted spinning pyramid (or a gyroscope, or a marble, if you want to be) and you trundle around over 380-odd screens of strange 3-D surfaces, having to contend with jumps, inclined surfaces, trampolines, switches that turn on hidden bridges and lifts, even ice and hostile marbles. The 3-D work is superb, with complex priorities being flawlessly rendered, and the gameplay is challenging and very extensive: I have spent half an hour playing, only to be told I've only done a measly 23% of the screens. Your objective is to map all the screens and collect jewels. You can call up a large map of the area showing what you've done and whether you've missed any jewels. You have a time limit, which you can extend by collecting jewels and visiting previously un-mapped screens. Now for the bad news: this excellent game is currently on the Amstrad (I've got mine out and dusted it off). However, I expect the good news to follow for C64 owners pretty soon now, because the Amstrad packaging has instructions printed on it for Amstrad **and** C64, implying the Commie version will be with us shortly. The game is so good that I reckon if it were coded for the Atari System One arcade game that originally ran Marble Madness, it'd make a worthy sequel. Me, I just hope the guy who wrote it has got an Atari ST... (hint hint)

5: Netwize

I've just started going onto Compunet again heavily after about a month of absence, I daren't look at my mailbox just yet, it must be full to the brim and it'll take me years to clear it! The new Partyline is running now, and is busy most nights right up till shutdown at 3. Most of the regulars are there at some time, and a few real junkies who must have absolutely mega phone bills. The quality of the free software on the Net is high as usual, with many Bogg tunes and some amazing demos from Bob; one of the best is a Bob/Mach collaboration that shows one of those sliding-puzzle things that proceeds to solve itself revealing a pint of Guinness, after which the message **Guinness- Pure Genius** is displayed in sprites underneath. It's a really clever demo and graphically very neat.

I've also been dabbling in Prestel and Micronet, and my first impression was of the sheer size of the database, which is huge. You get a directory when you join Prestel that tells you the subjects that are available. I was gratified to see that they had a section on Peru in which there are details of holidays to Peru; there's a section on just about anything you can think of. You can just wander the database or pick up one of the many chatlines and see who's about; Micronet has loads of chatlines for different interests. There's a solely-64 section of Micronet too. Prestel has a mailbox facility that's free, too, if you want private chat and don't want to pay the chatline fee. Another thing- there are millions and millions of travel agents on Prestel. You have been warned.

6: Events

The differences between Zzap and myself seem to have receded into history, and I was asked up to Zzap Towers (actually a couple of rooms in a place in Ludlow) to do battle with Tony Crowther, Archer Maclean, Andy Braybrook, and a couple other programmers for a sort of Programmer's Blast... we all played games against each other and then had a mega Programmer's Pissup afterwards. It was good fun (I won!!), especially the boozing. Because I won that one I had to go back the following month to do another one, this time against the Newsfield team, and I came second to the accursed Rignall. Still good fun though. More boozing!

We had the Atari show in March, and just coming up we're going to the CES electronics show in April, and of course the Commodore show in June. We'll be taking the huge video screen to both shows, so look out for us.

The new Genesis show is now on at the Laserium in London, and as I keep telling you, if you haven't been to the Laserium, make a point of going, coz it's really amazing and freaky. The new show has an excellent 'Dance on a Volcano' that's done with some very useful lightning FX.

I am off to Lanzarotte this week for a week of lying on the beach, with the all-night coding sessions I've been getting into recently I could do with the rest... sun, sand and camels, seems like an excellent scene to me!

I went to the Arcade Trade exhibition in London in January, and saw some amazing new arcade stuff that'll have you down the arcades slingin' in your 10p's like there was no tomorrow... best of all is a new game from Sega called **Space Harrier** that has better-than-Amiga graphics moving at incredible speeds... it's a shoot'em'up in which you control a man in a jetpack who flies 'into' the screen in 3-D perspective. You have to dodge rocks, mushrooms, all sorts of things, while blasting at some gloriously-constructed alien creatures; there are two-headed snakes, woolly mammoths, spaceships, robots, you name it and you get to kill it in Space Harrier. The graphix definitions for the game take up 1.2 megabytes of memory! The more expensive versions of the game come in one of those hydraulically-mounted simulator booths that respond to your joystick actions. Try it- you'll LOVE it...

Went to see Marillion, twice, since the last newsletter, and they were excellent, especially the second time I went which was to the New Street Odeon in Birmingham, I was right at the front. Go and see them if you get the chance coz they are well good.. I'm going to see Dio on the 7th of May, two days before the Commodore show (I hope my ears will have stopped ringing by then).

7: Nybbles...

Came across an interesting device the other day, an innocuous cartridge with a little button on the back called Freezeframe (the cartridge, not the button). It's more or less a hacker-in-a-cartridge; you load your game, wait until it's running, then press the button; you then get a dump of the whole memory-state of the computer to disk or tape. Reload this and the program takes up exactly where you left off when you pressed the button. However, this unethical little device isn't perfect; the disk files it creates refused utterly to load on my C128D internal drive; it didn't like the turbo loader that Freezeframe uses.

Most of the 'true' hackers I know (the type who perform the same function a lot more ingeniously and efficiently by using their own intelligence) scorn the new device; they reckon that there's no subtlety to it and indeed it does seem to generate a lot of large disk files that probably contain a lot of useless stuff along with the program. Besides, there's a lot of work that goes into some of the more artful hacking that you see doing the rounds on the disk circuit. I had a lovely cracked version of Batalyx the other day from Zeropage, they'd put a turbo loader onto it that displayed the excellent title picture while the game was loading, and even laid their own logo into the picture's bitmap. Very slick and a lot nicer than just loading a bunch of Freezeframe files!

Incidentally, I've heard that the latest versions of Final Cartridge (the useful little cartridge I mentioned last time) has both a Game Kill and Freezeframe option built in, along with all the rest.. if they carry on at this rate then Final Cartridge will soon be more sophisticated than the computer it's designed to plug into!

My Tempest blew up again this morning, just when I'd been getting fairly heavily into it again. I was playing it quite happily in the morning, then nipped into town (where I managed to get Wind & Wuthering on CD at last!) and returned to find it without anything on screen... the game still functions OK, you can start a game and hear the sonix etc., but there's just no screen display. Ah well, it could've been worse... might have been the Stargate!! Perhaps it's time for me to look out for a new game to replace the Tempest, I can't put up with the flippin' thing blowing all the time! Now what I'd **really** like is a Space Harrier... but methinx I can't afford it until I can get a second-hand one from somewhere, they mega-expensive!

After I finish doing Iridis I'm gonna look at the state of the Amiga market; if there are any around then I'll probably put **Colourspace** on the Amiga, something I've been itching to do for ages but haven't been able to justify yet because there aren't any Amiga owners around yet to sell it to. Commodore better pull their finger out pretty quick and get the Amiga out there fast because Atari have some pretty big guns ready to enter the battle on the ST front... stuff like a blitter that's better than the Amiga one (the blitter is what allows the Amiga to do its graphix so amazingly fast), and a sound chip called Amie that can actually put out better-quality sound than a CD player- and all available as cheap, plug-in add-ons to the current ST range... then there's **next** year's ST models that could have 1024x1024-pixel displays in at least 8 bit-planes (gimme one of those to do Colourspace on!) and a 68020 driving it all... but some of the stuff I'm seeing on the Amiga is so painfully good it'd be a criminal waste if the machine didn't get out there in decent numbers. Unless Commodore start getting successful soon it looks like the home micro market will be left to be divided between Atari and Amstrad, what with Amstrad's surprise takeover of Sinclair (well it certainly surprised ME). If that happens then I know which side I'm putting my money on- Alan Sugar's good, but Uncle Jack Tramiel's better....

Nice to see that Atari are reviving their 7800 video game machine. This was sceduled for release a couple years ago but got shelved; they've now dusted it off and look like they're gonna launch it. It's basically an 8-bit Atari computer with a decent sprite generator built in to replace the rather limited PMG system. There's some nice software for it too, stuff like Joust and Xevious, and the original version of Rescue on Fractalus (which was originally designed for the 7800, so I've heard, then converted to the 'old' 8-bit Ataris). Mind you I've always had a soft spot for video game machines- I speak as the proud owner of an Atari VCS, Coleco, Mattel Intellivision and Vectrex- all of which still get used! Games such as Atari 'Superman' and Mattel 'Tron Deadly Disks' may not possess much flashy graphics or depth of gameplay, but the playability is great. Also, the Mattel had this really zarjaz voice unit that produced excellent speech, without freezing the game action. Unfortunately they only ever produced three or four cartridges for the speech unit, which is a great shame because it really added to the enjoyment of the games. Of course the only drawback of the video game machines was the price of the cartridges-

usually £30 or £40 a shot which is far too much to expect anyone to pay for a game. Hopefully if Atari launch the 7800 they'll keep the cartridges down to under £20. There's also news of a game system to be launched by Nintendo that's supposed to have arcade quality graphics and cost about £40, but I can't fill you in with any details because I haven't seen one yet. Apparently the folks down at Activision have one and they keep going on about a game called Super Mario Brothers that they reckon's really good. I shall have to pop in and see it sometime.

I really should say 'thanx' to all the people who have sent me stuff recently. I get a lot of interesting letters, most of which I never get the chance to reply to in person, and also I get some ingenious pictures and interesting bitz. Some of them are very good, I did like the 'Psychedelia-addiction' poster I got a couple of weeks ago, it gave me a good giggle I must say. It's nice to see such a positive response to the work I do, and after a while you get to look forward to the mail so you can see what interesting stuff you'll get today. Thanx a lot...

Tony and I had an excellent time ski-ing just before Christmas, what with the slopes all day and the pub all night (well almost) we had a lot of fun. Tony had never done any ski-ing before but seemed to take to it really well, and we were all bombing down the mountain like nutcases before the two weeks were up. One night we got so smashed we decided it'd be a great idea to go down the piste to the next village using tea trays and old bits of cardboard box as sledges.... the things that inebriated programmers do, it's disgusting! It was fun but a sure way to get a really cold bum!

Anyway I'd better think about stopping writing now, the dawn'll soon be creeping in through the windows and this'll be the third night running I've been up until 6 or 7 am doing something or other. Much to do before I go on holiday on Thursday but at least I'll have earned my lying-around-on-the-beach time. I could do with some further work on the tan, too, I've got to go for it if I'm going to get rid of the 'panda patches' left by my ski goggles. I guess I'll probably see a lot of you at the Commodore show, we'll be the ones with the giant screen and the decent music (hopefully at excessive volumes if the organisers don't complain). That was another nice thing about the Atari show- the only time anyone complained about our music was when one of the people from a stand near ours came over to complain that the music wasn't loud enough, he couldn't hear it, and could we please turn it up please! The only time I had to turn it down was when we had Darkside on so loud my speakers were threatening to blow...

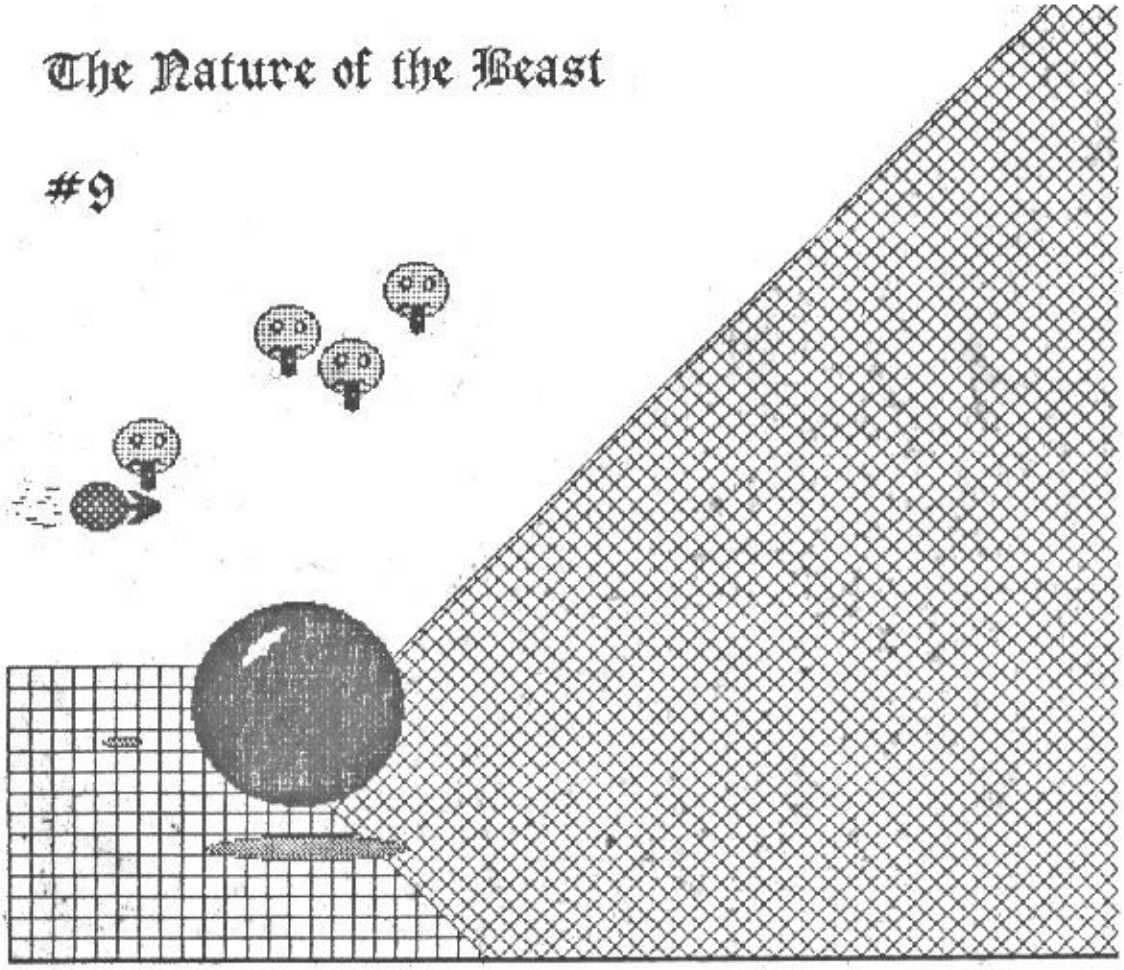
YAK go crash now, seeya around...

Expect to see IRIDIS around June, I hope it'll be done by then... any Colourspace-ST owners out there, if you do any good presets, I'd like to see them... try listening to Camel 'Nude', or any amount of Alan Parsons Project, especially 'Eye in the Sky'... and don't build The Wall too high.....

steina

The Nature of the Beast

#9



Perfect Madness?

EA's Amiga Madness... finished at last

Gilby at Mach 8....

IRIDIS ALPHA finished on C64... at last, a fast blaster on the Commodore!

1 : Go Ahead, Lose your Marbles....

Well, at last all the months of speculation are over. Marble Madness for the Amiga was one of those programs that everyone had heard of, but no-one ever got to see. EA have been advertising its imminent release since as long ago as PCW last year, and making great claims for it, saying that it would exactly duplicate the arcade original. Everyone had the feeling that when MM came out, then we'd really see the Amiga realising some if its vast potential. Early releases for Amiga had all been OK, but I for one felt that they weren't really pushing the machine to anywhere near the limits of its capabilities.

So last week I got a call from London saying to go to Ariola immediately, because MM was there. I'd almost given up hope of ever seeing the game, thinking that perhaps EA had abandoned the project, so I was pleased to hear that it really did exist; I nipped on to the train and within two shakes of a llama's fluffy little tail I was sitting in front of the Arioloid Amiga waiting for Madness to boot.

At last the screen cleared to reveal an option screen that looked decidedly... er... grotty I'm afraid, just standard Amiga text, no fancy graphics or anything! Nonetheless; I pressed on, selecting Level 0 of difficulty, and Mouse Control (none of the trackballs we tried were compatible). Clicked on GO!, the screen went black, the drive whirred... and then the Amiga turned into a Marble Madness arcade game.

The title screen may have been grotty; the game certainly is not. All the courses are graphically identical to those of the arcade engine. Everything is there, acid pools, hammers, ice, Marble Munchers, the Silly Wave where gravity is reversed, and those evil black ballbearings that try and knock you off the course. The sound is in stereo, the same tunes as in the original with perhaps not quite such a clean sound, but still millennia away from anything you'll hear on a C64. The spot FX are excellent, including the whizzy little sound you get when your marble gets stunned and what must be the best sound FX in video game history: when you get on the Silly Wave you find an area where all the Marble Munchers, Ballbearings and Acid Pools have become small and helpless, and you can roll over them with your marble to get your revenge and a 3-second time bonus. As you do so you get these BRILLIANT squish! splurp! pfftt! sound effects as you flatten the creeps. Control is good with the mouse, but you mustn't move the mouse too fast or control actually reverses! A gentle motion is all that is needed usually. Holding down the left mouse button gives you a faster marble.

In play, then, the game is superb, about 95% identical to the original. The game is not quite perfect, though, by reason of a few technical niggles and a fairly stupid oversight.

First, the niggles. There are some priority clashes when your marble gets close to some of the other objects, and a few colour clashes. The scrolling can be slow if there are many objects on the screen, and if, for

playing games on) and that you must, in your dreams, assume different personas and go adventuring in your own brain, restoring your neural linkages and eventually your sanity, along the way. You begin as a Wizard standing by a crystal in a curious, abstract 3-D landscape. You have to make a 'path' from your crystal to a goal marked on the game map. Along the way the terrain changes, and as it does, you have to change personas in order to be able to continue building the path. Along the way you are harassed by flying spheres and skulls which shoot out 'rays' that seek you out and fry you on contact! For your own defence you have one of the nicest weapons that I've ever come across in a video game: press FIRE and you get this flashing, noisy lightning bolt that you can direct around to zap the nasties. Very satisfying, and quite unbelievable if you play while listening to the sonix on a good pair of stereo 'phones. Upon arrival at the goal, there's a brief psychedelic tunnel that you have to fly down, attempting to enter green portals that flash by you. When you enter one you get a sound effect that sounds a lot like someone saying 'noosh-noosh-noosh', and then you get into the third phase of gameplay, where you wander around a maze made up of braincells zapping creepies by blowing them away with a laser beam reflected off a rotating shield. Should you successfully do that bit, you get the fourth phase, where you have to build up a jigsaw-puzzle made of psychedelic patterns a bit like a miniature Psychedelia. If you complete this cycle of four stages five times (I think it's five, I've never yet made it all the way through myself) you get the most amazing bit of music ever to grace a micro. It's really brilliant, with synth and almost electric-guitar sounds.

On the ST I've been sampling the delights of Joust, Star Raiders (not quite finished and a bit easy at the moment, but stunning grafix) and especially Time Bandits and Major Motion. Time Bandits is a huge shoot-'em arcade adventure, played over 16 different terrains, each of which has 16 different levels! Some of the locations you can visit have elements of text adventure, requiring limited manipulation of objects and keeping a weather eye out for clues; but mostly the game is good fast blasting, with the higher levels requiring the reflexes of a Stargate grand master! The graphics throughout are superb, especially the little spheres that poke their tongues out and look surprised when you kill them (watch out for the guest appearence made by these creatures in Iridis Alpha!)... There's one bit that really intrigues me, though, and that is this: there's this shepherd, y'see, outside a castle in one of the locations, and he offers to sell you one of his sheep! Naturally enough, I wanted to take him up on his offer but I couldn't find out what it was he wanted in exchange for the woolly organism in question. If anyone knows how, please let me know. I want that sheep.

I have done just a little bit of tinkering to Colourspace on the ST, too, and now have a sort of 'Space v1.1 that can load Neochrome files, and possesses really deep, dense starfields and also has a 'Vector mode' that produces patterns composed of lines rather than pixels. This last is rather neat, in that it can be adjusted from the Options menu to provide anything

3: Dream Machine Bitz

The Amiga scene is looking a lot healthier these days, some excellent completely-finished stuff has come my way. I've already raved at length about Marble Madness, but that's not the only program that makes the Amiga worth having, just one of a rapidly-growing number. I've had the excellent **Deluxe Paint** for some while now, and it's a paint program that is just unequalled in what it can do... it works in three modes, 320x200 with 32 colours onscreen (glurk!) or 640x200 or 640x400, each with 16 colours onscreen (a bit better than Multicolour Mode on the 64, it must be admitted). I'm no artist, but it's still tremendous fun to play around with: it can do **anything**, bending and rotating entire images, colour cycling, really fast fill, etc. etc... I'm not much good at it artistically, but Tony C. was down here last night (there was an End-of-Iridis-Alpha all night boozeup) and during the course of the evening cooked up this **amazing** piccy of an egg-headed creature with exotic skin painting and lazer spex, and the top of her **head** was opening up and there were green **plants** growing out from the inside of her **head**... it just looked totally brilliant, but then the Amiga decided to crash before it could get saved!!! which is a shame, 'coz I'm sure one or other of the Commodore mags would have published it, it was just so far out and spacy.

On the games front, I've got Arcticfox and Skyfox from EA... Arcticfox is like a sort of superduper Battle Zone done in solid graphics (the graphics look very much like those of a C64 game of a while back called **Stellar 7**, I reckon the Amiga proggy was done by the same crew). The game features some excellent sampled-sound SFX in glorious stereo, you can hear the missiles comin' to get you; unfortunately the speed of graphics update is very slow, which detracts from the playability a bit. I must confess that I didn't really get into it that much, mainly because of the slow update rate, but there are those who reckon it's a really good game strategically and all that if you can put up with the slowness. Definitely shows promise, but could have done with being a whole lot faster. The speed wasn't significantly faster than **3D Star Strike II**, which also uses shaded solid 3-D, and runs on a Spectrum!!! I suppose that once people become more used to the Amiga the efficiency of coding will increase and so will the speed of games.

Skyfox is really just the same as the C64 version, it's a bit faster and a bit neater, and the sonics are, of course, excellent, but it's still got a definite aura of 'conversion' rather than the 'made-for-Amiga' feel of stuff like Marble Madness and Mindwalker.

Ah yes, Mindwalker. A real gem this one. I had the pre-production version from ages ago, which looked and sounded really good but no-one could figure out just what was going on! Now, I have the finished game. Coded by Synapse, it is being distributed by Commodore-Amiga, and it's best described as a sort of psychedelic adventure! The deal is that you're insane (well you must be to spend £1700 on a computer and use it for

example, you just pushed a ballbearing off the edge on the Ultimate Wave, the action of the little brush sweeping up the remains tends to slow down the control of your marble for a little while, making matters awkward. The two-player mode suffers from the same sort of delays, and slows down quite alarmingly from time to time. Certainly, at least in one-player mode, these niggles are minor, and don't really detract much from the excellence of the game.

Now to the oversight, which is just plain dumb. There is NO high score table; once the Game Over message has gone, there is NO way you can even see what your last score was! It's as if someone else entirely stuck a really crude front-end on the game. It's a pity that such a brilliant game is flawed by the omission of something as trivial to program as a hi-score table. I think the whole front-end could have been done a hell of a lot better. I can't believe that the current bare option screen was produced by the same programmer who did the rest of the game. It's better that SYSing in to start the game up, but only just barely.

Despite my serious reservations about that front-end, I have to conclude that MM is well cool and froody. There's the odd glitch here and there, but it is sufficiently close to the real thing to make it utterly addictive. The graphics draw gasps of disbelief from the owners of lesser machines, and the satisfaction is great when you finally complete the Ultimate Race! Even after you've completed, you can choose a harder Skill Level and try again.

Just make sure your short-term memory's good so you can remember your scores....

2: Iridis Alpha completed

Finally I've finished it. This game has taken me the longest of any that I've yet produced on the c64, but I think it's worth it; it is excessively playable, and a really fast blaster such as you don't often get on the C64. It possesses the fastest scroll rate of any game I've ever seen, and there's plenty of depth to the action, with 100 levels and their inverses to complete, and a bonus game that's a pretty good game in its own right! I really do feel that Iridis is the finest game I've produced to date.

The action takes place on a horizontally-split screen upon which there are two opposing planet surfaces, back-to-back in the middle of the screen, and scrolling in opposite directions. You have **two** ships, only one of which is active at any given moment. During the course of the gameplay you flip control from one ship to the other. You are harrassed by hordes of evil nasty alien wrongdoers who you have to fry whilst flying about at huge velocities. As you kill, so you gain energy, which you must dump off at the Planetary Core before you get too much and overload. As you kill more creepies, so the game opens up and more destinations become available to you at the Warp Gate. If you fill the Core totally up, then you get access to the Bonus Game, where you must traverse a vertically scrolling course of

slopes, bumpers and narrow ledges. Your control in this phase is as in Batalyx Phase One, i.e. using your bullets as reaction mass, you fire in one direction and move in the opposite one! Just to make matters truly hairy you are pursued by flying eyeballs as well.

Should you complete the Bonus Phase you are awarded bonus points and an extra life, and you return to the main level. Failing in the Bonus Phase doesn't lose you a life, you just get no bonus or extra Gilby, that's all. (Oh yeah. The name of the droid is GILBY. If you don't understand why, I suggest that you have a Flip Side session immediately!)

The action is hard and fast, with all manner of nasty ships out to get you, and of course the inevitable camels and llamas thrown in. There are five planets: the Sheep Planet, the Tech Planet, the Brick Planet, the Mushroom Planet, and the Om Planet. As you open up the game you'll be able to warp from planet to planet at will. Each planet possesses 20 levels, each in 2 orientations, so that's 200 waves to do all told before you get the (very pretty) End of Game Bonus screen and it all gets harder!

The game has a whole lot of nice touches, like the Game Completion charts (you can call these up during the game for a graphical representation of your progress). These screens are remembered, and can be called up for any entry on the High Score Table so you can see how other players have done. The Pause Mode is nice too, containing MIF, a little game called Made In France that I wrote while I was ski-ing. Well not while I was actually ski-ing, but after I'd been to the bar in the evenings, if you see what I mean. MIF itself contains **another** demo called DNA that's rather nifty, as is the display you get if you do all 200 levels. But none of you are going to see that one for a few months yet- unless you find the Cheat Mode! The Title Screen contains a Fractal Music demo, too. I **love** Fractals, and this is the first time I've ever tried applying them to music. The results are interesting... not tunes as such, more like a never-ending bit that sounds like the music in a film when it gets to the tense bit. Weird.

Iridis can't be Freezeframed either. There's a way to defeat those cartridges that I mentioned in the last screed. Nor can it be Game Killed.

In play, Iridis is one of the most exhilarating blasts I've yet had. The sonix are loud and the game moves very fast, but you'll find that you still have to use your brains! My best score so far without the Cheat Mode is 136,000 odd, and I opened up 9 out of the 10 available Surfaces.

Iridis is being released in collaboration with Hewsons this time. Another experiment like the Ariola deal. And they did do rather well in promoting **Uridium**, so I don't see why they shouldn't do just as well for my Iridis.

Of course, working with Hewsons meant lots of hassle like working to **deadlines**, and having them come around all the time and poke their noses into my game design, and hassle me for lots of stuff, but I think it'll be worth it in the end! Iridis is released on 27 Aug. I'll be showing it at PCW too, so if you want to see it first come along and take a look!

from long-persistance sinuous designs that flow and change all over the screen, down to a tight line-trace that looks a lot like the scanning laser effects used at the Laserium. Eventually I intend to expand Colourspace a lot more, adding stuff like Midi interfacing and animation and various other hoopy bits whilst still retaining all the original functions. This will need the 1-megabyte RAM on the STs, I have just had my own rig expanded to a megabyte to make room for the new stuff. I also got a really neat little 3.5in drive from AST, it's tiny, much smaller than the Atari originals, and it's double sided too so it holds twice as much data.

Winter Games on the ST is well good, too; pretty grafix and not a bit of flicker, the scrolling's all well and groovy too, no glitches, and pretty cool for a machine that doesn't have any hardware smooth-scroll.

The games scene on both the megamachines is looking healthier now, with the ST having lots of good games out now, and the Amiga having slightly less stuff, but with one or two absolutely blindingly amazing games.

4: Happenings

In between working on Iridis, I've been doing the usual sort of stuff: going down the Clocktower for some decent ale and loud rock music, going to the odd gig, and going on Cnet far too much (though not as much as the high season of Cnet last Summer, where we were all on till 3am every day, without fail!)...

I knocked up a couple of really cool Cnet demos in between bits of Iridis, which you should try and pick up, since they are rather unusual. the first, **DNA**, draws a large rotating double helix on the screen, using the keyboard you can alter the shape of the helix, changing its phase and frequency and adding a second waveform to the first and changing the colours of the strands and so forth. Each strand of the DNA (there are two) is composed of 24 sprites, and there's a 48-sprite star field behind the lot, so that's a fair whack of sprites flyin' around the Commie screen! This demo is also available inside Iridis-Alpha, you just press the * key while you're in the Pause mode.

The other demo I have done recently is a sort of 'son-of-DNA' called TAURUS:TORUS, and it brings together a couple of routines that I put together for Iridis. The graphic display is of a rotating ring made up of sprites; the motion of the ring is controlled by four sinusoidal oscillators (each of which can be set from the keyboard). These oscillators in turn provide the generator for a fractal-sound routine running behind everything. Thus, as you alter the shape of the torus by adjusting the oscillators, you simultaneously alter the structure of the musical fractal being played. Well weird (and a little discordant at high pitches I'm afraid, 'coz I forgot to make the note tables long enough). I can really get into these oscillator-based demos... there's a lot of stuff in there that I'll be using in Colourspace II methinx!!

Getting away from programming for a moment, I went to se Marillion and Jethro Tull, amongst others, at the Milton Keynes Bowl the other weekend, and they were truly brilliant... at least I thought so after ingesting large amounts of beer! It helped that it was a brilliant sunny day, quite unlike the time I went to Knebworth to see Deep Purple last year when it chucked it down!

Whilst still on the subject of music, I hear that there is shortly to be a Sigue Sigue Spodnik game coming out! (Well, perhaps not exactly music then). I for one am not exactly thrilled at the prospect of a game linked to this largely uninspiring group who seem to be trying to work the old Sex Pistols 'Rock & Roll Swindle' scam all over again; but the game **may** bear some looking at nonetheless since I know the bloke who's doing it and he doesn't usually knock out duff code. My advice is to have a look at the game **despite** it's assssociations. The funny thing is, when I asked the chap behind the program how much SSS were paying him to do a game for them, he laughed and replied that **he** was paying **them** for the privilege! Weird.....

5: Down the Arcades

There's some interesting new stuff happening in the arcades just now. I was lucky enough to go to an Open Day at Deith Leisure the other day (Deith are one of the largest arcade suppliers in the country, and the source of my Stargate and Star Wars machines) where I saw quite a few new machines. The Open Day was great, you walked in to a large room full of the very latest video games and pinball tables, all on free play mode, and there was free beer too!

One of the most impressive new games was the new Konami blaster called **Salamander**. This is a lot like **Nemesis**, except that there are more stages and that two players can battle it out simultaneously! The graphics are brilliant, with pulsating brains, tentacles covered in gore that poke out and probe around for the players' ships, and an excellent sequence where you fly through a tunnel of flame (a bit like Sheep in Space would look if both planet surfaces decided to simultaneously and spontaneously erupt into flame) from which great, looping solar flares leap forth and (unless you're careful) fry your ship. The game is easy to get into, with lots of extra weaponry (multiples and ripple lasers etc) being easy to get right at the start of the game. This game has zillions of sprites on screen at the same time, it's quite unbelievable at times.... although when the going gets **really** heavy it does slow down a bit. Even so, an excellent blaster for the blood-and-thunder brigade.

The other major release was **Road Runner**, an Atari System One game that's based on the cartoon series. You guide R.R. around eating up bird seed and attempting to lure Wile E. Coyote to an unpleasant demise. The game has very good cartoon-like graphics, and provides a pleasant diversion in between the hectic intense bouts of playing **Salamander**.

There's also a sequel to **Hang-On**, the Sega motorbile variant of PolePos. The sequel's called **Enduro** and has a large, sit-upon replica of an Enduro bike that you have to wheelie at appropriate moments to make jumps on the course. The track has hills, too; the road goes up and down, something I've not seen in any racing game yet (except **Revs**).

6: Various...

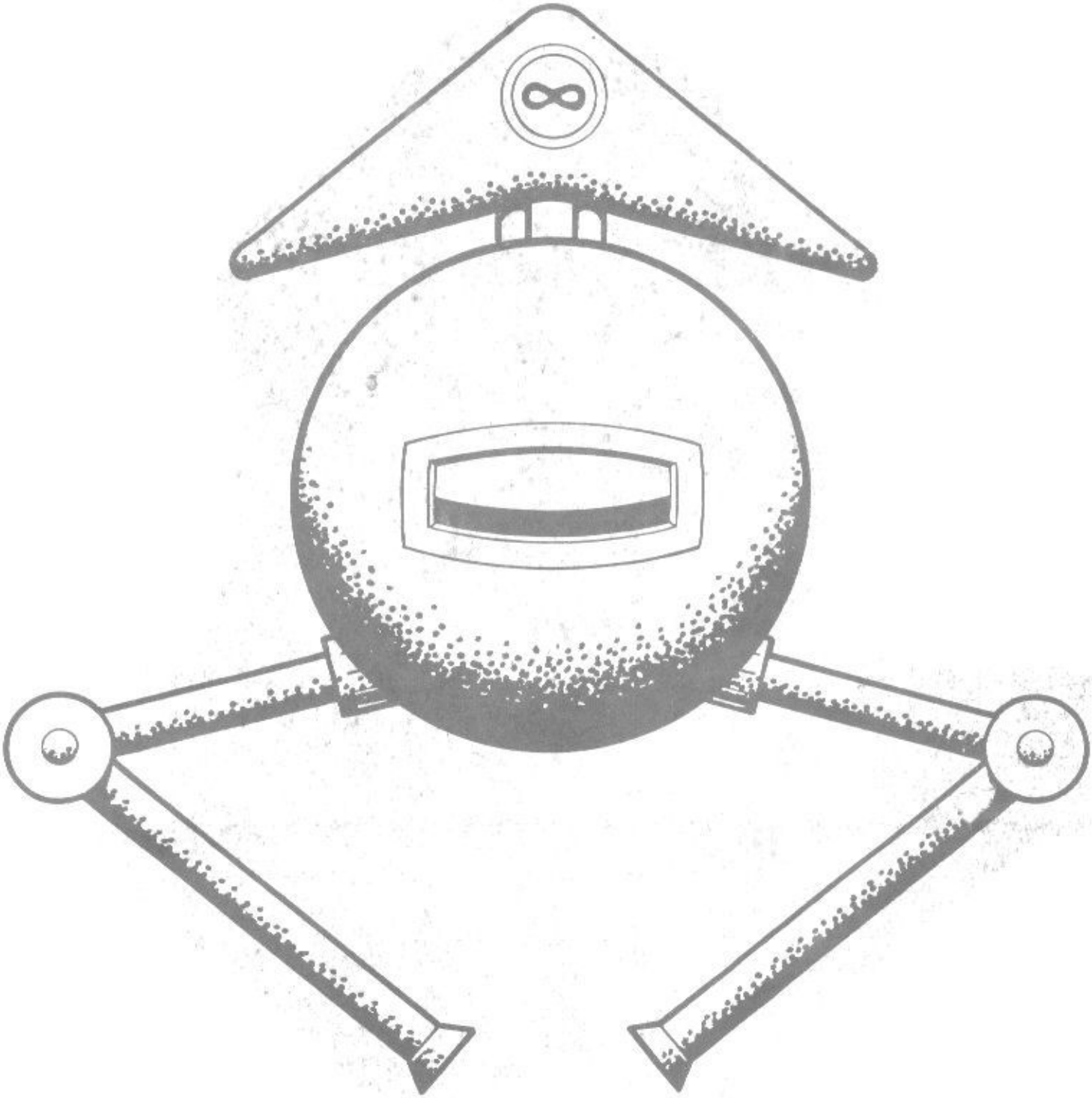
Now that I've finished IA, I'm off on hols for a couple of weeks and then I'm gonna come back and do a C16 game, nice and quickly so I've got most of it done for PCW. I want to make those 121 colors really work in a game. It's not been done yet and I intend to put that to rights....

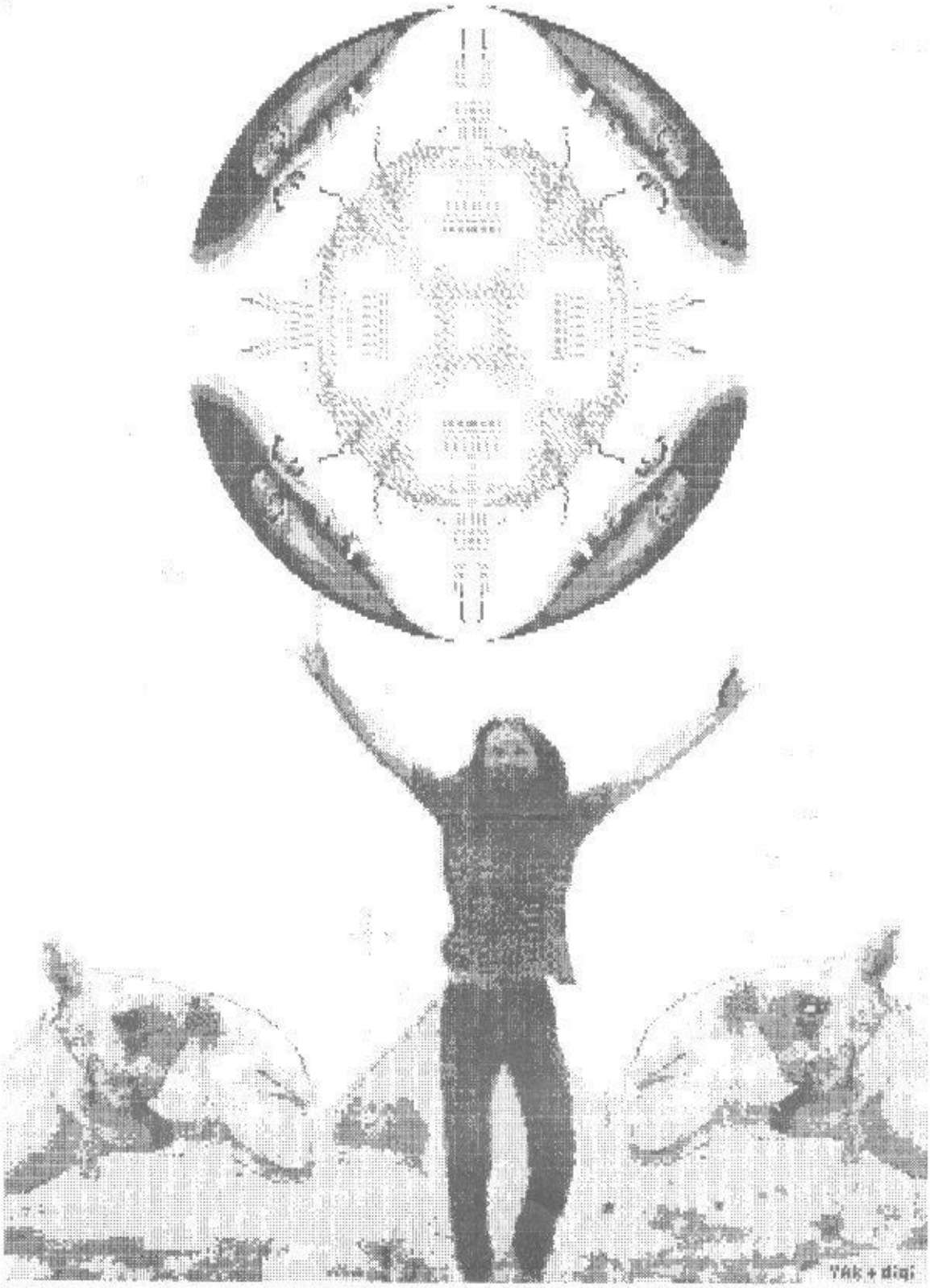
After that, I'm torn between getting down to another C64 game, or maybe doing something more for the Atari ST, either a game or the extended version of Colourspace I mentioned earlier. Of course what I'd really like is to do Colourspace on the Amiga, 'coz I am sure I could do a really mega version on that machine! Trouble is, there are so few Amigas in the UK that, unless I was assured of Stateside distribution of the finished program as well as UK sales, it wouldn't be commercially viable. I hate having to leave the Amiga alone for purely commercial reasons, but I have to eat and earn some bread somehow, and at the moment there aren't enough Amigas in the UK to allow me to work on Amiga stuff and make any money. I have heard rumours about the possibility of a cut-down Amiga variant being released, same graphics chips etc., but in a keyboard case more like the Atari ST, rather than the large and expensive PC-type box it comes in at present.: If such a machine were released in the £500-£700 range, it would be excellent; the Amiga affordable at last! Put the Amiga in a cheaper package, make it available to people who want to move on from their C64s at not too prohibitive a price, and Commodore's troubles would be over, I reckon. I hope it turns out to be more than a rumour, I really do. If it comes out I'll have a party.

Right now I'm off to Corfu with the Tadley Mafia tomorrow morning. I am completely knackered, what with finishing Iridis bang on me deadline and last night's Programmers Pissup to celebrate the completion of Iridis (there was me, the Mafia, Tony C., Andy Braybrook and ex-Taskset programmer Gibbo down here, & we didn't crash till 7 am!)...

I will see ya at PCW if you're coming along, we'll have Colourspace demos running continuously on the big screen, and Iridis Alpha and a demo of Voidrunner (Grid III) on the C16 too, so it should be a good show. PCW is always good fun. And then in October I'm off to Peru again in order to do a bit more llama-spotting.....

That's all for the moment... be sure and be at PCW and try Iridis-Alpha... suggested music to listen to: Sky, Dokken, lots and lots of Talking Heads (that Dave Byrne is SO weird!)... play Space Harrier in the arcades, try Green Beret on the C64, and Spindizzy too, that's well good... get Iridis Alpha and have yourself a BLAST!! Gilby sez GO GIVE 'EM HELL!!!!





NATURE OF THE BEAST....

NUMBER TEN

- COLOURSPACE II... work in progress
- IRIDIS ALPHA tips and strategies
- VOID RUNNER on C16
- and the next '64 project... the Beasts are Back!!

1: Iridis and Other Hoopy Stuff

After a lot of work Iridis was finally finished around the middle of August, and is doing fairly well I think. At least I've seen it around in Boots and places so it's getting out there. I was pretty pleased with Iridis, it satisfied the need I have long had to write the meanest fastest hardest and noisiest blast I could on the C64. So far I've heard of no-one completing it, I'd like to know if anyone manages it... my best game had me completing about 70% of the levels, but some of those higher Mushroom and Om planet levels are a trifle mean.

We must apologise to some of the earliest purchasers of IA, as well... it seems that some data was corrupted during the production phase of the data duplication, and the first few hundred copies of the game used to bug out if you lost at the Bonus Phase. All the buggy copies known of have been replaced, and all current tapes are fine, but if you find you have a buggy version you should send it back to those awfully nice Hewsons people and they'll give you an unglitchified one.

The instructions turned out a bit skimpy, too, 'coz some of my original draft got nobbled 'twixt Atari printout and instruction leaflet. Consequently there was no mention of the Bonus phase, or of access to the demo game or DNA-display. Basically, what was said was as follows:

BONUS LEVEL: When the player has completely filled the Core with energy, the Bonus Round begins. In the Bonus Round the player controls a reaction mass-driven Gilby over a vertically-scrolling obstacle course of ramps, bumpers and narrow passages. A bit like a pinball table, really, 'cept there are no flippers and YOU are the ball. Gilby fires bullets when you push the Joystick in any direction, and thanks to Newton Gilby moves in the opposite direction. Very much like Phase One in Batalyx. Your objective is to traverse the scrolling playfield by going up the screen as far as you can, until you find the goal. You have eight lives to do this, and you do not lose a life by bouncing off the walls of the course.

This is where the black pulsating eyeballs come in. Specifically, they come in in order to circle around you and attempt to collide with you, relieving you of one life for each collision, **and** knocking you off course, which is especially annoying when you have just achieved a state of blissful stasis on that really nasty narrow ledge on Level Five that always takes five minutes of frenzied attempts to get static on prior to going up that poky little passage to the goal and Level Six. Luckily, if you shoot the chain of eyeballs with your bullets, they go blue and freaked out for a little while and run away until they get straight again, at which time they charge back to resume their frenzied gyrations. You shoot them, and use the freakedout-time to negotiate tricky bits of course.

Should you reach the end of the course with lives in hand, you are awarded a bonus Gilby and some zarjaz points, and transferred back to the main game. If you lose the Bonus Phase, you return to the bonus game with no loss of life, but with sorry, no bonus.

A hint for getting used to the Bonus Phase: the first course can be run at

maximum speed by just going to the left of the screen and flying straight up as fast as you can.

PAUSE MODE is activated by pressing f1. This will dump you into MIF, a little pause-game in which your objective is to knock the trail of pixels into the pulsating blob on the screen. You do this by using the keys N and M. Pressing the N key puts a little / deflector in the path of the pixels; pressing M leaves a \. The trail of pixels bounces off this as it would off a mirror. Additionally, each time a reflector is bounced-off, it inverts its state, i.e. / becomes \, and vice versa. The more deflectors you use, the harder it becomes to get a clear shot at the pulsating blob. You must hit the blob before the timer bar (at the right of the screen) hits zero. The faster you hit the blob, the more points you get. Points are shown by the bar at the bottom of the screen; a blip above that bar represents the hi-score. There are four speeds of play, selectable during play by pressing the space bar. You can get additional bonus points this way, because the faster the game speed is at the time the blobby thing is hit, the more points you get. If you fail to hit the pulsating blobby thing before the timer runs out, the score is reset and the game restarts. A fun game of bounces, bars, bonuses, blips, blobby things and other stuff beginning with B.

You can leave the pause mode by pressing f1 again, or you can press star, which will take you into DNA, my psychedelic sprite-chain demo that I wrote for Cnet a while back. In DNA you can alter the waveforms, change the colours and speed of the strands, put on some Pink Floyd, turn out the lights, freak and groove generally, and have a relaxing and rather wonderful time before pressing star again to return to MIF, where you can press f1 if you want to resume the mayhem-at-hand in the real game. (But what is the Real Game? Iridis or MIF? DNA even? Life? Is Life the Real Game or are we all just in some gigantic Pause Mode for a richer, more wonderful Real Reality someplace, and should we all be worried about the Time of the Coming of the Finger that will press the Great F1 Key of the Universe so that God can resume what he was **really** doing in the first place?

As for general gameplay hints for IA, first I shall deal with the problem of Licker Ships. On the Level Three Lickers, **never** shoot the Phreds from close range. Fly along the screen, turn and fire, then fly on again. You see, when a Phred is shot, a Licker appears. The Licker cannot be shot, but unless it makes contact with you within half a second of its genesis, it will expire. If a Licker does hit you, it will hang on. You have then to shake it loose and **stay clear of it for half a second**, after which it will head for the Great Ice Lolly in the Sky, there to lick for eternity, or until God runs out of sprites. To shake off a Licker, do just that: shake the stick in every conceivable direction, distort your face into a grimace of feral hatred, and snarl and curse furiously.

Lickers will pop up regularly throughout the game, and you should use avoidance tactics at all times. Above all, **never** be standing around on the Core when there are Lickers about. They cling on to you and hinder your efforts to take off, and usually they'll drag you down before you manage it.

You will also encounter waves where no Transfer Rings become available during blasting, and you cannot Transfer to appease an ugly-looking Entropy Gauge. The trick is to hang around the Warp Gate and go in when the Entropy looks bad. A warp resets the Entropy, and it's far better to have a live Gilby on the wrong planet, than a dead one on the right planet....

Fly as fast as you comfortably can most of the time, as this will give you a high Bonus Multiplier value. Go for a methodical progress through the early waves of each set, opening up the next set of Icons on the Status Chart as soon as you can. This gives you a wider choice of Warp Gate destinations that you can use when you find yourself on a particularly diffy wave. Fill the Core and visit the Bonus Phase whenever you've just lost a Gilby, as a good Bonus Phase run will earn you an extra. If you find the BP difficult, don't go in until you really need to: if you save the easy Bonus runs for when the going gets tough planetside, you'll be grateful for the easy extra Gilbies. Also, don't go in the Bonus Phase if you already have four Gilbies (you cannot accrue more than four) unless you've got the Phase so totally wired that you can afford to go in there just for the points.

Use trees (or equivalent ground features on other planets) as mini-Cores. You can land and take off from the little bit of Core platform that lies at the base. Position Gilby a little to the left or right of centre over the tree, and land as usual. Conversely, the various planet features sticking up in the Core zone can be used for emergency takeoffs without having to walk off the Core. Just stroll up to a planet feature, and when you're about central over it, jump up. If you timed it right your jets will cut in and you'll be flying. This last manoeuvre is particularly useful if you are down on the Core and being hassled by Lickers.

Right, that's quite enough Iridis Alpha for the moment, let me tell you what I did next.

2: **What Yak Did Next**

was to take to the C16 and produce a game called **Voidrunner**. This is basically a sequel to the Gridrunner/Matrix sequence, and is played in a similar manner; i.e. various creepies hurtle towards you at improbable velocities, and you do your best to splatter their atoms before they splatter yours. VR is not so rigidly structured as the earlier Grid games were, in that you possess not one, but four ships, which appear in different formations each wave; and the aliens come at you from all sides, not only from the top of the screen downwards. The whole is pretty colourful, 'coz getting a lot of colours on the C16 is pretty easy, which makes me wonder why hardly any C16 games on the market use more than about eight of them. Weird.

Anyway, the game is an all-out blaster very much in the style of the old Vic-20 blasters that I used to knock out back in '82 and '83, and it was a lot of fun to sit down and write a nice quick blast instead of having to worry about filling up memory with a load of fancy tunes and graphics. It

should be coming out from Ariolasoft whenever they finally get around to releasing it; they haven't yet, and I finished it before I went to Peru, so I hope they pull their finger out. Any C16 people out there into speed and heavy metal blasting should give it a look.

Immediately after finishing Voidrunner I nipped off to South America, there to visit Colombia, Bolivia, Brazil, and mainly Peru. Like last time, I had an amazing time, meeting some interesting people and some rather beautiful beasties. I played Stargate in Cuzco, Space Invaders Part Two in Iguassu, Nemesis in La Paz, Pole Position II in Lima, and Star Wars in Rio de Janeiro... not that I spent all of my time in the arcades: a lot of it was spent trekking around the Inca ruins, relating to llamas, getting to grips with them and taking no end of photos of them. It always annoys me when people slag off llamas as being bad-tempered creatures. All the ones I met in Peru were perfectly friendly; I didn't get spat at at all. Mind you, maybe they can recognise the type of human (like me) who has a profound empathy with them. Maybe I was a llama in my last incarnation. That would explain a lot of my weirdness....

Mind you, llamas are pretty exceptional creatures. I'm not the only one impressed by them. Michael Jackson is famous for having a pet llama (or was he famous for something else? didn't he sing or something?); Steve Wozniak, the designer of the Apple II, lives, according to BYTE magazine, on a ranch in the California mountains, with a whole herd of the beasties; and in a recent interview with Ken Kesey, one of the original acid gurus of the 60s, he says that llamas give off a completely different kind of aura than any other type of animal that he has encountered. (I agree with him, but I'd add that camels have the same type of aura too, definitely something slightly... well... alien).

Anyway, 'nuff said about llamas. On me hols I did all the same things that I had done last time I went, and then some, 'coz the tour was extended, covering more than just Peru. Machu Picchu was still amazing, magical and mystical; the Inca ruins just as perplexing. In Brazil we visited waterfalls three kilometers wide; saw the largest hydroelectric dam in the world; and swam and sunbathed on possibly the most famous beach ever, Copacabana Beach in Rio. In Bolivia I found that you can get even better llama jumpers than in Peru; the jumpers are actually shaggy, and the shaggiest of the ones I bought looks more like a skin than a jumper. Also in Bolivia, in La Paz, all the arcades I went into, had armed police in them. Gives you a weird feeling to be playing Commando and turn around to see the real thing looking back at you. Creepy. I'm glad we don't get machine-pistol-toting coppers in the Crystal Rooms on Leicester Square! In Peru, fifty miles by boat up the Amazon from Iquitos, we stayed at the Explorama Jungle Lodge, which is really just a group of wooden huts on stilts, and where the loo is a hole in the ground with a seat over it and tarantula webs in the corners. Amazing place, real deep Tarzan-style jungle, local Indians who still use blowpipes for hunting.

It's also pretty tass to think that somewhere in the Amazon jumgle there is an Indian going around in an Iridis Alpha t-shirt, 'coz I traded one for a blowpipe and darts while I was there! The Indians only dress in their traditional gear for the tourists; we saw them out in their canoes on the river, and they all wear jeans and T-shirts, mostly American ones they've got off the tourists.

Upon return from these exotic parts, I got down to the serious business of deciding what to do next. First off, I fired up the ST with a view to extending Colourspace. I should be linking up with a musician next year to do some good stuff involving Colourspace, and I'd long felt the urge to extend the original concept, so this is the perfect opportunity: I'll have lots of new FX to use in my project, and Colourspace II to release at the end of it. So far, I have added to Colourspace 1 the capability to map the screen onto a variety of surfaces; for example, you can project a cube with Colourspace running on all three visible faces, or a series of concentric spheres with 'Space on the surfaces. This looks well good when you run a horizontal starfield over them, 'coz you get a series of gently-rotating starglobes that just look amazing. You can get Neo or Degas pix and remap them onto these surfaces, which looks really great (the stuff on the front cover was done that way). The extension of 'Space is going to continue over the next few months; at the end of it I hope to have animation stuff built-in, keyboard macros (which will allow you to pre-program any key with a specific event or series of events), nicer menus, with text rather than awkward unlabelled parameter representations, and the possibility of driving the thing by other controllers than just the mouse (a graphics tablet, for example). Plus, generally tidy the thing up and add anything nice that pops into my head. There's no hurry, 'Space 1 is still strong, so I probably won't release anything till Summer or so, but the work is in hand and proceeding smoothly.

Of course, I can't go spending all this time on the ST, much as I love the beastie, without doing something for the good ol' 64. With this in mind I have already started work on my next 64 game....

3: The Beasts are Back!

Get ready for... Revenge II! (I probably won't call it that in the end, smacks too much of film sequels and all that joss). It all started as I sat playing Choplifter on my new Sega video game (of which more later)... there was a rather zarjaz ground scroll routine the like of which I'd often thought of doing myself but never got around to. So one night I fell to and made a similar routine for the Commie, then I had the idea that I'd like to see a camel walking along that nice scrolling ground, so I chucked in the old Revenge sprites, then decided that I could really improve that old camel animation if I wanted to, and before I knew it I was writing Revenge II. The game is going to be an extension/improvement of the original idea, with better gameplay and graphix, and more depth than the original. I'm really enjoying returning to the Camels theme again, I've missed those 90

foot high laser-spitting neutronium-shielded beasties. The new camel will be able to fly and drop little black bombs (with BOMB written on them in tiny letters) and do lots more stuff than its Mark 1 ancestors. And I plan to write a much smarter ACONT routine than I've ever used in any other game, and also scroll lots more stuff on quite a few different levels. I shall Have Fun, and hopefully so will you when I've finished (which I hope will be March or so next year).

4: The SEGA and the 7800

At the PCW show, Ariolasoft gave me a rather nice pressie in the form of one of the only SEGA game consoles in the UK at that time. I have had it some time now, and from experience I can tell you: it's great. Mine lives on top of my Commodore monitor (it even has a Commodore-monitor-cable-compatible hole in the back!) and gets fired up when the assemblies start to take too long on the ol' 128. The games come in two forms, with 32K games on Astron cards and 128K games on proper cartridges. The display is excellent, the sonics OK, and the gameplay superb. The joysticks are tiny and take a bit of getting used to, but they seem well-made and mine show no signs of distress after a couple of months use, and are really pretty good when you get used to them. They have two independant fire buttons, with the least important function in any given game being delegated to Button Two. You can get away with playing most games with a single button joystick if you really want to (the joystick ports are standard types so you can use your Kempston Pro or whatever).

The games I've liked best so far are: **Hang-On,** an Astron-card version of the arcade bike racing game, very smooth and playable; **Astro Warrior,** a vertically-scrolling blaster in the Star Force/Salamander /Nemesis/Uridium mould, with lovely graphix; **Black Belt,** a fast beat'em up where your opponents break up into little sprites and fly apart whem you kick them (just like in the Bruce Lee films) and where I have yet to get past the large Sumo wrestler at the end of Level Three who has a psychopathic tendency to jump up and down on your head. **Choplifter** is great, exactly like the Arcade version with three levels (the last one, in the caves, is WELL hard) and zarjaz scrolling ground just like on Revenge II (hehe). Best of the lot, and worth the asking price of the Sega on its own, is **Fantasy Zone,** which defies description. It's a fast-paced shoot-'em up played against seven levels of amaaaaazing freaky psychedelic scrolling backgrounds, during which you get attacked by large blocks of wood (spitting peas at you); enraged conical flasks; huge silly-looking fish with ballistic teeth; an Inca sun (with lasers); snow-penguins; a grenade-lobbing turtle, and an angry blockhead which keeps on breaking apart and attempting to re-form itself on your noggin. Plus loads and LOADS of other enemies with names like Moo-colons and C-souls (well, it IS Japanese)! The music is great and... well.. weird, and if you do all seven levels, you have to confront all the large enemies over again before the Final Showdown with a

large alien which sends tentacles with heads on them shooting out to get you. I've not got past that bit yet but I will... Along the way you pick up coins obtained by blasting the nasties, and you can occasionally go into a Shop and buy goodies like laser beams, Smart bombs, seven-way shots (a really great option that, you can massacre everything in sight), firebombs (very useful for destroying enemy bases on the ground in the freaky blue fourth level), and even an extra ship. Of course, the more you buy of any given item, the more the price goes up (especially of the Extra Ships!). The game is just a joy to play; even though I'm pretty good at it now and can go Eighth Level most games, I still enjoy working my way up through the easier levels. It's just brilliant, and deserves a cult following. Bags me first member of the cult.

The Sega is pretty amazing for its price, around £100 I think; the games you'll play are far in advance of anything you're going to see arcade-wise on the C64. The only slight niggle is that there tends to be a bit of spriteflicker when you get a lot of sprites on one raster line, but that doesn't detract from the excellence of the games. Especially Fantasy Zone. I think Fantasy Zone is possibly the best shoot-'em-up I have ever played on a home system. It's **tass**. It's got **style**. Not only that, but I hear that Space Harrier is coming out for the Sega next year, with a 2 Megabyte ROM cartridge containing all the graphic data from the original game!...

Another system that I've seen but do not yet possess (although I have hopes of remedying that situation when I go visit Atari on Wednesday) is the Atari 7800, which I got a good look at at the Atari show last weekend. This beastie is based on the MARIE chip, Atari's successor to ANTIC, and looks pretty good judging by the stuff I saw. There was a neat version of Robotron, missing the blow-apart explosions, but very fast and blastable, and no flicker anywhere; a superb Xevious, as close to the arcade version as you'll get without buying an arcade game; Food Fight, a little-known but nonetheless tass Atari arcade game that has converted exactly to the 7800; Pole Pos II, a fine version of the classic race game; and Centipede, more or less perfect conversion. Those are the ones I saw, and I know that Asteroids, Joust, and improved versions of Fractalus and Ballblazer have been written for the system but I ain't seen them yet. Plus, the 7800 will run all yer old VCS stuff, which is fine if, like me, you still enjoy some of those old classics despite the blocky graphix, and can't be bothered to drag out the old VCS. (I still reckon VCS Superman is a fine game). The unit itself is sleek and spacy, and cheaper than the Sega too, price around £70 or so but Atari haven't confirmed that yet.

Beyond those two, the only remaining game console coming out is the Nintendo, supposedly the most powerful of the lot and also the most expensive, at £150. I haven't seen this yet, but I'm told that it runs a near-perfect version of Nemesis, in which I shall be very interested. (Salamander too, please guys).

Atari are providing me with a devkit for the 7800, so I should be able to put some nice stuff on that system, and if Ariola come through with some kit for the Sega I'll go for that too.

5: Shows an' stuff

I've just had a heavy couple of weeks, with the Commie show followed immediately by the Atari show... the CBM show was OK, but not as interesting as shows of old methinks, hardly any software houses there, just retailers selling cheap software. The Big C were there with the Amiga, now reduced in price but still beyond the reach of mere humans. I was hoping to get a copy of Sanctuary, a new Firebird game that warms my heart with its weirdness, but it's not released yet. Of course I met all me old Show mates and had the traditional Saturday night Laserium trip and boozeups and so on, and we had Sega sessions in my hotel room and all that sort of joss, so I had a good time. Tony C showed me a Marble Madness he's writing and which beats the p*ss out of the EA version, and his new blaster Moebius, which is sort of like a cross between Defender and Sheep in Space. I met Paul Shirley who told me he'd started a version of Spindizzy on the Atari ST, but shelved it for the moment; please hurry up and un-shelve it, I wanna see that game on my ST!

The following weekend was the Atari show, which was more interesting with lots of things happening for the ST. I got an ace Sound Sampler for the ST, and a graphics tablet for use with Colourspace, and Flight Sim II which is brilliant on the ST... I was there with the Barco projection system, doing Colourspace shows every couple of hours, demonstrating Colourspace version 1.3 with the spherical and cubic mapping options. There were more boozeups and Laserium trips and suchlike and I'm now knackered! There's plenty new games appearing for the ST, good stuff like Karate Kid II, a fine beat-'em-up with tass graphix and a weird sequence where you have to catch a fly with a pair of chopsticks! Plus Atari were there with STs and the 7800, and demonstrating the new Blitter which is coming out soon for the ST.

6: Blasting...

I've been getting into a good spot of zapping just recently, what with the Sega and all the new ST stuff and so on. I also have a Mach III arcade game which is just amazing. It's best if you stand in a dark room with some good heavy jet-fighter-music on the stereo and blast away as you scream through the groovy laser-disk scenery at warp factor 10.

Of the ST stuff, best blast since Time Bandit is definitely Jez San's Starglider, a brilliant fast vector-graphic 3D blaster along the lines of the Star Wars/Empire Strikes Back arcade games. The controls take a little while to master but it's worth the effort. One of the best effects is the Missile; when you launch a Missile a separate screen drops down over the play area and you get a missile's eye view of the flight toward the target; you can steer the missile towards its target. Very satisfying. Eighteen months in development but well worth the wait. Should be out for the Amiga soon, with solid graphics, which should be most interesting.

Also on the ST is Flight Sim II. I had this on me Commie but hardly

ever used to play it 'coz it was so S-L-O-W. On the ST it's very respectable in speed, doing solid 3D stuff at a fair clip, and you get an impressive array of options, such as the ability to look out your plane in any direction, even to see your plane from a spotter-aircraft following you or from the control tower. You can have multiple windows open with a different view in each. I'm not generally into flight sims but I love this one, 'coz it's actually very playable.

On the Commie there hasn't been that much in the way of blasters just recently, I've been keeping myself occupied playing my own Iridis Alpha when I feel like a bit of heavy metal blasting... beyond that I will occasionally go for a spot of Druid or perhaps a little Thrust, but what I'm really waiting to get hold of is that Sentinel game, which looks extremely weird (so I'm very likely to enjoy it). I've even been digging out Revenge from time to time. (Which reminds me: flicking through the Xmas Zzap I was pleased to notice my AMC character set being used in a game called **Nuclear Embargo**- which must bring the total of games using that excellent character set to at least thirty. It still amazes me that programmers can't be fagged to do their own char sets. Oh well, at least I can safely claim to having the Most Popular Alternate Character Set on the Commodore 64....).

I've been heavily involved in MSX Nemesis, too. At first sight this game looks awful, because the MSX cannot smooth scroll at all, and this program does nothing to hide that shameful fact, and everything lollops along at a chunk-rez clip. If you ignore the scrolling, though, what you've got is an excellent game of Nemesis. The Japs have coaxed more sprites out of the MSX than I've ever seen before, and the graphix, although jerky, are very detailed thanks to the game being on a whopping 128K of ROM.

The MSX has also had me in thrall with a pinball game called Roller Ball. This is a scrolling-style pinball game along the lines of Slamball, the Synapse one produced for the Commie a few years back now. RB has four sections of table, and the scroll is OK, surprisingly enough for an MSX. The best thing about the game is the playability- it is superb. When the Todd-creature (an Earthbeing of my aquaintance who has displayed an affinity for Pinball in real life) was exposed to Roller Ball he played for about four hours solid. The Japs definitely know all about playability in their games (witness just about any Konami MSX title, or the Sega stuff for example)...

Of course, now I'm waiting to see what has become of Gauntlet and Space Harrier at the hands of US Gold. Gauntlet on the C64 **should** be OK as the machine's quite well suited to the game; Space Harrier I'm not so sure about, 'coz the only way I can see the programmer getting the necessary speed and FX out of the screen would be to have huge character rez chunks of stuff flying out the screen so fast that you'd have little time to register the fact that they are in fact character-rez and not sprites. Hmm. It remains to be seen, but I'm thinking of that 2 Megabyte cart coming out for the Sega console and wondering if a 64k conversion shoehorned into a Commie could successfully represent the same game....

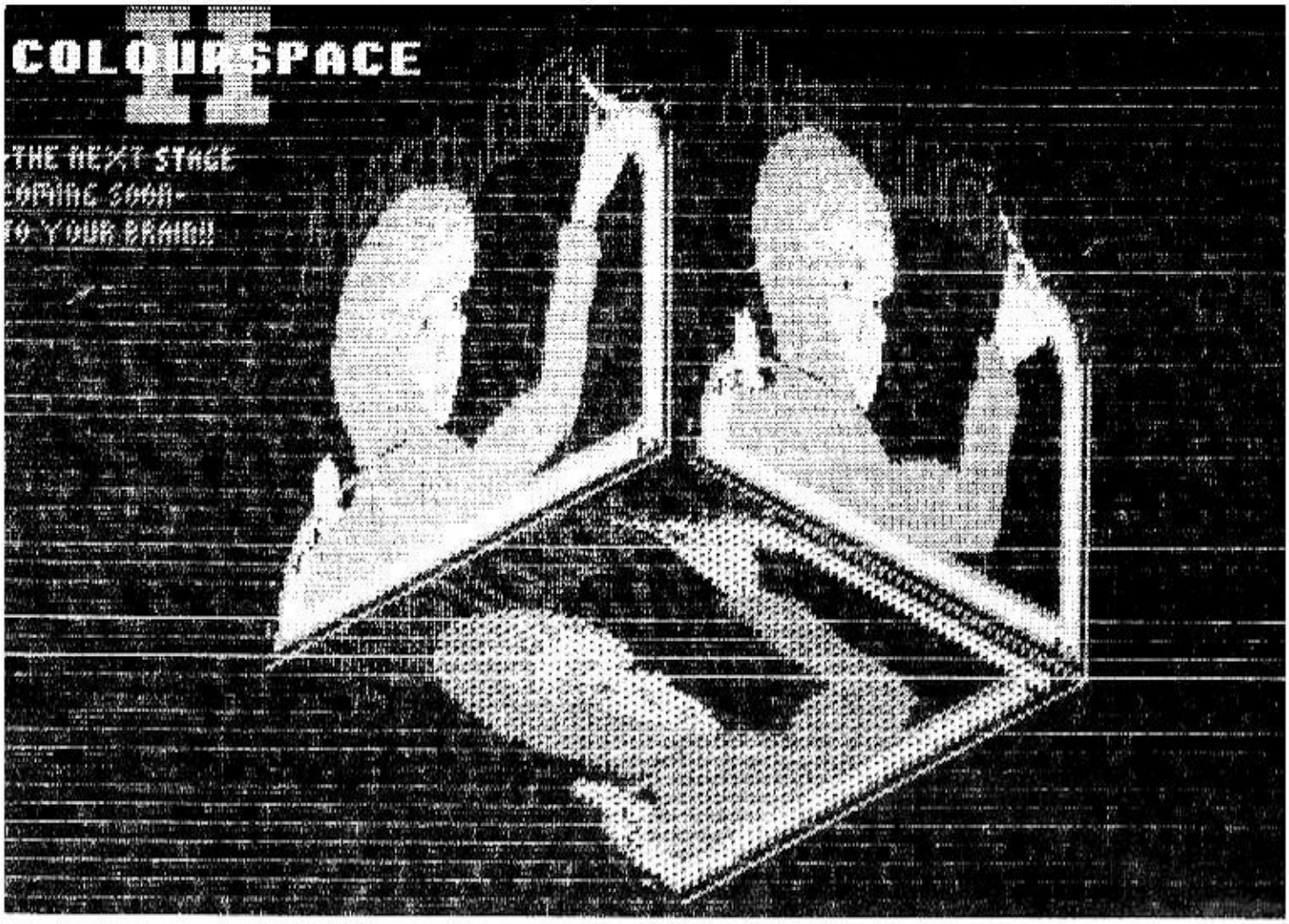
Gauntlet is also coming out for the ST, which should be well excellent. The Atari System One arcade system is 68000-based so there's no reason why most of the games should not be feasible on the good old ST. There is little doubt in my mind that the ST is the next great games micro. It's cheap (and getting cheaper), accessible, well-supported in both hardware and software, reliable (or at least my own ST has been) and very powerful. Atari themselves have expressed a commitment to the games market, and they're planning to have all their arcade titles available on disk and ROM. I'm looking forward to beginning my first blaster for the ST, which I shall begin coding as soon as I finish Revenge II on the '64.

The Amiga, I'm afraid, doesn't excite me as much as it used to. It's still inaccessible, even with the £500 price drop; and not much is happening for it at the moment, at last in the UK. Although it's a more powerful system than the ST, mine sits down the end of my room gathering dust most of the time (except for when I fancy games of MM or Mindwalker), and it's not really on to have all that system being used for two games, no matter how excellent. The ST, on the other hand, is in more or less constant use: it's been expanded to 1 Megabyte, and now has a sound sampler, graphics tablet, and 20 Meg hard drive added; it gets used for games, wordprocessing, and of course dev work for Colourspace. It'll also serve as the dev system for the 7800, and I hope to get 6502 cross-assembler so I can do all my '64 assemblies on the ST too, and download to the Commodore. For me, the worth of a system is measured by how much you use it, not how powerful it is technically, and by this measure my ST is worth a lot more to me than the Amiga. Maybe things will change when the B-52 cheap Amiga comes out next year... but by then the ST will be cheaper, too. And more powerful... Atari don't stand still!

Better amend this now... I just went up to London and got myself a copy of Sentinel at last, and I've been playing it quite a bit. It's good, but it gets very difficult very fast. In last night's session (I played until 4 am) I got from level zero to level eight, no sweat, then from eight to 22... and there I'm stuck. Very frustrating indeed: there are two Sentries as well as the Sentinel, and by the time you've worked your way up out of the hole you start in you're under full scan from both Sentries and no energy left to build any towers, and it's goodbye Robot. I hope I can evolve a strategy soon, or I'll pass the frustration-threshold and get pee'd off with the whole thing, which would be a shame, 'coz the game is interesting. It would've been nice to have a couple of Shields or something to at least allow you to get a good start into a level before you cop it.

Well, I better stop here, I have to go to Atari this afternoon t'pick up some goodies. Keep on blastin'...

YAK would like to wish the Herd a shaggy Christmas... remember that the Mutants are coming back Real Soon Now.. has anyone else apart from me and Wulf had Double-Om on Iridis, yet? Has anyone completed it? Has anyone got more than 27,500 in Starglider, or got any of the artifacts in Time Bandit? Does anyone know how to get the Shepherd to give you a sheep in T.Bandit?? I want that sheep!!!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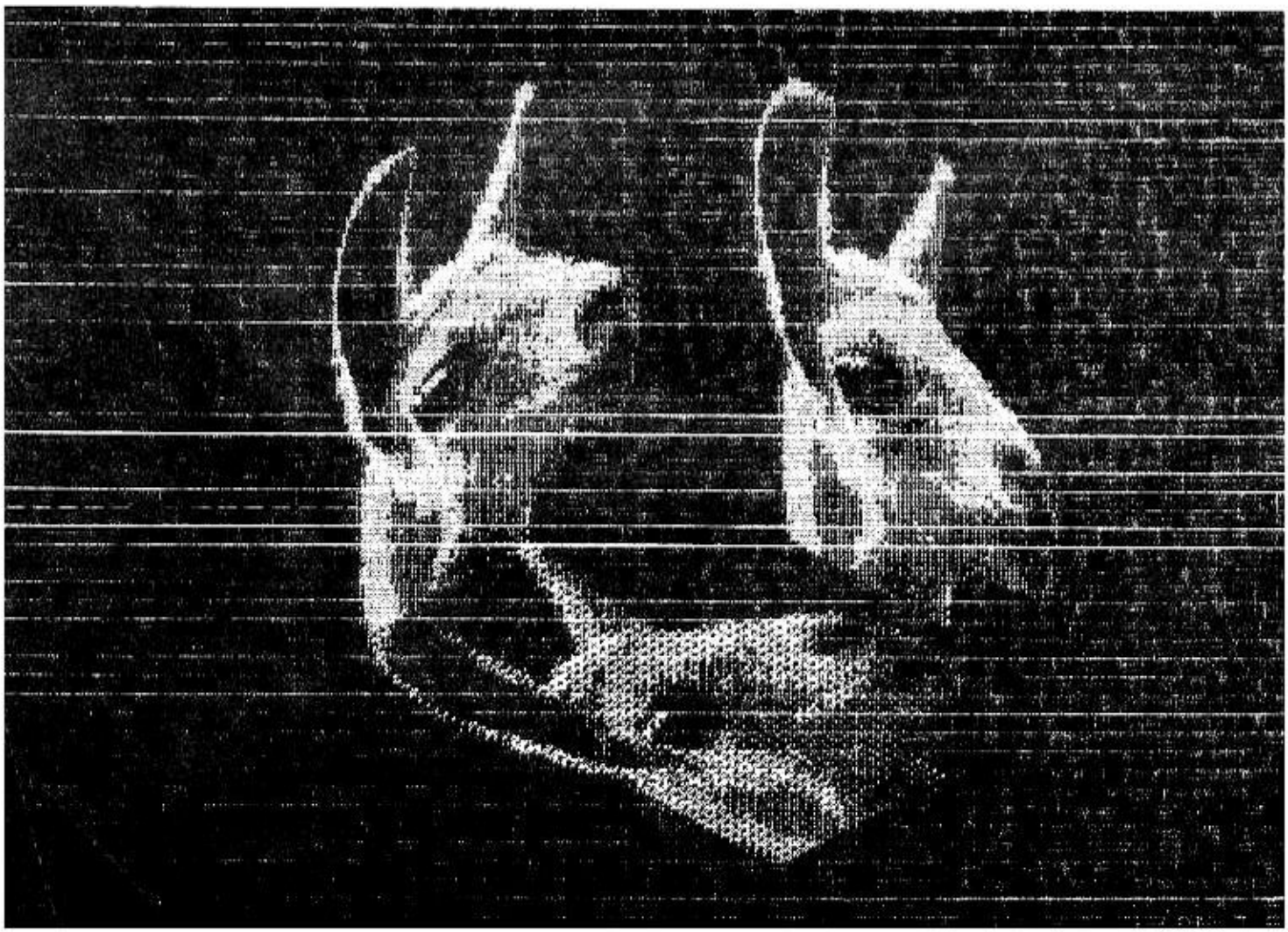

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My thanks to Jeff Minter for YEARS of total blasting pleasure ... for without the YaK none of this would have been possible... YaK rules the zone . . .