POPULAR Computing WEEKLY
SPECIAL supplement
1986 May 22-28

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BOBBY BEARING – THE EDGE'S LATEST

Whatever the fate of the Sinclair brand name under the Amstrad administration, the Spectrum will probably continue to be the country's most popular micro for some time to come. There's no sign of a let-up in the stream of innovative new products in both the games and the utility line, and the dedication of Spectrum users is legendary. With the 128K machine and the rumoured Super-Spectrum, excitement is still high.

This week we'll look at some stunning word-processors, the current crop of Spectrum 128 games, the impressive Bobby Bearing from The Edge, and the latest news from the world of the QL (yes, it's still alive and kicking!)

Together with a history of the Spectrum and a look at the latest video technology it's just a taste of how the Sinclair micros continue to provide fun and excitement for every owner. ◄

Sinclair Show surprises

The May Microfair was a rum do, notable mainly for a general air of uncertainty and an almost total lack of new products for the Spectrum. Instead, we were swamped with new releases for the QL, a system which it seems unlikely will continue to be produced unless by some miracle CST manages to save it.

As reported last week, the big news for QL users is the CST Thor, an upgrade of the existing machine which will eventually become an entirely new system.

Sandy's floppy disk drive

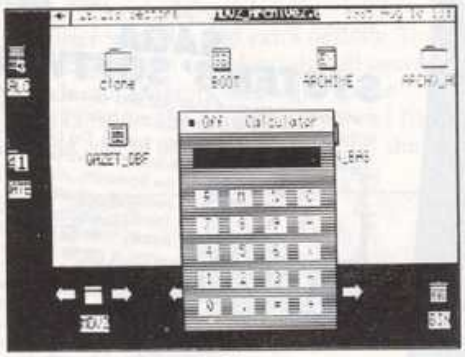
The prototype Thor is a repackage of the company's existing add-ons, fitted into a single case with a detachable IBM-AT-style keyboard. The new system, then, includes an enhanced QDOS, 640K RAM, single or dual 720K 3.5 floppy disk drives, and a 20 Mb Winchester option. The Winchester QDISC costs around £1,000, although CST are anticipating a price cut.

CST hopes to obtain QL's so that complete systems can be sold, rather than just offering a Thor upgrade. The final system is hoped to include a new 68020 processor, 1 Mb RAM, a 20 Mb floppy disk, the XCHANGE package, upgraded QDOS and casing at around £1800. CST plans a September launch.

Remaining with QL hardware, Farmintel showed the Sandy range of add-ons, including the 3.5 floppy disk drive, RAM card with through connector, twin expansion unit and Super Board with disk driver, parallel printer port, and superbasic extensions. Car Electronics and the SuperToolkit QL, a 16K ROM module which plugs into the expansion slot, and provides a full screen editor, default directories, job control, resident programs, file handling, extended networking, assignable keystrings and many more features.

Eidersoft's ICE program, a fully icon based desktop manager and front end for QDOS, comes on an EPROM cartridge and uses "next to no RAM". ICE is designed to be compatible with any Superbasic program and most commercial software, can be used with joysticks, keyboard, or a mouse, and offers multitasking, a clock, and calendar features. Costing £49.95, ICE is one of a series of utility packages and games for the QL from Eidersoft.

Prospero Software showed a series of



Eidersoft's ICE for the QL

68000-based lanaguage packages, including Pro Pascal, Pro Fortran and the Prospect graphics subroutine library. On the games front, MOA showed a preview of 2092, a complex Moon Buggy variant for the QL. Although the preview looked pretty flickery, the finished version will be available soon and we'll be able to give it a fuller review.

GAP software showed the Designer QL package, which includes a full screen editor with text facilities, additional text styles, and a character generator, while Datalink's CAD-PAK is a more technically-minded program.

As for the Spectrum, most of the new releases seemed to be concerned with overcoming the limitations of the tape

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With large enter key, full sized spacebar and printed keys, it has got to be good at **£39.95** (Inc. VAT).

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". . . The GLP . . . has a lot to recommend it . . ." —Sinclair User
only **£199.95** (Inc. VAT).

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". . . The 120D is an excellent printer . . ." —Sinclair User
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Big and robust the DX85 is a heavy duty dot matrix printer which is made in the U.K. It prints at 120 c.p.s. It has a bi-directional logic seeking print head and centronics interface (RS 232 available). It has a draft quality mode and costs only **£199.95** (Inc. VAT).

THE LTR1 PRINTER

The LTR1 is a letter quality printer, 12 c.p.s. with centronics and RS232 interface and costs only **£139.95** (Inc. VAT).

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SAGA 2+		£54.95	£1.50
SAGA 3 Elite		£69.95	£1.85
SAGA 2001	*	£119.95	Free
SAGA LO PROFILE		£39.95	£1.50
128K Keyboard up-grade kit		£4.99	Free
LTR1 PRINTER		£139.95	Free
CITIZEN 120D		£235.00	Free
THE SAGA DX85		£199.95	Free
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CENTRONICS INTERFACE		£34.95	Free
THE LAST WORD		£13.95	Free

VAT is included

Please state Spectrum model: 48K, +, 128K (please circle) *

TOTAL _____

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19th ZX MICROFAIR

loading system. TR's Beta-Plus disk interface has a new Magic Button facility, which enables any tape-based program to be transferred to disk with a single press. The interface also features auto boot, random and sequential access file handling, and auto checking. The interface is £109, and the Beta-Plus single-sided 40-track disc drive £229.

AT & Y's Spec-Mate claims to be able to transfer any tape program to microdrive, Beta or Opus disk. An expansion slot is provided on the back of the unit, so it can be left in place at all times, and it also offers turbo-tape loading facilities.

The Mirage Microdriver offers transfer of any tape-based program to microdrive, with optional saving of screen display, screen dumping, freeze facility and through connector.

Saga Systems gave a demonstration of their wide range of keyboards and the First Word program, reviewed elsewhere in this supplement, while Opus showed the

Discovery disk system from OPUS

Discovery disk system featuring the 128K version, which allows you to change operating modes at will, set up a random access filing system, use the 128's extra memory as a RAM disk, and retains the features of the original Discovery 1 including the peripheral through-connector parallel printer port, Kempston joystick interface, video monitor port and built-in screen designs. ◄

Video digitising

By far the most interesting new products at the Show were the two video digitisers, from Data Skip and Sunset.

The principle of video digitising isn't new, but the technology has only recently been adapted for home computers. The DataSkip, a Dutch product retailing at £69, is claimed to be able to digitise a video picture in 0.27 seconds, while the

Sunset device seems to have better handling facilities.

The Sunset video digitiser is housed in a Cheetah-style case, plugging into the Spectrum's user port. It can be connected via its standard video socket to any source such as a video camera (either the mono surveillance type or sophisticated home movie models) or the out put from any home video machine. The digitiser will then take any still picture and transfer it to the Spectrum's memory, storing it in the form of a 256 x 1992 pixel image at 16 resolution levels.

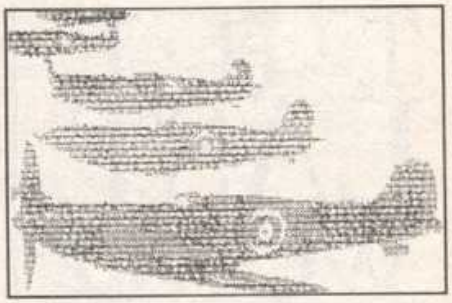
Sunset's video digitiser

Once you have the image on the screen, you can manipulate it by changing the contrast levels, saving it to cassette or microdrive for later use, load it into art software packages for further manipulation, or print it out.

The resolution of the Sunset digitiser is much higher than the Spectrum screen display can actually cope with. It's also larger than the Spectrum's screen display, so you can move the picture around the screen to crop it as you desire.

The menu-driven software allows you to control the input level and display type, though the digitised pictures are limited to black, white and shades of grey.

The software can be transferred to microdrive, and Sunset are working on various upgrades and extra options. The package comes complete with all necessary leads and adaptors, and will soon be available for the Amstrad, at around the same cost of £126.50. We'll review the



Digitiser in more depth at a later date.

Microfair Show organiser Mike Johnston said the Fairs would continue so long as there was support from the public and third party suppliers. On the evidence of this Show, there's plenty of enthusiasm, but the supply of new products for the Spectrum is slowing down, and the QL's future must remain in doubt until Amstrad decide whether it is worth continuing to support it, or arrange to put its fate in other hands. ◄

The word was Spectrum

CHRIS JENKINS LOOKS AT FIRST WORD AND TASWORD 3, AND PREVIEWS THE WRITER, THE MOST POWERFUL SPECTRUM WORD PROCESSOR YET

Building up an adequate word processing system on the Spectrum requires several tricky decisions. Firstly, you have to decide whether to replace the keyboard; then, whether to rely on tape, or go for microdrive or disk drive; next, which printer and interface to use; and, perhaps lastly, which software.

That last decision is now much easier, since there are now at least three word processing packages which offer a wide range of professional facilities.

The Last Word from Saga Systems is designed to be easy to use without having to wade through the 30-page manual. All sixty commands are available in an on-screen summary which shows the entry key combination required for each command.

I found it difficult to get used to the fact that the main control keys are Symbol Shift and Extend. This makes the Last Word package better suited for the Spectrum + or 128 than the squishy-key Spectrum, but then, how many users would be able to cope with the original keyboard anyway?

On loading – the program can be transferred to microdrive, wafadrive, and a variety of disk drives including Beta, Opus and Gordon – the main display shows a file window filling most of the screen, and a command line above it. The command line contains indicators for line and column number, tabs, video status, wrap, justify, overwrite, upper case lock and so on.

One of the best features of The Last Word is the clarity of the redefined character sets. Admittedly, I was using the system with a reasonably good monitor, and so had no difficulty with any of the 40, 48, 60 or 80-column displays. Using The Last Word with a TV, the 80-column display will probably only be of use for formatting the text; the letters tend to merge into each other too much for the text to be actually legible.

Once you have set the character size you want to work with, the program will "wrap-around" text as it reaches the edge of the screen. There are several commands which make it easy to reform paragraphs, either at different text sizes or with new margins or spacing.

Text editing is done with the cursor keys, and you can move through a document either a letter, a word, or a sentence at a time, using the Extend mode and symbol shift. Saving text can be done in ways. You can either define a start line and end line, or save the whole document, to either tape or microdrive. On reloading you can merge files together consecutively, or insert new material if you wish. If loading from tape, all the filenames present will be shown as they are found.

All the facilities of the most powerful word processors seem to be here; shifting blocks of text, search and replace for specific words or phrases, left or right justification and centering, word count (the maximum is about 4000 words), a calculator, a clock, variable line spacing, variable copy number, and powerful printer control routines.

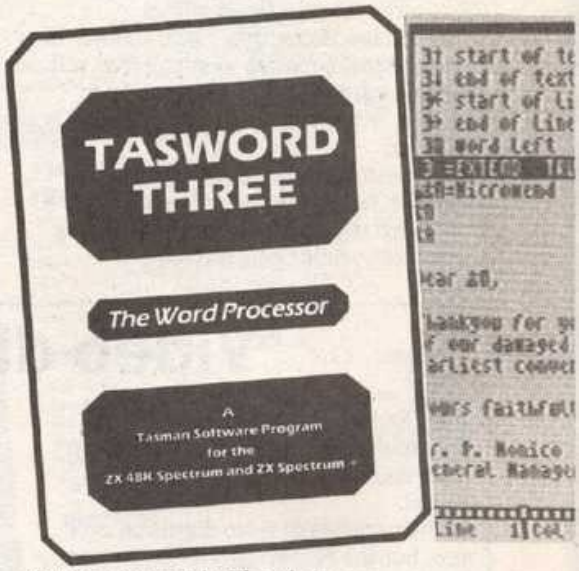
The Last Word supports 24 printer control tokens, which should allow you to use any common printer, although the basic set-up assumes a ZX-LPRINT III interface and Epson RX-80 if you are not using a Sinclair printer. Kempston, Morex, Tasprint and other interfaces are also supported, and since it is possible to exit to Basic from the main program, it should be possible to cope with other devices too.

Overall, while The Last Word is a very comprehensive and powerful program, I think its best feature is the screen design. Everything looks very professional, and is presented in a clear and user-friendly manner – essential in a program which is likely to become a firm favourite with Spectrum users. ◀

Program The Last Word
Supplier Saga Systems
Price £13.95
Format Cassette

Tasword Three has a lot to live up to, since its predecessors have established themselves as the best word-processing packages available for the Spectrum. The greatest immediate difference is that T3 is available only on microdrive.

The most controversial feature of T3 is the screen display. Some word processors, like The Last Word, split a line over two screen lines if the number of characters exceeds the set column width. With T3, the screen scrolls across to keep your text in



view as you type it. The obvious disadvantage is that you cannot see all of the text all of the time.

The manual – a beautifully-printed 64-page epic – is very full and clear, and kicks off by explaining the peculiar "reversed E" symbol used on the command menu. This indicates Extended mode, of course, and is used in conjunction with single keypresses to access most of the operational modes.

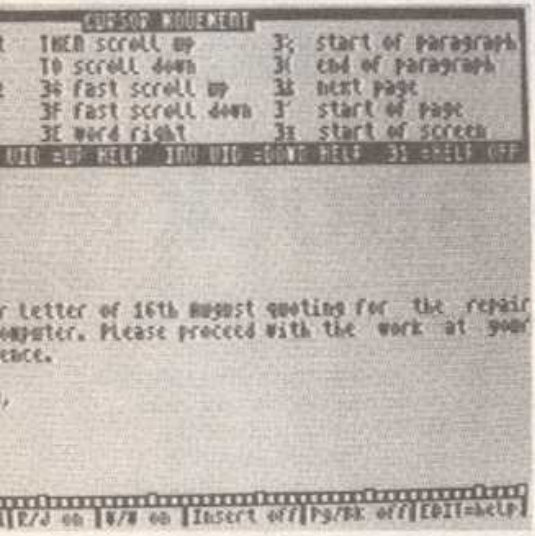
Maximum line length in Tasword 3 is 128 characters, while the display width is normally 64. A single text file can be up to 17000 characters long, while the central text window can show either 15 or 22 lines. There's an auto-repeat facility on all keys. There are two help pages, one dealing with text commands and one with I/O. These are really only summaries of the facilities available – much better explanations are given in the manual.

Just a list of some of the major features of Tasword 3 will give you some idea of how advanced it is. Word-wrapping at the end of each line can be overridden, as can the automatic justification. Right-justified text can be changed to left-justified and vice-versa. Files can be merged simply by loading new ones after existing text. The command cursor can be moved to the start or end of

T·H·E LAST WORD
for the 48k ZX Spectrum/plus micro-computer
SINCLAIR USER CLASSIC
Saga Systems Limited

the file, or the start or end of a line. There are slow and fast text scrolls, page skip, delete and undelete, (for the most recent line deleted), auto-insert to rejustify the current paragraph while new text is being inserted, search and replace, block move, printer control characters, variable window size, variable form length to adjust for different paper sizes, variable copy number, variable spacing, page numbering, and so on.

Tasword 3 is, up to this point, a powerful but fairly standard word processor. However, there are a number of clever features which are more advanced than some packages designed for much more expensive systems; for instance a word buffer which makes it practically impossible to "out-type" the program, Data Merge Filing for producing multiple copies of files with varying headings, say, conditional printing (by which information held in a data merge file can control whether a



document is printed or not), a tutorial program on the microdrive, and a wide range of customisation options for making personalised back-ups.

Tasprint and Tasword Two files can be used, providing the correct conversion procedure given in the T3 manual is followed.

Unless the inability to transfer Tasword to a disk system puts you off, the facilities and reliability of the product should make it an attractive purchase. I didn't find it as user-friendly as Last Word, but this is perhaps some reflection of the number of facilities available, and would probably be overcome with familiarity.◀

Program Tasword 3
Supplier Tasman Software
Price £16.50
Format Microdrive

The much-anticipated **Writer** program is an attempt to out-perform every word-processing package available for home computers, and on the evidence of my acquaintance with it so far, it in fact beats many professional packages.

Most of the standard text handling facilities are similar to Tasword 3 or Last Word. The Writer loads in black and white, but you can customise the screen colours to suit your taste. The status line above the text window gives you information on file name, line and column number, insert/delete/overwrite modes, caps lock on/off, and so on. Pressing the Edit key accesses the main menu bar, which includes FILE, EDIT, TEXT, SEARCH, FORMAT and HELP. The HELP menus are only available on the microdrive version of the program.

Using GRPH mode you can use a number of accented characters including the German double-s, C-cedilla, grave and acute e, and so on. Wordwrap can be enabled or disabled, there's a full search-and-replace facility, page numbering (Arabic or Roman!), headers and footers, printer control characters for underlining, a wide range of printer driver options, compatibility with Tasword 2 and Quill files, and so on and so on. However, the normal word processor facilities are just the start of what The Writer can do. Firstly, it can be customised or operate either with a joystick or with a Kempston mouse. The pull-down menu system is comparable to that of the Apple Macintosh, so using it with a mouse is the natural move. Using the Mouse eliminates much of the tedium of selecting the correct control keys, which is the major bug-bear of some word-processors. You can still use key commands even if you have the mouse in operation.

Secondly, The Writer takes into account the fact that some printers can cope with over 80 column, especially when using condensed modes. The Writer can display up to 127 columns of text, with a scrolling display.

I have not used any other program which has true printer spooling. You can actually write one document while another is printing out – and on the 128K version, it's possible to hold up to five documents in memory simultaneously.

The Writer is Wordstar file compatible, so you can take your files homes from the IBM PC in work, and load them into the humble Spectrum, via the RS-232 on Interface 1.

There are also not one but three forms of mail merge; a WRITE/INCLUDE function which will pull any microdrive file into your document, a more sophisticated mail merge using some simple Basic programming to merge lists of names and addresses into the text, and a third option using the forthcoming Filer program.

Perhaps most impressive is the Print Merge facility, which has some capabilities which I found quite astounding. It allows you to merge texts at the time of printing, and set up variables using GET and PUT commands, which can be updated at the time of printing. Conditional printing makes the program print a certain document, or part of a document, only if a condition set by a variable is satisfied. For instance, you could set up a letter reminding a number of clients about overdue debts, and two alternative final paragraphs, such that if the debt is over under £500 the letter reads " . . . and we would appreciate payment as soon as possible", while if the debt is over £500 it reads " . . . and the boys will be around to break your legs tomorrow."

Numeric variables can also be handled in the program, to such a level of complexity that you could, for instance, from a single given amount print the original, final price including VAT, and the VAT charge separately.

Needless to say, SofTechnics has made sure that any printer can be supported. This isn't just a vague promise – apparently *any* printer which can be attached to the Spectrum can be supported by The Writer, using user definable printer definition files. Some of the commonly-used interfaces are ready-defined (Kempston, ZX, etc), but the customising feature allows you to tackle any RS-232 or Centronics printer.

What else do you want? Well, apart from the microdrive transfer facility on the cassette, there ae Opus, Beta, and other disk versions coming. It's also possible to integrate files from the Artist graphics program, and the forthcoming Filer, Database and Spredsheet programs. Eventually SofTechnics hopes to offer a complete integrated system for business and uses such as page make-up for desk-top publishing.

This has necessarily only been an overview of some of the facilities of The Writer. There are so many facilities available that it would take a book to thoroughly explore all of them. One thing is certain, though; with the Tasword2 compatibility and the promise of forthcoming compatible software releases, The Writer presents Spectrum users with yet another worthy contender in the wordprocessing stakes.◀

Program The Writer
Supplier SofTechnics
Price £17.95
Format Cassette, m/drive and disk forthcoming

JUST WHERE DOES THE AMSTRAD TAKEOVER LEAVE OWNERS AND POTENTIAL PURCHASERS OF SINCLAIR MICROS? CHRISTINA ERSKINE FINDS OUT

Sinclair's future shock

Sinclair users and software companies alike have been left in a quandary by Alan Sugar's announcement of April 3, that he had picked up the rights to Sinclair's computers for a mere £5 million.

Confusion and speculation have surrounded the deal and what it means for the Spectrum, software support, the repair service, and Sinclair's idiosyncratic peripherals ever since, and no-one seems particularly keen to clarify things.

Bunker

The real losers, so far, appear to be those with faulty Spectrums, especially those who sent them in for repair shortly before the deal was announced. Amstrad says it's not its problem, while Sinclair Research has retreated to its bunker at Milton Hall, near Cambridge, although it won't be there much longer; the building is up for sale.

The repairs issue is the one causing most confusion among Spectrum owners. The truth is that Spectrums sent in for repair before the deal and not yet returned really aren't Amstrad's problem. Amstrad did not buy Sinclair, lock, stock and barrel. It bought rights to the Sinclair name, rights to manufacture its computers, and the existing stock.

The answer then is to contact Sinclair Reseach, or SRL, as it is now known, at Milton Hall, Milton, Cambridge CB4 4AE (0223 862661).Repairs are still its responsibility.

As for those whose Spectrums go wrong now, the message is clear. Don't send them to Amstrad, which is currently selling Spectrum stocks overseas, but take them back to the retailer.

And what of those who had been thinking of buying a Spectrum? Should they do so now, or wait until Amstrad's intended enhanced version appears?

Here,it is really a question of your own patience. All Amstrad has said is that it will bring out a Spectrum micro, "Son of Spectrum", as Alan Sugar, Amstrad's chairman termed it, for this Christmas, with a tape deck and for around £140, and that it will be a no-compromise entertainment machine. That was at the beginning of April, and there has been no official word since of any confirmation of this. So, if you're put off by the Spectrum's squidgy keyboard, or lack of joystick port, don't bank on Amstrad rectifying these. It hasn't said it will, however much it may seem a sensible course to take.

Cartridges

Recent speculation has suggested pushing the memory up to 256K Ram, and a facility to use Astron credit-card style cartridges. It remains to be seen whether such is indeed the case. There have also been reports that Amstrad may produce the comparable 'super Spectrum', codenamed Loki, which was being developed at Sinclair before the deal went through. The specification of Loki allowed for superior graphics and gamesplay, but it is not clear what stage of development the machine had reached, nor whether Amstrad will press ahead with it.

On the Spectrum peripherals side, many Microdrive users are worried about continued support – and are wondering if they should junk the whole Microdrive idea and go back to cassette.

This again is up to SRL (Sinclair). However, the news for microdrive cartridges may be gloomy. Any new QL now looks likely to use floppy discs rather than microdrives (see Popular Computing Weekly, News Desk, May 15). Continued supply will probably depend on continued demand. Again, contact SRL.

Spectrum 128 owners will have noticed that there is not much in the way of specific software to convince them it was worth shelling out for the new machine. Many of the software companies have postponed plans to bring out 128 versions of titles – or new releases especially for the 128 – until they know how long a life these programs will have under the Amstrad regime.

Exceptions

For 128-specific titles that are out, see the survey elsewhere in this supplement. Unfortunately, you cannot expect much more 128-only products until Amstrad's plans become clearer. Rest assured that the vast majority of Spectrum Plus programs will run on the 128.

The salient exceptions appear to be Elite (Firebird – compatible version in development), Fairlight (The Edge), Impossible Mission (US Gold), Laser Basic, Laser Compiler (Ocean IQ), Macadam Bumper (PSS), They Sold a Million (Hit Squad), Tomahawk (Digital Integration) and World Series Baseball (Imagine).

Only time will tell whether the popularity of the Spectrum can survive Amstrad's marketing it as an entertainment machine. ◄

THE WRITER

"The Best"

When it came to reviewing the best in wordprocessors for the Spectrum, Your Sinclair (Jan. 1986) said "I have no doubt that 'The Writer' will take over as the best Speccy wordprocessor."

Praise indeed. But praise we think is warranted for what one industry pundit described as "Probably the best wordprocessor I've seen for any Z80 based micro."

Just look at these professional features: up to 127 column screen display; Wordstar* compatible; Tasword II compatible; true printer spooling; user definable printer definition files (works with virtually any printer which can be interfaced to a Spectrum); pull-down menus; extensive 'help' files on non-tape versions; mail-merge (works with 'The Database' – forthcoming); print-merge; enables the definition of variables and numeric expressions in text; 48K and 128K Spectrum versions; Mouse/Joystick pointer options coming.

'The Writer' – "Simply, the best wordprocessor for the Sinclair Spectrum."

STOP PRESS: now Kempston Mouse compatible.

SOFTECHNICS

SofTechnics, 12/13 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LH.
Tel: 01-240 1422/7877. Tlx:892379.
Write for details of "The Database" and "The Spreadsheet" coming soon.
(The Writer and Artist II are available on most formats — disk, Microdrive and tape).

*Wordstar is a registered

THE ARTIST II

COMING SOON

"Better than the Best"

When we launched 'The Artist' in 1985 it was reviewed as the most amazing graphics package to have appeared for the Spectrum. Indeed, it became one of those very few 'utilities' to actually get into the Gallup Chart…

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And yet it is a game, and a very challenging one at that. The Solar System, the strange alien game, the eight mysterious capsules are all interconnected. Together they hold the key to survival of life on Earth.

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IS BIGGER ALWAYS BETTER?

WHAT CAN YOU DO WITH 128K THAT YOU CAN'T DO WITH 48K? JOHN MINSON LOOKS AT 128 GAMES

Back in the old days, when Sinclair was synonymous with Sir Clive and not Sugar, the Spectrum 128 launch was heralded with a hall full of software houses, seduced into producing games for the expanded (and more importantly, audible) machine. Still, the churls of the computer press said it was too little, too late and at too great a cost.

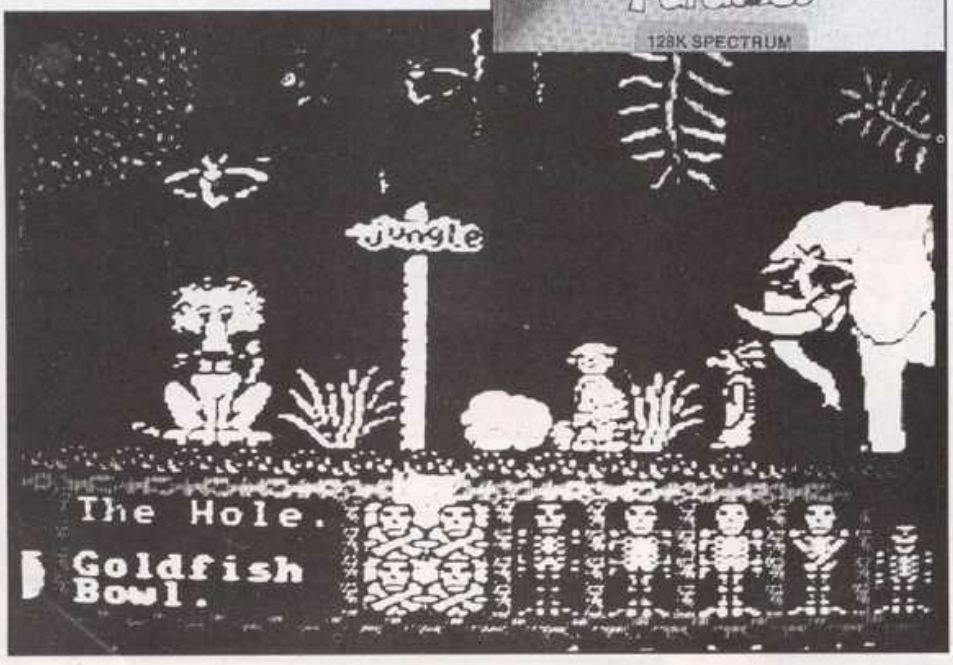
Now the marketing strategy of Amstrad is set to change all that. The spectrum Plus is being off-loaded like aerials from a car boot and the 128 has fallen to the price we said it should have been all along. In fact, with a probable revamping in time for Christmas (built-in tape recorder and almost certainly a joystick socket), it's about to become the machine we wanted all along!

This is sure to create renewed interest from the software houses, most of whom would tell you – off the record naturally – that even at the launch they didn't intend to follow up their initial titles until they'd seen how the machine was selling.

Bundling

Ocean were the lucky people to get their product bundled with the micro, so there's no avoiding *Daley Thompson's Super Test 128* or *The Never Ending Story*. These demonstrate the two most common traits of 128 conversions – improved sound and the avoidance of multi-loads! Both are highly proficient, have nice music to make use of the new sound chip and provide an introduction to keyboard punishing arcade games (was this a Sinclair ploy to write off their new machines quickly?) and accessible adventuring for the newcomer to computing. But for the already hardened hacker they hold few thrills.

Odin and related label Thor have a trio of games in *Nodes of Yesod, Arc of Yesod* and *Robin of the Wood*. The first two are in the arcade adventure mode though that's no bad thing when they're as well done as this. 128 means better music and added amusing touches, like the mole belching once it's eaten its way through the moon. The main quibble is that *Arc* is really just more of the same of *Nodes*. *Robin* is a *Sabre Wulfe* variation with some lovely medieval music. Still, would you really want to buy them if you'd already got the 48K versions?



Mikro-Gen's *Three Weeks in Paradise* and Gargoyle's *Sweevo's Whirled* indicate another possibility for programmers with all that extra RAM to use. Wally Week has a whole new area of Can Nibble Island to explore, though unless you are careful you may well miss the top secret sea-bed missile base. This was generally reckoned to be the best of the Wally games and certainly I'd choose the expanded version any time.

The same goes for *Sweevo*, a classic of 3D madness, which gains an extra 80K of lunacy with new levels for the fruit filled world of wumpuses and geese. Blow me if there aren't noses sprouting from the floor now. Once again, the expansion of a quality product has resulted in a tempting purchase.

Improvements

The course of improving on program size has also been followed by Martech with *Samantha Fox Strip Poker* (and no, that doesn't mean a bigger Sam, perish the thought!). I've not actually seen this but apparently it boasts yet more grainy pictures of famed intellectual displaying her most outstanding features. If you merely want to gaze at these protuberances I'd advise purchasing a copy of *The Scum*. However if you want a decent game of seven card poker the program provides it – on the Sam-less side which is presumably the same as the 48K version.

One game that has undeniably gained from being reworked is Domark's gory Roman ramble, *Gladiator*. In its original version it was decidedly a case of nice graphics, shame about the game play. Now not only have the backgrounds been added to and the combatants generally tarted up but the original clumsy control system has been jetisonned. This means that you now have a chance of stabbing your opponent in the kidneys, chopping at his legs and stabbing him through the adam's apple. All good clean fun for an ambitious slave!

Of more interest is *The Planets*, from Martech, which calls for several loads in its 48K version.

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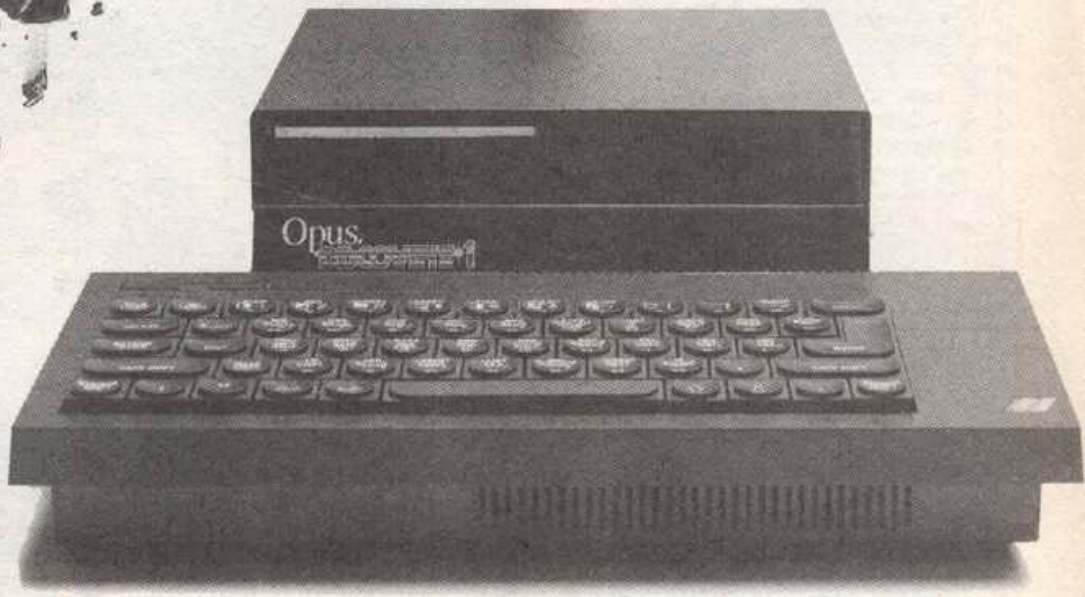

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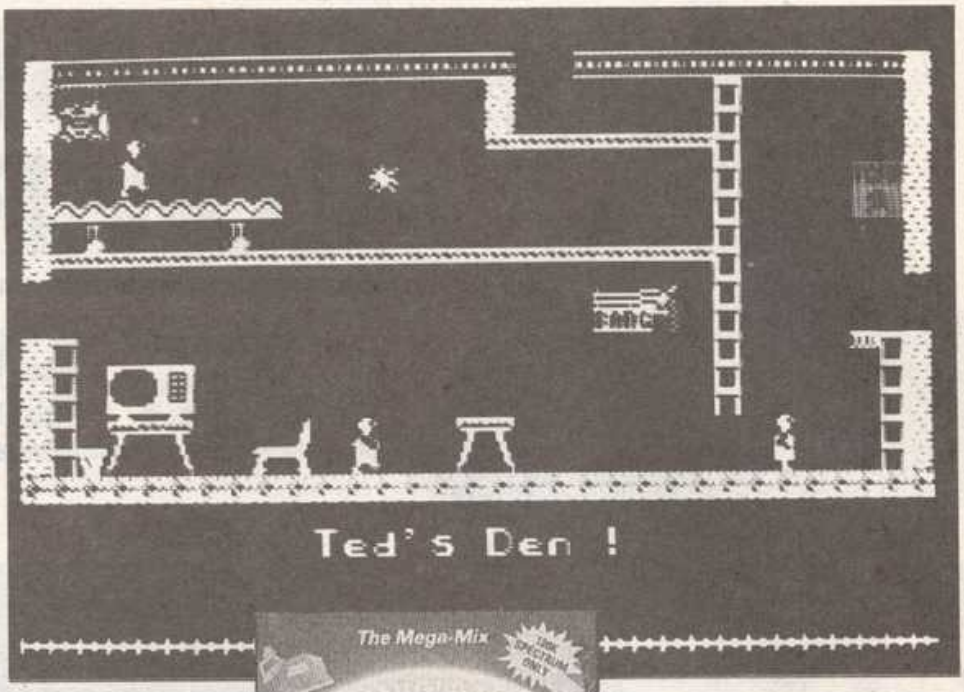
Opus.

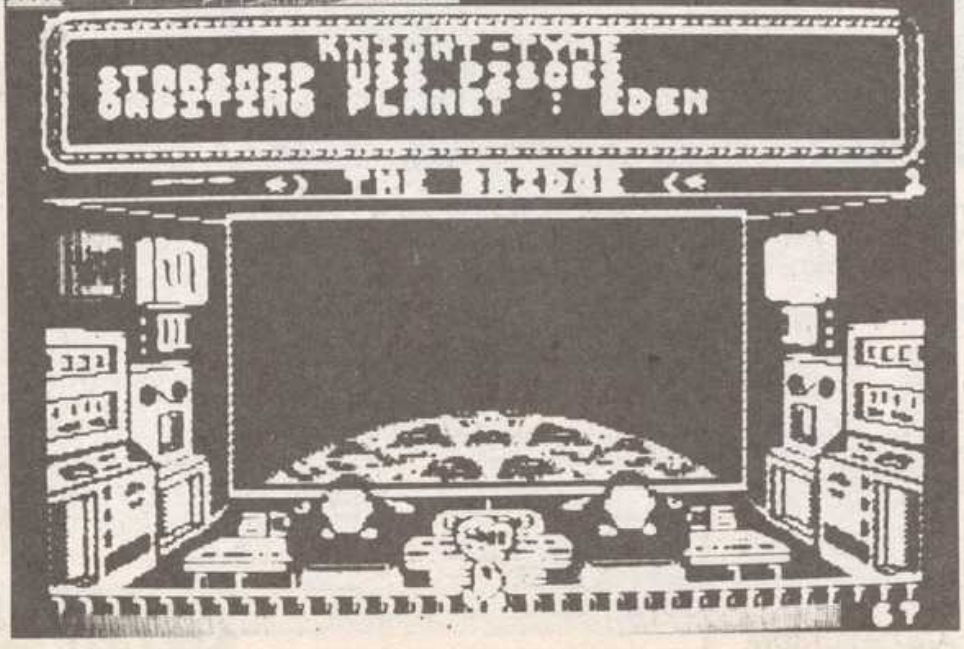
Disappointment concerning *Technician Ted* from Hewson's. A good enough game in its day it now looks long in the tooth and I don't quite understand their reason for adding to the size of this amiably daft arcade adventure. Similarly, *The Rocky Horror Show* from CRL has gained too little to make such improvement on the original. It's just a slightly louder, three voice version of The Time Warp.

Talking of music, I'm still to see the bigger, better version of Melbourne House's *Music Box*, which has lost its Wham tag (that should double sales as people are no longer scared off by the picture of the deadly duo). Apparently it still retains its odd system of notation but the sound is much improved by the new chip and it's one of the few programs to properly exploit the machine.

We're also still waiting for *Fairlight 128* from The Edge, who tell us that Swedish programming ace Bo Jangeborg got quite carried away adding new passages and areas which provide alternative methods of solving the secret of Castle Avars. A brief sneak preview indicated improved music too, plus some new skeleton guards and a grisly death mask that appears when Isvar loses his life – so grisly, in fact, that it's likely to be removed from the release version!

It's to be hoped that Bo is now hard at work on *Fairlight II* which is being designed specifically with the 128 in mind. And on the subject of The Edge, they're still promising us graphics package *The Artist* for the 128 with a host of features, plus word processor *The Writer* which will also take advantage of the expanded memory.





There are several games here for which bigger does mean better, which is all very well, but I still reckon you'd have to be a double sized fan to duplicate with double memory versions if you are merely upgrading. There is one software house who have put their faith in the machine to such an extent that they've developed an entirely original game for it though. That company is Mastertronic and their title, retailing at only £2.99 in the MAD range, is no cheapo quickie either.

Knight Tyme is a highly successful sequel to animated graphics adventure, *Spellbound*. This time Magic Knight is cast adrift on a spaceship and has to find his way back to his own time with the help of its various odd inmates. Once again the brilliant windowing system has been used for commands but the real advantage of the increased memory size is the number of locations.

Potential

At first it may all seem rather limited, but that's only because nobody will listen to you except two droids and the ship's computer. Solve the problem of gaining some authority and you can command the captain to fly you to the moon – or round the galaxy, at least, in search of a solution to your temporal tantrum.

So full marks to Mastertronic for producing the first crucial 128 purchase. Others are sure to follow now the machine is credibly priced and seems set at the low end of the Spectrum market (what will the software houses make of the even bigger version, rumoured to be on the way?). Until then shell out a meagre £2.99 but spend the rest of your money carefully until programs that properly address the RAM's potential appear. ◄

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Ramball rampage!

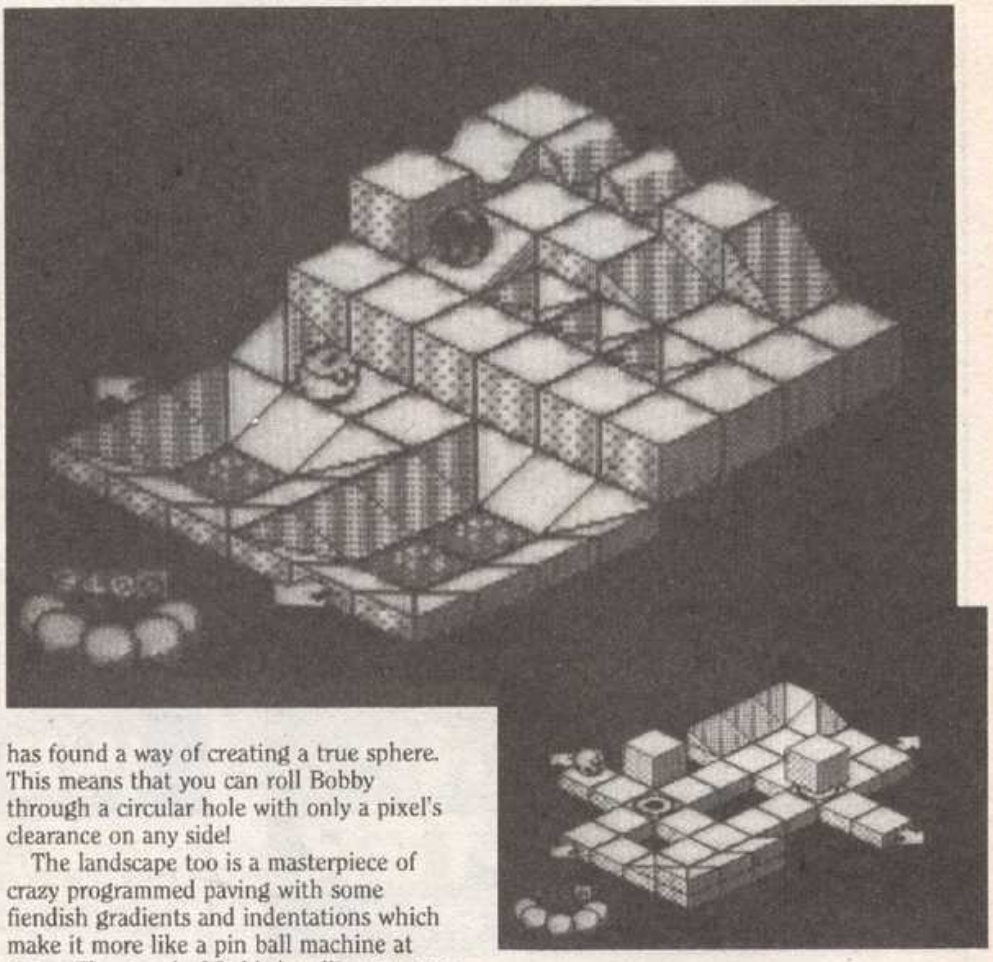
JOHN MINSON PREVIEWS THE EDGE'S TECHNICALLY STUNNING NEW SPECTRUM GAME, BOBBY BEARING

There are still pleasant surprises to be had in the software industry. One of those came the way of Tim Langdell of The Edge recently in the shape of Fig. Fig is two brothers, Trevor Figgins who does the screen design and Robert who does the programming and who literally walked in off the street with a cassette.

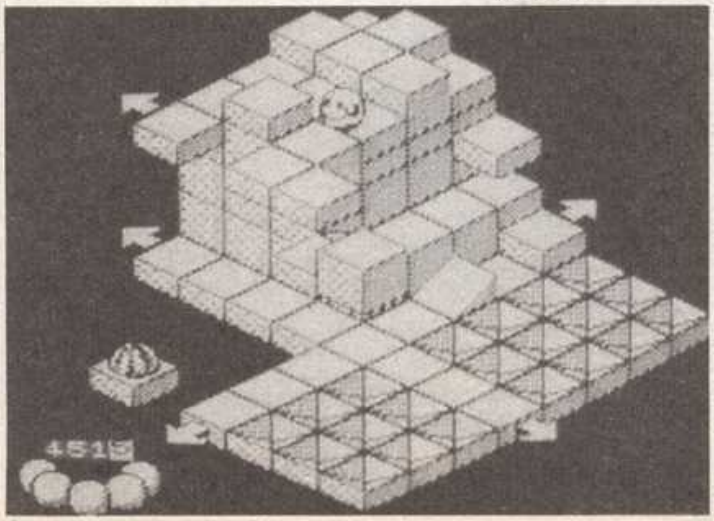
"I'm not very good at writing code," he explained to Langdell. What appeared on the screen gave the lie to that statement immediately. Prior to this Fig had made some contributions to 16/48 tape magazine but though the graphics had been great they were lacking in game play. But though this was his first real game, Robert Figgins had done things that Tim Langdell had previously thought impossible. So impressed was he that he consulted *Fairlight* programmer Bo Jangeborg, who also marvelled at the techniques employed. Robert hadn't realised that you weren't supposed to be able to do certain things – and had just gone ahead and done them!

The game in question is available at the end of May and goes by the name of *Bobby Bearing*. If that suggests a *Marble Madness* style program, you wouldn't be far wrong which means it's entering an increasingly competitive market with the likes of *Quazatron* and *Spindizzy*. But, *Bobby Bearing* has enough features that are unique and endearing to turn it into something special.

The first of these is none other than spherical hero Robert Bearing Esq. He's hardly your standard bland ball as he's got an expressive face which registers pain when you allow him to bump off a cliff. He's also an example of ingenious programming. While circular objects in previous games of the type have had to be held in the micro's memory as cubes, Fig has found a way of creating a true sphere. This means that you can roll Bobby through a circular hole with only a pixel's clearance on any side!



The landscape too is a masterpiece of crazy programmed paving with some fiendish gradients and indentations which make it more like a pin ball machine at times. The speed of Bobby's rolling progress round the curves is impressively smooth. Normally you'd avoid getting crushed below the falling blocks but allow yourself the masochistic luxury just once so that you can admire the animation which allows Bobby to be squashed and note that the higher the hammer, the flatter our hero gets!



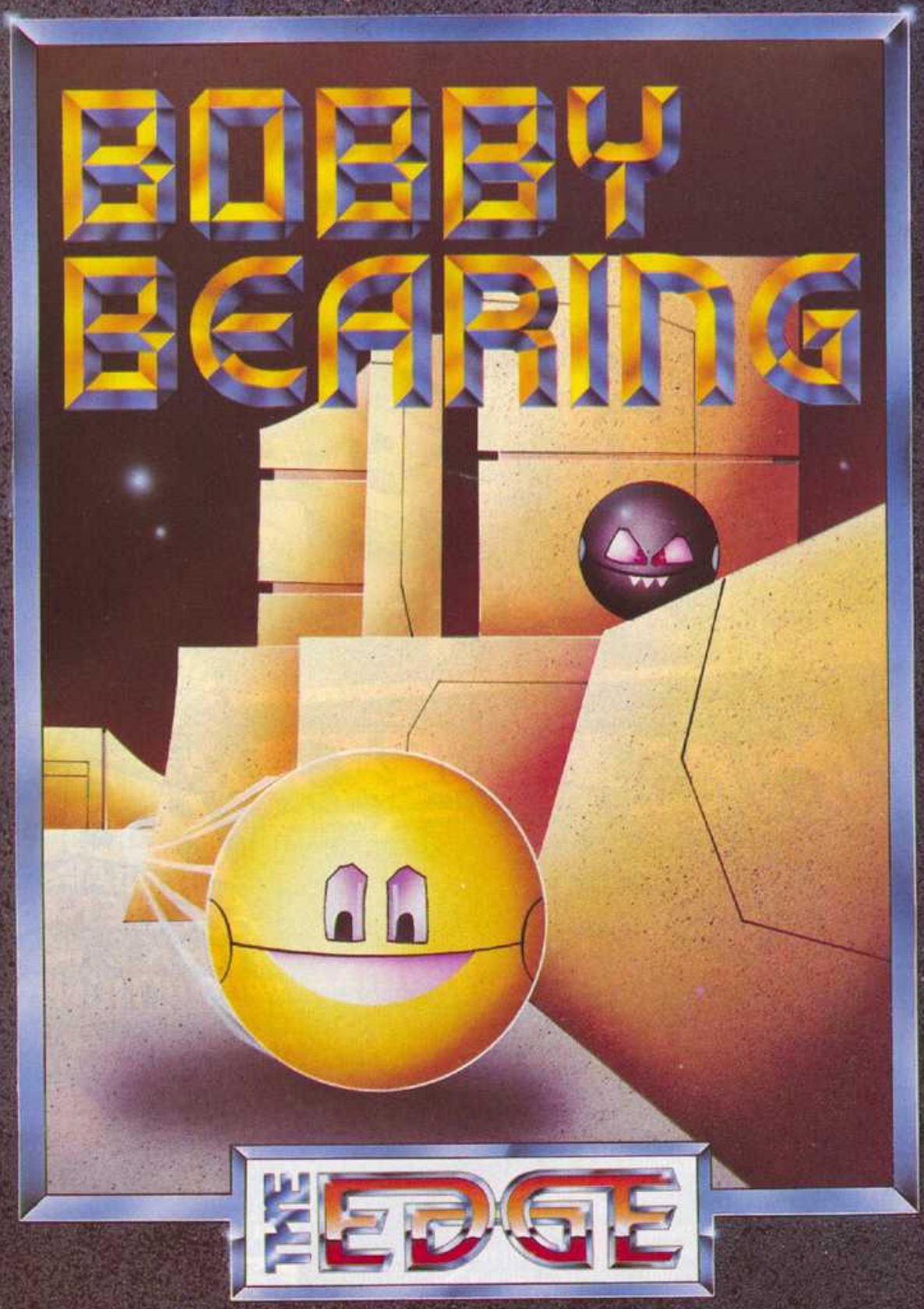
So to the plot. Bobby's family has been kidnapped (ballnapped?) by the evil bearing muggers who you'll recognise from their sharpened teeth. He has to locate and rescue his brothers then when the fraternal task's complete he goes for the hardest part, to retrieve his cousin. This is a quest that only a Ramball could complete.

His mission is made dangerous not only by the evil balls who have various levels of intelligence, some being clever enough to lie in wait to push Bobby off a ledge as he rolls by, but also by crushers, magnets and air-ducts. These last mentioned cause course problems when it comes to keeping to the straight and narrow though they can also be beneficial because some are linked to switches and if you manipulate them correctly they will help you on your way.

Once a sibling has been located Bobby has to push him back to safety, and if you thought dodging all those hazards was bad enough alone, you wait till you've got the added burden of a brother to propel past the traps. Naturally momentum has been included to make it all especially nasty.

There are 150 screens of this, which flip smoothly as Bobby moves across them, and the price has been set at a bargain £7.95. This is £2 cheaper than standard Edge price and has been done, Tim Langdell explains, because of his faith in the program's sales potential. Going by my preview, I can only agree. *Bobby Bearing* is certainly more than just another load of old balls!◀

Let the good times roll!



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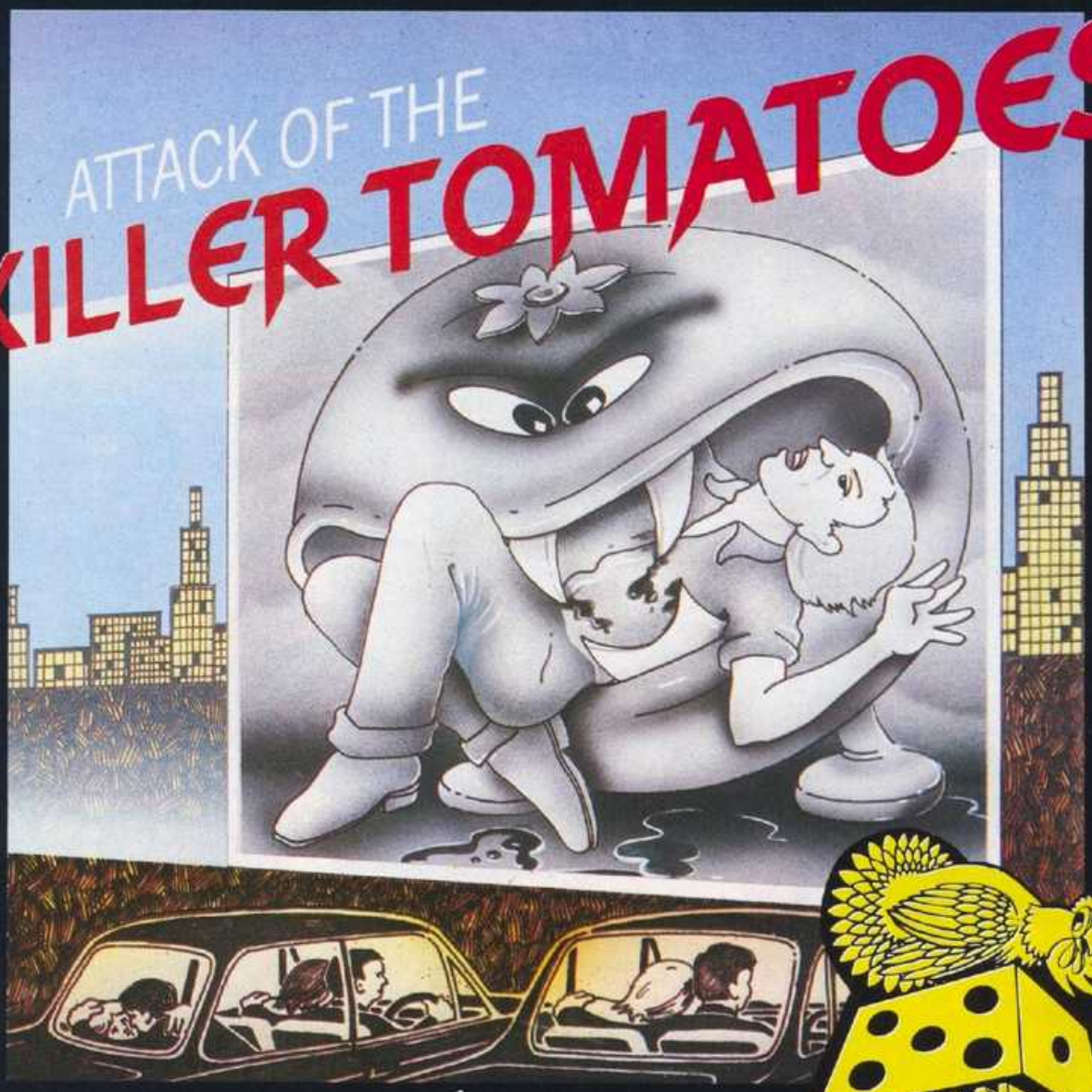

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