SOFT CENTRE

The first in an occasional series of pull-out-and-keep software surveys
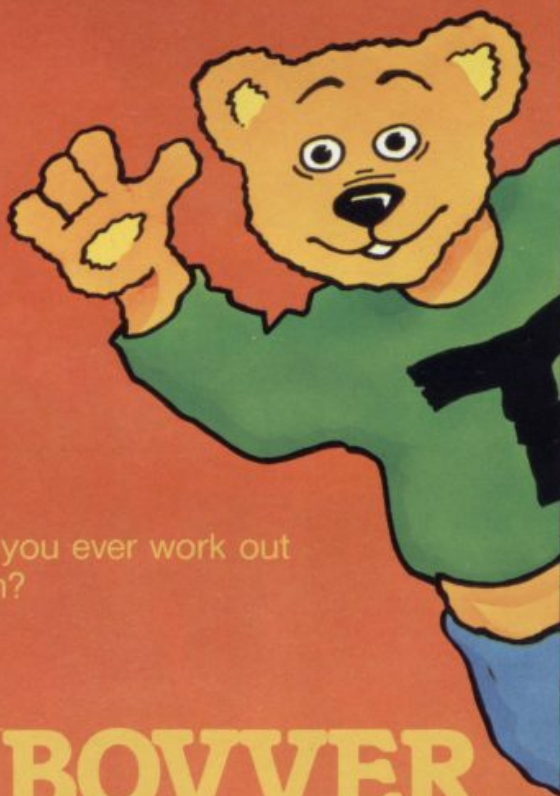
The Alchemist

ADVENTURE and arcade games are becoming more complex and of a better standard all the time, so it is no surprise that a company like Imagine Software has created a mixture of the two genres with **The Alchemist** for the 48K Spectrum.

You take the part of the alchemist who is searching for the parts of an ancient spell scroll which, when put together, will destroy an evil wizard. Your character can move around on the ground in human form or can transform into the guise of a giant bird and take to the air. All that can be performed with the keyboard or with many types of joystick.

To reach the parts of the scroll you must move past various evil monsters, including a colourful butterfly and a sheet-like ghost, which are all animated cleverly.

At first sight the game, with its cartoon maze and wizard as the central character, may remind you of the Ultimate Atic Atac. The extra features of the game, however, compensate for the similarity and there is much more variation in the maze construction and the creatures which will be seeking your blood.

If the attraction of the game is not sufficient and you still want something different you will be startled to learn that Imagine has the dubious honour of being the first software house to produce a gold-coloured cassette and cassette box. That adds interest to the game and gives a hint of what it contains when you learn that alchemists seek to turn lead into gold.
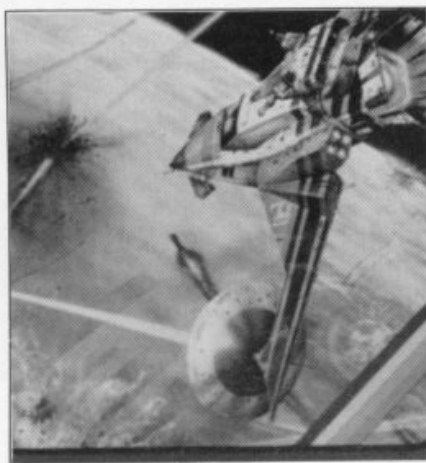
The combination of excellent cartoon animation and depth of plot should make The Alchemist a winner. It can be obtained from Imagine Software.

THE ALCHEMIST	
Memory:	**48K**
Price:	**£5.50**
Joystick:	**Kempston, AGF, Sinclair, Protek, Fuller, 12L**
Gilbert Factor:	**7**

Armageddon

ARMAGEDDON is based on that well-known arcade game Missile Defence. It involves defending six cities from incoming waves of thermo-nuclear missiles and other airborne weapons. According to the instructions, you may have to sacrifice some civilian targets for ultimate success, although missile bases are said to be your enemy's main target.

As a game it is very fast and requires good reactions. The graphics are fairly simple but include effective mushroom clouds. There is only one level of skill and since the game is so fast-moving it would benefit from several levels.

Problems were experienced loading the game but all Silversoft games are guaranteed and can be exchanged. Overall more attention should be paid to providing a better game than having a good title page.

Armageddon can be obtained from Silversoft.

ARMAGEDDON	
Memory:	**16K**
Price:	**£5.95**
Joystick:	**Kempston**
Gilbert Factor:	**3**

Autosonics

AUTOSONICS will enable you to add sound effects in Basic to your programs. Built into the program are 26 sounds to start. Twenty-one of them are named specifically while the others are under the general heading of space sounds.

All the sounds can be modified according to pitch, which can be steady or can rise and fall at a variable rate. The speed of repeat can also be varied, as can the length of the sound. Those adjustments are made on-screen using a range of graphically-displayed slider controls. Once you have created your sound the program can give you a line of Basic which will reproduce that sound exactly.

The program is clear and well-designed and is a useful addition to any amateur programmer's collection. A BEEP amplifier, as always, would be an advantage, but is by no means necessary. It shows what can be done in Basic using the limited Spectrum BEEP command and extensive instructions are provided with the cassette.

The specific sounds are not as interesting as they could be and the range of 'space noises' shows better what is possible. Overall a novel idea and well-presented.

Autosonics can be obtained from Buttercraft, 14 Western Avenue, Riddlesden, Keighley, Yorks.

AUTOSONICS	
Memory:	**16K**
Price:	**£4.99**
Gilbert Factor:	**5**

Bear Bovver

THE IDEA that teddy bears are cuddly has been dispelled in **Bear Bovver** for the 48K Spectrum. Your quest is for the batteries which will drive your car and the only way to get them is to climb the framework of ladders on the screen. There are three teddy bears just waiting to get you the moment you step out of your vehicle and a strange-looking creature with a long tail, which we have assumed to be father bear.

Before leaving the safety of your car you should plan your strategy to avoid the hairy miscreants. The only way in which you can kill the bears is to drop a battery on them or plant a bomb which should explode to good effect.

On the way up the scaffolding you can collect various bonus treats which include milk, cups of tea and Coca-Cola cans. All serve to illustrate the thought which has gone into the design of the game, which is a shining example of animated graphics.

Once you have put all three batteries of one screen into your car you can move to the next screen, which is even more complex than the previous one. The game will continue in that way until all your four lives are lost.

Bear Bovver has a brilliant new concept and without doubt will get into everybody's top ten games. It can be obtained from Artic Computing.

BEAR BOVVER	
Memory:	**48K**
Price:	**£6.95**
Joystick:	**Kempston, Fuller**
Gilbert Factor:	**8**

Brag

AS A GENERAL rule, card games do not benefit by being translated into computer programs but **Brag,** for the 48K Spectrum, almost manages to compensate for the lack of real players and cash which usually make for the excitement of this classic gambling game.

Both the cassette insert and the program give clear, easy-to-follow instructions on the rules of the game for those who have never played it previously. When play starts, the screen display is carefully thought out and the action is fast — almost too fast to follow in the case of the demonstration game the computer will play for you.

The program simulates the game very faithfully, not just by reproducing the rules, but by incorporating a bluffing element, and even varying styles of play for each of the three players which it represents. The computer will even adapt its style of play to yours if you attempt to bluff too often and, when you pay to see the other players' hands, it will show you thoughtfully not just the cards but who won and the state of everyone's winnings.

The author claims that the program is almost impossible to beat and has certainly made the attempt as addictive as possible. Even if you do not enjoy swapping bluffs with a computer the program should help to prepare you for any encounters with real-life Brag players.

Brag is available from T Lebon, Little Brays, Brays Lane, Rochford, Essex SS4 3RP.

BRAG
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£4.95**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Cassette A

CASSETTE A from Orwin Software is a collection of 11 short programs written largely in Basic and including arcade-style and mind games. It is an enterprising collection with some very good ideas, although many of the games suffer from the inevitable slowness of Basic programming. It is possible, however, to look at the listings and some of the programming techniques are interesting.

Among the more worthwhile programs are Ghost Gobbler, a Pac-man-style game with a choice of six skill levels; Reversi, a version of the well-known board game which plays a remarkably good game; Phoebus, a colourful tile-sliding game; Black Spot, an updated version of the old favourite, Snake; Minefield, where you must drive a tank around a minefield, picking up crowns and avoiding the electrified fence.

There is also a graphics demonstration program with good, inventive use of colours and shapes. On the whole it is reasonable value but is chiefly of interest to beginners rather than arcade game freaks.

CASSETTE A
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£6**
Gilbert Factor: **5**

Cavern Fighter

CAVERN FIGHTER, for the 16K Spectrum, is a version of the popular arcade game, Scramble, which is set in the unlikely location of Watford.

Your mission is to fly your spacecraft through a cavern filled with enemy fighters. You must destroy the aliens with your laser gun and hit the fuel tanks with your bombs. Points are scored for hitting aliens, or missiles, and extra fuel is allocated for hitting dumps. If you forget about the fuel dumps you will run out of fuel and crash.

Another way of crashing is to hit the ceiling or floor of the cavern as you go through it. That is all too easily done. The caverns become progressively more difficult as you advance and when you have finished with the missiles of the first phase the aliens, which look like space invaders, get bigger and meaner.

Cavern Fighter is by no means the best version of the scramble-type game on the market. It bears too much resemblance to other games, such as the Melbourne House Penetrator, to be original in either concept or graphics. The screen display is dull and little imagination has been used with the effects which could have been created in the scenario.

Cavern Fighter is available from Bug-Byte and can be obtained from W H Smith and John Menzies retail outlets.

CAVERN FIGHTER
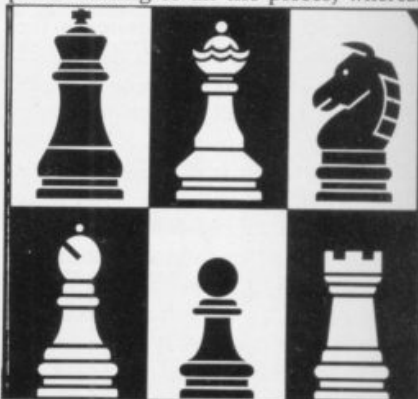Memory: **16K or 48K**
Price: **£5.95**
Joystick: **Kempston**
Gilbert Factor: **4**

Chess Tutor One

THERE ARE many programs for the 48K Spectrum which will play chess with a human player but very few which will teach the game of chess. **Chess Tutor One** compensates for that shortcoming in the computer market and serves as an excellent introduction to the mind game.

The program comprises several segments which can be loaded from a main menu. The segments introduce all the information you are likely to need when starting to play the game and it is split up in such a way as to be easy to understand. It also takes into account the level of play which you can obtain and could even be helpful to the experienced player.

Both the pieces and the tactics are explained and you have only to pick those parts of the course you need. For the beginner it may mean looking at the parts relating to all the pieces, whereas

the experienced player will want to learn about tactics, such as skewers, pins and forks.

All the lessons are punctuated with practical examples and the moves which can be made with the various chess pieces are shown graphically. As well as teaching the game, the package will also give the potential player a series of exercises to help reinforce the information provided. Most of the questions are fairly easy but they will help to put theory into practice.

Having said that, the price of Chess Tutor One seems excessive. It is a pity that price was fixed as it will deter many people who would otherwise buy this excellent piece of software.
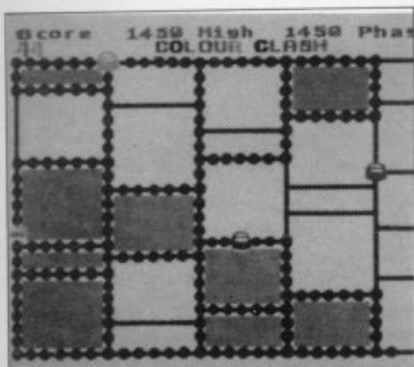
Chess Tutor One can be obtained from Sinclair Research.

CHESS TUTOR ONE
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£9.95**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Colour Clash

THE AUTHORS of **Colour Clash** seek to persuade the players that the world has been invaded by alien paint pots and that it can be saved only by colouring in all the rectangles on your television screen with a magic paintbrush. Why that should save the world, or why the world is threatened by those rather unintelligent pots is not explained, but the player is left to surround the rectangles and avoid the pots with only a few grenades to stave off destruction.

The idea behind Colour Clash is far from original but it is an enjoyable variation on the theme. Three keyboard options are presented and players with a Kempston or Sinclair Joystick 1 can use them. Movement is, therefore, easy and the main problem is, as it should be, to avoid the paint pots and not to disentangle fingers or to stumble round lining up the brush to the exact pixel to make turns possible. There are four levels to the game, which are played in sequence and then repeated, becoming more and more difficult, so that the game provides a challenge both for beginners and advanced players.

Produced by Romik Software Ltd, 277 Argyll Avenue, Slough, Berkshire, for any Spectrum.

COLOUR CLASH
Memory: 16K
Price: £7.99
Joystick: Kempston, Sinclair
Gilbert Factor: 4

County Cricket

ALLANSON COMPUTING has produced a tape which combines all the thrills and excitement of real **County Cricket.** In this 48K game you play the part of the captain of the team of your choice. By making the correct decisions you can guide it to the top of the league in a series of 20-overs matches. In addition, you can sit back and watch the play in hi-res graphics, a kind of arcade management game.

You start by picking your team from 15 possible players according to their form and then decide the order of play. After the coin has been tossed the game begins. If you are put in to bat you then have to sit and watch your team play and hope you have made the correct decision. If you become impatient you can either jump to a later point in the match or SAVE it for later.

Once you are all out you have to choose the order of bowlers, each of which is limited to four overs. As the game is played you can also move the fielders round or, as before, jump. If you win a match you are presented with a cup and move to the next round.

Written almost entirely in Basic, the game is a fairly good reproduction of the original, including being fairly slow-moving.

COUNTY CRICKET
Memory: 48K
Price: £4.95
Gilbert Factor: 6

The Crypt

CONTINUING its attraction for graphics adventures, Carnell Software produced **The Crypt** for the 48K Spectrum. The game is like The Black Crystal, although the scenario is a series of underground crypts which contain various treasures and monsters.

Unfortunately, for an animated game in which the players move around the screen, it is very slow. The slowness creates difficulty during play and after you have been through two crypts, picking up a sword or fighting a monster, you could become disenchanted with the package. Alternatively, a monster could zap you before you get anywhere and you would have to start the game again.

If the threat from the monsters is not sufficient you will also have to contend with the poison which the monsters may exude; if you are really unfortunate you will meet the dark cyclops.

The Crypt should be a fascinating and entertaining game but its slowness and the ease with which you can die detracts from its appeal.

THE CRYPT
Memory: 48K
Price: £4.95
Gilbert Factor: 6

Death Chase

ANIMATED graphics are making an appearance in more and more computer games, giving them a realism which would not have seemed possible a few years ago. **Death Chase** uses animated graphics to simulate the view from a motor-cycle. The player moves on it through trees, chasing other riders and occasionally spotting tanks or helicopters. Speed and direction are both realistically simulated, so much so that the inevitable crash comes as a worrying shock.

Other riders cross the player's field of vision, weaving back and forth, but never out of sight for long. It is impossible to overtake those riders; they cannot fire at you, they cannot escape unless you crash. It is at those harmless, realistically-drawn characters that the player must shoot to kill. No longer is it angular-looking invaders which are being killed. They are convincingly-drawn humans who must be killed just as ruthlessly and just as pointlessly. Their deaths are neat; no mangled remains are shown to trouble the player's conscience. The player is practically immortal, with three lives per game, and an indefinite number of games to be played.

After shooting a few riders it is tempting to dismount and talk to them. Of course that it is not possible — this is

an if-it-moves-shoot-it type game, not an adventure. Still, it is to be hoped that there will be a time when realism does not consist solely of creating more convincing victims, but in creating an environment where players face the consequences of their actions and killing people is not the only option.

Death Chase is produced by Micromega, 230–236 Lavender Hill, London SW11 1LE.

DEATH CHASE
Memory: 16K
Price: £6.95
Joystick: Kempston
Gilbert Factor: 6

De-Fusion

DE-FUSION, for the 48K Spectrum, has Happy Larry as a bomb disposal expert. His mission, should he choose to accept it, is to defuse a never-ending supply of time bombs while collecting flags and avoiding the skinhead's boot and the demon skulls.

The game starts with the screen being covered by square stepping-stones, on to some of which are added the flags and skulls. Larry must then reach the time bomb without getting caught. To make life more difficult, every time he stands on a stepping-stone it sinks without trace. His only method of restoring

them is to scroll the line he is on left and right; that brings in fresh stones from the edge of the screen.

He has one advantage over the boot — he can disappear off the edge of the screen and appear on the other side, leaving the boot trapped.

What appears to be a simple game can easily become very difficult, requiring plenty of thought, and all the time the seconds are ticking away. The game can be obtained from Lyndenhurst, 38 Ashley Road, London N19 3AF.

> **DE-FUSION**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£5.95**
> Joystick: **Kempston**
> Gilbert Factor: **6**

Demon Lord

ADVENTURE games tend to have certain things in common, points which the experienced adventurer takes for granted. N, S, E and W usually move a character north, south, east and west respectively; commands take the form verb, noun. Once one adventure game has been played, those points become self-evident, but they are baffling for a beginner, and **Demon Lord** makes no provision for a beginner.

The game is recorded in two 48K parts on two cassettes, which are sold separately. The player's task is to find and rescue King Arthur from Perilous Castle and to kill the Demon Lord who has taken him prisoner.

Each location through which the player passes is drawn painstakingly in such detail that a scene containing a key will be re-drawn without it following the command TAKE KEY. That makes progress slower than it might be, while adding little to the game. In fact, as the game progresses and more and more commands are rejected as being NOT ACCEPTABLE, it becomes obvious that too much memory has been allocated to the graphics and not sufficient to vocabulary.

To be enjoyable, an adventure game should have a number of responses. Demon Lord repeatedly produces the response SORRY NOT ACCEPTABLE. That can produce the wrong impression. TAKE THE BLUE KEY is labelled as unacceptable, whereas other games would indicate by a formula such as TAKE WHAT? that the problem lay with the limited program vocabulary.

Demon Lord is produced by MCE, 33 Albert Street, Mansfield.

> **DEMON LORD**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£5.50**
> Gilbert Factor: **5**

The Devil Rides In

STEP RIGHT into a nightmare with **The Devil Rides In** for the 16K Spectrum. You must stand alone in your magic circle and brandish your talisman against the various hosts of evil which are ready to destroy you.

Screen one of the game features ghosts and from there you will encounter spiders, little devils, winged demons, skeletons and the Angel of Death. Not only have you to deal with those horrors which cannot get into your protective circle but you also have to dodge the astral lights which can. Contact with the lights or with the boundary of the circle will destroy one of your three lives.

The game is obviously based on the Dennis Wheatley classic *The Devil Rides Out* and is complete with Angel of Death. It is an original twist to the Space Invaders type of program.

The graphics are good but slow and various pieces of demon and astral light are frequently left on the screen, pro-ducing an untidy effect. If you like games which are different from the usual adventure or zap 'em formats you will like this one from Carnell Software.

> **THE DEVIL RIDES IN**
> Memory: **16**
> Price: **£5.95**
> Joystick: **Protek, AGF with Interface II**
> Gilbert Factor: **7**

The Dietician

ONE OF SEVERAL programs from Keysoft for the home and office is **The Dietician** for the 48K Spectrum. It claims to be designed scientifically to help you lose weight at your own pace and on the diet of your choice.

The first step in using the program is to enter personal details such as your age, height, sex and activity level. You will be told what your ideal weight should be and you then have several options. The program will calculate how many calories you are allowed on the basis of how many weeks you wish to diet, or vice versa, and what your weight will be at weekly intervals if you stay with your calorie allowance. It will also indicate how many units of various food groups you can eat to shed the requisite amount of pounds — or kilogrammes, for that matter, as you can choose to operate in either metric or Imperial measure.

If you prefer to keep a computerised record of your diet, rather than written notes, and like to have simple calculations performed for you, you might find the program useful. Otherwise, it appears to have several shortcomings. Unless you already know something about dieting and calorific values, you may be deterred by the program's estimation of what is an ideal weight, which seems to take more account of fashion than common sense.

The various diet plans, too, are over-simplified and it is no easy matter to discover from the program how many ounces or grammes of each particular food your diet allows. It is also easy to get lost in the program, which does not always offer a simple route back to the main menu — if you will forgive the expression.

The Dietician is available from Keysoft, Freepost, London N17 6BR.

> **THE DIETICIAN**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£6.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **4**

Dlan

DLAN, short for display language, is a system for generating textual displays for both versions of the Spectrum. By defining any number of windows on the screen you can define the text, type style, INK and PAPER colours and direction of scroll in it. You can also define a pattern round the edge of the window. All the features can be put together to produce an advertising display at far less cost than a purpose-built system.

Each command is written as a REM statement, followed by a number of parameters detailing what will happen on-screen. Once complete, one USER command will set the whole thing running and it will then cycle around the commands non-stop. As with any new language, time must be spent learning it but effective results can be obtained by non-computer users in a short time. As well as all the commands to define the parameters it is also possible to build-in subroutines so that one display can call others.

What sets it apart from an ordinary program is the choice of 11 typefaces, four in the 16K version. They add a touch of professionalism to the display. A good utility program which can only add to the uses to which a Spectrum can be put. It can be obtained from Campbell Systems.

DLAN
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£7.95**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Dungeons of Doom

DUNGEONS OF DOOM also includes the game **Escape from the Underworld.** The first involves the player descending through a maze to find treasure; the second involves climbing upwards to escape the dungeons.

In each game a section of the maze is shown on the screen. Players who were attracted to the game by its bright, prismatic cover will be disappointed by its graphics. The maze comprises squares and rectangles and the monsters which inhabit it are not displayed, or even described, but merely named — the effect is of a ZX-81 game converted quickly for a Spectrum.

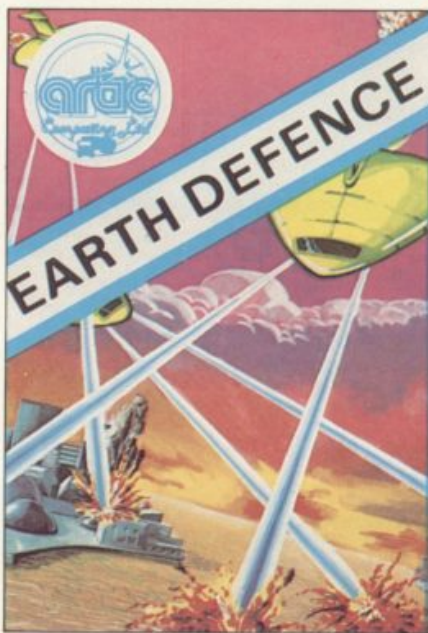Maze generation in the program is faulty and it is possible to materialise in a section from which there is no exit. If that section is small the flaw soon becomes obvious but on a bigger scale a player could move pointlessly for some time without realising escape was impossible.

The game is slow-moving; despite the poor graphics the picture appears slowly and the player is required to press ENTER after every move. The speed is explained by the game being written in Basic but the need to press ENTER and the sloppy maze-generation are programming flaws.

Dungeons of Doom is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Temptation Software Ltd, 27 Cinque Ports Street, Rye, Sussex.

DUNGEONS OF DOOM
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£5.95**
Gilbert Factor: **3**

Earth Defence

EARTH DEFENCE, for the 16K Spectrum, is a fairly faithful reproduction of the arcade game Missile Defence. In it you must defend your cities and missile sites from invading nuclear missiles and other craft.

You have three missile batteries from which to fire and a controllable cross-hair sight. Timing is all-important. You have a limited number of missiles and time must be allowed for them to reach their destination. If you survive the first wave of attackers your score is totalled according to how many cities and missiles you have remaining and another wave appears. Bonus cities are given every 1,000 points. The game has three levels of skill and can be played by one or two players, there is also provision to use either a Sinclair or Kempston joystick or the keyboard.

The graphics are adequate for this kind of game, although the sound is rather limited during the explosions.

EARTH DEFENCE
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£4.95**
Joystick: **Sinclair, Kempston**
Gilbert Factor: **5**

Extended Basic

MANY PROGRAMMERS would say that there is not much you could do to make Sinclair Software better, apart from making it faster, but **Extended Basic** for any Spectrum has proved them wrong. The extensions are more like toolkit routines and most of them are for use outside Basic programs.

There are 10 commands available in the package and they include auto line numbering, renumbering, memory left and the variables being used in a program. The program will also allow errors in Basic listings to be tracked using a TRACE command.

A real-time clock is also included in the package and it can be switched on to and off the screen at any time. It can also be used in other Basic programs and will continue to operate while the computer is doing other things.

The commands are entered as keywords, just as are those of Sinclair Basic, with the push of only two keys. That makes usage easy and provides a compatibility of use with the rest of the Basic on the Spectrum.

The package is called Extended Basic but the commands which are included form what could more correctly be described as a toolkit rather than an extension to a language.

The utilities, however, are useful in writing long programs and can increase the efficiency of the machine.

Extended Basic can be obtained from CP Software, 17 Orchard, Prestwood, Great Missenden, Bucks HP16 0NN.

EXTENDED BASIC
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£9.95**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Fighter Pilot

ALL THE ADVERTISING for **Fighter Pilot** has been a comparison between it and the well-known Flight Simulation from Psion. While they are similar they each appear to be aimed at different sectors of the buying public. Each succeeds in its own area. To do everything it does Fighter Pilot may not teach you so much about controlling an aircraft but it is just as entertaining. If possible buy both; if not, Fighter Pilot seems to have the edge.

On loading the game you are given four options—landing practice, flying training, air-to-air combat practice and air-to-air combat. To those you can add blind flying, where you lose the horizon, and/or cross winds and turbulence. Having made your choice you are switched to the cockpit, where all the usual controls are visible, including artificial horizon.

If needed, a map can be called-up showing the positions of the four runways and the various beacons — also any enemy aircraft if in combat mode. The map is updated while you watch it.

The flying area has wraparound so you cannot fly too far — about 100×150 miles — but it can give odd instrument readings when flying over a border. The game is compatible with Kempston, Sinclair and AGF Joysticks and the cursor keys. It can be obtained from Digital Integration.

FIGHTER PILOT
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£7.95**
Joystick: **Kempston, AGF, Sinclair**
Gilbert Factor: **8**

Fireflash

ALIEN MISSILES are descending towards the planet's surface, showering warheads on buildings and silos, while planet-levelling bombs detonate above the ground, preparing the way for the landing of the enormous alien mothership. Thus the scene is set for **Fireflash,** a run-of-the-mill arcade game from Abacus Programs which owes not a little to the popular Missile Command. You are in control of the Fireflash guided missiles and laser cannons which comprise the planet's defence.

Visually the game is more or less

what you would expect and the on-screen action holds few surprises, but the machine code program is sufficiently competent to while away an idle hour or two, and there is a poke facility allowing you to alter some of the program features.

On the flip side is **Destroyer,** a plodding submarine attack simulation which employs the limited sound effects of the Spectrum to imitate your destroyer's sonar.

FIREFLASH
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£5.95**
Gilbert Factor: **5**

French is Fun

THE CASSETTE insert for **French is Fun** claims that the program is designed for the student and the traveller, which reveals a basic flaw, since a less convenient and portable form of phrasebook could

hardly be devised. Nevertheless, it is clear that a fair amount of thought and care have gone into the program. Attractive graphics accompany each of the various themes you can study, such as countryside, beach, cafe or street, and you can choose the method you want to use. In the picture-only mode, the French name for each element is given as it unfolds; there is also a picture and phrases mode, or pictures with a French-English or English-French test.

The test consists of filling in the word required, with the computer accepting only the letters it is expecting. Unfortunately, the computer's spelling of French is not entirely reliable and some of the words in its vocabulary are unusual, to say the least. These are faults in what might otherwise have been an entertaining and instructive program.

French is Fun is produced by CDS Micro Systems, 10 Westfield Close, Tickhill, Doncaster DN11 9LA.

FRENCH IS FUN
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£5.95**
Gilbert Factor: **5**

Galactic Trooper

THE GALACTIC attack force is, apparently, attacking the earth. It is the player's job to save our planet for as long as possible by destroying the downward-moving galactic troopers, their landing craft and mothership, as frequently as possible.

This description sounds familiar and, indeed, the game and its object would be instantly recognisable to anybody who had played Space Invaders or one of its many other imitators. Move left, move right, fire. See the explosion. Hear the beeping noises. All that was entertaining and original, five years ago. A new variation seems pointless and dated. In writing **Galactic Trooper** the authors proved they can produce good imitations. Such a game is a test only of their programming skill, not an addition to the range of the software market.

Galactic Trooper is produced by Romik Software Ltd, 277 Argyll Avenue, Slough, Berkshire.
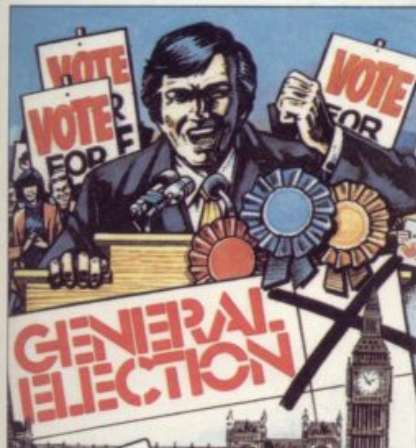
GALACTIC TROOPER
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£5.99**
Joystick: **Kempston**
Gilbert Factor: **3**

General Election

GENERAL ELECTION is a simulation of the events leading to a poll for two to four players but not the computer. Once you have chosen your party you start on the campaign trail round the country, try-

ing to persuade the population to vote for you. After you have visited all 100 constituencies you sit back and wait for the results.

The screen layout is a 10×10 board on which your candidate moves, the moves being decided by the throw of a dice. That is scarcely the ideal use for a computer; some board games have been translated to a computer successfully but this is not one of them.

To throw the dice the 'R' key must be pressed, as it must for almost all events. The only time it is not needed is when you have to guess the best policy — similar to letting the computer think of a number you then have to find, and about as interesting.

Once you have toured the country the results of the election are displayed. That takes almost half an hour. If you have never been bored by a game, try this one. It can be obtained from Bug-Byte.

> **GENERAL ELECTION**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£6.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **1**

The Island

FIND THE ISLAND, find the treasure and return home with it. That is the challenge presented by **The Island,** an adventure game for the 48K Spectrum.

Leaving home and setting off for the

island are simple enough if the player remembers to examine the map before leaving. Sailing towards the island produces one of the action sequences which are advertised on the cassette cover. The boat must be guided round numerous rocks and a crash will result in the central character's death.

It is a simple little game which seems out of place in an adventure game and which will send players expecting to be tested on their mental, not their manual dexterity, back to the beginning of the game many times.

The adventure has sufficient openings to persuade a beginner to continue with it and sufficient problems to test anyone. An addition to the normal adventure format is sound; the mosquitos buzz ominously, the flute plays tunelessly, and the computer reacts with different sounds to statements which it

understands and to ones it does not.

The Island is produced by Virgin Games Ltd.
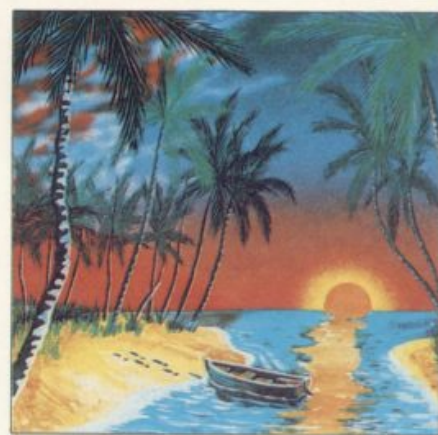
> **THE ISLAND**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£5.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **7**

The Island

FARAWAY islands, perilous quests, hidden treasures and ancient temples are the raw material of many classic adventure games. Crystal Computing's **The Island** is no exception. The program drops you from your aircraft on to a long sandy Pacific beach with the promise of an ultimate test of logic and deduction.

The island is set within the Ring of Fire, a chain of volcanoes bordering the ocean. Many explorers are said to have perished attempting to unravel the island's secrets and you are unlikely to be any luckier than the others.

The adventure is of the text-only type and is designed to run on 48K Spectrum. The initial instruction page tells you that the game will take the standard two-word commands and warns you to beware of red herrings, one of which you might unwisely pick up at the first location. It will explode with awful consequences shortly after. Movement is in the traditional N, S, E, W format but you may find it extremely difficult to get anywhere remotely interesting, as you will probably die or at least become irritated with the whole process after a relatively short time. Compared to similar adventures, **The Island** is dull stuff with nothing out of the ordinary to recommend it.

> **THE ISLAND**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£7.50**
> Gilbert Factor: **4**

Lojix

BILLED as a game which will frustrate and intrigue, **Lojix** will certainly frustrate you. The idea is that you have 18 different shaped pieces you have to fit into a grid.

If you complete the puzzle, Virgin, which has put 50 pence into a prize fund for every game sold, will send you your prize. It should be noted that the only other condition for collecting the prize is that you should be sane — hardly a good condition for anyone buying this game.

There seems to be little point in paying for a computer game when the same thing could be done as easily and far more cheaply with a few pieces of plastic.

Lojix can be obtained from Virgin Games.

> **LOJIX**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£5.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **3**

Magic Meanies

Magic Meanies, for the 16K Spectrum, gives CDS Micro Systems an opportunity to produce yet another version of Pac-man, although this time there is not even a maze.

CDS has dressed-up the concept a little by calling the Pac-man Meltec and giving him hero status. Meltec has to collect all the lead and cherries in the various levels of the game, being careful not to fall into the hands of the meanies which can move around the paths he has created.

To get rid of a meanie being particularly dastardly you can fire one of five crystal balls. You can also block their paths by dropping cherries in their way. After you have completed one screen you will find another, and another, and another, which all look similar in make-up.

Once you have finished you will find yourself on the high-score table which looks interesting until you discover you have to experiment to use it. The author tells you that you must use up, down, left and right keys to compose your name but there is no information how to do it.

Magic Meanies ranks as one of the poorer pieces of machine-coded software and has little to commend it. It can be obtained from CDS Micro Systems.

> **MAGIC MEANIES**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£5.95**
> Joystick: **Kempston**
> Gilbert Factor: **2**

Mansfield Park

AT FIRST SIGHT it may seem strange to study a great work of literature by means of a computer tape but **Mansfield Park** does not claim to form a substitute for careful reading of the text. What it does, and does well, is provide a large range of questions and answers at secondary school examination level on which a student can be tested.

Areas such as themes, content and characterisation are covered. A series of questions together with very full answers can be called-up on each subject and the student can be tested on the random order while being timed.

For those who learn by being tested, the program would form an excellent revision aid. Minor flaws in the program are that multiple-choice answers are shown singly rather than together, making choice more difficult than is necessary. Also, minor grammatical flaws and spelling mistakes grate in an educational program and it is to be hoped that they will be removed from subsequent editions.
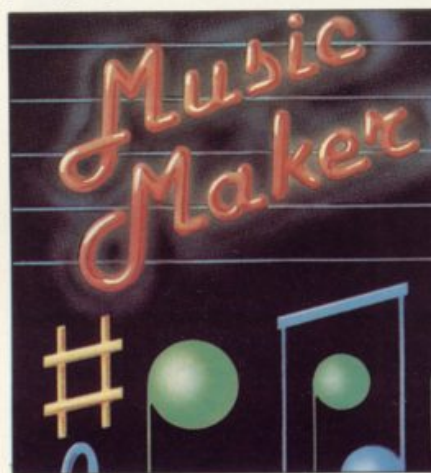
Mansfield Park is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Sussex Software, Townsend, Poulshot, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 1SD.

> **MANSFIELD PARK**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£10**
> Gilbert Factor: **7**

Music Maker

NONE but the tone deaf and owners with additional hardware attached to their machines would be able to detect a high degree of musical quality in the high, piercing sounds emitted by the Spectrum. The proliferation of programs devoted to its musical functions is therefore puzzling.

Music Maker allows users to compose, play and edit tunes for the Spec-

trum but does so in very slow fashion. Key signature, speed, notes and their length all must be picked-out laboriously. Those who are not gifted musically could probably produce similar musical effects after spending an hour programming with the Spectrum manual to hand. Musical notation would not be produced in the latter case but programming techniques would be developed.

Although no knowledge of musical theory is necessary to use the program, the use of musical notation to show notes already chosen would probably deter those who cannot read music.

Music Maker is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Bellflower Software, 6 Rosewood Avenue, Greenford, Middlesex.

> **MUSIC MAKER**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£5.75**
> Gilbert Factor: **3**

Musicmaster

MUSICMASTER, for the 48K Spectrum is supplied in the now standard Sinclair presentation box and includes an instruction manual and a keyboard overlay. During loading you are given a screen display of two music staves which are re-drawn once the program has loaded. That is obviously a waste of time on a long program.

In use, the program, which is menu-driven, gives you the option of a stave display which spans two octaves or a keyboard display which has only one. You then have a choice of notes on music, create a tune, play, amend, save or load a tune, stop or switch mode — keyboard or stave; there is also the option to COPY your tune.

The notes on music begin by playing and drawing a very slow chromatic scale in both modes. It then explains the use of key signatures very well, using sound and a visual display. That is probably one of the most valuable parts of the program but is slightly spoiled because the Spectrum does not BEEP precisely in tune.

When writing a tune the program is again interesting and fairly effective. You set your own time and key signatures — you can use only accidentals in stave mode — and each note is sounded and appears on the stave as you key it in.

It is possible to play back the tune at any point and at any speed by entering the number of crochets per minute. The only problem is that the stave is rather short, allowing you to see only about three bars of music at one time.

After a slow start it warms up to become an interesting program with educational possibilities, especially for children who are more excited by the idea of computing than ordinary music teaching. Available from Sinclair Research Ltd.

> **MUSICMASTER**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£9.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **6**

Nineteenth Century England

NINETEENTH Century England is designed as a revision aid for secondary level learning, a function which it fulfils admirably. The program LOADs in eight sections, each of which treats a separate aspect of the nineteenth century in England. Headings include The age of Palmerston, Empire and foreign policy, and England 1866-1885, among others. Each section contains a series of questions and answers which can be viewed together as revision material, or used as a timed or untimed test.

Unlike a book, there is no instant reference facility but, also unlike a book, there is scope for repeated testing of a student.

The program is aimed directly at those studying for examinations. Computer owners wishing to gain a clear picture of the nineteenth century would be well-advised to look elsewhere. Likewise, those who have passed secondary standard will find the program, like many other revision aids, most interesting for the way in which it highlights the merits and deficiencies of the examination system with which it deals.

Ideal for schools and useful for students, **Nineteenth Century England** is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Sussex Software, Townsend, Poulshot, Devizes, Wiltshire SN10 1SD.

NINETEENTH CENTURY ENGLAND
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£10**
Gilbert Factor: **8**

1984

THE YEAR 1984 has, for some time, been associated with dictatorial regimes and the tight fist of fascism. You can change that state of affairs in a government strategy game, **1984,** for the 48K Spectrum. It will first produce a bar chart of the state of the nation, which contains the figures for such national economic indicators as government spending, money put into industry and agriculture, and the economic situation for individuals.

To keep your books in order you will need to juggle with budgets for the various taxes, as well as those for allowances such as old age pensions and child allowances.

You will be rated at the end of each year depending on how well you have done your sums and whether you have a gigantic surplus or deficit for the year.
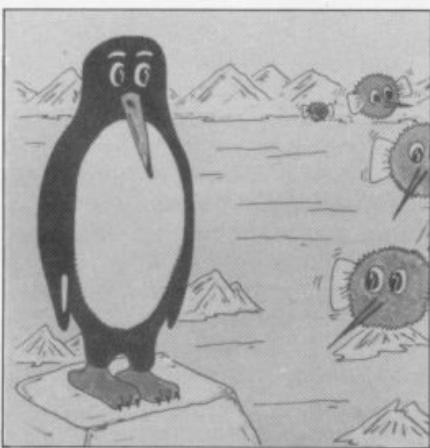
Also included with the package is a 'free' pocket guide to running Britain. It is useful if you do not understand what is happening in some parts of the game. It also shows that running a country is not as easy as it would seem. 1984 is an excellent game for the strategist who likes a challenge. It can be obtained from Incentive Software, 54 London Street, Reading RG1 4SQ.

1984
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£5.50**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Pengy

IT IS DIFFICULT being a penguin and having to push ice blocks all your life. It is even more tricky if you have to take part in a game such as

Pengy, for the 16K Spectrum, and dump the blocks on top of killer bees to stay alive.

When first played, the game seems difficult and the player will not last long as the ice bees are intelligent enough to root out any penguin which treads on their turf. It is also difficult to decide whether the ice block you intend to push will slide forward or just melt. If it melts the bees, which look like Pac-Man blobs, will not be affected sufficiently to die and you could lose one of your three lives.

The graphics are fairly simple and flicker when they move. It is difficult to decide which block of ice will move when you push and in that way the game seems to have no direction.

The difficulty of the game and the simple concept of pushing ice on to bees produces what can be described as only a mediocre game, although with a little polishing the standard could have been raised. The author has not provided on-screen instructions on how to play.

The Pengy concept may be new but the initial interest in the game soon departs. It can be obtained from Micromania, 14 Lower Hill Road, Epsom, Surrey KT19 8LT.

PENGY
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£5.95**
Joystick: **AGF, Kempston**
Gilbert Factor: **4**

Proteus

PROTEUS has a complicated senario in which you act as pathfinder for your main fleet of starships. You have to clear a route through a screenful of planet debris, at the same time knocking out your enemy's communication points and defending yourself against enemy attack. The game is much simpler to play onscreen than the cassette insert implies.

It is written to a good arcade standard, is fast-moving, and requires conserable practice for success, all the more since you cannot fire your guided missiles and manoeuvre your spacecraft at the same time.

Supplied as a bonus on the B side is **Android Pit Rescue,** a Basic game where for a change you do not have to kill anything but rather rescue trapped miners from a flooded pit. It has the appearance of a watery Kong type of game, without the ladders, but is entertaining to play nevertheless.

Proteus can be obtained from Abacus Programs.

PROTEUS
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£5.95**
Gilbert Factor: **5**

Quazar

AIMED AT the home/education market, **Quazar** is a collection of four programs for the 16K machine, all in the same format. The idea is that you are presented with a maze and are then given a general knowledge question. From the choice of three answers you must select the correct one then find that number in the maze.

Once you have found it you have a limited time to guide a little man to it. If you take too long a bow and arrow chases you and eventually shoots you, a change from simply getting a black mark. For a successful answer you receive a score and another question.

Each of the programs contains different questions and each contains enough to avoid continuous repetition. They range from simple Drake is to Duck as Sheep is to . . . to mathematical problems of the kind where If Mary has six green beans.

If the game is too fast for a particular child, instructions are given with the cassette to alter the speed. It is a difficult area to know what would hold a child's attention but this seems to be a reasonable attempt. Quazar can be obtained from Rose Cassettes.
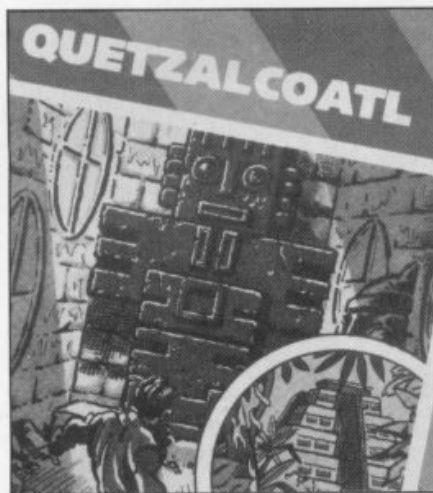
QUAZAR
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£4.95**
Gilbert Factor: **4**

Quetzalcoatl

QUETZALCOATL comprises four fully illustrated, three-dimensional mazes. The aim is to descend from one to the other, collecting glass beads on the way, to escape. The mazes are intricate and the player begins without map or compass.

Various dangers are to be found in the mazes. Descent from level to level must be via the blue chutes and not via the dangerous black chutes. Walking into a wall is apt to result in being burned alive. Each level contains a god, either benevolent or malevolent and, somehow, the malevolent gods are always easier to find than the blue chutes.

The instructions are clear and the game easy to begin. Drawing a map for future attempts is slow and somewhat laborious. Glass beads should never be used as markers as they appear and reappear, even after they have been collected. The graphics are excellent; the view is drawn quickly and clearly; gods

appear magically when approached and the map crumbles convincingly whenever exposed to light.

It is an excellent maze game, containing elements of danger, difficulty and skill which can be recommended to all except those in whom mazes produce a blind panic. It is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Virgin Games Ltd.

QUETZALCOATL
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£5.95**
Gilbert Factor: **8**

Robot Panic

THE FIRST question which enters into the minds of players of **Robot Panic** will be how could any manufacturer have the audacity to put this game on the relatively-sophisticated computer market and expect it to sell?

The graphics are painfully amateurish and jerky; the characters to be shot are virtually indistinguishable save by name, and the skill levels so lacking in thought as to leave the player bored in a few minutes.

The aim is to move a robot through the cargo hold of a spaceship, shooting down the dangerous creatures in each hold and avoiding the crushing walls. The easy level is ridiculously simple, while the impossible level is just that.

The cassette cover is one of the most professional aspects. Do not be fooled by it — the game is nowhere near acceptable professional quality.

Robot Panic is produced by Soft Mill, 20 Station Road, Haddenham, Ely, Cambs. CB6 3XD.

ROBOT PANIC
Memory: **16K**
Price: **£5.05**
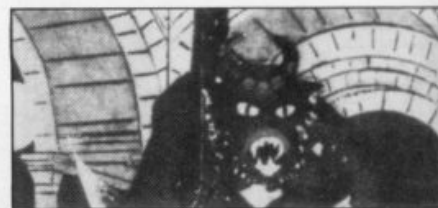Gilbert Factor: **1**

Satan's Pendulum

ONCE SATAN'S PENDULUM has LOADed the player is given a glimpse of the torture chamber of Prospero's castle where the heroine, Pixel Ramtop, is being held prisoner. By the look of her, Pixel has already been tortured by the over-application of plastic surgery but she is, at present, being tortured by **Satan's Pendulum,** which swings lower and lower until, eventually, it will cut her to pieces.

To save Pixel, the player must move round a ground plan of the castle. In each room there are evil monsters which attack and which must be destroyed if possible. The more monsters killed, the greater the player's strength becomes. The greater the player's strength, the greater the number of rooms which can be entered. The torture chamber is the most difficult room to enter.

There is a time limit, for you must save Pixel before the Pendulum reaches her. If not, you are transported to the torture chamber to watch her die.

The game involves strategy, as the player must decide whether to build strength slowly by fighting the easily-killed snakes in the outer rooms or to try to increase it quickly, with the greater risks entailed, by advancing towards the centre. It also involves co-ordination to kill the excellently-drawn animated monsters.

The booklet accompanying the cassette explains the principles of animation on the Spectrum in some depth, together with short sample programs. That useful addition is the finishing
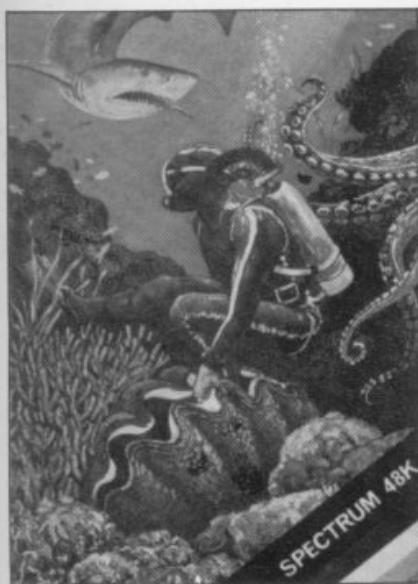
touch to an excellent game which is marred only by the needless and vicious sexism of Pixel's portrayal.

Satan's Pendulum is produced for the 48K Spectrum by Minatron Computing, 34 Pinewood Close, Westbury-on-Trym, Bristol BS9 4AJ.

SATAN'S PENDULUM
Memory: **48K**
Price: **£5.95**
Joystick: **Kempston**
Gilbert Factor: **7**

Scuba Dive

D IVE INTO the depths of the ocean to collect pearls from the oysters in **Scuba Dive** for the 48K Spectrum. You must jump into the water from your boat and scuba your way through the hazards, including sharks and squid. If you pass them you will have to slow down so that you do not hit your head on the sea bottom. When the oysters open you can collect your treasure but, again, do not get trapped.

As you go down further, aquatic life will change and the sharks will get bigger. You will also meet the octopus which guards the way into another level.

Pass the octopus and you will enter an even more dangerous domain. Once you have entered you will have to collect your pearls from the giant clams and they have a nasty tendency to close on your head.

Scuba Dive is an impressive and original game. The effect of underwater diving is achieved so well that you could imagine you are looking into the perils of the deep.

The arcade display has a three-dimensional quality about it and the movements of the various sea creatures you will meet have been incorporated carefully into the game to make it a fairly accurate interpretation of life under water.

As well as having the pearls to collect you might find a treasure chest from a sunken galleon on your travels. There are three types of chest and the amount of points you score obtaining the treasure will depend on which level of the game you are playing.

Scuba Dive, with full aquarium of dangerous predators, can be obtained from Durrel Software.

> **SCUBA DIVE**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£5.95**
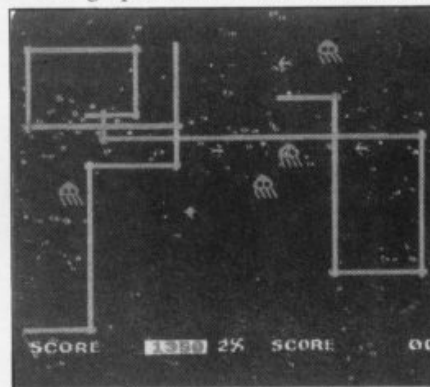> Joystick: **Most programmable**
> Gilbert Factor: **9**

Shark Attack

T HE OBJECT of **Shark Attack** is to cross the sea, avoiding the sharks, protecting the octopi and leaving as much net as possible trailing in the sea. As with so many Romik Software games, the story-line seems to fit the game uncomfortably but who buys a speed-and-reactions game for its storyline?

Leaving sufficient net produces a bonus, depending on how many octopi have been saved, and a fresh screen containing an additional octopus. A shark which eats an octopus becomes a super shark which can eat nets for a short time, so octopi should be protected by rows of net as soon as possible.

The graphics are not all that could be

expected of a professional game these days but, even so, the gradual increase in speed and difficulty make it suitable for all arcade game lovers.

Shark Attack is produced for the Spectrum by Romik Software Ltd, 277 Argyll Avenue, Slough, Berkshire.

> **SHARK ATTACK**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£5.99**
> Gilbert Factor: **5**

Space Station Zebra

S PACE STATION ZEBRA spins silently in space and you, the pilot and sole survivor, look out into the void until your radar screen warns you of approaching craft. As the space wheel shudders from the first alien onslaught, you attempt frantically to slow the spinning speed of the station to aim your lazgun at the approaching extraterrestrials. Before you can even pinpoint the enemy in your wandering sights the attack is over and the station destroyed. Press any key to continue, the computer suggests, hopefully.

The graphics in **Space Station Zebra,** for the 48K Spectrum, are excellent, depicting the control panel and the starry blackness beyond, dotted with the hulks of dead spacecraft and lifeless planets. The aliens, too, appear suitably fearsome in the brief seconds they take to zoom towards you.

Keyboard operation, however, is fiendishly difficult, and firing the lazgun involves the simultaneous operation of five keys, four to aim and one to fire. Destroying the aliens requires more luck than judgment and high scores are difficult to obtain.

Space Station Zebra, from Beyond Software, is certainly challenging and not a game for the novice.

> **SPACE STATION ZEBRA**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£6.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **6**

Spectsound

S PECTSOUND for the 16K Spectrum was written in 1982 and shows remarkably how much Spectrum programming has advanced since then. Once loaded, you have to RUN the program and, worse still, you have to break into it to save or load a tune. As a bonus, if you enter GOTO 45 instead of RUN and then press the B key you are treated to an inaccurate rendition of Hava-Nagila.

The program is not simple to use, the instructions not being clear.

The keys are very slow to react when you are playing and as the only onscreen representation of the notes is their code numbers, you can lose track of your tune quickly. When playing back a tune, you have the option of seeing the code numbers and duration of the notes but that display does not scroll itself automatically.

When the program was first written it may have been useful; it no longer seems to be. It can be obtained from PDQ Software.

> **SPECTSOUND**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£6.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **2**

Strike Four

FOR THE 16K machine, **Strike Four** is a compendium of four games all written in Basic. Each includes a title screen containing the instructions which can be printed-out on the ZX printer. Once you have tired of the game, it can load the next one automatically.

The first game, **Serpent's Tail,** is a new variation on the old favourite, Snake. You have eight screens to negotiate, all with different monsters and difficulties. A reasonably fast game.

The second is **3-D Maze.** First you choose the size of the maze and then you have to find your way through it. To add to your difficulties, every now and then the Maze Master arrives to test your reactions.

Next is a graphics utility, **Sketch Pad,** to allow you to create pictures. Finally, **Zombie Island** — a game for up to six players where you are marooned on a desert island inhabited by zombies and death pits. Supplied with a six-shooter, you must survive longer than the other players.

All the games show the limitations of trying to write fast arcade games in Basic but you have four of them. Strike Four can be obtained from Spectresoft.

> **STRIKE FOUR**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£4.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **4**

Superchess Three

SUPERCHESS THREE is one of the best versions of the popular mind game for the 48K Spectrum. It is an upgrade of the CP Software original Superchess which has foxed many better-than-average players.

As well as allowing you to play games at 10 levels of difficulty, the program will also analyse chess problems of up to four mating moves. The option will also give you an idea of how mate in various positions should be achieved.

One of the good aspects of **Superchess Three** is that a relative beginner can play on level one and have the feeling that he is a good match for the computer. On the higher levels, which can take some time to play, the expert at chess will find the computer an impressive opponent.

All the usual features which have become part of computer chess games are included. There is a recommended move option, an option to change sides halfway through a game, and a routine which will allow you to change the colours of both the pieces and the board.

An extra feature which is not included in most other chess games for the Spectrum is the technical information option. The section will tell you briefly about the techniques which the computer uses to find its moves and which are used when it analyses problems.

The program produces an absorbing game which it can modify quickly if the human player changes tactics. It is just as capable of defence as it is of attack.

We have no hesitation in recommending Superchess Three as one of the best chess programs for the Spectrum. It can be obtained from CP Software.

> **SUPERCHESS THREE**
> Memory: **48K**
> Price: **£8.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **9**

3D Monster Chase

MAZE GAMES for the Spectrum are being produced in ever-greater quantities. In some cases that is justified — a maze game can be exciting, skilful, and even original. **3D Monster Chase** is none of those things.

A standard, three-dimensional representation of a maze is shown, through which the player must move to find ever-increasing numbers of keys and to defuse the bombs which, for no good reason, appear whenever keys are found. An additional feature is the monsters, resembling three-legged Easter eggs, which can kill the hapless maze-farer unless bombed out of existence by the grenades provided.

Mazes are such a standard feature of Spectrum software that the monsters in them must be spectacular enough, or the purpose exciting enough, to tempt the player to enter. Being killed or finding a key in this game both produce similar feelings of lack of concern in the player.

Produced for the Spectrum by Romik Software Ltd, 277 Argyll Avenue, Slough, Berkshire.

> **3D MONSTER CHASE**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£6.99**
> Gilbert Factor: **3**

3D Strategy

NOUGHTS AND CROSSES can be a deadly dull pastime especially when played against a computer. The concept can be turned into an interesting game when a three-dimensional aspect is incorporated into the computer. That type of thinking has gone into **3D Strategy.**
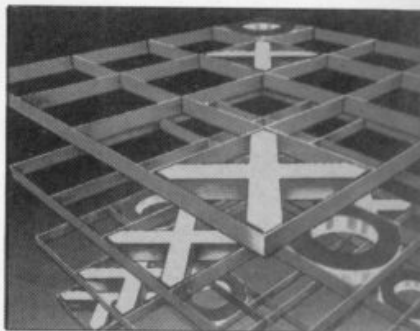
The game is played in a three-dimensional cube but, apart from that complication, is not much different from the original concept although that one difference is a big one.

The computer will play two types of game with you. The tactical play will make the computer move in a risky and decisive way with a good chance for the calm human player. The positional play option will make the computer move in a considered way. That means the human player can tailor the game to any style of play.

To make the competition even tougher you can put a time option, for minutes or seconds, into effect. It operates in a similar way to blitz chess, where the player and computer must complete a game before time expires.

3D Strategy can be obtained from Quicksilva.

> **3D STRATEGY**
> Memory: **16K**
> Price: **£6.95**
> Gilbert Factor: **8**

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