The soft touch

The heavens have opened and showered James Walsh with a wealth of software for his Spectrum. Read on and find out what he thought of it all . . .

Painter
— A&F Software

The first thing that can be said about Painter is that it certainly is different! This does, in turn, make it rather more difficult to explain.

The object of the game is run around a maze of paint pots on the screen and in turn fill them up with paint. This is whilst being chased by at least one roller, and making sure that you do not run out of paint. If you succeed in filling each pot then you play again but with two rollers chasing you, and so it goes on.

This is a novel game, using the properties of the Spectrum well. It may not be the most innovative program of this review, but it is one of the most enjoyable to play. The graphics are good, and the movement smooth. A game well worth playing, though I feel £7.00 is a little steep!

One characteristic of all A&F Software so far is that though it may be good, the plain packaging prevents it making sufficient impact on the shelf. A shame . . .
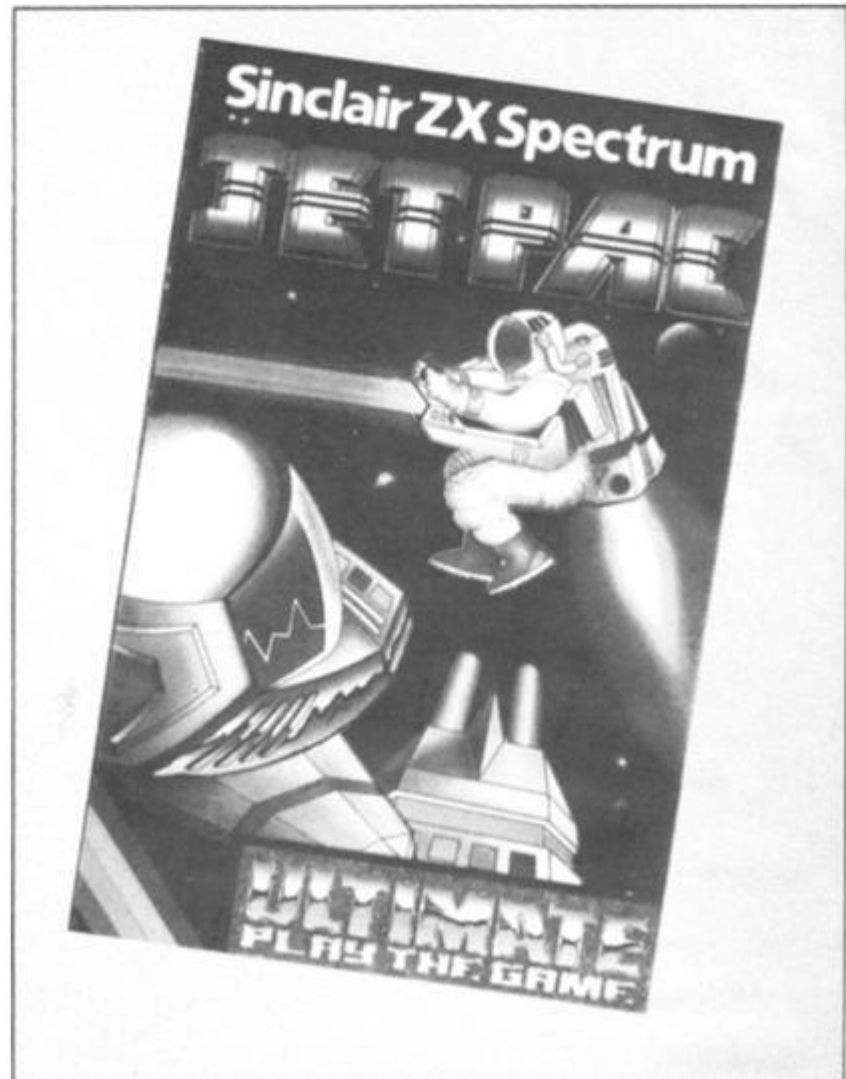
The Dungeon Master
— Crystal Computing

The Dungeon Master is nicely packaged with a large booklet of well thought out documentation. The concept of this game will be better known to the players of the traditional 'Dungeons and Dragons' games rather than the adventure games which are widely available for the Spectrum. This is, in fact, the first attempt to put the real 'D&D' game onto the Spectrum. Needless to say, it uses the full 48K of memory. This is partly due to the fact that it is written totally in BASIC, but also because the author has done his best to cram as much of the game onto the computer as possible. Obviously you cannot expect a full version on such a relatively limited computer as the Spectrum.

The game is based on the development of a character whose fate is determined by his own actions. The character is trapped in a dungeon and has to conquer many challenges. Though this is a totally text game, its main dif- ference is the fact that you can define your own dungeons as well as dangers. Hence the limits of the game extend as far as your imagination. On the tape there is a sample 140 location dungeons for your use.

This cassette must be highly recommended for its versatility, originality and quality. For an avid adventure player this is definitely well worth obtaining.

Jetpac
— Ashby Computers and Graphics Ltd

The idea of this game is that you are an astranaut and your object is to collect as many of the valuable minerals, etc, of the planet which you are on, whilst also collecting fuel for your safe departure. Though the scenario is not the most original around, what puts it to number one in this review is the fantastic quality of the graphics. The characters are beautifully designed and colour is used very well indeed. But the thing that really caught my eye was the incredible smoothness of it all. Never in the game will you see one jerky move. As you get to more
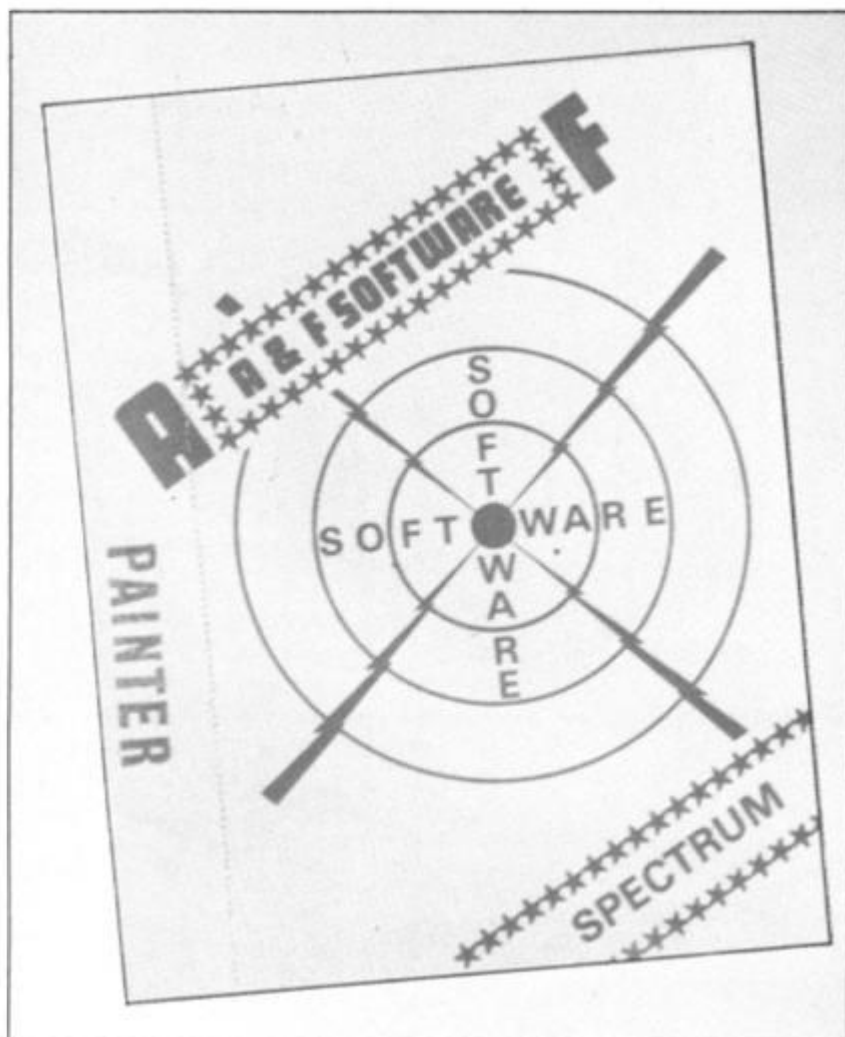
planets the inhabitants get more and more determined to stop you. Another nice feature is the way in which, as you proceed through the game, your rocket turns into the space shuttle — a nice touch.

There are five controls to be mastered: left, right, fire, thrust and hover. All of which maybe controlled via the keyboard or through a joystick.

Overall this is a very well put together piece of software. If you want a game with impact then this is one of the best around. An excellent program and game.

3D Tanx — dk'Tronics

The idea of the game is to destroy the 2D tanks which are moving from right to left across the screen, using your 3D gun turret. There are three levels of play, one or two player options, a hold feature, demo and training modes. One particularly nice feature is that you are allowed to pick your own control keys. Just to make it more difficult the tanks can actually fire back at you.

Colour is used well in this game, but whilst the detail of the graphics is good, the tanks still only move one character square at a time which does look rather jerky. The gun turret looks very good and moves very well indeed whilst you aim. Probably the most advanced feature of this game is the semi-recoil of the nozzle of the gun, going down each time you fire.

To conclude, it can be said that though the standard of 3D Tanx is not quite the best in this review, it is an addictive and entertaining game. Well recommended.

Dietron — Custom Data Ltd

Dietron is the only program in this review which is definitely not a game. It has a number of major functions: 1 — to work out your maximum advised weight and intake of calories according to your height, build, age, sex, etc, and 2 — it holds data on an enourmous number of different foods, so that it is possible to plan a balanced meal. The data available includes protein, fibre, vitamins, etc; this section is a very comprehensive catalogue indeed.

It is also possible to load in a second program which holds information on dieting, as well as how quickly you are likely to lose those precious pounds if you cut down by a chosen amount of calories. It also explains the value of each vitamin for which data has been given for the different foods. More specifically it gives details about them, as well as the consequences of too much or too little in your diet.

This is well written and researched program which can be useful for anyone who is interested in their diet. There is a substantial amount of data in Dietron which is well worth having and using. Though all of this can be found in a book, it has been arranged in such a way that makes it far quicker and easier to use on your Spectrum.

Cosmic Guerrilla — Crystal Computing

This is a new, original and fast, 100% machine code arcade type game. The object of the game is to protect your laser bases from the marauding aliens which slowly eat away your defences. The aliens are lined up vertically on either side of the screen, with your bases vertically lined up in the centre. The aliens smoothly walk towards the centre and collect the objects which are the only defence your bases have. Your task is to zap the aliens with the laser running horizontally along the bottom of the screen.

Though Cosmic Guerrilla does have some parallels with the 'space invaders' type games, the screen arrangement and the different scenarios put it way ahead in my view. One quality of 'Space Invaders' that it does unashamably possess, is its incredible addictive quality.

Amongst other things the graphics are good, as well as smooth, plus good sound and colour. This is a very playable game indeed. For all those who have enjoyed Space Invaders, then this is the next step up. Highly recommended.

The Black Hole — Quest Microsoftware

The idea of the game is that alien space craft are using the Black Hole to gain entrance to other galaxies. Unfortunately their intent is destructive, hence your task is to inflict as much damage on them as you possibly can. You have two weapons, the Positive and Negative Ion gun, and a Neutron Blaster. The large scale advertising campaign that Quest have launched for this program seems to suggest some amazing graphics. Yes the graphics are good, but
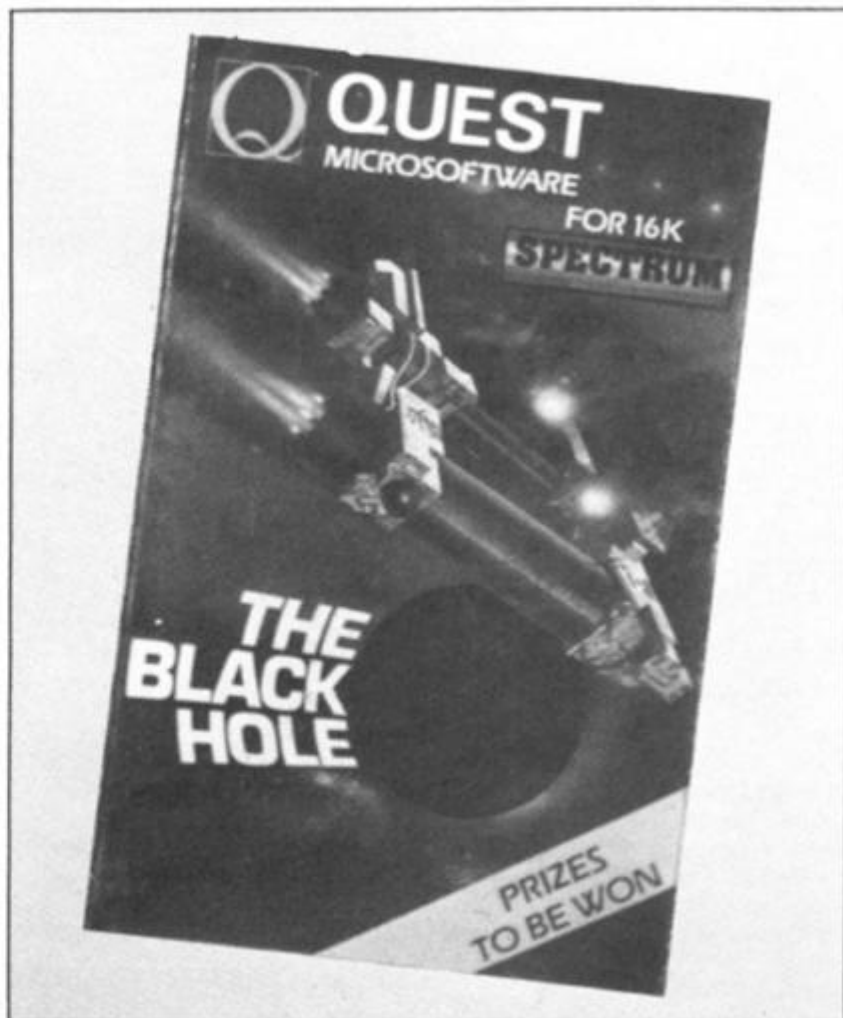
personally, I found the 2D effect rather confusing because it just doesn't look right. However, all in all, not a bad piece of software.

Krazy Kong — Control Technology

Kong the gorilla has captured a girl and your task is to rescue her from his evil grasp. There are three stages of this game: first you must avoid the barrels and fireballs which are being hurled at you and climb the ladders to the second screen. Then you must climb the staircase again avoiding the fireballs to rescue the girl. It is left up to your own imagination to decide who the fair maiden in distress is, so you can be the in-house hero!

Being written in machine code means that the action is pretty fast, though jerky and a little crude. Some of the controls are a little too sensitive, but apart from that it is a good, fun game, which can be played for hours — just change the maiden!

Blind Alley — Sunshine Books Ltd

The instructions on the back of the box tells that this game is a deadly duel, deep in space — the sport of the year 3017.

The idea is to trap your opponent or opponents by enclosing them in the trail that you have left. It is rather like the game in the movie, **Tron**. The graphics of the introductory screen are good, though the graphics of the rest of the game are less than brilliant. Though there is only one level of play it does get progressively more difficult, with more and more opponents sent against you.

Sunshine seem to have a habit of producing games which are not technically brilliant, but manage to be highly addictive and great fun to play.

Frenzy — Quicksilva

As soon as you see a Quicksilva game on the shelves of a shop or advertised you do expect it to be pretty good — they have a name to live up to. In this game you have been placed in a room with walls segmenting it, which is also inhabited by robots. Unfortunately they seem intent on killing you.

There are various special features, including different levels of robots, exploding pods and minelayers. The main disappointment comes when you see the screen display, which is rather dull, with all the robots, etc, taking up exact character squares. If you hit a wall you die — though it is possible to escape through a hole in the outer wall and then you find yourself in a new room with more robots.

I didn't think Frenzy was really up to QS's usual high technical standard, though it is still quite fun to play.

Alien Swarm — Titan Software

This is very much another version of the 'Galaxians' game. The idea is to kill off the swarms of aliens which proceed down the screen at you. Every so often the PAPER/INK colours change, making for some pretty weird combinations. After a while you are even lucky enough to get different shaped aliens.

Though Alien Swarm may be quite well written, it cannot compete with the other 'Galaxians/Invaders' clones such as Imagine's Arcadia, which I reviewed two issues back.

Overall this game may be quite fun but rather predictable and not very innovative.

Roulette — Micromega

It doesn't take much in the way of grey matter to work out what this game is all about. Unlike most previous versions of roulette for the Sinclair computer it does give you a good range of options, ie odds, evens, blacks, column, etc, and you can bet on a combination of these.

This is a well put together program with no real surprises except for the pretty screen display when the wheel is spun. If you like this type of game then you'll find Micromega's version a pretty safe bet.

UK Map — Kuma

Map of UK has recently been released by Kuma in a rather bigger than usual package — more along the lines of VIC software packaging.

Aimed mainly at the educational market this program produces a large map of the UK, a tour of which may be obtained by pressing the right keys. It is also possible to instruct the computer to search for a particular place. Fortunately, it does hold a reasonable number of places but for some reason county names have been omitted. There is also an inbuilt game in which you are in a balloon floating over the British Isles — quite an interesting diversion.

This is a useful educational package which I would recommend for the classroom.

The Knights Quest — Phipps Associates

This is one of the few adventure games with a decent amount of in-built graphics. Having a picture or map of your location does make a great deal of difference to an adventure game.

The screen itself is split into graphics and text, though often there is only text. The object of the game is to find the lost treasures whilst rescuing a Princess held by a witch (another chance to be a hero), and battling against various evils including scorpions, elves, etc. The Knights Quest follows the tradition of Phipps games by being extensive in detail and length and a pleasure to play.

As far as adventures go I feel confident to recommend Knights Quest most highly.

Spectrum Special 1 — Shiva Software

All the programs on this cassette are enhanced versions of some described in their range of books for the Spectrum.

There are ten programs: Sink the Bismark, Wolf Puzzle, Character Builder, Tiger Hunt, Pie Chart, St. Moritz, Hidden Words, Towers of Hanoi, Picasso and Statistics Made

Simple. All these are very obviously book-type programs because they are very simple and relatively unimaginative. However, all the programs work reasonably well and illustrate various techniques of programming included in the books.

This cassette can only really be recommended as a supplement to the books if you do not wish to type the programs in.

Panic — Mikrogen

Panic is very similar indeed to the ladders type arcade game. An almost identical version is available for the BBC under the name 'Monsters'. Though Panic may not be 100% original as a game, it is very well written indeed.

The idea is that you are caught in a maze of walls and ladders with a load of rather nasty aliens. The object is to lure them into holes which you have dug and then bang them over the head until they die. As if this wasn't enough you are in danger of running out of oxygen. As time goes on, and especially if an alien gets through a hole without getting hit, they get even more ferocious and difficult to kill.

Maybe not original, but this is the first time I have seen it for the Spectrum. It is definitely a highly addictive and enjoyable game to play.
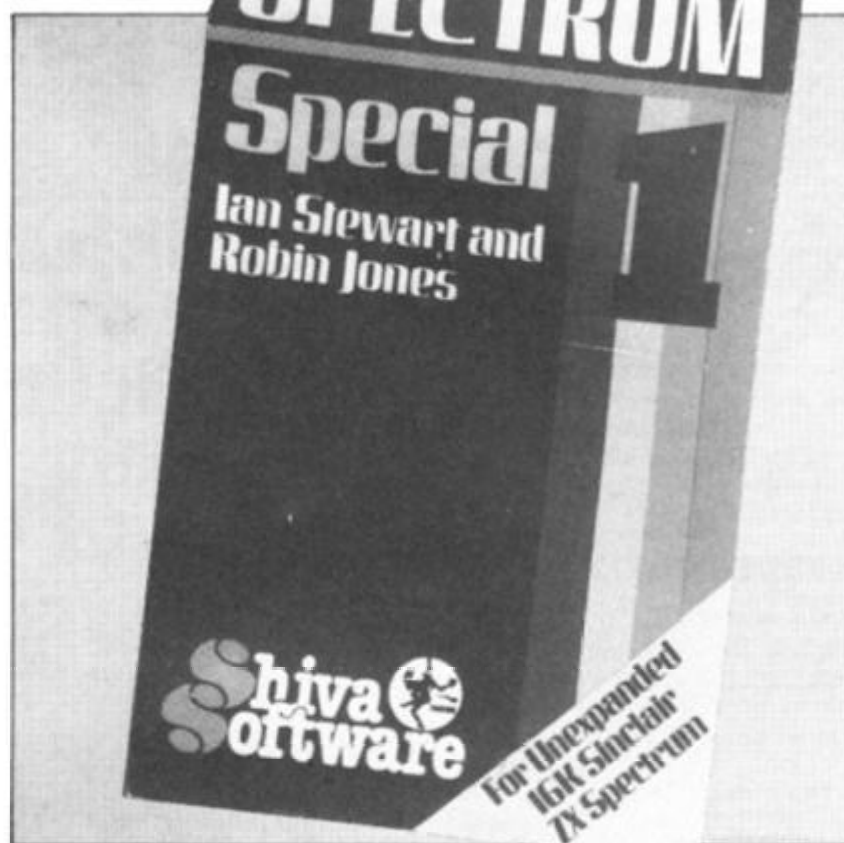
Name	Price	Memory	Documentation	Addictive quality	Graphics	Programming acheivement	Lasting appeal	Value
Frenzy	4.95	16K	3½	3	2	2	2	3
Roulette	4.95	16K	3	3½	3	3½	3½	3½
Map of UK	11.95	48K	3½	3	2½	3	3½	3½
Dungeon Master	6.95	48K	5	4½	2½	4½	5	4½
Cosmic Guerilla	5.95	16K	3½	4½	4	4	4½	4
Painter	7.00	16K	2½	4	4	4	4	4
Knights Quest	5.95	48K	3	4	4	4	4	4
Krazy Kong	5.00	48K	3½	3½	3	3½	3	3½
Jetpac	5.50	16K	4½	4½	5	4½	4½	4½
Black Hole	5.50	16K	3	3	3½	3½	3½	3½
Dietron	4.75	48K	4½	4	—	4	4½	4½
Blind Alley	4.95	16K	3½	4	3	3	4	4
3D Tanx	4.95	16K	3	4	4	4	3½	4
Spectrum Special 1	5.95	16K	3	2	3	2	3	3
Panic	5.95	16K	3½	4	4	3½	4	4
Alien Swarm	4.95	16K	3½	3	3	3	3	3

Addresses of suppliers

A&F Software, 830 Hyde Road, Gorton, Manchester.
Kuma Computers Ltd, 11 York Road, Maidenhead, Berks.
dk'Tronics, 23 Sussex Road, Gorleston, Gt. Yarmouth, Norfolk.
Sunshine Books Ltd, Mobhouse Court, 19 Whitcomb Street, London WC2 7HF.
Phipps Associates, 99 East Street, Epsom, Surrey KT17 1EA.
Control Technology, 184 Market Street, Hyde, Cheshire.
Quest Microsoftware, 119 The Promenade, Cheltenham, Gloucestershire.
Ashby Computers and Graphics Ltd, The Green, Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire.
Quicksilva Ltd, Palmerston Park House, 13 Palmerston Road, Southampton SO1 1LL.
Shiva Publishing Ltd, 4 Church Lane, Nantwich, Cheshire.
Micromega, 230-236 Lavender Hill, London SW11 1LE.
Crystal Computing, 50 Charles Close, Wroxham, Norwich NR12 8TU.
Mikrogen, 24 Agar Crescent, Bracknell, Berks.
Titan Software, The Computer Palace, 46 Market Place, Chipperton, Wilts.
Custom Data, 20 Friars Quay, Colegate, Norwich NR3 1ES.

48K ZX Spectrum