

I broke into a sweat as *Elite* loaded into the 64. Would it live up to expectations? Could I survive in the murderous space lanes? As I settled down in my executive class comfy swivel chair I knew I was about to experience the game of a lifetime.

Elite is already a classic game on the BBC but its arrival on the 64 is a much more important event. Despite problems of conversion, the game has been improved and is still the same brilliant mixture of 3D space laser combat and trading.

At its most basic the game is a

challenge to trade in certain basic goods so as to make enough money to buy sophisticated weaponry. Once you've got that armament you can take on the universe in ship to ship combat so as to improve your rating from Harmless to the much sought after Elite.

You begin your quest on the planet Lave in your Cobra Mk III spacecraft. You have one hundred credits with which to buy fuel and a cargo, but that won't buy much (you need to build up your finances very carefully on your early trips). Once your cargo is complete you're ready

to find yourself a suitable destination and get into space where you can get familiarised with your ship and practise flying.

If you cut to the galactic chart screen you'll find yourself in the bottom left of galaxy one. There are eight galaxies in all and 250 planets in each one, so running out of planets is pretty hard to do. You can look at your position more closely on the local chart screen which shows the planets within about seven light years. This is the maximum range of your ship so many journeys will be needed to cross a galaxy.

You can obtain data on any of

the planets indicated on the local chart and target them for a hyperspace jump.

Launching your ship takes you out into a whole new world of planets, ships, space stations and asteroids. Ahead of you will be a planet (Lave) and if you use your rear viewer you'll see the station behind. Left and right scans are also available so you can see everywhere but directly above and below you.

As you travel 'space dust' moves by you - well, it's called space dust for the sake of realism, but the effect is of stars shooting past. Other craft may

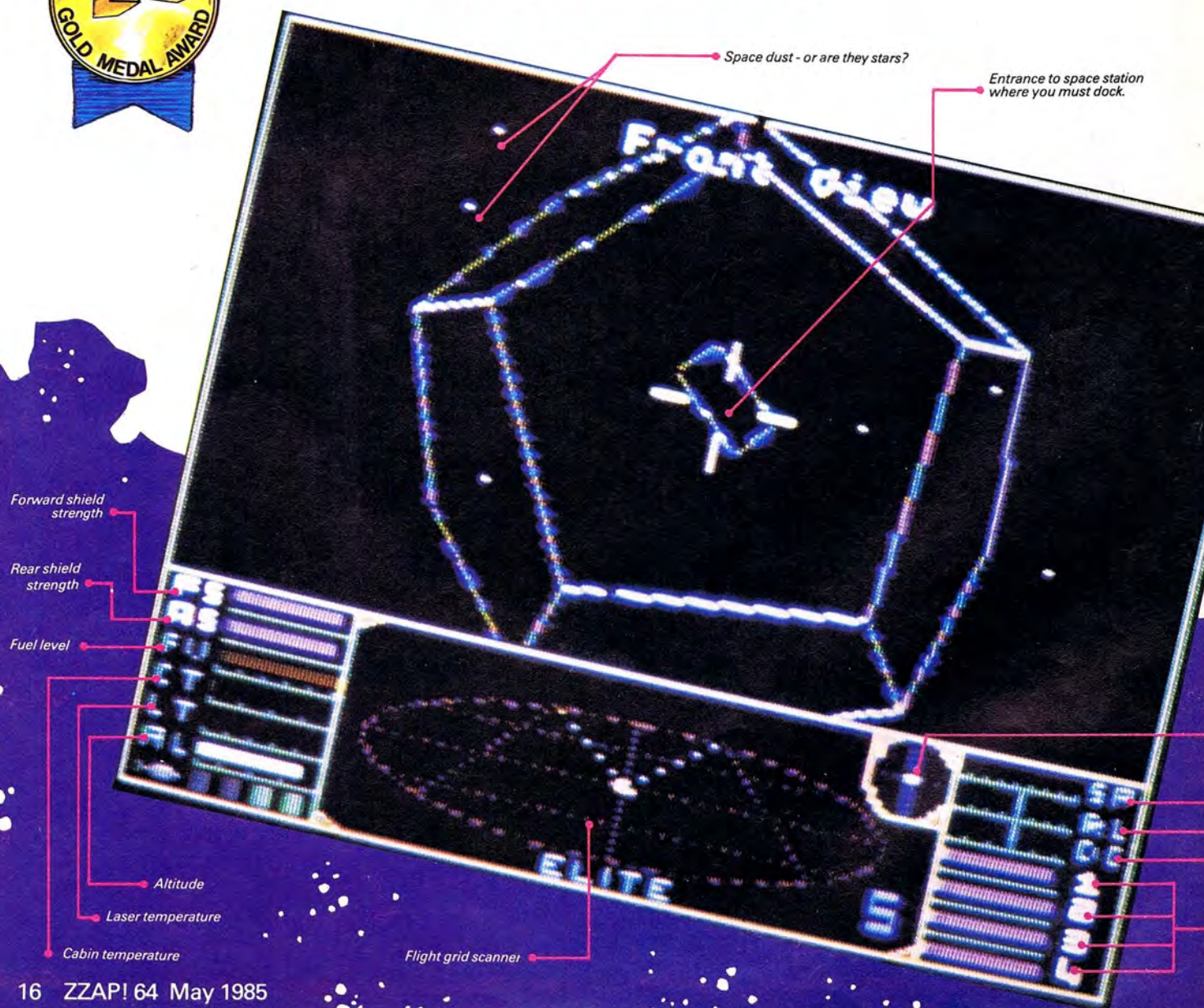
May 1985



ELITE

Firebird, £14.95 case, £17.95 disk, joystick with keys or keys.

- The amazing space mega-game hits the 64
- Real-time 3D shoot-em-up plus deep strategy
- 2000 planets plus 'trumbles' and extra missions



The Zzap! review

The 64 *Elite* is due in the shops in mid April, the same time as this magazine. The version of the game we reviewed was not quite finished, although Firebird assured us there would be no more significant changes.

We were shown the game exclusively by Firebird's game-testing whizz kid Colin Fudge who made a weekend trip to Yeovil guarding the precious pre-production disk. (Unfortunately two of the Zzap! team were away, but Chris Anderson and Bob Wade were able to give the game a thorough test, Bob continuing with the game late into the night.)

One change you will notice on the finished version involves the text appearing on screen - the character set will be different. Firebird had not yet finished the new version which will feature computer-style letters.

I played this game for six hours at my first sitting and was only dragged away from it then by fatigue and wanting to tell everyone out there about it. It is a brilliant game of blasting and trading and is certainly the best game I've seen this year. The controls are terrific and aren't too responsive as on the BBC. The action is always absorbing and as for the size of the game, what can you say but that this is truly a mega-game.



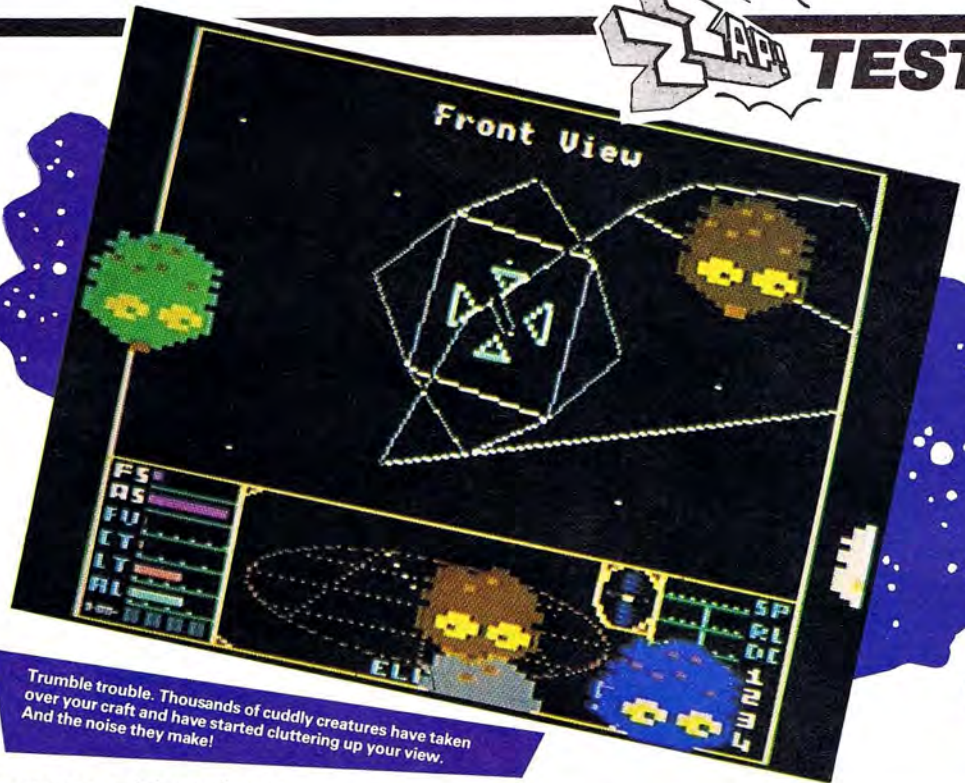
Compass

Speed indicator

Left-right roll indicator

Dive-climb indicator

Energy bars (currently healthy)



Trumble trouble. Thousands of cuddly creatures have taken over your craft and have started cluttering up your view. And the noise they make!

also appear and depending on their make, they may or may not be hostile. In general, unless you are near a space station, it's a case of shoot first and ask questions of the floating mass of space debris later.

While you're near a space station take the time to get the feel of your ship and to understand the instrument display. Your controls are left and right roll, which spin you on your axis, and climb and dive which do just that.

The roll controls are tough at first but once mastered provide excellent movement - to actually bank left, you must first roll left and then pull joystick back to climb (or roll right and dive). You can use either a joystick or the keys. For flying though most 64 owners will feel more at home with the joystick.

The instruments at the bottom of the screen indicate your forward and rear shield strength, fuel, cabin and laser temperature, altitude above a planet, number of missiles, speed,

PRESENTATION	ORIGINALITY
94% <i>Marvellous booklets: informative, funny and convenient.</i>	87% <i>3D shoot-em-up and trader game, but what a brilliant combination.</i>
GRAPHICS	HOOKABILITY
91% <i>Wonderful vector graphics showing great 3D action.</i>	95% <i>From your first space flight you know this is a winner.</i>
SOUND	LASTABILITY
52% <i>Laser blasts, crashing noises, hyperspace and docking sounds.</i>	98% <i>8 galaxies, 2000 planets, endless trading possibilities and tireless action.</i>
VALUE FOR MONEY	
95% <i>Even at £14.95 it's a must.</i>	

orientation and energy. The shields and energy are affected by hits on your ship and if you fire your own laser too much it will overheat and fire less rapidly.

The most complicated instrument is the flight grid scanner which indicates where objects are around you and is vital in the middle of dogfights with other

ships. It indicates whether a craft is above or below you and in front or behind you and whether it should be in view of your forward scanner.

Now you know your way around you can try a practice docking back at Lave. All you have to do is flip your ship over and head for the slit in the station side. This always faces

Two rich programmers

Here are the mega-brains behind the mega-game. Ian Bell (left) and David Braben, both in their early twenties, must be two of the wealthiest guys around. They've been paid a fortune by Firebird for world-wide rights to the game - those in the know reckon it's a six-figure sum!

That's in addition to the money paid them for the original BBC version by Acornsoft, who incidentally must be kicking themselves for not picking up worldwide rights at the same time.

Ian and David have done the conversion to the 64 at the same time as studying for final exams at Jesus College, Cambridge where they both won scholarships. (Prince Edward is a fellow student there - wonder what his combat rating is?)

It was David who first began programming *Elite* - and the machine he used? None other than the BBC's prehistoric ancestor, the Acorn Atom!



"GOOD GAMES NEED A LOTTA ROOM - SO TURN THAT PAGE!"

ELITE

towards the planet but you need to centre up carefully and slow down or you'll crash into the station or scrape your way down the docking entrance walls.

When you feel ready, you can hyperspace to your chosen planet where you may have to fight pirates, bounty hunters or mercenaries all out to get your cargo or blast you for the sheer fun of it. You may be able to make a quick jump to the planet. If not there are other ships around and you had better be ready for a fight.

Making it to the space station will bring a new set of market prices and hopefully a profit, that is if you've picked your planet and cargo properly.

The game comes in an excellent package along with a very thorough and humorous instruction book, a quick reference guide to controls and ships, and a marvellous scene setting story called the Dark Wheel by Robert Holdstock.

BW

Fighting the Elite

Once you do get involved in a fight there are several things to remember and numerous ways of killing and being killed. To start with you are equipped with a pulse laser and four missiles.

Additional weapons you can buy are beam lasers, military lasers, energy bombs and mining lasers. You can also buy extra defensive equipment - an ECM system, fuel scoops, escape capsule, extra energy unit, docking computers and galactic hyperdrive.

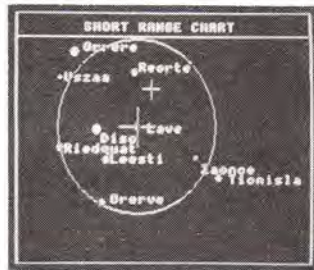
All of these can be bought at planets with the appropriate tech level. The most handy are military lasers which will blast

virtually any ship with a couple of hits, an energy bomb which destroys every ship in your immediate vicinity and an ECM system which destroys incoming missiles.

Lasers can be mounted on all four sides of the ship but you'll mostly use the front firing ones.

All of these are very expensive though and will take a while to get, but once acquired they can be devastating. Even with such power the same basic combat rules apply, either kill your enemy by getting on his tail as fast as possible before others arrive. Or if the odds look too great, try and run by making a hyperspace jump.

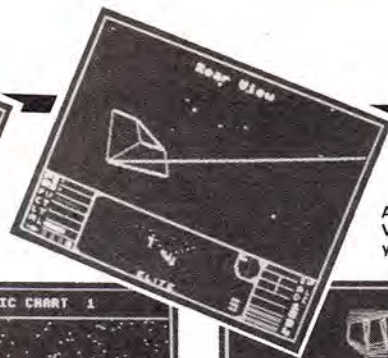
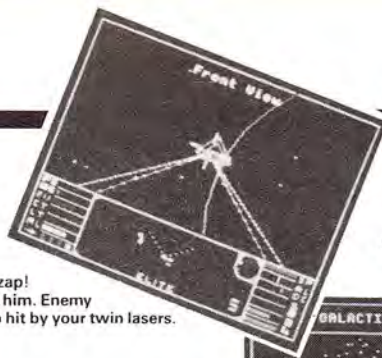
Zzzzap!
Got him. Enemy ship hit by your twin lasers.



Short range chart shows planets you can reach in one hyperspace jump.

LAVE MARKET PRICES			
PRODUCT	UNIT	UNIT PRICE	QUANTITY FOR SALE
Food	kg	100	1000
Textiles	kg	200	500
Medicatives	kg	300	200
Leaves	kg	400	100
Liquor/Mines	kg	500	50
Luxuries	kg	600	20
Narcotics	kg	700	10
Computers	kg	800	5
Robiners	kg	900	2
Illius	kg	1000	1
Weapons	kg	1100	1
Plus	kg	1200	1
Minerals	kg	1300	1
Platinum	kg	1400	1
Gen-Stones	kg	1500	1
Alien Items	kg	1600	1

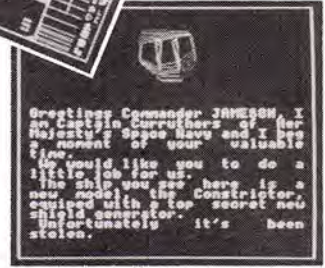
List of local market prices.



A deadly Police Viper fires across your bows.



Galactic chart - total of 250 planets per galaxy.



Instruction screen for one of the special missions.

Make a Killing without getting Killed

Trading is your key to success since it enables you to make enough cash to buy highly advanced weaponry. There are 17 goods in which you can trade although some bring better profits than others and three are officially illegal.

Your cargo bay only holds twenty tons, although for 400 credits you can buy a 35 ton bay. The most profitable forms of cargo are slaves, narcotics and firearms, but these are all illegal and trading in them will get you a rating of fugitive and bring the police onto your trail. You can remove this rating by trading in legal goods for a while but be warned, police Viper ships are lethal.

Items don't always provide a good profit margin and you need to study the data on a planet before you travel there to determine the price you are likely to get for certain goods. Rich developed worlds will pay well for foodstuffs to support their high populations whereas undeveloped agricultural worlds will pay a king's ransom for technology.

The nature of a planet's government should also determine how wise it is to go there since anarchies are likely to harbour a very nasty reception committee but democracies are easier places to stay alive.

If you just remember to buy low and sell high you won't go far wrong, although bear in mind a pirate can smell a valuable cargo from light years away and you might have company very fast.

Guide to Ships

Your Cobra is not the only ship blasting the space waves. Many other models exist but all are named after snakes and are dangerous. Anacondas, Boas and Pythons are all large cargo carrying vessels and if destroyed will leave an awful lot of space debris and hopefully some cargo canisters to scoop up (if you've got a scoop).

Pirates, bounty hunters and mercenaries will use a wide range of ships including Asps, Cobras, Fer-de-Lances, Geckos, Kraits and Mambas. Most of these are flown by experienced pilots, have nearly as much speed as you and are heavily armed - so watch out.

Most dangerous of all are Police Vipers and Thargoid invasion ships. Vipers are faster than you and will be encountered in large numbers if you have erred in any way, while Thargoids may appear with you out of hyperspace and swarm all over you, both resulting in rapid deaths unless you really are Elite.

64 version v BBC version

The first thing to be said is that the game runs quite a bit more slowly on the 64 - this is caused by a combination of the fact that the central processor in the BBC runs at a higher speed, and that vector graphics are harder to program on the 64.

However we don't think this detracts significantly from the game. In actual play the 64 graphics do not seem slow at all - you only notice the difference by running the two versions side by side. However if you've played the BBC version extensively, you'll probably find the 64 game has a different feel.

There are more than enough improvements to compensate. For a start, all known

bugs in the BBC game (and there are plenty) have been eliminated.

Secondly, thanks to the 64's larger memory, the entire game is present in memory all the time, a considerable improvement on the BBC cassette version which had certain features trimmed.

More important still, the 64 version contains some new features: there are extra 'special missions' that can occur if you prove yourself in battle. These are highly secret but we know that one of them is to track down a stolen ship which can only be destroyed with a military laser with repeated hits. The others you'll have to discover for yourself.

Then, unique to the 64, there are the Trumbles. These cute little furry guys will reproduce on your ship to fill the cargo bay and also your ears with a cacophony of breeding squeaks. They could eventually stop you carrying cargo and even start appearing on screen where the cute little bug-eyed bundles of fun may get in your way during a heavy battle or difficult docking. How you acquire them, and how you eventually get rid of them remain two of the universe's closely guarded secrets. Ones which only 64 owners can hope to uncover.

