



E·L·I·T·E

ELITE

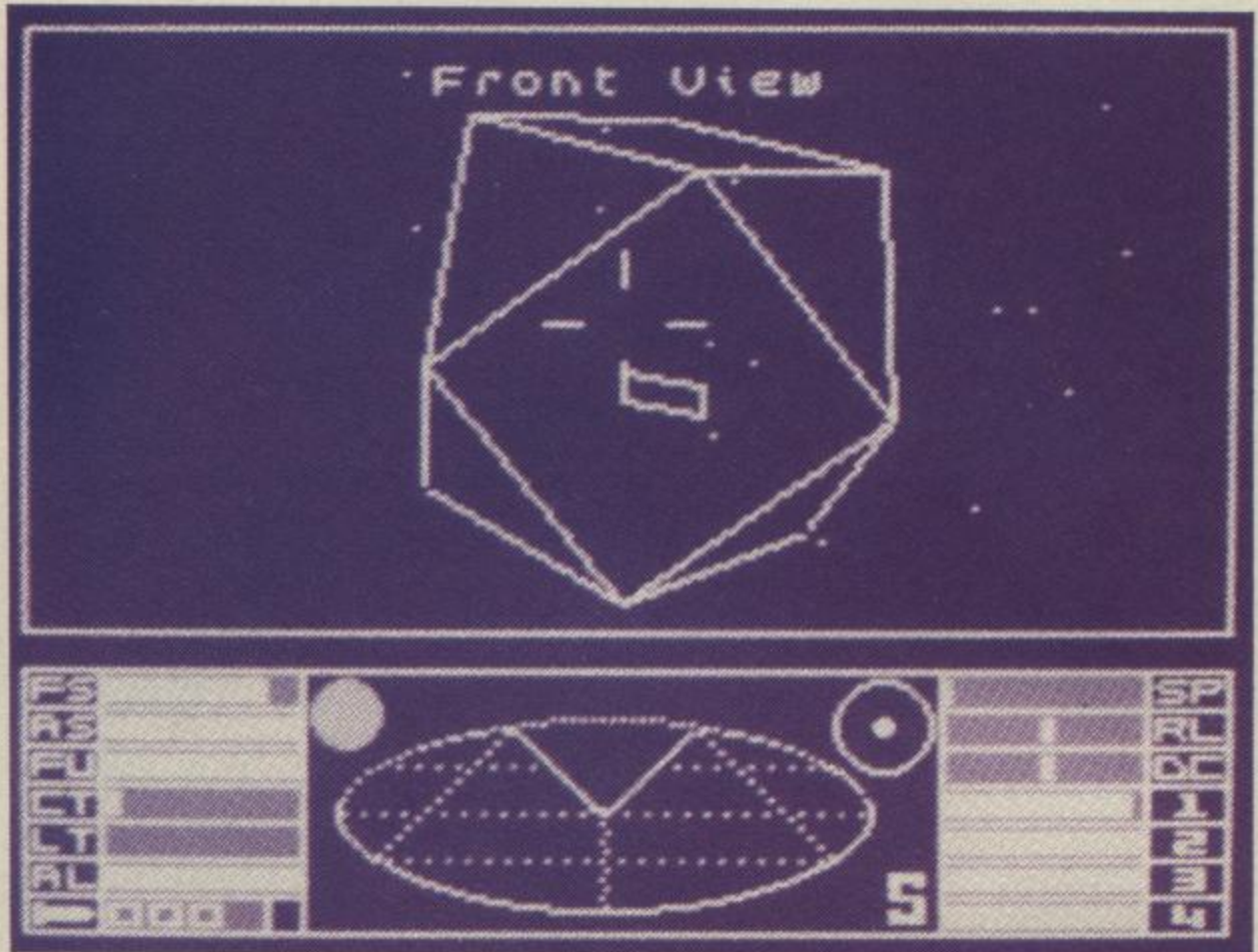
Producer: Firebird
Memory required: 48K
Retail price: £14.95
Language: machine code
Author: Torus

Starting life on the BBC, *Elite* was converted for the Commodore and, has just appeared for the Spectrum, a mere three months late. It will go down in history as the first major piece of software to be supplied with the *Lenslock* protection device — a cunning way of preventing piracy by supplying a plastic decoding lens which is used to discover the encrypted access code for the game. In essence, after loading you need to look through the lens onto the screen in order to see the code letters which must be input before the program will RUN. The cassette is also accompanied by a slim novella which sets the scene.

Converted by Torus, creators of *Gyron*, Spectrum *Elite* follows a very similar format to its other incarnations. With stars in your eyes and a Cobra Mk III in your charge, you've set yourself the task of becoming Elite, a combatier of the highest ranking. To become Elite you'll have to rise through several distinct stages starting with the almost derogatory rating of 'Harmless'. The more ships you kill, the higher your rating will rise, though mindless violence is not the only aspect to the game.

To become an efficient killer you must have a well equipped ship, replete with weapons of destruction. When you start, the ship you're given is a pretty poor machine, not really up to the rigours of deep space combat, so the best thing to do is to buy extra equipment from the space stations you'll find in orbit around every planet. Most of the military hardware doesn't come cheap and seeing as how you only start with one hundred credits you will need to make some money. This is where the mindwork comes into play. You will have to trade.

Every planet in the eight galaxies has a tech rating and some information detailing the world's economy. Using a trader's cunning, you can buy goods at one planet and take them to another and sell them for a profit. To be sure of making a profit it is wise to sell goods naturally rare on the planet you're trading with. For example a tech level 12, highly



industrialised planet will probably have to import food, making the market price quite high. If you buy food from a low tech agricultural planet you can ferry it to the more advanced planet for a good profit margin.

Information about each planet's political state is available, which will range from corporate state to anarchy. It is not wise to travel to an anarchic system with little in the way of weaponry as the place will be crawling with pirates. And pirates are doubly aware of you if you're carrying any cargo.

Different cultures aren't too friendly with each — you can't land on planets. This makes trade awkward, so it's effected through a system of space stations. Each trading planet is orbited by a Coriolis space station which you need to dock with — a time consuming and awkward task. Once docked, you can refuel your ship and barter your wares inside the hanger. If you get rich, it's possible to buy a docking computer to make life easier.

Fuel is only expended when you use hyperwarp for interstellar travel. Pottering around in planetary space burns no fuel and trips can be costed in fuel terms on a the short range chart. If you've bought some fuel scoops you can pick up free fuel by flying close and raking energy from the a star's corona — sun skimming.

Bounty hunting is lucrative and simple: jump into an anarchic system and blast away at everything. A kill point is

awarded for each ship destroyed and your credit status grows with the bounty. It is, however, best to go in heavily armed, and with a fair amount battle experience. Other loot gathering activities include asteroid mining, slave trading and drug running — but the last two are illegal and harm your legal status.

You see the action from the cockpit, viewing a 3D representation of space. Three other views are available through left, right and rear windows. The display is mainly monochrome; vector graphics represent ships and objects. Colour appears occasionally, in explosions.

To keep track of ships and asteroids not in your immediate vicinity, there's an oval short range chart. Other ships, attacking and friendly, are represented as a bar with small hook at the end showing the height above or below your ship and distance from it.

A wealth of informative documentation comes with the cassette. A book commissioned from SF writer Robert Holdstock gives an interesting story plus a multitude of veiled hints for survival in a rough galaxy. The Space Traders' Flight Training Manual is also included, an essential guide to survival giving hints on docking, trade and combat. You also receive a pretty wallchart to hang in your cabin!

If you are doing well it's possible to save out your progress to tape. This will record all your status attributes including score and credits.

CRITICISM

● 'Elite is one of the most imaginative games ever to be designed to run on a home computer and Spectrum owners should be pretty chuffed that they've got a superb version. When a ship's destroyed, the explosion looks like an expanding ball of gas and vaporised metal. It's highly effective. There are slightly fewer ships than on previous versions but the graphics move quite fast considering their complexity — they're flicker free, too! All in all an excellent version of an excellent game.'

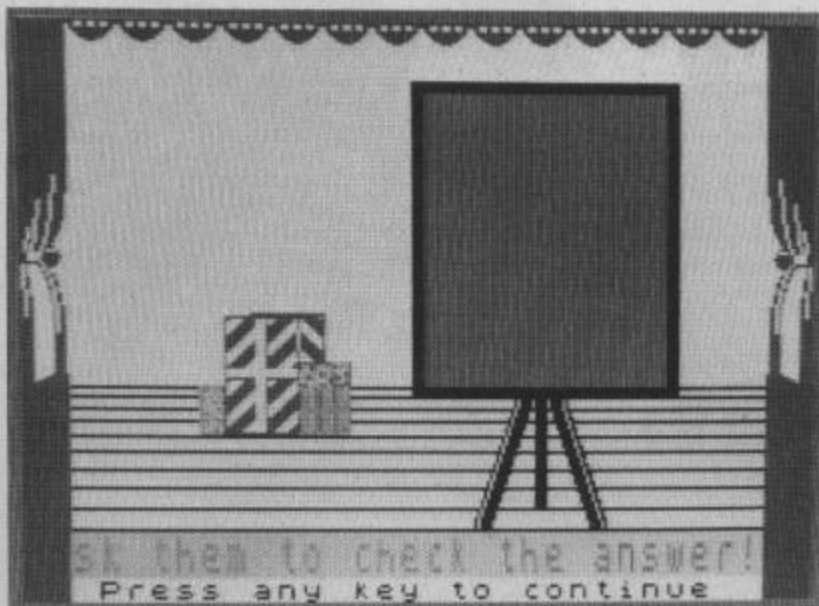
● 'With the Spectrum Elite, Firebird have improved on a tried and tested formula. It must have been quite a risk to take, adapting a cult game from the BBC and putting it on the Spectrum, but the risk has paid off handsomely. The graphics are excellent of a reasonable speed (not as fast as Starion), and, unlike previous versions of Elite, they are not flickery. So much for Elite the Spectrum version, what about Elite the game? It can be slow to get into, because at the outset you must trade to get on, but once you have achieved a level of skill that allows you better equipment for your ship, the game really hits deep space in a mean, mean way. This is a perfect blend of trading, shoot em up and strategy and if you're not very careful you can find yourself getting badly hooked, spending hours trying to get just

MAGIC

Producer: Macmillan Software
Memory required: 48K
Retail price: £8.95
Language: machine code
Author: Peter Eldin

Macmillan have been publishing educational software for some time now, but their latest series, while still being educational in nature, is aimed at a different market. They have decided to combine their book publishing talents with software publishing and have turned out a series of packages under a sub label *The Professional Touch*. Three packages have been produced so far, one of which is magic, or conjuring if you prefer.

The idea behind the *Magic* package is to provide the user with information and stimulation to encourage the study and enjoyment of conjuring. The book, some 34 pages thick, is liberally filled with instructions detailing the performance of some fourteen tricks, varying



from the simple 'crying coin' trick to effective 'eggs from nowhere'. Each trick is introduced and then presented in the form of step by step instructions with simple drawings to aid your understanding. At the end of each section there is a little box containing the Magician's tip. Generally the tips are designed to help you present the trick to an audience.

Performing tricks is not really a pastime that you can enjoy on your own — the fun only begins when you can confound your friends, pets and family. If you are going to put on any sort of a show you must be able to 'dress up' your tricks so that there are no awkward moments while you remove the matchbox or card which you secreted away earlier. The book places great emphasis on this point and quite a lot of attention is paid to the presentation of the tricks, not only in the Magician's tips boxes but there's also a separate section at the end that gives a little advice on practice, patter and preparation.

Only one page of the book is actually devoted to the software. After the program has loaded you will be asked if you want to make a Microdrive copy: an all-too-rare feature. There follows a little business of entering a code word, initially set to MAGIC, the idea being to prevent any of your potential audience taking a sneak look into you computerised box of tricks, always assuming that any of your victims could actually set a Spectrum up.

Once you are finally underway you will be asked to select between TRICKS, SEQUENCE and SHOW. The Tricks section demonstrates the inner secrets of nine tricks but does not deal with the type of magic found in the book. Some of the tricks could be better described as puzzles, and are very well known indeed. One of the tricks titled 'Now you see it now you don't' is not a vanishing act as the its title suggests, but more a display of optical illusions. You probably know the sort of thing where a picture of a young girl can, with a bit of imagination and screwing up of the eyes, also be seen as an old hag.

The Magic section is subdivided into three parts. The first part explains in words the principle behind the trick or illusion. Secondly, a tips section explains how the trick is performed and how you should put it across to an audience. The graphics associated with the trick are

presented on screen while a scrolling message underneath 'talks' you through the performance. The final section allows you to perform a trick any number of times, allowing you to get your spell off pat, and patter off your spell.

Once you have worked your way through the various tricks, and learnt the principles on which they are based, your understanding should enable you to present them to an audience with the panache and confidence of a true performer. The Sequence section of the game allows you to select which of the nine 'acts' you want in your show and you can choose the order they are presented in. Should you want, you can add some musical embellishment to your show. When you have decided on the content of your performance and are sure that you can present each act competently, then you are ready to begin.

The show begins with the stage curtains closed; press a key and the title of the first act will appear accompanied by some music. When the curtains open you will see the same stage set-up that you learned to love so much during rehearsals. However, this time you must present each trick to the audience without any help. Although the computer will perform the actual magic, you are the presenter. If you suddenly find yourself well endowed with over ripe fruit you can assume that you should return to the earlier stages in the game and polish up your performance. Either that or get a new act.

CRITICISM

My lasting impression of this package is that the book, thin though it is, is a great deal more valuable than the software. Having said that I can appreciate that the reverse is true in the case of a younger child, younger than say 10 years old. The book is so well presented it's interesting from beginning to end. The same cannot be said for the software: for one thing the tricks are tedious, and for another two of them will not work under certain circumstances. The 'Total Bemusement' trick causes just that, if the difference of a number and the reverse of that same number is equal to 99. Likewise when, for the 'Number Divination' trick, you enter the remainder of a number being divided by another, as zero then the trick fails.

The graphics for each of the tricks are only hovering around the reasonable standard mark, the same can be said for the overall presentation of the program. But if you have an inclining towards wizardry then this package could be a fair introduction. The book is certainly a good introduction.

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that little bit further. Here the *SAVE* game facility is a great help, and means that *Elite* is not so much a game — more a way of life. That may sound corny, but for once it really is true! No self-respecting *Spectrum* owner should be without it because it's worth every penny of the £15 price tag.

● Well here it is at last, the *Spectrum* version of *Elite*, and yes it has been worth the wait. The graphics are very good, only slowing down a little, if at all, when the screen gets chock a block. The launch/hyperspace sequence is very neat, nearly as good as *Dark Star*. The screen layout is well-balanced with just the right amount of colour and dots. The addictive nature of the game is increased with 5 missions compared to the meagre 2 of the C64 and BBC versions. My only gripe is that you have to use some stupid lenslock thing to play the game — you could spend hours trying to suss out the thing. You can compare you version of *Elite* versions for other machines and smile with pride at what Firebird have produced.

Energy Bomb (W); ECM (E); Find Planet (R); Fire Missile (F); Target (T); Unarm (U); Galactic Chart (I); Local Chart (O); Data on System (P); Fire Laser (A); Dive/Cursor Up (S); Climb/Cursor Down (X); Anti-clockwise Roll/Cursor Left (N); Clockwise Roll/Cursor Right (M); Distance (D); Hyperspace/Intergalactic Jump (H); Torus Jump Drive (J); Prices (K); Status (L); Inventory (ENTER); Freeze (SHIFT); Docking Computer (C); Home Cursor (B); Save/Decelerate (SYMBOL SHIFT); Continue/Accelerate (BREAK) Keyboard overlay provided

Joystick: compatible with all joysticks

Keyboard play: complicated!
Use of colour: sparse but highly effective

Graphics: excellent, but occasionally produces odd effects

Sound: nice tune when loaded, plus some spot effects

Skill levels: one

Screens: not applicable

General rating: a first class absorbing, game

Use of computer:

Graphics	93%
Playability	91%
Getting started	92%
Addictive qualities	94%
Value for money	81%
Overall	92%

COMMENTS

Control keys: Front View/Launch (1); Back View/Buy (2); Left View/Sell (3); Right View/Equip (4); Escape Pod (Q);