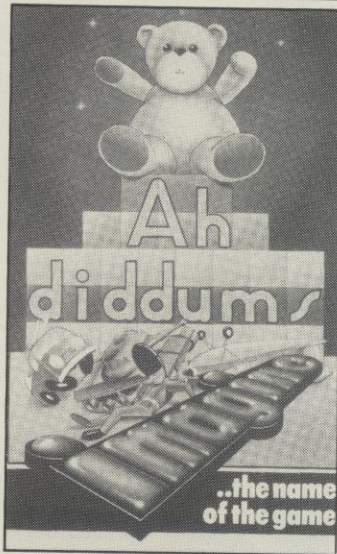## Ah Diddums

Computer: **Spectrum 16K or 48K**
Price: **£5.50**
Supplier: **Imagine Software, Masons Buildings, Exchange St East, Liverpool, Merseyside.**

When people are bored by standard computer games and it is your occupation to produce and sell these games, it doesn't take you long to realise that you can't go on existing solely by churning out run-of-the-mill stuff, and quite soon originality becomes your key word.

Imagine, which seemed to have started off with this precept in mind anyway, presented two new games to us recently, both of which can certainly claim to be different.

However, whilst this difference is refreshing for we reviewers, it seems that Imagine is trying a new tack, confusion.

On receipt of *Ah Diddums,* I spent a week trying to work out how to play the thing as the instructions, although voluminous, are far from clear, and no matter how I tried, I could not achieve the object.

So, I phoned Mark Butler at Imagine, and finally figured it out — at least it was worth it.

You are a teddy bear (this is a standard chat-up line of mine!), and you have to go and comfort your young human owner who, as owners of teddy bears are wont to do (even Sebastian Flyte), is crying.

To cheer him up, you have to climb out of the toybox that you've been unceremoniously stuck in for the night, and in order to do this, you have to collect all the coloured bricks in the toybox and put them in order at the top of the box.

Simple, I thought, and so indeed it is (initially, anyway)

once you have discovered how to actually do this part correctly.

I thought, as indeed did everyone I know who has tried to play it, that this meant that you pick up a brick, and go and deposit it in the position of the same colour at the top. Having done this once, I found that all the brick positions took on arbitrary colours, and thus confusion reigned.

So, instead of doing that, I tried all sorts of things, all to no avail. In the end, I consulted my teddy bear, and he said "phone Imagine". I did, and now I feel like I should be working for Jimmy Young, as I go around saying "this is what you do".

It's easy, really, but daft — you saunter up to the top of the screen with your brick, position yourself a little to the right of the place where the bricks are supposed to go, and drop the brick, whereupon it jumps into its proper place.

Now, I realise that all children expect their toys to be magical at night, but isn't this going over the top, just a little?

Anyway, you do this for all the bricks on the screen, avoiding the soldier on the left hand side, and collecting the little bits and pieces that don't qualify as projectiles (ie the things that disappear when you walk over them), and suddenly find yourself in the next box.

Ahah! a two-toybox family, you think. In fact, it's worse than that, as it appears that these boxes are actually infinite, but I'm probably wrong.

In each box, things get progressively harder, as eventually you get three soldiers, a train set, four mamma dolls resembling loopy cockroaches, two what I can only describe as 'things', and an aeroplane — all out to get you.

Quite an enjoyable game, with quite superb graphics, and a satisfactory antidote to invaders, et al.

Chateau

Computer: **Dragon 32**
Price: **£7.95**
Supplier: **Gem Software, Unit D, The Maltings, Station Road, Sawbridgeworth, Herts.**

"You are in an old chateau. When the old count who lived there died, he left all his worldly goods in the house. He also hid a hoard of treasure (valued at $2 million)."

The opening might not be startlingly original, nor the adventure itself anything out of

the ordinary, but this new tape from Gem does offer a certain amount of challenge and amusement.

You always begin in the same room, whose position is indicated in the top right of the screen: 1-3-6. This tells you the floor number, the X co-ordinate and the Y co-ordinate.

Although your start position is always constant, the movements you can make from that room and the objects you will find are different every time you set off, meaning there's always an element of luck no matter how much you learn through several playings.

All entries are single key, and the choices open to you are Move, Explore, Open, Status and Plan. These are really self-explanatory, movement being the usual compass directions, while Plan offers you a floor plan to show where you are and how you arrived there — would that there was a similar plan for life itself.

The first three floors our reviewer managed to investigate were all 6×6 in size, and while this sounds small not all the rooms are immediately accessible, and those that are contain pianos, fireplaces, clocks, statues, bookcases and other objects to be opened or explored or both.

The status display is disappointing in that it lists fully the various things you might find such as keys, lamps and clues, so that you know right from the beginning what items you are looking for. The status also has a note of the time lapsed, the treasure collected, and the strength units you hold, which start off at 100 but don't stay that way for long.

Strength is used up when you encounter one of a seemingly infinite number of monsters that populate the chateau: bats, salamanders, Golems and a few horrors more. Faced with one of these you have four options: Retreat, Fight, Gamble or Advice, the final one explaining the first three.

Retreating often works and so saves your strength, but not always; gambling puts your fate in the hands of the RND function and fighting needs some of your strength units to counter those of the appropriate nasty. Run out of strength and it's back to square one, or rather square 1-3-6. If you've amassed a little treasure, though, the computer will do a deal with you and allow you to buy some more strength, but at what can only be described as a Dragonian rate of exchange.

There are still several features our reviewer hasn't yet stumbled across, such as the mysterious travel agent who apparently turns up and whisks you off to exotic climes but the parts explored so far show it to be perfectly adequate. *Chateau* uses up all but about 3K of the Dragon's memory, and responds instantly to the commands, but being about 95 per cent text it does lose out when compared to software which offers you some graphics as well, such as *Pimania* or Wintersoft's *The Ring of Darkness.* Still, it should offer something to all but the hardened adventure freak, who will undoubtedly want more than the vintage offered by this chateau.
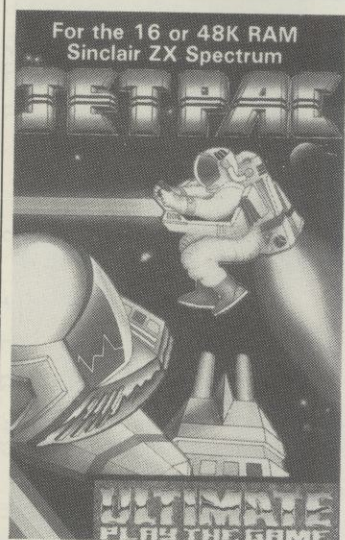
Jetpac

Computer: **Spectrum 16K or 48K**
Price: **£5.50**
Supplier: **Ultimate Play the Game, The Green, Ashby de la Zouch, Leics.**

With the now-apparent polarisation of games software houses into the good and the bad, it requires a great deal of skill and experience for a new company to get amongst the established big boys.

According to its press releases, Ultimate has just this skill — it is an ex-arcade game writer — but such claims are sure to engender great expectations.

A new idea, excellent implementation, extreme playability and addictiveness — *Jetpac* has all these, making all our preconceptions well-founded. Basically, capitalism is the name of the game; you have to visit an infinite number of planets, stealing the conveniently floating jewels, gold and treasure while collecting enough fuel to take your rocket to the next planet.

Every five planets, you have to assemble your rocket all over again, as well as doing everything else. Naturally, the planets' indigenous populations aren't too keen on you stealing all their valuables, and take steps to stop you.

Being a 16K program, there isn't much scope for variation, but even so, Ultimate has laudably created six or seven alien types, with various patterns of behaviour.

The first type always travel in straight lines and so are easy to avoid, but they get progressively more devious as the game is played, the final type being positively man-hunting, and it took us a long time to exactly understand their movement.

With *Jetpac,* as with any arcade game, a technique can eventually be discovered, but before that stage is reached it offers far more enjoyment and fun than the majority of games.

The graphics and sound are truly professional, taking the Spectrum very close to its limits, and the keyboard controls are sensibly placed and easy to master. There is also the option of using a Kempston joystick in place of the keyboard, which is a facility every game should offer, despite the highly personalised views of the use of these aids.

Definitely a 'five star' game in every respect. An excellent buy.

Zodiac

Computer: Oric 48K
Price: £10.39
Supplier: Oric Products International, Coworth Park Mansion, London Road, Sunninghill, Ascot, Berks SL5 7SE.

Zodiac, an adventure game, comes in possibly the most uninspiring packaging around. (It's the same as the 'Welcome to Oric' cassette.) It also comes with both slow and fast recordings.

We could not load either of the fast recordings so we tried the slow one. Success — it was loading! So, we sat back and waited ...... and waited ...... and waited. Some 20 minutes later the game started.

This long wait heightened our expectations of an excellent adventure, but on starting the message "Please wait a minute" appeared. This could only mean one thing. On typing ctrl-C our suspicions were confirmed — the program is written almost entirely in Basic.

It's amazing enough that people still write games in Basic

but to expect anyone to pay £10 for an adventure game that will have mediocre response times and allow the player to stop the program to examine both code and data whenever he/she gets into trouble is ridiculous.

The plot is quite straightforward; you have to collect six treasures and return them to the starting point.

The only difficulty arises when you try to get the sixth treasure, which is obtained by placing objects that represent the 12 astrological signs into a secret room.

The cassette inlay claims that the game "has lots of colour and sound" and indeed it has, if randomly changing ink and paper colours on entering each new location counts as colour. This, thankfully, can be switched off, unlike the sound, which is a horrible cacophony that is played on entering each location.

In the end, we deleted the code that produces the sound to make the game bearable. This also improved response times.

In conclusion, this is definitely over-priced at £10.39 but, for those of you who want to write adventure games, having the source code and data may provide some useful ideas.
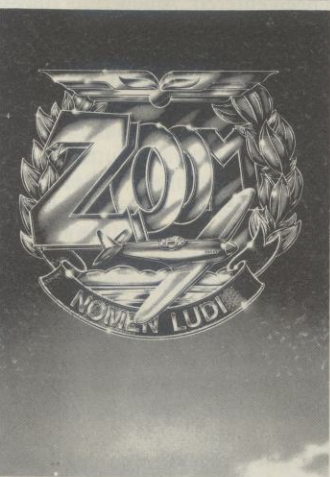
Zzoom

Computer: Spectrum 48K
Price: £5.50
Supplier: Imagine Software, Masons Buildings, Exchange St East, Liverpool, Merseyside.

Having apparently come to the conclusion that its highly-stylised packaging has taken it above the run-of-the-mill companies, Imagine has decided to consolidate this position by maintaining the price at £5.50 but raising the standard of the packages so far that it leaves everyone else standing.

The new format consists of a very large box with 'Imagine' embossed upon it, that opens up to reveal the cassette and a well-printed instruction leaflet, surrounded by a 'marbly-spacey' high-gloss backing.

Of course, all this flash PR will come to nothing if Imagine's games follow its usual inconsistency of playability mould, but with *Zzoom* Imagine knows that it's not playing around; for once, this *is* the name of the game.

Your mission is to rescue innocent refugees from the genocidal enemy, whose sole intent seems to be bombing them to smithereens. Without you, everything is in the napalm of their hands!

Installed in your 'Ground Skimmer', you await each enemy attack wave, watching the indicator go from condition green through to red, and then the fun starts.

The first four waves consist of a mixture of bomber planes and 'remote piloted vehicles' (rpv); that is, guided missiles.

Just for once it is daytime, with clouds skimming across the scene, the red specks of the enemy gradually getting larger and larger as they get nearer.

At present, you only have machine guns as weapons, but with practice you don't get hit too often. The rpvs dive in horrifyingly realistic 3-D straight for you, and the bombers fire 'exotron' missiles resembling flying swastikas at you.

Your shields allow you to sustain some damage, but as each level is progressively more difficult, it doesn't pay to get hit too often. Another ever-present danger is bad flying, ie hitting the ground. This accounted for more lost ships than any mere rpv until the problem was overcome — then came the tanks.

Again, four waves of these, but the desert (love the palm trees) was teeming with divisions of the things. From now on, despite having missiles as an extra weapon, things get decidedly tricky, and subsequent stages were never reached. The package indicates that submarines and helicopters come into play from this point onwards, but we can't verify this.

A really excellent game, with the best graphics ever seen on the Spectrum. Yes, there are bad points, but they only amount to minor details. Here, though, is a list of the ones we found: poor sound usage; awkward to control when using the keyboard; the program crashes when the Kempston joystick option is selected.

The Black Hole

Computer: Spectrum 16K or 48K
Price: £5.50
Supplier: Quest Microsoftware, 119 The Promenade, Cheltenham, Glos.

The Black Hole uses a difficult key arrangement making it very hard to play, coupled with a rather less than inventive plot.

The scenario is this: in the middle of space, temporarily compressed into your television set, is a black hole which, unlike most other games involving this phenomenon, you do not have to try to avoid — your ship's computer does this for you.

Floating around the hole are numerous aliens on fast, if predictable, courses. Every so often, big jelly-fish type aliens come out of the black hole, and are worth more points, being rarer.

You have at your disposal three weapons — a neutron blaster, which fires in a straight but short line; a positive ion gun, which has a long range but whose path is dependent on your proximity to the black hole; and a negative ion gun, which simply bends in the opposite direction. It becomes easy to see why CND is a burgeoning movement!

In theory, you could just move around zapping the odd alien as you go, but because of the key arrangement, it is not quite so easy. This is the only challenge to the game — figuring out a way of co-ordinating your fingers to be able to use seven keys on the same row. Expletives abound, the mildest being the proposed banishment of the author to his own black hole.

It is said that very little is known about black holes, but Quest teach us one thing — there is nothing to know.