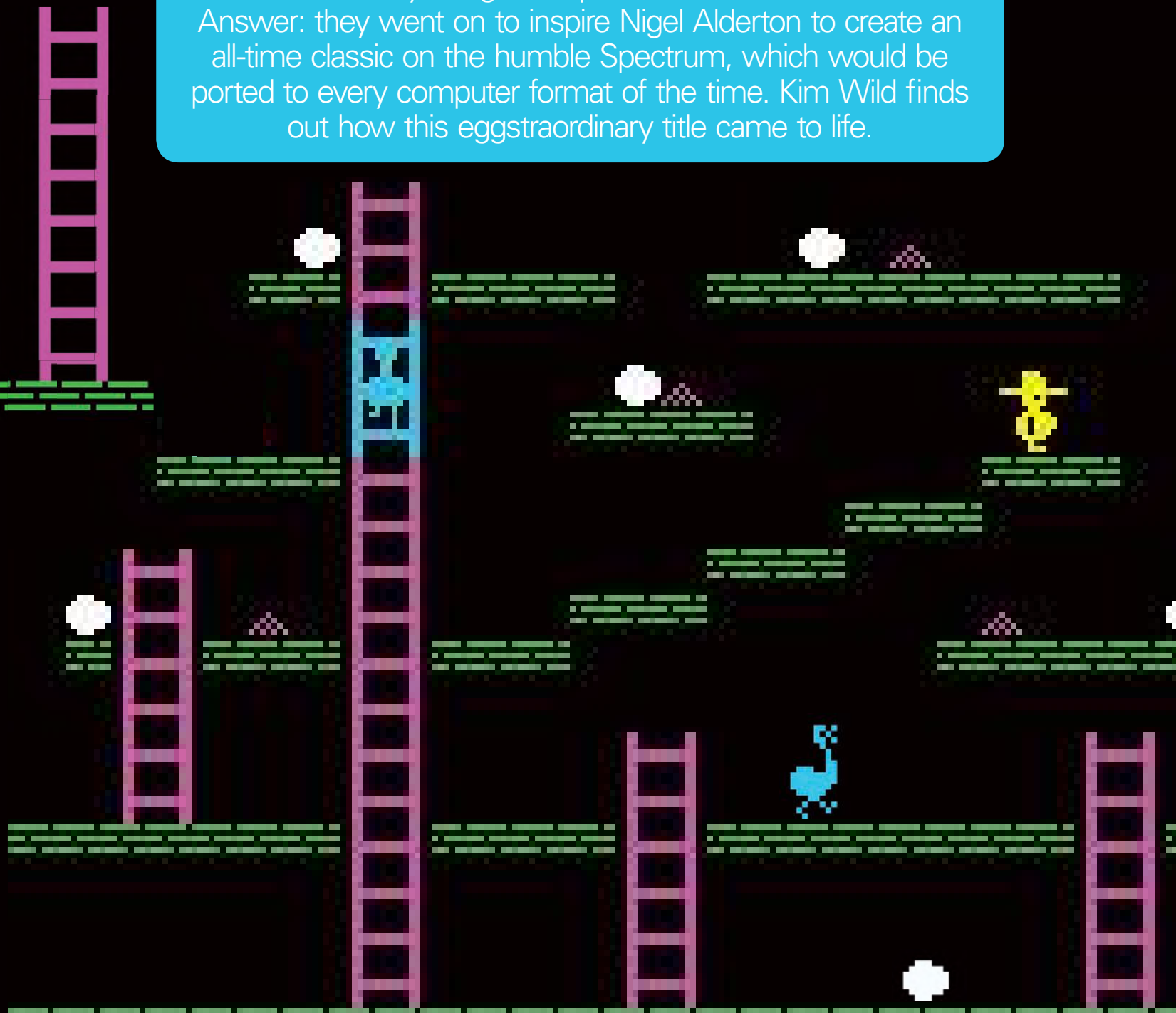


THE MAKING OF...

CHUCKIE EGG



What do Donkey Kong and Space Panic have in common? Answer: they went on to inspire Nigel Alderton to create an all-time classic on the humble Spectrum, which would be ported to every computer format of the time. Kim Wild finds out how this eggstraordinary title came to life.





» The sequel *Chuckie Egg 2* wasn't bad but never lived up to the original outing.



» The C64 conversion included six difficulty levels, a new addition to the original game.



» The Amstrad CPC version has a devoted following, being quite close to the BBC Micro game.

Every system has a killer app or a series of titles that makes it stand out, even if said games appear elsewhere. Game Boy had *Tetris*, NES had *Mario*, Master System had *Alex Kidd In Miracle World* and the Mega Drive kicked off an obsession with all things hedgehog related. The Spectrum isn't any different and if you ask any owner what games stand out, you can guarantee that alongside *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*, *Chuckie Egg* will get a mention, while many others will cite the BBC Micro version as one of that format's major stars. For teenager Nigel Alderton, the Spectrum would become a pathway to

would get to put his newfound skills to use. "I think I was about 15 when I got a Saturday job in [the A+F] shop serving customers, duplicating tapes, fetching bacon butties for the programmers and management and just helping out in general. I got £7 for the day, which wasn't bad at the time. I'd been working there for a few months when I told them that I was writing a game myself and asked them if they would look at it. All the programmers there had games published themselves and I was just the kid who made the tea, so they were mildly amused by my request. But one weekend I showed one of the programmers my unfinished 'Eggy Kong'

spotlight and make its fortunes. Nigel's original title of 'Eggy Kong' highlights the influence of a certain gorilla created by Shigeru Miyamoto. "It was inspired by arcade games that I was addicted to at the time. The newsagent on the way to school had classic games like *Donkey Kong* and *Scramble*. At one point it had a lesser-known game called *Space Panic*. *Chuckie Egg* is a cross between *Space Panic* and *Donkey Kong*. Almost every weekday for a couple of years I put a good part of my dinner money into those machines," recalls Nigel Alderton. His love for *Space Panic* meant that *Chuckie Egg* was effectively an unofficial follow-up. "I designed a game which I thought

CHUCKIE'S REVENGE

One of the better-known remakes has been a PC version cloned on the BBC Micro release. Mike Elson spoke to us regarding the remake. "The most essential tool was a commercial BBC emulator called pcBBC which I used to play the original to take screenshots to get the look right. To work out the jump patterns I ran the emulator in 'slow-motion' mode and took a screenshot after each re-draw... many of the moves that were possible in the original are recreated faithfully, but there were always things like bouncing off platforms, which I never got right. I got the samples by playing *Chuckie* on a real BBC with wires running from its internal speaker to the sound card of a PC, and recording sections of gameplay to edit down into raw sounds." To download the game, visit this website: <http://vroomfondel.net/chuckie>



"AT THE TIME MY FAVOURITE GAME WAS SPACE PANIC, SO CHUCKIE EGG IS REALLY SPACE PANIC?" NIGEL ALDERTON

a new world of game creation. "My first computer was a bog-standard ZX81 with 1K of RAM. My parents soon got fed up with me using it on the family TV so they got me a portable black-and-white telly for my bedroom. I loved [the Spectrum]. For a programmer it was such a simple piece of kit to use because you could bypass the operating system and control the hardware directly. Its weaknesses were the blocky character-based colour and lack of a sound processor or reliable storage media."

It would be during Nigel Alderton's mid teens that the talented programmer

game and I still remember the pride I felt when I saw his reaction. Suddenly he was talking to me on a level – asking questions and taking an interest. I never thought of offering it to anyone other than A+F."

A+F Software was founded by Doug Anderson and Mike Fitzgerald in 1981 who began publishing titles for the Acorn Atom and BBC Micro and were responsible for games such as *Polecat* and *Early Warning*. However, it would be Nigel Alderton's 'Eggy Kong' (renamed by A+F Software as *Chuckie Egg*) that would launch the company into the

I would enjoy playing myself. I wasn't a big fan of *Manic Miner*-style puzzles so I made *Chuckie Egg* more about dexterity than problem solving – more fast-and-furious than thoughtful. At the time my favourite game was *Space Panic*, so *Chuckie Egg* is really *Space Panic 2*. It's a bit embarrassing now looking back at screenshots of *Space Panic* and *Chuckie Egg* together – and how similar they look!"

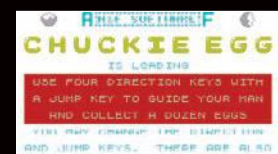
It has been stated in the past that only the first level of *Chuckie Egg* had been completed when shown to A+F Software but Nigel Alderton is keen to set the record straight. "Actually I'd coded five out of the eight screen layouts before I took it to A+F, but they only saw the first level that day because the code to collect eggs and move to the next level wasn't working. The game was still in monochrome at that stage too – the colour overlaying was added later – but the majority of the game coding was complete and most of the memory was already either used or allocated for animation."

While Nigel Alderton continued to program his Spectrum game, Doug Anderson would work on the BBC Micro version alongside it and although the two titles are mainly identical, there are a few subtle nuances. Aside from the colour variations, the speeds of the character



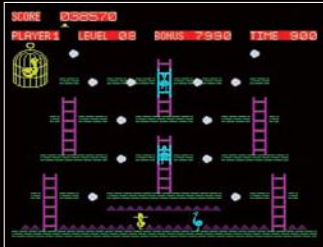
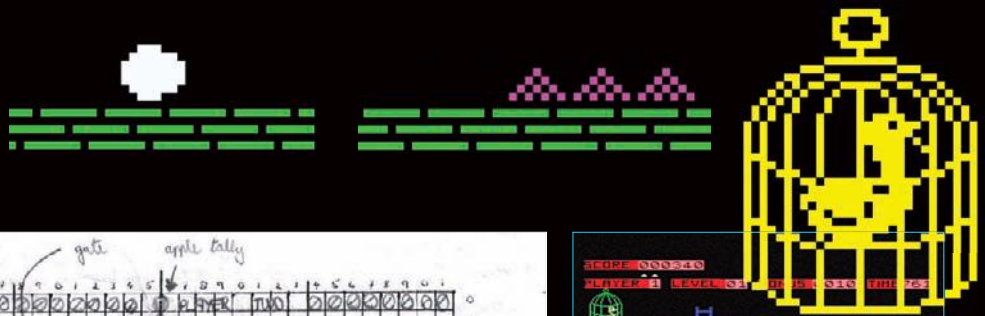
» The Acorn Electron had a particular affinity with pink and really big birds.

IN THE KNOW

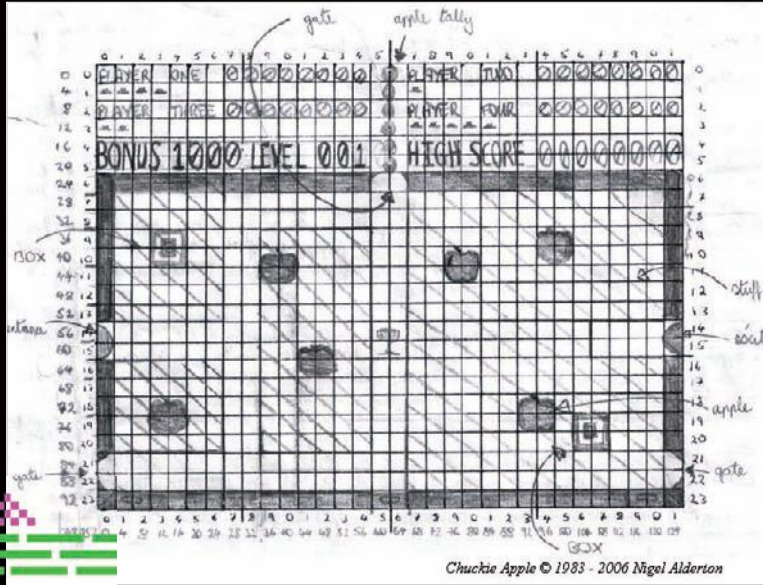


- » PUBLISHER: A+F SOFTWARE
- » DEVELOPER: NIGEL ALDERTON
- » RELEASED: 1983
- » GENRE: PLATFORM
- » EXPECT TO PAY: £2+

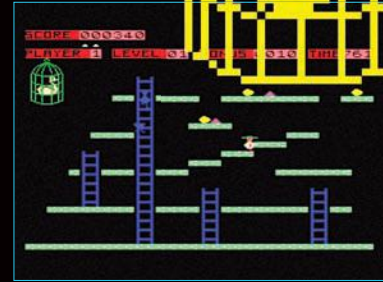
THE MAKING OF... CHUCKIE EGG



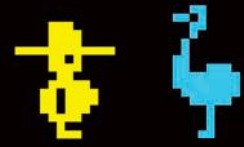
» Level 8 differs slightly in egg layout in the Spectrum (top) and BBC Micro versions.



» The design document for the never completed *Chuckie Apple* (courtesy of <http://www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg/>)



» The MSX version uses a variety of colours and gives Harry a bigger hat.



Hen House Harry, the lifts, the hens and mother duck all differ, while movement of Harry (especially while jumping) has a different rhythm in the BBC version. The BBC Micro also suffers from a bug, where it is possible to fall through the lift if the

game's main character was christened Hen House Harry by "a bloke at A+F who wrote the blurb for the back of the cassette," according to Alderton.

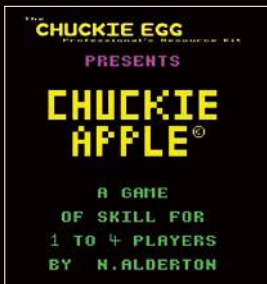
In 1983, *Chuckie Egg* would be released and the self-publishing nature of

Shortly after its release on Spectrum and BBC Micro, the company would convert *Chuckie Egg* to other computer formats including Dragon 32, C64, Electron, MSX, Amstrad and Einstein; and although Nigel Alderton wasn't involved with the ports, he was impressed with the results. "Most of the conversions are excellent, especially given the hardware restrictions of some of the machines like the C64 and Acorn Electron. I think the BBC version is probably the slickest, but I prefer my Spectrum original!"

Interestingly enough, its appeal is because the game can't be completed – with the pattern looping at level 40, Hen House Harry gets to carry on,

THE GAME THAT NEVER WAS

Despite not having any input into official sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*, Nigel Alderton began work on a new game in the series entitled *Chuckie Apple* on the Spectrum. Aiming to be similar in style to *Mr Do*, it was to feature "lots of bouncing apples and things". Sadly, it never even reached programming status. "Like *Chuckie Egg* it borrowed heavily from arcade games, but it barely got past the concept stage because I went to work for Ocean Software as an employee and I lost interest in," recalls Alderton. "I did do some drawings at the time which I found recently. I don't think it would have been as good as *Chuckie Egg*." A PDF containing early drawings and general gameplay information about *Chuckie Apple* can be found at The Chuckie Egg Professional Resource Kit website (<http://www.bagshot-row.org/chuckie-egg/>)



"I WANTED TO HAVE AN EXTRA EIGHT LEVELS WHERE THERE ARE TWO FLYING BIRDS CHASING YOU SIMULTANEOUSLY INSTEAD OF ONE" NIGEL ALDERTON

timing of the jump is not right. Level 8 has some layout alterations, where the arrangement of the eggs are stacked in a different way. The Spectrum and BBC Micro games are the ones that are most fondly remembered, with the latter often sneakily played by schoolchildren on their classroom machines when the teacher wasn't looking. Initially nameless, the

the business meant a lot of the packing was done in-house. "If a big order came in, everyone mucked in. Blank audio cassettes were unboxed and the card inserts replaced with the ones for the game, the blank tapes were put into cassette decks to record from the master, then re-boxed when they had finished recording. All done by hand."

seemingly destined to collect eggs and avoid rampaging birds for the rest of his natural life. Although the pattern remains the same, from level 48 the clock time decreases, making the game far more challenging without the need to add more content. *Chuckie Egg* is a high score game, where many gamers spend countless hours notching up points in the millions, trying to outdo each other to become the best *Chuckie Egg* player. Alderton explains that its lack of an ending was all part of the original design: "It was a conscious decision. I didn't enjoy the feeling of completing a game – I preferred it to go on and on."

The pressures of time to get the game finished meant that there were some ideas that never made it into the game, including the concept of two mother ducks chasing Hen House Harry around



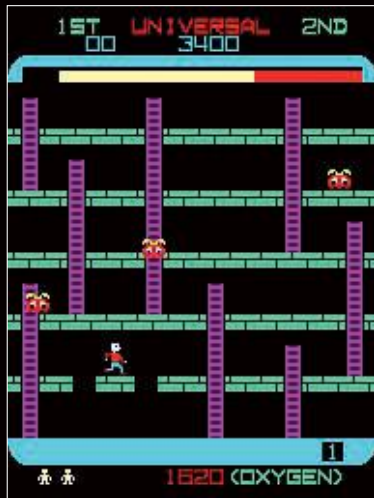
» Amiga and Atari ST versions had a graphical revamp, but suffered in the gameplay department.



» Unofficial versions were released, including this one which featured new levels and incorporated cheats (BBC Micro).



"I HAVEN'T MADE ANY MONEY OUT OF IT FOR YEARS BUT THE BRAGGING RIGHTS ARE PRICELESS" NIGEL ALDERTON



» This is *Space Panic*, the source (alongside *Donkey Kong*) of Nigel Alderton's inspiration.

the screen. There has been something of a widespread myth that two mother ducks featured in the original *Chuckie Egg* but we would like to debunk this right now as down to someone who has possibly been eating too many eggs. It was an idea that Nigel Alderton would have liked to have implemented though. "There were a couple of ideas which I wanted to include and just about had the memory available to do so, but didn't because A+F were putting pressure on me to get the game released. If they

hadn't it may never have got finished. I wanted to have an extra eight levels where there are two flying birds chasing you simultaneously instead of just one. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds plus the ostriches. Then a further eight levels where there are two flying birds, plus the ostriches, plus disappearing ladders. I could have gone on forever!"

The sales of *Chuckie Egg* meant that A+F Software was keen to capitalise on the game's success so they worked internally on the sequel *Chuckie Egg 2 (Choccy Egg)*. But as Nigel Alderton had just been a freelancer for A+F for the original game and then left to work for Ocean Software on *Kong Strikes Back*, the direction of the series was left entirely to the whim of the internal development team. "I wasn't involved in *Chuckie Egg 2* at all," says Alderton. "I didn't like the original concept, nor did I like the way A+F went about fleshing out the design, which was basically 'design-by-committee'." An entirely different style of game, *Choccy Egg* involved Hen House Harry navigating 120 screens in a *Dizzy* wannabe adventure, collecting items to help run a chocolate factory of Easter Eggs. Although popular enough to warrant releases on the Amiga and Atari ST, the game failed to emerge from the shadow of the original, suffering from its adventure game pretensions under the *Chuckie Egg* branding.

While A+F continued to release games such as *Cylon Attack*, *Kamakazi*, *Orpheus* and *Pharaoh's Tomb*, none lived up to the genius of *Chuckie Egg* or brought the kind of sales that the latter accumulated (over a million) and the company went bust in 1985. It would re-emerge as MC Lothlorien (later renamed Icon Design and then Tudor World), producing hurried conversions of both *Chuckie Egg* games for Amiga, Atari ST and PC in the late Eighties before also folding in 1991.

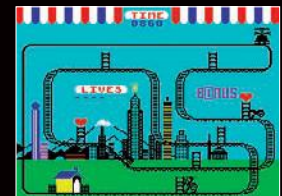
The advent of the internet has meant that *Chuckie Egg* fever has since gone into overdrive, with many fans setting up websites and creating remakes. "The amount of work that must go into them is incredible and very flattering," says Alderton. "Yes I've played a few of them, and some of their creators have been in touch by email just out of courtesy. One guy has even printed a *Chuckie Egg* T-shirt!" *Chuckie Egg's* popularity remains unabated and recent Retro Gamer reader polls have shown the game feature prominently in gamers' hearts, showing up at number 28 out of 100 in issue nine and number 8 in issue 37 respectively. "I'm very proud. I haven't made any money out of it for years but the bragging rights are priceless," says Alderton. "I can't pinpoint the secret of its success if it has one, but at the time I designed it I was addicted to arcade games and I'm sure that helped somehow."

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KONG STRIKES BACK
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM, AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1985

COMMANDO
SYSTEMS: SPECTRUM
YEAR: 1985

GHOSTS 'N GOBLINS
SYSTEMS: AMSTRAD CPC
YEAR: 1986



» A hacked version of *Chuckie Egg* (BBC Micro) was released to the community with extra colours.

