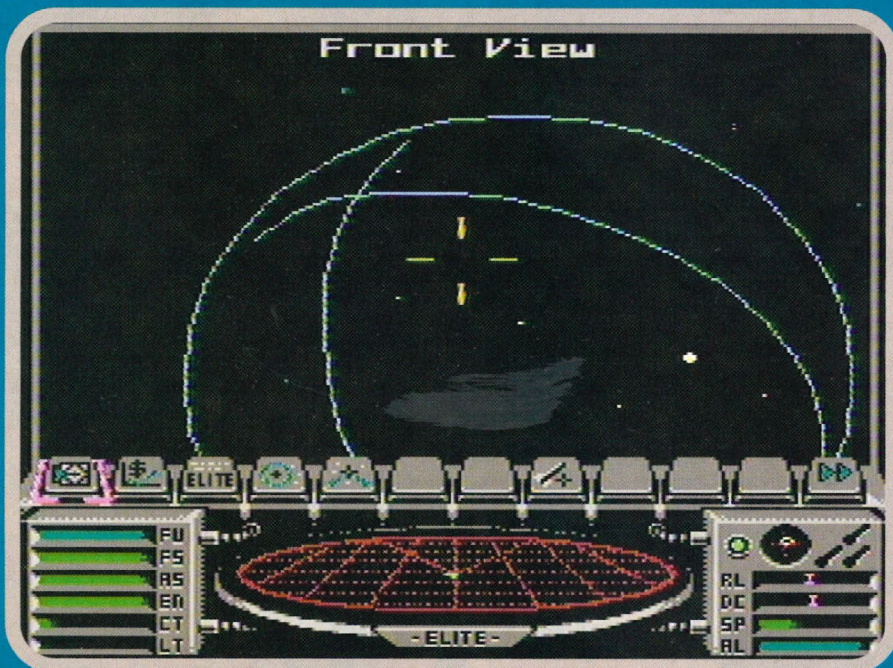




elite



There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots. *Marcus Bermann* is both. Old enough to remember *Elite* way back when it made the BBC micro worth buying. Bold enough to admit it. Who better to put the NES version through its paces?

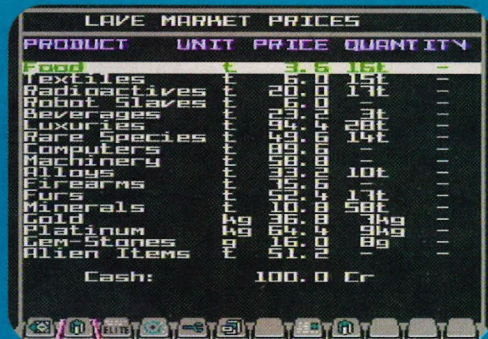


Here's the nearest planet, and somewhere near it a space station will lurk, where you can buy goods, re-equip your ship and indulge in curious sexual practices with all manner of alien creatures (Are you sure about that? Ed.)



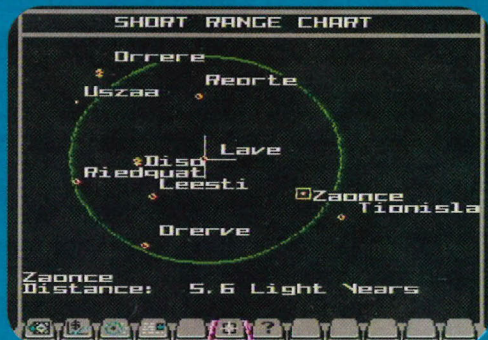
docking computer

This is where the docking computer icon should be, but as you're in the middle of a huge fight millions of kilometers from the space station, it isn't. If you were close to a space station, this icon starts the auto-docking sequence.



stock market prices

Let's you see the prices of goods in the current system. To actually buy or sell you have to reach the planet and dock with the station.



navigation computer

Shows the area of the galaxy immediately surrounding the current system, how far you can get with your current level of fuel, and lets you choose your next destination.

game, it has been much imitated over the years, but it's survived because it's good, and even now it remains supremely playable. And it's not too hard to pick up.

And so there you are on a space station far above the planet Lave, with a Cobra Mk III space trading and combat craft in the dock, 100 credits in your pocket and a huge-breasted young lovely on your arm. Actually, forget the lovely, because you are here to trade. The icons at the bottom of the screen toggle you between the various screens you're going to need. At the start, though, not a lot is going on: Lave is a very quiet and well ordered system. But as you venture further afield, buying and selling commodities as you go, increasing your fortune, equipping your ship, things begin to happen. People start shooting at you. In fact, people start killing you. It's a hard universe out there. Hard to stay alive in.

Combat is, in fact, the trickiest thing in *Elite*. For one thing, you have to know your ships – and there are an awful lot of different ships out there, some peaceful and most not. Here the manual – which, I should mention, is a model of its kind – is exceptionally helpful, although with characteristic Nintendo modesty it fails to alert you to the menace of the Thargoids. Some ships you will encounter will be

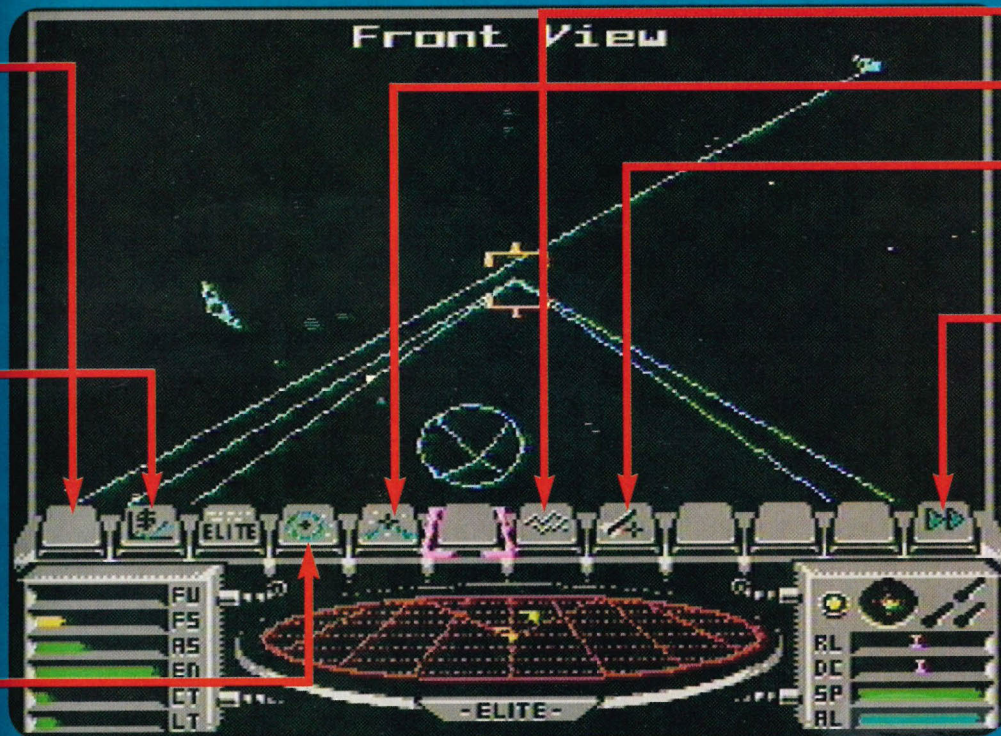
Red alert! Shields up! Call the nostalgia police! "Sorry to disturb you, boss, but this is a serious case. Forensics haven't confirmed it yet, but the evidence all points the same way – first degree nostalgia, ten to twenty minimum. The drooling, the dribbling, the faraway look in the watery eyes – it's not a pretty sight. He'll confess, it's obvious.

Oh all right, it's a fair cop. You've got me bang to rights. Like many an ageing joystick juggler, I have games in my gritty and grievous past that I'd rather not be reminded of. Games that can drag me down into a boundless pit of dark despair before you can whistle the *Tetris* theme. And yet there other games – rare, wondrous games that call up nothing more than happy memories of lost innocence

and joy, before the dizzy spells and the medication and all those problems with mayonnaise... but you don't want to hear my problems. And amongst those magical games of fond memory, for me at least, is one known as *Elite*. Me and *Elite*? We go way back. Listen, sunshine, I once played this game on the BBC Micro – back in the days when people actually used the word "micro" in polite conversation. Excuse me, officer, are these handcuffs necessary?

Out on bail from the nostalgia police, I am now banned from ever mentioning the good old days again – but that doesn't matter, as *Elite* is with us again, newly restored and converted to the beloved NES. Looking for something to tussle with for days, weeks, months? If you're a patient soul, *Elite* is it. It's the ultimate space trading game, a game of vast scope and subtlety, with no real point to it other than survival, prosperity and, if you're lucky, avoiding Thargoids. As it's an old

the wild black yonder



views

Cycles through the available views. (I'd never have guessed. Ed.)

ecm

If you've splashed the cash on an ECM unit (Electronic Counter-Measures. A Techie Twat.) this activates it, frying any nasty homing missiles in the surrounding area. Smart.

arm missile

This... wait for it... arms a missile! The next object to pass through your sight is targeted, and a Fire Missile icon appears, letting you... Well, you can probably guess.

fast forward

When there's nothing going on this lets you skip time, speeding your journey.



equip ship

This is the place to spend all your hard-earned cash, by refuelling and buying new toys to play with. Different planets sell different stuff, so shop around.

hangin' around the docks

launch

Erm, launches you from the station

stock market

The same as before, except now you can get down to some serious money-making wheeling and dealing.

status screen

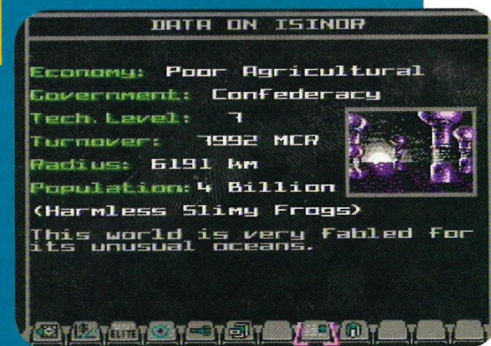
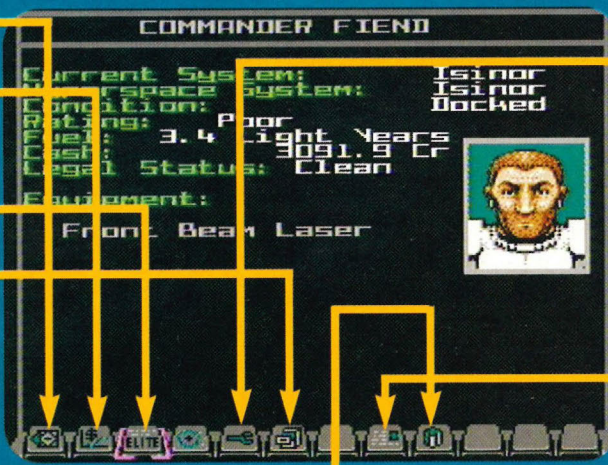
This screen. It's self-explanatory.

file

Lets you save and load your game position, via the wonders of modern battery technology.

inventory

A list of your current cargo. Okay, so that's obvious, but what else is there to say?



system data

Shows you the run-down on the system currently selected by the nav-computer. Vital for trading, as it gives you an idea of the likely prices of different goods.

relatively easy to destroy, and some will be more challenging. And then there are the Thargoids. When the Thargoids arrive you can run away, or die. Dying is easier.

So what are all these planets like? Sadly, you never find out: it seems that your Cobra Mk III "...is not equipped to enter a planet's atmosphere, because the weight of shielding required would make it too slow for combat."

Hmm, how very convenient. So you only ever see stars and space, and when you do catch sight of a space station in the distance, it's as welcoming as a cup of cocoa on a dark and stormy night. Switch on the docking computer (fee: five credits), settle back and enjoy the ride.

verdict

One of the few games deserving of the label 'classic.'

As you pick up the game, make some cash and start shooting down a few enemies, your combat rating, according to the Elite federation of pilots, slowly improves. You start as 'Harmless', but you could progress all the way to 'Elite' given a few months solid hard work. Few pilots ever make it that far, of course, but it's a testament to the game's pure and unsullied addictiveness that an awful lot

try. Does it stand up next to today's exciting new games? Yes sirree. In fact, this NES version is as good as any I've played - it's fast, responsive, as smooth as silk, and just as wonderfully playable as ever. Just don't tell the nostalgia police I told you. All right, officer, I'll come quietly...

LEAD ZONE

Graphics
 [Progress bar]

Sound
 [Progress bar]

Addictiveness
 [Progress bar]

Playability
 [Progress bar]

OVERALL 89

Out: Now Price: £34.99
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