

ROCKET MAN

Jet Pac marked the debut of the software company Ultimate, Play The Game. Originally written for the Spectrum, Jet Pac set new standards in high-quality graphics on the Sinclair machine and was an instant best-seller. The success of the Spectrum game meant that a version for the Vic-20 followed quickly on its heels.

The 'blast-the-alien' type of arcade-style game is often denigrated for its simplistic, adolescent approach. Nevertheless, the design of a successful example requires considerable programming skill. Jet Pac is such an example.

As is so often the case, the scenario outlined on the cassette inlay seems more complex than it is. As the chief test pilot for the Acme Interstellar Transport Company, it is your job to travel around the galaxy assembling spaceships on assorted planets, while collecting any precious stones and gold that you can lay your hands on. Rocket assembly is greatly assisted by a Hydrovac Jet Pac, which is capable of lifting almost anything, and allows you to manoeuvre components with ease. You are also conveniently armed with Quad Photon Laser Phasers, which are used to blast any alien being that might be unreasonable enough to complain about you despoiling its planet.

The game's description may evoke visions of a glorious Technicolor trip through the varied ecologies of different planets, but as usual the truth is more mundane. The planets you visit are virtually identical, so much so that the test pilot/hero must experience a strong sense of *déjà vu* at each landing. But the aliens make up for this. Each planet is inhabited by a single species only — in fact there would be little room for any others as all the aliens appear to breed like rabbits. These species vary in form from flying saucers to bouncing balloons, but they all have one thing in common — one touch from any one of them means instant death.

Scattered around the surface of each planet are three parts of a spaceship; these must be assembled before you can move on to your next port of call. No screwdrivers or monkey wrenches are required on this job — you simply drop the components onto the rocket base to see the spaceship form before your very eyes.

It is the aliens that make this game so enjoyable. There are plenty of them, and at first they give the impression of moving menacingly and unerringly in your direction. After a while you realise that they are, in fact, following predetermined paths from random starting points. The first wave of

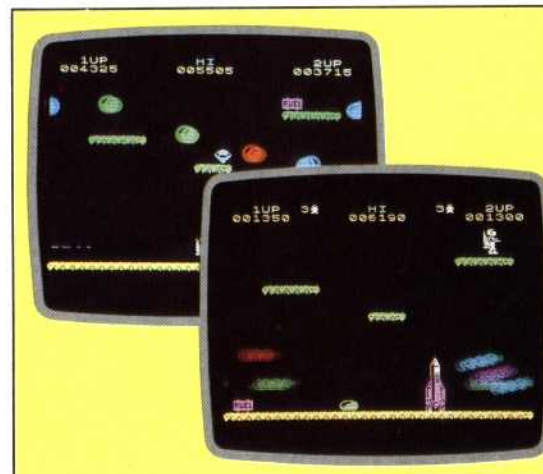
attackers descends slowly, giving you time to blast them with your deadly laser. The second wave is made up of bouncing balls, which ricochet across the screen between the rock ledges and the ground. This mixture of set paths and random movement provides just the right combination, requiring skill and fast reflexes for successful play.

This type of game is often ruined by a poor choice of control keys. Here they have been chosen sensibly. Two keys on the bottom row of the keyboard are used for left and right movement, catering for both left- and right-handed players. Any key on the second row up fires the lasers, which may be left permanently firing. The row above triggers the jets that make you ascend, and the top row allows you to hover. A nice touch is the fact that if no key is pressed you will drift slowly to the planet surface under the force of gravity.

The graphics are excellent. The test pilot is beautifully drawn, as is the Hydrovac Jet Pac, which gives off convincing puffs of smoke when 'thrust' or 'hover' are activated. The laser streaks the sky with multicoloured lines, and the aliens, when hit, explode in more clouds of smoke.

The game is much the same on either the Spectrum or the Vic-20, although the latter's screen format has the effect of making the test pilot look somewhat overweight. On both machines, Jet Pac is a satisfying and highly addictive game.

Jet Pac: for the 16 or 48K Spectrum, £5.50
for the 8K expanded Vic-20, £5.50
Publishers: Ashby Computers and Graphics Ltd.,
The Green, Ashby de la Zouch,
Leicestershire LE6 5JU
Authors: Ultimate, Play The Game
Joysticks: Kempston Competition-Pro (Spectrum);
'most Commodore-compatible joysticks' (Vic-20)
Format: Cassette



Space Assembly

The Jet Pac test pilot's task of assembling spaceships on various planets is made perilous by the attacking aliens, but the gold and jewels falling from the heavens (!) are some compensation

Jet Pac On The Spectrum