

INVASION FORCE

Never has a game captured the public's imagination so completely as Space Invaders. Simple yet effective, it proved so successful in the arcades that versions for the most popular home computers were eventually developed. We look at the original Atarisoft version of the game.

Almost every home computer now marketed has a version of Space Invaders available. The game has become so well known that, like Hoover or Biro, it is now frequently used as a generic term — to the extent that anyone playing any arcade game is often said to be 'playing Space Invaders'.

When Space Invaders was launched in 1978 it quickly produced a fever of almost epidemic proportions. Parents became worried that children would spend all their time and money hanging around in unsavoury arcades. What the watchdogs did not realise was that these children were in fact investigating the future.

It can be said that Space Invaders changed the way society saw computers. Before the game came along to exploit the graphics capabilities of the microprocessor, computers were considered untrustworthy, the classic example being the paranoid 'HAL' featured in *2001*.

Space Invaders was the forerunner of the whole shoot-em-up computer game genre. Since then there have been literally hundreds of games produced where the one hero or heroine has had to face hordes of attacking nasties, with only their speed on the fire button (and three lives left) to aid them.

It is an undeniable fact that Space Invaders is now showing its age. By today's standards, the game is very simple — yet no other piece of software has captured the public imagination to such a great extent. The player controls a movable

laser base, which is used to fire at the massed ranks of invading aliens that move menacingly down the screen towards the Earth's surface. A 'life' is lost if the laser base is hit by alien fire, or if the invaders reach the bottom of the screen.

There are several differences between the arcade original and the versions available for home computers. Instead of appearing out of thin air, the invading hordes now emerge from a large rocket that is situated to the left of the television screen. The invaders themselves are more brightly coloured and the sprites that form them are more complex. The defensive barriers, behind which the laser base could hide in the arcade version, are now missing, and the invaders have a shorter distance to travel before reaching the bottom of the screen. But one factor has remained constant: the menacing 'heartbeat' sound that accompanies the aliens' descent. This becomes more insistent as the invaders get closer and closer, and serves to generate a heady rush of adrenalin, which is probably the major reason for the game's huge success. Another feature of both the arcade and home computer versions is the 'mystery' bonus that is awarded if the player manages to hit one of the flying saucers that occasionally cross the screen from left to right.

Space Invaders has now managed to retain its appeal for six years. Despite the availability of considerably more sophisticated pieces of software, Space Invaders remains an exciting and highly enjoyable game — it is truly a 'software classic'.

Space Invaders: For all Atari computers, £9.99
Publishers: Atari Corporation UK Ltd., Atari House, Railway Terrace, Slough, Berkshire.
Authors: Atari
Joysticks: Required
Format: Cartridge

