

JUNGLE FEVER

Ultimate, Play The Game made its name selling high-quality arcade-style games for the Sinclair Spectrum, and its recent releases have combined graphic excellence, fast action and adventure strategy. Atic Atac (see page 376) was the first of this new breed. Here, we look at Ultimate's latest chart-topping hit, Sabre Wulf.

As sales of arcade action games have started to fall off, software companies have turned their attention to a new form of game that combines elements of arcade strategy and adventure gaming. Ultimate, Play The Game's new release, Sabre Wulf, follows this formula.

An adventure game, in which the player must transport the hero — often a character from science fiction or fantasy literature — through various locations, solving puzzles on the way, often has laborious stretches. The action can cease for long periods of time, while the player attempts to find the answer to a seemingly insoluble riddle. The arcade game, on the other hand, does little to encourage prolonged thought, requiring instead good reactions and a quick trigger finger.

Sabre Wulf attempts to combine the best of both of these types of games. It is basically a maze game, set in jungle scenery, and is loosely derived from the arcade classic, Pac Man. The hero, an Indiana Jones look-alike, is guided through a highly complex maze, avoiding attackers and acquiring treasure to score points. The object of the exercise is to retrieve the four scattered pieces of a broken magic amulet.

The jungle scenery is superb, vividly portrayed in some of the most detailed graphics you will see on the Spectrum. Animals, plants, mountains, caves and treasure are all beautifully depicted, and at times the overall effect is reminiscent of a Rousseau painting. The maze is highly complex, and it is quite an effort to cover as much as 20 per cent of it in one game.

Most of the attacking nasties are simply dispatched with a quick flick of your hero's sword, though he must be facing them at the time. In this respect, Sabre Wulf mirrors Pac Man. But some opponents require special weapons, and these must be discovered as you journey through the maze. Other objects will give you an extra life — which is very important in this game, as only the best players are likely to remain unscathed for long. Some objects, such as the flowering orchids, can either help or hinder you. Depending on their colour, they can make you immune to danger, turn you temporarily into a vegetable, double the speed

at which you move, or — most confusingly — reverse the effects of the controls. The effects of the orchids soon wear off.

Sabre Wulf is, in general, very well designed, although it suffers from some of the common faults that afflict other games software. The sound, initially highly entertaining and certainly complex, soon becomes annoying, and Ultimate has failed to include the facility to turn it off. Although supposedly either a one- or two-player game, it is in fact merely a one-player game that has two scoreboards. There is the usual Ultimate Hall of Fame, with space for the six highest scores. Here, Ultimate has opted for the arcade style of entering names: initials are entered by using the movement controls, on either the joystick or the keyboard.

Software manufacturers are at last beginning to recognise that there is a wide range of keyboards available for the Spectrum, and Ultimate has included provision for many of these. Keyboard use is less satisfactory, as Sabre Wulf employs the Q, W, E, R and T keys for movement and swordplay. This is difficult to understand, as all these keys fall in a single row and thus are extremely difficult to use.

But, minor quibbles about keyboard layout aside, Sabre Wulf is an excellent game, giving a fine balance between arcade action and adventure strategy. There is no doubt that it will prove popular for some time yet, and it is certainly a worthy successor to Ultimate's previous offerings.

Sabre Wulf: For 48K Spectrum, £9.95

Publishers: Ashby Computers and Graphics Ltd, Ashby de la Zouch, Leicestershire LE6 5JU

Authors: Ultimate, Play The Game

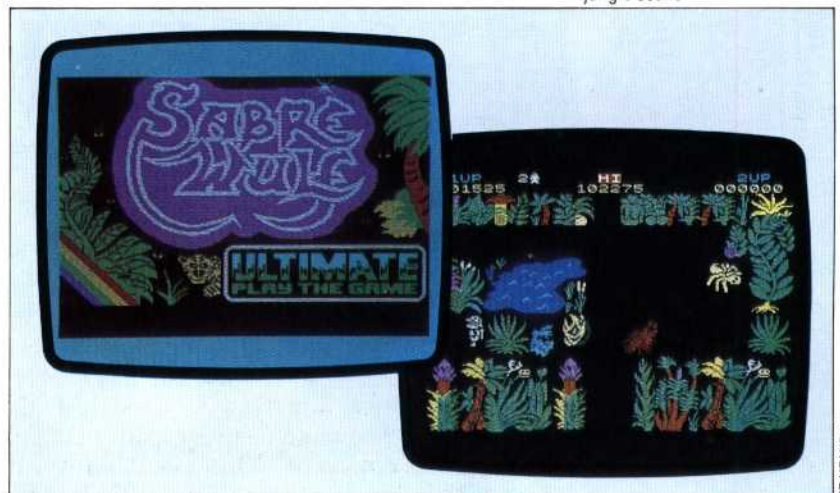
Joysticks: Kempston, Interface 2 and cursor

Format: Cassette

Title Page

This screen shows the graphics of the title page of Sabre Wulf. This same design is duplicated on the cover of the Sabre Wulf package.

Sabre Wulf is a maze game with an ingenious variety of nasty characters. The borders of the maze are filled with excellent graphics imitating a jungle scene



LIZ HEANEY