

CREATING
Cybernoid



sunteam

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History

In 1987, Hewson Consultants released a game on the Sinclair ZX Spectrum by a talented programmer and game designer, Raffaele Cecco. It was called Exolon and it was his first major hit. A walk-along shooting game, Exolon was both visually impressive and well designed, and received much critical praise.

In 1988, he followed his first smash with yet another - Cybernoid. In a time where Spectrum games were suffering from the monochrome capabilities of the machine compared with its new 16-Bit rivals the Amiga and Atari ST, Cybernoid was quite stunning to look at. The graphics were clear, bright and very colourful - with special effects that seemed on par with those found in the local arcades. The gameplay was a perfect formula of shooting and strategic weapon selection, and it was never anything less than great fun. It was also enhanced for the 128K Spectrum with a superb in-game tune that made the game worth playing over and over again.

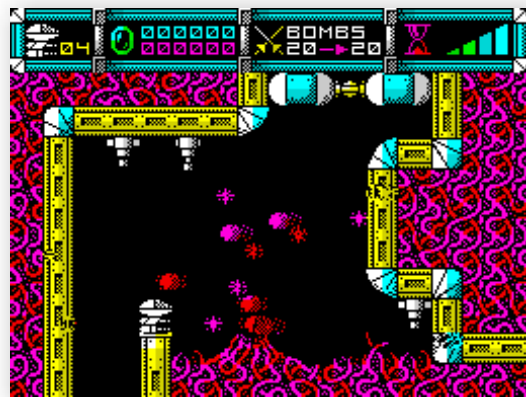
The success of the game was repeated on the Commodore 64 version with a quality conversion and yet another amazing piece of music that is a firm fan favourite - surpassed later by the legendary music to Cybernoid 2.

Many other versions also followed (see over).

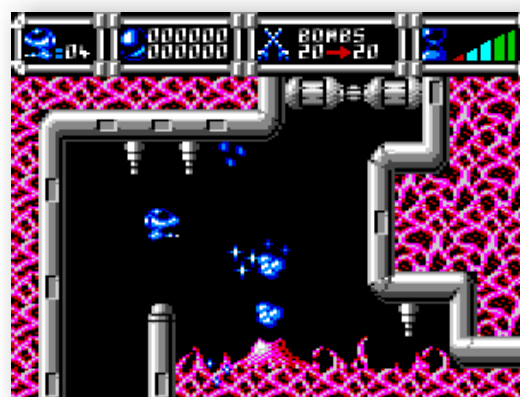


History

The Various Incarnations of Cybernoid



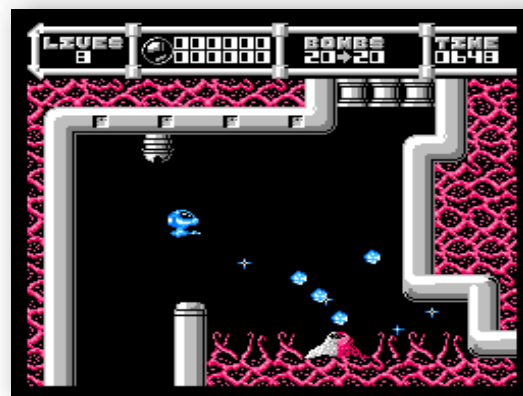
Spectrum



Commodore 64



Amstrad CPC



Nintendo Famicom/NES



Atari ST

History

The following review was from leading Spectrum magazine, CRASH:

"Fantastic! Who needs 16-bit machines when Hewson and Raffaele Cecco can produce games like this on the 8-bit Spectrum. Cybernoid is perfect in every way that a computer game should be: it has excellent sound, excellent graphics and excellent colour. In fact I cannot find anything wrong with it at all! The animation is the best I've seen for a long, long time, and the way you can add equipment to your ship to make it stronger is great, too. The backgrounds are all well drawn, as are the sprites. Understandably there is some colour clash but this is bearable and even adds to the effectiveness of the explosions. There's a good 128K tune constantly playing in the background and the special FX make it sound even better. As I've said before, it's the little extra touches that make a game enjoyable to play, and Cybernoid has plenty of these: volcanoes, animated cannons, and scrolling borders all make the game pleasing to the eye. Well done Hewson: the ultimate Spectrum arcade game!"

"Cybernoid: the sensational mean fighting machine, collecting cargo and firing bombs - the idea isn't exactly unusual but the slickness of its presentation certainly is. The graphics, reminiscent of Exolon and Starquake, are extremely colourful; the destruction of each Cybernoid ship is accompanied by an explosion so spectacular it's almost worth losing a life to watch the effect! The nasties are numerous and have some engaging characteristics: I particularly liked the wriggly caterpillar that carries on squirming even after most of its segments have been blown away. Immediately playable, Cybernoid gets gradually more and more difficult. After a while, progress inevitably becomes a matter of sacrificing a life to find out how to negotiate new screens. The gameplay, complemented by the atmospheric music, grows very addictive. Calling Spectrum owners everywhere - this is one version of a well established theme that it would be a pity to miss."

"An arcade game in your own home - you'd better believe it. Cybernoid is one of the most addictive, playable, attractive and downright unbelievable games you're ever likely to meet on the Spectrum. All the points that people used to criticize on the Spectrum could never be levelled at Raffaele Cecco's latest masterpiece. The graphics are astounding - fantastic use of colour and amazing detail. The (optionally) constant sound on the 128K complements the game superbly. Cybernoid sure is one helluva fighting machine - the weapons available are mean and monstrous, making the action really compulsive. Cybernoid defies all adjectives; it just has to be played to be believed - and once you do play it, you'll never leave it. If only all Spectrum games were like this!"

Joystick: Cursor, Kempston, Sinclair

Graphics: Cybernoid is so colourful and detailed you'd be forgiven for thinking it was an arcade version

Sound: An amazing 128K in-game tune, as well as some impressive spot effects

Presentation 93%

Graphics 96%

Playability 95%

Addictive qualities 96%

Overall 96%

Recreating the Game

Like many people of our generation, we grew up with the classic 8-bit computer systems - primarily the Sinclair ZX Spectrum and Commodore 64, then graduated through the Commodore Amiga and various game consoles, sucking in every new gaming experience with passion. So when the idea of returning to our past and converting a classic 8-bit title popped up, it seemed perfect. Of course, the idea of 8-bit remakes is not new, and there are many freely available on the net, most notably excellent versions of Manic Miner and Jet Set Willy by Andy Noble.

In August 2001, we were given an opportunity by a company that had acquired the rights, to produce an updated version of one of several games from the Spectrum and C64 era. Of these games, the dragon riding classic Thanatos seemed the most exciting, and we started on some graphical tests to see if we thought we could do it.

September 2001 - Work Starts

After these tests, which were pretty successful, we decided to drop the idea. This was mostly due to the third-party being more interested in a high resolution version of the original, that need not be entirely accurate to the original. This was a little disappointing and would require far more work for a decent result. So while mentally geared up for a retro remake, but seemingly nowhere to go, the idea for Cybernoid came up. The enthusiasm was very high and graphics work began immediately.

In keeping with the best of the recent retro remakes, we chose to stick as closely as possible to the original Spectrum game - even down to screen size and resolution. We've seen in the past what happens when people have 'updated' games and lost all the feel and look of the originals. Cybernoid was a good looking, well balanced piece of software and we didn't want to alter what made it a classic.

Recreating the Game

Mike (programming)

As I sit here listening to Tai-Pan on my little C64 Sid player I can't help but think the best of the gaming days are already behind us. Back then time seemed to stand still. It's difficult to describe unless you were there. I'd have to compare those times with being Alice in her Wonderland, sitting at our little Spectrums and Commodore 64s, pressing those buttons as hard as we could to get that extra gem or defeat the boss. Back then games had a sense of innocence, almost naivety, with all their colours and bizarre names you could quite easily forget the worries around you and submerge yourself into pure fantasy, where as nowadays most games are far too shocking, they probably cause more stress than work and to be honest, a lot of them are too bland. Also I don't think any one game nowadays can truly say it was any good, without at least attributing some design feature or other to an older game back in the Golden Days!

The good thing about doing a remake is that you don't need to add much (if anything at all) to make it work as the ideas and designs are already there. So in terms of workload I think we shared the load quite equally between graphics, programming and sound. Paul would busy himself with the graphics and it would be my task to bring these graphics to life. This is how I did it: My first task was to get the backgrounds and scenery in place, as this would provide the necessary boundaries for all the action. As per the previous versions of Cybernoid, a tile-based map would be used for each screen and thus an editor was required. Once the basic editor was up and running I could then create some test screens with which to start putting in all the action. Naturally the next step was to put the ship in. After all it wouldn't be Cybernoid without our Cybernoid ship! Surprisingly I had a few problems having the ship interact with the scenery and we don't want the player to fly through walls now, right?!! This was eventually sorted after I managed to get my head round the offsetting that was being applied to the background scenery (you'll notice that it sits in the middle of the screen not the top left which is the natural position).

Recreating the Game

So far so good, we had scenery and a ship, wahooo! Next up was firing bullets and enemies. The bullets were a doddle and I'd like to think I know a fair bit about AI and scripts and the like, but when doing stuff like the old fashioned adversaries of our Cybernoid hero you have to throw it all to the wind and rely on some good ole fashioned RAND search and move routines. In a way it's almost pleasing to see the enemy move around seemingly with intelligence, even though you know that in their tiny little heads, they don't even know where the Cybernoid ship is (see if you can tell the difference hehe).

Now that we had our ship and things to shoot at, I knew it was time to tie all this down to a proper structure before the programming got out of hand and I'd end up cursing the day I started Cybernoid (which fortunately I have not done). The structure I refer to is the same that you find in most game designs, like how do we handle each screen, from scenery to moving stuff etc... We need a structure otherwise you end up losing control of where the program is going and end up with some cludged together mess of a few screens and nowt much else. Fortunately I've been blessed with a logical mind and it wasn't too difficult to decide on the best method: separate data files for screen scenery structure layout, a core set of data per screen for general screen schematics, and a proprietary script language to load and build the screen entities (i.e. aliens, shooters etc...). Suffice to say when all was done I had the perfect structure to keep on building and building and building to sunrise :)

Having designed the 'under the bonnet' structure, all I needed to do then was write the code that read in each of the script commands and perform the required functions, like create a baddie or setup a powerup on screen. With evermore surprising regularity the coding breathed it's own life, and I coded long and hard like a man possessed, finding time whenever and wherever to do some more. This was not without some woes though. At one point I was stuck for several weeks trying to get the little tractor type things to go around the scenery properly. I could have strangled those little tractors; sometimes they would just wander off the screen; other times they would get stuck and go round in a tight circle GRRRRRRR In the end though I persevered and managed to put them back on

Recreating the Game

track. Another time I couldn't get the bombs to glide downwards correctly, I think we went through 3 different routines before we were happy. The good thing though, was that most of it worked first time, or after one or two tweaks, hence good progress was made in a short time.

Looking back over the program a sense of nostalgia washes over me, yet I'm compelled to ask myself a question; did Raffaele spend as much time as me on level designing? It just seemed to take up the most time, fiddling with those blocks, making sure they aligned and looked right, especially those tedious background blocks which give all the other blocks a real sense of belonging. The funny thing would be him laughing at my code, it's probably 10 times bigger than his original code ever was (alas happier days).

Still, with all the graphics and in-game movement done, it was time to breathe a little sound into the game. Naturally Cybernoid was most loved for it's music, on almost all platforms, and seeing as how we were doing an 8-bit rendition we opted to include the original Spectrum and C64 music (Paul woulda been happy with just the Speccy music, but I just could not let the C64 track fall by the side hehe). Also the sounds were important too - imagine shooting your weapon to the dull sound of silence, where would the fun be? Especially considering that we used the original sounds. Having spent the best part of the last 6 months programming Cybernoid, I feel as if I can finally relax, safe in the knowledge that our remake is as faithful as any out there.

As I write this we only have the intro and end sequences left to do. I sincerely hope you enjoy playing this game as much as I did programming it. To me Cybernoid was an all-time classic and to be able to write my own version of it has brought both respect for Raffaele and returned many fond memories which I thought lost in my past. Until our next title, happy blasting!

Mike

Recreating the Game

Paul (graphics / design)

Nostalgia is one of the most powerful feelings we have, though we may not realise it - but the ever increasing popularity of 'retro' makes this fact clear. It's hard to define exactly why we feel this way - maybe it's because it reminds us of childhood when we had far fewer worries, or maybe it's because the brain is expert at remembering the good things of the past and filtering out the bad.

Video games have developed a great deal in the last twenty years - to the point where now, due to the jump forward in technology, there are certain styles of gameplay that will never be revisited in commercial software. I'm not just talking 2D versus 3D here, but something much more. Cybernoid is a good example - how many shoot 'em ups in the last ten years have been 'flick screen'? With fast and smooth scrolling on newer machines that did not have to deal with colour clash, the flick screen shooter has faded out of existence. But there is no reason why a game that scrolls is any better designed or any more fun - in fact, there are plenty of scrollers inferior to Cybernoid. But programming techniques and public perception moves on, and so dies another style of game.

It is a belief with most people that while retro is interesting, when you come to play old games they are, by today's standards, just rubbish. While this can be true for some games, the truly great games remain enjoyable to this day, despite the technical limitations of the times. With many, a few minor tweaks and additions (mostly for difficulty and variety) would make all the difference. It just shows that while video games have become more and more visually impressive, there is no substitute for gameplay. I love today's games - but I also still love those that have gone before.

I have played a few retro remakes available on the net, and the best ones are always those that stuck rigidly to the gameplay of the originals. This is why we decided to do the same for Cybernoid. While there were various ideas for updating the weapons - adding new ones and modifying gameplay so

Recreating the Game

you could get out of your ship and walk around - it was clear that this would no longer be Cybernoid. What we wanted to give players is similar to what George Lucas wanted with the Star Wars Special Editions when he said that he wanted people to see the movies just as they **remembered** them. So it was important to keep the gameplay, all the original maps and visual designs in tact.

With this mindset now in place, the graphics seemed almost too easy. There are a few remakes of old games that try to reinvent the graphics of the originals - usually with higher resolution displays and modified designs. I have yet to see one that doesn't look poor, or at least way too different in comparison with the original. So I decided to keep the original resolution of the game the same. This made life considerably easier of course - all I now had to do was to screen capture all the visuals of the Spectrum version, bring them into Photoshop and colour 'em up! I have to say that it was very satisfying, bringing to life the monochrome graphics I knew so well. The only difficult decision was to make the Cybernoid ship red (as on the inlay) or white (as in the game). White was decided, as it is clearer to see and would match closer with the original. As the most important period in gaming for me was the PC Engine/Megadrive era, this has influenced the way in which I draw graphics. I'm not fond of ultra-smooth shading, such as was common in Amiga games - and I feel that you can get more of a texture to certain graphics in this type of resolution. I don't claim to be an artistic genius, and certainly couldn't compare to the professionals working today - maybe I'm trapped in the past? - but I hope that I can at least bring a good eye to what looks right and what doesn't.

Of course, there's more to our version of Cybernoid than the in-game graphics. The PC Engine was the first console to have a CD Rom unit, and this opened up a whole new world of stunning intro scenes. This has rubbed off on me a little, and I find that a modest intro adds a lot to the presentation of a game. So I plotted out an intro, utilising the back story from the manual (with a few additions of my own) and drew out some storyboards and designs. The intro was then edited and compressed, and I got to work on it. I decided that the easiest way to create the enemy ships was to render them in

Recreating the Game

3D - they are very geometric in shape, and this would save time in precise drawing and shading. The main character is very manga influenced - this is due to the fact that it's the only way I draw now rather than some style thing, being 'into' Japanese comics from a long time ago.

My wish to keep the whole game to a finished download size as small as possible meant that there were limitations to what we could do in the intro sequence. If everyone had broadband then we could have gone full screen with lots more animation. Also, if we were to finish the game off any time soon, it was probably for the best, as the intro was definitely the most time consuming part of it for me (sometimes it can take sooo long to create something from scratch!).

But I have to say that the most fun part of all was one of the 'secrets' that is only available by collecting tokens in the game. It may take you some time to get there but please try - it's worth it!

Finally, I would like to say thanks for taking the time to bother to play the game, as well as plough through my waffle. If you are of like mind to us, then I know you'll enjoy our version of Cybernoid. If you don't, then you're not the kind of person it's aimed at!

Paul

Finishing Touches

To update an old game by the numbers can be a satisfying act in itself, but it's often difficult to resist adding that little extra something to make your own 'personal' mark.

Having always enjoyed a decent intro sequence (before the days of FMV and polygon-mania), it seemed a natural step to add a small visual scene at the beginning of the game. Given the simple storyline behind the action, several designs had to be drawn up and an intro planned that was not too short or too long. The designs, along with storyboards can be found in the next section.

As games have progressed, there have been developments in what you could call a 'catch' to make people play more. A fine example of this is some kind of progressive 'collection' system, which is tried and tested. As some players may find the game quite difficult in places, we thought it best to give people the opportunity to cheat a little. But this has to be earned by collecting 'daruma' tokens in the game which allow the player to buy special features. By using this idea, we hope that players who at first find the game frustrating will persevere - and something special is waiting for those who REALLY stick with it!

Something else we added was the ability to use your own mp3 files to listen to while you play. As there are many arranged versions of the Cybernoid music available on the net (and we couldn't include them due to file size), we thought it best to give people the chance to experience the game as they wish. And if you don't like the Cybernoid music, then feel free to choose anything you like!

Storyboard & Designs

Various designs were made for the main pilot character. Some costume designs are here also..



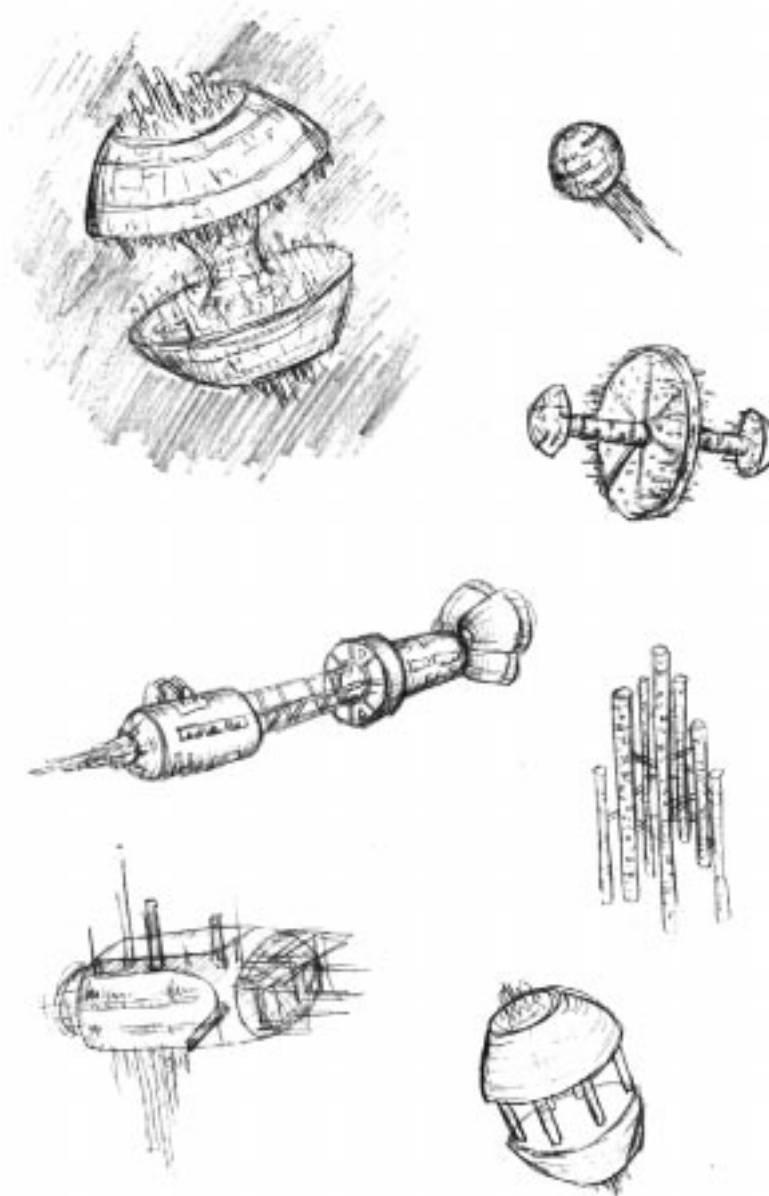
Storyboard & Designs

Helmet/Flight Mask ideas. This idea was later dropped.

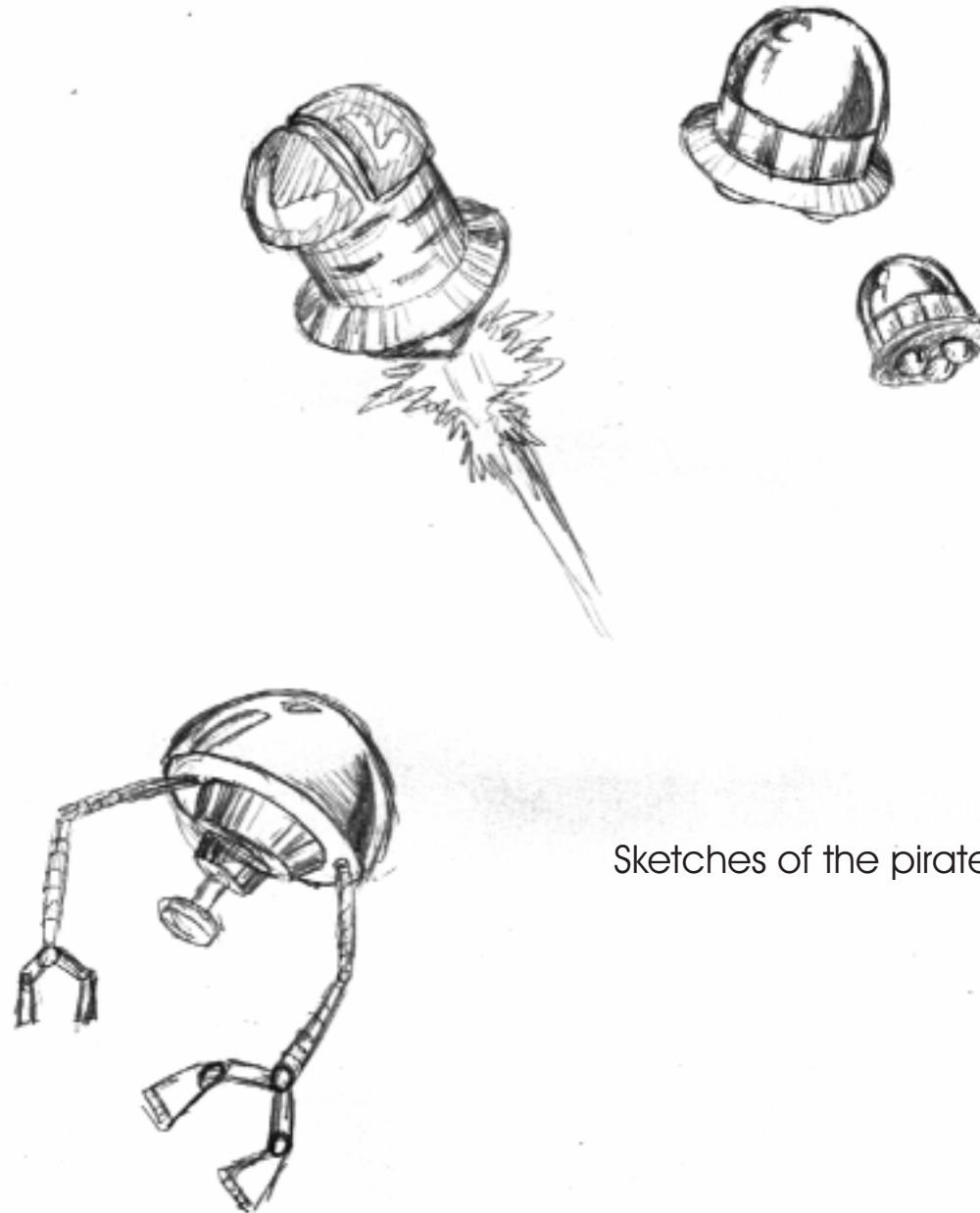


Storyboard & Designs

Space station designs.



Storyboard & Designs



Sketches of the pirate ships.