
Foreword

Wow, it's been quite a ride!

When I started writing this game back in 2008, I didn't expect it would take more than 7 years to complete it. Of course, the game itself is quite simple, and I didn't spend that much time on it after all. But I had a lot of work to do on the tools to use.

I started working on this as my first serious project for Amstrad CPC. The original plan was to have the game core written in BASIC, with some helper code in assembler to speed up sprite drawing and other intensive things. I asked CeD for graphics and he made everything in overscan, which is not possible to mix with BASIC. So I had to rewrite the whole game in assembly and forget about BASIC and the Amstrad firmware.

I also had to do a lot of things by hand at first. Converting pictures, assembling the code, creating disk images, running the emulator or transferring to floppies, all of it was done with GUI tools and it meant an awful lot of clicks to get through a complete build of the game.

This was not an acceptable way to work for me. So I started a quest to build better and more automated tools. I could fortunately build upon the work of others, and spent time on this on and off over the years, slowly improving the process. This also involved fixing issues in my preferred operating system and sometimes modifying it to improve my workflow.

Some of the tools I wrote or contributed to are used by several others as well. While the "cpcsdk" project itself does not seem to get that much users, at least some of the tools are now used in cpctelera, which is better documented and may help CPC developers discover the nice things an automated build can bring them.

Anyway, my goal when starting to write this game was to do a small and simple thing so I could learn z80 assembler and discover more about the Amstrad CPC hardware. I did learn a whole more than that.

Only a lot later I decided to enter this into the CPC retrodev contest. Not only it forced me to complete the game with a set deadline, but also it added to the challenge as one of the rules was to fit everything on the main RAM of a 464 CPC. With the overscan display eating half of the RAM, it was quite a challenge to fit everything. But at least I have the excuse of running out of space to justify for the not so great music included.

I'm proud of what I did with this game, and also happy that it's finally done and I can now start new projects without thinking "I still have these unfinished sources around on my hard drive...".

I hope you will enjoy playing ZNAX!

Getting started

Loading the game

The game is available in either disk or tape forms. In either case, insert the support in your computer and type RUN"LOADER". The game will be loaded (this could take some time, especially for the tape version), then the main menu will appear.

Menu

The menu has only 4 options, which should be self-explanatory. But in case you get lost, here they are:

Play

Start playing the game!

Scores

Shows the high score table. Can you get the first place here?

Help

This will show you the game rules and some examples.

Exit

Leave the game and return to BASIC. Be careful, you will need to load the game again if you want to play more! The high scores will also be lost.

Playing

Overview

The playfield is filled with blocks of 5 different colors in a 10x10 grid. Below it are your score, and a timer which starts with 60 seconds and counts down.

On the right is a picture of a clown, which does not serve any purpose in the game. But, it sure looks nice.

Goal

The goal of the game is to get as much points as possible. You do this by locating a rectangle in the playfield which has its 4 corners of the same color. You have to tag two opposite corners (forming a diagonal) to "select" the rectangle, the tiles in it will be replaced with new ones.

Each time you find a rectangle, you are awarded points and extra time. You have to find them rather fast if you want to continue playing. When the timer reaches 0, the game is over!

Controls

The game is played with the arrow keys and spacebar. Use the arrow keys to move your cursor around the playfield. Use space to select or deselect a tile. The first tile you select is marked, then you have to pick a second one to define a rectangle. If the 4 corners of the rectangle are not of the same color, this will not work.

Technical information

This game features:

- Runs on any computer from the Amstrad CPC and Plus range,
- Fits in 64K of RAM,
- Overscan, high-resolution graphics (including rasters to increase color count in mode 1)
- 4 different screens (menu, help, game, high scores)
- Hand-optimized assembler code
- Uses each kilobyte of RAM available
- Entertaining music
- High scores tracking