micro fair MADNESS

By Gareth Pitchford

OUT OF ORDER!

AUTOGRAPHS

Microfair Madness

Written by Gareth Pitchford

Programmed by 'The Spud'

A three-part text adventure for Commodore 64

with three extra bonus adventures!

The Quest for the Holy Snail

The Great Caravan Caper

Personal Computing Whirled!

'Back in the day' praise for the original ZX Spectrum version…

"Microfair Madness is… more polished, more inventive and it even manages to be funny when it tries to be. (A rare thing indeed!) It's a challenging game for the inexperience adventurer, and should even give the hardened pros a bit of a run for their money." **Your Sinclair** *8/10*

"Microfair Madness is an hilarious PAWed game that ranges from terrible puns to side-splitting send ups. [It's] a great game and well worth the money." **Crash** *80%*

Introduction

It was Friday the 13th of September, and you were woken up by the sound of hurricane force winds devastating your garden outside.

"What typical English weather!" you said, "Anyone would think it was summer."

You climbed out of bed and rescued the cat from the flood that was threatening to engulf the lower parts of your house. "Nothing could possibly go wrong today!"

For today was the day that you were travelling south to visit the 'Personal Computer Whirled Show - The 100th Microfair' to deliver your brand new adventure game to your publisher who had a stall there.

Travel south you did, until you found yourself standing outside Sir Clive's Exhibition Hall - the venue of this year's Microfair. Yet all your adventuring experience hadn't prepared you for the task that lay ahead; Halflings, popstars, Goons and Timelords - you'll meet them all in this crazy computer show.

That's providing you can get in - Guess which prat forgot the ticket?

Loading the Game

Microfair Madness Part One – Level One

*Insert Disk 1 – Type **LOAD "MM1",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

Microfair Madness Part Two* – The Search for Smok

*Insert Disk 1 – Type **LOAD "MM2",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

Microfair Madness Part Three* – Level Two

*Insert Disk 2 – Type **LOAD "MM3",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

*Unlike the Spectrum version, the various parts of the adventure are not password protected.

Playing the Game

Useful commands: EXAMINE (X), SEARCH, REDESCRIBE, GET, DROP, INVENTORY (I), OPEN, CLOSE, INSERT, GIVE, FILL, USE, WEAR, REMOVE, UNLOCK, DIAL, PULL, POUR, HELP

Directional commands can be shortened e.g. N for NORTH, S for SOUTH… E, W, U, D.

Game positions can be saved to disk using SAVE and LOAD, or to temporary memory using RAMSAVE and RAMLOAD.

For hints, tips & solutions, please see ***8bitag.com/games*** and other sites such as ***solutionarchive.com***

Bonus Adventures

Also converted to Commodore 64, and included in this Microfair Madness release, are three additional bonus adventures…

The Quest for the Holy Snail

Originally a mini-adventure, embedded into part three of the ZX Spectrum 128K edition of Microfair Madness, this version of 'The Quest for the Holy Snail' is a greatly expanded, full-length adventure which sends you on a search for the legendary relic. Your first task is to get into the castle where the Holy Snail resides.

The Great Caravan Caper

Another mini-adventure from the 128K version of Microfair Madness, presented here as a standalone adventure game. You're on a family holiday and you've been grounded. Can you escape from your caravan and meet up with your date, without your parents finding out?

Personal Computing Whirled!

It's time to return to Sir Clive's Exhibition Centre in this one-part bonus instalment of Microfair Madness. Your objective is the same, to deliver your game to your publisher, but this time you may have to contend with a certain Starfleet officer who is out for revenge.

Includes its own 'Virtual Reality' mini-adventure. And lots more bad puns. (Sorry)

Loading the Bonus Games

The Quest for the Holy Snail

*Insert Disk 3 – Type **LOAD "SNAIL",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

The Great Caravan Caper

*Insert Disk 3 – Type **LOAD "CARAVAN",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

Personal Computing Whirled!

*Insert Disk 2 – Type **LOAD "PCW",8,1** and then **RUN** the loader.*

Background

Microfair Madness was just one of the hundreds of text adventure games created in the late 1980s and early 1990s by amateur authors. Armed with copies of adventure writing tools, such as The Quill, the GAC, and the PAWs, these homegrown authors worked in their bedrooms or on their kitchen tables, producing wares with photocopied instruction sheets and inlays that were mailed off in protective jiffy bags to customers still eager to play a genre abandoned by mainstream publishers.

Text Adventure Designer seeks Programmer!

Microfair Madness first appeared in 1989… Well, sort of…

Gareth honestly can't remember if anything other than the title existed of Microfair Madness back in July 1989 when this mention appeared in Mike Gerrard's Your Sinclair adventure column. Although the plea did yield some responses, with collaborations started on some other more 'serious' games, it wasn't until a young man from Flitwick was thumbing through back issues of Your Sinclair, almost two years later, that Microfair Madness became a reality.

Delbert the Hamster Software

Scott Denyer had already written **Arnold the Adventurer** for John Wilson's legendary Spectrum indie Zenobi Software, when he decided to set up his own homegrown software label and publish games himself.

He already had a couple of titles ready to go but was looking around for more. Spotting the mention of Microfair Madness in an old issue of Your Sinclair, Scott got in touch with Gareth and asked him if he was still looking for a programmer.

And so began a lengthy period of collaboration on the game, all done by 'snail mail' with Gareth designing and writing the game and posting the reams of paper off to Scott who programmed it using Gilsoft's *Professional Adventure Writing System*.

Originally envisaged as a two-part adventure, it quickly became apparent that Gareth had written far too much to fit into the memory of the Spectrum 48K. The finished game came in both a three-part 48K version and a greatly expanded 128K edition that included more text, more puzzles, and two additional mini-adventures.

The Spectrum 48K and 128K versions of Microfair Madness were written over a period of five to six months during 1991 with the official launch at the *Second UK Adventurer's Convention* in Birmingham on the 26th October. Scott detailed the process of writing the game, and setting up his software label, in his 'Dear Diary' column in the *From Beyond* adventure fanzine...

6th June:
I have agreed to write a game which will be designed by a fellow adventurer (hereafter known as Gareth). I receive his initial designs for his game called 'Microfair Madness'. It's set in a... wait for it... Microfair! Let me say now it's going to be the most amazing, brilliant, rip-tooting, etc., game ever

21st June:
Having received most of the text for level 1 of 'MM', I can now finish programming it. I send Gareth a demo.

24th June:
Gareth writes back to say he thought the demo was brill! But... modesty forbids me to boast. I think I'll encounter memory problems though, as I've a whole level 1 mini game to incorporate, and I've only 4 bytes free.

28th June:
Another sad day. 'Your Sinclair' arrives and they've cut the adventure section down to 2 pages. (Tell me about it - Ed!) I wear a black arm-band and pace around the house quietly weeping, to everyone's amusement. I decide that 'Microfair Madness' will have to

be in 48k and 128k versions, as loads of Gareth's brill text won't fit into 48k. I also decide that the 'official' release date will be at the 'Adventure Probe Convention' on October the 26th. Therefore, I'll send it out to the mags around the end of September for a review in the November issues.

5th July:
I write and explain the memory problems to Gareth, and he promptly sends me more text for inclusion in the game. Sometimes the poor lad just doesn't understand.

15th July:
I get up at 7.00am to program the 'MM' mini adventure called 'The Search For Smok'! Yep! You've guessed it! It's a parody of... The Sound of Music'. No, just kidding my little tinkers! Anyway, I get the demo finished and sent off.

22nd August:
Programmed most of the 128k version of *Microfair Madness*. I must confess that converting a 48k version into 128k is rather tedious when you have to copy out all the 48k text first, before adding the 128k goodies.

15th September:
I make the masters for 'Microfair Madness' which is more difficult than it sounds as, due to memory problems on the 48k, some of the text is included on the loader, and called up via the 'extern' command. The games are then duly sent to the playtesters. ➤➤

12th October:
It's going to be amazingly close as to whether or not I'll get 'MM' to the convention in time. It's still being playtested, and I have to get 50 copies run off - a time consuming task if ever there was one!

15th October:
Had a talk on the phone with Barbara Gibb (playtester) and if I can get an amended tape of 'Microfair Madness 128' to her by Saturday (the 19th), she can playtest it by Monday, giving me exactly 4 days to amend it and duplicate 50 copies. It's gonna be close...
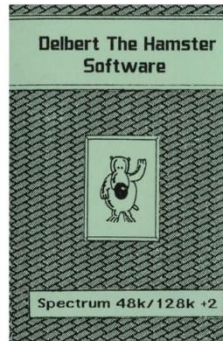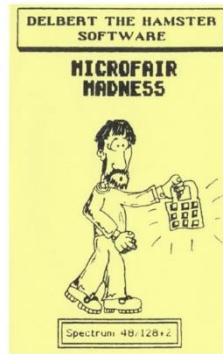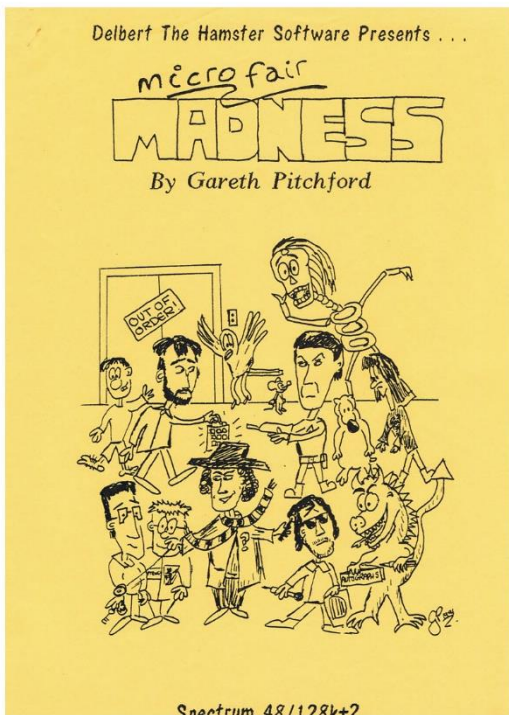
The original Spectrum release from Delbert the Hamster Software, first published in 1991.

The +3 version of the game was re-released by Zenobi Software.

An Amstrad CP/M version for disk-based CPCs and PCWs would later be produced and sold by The Guild / The Adventure Workshop.

The promised Commodore 64 version

As well as producing an Amstrad CPC version, The Guild were also due to create a Commodore 64 port of the game, as mentioned in **Commodore Force #1 (Zzap64 #91)** from November 1992. Sadly, this version never appeared… which may be just as well… we're not sure how much would've survived the transition to the Quill.

OVER YONDER HILL...

If you're wondering why I'm always mentioning The Guild, it's because they're the most active scholars of adventure-lore on the scene. If anyone else is marketing a game, feel free to send it in. Guild arch-mage Tony Collins has picked up the rights to convert several Spectrum adventures to the C64, so here's a quick roundup of what's over yonder hill!

● **Run Bronwyn Run, by Larry Horsfield**
Condemned to an arranged marriage with a man you despise, you seek to escape from your father's kingdom. Can you make it to safety?

● **Axe Of Kolt, by Larry Horsfield**
One of the most acclaimed Spectrum adventures ever finally hits the Commodore!

● **Magnetic Moon, by Larry Horsfield**
Your starship makes a forced landing on a mysterious planet, only to find it's unable to take off again! Ordered to stay on board and take no part in the exploratory mission, you have other ideas…

● **Starship Quest, by Larry Horsfield**
The dynamic sequel to *Magnetic Moon*.

Explore a hostile planet, meeting all sorts of odd individuals.

● **Grueknapped, by Bob Adams**
Trapped in the lair of the Grue (a hideous creature that lives in dark caves), you'll need all your wits about you if you're to escape.

● **Krazy Kartoonist Kapers, by Kez Grey**
Who says the interactive character in adventures has to be a warrior or a wizard? In *Krazy Kartoonist Kapers* you play a dog!

● **Desmond And Gertrude, by Scott Denyer**
A Romeo-And-Juliet-style love affair, you must guide the terrible twosome into each other's arms. The Spectrum version lets you change between characters at will, but it's not yet clear how this will translate to the Commodore.

● **Microfair Madness, by Gareth Pitchford**
All the fun of the fair — the Microfair that is! Look out for the Goons, Jean-Michel Jarre, Steve's clapped-out Skoda, and more… now where did I put that ticket?
    Quite a few of these games will be disk only. Look out for full reviews in Bash Yer Brains — more news as it's made.

This 2019 Commodore 64 version

This version of Microfair Madness (and the associated bonus adventures) was produced in 2019 by Gareth Pitchford using a variety of modern and retro adventure writing tools.

First the source code was extracted from the original ZX Spectrum 48K PAWed adventure by using a piece of software called **InPAWS**. This source was tweaked and corrected, fixing some of the original's bugs, adding extra responses and more hints, and improving the parser. The game was then exported from InPAWS into a form that could be compiled and played on disk-based machines such as the Amstrad CPC and PCW, running under the CP/M version of PAWs.

The source for this new CP/M version of the game was then run through **ANTUR**, a transcompiler by Stefan Vogt, which took the existing code and converted it into a form that was suitable to run on DAAD.

DAAD is a descendant of Gilsoft's the Quill and the PAW. It was originally created by Tim Gilberts of Infinite Imaginations exclusively for the use of Spanish adventure company Aventuras A.D. DAAD's compiler-based system allows authors to target multiple machines; the C64, ZX Spectrum, Amstrad CPC, MSX, PCW, Atari ST, Amiga, and IBM PC (DOS).

ANTUR automatically added a lot of the additional structure that DAAD source files require, but the resultant code still required a lot of hand-editing and work to get it to work properly and more closely resemble the original PAWed adventure game.

At this stage of the process more bugs were fixed, and further tweaks made… meaning that this C64 conversion is a lot more user-friendly and responsive than the original Spectrum 48K version.

Author's Note

Thanks for playing our game, Microfair Madness. It's definitely an old-school game. You will encounter the occasional sudden death and baffling parser-related puzzle. There will be plenty of awful puns and obscure references to the companies & personalities of the 1990s UK text adventure scene. I hope you still manage to glean some enjoyment from the experience.

Microfair Madness is a bit like a cross between a time-capsule and a diary for me. It contains all the things that my teenage self was interested in the time. There's Star Trek, Doctor Who, Jean Michel Jarre, The Goon Show, Tolkien… There are puzzles inspired by the things I saw looking around my bedroom, by the subjects I was studying at school, and by the part-time work I found myself doing at weekends.

Because of that, it was never going to be a timeless adventure, but I hope it's still an interesting one. Even over twenty-seven years later.

Credits:

Original ZX Spectrum Versions:

Microfair Madness / The Quest for the Holy Snail / The Great Caravan Caper

Written by Gareth Pitchford

Programmed by 'The Spud' (Scott Denyer) using Gilsoft's PAWs

Personal Computing Whirled!

Written & Programmed by Gareth Pitchford using Gilsoft's PAWs

Commodore 64 Versions:

Adapted from the 2018 / 2019 CP/M PAWs versions by Gareth Pitchford

Using…

inPAWs by Francisco Javier López,

ANTUR by Stefan Vogt, and

DAAD by Infinite Imaginations, with thanks to Aventuras AD.

Also, thanks to Chris Ainsley for the inPAWs & DAAD syntax highlighters,

John Wilson / Zenobi Software,

& Barbara Gibb for the original ZX Spectrum version playtesting