



Picture yourself late in the year 1983. You've watched Return of the Jedi at the pictures (and probably War Games as well). You're hearing 'Red Red Wine' on the radio and your Junior school has two new Acorn BBC computers which played a great Donkey Kong clone called Killer Gorilla (seriously, it was a brilliant game).

Clearly your G7000 or VCS no longer cuts it. Since Christmas is coming it's time to nag your parents for something better from your local Boots, WHSmiths Woolworths or Menzies. Maybe your town already had a computer shop already—they were opening everywhere in the early eighties.

So what do you ask for? There's the BBC, but it's in school—no good for the street cred. Another option is the 'breadbin' shaped Commodore 64, the American machine which looks exactly like the Vic-20—it's new though and still too expensive at Christmas 1983. No-one wanted an Amstrad—they're just mono green-screen pictures. So your final option is the small black one: You even know the man who made it because he's been on television a lot.

For choice of games and value the Speccy was the only option. The 48K Speccy appeared in June 1982 and like other manufacturers it was marketed as an education or business tool not a games machine. The first games appeared immediately but the first racing games for the Speccy didn't make it until 1983 when several pole position clones were released. For the purposes of nostalgia and just in case you had them:— **Grand Prix** (Britannia), **3d Speed Duel** (k'Tronics) and **Road Racer** (Thorn EM). If you ever played these games, I don't want to spoil the memory for you, but they were quite intolerable games you should try to forget. The official pole position didn't make it until 1985 when Datasoft made a conversion. Those games were bad. Very bad. But it all changed when later **3D Death Race** was released. It was all about high speed tree dodging. The better you are at the game, the more trees were present to dodge. It was fast and frantic and fun. So good was the game, that even 9 years after release, Your Sinclair (and legendary games journo Stuart Campbell) gave it an amazing position 1 in the top 100 Speccy games. His review is opposite. And whilst I don't agree it's the best Speccy racing game (CF) then I do agree it was a great game. Then again, Campbell is best known for his controversy.

Spectrum Facts

The Spectrum launched in April 1982 and after a year Sinclair made nearly £14 Million profit

It went on to sell over a Million by December 1983 (the same year Sinclair was knighted).

The biggest selling game was Sabrewolf (from Ultimate) which went on to sell over 350,000 units

Sabrewolf will undoubtedly have been enjoyed by many more due to the enormous pirate scene

The machine was capable of 256 x 192 with 4 colours or a lower resolution would allow 8 colours. Neither preceding Sinclair machines could produce any colour, so earlier Sinclair games (since 1980) were very poor and an Atari 2600 was better for gaming.

Sound was monaural and came directly from the machine

In the end, over 6,000 commercial games was written for the Speccy. In all 10K+ pieces of software was written.

And that included an original Psion utility for CAD work which allowed creation and manipulation of 3D vector graphics.

1 - Deathchase (Micromega)

No apologies, no regrets. Y'see, spec-chums, I've been playing computer games for as long as computer games have existed. I've played thousands of them, from coin-op games to ZX81 games to Apple Macintosh games and all points in between. And the simple fact of the matter is that there isn't one in existence that's as exciting, as gripping, as tense, or as downright thrilling as this is. Written in 1982 in just 9K of memory, Deathchase puts you on a motorbike in a forest, with no purpose in life other than to chase other characters on motorbikes and kill them for bounty money.

Your enemies don't shoot back at you (not even the the bonus-point tanks and helicopters), there are no power-ups, no end-of-level bosses, and the only things which can kill you are the trees of the forest itself. They don't TRY to kill you, of course, they just stand there, growing leaves and photosynthesising and doing whatever it is that trees do over the countless millennia, and wait for you to crash headlong into them at full tilt. And you will. The inanimate nature of your only enemy gives Deathchase addictive qualities which are almost unimaginable to anyone who hasn't played it. Y'see, when you get killed in Deathchase, it's nobody's fault but your own. The trees don't move, nothing shoots at you to distract you and you can even slow down or stop to catch your breath. Basically, there's absolutely no excuse for getting yourself splattered all over the forest except your own carelessness and impatience.

Which means, of course, that the next time you play, you won't make any of those silly mistakes. Will you? Well, of course you will. The thing is, the game is so utterly simple (I mean, 'Avoid the trees', it's almost insulting) that you don't see any reason to slow down, you can't accept that your skills as a games player aren't equal to the task. So off you go at top speed again, whizzing through the forest in fine dramatic style until you remember that you've got enemies to chase. So you swerve after them with your bullets zipping past just centimetres away, edge just that bit further over to get them into your sights, and BLAM! Another faceful of bark.

There's more to Deathchase than this, but not much more (as a wise man once said, more or less). For one thing there's the sound. Not that there's a lot of it, all you get is a scary siren effect at the start of each level and a jarring screech when you collide with one of these ubiquitous giant redwoods. The result, though, is so effective you wonder why no-one does it more often. The silence as you whip soundlessly between the trees just makes the sudden explosion of noise all the more terrifying - this is a game that'll make you jump off your seat in fright if you play it at night with the lights off.

And that reminds me - there's night time too. Every second level of Deathchase is a night level, with the same number of trees as the previous one but with the light blue sky turned pitch black. Theoretically it shouldn't make things any harder, but the atmosphere is so gloomy and oppressive that you find yourself crashing out of purpose out of sheer subconscious despair. The coming of dawn (when you finally manage to nail the two bikers) heralds an increased level of danger, but the relief of being back in daylight is so great that you almost welcome it.

Finally there are the 'bonuses'. Every now and again a tank or helicopter cruises slowly across the horizon from left to right. They don't shoot at you, they don't get in your way, they don't drop reinforcements for the bad guys, they don't do you harm in any way. Except that sometimes they're just too much of a sitting target to pass up, and you deviate from your path for a single second to bag the juicy points bonus you get for shooting them, and... BLAM! Time to leave your teethmarks for posterity once more. They never hurt you, but you'll grow to hate them.

Doesn't sound like much, does it? Bikes, trees, bonus targets and crashing. (Lots of crashing.) Only two real controls, hardly any sound, totally basic character square graphics and gameplay your dog could probably learn. I'm probably taking rubbish, all those years in front of flickering screens have probably destroyed my mind. It can't be that good really. So why not prove me wrong? Why don't you give it a try? What have you got to lose? Except the rest of your life, that is...

