

Amsthrees, “Making of”

Old but new

When I first thought in coding a game for the Amstrad platform I thought in doing something different from the typical platform game.

My first attempt was a vertical shooter, but my knowledge about the platform was close to zero, and I got out of memory with some of the basic features to include, so I just changed my mind and thought in something technically simpler, while increasing my low level skills... why not a puzzle game??

I've always liked the idea of mixing retro and contemporary concepts in games, so I began to search phones and tablets for fun games that could work on a CPC... and “Threes” appeared.

Threes is a very smart but enjoyable game, based in moving a 4x4 grid to form multiples of 3. It's a simple concept, but fun to play. Perfect for this project.

Begin in the beginning

After choosing the game that I wanted to implement, came the moment of starting coding. Instead in starting from scratch, as I did with the unfinished shooter, I decide to review the source code of some projects of the last Retrodevs, and the examples of Cpctelera, in order of learn about the basics of the CPC game development, and try to not reinvent the wheel. Among all the projects reviewed, the one that I liked the most was Space Moves, so I took as the model for the basic structure of Amsthrees (thank you Toni and Fran).

Changes, changes

The coding started, the days were passing fast, but the game wasn't advancing at a good pace. Mainly because as I was getting deeper in the knowing of how to use the different features of Cpctelera, and that made me refactor big parts of what was already done by that time.

Examples of that are the initial non tiled implementation vs Easytiles implementation in the final release, the use of transparent sprites based on a pre declared transparency table, instead of sprites based in masks, instead of raw sprites, the three different evolutions of the main deck, two different sizes of letter, two different loading screens, and three different designs of big letters, etc...

Lot's of “trial and error” work, but after a few weeks, a playable version was ready.

Gameplay tuning

Once a playable version was ready, was the time to improve the gameplay.

Examples of this improvements, are the implementation of the card bag, which increases the playability, avoiding the possibility of more than four repetitions of the same card, and maintaining the proportion between 1,2 and 3 cards.

The storage and printing of the highest card of the game, and the highest card of the session, in order to increase the challenge and persuade the player to play again to try to get higher than before. And the increasing pitch of the sfx, that raises with the apparition of every highest card on the table.

The Camelot Experience

There are three different small (and not so small) tributes to Camelot Warriors in the final release. Will you find them??

----- spoiler alert !!! -----

- The first tribute are four small icons (a coke, a tv, a telephone and a bulb... sound familiar??) that you can find in the top names of the scoreboard. Also, this icons are eligible as characters in your name, if you achieve a top score.
- The second one is the main tune of Camelot Warriors, that you will hear when a game finish..
- And the third one is the Camelot Mode. An special mode that will be unblocked if you are skilled enough to write your number between the four best in the scoreboard. In this mode, a new deck, tribute to Camelot Warriors, will substitute the ordinary one.

Epilogue

This game means a lot to me.

As many of the enthusiast people that are around the retro computing today, my wish, since I was a child, was programming a videogame for the first computer that I ever had.

I was ten years old when I first got in contact with the amazing machine which is an Amstrad, and now that I see my game finished, I look at the final release, and in spite of all its defects (that are a huge bunch), it looks wonderful to me.

Amsthrees it's been my first real finished project for the Amstrad CPC, but I hope that it won't be the last.

I hope that someone enjoys playing as much as I have enjoyed creating it.

Read you in the forums.

John Lobo