

MINDBLOWN BY MINDSMEAR

The ZZAP! Team had a phone call from two unknown, budding programmers who pressed hard enough to get this preview included at the very last minute. Calls like this are ten a penny, but to everyone's amazement their game MINDSMEAR turned out to be a shocker — read on . . .

Forget Lucasfilm. Forget Accolade. Forget Archer Maclean. Forget Jeff Minter. Stand by for a shock that may be as educational as it is startling. Soon to be released on an unsuspecting world is *Mindsmeas*, a game that defies categorisation. *Mindsmeas* wipes away all those 'well we've done as much with the machine as is possible' cynics and may well start something of a revolution in the industry.

Mindsmeas takes place within our solar system in a future where engineering has evolved robots far enough for them to be labelled as life. The sum total of countless thousands of artificial evolutionary stages is an almost perfect synthetic breed called **Meldings**. What price humanity in such a scenario? Not much sadly, but people do still exist, for the most part hunted down as vermin. However, there exists a band of few who oppose the Meldings and struggle for existence. For **The Few** the pivotal point of power lies in the possession of the Jovian moon Titan.

Within Titan's atmosphere is the largest readily available source of Hydrogen, needed in immense quantities to power any sort of practicable space travel. Using age-old skimming methods it's possible to gather this essential material from Titan's internal chemistry. Unfortunately Titan is Meldling controlled — but it's your job to change all that. You are the ultimate creation of *The Few* technology made up from 'identity slices' from the best brains within the last of human society, you are a *Mindsmeas*.

Several Meldling ground targets on Titan need to be destroyed, normally an impossible task, but thanks to your contacts on Earth it's possible to hold off attacks from Meldling intelligence. The way to deter enemy intervention is via subterfuge: this is the brains part of *Mindsmeas* and very interesting it is too. Using a complex windowing system, a sort of adventure game is played whilst trying to destroy main bunkers on Titan. It's possible to play both games simultaneously, the game screen shrinks down and the map/text screens are overlaid as windows, but be warned, the computer finds it easier to multi-task than you will!

The main game is in 3D — as near to life as a Commodore could ever be. Admittedly *Eidolon* was good, but there's just no

valid comparison. The main surprise is how smoothly everything moves while the illusion of true perspective in constantly captured. Each frame stands up as a competent piece of Commodore art. Even though the still photographs look impressive, they give but an inkling to *Mindsmeas*'s reality. Your ship is very neat, capable of a most astounding list of manoeuvres. Control is somewhat similar, but more versatile, to that employed in *Mercenary*. The routines interpreting the stick's movements are very clever, using specialized artificial intelligence procedures to make sure the joystick does what is needed. There's even an onboard computer that controls attacks on enemy ships, though caution should be exercised as it's prone to enemy infiltration. There's nothing worse than getting blasted to smithereens by your own battle computer!

The version exclusively shown to us at the ZZAP! offices was about 60% complete, but the main bulk of the game is written. At the time of going to print the two programmers of the project, **Paul and Phillip O'Connor**, were just starting to look for someone to publish *Mindsmeas*. Neither have the time to spend running a company of their own so a third party to market the game seems like a good idea. After seeing *Mindsmeas* we're sure they won't have to look very far.

Technically *Mindsmeas* really is a doozy. Hardly surprising considering the dazzling academic background of the main coder, 18 year old Paul O'Connor. After taking an entry exam for Cambridge at the age of 14 he's been there since and is now studying for a Doctorate in Maths and Psychology. How did Paul manage to squeeze so much into a machine so many think has reached its limit? Well the advantage we had over many other 64 programmers was that we were totally new to the machine. This may seem paradoxical but after talking to habitual 64 games authors it really seemed that they were bogged down by what had gone before them. We looked at the computer as a totally new hardware entity and designed a game accordingly.

Paul's work is the mainstay of the program but many of the sub-sections that make *Mindsmeas* so amazing were created

by Paul's brother Phillip. Phil is currently at secondary school studying for 'O' levels. The main secret was to work out a sensible data structure, preferably one that would work table-driven to keep up the general speed we needed. The trouble is that tables take up so much memory, so a sort of table buffer is used where the main reference blocks are generated rather than loaded. We did cheat a bit on the cassette version with the 'invisible' loading of code. While you play, large chunks of text are being pulled into computer. The speed depreciation of this system is negligible but the real problem is having so many sprites on screen and keeping everything reliable.

What surprised us most were the extremely high speed filled graphics, they really put *Elite*

and *Mercenary* to shame, we asked Paul how such astounding moving images were created. The good idea we had was to use the disk drive as slave processor to the main prog. It makes life very easy and means that a true 3D image can be generated and pulled onto screen in much less than a frame flyback, something previously unachieved on the 64. Obviously this was to detriment of the cassette version but after many late nights and quite a few pints of Home Brew the main algorithms were suitably speeded up to make the cassette version viable. It meant we could really go to town on disk version though, I particularly liked the sampled guitar note we got to do a very convincing Dave Gilmore guitar solo. Now that was cool.

Titan ground targets — an example of the filled in 3D effect achieved in MINDSMEAR, sadly black and white stills do them little credit.

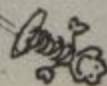


Multi-tasking on MINDSMEAR with the map window pulled down over the action background, in this case Great Britain where you want to locate an intelligence contact.

"I ALWAYS WELCOME NEW TALENT — IF IT'S NOT COMPETING WITH ME!"



"TALENT!"



WERE YOU MINDBLOWN BY MINDSMEAR

Those of you eagerly awaiting the release of *Mindsmeas*, the mega-game previewed last month, should have a look at the cover date of that issue. Yes, it was April and *Mindsmeas* was sadly just an April Fool, a mere product of the fertile imaginations of the ZZAP! reviewing team.

The amazing screen shots were knocked up by binary Magritte **Bob Stevenson**, and were just what they looked like — stills. The accompanying text does have its serious points though, and one of them was to try and silence all the moaning minnies claiming that software for the 64 has reached its peak of sophistication.

Technically the whole piece was quite feasible, though the bit about the guitar solo was stretching the possible slightly. However, it is possible to use the disk drive as a slave processor, but no one seems to have tried it yet. It would speed up 3D games a great deal, as calculations could be carried out by the 'second processor', leaving the 64 with more time to do its own thing.

If you did get caught out, don't feel too bad since you're in the same boat as *Firebird*, *Nexus* and *Bug-Byte* (sorry Peter, looks like we owe you the drink), who all fell for our little 'joke' and inquired about the possibility of marketing *Mindsmeas*. We apologise for any inconvenience caused, and leave you to feast your eyes once more on the truly stunning screen shots — but this time in full colour.



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