

STARPLOD REVIEW

STARPLOD

by ALAN PEMBERTON

Cost £8.00 from CGH Services, £6.50 if you supply the media and postage.

(Review from QL Adventurers' Forum no.6)

“THESE are the voyages of the Starship Boobyprize; its five year mission, to boldly plod where everyone with any sense has gone by four!” Starplod is, as you might have gathered, a space adventure and has absolutely nothing to do with policemen (think about it!).

Not a lot of people know this, but when the makers of Star Trek finished their five—year mission, back in the sixties, they dismantled the set and threw all the bits away. By the time they realised that ST was a cult hit all over the universe and went out to retrieve the stuff, it was too late.

Alan Pemberton had been rummaging through the dustbins looking for likely material for a new adventure, having exhausted his supply of used toilet rolls, empty Fairy Liquid bottles etc (see my review of Ye Classical—Type Adventure) and had made off with a used space shuttle, an obsolete space station and various minor members of the cast, leaving behind a pair of pointy ears, Lt. Uhuru's headphones and half a tree trunk (the Captain's Log).

He threw all the stuff into a QL and what came out was an adventure like wot you have never seen before — STARPLOD (roll credits, cue loud space epic—type music and fade to a distant part of the galaxy, two million years hence. Scene 1. A Well—Used Space Base).

You were one of the lucky ones to be ejected into space A Long Time Ago on a spaceship built to save mankind when the Earth was dying. Unfortunately just after you left scientists solved all the problems and also built a new type of engine that would help man conquer space. So they all overtook you, colonised space, ruined it for everybody else and then left. Now your ship has got where it was going but is running out of moronium, the stuff that has been keeping you alive by running the life—support system. You have been chosen to pop out and get some more.

Now you've got the picture, well half of it anyway. Because the system you're in is mostly occupied by baddies and a further complication is that you can operate this adventure only by pressing buttons. That's right, you tell the computer what to do by aligning the cursor over any one of 20 symbols and pressing The Spacebar (what else?).

If it's getting a bit tedious using cursor keys to zoom up and down the icons (posh word for pictures) then connect up the joystick (the one you don't use because YOUR QL isn't a games machine) and you'll find life a lot easier. L,R,U,D operate as expected and simply press the fire button to execute your instructions. If you find yourself halfway through an instruction and change your mind, just press ESC.

Alan Pemberton has also thoughtfully provided Ramsave and Ramload, as well as the more conventional save to and load from an mdv.

As I said, Spaceplod is an adventure like wot you have never seen before and the unusual way of giving instructions takes some getting used to. It does speed up the adventure because you don't have to work out what the computer undertands. On the other hand it can be frustrating because your options are limited. Until you get on to Alan Pemberton's wavelength you may struggle. But then if you've had a go at Adventure Playtime, Tower of Valagon and Ye Classical—Type Adventure, you will quickly get the hang of this one.

Whenever I get hold of an adventure by AP, I sometimes feel I must be a failed critic, cos I can't find anything nasty to say about it. But I've come to the conclusion that It is simply because the first thing AP does when he's written an adventure is pass it over to Rich Mellor to play with and it comes back with all the bugs removed.

As far as price goes, I've forgotten how much Starplod costs, but I'm sure Richard will enlighten you at the start of this review. Suffice it to say that Starplod is almost a giveaway compared with other adventures on the market. In my case it is a giveaway since RA sent me a free one to review and still managed to sell me a couple of other programs!

SHANE MCGARVEY

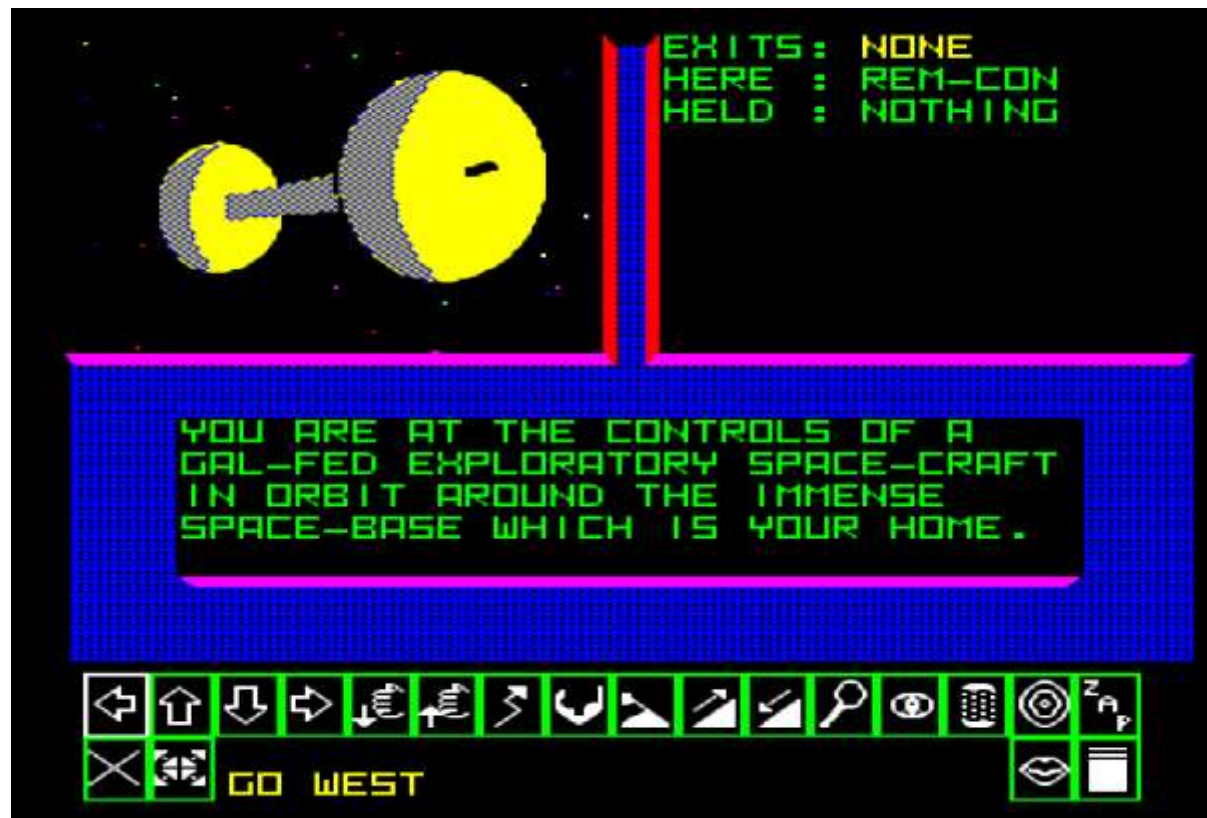
(n.b. Shane completed this without either the manual or the hints sheet. So no excuses from the rest of you if you get stuck.)

STARPLOD REVIEW

Being a review of Starplod, written by Alan Pemberton and published by C.G.H. Services. The price: £8.00 flp or mdv (plus 80p (PP etc.) . The review is by Nick Ward, from QL Leisure Review magazine, issue 1.

Taking a break from the writing of QL games, I decided to sample someone else's offering. With an unexpanded QL, and wanting some graphics, I plumped for 'STARPLOD' - a game which has intrigued me for some time. It's interesting to see how different people have approached the leisure side of the computer - both to pinch ideas and to note any improvements which could be made. Before I obtained the game I had very little idea of how it had been implemented.

For those of you still without a copy, the game is set in a planetary system surrounding a single star. As captain of a small ship you hyperdrive from planet to planet, landing on each to go adventuring. The screen holds the textual description, a small graphics window and a section that acts as the system map or inventory as required. Icons are provided at the bottom from which you select your commands.



As usual I dived straight in, no manual for me! (I did however make a back-up.) The icons are selected using the cursor-keys/joystick and no further commands are necessary. These icons cover every eventuality from a galactic phone to throwing the odd object around. There began my first problem - hyperdrive always took me to KIRVAL - at first sight a very boring planet indeed. Haha the manual, silly orange thing; so maybe it did turn out to be a tinsy-winsy bit useful.

So instructions to the fore, I dived in again, only to be slightly disappointed in how few locations I could actually get to without being killed or barred entry. This seemed to be a pattern throughout the game, you are almost led to discovering where to go next - there's not much option. Anyhow I then noticed that everything, should be 'analysed'. This turned up a prayer mat which was duly put to good use before firing on an irkoid ship - I still died, these relics are never infallible. Exploring the pirate-base got me no further and I went to bed thoroughly disappointed with my progress.

In the morning I played with all the other commands, climbing canals, throwing pirates - eventually I hit on a good combination and gained access to another planet. Here I just couldn't escape from the innards of a cute looking Zonster, ah well.

Suddenly I made a major breakthrough - or rather break-down on KIRVAL. More discoveries followed including the proper use for a prayer mat. Henceforth everything flowed more or less smoothly and by evening it was done, the space base saved.

So my opinions. Well, the graphics were most interesting. Each picture has been broken down into individual filled shapes which are drawn each time by the basic. If full images had been stored it would have taken too much memory and these are effective enough, but do slow the game down a little. Since the game takes a bit of mulling over, that's no real problem. In fact it's a fine

idea, maybe I could use it?

The game itself began in a most frustrating manner, there is little you can do until you master the philosophy behind the play. Every discovery is a joyous occasion however, and you zip off elsewhere to try out each new object. Yes it was most enjoyable and addictive. It's the first adventure I've actually finished through to the end. In fact its major drawback or disappointment is the shortness of it. The game seems to draw to a close just as you're getting warmed up - I'd have liked to see many more locations and puzzles, perhaps because it was so pleasant to play. The icons themselves, at first a little annoying, soon became perfectly acceptable and you don't have to check out the umpteenth different way of saying something in order to get results.

The puzzles themselves began very hard and then got easy. I feel that the limited initial locations might prove a bit daunting to someone who didn't get anywhere for a long time. Apart from that, a fine piece of programming, bright and enjoyable rather than a dull slog. Congratulations AP.

Nick Ward

Things are pretty dodgy abroad the Galactic Federation Space-Base. After plodding through the galaxies where no QL has plodded before our ship has picked out a likely solar system for us to try for size. Unfortunately, when we woke from our two-million-year cryogenic sleep we found that critical damage had occurred to the ship during our long flight from Earth.

The Space-Base is dangerously short of moronium, the precious mineral essential to the life-support systems generator. There is only sufficient to last a few days, or at most a week. Naturally, as Commander, I am going to order some poor moron to find more moronium – to put his life on the line for the rest of us 10,000 crew members – but who to send out in the small Gal-Fed exploratory craft? What about that ensign with the long black antique computer...?

Yes, you guessed it. It is you. So begins your mission in Alan Pemberton's new adventure game, *Starplod*.

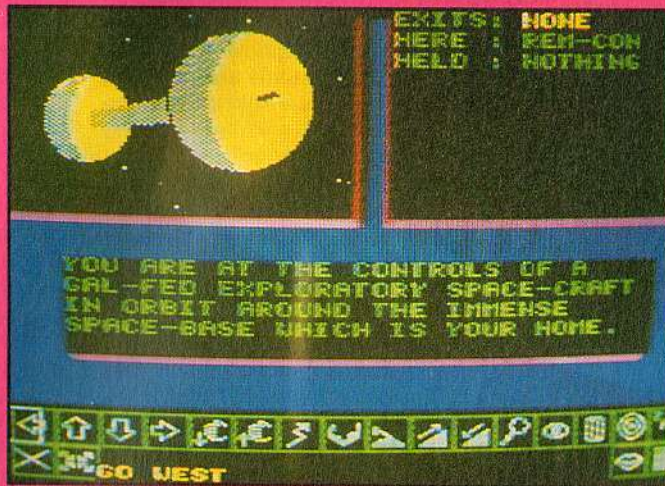
The first thing with which to come to terms in this delightful game is the fact that it is icon-driven. Using either arrow keys/spacebar or joystick, all commands are effected by selecting one of the 20 symbols in the icons/command window. Although this system perhaps reduces the complexity of the game, it has the advantage of ensuring that every command is executable. There is none of the irritation associated with responses from traditional parsers like "I don't understand. Try some different words."

One soon becomes adept at choosing each command. The neat thing is the way in which the object of some commands is highlighted in the text window. FIRE AT allows you to move through the location description until you light on a likely target. In the case of manipulating objects, after the command, e.g., ACTIVATE, the available items are scrolled through one by one until you reach the object you want.

The command THROW takes this method one stage further by requiring first the object to be thrown from the list and then the text window target at which to lob the chosen item. If this sounds

SOFTWARE FILE

Hyperdrive and icon-drive come to David Watson's aid in the depth of space.



Information:

Program: Starplod

Price: £8 (£6 if you supply media plus p&p), includes manual.

Source: CGH Services, Cwm Gwen Hall, Pencader, Dyfed, SA39 9HA. Tel: 055934 574.

Captain's Log: Stardate 200000.5

complicated, do not worry. In practice it is simple and neat.

Above the text window are two more displays. The one on the right gives information on exits from the current location and shows what objects are present and what objects are held. On Hyperdrive it also shows the solar system. To the left is the graphical display of your whereabouts and natty little pictures they are, too. I like particularly the effect when one Hyperdrives to a new location.

So how do you go about getting the required moronium, because you will not be allowed back on board the Space-Base until you have the darned stuff? This particular solar system contains five planets to which you will have to Hyperdrive. Once in orbit round a planet, you transport down to the surface. Is it me, or does the Transpad look suspiciously like a Big Mac?

Be warned. Some planets are inhospitable places. Then it is down to getting hold of the available objects and finding exactly what you are supposed to do with them. The game allows for Save and Ramsave and this is particularly useful because you will almost certainly be zapped at least a few times on your danger-fraught expedition.

Starplod is a charming game, well-thought-out and containing much of the whimsical humour which is the hallmark of Pemberton's work. One of the objects is a prayer mat. Trying to UTILISE it will in most cases return with "There is no Divine response." As a piece of programming, Starplod is very elegant. Perhaps the inclusion of sound might have added another dimension. My only real criticism is that I found it a little easy and the pleasure was over all too soon. At £8 you will have to trek or plod far to find comparable value.