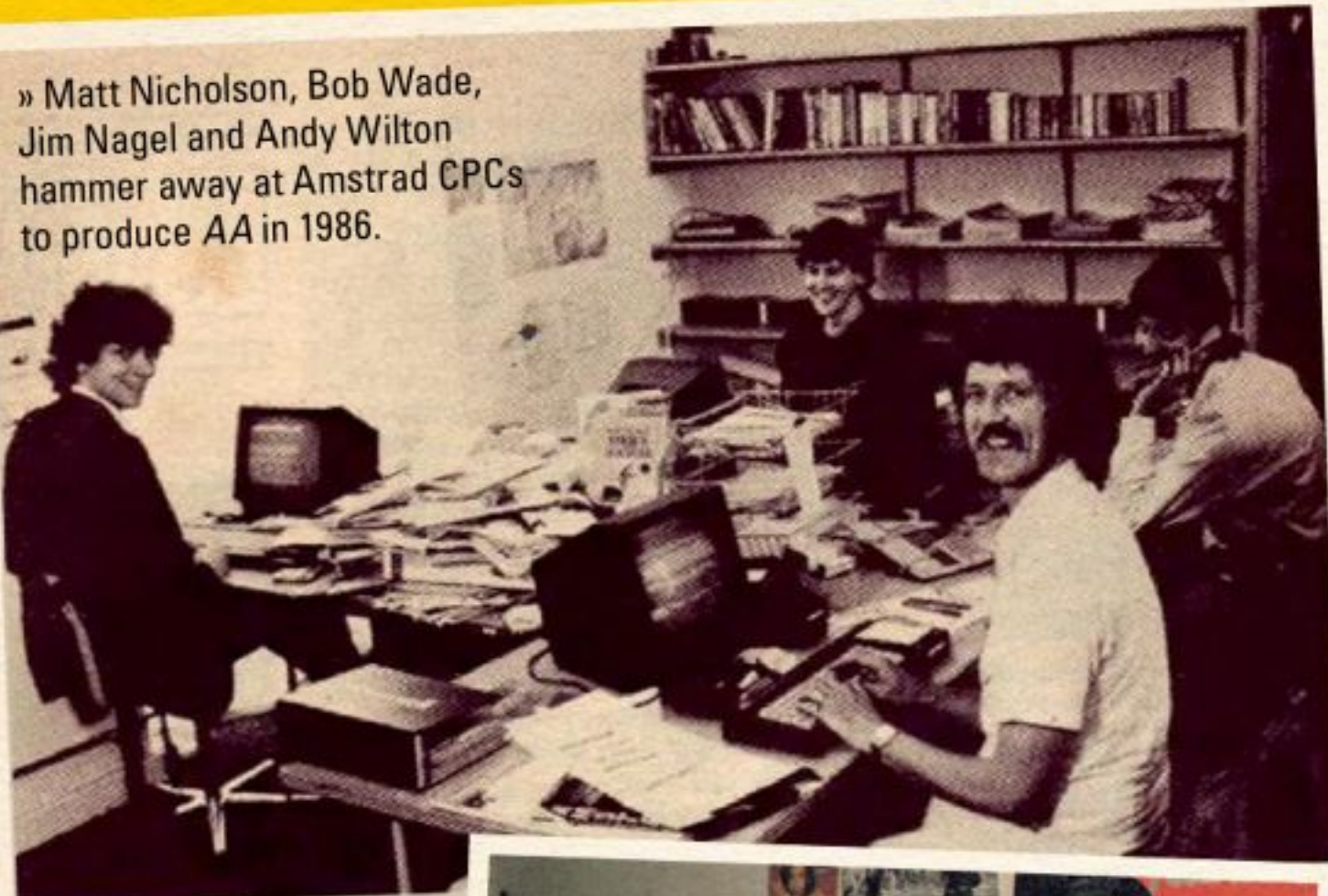


# AMSTRAD ACTION

WORDS BY DAVID CROOKES

» Matt Nicholson, Bob Wade, Jim Nagel and Andy Wilton hammer away at Amstrad CPCs to produce AA in 1986.



» Editor Rod Lawton looks on as staff writer Adam Peters discusses page design with art assistant Marianne Booth.



**IT WASN'T AN OFFICIAL PUBLICATION BUT FUTURE'S FIRST MAGAZINE BECAME A BESTSELLER, COVERING THE AMSTRAD CPC FOR TEN GLORIOUS YEARS AND STICKING WITH IT THROUGH THICK AND THIN**

**I**n *Amstrad Action's* debut, the magazine's first editor, Pete Connor, gave readers a glimpse into how the publication was put together. Thousands of words were initially typed into Amstrad CPCs. "Then our glorious prose is piped down a speaking tube on something called a modem," he wrote.

"Back come reams of print-covered paper which we lick and slap down on cardboard. Out with the box-camera, a few hours of exposure and then it's all sent by packhorse to a printer."

If that sounds rather quaint, it was – certainly by today's production methods. There was no packhorse but the writers did indeed hammer their words into an Amstrad CPC 464 connected to a colour screen or a green-monitored CPC 664. They'd use the

word processor Tasword, later upgrading to WordStar, and only after the first issue was put to bed did they get three Amstrad CPC 6128s – two used by the writers and the third by the fledgling admin team.

Yet for Chris Anderson, the magazine's publisher and founder, it was the beginning of a dream. The Oxford graduate had edited *Personal Computer Games* and launched *Zzap!64*, but his decision to set up Future Publishing and create a new magazine using a £15,000 bank loan was a big step for the 28-year-old burgeoning businessman. The magazine initially operated from Chris' house and later moved to an office behind a garage in the tight streets of picturesque Somerton. That first issue, dated October 1985, was created in three months. ▶

## WHERE ARE THEY NOW

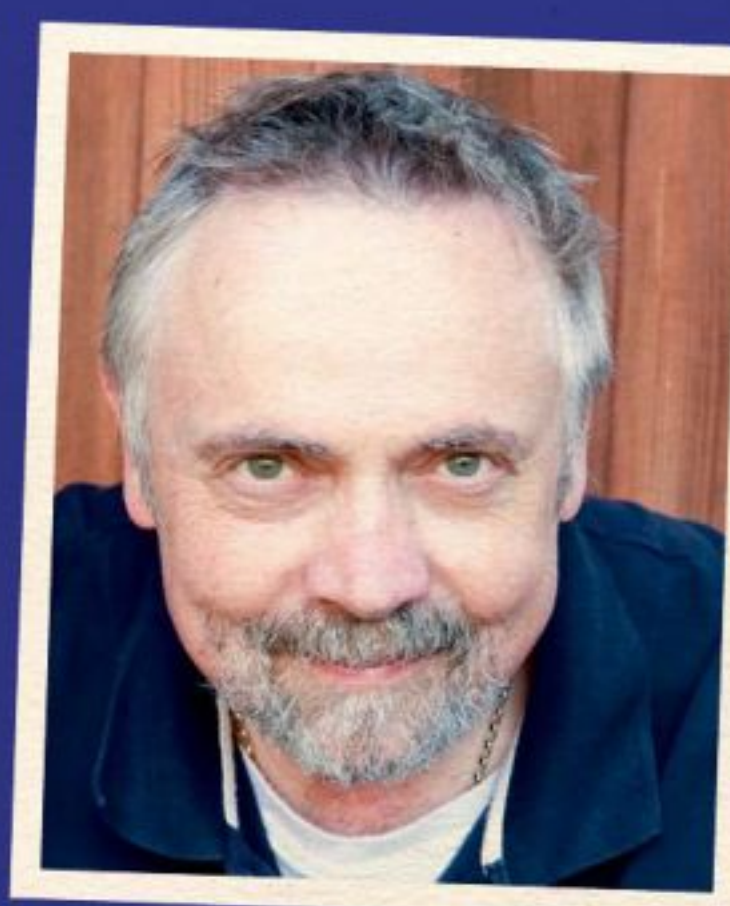


### CHRIS ANDERSON

With Future flourishing, Chris moved to the US in 1994 and founded Imagine Media. By 1999, he merged Imagine with Future and took the combined company public. His nonprofit organisation, the Sapling Foundation, acquired TED in 2001 and Chris left Future to run it.

### STEVE CAREY

Having edited *ST Format*, Steve took publishing responsibility for magazines such as *Amiga Power*, *PC Gamer* and *Edge*. After being a director at Future Publishing until 1998, he moved to Australia and worked on more magazines before becoming a business mentor and consultant.



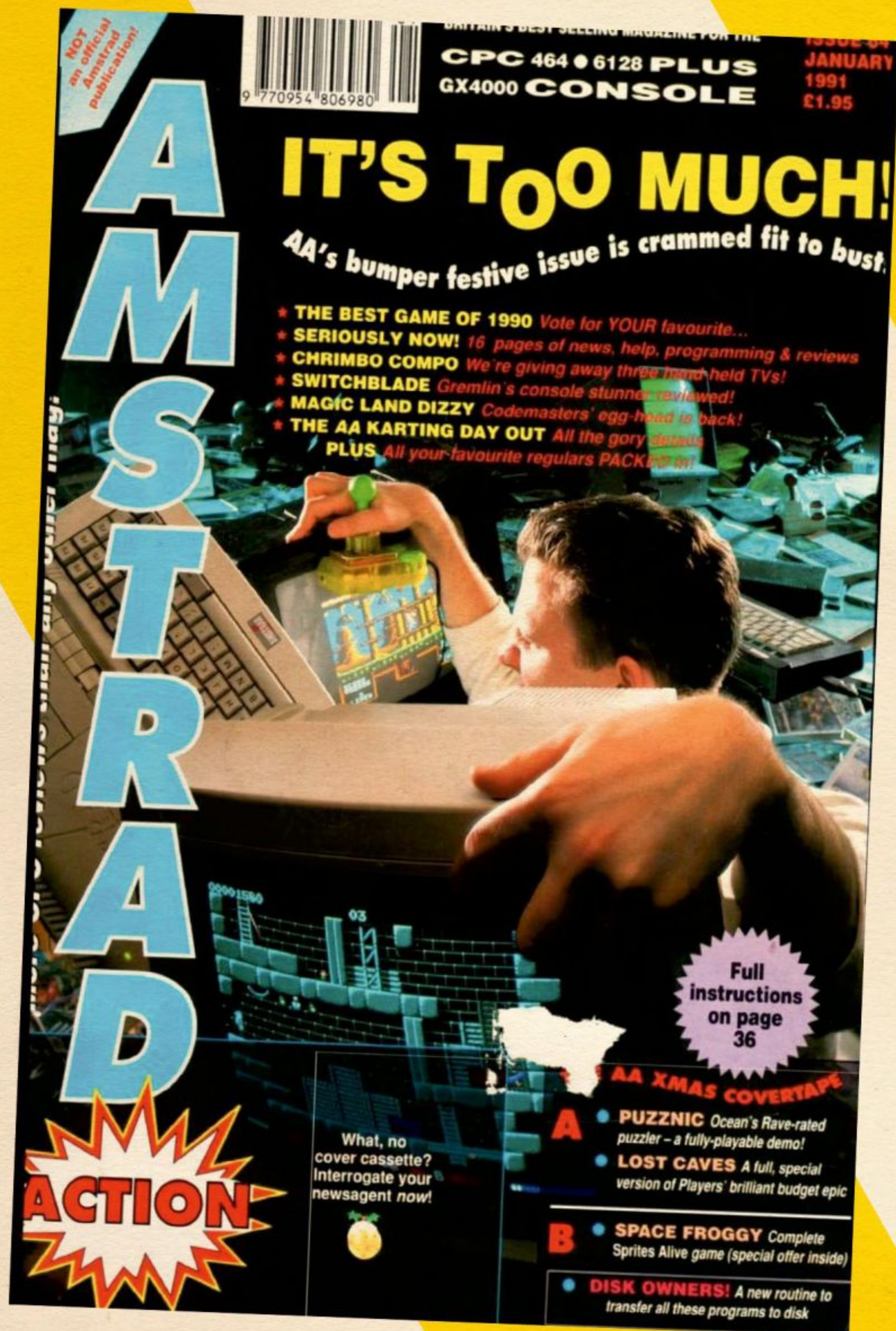
### STUART WHYTE

Stuart went to work for Microprose as a producer of console games, moving on to Bullfrog Productions, Lionhead Studios and Supermassive Games. He looked to set up a new developer in 2016 but he's currently director of VR Product Development at PlayStation London Studio.



### ROD LAWTON

Rod took some time away from Future Publishing and worked as a freelance journalist specialising in photography, technology and computing. He returned and became technique editor on *N-Photo* and an editor on *TechRadar*. He is currently the Group Reviews Editor of Future's Photography division.



» Adam Waring not only featured on the cover of issue 64, his game, *Lost Caves*, was on the cover tape.

## EMBARKING ON A CRAZY ADVENTURE

THE STORY BEHIND AMSTRAD ACTION'S REGULAR COLUMNISTS

Adventure games were a key component of AA from the beginning when the genre was covered by Steve Cooke who wrote under the pseudonym 'The Pilgrim'. The columns would be a mix of news, reviews and tips – or 'clue sniffing' – and they were so popular that, when Steve moved on to edit *ACE* magazine, he had to be replaced.

Stuart Whyte stepped into his shoes, writing the column as 'The Balrog'. He'd been named the Pilgrim Adventurer of the Year 1989 in issue 45 and was felt to be an ideal replacement, despite being just 18 years old. "I'd actually written my first column as The Pilgrim in issue 49 but Steve wasn't too happy so I had to come up with a new pseudonym. I was a massive fan of *Lord Of The Rings* and The Pilgrim has mentioned having a pet Balrog. I liked the idea of the pet eating the master and taking over his job".

He wanted to keep his own identity secret, "in part because my telephone number had appeared multiple times in the 'Lords And Ladies Of Adventure' section and I didn't want to have more people phoning me up". Stuart would

write his columns at home on the Amstrad CPC word processor Protext, and post a three-inch disk with his work to the office. "People really responded to the idea of a Balrog reviewing adventures and would write to me with this in mind – I had people offering their kid sisters for me to eat, people asking me what my favourite part of the dungeon was and so on. I think a particular highlight was when I did the 'Draw The Balrog' competition – the readers excelled themselves for this!"

When the Graphic Adventure Creator was given away on the covertape, there was a miniature boom in games, and a competition was set up with the winner, *Who's Afraid Of The Balrog?*, ending up on a future cassette. Stuart Whyte ended up writing for 44 issues of *Amstrad Action* but left as the output from companies such as Level 9, Infocom and Magnetic Scrolls dwindled. Stuart had also become a PC gamer so the column was handed to stalwart adventurer Debby Howard. "I was super happy that the column was going to someone who had the passion," says Stuart.



### RICHARD FAIRHURST

Through writing for AA, journalism became Richard's career. He worked for mags full-time after leaving university and he became editor of *Waterscape.com* as well as *Waterways World* and *Heritage* magazines. An OpenStreetMap activist, he is now the editor and founder of the website *cycle.travel*.



### ADAM WARING

Adam left Future Publishing to travel around the world and, upon his return, he continued his career in journalism by editing publications such as *Max Magazine* and *Spanish Magazine*. Since 2010, he has been the editor of *N-Photo* which caters for Nikon enthusiast photographers.

### DAVE GOLDER

After editing *Ultimate Future Games*, Dave Golder helped to launch the sci-fi magazine *SFX* in 1995 with Matt Bielby, becoming editor in 1996. He left in 2005 but returned as online editor and today he works as a freelance writer and media specialist.



### SIMON FORRESTER

After *Amstrad Action*, Simon edited *Commodore Format*, taking it to the final issue in October 1995. He left Future Publishing in 1998 and worked in digital marketing and web development. He's now a software developer for Mituyu, a marketing and advertising company in Bath.



### ADAM PETERS

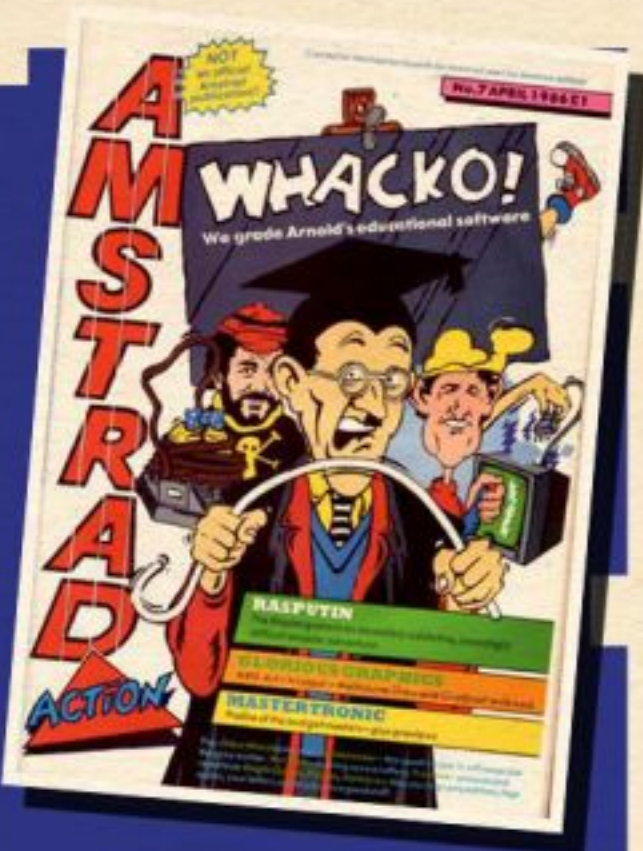
Adam moved back to London after leaving AA and worked on *Sega Zone* and *Game Zone*, which Future bought and moved to Bath. He left to embark on a career writing and producing children's TV instead of journalism, and he has been largely doing that ever since.



**ESSENTIAL ISSUES**

**ISSUE 7**

With a whopping – and never beaten – 124 pages, *Amstrad Action* had firmly ridden out its shaky start. Bob Wade visited Mastertronic, Action Test had some colour pages (ahh, those screenshots), *Rasputin* was awarded the Master Game and there were loads of *Elite* tips. Plus a look at educational software – which surely appeased parents.



**“EVEN WITH A MORIBUND MARKET LIKE THE AMSTRAD, FILLING THE MAG WASN'T HARD AND THE BIG DECISIONS WERE ABOUT WHAT TO LEAVE OUT”**

Steve Carey

► The small team was strong. Software editor Bob Wade had worked with Chris Anderson on both of his previous magazines. Responsibility for design was handed to Trevor Gilham who devised the magazine's vertical logo. Up the road was an advanced typesetter called Wordsmiths to which the *Amstrad Action* team would transmit text down the phone line and then drive over to pick up the finished bromide paper. When the typesetter got an Amstrad PCW, the staff would physically take over a three-inch disk containing the words and wait for the results before handing them over to the designer.

There had been hiccups along the way. Amstrad objected to the name *Amstrad Action* (AA) and suggested 'Action On The Amstrad CPC Computer' (it thankfully relented). Newsfield also announced potential rival *Amtix* would be launched at the same time. Yet that first *Amstrad Action* nailed some of the regular sections that would become a staple of the magazine for years to come, from the bustling news pages of *Amscene* and the popular adventure column by The Pilgrim (aka Steve Cooke) to Cheat Mode and the reviews within Action Test where the first Master Game was given to *The Way Of The Exploding Fist*.

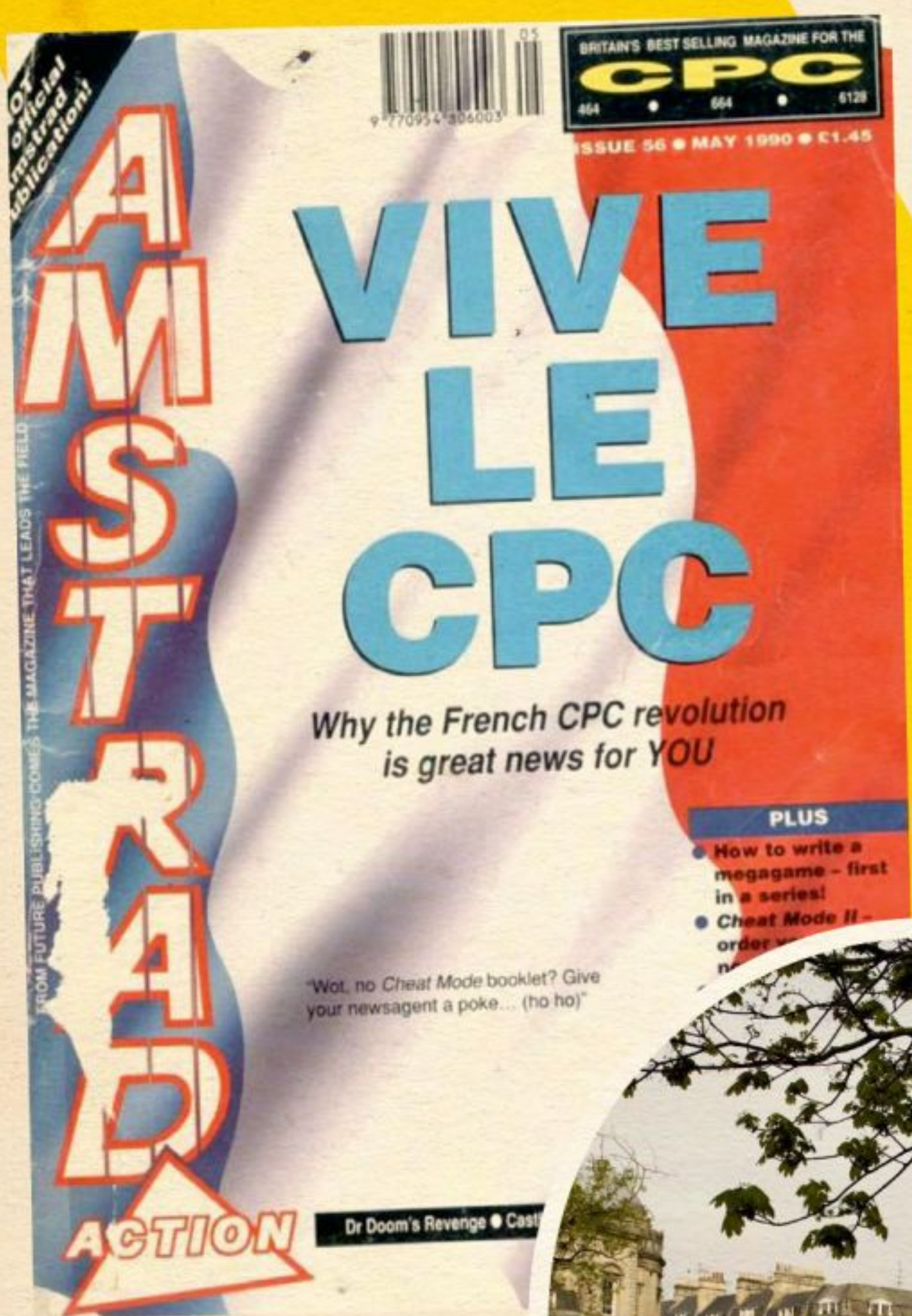
From the start, AA aimed itself at both a serious crowd and gamers, striving to strike the perfect balance. Initial sales, however, were poor and it took a giveaway of two previously unreleased Ocean games (*Kung Fu* and *Number 1*)

to save the magazine and the company from going under. They appeared on issue four's covertape, doubling sales. The future suddenly looked very bright.

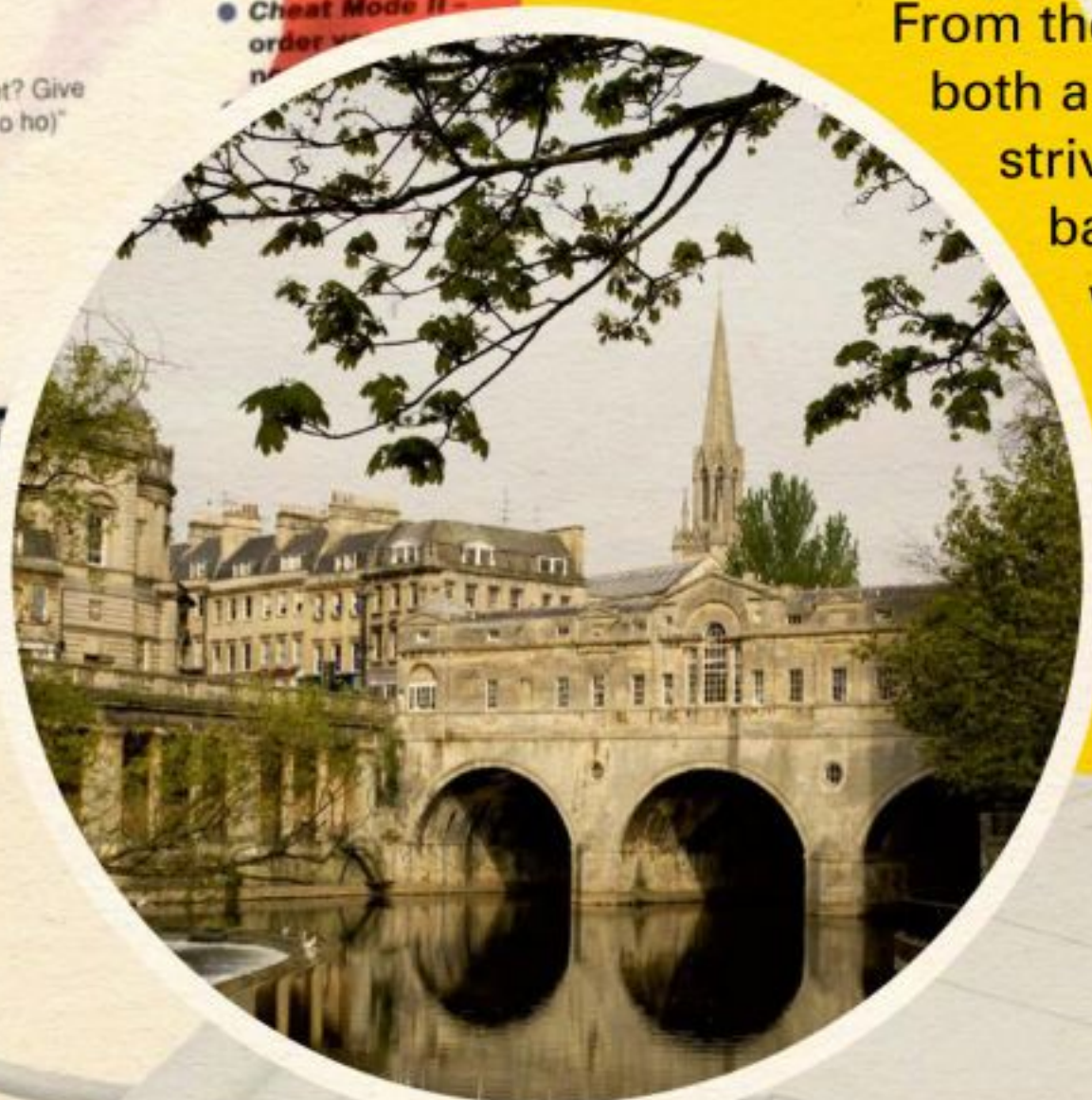
As more mags were launched, the company moved five minutes away to The Old Barn and, for the next year, AA saw editors coming and going (Matt Nicholson helmed for six issues, Jim Nagel for two and Chris Anderson for one). Nevertheless, it was establishing itself as the number one CPC mag. "It was so exciting to be part of Future Publishing back then," says Steve Carey who was production editor of *PC Plus* which launched in 1986. "Chris Anderson, as you know, is a genius and the company really took off."

AA covered the PCW for a short spell, ending before Bob Wade was in the editor's chair with issue 17. Bob and Trevor freshened AA's look, altering the game ratings boxes and brightening the pages and, when Steve took over in August 1988, with Future now in Bath, he vowed to make only a few tweaks. "AA was a fine magazine that didn't need fixing," Steve Carey tells us. "It was also my first editorship and I was proud as anything."

**T**he CPC wasn't the most buoyant of computer scenes, however. "But even with a moribund market like the Amstrad, filling the mag wasn't hard and the big decisions were about what to leave out," Steve says. To keep things fresh, Steve brought in Emma Broadley, whose outspoken comments and observations split opinion. "Emma Broadley wasn't real," confesses Steve. "She was actually



» AA looked across the channel for an in-depth report on the bustling French scene, discovering a brand-new CPC-compatible lightgun by Loriciel.



**ESSENTIAL ISSUES**

**ISSUE 36**

**WHIZZERS WITH CHIPS**

Notable more perhaps for having had the wrong number printed on the cover – 35 instead of 36 – but the issue also featured the Darling brothers and the Oliver twins on the cover, leading to a lively interview inside. *The Bard's Tale* achieved the Master Game and Niall Brady's *Arkanoid* cheat gave readers ten new screens to play.



**AGE OF AMSTRAD ACTION**



**1985** Amstrad Action became Future Publishing's first magazine when it was launched by Chris Anderson in October.

**1985** Sales were boosted by issue four's covertape containing the unreleased games *Kung Fu* and *Number 1*.

**1986** Issue 9 introduced coverage of the Amstrad PCW as well as the CPC but it didn't last long.



**1986** *Thrust* was given 94% and made an AA Rave - the highest rated title not to be named a Master Game.

**1987** A new look was introduced in issue 18 by Bob Wade, with efforts to lighten the tone of the magazine.

**1987** Future Publishing moved from Somerton to Queen Street in Bath.

**1987** The circulation figure was stated for the first time: 34,555 between July and December.

CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

THE AA CHRISTMAS PANTO

...of thousands (well, half a dozen), a budget of millions (er, £50) and spectacular locations (um, Bath council offices) are the ingredients for this seasonal spectacular from Amstrad Action. Relive the magic of pantomime's favourite stories, cheer the villains, boo the, er, goodies... get out your hankies for one of the saddest productions ever seen... (mean that)

...just another day at AA Towers... Cinderella Booth was hard at work... "Ere," shrieked other Emstrads, "get a move on... you can lock the dust off the floor..."



CHRISTMAS... Good old Cinderella, eh, readers? It's a decent, wholesome family show, featuring a beautiful and pure romance. A romance between a Prince in a leather miniskirt, and a young girl whose family consists entirely of men in dresses. Er...

Meanwhile at the ballroom, the sisters were trying to attract the attention of the Prince. "Yo! Oh, Princey, over here! Woodoo!" shouted Gemma.

"Er," said the Prince to the mysterious chameleon, "fancy a dance?" "All right," said Cinderella (for 'twas she). They danced, started snogging, and pretty soon had fallen head over heels in love (aww).

...as she thrashed Cinderella round the head with a baseball bat. "Once you've finished trying the outfit, you can wash our clothes, and then clean out the attic with a toothbrush."

...that ran off and... "Cinderella!" called the fairy. "Go away, you're weird!" shouted Cinderella from behind a pile of boxes. "But I'm your fairy godmother," protested the fairy godmother.

ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 49

LASER SHARP To celebrate its fourth birthday, AA popped a fully playable mission of Shinobi on the covertape, and awarded Laser Squad its Master Game. It also revealed why it didn't review Last Ninja 2 and RoboCop: the former was "the biggest loads of old rubbish since Psycho Pigs UXB" and Ocean didn't send the team the latter.



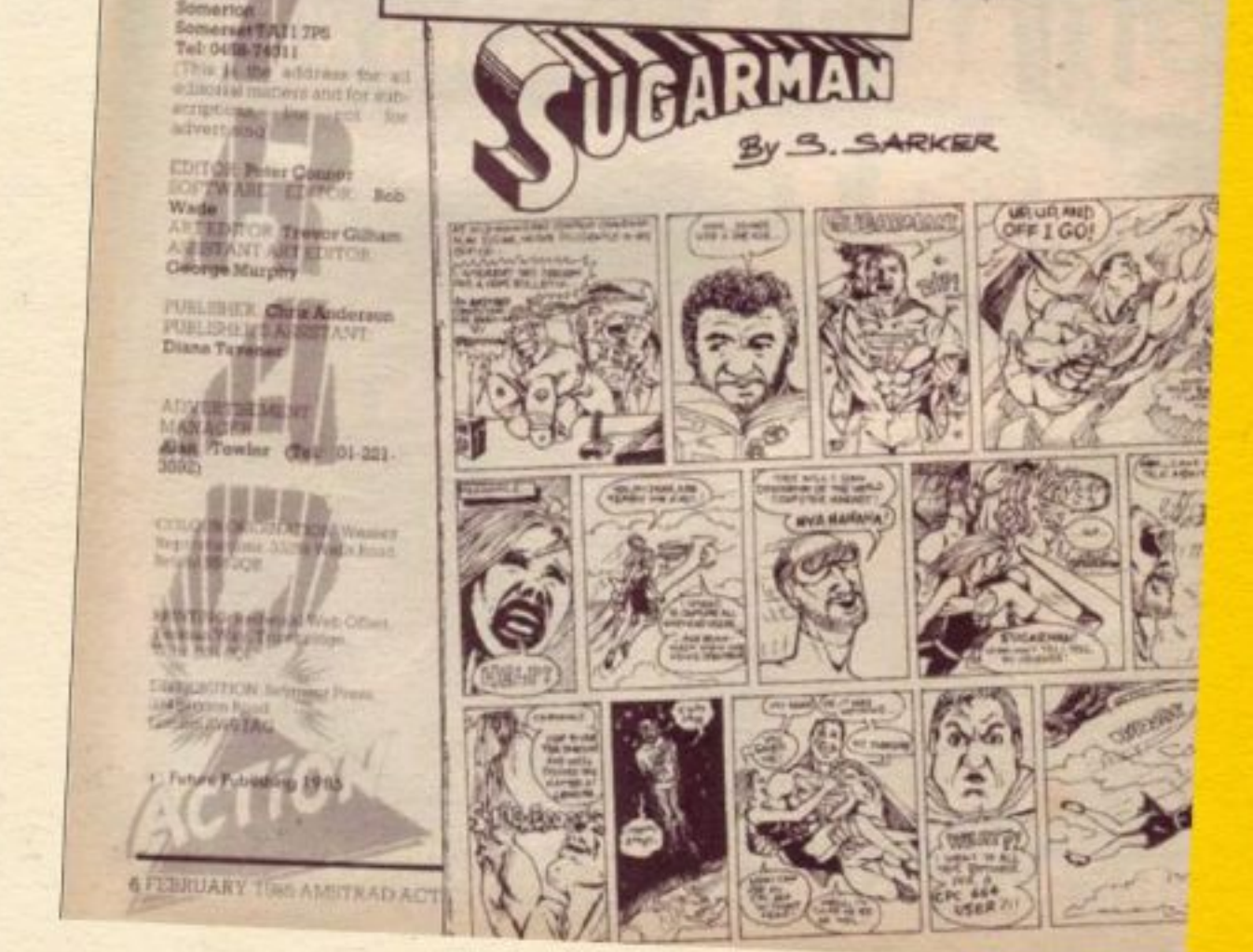
Amstrad Action presents its glittering galaxy of stars...

A grid of circular portraits of magazine staff members with their names and roles: Maryanne Booth (Art Assist.) as CINDERELLA, Jane Richardson (Publisher) as PRINCE CHARMING, Cheryl Beasley (Ad Manager) as THE FAIRY GODMOTHER, Rod Lawton (Editor) as ERMINTRUDE UGLY, Adam Waring (Tech Editor) as HATTERSLEY UGLY, and Adam Peters (Staff Writer) as GEMMA UGLY.

January 1992 AMSTRAD ACTION 25

The AA team dressed up for a bizarre panto photoshoot in issue 76, dated January 1992, with Adam Peters writing the story.

Sugarman, which turned Alan Sugar into a heroic comic character, made his debut in issue six. Dear Readers, You might wonder that this first issue of 1988 is just a riddle... Peter G... Sugarman



ESSENTIAL ISSUES

ISSUE 60

CONSOLES ARE COMING Amstrad stole a march on its rivals with full coverage of the ill-fated GX4000 console and new updated CPCs - the 464 Plus and 6128 Plus. As well as previewing forthcoming cartridges, AA gave Burnin' Rubber 100% for graphics. Rick Dangerous II was 'megareviewed' over a single page, too (it went on to get 97%).



my missus who I got to write as the 'voice of the people' and she was named after the Bradley Arms, a pub around the corner."

Trenton Webb became the new games reviewer. "He was great to have around and I don't think he realised how good he was," Steve says. Codemasters games developer Adam Waring was hired as the new technical editor.

Adam was an avid reader of AA and he'd seen the magazine's 'no prisoners' approach to reviews - AA had, after all, awarded US Gold's top seller World Cup Carnival 0% in issue 11. "It was a shameless reskin of an old Arctic Computing budget title that was still on sale for 99p and it was the official game of the Mexico '86 World Cup," he recalls.

Adam, however, was the reviewer who dished out AA's joint highest ever score, awarding Rick Dangerous II 97% in November 1990. "Much of the job involved playing games all day and often for far longer than was required to write the review. The biggest culprit would be Laser Squad, a brilliant turn-based strategy game by Julian Gollop. We'd have

a CPC running it in the corner pretty much constantly and take our turns throughout the day between doing real work."

A good chunk of Adam Waring's job was covering the serious side of the CPC. He'd learned to program in Z80 machine code on a Spectrum and worked with CPCs at Artic. Adam ended up staying for 34 issues and he was there throughout the long reign of the next editor, Rod Lawton, who certainly put humour centre stage.

"I always felt personality was important," Rod tells us, "and the worst thing a magazine can do is be boring. Adam Waring brought a very light tone to the technical content in the magazine which made a big difference, and Trenton's commitment to games and reviewing was amazing - he was quite a diplomat with the PR companies, too. But Ollie Alderton, AA's art editor, masterminded some of the best covers we ever had and made sure we ate enough beer and chips to keep us grounded."

Ollie worked up from being Trevor's art assistant and produced pages for the magazine for four years. He designed the September 1990 issue, heralding the launch of Amstrad's GX4000 console and Plus computers, but if AA was expecting the machines to widen its appeal, poor sales would lead to disappointment.

"The machines looked great but it felt too late," says Rod. "The writing was on the wall

A timeline of Amstrad Action magazine milestones from 1988 to 1991, including circulation figures, game reviews, and staff changes. 1988: AA marked its third birthday with an eggs-cellent collector's edition of Dizzy on the tape. 1988: Circulation hit 35,095 between January and June and 38,457 from July to December. 1989: Cheat Mode regular Phil Howard revealed how he hacked games in a series of articles. 1989: Circulation fell to 35,189 between January and June and fell to 35,064 from July to December. 1990: AA took a look at Codemasters' CD Games Pack and revealed the new GX4000 console and Plus computers. 1990: Rick Dangerous II was awarded 97% by Adam Waring and his own game, Lost Caves, was named 'Best Budget Breakthrough'. 1990: Circulation rose to 30,156 between January and June, and to 31,228 between July and December. 1991: Covertapes went monthly in April, thanks to mounting pressure from readers.

► for 8-bit computers by then so it felt like a last-ditch effort by Amstrad to squeeze some sales out of existing tech, but I did get to go to Paris for the launch and have dinner on the Eiffel Tower during a thunderstorm.”

Ollie was also involved throughout the era of wacky photoshoots such as the AA Christmas panto, which had art assistant Maryanne Booth as Cinderella, Rod as Eminent Ugly, Adam Waring as Hattersley Ugly and new staff writer Adam Peters as Gemima Ugly. “The photoshoots were probably the best, such as me having to sit for an hour underneath a trestle table piled high with readers’ letters with just my arm sticking through and holding one aloft,” says Rod. “We also came up with some great cover ideas which we probably

wouldn’t be able to do now because they were slightly mad and not always very cheap.”

Most of the photoshoot ideas were Adam Peters’. “I admired the fact Rod would happily go along with whatever stupid suggestion I came up with, such as him and me wrestling for a games review,” he says. Adam Peters first appeared in December 1988 on a page called ‘Day In The Life’ which allowed readers to discuss what they used their CPC for. “Instead, I just bitched about the poor customer service of one of AA’s advertisers whilst posing in black lipstick embracing my 6128.” It earned him £50 (“or in my currency, 50 pints of Becks at the student union bar”), gained him more freelance and landed him a job.

“I was in this huge building with advertising departments and publishers and all these other groups and layers that went into the production of the magazine,” Adam Peters continues. “Rod dealt with all those people, tutting and sighing to me about these folk setting parameters for the three people (him, me and a graphic designer) working full-time to create the mag.”

Future now had 19 magazines, 14 of them computer titles, and it occupied four buildings

**“I ADMIRER THE FACT ROD WOULD GO ALONG WITH WHATEVER STUPID SUGGESTION I CAME UP WITH, SUCH AS HIM AND ME WRESTLING FOR A REVIEW”**

Adam Peters

in central Bath. The magazine was produced on Apple Macs using QuarkXPress and printed on a laser typesetting Linotronic machine. There were a couple of CPC 6128s and a CPC 464 connected to a disc drive for testing programs and playing games. Rather than use a Multiface device to grab images (as was previously the case), one of two 6128 Plus machines would be connected to a Mac screen-grabber.

Adam Peters was given a lot of freedom. He’d plan the issues and reply to readers’ letters in the most offbeat of ways (giving particularly opinionated readers such as Peter Worley their own regular slots). “AA had a somewhat polarised readership,” Adam says. “On the one hand, you had kids and teens whose parents had bought them a CPC to do their school work, but who were only really interested in games. Then you had that middle-aged hobbyist crowd who were mostly using theirs to do the accounts for their doorknob polishing business or whatever. Of course, some people straddled both camps, but that need to engage two very different audiences was always driving the overall feel of the magazine.”

Adam admits to being “pretty rubbish” at games, giving him a cynical take towards gaming: “Basically, I approached game reviews from the perspective of a game-hating spreadsheet addict, whilst covering the non-games side from the perspective of a 14-year-old platform gamer.” The team would also field phone calls every Tuesday afternoon. “We’d always get at least one prank call from the older brother of a reader – ‘Amstrads are shit, Amigas rule’ or some such. The 1992 equivalent of



**ACTION TEST**

**RICK DANGEROUS II**

Micro Style £3.99 tape £14.99 disk  
Mystickeys

Rick Dangerous, professional hero and part time car park attendant, is off again. He just can't sit still for five minutes without going on some top-secret mission, or

retrieving some long lost artefact, or saving the world from alien invasion.

That's what he's up to this time. A busyness great UFO has landed right in the middle of Hyde Park, London. Everyone else has run away screaming. But not Rick. Quick as a flash, he slips into the nearest phone box and calls the fire brigade. Then he comes out with his underpants on top of his trousers, ready for anything.

The only way to prevent the world being conquered by these extra-terrestrial, Rick robots, is to capture their spaceship and fly off to the alien's home planets. So that's exactly what he intends to do. He's going to visit interesting and exotic places, meet bizarre and wonderful life forms, and kill them.

There are five levels in total. Four of them can be accessed at will, so if you get stuck on one, you can try another and go back to it later. The fifth can only be reached once you complete the other four in one mission session.

They are arranged roughly in order of difficulty (though that's not to say that any of them are easy). So you'd be well advised to start at Level One and work your way through.

Level One starts in Hyde Park, below the huge metallic bulk of the space-ship. It begins with laser beams spitting as our hero runs for the entrance hatch.

The main part of this level is inside the alien spaceship. There are plenty of traps lying in wait for Rick. They mainly seem to involve robots and lasers. It's tough, but not tough enough to stop our hero.

Solving this (for selecting from the menu) brings you to Level Two. Now that Rick has taken control of the ship, he can fly away to the various planets that the machine had from.

**MASTER GAME**

ADG is a computer game. When a trap catches you by surprise it's annoying, but frustration develops into determination and you'll keep on going until you beat the blasted thing. And if you do get stuck, the four levels (three, if you get that far), are different enough to make it almost like having four separate games.

The game is very similar to the original Rick Dangerous, with the Fire button being used in conjunction with the stick to produce various actions. This time, however, the bombs can be stored along the floor, exploding a few seconds later at a set distance – vital at many points.

The screen scrolls when you get close to the edges. Going up and down reveals more of the same area. Leaving a screen to the left or right shifts the entire area across, revealing a new screen.

If you then die (you will) then you'll start afresh from your last entry point to a new area.

Of course there are lots of traps, lots of secret buttons to find, and plenty of perils to prevent Rick succeeding.

Just as Rick once captured the Indiana Jones style no perfectly, Rick Two follows the Flash Gordon genre to a tee. It just goes to show what a versatile hero he is! And if Rick Dangerous 2 is beautiful, it's extremely bright and colourful, and the graphics are crisper than fluffy white bunny rabbits.

Each level has an entirely different set of graphics. The backgrounds, traps and spikes have been redrawn. In fact the only thing that looks the same is Rick himself, who looks the same dashing hero throughout the game.

For the most part, sound consists of effects to represent such things as firing, bombs exploding and traps activating. There's a suitably adventurous style tune on the title screen. As the game starts a short piece of music plays before fading and allowing the fit to cut in. This start-of-game music is different for each level. It's extremely atmospheric too, and all the music sounds finely tuned to fit in with the scenario.

Play it on a Plus machine and you'll even find the music is used to great effect. As the laser beams thunder across the screen, the sound is echoed from side to side through the appropriate speaker!

Rick Dangerous 2 is a very polished product indeed. A tremendous amount of work has gone into the game design, graphics and sound. In essence, it's a simple platform game, but the way it's been presented makes it far, far more than that.

**ACTION TEST**

- Ticky bit coming up – get ready to jump.
- Slide a bomb towards that thing to your right.
- Jump off the trolley and climb down the ladder.
- Level One, and your first robotic kill coming up!
- Crouch down as you go right or be electrocuted!
- Kick the button in the wall to stop that laser.
- You'll have to jump over that crawling robot.
- Level Two, and lots of nasty enemies (!)
- Watch out – those three spikes above are sharp!
- Level Four, and dodge-the-drum time.
- Watch those icy platforms, they're slippery.
- Level Three and some real monkey business.

**FIRST DAY TARGET SCORE**  
Classic Level One

**The Verdict**

**GRAPHICS** 96%  
1. Different parts for different levels.  
2. Good sound effects.

**SONICS** 94%  
1. Good sound effects.  
2. Good sound effects.

**GRAB FACTOR** 98%  
1. First of 2011 with best of better right saved.  
2. Good sound effects with tough post-ten.

**STAYING POWER** 97%  
1. Good sound effects with tough post-ten.  
2. Good sound effects with tough post-ten.

**AA RATING** 97%  
1. Good sound effects with tough post-ten.

**AMSTRAD ACTION 47**

**ESSENTIAL ISSUES**

**ISSUE 68**

**THINK OF THE CHILDREN**

Despite having four Master Game reviews to get giddy over – Total Recall, BAT, Switchblade and F-16 – some readers were more concerned over the inclusion of How To Be A Complete Bastard on the cover tape. “Amstrad Action is not, and never has been, a magazine devoted to children,” responded Rod Lawton two issues later.

» Amstrad Action gave Rick Dangerous II a whopping 97% – its joint highest ever score with Lemmings.

**1991** Frank O'Connor, who would later edit Total!, started his first journalism job at AA, taking over from James Leach.

**1991** Circulation rose to 35,159 between January and June and to 37,120 between July and December.

**1992** AA ramped up the fun and leaned more towards games. Readers named Turrican their favourite.

**1992** Reader Peter Worley's strong opinions earned him a regular spot in the letters pages under the heading 'Worley's World'.

**1992** Amstrad Computer User closed and AA gained a new rival in CPC Attack. It lasted six issues.

**1992** Circulation was 35,298 between January and June 1992 but slumped to 27,090 from July to January 1993.

**1992** The page count decreased to 60 pages.

**1993** Linda Barker took over from Rod Lawton as editor for one issue.

internet trolling, I guess, so we tried to bridge that reader/writer gap and create a community. A support group. A gang. Whatever."

There was certainly a can-do mindset to the magazine. "When we got a letter from a reader telling us shops in France had loads more CPC games than our shops, the response was simple," Adam recalls. "Two days later, Rod and I were heading down the M4 towards Dover so even if the reader turned out to be lying we'd be sorted for duty free Camembert. You say 'can-do attitude', I say '35p bottles of Sauvignon'."

**A** *Amstrad Action* began to take on a fanzine feel and circulation was rising. The writers believed readers were very much aware the CPC market was not buoyant. "Our publisher complained when I wrote a piece about how few games and programs were coming out, saying we shouldn't be suggesting the machine was dying, but the readers weren't stupid," Adam Peters affirms. "They could see what was on the shelves in WHSmith, where you had to crawl to some darkened ground level corner to find five rubbish games and Mini Office II in the not-even-labelled Amstrad section."

AA therefore became the glue for a growing indie scene and among those taking on a greater role was software developer Richard Fairhurst, who ran a public domain library called *Robot PD*. "When Adam Waring left, AA needed a new technical writer and they'd seen the programs I'd written for *Robot PD* and the columns I'd written for a CPC fanzine called *Artificial Intelligence*," he says.

Richard Fairhurst was well-connected. When Linda Barker took over from Rod Lawton for a month before passing on to Tim Norris for five months and eventually Dave Golder for the longer term, Richard increasingly drew on his contacts. "I'd be writing about PD, demos from Europe and indie productions by friends like Richard Wildey and Rob Buckley because that's literally all that was still available," Richard continues. "Without enthusiastic contributors, AA would have run out of things to write about."

Richard encouraged his friend Simon Forrester to apply for the job of staff writer which he began on his 19th birthday in 1993. Simon became a key part of *Amstrad Action*, particularly under Dave Golder. "I relied very heavily on my brilliant team to make me look good," Dave says. "I think Simon Forrester would happily back me up and agree I was 'winging it'."

There was certainly less material about. "It was difficult in comparison to the other computer magazines at Future, as obviously if new software is being released, you have more to write about," says Simon. "That said, there

were still a few games coming out in 1992/1993, when I joined, though, there was a heavier reliance on the scene rather than an industry."

More and more, the magazine lived on its wits. "I seem to remember that cancellation always seemed to be about six months down the line, and the real challenge was to seeing how long we could keep the magazine viable," Dave says. "A lot of that was down to encouraging a clubby feel. There was a blitz mentality, I think."

This brought its own difficulties. The homebrew and demo scene had its fair share of fallouts and politics but it was more reliable than the virtually-dead commercial sector. AA was caught out by US Gold's announcement of *Street Fighter II* for the CPC and it ran numerous teasers. "I know we pissed a few readers off who thought we should have called US Gold's bluff a long time before we eventually gave up on it," says Dave. The game never arrived.

Even so, the humour remained intact. "That was a fundamental part of AA's style and overall it was a great laugh," highlights Simon. Sadly, humour and the scene couldn't sustain the magazine and the circulation plummeted as fast as the page count.

Dave tried to be proactive. Rob – whose Plus-only platformer *Fluff* graced the cover of issue 103 – remembers receiving a phone call urging him to create an alternative fighting game called *Lethal Moves* ("I don't recall it, but it sounds like something I'd encourage," says Dave Golder) but it was all too late. Tim Norris took over for a solitary issue when Dave finished up in October 1994 and Karen Levell took over. AA limped on to its end in June 1995 with an issue that promised an issue 118 which never arrived.

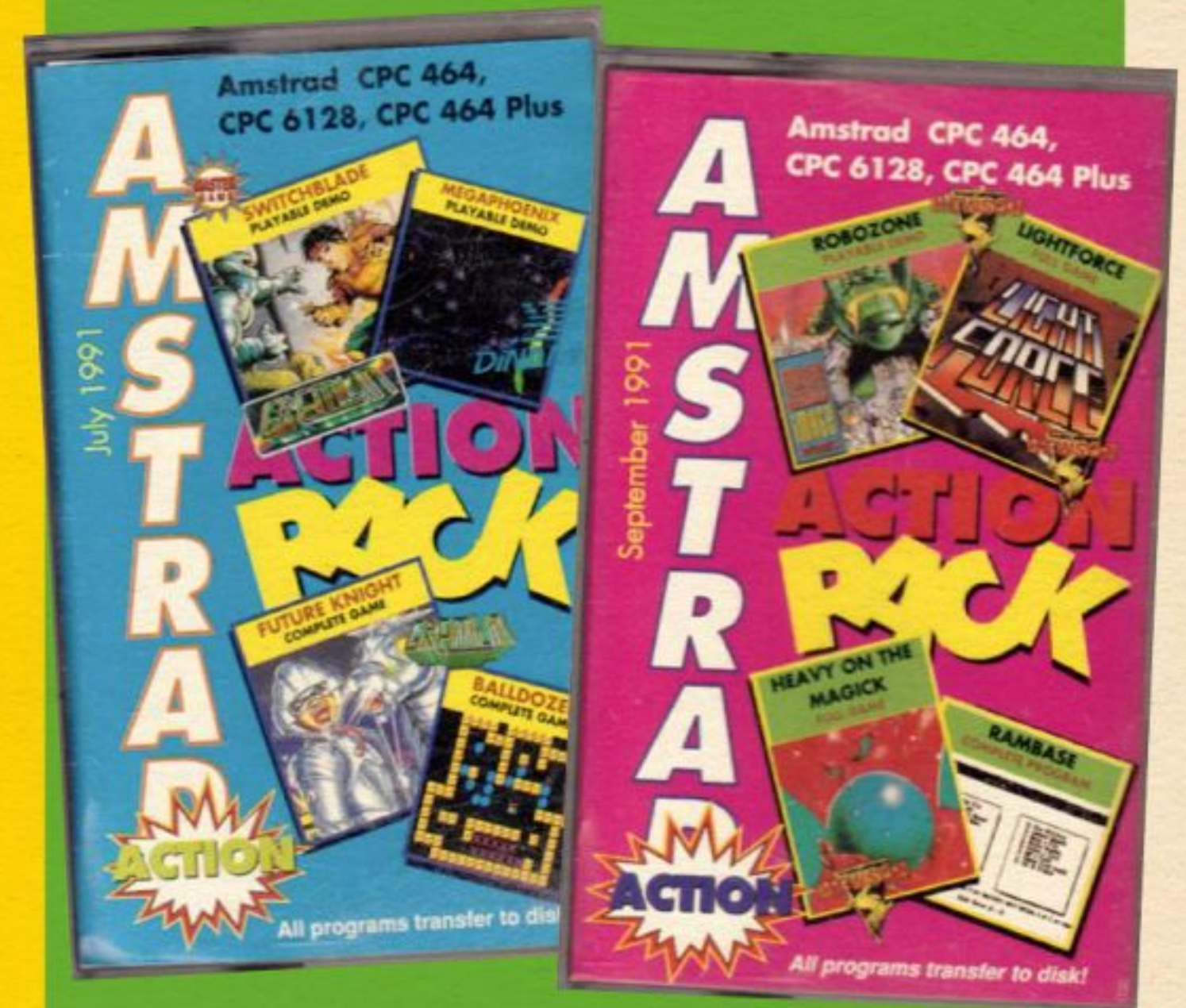
"A few of us briefly considered rounding up the copy already written and doing a DIY final issue, but it wouldn't have been worth the hassle," says Richard Fairhurst. *Amstrad Action* – Future's first magazine – was consigned to the past, but its mark will be forever felt. \*

## ESSENTIAL ISSUES

### ISSUE 85

#### WHAT A COVER UP

The lives and passions of AA writers were discussed in the magazine and their photos would end up on the pages, too. For a music special, Adam Peters bared his chest for the cover. "According to the circulation department, the issue with my 'guitar' on the front sold 5,000 less copies than usual, and I can't say I'm surprised," Adam says.



## ACTION-PACKED COVERTAPES

THE MAGAZINE WAS KNOWN FOR ITS FREE GIFTS, TOO

For years *Amstrad Action* had been inundated with readers requesting a more frequent covertape. Although Future's founder Chris Anderson had made such cover-mounted gifts popular, seeing them sticky-taped to the front of many other computer magazines, those for AA were restricted to the magazine's birthday and Christmas – until issue 67 in April 1991, that is, when they finally became a monthly thing.

The first tape – named the *Action Pack* – came with a demo of *Total Recall* and complete versions of *Hydrofool* and *Dizzy*. Subsequent gems included a censored *Stormlord* with issue 99 and *Elite* on the 100th issue – heralded as the best CPC game ever. But, despite the tape's role in increasing sales, the AA team wasn't as enamoured. "The covertapes gave us plenty of headaches – negotiating decent software to put on it, getting code from publishers who didn't know where it was any more, replacing mangled tapes and so on," recalls former editor Rod Lawton.

Technical editor Adam Waring was the covertape editor for a spell, handing over to Richard Fairhurst later. It was, Richard says, the "nightmare job from hell". "At first, the full-time staff would negotiate the games and I'd be tasked with putting a duplicatable tape together," he says. "We'd never get masters, just the same game you could buy in the shops, so my first job was to crack the anti-copying protection, which was never easy. I still have sleepless nights about *North & South*, though it was a great game."

Later on, Richard became responsible for negotiating the games as well (the tape was renamed *Classic Collection*, then *Serious Action*). "I was proudest of getting *Chuckie Egg* – a friend at university knew the coder, Nigel Alderton, and arranged an introduction. I'd often code the 'serious software' myself [PowerPage was an amazing DTP package]: one night I was still coding at 3am before going on holiday the next day, and I actually fell asleep while typing the documentation."

• 1993 •  
The vertical *Amstrad Action* logo was switched to a horizontal one.



• 1993 •  
Circulation fell to 21,832 between February and July 1993 and to 15,168 between July and January 1994.

• 1993 •  
Questions began to be asked about the long-running saga of US Gold's promised *Street Fighter II*.

• 1994 •  
AA reached issue 100 and put *Elite* on the covertape – calling it the best CPC game ever.



• 1994 •  
The magazine steered increasingly towards the indie scene, giving space to noncommercial software, such as the game *Fluff*.



• 1994 •  
With the page count having slipped from 60 to 52 to 36, the writing was on the wall for the future of Future's first mag.

• 1995 •  
The number of pages had fallen to 24, and issue 117 was to be AA's last.

