

Accolade Comics Steeve Keene, Private Spy

1987 Accolade

Programmed by Jeff Sember, Kevin P. Pickell, Amory Wong,
Michael Smithson & Allan Johanson

US Gold Accolade, £29.99 disk

Most text of the present article comes from the review published in the thirty first issue of the British C64 magazine ZZAP!64 (street date: October 8th, 1987).



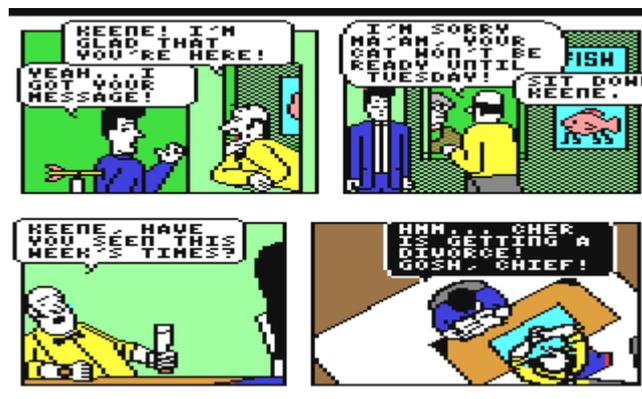
A COMICAL DESTINY?

Steve Jarratt, who knows a private dick when he sees one, ponders on the nature of predetermined fate in our lives.

If you're one of those folk unlucky enough not to own a disk-drive, then you may as well skip this bit, as Accolade's Comics takes up six sides of disk, and although Accolade are currently working in conjunction with US Gold to provide a workable tape version . . . don't hold your breath!

The storyline follows the exploits of a typical comic-book detective in the shape of Steve Keene, Private Spy . . . and all-round Smart-Alec.

Following a stunning introductory sequence, the story proper begins as Keene visits his secret headquarters hidden behind a pet alteration shop (the mind boggles). At this point the first chance to alter the path of the game appears, with the option to change the dialogue spoken by Keene's boss. Depending on which phrase is selected, one of the two main scenarios is played through -- the rescue of the missing professor, Zoron Farad, or the mysterious case of the reproducing fire-hydrants!



Toggling the dark speech bubble shows the choice of available dialogue

Keene's destiny is controlled to a degree by the player himself. At specific moments throughout the game, the player selects Keene's dialogue (which appears in speech balloons), or chooses a course of action designated by a moving arrow. The storyline changes slightly depending on the selection made, but in truth, Keene's fate is already sealed: ultimately, the plot follows a pre-determined path.

Each frame of the story is loaded in from disk and displays Keene's current situation. Almost every frame is accompanied by a piece of animation, ranging from adequate to simply superb, and the quality of the graphics is similarly brilliant, considering the limitations of the screen and the fact that each frame takes up at most only a quarter of the available area.

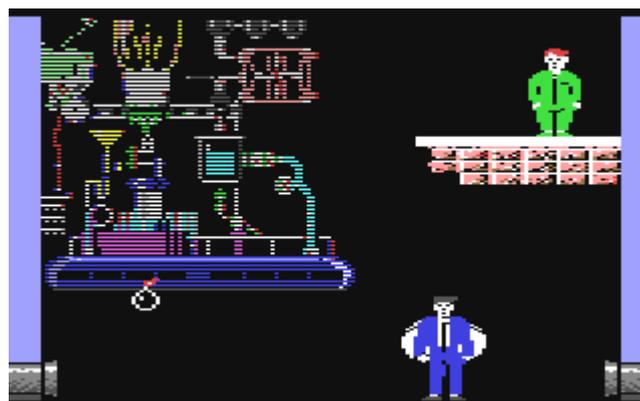
Once a frame has been viewed, the next is called up by pressing the fire button. The new frame fades in using some clever effects and once the screen is full the page disappears, again using some neat animation.



Steve Keene looks like he's having trouble with a new-fangled doorbell

Whenever Keene finds himself in physical danger, his situation usually reveals itself as one of the eight arcade sequences that crop up during play. At last Keene's actions come under the player's direct control and a degree of dexterity is usually required to successfully guide him through whatever mayhem the bad guys have in store for him. Failing to complete an arcade screen removes one of Keene's five lives. His incarnations may also be lost as the plot unfolds; selecting certain pathways sends Steve into situations from which he may not return! Following his demise, the number of remaining lives is displayed and the storyline then continues from a point several frames before, allowing the player to make a different selection next time around. When all five lives are finally spent the game ends and must be restarted from scratch.

At any time during play (excluding the arcade sequences) the game may be saved out to the source disk and any suitably high scores are also stored for posterity on completion of a case.



One of the challenging arcade sections in Accolade's Comics

Once completed, the urge to replay that particular scenario is severely diminished by the limited variation between successive turns. There just isn't enough action to justify a quick load-up and it certainly falls well short of being an interactive adventure. This is no fault of the programmers, however, as including several storylines and retaining the game's graphic style would have meant several tens of disks, rather than the three supplied here.

Accolade Comics is the sort of game that is a brilliant experience for the first few plays, but once seen offers no real lasting appeal. This is a shame, as it is brilliantly implemented, extremely polished and genuinely humorous in parts.