photocopied without permission from the studio.

Due to the various European formats, the Hollywood studios would usually only show interest in the versions that were relevant to the US market, therefore excluding formats like the Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and Atari ST (the latter of which only had a small market share in the US, even when it was at its peak). Therefore, any comments on the game were usually directed at the Amiga, PC and console versions (where applicable).

Comments were usually faxed from the studio to the publisher, and it was then down to the game's producer to circulate them to the developer(s). Some of the copyright holders exercised a lot more creative control over the game's content than others, right down to whether the correct colour was being used on a character's clothing, for example.

One great perk that came with working on a film licence (other than getting to read or see information about a movie before its general release) was the chance to visit the actual film sets during production. If the movie was being filmed in the UK (at Pinewood, Elstree or Shepperton Studios in the south, for example), UK publishers and developers were sometimes granted permission to go and see the film being made. The official reason for the visit would be to let them see the sets, actors and costumes close up in a way that 35mm slides and VHS tapes couldn't replicate. Unofficially, it was just a great experience to say you had been on the set of a movie!

›Producing Predator 2

Richard produced 1991's Predator 2 game for Mirrorsoft's Image Works label. Here he reveals the full story behind the game's difficult development
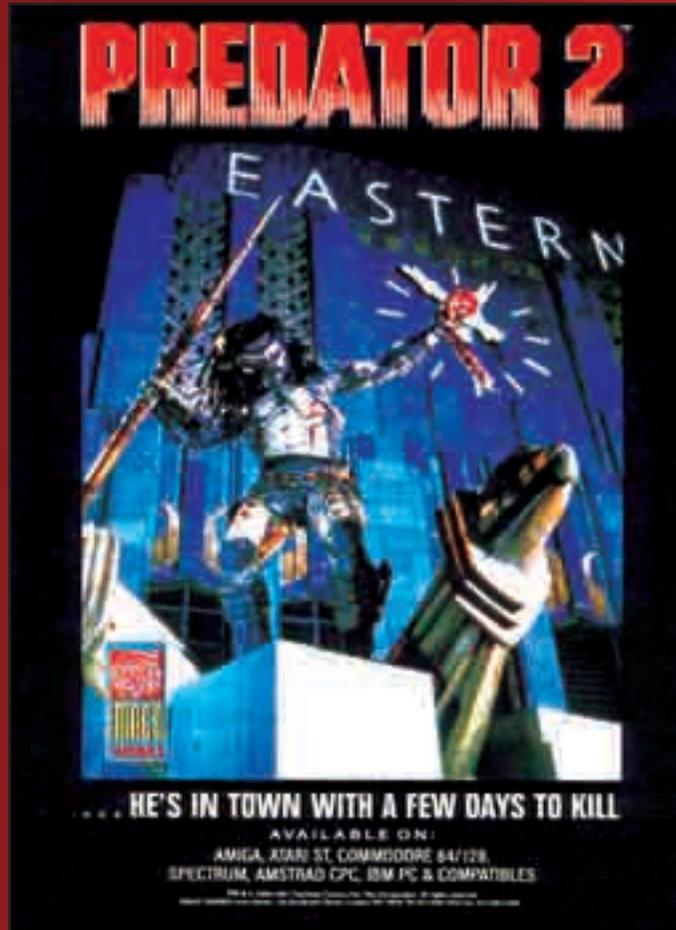
Mirrorsoft signed Predator 2 in 1990, at a point when the film studio (20th Century Fox) hadn't completely given up on getting Arnold Schwarzenneger to star in the movie. In the end, they went with Danny Glover and a script that didn't involve any of the characters from the original film.

It was decided fairly early on that the game would be a straightforward arcade shoot-em-up, as a number of key scenes from the movie (including the opening 10 minutes) involved gun battles in one form or another. The first suggested game design was based on the Operation Wolf arcade game, in which the player was always positioned in the centre of the screen and the locations scrolled by from right to left in front of them.

An alternative approach involved a split-screen, two-player game in which the player(s) were able to choose whether to play as Detective Harrigan (Danny Glover's character) or as the Predator. Each window would show a pseudo-3D environment where the player and their opponent would have to reach specific locations to gather useful objects before the other character got there first. If their paths crossed then battle would commence (either shooting or hand-to-hand), but they would also have to battle through various shoot outs en route that could slow them down.

Ultimately, the Operation Wolf approach was chosen, as it was the easiest to implement across all of the 8- and 16-bit formats. The console versions were managed by a different producer, and ended up with a different game design, this time loosely inspired by the Smash TV coin-op and deemed more suitable for the console market.

Arc Developments was quickly chosen as the developer for the computer versions. It had a proven track-record of producing solid arcade games in fairly short order (coin-op conversions of Crackdown and Forgotten Worlds had both been successful for US Gold), and it already had a
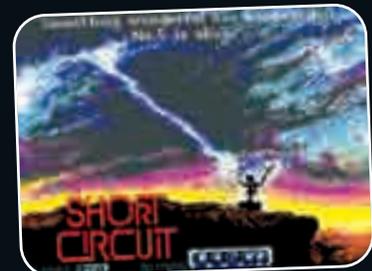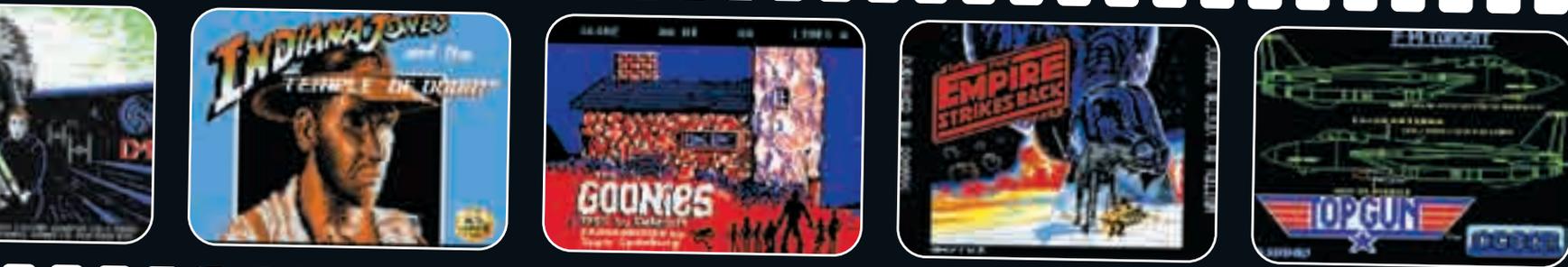
working relationship with Mirrorsoft. This helped a lot, as Arc could hit the ground running. Unfortunately, its PC and C64 coders weren't available, so Oxford Moebius and 221B were sub-contracted to convert for those respective formats.

Design duties

The Predator 2 game was split across four main locations from the movie. The first level was set in the streets of LA, during the gun battle between the police and the drug barons. The player had to survive the shoot out and reach the baron's main headquarters at the end of the level. The Predator remained cloaked (invisible) in the background scenery throughout the level. You would occasionally see his red laser target roaming the gangsters.

Weapon upgrades, ammo and body armour (for health) could be replenished by shooting these items as they scrolled past. Once in a while, a gangster would engage the player in hand-to-hand combat but this would only last for a few seconds. Innocent civilians would also find themselves in the heat of the battle, and the player had to ensure that they didn't shoot too many of them. If they did, Detective Harrigan's police badge was taken away and it was game over. If the player was hit too many times, his health would reduce to the point where Harrigan would be taken away in an ambulance, and it would be game over again. The reason for this slightly unsatisfying scenario was simple – Mirrorsoft was not allowed to depict Harrigan being killed. He didn't die in the movie, so he wasn't allowed to die in the game.

The second, third and fourth levels followed a similar pattern. Level two was set inside an ornate Egyptian-style penthouse, which contained skinned bodies hanging from the ceiling. Level three was based in the LA Subway and the final level took the player inside the Predator's spaceship. This was the only level in which the player got to see the Predator de-cloaked.

The style of game meant that the player only ever saw Danny Glover's character from behind. His body was outlined so you could see the background through him. This was useful for a number of reasons: it meant the player could still see enemies and items as they scrolled by directly in front of them, and it also meant that Mirrorsoft didn't have to worry about negotiating or paying additional fees for using Danny Glover's likeness in the game.

A decision was also made fairly early on in the game's development not to include Alan Silvestri's familiar Predator cue that featured in the film's musical score. Arc Developments therefore sub-contracted Justin Scharvona to compose a theme for the ST and Amiga versions. In hindsight, it was probably the wrong type of music for the game, but it was finished quite late and there wasn't really time to change it. Something that sounded similar in tone to the Predator theme would have been a much better choice.

Outfoxed

Graphics and videos of the game were being regularly sent to 20th Century Fox for approval, but near the end of development Mirrorsoft received an unexpected message from the studio to say that the producers of the movie weren't happy with the game! This caused a panic in the UK, as the studio had approved every stage up until the penultimate milestone. It transpired that the producers hadn't been shown anything up until near the end, and their gut reaction was that they didn't like it. Apparently, the studio's licensing department didn't even have a PC to view the disks that Mirrorsoft had been sending.

After everyone had calmed down, Fox relented and only a few changes were eventually made to the PC version. A static comic book-style introduction and conclusion was added to the US release (published by Konami) to book-end the arcade action. The frequency of the pick-ups (ammo, body armour, weapons) was also tweaked in an attempt to improve the overall gameplay across all versions.
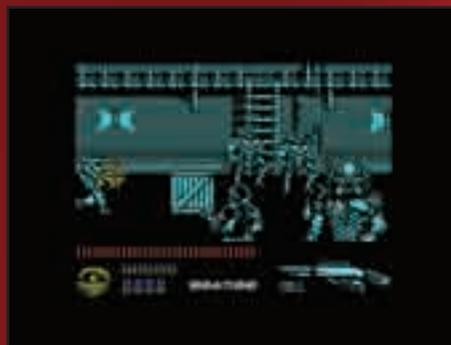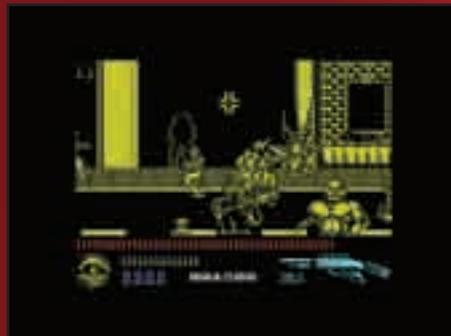
The C64 version was developed in tandem with the ST and Amiga versions, as was the PC conversion (written by Oxford Moebius). The Spectrum and CPC versions were handled in-house by Arc Developments, and they were the last versions to be started. Various minor changes were made to the 8-bit versions based on hardware restrictions, yet the largely monochrome Spectrum conversion actually ended up looking and playing the best of the 8-bit versions.

Although the *Predator 2* movie was originally scheduled for a May 1991 release in the US, 20th Century Fox pushed it forward to November 21st 1990 (Thanksgiving weekend). The European release was also brought forward a little, to early 1991. Thankfully, these changes
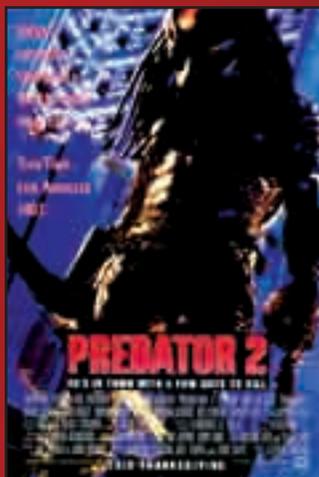
The Commodore 64 version, written by Sheffield-based developer 221b

Despite monochrome graphics, the Spectrum version was the best 8-bit version of the game

The Amiga version was the best-looking of the lot, with numerous on-screen sprites

The film was a disappointment, grossing just over $30 million in the US, half of the original's earnings

didn't affect the agreed completion dates for the game.

Unfortunately, US filmgoers tend to want family orientated movies at Thanksgiving and the run-in to Christmas, so *Predator 2* was never going to fill that niche. Some critics said that the film simply re-told the same story or that the audience had no empathy for any of the main characters. It was quickly labelled a lacklustre sequel and it failed to ignite the box office, earning considerably less than the original film.

The game also received lukewarm reviews from the magazines, especially for the 16-bit versions. Some magazines liked it, whilst some felt it was another example of a wasted film licence. The Spectrum version faired better, but the overall impression was still under-whelming.

Drawing conclusions

As producer of the Predator 2 game, most of the responsibility for its failings rested on my shoulders. In hindsight, I can now see where I should have done things differently. The style of game had already been chosen before I was given the project, and I really should have gone with my preferred choice (the split-screen chase and maze idea) because shoot-em-up arcade games simply weren't my forte. I was an adventure player at heart, and something that involved a little more thought was more to my liking. I never did like Operation Wolf-style games, and subconsciously that probably showed through more than I realised at the time.

Technically the title was OK, but not spectacular. As for the gameplay, there was no rush of adrenalin, no real addictive qualities to speak of. The game needed an 'against the clock' element that simply wasn't there. The only real incentive for the player was to battle on and finally encounter a visible predator, and possibly notch-up a high score along the way.

The lessons I learned have no doubt been experienced before by countless other producers working for countless other publishers over the years. It's a combination of choosing the right film, the right developer, the right producer and the right game design. Time and money are also big factors, as is the level of creative restraint that are put on the game itself by the film studio.