

In Emulation

Damian Walker continues the series about emulating other games platforms.

The IBM PC that most of us are using today was first released in 1981. But PCs of that era are very different to their modern equivalents.

The original PC system ran at 4.77 MHz, had at most 640k of memory, and ran an antiquated operating system called MS-DOS. Some PCs had monochrome text-only displays, but those systems that sported "CGA" colour graphics could display a grand total of 4 colours at a resolution of 320x200—the limited choice of colours being notoriously ugly. This display was inferior to many home computers of the time. The sound matched it: a simple beeper, though at least in the PC's case it was independent of the processor, so it could beep and do other things at the same time.

Such a PC is emulated by XTM, the PC emulator for EPOC. It runs on everything except the Osaris, whose screen isn't big enough to accommodate the PC display. To the original PC's graphics it adds the later 256-colour "MCGA" mode, at 320x200 pixels. It emulates the PC's beeper quite accurately too. It's freely available at www.nb-info.co.uk/xtminfo.htm.

Installation is not quite as easy as some other systems, as you have to prepare a DOS boot disk image, and put into that image a few of the specific utilities that XTM needs—such as a driver that allows the virtual PC to access your EPOC machine's drives. The manual gives step by step instructions on how to achieve this, but recommends that you set aside about an hour of your time for the process. I tried to use FreeDOS without success, but settled eventually on MS-DOS 6.22.

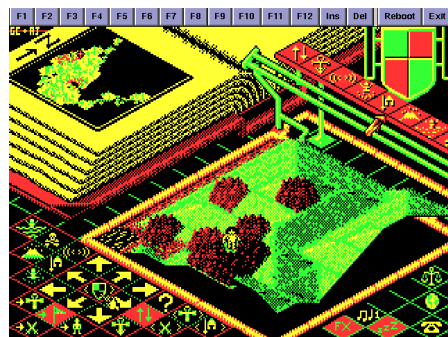
There are many reasons you'd want to run a PC emulator, for serious software as well as games. But you have to remember that due to performance reasons, which I'll go into later, you're emulating a PC from the 1980s, so bear that in mind when thinking of the software you want to run. Even at this early date, there were a number of interesting titles, and some early versions some series of games that were later to achieve lasting fame like the *Ultima* series.

XTM runs as quickly as the EPOC machine allows. On a Series 7 it seems to run a few times faster than the original PC, though on the Series 5 "classic" it struggles to keep up with the 1981 machine's speed. The use of any graphics, including the original 4-colour CGA graphics, restrict the frame rate, so it is recommended that you stick to text mode games only. This doesn't mean a complete lack of graphics: the original PC provided a number of line and box characters in its text mode that allowed simplistic graphics on the text screen; some games took great advantage of this. And though CGA was restricted to 4-colour graphics, in text mode it could display 16 colours.

My Series 7 easily runs the well known *Kingdom of Kroz* game, and the lesser known but absorbing space conquest game *Second Conflict*. I also managed to run the *Monkey Island* graphic adventure game demo and while it's slow, for this kind of game where the emphasis is more on puzzles than action the patient player can put up with the lack of speed. *Elite* runs in 256-colour graphics, but not fast enough to be playable.

The success rate begins to decline the more advanced the game is that you want to try. Unfortunately, the success at running even 4-colour games is very low, though in theory XTM should cope with them. I was particularly disappointed that the 4-colour version of *Elite* failed to run, as I think that speed-wise it would be quite successful. But text mode games like the two mentioned above, and the famous *Rogue*, run without a problem.

The main reason to run this emulator, if you've no serious use for old PC software, is nostalgia. It won't run many of the big blockbuster PC games, even those from the MS-DOS era, but if you enjoyed some of the text-mode games from the 1980s or early 1990s then XTM will be quite entertaining.



Populous in XTM - pretty, but unplayable

EPOC ENTERTAINER

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This month... Tracking Down Software

Welcome to another issue of *EPOC Entertainer*, and thank you for your patience! There was no issue in August due to work commitments. Since the July issue was late, I decided to aim for a 1st September release instead.

In this issue are a couple of reviews, one of the well-known *Vexed* game, which runs on all EPOC32 machines, and one of the lesser-known *Awari* board game for the Revo. We also continue the

In Emulation series, this month looking at the IBM PC. But we'll start off with some news on the work of John Spillett, to track down authors of software that is difficult or impossible to get hold of or register.

I hope you find this issue has been worth waiting for. If you have any comments, suggestions, news or contributions then please get in touch!

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The Software Sleuth

Damian Walker looks at the efforts of John Spillett to help users register games and other software for EPOC32.

Over the past couple of months, John Spillett has been diligently searching for registration contact details, or sometimes registration codes, for EPOC32 programs—particularly those for which the enclosed registration details are no longer current (that is, most of them). He is continually publishing his findings on his web site: <http://tobidog.com/>.

In some cases John has managed to contact the author, who has either given a registration code freely or has given new contact details for legitimate registration. Thus *Wari*, *Oedipus* and *LightBox* can now be registered with generic codes, and *Dark Horizons* can

now be registered with its author.

In other cases, attempts to contact the author have failed, and in such cases John is offering to send a generic registration code by email to those who ask for it, with a note to authors offering to remove their games from his site if they object. This is the usual process for abandon-ware as adopted by sites like *World of Spectrum* mentioned in a recent issue of *EPOC Entertainer*.

For further details, to keep track of John's progress or to pass on to him any information you might have, feel free to visit <http://tobidog.com/> and contact him by e-mail.

Seeds of Discontent

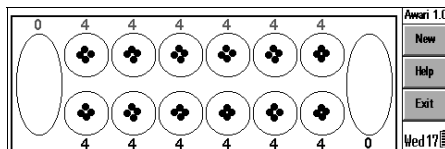
Damian Walker reviews Patrick Hahn's Awari board game conversion.

One of the most ancient games in the world to survive today is mancala, an African game in which stones or seeds are sown into a board of cups or holes, the object being to capture the seeds of the opponent from their place. There are various mancala games of two, three or four rows of holes, but the most well known in the west is awari.

I won't attempt to describe the rules of awari completely in the space of this review. The game is very sophisticated, being entirely a game of strategy with no luck element, much comparable to more modern draughts or checkers games. It's interesting in that your pieces aren't identified not by colour, but by location: put any of your pieces on the opponent's territory and they become his pieces. Patrick Hahn has implemented a very good and accurate game of Awari for EPOC32 machines.

The rules are properly outlined in a good help file supplied with the game. This is about as far as "features" go with the game. All of the game is accessed through three buttons on the button bar: New [game], Help and Exit. In the currently running game, moves are made simply by tapping on the hole on your side of the board with the stylus, the pieces it contains being moved around the board automatically according to the rules. The game is always played against the computer, with the player moving first. While there is apparently no difficulty setting, an easier opponent can apparently be accessed by tapping twice on "New". The computer still managed to walk all over my misdirected forces at this level, though, and I have yet to win a game.

The presentation of this game is very simple. The seeds are represented with little



black circles, the holes being the large hollow circles that contain them. Evidently the graphics are optimised for the Revo, but are centred horizontally to the screen of any machine apart from the Osaris, which lacks the horizontal resolution to accommodate the board. The game has no sound. It also lacks any menu system, having only the simple button bar already described.

It's a shame that this game wasn't developed further, and its lack of options is the main reason I count this as a two-star game, not a three-star one. The ability to allow the computer to move first would have been useful, as well as a proper difficulty level setting. Games are short enough to be played in one sitting, but if the program had a save game feature—even a simplistic one that remembers the position from one session to the next—it would have been more useful as a time-filler. Instead, the current game is simply abandoned when you exit the program.

The game is quite addictive, but the initial difficulty level will be too difficult for those unfamiliar with the kind of movement and spacial awareness needed to play mancala games. Indeed it is too difficult for me, and I have encountered a number of different mancala games before. This can be quite frustrating and might well put people off. However, those willing to persevere will find Awari a very rewarding game to play again and again.

By	Patrick Hahn
URL	psion.cynningstan.org.uk
Licence	Freeware
Compatibility	Revo
Rating	☆☆

Most Vexing

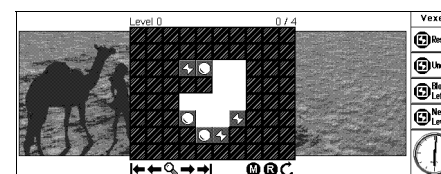
A review by Damian Walker of FreEPOC's Vexed puzzle game.

Puzzle games are popular on portable computers of all kinds. So are games with an Egyptian theme, as I found out with my *Senet on the move*. Ewan Spence has combined the two, with a puzzle game set in the ancient tombs of Egypt. This is the well-known *Vexed*, from FreEPOC.

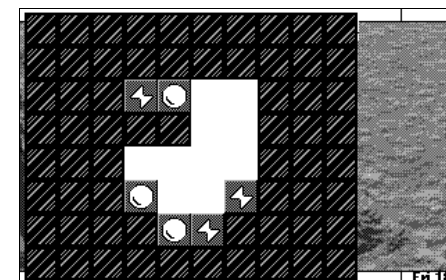
The game has a kind of treasure hunting story behind it. You play the part of a young woman named Sekushi, who has taken up a quest begun by your grandfather. This quest is based on the contents of ancient manuscripts, and involves travelling across Egypt in search of "treasures of untold beauty and of equal danger", as well as "to solve the ancient riddle and discover the secret of civilisation." This is a charming story which adds flavour to the game but—as with many puzzle games that adopt a story line—has almost nothing to do with game play.

Vexed consists of a series of puzzles you need to solve, all of which involve moving various decorated blocks left and right, and letting them fall, in a grid affected by gravity. When two or more identical blocks meet, they disappear, and the object of the game is, as in the Revo's cascade with its coloured spheres, to clear the playing space of them completely. These puzzles represent complex traps and devices in tombs, and as you solve each one, a link back to the story line is presented in the shape of a map of north-east Africa, with a red line showing Sekushi's progress from west to east among the various tombs.

The game comes with 100 levels. These may be enough to keep you going for a while, but



Series 5 screen shot



Osaris screen shot

I managed to get through the first 21 within an hour, so more experienced puzzlers might get through all in a short length of time. However, further level packs are available from the FreEPOC site, so the game should provide good replay value.

The graphics are very good. The map of north-east Africa used to show Sekushi's progress has an old-fashioned look in keeping with the story line. The levels themselves are well-drawn, and the player can select from three different styles of block to play with. Somehow I think players with monochrome devices get the best experience here. Only one of the graphic sets uses colour to distinguish blocks, and the display feels understated. On grey scale screens, I feel more that the graphical capabilities of the machine are being used to the full,

One thing I like about this game is that it supports all EPOC32 machines. There are some screen icons not visible on the Osaris, but the functions they access are all available through the menu system and the toolbar buttons. I think the omission of those icons is by design, to maximise the screen area used by the puzzle itself, as in all other respects the game appears to adapt itself to the screens of the various EPOC32 computers.

Vexed is in my opinion a very good puzzle game, among the best that EPOC32 has to offer. It's free, and still available at the FreEPOC site, so if you like puzzle games I recommend you give it a try.

By	FreEPOC
URL	www.freepoc.de
Licence	Freeware
Compatibility	All EPOC32 machines
Rating	☆☆☆