Get Lost!

A review by Damian Walker of Neil Sands' maze game Lost in 3D.

First-person perspective maze games have been popular on computers since the days of 3D Monster Maze on the ZX81. The mechanics of movement around a maze in the four compass directions has been adopted into other games, too, especially role-playing games. Solving a maze that you're actually in is more challenging than solving a maze using a bird's eye view.

Lost in 3D is a first-person perspective maze game for the Psion Series 5 and Series 7 computers, written by Neil Sands. It's a very simple game—it just generates a maze and puts you in there, leaving you to find your way out.

The graphics of this game are very basic. I also found them somewhat confusing. As you turn around in the four different compass directions, walls seem to move or disappear. This is particularly apparent at the entrance. When the entrance is to your left or right it looks like a passage way you could walk down. But turn to face it, and the passage way turns to solid wall. Only when you try to walk forwards into it does the game explain that this is the entrance. The exit suffers similarly, but at least is clearly marked. Another place where the graphics confuse is in areas where there are open spaces in the maze. A wall is drawn in the middle of the open space, and it faces in different directions as you move around it. This

rather spoils the immersive effect of the maze.

The game is without sound, but there would be no real benefit to adding noises to the game. As you are the only inhabitant of the maze, perhaps footsteps could have been added, but these would have become irritating very quickly.

The interface is easy to navigate. The keys for movement are simple: left and right to turn around, and up to walk forwards. A standard EPOC menu provides access to game features, information and help.

Configuration of the game is limited but adequate. At the start of the game you can specify the size of the maze you want to solve, from 3×3 to 60×40. You have a compass you can consult if you lose your sense of direction, and if you get really stuck then you can cheat by looking at the bird's eye view.

I don't think the game is particularly entertaining, though. Even if the graphics weren't confusing, there's too little to do in this maze. A small maze might provide a few minutes' amusement, but the amount of time and effort it takes to find your way out of the larger mazes makes the game tiresome. In the days of the ZX81, a monster was added to the maze to spice things up in 3D Monster Maze, and this worked quite well. Other old games would fill the maze with treasure. But without these embellishments I find the game a bit too bland.

For those who enjoy solving mazes in the traditional sense, Maze3D is a more attractive and interesting game, and was reviewed in *EPOC Entertainer* issue 14. If you like the first-person view, then Nick Dawkins' *Dungeon* provides a more exciting challenge, while the unfinished game *Dragonward* builds the idea into a role-playing adventure game. But I feel *Lost In 3D* will appeal to few gamers out there.

Lost in 3d v1.1

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By	Neil Sands
URL	psion.cyningstan.org.uk
Licence	Shareware
Compatibil	Series 5/5mx, Series 7/netBook
Rating	☆☆

Welcome to the latest edition of *EPOC Entertainer*! For a change it looks like I may get this one out in time. That's despite the fact that work, illness, a new laptop, and more work, have taken up much of my time this month and not left much time for EPOC32 adventures.

So, what does this month have in store for EPOC32 fans? A piece of lost software regained, for a start. Then our series on playing games under emulation continues, moving from computers to game consoles. Then we have the usual two reviews: Palmtop's excellent Palmtris, a clone of the ever-popular Tetris, and Neil Sands' Lost in 3D, an immersive maze game which contrasts with the very different Maze3D, reviewed back in issue 14.

As always, I'd welcome feedback for this issue. Is there a game you'd like to see reviewed? Would you like to write a short review yourself for inclusion in the magazine? Or maybe you've found a game that's missing from the EPOC32 Game Database? Perhaps you'd like to see a return of the programming tutorials to further your coding skills? Or maybe you're developing a game you'd like to tell us about.

If you have any comments about the magazine then please do get in touch at the usual address.

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Software News

Damian Walker passes on some news from John Spillett, who has uncovered another "lost" game.

As an update to last month's efforts, John Spillett has obtained a copy of Purple Software's BridgePro bridge card game. This was kindly supplied by the new copyright owners ZingMagic as unsupported software. They're happy for it to be distributed on the condition that people don't bother them with queries—you can play it, but you're on your own.

The game is currently obtained from John's web site http://www.tobidog.com/ as well as from the EPOC32 Game Database. The Game Database currently has a skeleton entry for the game, but this will be fleshed out when I have time to try out the game. There will also be a review in *EPOC Entertainer* in the near future.

In Emulation

This month, Damian Walker looks at emulating the Gameboy console.

Playing Aladdin in Goby on an MC218.

So far in this series I've looked at *computers* that EPOC32 can emulate. But there are other types of emulator available too. Gaming consoles are a popular target for emulation. While some of the more modern game console hardware is too advanced for EPOC32 to emulate, one console that can be emulated is Nintendo's Gameboy.

The Gameboy was launched in 1989 as a pocketable monochrome console. It featured an 8-bit processor similar to the Z80 of the ZX Spectrum, with a display of 160×144 pixels in four grey scales and facilities to play sampled sound. Games are supplied as ROM cartridges as in traditional home consoles, though of course all is on a small scale.

Two emulators are available for the Gameboy: Goby and EGnuBoy. Goby is the easiest to install. It comes as a SIS file and behaves like any other EPOC application. It runs on all EPOC machines. EGnuBoy is a port of GnuBoy, and as such doesn't behave quite like an EPOC application. It is installed into a non-standard directory and must be run by navigating to its directory and tapping on the *gnuboy.exe* file icon. It only runs on EPOC R5 machines too. Unlike Goby, however, it supports colour and will run games that would refuse to run on a monochrome Gameboy.

As nearly 120 million Gameboys have been sold, there is a large software library available for it. One of the top-selling games was *Tetris*, though as EPOC32 has several Tetris clones this may not be a good reason to install the emulator. The Gameboy is particularly strong in arcade and action games, though one other game of note is the *Zelda* role-playing game.

Commercial games for the Gameboy are all covered by copyright law, and very few if any have been released into the public domain. To legally play these you need to own the original cartridges. Instructions are available on the net on how to download these to a computer for play on an emulator. However, there is a growing home brew scene for the Gameboy, and a large number of good freeware games is available for the machine. A good site is *www.pdroms.de*.

Goby and EGnuBoy both support the standard *.gb* format ROM files. In addition, EGnuBoy supports *.gbc* files which are for the Gameboy Color. The emulators appear to be quite successful at emulation; the only problems I had were in trying to run some colour games in Goby. Performance is another matter, however. Monochrome games run at a reasonable speed on a Psion Series 7 with both emulators, but on a 5mx things slow down to a crawl. So while the 5mx would seem the ideal machine for Gameboy emulation, it will be limited to things like word games and turn based strategy. I also found that colour games were slow on the Series 7 too, especially if magnified to a size where you can actually see what's going on. So the colour advantage of EGnuBoy is negated somewhat.

Out of the two emulators I would probably recommend Goby. It has the advantage of ease of installation and use, where EGnuBoy hasn't been properly adapted for EPOC32. On the other hand, if you've got good eyesight and you really want to play the colour games on your Series 7 or netBook, then EGnuBoy is your only option.

By	David Sharp
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Expert Palmistry

Damian Walker reviews this Tetris clone by Palmtop BV.
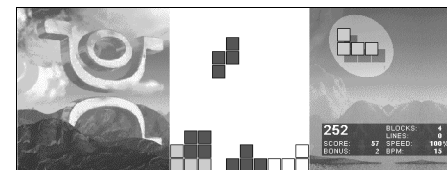
It would be difficult to know much about computer games without having heard of Tetris. Having been invented in the 1980s, Tetris took the world by storm. You, as the single player, have a 2-dimensional view of a pit, which is organised into rows of squares. Blocks of various shapes are falling into the pit, and you have to position them to fit in the most compact manner. If an entire row of squares is filled with blocks, it disappears and the blocks above this empty space fall into it. The object is to prevent the pile of blocks reaching the top of the pit for as long as possible. The game looks like a puzzle but plays like an arcade game.

There have been many variants of this interesting game idea. One of several available for the Psion Series 5 is Palmtris, by Palmtop, part of the Widget games pack. This was commercial software, but was released freely by them and is hosted on the Martin Guthrie's Pscience5 web site.

What's initially apparent about Palmtop's game is the excellent graphics. They're in sixteen grey scales, rather than four, which makes a great difference, especially to backdrops. Palmtop have used a clever trick to make this very vertical game fit the Psion's very horizontal screen. When only a few rows of blocks are scattered at the bottom of the pit, the display is quite wide, and the uppermost empty rows of the pit aren't shown. But if you start to build upwards, the display narrows and the blocks become smaller in order to show more and more of the space above, until all rows of the pit are displayed. This is quite distracting at first, but you soon get used to it.

Sound is of an equivalent quality to the graphics, with good sampled sound effects being used throughout the game. This version lacks the continuous music of some versions, but given the amount of space that music takes up in your precious Psion's memory, this is not necessarily a bad thing.

The user interface is nice and easy to use. EPOC menus and conventions are used, and everything is where you expect it. The game offers a myriad of options, though, using an extensive tabbed dialogue box. Many aspects of play are configurable, from the speed of the game to the colouring of the blocks. You can even turn off the zooming effect described earlier if it continues to distract you.

There is little to complain about in the performance or behaviour of this game. It runs at a reasonable speed on the Series 5 for which it was designed, as well as on my faster Ericsson MC218. My only complaint is the lack of support for screen sizes different to the Series 5.

So Osaris and Revo owners will have to look elsewhere for their Tetris fix, while Geofox and Series 7 owners will have to put up with a letterbox display. But for users of the Psion Series 5, 5mx, netPad and the Ericsson MC218, Palmtris is probably the best Tetris clone there is.

By	Palmtop BV
URL	www.pscience5.net
Licence	Commercial
Compatibil	Series 5/5mx
Rating	✩✩✩✩