Now We're Motoring!

Fred Botton's excellent implementation of the *Mille Bornes* game was reviewed back in *EPOC Entertainer* issue 3, also a "new look" issue. As it's a game I play often, I thought I'd share some playing tips I've picked up since then. Mille Bornes works on all machines apart from the Osaris.

Bottes: don't play these cards as soon as you get them, but let your opponent play the corresponding hazard first. Then play the botte straight afterwards: this is called a *coup fourré*, and is worth extra points.

Hazards: be careful about playing these as the round progresses. Your opponent might have the corresponding *botte* and play a coup fourré. The best time to play them is when *you* have the corresponding botte.

When discarding: first get rid of anything that's useless to you. Then think about discarding duplicates. Only then should you consider dumping distance cards. *Never* discard a botte!

Damage limitation: when your opponent reaches 900 he's within a single card of winning the hand. Make sure you play all your *bottes*—you don't want to finish the hand without getting those out on the table. This also applies if he's on 800 exactly, and hasn't played two 200 cards yet.

Discarding 75: if you're subject to a speed limit, discard 75s before discarding 50s and 25s as you may not be able to use the 75 for some time. But 100s and 200s should be kept, as their increased distance makes their use worth waiting for.

The home stretch: don't bother playing an *End Limit* if you're on 950 or 975, unless you've nothing else to play. As you're within 50 km of the finish, a speed limit won't affect you anyway.

Merry Christmas!

Those who've been reading *EPOC Entertainer* since the beginning may know that this month is the magazine's third anniverary. Launched at the end of 2007, the aim was to pay special attention to games on Psion's 32-bit machines and their clones.

After a couple of months the appearance of the magazine changed dramatically and its style and format remained constant for nearly three years. But now it's time for a change, and regular readers can't avoid noticing that this issue looks a lot different to the last thirty. The aim is to make it look more professional, and I hope you like the change.

As far as the game scene goes, there's been no *visible* activity in the past month. However, I've been working on a Psion project which some of you may know about from the Organiser II and Series 3. This is heading towards completion, as you'll see from the news below. Anybody who's interested in beta testing, let me know!

I'm not *quite* ready to start a new long-term series just yet, but in the mean time I thought I'd introduce a type of article you've not seen before: the player guide. In future issues I plan to do more of these. Some of my own games might feature, given that I'm most familiar with them. I had thought of doing a *Senet on the move* guide this month, but what with the news below, I thought better not to turn *EPOC Entertainer* into little more than an advertisement for my own games!

Enjoy the issue and have a Merry Christmas!

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THE HORDES ARE COMING!

Visitors to various Psion web sites will already know of Damian Walker's **Barbarians** game for 8-bit and 16-bit Psions. This month the hordes are due to invade EPOC32.

Barbarians is a game of strategy for one player, running on Psion hand-held computers. You take the lead of a civilised league of twelve cities at the very time the barbarians are entering the land. Your task is to raise armies and send them against the advancing hordes, and you will not rest until every last one is wiped out. While this is going on, you have to manage your empire's economy.

Beta testing is due to start soon and a release is planned by Christmas. For information on progress keep an eye on the game's web site:

games.cyningstan.org.uk/barbarians.php

Rowing Home to Haven

Adelino Oliveira's Ship Puzzle, also known as AOBRCPZ, is given the once over.

Adelino Oliveira has been responsible for bringing some interesting puzzles and games to the Psion Series 5. In an earlier issue there was a review of his Car Puzzle game, and this month it's time to look at another transport-related diversion, *Ship Puzzle*.

Ship puzzle is a variation on the well known sliding block picture puzzle. I've not seen it before, so I don't know if it's original or if it's an implementation of a traditional puzzle game. The object is to move a large ship from a harbour at one end of the puzzle to another harbour at the opposite end. The puzzle consists of a grid of decorated sliding blocks, most of which occupy two rows of seven. The two harbours occupy fixed positions at the end of the grid, and blocks are painted with small boats and with three sections of a larger ship.

Four more blocks occupy extra rows above and below, as you can see in the screen shot. There is room for these extra rows to slide left and right, and you can also slide the affected columns up and down, which effectively moves them sideways across your ship's path. By this means you can rearrange the order of the blocks, moving your ship to its destination. The smaller boats on some of the blocks appear to serve only as decoration.

In my first few attempts I found this puzzle fiendishly difficult to understand. The rules governing movement are easy to grasp, and the user interface is nice and simple. But the difficulty is in finding sequences of manoeuvres that will push one block to its proper destination without putting others out of place. In this it's much like other sliding block puzzles, even though the mechanism is quite different. It takes

a few attempts to work out how to get blocks from one end to the other, and possibly a couple more to do this without hopelessly mixing them up. Bear in mind that you will have to split up the three blocks of your ship to move them, because of the layout of the puzzle.

As I followed this learning curve I realised that Ship Puzzle is an unfinished product. The "Version 0" on the introductory screen should have given me a clue! On the main game screen there are four buttons: Restart, Solution, Replay and Finish. Only Finish works, the other three being crossed out and unavailable, permanently it seems. There is no pull-down menu, so the interface is limited to the Finish button and the cursor keys or pen taps to move the blocks. There's no undo, but this isn't a great loss as a mistake can be easily reversed—though it will cost you an extra move.

Graphics are simple but clear and well-presented, much what we're used to on EPOC32. They are a bit too spartan, though, and it would have been nice to see a little more decoration on the screen. Nothing special would be needed, just a title, and maybe some boxes surrounding the various panels of the screen. This minimalism is something that's common to all Adelino's games, though, so it's not surprising to see it here.

Sound is absent, but it would have been difficult to add sounds that don't become irritating very quickly. Despite the game being unfinished it has been released in a perfectly playable state. I'm finding it quite entertaining and will be keeping it on my MC218 until I manage to solve it.

Ship Puzzle's simple presentation hides a puzzle of surprising complexity. Screen shot taken on an Ericsson MC218.
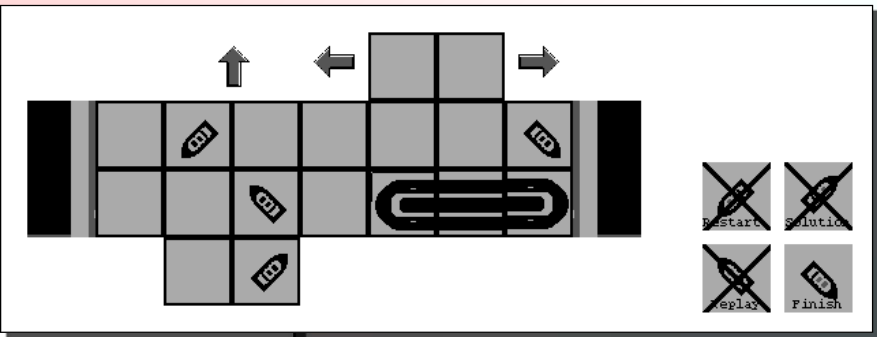
Fact File

Author	**Adelino Oliveira**
URL	**psion.cyningstan.org.uk**
Licence	**Freeware**
Systems	**Psion Series 5/5mx**

Rating
★★★

A Tangled Web

A review of Ian Webster's expansive platform game, Web World.

So near and yet so far! Ian Webster has written what could be one of the best of the few platform games on the Series 5. Unfortunately, the ravages of time have eroded some of the merits of *Web World*, one of his contributions to the EPOC32 shareware scene from 1997. Not only can it not now be registered, but it was written when the Series 5 "classic" was the only machine of the platform. This means it doesn't fit smaller screens, and runs too fast on faster machines. This is one strictly for Series 5 "classic" and Geofox users.

The story is simple: "The Orb of power which has protected Web World for generations has been stolen and deactivated by an evil mage who has plunged the world into chaos, transforming the people into terrible monsters. Locate the orb and teleport out to save the planet!"

Starting the game takes you to an attractively-drawn platform world, with your character looking for all the world like Miner Willy from the early ZX Spectrum games *Manic Miner* and *Jet Set Willy*. Web World resembles the latter in layout: the game world is made up of interconnected screens; as you pass the edge of one, the display flips over to another. Unfortunately the drawing of these screens takes a couple of seconds, so there is always a pause as you travel from screen to screen.

Enemies are clearly drawn when viewed as still graphics, but due to the Psion's screen they blur as they move, making them difficult to tell apart. This doesn't really matter for game play: you need to avoid everything that moves! For the curious, each creature has its own patterns of movement. The objects you can collect are somewhat less clearly drawn. The clock and the keys are obvious enough, but the sprites are so small I didn't recognise the chicken or the bomb till I'd picked them up and the game told me what they were.

Objects can be carried one at a time and seem to do their job automatically. Early on you're herded towards the handle, which will automatically lower the well cover when you return with it to the well, allowing you into the rest of the game world. I like this linear introduction to the game and the controls, after which you start to see choices of where to go next. The handle was the only object I discovered the use of. I assume that the keys will open the doors you see around Web World, though I never managed to get to a door while carrying a key. Heaven knows what the chicken does.

Being presented as an adventure rather than an arcade-style collect-em-up, the game doesn't have a great deal of treasure to collect. This contrasts with, say, *Jumpy! Plus*, reviewed in *EPOC Entertainer* 17. The emphasis here is more on exploration of the map, with the occasional puzzling platform layout that might leave you stumped for a while.

There are a few things I dislike about the game. First of all, it doesn't play from the D drive, or any drive other than C. Try to extract the files to a compact flash card and you will get a "File not found" error on running the program. Secondly, the game could have done with some sound. It is absolutely silent, apart from an unwelcome key click sound if you have that enabled. And thirdly, as mentioned before, the game can't be registered, which allows half an hour's play: plenty of opportunity to explore but, according to the author, not enough to complete the game. With those caveats, I still find this a very fun game for the Series 5.

Fact File

Author	**Ian Webster**
URL	**psion.cyningstan.org.uk**
Licence	**Shareware**
Systems	**Psion Series 5**

Rating
★★★

Creatures to watch out for

- Spiders move up and down on an invisible thread.
- These gorilla-like creatures climb up and down ropes and cables.
- Ghosts move in any direction, passing through walls. And they head straight for **YOU**!
- The toad-like creatures walk left and right along platforms.
- Flying saucers fly left and right above the ground.