PYROTECH

version 1.2

Pyrotech is a third millennium FG Soft release for the Commodore VIC-20 (16 KB RAM expansion required, I'm afraid).

It will run just fine on your emulator of choice, but of course there's nothing like the real deal, so if you still have the hardware - like myself - this may be a good time to dust it off.

It's been more than 25 years since I last wrote anything for a Commodore machine, or more than 30 if you just count the VIC-20!

GAME SCENARIO

You're in command of a team of *Pyrotechs* (initially three, with extra staff awarded in due course) on a mission to collect and defuse a batch of time bombs before they explode. While you're at it, you'll have to beware of a few thingies:

- **LANDMINES**: the general suggestion is not to tread on them. Featured in all levels.
- **ZAPPERS**: these static robots emit a cyclic high voltage discharge (the higher the level, the shorter the interval within discharges) which will kill anything in close range. Featured in all levels, starting from level 3.
- **ROAMERS**: these robots wander aimlessly around the lot. If you cross their path they will be less than friendly though. Featured in levels 5-6.
- **CHASERS**: just like the Roamers, except they have been programmed with your scent and they will chase you around the field, so don't fret too much. They replace the dumb Roamers starting from level 7.
- **DROPPERS**: just like the Chasers, but these guys carry additional time bombs and will occasionally drop them on the field, making your mission all the more stressful. Starting from level 10, two of the moving robots will be Droppers, the rest of them Chasers.
- and then of course **TIME**: if you fail to collect all the time bombs, an explosion will blast the whole surroundings, causing considerable distress in the neighborhood. The further you get in the game, the shorter the time you get to accomplish your task.

    Luckily, you can also count on a couple of useful tools:

- **TIME SHIFTER**: awarded once per level starting from level 6; if you grab it, it will add 10 seconds to the remaining time. Nifty tool.
- **TASER**: awarded once per level starting from level 8, it can be used to temporarily paralyze all the Chasers, Droppers and Zappers. Collect it first, then press the fire button to deploy it when you need it the most.

BONUS STAGE

This is a special recurring stage (you get the first bonus stage after level 2, then one every three levels starting from level 6) where you finally get to collect your pay, but to keep you trained the dough has been spread around the field and you have to collect as much as you can before the time runs out. And here's another catch: the cash comes in four different colors, and you can only collect the banknotes of a given color if you match that color. So run to any one of the paint buckets on the four corners of the battlefield to paint yourself accordingly and then collect the matching colored money (extra points awarded if you get it all). On the positive side, there are no landmines, no Zappers, and no wandering robots in this stage, so you can almost relax.

RELEASE NOTES:

version 1.1

- Solved a bug where there was no upper limit to the amount of landmines.
- Speed enhancements.
- Time shifter and taser appear earlier in the game.
- Four new maps for levels 3-4, 5-6, 7-9, 10-12; a random map is used for levels 13 and above.
- Pyrotech now has a less stiff, if somehow more perplexed, look.
- The game now requires a 16K RAM expansion (woops!).

version 1.2

- Solved an issue where the objects' initial positioning in level 1 was sometimes not truly randomized when running the game in an emulator.
- Solved an issue where the objects could be placed immediately next to Pyrotech during the initial positioning, this is no longer the case.
- Droppers lay bombs slightly more often.
- Improved, more symmetrical level maps on all levels.
- Added a new map for levels 13-15, so a random map is now used for levels 16 and above.
- Slowed down the introductory animations, they were too fast.
- A somehow nicer title screen.
- Pyrotech's demise is now a bit more dramatic.
- Tweaked the sound effects and the border/background colors.
- Pyrotech becomes green (Hulk-a-like?) when the taser is loaded and ready to go, and purple when the taser is doing its thing.
- Points awarded when the time shifter is collected, the taser is collected and the taser is deployed.

The game is released under the GNU GPL v3 license, so you're free to improve on it and redistribute it, as long as you keep within these terms and conditions: www.gnu.org/licenses/gpl-3.0.en.html.

Well that's it. I hope you'll like the game, if that is the case – or if you've made it better - maybe drop me a line at maxframes AT hotmail DOT com.

SO WHY DID I DO THIS?

Well, *why not*?

[…]

OK, so you turned the page and this was highly unlikely. So I might as well make up something.

The thing is, the early eighties were so damn *exciting*. I mean the microcomputer scene felt exciting. Maybe it was my young age, at 13/14 *everything* looks amazing and full of magic and promises as y'all know. But there really was *something* to this, though I can't quite put my finger on it. Things looked deceivingly simple, or at least *attainable*: if you could understand something – *anything* – of those machines you felt like you were in line for something remarkable or at least *relevant.* Although you needed to have the knack to really make your mark (hence my reference to the deceiving nature of this technological fascination), one couldn't help but feel that we had been lucky enough to get a jump start in what may have turned (as it did, big time) into the new industrial revolution. If you could cook up some code and make a decent job out of it, you could become a local hero – a *whiz kid* – and who knows, maybe even something more. After all, there was only so many things you could stuff into a handful of kilobytes wrapped around an 8 bits CPU clocked at 1 MHz, weren't there? Today the bar has been set so high that doing something really noticeable is mostly beyond the reach of the boy next door, it takes a real *developer* to do that (they used to call them *programmers* back then).

So, to cut an already long story a bit shorter, I started nagging my grownups for a microcomputer, and at the time (1983) that meant either a Sinclair or a Commodore. The Spectrum and the C64 were still too expensive – don't even think about it - while the ZX 81 was already old hat by then (not that the VIC was a novelty) - and out of stock anyway - and let's be serious: no sound and color? (before you bash me: I am now the proud owner of each one of these machines – and many more). So it had to be the VIC-20. To show my old ones I was actually serious about that, I duly spent the long months before my 14th birthday avidly studying up on BASIC (*ABC Personal Computer* by *Editoriale Jackson*) and hastily scribbling random snatches of code (which would never had worked) and screenshots of imaginary videogames on random pieces of paper.

When Unboxing Day finally came, the first thing was the *smell*. That thing smelled like *future*. It smelled like those months spent reading and wondering. And I will never forget my first "hello world" inevitable routine (10 print "ciao" – 20 goto 10 as it turned out). The mere fact that the computer was *doing* what *I* instructed it to (no matter how unbelievably dumb), and displaying it on our family TV set – the same one on which my Dad watched the news and my Mom watched the movies! - made me jump on my chair in excitement. It's almost impossible to explain this to a kid today, 30 years of mind-blowingly fast (r)evolution have changed the world for good and one result of it is we barely raise an eyebrow now for what would have looked like black sorcery back in the day (I remember standing in awe, open mouthed in front of *BC's Quest for Tires* running on an Apple II in a shop, amazed at that mind boggling "cartoon like graphics" which would look so primitive and raw by today's standards).

So what happened then? Nothing much, really. Not that I lost my interest, I guess I just wasn't stubborn enough, and probably not smart enough, to take that promise and make it into something tangible and worthwhile. Sure, I carried out my programming experiments like anyone else (I graduated to the Commodore 64 one year later, and the VIC went back to its case), even getting as far as faking up a mock-up of a software house of my own (members of staff: me, with the occasional little help from a friend), but the majority of them were either unfinished business or clumsily hatched up stuff (in my defense, editing code on those machines could be a nightmare, and I never had the patience to sketch out a flowchart before I laid my hands on the keyboard – a bad habit I still can't kick). At the end of the day, maybe just two or three of my programs could actually do anything to speak of, without crash landing for one reason or the other. I ended up doing what the vast majority of kids of my age did: playing games. Games *other people* wrote. The train had left the station, and I had missed it.

Flash forward to today, I have a job in IT as a systems administrator (a circumstance that may have something to do with the events you just read about, after all) and I sometimes even get to write some code, in various scripting languages. I'm still bad at it, but at least now I am more *organized* (OCD has its upside), so – much to my relief – I can say that most of that code kind of works. So at one point, having some time on my hands courtesy of a nasty influenza - I just thought: *why not*? The result is what is now (virtually) in your hands.

Granted, this game is nothing special, or particularly original, or particularly good. But, a bit like my scripts, it *kind of works* and I had fun putting it together. Here and there, while I was scratching my head about how to make this or that work, I could still feel a hint of that old thrill, that ineffable *eureka* moment (even if I was just reinventing the wheel, and a less efficient wheel of all things) And now that it's done, and I finally get to release an arcade game for the VIC-20 some 30 years overdue, I can almost say that it *smells*. It smells like delivered promise.

FG, somewhere in Italy, sometime in the next Century