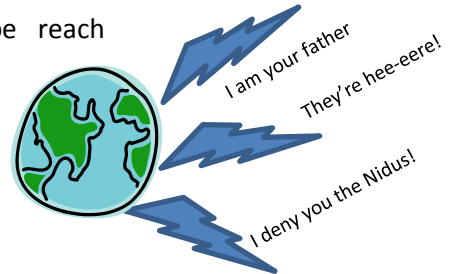


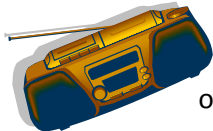
(Defence-Force 2014)

From time to time, the interdimensional veil gets thin... so thin that some electromagnetic signals may go through... and maybe reach someone listening...

And *they* heard. And found us: a civilization from another dimension. *They* silently recorded the signals and analyzed them.



And suddenly, after more than a decade, the signals stopped. The interdimensional veil had got thick again.

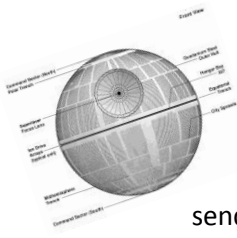


And *they* decoded the information. And learnt about our way of life, about our nature, about our fears... and planned our invasion. To be able to interact with our dimension, *they* had to adopt a physical shape. And *they* chose the form of which they considered our deepest horrors.

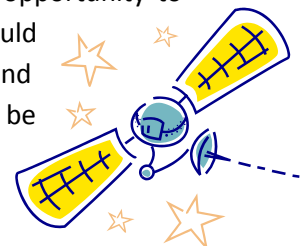
And *they* patiently waited for nearly three decades for the veil to become thin again. And then appeared...

When the attack was detected, the Earth nations united their forces and launched all our weaponry, just to find out that the enemy ships were shielded against it.

The counter-attack was futile, but the engineers found out that they created their dreadnaughts with a weak spot: a small ship could avoid their defenses, maneuver through the surface, and de-activate their shielding.



Nobody understood the weak design, but it was an opportunity to survive. The Earth Forces designed a machine that could launch an energy beam to the enemy dreadnaughts and send them back to their dimension. But their shielding had to be neutralized first.



You are selected as volunteer to take this mission. You will have to pilot your skimmer and maneuver through the surface of the enemy dreadnaughts, facing all the perils and horrors *they* launch at you, with the only objective of de-activating their shielding.

LOADING THE GAME

Oricium will work on any 48K Oric-1, Atmos and Pravetz 8D. It should also work in a Telestrat, though this has not been fully tested.

Oricium is a tape-based game, so you can load it with the usual CLOAD"" command; however you can also transfer it to a disk and load it from there.

Oricium is the first game (to my knowledge) running synchronized with the screen vertical refresh. As the Oric lacks a signal to achieve this, the game includes a small routine for calibration. Alternatively you can use the mod that takes the VSync signal from the RGB port and feeds it through the Tape-in pin in the tape connector. This idea first appeared at Fabrice Frances' old site: <http://oric.free.fr/hardware.html>. The game supports this mod. Just follow the on-screen instructions.

If you don't have the mod, then the game will ask for your aid to calibrate the timings. The routine is simple to use: as stated in the on-screen instructions, three sentences appear at the bottom of the screen, though not the all might be visible:

THIS TEXT SHOULD BE VISIBLE
THIS TEXT SHOULD BE VISIBLE TOO
THIS TEXT SHOULD NOT BE VISIBLE

A raster bar is displayed and the user is asked to move this bar up/down using the arrow keys until it is located at the bottom of the screen so that only the first two sentences are visible. There is no way to display this raster bar at a given position in the screen, so it may appear anywhere! Even it might not be visible after game loading. Just press up or down several times until it appears.

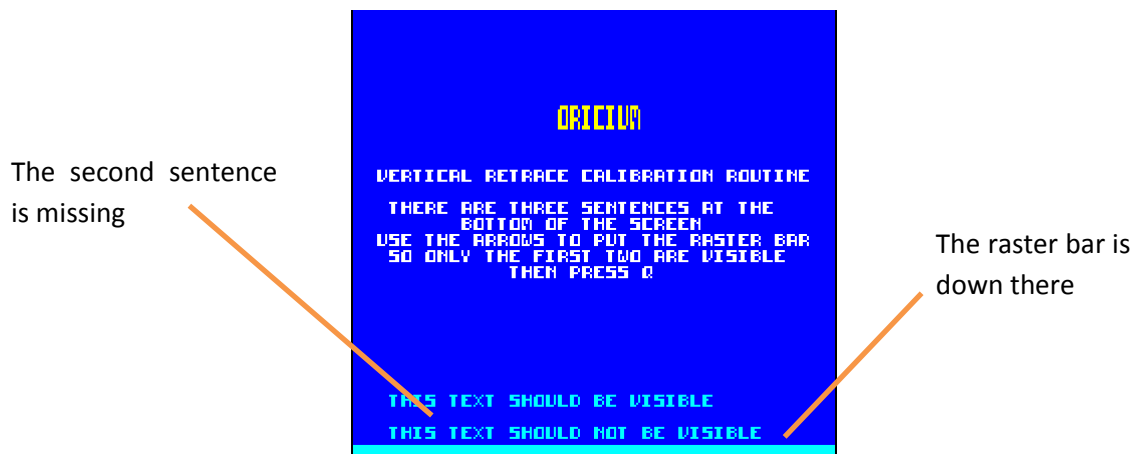


Fig. 1. Screenshot showing the calibration routine. The second sentence, which should be visible, is not. The raster bar is currently located at the bottom of the screen. Using the UP/DOWN arrow this bar should be moved to the correct position.

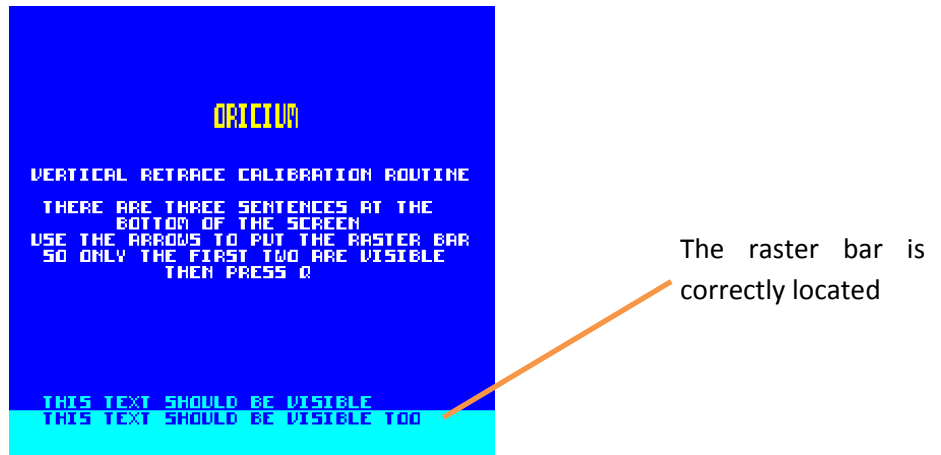


Fig. 2. Screenshot showing the raster bar correctly located. The first two sentences should be visible and the third should be hidden. The bar should not be moving. Pressing 'Q' will accept this calibration and run the game.

If you are running the game in an emulator, use one which supports full raster emulation in the video code, such as **Oricutron**. Better yet, **Oricutron** also supports the VSync mod emulation, so you can activate it and the game will detect the mod and run immediately after loading.

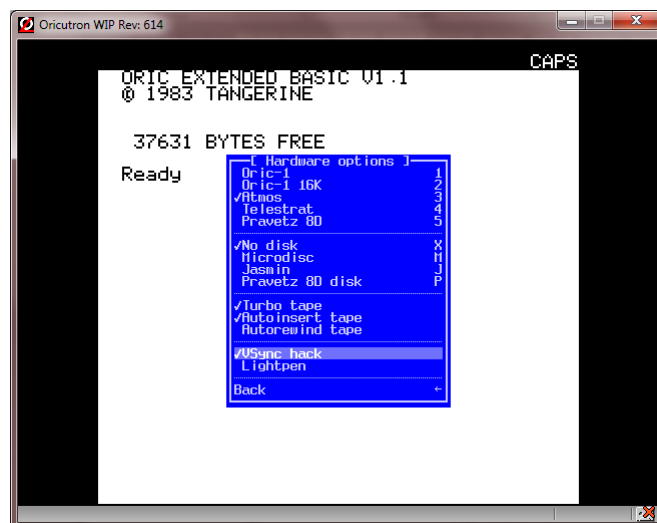


Fig. 3. Selecting the emulation of the VSync mod (or hack) in **Oricutron** through the 'Hardware Options' menu. You can do this before loading the game and it will run automatically after loading.

PLAYING THE GAME

Oricium is a side-scroll shoot-em-up game. But it is also more than that. The game contains **42** different levels, most of them populated with an enemy dreadnaught to get rid of, though from time to time, you'll have to face different challenges.

In order to get rid of the dreadnaught you should find out the way to deactivate its shields. And this is not easy. Throughout the ship's surface you'll find four switches with two positions. In the center of your upper scoreboard, you have four light indicators. Each switch may affect one or several indicators (turning them on/off or inverting their status, for instance). Your mission is finding out the correct combination for the switches which turns all the indicators green. Finding the combination may be easy in the first levels, but will quickly become a challenge!

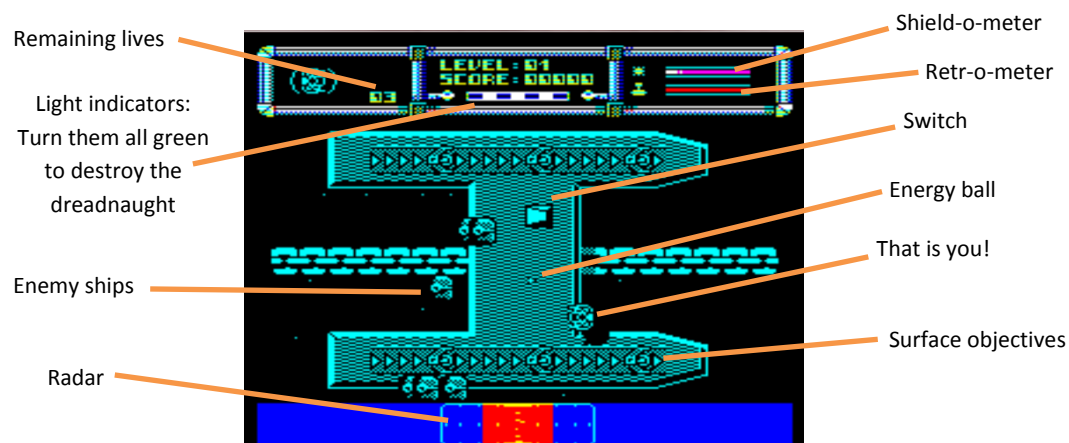


Fig. 4. Main in-game screen showing the most important game elements.

Of course the enemy will try to stop you at all costs, so they will send small units to destroy you. These units will take different shapes and will get more and more intelligent and deadly.

Whenever you collide with an enemy, your shields (indicated by the purple bar in the top-right section of your scorepanel: the *shield-o-meter*) will decrease. If it gets empty beware! Any further collision will destroy your ship. The *shield-o-meter*, however, can be recharged by collecting the glowing energy balls spread throughout the ship's surface.

To help you fighting these deadly small enemies, your skimmer is equipped with radar (at the bottom of the screen) and two laser cannons. Only the most skillful pilots will be able to survive the enemy attacks and find out the correct combination before the number of lives (at the right of the scorepanel) is exhausted.

Any exploding enemy may sometimes drop an item. You should do your best in collecting them, as they sometimes contain power-ups for your ship. And if they don't, they will be items that will increase your *retr-o-meter* (the red bar in the bottom-right section of your scorepanel). Whenever this bar gets full, you'll be granted an extra life!



Fig. 5 Power-up chart

Destroying objectives on the dreadnaught surface will grant you bonus at the end of each level.

Some dreadnaughts have anti-asteroid barriers on the surface. You should avoid colliding with them, because that will instantly make your ship explode.



Fig. 6. Barriers installed in the dreadnaught's surface. Your ship may avoid them or jump over them, but the latter is a risky maneuver, just for the most skillful pilots.



Fig. 7. Some levels include different challenges for the player, such as navigating this labyrinth.

CONTROLS

The in-game menu system provides access to the most important options. From here you can redefine the game keys, set the game sound and music volume level or select to play a new game. There is also an option to play a beginner's game. In this mode, the game itself will be the same as usual, but further text aids and indications will guide a new player to get the most out of **Oricum**.



Fig. 8 Main in-game menu

The default controls are:

⇐ OR ⇒	Accelerate or decelerate your ship (depending on the direction you are moving).
⇐ AND ⇒	Simultaneously pressed make your ship jump. The longer you keep the keys pressed, the longer the jump.
↓	Move your ship down
↑	Move your ship up
SPACE	Fire
LEFT SHIFT	Alternate way for jumping. The longer you keep the key pressed, the longer the jump.
ESC	Pause the game

At the end of each level the game will give a unique password. You can use this code to continue playing from that point in a further gaming session. As a general advice, note down this password whenever you reach a high level with a good number of remaining lives or whenever you want to quit your gaming session for the day.

To continue playing from that level in exactly the same conditions, simply select “CONTINUE PLAYING” and enter the password when prompted.

Final Words

Oricium started as an experiment to see if it was possible to produce a fast scrolling shoot-em-up game, including details such as masked sprites, animations, pseudo-parallax scrolling, many enemies, fast action, etc. Those specs seem at a first glance, something impossible for an Oric computer. At least they seemed so to me!

Of course the first inspiration came from the well-known Andrew Braybrook's game Uridium (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Uridium), but soon the gameplay departed from the original.

Oricium is quite a complex game, including (for the first time) synchronization with the screen refresh, and procedural generation for the dreadnaughts and other scenes. That is why it has the amazing number of 42 different levels. I also made a *huge* effort in many small details (graphics, music, sfx, animations...) to make the game look professional and also make the player smile from time to time if possible.

I also wanted this game to be tape-based, so everybody could enjoy it in their real machines. This is, as you may know, quite a big restriction! Fortunately, with the appearance of Cumulus and all the Microdisc controller clones, more and more people are able to use disks, so this might be the last time I develop a tape-based game.

Any thoughts, comments, questions, bugs or whatever, are more than welcome. Post them in the Oric Forums (forum.defence-force.org) (there is a forum for games) or email me at enguita@gmail.com. I will try to solve them as soon as possible.

This game would have never seen the light without the help of the Oric community.

Thanks to Dbug, Symoon, Godzil, Greymagick and Fabrice for the tests of the Alpha versions and for providing insights and ideas, as well as always giving me energy to complete this game.

Thanks too to the people in RetroWiki (www.retrowiki.es) for their help, support and nice comments. Specially to Silicebit for his counter routine (and also for this great Microdisc controller clone!), and dancresp and ron for their feedback and courage during the beta testing stage.

And also thanks to Twilichte, as he was always a source of inspiration. Rest in peace; we'll always remember you.

Don't hesitate to drop me a word (by email or at the forums) if you play the game. It is always good to receive feedback and encourage programmers to keep on developing new things for our old machines.

The game includes a lot of references (some trivial, some hidden) to the culture back in the 80s, so it would be nice to see how many of those you can spot!

Happy playing!!!

José María (Chema) Enguita - 2014