



MARCH

# MERCENARY

Novagen, £9.95 cass, £12.95 disk, Joystick with keys

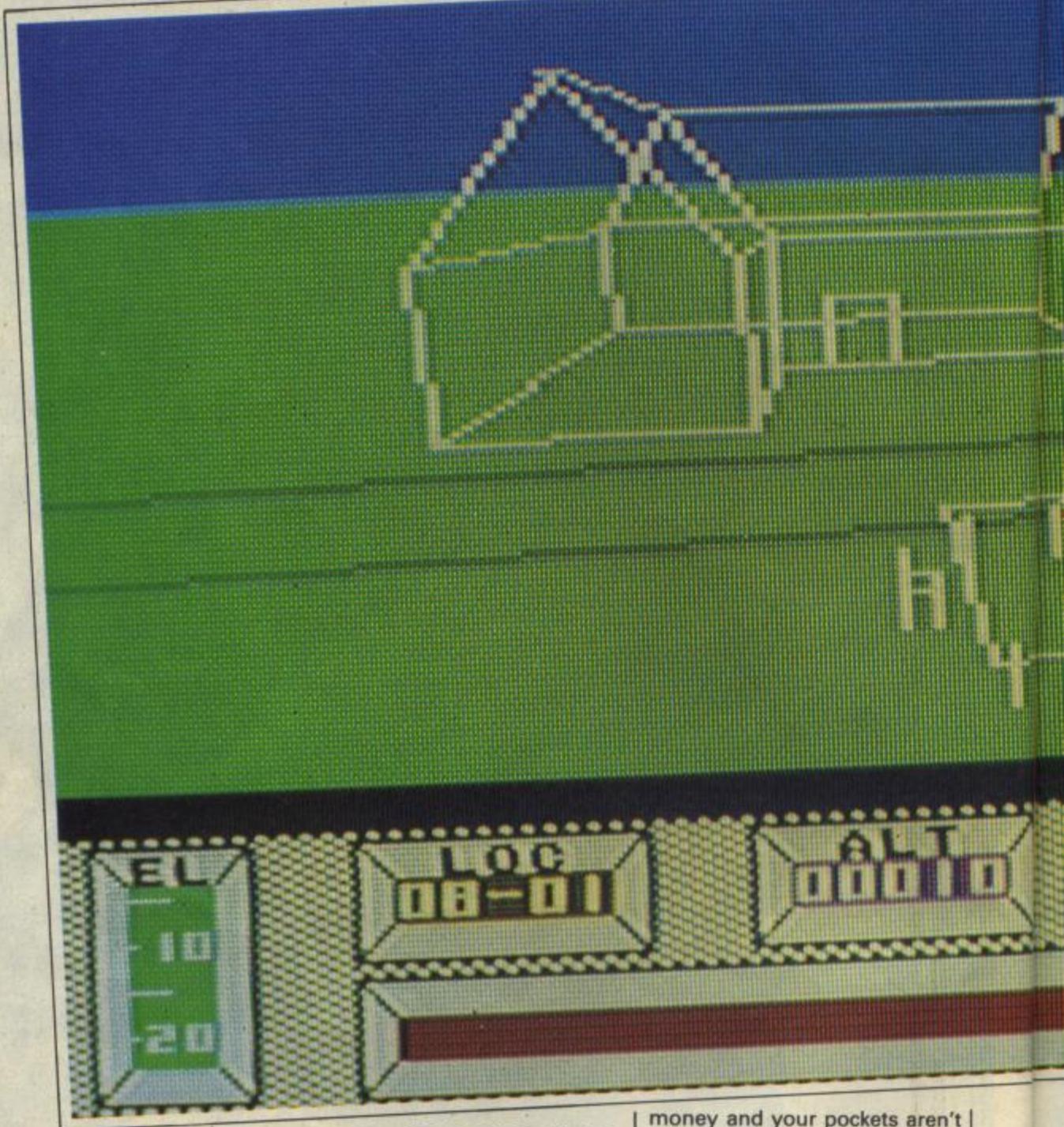


**A**fter many news stories, previews and much press hype, a copy of the legendary and until now mythical *Mercenary* has wended its way onto the ZZAP! office desk. The delay was due to a few complications in getting the program off an Atari and into a Commodore along with certain code modifications to increase and enhance the general speed of the program. Now all that's done it's just up to us to review it, well here we go:

The main play area of *Mercenary* is centred on the planet Targ, a world containing two races at war. The original inhabitants of Targ were the Palyars, a peaceful sentient species who led a contented existence until the arrival of the Mechanoids. Mechanoids are strange creatures in that they are not organically based and are an alien race of robots. Because of their warlike nature, the Mechanoids soon defeated the Palyars and are currently the dominant race on Targ. Most of the planet is a barren wasteland, the only major centre of population being a huge metropolis that at first appearance looks very sparse indeed. There are highways and roads linking the odd interesting structures but most of the actual city is housed underground forming a complicated subterranean complex of tunnels and caverns. This city is now in Mechanoid control.

The Palyars are not completely defeated though. The Palyar War Council and the majority of their population live in a colony craft that hovers high above the city. Though a few pockets of resistance still exist on the planet they are easily controlled by the Mechanoids.

You enter the scenario when, through a mechanical fault, your ship *Prestinium* crashes on Targ. The role to be played is that of a 21st century soldier of fortune, a mercenary through and through. Since the *Prestinium* is damaged beyond repair a new ship powerful enough to leave Targ must be found. The trouble is acquiring such a transport — ships like that cost



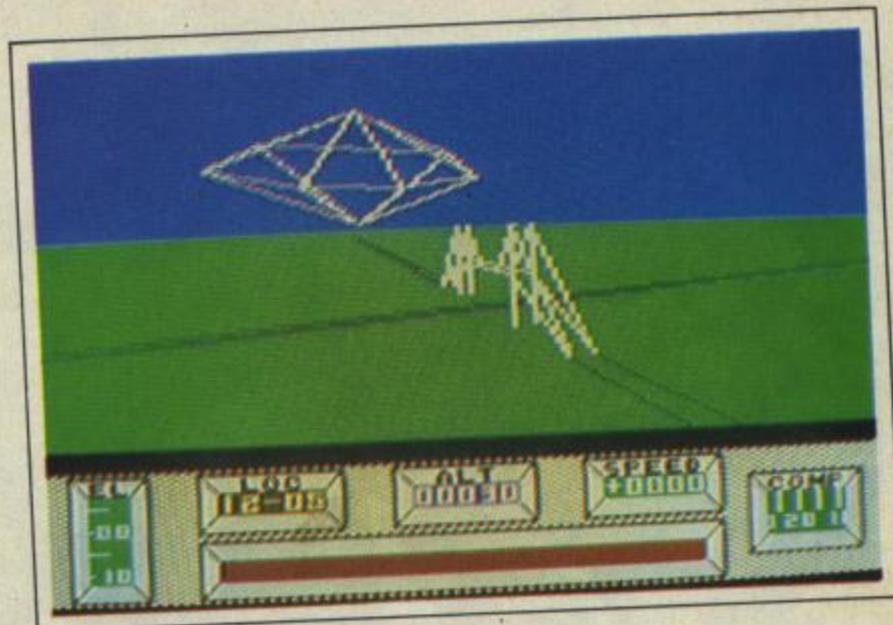
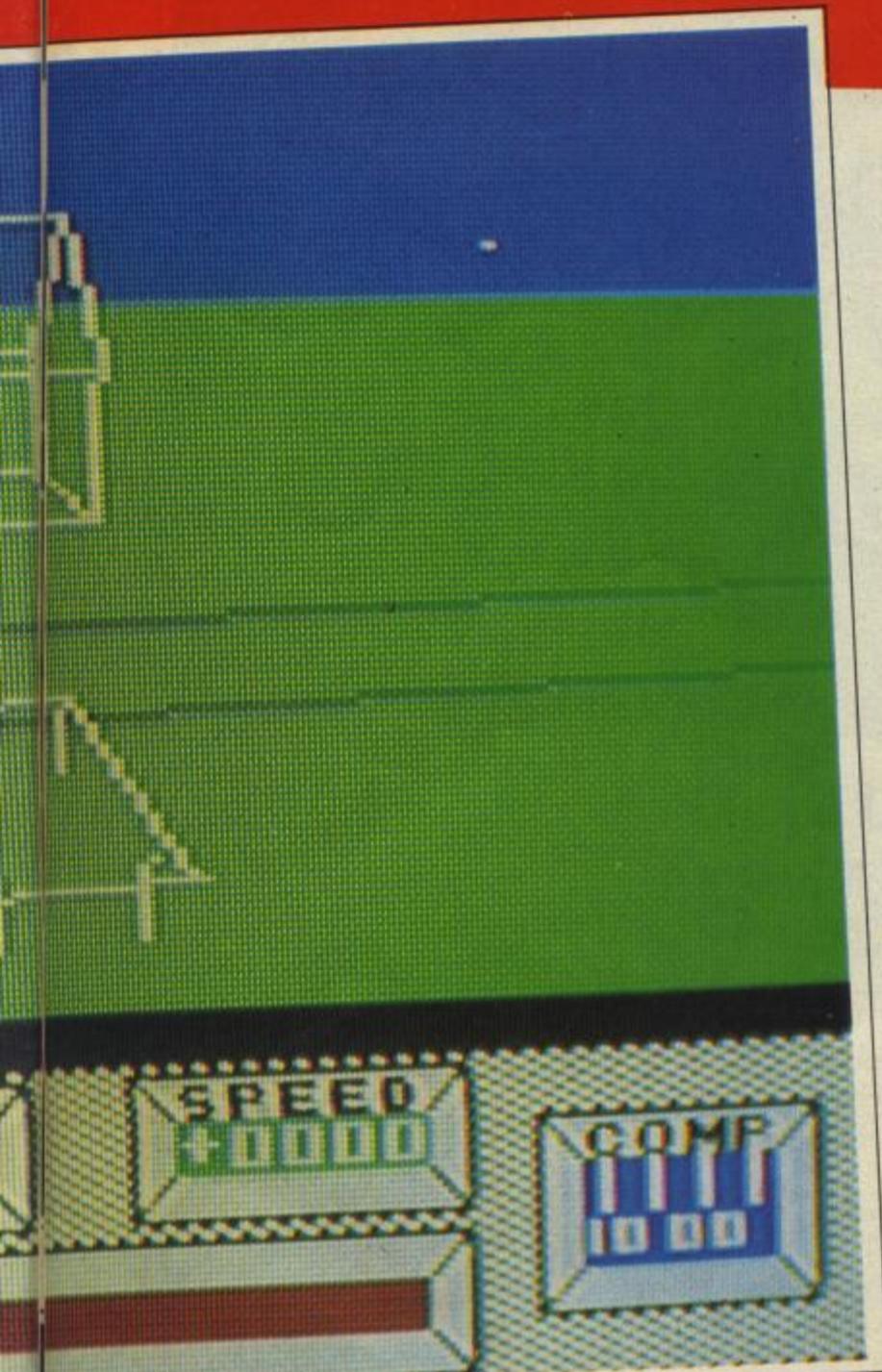
*Elite never really spawned that many look-alikes because its reputation was so hard to match. However, Novagen have managed to release a game based on a*

*similar approach, yet have introduced so many original elements that the resulting game surpasses its successful predecessor in terms of excitement and playability. The plot is well handled and the graphics are faster than any others of this type. It's easy to get into but hard to play well — classic game formula. The detail and rapid pace lend a tense atmosphere that sets it apart from the rest.*

*Mercenary is a game that will get you hooked quickly and keep you interested for a long time to come. I have absolutely no criticism to make of it.*

money and your pockets aren't exactly jingling. What you do have though is Benson, a ninth generation personal computer. He acts as your interface with the outside world, providing a 3D vector interpretation of the scene around you plus navigational information. Once on Targ, Benson relays the minimal amount of information in his data banks.

The main appeal of *Mercenary* is that there are various ways of achieving the end goal. The most obvious is to act as a freelance fighter for either Mechanoid or Palyar. Reaping the rewards of such a role it should be quite simple to get enough money for a ship to take you off planet. If this is the role you want to play then you'll need a craft of some sort to get around the planet. Such a ship is



located close to the crash site. Benson relays a message asking if you'd like to buy the ship. *Mercenary* plays just like the real world and instead of buying the ship you may choose to steal it, risking any retaliation from the vendor.

On screen there's the head up display fed to the monitor from Benson. When the program boots up, the game has you sitting in space with a starfield in front of you. Benson activates the ship's Novadrive but after a few seconds thrusting, a malfunction develops. The Prestinium still has considerable forward momentum and when a planet looms into view even maximum reverse thrust isn't enough to stop the ship from crash landing. Once crashed you are given full manual control. Everything is shown in vector graphics, with the ground and

sky filled in green and blue respectively. Along the screen's base is a control panel that shows your compass bearing plus elevation. A small window is also present for relaying any of Benson's comments to you. Using the joystick it's possible to move around in the fundamental eight directions (the keyboard is used to quite a large extent as well). The outside view updates as you move in true perspective.

To steal the ship, just walk over to it and press B for 'Board'. Once in control of a craft the joystick function changes considerably. Left and right rotate the craft around its centre while up and down tip or dip the ship's stern. The keys one to zero along the top of the keyboard control the machine's engines with zero delivering the greatest thrust. Once inside an aircraft just thrust of in the direction you

wish to travel then pull up. Landing requires a small angle of approach and a relatively slow velocity. Once on the ground and not moving, L for 'Leave' puts you back onto the ground to walk around once more. Pressing shift in conjunction with one of the thrust keys, a negative power boost is supplied.

On the bottom control panel is also a grid counter showing your position on the planet. The first message received instructs you to make your way to location 9,6 and then get to the conference room. At 9,6 there's a hanger (these allow you to enter the subterranean city through an elevator contained in them). The whole ship can be brought through the elevator, all you have to do is position yourself in the middle of the hanger and press E to activate the lift ('Elevator')?

Once inside the city it's necessary to walk about rather than use the ship. From the main hangar a number of corridors branch off into the metropolis. Each corridor has a door at either end and to walk through one just walk headfirst into it. Most doors are oblongs but a few are differently shaped. Trying to bump your way through one of those doors results in the message LOCKED flipping across your scanner. A key takes the form of a large three dimensional object in the same basic shape as the door it opens. When collecting a key P is used to pick up and D for dropping. This applies to all the objects that may be found around the place. Mind you, only ten objects can be carried at once.

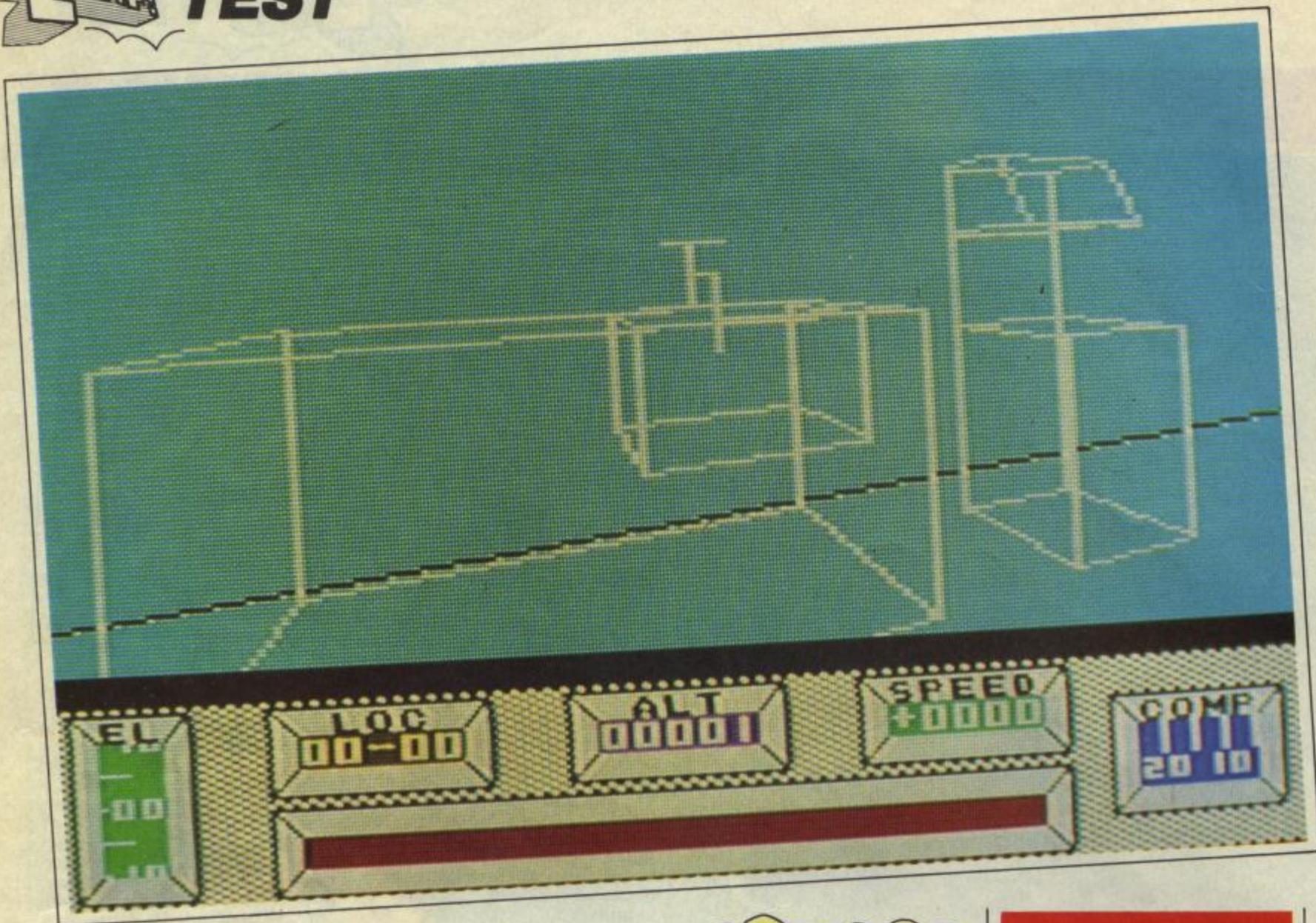
Once you get to the conference room a message from the



*Mercenary has certainly taken its time in appearing on the 64, but it's definitely been worth the wait.*

*Seldom has a game kept everyone at ZZAP! glued to a monitor for so long, but Mercenary deserves every second devoted to it. The game has incredible depth, and even if it is solved it is always possible to return to Targ and escape with even more credits and better equipment (remember the saved data disk tape).*

*The graphics are exceptional, the vectors make Elite seem like a BASIC program and Starion like, well Starion! The depth of the game is incredible — Mercenary has massive potential which is only realised through playing it. It's relatively easy to solve, but there is still an immense game waiting beyond that point, it'll certainly take a long, long time before anyone escapes Targ with the maximum credits and equipment. If there is one game which is worth buying then it is this — Mercenary is about the best computer game ever to be written.*



Palyars is relayed via Benson. They say that the delivery of certain Mechanoid items to the Palyar colony craft will result in a hefty cash reward from them. Also they say that a 'very special gratitude' will be awarded if all traces of Mechanoid occupation is removed from the planet.

Getting up to the colony craft isn't that easy as most of the craft found on the surface aren't powerful enough to reach the Palyar's fortress in the sky. The ship that can reach it is carefully hidden. An alternative route to the city is by finding some way of boosting your own ship's power with the correct piece of equipment. Getting to the colony craft is only half the problem since a key is also needed to enter. Various items when placed in certain rooms result in financial gain. The most rewarding act is to deliver the leader of the Mechanoids to the Palyar debriefing room. If enough credits are accumulated then a Novadrive ship can be hired from Hertz spaceship hire but it's still a case of being in the right place at the right time. This isn't the only way of completing *Mercenary*, there are three in total, but the other two are a bit of a mystery.

Throughout the game there are a number of amusing as-



*Paul Woakes' previous offering, in fact his first: Encounter, was a simple, but exceptional, shoot em up which unfortunately failed to make any impact due to a distinct lack of coverage. Thankfully, Mercenary has been received with far greater interest and it certainly deserves the acclaim, since it is one of the most exciting releases ever to appear on the 64.*

pects including a Commodore sign and an Atari one. A congratulatory message appears on shooting the Atari sign but Benson calls you a traitor for knocking out the Commodore

*Mercenary is thoroughly enjoyable to both play and map (useful) and is incredibly easy to get into — addiction is almost guaranteed. It has enough depth to maintain the initial interest, with three ways of finishing the game and the constant challenge of improving your final score. There is also plenty to explore and the many amusing and generally neat little touches throughout the game, make it all that more fun to play. The high quality of the graphics is evident from the comments made by my colleagues, so I shan't say anything more on the matter other than they are brilliant (the graphics, not Sean and Julian) as is the game itself.*

sign. Also in the city is a huge billboard with Encounter written on it: 'You have just destroyed . . . the authors advert . . . from now on . . . things will be . . . even tougher', you are informed on its destruction. *Mercenary* does seem to include everything, even a kitchen sink, which can be found in the colony craft.

### Presentation 95%

No options as such but features such as Benson and the excellent, atmospheric title sequence that gets you straight into the game — literally, make up amply for this apparent deficiency.

### Graphics 98%

Fast, effective 3D vector graphics.

### Sound 67%

Some very good sound effects, but little else.

### Hookability 97%

Incredibly easy to get into since 'you choose the action'.

### Lartability 99%

Lots to explore, three ways of completing the game and the ever present urge to improve that final score.

### Value For Money 97%

Just under ten pounds for an alternative way of life.

### Overall 96%

A classic.