

# Baba's Palace

Developer: Rafael Castillo      Requirements: 64KB  
 Release: November 2017      Web: [www.babas-palace.com](http://www.babas-palace.com)



The clear winner of #CPC RetroDev2017 gets the review treatment from James Ford...

The winning title of #CPC RetroDev2017 came from one Rafael Castillo, apparently a newcomer to CPC game development, although you would never in a million years have guessed it judging from the quality of the game on offer here. It is an adaptation of the game Pitman, which was originally released in 1985 as a BASIC listing in a Japanese magazine for the Sharp MZ-700 and made its way west via the Gameboy under the title 'Catrap' in 1990 (see boxout opposite).

## The Premise

A platform puzzler, the concept also shares some DNA with the likes of Boulderdash and Dig Dug. The player must take control of 'Shaolin Kid' and (on some levels) his buddy 'Little Indian' and guide them through a series of levels on a journey to defeat the witch, Baba Yaga.

Each level takes place on a single screen and the aim on each is to eliminate all of the enemies by simply walking into them from the side. There are ladders to be climbed, dirt to be dug through and boulders to be moved on your way to achieving that goal. There is no

time limit and no concept of lives so you can take as long as you like on each level and restart as many times as you need to. So far so straight forward? Not quite...

You see, there is this little thing called gravity, and it turns out that it is both your enemy and friend in equal measures. It comes into play whether you are digging through the soil, pushing a boulder or getting rid of an enemy and can completely change the lay of the level in seconds, with a potentially disastrous outcome. Any objects which were sat on top of another will come tumbling down when the object beneath them is removed, so you really need to think carefully and consider the consequences before performing any action. If you don't, you will soon find our hero becoming trapped or unable to reach the remaining enemies, rendering the level unsolvable.

## The Hook

The concept is smart, but in this type of game it is the level design which either makes it or breaks it. Thankfully, it's the former in this case as it is of a consistently high standard throughout. There is often only a single way of completing each level and things must be done in a certain order to succeed. Taking a measured approach and not being too headstrong will certainly help, but there will inevitably be some trial and error coming into play. More often than not, the solution to a level will only seem obvious once you've already attempted half a dozen other avenues and you'll be kicking yourself when you





LEVEL 05

finally discover it. It's not like the game is unfair in any way, if you're incredibly good at visualisation you could no doubt solve the level just by looking at it, but unfortunately for me I'm not that clever and had to resort to more brute force methods on certain levels.

### The Depth

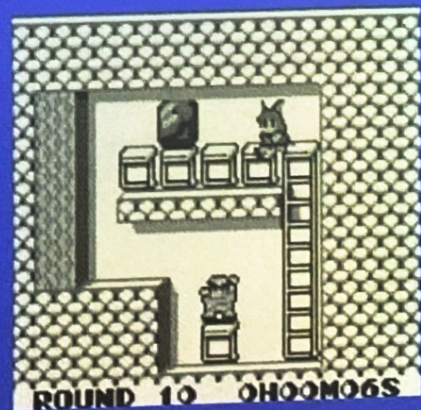
And while we're on the subject of levels, the game has a whopping one-hundred of them to sink your teeth into (yes, one-hundred), with five of them coming directly from the original Pitman and the remainder being

original creations. That is a helluva lot of game for your 64KiloBytes. Thankfully (given the quantity of levels), each one comes with a code enabling you to restart from that level at a later time, so you don't have sit in front of your CPC for days on end (although you may want to!). The first half-dozen or so levels ease you in gently, before the game twists the knife harshly and ramps the difficulty up to a level that will make your head begin to throb. This isn't a game that you're going to be able quickly whizz through, the quantity of levels

Now you're playing with (portable) power!



Ca-trap? Cat-rap? Cat-trap? We'll probably never know, but what we do know is that this was a cracking Gameboy title back in 1990. Unlike Baba's Palace, it features a time rewind mechanism that allows you to undo your fatal mistake without restarting the level from scratch.



and well balanced difficulty will ensure that you'll be revisiting this game for some time to come.

### The Look

In terms of graphics, the game plays to the CPC's strengths; chunky, bold, and brash sprites and the use of overscan means that the whole screen is filled. It really is a stunning looking game and the only thing that could really be improved would be to add a bit more variety between the levels, although this is understandable considering the whole game fits in 64KB of RAM.

### The Verdict

Overall, we can't recommend this game highly enough. The concept is incredibly clever, but it's in the execution that the game really shines. Great presentation, great gameplay, great level design. Suffice to say, we think it's pretty great. Not only is it the most impressive game that #CPCRetroDev has churned out thus far, but we reckon one of the very best on the CPC. (full stop)

James



<b>Graphics.....</b>	<b>9/10</b>
Well drawn sprites with smart use of colour, although more variety would have been the icing on the cake.	
<b>Sound.....</b>	<b>8.5/10</b>
Well crafted tunes that really suit the game.	
<b>Playability.....</b>	<b>9.5/10</b>
A simple concept but one that soon provides delight and frustration in just the right quantities!	
<b>Longevity.....</b>	<b>9/10</b>
It will take you some serious time to get through all 100 levels, but it's a challenge worth taking.	
<b>Overall...</b>	<b><u>9.5/10</u></b>

# An interview with... Rafael Castillo

(Author of Baba's Palace, in case you were wondering...)



**CPCF: Firstly, congratulations on your 1st place at CPCRetroDev2017. You must be delighted with the result?**

RC: Wow! I am impressed to see how far Baba's Palace has come! It was a very exciting ceremony thanks to the live scoring system.

For me an absolutely unexpected position, since in the days prior to the resolution of the contest, small videos of other participating games were published, and there I verified that the general level of all the games was very high. In particular, Profanation 2 boasted an impressive technical and artistic section, as well as Cris Odd Prelude, Bitume, Laser Boy and Phantis Legacy.

Seeing how Baba's Palace got the first place has been an unforgettable experience for me.

**CPCF: Your name is not a familiar one to those who follow the Amstrad CPC game scene. Tell us a little about yourself and how the development of Baba's Palace came about?**

RC: I had my first personal computer when I was 11, an Amstrad CPC 464, and since then I have always been fascinated by the world of computer science and design. I left that Amstrad parked when I got my first PC, in 1993. Last October 2016 I attended a retro event in my city, and I was very

impressed to see the incredible homebrew developments that were being published. There I got a great nostalgia for my younger years, and I decided that I would also like to develop a new game for Amstrad.

Certainly, I had no idea where to start, so looking for information I discovered CPCTelera, and the fantastic videos of Fran Gallego teaching all the ins and outs of programming for Amstrad. I rescued an old idea that I had for a video game and so, little by little and practicing, and thanks to the great help of John McKlain with his amazing music and fx, Baba's Palace was taking shape.

**CPCF: The game is based on Pitman/Catrap, what it is about that particular game that inspired you?**

RC: Pitman is a game that impressed me a lot in my youth. He managed to keep me attached to my original Game Boy for countless hours, and his game concept seems extraordinary to me. This game concept seemed perfect for a video game at Amstrad, as I thought it would not be particularly demanding in terms of resources and performance and could be an affordable project for someone with little experience in programming for Amstrad like me.

Later, during the development I discovered a series of characteristics that made this game a much more complex development than I imagined at first, but as I had everything underway, I had no choice but to be brave and push forward.

**CPCF: The setting of the game, sort of Kung Fu meets Slavic folklore is unusual. Are these interests of yours outside of gaming?**



RC: Hehehe, Actually not :) I am a very methodical person when it comes to planning projects, and in the case of videogames, history is a very important part for me, and I like to work it thoroughly. I'm a fan of anachronistic and unconventional stories, and a game with Shaolin Kid, Little Indian and Baba Yaga seemed like an ideal combination.

**CPCF: Some of the levels are incredibly challenging, pushing the player hard to figure out the solution. How did you approach the level design for the game, were they designed by hand or did you have an algorithm for generating the puzzles?**

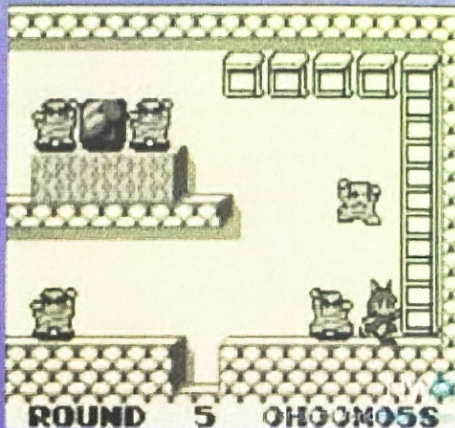
RC: Level design has been a complex and painful task. A lot more than I originally imagined! It was really necessary to invest a lot of time to be able to develop levels that would represent a great challenge to the players. In this phase of development I had to research a lot to get a method that was agile and efficient in this task. PuzzleScript was the solution. I recreated the logic of the game in PuzzleScript and did all the level design there. This allowed me to be very agile in the process of creation, testing and debugging, as opposed to having to compile and test in an Amstrad emulator. This system

allowed me to iterate in the development of levels to achieve that point of difficulty I was looking for.

Also, I created a tool that translated the levels developed in PuzzleScript to my level system in Amstrad. A great help that saved me a lot of work in the long run.

**CPCF: You developed the game using CPCTelera, what advantages did that give you in it's development?**

RC: CPCTelera is a robust tool that offers a set of utilities and libraries specially designed to develop videogames for Amstrad. The development language is C, with all the advantages and versatility that this programming language can offer. Although I had not programmed in C for many years, it was easy to catch up and



start to try out examples and develop ideas. The documentation is very well explained, and the videos published by Fran Gallego were very helpful for me. Without a doubt, thanks to CPCtelera, Baba's Palace is now a reality.

**CPCF: What was the biggest challenge that you faced whilst developing the game?**

RC: Throughout the creation of this project I have faced several challenges in different areas, such as the creation of levels or the development of the logic of the game. But without a doubt, the biggest challenge has been the fight against the low memory offered by this 8-bit system: 64KB. My great hope since the beginning of the project was to be able to include 100 levels, and that involved a great job to encode each level with minimal memory expenditure. The optimization of the code has been another fundamental aspect, and to achieve this I had to learn techniques that allowed me to obtain a more optimized code in terms of size. In the end only a handful of bytes have been left over, which gives an idea of how tight everything is.

**CPCF: A game of this quality, from a first-time CPC developer will hopefully inspire new developers onto our platform. What advice would you give to a newcomer, looking to develop their first game on the Amstrad CPC?**

RC: The best advice I can offer is to accept the challenge as a way to learn and enjoy along the way. During this development I have enjoyed as I could never imagine: looking for a system to encode levels using the minimum

possible bytes, developing character animations, optimizing algorithms to gain speed or memory space... Obviously, there are important details to have in consideration, such as knowing the platform and existing games so as not to set a goal that could be disproportionately ambitious. But without a doubt, enjoying the process and learning has been tremendously satisfying for me.

**CPCF: Have you played many of the recent game releases for the CPC, and if so, what is your favourite game of the past few years?**

RC: I think I fit the definition of casual player. Definitely, I do not have a lot of time to play... and when I have time I usually prefer retro video games of any 8 or 16 bit system. Anyway, I also play "more or less" modern games, but I'm not very persistent... The game that has entertained me most for the past few years has been Skyrim.

**CPCF: Finally, what can we expect from you in the future? Is this a dream of yours that has now been fulfilled, or should we keep an eye out for further CPC productions?**

RC: It could not be otherwise, I have been captivated by this great experience. To all that I have learned and enjoyed must be added the fact of having met wonderful people like McKlain, my great partner in this adventure, the 4MHz team (finalists with Profanation 2), Toni Ramirez (winner of the two previous editions of CPCretroDev),

Reidrac, Atila Merino, José María Velo, Juanje, Javi Ortiz... I can only feel lucky!

I can only say that Baba's Palace will not be my last game for Amstrad CPC.

And it certainly wasn't, with Rafael lending his skills to the following year's competition winner, Operation Alexandra. We will review it at some point, I just need to get good at it first...

