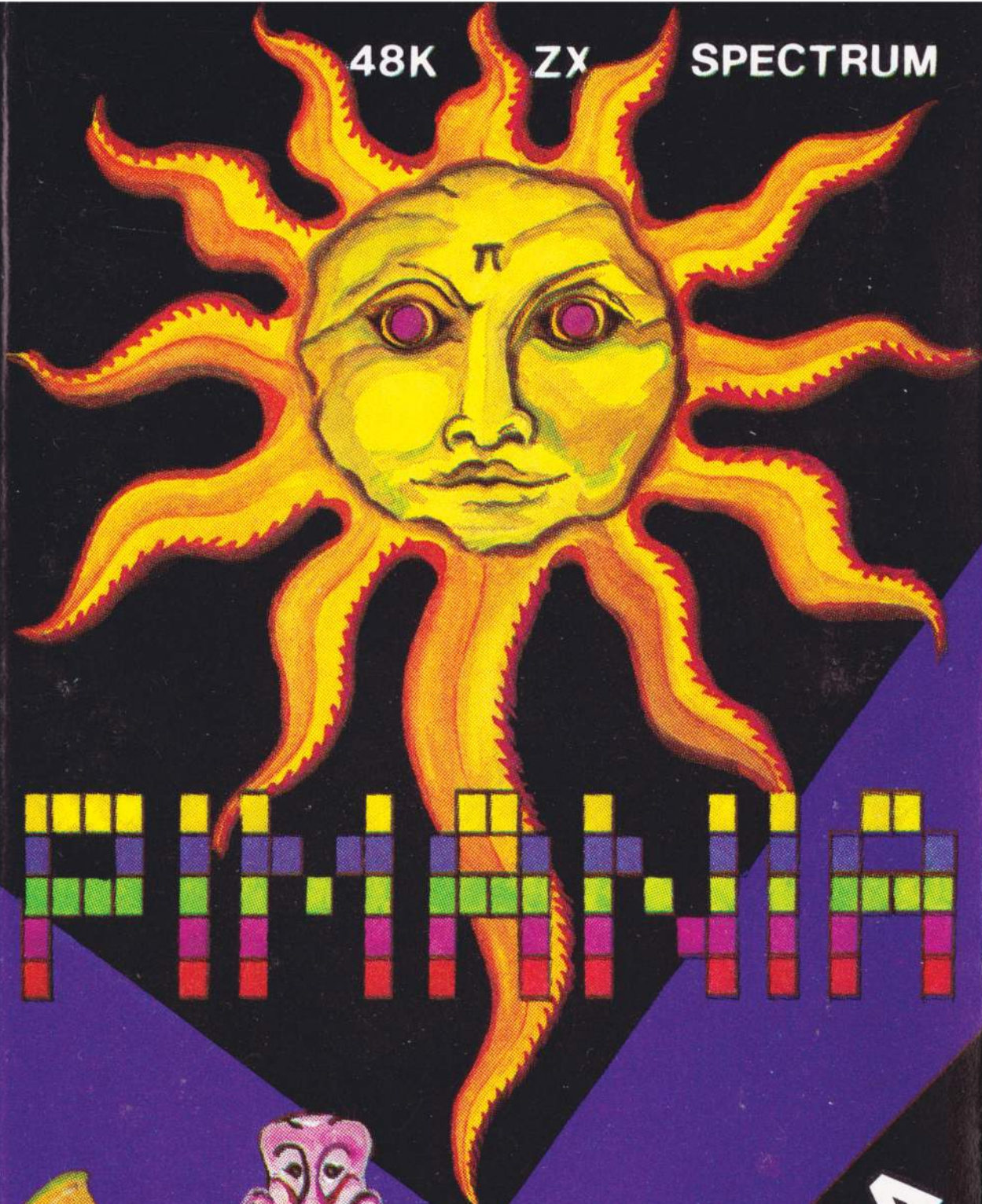


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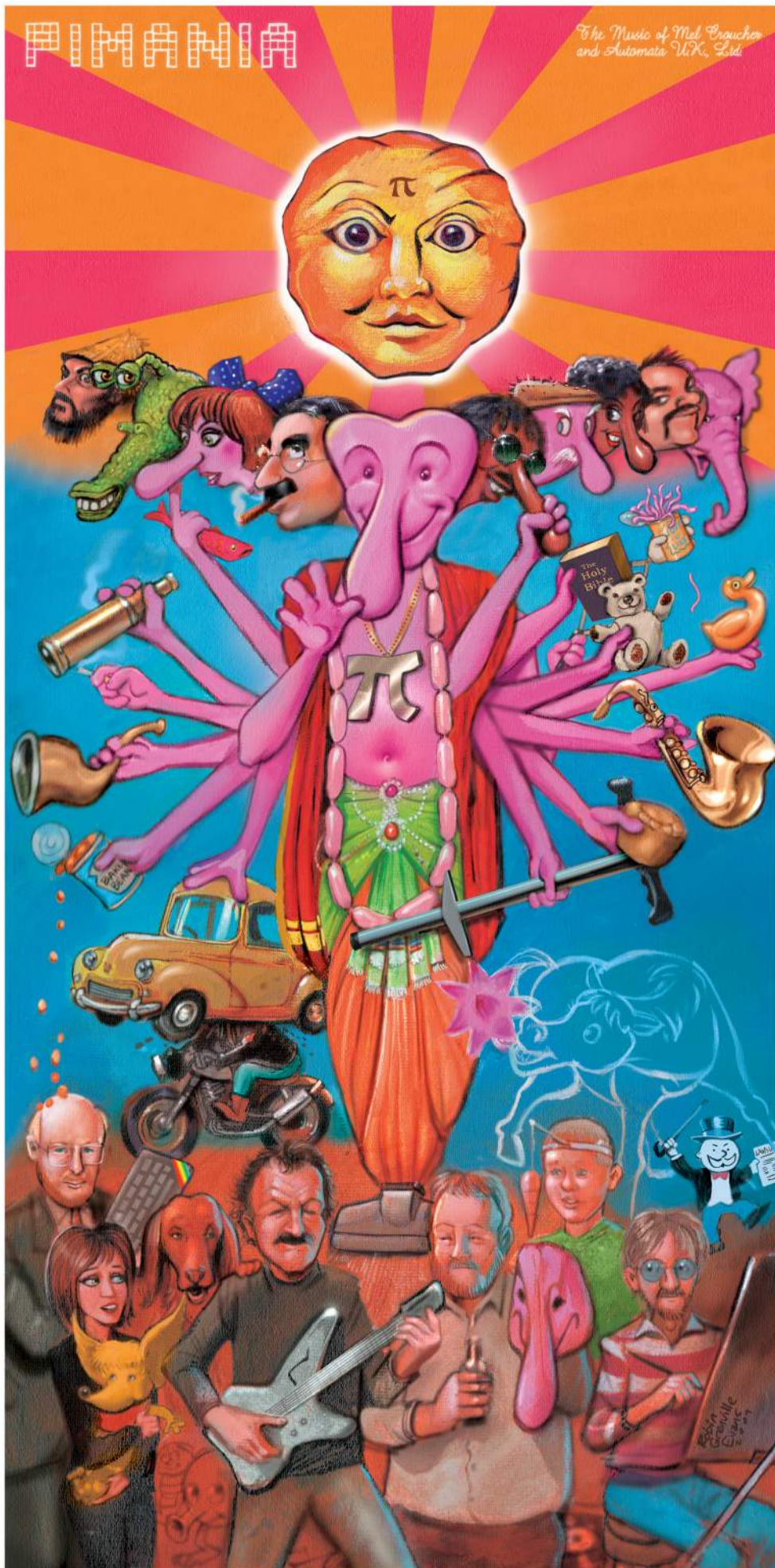
ZX

SPECTRUM



PIMANIA
the Adventure Quest
that's for real, with
£6,000 prize!
& free hit
single!

**PIMANIA: THE MUSIC OF MEL CROUCHER
AND AUTOMATA U.K., LTD.** Feeding Tube Records Press Kit



The Music of Mel Croucher
and Automata U.K. Ltd.

PIMANIA

The songs you will hear on this record were recorded between the years 1982 and 1985 by Mel Croucher to serve as backing tracks for games released by his software company, Automata U.K. Ltd., in the days when computer programs were still distributed on audio cassette. Combining primitive synthesizer tones and meandering psychedelic blues guitar with cryptic, off-color lyrics about the odd-fingered Piman and his pals, this is unlike any other "computer music" you are likely to imagine. The record will become available in late January from Feeding Tube Records, a small label based in Easthampton, Massachusetts. It is blessed with a gatefold jacket illustrated by Robin Evans, the original artist of the cartoons and advertising graphics of Automata. The rest of the package, which includes a large silkscreened poster and a printed inner sleeve with a cut-out Piman mask, contains still more photographs and graphics from the years of Automata.

FEEDING TUBE

www.feedingtuberecords.com

for more information write to
feedingtube@me.com

this kit may be downloaded as a pdf at
seminalissues.suchfun.net/ftr040.pdf



ABOVE: Mel Croucher relaxes in Giorgio Moroder mode, date unknown. LEFT: Mel and Piman pose with Sue Cooper & Lizzy Newman, the winners of the Golden Sundial, the prize at the end of the adventure Pimania, at the hill of High and Over near Beachy Head, Sussex, England, on the 22nd of July (22 over 7), 1985. BELOW: The End of Automata: Mel and the last beer before walking out the door. BEHIND AND INSET: One of Automata's anarchic Microfair appearances, with Christian Penfold as Piman and Croucher as Groucho; subsequent threat of arrest and conversion of the police; Birmingham, 1983.

WHO'S WHO ON THE OUTSIDE COVER:

At the top - Automata games characters (left to right) - Crusoe, Swettibitz, Lady Pi, Uncle Groucho, The Piman, Rastafarpi, Uncle Albert, Piana Ross, Eric, Piromaniac.

At the bottom - Automata contributors (left to right) - Sir Clive Sinclair (home computer pioneer; with: Wozwell the Womas), Lady Clair Sinclive (Carol-Ann Wright M.A., psychotherapist, author), Rory the Red Setter (loyalty, comfort and joy), Mel Croucher (concepts and music), Christian Penfold (programmer, sales director and The Piman "live"), Andy Stagg (machine-code stunt programmer extraordinaire), Robin Grenville-Evans (cartoonist and graphic artist.)

**FEEDING
TUBE** FTR
040



In the summer of 1966 I spent a long time persuading one of Her Majesty's Royal Navy computers to sing "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star". Wow! I had discovered the computer as a tool for entertainment, but it was over ten years before I founded Automata, which some folk say was the first computer games company in England. Between 19th November 1977 and All Fool's Day 1985, Automata produced around fifty computer games, and I insisted on three rules for all of them. One, they had to be non-violent. Two, they made players laugh or parodied ordinary games. Three, they included audio tracks as a bonus to the gameplay.

When Automata started, our games used one kilobyte of memory each, because home computers didn't have any more juice. The data was loaded from audio cassette recorders, and we duplicated our stuff by hand on a four-way deck. The thing about cassettes is they have two sides, and the thing about computer data is it only needs to be recorded on one side of the tape. So what to do with the blank side? I reckoned the obvious thing to do was record little scene-setters and comedy sketches to enhance the gameplay, but after the first couple of years I gave each Automata game its own theme song, and stuffed them with references and clues to the games.

We couldn't afford studios or musicians, but that wasn't the reason I ended up writing and performing everything myself. The reason was I enjoyed it. I was a weak musician and a crap singer, but I multi-tracked everything and edited out the bum notes before force-feeding my stuff to anyone who'd listen.

So here we are, thirty years on, and I wanted to call this retro album *Pibolar Disorder* in memory of the way Automata operated. But it says *Pimania* on the cover, which was our breakthrough game, and introduced the Piman to his fans. The Piman became a minor cult figure and the little bastard ended up with his own cartoon strip, a fan magazine and some amazing tv and live performances. Let's stick with *Pimania* then. Pimaniacs forever!

Mel X X

Mel Croucher, November 2009.



The music of Automata is the product of coincidences both technological and human, from a time at which personal computers were first being made available to everybody and it was up to everybody to imagine what computers could be. Some made a business of it. There were few barriers to entering the new profession of creating computer games: programs for commercial release could easily be written from start to finish by a single person—sometimes commissioned or solicited from teenage authors putting off schoolwork—and were distributed on the common format of the compact audio cassette tape. For Mel Croucher and Christian Penfold, who were already selling "interactive audio guides and cruddy little radio programs" on cassette when the Sinclair ZX81 was introduced in England, the start-up costs were already lowered. Automata Cartography were turning out their first software entertainment titles not long after trying one of the machines for the first time, duplicating them by hand, four at a time, with a bonus skit or song always included, on the same cassette decks they had started out using for audio.

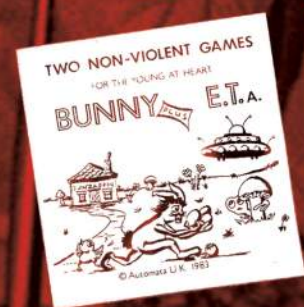
After a name change and the introduction of the upgraded ZX Spectrum computer, with its whopping 16 KB of memory, Automata U.K. Ltd. devised the game *Pimania*: "The Adventure Game That's For Real," and a name still infamous today. Deliberately employing only the thinnest of settings, *Pimania* did not compromise itself by lulling the player with some simulated fantasy world. It addressed her directly, through the screen, and amused her or annoyed her for an hour or two as the Piman, a sardonic, ungodly creation that ate cans of worms and would take his head off and dance on it by way of greeting, seized control over her television monitor. The game was most remarkable in that its end was not to be reached within the game at all: Automata offered a "£6,000 prize," in the form of a golden sundial encrusted with diamonds, to anyone who could show up at the right date, time, and location to claim it. Those who found their way to the end of the game's small map were met by a cryptic message:

"MEET ME AT NOON ON THE CORRECT DATE AND PLACE REVEALED. I'LL BE WAITING THERE FOR YOU EVERY YEAR, BEARING THE GOLDEN SUNDIAL OF PI."

Only the most attentive among them would have already figured out that the map they'd just explored was a thinly veiled riddle as to the sundial's location. Onwards and upwards . . . the two women who solved the game, after more than two years of frenetic questing by the computer-owning public of England and beyond, admitted they had spent more time researching the solution in libraries than they had seated at the computer. *Pimania* was a game not content to sit inert in two dimensions on a flashing and bleeping computer screen: this, true down to the "free appalling hypnotic disco theme music" included on its b-side as a valuable bonus. Everything Automata did was animated by a similar ambition to leapfrog over the technical and conceptual limitations of the time in order to craft some kind of hyper-dimensional object that was scattered in pieces across computer programs, musical interludes, contests, live appearances, and weekly cartoon advertisements featuring the Piman and ilk.

This ambition was most completely realized with *Deus Ex Machina*, a dystopic science fiction "computer movie" which had players spinning globs of DNA and evading the "defect police" to the voices of Ian Dury and Jon Pertwee on a separate, synchronized cassette soundtrack by Mel. That will have to wait for another record, because none of that soundtrack, which is LP-length on its own, is included in this compilation. Instead we've provided a miscellany of Mel's themes for earlier games by Automata. Though *Deus Ex Machina* was the only one they produced with a synchronized soundtrack, each game in its way was an experiment in making a "computer movie": a new, hybrid kind of thing, part video game, part music, stuck together in a way haphazard but utterly new, resulting in a whole, of mysterious shape, which only the initiated, or otherwise bent, might even be able to see. *Caroline Bren*

AUTOMATA U.K. LTD. PRESENTS



WOT? NO

SUNDIAL OF PI
Gemma Pimm-Lemon...
The Pimans had...
enough to raise the £4000...

1K ZX81 ADULT GAMES

ACNE VASECTOMY SMUT HITLER
DOLE ROYAL FLUSH REAGAN PIN 'O'S

DEATH

ADULTATION CONFESSION BIRTH BUCKLE UP
ON THE JOB BOB OR DEATH BOB

THE BIBLE

GENESIS ADAM-EVE NOAH PLAGUES EXODUS
SODOM GOLIATH JONAH BATHSHEBA



enough to raise the £4000...

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations, including one with a large head and another with a small head.

IMAGINE HAVING TO WORK LIKE THIS!



PROBATION REPORT
CONSUMABLES TO DATE
A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL PIMANIACS

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations, including one with a large head and another with a small head.

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations, including one with a large head and another with a small head.

PIMANIA
the answer
A cartoon illustration of a large, multi-eyed face with a city skyline below it, and a small character in the foreground.

the answer
a claim, the last being at...
The idea that pointed them...
to the answer was the fact...

PI US EX MACHINA
THE PI-MAN IS HE DEAD?
About a year ago, we thought...

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations, including one with a large head and another with a small head.

LADY CLAIR SPEAKING!
PIMAN EXPANDS
A cartoon illustration of a character in a red suit and another in a white suit.

Comic strip panels showing characters in various situations, including one with a large head and another with a small head.

A VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS & A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL PIMANIACS
AUTOMATA... "we put some THING in computing"