TURRICAN

Created in 1990, Manfred Trenz's Turrican remains a benchmark shooter that perfectly combines both platform and shoot-'em-up elements to create a thoroughly absorbing title. Eager to learn more about the landmark C64 shooter, Retro Gamer decided to track down and talk to Trenz himself

Looking at these magnificent screenshots, it's hard to imagine that *Turrican* was running on a humble Commodore 64

IN THE KNOW

» **PUBLISHER:** RAINBOW ARTS

» **DEVELOPER:** MANFRED TRENZ

» **RELEASED:** 1990

» **GENRE:** RUN 'N' GUN

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £3+

CBM 64/128 CASSETTE

TURRICAN

Ask any Commodore 64 owner to name their top five favourite games and you can guarantee that Turrican will be on the shortlist.

Released for the Commodore 64 in 1990 it was an immediate hit with critics and public alike thanks to its outrageously good visuals, outstanding sound and challenging gameplay – not bad for someone who'd only been in the industry for four years.

"I remember entering a graphic competition in 1986 for a German magazine called 64'er," explains Trenz, recalling his lucky break. I sent in some of my artwork and ended up coming third, which in my mind, was pretty good." Trenz had been initially introduced to the Vic20 in 1984 and had been so impressed by it that he eventually picked up a Commodore 64. Before long he started dabbling around in Basic and eventually created a simple single screen shooter where you took control of a helicopter. Frustrated with the lack of speed that Basic provided, the resourceful Trenz soon taught himself Assembly and started creating all sorts of short demos to impress his friends with.

While Trenz only managed to attain third place in the 64'er competition his talent hadn't

» Trenz was a stickler to detail and he painstakingly drew each level by hand, before actually desinging it. Here's just some of his handiwork…

EXHIBIT 1
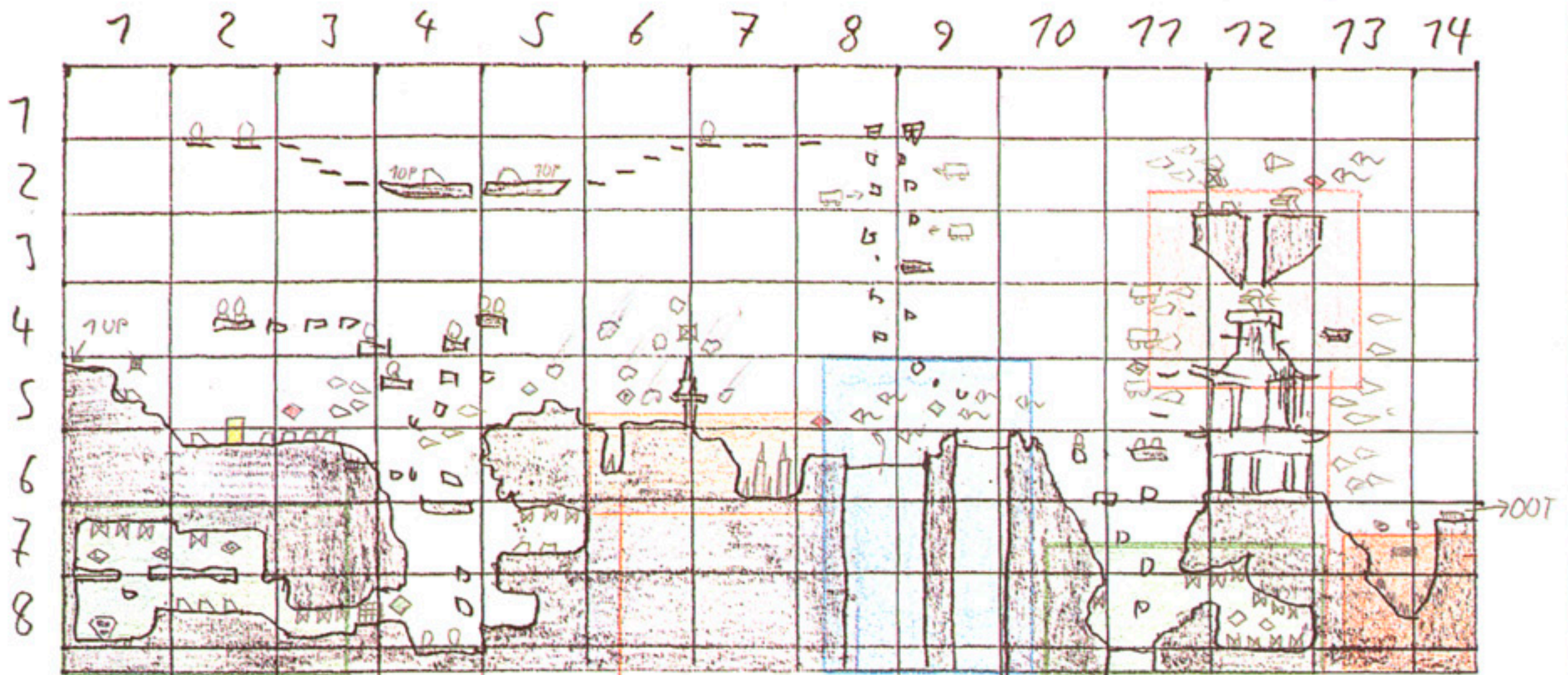
"LIKE KATAKIS BEFORE IT I CAME UP WITH THE NAME BY SIMPLY FLICKING THROUGH THE LOCAL TELEPHONE DIRECTORY AND LANDING ON THE PRIVATE HOME NUMBER OF AN ITALIAN NAMED TURRICANO"

gone unnoticed. A small company called Rainbow Arts had been impressed with his entries and soon got into contact with the talented artist. "They asked me to do some graphics for their games, so I initially started working for them on a freelance basis," continues Trenz. "By 1987 I was asked to join the company on a permanent basis as its graphics artist; I readily agreed. Although at that time Rainbow Arts didn't realise I was a coder as well! My first in-house project was the wonderful *The Great Giana Sisters*, a title which I created the graphics and level design for."

Essentially a computer version of Nintendo's NES hit *Super Mario Bros*, *The Great Giana Sisters* managed to stay on the shelves for one week before Nintendo's lawyers had it pulled (much to the detriment of fans everywhere who claim it to be the better game). Trenz's next project however, not only remained on shelves, it defined his career, shot Rainbow Arts into the limelight and is still played by many gamers today.

While *Turrican* felt like a breath of fresh air on Commodore's 8-bit machine, it wasn't exactly a new concept – indeed, Trenz had borrowed ideas from a myriad of different titles, the most obscure being an old Data East arcade game that Trenz had been addicted to at his local Düsseldorf arcade. "I adored *Psycho-Nics-Oscar* as it had several new features that I'd never seen in a game before," explains Trenz. "It featured a heavily armoured hero that was jumping around and throwing around lots of weapons. At the time, nothing like it existed for the C64, so I decided to use it as the basis for what would eventually become *Turrican*. Even *Turrican's* name was 'borrowed' "like *Katakis* before it I came up with the name by simply flicking through the local telephone directory and landing on the private home number of an Italian named Turricano."

With all his ideas firmly in place, Trenz locked himself away and set to work; his goal was simple – create an 8-way, smoothly scrolling masterpiece. Although to be fair, *Turrican* was far from a solo effort. "It took me around nine full months to complete the C64 version," confirms Trenz. "I took care of all the graphics, design and coding, Chris Huelsbeck and Ramiro Vaca handled the music, while Adam Bulka was in charge of the game's sound effects." Considering the sheer scale

of Trenz's ambition it was hardly surprising that Hurrican's (as it was originally known) development was a less than smooth process… "Creating *Turrican* certainly wasn't easy," confirms Trenz. "One of the biggest problems I encountered was the scrolling. I had to scroll all these colourful graphics in all directions without compromising the power of the CPU. I've no idea if what I was doing was the same as other coders, but when I did hit a snag, I always seemed to find a way to solve it."

And solve them he did; *Turrican* was graphically amazing and pulled off all sort of tricks that many thought were too difficult to achieve on the humble C64 – it was the first actual Commodore 64 title to feature 'true' parallax scrolling – and became an instant showpiece for when your less fortunate Spectrum and Amstrad owning mates turned up. *Turrican* was definitely a game to impress your mates with, but considering the sheer amount of effort Trenz had invested in it, it was never going to be anything less. Aware of his deadlines, Trenz had already created several graphics tools and had religiously played several titles to ensure that creating *Turrican's* applauded visuals caused as few problems as possible.

THEY SAID:

"ALL IN ALL, A HUGE GAME WHICH IS RECOMMENDED FOR ANYONE WANTING A TOP-NOTCH ARCADE BLAST."
ZZAP!64

"I'VE LOST COUNT OF THE NUMEROUS REQUESTS TO REMAKE TURRICAN, ALTHOUGH UNFORTUNATELY, THE RIGHTS FOR THE GAME ARE NOW IN THE WRONG HANDS"

SO MANY SYSTEMS, SO LITTLE TIME

Such was the success of *Turrican* that it soon appeared on a variety of different computers and consoles, with the Super NES version being particularly enjoyable to play through. Interestingly, though, Trenz had hardly any involvement with most of the different conversions that existed and only actually worked on the C64, Amiga and NES versions of the game. "The only console version I ever actually worked on was *Super Turrican* for the NES," he explains. "Although if I'm totally honest about it, I was far from satisfied with the end product. Mainly because it lacked many of the gameplay elements of the earlier versions and didn't feature the same degree of difficulty. Unfortunately, development time was short and it had to be finished on time, so there was little I could do. . The other versions such as the SNES and Mega Drive games had nothing to do with me.
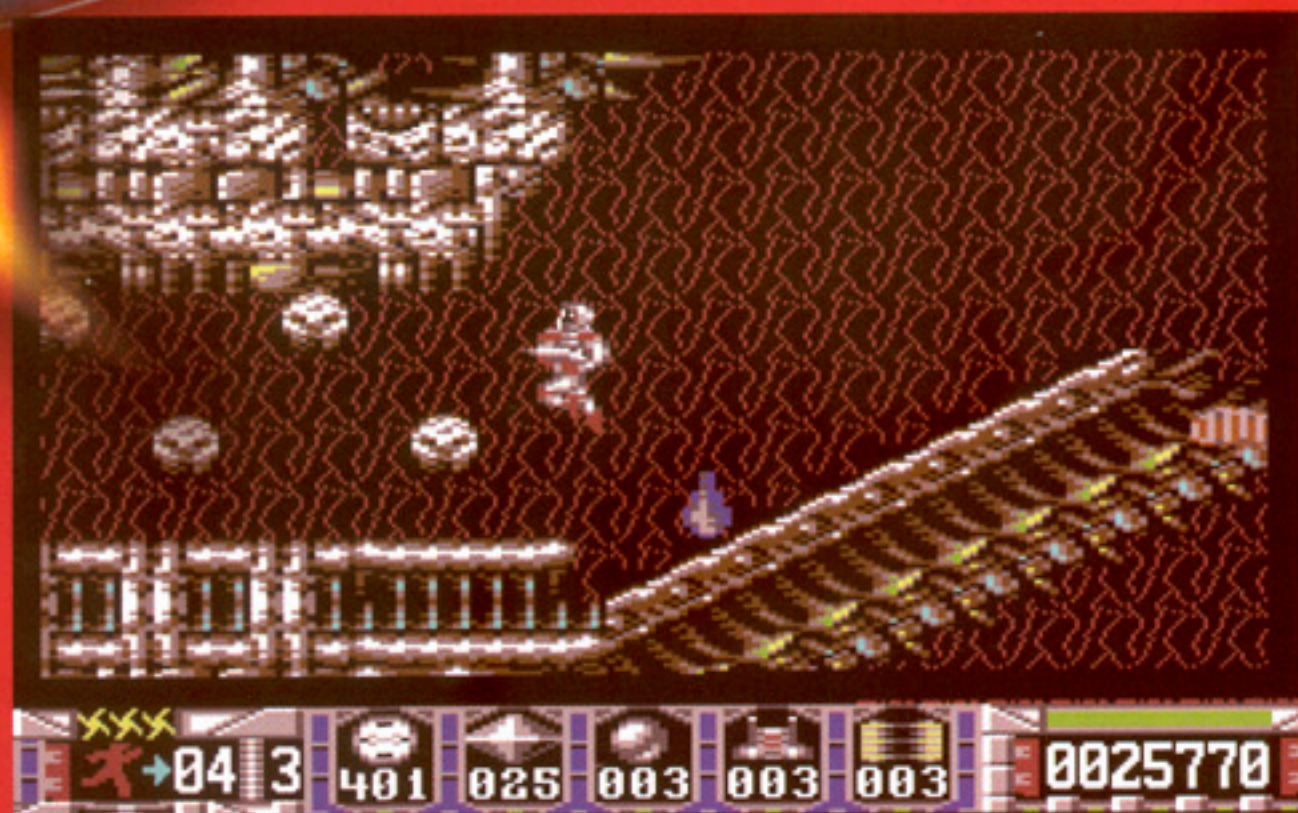
There were plenty of obstacles to clear in *Turrican*, with many being just as dangerous as the enemies you faced

"Being able to create the graphics from my own tools was great," admits Trenz, "and enabled me to get some great results from the old C64. I was also impressed with the way that other games at the time were using additional colour information for 8X8 blocks, as it made a huge difference to the way they eventually looked. As for the actual level design, well it initially all started off with me designing them on paper. I still have the original copies," he proudly proclaims. "Once I had the basic design in place, I simply added everything else. As with the graphics, I created a special level editor to create each stage, as well as an objects editor for taking care of the *Turrican's* many enemies. If I'm totally honest, it was more fun than work to create the actual levels."

While much of *Turrican's* graphical look and level design came from Trenz's own imagination, he does admit to using several elements from the aforementioned *Psycho-Niks-Oscar* and Nintendo's excellent *Metroid*. *Turrican* certainly shares plenty of traits with Samus' first adventure, but where the bounty hunter had to make do with some fairly mundane-looking weapons, the power-ups that were available in *Turrican* were of a much greater calibre.

Few C64 owners will forget the delight of creating huge destructive waves of electricity with *Turrican's* amazing Lightning gun, but Trenz had even more exciting weapons planned, he just couldn't put them all in… "I had so many more great weapons in mind but the limitations of the C64 made it impossible to make them all a reality. For example, there was this great full screen laserbeam, but it proved to be too much for the Commodore64 to handle. The weapons

you see in the final game are as good as could be for their time though. Even with the above restrictions *Turrican's* weapons were still a joy to use (and look at) and then you have those amazing bosses to you them on…

From the gigantic Piranha that spat out tinier fishes, to the huge metallic gauntlet. Each and every boss looked fantastic and was able to dish out tremendous amounts of damage to your one-man army. Like the game's outstanding visuals though, creating these impressive behemoths was far from straightforward… "Ah the bosses. They proved to be quite an issue at first," begins Trenz. "Because they were built out of so many sprites and multiplexed together avoiding flicker proved to be quite a problem for me. Still, I'd always been impressed with huge bosses in the many arcade games I had played, so I was desperate to include them in *Turrican*, and although many were my own creations, some were inspired by movies and other games. Take the metal fist for example; the idea originally came from Yellow Submarine. There's a scene in the movie when the Blue Meanies prepare to attack Pepperland with a huge blue fist. There's plenty more secrets I could share with you, but I'll save them for another time…"

Secrets aside, Trenz found numerous ways to solve most of the obstacles he encountered and when *Turrican* was eventually released, it immediately began earning rave reviews from everyone who was lucky enough to play it. Although Trenz himself admits to being totally surprised with the game's reception, "I really didn't expect it at all," he told us. Nevertheless, *Turrican* became an instant hit and an Amiga port (which had been started at the same time as the C64 game) quickly followed. Despite the higher hardware specifications, Trenz and the rest of the Amiga design team still encountered several problems… "The

Turrican may have been a tough game, but there was plenty of replay value to it

scrolling was the obvious difficulty," confirms Trenz. "Mainly because all the graphics had to be redrawn into bitmaps instead of tiles and had to be scrolled smoothly without stressing the CPU too much. Thanks to the impressive talents of programmer Holger Schmidt everything ended up working perfectly."

With the game being so well received, an inevitable sequel was soon requested. "There was a huge pressure on me, as the sequel had to be so much better," continues Trenz. "So many people had such high expectations for it. It wasn't easy, but I was eventually satisfied with the end results." He certainly must have been pleased with the end result as Trenz

cites the C64 version of *Turrican 2* as his favourite game in the series, "it has all the great elements of the original game, great flying sections that are similar to *Katakis*, and of course much better weapons." Despite his obvious love for the sequel, Trenz still holds a special torch for the game that gave him worldwide laim, and is impressed with its endurance. "Even today people are regularly writing to me to say that they still play the game. I've also lost count of the numerous requests to remake it, although unfortunately, the rights for the game are now in the wrong hands. Still, it's certainly a great feeling to have created a title that considered by many as a milestone in the history of videogames."

OTHER GAMES IN THE SERIES:
Turrican 2: The Final Fight, Turrican 3, Super Turrican, Turrican 3D (cancelled), Universal Soldier

IF I COULD MAKE A NEW TURRICAN GAME…

"I think there's definitely room in the marketplace for a *Turrican* game today," begins Trenz when we started talking about resurrecting the franchise. "It's important to remember that *Turrican's* magic came from the classical 2D view. Putting it into the third dimension would change the game too much, and it wouldn't be the same. I know what I'm talking about, believe me."

Indeed, Trenz began work on a 3D version of *Turrican* in 2000 but the project was scrapped, Factor 5 (formed from the remnants of Rainbow Arts) has also tried on several attempts to bring the franchise up to date, but its *Thornado* project is now a distant memory. Despite this, Trenz feels that a *Turrican* game could still work.

"A good platform for a *Turrican* game would be the Game Boy Advance or Nintendo DS. Of course changes and design enhancements would need to be made in design and gameplay in order to meet today's requirements. One example would be a cooperative mode using the wireless technique on the DS to fight together against evil, although to be truthful the possibilities are endless."

» Each stage was made up of a staggering amount of different screens and this particular drawing gives you real insight into Turrican's superb level design
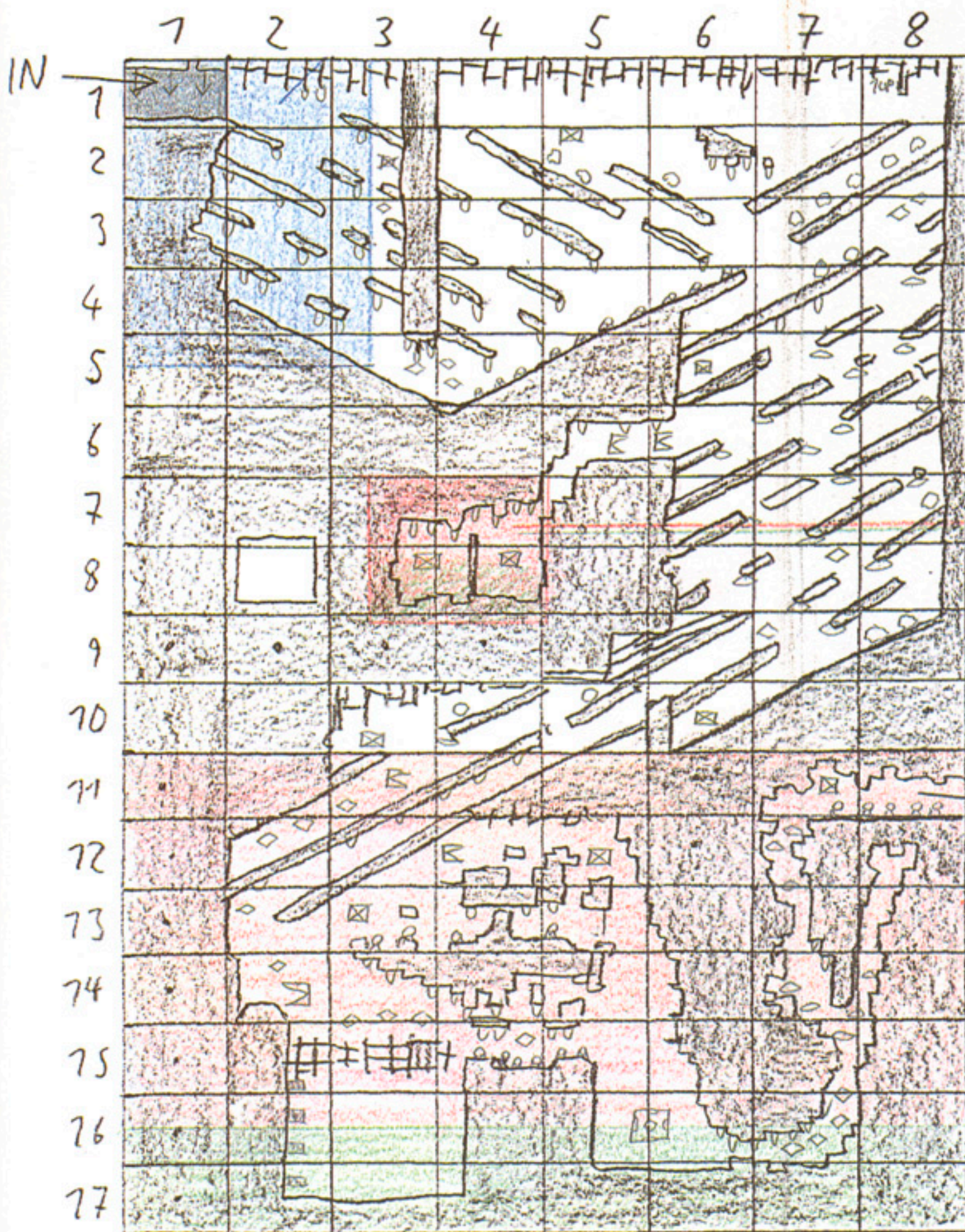
EXHIBIT 2

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

KATAKIS
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1988

R-TYPE
SYSTEMS: C64
YEAR: 1988

TURRICAN II: THE FINAL FIGHT
SYSTEMS: C64, AMIGA
YEAR: 1991