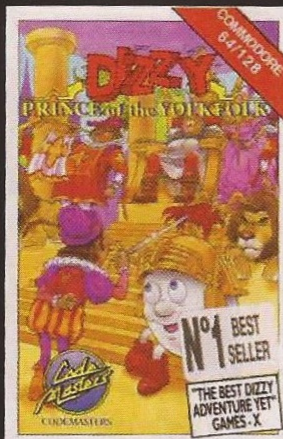




BEHIND THE SCENES

DIZZY: PRINCE OF THE YOLKFOLK

When it was announced that Dizzy was finally making a comeback, fans thought the news was eggshellent. But what made Prince Of The Yolkfolk such a critical success?



Title: Dizzy: Prince Of The Yolkfolk

Released: 1991

Format: Amstrad CPC, Spectrum, Commodore 64,

Atari ST, Amiga, PC, NES, CD32

Publisher: Codemasters

Developer: Big Red Software

KEY STAFF:

Paul Ranson (producer)
 Pete Ranson (artist, designer)
 Jon Cartwright (programmer)
 The Oliver Twins (supervisors)

PHILIP OLIVER IS an honest man; friendly, approachable, generous with his time. It is hard to imagine him having a problem with anybody but, when it comes to his most famous creation – a small, popular egg-shaped character called Dizzy, which he produced along with his twin brother Andrew – he is fiercely protective. And that is one of the reasons why it has taken nearly 20 years to see the return of a character that once dominated home computer gaming in the late Eighties and early Nineties; two decades of talks during which all that was reached was a stalemate.

A lot has changed since the egg's final adventure game, *Crystal Kingdom Dizzy*, was released. Since then, 2D virtual worlds have largely been supplanted by 3D and gamers tend to like their adventures to be more real, with fit, athletic characters such as Lara Croft and Nathan Drake coming to the fore. Technology has changed too. Back in 1992, mobile phones had yet to take off – and indeed wouldn't truly hit their stride for another seven years – and yet now those huge breezeblocks have given way to sleek, handheld, internet-connected computers. Today's world is more of a fantasy one than much of what was contained in those *Dizzy* games of old.

And yet despite all of that, there has been a long-standing desire to see the character return. Fans petitioned for the comeback of everyone's favourite boxing-gloved egg, yet it seemed as if it would never happen. But then smartphones came of age, a former developer began to play around and suddenly everything started to fall into place. Now the time was right.

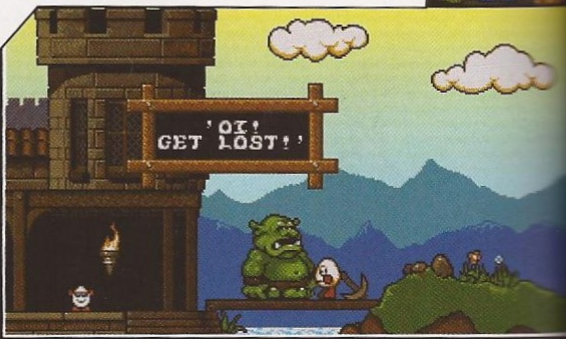
"Over the years there have been issues with Codemasters, between us and them, but it's okay. It's all resolved; it's all in the past now," says Philip Oliver. "We don't bear a grudge forever."

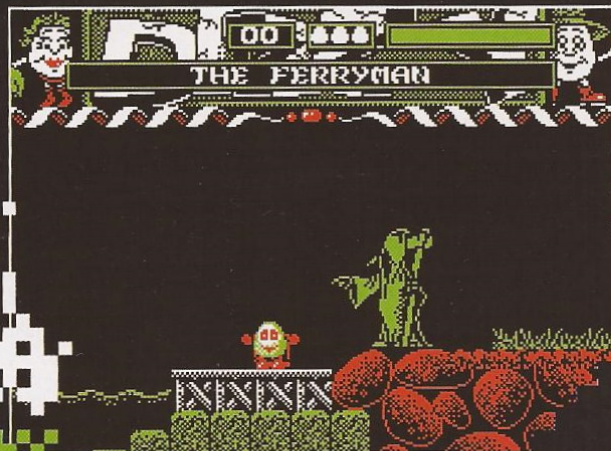
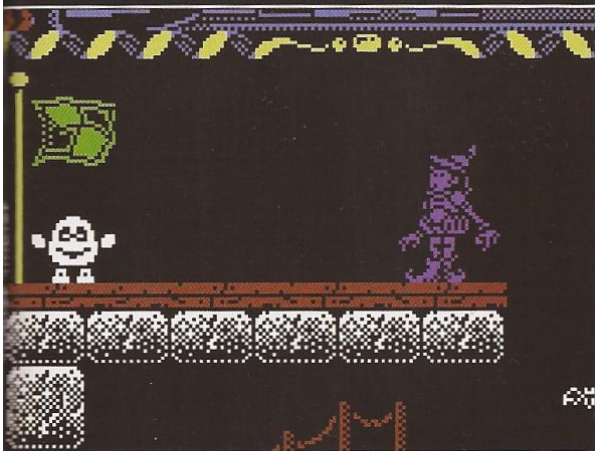
Dizzy is currently starring in an iOS/Android remake of *Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, **CONTINUED >**

Dizzy's limited inventory meant the eureka moment that accompanied each puzzle often came hand-in-hand with an annoyingly long walk.



PEOPLE KNEW WHAT WAS ALLOWED TO BE IN A DIZZY GAME AND WHAT WASNT





Originally, *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* was released as part of the *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* compilation.

Audiences are divided by the Flash-like graphical style of *Yolkfolk's* iOS remake. For what it's worth, we think it's a big step down.

FROM THE FORUM

Posted by:

MR MARVELOUS

▲ The first game was okay but it wasn't really until the sequel, *Treasure Island Dizzy*, that I really liked the little egg. Then *Fantasy World Dizzy* nailed it with better puzzles and a bigger game world, plus it removed the annoyance of only one life that *Treasure Island* had. The games went a bit downhill from that point for me and then the quite frankly dire spin-offs confined him to the same fate as Humpty Dumpty. Good to see him back, though I would have picked one of his first three adventures over the one we're getting.

Posted by:

RADIOFLOYD

▲ *Fantasy World Dizzy* was my first game! I had the Atari ST version, which I guess doesn't count but I loved it. I can still picture every screen, my brain exploding with endorphins the first time I activated the portcullis, Dizzy Grandfather drifting off to sea... Reading about *Treasure Island Dizzy* from the picture on the staircase thinking I'd missed something amazing.

Posted by:

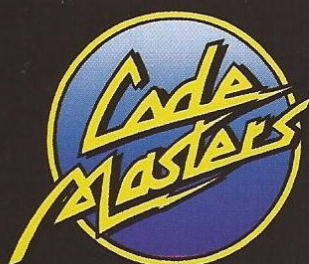
RYAN WHITELAW

▲ My favourite game series when I was younger. *Fantasy World Dizzy* was the best in many people's eyes but *Magicaland Dizzy* was the best. It was technically better than the others. *Kwik Snax* was also great fun, although obviously not a *Dizzy* title in spirit. Oh, and I always had a soft spot for Dylan too.

Posted by:

SLAPPY MCGUIRE

▲ I hated Dizzy. Watching him twitch and fidget just stood there, while you failed for the fifteenth time to negotiate the boxing-glove wearing testicle past a raincloud, fills me even now with bile.



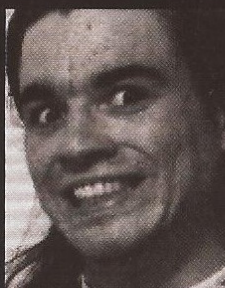
In 8-bit times, the Codemasters logo was a guaranteed badge of budget brilliance.

which was originally published in time for Christmas in 1991. As the sixth eggy puzzler, it was released as part of the *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures* compilation, lumped in with *Spellbound Dizzy* and a few non-platform spin offs: *Dizzy Down The Rapids*, *Panic Dizzy* and *Kwik Snax*. The most critically well-received of the lot was *Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, despite boasting just 30 screens.

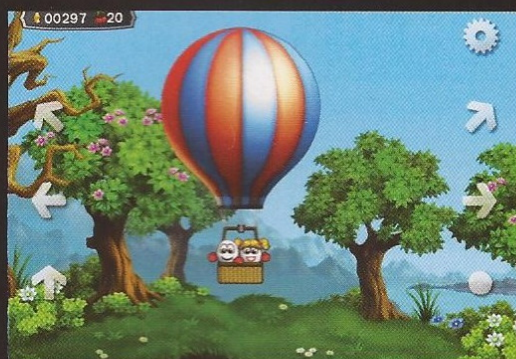
Prince Of The Yolkfolk was, like the previous two puzzle-platformers, created by Big Red Software, which had taken over from The Oliver Twins for the fourth adventure game, *MagiClan Dizzy*. Big Red went on to produce all of Dizzy's other adventures from that point on, since the Olivers felt they had taken the series as far as they could given the growing restraints on their time.

"We were only two individuals and we were very busy," says Philip Oliver. "We also knew that whatever game we wrote, it was going to become a big seller, so we wanted to try our hand at others things. By that point, we felt we'd established the *Dizzy* adventures pretty well. People knew what was allowed to be in a *Dizzy* game and what wasn't, and they understood the ethos of it. And we knew the guys at Big Red really, really well because they were based in Leamington and had worked at Codemasters. We thought we could trust them to go and do a *Dizzy* adventure game."

Big Red was headed up by Paul Ranson, who had grown passionate about the *Dizzy* series after playing the first three games. He was very keen to take over the series, having been told by the Olivers that they wanted to outsource the next title. A deal was struck very quickly and informally while at a party hosted by the Olivers in their flat. Ranson agreed to take the source code of the original *Dizzy* games and adapt it to a new version that Philip Oliver had designed.



PETE RANSON
Graphics



"Philip had drawn out some basic maps on paper and we replicated the entire design using an extremely basic map editor that Andrew had coded using the Spectrum engine as a basis," Ranson recalls of his work on *MagiClan Dizzy*. "It was using these techniques that we organised all of our subsequent run-and-jump adventure games back in the 1990s."

Ranson's team was small. His brother, Pete, was a recent art graduate and he produced the graphics. Fred 'R' Williams was a whiz at 8-bit coding. And although Big Red was contracted to produce the *Dizzy* game, the twins managed the process passionately. Not dissimilar to the style guides and bibles that developers refer to today, the Olivers had their own set idea of what made a *Dizzy* game, and they were keen to impart that to the new team. "It was their insight that sometimes we had to fight through to make Dizzy the character he is today," recalls Ranson. "I remember that the fascination we had at Big Red was to make the game as large as we could. It was a real programming challenge to get the games with as many rooms and as many puzzles that we could."

MagiClan Dizzy was enormous; *Spellbound Dizzy* was even bigger. Its 100 screens made up the largest

Why now is the right time

There were some concerns at bringing *Dizzy* back. "There's been an awful lot of water under the bridge since the game was released in 1991, and an awful lot of games have been produced in that time and moved on a lot, so we were slightly concerned and slightly worried what the reaction of what *Dizzy* coming back would actually be," says Philip Oliver. But when the news was

announced, those fears disappeared. "I understand that on Twitter it was trending at number two... whatever that means. I have to say I'm too old to understand all of this kind of stuff, but it's very pleasing that people are so positive about the idea." The team did not consider bringing *Dizzy* back as a full-price release. "We've always felt there's no point in coming back with a

massive 3D adventure game which would be a huge investment when we're not sure if the audience is still there," Oliver continues. "We know there's a big, loyal fan base, but how big? Coming back with a first offering £30-£40 release in a box would have been the wrong thing to do. The fact we can go digital distribution with a fairly low price point is kind of what has given the opportunity."



Philip Oliver,
Dizzy co-creator

map of any *Dizzy* game and, by the time of its release, Big Red was really shaping the character in the way it wanted, believing Dizzy to be a clever egg who should solve problems by his ingenuity and by helping people. It used the development team's anarchic sense of humour to challenge comic boundaries. "We did it in the pantomime way that *Shrek* and Pixar movies parody children's content today," says Ranson.

When it came to *Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, however, Big Red changed tack. With a Christmas deadline looming, it was not possible to produce yet another staggeringly large adventure, so the team made the decision to go with a smaller map. "We wanted to create something that was both commercial and good before Christmas arrived – and Christmas back then arrived on 25 December, not early November as today's game release calendar has it," remembers Ranson. "It made us focus on puzzles that were neat and logical, and the quality of the graphics was distilled into areas that all the players would all see without as much effort as the bigger games."

The game's design was largely placed in the hands of Pete Ranson, leaving Paul Ranson to run Big Red while still working for Codemasters, regularly driving back and forth from his company's base in Macclesfield to Leamington Spa. "Pete drew the levels on a piece of wallpaper that was blue-tacked to the wall," Ranson remembers. "Pete recalls making the *POTYF* map in one weekend with something called a pencil."

■■■■ HIS BROTHER REMEMBERS the time well. "I was involved in many projects for Codemasters seeing that Paul was development director there and I was the lead artist and designer at Big Red Software," he says. "Big Red was Paul's company and it worked exclusively for Codemasters. Very incestuous."

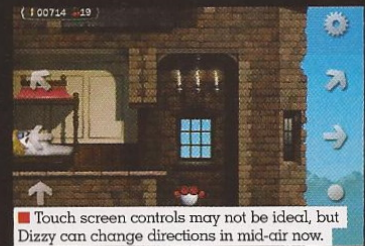
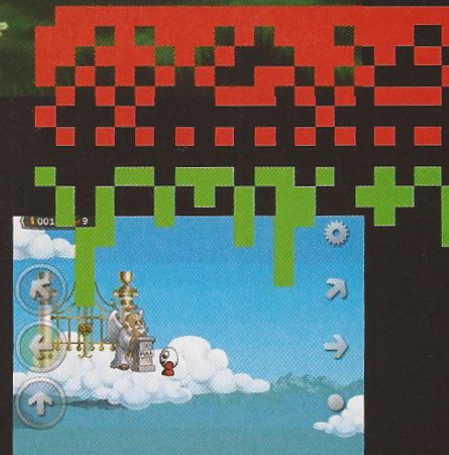
As well as producing *Dizzy*, Big Red had also branched off with a new character called Seymour, whose first adventure had been released in 1991. It was very much a *Dizzy*-inspired game. Codemasters had argued with Big Red over *Dizzy*'s direction, telling the developer it couldn't put Dizzy in real-life situations. Seymour was produced as an alternative hero and was placed in games that revolved around settings as diverse as Hollywood and the wild west.



PETE RECALLS MAKING THE MAP IN A WEEKEND WITH SOMETHING CALLED A PENCIL

"We had wanted to make *Hollywood Dizzy* but it wasn't approved," remembers Pete Ranson. "I was working on that game at around the same time as I was designing *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* and *Spellbound* under the watchful gaze and overall approval from Philip and Andrew who were busy playing around with Nintendo Entertainment Systems and something called a SNES. Big Red was very much still embedded in the old Spectrum and Amstrad scene, and games that we were making at Big Red were being converted to the other formats by other companies for Codies, and vice versa. There was a lot of cross company and mutual development tennis back then."

All of this experience of producing *Dizzy*-style titles ensured the team was able to work to the strictest of deadlines, even though it was being written at the same time as *Spellbound* **CONTINUED >**



■ Touch screen controls may not be ideal, but Dizzy can change directions in mid-air now.

>. A GAMING EVOLUTION

Dizzy > Prince Of The Yolkfolk > Clover



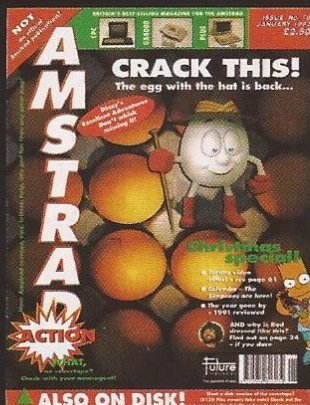
At its heart, *Prince Of The Yolkfolk* was just a natural evolution of the tried-and-tested – and hugely successful – *Dizzy* formula.



The *Dizzy* series has arguably evolved into a genre of its own over the years, but it does have some copycats, such as Xbox Live's *Clover*.



WHAT THEY SAID...



This is a Dizzy game as it should be, complex enough to present a long-term challenge but not so contrived in puzzle solutions as to propel you towards a padded cell

Amstrad Action, January 1992, Issue 76

Dizzy and right off the back of a *Fun School* title for Europress. To pile on the pressure, Richard and David Darling, who ran Codemasters, were keen that the collection should include only adventure games rather than the arcade game spin offs although that didn't happen in the end.

Nevertheless, Paul Ranson was confident they would pull it off. "It is safe to say that the Big Red team were probably the most competent people in the world to produce *Dizzy*-style adventure games, and so the challenge was issued to get a new *Dizzy* game done in time for Christmas, which at that point was less than two months away," he says.

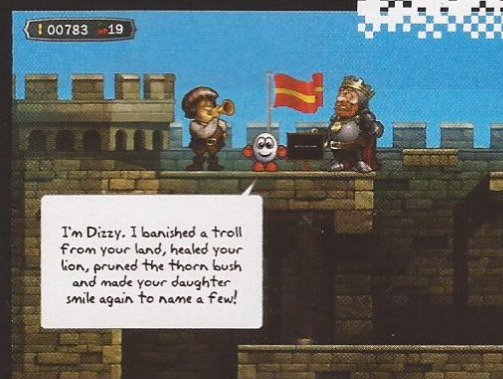
The map design and puzzles were designed in a weekend by Pete. They were shown to Paul who drove to Leamington Spa to show the Darlings and the Olivers. Pete began to draw the graphics while John Cartwright, who had been working on the *Fun School* game, made headway with the code. The original engine developed by Andrew was used and the graphics were built from a combination of existing assets and new art created by Pete in the moments he had free for producing the game.

"Pete hand drew the graphics on paper, scanned them in using a hand 'drag' scanner and then rescaled them to production size using software called D-Point," says Paul Ranson. "I remember that regular builds were sent to us using the Royal Mail, and took entire days to arrive."

For the first time, the Olivers didn't have as much input. "But we had been embedded in the development of *Dizzy* games for approaching a year so we could get really under the shell of *Dizzy*, so to speak. I think that the puzzles on the whole were not that different to the previous games, but I would volunteer the ones in *POTYF* and *Spellbound* had a cultural shift to include more humour than had been present in the previous incarnations."

The game was completed in time and it was rapidly tested, as always, by Richard and David Darling's much younger brothers and sisters. And it went down a storm, not only with them but with reviewers. Not that

Paul Ranson was surprised. "I think that this game was a neat and complete experience that was balanced more in



the favour of the players completing it," he says. "To some extent it shaped my development experience from that point on. I became aware that sometimes, as games programmers, we concentrate on the code more than the entertainment experience."

At the time, the gaming landscape was changing and the 8-bit era was coming to an end. *POTYF* was released as a budget cassette and, on November 1992, later launched as an enhanced version on the NES under the name *Dizzy The Adventurer*.

PUZZLES IN YOLKFOLK HAD A CULTURAL SHIFT TO INCLUDE MORE HUMOUR

It also formed part of *The Excellent Dizzy Collection* on the Sega Master System and Game Gear in November 1993 (the Olivers left after this compilation was released, splitting *Dizzy's* intellectual property between themselves and Codemasters).

"There was so much happening at the time – the decline of the 8-bit era, the rise of the 16-bit home computers, the advent of console gaming," says Pete Ranson. "Big Red moved from Greater Manchester to Warwickshire just to be close to the hub of activity. Looking back, it's amazing that we did it all in the days before email and a usable internet. Everything was done on transfer disks and via printed letters and actual real post, with postmen, stamps and everything."

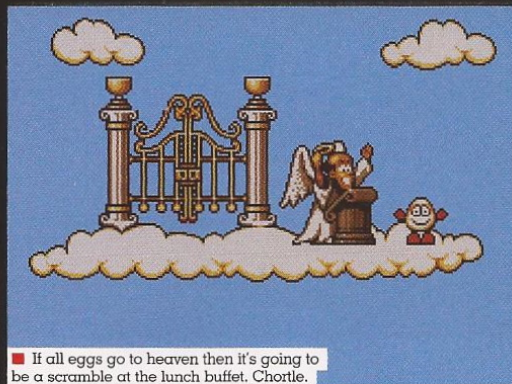
The lure of *Dizzy* never left Paul Ranson; nor did it leave The Olivers, who appreciated how the character shaped their development and business careers. Codemasters also knew it was sitting on a valuable franchise. In its day, *Dizzy* was king at Codies. "He pervaded all of our meetings," says Paul Ranson. "He was the reference to which all the games being made were compared. To be honest, at the time, I frankly did not quite comprehend the values that Phillip in particular was driving into us. It is only since becoming a parent that I quite 'got' our target children's market."

And so it was that, at the start of 2011, Paul began to play around with the character again. The idea of resurrecting *Dizzy* had been doing the rounds for years. There were even plans to produce a 3D version and the market was tested with a video – commissioned by the Olivers – which showed Dizzy in a three-dimensional world. This was backed up by a petition at yolkfolk.com calling for him to be brought back.

"The 3D pitch that we designed back in what must have been 2002 or 2003 was just a kind of concept of what it would be like if you were to take *Dizzy* into a 3D world," says Philip Oliver. "It was a question of what it might have looked like and it came about because we had an artist who was available and very passionate about *Dizzy*. He was talking to us about it and we said, 'Look you've got a little bit of time on your hands; why don't you do a re-imagining and we'll discuss it with Codemasters?' But it was decided that, commercially, to try to put *Dizzy* in a big 3D game at that time was pretty high risk. I think that was a fair conclusion."

■ ■ ■ BUT LAST YEAR, the advent of smartphones and the large casual market for games that has grown around them sparked off talks between Paul Ranson, the Olivers and Codemasters. Ranson, who now heads up Slam Productions, had been toying with the character in order to prove that the technology his business had developed was relevant to the creation of a platform game. He visited the yolkfolk.com website and thoughts turned to remaking *Prince Of The Yolkfolk*, a game which he felt wouldn't take a long time to do given the low number of screens involved. A prototype was soon underway and it was shown to the Olivers. Working with DNA Studios in Leamington Spa, the demo was turned into a quality product that brought the powers-that-be at Codemasters on board.

"Paul has always been very passionate for the game and he really wanted to bring *Dizzy* back," says Philip Oliver. "He engaged with us and Codemasters about it, asking if we could. We thought it was great but, just as importantly, that it was the right time to do it."



■ If all eggs go to heaven then it's going to be a scramble at the lunch buffet. Chortle.

A touching approach to gameplay

■ Moving from joystick and keyboard control to touch screen has its problems, and Paul Ranson worked hard to get it working. "During development we tried multiple systems as we wanted to make the controls as tight and accurate as the original keyboard mechanism," he says. "We tried tilt sensors to move Dizzy and then adopted a three-button interface for a long time. It simply had

a left and right jump and pick-up button on-screen, but some players struggled to make some of the tricky jumps. So then we added a jump left and jump right button. Position of the icons on screen is so crucial."

He said they had to remember the players were using their hands to support the device as well as to control Dizzy. "One attempt had the buttons along the bottom of the screen, but



■ Paul Ranson, Big Red Software

people found it too hard to hold and control at the same time. By putting the buttons at the sides of the screen, we found that the player's thumbs naturally hover over areas. We used this experience to locate the buttons to where we have them now," he says.

The remade game took a couple of months to code, with much of the attention paid to perfecting the controls as best they could – which Philip Oliver admits was the most difficult part of the process. "They work pretty well and I think Paul has done a great job, but obviously there are no buttons," he says. "If you look at *Fruit Ninja* and *Flight Control*, they are designed to be set up with glass, but *Dizzy* wasn't designed for that. Yet it works well; they've done a great job making it work as well as possible."



■ JON CARTWRIGHT
Programmer

Should the game sell well, there will be more. Philip Oliver doesn't rule out the possibility of new games, nor does he dismiss bringing the game to consoles. "I think we'll see how this one goes but, all being well, it's marking *Dizzy*'s return. Never say never – it would be a great honour to come back strong with more." Whether or not that means the unreleased games *Dreamworld Pogie* and *Wonderland Dizzy* will be unveiled is anyone's guess, but they would certainly form treats for the patient fans. 