

A space strategy game for the 48K Sinclair ZX Spectrum

Written by [@Blerkotron](#)
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Logo very kindly created by [@hot_piping](#)

Originally created for the ZX Spectrum BASIC Jam
Hosted by [@Gazzapper](#)
<https://itch.io/jam/zx-spectrum-basic-jam>

Find the latest version at
<https://blerkotron.itch.io/breakspace>

Introduction

BREAK/SPACE is a turn-based strategy game set in space. After an accident while testing an experimental warp drive, you find yourself stranded in an uncharted area of the universe. Your only chance of getting home is to recover your four warp cores (jettisoned during the accident) and then return to the wormhole that brought you here in order to get back to warp speed and back to Earth.

Unfortunately this part of the universe is inhabited by six alien races – some nice, some not-so-nice. You can barter and battle with these as you see fit, although be careful – your actions will have consequences, and beating up an easy mark can make them less likely to deal with you the next time your paths cross.

Complicating matters more is the fact that your long-range scanners are broken so you can't see what's ahead of you until you enter a region. Your ship is also a little underpowered and can only carry a certain amount of fuel and armaments. However, it's possible to use the few supplies you have to earn money, which you can then use to replenish stocks or improve your ship. And out in the darkness of space, perhaps there are other opportunities awaiting you?

But don't take too long. The wormhole will close soon, and once that happens you'll be trapped here forever!

Technical notes

BREAK/SPACE generates a new, random universe every time you play. Not only is the universe random, but so are the races within it, the planets you'll encounter, and the positions of the things you'll need. You won't know what's out there until you find it, and things you learn in one game won't necessarily hold true in the next.

Some universes will be harder than others, which might require you to change up your tactics. Fight and steal, or run and trade? The choice is yours – just make sure you make it out of there in time.

BREAK/SPACE was originally written for the ZX Spectrum BASIC Jam, and was around 38K of pure BASIC. The main problem with that was speed – Spectrum BASIC is not renowned for being fast and a lot of the time the game could feel fairly sluggish.

After the jam had finished I set about converting the source to compile under [ZX Basic](#), a brilliant cross-compiler that is mostly Spectrum BASIC-compatible (and so much more – seriously, check it out). The end result is a new version which is now 100% machine code and therefore very much faster and better to play (as well as being a little more polished than before).

If you'd like to see the original BASIC version then 1.1 is still hosted at the [BREAK/SPACE web site](#). If you'd just like to play the game without too much fuss, you'll want version 1.5 or later.

The game should run on any Spectrum or compatible with at least 48K of memory.

Playing the game

The game is played from a single screen, which will be displayed once universe generation is complete – please be patient as this can take a moment (especially if you're playing the BASIC version of the game)!



Top-left is the star map. At the beginning of the game this is made up entirely of '?' markers, but these will be removed as you explore. Your ship is represented by the flashing square.

Top-right is the status panel. From top to bottom this represents the following:

- !! **ATTACK POWER**
- ▲ **HULL STRENGTH**
- ☺ **DRIVE EFFICIENCY**

- A **MISSILES**
- ⊗ **FUEL**
- ⊕ **SHIELD STRENGTH**
- £ **MONEY**

The red part of the bottom panel is the main message area. Surrounding that are indicators showing the remaining time (marked with a T), the types and amounts of cargo you are currently carrying (food, technology and minerals, left to right) and the four warp cores (initially missing).

Your ship can be moved around using the cursor keys or Q, A, O and P. Each move uses one unit of fuel and decreases the clock by one hour. Each square that you move into may be empty, or it may contain one of the following:

 **PLANET**

An alien planet, coloured after the race that it belongs to. These may be friendly and offer to trade with you, or they may be unfriendly and demand you leave (or launch an attack). Sometimes you will find a blue, uninhabited planet which you can mine for free minerals at the expense of some time.

 **ALIEN SHIP**

Alien ships are represented by an icon showing the alien's face. Again, these may attack you if unfriendly but friendly ships can be hailed and may offer you a nice reward if you can fulfil their requirements.

 **MISSION**

Missions are varied and you often have multiple choices as to how to proceed. If you make the right choice these can be very lucrative, but if you choose poorly you could end up in a battle, or damaging your ship. Take care, and weigh up the risks.

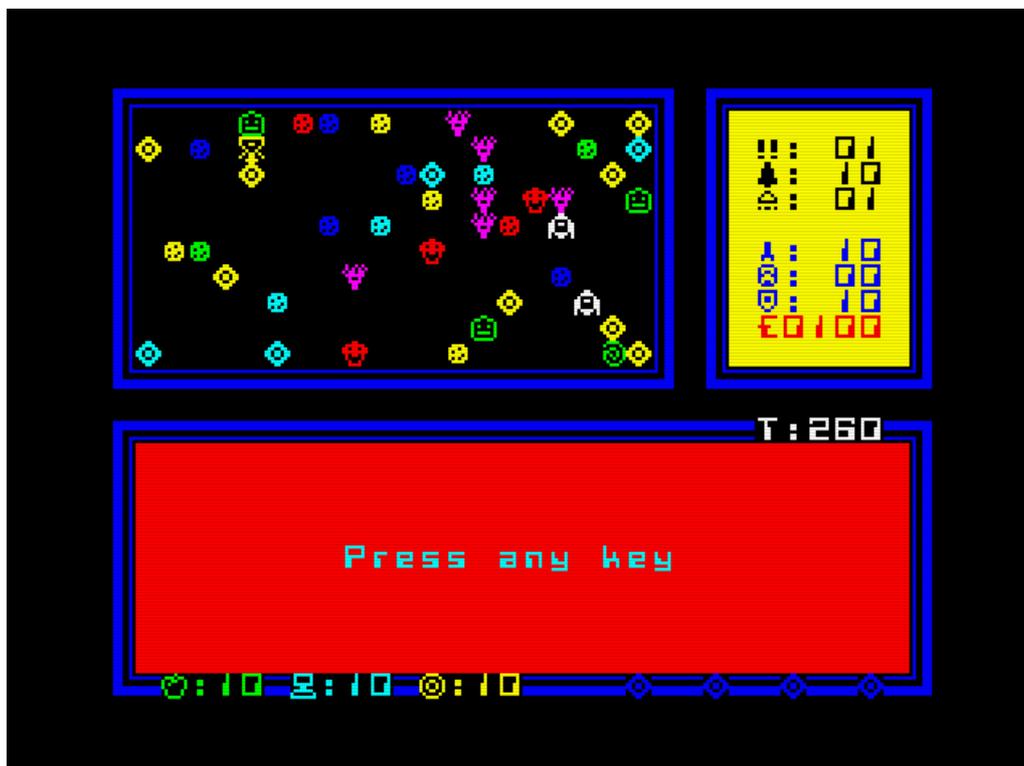
 **WARP CORE**

There are four warp cores hidden away within the star map. Finding one will automatically add it to your ship.

 **WORMHOLE**

The wormhole is your starting and finishing point on the map. You begin the game here, but you will not be able to use it to escape until you have all four warp cores.

The picture below shows a full map with all of the various elements uncovered:



Battles

When entering into combat, the screen changes slightly:



The yellow panel at the bottom-left represents the attacking ship. The black area top-right is the battle status panel where you will see instructions and messages, while the cyan panel represents your various battle choices.

Battles are turn-based, and you (and your enemy) can choose from a number of options:

1: 0 FIRE PHASERS

These are weak but 'free' - you don't need to recharge them.

2: 1 FIRE MISSILES

More powerful than phasers, but you only have a limited stock of them.

3: 0 CHARGE SHIELDS

If your shields are low you can sacrifice an attack to redirect power to your shields. Beware, as your opponent can do the same.

4: ESCAPE

If you don't think you can win, you can flee at any time. However, your opponent will be allowed one more turn while you make your escape – beware if your defences are down!

As your ship becomes more powerful your attack strength will rise and your ship will become more difficult to damage. Improving your drive efficiency will make it more likely that you will get the first turn, and also make enemy attacks more likely to miss.

If you succeed in combat then you may be rewarded with a small amount of loot from the destroyed craft (providing you have the capacity to take it on board).

Outside of battle your shields will slowly recharge themselves back to full strength, but be wary of hull damage – that can only be repaired at a friendly planet!

Trading

When visiting a planet and choosing to trade, you have a number of options available:



1. BUY CARGO / 2. SELL CARGO

Cargo comes in the form of food, technology or minerals and each planet will offer different prices for each of these depending on their needs and how much they like you. Buying and selling cargo is a good way to earn money, but be warned that you can only carry a maximum of 50 tons.

3. BUY UPGRADES

Upgrades improve your ship's capabilities permanently. You can boost attack or defence capabilities, or increase the capacity of your missile or fuel bays.

4. BUY STOCK/REPAIRS/INFO

If you need fuel or missiles or your hull needs repairing then this is the place to go, although all of these cost money. You may also choose to ask the native race for help – for a small fee they will reveal all of the star map squares surrounding their planet, plus a number of other random locations. You can choose to buy this information multiple times, but after the first time you will only benefit from the random locations. There's a decent chance they'll reveal the location of a warp core, incidentally...

5. LEAVE

Choose this option once you're done and want to get on your way. If you've done any trading then there's a chance that your relationship with the aliens will improve and prices will be lower the next time you visit, and as a goodwill gesture they will also fully recharge your shields before you leave.

Game Over

The game is over when one of a number of things happens:

Escape

Find all of the warp cores and enter the wormhole and you've won! Congratulations!

Out of time

Take too long and the wormhole will close forever, stranding you in unknown space.

Out of fuel

Run out of fuel and any hope you had of making it home is lost.

Ship destroyed

Watch that hull strength – if it reaches zero then your ship is finished.

Final words and acknowledgements

This was by far the biggest game I'd ever attempted in BASIC, and it was perhaps a little over-ambitious for a two-week game jam, but on the whole I was really pleased with how it turned out. It was a little slow, but all of the features I'd intended to include were present and correct, and it was quite fun to play to boot! It seems quite a few of you agreed too, as BREAK/SPACE ranked first in the voting round that followed the jam – a huge honour that I really didn't expect!

The revised compiled version is BREAK/SPACE as I originally imagined it – essentially the same, but faster and more responsive. If you played and enjoyed the original BASIC version then I hope you like this one even more!

Thank you so much to everyone who encouraged me along the way and everyone who voted for the game once the jam was over. Extra-special thanks to [@hot_piping](#) who created the brilliant logo, [@Quantum_Sheep](#) who offered some great feedback on the first version, [Boriel](#) for the excellent ZX Basic compiler, and of course [@Gazzapper](#) for creating and hosting the jam in the first place.

The compiled version of the game uses code from the [ZX7 optimal LZ77 packer](#) by Einar Saukas, and the fancy futuristic font is from the [8-bit font collection](#) by Paul van der Laan. Many thanks, gentlemen!

I hope you enjoy the game, and even if you don't perhaps you could take it apart and learn something or maybe improve it? Full source code (for both the original BASIC version and the revised ZX Basic port) is available from the [BREAK/SPACE web site](#) if you're curious.

Hugs!

@Blerkotron, 17/07/17

Revision history

1.8 (12/08/17)

- When buying a drive upgrade you got a boost of +10 instead of +1.
- If an attack on a ship caused shields to drop to exactly 0 then 1 point of hull strength would be accidentally restored.
- Events which resulted in you gaining free loot didn't recalculate your cargo's weight, which meant you could carry more than 50 tons of stuff and also caused some weird side effects when mining uninhabited planets.
- The reputation system wasn't working properly, which meant that repeatedly being nice (or nasty) to a particular race didn't result in their opinion of you changing. Hopefully this is correct now.
- Thanks to Ersh for reporting *all* of those issues, *and* offering an explanation/fix for one of them to boot. What a hero – cheers!

1.7 (02/08/17)

- Fixed two bugs in the buying and selling interface which resulted in you receiving the wrong amount of money when you sold goods worth more than £255 and/or being able to buy far more goods than your bank balance should have allowed. Thanks to Ersh for reporting both of those!

1.6 (17/07/17)

- Fixed cash overflow bug when buying cargo which could result in you having £65000+. Thanks to Andre Faria for reporting!
- Added Q/A support to buying/selling interface so you don't have to revert to cursor up/down if you've been playing with QAOP.
- Reinstated the version number on the title screen which somehow went AWOL in 1.5.

1.5 (16/07/17)

- Revised source to be compatible with the ZX Basic compiler, so it's now 100% machine code!
- Fixed missions bug which prevented most of the game's missions from functioning as intended. Luckily no one noticed this before.
- Ship can now be moved with Q, A, O and P as well as cursor keys 5, 6, 7 and 8.
- Revised menu screen with logo and fancy flashing colours. Flashy colours added in a few other places too to replace boring old FLASH 1.
- Second UDG bank for slightly improved in-game borders.
- Futuristic space font.

1.1 (14/06/17)

- The game now always begins at the wormhole. This makes it a little easier to complete the task within the time limit, and fits better with the back-story. The intro text has been adjusted slightly to reflect this.
- There is now a greatly increased chance that if you buy info from a planet they will reveal the location of one of your warp core pieces. Previously the uncovered locations were completely random, now they're weighted a little.
- The more aggressive aliens are now not quite as strong as they were before, as they were practically impossible to beat. They're still just as aggressive, though.
- If your drive rating is higher than an attacking alien you will now get the jump on them and go first in combat, even if they are the instigators of the battle.

- If your drive rating is lower than an attacking alien then there is still a chance you will get to go first if they attack – the higher your drive rating, the more likely it is that you'll react faster.
- The battle display now includes an icon to show you which race you're fighting – useful for surprise attacks.
- Added missing BEEPs when revealing squares around the planet when buying info.
- Added @hot_piping credit to startup screen for people who don't read the manual. Ironically those people won't read this message either.
- Updated manual to include extra graphics and clarifications, plus this section.

1.0 (13/06/17)

- Initial release