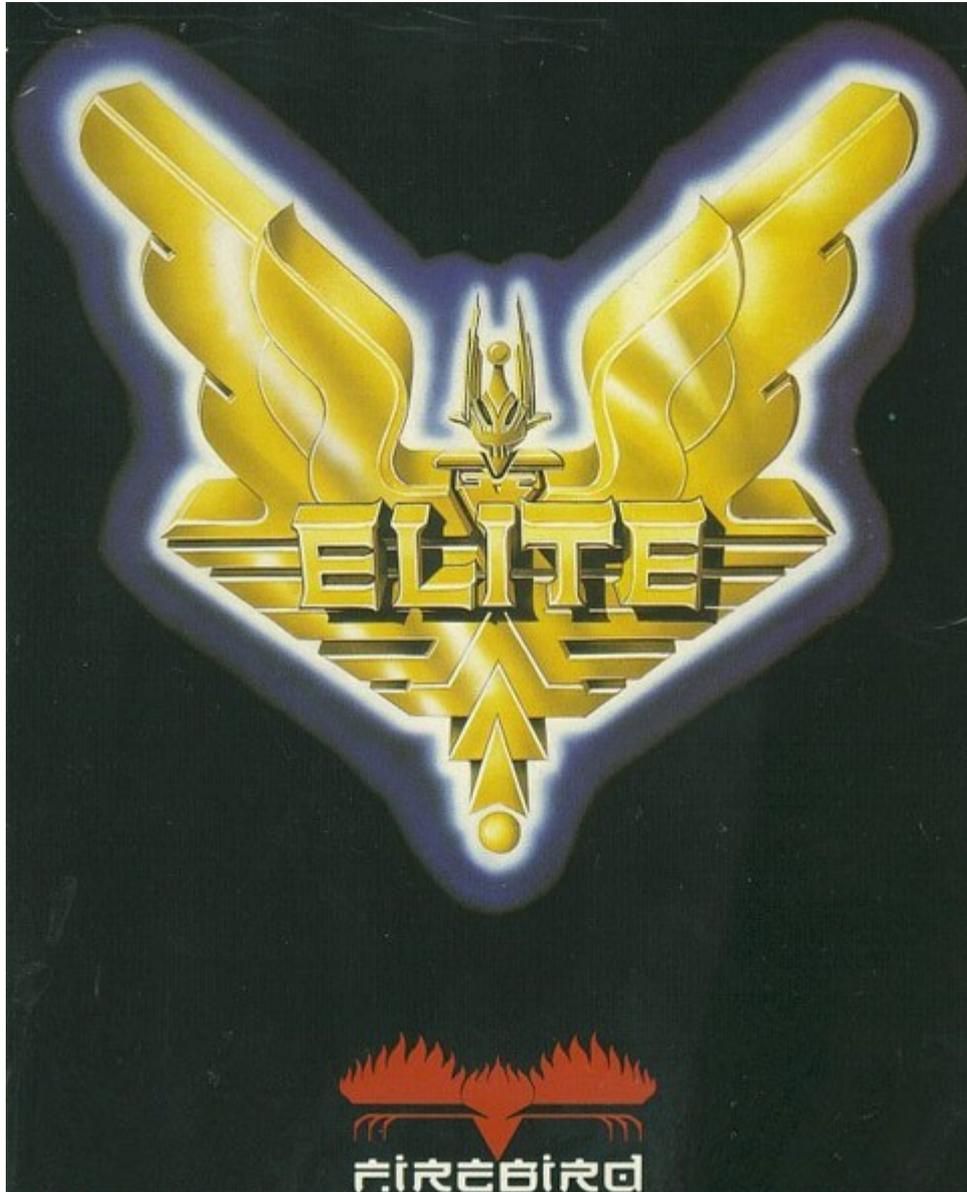**Retro Game Description and Breakdown – '*Elite*'**

Elite was first published by Acornsoft in September 1984 for the BBC Micro and Acorn Electron Computers to huge critical acclaim. The rights to port the game to other platforms were then auctioned by Jacqui Lyons of Marjacq. It was subsequently purchased by British Telecom who ported the game to many other platforms including the Commodore 64, Sinclair Spectrum and the Amstrad CPC under the publisher name of Firebird. The game was designed and developed by David Braben and Ian Bell, two friends who had met while studying at Jesus College, Cambridge University in 1982. At the time Braben was designing a 3D space game and Ian Bell had just finished a game of his own, 'Freefall' for Acornsoft.

They both came together and after a little over two years of hard work and the utmost support from the head of Acornsoft, David Johnson-Davies, Elite was born. Since then two sequels have been produced, Frontier: Elite 2 in 1993, and Frontier: First Encounters in 1995, both published by David Braben's company Frontier Developments. Both sequels had no involvement from Ian Bell, although the third sequel Frontier: First Encounters was the first game not to give Ian royalties, which led to several key claims in public interviews and David suing him for libel, after which Ian retracted the statements.

When Elite was released it was a huge success, and is still thought of today, as the best space trading game ever made. It was one of the first home computer games to use wireframe 3D graphics, this coupled with its open ended gameplay and advanced engine assured its place as a classic and genre maker in gaming history. Its impact on the gaming industry has been huge. Elite not only defined a genre, it was also one of the first games ever to use a sandbox world, in which we see in so many games of today. As the original space trading game, it has no doubt inspired several spin offs including X: Beyond the Frontiers and Eve Online. But also as one of the first games to ever use a sandbox world, it can also be said it has inspired games such as Morrowind and Grand Theft Auto, in which the open ended gameplay is crucial to their success.

Description

Elite is a futuristic, open ended space simulation, in which combat, exploration and trade all play a major role in making you become the deadliest, richest or most famous person in the galaxy.
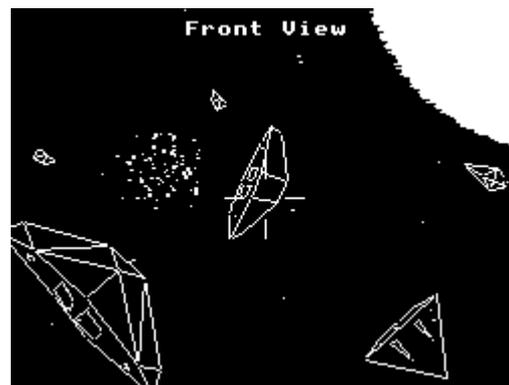
Premise

Elite is set in a fictional universe consisting of 8 different galaxies, each containing hundreds of solar systems with space stations, moons and planets to explore. The theme of the game is to achieve Elite status by amassing kills as you trade, explore or hunt your way through the galaxies. Elite is in essence a role playing space combat simulation, as your character progresses via combat and trade to achieve your goals. The game is aimed at people who love science fiction and would like the chance to be a pilot in space and decide their own destiny. The game setting and world is totally fictional, but with later sequels (Frontier: Elite 2), the game world successfully simulated our entire galaxy.
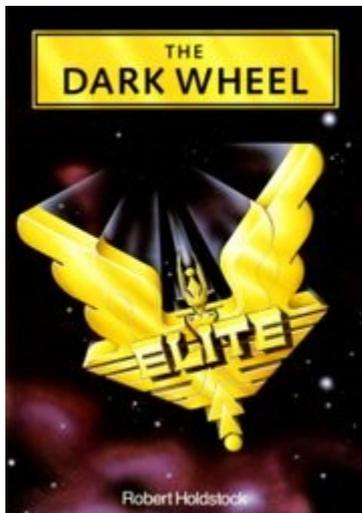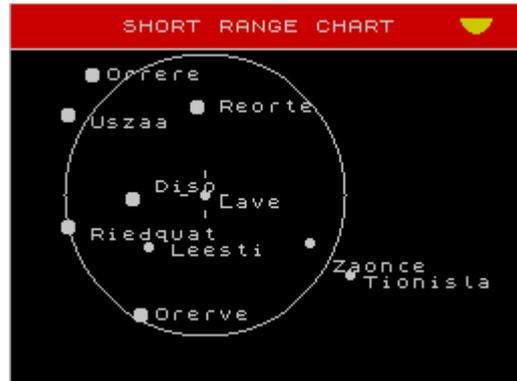
The game shipped with 'The Dark Wheel', a novella set in the Elite universe. The story tells of a young pilot, whose father was murdered by pirates. In trying to understand and revenge his father's death, he finds out about space combat, hyperspace and the truth about his father and his rank. This background story lays the groundwork for Commander Jameson who is the main character in the game.

Core Game Play

The aim of the game is for you to progress through the combat ratings and become an elite combateer. You're classified into rankings depending on how many kills you have acquired. The rankings are as follows: *Harmless* (0), *Mostly Harmless* (2), *Poor* (8), *Average* (24), *Above Average* (44), *Competent* (130), *Dangerous* (512), *Deadly* (2,560), and at last *ELITE* (6,400). The player does this by trading, doing missions or bounty hunting to get credits so he can upgrade his ship and amass more kills. This is no easy feat though; the player will face several increasingly difficult challenges.

For example, a simple trade to increase the player's credits would need to find a star system which sold goods at a lower price, and then selling it to a star system that will buy it for a higher price. This simple trade route would earn a few credits and take the player years to get enough to upgrade his ship. But for the more experienced player, trade routes can involve multiple star systems, with multiple goods and taking into account fuel costs to maximise profit and buying more cargo space, while still

fighting off the hordes of pirates trying to plunder him. But as the player ventures further from known space to increase his profit margins, he also increases his chance that he may encounter the deadly Thargoids. A highly evolved insectoid race with huge battle ships, bent on the destruction of the human race.

ITEM		AVERAGE PRICE/CR
Food	(Simple organic products, see below)	4.4 tonne
Textiles	(Unprocessed fabrics)	6.4 "
Radioactives	(Ores and by-products)	21.2 "
* Slaves	(Usually humanoid)	8.0 "
Liquor/Wines	(Exotic spirits from unearthy flora)	25.2 "
Luxuries	(Perfumes, Spices, Coffee)	91.2 "
* Narcotics	(Tobacco, Arcturan Megaweed)	114.8 "
Computers	(Intelligent machinery)	84.0 "
Machinery	(Factory and farm equipment)	56.4 "
Alloys	(Industrial Metals)	32.8 "
* Firearms	(Small-scale artillery, sidearms, etc)	70.4 "
Furs	(Includes leathers, Millennium Wompom Pelts)	56.0 "
Minerals	(Unrefined rock containing trace elements)	8.0 kg
Gold		37.2 kg
Platinum		65.2 kg
Gem-stones	(Includes jewelry)	16.4 g
Alien Items	(Artifacts, Weapons, etc)	27.0 tonne
* These items are defined as illegal by the Galactic Government, so trading in them is risky.		

This is only one way of increasing a player's credits though, as bounty hunting (tracking down known pirates) or doing missions (reconnaissance or assassination missions) are alternatives. This ranking system is all implemented into a combat system that allows the player to control his ship and fire lasers, missiles, bombs or even electro magnetic pulses to destroy enemy ships. As the player reaches the far ends of the galaxies and increases his combat ranking, pirate ships become more deadly. This forces the player to either upgrade his current equipment or buy a new and improved ship, to battle of his enemies and keep improving his own ranking.

Objectives, Goals and Victory Conditions

At the start of the game the player is given 100 credits and a lightly armoured trading ship, a Cobra Marl III. The main objective of the game is to increase your combat rating to Elite, but this is not a victory condition. In Elite there is no victory condition as the player sets his own goals within the game. These can range from becoming the richest person in the galaxy, or to explore every star system on the map. This is why Elite is so successful, as the player makes his own destiny and can choose to change it at any time during the game.

Rules and procedures

In any computer game rules are built into the programming which dictates what a player can and can't do. These rules are integral to the game and how the player can interact within the world. There are two rules within Elite that play major roles within the game. The first rule decides how far a player can travel through the galaxy. This is implemented by having a limited capacity of fuel on each ship. As the player travels he needs to replenish his fuel by docking at space-stations orbiting planets, so that he can travel to the next system. To travel through galaxies though another form of travel is needed, this is an extremely expensive one shot 'galactic hyperspace' which allows the player to travel to other galaxies. This rule is altered as the player progresses through the game though. As the player purchases new upgrades and ships, his capacity to hold more fuel is increased and so the player can travel further, before needing to refuel.

Another major rule is the limitations of purchasing goods and storing goods in a player's ship. This is implemented by only having a limited number of certain goods at a space station, and a limited cargo space on the player's ship. This rule is vital otherwise a player would be able to massive amounts of trading in limited time and earn millions of credits. This simple rule of limitation allows the economic system to be viable. This part of the game is also altered with equipment and ship upgrades which lead the cargo sizes being increased.

Formal Elements Objects and Assets

To play the game you need the disks that contain the game, and the system that runs it. But an interstellar map and a novellar are provided with the game. Both these items allow the player to plot routes and have a background story.
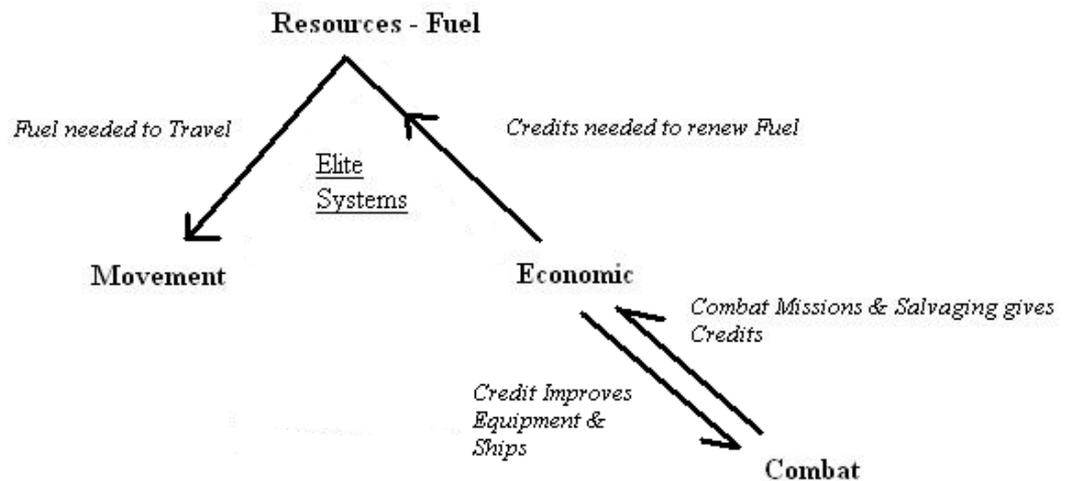
Systems

There are essentially 4 systems within Elite; Combat, Resources, Movement and Economic. They are all linked in different ways though. All 4 systems are inter-linked through Economic viability. To travel (Movement) the player needs fuel (Resource), which in turn needs credits to buy (Economic). These 3 systems are linked together and only work when used in conjunction with each other.

ITEM	TECH LEVEL	PRICE/CR
Fuel	always	varies
Missile	always	30
Large Cargo Bay	always	400
ECM System	2	600
Pulse Laser	3	400
Beam Laser	4	1000
Fuel Scoops	5	525
Escape Capsule	6	1000
Energy Bomb	7	900
Extra Energy Unit	8	1500
Docking Computers	9	1500
Galactic Hyperdrive	10	5000
Mining Lasers	10	800
Military Lasers	10	6000

But in space to survive you must be good at fighting off pirates (Combat), which is directly related to how you're good your ship is, which is dependant on how many credits you have (Economic). These two systems are linked in that Economic prowess is expressed in highly upgraded ships and weaponry which allow players to become impressive in Combat. The Combat system can also increase a player's credits via missions and salvaging of ships which leads to a two way link between both systems.

All four systems are utilised throughout the entirety of the game and directly linked via the Economic system. If one system was missing, then the game would not function. As you need Resources to be continually renewed to Move, you need credits (Economic) to renew your Resources.

Resources - Fuel

Fuel needed to Travel   *Credits needed to renew Fuel*

Elite
Systems

Movement   Economic

Combat Missions & Salvaging gives Credits

Credit Improves Equipment & Ships

Combat

Game Flow and Structure

As the game progresses the challenges a player will face become increasingly difficult. This is mainly because as the game advances, the player will face tougher and tougher opponents in combat, and have to plot more advanced trade routes spanning several star systems, with different goods, to achieve more profit to increase his combat prowess via upgrades. This type of progression forces players to improve or they will be held back and not be able to move onto new star systems or new galaxies. This progression of becoming a stronger player via equipment upgrades, which allows survival and eventual passage into new star systems, is the kind of progression we see in modern western role playing games.

As the player branches out further away from the starting star system, finding new ships or a new trade route become increasingly satisfying. This type of exploration and not knowing what you could find in the next system provide an increased immersion within the game. The player becomes embroiled within the world, trying to find the next best ship, or fighting his way into a new star system to deliver his newfound cargo. The ranking system also provides a way of rewarding the player throughout the game, and pushes the player to increase his combat prowess so he can get that next promotion.

The pace of the game is varied depending on how the player plays. If a player wanted to trade between safe systems then he could and the pace of the game would be quite slow and relaxed. Whereas if a player was a bounty hunter continually searching out pirates then the pace of the game is quite fast as fighting many ships and attacking space stations becomes quite hectic. This is why Elite is such a popular game, as the wide variety and differing pace of gameplay offer something for everyone.

As a whole the game flow and structure is dependant on the ranking system to show how the player is progressing, and how well the player thinks he is doing to achieving his own personal goals within the game. This type of sandbox world allows the player the freedom to enjoy any aspect of the game at his own choosing. This coupled with the development of the character by improving the player's ship and equipment offer one of the best computer games I have ever played.