



Elite – Revolutionary 3D space adventure sets new standards

Video transcript: clip from *Games Britannia*, Episode 3, first broadcast on BBC Four on 21 Dec 2009

BENJAMIN WOOLLEY:

I've come to Queen Mary's College in London to meet two of the original bedroom coders, Ian Bell and David Braben, architects of one of the most important British video-games ever made – Elite.

And these were the blueprints, just doodlings in a ring-binder. They may not look much, but in terms of the history of video games, they are like Leonardo's sketchbooks.

Look at this. This is an early design for the screen- is that right?

IAN BELL:

Yeah that's, I think, the first doodled design of what we thought the game might look like. It was the first game that put the player in 3D, that sort of taught the player how to move and think and navigate in 3D. Sort of raised the bar, in terms of ambitions for games.

DAVID BRABEN:

We expected you to take weeks to finish the game, not minutes. There was no score. There were no lives. And these were all the mantras, these were all the mechanics.

We were just breaking rules, one after the other after the other.

The original concept is sort of 3D ships fighting each other, but we just decided that would be too empty, too hollow an experience. There wouldn't be enough reason to want to continue.

BENJAMIN WOOLLEY:

The objectives of the game are basically simple. You were a trader, flying through space, buying and selling goods.

DAVID BRABEN:

Thatcher was in government, so I thought “Well, OK, it has to be money, doesn't it?” And the idea that you spend your money on other things to improve your spaceship.

BENJAMIN WOOLLEY:

But you were not alone in this world.

To get to the top and reach Elite status, you have to destroy space pirates, aliens, and sometimes even the police. To stand any chance of survival in this universe, I'll need help.

So I have recruited economist and Elite enthusiast Tim Miller to guide me through the game.

Despite the Etch-o-Sketch graphics and sound effects that a Casio watch would put to shame, the excitement at engaging in a bit of cosmic destruction is overwhelming.

It is exploding, a great cloud of particles.

Having dispatched some space pirates, our way is now clear to the space station and another integral part of the game.

Welcome to the world of intergalactic trading, as important as space combat in Elite.

Having set our sights on the agricultural planet Sutiku, I am wondering if it's worth trying to sell them computers. But then it occurs to us that what would make an absolute killing would be to take these farmers some illicit goods.

Let's pack some heat. Let's take...There we go, 23 tons of firearms. That'll warm things up.

Let's see what happens when we do that. So, we've done it. Now, what will the consequences be?

TIM MILLER:

Well, the consequences will be that when you choose which planet to go to, ehm, and we take off...

And we are in hyperspace there. The police will take an interest in us. And more's the point, the police are going for us at the moment. You can see there is a blue spot on the radar.

BENJAMIN WOOLLEY:

Suddenly, an innocent cargo hold full of computers is looking like a wiser move. The rozzers are all over us because of our choice to carry guns. Who would have seen that coming!

TIM MILLER:

I think we might be out of luck here.

BENJAMIN WOOLLEY:

Because we are running too low on energy? Oh, game over!

MUSIC LYRICS :

I fought the law and the law won

I fought the law and the. . .