Shatterball

notes for
v. 0.29

Shatterball & these notes
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Shatterball 0.29 should work on any Macintosh, beginning with the Mac+. The program must be run with System 7.0 or newer. It will run in color if the main monitor is set for color when the program is launched. (You may want to set the monitor to black and white if color performance seems slow or jerky.)

The Game Itself

Intro

Shatterball is essentially a 3D version of the ancient and venerable *Breakout*. The goal is to clear the field of bricks (denizens of the evil Rectangular Empire) by shattering them with the repeated hits of a small ball.

Startup

After we finish drawing all possible balls, you'll be presented with the stage selection screen. Just click on a number to play that stage.

Gameplay

A ball drops: grab it and throw toward the bricks. Keep the ball alive by blocking it when it comes toward you: it will shatter to dust if it hits the glass. Catch it, and throw again.

Hitting any key will pause the game.

Clicking on the play field, or hitting the spacebar, will resume play.

Bricks

Some bricks will shatter with a single hit, some require multiple hits, and some may simply not shatter. Some will be invisible until hit.

The Paddle

The hollow rectangle is your paddle: it follows the movements of your mouse. You will use it to block, catch, and throw the ball.

Blocking

Just move the paddle between the ball and the screen. A sweeping gesture is recommended.

Catching

Press and hold the mouse button, then block as usual. You don't have to time the mouseclick: just get the button down before the ball gets there. (If the paddle doesn't flash when you press the button, you are out of catches and this won't work. Watch for Zelvins.)

Throwing

Continue to hold the button down after a successful catch. As you move the paddle, the ball will be dragged along, lagging slightly. Stop dragging, then release the button to throw: the ball will fly.

This is the most difficult and subtle action of the game: Drag, stop, then release. Don't be discouraged: the skill and timing will come.

At first, don't even try to throw at specific targets (this can be difficult: carom shots are necessary in some gravities and spaces). Throw just to regulate the game speed, catch simply to end repetitive and unproductive patterns. Even later, when you have the skill, you'll still want to begin most stages like this; only targeting near the end to clear up the last few bricks.

Scoring and Champions

Time is the score: the shorter the better. The "Stage Champs" board shows the best time for each stage.

"Big Champs" are those who have completed the most stages, or have the shortest total time if the game was finished.

Zelvins

Hitting the light or dark rectangles on the rear of the court produces light or dark zelvins. Zelvins look like shimmering balls, but they're not exactly physical. For example, they travel right through the bricks that block the regular ball.

For another: catching a light zelvin gives you extra balls, a dark zelvin extra catches, and one that flashes back and forth gives you both. You don't need to hold the button down to catch the zelvins: just block them with the paddle. You'll know you got one when your paddle gets all shimmery for a second. You can even snare a zelvin while holding the ball after a catch: this may be the safest technique.

Balls and Catches

You have two resources to keep track of: balls and catches. The ease of zelvin generation varies from stage to stage, so stock up when you can for use in the sparser stages.

You get an extra catch when you use each new ball. Balls can thus be traded for catches by just letting the ball shatter (you do lose some time in this procedure, while the new ball is produced).

The Paddle Menu

"Set Paddle Size…", "Use Small Paddle…", and "Use Large Paddle" all set the size and shape of the paddle.

"Set Paddle Power" allows you to customize the throwing feel of the paddle. "**Drag**" sets the overall power of the paddle: the higher the setting, the greater the attraction for the ball (and the shorter the lag between ball and paddle). "**Throw**" sets the speed ratio at which the ball flies into the chamber. Here, you're looking at the paddle and ball from above, throwing while dragging to the right:

Saving and Restoring

Your current game progress and paddle settings are saved with your game when you select "Save Game" from the "File" menu. Select "Restore Game" the next time you play to retrieve the progress and settings.

Numbers

The Editor

Files

You can't edit the built-in stages: you'll have to open a file, or create a new one, to experiment with the editor. Select "Open…" or "New…" from the "File" menu. (The file called "Stages" contains copies of the built-in stages that you can edit.)

Once you have an editable file open, you can go back and forth between the play and editor screens using the "File" menu.

Editor

The upper right shows a single layer of the stage. (The shattered looking bricks are empty space.) Click here to place or remove bricks.

Below is the tool pallet: choose a shade to place bricks or the eraser to remove them. Double clicking on a shade allows you to set the number of hits that shade will take before shattering.

The arrow buttons to the left move you through the layers: layer 1 is closest to the front of the screen (& you).

The Tinker Menu

"Set Layers, Distances…" allows you to set the number of layers in the stage, and how far they are from you. Click in the upper portion to set or remove layers (represented by the gray stripes). Clicking in the lowest row sets the rear wall (the white stripe).

"Set Rows, Columns…" sets the grid on which the bricks are placed: this is the same for all layers in a stage.

"Set Gravity". Gravity is toward the directions stated unless the "invert" box is checked for a given axis. (Note that "inverted" gravity is not the same as normal gravity in the opposite direction.)

"Set Balls, Catches…" sets the number of each given to the player at the start of a new game.

The Zelvin Menu

The first three items allow you to set the range of speed for the zelvins. The rest of the menu concerns the rectangles in the rear of the court from which the zelvins are generated.

"Timing…" sets the initial delay before the rectangles appear, and how long the dark, light, and both together remain on the rear wall.

"Set Dark Rear Wall…" and "Set Light Rear Wall…" sets the range of sizes for the rectangles.

"Random Rear Wall" makes these sizes totally random.

Shatterball was conceived in 1988, developed sporadically, and abandoned in 1990, a failed experiment. It recently resurfaced (August 1993) in a general computer media housecleaning.

I fired it up: clearing the first couple of stages was more fun than I remembered. So I made a few small changes to make the software a little more presentable under current systems. Here it is, pretty much as it was.

Shatterball 0.29 is released as **Pleasureware**. You are free to play as much as you like, but a $5.00 (US) payment is requested if you begin to enjoy it. If you find yourself having a particularly good time, an optional $5.00 enthusiasm fee may be added. Reversing the traditional economies of addiction, we charge only for that first pleasurable dose: all subsequent play is once again free.

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