

## HOLLOW VOICE

These days, I spend a great deal of time—almost three hours a day—commuting to and from my new job. It's not so bad really; I make my way to Grand Central Terminal each morning, board the New Haven express, press "z" a whole bunch of times, and I'm there!

While "time passes" in this way, I strive to make the most of it. Since a number of you have told me how much you enjoy playing text adventures on your palmtops and laptops, I've been considering undertaking similar activities myself. I hesitate, though, because whenever I play IF games I like to scribble lots of handwritten notes and little maps that only I can decipher. Frankly, I'm not sure if I trust myself not to get overly absorbed and miss my stop on the train!

Can anyone tell me how other gameplaying commuters manage to juggle the laptop, the maps and sketches, a cup of coffee, and a briefcase at the same time? Do you play different games when you're on the road than you do at home, or do you travel with the same game that you just can't put down? Please write in to tell me your tips on the best games to play in transit.

### Contents:

Sneak Previews .....2

Letters .....3

Article: *Game Design at the Drawing Board*...5

News Briefs .....12

Summer Fiction:  
*The Adventurer* .....13

Game Reviews  
*MacWesleyan/PC University* .....16

Update to the  
*Infocom Bugs List* .....17

Survey .....20

Tales from the Code  
*Front: Designing a New Game Language, Not Just a Game* .....21

Spoiler Column .....23

What's on the Disk....24

### **The evolution of r.a.i-f**

As much as I enjoy reading the rec.arts.int-fiction newsgroup on Usenet, I really knew little to nothing about its origins or evolution. As a result, I was delighted when a friend who was skimming CompuServe pointed out a nonchalant comment included in a much larger post. It read, "I've read Usenet for many years—heck, I even started a group back in college (rec.arts.int-fiction)." The post's author was Adam Engst, author of several computer books and editor of "TidBits."

I checked in with Adam via email, and he readily confirmed he started r.a.i-f back in 1987 at Cornell, "when I was working full time in the dungeon of Sibley Hall as the full time operator of the computer room."

He adds, though, that the newsgroup has changed a lot from his original charter. "I majored in hypertextual fiction at Cornell, and the newsgroup was originally meant to be a place to discuss literary hypertext fiction, with a sidelight for the interactive fiction games from Infocom and the like. As time passed and I graduated, it moved more and more to the game side of things, although it looks like it's still being interesting." I'd definitely agree about that.

Until next issue, happy gaming!

**Eileen Mullin**  
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## Sneak Previews

Some "Sneak Preview" games languish in development for months after their announcement here, and some are quickly readied for release—before we even go to press! That's what happened with two of the originally planned "Sneak Preview" games for this issue—Gareth Rees' **Christminster** and Brendan Wyber's **Theatre**. Instead of crying over spilled bits, we'll simply have to urge you to try out both of these Inform games for yourself. You'll find our reviews of Theatre and Christminster in our September/October issue.

William Mullin's **Troll 2: Kill the King** is based on lyrics and characters created by Ronnie James Dio, the former singer for Black Sabbath. At the game's beginning, you're sitting around leafing through a copy of XYZZYnews (I like it already!) when suddenly a troll appears before you. You learn, as the story-line unfolds, that your soul has been stolen from you and it is your mission to discover how to get it back or face eternal damnation. On the path to retrieving your soul you'll interact with other characters and perform heroic deeds. Troll 2 is written for RAD (Mike DeSanto's REXX Adventure Developer for Warp).

I'm in the interesting position of previewing a game that's apparently set in the house in which I grew up (William is my brother) but alas, I don't have a computer that can run OS/2! :( Fellow Warp users (and Black Sabbath fans) can contact William at [bill@balrog.aecom.yu.edu](mailto:bill@balrog.aecom.yu.edu).

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## Classified Notices

Hey Hey Hey Productions seeks an HTML designer to adapt a game parser for a Web Page feature. Development project for the month of September, with possible extension through the year, involves working on an SF-based team with a writer, a graphic designer and others. Irreverent hipster attitude, creative mind a big plus. Please e-mail resumes (or just describe your lurid past). This should be fun. Contact: Jim Paul at [jimpaul@sirius.com](mailto:jimpaul@sirius.com).

Interactive Imaginations' Riddler Network is introducing new Web-based games with dynamic play, an interactive gamebar, and prizes for its 10K Charity Race, which begins August 24th and runs for 10 weeks. The 10K is an interactive race across the Web to benefit the Marion Foundation, which provides Internet access to homebound and disabled children. For more information, point your browser to <http://www.riddler.com>.

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To: XYZZYnews

Pinch me, I must be dreaming.  
There is hope after all!

I cannot describe how excited I am to have found your page! Years after Infocom vanished from Cambridge, Mass., I would feel these strange urges to replay all of my old Infocom titles on my dusty Apple //e. My memories of such cognitive and stimulating adventure games amazes me to this day — even in the wake of such well written graphic adventures (Ultima/Might&Magic/Wizardry...) Nothing compares to the lexical wizardry used by Blanc, Leibling, Meretzky and all the other greats. VERBOSE VERBOSE VERBOSE!!!

And I see that I am not alone after all! Please continue to maintain the XYZZYnews Home Page!

Thanks MUCH!

— Peter Torelli  
torep@rpi.edu

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To: XYZZYnews

Well it goes against my better judgement to write this note, as I've been trying very hard to avoid the temptation to tout my own vaporware. But Doug Atkinson's article "Character gender in Interactive Fiction" prompts me to mention that my upcoming game, HamsterWorld, features a female character as its protagonist. And the player has no choice in this matter, as the character's sex is an integral part of the (probably excessively) convoluted plot. It's been that way since I started writing the game back in early 1992. And, no, you don't play a hamster since the game hasn't got any.

I bring this up because I'm glad someone else has been bothered by the almost complete lack of female characters in adventure games. It so happens that I'm not female, but I'd be very alarmed if every single novel I read had a male or gender-neutral protagonist!

I find games in which I'm supposed to play bemuscled warriors or whatever particularly annoying. My choice of a female protagonist for my work was in large part a reaction to this sort of thing.

Of course I now run the risk of being told that my game features an unrealistic portrayal of a female character, which I think may be a small factor in explaining why so few male authors of I-F have written female characters. As Douglas Adams once said, "...I always get very nervous about writing (female characters) as I think I'll do something terribly wrong. You read other male accounts of women and you think, 'He's got them wrong!'"

— Neil K. Guy  
tela@tela.bc.ca

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Hi Eileen of the Featureless Cubicle!

XYZZYnews #3 is a riveting read. I liked Greg Soultanis' review of "The Gorreven Papers" so much I've just downloaded it from GMD (great article that one too). The command to restore or open saved games is "LOAD" (from within the game). By mistake I found myself reading the manual (from /programming/archetype) and came across LOAD, and remembered Greg's question. It is a nice change to try a different parser — it is certain-

ly very compact and ideal for my HP Palmtop as Archetype was developed on an 8088 processor. Hey, in #3 I even saw someone else who reads XYZZYnews on their HP Palmtop <G>.

Fantastic 'zine, Eileen. I read the letter about the fellow wishing his daughters liked text adventures. Maybe he should say XYZZY!!!! Bound to work <G>. I too wish there were a magic lozenge sometimes.

Looking forward to #4, 5, 6...

— Tony H.

100250.2347@compuserve.com

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To: XYZZYnews

In your editorial of issue #2 of XYZZYnews you wrote that you've heard from text adventure fans in 20 countries. Bet you haven't gotten a letter from Austria up 'til now!

I've been playing text adventures now for many years, but I didn't think that many other people still played some of them.

So I'm happy to have found proof that there are other people out there who still play games from Infocom, Level 9, Magnetic Scrolls...

You didn't mention that Demon's Tomb is also available for the Amiga. I have it, but my disk is corrupt. That always happens if I make no backup copy.

It's not easy for me to find other adventure-freaks with an Amiga here in Austria, so maybe you could help me and post a request on the Net/your mag/elsewhere, if only somebody could see it and answer me.

I'm 22, a student of the law; I have an Amiga, C-64 and I love to play all kinds of adventures, role playing games and strategy games. Maybe you

could help me to find someone with similar interests. You can, of course, give them my address. If you could help me, I would be very thankful.

I hope that your mag will continue to be released for a long time!

Yours sincerely,  
Wolfgang Ungar

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Hi Eileen,

I just received issue 3 of your magazine and wanted to say thank you for your impressive work. The interview with Volker Blasius was especially interesting, as were the discussions about women and text adventures. Not to mention the layout of the PDF version!

Things I would like to see in the upcoming issues:

- reviews of the recent games, especially those which have been

announced in the 'Sneak Previews' section,

- updated information about release dates of new games, if available,
- a regular covering of the major design tools, including information about the latest versions of compilers, libraries and manuals, new releases and work in progress
- more Tales from the Code Front
- a 'what's new in the if-archive' section.

Thanks for keeping the ancient word alive!

— Martin  
100106.2673@compuserve.com

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Dear Eileen,

Since you also mentioned [in *XYZZYnews* #3] the silence regarding the 'contest,' if I can manage to digest enough of

Inform I will be trying to get something together for the contest. I have this idea, you see... heheh. Anyhow, I think the contest is a great excuse to try and get something done. I mean, I don't really care about winning anything—it's just that I'd probably be too embarrassed to put something such as the thing I have mind out without the context of an excuse like a contest where it can get mashed in with other things. What I have in mind I think is somewhat original (as if anything is original) in that it's not exactly a game—although it does have objectives, of course — um, well maybe it is a game. Maybe I'll let others be the judge of whether it's a game or just totally annoying (or disgusting) or not. (-: I don't know. Maybe it's a game. Perhaps it's a psychological experiment. Possibly it's just junk. We shall see!

The only thing I am certain of is that if I had any sense at all after reading that interview then most definitely the title of anything I produce should have the word PORN in it somewhere!

— Tim Middleton  
tim.middleton@canrem.com

## Correction

In "Character Gender in Interactive Fiction" in *XYZZYnews* #3, we erred in saying "In *Save Princeton*, your roommates are male, so you probably are as well." As the game's prologue states, the game's opening location is a dorm room you've just wandered into, not your own room.

As the game's author, Jacob Weinstein, told us, "In fact, in implementing *Save Princeton*, I went out of my way to avoid any mention of the player's gender. If you hang around the jock long enough, you'll be told:

The jock starts to hit on you, and then realizes that he doesn't know whether or not you're female. 'Oh, well,' he says philosophically.

Offhand, I can't remember any other reference to gender in the game. Trying to kiss various characters usually results something along the lines of 'But you've only just met!' Trying to kiss the naked man in front of Tiger Inn results in something a little more interesting, but still gender-neutral.'

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To: *XYZZYnews*

Thank you for the new issue! It is extremely impressive, the standard of the material is very, very high. I especially liked the piece on gender in IF, and look forward to reading the second installment. Interviewing Volker Blasius was also a great idea; the Net is long on names and short on faces.

— Martin  
martin@skom.se

# Game Design

## at the Drawing Board

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by C.E. Forman

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**W**hat types of planning tools and techniques might prove useful to budding IF designers, especially those who have little or no programming experience? I recently posed the question to the inhabitants of a small yet extremely loyal and all-knowing sect, namely the rec.arts.int-fiction Usenet newsgroup. From them I received a small number of suggestions, enough to convince me that there was indeed an interest in such a subject, yet small enough to indicate that most authors either take design for granted, not giving it a great deal of conscious thought, or simply don't make much use of organized design methods, resorting to standard note-taking procedures for the entire design phase.

Please keep in mind that it's not necessary to use all these techniques for a single game layout. In fact, you may not even want to use any of them. Everything herein is offered to IF writers solely as a suggestion. There are no absolutely "right" or "wrong" ways to go about creating an adventure game, but the concepts I've listed here have the potential to greatly simplify the task. Or if nothing else, they can provide a good hearty laugh at my expense, since I'm currently making extensive use of several of them during my own design phase.

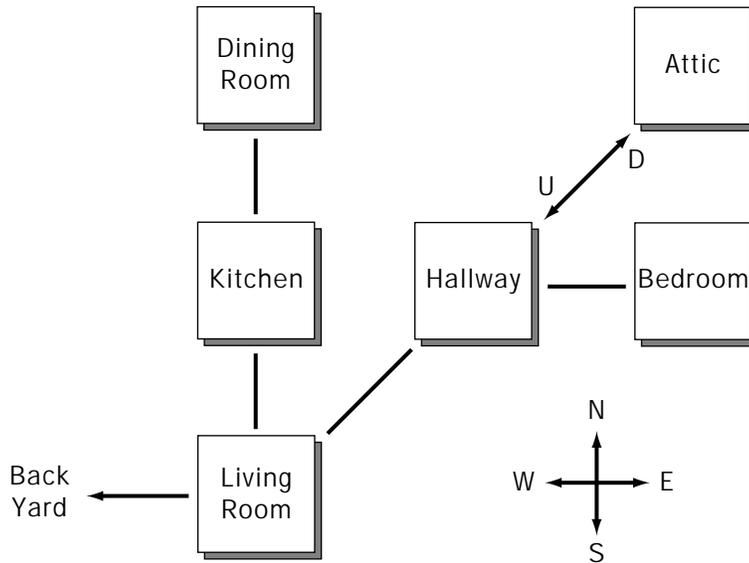
To help illustrate these ideas, I've included examples from existing games in the appropriate places. This article makes use of Infocom's "Zork I" and "Enchanter," two games that most players should be quite familiar with. Just in case you're not, I'll mention now that there *are* minor spoilers for "Zork I" and major spoilers for "Enchanter" in this article. You have been warned. Now, let's look at some of the more common design tools used:

### Maps

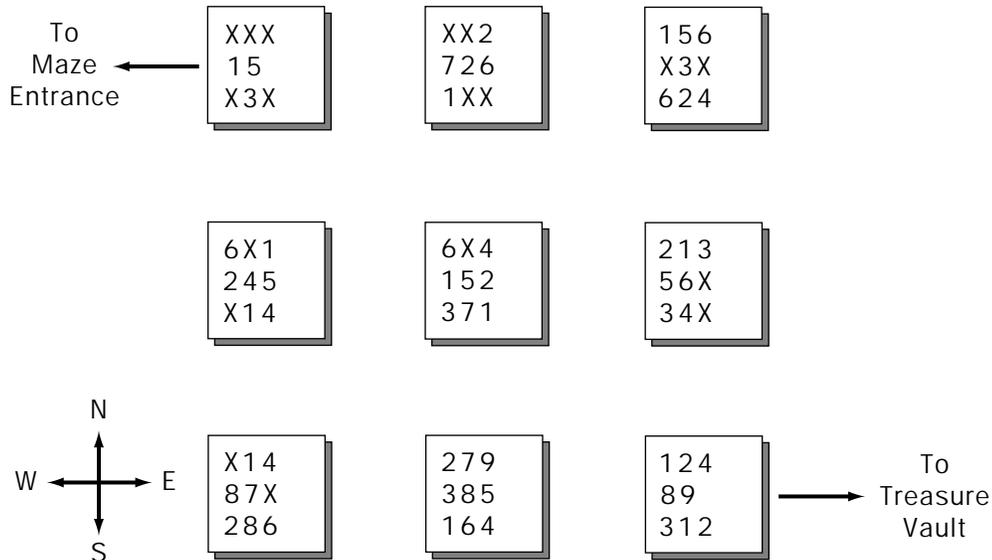
If you use only one sheet of paper to plan your entire game, you should use it to sketch out the game's maps. This may sound obvious, but I have in fact heard of authors who have kept their games' layouts entirely in their head, usually because the game is based on a place the author knows extremely well. A good, accurate game map is virtually indispensable, as it keeps an author from forgetting the layout of the game and deciding to place one puzzle in the same location as another. Further, it's far easier to alter or expand a map on paper should you discover that some aspect of the game just isn't going to work out with the existing layout.

Virtually all I-F designers (and players too, for that matter) seem to prefer drawing their maps in the style made famous by Infocom — that is, using boxes for each room, with lines connecting rooms in the appropriate directions. For more complex locations, such as mazes or puzzle areas with complicated layouts, using a special technique will probably help make the map easier to read.

Here's a simple map made by imitating Infocom's game maps...



...and this is my own personal technique for creating mazes. Each maze location is given a number, and the valid exits are labeled to correspond with the numbers of the rooms to which they lead. In the diagram below, the center number is the number of the room, and the numbers surrounding it represent the various exits. (An "X" represents a direction in which movement is blocked.) For example, room #1 has doors leading south to room #3 and east to room #5, while the western exit leaves the maze entirely. Notice also that some rooms have multiple exits going to the same room (room #4 has two exits to room #1), and that a few rooms have exits that lead back to themselves (rooms #2, #4, and #7).



## Game Walkthrough

A game walkthrough is a list of all the steps necessary to solve the game. This can be as detailed or as brief as you want, as shown in the example from “Zork I” below. Often the game may not have fully taken shape, but the gaps in a simple walkthrough can easily be filled in as you go along. Although they’re impractical in most cases, extremely detailed walkthroughs, which even go so far as to include the necessary directional moves (N, S, E, W, etc.), can save a lot of headaches when you’re dealing with puzzles that need to be solved within a specified number of turns.

You can write out a walkthrough of the game in as few..

```
GET LEAFLET FROM MAILBOX
ENTER HOUSE THROUGH WINDOW
GET LANTERN AND SWORD
GET ROPE AND KNIFE
MOVE RUG
OPEN TRAPDOOR AND ENTER CELLAR
```

...or as many individual steps as you want.

```
OPEN MAILBOX
GET LEAFLET
SOUTHEAST
NORTHEAST
OPEN WINDOW
ENTER HOUSE
WEST
GET LANTERN
GET SWORD
EAST
TURN ON LANTERN
UP
GET ROPE
GET KNIFE
DOWN
WEST
MOVE RUG
OPEN TRAPDOOR
DOWN
```

## Scoring List

You may find it helpful to keep a record of all points awarded in the game, as well as how to obtain them. This sheet may be little more than a simplified walkthrough, listing only the actions which earn the player points, or it may show how each point-giving action is broken down into its individual steps. The example below, a small portion of the scoring from Infocom’s “Enchanter,” illustrates both methods:

You can simply list the points in order from beginning to end...

```
OBTAIN KULCAD SCROLL -- 25
FIND OZMOO SCROLL -- 25
SURVIVE SACRIFICE -- 35
```

...or you can also include the individual steps leading up to the actual scoring itself.

```
OBTAIN KULCAD SCROLL -- 25
* CAST NITFOL ON TURTLE
* LEAD TURTLE TO ENGINE ROOM
* CAST EXEX ON TURTLE
* COMMAND TURTLE TO GET SCROLL
FIND OZMOO SCROLL -- 25
* ENTER GALLERY WITHOUT LIGHT
* REMOVE LIGHTED PORTRAIT
SURVIVE SACRIFICE -- 35
* MEMORIZE OZMOO SPELL
* ENTER TEMPLE & GET CAPTURED
* CAST OZMOO ON YOURSELF
```

After any changes have been made to the scoring system, it's easy to update the maximum score. Eliminating scoring problems, such as allowing players to earn more than the maximum, or making it impossible for the maximum to be achieved, is the primary goal of a scoring list. It also helps the designer to recognize situations where he or she is faced with optional puzzles (that is, puzzles that don't really have to be solved to win), puzzles with multiple valid solutions, and puzzles that can be solved repeatedly in the same game session.

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## Object and Item Specifications

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These are the details and descriptions that hold the game together. The goals here are to keep track of how things in the game change with the passage of time and completion of certain events in the game, and how the objects, characters, and items react when used in conjunction with one another. Most items won't behave in any special way, but the ones that do should be noted. Trying to think of strange ways to use things together will help flesh out the game, and should give you plenty of ideas for burying amusing text for players to discover.

Here are the specifications for the first room in "Zork I." (In this context, I use "object" when referring to something in the room that cannot be taken by the player. "Item" refers to something that can.)

REGION: Above Ground

ROOM: West of House

"You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door."

EXITS:

North, Northeast to "North of House"

South, Southeast to "South of House"

West to "Forest"

East -- "The door is boarded and you can't remove the boards."

OBJECTS:

House -- No initial description.

Examine -- "The house is a beautiful colonial house which is painted white. It is clear that the owners must have been extremely wealthy."

Enter -- "I can't see how to get in from here."

Front Door -- No initial description.

Open -- "The door cannot be opened."

Small Mailbox -- "There is a small mailbox here."

Can be opened and closed, acts as a container.

ITEMS:

Leaflet -- Inside small mailbox.

Read/ -- "WELCOME TO ZORK!"

Examine ZORK is a game of adventure, danger, and low cunning. In it you will explore some of the most amazing

territory ever seen by mortals. No  
computer should be without one!"  
Can be burned and cut.

ROOM: North of House

You might also find it helpful to note down any common synonyms for the people, places, and things in your game.

Your specs shouldn't have to be anywhere near as detailed as the example I've given above, since the more user-friendly IF languages automatically take care of the tiny details for you. But forcing yourself to look at these details can go a long way toward learning good design.

Further, if you're using a pre-written parser system, such as TADS, AGT, or Inform, you'll pretty much have the entire code written out for you when you're done. I personally prefer to scribble out a crude list on paper and then type the specifications into an ASCII (text) file. The time saved by being able to append the file to your existing game code (which at this point would probably contain only the room descriptions and possibly some grammar extensions) is a tremendous advantage. Translating the example above into Inform or TADS could be accomplished in a matter of seconds.

Some authors may prefer to simply type the details of their objects and items directly into the game code. That's fine too, but I personally like the other approach, since it allows me to concentrate on the writing, which is what interactive fiction is really all about. By appending the text to your source code, you don't have to worry about programming at all until the story is completely finished. In my humble opinion, that's a good thing.

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## Transcript

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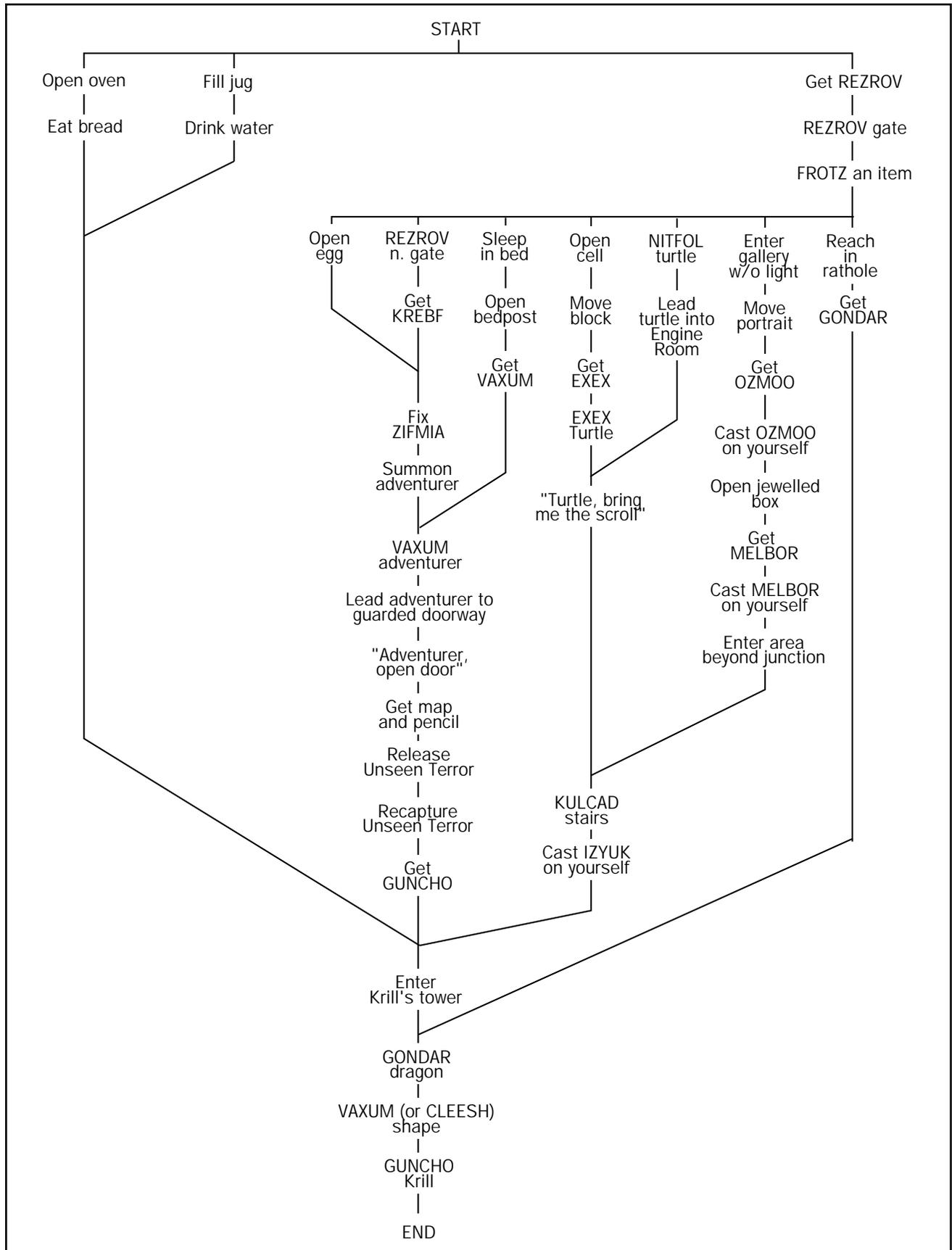
Anyone familiar with Infocom will likely understand what I mean by a transcript. Basically, it's an example of what the game will look like when it's being played. Transcripts include not only what the game will print on the screen, but also the player's commands that cause the various responses. I only write a transcript when I'm having trouble getting the story started, or if I need to visualize how a complex puzzle should work. Like object and item specs, anything you write into a transcript will mean less time spent coding later.

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## Puzzle Structure Chart

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This is my own personal favorite design tool, but unfortunately it's also the most difficult for me to describe in words. A puzzle structure chart is much like a hierarchy diagram which lists the necessary puzzles in an adventure game, from beginning to end, and indicates what must be done before each puzzle can be solved. Confused? Maybe it'll become clearer if you look at the example below. This is the complete puzzle structure chart for Infocom's "Enchanter" (and just in case you overlooked the first warning, the following diagram contains some really big-time spoilers):



Okay, let's start at the top of the chart and work downwards. At the start of "Enchanter," there are really only three significant tasks for the player to accomplish—opening the oven to find the bread, filling the jug with water, and getting the REZROV spell. The three separate paths leading off from "START" reflect this.

Note also that only one of these paths, finding the REZROV spell, really opens the doorway to further adventure. Eating and drinking are merely necessary to keep the player alive long enough to reach the end. So the game starts out almost purely linear, requiring players to find the spell, use it to enter the castle, and use the FROTZ spell to create a light, before anything else can be accomplished. Once the player gets past these first few minor obstacles, however, the scope of the puzzles reaches its widest point. The game is now quite non-linear, with seven distinct paths that players are able to follow.

As an example, let's assume that the player's first task is to open the jewelled egg and obtain the shredded ZIFMIA scroll inside. Let us assume that the player then proceeds to cast the REZROV spell on the castle's rusted north gate in order to gain access to the forest beyond, where the scroll inscribed with the KREBF spell is located. The player now has the KREBF spell and the shredded ZIFMIA scroll itself, both of which are necessary in order for the shredded scroll to be fixed. So the two initially separate paths merge into one, and the KREBF spell can now be used to obtain the ZIFMIA spell, which in turn can be used to summon the wandering adventurer.

In a puzzle structure chart of this nature, when a path splits into two or more separate paths, this indicates that there is more than one puzzle for the player to solve at that particular point in the game. When two (or more) paths merge into one, however, it indicates that *both* paths must be completely traversed before the player can continue. You couldn't obtain the ZIFMIA spell without the KREBF spell, nor could you get ZIFMIA if you didn't have the shredded scroll on which it is written in the first place. The puzzles leading up to the acquisition of both items must be solved before the two items can be used together to solve a third puzzle.

And what about optional puzzles, and puzzles with more than one solution? Well, to keep the above example less cluttered, I didn't include the CLEESH spell, since it isn't essential to victory. I did make a note that it could be used in place of VAXUM when confronting the shape in the endgame. The discovery of the CLEESH spell could have been inserted on a separate path branching off of the path in which the player enters the forest and finds the KREBF scroll, and later tied into the endgame.

With a puzzle structure chart, however, neither of these are absolutely necessary. A puzzle structure chart allows the designer to explore a game's linearity, to determine if it's too rigid or too vast and overwhelming. It lets a designer see if changes in the arrangement of the game's puzzles need to be made, and if so, where. Puzzle structure charts also eliminate circular logic in puzzles, that is, puzzle A needing an item that can only be obtained by solving puzzle B, which in turn can only be solved with an item from puzzle A. If such a situation exists, it will reveal itself in a puzzle structure chart.

The last important step involves deciding which techniques to use in combination with each other. It's really up to your own personal preference. I prefer puzzle structure charts, combined with a concise scoring list, when I'm designing on paper. As the game begins to take shape, I like to sit down and type out specifications for objects, items, and characters. And, of course, a good map is always put to use.

## AOL Joins Federation, but the Sailing Isn't All Smooth

This June, AOL members got their first taste of a text-based, multi-player RPG with the beta launch of "Federation."

A MUD-like scenario already familiar to many Internetters (on GENie, for example, the game has flourished for years), Federation takes place in a futuristic imbroglio of interstellar trade and politics. As players sign on, their first tasks are to bribe an official to obtain a ship permit and then go into debt to purchase a spaceship. Players then need to hire themselves out for jobs—hauling cargo, for example—to pay off their creditors.

By completing a number of such jobs, players can earn enough Imperial Groats (the game's currency) to rise in rank. As players climb the virtual social ladder, they abandon cargo hauls for trading on the galactic exchanges. Next come simulations where players build factories to produce their own goods, then create and oversee their own planets. The ultimate rank is that of a politically suave Duke overseeing a group of planets.

The AOL version of this cyber-capitalistic game combines text-based chat gaming with libraries of maps and hint files, and lessons in politics, economics, and player cooperation. Federation members can create elaborate personas of either gender, complete with detailed descriptions that will be incomprehensible to nonplayers. Socializing and networking with fellow gamers can have good payoffs for wheeling and dealing for your mutual benefit.

There's a demonstrable interest in Federation, perhaps in the RPG genre as a whole, on AOL—at last count, there were over 4,000 downloads of the Federation FAQ since late May. But the Federation forum has already undergone some drastic revisions in its short tenure on AOL. If the message boards are any indication, the enthusiasm of many players is being tempered by frustration over interactions

**Ed. note:** *If you have any information about noteworthy or newsworthy happenings in the interactive fiction community, please pass it on to us at [eileen@interport.net](mailto:eileen@interport.net). We're always interested in releases of new versions of design tools, innovations in new games or other new software, and related Web sites or BBSes.*

with some of the game "hosts" and confusion over some of the game's reorganization, rule changes, and missing player profiles. For example, game hosts may log on as Federation hosts, but they may also log on in character and as such be indistinguishable from other players. New players griped that these game hosts were unfairly altering the prime directive in a sense, by using their knowledge of answers to puzzles to affect other players' performance.

But the game's organizers appear to be making efforts to encourage more newbies to join the game by soliciting experienced players to act as "greeters" and by posting an extensive FAQ and messages for "newbods." The Federation game is still in beta, so hopefully an ironed-out version that makes it to an official release will help lessen the learning curve for AOL members. ☒

— Greg Saultanis

## July/August Top 10 Picks for IF on the World Wide Web

### Encyclopedia Frobozica, hypertext version

<http://www.spies.com/harrison/frobozz.html>

### Night — A graphical, interactive murder mystery

<http://www.compulink.co.uk/arc/night/night.htm>

### Adventure (Web interface by Yuval Fisher)

<http://inls.ucsd.edu/y-bin/adventure>

### Ron's IF Page

<http://www.webcom.com/~rwhe/if-links.html>

### Nexor's Game/Adventure Page

<http://pubweb.nexor.co.uk/public/mac/archive/data/game/adventure/index.html>

### MURC, IRC's Answer to MUDs

<http://www2.novagate.com/murc/>

### Infocom Homepage (by Peter Scheyen)

<http://www.csd.uwo.ca/~pete/Infocom/>

### The BoReD Page

<http://www.rain.org/~doctorx/bored>

### The Unending Addventure

<http://www.addventure.com/addventure/game2/>

### Interactive Media Theory Seminar

<http://www-leland.stanford.edu/~xinwei/pub/img/img.html>

# The Adventurer

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by Tobias Lehtipalo (b94tle@student.tdb.uu.se)

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Previously published in the last two issues (1990:5 & 1991:1) of the now defunct *Aventyr*, the fanzine of the one-time Swedish Interactive Fiction Society, *Svenska Aventyrsklubben*, SAK. Translated from Swedish by Martin Rundkvist (martin@skom.se).

**L**ight shone weakly through the little window. Among the shadows inside you could see a man who had collapsed over his keyboard. The monitor glow flickered in front of him. The lower edge of the display said “You die of starvation. Do you want to try again?”

Slowly the man at the computer started to move as the weak light from the dusty window grew stronger. He laboriously got up, felt an increasing hunger. Where was he? Wait, he was in a desert. He could remember seeing a nasty lizard somewhere. He looked around and spotted the bed; no, he must be wrong.

He scanned his surroundings in confusion. Wait, now he knew where he was. How could he have missed it. Naturally he was in Cleveland on a quest for a 1934 Ford headlight, or...

He had to find food, but how? He started opening the window with a can opener, but realized that it was easier without it. He picked up the bedsheets and tied them into a long rope. He handed one end to his wife (who had just then walked in with a breakfast tray) and then swung out the window. Heedless of his wife's exclamations, he climbed the 75 centimeters to the ground.

Now he was at the driveway of a house. If he went north, he would come to a road. To the east was a garden, but that way was blocked by a fence. As a seasoned adventurer he immediately started examining the place carefully even though it seemed strangely familiar. In the flower bed he found a number of tulips, and he pocketed one in case of emergency.

The adventurer went north and found himself at a road which led away in two directions: east and west. He tried east and wandered slowly along the road along rows of houses. Suddenly a pseudo-intelligent being approached him. After a quick examination he found that the creature had a baby carriage. He was now in a situation critical to the success of his mission. Did he need a baby carriage? The answer he arrived at was the only natural one for a real adventurer: dunno! He tried giving the tulip to the creature, which frightened it and caused it to run away down the street.

The man did not let this bother him but simply picked up the slightly battered tulip and continued on his way. One by one he examined a manhole, a streetlamp and a mailbox. In the mailbox he found a letter, but was interrupted by the addressee before he had read more than half of it. It was signed “Kronofogden”<sup>1</sup>, from which he deduced that there must be a castle in the vicinity. He continued hurriedly to evade the letter recipient who did not like people reading his mail as well as two others in white smocks who appeared out of nowhere.

In front of him loomed the castle. Shining letters right at the middle spelled I.C.A.<sup>2</sup> When he approached the doors they parted almost without a sound and he entered an enormous hall.

<sup>1</sup> “Kronofogden”—literally Royal Bailiff, in modern Swedish denoting an official responsible for the collection of debts.

<sup>2</sup> I.C.A.—a Swedish grocery store chain.

Slowly, hesitantly, he started walking across the glossy floor. Long rows of shelves towered above him on both sides and restricted his movements. The shelves were filled with multi-colored cans bearing various inscriptions. He took a can and examined it. It read "tomato paste," followed by a couple of magic symbols consisting of alternating white and black lines. He took the rest of the cans down from the shelf, but found only dust behind them so he continued walking. He spotted and grabbed a large bottle filled with a black liquid that might come in handy if he got thirsty. The label said "soy sauce."

Finally he saw the exit. All that barred his way was a lady sitting at a long table where something moved. He tried passing her when suddenly she yelled "Stop! Don't you try sneaking out without paying!" and pointed at the bottle in his hand.

Now he had to find out what the lady wanted. He took inventory of his belongings and decided that he could part with the tulip. No good. The angry red flush increasing in the lady's face and her penetrating stare made him drop the bottle and withdraw hastily.

He had the time however to put a coin in a machine at the exit, which gave him a piece of paper. The number was probably a combination for a safe, he was certain...

—

A statue stood at the middle of the marketplace. Like so many others, the statue depicted a horseman with sword and was covered with guano. Below it stood a man acting strangely. Sweat trickled down his forehead as he tried to turn the statue to point its arm in some other direction.

Finally he gave up and sat down, winded and frustrated, on the plinth. He looked around with empty gaze. He saw some houses, a church, a fountain and — aha — a black hole.

An orange-dressed workman raised his eyebrows in consternation as he saw our friend dive into the manhole and disappear into the darkness.

Carefully the adventurer made his way along the tunnel. Some half-forgotten memory made him expect to find an entrance to the palace of the Sultan or something along those lines. At intervals he yelled "kweepa," jumped a bit, and clapped his hands. These were all simple security measures. Now and then he could hear little splashes and frightened rats swimming away.

Suddenly a thin line of light from a hatch high above him appeared. He opened the hatch and climbed up, but to his disappointment found himself in a back-yard. A board fence ran between two large houses to the north and an imposing building stood to the south. The door of the building was open, but the adventurer naturally climbed through a window that stood slightly ajar.

Shelf after shelf of books filled the room from floor to ceiling. The adventurer carefully pulled out a book at random, but nothing happened. He started systematically to pull out the rest of the books from the shelf. When he got out the book "Martin's Desserts," a title that reminded him of something, something finally happened. A voice started to speak. He turned to see if someone was standing behind him, but did not see anyone. After a moment, however, he realized that he was facing the same way as before. When he turned again, slower this time, he saw that the voice belonged to a bespectacled man who continued:

— May I help you?

The adventurer considered the question and said:

— Librarian, give me small yellow card.

— I think that could be arranged, said the man, if you would please tell me your social security number, name and address.

The adventurer considered this for a while and then took a piece of paper out of his pocket.

— 4326, he said hopefully.

— I'm sure there must be more figures, smiled the man with the glasses.

Our friend then decided to concentrate on other problems. To the librarian's great surprise, he left the room.

The room he entered was even larger than the previous one. The sun shone through a glass dome over some chairs surrounded by plants. Here, too, were books in abundance. He took out "Kite-Flying 101," "How to Spell-Bind Your Listeners" and a set of headphones from a boy who had fallen asleep in one of the chairs.

He stopped for a moment and read a magic word on a green-glowing sign at the door. Before fleeing from the little boy who threatened him with his stick, and the man in glasses who had discovered all the books he had pulled down, he managed to snare the green "exit" sign.

The sun was shining from a clear blue sky. The adventurer wandered aimlessly through deserted streets. He should have drawn a map. He found an abandoned house and decided to investigate it. He entered the door which was adorned with posters in some foreign language. When he entered the large hall that filled part of the house the floor suddenly collapsed, and he fell into the basement.

In the dim light he saw old chairs, a bicycle, a ladder, another bicycle, two couches, an easy chair, an electrical outlet, a rat and a rusty food processor. But he saw no readily apparent exit. When he examined the room he found that the door was behind the two couches, one of the bicycles and the rat. He took inventory of what he had at hand and considered the situation.

After a while he got an idea. It was all really ridiculously simple: all he had to do was to connect the "exit" sign to the outlet so the light would come on. Then he could just walk out.

Sadly, his logical solution did not work. No door appeared. Apparently he had to try some other, more far-fetched solution, like raising the ladder to the hole and climbing out. Back on the street, slightly annoyed that the bicycles were too large to get through the hole, he went toward a canal he could barely make out between the houses.

A boat was bobbing at the quay. Ducks were hungrily devouring half-eaten cheese sandwiches. The boat's controls consisted of a mass of levers and gauges, but after a couple of hours our friend got it running and steered away slowly along the western quay.

About 10 meters forward the canal took a sharp turn. Instinctively he increased his speed as he approached the turn. He flew, hair fluttering, through the curve and landed in a kitchen that seemed strangely familiar. He tied the boat to the kitchen table and threw out some debris through the hole in the wall.

Apparently he had been here before. A corridor led to a room where his wife was standing. She held a rope made of bed sheets tied together and seemed surprised. He sat down at a flickering monitor that said:

What do you want to do now?

> i

You have:

A piece of paper with the figures 4326, a book, a book, a set of head-phones and a green electric sign.

# MacWesleyan/ PC University

Parser: TADS

Author: Neil deMause (neild@echonyc.com)

Availability: ftp.gmd.de; America Online

Supports: TADS ports

As a result of the popularity of interactive fiction among college students, a sizable number of games of this type have been set at various universities. Let's face it, authors often like to write about what they know best. In fact, the "college adventure" could easily be considered a distinct genre within the category of the text adventure.

Like any genre, similarities among this type of game are easily identified. For the most part, plots tend to be rather simplified, frequently involving the collection of various objects or items in order to complete a college-related goal, such as graduation or the survival of finals week. MacWesleyan (or PC University, if you're playing the PC version), is no different. Set at Wesleyan University in Middletown, Connecticut, MacWesleyan/PC University appears to be geared toward players whose skills range from beginner to intermediate. Aside from their names and the systems on which they run, the two games are identical.

In MW/PCU, your goal is to obtain six signatures on your Student Identification Form. The list of necessary appellations includes not only your faculty advisor, department chair, and dean, but also the autographs of the presidents of both Wesleyan and the United States! To top it all off, you must sign the form yourself, which brings about a whole new set of puzzles to be conquered. It's all quite amusingly goofy, and makes for a pleasant adventure that should keep even experienced players occupied for several days. As with all games set at universities, there is plenty of college history and some inside jokes, but MW/PCU can easily be solved without extensive knowledge of Wesleyan University.

Be observant — when you're playing MW/PCU, you have to pay close attention, since an overlooked detail can easily halt your progress for hours, or even put the game into an unsolvable state in a few rare cases. If you find yourself stuck, it's more than likely that you missed something which could have been

uncovered by a more thorough investigation of your surroundings. Basic adventuring skills, such as examining everything you come across, and reading the room descriptions carefully, are crucial to your success in MW/PCU, but to the game's credit, it doesn't complicate the matter with excessive verbosity. Players aren't forced to sift through a ton of useless text to discover what they need to know.

The puzzles, for the most part, are rather original, but they are not overly difficult once you discover the necessary items, and I even ended up accidentally solving a few of them without really trying. The majority of them are relatively straightforward, involving simple interactions with characters and objects. Others, such as the telescope and the infamous 5,000 mailboxes (see *XYZZYnews* #1), are quite impressive from a coding standpoint, but will probably not astound players unfamiliar with I-F design and parser writing. Virtually all the game's situations are humorous. As you attempt to complete your Student Identification Form, you'll participate in a "transliterary consciousness projection experiment," engage in a battle of wits with a reckless Domino's Pizza delivery guy, and visit with God (who resides in a blue bus in one of the Wesleyan parking lots). It all makes for a fun adventure.

The parser, on the other hand, can be a real pain sometimes, particularly with inventory management. While the game recognized almost everything I thought to try, a lot of puzzles simply cannot be solved unless the object(s) required to solve them are being carried in the player's hands. In order to carry more items, though, I frequently resorted to stuffing the smaller ones inside my character's jacket pocket. Unfortunately, when the time came to use certain items (the dollar bill in particular), I received only error messages, with no indication that taking them out of the pocket might help. It took some serious trial-and-error on my part to figure this out, so some kind of modification to the inventory recognition system is definitely necessary, especially when one realizes that other items (such as the candle) can be used regardless of where the player carries them.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed playing MW/PCU a lot. It's lighthearted, charismatic, and just challenging enough to hold an experienced player's interest while at the same time catering to newcomers. And besides, the author is distributing it as freeware. You can't beat that.

— C.E. Forman

# (yet Another) Infocom Bugs List Update...

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Compiled by C.E. Forman and Eileen Mullin

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*Just when we thought we'd exhausted the subject in "Update to the Infocom Bugs List" in XYZZYnews #3, a few more came trickling in. Thanks, again, to the contributors (listed below) who took the time to help us compile an even more thorough list of Infocom game glitches.*

## The Lurking Horror

- If you ask the hacker about the keyring or a single key, the response goes like this: "I've accumulated a few keys over the years. I'm a licensed locksmith, which helps. I can get into any room at Tech.' He pulls the keyring out on its chain, and *shows off a key you hadn't noticed before.*" This happens every time you repeat the question, even if you already do know about the master key.
- Give the Funny Bones to the hacker and he will swallow them. However, the Bones remain in your inventory, closed and untouched.
- You are able to go through the login procedure on the PC more than once. If you enter the wrong values while the PC is already up and running, the response goes as usual: "Invalid Login, Login Please." "x pc," on the other hand, shows that the computer still executes its current task.
- The behavior of the PC after your returning from the 'stone-scene' isn't consistent. The command "x screen" produces the reasonable reply "There's nothing recognizable on the screen," but "x pc" still answers "On the screen you see a menu box." In addition, the help key doesn't recognize that the pc has gone west and works as before.
- If you let the hacker take over your chair during the debugging sequence, then go south and return north to the terminal room, the hacker seems to be stuck to the plastic chair. The game, however, describes him as sitting on his own office chair.

— Martin Braun

## Enchanter

- If the turtle or adventurer encounters the hideous shape that haunts the Banquet Hall and Library, the player receives notice of their fate, as if it was his own.

— Graeme Cree

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## Moonmist

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- Bolitho will always ask if you are the famous young detective on a certain turn, even if he has already told you so on a previous turn, or even the same turn! As a result, this odd exchange can be generated:

>ASK BOLITHO ABOUT ME

"You're [your name], the famous young detective. Bolitho coughs diffidently, and asks [your name]? Am I right in assuming that you are the well-known young American detective?"

— Graeme Cree

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## Seastalker

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- If you try to use the words RESTART, RESTORE, VERSION, or \$VERIFY as either your first or last name, the program will regard them as commands, not names, and react accordingly. This can be very interesting with VERSION, since the player's name is a part of the game's title. If you try to use VERSION as your last name (i.e. JOE VERSION), the output from the version command will list the game's title as "SEASTALKER: JOE --- AND THE ULTRAMARINE BIOCEPTOR." If you try to use VERSION as your first name, the title is "SEASTALKER: --- --- AND THE ULTRAMARINE BIOCEPTOR."

— Graeme Cree

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## Sorcerer

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- Belboz's journal can be opened with the key, but cannot be closed. If you try, you get a message saying "It's already open." This was fixed by the LTO11 version.
- In early versions, you could open the chest with a Rezrov spell, although you would fail to gain points by doing so, and thus be unable to finish with a perfect score. Also, in some versions, Spell books were ruined by water, but scrolls were not.

— Graeme Cree

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## Starcross

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- In some versions, you can turn off the beam of energy in the Laboratory by typing "BEAM, OUT," generating the reply "The beam leaves the room."
- The bunk on the Starcross is not openable, yet if you try to PUT THE TAPE LIBRARY IN THE BUNK, you will get the response "The bunk isn't open."

— Graeme Cree

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## Suspended

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- Have Waldo get the four-inch cable and be incapacitated. Have Poet drag him to Alpha Repair to be fixed, and send them back to the Primary Channel, this time letting Waldo get zapped. If Poet LOOKs, he will see a non-functional Waldo in the room, while Waldo will see a non-functional Poet.

— Graeme Cree

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## Zork I

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- The container bug with the sack and bottle have indeed been fixed in the Solid Gold Version. However, there is another container bug that exists even there. If you put the coffin in the raft, then the raft in the coffin, you will get a message saying that there is no room. However if you put the raft in the coffin first, THEN the coffin in the raft, the game will crash on the next turn.
- In early versions, the command "HIT MIRROR WITH SWORD" will generate responses like "The mirror parries," or "The mirror dies in a cloud of sinister black fog."
- In early versions, the command "GIVE AXE TO TROLL" will generate a response like:  

"The troll accepts your gift, and not having the most discriminating taste, eats it.

The troll, disarmed, is cowering and begging for forgiveness in the guttural language of the trolls."
- In early versions, if you give the troll to himself, he eats himself and disappears (though he still bars you from leaving the room).
- In early versions, if you give the troll to the thief, the thief puts the troll in his bag. When the thief is killed, the troll appears and blocks all exits.

— Graeme Cree

- In the old version of Zork I that I played, if you knock the thief unconscious and try to take his stiletto, the game would say that it was "red hot" and you drop it immediately — obviously some sort of protective magic. If, like me, you insisted on trying to be merciful, you *could* "PUT STILETTO IN SACK" (for example) and it would let you. When the thief wakes up, though, he continues to attack you with the stiletto!

— B.J. Parker

## Help us "X READERSHIP"

We're conducting the first of a series of regularly scheduled comprehensive surveys of the IF-playing population. Here's your chance to help us obtain a more complete profile of who's playing text adventures, what games and themes are the most popular, and what you hope to see more of in the future.

### Demographics:

1. What is your age and gender? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What country do you live in? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Which of the following best describes your occupation:
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Professional/technical
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Manager/executive
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Clerical/sales
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Government/military
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Retired
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Unemployed
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Homemaker
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Academic/student
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Equipment:

4. On which platform(s) do you play computer games?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Acorn
  - \_\_\_\_\_ DOS
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Macintosh OS
  - \_\_\_\_\_ OS/2, OS/2 Warp
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Unix
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Windows, Windows 95, Windows NT
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_

### Best/Worst:

5. What is your favorite Infocom game of all time?
 

\_\_\_\_\_
6. What is your favorite non-Infocom text adventure of all time?
 

\_\_\_\_\_
7. What would you say was the worst text adventure game you ever played, and why?
 

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### General Preferences:

8. What text adventure game(s) are you currently playing?
 

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9. What computer game(s) aside from text adventures are you currently playing?
 

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10. How many hours a week do you play text adventure games? \_\_\_\_\_
11. When did you first start playing text adventures, and what was the first one you ever played?
 

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### Rating the 'Zine

12. Which sections or kinds of articles do you like reading in *XYZZYnews*? (choose as many as apply)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Letters
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Sneak Previews of upcoming games
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Hollow Voice (editorial)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Interviews
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Coverage of old Infocom games
  - \_\_\_\_\_ News Briefs
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Analytical articles (e.g., May/June's "Character Gender in Interactive Fiction")
  - \_\_\_\_\_ How-to articles (strategy, game design)
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Fiction
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Tales from the Code Front
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Game reviews
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Book reviews
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Spoiler Column
13. Where did you obtain this issue?
  - \_\_\_\_\_ GMD
  - \_\_\_\_\_ *XYZZYnews* Web site
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Downloaded from online service
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Downloaded from BBS
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Email subscription
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Snail mail subscription
  - \_\_\_\_\_ Other \_\_\_\_\_
14. Any additional comments:
 

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# Designing a New Game Language, Not Just a Game

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*If developing a new computer game sounds like a formidable enough challenge to you, just imagine adding to that the efforts of developing your own gaming language and parser. Would you undertake a campaign to popularize your new language to become the next TADS or Inform? What if you begin your development efforts without ever having heard of TADS or Inform? Our programmer's profile this issue comes from **Derek Jones**, who recounts below how he came to develop and distribute his own gaming language, Archetype.*

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I wrote my first adventure game in high school (circa 1985), using GW-BASIC. I wanted to write another, larger, one (it finally exists as STARSHIP.ACX in the games/archetype directory at ftp.gmd.de), but realized that the new program would be very similar to the program I just wrote, and decided to write an adventure-creation programming language before going one step further. I made a couple of abortive attempts at such a language during my nonexistent spare time in college.

Just before graduating from college late 1990, I finally decided just what the language should look like and began working on Archetype. Around this time I found out about AdvSys by David Betz and was crushed. I hadn't realized that anyone else had made a text adventure creation language. I owned a copy of XLISP 2.0, also by Betz, and saw that AdvSys was also object-oriented. Although LISP is certainly complete, it is also bewildering to a beginner, so I thought that perhaps Archetype would still have something to add. Besides, I was really doing this for my own enjoyment, the way some people take up knitting or golf.

As a result, Archetype is also something of an experiment in language and parser design, rather than an attempt to create or mimic an industry standard. The only thing I cared about was that I would be able to create the two adventures that I had in mind. If I could do this, I was going to consider it a success. The two games, "Starship Solitaire" (STARSHIP.ACX) and "The Gorreven Papers" (GORREVEN.ACX) are included in the Archetype package. The features important to me as an adventure programmer, and that made it into version 1.0, were:

1. The ability to create inheritance hierarchies.
2. A parser able to handle sentences at least as complex as "Take the ring of keys off of the coat hook."
3. A parser sensitive to different pronouns in the same context.

4. A parser sensitive to the context of the game and whether or not an object is present.
5. Standard output that would pause every 24 lines and word-wrap the text.
6. Dynamic object creation and destruction.
7. Ability to save and restore program state.
8. Encryption of executable so that the fink playing the game can't use a binary editor to look at all the adventure text.
9. Ability to hook certain actions to the execution loop (for countdown timers and so forth).
10. Ability to create user-defined directions, prompts, etc.
11. Verbs and verb-preposition combinations that could be handled special, making an end run around the parser when invoked.
12. No run-time errors, ever!
13. And most of all, the ability to create an entirely different sort of adventure-playing engine without changing the Archetype language.

Archetype was written using Turbo Pascal 5.5, under DOS, on an 8088 laptop with two low-density floppies and no hard drive. Because of this, and the fact that I had a 40-hour day job, I didn't finish Archetype until late 1992.

I sent it to some friends so they could beta-test it; after correcting the bugs they found, I uploaded the game to a number of BBSes in Tucson where I live, leaving it there as shareware. No response. I decided that text adventures must be dead in the wake of multimedia and forgot about Archetype for a couple of years. I did note that many BBSes carry multi-player D&D-style games, like Legend of the Red Dragon, which are quite popular on BBSes. An engine for this kind of game could be written in Archetype, and someday I would like to.

Then I discovered rec.arts.int-fiction and read the FAQ, noting that there were a half dozen systems for writing adventures, and that TADS and Inform seemed to lead the pack. I posted a message asking if there was any interested in yet ANOTHER language. About ten people or so emailed me; some warned me that my competition was TADS; about six or so asked for a copy. I emailed out uuencoded .ZIP files, but some people having trouble uudecoding the mail asked that I upload it to Volker Blasius at ftp.gmd.de, which I did.

I have looked a little at TADS and realize that it seems to cover many of the same bases as Archetype, and also has multiple inheritance as well as the flavor of C++. (The way to present text is also done very nicely.) There is some vocabulary difference: what TADS calls a fuse, Archetype calls a countdown; what TADS calls a daemon, Archetype calls a before-handler or after-handler.

Some people have asked if I plan to port Archetype to other, non-DOS platforms. This would entail converting it to ANSI C, something I am willing to do if there is interest in this. If people enjoy Archetype and find that there are reasons to use it instead of TADS for certain applications, I will cheerfully support it. However, if it seems that the community is zeroing in on TADS, I don't want to waste time supporting my dead-end language.

Archetype has been a fun experiment in language design for me, and has yielded some interesting results, such as its binary-expression compiler, whose algorithm, as far as I know, is unique. Whether it proves to be as fun and useful to others as to me remains to be seen! ☹

**Q.** Sorry to bug you, but a friend asked me how to get into the thief's lair in the original Zork game and I couldn't remember, and now it's really bothering me... and I was hoping you might know or remember... thanks for your time!

**A.** The thief's Treasure Room is reachable via the twisty-passaged maze. After you enter the maze by going west from the Troll Room, go south, east, and up (where you'll find a skeleton — but don't mess with it; just take the coins and key), SW, east, south, SE, when you'll reach the Cyclops room. You can dispatch him quickly by saying "Odysseus"; watch him crash straight through the eastern wall. But you can ignore this for now — you now have a safe passage straight up...leading into the thief's lair. Good luck from here, and remember to save your game often!

**Q.** Can you give me a hint for how to get over or around the laser beam in Waystation? I've tried everything I can think of to try to switch it off, then I tried jumping over it, sliding under it, and vaulting over it with the stick but no luck.

**A.** The slat is just one of the useful things that you'll find under the bed. Take another look after you find the slat, and you'll find a spring.

Attach these items together, and you'll have a quite serviceable pogo stick. Jumping over the laser beam shouldn't pose any more problems for you now.

**Q.** I'm at the point in MacWesleyan where I have all the signatures on my form. But now I seem to have run into another problem. I sign my name to the form and it says I misspelled it and the staffperson won't accept my form! I tried everything I could think of to fix it. It won't let me erase it, cross it out, resign it, etc. I tried to bribe the staffperson with the \$250. I even tried to pour the fact/fiction blurring liquid on the form to see what would happen, but no dice. Earlier in the game, I tried to sign the form and the same vowel misspelling thing happened. I figured that this just happened because I tried to sign the form before I had everyone else sign it (you know how it says "in your haste"). But now I guess it doesn't really

matter when you sign the form. Back at that point, however, I tried to get another form from the stack, but the environmentalist stopped me and warned me about not wasting paper. I figured that I needed to go to the recycling bin and throw the old form into it to be able to get a new one, but that didn't seem to work. The environmentalist still stops me. AAARRRGGG, I really don't know what to do. Is there some white-out I have to find or something? Do you think you could do me a favor and just tell me if there's something really stupid that I'm overlooking? Don't give me an exact clue or anything, just tell me whether or not I'm on the right track with any of the various remedies I told you that I tried. Sorry to keep wasting your time with these silly questions of mine. This game is just driving me crazy.

**A.** Hey, you're almost there...you're stuck at what's *supposed* to be the last signature you need to get...

So you've misspelled your name...can you think of anywhere you can "buy a vowel" (if you can enter that sort of reality) and obtain what you need in order to spell your name right? It's time to go back upstairs at the Campus Center, and take a certain something with you!!

**Q.** I've started playing "Unnkulian Unventure" recently and really like it — but I've been stuck for days trying to get past the Guardian. Is there any way to destroy it without getting killed? Do I need to lure someone/something else (like the droll from the Treasure Room) into the room for the Guardian to focus on instead? If the Guardian is really body-heat activated (I think there was a hint to that effect in the description), is there some kind of super-deodorant (make that Acme Dam Rite Garred?) that I need to protect myself?

**A.** Wow, I do like the deodorant idea, but the real solution is rather more straightforward. What do you have in your inventory that generates heat? Try dropping that glowing oil lamp of yours; throwing it won't work. The Guardian will be attracted to the motion and the heat of the lamp. Oh, one more thing...I hope you have a secondary light source, since that lamp won't be glowing so cheerily after the Guardian strikes it. (Bonus hint: get moving in the Side Cave if you're looking for another source of light.) ☒

The companion disk for XZZZYnews #4 contains the following game files. It's a good deal for people who have slower modems — at 2400 bps, it'd take a heck of a long time to download the contents of the companion disk. It's also a good deal for people with limited or no access to FTP sites or online services as a source for new games. If you're reading an electronic version of this issue, you can obtain this games disk with a print copy of XZZZYnews #4 by enclosing \$3.50 for postage and handling with the coupon on the bottom of this page. If you play and enjoy these games, please pay the shareware fees as applicable.

**THEATRE** — Ducking into the abandoned theater on a quick errand, you find yourself trapped within its confines. As you seek to escape and understand the checkered past of the old theater, you find yourself plagued by ghostly voices, dead bodies, and vengeful mannequins come to life. What is going on here, and will you ever discover the secrets of the theater? This Inform game is distributed as freeware.

**CHRISTMINSTER** — When your brother Malcolm sends you a telegram inviting you to visit him at Biblioll College in the ancient university town of Christminster, you imagine that the mysterious “discovery” he alludes to is nothing more than some esoteric bit of chemistry, and that you'll have a pleasant day out in beautiful surroundings. But when you arrive at Christminster, nothing is as you expect. Where

has Malcolm vanished to? What schemes are his evil colleagues up to? Inform, freeware.

**UNNKULIA ONE-HALF** — In this installation of the epic “Unnkulia Unnventure” series, you play an intrepid Acme salesman forced to work out of the Golden Dragon Inn. Will you succeed in your struggle to amass enough wealth to purchase the Golden Dragon Inn for yourself? TADS, freeware.

**UNNKULIA II: THE SECRET OF ACME** — In this sequel to the original Unnkulian Unventure, you try to create some good press for yourself — wouldn't want to fade away into obscurity, now would you? Along the way, you'll find the answers to these compelling questions, and more: What happened to the Unnkulians? Why are Acme products so bad? And what is this cheez stuff, really? TADS, shareware US\$10.

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