

## HOLLOW VOICE

There's a room in my new apartment that we call the Featureless Cubicle. If that sounds familiar, you may be thinking of the room with the same name in *The Legend Lives!*, which is what I was playing the day we were trying to come up with a name instead of just calling it "the office" or "the guest room." It's fun to have something in my real life that's reminiscent of a text adventure, since so few constructs from the IF worlds work well in everyday life. A friend once said to me he's glad people don't act in real life the way they do in text adventure games; otherwise, if they came over to your house they would just look in everything, look on everything, look behind everything, and look under everything. Then they'd try to take everything that wasn't nailed down, then ask you about and try to show you various objects. I have to agree. Those people would try everything they could to get past any locked doors in your house. How rude! And watch out if they stumble into a dark room; they might never find their way out! If you can think of any other good examples of how an IF code of conduct differs greatly from societal norms, please send me some email!

### **IF Competition**

In recent weeks, the most popular topic on the rec.arts.int-fiction has been discussion of a proposed IF competition. Despite a lack of consensus on rules, judging, and even timing, most of those posting expressed a desire to get on with it, write a short game, and worry about the rest later. As the editor of *XYZZYnews*, I'd like to donate two prizes: one is \$100 in U.S. currency or the equivalent in another nation's currency, as appropriate, minus bank fees. The second is a one-year (6 issue) subscription to the print version of *XYZZYnews* including the games disks. Either one is a pretty snazzy prize, if you ask me! If you're not familiar with the competition, I encourage you to subscribe to r.a.i-f and get caught up on the subject and the rules-in-progress.

Happy gaming!

**Eileen Mullin**  
[eileen@interport.net](mailto:eileen@interport.net)

### **Contents:**

<i>Tales From the Code Front: What XYZZY Does</i> .....	2
<i>Letters</i> .....	3
<i>Sneak Previews</i> .....	4
<i>Update to the Infocom Bugs List</i> .....	5
<i>News Briefs</i> .....	8
<i>Interview: Volker Blasius</i> .....	9
<i>Character Gender in Interactive Fiction</i> .....	15
<i>Game Reviews</i>	
<i>Klaustrophobia</i> .....	21
<i>The Gorreven Papers</i> .....	22
<i>Book Reviews</i> .....	23
<i>What's on the Disk</i> .....	24

XYZZYnews is published bimonthly by Bran Muffin Communications, 160 West 24th Street, # 7C, New York, NY 10011, USA. Email: eileen@interport.net. Send all inquiries, letters, and submissions to the address above.

Contents © 1995 XYZZYnews. All rights reserved. Published in the United States of America.

Electronic versions: There are currently two versions of XYZZYnews made available online. One is in ASCII and can be viewed with any text reader. You can also download a .PDF file that mirrors the layout of the print version. Use the Adobe Acrobat Reader (available for Windows, Mac, DOS and UNIX) to view the .PDF file; no special fonts or linked graphics are needed. You can obtain Acrobat Reader from ftp.adobe.com in the pub/adobe/applications/Acrobat folder, or <http://www.adobe.com/Software.html>. You can also read this issue of XYZZYnews on the World Wide Web at <http://www.interport.net/~eileen/xyzy3.html>

Subscriptions: Both electronic versions are available at no cost. You can obtain either one by FTPing to the ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/magazines/XYZZYnews directory. To be added to the mailing list, please write to eileen@interport.net and specify text-only or .PDF version. The print version includes a 3.5" Mac or PC disk and is \$21 (U.S.) for one year (6 issues) or \$3.50 for a sample issue. For print subscriptions outside the U.S. or Canada, please email or write for rates.

All products, names, and services are trademarks or registered trademarks of their respective companies.

Editorial deadline for Issue #4 is June 30, 1995.

---

**Editor:**

Eileen Mullin

**Contributors to this issue:**

Doug Atkinson  
Stuart Beach  
GreenPagan  
C.E. Forman  
Greg Soultanis

---

## Tales from the Code Front

### What XYZZY Does

Experienced IF game players know that successful strategies or solutions for puzzles in one game are often worth trying again in other games. Experienced game developers learn the value of coding special responses in anticipation of players trying out these strategies that worked for them before! My favorite example, obviously, is the magic word XYZZY from the game Adventure. Even if you don't want the command to work as your players *hope* it will in your game, it's much better to code a special response than have your parser kick in with a default like "I don't know the word 'xyzy'." Below, in alphabetical order, is a round-up of popular text adventures that *do* make use of special responses to the command XYZZY. How many of these have you seen?

<i>game title</i>	<i>What "XYZZY" does</i>
Curses	For a moment you can almost hear a hoarse voice say something to you. But it passes.
Enhanced	Suddenly you find yourself in exactly the same room you were in before! It's magic!
Horror of Rylvania	You speak an ancient word of power. A hollow voice says, "No chance, chucko. This is a serious adventure. Shape up and fly right!"
MacWesleyan	A hollow voice says, "To order XYZZYnews, the interactive fiction newsletter, send e-mail to xyzynews@aol.com."
Unnkulian Unventure II	You invoke an ancient word of power. So ancient, in fact, that it no longer works. Nothing happens.
Waystation	Actually having you magically teleport upon the utterance of that word would violate what little continuity exists in this game. Sorry about that.

This compels you to do more coding, I know, but the payoff is really high in terms of delighting your players with an inside reference to other text adventure games. Let's hope we see more of these in the future! :)

—Eileen Mullin

---

To: XYZZYnews

Yay! Issue #2 hath arrived!

Just the other day I was talking to my wife about how I was thinking of getting her a vanity plate reading XYZZY for the van. Heh! Heh! Now I know that word really works! (I had to explain it to her, though, as she is more the Tetris type. There's still hope, though!)

Thanks for issue #2. Now I got to figure out how to make my boss think it's work so I can read it...

One thing, though. Could you keep the line lengths to 80 chars or less? That would really make it easier to read. I can adjust the size of the window, but not everyone can, and if I want to print out a hard copy... (Actually, I transfer it to my trusty HP100LX and read it there.)

Thanks for the issue!

Bill B.  
bbloh@hpbs1686.boi.hp.com

---

To: XYZZYnews

I was thrilled to find your magazine and the ftp.gmd.de site this week! I've been playing text adventures off and on since about 1980, but I still haven't finished the first one I ever played. It was called Pyramid and was written for the TRS-80 Model I. I've looked quite a bit for hints but haven't had any luck...maybe one of your readers might have an idea. I wish you and your magazine all the best. Thanks for brightening up my day!

Richard Merryman  
richard.merryman@wpo.tmp.  
medtronic.com

---

Eileen,

Just one comment on your remarks about women and text adventures. I can't speak to the subject of women and *programming* of text adventures, but regarding women and playing of text adventures: I have tried to interest one ex-wife, one girl-friend (after the ex-wife), and two daughters in text adventures, with no success. Perhaps they don't relate to the subject matter (grues, sorcerers, spaceships, pyramids — rather arcane stuff perhaps) or perhaps it's the interface. Whatever the case, I would very much enjoy seeing them (especially my daughters) utilize their imaginations, and I would certainly enjoy their company on *my* adventures — I just don't know what it will take to get them there.

Greg  
repucci@saifr00.ateng.az.  
honeywell.com

---

To: XYZZYnews

First thank you for the nice article on GobblerNet. I've achieved my goal of being the largest text game BBS, with over 350 entries, probably approaching gmd.de in completeness.

And congratulations on the rest of the issue — a fine job, something to read more than once.

But I take slight exception with one statement you make: But the lopsided M-to-F ratio in the game programming world is consistent with the larger general computer programming industry. So what would encourage more women... etc.

I work in the computer industry, in fact I'm MIS manager for a medium size energy company, and my division has about 75 staff members. Now, I'm an over-40 white male, conservative and a believer in traditional values, so perhaps you would expect not quite the best. But I take great pride — in a corporate culture that has not been kind to women — in having championed equal pay and opportunity. I have four section managers reporting to me; two of them are women. I chose them not because they were (or were not) women; I chose them because they have the skills and talent and were the right people for the job. And they are paid equally to their male counterparts (actually a little more since they are superior contributors). I learned something really important, that it is not only morally correct to treat women and men equally, but it's good business. If you don't promote and properly treat talented women, you are utterly wasting a valuable resource. So, not everywhere in the industry is the ratio lopsided!

Now, if only I could get some of the other managers to follow suit...

Best wishes,  
Bob Newell  
bnewell@delphi.com  
gobblernet classic games bbs  
(701) 222-0429

---

To: XYZZYnews

I know this is going to sound like a stupid question, but... I have a slew of old Infocom games, but the problem is that over the years I have lost the important documentation for them. Particularly, I lost the

map that was included with Starcross, and I lost the decoder wheel that came with AMFV. Now, is there any way short of buying new copies of these games to get the docs I need? If anyone can help I would *really* appreciate it!

(I know it sounds like I pirated these games and am just trying to get over, but I got these things when I was much younger, and so haven't really kept track of where all the stuff went) If anyone can help, Thanx!

—Dave  
dmackie@csugrad.cs.vt.edu

---

Hi Eileen,

I've just picked up copies of editions 1 & 2 of XYZZYnews and had a great read.

(Caution — flame follows:  
<grin>)

By the by — it comes as a big relief to know that imagination is still alive and well out in the big, wide world. As one who was dragged up on text games I was getting worried! (My first two purchases for my first real computer (Apple II) were Colossal Cave and Zork. I'd played so much of the latter in the shop while trying to screw up the courage to lash out an *obscene* amount of money for a machine that I was up to about 100 points before I got the kit home!

There are a number of (perfectly adequate) Mac magazines in the UK, but they reflect the needs (prejudices?) of their target audience. A recent review of LTOI 1 gave it a very low score. The review went along the lines of "I know this is going to be hard to believe chaps — but there aren't any graphics at all in

these games and you have to type in words...!" (Wow!)

Call me old-fashioned if you will (and many do!) but I can't help feel that current (graphical) adventure games are at the equivalent stage they were a little over ten years ago, when machines couldn't handle graphics and text. Remember The Wizard and the Princess or Time Zone? The graphics were pretty crude and there was one line on which the player keyed in instructions to the parser. How I wish this route had been followed. Today's graphics are fantastic, but the interfaces make me weep.

Return to Zork (which I bought out of 'loyalty') reduced me to incoherence with the way in which everything had to be done step-by-(expletive deleted)-step, with layer upon layer of commands to be built up before being able to execute what should have been a simple command. Whatever happened to 'Get the blue rope then tie the rope to the green dwarf then strangle him'? (Ah, the good old days, what?)

The graphics have come on by leaps and bounds, but we seem to have retrogressed by an equal amount interface-wise. Ho hum.

Flame off (Mostly...) (I do get carried away — sorry about that.)

So why is it that I really *loved* Myst yet hated King's Quest V? Not just me, but several other (old-timers) I know? I wonder if it's because of the thought that went into the design, perhaps? Maybe there's hope for graphics and 'proper' adventures yet, eh?

What do other Xyzzy'ers think?

—Peter Kemp  
Peter@seagoon.demon.co.uk

## Sneak Previews

Perhaps everyone who's entering the quasi-organized IF competition is just keeping mum about their games-in-progress. Or maybe those academic types are just swamped with finals right now. Whatever the reason, we have an abbreviated column for "Sneak Previews" this issue, with the inside scoop on just one upcoming game (but it sounds really cool...):

In **The Resident: You Just Visit the Net, I Live Here**, by Mike DeSanto (desantom@io.com) you play a man who was assassinated, almost. A wealthy person has kept your brain alive in a tank and given you direct and permanent connection with cyberspace. He promises you a cyborg body in return for some work. You will have your hands full doing his errands while trying to find out who had you killed and why. Ultimately, the fate of the world is in your disembodied hands. The release date for this game is still up in the air. "The Resident" will run only under OS/2 with REXX installed. DeSanto has created his own interpreter, called REXX-Adventure, which uses a point-and-click interface and an object oriented structure. ☒

# Update to the Infocom Bugs List

---

Compiled by C.E. Forman

---

After “The Infocom Bugs List” appeared in XZZZYnews #2, we received several additions and corrections to the list. Some were new bugs we hadn’t seen before, and others clarified which version numbers of the games in which certain bugs were present. Thanks to all the contributors (listed below) who took the time to set the record straight!

## Bureaucracy

- In the PC version (I don’t know about any others), if you type RING THE DOORBELL in front of the Mansion, it works fine. However, you can stand in front of your own house and type RING DOORBELL, and you get the same results as if you were in front of the Mansion.

—Doug Atkinson

## Deadline

- Version 26 of Deadline does not have the “two Dunbars” bug (as reported in XZZZYnews #2). It was fixed in an earlier version.
- The “bathroom door” bug only exists in release 19/820427. Later versions had it fixed, while earlier versions hadn’t had the south closet door added yet.
- Two of the bugs mentioned in the *New York Times* Exterminator columns were never fixed. All versions of the game fail to recognize the player as being in the room when he is sitting on a piece of furniture. Likewise, all versions of Deadline look only at the first six letters of each word, so the confusion between GARDEN and GARDENer was never resolved.

—Paul David Doherty

## Enchanter

- The bug that lets you fill the jug and get spells anywhere in the game is not present in release 10 (as reported in XZZZYnews #2), only earlier versions.

—Paul David Doherty

---

## Leather Goddesses of Phobos

---

- This isn't exactly a bug, but sort of an excessively long way to go to avoid having to add another feature to the game: The software is very unwilling to let you take the portable transport into the mad scientist's house on Venus. He'll even "drop" it from within another container.

— John Payson

- The "purple button" (described in *XYZZYnews #2*) bug is *only* in the Solid Gold versions. None of the earlier releases had this problem.

—Paul David Doherty

---

## Sorcerer

---

- I had stated before that in *Sorcerer*, it was impossible to GNUSTO the GOLMAC spell, since you couldn't get into the room that held the GOLMAC scroll if you were carrying your spell book. But someone on [rec.games.int-fiction](http://rec.games.int-fiction) pointed out that, if you cast the GASPARE spell on yourself, and then leave the room without picking up the scroll, you'll reappear in the room after you're resurrected. When this happens, all your possessions will be intact, and you'll be able to take the scroll and GNUSTO GOLMAC. Unfortunately, the Infocom programmers never planned for this, so casting it elsewhere in the game doesn't accomplish anything. Interesting trick, though.

— C.E. Forman

---

## Suspect

---

- Last issue's "Infocom Bug Report" inaccurately stated that the bug allowing players to reach the office before Veronica's murder had been fixed in the LTOI release. Actually, this one is still present. To make it work, you have to get to the office by going west 3 times, south 6 times, west twice, and then north twice. This will get you to the office at 9:13 P.M., where you will see the fairy mask, but not the description of Veronica's body. Although Veronica actually reaches the office at 9:11, two minutes earlier (which can be confirmed by playing the game using ZIP for DOS with the -o switch active), her description doesn't turn up until 9:14. Typing "LOOK" the turn after you enter the office will cause time to pass, making it 9:14, and Veronica's body will suddenly appear out of nowhere.

—Paul David Doherty

## Trinity

- Saying “ROADRUNNER, DROP ME” results in “The roadrunner drops yourself at your feet.” The room description then says “There’s yourself here.” Leaving the location and coming back does not change the situation. And strangely, referring to the dropped “yourself” is interpreted by the game as an attempt to interact with the roadrunner. The roadrunner will only drop “you” once — trying it again causes the game to say “The roadrunner doesn’t have that.”
- Carrying the splinter into the bottom of the reservoir also reveals a small blooper. The room description talks about the lantern’s beam, even if you are carrying the splinter instead of the lantern. Evidently the author never considered the possibility of someone going to the Trinity site without solving all the other puzzles first.
- The “shining” bug, which involves getting a string of garbage from shining the splinter without specifying an object, is not present in the LTOI version. Earlier versions should have it, though.

—C.E. Forman

## The Witness

- The bug allowing you to get a drink anywhere in the game is still present in the LTOI version.

—Paul David Doherty

## Zork II

- If you time it right, you can blow up the base of the volcano while in the balloon. This requires dropping the bomb on the ground and lighting it, then crawling into the basket before it explodes. If you do it right, the computer should tell you that the balloon settles to the ground, followed by “You can’t go that way.”

—John Payson

## Zork III

- I found this bug in Zork III, but it also exists in most Dungeon/Zork ports. While you’re shoving blocks around to solve the Royal Puzzle, drop the gold card in the slot to open the door, then move a block in front of the door and leave the usual way (via the ladder). Walk around to the side door and you’ll find it’s not blocked! You can walk through the solid stone block back into the puzzle, but you can’t leave that way. I reported this bug to Infocom many years ago, but I doubt it was ever fixed.

—Dave Newkirk

## Jumping in the IF MUD: An Update

The first issue of *XYZZYnews* included a look at two multi-user dungeons (or MUDs, as they are commonly called) based on the fantasy world of Zork. At the time, both MUDs were at least partially operational. But things can change rapidly on Internet, and the situation is now quite different, making an update necessary. This time around, we take a brief look at two other MUDs presented in the style and format most familiar to the interactive fiction community.

First, an update on the MUDs reviewed in *XYZZYnews* #1. ZorkMUD (lestat.shv.hb.se 7890) is currently undergoing a major parser overhaul, but it is still up and running, and visitors are welcome to telnet in and check it out. Since the parser is still under construction, I was unable to get the game to respond much during my visits, but hopefully it should be up and running smoothly by the time you read this.

Sadly, ChicagoMUD (also mentioned in *XYZZYnews* #1) has been shut down recently, and writer and operator Nino Ruffini has no current plans to reopen it. Opening in the Zorkian city of Borphee, ChicagoMUD was full of well-known and obscure references to Infocom's classic fantasy series. This was due primarily to the efforts of Ruffini, whom many of you may recognize as the author of the *Encyclopedia Frobozzica* included with Return to Zork.

For a different online IF fantasy experience, you might try MUD\_II (iplay.interplay.com). Although it's not based on Zork, or any of Infocom's works, MUD\_II is a decent example of multi-user interactive fiction, with story-building being its main goal. Access for unregistered users is limited to 30 minutes per day, for 15 days, after which players' accounts are either upgraded or eliminated. Registered players have unlimited access.

Finally, you may find it worth your while to check out DUMII (dum.ts.umu.se 2001). Like MUD\_II, the basic goal is the solving of various

**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.

quests, with character-building a minor part of gameplay. Complex character ratings are not present in DUMII. The only statistic that is advanced during play is your character's experience level. According to the operator of DUMII, "Combat is part of some of the quests but in most cases some thinking can make the fights easy." This aspect of the game strongly reminded me of Infocom's Beyond Zork, although DUMII is set in a different fantasy world. ☹

## May/June Top 10 Picks for IF on the World Wide Web

### The Virtual Multimedia Interactive Mystery Theater

<http://www.coolsite.com/intro.html>

### Ancient Anguish

[http://www.bedrock.com/Ancient\\_Anguish/aa.html](http://www.bedrock.com/Ancient_Anguish/aa.html)

### Adventure Authoring Systems FAQ

<http://www.cis.ohio-state.edu/hypertext/faq/usenet/games/adventure-systems/faq.html>

### Zarf's List of Interactive Games on the Web

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/afs/andrew/org/kgb/www/zarf/games.html>

### Your Wacky World Wide Web Adventure

<http://ugweb.cs.ualberta.ca/~hubick/adventure/adventure.cgi>

### Baf's Guide to the Interactive Fiction Archive

<http://www.tiac.net/users/baf/if-guide.html>

### Web of Twisty Pages by Stephen Van Egmond

<http://www.undergrad.math.uwaterloo.ca/~svanegmo/if-index.html>

### Halloween - A Text Adventure on the Web

<http://www.dash.com/netro/fun/hol/hlw.html>

### John's Interactive Fiction Page

<http://speedracer.nmsu.edu/~jholder/intfiction.html>

### Infocom Fact Sheet Compiled by Paul David Doherty

<http://www-cgi.cs.cmu.edu/afs/cs.cmu.edu/user/wsr/Web/IF/infocom-info.html>

# Interview with Volker Blasius



---

Browse through any of Usenet's *rec.game* newsgroups, and you'll see that nearly any question beginning "Where can I find a copy of a text adventure called..." is answered with "Check out [ftp.gmd.de](ftp:gmd.de)." How did this vast IF archive get started anyway, and who do we have to thank for it? We tracked down the maintainer of the IF archive, Volker Blasius, to find out how this all came to pass...

---

**Q.** *What is your computer background?*

I have a degree that's probably equivalent to an MA in mathematics in the U.S. because that was the only degree available here at that time (1970) for people who messed around with computers. We had developed a time sharing system for an IBM mainframe running OS/360 MFT (long before IBM came out with TSO) and the work I got my degree for was something like PC Tools or the Norton Utilities for this mainframe: a fully interactive disk browsing and hex editing utility, written all in assembler language.

**Q.** *What was the chain of events that led you to establish the IF archive?*

During one of the radical changes in my working career at GMD I was thrown into Unix and the Internet, and while browsing through Usenet I somehow found the *rec.\*.int-fiction* newsgroups. I had grown up with IBM mainframes (well, not actually "grown up," but all my computer experience was with mainframes) and considered everything else a bulky and particularly useless form of pocket calculator, so I totally missed the Infocom era—the only computer game I knew for a very long time was ADVENT on the mainframe, but it fascinated me thoroughly. These newsgroups were a revelation to me, and I gobbled up whatever I could.

Very soon I noticed that many good things were available on the Net but they were almost hopelessly distributed all over the world. I didn't like Unix very much at the time, so I thought I might get better acquainted with it if I had a reason for really using it. I thought building an archive with IF stuff might be such a reason. I asked our ftp administrator whether I could have some disk space and a directory of my own on the ftp server, and I asked Dave Baggett (whom I knew from playing the Unnkulian Unventures and a few discussions about them) for his opinion. He thought that a central interactive fiction archive would be a great idea and offered his help. We copied the files we had to GMD's ftp server ([ftp.gmd.de](ftp:gmd.de)) and announced the archive in November 1992, inviting everyone to upload whatever they would like to see there.

**Q.** *Most text adventure fans probably don't know what GMD is. What do the initials stand for? What is your involvement with the computer center?*

GMD is a research establishment sponsored by the German federal government and two states where branch offices are located. It was founded in 1968 under the name "Gesellschaft fuer Mathematik und Datenverarbeitung mbH Bonn," which means



something like “Mathematics and Data Processing, Inc.” The obvious acronym for that was GMD. Bonn was appended to the name because the initial staff (including me working part-time as a student) was recruited from the mathematical department of Bonn University and GMD was not located in Bonn—so if Bonn wasn’t part of the address, at least it should be part of the name. Last year it was renamed “GMD—Forschungszentrum Informationstechnik GmbH” for German-speaking countries and “GMD—German National Research Center for Information Technology” for the rest of the world. This time they dropped Bonn but kept the old acronym as part of the new name.

From the start GMD consisted of several computer centers, each equipped with different brands of mainframes and located in different cities or even states. I used to work in the IBM center, first on the Birlinghoven Castle campus, where GMD headquarters are, then in a new branch office in Bonn. I then helped establish another IBM computer center for GMD and was head of the system programming and administration department there for 15 years, until this computer center was closed down because nobody needed mainframes any more. When GMD’s IBM mainframe era ended in ‘89, I helped set up a PC support group, but that was in turn deemed unnecessary in ‘92 and I was transferred to the central Unix support group back here at HQ.

What I’m actually doing now has little to do with Unix support: mainly odd jobs that need a good amount of expertise in a number of different areas and that nobody else can do or wants to do, but which everybody wants done and done well.

**Q.** *How did the archive develop from that point? How did word about it spread?*

I received very favorable comments from the very start, and soon I was asked about a mirror image in the USA. So I contacted Chris Myers at wuarchive and asked if he would be willing to mirror the IF-archive. He agreed at once and began mirroring the archive in January 1993. We had 12 MB then, and I estimated that it would eventually grow to about twice as much—I was a wee bit wrong there, I confess, we’re well over the 140 MB mark right now. :-)

Several people then asked me to post the changes in the archive to the Net, so that they wouldn’t have to pore through the ever-expanding archive all the time to avoid missing anything. I began to do that—I post my announcements in the IF groups and in several more general computer game groups, too, and I think this reached a lot of people who haven’t yet discovered the rec.\*.int-fiction groups. At first, I also read those general groups, answered questions about IF, and pointed people to rec.\*.int-fiction and the archive, but in the meantime a lot of people started doing that (some of whom I know and some I never even heard of), so I stopped answering those questions. This suited me fine, because other activities began demanding more and more of my time.

In October 1994 I received a letter from nic.funet.fi in Finland telling me that they had started mirroring the archive, too, and that’s the current state of affairs.

**Q.** *How much time do you spend in a week maintaining the IF archive, on average? What kinds of problems crop up most frequently with the files that are uploaded?*

I’ve never kept a record of how much time I actually spend on the archive, but I think my method of keeping up with uploads takes about 20 hours a week on average. Of course this isn’t just for moving the files around a bit; I download the files to a



machine that can handle them (I have a PC, a Mac and an ancient Sun here in my room), unpack them, read the documentation, run them if they are executables of some sort, write up a summary for the index file in the archive and my announcement on the Net, and finally decide on a destination directory and move the file there.

The problems I encounter through that process almost always have the same cause: inadvertent code conversion caused by passing the files through machines of different architectures. The most common manifestation are uploads of binary files in ASCII mode; this may work for some files if only Unix machines are involved, but if anything else happens to be in the way, this is sure to corrupt the files by translating between character sets, CRs, LFs, and CRLFs and by truncating files as soon as some kind of EOF code happens to occur in the binary file. A particularly nasty problem I had the other day was a PC executable that had been stored on a Macintosh; we eventually ended up with the original source code and the particular compiler version needed for that source being sent to me from different locations so I could recompile it here to create a distributable file. :-)

Other problems arise that aren't directly related to the uploaded files themselves. There are newbies asking for help, which isn't difficult but time-consuming and kind of boring in the long run. Also, uploads tend to arrive in large batches rather than at a more or less constant rate. People tend to be busy and creative during their vacations, and when they return to the Net they all send me their work at the same time. If this happens to coincide with a time when I'm busy with other stuff (like early this year and up to now), a huge backlog quickly forms, which is quite disheartening to look at. Just check my "unprocessed" directory. :-)

There are very few other problems—from time to time someone will use our incoming directory to distribute something we don't want, but unknown files are soon deleted, anyway. There isn't much free space in that file system, so there's very little room for abuse. No problems with commercial software; people are very scrupulous there.

**Q.** *How do you juggle maintaining the IF archive with the rest of the work you do at GMD? How long do you expect to continue doing it?*

The time between jobs I can spend on maintaining the archive varies greatly. Officially I'm not supposed to do it at all. The people in my department here know it all, of course, and they appreciate it because it gives GMD and its ftp archive a good name all over the world (together with the music archive a friend here maintains in much the same way as I do), but upper management doesn't know about it and it doesn't appear in official papers. I hope they won't read this. :-)

How long will I continue to do it? Frankly, I don't know. I would be glad to hand it over to someone else with more time than I have and a fresh mind, but such a person will be hard to find, I'm afraid. Any volunteers?

**Q.** *Do you keep track of the statistics on the most frequently accessed files, or where in the world callers are dialing in from?*

All the calls to the archive are logged and the aforementioned friend wrote a program to extract data from the log files. In 1993 we had 76,155 downloads from the archive,



steadily growing from 3,942 in January to 11,005 in December. By far the most popular file in that year was games/pc/softporn.zip, the original of Leisure Suit Larry I. :-)))

For the month of April 1995, the total number of downloads was 24,838. I just glanced through last week's log file to see if there's an obvious winner, but the current trend seems to be to download whole directories in one fell swoop, with solutions and solutions/uhs occurring most often, but info, games/pc, and programming/inform are very popular, too. Most callers are from the USA, but there are many from all over the world, some with country codes I never heard of. This world is really growing together!

**Q.** *What kinds of problems crop up most frequently with the files that are uploaded? For example, are there repetitive uploads of the same games, or does anyone ever try to upload commercial software?*

Apart from the technical problems mentioned above, there are very few problems—from time to time someone who uses our incoming directory to distribute something we don't want, but unknown files are soon deleted, anyway, and there isn't much free space in that file system, so there's very little room for abuse. No problems with commercial software; people are very scrupulous there.

**Q.** *Let's say the authors of a new text adventure wants to upload their new game to the if-archives; could you give some pointers for how they should go about submitting their file, and what information they should email to you?*

- ftp to ftp.gmd.de under the name of "ftp" (which is much more convenient than "anonymous") and with your email address as password.
- cd to incoming/if-archive (not incoming; the files there will be deleted).
- type "bin" to change to binary mode and upload your file.
- type "dir" and compare the file length with your original.
- disconnect and write email to Volker.Blasius@gmd.de with the following information:
  - your name (if it's not in your standard header)—the name of the file you uploaded
  - an informal description of the file's contents for me: what is it (a game?), its full name, what's it about, who wrote it, status (copyright? shareware?)
  - a more formal short description (one to three lines) that I can use for the Index file will save me a bit of time—anything else you want to tell me. I'll answer this letter after I've checked the file and moved it to its final directory.

**Q.** *Do you have any desire to program your own IF game, or to invent your own development system?*

To be honest, no. I don't think I have the talent and imagination to conceive a game anyone might want to play, and the days when I tried to develop my own programming language are over (I'm 51 now).



**Q.** *Do you play all of the games that get uploaded to you? What are your favorites?*

No, due to lack of time. As part of my file checking process I play a few moves, wander around a bit and try to find the first puzzle and solve it to get an impression of the game, but then I usually stop and forget about it. Among the very few I really played are Unnkulia 1 and 2 by the Daves (Leary and Baggett), which I finished and liked (and registered!), Doug McDonald's World, which I liked even better but never quite finished, and Graham Nelson's Curses, which absolutely fascinated me, but when I had reached 120 points or so I was interrupted for several weeks and I never picked it up again. :-)

**Q.** *What's the most difficult part about organizing the files on the IF archive?*

Keeping a sensible and intuitive structure, or at least something that looks like that to me. From time to time, when a new category of files shows up or a directory turns out to contain files that should be separated, I rearrange the directory tree a bit, and this takes some careful thinking to arrive at a structure that makes sense and will probably survive for some time—frequent reorganizations will only confuse the users.

**Q.** *Have you noticed any trends on the IF archive or the newsgroups over time?*

I already mentioned the irregular pattern of contributions, which is quite understandable since most IF writers are members of the academic community who are kept busy with other stuff during terms and mainly have their vacations to work on their favorite projects. What astonishes me most is that the development systems are as popular as the games; I can understand that for a programmer writing a game seems to be as attractive an adventure as playing it, but I would have expected that the players (i.e. consumers) would vastly outnumber the writers.

**Q.** *As the keeper of the archives, you must have a unique perspective on changing interests and the level of activity in usage of any one language development system.*

The only thing I've noticed from my black hole of vanishing time is that public interest seems to be shifting from TADS to Inform. TADS is still the favorite of the professionals, but new writers seem to tend to Inform—maybe because it's freeware. I'm not sure, but I think people have very subjective views on the relative heights of thresholds to things they want, and the example of ALAN makes me suspect that just to have to ask for something that you will get for free is quite a threshold indeed.

(ALAN, the Adventure LANguage, is a text adventure development system that is given away for free, but you have to ask the authors for it; they want to keep track of its usage. I have the manuals and the interpreter in the archive and a note on how to get a copy of the compiler from the authors, and all the reports I heard about it were rather favorable—but I never heard of a game written with ALAN. There are some coding examples in the archive, but not one complete game, if I'm not mistaken.)

The success of AGT in the CompuServe GAMERS forum shows that non-programmers like to write IF, too, and that some of their results are really good—why should programmers be the only people with creative potential? Dave Malmberg has dropped the



support of AGT, leaving a gap for people who are just plain afraid of modern programming languages like TADS or Inform, so maybe someone will invent a new programming system that doesn't look like a programming system and so doesn't scare writers off before they take a second look. After all, writers do use computers to compose their works, but they certainly wouldn't use them if they had to code a novel in C.

I don't think interest in IF will diminish; almost every day there is someone asking in comp.sys.ibm.pc.games.adventure, "What about text adventures? I think they are great, but are there new ones?" You can't make big money with text adventures any more, of course, that's why IF depends on a more or less free niche here in the Net, but the interest is there and the idealists are, so IF will continue to live. ☒

### Top 50 files downloaded from GMD's IF-archive for the month of April, 1995

Ranking	# of DL's	Directory path and filename	Ranking	# of DL's	Directory path and filename
1.	161	if-archive/games/pc/softporn.zip	25.	53	if-archive/games/infocom/curses.z5
2.	113	if-archive/solutions/uhs/uhsdos.zip	26.	52	if-archive/unprocessed/crypt.txt
3.	104	if-archive/solutions/uhs/uhswin.zip	27.	52	if-archive/solutions/uhs/kq7.uhs
4.	100	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ release_note.txt	28.	51	if-archive/unprocessed/mazedoom.txt
5.	81	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ library/grammar.h	29.	51	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ manuals/Technical.Manual.tex
6.	81	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ library/changes.txt	30.	51	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ examples/advent.inf
7.	79	if-archive/infocom/interpreters/zip/ zip203.zip	31.	51	if-archive/games/pc/drive-in.zip
8.	78	if-archive/solutions/Curses.solve	32.	50	if-archive/rec.games.int-fiction/FAQ
9.	76	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ manuals/designers_manual_plain_text	33.	50	if-archive/infocom/interpreters/zip/ wzip11.zip
10.	75	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ examples/balances.inf	34.	49	if-archive/unprocessed/riddles.txt
11.	75	if-archive/info/rec.arts.int-fiction.FAQ	35.	48	if-archive/infocom/hints/invisiclues/ Bureaucracy.inv
12.	74	if-archive/solutions/hints.many	36.	48	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ examples/shell.inf
13.	74	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ library/parser.h	37.	47	if-archive/solutions/uhs/t7g.uhs
14.	72	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ library/verblib.h	38.	47	if-archive/infocom/hints/invisiclues/ Trinity.inv
15.	68	if-archive/infocom/info/gameinfo.txt	39.	47	if-archive/infocom/hints/invisiclues/ AMFV.inv
16.	66	if-archive/programming/general- discussion/Graves.2	40.	47	if-archive/games/infocom/busted.zip
17.	66	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ examples/toyshop.inf	41.	46	if-archive/scott-adams/scott.zip
18.	66	if-archive/info/adventure-game-history	42.	46	if-archive/mapping-tools/mapper.zip
19.	65	if-archive/solutions/non- IF/cheatlam.txt	43.	46	if-archive/infocom/interpreters/zip/ xzip130.tar
20.	65	if-archive/infocom/patches/ InfocomPatches1.1.txt	44.	46	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ source/Bugs.In.Inform.v1404.txt
21.	64	if-archive/info/TADS-vs-Inform.FAQ	45.	46	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ examples/adventureland.inf
22.	62	if-archive/infocom/info/fact-sheet.txt	46.	46	if-archive/info/if-bibliography.txt
23.	62	if-archive/infocom/compiler/inform/ executables/i54p386.zip	47.	46	if-archive/games/pc/pcu10.zip
24.	59	if-archive/magazines/XYZZYnews/ XYZZY2.TXT	48.	45	if-archive/solutions/Curses.step
			49.	45	if-archive/games/pc/hobbit.zip
			50.	44	if-archive/unprocessed/artparts.txt

# Character Gender in Interactive Fiction

---

by Doug Atkinson (datkinson@lisp.purdy.wayne.edu)

---

*Caveat lector: In this article I discuss many classic Infocom games, as well as several currently available shareware games. Though I try to avoid specific spoilers, I do refer to puzzles that may spoil some surprises.*

Joe's Bar

An undistinguished bar, yet the social center of Upper Sandusky. The front door is almost lost amidst the hazy maze of neon that shrouds the grimy glass of the south wall. Doors marked "Ladies" and "Gents" lead, respectively, northeast and northwest. You feel an urge.

>NW

Gents' Room

This filthy bathroom belies the existence of disinfectant. A single toilet and sink are the only fixtures. More breathable air can be found to the southeast.

—Leather Goddesses of Phobos (Steve Meretzky)

---

## I. Introduction

---

One of the more intriguing issues in interactive fiction design is that of character identity. In many of the classic IF games, the player character has no specific identity beyond being "the adventurer" or "the detective" or whatever. This allows a wide variety of players to put themselves into the shoes of the title character.

There are a few fundamentals of identity that every (human) character must have, though, and one of them is gender. How is this handled in IF?

What next?

>PUSH THE EYE

The dragon's eye glows red. A voice comes from a hidden speaker. It says: "Please announce yourself. State your title -- such as Lord or Lady, Sir or Dame, Mr. or Ms. -- and your first and last name."

>DAME AGATHA CHRISTIE

"Did you say your name is Dame Agatha Christie?"

>YES

—Moonmist (Stu Galley and Jim Lawrence)

Other games take the attitude that anyone who turns up can play, as themselves, with whatever gender or attitudes (and in a dull enough game with no other characters, these don't even matter).

—Graham Nelson, "The Craft of the Adventure Game"

---

## II. The Androgynous Hero

---

Roughly half of Infocom's 33 classic text adventures have a main character with no specified gender. These range from the Enchanter Trilogy to *Suspended* and *Nord* and *Burt Couldn't Make Head or Tail of It*. This generally works best in games where there is little social interaction between the character and the NPCs, or when the character's clothes don't have to be mentioned in detail. The player is free to imagine the main character as anything they want (and even to envision themselves as the hero).

Ten games have explicitly male main characters, with some being special cases. Four of these, *Sherlock*, *Arthur*, *Shogun*, and *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, are adaptations of works of fiction with male main characters (one can't very well consider Dr. Watson's gender undecided, *Rex Stout* notwithstanding).

Sometimes it takes some reading between the lines to tell the character's gender. For example, there is only the faintest clue that the detective in *Witness* is male—there is a brief reference to flirting with the telephone operator. (*Occam's Razor* favors a male detective in any event—I don't know how many female police detectives there were in the 1930s, and it's a genre piece in a genre predominated by men.) The adventurer in the *Zork* trilogy is male, but you only find this out from the description of him in *ENCHANTER*—there's no evidence for it in the trilogy proper. (In fact, in *ZORK III* you wind up fighting someone who's your exact duplicate. The game accepts both "man" and "woman" as synonyms for this character!)

Two special cases are *A Mind Forever Voyaging* and the aforementioned *Hitchhiker's Guide*. In *AMFV* the main character (*Parry Simm*) is technically neuter, being an artificially intelligent computer, but he has a masculine persona in *Simulation Mode*. (This is one of the cases with a great deal of social interaction.) In *HHGG*, you start out playing *Arthur Dent*, but in the course of the game you become other characters, including the female *Trillian* for one scene.

The final game with male main characters is *Border Zone*, where all three characters you play are masculine. This is really the only one where the character is clearly male but didn't have to be; the businessman in part I could easily have been a woman, or just left vague.

Additionally, I have a suspicion that the main character in *The Lurking Horror* is male, although there's nothing about it in the game. Two reasons: 1) Technical schools are notorious for having male majorities, so the odds favor a male. 2) *LH* is a genre piece, much like *The Witness* or *Plundered Hearts*. Specifically, it's a *Lovecraft* genre piece, and *Lovecraft* never had any female protagonists. This doesn't mean that the character can't be female, of course, just that I have a harder time imagining it.

*Suspended* is an unusual and special case, because the main character never does anything, just orders around the robots. The robots are half male, half female, although since they're only robots this affects nothing except minor touches in their programming.

Five games allow you to choose your character's gender—*Ballyhoo*, *Bureaucracy*, *Beyond Zork*, *Leather Goddesses*, and *Moonmist*. (Some of the choosing sections are quoted as section headers.) These range from the elegant—in *LGOP* it's possible to not even notice that you're making a choice—to bluntly asking if you're male or female. Even in cases where the game just asks, it's frequently worked into the game (e.g., in *Ballyhoo* you punch a circle on your ticket).

The effects this has on the game range widely, although it has no real effect on the puzzles. In *Bureaucracy* the only effect is one thing the Hacker says to you ("Wait! Can I go out with your sister?" vs. "...with you?"); the effects in *Beyond Zork* are similarly small, mostly there so

the other characters can use pronouns in referring to you, although I recommend playing as a female and asking the shopkeeper about the Potion of Might.

In *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*, on the other hand, virtually all the characters' genders are based on yours. (A few don't, and this puts an interesting twist on one scene in the endgame. Hint: the game's title remains the same in both modes.) This is unsurprising, since the game is a sex farce, after all, and one couldn't expect the main character's gender to change while everything else remained the same.

Finally, one game, and only one, has a set female character. That game is **PLUNDERED HEARTS**, and I'll deal with it separately.

"My lovely," Jami son says huskily. His eyes burn intently, their blue like the sea on a summer day. A shiver of warmth flows through you, and you tremble at his touch. The pirate's hands, warm and exciting, caress you, searing through the thin linen of your chemise. His lips near yours, his breath softly scented. "May I kiss you?"

>KISS JAMI SON

You lean into his arms, face lifted. Tender is his kiss, soft his lips as his body presses hard against you. You drown in the tide of your passion, swept like the sea against the rocks of the shore.

—Plundered Hearts (Amy Briggs)

"Ur-grue?" asks the only woman I implement or.

"Ur-grue," nods another.

—Beyond Zork (Brian Moriarty)

---

### III. A Heart Forever Plundering

---

*Plundered Hearts* is an anomalous Infocom game in a number of ways. It's the only one published in the romance/adventure genre. It's also the only one where you play a female character (with no choice in the matter), and the only one written by a woman (although Hollywood Hijink does credit Liz Cyr-Jones with the original concept).

The choice of a female player character is unusual enough to be worthy of comment. It seems likely that this adventure was written to appeal to women (being grounded firmly in the romance novel genre, one whose readership is traditionally mostly female). Still, forcing one gender on the character is unusual for Infocom regardless of which one it is; the only ones that have blatantly male player characters and aren't adaptations are *Border Zone* and *A Mind Forever Voyaging*.

This is the result of the way this particular adventure is told; it places the emphasis on the "fiction" part of Interactive Fiction (as *BZ* and *AMFV* do, as well). Puzzle games like *Zork* and *Infidel* don't concern themselves with characterization, character interaction, and much plot; the character is just trying to get rich. Story games have a much higher ratio of prose to puzzles; in fact, once you've solved the problems in *PH* you can dash through the adventure very rapidly. They have much more personal interaction, and concern themselves more with characterization and storyline.

For this reason, having a specific character becomes much more important. The *Zork* adventurer really has no personality or motivations beyond greed. The detective in *Deadline* is just

doing his/her job. In a story where goals are more personal, however, the motivations can't be so generalized, and that means having a particular player character. Once you have a specific character as your hero, personal details begin to matter. We don't know anything about the life of the Zork adventurer before he appeared outside the White House; we don't know where he comes from, who his parents are, if he's married, or what his hobbies are (besides collecting treasure, that is). In a game where you're someone specific, and are expected to act in character, these details take on a much greater importance.

After these details are settled, character gender takes on a whole new significance, because the player's interactions with the NPCs will be strongly affected by this. It's significant that the two games with the most plot and fewest puzzles, PH and AMFV, are also the hardest to imagine with main characters of opposite genders. (In *Border Zone* it seems to have been a conscious decision on the programmer's part to use male characters; interestingly, the sample game transcript from BZ featured a female spy.)

These games feature a great deal of interaction, and how characters act towards each other will change somewhat if their sex does. In Zork, making the thief, troll, wizard, demon, etc. female would change nothing. In LGOP, characters can be interchangeably male or female because they're not very deep. Conversely, PH simply would not work with a male main character, female pirate, etc.: the motivations and character roles would go all askew. The constant threat of becoming LaFond's unwilling plaything would be much less credible. (That's also the result of its being a genre piece.) The same is less true of AMFV, but the interactions with Parry's family would be different if Parry were a woman.

The upshot of all this is that, the closer IF gets to being a story, the more clearly defined its main characters become. And character gender is not required for clear definition, but it helps considerably.

As for the other aspect of this game—the fact that the character is a woman—see the next section.

```
Are you male or female? [The default is male.]
>FEMALE
```

```
By what name will this character be called?
[The default is "Buck Palace."]
```

—Beyond Zork (Brian Moriarty)

---

## IV. Character Roles and Player Roles

---

Overall, very few Infocom games require you to play a character of a specific gender. (I don't quite count the Zork Trilogy, since the clue about the Adventurer's gender comes in another game.) Why, of those that do, does only one have a female hero—and in a game aimed at females, at that?

It's worth disposing of the adaptation games, first. They can't really be faulted for using male heroes (and HHGG does let you play Trillian, however briefly). It could be argued that Infocom should have adapted from a source with a female hero at some point, but that's really a minor point—especially given how few adaptations they did, total.

And to put their approach in perspective, look at the games released under their name after Activision bought them out. Except for *Journey*, which features a team, every one of them has a male hero. In both *Battletechs* and *Mines of Titan* you lead a team, but the leader and hero is male; in *Circuit's Edge*, you play a man, but *CE* is another adaptation of fiction. Infocom cared much more about inclusiveness than Activision does, apparently.

Why the effort towards androgyny in the games' heroes? Adventure gamers like to use their imaginations; why not let them imagine themselves as someone totally different?

The header quote from *Beyond Zork* is telling, and says a lot about the assumptions made by the Implementors (or at least Brian Moriarty). It could mean one of two things; either the assumption is that IF players are more masculine than feminine and prefer playing men, or a default was needed (the same way one's given for name) and "male" was chosen at random.

While not meaning to attack Infocom or Moriarty, I think some of the former was at work both in *Beyond Zork* and Infocom's approach to design. (Whenever I discuss Infocom, remember that I consider them to be one of the better companies in this respect; but they weren't perfect.) There are two assumptions there; the assumption that male IF players outnumber women, and the assumption that, if they must choose, they prefer playing men.

The first assumption we can dispense with quickly. That women do play IF there can be no doubt; this article was inspired by Eileen's editorial in *XYZZYnews #2* on the very subject. My mother and sister have both played Infocom games, and I have a female friend who's as devoted to Infocom as I am. However, there is a tacit assumption that men are more interested in computers, and computer games, than women are. This is partially a self-fulfilling prophecy, since the companies using this assumption will then produce games that are aimed at men. (Classic example: pinball. Women play pinball, too, but look at the number of pinball games with scantily-clad women on the cases. Even if this doesn't actively drive women away, it doesn't do a lot to encourage most of them to play.)

In any event, even if there is a male majority (and IF seems to hold more interest for women than, say, fighting games), it should be obvious that alienating women cuts out slightly more than 50% of the potential buying audience. Since IF hasn't been the dominating force in software for some time, it becomes doubly important to consider the audience. (Or, rather, it would if there were *any* real IF being produced commercially right now—role-playing simulations and GUI-heavy CD-ROMs seem to have killed it as a commercial concern, leaving it in the realm of shareware alone.)

What about the second assumption? Do more players prefer playing men, or does no one really care?

It's difficult to generalize, but I have a suspicion that (some) males have more difficulty playing female characters than vice versa. It seems to go back to childhood; girls are allowed to take an interest in "masculine" things, but boys who try the equivalent are scorned. ("Tomboy" isn't a particularly pejorative term, compared to "sissy".) Whether this is the result of an assumption that masculinity is the state to aspire to, or a double standard in which males get shafted, I won't attempt to judge, but it does seem to be true.

Combined, these factors probably explain why Infocom's only female-character-only game was one that was written by a woman and aimed especially at women. They preferred not to force players to take on specific roles, but in the few cases they did the male role won out over the female.

---

## V. The Shareware Revolution

---

That's how Infocom handled gender in its games. A decade later, the IF banner is mostly carried by independent programmers writing games for distribution via FTP. How do these neo-Implementors handle the issue? (And bear in mind that they don't have to worry about the audience quite as much, since they probably don't depend on sales of the game for their livelihoods.) I'll consider only the major and noteworthy shareware games, since there are so many out there.

Overall, fewer games take the genderless option these days. Most of the Unnkulian series does, as far as I can tell, as does John's Fire Witch. Graham Nelson's Curses also takes this tack; this makes his quote at the head of section II somewhat ironic, since Curses is by no means dull and has plenty of other characters. However, you aren't interacting with them in a social or romantic way (try kissing Aunt Jemima sometime, however) so it's not an issue.

Save Princeton and Busted, both college games, feature characters who are implicitly male but not quite explicitly so. (In Save Princeton, your roommates are male, so you probably are as well.) Busted (well, the parts I've seen so far) leaves a strong impression of a male main character without actually saying it. The note you find (presumably addressed to you) has a man's name on it, and your girlfriend shows up on the fifth turn, not that that proves anything in itself.)

In The Legend Lives!, you also play a male character; although I haven't played it myself (hardware incompatibilities), I gather that it's a plot-heavy game.

Veritas and CosmoServe take the choice option. Both do so by asking you straight out, but CosmoServe works it into the game (you're asked so you can be provided a gendered body in virtual reality) while Veritas just asks straight out. (Veritas also gives the impression of having been coded first for a male character, with the female bits added later; a description of something belonging to your roommate—who's always your own gender—refers to the roommate as "he" in both modes. On the other hand, in female mode you can have sex during the game, though it's about the least thrilling sex scene in all of IF.)

CosmoServe deserves special attention, because it has one slightly unusual feature; it's the only IF game I know of that lets you determine your own sexual orientation. It makes about as much difference as gender usually does—it affects one piece of dialogue and the gender of one set of minor NPCs—but it's an interesting touch. Incidentally, CosmoServe is written by the only woman I know of who's currently writing shareware IF, Judith Pintar.

As I mentioned above, programmers of shareware don't have the same worries about their market that commercial programmers do. The FTP distribution system means that 1) anyone in the world with Internet access can get a copy, and 2) getting a copy isn't a major financial decision; apart from the download time, you have ample opportunity to experiment before you shell out any money. Therefore, shareware authors don't seem to let the prospect of driving away potential customers worry them as much as do commercial programmers, leaving them freer to write games with specific main characters.

In some ways you'd think this might encourage software with more female characters, and indeed this might happen if there were more female programmers. It would be interesting to see more programmers give this some thought; if nothing else, it would broaden the range of potential stories.

Part II of this article will examine NPC genders in IF. As a preview, ask yourself: Are there \*any\* female NPCs in the original Zork trilogy? ☒

*This is the first of a two-part article.*

# Klaustrophobia

Parser: AGT

Author: Carol Hovick

Availability: ftp.gmd.de:/if-archive/games/pc/  
directory (Klaus.zip); CompuServe

Supports: AGT ports

A winner in the 1994 AGT programming contest, the three-part epic "Klaustrophobia" chronicles your exploits as you leave on a two-week vacation from ICON Inc., your place of employment. Although strongly influenced by Infocom's "Bureaucracy," both in its humor as well as its events and puzzles, "Klaustrophobia" remains a very original, very challenging, and at times extraordinarily frustrating adventure.

This is also one enormous game. It's so large, in fact, that it's been divided into three separate segments, apparently due to restrictions in AGT. When you reach the end of one section you can save your status and go on to the next portion, but you can't start from Parts 2 or 3 until you've solved the sections prior to them. The menuing system for this behaves rather strangely, though. Selecting to play the whole game at once, then typing "QUIT" in one section, will move you to the next rather than exiting the game entirely.

Unfortunately, the game also serves as a perfect guide to the restrictions of the AGT system. IF fans familiar with the AGT parser know that it's unpleasantly quirky under the best of circumstances and can be absolutely infuriating in others. "Guess-the-Verb" games are not uncommon.

To be fair, though, the author seems to have realized the restraints of her development system, and in most cases has made a serious effort to deal with them, or has at least attempted to cover them up. "Klaustrophobia" really pushes the limits of AGT, and the tremendous effort that went into it shows. The writing is also extremely well-done, with references to "Bureaucracy," "Hitchhiker's Guide," and the novels of Douglas Adam.

Like the author, you're a female by default in "Klaustrophobia," but you can elect to change and become a male at any point in the game (with humorous results in a few special circumstances). Your character's sex has almost no impact on the game's story or puzzles, though.

Part 1 of the game starts you off on your trip to Hollywood, where you've been selected to appear on a game show. As might be expected,

though, absolutely nothing goes right. From the game's inception, you'll be barraged with every annoying situation possible, from constantly having your flight rebooked, to being given the runaround when trying to pay bills, to never being able to find a pen when you really need one.

Compounding your problems is your evil cat Klaus, who, if not kept happy, will ruin your trip by shredding all your important mail and using your new Wafer-Stomper boots as his litterbox. Taking care of Klaus and running a million last-minute errands makes the first scenario an exercise in effective time-management.

A more difficult task is the unrealistic amount of foresight a player is sometimes required to have. It's quite likely that you'll overlook something early in the game and not realize it until later, when your progress grinds to a halt and there's no way to backtrack aside from restoring. In this respect, "Klaustrophobia" encounters the same problems inherent in "Bureaucracy," although the puzzles' solutions are far less obscure.

For the benefit of maze-haters, I should also mention that there are quite a few sprinkled throughout the game. Almost all of them are relatively straightforward, though, requiring only one or two moves in a single direction to get through.

Once you've *finally* managed to reach your destination, you'll enter Part 2 of the game, which moves you from TV gameshow to TV gameshow in much the same manner as Part 1 did with airports and planes. Eventually, you'll win a free trip to Mexico for the grand prize, thus moving the game into its third and final phase. The ending tells us that a sequel is planned.

Registering "Klaustrophobia" provides the player with numerous resources to draw upon, the most helpful being a set of pop-hints, similar to Infocom's InvisiClues. If you're anything short of an expert player, you'll probably need them, because this game is hard with a capital H. The difficulty stems equally from the puzzles—most of which are very good (I loved the MacGuyver bit!)—and the AGT parser's limitations.

Intelligent, hilarious, and occasionally so true-to-life that it's scary, "Klaustrophobia" deserves a place in every I-F hobbyist's library. Until someone decides to port the game to Inform or TADS, though, it's likely to remain every bit as aggravating as the situations it makes fun of. But when one looks at the game itself, apart from the system it was developed on, "Klaustrophobia" is excellent. ☒

—C.E. Forman

# The Gorreven Papers

Author: Derek Jones (dtj@rincon.primenet.com)  
 Availability: ftp.gmd.de/games/archetype  
 Requires: Archetype development system,  
 available via anonymous FTP from  
 ftp.gmd.de (runs on PCs only)

The Cold War may be over, but you can relive the intrigue of being a spy imprisoned behind enemy lines in "The Gorreven Papers." This game could be described as a "snack-sized adventure," to use John Baker's term, since it only contains about 30 locations. But I was really captivated (no pun intended) by this game's danger-at-every-turn setting, the author's eloquent writing, and the good interaction with the game's NPCs.

In *The Gorreven Papers*, you play a spy with a straightforward mission: outsmart your captors, obtain the top-secret documents that give the game its name, and make a safe escape.

The game is a great choice for beginning players, because of its short length and the hints available during play. If you ask for a hint at any point during play, you'll receive a clue that's relevant to the area of the game you're in or the puzzle at hand, which is very smart.

If you make a wrong move during the game, you're instantly made aware that you've blown it, and you may be given a hint for what you should've done instead. So even though there are several "instant death" situations, you're unlikely to make the same mistake twice.

The text descriptions for each room and event during the game were richly detailed and always fun to read. My only gripe about the writing was the sparseness of the endgame. Why was there so much description earlier but such a brief ending?

Interestingly, the game's author devised the game's entire parser and development system, called Archetype. *The Gorreven Papers* is one of several games included when you download Archetype from GMD. The game's parser is well-developed and could understand complex sentences. The parser's responses weren't always as sophisticated as those I've come to expect from TADS or Inform games. The game's vocabulary, too, is rather limited; you can prompt the game to tell you the verbs it understands, and there were not very many that it did. Additionally, there were many verbs I expected the parser to recognize that it didn't, like SHOOT (since you

use a gun during the game). Also, the game didn't seem to recognize the concept of "me" at all, as in EXAMINE ME. This I found very interesting, since *The Gorreven Papers* is written from the first-person perspective ("I'm standing by the north fence"), instead of the second-person perspective common to so many other text adventures ("You are standing in front of a white house."). I found the change of perspective very interesting; since it was so novel I can't really say yet if I really prefer it.

One operational difficulty I encountered was that I couldn't figure out how to restore saved gamefiles. I know that this *is* possible since Archetype did allow me to use the SAVE command, and did in fact create files with those names when I asked to save them. But I simply found myself unable to open or restore any of my saved games, either from the command line or from within *The Gorreven Papers*. As a result, I wound up having to play the game all the way through in one session in order to win. This wound up being OK since, as I mentioned, *The Gorreven Papers* is a relatively short game. Of course, I was frustrated when I walked into a deadly situation and made the wrong move, since I'd have to start all over again, but it I think it made me play with more concentration. But some clearer user documentation that clearly explicates how to restore saved game files would be a real bonus to all potential players.

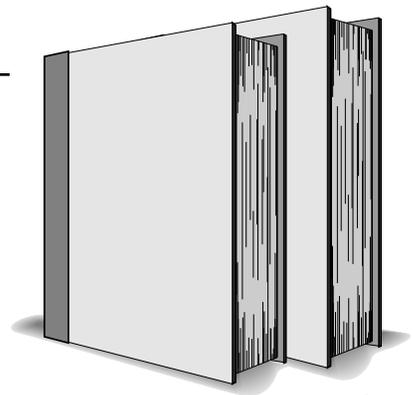
There are a fair number of red herrings planted throughout the games. This made the puzzles not as easy to solve as they seemed at first glance. But hey, you're a spy trying to escape from enemy hands; it's not supposed to be a piece of cake! It was also difficult at first to determine which found objects you might need later in the game, but this is a common gripe in all text adventures that limit the amount you can carry at one time in your inventory.

It would be great to see a TADS or Inform port of *The Gorreven Papers*, since Archetype is only designed to run on PCs so far. Although I'm incredibly impressed with the author's ability to program his own development system, I don't think it poses a challenge TADS or Inform as the programming language of choice for new game developers.

*The Gorreven Papers* displays richly developed text descriptions and some clever but not difficult puzzles; it would be a treat to see more games from Derek Jones, no matter which development system was used. ☒

— Greg Saultanis

# Book Reviews



## ***Entertainment in the Cyber Zone: Exploring the Interactive Universe of Multimedia***

by Chris McGowan and Jim McCullaugh  
Random House Electronic Publishing, 1995. \$19.  
390 pages, includes glossary and discography.  
ISBN: 0-679-75804-6.

“You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building. Around you is a forest. A path leads away from the building to Day of the Tentacle, Ultima, Lands of Lore, Dark Seed and King’s Quest.”

The first two sentences are from William Crowther’s *Adventure*, the first text adventure, while the last line might describe the trajectory of a new book called *Entertainment in the Cyber Zone: Exploring the Interactive Universe of Multimedia*.

Here, for the first time, is the history of PCs, text adventures, RPG games, video games, interactive narrative, CD-ROM and multimedia, all in one volume. There have been other books published recently that touch on one or more of these topics (such as *Understanding Hypermedia*, *The Cyberspace Lexicon*, and *The Magic of Interactive Entertainment*). But *Cyber Zone* ties it all together in one impressively comprehensive volume, with a staggering number of interviews with gaming and multimedia gurus.

This is not an overly technical book, and it does not include an accompanying CD or tips for programmers. But it should be of interest to both consumers and developers, as it has hundreds of CD-ROM reviews (of all types), many great anecdotes, and extensive quotes from people like Rand and Robyn Miller (*Myst*), Graeme Devine and Rob Landeros (*The 7th Guest*), Roberta Williams (*Sierra Online*), Joel Berez (*Activision*), Michelle Em (*Return to Zork*), Pepe Moreno (*Hell Cab*), Vince Lee (*Rebel Assault*), and Drew Huffman (*Iron Helix*), plus

music-film-book celebrities such as James Cameron (the *Terminator* movies), Terry Gilliam (*The Fisher King*, *Brazil*), Ray Manzarek (the Doors), Bruce Sterling (cyberpunk leader), Arthur C. Clarke (*2001*) and Todd Rundgren. An especially entertaining part of the book is that many developers reveal their favorite CD-ROMs!

The book is well-organized, and each chapter delves into the history of a particular genre. “Action Games” takes us on a journey from Spacewar and Pong to Sonic and Rebel Assault, while “The Movie-Game Continuum” moves from interactive theater and fiction to landmark CD-ROMs such as *Spaceship Warlock* and *Myst*.

The “Mind Games” chapter is especially noteworthy, as it has a long section on the history of text adventures and RPGs. It begins with *Crowther’s Adventure*, jumps to Donald Woods (who expanded the game, which then became known as the *Crowther and Woods Adventure* or *The Original Adventure*), travels to Infocom’s *Zork* and Sierra’s *Mystery House*, and leaps from computer floppy-disk quests to today’s adventure CD-ROMs such as *Return to Zork*.

The book doesn’t have exhaustive coverage of every game category, but it highlights many of the best and covers many different multimedia categories, including “The Movie-Game Continuum,” “Electronic Books,” “Multimedia for Children,” “Expanded Movies,” and “Music and Multimedia.” It obviously can’t include everything in any one area, but it gives a fascinating overview that sheds light on many hitherto invisible connections between people, companies, and technology.

My favorite sections were the interviews with developers, the various “historical” passages, and the “Cyber Jargon” glossary. The *Cyber Zone* is an enlightening look at where multimedia came from, what it means, and where it may be going.

—Green Pagan  
[GreenPagan@aol.com](mailto:GreenPagan@aol.com)

The companion disk for XYZZYnews #3 contains the following game files. It's a good deal for people who have slower modems—at 2400 bps, it'd take about two to three hours 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 XYZZYnews #3 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.

**WAYSTATION** — While driving home one night, your car mysteriously dies. You get out, pop the hood, and wham! that's the last you remember... until you wake up trapped in a cell. With no idea of how you got there and no one to ask, you must escape and find out why you were kidnapped. This TADS game is available as freeware.

**LOST**— As this TADS-based science fiction adventure begins, you spot what you think is a meteor crashing to the earth. When you go to investigate, you discover an alien spaceship that can take you to far-off worlds. You'll soon find yourself lost in time and space, battling hostile environments and solving various puzzles as you strive to find your way home. Shareware, US\$10.

**SAVE PRINCETON** — You're a prospective student visiting Princeton University, growing

increasingly bored with the student tour you're taking. As you slip away from the group, hiding in a nearby dorm room, you hear the sound of gunfire coming from outside in the courtyard. Soon you learn an invading army has taken over the campus and declared martial law. Princeton's only hope is for some brave soul to oust the occupation government and restore the college president to his rightful place. Are you up to the challenge? This TADS-based adventure is Shareware, US\$10.

**BUSTED** — This Inform-based game is set in a collegiate environment where crackdowns on drug possession are on the rise. Your friend has already been arrested and it's up to you to find and destroy all incriminating evidence pointing to you before you wind up in the same sorry state yourself! (See game review in XYZZYnews #1.)

## XYZZYnews Magazine/Disk Order Form

Checks and money orders preferred. Please send coupon with payment to: Eileen Mullin, XYZZYnews, 160 W. 24th Street, Ste. 7C, New York, NY 10011.

- Please send me a copy of the print version and companion games disk for XYZZYnews Issue #3. I have enclosed \$3.50 for postage & handling. (Check one: Mac disk \_\_\_ or PC disk \_\_\_)
- I need just the companion games disk for XYZZYnews Issue #3. I have enclosed \$2.50 for postage & handling. (Check one: Mac disk \_\_\_ or PC disk \_\_\_)
- Sign me up for a 6-issue subscription (within the U.S.). I have enclosed US\$21 for postage and handling. (Check one: Mac disk \_\_\_ or PC disk \_\_\_)
- Please send me a copy of the upcoming XYZZYnews Issue #4. I have enclosed \$3.50 for postage & handling. (Check one: Mac disk \_\_\_ or PC disk \_\_\_)

Full Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip/Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_

Country: \_\_\_\_\_ Email Address: \_\_\_\_\_