



Even though playing text adventure games is largely a solitary pursuit, IF fans sure like to put a competitive edge on it wherever possible.

Take the recent crop of mini IF competitions in all manner of niche categories: There was the XComp, for games involving the paranormal in some way. The I-Comp was notable for a feature its entries lacked; namely, the games could not let players use an inventory for collecting items. And in the Roadkill Comp...well, it's evident what games in that competition could be expected to feature. On the lighter side, the WackyComp (with entries based on one of a number of pithy aphorisms) was reminiscent of last year's Chicken Comp (with games that all featured a chicken crossing the road). If you missed the debut of any of these contests, visit <ftp://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/games/mini-comps/> to see how they fared.

While these mini-comps have so far not proven as hotly contested as the annual IF competition or the XYZZY Awards, they all point up a desire to share the wealth when it comes to honoring our game developer colleagues for their sharp-witted dialogue and skill in puzzle creation. Even though the XYZZY Awards offers prizes in a diverse range of categories, it's been dominated by the crowd favorites more than once.

In the most recent XYZZY Awards (held in February 1999), honoring the best games of 1998, Adam Cadre's Photopia and Andrew Plotkin's Spider and Web won in seven out of 10 categories. See this issue's Letters column for one proposal I received for restructuring the voting; it calls for enabling readers to vote in a second round after the top five vote-getters in each category are designated as nominees. My initial hunch is that the results would not turn out much differently — but please let me hear your thoughts on this as well!

Until next issue, happy gaming!

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

**Contents:**

*Top 10 Picks for IF  
on the Web* .....2

*Letters*.....3

*Description  
Medicine: Making a  
Room Come to Life*.....7

*Have IF, Will Travel:  
A Primer on Playing  
Text Adventures on  
PDAs and Handheld  
Devices*.....11

*Game Review:  
Dr. Dumont's  
Wild P.A.R.T.I*.....14

*Bulletin Board* .....15

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**Editor:**

Eileen Mullin

**Associate Editor:**

Neil deMause

**Contributors to this issue:**

Michael Berlyn  
Joe Merial  
Ross Rubin

## Issue # 17 Top 10 Picks for Interactive Fiction on the Web

### Adventure Review

<http://www3.sympatico.ca/philip.jong/index.htm>

### Creating a text adventure game in Java

<http://www.davidreilly.com/jcb/text-adventure/index.html>

### Douglas Adams' Amazing HHG Text Game

[http://www.comicrelief.org.uk/frames/fun/hitch\\_hike/dont\\_panic.htm](http://www.comicrelief.org.uk/frames/fun/hitch_hike/dont_panic.htm)

### Fiction Interactive

<http://home.earthlink.net/~phoebef/fictioninteractive/fictioninteractive.html>

### The Infocom Walkthrough Archives

<http://home.earthlink.net/~phantoman/infocom/>

### Interactive Fiction Playground

<http://www.tangrams.com/IF/>

### Intruder Online

<http://www.gay-point.de/intruder/>

### LSD Interactive Adventure Game

<http://www.aapi.co.uk/~oulik/lsd/>

### SLAG: A Z-Machine Hint System

<http://www.ecst.csuchico.edu/~beej/slag/>

### The Unofficial Legend Text Adventure Page

<http://www.waitingforgo.com/legend>

And we're not talking drugs here!

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WELCOME TO LSD - interactive adventure game, an Internet adventure game from an environment that is totally imaginary and yet can strike many as strangely familiar - from LSD, the university that is ALL universities. And no drugs were involved in the game or in its production (Well, O.K., nearly no drugs. And I can stop whenever I want to. Honest.)!

In the first act, *Bangside Blues*, you assume a role of a freshly arrived student to a luxurious LSD student residence known as the Bangside House. After a few initial steps, you begin to unravel a mystery that

For REGISTERED users only  
NO MORE waiting for the game to download - have it sent to your mailbox! Or request a walkthrough for the game!

LSD Interactive Adventure Game site

Hi there,

Thanks for running the XYZZY Awards again. In the aftermath of this year's ceremony, a bunch of us were kicking around some ideas. First off, most people seem to be in favor of breaking the voting up into a pair of two-week periods. The first would be for nominations, in which people could submit as many choices as they like for each category. Top five vote-getters in each category would be the nominees. Then there would be another two weeks in which people would vote. A lot of people said that it'd be much less daunting to select a favorite from a list of five than from a list of 120 games multiplied by all the puzzles and characters therein.

I personally would really like to see this second round done with Instant Runoff Voting, in which each voter would rank the choices from 1 to 5, with votes redistributed as candidates drop out. This would help prevent splits in the Individual categories — so if Dragon Town has a bunch of NPCs that people love, they won't end up splitting their votes and throwing the victory to the solitary NPC in Tornado Dogs or some such.

Finally (for now), David Dyte says that because of the medals, he'd like an absolute cap on ten awards per year. Nevertheless, IF changes over the years, and it might be nice if each year we could consider phasing out categories that come to seem marginal and phasing in ones that seem more relevant. (For instance, prior to 1997, a Best PC award probably wouldn't have occurred to many people — but now it seems quite essential.

Who knows what'll seem essential at this time next year?)

Anyway, just thought I'd pass these ideas along while they're still fresh. Thanks again.

—Adam Cadre  
grignr@retina.net

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Dear XYZZYnews,

Thank you for maintaining such a wonderful site. For years I have played the Infocom text adventures found the LTOI volumes 1 and 2. Only recently have I started looking on the Internet for other resources. The most pleasing surprise for me was the discovery of other Z-machine interpreters for various operating systems. It was these interpreters that got me thinking the other day.

Has anyone used the Dragon Naturally Speaking (or other speech recognition) software with the Win '9x Z-machine interpreters?

If Activision would take the time and effort to bundle the Infocom games with a decent interface and speech recognition (and synthesis) software, these titles could remain viable for quite some time. Since I do not run Win '9x or have a machine at home capable of handling speech recognition, this question is moot for me at this point. However, if people do have success with speech recognition and the Z-machine interpreter, that would be enough right there for me to save a few pennies and invest in a more contemporary model.

On a more philosophical note though, how do you feel about the use of speech recognition and synthesis for text

adventures? Would this added capability detract from the spirit of the games? These games would not expand vocabulary nearly as much. But, we would get away from tedious typing. (Admit it, typing can be tedious at times.) I would like to see the option remain open though for typing or speech synthesis. I don't believe the Z-code would need to be changed. Merely altering the front end or the interface should be enough. I am not sure though how to handle games like Beyond Zork where there is an automapping feature (which I personally really liked).

Those are my thoughts for the day on text adventures and where they may go. For what it's worth, the biggest loss came when graphic adventures dropped their parsers. The games and the computers they were played on lost their personalities.

Sincerely,

—Bob Langer  
writerbob@aol.com

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Hello XYZZY!

Just a note on the convention article in issue #16. From what I've read of the Erasmatron so far (*XYZZYnews* #14), it seems an abysmal failure at any sort of "revolution." I also strongly agree with Lucian Smith that the idea of "simplifying" code so that "artists" are able to bring their ideas to life in software is somewhat misled. I am *both* a computer programmer (programming since the age of five — ah, the days of the TRS-80 Color Computer!) and an artist (professional actor, professional graphic designer, amateur writer and illustrator); any

“artist” who doesn’t want to bother learning a new medium should not attempt to work within that medium — game design is simply another medium that an artist can choose to work in if so desired. I’m not sure whether Chris Crawford is belittling artists or pandering to them, but either way, I think his ideas are flawed.

—Semper Bufo  
sbufo@earthlink.net

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Dear XYZZYnews,

One thing I’ve found is that there are an awful lot of people going on about the golden age of Infocom. I haven’t yet heard mention in XYZZYnews about an Infocom/Mag Scrolls game before — so I’m mentioning it. Since I had a Spectrum, we got a vast range of games unique to our system, but very few ported from other systems — one or two Magnetic Scrolls ones, but that’s about it.

So therefore, I’m (practically) new to all this stuff — I’m used to games where GET ALL is a luxury — heck, even some games where they don’t allow GET, just TAKE... now that’s going a long way back!

On the other hand, there were some classics there. I still laugh at the bizarre humor in Buggy and Very Big Cave Adventure, and I still idolize the first text adventure I ever played properly — and the first I ever completed, the utterly wonderful Escape. A perfect beginners game, while a little too reliant on puns, it was a lot of fun, and got me bitten by the text adventure bug.

I think what I’m trying to say is that there is more than one way to get into text adventuring — you don’t have to go via Infocom.

Anyway, congratulations on an excellent (and very flashy) magazine.

—Matt  
Matthew.Clemson@keble.ox.ac.uk

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Dear Eileen,

Hi! I am a computer programmer. Over the past 10 years I and my friends have built, played, and then filed away many text adventures that we got together and wrote. The adventures were admittedly simple and hand-developed (we had no idea that such systems like TADS existed!), but they worked and we enjoyed building them, even if we were the only people who ever saw them.

The reason that I’m writing is because I’m currently developing yet another text-adventure. When I planned it all out a few weeks ago I was just planning to build it and file it away like I have all of the others. After thinking it over, though, I thought that perhaps it was time that I started releasing our text-adventure games instead of just filing them away and forgetting about them.

Upon thinking the matter over, I wasn’t sure what to do. I don’t use any text adventure development system; I simply sit down and build my application from the ground up in Visual Basic. The text-parser I developed on my own, and it probably isn’t as advanced as it should be. Moreover, the game I have in mind is rather large and complex; it’s quite likely that I won’t have the time to do it as thoroughly as I’d like to — and I don’t want to turn out a low-quality product.

So I had an idea: what if I were to ask the fans of interac-

tive fiction for help? If I were to do this on my own my game probably wouldn’t be a quality production. However, if I could have some help (perhaps some advice, perhaps some programming help, perhaps a few design ideas, etc.) I think that I could turn out a good product.

So, then: if anybody would be interested in having a hand (however large or small) in developing what I’m currently calling “The Tomorrow Problem” (perhaps someone could think of a better name!), or if anyone would just like to know what’s under development, let me know!

Sincerely,

—Jonathan K. Cooper  
ednacoooper@compuserve.com

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Dear XYZZYnews,

In the “Reporter’s Notebook, L.P. Smith incorrectly identifies “Rite of Spring” as Shostakovitch. It was, of course, Stravinsky who wrote “Le Sacre” (even though he denied it in later years ;-)).

—Blake  
BlakeWatson@compuserve.com

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Dear XYZZYnews,

I read the [letter] by Mrs. Mixon (XYZZYnews #15) about emotion being an important part of an interactive fiction, and have to agree with her. I haven’t played the game mentioned, but at the whole, I think that both technical puzzles and character interaction/ emotions are important. There are some IF games with hardly any characters at all, and it’s strange to explore a large map and never find someone to talk to.

This was one thing I liked in Curses, where you can often find some life, and may it just be the cat Austin. The people in the streets of the Unreal City are well done, too, even though they're just mentioned and cannot be referred to. Walking around a place alone can be irritating, especially when it is supposed to be a place where one should expect to find people.

Creating emotions is important, too. If something very important happens, why not making the messages a bit more exciting? Let's suppose you are an orphan, and find your father during the course of the game; why not creating a message like "With great excitement, you walk towards your father, trembling with..." and such, instead of just "You see your father here."

Some IF players I know think there should always be neutral messages in a game, blank spaces where the player can insert his own emotions. And the player's character should never actually speak, for this might ruin the illusion (never ask me what illusion they mean). This is true, to some extent. But I still think even though the main part of imagination should be done by the player, the game is allowed to manipulate feelings in some cases.

—Bjoern Ludwig  
ramghost@hotmail.com

Dear Eileen,

I've loved interactive fiction ever since I played Wumpus Hunter back in 1990. (If that counts as IF, hmmm)

You wanna know how much I love IF? Well, see, back in 1996 my dad found an old

book and bought it at a library sale. He gave it to me and it said "How to make adventure games in Basic", so I thought "Hey, this is great, I used to make Basic programs with my old TRS-80" So I found something called QBasic, and it took me about 12 to 15 hours to type in the whole adventure game from the book.

That was so horrible, afterwards my eyes were bloodshot and I was in a daze but sooo happy because I had finished the game. So I try to run it. It didn't work!

I found out later that QB doesn't work with old Basic! So, I found out that my school had some old computers in the old computer room. I snuck in, early in the morning, with my 5.25 disk and copied the old GW-Basic on it and then snuck back out, I was so happy to be able to play the game I had typed I almost skipped school! But I got through school, ran to my computer, put it in, and it worked! Now, do you see to what lengths I went to to get my interactive fiction! It makes me laugh to think back on it now, I must have been nuts to work all that time on that blasted game!

—Frogman302@aol.com

Dear Eileen,

This letter is open to any developer(s) who wish to reply. Currently I am working on developing a text editor which among other things is able to pick AGT commands and change their color real time (while you type).

My next step is to make a proper development environment that will create and AGT Script file output. Maybe a com-

piler with it or even a run engine for 32bit environment (W95)... All that will be free of charge.

If anyone out there is interested or willing to help designing and implementing such a project is more than welcome to contact (please be informal, its for pure fun!)

If anyone responsible for AGT sees this please contact me. We can talk!

Eileen, my congrats on your Web site. It's definitely top of my list.

Cheers!

—Leon

lvenediktou@csc.ragroup.co.uk

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### Infocom bugs, continued

Plundered Hearts: In the cargo hold with the burning fuse, if you throw your hand through the gap, you lose your hand.

Second, in the gallery, if you type BURN ROPE, it tells you:

You have no source of fire. The rope is consumed instantly in flames.

The version I found those bugs in is: Release 26, serial number 870730.

Mike

m\_cuffa@alcor.concordia.ca

I may have a new bug for your Zork bug list. I call it The Boat Of Holding Bug.

I have recently started replaying Zork I (last time was ages ago, and I forgot almost everything since then). I therefore cannot be sure if this is a bug or a feature, but it has the earmarks of a bug. The bug is a artifact of there being two distinct objects for the boat: one inflated, one deflated.

It is possible to inflate the boat, take everything that is not sharp, pile it in the boat, and deflate the boat. You may now pick the boat up and carry it around (along with the pump and whatever sharp objects you want to carry). This was discovered in Zork I 88/840726.

On a different note, I noticed on your bug list, you mention:

When you get to the Dungeon area, try this (in any version):

```
>DUNGEON MASTER, KILL
ME WITH THE STAFF
```

"If you wish," he replies.

If you insist...

Poof, you're dead!

```
**** The dungeon mas-
ter has died ****
```

The dungeon master follows you.

Your sword has begun to glow very brightly.

Or this:

```
>DUNGEON MASTER, KILL
DUNGEON MASTER WITH
STAFF
```

"If you wish," he replies.

"If you wish," he replies.

You aren't even holding the staff!

The last message appears even though you are holding the staff! Very surreal. I'm still scratching my head over these.

It would appear to me that these messages are caused by the engine performing output while interpreting the orders with the dungeon master as the subject. Put differently, some of the messages are the game talking to the Dungeon Master.

For instance, in the last case:

```
YOU> DUNGEON MASTER,
KILL DUNGEON MASTER WITH
STAFF
```

invokes

```
DM> KILL DUNGEON MAS-
TER WITH STAFF
```

Parser interprets:

Subject: DM

Verb: KILL

DO: DM

IO: Staff

Game engine checks for staff in inventory of DM (since he is the subject). Not there.

Engine dumps out with error:

You aren't even holding the staff!

which is displayed.

From the point of view of a Lisp hacker, this is a fairly straightforward bug. However, the dungeon master dying but not dying in the first message is what twigs me. Perhaps I will know more when I experiment with that bit of the game.

One final item. In Zork I, if you type DIVE while at Aragain Falls, you plummet to your death. This is accompanied by a couple of messages, such as:

```
Aragain Falls
```

```
>DIVE
```

This was not a very safe place to try jumping.

In the movies, your life would be passing before your eyes.

```
**** You have died ****
```

(You are then resurrected in whatever manner is appropriate for your situation.) The second line varies, although I have not yet figured out what it is based on. At one point, I elicited garbage. I will have to get back to you to tell you just how to do this. This is also in Zork I 88/840726.

—Piquan  
joelh@gnu.org

I have an addition to your complete Infocom Bug list:

In Suspended (early versions, anyway; I never tried it on LTOI), you could type HUMANS, KILL SELF, and the humans would obey the order and kill themselves.

Although this kept the humans from turning you (the player) off, it had the side effect of making the game unsolvable, since the humans wouldn't be alive to perform their necessary plot functions. I don't think the humans obeyed any other orders.

—Monty  
monty@blarg.net

I found some bugs in Planetfall, but most of them are a matter of opinion:

```
>look at benches
```

I see nothing special about the benches.

I can scrub the scrub brush!

```
>kick me
```

Kicking the you is as worthwhile as cleaning a Grotch cage.

```
>push/kick/turn/get
on me
```

pushing the you...

—Chad Schultz  
chadschultz@yahoo.com

# Description Medicine

*Learn how your words can make a room come to life*

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by *Michael Berlyn* ([mberlyn@cascajepublishing.com](mailto:mberlyn@cascajepublishing.com))

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**S**o, you've got the puzzles and the plot worked out, and you've even got your beta testers lined up. You're eager to release your latest masterpiece, something over which you've devoted most of your free time for the past few months. Or years. You play the game through one last time, just to make sure everything works. On completing the game with a perfect score, you figure it's ready for outside eyes. But you're probably wrong.

It takes only a few hours for you to hear back from one of your testers that holding the yellow polka-dot grunkle (a small domestic pet found on Altair 4) up to the squinza's handle (a feeding mechanism for the grunkle) while standing on your tiptoes seems a bit... obscure. He suggests an alternate solution which you think about for a minute or so before deciding to do as he says. You fervently code the new solution. Anything to make the testers happy. You send it out again, and this time hear nothing negative about the puzzle.

This process goes on until the beta testers bless the product or just plain give up. Oddly, you hear nothing about what a great game it is, or how enthralled they were while testing it. "Oh well, it's probably not a beta tester's role to tell me how good the story is. They're just there to find bugs," you think.

You announce the release of your product and wait a few days for the flood of e-mails to fill your in-box. But few messages appear.

So, what went wrong? Why weren't you nominated for the Implementor's Hall of Fame? Why aren't people singing your praises and calling you for phone interviews? Why aren't you dating Uma Thurman?

Well, maybe — just maybe — it was your writing.

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## The Room Description

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Room descriptions are the anchor on which your game rests. It is the primary method you have at your disposal for creating a reality for the player, for creating mood and tension.

I like to think of my job as a writer as "re-creating reality in the readers' minds." This re-creating reality is really a subset of communication. What I want to do is

trigger an experience in the reader by layering detail and by reminding them of their own experiences. By having a series of details about the environment, I can put the reader there.

Here's how it works:

Let's make up a simple example. I'll start with a central room and put a room off in all four major compass points. Here's what a skeletal description of the room would look like:

You're in a room. There are exits off to the north, south, east and west.

Thrilling, isn't it? While it does the job of providing the player with information, providing information just isn't enough. We're writing interactive fiction, and part of what makes it fiction is that the reader experiences what we all write.

Let's start with the room itself. Is it big? Small? Long and narrow? High ceilings? Does it matter? Simply put, yes. In writing a game, it matters a lot.

You're in a large room. A hallway starts up to the north, fading into the darkness. You can see doorways heading off to the east and west. A swinging door leads off to the south.

So, I've started to layer in a few more descriptive phrases. Instead of being in a room, we're in a large room. This is better, but not good enough. I also did a little work on the exits, trying to say something interesting about a few of them, enticing the player to pursue some exits. For example, to say "a swinging door leads off to the south" may elicit a curiosity about what's behind the door. In the same way, a hallway which is "fading into the darkness" is a little ominous, telling the player to use some caution.

But what about the room?

You're in a large, central room. The carpeting feels soft beneath your feet. The walls are adorned with portraits of the Ushers, from great-great grandfather through baby Usher, grotesque in his own right. Torches flicker on the walls, making the portraits seem to move on their own. A hallway starts up to the north, fading into the darkness. You can see doorways heading off to the east and west. A swinging door leads off to the south.

See how much difference some description makes?

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## **The Room Checklist**

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Here's an approach — more of a recipe, actually — to help you get started writing those great room descriptions. Answer each of these questions about each of the rooms you create and you'll be well on your way to writing better.

### **Size/Scope**

How big is the room? In *Zork: The Undiscovered Underground*, I thought it would be amusing to have a broom closet which was huge enough to support weather patterns. So, think about the size of the room. To say it's a living room isn't enough. Is it small? Cramped and tiny, just big enough for the furniture? Or is it immense, the size of a small football field?

### **Ceilings**

Is there a high ceiling? Is it vaulted? Or low enough to make the room feel cramped? Are there skylights? Can you see the cobwebs in the corners? Are there footprints up there? What color are the walls?

### **Floors/Ground**

Is the flooring marble, wood, carpeted? Can you hear your footsteps echo? Squish? Is the floor tiled — and if so, is the tile a black-and-white checkerboard pattern or terra cotta? Is the ground a dirt path? If so, are there plants along the side of the path? Does the path go straight or does it meander? If you're on a lawn, is it neatly mowed or wild? Are there flowers or bushes?

### **Walls**

Are the walls wallpapered? Painted? Natural stone? Do they emit light? Reflect light? What's on the walls — paintings? A mural? Windows?

### **Lighting**

Is it dark and gloomy or bright and sunny? Are there shadows in the corner? Is the place lit by natural lighting? Does the sun stream through the windows? If so, can you see dust particles dancing in the rays? Or is the sun glinting off the glass coffee table?

### **Mood**

Well, what's the room's atmosphere like? Gloomy? Somber? Happy? Whoever lives or lived here would likely have the room reflect their general mood. A depressed person is not likely to have yellow-and-red throw pillows.

## Senses

It's always a good idea to work as many of the senses into the room description as is reasonable. For example, what does the room smell like? Musty? Sweet from incense? Can you smell stale cigarette smoke? What can you hear? The dripping of a faucet? The rippling of water that flows by?

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## Practice

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The easiest way to approach all of this is to take a pen or pencil in hand, grab a notebook, and walk around the place where you live, describing everything you see. You don't have to write a lot of detail, but some detail does help make the scene pop for readers.

If you live in a one-room efficiency, you're kind of stuck — so take your notebook and pen with you when you leave and describe every room you enter. It makes a difference if the windows reach nearly the floor and stop a few feet from the ceiling. It makes a difference if the carpet is deep pile or indoor-outdoor Astroturf.

I'd like to share with you a room description from a work-in-progress, *Chameleon*. Here's a living room description from an apartment in the opening of the game:

South half of Living Room

This part of the living room has a bay window with a southern exposure. There are no window shades or curtains, so the direct sunlight is devastating to the untended plants he had placed here. Remmy's dead potted plants line the seat beneath the window. The tendrils and baby shoots of a spider plant are not quite dead, and sway slightly over the heating vent. To the right of the window is an old, beat up, rectangular dining table Remmy has shoved against the wall to use as a writing desk. It is strewn with papers. A metal folding chair sits at the desk. The rest of the living room consists of a remnant piece of carpet used as an area rug and small and large throw pillows for sitting. A small couch sits beneath the bay window beside an old, overstuffed easy chair.

There are things that *you* notice when you enter a room, whether you note them consciously or not. If it's a mess, you'll think differently about the person who lives there than if it's neat.

Rooms make a statement. Have yours make one, too. ☒

*Michael Berlyn has been in the computer industry since the square wheel was in common use. Known as "dino" to his aged friends and "Foobler" on the ifMud, he is hard at work on a new piece of puzzleless IF called "Chameleon." He hopes to be finished with it some time this century, but makes no promises. His publishing company, Cascade Mountain Publishing (<http://www.cascadepublishing.com>), publishes and sells books, eBooks and interactive fiction.*

# Have IF, Will Travel

*A primer on playing text adventures on PDAs and handheld devices*

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

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**W**hether you flash a Philips Velo or hang on to an HP 200LX when you're on the go, you're toting far more portable potential than your fellow commuters armed with Game Boys. So why not have at least as much fun? If you currently use your personal digital assistant (PDA) primarily for keeping your calendar or electronic note-taking, here's your chance to find out how you can add text-based gaming to your handheld's repertoire.

This article discusses two of the more popular modern handheld designs, those running Palm OS and Windows CE for Handheld PC devices. We'll look at how to find and download game files that you can run on your mobile device, as well as tips for optimizing performance and your playing experience.

The game files you'll be able to play will depend on which game interpreters are available for your handheld's operating system. Currently, for example, you can run Inform games using Window CE for handheld PCs, but there is no Z-machine interpreter available under Windows CE for palm-sized devices. While it should be technically possible to create a Z-machine interpreter for palm-sized PCs based on Windows CE — such as the Philips Nino, Casio E-10 and E-100 and Compaq Aero — no one has done so yet. If you're wondering whether there's a Z-machine interpreter available for another particular platform, you can check the **IF FAQ on interpreters** at <http://www.cs.uu.nl/wais/html/na-dir/games/interactive-fiction/part2.html>. You may be happily surprised to discover that yes, you can run text adventures on everything from an Apple Newton to a Psion 3c.

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## Get connected

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Before you can stroke, pen or key in your palm-sized pursuits, you'll need to get the game files onto your portable device. To do so, you'd typically either connect your handheld device to your PC or directly to the Internet in order to download game files. If you're used to synchronizing or copying over files between your PC and your handheld device, you're all set to move on to the next step. However, this may be a new experience for you if you've just recently acquired your PDA or if you conduct your handheld computing in an entirely separate way from what you do on your PC.

Most PDAs use a serial connection and many, like the Palm devices, use a cradle. For Palm Pilots, and the Palm III, V, and VII, install the Palm Desktop software that comes with the PDA; you can also obtain the latest upgrades from

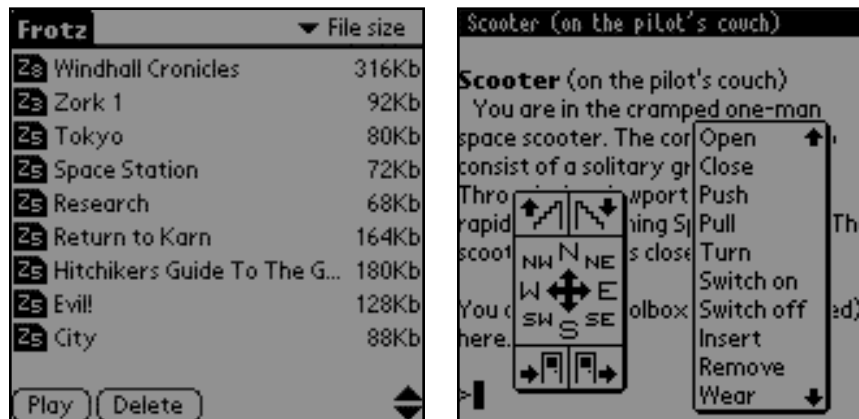
<http://palm.3com.com/custsupp/downloads/>. Once the Palm Desktop software is installed on your PC, you must install an interpreter and convert and install game files as explained in the next section.

For Windows CE devices that are primarily keyboard-based — such as the HP 320LX, LG Phenom Express, Vadem Clio, or Sharp Mobilon — you can use Windows CE ActiveSync to connect your handheld device to your PC. Simply drag the files you want to install into the synchronized folder; there's no need to go through the installation wizard. The files will transfer at the next sync or immediately depending on your preferences.

Check out the support or downloads section of the handheld manufacturer's Web site first to see there are any additional files you'll need to help you sync up with your PC or connect directly to the Web.

## Run, games, run!

For the purposes of this article I looked exclusively at playing games that could be run with a Z-machine interpreter — namely, any of the Inform or Infocom games. Several Z-machine interpreters are available for Palm OS-based devices and Windows CE Handheld PCs. I've included below some of the useful links I've found to Web sites that house these interpreters and discuss playing games on handheld devices. You can also find these Z-machine interpreters at the IF archive at GMD by drilling through the <http://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/infocom/interpreters/> directory.



Paul Hargrave's PilotFrotz features word lists, automatic carriage returns, and a compass rose.

Paul Hargrave's **PilotFrotz** is a robust Palm OS-based interpreter for Z-machine games. It's a port of the Frotz interpreter by Stefan Jokisch, and downloadable from <http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Way/2367/>.

To transfer files such as the PilotFrotz program from your PC to the Palm Computing device, drag them to the installation program (instapp.exe on the PC). The next time you HotSync, the files will be transferred to the handheld.

Once you're set up with PilotFrotz, you'll need to convert your Infocom or Inform text adventures (files with a .z3 or .z5 extension, for example) to .PDB files, a format for files to be used on a Palm OS-based device. There is a file converter included with PilotFrotz; and you can readily download Inform games from GMD at <ftp://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/games/inform/>.



FrotzCE running Zork I. Use your device's pen to tap the icons in the navigation bar to issue common commands; use the keyboard to type in more complex sentences.

You can save yourself some work on this front by availing yourself of the game files available for download on **Leisa ReFalo's interactive fiction page** (<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/9590/interactive.htm>). She has converted a number of Inform games for use with Palm OS-based devices to .PDB files. This page unfortunately has not been updated in some time, but you'll find many favorite Inform classics and the IF '97 Competition game files available here. Once your .z\* files are converted, they are installed via the same program you used to install the interpreter.

If you use a Windows CE handheld PC, you can pick up Ian Dean's **FrotzCE** interpreter at <http://www.pyram-id.demon.co.uk/FrotzCE.html>. Best of all, you don't need to re-package or convert the standard Inform game files at all before playing them — you can just download them from GMD and go.

## Experience points

So, how can you judge whether you'd enjoy playing text adventures well enough to justify the time and effort it would take to get set up — or to justify the cost, if you're still debating buying one in the first place? Here are some factors to consider:

- **Writing preferences** — Playing text adventures can be a typing-intensive activity. Is your mobile device's keyboard so small that typing at length becomes a hindrance? Determine how comfortable you are typing at a stretch — if you're forced to hunt and peck because the keys are too small for anything remotely resembling touch-typing, you'll find it hard to focus on your game at hand.
- **Ease of connecting** — If it's a drag to hook up your PDA to your PC for file transfers, you're unlikely to add new games to your repertoire. You want to make sure you're comfortable with synching with your PC, especially if you're playing a game at home so compelling you want to take it with you when you go out.
- **Speed** — Does your handheld respond as soon as you press the carriage return, or do you spend spine-tingling seconds in limbo waiting for a response? Check your device's memory capacity, and experiment with other Z-machine interpreters, if more than one is available for your device's platform. ☒

## Dr. Dumont's Wild P.A.R.T.I

Parser: Inform  
 Author: Muffy and Michael Berlyn  
 URL: <http://www.cascadepublishing.com/product.asp?sku=14>  
 Cost: US\$24

Ever wondered what would happen if you got stuck in a particle accelerator that allowed you to see the subatomic world in a series of mental metaphors? Oh, you haven't? Well, Dr. Dumont's Wild P.A.R.T.I. will fill you in on what you've been missing.

The game's basic premise concerns a machine called the Particle Accelerator and Reality Translation Integrator, the P.A.R.T.I. of the title. The machine puts you into a subatomic world. But instead of seeing protons and quarks, P.A.R.T.I. creates mental metaphors. Dr. Dumont shows you this machine secretly in hopes of taking your body specifications in order to run the machine. He wants to find the mysterious "Particle X" which has eluded scientists for years. As you step into the machine, you get worried and try to escape, but by doing this, you accidentally send yourself to this subatomic world.

You find yourself in a bedroom with nothing but a dirty pair of jeans. From there, you must find a way out of the machine without killing yourself. There are five elements you need to

shut down P.A.R.T.I. and return to the real world. In order to get these elements, you need to go through the UnFairgrounds, a Diploma of Thought, some ducks, a large cat, a floating professor, a kite race, and other abnormalities. The scoring system in "Dr. Dumont" has been replaced by just an indicator of how many elements you have.

This game's atmosphere is reminiscent of Infocom's "Nord and Bert". There are different "worlds" inside P.A.R.T.I. that all offer their own set of puzzles and comic relief. Unlike "Nord and Bert", you can don't "win" worlds; you can return to each world even after you have solved all the puzzles contained within. The comedy in the game is also kept under control so not to create completely farce situations (although, "Dr. Dumont's Wild P.A.R.T.I." itself is farce).

"Dr. Dumont" has all the aspects of a professionally-written game. It has obviously gone under weeks or even months of beta-testing to make sure everything was right. It also includes virtual "feelies," the various items that came with many Infocom games that will help you along your way.

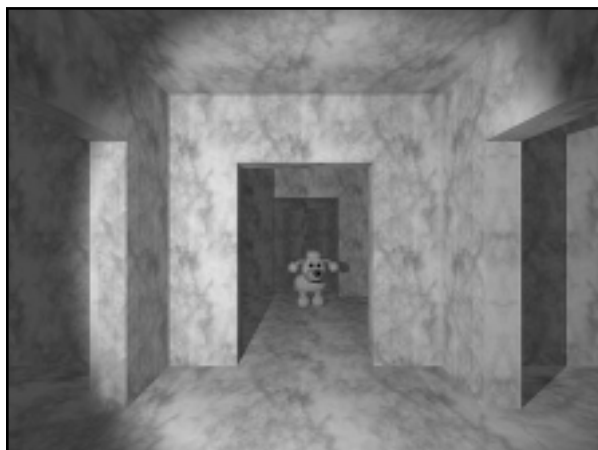
**Highs:** Good plot, great use of comedy, relevant puzzles that don't require countless saves, and "feelies".

**Lows:** The \$24 price tag

**Overall:** This is a great game that is professionally done. If you have \$24 burning a hole in your pocket, and you want to play some great IF, this is the game for you. ☒

—Joe Merical

## Spot the IF reference...



### PhotoLink

<http://www.netins.net/showcase/fotolink/>

This is one of those Web-based adventure games, and what's really cool is that it's also an online exhibit for the works of several photographers! Very clever (Warning: nudity! But not smut — artistic stuff] and while surfing through I found a reference on this page which made me smile knowingly:

<http://www.photolink.com/qcjcde/maze1.html>

—Brian O'Neill  
 Raleigh, NC

*Below are some new queries I've received recently from readers looking for hard-to-find games, or who are in need of specific help. If you can help answer any of these requests, please don't be shy about chiming in with an answer! —EM*

In your "Adventure Game Interfaces" [XYZZYnews #7], you made mention of ICOM, creators of the classic black-and-white Mac game, *Deja Vu*. Do you have any idea if it is available anywhere, for any amount of money? I have about eight old black-and-white Macs that I lend out to people and use myself — I'm trying to track down as much of the truly wonderful software as I can remember from that era (my first computer was an original 128K)...

Hope you can help me in my (oddball) quest,  
—David Reynolds  
dreynolds@extensis.com

I've been desperately trying to find a copy of an old game called *Hacker*. The game starts with just the word "LOGON:" and you have to work your way from there. Or so I hear. Anyway, if anybody could find me a copy/download of the game for any system at all, I would be eternally grateful.

—Andrew Dudzik  
adudzik@geocities.com

When I was a young man around the early '80s, I had a BBC micro and played a text adventure called *Castle of Riddles* by Acornsoft. Now I'm a bit older, I thought I'd see if it's still available in PC format on the Internet. That's how I discovered this incredible following for text adventures. I

also discovered *XYZZYnews*, which is great.

Through your pages I am hoping to find either a PC version of *Castle of Riddles* or a walkthrough.

After much research and work, I managed to obtain a BBC micro emulator for the PC, as well as a disk image of *Castle of Riddles*, so I can now play it as it was originally intended — complete with slow response times!

If anyone knows of hints or a walkthrough I would be grateful — and has anyone converted this game to Inform or other PC-playable version? It had some interesting room-types and puzzles which may be quite tricky to implement in Inform so it might be a challenge for someone!

—Andy Corbett  
Andy.Corbett@postoffice.co.uk

I have been playing through *Zork I*. Many times in the game there are references to the manual. I downloaded the game off the Infocom Web page and don't have the manual. Is there anywhere to get it?

Thanks.  
—David Vecchio  
vecchio@pineknot.com

**Adventure Maze Maps**

I was browsing through a back issue, and saw your request for *Maze Maps* for *Adventure*. You've probably been deluged with them by now, but just in case you haven't, here are two that I made several years ago.

You'll need to view them in a [monospace] font like Courier, in Windows Notepad for them to look right. [see column at right]

—Graeme Cree  
GraemeCree@aol.com

MAZE 1 (All alike)

Loc.	N	S	E	W	NW	NE	SW	SE	U	D
1	1	2	3	18	--	--	--	--	!	--
2	3	15	17	1	--	--	--	--	16	16
3	--	4	2	1	--	--	--	--	--	--
4	5	6	3	--	--	--	--	--	--	20
5*	--	4	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
6	--	7	4	21	--	--	--	--	--	22
7	8	7	22	6	--	--	--	--	23	25
8	8	--	9	7	--	--	--	--	--	26
9	10	14	11	8	--	--	--	--	--	#
10	--	9	11	13	--	--	--	--	--	--
11	9	--	--	10	12	--	--	--	--	--
12*@	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	11	--
13*	--	--	10	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
14*	--	--	9	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
15*	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
16	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	2	2
17*	--	--	--	2	--	--	--	--	--	--
18	1	18	19	18	--	--	--	--	--	--
19*	--	--	--	18	--	--	--	--	--	--
20*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	4
21	--	--	6	22	--	--	--	--	--	--
22	--	23	7	21	--	--	--	--	6	--
23	7	24	--	22	--	--	--	--	--	--
24*	--	--	--	23	--	--	--	--	--	--
25*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	7	--
26*	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	8	--

!=Hall of Mists, West  
#=Bird Room  
\*=Dead End  
@=Pirates Chest is here

MAZE 2 (All Different)

Loc.	N	S	E	W	NW	NE	SW	SE	U	DD
1	MTL	2	4	11	5	7	10	9	3	6 %
2	MLT	3	5	9	10	4	8	1	7	11 6
3	tLM	4	11	6	2	9	1	8	10	5 7
4	MtL	5	2	8	1	10	6	3	9	7 11
5	MLt	6	7	4	3	8	9	2	11	10 1
6	TLM	1	10	3	7	2	5	11	4	8 9
7	TML	8	6	1	4	11	2	10	5	9 3
8	LMt	9	12	10	11	3	7	4	6	2 5
9	LMT	10	3	5	6	1	11	7	8	4 2
10	tML	11	8	7	9	5	3	6	2	1 4
11	LTM	7	9	2	8	6	4	5	1	3 10
12	*S	8	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

\*=Dead End  
\$=Vending Machine  
%=Long Hall, West  
M=Maze  
L=Little  
T=Twisty  
t=Twisting

Hi there. When I was a little boy, I went and played in the basement of the Lawrence Hall of Science where they had a small number of primitive terminals (I can still remember the sound of the teletypes!). On those machines, you could (if I remember correctly) login to the "Plato" network. On that system was a primitive D&D-like game whose original name I can't remember, but it was renamed "Adventure" for a short while. The game was taken off of the Plato network, and I moved onto other things, as little boys are wont to do.

I know it wasn't the classic text adventure, "Adventure," because it had Ultima I-like vector-based graphics for going into a dungeon, finding a Vampire or Balrog, and seeing its representation on screen. I remember some details about the game, like being ranked with other players based upon the success of your character. I sorely miss that game. Could you set my feet on a path to finding this lost source code/game? I would appreciate it beyond words. Thank you.

—Paul Forbes  
pforbes@mail.in.opcode.com

Several years ago I tried America Online for a short while. I downloaded an IF game called Dragon Quest for Windows 3.1. However, later I got a new hard drive, gave the other away, and I've never seen the game since. I looked on the IF archive, do you have any idea where it might be?

—Chad Schultz  
chadschultz@yahoo.com

I am looking for information, about an old Infocom game

called Mines of Titan. I acquired the game from someone I know at work. Can you tell me where I can get any manuals, maps, relating to the game. I keep seeing something about a visitors guide, when I play it. I would appreciate any help you could give me. The game was made about 1989, in cooperation with Westwood Assoc. & Infocom Inc.

Warm regards,  
—Charles Mock  
cmock@usa.net

Hello, I have a request for your *XYZZYnews* bulletin board.

After a 10-year-break, I recently rediscovered Infocom and other IF games. I went straight to my local store and bought the Masterpieces package. Unfortunately, it didn't contain Hitchhiker's Guide, one of the games I was hoping to solve this time, nor Shogun. (Probably due to copyright reasons?) Are there any other editions available in Europe that contain either of these?

Any help is appreciated.  
—Florian Edlbauer  
florian\_edlbauer@yahoo.com

Sometime in my youth I played a text-adventure game on Spectrum. I cannot remember the name of this game and thus ask if you, or some reader of *XYZZYnews* could identify it. The game was said to be easy but I wasn't all too good with English back then.

Here's what I remember of the game: it was one of those where some places had a picture. I kind of remember that spectrum rendered the pictures... they were quite simple.

In the game you had to put on a helmet before you could

walk somewhere, then you got a sword by sleeping on a beach, did something in some village of some sort, travelled through some forest with some item telling you where to turn next, met a bear who had to be fed or he ate you. Last thing I remember is some haystack but I got stuck there then.

Unfortunately this is all I remember of the game. I'd much like to play it through sometime so it would stop haunting me =)

—Jari Komppa  
Jari.Komppa@viherjuuri.fi

I'm looking for a text game called The Mist, based on the short story of the same name by Stephen King. I'll pay anything for it. PC only please.

—Paul Neveu  
aupser@worldnet.att.net

I've had a copy of StarCross for years, got it around '83 for the c64 (actually, my parents got it, I was six at the time). Now, recently I've pulled the packet out to use the map as I played it on the PC, during which I found something interesting.

A copy of 'The New Zork Times' Vol II, No. (Infinity) Summer 1983. This is just the cover sheet; I dug around some of the old NZT archives, and found it was six pages (three printed pages); all this has is the first page and the order form. Has the front page, with the top story "Zork Users Group Will Shutdown" and the order page for the same user group for caps and things.

I'm not sure if this is valuable, but there might be someone out there who would be interested.

—Fox Cutter  
lmb@ieway.com