The Magazine for Interactive Fiction Enthusiasts

HOLLOW VOICE

My devoted 'zine readers may remember that I've been IF-deprived—not to mention sleep-deprived and social life-deprived—because of the book I've been writing. I'm happy to report that "The Essential Photoshop Book" (Prima Publishing, ISBN: 0-7615-0695-0) is finally on its way to print. Woo-hoo! :)

And just in time too, because I'm glad to be able to join in on the collaborative "let's make an IF CD" project proposed by Andrew Plotkin on the Usenet newsgroup rec.arts.int-fiction.

The CD proposal seems a natural extension of a couple of other recent r.a.i-f threads on whether IF game authors can make money and how to market or publicize this game category. Currently, the plans call for soliciting games (each author will receive an equal share of profits); producing a small batch of several hundred CDs (is there an equivalent term for "print run" that relates to CDs?); printing documentation; marketing; and overseeing sales and distribution.

I'm way excited about the project and the opportunities it presents for long-distance collaboration. Just by following the newsgroup posts, you can see that there are already IF fans from several different countries and—luckily—with different areas of expertise joining the effort. I don't know who will be organizing sales, but at this point I'd say if you're interested in contributing to the project or placing an order, Andrew Plotkin (erkyrath@netcom.com) should be the point person on that.

In other news, this issue addresses the impact of Activision's new graphical adventure game set in the Zork universe, Zork Nemesis. Interviewer Matt Newsome spoke with a couple of key members of Zork Nemesis' development team—and then separately with several of the old Infocom implementors, including Marc Blank, Dave Lebling and Steve Meretzky. Andrew Pontius describes in a "Tales from the Code Front" story the difficulties he faced in trying to program in TADS singular objects that are referred to in the plural (e.g., scissors). C.E. Forman contributes a song parody that should appeal to any IF fan familiar with the TV cartoon show "Animaniacs," and the usual "Top 10 Picks for IF on the Web," letters, and game reviews are included as well.

Until next issue, happy gaming!

Eileen Mullin
eileen@interport.net

Contents:

XYZZY*news*

Electronic versions: There are currently three 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 follow the links from their Web page at http://www.adobe.com. Thirdly, you can also read this issue of *XYZZYnews* on the World Wide Web at http://www.interport.net/~eileen/design/xyzzy.10.html

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Editorial deadline for Issue #11 is August 31, 1996.

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    Eileen Mullin

Contributors to this issue:
    Rob Daviau
    C.E. Forman
    Matt Newsome
    Andrew Pontious

NEWSBRIEFS...NEWSBRIEFS...NEWSBRIEFS...NEWSBRIEFS...

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

A Mazing Tale
http://www.entertain.com/creeper/

CNET gamecenter: outlaw gaming guide: Zork Nemesis
http://www.cnet.com/Gamecenter/Guide/Zork/

Gamers Site: UHS (Universal Hint System) Files
http://www.nitehawk.dk/KOLSTRUP/gsuhs.html

Gav and Peloso's Interactive Story
http://www.nuc.berkeley.edu/neutronics/gav/wayfarence/welcome.html

Hot Software: text adventures to download
http://www.worldvillage.com/wv/gamezone/html/downloa2.htm

Invisiclues for Andrew Plotkin's game So Far (written by Lucian Smith)
http://www.bioc.rice.edu/~lpsmith/IF/sofar.html

NeoText Software Home Page (Philip Dearmore)
http://www.eskimo.com/~morbeus/neotext.html

Python Universe Builder
http://www-acs.ucsd.edu/~jstrout/python/pub/index.htm

Quest Home Page
http://www.cae.wisc.edu/~masters/quest/quest.html
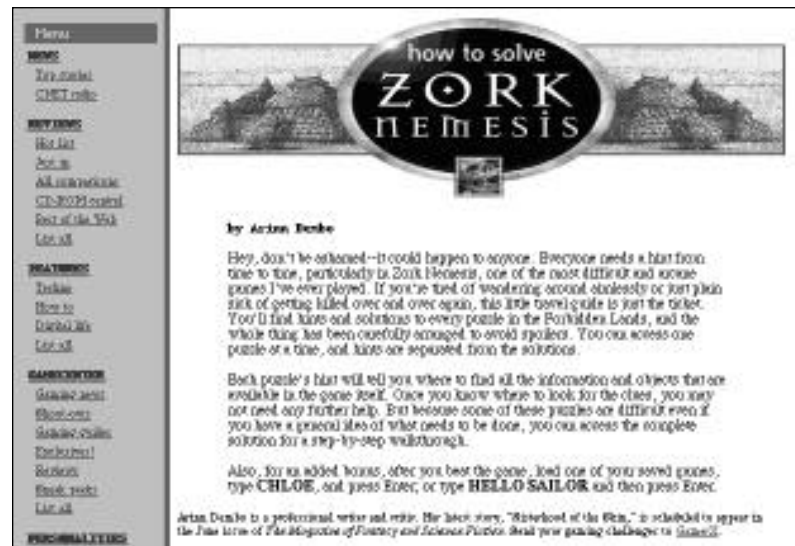
The Virtual Mystery Theater
http://www.coolsite.com/intro.html

CNET has a quick-and-dirty guide for beating Zork Nemesis.

Greetings XYZZYnews!,

I have just read your newsletter for the first time, and I found it very interesting. Keep up the good work!

I have always wanted to be either a writer or a game designer, and now with my finding of IF, I can now be both. I have AGT Master edition, and so far I have written three games on it, MY1STGAME, MYGAME, and MYWORLD, all of which were more or less getting to known AGT. I am now working on my 1st public release (no title yet) and so far AGT has done everything I could dream up to put into my games. I believe that if you have a good idea to start with, and take the time to do it right AGT can make wonderful games, but I have only played 2 TADS games before and 1 .z5 game, so I might be missing something. Could you clear me up on the difference in AGT and other IF languages?
—Steve
Butch2r@wilmington.net

Let me steer you towards the "Which System is Better?" FAQ maintained by Bob Newell and posted on GMD at ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/info/whichsys.zip, which does a much better job of succinctly outlining the pros and cons of the various text adventure systems than I could. —EM

Eileen,

Just wanted to say excellent work! Love *XYZZYnews*—I look forward to each issue and have been since issue #4 (I did go back and get 1-3 but just "discovered" *XYZZYnews* at issue #4).

Thanx for all the hard work you put in to getting us each issue.
—Dave
David_Hall@ml.com

Dear Eileen:

A weeks ago, I read first time *XYZZYnews,* and find it very interesting.

Maybe I must introduce myself…my name is Juan J. Munoz, and I'm the director of the most important (besides the older) adventurers club in Spain, the CAAD.

CAAD stands for "Club de Aventuras AD" (AD Adventures Club). Aventuras AD were the principal programming group of adventures in Spain, and we start as an extension of them, but now we're at our own.

We have a publication too (or a fanzine), and I'm very interested in the process you follow for make the .PDF version, because we need a PC reader based version of CAAD, and this seems a good way to do it.

Well, this is all by now. Is good see that the spirit of the adventure is still alive!

See you!

Juan
falco@arrakis.es

P.S. Excuse my poor English…I learned it playing adventures! 8-D

Here's how I go about creating the .PDF file for each issue: I first lay out the 'zine using the QuarkXpress page layout program, then print it to a PostScript file. I try to keep the file size low by limiting the number of fonts and graphics I use in the Quark

file. I use Adobe's Acrobat Distiller to convert the PostScript file to a .PDF file.—EM

Hi, Eileen.

I've been playing Infocom games for years. I am stuck in two different games though. Is there an online hints site somewhere, other than the great "Spoiler Column" in your newsletter??? Thanks for your help!

—Kelly Martin
kellybob@dibbs.net

Let me point you towards the solutions subdirectory of the IF archives on GMD; there you'll find a number of walkthroughs for all the Infocom games and a bunch of other text adventures. I bet you'd also get a fast response by posting a specific question about the game you're stuck in to the Usenet newsgroup rec.games.int-fiction. —EM

To XYZZYnews:

I finally fixed the Panic!! bug! [Sneak Previews, *XYZZYnews #9*]]Rejoice, rejoice, and all other rejoice-related activities! The reason for that bug, however, is because I didn't define something that I never used. Sounds strange? (Sounds like a holdover from Turbo Pascal, if you ask me!) Anyway, I expect Panic!! to be finished by the second week of August, and Panic!! 2 to be finished near the end. As you said in the preview, it's still FunWare and it's still a US10$ registration cost for Panic!! 2.
—Colin Marshall
Marshall@helen.bush.edu

Hi Eileen,

Do know where I can get a map of the Colossal Cave in the original Stanford version of the adventure game? Thanks,
—John
johore@sleeper.apana.org.au

I really don't know; can anyone else suggest where to look? —EM

To XYZZYnews:

I'm looking to get into down-loading some files to help me be able to write my own inter-active fiction on my power-mac. Do you know where I can get TADS or Inform?

The ftp.gmd site never lets me in without authorization and I don't know where else to go. Help! I think I can make a real contribution to IF. Thanks.
—Chris Kubica
miraklemax@aol.com

You can access the IF archives on GMF via anonymous FTP, which means you don't need to enter a password. When you connect to an FTP site via AOL, just uncheck the check-box that asks for an authorized name and password.—EM

Hi there!

My name's Megan Peard, and I've been enjoying looking through *XYZZYnews* plus other interactive game stuff, and hope you can help. I'm looking for an ancient interac-tive fiction game called "Mystery House" which I used to play on an Apple IIE back in 1984. If anyone can help, please reply!!
—Megan Peard
morgause@ozemail.com.au

Phil Darnowsky offered the following solution to this ques-

tion: The easiest way is to get an Apple II emulator from ftp.asimov.net, along with a file called mystery.dsk from the same site. Hope this helps. :) — EM

Hello Eileen,

I think this adventure, "Planetfall: The Search For Floyd" escaped me somehow. Have you heard of it? Steve Meretzky wrote it and it looks like "Infocom" released it sometime in 1995, or perhaps it never came out. Sigh!
Thank you.
—Susan
SusanD@ix.netcom.com

This game is still vaporware from Activision so far. If and when it's finally released, you'll certainly hear about it on the r.a.i-f and r.g.i-f newsgroups… and in XYZZYnews!—EM

Reviving an Old Tradition: The AGT Contest Returns

From the stuff I've read here in *XYZZYnews*, AGT is not quite dead. I know there are more AGT authors out there besides myself. I'm going to hold a new AGT programming contest this year, and this one's gonna blow the previous ones away! I know this is coming in light of the IF competition, but I feel that the IF competition is biased against AGT games. Here are the new rules:

1. Instead of a $100 prize, I feel that each game should have a $5 entry fee. Winner takes all. This change is due to the fact that we have no sponsor! Softworks is long gone.

2. Games must qualify before they can be judged. In too many of the previous contests, I felt I was judg-ing the best of the worst, so this year I'm going to try my hardest to weed out the bad stuff. Why the bother, you ask? Well, it's those cruddy AGT games that reflect people's opinion of AGT, and at the moment, there are too many bad games outweigh-ing good ones. So, my plan is to help the authors of unqualifying games personally, as an advisor. The qualifying deadline will be April 1st, 1997.

3. After the deadline, the games will be shipped out to my chosen judges. (e-mail me if you're interested in being a judge.) The judges will rate the games and the winner will be announced on July 1, 1997. The games will then be released to the IF archive (Unless author requests otherwise), and the next contest will begin.

4. Send your hopeful games to me, via E-mail, including AGT source code. Or, if you prefer, send by snail mail to: AGT Contest, 146 Oakland Ave., Pawtucket, RI 02861.

I, in return will send you back one of two things:
A.) A letter saying that your game qualified.
B.) A letter explaining why your game didn't quali-fy, and the things you might change to make the game qualify. Only upon qualification will you be required to pay $5 to the winning pot. So, AGT authors, break out your graph paper, notebooks, thinking caps, and AGT compilers, (Classic 1.7, Big 1.7, or Master's 1.6. Classic 1.83 not allowed.) and get ready for the AGT 1997 contest!
—Kevin Soucy
steelfist@usa.pipeline.com

Striving for Gothic Chill, Not a Humorous Touch

XYZZYnews interviews the Zork Nemesis developers

Matt Newsome (Matt@pnkfloyd.demon.co.uk) *conducted the following interview with Cecilia Barajas, producer, and Laird Malamed, technical director, of Activision's Zork Nemesis.*

XYZZYnews: Cecilia, Laird, thanks very much for agreeing to participate in this interview. Perhaps I could start by asking each of you to explain your role in relation to Zork Nemesis and your current projects. Were you involved with the development of any other Infocom/Zork games?

Cecilia Barajas: I was the director/producer of Zork Nemesis. Before that, I was an associate producer on [the Mac version of] Return to Zork.

Laird Malamed: I was the technical director of Zork Nemesis. I was in charge of overseeing all of the programming as well as various other technical aspects of the game. I helped on design and production. I will be directing the next Zork game.

XYZZYnews: Did you play any of the original Infocom interactive fiction works prior to embarking on the new project? Were you a fan during the early days?

CB: Yes, I did. I am a big fan of the early Zorks.

LM: I first played C&W's Adventure on a mainframe at my Uncle's bank in 1978. I then played almost all of the early games from Infocom (Zork I-III, Deadline, Enchanter, Suspended, Planetfall, etc...) as well as others (does anyone remember Broderbund's Kabul Spy?) on my Apple II. When I started at Activision (January 1995), I replayed the first three Zork's. I also played Ballyhoo and Infidel on my Psion during my vacation over the summer.

XYZZYnews: Was that for research purposes or for pleasure?

CB: I played the games originally for pleasure. I replayed them later for both pleasure and research.

LM: More for pleasure. But I was looking for research as well.

XYZZYnews: Do you have a favorite Infocom game?

CB: Zork 1.

LM: My favorite game is Zork III. Funny, I really disliked it the first time I played it. I even wrote a letter to Infocom telling them why it wasn't so great. I got back a reply from Marc Blank telling me my spelling was horrible. I was 14. Playing it

later in life, I really appreciate it. I also like Lurking Horror a lot as it takes place in a very MIT setting.

XYZZYnews: It's interesting to hear the name "Lurking Horror" come up because I, for one, feel that Nemesis has more in common with that work than Zork—especially in terms of that "gothic chill" when you're playing it! There's also, of course, the Department of Alchemy in Lurking Horror and alchemy is essentially the core theme in Nemesis.

Despite the success of this horror approach, one element of Zork that I felt was missing in Nemesis was humor! You can't get very far through the original Zork without grinning at something—whether it's the adventurer on the other side of the mirror, or being eaten by a grue, there's a fairly liberal injection of humorous comments throughout. Was this a deliberate move—to make the game more immersive, for example?

CB: Yes. I must say initially I thought about moving in more humor, but felt concerned that this would break the spell of being in a serious environment and undermine any immersivity.

One of the great things about text is that it allows you to play with tone. A lot of the humor in the early Zorks was in the computer responses to your mistakes. In this way, the creators were able to preserve a mood of an environment but interject humor. They were also able to control the type of humor so that it would generally stay on the side of hip and ironic, instead of hokey and stupid. Since I was working in the world of graphics, I didn't have this tool. Ultimately, however, I wanted the game to immerse the player in a surreal, credible alternate universe and believed too much humor would detract from that experience.

LM: Well, there's lots of humor in Nemesis as well. The books have some of it. Others are in the live action pieces or the diaromas. The game does lack the pun based humor of Return to Zork, and may not be as overtly humorous as Zork I-III, but that was the nature of the story.

XYZZYnews: I noticed that, unlike the last Zork title, "Return to Zork", the originators of Zork were not credited or acknowledged in the documentation for this game. To what extent do you feel the new game owes a debt of gratitude to the original Infocom staff?

CB&LM: The fact that they were not credited was in no way meant to cast any disrespect on their influence and importance in the Zork series, if not the computer games business. To us, the Zork universe not only created a powerful world, its birth was a seminal moment in the history of all computer games. At the risk of sounding hokey, We not only believe Zork Nemesis owes these creators a debt of gratitude, but so do all computer (especially adventure) games.

XYZZYnews: So were the original Infocom staff consulted or asked to join development at any stage?

CB&LM: Not really.

XYZZYnews: Do you feel the new graphical medium lacks any elements which were present in the original text-only medium?

CB: I believe the most powerful medium is "the word." Graphical games are woefully lacking the power of the text adventure. Think about the power of words. In a text adventure, I can say things like, "You suddenly feel a shiver run through your spine. The stench of death is overpowering." Can I even come close to expressing this through graphics or sound? No way. The reality is that those of us working with graphics and sound, can only struggle to use these tools in a way that comes close to the power of words.

LM: Yeah, we can't be as subtle. Everything is more or less in the open for discovery immediately. This makes the wrong answer feedback harder to do. Also, the wrong answers typically require more art and sound, which is expensive. There is also the narrator's voice (or world's voice) that is missing from the way first-person games work which was part of the text tradition. However, the ability to present fully visual elements, like narrative scenes, cool animations and the such are tools that we gain.

XYZZYnews: So what do you personally feel was the project's greatest success?

CB: I think the game's biggest success was in creating an immersive, compelling world with a strong, non-linear story.

LM: The story is very real and complex. I think the game tells an interesting and intriguing tale that keeps people playing. I also am proud of the Z-vision engine, and its new navigation style. I think the freedom of movement offers a lot and allows us to show more of the environment while giving players freedom to explore as they wish.

XYZZYnews: What is your long-term vision of computer games in the adventure/interactive fiction genre?

CB&LM: If you are including graphical adventures in this question, our belief is that this genre will continue to be strong. We both like first-person, immersive adventure games so we hope these will continue to evolve as well.

XYZZYnews: Is any Zork related merchandise available?

CB&LM: Yes, we have a strategy guide currently available. There is also a new Infocom Masterpieces collection coming onto the market and we might do other products such as a CD or a calendar.

XYZZYnews: Interesting! What type of material might appear on the CD and calendar?

LM: Well, nothing is for certain, but the CD would contain the ambient music and maybe some of the live action cues. Both the CD and Calendar would have images from the game as well.

XYZZYnews: Was the game a commercial success?

CB&LM: Yes.

XYZZYnews: Is there going to be a follow up? If so, has any kind of time scale been suggested for the next game?

CB&LM: There will be a follow up game although the schedule has not been solidified yet.

XYZZYnews: So, we can expect to see other games using the Z-Vision engine?

CB&LM: Yes you can—but we dare not say more.

XYZZYnews: Fair enough! In terms of design, how did you go about devising the theme and puzzles? Was it a one man show, or did a whole team of designers contribute?

CB: Initially, I came up with a core feel and tone to the game. I then worked with a writer and designer to start evolving the story. As we expanded the story, we then started to create the "puzzle landscapes" and weave them into the story so that they would spring out of the narrative. This went on for a few months and we came up with an alpha design. That design went under massive revisions. I revised where I thought puzzles were weak—working with people on my internal team. Revisions were a fairly informal process. I'd sit in my office with Laird or with Will Westwater and we'd discuss a puzzle its strength, weakness and then start hashing out possibilities. We devoted an extreme amount of attention to the puzzles, making sure they were fair and integrated. Before we went into production, we paper tested the design, and from this we made another set of revisions. Play balancing is something we did until the very end.

LM: Cecilia and Mark Long did the initial major design. Additional design was done by other members of the team.

XYZZYnews: As a computer science major, I'd be interested, as I'm sure others would, to hear what kind of systems you used to develop Nemesis—did you use a standard language like C and develop the Z-Vision engine, or was it built up from assembler?

CB: Z-Vision was built using C++ for the core engine with bits of assembly thrown in for optimization. A scripting tool was created using Visual Basic for the puzzle and node based game logic.

LM: Z-Vision is written in C++ with some C code as well. The core engine is a small application that was compiled in Visual C++. The game itself is programmed with a language we created (DouglaScript), that is generated by a graphical Visual Basic world builder. All of the scripts are in text and are easily editable, although they are stored in a special way so we easily change syntax or add parameters. This allows for flexibility and a low memory footprint at runtime.

XYZZYnews: To what do you attribute the continued interest in text-based interactive fiction? Are you surprised that a small group continue to reject the latest offerings in favor of these?

CB: I think people are interested in text-based interactive fiction because it is a totally compelling interactive experience. I think one of the things that happened with the advent of "wow" graphics and sound, was that people quickly grabbed the eye candy, leaving some of the satisfying and meaty (but not so immediately glamourous) text adventures behind. More and more mass consumers came into the market at this time—these people had never even heard of text adventures and were therefore less inclined to play them. One of the things I sincerely hope is that Zork Nemesis will encourage people to go back and play the early Zorks and help revitalize a genre that I believe will always be powerful.

LM: I am not terribly surprised. I still like playing the old games because they are so well written. Also, I like to read a lot, so they present two of my interests simultaneously—gaming and reading. Further, because of TADs and Inform, etc., many people can create games for many platforms without lots of outlay of cash or resources.

XYZZYnews: Laird, you mentioned earlier that you're familiar not only with Psions (which lots of *XYZZYnews* readers use to play the games when commuting), but also with Inform and TADS. Have either of you ever written a text adventure with one of these toolkits or even your own systems?

LM: I have written some basic stuff with Inform, but only to experiment. I hope to get more into it over the summer. I have written small adventures back in the Apple II days.

XYZZYnews: Cecilia, you mentioned that you feel games using graphics and sound have a harder job creating a convincing game world than their purely textual counterparts. Were elements of Nemesis, such as the books lying around and the library, included to try to harness some of this power?

CB: Yes and no. I believe text adventures are a totally different genre—the buzz of playing a text adventure is very different than the buzz of reading a book. So having a lot of books in the Nemesis world I wasn't trying to create the text adventure buzz, but I was trying to harness the power of the written word as a narrative device.

I could ramble on and on about the method of creating narrative in a graphical adventure game, but one of my approaches is to "seed" the world with packets of narrative where the player can discover potent bits of story. One of the ways I did this seeding in Nemesis was through video hallucinations, another was through the text passages. Text is great because you get a lot of narrative bang for your buck. �

More Interviews With The Infocommies

The following interviews Matt Newsome conducted with Marc Blank, Dave Lebling and Steve Meretzky of Infocom fame, were compiled from a number of email exchanges during the spring of 1996. Marc and Dave were the credited authors of the original Zork game, while Steve furthered the saga with Zork Zero. Matt started by asking them how they felt about other people furthering the Zork story...

Marc Blank: I'm pleased that there is still interest in the Zork universe, and somewhat surprised whenever I hear people express continued delight with the old text-only games.

Dave Lebling: I don't particularly feel they're "maintaining" the saga, other than to keep the Zork name before a public that has mostly forgotten text adventures. What Activision is doing is exploiting a well-known trademark that they own. They're certainly entitled to do this, but I get somewhat the same feeling as I do when I hear someone is making a sequel to Casablanca.

On the other hand, if they asked me to do it (or Marc, or Brian, or Steve) that might be another matter. Then they'd at least get a legitimate perversion of the original.

This is not to run down the creative efforts of the people who have worked on their new games—I'm not one of those who think things like the Star Trek "franchise" books are evil. You can do good work even within those limitations.

Steve Meretzky: Well, even though I had a hand in developing the Zork universe, I certainly came in years after its birth, so far be it from me to say that no one besides the original creators should work within that universe. If that were so, I never would've have gotten a chance to write Sorcerer and Zork Zero. I would say that people continuing the saga is a good thing as long as they spend the time to become thoroughly familiar with the earlier games and remain true to their spirit.

XYZZYnews: Have you played Return to Zork or Zork Nemesis? If so, do you feel they accomplish the kind goals you were striving for in Infocom's games? Assuming you have played the graphical Zorks, do you feel they are progressing in the direction you would like, or are they losing the plot (sorry, bad pun!)?

Blank: I played RTZ for a short while, and felt it was a great victory for style over substance. And, although the interface was highly touted at the time, I thought it was particularly clumsy. I might try Zork Nemesis if somebody would send me a copy, but I certainly don't have enough interest to purchase the game.

My sense, from talking to Zork Nemesis' producer, is that there was every intention to follow the direction taken in the original zork games, though I am more than a little skeptical. However, since I haven't played the game, it wouldn't be fair to comment further.

Lebling: I've played Return to Zork, which I thought was a flawed but ambitious attempt at a graphic adventure. It didn't really have much to do with Zork, of course. The puzzles were pretty lame, the acting was awful, there was no story. However, on the plus side they were trying to do something big and interesting. Like many first attempts, it wasn't that awesome. I haven't played Zork: Nemesis yet, but I plan to. I've heard reasonably good things about it, so I'm actually more-or-less looking forward to it.

I think they are attempting to be good graphical adventure games. This is not the same thing as being a good Zork game. There's no inherent reason why one can't write a good graphical Zork, but the "goals," if any, of the Zork series had more to do with creating an immersive environment that projected the illusion of complete responsiveness and flexibility. The idea was "interactive fiction," not "interactive movies." An "interactive movie" _can_ be "interactive fiction," but most interactive movies aren't even terrifically interactive.

As the graphical component of the games has taken over, the interactivity and responsiveness have dropped. We tried to make our games understand anything (taking the word "anything" with several large grains of salt, of course) that the user could type in.

A major issue in adventure games is always communication between the game and the player. We tried to solve the "guess the word" problem by widening the communication channel. Graphic games "solve" it by narrowing the channel. This is too bad.

Meretzky: I played Return to Zork to the end. I have only played Zork Nemesis for an hour or so, not getting beyond the temple. In addition, I've read a few reviews and walkthroughs. I thought that Return to Zork was particularly weak in matching the visual feel of the Zork Universe; it was too modern, not fantasy-ish enough, and not very "quirky". There were a few good puzzles, but most were pretty mediocre. The acting was pretty awful, and the story was pretty uncompelling, and was confusingly told. On the other hand, the interface was excellent, and the music was among the best I've heard in an adventure game.

Based on the little I saw, Zork Nemesis: was visually somewhat closer to my mental image of the Zork universe. The panoramic view of locations is far superior to RTZ's sudden 90 degree or 180 degree turns. On the other hand, the interface is far shallower than RTZ; they lobotomized many of the best features of the RTZ interface. Also, they appear to have completely thrown out character interaction! Design decisions appear to be completely driven by Myst-imitation syndrome, rather than keeping what worked well in RTZ and improving on it. Also, while RTZ has some of the humor of the original Zorks, ZN seems to have none. Based on what I've seen, ZN is much further from the spirit of Zork than RTZ.

By the way, my company (Boffo Games) is currently creating a large graphic adventure, to be published this Xmas by Rocket Science. Called The Space Bar, it is comparable in size and budget to ZN. As part of this effort, we are creating an adventure game engine called BAGEL (Boffo Adventure Game Engine and Libraries). When you see BAGEL (in the form of The Space Bar) you will see that it is much closer to RTZ than to ZN or Myst (although it does feature a panoramic view of locations, just like ZN). To me, BAGEL is where Activision should have gone from RTZ, but didn't. I am obviously speaking about adventure games in general here, rather than the Zork universe specifically.

XYZZYnews: Given that the interactive fiction Infocom produced enjoys such a devoted following, do you feel, as has been expressed by some critics of the new games, that graphics will never quite achieve what text adventures bring, i.e. in terms of atmosphere, immersion, etc.?

Blank: I wouldn't go so far as to say that graphics will NEVER achieve that which is possible with text (or audio, for that matter), but I have no trouble saying that the recent efforts have not been notably successful.

Lebling: "Do you feel that film will never quite achieve what books bring, et.…" Graphic adventures are a different medium from text adventures. They have their own strengths and weaknesses. Sometimes film is better than a book: think of 2001 as an example. Sometimes the book is better than the film: think of Demi Moore's version of The Scarlet Letter. Text adventures are a medium of the mind, graphic adventures are a medium of the eyes.

Meretzky: It is hard to imagine that budgets of graphic adventures will ever be large enough to show everything that we were able to describe in a 100K text adventure, and therefore graphic adventure will indeed never match the depth of text adventures. On the other hand, I never dreamed that we'd see $10 million computer games, or 4GB computer games, so who knows what might happen in another 5 or 10 years?

XYZZYnews: Do you have any suggestions as to how these games could be improved?

Blank: I wouldn't presume to tell Activision how to run their business.

Lebling: Graphic games could be improved by recognizing that they aren't just Hollywood movies on a CD (or seven CDs, as the case may be). Too many use non-interactive sequences to excess, have limited interactivity throughout (heaven forfend that the user should have to *gasp* type!), have unimaginative puzzles, and so on, ad nauseum. Even Myst, which was in most respects pretty awesome, had really limited puzzles—they were all "push the button" puzzles.

Meretzky: Again, watch for The Space Bar. While it certainly doesn't have the depth of gameplay that Infocom text adventures have, I think it will come closer than any graphic adventure ever has.

XYZZYnews: What would you say to someone who was about to embark on writing an IF game for the first time (graphical or textual in basis)?

Blank: I enjoyed the process of writing IF, particularly in considering the varied directions that our stories and/or puzzles could take. For someone of similar inclination, I would think it would be a rewarding and challenging proposition. However, I wouldn't try to convince anyone that writing if is a smart career move (anymore than I would say that writing novels is, for that matter).

Lebling: "Are you sure? Have you had your head examined?"

Meretzky: Advice: become familiar with the great games of the genre, and don't bother writing one unless you are prepared to push the genre significantly forward in some area, either technically or creatively.

XYZZYnews: Finally, if you had all the time and money to indulge whatever whim you fancied, would you go back to writing text adventures, employ the new technology to create multi-media games like Zork Nemesis, or do something else entirely?! (If it's not too personal, what would that other something be?)

Blank: I, with my partners (who include Mike Berlyn—author of Suspended, Infidel, etc. for infocom), are working on console games for the Sony Playstation and Sega Saturn. In all honesty, I have more fire in the belly for this sort of thing than I do for IF at this time. This is not to say that I haven't mused about doing another IF game, but I'm really not sure that the time is right.

Lebling: I suppose that in that unlikely eventuality, I'd do a graphic adventure as exciting and immersive as the best of the Infocom games, with great puz-

zles, full interactivity, great writing, and awesome graphics and sound. Or at least I'd try. I don't *think* I'd write another text adventure: "Been there, done that, wore out the T-shirt." Why do the same thing over and over again? Infinite loops are for computers.

Meretzky: If I had all the time and money to indulge whatever whim I fancied, I'd be lying on the beach in Tahiti reading through my backlog of about five million books while scantily dressed native women brought me a never-ending supply of rum punch. But seriously, I don't think I'd write text adventures, because I don't think there's much of a market for them anymore, and even aside from financial considerations I want lots and lots of people to play my games. I would just try to create a graphic adventure which allowed the player to do as many different things as the Infocom text games allowed.

Just as an aside from this interview with Dave, Marc and Steve, I thought it would be nice to end off with some brief comments from Stu Galley and Liz Cyr-Jones. Stu wrote Witness, Seastalker and Moonmist for Infocom while Liz was primarily the manager of the testing group. Here's what they had to say about the strength of Infocom and the work environment in contrast with the graphical adventure houses of the 90s:

Stu Galley: As for graphics in interactive story-telling, I'll say what I said to Bruce Davis when he took over Activision and wanted to launch a media empire: that it's not practical for a developer to implement all the various graphics needed to present a really flexible story in a convincing way. With words alone, a good writer can plant images and ideas in the player's mind using only a fraction of the bytes that pictures would need. And that's not counting the different personal ways that different players will envision the story.

Liz Cyr-Jones: I think Infocom's success was due in large part to the personalities of everyone involved. It was *very* magical; we'd have very serious discussions of what grues actually looked like, and whether they really would eat an adventurer, and stuff like that. The work environment was very nonserious. What I mean is, though we took games seriously, it was possible to get a bunch of people together and play Boggle on the mainframe.

Infocom nostalgia? I remember Marc interviewing some guy (can't for the life of me remember who it was) in his trademark aloha shirt and jeans, but he reclined on a chaise lounge, wore his sunglasses and sipped a frothy drink replete with umbrella and straw. In our heyday, we had a lot of perks-among them, free soda, bagels on Mondays…we also had a ping pong table in this huge room. This was '85…we used to play ping pong at times during the day. ⊗

Scissors, Pants, Glasses, and Yahoos

by **Andrew Pontious (byzantium@tuna.net)**

When I started programming my first TADS game, back in the seventeenth century… well, not that long ago, but it did feel like a long and torturous process. I was a newbie, yet I was determined to include several features that turned out to be in the advanced category. This article deals with one small change I made in game grammar, so that an otherwise unchanged version of TADS 2.2 recognizes "plural-singulars"—game constructs that are just one object, but are referred to in the plural. This could be for something like scissors, which are one thing in the real world, or for groups of things you want to combine for game convenience, like "twenty yahoos threatening you from the trees."

First off, I'll make one of those plural-singular objects. I'm going to annotate this pretty heavily for the non-TADS user:

```
scissors: item    // "item" is the TADS class for something you can pick up
    sdesc = "scissors"   // "short" description of object
    adesc = "scissors"    // descrip. used when game wants to say "a ___"
                          // In this case, we take out the "a" entirely
    noun = 'scissors'    // vocabulary player can use to refer to object
    location = startroom   // where the object is first located
;
```

This'll get us started. I also code a box in startroom (the specific class is called "container") so you could put things in it.

```
> look
You are in the starting room of your test game.
You see a box and scissors here.
```

A valid command at this point, grammatically but not logically, would be:

```
> take scissors out of box.
```

The game responds, sensibly, with:

```
The scissors isn't in the box.
```

Ah ha! Here is the beginning of the problem. I look around to see where this message comes from. It's in ADV.T, a file normally incorporated into every game (similar but not the same as Inform's verblib and grammar and parser) to prefabricate the TADS playing environment, setting up object prototypes like "room," "openable," and "container." At the very top of the hierarchy is the ur-object that virtually every other object is the descendent of, called "thing." All the standard game verbs are coded here, and are inherited by any objects which don't supersede that code in their own definitions. For instance, the code involving the verb "take" for the direct object looks like this:

```
verDoTakeOut( actor, io ) =
{
    if ( io <> nil and not self.isIn( io ))
    {
        caps(); self.thedesc; " isn't in "; io.thedesc; ". ";
    }
    self.verDoTake(actor);         /* ensure object can be taken at all */
}
```

The "actor" parameter refers to which actor is executing the action (usually "Me," the player) and "io" is the indirect object, in this case what you're taking the direct object out of. "Self" here is the scissors. Notice the code says if there is an indirect object ("io <> nil"), and if "self" (the scissors) isn't in it ("isIn" is a special routine which checks this), then it gives you the message we already encountered.

What I need to do is find some way of getting this routine to recognize that an object is plural, and giving the right response for it. My first attempt at a solution involved creating a new property in our scissors object, called "plural," by adding this line somewhere in the scissors definition:

```
plural = true
```

Then I use the "modify" command, which enables me to overwrite individual routines or properties in an object after the object has been defined already, in this case in ADV.T—though you can't modify individual lines of a routine or property, you have to repeat all of it. Like so:

```
modify thing

    verDoTakeOut( actor, io ) =
```

```
    {
        if ( io <> nil and not self.isIn( io ))
        {
            caps(); self.thedesc;
            // NEW CODE!
            if ( self.plural ) " aren't"; else " isn't";
            // REST OF OLD CODE
            " in "; io.thedesc; ". ";
        }
        self.verDoTake(actor);        /* ensure object can be taken at all */
    }
;
```

So I try to compile this and get the message "error TADS-335: invalid vocabulary property value." What does that mean? "Plural = true" is perfectly valid! After some searching, I found out that ADV.T already defines a property called "plural," but as a string. My later code tried to redefine the variable, which is fine, but also tried to redefine its type after it had been defined, from string to boolean true/false. A no-no.

So instead I change "plural" to the less elegant "pluralflag" (though I could've been malicious and used "Plural," since TADS is case-sensitive) and recompile. Now it runs as follows:

```
> take scissors from box.
The scissors aren't in the box.
```

Now, though, I've learned my lesson. I realize I need to look through ADV.T for further examples of "is" or "isn't" or "goes" or whatever. I'll give you a few more examples, though the full list is much longer.

```
From thing:
verDoPutOn: "The {direct object} is/are already on the {indirect object}!"
verDoTellAbout: "It doesn't look like the {direct object} is/are interested."
```

And from actor, another prototype-object, which has routines suitable for your NPCs:

```
verDoWalkon: "{Direct object} object/s to that."
```

So now I've found all of the spots where messages need to be changed, and modified all the objects and routines from ADV.T in my own code to do so. And even better for you, I save my changes as a separate file that other people could incorporate in their games in order to utilize its benefits, right "out of the box," as it were, by just incorporating "pluralflag = true" (or its new name—see below) in the

right objects. Remember, though, not to modify those same routines again in your code after you've included my utility, or you'll replace my changes to ADV.T! A better way if you need to change those same routines would be not to call the utility file from your game separately (technically: #include), but rather to paste my code into your game in its entirety, and fiddle with it there. You'll find it soon in the IF archive under the name plurals.t under Programming/TADS/Examples, or on the enclosed *XYZZYnews* disk if you've subscribed that way, along with a small test game called pluralstest.t, providing many samples of these objects.

So we're done, right? I thought so, too, until I tried:

```
>put scissors
What do you want to put it in?
```

Now, this is an error message generated by the parser in response to the lack of an indirect object (grammatically a preposition phrase, but let's not nitpick) when the only existing template or pattern for the verb requires one. You can't just put something, you have to put it in something or on something. The trouble is that pesky "it." With the greater control that version 2.2 gives you over parser error messages, maybe I could modify that as well.

First step: "The New Book of the Parser" in the TADS Version 2.2 Upgrade Manual. Page 90:

"If the verb requires a direct or indirect object, but the command doesn't specify one and the parser can't supply a suitable default…the parser checks to see if your game program defines a function called parseAskobjActor [before going on to its own solution]." Okay, cool, I'll provide one, but then I find that, even if it's the indirect object you're looking for, the routine doesn't give as a parameter the direct object—only the actor, the verb, and the preposition, if there is one. Therefore, you have no way of passing to your new parseAskobjActor routine the identity of that direct object and whether it is plural or singular before you ask him or her the question posed above. So, we can't alter that question to be plural-sensitive the way we want it to be. Dead end.

I look at the other, more general method that TADS provides to change error messages, the function parseError. It lets you replace any standard error message it generates with a new one, for instance, message number 6, "I expected a noun after 'of'." Again, here we're very limited; we just get the number of the message the parser would've given as the parameter (there's a whole table of them), and can either replace the message in every case the parser would've used it, or let it stand.

The message numbers 140-149 deal with the pieces of the message we could've fiddled with in its entirety with parseAskobjActor, like 140: "What do you want to" or 143: "?". Why you'd want to replace, say, the question mark, I'm not sure,

but you can. The parser assembles these pieces around what the player has typed in, for instance "What do you want to " + put + "it" + in + "?".

Number 141 is that pesky "it," but hold on, there's also message number 147, "them." When is that used? Page 91: "If a pronoun for the direct object is required, the parser checks each object in the direct object list. If the player explicitly specified multiple direct objects (by using "all" or a list of noun phrases), the parser displays message 144 ("them")." The text goes on to explain how it uses the properties isHim and isHer of the objects the player specified ("put Aunt Helena," for instance), to possibly substitute the pronouns "him" or "her" as well.

So the only way the parser will use "them" in that cobbled-together message is if you've specified two or more objects ("put the apple and the orange"); another dead end. Since the parser does all the processing without asking for our advice (how rude!), we can't affect it.

My way around this, admittedly an inelegant one, is to replace message 141 with "that." Hey, it makes sense. The way David Baggett's rewrite of ADV.T, called WorldClass, solves the problem is by excluding the pronoun entirely; his parseAskobjActor asks things like "With what?" or "In what?", which is, I must admit, a rather clever if "snappy" response.

A better solution would be to have the parser check my property, which for consistency's sake I now rechristen "isThem," before deciding what pronoun to use. It would be even more ideal if in the next TADS version (if there is a next TADS version) the parser would allow you to replace the whole pronoun-sorting business with your own routine, with the right parameters this time. Flexibility is king. This is where Inform really shines, since all such internal workings of the parser are available for tinkering by the player. (That's why they've already got a full plural-singular utility.)

And that's all the changes needed to implement plural-singulars! There may be others I didn't notice, but in my extensive testing of my own game, I haven't found any (famous last words…). My game has other wholesale changes in ADV.T to make things work more smoothly and logically and to add new features, and I want to make utilities out of those things as well once my game's out. You'll be able to use this, and them, if you don't want to make the wholesale switch to WorldClass. There's also the possibility that TADS itself will include similar improvements in the next version. Michael Roberts, are you listening?

As you can see, I love talking shop, so if anybody has any comments, feel free to e-mail me at the address at the beginning of this article. ✪

Yakko's IF World

Anyone familiar with the cartoon show "Animaniacs" should appreciate this irreverent little number by **C.E. Forman**, *which follows in the footsteps of "Yakko's World."*

(Music: Traditional [The Mexican Hat Dance] | Lyrics: C.E. Forman)

Announcer: And now, the world of Interactive Fiction, brought to you by Yakko Warner!

Yakko [sings]: Adventure, AdventureLand, Pirate Adventure, and Dungeon, Zork Trilogy too,
Beyond Zork, Bureaucracy, Hollywood Hijinx, and Hitchhiker's Guide, Ballyhoo.
There's Sherlock, Suspended, Zork Zero, Enchanter, and Planetfall,
        Moonmist as well,
Border Zone, Sorcerer, Seastalker, Deadline, then Wishbringer and Infidel.
There's Starcross and Cutthroats, A Mind 'ever Voyaging, Stationfall, and
        Plundered Hearts,
Spellbreaker, Nord and Bert, Trinity, Suspect, and Zork (which is split
        in three parts)!
Leather Goddesses, Arthur, The Infocom Samplers, both LTOI's, Quarterstaff,
Shogun, The Witness, Unkuulian Underworld Zero, One, Two, and One-Half.
Lost, Lurking Horror, Frustration, Rylvania, CosmoServe, and Golden Fleece,
Theatre, Journey, MacWesleyan, Busted, and Christminster (by Gareth Rees)!
The Sound of One Hand Clapping, Shelby's Addendum, then Balances,
        Abbey Montglane,
Detective, its MiSTing, The Gorreven Papers, then Waystation and Inhumane!

Library, Time Killer, Jigsaw, John's Fire Witch, Tesseract, then Paper Chase,
Odieus, Curses, The Dungeons of Dunjin, Great Archeological Race,
Save Princeton, T-Zero, The Legend Lives, Humbug, Electrabot, Jinxter,
        The Pawn,
TimeQuest, Corruption, The Guild of Thieves, Wonderland, Crypt, and
        The Golden Baton.
Klaustrophobia, Mindshadow, Fish, Magic Toyshop, then Veritas, World, and
        Pork 1,
The SpellCasting Trilogy, Tass Times in Tonetown, then Circus, and Mask of
        the Sun!
Gnome Ranger, Lancelot, ScapeGhost, Toonesia, then Avalon (not yet released),
Zebulon, Windhall, Dark Continent, Knight Orc, and Multi-Dimensional Thief.
Undertow, Tube Trouble, Change in the Weather, Museum Forever, Undo,
The Awe-Chasm, a.k.a. Chasm of Awe, which is a.k.a. Snatch and Crunch II!

There's TimeSquared: Centroplis, Lethe Flow Phoenix, The Caverns of Chaos, GC,
Space Aliens Laughed at My Cardigan, Disch's Amnesia, and +=3!

Enhanced, Mind Electric, The Jewels of Darkness, and Lin's The One
  That Got Away,
South American Trek, Mop and Murder, Red Moon, Lords of Time (Level 9),
  Shades of Gray.
Broken String, Castaway, cRiMe, and Jerusalem, Zanfar, then Spur,
  Demon's Tomb,
Lost New York, Mini-Zork, Eric the Viking, Oo-Topos, and Vial of Doom!
Jacaranda Jim, World Under Glass, and The Jewelled Arena, Gymnasium, Storms,
Hugo, TADS, Archetype, AdvSys, QuestMaker, AGT, ALan, Inform!

Silicon Dreams, Time and Majik, Marooned Again, Lottery, No Beer, Darknight,
Eric the Unready, Dinkum, then Dudley, The Four Symbols, Son of Stagefright.
Hampton, and Mindwheel, Wraith Blaster, Snowball, Plague Planet, and
  Legend's Gateway,
Sir Ramic Hobbs, SceptreQuest, East of Eastwood, and the Drifters (Deep Space
  and Ditch Day)!
Heather's Easter Egg Hunt, Stowaway, LogoMancer, Cliff Diver, A Fable, and
  GAGS,
Stuck Mid-Game, Wombat, The Miser, Eliza...
   ...Guards of Infinity, another game Trinity,
   Starship Columbus, Apprentice, Humongous Cave,
   Sleuth, Disenchanted, then SpiritWrak, Sanity
   Clause, and Melita, Crusade, Feasibility,
   Sangsarawardha, Death Arrow, So Far, then
   XYZZYnews and SPAG!!!

(With apologies to the authors whose titles I butchered to get this thing to pass for
rhyming, and also to the authors whose creations I just couldn't fit in...or, perhaps
more appropriately, to the authors whose games I DID fit in.)

Sources I consulted while writing this:

Volker Blasius' Master Index to the GMD Archive, Paul David Doherty's
"Infocom Fact Sheet", Carl Muckenhoupt's "Baf's Guide to the I-F Archive", Gerry
Kevin Wilson's "The (Other) TADS Game List", Brendon Wyber's list of Inform
Games; and article, "That Other Great Adventure Company" (published in issue
#3 of SPAG), Various game reviews from back issues of *SPAG* and *XYZZYnews*,
The rec.*.int-fiction FAQs, Recent rec.*.int-fiction posts, and my own (admittedly
shoddy) memory.

Zork Nemesis

Publisher: Activision (http://www.activision.com/)
Platform:DOS/Windows-95 CD-ROM, soon to be released for the Mac
System requirements: 486/DX2-66Mhz, 8MB RAM, 2xCD-ROM, SVGA 640x480, Mouse, 16bit sound card

Personally, I think Cecilia Barajas is brave. Imagine: you've been asked to design, direct and produce the next game in what is one of the most successful computer game series ever: Zork. Where do you even begin?

Well, if the final result is anything to judge by, you start with the design, then concentrate on the design for a while and, finally, you work on the design... Zork: Nemesis is absolutely packed full of puzzles—and for once, they're non-linear and central to the game.

For Zork aficionados, the story starts in the Temple of the Ancients in the Forbidden Lands, south of the Frigid River in the East-lands. Four respected citizens of the GUE have vanished and when a spy fails to return from the temple, where they are believed to be held, you are sent to find out what is going on. So begins a totally captivating journey through the temple and, later, into four other game areas: a school of music, a monastery, a fort and a chilling asylum, all five areas are interconnected by an alchemical theme. Actually, "chilling" summarizes the general feel of the game throughout—the recommended "15" rating is well-deserved.

Nemesis has a similar kind of atmosphere to that found in Dave Lebling's Lurking Horror, except in Nemesis there's no humor to lighten it up…

The game's interface is revolutionary—literally! In addition to moving between rooms, the new Z-Vision engine allows the player to rotate a full 360 degrees (as is possible in games like Doom) and interact with any of the game's objects along the way. Just like its textual predecessors, Nemesis basically centers around using the right object in the right place in the right manner, or manipulating some mechanical contraption to make progress. On the whole, the point-and-click interface is ideal for these tasks, and I found it a great improvement on the RTZ model, which I felt was an innovative but cumbersome design.

The very latest techniques have been applied as well, pushing my 486DX2-66 and quad-speed CD-ROM drive to the limit through the use of carefully integrated video clips directed by Joe Napolitano (X-Files and Murder One). Excellent use is made of the atmospheric, Enigma-like music, which sets off the 16-bit graphics to good effect. Similarly, the incidental sound effects and music enhance the action in the game and both benefit from the new "Q-Sound" system which gives superbly crisp output. Of course, all this extra technology takes its toll on storage space with the end result that the game comes on three CD-ROMs and requires at least 30MB of hard-disk space, preferably 100MB!

So how well does the game play? Well, thankfully, the news is good. For once, the multimedia aspects have been used carefully and intelligently. The designers have concentrated throughout on developing a convincing world and an exciting story to play out—after all, anything else is just a gimmick. In fact, unlike the majority of "interactive movies", I'm hard pressed to think of any gratuitous use of video, though, as ever, the acting could still be improved. In fact, character interaction is completely missing from the game, but surprisingly that is not greatly to its detriment—the player gains a sense of isolation which, I feel, enhances the gameplay.

All things considered, if (like me) you've waiting for a game with the quality of design found in that very first chapter of Zork, you'll want to order Zork: Nemesis immediately—it's what we've been waiting for. Save for the hassle when changing from one CD to another (and even that's relatively infrequent), it's sheer gaming heaven for even the most diehard Infocom fan.

In fact, if you do start playing, you can expect to be hooked for around forty hours of solid playtime. Because, after all, if it's two in the morning, this must be Zork! ✖

—Matt Newsome
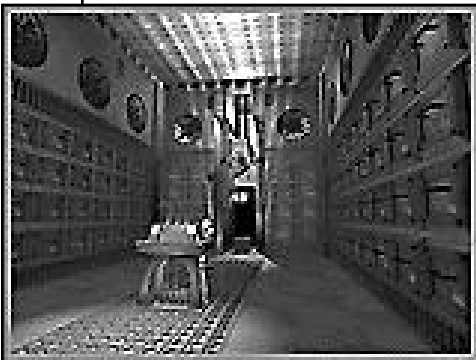
Lost New York

release 1.02f

Parser: TADS
Author: Neil deMause (neild@echonyc.com)
Availability: ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/games/
Requires: TADS run-time interpreter; platform-spe-
cific standalone
versions are also available at GMD
Response to the XYZZY command: "Sadly, recent
city budget cuts have led to the elimination of the
Department of Magic."

You're in New York to visit friends and have a few hours to kill. So you head off to the Statue of Liberty. Where a fog rolls in and strands you there. With a muttering old man, a surly concessions worker, and a cranky park ranger. And all you have are a few subway tokens and a credit card.

Welcome to the Big Apple.

The opening to Lost New York (by Neil deMause, author of MacWesleyan/PC University) plants you right smack at New York's most notable tourist attraction then takes you on a whirlwind tour of the city. Not through distance. But through time. Along the way you travel through the late 19th century, early 20th century, the 17th century, the 1950s, and even into the 21st century. All within America's biggest city.

For those of you who thought that New York geography had remained relatively untouched through its history will be pleasantly surprised. This is the type of game that manages to teach you a lot about a subject while making it a very pleasant trip indeed. Some of the effect may be lost to those who have never been to New York, but not all that much.

deMause has obviously done his homework (as the impressive bibliography attests). The descriptions, feel, and atmosphere of the different time periods is vivid and varied. It is one of the rare IF games with real geography. A nice feature to the game is the scoring system, which ranks you according to past New York mayors, complete with a mini-biography of that mayor's accomplishments (such as they were).

Another part I found particularly interesting was the fun that deMause had with the parser itself. I am so used to Infocom's gently playful parser or Mssrs. Nelson and Rees' British wit that it was a refreshing change to be served a fistful of New York sarcasm and attitude. The parser is from New York and lets you know it. Example: I tried to pick up a sewer grate, to which the game replied "So now all of a sudden you're Superman? It's far too heavy for you to lift by yourself." (Even better: try typing dirty words, assaulting someone, or just hitting return.)

Part of the problem with Lost NY may be that it has too much focus on ambiance. When I first traveled back in time, I assumed that I was trying to find my way back to meet my friends. Then I thought I was supposed to alter time for the better (kind of an anti-Jigsaw). Either way, it's not very clear what your purpose is in the New York time zones other than to solve puzzles and move forward. Even when you're solving puzzles, it's hard to tell what you're accomplishing in the big picture. Eventually, it becomes obvious how to get back to the present, then you just have to spend time getting it done.

The puzzles are logical and fairly straightforward. They are consistently challenging with few stumpers. I had a few problems with the parser but no more or less than with other games. There are a few places (especially near the beginning of the game) where you can get the game into an unwinnable situation by missing something or fiddling with something too soon. As usual, save often. There are few NPCs in the game and those that exist are relatively limited in their interaction with the player.

Lost New York is freeware. However, there is a registered version available that includes an online hint feature and a very well-written, nicely-laid out booklet detailing more of New York's history. The book adds a lot to the game and the help section gives successively clearer hints until it just flat out tells you what to do. Version 1.1 was recently uploaded to ftp.gmd.de. This version changes a few puzzles and fixes a number of minor bugs from v1.02.

Finally, a special request from Neil: "Please stop calling it 'Lost In New York.'" ✪

—Rob Daviau

The companion disk for XYZZYnews #10 contains the following game files. It's a good deal for people who have slower modems—at 2400 bps, it'd take a heck of a long time to download the contents of the companion disk. It's also a good deal for people with limited or no access to FTP sites or online services as a source for new games. If you're reading an electronic version of this issue, you can obtain this games disk with a print copy of XYZZYnews #10 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.

SO FAR—"Perhaps you would enjoy a play," suggests author Andrew Plotkin by way of introduction to his new Inform game, "So Far: An Interactive Catharsis." From the initial setting in a crowded theater, where you're searching for your lost love, Aessa, you'll go on to visit a series of richly descriptive but nearly incomprehensible worlds. You'll face a series of challenging puzzles in order to make further progress in this game.

URBAN CLEANUP—Life is pretty bleak in this sci-fi TADS game by Philip Dearmore. As gameplay begins, you've awakened from pleasant dreams only to realize "another day of oppression and slavery without love or happiness has

again begun." Can you figure out how to finish putting together your Neuroacter and escape to a game world? And after accomplishing that, what will you find there?

PLURALSTEST—This is a sample game and code for implementing the plural-singulars utility that author Andrew Pontious describes in his Tales from the Code Front article in this issue, "Scissors, Pants, Glasses, and Yahoos." You'll find this material more compelling from a developer's perspective than from a straight gameplaying experience, but it's intriguing enough to warrant a look even if you haven't given much thought before into how parser responses are put together.

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