HOLLOW VOICE

This issue's awfully late in coming out this time around, largely due to my already fully booked writing schedule. I've been so busy, I haven't even had a chance to play any text adventure games in months! Needless to say, I'm out of touch with the newsgroups too. I've had to hear third-hand about Mike Roberts releasing TADS as freeware and what's up in the r.a.i-f competition. The good news is that the book I'm working on is wrapping up even as we speak, and I hope to be both a diligent zine editor and a reliable source for game hints again sometime in the near future.

I'm finding that each issue's Top 10 picks for Web sites devoted to text adventure games are increasingly reflecting the impact of new technologies. For example, this issue's list includes a wonderful site with a number of Java-enabled Inform games you can play online—if your browser supports Java, that is. There's also a site devoted to the long-awaited developments in playing interactive fiction games on Apple's PDA, the Newton.

This issue also includes a thoughtful article by John Wood on player character identity in interactive fiction. It's a response of sorts to Doug Atkinson's article on gender and IF games back in issue #3, which I think has generated more response than any other article to date in the zine. Matt Newsome shares an e-mail exchange he had with Infocom implementor Stu Galley, and the prolific C.E. Forman contributes his reviews of Spiritwrak and Gumshoe.

In other news, I've been asked to allow *XYZZYnews* to be translated into German, which I'll be more than happy to see take place. I wouldn't mind seeing translations into other languages either.

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.9.html

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Editorial deadline for Issue #10 is July 15, 1996.

Editor:
    Eileen Mullin

Contributors to this issue:
    Stuart Beach
    C.E. Forman
    Matt Newsome
    John Wood

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

Infocom/Inform Games in Java
http://www.wpi.edu/~timbuktu/inform

Pueblo Multimedia MUD Client
http://www.chaco.com/pueblo/

GameSpot (includes walkthrough for Zork Nemesis)
http://www.gamespot.com/

Interactive Fiction (IF) Authorship
http://www.duke.edu/~srg3/IFAuthorship.html

J.L. Stroud, Jr.'s Tricky, An Interactive Novel
http://members.gnn.com/JStroud/mw5/tricky.htm

The Symbolic Theory of Game Design
http://www.symbolicsoft.com/theory/theory.htm
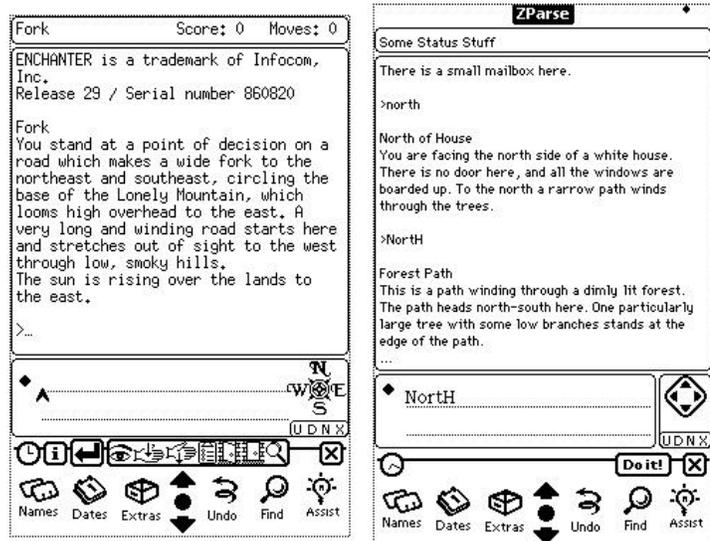
World Weavers World Wide Web Home Page
http://www.crl.com:80/~nimh/world_weavers/

Fundación Pro-Imagyna (in Spanish)
http://www-fib.upc.es/~e4181785/

Text Adventures on a Newton Information Page
http://www.mit.edu/people/sanj/zparse.html

Jay's Interactive Fiction Page
http://www.cs.uml.edu/~jpenney/if/

GIFs from the Text Adventures on a Newton page.

Eileen,

I found the articles about playtesting in XYZZYnews #8 both informative and entertaining. As a suggestion for further exploration of the topic, how about an interview with Michael Kinyon? This guy tests more "modern" games than anyone else in the entire IF community, and he earns frequent praise for his work. Things I would like to learn from him: Why did he decide to become a tester (rather than an author) of IF? What are the most frequent bugs? (and are some of them compiler-specific?) Which traps should potential game authors try to avoid? Are there noticeable trends in modern IF? Any gossip about not-yet-finished games?

As always, I was stunned by the quality of your material. Thanks for brightening up my day, and keep up the good work!

—Martin
braun@uba.de

Eileen,

I encourage you to reconsider [not printing articles initially published on Usenet] for the following reason:

Usenet articles last for a few days; *XYZZYnews* lasts indefinitely. I only recently rediscovered IF, and I found your magazine to be an invaluable resource. If an article is sufficiently good, you should consider including it whatever the source, so that the people who tune in months and years from now will be able to benefit from it.

Just my two cents. Cheers!
—Pat
patl@catfish.lcs.mit.edu

Eileen,

I'm in awe of the tremendous quality of your *XYZZYnews* 'zine; initially I read the HTML versions, then I read issue #4 as a PDF (using the recently published Amber version of the Acrobat reader for OS/2) and was much taken with the beautiful layout. I also like the simple, but in-character, title graphics you use on your html pages.

I started with Adventure (Colossal Cave) on IBM's VM/370 years ago, but soon got my own computer kit—a Z80-based Nascom-2—on which I was lucky to enjoy products from Level-9, Magnetic Scrolls, Infocom, and others. Somehow, I wish it were possible to port those games to one of the modern parsers—dream on! Although I have 2 Nascom-2 machines, neither is in working order any longer. However, I haven't given up hope—I still have the cassette tapes (believe me!).

What surprises me, and gives much pleasure, is the quality of recent output in material such as Curses, Theatre, and so on— I have to admit that these "feel" at least as good as some of the Infocom games, although even to myself, that is almost heresy!

These days, I play IF on my OS/2 machine and am currently enjoying Inform, TADS, and AGT games. My son is building an Inform game, but I'd better not try to steal his thunder, as he's now grown taller than me!

I like to enjoy IF in two ways: in competition with my son (15)—he's much smarter than me, darn it—and in the company of my daughter (19) during which we spark of new ideas on trying to solve problems. Both my children are accomplished role-play games masters (dungeon masters), so I guess their imaginations are sharpened through those experiences.

I wish you success with your other endeavors. I can only hope that we r.a.i-f followers can enjoy reading your editorial and your 'zine layouts for some time to come.

Thanks again for so much enjoyment!
—Roger Lee
rlee@hursley.ibm.com

Hello Eileen,

I discovered the XYZZYnews files uploaded to GMD have file names in capitals. Not that e.g. Windows 95 cares (which I'm using), but a UNIX hacker (which I am from time to time) might think it's less than practical.

—Anders
Anders.Borg@axis.se

To XYZZYnews:

In Issue #7 of XYZZYnews ["Interface Changes: A Brief Look at the Evolution of the Adventure Game Engine], you didn't mention my favorite early Mac text adventure with graphics…Transylvania, by Penguin Software. It was available for the Mac in 1984. It used a simple two-word parser and contained B&W graphics for each location, inventory item, and character. The graphics were on the left side along with a short description of the location below the picture. The text for actions taken and items available scrolled along the right side of the screen. Text was input by the player at the

bottom of the screen. The object of the game was to rescue a princess who had been captured by a vampire and hidden somewhere in a haunted land. The only real problem was that in some locations, going one direction then back the opposite direction did not always return you to the location you came from. Other than that it was an excellent game which mixed a text adventure with graphics very nicely.

—Al Staffieri Jr.
AlStaff@aol.com

Eileen,

I just finished reading issue #8 and found it as enjoyable and informative as ever.

I also read a letter in the #7 issue that caught my eye and I just had to put in my two cents worth. The letter was written by Mr. L. Ross Raszewski, regarding the A.G.T. Bashing that seems to be rampant in the IF community. First off I agree with Mr. Raszewski that AGT is getting an unfair rap. I feel that it is totally unfair to the authors of AGT-based games to be judged solely on the fact that the game was written using AGT.

I recently read a review (I don't remember the zine) where the reviewer said "I cringed when I found out the game was written with AGT." The review was for the game "Space Aliens Laughed at My Cardigan." Now I will be the first to admit that I played the game and it was horribly written. But that doesn't alter in the least the fact that before the reviewer even started he was already biased against it solely on the fact that it was written using AGT.

About a year ago I stumbled onto AGT. in the Gamers' Forum in CompuServe and I was ecstatic. I had found something that I'd been wishing for, for 15 years but never knew existed. A way to write my own adventure game, without the hassle of learning a complicated computer language. Then imagine if you will my utter surprise, shock, and disbelief to read that most of the IF community frowns upon the one thing that brought me back to text adventures.

Now don't get me wrong I have enormous respect for those who write adventures using the other popular languages (e.g. TADS, Inform, etc.) My hat's off to these fine people. But after a hard day's work if I sit down to my keyboard to work on a text adventure I want an easy-to-use language, not a lot of technical mumbo-jumbo.

I am very close to finishing a text adventure of my own using the AGT Masters Edition. And as long as the player doesn't try something that is totally illogical the parser works great. For a while I considered entering it in the IF contest on the Internet but decided not to. Mainly because it is written with AGT and I'd rather it not be held up to the general consensus, "It's written with AGT, it can't be any good."

I would like to think that the IF community would be glad that people without a great deal of programming experience could have a tool such as AGT as most creative and imaginative writers probably are not "hackers" or "whiz-kid programmers" but that doesn't seem to be the case.

OK I'll get down off my soapbox now. Thanks for the opportunity to let off a little

steam. Please keep up the good work at *XYZZYnews.*

—Ray Rettger
76743.3667@compuserve.com

To XYZZYnews:

I have read the bugs page of the Zork games. Great stuff! Did you ever get older versions of the three Zork games? Now that I know the old versions have cool bugs I am looking for them. I know one friend of mine has Beyond Zork, and Zork1 bought awhile ago. I have the Lost Treasures. I have figured out that if you type things with self in them it does neat stuff:

```
eat self
wave self
throw self
```

—Joe
jsaid@cs.purdue.edu

Requests for Information

Eileen,

I've read the Spoiler Column for some time now, and I haven't as yet found any hints/solutions for the game "Enchanted Castle."

Is there any way to get into the room with the smoke that comes out the window? How do I dispatch the basilisk in the closet? How can I pass the Hall of Dragons?

Please help me. You can email me answers, or maybe the URL of someplace that does have these available. Thank you very much. I really appreciate any help you can give me.

— Jared Menard
kbdm@xanadu2.net

Hello,

After my 11-year-old nephew turned me on to the "Choose Your Own Adventure" series, especially the few "serious" titles, I began to see the potential for non-fiction using this form.

While searching the Web I came across *XYZZYnews* and thought you might know about such material. I'm hoping to find what this category is called, sites and places that I can announce the interactive non-fiction title I've nearly finished, that helps people discovery their mission in life and develop strategies to fulfill it. Any suggestions you might have are appreciated.

Sincerely,
Corl Riblet
missionquest@seanet.com

To XYZZYnews:

Hi! I really liked your page on the infocom games bugs. I have about half of those games and some of the bugs are really neat!

I am also desperately trying to find any information at all on the Mines of Titan game that was written by Infocom. It's not a purely text game but I thought you might have some information on it. I would really appreciate it if you let me know if you do.

—Daniel Wong
danielw@easyaccess.com

To XYZZYnews:

I recently purchased Zork Nemesis and I'm stuck and need help. I'm looking for someone who can give hints.

Please e-mail if you know how I can get help.

—efein@emory.edu

To XYZZYnews:

I am looking for the original game "Leather Goddesses of Phobos" for DOS…I have been unable to find it anywhere. I am also looking for the medical simulator game called "Cardiac Arrest" by Mad Scientist Software…both of these I found many years ago, and used to play. Now I have a computer of my own, and cannot find them anywhere.

Can you help me???

—Tim
BQXP43A@prodigy.com

Infocom Bugs List Update

To XYZZYnews:

Found a bug in Mini-Zork. I got an interpreter for my Psion palmtop that runs Infocom games. I did get Mini-Zork. Try inflating the raft, put all of your valuables in the raft, then deflating it! You can pick up the plastic and carry it as a small item and not be encumbered by the treasures. Then when you need something, pump it up and pull it out! One not make sure the pump isn't in the boat when you deflate, otherwise
you can't re-inflate it!

— Eric Nichols
enichols@cps-systems.com

To XYZZYnews:

Hey there.. a few notes on the bug list:

I found a bug in Beyond Zork which is like the elvish sword/nicked sword problem

in Zork II.. If you're at the site in the jungle with the Crocodile idol, and the crocodile (the animal) is there too, you can't refer to it.

```
>attack crocodile
Which crocodile do
you mean, the idol or
the crocodile?
>crocodile
Which crocodile do
you mean, the idol or
the crocodile?
```

Also, two notes from Zork III. I was thinking about the following:

```
>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.
>DUNGEON MASTER, KILL
DUNGEON MASTER WITH
STAFF
"If you wish," he
replies.
"If you wish," he
replies.
You aren't even hold-
ing the staff!
```

In the first example, when you tell him to "kill me with staff," "me" refers to the DM. It displays the message you would get if you typed "kill me". However, he stays alive. I can't explain that. The second time, "You" is referring to the DM. See if you can give him the staff somehow and try it again.

And when you "trap" yourself in the Zork I area, can you enter the coal mines? What

happens when you try to go
north from the top of the ladder?
—Blazer
blazer@hoflink.com

To XYZZYnews:

Firstly, congratulations on
XYZZY news—it's absolutely
excellent.

Just thought I'd send some-
thing to the Infocom Bugs list:

In an old version of Hitch-
hikers I had there was a rather
important bug which meant
that if you saved the game
AFTER getting the vision
about what tool Marvin wants
but BEFORE actually giving
him the tool then the game
would not remember that you
knew the correct tool. This
effectively made the game
impossible to complete. Alas, I
can't tell you the version num-
ber of the game because it was
at least two computers ago and
I'm afraid I've lost everything
except the Microscopic space
fleet. I've heard other people
reporting this bug tho'.

Fortunately, almost every-
one was too impatient to save
in between these bits so hardly
anyone was affected by the
bug. I've not yet tried it in the
version of HHGTTG I got in
LTOI 1 so I can't confirm that
the bug is in all versions.

Anyway, thanks again for
the zine which is marvellous.

—Richard
richard@manor.york.ac.uk

To XYZZYnews:

This part in Zork III:

```
>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.
```

Maybe it's because the dungeon
master will die before he harms
you, once you've gotten this
far? And the last part may be
because a dead dungeon master
is following you? Weird, but at
least it's an explanation.
—Patrick Walton
pwalton@alice.math.tamu.edu

To XYZZYnews:

Beyond Zork:
The butterfly bug:
I could never "take" the
butterfly directly, and any
attempt to offer it to the
woman told me I had to take it
out of the goblet first, but if I
did "show butterfly to woman"
the system would include
"(taken)" in its response and I
would be holding the butterfly.
Does this variant work in #57?

Also note that the original
value of the butterfly may be 5,
10, or 15 (random) and that try-
ing to sell it when the price
would be -32768 (15 times for
an initial value of 5 or 15; 14
times for an initial value of 10)
will hang the PC version.

Hitchhiker's Guide, the
new "feature":
Not a bug, but I recall read-
ing that the "thing" can actual-
ly be used as a container. Does
this work in any/all versions?

Infidel:
The mast "bug":
I don't think it's a bug that
removing the shims will allow
the mast to be lifted from
above; it would seem that this
is a logical alternative solution

to the problem. Depending
upon the shape of the mast and
the area above, it really might
be possible to remove it with
one hand from above but not
from below (e.g. if you can use
your foot to hold it steady).

Starcross:
Not a bug per se, but amus-
ing little parser insight:

```
>IS
What do you want to
is?
>IS ME
What do you want to is
the you in?
>IS ME IN COMPUTER
No, it isn't.
```

Trinity:
Needless attention to
detail award:
If you're in the reservoir
when the bomb goes off, you
get a different description from
if you're elsewhere.

Annoying extra typing
requirement award:
Typing "TURN DIAL TO
OMEGA" will select a symbol
at random; you must use
"TURN DIAL TO SEVENTH
SYMBOL."

Zork II:
You list "N" for all ver-
sions on bug #8. Were you
unable to get this to work? The
key at least in the version I was
using is to recognize that the
balloon will move up or down
on, I think, every fourth turn.

Thus, you need to time the
sequence of events according to
this. If memory serves, the pro-
tocol was to close the burner,
wait for the balloon to settle,
open burner, leave, light fuse,
and reboard. Note that the bal-
loon MUST carry you away the
turn after you light the fuse or
you will be blown up.

Anyway, those are all the
touch-ups I remember. Thanks
for the nice work.
—John Payson
supercat@mcs.com

Player Character Identity in IF

by **John Wood (john@elvw.demon.co.uk)**

Warning: this article discusses the background and plots of several games, particularly TRINITY. There are, however, no spoilers for puzzles.

I. Introduction

Doug Atkinson's article about "Character Gender in Interactive Fiction" in XYZZYnews #3 led me to thinking about the wider subject of Character Identity. This article is shamelessly modeled after Doug's original. Reading between the lines, the article identified about four or five basic methods of identifying the Player Character's gender:

1. Indeterminate (JIGSAW);

1a. Not stated, but "feels" male (BUSTED);

2. Fixed gender (PLUNDERED HEARTS);

3. Determined by asking the player directly (BEYOND ZORK); and

4. Determined by player actions (LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS).

A similar division applies to the handling of Player Character (or PC) identity.

II. The Amorphous Hero

The original—and still most common—way of handling Player Character identity is to ignore it. The PC is, as Russ Bryan puts it, Everyman—sometimes with a heavy emphasis on the "man"—and you are free to project whatever motives and emotions you like onto your character. This accessibility can be comforting; you can pick up the game and instantly know who you are. It is also easier to program interactions with the non-player characters (or NPCs) when the only thing they need to react to is the PC's actions.

There is, however, a disadvantage to this. When PCs have no defined character they do not feel like part of the setting. Their interactions with NPCs tend to be bland, and they become onlookers and outsiders.

The best games try to use this impression to their advantage. In TRINITY, for instance, you start out as an American tourist in London—you *are* an outsider, and as a tourist it is perfectly natural that you will go around examining things and collecting curios. As the game progresses, it forces you into the role of onlooker as the episodic history of the atomic bomb unfolds, until there eventually comes a point when you might just be able to do something about it.

Few games manage to handle the amorphous PC with the panache of TRINITY, however. The more usual approach is to drop the PC into a situation far from home, thus justifying the lack of a sense of belonging, but to ignore other consequences (the magpie syndrome, the lack of interaction). Examples from Infocom include WISHBRINGER, HOLLYWOOD HIJINX (which avoids most interaction problems by having few other characters to interact with) and MOONMIST. This last is interesting because it gives you the illusion of choice, when it asks you for your name and title. These details actually make little difference to the game—you are just "the detective", an outsider tolerated because of your reputation and friendship with Tamara (a relationship that is less well developed than it could have been with a defined player character).

III. Part of the Genre

In the earliest games and their imitators the PC is simply the "adventurer," the eyes and ears of a player at the keyboard. However, almost every game since then has given you some context for your character, no matter how vague—in TRINITY you are a tourist, in MOONMIST a detective. Then there are games where the context goes a lot further towards defining your character. These are the genre games.

Genre games share some of the advantages of the amorphous hero. So long as you are familiar with the genre in question you can still quickly spot the kind of person your PC represents, and because the authors know how the PC should react NPCs can still have (relatively) straightforward reactions. Furthermore, these reactions can now appear less generic because of the framework provided by the conventions of the genre. For example, LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS is a genre game where there is little overt PC characterization. Despite this, the PC still has more personality than an amorphous hero, and engages in much more (ahem) personal interaction with the NPCs.

Genre games also offer the opportunity to go further, however. Doug Atkinson discussed PLUNDERED HEARTS at some length in his article (another game I have yet to play). The PC in the game is defined by the conventions of the romance/adventure genre, and Doug observed that this is one game where puzzles take a back seat to story—characterization, character interaction, and plot. This is something that is hard to accomplish with an amorphous hero.

Another example of a genre game is GUMSHOE. I have only played a little of this, but it succeeds in conjuring up the right images for a hard-boiled detective story. You know how to behave because you are playing a private eye in the Philip Marlowe/Sam Spade tradition.

IV.   I Yam What I Yam

Whereas the characters of a genre piece are stereotypes, the PC in an adaptation game such as SHERLOCK or the HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE are recognizable because they are known entities. In a way, these ARE genre games. The adventures of Holmes & Watson or King Arthur and his knights are so well ingrained in English-speaking culture that the images they conjure up provide us with just as complete a set of expectations as do the broader genres such as hard-boiled. I am less sure about the global nature of HHGTTG, but I do not know of anyone who has played the game without previously encountering the radio series, TV series, or books.

V.   You Don't Know Me, But...

Although superficially similar, fixed-character PCs created purely for a piece of Interactive Fiction are very different from their more famous adaptation counterparts. When the authors cannot rely on players having background knowledge and expectations built up from exposure to other media, they have to do a lot more work. On the other hand, there are also much greater opportunities for developing the story when the authors have this much control. Without genre-defined preconceptions the instant recognition is lost, but so are the constraints that so often result in cardboard characters going through the motions.

A MIND FOREVER VOYAGING is the only Infocom game I have played that falls firmly in this category. Parry Sim is supposed to be an artificial personality, but that personality is to my mind more richly developed than any other Infocom PC. As a commercial product AMFV has the benefit of packaging, and Infocom used this to good effect with the episodes from Parry's earlier "life," but most of his character is expressed through the simulation sequences during the game.

Notice that I refer to Parry as "he" throughout. Whereas it is easy for players to identify directly with an amorphous hero and it is natural to say things like "you are a tourist," the fact that Parry is so well defined forces players to take a step back. You can still identify with the PC, but it is more like empathizing with the lead character in a film or novel±you do not "become" Elizabeth Bennett when reading Pride & Prejudice or Han Solo when watching Star Wars.

A more recent game with a well-defined fixed-character PC is CHRISTMINSTER. Roger Giner-Sorolla includes a detailed analysis of Christabel's character in his Usenet article, "Crimes Against Mimesis," so I won't go into too much detail here. Suffice to say that CHRISTMINSTER is another good example of what can be accomplished with this style of game.

VI. Multiple Personalities

In THE HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE TO THE GALAXY, you swap characters for parts of the game. In BORDER ZONE, you play a different character in each install-ment. In SUSPENDED, you control one character but effectively have multiple viewpoints via the robots.

If handling one character is tricky, why would authors want to introduce more? One reason is to explore a variety of viewpoints on the same situation. The "party" is also an established feature of roleplaying games, both tabletop and com-puter, and once we move into the realm of graphic adventures these features become much more common. In DAY OF THE TENTACLE, for example, you control three characters in three different time zones.

So why are there so few multi-PC text games? It is easy to see why few allow you to choose your character. Text adventures depend heavily on description and interaction for their atmosphere. There would be little benefit in having multiple PCs unless those characters were well defined, and their interactions with NPCs suitably varied. This requires enormous effort on the part of a game's authors if the different characters are interacting with the same people and places, since NPCs need different responses for each, and ideally location and object descrip-tions would vary slightly too.

This argument would not apply to a text version of DOTT, however. There the char-acters are in distinct settings, interacting with different NPCs, so it would merely mean writing the three sections of the game in differing styles. A partial answer is, I think, that care needs to be taken to ensure that players can identify with their PC. when the viewpoint keeps switching, the task becomes that much harder.

I still think there is scope for further experiments with multiple PCs. For exam-ple, in the Arabian Nights genre destiny governs all and stories are nested within stories, so I am going to experiment with playing out these "inner" stories from a PC's perspective. If the playtesters like it... well, we'll just have to wait and see.

VII. Character Building

In all the games discussed so far, the PCs are defined (except perhaps for name and gender) by the game's authors, but there are ways to offer players some part in this decision process. The previous section gave reasons why it would be difficult to pro-vide a choice of distinctly characterized PCs, but there are aspects of a PC apart from personality that could cause less trouble: the attributes and abilities commonly given numerical values in roleplaying games. Very little has been done with this. BEYOND ZORK is the only text-based game I have played that takes up the idea, and (so far as I could tell) the attribute scores made little difference to how the game played.

Perhaps the random nature of a percentage-based ability is not best suited for text games, but it is not the only method. One alternative is to offer traits that are either on or off: PCs have the trait, or they don't. For example, a PC may be Strong and Clumsy, or Weak but Nimble. The former could bypass a locked door puzzle by breaking it down, the latter by picking the lock. This method has the advantage that it is clear-cut—there is no chance that a strong PC will fail to break down the door, nor that a weak one will succeed.

Authors can restrict the area of effect for these abilities to the purely physical world, or they can be more ambitious and allow NPC reactions to change as well. For example, NPCs may feel intimidated by the strong PC, but would perhaps place more trust in the weak one. This is edging towards the problems presented by a choice of distinct personalities; the advantage is that the authors have complete control over how far they wish to take it. The artificiality of NPCs treating all PCs the same during the game is replaced by the artificiality of a "character creation" process for one PC at the start.

Interestingly enough, this scheme also offers a means of helping beginning players. In WISHBRINGER, they could use the magic stone to bypass difficult puzzles while seasoned players carried on without it. Similarly, beginners could take a Strong, Nimble character while diehards could attempt the game with someone who was Weak and Clumsy.

VIII. Conclusion

Although I have presented fixed categories for the handling of PC identity in this article, the descriptions I give are flagpoles with games positioned around and between them, rather than pigeonholes. For instance, I have "categorized" MOONMIST as an amorphous hero game even though it is part of the mystery genre. I felt the game made little use of the genre's conventions, in effect saying "You are the detective—now detect." Other mystery games such as WITNESS use the trappings of the genre to influence the player.

JIGSAW is another game that by all reports defies simple classification (again, I have not played it for long). It looks like an amorphous hero game, but (from what others have said) the characterization is such that it could also be described as a fixed-character, though undetermined gender, game.

I am not ranking the categories, with the amorphous hero at the bottom. Although I do agree with Doug (and others) that fixed characters offer more scope to expand the story side of IF, my favorite game to date remains TRINITY (with LEATHER GODDESSES supplying my favorite ending). In evolutionary terms, there has been an "adaptive radiation" rather than a "ladder of success."

In some ways, the more you understand the motivations and limitations of a PC, the more satisfying the game. This can be achieved using any of the game styles described above, so long as the authors use methods appropriate to the style. ✪

Q&A with Stu Galley

Matt Newsome (Matt@pnkfloyd.demon.co.uk) contributed the following brief exchange he had with Stu Galley, author of The Witness and Seastalker for Infocom.

Q. *Do you still see the other Implementors?*

Yes, the ones that still live near Boston usually gather at Steve Meretzky's house every year on Oscar night to predict the winners and watch the results.

Q. *I read that you started work on HHGTTG2 (Restaurant). Can you give a quick synopsis of the type of thing you would have included/did include?*

I started working from "The Original Radio Scripts" (Pan Books, London, 1985). The first game ended in the middle of the third program, so I wanted to carry on with Magrathea, Deep Thought, Milliways, and so on. There would have been time travel, and perhaps a quest to find a "spork" and/or "towelette" from the restaurant.

Q. *If you still have Dave Ardito's Zork I poster, would you/he be prepared to put a GIF of it on the net? (pretty please!)*

I don't know where to find a scanner that's big enough. I think there might be a small version in the above-mentioned archive at GMD.

Q. *I'm English—can you *please* explain what you all meant by MSG overdose?!*

Chinese restaurants in the States often add monosodium glutamate to the food they serve in order to enhance the flavor. Some people react to the substance with dizziness and other strange mental activity.

Q. *Reading the transcript of the conference on Feb 18th 1992, I got the impression that the only thing stopping more Infocom games from being made is the financial security issue. Could you not produce smaller games and release them as shareware? It's a fast way to the niche market, and people have been known to make thousands from it! What do you think?*

I think it's very risky. I have heard only a tiny number of success stories among all the hopeful shareware authors. Do you have documented info that contradicts that?

> (8)   What does "Burma Shave" mean (from the signposts in Enchanter)?

It's a company that used to advertise in the States with a series of small signs along a highway, instead of a giant billboard. ✪

Are AGT Games Making a Comeback?

At least among new game authors, it appears to be enjoying a certain resurgence. The two games below were both designed using AGT, although their plots differ strikingly.

Pastoral Pitfalls is a new AGT game in which the player takes on the role of a Lutheran minister. The object of the game is to complete as many pastoral acts (that is, acts performed by a pastor) within the course of a "normal" day. Pastoral Pitfalls was written with the beginner in mind, and the puzzles are meant to inform and educate at the same time as they entertain. Quite naturally, the game includes religious content, although the purpose of the game is not to "convert" or "bash" anybody—simply to demonstrate, often in a humorous fashion, the difficulties of keeping pace with today's parish pastor. Pastoral Pitfalls is written by Guy Marquardt (gmm@conex.com.br).

In the game **Panic!,** Station Andromeda is a major crime-crushing facility in a semiquadrant of the Solar System, Mark Two. Using the most highly-trained officers and the most advanced Armada 959 Cruisers, they are extremely successful. Now you will get to see what it's like. You play the role of officer Kyra for four days of non-stop crime fighting. The situations include a raid on corrupted Sirius Systems, a rescue mission at Station Echelon, and a Descent into a death-trapped pit to rescue a hostage. The game also includes the new, improved AutoNav system in the Cruiser, which lets you go anywhere if you have the right NavCard, or word of authorization.

Panic! is written by Colin Marshall (marshall@helen.bush.edu) under the label FunWare Games. Colin noted, "Panic! is my most advanced game yet, using all but the graphics feature of the Master's Edition AGT. Even includes characters with Artificial Intelligence, such as Standard Andrea, who is your partner for most of the missions. The reason this game is just a sneak preview right now is because I have a minor bug that won't stop. Expect Panic!! on ftp.gmd.de in late July or early August." The game will be shareware, but users can send in a $10 registration fee to receive Panic 2.

> *Note:* If you're writing a new text adventure game and would like to see it announced in the 'zine, please send an e-mail to Eileen Mullin at eileen@interport.net and include the words "Sneak Preview" in the subject header. Please include as much information as you can about the basic story line, how many characters are in the game, what gaming language was used, and the game's cost (if any).

SpiritWrak
release 2

"SpiritWrak" is the first all-text adventure to be set in the Zork universe since the demise of Infocom. It takes place in 976 GUE, after the great Guildmaster (your character in "SpellBreaker") has brought an end to the Age of Magic and given birth to the Age of Science.

You have to wonder whether this is an infringement of copyright. After all, Activision still holds the entire Infocom universe in its unyielding grasp. On the other hand, there have been three or four Internet MUDs (multi-user dungeons) based loosely on the Zorkiverse, and I've never heard of their authors getting sued. In SpiritWrak, unlike the MUDs, the Zorkian names and places are complemented by some true atmosphere and Infocom-style puzzles.

The plot? You're a monk in a secret monastery where magic users continue to practice spells, though the game refers to them as "prayers" or "chants." Brother Joseph, the leader of the sect, has inadvertently used a Holy Rod to summon the demon Anabais into the world, much like Belboz and Jeearr in "Sorcerer." The demon shattered the Holy Rod into four pieces and scattered them, so the player's quest is to get them back. The journey takes players to the four corners of both the Eastlands and Westlands, to the Zorkian cities of Frostham, Gurth, Aragain, Anthar, Miznia, and (New) Borphee, among others.

The game's spell-casting system was quite obviously lifted directly from Graham Nelson's sample game Balances. Players must memorize spells before they can be cast, and once cast they're forgotten. Unfortunately, while this system worked great in the classics, nowadays it's a bit irritating to have to re-memorize spells again and again. A method such as that used in Legend Entertainment's SpellCasting trilogy, where the player can simply cast magic straight from the book, would have worked far better, and is strongly suggested for use in future games of this type. I also missed the amusing ability to cast spells on random objects. Most of the time, this pro-

duces only a message to the effect that the spell doesn't work at all, with no adequate explanation as to why.

Compounding this problem is the fact that magic is still deteriorating, so there's a chance a spell will fail even if a valid target is chosen. This feature wasn't really necessary and could have been eliminated, in my opinion. Also, as the game has no day/night cycle, uncasted spells aren't cleaned from the player's memory, and the player can't "forget something in the shuffle" by trying to memorize too many. The only way to get rid of a memorized spell is to cast it. Such quirks require "spell management" in addition to the normal inventory management of IF, and it ultimately detracts.

The puzzles are generally not hard—very few are close to the mind-benders in "Sorcerer" and "SpellBreaker"—but many of them, particularly the new ones added for Release 2, are quite clever, if a bit gratuitous. Release 2 also removes a couple of the less-than-intuitive puzzles and adds more zorkmids for increased flexibility in riding the Great Underground Subway. Nearly everything is satisfyingly logical, and there is plenty to do—the game itself is vast, with a wide area open for exploration from the inception (though Yu does take a few liberties with Zork geography).

The fact that the game is a direct and unauthorized continuation of the beloved Zork history, rather than being set far into the future (as was Return to Zork) may initially turn off some players, as it did myself, but I gave SpiritWrak a chance, and it grew on me. It has that intangible Infocom-esque nostalgia—the sense of interconnected puzzles, items, and travel that recent commercial adventures have failed to capture. Thus SpiritWrak seems a more natural extension of the Zorkiverse than, say, Activision's newly released Zork Nemesis, which feels more like a tribute or pastiche. A great many obscure names, places, and other references, many only recognizable from the original Infocom packaging, can be found in SpiritWrak, and they fit in quite well without appearing to flaunt their own presence.

Continuing the tradition of Zork and Enchanter, two of Infocom's most popular releases, is a difficult undertaking for any I-F author, and I applaud the efforts of "SpiritWrak." Still, it remains to be seen how much of Dan Yu's expanded Zork history will be taken at face value with regards to future Zork adventures. ✪

—C.E. Forman

Gumshoe

release 1

Parser: Inform
Author: Mike Oliphant (oliphant@cogsci.ucsd.edu)
Availability: ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/games/inform/
          Gumshoe.z5
Requires: ZIP interpreter

You wake up on the floor outside your office, in a drunken stupor. You haven't paid your secretary in weeks, the rent money is due today, and you're in deep to gangster Jimmy Voigt. But just when all hope is gone, you finally get a case that just might save your neck…

These private detective cliches are the opening of "Gumshoe," an IF investigation that may not add anything new to the detective genre as a whole, but manages to take text adventures in a direction relatively explored. Infocom's mystery games typically cast players as a police detective, and, though they broke from this mold with "Moonmist" and even more with "Suspect," the hard-boiled private detective genre was never attempted.

Any sort of detective story is difficult to do effectively, as investigating skills tend to be necessary in every IF environment. Players typically need to pay close attention to their surroundings and piece together plot events to discover what needs to be done next. Still, "Gumshoe" man-
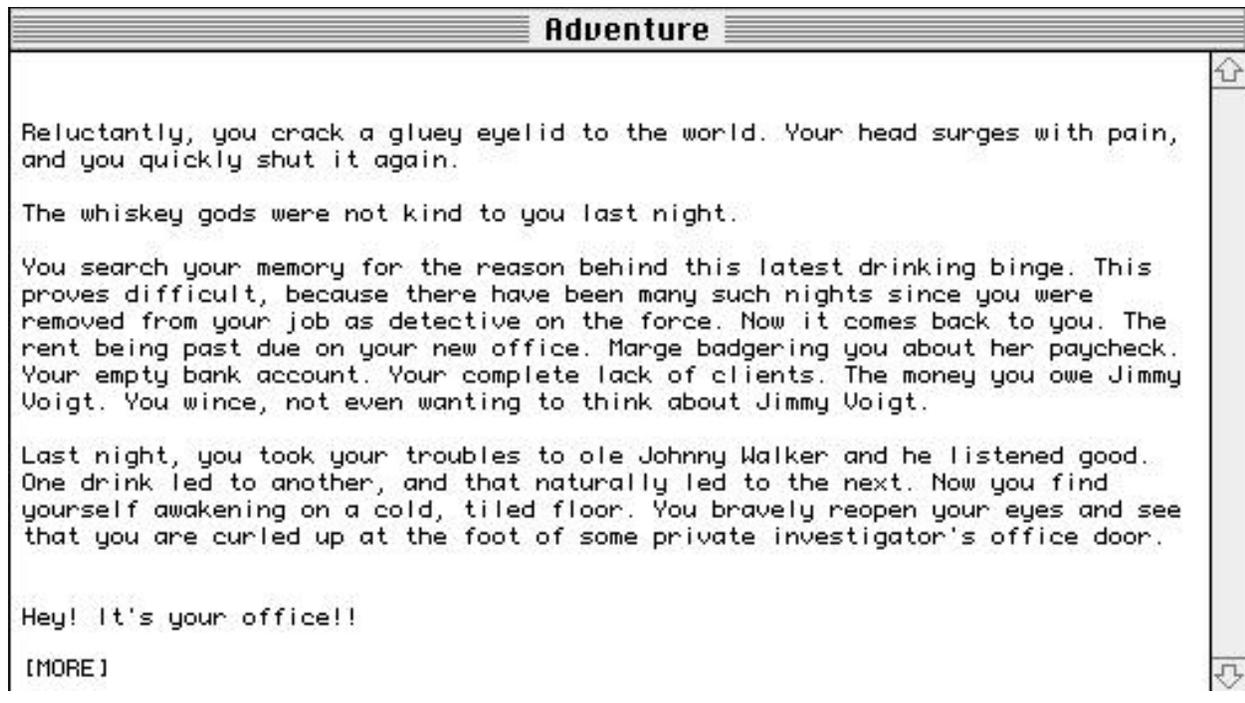
ages to be fairly convincing, and contains a fair amount of depth for such a small game. Travel to various places is accomplished via taxi, which creates the illusion of vastness in a game whose areas have at most four or five locations.

The NPCs are mobile, well-programmed and responsive, and interactions with them are necessary to gather information and make progress. Some, such as the bar customers, have vital clues that you need to extract while others, such as police detective Boggs, will do everything in their power to stop you. This sense of being the underdog and working against everyone else contributes largely to the sense of satisfaction obtained from overcoming the obstacles.

Overall "Gumshoe" is not difficult, but it's easy to get stuck if you miss an important clue or item somewhere. A couple of objects aren't listed in any of the descriptive text, and players must deduce their presence. It is possible to get the game into an unsolvable state in some instances, but as the game is relatively short, having to restore is not a problem. A nice feature is a "bad" ending you get if you earn your fee but don't accomplish everything you should have.

Though released early, "Gumshoe" would have made a nice entry for the 1996 IF competition. It's about the right length and demonstrates good Inform skills. I'm interested to see what Mike Oliphant has in mind for the competition itself. With another entry like "Gumshoe," he can't go wrong. ✖

—C.E. Forman


```
                         Adventure

Reluctantly, you crack a gluey eyelid to the world. Your head surges with pain,
and you quickly shut it again.

The whiskey gods were not kind to you last night.

You search your memory for the reason behind this latest drinking binge. This
proves difficult, because there have been many such nights since you were
removed from your job as detective on the force. Now it comes back to you. The
rent being past due on your new office. Marge badgering you about her paycheck.
Your empty bank account. Your complete lack of clients. The money you owe Jimmy
Voigt. You wince, not even wanting to think about Jimmy Voigt.

Last night, you took your troubles to ole Johnny Walker and he listened good.
One drink led to another, and that naturally led to the next. Now you find
yourself awakening on a cold, tiled floor. You bravely reopen your eyes and see
that you are curled up at the foot of some private investigator's office door.


Hey! It's your office!!

[MORE]
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The companion disk for XYZZYnews #9 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 #9 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.

SPIRITWRAK—Can it be, a new text adventure game set in the Zork universe? You're a monk in a hidden monastery where a terrible event has occurred—the demon Anabais has broken the Holy Rod into four pieces and dispersed them—and it's up to you to restore things to rights. This Inform game by Dan Yu is freeware. (See review in this issue.)

LOOKING FOR GODOT—You kept telling your English teacher you would return his copy of Waiting for Godot back "tomorrow." He's getting sick of waiting; you'd better find it tonight. You have just completed a thorough search of the porch and come up with nothing; where could it be? This

Inform game by Patrick Shaughnessy is distributed in the public domain.

PAST TENSE—You receive a package at your house addressed to an Agent Pritel with instructions for a mission…but wait, you're not Pritel! Naturally, the intrigue is just beginning…One neat feature about this TADS game by Daved Nault is that you can toggle between present and past tense. Source code is included.

GUMSHOE—This hard-boiled detective story by Mike Oliphant pits you as the down-and-almost-out Joe Gumshoe with one big case to crack. This Inform game is freeware. (See review in this issue.)

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