

Wishbringer™: The Story of Your Dreams

Festeron's not a bad place to live. It's a little seaside town with a picturesque church, a charming old-fashioned movie theater and a sparkling bay. There's that famous tourist attraction, Pleasure Wharf, and the Free Public Library with its collection of historic artifacts. There's even a miniature lighthouse.

The only thing Festeron doesn't have is a couple of dragons or princesses to spice things up. But that's okay. You spend a lot of time daydreaming, creating a Magick world that you can visit whenever you want. The only problem is your boss, Mr. Crisp, who always shows up when you're just about to polish off the dragon.

Mr. Crisp doesn't spice up your life — he's more like a thorn than a dragon. But as mail clerk, you do what he tells you to do, whether it's selling a stamp or delivering a letter. And, strangely enough, it's the letter he asks you to deliver one day that makes your life in good old Festeron as exciting as your dreams.

Here at Infocom, we like to turn fantasies into reality. In *Wishbringer*, our newest introductory-level fantasy, you are the Festeron mail clerk seeking the extraordinary in the land of the picturesque.

The special-delivery letter Mr. Crisp asks you to take to Ye Olde Magick Shoppe turns out to be a ransom note from the mysterious Evil One. The Magick Shoppe owner's beloved cat has been

kidnapped, and the ransom is an enchanted stone called Wishbringer.

When you leave the Magick Shoppe, after agreeing to help its proprietress find her cat, the charming world of Festeron has disappeared, familiar people and places gone or twisted into sinister forms. Goldfish have turned into piranhas, trolls guard bridges, grues lurk in caves, and your little post office has become a fortress-like tower. Overseeing this skewed environment is the Evil One and her omnipresent henchmen, the Boot Patrol.

As you venture through the grotesque realm of the Evil One, you'll befriend mythic creatures and evade the traps that have been set for you. And, like the Magick sword of your daydreams, the Wishbringer stone will be there to give you help when you need it.

According to legend, Wishbringer holds seven Magick wishes. The wishes, which are listed in *The Legend of Wishbringer* booklet included in the package, may each be used only once. To invoke a wish, you must have both the Wishbringer stone and a specified object in hand. For example, "LUCK will bring good fortune, if ye hold a Horseshoe and the Stone in thy possession."

You can solve all the puzzles in *Wishbringer* by logic alone. When used in this way, the story is a challenge for experienced interactive

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Included in every *Wishbringer* package are a sealed envelope containing the ransom note and a glowing *Wishbringer* stone.

Mail Order: Fulfillment Beyond Your Wildest Dreams

Having trouble finding *Starcross*™, *InvisiClues*™ or *Enchanter*™ for your Osborne? Many of our readers have made use of our direct order service. Every game and *InvisiClues* booklet we make is available by calling our toll-free order number, (800) 262-6868, or by mailing your order to:

Infocom, Inc.
P.O. Box 478
Cresskill, NJ 07626

Unfortunately, in the past some of the orders were mixed-up or slow to be processed.

We have moved our fulfillment service to a different company (note the new address) and we are confident that their service will be both accurate and speedy. (Most orders should be processed and shipped within 24 hours of receipt. That rivals even the old Zork Users Group!)

We apologize for any inconvenience our previous fulfillment service may have caused you and assure you that from now on no effort will be spared to provide you with the service you expect and deserve. **Z**

Don't Stick This in Your Ear . . .

Admit it. You were excited when you first got your very own interactive fiction version of *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*™, weren't you? You can't fool us — we know you wore your peril-sensitive sunglasses while driving, and nobody could get you to take your "DON'T PANIC" button off for weeks — you even wore it in the shower (painful, but it was worth it). Now there's a safer, more socially acceptable way to show your excitement about *Hitchhiker's*, with an

official Infocom "I GOT THE BABEL FISH" t-shirt.

These 100% cotton t-shirts are black with the same bright lettering as the front of your *Hitchhiker's* game package. They come in 4 sizes (S, M, L, and XL), and are available directly from Infocom (you may use the enclosed order form, or call our toll-free number [800-262-6868]). The price? Just \$7.95. And considering how excited you must be about this, we're sure you'll want two or three! **Z**

InfoNews Roundup

Party Tricks

A sumptuous mansion in Las Vegas, once owned by Elvis (Presley, not Flathead). A party with nearly a thousand guests, sipping drinks and discussing everything from politics to local scandals. A band serenading the crowds in the ballroom.

Suddenly a scream, and shots ring out. Moments later, a body is found,

shot twice in the chest, near the indoor swimming pool. Examination reveals that the victim has a knife wound in his back; yet strangulation is indicated by marks around his neck. A red drink nearby turns out to be a banana daiquiri with red food coloring added.

Everyone at the party immediately becomes a suspect. Other . . . *InfoNews* continued on page 5

MAIL BAG

To "Max the Knife" Dornbrook:

You know, Max, back when you were running the Zork Users Group (ahh, for the good old days) you were a real down to earth guy. But since you were hired at Infocom and given a cushy job as Product Manager (sneer) you seem to have forgotten about the little people (i.e., the type of people that CompuNews [double-sneer] ignores in its polls). And what the little people want is yaks. Back in the Fall 1984 issue when you started printing Yak Facts, I hoped that you might come down off your high horse long enough to do something to correct the severe paucity of yak news in computer gaming newsletters. But then you go and cancel the Yak Facts. It's still not too late, Max, and if you correct this grievous error the little people may just go back to calling you Mike.

On the lighter side, I would like to congratulate everyone at Infocom for their successes. So far I have played eleven games and have enjoyed them all very much, except that a yak doesn't appear in a single one! Anyway, keep up the good work.

Mike Zulauf

P.S. Please print this in *The New Zork Times*; this must be brought out in the open!

Dear Editor:

I just received my Winter 1985 edition of *The New Zork Times*, and, needless to say, I was excited. I look forward to each and every issue. But as I read this one, I saw the most distressing headline I have ever read: "Max Sacks Yak Facts." How could you do this?? If your defense is the survey mentioned, I must remind you that the average Zorker is not like the average person in a magazine survey. Some people actually rely upon yak facts for their very existence. I therefore believe that I speak for many other NZT readers when I say THE WORLD NEEDS MORE YAK FACTS! Perhaps even an interactive yak game is in order. To demonstrate the importance of the yak in daily life, I have included these facts that need desperately to be more widely known:

1) The typical yak is much, much larger than the typical housecat (and much, much more useful).

2) Well-instructed yaks can be used for such purposes as transportation, grinding coffee, and dragging large rocks through marshy fields.

3) If purchased for business purposes, yaks can become tax exemptions.

These are just a few of the important things that your readers could benefit from in the "Yak Facts" column. But fortunately, this omission is but a very minor (and hopefully temporary) flaw in your

terrific newsletter and line of interactive fiction.

James Funkhouser

Dear Info-Folks or editor (as you please):

Recently, upon arrival of your Winter '85 issue of *The New Zork Times*, my wife and I were surprised by the scathing article, "Max Sacks Yak Facts." We were shocked! I guess we fall into the lonely 0.1% who like to read "a significant amount about yaks."

It seemed so long ago that we were delighted by these Yak Facts in the Fall '84 issue. The Mrs. and I were sure that the new issue would hold more of these wondrous facts, only to be slapped in the face by your yak-hating editors.

So a final farewell to those good ole days of yak (?), we offer these final bits of yak facts:

Did you know that...

... Flood Control Dam #3 is as tall as 42 large bull yaks.

... a good yak can be purchased for less than 200 zorkmids.

... the word "yak" can be worth up to 30 points in Scrabble™ (sorry, this is from the pre-Zork days.)

W. Scott Kardel

P.S. Why are there no yaks in the topiary?

Ode to a Planetfall Player

Planetfall is a wonderful game, After I played it, I wasn't the same. The Stellar Patrol is invincible, With their ships made of steel and lead.

Their motto is: To Boldly Go Where Angels Fear To Tread.

Ode to a Zork Player

The roses have lost their luster, And I have lost my love.

The heavens have lost their moonlight,

And all the stars above.

The sky is plagued with darkness, The orchids rot with rue.

The world is dark and meaningless, I've been eaten by a grue.

—Jared A. Sorensen
(sixth grade)

Beneath the rug my adventure began
The way was fraught with danger
and reward

Vanquish a troll and find the shadow man

A score of treasure found, safely stored.

Unto the Wizard's realm I then did go,

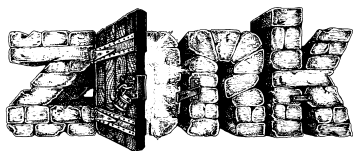
Melting the great dragon to gain the key.

Turn out the light and follow the dim glow

Open the door, a well fought victory!
The quest however is not at an end,

... Mail Bag continued on page 8

Come Work In Beautiful



How would you like to join a team of professionals whose claim to fame is quality? Infocom is growing by leaps and bounds, and we need professionals in product development, sales, marketing, testing and administration.

If you're looking for a brand new opportunity with proven success, consider a career with Infocom. But move fast... while we're still in the process of building.

Our business and game software company offers excellent benefits including health, dental and life insurance, and tuition reimbursement.

To find out about job opportunities at Infocom, please send your resume to Donna McCarron, Infocom, Inc., 125 CambridgePark Drive, Cambridge, MA 02140. We are an equal opportunity employer.

The New Zork® Times

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INFOCOM

The History of Zork — SECOND IN A SERIES

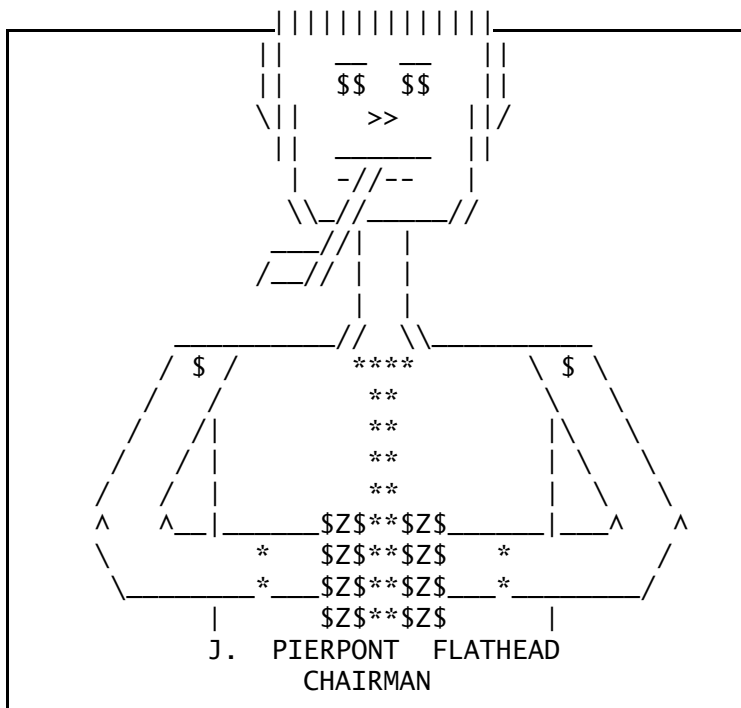
by Tim Anderson

When last seen, Zork® was a small game (probably slightly more than half the size of the final mainframe version) that ran on one computer. Although it was only six weeks old, and had never been advertised, it had a relatively large user community from all over the country. In some ways it was better than the classic *Adventure* at this time, but mostly it was the next game to come along, and it wasn't even the only contender.

The characters: MIT-DM, a PDP-10 running ITS; MDL (aka Muddle), a language that ran only on PDP-10s; Marc Blank, Bruce Daniels, Dave Lebling, and Tim Anderson, intrepid implementers; and assorted net randomness.

July 1977 saw two major additions to the game, the last for several months (we weren't exactly hired to write the thing, after all). The first of these was another BKD special: Bruce didn't write much code, but he was willing to design problems. We went to him, and asked for a particularly nasty section; the result was the coal mine. His design was originally nastier than the final implementation, since the maze was just about as horrible as the original one in the game; it got simplified due to popular demand. The problems were improving in quality, and the coal mine maze was a late example of making things hard by making them tedious.

The volcano section was Marc's second vehicle implementation, but is perhaps more noteworthy for the loving portraits of Lord Dimwit Flathead the Excessive that decorated the coin and stamp found in the section. The river (see Part I) and volcano sections, in addition to vehicles, required a better concept of time: both the boat and the balloon moved more or less on their own, and the volcano required the use of explosives and fuses. Marc added a clock daemon, which processed a queue of events that would happen some fixed number of moves later. This handled, in addition to the movement of the vehicles, the fuse, the lantern burning out, and the mysterious gnomes that occasionally appear. The first of these was in the



volcano: if the player got trapped in the upper reaches of the volcano by losing his balloon, after a few moves a volcano gnome would appear and offer freedom in exchange for a treasure. We were just being nice; most players weren't allowed to save their games, so they had no way of backing out if they made such a mistake. The gnome allowed them to keep playing, albeit with no chance of getting all the points.

Even before the volcano section, we'd talked about a problem that involved flying; Dave had a preference for something with an eagle, and its aerie, but we could never figure out how to restrict things enough — it wouldn't do to have a parallel map of the game viewed from the air. Once again, we worried about restraining a new concept, so the balloon had no way of leaving the volcano. And once again we were bitten by a new concept. When the player used the explosives in the wrong place, and didn't get out of the way, he'd end up with 20,000 pounds (or was it tons?) of rock on his head. This made a certain amount of sense in the underground section, but not out in the forest.

No more sections were added to the game for several months after July, but it continued to improve. In

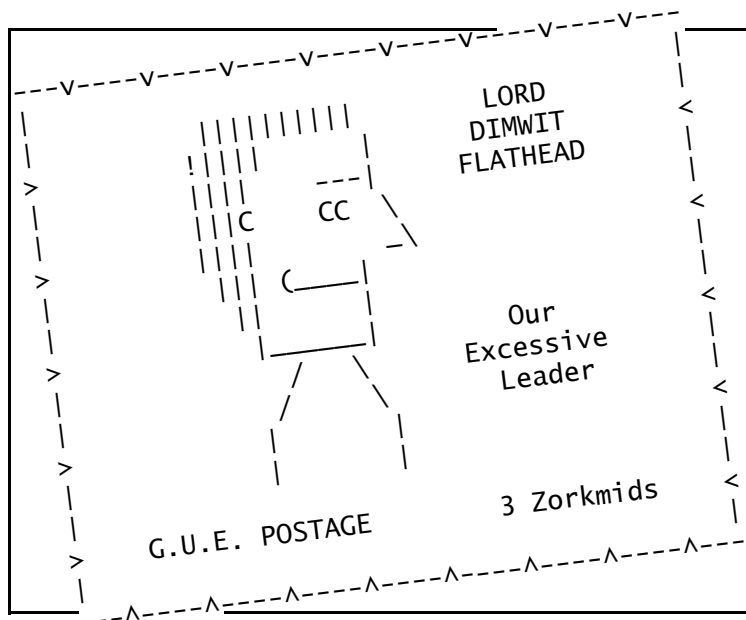
addition, it finally moved to machines other than DM, thus greatly expanding the number of players.

Although Muddle ran primarily on DM, a version for TENEX (the most popular PDP-10 operating system on the ARPAnet) had existed for some time; the TENEX version could, with some minor modifications, run on TOPS-20 as well. We finally succumbed to one of the requests for a copy of *Zork* when we were given

an account on a TOPS-20 machine on the net. After we made the necessary software modifications, of course, many copies could be made; a mailing list of *Zork* owners developed, so they could get whatever updates appeared.

Although people could get runnable *Zorks*, they couldn't get sources. We tried two approaches to protecting the sources (remember, there was no protection of any sort on DM): they were normally kept encrypted; and we patched the system to protect the directory where we kept the sources (named CFS, for either "Charles F. Stanley" or "Computer Fantasy and Simulation"). This worked pretty well, but was finally beaten by a system hacker from Digital: using some archaic ITS documentation (there's never been any other kind), he was able to figure out how to modify the running operating system. Being clever, he was also able to figure out how our patch to protect the source directory worked. Then it was just a matter of decrypting the sources, but that was soon reduced to figuring out the key we'd used. Ted had no trouble getting machine time; he just found a new TOPS-20 machine that was undergoing final testing, and started a program that tried every key until it got something that looked like text. After less than a day of

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The History of Zork

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crunching, he had a readable copy of the source. We had to concede that anyone who'd go to that much trouble deserved it. This led to some other things later on.

Players hadn't been able to save their *Zorks* because the method we used at first took several hundred thousand bytes for each save, and even on a time-sharing system that was excessive. Marc, around this time, invented a new way of saving that cut the size down to something more reasonable, with the slight disadvantages that any new rooms or objects added to the old game would break existing save files, and that it never quite worked right anyway. However, it did make it easier to play the game, and we still had the silly notion of being nice to our users.

Fall '77 saw two major additions to the game, as Marc took another break from medical school (yes, fans, he did graduate on time), and Dave got into coding in a big way. The *Alice in Wonderland* section, complete with its magic bucket and robot, was installed. The robot was the first "actor," an object that could perform some of the same tasks the player could. The style of address was familiar: "ROBOT, TAKE THE CAKE." The implementation of this required another change in the game's flow of control, and changes to anything else that one could reasonably talk to.

The first version of fighting was added about the same time. Dave, an old *Dungeons and Dragons* player, didn't like the completely predictable ways of killing creatures off. In the original game, for example, one killed a troll by throwing a knife at him; he would catch the knife and gleefully eat it (like anything else you threw at him), but hemorrhage as a result. Dave added basically the full complexity of DD-style fighting, with different strengths for different weapons, wounds, unconsciousness, and death. Each creature had its own set of messages, so a fight with the thief (who uses a stiletto) would be very different from a fight with the troll and his axe.

As a result of the purloined sources at DEC, a lunatic there decided to translate *Zork* into FORTRAN. We had always assumed this would be

impossible: Muddle is very (oops, *very*) different from FORTRAN, and *much* more complicated, and we'd used most of its features in designing *Zork*. The guy who did it was mostly a hardware person, so perhaps he didn't know what he was up against. At any rate, shortly after the Great Blizzard of '78 he had a working version, initially for PDP-11s. Since it was in FORTRAN, it could run on practically anything, and by now it has.

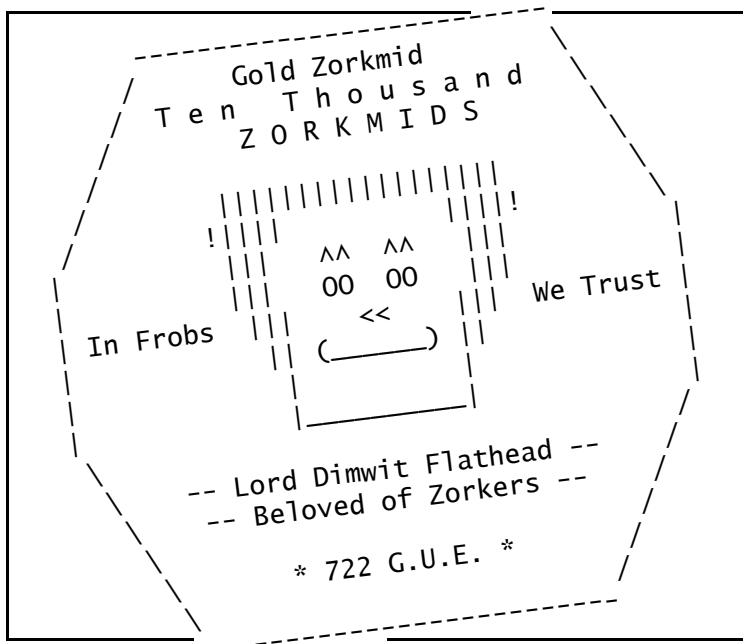
Unfortunately, at some point in the

game, etc., etc., etc. Silly as it sounds, we eventually started calling it *Dungeon*. (Dave admits to suggesting the new name, but that's only a minor sin.) When Bob the lunatic released his FORTRAN version to the DEC users' group, that was the name he used. I'm sure many people have noticed a curious similarity between the *Dungeon* game they played on their friendly IBM 4341 and the *Zork I* they played on their equally friendly IBM PC; now you know why.

We didn't agree (and MIT had some very expensive lawyers on retainer who agreed with us), but it encouraged us to do the right thing, and not hide our *Zorks* under a bushel.

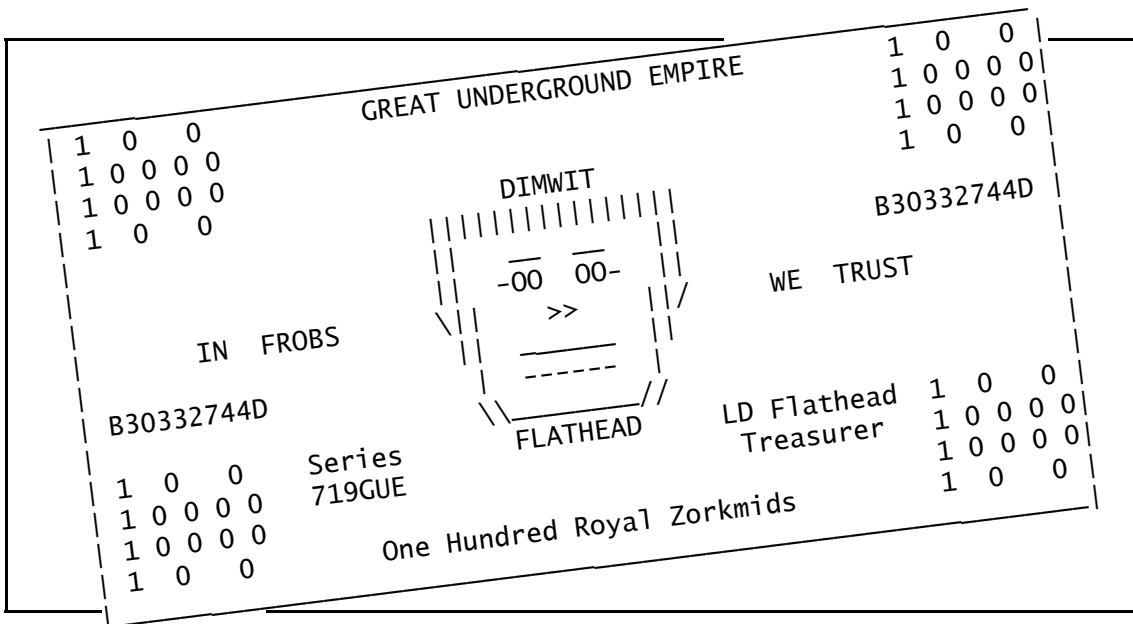
The next section that was added was intended to be the last: after a player had accumulated all the points in the game, he could play the End Game, designed largely by Dave. This became the section of *Zork III* with the Dungeon Master, and at the time was certainly the most involved, and hardest (as it should have been) thing in the game. The implementation was, if anything, more involved than the problem. Less than two months later, though, Marc had come up with something worse, probably during a boring anatomy lecture. The bank section has probably been fully deciphered by fewer people than anything else in the game; even those who solve it on their own don't usually understand what was going on. I can only say that it makes sense if you understand it.

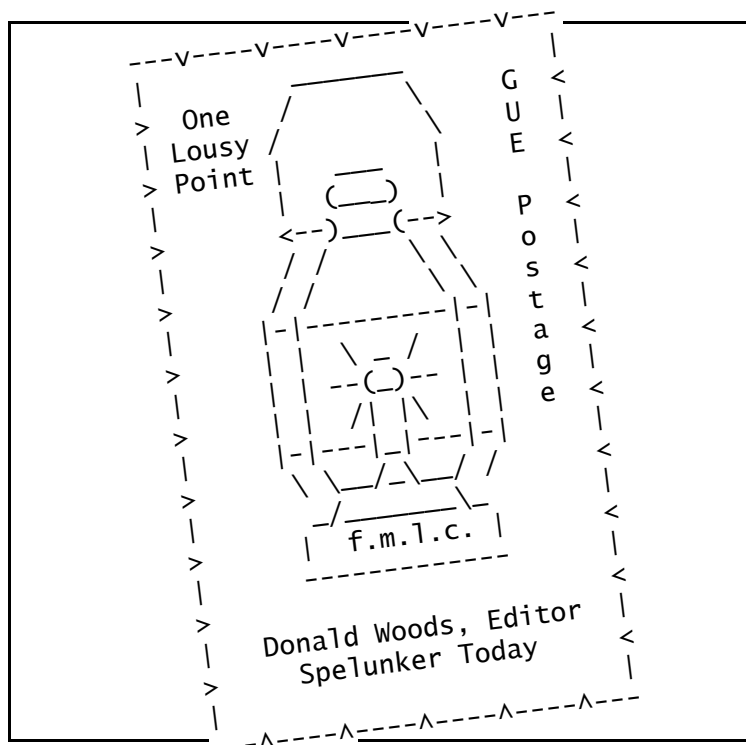
For some time, we'd been getting bug reports, fan mail, and suggestions for new problems from all sorts of people. We were beginning to run a little short on ideas anyway, and one of the ideas we got was very good. During a lengthy dinner at Roy's, our favorite Chinese restaurant, we worked out the details of the jewel-encrusted egg, purple prose courtesy of Dave. Many people on the net had long since solved the game, but went back in and did any new problems that came along; one of them had played DD with Dave, and called him up about a day after the egg was announced. "I've gotten



preceding year we (no one will now admit to suggesting the idea) had decided to change the name of the game. *Zork* was too much of a nonsense word, not descriptive of the

Fortunately for us, a certain company (which shall remain nameless) decided to claim that it had trademark rights to the name *Dungeon*, as a result of certain games that it sold.





the egg opened, but I assume you losers have some nonsense where you do something with the canary and the songbird." Dave, no fool, said "Cough, cough, ahem, of course," and immediately went off and added the brass bauble.

The remaining puzzles, the Royal Zork Puzzle Museum and the palantirs, were added in the late summer and fall of 1978. The puzzle was designed (several times) primarily by Bruce, who in theory was back trying to finish his dissertation. Finding the minimum number of moves required to solve it was a popular pastime among dedicated Zorkers for a while.

The last (lousy) point was a tribute to the final point in the original *Adventure*, which involved leaving a particular object in a particular room for no particular reason. When we first solved *Adventure* in 1977, Bruce finally figured this out by using a machine-language debugger on the running game (since *Adventure* was not written in machine language, this was not easy). The major difference between that and our version (a stamp worth One Lousy point) is that it would be harder to find ours without the source of the game.

The last puzzle was added in February of '79. We (mainly I, at this point) kept fixing bugs for almost

two more years — the last main-frame update was created in January of '81. No new puzzles were added because none of the implementers had time or inclination, and because we had no more space available: at the time, we were limited to a megabyte of memory, and we had used it all up. The first article about *Zork* appeared in April of '79, and attracted a great deal of interest; some of this may have been because we offered to give people the game (if they didn't already have it), and gave them parts of the sacred sources as well.

Infocom was incorporated in 1979 by various people from the DM group, including Marc, Dave, and me. It was not founded to sell *Zork*; rather, it was founded to give group members somewhere to go from MIT. Marc and Joel Berez (both exiled to Pittsburgh) determined that it would be possible to make *Zork* run on something cheaper than the \$400,000 PDP-10, and the company eventually went along. See the next NZT for further details.

In the meantime, we still get requests for hints on the mainframe *Zork* (sometimes it's called *Dungeon*, and often it's running on something other than a PDP-10). The most recent request for a copy came in on April 1, but I think it was serious. **Z**

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guests' arguments with the victim are remembered and denied. Clues, motives, and accusations are exchanged.

Is this another Infocom game, where you play the detective or the dupe? Is Sergeant Duffy waiting in the wings? Can you buy *InvisiClues* to figure this one out?

Hardly. The party was hosted by Infocom (who else?), to promote its most recent mystery game, *Suspect*[™]. Retailers, distributors, and lots of press were in town to attend the January 1985 CES (the Consumer Electronics Show, not the Convention of Enchanters and Sorcerers). With the help of a New York troupe of actors named Murder To Go, Inc., Infocom staged a crime and let the party guests become participants in solving the murder.

Sound like fun? It was; it was almost as much fun as *Suspect*.

Kudos

Sure, you've heard it a million times: Infocom is the best. Well, be warned: you're about to hear it again.

The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy has been called "without doubt the best adventure ever seen on a computer." Who said that? Not Binky O'Leary (he hated the game). Not Mozart (he died before he could figure out the babel fish problem). No, it was some little-known start-up newspaper called *The Times of London*, on March 12, 1985. Cheers!

Admit it: you read *People* magazine. You read it at home; you read it at the dentist's office; you read it while waiting on (or in) the check-out line at the supermarket. So in the March 18, 1985, issue, you saw the article about Infocom games in the "Picks & Pans" section (we were,

you remember, a "pick"). You read that (in the reviewer's words) "there's a refreshing side to interactive fiction: It lets you use your imagination, instead of reflexes, and stimulates you to build pictures in your mind, instead of leaving them in flat dimensions on the screen." Infocom is glad you saw that article, so it doesn't have to tell you about it.

Finally, this headline from the November 22, 1984, Salt Lake City *Tribune*: "New Software By Infocom Isn't Boring." Oh well; you can't please everyone.

Wave Bye-Bye, Junior

A very, very long time ago (Spring 1984), Infocom announced its first "junior-level" game: *Seastalker*[™], an adventure in the tradition of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*. *Seastalker* was a success. *People* magazine (remember them?) called *Seastalker* "a first-class introduction," and said "Though pitched to the junior set (9 and up), *Seastalker* can just as easily enthrall an oldster."

But some people didn't like the designation "junior-level." It sounded like it was for children only. Adults didn't want a kid's game; in fact, *kids* didn't want a kid's game. So Infocom went back to the (all-text) drawing boards.

Introducing (drumroll, please) "introductory level"! Infocom's first introductory-level game is *Wishbringer*, a new fantasy story in which your home town becomes a living nightmare. It's not just for kids: *Wishbringer* is a great introduction to interactive fiction for *everyone* from age 9 up. So tell your friends — whether they're macho linebackers, adventurous grandmothers, or just someone looking for

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fiction fans. First-time players will appreciate having the Magick wishes to help them out.

Along with *The Legend of Wishbringer*, each *Wishbringer* package includes a postal map of Festeron and a sealed special-delivery letter (the same one Mr.

Crisp asks you to deliver at the start of the story). You even get your very own glow-in-the-dark *Wishbringer* stone.

Wishbringer was written by Brian Moriarty, a new member of Infocom's in-house group of interactive fiction writers. It will retail for \$39.95 for most systems. **Z**



Two assistants pour over an exciting new discovery: papyrus scrolls depicting writings and artwork. Could these be the work of emus?



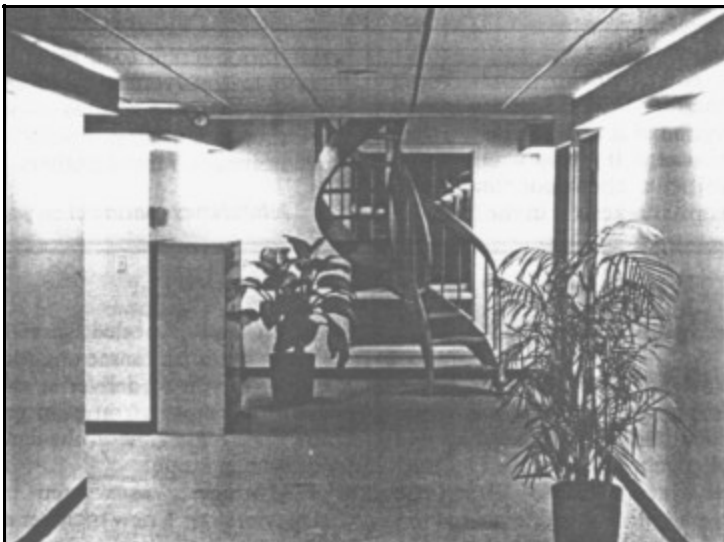
Doctor Feep supervises a crew of local diggers.



Sunset over the stark plains of the Ben Lomond plateau.

Searching for the Relics of the Emu

This month, *New Zork Times* photographer Paul Gross followed Doctor Lyman Izyuk Feep during a field trip to Tasmania. Doctor Feep is an expert on the emu, a flightless bird which was exterminated by European settlers hundreds of years ago. He travelled “down under” in order to research his theory, which claims that before their extinction, Tasmanian emus had achieved a tool-based civilization equal to that of medieval man.



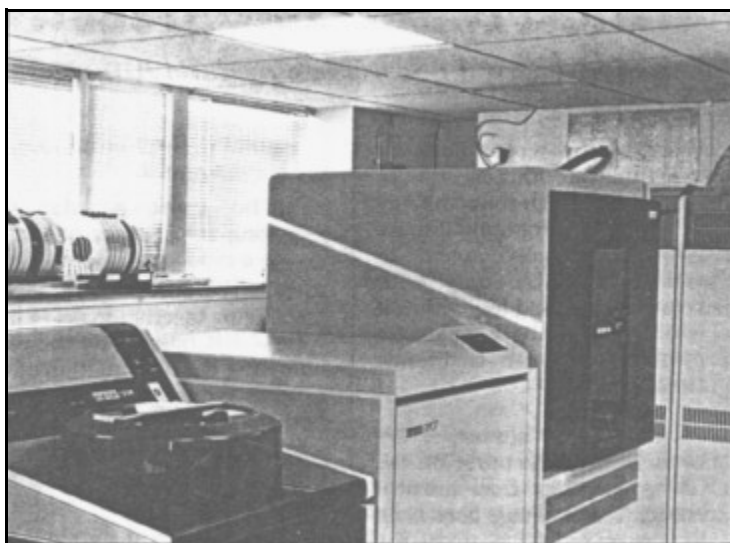
Diggers seek shade from the scorching noontime sun.



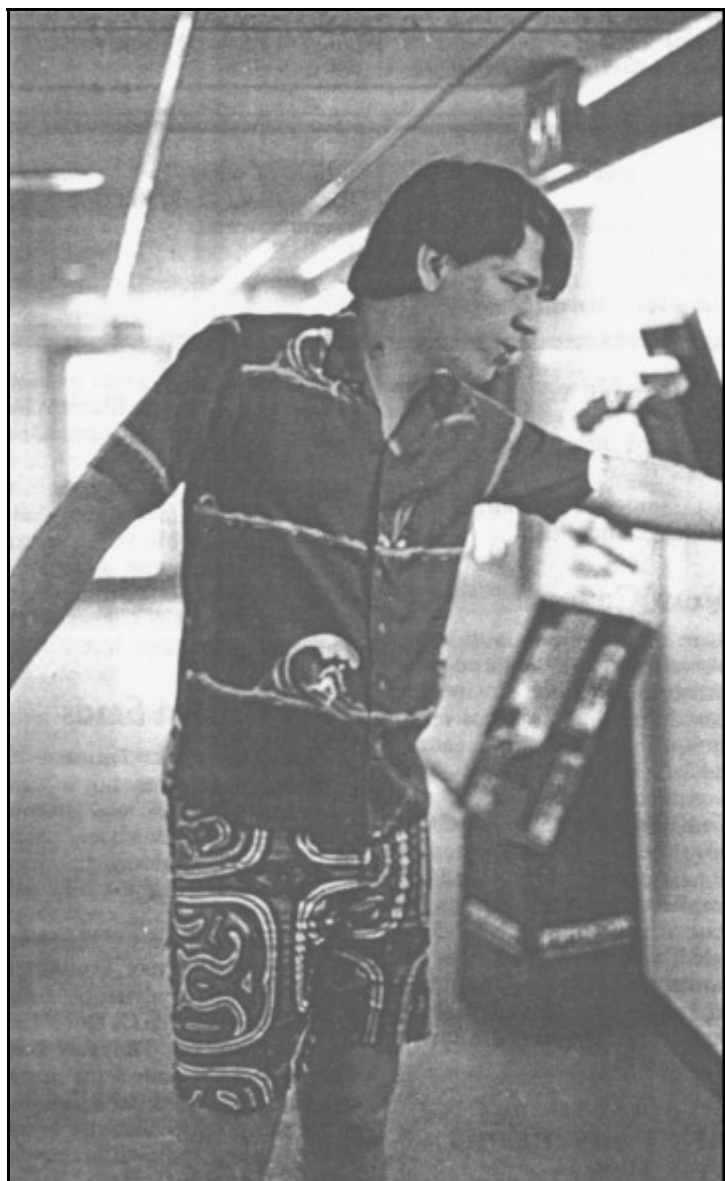
Doctor Feep, surrounded by several guards and his therapist, boards the plane back for the return trip to America.



After dinner, crew members quaff flagons of "qisslepou", a local ale.



Professor Edward Wilsonfoot, from the Archaeology Department of the University of Sydney, exchanges heated words with Doctor Feep.



A surprise visitor to the encampment, a full-grown kangaroo, startles Melinda Feep.



A poisonous asp, one of the dangers of the treacherous Tasmanian mountain ranges that the archaeological crew must constantly be on watch for.



In the midst of an excavation, Doctor Feep (wearing the black sombrero) points to the outline of the walls of a fortified emu temple, visible in the photo as dark, linear markings in the soil.

Music From The Great Underground Empire

(reprinted from U.S. News and Dungeon Report, 9/18/951)

Because of the recent craze of treasure-hunting that seems to have swept through the remnants of the Great Underground Empire (GUE), most people seem to associate the GUE only with jewels and gold, and forget that it was once a thriving kingdom of people, replete with traditions, culture, and art.

For example, almost every book or classroom course on the GUE ignores its fine musical heritage. This heritage goes back to the very earliest years of the GUE. Zilbo III, the last ruler of the Entharion Dynasty, who is most known for his invention of the card game Double Fanucci, is also the inventor of the brass Trombuoy, and wrote several sonatas for Trombuoy and Danvic-

torhorn.

The most popular music among the masses of the GUE was a type known as rock music, so-called because it was produced by banging together rocks (which were left lying all over the place following the construction of the caverns and tunnels of the GUE) and also because listeners frequently stuffed rocks in their ears due to the loud volumes involved.

The origins of the GUE's rock music can be traced to the legendary singer Elvis Flathead, whose first concert in 841 propelled him to stardom. However, the most famous rock musicians were undoubtedly Sgt. Duffy's Lonely

Hearts Club Band. Their songs include "I Get By With a Little Hint From My Friends" ("Would you be mad if I showed you a bug/Would you stand up and log out on me?") and "Sandy Cave" ("Sandy Cave is in my ears and in my eyes/There beneath the Frigid River skies").

A later addition to the GUE's rock music scene was a group called Men at Zork, whose hit song "Down Under" revitalized interest in the medium ("So you come from a land down under/Where trolls kill and thieves plunder"). Another popular rock artist was Billy Troll. (*Editor's Note: As a matter of fact, Infocom President Troll Berez is named after him.*) Other important rock musicians of the GUE were a

group named Jefferson Bucket (later re-named Jefferson Balloon) and a cute robot named Pink Floyd.

For the royal elite, more classical styles of music were in vogue. The most famous of these works is the "Toccata and Fugue and Theme and Variations, Opus No. 69105" by Johann Sebastian Flathead, commissioned by his cousin, Lord Dimwit the Excessive. The piece was only performed once in its entirety, in 787. Legend has it that several members of the 98,000-piece royal orchestra, chorus, corps de ballet, artillery battery, fireworks brigade, and smoke effects crew failed to survive the eighty-seven day ordeal. **Z**

... Mail Bag

continued from page 2

The Dungeon Master waits with
clever tricks,
Defeat him and with none do you
contend,
Deep in the heart contentment does
transfix.
Thus the end of my odyssey draws
nigh
I finish proud of deed and spirits
high.

—John Betz

'Tis sad I am
That my new disc
Has ceased to boot
Oh tsk Oh tsk
I used it once
On Christmas Day
Now it won't work
When I would play
If I have caused
The tribulation
By careless disk drive
Operation
Then I must pay
The dollars five
If once again
I wish to strive
To beat Suspended
With aplomb

I NEED THE HELP OF INFOCOM

—Bryan Hubbard

Zorkers are great, Zorkers are cool,
Zorkers know not to swim in the
pool.

Zorkers are clever, sneaky, and sly,
And only Zorkers know why...

When to come in, when to go out,
What to do in case of a bout
Between trolls, thieves, dragons, and
bats,

And how to use the old place mats.
We travel the land, the water, and
air,

And rely on intelligence in case of a
scare.

We do many things, no matter the
risk,

And to think this great world is just
on a disk.

We have conquered the thief, dragon,
and troll,

But our final challenge will be my
goal.

To reach the master, as he sits in his
seat,

The man, all this time, I've wanted to
meet.

Will he praise me, slay me or call me
a rookie?

Will he reach in his pocket and give
me a cookie

For the very hard job of reaching his
house?

Will he kick me out? Turn me into a
mouse?

I guess time will tell in this situation
I just hope I can stand all the
frustration!

I am not giving up, Master, you'll see

With the trouble you've caused me,
you won't get off free!

I now leave these meaningful lines of
verse,

For, without Zork, life would be
much worse!

—Eric Larson
(age 16)

... InfoNews

continued from page 5

a challenge and a thrill.

New Caverns

Recent improvements in lighting technology have reduced the number of Infoworkers eaten by grues. Infocom thus needs more spacious caverns to accommodate its growing staff. A new cavern has been found, at 125 CambridgePark Drive, Cambridge, MA 02140. Mapping of the new cavern has not yet been completed, but early reports indicate a large number of oddly-angled rooms. The offices of chairman Al Vezza and president Joel Berez are rumored to have been designed by Lord Dimwit the Excessive.

Zork Convention

Infocom may be hosting a Zork Convention later this year, open to all adventurers, sleuths, wizards, and Stellar Patrol members. Meet a real live Dornbeast; call Marc Blank

"Mark Blanc" to his face; learn all sorts of Infotrivia; hobnob with the game writers, the Infopeople, and your fellow fans. Interested? What else would you like to see or do? Let us know, and we'll see what we can do. Write to: InfoConvention, 125 CambridgePark Drive, Cambridge, MA 02140. **Z**

Stan's Ban Stands

"The New Zork Times is a specialty newsletter, not a high-class magazine." So said Infocom Product Manager Michael "Stan" Dornbrook, defending his controversial decision to keep yak news out of the respected Cambridge-based journal. Despite public outcry, protest letters, and a petition from WOOLLY (Women Of Outer Latvia Loving Yaks), *The New Zork Times* will continue its policy of no yak facts. "Yak fans will just have to make do with the yearly yak issue of *Sports Illustrated*," said Stan. (Actually, Michael Dornbrook's nickname is "Mike" or "Max." But "Stan" made a better headline.) **Z**

Starcrossed Adventurer Queries Author

Gentlemen:

I would like to make some comments on your games. The first one I bought was *Suspended*TM, and I was quite taken with it. The only modification I could suggest would be to fill the cavern with helium in order to protect the electric circuits from corrosion, and to have the protagonist sitting at a keyboard, and of course, unable to leave his chamber. Just a little detail to lend verisimilitude.

However, I was quite unhappy with *Starcross*. In the first place, there seems to be no logic to the fourth bump. If you have read *Rendezvous With Rama*, you recall that three was a key number to the builders of Rama. Perhaps the builders of the artifact in *Starcross* had four fingers, but how am I to know that?

Let me take the biology next. An exoskeleton is useful to retain body fluids for small animals, which have a large surface to volume ratio. However, an exoskeleton has the drawback that the owner must molt in order to grow. Hence, I think you will find animals with endoskeletons are better suited for ecological niches requiring large size. Unless, of course, you believe in creation and not evolution. Also, how could you tell that Gurthark was a mam-mal? I take it you didn't milk him.

Also, I think it is a general rule of ethology that animals will hide their weapons when they intend to appease. A sea gull will turn its beak away, and, while a man learns the action, he raises his empty hands. A careful observation of Gurthark would have shown, I think, that he was waving his palps, in a manner reminiscent of a male jumping spider semaphoring a female to placate her, and that he was not grinding his teeth at all. Moreover, surely a civilized gentleman like Gurthark would never sidle into someone else's personal space while they were talking. Actually, I found Gurthark the most sympathetic character in *Starcross*, and was sorry that programming limitations made it impossible to chat with him. However, I thought a

video tape recorder would have been of more interest to him, if he had deciphered speech, and had been listening to broadcasts. I don't know — is it easier to decipher broadcasts of pictures or of speech?

As for trading the space suit for the brown rod, I suggest you read Chagnon's account of the Yanomamo, if you think it would be easy to trade with a people who have been long isolated. I also doubt if a single group is viable, as contrasted to several groups divided into territories. I admit my view is gloomy in view of modern weapons, but that doesn't prove it untrue.

Let me take the physics next. If one were to float from the center of a rotating cylinder in a vacuum, one would certainly not accelerate. There is no centrifugal force. One would move to the outer surface at the same speed at which he left the axis. If the radial speed of the cylinder were 250 km per hour, the effect would be the same as jumping on a very large flatbed truck moving at 250 km an hour. However, I fail to see any reason why the artifact should rotate at a speed designed to give one earth gravity. If we assume a radial speed of 60 km an hour, or about one quarter earth gravity, then of course, anyone landing on a flat metal surface would be knocked arsy varsy when he landed, but I imagine one could make such a jump. Of course, once one reached radial speed of sixty km, one would feel as if one were in a quarter gravity. I assume no structures on the rim, but a flat surface.

Of course, a ray gun has no recoil. Read *Earthman's Burden* by Poul Anderson and Gordon Dickson. Of course, we must conserve momentum; we don't want it to become extinct; and radiation has no rest mass, and so no momentum.

Mostly, I objected to simple logic faults. I had inferred the green rod was either in a planter, or in the garage, although I didn't know the name. Surely one can sit on an object a meter long, and half a meter high. Contrast this with the remark in *Sorcerer*TM, when I tell the bat to take the parchment scroll. After all,



bats have claws, but the remark, "You're batty," had enough wit to be unobjectionable. For example, you might say, "The mouse won't do anything until you get off his back!" or perhaps something a little more witty. After all, as Chesterton remarked, one can believe in the impossible, but not in the improbable. Father Brown cited the case of Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar, but I can't believe I need a theory to sit on an object the size of a footstool. Of course, the edges of the container on the mouse's back might be sharp. Another point — why does the program recognize the word "planter"? Of course, I never obtained the red rod, so perhaps I am missing something.

After all, the difficulties in *Starcross* require a rather specialized knowledge of spherical coordinates, and nautical directions. I would imagine anyone with that knowledge would also spot howlers.

*Planetfall*TM was campy enough that I suppose one can't really criticize it. Also, I haven't finished it. However, I do think one shouldn't weep crocodile tears over someone for whom one couldn't provide covering fire. I did try to shoot the mutations, but the computer wouldn't recognize the word. I felt that was the least I could do, since I typed "KICK FLOYD" instead of

"WAIT" in the elevator and the shuttle.

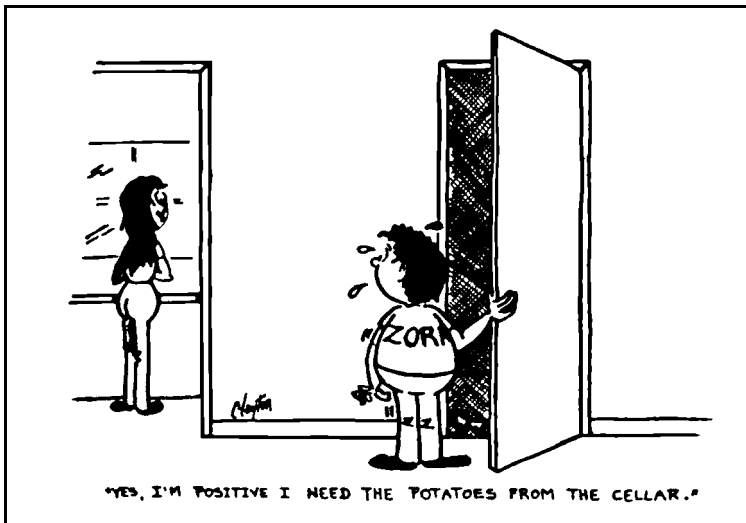
I've only gotten to 205 in *Sorcerer* so it is satisfactory as far as difficulty, and I've liked it so far. However, *Starcross* irritated me enough so that I doubt if I shall buy any more of your games.

Thank you for your attention in this matter.

John Wilson

P.S. Let me note that the rule of ethology I mentioned above is probably the result of evolution if the behavior is inborn. When one animal of a species shows its weapons, then another must be prepared to fight or submit. I don't think much of Freud's universal symbols, but I imagine any animal that was the product of evolution would not show its teeth as a gesture of friendship. If I am correct in my inference that the red rod is to choose between oxygen, methane, and ammonia, you are asking for a player who has a fairly wide knowledge of science to accept a view of behavior which is, frankly, nonsense. Perhaps you might be interested in David Snow's *Web of Adaptation*, a book that every psychologist should read.

... And Lebling Answers on page 11



Cartoonist Wanted

Congratulations are in order for Gary Clayton of California, for winning our cartoon contest this issue. "This issue?" you ask. Yes, this issue. The response we got was so good, we have decided to make this contest a regular part of *The New York Times*. If we print your cartoon, you'll win the Infocom game of your choice. For those of you who have just tuned in, we'll be happy to reprint the contest rules.

Cartoons will be printed approximately 4¼ inches wide by 5 inches deep, so please draw your cartoons

proportionally. Entries must be in black ink (no pencil or color illustrations will be considered) on white unlined paper. Do not fold your entries! All submissions become the property of Infocom, Inc. Be sure to send your cartoon to: NZT Cartoons, Infocom, Inc., 125 CambridgePark Drive, Cambridge, MA 02140. And don't forget to include a separate sheet that tells us who you are, what game you wish to win, your computer system, and where you live.



Sasha Blunderbraas: Prima Virtuosa

by S. Eric Merescu

At the age of nine, Sasha Blunderbraas toured the courts of Europe, playing *Adventure* for the royalty. At the age of twelve, he stunned the continent by solving the entire SAGA series in two hours and seven minutes. Two years ago, his performance of *Starcross* at the Albert Hall received a forty-five minute standing ovation. His videotapes have sold forty-million copies. When great interactive fiction players are discussed, Blunderbraas stands apart from the rest, a class unto himself. Where does someone go from the top?

The lights dim, and an expectant hush settles over the standing-room-only crowd at Carnegie Hall. They await his appearance with bated breath, their eager faces illuminated with a ghostly blue from the projection TVs, displaying the bootscreen of Zork I.

Blunderbraas seems so ordinary, sitting in his midtown hotel room in blue-jeans and a T-shirt, sipping a can of soda. It's hard to believe that this unassuming figure is the genius whose name is synonymous with performing interactive fiction.

"People are always surprised at my appearance when they see me for the first time," explains Blunderbraas, almost apologetically. "I think they expect someone taller, more commanding, with unkempt wild hair and a look of near madness in his eyes. I'm actually just pretty ordinary-looking."

The huge hall erupts with applause as Blunderbraas strides onto the stage, and it's easy to see why so many people have a bigger than life-size image of the master, as fifty-foot television screens capture him as he walks over to the waiting computer.

Blunderbraas swills the soda around in his mouth, pondering his answer. "Why Zork I again? Well, to tell you the truth, I've always had a particular fondness for its simplicity of structure. It's an almost perfect piece, and of course it's very accessible to audiences, which explains its tremendous popularity. With its very first three words, West of House, a familiar mood is established, forming a common meeting ground for audience and performer."

As Blunderbraas flips back his tails and settles onto the computer stool, a dead silence falls over the room. There is an electrifying moment while Blunderbraas seems frozen, his hands poised over the keyboard. Then with a crash of the keys, he's off and running, with the swift, steady inputs that are his trademark.

"I love to play Carnegie Hall," explains Blunderbraas, skirting the question of why he is touring again after two years of semi-retirement. "Its age, its ornateness, juxtaposed against the modern simplicity of the computer, creates an image of contradiction that frequently inspires me in my performance." A smile portends the release of a bauble from the stored wisdom of the master. "The great Wilbur Kleister once

called our art 'using illogic to untwist logical contradictions.' I was never sure what he meant by that until the first time I played Carnegie."

The opening moves of Zork I are standard, familiar to almost everyone, but already Blunderbraas has the audience gasping at his innovation, his daring twists and turns. His use of abbreviation during the troll battle leaves an unsuspecting woman in the front row on the verge of tears. The performance is still in its first minute, and already the audience's emotions are putty in the master's hands.

Traffic noise from Fifth Avenue is the only sound as Blunderbraas chews thoughtfully at the hot, bubbling, room service pizza. "I'd be lying if I said the audience reaction doesn't affect me. There's a bond there, and even though my concentration, my top-level thought, is fixed on that story, there's a secondary level of thought that is fed, nourished, and inspired by the level of electricity in the theatre."

As the emerald joins sixteen other treasures in the trophy case, an almost electric tremor ripples through the audience. The audience can sense history in the making; performances such as this one come only once in a lifetime. A man in the audience grabs his stunned wife's arm. "Not since the great Kleister have I seen such a magnificent use of AGAIN!" he murmurs.

"You hear this, you read that, what does it matter?" Blunderbraas asks,

shrugging off the suggestion that his performance at Carnegie Hall was his greatest ever. "Am I better than Kleister? Maybe, maybe not. Was Carnegie last night better than Albert Hall two years ago? Maybe, maybe not. Why should I ask myself questions I cannot answer?"

There are no surprises left. Blunderbraas skillfully sweeps the audience forward with his final, brilliant inputs. As the closing words of the story appear on the screen, and the barrow door crashes shut, the enthralled multitude is drawn to its feet as though by a single cord. As Blunderbraas turns for his bows, the room thunders with applause that threatens to bring down the walls. It rolls on and on, resounding around the room, propelling the evening's performance down the corridor of time, toward a pedestal of greatness it has already earned.

His agent appears at the door, reminding Blunderbraas of the impending flight. The master agrees to a final question. What's next for the man who is, if not unequalled in the annals of his art, at least unsurpassed? More performances? More tours, tapes, training? An autobiography? "Just now, I mostly want to go home, lie around on the beach, putter around my garden. When I feel the need to perform again, I will perform again." He reaches for his jacket and knapsack. "By the way," he asks. "Do you know when the next *Hitchhiker's* game will be out?"



You Can't Please All the People All the Time

Two comments we received on *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*: "Most puzzles very easy, however game is enjoyable" — Marc, Edmonds, Washington. "You obviously designed this game so that the user is forced to purchase the hint booklet" — Frank, Pacoima, California.

It's not easy making a game challenging but not too frustrating for most players. For one thing, we all have different backgrounds, educations, hobbies, and skills.

Our difficulty ratings are an indication of how hard or easy it should be for most people to get involved in the game. The older games were rated based on hundreds or thousands of comments received from players over the years. The new games are evaluated by our inside and outside testers, a significantly smaller but, we hope, representative group. Many of the problems are tweaked based on the testers' input.

If you find yourself up against a roadblock in one of the games, do something else for awhile; then you can attack the problem again with a fresh perspective. (This is why it often helps to play with a friend — a different point of view can be a great asset.) Whatever you do, don't despair! You'll figure it out. Remember: the greatest satisfaction results from solving the hardest problems. But you already know that... **Z**

ERRATUM

Due to a typesetting error, captions from the photo essay in the next issue ("Searching for the Relics of the Emu") were erroneously placed with the photo essay in this issue ("Life at Infocom"). We apologize for this mistake, which was discovered too late to correct in time for publications. We hope it does not interfere with your enjoyment of the "Life at Infocom" photo essay. The photos from "Searching for the Relics of the Emu" will run in the next issue. **Z**

YAK FACTS

Did you know that...

- ▶ yaks generally mate during the winter months?
- ▶ yaks live on Tibetan plateaus nearly 20,000 feet above sea level?
- ▶ yaks require large quantities of water, and have been known to eat ice during the cold season?
- ▶ the hide of the yak is used to make leather, that the hair of the yak is used to make rope, and that yak tails are used as fly whisks in India?
- ▶ no effective vaccine has ever been found for pleuropneumonia, a contagious disease caused by the organism *mycoplasma mycoides* which strikes yaks and other herding animals?
- ▶ the hybrid between a yak and a cattle is called a dzo and is preferable to the yak for plowing?
- ▶ dried yak dung is the only obtainable fuel on the treeless plateaus of Tibet?
- ▶ the gestation period of the yak is

SPECIAL OFFER

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Buy 2 expert-level games (*Starcross*, *Suspended* or *Deadline*), get either:

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For _____ (computer system)

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longer than any other warm-blooded animal?

▶ a herd of yaks can migrate over seven thousand miles in a single

day?

▶ wild yaks, although native to Tibet, are frequently found grazing as far away as Lima, Peru? **Z**

... and Lebling Answers

continued from page 9

Dear John,

I was very interested to read your comments about *Starcross*. I thought I'd respond just to clear a few misunderstandings about various parts of the game.

Bumps. If you read the description carefully, you will find an analogy with something far more obvious than the supposition that the artifact builders had four fingers. The fourth bump is obviously the Earth, the current destination of the artifact and your home. In short, it's more of a test than an example of numerical obsession. (It's the fourth bump because the large one representing the sun also counts.)

Gurthark. The whole point of the Gurthark "problem" is to see exactly how species-centric the player is. Gurthark is obviously not a spider, for the reasons you cited, but he's hairy and multi-armed and -legged, and he lives in a room crisscrossed by wires (not webs, notice). He seems rather spidery, and the solution to the problem is to deal with him without worrying about his appearance.

Weasels. Actually, the Yanomamo

are regarded by ethnologists as possibly the most hostile, xenophobic tribe ever discovered, so I wouldn't use them as an example. Besides, they aren't isolated. One reason they are so warlike is that they have been driven by pressure from other tribes into their present locale. I see the Weasels as living in a more benign environment. Their only "natural" enemy would be the Rat-Ants. You are probably right about the single group being non-viable in the long term. On the other hand, the *Bounty* mutineers have survived without significant outside contact or gene-pool contribution for 200 years.

Physics. You are absolutely right about floating from the center of a rotating cylinder in a vacuum. However, the interior of the artifact is not a vacuum. You would start slowly, then accelerate, not from the force of gravity but from the "wind" produced by the interaction of your inertia (following a straight path out from the center) and the inertia of the air (rotating about the axis of rotation of the artifact). You would hit hard but the effect of the wind would have speeded you up somewhat. I assumed .5g, by the way.

Ray guns. Ray guns can have

recoil. For example, the current best-known "ray gun" is the design for the so-called *Star Wars* missile defense, which starts by producing a large explosion whose energy is then lased. It is possible to imagine ray gun technologies that work by similar methods.

Planters. There are planters (and plants) in various halls, part of the oxygen recycling system. The program, within limits, recognizes the words it uses in descriptions.

Mouse. I agree the message should be better. In the current version it says "You can't climb onto the maintenance mouse." It's accurate, if inelegant. I will probably change it to say "The mouse whirrs and buzzes unhappily. It much prefers to collect small pieces of debris."

Teeth. I know an animal that shows its teeth as a gesture of friendship: man. What do you think a smile is? Gurthark is probably trying his best to smile.

I'm sorry you didn't enjoy *Starcross*. Perhaps if you take time to finish it you will like it better. I don't think it has as many howlers as you do.

Sincerely,

Dave Lebling **Z**

