

# Wander Into Wonderland!

ADVENTURE GAMES TAKE YOU ON A VACATION TO A PLACE AS VIVID AS YOUR IMAGINATION

ou won't need a passport to vacation in faraway lands this summer—the boulevards of Paris and the pyramids of Egypt are only as far away as the nearest adventure game. Just don't expect a tour guide to show you around, for *your* decisions determine what happens on this kind of trip. If you type GO NORTH in an alltext adventure like *Zork*, the program will display a paragraph of prose describing the new location you've just reached: ... CARVED OUT OF ILLUSTRATION BY BARTON STABLER

## **BY SHAY ADDAMS**

THE LIMESTONE, THE ROOM GLOWS WITH DIM LIGHT PROVIDED BY PHOSPHORESCENT MOSS, AND WEIRD SHADOWS MOVE ALL AROUND YOU. A NARROW PATH WINDS AMONG THE STALAGMITES. But type in GO SOUTH and you may wind up at the local Club Med. Graphic adventures show a game's different locations, people, and objects with highresolution pictures, and briefly sum up the situation in a few lines of text below.

In addition to sightseeing, you have a spe-

## ADVENTURE-GAME GLOSSARY

**Command:** The instructions you type in to tell the program what you want to do next. In some adventures, commands are limited to a simple noun-verb combination, though the best games accept complete sentences.

**Disk access:** A program often must access the disk to obtain the next illustration or text, or to decide how to respond to a command.

**First-person animation:** With this technique, the entire picture changes to give the impression that you are moving closer to it. It's almost a 3-D effect.

**Hard copy:** Some adventures offer the option of simultaneously sending text to the printer, so you can study it for clues later on.

**Parser:** Invisible to the player, this part of an adventure "reads" your command by comparing it with

the words in the program's vocabulary. Well-programmed parsers enable you to concentrate on the game rather than on trying to communicate with the program.

Restore game: The act of loading a saved game to continue playing it.

**Save game:** An option that allows you to save a game in progress and return to finish it later. The necessary information automatically is stored on disk.

**Spot animation:** A technique in which a small portion of a graphic adventure's illustration changes quickly to simulate motion.

**Vocabulary:** The words that a particular adventure program will understand. Games with large vocabularies have various parts of speech, such as adjectives and adverbs, that expand the variety of possible actions.

cific goal to accomplish on your travels. It may involve solving a sinister crime or retrieving fabulous treasures from a forbidding cavern but don't expect to stroll around casually scooping up gold and jewels. Access to many locations and hiding places is barred unless you possess special objects or passwords. The path may be blocked by a turbulent river, but after gathering logs and a vine from the jungle you could type TIE LOGS WITH VINE or MAKE BOAT and get across. This kind of logical problemsolving—in which you must rely on your brain rather than your reflexes and eye/hand coordination—is the essence of the adventuring experience.

## HOW TO CHOOSE A GAME

To make certain you don't make reservations for the wrong destination, I've rounded up the adventures that most effectively stimulate the imagination and transport you to another world. In an all-text game, much hinges on the clarity and eloquence of the prose. In graphic games, the quality of the art and color schemes is important. Other factors I considered were whether a game's problems were ingeniously planned and whether clues and hints were distributed fairly. The intelligence of the program's parser—a part of the program that enables you to type in commands—and the extent of its vocabulary also were weighed.

Each game's suggested skill level is noted in the accompanying chart. If this is the first time you've gone adventuring, try an introductory-level game—too many people get frustrated and give up because they begin with a game that's designed for experts. After single-handedly finishing an introductory game, you'll be ready to try any of the novice-level adventures. The intermediate-level programs are best approached by people who have solved two or three games from the lower skill levels. Advanced games require more patience and time (up to three months) to solve, and those described as "Masters only" contain the thorniest problems of all.

Though adventure games are designed to be played by one person, two or more heads can come in handy. And keep in mind that except for the varying skill levels and subject matter, most adventure games have similar play systems. Those listed in this article are all good, so choose the subject matter that excites your imagination, and wander into wonderland.

## FANTASYLANDS

The most popular subjects for adventure games are fantasylands, science fiction, mysteries, and what I like to call (for lack of a longer name) the "Indiana Jones is alive and well in an adventure game" category.

Fantasylands are first on the itinerary, and Zork is the all-time classic. Inspired by William Crowther and Don Woods' 1977 Original Adventure (Colossal Caves), Zork was written on a mainframe computer by students at M.I.T. An all-text game, Zork introduced the full-sentence parser, which allows players to type in more than two words at a time. When the students (Marc Blank and Mike Berlyn) founded Infocom and converted Zork to run on microcomputers, they sliced the game into three programs.

Zork I sends you into the ruins of the Great Underground Empire to retrieve a platinum bar, Neptune's trident, and 17 other treasures. The main obstacles are a murderous thief and a bewildering maze. With a fairy tale atmosphere, Zork II carries you deeper into a world ruled by magic as well as logic, where you encounter a dragon, a unicorn, and a princess. The Wizard of Frobozz will interfere with your quest for 10 more treasures, but his magical antics are often as funny as they are frustrating. The final game, Zork III, has a melancholy feel and an enigmatic goal that only becomes apparent as you penetrate the deepest regions of the underworld and come face to face with the Dungeon Master.

Some fantasyland adventures unfold in a "days of yore" setting. Sherwood Forest invites you to drop in on merry old England and fill Robin Hood's shoes as he seeks to win the heart of Maid Marian. Drawn in a cartoon style, the bright-color graphics are embellished with occasional spot animation, such as the shifty tax collector's eyes blinking open and shut. King's Quest, set in the mythical kingdom of Daventry, shows off the sharpest hi-res art ever seen in any kind of computer game. It also employs arcade-style animation to depict a young knave named Sir Grahame, whom you steer about via joystick or keyboard control on his quest to find a magic mirror, a magic shield, and a chest full of gold coins. The ugly trolls, a broom-riding witch, and some other nasty characters also are animated.

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**38 FAMILY COMPUTING** 

Coveted Mirror is another "days of yore" fantasy. You have to locate a missing piece of a magic mirror before the evil King Voar gets it, or the land falls under his reign forever. Doors and windows actually swing open when you type OPEN DOOR, and other instances of spot animation enhance this good-looking game.

Based on a recent fantasy novel, Dragonworld involves an exciting journey to the imaginary territory of Simbala to save "the last dragon" from unknown captors. The screen shows 14 text lines, while most graphic adventures use only four. And instead of full-screen graphics, three small pictures across the top of the screen illustrate the story. (This is true of most of Spinnaker's Telarium adventures, which also include well-orchestrated music and sound effects.) Dragonworld has three joystick-controlled action games built in.

## SCIENCE FICTION

Science-fiction adventures replace kings and dragons with robots and spaceships. In Planetfall, you crash-land on an uncharted planet and save an alien civilization from certain death. (What a holiday!) Floyd the robot, one of adventuredom's most personable characters, keeps you laughing throughout.

Another hilarious space epic, The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, was adapted from Doug Adams' novel (see interview). In it, you journey across the universe to the legendary planet of Magrathea.

If you'd rather be juggling robots, visit the planet Contra in Suspended. The game presents an unusual challenge: A gang of robots serves as your eyes, ears, and hands while you tell them how to repair a damaged underground control center.

Back on planet Earth, Fahrenheit 451 transforms Ray Bradbury's novel into an intriguing graphic adventure. The backdrop is New York City in the far future, where the fire department burns books instead of extinguishing blazes. Your goal is to foil its plans, which necessitates joining forces with the literary underground. Each rebel demands to hear a famous quote from classic novels such as Moby Dick, and many of the problems involve figuring out passwords. Bradbury worked with the programmers and wrote some of the game's text, which is unusually evocative and poetic.

## WHODUNNIT?

More down to earth, mystery games put you in charge of investigating a crime. The classic example is Deadline, an all-text "whodunnit," written in the style of a Raymond Chandler novel. With an assistant named Duffy, you must unravel the murder of a wealthy industrialist by questioning suspects and digging up clues in Connecticut. If you'd rather visit Europe, Earthly Delights offers a firstclass ticket. In Paris and the Swiss Alps, you'll track down a stolen painting and take on an international crime ring.

GAME <sup>1</sup>	Style	Computer	Skill Level	Manufacture	r Price <sup>2</sup>
FANTASYLAN Coveted Mirror	G	AP	Novice	Penguin	\$34.95
Dragonworld	G	AP, C 64, IBM	Novice	Telarium	\$32.95-\$39.9
Diagonwona	u	PC/PCjr (128K)	Novice	Telanum	<i>432.93-439.</i>
Enchanter	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Intermediate	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
King's Quest	G	AP, IBM PC	Advanced	Sierra;	\$49.95
Lucifer's Realm	G	(128K); PCjr AP, AT, C 64	Intermediate	IBM Zoom	\$49.95 \$39.95
Microsoft	T	IBM PC/PC/r	Advanced	IBM	\$34.95
Adventure		ibin ron of	manancea	15.11	¢0 1100
Sherwood F'est	G	AP	Intermediate	Zoom	\$34.95
Sorcerer	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Advanced	Infocom	\$39.95-\$44.9
Transylvania	G	AP, AT, C 64, IBM PC/PCjr, MAC	Novice	Penguin	\$34.95-\$39.9
Zork I	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Intermediate	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
Zork II	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Masters only	Infocom	\$34.95-\$44.9
Zork III	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Advanced	Infocom	\$39.95-\$44.9
SCIENCE FICTI	ON				
Cyborg	Т	AP, AT, C 64; MAC	Advanced	Sentient; Broderbund	\$34.95; \$39.95
Fahrenheit 451	G	AP. IBM PC/PCjr	Intermediate	Telarium	\$32.95-\$39.9
Forbidden Guest	T	AP, C 64, MAC, IBM PC/PCjr	Intermediate	Pryority	\$39.95-\$44.9
Hitchhiker's Guide	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Advanced	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
Mission Asteroid	G	AP, AT, C 64	Introductory	Sierra	\$19.95-\$29.9
Planetfall	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Advanced	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
Starcross	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Intermediate	Infocom	\$49.95
Suspended	T	see below <sup>3</sup>	Intermediate	Infocom	\$44.95-\$49.9
The Tracer Sanction	G	C 64, IBM PC/ PCjr	Introductory	Activision	\$29.95-\$39.9
WHODUNNIT	in the				
The Alpine Encounter	G	AP	Novice	Random House	\$29.95-\$39.9
Deadline	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Masters only	Infocom	\$44.95-\$49.9
Earthly Delights	Т	AP, C 64, IBM PC	Novice	Datamost	\$19.95
Masquerade	G	AP, C 64	Masters only	Zoom	\$34.95
Mindshadow	G	C 64, IBM PC/ PCjr	Introductory	Activision	\$29.95-\$39.9
Ripper	T	C 64	Novice	Avalon Hill	\$25
Suspect	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Advanced	Infocom	\$39.95-\$44.9
Witness	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Introductory	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
INDIANA JON					
Amazon	G	AP, C 64 IBM PC/PCjr (64K)	Player- adjustable	Telarium	\$32.95-\$39.9
Infidel	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Intermediate	Infocom	\$39.95-\$44.9
Mask of the Sun	G	AP, AT, C 64	Advanced	Broderbund	\$39.95
Serpent's Star	G	AP, AT, C 64	Advanced	Broderbund	\$39.95
INTERACTIVE			Contraction of the second s		
Cutthroats Mindwheel	T T	AP, AT, C 64, IBM PC/PC <i>jr</i>	Novice Intermediate	Infocom Synapse	\$34.95-\$39.9 \$39.95-\$44.9
KID STUFF		(64K), MAČ	and and a		
Below the Root	G	AP, C 64	Introductory	Spinnaker	\$26.95
Cave Girl Claire	G	AP	Introductory	Rhiannon	\$39.95
Gwendolyn: Pursuit of a Princess	G	AT, C 64	Introductory	Artworx	\$19.95
Mickey's Space Adventure		AP, C 64	Introductory	Sierra	\$39.95
Seastalker	Т	see below <sup>3</sup>	Introductory	Infocom	\$34.95-\$39.9
Swiss Family Robinson	G	AP, C 64	Introductorỳ	Spinnaker	\$26.95
Fales of Discovery	G	AP, C 64, IBM PC/PCjr	Introductory	Scholastic	\$24.95-\$29.9
Vinnie The Pooh	G	AP, C 64, IBM	Introductory	Sierra	\$39.95

T = all text: G = graphics: AP = Apple II series: C 64 = Commodore 64: AT = Atari: MAC = Macintosh FOOTNOTES

All games are on disk and require a minimum of 48K except infocom's (32K). <sup>2</sup>Price varies depending on computer version.

<sup>3</sup>Most Infocom adventures are available for: Apple II series and Macintosh, Atari, Commodore 64 & Plus/4, IBM PC/PC/r, Tandy 1000 & 2000, TI-99/4A, and TRS-80 CoCo & Model III. In many cases, Commodore markets the C 64 version.

<sup>4</sup>Other games also qualify for this heading. See article text.

# **Q.** HOW DO YOU MAKE FICTION "INTERACTIVE"? **A.** I DUNNO. ASK *HITCHHIKER'S* DOUG ADAMS.



Born in Cambridge, England, in 1952, Douglas Adams attended Cambridge University, where he collaborated with many of the comedy writers who later created "Monty Python's

Flying Circus" and "Not the Nine O'Clock News" for British television. After graduating in 1974, Adams penned several episodes of the "Dr. Who" TV series before finding time to write a radio show called "The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy." The show's cult following turned into an international audience when Adams' book version was published in America in the early '80s. He recently completed So Long, And Thanks for All the Fish, which picks up where the Hitchhiker's triology left off. Adams had just finished the screenplay for the book when he discussed his adventure game adaptation of Hitchhiker's Guide and its potential effect on the digital watch industry and civilization as we know it.

**Q:** What was the first adventure game you played?

**A:** Original Adventure [the first adventure game, by Crowther and Woods], on The Source about a year-and-a-half ago while living in Los Angeles. I guess my first commercial game was Suspended. That was the only one I actually played to the bitter end and completely finished. I played Deadline and Zork I and Starcross about the same time, but never finished them.

Q: What about graphic games?

A: I'm not so interested in graphic games. I think text is better for the imagination. There's a role for graphics in the games if they do things that are kind of incidental to the story, but I wouldn't like to see not-very-well-realized sort of cartoon figures of the characters in the story. That would spoil it for me. I think, "Well I can imagine better than that. Why not just give me the text?"

**Q:** Are adventure games popular in England?

A: Yes. they are. I haven't played any of them. The thing is, in England there are more home computers per capita than anywhere else in the world. But they're mostly very small machines, Sinclairs, and an awful lot of them don't have disk drives and don't have a lot of memory. So games that require a lot of disk space and memory have not made commercial inroads in England. The Infocom games are pretty much a cult thing there. When I was doing Hitchhiker, I phoned around all the English bulletin boards to see what the level of awareness of Infocom was. It was very strong, but amongst a fanatical minority.

**Q:** You mention telecomputing. What's it like in England?

A: Not nearly as developed as in the U.S. for one simple reason: getting modems is a lot more difficult and expensive. If a modem runs at 1200 baud it won't run at 300 baud. They're two completely different standards. And the reason for this is that British Telecom has had (although they'll shortly lose it) a monopoly on anything to do with the phone system. And they're terribly, terribly slow and old-fashioned and don't like the idea of people having modems.

When I was working on the game [from England], with Steve [Infocom's Meretzky] in Boston, we did a lot of it by electronic mail.

**Q:** How does writing an adventure differ from writing a novel?

A: I suppose it's more a difference of degree than a fundamental difference. When you're writing a book you're constantly aware of the reactions you're trying to provoke in the reader: how you intend to play with or manipulate those reactions, and the surprises you're going to spring; whether you want to lull them into a sense of false security in which they think they know what's going on. You just have a much greater ability to do that when you're writing an adventure game, because you're actually soliciting the reaction from the player, and the program will then know how to deal with that response. So you're fooling around with the reader/player a great deal more. Which is a

For mystery with a twist, investigate *Mindshadow*. While suffering from amnesia, you crisscross 19th-century Europe searching for clues to your identity. *Mindshadow*'s graphics represent genuine computer art, and the program includes a separate "adventure tutorial" as well as on-line help for beginners.

Robots of Dawn qualifies for two categories, since this computer version of Isaac Asimov's novel rockets you across the universe (science fiction) to determine who killed a robot (whodunnit). The program loads entirely into the computer's RAM, so no disk access is renatural extension of what you're doing when you're writing.

**Q:** What do you project for the future of adventure games as interactive fiction?

A: I feel that it's a completely new medium that we've only got one toe in-and there's a whole ocean out there. We're still very much constrained, I feel, by the traditional forms of novel writing. One doesn't necessarily need to be. I don't think breakthroughs come through suddenly, but that each time one sits down to work out a problem or the structure of an adventure game, I think you turn around the next corner and see another possibility and you turn another corner and you see another possibility. And every now and then it's as if you go past a little window or a little crack in the wall and you see a whole vast vista of possibilities. I think adventure games could become a very, very extraordinary and different, imaginative form of storytelling.

Q: Will it someday replace books?

A: People are always asking that silly question. Of course not. People said that about books when radio came out, and the same thing about radio when TV came out. But I think we keep on adding new media for storytelling. And none of them is killed by new forms. There's something particularly distinctive about the experience of reading a book; it's like nothing else. And nothing else will replace it. Something else may add to it, but nothing's going to replace it. I suppose TV dealt quite a nasty body blow to radio, which is a shame because I think radio is a much better medium than television. In the words of a small boy who was asked the difference between the two, "In radio the scenery is better." That's the strength of all text games-the scenery is better than that of graphic games.

I think there's an awful long way for adventure games, interactive fiction, whatever you want to call it, to go. And I hope that more people will come into that field from outside the computer field. Up until now, it's been rather like, well, imagine if everything ever written on a typewriter had been written by the guys who invented the typewriter. —S.A.

quired—Commodore 64 adventurists will see the appropriate response to their commands almost immediately.

## INDIANA JONES

There's no mystery about the inspiration of adventures that defy you to retrieve the treasures of ancient civilizations—Indiana Jones would feel right at home in any of them. *Infidel* is an invitation to explore a lost pyramid in Egypt, while *The Serpent's Star* concerns an expedition to find a fabled gem in Tibet. The latter is interspersed with cinematic first-person animation (*see glossary*), so the snowcapped peaks seem to grow larger and closer with each step as you trek through the Himalayan mountains.

If Tibet is too far from home, how about South America? *Amazon*, written by novelist/ film producer Michael Crichton, unfurls Telarium's finest full-screen graphics as you look for the lost city of Chak and its emerald mines. A wise-cracking parrot named Paco rides your shoulder and offers clues. So does a minicomputer that enables you to telecommunicate with your boss in the States. A pair of animated action games adds to the excitement.

## **INTERACTIVE FICTION**

Amazon moves along in a more linear fashion than games such as Zork, which qualifies it for the trendy heading, "interactive fiction." This relatively new style of adventure (which includes Deadline, Fahrenheit 451, Suspect, Earthly Delights, and Hitchhiker's Guide) incorporates some of the elements of traditional storytelling, such as an emphasis on other characters (besides yourself!) and a more substantial plot. Straight adventure games like Zork, on the other hand, are more object-oriented—you find and use "things" on your way to find the treasure.

While the term "interactive fiction" has real meaning, it's also used somewhat loosely as a marketing term. Infocom, for instance, calls all its adventures "interactive fiction" to distinguish them from fantasy/role-playing games (such as *Wizardry*) and other entertainment software.

One good example of interactive fiction is *Cutthroats*, an all-text game in which you solve people-oriented problems as well as puzzles, solutions to which involve objects like ropes and keys. While preparing to dive for treasure off two ships in the bay off Hardscrabble Island, you'll eventually discover that success pivots around talking with the island's citizens and your crew members. This gets you involved with the characters and plot in much the same way you do when reading a conventional story.

A more recent work of interactive fiction, Mindwheel is the first in a series dubbed "electronic novels." Packaged with a book containing the first few chapters of a story that you complete by playing the game, Mindwheel assigns you the task of saving Earth from selfdestruction. This can be accomplished only by traveling telepathically back to the beginning of civilization to find the Wheel of Wisdom. The trip takes you through the minds of four dead people-a rock star, a poet, a dictator, and a scientist-on your way to find the Cave Master who holds the Wheel. A highly advanced parser enables you to converse with the demons, winged people, and other weird characters more articulately than in any other adventure game to date. With truly entrancing prose and a warped sense of humor, the all-text story often verges on interactive poetry.







## **KID STUFF**

The newest kind of adventure games are those designed for young children. They are graphic (except for Infocom's *Seastalker*), and have parsers that require less typing. Spinnaker's Windham Classics, for example, are graphic adventures based on books like *The Swiss Family Robinson*. A "help key" comes to the rescue by showing verbs and nouns that might apply to the current problem. The parser, which completes a word after you type in the first few letters, reduces the need for typing skills, making the games suitable for young children (or bad typists). Good sound effects enhance game play.

Similarly, an adventure on Scholastic's *Microzine* called "The Dark Tower" allows you to enter single-letter commands—such as G for GET, w for WALK, etc. Other adventures for youngsters, such as Walt Disney's *Winnie the Pooh in The Hundred Acre Wood*, Sierra's *Mickey's Space Adventure*, and Scholastic's *Tales of Discovery*, require almost no typing, relying instead on a multiple-choice menu'. In *Cave Girl Claire*, too, in which an animated figure struggles to survive the hazards of life in The Stone Age, actions are executed with a single keystroke.

Stone Age or Space Age, young or old, there's an adventure-game destination that's right for you. All you need to pack is your imagination. And the fun doesn't have to end come autumn—you can take an adventure vacation *any* time of year.

### SOFTWARE MANUFACTURERS

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