

IFOGRAPHY

February 2015

Volume 1 Issue 2

In this issue

Lend a hand to fellow IFers

20 questions with Ryan Veeder

Create maps with the new Trizbort



Plus: What IF authors can learn from the original Prince of Persia

Issue 2 new and improved

BY MATT GOH

Welcome back to the second issue of IFography! From the comments on the forum page, it is great to see that some people had taken up an interest in the magazine!

We have received tons of suggestions and useful comments on how to improve the content of the magazine. If you look at the contents list, you can catch plenty of new articles and reviews to read. The new column, Down the Rabbit Hole, gives you an insight on subjects that are not really IF but are still of interest to readers.

And best of all, we have a new designer, Robert Patten, to professionally edit and design the PDF version of the magazine to make it look really eye-popping!

Although school is beginning to catch up on my schedule (yes, I'm 16 years old!), I still have plenty of time to work on the 'zine. It's still pretty sad that I have to learn about biology and chemistry rather than focusing

on the latest IF releases and news. Nevertheless, it is still fun to be at some other place other than my computer and talk with some of my classmates. Oh course, I will have to slow down whenever a test comes by during the mid-year. Well, school won't stop me from playing and reviewing the upcoming ParserComp games!

Another thing that we are looking towards for are submissions from other people. If you have something, we will take it with open arms. You will get the credit for your work.

Email us at ifography@gmail.com.



<< One of the surprises awaiting you in this month's issue.

IFOGRAPHY

This magazine brought to you by the fine folks at The Interactive Fiction Faction, including:

Editors: Matt Goh, Marshal Tenner Winter

Designer: Robert Patten

Other contributors: Hanon Ondricek, Jason Lautzenheiser, Andrew Schultz

On the cover: Many IF creators are turning to Patreon.

Note: Links to other pages in the magazine might not work on Apple-created PDF interpreters such as Preview and iBooks.

IFOGRAPHY

A magazine for interactive fiction enthusiasts

INGREDIENTS

NEWS

Two competitions. 50 top interactive fiction games. You vote.

TWENTY QUESTIONS

Ryan Veeder, author of Taco Fiction and Captain Verdetterre's Plunder, answers questions about his creativity, podcast, and plush toys.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MONTH

Check out the best releases on IFDB this month.

THE WORLD OF IF

COVER STORY: How you can help fellow IF enthusiasts.

TOOLS

Find out what's so awesome about the new Trizbort from someone who has been hard at work on it!

REVIEWS

Castle of Doom, Body Bargain, Balaclava, and There's a Snake in the Bathtub.

DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

What can an action-adventure game made a quarter-century ago teach IF authors today?

BY MATT GOH & ROBERT PATTEN

Competitions and festivals

Parser Comp 2015

Little clicking is required in this competition. As the name indicates, this competition is for games with an old-school interface. (And there's nothing wrong with that.)

ParserComp is put on by Carolyn VanEseltine.

In her words, "ParserComp 2015 is a ranked, long-form game jam for parser games (also sometimes called text adventures)."

Fourteen games were submitted.

The theme is "sunrise," but you don't have to get up early in the morning to play these, so what are you waiting for?

[Voting is happening until March 14.](#)

Concours de Fictions Interactives Francophones 2015 (aka Frenchcomp 2015)

It is interesting to see IF competitions organized in languages other than English, like in French! 2015 marks the ninth year of the Frenchcomp, or the Concours de Fictions Interactives Francophones.

[Voting will end March 15.](#) Judges have until then to complete three games, which is

doable, depending on when you are reading this.

Take your time and enjoy!

The 2015 Spring Thing Festival

The deadlines for the Spring Thing (aka Fall Fooferal) Festival are coming up:

March 1: Authors must submit intents to enter.

April 1: Authors must submit their games.

April 4 to May 5: The festival!

This event has been redesigned to "put the focus more on bringing authors together to celebrate new text games in many different formats" and is more of an exhibition than a competition.

Get more information at springthing.net.

My Compy Valentine

This "mini-festival," sponsored by the resurrected IF journal SPAG, was an outlet in which authors could express their thanks to the developers who created the tools to let them succeed.

There were three entries created in three different systems: Inform, Twine, and good old text.

[Check them out here.](#)

Interactive Fiction Top 50 of All Time (2015 Edition)

It has been more than four years since the last poll for the top 50 IF games of all time was held by Victor Gijssbers.

Now, it's time for the list to be re-updated and everyone has a chance to participate!

The results of the previous top 50 (if you are curious to find out) [are here](#).

It is recommended to vote for some different games rather than the ones already in the list, so that we can avoid getting the same list of games.

There are a number of great games which is recently released in the past few years, and you

know which ones they are!

The voting deadline is March 15, so there's plenty of time for you to replay your favorite games and vote.

For more information, visit the poll's forum page at ["Discussions, Hints and Reviews" at Intfiction](#). If you want to contact the organizer of this event, talk to him in the forums or email him at victor@lilith.cc. We hope to see a good list and this event to become a success!



Plush toys! A podcast! Ukuleles! Meet IF author Ryan Veeder

BY MARSHAL TENNER WINTER

Ryan Veeder is best known for Taco Fiction, which won first place in the 2011 IFComp and received XYZZY nominations for Best Writing, Best Implementation, and Best NPC. His unique and conspiratorial author's voice is apparent in other works such as Nautilusia, The Statue Got Me High, and the slickly-designed Captain Verdeterre's Plunder. His writing avoids sprawl, reminding one of a disciplined miniature shipbuilder conveying huge ideas in a minimum of space. Low-key exploratory works such as Wrenlaw and The Ascent of the Gothic Tower are studies in atmosphere and setting.

I guess I basically write a spec script for the game.

Around the same time, I draw up a map. Among other things, the map does a lot to determine the pacing of the game, so it and the plot outline have to evolve together until they work for each other.

When I have the map ironed out, I turn to the next page in my notebook and give a half-sheet to each room in the game. In this space I write down the details that belong in each room: stuff required by the plot outline, stuff that will make the setting more realistic, stuff that I think

1. Jumping right in: What's your favorite work that you've done?

Nautilusia. I had some very specific goals for that game, and it accomplished those goals more or less completely. It means exactly what it says, if that makes any sense. It's definitely not the best game I've made, but (to me) (in a very specific artistic sense) it is perfect.

2. What's your favorite work of IF overall?

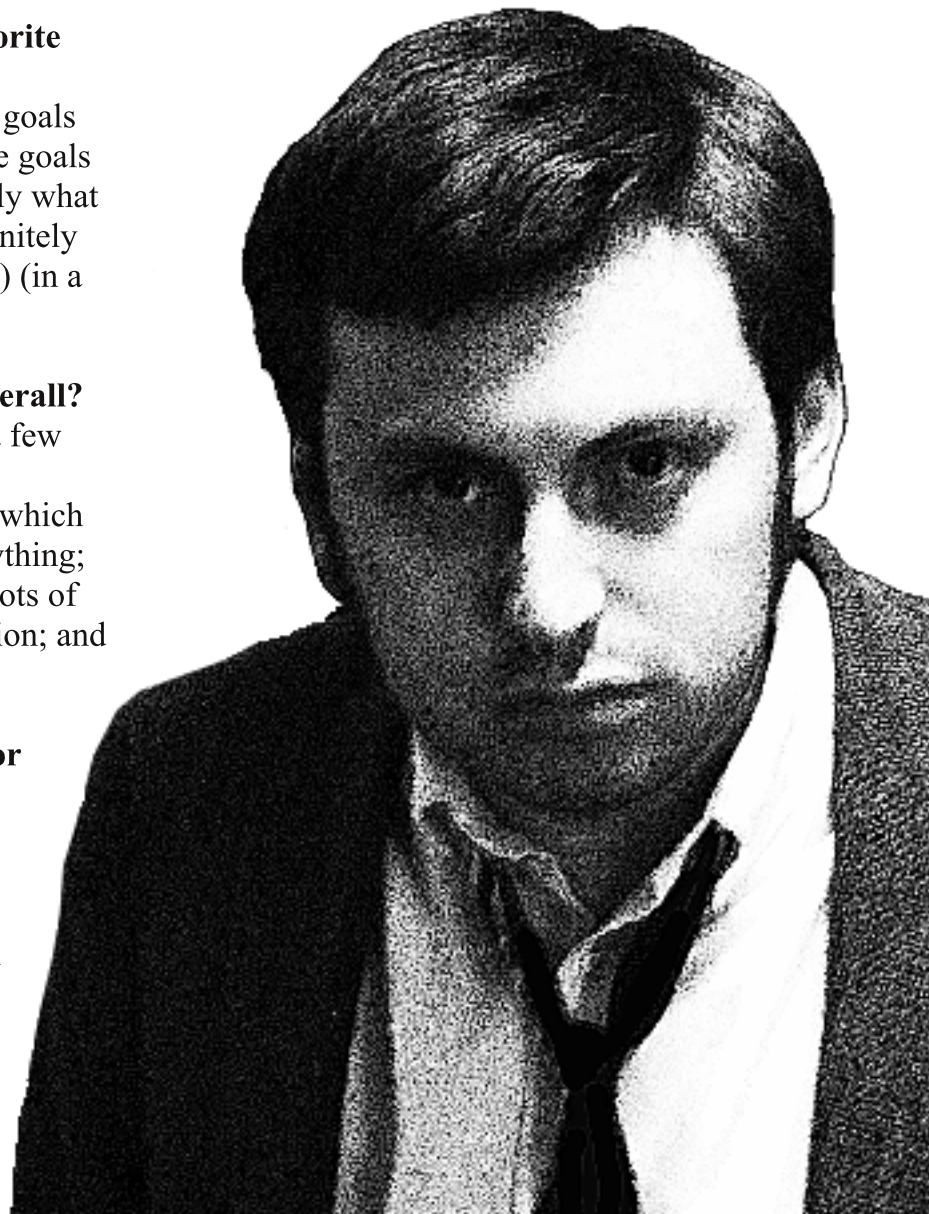
So impossible to say! But here are a few that I really love and which shaped my understanding of the medium: *Curses!*, which tries to do (and successfully does) everything; *Afflicted*, which hits numerous sweet spots of scale, tone, and the game/narrative tension; and *I-0*, which is really fun.

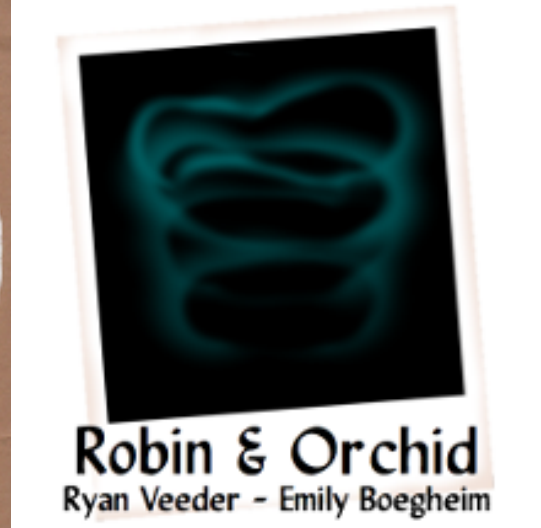
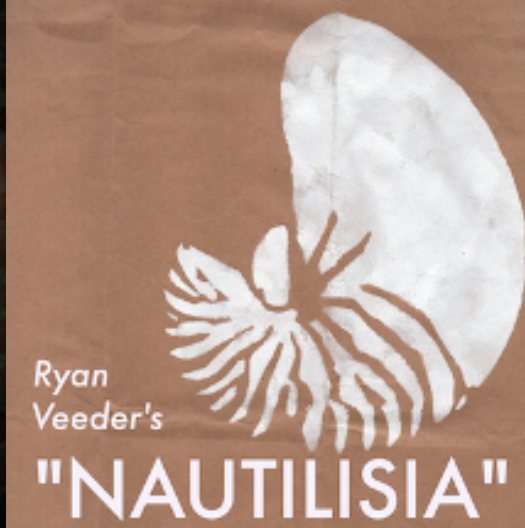
3. Tell us a little about your process for minimally implementing only what's important in a game.

I am about to tell you more than a little.

When I start to do concrete work on a game, one of the first things I write down is the critical path. Not a detailed walkthrough, but the major plot beats.

Ryan Veeder >>





Cover art from some of Veeder's interactive fiction, in no particular order. The unlabeled art is from Captain Verdeterre's Plunder, middle bottom, and The Ascent of the Gothic Tower.

will be fun. Then I type all this into Inform 7, in the form of section headings for each room and comments for each room's contents. Then I implement it.

(Often while I'm doing the real work of describing and coding I will think of another thing that would be fun and implement it on the fly. So I'm not sure I agree with the premise of the question. I'm pretty sure all of my games have things implemented in them that aren't important?)

The short version of this explanation is "I write an outline first."

4. Regarding your podcast, Clash of the Type-Ins, how do you handle the challenge of playing text adventures over Skype while keeping it interesting?

The challenge of playing text adventures over Skype is interesting in itself! The format of the podcast is such that we essentially introduce a second text parser, a human text parser, who by turns eases and increases the players' difficulties, and upon whom we inflict the indignity of presenting his or her work

"live" and "in person." And it's usually a game the author hasn't looked at in a while, which is always painful.

So I don't think we make any special effort. We just play games and gab with each other, which is an extremely interesting thing to listen to, for some people. Those people are our target audience.

5. You made a Seltani world, Bluedorn. Was there any particular reason that it's a museum? What was your inspiration for Bluedorn?

In my hometown there's a science museum called the Imaginarium. I spent a lot of time there as a kid, because its exhibits are mostly aimed at kids, but I still take friends there once in a great while. It's not quite the same place that I remember. It's older, and I'm older. My early memories of the Imaginarium are from the perspective of a herd of noisy first-graders, but when I've been there recently, I and my guests have been the only people around, and it's extremely quiet. I end up feeling very aware that whomever I'm with doesn't see the exhibits

the same way I do.

The concept of [Bluedorn](#) is more or less a joke.

In Seltani, in the *Ages of Myst*, you can visit any world you can imagine. In one of the games (or ancillary materials?), Atrus writes about carefully describing a world where dozens of heavenly bodies will careen into each other and explode in a fantastic cosmic fireworks show, and once the description is complete he's able to just go there and watch it all happen. This kind of fantasy is especially potent in the textual environment of Seltani, where description and creation really are identical. But I decided to describe a museum, in which the wonders of the universe(s) were all reduced to a more than manageable size. It is underwhelming, and there are usually popcorn crumbs on the floor.

6. Tell us about the stuffed animals you make.

I started making felt creatures during the winter of 2011-2012, when I decided to explore a new artistic medium in order to avoid working on my MA comps. Now I sell them at a local gift shop/art gallery place.

My favorite kind of dolls to make are completely original characters, with only a name to give any context, that leave you completely free to imagine what kind of world

this little thing came from and what adventures it's had. This is my ideal experience, as a consumer, and I want to provide it to others. From what I've learned in trying to sell these things, though, most people prefer to buy a critter that already has plenty of context built in.

The felt I usually use is made from recycled plastic bottles. I am led to believe that more serious crafters consider it a scrub's material, but I like it just fine.

7. You have an unusual narrative voice in your works. Is this by design or by accident?

I was not aware that I had an unusual narrative voice in my works. So, by accident, apparently.

8. Does the office conflict in *Someone Keeps Moving My Chair* come from real life?

The office conflict in that game comes from the They Might Be Giants song of the same name. Most of the details in that game exist to serve as references to They Might Be Giants songs. Can you find them all???

9. Do you play the ukulele for your podcast?

I recorded all the music used in the podcast! The outro music is indeed performed on ukulele. There's an alternate outro (I think it's used in the first parts of two-part episodes) that is performed on guitar and melodica. It always has my voice on top of it, so you can't really hear it, but it might be my favorite. The intro is just an electric keyboard.

10. How is it working with Jenni Polodna?

Weirdly I don't think of the stuff I do with Jenni as working with her! One of us says "we should do [some type of a thing]!" and the other says "Yeah!" and then we either do that thing, and have fun, or we never get around to doing the thing. Recording a podcast is adding the merest semblance of structure to what otherwise would be understood as "goofing off."

Editing the podcast – syncing tracks, removing dead air and background noise – is hard work, and not fun.

11. Last book read:

My friend gave me this book *The Art*



<< One of Ryan Veeder's plush creations: Kyubyanster, the Cubic Monster

of *Procrastination*, and I have not finished reading it.

That sounds like I'm making it up.

12. Favorite book:

That would be my volume of Borges' collected fictions. I am pretty sure this is true of every IF author.

13. If you could be a tree, what kind of tree would it be?

I don't know anything about trees, but as I think about it, the prospect of being a tree strikes me as unappealing. Trees are always outside. They are stuck in one place. They are covered in insects. Being a tree would be torture.

14. What brought about your book, *Motorcyclus*?

In the dusk of some September evening, I happened to see a motorcycle, dramatically backlit by the setting sun. I said to my dad, "That's a spooky motorcycle."

He said to me, "You should write a story about it."

So I did that, and the name of the story was "Motorcyclus." [The original version is still online at this URL](#). Later I wrote many other horror stories, and I collected them in a book called "[MOTORCYCLUS](#)" and Other Extremely Scary Stories.

15. You seem to keep busy with various outlets. Is there one that you enjoy most overall?

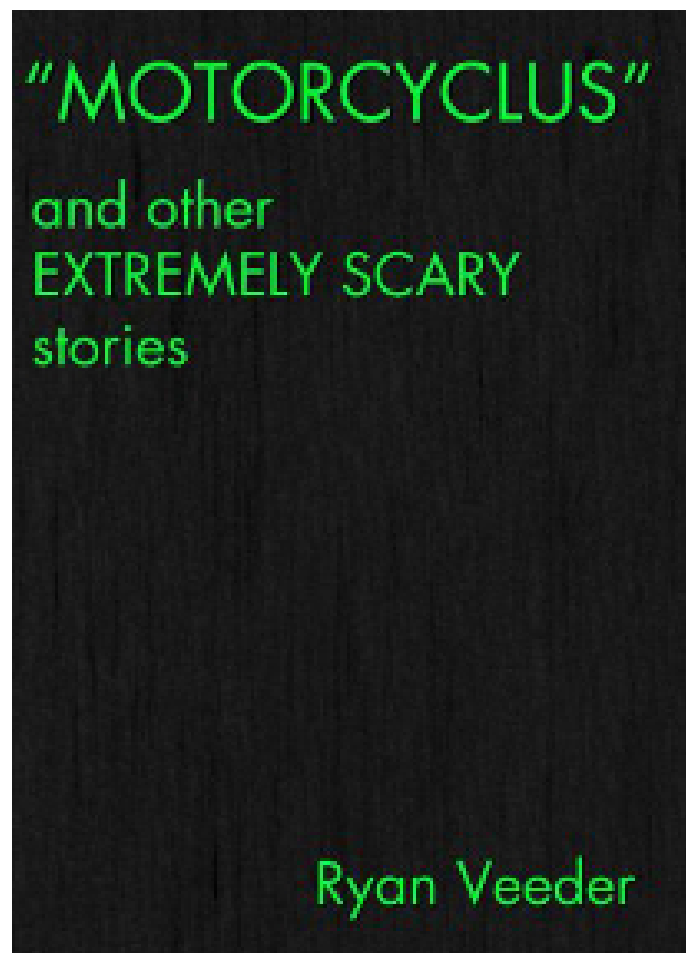
While I am working in a given medium, it (usually) seems far superior to other media to me.

But after I've spent enough time on any one type of thing, I tend to get burnt out, and working on something else – anything else – starts to look real nice.

My favorite outlet, therefore, is that type of project which takes just long enough to finish that I start to burn out on the medium just as I finish it.

16. What do you want to be when you grow up?

There is a very small island in the Pacific



Ocean. Its interior is a lush tropical forest with only a few buildings and dirt paths. Around its coast is one long, smoothly-paved road that follows the curves of the beaches and connects the island's handful of small towns. The road is close enough to the shore that it remains very flat, all the way around.

My job is to ride my bike across this island and deliver things from town to town. Sometimes I deliver messages; sometimes I deliver food. Only very rarely are the deliveries urgent, so I'm almost never in a hurry. I bike until the sun sets, which is when it starts to rain.

17. What first got you into the world of interactive fiction?

Like many text adventure fans, I started playing IF with the Infocom catalogue. My first game was *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, which I sought out because I liked the books so much, but that's about as interesting as that story gets. The story of how I started writing IF is probably more unique, and definitely stupider:

I spent many years alternating between playing text adventures and forgetting that they

existed. In June of 2011 I realized I needed an interpreter program for my new computer. The only application name I could remember was “Inform,” so I found and downloaded it without really paying attention to what it was supposed to do.

When I saw that it was for writing rather than interpreting IF, I said, “Well, heck. I guess I can probably figure this out.”

18. What’s your one big goal you’d like to accomplish?

I am averse to discussing large-scale specific goals in a public setting, and even to confiding them privately. It seems to me that announcing your plan greatly diminishes the odds of that plan coming to fruition. This sounds like magical thinking, but I dimly remember the theory being borne out in some sort of study or something, a few years ago, maybe.

My general goal is to distract people from their problems.

19. How will humanity end?

Man, why would you ask me this? This is a depressing question. I’m skipping this question.

20. What question did I not ask that I should have asked you?

I’m in no position to make pronouncements about what questions you should or shouldn’t ask.

If you didn’t mind adding a mercenary undertone to the interview, you could have asked something like “If I or someone reading this wants to purchase a copy of your book of scary stories or commission a doll from you, how would I or that person go about this?” – to which the answer would be, “Go ahead and email me at rcveeder@me.com and we’ll work something out. Easy.” But whether you should have asked me such a thing is not for me to say.

Visit <http://www.rcveeder.net> to learn more about Ryan Veeder and his work.

RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MONTH

Note: Games from this list are the best releases on IFDB that you can find during this month’s publication of the magazine. Be sure to give them a try whenever you can!

- [Howwl by Tipue](#)
- [DOUCHEBAG -- An Existential Adventure by William Mathieson](#)
- [Someone Keeps Moving My Chair by Ryan Veeder](#)
- [Traveler by Caelyn Sandel](#)
- [SKATE OUT! by Paperblurt](#)





You can help other IFers

BY MARSHAL TENNER WINTER

We're going to need new terms. No, I'm not talking about that useless debate on whether "interactive fiction" is a good enough label for interactive fiction. Rather, I'm referring to the way we refer to the '80s as the Commercial Era of interactive fiction. It seems we're in another commercial era of IF: the Crowdfunding Era. This leaves the space in between as simply a 20-year doldrum of sales.

One good thing about the growing population of our planet is that there is now a crowd for anything one can imagine, and the Internet makes it possible for these crowds to converge. That means, we no longer discuss IF as "dead" because "people want graphics." Instead, there are enough IFers out there to form a solid community.

Granted, we all know more are out there, lost and trying to find the community, which is why much of our efforts focused on outreach. Regardless, the IF crowd has become a melting pot of game developers, literature enthusiasts, educators, gamers, and anyone else who doesn't mind actually reading words and participating

in stories rather than just camping in Counter Strike.

This expansion and congealment of the IF community, with its many tendrils shaking hands with other communities, has allowed some IF authors, bloggers, developers, and general enthusiasts, to get Patreon or other crowdfunding accounts. This, in turn, has allowed their audience a chance to help rebuild a model of commercial interactive fiction wherein consumers put their money toward the projects or writers they like most.

Many would argue that the most anticipated crowdfunded IF project is Andrew Plotkin's Hadean Lands. I'm not discussing it as doing so would be rehashing easy-to-find information plastered all over the Net about it. It's an example, however, of an author directly marketing his works. I'm discussing, however, the other ways crowdfunding can be used in the world of IF.

David Welbourn is one example. The name is known to many old-school IFers as a person who meticulously plays as many works of IF as

the hours of the day allow. Welbourn also helps to edit the IFWiki. He may not always comment on or review the works he plays, but rest assured, if you uploaded something to the archive and listed it on the database, chances are Welbourn has some playthrough notes about it somewhere on his desk.



David Welbourn

The lucky ones get his special walkthrough treatment, with maps, alternate solutions, commentary, and pointers on where he or others might struggle, and interpretations even authors are surprised to find.

He calls these guides “rich” and “verbose,” and he's not kidding.

Perhaps he will save you time as a player. Or maybe he will uncover an old game you'd have missed otherwise. His walkthroughs even help authors looking to re-release to fix rough edges.

Now Welbourn has a Patreon account (<https://www.patreon.com/dswxyz>) to allow him to work on [walkthroughs and maps](#) for the community.

“It's already more successful than I expected,” he told IFography.

Finding pure IF authors on Patreon, however, is a bit challenging. A good percentage of the IF authors who are crowdfunding also classify themselves as developers for other types of video games, static fiction and poetry, among other things.

Adri Mills' Kickstarter, for example, is to

launch her *Imagine a World* game based on the MMO called *Glitch*. (The Kickstarter campaign apparently has been delayed, but you can get updates at <http://imagineaworld.net>.) She has received plenty of positive feedback from outside the IF world. She also has a Patreon page: <https://www.patreon.com/genericgeekgirl>

Here are more IF-related crowdfunding efforts:

- Jimmy Maher, author of *The King of Shreds & Patches* has a Patreon to support his coverage of the history of computer gaming: <https://www.patreon.com/DigitalAntiquarian>

- Deirdra Kiai, aka Squinky, is creating experimental video games and works of interactive fiction via Patreon. You may remember her from such stop-motion musical detective games as *Dominique Pamplémousse in “It's All Over Once The Fat Lady Sings!”*: <https://www.patreon.com/squinky>

- Caelyn Sandel (*It Is Pitch Black*) is on Patreon creating video games and “interactive stories”: <https://www.patreon.com/inurashii>

- The prolific Porpentine also has a Patreon. You know her from *howling dogs* and many other games and projects:

<https://www.patreon.com/porpentine>

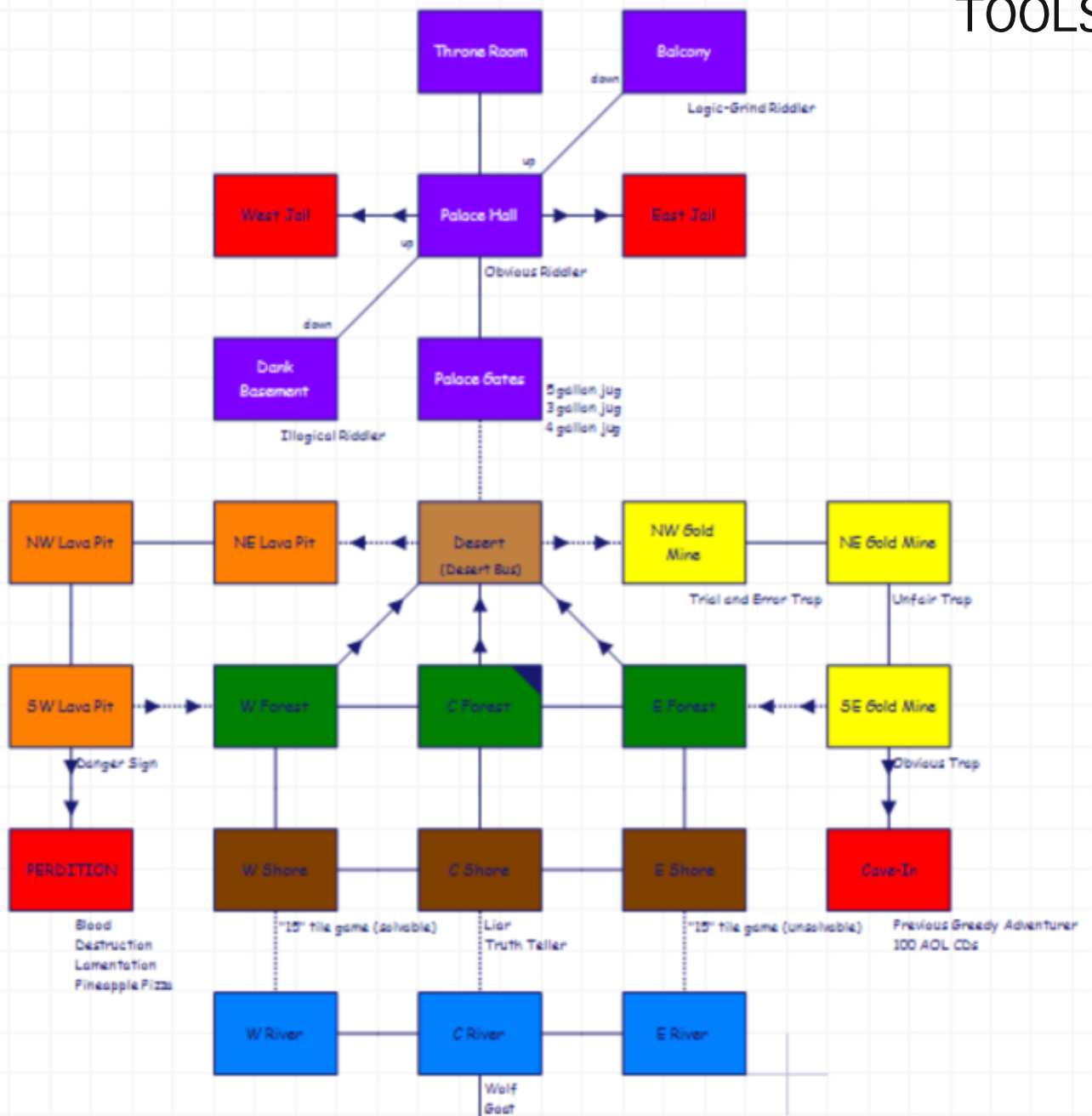
- Adam Cadre is a well-known IF author, but his Patreon mostly supports his static writing: <https://www.patreon.com/adamcadre>

No doubt there are people we missed here, and new efforts come up from time to time. We will revisit this subject in future issues of IFography.

Meanwhile, remember you don't have to give much to make a difference.

Please support your fellow IF enthusiasts.





There's a map for that

Color-coded regions among Trizbort's new features

BY JASON LAUTZENHEISER

Background

Trizbort was created in 2010 by Genstein as a map aid. You could create a map from a transcript or build one from scratch quickly and intuitively. In March 2013 Trizbort was rereleased on GitHub under the MIT license. Some developers added a few bug fixes, and added some minor features, but nothing came together.

In late December 2014, I decided to start exploring the source more just to see how

Genstein did things more than anything, but after playing around and making a few changes, I decided to ask in the private IF writing group I'm a part of to see if there was any interest in an update to the app. Andrew Schultz jumped right in with a ton of suggestions and has become the primary beta tester for this new version. We've also had conversations with Genstein, and he has open sourced the documentation as well, so Andrew has begun to update that.

If you're not familiar with Trizbort, it's useful even in its most basic form: to create maps of a game you're playing or want to write. With paper, there's the possibility you'll reach the edge, or you'll write in the wrong passage, and erasing is a pain. With Trizbort, you can reshuffle rooms as needed, and the lines move around.

Summary of updates since March 2013

The last official release was version 1.2.1 and was the starting point for my code. I also pulled in two other forks of the code. First, GitHub user Tymian did a bit of everything: adding copy and paste of rooms and connections, flexibility in room coloring, and several bug fixes. GitHub user tustin2121 added app settings for zooming with the mouse wheel..

I was able to code support for features and fix quite a few bugs based on Andrew Schultz's reports. You can add them yourself at <http://lautzofif.myjetbrains.com>. Many of the new features revolve around regions, and they're intended to be practical and aesthetic.

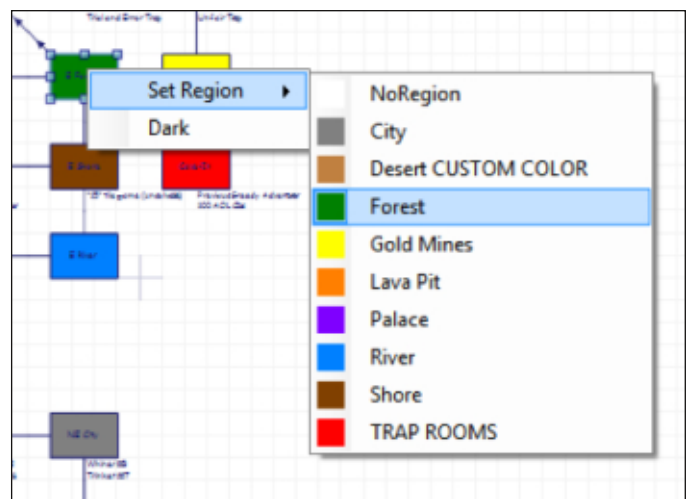
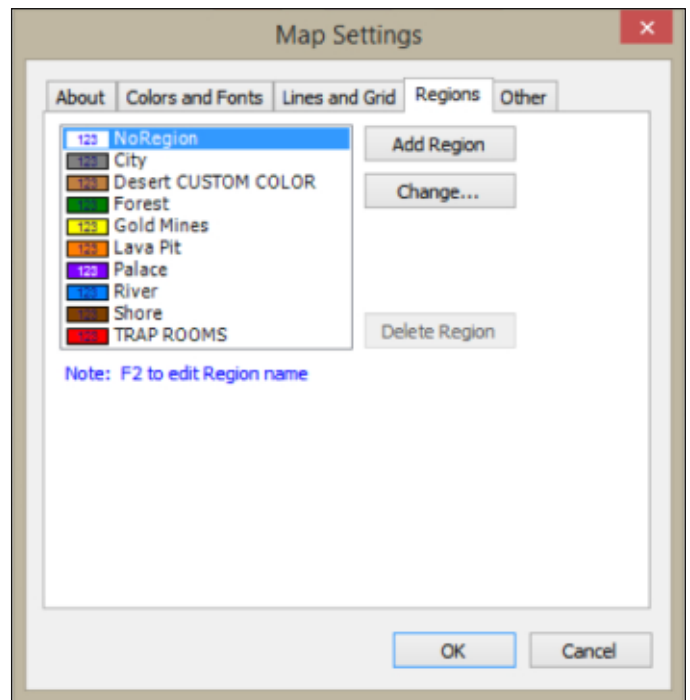
Regions

Regions in Inform 7 (my language of choice), allow the programmer to group rooms for a big-picture view of where the player is. For example, a region called "House" might have rooms for Kitchen, Living Room, Dining Room, and Bedroom. When rooms are grouped by region, rules and actions can be made easier. Backdrops can be managed more easily also.

Previously, in Trizbort, while you could color individual rooms, you had to do so one at a time. So we added the ability to create regions.

Once you've created a region, you can right-click on a room or edit its properties. The room will take the region's default colors. You can still change an individual room to have its own custom colors. Trizbort also preserves regions when you use control-arrow to create a new room.

With other accelerators that adjust line styles, you can create a map pretty quickly. Once you have all regions set up, your rooms created and set to their appropriate regions, you now have a nicely colored map.



These screenshots show Trizbort's new region feature in action.

Regions have also been incorporated into the Inform 7 export code, which you should be able to compile right away to a shell of a game. This isn't available for Inform 6 or TADS export, but the basic map exports should still work.

SmartSave

One small but useful feature that was implemented right away was SmartSave. It cut a lot of the busy work of saving the Trizbort map to different graphical formats. You can select a default graphical format to save to (from JPG, BMP, EMF and PNG) so SmartSave exports to both that format and PDF, in the same directory as the Trizbort file.

If you find yourself tinkering a lot, there's now less worry you'll forget to export the latest

version to a readable format.

Other navigational and UI improvements

Right-click context menus are a new feature currently used to set a room's region, but there obvious possibilities for lines and other features. Future versions will expand on these menus.

The Join Room feature works if you select two rooms and push J. Trizbort joins them in the most sensible non-diagonal direction. Diagonals will be a feature for later.

Tooltips now appear if you hover the mouse over a room.

You'll be able to see its regions and any objects. Again, more can be done, but we're currently adding big stuff, so users can ask for what they want.

What's coming in future versions?

Who knows? Andrew and I have been compiling a list of great features. But really it's just been the two of us so far. With this release,

we hope to garner some feedback and suggestions for more new features (hopefully more of those than bug reports). Usability and aesthetics are both worthwhile, so don't be afraid to dream a bit.

Andrew is working on updating the documentation with the new features, and we hope to have that released soon as well.

I invite you to try out Trizbort, whether for an old game you enjoyed, a tough game you're stuck on, or for a game you wrote or want to write.

It removes a lot of the busy work and we hope the new features help you imagine and visualize things better.

Genstein's initial work was too good to just sit there, and if you wonder why it doesn't have this feature or that, maybe nobody's thought of it, and with Trizbort's strong framework, adding it will be easier than you think.

Get the latest version at <http://bit.ly/trizbortjl> or you can view the source code at <https://github.com/JasonLautzenheiser/trizbort>.

REVIEWS

Warning: MIGHT CONTAIN PARTIAL SPOILERS. READ AT YOUR OWN RISK!



Castle of Doom by Bad Dog Studios

The description of *Castle of Doom* in IFDB is tempting:

Multiple endings! Riddles! Monsters and booby-traps galore!

Can you survive the night in the Castle of Doom?

This a game anybody, even those with very

little skill in gaming in general, can play without much trouble. This is interactive fiction with the same ease of use as *Photopia*, *Lost Pig*, *The Dreamhold*, and *9:05*.

Castle of Doom is a CYOA game made on TADS. (CYOA games are best for beginners, as there is no need to type commands into a parser.) It can be played on its own as a GAM file or as an EXE where the interpreter is provided within, which makes it very easy for people who doesn't have HTML TADS or Gargoyle in their systems.

Another positive is the quick shortcuts that appear during the deaths and wins to restart, restore and undo. Just typing a specific letter shown like (R) for restart makes thing much, much easier, considering that you might die constantly during your first playthrough. It's a good thing that the undo button is always there for you.

Most of the text and choices seen on screen are pretty short and simple, making it easier for beginners to read what is bestowed among them. Half of the crucial choices shown will

cause instant deaths, which might seem frustrating to some, but the death scenes are funny enough that most players won't mind. With the quick undo function, they will be moving too fast to even care about it. This makes the "puzzles" almost no challenge at all and if you happen to die, you can just go back to your previous point of death and retry until you strike the jackpot.

Castle of Doom is a very, very simple game, so easy that you can probably complete it in 5 minutes or less. Think that is horrible? Don't worry. There are many choices and endings that you can attempt to achieve. This brings its replayability level up compared to other many other CYOA games.

If you are curious enough to learn about how the castle came to be, there is a book somewhere in the game where you can read about it. Unfortunately, that part happens to be a minor puzzle where life and death is important and choices have to be made carefully, though how the castle was formed and the terrible things that plagued the fortress were interesting.

But if you are going to play this game, I have one piece of advice. Imagine me saying it in a wise old man's voice: "Wanderers and adventurers, the accursed castle must you not visit. But if you do, trust not the hints and words read. The truth they seldom speak. Be careful, brave wanderer."

OK, now that's done with. It took all my effort to count the number of good endings to expect in this game, which is four. You might be able to find more hidden endings somewhere in the game, though I thoroughly explored the area. Secret areas have their own mysterious ways of showing themselves to players dedicated enough. For the bad endings, well, there might be too many for me to count. Perhaps there will be a player one day who will be kind enough to hunt for them all.

Castle of Doom might be too short and easy for some players. It is clearly meant for

beginners, so IF veterans expecting a bigger challenge might want to look elsewhere. If you want to introduce the world of interactive fiction to others, maybe your kids or your close buddy, and they happen to be horrible at these type of games, show them *Castle of Doom*. They might learn a thing or two about how much they can achieve with these types of games.

Summary: A small bite-sized game made for beginners of IF, who have no experience with parser-based games and enjoys old CYOA books.

Verdict: 6/10

Body Bargain by Amanda Lange

Gore in art can be tricky.

Sometimes it's just wrong and should be avoided. (Do we really need to see yet another person get decapitated by zombies?) At other times, it can be an effective means of telling a story.

There's no escaping the gore in *Body Bargain* by Amanda Lange, which won an impressive eighth place in the 2012 IF Competition. In a nutshell, this game uses a mix of effective gore and slight horror to tell the story of a girl who wakes up alone in a clinic.

As you play this game, you will slowly piece together about how you got to the clinic and understand the reasons of why you are there.

As you awaken, the stereotypical "halfway to losing himself" doctor will tell you to perform operations on certain people who have come for his help in the clinic. And not all of his instructions involve helping and successfully performing a surgery on the patients.

Throughout your time playing this, you will constantly be shown disgusting descriptions of you operating the patients, like you slowly tearing out a flap of skin that has a tattoo on it and removing the arms (yeah, the entire arm from its socket) of some unlucky patient who cares too much about her looks.

The doctor, the other only important NPC in the game, has a big impact in this game, espe-

cially with his cyborg arms, which reminded me of Arnold Schwarzenegger from *The Terminator*.

Although he might have gone crazy losing both of his arms from some freak accident, you can't blame him for doing these things, as he's just doing his job.

After you are done helping the kind doctor with his patients, you can help him perform some random errands that are given to you. At that time, you can explore the entire clinic, which isn't too huge, to discover more about yourself and learn about the other patients.

The lackluster, depressing atmosphere in the clinic reminds me of what I can expect if I walk into one of these places. Just imagine those small bulbs in lamps on the ceiling, with the gray paint on the walls, and you opening the double doors to enter the surgery rooms.

Eventually, you will find the truth about the doctor, which is more or less what you expect. He is both good and bad. After all, severing a guy's hand for cosmetic reasons, even if it's the patient's wish, is still wrong.

In the middle of the game, be prepared to cut up this special patient deeply with a scalpel and remove her skin like a ripe orange from her body.

This is just sick.

On the good side, you have a half-decent parser to use that should understand most names and props that you throw at it.

You also can find a couple of different endings in this game, some good, some bad, but it takes some exploration and guts to try out different actions to achieve those endings. Luckily, you have the walkthrough provided in the game's feelies file to help make things easier for you.

And why exactly did you help the doctor in the start?

That will be the biggest thing you can discover.

In addition, this game might also get you thinking about the illegal clinics in the real world.

Summary: Despite the gore, this game has a atmosphere and story that replicate a true black market clinic perfectly and might make you flinch.

Verdict: 8/10

BALACLAVA.

Balaclava by Nahuel Denegri

This is recently released Quest game was written by Spanish author Nahuel Denegri. When I entered the game on the Quest website. I was pretty impressed to see both Spanish and English translations for this game, which means I didn't need to paste the text into Google Translate to understand it.

Rather than being a typical Quest parser-type game, *Balaclava* is more of a Twinish CYOA game. The background and layout is quite interesting too, the background being a minimalistic white and small amounts of text presented in the middle on the screen, so there's no need for you to strain your eyes to see the tiny white text printed against the usual black Twine Sugarcane display.

As you begin the game, you will start as a man who is being chased by some guys who are wearing balaclavas.

Sound familiar? It reminds me of the starting scene in *The Host*, which is a pretty bad movie released a few years back.

In this game, the author kept the high-speed chase short, and the whole thing is over in a couple of minutes.

I'm disappointed about the lack of choices. You only have one selectable choice in most parts of the game, which is something like UP, DOWN, GO TO THE STAIRS. There is no going left, right, backward, or even a choice to take on the men who are chasing you.

Another noticeable thing: This game is very, very short. Trust me. You can reach the ending in a few minutes if you click fast enough.

The ending was a little messy, and looks like it was hastily done. There was a spelling mistake in the ending that made it hard to interpret.

Because it is a linear game, you won't be able to find multiple endings, only one quick ending.

There were a few other choices that you can try to change the outcome of the story. Making a different choice will give you a little backstory on what is actually going on around you. The backstory isn't exactly something happy, as you will see that there is something very wrong about the world that you are in.

It is definitely more than it looks. The men in balaclavas weren't exactly normal. There will be something you will see on the TV that will show you that there is something a little different happening here.

Just remember to be careful of who is around you ...

Summary: A short CYOA game made on Quest that is more than meets the eye.

Verdict:
4/10

There's a Snake in the Bathtub by Edward Griffiths

I had to do some exploration in the IF Archive to find this game. A few weeks ago, I had this idea that I will download some old unheard game from the archives and review it for the magazine, which is the game that you are reading about now.

There's a Snake in the Bathtub is a short game released in 2004 that contains plenty of puzzles and know-hows on props on defeating the snake that appears in your bathtub.

The first thing that you have to know about this game is that it is basic, with its short descriptions and sentences about everything that is going on around you. The parser seems OK and will understand most phrases, provided you don't go overboard and put in words that are complex.

You start as a typical fry-cooker and have to follow the instructions given by your manager to

cook some fries. If you don't carefully read what the manager has told you (like me), there might be some guess-the-word problems with the parser. However, you will only fail to get a point if you can't complete the order.

After your hard day at work, it's time to return home for a calming, relaxing bath. Just you, the water and a whole night of relaxation. But as you open the door to your bathroom, you realize one thing very, very wrong. There is a snake in your bathtub. It is the very foe that is stopping you from enjoying yourself after a difficult day at work. The

only puzzle in this short game is to get the snake out of your tub and take a bath.

You will then run into a couple of problems with this game. One annoying issue is that doors don't open automatically when you go into the direction of one. You have to manually type OPEN DOOR, which is time-consuming and is just bad

implementation. I can't blame the game for doing this, though, as it was written in an

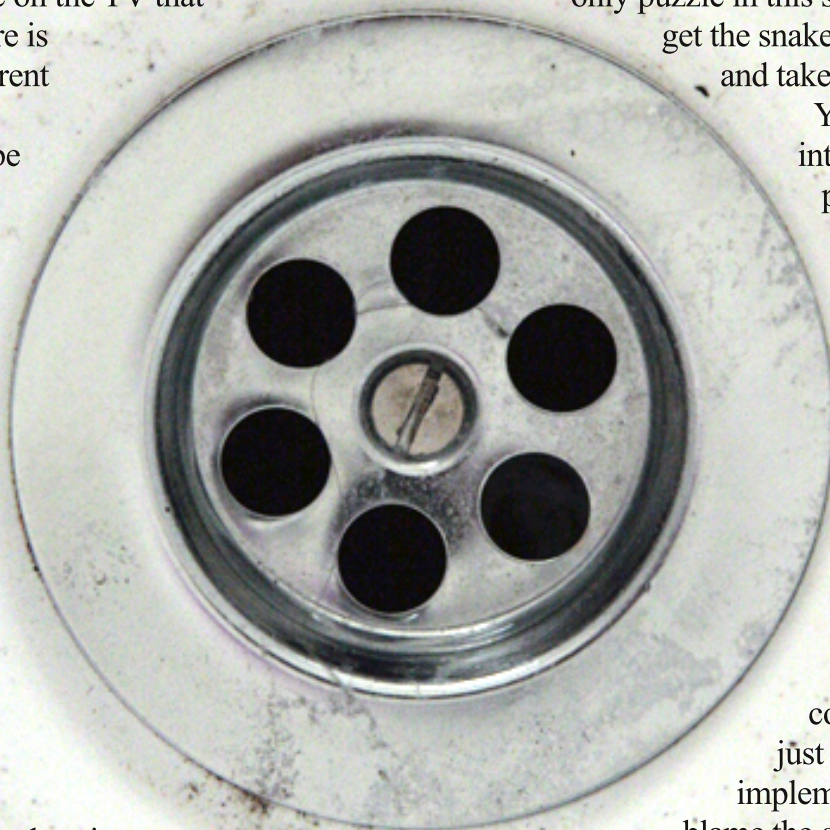
old version of Inform, and I guess many previous versions have this issue with their games.

Apparently, there is a 100-move limit to your actions after you have awakened the snake, which might give you some pressure to complete the puzzles more quickly. It is not an easy thing to do because there are a lot of props to use and very little hints and instructions given to you.

There is no walkthrough included in the game's page either. In the end, I gave up thanks to my lack of puzzle-solving brains.

Summary: An short adventure to destroy a snake in your bathtub, which should be played if you like twisting your head a little over puzzles.

Verdict: 5/10





DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE

Dungeons of doubt

The lessons of *Prince of Persia*

BY ROBERT PATTEN

NOTE: Down the Rabbit Hole is a section in IFography that features articles and commentary about subjects not directly related to interactive fiction, but of interest to the general IF community. The information here is not supposed to be exhaustive; rather, it's meant to inspire a journey.

If you have ever embarked on an ambitious project, you might have felt the excitement that nearly burst you in half gradually weaken into a list of excuses. What begins as The Best Thing Ever can easily turn into a morass of difficulty and discouragement.

When ambition runs into doubt, often the best encouragement to finish comes not from pep talks but example.

And sometimes, the best examples have a melodramatic flair:

In the Sultan's absence, the Grand Vizier JAFFAR rules with the iron fist of tyranny. Only one obstacle remains between Jaffar and the throne: the Sultan's beautiful young daughter ...

Marry Jaffar ... or die within the hour. All the Princesses's hopes now rest on the brave youth she loves. Little does she know that he is already a prisoner in Jaffar's dungeons ...

So begins the original *Prince of Persia*, a dangerous quest through the depths and heights of a palace, wherein our hero deals with guards, the undead, traps, and the constant threat of falling.

Perhaps you could find a way around the



latest pit of death or bloodthirsty swordsman, but you find yourself rushing into danger anyway. Why? You have unlimited lives, but a limited amount of time (one hour on most platforms). Your success depends on both reflexes and wits.

In Jordan Mechner's action-adventure game, the prince (you) has smoother movements than you might expect for 1989. This is because the prince is not just the prince – he is Mechner's brother.

Mechner videotaped his younger sibling running, jumping, and hanging off ledges. He used this footage when he drew the prince, a technique known as rotoscoping.

(You see another rabbit hole here.)

Remember, though, this was before digital cameras became commonplace. Getting footage from a Super 8 camera to an Apple II wasn't exactly a matter of plugging it into the computer.

Beyond the technical side, Mechner realized rotoscoping presented him with other challenges.

“Problems with using David as a model: By the time I figure out what additional footage I need, he'll be 3,000 miles away (and probably several inches taller),” he wrote.

This brings us what makes *Prince of Persia* truly significant, and it goes beyond the game itself.

Few video games have been as heavily documented as this one.

Mechner, 21 and fresh out of Yale, kept a journal.

It was more than a log of game development, though, just as making *Prince of Persia* involved more than sitting at a computer and typing away.

He had already experienced success with the martial arts game *Karateka* but thought his path lay in Hollywood. He took a chance, however, and moved to San Francisco to work on a new game for software company Brøder-



Go deeper

Prince of Persia has a modding community. This means two things:

1. You can play more levels of 8-bit danger!
2. You can create the levels yourself with a variety of modding tools.

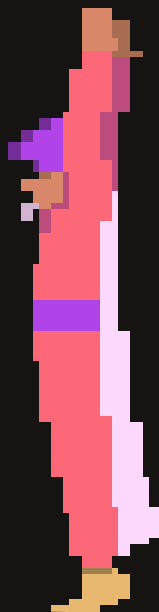
Go to <http://www.princeded.org> if you want to build your own adventure.

Caped hero above from Prince of Persia: Hardened with Vengeance.

bund. As existing technology and corporate culture presented him with one hurdle after another, he questioned himself. Was his first game beginner's luck, or could he pull off a miracle the second time?

Last night I was kept awake by anxiety about the new game. All the detail I'm gonna have to put in ... it just seems so daunting. How did I do it for Karateka? I can't remember. I'm not sure I can do it again.

The Doubt is still there in the back of my mind. It talks to me from time to time. "Jordan!" it says. "What are you doing? You're taking a step backward. You want to be a filmmaker. It's time to move on! You brought the Apple-computer-game thread of your life to its climax a year ago. You caught the industry just before it started to die, before you started to lose interest in



games yourself. Now you want to do 'just one more game' ... why? Timidity! Fear of breaking loose! You'll waste a year, man! If you're going to try for Hollywood, now is the time!"

"Shut up," I say, and Doubt grumbles and crawls, for the moment, back into its hole.

After periods of distraction and refocus, Mechner overcame the challenges from within and without. *Prince of Persia* was released on the Apple II and nearly every other popular platform and was a gradual success.

The influence of the game is apparent today.

It led to a series of sequels and even inspired a 2010 Disney movie starring Jake Gyllenhaal (which Mechner helped with).

The story of *Prince of Persia* doesn't stop there, however.

Decades after the game was published, Mechner found some floppy disks with the original Apple II source code.

As documented by [Wired](#) in 2012, archivist Jason Scott (best known in the IF community as the guy who made the documentary [Get Lamp](#)) and retro computing enthusiast Tony Diaz were able to recover the data.

[The source code is now available online.](#)

Warning: It might not make a lot of sense if you don't know 6502 assembly language. You don't need to understand the code, though, to be inspired by this particular dungeon crawler and the story behind it.

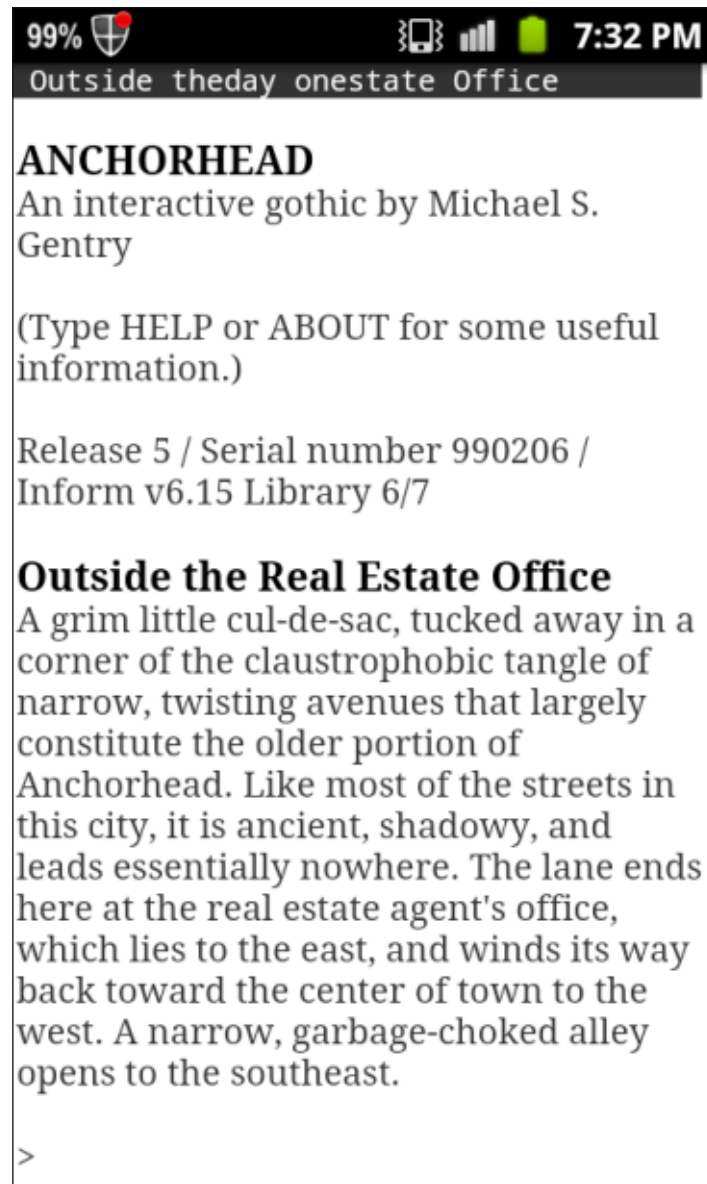
When Mechner needed some encouragement to finish *Prince of Persia*, he thought about what a friend had once told him about *Karateka*:

You've dug your way deep into an active gold mine and are holding off from digging the last two feet because you're too dumb to appreciate what you've got and too lazy to finish what you've started.

Keep digging.



In our next issue



Overcome the horror of playing IF on your phone