

## HOLLOW VOICE

“Zorkers do it under the rug...”

— quote from an Infocom fan’s .sig file

Two items from the blowing my own horn department: first, I hope you’ll all stop by Folio magazine’s mediacentral.com Web site to see a short but sweet review of *XYZZYnews* by Steve Wilson in the Zine & Noted section. You’ll find the URL inside this issue as a Top 10 Pick for IF on the Web—naturally! :-)

Secondly, it looks like—yet again!—it’s time for me to let you all know I’m changing jobs. I’m joining IBM’s corporate Internet programs, where I’ll serve as managing editor for the IBM home page. If there are any IBM employees out there in the *XYZZYnews* readership, please give me a holler—you should have no trouble finding me in PROFS. :-)

In real IF news, it sounds like all material for the CD project shepherded by Andrew Plotkin is proceeding apace; I’ll report back on when the CD will be available. I also may give a talk in the spring at New York University about the popularity of interactive fiction, as part of their Computer Advocacy Club’s annual Theme Week.

(My apologies for such a short editorial this time around, but I swear this issue would never get out otherwise!)

Until next issue, happy gaming!

**Eileen Mullin**  
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### September/October Top 10 Picks for IF on the World Wide Web

**The rec.arts.int-fiction Silly Game**  
<http://www.arnod.demon.co.uk/IF/sillygame/>

**Illusory Mental Images**  
<http://www.execpc.com/~illusory/illusory.html>

**Frotz Z-machine interpreter home page**  
<http://www.geocities.com/SiliconValley/Heights/3222/frotz.html>

**War of the words: Review of XYZZYnews**  
<http://www.mediacentral.com/Magazines/Folio/Zines/19961115.htm/737896>

**Atlantide 1664**  
<http://www.1664.com/>

**Matthew's Computer Game Reviews**  
<http://www.wsu.edu:8080/~i9717029/Reviews.html>

**Digital Dimensions**  
<http://www2.scifiu.com:80/scifiu/spaceb.html>

**Space Bar Preview**  
[http://www.cdmag.com:80/adventure\\_vault/space\\_bar\\_preview/page1.html](http://www.cdmag.com:80/adventure_vault/space_bar_preview/page1.html)

**Representing Human Characters in Interactive Games**  
[http://reality.sgi.com/employees/prevost\\_studio/personality.html](http://reality.sgi.com/employees/prevost_studio/personality.html)

**Space on your hard drive: A brief history of science fiction gaming**  
<http://www.scifi.com:80/scifi.com/gameroom/gamespot/>



Space on your hard drive: A brief history of science fiction gaming

Hi Eileen!

Just wanted to tell you that the ASCII versions of both Issue #9 and #10 of *XYZZYnews* are missing a very important "S" in the Legalese. The kind offer for the readers to send anything to your address has become a harsh denial: "end all inquiries, letters, and submissions to any of the addresses above."

Still grateful (boy, have I been missing something ignoring the .PDF version),

—Miron  
s590501@tfh-berlin.de

*Yikes! Let me thank you for catching that typo; that should explain any lapses in the amount of e-mail I get. :-)* —EM

Hi Eileen,

Firstly, I want to say that I enjoy reading the *XYZZYnews* each and every time it is mailed to me, and I do appreciate the trouble that you take to send it directly. It's a fine publication which celebrates an all-too-ignored genre in the gaming world.

At the end of the last issue, you asked if you should discontinue the "What's on the Disk" section to save time and space for those of us who receive it electronically, and therefore don't receive the diskette. Well, I thought I'd throw my two cents in and say that I really did miss that section, because it often serves as a reminder and guide to me to all the new games out there that I should be looking for. It also serves as a bit of an unintentional quality guide, because I assume that your standards for including these games on your distribu-

tion disk are somewhat similar to mine, and therefore, I rarely waste my time if I FTP to gmd.de and look for those specific games. Perhaps this is a use for your "What's on The Disk" column which you hadn't counted on, but I assure you that in my opinion, it is nevertheless an extremely valuable portion of the *XYZZYnews*, and it shouldn't be left out, if at all possible.

Thanks for everything,

—Meg  
73124.340@compuServe.com

To *XYZZYnews*:

Back in the early '80s a friend of mine and I spent several afternoons playing Adventure. Just before the floppy drive on the PC went dead, we had discovered a set of rooms under the Troll Bridge. To get down, we had to remove the Troll's Sign and hang the Golden Chain from the Sign Post. I have been looking for a version of Adventure that has this "feature" but can not find one. Do you or any of your readers have any insight?

—Jim McDonnell  
Jim.Mcdonnell@dbsoftware.com

*I'll throw this one open to the group for answers...any suggestions, folks?* —EM

To *XYZZYnews*,

Hi! First of all...let me say that *XYZZYnews* is terrific...you have just done an outstanding job. It's a treat to read.

I have a bug for the list... in the Witness (the LTOI I version, anyhow), if you drop the mystery book in the office, Phong picks it up and starts

reading... even though he is in his bedroom!

—SLaM  
laurie@pop.hip.cam.org

Dear Eileen,

First off, I'd like to thank and congratulate you regarding this excellent and needed publication. I thought I was one of the last people on Earth who still had an interest in Infocom games, as well as IF in general.

Recently, I happened to be shopping for entertainment software and was becoming a bit depressed by the fact that there are only a few games, constantly re-packaged, available anymore (war simulations, sci-fi and action type shoot-'em-ups, icon-driven fantasy adventures, sports simulators and classic board and strategy games), or so it would seem. Much to my astonished delight, I found a single copy of Infocom Masterpieces, which includes 33 of their published text adventures (apparently every one except Hitchhiker's Guide, Shogun, Quarterstaff and Mini-Zork). The fact that the price, \$19.94, was about half what a single Infocom title used to cost me was arguably the best news of all!

Needless to say, my intense, but by necessity, largely dormant interest in IF was re-kindled in a big way so I decided to do a Net search of "Infocom," expecting to find nothing, but still hopeful. Again, it was wonderful to be wrong. During the 1980s I solved 12 text adventures, including Zork I and II, Enchanter, Planetfall and Witness, plus seven from other companies. I'm currently making rapid progress on Sorcerer,

Stationfall and Infidel, plus the original Adventure, which I downloaded from the glorious IF archive. Anyway, my question is this: I would like to begin writing my own IF, but I have very limited programming abilities (and aptitude, I suspect). I can write some in BASIC but their appeal is apt to be limited. I have heard several mentions of AGT and other IF development systems but was wondering which one might be regarded as the best for a person with limited programming abilities (and where I might acquire such, if not in the IF archive). Thanks for any help you can offer and keep up the good work!

Sincerely,

—Kevin “The Cretin” O’Keeffe  
GEQR17A@prodigy.com

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Hi, Eileen.

Greetings! Love the 'zine. Anyway, I'm writing to tell you that I think I may have an addition to the Infocom Bug List—read on:

Here begins a transcript of interaction with ZORK ZERO: The Revenge of Megaboz (Release 393 / Pix 14 ).

>LOOK

Plain

You are on an amazingly flat plain of sun-bleached sand. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

>I

You are carrying a ceramic pigeon and a ceramic perch. You are

wearing a cloak.

>DROP PIGEON

Dropped.

>E

Plain

You are on an amazingly flat plain of sun-bleached sand. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

>SE

Plain

You are on an amazingly flat plain of sun-bleached sand. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

There is a soldier on horseback here. His armor is made of the shiniest metals, and his steed is lighter than drifted snow.

>KNIGHT, GO NW THEN W

"I'm off!" The mounted soldier and his steed jump high into the air and vanish! A moment later, you hear a proud whinny in the distance.

With a surprisingly high-pitched squeal of alarm, a mounted soldier materializes nearby. He seems somewhat dazed by the experience.

>L

Plain

You are on an amaz-

ingly flat plain of sun-bleached sand. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

There is a soldier on horseback here. His armor is made of the shiniest metals, and his steed is lighter than drifted snow. It seems that the mounted soldier has a ceramic pigeon.

>W

Plain

You are on an amazingly flat plain of deep, rich loam. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

>NW

Plain

You are on an amazingly flat plain of deep, rich loam. The plain seems to stretch endlessly in all directions.

There is a soldier on horseback here. His armor is made of the shiniest metals, and his steed is lighter than drifted snow. It seems that the mounted soldier has a ceramic pigeon.

**This could be useful if there is ever a shortage of knights in the kingdom... :)**

—Admiral Jota  
jota@laraby.tiac.net

# A Conversation with CosmoServe's Judith Pintar

## Exploring artificial intelligence, and a defense of AGT

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by C.E. Forman (ceforman@postoffice.worldnet.att.net)

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**XYZZYnews:** Please tell us a little about yourself and what you do for a living and in your spare time.

**Judith Pintar:** My current preoccupation is finishing my PhD in Sociology. I'm studying the social and cultural effects of mass violence, looking specifically at the former Yugoslavia. I am at the predissertation stage, applying for grant money to go into the field. This academic venture is a departure from my previous life as a health-insurance-less artiste. While I was writing CosmoServe, I worked as a children's theatre director, and for the ten years before that I was a actress, storyteller and concert musician. I play the celtic harp and have recorded three albums with the Sona Gaia label of Narada Media. After a couple of years of Graduate School I have to say that I miss my artistic life, and hope to somehow manage to do it all.

**XYZZYnews:** What first inspired you to write CosmoServe? How much of the game was based on real-life net experiences? Which parts of CosmoServe are your own personal favorites?

**JP:** I'm an Infocom fan from way back. From the moment that I first PUT BAT GUANO IN CANNON, I was hooked. My favorite Infocom game was SUSPENDED. What I liked about it so much was the sense you get that lots of stuff is happening all at the same time, that there are a whole set of independent actors. When I decided I wanted to write a professional-length game, I wanted to develop that same quality. The other influence on CosmoServe is that early AI program, Eliza, that pretends to be a therapist and responds seemingly intelligently to everything you say. I "talked" to Eliza at the Chicago Museum of Science and Industry in the early '80s, and spent about an hour asking her over and over, "Do you love me?" After she ran through the gamut of "Is it important that I love you?" "Why do you care if I love you?" "Did your mother love you?" "What is love?" etc..." , she finally answered "Yes." I was sure I had aggravated her into consciousness! Anyway, long story to say that I have always liked the illusion of artificial intelligence (until the real thing comes along).

The characters in CosmoServe are not based on anybody I know, but they are definitely influenced in a more general sense by friendships I have made online through the years. My favorite part of the game? Hmm, I'd have to say I'm pretty fond of Lucille (the crazed plumbing essay competitor), and I really enjoyed coming up with the fake conference announcements for each forum. Writing the sex conference was a lot of fun too.

**XYZZYnews:** CosmoServe won first place in the 5th Annual SoftWorks AGT Contest (tied with "The Multi-Dimensional Thief"). I'm sure many IF-ers completely missed these competitions. Could you tell us a little about them?

**JP:** I started writing IF in the mid-eighties, when the XT I bought happened to have GAGS (Generic Adventure Game System) on it, the precursor to AGT. I wrote my first games in EDLIN, of all prehistoric dos editors! When I joined CompuServe in 1990, I tried to find Mark Welch, to register GAGS, and discovered that it had become AGT and was administered by the co-author, David Malmberg. He had run several annual game-writing contests, and I was determined to enter (and win!). CosmoServe tied for first place. I won again the following year with Shades of Gray (more on that later). Most of the winners (and many of the runners-up) are commonly available in IF archives and collections. The contests stopped when AGT became freeware.

Maybe this is a good place for me to make a strident defense of AGT. I have had very good results using the program. I think it's terrific. The limits that people complain about are easily transcended by a quick trip into the Pascal source code. I tweaked the code for both CosmoServe and Shades of Gray to get the visual effects I wanted, to increase the number of verbs trapped for, and to change the standard responses. Easy as pie. AGT games can be as professional or as simple as the game writer wants, and has time to make them. Don't blame poorly-written and designed games on the game system! It's the writer's responsibility to thoroughly bug-test a beta version before public release, and it's really not that hard to put in a few extra hours trapping for unusual verbs. Okay, end of my little rant.

**XYZZYnews:** CosmoServe was written in 1991. In what ways do you feel its subjects (computers, BBSes, Internet culture) have changed since then? Do you feel these changes have adversely affected the realism of CosmoServe in any way?

**JP:** The biggest change, I suppose is the move to the graphical interface for just about anyone logging onto CompuServe. But the nearly universal shift from DOS to Windows has the amusing consequence of making the

DOS-related puzzles even more challenging. To win the game, you do need to know how to change directories from a DOS prompt, run programs and, the quaintest and most esoteric of all, PARK the hard drive to turn off the computer. This out of date aspect I kind of like. I think there will be people logging on from DOS machines into the 21st century. R.J. Wright, the hero of CosmoServe is definitely one of those people.

**XYZZYnews:** Looking back, was there anything you might have done differently in designing or writing CosmoServe, knowing what you know now?

**JP:** I think CosmoServe captures a particular moment in the history of online interaction, and for that reason I would be inclined to let it stand as I wrote it.

If I did rewrite it, I would get rid of the time-pressure requirement to finish the game by midnight. It necessitates a lot of restarts, to play the game more optimally, and the jokes get less funny the fifth time around.

**XYZZYnews:** You also worked as part of a team on Shades of Gray, which is generally considered the finest AGT game of all time. Which segments of Shades were yours? Shades of Gray also fascinates me in that none of its seven authors have ever met face-to-face. Could you describe the design process that occurred? How was the project organized?

**JP:** After I won the AGT contest, I didn't think it was sportsmanlike to enter it again. But the contest was so much fun and such a good incentive I had the idea of writing a game as part of a group venture. I posted this idea in CompuServe's Gamer's forum, and a small group of people responded. We brainstormed over a period of about a month, both about the content of the game and the way we would organize the project. We decided that the best way to work together was to have a high degree of autonomy. We discussed general ideas, but gave each other a lot of latitude in the individual parts of the game that we were responsible for.

The mini-adventures were initially separate "games" that could run on their own. Mark Baker wrote the opening sequences, (including the hallucinations), as well as the endgame. Steve Bauman wrote the civil war sequence. Mike Laskey did the Robin Hood sequence. Elizabeth Ellison (who was chiefly responsible for the historical research underlying the game) wrote the mind/memory sequence. I wrote the fortune teller and the code linking the separate parts of the game together, using the device of the card reading. I also tweaked the AGT source code to make it do what we needed it to do. I must admit to being fairly authoritarian in my editing of both text and code when I put it together, to make sure that the game was stylistically consistent. The two other credited authors did not write text for the game, but were crucial to the project.

We were given a private area in the forum to post our messages to one another and to share game files. Hercules, a Gamer's Forum sysop maintained this space for us, processed our files, etc., and was our guardian angel. Cynthia Yans stayed with us from brainstorming to bugtesting, offering valuable feedback and support.

The initial brainstorming and decision-making about the general plot outline took about a month, then individual writers took about two months to write their parts. I took another two months to merge the code (a nightmarish process), to write the aspects of the game that overarched the parts, and to edit the text. Finally we had about a month for the group effort of text polishing and bug-testing. We ended up winning the contest (in a special category, because we were a group project), and were delighted when the game was included in a CD rom collection of shareware games put out by the Waite Group (Fatal Distractions by David Gerrold). It was an amazing project, on a lot of levels, and I think I'd like to try it again sometime.

**XYZZYnews:** Do you still play or write I-F? If so, have you any new works around the corner? Were you planning to enter the r.\*.i-f competition this year?

**JP:** I won't be entering the competition, but don't count me out of the game-writing world. I have been planning a sequel to CosmoServe for years now. The problem is that I started writing a new game system and parser from scratch, and when that project got bogged down, the game did too. I do believe I will get to it someday. Now that I've said it publically, I have to do it, I guess. Anyway, I am a forever I-F fan. For my money pictures can never be as clever or funny as words. You just can't beat good writing.

**XYZZYnews:** Are there any other thoughts on I-F (or anything) that you'd care to add?

**JP:** There has been ongoing *XYZZYnews* discussion about gender in games, and I never got around to responding about how I handled it in CosmoServe. I was concerned that the sexual scenes not be offensive to people regardless of sexual preference. The character's name, R.J. is meant to be gender-neutral, but there are two places in the game where I collect specific information. In the sex conference, one character asks whether R.J. prefers men or women. Then later, when R.J. gets his/her virtual body, the player must choose a male or female body. The resulting combination of sexual preference and gender determines whether you end up in the virtual hotel with straight men, straight women, lesbians or gay men. Unfortunately if you dally with any of them you can't finish the game on time, but at least you get to leave the room with genuine regret, rather than fear and loathing! ☹

# XYZZYnews Talks to the Bearded Oracle of Yonkers



**...otherwise known as Infocom legend Steve Meretzky**

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by Matt Newsome (Matt@pnkfloyd.demon.co.uk)

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**XYZZYnews:** How did you feel about leaving Infocom?

**Steve E. Meretzky:** Extremely sad. There is no one who worked at Infocom who doesn't regard those years as the most fun and creatively satisfying years of their lives. Although things had gone downhill during the Activision Era (especially once Bruce Davis took over Activision), and more and more creative decisions were being made by people in California who didn't care a whit about quality, Infocom was still a fantastic place to be right up until the end.

**XYZZYnews:** Have you left Legend Entertainment?

**SEM:** The four games that I wrote for Legend were all as an independent contractor. I was never an employee of Legend, so I can't say that I've left Legend. When I started Boffo Games, it certainly reduced the likelihood of doing any more games for Legend, but there's always a chance that Legend and Boffo could get together for a project.

**XYZZYnews:** How interested are you now in interactive fiction?

**SEM:** Highly interested. If you count Superhero League of Hoboken as one-half (it was also partly a role-playing game), then 12.5 of my 14 games have been Interactive Fiction. And, in the future, I certainly expect that a majority of the games I write will be Interactive Fiction. It is a genre whose possibilities are still mostly unrealized.

**XYZZYnews:** Do you feel you are making Interactive Fiction or Adventure Games at Boffo?

**SEM:** I consider the terms to be completely interchangeable. As far as I am concerned, Interactive Fiction is just a term marketers invented to make the genre sound more high-falluting. Certainly, Adventure Games isn't a perfectly descriptive name for the genre, but it historically accurate in that it pays homage to the granddaddy of the genre, and every computer gamer knows what you're talking about when you say "adventure game." I feel the same way about people who reject "science fiction" in favor of phrases like "speculative fiction."

**XYZZYnews:** What was it like to work with Douglas Adams? Did he keep to schedule?

**SEM:** Douglas is wonderfully creative, looks at things in a completely different way than I do, and comes up with ideas that I never would. On the other hand...Douglas has raised procrastination to an art form. Hitchhikers Guide would never have gotten done if I hadn't gone over to England and virtually camped out on his doorstep.

**XYZZYnews:** Tell us a little about the plot in The Space Bar.

**SEM:** The game is set on Armpit VI, a drab backwater mining planet. It is a company planet in the way that some towns are company towns. You are a company cop, working for the Amalgamated Vacuum Security Force. You are a human being on a planet where humans are a despised minority.

There has been a break-in at corporate HQ, and some extremely valuable blueprints and prototypes have been stolen. The criminal is known to be hiding out in a spaceport dive known as The Thirsty Tentacle. You have several hours to go into the bar, figure out who the criminal is, and arrest him/her/it before they can catch a shuttle to a planet beyond the corporations jurisdiction.

In the bar, you'll have to interrogate dozens of aliens. One of your police skills is a technique called Empathy Telepathy, which involves getting into the memories of the person you're talking to, and reliving an event earlier in their lives. These flashbacks, set on various aliens home planets, are small adventure-games-within-the-game, each of which is a completely independent story, but each of which also contributes a clue you need toward the main story of finding the criminal.

**XYZZYnews:** What platforms will The Space Bar run on? When will it be available and what price (roughly) will it retail at? Will it be marketed in Europe also?

**SEM:** The Space Bar will be available on PC and Mac. The minimum system for the PC version is a P-75 with 16MB of RAM and a 4X CD-ROM drive. I don't know the Mac minimum config. It should be available (in English, in the U.S.) in October; I don't know anything about pricing. The game is being distributed by Rocket Science, and

one of their major investors is a European distributor, so the game will be marketing heavily in Europe. Translation work is already underway for several different languages.

**XYZZYnews:** How does the BAGEL engine differ from other graphical adventure interfaces we've seen of late, such as Z-Vision?

**SEM:** Like Z-Vision, BAGEL (Boffo Adventure Game Engine and Libraries) displays your environments panoramically, as pioneered by QuickTime VR. But that's really where the similarity ends. BAGELs interface allows for much more complex object and character interactions, and provides a deeper and richer gameplay that I think you'll find is the closest thing that a graphic adventure has come in reproducing the gameplay experience of the Infocom text adventures. Basically, I looked at all the graphic adventure games and adventure game engines from the last few years, in order to pick and choose the features that worked best.

**XYZZYnews:** Can you give us a broad-brush description of how you at Boffo go about writing a game, i.e. do you use a scripting tool built from C++ or similar; do you write some parts which have to be optimal in assembler, etc.

**SEM:** BAGEL itself is written in C++ and includes a scripting language which allows high-level programming of the specific game environments, puzzles, object interactions, and character dialogues. All of the underlying libraries are written in machine-independent code for easy porting to other platforms.

**XYZZYnews:** How do you feel *The Space Bar* pushes the boundaries of the adventure game genre?

**SEM:** As I mentioned earlier, I think it comes closest to recapturing the depth we've only seen until now in text adventures, but in a graphic adventure format. Also, the flashback structure of the game to some degree turns the game from an interactive novel to an interactive short story collection (although having the meta-game to keep it all tied together).

**XYZZYnews:** Some of the latest arcade games are starting to support virtual reality headgear. Do you think adventure games would benefit from such a feature?

**SEM:** I certainly didn't enjoy my one experience with VR headgear—I felt like I was looking through the world with my hands cupped around my eyes. Really bad tunnel vision. Also, I kept getting wrapped up in the cord. But, if the hardware starts appearing on PCs in large numbers and is popular, I'll write games that use it.

**XYZZYnews:** How do you sleep at night knowing that there are STILL people trapped in the GUE, or trying to get a damned babel fish, or trying to decipher a strange alien message?

**SEM:** When people STOP wanting to enjoy my games, that's when I'll have trouble sleeping at night.

**XYZZYnews:** What is your favorite of all the games you have written?

**SEM:** I get asked that a lot, and I don't have any single answer. There are various elements from various games that I like a lot or am very proud of: Floyd from Planetfall, the scope and political message of A Mind Forever Voyaging, the puzzles and GUE history and sheer size of Zork Zero, the appeal of Hodj 'n' Podj to many different types of non-computer gamers, the blending of adventure and RPG elements in Superhero League of Hoboken, the shattering of some computer game taboos with Leather Goddesses of Phobos... But overall, no one clear favorite.

**XYZZYnews:** What is your favorite Infocom game other than those you wrote?

**SEM:** Zork II was my favorite for a while, and then Starcross was my favorite for a while. The Witness my favorite of the mystery games. Suspended wasn't my favorite game, but it was probably the most interesting and daringly different game that Infocom ever did. But my hands-down all-time favorite Infocom game is Nord and Bert.

**XYZZYnews:** What is your favorite game of all time?

**SEM:** It's hard to name just one, but here are ten of my all-time favorites: Pac-Man, Shanghai, Tetris, SimCity, Civilization, The Fools Errand, Might and Magic, President Elect, MacRisk, The Incredible Machine. As you can see, its quite a diverse group.

**XYZZYnews:** What is your inside leg measurement?

**SEM:** I don't have an inside leg. Just two outside legs

**XYZZYnews:** So how was the game written? Are you entirely responsible for the plot?

**SEM:** I had two design assistants, Patricia Pizer and Tomas Bok, both confederates in interactive crime dating back to Infocom days. Also, Ron Cobb was at a few of the early design brainstorming sessions, so his involvement is more than just conceptual design.

**XYZZYnews:** Were you involved in the technical development of the game?

**SEM:** I helped to designed the interface, and to figure out what functionality BAGEL ought to have, and have answered (to date) 14, 583 ques-

tions from the programmers, but I haven't done any actual coding myself.

**XYZZYnews:** How long did it take to write *The Space Bar*?

**SEM:** Well, I first started thinking about the idea about 5 years ago, so material has been gathering in the back cobwebby corners of my brain since then. I started formally working on the design around May of 1995. The design was complete enough for engineering and graphics work to commence around mid-September of 1995. Writing of the dialogue continued through the fall, and the first audio recording session was in early December. Writing additional dialogue to be recorded, text for signs and plaques and computer screens and so forth, and other incidental design continues even through today.

**XYZZYnews:** *A Mind Forever Voyaging* was a profound vision of the future in terms of the political and social direction of western society in the coming centuries. It was a great success with IF fans and you are obviously very proud of it, so why have you never re-entered the genre with subsequent works?

**SEM:** Well, I continue to meet people now and then who think it was great, who think it was my best game, who think it was the best thing they've seen on a computer. On the other hand, at the time I got a lot of mail from people who were disappointed in the game: too quick, too easy, too unlike *Zork*, etc. And it didn't do that well sales-wise (about 35,000 which was pretty mediocre for an Infocom game at the time). I would love to do other "serious" "message" games, but it's not what publishers seem interested in at this time. *AMFV* was partly made possible by the tremendous success of *Hitchhiker's Guide*...so push *The Space Bar* a lot, so it'll do really well and I'll have the creative freedom to do more games like *AMFV*.

**XYZZYnews:** Just how formative an experience was packing nuts and bolts in your father's hardware business?

**SEM:** Clearly, the nuts had more of an impact than the bolts.

**XYZZYnews:** Are you still the "Bearded Oracle of Yonkers" or did you shave/move/lose your voice?

**SEM:** I am still bearded, I often give advice on topics ranging from lawn care to the proper use of balsamic vinegar, and hardly does a season go by where I do not find myself in Yonkers. Speaking of which, a joke: An Englishman goes to New York for a vacation. Upon returning home, he was asked how his vacation was. He replied, "Oh, I had a smashing time. But there's one thing that I'm still puzzled about. What are Yonkers?" ☒

# Announcing the XYZZY Awards

The movie industry has their Oscars, TV its Emmys, advertising its Cleos—all glorious excuses to take a break from creative endeavors and instead engage in some good old-fashioned competitiveness and back-biting. And, in the words of the immortal Cowardly Lion, what do they get that we ain't got? Nothing—at least, not anymore. Not with the inauguration of the first annual XYZZY Awards for outstanding achievement in the field of text-based interactive fiction.

The rules are as follows:

**ELIGIBILITY:** All IF games uploaded to ftp.gmd.de during the year 1996 are eligible for the 1996 Xyzzy. Short games, long games, even games with chicken pox -- all will be thrown together into the same bloodthirsty voting arena. A complete listing of all the eligible games (in alphabetical order) is given at the bottom of your ballot.

**VOTING:** Anyone is eligible to vote. You may not vote twice. Voting by dead people, fictional characters, and inanimate objects is strictly prohibited. Authors may not vote for their own games, nor may they threaten, cajole or otherwise intimidate their friends into voting for their games. While it is suggested that you play as many of the eligible games as possible before casting your ballot, we're not going to get ridiculous here.

**CATEGORIES:** There are eight XYZZY categories: Best Game, Best Writing, Best Story, Best Setting, Best Puzzles, Best NPCs, Best Individual Puzzle, and Best Individual NPC. In the first six categories, vote for the game you feel is tops in that respect; in the last two, vote for a particular puzzle and NPC within a game. Vote once in each category, then stop.

**DEADLINE:** All ballots must be returned to xyzzynews@aol.com or XYZZYNews, 160 W. 24th St., Suite 7C, New York, NY 10011, by February 1st, 1997. Ballots arriving after that date will be considered null and void. (Well, null, anyway.)

And now, on with the voting:

BEST GAME: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST PUZZLES: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST WRITING: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST NPCS: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST STORY: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST INDIVIDUAL PUZZLE: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST SETTING: \_\_\_\_\_

BEST INDIVIDUAL NPC: \_\_\_\_\_

## Eligible games:

A Night at the Computer Center  
Aayela  
Alien Abduction?  
BSE  
Delusions  
Don't Be Late!  
Fear  
Frobozz Magic Support  
Frozen  
Gumshoe  
Hero Inc., Vol. 1  
In The End  
Kissing the Buddha's Feet  
The Light: Shelby's Addendum  
Lists and Lists  
Looking For Godot  
Lost New York

Maiden of the Moonlight  
My First Stupid Game  
Of Forms Unknown  
Past Tense  
Pastoral Pitfalls  
Phlegm  
Piece of Mind  
Promoted!  
Punkirita Quest One  
Ralph  
Return to Karn  
Reverberations  
Rippled Flesh  
Silence of the Lambs  
Sir Ramic Hobbs and the Oriental  
Wok  
Small World

So Far  
SpiritWrak  
Stargazer  
Tapestry  
The Broken String  
The Curse of Eldor  
The House of the Stalker  
The Land Beyond the Picket Fence  
The Meteor, the Stone, and a Long  
Glass of Sherbet  
The Underoos That Ate New York  
The Wedding  
Time: All Things Come To An End  
Urban Cleanup  
Vindaloo  
Wearing the Claw

# The Windhall Chronicles: Path to Fortune

release 4

Parser: Inform

Author: C.E. Forman (ceforman@worldnet.att.net)  
and Jeff Cassidy (jcassidy@wpoff.monm.edu)

Availability: ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/games/

Cost: Shareware (\$10). Registering gives you a map  
and Invisiclude-style hints

Requires: Inform run-time interpreter

Response to the XYZZY command: "Such archaic  
magic is no longer practiced in this day and age."

I have always suspected that the IF-playing audience and the fantasy RPG audience overlapped heavily; after all, both are interactive forms of storytelling. Well, for all you D&D players and Tolkein fans out there, The Windhall Chronicles Volume 1: Path to Fortune, by C.E. Forman and Jeff Cassidy may be just for you. The plot is nothing revolutionary: you are Aerin, an apprentice blacksmith in the medieval/fantasy village of Windhall. The town is in a bind—taxes are due to Lord Osrich in a week and there's no way for the town to pay them. Someone comes up with the idea of finding an ancient dragon's lair and taking its treasure. Guess who gets nominated for the task?

Along the way to finding the dragon, you will explore a section of the richly defined world of the Realm of Rysch (in the Mendevell Empire), learning magic and sword skills, combating traditional fantasy foes, and learning of past history.

The NPCs are plentiful and well-defined, even though they are fantasy stereotypes. There's the mirthful elf, the dour dwarf blacksmith, the bearded wizard in a tower. Some of them are more defined than others. All are useful in some way. Although they stay in the same place, the characters all sleep at different times, giving a fairly good illusion of a town in motion.

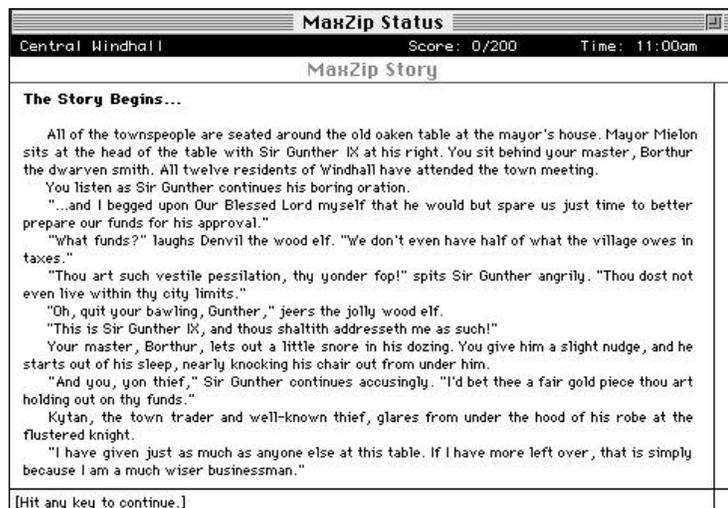
This game is difficult, usually in a good way. The puzzles are, by and large, challenging and logical. However, there are a few that just don't make sense to me, and I don't see how they could be solved without help. In particular, solving a Tower Of Hanoi type puzzle, entering the wizard's tower (which still makes no

sense), and finding a critical item are all game-stoppers. Another aspect of the game that starts out interesting but becomes more annoying is the fact that all of the NPCs have critical information, items, or skills needed for your quest. This means that every time you find a new topic, you need to visit all the NPCs and ask them about the new topic. Add this to their changing sleep schedules and this can quickly become a pain. My advice is to save several versions of the game when you are with different NPCs, then RESTORE back to them to ask new information.

One nice feature that the authors have included is the "Warning" mode. When the warning mode is on, the game will periodically jump in and warn you when it would be a good idea to "undo and save" before entering a room or when you put the game in an unwinnable state by wasting something or breaking something. At first, I was reluctant to use this feature, as it felt like cheating, but after the first notice that I (would have) put the game in an unwinnable state, I was glad to have it.

All in all, Path To Fortune is a well-defined, well-thought out story that makes you feel that this is a real little fantasy world populated with real people. The puzzles are indeed tough, but mostly fair. And the endgame message (the longest I've ever read in IF) sets the stage for the next segment of Aerin's adventures (more magic and more swordplay), showing that the authors have a vision for this series. If they can smooth out some of the more illogical puzzles and make the time-of-day elements less awkward, then future Windhall Chronicle adventures could become true fantasy IF classics. ☒

—Rob Daviau



Opening screen from The Windhall Chronicles: Path to Fortune

The companion disk for XYZZYnews #11 contains the following game files. It's a good deal for people who have slower modems—at 2400 bps, it'd take a heck of a long time to download the contents of the companion disk. It's also a good deal for people with limited or no access to FTP sites or online services as a source for new games. If you're reading an electronic version of this issue, you can obtain this games disk with a print copy of XYZZYnews #11 by enclosing \$3.50 for postage and handling with the coupon on the bottom of this page. If you play and enjoy these games, please pay the shareware fees as applicable.

**COSMOSERVE**—In honor of this issue's interview with Judith Pintar (see page 5), we've included her classic AGT game here. As R.J. Wright, a computer programmer who also fixes indoor plumbing to make ends meet, you have several problems you must solve—and quickly—in both your personal and online lives.

**PERDITION'S FLAMES**—Welcome to the after-life! As play begins in this freeware TADS games from Mike Roberts, you're on a boat that's pulling up to the gates of Hell. Somehow it all seems very... bureaucratic?

**DEEP SPACE DRIFTER**—In this classic TADS game by Mike Roberts and Steve McAdams, you are a lone space explorer adrift in your trusty spaceship. You've just discovered a terrible mis-

calculation has been made, leaving you nearly out of fuel and in the middle of nowhere. Now you'll have to send out a distress call and hope that somebody hears your signal. But, as you'll soon discover, getting rescued could become an adventure in itself. Freeware.

**DITCH DAY DRIFTER**—This is another classic TADS game by Mike Roberts. An undergraduate at Caltech, you discover that today is Ditch Day, the Caltech tradition in which seniors leave campus for the day and bar the doors to their rooms with all sorts of complex puzzles and devices called "stacks." Your job is to defeat the stack left by the senior who lives across the hall from you, in order to get into his room and claim whatever bribes might have been left behind. Freeware.

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