DOES 'BTZ' MEAN BETTER THAN ZORK?

MINDWHEEL: An Electronic Novel

More than just another new game, Mindwheel is the single most important adventure since Zork was released in 1979. Technically and artistically, it represents the "wave of the present" in interactive fiction and is significant because, for the first time, someone has established a beach-head on the all-text domain of those wizards at Cambridge-by-the-Sea.

Dubbed an "Electronic Novel™," the two-disk program is packaged with a 95-page hardcover book whose first few chapters introduce a story that you complete by playing the game. Mindwheel's story takes place in the not-so-distant future, when civilization is on the brink of self-destruction. Only the bizarre scientific project of Doctor Virgil can save the planet. He has found a method for sending people back through time, but not with the stereotypical H. G. Wells' time machine.

DEAD HEADS OF TIME

Instead, you will travel through the minds of four dead people on a journey to the dawn of civilization. Your goal is to find the Cave Master, who invented things like fire, cave paintings and other things that led to the founding of society, and bring back the Wheel of Wisdom. (He probably invented primal scream therapy, too, though this is not confirmed in the game or the book.) The Wheel played a role in the Cave Master's achievements and it "contains the secret of the planet's best values."

The telepathic journey is made possible by Virgil's discovery that all minds send thought-patterns echoing across the universe, which his computer-assisted equipment can detect and make contact with. While inside such a mind, you are really walking around inside that person's thoughts, dreams and nightmares, whose surrealistic landscapes are described with evocative prose and striking imagery. The four minds that you must pass through enroute to the Cave Master are those of an assassinated rock star, the Generalissimo, a poet and a "female Einstein" named Eva Fein.

MIND GAMES FOREVER

After telling Virg that you're ready to go, you find yourself onstage at a rock concert. It's the mind of Bobby Clemon, the rock star character who was obviously inspired by John Lennon. (At least Yoko's not in the game, screaming away at the top of her lungs.) Groupies, backup singers, bodyguards and screaming fans fill the concert hall that composes Clemon's mind.

From here you can enter the mind of the poet or the Generalissimo, for all four minds are interconnected. Of course, you can't just amble through the door. To reach the Generalissimo's macabre mind, you must solve a cryptic riddle engraved on the cage that imprisons a strange winged woman who offers to help you in your quest. There is another way to get past *this* barred door,

Adventure + Hotline

Wishing that Infocom would hurry up with their next game? Well, <u>Wishbringer</u> won't be out until June. Magic is involved, though the game isn't a sequel to the <u>Enchanter</u>/<u>Sorcerer</u> series. It's the story of a mailman caught up in a strange series of events that are more like a nightmare than a dream sequence. The player gets seven wishes, which serve as hints. If the wishes are used, the game will be an Introductory level challenge. If you don't make any wishes, it's more of a Novice or Intermediate level game. <u>Wishbringer</u> will be Infocom's first adventure by Brian Moriarty, who has been programming at Infocom for some time now.

Penguin Software's President Mark Pelczarski sounds excited about doing a graphic version of Mike Berlyn's first adventure, <u>Oo-topos</u>. Though the original story line will be followed, he says the new version will features numerous innovations, variations in the scenarios, and improvements in the program, which has always been a favorite around the QB office. Like most Penguin games, it will be released for the Apple first, the C-64 and maybe others, and should be available in June. Pelczarski also mentioned that Penguin is completing an adventure based on the "Frank and Ernest" comic strip (July) and that <u>Crimson Crown: Transylvania II</u> may be ready as soon as June. Their latest is <u>Sword of Kadash</u>, an action-oriented game in a fantasy setting, which we'll review In April. The next adventure they'll have out is <u>RingQuest</u>, a sequel to <u>The Quest</u>. It features the return of Lisa (the sorceress, not the computer).

Role-playing aficionados can look forward to a multiple-character scenario called <u>Phantasie</u>, the next title from Strategic Simulations. Set in medieval time, the story puts you in charge of one to six magician or warrior types who must seek out the Nine Rings. You'll need them to nail the Black Lord. A split-screen technique is employed, with the map on one side and animated battles scenes on the other.

MINDWHEEL

however, if riddles aren't your specialty.

In the Poet's mind, a demon named Spaw defies you to fill in six missing words in a poem called the "Fear Sonnet." The poem is displayed onscreen when you read it, and is filled in by saying something like "write word in blank 4." Get all six words and you'll gain entry to the Love Room, which is necessary in order to complete the game. I've never been good at this kind of puzzle and was surprised to solve it in a matter of hours. If you get stuck, find a rhyming dictionary and remember there are two different rhyme patterns for sonnets.

Death is no stranger to these minds, and you usually wind up back in Doctor Virgil's lab after getting killed. Sometimes you'll return to the Poet's mind instead, where Spaw and a host of other demons await. There's no score in terms of points, but you can type "PR" for a progress report. This informs you of your accomplishments and their significance to the long-range goal.

ON THE EVA DESTRUCTION

It won't take long to get through the first three minds, which don't require mapping, but the going gets tough when you reach the steel-trap mind of Eva Fein. This place is like a huge chess board, and there's an unmistakable Alice in Wonderland feel to the place. The chess board isn't bare, for there are rivers, trees, and robots to deal with.

The main problem involves reaching the far side of the board, where the Cave Master will be found. The obstacles are characters like the thug and Spaw. You can catch them by moving onto the same square, in which case the victim has to give you a useful object or clue. But if they catch you, you'll lose part of your inventory. Speaking of inventory, you can carry an unlimited number of objects until this phase and enter a certain room. To compound your problems, the game cannot be saved in progress while you are in Eva Fein's mind.

A REVOLUTIONARY PARSER

Many problems revolved around interacting with the other characters, which is a key element of true interactive fiction. This means that, in addition to manipulating the usual objects and solving an occasional riddle, you must figure out what they want from you and how to get what you want from them. When conversing with them, you can ask all sorts of things never possible in any previous adventure game: Spaw, "What is east of here?" or Thug, "What do you have?" Multiple commands are allowed, even when talking to a character: "Bodyguard, get the brooch then come here." In short, the parser outparses even Infocom's, and the 1,200 word vocabulary enhances communication with the program.

If you use a word that isn't in the vocabulary, the program responds that "the word 'pinhead' isn't included in Doctor Virgil's technology" or "that's a nice word, but it won't help you with this poem." As good as the parser may be, it remains unperfected. I said "feed the horse" and it responded "what do you want to give the horse to?" Once when I caught the Birdchild in the chess game and tried to speak to him, the program said he wasn't close enough to hear me. In another situation, I said "climb ladder" and was told "you are already near the ladder." Even so, the parser is fast, efficient and unquestionably state of the art.

A couple of other specs that will also apply to future "Electronic Novels" are worth noting. Mindwheel delivers hard copy of the text if you've got a printer, and its save and load game feature is fast. (Saved games are numbered,

SPIDER-MAN

The second title in the QuestProbe series, Spider-man outperforms The Hulk in all respects. It incorporates more characters from the comic books and has a smarter parser. There are superb hi-res color graphics that utilize some spot animation. When Spidey exerts his "spider-strength" to open a door, for example, he is portrayed in a rapid series of varied poses that are more effectively executed than similar scenes in Hulk. Close-up illustrations of some objects are also available. When the text informs you that, "I see Mysterio (or someone else) run by!" a full-screen picture of the individual appears. There's a sense of dimension and depth to the artwork, which is the best part of the game. No sound effects, though.

MEET THE CAST

The story opens inside a rundown office building from which all the furniture has been removed. You can direct Spider-man to use the elevator to reach the different floors of the building. He can also climb out a window and cling to the sides of the structure. Characters from the comic book show up in some of the rooms after Spider-man enters. In one of the first encounters, Lizard-man sneers: "You'll never get MY gem!" and reveals the goal of the game. Just as in Hulk, you're out to round up more gems. (Will *every* game in the Questprobe series repeat this theme?) Other characters include Mysterio, Doctor Octopus, Electro, Hydro-man, Sand-man, Lizard-man, Ringmaster, the Chief Examiner and Madame Web. Most of them possess gems like Lizard-man's, and the bulk of the problems revolve around figuring out how to relieve them of these valuables. Hydro-man's gem lies at the bottom of an aquarium. You can't break the tank to get it, however, because the program reminds you that "Spider-man is no vandal." Don't count on killing anyone, either: "Spider-man is no killer."

MADAME, MEET ADAMS

Madame Web is your main ally. If you ask her to "scan" something, she'll tell you a little about that person or object's future. "Scan lizardman" elicits a cryptic response from Madame Web: "$CaCO_3 + HCl - 7 > CaCl_2 +$". (Is this a chemical equation or what?) For Hydro-man, she simply says "Solid." These constitute clues that steer you in the right direction when trying to wrest the gems from each individual. In some cases, she may just say "That future is hidden." The puzzles aren't really logical (unless you graduated from the Scott Adams School of Adventure Logic), but are clever and amusing in their own way. You score points by having Spider-man leave the gems with her. A varying number of points is awarded for each gem, with a maximum of 100 points.

On the top floor, you'll find a chemical lab with no chemicals. Elsewhere you'll discover other mysteries, like a room full of bizarre equipment guarded by the Ringmaster. Death is always near, but not final. When the "matter energy egg" explodes and kills Spider-man, for instance, he is reincarnated on a staircase. A note from the Chief Examiner (the character who appears in all the Questprobe games and oversees the action) warns you to "Be more careful!" Then it's down the staircase to start over from the beginning.

S.A.G.A. PLUS

This game introduces S.A.G.A. Plus, the new parser from Adventure International. It's a definite improvement over the one used in their previous games. Multiple commands

are now permitted, which greatly speeds up the game once you're familiar with the territory and know what you want to do. You can say "n then s then look." But you still can't use complex commands like "put exotic powder in tank." It's a step in the right direction (north, then east, then south) for the Scott Adams' adventures.

Adventure International's deplorable command line prompt ("What shall I do now?") has finally been ditched. Now it says: "Spider-man, I want you to" and awaits your input. This underscores the Adams' perspective on adventuring. Rather than placing you in the story, he has you direct the actions of a character as though you're pulling strings on a puppet who reports back on what he sees and does. If you like this approach, or just happen to be a Spider-man fan, this is an above-average game that will have the Hulk turning green with envy. **SA**

Computer: COMMODORE 64 & PLUS-4
Planned Conversions: APPLE, ATARI
Skill Level: Intermediate
Saves: 26
Price: $29.95
Manufacturer: Commodore/Adventure Intl.

FREE ADVENTURE!

Was it too cold to get to the mailbox and enter January's contest, or what? Since no one entered, a name was selected at random and Lucien Filiatrault won a copy of Serpent's Star.
To enter this month's contest, just send in the names of your three favorite adventures and a winner will be chosen the same way.
Deadline is April 15, 1985
Void where prohibited by law

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SWAP SHOP

Want to trade original copies (Apple) of Zork I, Zork II, and Starcross. Complete with documentation, but no boxes. Can also trade Infocom maps and clue hint books for these games. Looking for: Planetfall, Sorcerer, Hitchhiker's Guide, or Coveted Mirror. Write before sending game: Philip R. Christensen, Nairobi (ID), Department of State, Washington, DC 20520.

Xyphus (Apple) for sale. $20. Write first: Gayle Ann Stanford, 3281 Foxgate Drive, Memphis, TN 38115.

Will trade Sorcerer for complete copy of either Starcross, Suspect, Robots of Dawn, Amazon, or Fahrenheit 451. (Apple only.) Mark Fujimoto, 1646 Komo Mai Dr., Pearl City, HI 96782.

I have the following games for sale: Mask of the Sun, Serpent's Star, Oo-topos, Transylvania, Wizard & the Princess, Xyphus, Seven Cities of Gold, Escape from Rungistan, Castle of Darkness, Time Zone, and others. All are for Apple. Scottie Freeman, Knott Route, Big Springs, TX 79720.

I'm looking for Infocom games for CP/M 8" disk. Will buy or trade. David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.

GEMSTONE WARRIOR

Questron was a big hit for Strategic Simulations, but the follow-up is not a sequel. Instead, it is an original game from Peter Lount and Trouba Gossen of Paradigm Creators. They are apparently aiming to lure the legions of joystick jockies into the fantasy role-playing camp, for Gemstone bolsters the typical "swords and sorcery" arsenal with enough fast-firing shoot-em-up action to satisfy the most jaded Robotron addict.

Gemstone even plays a lot like Robotron. Scores of skeletons, shamblers, and demons attack from all directions, and your character must blast them out of existence before they finish him off. The basis for all this mayhem is a quest for the five pieces of a magic gemstone, which the demons have stolen and stashed in remote parts of the caves beneath an extinct volcano. (Contrary to rumors, Jack Nicholson will not star in a film adaptation called *Five Magic Pieces* .) These must be returned to the temple that is shown in a hi-res picture in the opening scene.
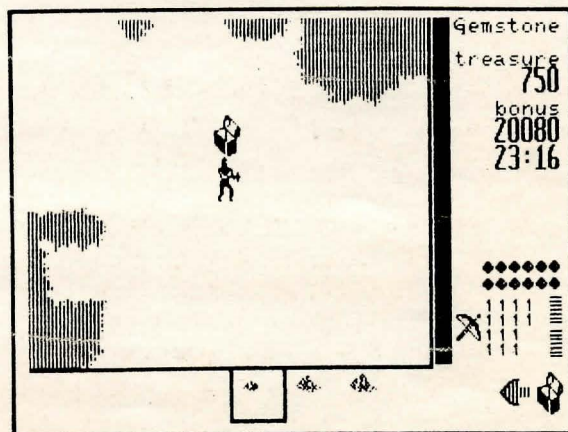
INTO THE CAVES

Your character appears as an animated figure about an inch high on the screen, who automatically dashes into a spinning gateway that teleports him from the temple into the first cave. With keyboard, joystick or a combination of the two, you direct him to the nearest grate or door. After some quick disk access, another cave or tunnel fills the screen. You get an aerial view, but your warrior and the monsters are seen from the side. You can hear footsteps tapping as your warrior walks or runs through the caves, and distinct sound effects for each type of creature

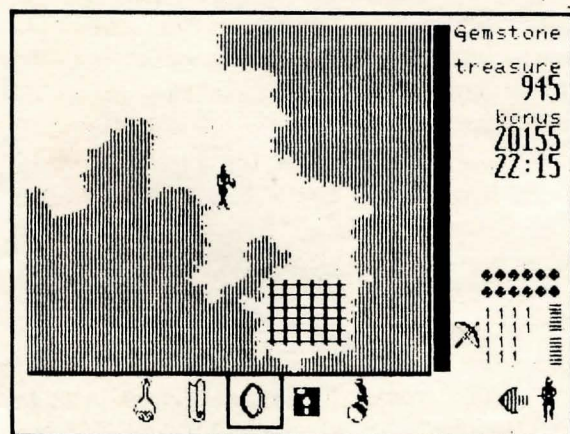signal their approach before they enter the room.

When the fiends attack, you can fire arrows from the crossbow or hurl fireballs at them. Though the emphasis in on action, various magic spells and potions are also useful and often vital in these encounters. These are represented by a row of icons at the bottom of the screen, your inventory. To select an item, you press a key and move the "inventory box" in either direction along the row, then punch another key to cast that spell or use that object. (Your initial inventory varies randomly in each new game.) It may take awhile before you recognize each icon, and the pause feature gives you time to relax and consult the manual. The quest can also be saved on the disk at any time during the game.

IN FOR THE KILL

Combat is fast and furious as the animated creatures move in for the kill. Some infect you with contagious diseases that don't-take effect immediately, while others will kill you on the spot. When firing, you can aim in any of eight directions. If you wipe out the enemy, you may search the body and add any spells or treasure to your inventory. Treasure chests and coffins hold similar booty. You also have the option of moving things from your

inventory into chests or other containers in the maze. Mapping is a must. The caves and tunnels are distinctively shaped and colored, which simplifies the process.   The pause

feature ensures that bands of roving demons don't attack while you're fumbling with pen and paper. Logical problem-solving is not important here, but determining the effects of the different spells, especially those marked "unknown" in the manual, is critical. The 12-page   manual   is   remarkably comprehensible, considering that SSI's war games have always been confusing.

KEEPING SCORE

Throughout a session, the right side of the screen shows the number of fireballs and arrows you have left, a vertical Life bar representing hit points, value of bonus, and time remaining for achieving bonus goal. (The bonus points are added to the treasure value, your overall score, if you collect enough treasure to match the bonus value in time.)   This enables several players to compete for high scores, and contributes to the arcade atmosphere of the game.   There's even a "vanity board" that displays the top five high scores, which are automatically saved to disk. You can erase the last two if

desired.   The board also shows the score of the last player (in the current session) and the highest score of the day.

Another feature borrowed from the arcades and home computer shoot-em-ups is the option of selecting one of three difficulty levels: beginner, normal, or kamikaze. After gaining proficiency at moving and firing with the joystick, Apple gamers can select the "expert joystick" option and use the stick to conduct searches and switch weapons as well. C-64 demon-slayers don't have this feature, but can execute all these actions except switching weapons.

NO PUB-CRAWLING ALLOWED

There's a balanced assortment of creatures and magic spells, always important in fantasy role-playing, but veteran orc-slayers who want a game with substance and depth may find this one a little heavy on the action side. Your character doesn't have any attributes like strength or charisma to develop, as aspect of role-playing that many people enjoy. This is virtually a non-stop chase scene in which there's no time to stop for a mug of ale in the local pub or converse with the inhabitants of the maze. The other side of that gold coin is that you can have a lot of fun by just jumping in and killing things without being concerned about the long-range goal. Even after fulfilling the quest, you can return and massacre to your heart's content, so Gemstone Warrior definitely has more replay value than most RPGs.   **SL**

Computer: APPLE, COMMODORE 64
Planned Conversions: Atari
Skill Level: Introductory/Novice
Saves: 1 (on game disk)
Price: $34.95
Manufacturer: Strategic Simulations

KUKULKAN

Based on the history and culture of the Aztec Indians, this is one of the few pieces of educational software I've seen that is worth the time it takes to boot. The story opens as you, an Aztec scribe, are called before the ruler, Montezuma. He tells of an ongoing plague of bad omens: earthquakes, floods, a "smoking star" and his sister's visions of bearded white men slaying their armies and burning the Aztec cities. He says floating houses have been seen in the Gulf of Mexico and thinks this portends the return of Quetzalcoatl, an ancient god.

Montezuma instructs you to "search out the books of picture writing," for the fruits of your search may determine fate of "the one world". The picture book constitutes a puzzle for the player to solve once it is located. All this is revealed with screenloads of text. You'll encounter Montezuma and other characters, but don't get to carry out significant conversations with them.

After leaving Montezuma to his paranoia, you find yourself on a causeway outside the royal palace in Tenochtitlan, where Mexico City is now situated. From here you may check out the nearby the Marketplace, climb a pyramid or try to make sense out of the huge Sun Stone, the Aztec calendar. You can canoe across Lake Texcoco to reach Teotihuacan, site of the Pyramid of the Sun, and other Aztec cities. In the Yucatan, you might visit Chichen Itza and the mighty temple of Kukulkan. No Club Med, but a nice getaway.

Most of the problems are object-oriented. Takeable objects are shown but not always named in the text lines. Visible exits are not named, either. A few hints appear to be hidden in documentation, and you are rewarded by applying knowledge of the Aztecs

to the situations. A thorough examination of the manual, which offers some fascinating background on the daily life and religion of the Aztecs, will save you lots of trial and error when trying to figure out what to do with weird things like the cocoa beans and the butterfly, for example. There are no points or score involved. It's divided into two parts and will require lots of mapping. If you get killed, which happens frequently in a society that practices human sacrifice, you will dispatched to Miotlan, land of the dead and the program automatically reboots.

Bright, lively colors and striking designs and patterns make the illustrations a knock-out. They're drawn in the style of authentic Aztec murals and picture-writing and convincingly evoke the primitive atmosphere of that long-dead civilization. The game's author, Michael D. Giltzow, says he tried to use historically accurate colors as often as possible, but in some cases chose colors that looked better with computer graphics. (Apparently the Aztecs didn't have a digitizer or a copy of Graphics Magician around when decorating their pyramids.) They look dramatically better than the graphics in American Eagle's previous game, Elysian Fields. There is no spot animation and only rudimentary sound effects.

SPEAKING IN TONGUES

The two-word parser could probably get a job at the United Nations -- it is bi-lingual. After you examine a canoe and are told that the Aztecs called it an acali, you may type in the Aztec word instead of the English. This reinforces both the learning aspect of the game and the experience of participating in the day to day life of an Aztec scribe. But the parser will only respond "perdon?" if your command or word is not understood, and multiple commands are not permitted. To examine or search a room, you must say

things like "look right" or "look left." A new picture appears if anything turns up.

This and several other quirks point to less than professional programming techniques. If you "go top" of the pyramid and then move north, you'll wind up in the same place as if you'd moved north from your original spot on the ground. Realistically, you should have to "go bottom" first. The most glaring discrepancy, oversight, or whatever you want to call it is the lack of an inventory function. Admittedly, you don't have to carry around as many items as in most games, but it's annoying to have to actually remember or write down a list of things.

Kukulkan's educational value lies in its "historical notes." In certain locations, you can type "h" and view a screenful of historical information on the building or object. The current illustration vanishes and a wing-flapping duck flies across the screen, spewing lines of words and sentences behind him all the way to the bottom. At the Skull Rack, for instance, such a note reveals that two of Cortés' men counted 136,000 skulls there -- and that the Aztecs deemed it an honor to have their heads wind up on the tzompantli. This doesn't represent any breakthroughs in programming, but it works. It would be nice if you could get more specific answers by asking about specific object.

In some cases, the historical note is just a message referring you to a lengthy passage in the 16-page manual, which also contains a two-page glossary of Aztec terminology and a bibliography of 17 books on the Aztec civilization and its conquest by Cortés. A lot of the information came from The Discovery and Conquest of Mexico, written by one of the people who accompanied Cortés during the campaign. Giltzow, says he spent over a year documenting the game to make it as historically accurate as possible, and the manual points out the few places where the game diverges from reality.

If you have the slightest interest in the Aztecs, Kukulkan is a good bet. The outstanding graphics, the most important element in a graphic game, may be enough for those with only a passing interest in the subject. Anyone studying this period Baseof history could profit from the insights obtained by wandering among the pyramids first-hand, and the game presents a lot of information in a manner that makes it more likely to be retained than if read in one of those dull history books. **SA**

Computer: APPLE
Planned Conversions: COMMODORE 64
Skill Level: Advanced
Saves: unlimited
Price: $39.95
Manufacturer: American Eagle

HOTLINE

The game mixes puzzle-solving, strategy and action, but strategy is supposed to be the main component. It's set for March (Apple and C-64).

MacULTIMA

The Macintosh conversion of Ultima II: Revenge of the Enchantress should ready soon, and Sierra Software provided this preliminary screen shot of the game. Lord British, whose Origin Systems just relocated to New Hampshire from

Massachusetts, is working away on on Mac version of Ultima II. With MacWizardy due soon, Mac gamers will soon be able to choose from a variety of role-playing scenarios.

MIMICS ANONYMOUS

Apple owners who haven't explored the Eamon series of parser-based, all-text role-playing games might want to write to AdventureDisk, POB 216, Mercer Island, WA 98040 for a catalog. These public domain games aren't professional quality, but some are fun and the price is right -- $5.00 for the required master disk and $2.50 for each game. Eighty-one games are available. We'll look at the AdventureDisk next month, too. There's also a new replacement for Eamon's Main Hall. Super Eamon introduces graphics, some animation and too many new options to cover here, so it will be reviewed in-depth in April.

NEW MACINTOSH ADVENTURE

Pryority Software has announced a new adventure called Gateway. Like their previous release, Forbidden Quest, it will include on-line help as well as a set of color Artext™ prints containing clues. Unlike the last game, Gateway will supplement the text with hi-res graphics. The story, from science fiction writer Michael A. Banks, is a "science fantasy tale" about eradicating a "malevolent evil!" that resides in a parallel universe before it migrates to Earth. Gateway should be out in March for the Mac, with Apple, PC and jr versions two months later.

MORE ELECTRONIC NOVELS

Synapse plans two new all-adventures for the spring. Essex is a science fiction story about a one-man mission on-board the Starship Essex, which careens overhead in a scene in Synapse's initial release, Mindwheel. IBM, Apple, C-64, Atari and Mac versions are lined up. They've got three other games for later in the year: Brimstone, Breakers, and Ronin. The latter sounds like the most original story, with a Samurai setting in 12th Century Japan.

Aiiiee!-KEOWWWWW!!

Speaking of martial arts, Dan'l Leviton, co-author of Earthly Delights, wrote in to say that, contrary to our December review, it is possible to defeat the karate-trained burglar in the game. Doing so opens up possibilities that are otherwise unavailable, he says. So don't let that guy push you around -- and don't go to Paris too soon.

HINT HYSTERIA

Yes, that's what it's called in the latest Penguin Software catalog. To eradicate this potentially malevolent evil from the face of the earth and save civilization as we know it, Penguin now offers free hint books (for their adventures only) to anyone sending an SASE to Hint Department, Penguin Software, POB 311, Geneva, IL 60134.

MINDWHEEL

not named.)   Apple and IBM versions support one or two disk drives and will display text in 40 or 80 columns. Though the game is stored on both sides of two disks, there isn't a lot of annoying disk-swapping to do. That's because each "mind" occupies its own side of a disk.

BUT IS IT ART?

The text displays literary qualities that are rare for an adventure game, another aspect that qualifies it as true interactive fiction. While a number of adventures have now been written by established novelists, Mindwheel is the first to be written by a poet. It might even be called "interactive poetry," for Pinsky conveys his fantasy worlds with evocative imagery as well as passages of descriptive prose. The demon wearing "lawyerskin boots," for example, and the sombre atmosphere of the Generalissimo's nightmarish castle, are particularly memorable visions, not to mention Spaw "magically waving the shinbone of a bureaucrat." (Pinsky's poetry has won prizes from the Guggenheim Foundation and the National Endowment for the Arts, and he is Poetry Editor of *New Republic* Magazine.)

True interactive fiction must also meet another requirement, that the story unfold in a life-life, realistic world in which things are happening all around you regardless of your actions. If you say "wait" in the opening minutes of Witness, for example, thunder rolls and rain begins falling. Hang around the Shanty in Cutthroats long enough and Johnny Red will pull up a chair and strike up a conversation.

This characteristic is manifested in a unique manner in Mindwheel, which introduces what would be called "real-time action" in a role-playing game.   The difference is that

things are continually happening in Mindwheel even if you *don't* type "wait." You might be analyzing Spaw's response to your latest effort at solving the Fear Sonnet, when suddenly the broccoli-colored frog in your pocket spits out a funny anecdote about his uncle Norm. A demon might decide to gobble down a fat puppy, or the Birdchild may pounce on your head. (With the command "time faster" or "slower," you can adjust the rate at which things happen.) This feature of the game keeps you alert and enlivens the story in a way never before seen, and the technique will probably be applied in many other ways in future adventures from Synapse.

BETTER THAN ZORK?

Mindwheel was programmed by Steve Hale, who wrote Fort Apocalypse, and William Mataga, author of Shamus. (Both are shoot-em-ups.)   Before programming the game, however, they led the project that produced the language-parser-development system called BTZ, a programming environment that will be used for other adventure games from Synapse. No one there will officially confirm a rumor that the letters BTZ stand for "Better Than Zork," but no one denied it, either.

Regardless of what BTZ means, Synapse obviously means business when it comes to adventure games. For years they produced some of the best action and shoot-em-up games, and it looks like their adventures will be even better. The first in the line, Mindwheel is the latest stage in the evolution of adventure games into a new art form, the literature of the Computer Age.   **SA**

♀ WAITING FOR DUFFY

Duffy's out slam dancing, but if you're hopelessly stuck and need help, send in a brief description of the situation and we'll run it in the next issue. (And please let us know when you want the ad deleted.)

In <u>Hitchhiker</u>, I'd really like to know how to get the black particle (common sense) in the grey maze. Anybody out there know how? P.S. I can help people on <u>Sorcerer</u>, <u>Planetfall</u>, <u>Witness</u> and some non-Infocom games. Mark Fujimoto, 1646 Komo Mai Dr., Pearl City, HI 96782. Mark Fukimoto, 1646 Komo Mai Dr., Pearl City, HI 96782.

I'm a novice adventurer and need all the help I can get with <u>Zork I</u>. C. Raudonis, 45 Pelham Rd., Hudson, NH 03051.

I can help anyone with *Zork I* -- free! David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.

Zapped by <u>Xyphus</u>: Does anyone know best combination of characters, if there are more than one Xiphoid in the first scenario, and how to kill the Werefalcons to the south? Duane Zumwalt, 7216 Wakefield Ct., Highland, CA 92346.

I will give $5 to the first person who tells me how to finish the second scenario of <u>Wizardry</u>. I already have the armor and sword. Oliver Pike, 1150 Johnson Dr., Naperville, IL 60540.

Need a clue on how to drain the pool in <u>Sands of Egypt</u>. Don L. Zeiders, R. D. 2, Box 169-B, Millerstown, PA 17062.

FREE GAMES!

Every issue of <u>QuestBusters</u>™ features a contest in which you have a chance to win a new adventure game. (Grues, gruds and their relatives are prohibited from entering any QB contests.)

FREE ADS!

The Swap Shop section is the perfect place to trade or sell your old adventures. Subscribers can simply send in their ads and we run them free. And if you're **stuck, stuck, stuck**, briefly describe the problem and send it to **Waiting for Duffy.**

NEXT ISSUE:

The Sword of Kadash looks and plays like SSI's **Gemstone Warrior**. But it is unique in severals ways, which we'll detail in an in-depth review. **Adventure Master**, the latest "write your own adventure program," and will also be covered. Also on the agenda are: the first Windham Classics from Spinnaker, **Swiss Family Robinson** and **Below the Root; Super Eamon**; and **AdventureDisk**. And if they're out in time, you can count on seeing the first reviews of **Phantasie, Essex, Wizardry IV, Gateway** and Origin's **Moebius**.