THE ADVENTURER'S NOTEBOOK
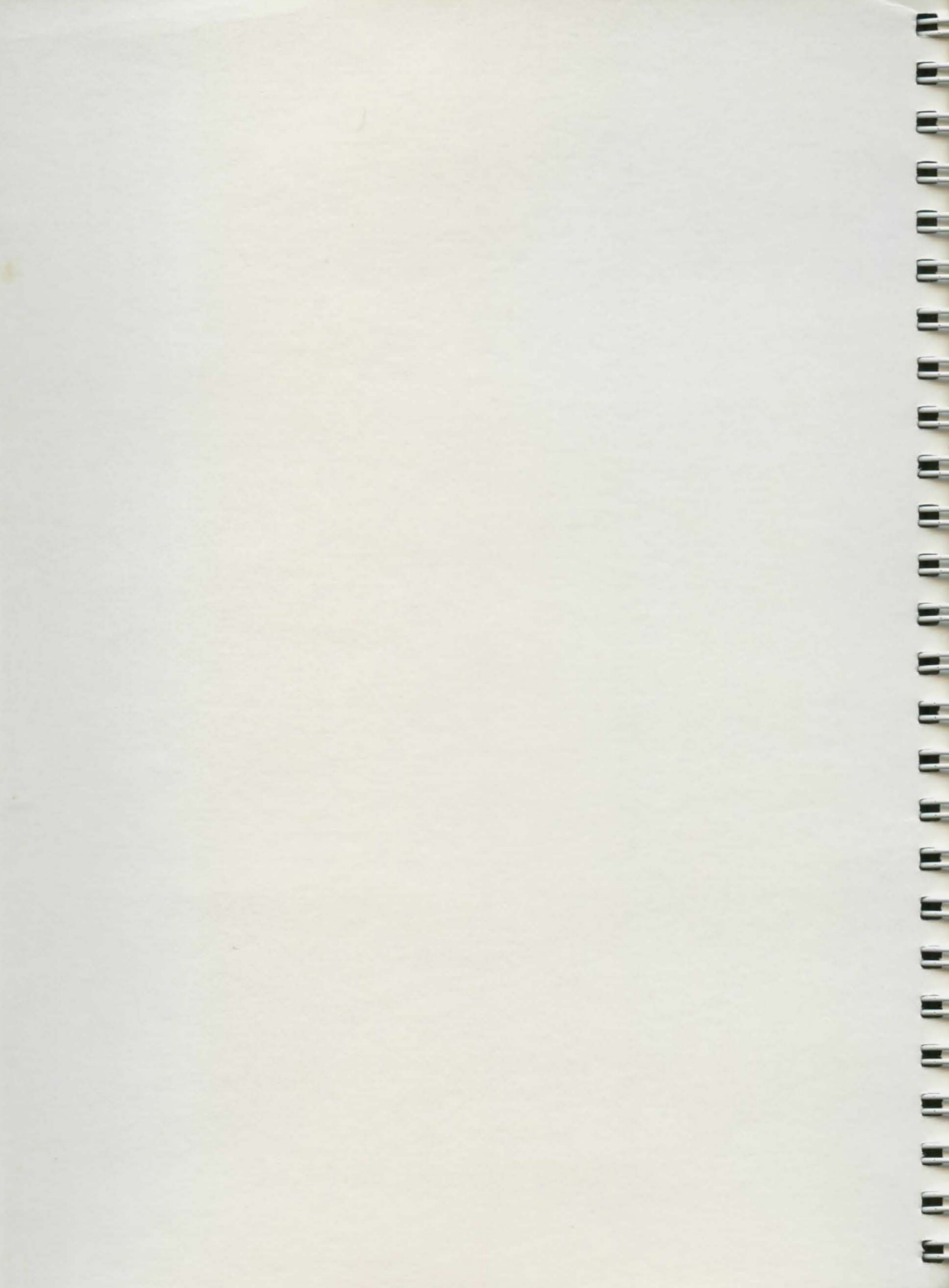
MIKE GERRARD

THE ADVENTURER'S NOTEBOOK

ADVENTURER'S NOTEBOOK

Mike Gerrard

Duckworth

THE ADVENTURER'S NOTEBOOK

Mike Gerrard

Contents

To my nan, with love

Introduction

I was sitting quietly at home one evening when a sudden urge to do battle with the Norse Gods came over me. Regular adventure players will know the feeling. As I waited for *Valhalla* to LOAD I searched for the right map from among the jumble of notes and booklets that I keep for the million and one adventures that I'm failing to solve at any particular moment. Perhaps I ought to get a folder for them all, I thought, so that at least they're in a file rather than just a pile. Then I wondered why no one had ever published a binder of some kind aimed specifically at adventure players, maybe even with blank maps all ready to be used, alongside which there would be room for notes and warnings, instead of littering up scribbled and sellotaped pages with asterisks and arrows that you don't understand when you come back to the adventure a few days later. The more I thought about it, and the more I asked round among adventure-playing friends, the better the idea seemed to be. And so, on the basis that if you want a good job doing you should do it yourself, I tried to design the kind of arrangement that would work best for me, and this is it: *The Adventurer's Notebook*.

As there is a limit to the number of spaces for locations that can be squeezed on to a single page, it was obviously necessary to find some way of coping with the 100 to 200 locations that go to make up today's average adventure. Looking at a road map provided the answer, and so if you are moving east-west, as it were, the pages have been designed to be folded over to enable you to continue your route uninterrupted. Ideally this would happen at the top and bottom of each page too, but as this would have meant inventing a book that was publishing's equivalent of the Rubik Cube, we have used the road map approach again, providing extra pages at the back of the book which can be moved on to and page referenced as you go off the top and bottom of the main map. We have tried to include enough pages to enable the adventurer to cope with the majority of current adventures, though if you plan to play Level 9's *Snowball* with a reputed 7,000 rooms then I'm afraid you're on your own. A roll of wallpaper might come in useful for that one.

No interconnecting lines have been put between the locations as it would be impossible to design a book that could cater for every possible option. Although in theory some adventures will have anything up to ten possible exits from any one location (N, S, E, W, NE, NW, SE, SW, UP and DOWN), in practice there are seldom more than about four or five movements available from one place, with the vast majority of adventures using just the four main compass points plus the regular UPs and DOWNs of the adventurer's life. Catering for the possibility of ten exits from every location would have been a waste of space and would have reduced the number of maps we could have included.

The way I suggest using the maps is to start your first location in the middle of the second or third page, allowing yourself plenty of room to spread out in every direction, though we all know about the unwritten law of adventure mapping, which is that no matter where you start your map it's always in the wrong place. If your first location only has an exit to the north, and you therefore place it near the foot of your blank page, you invariably find that after going one step north you make one move east or west, followed by seven moves south taking you off the bottom of the page. You start a new map near the top of the page, whereupon your route makes a sudden detour and your next eighteen locations are all to the north. I'm sure this is all part of the additional sadistic delight that programmers revel in when writing adventures.

The boxes for each location have room for two or three simple words of description as reminders, and I suggest also putting a location number in sequence for each place that you visit. As adventure programs are written by allocating a number to each location, it simplifies things for the player if you too organise your own numbering system. For any location where you have a problem or two to solve, where you encounter creatures good or evil, or where objects are lying around, make a note of these against the location number in the space provided in the margins, which can also be used for making a note of where you leave objects if you find you have too many to carry and are not sure what to take. If you are numbering your locations in sequence then obviously your notes in the margin will be appearing in sequence too, making them easy to refer to when needed.

You should make all these notes in pencil to allow for slight alterations over several playings of an adventure, and also to allow for adventures where objects are randomly scattered at the start of each new game, or where nasty creatures make their movements according to the route you choose to take. Next to the location numbers in the margins is also the place to make a note of the various magic combinations of words that are needed to get you through doors, over chasms, past sweet-toothed bears or generally out of trouble. If an adventure doesn't have a SAVE feature,

and you must set out from the beginning each time you play, you don't want to waste time trying to remember whether you LEAP WALL, JUMP WALL, BOUND WALL, HIT WALL, CLIMB WALL, THROW ROPE, WAIT or PRAY to get you past the obstacle – and it's surprising how you can forget that correct combination of words if you haven't played an adventure for a week or more.

The section on hints for playing adventures also explains why it's important to make a note of the various verbs and nouns that the program recognises, and we have left space in the margins for that as well. If you discover that the program recognises the word ROPE, it's no good simply making a mental note that there must be a rope hidden somewhere in the maze of passages if you're not able to come back to the adventure for several days. Mental notes have a habit of disappearing, like treasure in the colossal caves of the original Adventure game, leaving you with the feeling that there is something you ought to remember but you can't recall what it is.

If you're not familiar with that original Adventure then this book contains an outline of the history of adventure games, explaining how they developed, and also has sections on hints and tips, and recommended adventures for different home micros. We begin with an explanation of what an adventure game is, for those who aren't familiar with them.

We hope that *The Adventurer's Notebook* will therefore be useful in different ways to different people. It does help to be organised if you're planning on spending a few hours doing battle with those Norse Gods.

What is an Adventure Game?

New readers start here

The more you become engrossed in adventure games, and the more you get used to their conventions and problems, the easier it is to forget that there are many people who haven't a clue as to what they're about, and to whom they seem rather more daunting than the kind of game where all you need to know is that the only good alien is a zapped alien. There seems to be some kind of mistaken impression that you need to be a member of MENSA before you can even read the instructions for an adventure, so for those people who confess to a fear of adventure games, just what are they all about, and how do they work?

If you jump right in and try to explain all the possibilities at once then the world of adventures does seem rather confusing, with talk of Hobbits and Orcs, text and tasks, graphics, mythical worlds, underground caverns, maps, prompts, Pi-men and even Denis Thatcher. Where do they all fit in? It can be difficult enough coping with the jargon of computers, let alone a whole new sub-language that means lots to the adventure buff but nothing to the beginner.

In fact *Pimania* is a good game to start with, because although it's very different from most adventures it does have many typical features, and most people can equate trying to solve the riddles that this game presents with the well-known book *Masquerade*, both having their real-life prize to tempt players along. Just as in *Masquerade* readers were trying to discover the secret burial place of the Golden Hare, so in *Pimania* the game contains clues as to where and when the prize, the Golden Sundial of Pi, valued at £6,000, will be handed over. Even without that temptation the game is great fun to play, incorporating as it does several sequences of cartoon graphics, and it's a painless introduction which would get new adventure players used to the idea of collecting objects (and trying to hold on to them!), moving around from location to location, seeing how the locations are fitted together as in a map, and answering questions and dealing with problems at various stages before being able to proceed in a particular direction.

10

One feature which some people find difficult to understand is the way in which you, the player, are taking part in the adventure and responding to what you see on the screen. The computer keyboard is the connection between you and the text or graphics on the screen, but instead of using the joystick or cursor keys to move around as you would in an arcade game, you must type in your commands, such as GO EAST or GO WEST. Most adventures present you with a simple description in words of the location you are in (though now many will provide you with a picture as well), and most also use the various compass directions to enable you to move from place to place.

Let's invent the opening of a simple adventure, to show you how to go about playing adventure games. After you LOAD the program you read on the screen: YOU ARE IN AN UNDERGROUND CAVERN WITH EXITS LEADING EAST AND WEST. YOU CAN SEE A KEY. WHAT NOW? The program will always wait for you to give it instructions, and normally these are done as easy two-word commands, usually a verb followed by a noun, although some adventure programs are now becoming sophisticated enough to scan a complete sentence and understand it. For the moment, though, let's stick with the simple and most common form, and in the example quoted above your response might be to type in EXAMINE KEY. You are trying to respond as you might if you were in that real situation. Before picking up the key you would probably want to have a close look at it, and you're simply reducing that action to two words that the computer can understand. An adventure program should be written in such a way that it predicts your every possible action, and has its own reaction or sequence of reactions to whatever you do. Even if you have bizarre tastes and decide to EAT KEY the program should respond accordingly. Assuming you are fairly conventional in your eating habits, though, and have simply said EXAMINE KEY, the response is likely to be along the lines of IT IS JUST AN ORDINARY KEY, or perhaps IT IS A BRASS KEY, or maybe even IT IS A MAGIC KEY.

In the ping-pong manner in which adventures work, it is now your turn to respond to this updated piece of information, with the computer almost certainly prompting you to tell it WHAT NOW? Sometimes the prompt is dispensed with, and you know from seeing the flashing cursor that the program is ready for your next instruction. As keys are nearly always useful objects to have, whether Magic or just Yale, you'll then go on to type GET KEY, or TAKE KEY, or PICK KEY – different programs respond to slightly different words for what is basically the same action, though a good program should cater for you typing in any one of those three instructions.

11

The response on the screen should then be to tell you something like YOU HAVE PICKED UP THE KEY, or YOU HAVE THE KEY, or simply OK, informing you that your instructions have been carried out and the key is now in your possession, to be followed again by WHAT NOW? or whichever type of prompt is being used. Getting a little bolder now, you might try SEARCH CAVERN, to see if that reveals anything new, but assuming for the moment that it doesn't then the obvious move is to try one of the two available exits. Simplifying this to two words, you would type GO EAST or GO WEST, though you will discover that most programs respond to a straightforward E or W as instructions to travel in a particular direction, with movements being such a major part of adventure playing.

Whichever direction you choose to go in, the screen will proceed to let you know what happens to you, so let's assume you typed GO EAST and then received the following response: YOU ARE DEEPER INTO THE CAVERNS, AND CAN SEE WATER DRIPPING DOWN THE WALLS: A TUNNEL LEADS EAST, FROM WHICH YOU CAN HEAR THE SOUND OF HEAVY FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING. ANOTHER EXIT IS TO THE WEST. WHAT NOW? The exit to the west is obviously the one you have just come down, so you might decide that discretion is the better part of valour and you'd rather not face whatever is making those heavy footsteps just yet, so you type SEARCH CAVE just to have a quick look round to see if there's anything there not mentioned in the original description, quickly followed by GO WEST, which returns you to where you were before. Then you GO WEST again to see what that brings you to.

In that direction you might discover that YOU ARE IN A LARGE SHADOWY CHAMBER. YOU CAN SEE SOME LIGHT AT THE END OF A TUNNEL LEADING NORTH. A TUNNEL TO THE SOUTH SLOPES DOWN, AND OTHER PATHS LEAD EAST AND WEST. WHAT NOW? Well, you know that if you went east you'd be back where you started, unless the program is a sneaky one in which the tunnels bend so that compass directions from one location to another don't always correspond, but assuming that's not the case then you can elect to keep travelling west, or take the sloping path south, or investigate the source of light to the north. It is entirely up to you what to do, as playing an adventure is a test of your ingenuity and your responses to the situation you're in. You might SEARCH CHAMBER, or if you're worried by those footsteps you could try LISTEN, to make sure they're not following you. Programmers are clever enough and nasty enough to have them do just that. Whichever way you go you'll probably find a use for that key you're carrying at some stage in the adventure, perhaps to

unlock a chest containing treasure or a weapon that might make you feel a little more confident about turning back to face the person or beast making those footsteps.

You can see in just this simple invented example some of the elements that go to make up a typical adventure. With the different options available at each point there will obviously very soon be a great number of passages and places for you to explore, and it won't be long before you are confronted with your first task – perhaps a chasm to cross, a door to open, or a villain to fight or trick your way past. Whatever the task, though – and you can be sure there'll be plenty of them – any objects you'll need will be somewhere in the locations you're travelling through, and it will be up to your ingenuity as to whether you can solve the problems. If you have a chasm to cross then you don't go to a nearby location and magically discover a bridge lying around, but you might find wood, a saw and some rope scattered about, or possibly a staff that turns out to have magic powers when you wave it. In many ways an adventure is like being involved in a book, a mystery, with you the one that has to solve it and what happens depending entirely on how you respond to what the screen tells you.

Most adventures will inform you before you start as to what it is you're meant to be doing, whether it's rescuing someone from a magician's clutches, rescuing yourself from underground passages, or exploring a newly discovered planet, but sometimes you are simply presented with an opening screen of information and must start to explore for yourself till you begin to get some idea of what you're meant to be doing. It's this aspect of never being quite sure of what you're going to encounter that appeals to many adventure players. The game can take place in any location, and turning a corner or opening a door could whisk you away to a completely different setting. Playing a game written by a good adventure programmer should be like reading a book by a good writer. It should be convincing, but more than anything should keep you wanting to turn the pages (or corners) to discover what happens next.

A common feature of adventures is that you are acquiring pieces of treasure, and you earn points according to how many you find or how many you can take to the stated location. Some give you points for each task you perform successfully, and as well as just getting safely through the adventure you will be aiming to pick up the maximum possible points.

At this stage it's worth having a quick look at the language used by adventures, and if you want to know how well you're doing then typing SCORE will usually provide you with that information. Typing I, INV, INVE or INVENTORY will usually produce a list of the articles you have in your possession. If the program doesn't tell you, or perhaps tells

you to type INVENTORY in full then it's worth trying the abbreviations to see if they work. Most programs also include a few clues that can be obtained by saying HELP, or less commonly HINT, though don't be surprised if the clue is cryptic and provides you with one additional problem to solve. The variation on TAKE, GET and PICK has been mentioned, but DROP is the usual word if you want to leave an article somewhere. There is often a limit to the number of items you can carry, so you will be faced with the choice of what to take and what to leave behind. To have a good look round every location you should always try LOOK, EXAMINE, SEARCH or EXPLORE, as well as LISTEN and HEAR. You'll soon discover which words work in which adventures, and sometimes LOOK will reveal a hidden object, though it's also used, with REDESCRIBE, to remind you where you are if the original description has scrolled off the screen because of the series of commands you've tried typing in. Compass directions have been dealt with, but remember that the exits you're told you can see are not necessarily the only ones there. Try typing the other possibilities as well just to see what happens.

Those are the most common commands, and in fact many are so common that the program may not even tell you about them, but using these and other commands will be dealt with a little more fully in the section covering hints and tips.

Some people are good at adventures, just as some are good at spotting who-dun-it in a thriller, while others are slower but still enjoy the fun and the challenge, determined not to be outdone. Some, of course, hate them, but if you've never actually tried one then don't be put off by thinking they're like the micro equivalent of *Mastermind*. One or two undoubtedly are, but it's just as easy to spend all your time playing adventures that are simply funny. Most of them, though, will be taking you into fairly realistic recreations of a variety of settings, from Biblical times to space travel, from Viking longships to the wild west, and you can play any type of character you like … yes, even Bilbo Baggins or Denis Thatcher, as the mood takes you.

14

Hints for Adventurers

There are very few Golden Rules for adventure playing, mainly because if they could be played by following a lengthy set of rules then they'd be rather boring and not half as difficult or popular as they are. The attraction of adventures for many people is that when you sit down to play you have little idea of what's going to happen beyond that one screen of information that's immediately in front of you. A recent adventure from Level 9, *Lords of Time*, made full use of this fact by putting you at the start of the game into a time-ship (well, more of a time-piece really, it being a grandfather clock) which enabled you to go to any one of nine different time zones, so you find yourself stepping out into a country house, into the ice age, or emerging on a futuristic walkway. All you know is that you're searching for a symbolic object from each of the zones, but other than that you're on your own, and the first time you play you have no idea into which of the time zones you'll be stepping.

Despite the fact that you may not even know what you're doing, there are certain guidelines you can follow to increase your chances of plundering the booty or staying alive. The most obvious one hardly needs mentioning, particularly if you've bought this book, and that is: always make a map. If you're dealing with upwards of 100 locations, which is the average for adventures nowadays (*Lords of Time*, for instance, has over 200) then it's vital that you know where you are, and that you know where the locations are in relation to each other, enabling you to move quickly around. If you suddenly find yourself in desperate need of that rusty bucket you dropped because your greedy hands were too full of tempting treasures, you have to know how to get back to it speedily, particularly in the type of game where every move may sap your strength a little.

A few words in each location on the map are enough to identify it, and one thing you must do in each place is to mark all the possible exits at once. Even though you may only be able to follow one of them for the moment, if you reach a dead-end then you need to know where the other paths that you can try following are to be found. If you do that each time

15

you reach a new location then you will always know which directions you haven't explored in yet. If you're walking along a passage and find a fork in the route then mark the location of the one you don't take. Some adventure programmers are devious enough to reason that if you are walking along a passage heading north then you will see the fork going NE and NW, but if you're coming back down the passage having reached a dead-end at one of them then you might not see the other route when you get there unless you stop and turn or have a good look round. Don't expect favours from adventure programmers: some of them don't know the meaning of the word. Tunnels are particularly prone to lurking in dark corners where they can easily be missed unless you search for them. In each location, then, put a little arrow showing the start of the exits that you haven't yet tried.

Rather trickier to deal with are the amazing mazes that writers are fond of encouraging the players to go into. Regular players will know that feeling when the moment of truth dawns: you've been tempted to step off the straight and narrow forest path (or been thrown off it) and suddenly the trees close in on you on all sides and no matter which way you turn there are always paths leading north, south, east and west. I'm sure that just at the moment when realisation occurs and you groan 'Oh no' (or words to that effect), some form of telepathic communication transmits this to the distant programmer who laughs maliciously ... another victim!

As soon as I reach what is obviously going to be The Maze in a particular adventure I reach for a separate piece of paper to stop it cluttering up the main map. Some mazes may turn out to be very simple, or you may just strike lucky and escape within half a dozen moves, but if you're going to be plodding round for fifty or a hundred moves trying to figure out the maze's layout then it's best to do this separately, and the bigger the sheet of paper the better. At this point too you should SAVE the game if you can, and this aspect of adventure playing is something I'll return to after dealing with the way in which mazes can be constructed: knowing this can be useful to the adventure player trying to battle his or her way out.

The natural thing to do first is to try to step back to the location you've just come from, and if you're able to do this you will have a point of reference and can try making little forays into the maze and going back again to base before you get lost. You may not know whether you're going into a maze to find something or someone and then have to escape the same way, or whether you have to cross the maze to continue your quest, but whichever it is any points of reference you have are vital. If you can move two locations west, then two locations east and still find

yourself on the forest path then the programmer is obviously in a friendly frame of mind ... either that or you're being teased and the mat (or map) will be pulled from under your feet when you've made three or four steps into the impenetrable and gloomy forest.

Most likely, though, is that you'll step west, find yourself lost, then step back east and find yourself still lost. The programmer has struck. A popular tactic is to try dropping an object (preferably one you think you might be able to spare in case there's a thief about) and mark where it is on your map of the maze. Then continue to travel as far as you can in one particular direction, making a note of the number of moves you make. Some mazes are in fact simply constructed on the basis of endless loops, and you may find that after ten moves north you come across your dropped object again. If that happens then leave it where it is and try moving endlessly east or west. If the same thing happens then it's beginning to look like your maze is probably a 10 x 10 grid, with one location maybe having a clue to the exit or the object or person you've been sent into the maze to find. Most mazes have a purpose, though some exist purely to frustrate you. But if you know that the grid is a regular shape then at least you know you'll be able to search the maze thoroughly, using LOOK and LISTEN or whatever is appropriate in every location, rather than travelling wildly about hoping to find a way out.

If the programmer is sneakier, though, you might find that the maze is constructed in a more irregular shape. However, the dropped object can still help you work out what shape that is, which may in itself turn out to be a clue. If you start in location A, say, make six moves east and then come back to location A then you can construct one little section of the maze. Take a step south, drop the object again, and this time you may find it only takes you three moves east to return to it. Take another step south and the next east-west loop may contain ten identical locations, and this is when you begin to discover why you can soon get disorientated in mazes.

Even nastier programmers will ensure that you can't work out their mazes as easily as that, though. Drop an object, step east, step back west, and the object has gone. What has happened is that you are in the kind of maze where compass directions have been thrown out of the window, and this type of maze is very easy to construct. In fact it's easier to construct than a proper linked series of locations where the programmer has to ensure that stepping east from location A to location B corresponds with stepping west from location B to location A. You could construct a completely random adventure, if you wished, where stepping east from location A took you to location M, stepping west from there took you to

location Z, and stepping east from Z took you to location J, and so on.

Though easy to construct, this kind of maze is almost impossible to get out of. It is still worth dropping objects, however, as you may discover that you're frequently not actually leaving the location you thought you were moving from. You must also experiment here with various sequences of moves. Frequently you need only make the right few moves in order, and you're out of the maze, which is why SAVEing the game as soon as you know you're in the first maze location is important. There is a simple but fiendish maze along these lines in *The Pharaoh's Tomb*, an Egyptian graphics adventure published by the prolific and usually reliable Phipps Associates. Anticipating the dropped object technique, programmer Mike Farley has craftily covered the floor with mist! He does, however, provide a fan elsewhere in the adventure which is useful for wafting the mist away, and he also gives you a hint after you've been in the maze for twelve moves. Though only consisting of five locations, you need the right sequence of five moves to get you to the treasure in the Lost Cave, and if you make the wrong move at the final location you wind up in Death Dungeon instead.

To give you some idea of the way this works, so that you know what you're up against without spoiling the challenge, every exit from the first location you stumble into automatically takes you to the second ... and you thought you were going north, south, east or west! Every exit bar one from the second location simply returns you to that same location. This is why the mist is needed to cover the floor, otherwise you'd realise that you weren't in fact going anywhere apart from through one particular exit. From the third location, all exits bar one will return you to the second location. All exits bar one from the fourth location proceed to dump you back in the second or third. Two exits from the fifth return you right back to the second, one takes you to Death Dungeon, one takes you to the treasure, and one even takes you right back outside the maze without you finding anything so that you have to start the whole performance over again. Even when you've managed to get through to find the treasure, the only way you can move is back to the first location, right round the maze and then out from the fifth location. Did you follow that? Little wonder that the Pharaoh's tomb of this adventure is littered with mummies and skeletons.

With several hundred possible routes going twice round a simple five-room maze such as this, you can see why it's advisable to start your maze-plotting away from the main map, and to SAVE the game if you can as soon as you enter that first location.

You will need to use that SAVE facility constantly, and every adventure worth its salt will have such a facility, though of course it's not

18

always possible to know beforehand whether it has or not. I tend to avoid games that haven't, because there's nothing more frustrating than having to trace and retrace your steps trying to devise ways of getting past a tricky obstacle, perhaps one at the very end of the game. Use the SAVE command if you're about to embark on some death-defying act just in case you plummet to your doom or discover that the flask of water proves rather ineffectual against the dragon's flames. It's much quicker to LOAD a SAVEd game than start all over again, and while you're doing so you can reflect on whether some less heroic act might not be called for.

SAVE your position before you tackle any monsters, too, though of course you won't always be forewarned that a bad-tempered troll is waiting around the next corner. But if you find yourself in a tunnel listening to the heavy thump of approaching footsteps, you're better advised to reach for SAVE than for your sword. With the ultimate weapon of instant reincarnation behind you, you needn't have too much to fear from even the nastiest of monsters. You can indulge in wholesale slaughter, if you like. You might discover that you're the one being slaughtered, but on the other hand your bravery in standing up to a monster could bring its rewards, resulting in your being led to a passage you didn't know existed, or being given thanks and rewards by grateful terrorised villagers.

On the subject of monsters, and this is something that applies to the playing of adventures generally, it doesn't always do to jump to conclusions. Just because you're being approached by a fire-breathing dragon, it doesn't mean that you are necessarily about to be turned into a has-been on toast. Try feeding or befriending the beast before you try fighting it, and if that doesn't have much effect try offering it other items. If it turns everything down, *then* you might consider plunging your sword through its heart, but in most adventures the nasty creatures generally make their intentions pretty clear the minute you encounter them, and if they delay in seeing you off it's often a sign that they're waiting for something from you. If they don't happen to fancy any of the items you're carrying, consider any items you may have dropped earlier under the impression that they were useless or had served their one purpose. A dead cow might not seem too appealing to you, but it's the equivalent of a Big Mac to a monster with a built-in grill.

Just as you mustn't assume that all monsters are necessarily evil-hearted, nor must you assume that the friendly inn-keeper who offers you food and shelter is always Mr Nice-Guy. If your belongings start going missing and your diamonds disappear, then look around you suspiciously. The inn-keeper might turn out to be a kleptomaniac, and

you're better off avoiding his place for the night. Programmers can be a pretty heartless bunch, sometimes ensuring that a character is only useful to you for a short while before you have to get rid of them by leaving them behind or even worse. In *The Hobbit*, for instance, Thorin is vital to you if you're to escape from the dreaded Goblins' Dungeon, but after that you can let him wander off as you won't be needing him again. A little bit unkind, perhaps, though whatever you do you mustn't try killing him as you're likely to regret it.

In the same way that all characters you encounter have to be weighed up and scrutinised closely, so too you have to consider the purpose of every object that you come across. If the first two Golden Rules are always make a map and regularly SAVE your game, then the third is that every object in an adventure always has a function, even if that function is sometimes just to fool you into thinking it has a function. In the earlier adventures it was generally accepted that whatever you found lying around was somehow going to play an essential part in completing your task, though of late red herrings have become so popular that real red herrings are now making guest appearances in programs, such as *Franklin's Tomb* and *Urban Upstart*. In the latter, a very amusing adventure from Richard Shepherd Software, if you examine the fish and chip shop closely you'll discover a red herring lying on the counter. If you take this with you then a swarm of cats follows you wherever you go, though I haven't yet discovered whether this can be put to any practical use. In other words, is the red herring a real red herring or is it really a red herring?

The majority of objects will serve a purpose, though, and even if you can't carry everything at once you must always make a note of where each object is so that you can go back to collect something later if need be ... provided someone hasn't been along to pinch it in the meantime. Items like food, lamps, or lengths of rope are obviously useful to have, but still note down everything else as well. In *Inca Curse*, which is Adventure B in Artic's very popular series, a blanket seems to be of very limited use until you suddenly find yourself in the Fire Room, with no means of extinguishing the blaze ... except perhaps for the blanket you discarded some time previously. Now where did you drop it? Your notes will tell you and your map will enable you to go back and collect it.

Even if an object looks dangerous, it's better to try it and risk being blown up than to pass it by and never discover what goodies it might be concealing ... remembering to SAVE before you open any boxes or chests, of course, as these are sometimes booby-trapped. Adventure writers know that hardly anyone can resist a lever to pull, even if the chances are that it's going to open a trap-door beneath you or plunge you

to your death in endless space. But every once in a while you pull a lever and uncover a secret passageway behind a bookcase or in a blank wall.

If the game you're playing has a SCORE facility, with increasing points the further you get, it can be useful to test an object by typing SCORE both before and after you have picked it up. If your SCORE increases then it's almost certain to be useful at some stage. This obviously isn't infallible, and it may well be that the programmer is trying to keep one step ahead of your tricks, but it can sometimes help if you've found one use for an object and can't decide whether to put it down or not. Type SCORE, then drop the object and type SCORE again. If the figure remains the same then the chances are that the object has served its purpose in the adventure and you've been given your point or points for completing that particular task. If your SCORE drops then you're likely to need the rope or stick or whatever again, as otherwise you won't be able to reach the maximum SCORE for that adventure.

An example of this is in *Urban Upstart*, to return to that game, where at the start you need to be wearing a pair of dungarees if you're to leave your house safely and avoid being arrested for indecent exposure. At some stage – in fact at several stages – you'll be hospitalised through pneumonia, muggings, eating rotten cheese or whatever, and discover that you can't escape the hospital unless you're wearing a white coat to disguise you as a doctor. But if you wear the white coat do you still need the dungarees? Typing SCORE after dropping the dungarees shows no decrease so it seems safe to assume that you can sport the white coat outside the hospital without risking arrest for having no trousers beneath it.

You must also be adaptable in the way that you use the objects you find. An amusing bug that was discovered in the program for *The Hobbit* was that although there are certain items that are too heavy for you to carry, if you are already carrying the barrel and the rope you can sometimes tie these heavy objects with the rope, put the rope in the barrel, untie the rope and remove it, leaving you free to pick up the barrel with the uncarryable object inside it. They said *The Hobbit* was a miracle of programming, but I don't think that's what was meant.

Some people also think that keys are only designed for unlocking chests and doors, but don't forget that they can also be used for locking things again. If you're carrying treasure and starting to run out of hands, then you could always put some of it in any chests that happen to be lying around, locking them and leaving the treasure fairly safe – though I'm offering no money-back guarantees. Similarly a spade can be used to bury treasure as well as unearth it, as long as you remember where you buried it, and are prepared to go back and find that there's another

creature roaming about the adventure with a spade, and with your treasure.

Lateral thinking is what a lot of adventure solving is about, and this is well illustrated by a problem from an adventure in which you have to get into a castle, the difficulty being that the only way in is across a moat filled with piranhas. Trying to swim the moat merely proves to be a rather drastic method of losing a lot of weight very quickly, and the answer to the piranha problem (which, like all answers, sounds obvious when you explain it but can take hours to figure out when you're actually playing) is that if you search the surrounding countryside and houses carefully you will find, among many other seemingly more useful objects, a handy supply of sleeping pills. At first you assume that these must be for dropping in some nasty Count's coffee, but of course if you drop them into the moat all the fish fall asleep and across you swim. Getting a single idea into your head is dangerous when playing adventures, and lateral thinking means avoiding this kind of tunnel vision. Programmers present you with these seemingly obvious solutions just for the pleasure of telling you that they don't work.

If you literally come up against a brick wall then you could try beating your head against it, though it probably won't do much good. A better idea might be to wander away from the wall completely and maybe hope to find some amiable giant ... and get him to beat his head against it. Lateral thinking could be called stepping sideways to get round a problem instead of confronting it head-on. In *Urban Upstart*, for example, you frequently find yourself thrown into jail, usually for dropping objects in the street or examining parked cars and other suspicious actions, and at first it seems absolutely impossible to find a way of breaking out of the jail. (If you're stuck there at the moment and want to find your own way out then kindly close your eyes while reading the next sentence.) Eventually it might occur to you that the last time you ate the cheese or drank the lager you were rushed off to hospital in an ambulance, so if you try eating or drinking something while in jail you'll find yourself removed to the hospital, whence you can escape fairly easily.

Another trick with objects is to test the program's vocabulary to see if it recognises certain words. If you encounter a problem where you think a rope might be useful but you don't happen to have one, try typing USE ROPE or THROW ROPE anyway. If the response is I DON'T UNDERSTAND 'ROPE' then you'd better cast your mind round for another solution because the word ROPE isn't in the program's vocabulary. If the response instead is YOU'RE NOT CARRYING THE ROPE then you know you can organise a rope-hunt, even if you need to trek miles to find it. This is one reason why there is room alongside the

maps to jot down the words that the computer recognises. If you're experimenting early on and you discover that you can JUMP, but not over that particular obstacle, or you can THROW, but not just here, then make a note as you should be able to make use of the words later on, perhaps in a way that's not immediately obvious at the time when you need them.

It hardly needs saying that if you try to do something and the computer tells you that YOU CAN'T DO THAT YET then there's a fair chance that you're doing the right thing but perhaps you have to acquire another object first, or maybe just do something simple like opening a bottle or a chest.

Using the right words is all important, which is why a list of synonyms has been included here. Just as some programs recognise GET rather than TAKE or PICK when you want to pick up an object, so too do other actions need just the right word. If the programmer has done a thorough job then SHOOT LASER should work just as well as FIRE LASER, but sometimes programmers can be a little lazy, or program space is simply so tight that only one combination of words will work. In one carelessly written adventure I was playing recently, if you wanted to leave a house or room then you actually had to type ENTER or ENTER DOOR or GO DOOR as the more logical words I tried first, such as LEAVE, EXIT and DEPART, hadn't been included in the vocabulary. In another, where getting across a pit had to be accomplished by tying a rope to an axe and throwing the rope across the pit to form a swing, TIE ROPE TO AXE worked but TIE AXE TO ROPE or TIE AXE WITH ROPE or other combinations didn't.

In that instance you could see by looking at the program, which of course is the ultimate hint for solving adventures, that your inputs were being read as complete strings and matched with the sole answer that the programmer had decided would do. Usually the combination of verb and noun is read as two separate words, with possible synonyms for each being contained in the program. The more this is done, the more the computer tends to 'understand' what you mean, without demanding that you match its answer character by character – when even typing an extra SPACE in the middle or at the end can result in a wrong answer as far as the program is concerned. If you know you're dealing with quite a fussy program, then you must take great care with what you type … and summon up all your patience, as you'll certainly need it.

Patience is a virtue that programmers frequently call upon players to display. Sometimes they're not content with making sure that you have the right response, they then expect you to type it in twice or even more before they'll let you succeed. If you're sure that what you have to do is

HIT DOOR at some stage, then do try it several times as some doors can be pretty tough and require several blows before they'll open or splinter. This technique has always seemed to me to be very unfair, but then what can you expect of devious adventure writers? In the most popular and arguably the best adventure of them all so far, *The Hobbit*, you'll find yourself using the command WAIT, WAIT and keep WAITing until the door decides to open (provided you've done all the right things beforehand, of course). WAIT or SLEEP can be useful commands to try, sometimes restoring your energy or rewarding your patience with a visitor, but one command you must be careful in using is REST. Many adventures use this as meaning that you lay down your weary head and sleep for a while, but some unfortunately accept it as an abbreviation for RESTORE, so instead of you dozing off the program hangs up on you while it waits for you to give it some data.

Most programs work on the basis of reading only the first three or four letters of a word, which is why they may take REST as meaning RESTORE and not just REST, so to save time it's worth experimenting to see if you can abbreviate your inputs so that you type TAKE STET, say, or even TAK STE instead of the full TAKE STETHOSCOPE. This does sometimes result in a certain amount of confusion and downright peculiarity. If there are some steps in a room you are in and these lead up to the floor above, you might be surprised, if you type CLIMB STAIRS, to be told YOU CANNOT DO THAT. This could be because the letters STA have been used to represent another object, a stake perhaps, and as what you are trying to do in effect is to tell the computer to climb the stake it responds accordingly, and probably puts you down as an idiot.

You must also be prepared to LOOK and LISTEN the whole time you're playing an adventure (or EXAMINE or SEARCH or whichever word you discover allows you to see all those interesting things that somehow get hidden in dark corners, just as if you had X-Ray Specs or Superman's vision). You might be surprised to discover by typing LOOK that there's an elephant you didn't happen to notice when you first arrived on the scene. LISTEN is also in common use to reveal those squeaking or rustling noises that betray the presence of a small animal or something similar nearby. It can also forewarn you of the impending arrival of some galloping mountainous beast that's out to do you no good at all. It might seem boring to LOOK and LISTEN in every location, but you do need to be methodical. There's little point in having a LOOK every so often when you happen to remember ... by the time you reach your first insurmountable obstacle you will probably have passed two giants, a bear, three magic spells and an electric chain-saw, and you'll

only have to go back and fetch them.

It also helps to LOOK/EXAMINE every object in a location. In the hilarious *Denis through the Drinking Glass* adventure, Denis starts off in what appears to be a fairly spartan den, but by the time he's had a good look round he's discovered sheets, a book, a bookmark, a letter, a suit, some plus-fours ... and as to what he finds when he has a good look round the bedroom, well, that would be telling.

Desks can reveal secret cubby-holes, clocks can open on to whole new worlds, chests contain maps, and lamps can often contain genies if you rub them up the right way. Breaking objects sometimes reveals smaller objects hidden inside, though just as frequently it reveals that you're stuck with a broken object. However, as was stressed before, you must consider every object in great detail: look at it, listen to it, rub it, shake it, wave it in the air and dance the hokey-cokey with it if you've a mind to. Just as programmers are looking for ever-more devious tasks to set players, so too must you be ever-more imaginative if you want to solve those tasks.

To summarise, there are probably three simplified Golden Rules:

(1) Make a map.
(2) SAVE your position regularly.
(3) Consider every object, every character, and every location.

If all else fails then my only other advice is to try swearing at the program. Regular players of *Pimania* and *Valhalla* will know what differing results that little trick can have.

The History of Adventure Games

In a way, adventure games are as old as story-telling, and are just an adaptation of that ancient form incorporating modern technology. In fact the vast majority of adventures draw on the same traditional sources for their settings: tales of undiscovered lands, of myths and legends, of battles between good and evil, between heroes and villains. The advent of the computer has meant, though, that for the first time the listener/player can take a part in the story – the mental equivalent of a group of children working out a game of cowboys and indians, or Star Wars.

Adult versions of those children's games came of age with the development of *Dungeons and Dragons* and its variations in the early 1970s, although 'adult' doesn't mean you have to be over 18 to play them, as many a primary school teacher will tell you, just that they're slightly more sophisticated than the old 'Bang-Bang, you're dead' type of game ... now you have to find a Dungeon-Master to tell you 'Bang-Bang, you're dead'.

Many adventure games incorporate elements of *Dungeons and Dragons*, so it's worth looking briefly at that style of game, which came on the scene a few years before the first computer adventure itself was written.

Dungeons and Dragons, or *D & D* for short, is used as a general term to describe role-playing games as well as being a specific game itself, just as people use the word Hoover to describe any kind of vacuum cleaner, not just that particular make. War games and fantasy games had started to develop and increase their popularity in the 1960s, although table-top war strategy battles have been around for at least 200 years. Instead of just war confrontations, fantasy games used boards and pieces to enable players to pretend they were soldiers or magicians, and to take part in adventurous stories: who could get to the treasure first, or save the doomed kingdom? Two Americans, Dave Arneson and Gary Gygax, were responsible for giving *Dungeons and Dragons* to the games-players of the world.

In that game, based as the name tells you on a journey through a

network of dungeons, the players encounter a series of obstacles and must improvise ways of overcoming them as well as make decisions about which way to travel. Different players have different abilities, chosen from a range of options at the start of the game, and while some may elect to be super-intelligent but a little on the puny side, others may have an excess of brawn to the exclusion of brain. The whole game is under the control of a person known as the Dungeon-Master, who acts a little like the banker does in *Monopoly*, except that in *D & D* you can't get by without one. Armed with the comprehensively-written set of rules, drawn up by Arneson and Gygax to cover all possibilities and situations that may arise, the Dungeon-Master acts as a kind of referee and is able to tell the players the consequences of their actions.

The ultimate referee, of course, is a computer, which can store the massive amount of information needed and check through it instantaneously to inform you just what will happen if you open the door that is in front of you. A computer should also be free of any suggestion of bias or cheating, although anyone who has ever played (and lost) any kind of game against the infernal machines will have their own views on that subject.

In the mid-1970s, with *D & D* well-established as the most popular fantasy role-playing game, the first sizeable computer adventure was written by Willie Crowther and Don Woods (Americans again), using the Fortran language and occupying a massive 300K of memory. The game was called *Adventures*, though if you read any reference to Adventure, the Adventure, the Colossal Adventure, the Colossal Cave Adventure or simply the original Adventure then this is the one that is meant. It is now available for many home micros like the Spectrum and the BBC under the title *Colossal Adventure* (from Level 9). As to how you squeeze a 300K game into a 48K machine or less ... well, that's obviously been an adventure in itself for several programmers.

That original version owes a great deal to the *D & D* format, but is ideally suited to one or two players as you don't need to recruit anyone and the computer acts as automatic Dungeon-Master. Only one character sets off on the adventure, and there's no juggling with a variety of characteristics, but now you're exploring a series of underground caves rather than dungeons. The game soon achieved cult status and travelled round the circuits, so to speak, of American programmers, whose company bosses frequently discovered that their employees were apparently slaving away into the early hours of the morning, sweating over seemingly insoluble problems. They were somewhat displeased to discover that these problems were not along the lines of how to make the company more cost-efficient, but how to coax a singing bird into a wicker

27

cage or how to deal with evil little dwarves who continually popped up to throw axes at you. With time at the terminals costing vast amounts of money every hour, programmers frequently had to deal with dwarves on one side of the screen throwing axes and their bosses on the other side throwing fits. Little wonder the adventure game took off as it did – half the adventure was in just trying to get to play it.

For those who have not yet tried this original, it is worth buying not only for its historical interest but also because it is still one of the best adventure games around. Even though it might seem a little daunting in scale, it is still a very good adventure for a beginner to try, if only because everyone who played it originally had to be a beginner, this being the first, and so its themes and problems are slowly introduced to get you used to the idea of what it's all about. Current adventures tend to assume some kind of previous knowledge, whereas this one couldn't, so it's worth taking a look at the game in some detail.

The adventure begins quite simply by telling you that you are standing beside a small brick building at the end of a road. A river is flowing nearby, going south, with open country to the north and dense forest all around. The first few tasks are fairly straightforward as you investigate the building and surrounding countryside, collecting a few objects and taking care not to go plunging over clifftops here and there. There is a small forest maze to negotiate, but all this is a very gentle beginning for what is to follow.

From somewhere in the forest area, you should be able to find your way through to the opening of a sequence of caves, and this is where the story really starts. One of the good things about the original adventure was that it set very high descriptive standards, and once you have played a game which evokes a very convincing atmosphere it becomes difficult to enjoy the rather amateurish approach of some adventures where locations are along the lines of 'You are in a tunnel. Paths lead east and west', or 'You are in a large room. You can see a locked door'. Compare this with the description of a location you'll very soon find in the Crowther and Woods version: 'You are in the Hall of the Mountain Kings, a huge room decorated with majestic statues. The east wall is covered by trophies and the mounted heads of elves and monsters, with a carved granite throne standing beneath them. The hall is hung about with the tattered remains of rich tapestries and has large doorways on all sides. A huge green snake hisses fiercely at you.'

If you want to go further you obviously have to do something about that snake, and while I'm not going to spoil it for anyone who hasn't yet encountered or solved it, it is a good gentle introduction to what adventure-playing is all about, causing you to examine carefully the

28

handful of objects you have come across so far to see how they might be used, picking up and dropping different items, experimenting with various combinations of words, looking to see if there may be an alternative route to get you past the snake, and so on.

Once you've disposed of the creature (sorry, but there isn't a convenient anti-snake spray lying around) you can travel further around the caverns and passages and if you look in the right places now you will start to discover the treasures that traditionally await every adventurer – though whether you'll be allowed to keep them later is another matter. Magic words might also put in an appearance now, and another problem that faces you is a yawning chasm – and no, sleeping pills are not the answer to that one.

Further into the network of caves (and we're getting up to the 100 location mark now) more objects and problems await, and it's one of the virtues of this game that the tasks and locations are not in the least repetitive, but do open out and change so that there's little risk of boredom setting in. Having already discovered that some places are only open to you if you're carrying particular objects, you'll now discover another aspect of adventure-playing, which is that certain places can only be entered at certain times – much like pubs, really, but with the added drawback that you've no idea what the opening hours are. Magic words also now start to prove their use (assuming you've noted them down), though I've yet to find a pub that will open if you stand outside and shout 'Plover'.

Now too you will discover, if you put a foot wrong, just how wonderfully frustrating mazes can be. It's much more pleasurable to try to create them than escape them, particularly if you include the added nuisance of a mysterious pirate who appears from time to time and insists on parting you from your hard-earned treasure. With a dozen or more rooms all having the same description, and with no exits marked to distinguish them, and with about ten different dead-ends to add to the fun, the mind boggles at all those man-hours and dollars that must have been lost in the maze back in those original mainframe days.

If you do ever get through the whole network then the adventure climaxes spectacularly (in words, of course, not your machine blowing up), and while summarising the game in a few paragraphs may make it sound as if it wouldn't take too long to whizz through it, that's far from the case. It is the type of game which can absorb and frustrate players for months or even years, depending on how much time you allow yourself off for eating, drinking, sleeping and so on. Not so much an adventure, more a way of life.

One person who was captivated by this adventure to the extent that it

did change the whole course of his life was an American systems programmer named Scott Adams, who admits to being hooked on the game after a few minutes and going on to score the coveted 350 points and earn the title of Grand Master after ten days of playing every morning and evening. In between times he managed to fit in his work with the firm of Stromberg-Carlson, making telephone digital switches. This was in 1978, and Scott Adams had just bought a home micro, a TRS-80 Level II machine. Having finished writing a Backgammon program for it, he was intrigued by the prospect of doing his own adventure, though well aware of the slight difference in scale between the 300K game he had been playing and the 16K of his own Basic machine. His solution to the problem, which must have made him feel like Newton felt when the apple allegedly dropped on his head, was not to write an adventure straight away but to write an interpreter instead. For those who don't know what that means, a brief technical diversion will be necessary.

Most people know the difference between a language like Basic, which is termed a high-level language because of its closeness to standard English, and the machine code or machine language which the computer actually works in and which is known as a low-level language. You can program in Basic and let the machine do its own translating as it goes along, which tends to slow the operation down, or you can translate the program into the low-level language yourself. One way of doing this is with a compiler, which makes a permanent translation of your whole program into machine code. The new program is therefore extremely fast, but rather difficult to edit as you have to translate the whole thing back again unless you're one of those rare people who can actually edit machine language direct. The alternative method is to use an interpreter, which leaves the program in its original language and waits until it is RUN to translate it a line at a time into machine language. It is slightly slower in operation than a compiled program, but is far easier and quicker to edit.

To get back to Scott Adams, he wrote himself an adventure interpreter. This had two considerable advantages for him. First it enabled him to squeeze much more into his computer's restricted memory, and so produce an adventure on something like a reasonable scale, and secondly it turned Scott Adams into Scott Adams Adventure International as it allowed him to write many adventures using the same interpreter, just changing the data each time.

That may sound rather mechanical, but of course the writer still has to produce the story, the descriptions, set the tasks, and so on. In fact, far from being mechanical, it frees the writer's imagination and allows him

to concentrate on the content of the adventure, enabling him to forget about the routine programming needed, which is much the same for most adventures. This is the way many adventure writers work now, but Scott Adams was the first and certainly the most successful. Six months after starting work on his interpreter, *Adventureland* was published, and this was to be the first of a lengthy series of best-selling adventures, all of which are currently being released in the U.K. by Adventure International for the home micro market, with added graphics, initially on the BBC and Spectrum machines.

Adventureland is in the traditional setting of forests and dragons, axes and magic, and has you hunting for treasures in typically greedy fashion, while the second in the series, usually called *Pirate Adventure*, was unusual in more than one respect. It was written by Scott's wife, Alexis Adams, who had responded to the six months he had spent writing *Adventureland* and ignoring her by putting the disk of the finished adventure in the oven. Luckily it wasn't switched on at the time, but after that she realised that as she wasn't going to beat him she might as well join him and set about using his interpreter to come up with their next adventure. *Pirate Adventure* was different in that you weren't merely searching out treasures, first you had to build your own ship in which to do it! For those who think their O-Level Woodwork is up to that, this is one of the adventures now available here, with others taking place in the more familiar surroundings of mysterious castles, space ships, deserts and espionage, with a mystery fun house thrown in for good measure.

The addition of graphics to the Adams adventures, which have been perfectly successful up to now without them, shows the way in which this corner of computer gaming has developed, with many people thinking the days of the text-only adventure are numbered. That's as maybe, but with America having led the way up to now with adventures it's good to see that in the last year or so the British Computing Empire has struck back, with both *The Hobbit* and *Valhalla* employing new techniques in adventure programming.

The Hobbit was a first in that it took an already established and successful adventurous story and attempted to involve the player directly in the action by making him or her one of the characters, in this case Bilbo Baggins. It was also semi-revolutionary in creating independent lives for some of the other characters, who would be busily going about their business in locations away from you. I describe it as semi-revolutionary because the technique has always been hinted at, even in the original adventure (was there anything they omitted to cover?). Once you're in the underground caverns there then a pirate will appear to rob you of your treasure, and he has an independent life of a

31

limited nature in that he is programmed to appear at random intervals, but only in certain places and only if you are carrying some treasure at that moment.

Obviously this is very basic indeed when compared to *The Hobbit*, where several characters have been programmed to perform a variety of actions from a more complex series of options, though all in keeping with their personalities, which means that you can never be altogether sure what's going to happen next – just like real life! One problem with many adventures is that once you've solved them then the challenge disappears unless you want to go through them again and try to work towards the maximum possible score, which some of them tell you. *The Hobbit* not only gives you a percentage rating (and you can even exceed 100%) but the game plays differently every time so that there is not just a single solution but several ways of getting through the adventure. Even if you've successfully completed it more than once you can still find yourself confronted by a problem you didn't previously know existed.

There are also other techniques which *The Hobbit* developed and which helped it become one of the most talked-about (and bought) pieces of software for the Sinclair Spectrum, and now for other machines. One of these features was the way in which you could actually talk to the other characters, not merely instructing them to do things but having to ask them, and hoping they're in the right frame of mind to respond. At one point you are completely dependent on Thorin or Gandalf to help get you out of a particular location. Your instruction SAY TO THORIN "CARRY ME" is less likely to be successful if you've spent the earlier part of the game attempting to beat him up.

One of the reasons you are able to 'talk to the animals', as it were, is another feature of *The Hobbit* and other recent adventures, and that is the increasingly sophisticated scanning routines which read the inputs you type in at the keyboard. No longer are you restricted to saying GO NORTH or DROP ELEPHANT, many games will now accept quite lengthy sentences and make sense of them. The early adventure programs simply took your first word, compared it with a list of verbs it was able to act upon, and reacted accordingly, once it had compared the second word with the list of nouns it knew. Routines are now capable of moving along a sequence of words and picking out the various parts of speech for themselves, though they haven't yet quite got to the stage of criticising your grammar or spelling. With word processing packages becoming available to do that, it can only be a matter of time before adventure programs will respond to GET AXE with ONLY IF YOU SAY PLEASE, or to GO WINDOW with DO YOU MEAN GO TO THE WINDOW, GO THROUGH THE WINDOW OR WHAT?

The ability to accept and act upon quite complicated instructions was also a feature of *Valhalla*, a game which came some time after *The Hobbit* and which concentrated on taking the graphics elements of an adventure further than ever before, though some people said this was rather at the expense of the adventure itself. For all its advanced techniques, *The Hobbit* was still your traditional adventure with graphics simply being used to illustrate the locations you visited. You can just as easily play the game without the graphics – in fact BBC owners will have to, thanks to their machine not having enough spare memory to cope with pictures and words. But with *Valhalla* the graphics are what the game is all about, and it is one of those recent releases which is helping break down the traditional dividing line between arcade and adventure games, with others like Imagine's *Alchemist* or *Atic Atac* from Ultimate.

Valhalla's step forward was actually to depict the axe, the food, the treasures and even the characters, not merely as static objects in a picture but as moving cartoon-like creations which responded to the commands you typed in at the bottom of the split-screen. GET AXE results in your matchstick hero marching across the screen and picking up the axe, with commands like EAT FOOD, GET WINE and DRINK WINE producing similar responses. But just as in *The Hobbit* you are not taking part in the adventure alone, so too in *Valhalla* there is a host of other characters from Gods to dogs who all have a say in what's going on. If you're getting hungry and need to eat then you'd better make sure you get to the food before one of the others feels a bit peckish. And just because there's only you, a snake and a bottle of wine on the screen don't think you have all the time in the world to saunter across to the booze. The snake has been known to drink the wine to the bafflement of all concerned, presumably resulting in a paralytic python, or something similar.

In fact *Valhalla* was such a step forward that it was the first adventure game in which the player became redundant. If you LOAD the game and just sit back to watch then the various characters will wander on and off screen, eating, fighting, arguing, ignoring you or maybe even killing you, and you needn't lift a finger. Of course it's much more fun if you do. There is also an interesting kind of morality built into the program, whereby if you go around doing good deeds and co-operating with the other characters then you are far more likely to be successful than if you charge about attacking everyone in sight.

Both *The Hobbit* and *Valhalla* were produced by teams of programmers rather than a lone arranger of data like Scott Adams, and the other major adventure of recent years that cannot be ignored was also the product of several minds: P. David Lebling, Marc Blank, Tim Anderson

33

and Bruce Daniels, who together produced *Zork*, which is so vast that it is as yet only available for a few machines, and then only on disk, and even then split into three different parts. Although this makes it beyond the reach of many home micro owners at the moment, it is worth looking at because it is another landmark in the brief history of the adventure game, shows the way in which adventures are developing, and also may well soon be more readily available if the price of disk drives drops and with machines like the Sinclair QL bringing larger memories at cheaper prices to micro users.

In keeping with its much grander status, *Zork* is not merely an adventure game, we are informed, but a Computerised Fantasy Simulation, a computerised storybook, a new art form. Needless to say, it is of American origin, but for the purposes of this book it is an adventure, taking place as it does in the world of caves, lakes, forests, swords, trolls and trap doors. It's a larger than usual world, though, and to cope with it the program has a larger than usual vocabulary of over 600 words, including no less than 100 recognised verbs – some of us might have difficulty even thinking of 100 verbs. Because of its scale it has the most sophisticated routine yet devised for reading the player's instructions. It can deal with sentences as complicated as PUT ALL OF THE BOOKS BUT THE GREEN ONE UNDER THE RUG, and it also avoids those frustrating moments when, armed with only a sword, you type FIGHT DRAGON, and then in the time it takes the machine to ask you WHAT WITH? the dragon has succeeded in barbecuing you. *Zork* understands that if you only have one weapon then that is the one you'll be fighting with. One long-established complaint about computers is that they only do what you tell them to, not what you meant to tell them to, but with programs as complex as *Zork* that may not apply much longer.

All the objects in this game have the various properties appropriate to them, i.e. weight, volume, capacity, or positions relative to each other, which helps avoid the anomalies in most games where you can only carry a limited number of objects, whether six feathers or six barrels. The programmers have also taken care to avoid the type of bug which crept into *The Hobbit* and which is explained in the 'Hints' section, whereby the barrel can be used to carry objects you wouldn't otherwise be able to lift. In *Zork* every object has a weight, and you can only carry a certain amount, with no prospect of cheating by trying to put boats inside paper bags and similar devilish plots. Not that the program was without its early bugs – a prototype version contained the possibility that you might be killed by the collapse of an unstable room. Unfortunately the circumstances covering this event hadn't been fully worked out and so on occasion unsuspecting players were suddenly hit by 50,000 lbs of falling

rock while walking quietly through the forest.

An amusing aspect of the finished version is the way in which the authors have frustrated your attempts to find your way round a maze by dropping objects on the floor in the various locations. A thief has been written into the program, and the first time you wander round the identical passages merrily dropping your objects you will occasionally hear a voice in the distance informing you that he has just found your rope and will be moving it to another location. Cries of 'Unfair!' from adventurers, and unrestrained laughter from the programmers.

This is one way in which adventures naturally develop, with programmers endeavouring to keep one step ahead of the players who are trying to solve the adventures. This is hardly surprising as adventure programmers invariably start out (and continue) as adventure players and delight in trying to incorporate ever more fiendish features into their own games.

But what of the future of adventures, now that we have dealt with their short history? What of the technical advances, and the ways in which programmers are continually cramming more techniques into small memories? Following the example of *The Hobbit*, it may well soon be feasible to have a player starring as the hero or heroine of any book you care to name, from James Bond to Noddy in Toyland, with each program allowing for a wide range of actions from all the main characters, dependent upon the central figure's choice of moves, thereby allowing the player to try to control or change the events of the book/adventure. You could try to rewrite the endings of your favourite or unfavourite books, or perhaps have an adventure presenting a direct confrontation between two players, with one taking the part of James Bond and the other of Goldfinger maybe, with a battle of tactics and words and an infinite number of possible scenarios fought out on the screen.

There is no doubt that very soon the player will be able to type in straightforward instructions in plain English, and as chips become cheaper most machines will eventually be able to cope with almost infinite vocabularies. One company has developed a *Scrabble* program which incorporates special techniques to cram an 11,000 word vocabulary into 48K (and still leave room for the game!), and adventure writers will benefit from advances like this and later be able to incorporate similar tricks into their programs.

Much has been said about the development of the graphics adventure, and the way in which the text adventure now seems to be outdated. I don't share that view, and think that good text is the heart of a good adventure, and is what most of the people I know enjoy dealing with, but it is nevertheless interesting to speculate on how the ultimate graphics

adventure might turn out. It will probably enable you to be your own movie director, controlling the actions of a cast of characters believably created on screen. You should be able to feature yourself as the star, perhaps with the computer being able to create animations from a photograph that it scans, allowing you to share the screen with Robert Redford or Miss Piggy.

In the more foreseeable future, though, the player will obviously have to be represented on screen, but instead of the laborious process of typing GO NORTH he could actually be made to move in that direction by a single press of the 'N' key. With treasures to collect, which you could actually be seen to be gathering on screen, and a variety of monsters appearing from time to time in the maze of passages you're exploring, with you able either to flee or to devise some means of fighting them, the adventure could really take off. All you would need to do then would be to give it a catchy title ... like *Pac-Man*, maybe?

Recommended Adventures

It is impossible to draw up a definitive list of recommended adventures, not only because tastes vary so much but also because a list is out of date by the time it's been compiled, let alone published. In addition, what you might recommend for one machine due to lack of competition would be scarcely worth a mention on a rival machine that is better catered for: the Spectrum and Commodore 64 being particularly well served. Nevertheless, the following is a list of some adventures for each machine that are known to be reliable and widely enjoyed, with those that I haven't seen personally being recommended to me by friends and regular adventurers. That's not to say that there aren't many more that are worth buying, but these are the ones that I feel should be top of most people's lists. It's important to check who sells which title for which micro, though, as there are one or two instances in which the rights to produce a particular adventure have been given to different software houses for different machines.

The Level 9 series has been frequently referred to in the text, and these tend to be adventures on the grand scale, with enough brain-teasers and locations to tax anyone. In addition to their version of the original *Colossal Adventure*, done as the first of a trilogy of Middle Earth adventures, they have also recently released *Lords of Time* and *Snowball*, both of which are vaguely science-fiction based and highly recommended.

Another regular series which sells well and which produces lots of correspondence in the computer press from people seeking hints is that published by Artic Computing: *Planet of Death*, *Inca Curse*, *Ship of Doom*, *Espionage Island* and *Golden Apple*.

A series known as the *Mysterious Adventure* series is published by either Channel 8 or Digital Fantasia, according to the machine, and while some people have found them rather on the easy side, others remain baffled. You pays your money and you makes your series of choices.

Atari

The Atari with a disk drive will give you access to the mega-adventure *Zork*, though you won't see much change from £90 if you want to buy all three disks. Slightly cheaper is the Level 9 series, while Adventure International provide the Scott Adams series. The *Mysterious Adventure* series is also available for the Atari, from Channel 8.

BBC

Scott Adams' adventures are being made available slowly by Adventure International, with the bonus or distraction of graphics, depending on your point of view, while fans of *The Hobbit* won't get a chance to be distracted by graphics as they have had to be omitted from the BBC version. The *Mysterious Adventure* series for this machine is published by Digital Fantasia, while *Pimania* is recommended for those of a less sensible disposition. The Acornsoft adventures are also usually of a very high standard.

Commodore 64

Commodore owners can choose from *The Hobbit*, *Valhalla*, the Scott Adams series from Adventure International, the various Level 9 titles, some of the Artic series which are currently being converted, or the *Mysterious Adventure* series from Channel 8. People with access to a disk drive and a friendly bank manager may be able to afford the *Zork* trilogy.

Dragon

The Dragon is a machine that doesn't rate very highly for adventure players, being unable to cope with the size and graphics of the real classics. But *Pimania* is fun and *Ring of Darkness* should appeal to graphics rather than text fans. *Madness and the Minotaur* from Dragon Data seems to drive many people to distraction, while *Keys of the Wizard* is the best of the short list of adventures from Microdeal. Channel 8 are also going to be bringing out the *Mysterious Adventure* series.

Electron

At the time of writing no noticeable adventures have appeared for the

Electron – in fact no noticeable number of Electrons has appeared. It seems likely, though, that a fair number of the BBC adventures will turn up, possibly abbreviated. Acornsoft have also produced several popular titles for the BBC, which will presumably make their way over to little brother.

Oric

As a close-ish rival to the Spectrum, the Oric (or retitled Atmos) might be expected to give the adventurer a wide choice, though as yet the best around are the conversions of *The Hobbit*, the Level 9 titles, *Ring of Darkness* and Channel 8's *Mysterious Adventures*.

Sinclair QL

The only adventure yet available for this machine is filling in the order form and then waiting to see how long it takes to arrive.

Sinclair Spectrum

There's only one question to ask of adventurers with a Spectrum, and that's how much money can you spare? In no particular order you won't go far wrong with any from Level 9, Adventure International, Artic (with some available for the 16K machine), digital Fantasia's *Mysterious Adventures*, *Black Crystal* from Carnell or the two grand masters, *The Hobbit* and *Valhalla*. Those who prefer their adventures with a sense of humour are well catered for with *Pimania*, *Urban Upstart* or *Denis Through the Drinking Glass*.

Vic-20

With memory restrictions the Vic-20 is hardly the adventurer's dream machine, although you can get cartridge versions of the Scott Adams titles – not from Adventure International, but from Commodore themselves. It naturally wouldn't be right for me to recommend the adventures written by my brother, Pete Gerrard, and available from my publishers, Duckworth, so I won't.

ZX-81

With a little clever coding you could probably squeeze the copyright line from *Zork* into 1K, though with 16K expansion there becomes available to you most of the Artic series, *Pimania* from Automata and *Black Crystal* from Carnell Software, with *Knight's Quest* from Phipps Associates being a great favourite of many. Abersoft have endeavoured to get as much of the original adventure as possible into 16K, which is not a lot, but if you want a flavour of it then it goes by the title of *Adventure 1*.

Magazines

Required reading for adventure fans will be the monthly *Micro Adventurer* from Sunshine Publications, while *Popular Computing Weekly* has its regular Adventure Corner written by Tony Bridge, and *Personal Computer News* has just introduced a similar feature, though modesty forbids me mentioning its writer.

The December 1980 edition of the enormous *Byte* magazine from America was devoted to adventures, and some of the material on *Zork* and Scott Adams has come from its pages. There is also a lot more in that issue that's of interest, if you can manage to track down a back copy.

Books

I have only come across one book that deals with adventures in a general way, and that's *The Computer and Video Games Book of Adventure* by Keith Campbell (Melbourne House, £5.95), although there are several titles which tell you how to write adventures for particular micros. If you want to try to put the boot on the other foot and torment people with your own devious tasks and mazes then the two strongest lists of adventure titles are published by Sunshine Books (12-13 Little Newport Street, London WC2) and Duckworth (The Old Piano Factory, 43 Gloucester Crescent, London NW1).

Useful Addresses

Abersoft	7 Maes Afallen, Bow Street, Dyfed
Acornsoft	4a Market Hill, Cambridge
Adventure International	c/o Calisto Computers, 119 John Bright Street, Birmingham
Applications	8 St Paul's Road, Peterborough PE1 3DW (*Denis Through the Drinking Glass*)
Artic Computing	Main Street, Brandesburton, Driffield, Yorks
Atari	Atari House, Railway Terrace, Slough, Berks
Automata	27 Highland Road, Portsmouth, Hants (*Pimania*)
Carnell Software	North Weylands Industrial Estate, Mosley Road, Hersham, Surrey
Channel 8	51 Fishergate, Preston, Lancs
Commodore	675 Ajax Avenue, Slough, Berks
Digital Fantasia	24 Norbreck Road, Blackpool, Lancs
Dragon Data	Kenfig Industrial Estate, Margam, Port Talbot, West Glamorgan
Legend	1 Milton Road, Cambridge (*Valhalla*)
Level 9	229 Hughenden Road, High Wycombe, Bucks
Melbourne House	Castle Yard House, Castle Yard, Richmond, Surrey (*The Hobbit*)
Microdeal	41 Truro Road, St Austell, Cornwall
Phipps Associates	99 East Street, Epsom, Surrey
Richard Shepherd Software	23/25 Elmshott Lane, Cippenham, Slough, Berks (*Urban Upstart*)
Wintersoft	30 Uplands Park Road, Enfield, Middlesex (*Ring of Darkness*)

41

Synonyms and Suggestions

If at first you don't succeed then try, try again, and if you still don't succeed then try again using different words. To many adventure programs, for instance, a LIGHT is not a LAMP, and if you're using the wrong word you can stand there striking matches till the trolls come home but you won't get the thing to light.

The following is not a list of synonyms in the dictionary sense, in that I've tried not to duplicate words too much so that if you don't find anything effective under one entry, check other similar entries. It is also not an attempt at a comprehensive list as I haven't yet seen programs that accept commands like PROCURE AXE or DONATE HONEY TO BEAR, but I have included one or two slightly arcane words for those arcane adventures. Also, some of the words are obviously not synonyms but suggestions: if you can't BURY something, perhaps you can CONCEAL it, or if you can't AVOID the dragon then maybe you should RUN.

ACCEPT	receive, take, acquire, obtain, get
AID	help, assist, support, tend
AIM	point, direct, shoot
ALTER	change, adjust, move, amend
AMBUSH	trap, lure, trick, await, attack, assault, assail, charge
ANSWER	reply, respond, say, speak, talk
APPLY	use, employ
APPROACH	near, advance, go
ASCEND	rise, climb, mount, scale, up
ASK	enquire, inquire, question, demand, request, beg
ATTEMPT	try, seek, endeavour
AVOID	evade, elude, dodge, shun, run, resist
BEAR	carry, take, support, hold, convey, transport
BEAT	hit, strike, thump, pound, batter, smash, thrash, knock, kick, bump, bang, whack, attack

42

BLAST	explode, detonate, light, ignite
BOTTLE	jug, jar, flask, container
BOX	chest, trunk, case, casket, coffer, container
BREAK	shatter, smash, wreck, crash, demolish, split, drop, crack
BRIBE	offer, tempt, entice, lure, corrupt, give
BRING	carry, take, fetch
BURY	hide, dig, conceal, cover
BUY	purchase, obtain, acquire, claim, take
CALL	shout, exclaim, yell, cry, hail, scream, roar
CAPTURE	seize, trap, grab, arrest, catch, grasp, take
CAVE	cavern, grotto, hole
CHASE	pursue, follow, hunt, run, go
CLOSE	shut, fasten, bolt, lock, secure
COMBAT	fight, battle, oppose, contest, struggle
COMMAND	order, direct, demand, ask, insist
CONNECT	join, unite, tie, link, combine
CRACK	break, snap, split
CRASH	smash, shatter, beat, break
CRAWL	creep, slither, kneel
CUT	slash, sever, slice, carve, slit, cleave
DESTROY	ruin, demolish, spoil, kill, slay, drop
DIG	excavate, burrow, scoop, bury
DOOR	entrance, opening, gate, arch, portal, barrier
DRINK	swallow, sip, quench, gulp, use
EAT	swallow, consume, use, devour, dine, lunch, feast
ENTER	go, through, walk
ESCAPE	flee, avoid, evade, elude, run
EXAMINE	search, explore, inspect, look, study
EXTRACT	pull, draw, tug, remove, withdraw
FALL	drop, descend, plunge
FEED	nourish, satisfy, give, eat, offer
FEEL	touch, examine, grasp, grip
FIND	discover, look, uncover, obtain
FIX	attach, fasten, pin, tie, secure, affix, join
FLING	throw, toss, hurl
GET	pick, take
GIVE	offer, present, drop

GO	leave, depart, exit
GREET	meet, welcome, speak
HELP	hint, clue, aid
HIDE	conceal, cover, mask, screen, camouflage, cloak, shroud, veil
HIT	strike, smash, blow, beat
HURL	fling, throw, pitch, cast, drop, toss
INJURE	harm, hurt, wound, damage, hit
JAILER	captor, guard, keeper, warden
JUMP	leap, spring, bound, vault, hurdle, climb
KICK	boot, strike, hit, tap
KILL	slay, execute, murder, shoot, stab, destroy
LAMP	light, lantern
LEVER	bar, handle
LIFT	raise, elevate, pick
LOCATE	find, discover, unearth
LOCK	latch, hasp, bolt, padlock
LOOK	gaze, stare, glance, survey, watch, regard, see, study, examine
MAKE	construct, build, create, produce
MAP	chart, plan
MEND	repair, patch, fix
MIRROR	glass, looking-glass, reflector
MIST	fog, haze, cloud
MIX	combine, blend, mingle, unite
MONEY	cash, coins, coinage, currency, bribe
OPEN	unlock, pull, lift
OPPOSE	resist, combat, thwart, battle, withstand
PAUSE	sleep, wait, remain, delay, sit, lie, rest, doze, nap
PICK	choose, select, pluck, take
PULL	drag, twist, wrench, tug, jerk
PUNCH	blow, hit, thump
PUSH	force, twist, shove, thrust, press, depress
PUT	place, rest, drop, set

QUIT	stop, end
RESCUE	save, free, release, liberate, help, aid
RUB	shine, polish
SAY	speak, talk, state, tell, ask
SECURE	fix, fasten, tighten, lock
SHAKE	wave, move, tremble, vibrate, brandish
SHUT	close, lock, seal
STAFF	stick, pole, wand, club, weapon, rod
STATUS	score, strength, position, moves
STEAL	take, rob, pilfer, get
STRIKE	hit, beat, smash, blow
TIE	fix, fasten, bind, secure, join, connect, knot, link, unite
TOUCH	feel, test, handle, pick, examine
TWIST	turn, pull, slide, push, lift
UNITE	join, combine, tie, connect
USE	employ, utilise
UTTER	say, speak, talk
WAVE	shake, move, tremble, vibrate, brandish

Adventures

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Continued
Page →

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Continued
← Page →

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Continued
Page →

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

ADVENTURE: ....

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Location	Objects Found	Action Tried	Result

Continued
Page →

Page:

Recognised Words

Verbs	Nouns

Notes:

Duckworth Home Computing

THE ADVENTURER'S NOTEBOOK
by Mike Gerrard

This book is for both beginners and regular adventure players, and is designed to be used, rather than read once and then left on the shelf. The main part of the book consists of a series of ready-made maps, alongside which space has been left for your notes on verbs, nouns, the location of objects, how to pass obstacles – in fact everything the keen adventurer needs in order to keep all those scribbled sheets and notes together in one book.

A chapter for beginners explains what an adventure game is, and how it works, together with lengthy sections on the history of the adventure game and hints on how to play games more successfully. Also included are recommended adventures for all the popular home micros, and a list of synonyms and suggestions to use when you're stuck for just the right word.

Mike Gerrard is a regular contributor to *Personal Computer News* and *Which Micro?,* and has also written for *Home Computing Weekly, Honey, Mayfair, Woman's Realm* and the *Daily Mail*.