

QL Adventurers Forum



90p
Issue 4

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first printed edition of QL Adventurers' Forum the fourth in the series so far. This should have reached you before the ZX Microfair, but has been delayed due to factors beyond my control, the main one being that my photocopier blew its bulb and the new one mysteriously disappeared in the post together with some toner.

Well what's new? Well the good news for QL Adventurers is that C.G.H. Services have released Alan Pemberton's "From the Tower of Valagon" at the wonderful price of £6.00 (or £4.00 if you supply the necessary media and packaging and postage) which includes a splendid manual. Right that's enough hype for this page. The other good news is that Merv's "The Prawn" should be out by the time you read this, I understand there were delays over getting the manual done. Published by Talent+, and available from TK Software and most dealers.

More good news on the QL Adventuring scene is that Steve Sutton has managed to get Digital Precision to publish both Imagine and the APT system. APT is now "Adventure Creation Tool" and is "a greatly enhanced development of APT" (DP's words, not Steve's). It'll cost you £49.95, I'll see if we can get DP to give QLAF readers a discount - no promises though!

The other news is none too bright however. It looks as though we may lose the services of several adventure writers due to the lack of return on sales - so if you've been copying titles that are in print then you've only got yourselves to blame. I don't want to start a rush but the Atari ST looks like it might be the beneficiary of this, especially as the ST Adventure Creator, based on G.A.C., has just been released. If this carries on, this will have to become the 68000 Adventure Forum!

P.C.B.S. are, I assume, perhaps wrongly, having problems. They have moved to 6 Cresswell Street, Tilhead, Glasgow, Scotland. Apart from the save bug noted by John Shaw in the last issue, The Talisman looks like an excellent Dungeons and Dragons game, but there have been no adverts for several months. Gilsoft are still selling the Quill system for the QL at £10.95 if you supply the media and don't mind printing out your own manual. They are still at 2 Park Crescent, Barry, South Glamorgan, CF6 8HD (0446-732765). It looks unlikely that they will bring out P.A.W. for the Quill, which means that people

wanting to do illustrated adventures either have to do it all themselves or get ACT!

On the arcade adventure scene we've got the Maxtronics Alien Hijack which features some excellent graphics. It's 3-D dodge and pick-up game with, I presume, puzzles to solve. Being a bit rusty at this I've not got very far, but I can recommend it for people wanting to do a little joystick waggling. They can be contacted at Chi-Soft, 20 Chandos Way, Wellgarth Road, Hampstead, London NW11 7HF (01-458-7249). Cost £18.25 all inclusive.

Also if you're into Defender type maze games, Chris Skellern kindly sent me a copy of Starburst, which is a huge game, read the review and then order a copy!

O.K. You may remember that I've spoken of a wargame for the QL. Well, I've finished the preliminary notes (6,500 words) and hope soon to start working out the details. If you want in on this project contact me at the usual address and send a mdy_ and s.a.e. and I'll send you the latest version of the notes.

I hope you find this first issue legible, let me know if any typefaces are causing problems. I originally was going to use character width 2 for the articles but they were too blocky. What would be nice is a char. size 1.5. I've used Page Designer 2 for most of the text output, but have used a couple of PC progs: Greeting Card Maker and Sign and Banner Maker (a mere £9.95 each) for the cover and some of the adverts. Now there would be a useful set of progs for the QL!

Another first for this issue is the first part of Malcom Smith's maps for ZKUL. I'll be reproducing these as is, as using DTP for maps is a PAIN!

Right that's all for now. Don't forget that QLAF needs your contributions to survive and be useful. We welcome anything on adventures (text, graphic and arcade), simulations, strategy and wargames. Also notes on QL add-ons, front-ends, toolkits which are supposed to make life that little bit easier, but which often make it more complicated. I'm also happy to print anything educational if it includes programing hints or advice on simulations, etc.

See you in a few months time,

Richard Alexander

ADVENTURE

PLAYTIME

by ALAN D. PEMBERTON

PRICE £3 + mdv + p&p + vat from
Microdrive Exchange

IF you still have your 'L' plates up as an adventurer, then PLAYTIME is the one that will surely get you through the "Test". But at the same time Alan Pemberton's brilliant adventure will cater for the expert too, since the Quill document supplied with Playtime enables you to 'cheat' as much as you want - or not at all.

You are told at the outset that you are about to enter a world where a variety of characters expect you to perform tasks for them. You can wander through the land without hindrance once you get there - with two exceptions. You have to figure out how to get into the main adventure and there is one section you can't explore until you have performed most of the tasks.

Alan's sense of humour is evident throughout (try asking the librarian about the chest or, better still, examine it) but unlike some adventures, it doesn't swamp it at the expense of the "serious" business of getting home again in one piece.

The Quill doc gives you an idea about what is to come, tells you about the dictionary and how to converse with the various characters. I won't tell you what those characters are since I found that coming across these oddballs added a great deal of enjoyment to Playtime. So you'll have to go out and buy it, won't you!

In addition, the instructions give you a "cheat sheet" written in code, so that when you get stuck you can type in "DECODE" followed by the code, which will then give you the hint you've been looking for. You may find this aspect of the game a bit too accessible but as I said, you can cheat as much or as little as you like. YOU ALONE WILL KNOW YOUR DARK SECRET!

There is also a section in the Quill doc entitled TAKING PRECAUTIONS. When I was but a lad, that meant something completely different, involving a furtive visit to the chemists. For Alan, bless his innocence, it's merely a section advising you on how to save the game as you go along, so if you get splattered you don't have to start all over again.

Anyway, back to Playtime. Having completed your allotted tasks and

looking forward to the wonderful endscreen you have been promised as a reward, there's a sting in the tail. And that's all you get from this reviewer.

Happy adventuring.

SHANE MCGARVEY

XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
X O U T S I D E X
X C O S T S X
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX

Rich Mellor has written to say that he can supply Alan Pemberton's Adventure Playtime on 3.5" disk. If you want a copy, send an s.a.e. and a formatted 3.5" disk to Rich Mellor Roscoe and Gladstone Hall, Greenbank Lane, Liverpool, L17 1AH, England. Please note that Alan Pemberton has given his permission for this, as Microdrive Exchange only have the "rights" to the Microdrive version. If any one wants Adventure Playtime on 5.25" disk they can obtain a copy from C.G.H. Services. Again an s.a.e. and 5.25" disk will be required.

WANTED

New adventure, strategy,
simulation and wargames
for the QL and PC.



If you have written a game
that you'd like to have
published then contact
CGH Services.

DRAGONHOLD

This program is by RUBICON systems,
price £14.95.
Rubicon are at 46 POARROY CLOSE,
AARERSHAM, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, HP7 2BW

The program is a 'graphic adventure',
with a view from the top, although
your little man is shown side on for
obvious reasons. As you go around, you
will see all sorts of articles strewn
about, such as a dagger,
quarter-staff, food etc.

You move about by use of the cursor
Keys and can enter commands by the use
of single Key presses, with the
letters A - X corresponding to both
verbs and nouns.

There are several other characters
about, including a nagging woman, a
dwarf, a thief, a priest, and a
vampire bat (PLEASE NOTE, TRY TO STAY
CLEAR OF THE VAMPIRE BAT, SINCE THIS
WILL ATTACK YOU EVERY TIME AND KEEPS
ON AFTER YOU AS YOU TRY TO GET AWAY).
Nearly all of these characters will
attack you at the first opportunity,
and it seems impossible to reduce
their strength, while all the time
your strength is being reduced in the
fight. Still a quick bite to eat if
you are lucky enough to have found
some food, and you are back on your
feet and off to find some treasure.
On the first screen, it is impossible
to pass through the door which leads
to the next set of caves, until you
speak to the nagging woman who
promptly tells you, that you cannot
pass through a door if you are
carrying arms. Please note several of
the characters will not speak to you
unless you are carrying something -
For example, the woman will not speak
if you are armed.

The next set of caves is rather small,
with only a troll in there to stop
your passing by. However he is rather
stupid and can be lead into a dead end
while you pass by him and out through
the door at the top into the FOREST.
The forest seems rather devoid of
objects, so your best bet is to go
straight to the castle at the bottom
right corner.

Once in the castle everything seems to
happen at a more frantic pace with the
characters attacking you at nearly
every turning. Also you must beware,
since you may have all sorts of
goodies only to come into contact with
the thief, who promptly steals
something off you.

There is a deeper level, the dungeons
which contain a lot of the treasure,
but do not pass into them (through the
red doors inside the castle) unless
you have found a lamp, since you won't
be able to see about you at all, and
it is impossible to get out.

On the whole it is a very good game,

but I do have a few minor groans:

(1) The program is supposedly fully
multitasking, but problems occur if
you try to run the program with
SPREADSHEET switched on (PROBLEM for
BBAM users, who are unable to switch
it off), since the borders around the
windows will not appear after the
first title screen.

(2) The title screen asks you to input
the drive which contains the master
disk, and thinking it is only looking
for a Key, you enter this, only to
find the program proceeds to load
itself off this file, making a mockery
of any backup disk you may have. There
is a way around this however, if you
place your working copy in FLP1 and
the master disk in FLP2, type the
command COPY FLP2_ TO FLP1_ and when
it asks you for the drive containing
the master disk, just enter 'flp1_'
and the program will load ok. (NB DO
NOT USE THIS EXCEPT FOR YOUR OWN USE
SINCE THE COPY CONTAINS A NOTE OF YOUR
ROM NUMBER)

(3) The objects are scattered around
the screens every time you start the
game - this makes it more enjoyable to
play since it is different every go,
but a few times I have been unable to
find the lamp to enable me to go down
the dungeons. I suppose one of the
other characters had it, but when you
can't find anything they would like to
trade, it is impossible.

(4) The characters always say the same
things, even when they appear in
another set of caves. - What point is
there in the woman telling you in the
forest that you cannot pass through a
door carrying arms, since you needed
this information to leave the first
set of caves?

(5) When you die, you are offered the
chance of being reincarnated, but have
to start from the first set of caves
again - surely it would be better to
be reincarnated at the point where you
were killed, or at least by the door
to that set of caves.

The program has now been out since
1985 and it is a pity that these
problems have not been fixed yet.
However, all in all, I must admit to
thoroughly enjoying the game and would
recommend it to anyone.

R.A.MELLOR, Roscoe & Gladstone Hall,
Greenbank Lane, Liverpool, L17 1AH

IS THERE AN ADVENTURE THAT
YOU ARE STUCK ON, OR THAT
YOU CAN HELP OTHERS WITH?
WRITE TO BL ADVENTURERS'
FORUM, C/O CGH SERVICES.

BOOK REVIEW

WRITING ADVENTURE GAMES - PART THREE

A review of "Sinclair QL Adventures - a micro adventurer's handbook", by Tony Bridge and Richard Williams. Published 1984 by Sunshine Books, £5.95. Paperback, 165 pages. Currently available from APC Software, 72, Julian Rd, West Bridgeford, Nottingham, NG2 5AN, price £2.50 plus £1.00 postage. (SEE NOTE OVER !)

"Sinclair QL Adventures" is probably the only book written about adventure gaming with specific reference to the QL. Consequently, this volume is the main source of information and ideas for the programmer wishing to write adventures in SuperBASIC. The material it contains can help avoid the need to cross-reference general books on writing adventures in BASIC to the QL User Guide in order to get a game written for 'micro x' to run on the QL.

The authors are from worthy backgrounds. Tony Bridge was the adventure correspondent of Popular Computing Weekly for many years, and knows a good game when he sees one. Richard Williams lectures on computer courses and artificial intelligence, the latter being of certain interest to some adventure creators.

Though the main aim is to assist in the creation of SuperBASIC adventures, much of the book will be of use to those readers of QL Adventurers Forum who wish simply to play and solve games they have purchased from commercial sources, rather than writing their own games. This is because the first part is devoted to a history of adventure games and contains many useful hints on how to solve them.

In 1984, when Bridge and Richards were writing, only two Sinclair QL adventures were available, namely Talent's West and 2Kul, both of which are still on sale. West was a conversion from the Commodore 64, but 2Kul, like The Pawn, is believed to have been written first for the QL. As a result of this scarcity of QL adventures at the time, most of the comments of part one relate to the early mainframe adventures and to games on the ZX81, Spectrum and Commodore 64. However, the suggestions on how to tackle playing adventure games in general are quite useful for adventures on all sorts of computers, including the QL. Newcomers to adventuring may learn much from this part of the book, especially if they have a tendency to get completely

stuck after the third location! For hints on problem solving in specific QL games, consult all the back issues of BLAF.

Incidentally, though Bridge and Richards were not very complementary about West and 2Kul in their 1984 review, these games still pose problems to BLAF readers four years after their release. More expensive versions of these two Talent games were released on the Atari ST series, which must be flattery to the QL of a sort, and Talent + is still a major supplier of adventures for the QL.

THE QL ADVENTURE GENERATOR

Part two of the book deals with the serious topic of producing adventure games, but simplifies the task by means of the QL Adventure Generator (QLAG). This owes much in principle to Gilsoft's The Quill Adventure Writing System, which was not available for the QL until about two years after "Sinclair QL Adventures" had been published. The debt to The Quill is acknowledged by the authors.

A major difference between QLAG and The Quill is that you will have to type in QLAG at the Keyboard, as it is in the form of a SuperBASIC listing. It is a shame the publishers did not make QLAG available on cartridge as an optional extra for those readers who wanted to produce their games quickly without having to type in the generator program.

The options presented by QLAG are like a cut-down version of The Quill:

PRESS THE CORRECT NUMBER TO:

LOAD DATA FROM MICRODRIVE (1)

ALTER THE MAP (2)

ALTER THE OBJECTS (3)

ALTER THE MONSTERS (4)

ALTER THE CHARACTERS (5)

END THE PROGRAM (6)

It is best to read the book thoroughly before using the program, as there is little on screen help offered.

There are limitations to the types of games that can be produced with QLAG, therefore careful planning is required before you sit at the QL Keyboard to ensure that you will create a unique and interesting game. Bridge and Richards suggest that with careful

BOOK REVIEW

continued

design, you will be able to create an adventure which combines both combat and puzzle elements. It is unlikely that games produced with BLAG will equal the output of Gilsoft's game generator, but interesting games could still be produced.

As an incentive to typing in BLAG a simple adventure is included in the book, BL Adventure (BAD would you believe?). This should demonstrate how to use the adventure generator.

In addition, it is explained how simple graphics can be included in the adventure games you create with BLAG. At the present, the BL version of The Bull lacks the ability to include graphics in its games.

Though much of the book is dated, adventure games on all computers having progressed quite a bit in the past four years, it is still worth reading in 1988. And even though The Bull is available to BL adventurers, it is educational to examine the BL Adventure Generator to see how two programmers have tackled the task of producing adventures in SuperBASIC.

MPC Software of Nottingham are advertising the book at the time of writing, and the price is a few pounds less than it was originally. Buy now while stocks last! It would be a shame to miss it at such a bargain price.

Michael L. Jackson

Sad editorial note. I was hoping to get a few of these to make available to BLAF subscribers, but MPC informed me that they are out of stock and are unlikely to get hold of any more. So if you've got a copy that you want to sell please advertise in the small ads. Otherwise it's a trip to the library for you - and the best of luck. If anyone has written an adventure using this system please let us know how you got on.

Richard.

Further note:

I actually managed to pick a copy of this up in a computer shop in Haverford West but at the full price! (Curses) If someone felt like writing to the authors they may let the blag come into the public domain, now that the BL is practically dead as far as large scale sales go.

Richard.

CAVE ADVENTURE

In an @LAF1 we had a short piece on the Cave Adventure, in which Shane showed how far he had got. I have had another go at this adventure, aided by some clues given in a PC mag and have managed to get a bit further on.

In particular I have solved the problem (I hope) of the troll, and with it, that of the emerald. If you remember you can get to the emerald by saying plaver in the Y2 room, but getting out again successfully is another matter. The solution to this problem involves two parts. Firstly go into the emerald room with your lamp, get the emerald, NE into the dark room to get the pyramid, return then drop the lamp, go west then when you can get no further drop the emerald and return to get the lamp and return to the Y2 room. If this is done correctly (and I'll leave it to you to work out the exact commands!) the the emerald will be accessible from another direction.

To get to the emerald you'll need to be carrying the golden eggs - so don't plug them back to the building when you get them - the keys and some food. Once you've got the eggs go west from the oriental room then so to the long winding corridor, thence to the chasm where you'll be faced with a troll. He'll demand a toll (don't they always!) and to pay him throw the eggs at troll. (Giving doesn't work here.) Once over the chasm you can either go NE to a spectacular view and pick up some spices or SE to the bear, (or indeed do both). The bear, to be useful, needs feeding. So having fed the bear unlock the chain and the bear will be yours. To return past the troll simply drop the bear and he'll chase away the troll.

Right that means that, according to most versions of the game, we have only to find and kill the dragon and get the mat to trigger the end game. Alas, neither Shane or myself have come across the dragon so, dear readers, it's back to you. Is there a dragon, and if so where is it? Once we've sussed that out I have a solution to other versions that should let us complete the game, but that'll have to wait for another issue of @LAF!!!

Richard.

WORM ADVENTURE

ADVENTURE WRITTEN BY TOM BLADEN

This adventure is available from QUANTA to all of its members, free on DISK_07. A text-only version is also available free on DISK_06. (If you have only microdrives, the respective libraries are LIB_07 and LIB_08. NB you need three microdrive cartridges for LIB_08).

The graphics version has been enhanced by N.Taylor, who added a text compression technique and a split mode program (both from the QUANTA library) which has enabled the graphics to be displayed in MODE 8, while the text is displayed in MODE 4. I myself, have now just completed adding the finishing touches to a TURBO'd version of the program which will enable it to run on any QL version - a bug in the program had prevented this earlier - and have now re-submitted it to the library. I intend in the future to also update the MDV version and the text-only version.

So, what is the adventure all about? A worm who keeps the peace in the land has been kidnapped by the evil wizard and you must set out on your mission to rescue the worm. On the way there are lots of different tasks to perform, but all of them are very logical and well connected. (Mind you, I do query that a squirrel should be carrying a torch around with it?) An example of the logical solutions is that once inside the castle (can you find it I wonder) there is a dragon to contend with. Now the only way to put out the dragon's fire is to give it a large ice cube to eat, but if you try to pick up the ice-cube, you will find it will melt very quickly unless you are carrying something to keep it cool.

The adventure even includes a real time fight sequence against the wizard although the program's logic may need a little clearing up here, since all you have to do is to watch what the wizard is doing and you will defeat him easily. Still I guess the author didn't want this part to be too difficult, especially since once you have opened the way into the castle, the wizard will come out and find you wherever you are.

On the whole the adventure is well thought out, and there are several hints to help you along your way. These hints are in the form of signs which appear at several of the locations, and even in some objects! The graphics form the top quarter of the screen and include some sprites

such as when the dragon has been upset. These graphics are excellent and do not slow the game down very much, even though they are loaded from disk, since once you have been to a location once, the graphic representation for that location is available instantaneously.

I would indeed thoroughly recommend this adventure to anyone, and if you are thinking about joining QUANTA, this program may just sway your decision, especially with the knowledge that there is also another excellent adventure in the library by Tom ('JEWEL') and also the graphics program and text compression programs used in this adventure are also available to members of QUANTA.

HINTS

1) SQUIRRELS REALLY LOVE TO EAT ACORNS AND MAY GIVE UP PRESENTS IN EXCHANGE. DON'T EXPECT THEM TO CARRY TOO MUCH

2) A Y-SHAPED STICK COUPLED WITH A RUBBER BAND MAKES AN EXCELLENT CATAPULT

3) RIVER BEDS ARE EXCELLENT PLACES TO DIG

4) THE SNAKE IS AN ADDER. YOU NEED SOMETHING TO COUNTERACT THIS BEFORE YOU PICK IT UP

5) NORMAL SHOES WILL SINK IN THE MUD

6) THE STONE IS NOT ONLY A WEAPON, BUT CAN ALSO SHARPEN EDGES

7) THE TREES HAVE THINGS HIDDEN IN THEM

8) READ THE MESSAGES ON THE SIGNS

9) THE DRAGON ENJOYS EATING ICE, UNFORTUNATELY?

10) THE BIRD WILL TALK FOR SEEDS

11) THE LEECH CAN EXTRACT SOME BLOOD FOR YOU

12) PINE NEEDLES CAN SERVE ALL YOUR MENDING 'NEEDS'

13) THE DOG REALLY LIKES BONES

14) THE BALLROOM ISN'T USED FOR DANCES - TRY ANOTHER TYPE OF BALL THERE

15) GET THE MAGICAL SWORD AS SOON AS YOU ENTER THE CASTLE - IT'S YOUR ONLY PROTECTION AGAINST THE WIZARD!

REVIEW AND HINTS BY RICH MELLOR

QUEST FOR THE DRAGON SWORD.



One or two words concerning "Quest for the Dragonsword". Overall, I felt that your review was quite accurate and fair. (I thought that QL World's was as well apart from their "limited vocabulary" comment.)

The game was originally started in the summer of 1985 using the Quill system on a Spectrum (or rather a couple of Spectrums). Ian Ward, Malcolm Johnson and I had just finished school and I suggested trying to Quill an adventure. This took all summer, as we didn't plan anything, just making it up as we went. The 'finished' version was much smaller than the present QL adventure, left 38 bytes free in a 48K Spectrum and had more bugs than we ever realised, despite intensive debugging and testing. We tried to market it without success.

Shortly after, Malcolm and I purchased QL's at the new price of £200 and I tried to convert the game into 68000 machine code. Halfway through this horrendous task, I discovered that the QL Metacomco Assembler has an object code limit of 32K, which thankfully brought this project to a halt. About the same time, Gilsoft released the QL version of the Quill, so we bought that and took the opportunity to dramatically improve the game.

The greatest feat of engineering was the loading screen. This was transferred from the Spectrum to the QL, by 'beeping' it in binary on the

Spectrum, amplifying the beeps and reading them in by PEEKing the QL's network port. I then had to unscramble the Spectrum's weird screen format and tidy the picture up with various art packages. QL pixels are shorter and fatter than the Spectrum's, so the picture was squashed vertically and stretched horizontally, so the girl in the picture was transformed from being slim and elegant to being short and fat!!! I had to redraw her head and drastically alter the shape of her body! The process improved the look of the dragon though!

When the game was finished, we tried to save it, only to find that the early version of the Quill had a 32K code limit, so I had to get Gilsoft to supply me with a corrected version. They had been unaware of this bug until I told them about it.

After all this work (2 years on and off) and we have only just managed to break even, due to high advertising costs (and large advertisements). Still, we aren't too worried about that, Richard at Byteback took the financial risk and as he is a friend, I'm glad he didn't lose any money over it. Any further sales will be profit (however small) and money means beer to hard up students! Still, if people enjoy playing it then that's the main thing, I suppose, (although a profit would be very welcome, of course).

QUEST FOR THE DRAGONSWORD

Regarding the scenario, it was written one afternoon last summer, as an afterthought, by Malcolm and myself, partly to provide background information to the game and partly as an exercise in 'Monty Python' style humour. 'Claire' was Malcolm's idea and one which no-one else agreed with, but he insisted. He was also responsible for the name 'Kikiz Eddin' for the head of the Adventurers' guild. I'm afraid that 'Sir Lilipoo' was my idea, as I wanted a name that sounded least like a brave dragonslayer. We sought the opinions of several people about the scenario and found two general responses. Quite a number of people thought it was very funny, while others (such as my mum) shared your opinion. No offence was meant to anyone (including the N.U.M. about the Miners' strike jibe and the Y.T.S. My sister got a very good job through the Y.T.S.) We deliberately kept most of the excessive corny humour out of the game, although odd bits crept in. We did try to hide a lot of more subtle (or at least less obvious) jokes and puns in the game though. The most extreme description that we put in (probably under the influence of alcohol) was:-

"We are not going to give you a description of this object, as we are writing this at 11 o'clock at night, and we are all tired and hungry and want some chips but nobody will agree to go across the road to the chip shop to get us some."

Fortunately, I accidentally crashed the QL just before this was saved and we couldn't be bothered to type it in again. The proper description was entered the next day when we felt better.

Ian Foot

VERY OBSERVANT READERS MAY NOTICE ONE OR TWO SPELLING AND SIMILAR MISTAKES IN THIS PUBLICATION.

THESE HAVE BEEN INCLUDED PURELY FOR THOSE PEOPLE WHO LIKE LOOKING FOR SUCH MISTAKES.

KIND AREN'T WE !!!

CLUES

'Descartes the Stuffed Fish' is not difficult to converse with as long as you know what to say to him. If you don't know, go to your local library and look up Descartes. (then look up de horses. Silly ed) The answer can be found in the Encyclopaedia Britannica, as well as several books of quotations. Just type the correct sentence in and Descartes will reward you. (Solving this puzzle is not necessary for the completion of the game.)

RATS!!! This is probably the hardest puzzle in the game. Prevention is better than cure for bubonic plague. Perhaps something to ward off sickness might help. Escaping from the church requires the (unwilling) co-operation of the rats and remember that the easiest solution is not always the best.

If you are lost in the mountains, there are two ways out, one is an easy path, but well hidden and the other takes much longer and is often discovered accidentally.

The first part of the sword can be discovered by monkeying about, although this is a giant problem!

Don't be too greedy if you want to obtain the second part!

The key to the third part has been altared!

The fly shouldn't enter the spider's parlour by the front door!

Halitosis can be a real life-saver! (Difficult one this!)

Ian also says "I am not willing to provide the complete solution to the game, but I will provide more specific clues if asked. (£5.00 notes are also useful for extracting clues from me!!!)

(If you wish to contact Ian, write c/o CGH Services or Byteback)

Ian Foot

CONFESSIONS OF AN ADVENTURE WRITER

OR... HOW I WENT ABOUT WRITING MY
FIRST ADVENTURE PROGRAM

OR...

1001 Ways to make your adventure
boring and completely unplayable.

by Steve Sutton

My original introduction to adventure games was by way of the very first such program by Willie Crouther (updated by Don Woods) which I acquired at work (before the home computer revolution) and ran on a DEC mini-computer. Since this magical beginning (at least it enchanted me) I have played, with varying degrees of success, several other games both at work (lunchtimes of course) and at home on various micros.

Being the sort of bloke who can't resist copying a good idea, I started writing an adventure of my own on the DEC mini I had access to at work (yet more wasted lunch/coffee/tea breaks and late evenings...); this game was called IMAGIN (only 6 letters allowed for the DEC filing system) and ultimately it led me to write APT for my QL, but that's another story...

For no good reason, other than it happened to be the only language available to me at the time, I wrote this game in FORTRAN. This in itself caused lots of problems (if you think it's difficult to use the QUILL adventure writer just try starting from scratch with SuperBASIC say, the FORTRAN I had to use was very primitive compared to SuperBASIC). More importantly though, I made a lot of mistakes with the way I constructed the game, both in terms of the way it worked and also in what features I included in it.

This article is really a collection of my experiences after having embarked on writing a substantial adventure game. Substantial? IMAGIN has over 220 locations, 130 objects and a vocabulary of 450 words (the QL adventure I have now written (IMAGINE) that is 'cloned' from IMAGIN is a mere 100 locations and 60 objects). If you are tempted to think that this specification doesn't sound like a very big game, after all there are several games available for home micros that boast a similar number of locations and objects, then maybe the overall size of the game, about 450K

of total data/program space will convince you.

IMAGIN is still being played, from time to time, by interested persons at work. If anyone has access to a DEC PDP/11 that runs RT11 or TSX operating systems and would like IMAGIN then do get in touch, I'll gladly send a copy!

I tried to put a lot of the features that I liked from the various games I have played into IMAGIN, as well as including several completely new ideas of course. At the same time, I attempted to exclude all the features that I disliked in other games. Despite all the original good intention, I must say that it is VERY difficult to design a text only game that can maintain a high level of interest for a wide variety of players. I have learned a lot from IMAGIN, but I still consider myself a novice when it comes to writing a good adventure (I'm getting better though, honest!).

IMAGIN is a game of logic. It has a very loose theme, basically the player wakes up one morning to find themselves in a strange room. The object of the game is to find out how to get home to the 'real' world. All the usual sort of things like magic, monsters, riddles etc. are included, but I also relied a LOT on logical reasoning to provide the solution to many of the problems presented in the game.

I also included several quite novel features in the game, for example, the gamesman and the nagging wife (the wife is also included in IMAGINE, so I won't tell you too much about her!). The gamesman is a way of including a board game (othello) as part of the adventure, the player has to play and win a game against one of the characters in the game before they can continue beyond a certain point.

IMAGIN was continuously developed and improved in the light of various criticisms I received about it. These comments were absolutely essential to the development of the game, if you choose to discount everything I say as rubbish then fine, but that is one point I would always recommend - always get comments from as many people as you can about any game you write, it is a rare person who can write a really good game without such help, even if it's only at the

MORE CONFESSIONS

debugging stage.

The criticisms about IMAGIN have been many and varied. Some just reflect the particular features that different people like or dislike. For example, I had equal but opposite comments about:

the othello game - too easy/too hard
startup information - too complete (ie gives too much away) / incomplete (ie should have given more help with certain awkward problems)
location descriptions - too descriptive, especially where details mentioned don't correspond to words or objects the game actually knows about. Some people thought my descriptions were mostly too brief though...

and so on. All this goes to show that you can't please all of the people all of the time!

After spending some time thinking about the various comments made, I would list the following points as typical problems I encountered with IMAGIN, and also some more general do's and don'ts that came out of the criticisms.

On the whole I included more locations than were really sensible. Clearly some nodes (places) should be included in order to pad the game out and to provide a more interesting 'world' for the player to explore, but I would recommend that no more than 1 extra node be added for each node where something interesting can happen, be it an object to be found, some magic effect or whatever.

In a similar way, the number of 'red herring' objects should be limited. IMAGIN originally had many more redundant objects than useful ones and several of the people who have played it spent a lot of time trying to think of something useful to do with many of these. Again, I would recommend a ratio of AT LEAST 1 useful object for every redundant one.

I found that it is always a good idea to provide alternative ways of solving all problems that govern how far a player can complete the game. One way, the simple way, should be time consuming, lose the player points, possibly create other restrictions later in the game, but at least should provide a way of keeping the player interested by providing a route to proceed in the event of their not being able to solve the puzzle in the correct (hard) way.

Never underestimate how difficult problems might be for the player. I

found that many of the puzzles in IMAGIN were simply too obscure, initially, to allow them to be solved without hints. Try to make sure that there is an adequate clue to help the player if you do include any difficult problem, by adequate I mean that the clue should not be too obscure, make sure that the player can reasonably easily figure out that a clue does actually relate to the problem it is designed to help with. Don't make up puzzles that require too much prior knowledge from the player. It's OK to assume that the player has a reasonable general knowledge, but not everyone is familiar with Physics or Greek Mythology, etc. If you do set a problem that requires such specialised information then a hint or possible alternative solution should be included.

Repetitive puzzles get very boring. The first time you have to search for a key before you can unlock a box it is quite fun. If every container works this way, however, then it gets to be extremely tedious.

On the other hand, there are occasions where repeating a problem used previously in a game can be a good idea. IMAGIN had one such repeat which nearly everyone liked. This involved disguising the problem, the second time, so that players are distracted from the obvious solution. The actual trick I used was that early on in the game it is necessary to realise that you can move a heavy chest (by PUSHING or PULLING it) in order to reveal a hidden staircase, nothing very remarkable in that. However, later in the game I do exactly the same thing but this time the object that must be moved has apparently remarkable properties. In fact I make it a KLEIN bottle (a container that can contain itself!), so far everyone who has encountered this tried all sorts of other things, often remarkably inventive, before realising just how simple a puzzle it really was.

Pay particular attention to the logical correctness of your game. There is nothing worse than being given a clue or an instruction is a game only to find that it was simply wrong! For example, IMAGIN tried to be helpful to the player in many situations by providing a suggestion when certain commands failed. Say the player gives the command 'TAKE THE SHOVEL', if they are already carrying too much then they might get the response 'You haven't enough strength to carry that, try dropping something to lighten your load.'. This is fine in this case, but it is important to

EVEN MORE CONFESSIONS

make sure that the object really CAN be picked up if the player does as requested. In IMAGIN there were several objects that were simply too heavy for the player to manage even if they discarded ALL their possessions: in this case the response only has the effect of making the game tedious.

Partly as a result of copying features on some more recent games and partly as a general desire to make IMAGIN a 'sophisticated' game I initially included some command structures into the parser (that's the part of the program that decodes the commands that the player types in) that proved to be too complicated.

For example, I originally provided a sponge to allow liquids to be picked up by commands such as 'fill the bottle with water using the sponge'. An interesting idea but not altogether practical. In the end, after a universal failure of ANYONE actually working out how this command should work, I was forced to include the simpler commands 'fill sponge with water' and 'soak up water in sponge' as well as commands such as 'squeeze water into bottle' etc.

Generally, everyone who has played IMAGIN so far has always limited the commands they try to one of three general forms. These are 'verb', 'verb noun' and finally 'verb noun noun'. Additional words such as 'the', 'to' or 'with' etc are often (although not always) redundant. Of course there may be adjectives required to adequately distinguish each object, but the basic structure is still the same.

You will gather from this that I am not much interested in adventure games that boast parsers which can cope with multiple commands or that offer some sort of syntactical analysis of commands. On the whole I think, from my observations of how people actually PLAY games (mine at least), such features are a waste of time.

There is no reason why paths should travel in straight lines in an adventure. For example, if you go North from some location then the new place you arrive at need not be to the North of your starting point, thus going South might take you to a third location rather than back to where you started. This sort of non-reversability can add to the challenge of a game in some

situations, in a maze for example. However, if ALL routes are twisty in this way then it simply makes the game more difficult to explore but adds little to the fun in doing so. I had a lot of adverse comments initially over this, subsequently I made nearly all the paths in IMAGIN reversible, EXCEPT in the mazes.

It is helpful to provide details, either stated or implied, in the location descriptions, that indicate which directions have paths. If this isn't done then the player may spend a lot of time methodically checking each direction at each new location in order to 'map' the game. Of course, an alternative is to supply a map with the game, however I think part of the fun is in exploring so I would always choose NOT to supply a map.

In some locations it may be a part of the intended challenge that some path is hidden. In this case it is possible to use a location description something like 'there are numerous paths from here, obvious routes are to the North and Southeast', this then leaves the player to discover the other, possibly inaccessible until some task is completed, routes.

I notice that people will commonly miss a lot of information that might be put into location or object descriptions. If something is essential to complete the game then it should occur more than once or be stressed in some way.

Mostly, there is a problem with maintaining interest in a game once all the easy bits have been solved by the player. Basically, once the player runs out of ideas about the bits they haven't solved yet then unless something happens to spur them on the game will quickly be abandoned.

I think this is a general problem with adventure games, you quickly get interested in the initial game environment and solving the puzzles first encountered, but unless something unusual happens or you continue to make steady progress in solving the game, it will ultimately become boring.

IMAGIN was particularly bad in this respect to start with, the sort of comments I got were 'IMAGIN was OK but not much happened' or 'I couldn't see what I was supposed to do'.

The only advice I can offer for this problem is to always try to think what the player will try to do and cover as many alternative avenues as you can think of that the player might pursue at ALL the stages of the game. It is always useful to see how other games shape up in this respect. Probably the

LAST CONFESSIONS

best game I have played, to my mind, is called Magical Mystery Mansion (on a DEC machine again). This game managed to keep something happening virtually ALL the time, I don't think I ever lost interest in it once (I still play it from time to time since I haven't managed to solve it completely, yet).

Looking at the word count I think I had better draw this to a close. I could include a lot more examples and ideas along the same lines. However, if anyone is interested I could perhaps waffle on about some details of how I went about actually writing my first adventure (much of the logic I worked out for IMAGIN found it's way into APT and IMAGINE). I would welcome any feedback about these thoughts, especially positive criticisms about any of my conclusions/recommendations, they are, after all, only MY opinion based on my own experiences.

Steve Sutton, June 7, 1988

* STARBURST *

This exciting machine code
game for all QL's
is now available
for a measly
quid
(plus s&e and media)
from
CGH Services



ZKUL

Hints for ZKul - from Nestor PatriKios

The maze NW of the long hall should be mapped from a Known entry point; the use of objects to mark key points is very useful. Remember that descriptions are almost useless - there are any number of different locations with identical descriptions.

The maze above the oval room can be negotiated by persevering in a given direction, sidestepping obstacles, and returning in the opposite direction.

Always be generous to dwarves - even if you have no food, giving them the lamp will generally do the trick (and you get the lamp back). Poisoned food really doesn't seem to matter (except perhaps when fighting?).

The green liquid near the lab is an alchemist's dream but is also an irritant - tongs are needed for the dip.

In the same area, remember that wherever the cossat goes, so can you - think of a useful place to toss it. East of the oval room you may find an undocumented descent. Both these routes lead to the same area which should supply the logical companion to an ock and a whole new range of possibilities.

That's as far as I've got. There is something vital to be done in the domed city. It is to do, no doubt, with the spectral pedestal, but I can't work out what it is.

Nestor PatriKios

IMAGINE

IMAGINE by STEVE SUTTON
PRICE £19.95 (or is it £15, Steve?)
from SHADOW GAMES, if they ever get
round to it. Otherwise from Steve
himself.

IMAGINE you're in a nightmare full of
nasty monsters - a nibbler, a gobbler
and (worse) a nagging wife. (Is any
one else getting fed up with this
incessant sexism in adventure games -
where's the nagging husband, why are
there so few female adventure heroes,
Ed.)

IMAGINE you're reading a review by
someone who knows his way around the
first adventure written on the new APT
adventure writing system by the genius
who invented it. A very vivid
imagination is required here, mainly
because the only reason I can write
any sort of review is that Steve
Sutton sent me a cartridge full of
hints!

Steve explained APT in detail in QLAF
2, so I won't go into it here, except
to say the end product (IMAGINE) is
brilliant! You start off in a room
with a box and a few other bits and
pieces lying around. You know, the
usual adventuring sort of stuff - a
torch, a lucky charm, a mouldy
sandwich and a box that can zap you to
kingdom come.

I have to own up here and confess I
could get no further without help from
Steve. Although everything you need to
get out of the room is here. And
having got out of the room I still
needed Steve's assistance to get any
further. I was in one of those
infuriating situations where once you
know the answer to the puzzle you
wondered what all the fuss was about,
but until then you come close to
rearranging your QL with a chain saw.

You'll get some idea of the scale of
IMAGINE when I tell you that the cheat
sheet Steve sent me ran to 13 pages.
It is HUGE! And then he tells me
there's a version for EXPANDED QLs. On
the way you have to deal with a couple
of monsters (at least I've found two -
there may be more), a gremlin sort of
thing that moves your markers in a
maze, appease a nagging housewife and
do some gardening. Monsters I can deal
with; gardening and a nagging
housewife I can do without. (I thought
adventures were supposed to be some
sort of escapism Steve!)

Anyway, having done the gardening and
persuaded the nagging wife to leave
quietly - thus unblocking the way
south - I got stuck again, although
judging by the cheat sheet there is
just as much adventure left as I've
done already. Somehow it doesn't seem
right to review an adventure without
finding anything to complain about. So
I have. Call it nit-picking if you
will, but once again vocabulary - or
lack of it - has reared its ugly head.
There is nothing so frustrating in
adventures as finding that words used
by the author in describing locations
aren't recognised by the prog. A case
in point is the ladder in Imagine. It
warns you about low beams but won't
recognise the word "Beams" Or "under"
for that matter.

Imagine is definitely not one for the
beginner (see my review of Adventure
Playtime) and I must confess that the
theme isn't exactly my cup of tea.
Gardening and a wife (nagging or
otherwise) are a bit too close to
reality! Bring on the Orcs, dragons
and wizards - the stuff that dreams
(or nightmares) are made of.

No doubt there are a lot of QLAF
readers who will disagree and I mean
no disrespect to Steve when I say this,
but surely an adventure should be a
quest; rescuing damsels, collecting
pots of treasure and beating the bad
guys. IMAGINE is about getting home
again after being dumped in a room and
while it is a perfect example of its
genre (its type, for Sun readers) I
hope it won't spawn a generation of
adventures which involve shopping,
doing the dishes and going to the
toilet.

But, putting my personal gripe to one
side, IMAGINE is well thought out and
the graphics are a delight. The
screens are drawn in a matter of
seconds and compared to (for instance)
Mortville Manor they are supersonic.
So what are you waiting for?

SHANE MCGARVEY

SOLVED A QL ADVENTURE ?
NOT SENT IN YOUR SOLUTION ?
FEELING GUILTY ?
FOR ABSOLUTION WRITE TO QL
ADVENTURERS' FORUM TODAY AND
ALL WILL BE FORGIVEN !

STELLARIS

STELLARIS by D. CARMONA

Price £4.00 plus 1 mdv, vat, p&p from
Microdrive Exchange

ONE of the better adverts on telly these days features a small girl scoffing baked beans. She turns to her mum and asks: "If I eat enough baked beans, mum, will I grow up to be...Prime Minister?" Mum, rather hesitantly, replies: "Er, yes Margaret" - and promptly takes the beans away. Well now you can be prime minister - not just of Britain, but of an entire planet. And without risking the chronic flatulence that is bound to result from years of eating nothing but baked beans!

D. Carmona has come up with a space-age adventure/simulation that features YOU as an emissary from Earth, sent to ward off the threat of invasion by Imperia, a nasty planet that could well be a combination of Darth Vader's Death Star and wherever it is that the Klingons live. Anyway, the general idea is that you have to zap around the galaxy, looking for a likely planet to take over with the object of earning enough cash to buy arms, spaceships and the whole Dan Dare bit to conquer Imperia.

The "game" (and I risk D. Carmona's wrath by calling it such, since it's more serious than that) is a combination of text and graphics. You start off by looking through the windscreen of your spaceship and flying round looking for a race of likely looking mugs to drag kicking and screaming into the 25th century, or wherever you are. Having avoided black holes and time warps (black holes kill you and time warps zap you to a different part of the galaxy), it's time to check on the population and grain store of your chosen planet. By the way, all the time you are flying round the universe, Imperia is conquering more and more planets and getting closer. Once they conquer Earth, the game's up chum. Once you have decided to land you have to land! Pay attention to the quite superb graphics (a major feature of Stellaris) and bring your module down gently. It took me several goes to achieve this, largely because I used all my fuel up early and then free-fell the last 100km with catastrophic results.

Once you have landed the progress of Imperia seems to be curtailed somewhat, although relentlessly they march (or fly) onwards. Now it's time to stimulate the economy, You've

arrived in winter (with spring, summer and autumn to follow) and you are asked how much grain you want to feed to the people, how much grain to plant, how many people to work in the fields, how many in the planetary brigade and how many people to work in industry. Clue: You don't plant grain in winter, dumdum, and when you do plant it, in the obvious season, you won't see the results until autumn. At the end of each season you are shown what your resources are in manpower, cash and grain. You are also shown what the morale of the population is. Ignore it at your peril.

You also get the chance to buy stuff from the Federation (the good guys who sent you on this harebrained mission in the first place). But it's not cheap in the early stages, although if you are successful as a leader you will easily be able to afford the goodies later on. Keep an eye on your farming and industrial technologies, which drop by one point each season as the equipment you have becomes out-dated. You can buy more.

There is much, much more to this adventure as you will discover when you rush out to buy it. Unfortunately I don't know what it is. Twice I got to an advanced stage of the game only for the screen to go blank at a crucial stage. Try as I might I couldn't retrieve it. That's gripe one. Gripe two is that I couldn't get back to the menu to save the game. Gripe three (a minor one, once I realised what the problem was) is that as the menu comes up at the start of the game, you are told by the faithful QL that it is out of range at line 4. Type in mode 4 and then run. Problem solved. Gripe four is that when you have lost all five of your allotted lives, the screen doesn't clear to the main menu. Hit ctrl and space to get into basic and type run - obviously with Stellaris in mdv1.

While Microdrive Exchange progs do seem beset by bugs, the advantage is that if you know what you are doing, it's possible to put things right. So if Stellaris is just your cup of galactic soup, put away the baked beans and be prepared to go where no man has gone before.

May the Force be with you...

Shane McGarvey, Stardate 4.5.1988.

PS..Since I wrote this I have managed to finish the game. Imperia surrendered!

LETTERS

Dear Richard,

Please note that I have used QJUMP's QJUMP spelling checker for this document, and it seems able to keep up with me, no matter how fast I type - Even if it has managed to lag behind me for some reason - mainly while QUILL is tidying up the document and therefore not printing out any words, as soon as there is a break, as each new letter is printed on the screen, QJUMP checks it against its dictionary, so getting rid of the problem with SPELLBOUND which can miss out checking on whole words. Also, if you go backwards with QJUMP invoked, it is switched on again as soon as you type another space, unlike SPELLBOUND which you must turn on again.

I also have a copy of Digital Precision's TURBO compiler which they sold me at the cut down price of £64.95 - If anyone would like to contact me about compiling an adventure they have written, I would be willing to do so, so long as I get a copy and the adventure is given to QUANTA or at least offered at a discount to members of QUANTA and readers of QL Forum.

By the way, I got the £35 discount on TURBO by merely requesting the TURBO TOOLKIT on its own, which DP no longer sell separately.

If anyone is having problems with TURBO, or considering purchasing it, if they contact me I will tell them the advantages and pit-falls (warts and all)

I am currently working on compiling STELLARIS out of QL WORLD which may be of interest to QLAF readers - There are problems involved - mainly since TURBO won't compile a program which opens over 16 channels. However, I have managed to rewire most of it to overcome this, and now am left with the problem of getting rid of the few bugs which remain.

By the way, if anyone is interested, I have compiled the screen drawing routine in the excellent GOLF program published in QL WORLD, which makes the program much faster and therefore better.

Yours Sincerely,
Rich.

P.S.

I have a copy of TALENT software's GRAPHIQL+ (also known as QLPAINT) which I would like to sell due to upgrading to Digital Precision's EYE-Q

It would cost £24.95 new
ANY OFFERS?

Dear Richard,

I've been rather busy lately, what with one thing and another, so I haven't got around to sorting out quite a lot of things, APT and IMAGINE included!

OK, what about APT and IMAGINE I hear you ask (well actually I read the question from the note you sent to me, of course)?

Well, the news is that both APT and IMAGINE should shortly be marketed by Digital Precision. This arrangement has been pending for some time but obviously I was not able to say anything about it until the details were sorted, both with DP and Shadow Games.

I can't give too many details about prices etc but I can confirm that both APT and the game will have various improvements/upgrades made. It is also likely that APT will have a new name (a rose by any other name...). Don't worry, the hints I have sent you for IMAGINE will still apply to the new version (I'm not going to alter the game too much although it is likely to have some refinements such as a fancy font for the text and probably some more sound effects).

As far as a detailed timetable for the release goes, I expect that about 2 months from now is about the right sort of ball-park, however, such details are really up to DP, of course.

Let me know what you think about the article. If there is any interest I could continue on a similar vein with another article (that is if other QLAF readers can stand to read it....).

Keep up the good work

Steve Sutton

IF YOU'D LIKE YOUR LETTER
PUBLISHED IN QL ADVENTURERS'
FORUM, PLEASE SEND IT IN.
TELEPATHY HASN'T REACHED
PENCADER YET !

DARK SIDE OF THE MOON



In the first issue of QLAF I reviewed this game from Javid Systems, none too favourably I have to admit. However quite a few people have bought it so I thought it a good idea to give a little assistance to those readers who may be stuck with (sorry) in it.

These hints were supplied by David Colyer of Javid Systems

PHASE 1

EXAM sock reveals KEYS to crew's sleeping quarters and the ammo compartment.

If you take the spanner from Nobbie and give it to Robbie he will mend the spare engine so you can get the screwdriver.

If you SPIN the globe clockwise, you can then UNPLUG torch.

You can FIX buggy to trailer and ENTER and EXIT buggy.

When you are suitably equipped, get everything to the Navigation Room and SPIN wheel clockwise, ENTER buggy and go EAST.

(To which I'd add be careful when mapping the corridor, as it's easy to lose track where you are if you keep going in and out of rooms. Also you can load up the other characters with goodies as they'll follow you out without explicit directions or putting on their spacesuits.)

PHASE 2

The wheel brace is only required if you go to a location with smooth shiny walls and crash the buggy (i.e. the wall acts as a mirror). However it is not necessary to go to that location so the brace is not really needed.

You must REST at the crater to enable Admiral Cola to get the Star fragment, which only he knows how to use.

At the high boulders you must give the rope and peg to Dusty. He will climb up and fix the rope for you to go UP and get the ingot.

You must visit the quicksand to get a vitamin tablet and save the admiral by GIVE rope to Robbie.

It is best to put treasure in the trailer and give useful objects to the characters as the buggy breaks down a few moves from the Moonbase. (If you haven't already driven between two rocks and wrecked the buggy - be warned)

When you reach the Patroller shoot him and then take his clothing. Then dig a hole with the spade from Robbie and

then bury the body. You will need to return to the buggy to change into alien clothing. (Having done so you can drop the suit.)

You can now return to the Moonbase in disguise and can INSERT your identity card into the door. (Make sure you are carrying the paint.

The key to the maze is in the direction. E.G. Sadly means South, Well means West, Seven means SE etc. Also the number of roads also coincides with the correct direction. To which I'd add, when mapping leave space for at least another location all round each discovered location as the distance between locations is not even (i.e. you cannot map it on a grid basis)

Well that little lot should get you to the end of phase 2 of Dark Side of the Moon. If you're still stuck write in and we'll see if anyone can help you.

Richard.

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STARBURST

BY CHRIS SKELLERN

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NOW AVAILABLE FROM C.G.H. SERVICES FOR £1.00 PLUS MEDIA, P&P

As I write this my hands are aching after playing this game for over an hour, having used the cursor, ctrl, alt, and space keys to control this game. That in itself is a tribute to the addictiveness of Chris Skellern's game.

In itself it breaks no boundaries in terms of game design, being a maze/Defender hybrid, with the player controlling a space ship as it negotiates a massive maze in search of pirate ships to destroy. And whilst one is about it, one gets plenty of other installations to zap on the way. Having destroyed the 6 pirate ships you can then go on to zap the baddies' leader, but you won't get access to that area until all 6 pirate ships are destroyed.

Controlling the space ship takes a little getting used to, and some of the vertical passages can be difficult to get into as one tries to manoeuvre the craft into exactly the right position. Still it's all part of the fun, and fortunately Chris has provided the space ship with plenty of shield points so that accidental collisions are not a passport to instant death. Joysticks can also be used for directional control, but not gun aiming.

I had no idea how many screens one has to pass through to destroy all the pirate ships, and I'd hate to map this unless I had a spare wall to do it on. (Well it'd be more interesting than wallpaper!) Mapping should be quite possible as there are rarely more than 4 exits per screen, so you could stop and draw a map on each screen, or even print it out if you have a hot key dump. However even standing still takes up energy, so don't hang around too long. (nb we now have a map, it is in 2 sections, one 16 x 9, the other 14 x 8, a total of 256 screens. To help potential mappers play starts in cell 4 on the top row, access to the bottom "half" is via a passage on the extreme right of the play area and the maze is evil.)

The graphics are not spectacular, the background being a shade of pink I thought I'd seen the last of when I gave up drinking, and the installations and your space ship are rather small. But they do the job,

anything more complicated would have taken up memory and possibly slowed the game down. The screens flip rather than have continuous scrolling which can lead to annoyance at being lead up a dead end or into a hornet's nest. But that's what these type of games are all about.

The caverns have a few surprises in store for you as you fly around: shooting barriers pop-up unexpectedly, but these can be blasted and there is a large open space, about 3x3 screens large, which contains some heavy-duty battle-stations. These are quite fearsome and because you've got so much room to move around in, getting the right angle to blast them can be difficult, especially as panic all too easily sets in when trying to control the space ship. What is worse, the missiles fired from these battle-stations intercept your own missiles. If you can avoid these! You won't find any pirate ships flying around on your journey, they are all safely tucked up on their launch pads. One less thing to worry about.

This leads on to perhaps the only really awkward part of the game. To change direction you use the cursor keys, but the guns are controlled by the control and alt keys. But they're a touch too sensitive to be sure about the effects of pressing them, so you can waste precious time trying to get the angle of your gun correct. To minimise the damage done whilst you're floundering about trying to get this right, I'd suggest a tactical withdrawal to a safe place to get the angle of firing correct before returning to the screen where the enemy is.

On other grumble: there is no save function, which means that you'll need to set aside a hour or more for this one. I believe it was planned to have included this, plus a direction indicator, in an improved version of the game but Chris has, I believe, not implemented this and the improved version will not be coming out. As the game is 100% machine code I don't fancy anyone's chances of reuniting the game to include these features. However neither is essential and would only make the game easier !!!

Value for money? At £12.50 it was reasonable, considering how small the QL market is, although with its unsophisticated graphics, you'd probably pay less on other machines, but now that Chris has decided to quit publishing he has made Starburst public domain, so CGH can make it

HACK

HACK ADVENTURE - BY W. SOKER

This is yet another adventure which exists in the QUANTA library. It can be found on DISK_02 (cost £3) or LIB_27 (cost £1) - the latter being a microdrive version. Although the disk version is more expensive, it is the extra programs on the disk which cost the extra, another two microdrives are needed to the the same set of programs.

The program is a massive graphical adventure, taking you on a mystery tour of a large underground system of caverns as either a fighter, a wizard, a Knight, a caveman, or a tourist. The idea appears to be to race around, picking up objects, trying not to Kill the little dog which is constantly at your heels (your only ally) and picking up as much gold as possible. The program is made more difficult by the fact that the maze is only revealed to you a little at a time (although one of the scrolls will tell you where gold exists on that level).

Unfortunately, this program will only run on a QL with 640K memory, so dig deep into your pockets and get those memory boards stuck in to the side of the QL. (Mind you it is the only adventure so far to need an expanded QL to run (as far as I know, anyway)). - It is over 290K of machine code, which suggests that either the program is vast, or it is very badly coded, I suggest it is a combination of the two. Another problem is that the program will only run from disk if you issue the command FLP_USK mdv beforehand. I do not know why, but when I used DP's EDITOR to alter all occurrences of 'mdv' to 'flp', the program would not run, giving a BAD PARAMETER error!

The program has been copied from a mainframe version of the program, and has also appeared in different forms on the Commodores (although not so extensively in those cases). This is quite obvious when you see the program, since it is a graphical adventure, and yet does not make use of UDGs, using letters and other symbols to represent objects and animals. So if there is a budding artist out there with time to do the UDGs, then please feel welcome to go ahead and alter it, so long as you re-submit the program to the QUANTA library. - Damn it, I'd do it myself if only I had the time, maybe over this summer...

Also the program has been set up for use in Monitor mode, and it is

difficult on the instruction screens to see some of the symbols on a humble TV screen, although you can see the whole of the playing area. Don't people realise that some of us can't afford to spend £250 on a Monitor just to play games on!!

Besides the poor graphics, the program is quite enjoyable, even if after every few moves you have to ask for help to find out what that '/' up the corner represents. I must warn you though, the help screens are many and contain a lot of commands which you can issue - if you can remember them that is!

The game can be rather hectic, mainly due to the amount of creatures about the maze rather than the speed of the game, which is rather slow considering it is in machine code.

Overall I think that the adventure is a pleasant way to spend an hour or two even if you are just about to get to the last level when a troll eats you. It can be quite addictive if you give it a chance, although I wouldn't recommend to anyone who likes to sit back and think about problems in adventures (although there are several very good problems littered about the maze).

If someone added some better graphics to the game, it could be a very good game indeed, although it might take some work. Not among the best adventures in the QUANTA library, but is well worth a try.

Rich Mellor

STARBURST

available at the ludicrously cheap price of £1.00 plus media, postage and packing. At that price everybody should buy a copy! What is more, Chris has sent me his copy of the map, which is a tad on the messy side so will need redrawing before it gets published. (Don't worry, it won't spoil the fun as we won't be marking the position of the pirate ships !)

As for playability, well I'm off to have another shot at it, even without a save function, which is rare for me ! 'Nuff said ?

Richard Alexander

The Heart Of Gern

HINTS TOWARDS A SOLUTION

Firstly I must thank John Shaw for providing an almost complete solution to this adventure, which kept me on the right tracks as I attempted to solve Heart of Gern. I say almost as John, as I'm sure he won't mind me saying, left out many of the important commands. Still, so much the better as I was forced to actually go through the whole thing myself.

Well the first thing to do with this adventure is to thoroughly read the accompanying cartoon strip as this has many very important clues. Take special note of the rhyme in the centre as it holds the most essential clues. Just to the left of it you'll be given your password to the cave complex.

Right let's get stuck in. Having waited for the dawn and called the requisite name you can enter the cave. As the rhyme tells you, here are guards who must not see, so close the doors behind you and don't reveal the sun disc yet. This will entail some touching of walls in this stage but eventually you'll be in a room where you can safely shine the sun disc, faced with a yawning chasm (must be its bedtime!). Here a grope around the walls will give you something to touch that will bridge that gap.

Beyond here you face a bunch of statues who give you a choice of directions. Remember that there is only one true way, and that's the one to follow. The next problem is the stairs. These are rather odd and need testing and trying accordingly. Once safely at the bottom of the stairs you'll see a figure in the distance. Avoid this and test the wall in the direction you've come from to reveal a secret passage way and follow this. The next section is a test of your faith, so remember there is no alternative, so don't attempt any u-turns on the parapet and simply keep on going, even if there doesn't seem to be anything beneath your feet! Eventually through a few doors and archways, you'll arrive at a hall full of drumming skeletons. Refer to that rhyme again to give you the correct command to get past here.

Once past the dozen drummers drumming there are no maids a milking but rather a massive pair of stone doors. Here you'll need the help of one or two gods, so repeat what you said to get into the caves and read the inscription. You should then be able to work out who else to call, (I must confess needed John's notes to get past this one.) If you can't work it

out drop me a line or phone and tell you who to call.

Beyond the doors are some statues and you'll need to solve the riddle to get the right sword, so have a look at them all after looking at Barsh's. If in doubt keep trying every sword until you safely get past the metal doors. Mind you, you'll need to be certain of the floor beyond those doors but have faith.

Here you'll come to the wolf statue and a little gentle testing will reveal a very handsome casket, containing the Heart of Gern. Close up the box lest prying eyes see you or you fall, and test the surrounding walls until you find a way out. And once you're out you should find your old friend Basak waiting for you and a plug for the Fate of the Oracle.

I hope I haven't spoilt the fun for anyone who has yet to complete this adventure. It certainly has some nasty surprises for the unwary and you'll often be stumped whilst playing it, even with these notes. Can't wait for their next adventure.

Richard.

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MORTVILLE MANOR

HINTS

1. Go to meals regularly - It helps to keep everyone happy.

2. THE FOLLOWING ARE WHAT THE CHARACTERS HAVE TO SAY ABOUT EACH OTHER -

Eva - In interior decoration.

Luc - In jewels. According to Eva, he is 'interesting, hard to

understand, but is worth the detour.' - HE MAY GIVE YOU SOME LEADS IF SPOKEN TO IN PRIVATE.

Julia - Died of embolism of the lungs. Died suddenly as her health was improving.

Leo - Manages Julia's estate.

Ida - Sews, reads.

Pat - A corrupted go-getter. A manager of a perfume Co.

3. A letter (dated 15/2/51) accuses Pat of having been forging the accounts.

4. The back of an envelope reveals the following figures:

9/12 Interest	518 Fr	
13/12 Expenses		23 Fr
19/12 Sale	1203 Fr	
17/12 Cheque		1598 Fr
	-----	-----
	1721 Fr	1721 Fr

5. Another letter (dated 10/2/51) reveals that Pat owes Guy 50,000 Frs.

6. Yet another letter (dated 5/1/51) says the following:

From Eva to Luc:

'Guy knows about us. I have told him everything. Max keeps pestering me, but I am finished with him. He wants to be alone together with you. For you I would get a divorce.'

7. Note the dates - Julia's letter was sent 15/2/51.

8. A parchment in the desk drawer in the bureau contains the following message -

"Like a deep stony stare, a solitary eye that points towards the stars; the artery that links heaven and hell. You must fathom these depths, keeping hold of that which is, and will become, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Sunday from Monday 1st to Sunday 1st, plunging from one day to the next, your 'is' or 'will become'. Carrying your burden with love and light, the smallest oversight will seal your fate."

- This is obviously about the well. I believe you need to go down the well at night time, holding onto your rope and with a light in your hand, else you will drown. The days themselves may suggest that you cannot descend during the first week, but I am unsure about this at the moment, since I haven't got a copy at the moment. There will be a secret passage down the well I believe, which will lead

you to some new locations.

9. You cannot stay outside the house after 11pm unless you are carrying one of the many sets of keys which lie about the house.

10. The attic of the house contains many useful objects which you can explore normally without anyone suddenly appearing.

11. The following rooms contain the following (there may be more in them which I haven't yet found):

BATHROOM : Shaving Brush, Clothes Brush

KITCHEN : Ammunition (is it max's??), Tennis Ball, Pipe, Cut-throat Razor, Tin of Paint, Pistol, Sleeping Pills, Romantic Novel (max's again?!)

DINING ROOM : Playing Cards, Gun, Hairbrush, Candle, Jewelry Box (empty)

ATTIC : Rope, Reel of Thread, Flute, Binoculars, A Curious Diagonal Hole

(in the top of the chest of drawers), a Retort, Wooden Rod, Necklace, Bible,

Purse, Old Book, Pack of Cards

BUREAU : Medicine, Pen, Parchment, Paintbrush, Romantic Novel, Keys, Old Book, Expensive Ring

BOB'S ROOM : Suitcase, Dagger -

WARNING HE TENDS TO COME IN WHILE YOU ARE THERE

PAT'S ROOM : Envelope, Dossier, Keys, Expensive Ring, Engraved Goblet

EVA'S ROOM : Expensive Ring, Pen, Old Book, Rope, Gold Ring, Purse, Glasses, Coat of Armour, Dagger, Wallet, Lighter, Keys

12. Look closely at the shield, I am sure it contains a hint to the eventual conclusion of the adventure.

13. ABOVE ALL BE DISCREET.

14. Below is a full list of all the words understood by the adventure -

attach, bypass, close, climb, descend, eat, enter, exit, force, go, hide, insert, knock, look, list, listen, lift, open, place, play, put, read, scratch, search, smell, sleep, sound, take, talk, touch, turn, wait

Rich Mellor

Please note that I had to reformat the amounts given on the envelope as Page Designer 2 doesn't like having tab markers in its text, so the layout on the envelope may well be different. I also notice that someone can't add up. Whether I've inadvertently introduced an error in retyping the text, or Rich made an error in his Keying or, perhaps most likely, the error is deliberate and contains a subtle clue, I don't know!

Richard (editor and typist)

THE DOUBLE

by Peter Ives

price £4.00 + mdv,vat,p&p from
Microdrive Exchange.

THERE is a story, famous among sports journalists, that tells of the non-League football manager who became so fed up with being criticised by the sports editor of his local paper that he resigned - and told the scribe that if he thought he could do better, then he'd better get on with it.

There should, of course, be a happy ending to the story but the sad fact is that our hero went down like a lead balloon, proving that anyone can talk a good game but actually doing the business is a different matter altogether.

Well, move over Cloughie, here comes the latest addition to the ranks of football managers... McGarvey! Thanks to months of labour (a labour of love, I'm sure) by Peter Ives, you too can be a soccer manager. Whether you are a success is entirely up to you, since this extensive simulation (or is it an adventure) requires you to buy and sell players, pick the team and eventually win the Football League (sorry, Barclay's League) championship AND the FA Cup. Easy, isn't it! No!

The mechanics of The Double are simple enough. Guided by prompts from the screen you select which of 96 League clubs you wish to be (I'm Ipswich Town, since you ask) and are allotted a squad of players who range from teenagers to mid-30s with varying degrees of skill in goal, defence, midfield or attack (strikers to anyone born since 1960).

You then get the choice of getting a loan, selling players, or carrying on. If you carry on the screen shows the first match of your campaign in the Fourth Division. You can be Liverpool if you like, but you still start off in the Fourth.

The screen shows your opponents and their strengths against yours. At this point you can re-arrange your team - a worthwhile exercise for it is unlikely that you have got 11 players on the pitch. (?) Having selected your team, you are invited to play the first match and the cursor bleeps on your score or your opponents', depending on the strength of your midfield. When your score is "bleeping" the computer compares your attack with their defence and if you're good enough your team will score.

If you are down at half time you can have a team talk, but beware. You have

only 8 team talks available for the whole season of 46 matches plus cup games. I found it was important to win early matches so tended to use the talks up fairly quickly. The more you win, the higher your team's morale and so the fewer team talks you need - although I found it useful to keep one or two talks for cup matches.

At the end of the match your gate receipts are displayed, along with running costs and players wages, and your profit - or loss for the week. Then comes what I consider to be the piece de resistance of the programme - results in all four divisions and corresponding league tables. A masterpiece. Just that part of the programme is alone worth the money. You are also given the chance to buy players as and when they are made available by other clubs. How much they cost will depend on their age and skill level. 1 is low, 20 is high. But once you have 'agreed terms' with the selling club you have to strike a wage deal with the player. If your valuation of his services is too low he will demand more each time you make an offer, unless you get close to his demands. But what he says he wants isn't always what he will actually settle for.

The Double is addictive for soccer fans and indeed for anyone who has ever wondered where the fascination lies in 22 people kicking a ball around. I have played The Double as Ipswich Town for four 'seasons' and we have just been promoted - as champions, naturally - to Division Two.

Unfortunately, nothing in this world is perfect and The Double is no exception. There are annoying bugs in the programme, but thanks to the ease of access into the listings they are not too difficult to put right. However, I am of the old school who believe that if you are charging people money for a product, then that product should do what it is made to do. Mr Ives and Microdrive Exchange take note.

My main complaint is that the "save" routine is an absolute bitch. Having just been promoted to Division Two, I tried to save the game - and lost the lot.

You follow the screen prompts by pressing F4 to clear previously loaded data and then press SPACE to save the latest stuff. Unfortunately, when you press 7 and then ENTER on the main menu, the programme will interpret anything but the lightest touch on ENTER as strike on the spacebar and

(CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE..)

THE DOUBLE

CONTINUED...

tries to save. You then get a message that it already exists. I found out too late that you can put a new cartridge in mdv1 and type in RETRY. I have since found it best to use two cartridges at this stage, alternating between them to save a lot of heartache.

However, I am loathe to restart the whole game so my "Double" is due for a long rest. Needless to say I have found this particular 'bug' most annoying.

Having said that, The Double is a great deal of fun and is definitely addictive. So if Mr Ives can sort out the bugs, he may sell a few more.

FOOTNOTE...The Double differs from real life in one respect... so far this manager has found it impossible to get the sack!

SHANE McGARVEY, for QLAF at the Big Match. Now back to the studio...

Thank you Shane for that fine review, I must congratulate you on your patience as I simply got fed up with the time it took to calculate the divisional scores and positions.

Also I found actually understanding what was going on at times a little difficult but having said that, and bearing in mind the wee buggettes, the game is definitely "value for money".

New !!!

Alan Pemberton's

"From The Tower

of

Valagon"

for the QL

6 quid from

C.G.H. Services

NEXT ISSUE

WELL I HOPE YOU'VE ENJOYED THIS FIRST EDITION OF QL ADVENTURERS FORUM. JUST A FEW WORDS TO GIVE YOU AN INDICATION OF WHAT MIGHT BE IN STORE FOR YOU IN THE NEXT EXCITING (IT SAYS HERE) EDITION.

ALREADY RECEIVED IS A REVIEW BY BILLBOARD BAGGINS OF DIGITAL PRECISION'S IDIS DISASSEMBLER, V2.00. BILLBOARD'S WRITING LOOKED FAMILIAR BUT QUITE WHO BILLBOARD IS IN REAL LIFE, I DON'T KNOW.

THERE WILL BE THE SECOND PART OF THE MAPS FOR ZKUL BY MALCOLM SMITH, THERE IS A TOTAL OF 10 PAGES OF THESE SO IT LOOKS LIKE A THREE PARTER MINI-SERIES (THE SUSPENSE IS KILLING ME - STILL AT LEAST JOAN COLLINS ISN'T IN IT!).

THERE WILL BE SOME HINTS FOR DRAGONHOLD, I NEARLY PUT THEM IN THIS ISSUE BUT PREFER NOT TO PRINT HINTS UNTIL AFTER YOU'VE HAD TIME TO READ REVIEWS AND HAD A GO AT THEM.

THERE WILL BE YOUR LETTERS, SO SEND THEM IN. DO MARK ANY CONFIDENTIAL BITS, SO THAT I DON'T PRINT THEM.

AS FOR THE REVIEWS AND HINTS.

WELL, NEMESIS, QUEST FOR THE DRAGON-SWORD, WEST, ALL THE QL WARGAMES, LOADS OF SIMULATIONS, FUNFEAR, THE PRAWN, IMAGINE, TO NAME BUT A FEW, ARE STILL AWAITING SOLUTIONS (THOUGH I HAVE TO CONFESS I HAVE STEVE'S HINTS FOR IMAGINE, BUT BEING BUSY I HAVEN'T HAD TIME TO COMPLETE THE GAME.)

SO THERE'S PLENTY OF SCOPE FOR YOUR REVIEWS AND HINTS/CLUES, MOANS, BUGS AND ANYTHING ELSE YOU WANT TO SAY ABOUT QL ADVENTURES, STRATEGY, WARGAMES AND SIMULATIONS.

COPY IS ACCEPTABLE, EITHER ON MDV, 5.25" DISK, TYPED OR HANDWRITTEN OR IF YOU'RE FEELING ADVENTUROUS, WHY NOT TRY LAYING OUT A PAGE USING PAGE DESIGNER (IT'S VERY EASY TO GET THE HANG OF) OR FRONT PAGE EXTRA3 - WHICH I WOULD HAVE USED BUT PETER CHAMBERS IS A BIT SLOW IN SUPPLYING - OR YOUR OWN HOME GROWN LAYOUT KIT.

TONY WELLS HAS JUST SENT ME A COPY OF THE PROGS IN THE QL ADVENTURES BOOK AND, COPYRIGHT HOLDERS PERMITTING, WE SHALL BE MAKING THESE AVAILABLE AS PUBLIC DOMAIN (IF ANYONE KNOWS WHERE TO GET HOLD OF TONY BRIDGE OR RICHARD WILLIAMS). ONCE THEY'RE TRANSFERRED FROM 3.5" DISK TO MDV I'LL BE ABLE TO LET YOU KNOW HOW GOOD THEY ARE. TONY WELLS HAS ALSO FIXED A FEW BUGS IN THE PROGS SO THAT THEY WORK!!!

SEE YOU SOON, RICHARD