

QUESTBUSTERSTM

The Adventurer's Newsletter

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April, 1986

ACTIVISION BUYS INFOCOM!

If you can't beat 'em, buy 'em. That seems to be the strategy of Activision, which entered the adventure industry only last year with the release of *Mindshadow*, a graphics game. Activision Chairman and CEO James H. Levy recently announced plans to purchase Infocom, whose all-text adventures virtually created the adventure game market for home computers and have dominated it throughout the Eighties.

Levy says Activision has signed a letter of agreement to trade two million shares of their publicly-traded common stock for all the outstanding shares of Infocom's common stock, a transaction valued at \$7.5 million. The deal won't be finalized until details are agreed upon by the board of directors of both firms and Infocom shareholders, expected to happen

by the end of June. Negotiations have been underway since last December.

Plans are for Infocom to function as a subsidiary of Activision, retaining its marketing and product development in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Activision, based in Mountain View, California, will take over global distribution. Levy commented, "We look forward to working with Infocom to build their position in the worldwide home computer software market."

Activision's action is part of what he calls a "long-term strategy to broaden our product line." So far this has included purchasing Gamestar, under whose logo all sports games will now be marketed, and Creative Software for their line of productivity software. One of the companies that raked in big bucks during the videogame

craze, Activision ran into trouble when that market vanished -- along with hundreds of programmers, designers, and several game magazines. The company faltered during the early days of its transition into computer games, before extensive reorganization.

The main benefit to Infocom will be Activision's European marketing organization, Electric Dreams. Infocom games have been available in England for some time, but may now see distribution in Germany and some of the 40 other countries reached by Activision.

Asked to comment, Infocom President and CEO Joel Berez said, "We have a high regard for Activision's achievements and capabilities, especially their worldwide distribution strength, and believe that the combination of Infocom and Activision will have significant

influence in the software market." But would Infocom sell out simply to gain wider distribution? Most industry watchers think not. Syndicated columnist Dan Gutman observed that Infocom "lost a pile on *Cornerstone* trying to crack the productivity market." An IBM database, *Cornerstone* was initially priced at \$495, but a week after the Activision deal was announced Infocom cut the price to \$95, effective May 1. (Next thing you know they'll be offering a free *Cornerstone* with every copy of *Zork*.) Infocom will now focus exclusively on entertainment software.

That includes more in their Interactive Fiction Plus series, for computers with a minimum of 128K. The next title in the line, *Trinity*, is scheduled for a June release and set in an alternative reality where "magic and science co-exist."

Rings of Zilfin

by Ronald Wartow

Things have been peaceful of late, now that Werdna, Mondain, Minax, Exodus, Mantor and Lord Xyphus have been dispatched. Rest on your laurels no more! Lord Dragos has reared his malevolent head, and the kingdom of Batiniq, once peaceful and prosperous, needs your help. The nation's three realms include 27 inhabited towns and villages, a dark tower and a mountain castle, all surrounded by harsh deserts, unclimbable mountains, deadly mountain passes, dense forests and deadly marshes.

Batiniq was formerly protected by the powerful Zilfin wizards. The wizards, forgers of the two rings giving the wearer inestimable magical power, are now in hiding. Dragos has one of the rings and desperately

searches for the other, aided by accomplices of unspeakable evil. You alone must find the missing ring, then retrieve the second ring from Dragos and restore order to the land.

While all this may sound familiar, *Rings of Zilfin* is a superb animated fantasy role-playing adventure filled with refreshing originality, innovative techniques and superior mood enhancement. Generously sprinkled with special encounters, puzzles, sound effects and special effects, it successfully combines the better elements of all my favorite fantasy role-playing games and throws in surprising twists. For the 30 hours it took to complete the game, my attention was riveted.

Your lone character begins

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Rambo: The Game

Rambo: "This time, can we win?"

General: "Not with this parser."

Somehow I managed to miss Stallone's movie about a Vietnam vet who returns to rescue American MIAs. But after Mindscape turned "Rambo: First Blood, Part Two" into an all-text adventure, I had no choice. Duty called, so I signed up, booted up, and shipped out in a chopper for the jungles of Vietnam. The mission: bring back proof that American POWs are being held prisoner, and do it within the eighteen-hour time limit. (The current day is noted at the top left, the minutes in the opposite corner.)

It should have been subtitled "A Thousand Ways to Die," for this is among the deadliest adventures I've encountered.

Make a wrong move, forget to make the right one, and you're dead on arrival, blown away by Vietnamese gunships, snipers, Claymore mines, river pirates, everything but a Vietnamese orc.

The first few puzzles can be solved with common sense and the arsenal that comprises most of your initial inventory: a machine gun and five bullets, a compound bow with 6 arrows, a knife, a camera, and a pouch full of salt. Then suddenly the going gets tough, and unlike in *Bard's Tale*, there's no pub where the tough can go drinking.

Survival is the only reward for successful puzzle-solving, for there is also no point system or score at all (not even a body-count, which would have

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ADVENTURE HOTLINE

New Games In Town

Bard lovers -- as in bard of Avon, not Bard's Tale -- will want to check out a new four-game package called MacBeth. These text adventures (two also have graphics) cover different parts of Shakespeare's play, and each has a "psychological program" in which "Will and you dive into the minds of Lord and Lady MacBeth." You want packaging? Avalon Hill throws in a copy of the play and a batch of articles and other background on it. It's for C-64/128.

Activision's next adventures, still under development, are both situated on boats. In Riverboat, (a working title) you're a gambler who must solve a murder on a Mississippi riverboat. This is going to be the first all-text game that requires no typing. Crossbow, a graphic adventure, is based on a historical perspective of a pirate's life. You begin by choosing the life of a buccaneer or privateer, and then have to supply the ship with authentic gear of the era before sailing off to seek or bury treasure, fight other ships, and do all the other things pirates did on the seven seas.

A new company called Firebird has an Apple/C-64 space trading & action game called Elite, and a graphic adventure called The Pawn for the Atari ST. For the Atari 800 and XE, Electronic Arts just released a conversion of Adventure Construction Set.

King's Quest III

Look for the third installment of Roberta Williams' King's Quest series sometime in September. Tentative title: "To Heir Is Human." The main character will be the son of King Grahame, who will be able to cast spells, a first for the series. Sound effects are also being enhanced. It will be released first for the IBM, then Apple (with 128K) and perhaps the C-128.

Sierra also has a science fiction title, Star Quest, scheduled for takeoff. (Tighten up those O-rings, Roberta.) Also a 128K program, it should be available for the Apple, IBM and ST in June, and will then be converted to the Amiga and maybe someday the C-128.

Bad news for role-players who've been awaiting Sierra's import of Black Onyx, the "Wizardry of Japan." John Williams says they have scrapped the project because "it just wasn't working out." But Sierra is preparing to release the first role-playing game developed in-house at that little log cabin in the foothills of Coarsegold, California. In Tower of Seven, you'll role up a character for yourself while the computer controls four others in your party.

Blank Leaves Infocom

Adventure enthusiasts can expect to see more new by-lines on Infocom games. Mike Berlyn left the company last summer, and now Marc Blank, one of Infocom's original implementers and co-founders, has departed. Blank, who co-authored Zork, wrote Deadline, and designed the super parser that makes communicating with Infocom adventures so easy, left the company in early January. "It was just time to move on," says Blank, "I wanted to do other things." As Vice President of Computer Software Development at Simon & Schuster Electronic Publishing, he is now doing those other things in New York. Those things include: "artificial intelligence, expert systems, sorting out new technologies like optical and disk storage for Simon & Schuster." Some of his projects will be aimed at middle market and corporate users. "Interactive fiction isn't a priority" at S & S, according to Blank, but he says "what little they do I'll obviously look at. If there's a particularly good title or license [such as Star Trek, a big hit for the company], then we'll do it." According to the QuestBusters' Rumor Hotline, Blank's former office at Infocom now displays a picture of Mark with a caption that says: "Blank intentionally left this space."

Twenty-one Winners!

The results are in on the "Infocom Game of your Choice" contest, and the following people won that: Albert Lin, Matthew Friedman, Helena Bouchez, John Langlinais, Tony Ard, Aaron Chou, Mike Zito, Michael Cheng, James Tucker, Fred Holland, Richard Glickman, Mark Foshee, Mrs. N. Glickman, Ron Whipple, Martin Seehuus, Sandra K. Walton, Adam Ratner, Carl Huben, Robert Carter IV, and John Kalstrom.

In our ongoing contest, Mrs. Perry Sinks won a copy of The Black Cauldron. New subscribers' names are automatically entered in this contest, whose winner is selected randomly each month.

Need Help Right Away?

Stuck in a game and can't wait for Duffy? Solutions and maps to 40 recent adventures are offered in The Book of Adventure II from Haba Systems/Arrays. If you can't find it in a local store, send \$19.95 (and \$1.95 postage) to QuestBusters™. Book one is also available for those stuck in older games. We'll be reviewing both next issue.

RINGS OF ZILFIN

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with no magic skill and minimal skill levels

in strength, endurance (hit points), fatigue and fighting. If endurance or fatigue falls below zero, your character dies. Obviously, replenishing endurance and fatigue is important, but none of the magic spells you eventually obtain will do this. Instead, these important attributes and your spell points are restored with mushrooms and plants gathered during your travels. While there are only twelve magic spells (three levels), ranging from multi-monster zaps to shield protection to teleportation, the combination of these spells and your "gardening" makes for a powerful character.

Prior to travelling, your character's location is represented by a small cross on a large aerial-view map of the realm. You type in SW to start moving southwest, or one of the other eight common directions (because of this, mapping is a breeze). The map vanishes and you see a side-view of the terrain and your character, a small white figure. To start him moving you just lean on the space bar and watch him appear to walk as the panoramic view scrolls from left to right. The arrow keys increase and decrease his rate of speed. Along the way you come across the plants and mushrooms, monks with whom you can converse, and magical pools that can help or hurt.

When you reach a town, its armorers, shops, temples, barbershops, healers, bars, fortune tellers and other buildings are shown in a full-screen illustration like those seen in graphic adventure games. A four-line menu below asks which one you want to enter. When you choose one, your character walks to the door; next a window opens in the top right corner, showing the interior and your character striding into the room. Combat may occur in these windows, while on the road or in a town. (The Apple game has an all-keyboard interface; the

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QuestBusters™

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Ballyhoo - Under the Big Top

RAMBO

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The roar of the greasepaint, the smell of the crowd -- yes, the circus is in town, and now you don't even have to leave home to visit the big top. For "The Traveling Circus That Time Forgot" is the setting of the latest Infocom mystery, one that follows the style of *Suspect* by casting you as an ordinary citizen rather than a detective or policeman. It's a good idea: the "hard-boiled detective" theme has become as stereotyped and clichéd as "find and slay the evil wizard."

DESPERATELY SEEKING CHELSEA

As the circus shuts down for the night, the adventure begins. The place is deserted, and nothing happens until you hide inside the prop tent and eavesdrop on a conversation between the circus owner, Mr. Munrab, and a private detective. Munrab's daughter, Chelsea, has been kidnapped, and he has hired the p.i. to find her because he's afraid she'll be harmed if he calls the cops. The ransom note he hands over to the detective, and they both exit stage right. Without any solid clues to go on -- perhaps there's a way to get the note from the detective? -- your best bet is to explore the grounds and see what happens. (At least the manual hints that the kidnapping is an inside job and suggests this as the most effective line of investigation.)

Beneath the big top, you can walk the high wire or try your hand at lion-taming in a cage with a pair of hungry cats. More wild animals await on the midway: Mahler the gorilla and Hannibal the elephant. There you'll also find the expected freaks and other sideshows. Tina the 827-pound fat lady (one location is called "West Side of the Fat Lady") Andrew Jenny, a half-man/half-woman, and Rimshaw the Incomparable, a bizarre but helpful hypnotist. His brand of hypnosis might be called addictive in a way, for

you could easily wind up with a monkey on your back. A practicing soothsayer, Rimshaw will also read your palm, or feel the bumps on your head and tell your future.

Reaching the midway requires solving the problem of getting through the turnstile. The solution is simple, but can't be used to get beyond the other turnstile, through which Chuckles the Clown and the midget Comrade Thumb disappear early in the game. There are a few other characters, some of whom are helpful, but most of the puzzle-solving hinges on objects rather than character interaction. Instead of conducting an investigation by questioning suspects as in *Deadline* or *Suspect*, you'll want to concentrate on searching the grounds for a likely hiding place. Rimshaw transports you to one set of locations in a most unusual manner.

Despite solutions that are sometimes obvious, the problems still cannot be classified as easy. (Infocom calls it a Standard Level game, like *Cutthroats* and *Planetfall*.) One enigmatic clue turns up in the form of a cassette player that holds a Jimi Hendrix tape. At least one more is found in the packaging, which includes a balloon, a ticket to the circus, and a card touting the virtues of Dr. Nostrum's Extract. This potion is guaranteed to cure everything from toothaches to pin worms (and as Dave Letterman says, we all know how painful that can be).

Written by Jeff O'Neil, who has been at the company since 1984, this is among the funniest of the Infocom games. O'Neil sets you up with a serious and literate tone, tricking you into anticipating one thing, then catches you off guard with something else from his madcap imagination. When you hear a growl nearby, right after seeing the crowd in a state of pandemonium, naturally you

expect to turn and see an escaped lion; instead you discover the sound originates from a different and totally unexpected source -- your stomach! The crowd scene, in which you flashback to earlier in the evening, is a riot; it is one of those rare moments in interactive fiction that really makes you feel like you are in the scene. In addition to the humor, I enjoyed the assortment of fun things you get to do during in *Ballyhoo*. It reminded me of *Sorcerer* in this sense, with the amusement park and its log ride, scary house and arcade. The author has also devised some fresh, unexpected responses to player commands that don't elicit the desired result.

My sole complaint, and this is a minor one indeed, is that you're not promoted to a higher rank -- Planetary Commodore, Novice Adventurer -- at various plateaus as you collect more of the games' total 200 points. This was also true of *Wishbringer*, whose author later said he had to omit the ratings because the memory was being used for other things. Perhaps that's the case here.

Danger stalks your every move, though rarely will you realize it until it's too late and you wind up -- no, not dead. Ingeniously, O'Neil rigged a way of treating fatal mistakes with a touch of black comedy that stops short of death. That's like a breath of fresh air in a cave full of bat guano, for everyone must be getting weary of being killed so frequently in adventures. So if you've always dreamed of running away with the circus, here's your chance. And if that sounds like a lot of ballyhoo, well, that's the name of the game.

Computer: All, including
Amiga and ST
Skill Level: Intermediate
Price: \$34.95
Manufacturer: Infocom

been appropriate). With luck and perseverance -- personally I don't like getting killed every time I make a mistake, especially when the program takes a minute and a half to restart a saved game -- you'll eventually get some help by hooking up with your ground contact at a Buddhist temple three miles from the drop site. Ultimately your goal becomes to rescue the Americans, not just confirm their presence.

The game's most outstanding aspect is the uncredited author's vivid and evocative prose, conveying rich images of a narrow passage that "snakes through towering, slate grey boulders," a "scrub-covered ridge crowned with wild orchids" and provides precise descriptions of the weaponry: an AK-47 with fixed wooden grip and black matte finish, a maple and chromium compound bow, anodized black aluminum arrows with Copper Tiger arrowheads. And if you trip the wire of a booby trap, you'll feel "the terrible agony of hundreds of steel balls ripping into your right side" as "bloody bits of your flesh cover the forest floor." I've died a million times in the many worlds of adventure, but never to the tune of such graphic descriptions.

The worst thing about the game is the programming. As I already said, it takes far too long to reload a saved game. The parser is equally slow. It usually takes ten to fifteen seconds for the program to respond to a command. First it accesses the disk, then it pauses, then another disk access, and so on -- and this happens even in response to a simple directional commands such as "north."

It is hard to believe that a text game could take more time dredging up a paragraph than a graphic game takes to load a picture of the next scene, since the latter has to recall more data

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Three British Adventures for C-64s

by Ken St. André

I've known of the Mastertronics line for more than a year but never had a chance to play any of their games before.

While they usually run one-page ads in all the main Commodore magazines, you never see any of the games reviewed, perhaps because they're so low-priced that no one expects them to be any good. Or maybe it's because they're from England and are snubbed by American reviewers. Normally each Mastertronics program sells for \$9.95, but when I got an opportunity to pick up several of their adventures for \$7.79 at a local store, I splurged and grabbed three of them.

First a word about the packaging. Each program comes on disk in a handsome leather binder with a full-color title featuring some fantastic art. Though one could take the disks out and store them with the rest of your collection in a box or plastic cage, the original, book-like packaging is ideal for inserting them in bookcases. The leather binding is crush-proof and will hold up a great deal better than the cardboard boxes in which most American programs are packaged.

FINDERS KEEPERS

Cute. *Finder Keepers* is obviously aimed at young gamers, say 8-12. The storyline involves you as Magic Knight searching the Castle of Spriteland to find a suitable birthday present for Princess Germintrude. If you succeed, you may be appointed to the famous Polygon Table.

It's definitely a cartoon-arcade adventure. You have five lives and can run about the free-scrolling screen looking for various objects (each is represented by a small, glowing pyramid -- imagine a blacksmith depicted as a small, glowing pyramid!) You can only carry six of them at a

time. The entire playing field seems to consist of about twelve different screens: four *Jumpman*-style rooms in the castle proper, four screens of garden maze that scroll in any direction, and four screens of dungeon maze that scroll freely. Bright, bouncy music accompanies the scrambling of your short knight-like figure as he runs about gathering things. There are far more than six items to collect, so you must take them to Trader Don and sell them off as you find them. You can return and buy them back if they're needed later.

Animation is very good. Puzzle difficulty -- how to get the objects and what to do with them -- is fair. That is, they don't seem to be difficult, but I haven't managed to solve the game yet, find a suitable present, or escape with my life. Monsters include ghouls, spiders, ghosts and mother-in-laws. I've found no way to fight any of them. You just have to avoid the nasties, or let them drain your life-force. *Finders Keepers* is fun for about a half-hour if you're an adult like me, maybe more for the young at heart. Recommended.

SE-KAA of ASSIAH

This one is definitely a cut above *Finders Keepers*. It's a classic graphic and text adventure like *Wizard and the Princess* or *Amazon*, with a pure swords and sorcery background. It consists of two 50K programs by Les Hogarth and Clive Wilson. You must complete the first in order to gain access to the second. (So far I haven't finished the first half of the quest, so I can't say anything about the second part.) The program uses hi-res graphics with spot animation to show you what your *Se-Kaa* persona sees, and you have to interpret it yourself. The art is excellent, if perhaps a bit minimal and tending toward the

overly symmetrical. Colors are bright and well-chosen. There are sound effects where appropriate, but no constant musical theme to get on your nerves.

The story involves recovering three magical artifacts from the Castle of the Dead: the Rod of Light, the Hammer of Vib-Ra and the Casket of Vib-Ra. After these well-hidden artifacts are recovered, you, as *Se-Kaa*, must replace them in their holy resting places Somewhere Else to defeat the minions of evil that are besieging your land. I have wandered all over the Castle and haven't seen a trace of these magic dohickies, but I'm not ready to give up yet.

A classic swords and sorcery setting, epic puzzle-solving adventure, entertaining graphics and sound effects -- this is probably as good as *Gruds in Space* or *The Dark Crystal*, but not as long. Highly recommended at this price.

BLACK CRYSTAL

This is the top of the Mastertronics line -- a full role-playing adventure almost on a scale with *Ultima*. The game package consists of six different maps, each of which is a 50K text and graphics program in its own right. The authors are Roy Camell and Stuart A. Galloway; the programmer is Jon Young. I suspect these are name to be reckoned with in Britain, though they're mostly unknown on this side of the Atlantic.

It's a classic struggle of Good vs. Evil, Law vs. Chaos, with you, of course, as the pivotal player. To win you must recover seven magic rings and use them to destroy the Black Crystal. The story is outlined in the brief documentation. These is also a book of hints, which seem dim enough to me at this stage. It seems to be a combination of reflex-action and role-playing, requiring rather heroic gaming prowess on your part. It's a one-character game

that is played in real-time, with the looks and play action of *Ultima*. As soon as it opens, you're attacked. If you don't move quickly, the monster, whose actions are described in detail in a text window at the bottom of the screen, will kill you.

For adventure gamers who thrive on challenge and combat, I'm giving *Black Crystal* my top recommendation. Where else can you get a game nearly as complex as *Ultima* for under \$10?

CONCLUSION

I'm impressed with the Mastertronics games. One of my most important maxims is that "Less is More!" Mastertronics charges less and gives more than and good many other companies in the field. Give them a try -- you really can't lose.

Computer: C-64	Conversions:
Planned	None
Price: \$9.95	
Manufacturer: Mastertronics	

Borrowed Time

Sam Harlow, the private eye whose persona you assume in this disk drive detective game, has a problem: someone is trying to kill him. A pair of thugs chase Sam from one end of town to the other, and you've got to find out who they're working for and do something about it before they finish the job. Sam's office, circa 1934, serves as the opening scene in this delightfully illustrated but thinly plotted graphic adventure.

The phone rings, and a man says they're out to get you. Search the office and you'll find an alimony check to your ex-wife, Rita, and a note from secretary Iris that says Mavin from a bar call the Dublin Rose called and wants to see you.

Mavin's one of seven clients whose records are in the file cabinet. When selected, each index card is displayed on-screen along with background information: "Case 1: subject: Fred Mongo, suspected of arson job. Client: Acme Paper. Disposition: need more evidence." Another card tells about Boss Farnham, a reputed mobster you've been investigating for the FBI. That's what I mean about a thin plot: since when does the FBI hire p.i.s to help on a case? This immediately destroys any plausibility to the story.

ALLEY OOPS!

Outside, the thugs will gun you down in the alley if you don't run for cover. This precipitates a fast-paced chase scene in which you'll have to solve several simple problems in order to reach the real game. It's a good way to get the game moving, reminiscent of *Sorcerer's* introduction. It soon becomes looks as though the people in the various cases are interconnected. In the bar, for example, Mavis tells you that Farnham's man, Charlie LeBold, told Rita and Mongo that you'd never finish this case. All told you'll find 20 suspects. But first you'll have to do something about Rita, for as you leave the Rose someone runs up and tells you she's just been kidnapped.

Outside the bar the game really opens up. You're free to stroll the streets of New City, a watered-down version of Manhattan, and meet characters such as Hawkeye, a newstand vendor who offers tips. You can say things like "tell me about Mongo" or "show receipt to Hawkeye" in hopes of digging up some clues from him. More may be visible in pictures and/or described in accompanying text. The problems are all beginner material. Often the objects needed to solve a puzzle are found on the spot. Mapping is necessary but not difficult. Success hinges on finding clues that lead you closer to the

perpetrator and staying alive long enough to do so.

Parsing is capably implemented. You can use multiple sentences that may be reasonably complex, and commands can employ prepositions such as "in" and "behind." Quicksave and quickload options allow you to save and restore a game on the program disk with a single command; these and other eight more common actions like get all, drop (fill in blank), tell me about (blank) and repeat last command may be executed by punching the appropriate function keys or control-key commands.

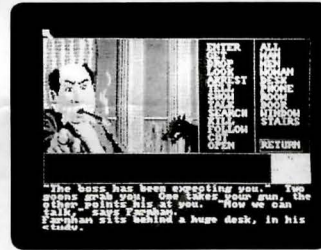
Bubbles in the office water cooler, a toe-tapping punk, the phone jangling off the hook, water dripping from Rita's kitchen sink -- superb spot animation like this is the game's best feature. In some scenes, the character's heads slowly turn like those in *Bard's Tale* (also an Interplay production). A bold, modernistic cartoon style typifies the graphics, which rescue the game from self-destruction by a mediocre story. Too bad they're so small: the right third of the screen is devoted to a column of nouns and one of verbs, which can be selected with joystick or mouse.

WASTED SCREEN SPACE

The words in the pair of lists never change, and you still have to type in those that don't appear in the list, so this is a serious waste of space. It may be convenient for first-timers, but I imagine even a beginner would rather see full-screen graphics. (The Telarium games let you view what amounts to pull-down lists of context-oriented nouns and verbs that change according to the situation or problem. Since they don't stay on-screen throughout the game, this is a much more satisfying method.) Icons depict your inventory, and some versions have an on-screen compass rose for moving in the four directions via mouse or joystick. Graphics can be

replaced with all-text on the left side of screen, as in *Penguin adventures*. Disk access is brisk, even on the Commodore, which incorporates a FastLoad routine.

Despite superior graphics and an effective parser, *Borrowed Time* is peopled with stereotyped characters that would be more at home in a cheap mystery novel written by some anonymous hack. The other negative aspect is the wasted screen space. If you've got such obviously talented



BORROWED TIME™

artists working on a game, why cramp their style? It's like telling Michelangelo, "Hey pal, just paint part of the ceiling."

According to Activision's catalog, the earlier Interplay adventures have been revamped in this fashion, an unfortunate decision; I hear they're actually planning an all-text game with the on-screen vocabulary "feature." Beginners can run through an on-board tutorial that explains how adventures work and gives a sample problem to solve; this is the same one that was introduced in *Mindshadow*. That game profited from a much more engaging plot, and experienced adventurers looking for an Interplay mystery to solve should try *Mindshadow* instead. First-timers may find *Borrowed Time* more appropriate.

Computer: Apple, C-64/128, Amiga, Atari ST, Macintosh
Planned **Conversions:** IBM PC & jr, Tandy 1000
Skill Level: Introductory
Saves: 10 on game disk
Price: Ap, \$39.95; C-64/128, \$29.95; Macintosh, ST, Amiga, \$49.95
Manufacturer: Activision

RAMBO

Continued from page 3

from disk in order to paint a picture on the screen. I don't know the nature of the problem, but the slow access time is the main reason I would never attempt to see this game through -- let those MIAs wait for an upgrade. At least the parser accepts prepositions and reasonably complex commands like "fire gun at sniper." It also understands the word "it" as referring to the previously used noun, which is handy. (But it won't accept multiple commands.)

If you want to wage a one-man war in the jungle and can tolerate a plodding program, *Rambo* offers a satisfying interactive read. Otherwise don't volunteer for this suicide mission.

Computer: Apple (64K), IBM PC & jr
Planned **Conversions:** none
Skill Level: Intermediate
Saves: 9
Price: \$39.95
Manufacturer: Mindscape

MAXWELL MANOR

This will be a brief review because the game, though labeled an "adventure mystery," is actually an arcade-style shoot-'em-up. The scenario involves a joystick-guided character who must blast his way through an old mansion while collecting treasure. As he enters a doorway, the picture scrolls to show the next room. Bugs and creatures crawl from the walls to attack, and game-play consists of shooting them and grabbing all the objects in the correct order before you get killed. Graphics and animation are flimsier than most Atari VCS or VIC-20 games. You can hit a key to look through your inventory and use different weapons and objects. But nowhere could I find the right weapon: Maxwell's silver hammer, so I could hit this game's programmer over the head. Several times. With great vigor and joy.

RINGS OF ZILFIN

Continued from page 2

Commodore version will also offer joystick control.)

Gold is rarely obtained as the result of winning a battle. Rather, your character trades in various goods like tobacco and silk that are available at towns and villages and tries to "buy low and sell high." Carefully ferreting out the best bargains is the key to success here, and you can dicker with the merchants. Of course, some items must be bought to complete the game, although the most pivotal items are earned through special deeds and encounters. Your inventory is shown on the status screen, along with spells and attributes.

Many of the towns and villages also feature "talking" inhabitants. Here the game takes on an *Ultima IV* character. Clues and hints about special non-player characters, important items, magic words and other interesting tidbits are given, requiring you to take careful notes. These clues build on the story line by leading you to the most important locations. Often they culminate in special encounters with non-player characters, usually accompanied by special effects.

The strength of a great role-playing game is its ability to provide healthy diversion, surprise, discovery and challenge, accomplished by what psychologists call "mood capturing" the player in the game's fantasy world. Some of the great moments in computer gaming demonstrate this: fighting and mapping your way through 3999 locations of *Wizardry's* dungeon, only to have your physically shredded party confronted at the 4000-th location with the ominous sign "Lair of the Evil Wizard Werdna. The Wizard Is In."; the mind-numbing endgame dungeon of *Ultima IV*, when after three hours without the ability to save you are confronted with a battery of questions, knowing that if any are incorrectly answered you will be instantly transported to the surface to face another three-hour ordeal; rocketing home in your badly crippled spaceship with the final shipment of

goods to complete *SunDog*, when the deadliest space pirates block your landing.

Zilfin evokes a similar "edge of your seat" excitement. It begins the moment you leave your home village, just in the nick of time to avoid Dragos' evil right-hand demon, Dzomon. Later on it escalates when you barely escape the Dark Tower only to be faced by Dzomon. Then there's the intensity of that final confrontation with Dragos, when every move you make had better be the right one, performed in the right order.

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Much of the atmosphere is enriched by the game's super special effects. After you enter a wizard's home that is engulfed in total darkness, an owl appears and transforms into the wizard, who calmly asks you to have a chair. Visiting a healer after forking over the requested fee, your character is placed in a bed and the four healers "gather round" to minister to your wounds. Upon encountering a monster while walking down a long tunnel, you drop your flickering torch on the ground behind you, to find it still burning until the combat is over.

One special encounter reminded me of the memorable final scene from *Questron*. Even some of the conversations are startling, like in the third and most difficult realm, when several monks suggest that you visit your homeland, the first realm, because you would now be invincible there. All of this, plus the combat (bow and arrow or sword/magical), is accompanied with spirited animation. Combat against flying monsters is arcadey and reminiscent of *Space Invader* or *Galaxia*, but I didn't mind.

There are numerous handy features. The statistics screen is available at almost anytime, even including combat. Various things like traveling or healing up in a town are done in real-time. (On one occasion, while doing some heavy-duty healing, I starved to death.) The game is easily saved on exiting any location, and you may continue playing without rebooting. You can copy the

disk on which the game is saved, so multiple games in progress are possible. The thorough fifteen-page manual is concise and gives valuable hints for completing the game.

QUEST FOR FLAWS

Some very minor nitpicks in this otherwise superior game: Certain attribute or property numbers top out at certain levels, so be careful not to waste money buying, for example, more than 99 of any one item, or healing when you are at an attribute's maximum. Sound can be disabled by pressing the "Z" key, but the documentation doesn't mention this. You get one last chance if endurance or fatigue falls below zero, but you can starve to death without warning. [Ed.: See page 5 for a potential and more devastating problem.]

Zilfin's author, Ali N. Atabek, deserves recognition for retelling the standard story of the genre with such originality. The windows, animation, and full-screen illustrations of towns and other locations give *Rings of Zilfin* real personality, ensuring its place in the pantheon of role-playing mythology.

Computer: Apple
Planned Conversions:
Commodore 64/128
Skill Level: Novice
Saves: One per character on game disk
Price: \$39.95
Manufacturer: SSI

EDITOR'S WARNING:

I was about to knock on Lord Dragos' door when disaster struck. A vital object had vanished from my inventory, apparently when I had tried to use it elsewhere. But it could not be replaced, since there was only one harp in the game and I had already taken it, so there was no way to finish the quest.

SSI says it must have been a fluke, not a bug. Whatever. The best insurance is copy your inventory from the status screen. Before you save, check the screen to make sure every item you collected in the current session -- particularly those that were found, not bought -- is still there.

ULTIMA UPDATE

For years it has been harder to find than mandrake root, but *Ultima I* will soon be reissued by Origin Systems, which recently obtained the rights to the game. According to Richard Garriott, "It will be rewritten in machine language (the original program was in BASIC), the graphics will be upgraded, and it should be out by the end of the summer." Origin has also reclaimed the rights to *Ultima II*, formerly distributed by Sierra. Each title in the series will be sold individually, and a bundled set will be introduced.

Garriott says *Ultima IV, Part Two*, is "still up in the air. Originally we were going to put a new plot into the *Ultima IV* game system, so people wouldn't have to wait two years while I write *Ultima V*. Steve Meuse was going to do it. Now we may decide to have Steve work with me on *Ultima V* so we can have it out in a year." Meuse just programmed Origin's *Ogre*, a simplified tactical war scenario based on the Steve Jackson board game.

About a recently published tip on how to kill Lord British in *Ultima III* (*MacUser*, April), Garriott says: "A number of people have found that, and my hat's off to them because I originally meant to make Lord British invincible. If you attack him, the program automatically skips over the damage routine." But wily orc-slayers discovered that luring LB in front of a ship and blasting away with the cannons would do the trick, because the program handles attacks by ships in a different manner. "In *Ultima IV*," Garriot says "I took care to make sure no one can do anything that mean and nasty. But feel free to try." Don't consider this a bounty, but QuestBusters™ is hereby posting a reward: a one-year subscription and the game of your choice to the first person who vanquishes Lord British in *Avatar* and sends us a verifiable set of instructions for doing the dirty deed.

KEYS TO THE KINGDOMS

RINGS OF ZILFIN

Keep going north & south between first two towns & collect a reserve supply of mushrooms before roaming far afield. To get past K-plants, use 2 purlets and 2 parzins just before you encounter these fiends. Buy tobacco in first town and sell it in Perimon. Stock up on ash bows, since they break so often, and don't bother looking for a Brom bow. There is only one and you can't buy it.

MACINTOSH WIZARDRY

Load Switcher, MacDraw, and MacWizardry on the same disk and use MacDraw to map the levels. Don't try to use a Level 123 Ninja from an Apple // or IBM 5 1/4 inch backup disk.

ULTIMA IV

Buy weapons for your party when you start, as it's easier to get money with only one character. Get 3 magic wands, 2 magic axes, 1 magic bow, 1 crossbow and 1 sling, the best weapons for each class. To get partial avatarship fast: For Spirituality: talk to Hawkwind as many times as needed till he says you're ready for spirituality. You don't have to leave the castle. Compassion: go to Britannia Castle's prison & give 1 piece of gold to every beggar. Go downstairs, then back up and repeat. Each time your counter goes up about two. Sacrifice: give blood at a healer. When you can't give anymore, get yourself healed and repeat process. You can do this type of thing with each virtue; do it once, leave the city or castle, enter & do it again. Enter Minoc during two full moons for a shrine location. To locate secret doors, look for white dot in middle of wall. In LB's castle, you'll find one due north of entrance to healer. Valor, sacrifice, honor and spirituality are made from honor. Compassion, sacrifice, spirituality and justice are made from love. Honesty, honor, justice and spirituality are made from truth.

UNIVERSE II

In the very beginning, add to your 200,000 credits by selling half your fuel, then head for Vromus and by two Voltac Group ES orbital shuttles, an Athik Technical LTMC converter, a Sehvalese Number 9 cargo hold, recruit 1 high level astrogator and 2 high level pilots, recruit and sent a high level engineer to school. Then trade your brains out between Vromus, Prisa, Hope, and the Pyxis star systems. You should have a million credits in about 5 hours.

SPELLBREAKER

Idol: The opal eye can be removed with the knife or shears. Removing the cube from its mouth requires more finesse and may take a couple of attempts. First get the opal eye, so the idol is blind. Memorize malyon and espnis. Malyon idol, then espnis idol and look idol. Eventually, he will asleep while yawning. If his mouth stays open, you can grab the cube. If not, just restore a saved position and repeat the process until it works.

If you have any clues, answers and strategies to new games, send them in. This month's help came from Aaron Chou, Ron Wartow, Andrew Bundschuh and Xuluii the Dishevelled. Last issues' answer (and sorry we overlooked mentioning this last month) were courtesy of GAMESIG members of Washington Apple Pi: Barry and Ben Bedrick, Richard Bollar, Dave and Steve Granite, Ray Hakim, and Ronald Wartow. Aaron Chou, John Reigle and Ralph Kinney also contributed.

[The April issue of MacUser has an excellent article, "The Cheat Sheet," which is full of general strategy tips on adventure games.]

Waiting for Duffy

Duffy's stuck in Harkym's Castle right now, so send in a brief ad if you need help.

Need help with Sundog and Suspect. Can help with Infocom and others. Chris Muller, 514 SW 34th St., Apt 6., Gainesville, FL 32607.

Free help on all Infocom adventures, up to 330 points on Spellbreaker. Also Ultima 3 and Mindwheel. Some Ultima 4. Send SASE to Matt Friedman, 108 Lewis Lane, Oak Ridge TN 37830. If you have more than 330 points in Spellbreaker, please write. I need help.

How do you solve the final one-person maze in Expedition Amazon? Does anybody know the way out of Gemstone Warrior? I am lost. Gayle Ann Stanford, 3281 Foxgate Dr., Memphis, TN 38115.

Can anyone tell me how in the world you build or make rooms with Adventure Master? I looked all through the "program guide" and could not find anything. Helen Whitley, Lot 141, 4701 Anderson Rd., Houston, TX 77053.

Ultima 4: What is the pure axiom and the word? Nine Princes in Amber: How can I win both Bleys & Gerard to my side? How can I meet Llewlla, Fiona, Caine or Brand? Perry Mason: need lots of help. Only person I scored with is Burns.

For .25-.50, I can help with all Infocom games (except Cutthroats and Spellbreaker), Amazon, Ultima 1-4 and many others. Send SASE. Aaron Chou, 7032 Stratford Rd., Woodbury, MN 55125.

Need lots of help in Ultima 4 and Rama. Can help with 9 Princes and Enchanter. Chris A. Raudonis, 45 Pelham Rd., Hudson, NH 03051.

Spellbreaker: How do you get cube in giant bird's nest? Will gladly pay for hints. Have solved and can help anyone with Ultima 2, 3 and 4, Enchanter,

Sorcerer, Zork 1,2,3, Hitchhiker's, Mask of Sun, Serpent's Star, Deadline, Suspect, Planetfall and some of Spellbreaker - free! Send SASE to M. Kim, 10425 NE 124th St., Kirkland, WA 98034.

The Mist: How do I start the truck? Queston: Mesron wants to see me; how do I find him in castle? Can help with Mindwheel, Tracer Sanction, Amazon, Mindshadow, Dragonworld. Call/write Karen Lee, 444 Bridgton Rd., Westbrook, ME 04092. (207) 797-7985.

Can help on Enchanter, Zork and Original Adventure for \$5 + map. Need clue on Ice Maze in New Adventure. David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.

Ripper: Have found clue under blood; had Holmes decipher both messages; identified all parties but dwarf; climbed ladder; tried to close closet door. Now what? Anyone know words so I can reach fireplace to find secret passage? J. Swienty, 7951 Saloma Ave., Van Nuys, CA 91402.

Spellbreaker: Have 8 cubes, 365 points and Belboz' key but can't open vault door or find crunchy food for green-eyed rock. Can help with many game, including some new ones. T. Walsh, 116 Homestead Cr., London, Ontario, Canada N6G 2E8.

Amazon: Need all the help I can get. Will pay for answers. Can help on Planetfall, Deadline, Seastalker, Cutthroats and Serpent's Star. J. Lema, 431 Alphabet St., Holbrook, NY 11741,

Amazon: how do you cross bridge? Sundog: where do you buy ground scanner? Can help with Quest, Mask of Sun, Zork I. W. Hall, 1110 44th St., Sacramento, CA 95819.

Can help with Asylum. Send SASE: Brian Smith, 3035 Montego, Plano, TX 75023



Make check payable to QuestBusters,
Canadian orders add \$5. PA residents
add 6% sales tax. We pay shipping.