

INFOCOM, INC.
125 Cambridge Park Drive
Cambridge, MA 02140
Attn: ~~Mr~~ Everyone!

Dear Inmates of Infocom:

This is a letter I have long wanted to write, but never got around to - until now. I have played every Infocom adventure to date including the mainframe Zork, so this letter may take a while. This may give you an "excuse to stop working", but don't stop ~~writing adventures~~ for too long; it's agony just waiting for the next game to appear in the store!

Let's start with the mainframe Zork, which my company somehow got for our LSI-11 under the name DUNGEON. It took me four months to crack that sucker. I had previously played the original Adventure at the University of Waterloo, but this, THIS, was something else. So many rooms, and was going on forever! My first exploratory map was ~~such~~ such a mess. I ~~quickly came up~~ ~~against several~~ ~~blocks~~ "blocks". It is such a pleasure when you actually solve these puzzles, but I needed help with some of them. I had solved the riddle room (a couple of years later, I came across the riddle in a text book on Children's Literature; until then I thought the riddle was original), the echo room (I thought that was easy, but everyone else I know had trouble there), the bank (oh, toughy). ^{But} After I learned you can walk through things, I took much pleasure trying to walk through the rainbow - and bumping my head against it! - and the maze (pure diligence!), the mirror and the window. After collaboration with my boss (who was also playing) we had the coal mine and dam and river areas solved.

Eventually, the need to cheat became overwhelming ^{when repeated} ~~with the~~ attempts to open the egg properly failed. I wrote a program to make a ~~text~~ printout of the text file contents, and I also did a RADSO dump of the program to learn the vocabulary. ~~Surprisingly~~ Surprisingly, this wealth of information didn't help me with the central problem of opening the egg! Oh, ~~the~~ ^{heavy} cheating did help me learn about the word EXERCISE which was holding me up at the gates of Hell & I had instantly recognized bell, book and candle from Dr. Faustus, but couldn't implement it, I already knew about PRAY, but had no clue about TREASURE and TEMPLE being teleport words. FOO, BAR and BLOTCH were a total mystery until I took Lisp at the University a couple years later. I also learned about the endgame earlier than I should have, but more on that later. Now I did find a description of the egg referring to a clasp, but this didn't help (further ~~reflection~~ inspection indicated that this description could never appear in the game, since it was an initial description, but the egg's initial position is in the nest.) And I found out about the bauble, which explained the song birds.

But I wanted to open that damned egg! Nothing in the text file described the transition from closed to open egg - which was surprising. Most puzzles when solved give you a fanfare of some sort to let you know you're doing the right thing. Oh, I tried hatching it, dropping it, shaking it, turning, spinning - nothing. Weeks of ~~frustration~~ ^{this} FRUSTRATION. My character was just too clumsy to open the ~~clasp~~ ~~thing~~ thing. FINALLY, the light dawns: if I'm too clumsy to open it, maybe someone else could! And hey! - the thief is light fingered - nah, you wouldn't do that. You wouldn't dare do that. Damned right you would. AAAAAARRRRRRGGGH!!

Well, once the egg was opened, the rest was ^{relatively} ~~clear~~ sailing. I remember the evening I spent solving the Puzzle Room. It took me a while to realize how to interpret the mini-map given. But that was the major problem. I've always felt that puzzle was a particularly ~~clever~~ one.

Soon, I was ready to tackle the endgame. It startled me to find out the save feature was discontinued for the endgame, but I didn't get to ~~the~~ Cheater status for nothing! When I got ~~the~~ ~~prison~~ ~~cell~~ problem, I made a command file that would run the program and feed responses up to that point. Further, I was using virtual lines to run these command files simultaneously so I wouldn't have to wait for the next ~~save~~ "restore". Eventually, I was able to ~~enter~~ ^{summon} the bronze door and to walk into the final repository of Zork. Nice ending.

But it was over. *sigh*

Unfortunately, once you've played the game to completion, there is little incentive to replay it, except to refresh your memory. Ah, but what memories. Whenever ~~you~~ play a game like this, I wish I had written it. I wonder what it must be like to play test these things - you guys must be having a ball.

Anyway, to continue chronologically, I still had to finish University. (Background note: the University of Waterloo has a co-op program which permits alternation of work terms and school terms in four-month cycles. My major was Computer Science.) During my last year, I come across something called Zork II in ~~a~~ ^{Stan} a computer software store. That rang a bell.

The store owner was generous enough to let me play it for a couple hours on the store's demonstration model, and I soon discovered that what I thought would be merely one-third of the mainframe Zork had unicorns, gazebos, topiaries and stuff I had never seen before! (Aa! gasp! ope! aieee!)

~~At~~ Now at this point I ~~didn't~~ ^{hadn't} have a computer, nor was I willing to buy one just yet (since I'm stingy). So what I did do was buy a copy of Zork I for a friend who had an Apple clone and played on his computer! By the time we stored Zork I, ~~he had~~ ^{my friend} ~~got~~ obtained copies of Zork II, Zork III and something called Enchanter.

I was hooked. I had to get my own computer. It was getting ^{up} inconvenient to play solely on my friend's since he was still in Waterloo, and I had since moved to Toronto to work full time. So I bought an Apple IIc solely to play adventure games. We hadn't finished Enchanter yet, but its sequel Sorcerer had come out. So the first Infocom adventure that I purchased for myself was Sorcerer.

My hunger for Infocom adventures now ~~is~~ rivals that of any game or even the ravenous Bryblatter beast of Traal. I have since bought Infidel, Steampunk Suspended, Seastalker, Cutthroats, Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Suspect and Wishbringer. My boss got a copy of Planetfall for the company's Macintosh. And my friend got copies of Witness and Deadline for his machine.

So when's the next one coming out?

Now its time for the portion of our program that this letter could not do without: The Inform Book of lists. Rather than go through each adventure separately forever, I want to touch on aspects ~~of~~ that the games share; the better for you to write more adventures instead of reading letters all day!
~~Note that the order listed regard the ~~to~~ items in a list as having~~
~~Best Endings to~~ equal standing

Best Endings ~~(to)~~

- 1) Zork III
- 2) Planetfall

(I have not actually finished Suspended, Cutthroats, Seastalker or Suspect so I can't judge their endings)

Best Humor

- 1) Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy
- 2) Planetfall

Quickest ~~To~~ Solve

- 1) Witness
- 2) Infidel (except last puzzle)
- 3) Wishbringer

Most Annoying Game

- 1) Seastalker

~~Fastest~~ Puzzles ~~that~~ I Honestly Solved ~~the~~ But Took Forever

- 1) ~~Enchanter~~ Zork Mainframe: opening the egg
- 2) Enchanter: opening the guarded door.
- 3) Hitchhikers: opening the hatch.
- 4) Enchanter: ~~open~~ the getting the scroll from the SE tower safely.
- 5) Hitchhikers: getting the babel fish

~~Stuff that~~

Sins or Why I Detested, Hated and Disliked Seastalker

~~Strongly~~ Formats

1) ~~Seastalker~~ ^{Nose leading} Being led by the nose: Seastalker, Hitchhiker's and Cutthroats all share this sin to some extent. The primary symptom ^{are} yes or no questions being asked that can't be avoided. This use of this feature not only decreases choice of what to do, it often reduces the player to a passive role which is no fun at all.

2) Map Giving: This isn't really a sin, but I like to map and if you give me one (as in Wishbringer) you take away that pleasure.

3) ~~Hit~~ Playing Hide & Seek with My ~~Player~~ ^{Character} — Seastalker does this constantly, and it is the primary reason I don't play it. I'm referring to putting blenders on my character so I can't examine my surroundings (such as in the sub) to ever see what objects are there. Examining the sub won't tell me that there is oxygen ~~the~~ equipment there. Examining ⁱⁿ Tip won't tell me that he has a magazine. Oh no, I have to fear.

4) ...Nagged Out of My Bound! — Wishbringer has this to a small extent, but the nagging in Seastalker is too much. Between Tip's comments and the computer's "If you want a hint..." or "You just gained 5 more points!" your ~~and~~ concentration is shot. There is no sense of story continuity with all the interruptions. It is very like you playing a game of solitaire, but the cards talk at you "why don't you play me on the red nine"? That's worse than being a passive player — you might as well let the cards play the game. Hey, they want to build you a dart gun, they want to install safety equipment. What did get to do? "Oh sure, go right ahead." Notice, they don't read meat all.

Puzzles I had to Ask About to Solve

- 1) Deadline: getting into the secret room
- 2) Infidel: opening the sarcophagus
- 3) Suspect: final proof of guilt
- 4) Sturcross: how to get red, blue and green rods.

Red Herring that ~~Had~~ Got Me Good

- 1) Planetfall: Trying to get that helicopter to fly
- 2) Sorcerer: The Mine Field and the entire amusement park.
- 3) Suspect: Phoning the costume shop for another costume
- 4) Wishbringer: the dying seahorse

Kudos For Subtlety And Cleverness

- 1) Cutthroats: needing to wind the watch
- 2) Zork III: the puzzle room
- 3) Hitchhiker: Don't plug the large plug into the large receptacle before the emergency.
- 4) Sturcross: giving the disk to the mouse.

Ending Trademarks

- 1) ~~Grues~~ Grues
- 2) ~~Fruboz~~ Fruboz Magic (insert name here) Company
- 3) Any references back to the house in Zork I

New Possible Scenarios ~~You Haven't Tried Yet~~

- 1) Western (as prospector? as ^{new} sheriff?)
- 2) Fairytale (to win a princess' hand?)
- 3) Spy Thriller (to infiltrate the enemy, to pass back information & sabotage enough to win a war, ^{gadgets & women!})
- 4) ~~Spy~~ Time Travel
- 5) Minuturization

limitations I'd like Improved

- 1) ~~Object~~ Renaming objects - I'd like to be able to give a name to my sword and refer to it ~~as a~~ ^{by the new} name. This facility would allow me to name a ~~newly-mixed~~ potion or a randomly-picked tone out of hundreds.
- 2) ~~Readable~~ Books - just once it would be nice to pick up ~~a~~ book and actually be able to read it rather than ~~a~~ protestations that it's in another language or a glit "you-read-it-for-a-few-minutes-and-fun-it-entertaining" message. Try doing it with generated nonsense verse, rather than prose:

"I threw a Turkid in the sky =
It was the apple in her eye
And where it fell I knew not why
She called her dragon Heidi-her!"

See, wasn't that fun?

- 3) Sets of objects - I'm not holding my breath on this one, but treating a bag of coins as one ~~of~~ ^{of} solid object ^{involves with} detracts from the suspension of disbelief any good story instills. I know, you're still treating water as two objects: carry-able water and everywhere-else water. That's why in Infidel when you fill the silver cup water and then refill the canteen at the river - the silver cup's water mysteriously vanishes. ~~It is not possible for a~~ ~~multiple~~ This is also why ~~you~~ in Planetfall you can't put coolant in the canteen nor put broth in the flask nor pour from one to the other. Can't you devise a data structure for multiple or fluid objects so they can "be at more than one place at a time" by allocating the necessary space during execution? Or does the SAVE feature constrain that possibility?

4) Command Clustering - While I'm asking for the moon, in next quantum leap above Zork, you may consider trying to permit "command clustering". This would enable the player to build a recipe on how to map a maze, check out an object, or engage a foe in combat. You could even take the recipe term literally; what can you do in kitchen scenarios now but admire the china? Someday you may want the player to have the ability ~~to~~ to make sandwiches and fried chicken to impress a boyfriend on a picnic (the scenarios so far have been ^{from a} male perspective

Dorothy Murphy
Doorfee northy.wizard
wizard
wizard
wizard
wizard
wizardAn Ode To Enjoy

~~I once knew the wizard from Borpheus
He had to go because
Of a breakdown of laws —
I think they were written by Murphy.~~

Infocom has a great new adventure
"Spellbreaker" they call it by name.
I love it, but really must venture:
Could you give me a hint for this game?

I've reached a plateau in my ~~quests~~ ^{questing}.
Eight ^{cubes} are all that I have found.
~~I'd rather do something~~ What fun it was searching and testing,
But now I'm just walking around.

Belboz gave ~~me~~ ^{rather} a ~~nice~~ present,
A beautiful wrought iron key.
I thanked him and tried to be pleasant,
Since ^{it may become} ~~it's~~ "useful" to me.

The key didn't work on the trap door,
The cabinet, nor at the shop.
The box has a latch and furthermore,
REZROV will make any door pop!

Perhaps there's a lock on which REZROV won't work
On a vault that has yet to be seen.
Or maybe its iron content is really magnetic.
Or the moon has ^{some} cheese that is green.

~~But~~ Belboz himself has oodles to say
If you ask him about cubes, twins or snakes.
He acknowledges ~~the~~ keys and magic ~~any~~ per se,
But the rest of the world he forsakes.

I bought a blue rug at a ~~merchant's~~ store.
The merchant ~~would~~ ^{would} sell one that's red.
I bargained him down to a coin piece.
And took the blue one instead,

That carpet is truly amazing.
You can actually tell it to fly!
Of course, you ^{must} sit on it first,
When above you, you see open sky.

I tried ^{to fly} in a volcano.
The ~~fly~~ carpet was starting to singe!
And the label (the label?) caught fire.
No more carpet, not even the fringe.

RESTORE-ing, I turn the rug over.
A label is waiting me there.
But if I should take it or cut it,
The carpet won't fly anywhere!

What protection is there ^{against} ~~from~~ fire?
TINSOT is the best that ~~is~~ I've got.
I TINSOT the LABEL, I TINSOT the rug.
But these trials all go to naught.
~~at all~~ ^{at all} for