

QuestBusters™

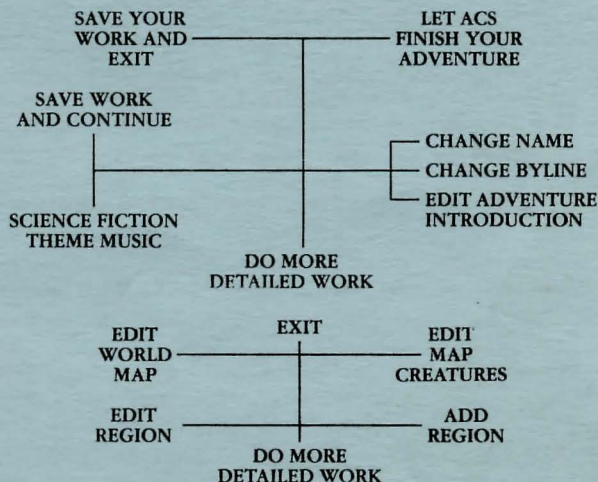
The Adventurer's Newsletter
February, 1985

Vol. II, # 2

BUILD YOUR OWN FANTASY WORLD WITH ADVENTURE CONSTRUCTION SET

Traditional parser-based adventures like Sorcerer and Mask of the Sun are beyond the scope of ACS, which is actually a "role-playing game construction set." It enables non-programmers to build games featuring animated characters whose lives hinge on maintaining their hit point levels while battling assorted creatures. A game's long range goal -- save the princess, kill the evil What'sisName, or anything you can imagine -- can be stated at the outset or left for the player(s) to discover. Some semi-puzzles (where to find the key to open a certain door; which spell kills what creature) can be worked into a game, and there are methods for displaying text passages that reveal clues and so on, but the emphasis is on real-time combat- and magic-oriented action sequences rather than strictly logical problem-solving.

Your character is moved via joystick (as in Ultima I and Questron) and you may select other actions by pressing the fire button, then highlighting one of the 12 options (use magic, rest, fire, etc.) shown at the bottom of the screen. There are three ways to attack without resorting to the game's various magic spells. "Missile weapons" such as spears and pistols are fired by guiding a cursor to the target and stabbing the fire button. (The results are animated as the shot slowly sails across the room.) Daggers, swords and other "melee weapons" are wielded by trying to move onto a space occupied by another character. A line of text describes the results of each blow, while



Two of ACS's "gear shift" menus

vertical bars on the sides of the screen indicate "life force" and "power" reserves. Up to four player characters can be controlled with one or two joysticks. They can even attack each other, which is rare for a role-playing game.

AS THE WORLD SCROLLS

The playing environment resembles that of the Ultima series. All games created with this system begin on a "world map" that is 40 x 40 squares in size. (These squares are *not* shown onscreen in a visible grid, which would detract from the game.) Only a 10 x 15 square area is visible at any given time, a view that scrolls when your character reaches the edge of the screen (unless you select the "no-scroll" option during game development).

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Adventure • Hotline

Epyx is mulling over a plan to implement a home version of the classic role-playing game Empire. It's currently accessible only via the Plato "Homelink" network.

When We're Wrong Department: Origin Systems' Dave Albert says there's no such thing as a new game called Penultimate (reported in our January issue). Somehow, we must have gotten it confused with Moebius I: The Orb of Celestial Harmony. Set for a March release, Moebius mixes martial arts, magic and swordplay in a role-playing game set in the four elemental planes of Earth, Water, Air and Fire. It's supposed to feature superb graphics and animation. An Apple game, it will be converted for the Mac, PC and jr, and C-64 this fall and should sell for \$59.95. Ultima IV: Quest for the Avatar (Apple) is now set for April.

And while SSI, which made its mark with war games like Knights of the Desert and D-Day, is invading the adventure scene (Questron and the new Gemstone Warrior), Sir-Tech has pulled off a strange role-reversal by marketing an animated war game called Rescue Raiders. Looks and plays sort of like Choplifter but you get tanks, soldiers and an attack helicopter that can shoot down enemy choppers and fire smart bombs. It's fun, but we'd rather be playing Return of Werdna.

Telarium just announced that all their adventures except Shadowkeep will be converted for the PC and jr by March, when the Macintosh Fahrenheit 451 should be released. Starman Jones, "still in the loop" according to Linda Pollock, may be out this spring. Future titles include Roger Zelazny's Nine Princes in Amber and The Grand Adventure by Philip Jose Farmer. (In case you're wondering why we're so late with reviews of Shadowkeep and Rama, blame it on a series of defective review copies. Spinnaker says an early production run may have been bad, but there have been no problems since then.

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ADVENTURE CONSTRUCTION

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

Thirteen kinds of terrain features, including trees, mountains, desert and rivers, may be planted anywhere on this map. Four types of portals can be used to permit entrance to what are called "regions." Portals serve the same purpose as the images of castles and towns in Ultima. When your character moves atop one, the disk is accessed and the world map is replaced with a map of the region.

Regions, comparable to the interior views of Ultima's towns and cities, are composed of rooms, whose shape and size are easily defined by drawing with the joystick. You can install doors that lead from a room to another region, back to the world map, or to another room in the same region. From a list of 128 creatures, you can designate which ones will randomly appear in what types of terrain on the world map. Creatures can also be assigned as residents of specific rooms or to roam them at random. You'll select from friendly, neutral, evil and other classes of creatures. There's also a "Master Thing List" with all sorts of weapons (from golf clubs to lasers), treasures, armor, ropes, lamps, and other useful items. You can easily edit existing things and creatures to change their effects and determine who can possess them, or create new ones. Their pictures can even be touched up with a joystick-manipulated "brush" or drawn completely from scratch.

SHIFTING GEARS

The means by which all these marvels are accomplished is extraordinarily well-structured and quickly mastered. ACS uses what might be called a set of "gear shift menus." The options in each of its three main menus are connected with straight lines. To select one, you joystick a cursor around the pattern until it hovers over "Edit World Map," for example, then press the button. In this case, a blank map appears. A similar menu at the bottom of this screen lets you view the types of terrain one-by-one and position them on the map

with the joystick. You can also determine conditions under which characters may pass through each kind of terrain and whether or not doing so triggers a magic spell or some other effect. (Similar "mini-menus" accompany other editing options and facilitate choosing creatures, weapons and other things from different lists.)

Magic spells may also be "attached" to doors and objects to make the game more exciting. Spells include Kill all but an owner of (you fill in the object's name), Give to Victim (pick an object), Display Message (you write it), and 12 others. With "custom spaces," you can work plant and other effects anywhere in a room. (These are not as thoroughly documented as the rest of options. The 43-page manual, however, is much more lucid



than most of the documentation from Electronic Arts, which is always very clever but usually about as comprehensible as a Wordstar manual.) Sound effects like "woop woop" and "razz" and several musical themes are available for the micro-maestro and will contribute to the atmosphere of any fantasy world.

Before beginning construction, you must use a built-in option to copy one of the three construction sets (Fantasy, Spy/Mystery, and Science Fiction) onto a blank disk. Or you can "Erase everything but graphics" and replace the Creature and Thing Lists entirely with your own inventions. A small world can be assembled overnight, then saved and elaborated upon in later sessions. Each game can have up to 15 regions that hold 16 rooms and 300 object apiece. Up to 335 text messages can be used in a single game. If you're not happy with your new world, delete it! Or any rooms, regions, things and creatures that aren't working out. You can also edit them to your satisfaction, changing their characteristics and even the behavior patterns of the creatures and non-player characters. An unfriendly, aggressive dragon can be transformed into a cuddly koala bear,

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ADVENTURE CONSTRUCTION

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for example, and represented with a new picture. ACS will also finish an uncompleted game for you, providing new rooms and regions, a goal, and assorted creatures.

The most inconvenient aspect of the system is that you can't immediately playtest new additions to a game. If a character picks up a magic sword from a room, that weapon won't be there the next time the game is loaded. This necessitates duplicating the game under development and playtesting the copy. It's a time-consuming process, but at least ACS has a built-in copy routine that obviates the need for any knowledge of DOS commands.

AVENTURIA & THE RIVERS OF LIGHT

ACS comes with a game called "Aventuria," which contains seven mini-quests that teach you how to play. The manual refers to some scenes as examples of how the construction set's tools and features can be applied in a game. There's also a full-blown game called "Rivers of Light," written by the program's author Stuart Smith with the set. (Smith previously programmed Ali Baba and The Return of Heracles.) After playing them, you can direct ACS to scramble their make-up and contents and turn them into new games.

These games also provide something to play for fun when not busy hammering away on your own scenarios. That's the big difference between ACS and Pinball Construction Set. With the latter, you can build a pinball game and enjoy playing it. With ACS, it's not so much fun to play the resulting game because you know where the treasures are hidden, which spells to cast on specific monsters.... Instead, the satisfaction lies in the experience of conjuring up a fantasy world and watching *someone else* play it, (and laughing fiendishly as they die in the claws of *your* two-headed jinnzak beast).

By this fall, there are likely to be quite a few new games available for the ACS system. (The

program disk is required in order to play a game written with it.) That's because Electronic Arts has announced a \$1,000 contest for the best game created with ACS. All entries become property of the company and may be sold by them or released as public domain software -- and EA doesn't say anything about a customer's right to sell such games. [Anyone who wants to sell or give away ACS games can run a free ad in the Swap Shop.]

Though easy to operate, ACS is a sophisticated program with too many features and details to cover individually here, and it probably packs a lot of subtle capabilities that only become apparent time and experience. (This review was written after spending a week inside the system to write a little game called "Quest for Hoffa.") If you've ever wanted to "roll your own" role-playing game, ACS is leagues ahead of the only other such program, Spinnaker's Adventure Creator. Just don't expect to put Lord British out of business.

[If you'd rather delve into designing an all-text, parser-based adventure, try Adventure Writer. It enables you to save a finished game in a format that can be run without the master program, and Codewriter permits you to sell games created with their system. A similar all-text editor from CBS Software, Adventure Master, will be covered in a future review.) And for all-text RPG development, there's always Eamon.]

Computer: COMMODORE 64

Planned Conversions: APPLE (maybe)

Skill Level: Not Applicable

Saves: 1 (on game disk)

Price: \$34.95

Manufacturer: Electronic Arts

AND THE WINNER IS:

Ed Rugh of Ardmore, PA, won December's contest and a copy of Ripper. The only other person who correctly completed the puzzle 100% was Chris Ciccarello.

Shadowkeep 2

Produced by the Ultrasoft crew that did Mask of the Sun, Shadowkeep attempts to graft a role-playing game system onto a graphic adventure. As the legend goes, "an evil spread across the land" after the demon Dal'Brad imprisoned Nacomedon (the good wizard) in his own castle, Shadowkeep. With a party of up to nine warriors and magicians, your quest is to nail him. Characters are chosen from four races: Roos, Thalidars, Zhis'tas and Humans. Up to 20 can be created and stored on the main program disk and also saved on a back-up disk. (Because you also have to copy the program disks to make four scenarios disks, you'll need five blank disks.)

There are four kinds of magicians: Necromancers, Monks, RuneMages, and ShadowMages. Each begins with four or five spells unique to his or her discipline. Spells, magical artifacts, and more powerful weapons and armor may be bought at the Inn or found within the tower. You can always return to the Inn (if you can find your way back from the maze), but it takes an interminably long time for disk access while waiting for the new graphics and menus to appear.

Inside the keep, a full-sentence parser permits you type in commands to arm your crew and carry out other actions. "Scarface, prepare the great sword and wear the leather armor." "Keegan, examine the room." A command issued without a name will be acted upon by the group leader. Directional orders affect everyone. The tower's mazes are shown in 3-D and are similar to but better looking than Ultima III and Wizardry's. Mapping is a must, so stock up on grid paper.

The best and worst elements of the game manifest themselves in the combat scenes. The monster's sword thrusts and other blows are depicted in stop-motion animation whose quality is a first for role-playing games. You'll see them raise their swords in a picture that stays onscreen for a few seconds. In the next, the creature's blade is shown at the half-way point as he slashes at

your face. Each creature goes through a series of four or five different pictures in this manner. The results of individual attacks are immediately described in a single text line below the full-screen illustrations. Effects of your magic spells are also portrayed with colorful animation, as are those of spellcasting creatures.

Shadowkeep's major flaw crops up when you select battle actions for your gang. The parser vanishes and a menu-driven command structure takes over. A window appears and lists each character's name and current action status at the beginning of a fight. After you choose a character to give orders to, another window offers eight options (attack twice, cast or invoke, etc.). Magicians must also choose a spell when "cast" is chosen and may have to pick a specific monster as its target. Spells are selected from yet another menu, so at least you don't have to type in its name.

The problem is that it takes a full two minutes to wade through this series of windows for a party of nine -- so you spend a lot of time staring at menus rather than topping the heads of Red Caps and DeathSheep. What should be a fun activity quickly turns into a tiresome process.

It's like a graphically enhanced Wizardry in slow motion. *Very* slow motion. If you can cope with this molasses-like interface, you'll discover podiums that teleport you to other parts of the tower (apparently consisting of seven-levels.) Secret passwords wait to be discovered, in addition to some puzzles that are reminiscent of those more typical of a pure adventure game.

Shadowkeep is the first role-playing game to be adapted into a novel rather than vice versa, so be sure to get a copy of Allan Dean Foster's book. You'll need something to keep you entertained while playing the game.

SA

Computer: APPLE (64K)

Planned Conversions: COMMODORE 64

Skill Level: Intermediate

Saves: 15

Price: \$39.95

Manufacturer: Telarium (Spinnaker)

SUN DOG

The majority of recent role-playing games have emulated either Ultima or Wizardry. Both are classics, so it's a safe policy for major software houses leery of taking a chance on trying anything new and therefore risky. Fortunately for the players, a few daring young companies are willing to risk everything by marketing a truly unique game like SunDog: Frozen Legacy.

A remarkable player interface lifts this science fiction "space merchant" saga into orbit with the pair of contemporary classics mentioned above. Instead of using menus and one-key commands, SunDog features ZoomAction Windows that materialize in the middle of the screen in numerous situations. Rectangular "buttons" indicate available options, which are executed by moving the cursor over one and jabbing the joystick button. In some windows, information and dialogue is displayed. In others, icons symbolizing various objects -- food, handguns, spare parts for the ship -- are manipulated via joystick much the same way parts are moved around in Pinball Construction Set or how the Macintosh interface works, so you never have to touch the keyboard. The result is a streamlined game that's a joy to play and almost impossible to switch off.

BANVILLE OR BUST!

Here's the plot: you've inherited an uncle's space-going cargo vessel and a contract to deliver certain items to Banville, a new colony on the planet Jondd. The initial scene displays a diagram of the SunDog and a small dot that represents you. A cursor rests in the center of the screen and is controlled with the joystick. To move your character to the cursor, you press one of the stick's buttons. When you stop at a room on the ship and release the button, a window pops up and shows the contents and status of places like the engine rooms, the gun bay, and cargo hold, which detaches and serves as a pod for traveling on land.

Steered in the same manner as your character is guided, the pod carries you from the spaceport into the streets of Jondd. Leave the city behind and a scrolling map depicts an aerial view of the continent. Pulling into the warehouse at Banville after you finally locate it, you'll see a scrolling message listing the items needed to complete Phase One. This includes staples like grain and fruits and a couple of cryogens, the future inhabitants of the colony who are currently stored in suspended animation in warehouses across the galaxy.

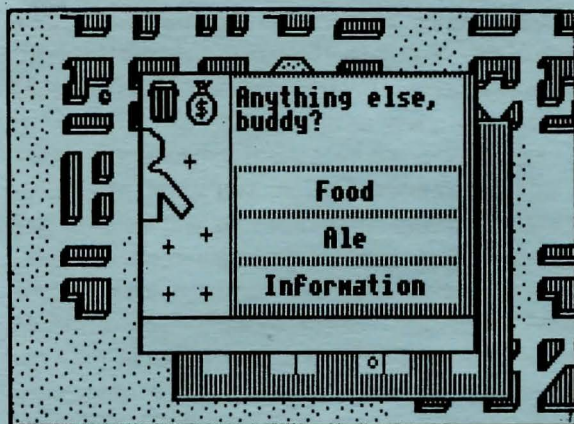
DROIDS FOR SALE, CHEAP

You begin with around 30,000 credits (money). By shuttling back and forth between the five cities on this planet, you'll spend lots of time buying droids, biochips, clothes or other goods and selling them, hopefully for a profit, in another town. There are hotels, bars, and different kinds of stores to investigate. Buildings are shape- and color-coded, so little mapping is needed. Instead, you'll want to record the prices and availability of goods in different places.

Shrewd trading is central to success. Everything Banville needs for the first phase can be located on Jondd, and a dozen or so new buildings materialize as soon as you make the last delivery in each phase. As you progress through nine subsequent stages, it becomes necessary to range deeper into space for the more exotic goods such as sunsuns, comgear and nullgravs. Teleportation centers will zap you (but not the pod) directly to any city or planet to check out their goods and prices.

THE SKY'S THE LIMIT

There are a total of eighteen planets and fifty cities, so you'll have to master the SunDog's controls and find out where to buy more powerful equipment to install in the ship's engineering bays. No instructions are provided on what to do with an autoslew, concentrator, or ground scanner after you buy them. All you can do is try out a new item in each bay until it fits, then take off and see what



happens. Flying the Sundog is a breeze -- it's outmaneuvering and outshooting the pirates who attack you in deep space that provides the supreme challenge. The display switches to a first-person viewscreen that looks out at the stars and the enemy. Often you have to choose between scrambling around to replace damaged equipment in the engineering bays or sticking by your laser. There are also brief combat phases in the cities, where you can chat with some characters who occasionally offer clues on where to go for the best deals. Windows simplify trading, banking transactions, dialogue and other scenes.

ICONS TO THE RESCUE

You can buy bottles of brawnboost to temporarily increase your character's strength, while other potions will do the same for the rest of his attributes. The only exasperating aspect of the game is its insistence that you get enough sleep. If your "rest" factor reaches zero, you pass out and the Status Window appears until you've rested enough. (This usually happens on long distance overland trips, however, and resourceful space merchants will soon find a way to fly city-to-city and avoid these pauses for sleep.) You may also call up this window at will to check your cash, location and other conditions, or to save the game in progress. This is accomplished by placing the cursor over the appropriate icon and pressing a joystick button. A similar method is used to move

icons around to install new parts in the Sundog, which breaks down almost as often as Hans Solo's *Millenium Falcon*.

Another convenient feature: you don't have to make a scenario disk. The game has a set of utilities on one side that keeps your saved games and enables you to quickly generate new characters. It also offers the option of automatically restarting the last saved game, so you can jump right back into the action. Disk access is fast, and sound effects serve practical purposes. That wasn't true of early releases of Sundog, which also had less exciting graphics and lacked the intergalactic teleportation booths and other interesting elements. Look for version 2.0.

A well-balanced game offering a wide variety of activities, *SunDog* provides months of riveting entertainment. The beauty of this game system is that it doesn't force you to follow a strictly linear path. You can concentrate on building a fortune, shooting down pirates, or outfitting the ship with sophisticated gear before tackling the main goal of fulfilling the Banville contract. (But sooner or later all these things must be achieved before you'll be able to complete the game.) A methodical approach may be followed, or you can just fire up the warp engines and see what's on the next star system. There's a feeling of freedom and independence that's less pronounced in many role-playing games -- and after a few hours inside this universe, you may not want to return to planet Earth. Now if you'll excuse me, I've got a cargo hold full of nullgravs to deliver to Jandul. SA

Computer: APPLE (64K & joystick required)

Planned Conversions: MACINTOSH

Skill Level: Intermediate

Saves: 4 (on game disk)

Price: \$39.95

Manufacturer: FTL Games, 7907 Ostrow St., Suite F, San Diego, CA 92111 (619) 279-5711



THE HULK

The first of Scott Adams' 12-part QuestProbe™ series, this graphic game is essentially another treasure hunt that plays a lot like his 1978 Adventureland. To win the game, you must score 100 points by collecting gems and storing them in a certain location. (When one is mentioned in the five-line text window, it even has an asterisk beside it: *gem -- just like primitive adventures written in BASIC.) Cutthroats is a treasure hunt, too, but demonstrates many enhancements and innovations in game play that show how Infocom has continued to improve their games and help the genre evolve into true interactive fiction. Hulk is more of an interactive comic book -- but if that's what you're looking for, this is it.

As Bruce Banner, your first problem is getting free from the ropes that confine you to a chair inside a strange geodesic dome. This and some other problems are solved by turning into the immensely powerful, bright green Hulk. Outside the dome, many of the outdoor scenes look quite similar, and it's easy to get lost and blunder into a death trap. Mapping, therefore, is crucial to staying alive. Of course, death leads to instant reincarnation on a stairway over the dome. A sign from the Chief Examiner, a mysterious character who will appear throughout this series, chides you for the mistake and gives you a chance to start over in the dome. (You retain inventory and points scored so far).

THE GOOD, THE BAD, & THE PARSER

When you check inventory, the screen displays a picture of Banner emptying a bag. Then the items appear in the air and are named below. Initially, the effect is entertaining, but eats up too much time when you're carrying a lot of objects. Speaking of time, graphics load in five seconds, which is very good for a Commodore adventure. And they represent the best artwork ever seen in anything from Adventure International. (No spot animation and minimal sound effects, though.) That's because it was done by artists from the

Marvel Comics crew: John Romita, Sr., Mark Gruenwald, and Ken McNaire. Unfortunately, these handsome illustrations are handcuffed to relatively crude programming.

Take the parser -- please! A two-word parser is fairly commonplace for a graphic adventure, though companies like Telarium and Penguin are equipping their games with more powerful ones. (We reported in December that this series would have Adventure International's full-sentence parser, but apparently it wasn't ready in time for this game.) It won't handle multiple commands, but the main problem is a skimpy 120+ word vocabulary that doesn't even recognize the word "all." Consider this situation: You're ready to store three gems. Instead of typing, "drop all," you must input "drop gem" three times. Very tedious. And the parser's input prompt -- "What shall I do now?" -- is demeaning. This phrase inevitably conjures up an image of a little old lady anxiously wringing her hands. There's no real plot, just another retreaded treasure hunt (as was Adams' previous game, Sorcerer of Claymorgue Castle).

Sure, lots of people turn out games with equally simple parsers and vocabularies. But they haven't been writing adventures since 1978, either. Anyone with Adams' experience should be turning out better games by now. And whoever did the packaging apparently didn't take time to "examine history of adventure." On the back, Adams is referred to as the "originator of Adventure games." Apparently they never heard of William Crowther.

Only two possible audiences exist for this game: anyone who simply *must* play an adventure starring the Hulk, and those who are already accustomed to the Adams' style. Hopefully, the next 12 games of the series will be improved.

Computer: COMMODORE 64 and PLUS-4

Planned Conversions: APPLE, ATARI (48K)

Skill Level: Novice/Intermediate

Saves: 4 (on game disk)

Price: \$29.95

Manufacturer: Commodore/Adventure Intl.

ZORK

Master the worlds of ZORK I, II & III, INFIDEL, WITNESS, DEADLINE, SUSPENDED, ENCHANTER, STARCROSS, PLANETFALL, SORCERER, CUTTHROATS and ADVENTURE with our maps and hint books. We won't spoil your fun. Also, the ADVENTURER'S TUTORIAL (tips and strategies for playing any Adventure game). Each book comes with multi-level hints and game map(s). All 3 ZORKS including ADVENTURE for \$18, or send \$6.95 for individual games, or get two games for \$10.95.

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NEW & PLANNED CONVERSIONS:

COMMODORE 64

Expedition Amazon, Xyphus (Penguin)
Sherwood Forest, Masquerade (American Eagle),
Earthly Delights (Datamost)

IBM

The Quest (Penguin)

MACINTOSH

Amazon, Fahrenheit 451, Dragonworld,
Shadowkeep, Rendezvous with Rama (Telarium)
Ultima II (Sierra), Ultima III (Origin)
The Quest, MacXyphus, MacCoveted Mirror
(Penguin), Earthly Delights (Datamost)

ATARI

Transylvania (Penguin)

WAITING FOR DUFFY

Duffy's gone deep sea diving, but if you're hopelessly stuck and need help, send in a brief description of the situation and it will appear in the next issue.

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

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

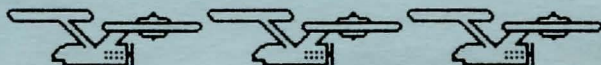
I can help anyone with Zork I -- free! David Aultfather, 13209 Dossau Rd., Austin, TX 78753.

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

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

Castle of Darkness: How do you get through the locked door past the room of fire? Scottie Freeman, Knott Route, Big Springs, TX 79720.

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



RENDEZVOUS WITH RAMA

Arthur C. Clarke's novel inspired the film 2001: A Space Odyssey and has now been "adventurized" by Spinnaker. It's a graphic game whose theme will be familiar to Starcross veterans. (Perhaps Dave Lebling was influenced by the book when he wrote the latter, Infocom's first science fiction adventure.) At first mistaken for an asteroid, a huge cylindrical "artifact" dubbed Rama drifts into our solar system and is headed straight for the sun. As Commander Norton, captain of the nearest ship currently in space, you're assigned to board Rama for an investigation.

The first action game kicks in when you enter the command "land." From the lower left corner, your ship must be maneuvered safely through a field of asteroids that streak diagonally across the screen. Rama awaits in the upper right corner. After reaching it, you'll face a similar scene when trying to land on the artifact whose picture fills the screen. The ship may be controlled via joystick or keyboard, no simple task if you're not a fan of action games. The clever adventurer can completely bypass this action episode.

Inside, you'll have to figure out how to get through a series of unusual doors and passageways into the vast interior of Rama. For advice in some situation, you can radio the three crewmembers who remain on your ship. Conversation typically consists of saying, "Laura, advise." Sometimes you can say "Pieter, landmark," and he'll remind you of your current location. Occasionally someone may break in with an unrequested suggestion. Assistance is also provided by a "simp." These are android chimpanzees that, while helpful, lack the personality of Amazon's Peco.

A map of Rama's disorienting interior is included. You'll have to construct your own, though, to avoid getting hopelessly lost. There are expansive plains to chart, a frozen sea to cross, and cities that look inexplicably like Moscow and New York. The "dragonfly," a portable one-man plane,

enables you to fly across the plains and save time. It's also employed in Rama's other action game, in which you dodge bolts of lightning in mid-air. In the cities, you will uncover something that apparently must be carried to Earth.

Time is a factor, for you must return to your ship in order to link up with another vessel for refueling. Current date and time are always displayed below the graphics, which occupy a bit more than half the top portion of the screen. Sound effects on the Apple are the standard beeps and blips. The C-64 game has better sound effects but nothing like those in Dragonworld or 451. And Rama's illustrations are not as detailed or well-executed in any of the other Telarium games.

The parser accepts complete sentences and multiple commands but isn't as articulate as Infocom's. It's also slow. Another snag is best illustrated with the example of the inflatable boat's (or is it a lifejacket?) ripcord. It seems you can only "pull ripcord" in one scene; at other times, you'll be told that "you reconsider your words." It would be more realistic if something -- anything -- happened when you pull the cord, regardless of location or situation. Still, Telarium's parser outpaces those found in most graphic games. The manual offers a list of the parser's vocabulary and some coded clues if you get stuck.

This is the only one of Telarium's adaptations that recreates the original book rather than uses the same characters and theme in a new story. It's the least satisfying of the line, too. Little character development or interaction is evidenced, the graphics are lackluster, and there's no atmosphere or sense of "being there." Rama isn't even in the same league with Amazon, Dragonworld and Fahrenheit 451, Telarium's best games. SA

Computer: APPLE, C-64

Planned Conversions: MACINTOSH

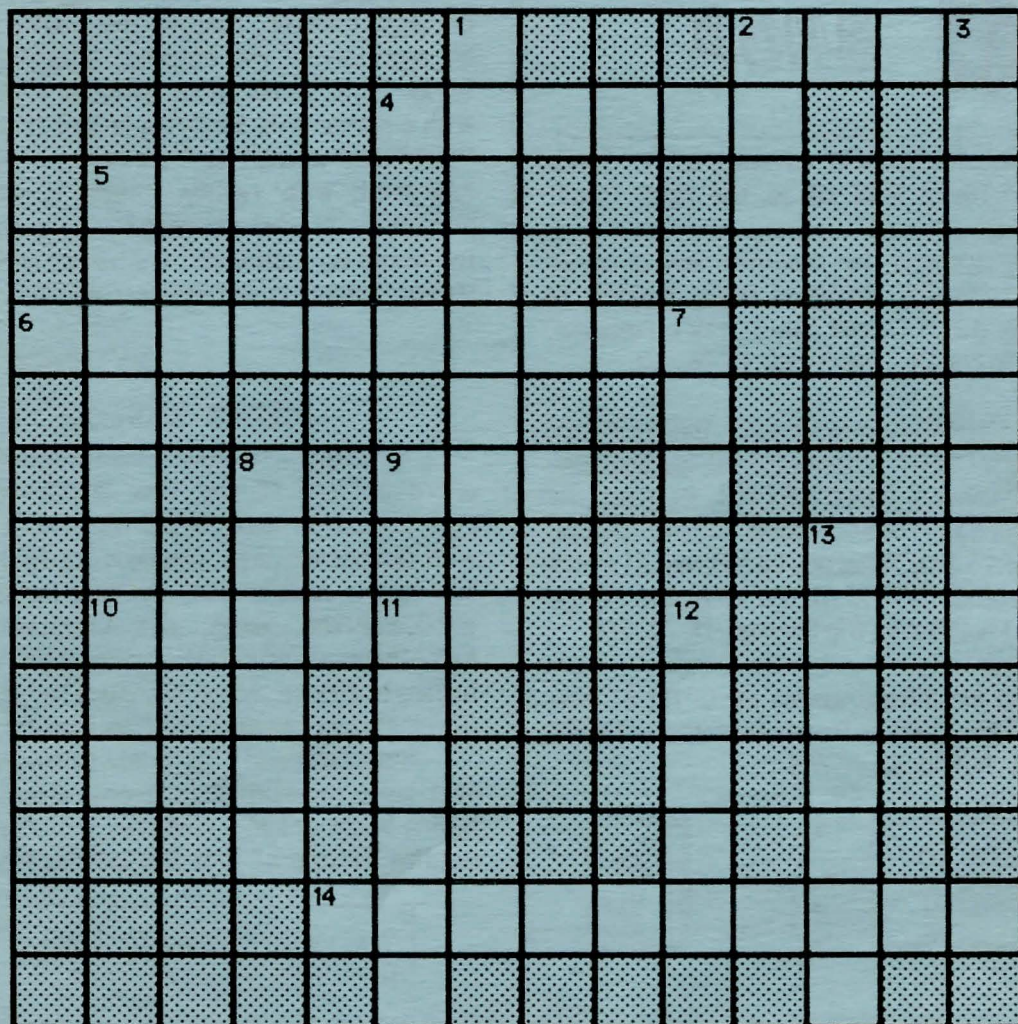
Skill Level: Novice

Saves: 10

Price: \$\$39.95, Apple; \$32.95, C-64

Manufacturer: Telarium (Spinnaker)

Win a Free Adventure!



ACROSS

- 2 Look ____
- 4 Your boss in Amazon
- 5 Lost in the ____
- 6 Scimitar's home port in Seastalker (two words)
- 9 1st adventure was written on a ____ computer
- 10 House of ____
(Zork's Compuserve name)
- 14 In King's Quest, you are ____ (two words)

Entry with the most correct answers wins a free game. In case of ties, earliest postmark wins. Random drawing determines winner in case of another tie. Void where prohibited by law. Deadline is Mar 15, 1985. State type of computer.

DOWN

- 1 In Ultima III, cast ____ for light
- 2 Type of bread
- 3 The hero in Mask of the Sun (two words)
- 5 A watery location in Death in the Caribbean
- 7 Wrote Wumpus Hunt, Gregory ____
- 8 The evil Prince ____ (Xyphus)
- 11 He always dies in Cutthroats
- 12 In Wizardry, cast ____ for light
- 13 In Ultima III, cast ____ for light



SWAP SHOP

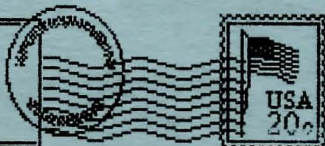
Got a houseful of old adventures? Trade 'em off with a free ad in the next issue.

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

I have the following games for sale: The Wizard and the Princess (\$30), Ulysses and the Golden Fleece (\$30), a complete Eamon set (\$5), Prisoner and Prisoner II (\$15 each), Sheila (\$10), Galactic Revolution (\$35), Wizardry (\$35), and ET Phone Home Adventure (\$10). All are for Apple. Scottie Freeman, Knott Route, Big Springs, TX 79720.

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

Letters to the Editor



Dear QB:

Thanks for reviewing Earthy Delights in your Dec. issue. It's the first full-length review received we've received and you noticed some features my co-author Roger Webster and I are particularly proud of. But to pigeon-hole our parser as the "noun-verb" type is misleading. In fact, the parser has a sophisticated design built around a single controlling idea: not to intrude upon the story. Most (but not all) the time you can get away with one or two-word commands, but you are free to be more expressive.

Consider the command "Kick the Thief in the shin." Zork's parser would complain either that it doesn't know one of the words in the command or that the sentence structure has boggled its "mind." Delights, however, realizes that you're trying to act aggressively and responds accordingly, even though "shin" is not in its vocabulary. A problem with a parser this forgiving is that if the player "barks up a wrong tree," the parser may seem to lose touch with reality. Here is where our philosophy of what we were trying to accomplish influenced our decisions. I think we erred in not stating this goal in our user manual.

Don't Leviton

NEXT ISSUE:

Strategic Simulations' Gemstone Warrior offers a blend of real-time arcade action and role-playing strategy -- but how does it compare with Questron, their previous hit RPG? We'll also look at Spiderman, the next installment in the QuestProbe series, and American Eagle's Kukulcan, an educational game about the Aztec Indians of Mexico, which has much better artwork than their last release (Elysian Fields).

These games will definitely be covered in the next issue, in addition to several others. We're hoping to get Origin's Moebius I in time, not to mention Return of Werdna and MacWizardry.

Yes, I want the next 12 issues of QuestBusters™, and enclose \$15.

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