

# a Brief History of Interactive Fiction

Fall 1945. ENIAC is assembled at the University of Pennsylvania.

1959. John McCarthy develops LISP.

1972. Will Crowther visits the Mammoth and Flint Ridge caves.

1975. Will Crowther writes a simulation of Bedquilt Cave (a real cave in Kentucky) on a PDP-10 in FORTRAN for his two daughters and names it *Advent* (also known as *Adventure* and *Colossal Cave*).

1975. The MITS Altair 8800 is the first personal computer on the market.

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1976. *Advent* begins spreading across ARPAnet.

1976. Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak form Apple and begin selling the Apple I.

1977. Radio Shack releases the TRS-80 Model I.

June 1977. Marc Blank, Bruce K. Daniels, Tim Anderson, & Dave Lebling begin writing *Dungeon*, the mainframe version of *Zork*, at the MIT Laboratory for Computer Science. The game is written in a computer language called MDL, an offshoot of LISP.

1977. Jack Tramiel forms Commodore. The company creates its first computer, the Commodore PET.

## 1945-1974 1975-1991

1978. At Cambridge, Jon Thackray and David Seal write *Acheton* on an IBM 370 mainframe named Phoenix.

February 1979. Last puzzle is added to *Dungeon*.

1979. Scott Adams founds Adventure International.

1979. *Pirate Adventure*, by Scott Adams and Adventure International.

1979. Atari releases the Atari 400 and Atari 800.

1980. On-line Systems (later called Sierra On-Line) releases Roberta Williams's *Mystery House*. The game is the first recorded commercial graphic adventure.

1981. Olli J. Paavola, at the Helsinki University of Technology, creates the first adventure game based on a book: *Lord*, based on the *Lord of the Rings*.

1982. Acornsoft and Peter Killworth begin releasing the Cambridge adventures for the BBC Micro. Peter begins by modifying *Brand X*; the new version of the game is called *Philosopher's Quest*.

1982. Melbourne House (the games division of Beam Software), an Australian company, releases *The Hobbit*, based on the Tolkien book of the same name. The game becomes renowned for its bugs.

1983. Sierra On-Line creates *King's Quest: Quest for the Crown*, a graphic adventure game, for IBM as a demonstration of the power of its new computer, the PCjr. The PCjr. fares poorly; Sierra goes on to create a whole line of graphic adventures.

1983. Level 9 releases *Colossal Adventure*, a version of the original *Adventure* for the 32k BBC Micro and Sinclair Spectrum.

1984. Anita Sinclair and Ken Gordon form Magnetic Scrolls, based in London, England.

1984. Synapse releases Robert Pinsky's *Mindwheel*, one of the earliest "literary" pieces of interactive fiction.

1984. Melbourne House updates *The Hobbit*, adding graphics, and releases it as *The Lord of the Rings*.

1985. Adventure International goes bankrupt, partway through the production of *Questprobe #4* for Marvel Comics.

1985. Magnetic Scrolls releases *The Pawn*.

1986. Thomas M. Disch's *Amnesia* is released by Electronic Arts. Disch is initially fascinated with this new art form of "Youdunnits," but is disillusioned by the poor sales of the game. He later blames this on the audience's desire for "trivial pursuits."

1986. Telarium finishes its last game, *The Scoop*. The game publisher Spinnaker will re-release it in 1989.

14 July 1986. David Betz releases ADVSYS, a Lisp-like adventure game language.

1987. Peter Killworth, David Seal, Jon Thackray, and Jonathan Partington port a number of the old Cambridge/Acornsoft adventures to more modern computers for the company Topologika.

1987. David Malmberg takes Mark Welch's GAGS and enhances it substantially. The two of them release the result as AGT, the Adventure Game Toolkit. AGT will go on to become one of the most popular early interactive fiction languages.

1987. Mastertronic buys Beam Software and the rights to the name Melbourne House.

28 January 1988. Thomas Nilsson and Göran Forslund complete version 0.10 of a text adventure language named Alan.

1989. *Scapeghost*, from Level 9, is released. It is to be Level 9's last adventure game.

1989. Bob Bates, who wrote *Sherlock: The Riddle of the Crown Jewels* and *Arthur: The Quest for Excalibur* for Infocom, and Mike Verdu form Legend Entertainment Company. Steve Meretzky, late of Infocom, joins them.

1990. Legend Entertainment releases its first game, *Spellcasting 101*, by Steve Meretzky.

## 1975-1991 1992-2000

June 1992. Thomas Nilsson releases Alan 2.3, the first widely-available version.

21 September 1992. The Usenet group rec.games.int-fiction (rgif) is created.

17 November 1992. TADS 2.0 is released.

1993. Legend Entertainment releases *Gateway II: Homeworld*. It is to be the last widely-released commercial game which is entirely parser-driven.

9 May 1993. Graham Nelson releases Inform 1. It holds the promise of allowing hobbyists to create text adventures that run on the Infocom z-machine.

1993. Mark Welch and David Malmberg release AGT as freeware.

September 1993. Activision releases *Return to Zork*, a graphic adventure set in the Great Underground Empire from the original *Zork* series.

16 May 1994. The first issue of Kevin Wilson's zine SPAG, The Society for the Preservation of Adventure Games, comes out.

13 June 1994. Graham Nelson announces Inform version 5. It is with this version that Inform truly begins to come into its own.

1994. Phoenix, the old IBM mainframe computer at Cambridge University on which *Acheton* and many other adventures resided, is shut down for the last time.

15 January 1995. Graham Nelson releases "The Craft of Adventure," a companion to the Inform manual. In it, Graham discusses what is involved in good game design.

8 March 1995. *The Legend Lives!*, by Dave Baggett.

May 1995. The readers of *rail* organize a competition for short Inform games. It is quickly expanded to include TADS games. The Kevin Wilson, who agrees to be the competition organizer, institutes the One Rule: games must be winnable in two hours or less.

21 July 1995. *Theatre*, by Brendon Wyber.

1 September 1995. The first interactive fiction competition officially begins, though many of the entries have been available earlier. Twelve games are entered: six TADS games, and six Inform games.

15 March 1996. DreamCatcher Interactive, a small game publishing company, releases its first title, *Jewels of the Oracle*. DreamCatcher will go on to become one of the largest adventure game companies at the turn of the century.

1 April 1996. Jacob Weinstein announces RAIIF-POOL, the most amazing IF language ever.

7 April 1996. As part of its publicity campaign for the graphic adventure *Zork: Nemesis*, Activision releases *Zork I* for free. *Zork II* and *III* soon follow.

19 June 1996. *So Far*, by Andrew Plotkin.

6 September 1996. Glen Summers releases his Level 9 interpreter.

16 October 1996. Mike Roberts makes the TADS source code available on GMD, spurring a new round of porting.

19 October 1996. The Second Annual Interactive Fiction Competition begins. Kevin "Whizzard" Wilson is the organizer. Twenty-six games are entered.

26 January 1997. Adam Cadre announces the release of *I-0*, his first game.

8 February 1997. The XYZZY Awards Ceremony is held on a temporary MUD that Andrew Plotkin creates for the occasion. Andrew also takes home four XYZZY Awards for his game *So Far*, including Best Game.

1 April 1997. Mark Pelczarski, ex-owner of the text adventure company Penguin/Polaware, releases his company's old games, including *Oo-Topos*, for free.

4 June 1997. The Mining Company (later About.com) opens its interactive fiction web site, with Stephen Granade at its helm.

11 August 1997. Kent Tesson releases version 2.4 of Hugo, which adds graphics capabilities to the language.

2 September 1997. Niclas Karlsson announces the release of *Magnetic*, an interpreter for the Magnetic Scrolls games.

7 December 1997. Dave Baggett releases all of the *Adventions* games, including the previously commercial ones, for free.

20 December 1997. Campbell Wild begins work on version 3.0 of what will soon become ADRIFT.

January 1998. Eileen Mullin opens voting for the 1997 XYZZY Awards.

15 January 1998. *Losing Your Grip*, by Stephen Granade.

4 March 1998. *Spider and Web*, by Andrew Plotkin.

April 1998. The Digital Village and Douglas Adams release *Starship Titanic*, a graphic adventure game which uses a parser for communicating with the robots in the game.

7 May 1998. Michael Anthony releases *Anchorhead*, a game of Lovecraftian horror.

12 May 1998. Lucian P. Smith announces a mini-competition, sparking a rash of other mini-competitions.

2 August 1998. *Guilty Bastards*, by Kent Tesson.

2 October 1998. The Fourth Annual Interactive Fiction Competition begins. David Dyte is the organizer. Twenty-seven games are entered.

2 October 1998. David Cornelson holds the first SpeedIF competition on iMUD, in which coders have one hour to write a very short piece of interactive fiction. The games must fit a given set of criteria which are determined by a madlib-style question and answer session.

6 January 1999. GT Interactive buys Legend Entertainment.

7 March 1999. Marnie Parker announces the first Interactive Fiction Art Show.

1 April 1999. Andrew Plotkin releases *Glux*, a new virtual machine designed for text adventures.

12 May 1999. The first IF Art Show ends. *Crystal Ball*, by Marian Taylor, takes Best of Show.

10 July 1999. Magnus Olsson steps down as editor of SPAG. Paul O'Brian becomes the new editor.

24 August 1999. Graham Nelson, Adam Atkinson, and Gunther Schmidt release z-machine versions of *Fyleet*, *Crobe*, and *Sangraal*, three of Jonathan Partington's old Phoenix games.

8 September 1999. The Summer 1999 IF Art Show ends. *Statue*, by David Cysdale, takes Best of Show.

1 November 1999. *Winchester's Nightmare*, by Nick Montfort. It is notable for being available as a "hardback," a computer running the game designed to mimic a hardback novel.

15 November 1999. Infogrames buys GT Interactive, thus inheriting Legend Entertainment.

10 December 1999. *Worlds Apart*, by Suzanne Britton.

6 January 2000. Lucian Smith announces the first installment in the Interactive Fiction Book Club, which is designed to foster discussion of longer games. The first game chosen is *Losing Your Grip*.

12 February 2000. The XYZZY Awards ceremony is held on iMUD. Adam Cadre's *Varicella* takes four awards, including Best Game.

3 May 2000. *Dangerous Curves*, by Irene Callaci.

6 August 2000. *Rematch*, by Andrew Pontious.

16 November 2000. Results of the Sixth Annual Interactive Fiction Competition are announced. *Kaged*, by Ian Finley, is the winner. Other notable games are *Metamorphoses*, by Emily Short, *Being Andrew Plotkin*, by J. Robinson Wheeler, *Ad Verbum*, by Nick Montfort, *My Angel*, by Jon Ingold, and *Shade*, by Andrew Plotkin.

20 December 2000. Campbell Wild releases version 3.90 of ADRIFT, which adds graphics and sound capabilities to the language.

1957. John Backus and a team at IBM create FORTRAN.

1960. Digital releases the Programmed Data Processor 1, or PDP-1.

1 October 1969. The first characters are transmitted between two computers. This is the start of ARPAnet, the predecessor to the Internet.

1975. Will Crowther writes a simulation of Bedquilt Cave (a real cave in Kentucky) on a PDP-10 in FORTRAN for his two daughters and names it *Advent* (also known as *Adventure* and *Colossal Cave*).

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1977. Jack Tramiel forms Commodore. The company creates its first computer, the Commodore PET.

1978. Scott Adams writes *Adventureland*, which is patterned loosely after the original *Advent*. When he takes out a small ad in a computer magazine and begins selling *Adventureland*, it becomes the first commercial adventure game.

22 June 1979. Infocom is incorporated, founded by ten members of the MIT Dynamics Modeling group.

1979. Tom Truscott, Jim Ellis, Steve Bellovin, and Steve Daniel create the first version of Usenet.

February 1980. Sinclair Research releases the Sinclair ZX80.

November 1980. First copy of *Zork I*, for a PDP-11, is sold by Infocom.

1981. Bruce Adler, Chris Kostanick, Michael Stein, Michael Urban, and Warren Usui, members of the UCLA Computer Club, create the infamous DDL, the *Dungeon Definition Language*.

12 August 1981. IBM announces the IBM PC.

1982. Three brothers, Pete, Mike, and Nick Austin, form Level 9.

April 1982. Sinclair Research releases the Sinclair ZX Spectrum.

1982. Commodore releases the Commodore 64.

December 1982. Acorn releases the BBC Micro.

1983. Gilsoft releases *The Quill*, by Graeme Yeandle. It is a commercial program for the Sinclair Spectrum and (later) the Commodore 64. In the USA *Quill* was marketed under the name *Adventure Writer*. It is the first widely-available program for writing text adventures.

1983. Level 9 releases *Snowball*. Its packaging proudly proclaims that it has over 7,000 rooms. This is true; however, some 6,800 of those rooms formed a color-coded maze with minimal descriptions.

January 1984. Apple releases the Macintosh.

1984. Trillium, soon to be called Telarium, releases *Fahrenheit 451*.

October 1984. Infocom releases *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, based on the Douglas Adams creation of the same name. Other than the *Zork* trilogy, it becomes their best-selling title.

1 November 1984. Infocom announces *Cornerstone*, its database software which accepts natural language input.

August 1985. Mark J. Welch releases GAGS, the Generic Adventure Game System, a shareware program for creating adventure games.

September 1985. Infocom releases *A Mind Forever Voyaging*.

February 1986. Infocom slashes the price of *Cornerstone* from \$495 to \$99.95.

June 1986. Infocom releases *Trinity*.

13 June 1986. Activision, Inc., buys Infocom for \$7.5 million.

1987. Michael J. Roberts releases version 1.0 of TADS, the Text Adventure Development System.

25 May 1987. The InfoTaskForce, a group of people working on reverse-engineering Infocom's z-machine, releases their first Infocom Standard Interpreter. This paves the way both for other z-machine interpreters such as ZIP and Frotz, and for Inform.

August 1987. The Usenet group rec.arts.int-fiction (raif) is created.

1987. Ross Cunniff and Tim Brengle write ADL, the Adventure Definition Language. It is superset of DDL, the *Dungeon Definition Language*.

5 May 1989. Of Infocom's 26 remaining employees, 15 are laid off. Activision (now called Mediagenic) offers to move the remaining 11 to California. Five accept.

June 1989. Mediagenic closes Infocom's Cambridge, MA offices and moves what remains of the company to Menlo Park, CA.

1991. Dave Baggett and Dave Leary create a company called *Adventions* to sell shareware and commercial text adventures. They release their first game, *Umkulan Underworld: The Unknown Unventure*, written by Dave Leary.

June 1991. Level 9 closes down.

January 1992. Activision releases *The Lost Treasures of Infocom*, a rebundling of many of the most popular Infocom adventures. It sells remarkably well; interest in text adventures begins to grow once again.

1992. Magnetic Scrolls goes bankrupt; Microprose buys the rights to their system.

July 1992. Buoyed by the success of the first, Activision releases *The Lost Treasures of Infocom II*. Between the two volumes, nearly the entire Infocom collection is once again available.

24 November 1992. Volker Blasius announces the opening of the interactive fiction archive at GMD. David M. Baggett is the co-maintainer.

28 April 1993. Graham Nelson releases *Curses!*. It begins at version 7.

18 May 1993. Graham Nelson posts "A Bill of Player's Rights" to rec.arts.int-fiction.

10 July 1993. Dave Baggett releases *Colossal Cave Revisited*, a port of *Advent* to TADS.

30 September 1993. Braderbund and Cyan release *Myst*. It goes on to become the bestselling graphic adventure of all time.

20 October 1993. Gerry Kevin Wilson asks for beta-testers for his game *Avalon*. He estimates that it will take him a month or two to finish it.

### Legend

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: blue;">b</span> Business</li> <li><span style="color: green;">c</span> Community</li> <li><span style="color: yellow;">c</span> Computers</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">e</span> Endings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><span style="color: green;">g</span> Games &amp; Authors</li> <li><span style="color: red;">i</span> Internet</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">l</span> Languages</li> <li><span style="color: red;">p</span> Programming</li> <li><span style="color: blue;">w</span> Writings</li> </ul>
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