

IFography

In Your Room

IFography

A New Beginning by Matt

Release 1 / Serial number 141220 / Inform 7 build 6L38 (I6/v6.33 lib 6/12N)

In Your Room

You sit and turn on your computer. You are ready to play some Interactive Fiction.

You can see a cardboard box (closed) here.

> open box

You open the cardboard box, revealing a magazine.

> take magazine

You remove the freshly published magazine from the box, and slowly put it in your hands.

> x magazine

Hey! It's the first issue of the latest IFography magazine!

>|

#1

Comp News

8th New Year Comp

The World of IF
Cthulhu and Comedy
IF- Yesterday and Tomorrow

Interviews

Geoff "Mostly Useless" Moore



IFography

A Magazine For Interactive Fiction Enthusiasts

Volume 1 - Issue 1

January 2015

Ingredients

Letter From The Editor on page 3

Twenty Questions (an Interview with Geoff Moore) on page 4

Competition News on page 8

IF- Yesterday and Tomorrow (an essay) on page 11

Cthulhu & Comedy (another essay) on page 17

Reviews on page 21

Closing Remarks on page 26

Brought to you by the fine folks of the Interactive Fiction Faction

Our First Issue!

Welcome all to the first issue of IFography! The holidays have just passed and New Year's celebrations will probably be over by the time this issue is published. We've all had our holiday turkeys and New Year wines, and it's time to restart the year and continue our boring lives as usual, if you want it to remain like that. If you make any mistakes and slipups this week, don't sweat it cause you'll have a whole year to change. This is a magazine which won't really change your lives in a major way but it should get you through the year with something good to read from time to time.

This is IFography, a magazine dedicated to giving readers a special one-of-a-kind experience in the magical world of Interactive Fiction. You can find news on the latest happenings on IF and reviews of all sorts of games, new and old. There's probably even some advice here on producing text games if you ever feel the power of creation within you, the need to make a game to showcase what goes on in your mind.



Rather than being just an online magazine, IFography is available as a .TXT file and a PDF file! If you are one of those people who have limited access to the internet on your phone (like me), go ahead and download this magazine on your device! Life in this magazine goes on, even without access to the greatest thing ever invented (wait, that's antiseptics). Of course, the PDF version of this magazine will have more features, such as pictures and a more magazine-like layout! You know, to make it more of a... magazine.

So if anyone here feels that this magazine sucks or is missing something that you feel **MUST** be in here, just email me! Constructive criticism is encouraged and will help this magazine to move on to the right track. You can get information about us on the magazine's website, including our contact information. Enough of rambling from me, so go ahead and enjoy the first issue of IFography!

- Matt "BlitzWithGuns" Goh

Twenty Questions

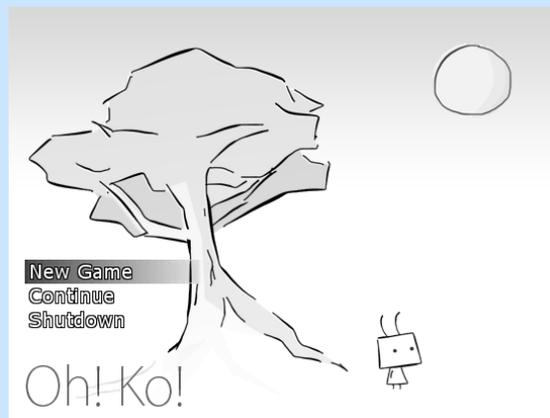
IFography hopes to include a bio/interview each issue. This is done with just about anyone working on making a name for themselves in the IF community (or the game development community in general).

For our first installment, we decided to interview someone who has done a number of notable things in the online world of Interactive Fiction and other gaming. Going by the alias "Mostly Useless" on various forums, Geoff Moore of the UK is generally reclusive when it comes to an online. Regardless, he hit the ground running when he introduced himself to the IF community



Geoff Moore- responding to our interview request

as the 1st Place winner of the 2013 Spring Thing competition with his endearing graphical text game *Witch's Girl*. The following Spring Thing, he would take 2nd Place with his brooding, sci-fi story *Surface*. In between the two games, he took 3rd place in the Halloween-themed EctoComp competition with his offering *Headless, Hapless*.



Outside of the IF community, Geoff submitted a graphical point-and-click adventure game for the 2014 Indie Game Maker Contest. Called *Oh! Ko!* and featuring more adorable characters in animated adventures, the game won 2nd Place and is now in commercial development.

Geoff remains busy in real life with an actual job, but by my calculations, doesn't have any real free

time because between writing and drawing graphical Interactive Fiction tales, he composes music for video game developers under the name Misty Mountain Music Hut; a business venture that has, at this time, kept him most busy of all his projects. Thankfully, he found some time to answer a few questions for those of us who would like to get to know our mysterious award-winning writer a bit more or to learn more about his stories.

Well, aren't you a little bundle of talents! Writing, drawing, composing. Is there one creative outlet that you identify with more than the others?

Music was my first passion, and its still the easiest to lose myself in for hours on end and the area where I feel most competent. That said, the greatest feeling of accomplishment for me comes from finishing a game and watching others play it.

As cheesy as this question is, I'm going to ask it anyway. What kinds of things inspire you? Or, if it helps, looking back at your work, do you see what sorts of themes you find yourself revisiting?

What inspires me... Huh. Well, I watch far too much TV, that probably helps. Game wise, my first love was Monkey Island (the first two, when it was made of pixels and awesomesauce). I think the

blend of silliness and small scale adventure so masterfully realised by Ron Gilbert has influenced me in no small way.



A scene from The Secret of Monkey Island



Do you have any pets? If yes, what are they? If no, why the hell not?

I have no pets, and no real time for them to be honest. I would like a sloth and some ferrets to ride it. And some penguins and a bunch of those adorable little finger monkeys.

Who is/are your favorite IF author(s) or IF works?

Admiral Jota's *Lost Pig* is all kinds of wonderful, and probably the only IF I've finished without peeking at a walkthrough.

I'm also fascinated by Porpentine's Twine works. Oh, and there was some old company called Infocom.

What's your favorite game in general?

That's an easy one, its got to be *Monkey Island 2: LeChuck's Revenge*. I must have completed it fifty times or more, and it still keeps me engrossed. From what I've played, Monkey Island has to be the greatest single vision in gaming history, which is why the later, weaker non-Gilbert games left me so bitterly disappointed.

Do you have any IF-related plans for 2015? If no, do you have any other plans for 2015? If no, do you have any conceivable reason at all for getting up in the morning?

I have a bunch of parser and hypertext projects on the backburner at various stages of completion. Whether I get around to any of them this year is another question...

What sorts of entertainment did you grow-up enjoying most?

It was all about cartoons for me - *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles*, *Dexter's Lab*, that kind of thing. It always amuses me when people say kids TV used to be better, they clearly don't watch a ridiculous amount of kids TV well into adulthood. The shows I loved don't hold a candle to *Gravity Falls* and *Adventure Time*.



A scene from *Witch's Girl*

What was your first computer?

The first PC I played around on was a 286, my dad taught me a bit of QBasic and I messed around making PC speaker tunes and simple choice-based games which I wish I still had copies of, just to laugh at.

Were you surprised *Witch's Girl* took first place in Spring Thing 2013? Tell us about what brought that work about.

Very pleasantly surprised! The game was made while I learnt Twine (not much learning to do, admittedly) and just after I won an iPad which I made all the illustrations on. I've always loved the old Choose Your Own Adventure Books so I thought I'd make one of my own, with actual page numbers and everything!

What brought *Surface* along? Are you full of little stories like this or are you just lucky making stuff up as you go along?

Surface came about after I discovered Sugarcube, a neat custom header that adds functionality to Twine, which made it easier to create a simple world model. I was going for a halfway point between the exploration of a parser game and the

free-flow of hypertext. The story, like pretty much everything I do, was made up on the fly, which is something of a gift and a curse.

When did you start making music? Is this something you were trained in or, again, are you just good at making stuff up?

I played flute as a kid and guitar as a teen layabout, and I did a music technology course at university, which was less music and more listening to arty farty nonsense made from granulated toilet flush sounds and the like. I don't actually read music, but I love playing around with sounds and I've had some good feedback and a fair amount of commission work. I suppose I should plug my Soundcloud at this point!
<https://soundcloud.com/misty-mountain-music-hut>



What can you tell us about Oh! Ko! and its commercial development at this point?

Oh! Ko! is a light graphical puzzle game about the wacky adventures of a little bug kid that's left home alone. I'm hoping to release the commercial version at some point this year, and it's going to be a lot longer and prettier than the contest version. While I'm plugging things, the discussion thread with a link to the latest free version is <http://bit.ly/14Rojqa>.

Do you have a favorite work of your own? Or are you one of those talented people who think they suck despite their accolades, completely alienating people from complimenting them?

Oh not at all, I'm firmly stuck up my own bottom and think everything I do is amazing. JOKE. Seriously, though, I'm happy with the stuff I've made but it's hard to pick a favourite. The feedback for *Oh! Ko!* has been overwhelmingly positive and I'm having a blast making it, so let's say that one.

Last book read: Sloane by Steve Lee **Favorite book:** Royo County by Robert Roper

Favorite TV show: *The X-Files*, only semi-ironically, mostly because it's awesome.

Favorite movie: Ummm... Either *Leon* or *Survive Style No. 5*.

Any advice for newbie IFers out there?

Have fun, implement synonyms and don't kill players without warning. And only set a game in your crappy apartment if there's a portal to a magical world in your fridge.

Competition News

As of this writing of this issue, the current competition is the 8th Annual New Year's Interactive Fiction Event. Historically a smaller comp, there were two entries this year. Our resident Malaysian, Matt Goh, reviews them both for you.

You Were Here by Joshua Houk

When I opened this game for the first time, I thought that I've been scammed. I looked down and saw the "Do you want to restart, restore...." text. Just before closing the game and deleting it, I remembered that it was a meta-game, which isn't really your normal IF game.

Upon typing ABOUT, I saw names. Way too many of them. It seemed to me that this game involved more than 50 authors in creating it! After quickly restarting the game and starting to read the text, it was pretty much disappointing. What I'm reading is the first part of some IF game released last year. There's no title of what game it's supposed to be either so I had no idea how I'm going to relate the text to anything. You can't do anything unless you actually played ALL the IF games published this year, which I guess is in the hundreds.

Typing RESTART again brings you yet to another set of text, which you are suppose to guess what you are reading. The next result is always randomized, which sounds nice, but might eventually bring you back to what you've read earlier. Most of the text is short, but you can find some long ones to read once in a while.

Some of the games that I've recognized included Hill 160 and Alethicorp, though a significant portion of text included are in a foreign language, maybe German or French? I'm not too sure myself. It's too bad I couldn't understand them, or it might have made the experience more enjoyable.

While playing, I constantly wished for a better and easier way to play this game, rather than typing RESTART every time I read the text. Maybe a 'G' or something?

Basically, this is an unique game, but it's presented in the wrong way. Rather than just putting some words that is expected for people to understand, a title of what the text is about or maybe some kind of interaction is definitely appreciated!

Maybe one or two turns of the games included in *You Were Here* would be great.

So if you have nothing much to do, you can just check how IF is going with this game. There are 2 versions of this game, one for Twine and another for the Z-machine. I recommend the Twine version, unless you want to keep typing RESTART every 10 seconds in the game. 2014 isn't too bad a year for text adventures, so I guess what you read shouldn't be too bad!

The Day of the Queen by Marius Müller

This is not going to be one of my better reviews, or long ones too, as this game is mostly unplayable. The next entry in the New Year Comp held this year, The Day of the Queen is disappointing due to its many limited features and strong guess-the-verb problems. It is mostly missing the usual commands that you can find in IF games, like ABOUT, HINT and HELP.

I have heard from a buddy that this game is part of a series that is released once every year during competitions, so that's one point that makes the 'The Day of' series sound less desirable. Whatever great power it held in the past is probably gone now, leaving only a husk of its old shell. No delightful and interesting parts, just shell.

I can give you some props that you can find in the game. A book. I take it and it says that the book happens to be a really boring story! Curiosity took over me and I attempted to read it. Guess what response I got? 'You can't open the book'. So I guess it's one of those prank stuff right? It looks like a book and has some great leather cover, but in the end the 'book' is just a hunk of plastic that you can get from the prank store. I have gotten a response that said that I was too sleepy to read it. Tried to sleep (on the airplane toilet floor) and I got the typical "You aren't feeling especially drowsy" response.

And one funny "bug" that I have discovered is that you can't even escape your little prison, the airplane toilet. There is a door that you can find on your left, but I seem to be missing a key to unlock it. Let me think, I feel that there is something strange about it... Oh yeah, airplane toilets have latches to lock doors, not keys! Unless you are on those really ancient planes (I don't think even those have keyholes), this is just bad level design.

The next problem is that there is too much guessing-the-verb. There was a puzzle at the start of the game, but my mind wasn't the same as the author's, therefore making me fail at completing it. 'Plate' isn't accepted, but the word in the text, 'plates' is.

With this problem, it's difficult to know what the game is trying to make me do. Any moves that I attempt just gives the the 'That's not a verb that I understand' response.

That shows the lack of implementation and mankind's natural inner desire to finish the coding of a game as fast as their body will allow them to. The game is supposed to be about some intergalactic queen taking over the planet, but I couldn't proceed anything more than that due to me being stuck in the mysterious cubicle of the toilet.

So this is all you can get from this game. Bad implementation, bad level design, and puzzles that are hard to complete. A walkthrough released would have made things so much easier, but I guess the author didn't have time to construct one. Play this if you are willing to finish a very challenging game, not in gameplay, but just to guess what you have to do next.

Recommendations of the Month

Hadean Lands - Andrew Plotkin

Lightyear - chromebookbob

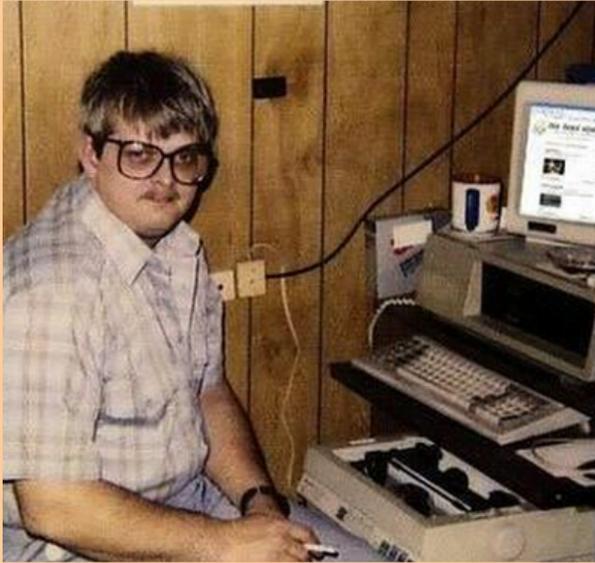
Someone Keeps Moving My Chair - Ryan Veeder

Coming Out Simulator 2014 - Nicky Case

Choice of Robots - Kevin Gold

IF - Yesterday & Tomorrow

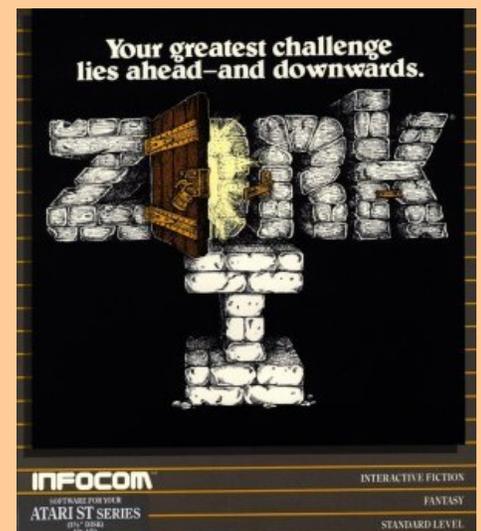
It's the year 1980. People are bored. There's this magical machine in their homes called a 'personal computer'. What it does is calculate sums, allows users to write documents and manage whatever files they had. But, it was just a piece of junk used for work and businesses. Adults only. Life was very dull at that time for anyone still young.



Then came the treatment for boredom from out of the blues. Some small company called Infocom released this 'game' called Zork 1. A small boy with his mother walks past his favourite computer stall and sees the box. "Hey, a new game! The box looks really nice and it's about you exploring a whole new world! Mum, can I get it please? It's my birthday tomorrow!" The child goes home, excited, and pops the disk into the family's computer.

The first thing he sees is words. Not graphics. Not even those simple computer symbols placed in such a way until it looks like a picture. Words. It's the 'thing' that he learn at school, the one dreaded thing in his life that he tries to escape everyday when he returns home from his own version of hell. "Mum," he shouts loudly to his mother. "This game is a piece of junk and only has words! I'm sorry for using up your money!" His mother peeks out of the kitchen and kindly says "George, why don't you just give the game a try? You'll never know how good it is until you play it."

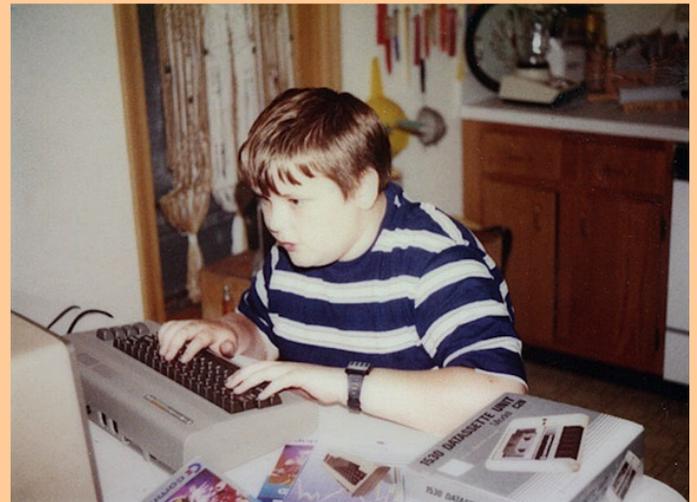
George sighs and begins to play the game. He slowly reads the words, 'You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox here.' The parser is ready for his command. George types 'play' and the parser returns 'I don't know the word "play".' He abruptly stands up and searches for the manual that came with the game. The manual drops out of the box and lands on the floor with its pages opened on the 'Playing Interactive Fiction' section.



Fast forward an hour later, George is furiously typing into the computer. He has reached Hell, found his way into the end of the infamous maze, and has completed the puzzles of the dam. His mother walks into the room, smiling. "What did I tell you, George?", she says. "You don't know until you try." George just shrugged and resumed his game.

And that was how Interactive Fiction became very popular in the 1980's. After Zork, there were more and more games created by Infocom, which included games that are about magic and games that brings you to exotic planets outer space. Other than Infocom, there were other people too who created IF games. These people used software and languages such as AGT, Hugo and TADS, but AGT fell out eventually due to its lack of features.

IF attracted people from all ages, from 10 to 53 years old (based on the Infocom game manuals). People who were good at puzzles and could put together pieces of a story well played harder IF games (yes, they had difficulty levels, just like "real" games with graphics) with more complicated writing and difficult puzzles.

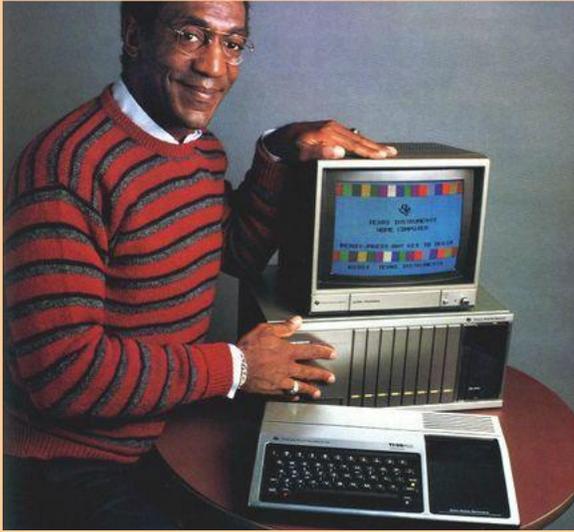


The others who wanted a more relaxed game with less mind-stressing played puzzleless IF games (which I'm a big fan of). These games focused more on story rather than interaction, so it's just like reading a short story on your computer. Infocom produced very little puzzleless games, so the fan-made ones are the right place to look.

Then, came the better PC. The ones that could support 16-bit graphics and had faster processors. These are the computers that can play the 'real games' that you see today. Just then, IF died down. Why would anyone in the right mind play with letters while you can play with impressive graphics and pictures? George, who is moving to adulthood now, throws away his humble collection of Infocom disks and buys those brand-new disks which he calls 'The Real Gaming'.

This is how Interactive Fiction dropped from being a mainstream activity to a rare hobby that only a small group still takes up.

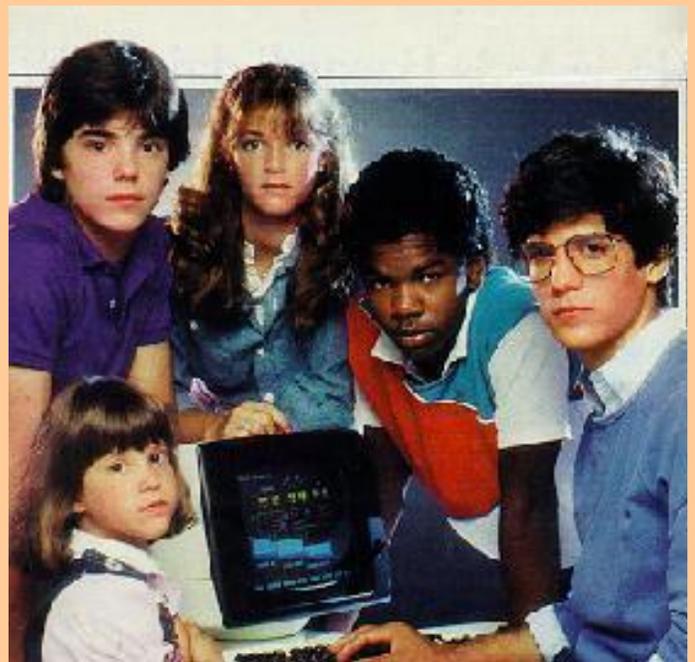
This is the group that you see in IFDB today, the ones who so faithfully keep what their childhood was made up of (and some who just recently rediscovered the best thing in the world). The surviving members continued to develop IF and helped it to adapt to the better PC, which could allow games to have some graphics and sound.



In 1995, the official IF competition was formed to showcase those newly made works by both amateur and professional authors. George, who decided to give graphical games a pause and resumed playing IF games, made a small game with TADS, which was one of those popular languages at that time, and entered it into the competition. Judges from all over the world played and reviewed his game, which earned a winning place in the end (of this fictional account, of course).

When Inform 7 was released in 2005, IF became a language that anyone, even a 12 year old, could program with. It's code was English. Not those weird codes with tons of strange symbols (like {, [, \), but English. You could actually read what you are trying to code, but of course, you have to program it in a way that it actually works. IFDB saw tons of new games released with Inform 7 in its 'What's New' section by new authors.

It wasn't until Twine that made 'difficulty in programming a game' non-existent. Twine was so simple to work with that anyone who had a good story in their head could make a functional game in 30 minutes. Rather than being a parser-commanded game like Inform or TADS, Twine games were Choose Your Own Adventure, or CYOA games. These games just involved clicking choices, or hyperlinks, on the screen to progress to the next section, which were perfect for beginners in Interactive Fiction. Just keep picking the right choices, and you win the game!



The Implementors of Infocom stopping to pose for a picture while writing Interactive Fiction!

But as one wise man has said, anything can happen, especially in the future. No one had actually expected smartphones to become a staple part of our lives and computers to contain more than 32 kilobytes of RAM in the past. The same goes for Interactive Fiction. Perhaps fiction will interact with us sometime in the next 100 years... Nah, that will never happen, har-har-har. Or will it? I'll leave it to you folks to decide.

Let me put the future in the form of another short story.

George, now an adult who just passed his mid-life crisis, decides to take a look at the newly opened IF website, IFclassics.com. He sees something that took up the whole front page. George squints his eyes and sees 2 magical words, Inform 8.

"Ahh, I remember Inform 7 from last time. That language is the hardest crap ever to program. Somehow, TADS is much, more easier to use! Even the 'manuals' they gave couldn't help me to create a blasted room. I lost the best idea ever to that thing!"

George thinks.



He decides to close the computer and forget about that distasteful memory, but the two words, blinking brightly on his computer screen, made him return. "Hmm... This is really tempting. I might as well see it. It better not ruin my life, again." he thought. Upon clicking the program's website, he reads how Inform 8 works. George sees a phrase which attracts his attention.

'The all new Inform 8 allows you to program a whole new game with spoken English!'

"Spoken English?" he thinks. "Let me take a closer look at an example." This is what he sees:

Example begins

"The House" by Tatilli Patilli

Start the game by saying 'You shouldn't have accepted the offer. But you did. And here you are now.'

There are some bushes here. You can probably make it full of rotten apples. Or maybe some dead birds. Pick a choice, Inform.

Also, make a door that is locked. The main character has the key, which can unlock

it. Describe the door as 'A solid looking door. You have the key to unlock it.'

Make the main character wear a black t-shirt and some blue jeans too.

There is a room called Living Room after you open the door. You can find a sofa, a half rotten table and some chairs here. Describe the dang sofa as 'It's at least 50 years old. No one probably sat here for a long, long time.'

Also Inform, I don't like you.

Example ends

George smiles brightly and immediately downloads the program. After thinking for a while, he manages to remember the great idea that he had years ago and easily makes a new game with Inform 8. Now if you mention the word 'Inform' around him, he won't beat you up for mentioning the 'cursed' word.

And that my friends, is technology. But of course, if only this kind of coding can happen in the future then this is possible. It's very unlikely, but as I said earlier on, no one from the past expected games to be 50 gigabytes today. We will have to make sentient computers to be able to talk and understand our coding. Think it as asking PRISM from A Mind Forever Voyaging to do our work for us, except for these computers exist in every household.



Another thing that could probably happen in the future, which is more possible than the Spoken English programming, is videos in Interactive Fiction games. We have pictures and sounds in Glulx games, but how about short video clips, something like those GIF videos you can watch in those comedy websites, but in games instead. It would be very interesting to see one of these in a comedy game. Imagine the laughs that you can get from reading some text, but how about if you can actually see what you are laughing about? Maybe it's some lame but funny pun or an anvil falling on a characters head! A medal will be given to the person who puts in some amusing videos into Toonesia! (An expression only!)

Looks like I've forgotten to talk about what's actually happening in the world of IF today. So we have new competitions coming up, like the Spring Thing 2015 event and the 2015 Parsercomp, but it will be a while after this magazine is up before it

actually happens. The 2014 IF comp and the 8th New Year IF comp have passed not too long ago, with some great games made. You can find more information about it further down below.

Inform 7 updates have been pretty quiet since its last version on September 2014. There probably won't be anymore updates until a breakthrough is discovered in its system and maybe allows programmers to make their game as flexible as TADS 3. And best of all, you can play certain Inform games online with a great program called Parchment! Though it can't be as good as the interpreters that you can download, games can be run pretty smoothly, with some lag only if massive amounts of text is displayed on the screen.



So folks, I'll leave it to you, the reader of this magazine, to decide how the future works. Anyone of you readers can find a breakthrough in the limitations of IF today and make the game itself better than ever before! One day, I see Interactive Fiction being even more popular than those new games like Dota or Call of Duty. Wait, that will probably happen only if an EMP hits Earth and all technology is wiped out, making older (like really old!) computers easier to set up than newer PC's and making IF games the only 'games' available on the planet! Let's all keep Interactive Fiction alive and bring it back to its glory again! Long live IF!



Matthew Goh is a Malaysian gentleman who is an IF enthusiast, merchant marine, granola spokesperson, paid assassin, and animal lover.

Cthulhu & Comedy

I would find it hard to believe that H.P. Lovecraft was a funny guy. He was a poor recluse with a difficult marriage, an interfering family and health issues. Amid all this, he might've gotten off a good knock-knock joke, or maybe even performed a 'got your nose' with a child now and again, but otherwise I think he was probably a desultory individual. His worldview, it would seem, lends even less to being funny. Staunch atheism and secret bigotry also seems a humorless combination.

Nonetheless, I attest that Lovecraft's writing, full of its cosmic terrors and forbidden black magic, can retain its sublime horror when delivered hand-in-hand with humor.

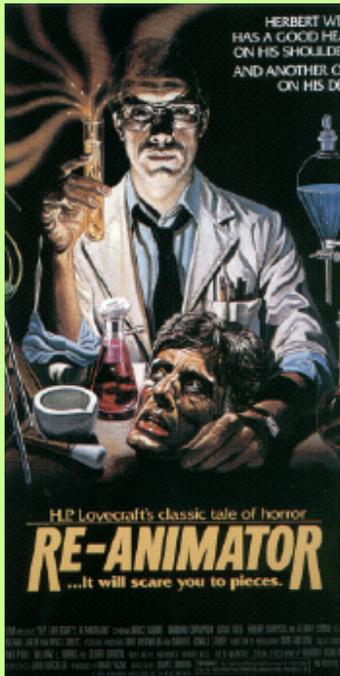
IF critic Sam Ashwell once wrote, "Lovecraft characters aren't driven mad by the sight of shoggoths because they're really big and gross, or because shoggoths shoot magical insanity beams from their arses: they go mad because the sight of the shoggoth represents the total collapse of their basic understanding of the universe. "

While this is true of Lovecraft's own characters, I believe that characters in newer Lovecraftian fiction, can approach these horrors with a wholly different kind of worldview.



H.P. Lovecraft- Unfunny Guy

Perhaps a stoic Generation-Xer would handle a shoggoth more than a studious gentleman raised decades before. It's with this world-weary attitude that allows humor to either deliver the horror, or be delivered with the horror, without lessening either.



Take movies. Even before *Evil Dead 2* with Bruce Campbell's pissed-off hero facing Lovecraftian terrors with a 'Christ, not again' roll of the eyes, we had movies that purported to bring Lovecraft to life. All they did was gross people out in hysterical ways, but were they failures in delivering horror with humor? I'm thinking of *The Reanimator* with the scene where the decapitated, talking head performs (DELETED) on a captive female. It's just ridiculous. In fact, I remember watching that flick as a youth with my dad and my dad literally fell off his chair laughing. Nonetheless, the story, muddled as it was with scenes such as the above, was truly Lovecraftian and the horrors were truly repulsive. The tongue-in-cheek delivery (pardon the pun) does nothing to lessen the terror.

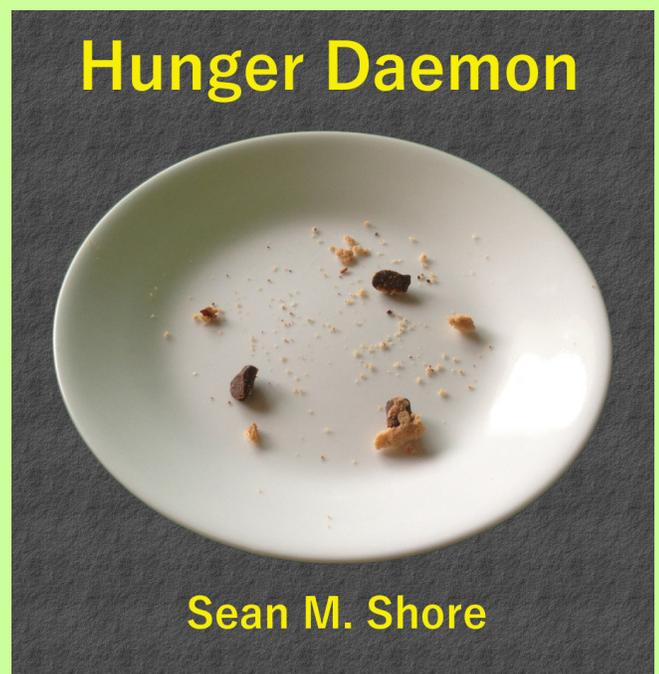


Unfortunately, Lovecraft never enjoyed the success that his mythos has become; his appeal having spread wide only after his death. It makes me wonder what the pale fellow would think now that his mythos has gone from just the pages of his horror tales to just about any form of entertainment you can think of. I was discussing this with IF author Hanon Ondricek (*Transparent, Final Girl*) and he succinctly put it,

"It's interesting how Lovecraft/Cthulhu has invaded internet/geek/gaming culture to the point that it's meme-able, and has gone from a scary thing to something that has plush toys and Etsy knitcraft."

And this brings us to the winner of the 2014 Interactive Fiction Competition: *Hunger Daemon* by Sean M. Shore. Here, I would begin to say that the work flows like a fast-paced movie, or a page-turner of a short story, but upon further reflection, I think the work goes one step beyond that. It presents itself as a top-notch work of Interactive Fiction akin to the works of the Halcyon days of Infocom. (Actually, Infocom works, if viewed with today's IF-lenses, would be seen as helaciously difficult and esoteric efforts in puzzlecraft rather than easy-to-navigate, intuitive games.) Basically, *Hunger Daemon* is what Interactive Fiction, to me, should be: accessible and intriguing, regardless of genre, while bringing interactivity to the forefront. And, of course, it's a superlative example of how Cthulhu and comedy can walk hand in hand. Or should I say "hand in tentacle"? No, I probably shouldn't. It's not that funny.

So, yes, *Hunger Daemon* fits the bill of an Interactive Fiction Competition winner. It hides the rails very well and delivers a truly funny interactive story. The humor begins at the onset once the player realizes s/he plays a cultist who is far from a zealot. - not so much disillusioned as completely apathetic to the family-cult-business to which he belongs. The author, by the way, does a great job fleshing out this "family" of cultists, their hideouts, and their culture. You really feels as if you are well within this strange world.



It's a great setting, and it's great when a story makes a great setting. It's as if further adventures can be had with this character and the cult to which he belongs, in all its dysfunctional glory. The PC, and the narrator actually, have a unique way of speaking. Take, for instance, the following bit:

"You lean over to have a peek at the section that Stu is reading from. *Dagon's dingus!* He's still on page 13! We're going to be here all day."

And, during the casting of an important spell with your friend Jeff:

"You're tearing up, and you feel insistent itch in your nasal passages. A sneeze is coming on. *Hastur's hot hole*, not now!"

More of these charming colloquialisms can be found peppered throughout the story.



Sean M. Shore during the writing of
[Hunger Daemon](#)

The main character is also a study in absurdity to begin with. He either does not truly understand what the cult is doing (I don't buy into this), or he doesn't buy into the whole cult thing enough to think that the cult's ritual (a world-ending evil ceremony) will even work. A final option is that he just doesn't give a rat's ass. His apathy is so ingrained that he will just go-with-the-flow regardless of what he's forced to do. He thinks about it, however, at times, such as when one can successfully pass the synagogue's parking lot puzzle, stealing a much-needed ticket from a volunteer without her knowing:

"You start to feel bad about this, but then comfort yourself with the thought that she's probably been to a zillion of these before."

This guilt is coming from a man who belongs to a cult bent on ending the world. Fortunately, there are multiple endings in an exciting climax, so something should suit your fancy when you interact with the story at that point.

Maybe Lovecraft missed out on opportunities to be funny in his stories, some would take from this essay. But I believe this would then never allow the original horror to be acknowledged in the first place.

Lovecraft's intent was to feature fear of the unknown in his stories, not really to entertain you in any other way. He does not lighten the tension with humor ever. He will only break the tension with something even more horrible, or with just a simple "The End."

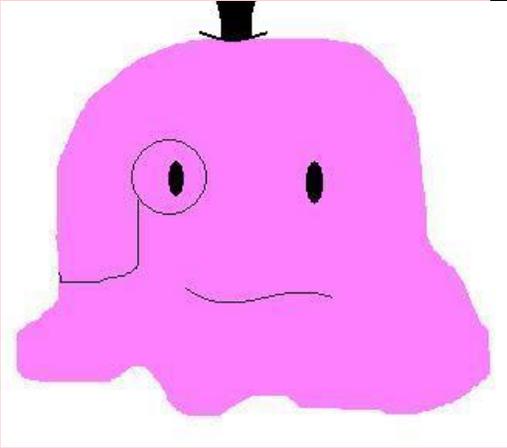
The humor that authors and filmmakers have invested into the mythos is something of our generation, not Lovecraft's. The humor can be totally flubbed, of course, and should only be used thoughtfully and, hopefully, with enough skill and wit to not diminish the original horror, terror, and fear Lovecraft intended when he dreamed up his little menagerie of creepy-crawlies.

As a Lovecraft-geek, I was happy to see a work such as *Hunger Daemon* win the 2014 Interactive Fiction Competition. It proves that Cthulhu and comedy can blend, at times, when the stars are right.



Marshal Tenner Winter is an American IF author who claims to be the defender of the magical fairies that live in his hair.

Reviews!



Tea Ceremony by Naomi Hinchin

In the 2014 IF Comp, there were games that involve puzzles. Some are hard, some are easy, and some are just humorous. Tea Ceremony falls into the second and third category, with its easy and funny puzzles. It earned 10th place in the competition, which is pretty good and well-earned.

Basically, the story is that you are a person from Earth, and your unfortunate job is to please a fancy alien from a strange planet for diplomacy purposes. To do so, you really have to show your position, which is really, really low. In real life, I would have beaten up the alien (and got myself thrown out and beaten up by the alien's guards). Life at the alien planet is very different from here, as aliens there eat pretty weird alternatives to food found on Earth and practice strange ways of life.

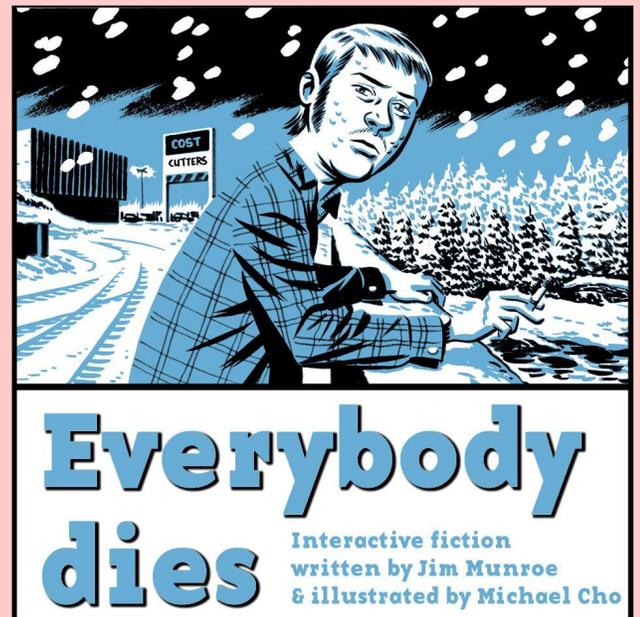
Puzzles in the game include having to dress up in a very embarrassing way and making some 'tea' to be served to the alien, hence the name 'Tea Ceremony'. There was one puzzle that was kept making me ask myself, "Must it be so complicated?". You were suppose to make some tea, and the way was to pour and drop the mixture until you reach the perfect amount, which took a number of moves (20-30 for me, to be exact!). I was wondering why can't you just type "POUR [AMOUNT] INTO CUP" and be done with it! I understand that it was to make the puzzle harder and the game longer, but... you get what I mean.

The ending of this game is pretty happy, and gives the player a good sense of achievement! Celebrations are made and babies are born (just joking!). So if you have some time to spare, try out this game. It will only take you a short time to finish, provided you can type out the names of the ingredients used for the tea in time, and it will give you some enjoyment!

Everybody Dies by Jim Munroe

This is Everybody Dies, the game that won 3rd place in the 2008 IF Comp. It is definitely not your typical game.

You start the game off as a lazy everyday worker who happens to be addicted to cigs. Your mission is to rescue a shopping cart that you threw away years ago, as the shopping mart that you are working for is a huge cheapskate



and will not tolerate lost equipment (why years later?). While you are trying to get the cart back, you encounter a rather humorous death and... the game ends.

Or does it?

Just after you see the most hated words of all 'YOU HAVE DIED', and just before you decide to go to delete the blasted game and go to sleep, you see pictures. Very interesting and vivid pictures. Of what? A void, a fish, a fish in a fish, and a guy who is Sikh... Suddenly, you are alive once again and ready for more action, but not as your starting character. Instead you are a Sikh working in the shopping mart.

The whole game revolves around the shopping mart called Cost Cutters. You then realize that you are working with a guy whose brain has snapped into half and he hates your guts because he's racist too. The hate goes to such a level until he decides to kill you with a shotty after seeing your family ceremonial dagger as a "death threat". Then you die, and... the pictures reappear!

I'm pretty sure that the game really likes fish, and fishes inside fishes, etc.

Fishception! And out of nowhere, your recently killed character suddenly revives outside the store with another random shopping cart job! I seriously couldn't understand the story of the game. It's too messed up. Perhaps you will have better luck playing it than me. The ending is quite good, and will leave you satisfied of what it took you to get through the whole game.

You know what, just play it. It's really short and will take you 10-15 minutes to finish it up, provided you can understand the writing near the end. The last puzzle was particularly hard, and it took me a walkthrough to understand how to

overcome it. The illustrations are great, and really matches the mood of the story. Everybody Dies is really one of those gems of IF.

Robin & Orchid by Ryan Veeder and Emily Boegheim

Robin and Orchid is an entry in the 2013 IF Comp, where it won 2nd place. Basically, the main plot is a couple of high school students decide to work together and sleep in a 'haunted' church to investigate it and to make an article for the local newspaper.

The main highlight of this game is its freedom for you to thoroughly explore the church. It has plenty of rooms for you to snoop around. The amount of detail used to describe every room in the church makes the whole building sound very chilling, especially in the dead of night. If there's anyone who is really interested to find out about the history of the church, there's a whole lot of material that you can read in the notebook that is in the player's inventory. (Warning, it might take a really long time to look through every object in the church and look it up.)

Rather than being a serious ghost-hunting experience, the game has rather humorous encounters between the characters. There was one time when a guy kept making fun of your character for being really short, and if you ever take a picture of your friend, the resulting photo is not too good.

After playing this game for a while, you will come to the conclusion that there might be something wrong with the church. Or is there? You will constantly see some paranormal activity, such as floating lights and a creepy figure in pigtails.



This slimy goo called ectoplasm seems to be appearing in the wrong places in the church too. You don't really want to know how 'ectoplasm' is really formed in real life. But somehow, this whole ghost thing just doesn't really seem to add up.

Another good thing about Robin and Orchid is its built-in walkthrough. It does have some rather hard puzzles, so the walkthrough can come in really handy in those situations. There was one puzzle that made me rage, and I nearly gave up the game.

I kept mistaking the name of this prop called 'The Ark of Covenant', and kept typing 'The Ark of Convenant'. I guess that's too much Halo and too little religious studies. One particular object that made me examine closely was this pile of bars and cables that was previously used as a glide during a Birth of Jesus play. I'm pretty sure that glides didn't exist during Christ's birth.

During the endgame, after the puzzles are completed and the weird stuff photographed, you get a pretty interesting twist in the story, though it is pretty much expected. The ending comes pretty fast after that and voila, you have completed a very interesting IF game!

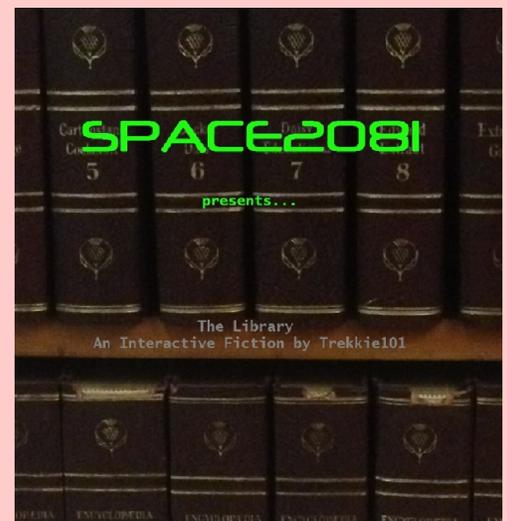
Overall, this is a great game that should be given a try whenever you have some time. It has good logical puzzles that make sense and a very interesting place for you to explore. I strongly recommend playing the latest version, Release 4, as all bugs encountered in previous versions are fixed and of course, newer is better right?

The Library by Trekkie101

It's not really my place to say if this game will really work out in the future or not. This game, called The Library, is created by Trekkie101 and emphasizes on exploration and the random puzzle. I couldn't complete it due to its difficult puzzles and the flawed parser. Before I start the review, get the Release 2 of this game if you want to try it out. The first release is very buggy and much harder to actually play than the later version.

When I saw this game on IFDB, the first thing that came to my mind was the great library in the Avatar cartoon and The Library, which was an extremely difficult level in Halo 1. Once again, another Halo reference.

The main complaint that I have about this game is its guess-the-word properties. When you want to write a command down, you have to write the whole thing, like "books" instead of "book". Of course, it was vastly fixed in the second version, so it isn't really much of a problem anymore. But it's still pretty tiring to have to type out the whole phrase. Maybe try putting more 'Understand' lines in the source code? An interesting thing that I found out is when you try going down in a empty room, it still says, "You have hit a wall. Ouch." I think it meant "You have bumped into a wall.



Not really painful".

But bad things aside, the library is actually an interesting place for you to explore. Whenever I use the cable car to navigate around the area, the curiosity of what lies beyond usually gets to me. There were pretty confusing areas, such as a small maze in the second section that doesn't mention that it's a maze and pretty interesting places, like a Starbucks somewhere in the library and a Hunger Games book in a bookstore. You can catch plenty of cool references here, so remember to hunt and find!

Apparently, the whole library was abandoned by the people who used to be in it. But why? That's when the puzzles come in, but I was too horrible in solving them so I can't write down the backstory in this review. There was a golden tome that I saw that was probably essential to the story, but when I tried to take it, the game acted as though the tome wasn't there and the tome disappeared soon after that. But one thing that I'm sure about is that there was a strange presence that kills off anything alive that stays near it for 2 turns (me). The presence usually appears in dark and scary hallways, so just stick on your territory and you shall be safe. Oh course, until you find a solution to the whole puzzle and then you can just waltz pass the evil presence. You can find some objects scattered around the library, but until you thoroughly explore the whole area, you won't really know what to do with it.

I hope that everyone else will have better luck with this game than me. It really has the potential to become a great game, but wasn't implemented in the right way for the sake of convenience and simplicity. Perhaps future releases will improve the flow of gameplay and difficulty of its puzzles.

Reviews this issue were written by Matt Goh.

Closing Remarks

So I guess this is the end of the first issue of IFography. From just a dream I had in a hotel room, that idea had evolved into the very magazine that you are reading now. It has been great fun writing the reviews and news that you see here and it has made good use of my time! Thanks so much for reading.

If you would like to submit content for upcoming issues, please email IFography@gmail.com. Even if you have a review, suggestion list, or an idea of whom we can interview. Drive safely!

-Matt Goh

Editors: Matt Goh and Marshal Tenner Winter

Proofreading: Robert Patten, Jason Lautezenheiser, Hanon Ondricek

Thanks to the rest of the IFF for their assistance in making our first issue!