

QuestBusters

The Adventurer's Newsletter

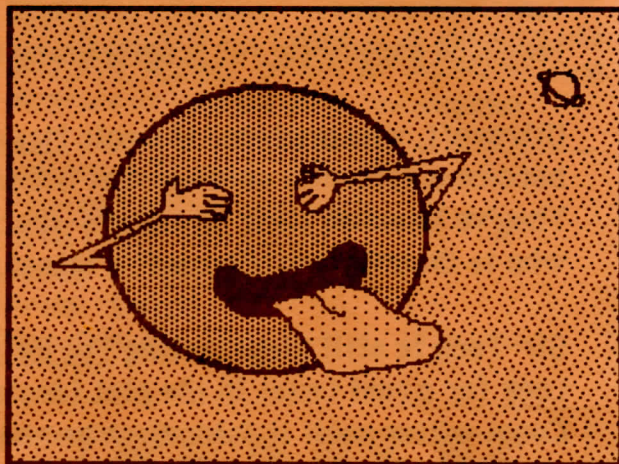
November, 1984

Thumbs up to

HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE to the GALAXY!

Don't panic! You don't need to read the book to play the game. And even if you have, the adventure won't be so easy you'll stroll through it in ten minutes. In case you've just returned from another planet, Douglas Adams' 1979 book told how Arthur Dent met up with an alien named Ford Prefect and thumbed a ride on a space ship moments before the earth was destroyed. Ford is a roving researcher for the Hitchhiker's Guide, a sort of "see the universe on \$5 a day" computerized travel book, and the madcap novel describes their off-the-wall escapades enroute to a legendary planet called Magrathea. You play the part of Arthur, whose house is about to be demolished by a bulldozer.

Steve "Planetfall" Meretzky has adhered closely to the plot line, and anyone familiar with the book will have a slight edge in the opening scenes. If you can't figure out how to stop the bulldozer from reducing your house to rubble, get a copy of the book and flip through the first chapter for the solution. This applies to most of the problems that occur before you escape earth's destruction by the Vogon fleet. Beyond this point, Meretzky and Adams have devised some **mindgrinding problems** that make the game tough no matter how many times you've reread the book. The babel fish, for instance, is necessary in order to understand the Vogons' speech so you can obtain a piece of equipment needed to operate the Improbability Drive later on. In the book, Ford Prefect told Arthur to "Just put this fish in your



ear." But in the adventure, the babel fish flies out of a tall machine when you push a button -- and a team of cleaning robots keep snatching up the fish and disposing of it before you can grab it. You can get to the game's next phase without solving this problem. However, the game can't be completed without **sticking a fish in your ear**. At least you can get a preview of what's in store.

Onboard the spaceship "Heart of Gold," Zaphod Beeblebrox, President of the Imperial Galactic Government, tells you and Ford that he's stolen the ship so he can find the lost planet of Magrathea. Other characters include Marvin the Paranoid Android, a woman named Trillian, and Eddie the ship's computer. This crew is much more one-dimensional than the characters in Cutthroats, though Ford Prefect is entertaining in his own way. (He's still **no Floyd**.) The game doesn't involve

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 3]

Adventure Hotline

More and more software houses are travelling "adventure road" these days. Spinnaker's new subsidiary, Trillium, is specializing in graphic adventures and working with established science fiction authors to adapt their novels. (Their Windham Classics could become the "Classics Illustrated" of adventure, but they've postponed its release.) Epyx is on the same track, with Isaac Asimov's Robots of Down. Synapse reports its line of all-text sf "Electronic Novels" is delayed again (until November). Could the problems lie in their ambitious project to develop a language especially for programming adventures, like Infocom's ZIL?

Ultrasoft, who produced the epic Mask of the Sun and Serpent's Star, has opted to become a software development house and let other companies market their titles. They've licensed their adventure-specific graphics language, Ultra III, to Trillium, who is distributing Ultrasoft's latest, Shadowkeep.

Sir-Tech is still play-testing The Return of Werdna, the fourth Wizardry scenario. Look for a real twist in the plot (designed by Roe Adams, Softalk magazine's East Coast editor until it folded). A sequel to Lyllegomyn is in the offing for Apple owners. MacWizardry should be ready by January. A TRS-80 version is underway, but nothing for the C-64 until someone comes up with a decent Pascal compiler.

Lord British promises significant changes in Ultima IV. The surface of the planet will be 16 times bigger than in the previous game. It will unfold in eight stages, each as complex as the earlier Ultimas, and won't retread the familiar "track down and slay the evil monster" motif. Instead, the emphasis is on developing one of your characters into an "Avatar." There's still magic and combat, though, so don't let your sword get rusty. Look for enhanced graphics, music, animation, and interaction with other characters such as pubtenders. By Christmas, it will be out

[CONTINUED ON PAGE 8]

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HITCHHIKER'S GUIDE

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1]

the same style of interaction with the characters, and you'll make more progress by consulting the Guide about the objects and people you encounter. It taps into a "Sub-Etha-Net database" light years away and answers relevant questions (this game's equivalent of Sorcerer's Encyclopedia Frobozzica). If it can't give you a practical answer, the Guide often offers a funny excuse like: "Sorry, that portion of our Sub-Etha database was accidentally deleted last night during a wild office party."

HOW TOUGH IS IT?

Categorized by Infocom as a Standard level game, HQ is more difficult than Cutthroats, another Standard title (reviewed elsewhere in this issue). **Hints are offered** within the game. Try to pick up or examine objects that are of no value in solving puzzles, and the program explains: "That's not important; leave it alone." After getting killed in the opening scene, you'll appreciate messages suggesting what you might have done to avoid death. Responses like "Useless, totally useless," and "Complete waste of time" sometimes warn you against pursuing absolute dead ends. There are no color-coded objects or clues hidden in the documentation. Adams and Meretzky each invented problems independently, but Steve says the best are those that the two collaborated on. They spent some time pubcrawling across England while conducting "in-depth" research for the game. The maximum score is 400 points.

For the first time in an Infocom game (except the mysteries, which don't have scores), you won't receive status titles like "Novice Adventurer" or "Apprentice Enchanter" for attaining points along the way to the final scene. That's too bad, because those little promotions are important rewards that boost the spirits of many adventurers.

The galaxy's a big place, but you won't need to do a lot of mapping. The numerous locations are not

spread across a vast landscape as in Zork, so you follow a more linear path until the Improbability Drive is assembled. Ever play Sierra's Time Zone, with its time machine for traveling through time and space? The Drive serves the purpose, but with major differences: [1] It operates randomly, so you never know where you'll wind up. [2] In addition to new locations, you often materialize in the body of another character! This offers unique perspectives on the story, because you may wind up as Ford Prefect trying to save Arthur, or as a girl Ford picks up at a cocktail party. From each major location, you can explore a number of rooms before finding the way to move on to the next area. Each area features its own problem, and these grow progressively tougher toward the end game. They can be fairly complex, and often hinge on figuring out what to do with tools like the "molecular hyperwave pincer" and other offbeat gear. The vocabulary boasts **over 800 words**. And there are plenty of ways to die, though the most exceptional is being **bored to death** by a "lethally dull woman at the cocktail party."

Whole chunks of the original text are woven into the adventure as it unfolds onscreen, while Adams' wry wit and satiric observations highlight every scene. And the new material is **even zanier than the book** at times. You get a red and yellow "Don't Panic!" button, some "peril-sensitive sunglasses," a microscopic space fleet and other whimsical items in the package. Meretzky has done a masterful job of evoking the novel's cockeyed comedic spirit, making this an excellent adaptation and the best novel-to-adventure to date. (It is Infocom's first such game.) There is one tradeoff. A single disk couldn't possibly hold the entire story and the fresh material, so the sequel will pick up where this one ends -- when the ship lands on Magrathea. **SA**

Computer: Most Home Computers

Skill Level: Intermediate

Saves: 8

Price: Atari & C-64, \$34.95. Others, \$39.95

Manufacturer: Infocom

T AMAZON T

Trillium stressed that their new line of adventures wouldn't emphasize the traditional style of logical problem-solving. The theory was that players would make progress by "staying in character" -- acting as the game's character would in the immediate situation (problem). In practice, you still have to think logically to determine **how to stay** in character. Nitpicking aside, Trillium's first adventure is a challenging **interactive movie** that's fun to figure out. Michael Crichton (author of The Andromeda Strain) has crafted a story line and settings that make the familiar treasure hunt theme seem almost new.

As an agent at a "top secret hi-tech" research firm, your mission is to find the Lost City of Chok in the Amazon jungles and locate its fabled emerald mines. The gems contain platinum impurities that make them vital to America's national defense projects. You can fly straight to South America, though little progress will be made without a stopover in Miami to visit a professor who's an expert on the savage Huni Indians that live near the Amazon. He turns up dead, but you'll meet **Paco, his tropical parrot**. A vividly painted compadre, Paco rides your shoulder throughout the game, offering wisecracks and occasional clues.

HELP! HELP!

A mini-computer provides help by enabling you to signal headquarters in Washington and receive news reports via satellite. In addition to the Huni, they'll warn about a local volcano that may erupt, snowstorms in the mountains you must cross, and government troops that are out to rob you. The amount of help delivered by Paco and the mini-computer depends on which of the three skill levels you choose at the outset. Little mapping is necessary. A map with a grid overlay is part of the documentation. Headquarters will give you a positional fix that tells where you are, then steer you in the right direction. Operating the field

computer, with its animation and sound effects, is like modeming into a weird version of Compuserve.

Two action sequences are effectively executed. In one you shoot cannibals with your laser; in the other you chase a monkey who has stolen your pack around a grid. The game uses a two-word parser that's fairly comfortable, and a vocabulary list is included. **Your name** is incorporated into the dialogue (as in Seastalker and Transylvania). The lush color graphics are fast-loading, there are lots of them, and they're backed up by sound effects that are top-notch for an Apple program. A few scenes entail smoothy executed animation, not just the "spot animation" seen in some graphic adventures.

After finding the Lost City, you have five days to recover the gems. (Of course, that volcano could go off any minute.) You must return to camp when night falls, or wind up as the Huni's main course. The shoot-'em-up scene breaks in when they arrive. One feature many people will appreciate: at the airport (at least in the Novice game) someone hands you many of the objects needed to solve various problems, so you don't have to worry about reaching the end game to discover you need a tool that was overlooked in the opening scenes. This eliminates the usual tedious backtracking.

For anyone hopelessly stuck, coded clues are provided with the documentation. Fact sheets on using the map, computer and other gear, and a news clipping about the previous expedition round out the package. It's a two-disk game, but structured there's no need to switch disks too frequently.

Amazon's action sequences are the best we've seen in an adventure game, with genuine animation that easily surpasses similar scenes in Mask of the Sun and Coveted Mirror. And the three skill setting make it equally appropriate for novices and master adventurers. SA

Computer : APPLE, C-64

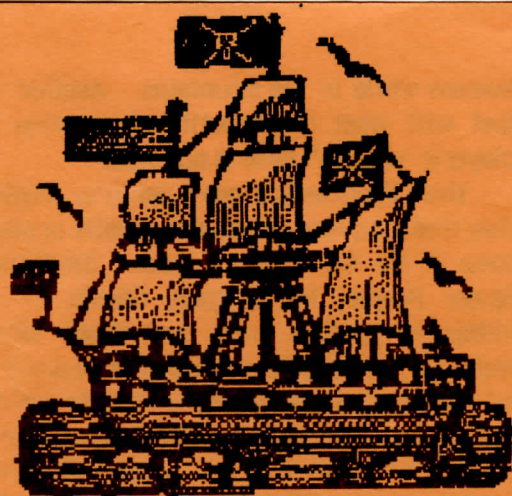
Skill Level : Player-Selectable

Minimum Memory Requirement: 64K

Saves (on Game Disk): 9

Price: \$44.95

Manufacturer: Trillium (Spinnaker)



CUTTHROATS

The second in Mike Berlyn's "Tales of Adventure" series is set on Hardscrabble Island, and casts you as a washed up diver. Unlike the lonely Infidel, Cutthroats boasts a crew of lively characters who really come to life on the screen. Just before he dies, one gives you a book that shows the location of two sunken treasure ships.

Then someone slides a note under your door, which leads to a meeting with Johnny Red, Pete the Rat, and the Weasel at a local pub. Johnny found some gold from one of the wrecks, and they want you to dive for the rest. But they don't know which of the four ships in the bay holds the treasure, so they need you and the book (a copy is part of the package). It has a **color map** showing where the wrecks lie and the water's depth. By comparing Johnny's clues with the map and information in the book, you must decide whether to dive for an old wooden sailing ship or a WWI passenger ship.

The island is small, so little mapping is necessary. You will have to wander around it to meet with the crew several times before sailing. (As in Enchanter, you must eat and drink often, but not as frequently as in Planetfall.) Another character, McGinty, wants to beat you to the gold. There's also a traitor in your group, and unless you're careful he will slash your throat from ear to ear before you ever set foot on the boat. You've

also got to buy supplies. A list of nautical gear -- batteries, air compressors, and other items -- is included with the packaging. Scuba gear and other tools can be found elsewhere. Get the right stuff, because you can't return to the island after setting sail. Choosing from the two rental boats, rigged for diving at different depths, is another key decision.

It's still possible to get your throat cut on the way to the site, but usually you'll be able to reach the sunken ship and attack the problems that lie between you and the treasure. You might run out of oxygen, but can't surface for more -- the game ends if you return to the ship without the goods. And unless you've discovered the traitor's identity and put him out of action -- and he can't be killed! -- you'll have a nasty surprise even if you do retrieve the treasure. Top score is 250 points, and after completing the game you can dive for a different treasure on the other ship. Different tools are used for each set of problems.

The puzzles on land are reminiscent of Deadline, and hinge of figuring out what the other characters are up to. Those underwater are based on object manipulation. Tougher than Seastalker, Cutthroats is the perfect introductory game for teenagers and adults, but anyone who's solved more complex adventures may finish it in a week or even less. If Zork still has you scratching your head, though, you might try this one just to savor the thrill of finally beating an Infocom game.

Cutthroats' outstanding aspect is its emphasis on interacting with the characters, who skulk about from the lighthouse to the Shanty quite independently. Hardscrabble Island comes across as a real place with genuine people, the reason it represents a substantial work of "interactive fiction" (perhaps Berlyn's best so far) and a hint at what the future holds for the genre. NY

Computer : All Home Computers
Skill Level : Introductory/Novice
Saves : 8
Price : \$49.95
Flavor : Salty
Manufacturer : Infocom

XYPHUS

We usually only review new games, but this outstanding September release has been overlooked so far by most computer magazines. The legend goes like this: Long ago on the Lost Continent of Arroya, the lord demon Xyphus was defeated by a wizard who ripped out the fiend's heart, a huge gem. He hid it deep underground, but goblins and demons grabbed up pieces of the crystal that broke off during the battle. These amulets (Xiphoids) are used to perform magic, which enables the demons to control a major part of the world. You've got to liberate the land by slaying Xyphus. The theme is familiar, but numerous innovations distinguish Xyphus from other role-playing games.

Six scenarios make up the game. You must complete each one's sub-goal before loading the next scenario and finally tracking down Xyphus. In the first, you've got to equip your warriors and strengthen them in combat; another scenario requires that you find an enchanted goblet, the "Lion of Saddhu." Kings and rulers at some forts will ask you to perform mini-missions for them.

The members in a party of up to four Spellcasters and Fighters are displayed as individual figures. With keyboard control, they can be marched in any of 6 directions instead of just 4, and individuals can even travel to widely separated deserts and castles, depicted on a hi-res color map like those seen in war games but without the grid of hexes. (The only drawback is that the characters are small and hard to tell apart. But the active one's name and stats are always shown.) The map doesn't scroll. Instead, its next portion fills the screen when you try to move past the screen's edge. If one character has wandered off all alone to some remote spot, the view shifts to show his current area when it's his turn to move. Xyphus employs other elements of war-gaming: varying movement factors like those used for different types of military units are applied to dwarves, elves and humans. These factors are affected by terrain, so dwarves move faster than

humans while in the mountains. Another feature that will whet the appetite of starving Ultima players: you don't have to buy food.

Your Spellcasters can't perform magic until they find a Xiphoid, which are usually protected by some of the 60 creature types. Sandskimmers, Spider People, Ice Dragons, Ghouls -- all lie hidden in specific areas and attack when you approach. Combat is conducted as in a war game, by attacking an enemy who is next to one of your party. (Another plus: the attacking creature's hit points are flashed onscreen, so you know how much damage you've inflicted.) Creatures don't act as predictably as those in Ultima III, and this makes combat more interesting. Strategy and tactics are vital, because the character who polishes off the monster gets the most experience points and gold. This forces you to concentrate on developing each character as an individual. Spellcasters can choose from 6 combat and 5 "hindrance" spells, sold in the forts and outposts where the shops are menu-driven. All characters' hit and endurance points are automatically restored upon entering.

Progress can be saved to the scenario disk at any stage. Deaths are not immediately written to the scenario disk as they are in Ultima and Wizardry. If the party is completely wiped out, you don't have to reboot the program to restart at the last saved position. Also, each scenario loads fully into RAM, so there's never a wait for disk access. Each new scenario more difficult, but at least the only underground maze to map is in the final phase. Count on 3-12 hours for each scenario. With so many unique features, Xyphus is a landmark program that sets new standards for the genre. Created by Robert Waller and Dave Albert, it's definitely the best new role-playing game so far this year. SA

Computer : APPLE

Planned Conversions : C-64, IBM PC & jr, Mac

Skill Level: Introductory/Advanced

Price: \$34.95-\$39.95, depending on computer

Manufacturer : Penguin Software

🤖🤖🤖🤖🤖 Robots of Dawn 🤖🤖🤖🤖🤖

Robots is an intriguing all-text mystery that lacks some of the conveniences and depth taken for granted in an Infocom game. The name of the current room isn't shown at the top of the screen, for instance. But anyone who's been frustrated by the inability to directly question the suspects in Deadline -- and who hasn't? -- will appreciate Robot's approach. As Elijah Bailey, the "Earth's Most Famous Detective," you can say "Did you have a motive?" and also grill people about means and opportunity. Daneel, a robot, assists on the case.

Daneel is the only humaniform robot in existence, built by your old friend Dr. Fastolfe -- whose murder you're out to solve. Arriving on the planet Aurora, you begin at the Fastolfe estate, where Daneel says Fastolfe was slain by a **poison gas bomb**. The Dr. died in his arms, so he's also a suspect. The next-door neighbor, Gladia, becomes a candidate when you learn that she's been dating Gremionis, who works at the Robotics Institute.

The Institute, led by Dr. Amadiro, is linked with Aurora's Globalist Party, who want to create hordes of humaniforms for space colonization. But only Fastolfe knew how to make them, and he preferred to send people, not robots, into space. Amadiro blames Daneel for the murder and says he should be turned over to the Institute. But perhaps Amadiro planned the murder so he could analyze Daneel and discover how to duplicate him? Even Fastolfe's daughter apparently had a motive to kill him. (You get bio sheets on all the suspects.)

Extensive mapping is required as you traverse the planet by train and jet airfoil. Daneel will tape suspects' answers and replay them at any time. You must also uncover some physical evidence -- all this within a time limit. Then, unless you get killed first, the Chairman of the World Council shows up to weigh your evidence. If you don't have enough for a conviction, the game ends.

The game packs a full-sentence parser, which even **accepts pronouns**. But the vocabulary is limited, and you can't get a print-out of the text.

The best news is that the program is RAM-resident, so it never has to access the slow 1541 drive for the next paragraph. However, the game's designer, Jon Leupp, couldn't fit as many words into RAM as a disk-based game holds, so you occasionally get terse descriptions like "You're in another office." Even so, Aurora is stocked with holographic phones, 3-D TVs, robots, tingle fields and other futuristic trappings of Asimov's novel. Lacking the depth and texture of an adaptation like Hitchhiker, Robots is still an impressive first adventure for Epyx and worth "investigation."

Computer: Commodore 64

Planned Conversions: Apple

Skill Level: Intermediate

Saves: 100 on Game Disk

Price: \$40.00

Manufacturer: Epyx

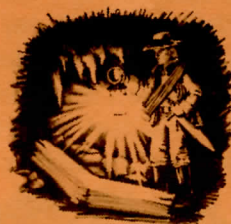
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ADVENTURE HOTLINE

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for Apple, C-64, Atari, IBM and Mac versions are also slated. Ultima III should be ready for the Macintosh by the end of 1984. Origin's also doing AUTODUEL, based on Steve Jackson's board game Car Wars. Wizardry wizard Andrew Greenberg is writing Ogre for the Mac at Origin. And Dave Albert just left Penguin to join Origin full-time.

QUEST FOR PARSERS

Adventure International has finally admitted the existence of the full-sentence parser, and Scott Adams has developed one called SAGAPLUS. Should make a big difference in his games' playability, but it won't be as strong as guess who's. Adams' current project is Questprobe, a series of adventures based on Marvel Comic characters. The Hulk and Spiderman are starters, aimed at the Apple, C-64 and Atari market. He may rerelease his old games with SAGAPLUS, and is converting them for IBMers. He's also doing a game based on the film Buckaroo Banzai.

BUT FLOYD...

Still waiting for the sequel hinted at by Floyd in Planetfall's last scene? Don't hold your breath -- Steve Meretzky plans are to do another sf story and his first "disk drive detective" scenario first. Then he's got the Hitchhiker sequel lined up.... There definitely will be a sequel to Sorcerer to round out the trilogy, but not soon. At Cambridge-by-the-Sea, they're currently shaping up a game whose nature makes it difficult to even categorize. We couldn't uncover any details, due to Infocom's tight security. (Which is so tight, that...let's just say that terrorists wouldn't be bombing the U.S. Embassy in Beirut if Marc Blank and Dave Lebling were Marine guards.) We can confirm that Mike Berlyn just bought a new car with all the options -- including "grues-control."



FREE GAMES!

The 1st subscriber with the closest answer wins a new adventure. [Specify type of computer.] **Who wrote the first adventure, where, and in what year?** Random drawing will be used in event of ties. Offer void where prohibited by law.

FREE ADS!

Got a trunkful of old adventures? Trade 'em off with a **FREE AD** in the next issue, when we'll start up the Swap Shop section. Subscribers are also encouraged to help each other with killer problems. If you're **stuck, stuck, stuck**, briefly describe the problem and send it to **Waiting for Duffy**, which begins next issue.

NEXT ISSUE:

Suspect is Dave "Starcross" Lebling's first mystery game. As usual, we'll review it months before any computer magazine. We'll also cover another mystery, **Ripper**, and **Earthly Delights**, an all-text game that takes you to Europe. Also: **Shadowkeep**, **Fahrenheit 451**, **Lucifer's Realm**, **Elysian Fields**, **Timeship**, and several more new titles. Plus our new **Conversion Column** will cover all the new and planned conversions for your computer. That's a lot of coverage, so we'll be the expanding to 12 pages beginning in December.

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