

# An Brief Introduction to Interactive Fiction

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# What is Interactive Fiction?

- A work of [interactive fiction](#) (IF, a.k.a. text adventure) is a puzzle game with
  - nonlinear storytelling with user-directed actions driving story,
  - text-based interaction (e.g. “go north”, “unlock door with skeleton key”), and
  - text description of locations and objects.
- Environment changes with user interactions.
- Puzzles are often solved by finding hidden objects or discovering creative uses for non-hidden objects (e.g. swamp gas + wine bladder + flint + steel + brick wall = loose bricks + new passage).

# Homestar Runner Parody

See it here: <http://www.homestarrunner.com/sbemail94.html>

- **STRONG BAD:** *{typing}* On the other hand, it might be cool to be in one of those text-based adventures. You know, for those intellectual people with better imaginations.
  - *{Cut to a black screen with a green arrow at the top (and moving green lines), similar to the Tandy 400.}*
- **STRONG BAD:** *{voiceover}* It'd be like...
- *{reading text}*
  - Ye find yeself in yon dungeon. Ye see a FLASK  
Obvious exits are NORTH, SOUTH, and DENNIS.  
  
What wouldst thou deau?*{Strong Bad doesn't say the last sentence.}*
- **STRONG BAD:** *{voiceover}* And you'd be all like...
  - Get ye flask
- **STRONG BAD:** *{voiceover}* And it'd say,
  - You can't get ye flask!
- **STRONG BAD:** *{voiceover}* And you'd just have to sit there and imagine *why on Earth* you can't get ye flask! Because the game's certainly not going to tell you.
  - *{At this the screen adds "I'm certainly not going to tell thou."}*
- **STRONG BAD:** *{voiceover}* And there's no precious graphics to help you out, either!
  - *{At this the screen adds "Graphics, shmaphics." and a few seconds later, ". . . for sooth!" Cut back to the computer.}*
- Source: [http://www.hrwiki.org/wiki/video\\_games](http://www.hrwiki.org/wiki/video_games)
- See also Thy Dungeonman 3: [http://www.hrwiki.org/wiki/Thy\\_Dungeonman\\_3](http://www.hrwiki.org/wiki/Thy_Dungeonman_3)

# Plotkin and Albaugh's IF How-To

You just started up a game and now you're staring at text and a blinking cursor (`> |`) and you *don't know what to do!*

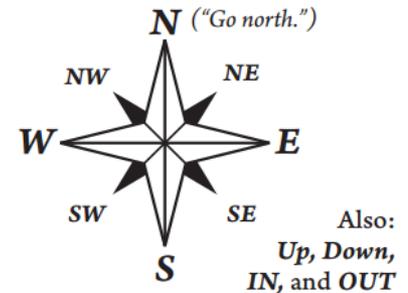
Don't panic kids—  
Crazy Uncle Zarf is here to help you get started...

These commands are very common:

<b>EXAMINE</b> it	<b>PUSH</b> it
<b>TAKE</b> it	<b>PULL</b> it
<b>DROP</b> it	<b>TURN</b> it
<b>OPEN</b> it	<b>FEEL</b> it
<b>PUT</b> it <b>IN</b> something	
<b>PUT</b> it <b>ON</b> something	

*When in doubt, examine more.*

Does the game intro suggest **ABOUT, INFO, HELP?**  
Try them first!



You are standing in an open field west of a white house, with a boarded front door. There is a small mailbox\* here.

\*Try opening!

You can try all sorts of commands on the things you see.  
Try the commands that make sense!  
Doors are for opening; buttons are for pushing; pie is for eating. (*Mmm, pie.*)

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If you meet a person, these should work:

**TALK TO** name  
**ASK** name **ABOUT** something  
**TELL** name **ABOUT** something  
**GIVE** something **TO** name  
**SHOW** something **TO** name

Each game has slightly different commands, but they all look pretty much like these.

You could also try:

<b>EAT</b> it	<b>CLIMB</b> it
<b>DRINK</b> it	<b>WAVE</b> it
<b>FILL</b> it	<b>WEAR</b> it
<b>SMELL</b> it	<b>TAKE</b> it <b>OFF</b>
<b>LISTEN TO</b> it	<b>TURN</b> it <b>ON</b>
<b>BREAK</b> it	<b>DIG</b> <b>IN</b> it
<b>BURN</b> it	<b>ENTER</b> it
<b>LOOK UNDER</b> it	<b>SEARCH</b> it
<b>UNLOCK</b> it <b>WITH</b> something	

Or even:

<b>LISTEN</b>	<b>JUMP</b>
<b>SLEEP</b>	<b>PRAY</b>
<b>WAKE UP</b>	<b>CURSE</b>
<b>UNDO</b> <sup>†</sup>	<b>SING</b>

<sup>†</sup>Take back one move — handy!

“What if I only want to type one or two letters?”

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**N/E/S/W/NE/SE/NW/SW: GO**  
in the indicated compass direction.

**L: LOOK**  
around to see what is nearby.

**X: EXAMINE**  
a thing in more detail.

**I: take INVENTORY**  
of what you possess.

**Z: WAIT**  
a turn without doing anything.

**G: do the same thing AGAIN**

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A service of the  
People's Republic of Interactive Fiction:

<http://pr-if.org>

# Beginner Tutorials and Web Games

- Brass Lantern
  - <http://www.brasslantern.org/beginners/beginnersguide.html>
- Emily Short
  - <http://inform-fiction.org/I7Downloads/Examples/dm/IntroductionToIF.pdf>
- IF Wiki FAQ
  - <http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/FAQ>
- IF playable online:
  - <http://pr-if.org/play/>
  - Infocom adventures online:  
<http://pot.home.xs4all.nl/infocom/>

# Early History: Colossal Cave Adventure

- [Colossal Cave Adventure](#) originally designed by Will Crowther in 1975-76 with map reflecting his knowledge of Mammoth Cave system
- Don Woods expanded Crowther's program to:
  - 3000 lines of code, 1800 lines of data
  - 140 map locations, 293 vocabulary words, 53 objects
  - travel tables, and miscellaneous messages
- Highly influential genre-starter, ported to many platforms and originating game memes, e.g.
  - "XYZZY"
  - "You are in a maze of twisty little passages, all alike"

# Adventure International and Adventureland

- [Scott Adams](#) (not Dilbert cartoonist) wrote [Adventureland](#) (1978), patterned loosely after Colossal Caves Adventure.
  - Sold independently through computer magazine ad → first commercial interactive fiction
  - founded [Adventure International](#) (1979-1985), the first commercial publisher of IF.
  - Other example games: Pirate's Cove, Mission Impossible, Pyramid of Doom
  - Commands mostly of 2-word form *<verb> <noun>*

# Infocom Parsers

- [Infocom](#) (1979-1989) produced [Zork](#), arguably one of the most popular IF works
  - Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Bruce Daniels, and Dave Lebling created Colossal-Cave-inspired Zork from 1977 through 1979 at MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science.
  - Released initially for TRS-80 in 1980, eventually selling more than 1M copies on many platforms
  - Series of games following Zork featured:
    - the most sophisticated language parser in a game (“attack the troll with the Elvish sword”)
    - An innovative interpreter that served as a the basis for all Infocom IF (same program – different game data)
    - “feelies” – plot-related items that sometimes served as copy protection
  - Currently available [online](#) or for download via [Gog.com](#)

# Evolution(?) to Graphical Adventures

- [Sierra On-Line](#) (1979 – present as Sierra Entertainment subsidiary of Activision)
  - Founded 1979 by [Ken](#) and [Roberta Williams](#)
  - [Mystery House](#) (1980) – first graphical text adventure
  - [King's Quest](#) (1983) – pioneered use of animation and pseudo-3D graphics in text adventure
- [LucasArts](#) graphical adventure sampling:
  - [Day of the Tentacle](#) (1993)
  - [Curse of Monkey Island](#) (1997)
  - [Grim Fandango](#) (1998)
  - [Sam and Max](#) (1993 – 2010)



# Modern IF

- As with book-movie comparisons, providing visualization has pros and cons.
- Surprisingly, with all the graphical glitz of modern games, IF as a text-based medium is alive and well, just as books persist alongside video storytelling.
- Two main competitions where you can find the best representative modern work:
  - XYZZY Awards  
([http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/Xyzzy Awards](http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/Xyzzy_Awards))
  - Annual IF Competition  
([http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/The Annual IF Competition](http://www.ifwiki.org/index.php/The_Annual_IF_Competition))

# Resources

- IF Wiki (<http://www.ifwiki.org>) – up-to-date information concerning games, competitions, authoring systems, etc.
- IF Archive (<http://www.ifarchive.org/>) – where you can find the latest interpreter software, games, authoring tools, etc.
- Interactive Fiction Database (IFDB; <http://ifdb.tads.org/>)
- Brass lantern (<http://www.brasslantern.org/>) – not so up-to-date site with good beginner introduction