

A 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
- See also 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—

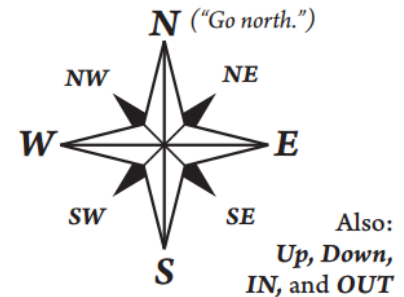
Crazy Uncle Zarf is here to help you get started...

These commands are very common:

EXAMINE it	PUSH it
TAKE it	PULL it
DROP it	TURN it
OPEN it	FEEL it
PUT it IN something	
PUT it ON 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:

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

Or even:

LISTEN	JUMP
SLEEP	PRAY
WAKE UP	CURSE
UNDO [†]	SING

[†]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