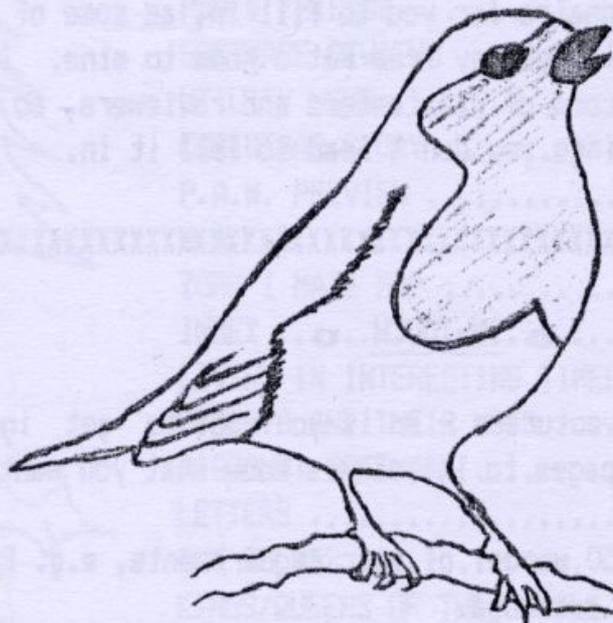


MERRY
CHRISTMAS

from

ADVENTURE

PROBE



Issue 7

December 1986

(c) ADVENTURE PROBE, 78 Merton Road, Highfield, Wigan. WN3 6AT

EDITOR : Sandra Sharkey





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~ QUESTIONNAIRES ~

I've enclosed another questionnaire for you to fill in, as some of the original ones have been mislaid in their journey from Pat's home to mine. I've designed this one to give me a full record of playtesters and reviewers, so if you're not interested in this side of things you don't need to fill it in.

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o IN-TOUCH o

Adventure Probe is read by adventurers - so if you want to get in touch with other adventurers, use these pages to let others know what you want.

Send us details (up to about 50 words) of your requirements, e.g. Penpals, items wanted or offered for sale or exchange.

This is a FREE service to readers of Probe please use it!

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to Issue 7 of Probe.

Thank you to everyone who found the time to send in contributions. Because of the good response I've been able to deliver the 'bumper issue' as promised.

That's the good news! Now for the bad! You all know that I try to write personally every month to all Probe's readers but it is becoming more and more difficult to do this as the readership grows; so in future I shall only be writing to people who write to me. I can, after all, write to everyone through the pages of the magazine. As most of you do write in, this will only affect those who don't. I'm sure you'll understand.

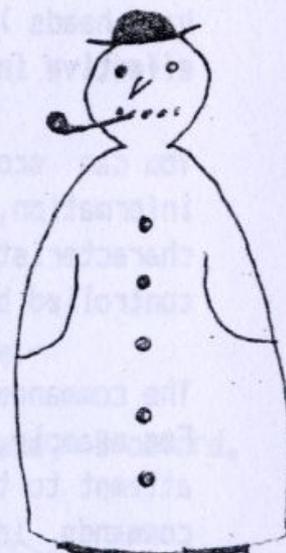
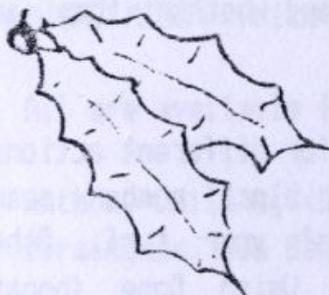
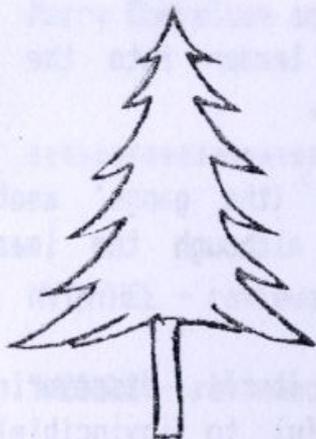
Hope you enjoy this 'festive' edition.

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND
A HAPPY NEW YEAR
Sandra



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PBM & Friends

This being the festive month of the year, our section is only short this month. With an upsurge in the post around Christmas, it is a particularly slow time in the PBM world. Turns are often late or delayed due to the large amount of post around Christmas.

As promised earlier we will bring you an in depth review of 'It's A Crime', the PBM game designed for people new to this form of adventuring. 'It's A Crime' is run by KJC Games and is by far the most popular PBM game in the country at this moment in time, with several thousand players.

As you would expect with a game designed for beginners, the rules are easy to understand and GM/Player communication is simplistic.

You play/act the part of a gang leader, in New York, in the distant future. The city is now a haven for gang wars, brutal muggings, murders, and other forms of felony. The police can do little, and more or less leave the gangs to fight amongst themselves, creating their own laws.

Your aim is simple. You must rise from a small time gang leader into the godfather of all the gangs, taking full control of the city.

Your gang consists of Pro's (the elite of the gang), Punks (the gangs' meat, hard heads) and the 'cruits (the largest part of the gang, although the least effective in fights and so on).

You can scout the 'blocks' directly around your own 'turf', discovering information, such as their strengths (ranging from pitiful to invincible), characteristics, warehouses, restaurants, lodgings, etc., and whether they are controlled by other gangs and so on.

The commands are also easy to use, consisting of a letter for different actions. For example, the letter C on your turn card followed by a block number means attempt to take CONTROL of that block, making it part of your turf. Other commands include Mugging, Buying Dope, Selling Dope, Using Dope (boosts morale!!), Bomb opposing blocks (arson), Gang Fights and several others.



The Turn Sheets are simple to fill out, you are allowed 4 commands until you are more established. You simply fill in the command letter, followed by the block number where you want to do it, and then the percentage of your gang to attempt the command. Do this 4 times, making sure the first is the most important and then send it off. The game is on a ten day turn around, giving plenty of time to decide what you want do.

However, certainly the best feature of the game is the price. It costs just £5.00 for eight turns (8 turns is the minimum amount of turns you can purchase), this means each turn costs around 63p which is excellent value.

'It's A Crime' is not for the young, or for people with strong views about drugs, fighting and other criminal activities. But it is an excellent game for the beginner and I would recommend it as a game to introduce you to PBMing. All in all a good buy!!

Well thats it for another month. Next month I'll bring you news of the next PBM convention, and review some more games.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New PBM Year from all of us to all of you.

Anthony 'Mudrik' Collins"

ADVENTURES FOR AMSTRAD AND SPECTRUM

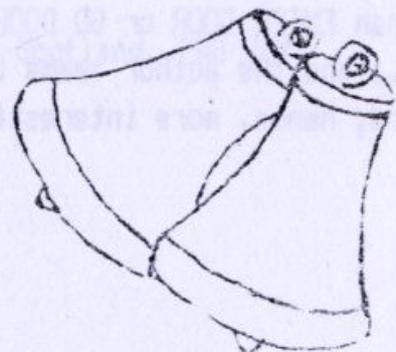
NYTHYHEL - reviewed in Issue 4 of Adventure Probe. Price £2.99.

THESEUS - reviewed in Issue 4 of Adventure Probe. Price £2.99.

MIAMI MICE - Price £1.99.

All are available for Spectrum and Amstrad by mail order only from:-

Anthony Collins, (DEPT. AP), 17 Larch House, 37 Shawsdale Road, Bromford, Birmingham. B36 8DG



SOFTWARE REVIEWS

TREASURE - David Edgar - Price £2.50

The opening screen gives you the entire plot of this adventure in just a few sentences - "Recover the Treasure from the hidden temple and return it to the forest gate. The temple is in the forest and you'll have to find it. Four coloured keys are needed to open the chest (containing the treasure). Remember, some creatures carry things of value."

This is a text-only adventure written using the Quill (although that fact does not seem to be acknowledged anywhere) which has one of the most attractive screen displays I have ever come across.

There's a chunky redesigned character set, black text on green paper, objects highlighted in a red flash, player's input in capital letters, program responses highlighted in a white flash, and a decent space left between the input and the response. All these features combine to create a display which is easy on the eye and a pleasure to read.

Although the adventure is, therefore, very competent technically, it is somewhat lacking in other directions.

Firstly, it is very small - less than 40 locations. Nothing intrinsically wrong with that, as Scott Adams has proved on a few occasions! However, where Mr. Adams scores, and Mr. Edgar does not, is in giving the adventurer an awful lot to do in those few locations. TREASURE, unfortunately, contains very few problems or puzzles with which to challenge the player.

It has very brief location descriptions which sometimes contain a clue, but don't create any atmosphere to speak of! This is compounded by the presence of a very weak EXAMINE command - responses consisting mainly of "You see nothing special". The overall effect being that it is very difficult for the player to feel involved in the game at all - so why should he/she be interested in it??

Apart from one or two 'sticky' inputs (GO THROUGH a door, for instance, rather than ENTER DOOR or GO DOOR), this was not a very difficult adventure to complete ... and the author seems to have ignored opportunities to make it more difficult and, hence, more interesting!

For instance, he introduces two characters - an ORC GUARD and a NASTY ORC - and then fails to use them in any constructive way! You can thump them with your sword, or you can ignore them completely! They have no effect whatsoever on the adventure. Why?? Likewise with the ORC CHIEFTAIN. This character does possess something you require, and you can thump him in order to get it! But wouldn't it have been slightly less predictable to have bribed him with the cigarette, or poisoned him with the food?

In conclusion, I would say that David Edgar is an adventure writer of some promise. His technical expertise is excellent. He now needs to concentrate on generating a more absorbing atmosphere in his adventures through the use of better location descriptions, a more powerful EXAMINE command, and more intricately constructed problems. If that happens, then I, for one, will look forward eagerly to his future products.

TREASURE is a simple, competent adventure, but at £2.50 for about two hours entertainment, I can't really recommend it.

Reviewer - JIM O'KEEFFE - Spectrum

ADVENTURES FOR THE 48K SPECTRUM

THE DRAGON OF NOTACARE - Read the review in Issue 4 of 'Probe'.

TREASURE - Reviewed this issue.

RESCUE FROM DOOM - Professor Tefal has been kidnapped and imprisoned in the mountain of DOOM and you have been assigned to rescue him. This adventure has pictures to complement the text description of every location except two.

PRICE: £2.50 each plus 30p postage and packaging, or £6 for all three plus 50p postage and packaging.

Send cheque/PO to:

David Edgar, (DEPT. AP), 1 High Parksail, Erskine, Scotland. PAB 7HY

LEATHER GODDESSES OF PHOBOS - Infocom - Price £24.99

The first thing that I have to say about this adventure is that it is definitely not for prudish people, as some of the descriptions are extremely explicit, in other words - this adventure is great fun!!!

You start the adventure in a pub - with an urge! There are two toilets, one for men and one for ladies, at this point you must choose which sex you are to be for the rest of the adventure.

After satisfying your urge, you notice a funny smell, this is where the Scratch'n'Sniff card comes in. The adventure tells you which number to sniff and you can then actually find out things from the smells.

Also included in the package is a 3D book and glasses, which is very good.

You will soon find yourself captured by a "thing", with hundreds of tentacles, and deposited in a cell. After finding your way out of the cell you should meet up with a friend, who is designing an "Anti-Leather Goddesses of Phobos Destruction Machine"!! To build this machine you must find an assortment of extremely odd items, such as a six foot length of rubber tubing!

After exploring your surroundings, you should soon find yourself in the Venusian jungle, being pursued by a randy, giant venus fly trap! After escaping from this you will find yourself turned into a gorilla by a mad scientist, experimenting into whether the sex drive is in the mind or the body.

This takes a lot of lateral thinking to escape! But once you do you can carry on to the Sultan's palace, where you will be asked a riddle. If you give the wrong answer it will mean certain death at the hands, or rather the paws, of the pet tigers. Answer correctly and you get an hour of bliss with any one of the sultan's many wives. This bit is well worth getting to!!! (I wonder what the ladies get! Sandra)

This is as far as I have got with the adventure but what I have seen has all proved to be very funny, enough to get you in hysterics! If you don't own a disk-drive, then beg, borrow or buy one to play this adventure - it is well worth it!

Reviewer - MARK GREAVES - Commodore 64

DRACULA - CRL - Price £9.95

This adventure, claims the author, is a "stunning masterpiece of Gothic horror". I found that this statement is not at all wrong! This adventure seems to be the adventurers dream. It contains graphics at certain points only, mainly when you get killed, it also contains some pretty good music, also mainly when you get killed.

You start the adventure outside the Golden Krone Hotel and the first problem is how to get past the coachman. With this out of the way you are free to wander around the hotel at your leisure and maybe have a meal before retiring to bed - and your nightmares! Not for the squeamish!

So far I have managed to find four ways to be killed during or after your sleep, each complimented by a gory picture and eerie music. The pictures have been digitised and then touched up, so they are extremely lifelike.

The adventure comes in three parts, the second part puts you on the coach to Dracula's castle and then into the castle - your first actual meeting with Dracula.

The third and final part goes back to England and you change persona to become Dr. Seward, a psychiatrist who owns an asylum. you receive a letter from a friend, telling you about Dracula. your main concern is with an inmate who has escaped - a weird person indeed, who feeds flies to spiders and then eats the spiders, in the belief that he will gain the strength of the flies!!!

All in all, this adventure has a fantastically eerie atmosphere all the way through and you find yourself being really drawn into it. On the minus side, you may find the pause, while the picture is displayed and the music plays, rather annoying after a while. But these are only small points against a really good adventure.

Well worth persevering with and good value for money. Highly recommended.

Reviewer - MARK GREAVES - Commodore 64

HEAVY ON THE MAGICK - Gargoyle Games - Price £9.95

An animated adventure for the 48K Spectrum and Amstrad CPC's.

Journey with me now, if you will, to one of the most dank and dismal dungeons known to Man. I speak of the deadly labyrinth which lies beneath the castle called Collodon's Pile! Here doth dwell all manner of ghostie, ghoulie and beastie - goblins, vampires, werewolves, wraiths, the dreaded Hydra, awesome Medusa herself and more ... much, much more!

Three exits are said to exist from this most pestilential place, but finding them will not be an easy task. For you are but one brave adventurer - albeit a fledgling magician - and the dangers before you are legion ... and lethal! And even if you manage, through luck and cunning, to shake off the ghastly attentions of the dungeon's dark inhabitants, still your troubles will not be over. Puzzles and problems of a quite different nature will rise to test your wits.

There are locked doors which need to be opened. Some require a key, others need a password. There are many keys scattered in the far flung corners, but which key will fit which door? Ah, there's the rub! And where does one find passwords? The Ogre and the Guards may give a clue, but these beings talk in riddles and understanding is not easily acquired. And what are the meanings of these strange signs etched into the dungeon walls? How does one pass through fire without being mortally scorched? How to cross a Chasm without perishing in the Great Abyss below it? So much to do, so much to see, so much to ponder over! Will the exits ever be found?

This is the scene set for HEAVY ON THE MAGICK, the latest animated adventure from the folks at Gargoyle Games. Like previous Gargoyle offerings, this one features an intelligent plot, large and detailed graphic characters, a vast landscape to roam around in, puzzles by the bucketful, humour by the ton, and a jolly good time to be had by all! Unlike the previous offerings, this one also allows for text input from the player.

Your task is to guide Axil the Able around the various parts of the dungeon in his quest to find the three exits which will deliver him from danger. On the way, you will discover the rich variety of dungeon monsters, a wealth of objects to examine and use, and lots of puzzles which all need solving.

At the start of the adventure, your Axil is awarded points for Stamina, Skill and Luck. Stamina is the most important as it reflects your life expectancy. If Stamina points fall to zero, you die. Stamina points, are used up as you explore. Combat uses them up at a faster rate. However, there are various foods scattered about which, when taken, will replenish your strength. And then there's Transfusion ...? Skill points reflect how effective your spell casting is likely to be. A low Skill rating and you may have to cast the same spell several times before it achieves the desired effect. A high Skill rating and the same spell works first time! And Luck ... well, Luck is Luck!

The graphics are just gorgeous. Bigger than in any other Gargoyle game. The animation is terrific. Just wait until you see Axil shrug his shoulders in resignation ... just wait until you see the wraiths give you a big, mournful, puppydog look - before attacking ... just wait till you see the Troll's maniacal grin as it tromps all over you ... just wait till you see the Hydra rise from its den, menace exuding from every pore! Real Magick! The dungeon itself is equally well drawn. A heavy, oppressive atmosphere is skilfully created and maintained.

The real revelation of the game however, is the command language used. It is so simple, yet so effective, it is genius! It depends heavily on the use of 20 or so "keywords" followed by whatever you wish to address. It "only" recognises about 400 words all told, but that is more than adequate for the needs of the adventure. No superfluous frills have been included ... no "take-the-fish-out-of-the-green-ear-and-put-it-in-the-blue-ear-then-walk-backwards-through-the-fourth-window-from-the-right" commands are allowed here ... but who needs them anyway?

Want to move? Enter "N" "S" "E" "W" etc., and off you go. Want to EXAMINE something? Enter "X, object" and it's done. Equally, "P object" and "D object" will pick something up and drop it again. Want to talk to a character? Enter the character's name followed by whatever you wish to say. Beautifully simple! Want to type ahead? It couldn't be easier. Enter as many commands as you like (each one separated by a comma) and when you've finished, press Enter once. Then sit back and watch Axil carry them all out. This is a useful feature because it allows you to move through locations very quickly ... hanging about in locations brings the monsters flocking to you! I don't know how many commands you can enter in a string like this as the program readily soaked up everything I fed into it ... and then executed each command perfectly! Smashing!

Congratulations are due to all at Gargoyle Games for creating a marvellously enjoyable adventure. They have been one of the few companies to make intelligent use of the capabilities of graphics in adventures, and now they have successfully managed to marry effective text input to their improved graphics techniques in such a way that one complements the other, and neither is mere decoration or padding.

I loved HEAVY ON THE MAGICK. There hasn't been a better adventure in 1986 ... and I doubt if there now will be. If you own a Spectrum or an Amstrad, get out and buy this NOW! If you own some other machine, eat your heart out!! (Or wait for the conversions!).

Reviewer - JIM O'KEEFFE - Spectrum

ADVENTURES FOR SPECTRUM AND COMMODORE 64 (QUICKLOAD)

HAMMER OF GRIMMOLD - reviewed in Issue 4 of Adventure Probe.

REALM OF DARKNESS - Recover treasure stolen from the King's castle in the face of a fierce dog, a wounded hyena and a fire breathing Mutant Mole.

MUTANT - Your job is to exterminate. Your mission is to seek out the Beast that is laying waste the mountainous regions of a small island.

WITCH HUNT - Based on Scottish folklore, this adventure puts you in the clutches of an evil witch. Your quest is simple, find your way home again.

THE JADE NECKLACE - Play the part of Phillip Mallow, private eye. Outwit Big Fats and his henchmen. Help the Police Captain put Big Fats behind bars.

All the above adventures plus LIFEBOAT and MATCHMAKER are £1.75 each or £3.20 for two from:

JACK LOCKERBY (AP), 44 Hyde Place, Aylesbury, Canterbury, Kent. CT3 3AL

LIFEBOAT - Jack Lockerby - Price £1.75

Does the thought of being lost at sea send shivers down your spine? If so, then read no further. As the title suggests, you have been shipwrecked and are adrift on the open sea in a small wooden lifeboat with four companions.

You have no food, your companions are somewhat edgy, thick fog enshrouds you and the occasional black fin can be seen circling the boat. What next?.....

Lifeboat is Quilled, Illustrated and Patched. Often when an adventure is written using the Quill it is treated as an inferior product. This is unfair, as a superior adventure like Lifeboat proves.

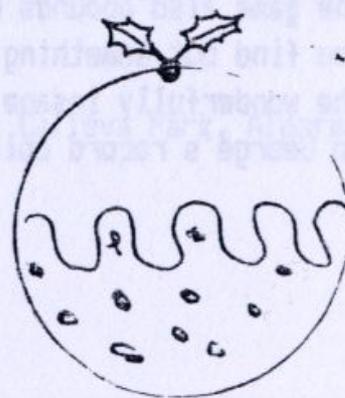
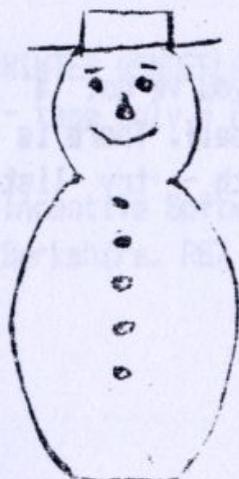
The Lifeboat is only the first location in an adventure which turned out to be the most enjoyable Spectrum adventure game which I have played recently, I don't want to spoil your fun, but if you have an affection for nursery rhymes then you are in for a treat.

There are many interesting, perhaps recognisable characters in this game with whom it is essential to interact. It is this interaction, not always to your benefit, which gives the game its charm. I enjoyed solving all the problems which, even when magic is involved, are logical and fit into the scenario perfectly.

The screen layout is particularly good. The graphics take up just over the top third of the screen, and the redefined text, white on black, appears just below. I don't particularly like graphics but these are O.K., good use having been made of the Illustrator's shading command. You also have the option of switching the graphics on or off.

I thoroughly recommend this very atmospheric adventure. It's great fun, great value for money, and even boasts a surprise ending.....

Reviewer - PAUL SERBERT - Spectrum



DEADLINE - Infocom (Disc only) - Price £4.99 to £40 (Shop around)
Interlogic Mystery Series: Advanced Level.

'Deadline' originally appeared in 1982 as the first of the Interlogic Mystery Series. Later games in this series (Suspect and The Witness) are undoubtedly more sophisticated in terms of interaction and programming skill, but 'Deadline' still makes other Detective style adventures like 'Sherlock' seem primitive.

You, the Detective, have been summoned to the estate of wealthy industrialist Marshal Robner, who died apparently due to a self-inflicted overdose a few days before. He was in his library, alone with the door bolted from the inside, an empty bottle of Ebullion (a tranquiliser which he had been prescribed) beside him. The Post Mortem indicated death due to Ebullion poisoning. His attorney however, is suspicious in that Robner had phoned him only days before his death to make a new will. Mrs. Robner has agreed that you can spend 12 hours on the estate in an attempt to gain further information, on the day his will is due to be read.

As you have probably guessed, the solution to this adventure does not depend on moving objects from one location to another etc. It depends on interacting with the other characters in the game, asking them the right questions and showing the right pieces of evidence to them. Thanks to Infocom's usual magic, it is possible to hold a rather complex conversation if you wish.

Objects can be fingerprinted, or sent to the lab. to be analysed. Once you feel that you have enough evidence to convict someone, you can arrest them. Your faithful sidekick Sgt. Puffy will appear and lead them off to jail. You will then receive a memo telling you the result of the trial.

The game's characters are excellently portrayed:
George Robner, the son, is a spoilt obnoxious little rich kid. Mr. McNab, the gardener, is a grouchy old Scotsman. And the enigmatic Ms. Dunbar, Robner's Personal Secretary.

The game also abounds with red herrings - just as you think you've got a lead, you find out something else that makes you want to kick yourself. There is also the wonderfully insane Infocom sense of humour to contend with - try listening to George's record collection for a while.

I believe that this was the first game that Steve Meretsky worked on for Infocom, so that probably explains the more bizarre aspects of the game.

Although, as stated earlier, 'Deadline' does not quite come up to the present-day Infocom standards, I would still heartily recommend it to anyone who fancies a different, if rather difficult, adventure. Especially as the C64 version was spotted just a few weeks ago in John Menzies at £4.99!

Ratings: Atmosphere - *****
Vocabulary - *****
Interaction - ****
Overall - ****

Reviewer - JOHN MACVIE - Commodore 64

INCENTIVE SOFTWARE

The first two GACed adventures in Incentive's Medallion Range are:-

The Legend of APACHE GOLD - written by Peter Torrance the author of SUBSUNK and SEABASE DELTA.

Lonesome Cowboy 'LUKE WARME', not a Dime to your name and only dreaming of riches. But there is a LEGEND. A legend of great riches in an Indian Burial Ground.

WINTER WONDERLAND - Breaking through the dense cloud cover you were relieved to see a dazzling white snowfield spread below you. Desperately preparing for a crash landing, you were distracted by a glint of sunlight on glass - a building! Could THIS be the lost civilisation?

Your attention however was drawn back to the ground hurtling towards you.....

APACHE GOLD is available on Commodore 64, Spectrum, Amstrad CPC - tape only - Price £7.95.

WINTER WONDERLAND is available on Commodore 64, Spectrum, Amstrad CPC and BBC B - tape only - Price £7.95.

Incentive Software Ltd., (Dept. AP), 2 Minerva House, Calleva Park, Aldermaston, Berkshire. RG7 4QW

UTILITY NEWS
by Malcolm Serbert

Up until now I have held the opinion that adventure game creators were too restrictive, and that those who used them would eventually suffer a sort of mental paralysis, where they would be afraid to try anything different, because they would be too firmly entrenched in the utility system.

However I could be wrong, I have just been in contact with Gilsoft and I have received full specification on the new Professional Writing System, or PAW as it will no doubt be known as.

I am sending for the utility today, and I hope to let you know my views upon its performance as soon as possible.

At the moment only the Spectrum 48K and Spectrum 128K versions are ready, but others will follow.

It costs £22.95 and seems to have just about everything that an adventure game author is ever likely to require. The possible exceptions being multi tasking routines which do exist, and artificial intelligence routines which still have a long way to go yet.

I have also heard of another product, this time from the Ram Jam corporation, it's called the Biro, and it is available on licence to anyone who wants to write an adventure with it.

The main restriction being that completed games must be vetted by the licence owners, and rejected if they are not considered good enough.

I understand that programming skill is not a factor, and they say anyone who understands English can use the system, so who amongst us is going to give it a try? I think I might be tied up with PAW for a while.

Finally it's that time of year, so Merry Christmas and seasonal greetings to everyone who reads this.

(See preview of PAW on page 24)

MISSION TO THE POLE!
OR
OLD ACQUAINTANCES ARE NOT FORGOTTEN!!

by Jim O'Keeffe

It was just about two weeks before Christmas when the call came. The SHARK, legendary head of the shadowy organisation known only as PROBE, wanted to see me. We met in the barren remoteness of a motorway service station. The briefing was short and crisp. The SHARK gave me a letter (I whistled softly as I read the name and address neatly printed on the envelope).

"I want you to deliver this" she said, "you leave immediately."

"Uh, sure, boss" I stammered, slipping the envelope into an inside pocket, "but why me?"

"Because you're avai...! Because you're the best agent available!" she retorted sharply. "Now make no mistake, Jim" she continued, moving in closer, "that letter must be delivered as quickly as possible. I cannot over-emphasise the importance of this mission!"

I gulped, and wondered how I could go about getting out of this, but the SHARK wasn't finished yet!

"In fact" she carried on "this mission is so important that even someone of your, uh, admirable, uh, qualities could not be expected to complete it alone. I have, therefore, arranged for a series of escorts to help you on your way".

"Well, uh, thanks boss!" I smiled, not really sure what she meant!

"I must leave now" said the SHARK, "here comes your first escort". And then she was gone! I turned around to see who my first escort might be.

The slim, lithe figure who stood there was dressed in a Kevlar leotard and carried a bubble helmet under one arm. Even without the slow, enigmatic smile I would have had no trouble in recognising the one and only - KIM KIMBERLEY!!



"KIM!" I cried in genuine pleasure, "It's good to see you again old friend! How have you been? Where have you been? They told us you were dead!" The words gushed from me in an uncontrollable torrent. The KIMBERLEY smile broke into a low, throaty chuckle.

"Well, as you can see, reports of my death have been greatly exaggerated! I simply slipped out of Enoch when the place appeared to be getting too programmed for comfort. It pleased my successors to put it about that I was dead."

KIM led me to a SKYFLYER parked on the tarmac outside and, within minutes, we were airborne and heading northwards. KIM piloted the craft with the easy relaxed grace with which I had become so familiar and I felt myself relaxing also, despite the heavy burden of the SHARK's letter in my pocket. The appearance of the first snowfield below us rekindled some old memories which I decided to share with KIM.

"Remember our time aboard the SNOWBALL, KIM? When we were stumbling all over the snowfield in the dark because we couldn't get the BATPAK out of the VIDEO VIEWER and into the TORCH? Remember that?"

"Sure" said KIM, "it was pretty hairy for a while! But we made it in the end!"

"Yeah!" I said, joining in with KIM's laughter, "and we also managed to get the BATPAK into the TORCH in the end too! That helped!"

Our talk continued as the miles slid past. I told KIM of my recent adventures in Enoch in the company of the one known only as WORM. The enigmatic smile was momentarily replaced by a dark scowl as I revealed the wicked deception perpetrated by the Enoch Council using a fake Alien Spaceship. But the moment passed quickly and soon the small craft echoed to KIM's hearty laughter as I recounted the climatic denouncement in the Seat of Power which gave WORM and I our final victory!

"Ah!" said Kim, "it does my heart good to know that there are still some in Enoch who possess a keen mind and a brave soul. There were times, just before I left, when it proved difficult to tell the people from the robots, so alike were they in programmed behaviour and thought! Perhaps the robots are all the future Mankind has?"



The smile had faded now and there was something in KIM's eyes which was infinitely sad. But the SKYFLYER floated gently to a halt, the canopy opened, and the chill night air spilled in around us, breaking the mood. I looked out on a land covered with snow for as far as the eye could see. The wind blew strongly and sharply, but we were on the edge of a forest and I knew, that once inside it, the worst effects of the blow would be dissipated.

"Your next escort will meet you just inside the forest's edge" said KIM, "take good care ... and good luck!"

"You too, old friend" I called from the hard-packed surface of the snow, "and KIM ... there's one thing that robots will never be able to do ... write adventure games!"

"I wouldn't be too sure" shouted KIM, "have you played HUNCHBACK?!"

The canopy slid shut and with just a whisper from its engines, the SNOWFLYER sped away. I gave a brief, fond wave and then hurried towards the protective shelter of the forest before the wind froze the blood in my veins. It seemed that the only warm spot in my whole body was the place where the SHARK's letter lay, burning a hole in my pocket!"

As I stepped into the deeper gloom beneath the trees, a match flared brightly just off to my right, revealing a silhouetted figure leaning against a trunk. In the brief illumination, I noted the figure was wearing a deerstalker hat, smoking a curling Meerschaum pipe, had a bow and quiver slung across his back and a violin neatly tucked under his chin! It couldn't be - but it was! ROBIN OF SHERLOCK!!

I stepped up and introduced myself. The great, lincoln-green detective appraised me silently. I looked into his deep, grey eyes, and I knew, with absolute certainty, that behind the smooth, charming exterior there was not the slightest trace of a brain at all!

"The Kipper Flies at Midnight" I whispered, giving the password. ROBIN thought carefully about that and then said, "That's as may be, but me and you have got to walk! I'm here to guide you safely through the forest." He relit his pipe with another match, "We will need to be discreet" he said, tossing the still-lit match over his shoulder, where it landed in a tinder-dry hollow stump which promptly exploded in a fountain of flame and cascading sparks!



"We will also need to travel swiftly" continued ROBIN, obliviously twisting and turning the RUBIK'S MAGIC which he produced from a pocket. "If only I could finish this we could be on our way!"

I argued relentlessly, but to no avail. It was fully 45 minutes later before ROBIN tossed the perplexing toy over his shoulder into the blackened and still smouldering stump, declaring "There must be a bug in that copy!" We then set off through the forest. I slipped silently through the trees, conscious of the need for silence. ROBIN led the way, playing a sweet, 10 decibel melody on his violin which was so painfully out of tune that all the squirrels for miles around began to howl like werewolves! Not for the first time, I began to wish that I'd been somewhere else when the SHARK's call had come!!

Throughout the night, ROBIN led me along the many circuitous and tortuous paths which criss-crossed the forest. Slowly, we drew ever closer to my ultimate destination. The going was hard ... the pace relentless ... there were times when we didn't know where our next squirrelburger was coming from ... but we forged on nevertheless! As we travelled, ROBIN recounted to me the news from the forest!

HURN, it seemed, was completely recovered from his ordeal at the hands of MORIARTY and was now busy building a chain of multi-storey garden sheds with full carparking facilities! GODFATHER SMURPH and MOTHER SUPERIOR had mended their ways, and were now running a combined vegetarian bistro and breakdancing club! DOROTHY had returned from Huddersfield and was busy boring everybody with her holiday snaps - at every conceivable opportunity!

Thus did we pass our journey in merry banter, and the coming of the northern dawn found us at last on the far edge of the forest. I bid ROBIN a fond adieu - resisting his offer to take just one more turn around the outskirts of the forest - and thanked him heartily for his kind assistance. The freedom-fighting, living legend merely shrugged his shoulders and wished me well. Then he wandered away ... and before long the forest once again shook to the strains of another discordant melody!!

The weather was now more bitter ... the snow much deeper ... the wind stronger and more cutting. I pulled the folds of my trenchcoat tighter about me, but it gave little protection from the elements. I could no longer feel the presence of the all-important letter in my pocket ... I just prayed that it was still there!



I trudged on, up to my knees in the soft snow drifts, towards a small rise where I could see my next escorts awaiting. I knew I could not be far from the NORTH POLE now ... my mission was nearly complete.

The two who awaited me atop the small rise were both small. One was about half the normal height, fat and brightly dressed with leathery, hairy feet which were completely bare! The other was taller (although still small by human standards) with a long beard, a haughty air and wearing a sky blue hood with a long silver tassel. I approached in stunned disbelief!

"Upon my word! BILBO BAGGINS and THORIN OAKENSHIELD! It's been an age since I last saw you!"

"Your pardon, sir" said BILBO, "but you seem to have the advantage of us?" I introduced myself. "Ah! Of course!" said BILBO, "You must forgive us, but one travels with so many adventurers - it is hard to remember all the names! you know, I've been 'there and back again' that many times, I'm fully half a foot shorter than I used to be!"

I chuckled along with the brave old Hobbit, and we set off on the last phase of my journey. THORIN, as is his habit, set off in a completely different direction to us, but this seemed to bother BILBO not at all. He set off at a goodish pace, whistling a merry little elvish tune.

Before long we began to descend into a shallow valley, its slopes dotted with strong, young fir trees. The going was now much easier - we half-walked, half-slid towards the bottom - covering ourselves in snow, and drinking in the pure delight of simply being alive! I felt my fatigue and fears lift from me, renewing my strength and determination to succeed!

At the bottom of the valley we found a small cottage, drifts of snow banked up against its sides, smoke curled gently from its chimney. This was the place I sought ... the home of the man to whom the SHARK had addressed her letter. I had made it! ... I had made it!! ... I HAD MADE IT!!!

I danced an impromptu little jig to signify my pleasure! During which time, THORIN rejoined BILBO and I ... but from where I didn't quite see!!



Breathless, I approached the cottage door and THORIN knocked loudly upon it. It opened with a jerk - and all three of us - hobbit, dwarf and man - tumbled into the inside hallway in an ungainly heap! We ended up at the feet of the cottage owner, who was rocking with laughter at our predicament.

I managed to untangle myself and scrambled to my feet. Brushing the snow from my clothes, I tried to splutter my apologies, but the large man in red trousers would have none of it! He ushered me to a fireside chair where I might warm myself, and pressed a hot drink into my hand. I allowed myself to relax.

The warm liquid and the roaring log fire soon brought a thaw into my bones, and I was able to fumble the SHARK's letter from my pocket and hand it over.

"Well, what's this?" said my host, reading the address on the envelope, "SANTA CLAUS, Small cottage, North Pole ... HO! HO! HO!!" He slit it open and extracted a flimsy sheet of paper. "Dear SANTA ..." he read, "What I would like for Christmas is ... HO! HO! HO! What a list! What a list!" He stood up and began to pace back and forth, still reading the letter.

"Let me see ... My Little Pony Dream Castle ... yes, I think I still have one of those left ... The Collected Works of Motorhead ... well, that should raise a roof or two ... ah! a few books ... The Melbourne House Guide to Bug-free Adventure Writing ... The Level 9 Meaningful Graphics Compendium ... two classic volumes those ... and, good gracious! A Laserprinter! However am I going to get that down the chimney?" He broke off and turned towards me. "I'm sorry my young friend, but I must leave you. I must see to these requests at once! Make yourself at home ... eat, drink, relax ... when I return I shall arrange your passage home!"

SANTA stomped off towards the door, pulling his coat on as he went. I felt his booming laugh shake the entire room as he continued to read the SHARK's letter. "HO! HO! HO! A mithril jacket and a length of strong rope ... what possible use could they be?" I heard him say, just before the door closed behind him!

I joined BILBO and THORIN at the table, where they had already managed to demolish a small mountain of food and a large cask of ale. I dug in with a light heart and a good appetite. The mission was over. The SHARK was now guaranteed her Chrissie prezzies and all was once more right with the world!

I settled down to enjoy an evening of most convivial company. BILBO, THORIN and I talked long into the night - discussing adventures long past and yet to come - places visited and dangers faced - triumphs and heroic failures!

The time passed quickly and 'ere long the ale began to run dry and we retired to our beds.

As I lay amongst some warm fur pelts, I reflected that tomorrow I would be home again and, with that pleasing thought, I was on the verge of drifting off to sleep when, from elsewhere in the cottage, THORIN began to sing, very loudly and very drunkenly about GOLD!!!

I wistfully wondered if the season of goodwill to all men might not necessarily apply to dwarves!!

A most merry Christmas and happy New Year to all of you!



HINTS

SNOW QUEEN - Geoff Wing

Part 1

Try having a wash, look under the bed, kiss grandma, give purse to old lady.

Part 2

Enter password "PRIMULA", talk to pigeons, look ankle, look bed, take knife, look baths, cut rope, look perches, cut strings.

.....

TWIN KINGDOM VALLEY - Vernon Leigh

The witch wants her crystal ball. Remember, trying to kill her is useless. The dragon is an annoying beast. There are two ways of dealing with it. (1) Hit him with the staff (it's a type of gun), (2) Free the giant, take him to Watersmeet and you can have a wonderful time dragon bashing. To rescue the princess, (SAVE on this one), wear the amulet from the Forest King, only then when you open her prison cell will she recognise you.



PROFESSIONAL ADVENTURE WRITER

from Gilsoft

A preview by G. T. Kellett

I first got to hear about this from a piece in Popular Computing Weekly (PCW). I phoned Gilsoft straight away and they were only too eager to give me details (it is a pity they aren't so responsive to postal communications as they are to telephonic ones!).

When I received the notes they sent me, I found them to be lacking in detail and there were certain discrepancies between these, the short piece in PCW, and other information imparted to me in the first 'phone conversation. So I rang them again to get more details, most of which I got, but in the course of this second conversation certain other differences from the supplied notes came to light.

There was also some vacillation about the launch date. The date I had been given the first time as the FIRM launch date was now being stated as only a PROJECTED launch date. However, by the time you read this it SHOULD have already been launched.

So what will you get for your £22.95 - I wonder if this price was influenced by the fact that this is also the price of GAC? What you get is a system that combines all the features of the QUILL, ILLUSTRATOR and PATCH, some features similar to GAC, and a few completely new ideas.

What you do not get, unfortunately, is compatibility with the QUILL suite of programs. The other bad news is that there are two different versions for the two memory sizes, the one for the 128K has the text and graphics sections all in one. It will work on the 48K (I am told it senses which machine it is in and configures itself accordingly) but leaves only about 22K for the data-base, against 110K when used on the 128K.

The 48K version (which I presume only works in 48K mode on the 128K) is split in the fashion of the QUILL/ILLUSTRATOR into text and graphics sections loaded separately, the further bad news is that the data-bases of the two versions are not interchangeable, although adventures written with either will run on the other (providing when using the 128K you stay within the 48K size).

Using the QUILL system as a reference point I will now outline the salient features:-

1) It will cope with whole sentences, allowing punctuation and 'speech facility' (i.e. you can put words between quotes), I am not quite sure how it processes a sentence, but it appears to do this in a similar way to the QUILL, matching words in the vocabulary and assigning 'word values' to them, but which are then made use of in a GAC like manner.

The Vocabulary now consists of separate tables for Verbs, Nouns, Adverbs, Adjectives, Prepositions etc., with a maximum of 250 words in each table and a maximum total of 1500 words for all of these, with as many synonyms as space allows.

2) The Event and Status tables are replaced with Multiple Process Tables (MPT), (255 of them are available, whether the 256th is used as a master table to deal with making sense of the words input I can only speculate), they are used in a similar manner to QUILL's Event & Status Tables, but conditions and actions can be mixed together and not kept in separate fields of the table. There is an action that allows you to 'call' a Process Table, whether as in a GOSUB, or GOTO fashion, and from where this is done I did not ascertain.

3) There are now 256 flags, 240 of which are free for use by the writer, the others store 'word values' etc. Actions to add to, subtract from, copy and compare flags, also to ascertain object positions are now included. (I wonder where they got the idea for these? I only comment on this because ALL of these were outlined by me in the proposal I sent to Gilsoft when I offered them the 'proto-FIX', and for those of you familiar with THE-FIX, all of these can be implemented using the ADD and SUB actions).

Also PUTIN and TAKEOUT (these were missing from the notes, vaguely mentioned the first time, but detailed in the second 'phone call), actions to implement 'container objects', I did not ascertain where objects placed inside a 'container object' are 'stored' - in a Location perhaps? (Something similar to these were also in my proposal, but mine would have implemented 'vehicle objects' as well).

A welcome inclusion is that of a GETALL action. Movements (the unconditional ones) between Locations are dealt with by a 'Connections Table' which is processed after the MPT, not before as with the QUILL.

The facility for pseudo-independent characters is not specifically catered for, as the piece in PCW implied they were, but must be implemented by the writer using MPT if they are required.

4) In the Graphics department, it has a character designer to produce the alternative sets. The actual Graphics system seems to be a 'souped up' version of the Illustrator, with a faster shade routine and 'rubber-banding' on line drawing, still lacking circle or arc drawing (far too slow they said, and I hope if it is similar to the Illustrators, they are not still claiming '256 different shade patterns', as there are not).

You have a choice of screen formats; full screen pictures (as per Illustrator), split screen (as per Patch with partial screen pictures), the third choice has been changed from 'text overlaying picture' (as per Patch with full screen pictures), to a 'continuous scroll mode' (when the text reaches the bottom the whole screen scrolls up), lastly split screen with fixed windows (picture stays put, text scrolls independently, similar to The Hobbit), where applicable a 'scroll' prompt is given. You can have as many pictures as you have locations (maximum 256 as per the Quill/Illustrator), but you can 'call up' pictures other than that of the current location with a PICTURE n command.

5) Objects can be assigned 'weights', and the Patch facilities for the 'weight' the player can carry to be varied as the adventure progresses. RAM SAVE/LOAD and multiple character sets (with apparently the ability to change between them in a single message) are incorporated, as well as the random choice prompts as per the Quill, you can now control which prompt is printed.

6) A 'time-out' option facility, whereby if the player does not input anything for a while then processing continues, (I presume for one extra pass round the loop).

7) Compression of text by up to 40% from a pre-prepared dictionary (prepared by whom? Gilsoft or the writer?), originally this was to be available only on the 48K version, but despite saying they did not think it was strictly necessary, they would now be including it on the 128K version as well.

The Professional Adventure Writer (PAW as it will indubitably be known), retains the single letter input to select an option, menu format of the Quill.

To what market is PAW directed? Well it has a distinct bias to larger memory machines, (despite the concession to a 48K version, which incidentally will be coming out sometime after the 128K one), so 48K owners will be at a disadvantage. Neither are Gilsoft going to endear themselves with current Quill users by bringing out a new system that supercedes the Quill but is incompatible with it. As usual they are releasing it only for the Spectrum to start with, (when quizzed about the launch date of PAW for other machines they would only say 'sometime next year', although a comment made by them to a remark I made, that ought they not to have brought it out earlier so that writers would have been able to produce adventures in time for Christmas, got a reply to the effect that 'it would take six months before writers got completely to grips with the full potential of PAW' may give a clue).

Termining it 'Professional' implies to some extent that they expect software houses to use it, but most of the larger adventure writing houses have their own 'in-house' systems, (e.g. LEVEL 9 has its A-code and RAM-JAM their BIRO, which they also intend to sell to other adventure houses), and some of those who were using the Quill, like Fergus McNeill & Delta 4 who now have SWAN, are dropping it for systems they have developed.

That leaves small adventure houses and individual authors, how many of them can afford to take the 6 months Gilsoft say it will take to learn to use PAW fully? (The non-interchangeability of data-bases between the two memory sizes, requiring an adventure to be input twice if you want to release an adventure on both, does not help in that respect). And, despite splitting the manual into 'beginners guide' and 'full technical details' sections it can hardly be said to be a system for novices, the Quill is much more an 'entry-level' system, made even more attractive with the price cut to £8.95 each for the Quill/Illustrator or £16.95 for the pair.

In conclusion I will say, don't throw away your Quill just yet, keep it for writing on the 48K, (and dare I suggest, even upgrade it with THE-FIX, miniFIX, or the forthcoming THE-FIX+), and get PAW for writing big adventures on 128K only, because it is not worth the bother of having to buy a second version for, re-do adventures to also go onto, or the restrictions compared to the 128K, with the 48K machine.

H.A.L.A. (The Hints Archive for Lost Adventurers)

Everyone knows how desperately frustrating it can be to come to a problem in an adventure that seems to have no solution. Or to run out of locations after visiting the first half dozen. Well, H.A.L.A. was founded to help you at those most annoying moments.

H.A.L.A. are trying to become the foremost leading reference service for the serious adventurer. No membership fee is required, all they ask is that if you have an enquiry could you please include clues and/or maps for any adventures that you have fully or partially completed. They also ask you to send in a list of all your completed adventures for future reference and, as no fee is required, an enclosed SAE would be appreciated and would speed up the reply service considerably.

The clues/maps you send will contribute to what they hope will become the largest and most extensive adventure users service in the country. Another branch of the service is to put adventurers having problems with the same game in touch with each other. If the answer to your particular problem is not to be found in their archive, then all possible efforts will be made to acquire the solution you need and it will be sent off to you as soon as it is available. If this situation arises you will be advised immediately so that you can proceed with another game in the interim.

If you would like further details of H.A.L.A. then write (enclosing a SAE) to: Sonia Griffiths-Glover, H.A.L.A., (Dept. AP), 38 Bellfield Drive, Well Lane, Willerby, E. Yorks. HU10 6HQ

BUGS AND AMUSING RESPONSES

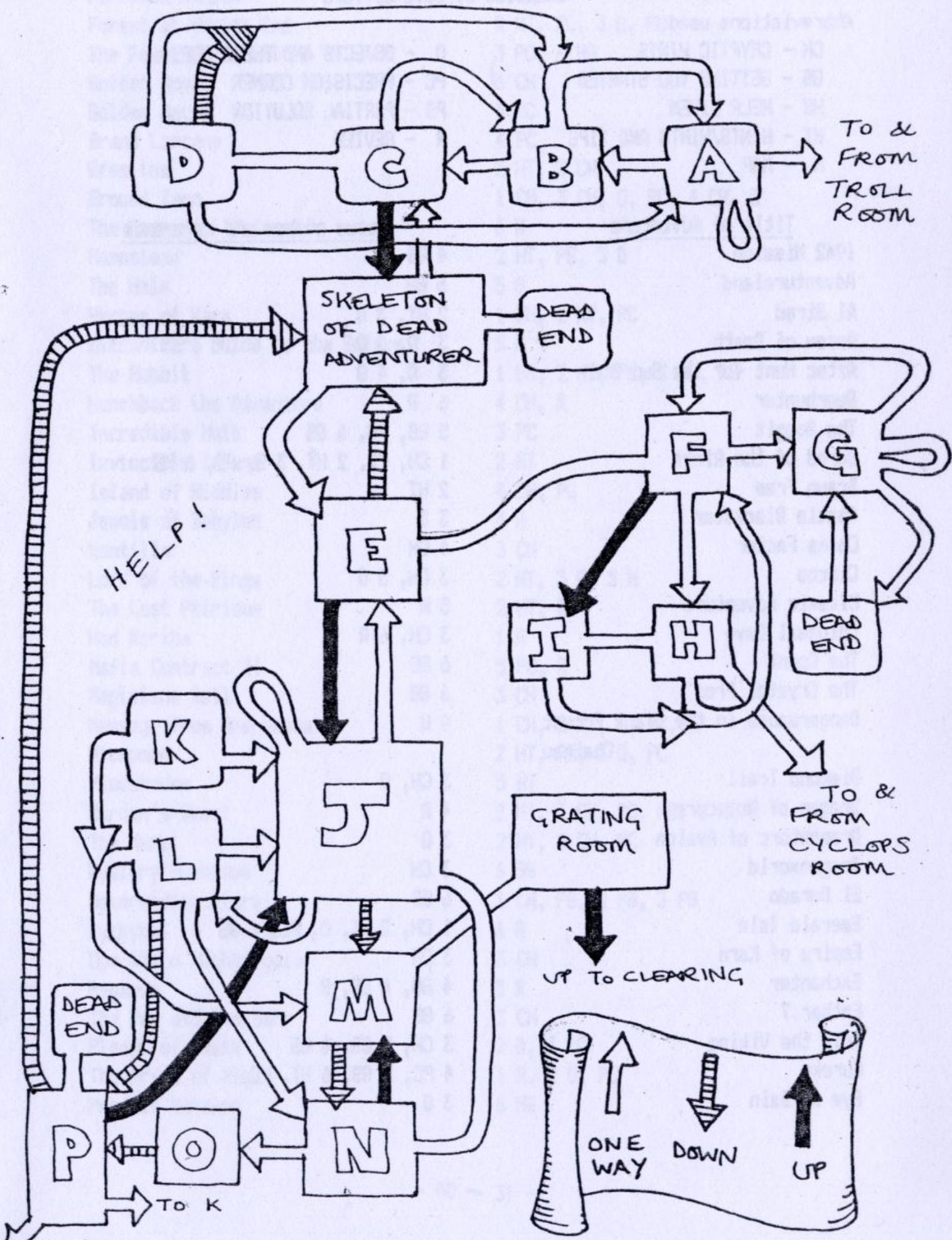
John Macvie recommends the following inputs for Deadline: ARREST ME, KISS GEORGE. Also in Leather Goddesses of Phobos: TIE RUBBER HOSE, TIE ROPE TO SULTAN'S WIFE, WHIP SULTAN'S WIFE. Zork 1: HELLO, ZORK, EXAMINE ME, KILL ME. Planetfall: KISS ME.

John also sent some 'suggestive' suggestions for the above games, if you would like to know what they are, let me know and I'll send them in a "plain brown package" so that nobody will know what a dirty mind you've got!.....Sandra

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THE DREADED ZORK MAZE - MAPPED!

DRAWN BY CHRISTOPHER HESTER.



Fantasia Diamond	5 O
Ferryman Awaits	6 GS
Forest at Worlds End	2 HT, PC, 3 O, PC
The Fourth Protocol	3 PC, 6 HG
Golden Apple	3 CH
Golden Baton	4 PC
Grand Larceny	4 PC
Gremlins	2 HT, 3 CH
Ground Zero	1 CH, 3 CH, O, PC, 4 CH, O
The Hammer of Grimold	6 R
Hampstead	2 HT, PS, 5 O
The Helm	5 O
Heroes of Karn	1 CH, 2 HT, PC
Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy	5 R
The Hobbit	1 PS, 2 HT, PS, 3 PC, PS
Hunchback the Adventure	4 CH, R
Incredible Hulk	3 PC
Invincible Island	2 HT
Island of Riddles	4 CH, PC
Jewels of Babylon	4 M
Kentilla	3 CH
Lord of the Rings	2 HT, 3 O, 5 H
The Lost Phirious	2 HT, R
Mad Martha	1 R
Mafia Contract II	5 PC, R
Magicians Ball	3 CH
Message from Andromeda	1 CH, 2 HT, O, PC, R
Micromen	2 HT, PC, 3 O, PC
Mindshadow	5 HT
Mordon's Quest	2 HT, 3 CH, PC, PS, 5 H, O
The Mural	2 HT, 4 CH, PC
Mystery Funhouse	6 GS
Neverending Story	1 CH, PS, 2 PS, 3 PS
Nythyhel	6 R
Operation Nightingale	3 CH
Pegasus	5 R
The Pen and the Dark	3 CH
Planet of Death	2 R, 3 PC
The Price of Magik	1 R, 2 O, PC
Project Volcano	6 HG