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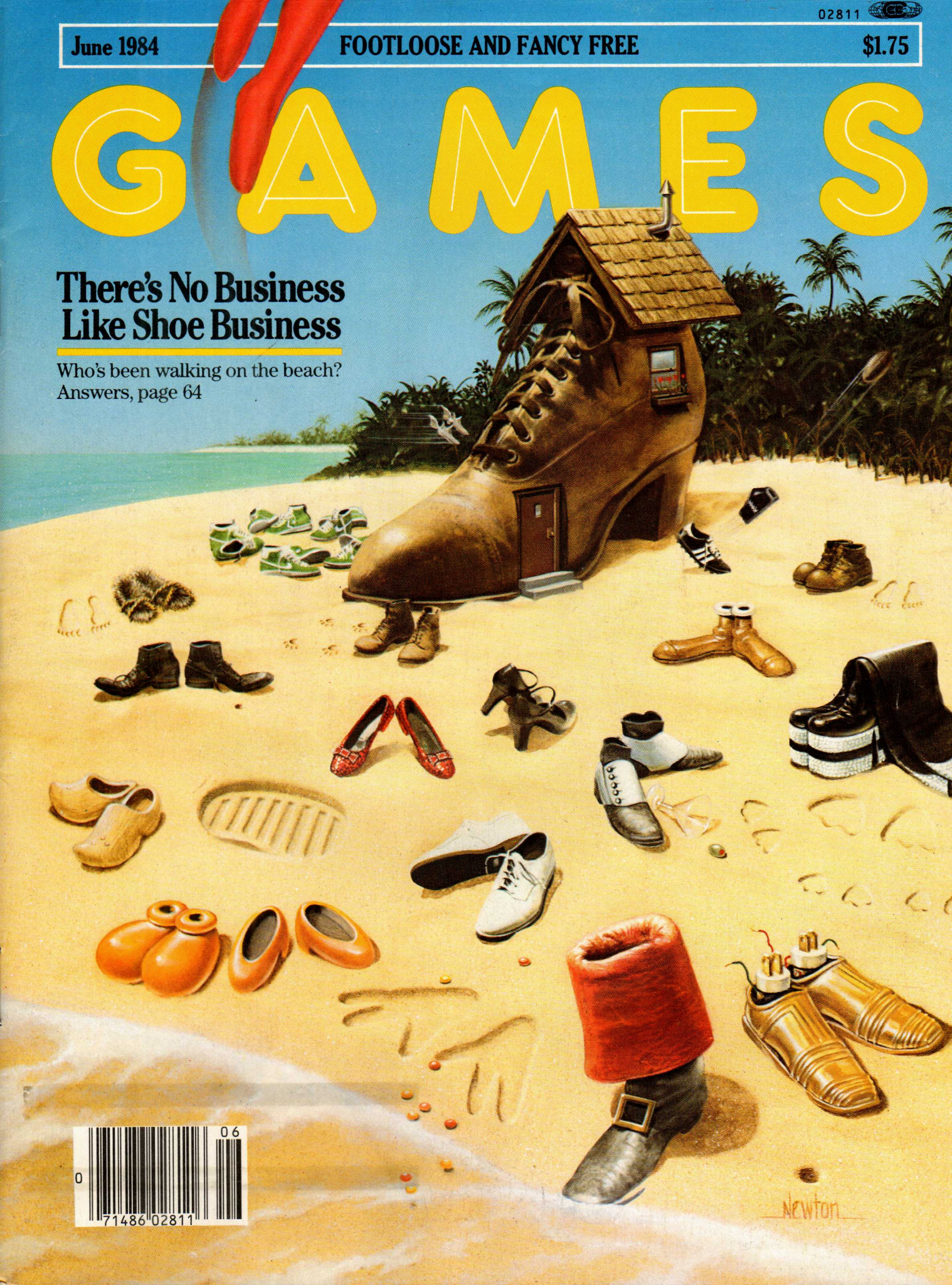
GAMES

There's No Business Like Shoe Business

Who's been walking on the beach?
Answers, page 64



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JUNE 1984

GAMES

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FEATURES

PENCILWISE

CONTEST

DEPARTMENTS

Difficulty Rating Smooth Sailing ★ Uphill Climb ★★ Proceed at Your Own Risk ★★★ Mixed Bag ★☆

Cover Illustration Richard Newton **Puzzle** Stephanie A. Spadaccini

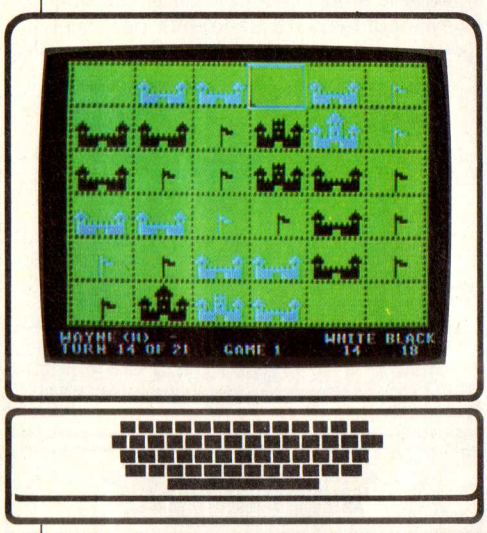
GAMES & BOOKS

Edited by R. Wayne Schmittberger

Fortress by Jim Templeman and Patty Denbrook; (Strategic Simulations, Inc., on disk for Commodore 64 and Apple and Atari computers, around $35)

On the surface, Fortress is a simple, fast-paced strategy game in which two players (either or both of whom may be the computer) build castles on a 6×6 grid in an attempt to control territory. But on a deeper level, this disk allows human players to create computer extensions of themselves by "training" different computer-controlled characters to play the game: The computer will learn from its mistakes and gradually improve, until the human finds it difficult to defeat his own creation.

Each player in turn selects a square (using keyboard or joystick) on which he wants to build. Pressing a button creates a castle of his color in the square, and flags of his color on the four adjacent squares, indicating the additional territory controlled by the castle. Instead of building a new castle, a player may double or triple the strength of an existing one. An enemy castle is captured by bringing sufficient strength to bear against its square. Whoever controls more territory after a fixed number of turns (players decide how many) wins.



PHOTOGRAPH BY KIMBERLEY BUTLER

Five computer opponents are on the disk, each with its own strength and style. After a series of games, you may update their learning by adjusting the strategy tables they use to choose moves. Updated computer-controlled players can be stored on disk under new names, and later tested against their "ancestors."

The strategy tables are probably not complex enough to enable a computer player to win consistently against a strong human. When playing second, for example, the computer is not capable of adopting the strategy of imitating the opponent—which is perhaps just as well, since that strategy guarantees a tie, and can often win if the symmetry is broken on the last move of the game. But the game's limitations are minor; if anything, they add to the unpredictability and excitement of a match between two differently trained computer opponents.

Pitting your trained computer opponent against someone else's is a fascinating new mode of gameplay. Its great potential, first suggested by games like Robotwar and Worms?, is still largely unexplored. —R. W. S.

Quadwrangle (available from Hiron Games Ltd., 25 Barons Keep, Gliddon Rd., London W14, 9AT UK; $10 includes postage; available in the U.S. later this year)

Playing this fast, addictive, two-player game is like engaging in nine simultaneous tug-of-war contests in which your decisions—and the luck of the dice—determine where you are gaining and losing ground.

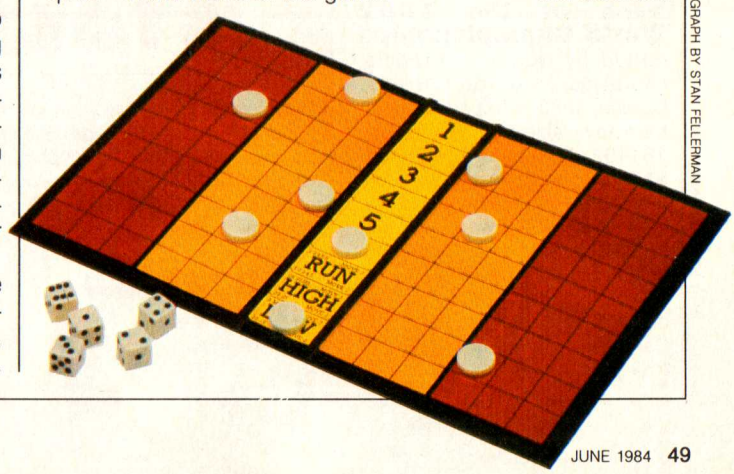
At the start, a marker is placed in the middle of each of the board's nine columns. Six columns are labeled from 1 to 6, the other three "high," "low," and "run." The first player throws five standard dice, and may rethrow any number of them a second and third time. Depending on the result of the final throw, the player moves one or more markers along the columns toward his "goal," an area on his own side of the board. The second player now throws the dice, and his final roll entitles him to move markers—often the same ones that were just moved—away from the first player's goal and toward his own.

In the first six columns, a marker is moved one space less than the number of dice showing one of those numbers. Thus if a final throw is 6-6-5-5-5, markers can be moved one space in the 6 column and two in the 5 column. But since this throw adds up to a total of 27, the player can elect to move the marker in the "high" column, which requires a throw in the 23–30 range. Similarly, the "low" column may be used on a total count of 12 or less.

To move in the "run" column requires a sequence from 1 through 5 or 2 through 6. Shooting for this is risky, since a miss leaves you very little; but if you happen to throw a run, chances are the opponent won't be able to move the marker back.

The player who gets three markers in his goal at the same time wins. But no marker is ever safe—even in a goal, a marker can be pulled out by the opponent, so the outcome of the game is in doubt until the final throw.

The strategic decisions—whether to play offensively or defensively and when to abandon one column to concentrate on another—are interesting enough to make you want to play longer. The normal playing time of 10–15 minutes can be extended—and the battle made more complicated—by requiring four markers in a goal to win, which also justifies the "quad" in the name of the game. —Sid Sackson



PHOTOGRAPH BY STAN FELLERMAN

Krakatoa (available from Xanadu Leisure, Ltd., Box 10-Q, Honolulu, HI 96816; $12.95 includes airmail postage)

This may be the first dice game in which the players' dexterity affects the outcome as much as chance and strategy. The object of the game is to score points by throwing and rethrowing (as part of the same turn) nine 12-sided dice, or "dodecas," which have blue, red, and yellow colored dots on their faces instead of numbers.

The nine dodecas actually comprise three distinct sets—white, gray, and black—of three dodecas each. The point value of a throw is determined by adding up the values of the color patterns thrown on each of these three sets of dodecas. The best patterns are named after volcanoes; naturally, the highest scoring (three yellows) is called a Krakatoa.

Each round, a player throws all nine dodecas, then makes four successive rethrows of single sets of three. On every rethrow—here's where dexterity counts a lot—the player must hit at least one of the dodecas left on the table, and must either turn that dodeca to a new face or move it at least an inch. A moderately soft playing surface (such as a tabletop covered by a towel) gives best results. With planning and accuracy, a player can greatly improve his chances of obtaining special bonuses. For example, achieving a cumulative score evenly divisible by 20 earns a "Big Quake," which has the effect of quadrupling the score of that player's next throw.

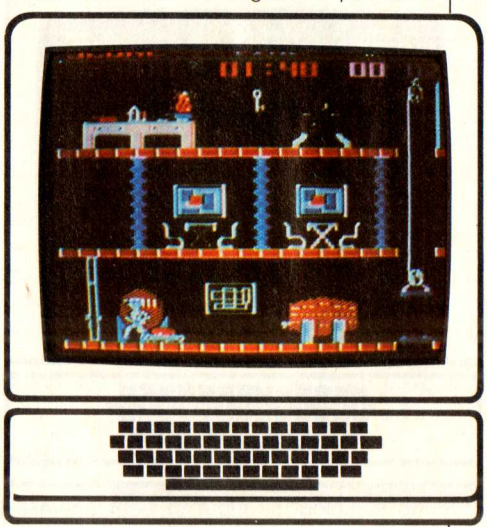
The rules are relatively elaborate for a dice game, but have been divided into an introductory Basic Game and the full Advanced Game for ease of learning. Though designed for two players, Krakatoa can accommodate up to four, and makes an interesting solitaire as well. The game was invented by GAMES contributor Prince Joli Kansil, whose other games include Bridgette and Marrakesh. —R. W. S.

The Heist by Mike Livesay (Microlab, on disk for Apple Computers, IBM PC/PCjr, Commodore 64; on cartridge for ColecoVision/Adam; available soon for Atari computers; $35–$45)

Following hard on the heels of his 1983 hit Miner 2049er, Mike Livesay's newest work is a running/jumping/thinking maze game that requires more sheer perseverance than any computer game in recent memory.

The task is to pick up (by running past) every *objet d'art* on all three floors of a museum, the rooms of which are laid out horizontally in a loop (if you keep going in the same direction you end up where you started). Roving and stationary guards, disappearing platforms, and other hazards succeed in making the job as difficult as possible—harder still on level two, truly daunting on level three.

But they're only half the problem. Locked doors, brick walls, one-way escalators, and gaps too wide to jump prevent you from breezing along from room to room—frequent detours and backtracking are necessary to get keys to open doors and to pick up paintings you couldn't reach directly. The museum is in fact an elaborate maze, only a small part of which you can see at any one time. The Apple disk—the only one available for review—contains 16 segments per level (144 rooms in all), the other versions 10. It's up to the player to remember how the rooms and floors are connected so the job can be finished before the time runs out.



Yes, there's a timer—as if things weren't tough enough. On level one, you have three and a half minutes to pick up each successive key or art object; on level two, you have two-and-a-half minutes; and on level three, you have one-and-a-half minutes.

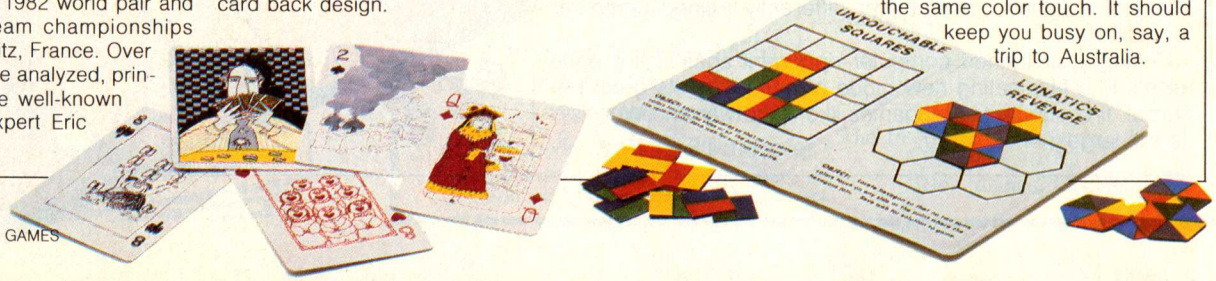
Playing the game requires such exquisite precision at every stage that there's not the slightest danger of getting bored, even after you've solved the maze. —B. H.

ETCETERA

The Official Handbook of the 1982 World Championships edited by Henry G. Francis, (American Contract Bridge League, 1983, 176 pages paperback; available from ACBL, Box 161192, Memphis, TN 38186; $12.95 includes postage) gives a thorough, play-by-play report on the October 1982 world pair and knockout team championships held in Biarritz, France. Over 220 deals are analyzed, principally by the well-known Canadian expert Eric Kokish.

The Deck (available from Ink, Inc., 17 White St., New York, NY 10013; $25 plus $2 postage) is a set of two matching decks of playing cards embellished with sophisticated cartoons by five artists. Roz Chast illustrated the diamonds, William Steig the hearts, Arnold Levin the spades, Lee Lorenz the clubs, and Jack Zeigler the jokers and card back design.

Lunatic's Revenge (Smethport Specialty Company, One Magnetic Ave., Smethport, PA 16749; 4 plus $1.29 postage), from a line of magnetic games and puzzles ("Hip Huggers"), contains two puzzles, one using square pieces and the other hexagonal pieces. The object is to arrange them so that no areas of the same color touch. It should keep you busy on, say, a trip to Australia.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY STAN FELLERMAN

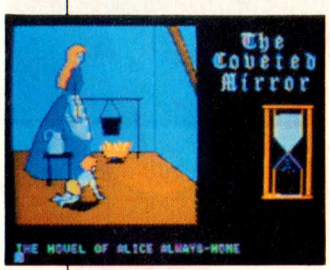
Solving Electronic Adventures

A computer adventure game is really a puzzle, or a set of puzzles, that can be solved only by using your wits. But before you can begin solving, you'll need to learn the physical layout of the game's world, where you are in relation to other locales, and how to move around without getting lost.

Whether it uses graphics and text combined or text only, a game contains dozens or even hundreds of separate locations (each of which is called a room, whether it's an actual room, a clearing in the jungle, a path, or a planet), and in most games you must visit many of the same places several times. If you rely on memory to find your way around, you won't find your way around. What you need is a map.

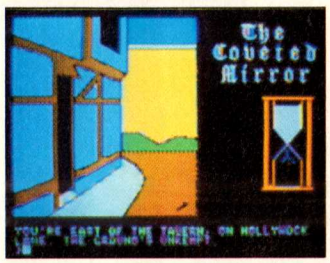
Mapping

The most effective type of map for most games is a balloon map. When the game begins, draw a small circle ("balloon") in the center of a blank sheet of paper and identify it (cell, navigation room, king's chamber, whatever). Also, note any objects to come back for later on. Enter a direction on your keyboard, and when you arrive at the new room draw another balloon in that direction (assume the top of the paper is NORTH), identify it, and connect the two balloons with a straight line. Now go back to the first room and follow the same procedure for every direction (in games with stairways and the like, don't forget UP and DOWN as well as N, S, E, W, and, in some games, NW, SE, etc.). Continue mapping as much of the game as possible without picking up objects or taking any action except those that enable you to keep going. In this way you'll get the lay of the land, enabling you to anticipate where many of the traps and obstacles are, which avenues seem the most promising, and maybe even the location of a vital item that might have taken hours to find by playing the game blind.



(A) Alice's Hovel

The more difficult games often contain twisting labyrinths or one-way passages—if you move EAST and try to return WEST, for example, you may find that you're in a completely unexpected room or that the WEST exit simply doesn't exist. For this kind of game, a different sort of map is needed. First try to find out how many rooms the game contains, and number them. Draw a simple grid, writing the room numbers across the top and all possible directions along one side. If you start in room 1 and move NORTH, which brings you to room 4, write the number 4 in the box where room 1 and NORTH meet on your grid. Continue until you've exhausted all directions from room 1, then again for each room in the labyrinth. When you're finished, your grid will enable you to get quickly from any room in the labyrinth to any other.



(B) Outside the Tavern

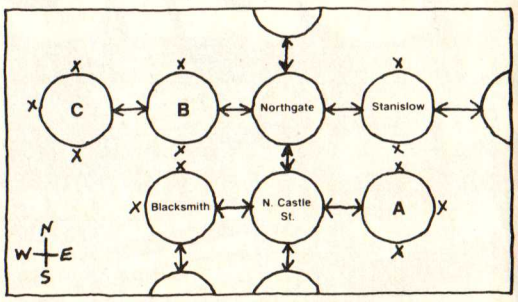
Try Everything

Remember that every puzzle has an answer, although it's often not obvious. Game designers love to put in little verbal or visual clues which, if properly understood, will help you solve the puzzle. In one of the most famous all-text adventures, Zork I (Infocom), for instance, you find a jewel-encrusted egg with a hinge and a clasp. It is clearly meant to be opened, but every time you try "open egg" you are told, "You have neither the tools nor the expertise." If you proceed by placing the egg in your treasure case, you'll miss the implication of that statement: Since *you* don't have the tools or expertise, someone else must. The solution is to let the thief steal the egg when you encounter him. A skillful lockpick, he will have no trouble opening the egg and repairing it. Later you can steal it back.

In graphic adventures, study each picture carefully for clues. Pick up everything that isn't nailed down, and if it *is* nailed down, try to remove the nails. Look under rugs and behind houses; break doors, climb trees, dig holes. You may be told, "You can't do that now," which means you may be able to do it after you've done something else or when you're carrying something you don't have now. Study the exact phraseology of the text. In Coveted Mirror (Penguin Software), for instance, the baker requests an ingredient for "chocolate moose," which you may think is a misspelling for "mousse." But much later in the game, in the castle's game room, a close look at the wall reveals a moose head made of chocolate—something you might not have noticed or thought significant were it not for the earlier verbal clue.

It's also easy to overlook the obvious. In Escape From Rungistan (Sirius), you find yourself in a forest during a snowstorm, and after freezing to death a few times and repeatedly restarting the game, you'll learn to move EAST quickly to a cabin containing a pair of skis. But you won't know how to use the skis unless it occurred to you earlier, after killing a bear in a cave, to examine the scratches on the cave walls. They are, in fact, skiing instructions. Another example is in the 2062 A.D. scenario of Time Zone (Sierra On-Line). Under the doormat of a house in Los Angeles is a key that will fit neither the door of the house nor the door of the futuristic car parked nearby. You might suppose that it fits some other door in some other scene, maybe even in a different era. But if you notice that the car has a *trunk* and try the key again, the trunk will open to reveal a load of dynamite.

Sometimes you have to try the same thing two or more times before it finally works. In Zork I you must take an axe



This balloon map, keyed to the three photos above, shows how to get from the hovel of Alice Always-Home (A) to the Tavern (C) in The Coveted Mirror. In the mapping phase, don't examine or pick up anything. Here, if you stop to get the object outside the Tavern (B), it will promptly be stolen when you go inside.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY KIMBERLY BUTLER

away from a troll. If you try "Kill troll with sword," he is momentarily stunned but recovers to threaten you again. When you enter "Kill troll with sword" a second time, he accommodatingly dies and leaves you his axe.

Trying everything is the only way to be sure of not overlooking something, but you'll occasionally run across a red herring—an object or room that seems to require some action but is there only to distract you. Gruds in Space (Sirius), for instance, contains a number of houses, including a barracks, whose residents invariably tell you, "Go away, human." After you've tried every conceivable way of getting into those houses, you realize that they're just window-dressing. (At such times you may want to vent your frustration by insulting the computer. Don't be surprised if you get insulted back. For some of the interesting dialogues we've had with our computer, see "It Does Not Compute," at right).

(C) In the Tavern

Logic and Experience

After you've played a few adventure games you'll have gained an understanding of how game designers think and how they differ from one another. Once you've learned how to get inside a designer's head, even the most difficult game will be solvable.

One example is Proving Ground of the Mad Overlord, the first of the Wizardry scenarios (Sir-Tech). For vanquishing a difficult group of monsters you are awarded a treasure called the Deadly Ring. Since you receive it as a reward, you're likely to think that wearing it confers special powers or that you'll need it in some future encounter. But if you've played other games designed by Wizardry's Andrew Greenberg and Robert Woodhead, you'll know how devious they are. The Deadly Ring is one of their greatest traps: Very gradually, as the game progresses, whoever wears it grows weaker and weaker, not understanding why, and finally dies, poisoned by the ring. Even if the adventurer gets wise to the ring's curse, his knowledge is of no use, for the ring cannot be removed in the dungeon. Many novice players have lost their best characters to this insidious trap. But experienced players, attuned to the designer's thinking, will approach such "treasures" with caution and proceed accordingly.

There is no feeling of satisfaction quite like that of completing an adventure game successfully. Indeed, it's the only kind of computer game that you can actually win—action games almost always beat you in the end, however high your score. In an adventure game your only way of knowing how good you are is the time it takes you to complete it. A novice may take several weeks to finish even a relatively simple game, but a top expert can complete the average game in a matter of hours.

Remember, no matter how difficult a problem may seem, there's always an answer. Paste this sign just above your monitor: TRY EVERYTHING!

Roe R. Adams III has solved the 6-disk, 12-sided Time Zone in a record seven days. This article was adapted from "Digital Deli" edited by Steve Ditlea (Workman Publishing).

It Does Not Compute

In trying everything to get past an obstacle or take a needed object from a recalcitrant alien, you often find yourself entering commands that are patently ridiculous. But you enter them anyway, figuring "Why not? Nothing else seems to work." And what a nice surprise you get when, for instance, you shoot a pistol in desperation at a massive tree—and see it fall to form a bridge across a river that's had you stumped.

But sometimes a silly command—or even just a simple wrong try—elicits a testy rebuke from the computer (a.k.a. game designer). Encountering a frog in a bog, we tried feeding it, killing it, hitting it, bribing it, moving it, taking it, talking to it, and even eating it—all to no avail. Then we had an inspiration prompted by a childhood memory.

Player: Kiss frog.
Computer: Isn't that a little corny?

Another time, we spied an interesting-looking old man at the other end of a large room. He surely had something to tell us, so:

Player: Speak to old man.
Computer: Shouting across the room might work in Abilene, but not here.

That response was a hint: We could talk to the old man if we got closer. The computer's smart-alecky comments often contain such hints. We once found ourselves at a gorge, and crossing it was the only way to make progress. But how?

Player: Jump gorge.
Computer: The gap is 10 feet longer than the world record for the standing broad jump.

Which implied that the way to get across was with a *running* broad jump.

Just as often, though, a wrong try can be unceremoniously shot down.

Player: Kill robot.
Computer: Fat chance. This thing is a R-O-B-O-T.

Or, in another game, in which we were trying without success to find a way of getting into a wagon:

Player: Sit.
Computer: You are too young to be pooped already. Get it in gear.

A corollary to the cardinal rule of trying everything is to examine everything. Usually when an object is of no interest, the computer simply says so. But not always.

Player (in a meadow): Look grass.
Computer: The grass is greener somewhere else.

In another game, we entered a room that seemed to contain nothing of interest, and the only exit was the way we had come in. But we figured the room must have a purpose, so we tried to dig a hole, remove the door, say a password, and finally:

Player: Look walls.
Computer: If you're frustrated, try climbing them.

Different games may project diametrically opposite world views. In one, the only way to get a rope away from an alien was to steal it. But in another, we were bluntly chastised.

Player: Take coconut.
Computer: The coconuts are not ours to pick as we please.

A game's vocabulary is usually limited to a verb/noun combination, but some games allow the use of prepositions and objects (such as "Give gold to wizard"). Often, however, it's hard to find exactly the right words to make the computer understand what you want it to do. Sometimes the machine says simply, "I don't know how to do that," or "I can't," or "You can't," or even an abrupt "No." At other times you may find yourself stuck in a no-exit dialogue that recalls some old comedy routine. Like the time we couldn't find a way to get past an angry bull.

Player: Tranquilize bull.
Computer: I do not know how to tranquilize.
Player: Think.
Computer: You cannot think.
Player: Fool me.
Computer: You cannot fool me.

And finally, just to end it:

Player: Quit.
Computer: You cannot quit.

Well,that's true enough. But if your frustration builds to such a level that you want to curse the machine, first consider the consequences.

Player: &¢@$#?!!
Computer: A good angel appears and says naughty naughty. As you have sinned, I will move some of the objects you carry. REPENT!

—B. H./J. D.