

INFOCOM INTRODUCES SEASTALKER™



Inside the *Seastalker* package you'll find a submarine logbook, nautical chart, special decal, and top-secret Infocards with decoder film.

FIRST JUNIOR-LEVEL INTERACTIVE FICTION

InfoNews Roundup

Seastalker, a new adventure in the tradition of Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, will make its appearance in June. Its arrival marks a number of firsts for Infocom.

As the first of the new Junior-Level series, it has been written to be the best introduction to our line of interactive fiction for preteens. While still offering a good challenge to our older customers, it includes a number of Infocards (clue cards) which will help the younger players get through the game.

In another major development in the evolution of interactive fiction, a noted outside author has collaborated with a member of the Infocom staff in producing the game. That author, Jim Lawrence, has authored nearly 60 books — many of these were ghosted for series like Tom Swift, Jr., The Hardy Boys, Nancy Drew, and the Bobbsey Twins.

Jim worked with Infocom's Stu Galley, whose first effort, *The Witness*™, was recently named "The Best Adventure of 1984" by Electronic Games magazine. Stu and Jim worked for nearly a year to put *Seastalker* together, a longer time than for any other Infocom product to date. Much of the effort went into additional features that make the story easier for newcomers to interactive fiction to play.

The story is this: An alarm sounds. You are told that there's something terrifying in the depths of the ocean below, and that it threatens the Aquadome, the world's first undersea research station. Your specially equipped submarine, the Scimitar, is ready. But wait — you haven't even tested the Scimitar in deep water, and the crew of the Aquadome may have a traitor in its ranks. Mystery, intrigue, and adventure await you as you face the underwater world of *Seastalker*.

Inside the *Seastalker* package, you will find a submarine logbook, which serves as the manual. There are also eight top-secret Infocards, Infocard decoder film (which can be used to reveal the clues), a nautical chart of Frobton Bay, and a special Discovery Squad decal.

Infocom Poster

Many of you have asked us to produce a poster of the back cover of the "Our Circuits, Ourselves" brochure. Your wish has been granted. A stunning poster has been created of the man and computer walking off into the sunset, bordered in black. The 22" by 28" poster is full color and is shipped rolled in a mailing tube. It is being made available exclusively to readers of *The New York Times*.

Update on the Macintosh

For those of you who are upgrading to the new Macintosh or know someone else who is, Infocom's entire line of interactive fiction titles will be available in early July. Judging from the number of requests for information on our software availability for the Mac, this is going to be a hot-selling system.

HP 150 and TRS-80 Color Computer

Infocom will soon be shipping a new version of its MS-DOS 2.0 products that will be compatible with many more computer systems, including Hewlett-Packard's HP 150 Touch Screen Computer. Also watch for TRS-80 Color Computer versions sometime this summer.

...more InfoNews on page 3

FRANK ANSWERS

TO THE TEN MOST FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Why are your games so difficult?

Although our games are interactive fiction, they're more than just stories: they are also a series of puzzles. It is these puzzles that transform our text from an hour's worth of reading to many, many hours' worth of thinking. It is these puzzles that cause a player to suddenly leap out of bed in the middle of the night and run to his computer because he just thought of a possible solution to a problem.

The value of our games is that they will provide many hours of stimulating mental exercise. If the puzzles were significantly easier, then many people would no longer find them challenging. For those people who find the level of difficulty *too* challenging, InvisiClues™ booklets are always available to provide hints.

2. Why are some games more difficult than others?

It's often hard to tell how difficult a game is going to be until many people begin playing it. During 1983, when we doubled the number of game titles, we also began putting our games through much more widespread play-testing. Because we try to incorporate any reasonable suggestions from our testers, including suggestions for adding hints to problems they found difficult, the 1983 games were generally a bit easier than our earlier games.

Beginning later this year, we will be rating our interactive fiction according to four categories of difficulty. We will continue producing games in each of these categories in order to provide for everyone from the neophyte to the hard-core fan.

...more Frank answers on page 2

...Frank answers

continued from page 1

3. Why aren't hint booklets included with the game?

Two reasons, the first being temptation. Even though the answers are printed in invisible ink, the temptation to look up the answer to a problem immediately after getting stuck would be too great for many people. After all, one of the great joys of interactive fiction is the rewarding feeling of finding a solution on your own after several hours of exercising the logic and imagination of your brain.

The second reason is cost. If InvisiClues were included, the price of the game would have to be increased slightly to cover this extra cost. People who don't want or need the hint booklet would not be pleased to have to pay this extra amount.

4. Why don't your games have graphics?

We have nothing against graphics per se. However, given the quality of graphics currently available on home computers, we would rather use that disk space for additional puzzles and richer descriptions. After all, as our famous "brain ad" says, the world's best graphics generator is your own imagination.

5. Why are there so many "red herrings" in your games?

People accustomed to standard adventure games, where every item you run across has one (and only one) purpose, may find our games a bit disorienting. Some objects will have several uses, and many items will have no purpose at all — "red herrings." Since the player has to determine not only where something is useful, but even whether it is useful at all, this increases the player's mental stimulation. In addition, these red herrings add to the realism of the game. After all, if you really found yourself stranded on a doomed planet or exploring an ancient pyramid, is it likely that every object you ran across would have one (and only one) use? (Hint: The answer is not "yes.")

6. Why are the prices of your games so high?

One reason that our interactive fiction costs a little more than your run-of-the-mill computer game is all the honing and perfecting that goes on here at Infocom. Before you think

this is starting to sound like one of our ads, stop and think for a moment. Each of our games lasts hundreds of moves, and at each move there are literally thousands of possible responses. Add some magic, or some characters wandering around the game doing their thing, and the result is staggeringly complex.

Infocom's interactive fiction programs are among the most complex programs available for microcomputers (and that includes *all* programs, not just entertainment programs). The writing and perfecting of an average piece of Infocom's interactive fiction takes nearly a year, and even that speed is only possible due to our powerful development system. (*Deadline*™ author and Infocom V.P. Marc Blank is fond of saying that *Deadline* would have taken five years to write without our development system — and then it would only have been ready to run on *one* type of computer.) For *Sorcerer*™, which was released a few months ago, nearly two thousand individual "bugs" were located and fixed. These ranged from minor typos to game-crashers. Right up until the day the disk masters were sent out we were still arguing about whether a bat has paws, claws, or talons. But I digress.

Another reason is our elaborate packaging, which costs a lot to design and a lot to produce. (See the next question.)

One final reason our prices are so high is — that our prices aren't that high! Fifty dollars may seem like a lot of money for a game, but divide that amount by the 30 or 40 hours you'll probably be spending with that game, and it actually works out to fairly inexpensive entertainment!

7. Why are your packages so elaborate?

Because our games are more than games, they're fiction. The purpose of the package and the many items you'll find inside them are to get you into the mood of the game before you even put the disk into your drive.

Also, there's a pretty limited amount of space on a floppy disk. By putting necessary background information into the documentation and packaging, we save room on the disk for the important stuff — the descriptions and puzzles of the game itself.

Finally, our packages are an attempt to discourage the piracy that is devastating the software industry. The disk is merely the most impor-

tant item in a large portfolio of material that comprises an interactive fiction game.

8. Why are your disks copy-protected and backup-limited?

As mentioned in the preceding paragraph, software piracy is a problem rampant in our industry. When disks are copied for other than legitimate back-up reasons, the producer is denied revenue (not to mention the fact that it's illegal). On a wide scale, piracy results in higher prices as the constant development cost must be spread over a smaller number of buyers. Therefore, copy-protection helps legitimate consumers like you, as well as us, by foiling piracy.

Also, remember that Infocom will replace any defective disks for no charge within the first 90 days after purchase, and for a \$5 charge after that. However, since we use the highest quality disks, this isn't a frequent occurrence.

9. Why aren't your games larger?

People with more powerful home computers frequently ask us this question. That answer is that we want our games to be available on a wide number of systems. Our current size limit is around 110,000 bytes. If we increased this limit, then our games would be unable to run on a number of machines, including the Atari 400/800, the TRS-80 Model I, and the Osborne 1. Of course, thanks to our ingenious ultra-neato compression techniques, we get a heck of a lot into those 110,000 bytes.

10. Why is the vocabulary of your games so limited?

Hey! First of all, our games understand a *heck* of a lot more words than anything our competitors have ever produced. Secondly, you're talking

about interactive fiction here, not some glorified Eliza program that pretends to converse with the user but actually "understands" nothing that is being said. Our games actually understand every input they claim to understand. These inputs fall within the rules outlined in the game manual, and if you stick to these rules, you should almost never end up using a word the game doesn't understand.

This problem is always most acute for people playing one of our mystery games for the first time. Despite all the warnings in the manual, people always want to grab Baxter, shake him, and ask him WHY WERE YOU RUNNING DOWN THE HALL DURING THE SCREAMING, or WHERE WERE YOU AT 8:00 PM ON THE NIGHT BEFORE THE MURDER. After all, this is how Columbo or Hercule Poirot always questions the suspects. Well, if the game were to try to handle every conceivable question of this complexity, it would occupy 20 disks and take 15 years to write and test. Just play it by the rules, folks. Stick to WHERE IS THE SMOKING GUN and TELL ME ABOUT DOCTOR BLANK.

★ BONUS QUESTION ★

11. Why don't you provide a vocabulary list with each game?

If you think about it, including a list of all the words a game understands would run the risk of giving away problems. Here's an example that you shouldn't read unless you've completed *Zork I*: What if you were perusing a vocabulary list for *Zork I* and you noticed the words ECHO, ODYSSEUS, RAFT, DIAMOND? The enjoyment of figuring out the Loud Room, cyclops, pile of plastic, and coal mine problems has just been reduced by these "give-aways."

Also, we like to remain enigmatic.



The New Zork® Times

Chairman	Albert "Al" Vezza
Managing Editor	Michael "Mike" Dornbrook
Contributing Editor	Steven "Steve" Meretzky
Semi-Contributing Editor	Marc "Mark" Blank
Non-Contributing Editor	David "Dave" Anderson
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Production Manager	Angela "Angela" Raup

Infocom Scoreboard

Did you know that *Zork I* has more rooms and takeable objects than any other Infocom game, yet is one of the smallest in size? Were you aware that *Sorcerer* is not only the largest game, but also the most dangerous?

The following chart shows some interesting statistics about the first eleven Infocom games. The first column shows the number of rooms in each game as far as the game's own internal programming is concerned. This sometimes differs with the apparent number of rooms (second column). For example, the Royal Puzzle in *Zork III* seems like 31 rooms, but internally it's actually just one room. The Desert in *Infidel* seems infinite, but it's actually just

10 rooms. And in several games, for various arcane reasons, there are rooms that can never be entered.

The third column lists the number of different ways to die in each game. For *Suspended*[™], this refers to the number of different ways that you (the person in the cylinder) can be killed, not the individual robots. The fourth column tells the number of words in each game's vocabulary — that is, the words that the game will understand in your inputs without saying "I don't know that word." The fifth column shows the size of each game (most recent release) in bytes.

The last column shows the number of takeable objects in each game.

Games	Rooms: internal	Rooms: external	Ways of Dying	Vocab- ulary	Size (bytes)	Takeable Objects
Zork I	110	110	28	698	84,868	59
Zork II	86	81	50	628	89,136	49
Zork III	89	105	30	563	81,626	23
Enchanter	74	∞	17	718	109,234	31
Sorcerer	84	110	70	1011	109,734	41
Starcross [™]	86	84	39	561	84,740	23
Suspended	63	61	6	676	105,492	32
Planetfall	105	105	41	666	109,052	49
Deadline	51	49	2	656	108,454	37
Witness	31	28	2	711	104,704	18
Infidel	77	∞	40	613	93,556	49

This figure is occasionally misleading: for example, the raft in *Zork I* is actually three different takeable objects (inflated, uninflated, and punctured). **Z**

...InfoNews cont'd from page 1

Evening Magazine Salutes Infocom

On March 21 the New England edition of Evening Magazine featured a segment on Infocom's interactive fiction starring Marc Blank. It was filmed on location at Infocom and highlighted our entire line of programs. If you're not in New England, you may get to see it anyway — each of the "editions" of the television magazine (called PM Magazine in some areas) picks up interesting segments from around the country. Let us know if you see it.

Popular Computing Salutes Enchanter

The May 1984 issue of *Popular Computing* included a review of *Enchanter*[™]:

"...*Enchanter* develops a sense of realism both in the text and story line. Marc Blank and his co-author Dave Lebling have created a special kind of mood through their very graphic descriptions — flies buzz about, rats scurry at your feet, even wandering dogs cross the adventurer's path at odd times In *Enchanter*, the sun comes up and goes down, the moon lights the night sky, and the stars shine in the midnight hour. These realistic descriptions stimulate the player's

imagination and produce a wonderfully eerie feeling of foreboding.

"It is hard to imagine a veteran of *Zork* being disappointed with this game. In fact, I played this game with a hard-core Zorker who suggested that not only would old Zorkers love it, but also so might a number of dyed-in-the-wool Dungeons and Dragons enthusiasts because of the spell-casting element and the role-playing nature of the game. *Enchanter* represents the highest kind of entertainment value in terms of cost vis-a-vis the time spent with the program It is just this kind of entertainment quotient that guarantees a game's eventual success in the marketplace. *Enchanter*, like *Zork*, is quite deserving of that success."

Steve Meretzky Awarded

Video Review magazine in its April 1984 issue named Steve Meretzky "Game Designer of the Year" in recognition of his first work of interactive fiction, *Planetfall*[™]. Steve accepted the award at a ceremony at New York's Savoy Plaza hotel.

Demos on the Way

In early June, Infocom's new Interactive Fiction Tutorial and *Zork I* Demo will begin appearing in computer stores across the country. Be sure to tell any of your friends who have not yet experienced this unique form of entertainment. **Z**

INFOCOM HOROSCOPE

HELLHOUND (March 21 to April 18) ★ Don't eat any foods with names beginning with a G or a Y, such as grapes or yogurt. This is a good week to learn Latin.

GRUE (April 19 to May 20) ★ Procrastination is ill-advised, especially if you were considering software purchases. Avoid zoos and art museums.

DRYAD (May 21 to May 24) ★ This is a good time to experiment with hair replacement techniques. Consider selling any kitchen appliance that you've had for over six years.

DORN (May 25 to May 27) ★ Don't go swimming if you've eaten in the last thirty minutes. Wear a scarf if it's less than forty degrees outside. Call your mother.

BROGMOID (May 28 to November 19) ★ If you've ever robbed any banks, today is a good day to apologize and start life anew. Sell all your U.S. Steel stock at once.

BLOODWORM (November 20) ★ Wait 24 hours, then buy all the U.S. Steel stock you can get your hands on. Do not taunt snakes or bus drivers.

YIPPLE (November 21, until 3:00 p.m.) ★ Give flowers to your mate. Buy a house. Eat three cookies. Fly to France. Challenge your dentist to a duel.

SURMIN (November 21, after 3:00 p.m.) ★ Spend time with a sick friend. This is crucial. If necessary, take a healthy friend and expose him/her to a contagious disease.

ROTGRUB (November 22 to January 3, January 18 to March 20) ★ An old business partner will meet you in the fruit and vegetable aisle of the supermarket. Be wary: if you chat there too long, the store will be sold out of casaba melons.

KOBOLD (January 4 to January 17, except where prohibited by law) ★ Don't marry anyone named Waldo or Matilda this week. Next week, marry *only* people named Waldo and Matilda.

ORC (anyone born in Cleveland on a national holiday) ★ Avoid reading your horoscope today. It will only be misleading, dangerous, and possibly even fatal.

NABIZ (all redheads born during a total eclipse) ★ Talk to strangers. Frequent dark alleys. Cross the street without looking both ways. Eat quickly without chewing well. Don't call your mother.

InfoSports Roundup

A recent article about Infocom described the software industry as "split like the medieval papacy between Cambridge and the West Coast." Here at Infocom, we've always felt that the software industry was split — between the Fresh Pond and Kendall Square sections of

Cambridge! These two programming meccas clash time after time — on the softball diamond.

Infocom finished with a hard-fought 2-3 record in a six-team high-tech league which included the leading companies in educational software (Spinnaker), business

software (Lotus), and entertainment software (Infocom).

Infocom squeaked past Lotus, who recently defected to Kendall Square from its quarters in Fresh Pond. (In fact, Lotus was in our very building, one floor above us. Our 6-5 victory, over a company four times our size, was our revenge for a year of pounding footsteps and constant furniture re-arrangement from the floor

above.)

Spinnaker managed to score 12 runs against us but was crushed under the weight of the hard-hitting InfoSluggers who scored 18 runs.

Leading this pack of sluggers was none other than Product Manager Mike Dornbrook (the "Mike" of the Zork Users Group, for you former ZUGroupies), who finished the season with a perfect 1.000 batting average (2 for 2). Among the regulars, Product Testing Supervisor "Hollywood Dave" Anderson led with a season average of .875 (7 for 8) and 3 home runs. Vice President of Development Marc Blank was 11 for 18, giving him an average of .611. Blank also slugged a team-leading 10 RBI's.

It's springtime again, and as the InfoSluggers are training themselves into shape, all the oddsmakers and fans are thinking the same thing: will Lotus and Spinnaker avenge their ignominious defeats or will Infocom once again prevail? Don't miss the next InfoSports Roundup! **Z**

Zork is a registered trademark of Infocom, Inc. *Enchanter*, *Sorcerer*, *Starcross*, *Suspended*, *Planetfall*, *Deadline*, *Witness*, *Infidel*, *Seastalker*, and *InvisiClues* are trademarks of Infocom, Inc. **Z**

----- (CUT ON DOTTED LINE) -----

NEW ZORK TIMES PUZZLE

NUMBER 2

NOTE: Due to the late mailing of the Winter '84 issue, the deadline for Puzzle Number One has been extended to July 1, 1984. The solutions to Puzzle Number One and Puzzle Number Two will both appear in the Summer '84 issue.

The following transcript contains references to all of the first eleven Infocom games — except one. Identify that game. **Answer:** _____

Living Room

This is a large and impressive room, whose furnishings bespeak the great personal wealth of the Robners. A wood pile sits beside a huge fieldstone fireplace. Grouped in front of the fire are a glass-topped coffee table and a rattan davenport and club chair, with cushions covered in a print showing bamboo plants in the style of Japanese brush-painting. There is a doorway to the east, a wooden door with strange gothic lettering to the west, which appears to be nailed shut, a trophy case, and a large oriental rug in the center of the room.

>EAST

Kitchen

You are in the kitchen of the white house. A table seems to have been used recently for the preparation of food. A rat nest fills one of the ovens, and cobwebs are everywhere. There is some rotting food in a garbage heap in one corner. A window to the east is slightly ajar. Sitting in the sand, bulging a little, is a beaten-up knapsack.

>OPEN THE KNAPSACK

Opening the knapsack reveals a canteen.

>TAKE THE CANTEEN

Taken.

>INVENTORY

You are carrying:

- a fancy violin,
- a disfigured device,
- a canteen.

The canteen contains:

- a quantity of high-protein liquid

>CLIMB THROUGH THE WINDOW

Forest

This is the forest primeval, conifers and cycads in rank profusion. Here and there huge trees thrust upward through the forest canopy. One particularly large tree is to port of here.

A hellhound is racing straight toward you, its open jaws displaying rows of razor-sharp teeth.

CONTEST RULES:

1. All entries must be submitted on this form. No copies accepted.
2. All entries must be received by August 1, 1984.
3. Up to ten prizes will be awarded for correct answers. If more than ten correct answers are received, a drawing will be held to determine the winners. Void where prohibited by law.

PRIZE: A copy of *Seastalker*.

Please enclose your name, address, telephone number and the system you'd want *Seastalker* to run on. Return to Infocom, NZT Puzzle, 55 Wheeler St., Cambridge, MA 02138.

Infocom Poster Offer

22" x 28" poster of back cover of Infocom's "Our Circuits, Ourselves" brochure. Full color picture of man and computer walking off into sunset, bordered in black. Stunning! Shipped rolled in mailing tube. Order on the enclosed order form. Catalog number INF-POS, price \$5.95 (includes shipping).