

INTERACTIVE
FICTION
now

January 1998

Previews
and Reviews



Masters of Revolution

Interview with Charles Cecil

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This issue of IFN owes a debt of gratitude
to the following people (in alphabetical order):

*Sophie Astin at The Digital Village
Simon Byron at Bastion
Charles Cecil at Revolution Software
Jamey Gottlieb at Activision
Susie Hamilton at Core Design
Laird Malamed at Activision
Danny Pample at CUC Software
Morag Pavich at Hobsbawm Macaulay Communications*

IFN MAGAZINE

TIME marches on and Xmas has been and gone again!

Best wishes for a Happy New Year from IFN Magazine!

This issue of IFN is packed full of features for Adventure fans.

Following our exclusive interview with the director of *Zork: Grand Inquisitor* last month, we review the latest journey into the Great Underground Empire.

The sequel to *Tomb Raider* also comes under our critical eye, as does the long awaited officially licensed computer game version of *Bladerunner*.

We've a sneak look at Douglas Adams' new game, *Starship Titanic* and *Gabriel Knight 3* from Sierra.

Our feature this issue, however, is an exclusive interview with Charles Cecil, industry Grand-Daddy and cutting edge game developer in equal measure.

We talk about the *Broken Sword* series and the future of Adventure Gaming.

Wherever email addresses are cited in this issue, like this one, comments@if-now.demon.co.uk, click on them to send mail to that address.

Similarly, if you click on a World Wide Web (WWW) address, such as this one: www.if-now.demon.co.uk, or any of the pictures in this issue, your browser will be opened at the appropriate web page.

From this month onwards, IFN is also available by FTP from [ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/magazines/IFN/](ftp://ftp.gmd.de/if-archive/magazines/IFN/) (which is mirrored elsewhere – see the site).

As always, please enjoy yourselves, and feel free to email me here at Interactive Fiction Now with your comments and suggestions (comments@if-now.demon.co.uk) **"IFN."**



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Gabriel Knight III

Sierra On-Line's Gabriel Knight series has probably seen more dramatic changes over the course of three games than any other series, and the forthcoming third instalment, interestingly titled, "Blood Of The Sacred, Blood Of The Damned," looks set to cause a stir upon its release in Summer '98.



The first game's use of sprite animations was complemented by a Hollywood casting including Tim Curry (*Rocky Horror Picture Show*), Mark Hamill (*Star Wars Trilogy*) and Michael Dorn (*Star Trek: The Next Generation*).

The trend for radical change in the series was firmly established when, "*Gabriel Knight 2: The Beast Within*," was released. Adopting the style of an "Interactive Movie", GK2 used Full Motion Video sequences extensively (six CDs' worth, to be exact) for in-game movement.

Next year's release will continue that trend, with the introduction of Sierra's new technology "G-Engine" 3D game engine, boasting what is being described as "ultra-realistic" game-play and featuring "unlimited exploratory control".



According to Sierra, the plot for the new game concerns a small village in rural Europe, home of a currently dethroned royal scion who has asked Gabriel Knight to help uncover the answers to recent bizarre, possibly supernatural, events taking place inside the family's close circles. The game will be designed and produced once again by Jane Jensen.

More information on Sierra On-Line and the new Gabriel Knight game can be found by pointing your web browser at Sierra's website

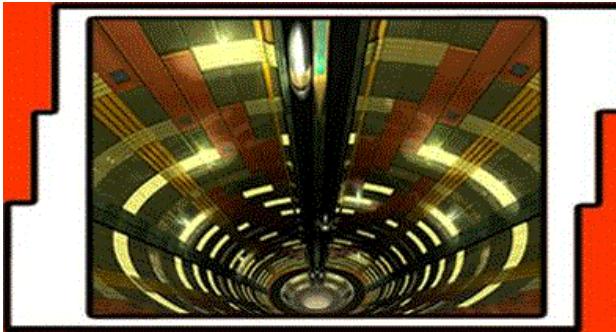
[<http://www.sierra.com/titles/gk3>]



New Douglas Adams Game Delayed



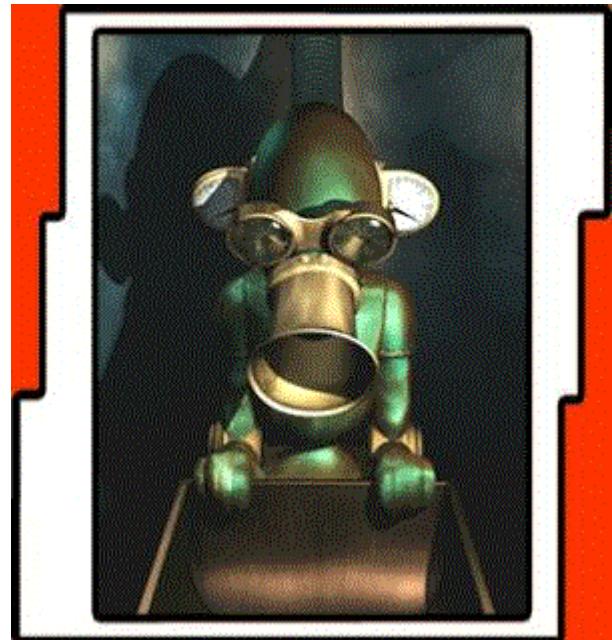
Starship Titanic, the new graphical adventure game by Douglas Adams' company, The Digital Village, has been delayed until the first quarter of 1998.



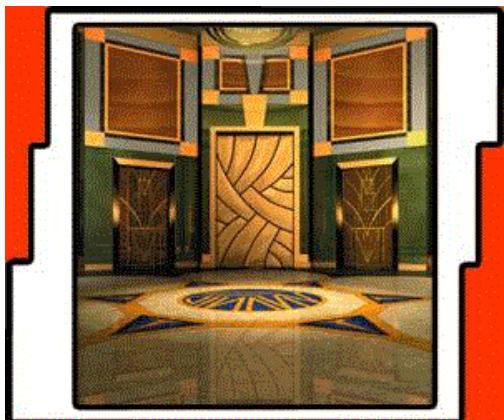
Company CEO Robby Stamp explained in a recent press release that, "the game engine and logic are fully realised and tested," but that the delay is due to, "essential quality evaluation and testing procedures."

In the meantime, eager gamers can read the novelisation, written by ex-Monty Python member, Terry Jones. "One of the characters in the game is a semi-deranged workman's parrot which had been left on board the ship," says Adams, "and Terry had agreed to play the voice part."

When Terry saw all the graphics and character animations we had been creating over the previous months, he became very excited about the whole project." The book is to be released in the UK by Pan-Macmillan, with a planned release date of 21st November 1997, and in the US by Harmony Books (a division of Random House).



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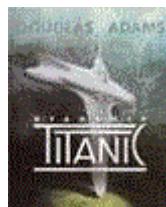
Written and designed by Douglas Adams, Starship Titanic takes its name from a spaceship of the same name briefly mentioned in Adams' "Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy" series. The game marks Adams' first work in the industry since Bureaucracy, his second work of text-based interactive fiction with Infocom in the early 1980s, and follow-up to the legendary Hitchhiker game.



The new game sees a departure and a return to those games. A departure because the new game has photo-realistic graphics to depict the game environment, with art direction by Academy Award winners Oscar Chichoni and Isabel Molina. A return in that the game features a text parser, allowing the player to interact with in-game characters directly using conversational English.



The Digital Village, based in London, can be found on-line at www.tdv.com, whilst Starship Titanic has its own dedicated website at www.starshiptitanic.com.



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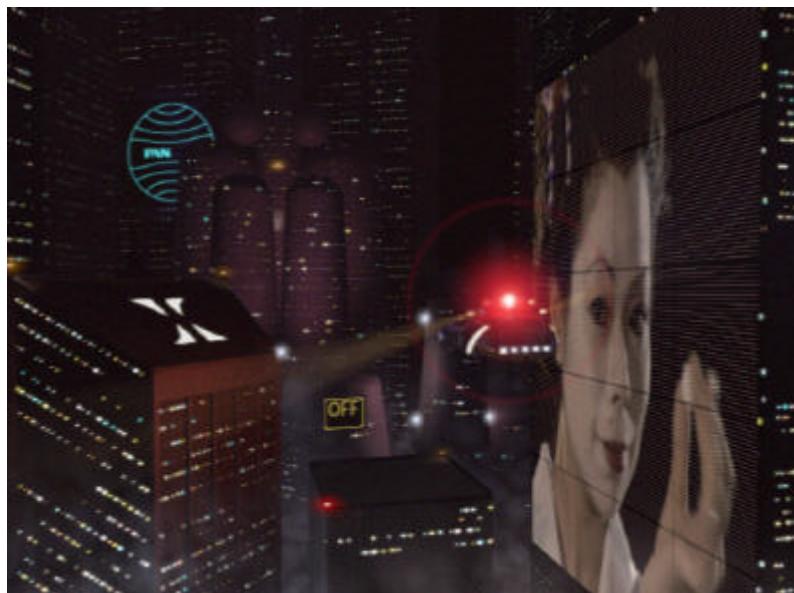


Every once in a while, a computer game is released which not only meets the hype, but surpasses it. Blade Runner, from Westwood Studios, is such a game.

Although there are several excellent graphical adventure games on release at the moment whose production standards are remarkable, few can actually be said to have moved the genre in a new direction. With Blade Runner,

however, a whole new variant of immersive gaming has been produced, and adventurers are going to love it.

The game uses a fusion of full motion video with motion capture and breathtaking backdrops to produce an ambience entirely in keeping with Ridley Scott's 1982 future-noir movie.



An Official License developed in conjunction with the Blade Runner partnership, the game is rare in its ability to successfully translate from the medium of film to that of the interactive computer game. Looking back, very few have enjoyed similar success, either due to excessive zeal to match the game's storyline with that of the film, or apparent low investment due to the guaranteed sales such a license will bring.

R E V I E W

Perhaps Blade Runner's edge is that the film version is now over fifteen years old. This puts less emphasis on producing a game within a set period of time. Indeed, there is an even greater likelihood that, owing to the considerable cult success Scott's film has enjoyed to date, there is greater pressure to push the envelope in order to make the game worthy of its title. The Bladerunner partnership themselves are likely to have ensured that the game quality warranted its title.

The graphics aside, Blade Runner succeeds for several reasons. First and foremost, the graphics never obstruct the gameplay. The four CD distribution is seamlessly integrated into the storyline, with minimal disruption caused to the user. Beyond this technical aspect, however, Blade Runner is an adventurer's adventure. The playing area is large enough to make you think about your next step, yet small enough to prevent you arriving at the point where you don't have a clue as to what to do next.



In addition to this, there are not only multiple routes to solving a puzzle, but multiple game configurations. The plot of the game varies from one go to the next, introducing a degree of playability previously sorely lacking in the adventure genre.

What's more, the user can also express some control over the route the McCoy character takes within the game. This is achieved by choosing either to remain in the mould of the Decker character from the film (a replicant hit-man), or to become a replicant sympathiser and aid the rebels in the fight for longevity and legitimised sentience.



Blade Runner has many wonderful aspects which will keep all manner of adventurers playing, but most of all, this is a visually breathtaking gaming experience.

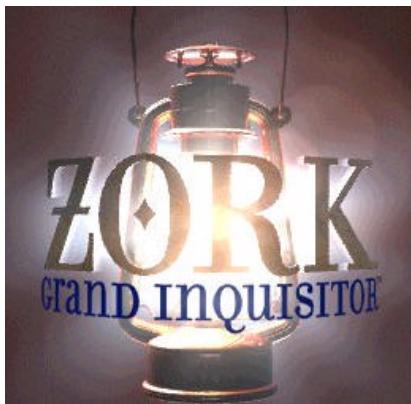
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A stunning film conversion which advances the adventure game genre. Unlikely to disappoint any adventure gamer.

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R E V I E W



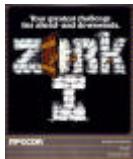
ZORK IS BACK!

Remember your very first adventure game? Chances are it was one of the numerous Infocom titles. The

legendary Infocom text adventure company, based in Cambridge, Massachusetts, were bought out by software giant Activision in the late 1980s. After a little dust had settled, Activision put together a new team and released the first graphical *Zork* game.

The critically acclaimed *Return to Zork* clearly demonstrated that there was great potential for continuing the massively popular *Zork* series in graphical adventure format.

Thankfully, Activision recognised this, and last year released their second graphical *Zork* episode, *Zork: Nemesis* to great acclaim. The new Z-Vision engine advanced the graphical adventure genre by introducing 360° horizontal panning within pre-rendered game locations.



Grand Inquisitor is the eighth game in the series after *Zorks 1,2 and 3*, *Zork Zero*, *Beyond Zork*, *Return to Zork* and *Zork: Nemesis*

In spite of the quality of *Nemesis'* assets, however, there was little doubt that the humour of the original *Zork* series had been dropped in favour of a very dark atmosphere. This worked to excellent effect in *Nemesis*, however, Activision have now chosen to re-introduce the "Zorkiness" in their latest game, *Zork: Grand Inquisitor*. Witty comments and tongue-in-cheek asides abound, and there are even some great in-jokes for veterans of the earlier *Zork* games (at one point you find an ancient PC running a copy of *Planetfall*).

One classic example of the humour in the game is in a list of instructions written on the side of a barrel of toxic waste early in the game. They read, "Do not bother waste. If waste gets angry, run away. Do not eat waste. If waste glows, alert police. Do not make waste tea. Do not use as children's toys...", and so the list goes on.

The guiding force behind the new *Zork* game is Laird Malamed, who worked as technical director on *Nemesis* and was given the big chair for this latest project. The Director's job is not an easy one as the divide between adventure games and Hollywood grows increasingly hazy.

REVIEW



The Legendary G.U.E. Tech

direction is a game which looks high-production, but plays Zork - a balance which was arguably lacking in the previous graphical Zork titles.

For music, the gothic horror feel of some parts of *Nemesis* has been replaced with more ambient overtones. This is easier to listen to for prolonged periods, which is useful as some of the puzzles require *lots* of thought - if anything the puzzles in *Grand Inquisitor* are harder than those in its predecessor.

The game engine itself is a modified version of Z-Vision, the ingenious twist on pre-rendered scenery which allows the player to spin through 360° in each location. It is surprising just how much of a difference this aspect makes to the overall gameplay, and even more so that the technique has not been "borrowed" for other titles such as *Riven: The Sequel to Myst* (this is assumedly owing to the competence of Activision's lawyers...).

Whilst *Grand Inquisitor* uses essentially the same engine as *Nemesis*, some new aspects have been introduced to the engine, partly originating from gamers' suggestions. The game now supports a full inventory feature complete with spell-book and allows you to travel quickly to already discovered locations by use of teleport points around the game area. The fact that the facilities to zip from one location to another are part of the game world is to the game's credit as it allows the player to remain within the game rather than flip out to a menu.

For example, on this project, Malamed had input into puzzle design, technical direction, script writing, general production and, Malamed tells me, Full Motion Video filming direction as well. [Speaking of FMV, incidentally, it's nice to see some British actors surfacing in these sequences!] The overall result of Malamed's



Our first look at the White House since Zork I (although at this point in the game, it's a poor shadow of that building)

R E V I E W



The Inventory screen marks the major change in the game engine since *Nemesis*

The only minor problem we could see with the game engine relates to the transfer of game files when playing the game after installing the minimal version. Transfer of game files does unfortunately detract slightly from the gameplay, although it should be stressed that this is entirely tolerable. We recommend freeing some hard-disk space to prevent minor irritations.

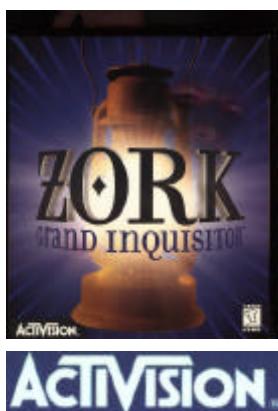
One really great feature of the game is the use of a text-adventuresque console which appears whenever you die. Rather than showing your demise, you are given a textual account of your end, which re-introduces the power of verbal description lost in the move from text to graphics-based gaming.

These end descriptions, in addition to the comments made by the Dungeon Master (who accompanies you from early in the game), are the main reasons this game feels like a Zork episode, and our hats go off to Activision for making it happen.

Name us another game where you're led across the sulphur river to Hades by a ferryman in a New York Cabbie's hat who plays 70s funk music. Exactly.

With firm plans for two more games to come from Activision under Malamed's direction, Zorkers can feel free (sorry, "filfre!") to raise a smile about the future of Zork.

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The closest a graphical Zork has ever come to the text-based originals, and a great game in its own right. Play this game or be totemized!

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TOMB RAIDER 2



Lara Croft is unquestionably a modern day phenomenon. Her media coverage extends beyond the confines of computer gaming to the popular press and television across the globe. Not surprising then that Core Design/Eidos have released Tomb Raider 2 in time for Christmas 1997 featuring an entirely new plot, new locations, new enemies, vehicles, but most importantly, of course, Lara herself.

Following last year's outing with the buxom young lady, in which Lara is contracted to recover the fragmented remains of an ancient artefact known as the Scion, Tomb Raider 2 introduces an entirely new storyline. The dagger of Xian, we are told, is an ancient Chinese dagger believed to hold immense power. The power of the Xian is apparently bestowed upon the person who is able to recover the dagger (the easier bit) and gather the courage to plunge it into their own heart (the harder bit). For only in this way can the power be inherited. The Xian is believed to have once been used by an unnamed tyrannical emperor before its seizure by Tibetan warrior monks and subsequent restoration to a legendary resting-place within The Great Wall.



From the Great Wall of China to Venice, and onwards (we don't want to spoil the story too much for you!), by speedboat, by skidoo, wearing all manner of costumes, Tomb Raider II is as extensive and new as it is familiar to Tomb Raider players. For example, Lara herself has different outfits for different locations, dynamic hair (including swinging ponytail) and, seemingly, an even larger chest! She also has an array of additional moves and actions such as hand-over-hand climbing and underwater combat with her new harpoon gun.



A warm chest,
but cold legs
for Lara in
Tibet

The new game is Windows 95-Native and features excellent use of dynamic lighting effects to add to the realism with flares and gunfire flashes newly introduced.

R E V I E W



Lara Croft Concept Art

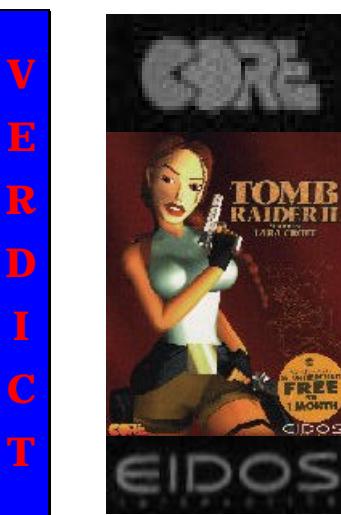
The music in Tomb Raider 2 was produced in-house at Core Design by Nathan McCree, and seems to be better integrated with the gameplay. Different musical cues are played: some positive music whenever Lara makes progress or a tense phrase when she's in trouble. This adds wonderfully to the sense being in the middle of a movie-style production.

All things considered, Tomb Raider 2 offers some great new levels - the heart of the game, after all is the exploration and adventure - and they will be lapped up by Lara-fans everywhere. It is to Core's credit that they have also managed to improve the game engine in so short a time with more new features (many of them subtle but contributing to the whole gameplay experience).

For those adventures who are interested in action-adventures, this game will delight, but more traditional adventurers should definitely take the plunge or risk missing out on a great adventure!



Core Design have created numerous new levels for Lara to explore



More Lara Croft, more levels, more realism, more graphics, more weapons, more costumes. The perfect Xmas present for action-adventure players!

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Viva la Revolution



Revolution Software, based in Northern England, are responsible for four smash hit adventure games: Lure of the Temptress, Beneath a Steel Sky, Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars (Circle of Blood in the US), and Broken Sword 2: The Smoking Mirror. IFN Editor, Matt Newsome, spoke to Revolution's Managing Director, Charles Cecil [third from left, standing].

Charles Cecil is a founding father of our industry, having worked on text adventure games for the Sinclair ZX81 with Arctic Computing back in the early eighties and other games ever since. After a period with US Gold, and subsequently with Activision, however, he launched Revolution with Noirin Carmody. I asked Charles what aspects he felt gave Revolution their edge.

Charles Cecil: We looked very hard at all the aspects that collectively come together to make the gameplay experience. We have a very experienced team of writers, sprite animators, and programmers, but people outside the industry understand wider presentational aspects. Part of our strength comes from the combination of this external and internal expertise.

We really wanted to get the very best gameplay because ultimately what we're doing is competing against Hollywood for people's leisure time. People have limited leisure time, so the experience has really got to be good. If you want to break away from a very niche market, you've got to create something that really competes with television and other forms of mass entertainment, which hopefully our games do.

IFN: There is extensive use of animation in Broken Sword II. How did you produce the "cartoon" appearance?

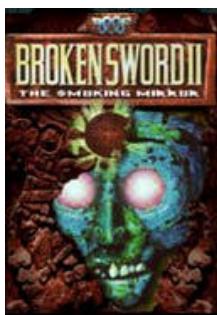
CC: We thought about the background screens and decided that we could gain considerable expertise from working with cartoon layout artists.

So we teamed up with a layout artist, Eoghan Cahill, who used to work for the Don Bluth studios. They produced "All Dogs Go To Heaven" and a number of similar cartoons. What was really exciting was working with someone who

really understood the opportunities and limitations of layout. We would provide a clear specification from which Eoghan would draw out a rough layout to make the scene as

exciting as possible. We would then make sure that the layout actually fitted the specification and then he'd draw the final layout. The quality of a layout had to be better, actually, than it would be in a cartoon, because in a cartoon, you're looking primarily at the animation on the screen whereas in an adventure game you spend so much time examining the background for clues.

We worked with classical cartoon animators for sections of our animation. And that was great fun again because the best animators have a great feeling for how to depict expression and emotion, how to portray the excitement. And



that was of great use to our animators whose expertise lay in animation for games. A lot of the in-game sprite animation was done in-house - our guys are very, very experienced now. But the volume of animation was far too great to exclusively handle in-house. A lot of animation was sent out of house to a huge studio where they've got thirty or forty animators working in parallel.

So in the project, we were very much looking for the best people in each field. We understand gameplay, and hopefully we understand interactive story-telling. We also understand sprite animations and the limitations. Other people better understood other presentational aspects.

IFN: Are the story-lines for your games written in-house?

CC: Yes, we have in house writers. I got very heavily involved with the story. We loved the Templar story and we loved the Mayans as well. There are only so many really fascinating historical conspiracies. In Indiana Jones/Raiders of the Lost Ark, the analogy that they used with the biblical story gave it such an edge, and that's certainly what we tried to do.

Interactive storytelling is very different from writing movies or books. This is an aspect that we kept very much under our control.

IFN: The music for Revolution games is of a high quality relative to other games in the genre - how do you achieve this?

CC: Often developers just phone up a musician who bangs out some music, and we really didn't feel that was good enough. We looked around for musicians and teamed up with an old friend of mine called Barrington Pheloung. Barrington wrote the music for Inspector Morse. He also wrote the music for Truly, Madly, Deeply. Normally he'd write about three-quarters of an hour's music for a full length feature film. For Broken Sword II, he's written over three hour's worth of music, the majority of which is recorded with a live orchestra.

And he really, really put his soul into it. In the end, he wrote many, many hundreds of cues. And that means that if you do something one way then one bit of music will play, if you do it another, then a different bit will play. There is music triggered if the player does nothing. Barrington treated the game as he would do a film. He played the game and really got to understand the emotion that needed to be conveyed through the music.

IFN: Douglas Adams' company is working on a game called Starship Titanic which will use text consoles to interact with in-game characters. Is this a future for the parser in Revolution games?

CC: I used to write adventures back in the early eighties, and they were pure text. And certainly the text parser is the very pure way of getting across the feeling that you're really talking to a character and saying what you want to say. There are two drawbacks. The first is that the parser almost inevitably

doesn't understand what it is you want to say, and secondly, commercially people won't buy games with this sort of interface, not the mass market.

Some die-hards love text parsers. If you look at MUD2 on Wireplay, it's all text input, so it's just like a text adventure but with a few icons, but primarily it is a text adventure. And the die-hard people absolutely love it. I suspect that Mr. Average who goes on and plays will not play it for long because graphically, it doesn't have the production values, to use a horrible American expression, that people are expecting in games today. So I think it's very brave, but I would not copy him on that.



IFN: What are your plans for furthering the Revolution?

CC: The adventure market is declining, so we do need to appeal to a wider audience with our future games. It's great to get nice reviews, but ultimately, the final test is whether people who actually paid the money feel it's worthwhile, and we get some great feedback on that, and that's really, really nice.

But we now have people who have certain expectations of the games that we've written and certainly the plot is very important. Whatever happens, whatever new project we do, it has to be primarily plot driven. I think that that's the future for the mass market.

IFN: The Broken Sword series features a highly cosmopolitan philosophy, most notably an American lead role, which is rare for a British produced game.

Did you particularly target the US audience?

CC: To appeal to the American market, we decided to make our main character American - but without prostituting ourselves by pretending that we were American developers. So the game features an American in Paris. We wrote the game in English, American, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Brazilian, Portuguese and Finnish (there might well be further languages -, we're talking about a Taiwanese version presently). As a European developer, we are very geared to producing translations.

The mainland Europeans are used to dubbing English speaking films. For the major stars, like Clint Eastwood or Sharon Stone they will often use the same voice over actor to play their counterpart American / English actor.

That European voice then becomes the voice of the American face. In Germany they used the voice of the voice over actress of Sharon Stone to play Nico, so that when people played Broken Sword they associated Nico with Sharon Stone!

The European territories take the translation process very seriously. So what this means is that the game comes across as a French game in France, or a German game in Germany.

IFN: Will there be a Broken Sword III?

CC: There will certainly be a Broken Sword 3, but we're not working on it at the moment. We're thinking about it, but we're not going to rush it out. The adventure market needs to change to appeal to a wider audience without losing the gameplay and without losing the plot, development, the narrative, and we're currently thinking very hard how to do that. We want to innovate enormously on the gameplay front. So, yes there will be, but I don't know when!



IFN: What are your thoughts on the current state of the Adventure market?

CC: Let's be honest. One of the reasons that the adventure genre has declined is that there are so many bad adventures being published. Too many developers think to themselves, "I can write an adventure, I can tell a story.". And if they find a publisher who finances them, then another adventure comes onto the market. It may not sell many units, but those that do buy the game will be disappointed. And since games are not cheap, the consumer doesn't need to buy many games before he is put off!

People ask me, "are we going to write a different type of game," and the answer is, "no," because hopefully we've got to grips with a

particular genre of game which we understand. I wouldn't write a Warcraft 2-type game. Warcraft 2 is one of my favourite games. I know why I love it, but I wouldn't be complacent enough to turn around and say, "well actually I could write something that's better".



Lots of people think that they can write an adventure, but very few of them succeed. In the UK last year, Broken Sword was the only adventure to sell well across Europe. Consider those that were released but didn't sell well - "The Last Express, ", "The Orion Burger, ", "Toon Struck, ". This year, ofcourse, Broken Sword 2 has had very stiff competition, including "Monkey Island 3" and "Blade Runner".

IFN: Which companies have inspired you at Revolution?

CC: Well, the companies that I really admire are those that innovate and change. Ultimage wrote excellent Spectrum games like "Jet Pac" and then, from a

position of strength, turned around and decided that there was a better future in writing Nintendo games, and became Rare. Rare write excellent games - I am currently hooked on "GoldenEye". I admire Nintendo for the Mario series, particularly Mario 64 which is so well crafted. And I admire Blizzard for coming from no where and writing a string of games that have such well balanced gameplay.

I'd like to think that what Revolution is doing, from a position of strength, is that we're turning around and saying, "we really feel confident, we're really proud of what we've produced, but things need to change, where is the way forward?"

IFN: Interactive Fiction Now would like to thank you for talking to us.

CC: That's a great pleasure!



N E X T I S S U E

And so we conclude another issue of **"IFN"**!

...but we'll be back in February with coverage of all the new adventure games in the pipeline.

Monkey Island 3 will be scrutinised and we'll have a sneak peek at the forthcoming Warcraft Adventures from Sierra. Coverage will also be given to Temujin, Dark Earth and the budget release of Simon the Sorceror episodes 1 and 2.

Depending on the project's progress, we'll also have more coverage of Starship Titanic (including the novelisation).

As a feature for the New Year, our new sister magazine, IFN Plus! will be looking at the gaming market on a slightly broader scale with a peek at the major new games in other genres, such as Quake 2, Dark Reign and Heavy Gear. Coverage will also be given to non-game software and peripherals. IFN Plus! will be accessible in March 1998 from the main IFN homepage.

Timescales permitting we'll also be looking at the vast array of Star Trek games available at the moment.

Issue#3 will be published February 28th 1998 (but check the IFN homepage nearer the time for confirmation).

And, as always, there's plenty more unconfirmed material, so keep an eye out! **"IFN"**