The Post Infocom Text Adventure Collection

Many of us played and loved the text adventures produced by Infocom in the 1980's. They were rich in story and puzzles, and contained some excellent writing. In the years since Infocom's demise in 1989, there have been a lot of good games produced using the Z-Machine - the game format that Infocom was using. This gives us a chance to make these modern-day games run on the computers of the 80's, like the Commodore 64.

I decided to create a collection of Z-machine games for the C64, and this is it. All in all, it's 31 games, released in 1993-2015. Each game has been put into its own directory, in which is also an empty disk for game saves and a file called AUTOSWAP.LST to make life easier for people using the SD2IEC diskdrive substitute.

If you haven't played text adventures before, or feel that you never got the hang of it, you should read the chapter How to play a text adventure. If you want more of a background on Infocom and the game format they used, you should read the chapter about The Zork Machine at the end of this document. There is also a chapter about the process of porting Z-machine games to the C64 and, finally, a chapter about writing your own games.

I created this documentation as a PDF, so that you could easily print it out and keep it nearby if you're enjoying the collection on a real C64.

Have fun!

Fredrik Ramsberg, December 2016
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The games

(`adventz3`) Adventure (Z-machine version 3)

First release: 1976
Release / Serial No: 1 / 151001
Authors: Crowther and Woods
Programmer: Jesse McGrew - Email: jmcgrew AT hansprestige.com
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=fft6pu91j85y4acv

This is based on the 350-point version of Adventure, sometimes called Colossal Cave Adventure. The original game was released by Will Crowther in 1976 and expanded by Don Woods in 1977. This was the game that started the text adventure genre, and the inspiration behind Zork. This implementation is actually the only game in the collection not written in Inform. Instead, it was written in ZILF, a language mimicking the language used by Infocom to program Zork and their other Z-machine games. The code seems to be quite efficient, and the version 3 interpreter leaves more room for game code in main memory, and so the game runs faster than most others.

(`adverbum`) Ad Verbum

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: 11 / 060905
Author: Nick Montfort - Email: nickm AT nickm.com
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=xi4s5ne9m6w821xd

"With the cantankerous Wizard of Wordplay evicted from his mansion, the worthless plot can now be redeveloped. The city regulations declare, however, that the rip-down job can't proceed until all the items within had been removed.

As an adventurer hired by the demolitions contractor to kleptomaniacially clear out this mansion, you must engage in wordplay in order to gather all the items inside. It is not necessary to think of puns, cliches, or homonyms, however, as has been the case with previous logological interactive fiction. The puzzles in Ad Verbum are of a different -- and perhaps even unique -- nature." [--blurb from Competition Aught-Zero]

(`aisle`) Aisle

Year: 1999
Release / Serial No: 3 / 990528
Author: Sam Barlow
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=j49crlvd62mhwuzu

"Late Thursday night. You've had a hard day and the last thing you need is this: shopping. Luckily, the place is pretty empty and you're progressing rapidly. On to the next aisle...

Aisle started out as a game which would not need the usual meta-verbs... i.e. a game with only one turn. The initial idea was: How do I make a game with only one turn interesting? Give it lots of endings--in fact there are many 'endings' and (hopefully) every sensible action results in an 'ending'. There is no winning action. There is however more going on than just this and the more endings you see the more things should become clear." [--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

Sam Barlow has since gone on to design some of the Silent Hill games, and has achieved great success on the indie game scene with "Her Story".

(`allroads`) All Roads

Year: 2001
Release / Serial No: 1 / 011119
Author: Jon Ingold
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=4s7uohdncurgqb0h

Supernatural espionage thriller set in a quasi-medieval Venice (oh, **that** old genre again). You jump around in space and time through a series of apparently disconnected scenes, and eventually, if you're paying enough attention, things come together. Largely puzzleless, in the conventional sense.
-- Duncan Stevens

Has won many awards, including Best Game, Best Story and Best Setting in the 2001 XYZZY Awards.

(`animals`) Animals

Year: 2007
Release / Serial No: 1.1 / -
Author: David Fisher - Email: davidfisher AT australiaonline.net.au
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=vevcfm7edolbumfc

This isn't actually IF, but a logic/observation puzzle game, inspired by the word game "my very eccentric Aunt". Four difficulty levels.

An entry in the C-40 competition, which required games to be at most 40K in size.

(`awakenin`) The Awakening

Year: 1998
Release / Serial No: 1 / 980726
Author: Dennis Matheson
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=12pkmwaekw4suh7g

A short, simple horror game in the Lovecraftian mode. The puzzles are logical and sensible, and objects are found in logical places. The best thing about the game is the prose, which is expansive but not wordy. The only real problem here is that the game's main audience, Lovecraft fans, are likely to figure things out far too early.
-- R. Serena Wakefield

(`balances`) Balances

Year: 1994
Release / Serial No: 5 / 961216
Author: Graham Nelson
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=x6ne0bbd2oqm6h3a

A small unofficial sequel to Infocom's Enchanter trilogy, based partly on their sample transcripts and partly on the need for a better look at the last four cubes in Spellbreaker. The main reason this game was written was to show off the more advanced features of Inform, such as dynamic vocabulary and indistinguishable objects. It's still a pretty good little game in its own right, with loads of clever spellcasting. One required action is completely motivationless and somewhat suicidal, but you might hit on it if you try things just to see what happens.
-- Carl Muckenhoupt

(`bandit`) The Tale of the Kissing Bandit

Year: 2001
Release / Serial No: 1 / 010210
Author: J. Robinson Wheeler
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=jv9y29bn167wwix5

The Kissing Bandit is extremely linear, and basically runs on rails, with little real interactivity. What saves it, tough, is the hysterical writing, which are sure to make you smile throughout the game.

There are no puzzles as such, and you don't even have to pick up anything during the game (but do examine your inventory!). While many 'original' verbs are implemented, several items mentioned in the room descriptions are not, and the autocompletion could be smarter. For instance, typing 'climb' outside a tower offers the not-so-helpful (but somewhat amusing) completion 'climb (the maiden)'. The author does acknowledge the somewhat spotty implementation, caused by lack of time before the submit deadline, and it would be nice to see an expanded and improved version released.

All in all, I think the humour and the overall cuteness of The Kissing Bandit does make up for some of its shortcomings, and since the game only takes about 10 minutes to play, it's well worth spending those 10 minutes.
-- Karl Ove Hufthammer

(`bear`) A Bear's Night Out

Year: 1997
Release / Serial No: 5 / 990224
Author: David Dyte
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=c9ll6cr8zr1txtfe

Teddy bears, as anyone who owns one can tell you, come to life when you're asleep. This game puts you in one bear's shoes, making mischief and preparing for a big day. Although allegedly an "interactive children's story", it will probably leave most genuine children baffled, through both its vocabulary and its several major references to other prominent text adventures. Small, with good puzzles based on overcoming the limitations of being two feet tall and made of cloth. Contains an adaptive hint menu.
-- Carl Muckenhoupt

(`bishoes`) Buried In Shoes

Year: 2008
Release / Serial No: 4 / 090513
Author: Dominic Delabruere
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=zy2o84xckwqgdn2l

This work addresses a really serious theme - holocaust. It's always a risky and difficult thing to do; however, the author managed to find a right tone for his game, and coped with his task well enough, avoiding sliding into histrionics or telling commonplaces. On the other hand, Buried In Shoes fails to form an integral picture, remaining a set of detached scenes - each of them moving, but not necessarily meaningful.
--Valentine Kopteltsev

(`change`) For a Change

Year: 1999
Release / Serial No: 1 / 990930
Author: Dan Schmidt
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=t61i5akczyblx2zd

"The sun is gone. It must be brought. You have a rock." So begins For a Change, one of the most unusual games in recent memory: the language is distinctly nonstandard, in an e.e. cummings sort of way, and figuring out exactly what's going on requires some lateral thinking. (Another example of the syntax: "This subsection of the inset brightens and flickers. The shadows . . . walk the cordstone walls; they move and excite.") While it's not as accessible as most IF, it's still a richly rewarding playing experience; once you learn to think in the same off-kilter way as the game's written, it all comes together. The puzzles are a mixed bag--some make more sense than others--but generally this works both as a game and as a linguistic experiment, and rewards the imagination.
-- Duncan Stevens

Winner: Best Writing, 1999 XYZZY Awards

(`claw`) Wearing the Claw

Year: 1996
Release / Serial No: 3 / 970327
Author: Paul O'Brian
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=zflseqfngmbhwhny

A traditional fantasy quest in which you and your village have been cursed with a slow transformation into various animals. The only way to stop the curse is to retrieve the Pendant of Elinor from the mysterious island of the Goergs.
[--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

(`cottage`) Cottage

Year: 1978
Release / Serial No: 1 / 090715
Authors: Kimmo & Viggo Kann, Olle E Johansson
Translator: Johan Ottosson
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=1z3m4yew6bg3bfc

You're on a jetty by a lake somewhere in Småland. In the distance you can see a red cottage. Around the house there are forests extending for miles and miles, waterfalls, and many strange characters. When you enter the cottage you discover that it's a lot bigger on the inside than on the outside. It's even got a lift!

You have to use all of your cunning to collect treasures and valuables and make it through the game with as many points as possible. Hours of interesting and intelligent entertainment are in store for you!

Cottage is a translation of Stuga, the earliest known Swedish text adventure, originally written in DEC Basic on a mainframe computer in 1977-8. The above text is part of the blurb on the commercial version Stugan, which was released in 1986. It quickly became one of the most widespread PC games in Sweden.

Technical Note: The game warns you at the beginning that the interpreter doesn't support timed input. In fact, timed input works just fine, so no need to worry. This is just one of the interpreter's little quirks.

(`curses`) Curses (Z-Machine version 3)

Year: 1993
Release / Serial No: 7 / 930428
Author: Graham Nelson
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=plvzam05bmz3enh8

"As "Curses" opens, you're hunting about in the attic of your family home, looking for a tatty old map of Paris (you're going on holiday tomorrow) and generally trying to avoid all the packing. Aunt Jemima is potting daisies and sulking; the attics are full of endless distractions and secrets; Greek myths, horoscopes, sixth-century politics, a less than altogether helpful demon, a mysterious bomb plot, photography, ritual, poetry and a dream or two all get in your way; and somehow you keep being reminded of your family through the ages, and all its Curses... ...could it be that even you are Cursed?"
[--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

(`cycles`) Vicious Cycles

Year: 2001
Release / Serial No: 3 / 020222
Author: Simon Mark - Email: bloomengine AT gmail.com
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=abbys81jz2sigdeu

Vicious Cycles is a complex game. It contains two interwoven narratives; it deals with complex issues in real life; it has puzzles requiring many replays to solve.

The game has a few early surprise which I won't mention here, but I can say that the atmosphere is a sort of dogged determination to overcome despite discouraging odds. The gritty feel reminded me of Cape by Bruno Dias, although the stories themselves are very different.

Overall, I highly recommend this game. It is fairly short, about 100-400 moves for a typical playthrough, although a perfect playthrough is probably 50 or less.
[--IFDB review by MathBrush]

(`darkiss1`) Darkiss! Wrath of the Vampire -
Chapter 1: the Awakening

Year: 2015
Release / Serial No: 2 / 160130
Author: Marco Vallarino - Email: marco.vallarino AT gmail.com
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=ozmtl3j82zwtpwxn

You're the nightmare from which people can't wake. Dead twice. One by the hand of your maker, the second by the fiend who drove a stake through your heart while you were sleeping defenceless in your coffin. Alive thrice, it seems, although this last one shouldn't be possible. Something happened.

(`djinni`) The Djinni Chronicles

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: 2 / 001117
Author: J.D. Berry
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=zu3xhhd3l9y6r177

You're a djinn, or rather a series of them, trying both to serve your various masters' commands and to achieve your own purposes. Well implemented and richly imagined--the game devises a djinni cosmology that's extremely involved and makes sense of your motivations and the limitations on your movement. You need to tune into a sort of djinni ethics to figure out why things work as they do. Not very long, with just a few puzzles, but the thoroughness of the worldbuilding makes up for the brevity.
-- Duncan Stevens

(`eas`) Earth And Sky

Year: 2001
Release / Serial No: 2 / 011204
Author: Paul O'Brian
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=xtlhfet0vixthar5

It's been almost a month since your parents disappeared.

One Tuesday, they just didn't come home, and there's been no sign of them since. For the University and the rest of the town, the mystery is beginning to pall. To those people, it's as if Claire and Scott Colborn suddenly stopped existing -- strange and inexplicable, to be sure, but forgettable in the long run.

But for you it's as if the ground beneath your feet stopped existing, and you've been plummeting in freefall ever since. Your brother Austin, though, has been a rock through the whole experience, handling the numbing details, the endless meetings with useless detectives, even sorting through Mom and Dad's lab in hopes of finding an answer. Now you stand outside the lab door, clutching his note, hardly daring to hope that such an answer may have arrived at long last.

(`failsafe`) Fail-Safe

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: ?
Author: Jon Ingold
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=c6x835i6o9zqfc59

A brief game with a novel premise that it would be disastrous to describe. This work plays some interesting games with the player/player-character/parser identities. It also turns off meta-verbs, so be prepared for the fact that you won't be able to save and restore. The game is so brief, thought, that it probably won't matter much. Definitely worth a try.
-- Emily Short

(`huntdark`) Hunter, In Darkness

Year: 1999
Release / Serial No: 4 / 991119
Author: Andrew Plotkin
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=mh1a6hizgwjdbeg7

The plot--you're exploring a cave, hunting a mysterious beast called a Wumpus--is derived from the ancient minimalist BASIC game Hunt the Wumpus, but the similarity ends there. This is arguably the most richly described cave in the history of IF, and your experience of it is thoroughly and harrowingly described. In fact, the cave is as much your adversary as the Wumpus itself, and it takes just as great a toll on you. The puzzles are fairly conventional (though the last one is rather elegant), and they include a maze that isn't really a maze. But the story is brilliantly executed--the plot branches and rejoins so seamlessly that you're unlikely to notice that there are multiple ways through the game--and the writing is terrific; Plotkin is adept at using all the senses. Hunter... breathes new life into a very tired genre, no small feat.
-- Duncan Stevens

(`lists`) Lists and Lists

Year: 1996
Release / Serial No: 3 / 960823
Author: Andrew Plotkin
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=zj3ie12ewi1mrj1t

An introductory course in the Scheme programming language (a dialect of Lisp) presented as a text adventure - or, to put it another way, a Scheme interpreter with a wee scrap of text adventure wrapped around it. Since it's Z-code, and the first Z-code games were written in another Lisp variant, there's an odd circularity to it all. Not all of Scheme's syntax is represented, but it's still a good show-off piece. Hardly interactive fiction, though.
-- Carl Muckenhoupt

(`moonlit`) The Moonlit Tower

Year: 2002
Release / Serial No: 1 / 020927
Author: Yoon Ha Lee
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=10387w68qlwehbyq

A beautifully-written game based on Asian mythology. To explain the premise would be difficult, but that's not really an issue -- the best thing about this game is simply enjoying the setting, which is full of rare and lovely imagery. The puzzles are occasionally a bit elusive, but the built-in hint system helps somewhat with that problem. There are also multiple endings and an extensive set of notes describing the game's background -- quite a lot of polish for a (relatively) brief piece.
-- Emily Short

Winner: Best Writing, 2002 XYZZY Awards

(`shade`) Shade

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: 3 / 001127
Author: Andrew Plotkin
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=hsfc7fnl40k4a30q

Shade is one of those classics that get recommended anytime anyone recommends any IF to newcomers: it's brief, disquieting, ambiguous, memorable without being especially difficult. It offers an interaction style too guided and fluid to be called "puzzly", and which probably belongs in some other category. It threatens one's ideas of the relationship between the player and the protagonist. It has entered the canon, as far as interactive fiction has one.
-- Play This Thing!

Winner: Best Setting, 2000 XYZZY Awards

(`shrapnel`) Shrapnel

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: 1.01 / 9504
Author: Adam Cadre
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=82mn545s8bt3csa4

This is one of those games that you can't say very much about without weakening the impact, but I'll say what I can. The content can be broadly described by two words: violence and gimmicks. Despite some structural allusions to Zork, it's story-driven (or possibly gimmick-driven) with no puzzles, except insofar as the story itself is rather puzzling. Nightmarish, disjointed, short enough to be played at one sitting, does some interesting things technically (including some tricks that I didn't notice until poking around in my second play-through). Far from perfect as a work of art, but I don't count the time spent playing it as wasted.
-- Carl Muckenhoupt

Winner: Best Use of Medium, 2000 XYZZY Awards

(`sutwin`) The Space Under the Window

Year: 1997
Release / Serial No: 2 / 970402
Author: Andrew Plotkin
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=egtt6j8vif0plzrc

A new, experimental game that has no puzzles but uses only words that change your focus on things, thereby adapting the story.
[--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

(`temple`) The Temple

Year: 2002
Release / Serial No: 3 /161123
Author: Johan Berntsson
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=kq9qgjkf2k6xn1c0

You have a recurring nightmare, and this time you can't get out. You explore an abandoned city that is a mix of R'lyeh and of the fortress in Enchanter by Infocom. Ancient writing, mystical texts, haunting memories from a half-forgotten past, violent cultists, gibbering horrors, this hits up a lot of the best parts of Lovecraft.
-- MathBrush

(`tokyo`) Downtown Tokyo, Present Day

Year: 1998
Release / Serial No: 2 / 000615
Author: John Kean
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=4ipti3pkye3wkucz

"In this game you actually play two people - one is the real you, sitting in the dark in a movie theatre, and the other is the hero of the film that you are watching.
Originally conceived for Adam Cadre's infamous Chicken-Comp of June 1998 (spot the chicken-crossing-the-road)."
[--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

(`toyshop`) The Magic Toyshop

Year: 1995
Release / Serial No: 1 / 951018
Author: Gareth Rees
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=52x2zxt8ers4rxc0

A one-location game in which you play a series of puzzles against a shopkeeper in order to get a present.
[--blurb from The Z-Files Catalogue]

(`weather`) A Change in the Weather

Year: 1995
Release / Serial No: 6 / 960613
Author: Andrew Plotkin
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=00wlim27k5d1hmf2

A deceptively simple premise: You get stuck out in the rain. This is one difficult little game, made of interlocking time-sensitive parts with ample opportunity to get things irrevocably wrong. Consists of two acts, one before and one during the all-important and landscape-transforming downpour. Well-polished prose. Excellent building of tension. Odd and twisty map. Very satisfying.
-- Carl Muckenhoupt

(`voices`) Voices

Year: 2001
Release / Serial No: 2 / 010504
Author: Aris Katsaris - Email: katsaris AT gmail.com
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=nue0kr86i5cpkqze

[...] quite possibly the only Christian IF game written which didn't suck. The author has put storytelling above evangelizing, which means that the religious layer is much deeper, since it forms the basis of the world view, rather than the basis of the plot. I prefer it this way.
-- IF-Review

(`yagwad`) Yes, Another Game With a Dragon!

Year: 2000
Release / Serial No: 2 / 001121
Author: John Kean
Link: http://ifdb.tads.org/viewgame?id=ljqfvoa6dshtk8xa

An entertaining little romp that's sometimes straight fantasy and sometimes more akin to parody of fantasy, as indicated by the name (which adverts to the r*if community's well-aired dislike for games involving dragons). A few of the puzzles are a bit obscure, but most are both challenging and reasonable, and there's substantially more plot than the typical canonical fantasy game offers. Funny and well-written.
-- Duncan Stevens

Supplementary Information

Here you can find some information about playing text adventures, Infocom, the game format Infocom developed, the process of porting text adventures from modern computers to the C64, and what you need to write your own text adventure.

How to play a text adventure

If you have never played a text adventure game (sometimes called an Interactive Fiction game or story), you may find it hard to get started. These instructions should be enough to teach you what you need to know. Of course you can expect some exceptions, but the vast majority of the games tend to stick to a set of conventions. So, let's dive right in!

The game starts

When you start a game, you will first see an introduction, usually consisting of one or a few screenfuls of text, giving you some background on who you are, where you are, and perhaps even what your objectives in the game are. Whenever the game has printed a screenful of text, it will wait until you press ENTER or some other key, so that you get a chance to read everything before it scrolls off the top of the screen.

How to interact

When the introduction is over, you will get a prompt, usually ">", but it may be a little different from game to game. The prompt means that the game is now waiting for you to tell it what you want to do. You do this by typing in imperative commands, as if you were commanding someone. Let's say the introduction told you that you are in a kitchen, and that you can see a closed glass jar standing on the kitchen counter. Commands you could try at this point include *TAKE THE JAR*, or *OPEN THE JAR*, or perhaps *EXAMINE THE JAR* (Throughout this document, things that are written in capital letters with an italic font are complete commands that can be typed into an IF game. They don't have to be typed in capital letters when entered into a game). If you want to, you can skip the articles: *TAKE JAR* will work just at well as *TAKE THE JAR*. If there are several different jars you could mean, the game may ask you which one you mean. Just type one or more words that uniquely identifies one of the items. For instance, if the game says "Which one do you mean, the blue glass jar or the green glass jar?", you might reply *BLUE* to take the blue one. You can also choose to ignore the question altogether, just typing a new command.

Movement

To go to another location, most games expect you to type in which direction you want to go. You can type *GO SOUTH*, but just *SOUTH* will also do the trick, as will *S* (which is the commonly accepted abbreviation for *SOUTH*). Other directions and their abbreviations are *NORTH (N), EAST (E), WEST (W), NORTHEAST (NE), SOUTHEAST (SE), NORTHWEST (NW), SOUTHWEST (SW), UP (U), DOWN (D), IN* and *OUT*. If you are aboard a ship of some kind you may also be able to use *FORE, AFT, STARBOARD* and *PORT*.

Other ways to move around may include commands like *ENTER CAR, GO CAR, SIT ON MOTORCYCLE, GET ON BIKE, CLIMB ONTO SHIP, JUMP ONTO PLATFORM, DIVE INTO LAKE, BOARD SHIP, EXIT CAR, EXIT, LEAVE, GET OUT*. Exactly which commands are recognized vary from game to game as well as from situation to situation in those games. When interacting with IF games, always try to express yourself as simply as possible. If you have tried several ways of expressing yourself and the game refuses to understand what you want to do, you are most probably on the wrong track; it's time to try something completely different.

Common verbs

As you know by now, you can use the verb TAKE to pick up items in the game. Of course, you can also use DROP to drop items. Most modern games actually recognize a hundred different verbs or more. With some of the most used verbs, you can also use multiple items, like this: *TAKE GREEN BALL AND SCREWDRIVER* or *DROP ALL* or *PUT ALL BUT HAMMER IN BAG*. You'll find that ALL is often a very useful word, although it only works with certain verbs, most notably TAKE and DROP. Here are some of the most important verbs, with examples:

LOOK or L	*L* or *LOOK AT BOB* or *LOOK IN JAR* or *LOOK UNDER BED*
TAKE	*TAKE KNIFE*
DROP	*DROP KNIFE*
EXAMINE or X	*EXAMINE KNIFE* or *X KNIFE*
SEARCH	*SEARCH DESK*
INVENTORY or I	*I*
OPEN	*OPEN DRAWER*
CLOSE	*CLOSE DRAWER*
LOCK	*LOCK DOOR WITH RUSTY KEY*
UNLOCK	*UNLOCK DOOR WITH RUSTY KEY*
ASK	*ASK JOHN ABOUT POLICE OFFICER*
TELL	*TELL JOHN ABOUT MURDER*
SAY	*SAY HELLO TO JOHN*
GIVE	*GIVE RABBIT TO BOB*
SHOW	*SHOW KNIFE TO POLICE OFFICER*
WAIT or Z	*Z*
AGAIN or G	*G*

Other verbs you will need from time to time include *ATTACK, BUY, COVER, DRINK, EAT, FILL, JUMP, KISS, KNOCK, LISTEN, MOVE, PULL, PUSH, REMOVE, READ, SIT, SLEEP, STAND, THROW, TIE, TOUCH, TURN, TYPE, UNTIE, WEAR*. There are lots more. Hopefully they will seem natural to you when you need them.

How time works

Almost all IF games count time in turns, rather than hours and minutes. Every time you type something and press ENTER, one turn passes. This also means that until you press ENTER, no time passes. You could think of a turn as being something like a minute, but how long it actually is depends on what you do during that turn. If you want time to pass, but don't want to perform any actions, just type *WAIT* or *Z*. This will prove useful while waiting for someone to arrive or something to get ready in the oven etc (in the game world, not in the real world!).

There are games that use real-time instead of turn-based play, but they are few and far between, and they will tell you about their real-time system at the beginning of the game.

Talking to people

The most useful ways of talking to people usually involve the verbs ASK and TELL. When using them, try to pin down the best keyword for what you are interested in, rather than longer constructs. For example, *TELL BOB ABOUT HOW I SAW SHEILA GIVE A STRANGE AMULET TO ANOTHER WOMAN* is not likely to yield any useful results, but *TELL BOB ABOUT AMULET* or perhaps *TELL BOB ABOUT SHEILA* may indeed be useful. In other words, you tell the game the subject you want to talk about or ask about, not exactly what to say. The game will try to make reasonable assumptions on what you want to say regarding the subject.

Also note that many games are quite primitive when it comes to modelling people. The author has to put in an enormous amount of work to make people in the game behave realistically and respond well to conversation. In general, don't expect too much from people in the game, but there are of course games that shine in this area too. You'll also see that some authors prefer menu-based conversation, to facilitate interaction.

To tell someone else to do something, type the name of the person, a comma, and then a command. Example: *BOB, BREAK THE JAR*. Just like in real life, most people won't automatically do something just because you tell them to. If you think Bob knows what to do with the jar, you can also try *GIVE JAR TO BOB* or *SHOW JAR TO BOB*.

Special verbs

All games recognize some verbs that don't do anything in the game world, but tells the game something about how you want it to behave, or some special task you want it to peform. These verbs include:

UNDO	Takes back the last move you made.
QUIT or Q	Ends the current game.
RESTART	Starts the game over from the beginning.
SAVE	Saves your current position to a file on disk.
RESTORE	Loads a previously saved game position.
HELP or ABOUT	Shows some information about the game and its author, in some cases even hints to some of the puzzles.
VERBOSE	Tells the game you want a long description of every room you enter, even if you've been there before.
BRIEF	Tells the game you want a long description the first time you enter a room, and a short description when you come back. This is the default mode.
SUPERBRIEF	Tells the game you always want short descriptions of all rooms.

Getting stuck and unstuck

While playing IF, you will get stuck. This is part of the deal -- where there are puzzles, there will also be stuckness. If you grow tired of being stuck in the same spot for too long, you can either type *HELP* or *HINT* in the game to see if there are any hints available, or you can ask other players for hints. A good place to ask for hints is the the forum at http://www.intfiction.org . That's also one of the best places to meet other IF players, discuss games you've played, get tips on games you should play and more.

Oh, one last thing about playing interactive fiction. Make a map as you play. You are very likely to need it.

The Zork Machine - past and present

In 1977, a few guys at Massachusetts Institute of Technology played Adventure, which is widely considered to be the first text adventure. They decided to write their own adventure game, first called Zork, then Dungeon, then Zork again. In 1979, they started a company called Infocom, to make business software. They needed a source of income as they were starting up, and they thought Zork could provide that, if they could only get it to run on the micro computers of the time. The game was about 1 MB in size, and the computers they needed to run it on typically had 32 KB of memory. Also, the game was written in Fortran, which wasn't available for micro computers. On top of all this, there were new computer models coming out all the time, and they wanted the game to run on as many different platforms as possible.

To solve this equation, they designed a virtual machine, an imaginary computer never meant to be built, but to be emulated. The machine was called the Z-Machine (Zork Machine), and it was designed only for running text adventures. They then created their own programming language called ZIL (Zork Implementation Language), heavily inspired by MDL, the language they wrote the first version of Zork in. They wrote a compiler called Zilch, which compiled ZIL programs to Z-code, programs ready to be run on the Z-machine. They then wrote a separate ZIP (Z-machine Interpreter) to emulate the Z-machine on each platform they wanted to support. The end result was that they could, after the hard work of writing all this software was done, release their text adventures for many different platforms without rewriting any of the code.

While the Z-machine was heavily optimized to make text adventures compact in size, Zork was still too big. They split up the game into three different parts, adding some pieces and removing others, to make three different games, each one of them playable on a micro computer with a disk drive attached. An entire game would fit on a disk, and the computer would use virtual memory, copying the parts of the game that it needed at the moment from disk to memory. In this way, games of up to 128 KB in size could be played on a computer with only 32 KB of memory. Zork I was released in 1980, and became a commercial success. Infocom kept on making text adventures for about ten years, producing some of the finest games of the eighties.

Fast forward to the nineties. Infocom had been bought by Activision and eventually shut down. Some fans gathered together over the now emerging Internet, and started figuring out just exactly how the Z-Machine worked, by reading the machine code of the interpreters used (ZIP:s). They called themselves The Infocom Taskforce. A guy in England called Graham Nelson saw what was happening and started to write his own programming language, compiler and text adventure programming library, based on the findings of the Infocom Task Force. He called his system Inform. While he was developing it, we also wrote his own game in Inform, called Curses. When Inform hit version 5, it had matured enough for a much wider audience to use it. Graham made Inform available for free, along with Curses.

Since Curses was using the same virtual machine as Infocom had used, it could also be played with the same ZIP:s that Infocom had produced, but soon enough other people started to write new Z-machine interpreters, for modern computers. Graham also created two new versions of the Z-machine, called version 7 and 8 (Infocom created versions 1-6), which allowed for bigger games. A version 8 game can be up to 512 KB in size, which allows for truly huge text adventures. It has been estimated that Infocom's first six games could be combined into a single game without hitting this limit.

Inform 5 was used to produce a dozen games or so. Then came Inform 6, which has been used to write hundreds of games. After that came Inform 7, which is very different from the earlier versions. It has been used to create hundreds of games as well. To allow for even larger games, and to make it easier to incorporate graphics and sound into text adventures, a new virtual machine, Glulx, was designed by Andrew Plotkin. Inform 7, as well as the more recent versions of Inform 6, can produce both Z-code and Glulx games.

Porting Inform games to the C64

The Z-machine is available in eight versions, numbered 1-8. Infocom released games using the Z-machine version 3, 4 and 5 for the Commodore 64, and therefore there are now Infocom-produced Z-machine interpreters available for these versions .

Almost all Z-machine games produced in Inform use Z-machine version 5 or 8. A version 5 game can be up to 256 KB in size. However, a C64 can't run a version 5 game bigger than 214 KB. Also, long before hitting this limit, games usually get so complex that neither the CPU nor the disk drive of the C64 is fast enough to play the games at an enjoyable speed.

The Infocom game interpreters were not bug free. Some modern games may use Z-machine options which were never used in any Infocom games on the C64, and which may now make the interpreter crash or just not work properly.

The Z-machine format has also been extended to allow for inclusion of Unicode characters. This works fine in many modern interpreters, but of course not in the Infocom ones. For this reason, none of the Inform games written in French, German, Swedish or other languages using accented characters can be expected to work.

In creating this compilation, I have tried out many Inform games, and only kept the ones that seem to run perfectly or with only some minor display issue, and at a reasonable speed. I can't guarantee that the games work all the way to the end, but I would generally expect that they do. Some games present menus or quote boxes that aren't very well adapted to a screen which is only 40 characters wide, but they should be playable nonetheless.

To port the games, I used an excellent tool developed by Paul David Doherty, called D64ToInf. It can be used to extract the game file from one or two D64 disk images, or to create one or two disk images from a game file (a small game can fit on one disk image, while a larger one takes two).

Writing your own Inform games

You can of course write your own text adventures as well, and Inform is an excellent tool to do it. If you want to write something that will run on a Commodore 64, you will need to use Inform 6. If you don't care about that aspect, you can choose between Inform 6 and 7, or TADS, or Hugo, or Adrift etc.

Supposing for now that you want to write a game in Inform 6, possibly with the goal of porting it to the Commodore 64, here's some advice to get you started.

There is a rather extensive document serving as the reference manual for Inform 6, called The Inform Designer's Manual, Fourth Edition, or DM4 for short. It can be read in HTML form or downloaded in several different formats at
http://inform-fiction.org/manual/download_dm4.html

If you are new to programming, or just find the DM4 a bit hard to get through, you may prefer The Inform Beginner's Guide instead. It's available at
http://inform-fiction.org/manual/download_ibg.html

There is an excellent FAQ for Inform 6 available too:
http://www.firthworks.com/roger/informfaq/index.html

No matter how you choose to learn Inform, you will need to download the software itself. It can be found at http://inform-fiction.org/software/index.html

A final advice, if you want to compile a game with the intention of porting it to the C64, make sure you use the -~S compiler switch. This makes the game both smaller and faster, by avoiding a lot of run-time checks in the code.