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# Oral History of Video Games 2012-13

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**THE ORAL HISTORY OF VIDEO GAMES**

Interactive Qualifying Project Report Completed in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Bachelor of Science Degree at  
Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Worcester, MA

Submitted to:  
Professor Dean M. O'Donnell (adviser)

Suzanne DelPrete  
Eyleen Graedler

March 5, 2013

This report represents the work of one or more WPI undergraduate students  
submitted to the faculty as evidence of completion of a degree requirement.  
WPI routinely publishes these reports on its web site without editorial or peer review.

## **Abstract:**

We interviewed Andrew “Zarf” Plotkin and Stuart Galley to further expand the IGDA Game Preservation SIG<sup>1</sup> and Worcester Polytechnic Institute’s Oral History of Video Games website<sup>2</sup>. Prior to the interviews with Plotkin and Galley, we conducted practice interviews on WPI students to ascertain the best way to conduct an interview. We also viewed documentaries to examine different ways in which professionals conducted good interviews and edited them to correctly to capture their essence.

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<sup>1</sup> IGDA preservation website <<http://www.igda.org/preservation>>

<sup>2</sup> Oral History of Video Games Website <<http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/>>

## Authorship Page:

Suzanne DelPrete and Eyleen Graedler each had individual as well as group responsibilities in the completion of the IQP. As a group, we watched various documentaries to get a feel for how interviews are conducted. While researching subjects to interview, Suzanne wrote up the biography for Andrew Plotkin while Eyleen wrote up one for Stuart Galley.

Suzanne DelPrete was the video editor and outreach person of this IQP. She contacted possible interviewees and worked with them to set up interview times and locations. She also wrote out the agendas for our weekly meetings with our adviser. As the one with the most editing experience, Suzanne was the one who edited the interviews. She also contacted people in order to receive permission for image usage in the clips.

Eyleen Graedler was the “behind-the-scenes” technical member of the group. She was responsible for obtaining and maintaining the necessary equipment for the interview from the Academic Technology Center (ATC)<sup>3</sup> as well as retrieving the interview footage from the cameras used. Eyleen also was responsible for updating the website. She added a new page which provided links to other oral histories then created individual pages for Zarf and Stu. These pages included the clips Suzanne had edited and gave viewers the option of downloading the whole interview.

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<sup>3</sup> ATC Website <<http://www.wpi.edu/academics/ATC/>>

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# Introduction

## 1. What is an oral history?

Oral histories are accounts of past events told by individuals who experienced them first hand. They depend upon the capacity of the human memory and the spoken word<sup>1</sup>. Oral histories differ from normal historical accounts in that they focus less on the specifics of an event, instead catering to the experiences and feelings of the interviewee during the time period. They are not gossip, rumor, or folklore<sup>2</sup>. Oral histories are halfway between interviews and regular conversation in that they can have the structure of an interview, but have no “set” course. They may often diverge from a main topic if the interviewee feels they have an important story to tell. Oral histories are usually taped or recorded, and then may be transcribed into printed documentary form. Oral historians attempt to verify their findings, analyze them, and place them in an accurate historical context<sup>3</sup>.

Everyone has a unique and invaluable story to tell. Oral histories are collections of living people’s testimonies about their own experiences- priceless treasures for the person’s family and community<sup>4</sup>. Learning about the past began with personal stories and lessons shared with friends and family<sup>5</sup>. There is historical importance in the memories of everyday people, not just the rich and famous. In order to have a more inclusive and accurate picture of the past, it is important to interview people of all different cultural and social groups, classes, genders, and race. The human lifespan puts boundaries on the subject matter we can collect with oral history, so with each passing moment, irretrievable information is slipping away from us<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Shopes, Linda. *What Is Oral History?* History Matters: The U.S. Survey on the Web. Web. <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf>>. (February 20, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Moyer, Judith. *Step-by-Step Guide to Oral History*. DoHistory. 1999. Web. <[http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)>. (February 25, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> <[http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)>

<sup>4</sup> <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf>>

<sup>5</sup> *What is Oral History?* In Their Words: AETN’S World War II Oral History Project. AETN and the Arkansas Department of Education. 2010. Web.

<[http://www.intheirwords.org/the\\_project/what\\_is\\_oral\\_history](http://www.intheirwords.org/the_project/what_is_oral_history)>. (March 1, 2013).

<sup>6</sup> <[http://dohistory.org/on\\_your\\_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html](http://dohistory.org/on_your_own/toolkit/oralHistory.html)>

These stories will disappear forever if we do not collect and preserve those memories, so oral historians are also concerned with storage of their findings for use by scholars later.

The first historians were storytellers who sat around fires describing events from their own lives as well as experiences of their ancestors<sup>7</sup>. Early efforts to record firsthand accounts of the past can be termed “oral history” by only the most generous of definitions. There was an absence of audio and videotape recorders that necessitated reliance on human note-takers, thus raising questions about reliability and veracity. Also, early interviewers often conducted with no intention of developing a permanent archival collection<sup>8</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> <[http://www.intheirwords.org/the\\_project/what\\_is\\_oral\\_history](http://www.intheirwords.org/the_project/what_is_oral_history)>

<sup>8</sup> <<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/oral/oral.pdf>>

## 2. Conducting an oral history

When conducting an oral history, there are a number of steps to take. Presented below is a compressed list of actions we followed that will be expanded further upon in the *Process* section of this paper, adapted from Judith Moyer's *Step by Step Guide to Oral History*:

- 1 Decide on the area of topic. Consider/formulate a central question or issue.
- 2 Plan the project. Consider such things as end products, budget, equipment, and time frames.
- 3 Find people who fit the wanted criteria and would make valuable contributions in the form of an oral history. Contact them and set up an interview time. Make sure the interviewee agrees to a release beforehand.
- 4 Conduct plenty of background research about the person's life. Formulate specific questions to ask your subject. Become well versed in their history.
- 5 Interview. Follow up with subject afterwards thanking them for their time.
- 6 Process interviews.
- 7 Evaluate research and interviews and cycle back to step 1 or go on to step 8.
- 8 Organize and present results. Store the materials archaically.

We organized our results by editing the interviews into smaller clips that had specific focuses. They were then presented and stored through the school's Alpheus website, but there are a variety of other ways this could be done.

### 3. WPI's oral history project

The objective of this IQP was to add to the collection of oral histories located on the IMGD's Oral History of Video Games website (<http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history>), which was made in partnership with the IGDA Game Preservation SIG. This program at Worcester Polytechnic Institute is aimed at documenting the history of video games and the industry around them. Our goal was to interview inventors, developers, and artists that were around at the birth of the industry. Our focus was to obtain honest interviews with pioneers who can discuss how the industry got started and different areas of the video game industry.

The two subjects we interviewed for this project were Stuart Galley and Andrew "Zarf" Plotkin. The two oral histories focus equally on Plotkin and Galley's contribution to the world of interactive fiction, as well as the men themselves and their motivation for choosing their field. Andrew "Zarf" Plotkin is still a part of the interactive fiction scene, founding his own company, Zarfhome Software Consulting<sup>9</sup>, while Stu Galley was a member of the now-defunct gaming company, Infocom<sup>10</sup>. The interactive fiction genre is a small one and because of this, we wanted to discuss the challenges of working in this part of the industry and what makes it so different from "normal," visually-based video games.

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The selection of an oral history interviewee is a balancing act. If the interviewee is retired from their field, they are more likely to talk freely and honestly about failures and embarrassments of their heyday, however, the passage of time will have faded some details. On the other hand, if the interviewee is still active in their field, their memories are sharper. Along with this come the memories of their embarrassments and failures, making them harder to talk about. Previous IQPs focused more on the former group, while we interviewed one person from both groups: Galley of the former and Plotkin of the latter. This shift was created by another

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<sup>9</sup> Andrew Plotkin's website <<http://zarfhome.com/>>

<sup>10</sup> Infocom's website <<http://www.infocom-if.org/index2.html>>

factor present in the selection of possible interviewees: locality. Many of the people we considered interviewing no longer lived in the area, prompting us to consider people different from earlier IQPs.

Using Jason Scott's *BBS: The Documentary*, Errol Morris's *First Person* documentaries, *The King of King: Beyond the Arcade*, *Chasing Ghosts*, *The Aristocrats*, and many other documentaries as guides, we conducted several test interviews with WPI students, mainly during late A-term into B-term. We studied the documentaries, dissected them, and analyzed them thoroughly to perfect our technique and prepare for the interviews with Plotkin and Galley. Some techniques we learned from editing were using secondary shots (cameras), gathering B-roll beforehand relevant to topic areas, filtering the audio with Audacity<sup>11</sup> to have superior sound quality, and which questions would evoke better responses from interviewees. Audacity is an freeware audio editor for recording, slicing, and mixing audio.

WPI's Oral History Project is an important tradition to continue. WPI's Interactive Media and Game Development program is listed number six in the United States and Canada, one of a growing number of its kind. The industry is continuing to boom and it is necessary to preserve the history of the pioneers of the video game industry. With video games becoming more and more mainstream, it is more important than ever to provide some grounding, and where things come from<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>11</sup> Audacity Website <audacity.sourceforge.net/>

<sup>12</sup> Garr, Brian. *UT archive preserving video game history*. Statesman.com. 12/20/10. Web. <<http://www.statesman.com/news/business/ut-archive-preserving-video-game-history-1/nRT5r/>>. (March 4, 2013).

## Background

### 1. Stuart Galley

Stuart Galley was born in Philadelphia in 1946, but moved to southern California when he was three years old. He was the youngest of three children; the eldest was sixteen years older than him<sup>13</sup>. Stu's father was a mechanical engineer and his mother was a housewife. As a child, his hobbies were collecting things, such as coins and stamps, and he was also interested in amateur astronomy. Since he couldn't afford the equipment, Stu joined a club at school where it was provided<sup>14</sup>.

In high school, Stu received a mechanical digital computer kit with three rotating wheels you could put jumpers on, contacts underneath them, and wiring in the back. The computer could be used to play tic-tac-toe<sup>15</sup>. He also had a few summer jobs doing scientific programming. Stu took Russian for three years in high school, at which time the Cold War was going on.

For his undergraduate studies, Stu went to the California Institute of Technology, majoring in physics. Unfortunately at Caltech, they did not have much of a computer curriculum. It wasn't until Stu's last year that they finally introduced three subjects those interested in computer science could take<sup>16</sup>. In the meantime, he did scientific programming for physicists, though it was humdrum work. Stu was a part of the school's small newspaper staff, *The California Tech*<sup>17</sup>, and eventually became the editor-in-chief then business manager<sup>18</sup>. Two notable people he interviewed were Linus Pauling<sup>19</sup> and Richard Feynman<sup>20</sup>, professors at the school who won the Nobel Prize. Stu was also a part of Alpha Phi Beta and Tau Beta Pi, glee club, and the track team and was the residence house's vice president.

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<sup>13</sup> Galley, Stu. Personal interview. 30 Jan. 2013.

<sup>14</sup> Galley

<sup>15</sup> Galley

<sup>16</sup> Galley

<sup>17</sup> The California Tech Website <<http://tech.caltech.edu/>>

<sup>18</sup> Infocom. *Stu Galley*. Infocom- The Master Storytellers. 08/20/10 Web.<<http://www.infocom-if.org/authors/galley.html>>. (February 20, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Article about Linus Pauling <[http://caltechcampuspubs.library.caltech.edu/590/1/1963\\_10\\_17\\_65\\_04.pdf](http://caltechcampuspubs.library.caltech.edu/590/1/1963_10_17_65_04.pdf)>

<sup>20</sup> Article about Richard Feynman <[http://caltechcampuspubs.library.caltech.edu/665/1/1965\\_10\\_28\\_67\\_06.pdf](http://caltechcampuspubs.library.caltech.edu/665/1/1965_10_28_67_06.pdf)>

Stu didn't become fully interested in computers for a long time, not until he went to MIT. Stu had just gotten married and wanted to see another part of the county, so he applied to Massachusetts Institute of Technology, a college that had a strong physics department with lots of different specialties<sup>21</sup>. MIT also had a great computer science program with topics ranging from artificial intelligence to operating systems. At MIT, Stu audited talks and seminars about computers, and got a lot of information that way. There, he also got a full time job working with computers, although he lacked formal experience.

Stu eventually left grad school in order to pursue his own interests because the physicists at that time thought working with computers had nothing to do with physics at all. By that time, Stu had done enough physics to know he didn't want it to be his career anymore. After leaving grad school, Stu joined the Lab for Computer Science (LCS) group at MIT (of which he was a part of for about ten years), and met many people who furthered his interest in computers. More importantly, he ended up collaborating with this group whose members would later form Infocom<sup>22</sup>.

Working at Infocom was not Stu's first experience with interactive fiction. The first IF game Stu played was the original *Zork* adventure. The original game was not created by Infocom, but was a midnight project<sup>23</sup>. He was also one of the early testers for *Deadline*- a murder mystery with real life puzzles to think about. These experiences lead to Stu ultimately working for Infocom in 1979 and wanting to write for himself<sup>24</sup>.

Stuart Galley was the sixth person to be hired at Infocom<sup>25</sup>. At Infocom, Stu was secretary (clerk) and treasurer, offices required by state law. As secretary, Stu took care of the formal reports, listed the stockholders, and took minutes of board meetings. As treasurer, early

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<sup>21</sup> Galley

<sup>22</sup> <<http://www.infocom-if.org/authors/galley.html>>

<sup>23</sup> Brinceno, Hector, et al. *Down From the Top of Its Game: The Story of Infocom, Inc.* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Fall 2000), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Scott, Jason. *GET LAMP: Stu Galley* (February 3, 2008). The Moving Image Archive- The Get Lamp Interview Archives. 02/03/08. Web.

<<http://archive.org/details/getlamp-galley>>. (February 21, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> <<http://archive.org/details/getlamp-galley>>

on, Stu collected investments from the stockholders and bought equipment<sup>26</sup>. Later on when they started selling games at retail, there was a lot more paperwork involved and it became too much for Stu to handle, so Infocom hired professional accountants instead. Stu continued working as clerk right up until the corporation dissolved and Infocom was acquired by Activision.

Stu's first interactive fiction game for Infocom was *The Witness*, written in 1983. In *The Witness*, you are a police detective working near Los Angeles in 1938. On a stormy February night, a wealthy but frightened man asks for your protection, but in spite of your best efforts, a death will occur. You then have twelve hours to solve the mystery and try to arrest the killer. Following the success of *Deadline*, this became an instant hit as well. Stu earned the silver plaque of the Software Publishers Association and the award "best computer adventure of the year" from Electronic Games magazine<sup>27</sup>.

His next project was aimed at a younger audience<sup>28</sup>. Stu paired up with the famous fiction writer, Jim Lawrence, and their resulting game was *Seastalker* (1984)<sup>29</sup>. In *Seastalker*, you are a young inventor who has just created a mini submarine. The submarine can dive deeply into the sea and capture plants and animals for you to study<sup>30</sup>. There is also an underwater submarine station being attacked by a sea monster. This game is associated with one of Jim's most famous quotes to Stu. When Stu was having trouble trying to figure out a way to have the player defeat the sea monster, Jim said to him, "Don't worry Stu. I've gotten heroes out of much tougher situations than this"<sup>31</sup>. Sure enough, Jim adapted the submarine's sonar and created a specific set of rules regarding the monster's movement, effectively salvaging the end of the game.

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<sup>26</sup> Galley

<sup>27</sup> Infocom. *The Witness*. Infocom- The Master Storytellers. 08/20/10 Web.<<http://www.infocom-if.org/witness/witness.html>>. (February 25, 2013).

<sup>28</sup> Masterson, Sean. *Four Minds Forever Voyaging*. Zzap!64. Web. <[http://www.zzap64.co.uk/zzap14/four\\_minds02.htm](http://www.zzap64.co.uk/zzap14/four_minds02.htm)> (March 4, 2013).

<sup>29</sup> Scheyen, Peter. *Infocom- Imps*. Infocom Interactive Fiction (Peter Scheyen Archive). 06/23/1999. Web. <<http://www.vaxdungeon.com/Infocom/authors.asp>> (March 4, 2013).

<sup>30</sup> Infocom. *Seastalker*. Infocom- The Master Storytellers. 08/20/10 Web.<<http://www.infocom-if.org/seastalker/seastalker.html>>. (February 25, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> <<http://archive.org/details/getlamp-galley>>

Stu and Jim then teamed up again for Stu's last complete game at Infocom, *Moonmist*, written in 1986. In *Moonmist*, you play as a famous young American detective who travels to England to help your friend solve a mystery. A ghost is haunting your friend and one of your tasks is to figure out why<sup>32</sup>. *Moonmist* can be played as four different versions, which is decided at the beginning of the game with the player's favorite color<sup>33</sup>. Shortly after the game was completed, Activision took over Infocom<sup>34</sup>. *Moonmist* remains the last finished game authored by Stu. He had been working on *Hitchhiker's Guide 2*, but the game was never completed.

With the success of *the Witness* and *Moonmist*, Stu was invited to join the Mystery Authors of America, an organization for mystery writers based in New York<sup>35</sup>. Stu let it lapse only after one year, though, because after he left Infocom, he didn't write any more mysteries.

In 1989, Stu began working for Thinking Machines Corporation, a spinoff of MIT, as a sales analyst<sup>36</sup>. Unfortunately, after a few years, that company went under and in 1994, he ultimately returned to MIT as a computer systems administrator. Being a systems administrator there involved programming in several different languages as well as engineering design. Stu stopped programming after leaving MIT.

In 2006, while in between jobs, Stu created a consulting freelance company called Dragonfly Enterprises. The company is mostly system administration with no programming. He had done some work with Bob Bates at Legend Entertainment, but wasn't brought on until the end of the project, so he created Dragonfly Enterprises<sup>37</sup>. Dragonflies are one of Stu's favorite insects and, while also between jobs, he went to Mass Audubon to take a course on dragonfly identification<sup>38</sup>. In 2010, Stu was featured in the film *GET LAMP* by Jason Scott. Currently,

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<sup>32</sup> Infocom. *Moonmist*. Infocom- The Master Storytellers. 08/20/10 Web.<<http://www.infocom-if.org/moonmist/moonmist.html>>. (February 25, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Galley

<sup>34</sup> <<http://archive.org/details/getlamp-galley>>

<sup>35</sup> <<http://archive.org/details/getlamp-galley>>

<sup>36</sup> Galley

<sup>37</sup> Galley

<sup>38</sup> Galley

Stu lives in Massachusetts with his wife and dog, Zorka.

## 2. Andrew Plotkin

Andrew Plotkin was born on May 15, 1970 in Syracuse, New York. However, he grew up in Rockville, MD, where he was introduced to his first computer<sup>39</sup>. At the age of eight, Plotkin played his first text adventure game, *Colossal Caves Adventure*, a text adventure based on the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky<sup>40</sup>. It was on a take-your-child-to-work day when his dad showed it to him. Andrew ended up playing the game that entire day. When his family got a computer a few years later, Andrew relapsed back to text adventures and has been playing ever since.

At the age of 13, Andrew read a thriller called *Apple\_Crunch*, about a group of computer hackers in New York City. One of the groups had used the codename “Zarf.” Andrew admired the white-hat hacker group and took this as his moniker<sup>41</sup>. Occasionally, he is also known as “Erkyrath.”

Zarf attended college at Carnegie Mellon University from 1988 to 1992. While there, he was one of the early members of the Carnegie Mellon KGB, an informal student organization that didn't really take itself seriously and was created as a spoof of the Carnegie Involvement Agency, or CIA<sup>42</sup>. Zarf created the organization's signature Capture the Flag with Stuff game, which is still being played to this day.

Zarf dabbled with simple BASIC adventure games as a teenager<sup>43</sup> and once in college, graduated to thinking about how to design his own IF compiler. In 1995, inspired by the then-brand-new Interactive Fiction Competition, he tried building a small evocative game about being caught in a thunderstorm. *A Change in the Weather* (1995) won first place in the Inform

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<sup>39</sup> Plotkin, Andrew. Personal interview. 5 Dec. 2012.

<sup>40</sup> Jong, Philip. *Andrew Plotkin*. Adventure Classic Gaming. 01/07/11. Web. <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/622/>>. (February 27, 2013).

<sup>41</sup> <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/622/>>.

<sup>42</sup> Plotkin

<sup>43</sup> Dimopoulos, Konstatinos. *Interview: Andrew Plotkin on Interactive Fiction*. IndieGames the Weblog. 07/06/12. Web. <[http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview\\_andrew\\_plotkin\\_on\\_in.html](http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview_andrew_plotkin_on_in.html)>. (February 28, 2013)

category of the first annual Interactive Fiction Competition<sup>44</sup>. The game modeled scenery in great detail but frustrated players with its tremendous difficulty; similarly, the sprawling, surreal *So Far* (1996) could easily make victory impossible early on.

Plotkin became a central figure in the modern interactive fiction community, where he is widely recognized for his creative and technical contributions to the IF scene. He has written a number of award-winning games, including the IF-tutorial game *the Dreamhold* (2006), and developed a range of new file formats, interpreters, and other utilities for the design, production, and running of IF games.

Plotkin was one of the first people to use Graham Nelson's Inform development system<sup>45</sup>. He was also one of the first to explore the boundaries of interactive fiction as an artistic medium after Infocom dissolved. Zarf has won many awards within the community and countless interactive fiction authors have cited him as a primary influence.

Zarf defined the Glk standard, an API for interactive fiction I/O<sup>46</sup>. Interactive fiction ordinarily was produced for a virtual machine which could be emulated on different operating systems, thus circumventing problems with cross-platforming. Glk defines a standard means for interpreters to provide input/output on different platforms. Universal translators such as Gargoyle are the offspring of this advance and are capable of running interactive fiction no matter the format.

Plotkin also defined the Glulx virtual machine, a replacement for the venerable Z-machine standard<sup>47</sup>. The Z-machine was created by Infocom and became a de facto standard for modern interactive fiction<sup>48</sup>. Most of Plotkin's own works were produced for it using the Inform programming language created by Graham Nelson. As new works of interactive fiction

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<sup>44</sup> Competition Results <<http://ifcomp.org/comp95/>>

<sup>45</sup> <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/622/>>

<sup>46</sup> <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/622/>>

<sup>47</sup> <<http://www.adventureclassicgaming.com/index.php/site/interviews/622/>>

<sup>48</sup> Brinceno, 7.

began to approach the limits of the Z-machine, Plotkin created the Glulx virtual machine for the Inform language Nelson had designed. (In an example of code reuse, Plotkin delegated the input/output capabilities of Glulx to Glk.) The Inform compiler is now able to produce programs for either the Z-machine or Glulx.

Lastly, he created a standard for packaging sound and graphics files with interactive fiction games called blorb<sup>49</sup>. The standard is currently used by many z-machine and glulx interpreters.

Two of Zarf's most well-known games are *System's Twilight* (1993) and *Spider and Web* (1998). As of 2007, Plotkin holds two ZYZZY Award- related records. He won the most XYZZYs in one year, five for *Spider and Web*, and had the XYZZY record for most awards won in total, eighteen<sup>50</sup>. Some of his most influential games are *Freefall*, *A Change in the Weather*, and *The Space Under the Window*.

Andrew Plotkin's works of interactive fiction have earned a reputation for difficulty and cruelty, but also for high quality. More recent games by Andrew Plotkin have been more generous to the player. The near-future spy-thriller *Spider and Web* (1998), the Hunt the Wumpus-inspired *Hunter, in Darkness* (1999), and the unnerving one-room *Shade* (2000) are more linearly structured and more forgiving than his earlier works.

Several of Andrew Plotkin's works defy traditional interactive fiction categorization and can only be regarded as experimental. The *Space Under the Window* (1997) is a poetic work structured similarly to hypertext; *Lists and Lists* (1996) is an Inform port of the Scheme programming language; *Lighan ses Lion* (2001), an entry in Emily Short's Walkthrough Competition, is a linguistic puzzle akin to Carl Muckenhoupt's contemporary work *The Gostak*

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<sup>49</sup> Plotkin, Andrew. *Blorb: An IF Resource Collection Format Standard*. Eblong.com.Web. <<http://www.eblong.com/zarf/blorb/blorb.html>>. (March 4, 2013).

<sup>50</sup> Muckenhoupt, Carl. *Zyzy Awards*. Baf's Guide to the IF Archive. 2013. Web.<<http://wurb.com/if/award/3>>. (February 27, 2013).

(2001)<sup>51</sup>.

As of 2010, Plotkin has been working on a new interactive fiction piece called *Hadean Lands* for the iPhone<sup>52</sup>. He was featured on CNN Money<sup>53</sup> for raising \$31,000 using Kickstarter to develop this game. It was supposed to be finished in early 2011, but work is still continuing on it. Plotkin was also featured as a prominent figure in the 2010 interactive fiction documentary, GET LAMP.

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<sup>51</sup> Plotkin, Andrew. *Lighan ses Lion*. Eblong.com. Web. <<http://www.eblong.com/zarf/zplet/lighan.html>>. (March 4, 2013).

<sup>52</sup> <[http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview\\_andrew\\_plotkin\\_on\\_in.html](http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview_andrew_plotkin_on_in.html)>

<sup>53</sup> Article written about Zarf for CNN Money < [http://money.cnn.com/2010/11/15/technology/kickstart\\_plotkin/index.htm](http://money.cnn.com/2010/11/15/technology/kickstart_plotkin/index.htm)>

### 3. Infocom

The interactive fiction genre is a small genre on the edge of the video game world. Infocom is well-known within the interactive fiction circle, but virtually unknown without it. During the course of our IQP, we realized that Infocom was an integral part of the interactive fiction; as such, we decided to add a section on the company.

Infocom found its start inside MIT's Laboratory for Computer Science (LCS), where a small group of students, the Dynamic Modeling group, worked on projects for the Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA, originally called ARPA, the Advanced Research Project Agency). Their projects included one that involved developing an AI to interpret Morse code in much the same way that modern speech recognition interprets the spoken word. In 1979, some members of the Dynamic Modeling group wanted to work together more and thus decided to form a company to make their wish a reality<sup>54</sup>.

Infocom was officially founded and incorporated on June 22, 1979. "The first Board of Directors consisted of Al Vezza, Dave Lebling, Michael Broos, Stu Galley, and Joel Berez. In November of 1979 Lebling and Galley resigned as Directors, and Blank and Licklider filled their positions. Following that, Broos resigned as President, and Berez was elected to take over the position"<sup>55</sup>. After they created their company, the founders of Infocom quickly realized that they did not have a product to sell, so the decision was made to try to market *Zork*. Until that point, *Zork* had been the group's midnight project implemented on MIT's PDP-10 mainframe computer. "The emerging personal computer market presented a golden opportunity for Infocom, but its founders faced a difficult challenge: How could they make *Zork*, which barely ran on a PDP-10, work on comparatively tiny microcomputers?"<sup>56</sup> The solution was to create a virtual

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<sup>54</sup> Brinceno, 8.

<sup>55</sup> Brinceno, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Brinceno, 11.

machine to run the *Zork* program. At the time, programs which were to be run by a computer were fully loaded into memory and then executed. Infocom's virtual machine, called the Z-machine, would leave most of the program code on the disk and only loaded the necessary sections into memory. The result was that the maximum size of a program increased beyond the size of a computer's memory to the size of the computer's disk memory.

Today, this functionality of the Z-machine is called virtual memory and is widely used by modern computers (for example, the loading screen present in most video games is the result of the game loading the next area into memory). Virtual memory allows programs to be larger than a computer's memory and also allows for better use and management of said memory. Virtual machines are simulations of hardware or operating systems which are run by the host machine as if they were a regular process.

Even with the Z-machine, which was also capable of compressing text, *Zork* was still too big for some personal computers. As a result, Infocom's first product become known as *Zork I*, released in 1981 which was *Zork* minus some parts. A year later, *Zork* was fully released for personal computers in the form of *Zork II* and *Zork III*.

The success of their many interactive fiction games allowed Infocom to do what they had wanted to do in the beginning: develop business software. Infocom created a Business Products division in 1982 which then began work on a database called *Cornerstone*. At the time, there was more money to be made from selling business software than video games (the same is still true today as software suites and tools often sell for over \$100 whereas video games rarely reach a triple-digit price tag). However, *Cornerstone* wasn't the success it had been predicted to be. This signaled the beginning of Infocom's end, as game sales were declining as well. Infocom's end, or Activision buy-out of Infocom, in many ways signaled the end of the era of text-based games. Part of their popularity was the fact that the words on the screen printed a better picture than the

graphics of the time could. As personal computers became more powerful and graphics-based consoles became widely available, the need and desire for text- based games dropped<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>57</sup> Brinceno, 4.

#### 4. Interactive Fiction

Interactive fiction, or IF for short, is a result of crossing the interactivity of video games with a book. In IF, players use text commands to control characters and influence the environment<sup>58</sup>. IF games are commonly confused with text adventures, a type of adventure game where the entire interface can be “text-only”<sup>59</sup>. The difference between text adventures and interactive fiction is that interactive fiction focuses on narrative and text adventures focuses on puzzles. IF games hail from an era when one megabyte was considered a lot (as a comparison, a single three minute MP3 file is 3MB or more in size) and graphics were simply not possible on the computers of the time.

IF games use text to carry their stories in the same way a book does. The difference between books and IF games is that in a book, the path of the story is predefined by the author and cannot be changed by the reader. In interactive fiction, the player is given exposition to describe their surroundings and is also told what items and characters they can interact with. The player types commands which determine the actions of the character and the flow of the story<sup>60</sup>. Input is based on a specific set of verbs and keywords. As the player moves about, they will encounter puzzles which impede their progress. One of the most fun and challenging parts of interactive fiction games are solving these puzzles<sup>61</sup>. Each decision has a consequence and because of this, action is more difficult in IF than in books- it’s hard to achieve flow when the cursor is waiting for input. IF games often have multiple endings, many which have the character die.

Interactive fiction reached its peak in popularity from 1979 to 1986 as a dominant software product marketed for home computers. Since interactive fiction games are of a text-

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<sup>58</sup> Jerz, Dennis G. *Playing, Studying and Writing Interactive Fiction (Text Adventure Games)*. Jerz’s Literacy Weblog. 01/27/00. Web. <<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/>>. (March 1, 2013).

<sup>59</sup> <[http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview\\_andrew\\_plotkin\\_on\\_in.html](http://indiegames.com/2012/07/interview_andrew_plotkin_on_in.html)>

<sup>60</sup> <<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/if/>>

<sup>61</sup> *About Interactive Fiction*. Interactive Fiction Competition. 2012. Web. <<http://ifcomp.org/comp12/if.html>>. (March 1, 2013).

only nature, they were often pirated or shared. To counteract this, Infocom created “feelies.” Feelies were extra content included in the game’s box that, if not included, would have made the game impossible to solve<sup>62</sup>. Interactive fiction games, though, were also easily ported across all popular platforms because of their text-only based nature.

Today, there is a small but stable interactive fiction community which continues to churn out new games, tackling a much wider range of subjects and genres than Infocom ever did. An online IF Archive<sup>63</sup> is maintained by David Kinder, Stephen Granade, and Zarf, containing thousands of text adventures, text adventure development tools, articles, essays, hint files, and walkthroughs contributed by the interactive fiction community, past and present. Other similar archives exist, such as the Interactive Fiction Database<sup>64</sup> and an IFWiki<sup>65</sup>. Each year, there is an annual interactive fiction competition<sup>66</sup> in which programmers create some of the best games available anywhere.

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<sup>62</sup> Galley

<sup>63</sup> IF Archive Website <<http://www.ifarchive.org/>>

<sup>64</sup> IF Database <<http://ifdb.tads.org/>>

<sup>65</sup> IF Wiki <[http://ifwiki.org/index.php/Main\\_Page](http://ifwiki.org/index.php/Main_Page)>

<sup>66</sup> IF Competition Website <<http://ifcomp.org/>>

## Procedure

### 1. Learning the Process

We began our IQP in August, deciding on a three term project. We settled the logistics over the summer, and when school started, we officially filled out all of the forms necessary to actually begin our project. One of the first things our adviser, Dean O'Donnell, had us do was start reading books on the history of video games. We checked out about ten books, including *The Ultimate History of Video Games* and *Videogames: In the Beginning*. We read through the books, writing down people mentioned, and then researched them to see if they were still in the area. Unfortunately, most of the people mentioned in the books were either in Japan, on the West Coast, or had passed away. Ralph Baer, author of *Videogames: In the Beginning* was still on the east coast, but he was actually the first person interviewed when the project began in 2007.

Next, we discovered (researched) what an oral history is. We talked about the Smithsonian and their exhibit on video games that was going on in Washington, D.C.<sup>67</sup>, but it was unfeasible to actually visit the museum because of time constraints and money. The Smithsonian has many archives on oral history, one notably being the oral history of Jazz<sup>68</sup>.

To begin understanding how to conduct an interview, we watched Jason Scott's *BBS: A Documentary*. This documentary focused on people who were big into the BBS, or bulletin board system, scene, featuring some people such as Ward Christensen and Randy Suess. Christensen and Suess are the creators of the CBBS bulletin board, the first bulletin board system (BBS) ever brought online. After we watched these videos, Dean suggested we try interviewing one of the creators of *Tradewars*. We looked up the developers, but there was hardly any information about them on the internet.

With our leads going nowhere, we decided to talk to Professor Brian Moriarty for

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<sup>67</sup> Smithsonian American Art Museum: The Art of Videogames <<http://americanart.si.edu/exhibitions/archive/2012/games/>>

<sup>68</sup> Smithsonian Jazz <<http://www.smithsonianjazz.org/>>

suggestions on whom to interview (and still lives in the area). Brian was a technician and author at Infocom, working there from 1984 to 1989. While at Infocom, he wrote *Wishbringer* (1985), *Trinity* (1986), and *Beyond Zork* (1988)<sup>69</sup>. He was also the focus of this project for 2008.

Professor Moriarty had helped the previous years' group members get into contact with people in the industry, so we figured he would be a great help. He directed us to a few people, two of which were Stuart Galley and Andrew Plotkin, members of the interactive fiction scene. We compiled a list of all the possible interview candidates and after conducting much research, decided we wanted to focus on Galley and Plotkin.

Dean then had us conduct multiple practice interviews on WPI students, one for each week. For A term, we interviewed Jason Lackie (9/10/12), Karen Paklin (9/15/12), Danielle LaRose (9/23/12), and Andrew Aveyard (9/28/12). We borrowed equipment from the Academic Technology Center, the main camera being the Interactive Media and Game Development's G1, equipment neither of us had experience with before. A slight hiccup ensued with the G1 where we were not able to remove the footage from the camera, and with much help from the ATC, we were good to go. After conducting each practice interview, we edited them down with *Adobe Premiere Elements 10* to a short two or three minute clip focused on a single topic. This taught us how to effectively use B-roll and edit together non-consecutive pieces of film into a cohesive whole. Dean then critiqued our practice interviews and gave us advice on how to improve our technique, which we would then be incorporated into the next interview. From watching the first interview to our last, the evidence was overwhelming about how much we had learned about editing.

Toward the end the term, we watched the drama, *Slacker*, and Errol Morris's *First Person* documentaries. *Slacker* used a variety of cameras and different angles while filming, making an

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<sup>69</sup> Infocom. *Brian Moriarty*. Infocom- The Master Storytellers. 08/20/10 Web. <<http://www.infocom-if.org/authors/moriarty.html>>. (March 4, 2013).

interesting story to something that otherwise was quite confusing. In his series, Errol Morris used a camera rig he had constructed just to interview individuals called the Interrotron (patent pending)<sup>70</sup>. The rig consists of a giant screen with a built in camera on which is Errol's face (he interviewed them from another room) and he could move the camera rig any way he wanted. With this technology, it seemed like the interviewees were looking directly into the lens of the camera. This led to a number of interesting shots and angles that were used to convey different meanings.

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<sup>70</sup> Pavlus, John. *Errol Morris's Secret Weapon for Unsettling Interviews: The Interrotron*. Fastco Design. 01/26/11. Web. <<http://www.fastcodesign.com/1663105/errol-morriss-secret-weapon-for-unsettling-interviews-the-interrotron>>. (March 1, 2013).

## 2. Deciding on and Obtaining the Interviewees

At the beginning of B-term, we continued our IQP by watching *The Aristocrats*. *The Aristocrats* is a comedic documentary in which a multitude of comedians all tell the same joke, but never the same way. This movie was a metaphor for editing interviews- you can present the same material, but with different angles or B-roll (the joke's variations), it will still remain interesting.

On the third day back of the term, we went to Boston Postmortem, located at the Skellig in Waltham. Our aim was to find more people to interview, in case things fell through with Stu and Andrew. We created business cards and gave an announcement, but it turned out to be a bust. The few people who came up to us, three in total, falsely interpreted the idea of the project, and had just started in the industry. Also, no one attending the event was over the age of forty. We sent follow up emails to the people who had contacted us anyways, and thanked them for their time. It was interesting, though, talking to people who were currently in the business and we learned about a few game companies in Boston.

After that, we contacted Zarf and Stu by email, provided to us by Professor Moriarty. With that, we sent them release forms that we would be later collected after their interviews ended. We created a modified version for Stu, one that said he would be allowed to approve the clips before they went onto Alpheus.

We finished conducting practice interviews this term, talking to Jaclyn DelPrete (11/10/12). After a long search in the IMGD department, Dean found the light kits, which we used in our last practice interview with Jaclyn. The light kits made a huge difference in the overall quality of the video and we were excited to have them for Zarf and Stu. In November, we were granted access to the alpheus server, which hosts the website, by Mike Voorhis. On December 5, 2012, we interviewed Andrew "Zarf" Plotkin at his apartment in Medford, MA. We

talked to him about his early years, interest in IF, games he had created, and projects he is currently working on. The interview ran for about two and a half hours, afterward which we collected B-roll. We sent Zarf a follow up interview thanking him for his time and have sent him emails periodically updating him on progress to the site.

### **3. Doing the Interviews and Post Production**

One of the first things we did at the beginning of C-term was to reconfirm and conduct the interview with Stu Galley we had scheduled in the previous term. Prior to the interview, Stu asked for changes in the original release that said he would have the option to review what we posted onto the website. We would let Stu watch the videos first, giving a “yes” or “no” on whether they could go onto his Alpheus page. We conducted the interview on January 30, 2013, lasting about one and a half hours, at Galley’s home in Arlington, MA. At the interview, we asked Galley about his early life, time at Caltech and MIT, roles in Infocom, games he created, and current situations. After the interview, we collected B-roll and sent numerous follow up emails thanking Stu for his time. We continued to send Stu emails periodically, updating him about his videos and asking him questions to clarify things we hadn’t covered in the interview.

With all our interviews completed, we started working on the tactical aspects of this project: modifying the alpheus website to include our new interviews and edit both Plotkin and Galley’s interviews down to multiple smaller clips.

Most of C-Term was spent editing the interviews down from one long video to multiple shorter clips, each focused on a single topic. Editing condenses the interview into little packets of information and removes the pauses, failed starts, and silences that exist in normal conversation. Suzanne created the clips, modifying them several times, and contacted people for image usage permission for the interviews.

Modifying the alpheus website consisted of adding pages to the alpheus server and linking them to the main page. The web pages for Plotkin and Galley, like most of the other pages on the website, have streaming capability for all clips and the option to download the full, un-edited interview (as a zip file). Zip files are used to compress files and take up less space when downloading.

At the request of our advisor, we also added a links page to the website. This page includes links to other oral history projects and guilds to creating and conducting oral histories. Eyleen created the web pages for Galley and Plotkin, along with the links page.

The last thing we did for C-term was inform everyone the pages were up and write our report.

## Editing

### 1. Why Edit?

Editing is an important part of the creative process. Bluntly put, editing is used to better a project, whether it is aural, visual, graphical, etc. The main reason why we edited the interviews into smaller clips was to focus on specific topics. Editing can be used to bring relevant material together that may not have been sequential. On the opposite side of the spectrum, editing can also be used to show contrasting points of view. With the videos, we wanted to keep our audience interested and engaged, and try to evoke their feelings about a subject.

After thirty seconds of continuous audio/visual stimulation, a person will become bored and lose interest in the subject<sup>71</sup>. This is why it is an important reason to have b-roll or secondary cameras. B-roll is the supplemental or alternative footage intercut with the main shot in an interview or documentary. B-roll can be used to add meaning to the sequence or disguise the elimination of unwanted content/awkward cuts. Secondary cameras add different dimensions to the interview. It is important when filming to make sure the secondary camera and main camera don't have similar views. The main camera could be used to shoot the whole subject while the secondary camera could be used for close ups.

Lastly, it is important to edit videos to make sure they make a point. In normal speech, people repeat themselves, pause, say "uh" and do other things to fill time while they formulate what they're going to say. With editing, the video can be easily shortened and instances such as these can be cut out. Getting rid of "ums", "likes", mess ups, and unnecessary repetitions can make a video ten times better. Overall, editing is very beneficial, especially with interviews, to correctly capture their subject's essence.

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<sup>71</sup> Shaw, Adam D. and Dennis F. Valovcin. *Oral History Documentary: An Interview with Brian Moriarty*. Worcester Polytechnic Institute –Interactive Qualifying Project. 2/29/08. <<http://www.wpi.edu/Pubs/E-project/Available/E-project-030908-225759/unrestricted/IQP-DMO3263-Paper.pdf>>, 19.

## 2. How to edit

Editing comes in all different shapes and forms. Most editing comes from having the proper software and a goal set in mind for your individual clips. To edit the footage we had of Andrew “Zarf” Plotkin and Stuart Galley, we first began by watching the interviews all of the way through. We already had ideas in mind for which clips we wanted to create, but watching the interviews again helped solidify our choices. We made sure to make extra copies of the original interview so we had one that was left untouched and unedited for download. Then, we made sure to line up the footage from both the main camera and secondary camera. We used the audio from the main camera (both subjects wore a wired microphone connected to the main camera), so it was imperative we had high quality sound from both sets of footage. We then split the entire interview into clips based on topics the subject was talking about. Something that would have been useful was adding short descriptions to the clips. Dean had informed us earlier on that this was a good idea to do, but at the time of interviewing, we forgot his advice. We would have found it much more useful to have named clips ahead of time, especially when searching for the topics later.

After gathering the clips, we saved different versions of the original cut up interviews, one for each clip we intended to make. By doing this, we would not have to line the footage up again, a very time consuming process. We deleted all other parts of the footage from the workspace, besides those that were related to the clip’s subject. With this, we could see whether or not the clips would flow together and make for a coherent three minute video.

Next, we began to polish the individual cut up clips. To edit the clips, we would take out instances of the men coughing, saying “um,” repeated phrases/parts of a sentence, word stutters, and long pauses. Since the clips and audio were already lined up, we could easily edit the audio and video at the same time. B-roll and footage from the secondary camera was used to cover up

awkward video transitions. Besides obtaining image permission from two other sources, we created a lot of the b-roll herself (images) in *Photoshop*. We also used royalty free images that could be obtained from sources such as *Microsoft Office*'s website online.

In the end, we created several drafts of each individual video. We made sure to keep transitions consistent, using a "fade-to-black" technique. In each video, we also created title slides, lasting about two seconds long, and end slides that informed the viewer who did what and gave special thanks. We wished we had better organized Zarf's clips when starting out, as we had with Stu. Editing video takes many hours and we could have saved at least ten by organizing our clips at the beginning.

### 3. Tips on editing

Most of the useful information we learned about editing came from trial and error, along with feedback from our adviser, Dean O'Donnell. Constant criticism from Dean created much better products from the first clip drafts to the final ones that went on the website.

One of the most useful things Dean told us was that people get bored after about thirty seconds of staring at the same thing and to fix this, switch to another camera angle or fill it with b-roll. After about thirty seconds, the viewer will wonder why they are still there<sup>72</sup>. By keeping the clips thirty seconds or less, it forces you to decide which parts of the clip are most important. Editing out pauses and “umms” can also help shorten clips from what may normally have been over thirty seconds to less than that.

Another tip we learned when editing was to disregard the original order of the clips. Although we didn't have to do this much for the interviews with Stu and Zarf, it was often used for the practice interviews. If we had decided to create a clip about Zarf's early life, this would have been most helpful. In the original interview, we asked him about his childhood at the beginning, but it wasn't until later we asked him more about his hobbies and if he had any siblings. We would have taken the later footage and cut it into the beginning after which Zarf talked about his parents. Do not be afraid to move things around if the footage would make more sense after. Something to be aware of with this, though, is that you do not want to put words into someone's mouth by editing the footage in such a way that the context of what the interviewee says is lost. Be aware of the context and not misrepresenting what your interviewee said.

Finally, find a piece of software you are most comfortable with and practice using it as much as possible. If applicable, read books on the software or watch tutorials. The software we used to edit the clips was *Adobe Premiere Elements 10*, which we did on campus in Fuller

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<sup>72</sup> Valovcin, 19.

Laboratories's IMGD Lab and Zoo Lab. Once or twice, though, we were forced to use *Adobe Premiere 10* in Gordon Library's Multimedia Lab. Switching between programs, even something as small as a step us, could be confusing at times, especially with different interfaces. Take the time to explore all different forms of editing software available for use. No two programs are the same when it comes to editing; older versions of software may often be missing plugins. If you do not have editing software, it is available in Gordon Library's Multimedia Lab and Fuller Laboratories's IMGD and Zoo Labs. The Academic Technology Center in Fuller Labs also offers training in how to use the software.

## Overall Thoughts and Tips for Future Groups

One of the things we wish we did before starting this IQP was pay more attention to the previous years' recommendations. With that said, future IQP teams please heed this advice:

One of the most important things for future IQP teams to do is listen to Dean O'Donnell and complete assignments at appropriate times. At the beginning of this project, we did not take the IQP, specifically finding interviewees, as seriously as we should have and as a result, didn't have much to show for each week, setting us far back. Create a calendar where you map out due dates and devise a weekly schedule with your partner for when to meet, more than once a week, would be most beneficial. Do not leave things to the last minute- you will be kicking yourself near the completion of your project. Contact Mike Voorhis about getting access to Alpheus. You will not be able to edit the webpage without his permission.

Start early on, as in the first week, or even day. Focus on contacting people sooner rather than later. Do not leave your interviews for the very end of the second term; set them for a reasonable time. We think it would have been more beneficial if we interviewed both Zarf and Stu late November/early December. Suzanne was scrambling to get the clips done, along with writing most of the paper. Always have backups for you interviewees and have the interview set for a later date, that way you have time to get someone else. Create biographies for potential interviewees, then further expand upon them when the interview date is set in stone. Watch interviews the subjects have already given to make sure you hit on key subjects. Fortunately, for us, both Zarf and Stu were already interviewed in *GET LAMP*. These will help you when asking questions and can be later used as a background information section in the literature review, provided it is further edited.

As should be expected, make sure you divide all work equally. Have all parties learn how to use the equipment, edit videos, edit html, etc. It can be a heavy burden for a person when they

are the only one who knows how to edit. This will often sway the division of workload.

Renting equipment and learning how to maintain/use it is one of the most important aspects of performing an interview. For practice interviews, try to keep them in generally the same time/day every week. If you do this, you can set up reservations for equipment with the ATC ahead of time. The ATC does not enjoy when people pop in on them, especially if they are looking for large amounts of equipment at the last minute. Most of the practice interviews we conducted were on the weekend, so we reserved equipment every week for Thursday afternoon until Monday morning. With this, you can have the best relationship with the ATC and not have to worry about missing equipment. Along with this comes another point- if you plan to use the IMGD Department's G1 camera, make sure you talk to someone in the ATC about operating it, receiving specific instructions. We used the G1 for our second practice interview (and onward) and weren't fully sure how it worked. This was most prevalent when we tried to get the interview footage off the camera. The ATC became somewhat annoyed with us when we kept going to them for help, eventually having to have them remove the footage themselves. They, first and foremost, were the ones to suggest receiving instructional help.

Practice interviews were something we were always unprepared for. The key thing to practice interviews is finding your subject's passions or something interesting about them, and then informing them you are going to ask them about it ahead of time so they will be ready to answer questions. For the first couple of our interviews, we weren't aware of what we wanted to film, so subjects would come up with things on the fly, leading to poor interviews. Make your interviewee aware of what they will be talking about and don't let them change the subject drastically. For instance, when we filmed Jason, we originally intended to ask him about video games. To set the scene, we placed some of his favorite games, controllers, etc. in front of him on the table, but at the last minute, he decided he wanted to talk about a club he was involved

with, WPI's Lens and Lights (LNL). Ultimately, we ended up with a confusing looking interview that wasn't the greatest regarding content either. Get your interviewee to decide on a subject and stick to it, then film them preferably in a location that tells more about their hobby and passion.

Here is some advice for the actual interviews. These are the most important part of your IQP so it is imperative everything goes swimmingly. Always have extra batteries, an extension cord/surge protector, extra tapes, and both lighting kits. Your subjects' homes may not have a superfluous amount of outlets, or even outlets with ground. Extra batteries and extension cords are perfect in this situation. For our second interview, we used two umbrella lights, both of which had bulbs that blew out. At the very least, carry the extra bulbs with you if you are not going to bring the second lighting kit. Have one person in charge of conducting the interview, while the other teammate(s) controls the camera(s), but also let other people in your group pipe up in case you forget to ask something.

Speaking of cameras, their placement is key to a good looking interview. Have the main camera placed far away enough from the subject, with their body being about  $\frac{2}{5}$  the size of the screen. Check to make sure the picture is centered exactly. For the secondary camera, one option could be a 30 degree angle change while another could be similar to the main camera, except the subject could be about one half the size of the screen, focusing on the head and upper shoulders. One thing you absolutely should not do for the secondary camera is shoot at a 75 to 90 degree angle. Unfortunately, because of space restrictions with Zarf, this was the only way we could use the secondary camera. It made for a weird side shot. If we had extra time, we would have taken the footage from the main camera and swapped the side shots for close-ups. The only thing that is a downside to this is it distorts the quality of the image the more you magnify the original shot.

Have questions already written out with notes and always have a set goal in mind as to

where you would like the interview to go. Pay close attention to your interviewee so you can get relevant B-roll at the end of the interview. This goes along with deciding what clips to create while the interview is progressing; get B-roll of the subject with their gadgets, toys, decorations, etc. In Stu's case, he talked about his dog, Zorka, so we made sure to get a picture of her ahead of time. He also talked about his company, Dragonfly Enterprises, so we made sure to take lots of footage with him and his dragonfly decorations. Always make sure to obtain the signed release form from your interviewee at the beginning of the interview. If your subject refuses to sign the release, you won't waste everyone's time doing an interview you can't use. Even if you, the interviewer, don't sign it when your interviewee does, make sure you scan it right away into your computer and email it to yourself. We had mishaps with the release form for both parties. Zarf's release form went missing, while we forgot to ask Stu for his. Fortunately, both parties were understanding and we were able to get new signed copies of each release. Without a signed release, you do not have permission to put the interviews up on the website, a big component of the IQP.

After your IQP is done, a list of people to interview should be gathered for future years. More often than not, game developers are moving out west to California, where some of the major game companies are. There is a steadily decreasing number of people that were pioneers of the video game industry still living in the northeast, so it's important to pinpoint who is still here. Research old game companies from Boston and the people who used to work there. Talk to Brian Moriarty early on when you are trying to decide who to interview. Brian worked at Infocom and still has a lot of connections to people that could be possibly interviewed. We believe that unless this tradition is carried on, the IQP should not continue. It is getting increasingly more difficult to find interview subjects.

And finally, be prepared for what may become a few all-nighters. We had a lot of these

towards the end of our project when we were rushing to complete editing the videos and writing the paper. IQP is a degree requirement and should be given the most attention above all other classes.

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## Appendix A:

### Notes and Questions for Andrew Plotkin

XYZZY awards:

Zarf himself holds two: one for the most XYZZY awards won in one year (five of them with *Spider and Web*) and for most awards won in total (eighteen)

XYZZY awards recognize extraordinary IF, like the Academy Awards

Z-machine: Infocom virtual machine for its text-adventure games.

Games by Zarf:

- *Freefall* (1995): tetris clone, possibly first Z-machine abuse, very crude
- *A Change in the Weather* (1995): won first place in the Inform category of the first ever Interactive Fiction Competition (1995)

This game is unusual in that the objective—to prevent the bridge crossed early in the game to be destroyed by the storm that rages throughout the game. It also gives the player the option of not crossing the bridge, thereby abandoning the game. The game ends immediately if the bridge is destroyed. If the player is successful, they are returned to the starting location with the only way to end the game being walking away. The game is said to represent the value of experiences. (Zarf himself said that the game's puzzles were a bit on the hard side.)
- *So Far* (1996): won XYZZY Awards for Best IF Game, Best Writing, Best Puzzles, and Best Individual Puzzle in the same year. Also two runners-up for Best Individual Puzzle A game rated “cruel” where a mistake can make the game un-winnable. An uncomfortable theater performance suddenly turns into a journey among different worlds ranging from the strange to the dangerous.
- *The Space Under the Window* (1997): Not your traditional IF game. Verbs have no meaning and the effect that referring to an object has on that object varies.
- *Spider and Web* (1998): won XYZZY Awards for Best Game, Best Use of Medium, Best Individual NPC, Best Puzzles, and Best Individual Puzzle in 1998.

On the surface, this game is about a vacation. Underneath the surface; however, it's a game about deception, half-lies and how manipulative the narrator can be in an IF work. Unlike *So Far* the game will let the player know and allow them to correct their mistake. Ironically, the game cannot be fully experienced unless the player makes a few mistakes.
- *Hunter, in Darkness* (1999): won the XYZZY Awards for Best Individual Puzzle and Best Setting in 1999

Similar to *The Space Under the Window*, this game is unique in that an element of the traditional IF game is missing. This time it's the directions that have no

meaning. (This game does not use the usual “north”, “south”, “east”, “west” compass directions. Try “ahead”, “back”, “left”, “right”, “up”, or “down”. You can also “enter” a particular passage.)

- *Shade* (2000): won the XYZZY Award for Best Setting in 2000  
An experiment in surrealism and psychological fear. A take on the “room escape” scenario.
1. Where did you grow up?
  2. What did your parents do for a living?
  3. Where did you attend school?
  4. Who were you childhood best friends?
  5. How did the names Zarf and erkyrath come along?
  6. What was your major at Carnegie Mellon?
  7. Is it applicable to your work today?
  8. What years did you attend Carnegie Mellon?
  9. How would you describe the Carnegie Mellon KGB?
  10. How exactly do you play Capture the Flag and Stuff?
  11. What was Carnegie Mellon like?
  12. Was this ultimately the best choice of college to go to?
  13. Did you live in a dorm? Rooming arrangements?
  14. Besides the KGB, what else did you do in your free time?
  15. What drew you to IF?(The time when he played Colossal Caves when his dad took him to work [at age 8]? First computer a few years later?)
  16. Generic question: what is your take on violence in video games? (Do fighting/graphic games cause people to become violent and create destruction in real life?) Why don't people make a big stink when there is violence in text/books? No rating system for IF games.
  17. Do you play “normal” videogames (not IF)? If so, which ones?
  18. What about IF, the fusion of book and video game?-Talk about games. How did he come up with the ideas? Some of them are very psychological...etc.
  19. Talk about your games A Change in the Weather, So Far, The Space Under the Window, Spider and Web, Hunter, in Darkness, and Shade.
  20. Of the games you created, which is your favorite? What stands it apart from the rest of your games?
  21. How's Hadean Lands coming along? (Go into Kickstarter/notes below)
  22. What are your ideas to try to make IF popular again? (Bring it to platforms like the Kindle?)
  23. If IF is dying, why do you continue to work in the field? Why not become a full time programmer?
  24. \*\*If he's not still working on Hadean Lands\*\* What are you doing now? Have you gone back to being a programmer as your day job? New projects?
  25. How can you quit your day job and work on it full time? Did you end up actually quitting your job?
  26. Talk to him about IF scene -“really famous among a small group of people”
  27. How it [the IF scene] changed for the worse when comps could process graphics -Dying, growing, steady state?

## **Appendix B:**

### **Interview with Andrew Plotkin**

The edited clips of the interview with Andrew Plotkin and the full, unedited interview footage can be found at:

<http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/Interview-Plotkin.html>

## Appendix C:

### Questions for Stu Galley

1. Where were you born and where were you raised?
2. What did your parents do for a living? Early life?
3. Where did you go to college? What major? Applicable to IF? (Caltech)
4. College life (Alpha Phi Gamma and Tau Beta Pi) – How did you become editor in chief of the campus newspaper? A hard hitting story from your heyday?
5. Where did the idea for Infocom come from?
6. What were some of your duties as Implementer at Infocom?
7. Favorite game you helped to develop and why?
8. Which of your games are you the least proud of? Why?
9. If Infocom started up again and was exactly like it was in its heyday, would you consider working again for the company? (Granted you were not retired.)
10. Opinion on violence in videogames?
11. How would you define a book? A game? Would you classify IFs as books?
12. Do you think that IF could make a comeback in the near future with applications such as kindles, e-readers, etc.?
13. The Witness
14. Seastalker
15. Moonmist
16. Are you still a part of the Mystery Writers of America? Do you continue to write? What genre?
17. What do you enjoy more, conducting interviews or creating IF?
18. What were your duties as corporate clerk at Activision?
19. Which company did you enjoy working for more, Infocom or Activision?
20. Describe your process for developing a game.

## **Appendix D:**

### **Interview with Stu Galley**

The edited clips of the interview with Stu Galley and the full, unedited interview footage can be found at:

<http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/Interview-Galley.html>

## **Appendix E:**

### **Practice Interviews**

To view the practice interviews, please download the full pdf at this site:

[http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/DelPrete\\_and\\_Graedler\\_IQP.pdf](http://alpheus.wpi.edu/imgd/oral-history/DelPrete_and_Graedler_IQP.pdf)

Due to the 20 MB restriction on the submission site, we decided to upload our report without the practice interviews and make the full pdf [86 MB] available through the Alpheus website.