

# Infocom Does It Again... And Again

## Monte Schultz and Steve Arrants

With each new release, each new venture into a genre they have made famous, the people at Infocom, authors of *Zork* and *Deadline*, seem to reaffirm a commitment to a level of quality and innovation that has guaranteed them not only a fiercely loyal following, but also an undisputed position at the forefront of the computer adventure market.

Being in such a position can have its drawbacks, not the least of which is striving to maintain the level of quality and excellence for which they are known. Thus far this year, with the releases of Michael Berlyn's *Suspended* and Stu Galley's *The Witness*, they have done nothing but strengthen their position. And now there is *Planetfall*, a new science fiction adventure by another first time Infocom author, Steve Meretsky.

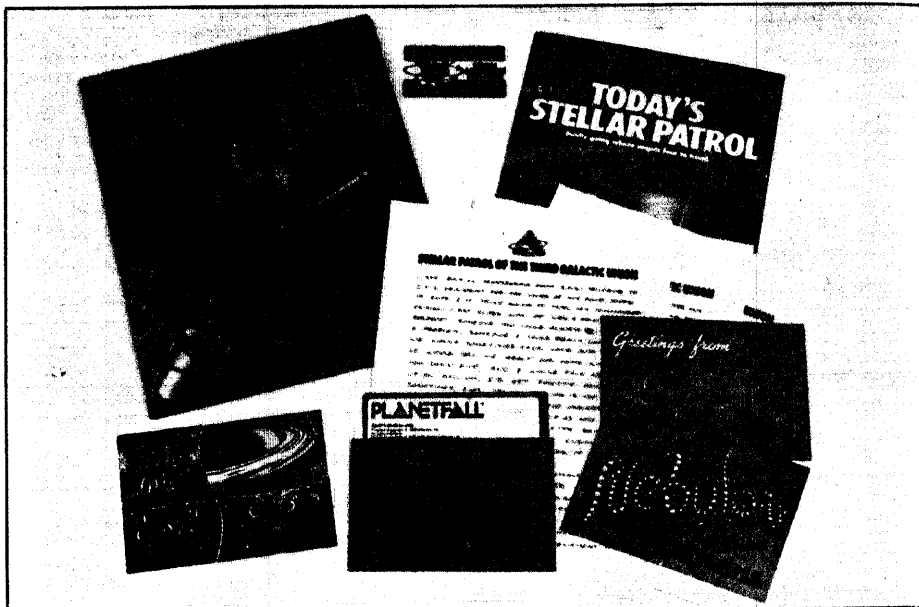
### Planetfall

*Planetfall* is as remarkable, funny, perplexing, and entertaining a game as you are likely to find anywhere. It begins with

**Like Zork, Planetfall  
is big—more than  
100 rooms.**

you, a lowly ensign seventh class, scrubbing deck nine of the Stellar Patrol Ship Feinstein. Thanks to a certain Ensign First Class Blather, this tour of duty has not been everything you had hoped it might be. However, things are about to take an unexpected turn and not necessarily for the better.

Cast alone into space, you soon find yourself marooned on one of two twin islands in the middle of the strange water-covered planet working hard just to find a little food and a safe place to sleep. As



night falls on the first day, and you prepare to bed down in a large empty dormitory, you will have wandered about and mapped most of a huge complex called Kalamontee.

When you wake again, the real adventure begins as you try to discover why the complex was apparently abandoned and what happened to those who were there before you.

In your search for answers to these and other questions, you will find a friend, a robot named Floyd, who will prove to be as good and true a companion to you as E.T. was to Elliot.

Clearly, the most imaginative and cleverly written part of the entire game, Floyd, besides being hysterically funny through most of the adventure, evokes in the player of *Planetfall* authentic feelings of affection and attachment. Indeed, Floyd is critical to finishing the game in terms of being a large part of the solution to three major problems in *Planetfall* besides lending his own brand of moral support to the stranded and baffled adventurer.

Like *Zork*, *Planetfall* is big—more than 100 rooms and much of the fun of the game is found in exploring the vast twin complexes of Kalamontee and Lawanda. In fact, each area of *Planetfall* seems to lead you on to the next, holding your

### creative computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

**Name:** Planetfall

**Type:** Text adventure

**System:** Apple, Atari, IBM PC,  
Commodore 64, TRS-80

**Format:** Disk

**Summary:** Best entry level adventure  
from Infocom. Logical,  
funny, entertaining.

**Price:** \$49.95

**Manufacturer:**

Infocom, Inc.  
55 Wheeler St.  
Cambridge, MA 02138

## Infocom, continued...

attention yet never becoming so obscure as to drain your enthusiasm.

The level of difficulty is, of course, subjective; it took me 30 to 40 hours to acquire all 80 points, thanks mostly to a disastrous oversight in mapping, two red herrings, and one particularly challenging puzzle near the end of the game. Still, the solutions to the more difficult puzzles never quite seem unattainable, so the hours spent locked to the computer do not feel wasted.

The puzzles in *Planetfall* are, for the most part, of an interactive nature, meaning that objects like special access cards, keys, and other tools must be combined in a variety of ways to find solutions to the problems presented.

Fortunately, this game has probably the most logically and straightforward puzzles of any Infocom adventure, so patience and perseverance are rewarded without any unnecessary reliance on sheer luck.

In terms of danger, there are few instances in this game where the player runs the risk of happening upon the kind of gratuitous death one finds in both the *Zork* trilogy and *Starcross*. The risks one takes in *Planetfall* are ones for which he can prepare, and in most cases only carelessness evokes the standard \*\*\*You have died\*\*\* response from the program.

### Text IS Fine

*Planetfall* is a perfect argument in favor of text adventures. The detail present in the descriptions—that which is provided for the mind to see—and those special parts of the game that produce a kind of running action, would simply appear like so many Saturday morning cartoons on a hi-res screen, effectively weakening both the excitement and the drama in those sequences. Though, again, this type of game requires more than a passive involvement from the player and indeed, will not give up many of its secrets without both an intellectual and imaginative investment from the player. For my part, as

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**If you do find a likely suspect, it is possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling.**

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in reading a good book, this is as it should be.

The documentation for *Planetfall* includes, among other things, a manual and a very funny diary. The manual especially is well worth reading since the people at Infocom tell me that the majority of problem-stranded adventurers ask for hints

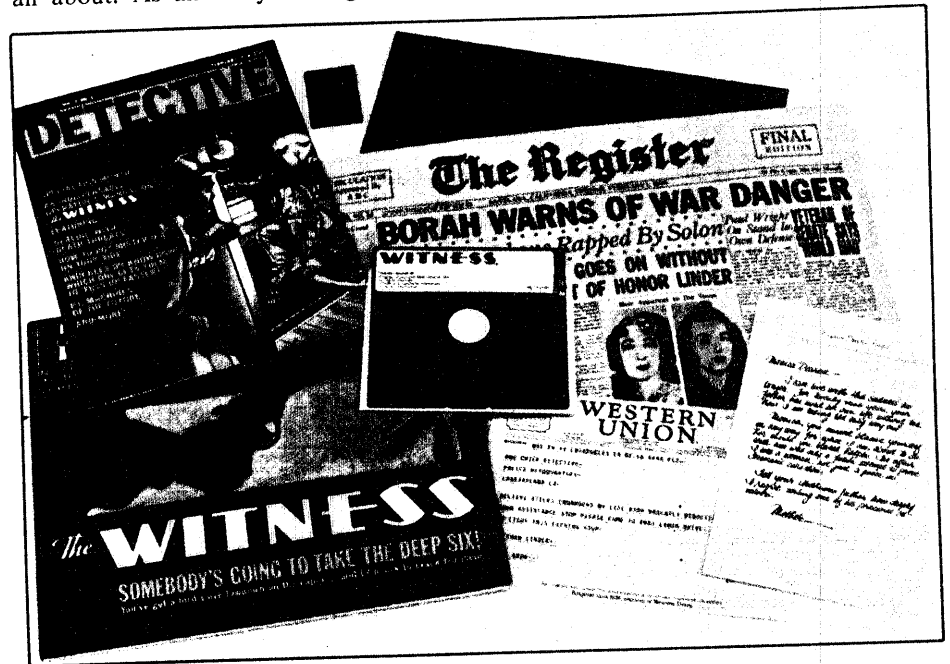
on can be avoided by a careful examination of the command and advice instructions. (I say this from experience having spent at least a month longer than I should have in the Riddle Room of *Zork II* through a failure to read carefully the instructions for speaking to other characters in the game.)

To my mind, *Planetfall*, is the most entertaining Infocom program yet, particularly on the first time through. It has a liveliness to it that never seems to falter, and the ending is without a doubt the most satisfying yet.

First time author Steve Meretsky has written a game that is most of all fun to play, which is really what these games are all about. As an entry level game for

recently committed suicide, and her ex-lover has threatened to kill Linder. While you are in the mansion, Linder is killed. The ex-lover is seen running through the woods behind the house. Did he commit the murder? Is the case closed? Monica, Linder's daughter and the Oriental butler seem to be involved in the case. Where? How? What secrets are they hiding?

As the red herrings begin to pile up, you race against the clock to solve this difficult case. You can question the suspects, but if you are too aggressive or too fawning, you will not get far. Suspects can also lie, whether they are guilty or innocent. You must discover the truth about Linder, his wife, her lover, and the murderer.



those who have yet to try one of Infocom's adventures, *Planetfall* deserves a large audience.—MS

### The Witness

Many Infocom games include maps, clues, and other devices that help you in the game. *Witness* includes a telegram, a suicide note, a pack of matches, a newspaper front page, and an issue of *National Detective* magazine which contains hints for playing the game.

*Witness* is a murder mystery that takes place in 1938. An interesting twist on this theme is that the murder takes place while you are talking to the victim! You can't prevent the murder—that would make for a short game. You must discover who the murderer is and gather enough evidence for a conviction. It isn't enough to have some evidence and a strong hunch. You must prove beyond a reasonable doubt that the accused committed a murder.

The game begins as you are called to the mansion of a Mr. Linder. His wife

You have an assistant who performs laboratory analysis on fingerprints and other evidence. If you find yourself in a tough spot, he will even help save your life.

If you do find a likely suspect, it is

## Creative Computing SOFTWARE PROFILE

**Name:** The Witness

**Type:** Mystery

**System:** Apple II+, IIe

**Format:** Disk

**Language:** Machine

**Summary:** Tough, involving, and a winner.

**Price:** \$49.95

**Manufacturer:**

Infocom, Inc.  
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Cambridge, MA 02138

## Infocom, continued...

possible that a jury will release him because your evidence is not compelling. Make sure that you have an iron-clad case or a murderer may be set free.

Infocom has come up with another fine game with *Witness*. They really have no competition. No other text adventure game has such a sophisticated parser. Most only allow the input of simple commands. Infocom's innovative parser lets you link commands in one sentence, making the game seem more natural and life-like.

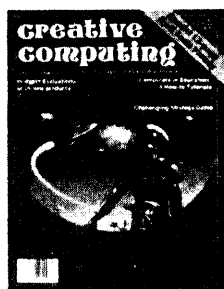
Their packaging of games is also innovative. Whether it is *Witness*, *Deadline*, *Suspended*, or *Starcross*, the package of each game is related to the action. *Witness* has clues in a police file. *Suspended* has a map of the underground complex in which it takes place and markers for the robots, in addition to memos from the director of the complex.

Getting you into the right frame of mind is as important as the playability of a game. Infocom is rare in that it believes this philosophy.

*Witness* is not for a beginner at text games. I solved the mystery through luck rather than hard detective work. It may take you quite a long time to solve this case. If you have ever longed to work with Philip Marlowe, Miss Marple, or Lord Peter Wimsey, *Witness* is the next best thing.—SA END

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