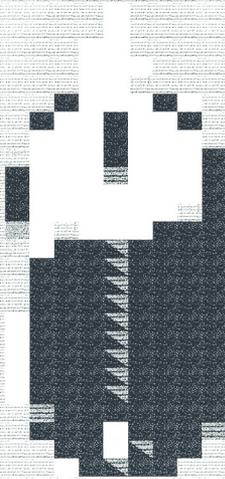


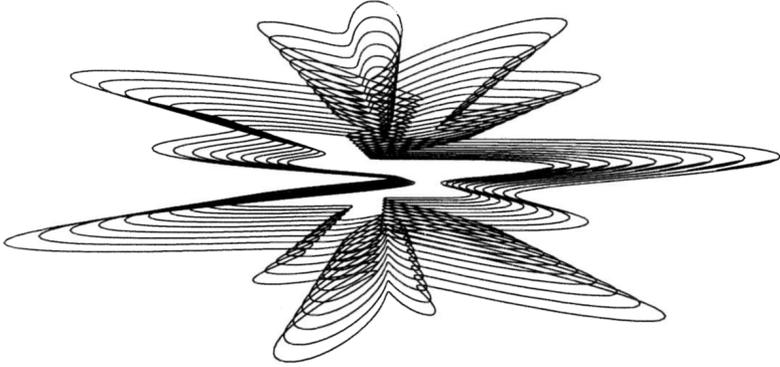
MUD



ROOM

Game | Work by Wiley Wiggins
April 5th - 7th
Broad Center Graduate Gallery
www.mudroom.rip

Articles and Commentary



SONIC BOOM

"Computer Art for People"
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The Genesis of Hunt the Wumpus,
*Gregory Yob, The Best of Creative Computing,
Vol 1 1978*

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Aknowledgements

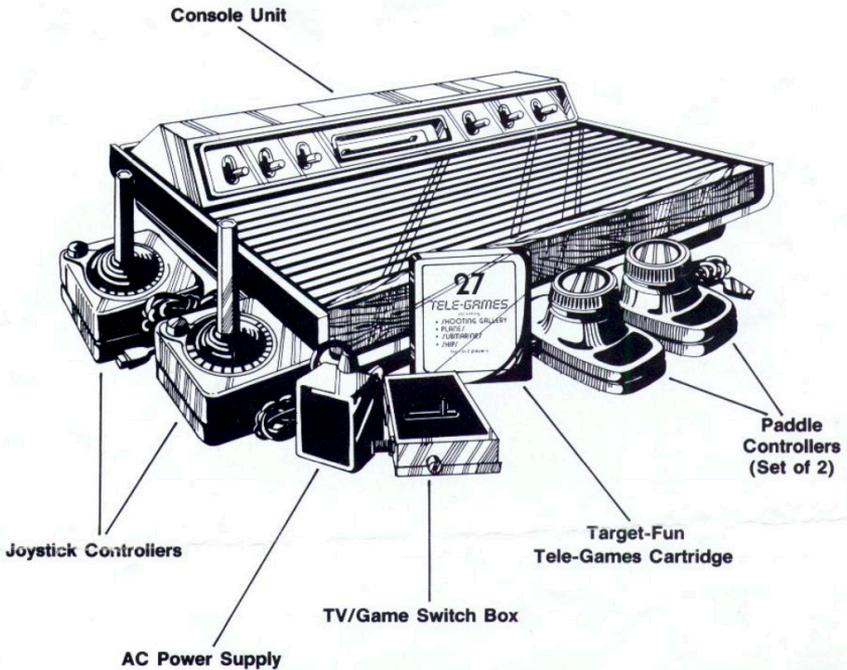
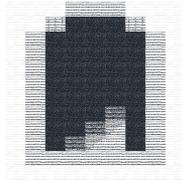


Figure 1 — Parts of Sears Cartridge Tele-Games System Video Arcade™

When you remove your Sears Cartridge Tele-Games System Video Arcade™ from the box, you should have:

- Video Arcade Console Unit
- Target-Fun Telegames Cartridge
- 2 Joystick Controllers (for use with the Target-Fun Tele-Games Cartridge)
- Set of 2 Paddle Controllers (for use with additional Tele-Games Cartridges, sold separately)
- AC Power Supply
- TV/Game Switch Box with twin-lead wires

The only tool needed to set up your Video Arcade is a flat-head screwdriver. See further instructions on page 3.



The **Mud Room** is a transitional area between inside and outside. A place to wash hands. At rest, a pair of muddy boots.

“Mud Room” for me also recalls a room in a Multi User Dungeon, an early form of persistent fantasy text videogame. A clockwork assembly of words.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] A barely yielding, rubberized controller.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. A mechanical pencil on a legal pad locked under a roll-top desk.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED].
A bucket, a scrub-brush, gloves.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] A crumpled pack of
Winstons.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] A crack in the wall.

[REDACTED] A burning
torch.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. The narrow split in a vault door.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. An absence, a search.

[REDACTED]
A glowing screen in the dark.

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED] A useless gold
sword.

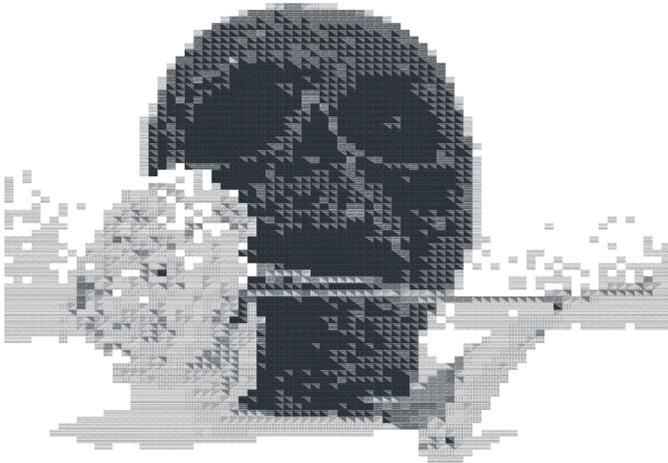
Terminology

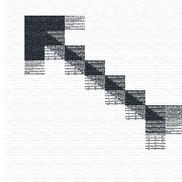
Mud Room is a site-specific installation that focuses on a single room in in a larger work called Dušičky. It's a work about family breakdown, fantasy spaces, hidden labor, and ideas about a dichotomy of play and work.

Dušičky [du-shich-key] (Little Souls) is the Czech name for the November 2nd observance of All Souls' Day. Dušičky is a larger-scale aspirational project that presents a multiplayer space made of many rooms built from family tree data (using a standardized genealogy data format called GEDCOM). It focuses on a branch of my family who were Czech emigres to Texas, their cultural identity and assimilation. Mud Room is a test experiment on the road to Dušičky.

Grotto is a web application built to handle data for both projects. It creates a web page for each room and tracks the movement of items and characters between those rooms. There are text-only, graphical, and XR views of rooms that allow for different UI schemas and interactions. The maze has a history and layers, it's not a pure conceptual space that comes from a single authorial voice. To a player carrying out acts in rooms that represent their own family it may feel like a "real" place, backed by data. To a player without this context, exploring rooms as an assumed "character", it may feel like a superficial game-space filled with videogame tropes and autogenerated content.

You can visit these spaces on your own devices at
<https://mudroom.rip>





The Mud Room is a single room in a network of grottos, some of which contain cenotaphs to the dead. I only stay within a few rooms in this dungeon, but one day I'll clear paths to the rest of the maze. We are all connected together by these passageways.

There are different ways to look into this space. I have offered two here, an iconic view that you may use, and a specific, temporary rendering of just the Mud Room. I am using a kneeling pad and an old game controller to inhabit this space. This is still a public room, you can also try using these objects if you like.

We interact with these spaces as characters- unique but anonymized, ultimately disposable.

It's still dangerous in some of these places, but it's only a sort of play danger.

The maze is a moving index of things and people, but no bones lie there. A cenotaph is an empty tomb.

Collecting is the redemption of things, which complements the redemption of man
- Benjamin

USING THE CONTROLLER

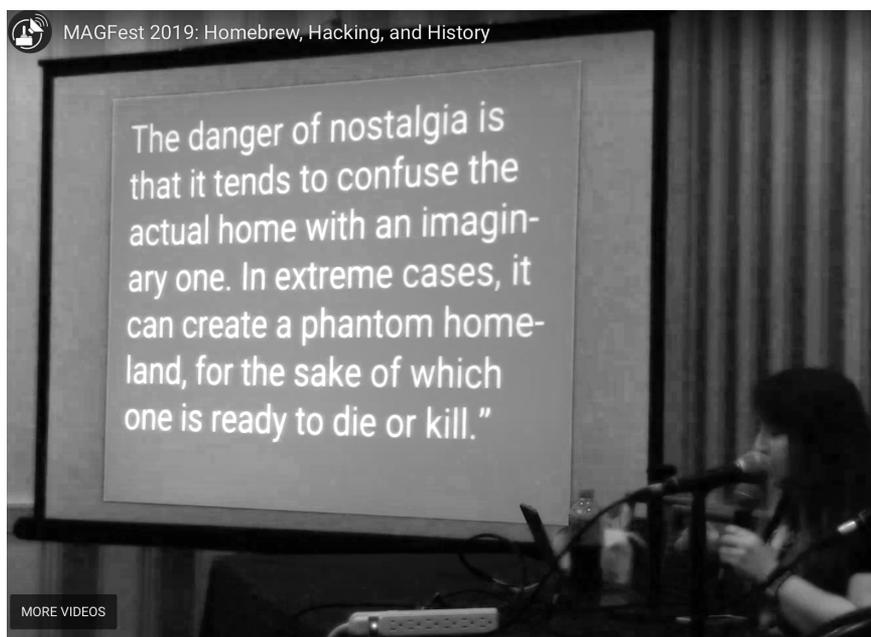


Use your Joystick Controller with this ATARI® Game Program™ cartridge. Be sure to plug the controller cable firmly into the left jack at the back of your ATARI Video Computer System™ game. Hold the Joystick with the red button to your upper left, toward the television screen. (See Section 3 of your Owner's Manual for further details.)

PHANTOM HOMELAND

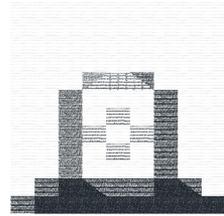
Excerpt from an interview with the artist by Michael Luo

Michael Luo: Can you share your interest in retro-computing and retro-gaming as a form of art-making? That part of history is very much lost on me, but I'm really curious about the drive behind it.



Wiley Wiggins: I guess I'm drawn to old games and low-fidelity games for a number of reasons. When I talk about it, I keep returning to a talk that my friend Rachel Weil gave at an event called MagFest about current day modding and homebrew game creation on vintage hardware. The whole thing is worth watching, but she ends on a good note that talks about engaging critically with old hardware and history relating to her practice of making actual new games for the NES (Nintendo Entertainment System), which is an incredibly arcane practice that involves coding in an assembly language. Rachel charges right into the idea that unexamined nostalgia is toxic, at this retro game and chiptune convention! And it's pretty gutsy and amazing, and she actually completely gets the audience on board in a way that's encouraging. I think nostalgia is a powerful urge that should be critically engaged with along other powerful urges, and doing so puts the artist in connection with the past, gives space to critique ideas of technological progress.

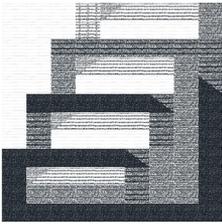
I've been spending a chunk of my time lately participating in group playthroughs of games via my friend Andy Reitano's emulator webapp *Telemelt*. It's been like an excellent book club for old games, playing through this spreadsheet of games together and talking about them, looking up their histories. A lot of these games that are significant to me... they're often *kusoge* (shit games) that nobody else cares about, but because I spent a lot of time with them, because you know... I got the crappy bargain bin game and maybe I didn't have a manual for it and I just had this very mysterious experience of working really hard to explore it and get through it... that's significant to me. That's something I engage with a lot in the new games I make, this edge of alienation that doesn't turn a player completely off but gives them sometimes confusing or incongruous feedback to work with and recreates this mysterious experience. I want to try and get that significance I feel for some of these older games across when the conversation about games is often only about their... you know, historical value in this supposed march forward of technical progress. We recently played this game *Deadly Towers* that is a pretty universally panned game for the NES that I spent a huge amount of time playing and beating as a kid. I had wild dreams for a week after playing it again. It's kind of a cookie cutter adventure game but it's riddled with these invisible spots on its map that, when touched, cause the player to slip through portals into deeper mazes. It's this sort of recursive labyrinth, and these mazes had to be mapped out on paper or memorized to complete the game, back before the internet provided an easily accessible solution to every maze or puzzle game. That idea of finding an invisible door, a tesseract between dissimilar places, and by extension disjunctive links in text, is something I am exploring. In *Mud Room* I focus on a couple of Atari 2600 games that I played as a kid without manuals. Both the games I'm focusing on were unpopular, maybe poorly designed, but were these mysterious, even frightening spaces that I explored as a child. They were psychogeographic maps that I filled with the drama of childhood as I traversed them.



Games work as both media artifacts and places of embodied actions that can act as triggers for memory. They're a sweet-spot of spatialized information, remembered hand movements, a visual language and a constructed world... it's a very potent mix of things as far as memories go and it all hits somewhere deep in the limbic system, in some part of your brain that's reserved for performing rituals. That's arguably why games exist, right? They're there to teach dangerous skills in safety or enact social ways of being or embody ancestors... all these important social functions that we have carefully tried to decouple games from. There is this tendency to try to discreetly extract... say, music from its ritual functions and say, oh isn't this interesting in this very abstract way, isn't this pure abstraction interesting because it's just math or whatever, and you're looking at the tip of this giant iceberg of interconnected things. Our capacity and drive to recognize and remember unfamiliar patterns is there because it served very specific purposes.

I think everyone interested in game studies should also look into ethnomusicology. I've learned a lot from reading books like Kyra Gaunt's *The Games Black Girls Play*. Re-connecting with a sort of anthropology of games is a place of resistance against turning games into discrete commercial products that satisfy some kind of isolating, individualized market demographic need that can never be filled, and returns them to being social rituals of cooperative meaning making that actually ARE satisfying. There's good research that points to musicality as having preceded symbolic language, and you can say the same thing about games and play.

Michael Luo: Yeah, I don't know how much I wanted to get into this, but there's so much ambiguity around the origins of play, but now you know when we talk about video games when or when like average Joe talks about video games it's not engaged with at all. Just this sort of checklist of AAA game interactions that are satisfying for some reason that we won't get into, they're just marketing requirements.



Wiley Wiggins: Well the fact that I'm already engaging with videogames should hopefully tell people I'm not a snob about high/low art, if someone has a compelling experience in a big commercial game, that's valid, but I agree that we should engage with why some of these interactions work for people other than just making a laundry list of psychological quirks to be exploited. We should question these ideologies being couched in these pleasurable experiences which have been disconnected from their historical social and ritual functions. I play plenty of big commercial games. I mean I love Minecraft (laughs). But the reason I play it is because I play

with a group of adult hardcore Minecraft players who have a server running with a 10 year history and the most amazing and expansive constructions. It's dizzying the stuff they've built. I can enjoy that and also question the underlying idea of Minecraft- inexhaustible extraction without consequences. Or, Animal Crossing, I love that game too. But you don't have to look too closely to see it's a nerfed economy for kids where you still need to pay a mortgage, but you can sell bugs and seashells and shake money out of trees so what's the harm? Instead of imagining a new way to live we've made a "nice" version of what we have, to kind of gently indoctrinate kids to the way it's going to be for them. Why do 10 people on an island need an economy with a turnip-based stock market? It's important to engage with what ideas pleasure is backgrounding as inherent and unquestionable when games become ideological corporate apparatuses. When you make a game you are making a reality with baked-in assumptions, and that has a subtle effect on a player, especially young players.

Michael Luo: on that topic can you talk a little about your game design influences? I see you attempting some quite complex systems of interaction and operation lately, can you speak to the aesthetics of systems and maybe dungeons, which you keep returning

to as a theme? It's very different than the direction I've been going, but it's interesting to me.

Wiley Wiggins: Well, part of being in an MFA program right now is about trying to get my technical skills to catch up with my imagination, so there's still a gulf between the kinds of games that I find mechanically effective or evocative and the kinds of stuff I currently make. Also, I am guessing that you, like me, appreciate and play a lot of different kinds of games that are dissimilar from the stuff you currently make or want to make. I am really attracted to non-deterministic, non-linear, systems-y games, especially if they have some kind of community aspect and some kind of history that accrues over time. I love text based games, although I think that a text parser as input is a torture not many players are willing to put up with. I'm also really attracted to roguelike games, especially *Brogue*.

My design method now is to start with the simplest possible version of a game and then very slowly build on it, preferably with actual players involved. It's something that I should have started doing a long time ago, and I am finding it a very gratifying way of working. I'm very focused on that idea of games as narrative *generators* rather than narratives, and as a kind of a collaboration with the player. I think there's a place for polemical games and there may be polemical aspects to what I make, but I still want to make them in a space that I don't totally own and that can surprise me... that has some life of its own.

For me games do a lot of different things... For one thing, they sort of spatialize information. A kind of architecture. They can be a place to hide things in a way that would be difficult or feel very different in a flat deterministic piece of animation or writing. It's making a place and some situations and then watching what happens there. I'm very invested in the idea of Easter eggs, and of digital games as a form of software that opposes productivity software— it's software that resists its user to a certain extent, that carries secrets, and that has to be unfolded. I'm interested in using games to retopologize other kinds of data, like for instance my current project, which in the long term I am working to make import genealogy data and turn it into a large maze of interconnected rooms to explore. Architecture built out of lives.

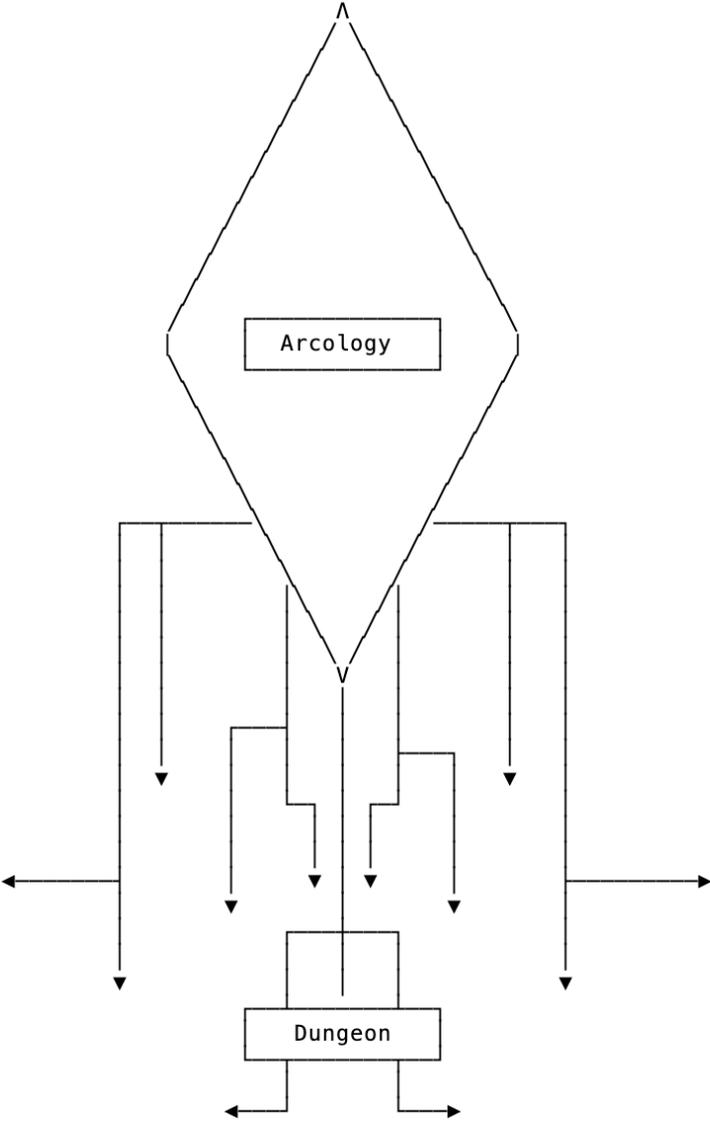
When I had that idea I was... I was thinking a lot about... Have you ever seen these videos where someone will come and pour molten silver into an ant hill and then let it cool... and then pull it out this branching sculpture from all of the tunnels? I mean it sucks to be one of those ants, but the result is that it becomes this sculptural thing... I think about that, I thought about that the other day... "If I do this and it works, I'm basically pouring molten silver down the ant hill of my family." I can place items in this new architecture... I've made a few games that utilize random objects as a mechanic. My mother is a compulsive collector and I like the idea of moving these objects around to create associations and meaning inside this information architecture that lets me look at life outside the game in a different way.

Michael Luo: Yeah OK, so I guess this segues really well to another question I had. I think one most curious things about this new project is you've put a lot of very personal stuff into it, but hidden in this silver ant-hill structure like you said. Is obfuscating things part of the interaction design? How does security through obscurity work in the internet age?

Wiley Wiggins: I think that's something I'm actively working on. There's painful stuff in *Mud Room* that might really upset some of my family members or re-open some trauma. Working in a way where this stuff isn't just, online as a short animation or whatever, mining my family trauma for views or something awful like that, is really important to me. I am taking these events out and trying to process them in a space that is changing over time, that is semi-public but in a way where you really have to engage to access them, and where there's a very different experience for me carrying out actions in the game space than for other players who are kind of tourists in the space. I talk about it like I am an NPC that lives in the dungeon and you are wanderers passing through, and we all have our own real motivations for being in the space, even as assumed characters. There's also this game trope that I am playing with- How often in games there's these really personal journal entries or tape recordings that are just lying around in the open for the player to peruse in order to reconstruct a backstory. Not everything left in this maze will be accessible to others. I like to confuse the idea that everything is constructed and staged for other players. It de-privileges them just a little bit. There's no breadcrumb trail creating a narrative path through mud room right now, it's more like a workspace, an index. It seems like in the discussion of games, or really any kind of software, there's no longer any popular conception that these things could be made by a person for their own needs or just the needs of their community. I'm making this place firstly for myself and secondly reaching out in trust to an imagined someone that I can't see.



*They grew, and overgrown were torn out and kept away with cold memories of spring.
Long term tenant.*



The Quest for the Real-Life Treasures of Atari's *Swordquest*

BY ERIC GRUNDHAUSER

Atlas Obscura



WARNING: *All you who enter EarthWorld will encounter danger, trials, tests, and obstacles. All will have an equal chance to decipher the hidden message.*

Welcome to EarthWorld. This is the first in a series of four worlds that you must pass through on your quest for the Sword of Ultimate Sorcery.

Whatever happened to the lost treasures of *Swordquest*? A solid gold sword. A diamond-encrusted chalice. A bejeweled talisman. Playing Atari in the 1980s, these were some of the prizes you could win—not delivered in pixel form on a screen, but as real-world treasures placed in the palm of your hand.

Atari commissioned five such prizes worth a total of \$150,000, all to promote their new fantasy adventure game series, *Swordquest*. The Swordquest contest, one of the most audacious in video game history, offered players the chance to go on a digital quest for real treasure. They would follow a trail of esoteric clues from video game to comic book to live tournament, all for the chance to win real prizes valued at tens of thousands of dollars.

The contest began in spectacular fashion, but in the middle of it all, before all the prizes had been awarded, the whole thing was abruptly cancelled. The undistributed treasures seemed to disappear, their whereabouts a 30-year mystery. Until now.

Swordquest was an innovative, and ultimately aborted, series of fantasy adventure games that ran one of the most audacious contests in the history of gaming, asking brave players to follow a trail of esoteric clues from video game to comic book to a live tournament, all for the chance to win IRL quest prizes, like a large gem in a golden box or a jewel-studded crown of gold, each worth tens of thousands of dollars.

By the early 1980s, Atari, Inc. was at the pinnacle of its success. Dreaming big wasn't a problem. The company ruled the burgeoning video game market, pulling in millions of dollars a year with its Atari 2600 home gaming system alone. One of the system's most acclaimed games was a fantasy adventure called, well, *Adventure*. Released in late 1979, this game, filled with dragons with names like Grundle and Yorgle, quickly became a classic title, spurred on by its unique hidden clue known as the "Gray Dot." This rogue pixel could be moved around to find a secret room that displayed the programmer's name.



Atari historian Curt Vendel, co-author of the 2012 book, *Atari Inc.: Business is Fun*, told us that in the wake of this Easter egg becoming popular among players, "marketing thought it would be a great idea to create a series of games where players would have to find clues both in the game [and in its physical materials]."

This proposed sequel to *Adventure* was the project that morphed into the ambitious crossover event series, *Swordquest*.

In 1982, Atari was owned by Warner Communications, which happened to own a pair of other companies, DC Comics, and the Franklin Mint. As development on the *Adventure* sequel continued that year, the project began to expand, becoming a full-fledged crossover incorporating comic books from DC and bejeweled prizes from the Franklin Mint. With the help of game designer Tod Frye, who says he was, "pretty much the sole initiator and creative spirit behind the whole Swordquest thing," the Swordquest-mythos was born, incorporating elements of fantasy gaming, astrology, and the kabbalah, into a multimedia contest that was equal parts Willy Wonka and *The Last Starfighter*.

The plan was to release a quartet of *Swordquest* games, each based around one of the

Swordquest!

You Can Win Fabulous Prizes by Solving the Mysteries of Four New Cartridges

In October, Atan presents the *EarthWorld* Game Program cartridge, launching the most exciting real-life treasure hunt of our time—the SwordQuest Cycle.

There will be four new SwordQuest games in all, each part of the total SwordQuest adventure story. This continuing fantasy tale of treacherous tyrants and daring deeds is told in the special DC comic books packed with the cartridges, and played out in the games themselves.

But the SwordQuest challenge is more than on-screen action—by finding clues hidden in each cartridge and comic book combination, players can win prizes worth thousands of dollars!

The Quest begins with *EarthWorld*, which holds the key to winning a spectacular 18kt solid gold Talisman, studded with twelve diamonds and twelve

\$25,000 golden Crown, encrusted with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, green tourmalines, and aquamarines.

Finally comes *AirWorld*. Uncovering its secrets will win the fourth \$25,000 prize for some lucky player—it's a modern-day version of the mythical Philosopher's Stone, encased in an 18kt



THE TALISMAN



THE CHALICE



THE CROWN



THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

gold box studded with emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and citrines.

And when the SwordQuest cycle is complete, it will be time for the fifth and final challenge of SwordQuest—the answer which will earn the grand prize winner an incredible jewel-encrusted Sword, with 18kt gold handle and gleaming silver blade, blazing with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires—a \$50,000 sword!

What kind of secrets are hidden in the games? No one is saying—but Jewel Savadelis, Atan's Director of Marketing Software, says, "When someone finds the clues, they'll know it!"

"All the contest details will be enclosed in the cartridge boxes," she explains, "but I can tell you that we're going to recognize *everyone* who finds at least a single valid clue. Find more, you'll receive a greater level of recognition. But you'll have to find all five valid clues to be eligible to win the major prize for each cartridge—and that fifth valid clue is a *real* challenge!"

other precious stones—a prize produced at a cost of \$25,000.

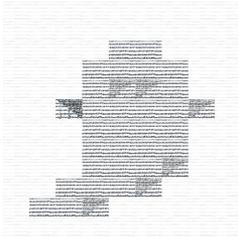
Next comes *FireWorld*, in early 1983. The winner of the *FireWorld* contest walks off with a Chalice, a gorgeous goblet of platinum and gold, glistening with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls—another \$25,000 prize.

Later in 1983 there is *WaterWorld*, with a prize truly fit for a king—a

four elements—*Earthworld*, *Fireworld*, *Waterworld*, and *Airworld*. Each game would come with a tie-in comic book that gave a more detailed telling of the game’s story than the pixelated graphics the Atari 2600 could achieve. These comic books would also hide clues that, if correctly deciphered, could earn a player entry into a final tournament.

The winner of each game’s tournament would receive a special treasure ripped straight from the pages of the comic, and brought to life by the Franklin Mint, with real gemstones and gold. The winner of the *Earthworld* tournament would win the “Talisman of Penultimate Truth;” the *Fireworld* contest would award the “Chalice of Light;” the *Waterworld* winner would earn the “Crown of Life;” and the champion of *Airworld* would be awarded the “Philosopher’s Stone.” In addition to these prizes, the four winners would then compete for a final, ultimate prize: “The Sword of Ultimate Sorcery!” Each of the first four treasures was valued at around \$25,000, while the sword was valued at \$50,000.

The *Swordquest* series officially began in October of 1982 with the release of *Swordquest: Earthworld*. In the game, players moved through a series of rooms, each one corresponding to a Zodiac sign. They had to place specific items in each to uncover numeric clues that would point to word clues in the accompanying comic book. For instance, leaving the Grappling Hook in the Cancer room, and the Rope in the Leo room, would reveal the number clue “25 - 6.” This led players to page 25, panel six of the *Earthworld* comic book where the word “THE” was hidden within the background illustration.



The accompanying comic book, written by comic book greats Gerry Conway and Roy Thomas and illustrated by George Perez, told the tale of twins Tarra and Torr as they embarked on a quest to defeat the evil Tyrannus and collect the very same prizes that players were trying to win in the real world. The comic included 10 different words hidden throughout its 52 pages. But the contest entry form only asked for five words. This final step was deciphered by noticing the words “prime” and “number” were colored purple in the comic book’s introduction.

This clue indicated that only the words found on prime numbered pages were correct.

In the end, players who wrote in with the phrase, “QUEST IN TOWER TALISMAN FOUND” were awarded the title of “Supreme Sage of Sorcery” by Atari (people with three to four correct words were named “Wise Warrior,” and those with only one or two were dubbed “Brave Venturer”), and their names were entered in for a chance to join the final *Earthworld* tournament.

Earthworld sold around 500,000 copies, and around 5,000 players ended up submitting their answers to the final tournament. Of all those, only eight Supreme Sages of Sorcery submitted the correct words, granting them access to the competition. In May

of 1983, the tournament was held at Atari headquarters in California. Each of the eight players was given a specially programmed version of *Earthworld* to complete in under 90 minutes. Stephen Bell, an unemployed 20-year-old from Detroit, took home the victory after he completed the game in just 46 minutes. Bell was given the Talisman of Penultimate Truth, a solid gold pendant inlaid with diamonds and other precious stones. It was also hung with a small, white gold sword.



Stephen Bell and the Talisman of Penultimate Truth. (Atari Mania)

For his part, Bell wasn't so entranced by the fantasy of the prize. When asked what he was going to do with the \$25,000 boondoggle, he said, "No plans yet. I didn't really expect to win ... Maybe I'll get a car. I've never had one."

By the time the *Earthworld* tournament concluded, the next game in the series, *Fireworld*, had already been on shelves for three months. Players were already on their way to conquering the second volume's mysteries. Unlike *Earthworld's* map, which was based on the houses of the zodiac, the layout of *Fireworld* was based on the Tree of Life from the Kabbalah. The gameplay was much the same as in the previous game.



Michael Rideout and the Chalice of Light. (Atari Mania)

Players put items in specific rooms to get clues leading to the comic book, where Tarra and Torr continued their adventures.

Again, 10 words were hidden within the comic book, with only five of them being the correct ones. The meta-clue in the Fireworld comic book was the word “seven,” once again in the introduction, but this time called out by a different font. This indicated that only the hidden words found on page numbers adding up to seven were correct. For example, the word “leads” was hidden on page 16; $1+6=7$. The winning phrase included the words “LEADS TO CHALICE POWER ABOUND.”

Unlike the small number of winners who had deciphered the Earthworld riddles, the response to the Fireworld puzzles was much larger. Again, Atari sent out certificates awarding honorary titles to everyone who submitted. Those with one-to-two words correct were named “Valiant Stripling;” those with three-to-four words correct were called “Master Pathfinder;” and those who had cracked the whole code were dubbed a “Knight of Chalice.” This time, Atari had so many winners that it had to whittle down the number of contestants, from 73 to a manageable 50, by having each Knight of Chalice submit a written essay about what they liked about the game.

With the field narrowed to 50, the Fireworld tournament was finally held in January

of 1984. Like the previous competition, each player competed using a specially programmed version of the game at Atari headquarters. This time the contest was won by Michael Rideout from Aiken, South Carolina, who beat the game in 50 minutes using the knowledge of the Tree of Life he had garnered while dabbling in tarot.

Rideout won the Chalice of Light, a fantasy-styled pimp cup made of gold and platinum, studded with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and pearls.

Then came *Waterworld*, the third, and unexpectedly final installment of the Swordquest games. Unlike the previous games, *Waterworld* was given a limited release in



February of 1984, being made available only to official Atari Club members who mailed away for the game. The layout of this installment was based on the seven spiritual chakras popular in New Age belief, making for a smaller map than ever before, with just eight rooms to explore. Once again, the clues pointed to-

wards the comic book adventures of Tarra and Torr, this time looking for the words, “HASTEN TOWARD REVEALED CROWN.”

Unfortunately for the anxious Atari Club members who took the time to solve *Waterworld*'s puzzles, the entire Swordquest campaign was abruptly cancelled in the middle of 1984. Most of those who had already entered were told they didn't qualify for the contest any longer (more on that below), and both Rideout and Bell were given \$15,000 and an Atari 7800 as compensation for being unable to compete for the Sword of Ultimate Sorcery. Work had begun on both the game and comic book of *Airworld*, which would have been patterned after the I Ching, but neither was ever created, and the story was never finished. It seemed that Tyrannus finally won.

The contest's cancellation was a result of Atari being purchased by controversial gaming CEO Jack Tramiel, and his new company Tramel Technology. The video game industry had been in a swift decline since 1983, and Atari had finally bottomed out by mid-1984, allowing Tramiel to purchase Atari Inc. and its intellectual property for a song. During this time, Atari's various divisions were sold and reassigned. Somewhere in that tornado of business, the remaining treasures of Swordquest were seemingly lost.

In an interview in 2005, Rideout confirmed that he still had the chalice, which he kept in a safe deposit box. The fate of the talisman is a bit more murky, although in that same interview, Rideout says that he'd heard Bell had it melted down by a coin dealer for col-

lege money, only keeping the white gold sword. Vendel confirmed that Bell had in fact melted down the amulet for cash.

As to the Crown of Life that would have been given to the winner of the *Waterworld* competition, Vendel says that it was awarded, but during a semi-secret tournament, the winner of which has never been revealed. “Under contract, Warner was obligated to complete the contest for *Waterworld*, because players had submitted correct answers, and the game was sold to the public based on the fact that whomever solves the puzzle in the game would be awarded a prize,” says Vendel.

“They held a very quiet, non-public contest with the 10 people who solved the *Waterworld* contest. The crown was awarded to the third prize winner.” While we could find no hard evidence of this contest, Vendel says the contest had to take place by law.



Since *Airworld* was never completed or sold, that game’s contest did not take place. The Philosopher’s Stone and the Sword of Ultimate Sorcery were also thought to be lost, though Vendel says they were destroyed. The popular myth is that the remaining prizes were included in Tramiel’s purchase of Atari Inc., and that he held onto them—specifically, that the Sword of Ultimate Sorcery hung over Tramiel’s mantelpiece. (Tramiel passed away in 2012.)

Even lead designer Frye told us that he believed the prizes went to Tramiel. “As best I can determine, [the remaining] three prizes were part of the Atari assets, and were transferred to the Trameil family in ‘84,” he says. Vendel, however is vehement that this is all fantasy. “[What] did not belong to Atari, nor was purchased by Tramel Technologies were the *Swordquest* prizes, because they were owned by Warner Communications, and were being held by Franklin Mint,” he says. “They’re not sitting on Jack Tramiel’s mantel, nor is the sword sitting over Jack Tramiel’s fireplace. He never had the rights or access to the [prizes].”

According to Vendel, the rumor stems from an Atari employee who did see a sword over the mantel, but it was a family heirloom, not the *Swordquest* sword.

So what did happen to the Philosopher’s Stone and the Sword of Ultimate Sorcery? Vendel told us he got the scoop from a former member of Warner management. “Once Atari was sold, those prizes languished at Franklin Mint,” he says. “At some point Franklin Mint disposed of them. They were not retained, because why would they retain the prizes? It’s a lot easier just to smelt it back down and turn them into gold coins or other things they could sell.”

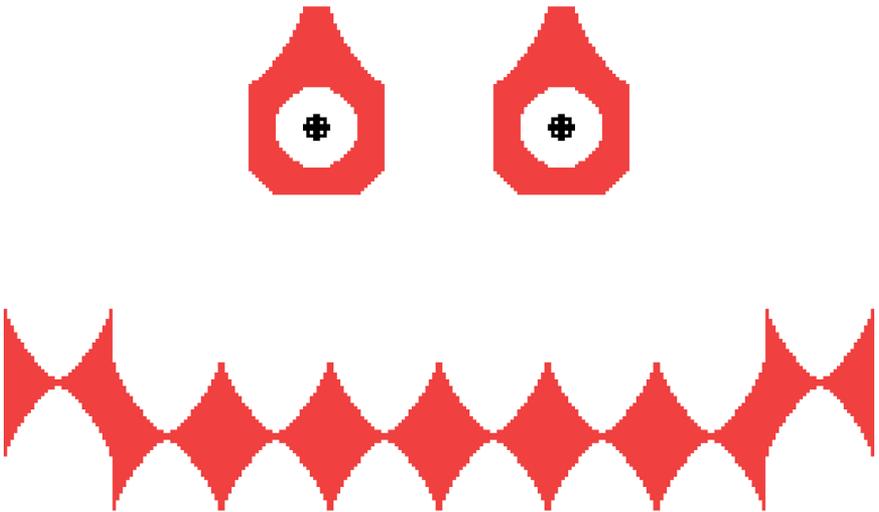
It seems that most of the lost treasures of *Swordquest* are just that: lost. But like with any great adventure there is still the glimmer of hope that the Crown of Life is still out there somewhere, awarded to some anonymous gamer who, all this time, has been a secret king.

WHAT IS A WUMPUS?

The wumpus lives (as of April 5th 2022) on the first floor of the Dungeon. The wumpus is “Dangerous”.

Worse things live deeper in the Dungeon, we will leave those passageways closed for now.

There is a lot of uncertainty as to what a wumpus looks like, and there have been many many attempts to depict it. I am strongly drawn to the image of its teeth closing shown in the Texas Instruments-994a graphical version of the game that I played in kindergarten. It looked like this:



Its teeth around my tiny neck



Another new game from Creative Computing.



The Genesis of Wumpus

Two years ago I happened by People's Computer Company (PCC) and saw some of their computer games — such as Hurtle, Snark, and Mugwump. My reaction was: "EECH!!" Each of these games was based on a 10 x 10 grid in Cartesian co-ordinates and three of them was too much for me. I started to think along the lines of: "There has to be a hide and seek computer game without that (exp. deleted) grid!!" In fact, why not a topological computer game — Imagine a set of points connected in some way and the player moves about the set via the interconnections.

That afternoon in meditation the phrase "Hunt the Wumpus" arrived, and Wumpus was born. He's still a bit vague in physical detail as most dedicated Wumpus hunters know, but appearances are part of the game. (If you like, send me a picture of your version of a Wumpus. Perhaps friendly Dave, our editor, will publish the best one in *Creative Computing*.) The grid I chose was the vertices of a dodecahedron — simply because it's my favorite Platonic solid and once, ages ago, I made a kite shaped like one. The edges became the connecting tunnels between the caves which were the set of points for the game.

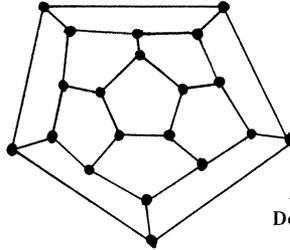
My basic idea at this time was for the player to approach the Wumpus, back off, and come up to him by going around the dodecahedron. To my knowledge, this has never happened . . . most players adopt other strategies rather than this cold-blooded approach.

Anyway . . . how to get the Wumpus! How about an arrow which could turn corners as it goes from room to room. Let the hunter tell the arrow where to go and let it fly. The shortest round trip without reversals is 5 caves — and thus the Crooked Arrow.

Hmmm . . . How does one sense the Wumpus? It's dark in yonder cave, and light would wake him up. If one got one cave away, the wumpus's distinct smell would serve as a warning. So far, so good . . . but Wumpus is still too easy, so let's find some appropriate hazards for the caves.

Bottomless pits were easy. Any imaginary cave would have a few of those around the place. Superbats were harder to come by. It took me a day or two to get that idea. The Superbats are a sort of rapid transit system gone a little batty (sorry about that one). They take you a random distance to a random cave and leave you there. If that's a pit or a Wumpus, well, you are in Fate's hands.

Around this time, I saw that Map-making would be a regular activity of Wumpus-hunters. I numbered the caves and made the scheme fixed in the hopes a practised player might notice this and make himself a permanent map of the caverns. (Another unrealised hope — as an exercise, make yourself such a map on a Squashed Dodecahedron).



A Squashed Dodecahedron

To start the game fairly, Wumpus, Hazards, and Hunter are located on different points at the start of the game. Each game starts with random choices of location, but the hunter may restart with the same set-up if he chooses. This allows re-plays if the hunter, say, fell into a pit on the first move.

Wumpus was nearly done in my mind . . . (hint to a games-writer: Have a clear notion of your game before you

start coding it. This saves MUCH confusion.) yet I felt it was a bit dull. Once you found the Wumpus all you had to do was shoot it. To fix this, the Wumpus was given a little life. If you shot an arrow or moved into his cave, he woke up and chose to move to a neighboring room or to the same room (one of 4 choices). If you and the Wumpus were in the same room after he moved, he ATE YOU UP!!

Around here I noticed that the pits and the bats didn't affect the Wumpus. To explain this, I added some color by making him heavy and with the legendary sucker feet. After all, evolution works in strange ways!! If you are a Wumpus fiend, make a version of Wumpus in which he avoids pits and superbats can carry him only one room (with the possibility of being dumped into your cave). This can be done by making the wumpus moving procedure a subroutine.

I wrote Wumpus and dropped it off at PCC. Then I went home and dreamed up Wumpus II which will be covered in the next issue of *Creative Computing*.

The Birth of Wumpus

Around a month later, I went to the Synergy conference at Stanford, where many of the far-out folk were gathered to share their visions of improving the world. PCC had a few terminals running in a conference room and I dropped by. To my vast surprise, all of the terminals were running Wumpus and scraps of paper on the floor with scrawled numbers and lines testified that much dedicated Wumpus-hunting was in progress. I had spawned a hit computer game!!

Later, PCC published Wumpus in its newsletter (If you haven't seen it, write them for a subscription: P.O. Box 310, Menlo Park, Cal. 94025), and Wumpus appeared in all sorts of unlikely places. I have reports of Wumpus written in RPG, a listing of one in FORTRAN, a rumor of a system command of 'to Wumpus' on a large corporation's R&D computer system and have even seen an illustrated version for the Hazeltine CRT terminal!!

HUNT THE WUMPUS

EATS NEAREY!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 2
TUNNELS LEAD TO 1 3 10

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?1
ZAP--SUPER EAT SNATCH! ELSEWHEREVILLE FOR YOU!
YYYYIIIEEEF . . . FELL IN PIT
HA HA HA - YOU LOSE!
SAME SET-UP (Y-N)?Y
HUNT THE WUMPUS

EATS NEAREY!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 2
TUNNELS LEAD TO 1 3 10

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?3

YOU ARE IN ROOM 3
TUNNELS LEAD TO 2 4 12

more

WUMPUS TAPES, ETC.

I can be found at:

Gregory Job
PO Box 354
Palo Alto, Calif. 94301

Paper tapes of Wumpus, Wumpus 2 and Wumpus 3 are available and cost \$5.00 each.

May your arrows remain straight. —Gregory Job.

SAMPLE RUN

INSTRUCTIONS (Y-N)?Y

WELCOME TO "HUNT THE WUMPUS"

THE WUMPUS LIVES IN A CAVE OF 20 ROOMS. EACH ROOM HAS 3 TUNNELS LEADING TO OTHER ROOMS. (LOOK AT A DODECAHEDRON TO SEE HOW THIS WORKS-IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT A DODECAHEDRON IS, ASK SOMEONE)

HAZARDS!

BOTTOMLESS PITS - TWO ROOMS HAVE BOTTOMLESS PITS IN THEM
IF YOU GO THERE, YOU FALL INTO THE PIT (& LOSE!)
SUPER BATS - TWO OTHER ROOMS HAVE SUPER EATS. IF YOU GO THERE, A BAT GRAES YOU AND TAKES YOU TO SOME OTHER ROOM AT RANDOM. (WHICH MIGHT BE TROUBLESOME)

WUMPUS!

THE WUMPUS IS NOT BOTHERED BY THE HAZARDS (HE HAS SUCKER FEET AND IS TOO BIG FOR A BAT TO LIFT). USUALLY HE IS ASLEEP. TWO THINGS WAKE HIM UP: YOUR ENTERING HIS ROOM OR YOUR SHOOTING AN ARROW.

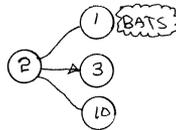
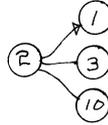
IF THE WUMPUS WAKES, HE MOVES (P=.75) ONE ROOM OR STAYS STILL (P=.25). AFTER THAT, IF HE IS WHERE YOU ARE, HE EATS YOU UP (& YOU LOSE!)

YOU!

EACH TURN YOU MAY MOVE OR SHOOT A CROOKED ARROW
MOVING: YOU CAN GO ONE ROOM (THRU ONE TUNNEL)
ARROWS: YOU HAVE 5 ARROWS. YOU LOSE WHEN YOU RUN OUT.
EACH ARROW CAN GO FROM 1 TO 5 ROOMS. YOU AIM BY TELLING THE COMPUTER THE ROOMS YOU WANT THE ARROW TO GO TO.
IF THE ARROW CAN'T GO THAT WAY (IE NO TUNNEL) IT MOVES AT RANDOM TO THE NEXT ROOM.
IF THE ARROW HITS THE WUMPUS, YOU WIN.
IF THE ARROW HITS YOU, YOU LOSE.

WARNINGS:

WHEN YOU ARE ONE ROOM AWAY FROM WUMPUS OR HAZARD,
THE COMPUTER SAYS:
WUMPUS - 'I SMELL A WUMPUS'
BAT - 'EATS NEAREY'
PIT - 'I FEEL A DRAFT'



SUPERBATS
PUT ME IN A
PIT SOMEWHERE

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?4

YOU ARE IN ROOM 4
TUNNELS LEAD TO 3 5 14

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?5

BATS NEAREY!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 5
TUNNELS LEAD TO 1 4 6

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?6

I FEEL A DRAFT
YOU ARE IN ROOM 6
TUNNELS LEAD TO 5 7 15

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?7
YYYYIIIIIEEEEE . . . FELL IN PIT
HA HA HA - YOU LOSE!
SAME SET-UP (Y-N)?Y
HUNT THE WUMPUS

BATS NEAREY!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 2
TUNNELS LEAD TO 1 3 10

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?10

BATS NEAREY!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 10
TUNNELS LEAD TO 2 9 11

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?11
ZAP--SUPER BAT SNATCH! ELSEWHEREVILLE FOR YOU!

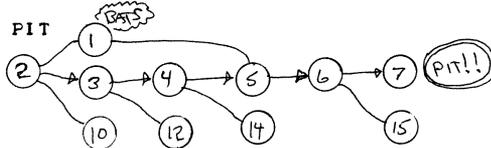
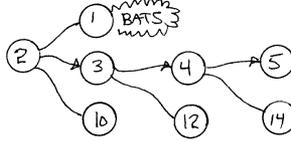
YOU ARE IN ROOM 14
TUNNELS LEAD TO 4 13 15

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?M
WHERE TO?15

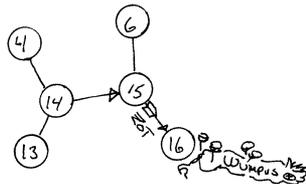
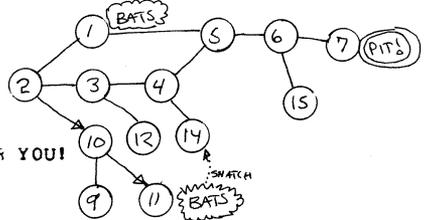
I SMELL A WUMPUS!
YOU ARE IN ROOM 15
TUNNELS LEAD TO 6 14 16

SHOOT OR MOVE (S-M)?S
NO. OF ROOMS(1-5)?1
ROOM #716
AHA! YOU GOT THE WUMPUS!
HEE HEE HEE - THE WUMPUS'LL GETCHA NEXT TIME!!

JUST KEEP ON TRAXKIN!



BLEW IT AGAIN!!



CAN YOU FIT THIS
MAP INTO THE OTHER
ONE ABOVE? FIGURE OUT
HOW I KNEW THE WUMPUS
WAS IN 16.

PROGRAM LISTING

```

0010 REM- HUNT THE WUMPUS
0015 REM: BY GREGORY YOB
0020 PRINT "INSTRUCTIONS (Y-N)?"
0030 INPUT IS
0040 IF IS#"N" THEN 52
0050 GOSUB 1000
0055 REM- ANNOUNCE WUMPUSII FOR ALL AFICIONADOS ... ADDED BY DAVE
0064 PRINT "ATTENTION ALL WUMPUS LOVERS!!!!"
0065 PRINT " THERE ARE NOW TWO ADDITIONS TO THE WUMPUS FAMILY!"
0066 PRINT " OF PROGRAMS."
0067 PRINT
0068 PRINT " WUMP2: SOME DIFFERENT CAVE ARRANGEMENTS"
0069 PRINT " WUMP3: DIFFERENT HAZARDS"
0070 PRINT
0071 REM- SET UP CAVE (DODECAHEDRAL NODE LIST)
0072 DIM S$(20,3)
0080 FOR J#1 TO 20
0090 FOR K#1 TO 3
0100 READ S$(J,K)
0110 NEXT K
0120 NEXT J
0130 DATA 2,5,8,1,3,10,2,4,12,3,5,14,1,4,6
0140 DATA 5,7,15,6,8,17,1,7,9,8,10,18,2,9,11
0150 DATA 10,18,19,3,11,13,18,14,20,4,13,15,6,14,16
0160 DATA 15,17,20,7,16,18,9,17,19,11,18,20,13,16,19
0170 DEF FNA(X)=INT(20*RNDC(0))+1
0180 DEF FNB(X)=INT(3*RNDC(0))+1
0190 DEF FNC(X)=INT(4*RNDC(0))+1
0200 REM-LOCATE L ARRAY ITEMS
0210 REM-1-YOU,2-WUMPUS,3AA-PIGS,566-BATS
0220 DIM L(6)
0230 DIM M(6)
0240 FOR J#1 TO 6
0250 L(J)=FNA(0)
0260 M(J)=L(J)
0270 NEXT J
0280 REM-CHECK FOR CROSSOVERS (IE L(1)=L(2),ETC)
0290 FOR J#1 TO 6
0300 FOR K#J TO 6
0310 IF J#K THEN 330
0320 IF L(J)=L(K) THEN 240
0330 NEXT K
0340 NEXT J
0350 REM-SET# ARROWS
0360 A#5
0365 L#L(1)
0370 REM-RUN THE GAME
0375 PRINT "HUNT THE WUMPUS"
0380 REM-HAZARD WARNINGS & LOCATION
0390 GOSUB 2000
0400 REM-MOVE OR SHOOT
0410 GOSUB 2500
0420 GOTO 0 OF 440,480
0430 REM-SHOOT
0440 GOSUB 3000
0450 IF F#0 THEN 390
0460 GOTO 500
0470 REM-MOVE
0480 GOSUB 4000
0490 IF F#0 THEN 390
0500 IF F#0 THEN 550
0510 REM-LOSE
0520 PRINT "HA HA HA - YOU LOSE!"
0530 GOTO 560
0540 REM-WIN
0550 PRINT "HEE HEE HEE - THE WUMPUS'LL RETCHA NEXT TIME!!"
0560 FOR J#1 TO 6
0570 L(J)=M(J)
0580 NEXT J
0590 PRINT "SAME SET-UP (Y-N)?"
0600 INPUT IS
0610 IF IS#"Y" THEN 240
0620 GOTO 360
1000 REM-INSTRUCTIONS
1010 PRINT "WELCOME TO 'HUNT THE WUMPUS'"
1020 PRINT " THE WUMPUS LIVES IN A CAVE OF 20 ROOMS. EACH ROOM"
1030 PRINT " HAS 3 TUNNELS LEADING TO OTHER ROOMS. (LOOK AT A"
1040 PRINT " DODECAHEDRON TO SEE HOW THIS WORKS-IF YOU DON'T KNOW"
1050 PRINT " WHAT A DODECAHEDRON IS, ASK SOMEONE)"
1060 PRINT
1070 PRINT " HAZARDS#"
1080 PRINT " BOTTOMLESS PITS - TWO ROOMS HAVE BOTTOMLESS PITS IN THEM"
1090 PRINT " IF YOU GO THERE, YOU FALL INTO THE PIT (& LOSE)"
1100 PRINT " SUPER BATS - TWO OTHER ROOMS HAVE SUPER BATS. IF YOU"
1110 PRINT " GO THERE, A BAT GRAES YOU AND TAKES YOU TO SOME OTHER"
1120 PRINT " ROOM AT RANDOM. (WHICH MIGHT BE TROULESOME)"
1130 PRINT
1140 PRINT " WUMPUS#"
1150 PRINT " THE WUMPUS IS NOT BOTHERED BY THE HAZARDS (HE HAS SUCKER)"
1160 PRINT " FEET AND IS TOO BIG FOR A BAT TO LIFT). USUALLY"
1170 PRINT " HE IS ASLEEP. TWO THINGS WAKE HIM UP: YOUR ENTERING"
1180 PRINT " HIS ROOM OR YOUR SHOOTING AN ARROW."
1190 PRINT " IF THE WUMPUS WAKES, HE MOVES (P#.75) ONE ROOM"
1200 PRINT " OR STAYS STILL (P#=.25). AFTER THAT, IF HE IS WHERE YOU"
1210 PRINT " ARE, HE EATS YOU UP (& YOU LOSE)!"
1220 PRINT
1230 PRINT " YOU#"
1240 PRINT " EACH TURN YOU MAY MOVE OR SHOOT A CROOKED ARROW"
1250 PRINT " MOVING: YOU CAN GO ONE ROOM (THRU ONE TUNNEL)"
1260 PRINT " ARROWS: YOU HAVE 5 ARROWS. YOU LOSE WHEN YOU RUN OUT."
1270 PRINT " EACH ARROW CAN GO FROM 1 TO 5 ROOMS- YOU AIM BY TELLING"
1280 PRINT " THE COMPUTER THE ROOMS YOU WANT THE ARROW TO GO TO."
1290 PRINT " IF THE ARROW CAN'T GO THAT WAY(IE NO TUNNEL) IT MOFES"
1300 PRINT " AT RANDOM TO THE NEXT ROOM."
1310 PRINT " IF THE ARROW HITS THE WUMPUS, YOU WIN."
1320 PRINT " IF THE ARROW HITS YOU, YOU LOSE."
1330 PRINT
1340 PRINT " WARNINGS#"
1350 PRINT " WHEN YOU ARE ONE ROOM AWAY FROM WUMPUS OR HAZARD,"
1360 PRINT " THE COMPUTER SAYS!"
1370 PRINT " WUMPUS- 'I SMELL A WUMPUS'"
1380 PRINT " BAT - 'BATS NEARBY'"

```

Acknowledgements

This show and its supporting systems would not exist without the invaluable assistance of **Paul Stiverson**, **Ariel Uzal**, and **Alex Rickett**, Professors **Jenna Caravello**, **Chandler McWilliams** and **Lauren McCarthy**, along with the whole cohort and faculty of **UCLA's Design | Media Arts MFA program** and the **UCLA Game Lab**, under the direction of Professor **Eddo Stern**.

Portions of Mud Room were built using the open source project **Grotto**, created by **Wiley Wiggins** and **Paul Stiverson**.

Parts of the web view of this game use algorithmically generated text that incorporates both original writing by the artist and additional text corpora, including:

- “100 Dungeon Room Descriptions”
<https://vdocuments.site/100-dungeon-room-descriptions.html>
- Selected “Texas - homes for sale” descriptions, [Zillow.com](https://www.zillow.com)
- Novel color names taken from *Ulysses* by James Joyce
- Corpora Project- color names
<https://github.com/dariusk/corpora>

SwordQuest!

You Can Win Fabulous Prizes by Solving
the Mysteries of Four New Cartridges



In October, Atan presents the *EarthWorld* Game Program cartridge, launching the most exciting real-life treasure hunt of our time—the SwordQuest Cycle.

There will be four new SwordQuest games in all, each part of the total SwordQuest adventure story. This continuing fantasy tale of treacherous tyrants and daring deeds is told in the special DC comic books packed with the cartridges, and played out in the games themselves.

But the SwordQuest challenge is more than on-screen action—by finding clues hidden in each cartridge and comic book combination, players can win prizes worth thousands of dollars!

The Quest begins with *EarthWorld*, which holds the key to winning a spectacular 18kt solid gold Talsman, studded with twelve diamonds and twelve

\$25,000 golden Crown, encrusted with diamonds, rubies, sapphires, green tourmalines, and aquamarines.

Finally comes *AurWorld*. Uncovering its secrets will win the fourth \$25,000 prize for some lucky player—it's a modern-day version of the mythical Philosopher's Stone, encased in an 18kt



THE TALSMAN



THE CHALICE



THE CROWN



THE PHILOSOPHER'S STONE

gold box studded with emeralds, rubies, diamonds, and zircons.

And when the SwordQuest cycle is complete, it will be time for the fifth and final challenge of SwordQuest—the answer which will earn the grand prize winner an incredible jewel-encrusted Sword, with 18kt gold handle and gleaming silver blade, blazing with diamonds, emeralds, rubies, and sapphires—a \$50,000 sword!

What kind of secrets are hidden in the games? No one is saying—but Jewel Savadelis, Atan's Director of Marketing Software, says, "When someone finds the clues, they'll know it!"

"All the contest details will be enclosed in the cartridge boxes," she explains, "but I can tell you that we're going to recognize *everyone* who finds at least a single valid clue. Find more, you'll receive a greater level of recognition. But you'll have to find all five valid clues to be eligible to win the major prize for each cartridge—and that fifth valid clue is a *real* challenge!"

other precious stones—a prize produced at a cost of \$25,000.

Next comes *FireWorld*, in early 1983. The winner of the *FireWorld* contest walks off with a Chalice, a gorgeous goblet of platinum and gold, glistening with rubies, sapphires, diamonds, and pearls—another \$25,000 prize.

Later in 1983 there is *WaterWorld*, with a prize truly fit for a king—a