

HE WENT

# GALUMPHING

BACK



A CONTRIBUTION FOR ANZAPA FROM DAVID R. GRIGG

## What the heck is this, then?

Well, you know, after a while you decide you need a change. *The Fretful Porpentine* has served me well as my ANZAPA contribution for a long while, but things change.

I'm going to make *Galumphing* more personal, much less focused on my reading. My book reviews will still be available, but they'll be in a new title, *The Megaloscope*, which I'll be running through ANZAPA separately. In this fanzine I may or may not talk in general terms about my reading, but I won't publish long reviews here. Well, that's the plan, anyway, we'll see how it works out.

I can't believe that I need to spell out where the title comes from, but you never know. Apparently my grandchildren have never read *Alice in Wonderland*, let alone *Through the Looking Glass*. Harry Potter, they are experts in, but know nothing at all of Lewis Carroll.

For the sake of posterity then, the title of this contribution comes from the nonsense poem "Jabberwocky" out of Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, specifically this bit:

And as in uffish thought he stood,  
The Jabberwock, with eyes of flame,  
Came whiffling through the tulgey wood,  
And burbled as it came!

One, two! One, two! And through and through  
The vorpal blade went snicker-snack!  
He left it dead, and with its head  
He went galumphing back.

Because I'm quirky, *He Went Galumphing Back* is the full title of the fanzine, but you are welcome to call it just *Galumphing* for short.

## What's been happening with us?

Well, the most *exciting* thing that's happened recently is that there was a nearby house fire last night. I was sitting reading in our living room when I thought I could smell something odd and then, when I heard sirens going, I opened the back door. The back yard was full of smoke, and looking over our garage towards the street I could see a red glow.

I walked through the garage and into the front yard, and **crikey!** There were flames reaching for the sky somewhere just behind the nearest house across the street. Clearly there was a serious fire going on, probably in the next street over. Multiple sirens were going as a series of fire trucks, police, etc., were zooming to the scene. I stood and chatted for a minute or two with our next door

neighbour before heading back inside to let Sue know what was happening.

We pulled up the Vic Emergency app on our phones and could see that the fire was in a small court which runs roughly parallel to our street for a stretch. The concern, of course, would have been if the fire had been spreading, but the Vic Emergency app told us that seven vehicles were in attendance, though it also said that the fire was not yet under control. We kept checking, and in about 45 minutes it was all over. The only problem was that there was still a distinct smoky smell throughout our house as we went to bed.

Less scary but in its own way quite dramatic was what happened to our garage door a few weeks ago.

Sue had been off picking up our grandkids from school (as we now do once a week). She reversed the car into our garage and pressed the remote to close the roller door. She heard a loud **crack!** and the door started to unspool rather than coming down, spooling out a large loop which came close to coming down onto the car roof, but fortunately it stopped before doing so.

Sue shepherded the startled kids into the house and we examined the situation. It was pretty clear that something fundamental was broken and we'd need to get it fixed or replaced.

In the meantime, there was the car in the garage and the garage door about halfway down, just about a quarter-metre too low to get the car out. We rang our daughter, who had been due anyway to come and take her kids back home, and we asked her to see if her husband Chris could come as well. It looked as though a few strong people could ease the broken door up enough to let the car out of the garage so we could still drive it. So that's what we did. But the door stayed up only as long as there were people lifting it. The car is now free to come and go, but we can't get it back in the garage.

The next day, of course, we rang a company which supplies and fits roller doors. Sue told the receptionist that we either needed a repair or a replacement and was told that those were two entirely different departments. Sue described the problem, and it seemed as though it was going to cost us a minimum of a couple of hundred dollars to get a repair crew out to determine *if* the mechanism could be fixed. Now, the door had been in place when we bought the house 11 years ago, and who knows how long before that it had been installed. It seemed pretty obvious that it would be better to get a new roller door installed (which naturally

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*He Went Galumphing Back #1* is a contribution to ANZAPA June 2022 from David R. Grigg.

Cover illustration, of course, is by Sir John Tenniel to illustrate the poem "Jabberwocky" by Lewis Carroll.

suited the company better too!). They were very quick indeed to supply a cheerful sales guy who came and measured up.

We took the opportunity to also organise a roller door for the back of the garage, which has always just been open to the elements. This one will just be manually lifted up and down as we need it. But it will serve, we hope, to keep out the birds who each season fly into the garage and try to nest in its rafters (and drop poop and litter onto the car).

So now we wait. Supply chain issues of course mean that it won't be happening soon, but we do hope for it to happen sometime in June.

Apart from that, things roll on pretty much the same as always. My mother's aged care facility has had several outbreaks of COVID in the last couple of months, but thankfully she has been spared. She's due to get her 4<sup>th</sup> vaccination early next week (they kept putting this off due to the outbreaks)

The podcast, my newsletters and this apa keep me pretty busy. Oh, and I'm still doing work for Standard Ebooks, doing my own productions and helping oversee and review those of other people. I'm currently working on Dickens' *Our Mutual Friend*. Some time ago I also completed the last of Trollope's Barsetshire novels, *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, which was a pretty good read.

## Hooray! Hooray! Scotty is gone!

While I don't really want to dance in circles singing *Ding dong! The witch is dead! Which old witch? The wicked witch!* I'm not far off it, I can tell you.

Sue and I are of course extremely happy to see the back of Scott Morrison and his motley crew, freeing them from the onerous task of pretending to actually run the country. They weren't bad at the pretending, I grant you.

We had felt very hopeful that the LNP government would be tossed out, but after feeling that way and being bitterly disappointed three years ago, we weren't taking anything for granted. We don't watch any free-to-air television, so staying away from the live coverage was easy, but we refrained from even looking at the Internet until about 9 pm on election night, by which time the ultimate result was already clear. We were able to go to bed feeling very positive.

What has been wonderful to see is the strong showing of independent candidates in this election. This was the real story: the LNP lost heaps of their heartland seats to independents impatient with the LNP's lack of action on climate change, their obvious misogyny, their failed promise to introduce an independent commission on corruption. Last time I checked (some seats are still to be determined due to our preferential

voting system), it looked as though there are going to be about 10 independent MPs in the House, mostly the so-called "Teal" candidates (though they say they aren't going to vote together as a party). Not only is it good to see independent voices pushing hard for action on climate change and a range of other progressive issues, but it's also very good that because they were all women, the gender balance of parliament has been greatly improved. More power to their arm, say I. Plus, I think there are going to be four Greens MPs in the lower house.

And in the Senate it looks as though the Greens are going to have a very powerful role and probably hold the balance of power. Couldn't be better, if you ask me.

But of course the Murdoch papers and the new Opposition Leader Peter Dutton are already demanding to know why Labor hasn't already solved all of the problems the LNP left them. They've had two weeks already!

Labor are far from perfect and have a number of policies I strongly disagree with, but I am hopeful that the independents and the Greens will be able to put a lot of pressure on to improve those policies. I'm hoping that some at least of Labor's policies were there to make sure they were a small target and prevent the LNP wedging them on issues. We'll have to see. But there's no question but that there's a real sense of relief in the air.

If only the possibility of World War III wasn't also floating in the air with Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine...

## What I've been reading

You haven't been paying attention, have you? You'll find all that in *The Megaloscope*, a separate contribution.

## What we've been watching

On the other hand, I may talk here about the very few things which Sue and I have watched on television. In this case, just one thing:

### Halt and Catch Fire - Season One

This is a four-season television series which first went to air in 2014. Perry always mocks me about the fact that when I do watch something on TV, it's something ancient that everyone else saw years ago. I'm not sure how many of you would have seen this, though. It was made by the producers of *Breaking Bad*, however, so maybe it was more widely seen than I think.

*Halt and Catch Fire* focuses on the early years of the personal computer industry, early 1980s. An extraordinary character, Joe Macmillan (played by Lee Pace), gets himself hired by a small company,

Cornish Electronics, which is selling minicomputers and mainframes. Macmillan worked for a while at IBM, but what he's been doing for the last year and a half is unclear. He begins to subvert Cornish so that it is forced to start designing a personal computer to compete with the IBM PC, and recruits several other characters: a hardware engineer Gordon Clark (played by Scoot McNairy) and a brilliant but unconventional female software engineer, Cameron Howe (Mackenzie Davis). A very important secondary character is Donna, Gordon's wife (played by Kerry Bishé), who is a technical whizz in her own right.

All the characters are excellent, the plot is gripping and has many unexpected turns. And the attention to detail about the technology and culture of the time is really well done. We both really liked it.

I couldn't find this on any streaming service available to us in Australia, so I ended up paying Apple for the first season (\$22 for 10 episodes). Not yet sure if we'll pay for the other seasons, but it's tempting.

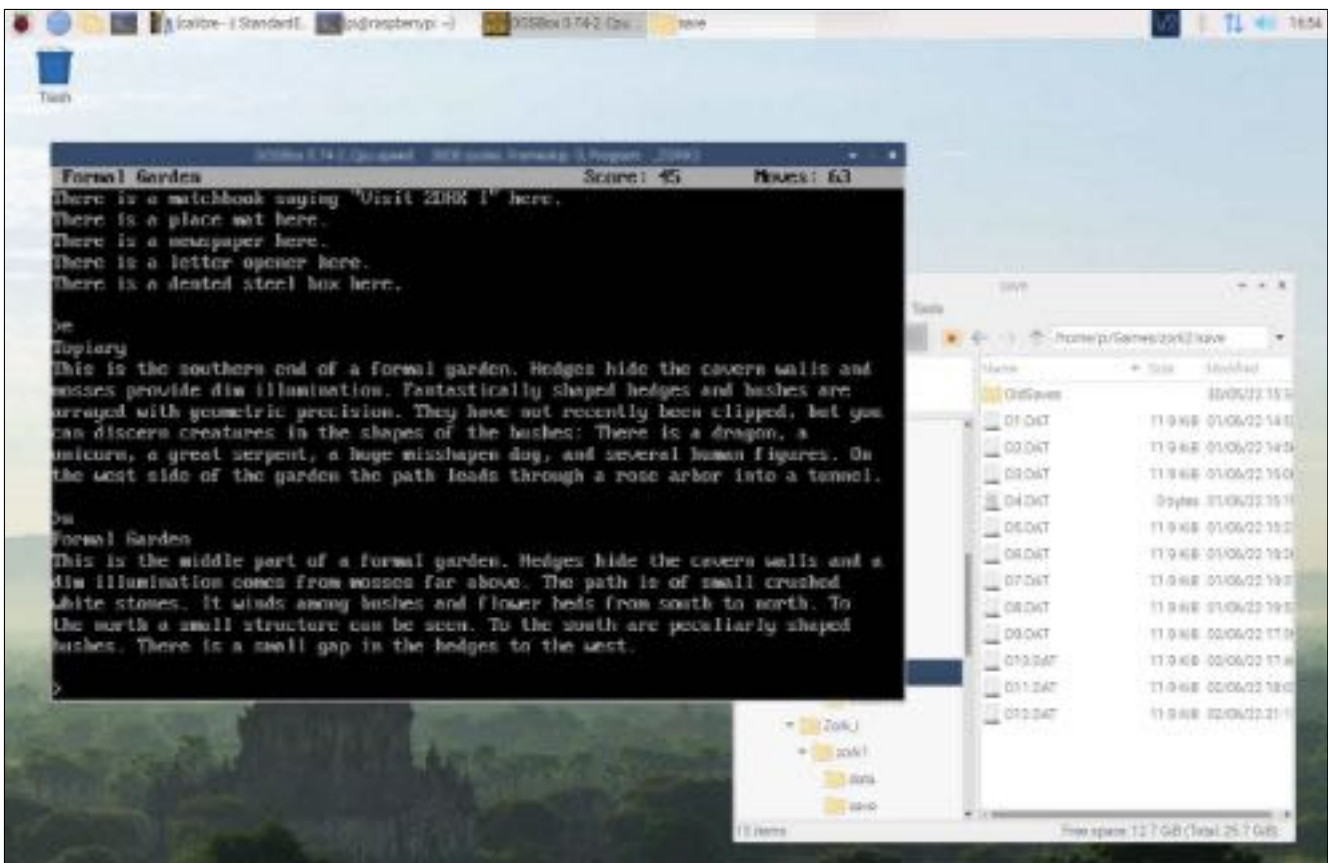
## Adventures in coding

I don't know whether you recall the old text-based adventure games which were popular in the early days of personal computing. In such games, the whole thing is just a series of interactions in plain text. You are given the description of a 'room' in text, and can give textual commands to move in various directions, or take a series of actions. They can be very frustrating to play, as you try to guess the right words to do something. And they can have some fiendish puzzles in them which, quite frankly, I don't see how anyone ever solved without inside knowledge. Despite all that, they can be a lot of fun to play, and I bought and enjoyed quite a few in my time, mostly for my Apple II computer in the early days (we're talking early 1980s).

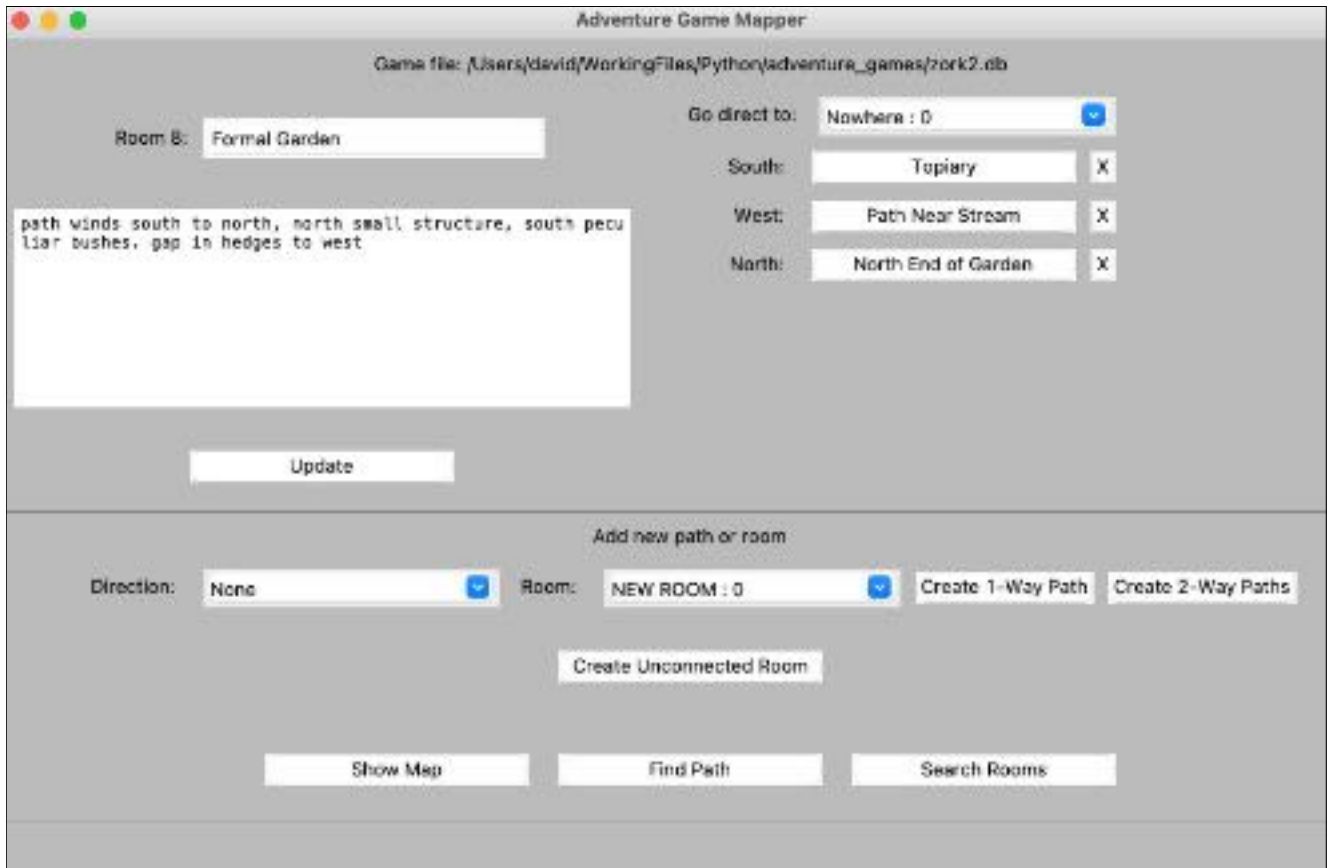
Anyway, this is all a long preamble to the fact that I was reminded of these games when Sue and I were watching the first season of *Halt and Catch Fire*, a television series from a few years ago about the early days of computing. In one of the episodes there's quite a bit of action involving the text adventure *Colossal Cave*, which first ran on minicomputers like the PDP-10 in the late 1970s.

Reminded of how I enjoyed such games, I did a bit of research and discovered that the Internet Archive has a heap of MS-DOS games available, which you can download or play online, for free, the companies which made them having now been defunct for many years. These include a heap of the classic Infocom text adventures such as the *Zork* series.

*Zork II* running in DOSBOX on my Raspberry Pi







*The main interface to my Adventure Game Mapper*

I tried my hand at playing these through the browser but for whatever reason they didn't work well in the Safari browser on my Mac (and I hate Google's Chrome browser). So the alternative was to download a zip file of the game and run it directly. Which, pretty much *of course*, wasn't going to work on my Mac. But there is a good MS-DOS emulator called Dosbox available. Now, I *could* have downloaded this emulator and run it on my Mac. I can't now recall exactly why I didn't want to do that, but it may be that it won't run on a non-Intel computer (mine runs on Apple's ARM chip).

Thinks to self: *where can I run Dosbox without any worries?* In a virtual Windows machine? That also wouldn't run on my M1 iMac. Hmmm, what about my Raspberry Pi? This tiny little computer sits in our media cabinet in the family room, where it runs Plex and Calibre to serve videos, music and ebooks to any other device in the house. But it doesn't work up a sweat doing that. Could it run Dosbox? Easily, as it turned out.

A short time later I had *Zork II* running on the Raspberry Pi. I access this device over the wireless network using VNC. (Why *Zork II*, not I? Because I remembered that particular episode fondly).

However, it didn't take me long to remember one reason such text adventures can be frustrating: it becomes hard to keep track of the locations you've visited, objects you've found, and so on. Yes, you can draw yourself a map using pencil and paper and keep notes, but it's easy to lose track, and the

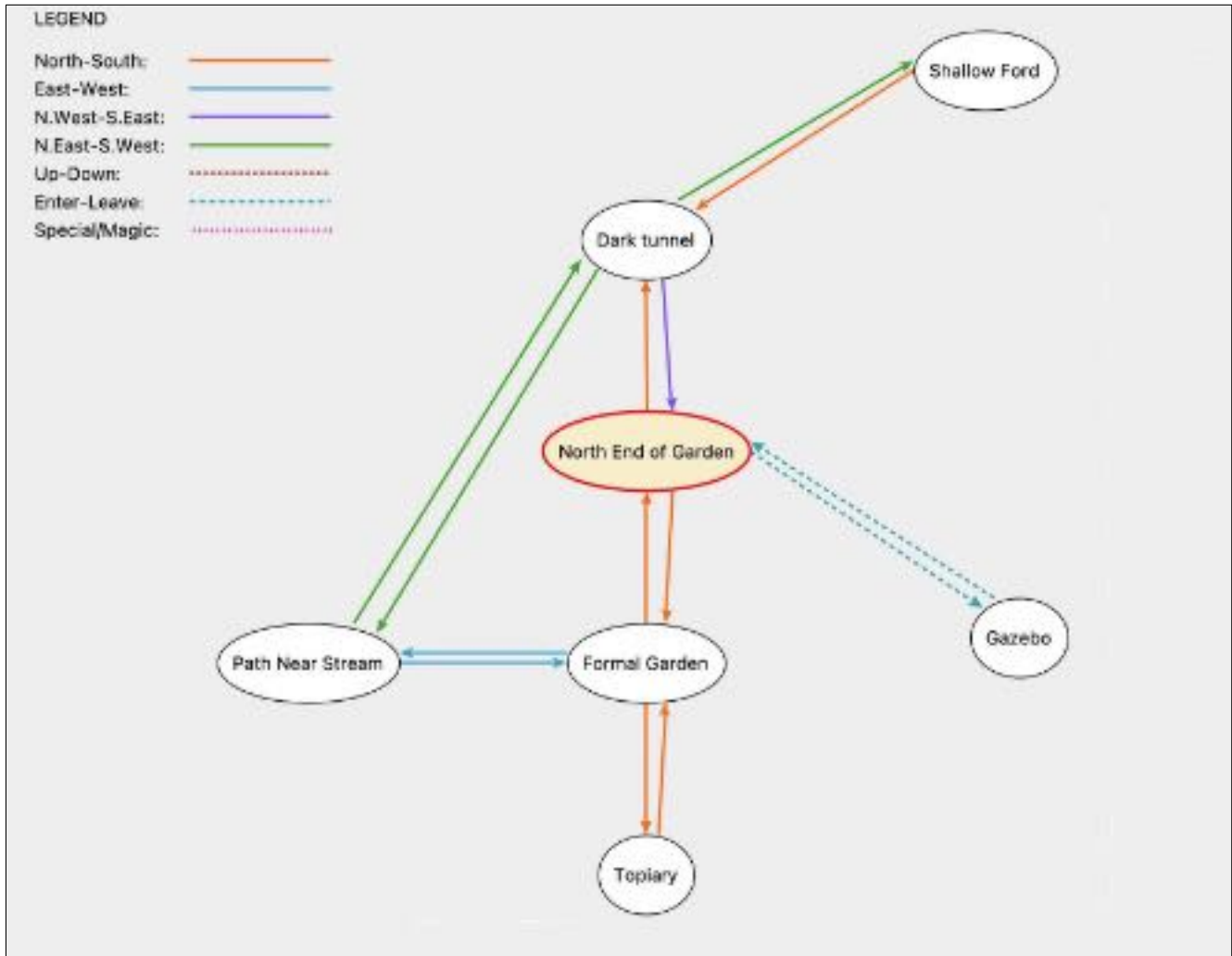
connections between rooms can quickly become very complex and so your map becomes tangled and then you feel you have to start over with a clean bit of paper and the whole thing becomes a bit tedious.

Tedious? If you read my last ANZAPA contribution you won't be surprised that I wanted to find a better way. But I thought to myself: such games have been around for forty years or so, surely someone came up with a bit of software to help with this kind of process, so I went looking, and indeed there was adventure game mapping software written, but either it had been abandoned years ago even for Windows computers, or it wouldn't run on my modern iMac based on Apple Silicon.

Well, I don't really *need* such mapping software. Pencil and paper would do. But then I started thinking to myself: *if I were writing a piece of software to do that job, just how would I go about it exactly?*

You won't therefore be surprised to learn that I then spent many hours putting together a tool to do the job. I wrote it in Python because that's my language of choice these days, and although creating a neat user interface with it is a bit of a struggle, I felt confident that I could at least make something usable.

To be honest, I've had much more fun writing the code than in playing the games so far, but who



cares? And of course I'm going to bore you while I brag about it!

On the previous page is shown the main interface, in which you log each room as you discover it, and make paths to other rooms. The buttons at the right take you quickly to the neighbouring rooms.

And above is a typical map which it generates. I've had to restrict this to just the nearby rooms otherwise the map quickly becomes a mess, but you can click on any individual room to view the map from that room. I also felt the need to colour-code the directions, which don't always work in a consistent way: in this example, the path from the Shallow Ford goes south to the Dark Tunnel, but to return you have to go north-west.

I've also built in a way to search the text you've entered about various rooms. If you've entered where you found or left various objects, then this is a great way to remind yourself where you've got to go to pick them up.

Then there's something I'm really quite proud of,

and that's the ability to generate a list of directions from any room to any other. This can be tricky because there can be many ways to do that. It does its best to find the shortest route. See the screenshot at bottom right.

What use is any of this? Well, it's made my playing of such games a lot easier, and maybe other people can make use of it too, if they are into these retro games. I've open-sourced the code and put it up under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC) license. You [can find it here](#).

With its help (and, admittedly, a lot of hints from a walkthrough of the game I found online), I managed to get all the way through *Zork II*. Now on to *Zork I* and *III*, then *Planetfall* and other similar titles!

