Man About the House
Playtest Reports

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Despite what some people might think, most authors of amateur homegrown adventures really tried to release a bug and frustration-free product. They'd often pass their games on to friends and family, fellow adventure authors or reviewers, to have a look at before they committed the final code to tape or disk.

For our Delbert the Hamster games we enlisted the services of keen adventurers such as Barbara Gibb, Phil Glover or Sharon Harwood to playtest the games.

John Wilson at Zenobi Software had his own regular team of playtesters who would give your adventures a good going over and submit a report with their findings and personal thoughts on the game. If you wanted your title released by John, it would have to pass under the steely gaze of two members of his team of volunteers. These were experienced adventurers like Terry Taylor and Joan Williams, who could spot an apostrophe out of place at forty paces.

Most of the playtest reports I still have copies of, make pretty dull reading, being largely a collection of corrections to my atrocious spelling mistakes. However, I've included the following two reports, for my game 'Man About the House', on the site as I think they highlight the tireless work done behind the scenes by these unsung heroes. They also show how feedback from good playtesters could often convince an author to tweak or change a game's design.

The first of the reports attached is by Terry Taylor. Unfortunately, I can't recall who wrote the second report as the printout I have is not named. (Apologies if the scans are difficult to read. At some point, when I have some free time, I will retype them.)

Terry Taylor was an adventure author himself, having produced the excellent game, The Labours of Hercules, which faithfully recreated the trials of the famous Greek hero in text adventure form. I was a big fan of that particular title, so Terry's words carried a lot of weight.

His adventure authoring roots are apparent in his playtest report. Not only does Terry find the bugs in the code, but he suggests the changes required to fix them. His meticulous attention to detail and systematic approach are evident throughout. By nosing through the code, he even spots one of the pretty important messages that I'd forgotten to 'wire up'.

Not that Terry was unique in inspecting the nuts and bolts of the game. Many of the playtesters I worked with would load the games they were appraising into a copy of the Professional Adventure Writer, to help locate any issues. Sometimes, accessing and editing the code was necessary to make progress past a particularly problematic bug. Also, from

an author's point of view, being presented with a playtest report that identified by number, exactly which messages had mistakes in was a godsend and a real time-saver.

Both attached reports identify copious spelling and grammatical errors, but they haven't necessarily spotted the same mistakes and don't always agree on the changes required. This highlights how important it was to make sure at least two people cast their eyes over a game.

Aside for the game-breaking bug, the most interesting and useful thing for me, as an author in these particular reports, was that both playtesters identified the same part of the game that they didn't like, with the second playtester even saying that it had ruined the game somewhat for her.

They were right. I had been extremely self-indulgent and had a character from my earlier 'Microfair Madness' game, the Doctor Who-inspired 'Dentist', make a cameo towards the end of the game. This was a jarring inclusion in what was an otherwise, fantasy-free, real-world adventure. It wasn't just a fleeting appearance, either, it tied in to a main puzzle.

Having replayed the released version of the adventure recently, it was quite a surprise to come across this section of the game in my original design documents. I'd forgotten 'the Dentist' was even in there as late as the playtesting stage. The finished game replaces the time lord with a local mad inventor, Professor Aine. He still has a robotic 'security alarm' dog, so the rest of the puzzles remain intact, but this simple change, based on the response of the playtesters, does improve the ending of the adventure. I'm glad I listened to them and made the changes.

So, my thanks go to all the many playtesters who took the time to look over our games 'back in the day'. Especially the ones who patiently corrected my awful spelling and put up with the lousy puns, teenage humour & obscure references, just for their love of playing new adventures.

I may even be a slightly better speller these days thanks to them.

(Slightly).

16th October 1993

Zenobi Software

Dear John,

MAN ABOUT THE HOUSE

Never met Ernie Spludge before — but he sounds a bit like me whenever I've got the house to myself!!

It's a novel theme for a game, I suppose — getting everything "ship-shape" before Rosie comes out of hospital — and there's nothing in it which might be considered contentious.
In general, the storyline hangs together pretty well — though I'm not too sure why the author should introduce the Dentist and his Tardit into such a down-to-earth topic; just doesn't fit in somehow.

Despite that, the game is well written, well presented, and the game-play follows on nicely — with enough "pitfalls" to have the player going back to try again. I had to play it through several times just to try out the various possible endings — i.e. not delivering the manuscript; not collecting the dog etc.

On first loading it in, my initial reaction was *"Oh no, not a timed game"* — I hate those! But, once you sort out what you're doing, there's more than enough time allowed (even more than the author intended, I believe — but more about that later!)

Having mapped out the game, there seems to be quite a lot of "padding" locations — i.e. where nothing happens. In the town of Scumsville, several establishments are mentioned, but you can't visit them; in Cruddleton, there are only two locations, out of about 14, where anything happens — and in one of these, delivering Rosie's manuscript, the programme does it for you — you don't have to make any input.
I'm not usually fond of too many of these "padding" locations; but, in this case, I believe they can be justified to some extent — in that, whilst the player is busy "exploring" them, the clock is ticking by, thereby giving him less chance of getting everything done in time. But that's just the sadist in me!

Whilst playing, there were the odd couple of "hiccups" I noticed — although nothing really drastic; perhaps the most major being the time:

/.....

<u>The Time</u>

Robin had cleaned the house; I'd delivered the manuscript; I'd collected the dog - all I had to do was pick up the car from the garage! Easier said than done!!
By now it was just after 12-00 noon; and I was told at the garage to come back after 2-00, when the car would be ready!
So I waited, and waited, and waited - the time went on: 12-30; 1-00; 1-30; 2-00; right, back to the garage!
"Come back after 2-00" - but it IS after 2-00.
So I kept on waiting - 3-00; 4-00; 5-00 all came and went - and still I was being told to come back after 2-00!!

And so it went on until 2-00 <u>in the morning</u>, when I was finally allowed to collect the car!!

As the game starts with the alarm clock ringing at 8-30, I assume that it is 8-30 in the morning; therefore, when the call from the hospital tells me pick Rosie up at 2-30, I assume they mean 2-30 in the afternoon - not the early hours of the next morning!!

In programming, Gareth seems to have forgotten that he's using the 24 hour clock - and 2-00 is therefore 14-00!!

Entry in Response:

```
ENTER CAR - AT 53
              SAME 38 92
             *EQ 131 2
              GT 132 0
              MESSAGE 191
              ANYKEY
              PROCESS 14
```

The entry marked (*) should actually be EQ 131 14.

There is also an entry in Process 2, which is <u>supposed</u> to tell the player that it is now 2-30, and he's too late to collect Rosie - again, this is incorrect.

Existing entry: * * - EQ 131 2
                               EQ 132 30
                               MESSAGE 185
                               PROCESS 13

Again, the first line should read EQ 131 14; but what about the second line? As it stands, it will only be actioned when Flag 132 (minutes) = 30. However, if the player were to WAIT 30 or just WAIT (adds 3 minutes) <u>immediately</u> prior to 2-30, Flag 132 would then <u>exceed</u> 30 - the condition would never be fulfilled, and the message never received! I know it's a long shot on it's happening - but you never know with players.
I believe, therefore, the entry should be:

          * * - EQ 131 14
                 GT 132 29   (this covers all after
                 MESSAGE 185   30)
                 PROCESS 13

                                                  /....

Ramsave/Ramload

Although these work fine, the player is given no indication of this — in each case, the cursor merely jumps to the next line.

Ramsave — should at least acknowledge to the player that it's been done — even if it's only OK.

Ramload — as it stands, there's nothing to tell the player that this has been actioned — on screen, you're still in the same place, and you have to redescribe yourself to see that it's worked!!

Existing Entries: RAMSAVE — RAMSAVE

RAMLOAD — RAMLOAD 255

Should be: RAMSAVE — RAMSAVE   RAMLOAD — RAMLOAD 255
                       OK   DESC

Directions

a) Loc 4 — The Landing: gives the exit to the nursery as north-west; it should be north-east.

b) Loc 18 — The Road: there is no mention of the exit north to the drive.

c) Loc 49 — Outside Kwayzar: the text says the Kwayzar Centre is east, then later says the road is east; the Kwayzar Centre should be to the west.

Wall at Dog Pound

Whilst looking through the database, I noticed the following message — "The wall's too high to climb unaided" — obviously meant for when you don't have the ladder.
This message, however, does not appear; instead, you merely get "I can't go that way."

As far as I can see, there is no entry in response to bring up this message; and, to my mind, it is an important one! Without it, the player may well think that he can never get over the wall, and would then have no reason to go buying a ladder; with it, he at least knows it is climbable, and that he must seek something to help him over.

Existing entry in Response:

```
U _ — AT 26
      PRESENT 11
      LET 33 50
      LET 34 101
```

/....

I believe, therefore, that an additional entry is needed:

```
U _ - AT 26
      ABSENT 11
      MESSAGE 179
      DONE
```

✓Robin

Having arrived back home after my "driving lesson", I was just
in time to meet Robin, who informed me that he'd cleaned up the
house:
Robin enters the room
....I've cleaned up..
Robin leaves the room.

The only thing was, I wasn't in a room - I was in the garden -
which made it non-sensical.

The entries in Process 5 are:
```
                                  ATLT 13
                                  NOTZERO 76
                                  NOTAT 2
                                  MESSAGE 48

                                  ATLT 13
                                  NOTZERO 76
                                  MES 49
                                  MESSAGE 46
                                  CLEAR 75
                                  LET 73 0
                                  SET 78
                                  PLUS 30 10
```

As I see it, there are two alternatives:

a) include further NOTAT conditions in the entries, to cover
   the garden, shed, front garden and doorstep.

b) leave the entries as they are, and merely alter Messages 48
   & 46 to read "*Robin enters*" and "*Robin leaves*".

The latter would seem to be the easiest.

Score

I finished the game with a score of 61 out of 50 - not bad eh!!
I counted the scoring entries in both Response and Process, and
they totalled well in excess of 50.
ENTERing the BUS scores 2 - but it seems that it can be repeated
each time you do it; as you need to get on the bus twice, I'm
not sure whether this was meant. You can also score 2 points if
you get on the bus at the terminus in Scumsville - even though
that's the wrong thing to do!
Getting the message from Robin seems to score a massive 10 (see
above listing), when you could quite easily miss getting the
message!
The scoring needs a bit of re-thinking.

/....

The Telephone

Bit of a strange one is this!
The telephone is supposed to ring between 9-10 and 9-12, and if
you're in, or around, the house at that time, you get the
message that the phone is ringing.
I tried that out and it worked.
So, the next time I played it, I didn't bother with the phone —
instead, I went to get the Yellow Pages from next door, and to
push the car out into the street — hence, at the above time, I
was not around to get the message.

However, I then went back into the hall to phone for the
recovery service — it was now about 9-40, and long after the
call from the hospital. I tried to DIAL the appropriate number,
and got the message — "*I think I'd better answer the phone
first.*" BUT IT'S NOT RINGING!!

I've had a look through the database, but I can find no reason
why this should happen.
It only happened once, and I couldn't get it to do the same
again — I can therefore offer no explanation, I just know that
it DID happen!

One for Gareth!

Spelling/Typing/Grammatical Errors

		ERROR	SHOULD BE
MESS 1	—	"..managed to something"	"..managed to do something"
MESS 3	—	"time honoured"	"time-honoured"
MESS 23	—	"Rosies"	"Rosie's"
MESS 24	—	"I flick few a few"	"I flick through a few"
		"..the most simplest.."	"..the simplest.." or "..the most simple.."
MESS 25	—	"plaquard"	"placard"
MESS 31	—	"carpet sucking"	"carpet-sucking"
MESS 33	—	"specefic"	"specific"
MESS 52	—	"Somthing"	"Something"
MESS 67	—	"answer machine"	"answering machine"
MESS 102	—	"passer by"	"passer-by"
MESS 137	—	"wierd"	"weird"
MESS 148	—	"it's"	"its"
MESS 149	—	"it's"	"its"
MESS 161	—	"screaching"	"screeching"
MESS 162	—	"instuction"	"instruction"
MESS 165	—	"license"	"licence"
MESS 166	—	"license"	"licence"
MESS 172	—	"time-lords"	"time-lord's"
LOC 1	—	"nursary"	"nursery"
LOC 2	—	"nursary"	"nursery"
LOC 15	—	"It's"	"Its"
LOC 23	—	"it's faded sign"	"its faded sign"

/....

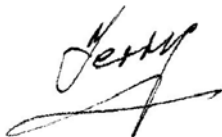|	ERROR			SHOULD BE
LOC 27	–	"vicious looking"		"vicious-looking"
LOC 28	–	"refuge tip"		"refuse tip"
LOC 29	–	"refuge tip"		"refuse tip"
		"Scumscille"		"Scumsville"
LOC 30	–	"Scumsvilee"		"Scumsville"
		"it's"		"its"
LOC 37	–	"Th highstreet"		"The high street"
LOC 39	–	"highstreet"		"high street"
LOC 40	–	"jewellers"		"jeweller's"
LOC 42	–	"chuch"		"church"
LOC 45	–	"highstreet"		"high street"
LOC 46	–	"busses"		"buses"
LOC 47	–	"post"		"poster" (?)
		"mainpart"		"main part"
LOC 50	–	"It's"		"Its"
LOC 52	–	"Wuik-Fitt"		"Quik-Fitt"
LOC 54	–	"Scumville"		"Scumsville"
LOC 57	–	"Inddustrial"		"Industrial"
LOC 61	–	"..either to the north and south"		"..either to the north or south"
LOC 62	–	"shop assistants"		"shop assistant's"
LOC 63	–	"it's"		"its"
LOC 65	–	"futuristic looking"		"futuristic-looking"
LOC 67	–	"To the east lies more units"		"To the east lie more units"
LOC 70	–	"depressed looking"		"depressed-looking"

And that's about it!
All in all, not a bad little game – not too difficult, but another nice bit of fun from Gareth.
Just needs a bit of tidying up here and there – though how he's going to do that with only 3 bytes of memory left.....

Over to you, Gareth!

Best wishes,

[signature: Jerry]

Mostly spelling or typing errors, with some grammatical and punctuation mistakes.

Robin takes the hoover off me - should be from me and should be a capital H for Hoover when referring to the vacuum cleaner. (Small h for the act of hoovering or vacuuming.)

The bus reaches it's destination - should be its destination.

Vehical Recover Service - should be Vehicle.

At Stand A of bus station, busses should be buses.

At Stand B, " ...a post reads etc" - should be poster.

Should be capital letters for Scumsville and High Street.

Outside St. Nigel's Church "the chuch is to the west" should be church.

At location where garage is east, WUIK-FITT should be QUIK-FITT.

In the High Street, 'J. Salisburys' should be 'J.Salisbury'

At the top of the hill, the town wallows in it's smog - should be its smog.

Where the alley leads north, refuge tip should be refuse tip. (Also at the refuse tip.)

At X JUNK a comma is not needed after smelly.

At BUY TICKET, " ... buy a ticket off the travel agent" - should be from the travel agent.

Should be capital C for Cruddleton. *IT is!*

At Cruddleton Industrial Estate, industrial has an extra d.

Salisbury's Homebass should be Homebase. *No!*

Inside the Tardit, " ... there's round panels etc" and at X KAY " ... there's also power terminals etc" - in both sentences should be there are.

Also "EXERMINATING INTRUDER" should be exterminating.

Also "A small round muzzle comes out of it's nose etc" should be nozzle comes out of its nose.

Also it's lights dim should be its lights.

At cul-de-sac location, it's only exit should be its only exit.

NOTE for author — it's (with an apostrophe) ALWAYS means it is. The apostrophe is never used with IT to signify ownership, as in Gareth's game or playtester's report.

I phone up the driving school etc — should be I 'phone the driving school.

Nearly knocked over by car screaching to a halt — should be screeching.

Edward Lewis driving instuction vehicle — should be instruction.

Instructor asks for license — should be licence.(N.B. ce for the noun, a licence, but se for the verb, to license.)

When it's over I pay Edward drops me at home — the words I pay are not needed here: have already paid using cheque book.

When kiosk turns back into coffee machine, wierd should be weird.

Oddities ...

I went to the garage after 2 o'clock, but couldn't ENTER CAR — kept getting message about it not being ready yet. **FORGOT 24 HOUR CLOCK!**

Ernie doesn't wear clothes — not even pyjamas!!!

The message about Robin entering the room and saying he'd cleaned up everywhere, then leaving, came up every time I typed WAIT (not just once, as it should have done.) **PROCESS 5**

Scoring went wrong somewhere — I scored 255 out of 50!

Suggestion —
It would be nice if the location changed to the ramsaved position, when using the ramload facility, instead of just OK then having to LOOK to see where you are.

Comments —
I liked the re-dial idea to summon friend Robin. This game had the "it" factor (the indefinable something which makes it a good game) until the coffee machine appeared and turned into the Tardit. For me, this ruined the whole game, which until then had been about actual situations and problems. Reality and fantasy shouldn't be mixed unless a dream sequence is involved, which wasn't the case here. I'm sure the author could conjure up a different way of obtaining a coin to telephone the driving school, and another method of distracting the dogs in the pound. If these two puzzles had factual bases, this would restore the "it" factor. For instance, there could be a tree with a nest in it and also a cat stranded on a branch because it had got tangled up in a kite string. The player would need a ladder from somewhere, and could find a coin in the (jackdaw's) nest and could free the cat and drop it in the pound.