It is as if you were playing a text adventure (2024)

The evolution of...

Pippin Barr x Devolution

readme.md

This is the process documentation for the game *It is as if you were playing a text adventure* (2024) by Pippin Barr.

- There is no press kit. Should there be? Read **Info** (Chapter 1) instead
- Take a look at the **Journal** (Chapter 2) for a very incomplete picture of development
- Look at the **To Dos** (Chapter 3) for lists of practical tasks for the project
- Read the **Commit History** (Chapter 4) for detailed, moment-to-moment insights into the development process
- Look at the **File Structure** (Chapter 5) for the evolution of the source code

A note on the text

The text has been edited for print, but remains as close to the original as possible. Its main purpose is to provide the original material for exploration.

The game is not finished at the time of printing. As a physical booklet it preserves the state of the project *as is* at a given moment in time, please visit the repository[1] to see the full (?) design journey of the game.

It is as if you were...

See: *Love*

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[1] github.com/pippinbarr/it-is-as-if-you-were-playing-a-text-adventure

1 info.md

Play Online[1]

Description

…

It is as if you were playing a text adventure is an attempt to tell a story through the user-interface of a classic parser-based text adventure.

Documentation

- Read the Process documentation for process journal, to do list, and related work
- Read the Commit History for step-by-step information about how the project was built
- Look at the Code Repository for source code etc.

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[1] pippinbarr.com/it-is-as-if-you-were-playing-a-text-adventure

2 journal.md

The Basics – Sunday 8 September 2024

I've made a genuine start at this point, two sessions to try to get a basic skeleton of how the basic input-output flow would be able to work.

I've also had a brief conversation with Michael B about kind of piggy-backing on/reacting to a short story of his that I really loved, so that's still in my mind as something to do.

Having made it this far though the next step is really to understand how I should be generating/choosing the sequence of commands for the user to input. In an earlier version of this I'd imagined something more or less like *It is as if you were playing chess* where I'd just have a fixed sequence the user would type it.

And that still makes sense - a lot of sense in some ways because it mirrors the essentially linear nature of stories. That is, there would be a fixed, implicit story being told that the user is perceiving only through the commands they type in as well as any suggested reactions they should have to it.

But I also feel a weird kind of pressure in that scenario where I actually need to understand what is happening moment to moment - there's a need for a real story to exist in that scenario I think. And... well, I suppose that's what I wanted, a chance to secretly write a story that nobody would actually read?

As I approach it, though, I've also found my brain going the more generative track. What would it take to perhaps generate commands instead, so that different people would have different experiences and we'd be talking more about how you build up an understanding of a world by probing it with commands? Which is *also* interesting.

In that case I've started thinking in terms of a data structure that would represent the *world* in much the same way an Inform story does (rooms, objects, special/relevant commands). And then having a system that would track: where the user is, what they're holding, maybe other status effects if I want to go nutso?

And that is appealing... I gotta say, because there could be some pretty fun serendipty around it? And it's this weird idea of designing some of a game but not all of it? (It would frankly even leave room for freakier stuff like actually letting story bleed in some places, though that sounds a bit much.)

Anyway, that's where we are with this right now. I think I will at least try out the weird structural idea if only because it just seems technically challenging and funny as an idea. A secret structure of a game that only exists to generate relevant commands is pretty great.

Oh also, I suppose some kind of statistical likelihood thing may make sense? Because you obviously do "look" a lot more than other things and so on?

And some way of creating some more specific "reaction" suggestions for the user? So that they seem a bit more relevant? Shocks versus boredom etc.? Annoyance?

And can you win? It would be really funny if you could technically win?

Further thoughts – Sunday 8 September 2024

I spent some more time with this this evening and it's now crossed some kind of threshold where it both seems real (I have two locations, a few commands available) but where it also starts to seem like the contortions involved in a more "simulation" approach may not be all that fun and nor all that important?

There is tension - probably interesting, probably worth reflecting on - between creating something more procedural (leaning more into the "truth" of parser-based IF I guess?) and something more (or totally) linear (leaning more into the nature of story telling).

When I actually "play" what I have so far I think the thing that gives me the best little thrill is, well, just any command input, but especially changing locations (and seeing the location acknowledged in the menu bar) and picking something up… because those are moments where you really feel like you act on the world (unlike looking etc.).

I feel like getting a "realistic" representation of the command sequence in the simulation version might just be too hard and it might seem too weird without it? Like how do you reproduce the idea that if you enter a room you almost always "look", but not all the time. Or how when you pick something up you might look at it. Or how you often try using all your items on a specific situation.

And it's not even totally about realism there, but also about the narrative potential of those things too? Or of just being able to communicate a state of play… the story of playing sitting on top of the story itself…

So I'm perhaps just talking myself into a version where:

- It's linear… you will just be typing in a set of instructions (which, I mean, who is ever going to replay this!)
- But it includes triggers around location, points, and anything else that could make sense to sort of reflect action through the UI

I briefly thought I'd need an inventory, but I suppose not actually. I'd need to keep track of it personally though.

Hmmm. Yeah well I think I just plow on with the linear version as my next thing, maybe just string together 10-20 commands including a location change to get a sense of what that would feel like? Maybe look at some walkthroughs of *good* IF to see how many commands etc. it might make sense to have? Start stockpiling forms that might be in there ("ask X about Y" for example).

Reminding myself of where I am – Monday 16 September 2024

Yes, it has been eight days. Sosumi. It would be nice to round the corner into an understanding of what the screen itself needs so that I can "just" write the thing. If it's linear is the point to also pre-write all the "reaction" stuff, or should that be drawn from a pool? Or… really, why do that? Might as well use the reactions as a way to further communicate about what might be happening.

The biggest question to me ultimately become: how much do *I* need to know about what is "really happening" both in the sense of the overarching story being told and the structuring of the parser-based IF that's telling it?

I do like that this is yet another different take on the use of "It is as if" though. Speculative fiction, looking smart on the metro, … narrative vehicle…

Well but how do I write this then? I suppose first approximation is that each beat needs data, the same data… which would amount to what?

- Input (what they should type)
- Reaction (how they should "act", including instructions on how much to read? Or text padding that lets them read "the right amount"? A shape…)
- Location (to display)
- Points (to add)

Plausibly something else? But also I suppose I should take a look at some walk throughs and some actual IF as some point soon. Maybe that's tonight's little job? Or is it just to put together a teeny draft of the above so I can see what that looks like? Or both, let's see.

Time passes – Monday 14 April 2025

Yes it does yes it does. This project was reactivated in my mind because:

- I'm doing this *The Designer Is Present* thing with AMAZE this year and I "need" an *It is as if* game to be working on while I'm there

- Csongor specifically inquired about this project because it's kind of a rare "abandoned" one? But it was only sleeping...
- I'm also (pleasantly) "on the hook" to make a "game poem" for a publication thing that Jordan Magnuson is doing and it occurred to me that Text Adventure is a good option for that, especially in combination with Michael B's *Cornerstone*

All this came together when I was sitting down thinking about the "what next". So in Things I wrote:

```
It is as if you were playing a text adventure
As poetry
Read Michael B
Write a lot of poems
Maybe in that world (or jumping from there)
Arrange them to imply a trajectory through a game
The idea of could have been otherwise
Talismanic objects
Obtuse npcs
Implied puzzles
Repetitions, typos, human elements
Can the act of playing and typing also fit into the frame?
Don't forget to put this in the docs
```

So there are some design leads there too as I try to spin up.

Not on this list but underway is a conversation with Michael B about his feelings about me doing this and especially about me doing this publically. Right now he's just "Michael B"ing his way around in this docs, but if I got serious I'd want to include the notes I'm taking on *Cornerstone* etc.

3 to-do.md

2024-09-18

- **Bascally fine** ~~Fix it so that the history of commands shows up like a normal IF~~
- ~~Do enough styling so it looks like an IF instead of a piece of shit~~
- Probably not this, even with Lorem ipsum I'm kind of sold on the idea that there's a way to write something here ~~Consider some kind of styling that looks more like text and the *contains* the preaction and reactions? Some way to fill the space out a bit more?~~
- Yes I do want to ~~Or do I want to write more extensively? Is there a writing opportunity here to say more at a meta level~~
- For now I think that it's better NOT to have timing introduced ~~Work on the time of pre and re actions as well as the command, give it a more natural flow, consider the relationship of delays to storytelling~~
- Write one scene (paragraph-level preactions)

4 Commit History

Overview

Commits over time

Weekly from 25. Aug. 2024 to 13. Apr. 2025
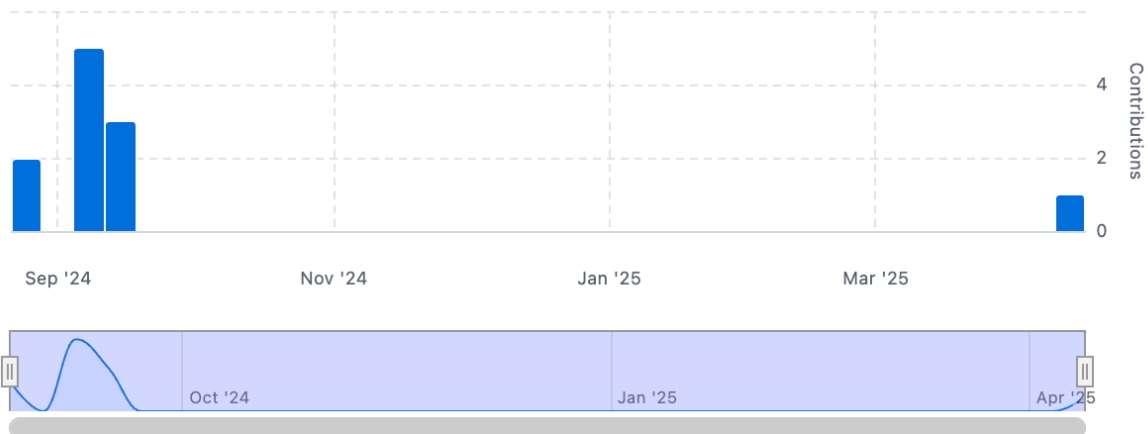
Messages

Mon, 26 Aug 2024 21:05:15
Initial commit

Mon, 26 Aug 2024 21:34:39
Initial setup

- Very early html
- Miniature questions like "should there be a menu bar?"
- Looked at Kicker (and thus Inform online) for a basic understanding, but didn't really implement any of that particularly

Sun, 08 Sep 2024 15:28:38
A very basic framework is in place now

- Two commands, one of which yields point

- A history that will build over time (have to pay attention to it scrolling off the bottom)
- A feeling that this may not be a good solution, just going for total randomness, because it would be kind of hard to tell any kind of a story?
- A feeling I shouldn't overthink this... generating commands with a tracery grammar might be the smartest approach?
- But on the other hand do we want some level of awareness of what's actually around??
- Do I end up secretly creating some part of an actual Inform thing if I do this? Kind of, but also not... maybe I can make a data structure that can generate meaningful and consistent stuff? Kind of like that...

Sun, 08 Sep 2024 15:40:22
Journal: The Basics

Sun, 08 Sep 2024 22:02:03
Very basic "procedural" idea working

- But also not working at all really because it blossoms out into extreme complexity the more I think about it?
- Having my doubts about this approach. I think it's doable but things like picking the probablility of specific commands seems daunting having put this little thing together
- BUT I will say that it's for sure really quite satisfying feeling like it works and that there's this (fake-ass) sense of switching locations, picking something up, etc. I think there's something to this overall

Sun, 08 Sep 2024 22:18:11
Journal: Further thoughts

Sun, 08 Sep 2024 22:20:55
Fixed info/

- Embarassingly it was still the Chesses 3 information

Mon, 16 Sep 2024 20:51:05
Journal: Reminding myself of where I am

Mon, 16 Sep 2024 21:22:25
Moving over to the linear story

- Reworked the data and the engine to tell a linear story
- Started thinking about the relationship of delays and timing to text
- Thought about the idea of "preactions" and "reactions"... the idea of an expression of anticipation and then a response to whatever command and output you have
- Because the user THINKS ABOUT WHAT TO TYPE and also then REACTS TO THE RESPONSE TO THAT TYPING
- Oh my GOD I need to have typoes
- I'm enjoying this form, but well aware I'm hiding from the real storytelling/writing task

- But when I get there I get there

Tue, 17 Sep 2024 22:14:30
Styling, flow, lorem ipsum

- Spent time making the style sheet look at least partly "nice" or at least "more like a text adventure" - fixed width font feels like a win somehow, even though I don't think that's the norm?
- Importantly now have the command entered as part of the history which looks right and was one of the things kind of throwing me somehow
- Started thinking about how to write preactions/reactions and noticed that I was being thrown (it's like judo!) by how *short* the placeholders were. I threw in some Lorem ipsum and *that* turned out to be oddly inspiring... the idea of paragraph level texts describing what the player should do unlocks the idea of this being more of a true writing project which I kind of like... a meta story about how to act like you're reading a real story in an IF... it's kind of delightfully fucked up?
- It may turn out to be impossible

Mon, 14 Apr 2025 17:14:58
Journal: Time passes

5 File Structure

2024-08-27

```
It is as if you were playing a text adventure/
   .vscode/
   css/
   info/
   js/
      script.js
   process/
      journal.md
      README.md
      to-do.md
 _config.yml
 index.html
 README.md
```

2024-09-17

```
It is as if you were playing a text adventure/
   .vscode/
   css/
   data/
      en.json
   info/
   js/
      main.js
   process/
       images/
      journal.md
      README.md
      to-do.md
 _config.yml
 index.html
```

README.md

Imprint

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