

Grand Text Auto

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March 15, 2005

Mystery House Taken Over

by Nick Montfort , 9:00 am

The MHTO Occupation Force is pleased to announce the launch of [Mystery House Taken Over](#).

The Mystery House Advance Team — Nick Montfort, Dan Shiovitz, and Emily Short — has reverse engineered *Mystery House*, the first text-and-graphics adventure game. Members of the Advance Team have reimplemented it in a modern, cross-platform, free language for interactive fiction development, and have fashioned a kit to allow others to easily modify this early game.



Modified versions of *Mystery House* have been created by the elite Mystery House Occupation Force, consisting of individuals from the interactive fiction, electronic literature, and net art communities:

- Adam Cadre (*Varicella*, *Photopia*)
- Daniel Garrido, a.k.a. dhan (*Ocaso Mortal*)
- Michael Gentry (*Little Blue Men*, *Anchorhead*)
- Yune Kyung Lee & Yoon Ha Lee (*The Moonlit Tower*, *Swanglass*)
- Nick Montfort (*Ad Verbum*, *Implementation*)
- Scott Rettberg (*The Unknown*, *Implementation*)
- Dan Shiovitz (*Lethe Flow Phoenix*, *Bad Machine*)
- Emily Short (*Savoir-Faire*, *City of Secrets*)

Visitors to the site can play these modded games and can also create their own versions to offer online there. The Mystery House Occupation Kit allows artists and authors, with or without programming experience, to hack at and reshape *Mystery House*, easily modifying the “surface” aspects. Artists and writers may also choose to undertake more substantial renovations, engaging with, commenting on, and transforming an important interactive program from decades past.

Mystery House is a primitive interactive fiction for the Apple II by Roberta and Ken Williams, who published the game in 1980 through their company, On-Line Systems (later called Sierra). The game was a hit — Sierra sold more than 10,000 copies in a

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very small, new market for home computer software. *Mystery House* accepts one- or two-word typed commands from the user and presents crude, monochrome line drawings and terse textual descriptions. In 1987, in celebration of Sierra's 7th anniversary, *Mystery House* was placed in the public domain. The modifiable Mystery House Taken Over reimplementation has likewise been placed in the public domain by the Advance Team.

Mystery House Taken Over is a 2004 commission of New Radio and Performing Arts, Inc., (aka Ether-Ore) for its [Turbulence web site](#). It was made possible with funding from the Andy Warhol Foundation for the Visual Arts.

7 Responses to "Mystery House Taken Over"

1. [noah](#) Says:

March 15th, 2005 at 2:08 pm

Looks great. Congratulations, Nick & co!

2. [josh g.](#) Says:

March 16th, 2005 at 1:09 am

Having grown up on Sierra games but never having played Mystery House, this is just plain excellent. There's something wonderfully ironic in enjoying the results of the effort the MHTO team put into remaking this classic ... and then seeing it all completely violated by the l33t-h4X0r3D version. I laughed very hard. (Then I played Dan's version, and laughed more. Then I played Michael's version and started seeing aphids everywhere.)

3. [andrew](#) Says:

March 17th, 2005 at 1:43 pm

This project seems super-cool. I'm looking forward to checking out all the pieces when I have some free time!

Have Ken and Roberta Williams (the original creators 25 years ago) found out about it, and if so, any reaction from them?

4. [nick](#) Says:

March 17th, 2005 at 2:16 pm

I would love to reach them but their email addresses are (wisely, no doubt) not easily found on the Web. While thinking again of how to contact them, I realized that I should definitely get in touch with the folks at [Sierra Planet](#), both because they might be able to pass the message along and because they might like to know about the project. We'll see if the news can reach Roberta and Ken this way...

5. [nick](#) Says:

March 21st, 2005 at 2:37 pm

An update: *All* games are now available for online play, thanks to Jon Alfred Zeppieri (the author of Zag) and the magic of Java Web Start.

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When you download a file now, it will be sent as mhto-##-Author-Name.blb or mhto-##-Author-Name.z*, so the files will be easier to identify than they used to be.

And hopefully the instructions are now a bit more clear for those not familiar with IF.

6. **nick** Says:

February 2nd, 2006 at 1:28 pm

I should have mentioned this earlier, but better late than never: Jess Knoch, as part of the Non-Comp Review Project 2005, admirably took on the work of [reviewing the entire Mystery House Taken Over project](#), playing everything and mentioning at least a bit about each piece.

7. Trapezo Says:

February 6th, 2006 at 9:41 am

Those Sierra antiquarians among you may wish to visit eBay and search for MYSTERY HOUSE GAME. A copy of the original MYSTERY HOUSE package, signed and inscribed by Ken and Roberta Williams, has just appeared there.

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