



Portable fantasy

*Pam Turnbull gives the Z88's
first text adventure a trial run*

Product: Withered Toad
Price: £24.95
Supplier: Wordmongers, 21 Edison Road, Rabans Lane, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP19 3TE.
Tel: 0296 437878

SUPPOSE that it was only a matter of time until someone introduced games to the Z88. Indeed in some ways it's the ideal medium – portable, battery-powered and compact. Unfortunately, the screen does limit the type of game but is ideally suited to text adventures. Now the addict can play whenever he or she wants and flip to the game from any of the Z88's other facilities.

Full marks then must go to Wordmongers for Withered Toad. This text adventure is expensive – but the main cost is that of the eprom, with the game itself adding only £5 on top. In time the price of the hardware will probably come down.

A daunting licence agreement comes with the package, as with all Wordmongers' products, to remind you of copyright restrictions – but it's rather unusual for games.

Setting up is easy – just a matter of plugging the eprom into your Z88 and from then it appears as an option on the Index and is as simple to load as Pipedream. Do take note of the fitting instructions on the inlay – don't remove a ram cartridge to insert the game.

Where I was most disappointed was in the quality of the parser. Over the last few years we have seen an increase in the quality of adventure parsers thanks to Quill and other adventure creators. Unfortunately, for this game any avid adventurer must return to the days of precise statement – no more TAKE ALL commands. As far as directions are concerned you are limited to the four major compass points, anything more complicated is met by incomprehension.

The knack is to use succinct, simple commands, limited to two words. Abbreviations are allowed, but the vocabulary is limited and more than ever you need to be on the same wavelength as the authors

Now to the game itself. You and the withered toad must find your way home via the tube sta-

tion. You start alone in your room with a locked door and a key. Mysteriously – and via a 007-type lift – you find yourself in a basement apartment reminiscent of poorer student days – full of discarded food and green slime!

The withered toad himself pops in and out of the adventure signalled by a bleep from your micro and the description of the little creature hopping on and off your head. But there is no simple way of following the toad through the passages.

The Withered Toad is not a large adventure – it has about 40 locations. I enjoyed playing it though, and I am sure the teeth marks and footsteps must belong to someone but I haven't found out who yet and I am not sure I want to – especially as each time I wanted to hit something with my sword I was told that this was a nice game and I couldn't do that.

A couple of friends who played the game were disappointed by the size – but they play more adventures than me and this game is not aimed at them. Not having much time to spare I appreciate the ability it gave me to pop out of the game into Pipedream whenever I needed, knowing that I could rush back to avert doom a little later. I especially like not having to save and load first – you can save your position to be on the safe side, though.

Wordmongers was not attempting to write a definitive Colossal Cave type of adventure but an enjoyable and entertaining game. Once you have succeeded you are invited to send in your comments so that these ideas can be incorporated into the next one.

Wordmongers has already supplied a Defender type game on one eprom and seems to be ready to introduce more than just comms packages to the Z88 – indeed it has plans for a database manager, a filofax-type facility and a machine code assembler.

No one is trying to say that the Z88 is a portable games machine, and it would be to trivialise many of its uses and facilities to do that. Yet Withered Toad does open up another use and offers light relief, which is always welcome. It is wittily written and, despite the cost, I look forward to seeing Wordmongers' next offering.

Points for:

- Ideal introduction to adventures
- Always ready to play

...against:

- Poor parser
- No challenge for experts

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**The bottom
line...**

Great for a game on
the train