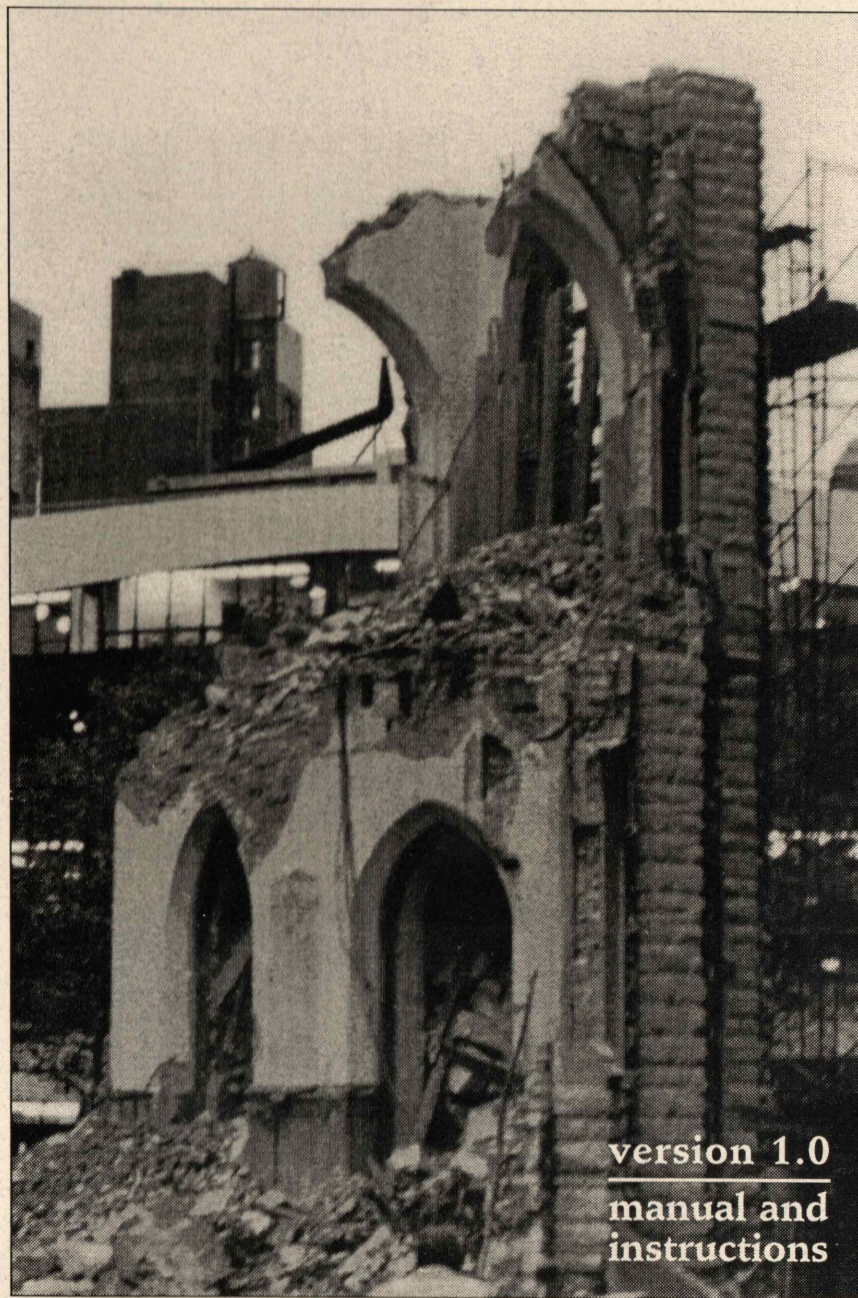# LOST NEW YORK

INTERACTIVE FICTION BY NEIL DEMAUSE

version 1.0

manual and instructions

There's no trick to playing interactive-fiction games like LOST NEW YORK—you just type what you want to do in simple English, and the game's parser understands you. TADS (the system used for writing LOST NEW YORK) has an exceptionally powerful parser, so there's no need to limit yourself to simple two-word sentences, like you might in some computer games.

The accompanying chart lists some commonly used commands, along with some sample sentences, all of which can be understood by LOST NEW YORK (though there's no guarantee they'll be useful). In general, if you're not sure if something will work, try it; and in the rare instances that the game doesn't understand you, try using a synonym or rephrasing your request.

Common Commands

you type...	you get...
north (or n), south (s), east (e), west (w), up (u), down (d)	takes you in the indicated direction
look (or l)	describes your immediate surroundings
inventory (or i)	lists your possessions
examine (or x) <item>	describes an item in greater detail
take (or get) <item>	picks up an item
drop <item>	drops the item
wait (or z)	allows time to pass without doing anything
again (or g)	repeats your previous move
hint (or help)	calls up the hints menu
score	gives your total points
full	lists what actions have earned you points
undo	undoes your previous move
save	saves your position
restore	restores a saves game
restart	begins the game over
quit	exits the game

Other sample sentences

```
Take the sandwich and eat it
Ask the man about the newspaper
Guard, give me the key
Go west. Climb through window. Put book on
table.
Throw red stone at wall
Take any book from the counter
Put all in knapsack
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LOST NEW YORK

INTRODUCTION

The history of New York City is a mad mix of inevitable outcomes and improbable moments.

Looking back on the city's development, some things seem, indeed, unavoidable, even predestined. The merchant economy and industrial boom that spurred the city's early growth, the massive influx of immigrants (which began with the Irish fleeing famine in the 1840s and continues to this day with people from all over the world), the drive for skyscrapers and then suburbanization in the 20th century—surely no matter who the individual players, the script would have been carried out largely the same way?

And yet, there are those moments. What if the Erie Canal had never been built, and some other city had become the maritime gateway to the Great Lakes? What if populist single-tax advocate Henry George hadn't died suddenly on the eve of his probable election as mayor in 1897? What if it had been Jones Wood, not Central Park, that the city council approved in the 1850s as Manhattan's great park?

It's remarkable, looking back, how a few certain key decisions, and individuals, have influenced huge portions of New York's development. If you've admired the Empire State Building or the Chrysler Building, thank the 1916 zoning law that required terraced setbacks on skyscrapers. (If you hate the modern steel-and-glass boxes of the past 30 years, blame the 1961 decision that reversed those laws.) And, of course, there's Robert Moses, the park lover, virulent racist and reformer-turned-dealmaker who, as holder of an unprecedented network of unelected positions, practically single-handedly redrew the map of New York between the '30s and '60s.

New York may have eight million stories in it, but in terms of making a difference in the lives of its citizens, it's often only certain

stories that count: those of the wealthy businessmen and financiers, plus the few elected (or, in the case of Moses, unelected) power brokers who make the real decisions. It makes it all the more tempting to wonder how things would have turned out differently if someone had been able to change things in the slightest…

In LOST NEW YORK, you're an unsuspecting tourist who's suddenly thrust into the city's past, forced to discover how to interact with it in order to find your way home. The intricate web of history will be laid out before you, and though many of the strands will be far out of reach, a few may fall tantalizingly close, offering the possibility that you can play a deciding role in some of New York's most defining moments.

LOST NEW YORK is not a typical adventure game; you certainly won't find any treasure or have to fight off enemies with swordplay. Traveling through New York's past, it turns out, is much like living in its present: You can only watch the story unfold, and wait for your moment. It's then that you decide your future—and that of the city as a whole.

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Five Points Dead and Gone

History, it is said, belongs to the victors, and the history of New York is no exception. To be on the winning side in this city, whether through business or politics, has always been to be on the side of money; to lose has been to be poor, and almost inevitably of a different skin color or differently accented from the winners. And the victory of money has been complete: the people, black and Irish and Italian and Latina, who have called this city home without owning it for two hundred years are not just forgotten, but obliterated; their very homes and streets paved over by progress or profit or some unwholesome combination of the two. The buildings that are today identified with "old New York"—City Hall, Trinity Church—betray nothing of the lives of the vast majority of New Yorkers, past and present. Yet still there are clues.

If there is one point on the face of New York that epitomizes this lost history, it is at the corner of Worth and Baxter Streets in lower Manhattan. This nondescript intersection hard by the Department of Motor Vehicles building, today an uninteresting buffer zone between Chinatown to the east and Foley Square to the west, was a century and a half ago the heart of city's most notorious locale, a haven for the city's first despised classes: the Five Points.

To try to envision the Five Points today is a nearly insurmountable task—even the streets that framed the five "points" disappeared decades ago. But let's try. Standing on the current site of the DMV in 1840, you would have faced east to the intersection of Baxter Street (then Orange) and Park Street (the block-long street across the park in front of you, then Cross). Worth Street (then Anthony) deadended at the intersection, forming a five-pointed star that served as the hub of immigrant life in the city's early years.

Walk a block north on Baxter, and you come to an even more

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incredible site: here, where the road bends abruptly to the east, you find yourself standing on the ancient shores of the Collect, a large, clear freshwater pond, so deep as to be thought bottomless. The pond—still visible as a shallow depression around the intersection of Centre and Leonard—was a hub of colonial life, with ice skating in winter and swimming and fishing in the warmer months. (An island in the center of the Collect was had a less wholesome role: home to the city's first gallows, where after one unsuccessful slave revolt, dozens of blacks were executed and buried on the spot.)

But in the battle between bucolic charm and industrial progress, the Collect quickly lost out. A deep, clear freshwater pond when Europeans arrived, the Collect was soon transformed into an open sewer, as colonists used its waters as a dumping ground for animal carcasses and other wastes. When the fierce winter of 1808 threw many New Yorkers out of work, the city devised a novel public works program in which hundreds of men were employed to drain the Collect via a canal (later transformed into Canal Street) and fill it with earth from the hundred-foot-high hill that had stood to the pond's west. By spring, this had produced a broad, soggy plain where the Collect had stood—just in time for a wave of immigration that sent Manhattan real-estate development hurtling northward.

In the early 19th century, these immigrants were overwhelmingly Irish, pouring into New York by the tens of thousands to escape from British rule and famine, only to find themselves barred from most jobs in their new home. They responded by turning to petty crime and petty politics to make ends meet, and as a result, the Five Points region became not just the largest Irish community outside Dublin but also the home of New York's first organized gangs, the Forty Thieves and the Kerryonites. "Blind pigs"—unlicensed saloons selling cut-rate liquor in the back rooms of so-called groceries—were common streetcorner sights. And so was radical politician Mike Walsh, whose Subterranean newspaper railed against wage slavery and for Irish immigrants' rights.

The blocks surrounding the Five Points were also home to the one
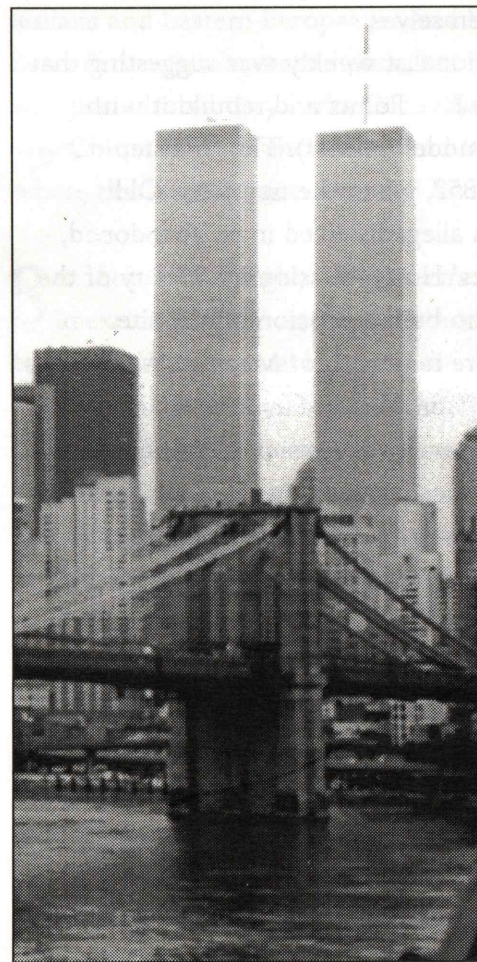
ethnic group even lower on the socioeconomic scale than the Irish: blacks. "Stagg Town" was the city's primary settlement area for freed slaves: the Abyssinian Baptist Church—later to relocate to Harlem—was founded in 1808 on Anthony Street, and St. Philip's Protestant Episcopal on Centre and Bethel African Methodist Episcopal on Mott were soon to follow.

And as the years passed, still more immigrants poured in to the Five Points. The slap-dash frame houses and tenements that had been thrown up on the sodden fill of the former Collect were horribly overcrowded: six, eight, ten families per floor packed together in windowless rooms. The tenement owners' strategy was as simple as it was gruesome: "Pack the tenants in; let the property deteriorate; charge rents high enough to cover the anticipated decay or destruction of the houses," recounts one historian of the period, "this was a natural formula, given prevailing attitudes and values, to govern the use of space in the lower wards."

For the next hundred years, "prevailing attitudes" would continue to determine the Five Points' evolution. The response of the city's more privileged classes to the area's poverty was to attempt to protect Five Points denizens from that which was perceived to be the

cause of their plight: namely, themselves.

As early as 1850, a Congregationalist weekly was suggesting that "Christian landlords" buy up the Five Points and rebuild it with model homes (for, presumably, model tenants). The first step towards this end was taken in 1852, when the notorious Old Brewery, where a thousand men allegedly lived in an abandoned, was knocked down by the Ladies' Home Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, who built a mission on the site. Orange and Anthony Streets were renamed for Mexican War heroes Lt. Col. Charles Baxter and Maj.-Gen. William Jenkins Worth in the hopes that this would somehow inspire the residents to higher morals. In 1868, a reform group tried to clean up the neighborhood by knocking through Worth Street clear to Chatham Square two blocks to the east, but even with the addition of a sixth point the residents steadfastly remained ethnic, and poor.

By the turn of the century, significant chunks of the old Five Points had been knocked askew by reform forces. Still another reform group, this one led by Jacob Riis, had finally succeeded—in 1899—in getting the city to knock down the exceptionally notorious block of tenements bounded by Mulberry, Baxter, Worth, and Bayard, which had been collectively known as Mulberry Bend. Many of the Irish who had successfully risen through the ranks of the gangs and political clubs had moved uptown to the new districts spreading north toward Central Park. And blacks had fled uptown under less auspicious conditions, to begin their long northward trek in search of a neighborhood to call their own. (It was not to end until the 1900s, when the residents of the then-Jewish suburb of Harlem, instead of fighting the black arrivals with knives and razors as the Italians of Greenwich Village and the Irish of the West 60s had done, merely fled to the Upper West Side.)

Yet if the Five Points had been altered, it was in many ways still recognizable. The apartments of the Irish and blacks were now occupied by the immigrants that typified late-19th-century New York,

Italians and Eastern Europeans. And beyond newly created Mulberry Bend Park—then an actual park, not yet covered with asphalt by playground-mad City Parks Commissioner Robert Moses—lay the tiny Chinatown, an enclave around Mott, Pell, and Doyers streets where the few Chinese admitted by immigration law clustered.

But though the neighborhood seemed to have settled into a stable if unexciting middle age, it was already doomed by then, by an odd building that lay several blocks to the south.

In late 19th-century New York, the political scene was the scene of an incredible scramble for upward mobility as population boomed, and with it opportunities for power. The locus of political power was the machine known as Tammany Hall, whose lineage could be traced back to knife fighter–turned–political fixer Isaiah Rynders, who during the heydey of the Five Points had owned six "groceries" around the Five Points. By the 1860s, Rynders' protege, William Marcy "Boss" Tweed, had built Tammany into the prototypical political machine, a source of graft (if never actual economic power) for the slum residents of the Lower East Side. His crowning achievement in looting the city's treasury was a new county courthouse behind City Hall, built for a then-astonishing $12 million, including, according to Sante, nearly $2 million for what should have been a $50,000 plastering job and $7 million for furniture and decorations.

The $3.5 million in "repairs" paid on the courthouse over the next three years may have gone into the Tweed Ring's pockets, but a good chunk of it may have been legitimate: by the turn of the century, the Tweed courthouse would be crumbling so badly that justices were falling ill and even dying from the damp, musty atmosphere within. The municipal judges banded together to insist that a more spacious replacement be erected at once; the site of the current courthouse could easily be expanded to include some of the surrounding grassy area behind City Hall.

City leaders were apoplectic. For years, reformers (then consisting
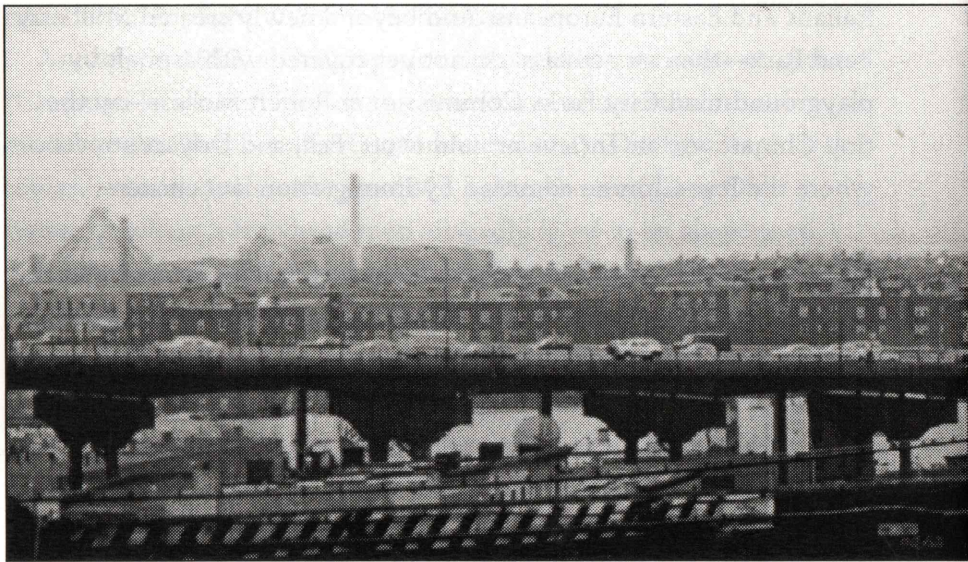
primarily of wealthy anti-Tammany progressives) had been hoping to raze both the courthouse and the old Post Office, another bizarrely ornate Tweed construction at the corner of Broadway and Park Place, to "restore" City Hall Park to its original dimensions. The planned courthouse, certain to be an "unsightly excrescence," would, they feared, be an intrusion on the bucolic enclave they envisioned blooming around City Hall. "Save the Park!" they cried, suggesting instead that the city construct a grand civic centre in the blocks north of Chambers Street, with room for a court house, post office, and more.

That these blocks were filled with the remnants of an old immigrant district, mere blocks from the seat of city government, only made the civic centre proposal more appealing. This plan, the *Times* editorialized, "comprehends a reconstruction of a hitherto shamefully neglected part of Manhattan." Erection of a new courthouse there, remarked the paper on another occasion, "would result in reclaiming a squalid neighborhood, and so increasing its assessable value."

This last bit—"assessable value"—is key to understanding how the search for a new courthouse site quickly ballooned into a master plan for the entire stretch of land between Park Row and Lafayette Street,
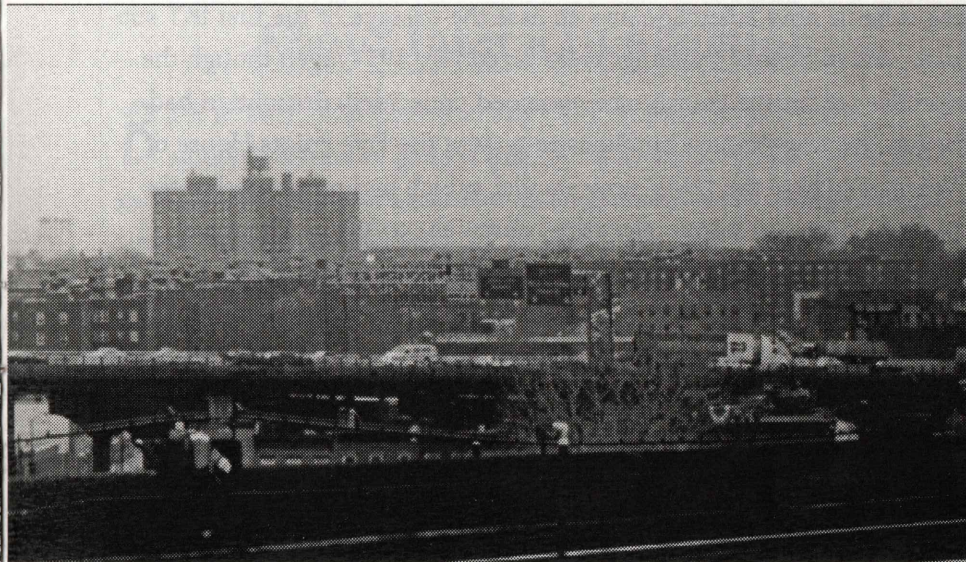
from City Hall north to Leonard. The "improvement" provided by a new courthouse, it was certain, would raise property values in the surrounding area. By buying up *all* the land in the neighborhood ahead of time, the city would save itself untold millions of dollars: if the additional land was later needed for more city buildings, it would already have been purchased at cut-rate prices; if not, the city could sell the leftovers for a tidy profit. Furthermore, since the city's borrowing power was based on the value of its assessed land, the demolition and reconstruction of the Five Points district would allow the city to borrow still more money to finance still more urban improvement projects.

But amidst the finances, there were still people living in this "shamefully neglected" neighborhood. To the east of Centre Street lay dozens of tenements—"populous tenements," sneered the Times, "with the stores given up to picture post card dealers, dime theatres, and the cheap stores characteristic of the lower end of the Bowery."

But what skirmishes there were over the plan revolved around money and "home rule," not around the disruption to people's lives. (In fact, the city had already carved up a sizeable chunk of the neighborhood some years earlier, when Lafayette Street was cut through—cross-

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ing what is now Foley Square—to ease the passage of the first IRT subway, and dozens of buildings were razed.) By 1914, even though the specific site for the courthouse remained undecided, demolition had begun. Among the first buildings to go was the Five Points House of Industry (where the DMV now stands), which had ministered to the poor for 56 years before relocating, obscurely, to White Plains just before its building was condemned for the civic centre project.

History—or at least the *Times*—does not record what became of the displaced tenants—which from contemporary accounts included certainly hundreds of families, consisting of thousands of people. It is likely that they were forced to migrate east and north into the already-overcrowded Lower East Side.

Meanwhile, the civic centre dragged on, and on, as engineers scrambled to devise ways to keep the waters that had fed the Collect, driven underground by the 1808 landfill, from washing the new structures' foundations out from under them. For thirty years, the project slogged forward—the Health Department building at Worth and Centre was not finished until 1936, the old Post Office not razed until three years after that.

And if you walk south, past the courts and the Municipal building, and turn the corner of Chambers Street, there you will still find it: the Tweed Courthouse, in all its drafty, grafty glory. In 1978, Dustin Hoffman spent several weeks in the old building, filming *Kramer vs. Kramer*. He caught a cold.

But if Tweed's courthouse still stands, the old neighborhood of his constituents does not. Today, you can travel among the buildings of the Civic Centre without ever realizing that a mere two blocks away people live in ancient tenements, much as when the area was first settled a century and a half ago—much less that this was once a thriving neighborhood of immigrants and shops. Instead, all that remains is an antiseptic, windswept plaza, a monument in marble and steel to the city's inability to deal with poverty.

About Interactive Fiction

Back in 1977, Will Crowther and Don Woods set off a craze amongst computer gamers (the few that then existed) with their game Adventure, which featured an enormous cave to explore, magic words that teleported you from room to room, and a two-word parser that could understand English commands. Immediately, programmers set out to do Adventure one better.

Among those were a group of MIT computer science students who designed a more powerful parser and a more intricate game by the name of Zork. The game proved so popular that it enabled the students to start their own company, Infocom, which created over 30 renowned games such as Planetfall, Trinity, and several Zork sequels before its untimely demise in 1989.

The corporate gaming industry has long since moved on to multiple-CD full-motion-video games starring the likes of Mark Hamill, or "adventures" where the interactivity is limited to seeing how many aliens you can kill. But the idea of computer games that use the written word to create a more truly interactive *story* is far from dead—today, dozens of individuals continue to write and distribute interactive fiction, primarily via the internet FTP site at ftp.gmd.de, which maintains a huge i-f archive (including a version of the original pre-Infocom Zork.). The Usenet groups rec.arts.int-fiction and rec.games.int-fiction maintain a healthy community of i-f players who sponsors their own yearly competition in short i-f writing; the field even has its own bimonthly newsletter, *XYZZYnews*.

Interactive fiction games like the one you're holding don't have computer-generated graphics or sound effects, but then again, neither does a novel. Both rely, as Infocom put it in one of their most famous ads, on "the world's most powerful graphics technology"—your brain. If you have one of your own, you should enjoy putting it to work exploring the world of interactive fiction.

About The Author

Neil deMause is a freelance political journalist and an editor for *Brooklyn Metro Times,* a quarterly zine of politics and culture. LOST NEW YORK is his second work of interactive fiction; his first, MacWesleyan (the DOS version is PC University), is available at ftp.gmd.de, or by mail on request from the author.

About The Photos

THE COVER: Historic All Angels' Church on 81st Street and West End Avenue is torn down to make way for a co-op apartment building. Gentrification of this sort was rampant in New York City in the '70s and '80s.

PAGE FOUR: When the Loews 83rd Street movie theater stood in the way of another planned apartment building, Loews simply built another theater next door and allowed the new building to rise on top of it. The price of progress: escalators and sterile modern furnishings replaced the sweeping staircases and lush decor of the old theater.

PAGE SEVEN: Two eras in city "progress." The Brooklyn Bridge was the crowning achievement of gaslight New York, linking Manhattan and Brooklyn and ushering in the era of Greater New York City (and, coincidentally, obliterating a good chunk of lower Manhattan). A century later, the World Trade Center became a monument to the city's changing economy: its glassed-in offices took the place of a thriving marketplace that had existed on the site for two centuries.

PAGE TEN: Robert Moses' handiwork: the Moses-built Gowanus Expressway runs past the Moses-inspired Red Hook Houses.

Together, they create a walled-off ghetto separated from brownstone Brooklyn by a ribbon of asphalt and carbon monoxide.

All photographs by Neil deMause

LOST NEW YORK

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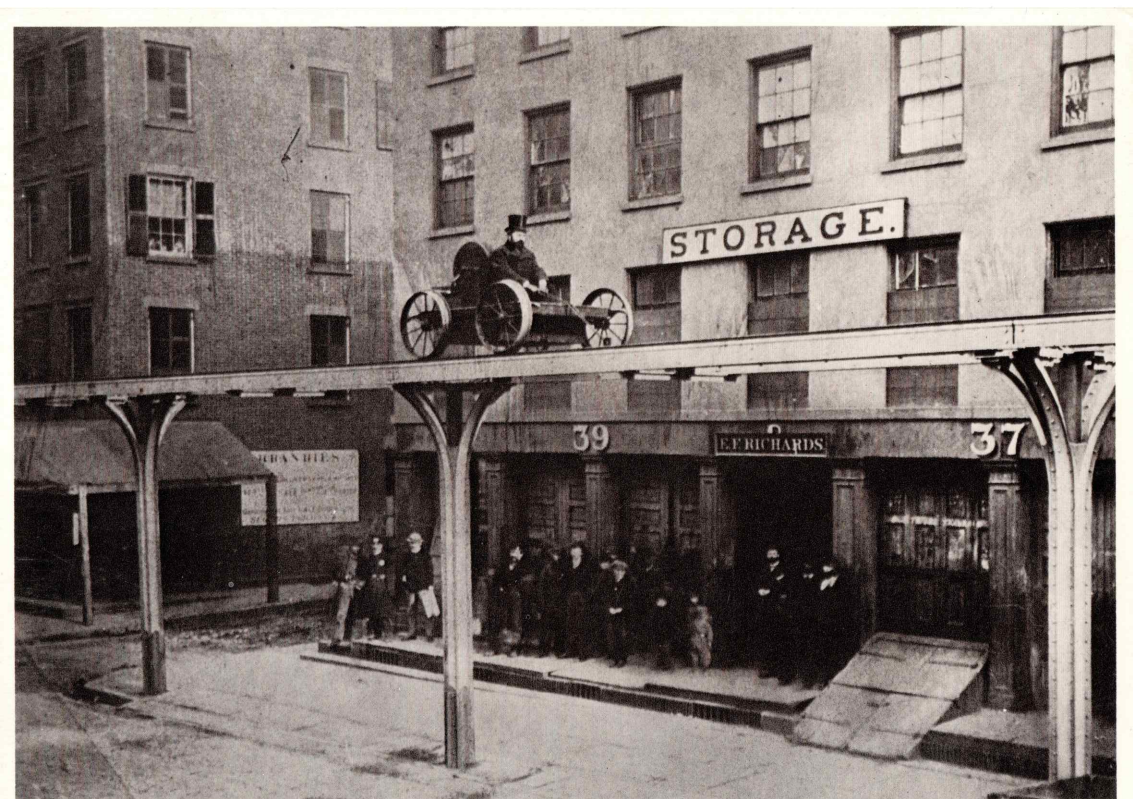
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CHARLES T. HARVEY'S TRIAL TRIP ON FIRST ELEVATED RAILWAY
GREENWICH STREET, NEW YORK, 1862
PHOTOGRAPHER UNKNOWN

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