

Designer is good value for money.

Having chosen a game to be the outline for modification, you are presented with a choice of the type and scope of that modification, starting with the shape and colour of the sprites used to represent the protagonists. Even though a menu of existing sprites is presented, this is more a convenience than a constraint, for you are able to start from a predefined design and change any bit within the  $12 \times 12$  matrix, or opt to begin with a 'blank page' and originate a completely new figure. The  $12 \times 12$  format (two characters by two characters) results in a perfectly usable and distinctive sprite.

Sprite definition itself is menu-driven, the choice of available commands being displayed to the left of the screen and a magnified image of the sprite in question at the right. A helpful addition is a second image of the sprite, displayed in its actual size and colour at the foot of the text.

The next step is to define the manner in which these sprites will move about the games ground. This section, called Configuration, actually allows you greater scope than simply directing the movement of individual tokens. Following on from this, in the order in which options are displayed on the main menu, you are invited to select a movement pattern for the screen tokens. To make the movement more complex, two or more patterns may be linked together at this stage.

Now you have to decide on the frequency of the attack waves and insert special effects, both visual and audible.

Having created a game, it only remains to save it on cassette, so that it can be played again in the future. Here the package falls down badly, from the user's point of view, for it does not store a game in playable form, but only as input parameters to the Games Designer package itself, rendering the exercise useless to those who might wish to develop a game for subsequent sale.

## THE QUILL

In direct contrast to Games Designer, The Quill is oriented towards those who wish to create Adventure games and attempt to market them — there is even a section in the comprehensive manual headed *Selling your Adventure* that gives useful hints on the steps you should take in testing and debugging. Chief among the hints is to have as many people as possible play the game critically. Remarkably, the authors require nothing more than a 'mention somewhere in [the game] that it was written with The Quill' — a rare piece of altruism.

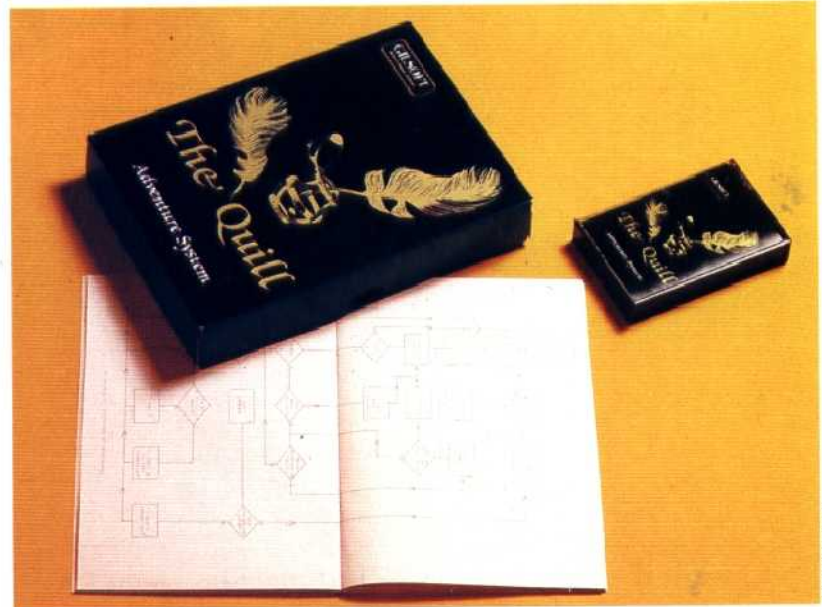
While it is presented as a generator of Dungeons and Dragons type games, the Quill uses techniques more akin to those employed by commercial database management packages. It is divided into three main parts — the database itself; a database editor, which allows the parameters to be set up; and a database interpreter, which executes the game interactively.

Just as one may analyse Space Invaders and the like as protagonist-positioning games, so the basis of Adventure games is the 'conceptual maze': a maze that exists in more dimensions than the purely spatial ones. Thus, in addition to seeking the exit route the player is presented with a list of objects, each of which is useful only in a specific circumstance — if you never go into a room with an empty light socket, then there is no point in carrying a light bulb, for instance.

To make the game more interesting, a limit is normally placed on the number of objects the player can carry with him from place to place —

### Defining The Object

The Quill offers users a way of creating Adventure games for themselves. Similar in style to a number of database management packages, the Quill requires the locations and objects that feature in the adventure to be defined. Object oriented programming techniques then allow these assigned attributes to be called up and displayed, or used as parameters, whenever the object or location features in the game.



IAN MCKINNEL

and there is nothing to stop the designer using this artificial limit to send the player back and forth accumulating the collection of objects that he will need to accomplish the tasks he is set as the game unfolds.

The first stage in constructing an Adventure game is to map out a script and a scenario in which the script will operate. The Quill's manual starts by outlining a simple game which presents the player with a choice of ten objects in a simple environment comprising six rooms. This game is not embodied within the program, forcing you to enter all the parameters outlined in the manual before you can play it, just as you would have to if you created your own game.

The Quill places a limit on the number of parameters that may be used in the game, but this is so large — 252 locations and 210 objects — that you are unlikely to run out of options.

The package is quite capable of producing Adventure games to rival most of those commercially available (in fact a number of them were written on it), but it does have its limitations. First, it does not allow the creation of screen graphics such as those used to good effect in *The Hobbit*, for example; nor does it permit any interaction with characters — so there is no point in trying to create them. Apart from offering the Adventure games player a simplified method of composing his own games, its great strength lies in the discipline required to use it.