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Infocom was a pioneering American software company founded in 1979 by a group of MIT students and staff, originally spun out of the MIT Dynamic Modeling Group. The founders included Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Dave Lebling, and Bruce Daniels, who sought to merge their programming expertise with a passion for storytelling and games. The company quickly became synonymous with interactive fiction, a genre of computer games that presented players with text-based narratives where typed commands influenced the story's direction. In an era dominated by simple arcade graphics, Infocom distinguished itself by emphasizing *literary-quality writing* and *open-ended gameplay*. Their first major success, *Zork*, grew out of the MIT-developed "Dungeon" game (an adaptation of Will Crowther and Don Woods' *Colossal Cave Adventure*). *Zork*'s popularity propelled Infocom to the forefront of the early home computer market, as it could run on a wide range of systems. By the mid-1980s, Infocom was widely regarded as the premier studio for intelligent, narrative-driven games, attracting both casual players and literary enthusiasts.

One of Infocom's most influential contributions was the creation of the Z-machine, a virtual machine designed to ensure cross-platform compatibility. In an age when dozens of home computer models each had their own architecture, the Z-machine allowed Infocom's games to be written once and then run on almost any system with only a small interpreter. This not only gave Infocom a wide commercial reach but also ensured their games could have far richer text, larger worlds, and more sophisticated parsers than their competitors. The parser technology itself was revolutionary, interpreting full-sentence player input rather than restricting interaction to two-word commands. This gave players the feeling of conversing with the game and deepened immersion. Beyond the software, Infocom became famous for its "feelies"—physical items like maps, letters, or quirky props included in game boxes. These served both as immersive supplements to the story and as a form of copy protection, since some puzzles required details only available in the package. Despite their success in gaming, Infocom stumbled with their ambitious attempt to enter the business software market through *Cornerstone*, a database program that failed commercially and financially weakened the company. Eventually, Infocom was acquired by Activision in 1986, but despite continued releases, the studio declined and was closed by 1989.

Infocom's library of over 30 games remains among the most influential in gaming history. Their *Zork* trilogy (*Zork I*, *II*, *III*) became iconic for its sprawling underground empire, witty descriptions, and tricky puzzles. The company also pushed boundaries with licensed works like *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, co-written with Douglas Adams, which earned fame for its humor and brutal difficulty. Other classics include *Planetfall*, remembered for its endearing robot companion Floyd; *A Mind Forever Voyaging*, which broke genre conventions by offering a serious, political sci-fi narrative focused less on puzzles and more on exploration; and *Trinity*, an allegorical tale involving nuclear weapons and time travel. Infocom also experimented with detective-style mysteries such as *Deadline* and *The Witness*, as well as lighter titles like *Leather Goddesses of Phobos*, a tongue-in-cheek parody of pulp sci-fi. Collectively, these games

demonstrated the power of interactive storytelling and influenced generations of developers and writers. Even after Infocom's closure, its innovations lived on through fan communities, the open-source Inform language, and modern interactive fiction platforms. Today, Infocom's works are celebrated not only as games but as early examples of digital literature, bridging the gap between computing and storytelling in a way that was truly ahead of its time.