

Indiana Jones Fights the Communist Police: Local Appropriation of the Text Adventure Genre in the 1980s Czechoslovakia*

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Introduction

Computer and video game scholarship seems to be a foremost example of a truly global academic endeavor. Most of its output, as well as its objects of study, are in English, which has become the lingua franca of both games studies and a large portion of the game industry. At first glance, it is unsurprising: video games seem to be an eminent example of cultural globalization. This contributes to the illusion that digital games are a homogenous phenomenon hovering weightlessly in a culturally undefined space, independent of local contexts—with the widely acknowledged singular exception of Japanese culture. This volume argues that the situation is not nearly as simple—that gaming cultures around the world involve a complex interplay of local and global influences. This chapter focuses on a specific time and place—the 1980s Czechoslovakia—and introduces the Czechoslovak text adventure games of the 1980s as an example of specific textual and gaming practices influenced by the social, economic, and cultural context of the era. Inspired by British and American text adventures, Czechoslovak text adventures (called *textovky*, or *textovka* in singular) became a genre of their own, employing a particular range of fictional settings, design conventions, and humor. The history of *textovka* demonstrates that even behind the Iron Curtain, not only were Western computer games played, but Western genres were also being adapted and localized by local hobbyists. What emerged from this era was a community of designers and collection of games that were uniquely Czech.

The material for this chapter was gathered for an ongoing research project that seeks to map the history of computer gaming culture in Czechoslovakia. Its sources include archival material, contemporary media discourse, and personal interviews. The games analyzed here were retrieved from the *textovky.cz* online database (Fismol 2010). The primary focus is on games for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum computer and compatibles, which was the dominant hardware platform at the time.¹

In the course of the chapter, I first outline the sociopolitical context of the 1980s Czechoslovakia and then introduce the genre of text adventure, and its local variation, the *textovka*. I then proceed to discuss the intertextuality typical of the 1980s hobbyist development environment. In the last section, I introduce two titles that launched the genre into the mainstream, thanks to the support of nationwide media.

Things You Don't Buy in a Store: Home Computing in the 1980s Czechoslovakia

The late Communist- and early post-Communist–era Czechoslovakia is intriguing to a historian of computing in terms of both computer hardware and software, access to which was severely limited due to economic isolation and inefficient domestic production. The late 1980s saw the last excesses of “normalization” (*normalizace*), a post-1968 political process of mostly nonviolent but systematic suppression of individual and communal liberties. Traveling to countries on the other side of the Iron Curtain was restricted to selected individuals; access to culture and technology from the West was limited, although there were informal systems of distribution of printed media, music, film, and software.

Although microcomputers were being produced domestically, they were not usually sold for home use. They were initially sold only directly to state-owned facilities and educational institutions. Many early users were introduced to computers at schools, computer clubs run by youth organizations, or through parents who worked at research institutions or Information Technology (IT) departments. For

a long time, the only way one could become a home computer owner was to purchase it abroad—which some citizens could do on limited occasions—or in government-controlled stores with imported goods, whose supply of computer hardware was far from sufficient. Another popular way of purchasing computers and electronics was the black market. In fact, both computer clubs and research institutions resorted to purchasing computers in the black market (Libovický 2011).

The first Czechoslovak computer released to the general public was the 1987 **Didaktik Gama**, a clone of the British Sinclair ZX Spectrum 8-bit computer. Over 50,000 of these were sold, but there was still a significant shortage of supply (Meca 1989). Computer games and home computing were therefore relatively niche hobbies. In 1989, only 1.8 percent Czech households owned a computer (Czech Statistical Office 2010b). The video game console market was virtually nonexistent.

As for software, first mentions of original copies of computer games being sold in the country surfaced only in early 1989, mere months before the Velvet Revolution:

As far as we know, there are no programs for this computer [**Didaktik Gama—J.Š.**] available on the market. Before Christmas, copies of four games (probably sales items) for the ZX Spectrum were imported. They missed the Christmas season, however, because their price had not been determined² soon enough. (Bechyně 1989)³

Despite all these limitations, a lively community of home computer users played computer games, including text adventures. Informal systems of distribution were in place, forming a shadow economy as well as a space for free sharing of software (Švelch 2010b). According to Vít Libovický, the author of the *City of Robots*⁴ text adventure, this informal distribution network operated at “the speed of lightning.” It reportedly took about two weeks in the mid-1980s for a piece of software on a cassette tape to reach computer enthusiasts all across the nation (Libovický 2011). Major foreign computer game titles were usually circulating in the distribution networks a few months after release.

But there was another barrier to overcome. Most users could not read English. Many programmers, encouraged by computer clubs, disassembled foreign commercial programs, translated them into Czech or Slovak, and distributed them further. The importance of diacritics in both Czech and Slovak languages⁵ led to the introduction of many competing character-coding systems, required both in text processing and in text-based games.

Games were a popular type of software among the home computer enthusiast community in the mid-1980s. According to a 1986 survey published in the newsletter of a major computer club, Mikrobáze, an average respondent had 22 games, comprising 54 percent of his or her software collection (Mikrobáze 1986a). While action-oriented games could be, at least to a certain extent, enjoyed without understanding the original language,⁶ the same could not be said about text adventures. At this point, the Mikrobáze club made an explicit appeal to its members to translate “dialogue games”:

The most serious problem for us due to the lack of time is the transcription of dialogue games from English into Czech. This is enormously difficult in case of games with compressed text. We welcome (and are ready to remunerate) any fruitful effort that would help include these specific, strategically and logically challenging games into the Mikrobáze collection. (Mikrobáze 1986b, 62)

The Mikrobáze computer club was a part of the “602nd base organization” of *Svazarm*, the Union for Cooperation with the Army. Although officially a paramilitary organization, many youth clubs run by the Svazarm were completely apolitical; one of the founders of Mikrobáze, Ladislav Zajíček, was even active in the cultural dissent (Kofránek 2001). Mikrobáze was a rare example of a large (reportedly having thousands of members), well-organized club that could pay royalties to programmers or translators. Its encouragement of text adventure localization is important evidence of the genre’s attractiveness to

Czechoslovak hobbyists. Around the same time, the first attempts to create original Czechoslovak text adventures were underway.

Overcoming the Obstacles: The Textovka as a Genre

Around 1985, František Fuka, a teenage computer hobbyist connected to the computer club of the 666th organization of *Svazarm* and working under the Fuxoft label, set out to code his own text adventures. After a few rudimentary attempts, he released a short text adventure game *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* in 1985 (see figure 8.1).

Figure 8.1 Here

Fuka admits he had not played many English-language text adventures before creating his own:

My emigree uncle gave me a subscription to the Creative Computing magazine that was mailed to me in the Czech Republic [sic!] and that covered the genre a lot.⁷ So I was reading the reviews of these text adventures and saw ads for them. So I had a pretty solid idea of how they work and what they are, but I didn't in fact play any specific titles. (Šidlichovský 2012)

His first *Indiana Jones* game however followed most of the game-design conventions utilized in Western text adventures. According to histories of text adventures, the genre descends from the game *Adventure* (Crowther and Woods 1976) that originated in the 1970s on mainframe computers in American research labs and universities. The genre experienced its “golden age” in the United States in the early and mid-1980s and has since moved to the fringes of digital entertainment (Aarseth 1997; Montfort 2005). These days, both its creators and scholars usually call it interactive fiction or IF.

In Czechoslovakia, the genre reached its apex around the Velvet Revolution of 1989. By then, the most widely used Czech and Slovak term “*textová hra*” (text game) had been shortened to *textovka* (“textie”). Initially, alternative genre names were also used, such as “dialog games” (as seen above) or “conversational games.” Each of these names highlights a different aspect of the genre.

The dialogue part refers to the typical text adventure's gameplay cycle. First, the program displays a text description of a particular part of the fictional game world. Then, the player is expected to enter a command to control the player character. Commands were originally typed in via a keyboard, most often using the verb+object structure. In some later games, commands were selected from a menu or a set of icons. The inventory of actions tends to follow genre conventions and usually includes verbs such as EXAMINE, PICK UP, USE, and so on. Following the input, the program parses the command, and if it is valid, the data representation of the fictional world in the computer's memory may change accordingly indicating that the simulated world has been acted upon. The player receives feedback and can enter another command. This cycle shares many similarities to interacting with the command prompt of an operating system.

In terms of narrative theory, it is rather difficult to determine who is actually talking to whom in this dialogue, as the narrator's voice is being mixed with the voice of the character and with system messages, creating a "mechanical choir" (Aarseth 1997, 120). While Fuxoft's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* narrates in second person ("You are standing on a clearing near a huge rock massif."), *City of Robots* narrates in first person ("I am in a supermodern city. I can see: A strange lake. An inscription."). However, this is more of a stylistic choice, as it does not affect the way the player interacts.

While the basic controls of text adventures are intuitive and self-explanatory, it is much more difficult to conceptualize what is going on between the player and the character, or how the "conversation" relates to the narrative generated. Czechoslovak developers also struggled to describe these, as the following example from the *City of Robots* manual shows:

During the game, the player must decide for an astronaut, as if he was remotely controlling him. The aim of the game is to overcome all the obstacles, find a spaceship, ready it for launch and take off for Earth. There is an emphasis on player's logical and creative thinking. (Libovický 1989)

Text adventures have been a topic of interest for literary and game scholars alike. Aarseth considers text adventures *cybertexts*, or texts whose traversal requires nontrivial effort and are configurative.

According to him, what is specific for the narrative discourse of text adventures is the *negotiation plane*, in which the player seeks to achieve a desirable unfolding of the events (Aarseth 1997). Viewing text adventures as a genre of computer games, Juul sees them as games of *progression*, as they usually constitute a series of puzzles that need to be solved ("obstacles to be overcome") in order to achieve a goal (Juul 2005). These structural features of the genre relate to the frequent utilization of narrative and gameplay devices such as labyrinths, encrypted messages, and so on. In terms of fictional content, Czechoslovak text adventures drew inspiration from adventure movies (the *Indiana Jones* games), science fiction (*City of Robots*), and fantasy (*Belegost*). Many were lighthearted parodies of existing genres.

In the popular discourse, however, the term "textovky" covered additional computer game subgenres, lumped together based on the mode of presentation. Text-based strategy games, such as *Hamurabi* (*Chammurapi* in Czech and Slovak), were also counted among textovky (Fait 2011). A specific subgenre was that of the *hacking game*.⁸ These were simulations of a computer inside a computer—a player's computer was connected to an imaginary computer network via an imaginary modem and he or she could read messages, dial numbers, hack bank accounts, and so on. Inspired by films like *WarGames* (Badham 1983), one of the first hacking games was *System 15000* (Kristofferson 1984) by the UK developer Lee Kristofferson. Although the genre never gained widespread popularity in the United Kingdom or in the United States, it had a following in Czechoslovakia thanks to the *Sting* series started by František Fuka (see figure 8.2).

Figure 8.2 Here

Hacking games managed to sidestep the technological limitations of the 1980s computers by narrating mainly using e-mail messages and text files downloaded from fictional databases. This ingenious storytelling strategy allows them to narrate without much mediation.⁹ František Fuka explains on the loading screen of *Sting III* as follows:

Play the role of the unemployed programmer Tim Coleman, equipped with a Timex 2097 computer and a RS-2368 modem, and try to rob other robbers with a little help from your friends. (Fuka 1986)

Tim Coleman later became the main character of many more Czechoslovak games; in the game *Fuksoft* (Sybilasoft 1987a), he even met a fictionalized František Fuka, the prolific game designer who had become a character in other authors' games. This phenomenon of intertextuality highlights the social functions of text adventures in Czechoslovakia.

Don't Strand Your Friend: The Culture of Intertextuality

Although there was a vibrant text adventure market in the 1980s United States and the United Kingdom, English-language commercial titles could not attract a sizable following in Czechoslovakia due to the language barrier. The establishment of the domestic textovka as a national version of the international genre was therefore an important step in the history of Czech gaming culture. For some time, text adventures comprised the majority of domestic game production. One of the obvious reasons was the fact that they were easier to make than other genres. As František Fait, the lead programmer of the ...*What the Heck?!* hypertext adventure puts it, "We didn't have time, knowledge or skills for anything more" (Fait 2011). This is not to say that *any* text adventure is easy to make—but on the 8-bit platforms, a passable text adventure were easier to produce in terms of code and assets than a passable action

game. All of the games discussed here were made in a hobbyist environment and only a few could stand comparison with foreign commercial titles in terms of gameplay and narrative complexity.

Between 1985 and 1989, at least 65 original text adventures were produced for the Sinclair ZX Spectrum, along with some translations (Fismol 2010). Most of their authors were hobbyist users of 8-bit computers, some of them were members of computer clubs run by youth organizations or Svazarm, and, as described above, an informal distribution network connected them. Sybilasoft's Michal Hlaváč remembers that as producers of popular text adventures, they were receiving letters from all over the country (personal communication, 2011).

The informality and interconnectedness of the Czechoslovak hobby-computing scene, along with an open-minded approach to copyright of both foreign and domestic software, resulted in intense intertextuality. For example, the *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* game was by no means a licensed product. Instead, it resembles a piece of fan (interactive) fiction. The first two Indiana Jones films were hugely popular in Czechoslovakia thanks to the fact that they were among the few action-adventure US films selected for a (delayed) Czechoslovak theatrical release.¹⁰ Although Fuka's *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* shares the title with Lucas' film, it only vaguely adapts a part of it. It includes exploration of an ancient labyrinth, but eliminates all supporting characters. It is neither an adaptation, nor a parody.

In order to be able to pinpoint different nuances of intertextuality, we can turn to the work of the Slovak literary scholar Anton Popovič, who focused on intertextuality as a textual practice and classified intertextual relationships according to three binary categories: (1) the attitude of the author toward the original text, which can be either *affirmative*, or *controversial*; (2) the strategy of the author, who can make the relationship either *obvious*, or *covert*; and (3) the level of transfer, that is whether the new text relates to the original as *a whole*, or to its particular *elements*. According to this classification, a

parody would be considered an example of intertextuality that is controversial (as it “makes fun” of the original), covert (because, as opposed to travesty, it does not declare its relationship to the original), and relating to the original as a whole (Popovič 1975). The following pages will show that intertextuality in Czech text adventure games spanned all these categories. There were translations and ports of complete games, there was fan fiction borrowing characters from various sources, and there was parody.

Fuka’s *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* displays affirmative, obvious, and partial intertextuality. The developer based its sequel, *Indiana Jones 2* (1987) on what he knew about the story of *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* film (Spielberg 1981), but without having seen the actual film (Šidlichovský 2012). In the third part of his series, Fuka states explicitly,

This game is to a certain extent (but not entirely) inspired by the movie *Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, which might make it into our movie theaters some time this decade. (Fuka 1990)

Fuka was not the only designer who made the Indiana Jones text adventures. *Indiana Jones and the Golden Idol of the Celts* (Madmax 1989) was written by a different author independently of Fuka (although the author greets him on the welcome screen). Indiana Jones was an iconic hero of Czechoslovak computer games, even becoming the player character in the anonymously released, topical text adventure *The Adventures of Indiana Jones in Wenceslas Square in Prague on January 16, 1989* (Znovuzrozeny 1989).¹¹ The game takes place during the Jan Palach Week in January 1989, which ended in violence by the Public Security (*Veřejná bezpečnost*, the police force in the Communist Czechoslovakia) and the People’s Militia against a peaceful gathering commemorating the thirtieth anniversary of the death of Jan Palach.¹² Indy negotiates his way through Wenceslas Square, where the clash took place, and has to find his way back into the United States. This involves violent disposal of the members of law enforcement:

You are standing in front of the Grocery House department store. The entrance into the subway is fortunately clear. An annoying man (probably a communist) is looking out of a balcony and happily watching the good work of the members of the Public Security. You can go down, to the right and inside. You see a cop.

> USE AXE

You drove your axe so deep inside his skull, that it cannot be pulled out. You see a dead cop.

(Znovuzrozeny 1989)

Whereas Fuka's Indiana Jones maintained much of the humor of the original films, this game is a hyperbolic, but rather blunt response to the January 1989 events.¹³ Portraying Indiana Jones as an action hero, it relates to the original franchise in an obvious and affirmative manner. However, the absurd premise (there is no explanation of why Indy went to Prague in the first place) pushes it into the realm of parody. In terms of puzzle design, the game's Wenceslas Square is a battlefield: each place on the map is deadly unless Indy is carrying the right items and uses them immediately (see figure 8.3). In this case, the uncompromising difficulty of the game might be making a point about the actual event.

Figure 8.3 Here

Another example of parody is a text adventure in Slovak titled *Fuksoft* (Sybilasoft 1987a). In this game, the main character, Tim Coleman from Fuka's *Sting III*, is on a mission to rescue his neighbor, František Fuka, from a certain death plotted by Coleman's antagonists, also characters from *Sting III*:

Vengeful Jack Ragger and Jonathan Fox got into F. Fuka's apartment and planted a timed bomb there. I hope you will be a gentleman and won't strand your friend! (Sybilasoft 1987a)

The game takes place in an ordinary apartment building in Czechoslovakia, mixing adventure with real-life settings. The author of this game, Stanislav (or Stanley) Hrda ("a promising programmer of the 21st century") later himself became a character in the *Haunted Castle of Programmers* (Tom&Jerry and

Delphine soft 1988). And in another crossover, *Stinging Indiana Jones* (Kořenský 1987), a fictionalized František Fuka met Indiana Jones.

While Indiana Jones fits the text adventure genre by the virtue of being an adventurer, it is also important to remember that in Czechoslovakia, he was also a symbol of Western popular culture. Another major 1980s hero was Sylvester Stallone's John Rambo,¹⁴ who was—not surprisingly—also featured in a textovka. In *Šatochin* (Sybilasoft 1988), he is not the protagonist, but rather the antagonist, to be eliminated by Major Šatochin of the Red Army. Despite this reversal of the original Rambo narrative, the Slovak game is not a piece of propaganda, but a parody of both American action movies and Soviet war hero narratives. Creators of *Šatochin* also made a rather faithful text adventure adaptation of a Sherlock Holmes short story (Sybilasoft 1987b) and a game based on a popular children's book about anthropomorphic insects (Sybilasoft 1991).

The previous account suggests that these wild outbursts of intertextuality hardly fit any preconceived categories. Text adventures were produced in an uncoordinated and impulsive manner in an interconnected, but decentralized community. This led to confusing title sequel numbering: for instance, there were two different games called *Podraz 4*, one by a Slovak author (Tokar 1987) and another one by a Czech (Rak 1988). Neither of them could be finished without information from Fuka's *Podraz III*, although Fuka himself took no part in their production. At the same time, many hobbyist developers were making conversions and variations of existing games for other home computer platforms.

Intertextuality was one of the ways in which the Czechoslovak gaming community was building its identity using a shared fictional universe, in which Fuka, Coleman, and Indiana Jones could all meet. Extradiegetic elements of the games also served community purposes; the games contained messages

and shout-outs to friends and colleagues, as the example of the scrolling message from the *Indiana Jones 3* (Fuka 1990) intro screen shows:

Of course I want to say hello especially to T.R.C. and Cybexlab . . . And, what's going on?? Radek Solar still hasn't returned the black shopping bag I left at his place on last year's New Year's Eve.
(Fuka 1990)

Such greetings are commonplace on the demo scene and among cracking groups, but rare in commercially distributed games. In Czechoslovakia, these shootouts substituted for the lack of other communication channels. Before 1989, there was only one dedicated computing magazine, which was only published intermittently, and no gaming magazines.

You Can Be a Winner: Text Adventures and Nationwide Contests

Although textovky should not be overlooked in the history of Czech gaming and home computing culture, it is difficult to estimate their impact. According to the data from 1989, there were 1.8 computers per 100 households in 1989. Many more were at educational and other institutions. How many of these were used to play text adventures? Certainly, enough to grant quasi-celebrity status to some of their authors. In the intro text in *Indiana Jones 3*, Fuka addressed the players,

Please, if you get stuck in this game, don't send me letters—I'm already drowning in letters. If you can't help it, call this number [a phone number], but not at 8 in the morning (I like to sleep in!). (Fuka 1990)

The popularity of text adventures is also evidenced by the fact that as soon as the market opened up to private enterprise, companies like Ultrasoft and Proxima started to commercially rerelease popular text adventures (Fismol 2010). The turn of the decade also saw the releases of two ambitious multiplatform projects: *City of Robots* (Libovický 1989) and *What the Heck?!* (Fait, Diviš, Kohout and Vávra 1990). Both of these involved nationwide contests in which a number of players who finished the games first could

win prizes. To grant equal conditions to all players, the games had been encrypted and protected by a password, which was announced by national media outlets on a certain date. After the completion, the game generated codes that winners had to send to the organizers via telegram or mail. Similar contests had taken place in the United Kingdom in the 1980s, but national mainstream media did not support them as they did in Czechoslovakia (Švelch 2010a).

When Zenitcentrum Beroun, a state-owned computer hobbyist center based in the town of Beroun, organized the *City of Robots* contest (in cooperation with other youth organizations), 5,000 prizes were available, at least according to the game's manual (Libovický 1989). Although the clubs themselves, Zenitcentrum included, were usually apolitical, the support of Czechoslovak Television and the daily press was secured thanks to the organizers' connections with the central management of the Socialist Union of Youth (Libovický 2011). However, the organizers did not avoid taking risks. The game's official cover featured a drawing by a well-known comics artist Kája Saudek, an "undesirable" figure banned from appearing in the mainstream media.

Figure 8.4 Here

The game was programmed by Vít Libovický, a computer enthusiast and one of the first professional freelance programmers in Czechoslovakia, and was an adaptation of a text adventure game in English.¹⁵ It featured a rudimentary science fiction story, numerous puzzles, and an advanced parser with a large vocabulary (see figure 8.4). The game, along with the "Cosmic Information Service pilot registration card," cost 99 Czechoslovak crowns, while a movie ticket cost 10 crowns in 1989 (Czech Statistical Office 2010a). The password that was supposed to unlock the game was to be broadcast on September 21, 1989. However, due to a programming error, the password remained in the memory buffer during the production of the master copy, which made the game trivial to hack. The contest had to be canceled, with Libovický explaining the matter in a Czechoslovak Television news broadcast. Instead, winners were drawn in a lottery. Despite the failure of the contest, the game gained

widespread popularity and circulated in pirate copies (Pavero 2010). A sequel based on a short story by Robert Merle was planned, but never materialized (Libovický 2011).

The other game, ...*What the Heck?!*, was developed by a group of students at the Electrotechnical University in Pilsen. They were inspired by *City of Robots*, a game they finished in record time thanks to their hacking skills:

The game [*City of Robots*] was incredibly difficult. We played it in a team. On one computer, one of us was actually physically playing, on another one, somebody was running a disassembler and looking into the data structures. One would say: “I have three buttons in front of me, what should I do?” and we would look into the data to find the solution. (Fait 2011)

Whereas *City of Robots* was a fairly conventional text adventure, the “interactive narrative” (as it was dubbed by the authors themselves) ...*What the Heck?!*, released shortly after the Velvet Revolution, was based on a different concept. Instead of traditional verbal input or menu systems, the game was controlled using a cursor that allowed the player to navigate a piece of text (see figure 8.5). After the player pointed the cursor at a highlighted word and pressed fire, the program could change the state of the game world and display another piece of text. Very similar to hypertext narratives and hypertext in general, the concept of the game was actually inspired by the context-sensitive help system of Turbo Pascal for MS-DOS (Fait 2011).

Figure 8.5 Here

The main character, Bob, is a journalist whose assignment to write an article about Brazilian coffee eventually leads him to uncovering a worldwide conspiracy. The game marries science fiction and satirical comments on the fall of the Soviet bloc. Its first part resembles a hacking game—Bob is sitting at his office and browsing news agency feeds—while the second part takes place outdoors.

In the summer of 1990, the developers announced a contest in which ten fastest players could (and did) win a trip to France. They based their operation on a farm in the Bohemian Forest, coded the game for several platforms, and started distributing it. The Czechoslovak Radio broadcast the password on September 3, 1990. Around 1,600 copies were sold (Kohout 2011) for 106 Czechoslovak crowns each. Although the first contestant sent his winning code in before the broadcast, having managed to hack the code, he was accepted as a winner. According to one of the designers, two or three more out of the ten winners probably hacked the game instead of finishing it legitimately (Kohout 2011). However, in the end, the project covered its costs and even made some money, partly thanks to the support from the mainstream media, which provided free publicity. The success of this game and *City of Robots* illustrates the popularity of the text adventure genre at the turn of the decade.

The story, however, does not stop here. In the early 1990s, a number of companies attempted to publish text adventures commercially. But in their function as a “national genre,” text adventures were soon replaced by graphic (point and click) adventures. Although these were no longer purely text based, they did contain large quantities of text, making foreign titles difficult to play for Czech gamers. It is not surprising that one of the first commercially published Czech games for the IBM PC platform was *The Secret of Donkey Island* (Pterodon Software 1994), a parody of Lucasfilm’s *The Secret of Monkey Island* (Lucasfilm Games 1990), from which it borrowed the protagonist, Guybrush Threepwood, just like Fuka borrowed Indiana Jones.

For over a decade, adventure games remained one of the most popular genres among Czech and Slovak developers. The cop comedy *Polda*¹⁶ (Zima Software 1998), featuring voice acting by popular Czech comedians, became a domestic best seller and spawned four sequels, two of which have been recently ported to iOS devices. The 1990s commercial game development community continued in the tradition of youth clubs and was mostly semiprofessional; both *Donkey Island* and *Polda* were developed by high school and college students. According to Martin Bach, the vice president of the Czech Game

Industry Association, there were up to eight companies developing commercial adventure games throughout the 2000s, most of which have since shut down (personal communication, 2011). Most of their production consisted of budget titles for the domestic or Central and Eastern European market. However, the original mystery adventure *The Black Mirror* (Future Games 2003) was released worldwide. Two larger AAA-level game developers, *Bohemia Interactive* and *Illusion Softworks*, emerged in the early 2000s and launched two original nonadventure franchises, *Operation Flashpoint* and *Mafia*, respectively.

Today, many Czech developers are fully or partially owned by multinationals and produce sequels to existing franchises (i.e., *Silent Hill: Downpour*, developed by Vatra Games). The relatively small studio *Amanita Design* has been producing successful indie adventure/puzzle hybrids such as *Samorost*, *Machinarium* and *Botanicula* since 2003. Inspired by the Czech animation of the 1960s and 1970s, these games feature playful visuals and offbeat, yet family-friendly humor. Unlike their 1980s and 1990s predecessors, they are aimed at the international market. The emergence of new platforms such as smartphones and tablets reinvigorated independent game development, but it can hardly be considered a continuation of the 1980s scene. Most authors of the games discussed here are no longer active in game development, although many of them still work in IT-related jobs.

Conclusions

The aim of this chapter was to demonstrate the interplay of the foreign and the domestic in the Czechoslovak gaming culture using the example of the *textovka*—a genre that represented the first wave of domestic computer game production in the late 1980s. Inspired mostly by British titles, it became a distinctly local phenomenon, with its hobbyist background contributing to its irreverent humor and pronounced intertextuality.

This chapter also demonstrated a new direction in computer and video game research. Too often, the historical study of games is limited in scope to canonical, representative, or “quality” texts and treats these texts as autonomous objects that withstood the test of time. However, the games mentioned here are obscure (at least on the international level) and the production quality of their design and writing tends to be low. But the historical investigation of these artifacts can tell us much about specific computing or gaming cultures, about the potential uses and social functions of computer entertainment, and also about the international flows of popular culture content and technical knowledge. There is much more work to be done in this regard, both in the Czechoslovak context and internationally. The adventure has only just begun.

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Sinclair ZX Spectrum: Freeware.

Figure 8.1 The loading screen (*left*) and the opening screen of the first Czechoslovak *Indiana Jones* game (Fuka 1985). Unlike in most of the later text adventures, there were no diacritics. The game screen reads, “You are standing on a clearing near a huge rock massif. There is small opening in the rock at the ground level. Another quite big opening is about 15 meters above you. You can see a letter. You can go east. Command: ?”

Figure 8.2 Hacking games: *System 15000* (Kristofferson 1984) and *Sting III* (Fuka 1986). *Sting III* was the first game in the Czechoslovak series, intended as a sequel to the films *Sting* (Roy Hill 1973) and *Sting II* (Kagan 1983).

Figure 8.3 Indiana Jones as a protagonist of intertextuality in Czechoslovak text adventures. The menu-driven *Indiana Jones 2* (Fuka 1987) on the left: “You woke up in a small two-engine airplane gliding above the Egyptian desert. It is beautifully peaceful here, because the engines are still and there is no living soul here other than you (An interesting situation, isn’t it?) / You see: A whip. Empty seats.” On the right, *The Adventures of Indiana Jones in Wenceslas Square in Prague on January 16, 1989* (Znovuzrozeny 1989): “O.K. You are standing at an unobstructed entrance into the subway. As soon as you showed up, an officer came to you and searched you. Having found nothing, he called on his ‘comrades’ and they beat you senseless. As they were running away to deal with some woman with a baby carriage, one of them lost a machete. You crawled for it and committed hara-kiri. INDIANA JONES IS DEAD [scroll].”

Figure 8.4 The title screen and an in-game screen of *City of Robots* (Libovický 1989). The title screen reads, “<< City of Robots >> A science fiction computer game. Produced by Zenitcentrum to celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Pionýr Organization of the Socialist Union of Youth. (Press a key).” The *Pionýr* organization was an organization for children and youth controlled by the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. The in-game screen: “I am on a metal-plated street. I see: A round building. A thin beam of light. A steel door. Robot parts. Exits: East. West.”

Figure 8.5 The title screen and an in-game screenshot of *...What the Heck?!* The illustration was drawn by Vladimír Jiránek, a prominent political cartoonist of the transformation era. The in-game screen reads: “There is a terminal on your desk, that connects you to the newest agency news reports and the paper’s archive. The surroundings of the terminal are decorated with messages” (Fait, Diviš, Kohout and Vávra 1990).

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¹ Many Czechoslovak games were ported to or originated on other platforms, such as Sharp MZ-800, Atari 8-bit, or Commodore 64.

² In the planned economy of communist Czechoslovakia, prices were set centrally.

³ All quotations from Czech or Slovak sources were translated by the author.

⁴ For the sake of readability, I will refer to individual titles using their English translations. The full list of cited games with their original titles is available in the references section.

⁵ The two languages are to a large extent mutually intelligible.

⁶ Most games that circulated in the country were in English, some in Spanish, German, or French.

⁷ Fuka, whose uncle left Czechoslovakia for the United States, was in fact of the lucky few who owned copies of foreign computing magazines.

⁸ This is a retrospective label not in use in the 1980s.

⁹ A recent example of a hacking game is Christine Love's acclaimed indie title *Digital: A Love Story* (Love 2010).

¹⁰ The releases in Czechoslovakia were delayed by a few years. *Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark* (Spielberg 1981) saw a 1985 release, while *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* (Spielberg 1984) made it into Czechoslovak theatres in August 1989 (Havel 2008).

¹¹ I was not able to track down the author of this game. There is also no reliable information about its release date. It was probably an immediate response to the events of the Palach Week, but it could have also been released after that November's Velvet Revolution.

¹² Palach was a student who committed suicide by self-immolation in 1969 as a protest against the Soviet occupation of Czechoslovakia and the post-1968 developments.

¹³ This game was not the only text adventure attacking the Communist regime. The year 1988 saw the release of a less confrontational and more satirical game *Perestroika* (UV Soft 1988).

¹⁴ Unlike *Indiana Jones*, the *Rambo* films were not shown in Czechoslovak theatres pre-Velvet Revolution (Havel 2008).

¹⁵ According to Libovický, it was a game for the VideoGenie computer, but he does not remember its title. I have not been able to recover the title.

¹⁶ In Czech, "polda" is a colloquial version of the expression "police officer."