The Galleon (A gálya)

This text adventure game emerging on the Hungarian *Interactive Fiction* scene in 1993 – still providing an unparalleled technical achievement in many respects since then – may be considered a real milestone. Not much later, from beginning of '94, *Com-Ware Kft.* (or *CoV* – the first and greatest Hungarian gaming journal, and its publisher) released and started spreading it, although a few preview/demo versions had already been known to publicity since '91 by some other press organs (e. g. *Guru* magazine, and *576 KByte*, exactly the very first its *Exclusive* column edited by Zoltan Aprili (Zolee), who broadcasted about the development in a few sentences, and the first demo). Originally *576 KByte* would have also been meant to be its publisher, but unfortunately, we could not come to an agreement in time.

If we had agreed with 576, then probably it would have been purchased by a relatively larger customer base across a wider publicity campaign (being counted in those times' circumstances it means a retailing number measurable in some order of magnitude of thousands instead of hundreds…), however, it would have looked differently a bit, and we would remember it differently, too… I would definitely miss those evocative *Kis Gettó*™ illustrations on the covering and in the user manual. (The former is the opening picture of the website now.) Those out-of-date economic values are already nearly indifferent these days, but the material remains really not. (And the inner content matters far much more!)

That transitionary interval of '93-'94 is very interesting to the Hungarian programmer and gaming subculture in several respects: a „still" and an „already" meets there. The 8-bit machines *still* remained considerably popular those days, and actively used for programming

and playing for many years (the old established firm Commodore declared bankruptcy in 1994, and just ceased to product C64 machines any more… then so ceased the mainstream game development onto that; but in less official circles remained a pretty much liked one); and, at once, it was *already* the time for another medium to start: the legal and real computer program releasing and spreading regularized by law. (In Hungarian copyright, there appeared the first paragraphs for software near '93, and also the first modifications made to them in '94 that gave the word of law some weight… A remarkable, great scandal of the year was BSA's and police's infamous marching out to the PeCsa flea-market in Budapest, and arresting many publicly warezing people, confiscating twenty thousand floppy disks and lots of computers in a big razzia, see a contemporary article in *CoV 48* as „*Woe to the Software Pirates!*" there.)

Previously – beside *warez* vaunting in full bloom – the mere conception of „software releasing" might be existing formally, only at the *2C* shop of *Novotrade Rt.* in Budapest (but the Novotrade company had not either earned a living on that, but rather developed for foreign – tipically Western European – software-houses instead; that store selling those few home produces rather only yawned as a mute shop-window), or, again, in abandoned columns of newspaper advertisements; a dead-and-alive stagnant water of a settling decade broke then. The above-mentioned 576 KByte was one of those first accepting this: not only by starting their first new shop in Budapest, but also by releasing the relatively „first" Hungarian game from then: that was *A kastély* (*The Castle*) of Mantis Software (they chose this instead of *The Galleon*). Albeit CoV had outpaced them by months with *Wasted Time* (introduced at Computer Christmas of '93 fully boxed-in etc.), then following them not too late by *Newcomer* from fantasy book-publisher Valhalla Páholy; and between them *The Galleon*. (All of these games appeared in a short time interval, a little surprisingly, rivalling.)

Exactly these times were the most creative and productive years of my own programming carreer (approximately the preceding and the following two years), and I may regard it as my good fortune especially to catch this certain period – just also because at one go another mentality called the „heroic age" ended then (not only for us – it is a world phenomenon from now on) which meant that only one person by oneself could be able to entirely develop a professional game program, as well as being considered as creative and arctistical activity, too. (In parallel with this, neither the whole adventure game genre itself had got too much time left. All of this might already be seen and known then, too.)

Therefore I went at the work full blast: *The Galleon (A gálya)* truly and actually reflects this. (So reflects the other gem of our age, *Newcomer* – in another genre.) It had been being made for more than two years, and shows several such marks that can be matched by only a very few pairs on even placing on a world scale. In respect of style and manner, I can name the well-known *Magnetic Scrolls*, *Level 9* and *Melbourne House* games as my primary sources: all of these had scarcely any local equivalents in our parts before. In the beginning, namely, it seemed a *very* hard task to write an intelligent parser for the Hungarian language; and it even seems by now that nobody else has really dared to go at it… (Though there would have been a claim to this: it can be measured by the partial success of some much more simple Hungarian text adventure games in the preceding years.) Moreover, I wrote the entire game not only in Hungarian, but also in English, in parallel. (And, unfortunately, in vain; we did fail in selling it abroad.)

It is a quite peculiar and fairly individual characteristic for a text adventure game, that it must be played with *two* characters simultaneously. (By the story: these two are a barbarian called Tongrak and a magician called Raernon, who are brothers on an island.) You can always be switching between them; moreover, not only can, but also have to: in a major share of your commissions, as a matter of fact, you will need for both; and both have got some different skills, too. The plot, besides, all along is satiric, absurd, strongly *non-linear* in pace, powerfully layered, and a little incalculable; and so thus its practical length is – as being an IF

and also an eight-bit – nearly lunatic and megalomaniac of size. (When, in the very final phase of testing, I myself played along the whole game from the beginning to the end, with all considered hypothetical possibilities to be done or tried at least, it took me for not less than an entire day, namely close to 24 hours without stopping for a break; although a mere, naked, quicker walk-through might be done in less than half of that.)

Since from the first moment I had already decided that to break the course of playing by some continuous disk changing or anything else was not allowed (and to conquer more than one whole floppy disk at its both sides would have already been not too recommended, either, just because of the possible surplus costs of the latter manufacturing), practically – and literally – I exploited all that around 230kB storage place I reached (the 64kB operative memory, plus the 166kB background capacity of the B-side). The 64kB physical RAM is approximately divided apart like that about a 40kB quantity of compiled Assembly code perfectly optimized as being resident (that is supplemented by another 10-20kB being loaded from the disk in parts right before the execution); nearly 10kB uninflected base-dictionary (*1400 words!*); and the rest containing data-tables and some actual datas of the texts and graphics etc. This is completed by nearly 110-120kB of text on disk (that does not contain the comprehensive opening and closing episodes on the A-side yet; also adding them it is more than 140kB text sum total); and the remaining free space could somehow then hold some two dozens of pictures, too. (As a final result, the B-side of the floppy disk just became full to overflowing. Therefore you still actually had to swap it for saving a game state anyway.) Not even that fastloader subroutine of few kB size I used to load the main program fit into the final memory, thus the remainder of the game itself must be loaded without it. The scene built-up contains more than 250 places, with close to 100 living characters and 140 mobile objects. The course of progressing events inside is very meandering, intricated, furthermore rendered more difficult by annoyingly returning and repeating elements. (Darkness and lighting, money-using, and also being economical with them, mazes and labyrinths, doors, trap-doors continuously re-closing and re-opening… etc.)

If it was still not enough for salvation, or damnation (please delete what is not applicable), I have subsequently overloaded this all result with maybe the most gigantic-sized game-description (a verbose and detailed, printed, literal and full solution with walk-through) in the Hungarian (if only in that…?) history of gaming journalism. Since „of course" nobody was able to complete my game without my help, that's why it fell on me to compose the solution for the *'95 CoV Yearbook*. When I solemnly appeared at the editorial office with the ready material, it created a not little general uproar, and finally had to be significantly reduced (moreover omitting few parts), and after all it was still nearly thirty pages long… A recently half-reconstruated full version is of 37 pages (*see the PDF – but only in Hungarian, sorry*), with a character number calculated similar to those in the game itself.

The article on the internet: **http://istennyila.hu/eng/game/0005/0000.htm**

Games: **http://istennyila.hu/eng/game/**

The Galleon (A gálya): **http://istennyila.hu/galya/**

The author's website: **http://istennyila.hu/**

Robert Olessak (2011)