

Project Syzygy Reference

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Chapter 1. Introduction

\$Id: intro.xml,v 1.11 2004/04/01 19:04:33 enigma Exp \$

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Table 1.1.



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Introduction

This is my attempt at creating a guide for Project Syzygy. According to a number of auto response emails, it will begin in late 2004--but there was a brief, but exciting, pregame in March 2004 that gathered interest. Project Syzygy is an Alternate Reality Game [1], or ARG. We really do not know much more about it than that.

At present, they are looking to hire people to help out:

Remember the Cloudmakers [2]? That aggregation of thousands of people playing an incredibly immersive game? If you played, you'll remember. It's likely that you'll never be able to forget. Since then, the scene's been, well, not exactly quiet, but not setting the world on fire, either. I got depressed for a while at the state of massively multi-player immersive gaming. That amazing new genre was starting to look as if it had prematurely died.

Now, though, I'm excited and for good reason: Project Syzygy [3] is launching, and we're hiring.

—Dan Hon (ref [4])

ARG Background

ARG Terminology

The Alternate Reality Gaming world has invented a number of new terms as well as given new meaning to existing words and phrases. Some of them may seem a little odd or technical at first, but most people pick up on them fairly quickly.

Glossary

Alternate Reality Gaming

A form of interactive fiction that immerses the player in the story. Typically the plot and characters unfold through viewing or interacting with a variety of media including, but not limited to: websites, email, online chat, text messaging, phone calls, faxes, "snail mail," newspapers, and real life (for instance, a CD hidden in a library book).

ARG

See Also Alternate Reality Gaming.

Behind the Curtain

[1] <http://unfiction.com/history/>

[2] <http://cloudmakers.org/>

[3] <http://projectsyzygy.com/>

[4] http://danhon.com/ec/mtarchives/2004/02/27/project_syzygy/index.shtml

Anything that is not technically part of the game, that you should not be allowed to see. For instance, in an ARG with unknown Puppet Masters, discovering the identity of the PMs is considered peeking behind the curtain--and rather inappropriate. Taken from The Wizard of Oz: "pay no attention to the man behind the curtain."

Brute Force

Applying massive amounts of computing power to solve something. For instance: using a computer program to try every possible combination of letters and numbers to discover a password. Generally, any solution involving brute force is inelegant and frowned upon, unless brute forcing can be done in such a way as to cause no adverse side effects for players or Puppet Masters. ...and even then, it is debatable whether brute forcing is permitted.

Internet Relay Chat

A system of online, live, text chatting (similar to an AOL chat room or Yahoo group chat) often employed as a communications tool while solving puzzles. It is also used as an online "hangout" and place to waste time when there are no immediate puzzles. More information, as well as a web-browser based Java client is available at Unfiction [5].

IRC

See Also Internet Relay Chat.

PM

Either Puppet Master or Private Message, depending on the context. See Also Puppet Master, Private Message.

Private Message

A way of communicating privately to another player. This often implies using the private message functionality of a phpBB message board (such as can be found on the Unforums [6]), but could also be extended to mean email.

Puppet Master

The people running the game. They may or may not be known ahead of time.

Steganography

Taken from a SecurityFocus article: (ref [7])

While we are discussing it in terms of computer security, steganography is really nothing new, as it has been around since the times of ancient Rome. For example, in ancient Rome and Greece, text was traditionally written on wax that was poured on top of stone tablets. If the sender of the information wanted to obscure the message - for purposes of military intelligence, for instance - they would use steganography: the wax would be scraped off and the message would be inscribed or written directly on the tablet, wax would then be poured on top of the message, thereby obscuring not just its meaning but its very existence.

According to Dictionary.com, steganography (also known as "steg" or "stego") is "the art of writing in cipher, or in characters, which are not intelligible except to persons who have the key; cryptography." In computer terms, steganography has evolved into the practice of hiding a message within a larger one in such a way that others cannot discern the presence or contents of the hidden message. In contemporary terms, steganography has evolved into a digital strategy of hiding a file in some form of mul-

[6] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/privmsg.php?folder=inbox>

[7] <http://www.securityfocus.com/infocus/1684>

timedia, such as an image, an audio file (like a .wav or mp3) or even a video file.

Basically, it lets you hide a message inside of another file--a picture file, a sound file, a text file, etc. Programs to extract these secret messages include Stegdetect [8] and MP3stego [9].

Rabbit Hole

The site, sites, or other communication mechanism that starts a given ARG. In the case of Project Syzygy, this would be the project website as well as the newspaper and magazine advertisements.

The Do's and Don'ts of ARGdom

There are very strict rules governing ARG playing. Okay, so...no--the rules are not terribly strict. That is sort of the point. Participating in an ARG is not like playing chess, with strict bounds defining the move of each piece and steadfast logic for determining who won and who lost. The rules for ARGs are only barely written down and codified. They are more like "unwritten laws" or a gentlemen's agreement. Think of the following list as a set of guidelines. ARGs are designed to change the way you think--and who knows? Maybe one time, that might involve bending a rule.

Brute Forcing

Brute forcing an online resource, such as a web server, eats up bandwidth and CPU cycles. This can leave the people running the server (in our case, the Puppet Masters) with excessive bandwidth charges. It also means that other players trying to access the machine are getting a slow response because of the CPU utilization. This is a bad situation for everyone involved and should be avoided at all costs. There is always a more elegant and less intrusive way of solving something than this kind of brute force.

On the other hand, brute forcing an offline resource, such as the MD5 hashes found in Marketing Week, may be the only way to solve a puzzle. In this case, you will need to use your own judgement. If you think of a puzzle as a lock, you will earn much more praise and respect for discovering a cunning and ingenious method of picking the lock, than you would for smashing it with a sledgehammer.

Common Sense

Always use your common sense. If you are unsure whether an action is potentially good or bad, stop and think. How is it going to effect the game? The other players? The PMs? If you are still struggling with it, try dropping a note in the forums (make it anonymous, if you need to). There are plenty of friendly people online who are looking for something to discuss between puzzles. ::grin::

Decompiling

Often times, sites include embedded Flash or Java applets. Quite a few tools exist out there to decompile these mini-programs, so you can see the original source code. The security community finds this useful, as it can show flaws in an application. The ARG community might also find this useful, as sometimes there is data hidden in the Flash files that leads to more game knowledge.

The question arises: is this a proper thing to do in an ARG? Often times, poorly designed sites leave things in the flash that the original

[9] <http://www.petitcolas.net/fabien/steganography/mp3stego/>

designers did not want you to know. There are many people who are unaware of the fact that this data can be reversed out of Flash. The old-school ARG players will say that it is the same as cheating, and is therefore off-limits. Others say that if it runs on their computer, they should be able to see what it is doing--either by decompiling a program or watching network packets as they flow into and out of the computer. ARG player Diandra notes: "The general etiquette regarding Flash file decompiling has been that the PMs can't stop you from doing it. However, it's considered bad form to post solutions derived purely by decompilation of Flash files to any ARG forum."

Currently, there is no solid answer to this question. It is still being debated. Be warned, though, that in the US it is technically illegal to decompile a program, except under very specific circumstances, because of the DMCA. Other countries have DMCA-like legislation. My personal opinion is that the web follows standard client/server architecture. If secret data needs to be calculated, it should be done server-side, where the client cannot see it. If Flash and Java are utilized to do something like check a password, it should be sent to the server (possibly hashed to protect from eavesdropping) and tested server-side, instead of a "IF \$password = "secret" THEN GOTO 100" sort of scheme. Be advised, the previous statement is this author's *opinion*. The jury is still out as to whether this stuff is acceptable ARG practice and generally gets decided upon by the community on a case-by-case basis.

Fake Sites

Do not put up a fake website that claims to be part of the game. Similarly, do not pretend to be an in-game character in chat, on Blog posts, by forging email headers, or by any other mechanism. Unraveling the plot and puzzle solutions can be difficult as it is, without mean-spirited people inserting a bunch of intentional red herrings.

A fan site, on the other hand, may just add to the flavor and immersive quality of the game. If you want to start up a fan site, please try to be a responsible person and think about its impact on the in-game sites.

Hacking

If some aspect of the ARG requires hacking to solve, it will be obvious. Don't hack a server just because you can. Breaking in to an ARG's computer system just to see what is there can be similar to skipping to the last page of a murder mystery. Sure, you have all the answers, but you end up losing the story and the interactive experience.

Again, if hacking is required, it will be obvious from the clues and plot. Also, nearly every ARG puzzle instance that has required hacking has been a "custom web page" system and not an "off the shelf" piece of software. In general, SquirrelMail, telnet, FTP, secure shell, and a number of other services come pre-installed on servers and allow the Puppet Masters and hosting administrators to update the websites and monitor system status. These are rarely, if ever, the intended target of hacking. Usually, ARG hacking is simply guessing passwords on a custom web login form.

See: Legality

Information Gathering

A great many informational tools are available on the internet that will tell you about a domain name. Generally, a simple DNS lookup is considered acceptable. Usually, it will just give some useless information about who registered the domain name. Occasionally, it a clue will exist in the DNS data. On the other hand, using a reverse-DNS tool to enumerate all of the domain names attached to a specific webserver is frowned upon. Often, this will show domain names that were registered for the game, but are not yet available for plot reasons. This is akin to peeking ahead a few chapters in a mystery novel. It does not necessarily tell you whodunnit, but it might prematurely reveal a piece of the plot that would have been more fun to discover through an engaging story.

Legality

Are you considering taking some action? Is it *illegal* in your jurisdiction or that of the ARG or its servers? Then don't do it. Period. ARGs are not here to get you in trouble or make you break the law. If you feel you have to do something illegal, I would suggest finding another pastime.

See: Hacking

Privacy

Keep private information private. If the Puppet Masters of a particular ARG do not wish to be known, but you happen to accidentally discover their identity, keep that information "behind the curtain." Do not blab about it to anyone and everyone. If you really must tell someone, perhaps you should send a little note to the PMs explaining how you obtained this supposedly private knowledge. At the very least, it will help them plug the security or information leak so that more people do not find out. Do not simply think about yourself and how "cool" you will look announcing the identity of the PMs. Think about the other players and how knowing that information may just break the reality of their ARG experience. Besides, they think you are to blame for messing up that experience, they are less likely to think of you as "cool" and more likely to think of you as "that lamer who ruined the game."

Technology

This guide originally exists as a collection of XML files. These files conform to the DocBook specification [10], and allow dynamic generation of a variety of output formats, including: a single monolithic web page, a collection of smaller web pages, PDF files, etc. If you are at all interested in the XML source of this guide, feel free to check out the following files:

- The "wrapper" XML document [11]
- This introduction [12]
- Reference [13]

[10] <http://www.oasis-open.org/docbook/>
[11] [index.xml](#)
[12] [intro.xml](#)
[13] [reference.xml](#)
[14] [pregame.xml](#)

- Notes [15]
- Fine Print [16]

The specific transform used for the monolithic web page is the Docbook-XSL [17] package, with the specific transformation "heavy-lifting" via the **xsltproc** command (part of the libxslt [18] package).

The specific transform used for the multiple web pages is the same as above, only using the **html/chunk.xsl** template. Previously, it was DSSSL and OpenJade, but that ended up being too problematic for certain XML elements.

The specific transform used for the PDF document was the above-mentioned XSL translator combined with the Apache FOP [19] project.

Update History

2004-04-01	Re-released under the Creative Commons license. Fixup of decompilation section (thanks, Diandra!). Added "padding" text to add a little more space between the "Background" header and the "Glossary" header.
2004-03-31	Added ARG background information. Fixed outdated XSL/DSSSL information in the Technology section.
2004-03-16	Marketing Week solve and minor spelling/grammar issues.
2004-03-15	Scan of Guardian ad, scan of Marketing Week ad, update to Guardian and Marketing Week information.
2004-03-14	Added Pareidolia section, fixed line wrapping issues, added unique IDs to heading nodes.
2004-03-13	Updated styles, added IRC conversation, changed image filenames to include date.
previous to 2004-03-13	Too many little things to mention, going back to the inception of this document.

Questions, Comments, Corrections, Updates?

Please send questions, comments, corrections, and updates to <enigma@netninja.com>. If you found this guide offline or mirrored elsewhere, you can always find the latest version at <http://syzygy.netninja.com>.

[15] notes.xml

[16] fineprint.xml

[17] http://sourceforge.net/project/showfiles.php?group_id=21935&package_id=16608

[18] <http://xmlsoft.org/XSLT/>

[19] <http://xml.apache.org/fop/index.html>

Chapter 2. Reference

\$Id: reference.xml,v 1.8 2004/03/16 18:17:17 enigma Exp \$

Links

Meta-Links

- [Unfiction's Project Syzygy thread](#) [1]
- [This guide](#) [2]
- [Syzygy Yahoo Group](#) [3]

Known In-Game Links

- [Project Syzygy](#) [4]
[Browsable images](#) [5]
[Contains alison.rtf](#) [6]

Questionable Links

- [Predicaments](#) [7] - Mentioned in the Project Syzygy site's source
[Browsable images](#) [8]
[Control files for Macromedia Fireworks?](#) [9]
Anyway, plenty of fun files and subfolders in the browsable images directory
- [Perplexcity](#) [10] - Mentioned in some of the Fireworks metadata files
- [Perplex-city](#) [11] - Same as above?
- [Actionsmith](#) [12] - ??? Mentioned here [13]

[1] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewforum.php?f=73>

[2] <http://syzygy.netninja.com>

[3] <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/projectsyzygy/>

[4] <http://www.projectszygy.com/>

[5] <http://www.projectszygy.com/images/>

[6] http://www.projectszygy.com/images/_/

[7] <http://www.pedicaments.com/>

[8] <http://www.pedicaments.com/images/>

[9] http://www.pedicaments.com/images/_notes/

[10] <http://www.perplexcity.net/>

[11] <http://www.perplex-city.net/>

[12] <http://www.actonsmith.com/actonsmith.com/>

[13] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35817#35817>

Definitions

syzygy [14] - The straight-line configuration between three celestial bodies. (How is this pronounced? [15])

pareidolia [16] - a type of illusion or misperception involving a vague or obscure stimulus being perceived as something clear and distinct.

Tools

- Unfiction's list of online tools [17]
- BufferOverrun's crypto/encoding tools [18]

[14] <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=syzygy>

[15] <images/syzygy01.wav>

[16] <http://skepdic.com/pareidol.html>

[17] <http://unfiction.com/resource/otools.html>

[18] <http://bufferoverrun.org/tools.html>

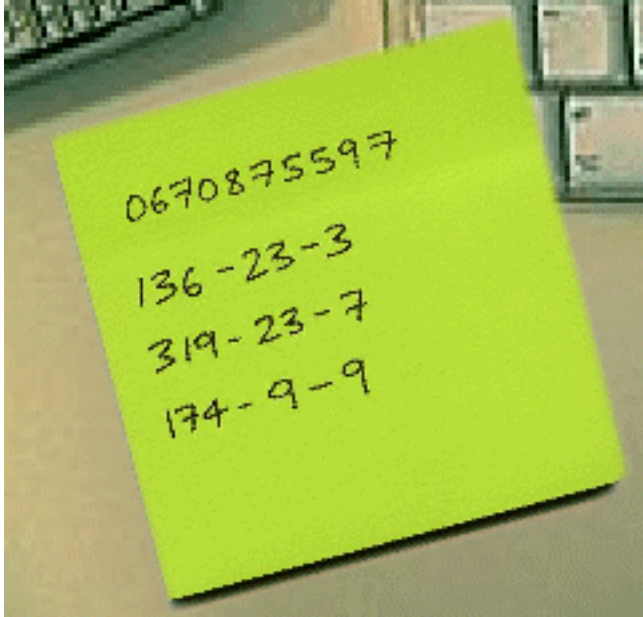
Chapter 3. Prologue

\$Id: pregame.xml,v 1.22 2004/04/01 00:22:50 enigma Exp \$

Project Syzygy Site

Images

Zoom in on the Post-It note: (ref [1])



ISBN and page-line-word references: "change the world" (ref [2])



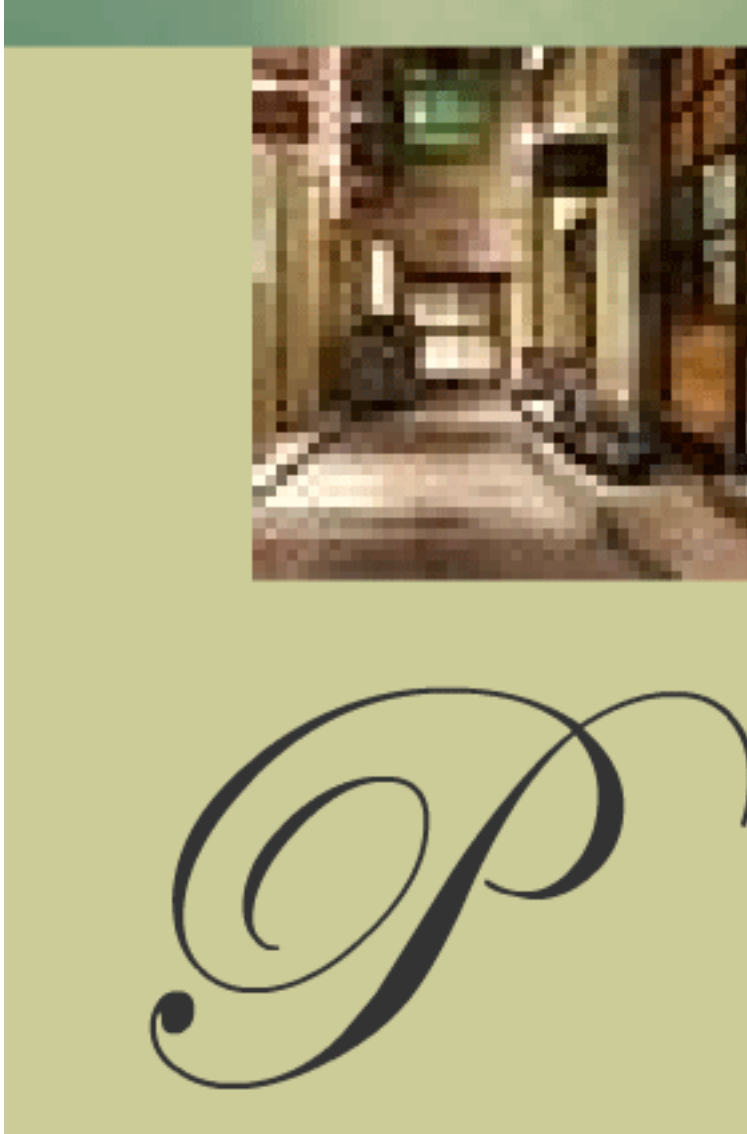
"I can see you" (ref [3])

Anyone want to speculate what is in the lower-right corner?

[1] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35803#35803>

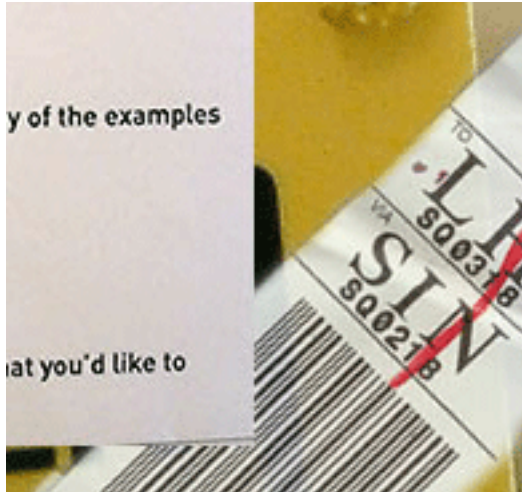
[2] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35814#35814>

[3] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35805#35805>



Luggage tag with bar code...from Singapore to Heathrow (ref [4])

[4] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35863#35863>



The bar code ends up being 61149, for what it's worth. (ref [5])



Metadata

In the page metadata (ref [6]):

In the source code:

```
<meta name="keywords" content="TE OE K MQD J JE IFUDT JXU  
HUIJ EV OE KH BY VU IU BBDW IKWQ HUT M QJUH EH TE OEK  
MQDJ JE">
```

ROT-11 gives:

```
DO YO U WAN T TO SPEND THE REST OF YO UR LI FE SE LLING  
SUGA RED W ATER OR DO YOU WANT TO
```

A famous quote from Steve Jobs to John Sculley in 1984, when Jobs was trying to lure Sculley away from Pepsi and bring him to Apple. The remainder of the line is:

```
CHANGE THE WORLD
```

Directory Browsing

http://www.projectszygy.com/images/_/ offers something interesting: alison.rtf. (ref [8]) This is a Rich Text [9] file--basically a simplistic word processing format that is compatible across many editing pro-

[5] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36164#36164>

[6] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35810#35810>

[8] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35890#35890>

grams and operating systems. While it may look like garbage, detailed analysis shows that the contents are intentional. (ref [10]) The content is **2oc4o:ptxt**. It was slightly different previously (**2oc3o:ptxt**), but it has been confirmed that the previous value was a mistake. (See Pregame IRC section) After the direction/redirection hints, several people (AnthraX101, SpaceBass, etc) guessed that this might be a parameter for tinyurl.com [11]. It did end up redirecting to <http://www.cs.utsa.edu/~wagner/laws/Abeale.html>, but this seemed to be an obviously out-of-game page about Beale ciphers. We did not have any data that looked like it was encrypted, so figured it was an incorrect dead-end.

On 2004-03-15, the contents of alison.rtf changed yet again:

```
'i7 re5t6urn8e1ld, a2nd saw10 unde12r3 the sun, that the race is not to
the swift,
nor the battle to the strong9, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet
riches
to mlen of understanding, nor yet favour to men of sk4l3ill; but time
and chance
happeneth to them all.

page 60'.
```

It was explained in chat that we were supposed to be looking at the sample cipher on that page - specifically the plaintext used (PTXT! Get it?):

```
ireturnedandsawunderthesunthattheraceisnottototheswiftnor
thebattletothestrongneitheryetbreadtothewisenoryetrichest
omenofunderstandingnoryetfavourtomenofskillbutttimeand
chancehappenethtothemall
```

This appears to be Hebrew Ecclesiastes 9:11. (ref [13]) Also, when you read the letters closest to the numbers in numerical order, you get 'marketing week', which is a weekly UK publication [14]. (ref [15])

Periodicals

Guardian

The UK paper The Guardian, on Monday 2004-03-15 had a job advertisement that states: (ref [16])

```
"EVER SEEN 'THE GAME' STARRING MICHEAL DOUGLAS"

CICV EFZJEB CD QE00E B J YCTEB D OTC MSVOZEB TCUAEB J MVZRO
Z GLVUD-MTZBJEB J, JULYC-QAZBBEB J EFFCVQEIC OVCZQSVC TSBO?
```

[9] <http://latex2rtf.sourceforge.net/rtfspec.html>
[10] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=35907#35907>
[11] <http://tinyurl.com>
[13] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36189#36189>
[14] <http://www.mad.co.uk/publication/mw/>
[15] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36188#36188>
[16] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36199#36199>

GC'VC MVCZOEBJ Z MLFAUCOCUK BCG OKAC LR JZFC. KLS AUZK
CICVKGTCVC. MUSCQ QSVVLSBD KLS EB BCGQAZACVQ, FZJZXEBQ,
REUFQ, YLLHQ, IEDCL JZFCQ, IEZ OWO ZBD ZMVLQQ Z QAVZGUEBJ
FZXC LR GCYQEOCQ. GTLF MZB KLS OVSQO? GTCVC DLCQ RZBOZQK
CBD ZBD VCZUEOK YCJEB?

KLS'IC AZQQCD OTC REVQO QOZJC. BLG RLUULG OTC GTEOC
VZYYEO:

GGG.AVLPCMOQKXKJK.MLF

Then in mirror was:

QCC FZVHCOEBJ GCCH AZJC 11/03/04.

This is a simple substitution cipher that translates to:

Ever imagined sitting behind the curtain helping craft
a world changing, globe spanning immersive treasure hunt?

We're creating a completely new type of game you play
everywhere clues-surround you in newspapers, magazines,
films, books video games via txt and across a spanning
maze of websites. Whom can you trust? Where does fantasy
end and reality begin?

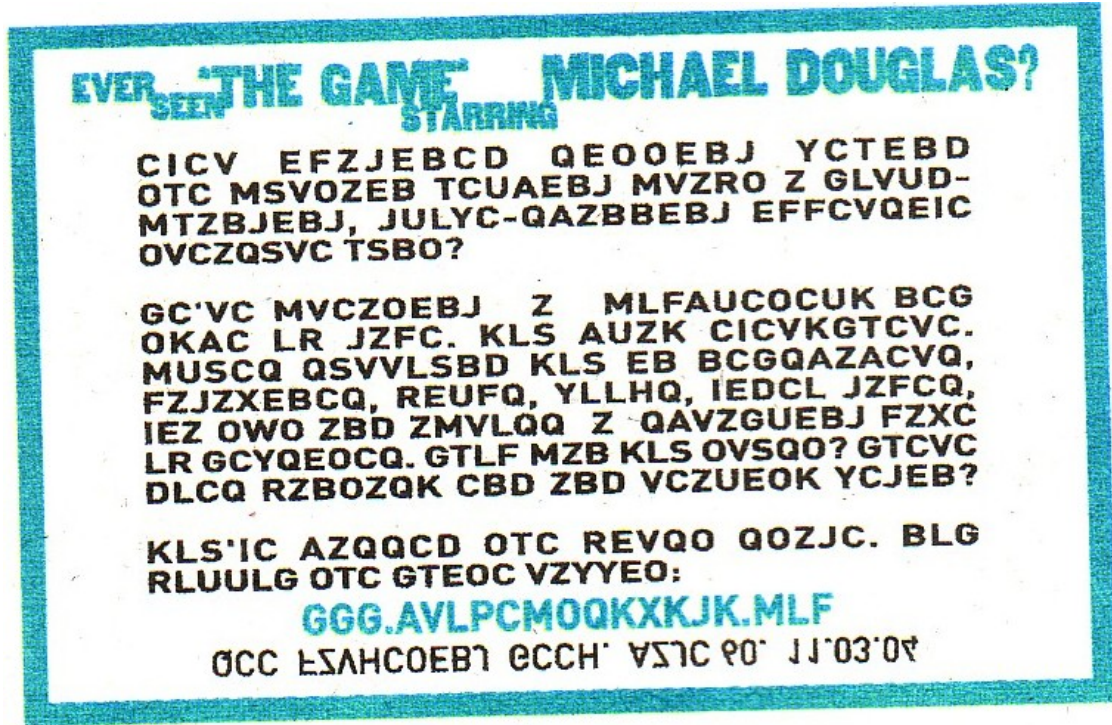
You've passed the first test stage now follow the
white rabbit.

www.projectszygy.com

see marketing week page 60 11/03/04.

Here is a scan of the original: (ref [17])

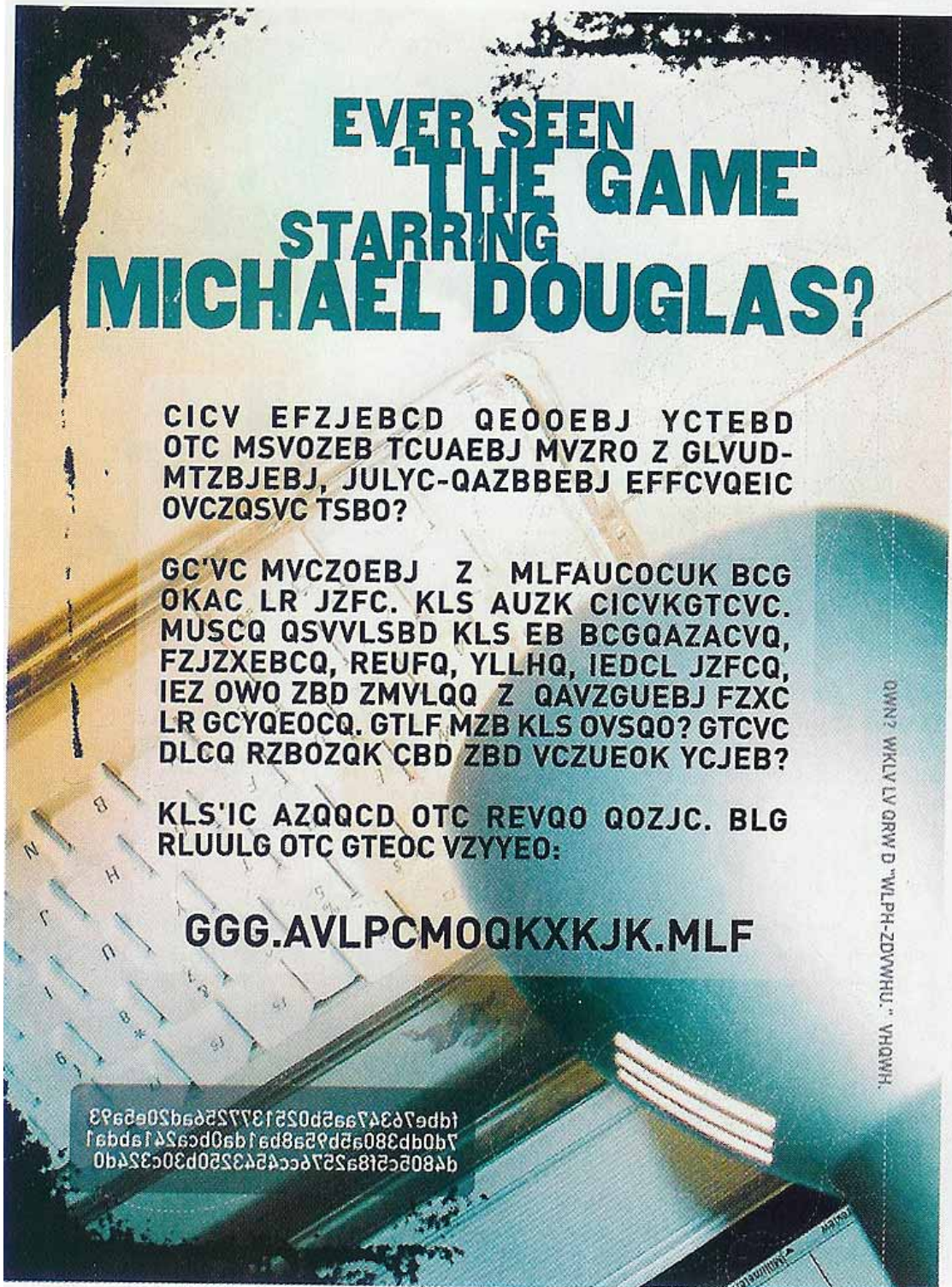
[17] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36203#36203>



Marketing Week

Both alison.rtf and The Guardian ad led us to Marketing Week, in which we find: (ref [18])

[18] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36208&sid=244285bc78f8b8930a05cca0b293e67a#36208>



**EVER SEEN
"THE GAME"
STARRING
MICHAEL DOUGLAS?**

CICV EFZJEB CD QEOOEBJ YCTEBD
OTC MSVOZEB TCUAEBJ MVZRO Z GLVUD-
MTZBJE BJ, JULYC-QAZBBE BJ EFFCVQEIC
OVCZQSVC TSBO?

GC'VC MVCZOEBJ Z MLFAUCOCUK BCG
OKAC LR JZFC. KLS AUZK CICVKGTCVC.
MUSCQ QSVVLSBD KLS EB BCGQAZACVQ,
FZJZXEB CQ, REUFQ, YLLHQ, IEDCL JZFCQ,
IEZ OWO ZBD ZMVLQQ Z QAVZGUEBJ FZXC
LR GCYQEOCQ. GTLF MZB KLS OVSQO? GTCVC
DLCQ RZBOZQK CBD ZBD VCZUEOK YCJEB?

KLS'IC AZQQCD OTC REVQO QOZJC. BLG
RLUULG OTC GTEOC VZYYEO:

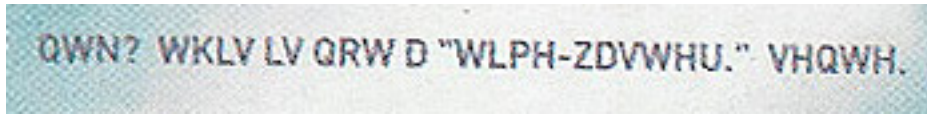
GGG.AVLPCM OQKXKJK.MLF

fbpe78347a92p052137752e9q50e9a3
740p3802p82a14a0pca241a8a1
q4802c218252cc42520p30c324q0

QWN? WKLV LV GRW D "WLPH-ZDWHU" VHQWH.

The text in the main body of the ad is identical to The Guardian except for a couple of extra words (it mentions that the game will be played by "txt" - which I presume is SMS text message) - probably dropped for space since The Guardian ad is smaller.

However, there are two notable differences. one is a short message printed on the side of the ad:

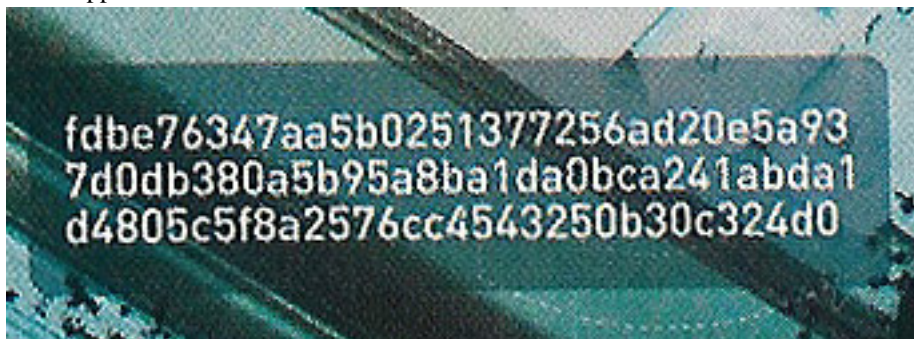


QWN? WKLV LV QRW D "WLPH-ZDVWHU." VHQWH.

This is not in the same code as the main text, but translates to:

NTK? THIS IS NOT A "TIME-WASTER." SENTE.

NTK refers to an NTK.net (Need-To-Know) blurb calling Syzygy a time-waster. (See chat with Adrian-Hon and Raze) (ref [19]) Below that, printed backwards, is a long string of letters and numbers. It has been flipped to make it easier to read here:



fdbe76347aa5b0251377256ad20e5a93
7d0db380a5b95a8ba1da0bca241abda1
d4805c5f8a2576cc4543250b30c324d0

AnthraX101 discovered this to be a set of three MD5 hashes, specifically: (ref [20])

fdbe76347aa5b0251377256ad20e5a93 = [don't know yet]
7d0db380a5b95a8ba1da0bca241abda1 = at
d4805c5f8a2576cc4543250b30c324d0 = projectsyzygy.com

...and grumpyboy discovered the first hash to be "dinah". A quick email later, received the following auto response, with the subject line "exchange": (ref [21])

[19] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36226#36226>

[20] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36231#36231>

[21] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36234#36234>

On 5 Mar 2004, at 00:29, xxxx wrote:

I don't think I have anything more to add, except for the requisite shout-outs to the immersive fiction community all over the web and around the world (you know who you are). Anyone reading this should know that it's going to get a lot harder and a lot more fun. You ain't seen nothing yet.

One last thing - it all begins with AADAA...

xxxx

On 5 Mar 2004, at 00:13, xxxx wrote:

What a cool idea. I love it. All we'd need to do is sanitise our email exchange by removing reference to things like xxxx and then put it online somewhere. This could be the last email of our exchange we publish.

Unless of course you follow this one with a witty reply that our hard-core cryptographer friends would enjoy ;)

xxxx

On 4 Mar 2004, at 23:58, xxxx wrote:

Actually, yeah, I think you are probably right. As long as the puzzle isn't *ridiculously* easy, then people aren't going to think worse of it (especially if you put 'Easy wasn't it?' as a more difficult one!). Simple substitution is a nice way to go.

Now I'm wondering what sort of code to use for the 'easy wasn't it' thing...

It occurred to me this evening that a nice reward for ultra-hardcore cryptographers would be to see this exchange of emails - it wouldn't actually reveal anything at all about xxxx, and they'd probably appreciate the thought that's gone into the ad puzzle. Perhaps we could encrypt a key in the ad that would unlock these emails on the web somewhere. Or maybe not. Just another random idea

xxxx

On 4 Mar 2004, at 23:48, xxxx wrote:

Fair point. I've been thinking about this a lot this evening. It's a tricky balance we're trying to strike.

The code at the moment is laughably easy to crack but that's the point. I think 99% of people reading the ad will feel pretty pleased with themselves for cracking a Caesar shift or simple substitution cipher. The image I have is of people stumbling across our ad while flicking

through a stack of job ads in a coffee shop. They'll be intrigued by it but unless they have a hook to start solving it quickly I think they'll give up and probably won't give it another thought.

Alternatively if they immediately see a way in and manage to solve it on the back of a napkin within five or ten minutes then I think they'd be very likely to check out the site and more importantly mention it to other people.

In hindsight a simple substitution cipher probably makes more sense than a Caesar shift - particularly if we leave the web address format as it is. This provides the easy way in to give the average person a foothold of four letters.

It'll be a different matter when the game is live and people are xxxx but in this instance I think a Vigenere cipher would require too much effort for the average person. Obviously we wouldn't want to recruit anyone for the full-time team who'd struggle to decode a Vigenere cipher but this is a great opportunity to get a lot of people chatting about the concept and the site itself. If the puzzle is too complex then we lose all that and the fact we gain an average of higher quality submissions probably doesn't offset it.

You're right in that we don't want to look like light-weight puzzle designers so a way around this might be to hide a much more complex code in the background that acknowledges the very important but tiny minority of ultra smart folks. Perhaps something as simple as "Easy wasn't it?"

Any thoughts??

Cheers

xxxx

On 4 Mar 2004, at 18:38, xxxx wrote:

Hi all,

I think the text of the ad is perfect, but I have some comments on other aspects.

Firstly, I think a Caesar shift is too easy - I mean, even I could figure that one out! If people are interested in the ad, then they'll be willing to put at least a few minutes work into it - and if they're not interested in the ad, it won't be because the cryptosystem is too hard, it'll be because it just looks like gibberish. So I don't feel there's anything wrong with knocking it up a notch and using, say, a simple substitution cipher. These are easily broken using frequency analysis or brute force, but it's a step up from Caesar.

Another possibility is using a Vigenere Cipher, which is essentially a Caesar cipher done twice, using a keyword

to determine the shift. It's much more difficult to brute force without the keyword and very very difficult for short texts, which obviously this one is, so we should make the keyword available. A possible scenario would be to encode the majority of the text in a Vigenere Cipher (which is immune to frequency analysis) and encode the keyword (written in Braille or morse code or baudot) with a simple substitution cipher or something similar.

Whichever system is used, it would be a mistake to write out the web address in the usual 'http://www...com' format, simply because it'd be very recognisable and thus provide an easy shortcut to crack the puzzle (and that would be no fun for anyone). To be totally safe, I would write it out as 'visit project-syzygy dot com' so there isn't any strange punctuation to give the game away.

So - if you went for the Vigenere route, here is how I would do it (and obviously there are many other ways, many of which are undoubtedly better):

1. In a corner or on the border of the ad, the phrase 'You're always a day away' is written in morse or braille or baudot. Optionally, it is encoded via a simple substitution cipher, or maybe just a Caesar shift.

2. This phrase is obviously from the song 'Tomorrow' in the movie 'Annie'. Thus the keyword is 'Tomorrow' - it's not hard to figure out.

3. From there, if you recognise that the main text is encoded in Vigenere, it is trivial to decode it using the keyword.

You could always highlight some of the letters in the text and use them as a keyword for a future puzzle on the web - we wouldn't even need to decide on them beforehand, we could just design the future puzzle around them.

My reasoning for making the puzzle a bit harder and more circuituous is because it involves the 'player' a little more and thus will give them a bit more satisfaction on completion and also convince them that we are not lightweights when it comes to cryptography. Furthermore, if anyone did want to write a story about it, it's more interesting this way

Of course, it is entirely possible that making the puzzle harder will put people off, which is clearly not the goal. However, it will be cracked by *someone* in short order, and the answer and instructions will then be put on the web for all to see. Success!

xxxx

On 4 Mar 2004, at 16:32, xxxx wrote:

Here's a first stab at text for the ad that will be going into the press over next week or so. I'm planning to

put it into Marketing Week and then play it by ear after that.

If anyone has any suggestions or improvements then give me a shout asap since we're hoping to get this finished by midday on Monday. Might be nice to hide a deeper clue in there somewhere as well. Any suggestions? Perhaps we could very subtly highlight some of the letters (tiny dot above or below) to spell out a new message. Or we could partially hide the 'I can see you' Braille text somewhere within the design around the edge of the text? Not very imaginative though!

I currently think that the best plan would be for the first sentence to be unencrypted to hook people's interest and then encode the rest of the text via a caesar shift (including the web address obviously!)

With a bit of luck it should get picked up and commented on by the mainstream press.

Cheers

xxxx

Comments

IRC

Conversation in #syzygy on irc.chat-solutions.org, wherein we learn about pareidolia...

```
[16:09] <danhon> Man, does anybody ever talk in here?
[16:11] <AnthraX101> Shh!
[16:15] <danhon> Riiiiiiiiight
[16:15] <AnthraX101> All the real action takes place
in #unfiction
[16:16] <danhon> You know, I just thought Pareidolia
was a cool word.
[16:16] *** ZM|Away is now known as ZMaiden
[16:16] <danhon> I'm just sayin'.
[16:16] <danhon> I'll lurk in there, then
[16:16] <AnthraX101> Heh
[16:19] <danhon> (and that is about a big a hint as
you're going to get)
[16:20] <AnthraX101> Heh, I see
...
[??:??] <AdrianHon> Look for comments. Look for direc-
tion.
```

(ref [22])

Conversation in #syzygy on 2004-03-12, wherein we are dropped hints and learn more the original content of alison.rtf was a mistake...

[22] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36109#36109>

[17:34] --> AdrianHon
(adrianhon@3cae4b8e.20846cb9.ox.ac.uk) has joined #szygyg
[17:34] <yanka> he would know
[17:34] <geist> lol
[17:34] <yanka> :-)
[17:36] <colin> i'm interested in how global it will
be
[17:38] <AdrianHon> Quite
[17:38] <colin> as in don't speak?
[17:38] <AdrianHon> No, as in quite global
[17:39] <yanka> the problem is, what they said can
have so many interpretations. "Look for comments," for
example, can mean "comments in the source code" "comments
in the blogs" "comments on the popups" (and then it de-
pends on what would be considered "comments")
[17:39] <AdrianHon> Look guys, there is something
you have missed
[17:39] <AdrianHon> In fact, two things you have
missed
[17:39] <AdrianHon> But no doubt you will find them
eventually
[17:39] <AdrianHon> One of them you have already
seen, but brushed over
[17:40] <yanka> I am going to cry... again
[17:40] <AdrianHon> The other one is really obvious
when you find it though
[17:40] <colin> where does it lead?
[17:40] <yanka> haha
[17:41] <AdrianHon> To something very interesting
[17:41] <yanka> ok, things we brushed over: that "s"
over the word "webs", the sound,
[17:41] <AdrianHon> To behind the curtain
[17:41] <AdrianHon> No :)
[17:41] <AdrianHon> brb
[17:41] <colin> you need people to solve it because
the people that solve it are the people that will create
the game?
[17:42] <AdrianHon> No
[17:42] <colin> atm, its just two people
[17:42] <AdrianHon> You know the game doesn't start
until Q4. This is nothing new.
[17:42] <AdrianHon> We are going through the pro-
logue
[17:42] <yanka> colin, are you going to post what he
said (is saying)?
[17:42] <colin> well i could
[17:43] <colin> or i could solve it myself first
[17:43] <colin> ;)
[17:43] <yanka> hee. what other things have we
brushed over?
[17:43] <AdrianHon> Sigh
[17:43] <colin> i didn't really look at it properly
[17:44] <AdrianHon> I am disappointed by you guys ;)
[17:44] <yanka> I have no doubt
[17:44] <AdrianHon> Direction. Alison. That's all
I'm saying.
[17:44] <yanka> omg
...
[18:20] <yanka> 2oc3o:ptxt alison.rtf
02-Mar-2004 10:48
[18:21] <yanka> 2oc4o:ptxt alison.rtf
02-Mar-2004 15:08
[18:21] <catherwood> to oh see three oh

[18:21] <AdrianHon> OK
[18:21] <AdrianHon> Ignore the first one. That was a mistake.
[18:21] <catherwood> heehee
[18:21] <yanka> thanks again
[18:21] <yanka> I tried even tocto
[18:21] <AdrianHon> If you need any more clues, I will have to commit seppuku
[18:21] <catherwood> i tried to find a file called 2oc4o.ptxt
[18:22] <catherwood> iie, sensai
[18:22] <AdrianHon> It is not a file!
[18:22] <AdrianHon> The reason I am giving you these clues is because this is a minor puzzle. The bigger puzzle is still hidden.
[18:22] <catherwood> i didn't think so, just telling people what i tried (in error)
[18:22] <yanka> if it's not a file, it could be: directory, new site, login
[18:22] <AdrianHon> You need direction.
[18:23] <yanka> directory, then
[18:23] <catherwood> north south east west
[18:23] <AdrianHon> No
[18:23] <yanka> who - no?
[18:23] <AdrianHon> More abstract
[18:23] <catherwood> "stage left"
[18:24] <AdrianHon> Imaginary. Virtual direction, even.
[18:24] <AdrianHon> In any case, you'll love the next puzzle. It cost enough, in any case.
[18:24] <yanka> this reminds me of that last Dina's page solve
[18:26] <catherwood> 2o c 4o : pxt 2=p, o=t, c4=x, o=t
[18:26] <catherwood> some of us are just too left-brained
[18:27] <catherwood> alison -> 2oc4o ... i would think there is some useful reason for the file name
[18:27] <yanka> to "oc" for "o"?
[18:28] <yanka> alison = 1 12 9 19 14
[18:28] <yanka> oops
[18:28] <AdrianHon> No :)
[18:28] <AdrianHon> Direction. Redirection.
[18:28] <AdrianHon> And now I am off to bed.

Another conversation, this time 2004-03-13, wherein we are dropped "direction" hints...

[00:38] <danhon> Good morning, kids
[00:39] <yanka> Dan, hi!
[00:39] <danhon> Solved it yet?
[00:39] <yanka> um... no?
[00:39] <colin> morn
[00:39] <danhon> Has Adrian tried to redirect you?
[00:40] <yanka> yes, he said it's alison.rtf
[00:40] <yanka> he also said he'd give us more hints in the morning
[00:40] <yanka> *hint*hint*
[00:40] <danhon> Good. You all seemed to have lost direction.
[00:41] <danhon> Redirecting you is probably the best

thing he could have done.
 [00:41] <colin> i never had direction
 [00:41] <yanka> and he said "direction" at least 87
 times, I think
 [00:41] <yanka> so we thought about this aibohphobia
 thing
 [00:41] <yanka> and... well, we're still here :-)
 [00:42] <danhon> :)
 [00:43] <colin> a more specific direction would be
 helpful
 [00:43] <yanka> could be chapter 2 [paragraph?] 4 of
 alice - which one, though?
 [00:43] <yanka> could be some sort of redirect
 script
 [00:44] <yanka> oh, Dan, he even went so far as to
 say "virtual direction"
 [00:44] <colin> (which confused me more)
 [00:44] <yanka> naturally
 [00:45] <colin> can i ask why its .rtf not .txt
 [00:45] <danhon> Yes
 [00:45] <colin> why is alison.rtf an rtf and not a
 txt?
 [00:46] <danhon> *shrug* :)
 [00:46] <danhon> Now that's an example of heading in
 the wrong direction :)
 [00:46] <yanka> but "alison" couldn't be any other
 word/name?
 [00:47] <yanka> I guess I can't ask that?
 [00:47] <danhon> You can. Same answer as before.
 [00:48] <colin> where does this lead? an address,
 phone number?
 [00:49] <danhon> Getting warmer.
 [00:49] <danhon> I think that's me done for the
 while.
 [00:49] <colin> noooo
 [00:49] <colin> which country is it in
 [00:49] <danhon> Okay, one last answer. All of them.
 [00:50] <colin> that's a lot of effort you went to
 :/
 [00:50] <colin> one more, is the puzzle self con-
 tained?
 [00:50] <colin> or do i need some experience to
 solve it?
 [00:54] <yanka> I wonder when Adrian wakes up
 [00:55] <colin> i'll work it out
 [00:55] <yanka> you have an idea?
 [00:55] <colin> no
 [00:56] <yanka> what do you mean then?
 [00:56] <colin> adrian will be two more hours
 atleast
 [00:56] <colin> i think
 [00:56] <colin> if its available everywhere, i must
 be on the web
 [00:57] <colin> *it must
 [00:57] <yanka> but then how is "address, phone num-
 ber" getting warmer?
 [00:57] <colin> web address
 [00:57] <yanka> same as url
 [00:58] <colin> or its an object that could be got-
 ten in every country
 [00:58] <yanka> you know, it could be something like
 sunset times or lunar exlipses
 [00:59] <yanka> satellite coordinates
 [00:59] <yanka> eclipses, even

[00:59] <colin> but again what does that achieve
[00:59] <yanka> I don't know - a set of numbers?
[00:59] <colin> its supposed to lead to a larger
puzzle
[01:00] <colin> i'm thinking it could be a subdomain
thingy like answer.projectszygy.com
[01:01] <yanka> could be, and maybe that's why Adri-
an said "no" to directory
[01:04] <danhon> You're trying to make this far too
hard. Too long. You should try and look for a simpler an-
swer, make it shorter.
[01:05] <yanka> divide 2oc4o by ptxt?
[01:06] <colin> is it a code?
[01:07] <colin> is it creative?
[01:07] <yanka> does it even have a solution?
[01:07] <yanka> :-)
[01:07] <danhon> Yes, it does, and you're trying far
too hard.
[01:07] <danhon> There are no sunset times.
[01:07] <danhon> There are no satellite coordinates.
[01:07] <colin> location?
[01:08] <danhon> There is a location in there.
[01:08] <yanka> a WEB location
[01:08] <danhon> And when you solve it, there'll be
some nifty redirection.
[01:08] <yanka> ?
[01:08] <colin> its so short though
[01:08] <danhon> Beyond that you have to think,
Mcfly, think :)
[01:09] <colin> i hate manure!
[01:10] <colin> is :p a smiley
[01:10] <-- danhon
(danhon@231698ba.6a63aef.cable.ntl.com) has left #syzygy
(Leaving)
[01:10] <yanka> nooo
[01:10] <--> danhon
(danhon@231698ba.6a63aef.cable.ntl.com) has joined #syzygy
[01:10] <yanka> yes
[01:11] <colin> wb
[01:11] <danhon> Sorry, can't give any more hints.
[01:11] <yanka> you CAN, you just WON'T
[01:11] <colin> sorry, its not getting solved :/
[01:12] <colin> i think we need a pregame haiku con-
test to get rid of the stress
[01:12] <yanka> colin, you know, they name images
with these _c2_ things
[01:13] <colin> r = row c = column
[01:13] <colin> standard output of programs like
fireworks
[01:14] <colin> should i look at it upside down?
[01:15] <yanka> no. turn your monitor upside down
[01:15] <colin> don't think it turns that far
[01:16] <yanka> mine doesn't either. try standing
on your head?
[01:16] * colin stands on head
[01:17] * colin falls down
[01:17] <yanka> oh, be careful
[01:17] <colin> i just realised i can't use the
mouse when i'm on my head
[01:17] <yanka> you still need to solve this, you
know
[01:17] <yanka> haha
[01:17] <colin> i can't
[01:18] <yanka> plz don't give up. I won't be able

to sleep, and I don't want to be here alone
 [01:19] <colin> i'm not sleeping until its solved i
 want to be there
 [01:19] <yanka> well, it's daytime for you anyway,
 right?
 [01:19] <colin> evening
 [01:19] <yanka> same thing
 [01:20] <colin> i've got it!!! 2oc4o:ptxt is the
 meaning of life
 [01:20] <yanka> ha! and here I thought it was
 "stol"
 [01:20] <colin> oh, i forgot stol
 [01:22] <colin> !nextclue
 [01:23] <yanka> :-(
 [01:24] <yanka> I probably shouldn't even bring that
 up, but what did pareidolia have to do with this?
 [01:24] <danhon> It's a cool word
 [01:25] <danhon> I'm allowed to like cool words :)
 [01:25] <yanka> you're not allowed to express that,
 though :-)
 [01:27] <danhon> Redirection is a cool word, too.
 [01:27] <colin> do we need to change the text at all
 [01:27] <danhon> It sounds as if you'd like me to
 just hand you the answer.
 [01:28] <yanka> no, there is no fun in that
 [01:28] <danhon> Then no more hints :)
 [01:28] <yanka> but, you know, "direct" us? plz?
 [01:28] <danhon> Maybe you should sleep on it.
 [01:28] <danhon> It's not going to go away!
 [01:28] <yanka> no!
 [01:28] <colin> i don't have any ideas left
 [01:29] <yanka> besides, it's already been there for
 10 days - so we had plenty of sleeping on it
 [01:30] <colin> 10 days?
 [01:30] <yanka> yep
 [01:30] <colin> maybe 10 has something to do with it
 [01:30] <yanka> no, it can't
 [01:30] <yanka> cause we found it as soon as they
 put it there
 [01:31] <yanka> nor can the time of upload be of
 significance
 [01:32] --- colin is now known as anything
 [01:33] --- anything is now known as coliniloc
 [01:34] * yanka yanka in complete tran
 [01:34] --- coliniloc is now known as food_potato
 [01:34] --- yanka is now known as
 yanka_in_complete_tranZ
 [01:34] --- food_potato is now known as ironchef
 [01:34] --- ironchef is now known as ironchef_away
 [01:34] <yanka_in_complete_tranZ> omg, I'm loosing my
 mind
 [01:35] --- yanka_in_complete_tranZ is now known as
 yanka
 [01:51] <yanka> I wonder what qualifies a puzzle as
 "difficult" or "easy"
 [02:02] <yanka> I think I have succeeded in crying
 myself to sleep. colin, good luck!
 [02:03] <-- yanka has quit (Quit: Leaving)
 [02:07] --> Addlepatad
 (~Addlepate@18251e65.2e099bf0.dsl.speakeasy.net) has
 joined #syzygy
 [02:07] <Addlepatad> anyone awake?
 [02:10] --- ironchef_away is now known as chal-
 lenger_won

```
[02:11] --- challenger_won is now known as
colin|dinner
[02:29] <colin|dinner> i'm awake
[02:29] --> AdrianHon
(adrianhon@3cae4b8e.20846cb9.ox.ac.uk) has joined #syzygy
[02:29] <AdrianHon> ht-
tp://astromm.calstatela.edu/images/gr/BriefHistory/Wormhol
e_toAlphaCen_p201.jpg
[02:30] <-- AdrianHon has quit (Client exited)
```

A chat on 2004-03-15, wherein we learn about Marketing Week...

```
[07:46] --> AdrianHon
(~adrianhon@3cae4b8e.20846cb9.ox.ac.uk) has joined #syzygy
[07:47] <krystal> well hello :)
[07:48] <AdrianHon> Hi!
[07:48] <krystal> i hope you are well today
[07:48] <AdrianHon> I am
[07:48] <krystal> good
[07:48] <krystal> found the update to alis-
on.rtf
[07:48] <AdrianHon> I noticed
[07:48] <AdrianHon> Almost there
[07:48] <krystal> :P
[07:49] <krystal> yeah!
[07:50] <krystal> so 2oc4o.ptxt have anything
to do with the new update/
[07:50] <krystal> ?
[07:51] <AdrianHon> No, forget about that
[07:51] <krystal> good
[07:51] <krystal> was still trying to figure
that one out
[07:51] <krystal> i've come to the conclusion
if its too simple i wont get it.. it has to be complicated
:P
[07:51] <AdrianHon> Yeah
[07:52] <AdrianHon> You guys are crazy
[07:52] <krystal> hehehe
[07:52] <krystal> so since this new update has
nothing to do with 2oc4o.ptxt i'm assuming then we are
still missing out on something else?
[07:52] <AdrianHon> No, I would rather you
forget about everything before this new puzzle
[07:53] <krystal> ok
[07:53] <AdrianHon> I'm sure it will all be
explained in due course, but for now don't bother with it
[07:54] <krystal> no problem here it gave me 2
headaches ;)
[07:54] <krystal> hehe
[07:54] <AdrianHon> :)
[08:00] --> enaxor
(enaxor@1b533a89.29773c92.ipt.aol.com) has joined #syzygy
[08:00] <enaxor> morning all
[08:00] <krystal> hi enaxor
[08:00] <AdrianHon> hey
[08:00] <AdrianHon> bbl
[08:00] <krystal> k thanks for the info adrian
[08:00] <enaxor> cya have a good one
[08:01] <enaxor> what info did he give?
[08:01] <krystal> well the alison.rtf has been
```

updated you can see that on the unforum
[08:01] <krystal> i asked him if it had to do
with the 2oc4o.ptxt
[08:01] <krystal> he said no forget that
[08:01] <krystal> forget everything before
[08:01] <krystal> and just concentrate on this
[08:02] <enaxor> I wondered what 2oc4o could
have gotten us to marketing week
[08:02] <enaxor> I found the magazine online
thru my library system but it skips page 60 and goes from
42 to page 82
[08:04] <enaxor> for anyone interested its
Date 9/11/03 Volume 26 Issue 37
[08:04] <krystal> i dont think 2oc4o would of
gotten us to marketing week he said it didn't have to do
with what we are seeing now
[08:06] <SpaceBass> wait didn't the 2oc4o:ptxt
mean to look at the plaintext on that beale cipher page
via tinyurl
[08:06] <SpaceBass> that's what's in the rtf
now right, except with interspersed numbers
[08:06] <krystal> really
[08:06] <krystal> i must of left
[08:06] <SpaceBass> i just don't get where
those numbers and the page 60 came from
[08:06] <krystal> before all that
[08:06] <SpaceBass> well it's only obvious in
retrospect with the change
[08:06] <krystal> the numbers spell out mar-
keting week
[08:06] <SpaceBass> ok
[08:08] <enaxor> SB what is this about tiny-
url?
[08:08] <SpaceBass> <http://tinyurl.com/2oc4o>
[08:08] <SpaceBass> we found that last night
but i discounted it because i thought dan had said it
didn't have to do with cryptography
[08:09] <SpaceBass> if you read down the page
you'll find a plaintext phrase that matches what's in the
rtf now
[08:09] <krystal> yep seeing that
[08:10] <enaxor> how did that get found?
[08:10] <krystal> which would of led us to
Hebrew Ecclesiastes 9:11
[08:11] <krystal> but how would we of gotten
marketing week out of it
[08:13] <SpaceBass> i just tried it on tinyurl
at one point
[08:13] <SpaceBass> because it looked like a
tinyurl link
[08:13] <SpaceBass> brian did the same thing i
think
[08:14] <SpaceBass> i was thinking redirect
and then the characters looked familiar, but i didn't
click the ptxt part until this morning
[08:14] <enaxor> so that was the redirect?
[08:15] <enaxor> or redirection
[08:15] <SpaceBass> i think so but again i
could be wrong
[08:16] --- ZMaiden is now known as ZM[a]iden
[08:16] <enaxor> I've never heard of tinyurl,
so I'd have never got that
[08:17] <enaxor> I'll have to remeber that
[08:17] <SpaceBass> it's handy

[08:17] <SpaceBass> and very popular in #evanchan oddly enough ;)
[08:17] <krystal> i found alot of redirection sites by just searching on redirection so i'm sure you'd of figured it out
[08:18] <enaxor> so it seems there are alot of things that have to do with playing the beast, which I didn't
[08:19] <enaxor> I guess I'll have to go read up on it and by the time I'm finished this game should be over ;)
[08:20] <krystal> hehehe
[08:20] <SpaceBass> it wasn't really a beast thing, just a meta thing
[08:20] <AnthraX101> I'm begining to suspect we are looking for an advertisement in marketing week
[08:21] <-- AdrianHon has quit (Ping timeout: 181 seconds)
[08:22] <enaxor> ah thanks SB
[08:22] <enaxor> I'll still have to read up
[08:22] --> yanka (lurker@20846cb9.3ee19918.biz.rr.com) has joined #syzygy
[08:22] <yanka> morning
[08:23] <enaxor> hey yanka
[08:23] <Giskard> lo all
[08:23] <AnthraX101> hey yanka
[08:24] <enaxor> AnthraX that would make sense, I just hope someone can find a hard copy
[08:28] <krystal> yeah you have to pay on the website
[08:28] <AnthraX101> And even then you might not get the advertisements
[08:35] --> Semioclast (~Semioclas@17dc4bf9.a8c8d76.bflony.adelphia.net) has joined #syzygy
[08:35] <Semioclast> See what happens when I go to sleep?
[08:36] * AnthraX101 sneaks up behind Semio-clast with the chloroform
[08:43] --> AdrianHon (~adrianhon@3cae4b8e.20846cb9.ox.ac.uk) has joined #syzygy
[08:47] <Semioclast> :)
[08:47] <Semioclast> 'Hi, Adrian
[08:48] <Semioclast> I feel kind of bad that you had to smack us accross the face, practically
[08:50] <AdrianHon> Ah
[08:50] <AdrianHon> Well, there were mistakes on both ends
[08:50] * Semioclast cannot help but notice Adrian seems to be logged in from Oxford
[08:50] <AdrianHon> I think you'll be pleased with where this mini puzzle eventually leads
[08:51] <AdrianHon> That may be because I live in Oxford :)
[08:51] <Semioclast> I went to Hertford
[08:51] <AdrianHon> Ah
[08:51] <AdrianHon> Nice
[08:51] <Semioclast> and I used to bartend at the PT
[08:51] <AdrianHon> Heh
[08:51] <Semioclast> small world!
[08:51] <AdrianHon> Certainly is
[08:51] <Semioclast> do you go to school there?

[08:51] <AdrianHon> I'm at Queen's
[08:52] <Semioclast> excellent
[08:52] <AdrianHon> Doing a PhD
[08:52] <Semioclast> It looks like I am going
to be doing me PhD at Duke
[08:52] <AdrianHon> Cool
[08:53] <Semioclast> I was only there for a
year, on an NEH fellowship
[08:53] <AdrianHon> One last clue about the
puzzle, because I feel I partly messed you guys about on
the 2oc4o: page 60 will only apply for two or three more
days.

A chat on 2004-03-16, wherein we learn about "NTK" and that the Marketing Week hex puzzle is entirely self contained...

[02:19] <colin> any advice adrian? ;)
[02:19] <geist> the cyptogram was not that
hard so i would thought this would be round same level
[02:20] <AdrianHon> This is harder
[02:20] <AdrianHon> You can solve it though.
[02:20] <colin> clues as to where it leads al-
ways help me
[02:21] <AdrianHon> Good for you :)
[02:21] <colin> sure its not another 2oc4o
[02:22] <geist> i hope you got a lot more hits
to the syzygy website after the ad in the paper
[02:22] <AdrianHon> There's nothing wrong with
the puzzle, it is perfectly solvable as it is
[02:23] <colin> yeah, ARGs need more publicity
[02:23] <AdrianHon> I haven't looked at the
stats
[02:23] <AdrianHon> But I know there has been
a big response
[02:23] <colin> how?
[02:23] <AdrianHon> It *is* a job ad, remember
?:)
[02:24] <colin> i'm not experienced in job ads
:/
[02:25] <geist> well from some of the jobs ive
been going for i know they can easily get over 200 reply
to an ad
[02:26] <AdrianHon> Yeah
[02:36] <colin> alias is on, bbl
[03:33] --> Raze
(~raze@l13ade0c.a9a2d23.blueyonder.co.uk) has joined
#syzygy
[03:33] <colin> hi
[03:33] <Raze> hello
[03:33] <Raze> What a small world it is.
[03:34] <Raze> Here I am reading the Guardian
for jobs and stumble on the puzzle.
[03:34] <Raze> And being an ex-Cloudmaker,
does that prejudice me from applying for a job? :)
[03:35] <colin> lol, no come join the fun
[03:35] <colin> you'll be so distracted, you
wont end up getting a job
[03:36] <Raze> That's what I feared :S
[03:37] <Raze> That extra bit of code in the
marketing week ad is a slight at NTK.net, for calling

syzygy a "time-waster"
[03:37] <Raze> if that hadn't already been
solved
[03:37] <Raze> ht-
tp://www.ntk.net/index.cgi?b=02004-03-05&l=206#1
[03:37] <colin> no it hadn't
[03:37] <colin> are you signed up to unfic-
tion?
[03:38] <Raze> no, I sorta never had time to
play The Beast, so was too scared to play much of any of
the others
[03:38] <Raze> I just kept my eye in, but was
very pleased to get the Guardian ad to lead me back down
the rabbit hole :)
[03:39] <colin> well you should post that on
the forum
[03:39] <Raze> Okay, will do.
[03:39] <Raze> I think I have an idea on "dir-
ection", as well, but I'll develop that in a minute.
[03:40] <colin> that ntk is a great find
[03:41] <Raze> :P
[03:43] <AdrianHon> I think it is worth re-
peating that you should ignore the entire 2oc4o thing, in-
cluding stuff about direction :)
[03:43] <colin> ty adrian
[03:43] <AdrianHon> Let us say that the Mar-
keting Week thing is self-contained
[03:44] <colin> your comments are so insight
full, i'm beginning to think your on 'the inside' ;)
[03:45] <AdrianHon> Well
[03:45] <colin> my english is going down hill,
insightful
[03:46] <AdrianHon> I'm glad to see that a lot
of people have spotted the Guardian ad
[03:46] <colin> i'm more impressed that they
made it all the way to the chat room, that's a puzzle in
itself
[03:47] <AdrianHon> True
[03:47] <colin> incidently, in the last ~24hrs
google recored 158 new pages for "project syzygy"

Web Logs

As posted to Semioclast's blog:

"In the quest for truth
Disregard the distractions
Look for direction"

Commenter's name: Sweborg
Email: sweborg@coroner.org
Website: <http://www.coroner.org>
Post IP Address: 168.143.113.150

(ref [23])

[23] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36119#36119>

Since the blog's comment mechanism does not validate usernames or email addresses, *anyone* could have posted that comment using that data. The IP address in question traces back to verio.net, a network block that someone (AnthraX101?) informed me it is used by the Anonymizer web service. Therefore, this should be taken with a grain of salt--anyone could have posted this comment.

Pareidolia.com - Hoax?

Is it in game? Is it out of game? Nobody knows.

Previous to 2004-03-14, the site exhibited a particular behavior. The front page, contained the text "p a r e i d o l i a" with a tiled image of the "Mars Face." There was also commented-out text, with hard spaces such that two letters "e" and "o" appear below the "e" and "o" in the first line. Any request that started with "/index/" (that is /index/2oc4o [24], /index/yo/mamma [25], /index/monkey [26]) would pull up the same content as the original index.html file. (Albeit, the browser interpreted the directory incorrectly and was unable to retrieve the background image, so the background appeared grey.)

On 2004-03-14, the site's characteristics changed. Now <http://pareidolia.com/index/2oc40.htm> points to a file containing the text:

```
2oc40:ptxt
2oc-0:ptxt
```

Additionally, all of the variants of /index/* (like /index/yo/mamma [28]) work anymore, giving 404 errors. ...save one /index/ninja/monkey/ [29]. Also, the "deep directory" pages (at least, the one that is still available) has a working background (specified in a relative URL, rather than an absolute one).

What does this all mean? It could very well be a clue. Alternately, it could be a tired, bored, amused, or evil website administrator. Certainly something changed on the site, but it is interesting to note...

- All the original /index/* requests looked like they got mapped back to the original index file, <http://pareidolia.com/index.php>. This is pretty easy to do in Apache.
- An administrator of a sleepy site that suddenly saw a zillion hits can check the referrer logs and see they all came from unfiction [31], then study up on what people have posted on that thread.
- The mapping of /index/* no longer works. This is because the directory /index/ was explicitly created.
- The only "new" files were ones explicitly linked to from the message boards. For instance, why does /index/ninja/monkey/ [32] work, but /index/ninja/monkey1/ [33] not? The web administrator felt the need to create the directory hierarchy leading to /index/ninja/monkey/index.php [34], which just seems like he/she wanted to "plug the holes" of all the URLs that link over to the site.
- pareidolia.com has existed since 2000-12-07 and was last updated on 2003-12-11.

This author thinks it is probably a hoax--us chasing the shadow of an innocent word used in chat, and a devious sysadmin having fun with it. On the other hand, it is entirely possible that this is in-game. For instance, if the PM's decided to purchase the domain from someone else, it would explain the date and content, at least, (although leaves the "/index/ninja/monkey" question still up in the air).

[24] <http://pareidolia.com/index/2oc4o>

[25] <http://pareidolia.com/index/yo/mamma>

[26] <http://pareidolia.com/index/monkey>

[28] <http://pareidolia.com/index/yo/mama>

[29] <http://pareidolia.com/index/ninja/monkey/>

[31] <http://forums.unfiction.com/forums/viewtopic.php?p=36180#36180>

[32] <http://pareidolia.com/index/ninja/monkey/>

[33] <http://pareidolia.com/index/ninja/monkey1/>

[34] <http://pareidolia.com/index/ninja/monkey/index.php>

Chapter 4. My Notes

\$Id: notes.xml,v 1.5 2004/04/01 00:22:50 enigma Exp \$

Overview

This is just a bunch of my random notes while problem solving. It may not be of any significance, or it may be vitally important and I'm just a tard that doesn't see the obvious. My notes are here, in case they may spark off somebody else's thoughts.

alison.rtf

The file `alison.rtf` contains the string of characters `2oc4o:ptxt`. It is interesting to note that both the filename and contents are the same length. Furthermore, an IRC chat mentioned that the previous value (`2oc3o`) was incorrect. This seems to indicate the value itself is important: "`2oc3o`" by itself had to be corrected. If it was simply a directory or file name, a correction might not be necessary because the directory or file could be renamed. The fact that it had to be changed implies that this value likely interacts with something else.

I tried to perform a few mathematical calculations (converting each letter/number/symbol to a number first).

```
a l i s o n . r t f
2 o c 4 o : p t x t

61 6c 69 73 6f 6e 2e 72 74 66  alison.rtf
32 6f 63 34 67 3a 70 74 78 74  2oc4o:ptxt

13 5B 4C 27 56 28 1E 66 6C 5A  Add (rolling @0x80)
   [ L ' V (   f l Z

2f 7d 06 3f 08 34 3e 7e 7c 72  Subtract second from first (rolling @0x80)
/ )      ?      4 > ~ | r

51 03 7A 41 78 4C 42 02 04 0e  Subtract first from second (rolling @0x80)
3      z A x L B

2f 03 06 3f 08 34 42 02 04 0E  Subtract bigger from smaller
/      ?      4 B

                               73 76 6d  Average (impossible because of fractions)
                               s v m
```

What about a custom A-Z0-9 alphabet instead of the ASCII table ?
Problem: what to do with punctuation?

This time, in decimal, using the following table (instead of ASCII):

a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i	j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r	s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	33	34	35	36

```
01 12 09 19 15 14 . 18 20 06  alison.rtf
29 15 03 21 15 : 16 20 24 20  2oc4o:ptxt

30 27 12 04 30 ? ? 02 08 26  add
3 0 1 d 3 ? ? b h z
```

8 33 6 34 0 ? ? 34 32 22 subtract second from first
h 6 f 7 ? ? ? 7 5 v

28 3 30 2 0 ? ? 2 4 14 subtract first from second
l c 3 b ? ? ? b d n

28 3 6 2 0 ? ? 2 4 14 subtract biggest from smallest
l c f b ? ? ? b d n

15 ? 6 20 15 ? ? 19 22 13 average
o ? f t o ? ? s v m

Chapter 5. The Fine Print

\$Id: fineprint.xml,v 1.1 2004/04/01 18:51:45 enigma Exp \$



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