**A Gloss of Infocom's *The Lurking Horror***

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**FEELIES**

***G.U.E. At A Glance*:** Modeled on a guide given MIT freshmen called *HoToGAMIT,* or *How to Get Around MIT*. (Note that on p.3 the publication is abbreviated *GAAG*).

**p. 3 photo:** Actual front steps of MIT’s 77 Massachusetts Avenue (pronounced “Mass Ave”) entrance.

**p. 3 text:** Students discussed MIT’s suicide rate quite a bit, and it was always rumored that it was worse than official numbers would tell you. See <http://www.technologyreview.com/article/527861/tech-is-and-always-has-been-hell/>

**p. 4 text:** None of these observances are based on real MIT events.

**p.5 photo:** The Infinite Corridor is an actual MIT landmark, just a very long corridor extending west from the entrance on Mass Ave for about 823 feet. It connects most of the core academic buildings. (Twice a year [MIThenge](http://futureboy.us/mithenge/) occurs, when the sun aligns with the corridor and can be seen down its entire length.)

**p. 5 text:** The first paragraph is pretty much the straight scoop (although I don’t think there were ever any RL deaths attributed to “roof and tunnel hacking,” which basically meant going places you weren’t supposed be able to go). [Here’s one of my favorite stories: During my Freshman Orientation, I joined a very unofficial student-run tour of the roofs and tunnels. After a long trip through really creepy steam tunnels, we reached a grate in the sidewalk on Mass. Ave. Just as we started to exit, an MIT campus cop came by and said, “You’re not supposed to be in there! Go back the way you came!” He was not swayed by our logic, so back we went.]

The dorm info given doesn’t appear to have any relation to RL.

**Map:** Looks just like a simplified version of the actual MIT campus. (Except the real Great Court isn’t triangular.)

**Massachusetts Avenue:** In RL the same name, but always referred to as Mass Ave.

**Smith Street:** In RL is Vassar St. (Vassar and Smith both being members of the Seven Sisters).

**Edwards Square:** Kendall Square

**Adams Street:** Ames Street

**River Street:** Memorial Drive (“Mem Drive”), running along the Charles River

**Brown Building:** Represents Bldg. 54, the RL Green Building — named after a guy named Green, nothing to do with the color. It’s the tallest building in Cambridge. It’s also one of only a few buildings on campus generally referred to by name rather than number. As described in the game, it does house Earth and Planetary Sciences.

**Temporary Building:** The story the game tells is (almost) exactly true. The wooden Temporary Building (Bldg. 20) was put up quickly during WWII (1943) and housed the Radiation Lab (where crucial work on radar and radio navigation was done). Because it was “temporary,” it never got a name. After the war, they kept the building up because they needed the space, and ultimately it wasn't torn down until 1999! Possibly relevant: it was also the home of the Tech Model Railroad Club, where a lot of aspects of hacker culture developed. One inaccuracy in the game is that Bldg. 20 had no basement, although for some reason the ground floor was assigned room numbers beginning with 0, and many occupants complained that it looked like a basement. Apparently in the years since demolition, there has been a persistent joke on campus that it’s still standing, but concealed by an invisibility field. More [here](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Building_20).

**Department of Alchemy:** A hack originally in the ‘60s or ‘70s created a door in Building 2 labeled “Department of Alchemy.” A later version of it can be seen here: <http://hacks.mit.edu/Hacks/by_year/1992/dept_alchemy/alchemy_door.html>

**p. 8 photo:** Not at MIT, but I don’t know where.

**p. 8 text:** The list of slang is almost all real; neither I nor my husband has ever heard either of the last two, though I can’t state definitively that they were never used.

**p. 9 text:** The joke about the male:female ratio was already becoming outdated: my class (1985) was one-third women, and the proportion of women has continued to increase, most recently to 46%. (This refers only to undergrads; the grad student population was and is still more skewed male.)

[House of Roy](http://ginhill.com/2011/02/house-of-roy/) was a real Chinese restaurant that was a favorite of students in the ‘70s including some of the Infocommies, but the rest of the restaurants just seem to be jokes (Dot ‘n’ Dash is a reference to Morse code, and Real Irish Pizza is an oxymoron…).

**Alma Mater:** Not a direct parody, but has the feel of the outdated “Take Me Back to Tech,” a song so old it refers to MIT’s original location in Boston. (<http://web.mit.edu/21w785/F98/HTG/mitsongsC.html>) The reference to the change in pronunciation of GUE may be a reference to the fact that earlier generations of MIT students referred to the school as Tech.

**GAME**

**Terminal Room:** This is actually a straight description of what the computer labs looked like then.

**Whiz-bang PC:** A better machine than what you'd have found there at that time. This appears to be what was described in the early 1980s as a [3M machine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3M_computer): 1 megabyte of memory, 1 megapixel display, 1 million instructions per second (MIPS). (It was sometimes added that it should cost no more than a “megapenny,” $10,000.) This was considered a very aggressive goal, with most universities unable to afford such advanced workstations. [By way of contrast, the laptop I’m writing this on has 16 GB memory (16,000 times more), a 5.1 megapixel display, and approximately 100,000 MIPS.]

A **big key ring** was considered part of a hacker’s uniform: the more keys, the more impressive.

**Assignment:** MIT classes are generally known by their numerical designations rather than their names (with a few exceptions); e.g., freshman physics first semester is 8.01 (said as eight oh one). The first number indicates the department (Course, in MIT lingo), and the numbers after the decimal represent the specific class. The assignment in the game is for a class in Course 21, which is Humanities, which fits the description of the class.

**YAK text editor:** YA was a common prefix meaning yet another (as in YALOE, “yet another line-oriented editor,” which this may be a reference to).

**Nodes** were what would now be the equivalent of a personal computer; each was a workstation, and they each had a unique name. People tended to use themed naming for a cluster; e.g, there was one cluster each of whose nodes was named for a local Chinese restaurant, and one group of 3 named Huey, Dewey, and Louie.

**Overheating Chinese food:** If you’ve left the Szechuan shrimp in the microwave too long, it will be described as “radioactive.” This is presumably a reference to the use of the verb “nuke” to mean microwave, which was — I believe — an MITism. (I hadn’t heard it until I got there in the early ‘80s [microwave ovens were just becoming common], and an online etymology site puts the first attested usage of the term in 1987.)

**Elevator Graffiti:**

* “I.H.T.F.P.” is MIT’s unofficial motto; it stands for “I hate this fucking place.”
* “Tech is hell” is an older version of that catchphrase, from when students called the place “Tech.”

**Urchin:** This was indeed a word used in general to refer to (mostly teenage) locals who hung around campus and not infrequently stole things. [When my dorm started getting reports of people having things stolen from their rooms, we’d get an “Urchin Alert,” with a reminder to lock our doors.]

**Bolt cutter:** Bicycle theft was a major problem. Probably still is.

**Tomb:** The name given to small basement/tunnel rooms or spaces that are extremely difficult to get into. The most famous, known in RL as The Tomb of the Unknown Hacker, has walls covered with the signatures of people who got in there.

**Floor waxer:** Because hackers kept weird hours and at that time needed to use computer labs, they haunted the halls at odd times and were the only ones who saw the waxers in action (aside from the custodial staff operating them, of course).

**Floor wax and dessert topping:** This refers to an early *Saturday Night Live* [skit](http://www.nbc.com/saturday-night-live/video/shimmer-floor-wax/n8625) that was a popular reference.

**Mass. Ave.** (exiting W from Infinite Corridor)**:** Every MIT student sees the RL inscription daily; it says “WILLIAM BARTON ROGERS, FOVNDER,” which we always pronounced as written. Unlike Lebling’s, the architect’s name is not found there.

**Classic Coke:** The switch from sucrose to fructose was a big topic of discussion in those days, with many people swearing that sucrose made old Coke taste better. Also, the four basic food groups are caffeine, sugar, salt, and grease.

**Great Dome:** The hardest and most rewarding goal of the roof hacker. Many of the best hacks (in the “prank” sense) were staged here.

**Fruits and Nuts:** Nickname for the “Food and Nutrition” department.

**Brass hyrax:** MIT’s class ring, which features a beaver and twigs, is referred to as a “brass rat.”