



Guide to the Michele Em Papers, 1981-2007

— 123.4309

This finding aid was produced using ArchivesSpace on September 29, 2025.

Description is written in: English.

Describing Archives: A Content Standard

Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong

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Summary Information

Repository:	Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong
Creator:	Em, Michele
Title:	Michele Em papers
ID:	123.4309
ID [aspace_uri]:	/repositories/3/resources/354
Date [inclusive]:	1981-2007
Date [bulk]:	bulk 1982-1997
Physical Description:	5.1 Linear Feet (7 document boxes, 1 oversized folder)
Language of the Material:	English
Mixed Materials [box]:	1-7
Mixed Materials [folder]:	OS1
Abstract:	This collection consists of video game development documents from <i>Return to Zork</i> , an abandoned "Pirates of the Caribbean" game, and more games written by Michele Em. The materials date from 1981 through 2007, with the bulk of the dates from 1982 through 2001. The collection includes interactive screenplays, scripts, correspondence, expense reimbursement receipts, sketches, promotion materials, audio and VHS cassettes, and game maps.

Preferred citation for publication

Michele Em papers, Brian Sutton-Smith Library and Archives of Play at The Strong.

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Biographical Note

Michele Em is a writer and producer based in California. She received a bachelor's degree in Design and Film at the Art Center College in 1977, and a master's degree in creative writing in 1989 at the University of New Mexico.

Em is a prolific writer, as she wrote the script for the 1993 computer game *Return to Zork* and the original unpublished "Pirates of the Caribbean" video game, which would serve as a precursor to the more famous *Pirates of the Caribbean* movie franchise. Her writing career extended beyond video games, as she wrote film scripts for *An Afternoon with John Whitney* (1991) and *The Zen Detectives* (1996). She has published articles in industry magazines, periodicals, and books. Em taught at USC in the late 1990s and she continues to write and produce, with her most recent work being the documentary *Breaking Good*(2019).

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Collection Scope and Content Note

The materials in this collection document the game development process for published games such as *Return to Zork* and unpublished games such as "Pirates of the Caribbean" (developed in the early 1990s), focused primarily on the writing stage of game development. The materials in this collection highlight the business aspects of video game development from a script writer's point of view, such as contract negotiations and the role that labor unions play. The collection is made up of scripts, interactive screenplays, correspondence, memoranda, magazine and news articles, and an audiovisual component consisting of audio and VHS cassettes. The materials range from 1981 through 2007, with the bulk dates from 1982 through 2001.

The papers have been arranged into four series with one series further subdivided into subseries. The physical materials are housed in seven boxes and one over-sized folder. Additional scope and content information can be found in the Collection Inventory section of the finding aid.

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System of Arrangement

Series I: "Pirates of the Caribbean", 1991-1994, 2003

Series II: *Return to Zork*, 1992-1994

Series III: Other games, 1982, 1995-1998

Series IV: Career, 1981-2007

Subseries A: Teaching, 1997-1998

Subseries B: Writers Guild of America (WGA), 1992-1998

Subseries C: Publicity, 1981, 1991-2007

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Conditions Governing Access

This collection is open for research use by staff of The Strong and by users of its library and archives.

Conditions Governing Use

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Immediate Source of Acquisition

The papers were donated to The Strong in November 2023 as a gift by Michele Em and accessioned by The Strong under object ID 123.4309. The collection was received from Michele Em in three boxes.

Processed by

Keegan Matthews, August 2025

Processing Information

The Archival Processing Internship was made possible through funding from the Rochester Regional Library Council [RRLC] Internship grant.

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Controlled Access Headings

- Pirates of the Caribbean (Video game)
- Return to Zork (Video game)
- Computer games industry
- Computer games -- Design
- Computer games -- Development
- Computer games -- Handbooks, manuals, etc.
- Computer games
- Computer games industry
- Role playing games
- Promotional materials
- Women in Games
- Writer's Guild of America
- Walt Disney Company
- Activision (Firm)

Collection Inventory

**Series I: "Pirates of the Caribbean", 1991-1994,
2003**

box 1-2

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/56892

Series Scope and Content Note

The "Pirates of the Caribbean" game was an unpublished game developed in the early 1990s by Disney. It was inspired by the Disneyland ride bearing the same name, and both the ride and the video game influenced the 2003 movie *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl* and the subsequent *Pirates of the Caribbean* film franchise.

The "Pirates of the Caribbean" series includes scripts, interactive screenplays, game maps, non-playable character (NPC) design charts, background research, correspondence, and copies of storyboard sketches. Also of note, the scripts highlight the diversity of potential dialogue options and how player choices could influence NPC attitudes.

The documents in this series were originally in binders, the archivist removed the materials from the binder for preservation but maintained the original order. The series also includes a script for *Pirates of the Caribbean: Curse of the Black Pearl*.

The series dates from 1991 through 2003, with the bulk dates from 1992 through 1994.

Title/Description	Instances	
Dialogue flowcharts binder, 1991-1994	box 1	folder 1-3
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57135		
Game documentation binder, 1991-1994	box 1	folder 4-6
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57136		
"Lite Version" design documentation binder, 1991-1993	box 1	folder 7-10
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57137		
"Lite" script, 1993	box 1	folder 11
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57138		
Disney - agreement and correspondence, 1993-1994	box 1	folder 12
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57139		
Interactive screenplay [3 copies], 1994	box 2	folder 1-9
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57140		
<i>Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl</i> screenplay, 2003	box 2	folder 10
ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57141		

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Series II: *Return to Zork* , 1992-1994ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/56900

box 3-4

folder OS1

Series Scope and Content Note

The game *Return to Zork* is part of the *Zork* video game series, which was popular in the 1980s and 1990s. The *Zork* series was a single-player adventure series defined by its fantastical setting and comedic writing, and though it was initially published by Infocom, by the time that *Return to Zork* was published in 1994, Infocom had merged with Activision.

The *Return to Zork* series centers on Michele Em's work with the 1994 game. The series includes interactive screenplays, scripts, game maps, copies of storyboard sketches, NPC dialogues, game design flowcharts, pre-Beta test instructions, promotional materials, and magazine articles related to the game. Of note is that this series maps out the development cycle of this game from the perspective of a writer. Also noteworthy is the inclusion of original promotion materials, as well as magazine articles written about the game by Michele Em herself. The documents in the "Dialogue flowchart binder" and the "Game documentation binder" folders arrived in binders. The archivist removed the materials from the binder for preservation purposes but maintained the original order.

The series includes documents from 1992 through 1994.

Title/Description	Instances	
Structure and contents binder, 1992	box 3	folder 1-3
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57142		
Storyboards, 1992	box 3	folder 4
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57143		
Project and actors' schedules, 1992	box 3	folder 5
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57144		
<i>Return to Zork: Official Guide</i> chapter 2 "The Rise and Fall of Zork" draft, 1992	box 3	folder 6
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57145		
"Original" <i>Return to Zork</i> screenplay, 1992	box 3	folder 7
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57146		
Interactive screenplay, 1992	box 3	folder 8
<u>ID [aspace uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57147		
Interactive screenplay, 1992	box 4	folder 1-2

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57148](#)

Game design documents, 1992-1993	box 4	folder 3-4
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57149		
Activision contract, 1993-1994	box 4	folder 5
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57150		
Photographs, undated	box 4	folder 6
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57151		
Promotional flier cardboard stand, undated [circa 1994]	folder OS1	object 1
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57196		
Non-playable character and item table, undated	folder OS1	object 2
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57197		
Location flowchart, undated	folder OS1	object 3
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57198		

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Series III: Other games, 1982, 1995-1998

box 4-5

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57062](#)

Series Scope and Content Note

The "Other games" series consists of documents from other games that Michele Em wrote for, such as the unpublished puzzle adventure game "The Egyptian Jukebox" and the hacker game "Jericho". The documents in this series consist mainly of dialogues and scripts, with accompanying correspondence and memoranda. The game documents within this series are mostly for puzzle video games and of note is that the majority of these games were never published. The series has been arranged in chronological order, as there was no discernable order.

The bulk of the documents are dated from 1995 through 1997, though it includes documents from 1982 as well.

Title/Description	Instances	
Syntomics, LTD. reference, photographs, and correspondence, 1982	box 4	folder 7
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57152		
Lightspan - correspondence, 1995	box 4	folder 8
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57153		
Mirabilis Firms correspondence, 1995	box 4	folder 9

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57154](#)

Mirabilis "Zen Detectives" correspondence, 1995-1996 box 4 folder 10

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57155](#)

Girl Games concept document, 1996 box 4 folder 11

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57156](#)

"The Egyptian Jukebox" correspondence, 1996 box 4 folder 12

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57157](#)

"The Egyptian Jukebox" script, undated [circa 1996] box 4 folder 13-14

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57158](#)

"Jericho" concept documents, 1996 box 5 folder 1

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57159](#)

"Jericho" concept paper, undated [circa 1997] box 5 folder 2-3

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57160](#)

"Jericho" game proposal, undated [circa 1997] box 5 folder 5

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57161](#)

"Jericho" CD, undated [circa 1997] box 5 folder 6

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57162](#)

Mirvo contract, 1998 box 5 folder 7

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57163](#)

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Series IV: Career, 1981-2007

box 5-7

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57063](#)

Series Scope and Content Note

This series is centered around Michele Em's career beyond her work with video games, namely her publicity, her work with the Writer's Guild of America (WGA), and her time teaching at the University of Southern California (USC). It has been broken down into three different sub-series and includes resumes, correspondence, magazine articles, and WGA membership cards. The documents in the series date from 1992 through 1997, with the bulk of them from 1992 through 2001.

Sub-series A: Teaching, 1997-1998

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57064](#)

Sub-series Scope and Content Note

This sub-series consists of documents related to Michele Em's teaching career. Em was a professor at the University of Southern California in the 1997-1998 academic year, where she taught interactive storytelling courses. The sub-series contains correspondence between her and the university, as well as syllabi and course schedules for classes she taught. It dates from 1997 through 1998.

Title/Description	Instances
University of Southern California (USC) correspondence, 1997-1998	box 5 folder 8
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57164	
"Interactive Storytelling" course syllabus, undated [circa 1998]	box 5 folder 9
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57165	

Sub-series B: Writers Guild of America (WGA), 1992-1998

[ID \[aspace_uri\]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57065](#)

Sub-series Scope and Content Note

This sub-series is centered around Michele Em's membership and involvement with the Writer's Guild of America (shortened to WGA). The Writer's Guild of America is actually the name of the two main labor unions for screenwriters and video game writers in the United States based on the East Coast and West Coast of the US. Founded in 1949, the Writer's Guild of America West is the larger of the two guilds, operating west of the Mississippi river, while the Writer's Guild of America East operates to the east of the Mississippi. Of the two guilds, it would be the Writer's Guild of America West that Michele Em first became involved with in 1992 and she would remain an active participant with them for the next ten or so years.

This sub-series follows her journey through the guild membership process, as well as the guild's obligations. It includes documents related to the role that the WGA played in facilitating contract negotiations and helping to navigate emerging technologies in the 1990s. The sub-series consists of correspondence, memoranda, Em's membership cards, articles she wrote for the WGA, pension plans, and dues receipts. It dates from 1992 through 1997.

Title/Description	Instances
"Info-Pak" correspondence, 1992-1993	box 5 folder 9
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57166	
Creative Media and Technology Committee minutes and agendas, 1993, 1998, undated	box 5 folder 10
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57167	
News release, 1993	box 5 folder 11
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57168	
Interactive Program contract, memoranda, and pension plan, 1993-1998	box 5 folder 12
ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57169	
National Writers Union newsletter, 1994	box 5 folder 13

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57170

Membership application and payments, 1994-1996 box 5 folder 14

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57171

"Secrets of the Next Wave" release form, 1996 box 5 folder 15

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57172

The Journal of the Writers Guild of America, West, 1996 box 5 folder 16
February

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57173

"New Dimensions International Symposium" box 5 folder 17
advertisement, 1998

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57174

Website study, 1998 box 5 folder 18

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57175

Venice Interactive Community events and box 5 folder 19
correspondence, 1998, undated

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57176

Sub-series C: Publicity, 1981, 1991-2007

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57097

Sub-series Scope and Content Note

Michele Em, in addition to writing scripts for video games, also wrote for magazines such as *Computer Gaming World* and *The Journal of the Writer's Guild of America*. Em wrote about projects she was involved in and emerging technologies in the 1990s. Notably, Michele Em wrote about the development of the script of the game *Return to Zork* and the challenges that developing interactive scripts posed for writers. Her writings centered on the video game industry, though she also wrote articles about topics such as fencing.

The sub-series "Publicity" centers mainly on Michele Em's non-video game writing, as well as references to her career, conferences she attended, and awards that she earned. It includes magazine articles, magazines, Em's resume, correspondence, and pamphlets for events that she spoke at. The documents date from 1982 through 2007, with the bulk of them from 1993 through 2001.

Title/Description	Instances	
<i>On Location</i> , 1981 August	box 5	folder 20
<u>ID [aspace_uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57177		
<i>On Location</i> , 1981 December	box 5	folder 21
<u>ID [aspace_uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57178		
<i>The Journal of Computer Game Design</i> , 1993 February	box 5	folder 22
<u>ID [aspace_uri]:</u> /repositories/3/archival_objects/57179		
<i>Computer Gaming World</i> , 1993 July	box 5	folder 23

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57180

The Journal of the Writers Guild of America, West, 1994 June box 5 folder 24

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57181

Clippings, 1994-1999 box 6 folder 1

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57182

Correspondence and resume, 1994 box 6 folder 2

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57183

Axios 95, 1995 box 6 folder 3

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57184

Written By, 1998 December/January box 6 folder 4

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57185

IGDN game developer events pamphlet, 1998 October box 6 folder 5

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57186

Written By, 1999 December/January box 6 folder 6

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57187

Written By, 2001 August box 6 folder 7

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57188

American Fencing, 2007 Summer/Fall box 6 folder 8

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57189

"Production & Authoring Writers/Designers - The Auteurs of Interactive New Media", 1994 April 12-14 box 6 cassette 1

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57193

Interactive Writer's Handbook, 1995 box 6 item 2

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57194

"The Writer's Panel", 1995 box 6 cassette 3

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57195

"Dan Rather News, 1/2 hour", undated box 6 cassette 4

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57191

"Michele Em Director/Producer" [two copies], undated box 6 cassette 5-6

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57192

"Michele on CNN" VHS cassette, undated box 6 cassette 7

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57190

Michele Em demo reel, 1990 August box 7 cassette 1

ID [aspace uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57523

WGAW/Comdex 1995 promo, 1995 November box 7 cassette 2

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57521

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57524

Documentary w/me, undated box 7 cassette 4

ID [aspace_uri]: /repositories/3/archival_objects/57522

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