To the Student

About Alice

Alice is a three-dimensional graphics software package. The Alice environment is an authoring tool that will allow you to create interactive virtual worlds. The 3-D worlds contain objects with behaviors that can be changed. What this means is that you can select special images (like rabbits and helicopters) and create animations with those images (like the bunny riding on top of the helicopter…going, going…)

The name Alice is a tribute to the well-known Lewis Carroll story entitled Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1890's). In Carroll's famous story, Alice was a young girl who falls asleep and, in her dreams, creates and explores her own "curious" virtual world full of strange creatures, for example the white rabbit and the mad hatter. Using Alice you will be able to create your own curious virtual worlds and inhabit them with your own strange creatures.

The Alice software package was created in the early 1990's by the User Interface Group at the University of Virginia, under the directorship of Randy Pausch. The Alice interface/language is still under development by a new research group, with many of the same people, now located at Carnegie Mellon University.

Python

Alice is constructed on a foundation language named Python. Python is an interpreted, interactive, object-oriented programming language. (Don't panic. These terms will be explained in the modules that follow.) Python is often compared to other computer languages like Scheme and Java. In order to make your image objects move around and interact in Alice, you will need to use some of the Python language. The necessary Python commands will be introduced as you learn to build more sophisticated animations.

Python is a copyrighted language made available by the Corporation for National Research Initiatives (CNRI). Python has nothing to do with reptiles of questionable reputation. Instead, Python is named after the BBC television show, Monty Python's Flying Circus.

Useful URLs

You may find it helpful to look at the web sites for Alice and Python. Here are the URLs of interest:

http://alice.cs.cmu.edu/

http://www.python.org/