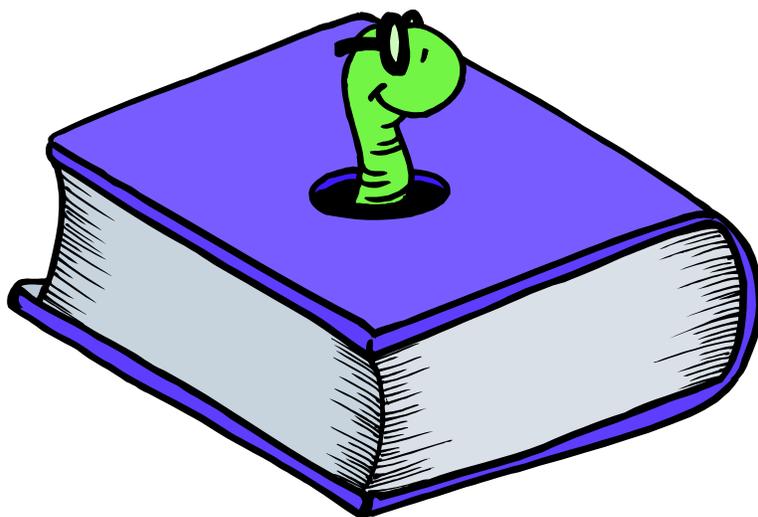


Reviews Exchange

Issue 5
(July 2005)



Contents

Welcome to Issue 5 of the **Reviews Exchange!**

Up until about a month ago, this was looking like a surprisingly slim issue comprising, as it did at the time, of just slightly less than one review. But then – lo and behold! – reviews started flooded in thick and fast, until there were no less than 31(!) in total. A big thank you to everyone who sent a review in, and also a thank you to Richard Otter for organising the ADRIFT Intro Comp whose entries accounted for 21 of the 31 reviews herein.

And without further ado...

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The Adventure Of Space Boy!

by

David Parish

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Superhero

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/spaceboy.zip>

.....

I've always liked games about superheroes. In fact, I've even written one myself. So when I saw this announced on the ADRIFT forum, I quickly rushed over and downloaded it... and came away feeling very disappointed.

The Adventure Of Space Boy! follows is a game about a superhero whose cape has been stolen and his sidekick, Wonder Dog, is missing. You need to find four items that can mimic Space Boy's powers and also discover what's happened to his cape. Oh, and find Wonder Dog as well I guess although the game never actually says this.

It's pretty obvious right from the start that this is a game by a newcomer and has undergone little or no testing at all. While we were all newcomers at one point, it's still hard to overlook the sheer number of things missed out here that really should have been covered. Okay, asking for people to test your very first game when you don't really know anyone to ask isn't an easy thing, but even so...

You can get a good feel for the overall quality of the game right from the beginning. Very few of the items mentioned in the room

descriptions can be examined, and the descriptions for the ones that *are* covered are minimal to say the least – most less than a line in length. Obvious commands are missing for a good number of the things I tried to do – I can't use or turn on or turn off the computer. There's text displayed on the screen yet reading or examining the screen isn't an option, nor is reading or examining the text itself. While this is a pain, it's not impossible to figure out what needs to be done to read the text. However, when YOU SEE NO SUCH THING pops up almost every time I try and examine something, I'm left with the feeling that I'm probably not going to enjoy this game much.



Other locations contain other annoyances. The front yard lists a large platform to the east yet I never did figure out how to reach it as going east won't work and GO PLATFORM hasn't been covered. In fact, precious few commands are covered. And there are no hints. Never a good thing.

Inevitably, I got stuck and cheated by opening up the Generator (mercifully the game is unpassworded) and had a look there to see what I could find out. Not much unfortunately. Maybe I missed something but there seemed to be a serious amount of guess the verb involved with some of the required tasks (USE KEY ON DOOR is needed to open a door instead of OPEN DOOR or UNLOCK DOOR) and several items appear to be next to impossible to get hold of.

The writing is brief and to the point. It's also very basic. Room descriptions tend to list what the player can see and nothing else. No effort is made to inject depth into the proceedings and it's not long before I was getting tired of the game. At heart, this is meant to be a comical, light-hearted game about a superhero and his dog yet there's

nothing very comical about it. More time needs to be spent on fleshing out the room descriptions, as well as the items in them, and some definite work needs to be done as far as the puzzles are concerned.

One of the game's main problems is clearly down to the fact that it's written by a newcomer who's probably never written a game before and so has missed out on a good number of the things that are generally expected in a text adventure these days. Hopefully he can get these fixed in time for either his next game or a revised version of this one. He also needs to get someone to test his games beforehand, or at least do a more thorough job of testing them himself because there are some strange bugs in evidence that any half-decent betatester would have picked up on. The Parico Flight Boots start off closed (I'm not even sure how boots can ever be considered closed but anyway...) yet I'm still able to wear them. However, even whilst wearing them, with my feet actually *in* the boots, I'm able to close and then open them. Funnily enough, the game won't let me fly if the boots are closed while I'm wearing them, yet will if they're open.

All in all, a game I couldn't really recommend to anyone but here's hoping the writer learns from his mistake and releases a better game next time round, and doesn't just disappear like all the other newbies before him whose first game wasn't very well received.

2 out of 10



Escape To Freedom

by

Richard Otter

Review: David Whyld

Genre: War/Espionage

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/freedom.zip>

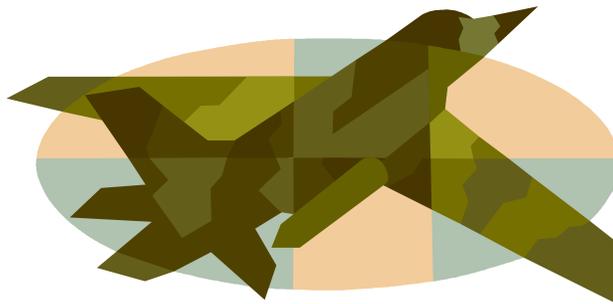
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In a retro mood? Suffering pangs of nostalgia for the more straightforward and simple type of text adventures of the 80's that were more about the finding of treasure and less about exploring the vagaries of the human mind? Welcome to **Escape To Freedom**, a port of a game originally written in 1989 for the Commodore 64 by one Mario Moeller. No, I'd never heard of him either, and while I played a *lot* of text adventures back then, I'd never heard of **Escape To Freedom** either.

You play the part of a World War II bomber, shot down over enemy territory and forced to crash land. After that, it's a case of trying to find your way back home before the enemy grab hold of you and subject you to whatever unpleasantness World War II bombers get subjected to when they fall into enemy hands. Nothing very nice I suspect.

Without having played the original – one of the many that passed me by in the Golden Age of Text Adventures – it's difficult to say how accurate a port this game is. There are the obvious differences that hit you straight off – text adventures these days go for a miniscule font

whereas ones back in the good ol' days had a larger font. Why? Beats me. The game *feels* retro, though. Descriptions are brief without ever seeming rushed, telling you what you need to know without resorting to anything *too* flowery. Part of me likes this sort of thing – it brings back fond memories of text adventures as they used to be – whereas another part longs for more fleshed out descriptions. In the original game the descriptions *had* to be brief and to the point as the game was written with the Commodore 64, and 64KB of RAM just isn't a huge amount for a full size game to fit into. In the modern age, with memory restrictions so huge as to be virtually non-existent, the descriptions could certainly have been fleshed out.



Unfortunately, fond as I am of the retro period, there are things about it that bug me. Precise wording for certain puzzles is required and so though you might figure out what you need to do to solve a certain puzzle, hitting the correct phrasing is often harder than the puzzle itself. I found some floorboards which I was sure I needed to lift yet couldn't work out how to go about it. After trying several different ways without success, I weakened and went to the walkthrough. Apparently GET FLOORBOARDS WITH KNIFE is needed, not just LIFT FLOORBOARDS or LIFT FLOORBOARDS WITH KNIFE or even GET FLOORBOARDS. Typical retro period guess the verb for you there. It's kind of annoying that this wasn't fixed in the port, although I think the writer (porter?) was going for a true retro feel so he probably felt that leaving in the hideous guess the verb problems was appropriate.

Some of the puzzles are quite good, but poorly clued. They're of the variety that you probably won't get first time round but after you've messed them up, the solution is pretty much handed to you on a plate. Some you might even solve without realising you've done them. One involves creeping through a hole you've cut in a wire. Creep through at the wrong time of day (when it's light) and you'll be caught. Creep through during darkness and you're fine. The only problem is, it's often

hard to know what time of day it is. The message telling you just flashes past on screen and probably won't even be noticed at the time. Examining the sky or your surroundings don't produce any clues so it's probably down to timing more than anything else: if you happen to be at the hole in the wire during nightfall, you'll be fine. Otherwise, you're caught and thrown in the slammer with the game telling you that you should have tried when it was dark. Not a bad puzzle, but a difficult one to get first time round as you'll most likely not know what time of the day it is *or* that it matters.

Being a retro game, **Escape To Freedom** is very fond of putting the player in an impossible to win situation without giving him the slightest hint that this has happened. On my first play through, I found myself in the prison camp which comprises a good portion of the game. I wandered round, solved a few minor puzzles, tried to escape, got caught... and didn't get anywhere fast. Later, I realised that an item found right at the very start of the game was one I'd missed out on and, as a result of this, the game was impossible to finish. It was annoying knowing that everything I'd done since then was now useless as that one thing had effectively ruined the game for me. This wasn't a terrible thing in itself, as all it required me to do was restart the game and pick up the item then make my way through the game again to the point at which I had become stuck, but as it happens so rarely in modern games (thank heavens!), it bugged me no end. In a way it's strange in that I used to play so many games that did such things to me back in the 80's, and never found it much of an annoyance, yet faced with it today it makes me want to throttle the writer who decided to utilise it in his game. A warning would have been nice...

Bugs the game seems just about free of. I only ran into a small problem with a pistol although as this actually helped me out, I'm not going to complain about it at length. The pistol was empty when I picked it up, and yet later I was able to shoot someone with it. Then again, a bullet I had eaten and then vomited out (don't ask) earlier on mysteriously disappeared from my inventory around this time so maybe that's where it went. Although if so, the game certainly never told me this.

No retro game would be complete without a maze. Well, that's not strictly speaking true as quite a few retro games lacked a maze. But **Escape To Freedom** has one. It's a forest where all the locations are the same. Now while I have great fondness for retro games in general,

mazes are the one thing about them (even more so than the guess the verb issues) that I'm quite happy to go without. So when faced with this one... I cheated. Yep, opened up the walkthrough and just typed in the commands as they appeared. I probably ought to feel bad about it, but whoever came up with the idea of including mazes in so many retro games needs shooting. Preferably with a gun with bullets in.

Overall, I liked **Escape To Freedom**. It evoked a nice retro feel in me that kind of compensated for its other shortcomings. It probably won't appeal to many people who lack fondness for the retro era, but for those of us who have nice memories of the likes of **The Hobbit** and **Colossal Cave**, it should be worth playing. In a way, I'm kind of curious as to why this one got the retro treatment and not one of the better known classics.

Retro rating: 6 out of 10

Non-retro rating: 3 out of 10



The Final Question

by

David Whyld

Review: C. Henshaw

Genre: Horror

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

1. Does it set the scene?

The Final Question starts off with a dialogue between two conspirators, although you don't know what they are conspiring about until the 3rd or 4th paragraph. The dialogue sets the scene well – two personalities are in league over something, but a certain friction is also present. There is a bit of a hiccup with the very first sentence though – Markham's 'The question... is whether or not you will really go through with it or not.' This wording set me up to expect some comedy element, silly dialogue or something. But no – read further and the impression is that this story is actually quite serious. Luckily that first line is forgotten in the continuation of the dialogue.



The opening is all about mood – the character’s mood (a scientist about to self test a Machine of immortality) and the game’s mood (self-reflective, a bit macho, and with anyone else I’d say gearing for surreal, but having played a few other games by David, I wouldn’t be surprised to see some gritty realism).

I have to admit that by the beginning of game play I was having a strong sense of *déjà vu* – the premise so far was very similar to *Unravelling God* in which a driven professor of science chases immortality, and whose name is Markson. So this in itself gave me some preconceptions of what this game would entail. Sure enough – at a certain point there is a flashback to a scene of the PC, Anton, in a hospital bed. Then we move forward again to Anton’s study, where (unsurprisingly like Markson’s house) it is described as a reflection of Anton’s personality and lifestyle.



Despite strange feelings of having read this before, this intro does a pretty decent job of setting up the back-story, getting the player involved in the character, and arousing interest in the plot. Passages from books like *The Theory of Immortality* give further weight to the interests and aims of Anton’s experiment. The very ending, Anton’s dramatic plunge into... immortality? Something, anyway... rounds off

the introduction and made me think – Ah, here's where the game *really* starts.

2. Is it well implemented?

In general, this game is well put together, with lots of text broken up by waitkey commands, which are an excellent way to keep you reading – put in a pause at a particularly interesting junction in dialogue, or at a cliff-hanger, and you've got the player (or me at least) hooked.

Game play isn't an issue much in this game, most of the introduction is back-story and working up to the cliffhanger at the end of the prologue – when Anton enters the Machine. The countdown (a real countdown) to entering the machine gives the player time to study the surroundings, although the description of the room could have been a bit more coherent (you can only examine the Machine and the cables). I was happy to see that PC description was implemented, and you could look at Markham even though he wasn't there (as a remembered description by the PC).

In the study, the descriptions fall a bit short – walls, floor and door are mentioned in the room description, but you can't examine them (you can however examine the carpet). There's not much to do in the study except read passages from the books mentioned above, which are interesting, but once you've read them, you sort of stand there, waiting for something to happen. There are a lot of things you can't do – open the door, open the curtains (and thus look out the window), light the fireplace, drink anything in the drinks cabinet, and while you can open the drawer in the desk, there's nothing in it (and you can't remember if you ever put anything in it). Okay, so this room is for reading books only. 'Take books' or 'take a book' comes back with 'Sorry. That is not a command used in this adventure. Try something else.' But I've already tried everything else!

Aha! I'd missed that last book title at the end of the line. Story progresses to the end.

3. Do I want more?

Yes, as long as Anton doesn't end up mimicking Markson *too* much. I'd like to see some really surreal situations, something unique and fascinating, after that great build up. *Unravelling God* is one of my

favourite ADRIFT games, so it's not a bad one to imitate. If the writing can hold up to its former example, then this is set to be one of the better games I've played in quite a while.

Score (each out of 10):

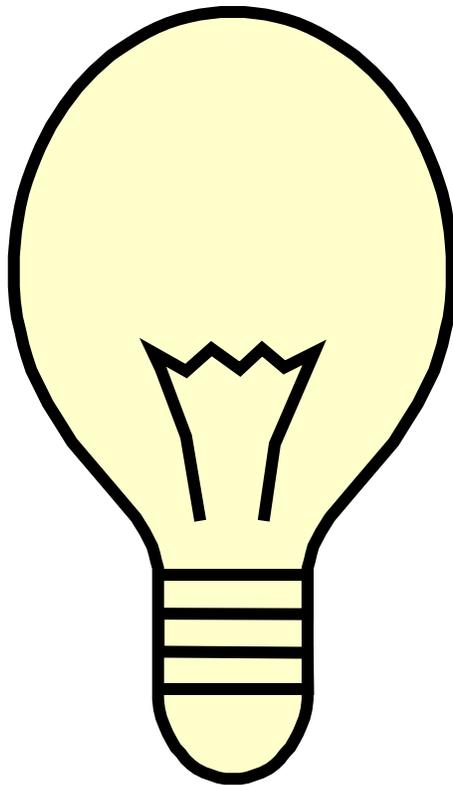
Scene setting: 8

Implementation: 7

Appetite whetting: 8

Bonus points: 2 for the best prologue in the comp

Total: 25 (should have a pretty long shelf-life)



The Final Question

by

David Whyld

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Genre: Horror

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

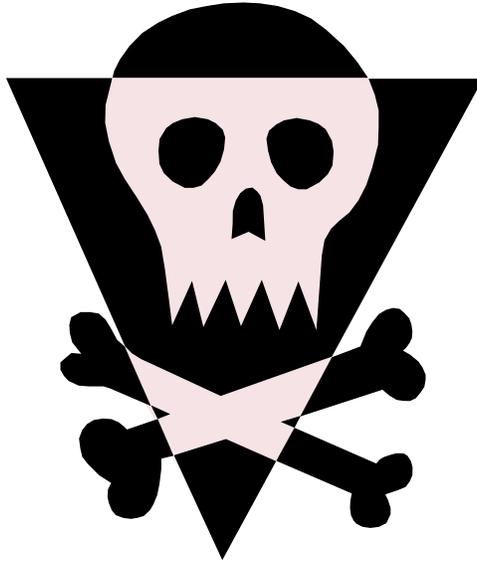
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This entry of the Adrift Intro Comp 2005 is written by David Whyld, the most prolific Adrift author. It finished second, equal with 'Murder Mansion' by Reelyor.

'The Final Question' is a game about Anton Ryder, the player's alter ego with a rather unusual passion: trying to find a way to live forever. And although we see an engaged discussion between the ambitious scientist and his partner, Markham, we soon find ourselves in a room with a machine, designed to bring eternal life to whomever enters through its gateway. After we examine the machine a little bit, Markham starts the countdown for what could be a historical landmark of humanity. Given this impact, I can understand why the author has chosen to let the countdown go down one by one. Nevertheless, typing 'wait' several times didn't really increase the tension for me. Maybe there's another way of doing this, like an automatic countdown or a soundfile?

After the player has entered the machine, the game takes us on a flashback to a scene seven years earlier. It gives us more information on the lonely and unemotional life Anton has, and we witness how he

even isn't able to show emotions in a moment of great grief, as he learns of his parents death in a car accident.



The scene changes again, and Anton, unenthusiastically as you'd expect him, describes his workplace. Except for the door and the ceiling, everything in the workplace can be examined. The most interesting objects by far are some books, which, upon reading, show some excerpts about death and life; they add a strong sense of suspense to the story. The books have to be read one after one, as 'read books' isn't a recognized command.

In the final stage of the intro, we're back in the present and Anton is experiencing strange feelings as his trip through the machine unfolds. The end cuts in at a tensing moment, when we only know that he is safe, but nothing more about the future fate of his journey.

Apart from a few missing commands and objects, I enjoyed this intro. It established a good and enthralling storyline, and the pacing at which new information are given is very well arranged. The experience this author has with game writing clearly shows. I was a little bit disappointed about not being able to explore more on my own, but that's not that surprising for an intro.

So, will a game follow this intro? In a recent thread on the Adrift forums, David Whyld hasn't included it on a list of his working titles, but maybe it will reincarnate in another one of his games? I certainly hope so.



[NOTE from author: yes, I'll be writing a full length version of this game. One day.]

The Fire Tower

by

Jacqueline A. Lott

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Real Life

Platform: Inform

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/firetower.z8>

.....

Interactive fiction used to be about finding lost treasure or battling monsters in dark dungeons or saving the world from terrible evil. How times have changed. **The Fire Tower** is about a hiker.

I'd be lying if I said I don't have fond nostalgia for the text adventures of old. The storylines might have been corny, they might not have made much sense, and the mazes which populated a lot of the games could make even a sane man tear his hair out in frustration, but I always felt like none of that really mattered and what *was* important was that the games themselves had interesting storylines. A game where you play a hiker just doesn't really compare to a quest to save the world. Save the world and you feel like you've achieved something major. Finish your hike...? Well, it's just not the same thing.

But that aside, what's **The Fire Tower** like as a game? Unfortunately, there's not much in the way of actual gameplay here. There are no puzzles to solve, no items that play a role (you start carrying several but they aren't required for anything and seem to be there because it's expected that the player is going to be carrying something), and precious little storyline. There are no ways to die or fail the game that I found, although I think I read in another review that you *can* die if

you're especially unlucky. I guess this must have been my lucky day. Very little happens to enliven things.

Is it all bad then? No, far from it. It's actually quite refreshing to just wander from location to location without anything to really do in them. The writing is way above average and while I've never been fond of hiking before today (too much like hard work for my liking), I might give it a try after this. Unfortunately where I live there tends to be a lack of beautiful scenery so maybe I'm better off reading about it on a computer screen as opposed to experiencing it first hand.



To say the game is called **The Fire Tower**, the fire tower itself doesn't really play any major part in the proceedings. I expected some kind of revelation when I reached it, or for the game to take some abrupt turn and become a bit more interesting, or... *something*. Instead, I reached the fire tower, went inside, didn't find a whole lot and left. Expecting something to happen if I tried moving away from the tower, I did that. Only to find that once I had left the vicinity of the tower, I wasn't able to return. So my hike up to the fire tower seemed pretty anti-climactic. All that was left afterwards was for me to hike back down and the game ended.

I played the game through a few more times to see if I'd missed anything on my first play, but aside from wandering slightly off the beaten path at one point, I think I had seen pretty much all the game had to offer.

A bit disappointing then? In some ways: yes. In others: no. For the time I spent playing it – it didn't take much more than fifteen minutes from start to finish – it was interesting enough to hold my attention, although that was partly because I kept thinking "there has to be more to it than simply wandering from place to place" and right up to the last bit, I was expecting some kind of puzzle to spring itself upon me. When it didn't, and then the game ended, I was left with the feeling that while it had held my interest for fifteen minutes, it wouldn't have kept me glued to the screen for much longer.



Puzzle filled games have never been my cup of tea. Mainly, I readily admit, because I'm terrible at puzzles and can't figure them out half the time. Even the easy ones, I generally don't have the patience for and when I faced with one puzzle after another, the urge to just quit and play something else becomes overwhelming. But then I've never

been a fan of puzzle free games either. Just wandering around with precious little to do isn't especially interesting and while the setting doesn't really allow for the placement of oodles of puzzles, I'm sure a few could have been worked into the mix without too much effort. Maybe the fire tower could be locked and I need to find a way inside. Maybe a path is blocked and I have to find an alternative route, perhaps using a log to cross a river. Maybe when I meet the bear, I have to use my wits to get past it instead of the game just moving me past it without me being required to do anything.

But no puzzles. And a very short game. Subsequent plays didn't reveal anything hidden that I hadn't discovered on my first play and after reaching the ending for the third time, I decided that enough was enough. While okay in its own right, **The Fire Tower** just isn't interesting enough to keep me coming back for further plays.

Bugs it's pretty free of. I encountered a few annoyances but nothing that really put me off the game. In one location there's a woodpecker but you can't listen to it by referring to it as "woodpecker" but instead "bird". A few other times, I'd stop for a rest during my hike and trying to move in a direction afterwards would hit me with a message saying I couldn't do that while I was on the ground. The first time I saw this it confused me a bit because I wasn't really sure what it was telling me. Yes, I was on the ground. Why was moving in a direction a problem? It wasn't till I realised that I was sitting down and needed to stand up first before I was able to actually go anywhere. Towards the end of the game, I game across a locked gate. Just as I was about to cry out "a puzzle at last!" I realised it wasn't a puzzle at all as there's no way of opening it. Oh well. However, the text informs me that I don't need to open it as I can walk around it to the northeast. Only I can't. It's *northwest* I need to go.

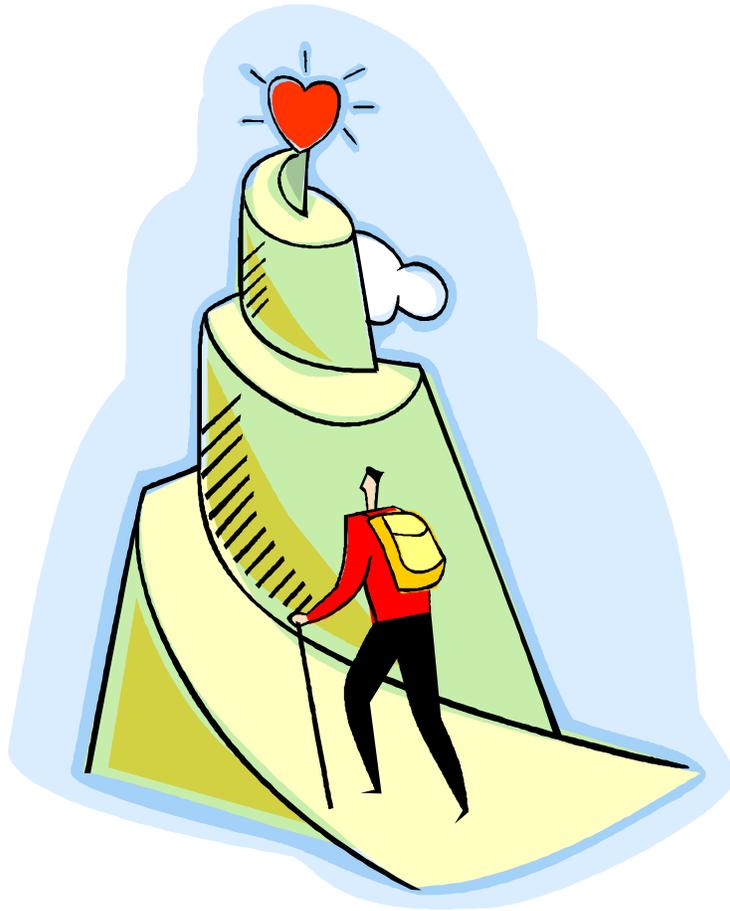
The major annoyance, as far as I was concerned anyway, was that once you go in one direction, you can't go back. I guess this might be believable in the sense that the locations are often spaced far apart – you're hiking several miles after all – but it made me feel that I was missing out on significant portions of the game by going one way when I should have gone another and once I'd gone that way there was no backtracking. Aside from that, the game also has the tendency to prevent you going in directions you might want to go in and instead steers you along a very set path. So while you have the illusion of

being able to wander pretty much wherever you want, the reality is that you're restricted in where you can go.

Conclusion

If you've half an hour to spare, give **The Fire Tower** a try. It doesn't break new ground and the storyline isn't anything special, but it's nicely written and the scenery is stunning. Me, I think I'm off to stumble through a few tunnels in retro games and smite me a monster or three.

5 out of 10



Future Boy

by

Kent Tessman

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Superhero

Platform: Hugo

Download: <http://www.generalcoffee.com/futureboy/about.html> (demo)

.....

And after many years of commercial interactive fiction being just a pipe dream or a fondly remembered memory, along comes a new one. Okay, I'm aware of the Malinche games but given their less than flattering reputation in the IF community and the general 'Malinche as black sheep' feeling that hangs over them, I'm happy I've decided to avoid buying them thus far. But **Future Boy** tempted me. Maybe it's because I'm a sucker for superhero games or maybe because I'd played a previous game by the same author (**Guilty Bastards**) and liked it a lot. Or maybe it was just sheer curiosity that got the better of me.



I approached **Future Boy** wanting to like it. Really wanting to like it. As someone obsessed with the idea of writing his own commercial interactive fiction one day, the coming of **Future Boy** was like a gift from the gods themselves. Could this, I wondered, finally be the rebirth of commercial IF once more?

I eagerly popped in the CD, installed the programme, tapping my fingers impatiently on the edge of the desk whilst doing so... and then, once I got to the game itself and started playing it, I found myself a little disappointed. Which isn't to say that **Future Boy** is a terrible game. It isn't. It's good, *very* good in parts. It's just that, for a commercial product, it's a lot less polished than I expected it to be. I've played free IF that has been far smoother than this, so if the free stuff can hit such high standards, why can't the commercial stuff? After all, we're paying for something that is bug free and better than anything else, right? Wrong.

As the name implies, **Future Boy** is a superhero game, a genre I've always been particularly fond of, despite (or perhaps because of) its overly cheesy idea of people in silly costumes fighting other people in silly costumes. On the downside, you don't actually get to play the superhero in question which struck me as a strange direction for the game to take, akin to playing a Superman game and getting to control Lois Lane instead of the Man of Steel himself. Or the recent Matrix game in which you don't play Neo but some of the minor characters from the film that you probably blinked and missed. So **Future Boy** is basically a superhero game in which you don't get to play a superhero. Hmm...

There's a playable demo available, which was what I came to first. Was I overwhelmed with the attention to detail and impressed with the depth of story and interaction? Yes and no. **Future Boy** certainly starts off strangely – you're falling through the air and about to hit the ground – and I'm not sure this was the best way for the game to start. Why not Future Boy putting the smack down on some vicious supervillain? Future Boy saving the world from darkest evil? Future Boy stopping a derailed train about to plunge into a deep precipice? Etc etc. Instead we have Future Boy falling? Not quite the same thing. As it happens, the falling part is actually a dream (hope I didn't give away too much there) and the game moves to the introduction properly once you awaken.

I wasn't too keen on the introduction, either. Two strikes against the game. After the falling sequence, I was expecting something a bit more interesting than simply ambling around my apartment. I wasn't able to leave which clued me to the fact that there was still something that needed doing beforehand. What needed doing? Simple: I've got to wake up my lazy flatmate. Once that's out of the way – and the realisation that you're sharing a flat with a genuine card-carrying superhero (unfortunately this realisation is handled pretty poorly) – you're on with the game properly. Does it get any more interesting then? Well... The next part begins with you delivering some laundry bags to the prison. Wow.



Around this time (I was still playing the demo), I began to wonder if the writer of **Future Boy** had made something of an error in judgement in the way the game begins. The falling sequence isn't very interesting, the events of the introduction aren't either, and delivering laundry bags to a prison? Well... let's just say that I was in two minds over whether to purchase the full product when I reached the end of the demo. In the end, I went ahead and bought it anyway. While the demo is certainly flawed, and considerably less polished than I might have expected, it was nevertheless very well written and I've always been a sucker for superhero games. And then there's the fact that I

really, really, really want the commercial aspect of IF to emerge again. And then there was the fact that, on the whole, what I'd heard about the full game from various internet message boards and newsgroups was on the whole positive.

There were a few strange annoyances about **Future Boy** which I was surprised about. This is, after all, a commercial product and that generally means a higher level of testing than something given away for free*. One of the first things I typed was X YOU but was told THAT DOESN'T MAKE ANY SENSE! However X ME works fine. As the game constantly refers to the player as "you", I found this unusual to say the least.

* In theory anyway. I've played enough commercial games over the years, both IF and otherwise, to know that just because the companies making them are charging money, it doesn't necessarily mean they've bothered testing them. Hopefully we'll soon see a 'patch' available for **Future Boy** which takes care of these annoyances. If, indeed, it's even possible to apply patches to IF games in this way.



One thing **Future Boy** has, and has in abundance, is a large number of puzzles. And some are hard. Unfairly so. And, worse, they're not even very interesting puzzles. Take the prison cell you find yourself locked in during the early part of the game. While I suppose it's possible to figure out on your own what you need to do to get out of it, it's such a longwinded and, overall, boring series of events that I just didn't have the willpower to even try. Added to that was the truly frustrating way I kept passing out every few moves and then having to wait several more moves before I was able to do something – was the

writer actively trying to make me type QUIT?* Thank god for the hints, which told me exactly what I needed to do. And thank god the demo version of the game ended before dumping the player in the prison cell because I doubt I'd have bought the full version if faced with that sort of thing.

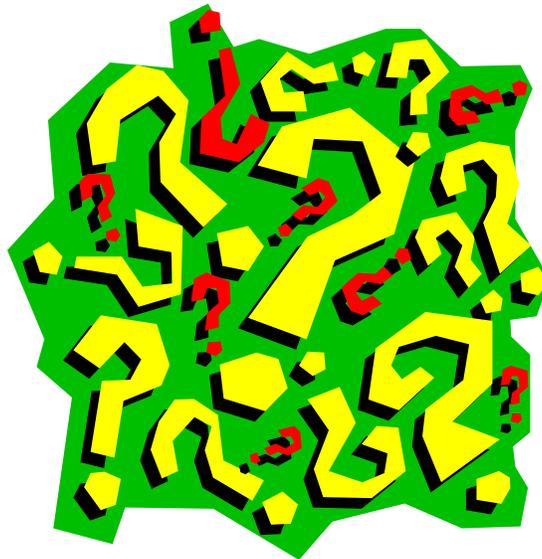
* Actually, the passing out bug is one that, according to the hints, can be avoided. However, I never figured out how so escaping my prison cell took about ten times as long as it should have done. I'm pretty sure that if I hadn't paid for **Future Boy** I'd have thrown the game in the recycle bin at this stage.

Future Boy takes places in various parts of the city where you work as a laundry bag delivery man. Access to the different parts of the city is via the subway system, which does an effective job of moving the player from one part of the city to another without the necessity of introducing large numbers of filler locations. I wasn't overly fond of the subway system, though. Maybe it was the hassle I had over finding my subway ticket (I'm apparently the sort of really poor chap who never carries around enough loose cash to buy a subway ticket) or maybe the annoying graphic that runs every time you board a train. Or maybe it was that the subway can only take you to four different places in the city and three of them are pretty empty. I like to explore in games, wander around and see what there is to see. Personally I think I'd have preferred a city filled with several dozen more locations for me to explore, even if they weren't directly relevant to the game.

In many ways, **Future Boy** strikes me as a strange game to make a stab at the commercial side of things. It's not an especially user-friendly game for a start. People familiar with IF games will obviously have an easier time with it than complete newcomers to the scene (although as I've been playing IF for over twenty years and I struggled greatly with it, that might not be the case). While no one really wants a game to be too easy – where's the challenge in solving easy puzzles? – no one really wants a game to be as frustrating as this one often is. A fine balance needs to be made between what is easy and what is hard, and **Future Boy** seems to step over the line into too hard frequently.

Some of the problems might well be with the system used to write the game, Hugo. I haven't played enough Hugo games to tell for certain but with over half the screen taken up with the graphics, the text

tends to get bunched up in a very small, non-resizable window at the bottom. And as **Future Boy** is quite a wordy game, this meant that most of my commands ran off the screen and I seemed to be forever seeing the <MORE> prompt telling me I needed a press a key to see the rest of the text. Often when I did this, the text jumped up the screen so quickly that I had to spend a second or two finding my place again. Personally I'd have preferred an option to either increase the size of the text window or, better still, just turn off the graphics altogether. They're nice graphics, and they *do* add to the overall feeling of the game, but sometimes I could just have done without them. There *is* an option to turn off the graphics but as this just left me with a large blank space at the top of the screen, I decided in the end that I was better turning turn them back on again.



Another thing that bugged me, minor though it was, was the way when moving from one location to another I would often find myself sitting down and have to STAND. It might seem a really small thing to do to just type STAND but it's a pain all the same. Wouldn't it have made more sense to just have the player standing by default? Particularly as little can be achieved with you seated?

In other places, the dreaded guess the verb rears its ugly head. Yes indeed. I'd hoped that with this being a commercial game, it would have been tested through the roof to eliminate any kind of guess the verb struggling that might otherwise have resulted, but sadly a few little swines were overlooked. I had great difficulty getting into the

police impound to recover my van due to the game not understanding most of what I was trying to do and being very particular about exactly what it would accept. Especially annoying was THROW BLANKET OVER FENCE which got me WHAT EXACTLY ARE YOU HOPING FOR? I thought it was pretty obvious what I was hoping for – to throw the blanket over the fence. COVER FENCE WITH BLANKET and COVER BARBED WIRE WITH BLANKET (there being barbed wire over the top of the fence) resulted in BETTER START WITH A VERB. Funny. I – and the dictionary – think that 'cover' *is* a verb but apparently Hugo knows better. By the time I hit upon DRAPE BLANKET OVER FENCE I was beginning to wonder if some hideous bug had crept into the game. Why the needing for the word 'drape' when 'cover' or 'throw' would have worked just as well? Beats me.

One thing I disliked about the game, and which got increasingly more annoying the longer I played, was how the solution to some of the puzzles seemed unnecessarily longwinded. Often I would uncover some vital clue and yet the process of actually doing anything with it was never as straightforward as it seemed. At one point, I found the hideout of the evil supervillain, yet no one seemed to care and my attempts to tell Frank (the civilian version of Future Boy himself) about it just elicited an unhelpful response. More and more often I seemed to be resorting to the hints just to make any kind of progress and whenever I tried to reason something out for myself, the game just refused to play ball. While I can appreciate that if **Future Boy** was an easy game, people would probably feel they hadn't got their money worth because it would only take them a matter of hours to complete it, at the same time I'm not convinced that throwing hard puzzles at the player is going to make him like it any better. While some of the puzzles *are* reasonably easy, others aren't. And some are downright nightmarish. At least a few require you to revisit locations you have been to before and not found anything worthwhile in, and then to wait around for something to happen. While I guess it's possible you could hit on the solution to these puzzles by sheer dogged persistence, or pure luck, it seems likely that a good number will baffle most people. I'm not even sure why some of them were included at all. Yes, they make you really think about things but after battering my head against certain puzzles for a while, only to realise that the solution was in a completely different location that I had already visited, just at the wrong time, I would have been happier with a more puzzle-free game.



Aside from problems with the difficulty of some of the puzzles (the computer in particular), a good number of them are just downright tedious. Even when armed with the hints, I found myself struggling with the computer puzzle. Not so much to figure out what I needed to do, but to keep my enthusiasm for the game long enough to actually keep playing it. Now maybe it's just me – I'm not a fan of overly complicated puzzle games at the best of times – but I'm sure that most people don't find that kind of puzzle interesting.

Then again, some of the puzzles *are* pretty inspired. I particularly enjoyed the time travel puzzles associated with the large and small orbs (once I'd found them that was, which I doubt I'd have done without the hints telling me where they were; and once I'd figured out how I was supposed to use them (again, the hints came to the rescue)), even though I'd have definitely preferred if using them was made somewhat easier. The first time I managed to successfully activate the small orb and travel through time, I wasn't even sure what had gone on and it wasn't until I'd done it a few times that I realised the truth of the situation. A smile lit up my face then at a genuinely decent twist in the game. If only all the puzzles were this good.

Fortunately, there's an excellent hints system in place for the many times when the puzzles might get the better of you. Did I say excellent? Well, it's certainly excellent in the sense that it helps you steer past the hardest of the game's puzzles, and without it I'd probably still be stuck in that cell right at the start of the game with 95% of it still to go. But the way the information is presented is a downright pain. Type HINT and the screen clears and you're faced with miniscule text in the middle of the screen which you have to navigate through to the relevant hint. This is cumbersome to use and having to bang the ESC key to move back out each time you've finished, and H to reveal another hint doesn't help matters either. Worse still, a good number of the hints are red herrings. I spent a while trying to figure out how to get inside the supervillain's hideout with a hot air balloon only to find, when I resorted to the hints again, that there *wasn't* a hot air balloon in the game. Ho ho. How I laughed then. In fact, I laughed so hard that I almost deleted the frustrating game and tried something else.

Yes, it's ultimately a frustrating game. Genuine brilliance shines through in a few instances – the time travel aspects in particular – but all too often the game annoyed me so much I regretted ever buying it in the first place. I didn't want to be annoyed. I wanted to be entertained. I didn't buy the game to see how much it could annoy me. Which is a shame, because if that *was* the reason I'd bought it, I'd have certainly got my money's worth.

Another point against the game is the multi-coloured text used for various dialogue options with the NPCs. Multiple colours looks gaudy and, worse, some of it isn't especially easy to read. Text all of the same colour would have been my preference.

The conversation system is another point against the game (yes, another). Usually I'm a fan of conversation systems that use the dialogue options way of doing things because selecting what you want to say from a list of displayed options is a lot easier than trying to figure out what you need to ask people about. Here, alas, it's handled poorly. The conversation system is awkward to use and moving between the dialogue options slow and fiddly. A few times I selected the wrong option by mistake because the cursor had moved on to the next option without me realising it.

No superhero game would be complete without a supervillain. Here we have Clayton Eno. *Clayton Eno?* Hmm... the supervillains in the comics I read as a kid always had cool names like Dr Doom, Ultron, Magneto, Dr Octopus and so on and so forth. Clayton Eno just doesn't seem to have the same ring to it. Nor does he really get up to the kind of villainous deeds that supervillains are famed for: no world domination for Clayton Eno. Nope. He's planning to get himself elected mayor and does this by blocking off a bridge. If **Future Boy** was meant wholly as a parody of the superhero genre (and maybe it was and I just missed the signs), it would probably get away with this sort of thing, but as it seems intended more as a straight superhero game, it suffers badly from a poor supervillain and his poor schemes. Getting yourself elected mayor just isn't the same as a diabolical plan to blow the world up. And he doesn't even cackle insanely.

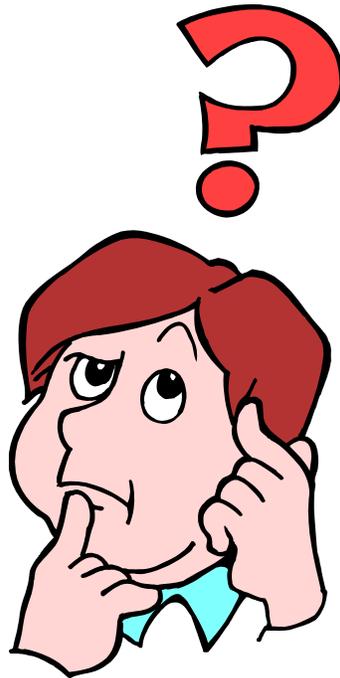


So... worth playing? Yes. Worth buying? Perhaps not. **Future Boy** is certainly one of the better IF games I've played over the past year or so, but it's got so many rough edges that I'd be hard pressed to recommend buying it to anyone. A couple of free games I've played recently – **City Of Secrets** and **Varicella** – were considerably smoother and a lot less buggy. A lot more user friendly as well (**Future Boy** has a sarcastic parser that often makes fun of the player for trying out perfectly normal actions). If this was a free game, I'd

definitely recommend people try it out as there's a lot to like about it. As a commercial release, you're probably better off playing one of the others I've just mentioned and hoping **Future Boy** one day becomes freeware.

In some ways, I feel bad about giving **Future Boy** such a harsh review because it's not a terrible game and it's obviously had a considerable amount of time and effort expended on it. Maybe it's a sign of the times. If this had come out in the 80's when interactive fiction (or text adventures as they were known back then) was 100% commercial, it would certainly have held its ground against the majority of the other games around at the time. Heck, it might even be remembered these days with the same kind of fondness as **The Hobbit** and **Zork**. But IF has moved on in the intervening years and with 99% of it being free these days, for a commercial product to succeed it has to be the best of the lot. And, sorry to say, **Future Boy** isn't anywhere close. It's good, just not *that* good.

6 out of 10



Halloween Hijinks

by

David Whyld

Review: Robert Rafgon

Genre: Comedy Horror

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/hijinks.taf>

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"Halloween Hijinks" is another comedy game by David Whyld. It is Halloween themed where you and your sister have to go trick or treating on the ominously named Murder Drive. The history and residents (who haven't yet disappeared) of the road, make the name seem appropriate. The aim of the game is to collect as many treats as possible. None of the residents make it easy to get into their houses, or if they do, then they seem to want you to carry out a favour first. I didn't know that trick or treating could have so many puzzles. I always thought it was a simpler process.

The main NPC is your little sister, who is aged six compared to your eight, and she accompanies you for most of this game. She is a lot more aggressive and braver, although in this neighbourhood that is not the same as smarter. Your little sister does not speak in clear English, instead using phonetically similar nonsense words, and sometimes it does take work to figure out what she is actually saying. She adds a good contrast to your more cautious character, and this adds more humour. She is necessary to solve a few puzzles, but I felt that she could have played a greater role in the game. The other NPCs

are a mix of unpleasant and crazy people, who really do not get into the spirit of giving out treats.



"Halloween Hijinks" is not a long game to play, although the puzzles are at times difficult, and I struggled a little in trying to figure out how I was supposed to achieve my goals. I eventually succeeded with a bit of help from the walkthrough. I felt that some of the actions required were a little illogical and didn't have much motivation until at the end you suddenly received some treats. There is a fair amount of violence in this game, with both the actions of other characters and occasionally some of your own efforts doing the road's name proud. Comic violence isn't that offensive though.

This game for some reason does appear to have a few problems with doors, and seeing as the majority of puzzles are how to get past these doors, it could be improved. An example is "Open door" at Gubbins' house telling me that the door is open, when it clearly isn't. Another strange response was from "X door" at Barney Bloggs' house, which accidentally explains how the puzzle is solved (although it is difficult to figure out how to achieve this).

Overall "Halloween Hijinks" is another entertaining game by David Whyld, with an interesting and unusual premise. Just remind me never to live on a road called Murder Drive.

SCORE - 6/10



In The Claws Of Clueless Bob

by

David Whyld

Review: Robert Rafgon

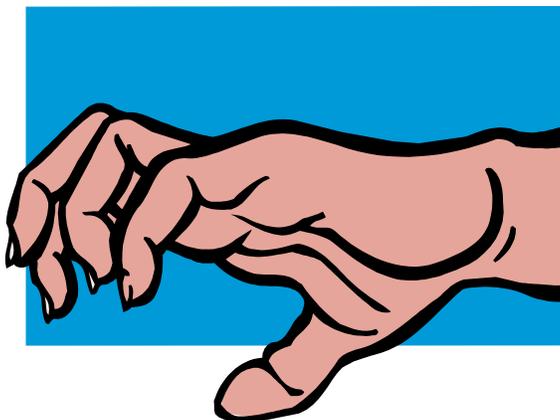
Genre: Comedy/Parody

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/cluelessbob.taf>

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When David Whyld posted a new game announcement I was all excited, until I read the post more carefully and found out that the new game was in fact the latest in his Clueless Bob Newbie series. For those who haven't played the previous games, Clueless Bob Newbie has starred in a series of 1 and 3-hour Comp games, where he tries to inflict his terrible games on anyone in sight. I have played through some of this series, and I have to admit that they are not amongst my favourite games. Still, I decided to give this game a try.



"In The Claws of Clueless Bob" starts out with you trying some of Clueless Bob Newbie's games, which is reminiscent of David Whyld's previous effort "The Worst Game In the World Ever...". Although these games are funny in their poor design to start off with, the poor design also means that they are nearly impossible to win without resorting to hints, and they become annoying very fast. However fortunately, the game moves on outside this setting later, although only if you pay close attention. If you are like me, then you may get stuck for a while trying to figure out how to survive the horror. And it is horror, as I hope I never have to see games like this for real.

The second part of the game features the great escape from the claws of Clueless Bob. The humour improves, but it is still very illogical. At the end you find out that you will have to wait for the next part in the epic Clueless Bob Newbie saga. I'm not sure whether to look forward to this or not. I should say here that David Whyld maintains his usual high standard of writing throughout the game, but I'm sure you already know that he is going to do that. Unfortunately I found this game very difficult to solve without looking at the hints, especially the initial escape.

This game is reasonable, but not great, especially when compared to some of David Whyld's recent efforts such as Second Chance. However, for some short term fun whilst you wait for the next great David Whyld game, it is worthwhile to give it a go.

SCORE - 5/10

In The Claws Of Clueless Bob

by

David Whyld

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Genre: Comedy/Parody

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/cluelessbob.taf>

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David Whyld's newest game, 'In The Claws Of Clueless Bob', starts with a good introduction screen which gives the game a nice and professional touch. The player can choose between different options, e.g. reading the intro or starting the game directly. There's even a walkthrough included, and also a section called 'Things to know before playing the game', wherein the author describes his game as 'small and silly' and brings the hint and scoring systems to our attention.



With these good preparations, it's time to try the game. The intro tells how Clueless Bob Newbie (CBN) is outraged about all the bad reviews of his text adventures and therefore kidnaps Mr. Smiffy, the player's character and game reviewer for a computer magazine. Clueless Bob's intention are truly evil: He'll let you play his games over and over again, until you see and praise their magnitude. After this intriguing but frightening outlook, the actual game starts.

All your appeals to Clueless Bob Newbie's mercy or your human rights have passed unheard, and he is more than keen to show you one of many games from a CD labeled '321 Masterpieces of CBN' (Vol 1). As there are no alternatives, you begin with a game called 'The Hobbyt': What in normal circumstances would be unplayable crap riddled with spelling mistakes and online slang is now turned into a funny game within a game. After 'finishing' it, Clueless Bob puts you back to the cellar, your prison cell. Under the influence of CBN, this place has become weird and uncomfortable, but remains the best location for an escape nevertheless.



Patience is needed to elude the claws of Clueless Bob Newbie, so the suffering isn't over yet. CBN has many games for Mr Smiffy to play, among them such classic as 'the big maize game' (sic) and 'wars trek'. For a short time, a routine kicks in as you switch between playing the mini games by CBN (and telling him how utterly bad they are) and being thrown back into the cellar where you can work on your escape. This routine was broken by the sudden death of Mr Smiffy. Even though the reason for his death is well justified, it came as a big

surprise to me. Thanks to the useful hint system, I survived on the next try, so I could literally eat my way out of the cellar. Relief was only a short gift, though, as I still seemed to be trapped in a strange mix between reality and CBN's universe; the game's not quite over. But eventually, a few quests later, the game ended in a somewhat obscure dystopia.

'In The Claws Of Clueless Bob' keeps its promise and delivers a short game which is both funny and (to a certain extent) silly. The puzzles are on different difficulty levels, and although not very complex, the hints system did come in handy for me. Most of the attraction of the game is due to the small games within the game, which are terrible but hilarious reminders of how not to write text adventures. The end is odd, but that's probably the famous British humour. I was only surprised that the final score didn't trigger any witty or sarcastic comments, which I consider a missed opportunity. Still, it is a highly enjoyable game, and the sensation of trying 'north, north, north, north and north' as a command is memorable.

Lauren's Awakening

by

TotalDirt

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Adult

Platform: Adrift 3.9

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/lauren.taf>

This was an entry in the Christopher Cole/A. Bomire Competition (called with inspiration Christopher Cole and A. Bomire's Competition). As it's a competition game, I was hoping for a better than usual AIF game. More tested, less filled with guess the verb issues, fewer bugs... and I was disappointed.

Lauren's Awakening, being an adult game, is as sparse on storyline as you might expect. Basically, you're a 17 year old girl called Lauren who has just moved to a new town, are a bit shy and... that's about it.

It's probably not worth mentioning the usual flaws that seem to bog down 90% of the AIF (adult interactive fiction) games that I've played but I'll mention them anyway in the vague hope that the author reads this review and takes heed and does something about them in his next game. *His* game? Well, TotalDirt *could* be a woman, I guess, but as this is a game about a 17 year old girl having lots and lots of sex, it's a fair bet the author is of the male variety.



The flaws? Numerous in the first location alone. A stereo that can't be turned on or used or even listened to. Very basic descriptions for the majority of items. The second location features a shower whose description reads "You see no such thing". By the evidence on show so far, you can tell the game went through some seriously thorough testing. The closet features an item called "Lauren's clothes". As I'm Lauren, shouldn't that be "my clothes" or "your clothes"? What else? Oh yes, an exit that only appears *after* you've got your clothes on but is mysteriously invisible beforehand.

So far, not *too* bad. About what I expected from the opening of an AIF game. Better written than usual as well so maybe this one, aside from the bugs I'd already encountered, wouldn't be too bad after all.

Unfortunately, the bugs in question are pretty much game killers.

I wasn't able to leave the location "Kat's back yard" when I first arrived despite being told there were exits to the east, west and south. The western exit didn't seem to exist at all. I wasn't able to go east

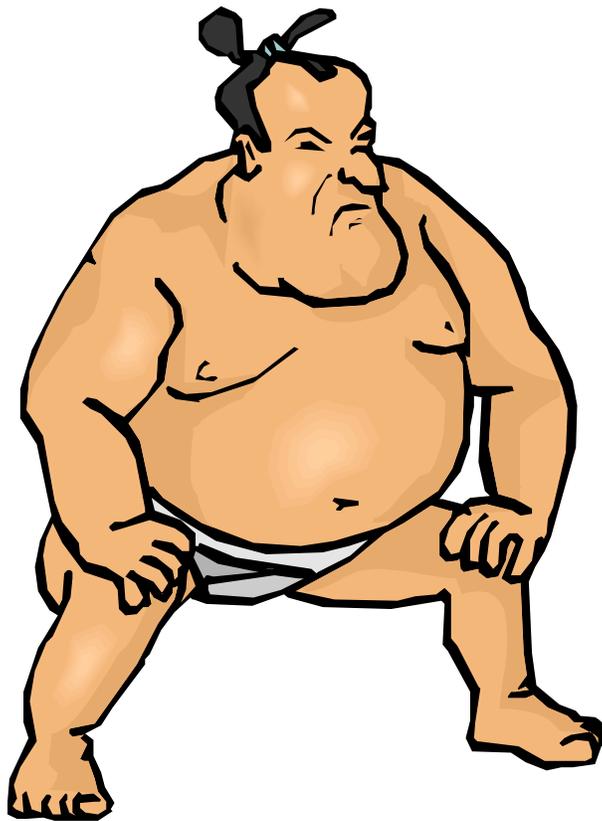
because "you've got work to do!" *What* work? I'm at a party, for crying out loud. South produces the same wonderful response as trying to go west. Funnily enough, it also tells me I can go in but the game apparently disagrees because it won't let me.

Several minutes of beating my head against the nearest wall resulted in a brain wave where I managed to figure out that I had to type "go east" and "go west" to move around. The previous comment about the level of testing on this game was, believe it or not, meant in jest.

Once past the hideous directions bug, I wandered around and met a few of the one dimensional characters that tend to populate a lot of AIF games I've played. I found a couple of boys under a tree – Chris and Robbie – who are either gay, or I'm playing a remarkably ugly girl, because when I tried to kiss them I was told they wouldn't appreciate it. Hmmm... talk about rejection. No wonder Lauren's so damn shy. Funnily enough, when I tried to "**** [either of them]", the game told me off for swearing. Of all the commands I might have expected to be covered in an AIF game, *that* was top of the list.

Conversation with any of the characters is a painful game of "guess the conversation subject" as the easier "talk to [name]" system isn't used. Another point off the game. While "ask [name] about [subject]" *can* work, it's a far harder system to use properly than "talk to [name]", and a lot less fun to use from a player's point of view. Maybe it doesn't bother anyone else, but when I've tried ten different conversation topics with someone and not got a decent response to any of them, my enthusiasm just really starts to wane. As it happened, I got a few responses from Chris which confirmed my suspicion that the men in AIF games are every bit as intellectually challenged as the women.

In another location, I ran into a bug when trying to get into a wrestling ring. The game wouldn't let me and kept telling me I wasn't really dressed for wrestling. As I didn't have a wrestling outfit with me, and didn't have a clue where to get one from, I had to get in the ring by typing "go in" (the flaw in the directions bug actually helped me out here). Then I engaged in a bout of wrestling, which was probably the best part of this game. In fact, the only part I liked. I won't say the combat system used was particularly inspiring but it certainly did the job, although see that Ashley had 200 HP and I had 1 HP was kind of depressing. A bug? Or am I just remarkably puny as well as being shy?



A funny thing happened after the wrestling match (which I lost) and the obligatory sex scene. The game moved me to outside the wrestling ring, I and Ashley had sex (the shyness part of Lauren's character apparently doesn't extend as far as not having sex with another girl at a party in front of dozens of strangers) and then everything went to pot. The game moved me outside the ring but kept Ashley inside. Hmmmm...

And there I became stuck. The hints were every bit as bad as I might have expected. The action they advised me to perform didn't work so I was left outside the ring without a clue what to do next. As my shoulders were pretty much bowed down with errors and guess the verb by this time, I decided it was probably for the best and put the game out of its misery once and for all.

3 out of 10 (was going to be 2 but I added 1 because the wrestling was kind of fun)

Murder Mansion

by

Reelyor

Review: C. Henshaw

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Murder Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

1. Does it set the scene?

The somewhat cheesy title and credits, caught my attention, although once I started the game, I never could tell how relevant this cheesiness might be.

Once you choose to get into the game, the description is very atmospheric and nicely descriptive. It does border on the *too* descriptive, with ungainly sentences stringing lots of adjectives together. But all the required info is there before any action is taken - the who (you are a detective, a person has died, an anonymous caller has tipped you off), the what (you are investigating a possible murder), the where (a stately mansion with lots of potentially interesting rooms based on *Cluedo* which of course we all know and love), and the why (you are a detective and it's your job). The how is still to be determined of course. To do all this, *and* give a fully-fleshed description of the location in the first couple of paragraphs is pretty good going.

Following on from the style and depth of the initial description, the first room description provides continuity, even more atmosphere, and a lot of interesting bits and pieces to examine. Initial urge – I want to get into that creepy house!



Inside the house, in the Entry Hall, more familiar adjective-prone descriptions are densely packed into a couple paragraphs. Perhaps a bit more careful writing would make the descriptions flow more easily. As an example:

‘On the floor, between each of the doors, are plush red velvet upholstered settees and chairs and attendant small oak tables at which you observe some people who are seated, looking at you.’

Too much of this, and I would skim it – not really getting the full sense of what the writer is trying to portray. But since this kind of prose is limited to a paragraph or two at a time, it works.

2. Is it well implemented?

This game at first disconcerted me in that ‘x’ and ‘look at’ give you two different descriptions. ‘X’ is tactile – a nice touch (pun intended) and adds further depth to the environment (once you realise that’s what’s

going on). Pretty much everything can be examined – this has obviously been well-thought-out and a lot of effort has been put into visualising and describing all the relevant details.

Other than examining and opening the door, there is no other game play, and no action except a bit of dialogue with the maid (Marian) and the owner of the house (Sir Basil).

3. Do I want more?

Yes! I want to explore that house, meet some of those characters, maybe solve some humorous puzzles. That's the expectation anyway, and that, essentially, is why I voted this game first in the Intro comp.

Score (each out of 10):

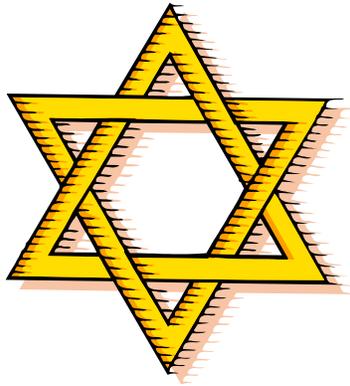
Scene setting: 9

Implementation: 8

Appetite whetting: 9

Bonus points: 2 for basing a game on *Cluedo*

Total: 28 (almost perfect in every way)



Murder Mansion

by

Reelyor

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Murder Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

You're a detective just arrived at a countryside mansion to investigate a brutal murder. Hardly an original idea but non-original ideas can often produce decent games if handled well. And here it's handled very well indeed.

Even though the introduction was over almost before I knew it, there was a considerable amount of depth in the two locations on show. There was even a credits, instructions and introduction section (an introduction to the introduction? Apparently so.) The only thing I wasn't too keen on was the multi-coloured text which made the game somewhat gaudy and amateurish (memories of my earlier games when I did a similar thing have been buried far too deeply to ever resurface).

This was only one of two games from the Intro Comp that I played through several times to see what I had missed the first time. As it happened, I missed very little because there's very to do or so, but what little there *is* definitely worth seeing.

Unfortunately, just as I managed to get inside the mansion and was about to start investigating this most brutal of murders, the intro came to end... Perfectly timed to make me want to see the rest of it.

Of all the games in the Intro Comp, this is the one I'm hoping most of all makes its way to a full blown game one day.

Do I want to play the full game? Definitely!



Murder Mansion

by

Reelyor

Review: Stefan Donati

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Murder Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

Together with David Whyld's 'The Final Question', this game by Reelyor was placed second on the Adrift Intro Comp 2005.

It starts with a nicely done instruction and information screen, a feature I immediately liked. Given the title of this game, it comes as no big surprise when we learn that the player's task in 'Murder Mansion' is indeed to solve a homicide case. What lets the game stand out is the promise of a very high replay value. To quote the short description: 'Each time you begin a new game, the location of the murder, the weapon and the murderer will be chosen at random...'. Another distinguish feature is the variety of custom commands: The player is encouraged to gather all possible information available to solve the murder, assisted by commands such as 'accuse', 'touch', 'smell' and so on. A very innovative approach to this genre.

But does it deliver? After the short description and a review of the special commands, the introduction to your case starts: A women called the police, calmly stating that someone has died. As Chief

Inspector you're assigned to find the murderer, and so you are at the front stoop of an old mansion, on a rainy night of the year 1938. Standing there, I tried to make use of some of the game's unique commands. Unfortunately, they don't seem to be integrated yet, and there's not that much to explore on the outside of the house. Thus, this part only serves as a way to move the player inside. The introduction continues in the entry hall, as a shocked Sir Basil, patron of the villa who's hosting his own birthday party, welcomes you. He gives you a brief overview of the attending guests, and tells you of the victim, whose murder took place during a blackout. After that, the intro ends.

So, does it deliver? I have some difficulties answering this question. The intro still lacks interactivity, and it remains to be seen how well all the unique possibilities of the game will be covered. On the other hand, the intro was certainly a very good teaser; and this first glimpse shows that the author, Reeylor, is able to establish a good and convincingly mood. In addition, the very detailed writing is top-notch. It really created a picture of the police officer in my imagination; how he tries to solve a murder case while rain falls on a dark, art deco mansion, and some jazz music plays in the background...

Must Escape!

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: C. Henshaw

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Espionage

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>



1. Does it set the scene?

The first paragraph is a bit awkward in its wording, but the laboratory description that follows on from it is compelling, and sets the scene quite well – a scene of destruction caused by you, with imminent consequences. Adrenaline on reading the beginning – high.

2. Is it well implemented?

There is nothing worse than not being able to examine everything in an introduction. I like to get into a game slowly, look at everything, think about what's going on, what kind of game this is going to be, etc. Must Escape! ticks these boxes to begin with – I can examine most things in the lab, and the descriptions of static objects continues to set the scene of chaos.

There are problems with room interaction though, that starts to get frustrating; although there is shattered glass, pools of liquid, etc. on the floor, 'x floor' returns 'The floor looks normal.' There is no

description for the walls or ceiling, which would help round out this important first-contact room. Also, there is nothing that can be taken or picked up in this room – it's essentially an empty room (unless I missed something, and knowing me I probably did).



'X me' returns the bog-standard ADRIFT response – a bit disappointing considering I've just sabotaged an enemy base, trashing its laboratory. Also, I'm a bit surprised to be holding nothing, since, again, I've just sabotaged an army base!

Exiting the room to the west, the action begins. The explanation is a bit strange – a prescribed 'you have to do this now' scenario, which can be useful at times, but here is pretty obvious. There's an enemy agent, and nowhere to go (except back into the lab). So you have to fight...

Now this is where this game gets interesting for me, because I'm highly in favour of trying new methods in IF to engage the player. There is a basic diagram of two stick figures, in a fight pose, with health levels underneath. You are given a series of commands, for right, left, punch and wait. When I first saw this I thought 'what fun!

Some graphic involvement!' I give lots of credit for this. Left and right moves you across the screen (so its actually forward and back), and if you are too far away your punches miss. The graphics shows these changes in movement, and it shows who's punching who. As it turns out, there's not that much interesting about it, it's slow, and the graphics are just *too* basic to be exactly riveting. However, I think there's a lot of potential here (how cool would some old fashioned POW! and BLAM! balloons be!).

3. Do I want more?

Not at this point. This intro would need a lot more work put into it to make me want to keep playing. Although the idea is interesting – interactive fighting – it needs more character build-up, a more comprehensive narrative, and better graphics. The single-minded plot – to fight your way out of a tricky situation – would be fine if the interactive gimmicks were better implemented.

Score (each out of 10):

Scene setting: 5

Implementation: 3

Appetite whetting: 1

Bonus points: 5 for attempting something new in ADRIFT

Total: 14 (less than good in practice, but has potential in theory)

Must Escape!

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Espionage

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

This started well but then seemed to lose its focus too quickly. You're a saboteur, apparently, who has just succeeded in his mission to wreck an enemy base. Only you've been detected and must escape before you're captured.

This could have been quite an interesting intro to a game but what follows is a very clumsily done fight between you and a guard. The game ends the moment the fight is done, making **Must Escape** remarkably short even for an intro.

I'll grudgingly admit the fight was interesting. It consists of graphics of each of the combatants which move back and forth across the screen as they fight. A nice touch, although I felt it could have been handled better.

Did it make me want to play the rest of the game? Not really. When all is said and done, there was too little here to really judge what the rest of the game would be like, and if it involves any more combat I

definitely wouldn't want to play it. A nice idea in the short term, maybe, but anything longer with quickly devolve into tedium.

Personally, I felt this would have worked better if set at the start of your mission and you were given the opportunity to enter the enemy base and maybe plant a few bombs along the way. Setting an intro at what seems like the middle or end part of a game just didn't work very well. This played more like an excerpt than an intro.

Do I want to play the full game? No.



Must Escape!

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Espionage

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

Robert Rafgon entered the Adrift Intro Comp 2005 with two games. This one, 'Must Escape!', was placed sixth.

For a relief, the game starts right in the middle of the action, which in this case takes place inside the enemy's base, in a laboratory. The player's character, some kind of agent it seems, has successfully destroyed all experiments in the lab. His attempt at staying undiscovered was not equally successful, though, as a loud alarm is ringing in the background. You must escape! And with only one exit, this proves to be an easy but also dangerous decision. Subsequently, you are spotted by a guard and drawn into a fight. After a victorious slugfest, you're still on the run, knowingly that you've won a battle, but not the war. And so the intro ends.

The use of a combat system to fight the enemy agent was refreshing, although the knowledge of close combat skills the two opponents possessed appears to be limited to punching. That said, it was quite fun and neatly done. However, it hardly can be called a fair fight, as the player has an enormous health advantage. I suppose this was

done so that the intro could end properly, and explains why my (deliberately forced) death returned only a standard 'you are dead' message.

The writing is to the point, and as fast-paced as one should expect from an agent game. The plot still keeps much in the dark, I would have welcomed an additional room with some more information about the player's character, his mission or the enemy. With so little information it's hard to tell if the story will develop independently or become an agent thriller blockbuster kind of game.

'Must Escape!' is a good game, but alas a little bit short. I'm not sure how well the combat system would work for a full game, but if the author continues the story and avoids the dangers of clichés, it has great potential.

Normville

by

BBBen

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Adult

Platform: Adrift 3.9

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/normville.zip>

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I wish I lived in the same world as the one portrayed in many AIF games. I really do. You see, in AIF games it's *so* easy to have sex you practically have to beat the women off with a stick... and even then you'll probably end up doing the deed whether you want it or not. Yes, a great world fuelled by the dreams of adolescent school boys. Nothing like the real one, of course, but if only it was.

Two minutes into playing **Normville**, I was exchanging pleasantries with my girlfriend's mom and then, before I knew it, she was insisting I have sex with her. Unrealistic? Hell no. The same thing happened to me three times just last week.

Normally at this point in the review I'd give a brief outline of the game's storyline, but as I don't have a clue what that might be it'll just have to wait. On with the sex with my girlfriend's mother then...

Or attempted sex anyway. This being an AIF game, it's got the usual guess the verb issues. Just typing **** [name] would be far too easy, I guess. Strangely, this version of the game I'm playing purports to be a "Gold" edition and the README says that the game has been

improved since earlier versions. Hmm... Just as well I didn't play any of the earlier versions is all I can say. KISS JESSICA results in me and the aforementioned Jessica engaging in a bit of kissing. Trying to take things a step further and I'm hit with a message telling me I need to work my way up with some petting first. Back to the petting. Still getting the same message. Try something else. Still told I need to work my way up from petting first.

At which point I went to the walkthrough and discovered I needed to RUB (a certain part of her anatomy). Ah. Where does AIF's poor reputation among the rest of the IF world come from? Complete mystery to me.



After that, the sex scene progressed to its inevitable conclusion and ended with my girlfriend's mother advising me not to "strain" her daughter too much (love that phrase by the way) and then even offering the name of a friend she has who will have sex with me so as not to "strain" her daughter.

I came pretty close to just deleting the game right there and then but something made me play it a bit further. Probably sheer damn masochism. It *has* to get better, right?

Fortunately the game *does* get a bit better later on, *if* you're willing to persist. The usual errors that mar almost every AIF game I've ever played are still in abundance though. The game understands the bare minimum of commands required so if you type OPEN CLOSET and

opening the closet isn't required to finish the game, you're going to get an error message saying you can't do that. Trying to climb through an open window also got me the same error message. When you've tried a dozen or more different things along these lines and been hit with an error message for ten of them, you really start to despair. It's things like this that really show AIF in a bad light and are probably the main reason why it's such a poorly regarded genre. While the majority of people playing the game are most likely playing it solely for the sex and don't give a hoot about the game itself, it would still be nice to include the extra commands for those few of us who are approaching this from the "it's an IF game" point of view.

There were a number of bugs in the game which obviously escaped the update to the Gold edition. Outside one house there's a dog called Muttley who won't let me into the house. I wasn't sure why but the room description stated he was eating a steak I'd given him. I hadn't given him a steak at this stage but later on I happened to find a steak in the fridge and gave it to him. The room description stayed the same but this time the dog let me pass. Strange.



No AIF game would be complete without its sex scenes. In fact, take away the sex scenes and it's doubtful anyone would play them.

Normville has its fair share of them alright. Are they good? Bad? Indifferent? Well... my eyes tend to glaze over after I've read the eighth sex scene in a row but they weren't especially horrible. The writing was certainly better than usual for an AIF game and while none of the characters came across as the least bit believable, that's kind of a given in a game like this. I also had the sneaking suspicion that they were all the same woman, albeit with a name change. Or do they just all have identical personalities?

The sex scenes followed the strange convention of sex scenes in quite a few AIF games that I've played. Simply typing **** [name] isn't enough. No, you have guess the verb through the roof as you try to figure out just what needs doing to advance the game to the next part of the sex. Often you're forced to carry out four or five different sex acts just to move on. Some people might find this a turn on. Me? I was too busy yawning. It's also not helped that certain sex acts can only be performed in a certain order and sometimes the game will lock down until you figure out what that order is. I wasn't able to leave the room at the start until I guessed the verb my way past Jessica, and the scene with Lin was equally troublesome in the way the exit just mysteriously disappeared until I had had my wicked way with her.

As for the storyline, there really isn't one. You wander around town, you meet lots of women who are just dying to have sex with you for reasons that never seem to be specified – are you some kind of super stud? Or the only man in town? Or are the women just the usual brain dead stereotypes that generally populate AIF games? You know the sort: beautiful, busty and without an ounce of common sense to their name. For once, it'd be nice to actually have a woman in an AIF game who could add 2 and 2 together and get the right answer. No wonder there are so few women writing AIF games if this is how the ones in them are portrayed.

There were a couple of times when I felt the game might turn into something a bit more interesting. When I spanked one of the brainless bimbos, a strange light seemed to emanate from the paddle I was spanking her with. I tried it again (to see if the light was produced once more and what would happen if it was, not because of any perverse desire to spank someone on a computer screen (honest!)) but no such joy. Towards the end of the game, everything started getting a bit bizarre. A gremlin turned up and when I defeated it, the bed I was lying on had moved itself to a field in the middle of nowhere.

All very eerie. Unfortunately, by this time my enthusiasm for the game was completely shot. The game ending a moment later with a note about a sequel soon to be released didn't help either.

So another AIF game, another bad review. Maybe there's a connection between the two. Alas it seems that for every decent AIF game I've played – of which only two were games I'd recommend to anyone else (**Ghost Justice** and **The Backlot**) – there are a dozen others that leave so much to be desired that it's hard to find a positive thing to say about them. For the most part, **Normville** was regular run of the mill AIF. Minimal storyline, minimal gameplay, guess the verb issues, overly long and tedious sex scenes, poorly done characters and not much else. The only puzzles seemed to be a case of figuring out how to have sex with a variety of similar seeming women. The only time it got remotely interesting was right before it ended and it's perhaps doubtful anyone not obsessed with the AIF genre is still going to be playing it by that stage (I was only still playing it myself because I intended to write a review of it and I had the walkthrough to hand, thus allowing me to sidestep the horrendous guess the verb problems). Hopefully later games in the series will show a marked improvement on this one because this really wasn't an impressive start.

3.5 out of 10



Outline

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: C. Henshaw

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Detective

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

1. Does it set the scene?

Like most of the intros in the Intro Comp, all the required elements are present in the first few paragraphs. You get the important background information, although the writing style could be improved. There's nothing wrong with a short, punchy introductory text – in fact sometimes it can be a relief - but the writing style here falls into my category 3 opinion, 1 being 'good story, well written', 2 'good story, writing style neutral' and 3 'good story, but interference from poor writing'.



Character-wise, I know quite a bit about myself in the first instance – a somewhat lazy, unmotivated policeman who just wants to get the job over with. Although a bit of a *cliché* it does provide possibilities of wry humour and ironic situations (which is what I would expect in this case). The idea of the protagonist as a standard-issue beat policeman, becoming involved in a potentially important investigation could lead to some interesting scenarios.

The first room description gives a basic layout of the crime scene, the office of Michael Fleming, a chairman who has supposedly committed suicide by jumping out the window. There is little to distract me from getting on with the action, but that's probably what such a character would be like anyway. No frilly adjectives here – everything is seen either providing evidence, or not. First impression – curious enough to keep playing.

The ending – well, it's a bit obvious, but you can never tell from an intro if what's obvious is true, or is trying to throw you off track. It does show that there *is* a plot, and that corporate skulduggery will be involved, so as far as setting the scene goes, it does it's job well.

2. Is it well implemented?

Object descriptions are functional and spare – the obvious intent here is to get on with it. 'X me' is not specific, one of my pet peeves, but not exactly uncommon in IF.

One strange bug (unless I missed something), is that in the beginning, it's said that I've been given a key. But it's not in my inventory, and I can't see it anywhere. Hmm. Hope I don't actually need the thing!

I'm faced with a little puzzle right away, which is nice – I like puzzles! What I don't much like though, is when object descriptions don't change to reflect what is done to it. The pipe is described as blocked. After unblocking it, the pipe is still described as blocked. Okay, that also happens a lot in IF, so I can ignore it. Otherwise the puzzle is perfectly logical, and satisfying (I like these kind).

In James McDonald's office, there is again little to distract from what needs doing. Without going into too much detail, I thought the safe would be a bit more difficult to open. I find a paper, which I can't examine, take or read which kind of goes against the grain of what I'm

used to doing. It would be better if the narrative gave some idea that you don't need to try doing those things.

3. Do I want more?

Sure, why not? I like puzzles, and I think this will have some good ones, even if I find my interest in the character and the plot is a bit blasé.

Score (each out of 10):

Scene setting: 5

Implementation: 6

Appetite whetting: 5

Bonus points: 5 for an opening puzzle I liked (and solved on my own)

Total: 21 (averagely better-than-average)

Outline

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Detective

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

Detectives investigating brutal murders seems to be a popular idea at the moment as this was the second game entered in the intro comp that featured this idea.

I didn't like this as much as **Murder Mansion**. The setting never really gripped me and while there was nothing terribly wrong with it, it just wasn't that interesting either.

For a short game, there were quite a few puzzles to be found. Maybe too many for such a short game in fact, although that might be just me and my dislike of puzzlefests creeping in again. Several of the things I was required to do seemed overly complicated. In one location there's a pipe which I need to unblock, fill a cup with water from, and then use the water to clean another item to enable me to open a door with it. Aside from this being a really lengthy and convoluted series of actions just to get a simple door open, if I was a detective investigating a suicide/murder wouldn't I have just ordered the door to be broken down? For that matter, how come I'm the only detective investigating this murder? Where are all the others?

The intro ends with a series of questions which I'm guessing are supposed to make me think about what the rest of the game would be liked. But I'm in two minds about whether I actually liked this or not – it seemed a little tacky and forced. It also was the sort of thing obviously included purely for the intro and not something you'd be likely to find in a full sized game.

I'll play the finished game if it ever emerges but it's not one I'm really going to be looking forward to based on what was available in this intro.

Do I want to play the full game? Probably.

Outline

by

Robert Rafgon

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Detective

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

Another entry to the Adrift Intro Comp 2005, 'Outline' by Robert Rafgon made it on the 5th place.

The game focuses on the suicide of Micheal Fleming, chairman of a corporation called Mastocorp. When news about this event reach the local police station, the player must leave his comfortable seat to lead the investigation. And since your last job performance wasn't all that brilliant, you'd better make no mistake this time! Although, a suicide case probably won't be much of a hassle.

The office of Micheal Fleming is very clean, and it's only the lack of a suicide note which prevents you from leaving the office and fill in a report to end this case. Trying to examine the office, I first started with the desk, which didn't reveal anything spectacular. An oversight by the author is the description of the desk's drawer, which gives the same description as the desk and states that 'the papers are presumably in the drawer'. Only on my third try did I find the correct command, 'open drawer'. Still, this is only a small thing, as the drawer isn't important for the rest of the game.

Much more interesting is the bookshelf, which gives way to a hidden passageway behind it. With this, the whole suicide case could get a new spin, at least if you're able to find something useful in there. Maybe the room behind the locked door offers more answers? Achieving to open the door involves solving some puzzles. I didn't find them unfair, but hard enough to use the hint system. Unfortunately, the hints are only numbered numerical, and the hint I needed wasn't number one. Naming the hints to something more directly related to the actual puzzle could fix this. After solving the first puzzle, I encountered another oversight. When I found a pair of tweezers, it was clear that I needed to clean them by solving another puzzle. Anyhow, my first try was to just use 'clean tweezers', which worked perfectly, and cleaned them with some water which shouldn't be there yet.

Finally through the door, you're in the office of the vice-chairman of Mastocorp., where some more puzzles await the player. Once solved (I'm not going to spoil them), you're in the possession of some interesting outlines. It appears that a big intrigue may be going on. Here the games end, recalling the open questions of the case and thus giving the player an insight of what he can expect from the full game.

Overall, I liked 'outline'. I sometimes had a hard time guessing the right verb, but to be fair, I'm not sure if this is due to my knowledge of English or not (my mother tongue is German). What I missed the most were more detailed descriptions of the whole environment. Is Mastocorp. a big, worldwide operating company or a local small business? Also, the two offices were too spartan, and remembered me more of a cubicle or lower management office than of a representative bureau of a chairman. But the story sounds promising and I enjoyed solving the puzzles.

Point 2 Point

by

C. Henshaw

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Horse Racing

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

How's this for strangeness? C. Henshaw entered two games in the Intro Comp. One did amazingly well, getting almost twice as many points as the games that came joint second; the other came last without getting a single point. One game was very well written and put together; the other started bad and went downhill all the way. One was great; the other... well, we all have our off days I guess.

This was the bad one.

If this had been better handled, **Point 2 Point** might actually have been a half decent game. It's certainly an unusual idea: you're a jockey and have to ride your horse around a racecourse using a special series of commands. Unfortunately it's been put together so badly that it's painful to play, the IF equivalent you might say of heated needles under the fingernails.

Straight off, the game advises me to type 'hint' which I decided against doing as a) it's kind of cheating and b) I wanted to see how well I could do without the hints. Occasionally, I like to try and pit the

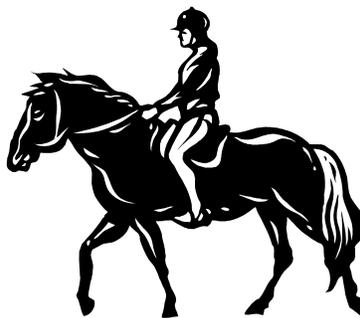
old grey matter against a game and see if I can come off better. Big mistake! Three moves later I was dead and didn't have a clue what I was supposed to be doing.

So I tried again and went straight to the hints this time, discovering that directional commands don't work and instead I needed to type things like "turn left", "turn right", "slow down", "jump" and so on. All well and good, except when I tried "turn right" I was informed I couldn't because there were too many horses around me. "Turn left" told me I "couldn't turn that" and "slow down" produces "stop trying to distract me!" Finally I hit on "jump" which moved me to the next location. Thank god. If *that* hadn't worked I think my next attempt would have been "slash wrists".

Another major problem: there are no location descriptions. Nope, none at all. All you get is "the pine stand" or "the wretched curve" or "the harlequin pond". I've never played a text adventure before that doesn't have even the most basic location descriptions so I wasn't sure what to make of this one but I sure didn't like it much. Without any kind of descriptions for the locations, just a title, it's hard for any kind of depth to creep into the game. Then again, by the time I'd reached the second location and realised there wasn't a second location aside from three words on the status bar, I was pretty much ready to quit so any effort expended at that point would have lost on me anyway.

All in all, thumbs up for a different idea but a massive thumbs down for the way it was put together. Go play **Silk Road Secrets** instead.

Do I want to play the full game? No.



Point 2 Point

by

C. Henshaw

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Genre: Racing

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

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This is the second entry of Christy Henshaw to the Adrift Intro Comp 2005, but unlike her excellent first entry, 'Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand to Lop Nor', this one was not meant to fly and finished last.

The initial setting is quite simple: You have joined with other riders for a horse race. The writing of the intro is decent, but nowhere near the level of Silk Road Secrets. The task as a player is to direct your horse, which is - major spoiler ahead - quite impossible. There are no directions to help the player, so I was left with the good old "try, die, try again"-approach. While this was somehow manageable, since there are only three rooms (each a different part of the racing course), I dare to imagine how it would have ended up in a full game.

This game is not as bad as it's unfinished. I still think the basic idea could be implemented with Adrift (at least better then now), but if this should ever become a full game, there's *much* work to be done!

Rift

by

Red-Sith

Review: C. Henshaw

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

1. Does it set the scene?

First of all I have to say, I like the title. Not many single-word, four-letter titles out there, and even before playing I was thinking this game might be unusual.

The first paragraph continues this thought. No extra words here, but just what is needed to set the tone. 'You appear in a small steel room.' I really like that sentence (and since this is just an intro, I feel I can break down my review sentence by sentence if I want to!). 'You appear...' that makes me think something out of the ordinary is happening – I didn't walk in through a door, or climb through a window, or am just already there. I *appeared* – from thin air? Hmmmm. And 'small steel room'. Ooh, creepy. This simplicity is like the steel room itself, with its lack of windows and doors. You can't fault this room description.

Then, some dialogue ensues between a man with a taped mouth tied to a chair and the PC, which sort of breaks the spell a bit. For one thing, there are certain sounds that can't really be made when one's

mouth is taped, such as 'phhh' and 't' and 'f'. This whole section of the scene would have worked a lot better with much fewer words.



More dialogue once the tape is off, and the man explains what happened to him. Typos aside, the dialogue is stilted and unrealistic. But the idea that I've just met myself in a dream, where my other self *also* seems to be dreaming, is interesting. I'm still not sure though why I didn't recognise myself and had to ask myself his name... Upon waking it's instantly obvious that the dream the other me in my dream described is about to come true for the present me (I know, it's confusing.)

The bedroom description starts off by saying it's 'barren', except of course for the bed, tv, huge chest full of games, Ps2, Xbox, and various consoles! Sounds pretty full of stuff to me. Also, the PC is turning out to be yet another male teenage, game-obsessed youth, which is fine except that the beginning of this game set me up to expect something a bit more –'out-there' or unusual with the PC.

The under-floor lab doesn't really compare to the succinct appeal of the steel room description. 'The walls look very thick and blank.' I can't quite picture 'thick and blank' walls in my head, but I guess 'plain' is what the writer is getting at. 'Capsule-type thing' also doesn't really do it for my imagination, but the description does bring into play the idea of *déjà vu*, presumably from my dream self. When I examine the console, the game takes control and whisks on to the end – I don't know if it's triggered by looking at the console, or is a timed thing. The idea is interesting – a time machine, possibilities of your future self transporting back and forth with your present self... but the narrative has gone kind of, well, I wouldn't want to say 'lame' but it does seem

lame *in comparison to* the very beginning. From a chilling scene in a steel room with a bound man who's you from the future to a button that says 'go'. Well, it sort of fizzles out for me there. Final impression – a sprinter that just didn't stay the course.



2. Is it well implemented?

A few typos don't usually distract me, but there were too many in this game. It's like when I get emails from certain of my friends who don't bother to capitalise their I-s and words at the beginning of sentences – so much worse than spelling mistakes. It makes me think they're whipping it out, don't really want to do it but feel they should, and need to get it over with quickly because they've got better things to be doing. Hmph. Here, where you are actually *expected* to carefully edit your writing, mistakes like that are really inexcusable. But they're also not worth going on and on about in a review...

In the bedroom, there are a number of things I can't examine – the Ps2 and the Xbox, the walls, the floor (even though there's an obviously beckoning loose floorboard). If I examine the chest, I can see the games in there, but if I try to open it the response is 'you can't open the chest', which is a bit off-putting, but not a big deal really.

Another intro with no PC description – I should stop being surprised really! I guess this is something many people add on later or don't think much about normally.

There is no game play in this intro. It's all about dialogue, description and plot. So there is little to comment on in that department.

3. Do I want more?

Probably not. If the standard of writing and imagery had remained as good as the beginning throughout the story, I would have been eager for a full version, and would have rated this game quite highly. As it was I got a bit annoyed with the typos, the character didn't appeal to me much after the prologue, and it got a bit stale at the end, even as the plot was thickening.

Score (each out of 10):

Scene setting: 6

Implementation: 4

Appetite whetting: 2

Bonus points: 4: 1 for a great title, 3 for the unbeatable steel room description

Total: 16 (needs to grow up a bit)

Rift

by

Red-Sith

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

This got off to a terrible start due to some awful guess the verb problems. You start locked in a room (well, I say 'locked' but as there's no door in sight that's probably a bit misleading) with a man who is tied to a chair. The room description reveals that the man has a blindfold around his eyes and tape on his mouth. Neither the blindfold nor the tape can be examined. I tried to remove the tape and was told "remove what?" 'Get tape' produced "what tape?" I tried several more combinations along these lines but all to no avail. In desperation, I looked in the Generator and discovered the correct command was actually "take tape off mouth". Thank heavens the game wasn't passworded.

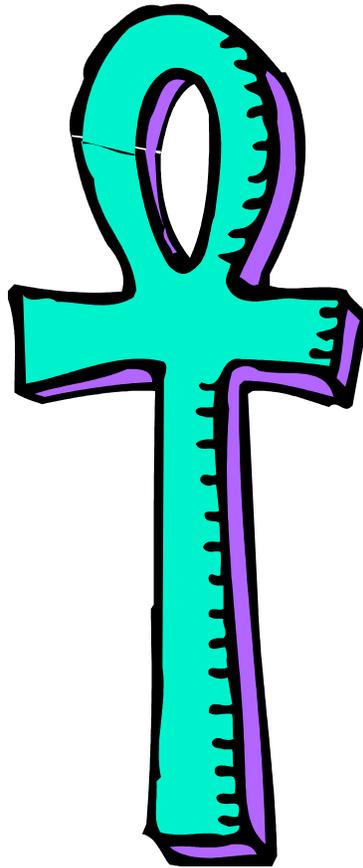
After that, mercifully, the game got quite a bit better. It wasn't very well written at any point – capitalisation really left a lot to be desired – and the actions of the main character seemed a little strange. There was also a liking on the game's part to carry out actions for you that you might not *want* to carry out: examine the floorboards and before you know it you've discovered a secret room below you and hopped down to investigate. It might have been nice to have been given the

choice as to whether I *wanted* to investigate the room or not. Or at least be given the opportunity to examine it first.

All in all, an uneven game that had too many glaring errors for me to say I liked it, but I'm at least curious to see what the finished product is like.

Funnily enough, out of the eight games in the Comp, this came seventh and scored just a single point. I felt it deserved better than its poor placing and put it third in my overall list, but clearly I was in a minority here.

Do I want to play the full game? More than likely.



Rift

by

Red-Sith

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Mystery

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

This intro by Red-Sith, called 'Rift', finished on the seventh place of the Adrift Intro Comp 2005.

The game doesn't lose much time with a traditional introduction, and takes the player right into a rather featureless and anonymous steel room, where a man is tied up to a chair. After releasing him, he recounts a strange story: After having a dream about his childhood and a hidden laboratory, he finds himself in this unknown location, knowing that someone wants to kill him. On a further inquiry, the man reveals his name: Lyle Crow, which is also the name of the player's character. Puzzled by this, Lyle Crow (the player) awakes in his bedroom, and life seems to be back at normality. Or at least for a few moments, as the player finds a big computer facility beneath his bedroom, with a time machine in it. Eager to find out more about these weird events, Lyle pushes a button simply labeled 'go', which presumably sends him to another time period and also ends this intro.

I wasn't exactly thrilled by the story. It left many unanswered questions, and I'm still a bit confused. What's up with all these

dreams, and how did this big computer facility with a time machine in it appear under the bedroom? But maybe this is meant to be uncovered later, and with so many plot devices, pretty much anything is possible.

As far as the writing is concerned, I also have different feelings. It tells you everything important, but is a little bit overenthusiastic in its use of heady words (like Argh, Hmpf!). The room descriptions are basic, build only an elementary atmosphere and offer little to distract the player. My biggest issue is the obvious attempt to guide the player's actions. In order to find the hidden facility, the player has to examine some loose floorboards in his bedroom and is given three somewhat blatant in-game hints for this task alone.

Despite all this, Rift is better than its place might suggest. For a further development, I think the story needs to be handled carefully so as to not lose focus. With this and some improved room descriptions, the game could become something to look out for.



Sex Artist

by

A. Ninny

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Adult

Platform: Tads 2

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/sexartist.gam>

.....

Another entry in the recent adult comp by Chris Cole and A. Bomire and, thankfully, quite a bit better than the previous game I had tried (**Lauren's Awakening**). **Sex Artist** has a bit of a storyline – a rarity in itself as far as AIF games are concerned – and a style of writing that's a big improvement on the norm. What, an AIF game written by someone who knows how to write? Ye gods...

You play the part of Buzz (no relation to the *Toy Story* character I'm sure) who makes his living as the 'sex artist' of the game's title. This basically means you go around painting people having sex. Nice work if you can get it. Strangely enough, the intro to the game says that you're fed up of working with porn actors. Interesting admission from the main character in what is essentially a porn game.

Where **Sex Artist** scores is mainly in the writing. Better than usual for an AIF game. Room descriptions are nice as well and it made a refreshing change being able to examine most of what I could see. Where it loses out is in the main problems that seem to befall 99% of the AIF games I've played. I ran into quite a few problems early on in this game as I assumed, it being an adult game and attention to deal

not being high on the writer's list of things to include, that there wouldn't be any items just lying around for me to find. Big mistake. There were quite a few. The environment isn't as well detailed as it might be in a non-AIF game, but it was certainly more than adequate for what was required here.



Characterisation was poor. Believable NPCs in an AIF game might not be a necessity when the only interaction you're likely to engage in with them is removing their clothing, but they sure add to the depth of the game. The ones here could have given cardboard cut-outs a run for their money. I met a couple in the park who were having sex and, being the perv that I am, I decided to sketch them. They noticed me at one point but, rather than the guy lunge at me and try to beat the living daylights out of me for gawping at him and his girlfriend in an intimate moment, he instead invited me back to their apartment so I could sketch them having sex. *And* they'd pay me for it! If only real life was like this.

For once I'd have liked to see an adult game with believable NPCs but it seems I was to be disappointed. Oh well...

The first few puzzles the game threw at me – finding someone to sketch while having sex was one of them – I managed fine. Either I'm getting better at AIF games or the puzzles in this one were easier than the norm. But as soon as the first obligatory sex scene commenced (I was a voyeur and not a participant, alas), I quickly ran into problems.

The first was that the commands required to get the characters to actually do anything aren't specified and it was only after some trial and error that I hit upon the correct phrasing. There's no help or hints command in the game and the ABOUT command helpfully misses out the relevant information. Nice one.

But I persevered and the two had sex. Repeatedly. In a dozen and one positions. And two separate rooms. Was it a turn on? Well... not really. It was more hardcore than erotica. Reasonably well written hardcore as far as hardcore goes, but still not especially arousing. And after I'd seen the fifth screen of text flash past my eyes describing Jim and Liz's sexual exploits, my eyes started to glaze over and I skimmed through the rest of it. Unfortunately, the game seems determined not to let you skim through things as it blocks the exit and won't let you leave until you've commanded Jim and Liz to engage in all manner of sexual activity. Commanded? Yep, apparently neither of them knows how to have sex without someone standing to one side and telling them exactly to do so first you've got to get them to take their clothes off (they don't seem to realise it's better that way) and then tell them, word for word, what needs doing. Are they a bit, um, backwards in the old grey matter department?

By the time I'd convinced Liz to strip off (one tedious item at a time) and she was actually 'doing it' with Jim, any kind of eroticism the scene might otherwise have held for me had been drowned amidst a deluge of guess the verb problems and the game's general unwillingness to let the pair just **** and be done with it. Funnily enough, when I tried to sketch the pair of them going at it like a pair of rabid beavers, the game told me that I was a bit too nervous to do that, despite the fact that I'd spent the last half hour telling them to have sex and describing exactly what I wanted them to do. Another time I attempted to sketch them and the game told me they weren't doing anything very special. Hmmm...

How did the sex scene end? Beats me. Jim and Liz went at it for a while, I told them what to do, sketched them... but the damn game just wouldn't let me go. I was able to endlessly repeat the commands telling them what to do, so that by the time I finally succumbed to the guess the verb plague that was beginning to take hold of me, the two of them had managed to fill up around 45 screens with their sexual exploits. Talk about stamina!

That was as far as I got with the game. From what I could tell, the main puzzles seem to be related to this long drawn out and tiresome sex scene, and as I was unable to reach a conclusion I was unable to get any further with the game. Pity. This had actually looked for a while like it might have been one of those rare AIF games: a good one.

5 out of 10



Silk Road Secrets:

Samarkand To Lop Nor

by

C. Henshaw

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Fantasy

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

This game I liked immediately. There's a decent background and the setting looks to have stepped straight out of the Arabian Nights, almost one of my faves.

Unfortunately, as with the author's other entry in the intro comp, there are many things about it that leave a lot to be desired and while one might be a flaw on Adrift's part, the others are definitely down to the author.

Figuring out what to do is hard. There are two locations to begin with but I couldn't seem to find anything that actually required doing: no puzzles, no people to speak to. Nothing. There were things to examine and the descriptions were nice but no matter what I examined, I didn't find anything that would move the game further forward. In despair I went to the hints and found the walkthrough. Funnily enough, the walkthrough indicates there's a sword to pick up in the second location

which I thought was a little strange as I'd been there and not seen one. But I went and had another look. Still no sword. However, typing "get sword" allows me to take the previously invisible sword. I've seen this problem before so it's probably some flaw in the game system but I'm surprised the author never noticed it and took steps to fix it.



The next problem involved examining a mosque in the first location which was a problem in the sense that the location description doesn't list a mosque being there. How was I supposed to know it was there? Beats me.

Then there's the problem that the walkthrough doesn't work beyond the first few moves. I'm told to go northeast from the first location but I can't.

I'm in two minds about whether I'd be interested in playing the full version of this game. On one hand, yes I would. It was well written and I loved the setting. On the other hand, if invisible swords, invisible mosques and a walkthrough that doesn't even work are what the full game has to offer, then I'm probably better off avoiding it. But I'd like to think that these things will be fixed if this ever evolves into a full game, so...

Do I want to play the full game? Yes.

Silk Road Secrets:

Samarkand To Lop Nor

by

C. Henshaw

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Genre: Fantasy

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/>

.....

This game was an entry in the Adrift Intro Comp 2005, where it finished first. At the beginning, we are told the story of Beghram, a young Tokharian, who was outcasted ten years ago. Now, at the age of 25, it's no wonder he leaves his current exile in Damascus to serve the Khan of the legendary city of Samarkand with an unspecified task.

The actual game starts with the player standing in the middle of a vividly described marketplace in the Shakhristan (Inner City) of Samarkand. Shortly thereafter the meeting with the Khan, a nervous man eager to send you off, takes place. By promising you the sword of Nismus, a probable solution to end your exile, you accept the mission. Enriched by a first glimpse at your quest and another, precious sword of the Khan, Beghram goes on to meet a priest at the zoroastrine

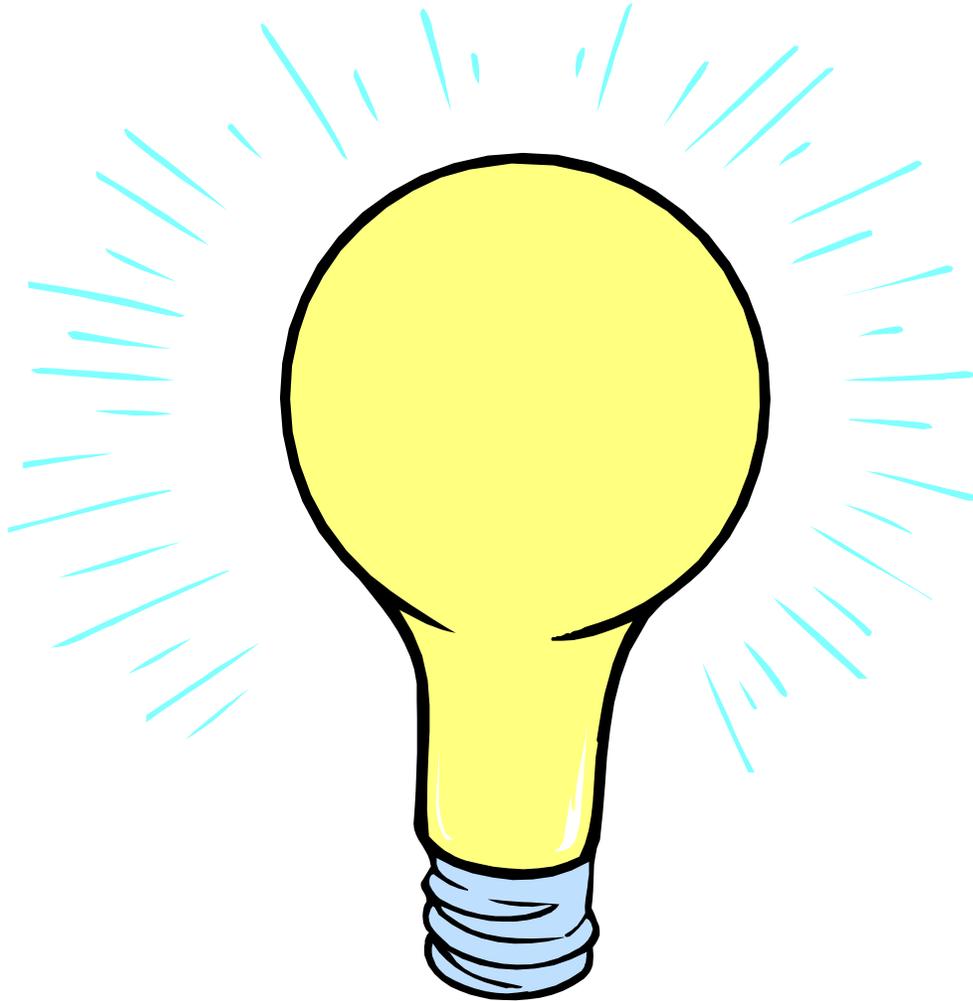
shrine. I found it rather hard to get the useful information here, as I wasn't sure what to ask. But I was eventually rewarded with more hints and an old, mysterious amulet. At the end of this intro game, back at the marketplace, you buy a horse called Syx. Given the presence of the market, I think the game misses a good chance here. I'd have loved to bargain for this horse actively!



The whole setting of the story is very well done, and adds a very tight and lovingly atmosphere to the game. It can only be hoped that the author, C. Henshaw, keeps up the high level of passion for the writing throughout the whole game. There's not much in it as far as puzzles are concerned, but the story leaves already enough space and ideas for a further and thrilling development.

Still, I also found a few negative points. Spelling was generally good, and the mistake I've found has been reported back to the author. And for my (maybe lazy) taste, the depth needed to perform some actions is too long. In order to see how much money Beghram carries, I needed to open the pouch, examine it, and then examine (count didn't work) the coins. As long as the author doesn't intend to make something special with the pouch (like punishing me for not having closed it afterwards), I think this are too many steps for such basic information. This love for detail left me even more wondering why I've been able to leave the Zoroastrian shrine even though I had closed the door.

All in all, 'Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand to Lop Nor' is very promising and excellent written. I for one am really anticipating the release of the full game.



The Will

by

Ambrosine

Review: Robert Rafgon

Genre: Horror

Platform: Adrift 3.9

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/thewill.taf>

.....

This older game was rediscovered a short while ago when David Whyld was collecting games for the Games Archive on his site. "The Will" is not surprisingly about a will, but it is surprisingly fun to play. The story can be found by reading the will in your inventory at the start, which says, "Find the 16 treasures hidden in and around my house and store them safely away and you will inherit a fortune". That's it for the storyline, and basically describes what you have to do to win the game.



The sixteen treasures you are hunting for include items such as a silver necklace, a rare stamp and a titanium pocket watch. Some of these treasures are more difficult to find than others, and you have to examine everything closely. The main feature of this game is the many puzzles that you have to solve in order to locate the treasures. There often is no other reason to solve a puzzle apart from that it is there, and you are fairly certain that there will be a treasure hidden at the end of it. The puzzles were mainly logical, although I will admit that I looked in the generator when I was stuck trying to figure out how to get to the last few treasures. Usually though, the puzzles were fairly easy to figure out, and you just had to keep looking around until you found suitable objects to solve them with.

This is an old-style game and does include a maze, although it is not too difficult. It is possible to, and I did several times, die, but this is usually well warned. The writing is generally of good quality, and there are lots of different locations to wander in and around the house. One thing that could have been better hinted within the game was that I had trouble figuring out where the treasures were supposed to be deposited. Eventually I found out that they all had to be placed on the Oriental rug in the gallery.

Overall, "The Will" is a fun game. There is no deep storyline, but the game did entertain me whilst I was trying to figure out everything I had to do.

SCORE - 6/10

Zack Smackfoot:

Escape The Jungle Terror

by

KFAdrift

Review: C. Henshaw

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Comedy

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

1. Does it set the scene?

The initial opening is fun – hooray for a bit of motion! It also makes sense when you read the first description, rather than acting just as an attention-getting gimmick (although it's that, too).

The opening text is well-written, and describes not your surroundings, your first actions and reactions to your situation well. You are given enough information to know what's happening at the moment, although the details are shady enough to let you know there is more to find out (at least that's what I assume) about your predicament (why are you flying from Peru to Florida? why do you have a locked metal briefcase? why do you have a gun? why is there a crate of poisonous snakes? Things that are no mystery to the character, but allows room to flesh out the story at the appropriate moments).

The description of the interior of the plane is decent – adequate for the purpose, not too padded with adjectives, and gives further information on the situation you are in. This is an action game, and not a time to sit around and marvel at your surroundings.



Good! There's a character description – *and* it provides useful information on your personality (wheeler dealer, live by your wits, etc.). You can even examine your clothes, with an appropriate response for trying to take them off.

Getting out of the plane was satisfying, although the jungle description could have been more enticing to make me really want to get out there and figure out what the Jungle Terror is (or is it the jungle itself?).

2. Is it well implemented?

I had some difficulty getting into the cargo bay, since there was no directional. I did get in eventually after trying a number of commands.

There are a few bugs and grammatical errors in the narrative but they were not bad enough to bother me (except in one case having to do with the penknife and the slot), and didn't interfere with game-playing.

The responses to different actions are well-thought-out – informative and interesting, it makes you want to try various things just to see what gets said.

Playing around with the snakes is kind of fun, although I have no idea why they are there, and if they will play any role in the plot. A possible bug is that upon opening the box, it says there is 'a' snake, indicating

'one' snake. But if you spend time in the cargo bay, more than one snake seems to make an appearance. I'm not sure if that's deliberate or not.

3. Do I want more?

Yes. I'm interested in the character, the background to the briefcase, Peru and the snakes, and some more of those puzzles.

Score (each out of 10):

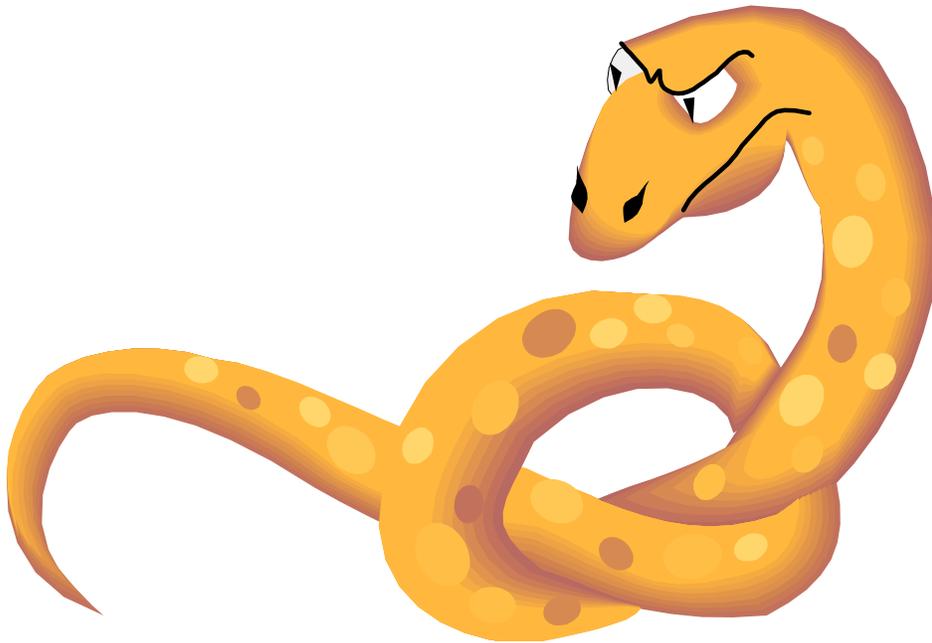
Scene setting: 8

Implementation: 7

Appetite whetting: 7

Bonus points: 2 for the cute opening

Total: 24 (quite good, to be frank)



Zack Smackfoot:

Escape The Jungle Terror

by

KFAdrift

Review: David Whyld

Platform: Adrift

Genre: Comedy

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

.....

In brief: your plane has crashed in the jungle and you have to escape from it.

It started pretty well with the opening screen describing nicely your plane crashing but then seemed to lose its way a bit afterwards. I immediately ran into problems due to the game not accepting the normal directional commands. You can't go north or south in **Zack Smackfoot**; nope, you're restricted to "go back" or "go forward". Is this better than a simple "n" or "s"? I wouldn't have said so. It also isn't helped much by the fact that when I first tried to use the standard directional commands, I got hit with a message stating "you can't go in any direction" leading me to suspect at the time, wrongly as it happened, that this was a one room intro.

Once I'd got the hang of the strange system of moving around, things got a bit easier. I manoeuvred my way out of the plane without too

much trouble although there were several parts that could really have been worked on. For a very short game, it had more than its fair share of rough edges. There were a few instances of "it's" being used when "its" should have been (a pet peeve of mine and one I probably tend to notice more precisely because it annoys me) and error messages being delivered even when I'd done what was required. Try putting the knife into the slot before opening the knife and you get a message telling you it's too big to fit into the slot. Open it and try again and you get the same message, followed by the cargo door opening anyway. Oh, and the door "hit's" the ground with a crash.

I'm not sure whether I'd look forward to playing the full game but this wasn't horrible by any means. Then again, the odds of this ever being turned into a full game are probably less than the people at RAIF proclaiming ADRIFT as superior to TADS so it's perhaps a moot point anyway.

Do I want to play the full game? Maybe.



Zack Smackfoot:

Escape The Jungle Terror

by

KFAdrift

Review: Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Genre: Comedy

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.shadowvault.net/games/intro.zip>

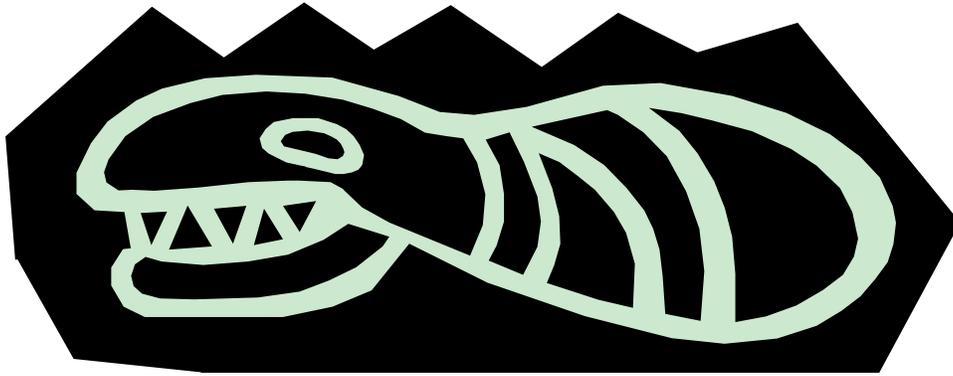
.....

This entry of the Adrift Intro Comp 2005 was written by Ken Franklin and finished fourth.

I loved the intro to the game, with its simple yet effective way of describing the sounds of a crash. It turns out that you're the pilot of a cargo aircraft which has been struck by a lightning and is now stranded in a vast jungle, somewhere between Peru and Florida.

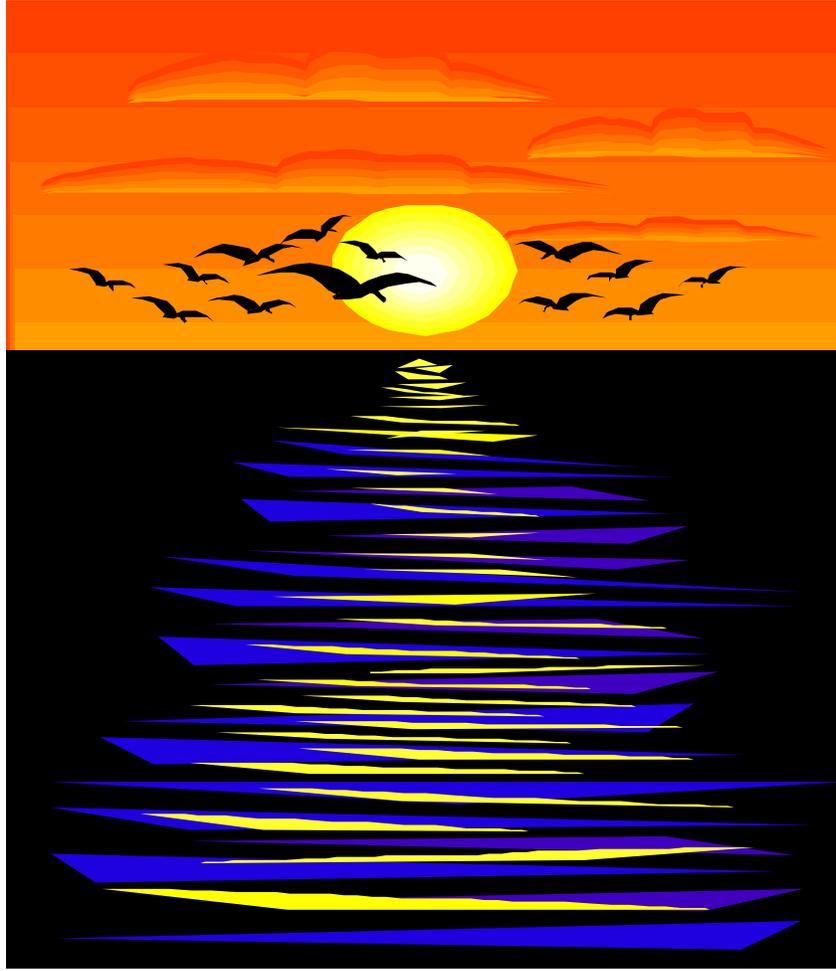
The first thing you get to see after gaining your consciousness again is the cockpit of the aircraft. Everything in it is nicely explained, and gives the player the ability to choose how much he wants to go into details. However, examining a room by referring to its name (as in 'examine cockpit') doesn't work throughout the game. The most intriguing object inside the cockpit is a metal briefcase, and beside some suspicions you have about its content, no more information can be obtained. Not knowing exactly if the briefcase will play a further role in the game, I took it with me.

While you struggle to find a way out of the airplane, you can also make an acquaintance with a dangerous snake. Handling the snake is no big problem per se, but careless players will get bitten. Luckily, the poison isn't deadly, so it's actually a clever way of warning the player to pay more attention in the future. The only inconsistency was that the command 'kill snake' didn't get a proper response, even though the player is carrying a knife.



The game ends after you have found a way to leave the airplane, which is a rather easy task. Still, at first I was left wondering how to move forward, as I wasn't sure about the exact command. I unsuccessfully tried 'move out' and other alternatives, only to find out that 'out' is everything which is needed. Perhaps I'm not familiar enough with text adventures, but a covering of this command would have been helpful to me. And then a nice surprise came afterwards, in form of two different endings (depending on whether you've taken the briefcase from the cockpit with you) - nice touch.

I liked the setting of the game as well as the freedom the player has to examine the surrounding world. The story about the suspicious briefcase and its owners was still a little vague, a few more information could have helped the already good atmosphere further. However, all 'flaws' mentioned can be easily solved, and with this scenery, the game could become an adventure in the truest sense of the word.



Credits

Many thanks to:

C. Henshaw for her reviews of *The Final Question*, *Murder Mansion*, *Must Escape!*, *Outline*, *Rift* and *Zack Smackfoot*

Robert Rafgon for his reviews of *Halloween Hijinks*, *In The Claws Of Clueless Bob* and *The Will*

Stefan Donati (Shuarian) for his reviews of *The Final Question*, *In The Claws Of Clueless Bob*, *Murder Mansion*, *Must Escape!*, *Outline*, *Point 2 Point*, *Rift*, *Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand To Lop Nor* and *Zack Smackfoot*



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dwhyld@gmail.com

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Issue six is due out on Saturday, 3rd September.