

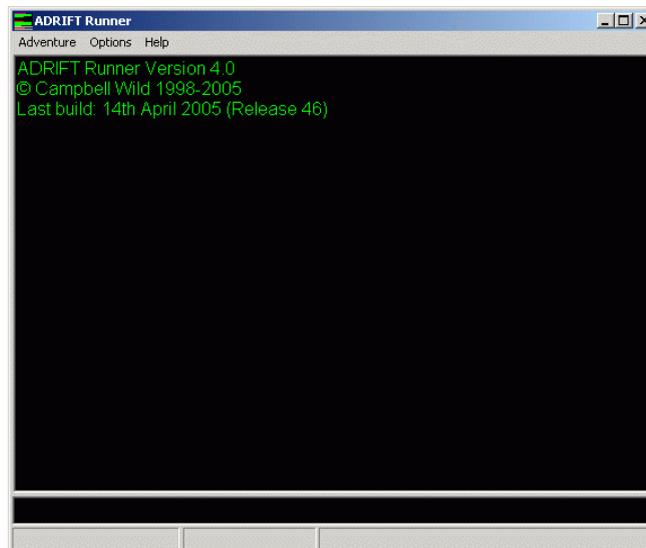
# Reviews Exchange

A COLLECTION OF REVIEWS OF ADRIFT GAMES WHICH PEOPLE HAVE WRITTEN BUT THEY MIGHT NOT NECESSARILY BE ALL ADRIFT GAMES THAT PEOPLE ARE WRITING REVIEWS OF

ISSUE 8

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## CONTENTS

### INTRODUCTION

#### WRITING CHALLENGES COMPETITION ENTRIES

Results from the competition

Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist - reviewed by Robert Street and David Whyld

Too Much Exercise - reviewed by David Whyld

Glum Fiddle - reviewed by Robert Street and David Whyld

Man Overboard!!! - reviewed by Robert Street, David Whyld and TDS

#### OTHER RECENT ADRIFT GAMES

The Makeshift Magician - reviewed by David Whyld

Provenance - reviewed by TDS

#### OLDER ADRIFT GAMES

Akari's Story - reviewed by Sara Brookside

First Day - reviewed by David Whyld

First to Arise: Alone with a Pug - reviewed by David Whyld

The Fox - reviewed by David Whyld

Jason Evans 1 - reviewed by David Whyld

The Quest For More Hair - reviewed by David Whyld

#### NON-ADRIFT GAMES

The Ghost Train - reviewed by David Whyld

#### ADULT GAMES

To Cage A Magpie - reviewed by David Whyld

#### APPENDIX

List of games reviewed in this issue and previous issues

## **INTRODUCTION**

Welcome to the eighth edition of the Reviews Exchange. This issue covers the months of January to March, which traditionally is a very slow time for new games to appear. Why is it so slow? There are normally no competitions in this period, as it lies between the heavy competition schedules of the IF/End of Year competition at the end of 2005 and the Spring Thing in April.

Unfortunately, non-competition games are always rare. Hopefully the continuing presence of the Reviews Exchange will encourage authors to release more games by providing feedback. In the last few months a solitary non-competition game was released in the ADRIFT community. This game looked like it would be the only new game for the period, until David Whyld announced a minicomp. The minicomp boosted the new games tally to five non-adult games over three months. This still isn't a large amount of games, but hopefully many more will be released over the year. With three new games having been released since the start of April, just before this edition was released, there has been a good start.

Of course, the Reviews Exchange is not just about new games. It is about reviewing any IF game from any time. Reviewing new games is important to provide feedback to authors soon after a game's release, and to show everyone what is available. However, it can also be good to go back and play some of the old games that are around, as some are very good, although not all of them. David Whyld has done a good job of going through the ADRIFT games archive to see what obscure games can be found in there.

I'd like to say a big thank you to David Whyld, as I was initially worried that I wouldn't receive many reviews for this issue with the lack of new games. Thank you to Sara Brookside and TDS, as well.

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## WRITING CHALLENGES COMPETITION ENTRIES

### RESULTS FROM THE COMPETITION

The concept behind the Writing Challenges competition was to include in a short game, one of the locations from the Writing Challenges that take place regularly on the ADRIFT forum. One or more of the following locations had to be included; a valley, ship's helm, sweet shop, elevator and escape tunnel.

Voting for the Writing Challenges Competition in 2006 took place during March, with the final positions and average scores being:

- 1) **Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist** by Ren - 6.2
- 2) **Too Much Exercise** by Robert Street - 5.8
- 3) **Glum Fiddle** by C. Henshaw - 5.2
- 4) **Man Oveboard!!!** By TonyB - 5.0

Below are reviews of all the entries to the competition.

### JONATHAN GRIM: SPACE TOURIST

**AUTHOR:** REN  
**PLATFORM:** ADRIFT 4.00

**REVIEWER:** ROBERT STREET

**Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist** is a difficult game that has included every one of the five scenarios listed for the competition. The ideas did not naturally mesh together well with a sweet shop, escape tunnel, ship's helm, valley and elevator, so it is surprising that this was not really noticeable within the game.

This game's main strength is the depth of implementation. Lots of stuff that I didn't expect to generate responses actually did receive a comment. The difficulty of the puzzles meant that I could have given up, but I was encouraged to persevere by the way that my ideas even if they failed were at least being acknowledged. In difficult games it is also rewarding to finally solve puzzles. A hint menu could have helped the game and removed some of the frustration, but it can be too tempting and remove some of the satisfaction of success. The game continued for longer than I had expected. Just when you think the game is ending, it continues with more action. I almost finished the game without any help, but got stuck and had to ask the author about the final puzzle.

The writing is also well done, although there is not really much of a story. The descriptions of everything are entertaining though. There are lots of various items around, and a surprising amount is actually useful for something in the end. There were a few bugs, with the door/smoke detector task not repeating, being notable. The fact that you can get off the alien spaceship and go back to the planet also doesn't seem quite right.

Some advice for writers. Using the <wait> command tends to annoy people unless it is used carefully. Sitting through and waiting for the intro to complete is not fun for a fast reader like myself. If you want to use this command, it would be best to provide a command at the start to turn it off for people like me. It especially is

worse when you have to wait before you can enter any command. When I had to take a break and come back to the game later, I didn't enjoy having to sit through the introduction again.

A good game, although don't expect to complete it too quickly.

SCORE - 7/10

**REVIEWER:** DAVID WHYLD

**Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist** suffered from a severe bout of newbieness which was so bad in places that it became almost painful. The introduction is long and there are timed pauses between each paragraph, meaning that every time you play the game, or restart it, you're forced to sit there and wait for the text to scroll its way through. Even more annoying, some of the pauses are followed by "press a key to continue" commands which means you can't even leave the keyboard for a minute and return to find them all gone.

The major issues with the game, though, came from the truly bizarre commands the player is expected to type in. Some of the responses to commands I tried were just baffling. After struggling with the door in my cabin for a while - OPEN DOOR and UNLOCK DOOR didn't work even though I had the room key in my hand - I tried USE KEY ON DOOR which produced "You miss Royston. You wish you had your big rock." Make any sense to you? Nope, me neither. I was also kind of bemused when I tried to open the boxes and was told that I couldn't open my bed. If all that wasn't confusing enough, most of the other commands are, with the majority of them seeming to be carried out for no other reason than they're necessary to complete the game. Why would I try to wear the marmalade? Why would I try the command 'forward' to move along a pipe when a simple directional command doesn't work? What possible reason could I have for pushing the chair against the door? While I'll grudgingly admit that the THROW SPANNER IN W.O.R.C.S. command is kind of witty, why would I attempt THROW BOX IN HOLE immediately afterwards?

On my own, I didn't even manage to get out of my cabin before becoming stuck. Fortunately I had the advantage of being the guy who organised the Comp and so had the walkthrough to fall back on. Good job as well, otherwise I'd have never progressed beyond the first location.

On the positive side, the standard of writing is fairly accomplished and while there are a few typos, these are nothing terrible. Unfortunately, those are about the only positive things I could find to say about the game. The intro was frustrating and the guess the verb even worse. I'm assuming the commands were of the variety that the writer felt would be obvious to the player, but they certainly weren't to this poor player. Even after checking the walkthrough, I'm not sure I would have got most of them.

3 out of 10

## TOO MUCH EXERCISE

AUTHOR: ROBERT STREET  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

The shortest game in the Writing Challenges Comp, and also by far the easiest, **Too Much Exercise** starts without any introduction to clue the player in as to what it's all about. Fortunately it soon becomes obvious: you're a big man looking for his next meal. (Actually there's a nice twist at the end of the game that throws this idea out but you'll have to finish it to see exactly what this is.)

Comprising just four locations, **Too Much Exercise** isn't a big game by any means. The necessary commands required to progress it are all fairly easy, and what few puzzles there are don't need much thought to figure out. The only time I stumbled was when trying to make an offering after putting my wallet on the altar - the coins not being in my possession stopped the task from working, which had me muttering more than a few colourful comments at the computer before I realised my error.

As well as being very small, this is also a very easy game. While it has quite a few puzzles (for its size), they are all remarkably easy and straightforward. None really require much in the way of puzzling out. Of the four games in the Comp, this was the only one I was able to complete without running into any actual problems (the wallet and the altar notwithstanding). From start to finish, you're looking at perhaps ten to fifteen minutes of gameplay time...

...which is more of a disadvantage than an advantage really. The game is over with before you've really had chance to start playing it; although, saying that, nothing about the game that I saw struck me as particularly memorable. It's okay for the ten minutes I spent playing it but nothing more.

5 out of 10

## GLUM FIDDLE

AUTHOR: C. HENSHAW  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

**Glum Fiddle** has an interesting premise, with great writing. **Glum Fiddle** chose to expand upon the valley theme from the Writing Challenges. The setting and characters are very humorous and the game made a really good first impression. Unfortunately, I found that I became annoyed with the limits of the game whilst I was playing it.

The game started really well, with a few good puzzles, but then I became progressively more and more stuck, dying again and again. I felt in this game that it was too easy to die without warning, and at times I seemed to be learning from my deaths, rather than being able to predict events before failing once. ADRIFT's

standard behaviour of exiting the program made it worse. Games with frequent deaths, like this one, should not make you restart the game every time before being able to restore. The hints were not very useful and I found this a difficult game to complete.

I had a number of problems with phrasing, such as that I had to drop the plank not put it on the chasm. There seemed to be a lack of checking alternatives in the testing of this game. If you stuck to the standard path you were fine, but as soon as you stepped outside the game did not work as well. An example is when I took the plank away from the chasm in case I still needed it, and the giant ended up disappearing somewhere. Another annoyance was that there was a message about an ogre breathing heavily that repeated everywhere after a while.

I admit that I am probably being harsh on this game, but it annoys me when I keep being killed whilst I am trying to figure out what is going on. Overall this game showed great potential, but I felt it just didn't quite reach it.

SCORE - 6/10

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

At heart, this is quite an amusing little tale about a young woman embarking on a quest to rescue her parents from a giant called Glum Fiddle, who seems to have abducted them for nothing more sinister than teaching him to read Shakespeare and play chess. Unfortunately, it's hit by some pretty serious bugs - some strange, some downright bizarre. Examine the vines and I'm asked which vines I mean: the blackberry vines or the massive wrought-iron gate? Elsewhere, I was able to pass through a locked gate by typing GO WEST when W wouldn't suffice. By far the worst error, and one no doubt caused by the GET command being overridden, came when I tried to pick up some mud and instead found myself taking a pigsty! (Actually, the pigsty never appeared in my inventory but it, along with every static item in the game, can be picked up. Ouch.) The get command override also allowed me to pick up the plank after Glum Fiddle had broken it and drop it over the chasm again.

A few other things arose which I was never really sure were bugs or not. I successfully found my parents and hid in some barrels from them from Glum Fiddle, who promptly fell into a chasm... and was never seen from again. No matter what I did after that, I couldn't seem to find him again and there also didn't appear to be any way of progressing the game. Armed with the walkthrough (one of the perks of organising the Comp), I was able to successfully finish the game, but lacking the walkthrough I'm not sure I would have managed it as a fair number of non-obvious commands were required.

All in all, there's a likeable charm to **Glum Fiddle**, but it's also marred by too many bugs (not to mention numerous typos and grammar errors) for me to recommend it.

4 out of 10

**MAN OVERBOARD!!!**

AUTHOR: TONYB  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

**Man Overboard!!!** is a fairly easy game that chooses to use the ship's helm theme from the Writing Challenges. The game does a good job of expanding the horizons of this concept, without becoming a cliché such as a pirate adventure. This game is a comedy game, with nothing being taken seriously. Unfortunately I found the humour to be a little over the top at times and it was not nearly as funny as the game wanted itself to be. It wasn't bad, just not great. Even if I didn't find every joke funny, the writing style for the game is still good.

The puzzles are not difficult, so this game should not take too long. The game uses the full ten room limit to create a convincing layout for the ship. I liked having a room specially for the plank. A bit more detail could have improved the game, with the NPCs in particular being fairly lifeless. Reasons are given for their lack of responsiveness, but they really might as well not have been there. My overall thoughts were that this is a reasonable game, which can provide a good short diversion.

SCORE - 5/10

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

An entry to the Writing Challenges Comp I hosted (see? Even now the comp has ended, I'm still plugging it at every opportunity!). This one chose the ship's helm location for its setting.

You're Captain Jean Luc-Warm (yes, very witty) of the Royal Navy cargo ship, HMS Challenged. You've been assigned to deliver a cargo of IKEA furniture to the inhabitants of the Island of the Damned, only while you're at sea you realise that the rest of the crew are a bunch of hopeless incompetents. How do you handle this situation? Go down with the ship like the captain should? Hardly. You're going to abandon ship.

Amusing intro. Amusing game on the whole. Within the confines of a game that is restricted to a maximum of ten rooms in order to meet the comp requirements, there's a fair bit to do here, although I felt the lack of NPC interaction could have been improved upon.

There was only one bit in the game that stumped me and this involved looking under something. At every other point in the game that I tried, LOOK UNDER [ITEM] had produced the same response as EXAMINE [ITEM], leading me to suspect that the two were going to be treated the exact same way throughout the whole game. Not so. At one crucial point, I was required to LOOK UNDER an item to find a couple of things - this I discovered after checking the walkthrough to see if there was anything I was missing about the game. Perhaps strangest of all was that the item I needed to look under (a pantry) isn't the sort of item I would otherwise have even tried to look under. Isn't a pantry a small room off one side of a kitchen where food is stored? And aren't those small rooms off one side of a kitchen where food is

stored generally situated on the floor? As such, is it even possible to look under one of them?

Other than that, any faults the game had were pretty minimal. There are a few NPCs around the ship to speak to. The conversation system used is in the TALK TO [NAME] format but whereas this works with some NPCs, it doesn't with all of them. Instead you get hit with ADRIFT's default advising you to ASK [NAME] ABOUT [SUBJECT], only when I tried this I never managed to get a meaningful response from anyone no matter what I tried. Then again, I don't think conversation is really required for this game as I managed to reach both of the endings without engaging in a single conversation.

Aside from a few rough edges (and the odd typo here and there!), this was a pretty decent game for a newcomer: amusing and nicely written. Very easy as well. None of the puzzles really require any thinking about, and assuming you don't trip yourself up with the items under the pantry, you ought to be able to get through the entire thing in about 10-15 minutes. Fortunately the pantry problem only affects one of the game's possible endings so if you can't figure it out, no need to worry. Just go for the other one.

7 out of 10

**REVIEWER:** TDS

### **General(for players)**

This entry is TonyB's first effort at an IF game and it isn't too bad. You are the captain of a cargo ship on the way to "the Island of the Damned" to deliver furniture. Unfortunately your crew are a bunch of idiots and you plan to abandon ship to start your own lingerie firm on the internet. Needless to say, it's a lighthearted adventure that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Exploring the ship I found an alarming number of common first-time technical mistakes such as every room description starting off with "You are in..." and actions in descriptions. Your crew is pathetic and there's no npc interaction within the game. You're given the common excuses as to why you can't talk to them. Since the game is a comedy it could benefit from funny conversations with the ship's highly incompetent crew members. The game could've also done better with a little more length. Some of the rooms and all of the characters were useless and could've provided for nice puzzles or at least been a little more entertaining. Although I do like the fact the game has multiple endings. It adds to the replay value and many games(especially small ones) would do well to have them. The writing needed a boost along with every other aspect of the game.

However, this **is** his first game. Be aware the game has a ridiculous amount of technical errors(which I will discuss in the technical review). If you can get over that you'll find a decent adventure you can beat in a couple minutes.

5/10

### **Technical(for authors)**

\*This is my analysis of the game. Everything I suggest are just suggestions that I

think would make the game better.

Hmm...where do I start? How about the first thing that hit me upon playing.

### Sloppy intro

The introduction to the game is rather sloppy. It gives the game title twice and the second time it is in quotes. No need for quotes and no need restating the title twice for an intro screen. There are colors which some may find to be a signal of newbdom but I personally don't mind. The intro also breaks the "fourth wall" a couple times by saying things such as "Welcome drifter" and "we start our quest". It also mentions how many rooms there are within the text. Since it's a comedy it isn't too bad but if you're going to break the fourth wall, do it elegantly.

### "You are in..." syndrome

Every room description in the game starts off with "You are...." This is silly because we know by the room title we are in the room! Adding "You are.." at the beginning every room description shows the author is new to the whole authoring game. Try not to start any room with "You are in..." and your writing will improve, guaranteed.

### Actions in descriptions

The unwritten rule(actually I think it is written) of IF design is that you **never** put actions in descriptions.

You notice a large mouse scuttle across the floor and vanish under the pantry.

That is in one room description and it never changes. So every time I enter the room a large mouse scuttles across the floor. That is BAD.

There is some writing on the wall in red marker pen that reads "Please knock before entering". You decided not to bother knocking as you know the first mate is never in his room, and, as you operate a "no knocking policy" prior to snooping round people's rooms looking for stuff to steal.

Also BAD. The player is being controlled way too much. It's the player's choice to knock on the door or not. Remember, descriptions **describe** a place, person, or thing. I shouldn't examine a floorboard and end up pulling it up, you know?

### Descriptions

>x floor  
A wooden floor...what more can I say?

You can say a lot more! Force your brain to pump out a creative way to describe it. Leaving the description bare hurts your creativity in the long run.

> x shark  
A shark is circling the water below you...

Details, details, details. What does the shark look like? Although I have an idea of

what a shark looks like it's the writers job to paint an image for me.

### Misc.

You can move North, East, South, West, up or down.

I don't know if this is how old school text adventures did it or just the mark of a first time author. But there is no reason those directions should be capitalized. It doesn't help me notice it in the text and sticks out like a sore thumb. One shouldn't just flat out say "You can move north, east, south, west, up, or down" either. Mix the exits in the room descriptions. It looks much better and the player knows where he or she is going.

### **QuickNotes**

- Easy on the exclamation marks.
- Don't capitalize so much.
- When using ellipses (using multiple periods like this...) use three if you use in the middle of a sentence, four at the end of a sentence. "Press any key" doesn't count.
- Don't say the player is wearing something in the room description unless it changes or player can't take it off.
- NPCs need **life**. Give them a soul for god's sake!

Lots of potential on author's part. Next game should be better.

Technical Rating - 1/10

Overall Rating(not average) - 2/10

## OTHER RECENT ADRIFT GAMES

### THE MAKESHIFT MAGICIAN

AUTHOR: C. HENSHAW

PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Another one room game and quite a bit better than the previous one I played by the same author (Lab Rats) but still with more than a few rough edges.

You're a magician, as the title might imply, and you're entertaining kids at a party. Nice idea, and some interesting tricks you can perform (albeit none of them really qualify as 'magic', they're more the sort of things TV magicians tend to perform instead of genuine magic), but in the confines of a single room there's only so much that can be done. It might be worth fleshing this idea out a bit, including a few genuine magic tricks with spell components and the like, but then as the same idea has been used before in an ADRIFT game (The Magic Show), maybe it's best left as a single room game after all to avoid further comparisons.

Quite a few of the magic tricks involve nothing more complicated than simply picking up an item. You don't even have to figure out how to use it, as once the item is in your possession the game will take over and perform the trick for you. Like... magic! Unfortunately, it's not all this straightforward as several of the tricks require some serious thought to figure out what needs to be done, and a few others, alas, are hit pretty bad by guess the verb. Lab Rats had guess the verb problems that had me climbing the walls in frustration at one point. There's nothing as heinous as that here thankfully, although several minutes spent trying to figure out the correct thing to type in relation to the balloons (and wrestling with more ambiguity errors than you can shake a stick at) was almost as bad. Surely the author must have been aware of such problems?

A few obvious responses - like bursting the balloons or waving the wand - didn't seem to be covered, and sometimes produced rather strange error messages along the lines of I HAVEN'T LEARNED HOW TO DO THAT. Not the best error message in the world when faced with something simple like bursting a balloon or waving a wand.

Of the nine separate magic tricks that need to be completed in order to finish the game, I got all but two on my own (both relating to the balloons) so overall this was a fairly easy game. Amusing as well for as long as it lasted - probably ten or fifteen minutes - although there were more than a few typos in the text that really should have been caught by a careful proofread.

5 out of 10

**PROVENANCE**

**AUTHOR:** COREY W. ARNETT  
**PLATFORM:** ADRIFT 4.00

**REVIEWER:** TDS

Even though you know better, some unseen force draws you up the long path towards the house for a closer look. No good can come of this, you are certain, but the attraction is simply too strong. You must investigate. You are beginning to develop an uneasy sense that all is not right here, but that it is somehow up to you to find out. Church bells in the distance sound out four o'clock in the afternoon. It will be dark soon. And with the night comes things that go bump.

I always laugh at that last sentence. The whole paragraph is incredibly overwritten. So much for good first impressions.

Before the game even starts you are hit with even more ridiculous lines such as:

The sun has breached the horizon and its fervent intensity warms the land, pulling the moisture from the ground in a sinuous miasma that rises up into the atmosphere like languid serpents.

Yes, the game is quite literary. A bit too literary for my tastes. When the game finally does begin you are creeping around a house for no reason. In my case I was stuck wandering around for quite some time before I realized I'd missed a very important item. I had missed an item list that told me what I'd be collecting. That's what the game is about. Collecting items on a list. You have to be kidding me.

Wading through room after room of stale (yet full) descriptions doesn't interest me. Very little action progressed the story at all. In fact there's a huge gap from the beginning to end where story advancement is concerned. You don't learn much more about it except from these two points. This would be fine but there are no good puzzles to hold the story up. Most of the puzzles have been thrown in for the sole purpose of keeping the player busy. Actually **all** of the puzzles have been created for that reason. The flowery writing is the weak glue that keeps the game from falling apart to reveal what it really is. A tedious, story-thin treasure hunt.

To beat the game you must collect items off a list and travel to the center of a maze to win. If that sounds fun to you then this game will keep you busy for ages.

If I judged games on how good they look instead of how well they play this game would get a 9/10. But because presentation isn't everything I give it a...

3/10.

## OLDER ADRIFT GAMES

### AKARI'S STORY

AUTHOR: TALEWEAVER  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 3.90

REVIEWER: SARA BROOKSIDE

In this game, you play a Japanese teenager on a typical weekend day (in other words, no school!) I would place this piece of IF in the "slice-of-life" genre and the game does do a relatively good job of faithfully simulating Akari's daily life. Unfortunately, that simulation can sometimes be a little bit pedantic in the sense that it provides little in the way of "escape value." I wasn't particularly caught up in the story or involved in the action, despite the fact that the world-modeling implementation was adequate. Along those same lines, Akari's day lacked a sense of urgency or any clear goals. Accordingly, there wasn't very much to command action or to require much of the PC.

The walkthrough reveals that the game ends after a certain number of turns... at the end of the day, so to speak. So, there is no real way to "win" the game, although there is a scoring system that awards points for certain actions. The walkthrough also revealed that I tried many of the actions that the author had in mind, while there were others that I missed completely and would have never thought of had I not read the walkthrough.

One of the most interesting aspects of this piece is that it DOES provide insight into another culture (unless, of course, you happen to be a Japanese teenager yourself!) Japanese customs and terminology and even dietary preferences are woven into the game, which is quite intriguing! The game also reveals a bit about what is important to modern Japanese youngsters... also neat to know. On the downside, this may have the effect of making the player feel more like a spectator than a participant. It is as if one is observing Akari's life, rather than participating in it or living it, which makes the pace of the work feel rather slow at times.

The writing is rather sparse, in the sense that room descriptions are relatively brief and many nouns are non-examinable. Still, I didn't note any particularly jarring errors in grammar or spelling, which certainly helped make for a pleasant reading experience in that regard. In short, however, I felt much as if I was reading an essay by a Japanese teenager about her life, rather than playing a game.

There are puzzles in the game and they are reasonably well-crafted, although certainly not complicated. I wish there had been more of a sense of payoff to successfully solving the puzzles, however. Because the problems posed were essentially of the routine, day-to-day variety, and there was very little urgency, it didn't seem to matter much whether I solved the puzzles or not. The only real impact for doing so was the point value added to my score for performing certain actions.

The characters in the game were largely undeveloped, except for the PC. All of the NPCs felt rather static and cardboard to me, almost as if they were objects rather than characters. Conversation is minimal, except if you happen to guess the few things that the author has allowed you to "ask [character] about," but this is not an uncommon problem by any means.

As for plot and story, both were a little thin. Without a compelling goal to spur action, the experience was much more like an exploration than an interactive narrative. Game play progressed smoothly, though, with little evidence of "bugginess." There was an occurrence or two of "guess the verb," but I found those issues to be relatively easily solved and certainly not game-stoppers. A reading of the walkthrough definitely revealed several cases of "read the author's mind" and in each case, I had failed to do so.

In conclusion, this game could be much improved by augmenting descriptions to add atmosphere and capture the attention of the player, as well as implementing more variety and innovation in the tasks of the PC to make for a more compelling story line.

Overall rating: \*\* out of \*\*\*\*\* for faithful simulation, fair puzzles, and cross-cultural value.

### **FIRST DAY**

**AUTHOR:** MYSTERY  
**PLATFORM:** ADRIFT 3.90

**REVIEWER:** DAVID WHYLD

Background: you're a schoolboy who has to get ready for school.

Hardly the most enthralling of introductions unfortunately. The game's READ ME task makes a big point of emphasising the fact that this game is for kids. IT IS FOR KIDS! it shouts at one point and that point should be kept in mind if people decide to rate it. Hmmm... Sounds to me like someone who has written a bad game and is trying to ward off any negative comments it may receive.

But on with the game itself. What's it like? Not too bad for the most part. A few typos here and there yet nothing too hideous. The only problem that presents itself is, wait for it, the dreaded guess the verb. And this game has guess the verb galore. Some of the guess the verb issues are just downright strange - WEAR UNIFORM doesn't work yet produces a message advising me to try something else. (Being advised what I needed to try would have been helpful.) However, PUT CLOTHES ON works fine. Now, even accepting that this game is aimed directly at kids, how many of them are likely to type PUT CLOTHES ON instead of WEAR CLOTHES? (I discovered this not by trial and error but by opening up the game in the Generator to see what I was missing.) Another location features a bowl and a box of Frooties but whereas Frooties can be referred to in some instances, POUR CEREAL IN BOWL is required to actually get anything done.

Directions in the game appear only after certain tasks have been completed, never a favourite idea of mine. So your bedroom to begin with has just one exit, north to the bathroom, yet once you're wearing your uniform another exit opens up to the east. Likewise, you can't leave your house until you've eaten your breakfast (perhaps the breakfast cereal contains certain ingredients that make the invisible front door somehow visible). And you can't do anything outside your house... well, at all. The game seems to reach an ending outside of your house with no further

tasks to complete, no items to examine and nothing to do at all as far as I could tell.

Overall, **First Day** isn't a horrible game but it has the impression of one barely even finished. Outside the house there are no examinable items or even any tasks that need performing - is that the end of the game? But if so, shouldn't there at least be some kind of THIS IS THE END OF THE GAME message displayed on screen?

3 out of 10

### **FIRST TO ARISE: ALONE WITH A PUG**

**AUTHOR:** DARKLING  
**PLATFORM:** ADRIFT 4.00

**REVIEWER:** DAVID WHYLD

Background: you're a half-elf called Alex Thassylian, the daughter of (wait for it!) Sysallandrianthasa Thassylian. Today your friends, Greg and Selana, have embarked on a journey but seem to have left without first waking you.

A decidedly strange title for the game, but **The First To Arise: Alone With A Pug** isn't at all bad. It's nicely written, has a few difficult (but easily solvable puzzles) and was quite enjoyable to play for as far as I managed to get before becoming well and truly stuck (not all the puzzles are easily solvable unfortunately).

The pug of the game's title is some kind of intelligent dog called Flash who the player can question about a few subjects in the **ask [name] about [subject]** style. Normally I'm not a big fan of this but here it works pretty well as I was able to question Flash about a fair number of subjects and get decent responses to most of my attempts. That he kept running away in the midst of conversations and I was forced to pursue him round the house just to get answers was annoying though.

Some of the puzzles are awkward. Questioning Flash reveals the location of a key, yet examining that location fails to reveal said key. After first muttering a while over what looked like an error in the game, then a bit of wrestling with guess the verb, the key is discovered but, while it will unlock a door elsewhere in the game, it can't open it due to the wood having warped. Getting through the door seems to be the main aim of the game but it got the better of me in the end as no matter what I did, I couldn't seem to find a way of getting it open. (I felt the game was pretty decent overall so I won't go on at length the fact that there are several unbarred windows in the house that the player could, in real life, have climbed through to get outside if he was determined.)

Of all the older ADRIFT games I played recently, this one stood out as the best of the bunch. While not an exceptional game (I didn't reach the later stages so if it became exceptional then, I unfortunately missed out on that), it was head and shoulders above the others. Just don't be put off by the overly strange title!

6 out of 10

## THE FOX

AUTHOR: FLAME ACHRON  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 3.90

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Background: (from the intro) You are [name], in a quest to save Florand, from the Distant Fox of D'narolf, in the paralell land.

Hardly the kind of introduction that makes you sit up and take notice, is it? Then again, the quality (or otherwise) of the introduction is pretty much par for the course for the rest of the game so it's at least a good indicator of what is to come.

**The Fox** isn't a game many people are likely to enjoy. It features minimal room descriptions - most being little more than a line in length with no attempt made to add any depth - NPCs who can't be interacted with aside from buying items from them, bad spelling, worse grammar... and, if that wasn't bad enough, you find right at the end that you can't complete the game if you picked the wrong class at the start!

Other annoyances pop up in the form of a troll that disappears partway through a combat and isn't seen from again after that. (Is this ADRIFT's combat system moving the troll after it dies and not telling the player about it, or just a weirdness on the part of the game itself?) Overall, you'll probably be through the entire game in a matter of minutes as there are no puzzles to solve here and the bulk of the commands that need to be entered are directional ones. Move from point A to point B, kill a troll, enter point C (assuming you're a Sorcerer... if not, bad luck. You can't finish the game) and you're there. Certainly the easiest game I've played for a long time, but if I was asked what the point of it was I'd be hard pressed to tell you.

Oh, and it also features a truly jaw dropping description for an item called the warrior sword: THIS IS A SWORD FOR WARRIORS. Classic.

3 out of 10

## JASON EVANS 1

AUTHOR: SOCKETS  
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 3.90

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Background: your father sends you out with the trash, then along to the local serial killer's house to fetch some milk. Before long, you're being chased by some guy with a chainsaw.

I remember playing all four versions of **Jason Evans 4** - the first almost okay although still flawed, the second bad, the third dire, and the less said about the fourth the better (but it almost gave **Death Agency** a run for its money as Worst ADRIFT Game Of All Time). But I'd never played any of the first three games. Partly this was because of what everyone said about them (that they were unbelievably

awful) and partly because of the way the writer used to make a point of referring to himself as "The Master Horror Game Writer" on the ADRIFT forum and was forever talking about his latest "masterpiece". Hmm...

But curiosity got the better of me, so, with the lack of current ADRIFT games around, I decided I'd try the first game and see if it was as bad as everyone said.

And was it? No.

Actually, it was a lot worse...

The writing is, and let's not beat about the bush here, terrible. Truly terrible. Probably the worst writing I've ever come across. There are spelling mistakes galore and some appalling grammar. If all that wasn't bad enough, the game is written from first person perspective yet the default responses are second person. In a good game, this would be annoying. In a bad game, it's just another nail in the coffin.

Aside from that, we have some serious lapses in anything approaching logic. The player is sent to get some milk from his neighbour, Jason Evans, despite the man's reputation. On top of that, when he arrives at Jason's house, lets himself in and finds a crazy man thumping on the window, does he run like heck to get out there as soon as possible? Nope. He hunts around for some milk first. Sheesh...

Play the game with the Generator open at all times. You'll need it. I'm probably not spoiling the game (it's already too spoilt as it is) by saying that the milk you need is on top of the fridge, but you'll never discover this if you play by the rules. Examining the fridge reveals nothing. You can't open it. Only by checking the Generator and discovering the bizarrely worded task USE CHAIR ON FRIDGE did I manage to locate and take the milk.

There are too many errors in the game to make it even vaguely playable. After taking the milk, a man bursts through the window into the kitchen, yet when trying to examine him you're told he isn't there. In another location, you need to escape from the man by breaking a statue, yet never is there any indication as to why this should make a difference. Elsewhere I found myself at a dead end, but when I tried knocking on a door I'm told there's actually another road leading off to the west.

That was about all I could take. The terrible reputation that the Jason Evans' games have achieved over the years seems well founded. This is one truly awful game.

1 out of 10

### **THE QUEST FOR MORE HAIR**

**AUTHOR:** MATT (DARK BARON)

**PLATFORM:** ADRIFT 3.90

**REVIEWER:** DAVID WHYLD

Background: you're an adventurer called Liquid who is bald and has decided to go on a quest for more hair.

What the...?

Yep. You read that right. An adventurer called Liquid. Who is bald. Who is going on a quest for more hair. No wonder I don't remember much about the game from when it first came out. I probably took one look at the introduction (littered with spelling mistakes as it happens) and quit it five seconds later. The fact that it was credited to someone with the bizarre name of Matt (Dark Baron) didn't help matters much either.

There are so many things wrong with the game that making any kind of progress is a constant guess the verb battle. Or, more appropriately, 'guess what the heck the writer was thinking'. Want an example? Well... one room has a rusty bell in it that needs to be rung. But does RING BELL work? Nope. RING RUSTY BELL? Nope. Seems you need to put RING \*THE\* BELL in order to get the game to understand what you want. Grrrr.

The game also makes use of ADRIFT's built in combat system which is every bit as bad here as it is in every other game I've played that has used it. Most of the time, it's simply a case of typing KILL DRUNK WITH SWORD until either you or the drunk fall down dead and seeing such wonderful messages as this

YOU HIT DRUNK WITH THE SWORD. DRUNK HITS YOU.

YOU HIT DRUNK WITH THE SWORD. DRUNK HITS YOU.

YOU HIT DRUNK WITH THE SWORD. DRUNK HITS YOU.

YOU HIT DRUNK WITH THE SWORD. DRUNK HITS YOU.

displayed on the screen. Anyone who thinks that combat systems have no place in a text adventure would certainly be speaking from a stronger footing if they played this game.

What else is there to say about the game? There are numerous spelling mistakes - a few in almost every sentence - as well as more grammatical errors than you'd see if you attended the Grammatical Errors Convention; there are descriptions for very few of the items mentioned in room descriptions (and the ones that have descriptions are seriously lacking (the key carries the wonderful description IT IS A SMALL BRONZE KEY)); item names begin with capital letters (Sword and Cabinet) for no apparent reason; a location with a pit that kills you a turn after you enter it (some kind of event runs that moves you over the pit and then plunges you downwards to your doom, whether or not you actually wanted to do that or not); a ferry man armed with a (sic) Schmitar; and unhelpful and often sarcastic responses to reasonable commands.

All in all, this is one terrible game.

1 out of 10

## NON-ADRIFT GAMES

### THE GHOST TRAIN

AUTHOR: PAUL JOHNSON

PLATFORM: INFORM

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

I've played a couple of other games by the same author recently - **House Of The Midnight Sun**, which was very good but also flawed, and **Jet Blue**, which was okay but also flawed and probably contained one of the highest number of typos I've ever seen in a game. **The Ghost Train** actually comes between the other two but I missed it out at the time because, like HOTMS, it's a horror and I felt like a change of pace. But while looking around for a game to play recently, I remembered this one and decided to give it a whirl.

#### First Impressions

My first impression of **The Ghost Train** was that it was a bit too linear for my liking. It begins in a train compartment, with you and your fiancé, Ingrid, travelling home to see your family for Christmas. Nothing seems to happen for several moves, after which the train crashes and you, perhaps unsurprisingly, are the train's only survivor. You awaken at the side of the wrecked train, wander around for a bit, and then return to the scene of the crash... only to find the wreckage missing. All very eerie.

Stranger things follow. Your fiancé's necklace, which she was wearing on the train, shows up nearby, and you even hear her voice on an old phone. This is all very atmospheric and well written and bodes well for the rest of the game.

Unfortunately, the start of the game seems to be most polished and things seem to go quickly downhill. Later parts have a rushed feel to them, as well as making precious little sense. While I could get my head around the idea of the game to begin with, later on it just seemed to lose its way.

#### Problems

The most noticeable problems with the game are the constant grammatical errors which seem to litter almost every location. Frequently the game will put two different parts of a conversation on the same line whereas other times they are separated by a couple of lines space, or put apostrophes in the wrong place or just format the text in such a way that it often looks out of place on the screen. None of these are major problems and a few would be easily forgivable, but a decent proofread through the text could have picked up 99% of them.

One problem I came across was due to the unhelpful way the game described a creature that was trying to kill me. He was referred to alternatively as "ticket collector", "corpse" and "skeleton" yet examining any of those or trying to interact with them just hit me with one error message after another. I figured out what I needed to do, yet it wasn't until I checked the walkthrough and realised I actually need to refer to him as "ghost" (which he clearly wasn't) that I was able to deal with him.

A previous game I played by the same author - **House Of The Midnight Sun** - showed a high standard of testing for the most part. This game doesn't. There are strange errors popping up all over the place, not the least of which is a list of deaths I found in the chapel which I couldn't seem to figure out anything to do with. Examining it hit me with the strange error message I ONLY UNDERSTOOD YOU AS FAR AS WANTING TO EXAMINE THE LIST OF DEATHS, with EXAMINE being replaced with READ or GET if that's what you try instead. Perhaps strangest of all is the fact that I wasn't even aware a list of deaths existed in the chapel until I tried, following a prompt in the game, to locate some information on my fiancé and in response to SEARCH INGRID I was told "In the bookcase is a list of deaths".

One particularly frustrating thing the game does part of the way through is put some of the location descriptions in poetry (very bad poetry, and often riddled with spelling mistakes). The first time I saw this I assumed it was just some quote from a poem that the author had decided, for whatever reason, to include in his game... and I promptly ignored them afterwards. It wasn't till later in the game, when I'd exhausted just about every other option and was struggling to find some way forward, that I realised the poems weren't just there for decoration and actually served a purpose. Annoying? Oh yes.

### Problems

Again and again while playing **The Ghost Train** I was forced back to the walkthrough. A couple of times it was a case of me not trying hard enough or simply missing a clue that was presented to me (nothing new there!); other times it was down to some very definite faults in the game design. Aside from the ghost being referred to as different names during the game, there was an error in the name of a church I had to research information on. The church is down as 'Gorgan' in the inscription I found, yet 'Gorgon' is what you need to type to find out any information on it. Whatever positive things the game has going for it, and it does have a few despite the largely negative tone of this review so far, they get lost amidst the sheer number of problems.

Some of the game's puzzles are easy to figure out. Some are difficult but well clued. Some are so vague as to be almost impossible. Even after seeing the walkthrough, I'm still not sure about some of them. Obviously someone managed to solve them so they're not as impossible as you might think, but it's hard to imagine many people having the patience to reason them out. Towards the end of the game in particular, the puzzles become generally less well clued as if the author either got bored or was simply trying to finish the game as quickly as possible. A conversation option towards the end of the game, involving Satan (or Salan as he's wrongly referred to on occasion), requires the player to ask a question about a subject that there's no reason to ask about.

Clearly whatever kind of testing this game went through prior to release was poor at best.

### Overall

Despite the many, many problems with the game, I found myself enjoying playing **The Ghost Train** for the most part, but every time I thought it was going to turn into a really good game, I ran into another error, or another impossible to figure out puzzle, or a whole mass of typos one after one, and my favourable opinion of it dropped a notch. Any game that has me consulting the walkthrough on a regular basis isn't necessarily a bad game in itself, but when the puzzles I'm stuck on are down to guess the noun issues (like with the ghost/ticket collector/skeleton/

corpse) or misspellings (Gorgan instead of Gorgon), I start to wish I'd played something else instead. Fix the errors, a mammoth task in itself, and this would be a well above average horror game. As it stands, it's still good enough in its own right but definitely not anywhere as good as it could have been.

This is the third game by the same author I've played recently, and while I've enjoyed them all to one degree or another, they've all been particularly prone to bugs and guess the verb. Each has contained more than a few of each, this game being the worst of the three, and indicates an author too eager to properly test his games out before releasing them or one who simply doesn't think that bugs and guess the verb are a problem. Now if this was some talentless hack who couldn't write worth a damn, I'd just make a point of avoiding any future games he releases and decide I wasn't really missing anything, but the writing in the games is generally good, the storylines interesting, and my overall feeling is that the games are well above average. So it's a crying shame that he just can't pay a little more attention to detail and maybe even take the time to proofread his text. None of the games have been masterpieces, but the potential is certainly there... if the problems can be fixed.

4 out of 10

## ADULT GAMES

<<THE FOLLOWING REVIEWS ARE FOR AIF GAMES, WHICH CONTAIN STRONG SEXUAL CONTENT>>

### TO CAGE A MAGPIE

AUTHOR: LUCILLA FROST

PLATFORM: TADS

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

The author's first game, **British Fox & The Celebrity Abductions**, was highly spoken of in the AIF community when it came out, yet for some reason I never seemed to have got round to playing it. But when the sequel, written in TADS (the original was an ADRIFT game) put in an appearance, I decided I'd give it a go to see what all the fuss was about. Would it live up to the hype generated by its predecessor? Or would it just be another of those games that the AIF people love but the rest of the world hate?

Thankfully it was the former.

**To Cage A Magpie** follows the adventures of cockney thief, Angela Hall, AKA The Magpie, who uses her powers of being able to fly and turn invisible to rob from the rich and... well, keep it for herself. (Where did she get these powers from? Don't know. The game doesn't see fit to enlighten me.) Obviously Anj (as she's known to friends) hasn't made good use of her talents as she's living in a grimy council flat when the game begins.

There are a few problems with Magpie but considerably less than I expected from an AIF game. It's been tested, for god's sake! Actually tested! Unfortunately the testing missed out a few annoyances like a crucial item required to progress the game only showing up after the 'stuff' in Magpie's apartment has been searched a certain number of times (the actual number seems to vary from game to game). As such, I spent a good fifteen minutes scratching my head in frustration before I could even leave the apartment. I'd searched everywhere, done everything I could think of, tried the hints which, this being an AIF game, were non-existent, and was just on the verge of quitting when I decided to search again and, lo and behold, I found something useful! After that, the game progressed quite happily for a while, although I'd question the necessity to make the player search something a random number of times. After you search once and fail to find something useful, why would you keep searching on the off chance something you need will show up?

The storyline involves stealing a briefcase from the house of one Mr Smythe, inside which are a number of confidential documents. Getting into the house is easy enough (there are several different ways to get inside) but getting the briefcase, and then getting out of the house again, is a nightmare. Kudos to the writer for coming up with such a mind bogglingly frustrating series of events, and I suppose it's to her credit that I kept on struggling with things long after I'd have given up with most other games. Part of the incentive to keep on trying is the way every time you fail, you seem to get ever so slightly closer to what you're trying to achieve and it's easy to think "ah, but if I did it that way instead..." then you'll get to where you need to be.

Magpie is unusual for an AIF game for several reasons. First, as stated above, it's been tested and while this hasn't eliminated every problem (try searching Mr Smythe or Lady Windsor and you'll see what I mean), it's certainly gone a long way towards making this one of the few AIF games released recently that's actually well worth playing. Second, the game is about the storyline and not solely focused on the sex. In fact, there's not even that much sex in Magpie, and even less that directly involves the player. Smythe and Windsor will have a lengthy sex scene, but this progresses whether the player is actually present or not. A later sex scene, necessary to the game's completion, features the player and Windsor herself, although it's more erotic than the usual explicit hardcore writings that plague most AIF games. I'm sure even a few of the regular IF crowd could play this game and not be unduly offended over it.

One of the game's oddities, although it didn't really affect the game in the long run, was the way the description of Smythe's living room is repeated for both the stairs and the kitchen, thereby making it awkward sometimes telling where the player is. A couple of times, I could have sworn I was actually in the living room but the game wouldn't let me move upstairs because it seemed to think I was in the kitchen.

By far the worst thing about the game, and the ceaseless repetition of which was enough to tempt me to bash out QUIT a time or two, is the PC's craving for a smoke. Now if this happened once or twice throughout the game, it'd be acceptable. But every few moves? Definitely not acceptable. Before I'd even managed to leave my apartment, I was overcome with the urge for a smoke. I had another while trying to get into Smythe's house, another once I was inside, several others whilst searching for the briefcase... Tedious puzzle? Oh yes. But then it's not even really a puzzle as simply typing SMOKE fixes the cigarette craving - or at least resets the timer so you have a whole four or five moves before it begins all over again. Strangely SMOKE and SMOKE TAB (another name for the cigarettes) sometimes produce different responses, SMOKE TAB being a stealthy smoke while SMOKE being a non-stealthy one that various NPCs in the game will detect if they're close enough. This might have been a nice enough puzzle if I hadn't been typing SMOKE TAB right from the start of the game and so was unaware of it for the most part.

If you decide not to bother smoking a cigarette, or you run out, the game ends after a certain amount of the time with Magpie deciding to abandon her mission and go off in search of some more smokes. This she can do even if she happens to be locked in Smythe's house at the time with no other way out!

Many of the game's puzzles are of the try and die variety: meaning you try something not knowing whether it's going to succeed or kill you. Often this is the only way to make progress and while it isn't much of a hassle to reload the game if it kills you, or simply type UNDO a few times, it becomes annoying when you're dying every few moves. As some of the puzzles (getting hold of the key being the worst offender) are time based and can only happen at a certain time, it's a fair bet you're going to be reloading and UNDOing a lot. By the time I finally got hold of the key without Smythe catching me, I must have died a dozen or more times.

There are many ways to put the game into an unfinishable situation and some had me almost climbing the walls in frustration. The way the game's sequences fit together is quite ingenious, often requiring split second timing on the behalf of the player in order to solve them. I ended up dying numerous times because I'd left

something a fraction of a second too long and either Smythe or Windsor caught me. Other times, I died when the ultraviolet sensors came on and I was detected because I hadn't moved out of the way in time.

While not a perfect game (I'm still having nightmares about the endless craving for smokes and getting the safe open without being caught), **To Cage A Magpie** is certainly a decent one. Compared to the recent bug-ridden AIF offerings, it's a delight. Beta-tested, well written, an actual honest to god storyline, multiple ways of solving many of the game's puzzles... it's the kind of thing the AIF community is crying out for, but which it gets so very seldom indeed.

Highly recommended.

7 out of 10

## APPENDIX

## LIST OF GAMES REVIEWED IN THIS ISSUE AND PREVIOUS ISSUES

- The Adventures of Space Boy! Volume I** by David Parish ([1] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 6 review by Robert Street)
- The Adventures Of Thumper: Wonder Wombat** by Sarazar (issue 3 review by Robert Street)
- Akari's Story** by Taleweaver (issue 8 review by Sara Brookside)
- Authority** by Eva Vikstrom (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- Back To Life... Unfortunately** by David Whyld ([1] issue 2 review by Laurence Moore / [2] issue 2 review by Lumin)
- Bedlam** by Mark Whitmore (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- Bolivia By Night** by Aidan Doyle (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- The Cabin** by Blue Roses (issue 2 review by Lumin)
- Can I Do It?** by Chillindawg (issue 7 review by David Whyld)
- Can It All Be So Simple?** by The Dominant Species ([1] issue 6 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 6 review by David Whyld)
- Castle Quest** by Andrew Cornish (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- The Cave Of Morpheus** by Mark Silcox (issue 2 review by THoiA)
- Chasing the Russian** by Greg Broulette (issue 7 review by David Whyld)
- City Of Secrets** by Emily Short (issue 2 review by David Whyld)
- Crazy Old Bag Lady** by Sprite (issue 6 review by Robert Street)
- Darkness** by Richard Otter ([1] issue 2 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 3 review by Red-Sith)
- A Day At The Seaside** by Matthew Hunter ([1] issue 4 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 4 by Robert Street)
- The Demon Hunter** by David Parish (issue 7 review by Robert Street)
- Doctor Who & The Vortex Of Lust** by Christopher Cole (issue 2 review by THoiA)
- Escape to Freedom** by Richard Otter (issue 5 review by David Whyld)
- Escape to New York** by Richard Otter (issue 7 review by The Dominant Species)
- The Final Question** by David Whyld ([1] issue 5 review by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)
- Fire In The Blood** by Richard Otter ([1] issue 4 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 4 by Robert Street)
- The Fire Tower** by Jacqueline A. Lott (issue 5 review by David Whyld)
- First Day** by Mystery (issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- First to Arise: Alone with a Pug** by Darkling (issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- Flat Feet** by Joel Ray Holveck (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- The Fox** by Flame Achron (issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- Frustrated Interviewee** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- Future Boy!** by Kent Tessman (issue 5 review by David Whyld)
- The Ghost Train** by Paul Johnson (issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- Glum Fiddle** by C. Henshaw ([1] issue 8 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- Halloween Hijinks** by David Whyld (issue 5 review by Robert Street)
- The HeBGB Horror** by Eric Mayer (issue 2 review by David Whyld)
- Hoedown In Ho-Town** by S. Welling (issue 3 review by David Whyld)
- House Husband** by C. Henshaw ([1] issue 4 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 4 review by Robert Street / [3] issue 6 review by Lumin)
- House of the Midnight Sun** by Paul Johnson (issue 7 review by David Whyld)
- How It All Began** by Kevin Treadway (issue 4 review by David Whyld)
- The Hunter** by Red Assassin (issue 7 review by Robert Street)
- In The Claws Of Clueless Bob** by David Whyld ([1] issue 5 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)
- Jack of Shadows** by Arnold "Ace" Rimmer (issue 7 review by David Whyld)
- Jason Evans 1** by Sockets (issue 8 review by David Whyld)
- Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist** by Ren ([1] issue 8 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 8 review by David Whyld)

**Laboratory R.A.T.S.** by C. Henshaw ([1] issue 6 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 6 review by David Whyld)

**Lauren's Awakening** by TotalDirt (issue 5 review by David Whyld)

**Lights, Camera, Action** by David Whyld (issue 6 review by Robert Street)

**The Magic Show** by Jason MacInnes ([1] issue 2 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 2 review by Laurence Moore)

**The Makeshift Magician** by C. Henshaw (issue 8 review by David Whyld)

**Man Overboard!!!** by TonyB ([1] issue 8 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 8 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 8 review by TDS)

**The Merry Murders** by Mel S (issue 1 review by Woodfish)

**The Monster In The Mirror: Part 1** by Mystery (issue 4 review by Robert Street)

**The Monster In The Mirror: Part 2** by Mystery (issue 4 review by Robert Street)

**Mortality** by David Whyld (issue 7 review by The Dominant Species)

**Mount Voluptuous** by Christopher Cole (issue 1 review by David Whyld)

**Murder In Great Falls** by Mel S ([1] issue 1 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 1 review by Laurence Moore)

**Murder Mansion** by Reelyor ([1] issue 5 review by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 5 by Stefan Donati)

**The Murder Of Jack Morely** by Mystery (issue 2 review by David Whyld)

**Must Escape!** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] ([1] issue 6 review by Stefan Donati / [2] issue 6 review by David Whyld)

**Must Escape! (introduction)** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] ([1] issue 5 review by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)

**The Mystery Of The Darkhaven Caves** by David Whyld (issue 4 review by Laurence Moore)

**Neighbours From Hell** by David Whyld (issue 1 review by Laurence Moore)

**Normville** by BBBen (issue 5 review by David Whyld)

**Outline** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] ([1] issue 5 by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)

**Pathway to Destruction** by Richard Otter (issue 7 review by David Whyld)

**The Plague (Redux)** by Laurence Moore (issue 7 review by The Dominant Species)

**Point 2 Point** by C. Henshaw ([1] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 5 by Stefan Donati)

**Private Eye** by David Whyld (issue 4 review by Robert Street)

**The Prostitute** by The Anonymous Martian (issue 4 review by Laurence Moore)

**Provenance** by Corey W Arnett ([1] issue 7 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 8 review by TDS)

**The Quest for More Hair** by Matt (Dark Baron) (issue 8 review by David Whyld)

**Regrets** by David Whyld (issue 6 review by Robert Street)

**Rift** by Red-Sith ([1] issue 5 review by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)

**Selma's Will** by Mystery (issue 4 review by Robert Street)

**Sex Artist** by A. Ninny (issue 5 review by David Whyld)

**Shadow of the Past** by Catherine Post (issue 7 review by David Whyld)

**Shards Of Memory** by David Whyld (issue 1 review by Greybear)

**Showtime at the Gallows** by The Dominant Species (issue 7 review by Robert Street)

**Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand To Lop Nor** by C. Henshaw ([1] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 5 by Stefan Donati)

**Snakes And Ladders** by KFAdrift (issue 2 review by David Whyld)

**A Spot of Bother** by David Whyld (issue 7 review by Robert Street)

**Sun Empire: Quest For The Founders** by Tech (issue 3 review by Robert Street)

**Take One** by Robert Street (issue 7 review by David Whyld)

**Target** by Richard Otter ([1] issue 6 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 6 review by David Whyld)

**Threnody** by John Schiff (issue 4 review by David Whyld)

**The Timmy Reid Adventure** by Jonathan R. Reid (issue 3 review by Robert Street)

**To Cage a Magpie** by Lucilla Frost (issue 8 review by David Whyld)

**Too Much Exercise** by Robert Street (issue 8 review by David Whyld)

**Varicella** by Adam Cadre (issue 3 review by David Whyld)

**Vendetta** by James Hall ([1] issue 7 review by The Dominant Species / [2] issue 7 review by Robert Street)

**Veteran Experience** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] (issue 2 review by David Whyld)  
**Veteran Knowledge** by Robert Rafgon [AKA Robert Street] ([1] issue 3 review by Cobra1 / [2] issue 3 review by David Whyld)  
**A Walk At Dusk** by Eric Mayer ([1] issue 3 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 3 review by Laurence Moore)  
**We Are Coming To Get You!** by Richard Otter ([1] issue 2 review by David Whyld / [2] issue 2 review by Laurence Moore)  
**Where Are My Keys?** by Richard Otter (issue 1 review by David Whyld)  
**The White Singularity** by Irene Villanueva ([1] issue 6 review by Stefan Donati / [2] issue 6 review by David Whyld)  
**Whom The Telling Changed** by Aaron A. Reed (issue 4 review by David Whyld)  
**The Will** by Ambrosine (issue 5 review by Robert Street)  
**Wizard's Playground** by Evil\_Flagpole (issue 7 review by Greg Boettcher)  
**The Woodfish Compendium** by Woodfish (issue 1 review by David Whyld)  
**The Woods Are Dark** by Cannibal [AKA Laurence Moore] (issue 2 review by THoiA)  
**Zack Smackfoot** by KFAdrift ([1] issue 5 by C. Henshaw / [2] issue 5 review by David Whyld / [3] issue 5 by Stefan Donati)  
**Zombies Are Cool, But Not So Cool When They're Eating Your Head** by Mel S (issue 2 review by David Whyld)