

Reviews Exchange

*Issue 2
(January 2005)*



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Welcome to the second issue of the Reviews Exchange, a collection of reviews written by drifters for drifters - and anyone else who wants to read them.

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Back To Life... Unfortunately

By David Whyld

Review: Laurence Moore

Genre: Comedy

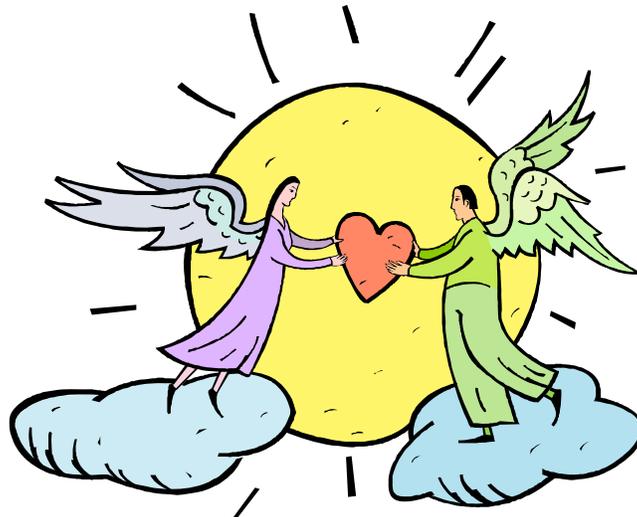
Platform: Adrift 4

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

This is a highly amusing and fairly original game. The premise is that you have been resurrected by your people to save them and administer their affairs. However, you were quite content being dead and intend to stay dead.

So begins the quest for treasure? Right? Wrong!

Toss away your bunch of keys and oil lanterns and [MINOR SPOILER] throw yourself off the balcony because the only way you will win this game is by killing yourself numerous times and ensuring you stay dead.



The map is quite small - although it seems bigger - and this is due to the often lengthy and well detailed (and well written) locations packed with static objects that can be examined further and interacted with, as well. The humour is at the right slant and there is a perverse fun in trying to kill yourself over and over again. In fact, I can't think of a piece of IF where the quest is death (yours).

So, is it any good?

Yes, it's good, very good, in fact. And, to be truth, a bit too good to just have been released during another dry spell for Adrift games. This is the kind of game that might have fared well in a competition (possibly the IF one) due to its quality and original plot. A few rough bits here and there but no game is perfect and nothing detracts for the enjoyment factor.

7.5/10

Back To Life... Unfortunately

By David Whyld

Review: Lumin

Genre: Comedy

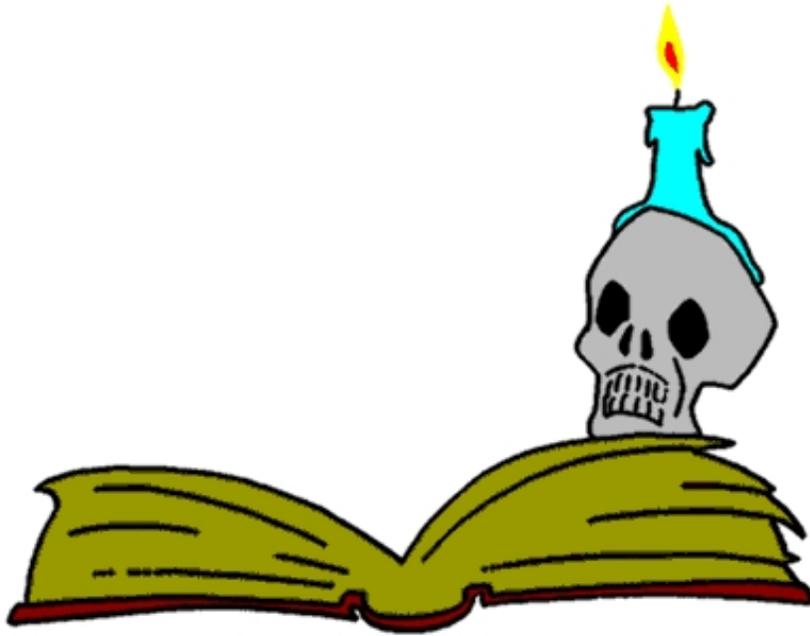
Platform: Adrift 4

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

DavidW's newest game, 'Back to Life...Unfortunately' puts you in the reluctant royal robes of a recently un-deceased king, and it's the player's job to get him deceased again, permanently this time. It's an original premise, one I don't recall seeing in an IF game before, and it's delivered in a consistently funny manner that keeps the tone light enough that it never sinks into the realm of the morbid (which would have been all too easy, given the subject matter), while at the same time not having the restraint not to go completely into the over-the-top humor I've never been too fond of.



With only four rooms, it may seem small on the surface, but David has managed to pack in so many creative ways to off yourself that it actually feels more substantial than a lot of games three times its size. Paying close attention to details in room and object descriptions is a necessity; players who are accustomed to skimming text are going to miss out on a lot, and may find it impossible to get the full score. I'm the kind of person who likes to scrutinize every noun, and I still missed a couple of important things in the starting room on my first play through.



There are about a dozen puzzles in all, and except for one that I'll get to later, none of them are overly difficult as long as you follow the advice in the paragraph above. A nice touch that adds to the replay value is that you can actually beat the game after only solving a couple if you so desire, but of course the typical (read: obsessive) IF player will have to keep playing until they get the highest score possible.

And that brings me to my first real complaint. One of the puzzles, the one involving the king's son that's required for the optimal ending, is decidedly unfair. Unless I'm just missing out on some hints that were given elsewhere, there's no way in a million years I would have thought to try the action that's required. Not only is it inadequately clued, (actually, not clued at all, as far as I can tell), but the result doesn't make much sense, either.

So even though it's a very good game, it's not without a few flaws. For instance, in one room I kept running across a bunch of weird ambiguity errors that got annoying fast. 'x pentagram' would result 'Which pentagram? The pentagram or the pentagram?' (this was doubly strange as there was only one pentagram there in the first place). In the same room there was a collection of potions that were similarly frustrating. Part of this might be Adrift's fault, but it doesn't seem like it would be too difficult to notice this and work around it during testing, or at the very least, if it's a known problem it could have been avoided by having objects with different names (red potion, green vial, purple flask, etc.) that served the same purpose.



In another place, the text in a room description changes to mention a previous event, whether or not the event actually played out that way. It's not really a big deal and doesn't effect gameplay, but it does make some of the text directly contradict itself. The same thing happens in one of the endings, where you're told you didn't accomplish something, and then a couple of paragraphs later you're congratulated for accomplishing it.

Still, nitpicks aside, 'Back to Life' is a thoroughly entertaining game that's well worth the time it takes to play. The descriptions, as well as the writing itself is excellent, and obviously a lot of time was spent proofreading, as I only spotted a couple of tiny errors. Definitely recommended.

(8/10)

The Cabin *By Blue Roses*

Review: Lumin

Genre: Adult

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/aifarchive/>

Recently there's been some discussion on the forum about whether more adult themes could successfully be integrated into regular IF, and of course the topic naturally turned to AIF. I'd played a couple of AIF games in the past that left me with no absolutely no desire to ever play another, but after all the talk I decided to give the genre another chance.



At the AIF Yahoo group there seemed to be a lot of buzz about one game in particular; most of the discussion seemed to be about hints, but since not a single person complained or mentioned any flaws, I assumed this was a pretty standard example of modern AIF, and went ahead and downloaded it.

"The Cabin", by Blue Roses, starts off with the PC, a famous AIF author, renting a cabin in the woods to get away from the media and his many fans for a little while. As an intro, it's rather sparse and feels tacked on, but there's nothing overtly awful about it, so I soldiered on.

The first thing I notice is that for all the money this rich and famous PC must have, he's apparently rented the most boring cabin in the world. Room descriptions are the very basic 'list the objects, list the exits' variety, which struck me as a huge missed opportunity, as I'd imagine that if the author had taken the trouble, a lonely cabin in the woods could have added a lot of atmosphere in a game like this. Objects are even

worse, with some not even described and the rest with one-line descriptions that barely tell you anything about what you're looking at.

For example: x couch
It's a nice couch, a bit old perhaps.

x table
It's a normal table.

x chairs
They are cheap looking chairs.

x fireplace
The fireplace is already filled with wood.

Etc, etc. Lighting the fireplace changes the description to "The wood in the fireplace is burning." Wow, how romantic. Not. And where's the bearskin rug, dang it?

Well okay, that's unfair. It's pretty obvious that romance wasn't what the author meant for the game to be about, though in my opinion what it *is* about is much less interesting.

The game really starts when a woman comes into your cabin (without knocking, how rude) to give you a neighborly hello. A *very* neighborly hello as it turns out, as after exchanging about two sentences with you, a man she's never met before in her life, she's ready to go to bed with you with no preliminaries whatsoever. Though in this case "go to bed" is only a figure of speech, as in actuality she's ready to do it right there on the living room floor. Oh yes, I had a new neighbor move in last week and I assure you that that's *exactly* how it works. Baking cookies is *so* 1950's. (On another note, if "show [part of anatomy] to woman" is considered an acceptable way for a guy to let a girl know he likes her, then I'm not nearly as scared of that half of the species as I should be...)



The rest of the “encounters” are just as believable as the first, so suffice to say that things like “plot” or “character development” are not on the menu. But then again, this is AIF, so it’s not like I was expecting it to be freakin’ Gone With the Wind to begin with. I would assume that most fans of the genre would probably be happy with well-written sex scenes, and screw everything else. (Pardon the pun.) The thing is, they’re *not* well written. In fact, I couldn’t find much in this game that was well written at all.

A glance at the readme file will reveal three interesting points. The author says they didn’t beta-test (obviously), but they used a spellchecker (doubtful). They also say they aren’t a native English-speaker. That actually surprised me, because usually I can tell if a person isn’t used to the language or not by the wonky syntax, but at the point I’d gotten to in the game so far, the only strange wording I’d come across was the subtitle, “Inspiration does not come standard,” whatever that means.

Personally, I’m of the belief that an author, whether of regular static fiction or interactive fiction, should be responsible for knowing how to write properly in the language they’ve chosen to write in. (Which is while you’ll never catch me trying to write in Spanish, despite being fairly familiar with it.) Even then, though, I’d be likely to cut a game a little slack if I knew the author was a non-native speaker. But that’s just a side

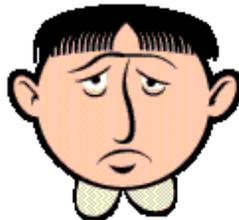
note. The truth is, Blue Roses knows English surprisingly well. The problem is that he (or she) just doesn't seem inspired to do very much with it.

You see, I'm pretty sure that things like punctuation are pretty standardized no matter what language you're speaking. Sure, there may be small differences, but I believe that most people will be familiar with concepts like "putting a period at the end of a sentence," and "proofreading your work for obvious errors."

Punctuation is probably the worst problem here, and acts as a constant distraction and annoyance. The dialogue is especially bad, as the game seems to contain everything from:

["Blah blah blah." She said.] to ["blah blah blah" she said.] to ["Blah blah blah." she said.]

Once or twice I did spot a correct use of dialogue tags, but it still seemed like the author was either not paying any attention to what they were typing whatsoever, or else they had no idea how dialogue tags worked and were just trying a little of everything in hopes of getting *something* right. (Hint: Try picking up any novel you can find and opening it to a place where the characters are talking to each other. The first page, for instance.)



For this reviewer, at least, things like this, as well as some guess-the-verb and a myriad of smaller annoyances and inconsistencies were enough to put the final nail in this game's coffin.

Still, I hear you ask, was it really that horribly, painfully bad? Well, it was pretty bad, but then again, I've played worse. The reason I may be being a little harsh is because I take the author's comment on how they didn't get "The Cabin" beta-tested as a tacit admission that they *knew* the game was unfinished when they released it. And even if they hadn't had beta-testers, I get the impression the majority of the errors could have been

avoided even if they'd played through the game even once or twice by themselves. My only conclusion is that this game is bad due to sloppiness, and in a non-comp game with no deadline there's simply no excuse for it.

(2 stars)



The Cave Of Morpheus

By Mark Silcox

Review: ThOIA

Genre: Surreal

Platform: Adrift 3.9

Download: <http://www.ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/competition2001/adrift/tcom/tcom.taf>

Here's an odd little game that the end result is I don't think I actually enjoyed it but I kept playing it due to other reviews telling me how short this game was. Indeed it was short...which makes me question why the game was split into two separate game files. That's right you get a certain point in the game and are told that part 1 is over, go load up part 2. I'm assuming this is due to the change the narrative position and while only a minor annoyance to the player it is after all an annoyance. Putting that aside the writing is only ok, I just never felt immersed in this world but kept holding out that I might get there. This is a minimalist's game without a doubt, and while that can be intriguing for some I found it lacking in substance as a result. It certainly will not be a major endeavour to run through this game so I'd say if you are curious don't hesitate to give it a go, just don't be expecting a world stopping story.



City Of Secrets *By Emily Short*

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Fantasy

Platform: Glulx

Download: <http://www.ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/glulx/CoS.zip>

City Of Secrets starts quite ordinarily: you're on a train on your way to a wedding. The train runs breaks down and is forced to stop in the city of the title (which never seems to be referred to as anything other than 'the City') and the train company, nice people that they are, put you up in a nearby hotel until the train is fixed. You're not especially happy about this but as you've no choice you go along with it.

Most games that start without giving me any real idea of what I'm supposed to be doing don't generally go down very well with me but *City Of Secrets* gets away with it for a number of reasons, not the least of which is that it looks like a really professional work. The left side of the interface is given over to a panel which displays a few custom images and, below that, a handy little compass system showing which directions you can go (no need to wade through a lengthy location description just to know where the exits are!) The right hand side is the main area of the text and the panel across the bottom contains either plain text compass directions or, if you're in the middle of a conversation, dialogue options. This made such a nice change to the other interactive fiction games I play these days - lines of text scrolling up the screen without a smidgeon of decoration to spice things up - that I found myself having nostalgic feelings for the games I used to play as a kid. The professional interface impressed me so much that I suspect I might have enjoyed playing *City Of Secrets* even if the rest of the game had been bad. But it wasn't. It was good. *Very good.*

I'm not sure if the interface is the same for every version of the game. One review I read commented on the fact that the left hand pane showed a description of how the player was feeling at the time which I certainly never saw.



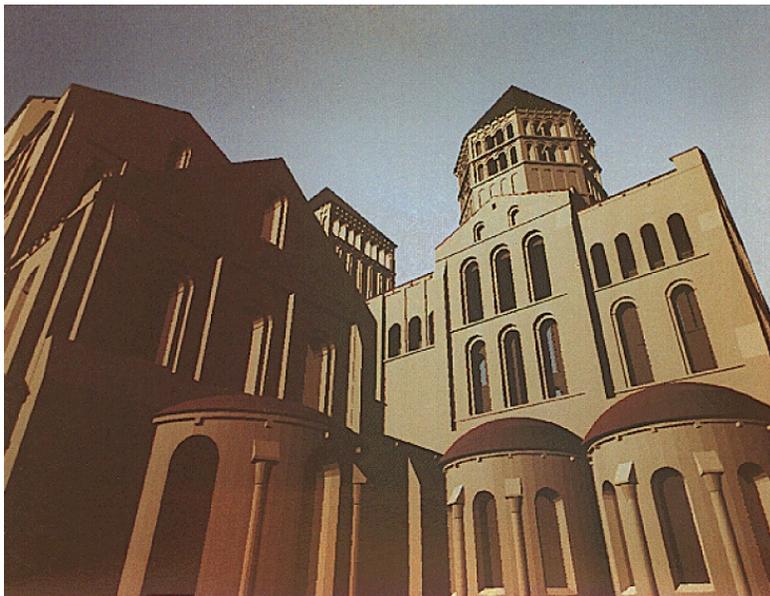
It's an easy game to make progress with at first and I probably spent a good hour just wandering around playing the part of the tourist and familiarising myself with the way everything worked before I got down to the task of actually doing anything. My pleasant little stroll around the city ended when I was mugged and after that bout of unpleasantness, the game seemed to start properly as I found myself in the middle of a power struggle for control of the city.

City Of Secrets is a vast game. The city itself is a large, sprawling metropolis (although, saying that, the number of locations it contains, while large, is only a fraction of what I'm sure would exist in a city of these proportions) and there are few, if any, wasted locations. Each seems to have something in them to either use or simply examine, although not all of them are apparent at first. There's a tremendous sense of depth in the locations as well; often it seems like the city is a real place and it's easy to forget you're wandering through a fictional place and not something that really exists somewhere in the world.

The idea behind the game is a power struggle within the city by Thomas Malik (the current ruler) and a mysterious woman called Evaine (who might well be the city's true ruler). I was quite minded to throw my lot in with Malik when I first met him, despite the fact that there seemed something very suspicious about him, as this was following an encounter with a ruffian who it appeared Evaine had set on me. He beat me unconscious and stole my money. Strange behaviour indeed for the agent of someone who I believed actually wanted my help!

My first wander around the city impressed me greatly. The effort expended on making the locations seem alive – complete with NPCs who flittered about to give the impression you weren't alone in the city (as happens so often in games set within cities) – is evident, although I'd hate to see how much hard work it was. On the down side, the NPCs who populate the place and make it come to life could have been handled quite a bit better. I tried speaking to them or examining them and found I wasn't able to as there don't seem to have any responses coded for them. In short, they're just pieces of scenery which move about to make you think there's more going on in the game than there is. To a degree it works well, but it would have been nice to talk to a few of the NPCs.

Then again, there are a considerable amount of NPCs you *can* talk to and the range of conversation options is quite staggering. None of them are what I'd call classic NPCs (i.e. they're not particularly memorable) but they serve their purpose adequately enough. A handy feature of the game that impressed me no end is the "think about [name]" command which lists all the bits of information you've managed to discover about certain people from speaking to other people about them. Quite ingenious (even if most of the stuff it remembers isn't especially helpful or even useful). There's no score as such but "summary" provides a list of things you've done during the game. Some of these are a little on the pointless side (is there any reason to tell the player he's been wandering around tired?) but, again, it's a nice feature.



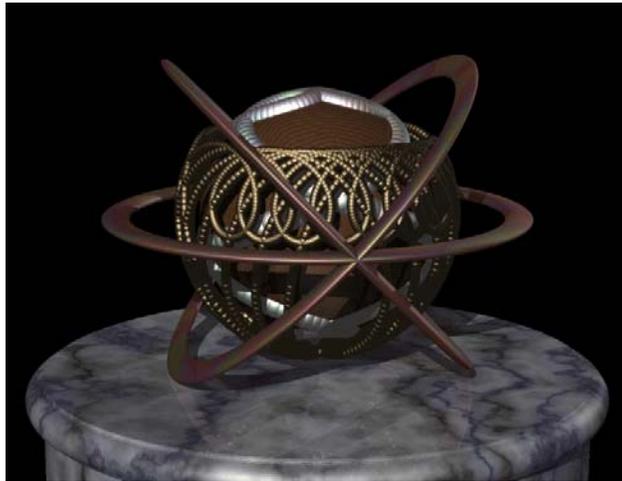
It's not a game without problems, though. The conversation system in particular seems especially buggy. Quite a few times I was partway through a conversation and suddenly an option would come up which seemed to have no real relation to what had been discussed before. More annoyingly, a conversation would end (the conversation options section would be blank) and yet when I tried to restart the conversation I'd be told the conversation was still progressing so I couldn't say anything else! This happened in almost every conversation at some point and quickly became tiresome. I wasn't sure afterwards if this meant the conversation options had been exhausted and there was no reason to keep speaking to the NPC in question, or whether it was just a failing on the part of either the writer or the system.

There were also problems with the city itself. I wasn't able to examine a temple despite the fact that I was standing right outside it at the time. (Funnily enough, when I was standing one location west of the temple I was able to examine it perfectly.) Nor was the river examinable. I also couldn't figure out to get through the green door into Malik's office. I unlocked and opened it - minus any kind of key - but then was still unable to enter as there was "nothing beyond the green door". Trying to 'go door' hit me with:

**[** Programming error: East Alley (object number 1600537)
has no property <number 0> to read **]
The alley runs east-west.**

which I'm guessing must be some kind of system message in Inform for when you try something the writer hasn't thought to cover. In a game where so much time and effort seems to have gone into it, the bugs with the green door were jarring to say the least. But then I guess no one's perfect...

Inevitably, as always seems to happen when I'm playing a game (particularly a big and ambitious one like this), I got stuck. I had spoken to everyone in the city I could find to speak to, uncovered numerous items (very few of which I seemed to be able to find a use for) but then seemed to hit a brick wall in that I couldn't figure out what I was supposed to do next. For a while I just wandered around and hoped something would happen. A couple of times I returned to the hotel and tried to sleep as previously this had moved the game on and opened up other events, but this time I was just informed that I was awake and would be staying that way.



There was a hints system, and a lengthy and very detailed one it was too, but unfortunately it wasn't so much a hints system (despite being accessed by typing "hint" or "help") as a guide to playing the game. While this was all well and good, it wasn't a whole lot of help to someone who had reached as far in the game as he was able to get and didn't know what he was supposed to do next to progress the game any further. Admittedly part of that problem with progressing any further might have been my own fault - turning down Malik's offer to work for him probably didn't help and nor did refusing to help the urchin who approached me - but in the end I seemed to be wandering around the city without a clue as to what I was supposed to do next. Perseverance managed to get me to see Evaine but after that I really came undone. I was sent out to get myself arrested in order to bring me closer to Malik. How was I supposed to do this? Beats me. I attempted to kill every NPC in the city, smash things up, even threw items at the bots repairing the roof of one of the buildings - nothing.

But while it has its fair share of problems, *City Of Secrets* is a pretty amazing game all things considered. It's huge in scope and the writing is excellent throughout. The back story is an interesting one and could probably form the basis of an entire novel in itself. And the city impressed with no end with its sheer depth of character.

Definitely recommended.

9 out of 10

Darkness
By Richard Otter

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Mystery Thriller

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/new/download.cgi?786>

Darkness is a slight game set at a lighthouse where the resident workers all seem to have disappeared in mysterious circumstances. You, the local harbour master, have decided to head out there and take a look (without, alas, a radio with which to call for help if you get stuck...)

Part of me liked the idea while another part of me felt that it wasn't presented well enough. There could be the makings of a good game here but the majority of the text seems rushed as if the writer was so eager to get it finished he didn't bother looking for spelling and grammatical errors.

The bulk of the game takes place in the lighthouse and as far as locations for games are concerned, this isn't a particularly enthralling one. It's just a set of not very interesting rooms all on top of one another. A little effort has been made to spice things up by having the player periodically hear someone approaching from behind, yet turning around and seeing nothing. At other times, you can hear someone talking and a hat which you rescue from the sea seems to have a mind of its own about where it actually moves to. The idea of someone else in the lighthouse following you around was a nice one but I felt it was done a little *too* much. At one point, the player seemed to be hearing someone behind him every couple of moves.

Errors hit in *Darkness* from the moment you examine the first item you see and get:

In is a wooden ladder which is attached to the jetty.

Typing “in” when you meant “it” isn't a terrible error on its own but when the first item you try and examine has a buggy description, it's not a good way to start the game. Unfortunately, it gets a lot worse later on.



One peculiarity of the game is its way of listing measurements in feet first of all then in metres (or sometimes millimetres) afterwards in brackets. I'm not quite sure what the point of this was (help for those who don't understand measurements in feet perhaps) but it made for a jarring read at times. If I gave a damn about mimesis, I'd probably comment that it snapped it in half like a twig but I'll leave the mimesis comments for the people who really care for them.

Despite taking place on an island surrounded by water, there's no response given to one of the more obvious commands: “swim”. There's also a hat floating in the sea which remains there for as long as it takes you to fetch a boat hook and fish it out. Is this an island completely becalmed then? Or just one with incredibly an docile current around it? Strangely, you're not able to jump into the sea and retrieve the hat.

Difficulty-wise it's easier than the writer's other games. I was able to figure quite a few of the puzzles out for myself and I seldom needed to

resort to the hints. The hints system at least is competent and should point you in the right direction if you *do* get stuck.

As with the writer's previous games, *Darkness* comes with a huge assortment of items, most of which you'll probably never figure out a use for. One amusing thing I noticed is that there are several items which can be worn and there are no restrictions in place to prevent you wearing them all at the same time. So at one point I was wandering around the lighthouse, clambering up and down stairs, whilst wearing a sou'wester hat, a weatherproof coat, some weatherproof boots, some ear defenders, a hard hat, a lifejacket and a rucksack. I'm not sure whether the sou'wester hat was worn on top of the hard hat or the other way round but I bet I looked a bit of a state with all that clothing on.



A radio I found seemed to be either broken or so prone to bugs as to appear broken. Turning the dial increased the number the dial was on by 100, no matter what I turned it to. As the game's intro tells you that you've already tried contacting the lighthouse via radio and received no response (hence you coming out here in the first place), I'm guessing the radio *is* broken but why the dial number is incremented in this fashion I couldn't say.

I managed to get a few strange responses to what (as least as far as I was concerned) were reasonably sensible commands. "Fill can with petrol" hit me with "don't be daft!" (*why* is that daft?) while "fill can" just got me "I don't understand what you want me to do with the fuel can." By far the worse error was when I examined the torch and saw

It is your trusty, powerful, battery flashlight which is %state_torch% at the moment.

It's hard to imagine how an error like that escaped even the most cursory testing but apparently it did. Then again, judging by how the rest of the game seems afflicted with so many errors it's quite likely that testing is one thing *Darkness* wasn't subjected to. At best, I suspect the game was played through to completion just to ensure it *could* be completed and then was uploaded without further testing.



I wonder if Richard Otter is writing too many games too quickly. He's now produced three full size games in less than four months (not counting the mini-game he wrote for the last ADRIFT comp). The first - *Ticket To No Where* - was quite good; the second - *Where Are My Keys?* (see issue 1 for review) - was patchy in places and contained entirely too many errors but was still a likeable enough game in its own right; the third - this game, *Darkness* - is his weakest effort yet and seems to run into problems from the word go, a good number of which I'm guessing are down to how quickly he's writing them and not enough time and effort being expended on catching errors. Each game he writes seems smaller and buggier than the last. Too much, too soon? It's a worrying progression whatever way you look at it.

In the end, I felt that *Darkness* was a wasted opportunity. With a *lot* more effort and some time spent on a decent spell-checker, it could be improved considerably.

3 out of 10



Doctor Who & The Vortex Of Lust

By Christopher Cole

Review: ThOIA

Genre: Adult/sci-fi

Platform: Adrift 3.9

Download: <http://geocities.com/cjcole144/dr-who-vortex-lust.zip>

There was a thread on the Adrift message board concerning adult IF to which Chris Cole became a very important poster. I've not really had much inclination to play adult IF (at least not in a long, long time) but given Chris' passion in his posts I visited his website. He spoke about his detail in the story of his games and how sex was not the main goal. I decided to investigate. Upon reviewing his list of games I saw "Dr. Who and the Vortex of Lust." Being a huge fan of Dr. Who this was game was downloaded immediately.



The level of writing in this game is quite high, much higher than I had expected. Chris was right in his posts he does take a lot of time and effort to create richly detailed scenes and it was greatly appreciated. In addition he didn't just throw sex in the Dr. Who world, he created a viable reason for actions within the game. The game starts out with you in the control room of the TARDIS with the Doctor who is frantically attempting to evaluate the damage of a temporal energy breach caused by a temporal storm. He lets you know that strange things may take place and

visions of past and future lives of the Doctor may be seen and to remain calm. What the Doctor fails to mention is that this much temporal action running through the inferior human brain also stimulates the sexual side and well...causes you and the other human inhabitants to become quite horny.

Chris incorporates images straight out of Dr. Who screen captures for some of the characters in the game, but it's really not executed very well and doesn't add much to the game in my opinion. The actual adult portion of the game is, like everything else, very well written but truthfully didn't do anything for me. The adult aspect is certainly there and is a fundamental part of this game so removing it would hurt the game but aside from it the rest of the game is very well written and fun to play. Had I not been a Dr. Who fan I think I would not have enjoyed it nearly as much.

The bottom line here is if you have ever been slightly interested in AIF but downloaded the idiot games that the focus was sex and quit playing before you got out of the second room, Chris Cole's work might be for you. Sex is a part of his games but not central, and in this game at least not the main goal. His writing is well thought out, detailed and thankfully interesting. Dr. Who and the Vortex of Lust would be hard to improve...but I might want to start with a slightly less cheesy title.



The HeBGB Horror!

By Eric Mayer

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Surreal/horror

Platform: Alan 2

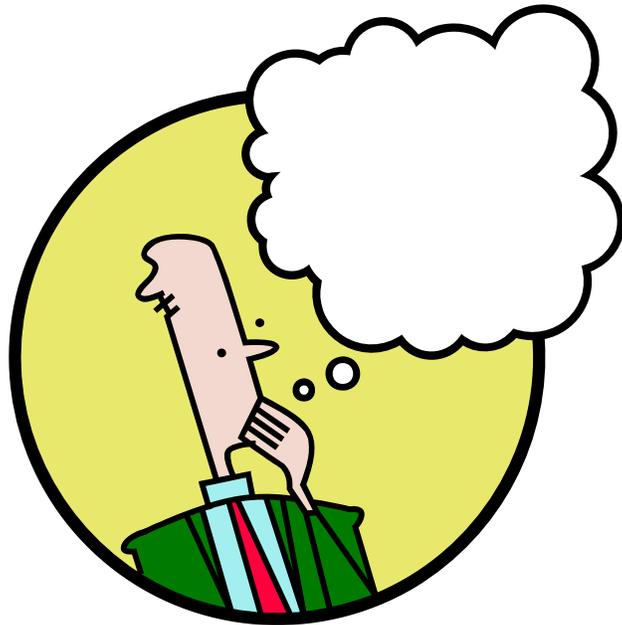
Download: <http://www.ifarchive.org/if-archive/games/alan/hebgb.zip>

Just to try something different, I thought I'd have a go at this little game – an ALAN game from a previous IFCOMP (it came 16th) which I'd meant to play a while ago but, for some reason, never did.

You play a musician (or, the game informs you, you at least know how to play a few guitar chords) called Phil Howard who has arrived in New York to follow in the footsteps of his idols, groups like the Ramones, the Stranglers and so on. Only things haven't gone quite according to plan and you haven't managed to get a single gig. All you can do right now is attend one last show at the HeBGB, your favourite rock club.



All well and good so far. Nicely atmospheric start with a few touches of humour (the zombie-like hordes clogging up the streets made me smile). The game begins with you standing outside a record store – The Land of 10,000 Disks – wondering how you're going to find enough money for a ticket to the HeBGB. One of the first things you notice is a poster being taped to the window announcing that a group called the Laughing Kats are going to be performing their new single at the HeBGB. The aim of the game seems pretty obvious: get some cash together and then head to the club. (Actually, you can't go to the club straight off anyway as the game informs you that you cannot leave the area of the shop until you have found what you need. The first time I saw this it threw me a bit because at that stage I hadn't bothered examining the poster and didn't know what my next move should be. I *thought* I needed to get to the HeBGB as soon as possible and being hit with a message telling me that I couldn't leave until I had found what I needed (whatever that was!) left me a little baffled.)



“Getting what you need” actually turns out to be a mini-game in its own right. Very little here is straightforward, although most of the puzzles are fairly easy and none should really give you problems. In fact, I seemed to spend most of my time discovering something I hadn't previously known, trying it out, and then being presented with another problem to solve. Example: there's a tall, cadaverous fellow outside the shop who won't speak to you until you know his name. Figuring that, as this is a text adventure, his name will be found somewhere nearby, I conducted a

pretty thorough search of the shop. And found his name. And told it to him. He then offers to sign something for me. Unfortunately I don't have anything he can sign so I go back into the shop to find something. Which I do. Only then he can't sign it because neither of us have a pen. Off I go to find a pen...

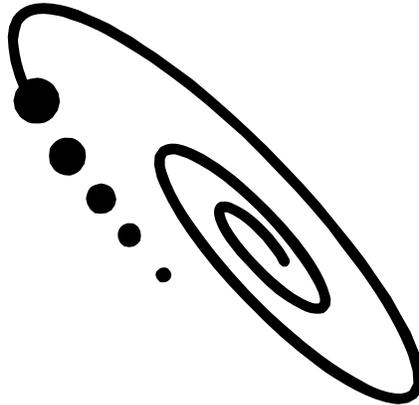
Logic took a backseat here for a while. Okay, neither of us have got a pen but in real life wouldn't I just have nipped down the street to another shop and bought one? I certainly wouldn't have practically turned the record shop upside down searching for one. (As it happens, the pen you find isn't what's required to get an autograph but that's not something I found out until I tried giving it to the tall, cadaverous fellow and being advised it wasn't working. At that point I fell back to the tried-and-tested method of "giving every item in the game to the NPC and hoping one of them works". One of them did thankfully.)

The game opens up a little more after you leave the vicinity of The Land of 10,000 Disks (successfully having found what you needed) and you then make your way to the HeBGB club itself. Here I felt the game went downhill a bit. Getting inside the club involves an awkward series of commands, none of which seemed very obvious to me at the time and at this point I found myself looking hopefully at the helpful walkthrough file which accompanied the game. In hindsight, I can see how the commands fall into place and with enough time and effort it's probably not that difficult getting inside although one of the commands - "push pin through cheek" - wouldn't have occurred to me in a million years. Maybe I just don't have enough *punk* in me for something like that...

Inside the club, things get strange indeed. I bought a drink (after first being forced to leave the club and scrounge some money up to pay for it) and then proceeded into some kind of drugs/drink haze where I appeared on stage, played a guitar and then spoke to a punkette who promptly disappeared in a puff of smoke. (Told you it was strange.) There's not much beyond this point to the end of the game which is perhaps even stranger than anything else that has gone before.

Overall I found myself liking the game. A lot. But I also felt that the earlier part - around The Land of 10,000 Disks - was a lot better than the later parts. Once inside the HeBGB club itself, the game becomes decidedly weird and little of it makes any kind of sense. It also becomes a lot harder - while I was able to complete the first part easily enough, I became completely unstuck as far as getting inside the club was concerned and once I was in there I didn't have a clue how I was supposed to proceed

any further. The sequence of events right before the end – the alien creature in the room beneath the commode and dropping peanuts and a pretzel to distract rats – just baffled me altogether.



Problems? I'd put down quite a few to the system but none of them really affected my overall enjoyment of the game. ALAN's scrollback window seems very limited in that no more than a few screens of text can be stored at any one time, meaning that if you want to read over something more than a few screens back you're out of luck. There's also no transcript ability, at least not that I found. And the cursor seems to move remarkably slowly, often being several characters behind the one I'm actually typing. But those are problems with the system and not the game itself. The only problem I encountered with the game came when Billy attacked me and the obvious command – "kill Billy" (I'm assuming the Quentin Tarantino film of almost-the-same-name wasn't based on this) – told me that violence wasn't the answer to that one. The next moment, I stabbed him with a record called *Stab Stab Stab Stab* so, clearly, violence *was* the answer after all.

The HeBGB Horror left me with the feeling that there was a very decent game here but one that I didn't fully warm to due to the downright strangeness once the first part was taken care of. At times I wasn't sure what I should be doing or how the game should proceed; while the first part had defined goals, the later parts didn't. One thing I liked was that most of the puzzles have multiple solutions to them and the idea of stealing the single from the record shop by hiding it about your person was one I really wished I'd thought of trying at the time.

All in all, above average but could have been better.

6 out of 10



The Magic Show *By Jason MacInnes*

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Mystery

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <ftp://ftp.adrift.org.uk/adrift/games/magicshow.zip>

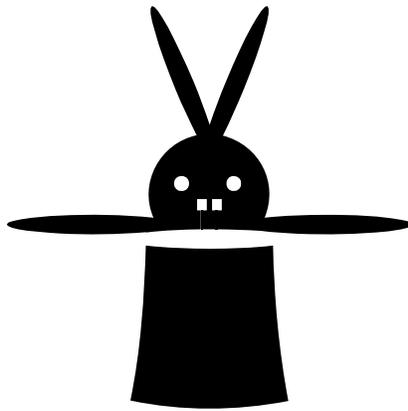
Games by newcomers to the ADRIFT scene seem to be few and far between these days so I approached *The Magic Show* with a fair amount of trepidation. The description of the game listed on the main ADRIFT page was at least reasonably interesting:

A skilled magician, you expect it'll just be another night working at the dinner theatre. Or so the evening begins as you head out onto the stage to perform your usual feats of magic. But the night will be longer than you think and your magical skills will become a matter of life and death.



So I decided to give it a whirl.

The Magic Show begins with you, a magician (either Justin Case (heh heh) if you're male or Justine Case if you're female) preparing for the night's entertainment. You're in your dressing room, a sparsely furnished location which would just about get away with so sparsely furnished if it wasn't the first place you see in the game. Most items mentioned in the room description can be examined but there are a few lacking descriptions. The napkin is frustrating in that examining it reveals writing which supposedly can be read but "x writing" and "read writing" both return an error message. "Read napkin" works fine, however, and looks to a good luck message from one of the game's testers.



I got into some guess the verb hassles with a magic wand. I've got my top hat on which, I'm informed, has been magically locked and can only be opened with my wand. All well and good, but where *is* the wand? By the time I got round to examining my top hat I'd already given the dressing room the once over and never saw any sign of it. A second, more careful, inspection proved no more fruitful than the first. Now I've played games in the past where the writer has forgotten to override restrictions and you can pretty much get away with murder in games like that. I tried it here - "get wand" - and the wand was mine! Wa-hey! Apparently it had been in the sleeves of my tuxedo all along although as the tuxedo isn't listed amongst my inventory items, I had no reason to assume I was wearing it. "x you" doesn't work, "x me" reveals the tuxedo and a few other items. But why weren't they listed in my inventory?

Once you leave the dressing room, the game starts properly as you entertain (or try to at any rate) an audience with your magic tricks. Most of the tricks are the standard fare that you'd expect to see at any magic show: levitation tricks, sawing a woman in half (why is it always a woman that gets sawn in half?), card tricks and the like. The first time I tried them, I came seriously unstuck with most of the tricks because I was lacking a key item needed to move them forward. Without it, I wasn't able to get the tricks to proceed and - here's an annoying thing - there's no way of backing out of a trick partway through and trying something else. So if you've picked a trick and can't figure out how to finish it, you're basically stuck with no way out. Want to hear something else annoying? The 'undo' command has been disabled. So you can't even backtrack a few moves and try something else. As I didn't have a save game at this time, I was forced to restart.

One nice touch which I felt the game lacked would be a timer set to have the audience start heckling you if you just stand around for a while without performing any magic tricks.

My second time through I did considerably better. I did the levitation trick. A problem I ran into was with precise spelling of a certain word. The writer uses American spellings of words like "realise" or "synthesise" whereas I use the English spellings. As one of the words you need to type is the American spelling, you might struggle a bit trying to figure out why your perfectly logical command just isn't working - unless your American of course in which case it'll work perfectly. Ideally, both versions of the word should have been covered.



Another aspect of the game I didn't like, and which the lack of 'undo' made especially worse, was how all the items you find in the first location are returned to their initial location as soon as you enter the main area of the game. I was particularly annoyed to find myself manacled in a black cabinet and unable to reach the skeleton key I knew I had on me. It had been in my hand when I left the dressing room yet the game, in its unhelpfulness, had returned it to my pocket and so therefore it was out of my reach. Normally I'd just hit 'undo' a few times until I was free of the cabinet, get the skeleton key out of my pocket and then carry on with the game as normal. But with 'undo' disabled, that's not an option. Quitting *is* an option and one I came seriously close to taking right then.

Fortunately, the cabinet trick is one that plays out to completion without any real input from you. Just sit there and wait a few times and the trick is over. You don't get much of a boost to your score but at least you're through it.

When I left the stage - my score was about half of the maximum amount so I guess I didn't do especially well with the magic tricks - I expected the game to be over. But instead there was a letter awaiting me in my dressing room informing me that my assistant, Tiffany, had been kidnapped and I was required to steal something called the "Golden Scarab" from the Tri-City Museum or the kidnappers would murder her. Rather than calling the police, I instead head off across town to the Museum...

... and that's as far as I got. The museum is locked and the doors seem to resist my best efforts to unlock them. Apparently the doors are locked from the *other* side - clearly the museum employs its own brand of magicians who are capable of walking through walls and don't require such things as doors with locks on the outside. Unfortunately the walking through walls trick isn't one I've learnt myself and so here I must resort to more mundane methods of affecting an entrance.

In theory anyway. In practice I got well and truly stuck. I couldn't get the doors open no matter what I did. I found some cars in the parking lot but the description of each just gave me a description of the cars as a whole. Was this a bug or just a writer being lazy? In desperation, I turned to the hints.



Ah, the hints. Now, I'm normally all in favour of hints as I'm one of those people who get stuck very often and seldom finish games without them. So when I first typed 'hint' in *The Magic Show* and saw a whole list of them ready and waiting for me, I was quite pleased. Until, that is, I actually *tried* one of them.

Oh dear.

Here we have a few of the most unhelpful hints I've ever come across. A few of my favourites:

How do I do the coin trick? - Amaze the audience with your slight [sic] of hand.

How do I get in the museum? - Explore. There are more ways than one for a magician to enter a building.

Help, I'm no good at riddles! - Fortunately, you're not alone.

How do I do the levitation trick? - The trick can be frightening for a volunteer who's not in a peaceful, relaxed state of mind.

I don't think there's a single hint in the game that I actually managed to put to any use. Most are simply irritating. A few are downright infuriating. One involving the cabinet trick actually says that you're carrying the item you need to perform the trick - yet because you're currently manacled, you're unable to reach it. Confession time: this is the first game I've played which contained hints that I found myself wishing *didn't* have hints. None are helpful in the least and most seem to be attempts, successful admittedly, on the part of the writer to annoy the player. Wouldn't it have been a better idea to have one of the hints actually be useful for something?

I didn't get any further than being stuck outside the museum. Of the four hints I quoted above, the middle two are what I got when I arrived at the museum. As neither gave me a clue as to what I was supposed to be doing, I decided it was high time I gave *The Magic Show* a rest and tried something else. In a way, it's a pity the hints are so bad because if they'd have been better I'd doubtless have spent a lot longer playing the game and might even have finished it. I'd have certainly enjoyed it more.



It's got good and bad parts. The magic tricks are nothing new or original (old hat really and any credible magician wouldn't be seen dead performing them) but interesting all the same. The style of writing is good and if there are spelling or grammatical errors I didn't spot any. My low score for the game - 4 out of a maximum of 10 - reflects the annoyance I felt for most of the time I was playing. The appalling hints (it's probably wrong to even call them that) were a big disappointment and the lack of 'undo' was even worse. At times it felt like the writer was deliberately going out of his way to annoy the player and while I'm sure that wasn't the case, *The Magic Show* has so many things about it that could be made more user-friendly that it's hard to imagine he was unaware of what a frustrating game this could be.

4 out of 10



The Magic Show

By Jason MacInnes

Review: Laurence Moore

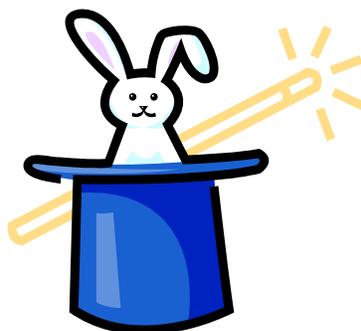
Genre: Mystery

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <ftp://ftp.adrift.org.uk/adrift/games/magicshow.zip>

How do you rate a game good or bad if you're disinterested in the settings and lead PC from the introduction?

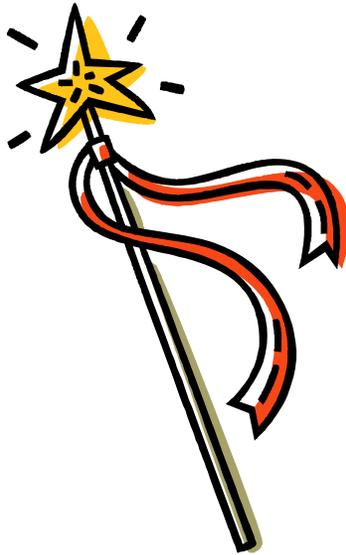
Well, that's the problem I had with new Adrift writer Jason Mac Innes' debut game - The Magic Show. I wasn't sure what to expect from the title but I did have a pretty good idea and hoped I would be wrong. Unfortunately, no, I wasn't wrong. The scenario is that you play as a magician about to head out on stage. That's pretty much the only background you can glean from the opening scene as you admire yourself in a dressing room mirror. The initial presentation, just as vital as the actual writing, was fine. It seemed free of spelling errors which shows, at the very least, a basic level of testing (a plus point for a newcomer). However, the choose your gender prompt seemed out of place. I always imagine a magician to be male with an attractive female assistant. I don't know many female magicians. Then again, I don't know many magicians so I am probably talking out of my rear.



That slightly mimesis-breaking quirk aside, how did things pan out?

Location descriptions are more than reasonable and I was quickly able to conjure the setting I found myself in. Some tenses were wrong - fluorescents illuminate light (lit) passage - and describing both crates and posters adorning a wall does not sound right. Various items mentioned can be - and need to be - examined and there is always another level of descriptive text although I saw nothing special when inspecting the floor and walls (pointless, I know, but if you mention them then back them up with more than you see nothing special. I would suggest you see nothing special about the floor is better than just nothing special).

Now I encountered a problem when I examined the counter and saw a napkin. It's not a bug but, surely, I could see the napkin from the beginning yet it was not displayed as an available item until I examined the counter. If the counter had been a high shelf then, logically, I would have been unable to see the napkin until further examination. However, the counter has a stool tucked under it which suggests that visibility is not a problem. Ergo, the napkin should be visible from the beginning. Looking under the counter throws up the same response as examining it - which is wrong - the action is different. I can forgive a first time author for missing this but the option to look under the sofa is covered so why not the counter.

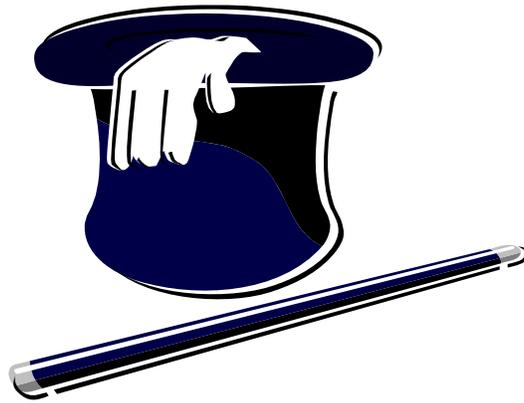


Movement has been customised so there is no you walk north upon leaving the dressing room but you open the dressing room door and walk north which is good to see. However, I would suggest a page break before then detailing the next location otherwise the text becomes a little squashed.

I made decent progress with the game and began to enjoy certain aspects - performing on stage - but I won't reveal too much of the unfolding plot. There are, apparently, multiple endings, but I am yet to reach a satisfactory one.

All in all, I rate The Magic Show as a reasonable first game. Not the best, definitely not the worse, either, with the right balance of good things rather than bad. The scenario didn't capture my attention but I am certain it will have an audience with other players. Overall, I failed to find that many glaring errors and there were more positives than negatives. The game had three beta-testers - it shows - but I was a little surprised that certain obvious errors were missed. The Magic Show does have edges that need sharpening and surfaces that need polishing but I am confident the author can use this as a platform for a second game. I just hope he doesn't wait another twenty years!

5/10



The Second Three Hour Competition

By Various

Review: David Whyld

Genre: Various

Platform: Adrift 3.9 and Adrift 4

Download: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/new/download.cgi?669>

As it's hardly fair to judge a game written in just three hours in the same way you would a game written in however-many-hours, some of the scores here are quite a bit more generous than I would normally have given.



The Murder Of Jack Morely (Adrift 4)

By Mystery

Amount of commands actually required to complete this “game”: one.

Yep. Just one. I put game in speech marks there because I'm not even sure it qualifies as such. The one command required to move anywhere is “open door”; after that the game just progresses to its conclusion without the player doing anything. Any commands typed are ignored by the game

as the storyline plays on irrespective of any action carried out by the player. Confusing? You bet.

It looked like a typical murder mystery to begin with: the police show up at your door and inform you that your ex-husband has been murdered and you, as seems to happen in every murder mystery game I've ever played, are the prime suspect. Off to the police station you go for some interrogation.

Only it's not really an interrogation. As I said before, the game ignores any actions you might want to carry out and instead responds with another piece of storyline in its place. This gets annoying very quickly and would have worked quite a bit better, at least as far as I'm concerned, if the player was given the opportunity to decide what they wanted to do instead of being forced down a very set path. As far as linearity goes, this game is probably as linear as it's possible for a game to be.

Overall it wasn't bad but I couldn't help but wonder if *The Murder Of Jack Morely* might have been better as a short story.

5 out of 10



* * * * *

Snakes And Ladders (Adrift 4)

By *KFAdrift*

Er...

Sometimes a game (I'm using that term loosely) comes along and you just don't have a clue what you're supposed to make of it. Basically this is a game of snakes and ladders in text adventure format but lacking any kind of visual aid to let you know what is going on aside from a row of six dots, one or more of which might be blocked out to indicate a snake or a ladder ahead of you. Progress is made by pressing keys to move you along a certain number of squares on the snakes and ladders board but without any way of really knowing what you're going to roll or what might be on any particular square ahead of you, it's difficult to play this game.



As an exercise in porting a board game to ADRIFT I guess it had novelty value but I really couldn't find anything about it to recommend.

Sorry but...

1 out of 10

* * * * *

Veteran Experience (Adrift 4)

By Robert Rafgon

A game by a newcomer and one brave enough to enter it in a competition to boot. Well, well...

What's it about? You're the Veteran, a wrestler who seems to have gone to seed but is still determined to win a world wrestling tournament despite the slight disadvantage of all the other wrestlers being superior to him. How are you going to beat them then? Simple: you're going to cheat...

Strangely this was closer to an actual game than anything else in the Comp: there were puzzles to solve (albeit simple and straightforward ones), things to examine and NPCs to interact with. The writing was nothing special but then three hours isn't a long time to work on your prose so that's no problem.

The moral of the game seems to be a strange one: if you can't win fair 'n' square, cheat your ass off. I got the better of one opponent by beating him unconscious with a crowbar, another I burnt his face off with acid. I dealt with the other in a low-handed way as well and was left thinking afterwards that it might have been a better idea to have an option whereby you can defeat your enemies without having to maim them for life. It's also a bit farfetched that no one would have heard me braining some poor chap or throwing acid at someone else.



But at the end of the day, this wasn't bad at all. It's a long way from being *good* but as far as three hour comp games go by newcomers, it was certainly a worthy first effort.

4 out of 10

* * * * *

We Are Coming To Get You! (Adrift 4)

By Richard Otter

This struck me as a reasonably good idea to begin with but as soon as I'd started playing the game it quickly lost interest for me.

You play a germ who has the task of crawling around a body and infecting things. Sounds interesting? Well... not really but it's certainly different enough to make you pay attention.

Unfortunately, it's also a frustrating game to play. The intro informs you that you can "infect" things and that you should crawl around the body and infect as many things as you can. My first command, therefore, was "infect throat" which told me that I could not infect a whole area at once. So I went for something smaller: "infect tube". This hit me with an error message that it didn't understand what I meant! A bad case of programming there, particularly as the game advises you to "infect" things. There should at least have been some kind of default error message for when you try and infect something the writer hasn't covered.

There were other annoying parts that I felt could have been improved on and even in a game written in just three hours, some of the oversights were hard to overlook. One location has an ear canal full of wax (clearly this isn't a game you want to play while you're eating your dinner) which needs to be removed. "Remove wax" doesn't work as the game interprets this as an attempt to remove the wax as if it was actually been worn! Trying to take the wax hits you with an unhelpful message saying that you can't but not actually saying *why*.

I finished *We Are Coming To Get You!* easily enough once I'd got the basics of the game figured out yet I was left with the feeling that this could have been a whole lot better.

3 out of 10



* * * * *

Zombies Are Cool, But Not So Cool When They're Eating Your Head

(Adrift 3.9)

By Mel S

Winner of the Weirdest Named ADRIFT Game Of All Time™, this isn't quite as much fun as you might think from the title.

Zombies Are Cool... (I'm not going to type out the entire title every time) is a parody of *Shaun Of The Dead* which was itself a parody of *Dawn Of The Dead*. A parody of a parody? Hmmm...

At the start of the game I was wondering if, despite the title, this was some kind of cowboy game as the main character has apparently just woken up after punching his horse and then drinking a bottle of scotch. But as soon as you venture from your house and head into a shed, you find yourself plunged well and truly into a bizarre zombie game.

It's an easy game as well. Ridiculously so. There was only one bit that stumped was when I hadn't thought to re-enter the shed and pick up a certain item I needed. I wound up in a street full of zombies and without

a weapon to hand to defend myself with – although my friend, Stu, had a rifle which he didn't seem very inclined to use. Other than that, it's likely you'll be through the entire game in little more than five minutes. A bit of guess the verb might slow you down – “use chainsaw on zombies” works but “use chainsaw” doesn't – but as there are only two items in the game and their uses are pretty obvious, you should be through this in no time.



There is some amusing dialogue which made me chuckle, the best being an interchange between the main character and Stu right at the end of the game:

Stu steps in through the broken window. “Well, it looks like we might survive this zombie holocaust after all.”

You nod. “Yep. Zombies are pushovers. I mean, I’ve killed old people that were harder to defeat.”

Not as much fun as the Evil Chicken games but worth playing all the same.

5 out of 10

We Are Coming To Get You!

By Richard Otter

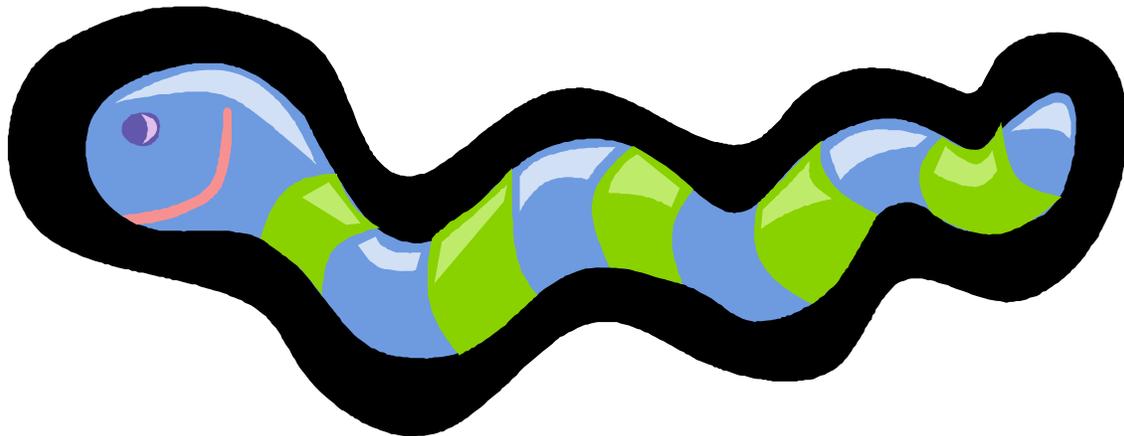
Review: Laurence Moore

Genre: Surreal

Platform: Adrift 4

Download: <http://ftp.adrift.org.uk/adrift/games/3hourcompetition.zip>

An intriguing title and a fairly novel idea for an adventure - you play a germ, yep, a germ - but I actually grew tired of it very quickly and was unable to progress far. In the opening location, the throat, I attempted to infect the lining and the tube but neither command was understood. This was very annoying for an opening location and did not bode well. I travelled to the ear where it was hinted that the wax should be removed. I checked my inventory but, being a germ, I wasn't too surprised to find that I did not have possession of a great cotton bud so I opted for a simple "remove wax" to be told I wasn't wearing it. Not good. I tried to infect the ear wax - probably a silly command - and was greeted with another "I don't understand" response. I tried to examine the ear wax and learned that I couldn't see too much because of all the ear wax!!



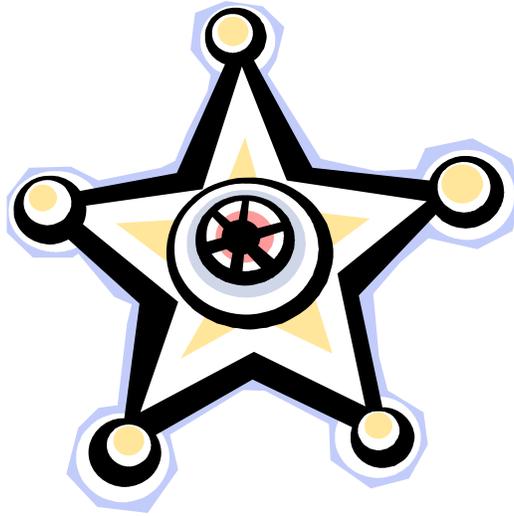
I moved to a few other locations - we're in a human body, in case you haven't already guessed it - and was able to infect a mouth ulcer but I

couldn't get anywhere other than that and gave up in disappointment and frustration.

However, the game does have a few positive aspects - layout is pleasing to the eye (throat, mouth) and far improved from Richard's previous adventure. I didn't spot any spelling or grammar mistakes, either, and the idea behind the game did interest me, albeit for a short time.

The game was part of a three hour competition so, perhaps, I shouldn't be too harsh but, overall, I couldn't work out how to progress and basic commands seem to yield too many negative and unhelpful responses.

3/10



The Woods Are Dark

By Cannibal

Review: THoiA

Genre: Horror

Download: <ftp://ftp.adrift.org.uk/adrift/games/thewoodsaredark.taf>

This is a game written by an IF author with the focus on author. This boiled down to being a well written creepy story that waits for you to prod it along. I can't applaud this game enough for that aspect, there wasn't mucking about with making the player agonize over puzzles. Not that the puzzles were overly simple, but rather they were straight forward, thought provoking and important to the plot. There is one that I can think of that caused me a bit of aggravation more towards the end of the game but once solved it really escalated the pace of the game and therefore probably should be left a bit difficult.

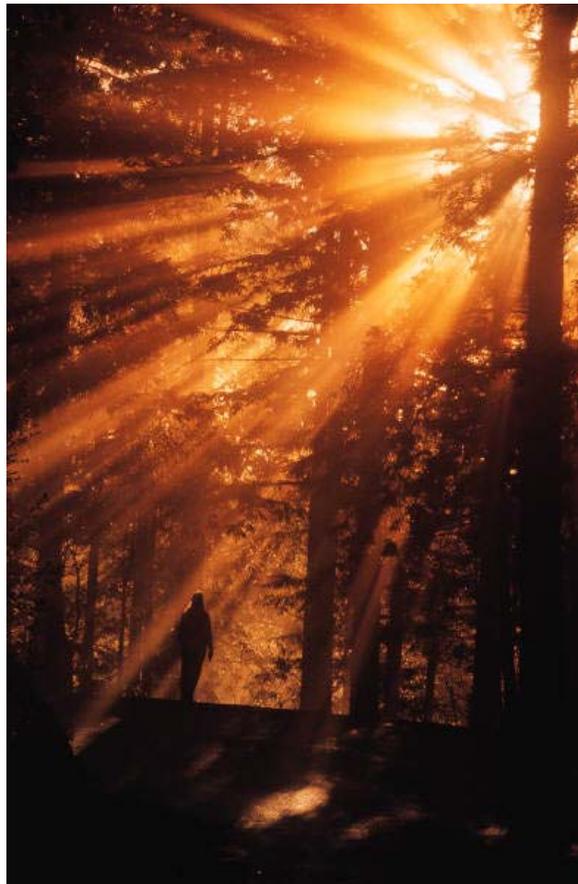


The intro to this game is very well written and detailed enough to give background, character development (character development in terms of the plot line as the game doesn't really have characters in it) and build a genuine interest in the story.

The game starts out as a basic haunted house story and generates the appropriate emotions however as the game unravels the lush detailed writing gives the player a true sense of unsettlement. This is a pretty short game and a lot of fun to run through. I feel a little let down with the ending in all honesty. I think the writing might have gone a bit soft here, but given that there is suppose to be a sequel to the game that can easily be fixed...however when I finished the game it said the sequel would arrive in 2003. I checked the authors website no such sequel as of yet.

My bottom line is "The Woods Were Dark" is a superb, fun to play, well thought out horror game that could have ended on a slightly better note.

9 out of 10 in my book.



ADRIFT Review Of The Year - 2004

Review: David Whyld

So what were the highs and lows for ADRIFT in 2004? What games were your favourites and which did you wish you'd never even bothered downloading in the first place? Below are my favourite ten of the year and a few of the ones I really wonder why they ever got written.

Okay, before I start I might as well say that 2004, for me anyway, wasn't a great year for ADRIFT games. There were a few that I thought were good, and quite a few others that were above average, but there was nothing that I enjoyed half as much as *The PK Girl*, *To Hell In A Hamper*, *The Woods Are Dark*, *Unraveling God* or any of half a dozen other titles I could name from previous years. Does this mean the time of great ADRIFT games has passed and people are turning to other systems to write their games with? Or, maybe, has everyone who *was* going to write a great game in 2004 instead decided to leave it and bring it out in 2005 instead? Let's hope so...

And so without further ado, my favourite ADRIFT games of the year:

Wax Worx by Eric Mayer

One of the strangest games of 2004 and also one of my favourites. The strangeness involves the talking wax head of Marie Antoinette and some truly bizarre puzzles. A few flaws let *Wax Worx* down but it was otherwise a great game.

Ticket To No Where by Richard Otter

The first of four games by the most prolific newbie of 2004 and the best in terms of storyline and puzzles. An easy enough game to make progress with but a difficult one to finish due to the sheer volume of tasks that need to be accomplished, as well as some not very obvious ones.

Ghost Justice by Purple Dragon

My favourite ADRIFT game of the year and, yes, it's an adult game. Thankfully it's one of those rare breed: a game concerned more with the storyline side of things than with the sex scenes (although there are plenty of those, too). Despite its daunting size, it's actually a fairly easy game to finish although achieving the maximum score is anything *but* easy.

Topaz by Woodfish

A short game (but aren't all his games short?) involving a talking sword. It makes little sense but then few of the writer's games do and the stylish writing more than makes up for the strangeness. If only he'd go ahead and write a full sized game one day...

Cruel And Hilarious Punishment by Mel S

Not as much fun as his *Evil Chicken Of Doom* games but amusing in its own right. You work for the TV show of the game's title and have to come up with footage for the next episode. This involves

Vagabond by Captain Obvious

Another short game, and one which didn't make a whole lot of sense to me. You play (I'm guessing from the title) a vagabond who has just arrived on an alien world. Someone tells you to get out of there as soon as you can and, basically, you do. It never made much sense to me frankly but it was good and for a game that was written in just an hour, it was quite an accomplishment.

And from the sublime (kind of) to the ridiculous (definitely). My least favourite games of 2004:

Late Work by Vachon

I had the misfortune to play this as part of a competition I entered and, at the time, was planning on writing reviews for. *Late Work* was the first game I played and a worse example of adult interactive fiction I doubt exists. Terrible writing littered with spelling and grammatical errors and a storyline slightly less interesting than watching paint dry. This is the kind of thing that people who hate the adult genre of text adventures tend to point at as an example of just how bad adult games are.

The Quest For Spam by Whatever

Even for a game written in just an hour, this was bad. Descriptions were lacking for almost everything you might want to examine and items seemed to show up purely when they felt like it. On top of that, it made no sense whatsoever.

Undefined by 30otsix

30otsix had a great game with *The Dead Man* so what went wrong here I don't know. I guess we all have our off days and *this* is the kind of thing I bet even the writer feels a little embarrassed about.

Tears Of A Tough Man by Bruce Humphrey

This started off looking like it might actually be quite decent but as soon as you finish reading the introduction, disappointment falls on you like a tonne of bricks. In one location there's a tree you can pick up and in another some serious guess the verb problems with a shed. I'm sure the writer's capable of a lot better than this.

Snakes And Ladders by KFAdrift

KF contributes a lot of things to the ADRIFT community but, sadly, decent games aren't one of them. While the idea of Snakes And Ladders as an ADRIFT game is interesting, it's handled so poorly that you often don't have a clue what's happening when you're playing it.



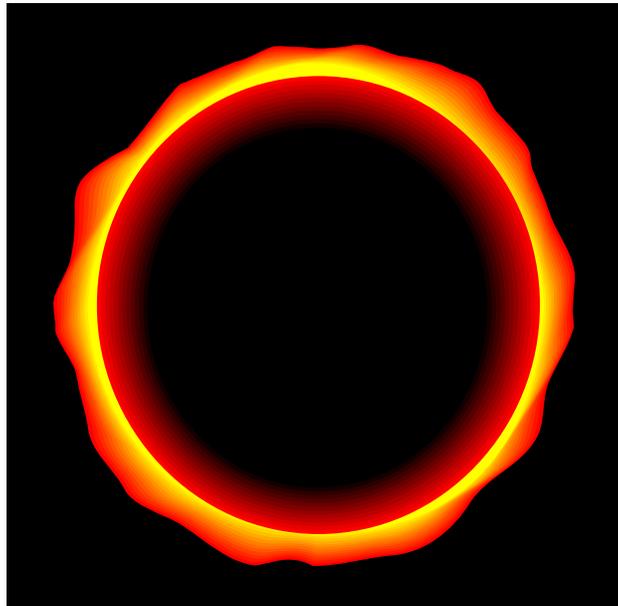
Credits

Many thanks to:

*Laurence Moore for his reviews of **Back To Life... Unfortunately, The Magic Show and We Are Coming To Get You!***

*Lumin for her reviews of **Back To Life... Unfortunately and The Cabin***

*ThoiA for **The Cave Of Morpheus, Doctor Who & The Vortex Of Lust and The Woods Are Dark***



Want to submit a review? Make a comment on the issue? Offer suggestions for future issues? Send an e-mail to reviews@dwhyld.plus.com

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