Buddy Anderson couldn’t wait to get home. He knew there had been a murder, and tonight he felt he finally had enough information to solve the crime and claim the $100,000 reward.

Buddy burst into his small apartment, barely pausing to throw his overcoat on a hook by the door. He went immediately to his computer, which sat on a cluttered desk in the living room. Remnants of the previous evening surrounded the keyboard... crumpled wads of paper, clues provided with the text-adventure game, a pizza box with a few remaining hunks of cheese clinging to the inside cover.

He impatiently swept everything onto the floor. He wanted nothing to get in the way of the game tonight.

He was so close, after weeks of working on it night after night. He had thought about the game all day as...
he went through the motions of fixing engines and changing tires at Rod's Body Shop. It was while he was installing a new muffler on a customer's car that the answer hit him. It was so obvious. He couldn't wait to wash his hands of the day's drudge and grime and escape into the game.

Buddy sat down at his desk and turned on the computer. The monitor displayed the name of the text-adventure game: MURDER AT 220 MERRILL.

He impatiently scrolled past all the background information he had seen a hundred times before. The information established his character as Detective Harry Honcho. He had been called to the scene of a murder at 220 Merrill, the imposing home of millionaire Dutch Langdorf, who had made his fortune selling gold on the commodities exchange. Now Langdorf was dead, with only his wife, Veronica, and their pet poodle, Fluff, surviving.

Buddy had already been to the Langdorf house many times—via computer, of course. As Detective Harry Honcho, he had questioned Veronica, searched the house, even talked to the servants and made friends with Fluff. He had gathered many important clues along the way, and acquired a kit that was designed to tell real gold from fake gold—if he ever got near any.

But until now, Buddy had never had quite enough clues or information to solve the murder... the murder that would award him $100,000 from the software manufacturers if he could solve it. Buddy just needed a little more time, a little more information. He knew that tonight was the night... he could almost smell that $100,000.

Buddy continued to scroll through the text, until he reached the part where Harry Honcho was on the driveway in front of the towering mansion, set on 18 acres so lushly landscaped you would swear it was a national park. This was where Buddy always hit "N" on the keyboard, advancing Harry to the front door, where he would be admitted by the Langdorf's rather forbidding German maid. But tonight, Buddy decided to try a different avenue. He pushed "W" and the RETURN key.

The monitor read, YOU CANNOT GO THAT WAY. DO NOT PRESS "W" AGAIN! Buddy pressed "W" again, more insistently this time. The monitor read, ARE YOU SURE YOU WANT TO DO THIS? Buddy typed yes and pressed RETURN.

Suddenly, he felt his fingertips tingling, and a black veil descended over his eyes. He tried to fight the cloud that was making it impossible to think. He closed his eyes and the room careened sickeningly. Everything went blank.

Buddy awoke with a foreign object quite rudely poking his back. He was staring straight up into the night, with the moon staring right back at him. How had he gotten outside? He knew he wasn't dreaming, and he hadn't even had a beer before sitting down at the computer.

Buddy rolled to one side and reached behind him to find the object of his discomfort. It was a knife. Horrified, he sat straight up and saw a dark form lying near some bushes several yards away. Cautionously, he crept over to the still shape. It was a person, and by the light of the moon, the face matched the description he knew so well from playing the game... it was Detective Harry Honcho.

But Harry wasn't dead yet. As Buddy leaned over him, Harry forced open his eyes and gasped, "Come closer." Buddy wasn't sure he wanted to, but his curiosity got the better of him.

Harry struggled to speak. "I got too close to the answer. But somebody's gotta solve this murder... the final clue is in my coat pocket..." Harry's sentence trailed off as he babbled his last breath.

Buddy looked around frantically. This couldn't be happening! And then he saw the unmistakable Tudor mansion in the eerie moonlight and knew... somehow he had gotten inside the 220 Merrill text-adventure game. But how? Then he remembered pressing the forbidden key. Now what was he to do?

Buddy remembered Harry's last words and dug a piece of paper from his coat pocket. It was a candy bar wrapper. He looked again, and found another piece of paper. Examining it under the light of the moon, he saw it was a map. It was a clue he hadn't found in the game before... the final clue he needed to wrap up the mystery. Buddy had already figured out that Langdorf had met his messy fate because he had been caught selling fake gold bars to some very important businessmen who didn't appreciate that kind of thing. But Buddy hadn't yet figured out who had actually killed Langdorf, and where the real gold bars were.

He was distracted by a sudden blaze of light from the ominous dark house. It was late now, and he assumed Veronica Langdorf and the servants had gone to sleep long ago. Buddy ventured closer to the house and saw a woman through the open upstairs window. He watched as she disappeared, then returned with clothes heaped in her arms. She must be filling a suitcase, and a very large one at that. It could only be one person, Veronica Langdorf. She mustn't get away—not before Buddy could follow the map.

On a hunch, Buddy ran toward the rear of the house and found the garage. There was only one car inside... a powder-blue Mercedes. With expert hands, he popped the hood and tinkered around for a few moments. Veronica Langdorf wouldn't be going anywhere in this car.

Buddy jumped as he heard a door slam. Veronica must be on her way out. He ran from the garage, heading blindly for the back of the house. As he reached the safety of a series of tall, square hedges, he paused to look at the map once more. He was startled to see hedges on the map much like those he was crouching next to. They were arranged in a maze, with a giant "X" marked inside one of the corridors.

Buddy knew he didn't have much time before Veronica would discover her car trouble and start looking around the grounds. He sprinted toward the entrance to the maze and ran up and down the vast corridors, his breath ragged in his throat. He kept glancing at the map as he ran, trying not to stumble. A wrong turn here... a dead end there... he heard the agonized wheeze of the Mercedes' tortured engine. It was only a matter of minutes now.

Buddy turned and stumbled, falling with a slam against the ground. He pulled himself up, ready to continue, then thought of looking down to see what

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had caused him to trip. He felt around the clipped grass
and found an edge with his fingers. Dropping to his
knees, he pulled on the sod. It came away in one neat
hunk to reveal a steel door with a handle.

Buddy yanked on the handle. Nothing happened.
He summoned up all his strength and pulled harder.
The door flew open, revealing a spray of light that al-
most blinded him. Poking his head inside, he thought
he was hallucinating. Bars upon bars of gold were
stacked from floor to ceiling in a room directly beneath
him, with corridors stretching into darkness beyond.
Was this the real gold? There was only one way to find
out.

Buddy pushed his feet through the opening and
dropped to the floor below, his soles stinging from land-
ing on the concrete. Just as he was pulling out the gold
test kit provided with the game, he heard a noise above
him and looked up into the grinning face of Veronica
Langdorf. She had always been described in the game
as resembling a battleship, but close up, she looked
more like 10 battleships. Her round, fleshy face was
flushed from hanging upside down as she peered
through the opening.

What are you doing here?" Her voice echoed in
the underground chamber. "Not that it mat-
ters. You won't get out of here alive, or rich!"

Her face disappeared for a brief moment and
then Buddy saw with horror that she was preparing
to drop down to the floor beside him. He turned to pick up
a gold bar for protection as she landed with a solid
"thunk"—too close for comfort.

"Ah, I see you found the real gold!" Veronica smiled
with teeth that revealed even more gold. "But it's all
mine now. A reward for working for my husband all
these years. You think I killed him, don't you?"

She hooked one thin eyebrow at him.

In fact, at first Buddy had thought she'd done it,
but that was too obvious. The answer was just a shade
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... but you substituted fake gold, bit by bit, hiding the
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Veronica smiled. "That's right. You're a smart one,
but not smart enough to live." She lunged toward him
and he saw the gleam of a knife, the same type of knife
he had found near Harry Honcho. Buddy managed to
hurl the bar of gold he had been holding, throwing her
bulky body momentarily off-guard. He turned and ran
down the nearest corridor. It seemed like all he had
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Buddy vowed never to complain about the dullness of
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Buddy heard heavy footsteps behind him as he
reached a dead end. The dim light in the corridor was
just enough to make out a door blocking his escape. He
turned the handle, sure that it would be locked. Mirac-
ulously, it swung open.

The scene that greeted his eyes almost seared them
with brightness. Gold bars filled the back of a large
delivery van, the door open as if somebody was in the
middle of loading the cargo.

Buddy realized that this must be the real gold.
Veronica had thrown him off with the stuff in the other
room. He quickly got his gold test kit and climbed into
the back of the truck to rub one of the gold bars with a
special test paper. It was the real gold, all right. Hearing
sounds in the corridor, he leapt from the truck, slammed
the back door, and ran to the cab. There was no key,
but that didn't stop him. He reached into his jeans
pocket, pulling out a bit of wire left over from work, and
quickly hot-wired the truck. The engine roared. Now he
could get away with all this gold ... and the $100,000
prize money. He laughed until he realized he was still
inside the game.

How could he get out? The old-fashioned Wizard of
Oz trick of tapping shoes together and wishing for
home wouldn't work in this new computer age. There
was a large garage-type door between him and the out-
side, with no way to open it except with an electronic
device ... he could see the mechanism from where he
sat. Just as he was ready to leave the relative safety of
the truck, a face pressed against the window, hideous
Veronicamaynothavekilledherhusbanddirect-
ly, but she certainly looked like she was going to kill
Buddy all by herself. He saw the gun and threw his
hands up in a futile attempt to shield himself. He heard
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