

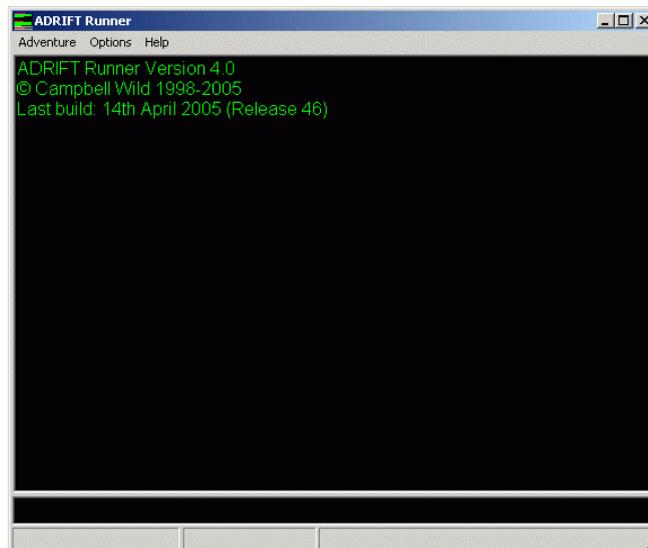
Reviews Exchange

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

ISSUE 7

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the seventh edition of the Reviews Exchange. In the following sections are 18 reviews and 2 articles of thoughts on the year 2005. Thank you to David Whyld, Greg Boettcher, Christy Henshaw and TDS for their contributions.

2005 was my first full year as a member of the ADRIFT community, as I joined the ADRIFT forums in late 2004. I may not be the best judge of how this year compares to previous years, but I think that 2005 was a strong year for ADRIFT. There may not have been any game that stood out for me as absolutely outstanding, but there were a lot of very good games released over the year, highlighted by the strong performance by ADRIFT in the IF competition. The forums on the ADRIFT main site were also steadily active throughout the year (barring the occasional crash of the ADRIFT site, which thankfully has greatly improved in reliability in the second half of the year), with a lot of interesting threads.

2005 was also the first full year of the Reviews Exchange with 5 issues and 95 reviews (not counting this edition, which was in 2006, or the first issue, which was in 2004). That is a large effort for a community as small as the ADRIFT community and I hope that people have enjoyed reading it. As a comparison over the same time period SPAG for the general IF community has released 4 issues and 48 reviews. Thank you to the following contributors over the last year:

- David Whyld (44 reviews);
- Robert Street (20 reviews)
- Stefan Donati (11 reviews)
- Christy Henshaw (6 reviews)
- Laurence Moore (6 reviews);
- Lumin (3 reviews)
- THoiA (3 reviews)
- Cobra1 (1 review); and
- Red-Sith (1 review).

Hopefully in 2006 we will see more reviews from these reviewers, plus some from new reviewers.

My personal three favourite ADRIFT games of 2005 were:

The Plague (Redux) - The first game by Laurence Moore for several years showed that he hasn't lost his ability to create a creepy atmosphere, with good writing and an interesting story.

Second Chance - Second Chance showed that David Whyld can write more serious story-based games just as well and possibly better than his more usual comedy games.

Pathway to Destruction - Generally I would be much more disappointed at just missing out on winning a competition. However, I felt that Pathway to Destruction by Richard Otter was a very good game that created a strong story from the constraints of the competition and it deserved to win.

REVIEWS EXCHANGE

Hopefully, 2006 will be an even better year, with the Reviews Exchange continuing strongly and more new great games. Given Campbell Wild's recent comments on the ADRIFT forums, maybe even a much improved ADRIFT 5.0 will be released. Whatever happens, I look forward to the next year.

Robert Street
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2005 YEAR IN REVIEW

TOP TEN GAMES OF THE YEAR

By David Whyld

My favourite ten ADRIFT games of 2005, and why I liked 'em:

Can It Be All So Simple? By TDS

A strange horror game where precious little makes sense (is it all in the player's mind?) but which is well worth playing all the same.

Unusually for a game by a newbie, this shows a high level of professionalism in that just about every item mentioned in the room descriptions can be examined. The dreaded "you see no such thing" is mercifully absent for most of the time.

I wasn't too keen on the intro, which seemed to bear little relation to the rest of the game, and I would have liked a better explanation for what went on, but those points aside this was certainly an impressive debut.

Crazy Old Bag Lady by Sprite

Sometimes games come very close to being really good, but just miss out at the last moment. "Crazy Old Bag Lady" was one such game.

It's the amusing, tongue-in-cheek story of a bag lady on a quest to find a golden shopping trolley, along the way contending with a mad cat lady (shamelessly stolen from The Simpsons?) and a whole weird consortium of the homeless. Very comical in places and well written, but...

But the bugs. Oh dear. The original version of the game had a bug that crashed it the moment you entered a certain location; this version has that one fixed but several others have crept in, thus spoiling what is otherwise a decent game.

Frustrated Interviewee by Robert Street (Rafgon)

I generally avoid puzzlefests like the plague (ignoring the fact that I've just written one) as I'm hopeless at the puzzles and inevitably wind up frustrated and wishing I'd never bothered in the first place. But I gave this one a whirl anyway.

For a while I managed to do pretty well with it, moving along from one scene to the next with only minor problems. But then the puzzles started piling on thick 'n' fast and before long I was being overwhelmed by them. Solve a difficult puzzle and you've got another one just around the corner, with a few of its friends lurking in the background.

A decent enough puzzlefest when all is said and done. Just... too many puzzles.

Pathway To Destruction by Richard Otter

Winner of the Finish The Game Comp I organised and an interesting game in its own right. I usually start off liking Richard Otter's games and then go off them when I come across the lifeless NPCs and their stilted dialogue, but "Pathway To Destruction" is an NPC-free game... and all the better for it.

Out of all the FTG entries, I felt this one made the best use of the source material. Admittedly the source material was intended more for a fantasy-style game, but I think the sci-fi setting used here works equally well.

A few guess the verb and guess what the writer's thinking (why would I want to do *that* to the lamp post?) aside, this was a thoroughly enjoyable game.

The Plague - Redux by Cannibal

This fared surprisingly poorly in the IFCComp (where I thought it would be the highest placed ADRIFT entry), yet I still liked it. You can't go far wrong with vicious man-eating zombies and a girl in a mini-skirt with a metal pole knocking 'em for six.

The bulk of the game is a kind of silly 'hunt for change for a vending machine 'cos you need a bottle of water out of it', thus ignoring the fact that there are shops all over the place which would have water in them... and further ignoring the fact that the damsel in distress is being chased by the undead so hunting around a subway station for loose change doesn't make a whole lot of sense. But forget the gaping holes in the slot and just sit back and enjoy the best ADRIFT game of 2005.

Provenance by Corey Arnett

Well, I certainly never thought I'd be including a game with no hints *and* a maze in my top ten ADRIFT games of the year, but "Provenance" thankfully has a lot else going for it.

It's a horror, creepily written and with a great deal of background information on hand to flesh things out. Making progress is fairly easy to begin with... probably just as well considering as the writer hasn't bothered including any hints. And the maze? Well, I solved it the hard way, with a pen and graph paper, even though my initial reaction upon discovering that over a hundred of the game's locations had been wasted on a maze was to quit.

The maze aside (I'm still having nightmares about it), I liked the game.

Take One by Robert Street (Rafgon)

The idea behind "Take One" was certainly an inspired one: you're a film director moving Indianette Jones (nice name by the way) around a film set and steering her past all the usual dangers that lurk there.

If anything, this was a better idea than the one used in "Pathway To Destruction", but the non-obvious puzzles really got me cursing at times. Then, too, it's a very, very short game. Figure out what you need to do and you can be through the entire thing in a few minutes... too short to really enjoy what's going on. An expanded version (hint hint) might be an idea for the future.

Veteran Knowledge by Robert Street (Rafgon)

An enlarged version of a mini-game, this was a lot better than I expected it to be. I think I had the idea that it would just be a case of adding a few extra locations, slapping some more items in and leaving it at that. So I was pleasantly surprised to find it was a lot more than that. Gone are the minimal set of locations from the original game and in their place is a far larger game, complete with a whole different direction and a wide variety of characters.

It isn't all good news though: the dialogue of the NPCs is so bad in places it's almost funny.

But if you fancy taking a walk on the wild side and playing a character who is a thoroughly unpleasant SOB, this might be the game for you.

A Walk At Dusk by Eric Mayer

"A Walk At Dusk" is a different kind of game from the usual ones I play. There's no quest for buried treasure, or rescuing a damsel in distress or even any world saving going on. Just a guy out for a walk one evening..

If you don't think that sounds like a particularly enthralling idea, you've just hit on the main flaw in the game. It's nicely written, interesting enough to keep your attention for as long as it takes to finish (which won't be long as there are no real puzzles), but just not that remarkable.

The White Singularity by Irene

I umm'ed and ahh'ed quite a bit before including "The White Singularity" in my list of favourite ADRIFT games of 2005. On one hand, it *does* deserve including: it's well written and it's got an interesting storyline. On the other hand, it *doesn't* deserve including: it's bugged to high heaven.

The story is pure pulp sci-fi: scientist embarks on a journey to the centre of the Earth in a vessel and discovers strange things on the way. I've always had a soft spot for this sort of thing and warmed to the game straight off.

But the bugs. Oh dear. Most of them can be attributed to sheer newbiness, but they're still a pain. With them all fixed, and some extra content added, this could be an excellent game; as it is, it's still good but if you play it be prepared for a lot of annoyances.

And in order of which games I liked the best:

1. The Plague - Redux
2. Pathway To Destruction
3. Take One
4. Can It Be All So Simple?
5. Crazy Old Bag Lady
6. Provenance
7. Veteran Knowledge
8. The White Singularity
9. A Walk At Dusk
10. Frustrated Interviewee

2005 - MY FIRST YEAR AS A DRIFTER
By Christy Henshaw

When I sat down to see what my personal experiences with ADRIFT have been over the past year, I was surprised to see that I hadn't even registered ADRIFT until February 2005. So why do I feel like it's been so much longer?

Over the past year, I feel I have come to know a bit about other ADRIFT fans through the forum, and I seem to have found a place for myself within the community. This is primarily through the efforts of the dozen or so 'regulars' who keep conversations going, start new discussions, and moderate the occasional personality clashes (one thing I've learned - people stick with their individual personalities even in a format as anonymous as this is). In my view 2005 has been full of lively discussion, with questions answered on a wide variety of issues with game writing, Cast Adrift revived, continual posting of beta-testing requests and game reviews, and general feedback on all the IF and ADRIFT events throughout the year.

As far as game writing is concerned (and that is the whole point of this, although it's easy to lose sight of that what with all the forum chit-chat), I have felt positive about the quality and quantity of game-writing over the year, both in ADRIFT and IF comps, as well as for general release games. My own personal contribution, as a newbie, hasn't been exactly earth-shattering, but the fact that I managed to release a couple of full games, and participate in a couple of comps is a lot of activity for a first year (which is why it feels like I've been involved twice as long as I actually have).

All of the comps this year had a good turnout of ADRIFT: after a slow start at the beginning of the year for specific ADRIFT comps, with not much voting activity, people pulled up their bootstraps and mucked in with all the rest of the events throughout the year. In the IF comp recently, ADRIFT placed very well and ADRIFT games have, over the year, received some insightful and often positive reviews on other review websites and forums. This bodes well for ADRIFT as a platform, and is heartening for those writers, like me, who don't want to learn a programming language.

Looking into 2006, I wonder if I will be able to maintain my interest in gaming, posting on the forum, and staying involved in events - I can't predict for myself what will happen, having such a short track record. But as of this moment, I have a nearly finished game I've been meaning to release for a couple months, a half-finished game I haven't yet lost interest in, and high hopes for one or two of the comps next spring and summer (if, that is, there's any room between all the increased gym-going, healthy-eating, music-playing and Classics-reading I've also resolved to start doing...).

I'm sure I'm not the only member asking myself these questions as 2006 rolls in, but several recent developments are certainly promising for the future. By the end of 2005 a few developments indicated that 2006 could to be an even better year for ADRIFT: the establishment of a live chatroom, the presence of many new members, the release of several debut games, and, of course, most of all, the announcement that a major new version of ADRIFT is under construction. Will 2006 see the release of ADRIFT v. 5? That is the big question for the next year, and the hinge on which ADRIFT's future success rests.

FINISH THE GAME COMPETITION ENTRIES

RESULTS FROM THE COMPETITION

The concept behind the Finish the Game Competition was that a few identical room and inventory descriptions were provided to each author, and these had to be expanded into a full game.

Voting for the Finish the Game Competition in 2005 took place during October, with the final positions and average scores being:

- 1) **Pathway to Destruction** by Richard Otter - 7.3
- 2) **Take One** by Robert Street - 7.1
- 3) **The Demon Hunter** by David Parish - 6.4
- 4) **The Hunter** by Red Assassin - 4.9
- 5) **Shadow of the Path** by Catherine Post - 4.3
- 6) **Jack of Shadows** by Arnold "Ace" Rimmer - 4.1

Below are reviews of all the entries to the competition.

PATHWAY TO DESTRUCTION

AUTHOR: RICHARD OTTER
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Pathway To Destruction: winner of the Finish The Game Comp I organised, and my personal favourite out of the comp entries.

What's it about?

You're a worker at the Institute of Transportation and about to embark on an experimental mission that should, in theory, teleport you from one side of the planet to the other. Only, of course, something goes wrong and you actually find yourself in a desolate ruin of the world you once knew.

I felt **Pathway To Destruction** made very good use of the source material, although in a completely different way than I envisioned when I wrote the source. I had had in mind something along the lines of a medieval fantasy adventure with a swords & sorcery element thrown into the mix, but **Pathway To Destruction's** sci-fi setting seems to fit in remarkably well with the mini-game that was already written, and at no point did I feel that it was out of place. Full marks for that.

A frequent failing of the author's games in the past has been the shallow NPCs and their wildly implausible dialogue, something that **Pathway To Destruction** is mercifully free of. There aren't any NPCs here, just the main character, and the game is much better for it. (Although saying that, there are bits when the player, despite being alone, speaks out loud which are pretty implausible themselves. Would he really tell himself what to do next after throwing a certain item at another item?)

My only real complaint with the game was the difficulty factor of some of the puzzles; or, if not difficulty factor, then the fact that some of them are so unobvious that it's hard to imagine people ever figuring them out without resorting to the hints. Why would I want to push a lamp post over? Why would I throw a certain item at another item? Why would putting one item on top of another make the second item work? (The second item, incidentally, has a slot in the side which I spent a while trying to put the first item into. It never occurred to me to try putting it on top.) Getting inside the author's mind, or being psychic, is a good requirement for finishing this game. It also didn't help that sometimes seemingly obvious solutions to puzzles didn't work and there wasn't any real explanation for why. I needed to use one item to get the jewel but another item I had, a bar, didn't work. Why?

But overall I thoroughly enjoyed **Pathway To Destruction**. It wasn't a perfect game, and there were bits that could have done with improving upon, and some of the puzzles could certainly have been better clued, but those issues notwithstanding it was the best game in the comp and definitely the best game the author has written to date.

7 out of 10

TAKE ONE

AUTHOR: ROBERT STREET
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

This came second in the Finish The Game Comp, beaten very narrowly by **Pathway To Destruction**.

What's it about?

You're a director having to guide Indianette Jones around the set of his latest film, freeing an orb from a crystal and dealing with a demon in the process. Indianette needs telling what to do, you see, because she's the typical generic bimbo without a thought in her own head (kind of like a blonde version of Lara Croft).

I felt this was the best idea in the Comp, and it's probably just sheer bad luck it didn't win. The only problems with it are that it's too short - using only the locations already in the source game and adding no others - and takes little more than five or ten minutes to reach its conclusion. Of course, due to the difficulty factor of some of the puzzles you'll most likely end up spending quite a bit longer than five or ten minutes playing it. Some of the puzzles are nice and straightforward (like trapping the demon and swinging on the beam) - not easy, but logical enough when you think about them. Others - actually setting the trap for the demon - are the sort of things I only figured out how to do by looking in the Generator.

A neat trick is that if the demon isn't stopped in time and he kills Indianette, the game just resets itself. This is pretty much the same as simply killing you off outright, but misses out the annoying built in end game feature that plagues most ADRIFT games and is probably worth an extra point in itself.

For the ten minutes or so that I played **Take One**, I thoroughly enjoyed it. But I wish it had been a bit longer...

7 out of 10

THE DEMON HUNTER

AUTHOR: DAVID PARISH
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

The Demon Hunter is a good game, which is appropriately about a demon hunter. I felt that this game was well-deserving of the third place it received in the Finish The Game competition. The game provides atmosphere, and you do feel that there could be danger at any time.

There is an interesting story in **The Demon Hunter**, with the game focusing more on the story than most of the other competition entries. Creating an interesting story is difficult when you already have an initial set of locations, so the author has done well to include it. There is a very extensive back story, with quite a few pages of text available by reading the journal. This is a little concentrated, and ideally this story would be a bit more spread out in the game to break it up, as it is slightly intimidating in size.

The game is not too long and the puzzles are mainly reasonable. A few more synonyms around the puzzle with the pile of books might have made it a little easier though. Overall this is a good short game that successfully managed to build on the premise of the original locations.

SCORE - 6/10

THE HUNTER

AUTHOR: RED ASSASSIN
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

The Hunter is the second game in the competition with the word 'hunter' in the title, but it is completely different in style to **The Demon Hunter**. This is a fairly traditional kind of fun puzzle-solving adventure.

Unlike the other entries, **The Hunter** did not really use the original locations. The players only briefly pass through these locations on their way to the rest of the game, which is a pity as one of the interests I had in the competition was to see different people's ideas on how to create puzzles in the same locations. However, the game makes up for this by having a large amount of other locations. None of the other games come close to having as many additional locations. Expanding the world was an interesting idea, but too many locations were empty in this game. It possibly would have been better to cut down on the number of locations and simplify the map.

Make sure to pick up the hidden manual near the start to explain the magic system. This is the only useful object in the initial locations of the game. The magic system is interesting, but it really isn't that important after using it to solve the puzzles in the first couple of locations. It is very difficult to fully integrate a magic system into a game though.

The puzzles were mainly reasonable, although I found the time limit in the last puzzle was a little too short, and it took me a few attempts before I managed to find everything and figure out the order of commands. There is not a huge amount of story in this game, and the ending comes suddenly, which does leave scope for further adventures.

Overall, this is another interesting entry in the competition, which is fun and does not take too long.

SCORE - 5/10

SHADOW OF THE PAST

AUTHOR: CATHERINE POST
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Overall I liked **Shadow Of The Past** but there were some glaring errors in it. The journal I was carrying in my canvass bag (which has to be referred to as "canvass bag" and not just "bag"), has a lock on that can be opened with a key found in another location. Only I was able to read the journal with it still being locked. In fact, it wasn't until I found the key and was told it bore similar markings to the journal that I even knew there was a lock on the journal.

There was also the bigger issue with the lever in the cage: namely, that it's not even mentioned in the game! I ran into pretty much a dead end after I'd been playing for about twenty minutes: I'd been everywhere, examined everything, tried all manner of different things (including dying unexpectedly by touching a certain item that was just crying out to be touched) and couldn't seem to progress any further. As there were no hints in the game (always a bad thing as far as I'm concerned), I went to the Generator and discovered a task involving a lever in the cage. Puzzled that I hadn't noticed this before, I went back to the cage and had a good, long look at it. No lever. Anywhere. Yet the command PULL LEVER worked. Just as well I looked in the Generator. Oh, and there was a rope in the blocked passage but I only found that by looking in the Generator for it; for some reason, it's not listed in the room description so to all intents and purposes it's completely invisible to the player.

On a more positive note, it was a nicely written game. Good descriptions for the items that could be examined, although the number that didn't have a description at all was higher than I would have liked. Whether items listed in room descriptions have any direct bearing on the game or not, it's always a good idea to give them some kind of description, even if it's only a few words long.

Aside from the obvious errors of invisible crucial-to-finishing-the-game items such as the lever and the rope, the game makes use of ADRIFT's in-built combat system at one point. Big mistake. Properly customised, this might not be a terrible thing but when you see this sort of thing, it's definitely not good:

Beast hits you.

> kill beast with dagger
You chop Beast with the dagger.

> kill beast with dagger
You chop Beast with the dagger. Beast hits you.

> kill beast with dagger
You chop Beast with the dagger. Beast falls down, dead.

> x beast
You cannot see Beast from here.

Now "you chop 'the' beast with the dagger" wouldn't be too bad. Or moving an examinable beast to the same room as the player when it dies. But when I read things like "beast hits you" and "beast falls down, dead" and then try to examine the beast that I've just killed only to find it's vanished into thin air, it's definitely not a good sign.

A likeable enough game in its own right, but **Shadow Of The Past** had so many things wrong with it that need fixing that it's a hard game to recommend.

3 out of 10

JACK OF SHADOWS

AUTHOR: ARNOLD "ACE" RIMMER
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

There were some terrible guess the verb issues and non-obvious commands at work here. The player is expected to pick open the lock of a cage (despite the fact that no lock is ever mentioned) with a bar he uncovers (even though a description of the bar doesn't give any indication it could be used to pick anything open - and for that matter, why would someone try to pick open a locked cage with a bar anyway?) Worse still, at the very end of the game (reached only after looking in the Generator for most of the commands I'm sorry to say), the player is expected to carry out a couple of commands that I'm sure no one would ever consider doing. If that wasn't bad enough, "x" and "search" yield different results. By the time I discovered this (by peeking at the walkthrough), I'd already been through every location and "x" everything, so having to go back around and "search" everything was pretty frustrating. If these two commands, which generally mean the same thing, mean something different here then it might be a good idea to say so at the start of the game. Oh, and why oh why would the player put the jewel inside his cloak before entering the shadows to be teleported away? Then again, why would the player know that entering the shadows would teleport him anyway? Unless

you're either psychic or the author, or probably both, this is one game you're going to struggle with.

There were a few other things that gave the impression of either a game rushed through or just one suffering from Newbie Syndrome (i.e. not covering the kind of things that anyone with a bit more experience of writing text adventures would pick up on). Your cloak is described as having a pocket in the lining yet I was never able to examine it or look inside it or put anything inside it. Does it have a purpose or was it just included and then forgotten about?

On the plus side, the writing is at least reasonably accomplished, although at times it comes across as a poor man's take on Star Wars what with "Dayside" and "Darkside" and some chap called "The Colonel Who Never Died". Items mentioned in the room descriptions can be examined for the most part, although there are a few locations (most notably the humming chamber and the blocked passage) where very little seems to have been covered. A rushed game or more Newbie Syndrome? I wasn't sure. Maybe a bit of both.

Overall, **Jack Of Shadows** is a fairly average game let down by some terrible guess the verb issues. If you're playing this with the walkthrough by the side of you, you'll be fine. Otherwise, you're going to have a struggle on your hands.

3 out of 10

IF COMPETITION ENTRIES

RESULTS FROM THE COMPETITION

The IF competition is the largest competition each year for the general IF community, with 2005 having 36 entries. The main rule is that games have to be assessed after only two hours of playing. Voting for the IF Competition in 2005 took place during October and November, with the final positions and average scores for the top three games being:

- | | |
|---|--------|
| 1) Vespers by Jason Devlin | - 7.92 |
| 2) Beyond by Mondi Confinanti | - 7.40 |
| A New Life by Alexandre Owen Muñiz | - 7.40 |

The final positions and average scores for the five ADRIFT entries were:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 11) Escape to New York by Richard Otter | - 5.77 |
| 12) Mortality by David Whyld | - 5.72 |
| 14) Vendetta by Fuyu Yuki (James Hall) | - 5.43 |
| 22) The Plague (Redux) by Cannibal (Laurence Moore) | - 4.98 |
| 35) PTBAD6andoneighth by Slan Xorax | - 1.58 |

ADRIFT community members with non-ADRIFT games included:

- | | |
|--|--------|
| 6) The Colour Pink by Robert Street | - 6.53 |
| 18) Waldo's Pie by Michael Arnaud | - 5.31 |

Notably as well, **The Plague (Redux)** finished third in the Miss Congeniality contest voted on by the authors of the games in the competition behind **Vespers** and **A New Life**. Below are reviews of some of the entries to the competition.

ESCAPE TO NEW YORK

AUTHOR: RICHARD OTTER
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: THE DOMINANT SPECIES (TDS)

Your name is Jack Thompson and you are, for want of a better word, a thief. On your latest adventure you have managed to acquire Johnson's 'The Willow Tree', which is worth more than you will be able to spend in a lifetime. With a buyer in New York you need to get there by Thursday 18th April, and as this is 1912 you have booked passage on a ship due to sail on Wednesday 10th April. All being well you should get to New York in plenty of time.

Objectives? Get 'your' painting out of the mail room, avoid capture and leave the ship as soon as possible.

As you may tell from the snippets of the game's intro, **Escape to New York** really isn't a complex game. It's more tradition IF. One that has four parts marked with four clear goals.

- Part 1 - Find the Mailroom
- Part 2 - Find Your Package
- Part 3 - Avoid Capture

Part 4 - Get Off the Ship

Each part not quite as simple as you may think, but free from any gut-wrenching story twists. In fact, this game relies on the puzzle aspect more so than the story, which I expected after reading the simple storyline. It's a classic IF situation.

Unfortunately this is both a gift and curse to the game. Your character is pretty faceless aside from a name and "job preference", allowing you to do away with the nonsense of backstory and all that gibberish. Along with that, the room descriptions are written in a mechanical prose.

Corridor, F Deck

You are in a bright white panelled corridor which heads east and west as far as you can see. The forward staircase is to the north and a cabin door is just to the south.

This is too lifeless.

The characters are (you guessed it) bland and elementary. This fits in well with the game as I wouldn't expect a fully interactive NPC in a game like this but one that denies to respond to anything I say until I give it what he or she wants.

Overall, not too bad if you like this type of game. Simple story, decent puzzles.

6/10

MORTALITY

AUTHOR: DAVID WHYLD
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: THE DOMINANT SPECIES (TDS)

Mortality is the story of a man called Steven James Rogers and the events that follow his taking a job working for ageing multi-millionaire, Wilfred Gamble. The job involves acting as the personal bodyguard of Gamble's younger (by sixty-one years) wife, Stephanie Gamble, and the events that unfold when the two of them decide that life without Wilfred would be a nice thing.

This writing in the game is good for the most part, but it gets a little over the top at times. There aren't any real puzzles in the game to solve, you can only navigate through the CYOA menus and occasionally move around. This hybrid of CYOA and IF makes the game seem even more limited than both, due to the inability to clearly see the choices you have. This isn't helped by the restricting responses you get when trying to do anything other than what the author intends:

> n

I step into the study where I first met Wilfred Gamble all those many months ago. It seems a smaller room than I remembered, more compact, as if the death of its former occupant has taken the very life from it. Experiencing a chill, I quickly leave the study and return to the dining room.

> w

I step away from the dining room for a second, only to find myself in a small, almost empty room set aside for cleaning implements. Why did I come in here? I return to the dining room before my presence is missed.

> se

I leave the dining room and step out onto a balcony overlooking the gardens. After a few moments, I sense Stephanie join me...

The characters were unrealistic. Every time people talk you don't get a quotable or amusing quip. They shouldn't be so realistic they are boring, but slightly more human than what they are portrayed as in the game.

After a while the game fails to hold your interest with the mountains of text you trudge through, and by the end of the game you'll feel cheated when you come to the bad ending. That was realized that the whole affair was ridiculous. I really felt cheated at the end. I got a crap ending after sitting and reading all that story unfold. Just because the ending is supposed to be bad doesn't mean you should let your player feel like total crap after playing it. After getting the bad ending I had no incentive to play because: one, the game is restrictive beyond belief; and two, I don't like any of the characters.

Despite all this, I only found one small grammatical error. Thus, I give the game a five(average/decent/playable/middle of the road).

5/10

VENDETTA

AUTHOR: FUYU YUKI (JAMES HALL)
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: THE DOMINANT SPECIES (TDS)

First off, kudos to Fuyu for putting his first game in the hostile environment that is the IFCComp. Now, on the game.

Vendetta is the futuristic tale of a nanobot that has to rescue his girlfriend from the clutches of an evil woman that intends on using him to assassinate a company owner. Although the game doesn't really start until half-way through the game. Confused? Ok, let me explain.

This game has a long, drawn out introduction, which could have easily been cut to a length more appropriate. You start off in your hotel room and run a couple boring errands before picking up your girlfriend Sally from a theater and taking her to dinner. Afterwards, you return back to your room where you started. All of this wouldn't be so bad if it weren't for the sheer amount of text you are drowned in. The info dumps explaining backstory and why the player is an artificial life form are ridiculous. It's simply too much to swallow for one starting the game. The fluff doesn't stop there, however. In the game you'll come across many repeat rooms that have been put in to make the game look larger.

The middle game is basically a puzzle fest where you solve a puzzle per floor of a facility. In this facility you run into highly incompetent guards. I mean the player gets to walk right into a guard station and kill a guard. You'd think the door would be locked or he'd hear the player approaching. Should I mention the guards who fail to recognize you as a threat even when you're in the same room as them? Apparently in the future guards believe it's normal for people to walk around with rifles in their hands.

There are a number of bad gameplay elements:

- > x case
Leave it alone for now.

What kind of response is that to examining an object?

- > x door
The door is made of wood. Knocking on it suggests that it is fairly thick, too. It is slightly rotten in places, though, and there are a few black marks on the bottom half of it.

- > knock on door
I don't understand what you want me to do with the door.

Why not let the player to decide to knock on the door instead of having it listed when examining? I was going to knock on the wood naturally but the description already covered it. When I do knock on the door the game doesn't understand.

- > x painting
It is an old oil painting. It shows two men dressed in black sitting on a lawn,

discussing some aspect of a naked woman who happens to be lying near to them. Other than that, there does not appear to be anything unusual about the painting; lifting it reveals nothing behind.

Another case where there are actions in the description. This comes off as very amateurish.

A cleaner is here, polishing the floor

Why not "A cleaner is here polishing the floor."? Why not add a period to end the sentence?

A tall guard and A short guard are here.

Are you kidding me?

> undo

Unfortunately, as talented as you are, the ability to reverse time is beyond your capability.

Is that right?

> undo it
(the switch)
Undone.

NEVER disable undo.

> x guard
The guard is dead. Let us leave it at that.

Cop out. The author got lazy here.

The few redeeming qualities such as the futuristic setting and a couple neat puzzles are overwhelmed by the rest of the game's faults. I'd give it a 5/10(average on my scale) but the bugs take off a point. I take another point for the fact it was poorly executed overall.

3/10

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

Vendetta was one of the five ADRIFT entries to the 2005 IF Competition, where it finished fourteenth. The game started slowly, with a lot of cut scenes to work through as most of the plot was revealed. I haven't seen many science fiction games done well in IF, but I thought this game had an interesting premise. The player character in this game is not a human, but an emotionless bio-construct, trying to survive in a human world.

There is lots and lots of action in this game, as you spend a lot of time fighting your way through to your objective. There are various ways to maximise your odds of success. The NPCs that do appear are well done, but for most of the game there are very few NPCs. I would have expected a few more guards wandering through the building possibly, but I know it would be very hard to implement or play otherwise. The puzzles seemed mainly reasonable, apart from the long search time for useable objects.

My major issue with **Vendetta** is that there are a lot of rooms in the main section of the game. I know it was necessary to create a feel of a realistic complex, but I had trouble finding anything useful within the large complex. A lot of the corridor descriptions were short as well, and many descriptions were repeated throughout areas. I admit it would be difficult to write that many detailed descriptions, but if there is not much going to be added, it could just be left as one room. It might not fill out the ADRIFT map so well, but it would be easier to navigate. Although the room descriptions weren't always long, I thought the object descriptions were generally well done.

Overall this was an entertaining game. It might have benefited from being a little more geographically concise, but I still had fun playing it.

SCORE - 6/10

THE PLAGUE (REDUX)

AUTHOR: CANNIBAL (LAURENCE MOORE)
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: THE DOMINANT SPECIES (TDS)

The following text adventure contains scenes
of graphic violence, gore and
strong language

From the get-go I am delivered a very resident evil-esque message, letting me know I'm in for something sinister by playing this game. Great presentation from the start, not wasting any of my time with too many unneeded options and hinting at what the game is going to be about without slapping me in the face with infodumps. I wish more games would be like this.

Things suddenly turn bad for Stacie, Catherine, Andrea, and Rachel when zombies invade an underground train station. Stacie, the protagonist, eventually loses contact with her friends in the middle of the chaos. She awakes back in the station at night when all the infected has disappeared and there isn't a soul in sight. This is where the game really starts. Unfortunately, this is where the game starts to fall flat.

After you regain your senses and take a look around you run into your first puzzle. Collect change to buy a bottle of water. You spend the next 20-30 minutes trudging through every room looking for change. This involves examining every object you come across. It's a very tedious process, especially when examining some items you get this:

> x walls

There was nothing absorbing or even remotely interesting about that.

Then you'll examine something else considered unimportant and you'll end up picking up change! The situation is aggravated by the lack of room titles in the status window. I may be old fashioned, but I don't find it stylish to make the title of room names in the status window invisible, considering this basically disables using goto on the map. Using the goto command is valuable when you're having to balance inventory. There came a time when I had accumulated so much crap I didn't know what to drop and what to keep because all of it may have been useful. So I dropped something and later found out I needed it for a puzzle. Then I travelled all the way back where I had stashed it and brought it to the person that wanted it. It's as fun as it sounds.

It isn't too hard to find your way around with descriptions like this:

Tunnel

I flashed the torchlight about as I walked slowly along the tracks, the noise of the flesh eating zombies growing louder and more fearsome as I neared Bond Street station. I could head southeast (tunnel) or west (tunnel).

As you can see, the room lists its directions at the end of its description. This is great, but it takes away from the atmosphere quite a bit by injecting interface in the game. Some will argue "It's just a game for God's sake! You'll never forget it's a

game!" but I want to be immersed into the game as much as possible, and interface in the room descriptions takes a little away.

The game also has descriptions that say plenty but only have two or three objects you can examine. Some descriptions haven't had any effort put into them.

> x torso

It was too unspeakably gory for words...

Can you say "cop out"?

One thing that really killed the enjoyment for me was the puzzles. They are ridiculous. The one where you have to find change for a vending machine isn't the only one. There's one puzzle where you have to look under an object. First I type "x object" and my character searches through the object. Later I try to examine it again and it only says "You've already searched the object." Then I try to "move object" and "search object" to no avail. So I think "well, there's nothing important here" and move on. About five or ten minutes later when I am frustrated I look at the walkthrough I find out I have to "look under object". Are you kidding me? That's not all; you also collect batteries for a flashlight and collect weapons to kill zombies! And collect gloves to hold spiky objects and collect cigarettes for a man to help you. Yes, zombies are running rampant and a guy denies to help you unless he has his cigs. At this point the game's atmosphere has been completely stripped away and you start playing "Treasure Hunt: Zombie Underground".

The zombies in the game are pathetic, unscary, and all-around unneeded. I would've been more scared if there were no zombies in the station and were trying to get in than having a girl in a mini-skirt beat down on them without suffering a scratch. By the time I managed to get myself killed by them they were no longer scary. There is no suspense or build-up past the introduction. There's no feeling of zombies chasing you or even the slightest bit of terror. After realizing you'll never die, survival is the least of your worries (even though the game is billed as a survival horror).

The nail on the coffin are bugs. There's a bug in the beginning where "up" wasn't an acceptable command to move up steps. A couple days later I asked about it and found out I need to use "u" instead. In one area I entered a bathroom stall with zombies inside and am given the option to fight or flee. Neither options worked. By this time I am pretty unforgiving from having put up with bad puzzles and boring story. How could you miss these bugs in beta testing? Was it even beta tested? Again, why are the room titles invisible???

In the end, I thought about why I didn't enjoy the game. First thing that came to my mind were the weak puzzles. Then I asked myself "Is this story even worth being told?" and decided the answer was "no". Finally, I took off a point for the bugs that made the game below average. The only thing it has going for it is the writing, and sadly that isn't enough to make a good game.

4/10

GAME OF THE YEAR COMPETITION ENTRIES

RESULTS FROM THE COMPETITION

Voting for the Game of the Year Competition in 2005 took place during late December. No results were available at the time of release of this issue of the Reviews Exchange.

The games involved in this competition included new and previously released games. A list of the twelve games is shown below.

- **Escape to New York** by Richard Otter
- **Fire in the Blood** by Richard Otter
- **Frustrated Interviewee** by Robert Street
- **Mortality** by David Whyld
- **Pathway to Destruction** by Richard Otter
- **The Plague (Redux)** by Laurence Moore
- **Private Eye** by David Whyld
- **Provenance** by Corey W Arnett
- **Second Chance** by David Whyld
- **Showtime at the Gallows** by The Dominant Species
- **A Spot of Bother** by David Whyld
- **Veteran Knowledge** by Robert Street

Below are reviews of all the new games entered to the competition.

PROVENANCE

AUTHOR: COREY W ARNETT
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Provenance starts off well: a nice introduction which does an excellent job of setting the scene (although the final line "AND WITH THE NIGHT COMES THINGS THAT GO BUMP" rather spoiled the mood). The game had a professional feel and it's obvious a lot of time and effort has been put into its making. It also comes bundled with a lengthy PDF file containing the game's background and some advice on playing interactive fiction in general. A nice touch.

At first impression, it seems like a horror game. You arrive on the brick walkway leading to a large mansion with eerie feelings hanging over you. Something tells you it's a bad idea to go further, but go further you do...

The game doesn't credit any betatesters which, for the first game by an author, isn't perhaps a wise thing. To begin with, it didn't seem to affect things too much as I was able to wander around a large number of occasions, perform all manner of tasks, examine things all over the place and all without running into any kind of problems. Later on, though, a number of bugs crept in. A good deal of them have now been fixed (the game is up to version three at the time of writing this review), but quite a few still remain. Some of the bugs actually made the game easier (getting the maul out of the stump was easy in the original version as you simply pulled it out (despite the fact that the game told you that you couldn't do this and the description of the stump still had it embedded there)) yet in the later version

it's a lot harder. Likewise, the cellar is now locked whereas before it was wide open and could be entered any time the player chose.

The game is quite picky about what it will and won't let me do. A list of items I found under a welcome mat (not mentioned anywhere in the room description incidentally) advised me of things I needed to collect, although the reasons as to *why* I was collecting them weren't revealed. One of the items was a canteen which I also needed to fill with water from the well. I couldn't find the canteen at first yet I found a bucket, only couldn't figure out a way to fill it from the well, as even when it was full of items, including a large stone, it wouldn't sink far enough down into the well to fill itself up with water. Then again, I'm not even sure why this was necessary because another location contains a fountain, yet the game won't let me fill the bucket up there. And what about the taps in the house?

Provenance comes with a number of frustrations that I'm sure the author had a good reason for including but which I can't figure out myself. There's a hundred plus location maze which I imagine will have people bashing out QUIT in droves*. There's the item restriction, meaning that you can only carry a certain amount of items and have to spend half the game trekking back and forth picking up different items for different puzzles. As with every ADRIFT game I've ever played which has used an item restriction, this one is amazingly flawed. You can carry, say, ten items (I haven't counted), yet pick up extra ones automatically (finding the knife in the tree trunk, for example, or pulling the axe/maul out of the stump - performing these tasks adds the items to your inventory and neatly bypasses the restriction) and thus go over your limit. The frustrating thing is that if you're carrying more than the maximum item limit and decide to drop one, the game won't let you pick it back up because you're carrying too many items, even though you were quite capable of carrying it beforehand. On top of all that, you're often able to carry around ten or more heavy items, yet trying to pick up something relatively light is too much for you. Oh yes, ADRIFT's item restriction leaves a lot to be desired. In a game like this, with several dozen items scattered all over the place, quite a few of them necessary to complete the game, you're going to be spending a *lot* of time aimlessly trekking back and forth.

* Actually the maze doesn't need to be travelled through according to the README file which accompanies the game. There's a shortcut to the centre of it from another location, although as to access this shortcut you need to ask the butler about a certain thing that's at the very centre of the maze, and which can't be seen until you've been to the centre, you're going to have to go through the maze at some point. It's even more frustrating that you only need to venture through the maze after a certain point in the game, but nowhere is this made clear. I found the maze quite soon into playing and got out the graph paper and pen and mapped it out the old-fashioned way. Exits from the 100+ locations aren't listed, which was a pain, but as ADRIFT helpfully lists them anyway if you head in a direction which lacks an exit (like up or down), it's fairly easy to get through. But tedious. Oh so tedious. But not half as tedious as reaching the centre of the maze and finding there was nothing for me to do there yet because I'd come too early in the game...

Depending on which version of the game you're playing, you might well find that ADRIFT's in built map has been disabled - in a game which boasts two hundred locations, including one hundred in a maze(!) of all things, this is a bad, bad idea. And there are no hints. No. None at all. So when you get stuck, you're stuck. Later versions thankfully enable the map, but there are still no hints around.

Yes, there are a lot of negative things about **Provenance** but there are also a good number of positive things as well. It's got a fairly high standard of writing and the storyline was interesting enough to keep me playing long after the many frustrations had prompted me to quit.

One of the game's main flaws is that it often requires the player to jump through hoops to attain a fairly simple result for no other reason than the writer has written the game in a certain way and wants the player to play the game that way because... well, just because. Escaping from the house (whose door locks behind you the moment you step inside) is particularly annoying because there are all manner of windows around the house which can't be opened, broken or climbed through, not to mention the door itself which, if it was locked, I would have merely booted down to get out instead of getting out the way I did. There are also a few instances of puzzles being inserted into the game for no other reason than, it seemed, to include puzzles. I knock on the door of the house, it opens, and then before I can enter it closes again. I'm then required to search for the key, despite the fact that there's someone in the house who needs my help. Why am I required to search for the key? Because the writer wanted me to do so...

Then there's the item list. Granted, it's easy enough to find, but *why* am I collecting the items on it? For what purpose? And when I've collected them, what am I supposed to do with them? Most of them are easy enough to come across, but with the item restriction in place, it's clearly going to be impossible to carry them all at the same time which is going to require a lot of very tedious trekking back and forth. I never saw a good reason for item restrictions back in the 80's when they were quite common and I sure don't see a good reason for one now. It might be unrealistic to have the player lugging around thirty or forty items, but it's also a handy way of cutting down on unnecessary frustrations. And when I'm carrying a dozen items, try to pick up a piece of paper and get told that I can't because it's too heavy, any kind of realism the writer was going for is just lost anyway.

Overall I liked **Provenance** but my positive feelings for it were tempered by the many, many annoyances that marred the game. I'm not just talking about the bugs (although they certainly contributed towards a good deal of the frustration), but the way perfectly logical things won't work for no other reason than the writer doesn't want me to solve a puzzle in that way. On top of the lack of hints, the maze and the inventory limit (and the disabled map in the earlier version of the game), I found getting beyond a certain stage in the game something of a chore. Much as I liked it, it was also an irritating game to play at times. I finished it eventually, with the aid of the walkthrough, although the series of events that actually lead to the game's conclusion are a little confusing to say the least. Granted, I'd seen the items list so I knew which items I needed to collect, but where did it say I was supposed to put them *there* and what I was required to do next?

6 out of 10

SHOWTIME AT THE GALLOWES

AUTHOR: THE DOMINANT SPECIES (TDS)

PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

Showtime at the Gallows is another horror game written by TDS. The horror is a lot more graphic than his other game **Can It Be All So Simple?** and I wouldn't recommend it to people who dislike gory violence. Personally, I have never been a fan of this kind of horror, so I didn't find the game as interesting as other people may.

The writing is well done, but I found that the puzzles and story weren't quite as good. There weren't many real puzzles, and when there were puzzles, I had to resort to the hints a surprising number of times, as I just couldn't figure out what command was needed and I kept on dying. This is probably because I just didn't connect with the player character or storyline very well. A few mazes were also included, and although they were easy to progress through, they did not really add anything apart from bulking up the size of the game. A lot of the game did feel like filler, as there wasn't a huge amount of story. The game was more just a collection of horror scenes, which if you like horror it would be fine, but I prefer more story.

Overall, I didn't find the game hugely interactive. Mostly you could not move off the rails, and generally all you had to do was wait for scenes to end. However, every so often something came up where you did have to react, which I sometimes did not realise as I assumed that there was more waiting involved. A plus point to this game was that I didn't really find any bugs or errors, so the game was technically done well.

Showtime at the Gallows is good for what it is, but unfortunately I personally did not enjoy playing it that much. Don't take this review as being too definitive, as I am sure that other players will enjoy this game far more than me, if they like this kind of horror.

SCORE - 5/10

A SPOT OF BOTHER

AUTHOR: DAVID WHYLD
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

A Spot of Bother is a comedy game written by David Whyld, but this time with lots of puzzles. The premise of a soldier sent in to disarm traps, is given a humorous turn as the traps are set by a paranoid old lady in her cottage. You need to rescue and wake up the lady who has fainted in the heat wave, as she is needed to stop a nuclear bomb from exploding. I thought that this was a very good setup for the puzzles of an IF game. The writing is well done, as expected from David Whyld, so the real question is how was the gameplay?

Unfortunately, as I find most of David Whyld's games, the game starts off more promising than it ends up. In this case, for a few of the puzzles, I can't see how I could have guessed the solution without looking at the walkthrough, and this becomes annoying when you do finally give up and read what the answer was. This notably included the spoken password, portrait and the NPC puzzles. There probably were better hints than what I found, as I did occasionally find very useful hints around the cottage. Absolutely everything needs to be examined closely in this game. The hint system also generally did well at nudging you towards the answer, but not always. I didn't figure out the spoken password despite the hints on the computer. The portrait puzzle could have used better phrasing, as it wasn't until I looked at the walkthrough that I figured out that I had to carry out a series of commands phrased within a single command rather than individually. Another difficult puzzle was that despite exhausting all conversation options, and trying to give him everything, I never did manage to get the only other character in the game to help me.

Although I have just listed a series of complaints, there are a lot of puzzles in this game, and it was only the occasional puzzle that annoyed me. Most of the puzzles were reasonably challenging, but were possible and rewarding to figure out. If I couldn't figure one out, I often could just use up one of my five lives to disarm the trap. This was an interesting feature, as it means that if you really couldn't solve how to disarm a trap, then you could trigger it, and then walk past the trap's remains later. You could only do this five times though, as the player character Stavros "The Bulldog" McGrogan can only take so much life-threatening damage before literally falling apart. This feature means that not all of the puzzles are required to be solved, although I had trouble abandoning a puzzle and admitting to myself that I could not solve it. I have to admit that I used "undo" and "restore" fairly frequently at times, so I did not lose any lives.

Overall, this is an entertaining game that is worth giving a try.

SCORE - 7/10

OTHER RECENT ADRIFT GAMES

CAN I DO IT?

AUTHOR: CHILLINDAWG
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

I wasn't expecting much from this game. The author had written two games prior to **Can I Do It?** One was removed from the main ADRIFT site before I got the chance to play it, although from what I hear of it I didn't miss much. The other? Oh dear... Let's just say it was bad and leave it at that. So I didn't have high hopes for this one.

It started off better than I expected. Nice introduction (although it would have had my old English teacher (the one with the grammar obsession) fairly spitting blood) but fails a little as it doesn't actually say what the aim of the game is. I figured it out from the title of the taf ("Heist") but it would have been a good idea to make it clearer in the intro.

Can I Do It? is a better game than the previous one I'd played by the author, but it's still got more holes than some very holey cheese. There are lots of newbie annoyances - GET and TAKE mean different things, so if, like me, you type the former as opposed to the latter, you won't be able to finish the game. A crucial item required to trigger the end game event only works if the TAKE command is used. I used GET, so even though I was carrying the item in question when I left the store the game wouldn't finish for me.

Some of the other problems with the game were minor, but annoying all the same. In one location, there is a food rack and a magazine rack, yet examining either of them just gives you the description for the food rack.

There were a few lapses in logic that were pretty frustrating. I'm able to find a bag and wear it then wander around the store with it on, yet the shopkeeper doesn't think there's anything unusual about this. I'm also able to pick up items (steal them really) and leave the store without the shopkeeper doing a thing about it, yet I'm still expected to buy the items to move the game forward. I'm also kind of dubious that the shopkeeper would tell a customer where he keeps his gun just because you give him some candy. For that matter, why is the gun even where you find it and not somewhere closer to the shopkeeper? A gun out of reach isn't much use in the event of a robbery.

Some bits of the game were in past tense, others present tense which made for a jarring read at times. It could also have done from running through a spell check, and the frequent grammar errors were trying.

But all in all, it's a step in the right direction. By no means a perfect game, **Can I Do It?** is a marked improvement on the author's previous works and shows that, if he can start writing some proper sized games (this one was 5 KB), test them properly beforehand, and fix his spelling and grammar, he might actually have potential.

3 out of 10

CHASING THE RUSSIAN

AUTHOR: GREG BROULETTE
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

This game kicked up quite a lot of fuss on the ADRIFT forum, both before and after it was released. Before: because the author took the time to release a demo of it, get people's opinions, and then fix all the bugs and errors in readiness for an official release. (This probably has happened a few times before but it's worth mentioning all the same because a newbie actually having the patience to listen to advice is a rare thing indeed. Kudos to him for that.) After: because the author threw a full blown tantrum after several people (including yours truly) pointed out there were still bugs and errors in his game and advised him how best to go about fixing them. Five minutes later, he took the game down off the main ADRIFT site, then from his own site, and disappeared off into the sunset in a sulk. All because people were trying to help...

Oh dear. Just as well he left before reading this review, I guess...

In all honesty, the game's a long way from a complete stinker. I've certainly played worse ADRIFT games this year. But I've also played a lot better.

You play the part of a secret agent hunting for a Dr Stoyonov, the Russian of the game's title. You're currently undercover working at a travel agency while you close in your prey.

The intro was actually quite amusing and indicated that the author, if he ever returns from wherever he's gone and tries his hand at a comedy, might do well. As for the rest of the game, there were a *lot* of bugs in it. I didn't really expect it to be bug free (is there such a thing?) but after going through a demo version where people pointed out various errors in it, I thought the finished game might be as close to bug free as it's reasonable to expect. Unfortunately not. While most of the bugs were relatively minor, they were all annoying to one degree or another. The worst offenders seemed to be:

- * Lack of proofreading. Though hardly unreadable, the text was littered with spelling mistakes. Some locations were worse than others; indeed, some didn't seem to have any typos at all. Others were just full of them. Is it Mrs Beazly or Mrs Beasley or Mrs Beasley? The game can't seem to decide.

- * Items not given proper prefixes: "a magazines" popped up in one location, "a ashes" in another. Frequently, items didn't have prefixes at all so you might get told "book of matches is too heavy for you to carry at the moment" and the like.

- * Silly carrying restrictions. See the previous point. I can wander around town with a dozen items, yet trying to pick up a book of matches is too much for me?

- * Too much needless unlocking and opening of doors and gates. Is there any need to make the player type UNLOCK DOOR and then OPEN DOOR? For that matter, if the door or gate isn't locked anyway, why even start it closed in the first place? It's just plain irritating. (Funnily enough, the game lets me open Mrs Beazly/Beazley/Beasley's door even though it's never mentioned in the room description, but even after it's open I'm not able to go through it.)

- * Crucial things needed to complete the game aren't mentioned in the room descriptions. There's a button on a street light that needs to be pressed (secret agents apparently aren't capable of crossing the street without the green man

being on) yet the street light isn't referred to in the room description. Another location has a carpet with an item concealed under it, yet where is the carpet?

* Conversation without speech marks? Never a good idea.

All in all, **Chasing The Russian** is an easy enough game to get through. It has a few extras that don't really seem to fit into the general theme of the game (getting some cookies from the woman with the ever name surname and buying some food in a shop), but they don't knock the game down any. A few liberal typings of HINT from time to time and you get through the worst of the game's hassles. And, perhaps best of all, you even get awarded at the end of the game for things you haven't even done. The game awarded me extra bonus points for locking a door (which I hadn't done) and putting the ladder back in the garage (which I also hadn't even. As it happened, I hadn't even found the ladder *or* been in the garage).

The actual game is some 35 KB in size (a fairly large effort for a newbie), but comes with 7,000+ KB of sound effects included. 7,000+? Yep. That's right. Are they, then, mind-blowing sound effects? The sort of thing that keep you on the edge of your seat? Er... not quite. A few outdoor locations had sound effects that were basically the kind of sounds you might expect to hear if you were walking down the street. Yes, as exciting as that. And every bit as distracting. After a couple of locations of listening to every day sounds while I was trying to concentrate, I found the distraction level to be too high and promptly turned them off.

So all in all, not a truly terrible game but without much going for it either. If all the bugs are fixed, this might be a fairly decent game but it's hard to recommend it to anyone as it currently stands.

3 out of 10

OLDER ADRIFT GAMES

WIZARD'S PLAYGROUND

AUTHOR: EVIL_FLAGPOLE
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: GREG BOETTCHER

Wizards Playground is a small ADRIFT role-playing game. It mostly does a reasonably decent job with combat and magic, but whereas good games are well fleshed-out, this one is skeletal.

For instance, don't go examining any of the scenic objects in this game, because nothing has been implemented except that which has to do with combat and magic. Also, even when you can refer to things, it's not always easy. For instance, if you want to look at Master Jibu, you have to type "examine master jibu." If you type "examine jibu" or "examine master," you get the same response as "examine asdf."

With all the non-standard commands required for combat and magic, guess-the-verb could have been a problem. Fortunately the author recognized this and tells you what commands to use. Unfortunately, these instructions are given in room descriptions, not in any response to "help" or "about." This is rather awkward. Also, the magic and combat commands have no synonyms, and, in at least one case, were not well clued. Do not type "join' the wizard's guild," as the room description tells you to; you must instead simply type "join." And then, even when you do join, I was not able to figure out how to do anything in the Wizard's Guild's main hall. No clues there, or none that I found.

There are some enemies to beat here, and I was able to beat most of them without much difficulty, except for one troll. It might be that you win the game if you beat the troll, but this is just a guess. On the other hand, oddly enough, it is possible to walk past the troll without hitting him and cross the bridge that he guards. Oddly, too, there is nothing special on the other side of the bridge. This certainly does not build anticipation or any desire to try hard to defeat the troll. As a result, I stopped playing this game without winning.

There is no story here, nor anything else except whatever is necessary for combat and magic. The game feels sort of like a demo or an exercise in game design. As such, I wouldn't recommend it except to somebody who was interested in seeing what is possible for RPGs in ADRIFT. With regard to that, it's not so bad. Otherwise, though, it doesn't have much to offer.

NON-ADRIFT GAMES

HOUSE OF THE MIDNIGHT SUN

AUTHOR: PAUL JOHNSON
PLATFORM: INFORM

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

I usually write reviews of games when I've either finished them, or got as far into them as I'm able to get, but for a change I decided to write a review of **House Of The Midnight Sun** as I was actually playing it.

What's it about?

It's a game about vampires, always a favourite subject of mine (heck, I even wrote one myself a few years back) with you, the intrepid vampire hunter, out to rid the world of the long-toothed menaces. You've travelled to Transylvania to combat them, albeit you haven't come very well prepared as you start the game without a single item to your name.....

'Nicely written' was the first thing I thought upon starting the game. The location descriptions aren't especially lengthy but the writer does a first class job of setting the scene and there's a genuine sense of menace hanging over the proceedings.

A few minor issues arise. There's no HELP or HINT command (always a bad point) and the game uses the MENU command instead of the more common ABOUT or INFO. Admittedly it *does* point out the MENU command right at the start of the game, but by the time I decided to use it, an hour or so into play, I'd forgotten about it and it wasn't till I restarted after being killed that I saw the option again. The puzzles at the start are pretty well clued so help isn't really required until later on, but one puzzle - stopping the ice man - had me stumped for a while because the one command I thought was obvious didn't work yet another, less obvious command (although still clued) was the one I needed.

The problem with the ice man is a timed puzzle, and one of the annoying kind that has a tendency to kill you off if you make a wrong move. As I was battling with guess the verb issues at the time, I ended up being killed off more than a few times before I hit upon the right combination and finally dealt with him.

There seem to be a few red herrings thrown into the start of the game that either don't do anything (and the online walkthrough I found would back me up on this) or just have a purpose that I was never able to discern. I found a hand poking out of the wall beneath a cottage, yet no matter what I tried, I wasn't able to do anything about it aside from try to take the hand... and wind up deader than the vampires I'm hunting in the process. In another location, special mention is made of some vines - even referred to as Devil's vine when you examine them. Trying to cut the vines implies that the vines *can* be cut, but you don't have anything suitable to cut them with. Search as I did, and even consulted the walkthrough, but I couldn't find a single thing capable of cutting them. Inform's parser didn't help me much either, as it kept throwing up messages along the lines of "I only understood you as far as wanting to cut the Devil's vine" in response to 90% of the things I typed. If there's a way to actually get the Devil's vine at this stage in the game, I never discovered it.

On to the next part of the game. An attempt at digging plunges me into an underground chamber from out of which there at first appears to be no escape due to the way in being out of reach and the only other exit blocked by a horde of rats. There were some strange errors here in that the rats were blocking the exit and yet the most obvious command - KILL RATS - produced the response "you don't need to worry about the rats". Clearly I do as they're in my way. The solution was a fairly easy one to come across, if a little on the gruesome side, but the whole puzzle struck me as a bit of a stretch. The obvious command hadn't been accounted for which forced the player to follow the designs of the puzzle, seemingly for no other reason than the writer *wanted* people to get past the rats in this manner and no other way. Surely the KILL RATS command should have produced a proper response, even if was just a simple "you can't, there's too many of them". Then again, I wasn't able to burn them with the tinderbox I was carrying either.

Not long after this I became completely stuck, and spent quite a time swearing at the game for not including even the most basic hints. After checking the walkthrough, I spent longer swearing at myself for being unable to see the solution to a puzzle that was right before my eyes. In fact, most of the puzzles up to this stage in the game had been like that: difficult upon first reaching them, but logical enough when you actually think about them. I suppose it goes to show just how bad I am these days at solving puzzles when the really obvious in-your-face kind just completely baffle me sometimes. (But I still think hints would have been a good idea.)

Most of the time, **House Of The Midnight Sun** shows a high level of testing and covers commands you might not expect it to. In other places, the testing seems pretty minimal at best. I came across the slaughtered carcass of a bull, hung upon a hook, and examining it showed something metal lodged inside. Trying to take the metal resulted in "the spider won't let you!" which was quite surprising as I hadn't even been aware there *was* a spider up to that stage. Again, the obvious command of KILL SPIDER didn't produce a helpful response - "violence isn't the answer to this one" - which required me to engage in another game of guess-the-puzzle. Likewise, I wasn't able to burn the spider with my tinderbox or get rid of it by throwing things at it.

It was here I encountered the first actual bug of the game. Pity. I had been hoping that, minor errors aside, it might be bug free. The metal lodged in the bull's carcass can't be taken if referred to as 'metal' (this is when the spider jumps out at you), yet look into the bull and you see the metal is actually a 'saw'. GET SAW works fine. No sign of the troublesome spider.

It was also around this time that I started to notice that not all of the game had been as carefully put together as the earlier parts and gave me the impression that this section had been rushed through. The pantry description is a single line long and lacking in any kind of depth. The descriptions of the two items mentioned are even shorter. Okay, it might be a minor point that the pantry description isn't lengthier and the descriptions of the items within aren't much to write home about, but sometimes it's the little things that make or break a game. And as the little things had been covered earlier in the game, it's disappointing that they aren't covered now.

Up to this point, **House Of The Midnight Sun** had been a fairly linear and compact game. There had been very little room to explore and I had been forced along a very set path. But now that I had arrived in the vampire's castle, things began to

open up. A large number of locations were presented to me, some seeming almost empty, others filled with hazards (including several fatal ones but I'll come to them in a moment). While I was pleased to see a variation, it also meant the game got quite a bit harder as there were several points now at which I was stuck for a way forward.

Again, it was guess the verb that stopped me in my tracks. One room has a block of ice in the middle of the floor. (Why is there a block of ice in the middle of the floor? Why hasn't it melted?) As I was carrying a tinderbox, my first thought was to try and melt it using this. No joy. Likewise, I had a bottle with me filled with water that was hot to the touch. Could I use this to melt the ice? In a way, but MELT ICE didn't work. The actual solution, supplied to me by the walkthrough, was one of those that probably seemed incredibly obvious to the writer but it sure didn't to this poor player.

Another location featured more of the Devil's vine I had encountered at the start of the game. This time I had the saw I had taken from the bull's carcass so I immediately set at it with CUT VINE WITH SAW which hit me with the strange response "I only understood you as far as wanting to cut the Devil's vine". CUT VINE, funnily enough, produced the correct response.

As well as being a game about vampires, **House Of The Midnight Sun** features a few other monsters of legend. Frankenstein's monster turns up at one point, there's a witch, Bluebeard the pirate, and even Jack the Ripper...

The incident with Jack the Ripper was a strange one. There's a torture chamber you find, the only ways out of it being the door you entered by and a chain. Climb the chain and Jack gets you, only at the time you aren't aware that it's Jack the Ripper because it never actually says so. You basically get knocked unconscious and wake up to find yourself tied to a wooden board over a pit. Now it might have been a good idea to take the player's items away at this point because I woke up, tied to the board, and then, despite the fact that I was tied up, I was able to drop my items and then pick them back up again. How was I able to drop items when I was tied up like that? For that matter, how come the items didn't simply fall into the pit the moment I let go of them?

If it's possible to get out of this little predicament in one piece without being psychic, I never discovered it. The guy who put the walkthrough together didn't either. Instead, it seems you need to go back a few locations and ask the witch you came across about a character you haven't even met yet. Now I can't guarantee that this character isn't mentioned at some point during the game (although my transcript would argue otherwise), but it seems a bit of a leap that the player is expected to realise he needs to ask the witch about the character (even assuming you're aware this character even exists!) in order to gain an item without which you're never going to finish the game. All the previous puzzles in the game had been very well clued but this one was just off the radar in terms of sheer unfair.

But on with the game...

One annoying aspect that crept into the game now was a profusion of locked doors. I had the keys to most of them so there was no problem involved in getting past them, but was it really necessary to make the player unlock every single one of them? Maybe attempting to walk in the direction of the door should, if you're carrying the correct key for it, open it automatically for you?

For a while after this, I managed to make a lot of progress without too much difficulty at all. I came across Bluebeard's ship (referred to as Blackbeard in the log!), the crew of which were all dead, and managed to sail this ship to an underground island in a lake and retrieve a little item the witch wanted. The only parts I had trouble with were EXAMINE and SEARCH sometimes yielding different responses; whereas before in the game, you tended to just EXAMINE something and find what was needed, now you would occasionally find something by SEARCHING that you couldn't find by EXAMINING.

I was now very close to the end of the game (although didn't realise it at the time), and things began to get considerably harder here. Whereas before, the majority of the puzzles (with the notable exception of the Jack the Ripper puzzle) had been fairly logical and straightforward, here the difficulty was cranked up several notches. There were also instances where things happened that seemed to make precious little sense, and which I only discovered the solution to by a lot of wandering aimlessly around (and, yes, that ever helpful walkthrough).

One puzzle involves placing an item on the spindle in the castle clocktower, and then moving to another location at exactly midnight. What I never realised, and which I only discovered by use of the walkthrough, was that a certain event occurs in the other location at midnight, but *only* if you've placed the item on the spindle. How the player is expected to realise this I don't know. Yes, it's a vampire game and the midnight hour features in a lot of vampire films, but how can the player reason which location they need to be in at midnight? Fortunately, if you happen to be in the wrong location at midnight, the spindle knocks the item off and the timer resets itself so you can have another go at it.

Now armed with the weapon I received at midnight (and why didn't I come to the castle armed with such a weapon in the first place?), I was again at a loss as to what to do next. There was still one unlocked door in the castle that I hadn't yet been able to find a way of opening, but I doubted the weapon I had found was going to be of any use there. (As it happened, I tried and found that, no, it wasn't any use at all.) But during my wanderings through the castle, trying to discover what it was I needed to do next, I stumbled on a location I had passed through earlier in the game and found things had changed. My very first vampire! Put paid to a few seconds later by use of my trusty weapon.

The only other puzzle to be solved in the game after the disposal of the vampire is getting access to Dracula's coffin itself. The solution was a strange one, and another that I wouldn't have figured out myself without the walkthrough. Maybe I'm just getting especially bad at text adventures, but I'm betting not many people would have hit upon the solution without a little help. After that, disposing of the evil Count is a simple task: point your weapon at him, fire it and he's gone. In a way, the killing of Dracula is very anti-climactic and puts a bit of a downer on what was otherwise a very entertaining game. I'd have preferred a longer fight, or the Count giving an Evil Villain Speech as per the best evil villains. A few words and then him dying just wasn't the same thing.

The end of the game, which was just a few moves after the demise of Dracula, was a tad disappointing. You know how you play a game through to the end, defeat all the enemies, solve the puzzles and overcome all odds - only to find yourself with an ending that's probably less satisfactory than you dying two moves into the games? I've played a number of good adventure games that end in such a way

(Adam Cadre's **Varicella** being perhaps the best example), and **House Of The Midnight Sun** is another to add to the list. Maybe there's a kind of perversion in writing deliberately bad endings for the main character with the writer thinking "ha! He did everything he needed to do and he's *still* screwed at the end!" I don't know. Myself, I'd have preferred a happy ending with the hero wandering off into the sunset content in the knowledge that he'd rid the world of the vampire menace.

A few random thoughts...

House Of The Midnight Sun is a huge game, spanning around a hundred locations, and for the most part it makes good use of the locations. Most games that have this many locations tend to have quite a few filler ones thrown in as well, as if the writer decided it would be a good idea to include a couple dozen rooms for no other reason than he felt like it. While this sort of thing *does* happen in this game, it's not a particularly bad thing here. The game has a definite retro feel to it - the way it's written, the overall atmosphere of the game, the puzzles and so on - and the extra locations seem to fit right in. Although saying that, I'm sure a few of them could have been cut out to keep things down to a more manageable size.

Items referred to in room descriptions are pretty much hit and miss. Some can be examined, some can't. There never seems to be any kind of consistency in this sort of thing. An item in one location will carry a description; a similar item in another location will return an error message when you try and examine it. In a game of this size, where takeable items are often concealed behind other items mentioned in the room descriptions, it's often frustrating not being able to examine the things you see. You need to be especially persistent in examining things to be hit by "you can't see any such thing" half a dozen times in a row, and still keep on examining everything else in case there's something you need.

Would I have finished **House Of The Midnight Sun** without being able to consult the walkthrough from time to time? I doubt it very much. Some of the puzzles I got stuck on - the crocodile one in particular - were the kind of things that I would have figured out eventually given the time (or so I'd like to think anyway :)), but others - melting the block of ice, getting access to Dracula's coffin, the Jack the Ripper problem - I don't think I'd have ever got to grips with. Often, there would be puzzles that seem to have an obvious solution, but the game doesn't accept that solution and instead forces you to do things its own way. Sometimes (the rats puzzle springs to mind) the game's own way isn't especially difficult to figure out; other times (the block of ice) it's a pain.

My main issues with the game, and for the most part they were relatively minor issues that didn't really affect my overall enjoyment of it, were the lack of hints - sooner or later, I tend to get stuck in most games, and even when the puzzles are well clued, as they tend to be here, it's still likely that people will become stuck at some point. No hints is never a good idea. Other than that, the game's only real fault is the lack of motivation on the part of the player, and the player's strange lack of preparation. I'm a vampire hunter, that much is indicated right at the start of the game, yet *why* am I a vampire hunter? Have I previously been wronged by vampires and I'm out seeking revenge? Or do I just hate them for what they are and am intent on killing them for no other reason than they're evil and deserve to die? The player's lack of preparation is a strange thing. Would I really set out to kill vampires without first arming myself with a cross, stake, holy water, garlic and the like? Surely even the most hapless vampire hunter would find himself a weapon beforehand?

And I'm not too chuffed with the ending either. Is there another one I missed where the vampire hunter lives happily ever after?

But those are minor issues that for the most part can be overlooked. Overall **House Of The Midnight Sun** is a first class horror game: well written, creepy and with enough gruesomeness and gore thrown in to keep any fan of the genre satisfied.

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)
- 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)
- Flat Feet** by Joel Ray Holveck (issue 4 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)
- 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)
- 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 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 (issue 7 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 Greycbear)
- 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)
- 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)