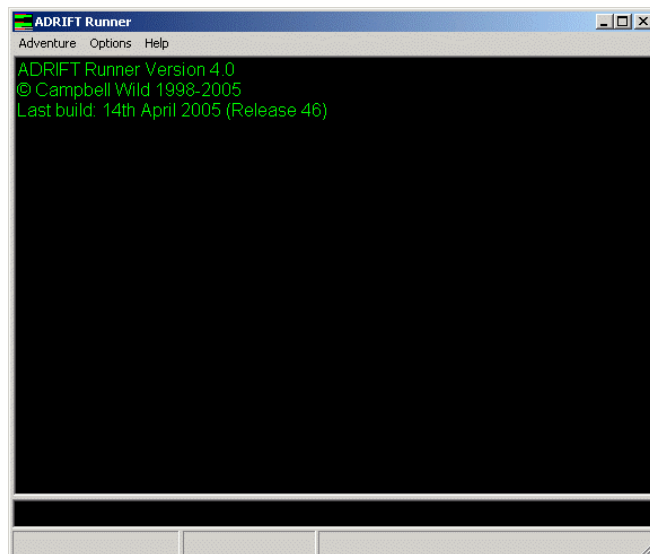


Reviews Exchange

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

ISSUE 6

EDITED BY ROBERT STREET (EMAIL: adrift.reviews@gmail.com)
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INTRODUCTION

This is the sixth issue of the Reviews Exchange, but the first since the relaunch under a new editor, which is me, Robert Street. I would firstly like to thank David Whyld for putting in the hard work needed to start this newsletter. I have enjoyed reading and contributing to the previous issues, and was disappointed when it was announced that it would be cancelled. Thus, you have here, a new version of the Reviews Exchange.

There will be some changes to the Reviews Exchange. I am switching to a quarterly publishing schedule, as I feel that there are an insufficient number of new ADRIFT games released for a shorter schedule to be viable in the long run. Gone as well is the old format of the newsletter, but hopefully you will like this alternative format. If you have any further ideas on other changes that you would like to see, please email me your suggestions.

Some of you may be wondering who this new editor is? Well, if you are a regular on the ADRIFT forums, you may know me under the username Rafgon. I have released a number of ADRIFT games; **Veteran Knowledge**, **Frustrated Interviewee** and **Must Escape!** under the pseudonym of Robert Rafgon. At the time of writing I have entered an Inform game **The Colour Pink** into the IF competition. I don't have a long history of playing IF, as I'm just young enough to have missed the Infocom era, but I have tried to make up for it ever since I discovered IF.

Enough about me. I know that is not why you're here. First up below is an article to encourage everyone to participate in future issues. Following that is the 15 reviews that make up this issue.

Thank you to David Whyld, Stefan Donati (Shuarian) and Lumin for contributing reviews.

Robert Street
(adrift.reviews@gmail.com)

WHY WRITE A REVIEW?

by Robert Street

At the Reviews Exchange we are always looking for new people to contribute reviews. So, why should you, the reader of this newsletter become one of these contributors? There are lots of good reasons, a few of which I enumerate below:

1) Authors like feedback

There is nothing worse for an author of a game to release it, but have nothing said about the game in reply. Yes, the game may be downloaded by lots of people, but it is difficult for an author to tell if people really like the game, or if they are deleting it soon after they start playing. If a game is really good, a review is a chance to give the author the praise that they deserve and encourage them to continue writing. If it is really bad, a review is a chance to point out errors where the author can improve in the future. If, as it is more likely, the game is somewhere in between, it is a chance to do both. Reviews can make the author feel that the time spent writing is worthwhile

Any feedback is good feedback for an author to improve himself or herself for future games. This means that writing a review can directly benefit you in the future; by making sure that future games by an author are even more enjoyable. If you are a game player, then you should provide feedback where possible.

2) If you are an author, it will help your own writing

When I first started reviewing, I had difficulty in determining the reasons behind why I liked or disliked games. It took me a while before I started to be able to see what design or story features I thought were done well or badly. This has actually improved my own writing as well. Anything I don't like, I make sure not to feature in any of my own games. Anything I do like, I take inspiration from. It is far more effective to analyse games for yourself, than just reading other people's analysis. Writing a review is a good opportunity to learn from other game authors.

3) It can give other people who are thinking about playing a game, a better idea of whether they should

If people read a good review of a game, they are more likely to download it and give it a try. If you play a good game, a review can be a chance to encourage others to share your opinion. A review can also describe themes or features of a game. Some will appeal to some players, and some to others. Whatever is said in the review, readers who have not played the game should have a better idea of whether they should by the end of the review. As a reviewer, this is your chance to explain why you think games should or shouldn't be played by others.

4) Critical analysis of a game

This may not apply to all games, but if a game is particularly difficult to understand, then it may be interesting to provide your analysis on what the game is

really about. The themes from a game or the underlying messages can also be analysed.

5) Writing reviews is fun

This point is simply that writing a review is fun. I have enjoyed writing all the reviews I have contributed. For me, it is a good break from game writing. It is a different style, and it allows me to stretch myself in different ways.

After reading the above points and deciding that you should review a game, your next question might be, how do you go about doing so? There are lots of different ways, and each suit different people. I can't give advice that will definitely suit you, but I can describe how I go about writing a review. I usually start off with a simple four paragraph structure that I expand or contract as needed. The first paragraph describes what the game is about. The second paragraph describes what I think the game did well. The third paragraph describes what I think the game did badly. The last paragraph is my overall thoughts on the game. The above advice may help or not.

You could also try reading through the past issues of the Reviews Exchange, which can be downloaded from <http://adrift.sitesled.com>, for more ideas on how people have previously written reviews. If you have any further questions, then direct them to adrift.reviews@gmail.com, and I will do my best to help.

To finish, some ADRIFT games that I would like to see reviewed for the next issue include:

- Three Monkeys, One Cage
- To Hell In A Hamper
- Panic
- Lara Croft & The Sun Obelisk (non-adult version)
- Second Chance
- Any new games that are released after this issue is published

If you write a review send it to adrift.reviews@gmail.com, and I will publish it in the next issue.

INSIDEADRIFT SUMMER COMPETITION ENTRIES

RESULTS FROM THE COMPETITION

Voting for the InsideADRIFT Summer Competition in 2005 took place during August, with the final positions and vote tallies being:

- 1) "Target" by Richard Otter - 14
- 2) "Lights, Camera, Action" by David Whyld - 13
- 3) "Can It All Be So Simple?" by TDS - 10
- 4) "Must Escape!" by Robert Rafgon (Robert Street) - 9
- 5) "Regrets" by David Whyld - 5

Below are reviews of all the entries to the competition.

CAN IT ALL BE SO SIMPLE?

AUTHOR: THE DOMINANT SPECIES
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

"Can It Be All So Simple?" is the first game by TDS (The Dominant Species). It is a horror game, with the main character being a son from a family who have fallen upon hard times, and it is not getting better. I will note for this review that I helped to beta test the game.

"Can It Be All So Simple?" is a small game, but it is as large as most of the games in this competition. This game is mainly story-based with only a few simple puzzles that really just require you to search around the house for items. Some of these puzzles have multiple solutions, but all the solutions are fairly similar. I would have preferred slightly more difficult puzzles, but it probably would have broken up the story more. The setting for the game is the main character's house, with the locations that you wander through being sparse, but this fits the game's story. The writing evokes the depression surrounding the main character, and what has occurred to him and his family recently.

The story of the game is interesting. However, the twist at the end was fairly predictable, at least to me, but it was still well done. Of course, that is, if I got the twist right. This game never fully explains anything, so you can only guess that your interpretations of the events are right. The vagueness gives a mysterious feeling to the game, which works with the horror atmosphere. You are never really sure of anything.

Overall, this is a good first effort by TDS, which I voted as my favourite game of the Summer Competition.

SCORE - 7/10

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

This was my personal fave of all the games in the recent ADRIFT Summer Comp 2005, a decidedly dark horror where very little is as it seems. While not a perfect game by any means, it was an impressive debut. Of the five games entered in the Comp, it came a respectable third but I felt it should have done better.

"Can It Be All So Simple?" is a strange game. At times, it's hard to understand just what's going on, and even after finishing it, I'm still a little unsure about some aspects of it. It's a very linear game with minimal replay value, although to understand it all you'll probably need to replay it at least once. At times, the game seems to almost force the player along a set path, with the interactive side of things pushed to one side; this is used to make the storyline tighter and works to a degree, but at the same time the freedom to explore is what generally attracts people to interactive fiction. An example of this is used at the beginning when the player awakens in a dark room. The first four or five commands yield no proper responses; indeed, until the player is told he can see the bedroom, little can be achieved at all. This isn't a terrible thing in itself but it's annoying when you've tried certain commands and gotten nowhere with them, only to try them again a few moves later and achieve something.

Good points: well written. There's a nice little horror game here, complete with creepy monsters, things going bump in the middle of the night and weird goings on. It's also refreshing in a game by a newbie to find that items listed in the room description can be examined and interacted with just the way they should be. You need to really try to find the dreaded YOU SEE NO SUCH THING response displayed.

Bad points: it's... strange. Too strange in parts. The intro is notable more for its ever-changing colour scheme than for what it's saying. Unfortunately the colour scheme makes the text somewhat difficult to read - small red text on a dark background? Hmmm... The intro's also a little pretentious. It contains such lines as:

*"How did the earth come to be?
Did an invisible hand in the sky form us in seven days?
Did we slowly evolve as a species through millions of years?
Or were we all a product of a cosmic explosion in space?"*

And:

*"I wonder in the end will it all make sense. I wonder
does killing another person matter when it comes to looking at the big picture.
I wonder is having prisons really such a good idea."*

After that intro, I was expecting a different game than what followed. Or, at least, a game which bore some kind of semblance to the introduction. But I didn't see any such thing. If anything, the introduction seemed to be tacked on for no real reason and had little to do with the game itself.

There are a few flaws in the game but nothing that really ruins it for the player. I had problems in getting my neighbour, Debbie, to follow me at one point, until realising that she was following me but just wasn't included in the room description. There were a few lapses in logic as well: the player encounters monsters in his parents' bedroom yet his first reaction is to run and tell the next door neighbour instead of going for the police?

One point definitely in the game's favour is that it dispenses with the built in ADRIFT end game sequence and includes a custom one instead. Why is this a good idea? Simply: it gives the player the option of undoing his last command, or restarting the game or loading from a previous save, without the necessity of going through the tedious end game sequence that populates almost every other ADRIFT game. With a simple command, you're back playing the game. Why more people don't do this sort of thing I'll never know.

"Can It Be All So Simple?" is a very short game. Even taking the time to wander around every location in the game, pick up items, examine things, etc, you'll probably be through the entire thing in half an hour. But it's well worth playing all the same, even if the ending is a bit predictable.

6 out of 10

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

AUTHOR: DAVID WHYLD
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

"Lights, Camera, Action" is much longer than David Whyld's other Summer competition entry "Regrets". There are a lot of characters, a lot of locations and a lot of puzzles to solve. This is another David Whyld comedy game, so if you have played one before, you know roughly what to expect of the writing and humour. Personally I enjoy these games, but I did find that "Lights, Camera, Action" had some significant weaknesses. This review is based on the competition version of the game, so some of these weaknesses may have been subsequently fixed. "Lights, Camera, Action" is about a director who is trying to film a movie, but there are a lot of disasters on set that prevent his progress.

One of the strongest points of this game is the many distinctive NPCs. They showcase the humour of the game well. The conversation system uses a number-based option approach, but there are enough options usually that this does not seem restrictive. With the game taking place on a movie set, there is a wide variety of places to go, from Mount Doom to Heaven to the Moon. However, as the studios are cheap, none of these places are ever as impressive as they first appear. This is one of the funniest aspects of the game as you examine each location closer and closer to discover what is really there, rather than what is supposed to be.

Another good point is the hint system, with David Whyld deciding to use an alternate hint system to that normally used in ADRIFT. Each time you type "hint" in a location one more hint appears on a list that is relevant to that location. I feel that this is an improvement on the normal system, as the hints produced are better controlled in their release to the player, but there is one weakness in that if you forget a hint and type "hint" again, then you can get a bonus hint that you do not want yet.

The puzzles in this game are difficult, but achievable. In a way, there is a bit too much going on to start off with. All the interweaving plots, locations, characters and random objects that you pick up, can be a little overwhelming and confusing at first, especially if you can't figure out anything to do with most of the objects immediately. I needed a few hints to get going, but once I had narrowed down the objects by a few, I started to make rapid progress in the game. At least until I hit some very bad bugs.

Midway through "Lights, Camera, Action", I thought that I was going to give the game a great review. Unfortunately, mid-game my opinion rapidly headed downhill due to the number of bugs that made it almost unplayable near the end. Maybe other players will not have as many problems and I was unlucky, but I almost abandoned the game in frustration. I don't want to mention every specific bug here, but I will give a few examples.

Firstly I managed to put the game in an unwinnable state. Trying not to give away too many spoilers below. It started off when I took a photo of one character, and a second character appeared automatically. However, I made the mistake of checking a hint later, and showed the photo to second character, so he returned to this location. I then couldn't budge him, as he refused all gifts and no longer wanted to talk to me. Another annoyance that forced me to restore earlier was that I showed some evidence to the policeman, and he asked me to find someone, but I then had no way of telling him that the person was waiting around for the movie. A final annoyance was in the final scene when two versions of Scene 4 played in succession and my inventory was emptied including the item that I needed to complete the game.

There are a few weaknesses in the game design, such as that you have to "wait" after a scene was done. I don't tend to wait around and thought that I had to progress the game somewhere else before the people would move. However, the main issue I had was with the bugs.

Unfortunately this was a game that I was enjoying, but it just went badly wrong. I don't like games where I have to keep restoring to earlier game states as I have fallen prey to a bug. The score below reflects that although parts of the game were good, I felt annoyed during my gameplay, especially at the missed potential.

SCORE - 6/10

MUST ESCAPE!

AUTHOR: ROBERT RAFGON (ROBERT STREET)
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

The original version of "Must Escape!" - an entry in the ADRIFT Summer Comp 2005 (where it came fourth out of five entries) - was entered in the ADRIFT Intro Comp. It comprised of just two locations and one fight between the player and a nameless NPC. As a novelty item, it was harmless enough but I never really warmed to it. So when I found out it had been enlarged to a full size game for the Summer Comp, I can't say I was really looking forward to it. But just as when he took the mini-game "Veteran Experience" and enlarged it to make the full game "Veteran Knowledge", the author has added quite a lot of content to this game, turning it from a novelty into quite an interesting piece.

In "Must Escape!" you are a saboteur. You've just destroyed a laboratory and must get out of the building in one piece.

The full version starts at the same place as the original, but whereas the original finished the moment the fight with the first NPC you encounter is over, the full version continues after that. You're at loose in an enemy building, with guards closing in on you, and you need to utilise whatever resources you can in order to escape.

There are a few failings in logic scattered throughout the game, almost most are common place in the majority of text adventures. The items needed to progress through each of the locked doors are, quite conveniently, just lying around waiting for the player to come along and pick them up; there's a locked cabinet at one point which the player is able to open with an item he just so happens to find right beforehand; enemy soldiers are always encountered one at a time, so there's never any risk of the player being overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers. It's also remarkably lucky for the player that all the enemies he faces while unarmed* are also unarmed.

* You broke into an enemy base and sabotaged it without a weapon to hand? See what I meant about logic...

Combat makes up a good portion of this game so it's only fair to mention it in this review. I didn't much care for it in the intro, but here it's much better handled. Stick figures of the player and the NPC appear on screen, with commands listed below along the lines of Kick, Punch, Move Left, Turn Right, Shoot, Wait and so on. Figuring out the commands to use to deal with your enemies is part of the fun of "Must Escape!" but the combats themselves seem heavily weighted in favour of the player. You always get to attack first, you always hit, and so if you've got more health than your enemy there's no chance of you losing.

The final fight varies from the others in that you don't actually need to do any real fighting. It's just you and a gun, facing an NPC and a gun. Shoot him and he has a tendency to duck out of the way through an open door so you end up missing him. Don't shoot him and he shoots you (ending the game rather suddenly, and rather annoyingly as well as my previous save was quite a few moves further back). I

figured my way past the guard in the end and that was it for "Must Escape!" My player escaped and, presumably, lived happily ever after.

The full version of this game is certainly more interesting than the intro, but I can't help feel that it's a bit of a comedown compared to what the author did when expanding "Veteran Experience" into "Veteran Knowledge".

5 out of 10

REVIEWER: STEFAN DONATI (SHUARIAN)

This entry of the Adrift Summer Comp 2005 is written by Robert Rafgon, and was placed fourth. After the end of the comp, a second version with some bug fixes has been released, and can be downloaded from the official Adrift site. My review covers the second version.

The intro of the game is already known from this year's Intro Comp, and hasn't changed. The player is some kind of agent who's on his mission inside the enemy laboratory. But luck isn't on your side this time, and the alarm goes off: clearly, you must escape. Being inside an enemy base doesn't necessarily make this any easier, and a fight against a guard happens right after the first corner. Fighting is done via the Adrift battle system, and is graphically nice implemented by showing the fighting of the two opponents. While the intro ends after this fight, the full game does not, of course. The base has several different areas, which all must be explored in order to escape. What I really liked is that the map is easily memorised but multilayered nonetheless.

Winning the game basically means solving a few, not very difficult, puzzles; finding the right keys for the doors and survive and avoid the battles against the guards. And while I've been sceptically about how well the fighting system may work in a full version, it turns out it does surprisingly well. The fights are different, the player has to take care of his health status, and especially the end sequence gives enough space to move around freely while fighting your way out.

The writing is good, and describes everything in a short and informative manner. However, the base feels rather empty, and while this suits some rooms well, it seems a little bit artificial in others. Speaking about emptiness, the story comes to mind, unfortunately. There's not much the game tells us about the player's character, his mission, or the enemy.

Still, the games manages to establish a certain atmosphere which makes it thrilling to move on, trying to escape from this unfriendly place. There's no adrenaline involved, though, as the threads of being caught only lingers in the air but is not very immediate - the game won't let you into certain rooms, and the guards are not patrolling around. Thus I felt as if the game would patronise me, and won't allow my detection; I experienced this as a drawback to my overall impression.

But after all, I enjoyed this game. It is a short agent thriller, and is fun to play.

REGRETS

AUTHOR: DAVID WHYLD
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

This is a short review, but "Regrets" is only a short game. I was surprised to find a game with a smaller file size than my entry in the competition. Interestingly in the about section, it says that the game was written for a One Room comp, and it lives up to this with the action only taking place in one room. In fact, it isn't even a particularly full room, with only a couple of pieces of furniture. The aim of this game is that you are exploring the room and have to figure out how to trigger memories. The writing is fine, and the story is well done, but there really isn't much to this game.

I managed to find most of the memories, but I felt that the drawer puzzle was a little unfair, as the solution did not occur to me until I looked at the walkthrough. I tried pulling the drawer aggressively or just hitting it, and I guess I just wouldn't open a drawer in that way. There is an annoying bug at the end, where the only command that works is south. Whilst I was playing, I couldn't figure out what to do when all that was being printed out was "The game has ended." to anything I typed in. The ending was clever though once I got there.

Overall Regrets is fun for the short amount of time that it took to play.

SCORE - 6/10

TARGET

AUTHOR: RICHARD OTTER
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

This is another short entry to the Summer competition. In "Target" you are a professional killer, and the aim of the game is to eliminate your target. In my first go I managed this in a couple of turns, but the game is not quite that short, as I subsequently lost. There are a few puzzles, but they are not difficult, and the last puzzle can be completely ignored. In fact I didn't really recognise that it could be solved when I first saw it.

One of the most interesting features of this game is that a lot of it is randomised. The description and location of your target changes each game, so you have to check everyone carefully. This is a good technical achievement and even offers more replay value than usual, as each time you play the game, the solution will be different. I didn't discover any bugs whilst playing the game, which is always a plus point. However, it could have been better if the game was just a little longer. With the short gameplay time, I was left thinking was that it?

Still, "Target" was fun while it lasted.

SCORE - 6/10

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

Clearly I'm getting worse at predicting things. When I played "Target" - an entry in the ADRIFT Spring Comp 2005 (it was the first game I played) - I remember thinking "hmmm... this is going to come last". It actually came first. While there's nothing terrible about the game, there's nothing particularly great about it either. Or so I thought anyway. But as it came first, I'm clearly in a minority.

"Target" is a game about a hit man hired to assassinate someone. It starts with you, the hit man, on the rooftop of a building. You've got a rifle and a description of your target. All you have to do is find him... and kill him.

That's essentially the game in a nutshell. One nice feature is that the identity of the hit man you play, as well as the identity of your victim, change each time you play the game. I discovered this after dying several times and finding myself with a different target each time. Heck, one time the hit man was even yours truly! But while identities may change each time, it's still pretty much the same game. The layout of the rooftop remains the same and as you start with a description of your victim, it's a simple task to wander about the rooftop, match up the description and shoot the guy in question. There are no added complications depending upon which victim you are assigned to kill: it's just a case of find 'em and shoot 'em.

I played "Target" through three times before figuring out the basics behind identifying my victim and dealing with him, and disposing of the undercover cop and the sniper as well, and it seemed like a remarkably short game. Strangely enough, when I opened it in the Generator, I was surprised to see a whopping 1084 tasks (!), which was about 20 times as many as I expected to see. On the surface, "Target" seems like a simple game indeed; but a closer look reveals that there's actually been a considerable amount of work expended on it. Just a pity I didn't like it more.

Logic doesn't play a large part in this game. My hit man character wanders around the rooftop of the building with his rifle in hand, yet the tramp (actually an undercover cop) makes no effort to arrest me until I've actually gone and shot someone. (For that matter, why is there even a tramp on top of the building?) The tramp makes several inane comments as I stand there, toting my rifle, about the rooftop, a neon sign and the like, yet doesn't bother asking me about said rifle. He provides information about every subject under the sun - almost literally - but I found his constant comments, every two or three moves, to be so distracting that before long I was itching to kill him just to get a bit of peace and quiet.

Yet despite all its failings, "Target" won the ADRIFT Summer Comp 2005 and proved surprisingly popular with lots of people. I just wish I could see its appeal myself.

2 out of 10

OTHER RECENT ADRIFT GAMES

THE ADVENTURES OF SPACE BOY! VOLUME I

AUTHOR: DAVID PARISH

PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

I have to admit that I never got around to playing Version 1 of "The Adventures of Space Boy! Volume I", after hearing on the forums that it was a bit buggy. However, after seeing that an improved Version 2 had been released, I thought it was time to take a look. My first thought looking at the file size was that this was probably a large game. However, after playing it, the game is reasonably large but not too much so, with most of the large file size consisting of pictures, which often add hints to the puzzle solutions in the game.

The star of the game is Space Boy who is looking for his Wonder Dog. Apart from this there isn't much story to this game, so it is a puzzlefest. I don't mind puzzlefests, but I prefer a clearer motivation as to what my goals are. The motivation behind actions was not always well done here. I ended up doing stuff because it was there, more than doing it because I was after a specific goal. It was only after completing some actions and ending up with the consequent necessary objects, that it was finally explained why I was doing what I was doing. The game also seemed to throw in puzzles for the sake of throwing in puzzles, rather than because they added to the game.

The puzzle difficulty wasn't actually too bad. I needed a few hints, but I mostly found that I was on the right track, I just hadn't quite figured it out yet. The writing is reasonable and the game is friendly, it just isn't that exciting. I hate to admit this, but I found myself wondering midway through, when was the game going to be over, which is never a good sign. It wasn't that there was anything really wrong with the game, it just didn't really interest me. Still, I shouldn't be too negative here, as I was glad that I did decide to keep playing, and the setting may interest other players more.

This game could still have been implemented a bit better, as not every phrasing is accounted for in the tasks and objects. For example, it took me a while to figure out that (changed slightly to avoid spoilers) 'greenpurpleorange' was not a synonym of 'greenpurpleorange tile'. The room descriptions are not that long, with not many items in each room. This could be increased to add more atmosphere to the game. A few spelling mistakes also remain in the game. None of these issues are that serious, but are areas where the author could improve in the future.

Overall the game is reasonable, and there is a promise of a sequel at the end, which wasn't a surprise given that the game has a subtitle of Volume I. Would I be interested in a sequel? Well, based on this game, I would give it a go.

SCORE - 5/10

CRAZY OLD BAG LADY

AUTHOR: SPRITE
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

A not very serious concept, which pokes fun at the IF convention of picking up any objects that you see, even if there is no use for them. In fact it makes jokes about the title character being a computer game player gone bad. Now she just collects objects for no reason, but still doesn't like dropping anything. The starting inventory is an amusing collection of useless junk.

Of course if the joke was only that there was a random picking up of objects, it wouldn't be enough to sustain a game. So, she actually has to solve puzzles as well with these objects. Actually, very few of the objects, apart from those that you start with, are red herrings. Almost all of them are used towards solving the aim of the game, which is the search for the golden trolley. I was almost hoping for a few more funny red herrings, but I admit that it would take a lot more work.

Where this game is strong is in the humour and writing, with this game being very funny. The names especially are amusing. Just look at the title of the game for an example. Unfortunately there are quite a few problems, which blight this game. There are a number of spelling mistakes, which is something I am always very fussy about. There are points where the scenery could be a bit better implemented, especially in the corner shop where there seem to be no objects at all. A small bug is that the conversation with Ollie does not change after the task he asked for is completed. The worst bug is obviously a game killing bug with the newspapers, where no newspaper appears after the task is completed. This bug appears to be fairly late in the game. It is a pity, as I was enjoying it before my game playing experience came to an abrupt halt.

Due to the good writing, I would like to give a higher score to this game, but with the current level of bugs, I can't. The low score below mainly reflects the game killing bug, rather than the rest of the game, which I would rate closer to a 6. Hopefully, the author will fix up some of the remaining problems. If she does, I look forward to completing the game in the future.

SCORE - 3/10

LABORATORY R.A.T.S.

AUTHOR: C. HENSHAW
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: ROBERT STREET

"Laboratory R.A.T.S." is a short one room game. There is only one puzzle, and it is not even really a puzzle. It is just a matter of figuring out the right sequence of commands. More alternatives should probably have been included to better hint the player towards these commands. However, it is not difficult to figure out if you examine the microscope carefully enough.

The single room is a detailed environment, and it is fun to examine everything to find out more about all the characters and what they are trying to achieve. Most of the story is integrated into the descriptions. It is also necessary to explore closely, as mentioned above to figure out what is necessary in order to progress. There are fun background conversations between several NPCs, which add character to the game. The story is well done, but unfortunately the game ends, just when it is beginning to get really interesting.

As a brief diversion, which is what this game is aimed for, "Laboratory R.A.T.S." works well. However, it is very short, and I would have preferred for the game to keep going from where it ended.

SCORE - 5/10

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

One room games, of which "Laboratory R.A.T.S." is such a thing, tend to be more puzzled-orientated than other games. Without a large area to explore, all the gameplay has to take place in a single location and so every puzzle you are going to encounter is there ready and waiting for you. And I've never been fond of puzzle games...

"Laboratory R.A.T.S." involves several scientists at work deep underground in a laboratory. The idea is to get a microscope a work. Easy? Heck no.

Overall this is one mighty frustrating game. It might only be one room in size, but it's certainly a more confusing game than some I've played that have occupied fifty rooms. Doing just about anything is a pain:

> use microscope

The microscope is on, you just need to put your sample inside and take a look.

> put sample inside microscope

I can't put anything in the chamber while the cap is still on the air-lock.

> remove cap

I haven't released the cap of the air lock.

> release cap

I don't understand what you want me to do with the cap.

Most of my time spent playing the game was wrestling with guess the verb issues like this. What I wanted to do was mind-numbingly simple - put my sample in the microscope and examine it - yet every command I tried seemed to either not be understood or just produced another unhelpful response.

To make matters worse, examining the cap informs me that it can be rotated, but:

> rotate cap

I don't understand what you want me to do with the cap.

> rotate cap clockwise

I don't understand what you want me to do with the cap.

> rotate cap anti-clockwise

I can't turn the cap while the vacuum is on.

> turn vacuum off

I can't turn that off.

Is this the worst case of guess the verb I've ever come across? If not, it's certainly a close second. One command I tried - PUSH PUMP BUTTON - produced a message saying nothing happens the first time, but when I tried it again, it told me I had already pumped the chamber. Only after going through the commands in the Generator one by one was I able to make any kind of progress, and as that was about as much fun as watching paint dry, I resorted to banging out a command that, thankfully, the game understood: QUIT.

A couple of NPCs who interject amusing comments from time to time raised the quality of this game just enough to stop me giving it the deathly 1 out of 10, but until some of the guess the verb issues are fixed, I could never recommend "Laboratory R.A.T.S." to anyone.

2 out of 10

THE WHITE SINGULARITY

AUTHOR: IRENE VILLANUEVA
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: DAVID WHYLD

"The White Singularity" is quite an intriguing game. It's part interactive fiction and part gamebook - the kind of thing I've been meaning to get around to writing myself for a while now but never seem to get started on. But it's also very, very flawed.

The storyline is an interesting one: you are a celebrated scientist who has dreamed his entire life of journeying to the centre of the Earth. And now, after all these years, it seems your dream might finally be coming true. The means to travel to the centre has been discovered, and you are just about to embark on the journey of a lifetime.

Unfortunately, where the story side of things is strong, and the writing accomplished, the text adventure side of things is very weak indeed. In the first location, it's possible to speak to your wife, Irene (also the name of the game's writer incidentally), before she's even arrived. And even when she's standing there right in front of you, the room description hasn't been updated to show this fact and tells you that you're still waiting for her. Then there are the numerous problems with the game layout. Some of this is down to a flaw in the ADRIFT programme when handling large blocks of text - it's supposed to put a MORE prompt in at certain intervals so a screen full of text is displayed without anything scrolling off the screen before you can read it. This it does poorly. Nine times out of ten when presented with a large block of text, it puts the MORE prompt in at the wrong place so the first few lines have always scrolled off screen before you have chance to read them. Scrolling back up is an option but it's also a pain. There are ways around this kind of thing - inserting your own 'more' commands at the relevant intervals - but this hasn't been used in The White Singularity, meaning that you're going to be doing a lot of scrolling back up the screen to read the text. In a game like this, it's particularly bad because it breaks the narrative flow.

The text spacing is also messed up in many places. Sometimes the paragraphs directly follow on from each other, other times they're separated by one or two line spaces. There's also a strange bit partway through the game when all the text becomes centred. Surely the author must have noticed this during testing?

There's a particularly annoying bit partway through one of the game paths when you're sitting in your office and there's a knock at the door. You're told you can't open the door as it's locked and you can't unlock it as you don't have the keys. Then it tells you that the keys are on your desk, yet if you examine your desk, you don't see the keys. The weird thing is that no matter what you do, you never get to find out who's on the other side of the door as they walk away if you open the door - and, weirder still, they do so without you even catching sight of who they are. To confuse matters further still, OPEN THE DOOR produces a different response than OPEN DOOR. Yet OPEN THE DOOR won't work as it tells you the door is door is already open. Funnily enough, CLOSE DOOR won't work because the door is already closed!

Playing the game can be a chore at times. Often, a room description will be used

for a series of events and a bit of back history, some conversation and the like, as well as the actual room description itself. So if you want to refresh your memory about what's in the room, you end up having to scroll through several screens of text afterwards. While it's handy to have all the text there to read back through in case you need to refer to something, it would perhaps have been better to have handled it all with tasks or events instead.

Most room descriptions end with a series of options, some of which are in bold text, that the player can pick and choose from to decide which way the game progresses. While this is a nice idea in principal, it breaks down somewhat when it turns out that you need to type the entire text in bold to select an option (minus any punctuation), as opposed to just typing a number or a single letter. It's a clumsy way of handling things and really should have been improved upon.

Different paths through the game offer a reasonable amount of replay value, although the instant death options can be trying at times. Most of these, fortunately, are well highlighted so if you end up killing yourself by doing something foolhardy you've really only got yourself to blame.

The White Singularity is a game best approached from the viewpoint of it being a gamebook with a few interactive fictions elements thrown in instead of an interactive fiction game with a few gamebook elements thrown in. The IF side of things needs such a lot of work before it's ever going to be any good, yet the gamebook side is good. For a guess, this was written by someone who had a great idea for a gamebook but lacked the necessary skill with ADRIFT to make it work properly, yet went ahead and wrote it anyway. While I can admire the effort that went into this, I can't help but wonder how much better it would have been if she had taken a bit more care with things. I held off playing it for a while in case a second version with all the bugs fixed came out, but no such luck. So it looks like this is all we're going to see of The White Singularity. Personally I'd like to see more games like this in the future, only preferably ones better tested beforehand.

7 out of 10 for the game

3 out of 10 for the way it's been programmed

Overall: 5 out of 10

REVIEWER: STEFAN DONATI (SHUARIAN)

'The White Singularity', a game written by a certain Irene, appeared out of nowhere on the adventure section of the Adrift site. It starts with a nice but rather short intro, which just tells you the basics: you take the role of a famous naturalist who has seen it all. Well, not quite all, there's still this one dream of your childhood...

After the intro, the game leaves the player literally in the dark; there's no further description. This happens a few times during the game, and if this would have been my first encounter with a text-adventure, I probably would have quit right then. But so I just tried the standard set of commands, and 'examine room' finally led to a description of the room I'm in, my office. Twiddling a little bit around, I didn't know what I'm supposed to do. Obviously the skills of a famous scientist don't include leaving an office, as this isn't possible, no matter what I do with the keys or the door, which is sometimes locked, sometimes not. As there are no hints available for this game, I was able to progress by chance. After examining some pictures, the player character's wife, coincidentally (?) also called Irene, enters the room. The only possible action is to talk to her, and so an interesting and long discussion ensues.

Eight months later (I've told you the conversation was long), things have progressed nicely, particularly thanks due to NESCA, your personal robot assistant. Standing with your wife and the human shaped NESCA by a newly designed ship, your dream ultimately may come true: To make a journey to the centre of the earth!

The game then continues, and actually does a good job at using CYOA (Choose Your Own Adventure) elements. Whenever a choice is needed for the story, three standard possibilities are offered. Playing along the chosen path is done through exploring, although most of what can be explored is explained by talks with Irene. In the end, as with most CYOA games, the story can take more than one path, and influenced by the choices and actions the player makes, the ending will turn out differently.

Conclusion: This game is a lost chance. The writing is generally good, not only by its quality, but also quantity-wise. Yes, although the game doesn't take many turns to finish, just reading it takes some time. The apparent flaws are easily forgotten and many shortcomings of the game can be avoided once the game is played the way the author probably intended it. Leaving this path does the game no good, however, and can be distracting. Also rather distracting are the used graphics. They appear to be gathered from a quick internet search, and leave a small question mark to the copyright issue.

As you might tell, I really want to like the game. It is good fiction. But unfortunately, not so good interactive fiction. Why oh why hasn't the author asked for some beta testers?

OLDER ADRIFT GAMES

THE HOUSE HUSBAND

AUTHOR: C. HENSHAW
PLATFORM: ADRIFT 4.00

REVIEWER: LUMIN

At the time of its release, Chenshaw's "The House Husband" was the recipient of a few less-than-complimentary reviews. As my own experience with the game was somewhat more favourable, I figured I should go ahead and weigh in a well. Then, I...got busy with other stuff. But I'm writing the review now. Finally.

Not to say the game is a shining example of perfection or anything, because it's not. There are parts I think could have been handled better, and at least one significant bug, but on the whole I enjoyed the game and disagree with the assessment in other reviews that it was 'boring' or lacking in plot.

When I loaded 'Husband' up, the first thing I noticed was that it was in first person, an approach which sometimes works for me and sometimes doesn't. In most cases I prefer the classic second person approach, but this time around, at least, Chenshaw did a good enough job pulling off the unusual POV that it was never an annoyance.

The second thing I noticed was that the writing was excellent. Clear, cleanly written descriptions abounded, from the intro on. In the entire game, there were only a couple of passages that I felt were weak in comparison to the rest, but I'll get to that later in the review.

From the beginning the plot is very simple and straightforward -- you wake up to a filthy house after a bout of drinking, and have to get things in order before your wife comes home from a business trip -- though later it's revealed that there's more going on than first meets the eye. Some of the criticisms of the game have been that it doesn't give players enough direction on what to do, so it may be worth mentioning that I didn't have any problems with that. The intro doesn't exactly spell everything out for you, but the last line of it prompted me to examine my watch, the description of which made my goal obvious. (Though in any case, items in my inventory are usually among the first objects to be examined.)

The puzzles also fall under the 'simple and straightforward' category, but that's not necessarily a bad thing, and as I'm typically pathetic at solving them it was nice not having to resort to hints or a walkthrough for once. The majority of the puzzles involved cleaning up around the house, which may not be the most exciting thing in the world, but they were made reasonably challenging by the fact that they made you pay close attention to details and examine EVERYTHING, including things even a seasoned adventurer might miss on the first pass through a room.

However, there were two problems I ran into, both which could have been avoided by a little more testing. The first is simply that the door to the dining room is never mentioned in the kitchen's description, which left me unable to make any progress past a certain point until I literally stumbled on the exit by accident. The second is a great deal more serious, an apparent bug that kept me from completing the game. I found all the items I needed to find (looking in the generator confirmed

this) and threw them away, but either I did things in the wrong order or the game didn't like the fact that I carried some items out to the shed by hand instead of putting them in the waste bin first, and I was never able to trigger the ending. This was made doubly frustrating by the fact that I'd figured out what the twist was a long time ago, but had no way to do anything about it other than the completely unrelated action of taking out the trash. Finally I just gave up and read the ending in the generator.

Actually, the ending, in fact all the endings, were probably the weakest part of the game for me. Besides the bug I ran into, during the 'cutscenes' the writing itself was a bit of a let down. Not to say that it was bad, but it came across as a little over the top and didn't seem to fit very well with the style of the rest of the game. This is especially true of the ending involving the TV, which took the game into cheesy horror territory.

In contrast, the most genuinely chilling moment in the game involves nothing more complex than finding a certain item in the dining room and realizing its significance. In this case, less is more.

All in all, despite needing a bug fix and a couple of other tweaks, 'The House Husband' is a solid, well-written work of IF that kept me interested enough to play it through, which is really all I ask of any game.

NON-ADRIFT GAMES

There are no non-ADRIFT games reviewed in this issue, but in future issues, I would be happy to publish reviews of games not made with ADRIFT.

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 It All Be So Simple? by TDS ([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)

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)

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)

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)

How It All Began by Kevin Treadway (issue 4 review by David Whyld)

In The Claws Of Clueless Bob by David Whyld ([1] issue 5 review by Robert Street / [2] issue 5 review by Stefan Donati)

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)

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)
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)
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)
Shards Of Memory by David Whyld (issue 1 review by Greybear)
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)
Sun Empire: Quest For The Founders by Tech (issue 3 review by Robert Street)
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)
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)
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)