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Mission Statement

Inside Erin is written and published by people who enjoy AIF. It is done for fun, but we also have some goals that we seek to achieve through the newsletter:

1. To encourage the production of more quality AIF games by providing advice from game developers, and by offering constructive criticism that is specifically relevant to AIF.
2. To encourage activity and growth in the AIF community. We aim to generate a constant level of activity so that there aren't long periods in which people can lose interest in AIF.
3. To help document and organize the AIF community. This is done through reporting on games and events, as well as by helping to organize community-wide activities such as competitions and the yearly Erin Awards.

I know I mentioned that I planned on revisiting my editorial from last month, in which I took the Justice Department to task for creating an Obscenity Prosecution Task Force. I still do plan on going deeper into that, but I didn't prepare anything for this month. I will address this more deeply in future months. Suffice it to say that I was pleasantly surprised that the jack-booted thugs didn't come to confiscate my hard drive this month. I suppose, or at least I hope, they have bigger fish to fry.



So this month, while all of you are feverishly finishing up your Mini-comp entries – due May 11, remember (thereby not releasing any new games for us to discuss), I thought I'd try waxing poetic about the power of >.

> represents endless possibilities and is what makes IF so compelling. After the > I can type absolutely whatever I command want. Should I e(x)amine the objects in my surroundings first? Should I leave the room? Should I try to pick up or look under or search or open or close or destroy? Anything should be possible, and I should feel like my universe is expansive enough to accommodate me.

My own personal preference is to begin a game by examining everything I can, right off the bat. Doing that allows me to ease into the game's environment and also to let me know how robust the implementation is. If the room is a kitchen and mentions that there is cutlery on the counter, I will always try to >x cutlery. If the game hasn't provided cutlery for me to examine, I know immediately that the game's environment won't be full, which is very

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It's been a slow month with no game releases, so there's not much to report here. Most chatter seems to have surrounded the upcoming mini-comp, and it looks like there's been a fair bit of interest. Hopefully that will result in a good turnout this year, although I've also noticed a surprising amount of difficulty from a number of authors in actually reaching the finish line with their mini-comp entry. I hope this doesn't result in a whole bunch of promising games trickling away and leaving a paltry crop for the actual comp.



On a related matter, our editor began a linked erotic short story competition to tie in with the mini-comp. I'm not sure how this has turned out yet, so I can't really comment much on it. As I told A. Ninny (too late for my advice to be of any use, of course), I think this comp would actually be a good thing to help fill the dry space between the mini-comp and the end of October (when the Erins deadline comes up and we get a flurry of game releases).

In an interesting development, Emily Short, a prominent member of the IF community gave a level-headed review of *Ron Weasley and the Quest for Hermione* (read it here: <http://www.joltcountry.com/trottingkrips/ronw.html>); interesting because it's rare to see any notice of AIF by the IF community that isn't dismissive or done out of an intent to prove AIF's evils. The review wasn't actually a ringing endorsement of the game, and also didn't make

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disappointing. But when the implementation is robust, I enjoy learning about the atmosphere in a game, interacting with objects, and gaining an appreciation for the author's style, attitude, etc.

Occasionally a game's introduction will try to create a sense of urgency, attempting to lead me to perform a particular action right away. I'll be given a message that, for example, a television program that I can't afford to miss is about to come on. The command the author is looking for is, of course, >turn on television. But what if watching the program changes the game state and makes it impossible for me to return to the pre-'>turn on television' state?

> gives me that option. I can either get caught up in the game's pace, moving when the author says move, or I can be leisurely, knowing that there could be consequences to that choice, but also knowing that >save, >undo or, at worst, >restart are available options.

One area where > can cause trouble, however, is in a game's sex scenes. Most games continue to allow me to type anything, making it possible to completely scramble the sex by jumping from act to act and spot to spot, all over a NPC's body. Others limit specifically what acts can be performed at any given time. Neither option is entirely successful and very few games program in any sort of sex continuity or transitions from sex act to sex act. It's that continuity and transitions that, for me, create the character in the sex scenes.

On the news front, I'm happy to report that I'm getting a very active response to the 2007 AIF mini-comp. If everyone who has expressed interest and/or requested beta-testing help actually enters, this may be the biggest mini-comp ever. Look for the competition games to be released by May 14. ●

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any attempt to address the sexual content of the game, but still addressed it on a level that seemed relevant to the intentions of the game.

The files section at AIFGames.com should now be browse-able to unregistered users. This means that while you still need to register to download files, if you're not registered you can at least see what is available, and that might encourage new people. And it seems that new people are being successfully encouraged to check out AIFGames.com - most of the community action was on AIFGames.com this month, which is new because normally the AIF Archive gets the lion's share. The AIF Archive was quite quiet by comparison, and I wonder if this is a sign that AIFGames.com is starting to gain some momentum. Apparently the membership is pretty high - rivalling the AIF Archive (although not quite there yet). I always assumed that a fair number of members of the AIF Archive were people who'd joined up and not really checked back again, leaving themselves belonging to the group for long periods without being very active; however, joining AIFGames.com suggests that a person is at least reasonably up to date with what's currently happening in the community, and that means that there actually are thousands who regularly play the games - a comforting thought to someone who wonders sometimes if anyone out there is paying attention.

Well, that's it. Sorry I don't have more to say but you'll have to give me more to work with! Next month is the mini-comp, so that will be okay, but after that I want some serious activity or I'm going to have to start issuing detentions! All right, class dismissed. ●

The following stories were submitted for the 2007 Adult Non-Interactive Fiction Competition, announced in the beginning of April. The criteria for entry in this competition were for stories of any subject matter, of approximate length of 3000 words or less. Upon publication, a poll will be established at the Yahoo! aifarchive group. Everyone is invited to participate in the poll. The entry which receives the most votes will be declared the winner. These are the entries received:

1. "Dr. Who: Ace!" by Christopher Cole
2. "Restraint" by Mondragon
3. "Lament" by Christopher Cole



Dr. Who: Ace!

by Christopher Cole

"Well, I'll say one thing. It's really white," I looked around again and didn't change my opinion. It was white like opening a new word document on the computer, but before you actually write anything. Put your face right up to the screen; that kind of white.

"Yes, it is, isn't it?" the Doctor agreed. He was juggling a few small high-tech devices in his hands, taking readings and trying to get his bearings. It didn't change anything; it was still white.

For those of you just tuning in, I travel through time and space with a 900-year old alien who calls himself the Doctor. He looks human. To be precise, he looks like a middle-aged little man who wears a cream-coloured jacket and dark pants, a pullover with silly little question marks on it, and a hat. He usually carries around a red-handled umbrella, though he seems to have lost that somewhere on our current adventure, though I wouldn't be surprised if he somehow fit it into his pockets as, like his time ship, they hold a lot more than they should be able to.

I don't travel alone with the Doctor though. His other companion is twenty-year old Ace. She's never told me her real name. She's got a lot of energy, and is quite athletic. She's a feisty one for sure. She has longish, straight light brown hair and a nice body with a really, really great ass. I would never, ever tell her that though for fear of her right hook. I've travelled with the Doctor for a couple of months now. Ace has been with him for closer to two or three years.

And that brings us back to our current predicament: stuck in this whiteness. I won't bore you with the details, partially because it'd be filled with technobabble and goobledook, but mainly because I really don't know what happened. The Doctor informed Ace and I that he was meeting an old friend, then the next thing we knew, we were no longer in the TARDIS (the Doctor's time and space ship), and we found ourselves walking in this whiteness.

Ace nudged me in the ribs and the Doctor fumbled with his scanners and devices.

"What do you say?" she asked. "Wanna wager how long it'll take the Professor to figure out what happened?"

She was grinning. As I said, she had travelled with the Doctor a lot longer than I had, but I was still amazed how easily she handled all this crazy adventuring through all of time and space. I put on a good face, but I still got the willies whenever this weird stuff started, which usually turned out to be more often than not.

I couldn't help but smile back at her. She really was very pretty.

"What're we betting?" I asked. I didn't mean anything by the question. I was thinking along the lines of cleaning the other's room or making a special meal. But I could see by the quick glint in Ace's eyes that her first thoughts turned to something completely different. It was an unbelievably sexy look. It passed quickly though.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "We'll figure it out later. I say the Professor'll have us back in the TARDIS within the hour, on our way to face the Daleks like nothing ever happened."

"Hmmm," I thought. I really didn't see how the Doctor could get us out of this, but he had a knack of constantly doing the impossible. "I'll say twelve hours."

"Ye of little faith."

We both turned to face the Doctor who was now somehow empty handed. He was staring into the whiteness, but was addressing us. We didn't realize he was listening, or that he had come so close to us. Finally he turned to us, a smile on his face.

"It just so happens that I have solved our little dilemma."

"Really?" Ace asked.

"What's going on?" I added.

The Doctor looked as if he was going to speak, and then placed a finger to his chin, thinking. "I'll explain later," he said. "In the mean time, I'll need complete silence. We're in a null void. A place out-of-time. I'm still not sure who created it or why, but I think I should be able to close the void, allowing us to slip back into our time stream where we left it."

"The TARDIS?" I asked.

"The TARDIS," the Doctor agreed.

"Will closing the void be safe?" Ace asked, probably already guessing the answer.

"No," the Doctor said and held his hands out into the whiteness, a look of complete concentration on his face. I noticed the whiteness immediately begin to go dull around his hands, as if he was reaching *into* the white. His expression began to take on a pained look, and Ace and I started to worry about him, but when we started to move closer to see if he needed help, he warned us back with a quick shake of his head.

The whole void began to shake. Maintaining equilibrium was difficult enough as it was, but was now ridiculous as the tremors began to fill the space, seemingly coming from every direction at once. The Doctor yelled out in pain and the area where his hands were "inside" the whiteness began to change to a more reddish colour.

A wind began to pick up in the space. Ace and I struggled to maintain our balance, but quickly lost the battle. We were flung to the ground, bruising ourselves. Suddenly, a large blackness opened between us and the Doctor. The pit was the cause of the wind; it was a whirlpool of nothingness and it was attempting to suck everything inside. The Doctor's hat flew off his head and was devoured by the blackness.

I was able to get a tenuous grip on the ground, but I noticed that Ace began to slide along the whiteness towards the pit. She was yelling and using all her strength to hold herself back, but she was fighting a losing battle. Her feet were now dangling over the edge of the pit. I let go of my grip and slid along the ground until I was in front of Ace, facing her. I grabbed her wrist and held on. She reached up with her free hand and took hold of my arm as I held her there; for the time being we were immobile, but I knew I wouldn't be able to hang on forever. Soon, my grip began to slip and I could feel the two of us sliding into the darkness...

...and then we were in the console room of the TARDIS. Ace and I were lying on the ground arm in arm. We got up, slightly embarrassed.

"Ah, glad you decided to join me," the Doctor said, calmly checking over the controls of the ship. "You were out for quite a while."

The Doctor explained that he had closed the void and opened a crack for us to slip back to the TARDIS. He used a lot of technobabble which I can't really remember. I was dead tired and just wanted to go to my room and sleep.

A while later, I awoke in my room and made my way to the large bath just down the hall. The TARDIS was an amazing ship. Outside it looked like a 1960's British police telephone box; basically a 5' by 5' telephone booth. The inside however was another matter. It was huge. Even Ace said she hadn't seen every room. At the end of the hall that contained my room, there was a huge bathroom; all marble and the size of a small house. In it was a large whirlpool that I liked to relax in. I needed relaxation after that little brush with death. I took off my boxers and slipped into the hot, swirling water. I lay back and closed my eyes, enjoying the healing properties of the water.

I looked up when I heard a noise and noticed Ace enter the bathroom wearing a towel. She smiled sheepishly at me and approached the whirlpool. Without a word, she entered the pool and removed her towel when she was under the water, tossing the sopping towel onto the floor when she was underwater.

“Mind if I join you?” she asked and sighed as the waters rushed all around her.

She was sitting just across from me in the large pool. She had a look in her eyes that I hadn’t seen before; playful, hungry, sexy. She just sat there for a long time, looking at me, a slight smile on her face. I relaxed finally and smiled back at her. Without a word, she moved across the water and straddled me as I sat there. She put her arms around my head and leaned in to me, kissing me slowly. I returned her kiss. It started out softly and then she opened her mouth and her tongue was playing with mine. I could feel my cock begin to stiffen under her leg as she sat on me.

My hands began to move over her body, sliding down her back and pulling her closer to me. I kissed her neck and she raised her head, sighing as my lips tasted her skin, moving along her neck, cheeks and chin. I cupped her gorgeous ass and shifted her body slightly so that my hard cock pressed against her pussy. She moaned and began grinding against me slightly.

She lifted herself a little more out of the water and her small, pert breasts appeared above the surface. She grabbed the back of my head and pulled me to her chest. I took one of her hard nipples into my mouth and sucked on it, teasing it with my tongue. I moved from nipple to nipple, kissing her tits.

She moved away from me and giggled, biting her lip. She turned her back to me and stepped up to the rim of the whirlpool and rested her arms on the wet floor. She was standing on the last step of the pool, her legs still under water from the calf down. She bent over, offering her bottom to me. It was the greatest ass I had ever seen, perfectly shaped, her skin lightly tanned. I moved through the water and took her ass into my hands, kneading her cheeks and feeling her warm, wet skin under my touch. I leaned in and began planting kisses on her cheeks, moving to her crack and then down ever so slightly until my lips brushed against her pussy lips. She gasped as I began to tease her there, sliding my tongue into her wetness and eating her from behind. I teased her asshole with my tongue before returning my attention to her sweet pussy.

After a few minutes of oral pleasure, Ace turned around and laughed. “Holy shit, you’re good at that,” she said. We laughed and floated in each other’s arms in the pool for a while. She pushed me against the wall of the whirlpool and reached under the water. I felt her hand grip my hard cock and she began to pump it under the water. “Mmmmm,” she said. “You’ve got a nice cock. Sit on the ledge.”

I did as she asked, and she spread my legs, moving in between them. She leaned over and took my cock into her mouth. She began to slowly slide her mouth up and down my length, working it with her hand as she did so, pumping and twisting it with her fist. I stared down at Ace as she sucked my cock. She looked up at me and flicked her tongue over the swollen head of my dick.

“How does that feel?” she breathed.

“Amazing,” I said.

“Mmm-hmmmmmm,” she said and then deep-throated me. She kept me deep in her throat and bobbed her head ever so slightly on my shaft, gagging herself a little in the process. She brought me very close to orgasm before pulling off and stepping up to the ledge with me. She straddled me again and lowered herself onto me, sliding my cock into her wet pussy. It felt amazing.

She began to move up and down on my cock, using her legs to pump her body. She was moving very slowly and we kissed as she fucked me, staring into each other’s eyes. I grabbed her ass as she fucked me and my finger tips could feel my slick cock sliding in and out of her pussy.

She lifted herself off me after a while and re-entered the pool. I joined her as she again leaned against the ledge of the pool, her ass stuck out to me. I moved in behind her and slid my cock into her from behind. I looked down and watched my cock as I thrust in and out of her. I grabbed Ace’s ass and fucked her hard from behind. She was yelling with pleasure and I was grunting as I brought myself to the edge.

“I’m gonna cum, Ace,” I said.

“Yeah, cum in my mouth,” she said, and pulled off me, turning and leaning down to take me into her mouth. She pumped my cock with her hand, while she held my cock just inside her open mouth. I watched my hot cum spurt onto her tongue and into her mouth. She looked up at me as I came and then swallowed everything I had to offer.

When I finished, I pushed Ace onto her back on the ledge and dove into her pussy again with my mouth. I licked and sucked her clit and fucked her with my tongue. She had a handful of my hair and screamed with pleasure when she came hard onto my tongue. I could feel her ass shaking as she came and I continued to eat her through another two orgasms.

When we were finally spent, we floated in the whirlpool.

“Don’t get all googly-eyed on me,” Ace said after a few minutes. “This was just a tension release, right?”

“Oh, okay, right,” I said.

A few seconds passed. “Of course,” she added, smiling. “I think we’ll need some tension release pretty often with the adventures we have. C’mon, let’s get out of the water before we shrivel up.”

I found I was looking forward to our next dangerous adventure. ●

Restraint

by Mondragon

Her: What do you feel?

Him: Well, I feel your fingertips.

Her: Anything else?

Him: I'm not sure. What am I supposed to be feeling?

Her: You feel nothing but my fingertips. That's not a question, you note. I'm disappointed. I thought you had imagination.

Him: ...

Her: I'm sorry. Let me back up. Tell me, instead of what you feel, what do you see?

Him: I see you. You're sitting in front of me.

Her: And?

Him: And your legs are crossed and you look relaxed. We're in your bedroom, on your bed. You're wearing a loose-fitting light blue button shirt and shorts. I see your hands and my hands. Our fingertips are pressed together, but other than that, we're not touching anywhere.

Her: Can I tell you what I see?

Him: Please.

Her: I see you. You're sitting in front of me. Your legs are crossed. Your eyes have an intense look on them. I see you trying to figure out what we're doing. You'd rather be kissing me or touching me. I can see that. You're wearing a red t-shirt and shorts. The t-shirt fits just tightly enough that it tells me something about how your chest looks.

Him: I would rather be kissing you. Can I kiss you now?

Her: No. And don't move your hands away, either. What else do you see? You mentioned some details about my shirt. Tell me more about it.

Him: The shirt is soft fabric. I know that because I've touched it. It is not very revealing, but I still like it. It hangs comfortably on your shoulders and you look at home in it.

Her: What does it do for my breasts?

Him: It is pretty modest, but that's a good thing. It makes you seem like you and your breasts are a natural pair. No pun intended.

Her: What if I turn like this?

Him: If you turn like that, I can see a little ways down the shirt. I can see your bra strap but not the cup, and I can see the top swoop of your right breast.

Her: The swoop?

Him: Yes. The soft part of the top of your breast that falls away from your collarbone. When the whole breast is exposed, the swoop is usually ignored in favor of ... other parts, but when the swoop is all I can see, well, it makes my imagination fill in the rest.

Her: So you do have an imagination, after all.

Him: ...

Her: And what do you see if I lean forward like this?

Him: The front of your shirt has fallen away from your chest and there's a large gap between your body and your shirt. I can see down your shirt very easily. Your breasts appear to be resting very comfortably in the cups of your light beige bra.

Her: Do you know what I see when I lean forward like this?

Him: Do tell.

Her: I can see that your penis is erect. It is deforming your shorts in a way that looks pretty uncomfortable.

Him: It is erect, and I am a little uncomfortable. Would you like to help me with that?

Her: I would like to. But first: tell me what you feel.

Him: Uncomfortable? Fingertips?

Her: Let me help you. This is what I feel. Yes, I feel your fingertips. Your fingertips are pressed into my fingertips. I can tense and relax my fingers and I know that you feel that I just did that. And I feel that you just did the same. I feel your erec-

tion. No! Keep your fingers on mine. I mean that I can feel it because it's causing you some tension - some need. I feel your need. That need is translating from your fingertips into my fingertips, like sexual energy. I feel those sex-lectrons flowing from you in a pulsing flow. Many of them are focusing in my breasts. When I lean forward like this it's like creating two reservoirs of ponded energy. The pools weigh down my breasts and make them push heavily into my bra. It's like all your sexual tension and mine is in my breasts. It's pleasant, but it's like a longing for release as well. If you were to touch my nipples, it would all pour out at once, like a flood.

Him: Sex-lectrons. That's incredible. I'm starting to see what you mean. OK, let me try again. I feel your fingertips pressed into my fingertips, and I feel that the sex-lectrons are really going in both directions. Some of them are coming back to me and I feel them traveling up my arms. They seem to be moving up my neck and to be gathering in my face for some reason. It's my face more than anything right now that wants to get closer to you, to touch you. I want to lean forward and kiss the swoop of your breasts. I think if I did that, there could be an sex-lectron release of seriously huge magnitude.

Her: I think there would be, too.

Him: Can I try it? I want to experience that.

Her: I do too, but we're doing restraint, remember?

Him: Oh. Yeah. ... So can I do anything to you?

Her: Well, you can move closer, so long as no part of you touches me.

Him: Can you feel this?

Her: Yes, barely. Mmm, It's more sex-lectrons, passing through the tiny gap between our cheeks. It makes me want to press my mouth onto your cheek and taste you. I can almost taste you from here. I think it's your smell, but it feels like the taste is moving through our fingertips. It's very odd.

Him: ...

Her: And it's nice, too. Mmm, I think you need to sit back now. I'm finding my resolve weakening, and I'm not ready to stop this yet.

Him: Is this better?

Her: Yeah.

Him: ...

Her: ...

Him: I think I feel something else now.

Her: What?

Him: It's like I don't really feel your fingertips anymore. I'm starting to imagine myself doing things and I can feel them like I was actually doing them.

Her: Tell me what you're doing. I want to feel it too.

Him: OK... I imagine my fingers running down the front of your shirt. Very gently, mind you, really only brushing the fabric. I can feel the weave...

Her: I hold totally still, concentrating, barely feeling the effect of your fingertips on my shirt...

Him: I feel myself wanting to press my hands forward, wanting to make the shirt form to your breasts, wanting to finally feel their weight in my hands.

Her: My breasts ...they... I ... want you to feel them. I inhale slowly, filling out my chest, I feel my breasts push out against the fabric and against your fingertips. Like this. My nipples are very sensitive. They're full of sex-lectrons. They almost ache.

Him: It's like a charge. I can feel your breasts now, even through our fingertips. The fabric has something behind it now, giving it resistance. The resistance is soft, but heavy. I can feel my fingers pushing slightly now, learning the shape of you inside your shirt.

Her: ... I can feel it too. It's really nice. You're feeding me the feeling just by telling me about it. Keep going.

Him: I pull my hands back. They are reluctant to go. Just like I'm only barely brushing your fingertips right now. But then I put my hands on your head and wrap my fingers up in your hair. Your hair envelops my hands, enclosing them completely. I move close to you... and you can feel my breath on your mouth... like this... and you spread your lips slightly... like that... and I kiss you, and your lips are soft and just a little moist, and your eyes close... like that...

Her: And the kiss is wonderful and it makes me gasp and melt into you, and I pull my body close to yours...

Him: And you smell and taste so sexy...

Her: ...

Him: Do you want to know what I'm doing now?

Her: Of course.

Him: Well, I've taken my hands out of your hair. I've sat back a bit, like this, so I can see you better. Then I begin to unbutton your shirt. I start with the top one. I'm taking my time - there's no hurry. That's one. That's the next one. Your shirt begins to open up--

Her: I can feel cool air across my chest.

Him: --that's the third one. I admire your breasts, but I'm not touching them. I'm still not hurrying. That's the last one. Without touching you, I push the shirt open so that it rests relaxed on either side of your breasts.

Her: I push my breasts toward you. It's a reaction, involuntary. They simply want you to touch them. They're dying for your touch.

Him: This is about restraint, right? I'm not touching them yet. Instead, I run my hands up inside the hems of your shirt to

your shoulders. My fingertips brush your shoulders.

Her: I shrug, like this and—

Him: -and your shirt falls off you.

Her: Right. I reach up and take your hands. I can't not do it. I bring your hands down and place them on my breasts. Oh my... That is incredible.

Him: Is your restraint weakening? Are you ready go for real yet?

Her: Just a little longer...I think I can hold out. You?

Him: It's hard. But okay. A little longer.

Her: I feel your fingertips. Your fingertips are pressed into my fingertips. But I can still feel them on my breasts. They're gently caressing them, through my bra. The feeling is electric--

Him: Sex-lectric.

Her: --sex-lectric. Do you still feel your sex-lectricity pooled in your face?

Him: Yes...

Her: I move my hands to your face. While you touch my breasts, I run my fingertips over your lips—

Him: I open my mouth just a little—

Her: --and your lips are soft, but masculine, and I let my fingertips find their way just a bit into your mouth and I feel your tongue getting to know them, pushing back, and I can feel how much this makes you want me.

Him: And I love the taste of your fingers. They're a little spicy and a little sweet. And I want you.

Her: And I want you too. I move my hands down your neck to your chest and down your sides. I grab your t-shirt and pull it up. I pull it over your head. When I do, your hands come off my breasts, but that's okay. I know they'll be back. I admire your chest, and I put my hands on it and feel your skin.

Him: Your touch sends a jolt through me and I feel briefly winded. But I recover. I reach behind you and undo the clasp of your bra, then pull the straps forward. I keep pulling. The bra falls off your breasts and drapes over your arms—

Her: —I let it drop—

Him: —and I look at your breasts. They're breathtaking. I cannot tear my eyes away. My mouth begins to water.

Her: Will you suck them? They love to be sucked.

Him: I gently guide you onto your back—

Her: —I relax and look at you—

Him: — I lay down next to you. I move my mouth to your breast...I touch your nipple with my tongue...

Her: Oh, God...

Him: Mm, I feel a surge of sex-lectrons. I ... I think I can't restrain myself anymore...

Her: Me neither. Shall we...?

Him: ...Get on with it?

Her: Yes, please.

Him: Ok. Breaking fingertips' touch — now.

Her: ...

Him: ... ●

Lament

by Christopher Cole

Editor's Note: This story contains graphic violence. If you are offended by this type of material, please do not read this story.

"What's your pleasure, sir?"

London barely registered the tiny Asian merchant. His hands shook slightly as he held the cube in his hand. Its metal plating felt surprisingly cool to the touch even with the excruciating heat and humidity of the late afternoon. His gaze fixed upon the puzzle box, studying the tiny runes carved painstakingly onto its surface.

He reached into a pocket and handed the merchant a wad of bills. He didn't count the total; he didn't care.

He didn't remember returning to the hotel, but he soon found himself sitting on the floor of his room. The flies buzzed around his head. His hair was matted with sweat. A hot breeze blew in through the open window. The sun was nearly spent, and its last rays created strange shadows in the corner of the room.

He held the puzzle box in his hand. He knew... he knew at last he had found that which would sate his appetite. He ran his dirty fingers over the six sides of the box, searching for a way to solve the puzzle; looking for a way to open the configuration.

There was a click and the box became hot in his hands. Still he held it. The sides of the puzzle box began to shift and move of its own accord. A piece lifted and twisted before moving to a new location. Small sections moved and turned and changed their positions, turning the box into a twisted ziggurat.

London was aware of a change in the air. The walls of the room began to creak. The sun finally gave up its fight to the night. Yet, a strange blue light remained. It seeped through the floorboards and the cracks in the walls. London could hear the tinkling of chains and the murmurs of something unnatural.

He finally tore his gaze from the box and as he began to look around the room, his head exploded with a searing pain. He was pulled from the floor and lifted from the ground. He could feel something digging into the back of his skull, and he felt something hot and wet pouring down his back. His toes brushed against the floor as he swayed slightly in the air. The room was now filled with chains of various sizes dangling from the ceiling. Chains covered with hooks and blades and pieces of flesh. He noticed shadows moving at the corners of his vision and knew he wasn't alone. The pain was delicious.

The shadows moved closer.

"Ahhh," a deep, melodious voice said in his ear. "Such sweet sorrow..."

London sat up in bed with a yell. Sweat covered his naked body and he shivered when the cool night air passed over him. He twisted his head this way and that, looking into the shadows of the room; looking for his tormentors.

"What's the matter, baby?" the girl asked beside him.

When he finally realized he had simply awoken from a dream, he looked at the girl. She was also naked, lying next to him, half-covered with the thin sheet. The wind blew the curtains of the window, but now the breeze felt refreshing, fully chasing away the remnants of the nightmare.

"Nothing," he said.

"Oh, not nothing," the girl said, looking down at his manhood.

London remembered the nightmare, remembered the gorgeous feeling of pain he had endured. Remembered the horror and felt his cock get even harder. The girl had taken it into her hand and was stroking it now. London sighed and lay back on his pillow and she began to pump his cock with her hand. She slid down the bed and positioned herself above his lower body and he gasped when he felt her take him into her mouth. She was an expert, there was no denying it. She worked his erect penis with her hands and mouth and tongue and swiftly and easily brought him to the edge. He tilted his head to look down at her so he could watch as he exploded into her mouth. She looked up at him as she jacked his cock, rubbing the swollen head against her tongue as she licked him. He grunted and his hot load spurted out of his cock onto her wet, waiting tongue.

"Yeah, yeah," she moaned as he came inside her mouth. Spent, he fell back again onto the bed and she licked and sucked him clean.

A while later, he sat on the armchair in the room staring at the bed. The bed was soaked with blood and bits of flesh. He was naked, and his body was also covered in blood. His right hand still clutched the bloody hunting knife. He stared without blinking, lost in his post-rage. She hadn't put up much of a fight. She just laid there, a look of total surprise on her face when he had begun to kill her. It barely gave him pleasure.

The more he killed, the more he had to kill. But the more he killed, the less satisfied he was. It was the same with sex. He had to have more. He had to find more.

He absentmindedly swatted a fly away from his face.

He awoke. Pain was still there, but it was fleeting, numb. He blinked sweat and blood from his eyes and found that he was still swaying off the ground. His arms and legs were spread out, hooks through each, pulling him as if being drawn and quartered.

The figure was there before him and he recognized it at last. He was right. He had opened a gateway to hell and one of the Masters of Hell stood before him; a Cenobite. Its human form was covered with a bloodied leather gown and numerous body piercings. Its bald, pale white head was criss-crossed with nails, driven into its face and scalp; a perfect symmetry.

"At last, awoken," the Cenobite said. London sensed others nearby but he could not turn his head. He could hear a strange chattering and the sound of the swaying chains.

The Cenobite bent and lifted something off the ground. He held it up before London's eyes. It was a chunk of flesh. It was so mangled, London barely recognized it, but when he did, he screamed.

"A pound of flesh," the Cenobite said.

London was slamming her hard from behind. The girl was bent over another and was lapping away at her pussy as he fucked her. The third girl was behind him, kissing his neck and shoulders, her hands rubbing his chest.

He slowed his pace and watched his cock, glistening with her juices, slowly slide in and out of her wet pussy. He was fully aroused, yet his mind kept wandering. Normally he was fine until he came, and then his focus would shift, usually to darker matters. Now however, it was almost as if he was not actually taking part in the proceedings.

He pulled out and stood there while the girls knelt in from of him and took turns sucking and licking his cock. He tried to focus on the action, but the strangest images would appear in his mind's eye...

A dark alley, complete with the stench of horses and decay. The buildings were old, yet new. A mist clung to the air. His vision was blurry, but he could see a woman leading him further into the dark alleyway. The nearby street sign read "Berner". He didn't recognize the surroundings. He held a rose in his hand.

His thoughts came back to the room. He was sitting in a chair and one of the girls was sucking his cock while the others played with each other on the bed. He felt drunk. His unfocussed eyes looked on as the girls pleased themselves. He was aware of the third girls' mouth expertly working his cock, but he felt out of time...

He was standing over the woman, a long knife in his hand. Her life blood slowly poured from the gash in her neck, pooling on the rough street. He saw a shadow and felt his heart beat faster until he realized it was his own; dark and ominous.

His mind finally focussed completely as he came. He shot his load over the waiting faces of the girls, and tried desperately to cling to that moment of clarity. That moment when he was actually content and just possibly, happy. But like always, the happiness died with the end of the Little Death. And it was then that he knew again the girls would not see another morning. He would find himself sitting amongst their dismembered bodies, staring blankly at the walls; emotionless.

Anger boiled up within him. *Why can't I be satisfied?* He wondered. *There must be more out there. I must find it. I must have it!*

He came to again, still hanging above the ground. The pain had returned, but it was just barely recognizable. It was almost pleasure. The Cenobite was still standing before him, staring at him with those black eyes. He could hear the others now, though he still could not see them.

"Why do you hesitate?" a somewhat feminine voice asked. "He is useless now."

The Lead Cenobite turned his head slightly to address the other. "No. His amnesia is to be expected. He is close now."

The hellish lieutenant fixed his gaze back onto London.

"You can't hurt me any more," London spat. "I'll wake up again soon as usual, and this will be but a shadowy memory."

The Cenobite laughed, and it was the most frightening sound London had ever heard in his life. It reminded him of something but he couldn't quite place it. The creature's laugh stopped abruptly. He moved in so close to London's face that the nails in the monster's face pushed against his skin.

"You still do not comprehend," it said. "What you wake to is the dream. This is your reality!"

London's mind broke as the realization dawned on him. Images of the murders committed at his hands came back to him in a flood as the memory dam broke. His quest to sate his desires had led him to seek out supernatural means of release. Had led him to the Lament Configuration.

"We had searched for you for a very long time," the Cenobite breathed. "You are such a special soul. You die and are born again. You kill and kill again. You are the very blade of Leviathan..."

London's mind reeled. He saw himself in different time periods. Always the same, though. Killing... killing... unsated. He remembered it all, and he realized he now had what he had searched for for so long. Using the last of his strength, he lifted his head and looked into the eyes of his savior through his sweat and blood soaked hair. He smiled.

"Ah," the Cenobite smiled. "Welcome home, Ripper."

He entered the small back room of the Opium House. He spotted the merchant sitting at a table. He removed his top hat and placed it upon the table before taking a seat across from the little man. He placed his gloved hands flat upon the surface of the table and smiled at the Asian. The little merchant looked up at him.

"What's your pleasure, sir?" ●

Hello, wayward reader! You've stumbled into a dark realm of laziness, subversion and self-indulgence. Yes, it's yet another month of *How NOT to Write AIF*, the ongoing chronicle of my struggle as a first-time (and last-time) AIF author.

The game in question is *How I Got Syphilis*, and it's currently an ADRIFT file so large, so ridiculously monolithic, that it blots out the sun... which explains my pasty skin and stunted growth.

I'm Bitterfrost. Take a good, long look. If ever there was someone who shouldn't attempt a project like this, it's me. For one, I have the tiniest allotment of free-time known to man. For two, I do everything the hard way. I mean, why go in a straight line when a parabola will get you there in style? What can I say? It's the way I'm wired.



While I wryly call this column *How NOT to Write AIF* and fully admit I'm wandering a crooked path, I take a certain pride in my contrary ways. Sure, if I'd been smart about all this, I would've done several games over several years instead of pouring everything I've got into one big AIF. It's a bear to manage all of the content, especially in ADRIFT. However, by stuffing it to the rafters, I like to think it's taking on a lot of character and that it will make for a unique AIF experience.

Despite another free-time drought, I actually made some progress this month. Most of that progress was philosophical, but I did a good share of writing as well. I'm happy with the first section of the game and excited about the ending. It's the part in between that I'm struggling with. I've never been good with "middle bits" in just about any circumstance.

I've been working on dialogue and some schtick that will keep the gameplay fresh in the middle of the story. Not too bad considering the tiny island of free-time this month.

I'm pleased with how this is coming together. The benefit of being in the middle is that I can still change my mind about some things. I was winging it at the beginning, but I feel like I know where I'm going with this game now. I made some tough editing decisions this month, but I feel like the game is finally starting to tighten up.

For those of you keeping track of such things, *HIGS* isn't a multimedia thing. At the very beginning of this project, I almost made a game with photos, but I quickly changed my mind. For me, the game had to be about the writing. I didn't want photos to distract the player and blunt the words.

I might not blow players away with technical advances and complex constructs, but I'm packing this game with all manner of details and diversions. Even here at the midway point, I've lost track of bits and extras I added ages ago. I did a little testing this month and found myself laughing at things I'd completely forgotten I'd written. And I'm supposed to be in charge of this thing! It's taking on a life of its own, and I couldn't be happier about it. It might not be the best AIF ever, but I guarantee you'll really have to work hard to run out of things to do in it.

Besides *HIGS*, I've had fun this month writing impromptu AIF bits and little asides that I might incorporate into my game. Or not. Yeah, I know I need to focus on my game if it's ever going to see the light of day, but large chunks of time were hard to come by this month.

HIGS is like a NASA project: painstaking, demanding, dangerous and ultimately of interest to maybe three people.

Live AIF is like setting off rockets in the backyard. Immediate. Uncomplicated. Fun. And there's the added benefit of getting my creative fluids circulating, which ultimately benefits *HIGS*... you know, in a roundabout way.

Also this month, I seriously considered porting my game from ADRIFT to TADS. I mean I really thought long and hard about it.

ADRIFT won this round by a hair... well, two hairs. For one, it would mean stopping everything and losing momentum while I spend months copying, pasting and coding. Secondly, there's a language barrier. TADS baffled me way back when I started this project. I see the sense in it, but I just can't wrap my head around the coding. I think it's my determination to do things the hard way that's causing the resistance. If I'd embraced TADS, I'd probably be done by now, sipping pina coladas in the shade on some remote island.

Oh well. ADRIFT can be a bear to work with once you've really loaded up on locations, events and tasks. However, it will get you where you want to go if you're patient with it. I've learned its quirks and feel halfway comfortable that I can get it to do what I want, even if that means resorting to trickery or convoluted methods that would stymie Rube Goldberg. It's working, so I'm not going to mess with it.

Even though my ADRIFT file is already massive and confusing, it makes a certain amount of sense to me. I know. It's like giving up a nice, tidy organizer for a familiar junk drawer, but that's me in a nutshell. If this ADRIFT file finally reaches critical mass and implodes, then I'll give in and switch over to TADS. And, yes, you'll all be welcome to say, "I told you so!" •

OPTIONS: At the end of this story each month, you will be given a number of options. Choose the option that you like and vote in the poll at the Yahoo AIF Archive. The option that gets the most votes will determine how the story continues in next month's newsletter.

NOTE: You can read background information and other tidbits about this story here: <http://ccole.aftermath.cx/theah.htm>.

Magnus yelled out as he came. He held his cock deep inside the mysterious woman and felt it throb as he emptied himself inside her pussy. When he finished, the woman turned and kissed him again. He felt strange and watched with a sort of detachment as she threw her hand over his head, sprinkling some sort of glittering dust in the air. The dust fell onto his face, and he immediately gained clarity. He found himself fully erect again and extremely aroused.

The woman smiled at him and he turned as he heard some splashing sounds from the pool. He saw two more of the magically alluring women exit the pool. They too were naked, with beads and tattoos adorning their bodies. One had extremely short blonde hair, slicked back, with small, firm breasts. The other was a long-haired brunette with breasts larger than the woman he was just with. They moved up to him and all three began to slide their hands over him and each other.

The first woman he was with began to kiss and caress the brunette, their hands cupping each other's breasts and sliding down to find the wetness between their legs. The short-haired blonde knelt in front of Magnus and took his stiff cock into her mouth, slowly moving up and down his length as he watched the other two lie onto the warm, wet rocks. The brunette moved between the legs of the first woman and began lightly kissing and teasing her pussy. Her legs opened and the girl lapped away at the other's wet lips and clit.

The blonde stood and led Magnus over to the other two. She guided him down so his head was underneath the brunette as she was on all fours, eating the other's pussy. She lowered her bottom onto Magnus' face and he tasted her sweet juices. He felt the blonde lower herself onto his rod and began to ride him as he licked and sucked the brunette's pussy and ass. She came onto his face, covering his tongue and lips with her sweet tasting juices. Then she rose and changed places with the blonde. The blonde moved over and straddled the curly-haired beauty's face, spreading her pussy with her fingers, letting the other girl lick and kiss her clit.

The brunette lowered herself onto Magnus' cock and began riding him fast and hard, her large, soft breasts bouncing up and down against her body. Magnus reached up and grasped her large tits, squeezing them and pinching her nipples.

The brunette got off Magnus and moved down his body until his slick cock was between her pendulous breasts. She squeezed them together and began to move them up and down his length; a little awkwardly in the position she was in, but still enough to feel amazing.



The other two seemed finished with each other for now and the group came together in an orgy of kissing, licking and touching.

WHAT SHOULD MAGNUS DO?

- 1) Fuck the blonde?
- 2) Fuck the brunette?
- 3) Fuck the curly haired one?
- 4) Get them all to suck his cock?
- 5) Masturbate while the three girls play with each other?
- 6) Get the brunette and the curly haired one to suck his cock while the blonde masturbates?
- 7) Fuck all three at once?
- 8) Eat them all out?
- 9) Play with all their breasts?
- 10) Dive into the pool?

Each month we will revisit a game we've all played before and select a couple of blocks of text that we feel really emphasize what is great about that game. Generally, these will be excerpts from sex scenes, but if we decide that a non-sex moment is particularly funny or vibrant, we will present that as well.

This month's selection is from a genuine classic: *Ideal New England Prep School* by NewKid. This is a compilation of two scenes featuring Laura, the best athlete in the school. The first part contains the first time we meet her in the woods and the second is the last time we meet her. Enjoy.



>n

Secret glen

You are in a small, quiet glen. It is surrounded by bushes, concealing it from view. There are barely visible gaps to the south and the east. The ground is covered with soft grass.

>z

Time passes...

Laura comes running along from the south, in front of the pack. Laura stops dead when she sees you. You raise an eyebrow, noting that shortcuts are not quite legal.

"Shit!" says Laura. "Ok, Ninny, you caught me. What can I say, I'm a sprinter, not a distance runner. Shit...." She looks at you again and says, "So what's it going to take for you to keep quiet about this?"

>x laura

Laura Farewell is the best looking female jock in school. She is a star cross-country runner, and she also plays basketball and runs track in the winter and spring. She is tall, over six feet, with long, lean legs. She wears her long sun-bleached hair straight, and it reaches well down her back.

Laura does not have the biggest breasts around, but they are plenty firm. She wears her uniform shirt much tighter than most, which shows off what she has to the best advantage. She wears a pair of running shorts which are at least two sizes too small. This leaves them drawn tight across her athletic ass, and they ride so high that they expose every inch of her magnificent long legs, and maybe a bit more....

>kiss laura

You reach up to Laura's neck, and pull her head down. You place your lips on hers and kiss her gently. She starts to pull away, then relents. As the kiss progresses, her resistance fades away. "OK, so I guess we are even," says Laura. "But I guess I'll hang around until the rest of the racers come along, so I can slip back into the race and sprint for the win."

[Later in the game, similar setting:]

>z

Time passes...

Laura comes running along from the south, in front of the pack. Laura actually smiles when she sees you this time. "You know, I was just getting to like this little break in the middle of my races. Too bad this is the last race of the season."

She smiles a brilliant smile, her chest heaving from her exertion. "So, how do I 'buy' your silence today?"

>Laura, suck me

"Mmmmm, the things I do to help us win meets...." murmurs Laura. She pushes you back against a tree, and presses herself against you, her hardened nipples pushing through her shirt and yours to tickle your chest. She slowly slides down your body, until she kneels between your legs.

Laura pulls your khakis open and pulls them down to expose your eager cock. "Pretty, pretty," coos Laura, as she strokes and explores your cock with her fingers. Finally, she leans over and kisses the head, then licks it until it drips with saliva. She takes it into her mouth and begins to suck at it hard. She does not take it very deep, due to her still heavy breathing from the race, but she massages the base with her hands in quite delightful fashion.

As Laura works, you lean back hard against the tree, and its bark digs into your back. Somewhere off in the distance, you hear the cries of spectators cheering on the racers. Laura is spurred on by the time, and doubles her efforts. Soon you cannot sense anything other than the soft, wet flesh of her lips and tongue, and your impending release.

With a groan, you come deep in Laura's mouth. She clamps her lips down and sucks hard, swallowing your jism as it comes. She jacks harder at the base of your shaft with her hands, adding an additional and final spasm to your orgasm. She licks her lips and says, "A yummy protein drink. Just the thing for a mid-race pickmeup!" She tucks your shiny clean dick back into your pants and zips you up very carefully, as if caring for a valuable piece of crystal. Finally, Laura stands and kisses you deeply.

"I'll owe you anytime, lover," she breathes. Laura adds, "Look, the season is over, but if you decide I need to continue to buy your silence, come by my dorm room, if you can, and I'll make more payment...." she smiles. ●

Just for my own amusement, over the past few weeks I've been playing around with designing a browser-based Choose-Your-Own-Adventure (CYOA) system. For those of you who are unfamiliar with the CYOA concept, it is a story presented to you in sections, with a choice (or multiple choices) at the end of each section. Making a choice will direct you to a new section to relay how the story proceeds. There have been a few AIF games written in this style, the most recent being the four-part series written by David Whyld: *Choices*, *Options*, *Decisions* and *Consequences*. Of course, there is nothing wrong with using ADRIFT, TADS, Inform, or any of the other usual IF development systems to create a CYOA. But creating one that is browser-friendly will let you host it on a website.



CYOA Development Tools

A review by A. Bomire

After working out a system of my own using CSS and Javascript, I was intrigued by a recent post at the Yahoo! AIF Archive describing two systems already created to help write CYOA without any knowledge of HTML, CSS or Javascript. (If you don't know what those things are, don't worry about it. Suffice it to say, they are used in creating web pages.) As is usual with such things, I had to try them out for myself.

The two tools referenced in the post were Tweebox and QuestML. I went to each website and downloaded the latest available versions to try them out.

Tweebox

First of all, Tweebox originally wasn't a tool for creating CYOA. Tweebox was actually written to develop wiki-pages. (Wiki - a sort of extended FAQ that is becoming very popular. The most famous of these is probably the Wikipedia, <http://www.wikipedia.org/>.) Tweebox has a couple of built-in templates for different views and styles of wiki's. However, a template was added that can be used to write online stories in the CYOA style - the Jonah template. The other two templates (oddly named TiddlyWiki 1.2 and TiddlyWiki 2.0) are for creating wiki pages and will not work for the CYOA style. In other words, if all you are doing is CYOA - ignore them. Of course, if you are like me, reading something like that means that the first template you try is going to be one of the TiddlyWiki templates. They are nice for building a wiki, but they don't work in online story telling. I played around with them a little, just long enough to realize that I wasn't really interested in them.

Using Tweebox is really pretty easy. Everything is done using a web browser. After creating a project by clicking on the "New Project" button (and naming it), you select a file (or files) containing the text of your story, using a familiar "Browse" dialog box. You provide a name for the resulting HTML document, and click on the big "Build" button to create it. Very simple and easy. Of course, there are some special codes you need to put into your story files to cause it to link and jump from section to section, and all of this is explained pretty thoroughly in the Help. I'll go over that in a minute.

First, however, one warning: using the browser to write files to your PC is considered a no-no. As such, both Internet Explorer and Firefox will pop up dialogs warning you that letting web pages (even web pages saved to your PC) write to your hard drive is a serious security risk. They let you override this security block, but be careful. Other web pages could also be allowed to make changes, which may not be what you want.

The hard part (and it isn't that hard) of using Tweebox comes from creating the files you use to contain your story. These are text files. Note: It has to be TEXT. You can write it using your favorite word processor (like Microsoft Word or OpenOffice Writer), but when you do you have to save it as a text file. This strips out any special formatting you may have used like bold or italic.

Don't despair, however, as you can format your text using the usual formatting styles of bold, italic, underscore, etc. using special tags within the text file. What is odd is that you don't use standard HTML tags for this; you use special formatting tags unique to Tweebox. For example, to make your text bold, you put it in double apostrophes: "this text would be bold". (Note: those are not double-quotes; those are two single apostrophes next to each other.) To make it italic, you surround it in double backslashes: //this is italic//. There are similar formatting codes for strike through, underscoring, highlighting, etc. It wasn't really clear to me why you use these special tags instead of the usual HTML codes. Since your story is going to be displayed as a web page, I decided to try out using the usual HTML formatting codes anyway. Sure enough, they didn't work.

You use other special formatting codes to define stuff like the story title, a subtitle, the story's author, and the various sections of the story to be displayed, and the links to display those sections. (Tweebox calls those links "Tiddlers".) The links can actually be used to link to other websites as well, which is pretty nice. So, for example, the author's name could be displayed as a link to your home page if you wanted. Sections of the story are marked by two colons (::), and links are contained within double brackets ([[]]). Here is an example of a simple story opening, with the various text formatting codes used by Tweebox:

```
:: SiteTitle
Test Story
```

```
:: SiteSubtitle
```

```
:: SiteAuthor
Me
```

```
::Start
It was a dark and stormy night. You sat in the library by the crackling fire, a worn copy of your favorite book in your hands. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.
```

```
What do you do?
[[Open the door]]
[[Ignore it]]
```

```
:: Open the door
You open the door. Shivering on your doorstep is a beautiful, yet rain-soaked, woman.
```

```
"I'm sorry to bother you," she says tentatively. "But my car broke down. Can I use your phone?"
```

```
:: Ignore it
You ignore the knocking, which gets more insistent. Finally, it ceases. You finish your book in peace and go up to bed.
```

You'll note the bones of the original wiki site construction left over in codes like "SiteTitle" and "SiteAuthor". When you press the build button, the above text produces a story that looks like this:

Test Story

by Me

Start

It was a dark and stormy night. You sat in the library by the crackling fire, a worn copy of your favorite book in your hands. Suddenly, there was a knock at the door.

What do you do?

[Open the door](#)

[Ignore it](#)

When you click on the links "Open the door" or "Ignore it", those sections of the story file are displayed. And, for simple stories, that is all you need to know.

But, what about not-so-simple stories? Well, Tweebox comes with a host of advanced features to use as well. These are called "macros", and are contained in double-arrow characters (<< >>). (Perhaps the use of these particular characters is why normal HTML formatting is not allowed.) Suppose, for example, that in our above story clicking on "Ignore it" doesn't end the story but instead prints out something like this:

"You ignore the knocking, which only gets more insistent. Finally, grumbling, you put down your book."

And from here you wish the story to proceed just as it does if you had clicked "Open the door". Well, Tweebox lets you jump right to that part of the story text directly without having to click on the link. This lets you create different story outputs that still lead you down the same path, without having to retype whole sections of text.

Another useful macro is the "choice" macro. In the above example, once you click on "Open the door", the "Ignore it" link remains active. You can go back and click on it to see that story text as well. This usually isn't what you want; you want the two choices to be mutually exclusive. Tweebox has a different tag for those types of links: <<choice "*choice text*">>.

There is also the "action" macro, which lets you perform a single action without changing the story or linking to a different section. For example, you can examine an item (which prints the description).

Along with these macros, you can set variables and use IF-ELSE condition checking. You can also get fairly complicated and write your own macros, or choose from a host of macros pre-written and available from the Tweebox website. Enough features? Well, in the upper corner there is a menu which contains a link to "Restart story". You can also modify this menu to contain any useful menu items you wish. For example, suppose your story spans multiple volumes (such as David Whyld's four-part series). You could put links to other parts of the series in the menu at the top if you wished.

This may seem like a lot to remember, but there is a very helpful HELP document that is included, which walks you step by step through creating your first CYOA story, and goes over all of the advanced features.

Okay, that's all of the stuff I like about Tweebox. What about the stuff I don't like? Well, for one, it stores all of the information about your project as a cookie in your browser's cookie folder. If you, like me, regularly clean out this folder, then all of the information about your project will be cleaned out as well. It's fairly simple to rebuild it again, especially since all of your story text is contained within external files, but it can be annoying having to re-setup your project again and again every time you edit it.

Another thing that some people may not like is that some of the features don't work well in some browsers. What I mean is that periodically in the documentation it mentions that this or that feature doesn't work as described when used in a browser such as Opera (in fact, it specifically mentions Opera). This probably means that those features won't work in other browsers as well. Mostly these are the more advanced features, so simple stories like the one above shouldn't have any problems.

As for using it in Internet Explorer and Firefox, I noticed a difference both in the look and action of the system. It was obviously written for use in Firefox, and then retrofitted for Internet Explorer (an odd way of doing things as it is usually the reverse). I first did everything in Firefox, which is my preferred browser. Then I went back and did the same thing in Internet Explorer. Some parts of the help document were missing or blank and the options to allow Internet Explorer to write files to the hard disk were a little harder to track down. This latter part isn't a problem with Tweebox, but I wanted to point it out anyway. If you were going to use this system to develop your CYOA story, I would recommend using Firefox as it seemed to operate more smoothly.

How well does it work? Well, after reading over the help and playing around with a few of the macros, I went to one of the online CYOA sites, specifically CHYOO. There I picked a story at random (picking a short story, only going 5 or so levels deep). In just a few minutes, I had duplicated this story in Tweebox. Of course, this is not your usual writing experience, as I was able to cut and paste the text and only had to worry about creating the various links. But it was easy to do.

For more information, and to download the Tweebox system, check out the home page at:
<http://gimcrackd.com/etc/src/#Twee>.

QuestML

After the relative ease-of-use of Tweebox, I then downloaded QuestML. The first thing I noticed is a difference in size. Tweebox is very small: less than 400K. QuestML is much larger, being over 7MB. Tweebox is a set of HTML files that you open within a browser. QuestML is an actual application that you install on your computer. It appears to be for Windows only, but you may be able to get it to run on Linux using WINE. Mac users are probably out of luck. This 7MB includes the QML editor, which is used to create QuestML files. If you want to create your files using a standard text editor, you can download the much smaller QML2 package, which is just under 700K. I decided to go for the full experience, and downloaded the editor.

Installing QuestML brought up something that made me take notice. A dialog box pops up saying that the InstallShield program used to create the QuestML setup program was the unregistered evaluation copy. If you, as an individual, want to download evaluation software and use it without paying for it, that is your decision. I'll let the courts decide what is right and wrong about it. But, you probably don't want to release something to the world at large advertising that you may be stealing software – which is exactly what this dialog box means. That issue, however, has nothing to do with the quality of the QuestML application, which is really what I am supposed to be discussing.

Reading over the QuestML documentation, you find you don't need to use the included QML-Edit application to create CYOA stories. You can write them using any text editor, just the same as Tweebox. QuestML uses XML (an eXtended HTML set of tags used in application development). You simply write your text file using the QuestML tags, and include the supporting files which you can get in the QML2 package I mentioned earlier. Again, I decided not to do it this way, and use the free QML-Edit application.

I opened QML-Edit and was immediately presented with a new project. The interface is very similar to other point-and-click development systems I've used such as ADRIFT and RAGS. Down the left side of the page is a list of "stations", which is QuestML's name for story sections. The right side of the page has a large window at the top for the story text, with a list of links below it. It even helpfully prompts you by putting "Enter your text here" in the large window. Along the bottom are three tabs labeled: Editor, Source and Preview. Clicking on them in turn reveals that the Editor is the page I am currently on, letting me use the point-and-click interface to enter my story elements. The Source page reveals the actual XML code that is created by the editor. The Preview tab shows me what my text will look like when it is actually opened in a web browser. I like these features – it lets me use the QML-Edit program to point-and-click my way along until I am more familiar with the XML tags, showing me what they are so that later I can skip the editor all together if I wish. And I can immediately see what my results will be.

Once I add other stations (i.e., sections) into the editor, I can then create links to them using the drop down lists at the bottom. Unlike Tweebox, I can give a textual description of the link without having it also be the name of the link as well. For example, I can create a station called "Part2" and then the link text can read "Jump to the second part of the story". The drop down list of stations includes all of the stations I have created thus far, plus two others: start and back. Start takes me back to the start of the story, and back takes me back to the previous "page". It is nice having these automatically listed.

Along with the editor, there are a host of menu options available. These menu options let you set things like the title of the story, the author's name, the background color, the default font, the link font and color, the background image, etc. Basically, all of the usual things you can set in an HTML document using Cascading Style Sheets (CSS). A couple of the options were unclear from their name and not clearly documented, such as the "References" option for the current station and the "Analyze" option for the project. Clicking on these brought up Internet Explorer with a "Page not found" error, so I still don't know what they do. Worse, I got the same result when clicking on the "View Help" menu option. There is a separate included Help document, but still this missing link was annoying.

When I finished, I closed and saved my project. You *have* to save your project in the QuestML directory – if you try to save it any place else it will not let you. It saves the file as an HTML document which I then opened in Internet Explorer (more on that later), and it worked just fine. Unlike Tweebox, which displays your story in an ever expanding single window, QuestML clears the "screen" with each change in station. Thus, only the current active station is on screen at a time. It's a style choice that some will like, and others will not.

Okay, that's for a relatively simple story. What about more complicated stuff? Well, QuestML will let you do the same sort of things that Tweebox will do – such as set variables, test them with IF-ELSE conditions, include other sections, etc. It also has a host of other features not available in Tweebox such as including images and music, getting player input (such as his/her name), and using different choice options like using an image as an image map. For example, you can present an image of a

house, and clicking on the bedroom window will bring you to the part of the story describing what you see inside – or a picture of the bedroom if that is what you want. These advanced options aren't immediately apparent as they don't become available unless you are on the Source tab. Again, I didn't find this documented anywhere. It just became apparent as I played around with the interface.

After finding out that I had to save my document in a specific place, I decided to copy it to another folder and try opening it. It didn't work. Or, I should say that it opened and displayed a blank page. I opened the document in a text editor, and saw all kinds of HTML codes linking in scripts and CSS files. These additional files are in folders in the QuestML install directory, and will have to be included when you distribute your finished CYOA story. In order to create a "stand alone" project that can be uploaded to a web page, you need to "Export" your project. This will create the needed HTML document and all supporting files in a folder whose name you provide. Or, I should say, it *should* create the needed HTML document and all supporting files. When I tried it, I received an ActiveX error and the application shut down. Not very friendly at all!

What is also not very friendly is that the QuestML files are only usable in Internet Explorer. When I tried to open my test project in Firefox, all I saw was a blank page. This is probably because of the extensive use of VBscript by QuestML documents, which Firefox doesn't support. Other browsers (such as Opera) may support VBscript, but I'm not sure. I don't use those browsers, so I was unable to test it.

After my experience in creating the simple test story, I decided to skip trying to implement the CHYOO story as I did in Tweebox. Cutting-and-pasting the text and creating the links would be simple. Exporting and viewing would not.

For more information, and to download the QuestML system, check out the home page at <http://www.questml.com>.

What are my final thoughts? Well, despite having a superior application for creating CYOA stories, as well as many more options, QuestML really disappointed me in its actual use. The QML-Edit application is clearly not ready for use yet. The online tutorial goes over manually editing and creating stories by including the XML tags, which I'm sure works just fine given all of the sample stories available on the site. But, that is much too complicated for just a simple CYOA story such as most users will probably want to create. If you want the bells and whistles of including images and sounds in your stories, then go ahead and learn QuestML's XML tags.

Even though Tweebox's text-editing method isn't as easy to use as the point-and-click interface of the QML-Edit package, it has the distinct advantage of actually being something that works. If I were going to use a package to create a CYOA story, Tweebox would be it. ●

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