inside erin

THE AIF COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Contents

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 think we ended up with a good batch of games this year, and I don't know that we have ever ended up with a more varied set before. For instance, we had 3 game by new authors, 3 games with female PCs, 3 games with multimedia, 2 space-themed games, 2 fanfic games, and a partridge in a pear tree.

A Letter From the Editor   Purple Dragon

As far as themes go we have them running from as innocent as relating a night's adventure to a friend or trolling the bar for chicks on one side. To Nazism, kidnapping, and murder in the cold depths of space on the other. And it's not just the games themselves that are varied, but even the authoring systems used to create them. Two were written in TADS, two in Inform, and three in ADRIFT.

Since I ended up beta testing several of the games this year I didn't feel like actually writing reviews on them. However, I did have a few thoughts about each of them that I wanted to relate.

Ashley's Story by Rip_CPU is a choose your own adventure type game. Let's get it out of the way right now that the game is way too short. This is certainly the main flaw with the game (if you can even call it that) and I think a lot more could have been done with the space to do it. However, what is here is very good. Having the game be a retelling of something that happened previously is an interesting idea, and one that works very well. The writing is good, and even in so small a space, the author has managed to put enough detail in to develop distinct characters out of the PC, and especially Ashley. This is a game that I would love to see expanded and rereleased, and I would certainly enjoy playing it again.

Buffy: Before the Date by Archer is a game that I actually ended up liking in spite of myself. I am not really a Buffy fan. My whole experience is limited to the original movie and about 2 episodes that I've seen all the way through. Since I'm not a fan of the show, I kind of wondered if I would be able to get into the game, but as it turns out, it wasn't much of a problem.

I really liked the mechanics of the game. There are probably around a dozen or so 'puzzles' that the player can solve, although it is not necessary, or in some cases even possible, to solve them all in the same play through. The puzzles you do solve affect how the sex scene at the end of the game (if any) will go. I like games where things you do at the beginning have an effect on events later on, and this certainly qualifies. This system also adds a lot of replay value to the game since you have to play it at least three times to see most of the content.

All this makes for a fairly ambitious game, especially for a first time author. As a result, although this is certainly better than a lot of first time games out there (my own to name one), it could have used quite a bit more testing to iron out some of the wrinkles. There were missing objects, missing descriptions, commands that work some places but not others, and more than a few typos and spelling mistakes. None of them by themselves (with one or two exceptions) amount to much, but all together they add up to a big distraction from what was essentially a very good game.

Last Horizon is another solid game from the force of nature called GoblinBoy. Although it wasn't perfect, and suffered a bit from the restrictions placed on it by the comp, it was a very good game, and I liked it very much. There was a lot of discussion over at the Yahoo group about things that people wanted to see changed or added to the game. Most of the comments boiled down to people wanting more sex or more pictures (or both), but some delved into the actual plot of the game. I would like to throw my hat into the small group of people who liked the game as is.

If GoblinBoy is planning on releasing a new version of the game, and I don't at all think that it's crucial to do so in this case, then I hope that the basics stay largely the same. Most of the changes that I would make would be expansions on the existing theme. Things like being able to search the suspect's rooms have already been mentioned and would certainly be welcomed in a version that wasn't limited by comp rules. I won't go into all the here's and there's that I would change, but the point is that I think the game is large just fine as it stands. It's a good story, and I'm afraid that if too many changes are made in an attempt to make it better, it might end up having just the opposite effect.

In *The Princess and the Dragon* by Rogue AI you play a private contractor hired to recover the kidnapped daughter of a very rich (we won't speculate on where he gets his money) man. I was excited at the beginning of this game as it described by character, equipment, and goals. I was looking forward to getting in there, using all my cool toys, and wreaking a little havoc on the bad guys. Well, havoc was wreaked, but not as much, and not in quite the way I would have liked. It would have been nice to be able to make fuller use of my gadgets and skills. I would have liked to be able to take out the guards (without alerting everyone in the house) or maybe sneak in and disable Dragon without having to resort to a fire fight. I think there are a lot more things that could have been put in, but then again this was a mini-comp game, and it was still pretty cool as it stood.

After the rescue you return with the girl to the hotel room and the fun really starts. This is one of the most completely implemented conversations that I can remember seeing for a long time. Sofia has multiple responses to many different conversational topics, and through talking to her you get a pretty good idea of what is going on, both with the Dragon and his gang, as well as the situation at home. After you make your choice at the end of the game, the sex scene starts up as she either tries to convince you not to return her to her home, or thanks you for not doing so. The sex scene is well written and hot although I did get a few odd responses at times. Still, no real complaints there, and over all a very nice game.

Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action by Begferdeth is obviously a sequel to last year's comp entry, Redskirt. I want to like these games, I really do. I am very much a fan of the classic trek episodes, and the author does a pretty good job of capturing, and twisting some of the things that made the show good. I like his sense of humor, and am right there with him as he sets up the scenario and explains what is going on. Unfortunately, the game loses something along the way as poor implementation and testing allow all the flaws to bubble to the surface.

I know that one reason for this is the deadline on the comp. As time runs out things get overlooked or just abandoned all together, and testing either gets thrown out the window or rushed through. I hope the author takes this to heart and sweats the details a bit more next time, because if so, I think we'd be looking at a mighty good game.

SS Whore by Blue Satyr casts the player in the part of a beautiful American spy sent to infiltrate the Nazi party during WWII. Not exactly a happy-go-lucky theme for a game, and I was afraid that the nature of the game might be a bit much for my delicate sensibilities – Hey, stop laughing at me. Anyway, as it turns out I was able to get into it just fine. Actually, I ended up really liking the game. The writing is really good, the puzzles make sense, and the characters come alive very nicely. I was even able to buy into the whole, "The Nazis are making an army of busty, drop-dead gorgeous sex slaves to enslave the world" thing because, well, they're Nazis and most of the things they did were evil and didn't make a lot of sense.

The sex, although maybe a bit harsh for my normal tastes, was very good. It was well written and the fact that there are several different positions to choose from give the scene some good replay value. Overall, a very nice, well-implemented game.

The Wingman by Dark Horse is a pretty straightforward game about picking up some girls in a bar, taking them home, and having your way with them. Or at least it would have been straightforward if the commands needed to get there were themselves a bit more intuitive.   Overall, the game just feels rushed. It feels like the author got about 80% done with it and then ran out of time, patched the rest together well enough to get it to run, and sent it in. Of course, given the deadline for the comp, that could be precisely what happened. I'll echo my own words above by saying that I hope for his next game the author takes the time to worry at the details a bit more and have the game properly tested.

Well, that's all I have to say. Looking back on the last two and a half pages I now realize that my "few thoughts" turned into something more closely resembling reviews after all. Oh well, what are you going to do? Now, I'm sure you are all wondering about the results of the comp (yeah right, like you haven't already looked ahead). At any rate, thanks for reading, and we'll see you next time.

Once again GoblinBoy can't be stopped, although he did have a little competition this year. Most of the categories were very close, especially for first place. In fact, in one of the categories that GB won *SS Whore* actually ended up with more first place votes. However, using the instant runoff voting meant that *Last Horizon* snuck back into the lead at the end since it had many more 2nd and 3rd place votes in that category. So congratulations to GoblinBoy, and to all our authors for some very nice games.

2011 AIF Mini-Comp Results

Overall Finish Results

1st place: Last Horizon by GoblinBoy
2nd place: SS Whore by Blue Satyr
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon by Rogue AI
4th place: Ashley's Story by Rip_CPU
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date by Archer

Concept

1st place: Last Horizon
2nd place: SS Whore
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Writing

1st place: Last Horizon
2nd place: SS Whore
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Characters

1st place: Last Horizon
2nd place: SS Whore
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Sex

1st place: SS Whore
2nd place: Last Horizon
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Technical

1st place: Last Horizon
2nd place: SS Whore
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Enjoyment

1st place: Last Horizon
2nd place: SS Whore
3rd place: The Princess and the Dragon
4th place: Ashley's Story
5th place: Buffy: Before the Date

Ashley's Story by Rip_CPU

Ashley's Story is a short choose-your-own-adventure style game. Given that format, it's difficult to tell whether it falls afoul of the minicomp restrictions or not. I think there are only four different locations within the story, but there are either two sexually interactive NPCs or there are none.

I really liked the concept of this game, especially the way it set up a back-and-forth between the narrator (Ashley) and her friend (the player). Ashley has a very distinctive narrative voice that almost jumps off the screen and makes her a memorable character. That's very important given the limited interactions the player otherwise has with her.

Mini-comp Reviews

By ExLibris

However, the game itself is very short. If you're a quick reader you could probably play through it in a minute or so. I've only found two sex scenes, neither of which I found to be particularly arousing (although they do continue this comp's theme of female PCs being pushed into sex).

No major technical issues, but there were a few too many spelling mistakes for my liking, although 'probabled' could be something the kids are saying nowadays I suppose.

Buffy: Before the Date by Archer

Buffy: Before the Date puts the player in the role of Xander, who Willow has given the task of seducing Buffy. It's hard to work out at which point in the series this game is supposed to be set. The readme says it's in the latter half of season two, which is supported by the fact that Xander is on the swim team and going out with Cordelia. But if Willow realised she liked girls that early in the series (rather than in season 4) you have to explain why she spends most of the next two seasons in a relationship with Oz. Another problem I had is that I simply can't imagine Willow ever saying "I haven't completly {sic} given up on cock". Not in a million zillion years. At least Xander also thinks it's out of character.

Stripped of the fanfic elements, I don't think the concept is a very strong one, particularly since Xander is supposed to be acting as Willow's proxy so that she can vicariously fulfil her fantasy of having sex with Buffy. I would have preferred it if the author had cut out the middleman and made Willow the PC. Dialogue is a problem in the sense that there's not enough of it. Buffy and Willow have maybe three or four conversation topics each. Asking them about the other characters from the show, for instance, is mostly met with blank stares. The dialogue also doesn't do much to establish any kind of attraction or romantic interest from Buffy's side.

Descriptions are another weakness of this game, with some objects not being mentioned in the room descriptions (entertainment center, oven), other objects being mentioned but not implemented (coffee table, stove), and yet other objects being implemented but not described (branch). There are also issues with synonyms, such as 'x shelves' working, but 'search shelves' not working. It seems superfluous to add that there are a lot of spelling mistakes as well.

The game's strength is the number of different sex scenes that it's possible to set up. That sets Buffy apart

from the other games in this year's minicomp, and is why I ended up ranking it first in that area. Granted, none of the scenes are particularly deeply implemented. The 'Xander dominant' scene, which was the first I found, lasts a grand total of four actions, which was disappointing. The 'friends with benefits' one is a bit better, but I would never have gotten it without a walkthrough since it requires you to cut an object that doesn't have a description and without having anything to cut it with, open an object that's not mentioned in the room description, and use a verb that's not mentioned in the readme.

This was probably the most frustrating game in this year's minicomp. It's not lacking ambition (as evidenced by the multiple scenes) but it's let down by poor execution. In fact the multiple endings inadvertently lowered my opinion of the game by encouraging me to replay it several times, during which I was exposed to more and more of its problems. That's reflected by the fact that although I ranked it highly in one area, Buffy scored poorly everywhere else. I hope it's not the only game the author ever makes, because he does show a lot of promise, but his next game needs a lot more testing.

Last Horizon by Goblinboy

Ten Little Indians in space! A murder mystery is an intriguing and original backdrop for AIF, and placing it within a science fiction setting gives it an added element of defamiliarisation. A basic knowledge of mystery conventions led me to correctly guess the identity of the murderer even before I'd finished reading the opening. However, the insertion of the Alien-style fake out in the middle of the game made me doubt that judgment, which was a nice twist. Overall, the fact that the Last Horizon's story stands up on its own merits, rather than simply being a pretext for some sex scenes, is probably the thing I liked most about this game.

I failed to work out who the sexually interactive character was the first time round because I assumed the sex scene would come at the end of the game and that it wouldn't involve the murderer. It's good that the game wasn't formulaic in that respect, but in the end I think I enjoyed the non-interactive scene more than the main interactive scene, simply because the interactive one has so little build up. Yes, it is established that Shiana and the PC are in a relationship of sorts, but establishing that via cut scene is not as effective as establishing it through playing. I tend to enjoy a scene more when I feel like I've done something to earn it. Consequently Shiana's first scene, although well written, made me feel no strong emotions at all. Shiana's second scene is more enjoyable, since by that point there has been some build up. However, I didn't even realise it existed for a long time, since getting it requires the PC to be almost wilfully blind to the various clues. In the other possible endings the PC 'wins' so to speak, but he doesn't get the girl, which is something of an anticlimax for AIF.

The player does have to work for Teisha's scene, so it has an advantage there even if it isn't interactive. However, I found Teisha's scene to be a little implausible in the sense that circumstances (i.e. the PC investigating a murder and Teisha being one of the suspects) don't seem to be conducive to them forming a relationship as rapidly as they do, unless Teisha was deliberately trying to seduce the PC to divert suspicion away from her (a possibility that's immediately disproved when she herself is murdered). It's also rather unprofessional of the PC to seduce a murder suspect he's supposed to be investigating, but as a non-interactive scene it's easily ignored if you prefer.

All three NPCs are well implemented and have distinct personalities, with a lot of conversation options to flesh them out. The process of gathering clues is involving for the player, although it's a pity that no explanation is given for why you can't search the other NPCs' rooms, or why Spiers doesn't simply revive replacement crew members and put all three suspects in the brig.

Redskirt II - Another Piece of the Action by begferdeath

Redskirt II is the sequel to Redskirt from last year's minicomp. It shares a lot of similarities with its predecessor. You're playing the same character and you're forced to have sex with an alien to complete an away mission. The major difference is that the original game felt a lot more... finished.

In this sequel I frequently attempted actions and got only a placeholder response, or no response at all. There were other problems, such as when Larus (the alien) invites the PC to sit on the desk... which can't be done with anything as simple as 'sit on desk'. Not to mention that the lamp and picture are fixed in place, even though the description says that they've been swept aside many times. Or that you can pick up Kirk and Spock. Sigh.

The game gets some mileage out of Trek-themed humour, but frankly they were all jokes I'd heard before and they soon became tiresome. Larus doesn't have much in the way of conversation, but what he does have he repeats again and again. An irritating alien with a one track mind wouldn't have been my first choice for the game's sexually interactive character, but it's in keeping with this minicomp's apparent theme of forcing female PCs into sex for reasons that are unconnected with their own desires. When I'm playing a female character I find I need much more set-up before I'm interested in a scene, so I didn't get much enjoyment from the sex in this game. At least you can shoot Larus.

SS Whore by Blue Satyr

This was the most polished of the three Adrift games in this year's minicomp. Perhaps not uncoincidentally it was also the only one written with Adrift 4.0. SS Whore has a number of interesting features, such as topic lists for conversations, several puzzles, multiple positions in the sex scene, etc.

The first half of the game is a mixture of puzzles and dialogue. None of the puzzles were particularly complicated or frustrating, but they were hard enough that I felt some pleasure at completing them. The conversations with van Siemens and Klaus were well written, although it seemed a little implausible to me that either of them would have such long and personal conversations with a captured enemy spy. However, the main problem I had was that it seemed like the author couldn't decide whether he wanted comedy Nazis (a la 'Allo 'Allo) or something more realistic. The fact that the main NPC is called von Bonerstein suggests that he eventually came down on the side of comedy, but that strikes a dissonant chord when contrasted with the callous treatment of Brunhilda or the reality of Hitler's voice being broadcast on the radio.

I didn't enjoy the sex scene in the second half of the game for a couple of reasons. The first is subjective, in that the set-up for the scene left me completely cold. Yet again a female PC is forced to have sex with someone she has no reason to like (and good reason to hate) just to fulfil some other obligation, which I didn't find the slightest bit erotic. It doesn't help that von Bonerstein is a thoroughly unlikeable Teutonic stereotype and the most weakly characterised of the three NPCs. The second is that the scene was just too complicated for me. I kept having to refer back to the list of sex commands, which really broke up the flow of the scene.

Objectively, SS Whore is one of the best games in this year's minicomp. However, for purely subjective reasons, I didn't enjoy it very much, which allowed games like The Princess and the Dragon and Ashley's Story to sneak past it in my rankings.

The Princess and the Dragon by Rogue AI

This was probably the most straight-forward of the games in this year's minicomp, being split between two scenes: the rescue and the hotel room. That's partially compensated for by the fact that there are several different ways to accomplish the rescue, although they're not very different.

Sofia is possibly the best implemented single character in the minicomp, although because of the structure of the game her dialogue comes across as one big exposition dump. It would have been nice if there had been a more natural way to drip feed it to the player. I also would have preferred it if the transition to the sex scene wasn't quite so abrupt. It's a little disconcerting (and unbelievable) to see her going from feeling sorrow at the death of the Dragon, to hurling herself at his killer. It also means that the player doesn't do anything to win her over since the scene happens no matter what choices you make. The sex scene uses what appear to be randomised assortments of sentences as the response to each action. The effect is that is that each response is slightly different and you're unlikely to get any duplication, which obviates one of the main things I dislike about arousal-based sex mechanics in AIF. The drawback is that sometimes the responses are jarringly out of context.

In many ways this was the game that I found to be the most interesting. I enjoyed playing an action hero type of character, diving through windows and shooting bad guys. It made a pleasant change from the many games that cast the PC as an ordinary and anonymous Everyman. I hope that this isn't the last game we see from this author, as I'm looking forward to seeing what he can do with a bigger canvas.

The Wingman by Dark Horse

Unfortunately, there always seems to be one game in every minicomp where it's obvious from the moment you start playing it that it's not going to be very good, and this year it's The Wingman's turn. The basic concept of the game is sound, but it's let down by poor execution. You'll realise very quickly that the author doesn't have much truck with things like capitalisation or speech marks, which makes the text more difficult to read. Something else that was omitted was any mention of things like a bartender or a barstool in the description of the bar. Yes, you could probably assume that they were there, but the fact that they weren't mentioned just makes things unnecessarily harder for the player.

However, the major problem with the game was how the verbs were implemented. It's a good thing there was a walkthrough included, otherwise I would have quit in disgust after failing to guess exactly what verbs the game expects you to pick, and which nouns they can be applied to. As an example, the game accepts 'rub cock' and 'suck dick', but not 'suck cock'. Things like that just make me want to bang my head against a brick wall. That being said, there's the foundations for a good game buried under all the flaws, so there's no reason why the author can't improve in his next game.

Overall
1. Last Horizon
2. The Princess and the Dragon
3. Ashley's Story
4. SS Whore
5. Buffy: Before the Date
6. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action
7. The Wingman

Best concept

1. Ashley's Story
2. Last Horizon
3. SS Whore
4. The Princess and the Dragon
5. The Wingman
6. Buffy: Before the Date
7. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action

Best writing

1. Ashley's Story
2. Last Horizon
3. The Princess and the Dragon
4. SS Whore
5. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action
6. Buffy: Before the Date
7. The Wingman

Best characters

1. Last Horizon
2. The Princess and the Dragon
3. SS Whore
4. Ashley's Story
5. Buffy: Before the Date
6. The Wingman
7. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action

Best sex

1. Buffy: Before the Date
2. Last Horizon
3. The Princess and the Dragon
4. SS Whore
5. Ashley's Story
6. The Wingman
7. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action

Best technical

1. The Princess and the Dragon
2. SS Whore
3. Last Horizon
4. Ashley's Story
5. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action
6. Buffy: Before the Date
7. The Wingman

Best enjoyment

1. The Princess and the Dragon
2. Last Horizon
3. Ashley's Story
4. SS Whore
5. Buffy: Before the Date
6. Redskirt II: Another Piece of the Action
7. The Wingman

If you can write game reviews, articles, opinion pieces, humorous essays, or endless blather, we want you. Contact the Editor for suggested content or just write what you want and send it to us.

Submitting your work to Inside Erin:

Please direct all comments, articles, reviews, discussion and art to the Editor at aifsubmissions@gmail.com.

AIF
Wants
You!

Editor:

Purple Dragon has written several AIF games including *Archie's Birthday - Chapter 1: Reggie's Gift, A Dream Come True*, and *Time in the Dark.* He has received one Erin award and been nominated for several others.

Staff:

Staff

A Bomire is the author of several TADS AIF games, including *Dexter Dixon: In Search of the Prussian Pussy*, *Tomorrow Never Comes* and *The Backlot*. His games have won numerous awards and Erin nominations. He was the co-recipient of the Badman Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award in 2006.

A Ninny is an AIF player, author of four AIF games and frequent beta-tester. His *Parlour* received an Erin for Best "One Night Stand" game in 2004 and his most recent game, *HORSE* walked away with three Erins at the 2007 awards show.

BBBen is an author of a number of Adrift AIF games. His games have received numerous Erin awards and nominations and first place in A. Bomire's 2004 mini-comp. He was also the recipient of the 2007 Badman Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award.

Bitterfrost is a longtime IF/AIF player working on his first (and last) game, *How I Got Syphilix*.

Dudeman has released one game and is working on a second. He has also released an impressive Inform 7 sex extension to help make it easier for others to write games of their own.

Knight Errant is an AIF player who has released two games and is currently working on a couple of others.

'trix has released one game, *Casting*, which was written in Inform 6, and is sporadically working on another in TADS 3.