Sextra Curricular Activities

Our Mission by Markaedw	Volume 1 Issue 3 31-MAR-05

When ever a new magazine is published on if the first things the editor does is state the mission of the publication. I was so tied up in getting out the first issue I didn't do this, and the second one well I didn't do that in the first issue.

This month the issue of quality came up and I felt that now would be the right time to define ourselves, and why we do what we do.

Why do the first three issues of the newsletter concentrate so much on beta testing games? Why do we want to put together a list of available beta-testers? And why did place so much time and effort into "the Erins".

We want to create a standard that all writers will aspire to. We

This Month in AIF by BBBen

Well, I suppose the big community news this month has been the Erin awards. A big thank you has to go out to A Ninny, who did most of the organising of the voting, tabulation, nominations and the website. You can find the results at http://erins.aifcommunity.org so I won't go too far into them here.

I will say congratulations to all the winners, particularly One-Eyed-Jack who swept the awards, and Newkid who was acknowledged with a long overdue Badman Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award. I was honoured to receive an award myself for which I am very grateful.

A Bomire: The Guru of AIF by Markaedw

Last month when I thought about who I was going to interview, A Bomire's name come up a lot, people were talking about how much he helped them write their games. I thought it would be a interesting to learn a little the about the Guru of AIF.

Markaedw: Why don't we start off with, telling our readers a little about yourself.

A Bomire: The details of my life are quite inconsequential. Just kidding - I've probably mentioned quite a bit about me over the years in various posts. I've been writing computer programs for over 20 years, and many of those years as a professional. Although that phase of my professional life is over, I still program quite a bit - for AIF and other reasons. I've also been writing stories for quite a while as well, mostly for my own amusement but a few have been published in the odd newsletter or such (nothing nationally known). My pseudonym derives from one of my favorite characters I developed back in college.

Markaedw: How long have you been involved in writing AIF, and what caused you to start?

Newsletter Spotlights

This issue A Bomire finishes off his articles on testing games. I finally got around to defining our mission , and A Ninny explains why we need the newsletter. BBBen and I wrote a couple of reviews and to round things off, David Wyld sent in a piece about why AIF can be good, using the controversy surrounding Sly_Old_Dog's new game *Rachel has a bad day*.

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A Bomire: Well, my first IF game was written back in high school using BASIC. I don't think anyone ever saw it -and the world is a better place because of that! I'm really not sure how long I've been writing AIF - at least four years, maybe five. My first few games were never released - thank goodness! However, some bits and pieces did make their way into "The Backlot". What caused me to start is probably the same thing that causes any AIF author to start - I wanted to see if I could do it. I was playing some then-current AIF games and got an idea for a game of my own (it was in the Star Trek universe), and decided to try to write it. At the time I was using AGT, and I later ported a lot of the game over to Inform before giving up on it entirely.

Markaedw: I see that all of your games are in TADS, is TADS, better, easier or just different than ADRIFT?

A Bomire: I don't think any authoring language is necessarily better or easier than any other. I found TADS easy to understand and work with, but I've been programming for a long time so I was familiar with most of TADS structure long before ever seeing my first line of TADS code. I think choosing a language depends upon two things. The second most important one is finding one that can do all of the things you want to do. Personally, I've only found one thing I could not do in TADS - dynamic maps such as are in ADRIFT (there is a module for this at the IF Archive, but it is too cumbersome for my tastes). But if you are happy working in ADRIFT and don't run into any limitations, then I say "more power to you!" Christopher Cole has been doing it for years. This leads to the most important criteria - choose a language you enjoy working with. If you find writing TADS code to be comparable to having a tooth drilled - then forget it! You'll never finish a game that way.

Markaedw: Which platform do you suggest for game writers just starting out?

A Bomire: I don't suggest any platform - I suggest doing what I did. Try out each one to see which one you find easiest to understand and use. The only thing I recommend is if you are just starting out, try to pick a platform for which you can find support. You're going to have questions and it is nice if there are people available to answer them for you. HUGO and ALAN may be great platforms, but I don't know very many people who use them.

Markaedw: Several writers (Lucilla Frost included [see 28-FEB-05 issue]) , have credited you as help in writing their games, any general help for those, just staring out?

A Bomire: Well, I helped Lucilla Frost and others with their TADS coding, not necessarily with game writing. However, I don't mind sharing some advice for budding authors. Number one - it is harder than it looks. Not a little harder - A LOT harder. You're going to spend 90% of your time doing about 10% of the work - fine-tuning, polishing and debugging. That's a lot of work for very little results and it can be discouraging. Number two - try something small first. You'll get a feel for the amount of effort involved. Number three - block out your game first. Know what is going to happen at the beginning, the middle and the end. You don't have to know every last detail of every scene, but at least have an idea. Finally - get out there and do it!

Games by A Bomire

Dextor Dixon: In Search of the Prussion Pussy which was nominated for 5 Erins and received
        honorable mention for Best Humor.
Last minute Gift which took fist place in Christopher Coles minicomp and received two 20003
        Erins for Best Male/Female Scene and Best One-Night.
The Backlot which has been nominated for eight Erins it has won two for best m/f sex scene and
        best technical implementation/Use of Medium.
Santa's Little Helper which also has been nominated for eight Erins it has won Best Threesome/
        Orgy and Best Puzzle.
Pool Party a collaborative effort with Christopher Cole.
Tomorrow Never Comes

also want to create a place where new writers can go to learn how to improve their craft. Part of that place is alt.games.xtrek or Yahoo! and part of that is here.

It has been said before all these games are free, created by volunteers for the love of the genre. That does not mean that we should accept and tolerate bad coding. It also does not mean that we should burn in effigy every author who releases a poorly-coded game. Rather, we should encourage improvement through constructive criticisms and offers of assistance. We have had games released that had a few bugs, so we pointed them out. Occasionally the authors corrected them and they ended up being good games.

It has been said that even commercial games have bugs, and yes they do, but if they keep repeating them, the writers get fired or the company goes out of business. With the average computer game costing around $40we should get bug-free games or at least patches to fix them.

If this is a labor of love, then why release poorly coded games, and is if it is not out of love, then why are you doing it?

The Zen of Testing by A.Bomire

Part III - Making the Most of a Good Thing

This is the third and last part of a three-part series on testing your game. In the first part, "The Art of Alpha Testing", I discussed you testing your own game during the writing process, or alpha testing. In part two, "Desperately Seeking Testers", I discussed the two processes in beta testing and how to find good beta testers. In this third part, I will discuss what to look for in the results provided by your testers to most effectively utilize their efforts.

First off, let me say that I am by no means the first, best, or probably last person to discuss most if not all of the points in this article (and my previous two). You can find a list of links to other what others have to say about this at the end of this article.

Okay, let's assume you've alpha tested your game until you are relatively certain you've gotten all of the bugs out of it. And, you've tracked down and contacted a list of people who are willing to test your game. What do you do with them? Well, you could just send them a copy of your game and say "Test it and get back to me". That is, if you want to waste their time and yours.

A much better method is to tell them what you are looking for, and outline how you want their results presented back to you. To do this, you first have to know what you want to start with. Here are some points that I often think about when sending out game for beta testing:

1) Do I want plot changes?
   Since I tend to send my games out when I am completely finished, I tend to not want my testers to send back requests for major plot changes. I don't want them suggesting new women to place into the game, or to say "Hey, wouldn't it be great if the hero could journey to the mountain you mention in scene 5 and climb up to talk to a hermit there?" No, that wouldn't be great. What that would be is a lot of extra work for me and my testers.

   However, some authors are looking for exactly this type of suggestion. They want to know how to improve the game and adding in this scene could be a major improvement to the game. So could taking out some other scene: "You know, the scene at the bar with the piano player is great, but what does it really add to the overall gun fight scenario? You could probably take it out and make the game play a little smoother."

   So, as an author, think about what type of feedback you want, and make sure you specify it when you contact your beta testers.

2) Do the puzzles "work"?
   If you did a good job in alpha testing, you know that your puzzles work in terms of coding - ie. there are no bugs. However, do they work in terms of game play? Are they too hard? Too

easy? Totally illogical? ("Why does petting the dog cause the secret door to open?") Ask your beta testers to consider this while testing the game, and
provide feedback on it.

3) Are there inconsistencies and illogical circumstances?
Have your testers look for inconsistencies you missed, such as referring to Dr. Haversham as a psychiatrist at the beginning of the game and a psychologist later. Also, have them look for stuff that might be out of your knowledge base. ("You refer to the F-15 fighter as the Tomcat. The Tomcat is the F-14; the F-15 is the Eagle.")

4) Does the game have the "feeling" I am trying to present?
 This goes to the overall play of the game. Since when I write, I write bits and pieces of the game in modular sections. When I test it, I test the section I am currently working on, sometimes skipping previous or later sections. So, I sometimes don't play the whole game through at once. This can lead to a game that just doesn't "feel" right when played as a whole. I often ask my beta testers to provide feedback on the general result of the whole game. This is a very subjective point, I'll admit, but one that I find worthwhile.

5) Anything else
Of course, no matter how much alpha testing and spell/grammar checking you do, you probably missed something, so have your beta testers look for that as well. Things like "You say there are two chairs in the living room, but I can only examine one of them" can be easily overlooked when writing the game, especially if the chairs are very minor parts in the overall game.

Now that you know what you want, you need to lay out how you want it presented. I generally ask my testers to provide as much information as possible about the problem they found to pinpoint where it is in the game. This is especially important in large games with several encounters with the same characters. If a beta tester reported "You use the word 'their' instead of 'there' when speaking to Jane" and I have several encounters with Jane, this isn't very helpful. It would be more helpful to say "In the scene with Jane at the library, in the line 'I think their is more to this bookshelf than meets the eye', 'their' should be 'there'."

If your beta tester finds a bug, have him or her provide details about the circumstances leading up to the bug. For example: "When I leave the library, I get an error." is not very helpful. However, "I enter the library with Jane. I search the bookshelf and find the hidden tome. We leave the library. Then I go back in and put the tome back on the shelf. When I leave now I get an error." This provides enough information to recreate the problem and see just what is going on.

Another good request it so always - and I mean ALWAYS - have your beta testers provide a copy of the game output. This can normally be done by turning scripting on in whatever runtime you are using. Not only does this provide detailed information about whatever bugs they encountered, but it also provides good insight into ways to improve your game.

As a player, you are probably used to playing a game and trying something that doesn't work. You just move on to try something else and don't think twice about it. Well, your beta testers are the same. However, as an author you can see their failed attempts and use them to improve the game. You can implement new synonyms for objects, or new verbs to remove "guess-the-verb" problems. Let's take this sample game output for the scene above with Jane at the library:

The Library
You are standing in the local library, with shelves of books stretching out of sight before you. The musty smell of the books is almost overwhelming, and you find yourself fighting not to sneeze. The exit is behind you to the south. Jane is here.

>x shelf
 I don't know the word 'shelf'.

>x shelves
The bookshelves stretch out before you, marching in a line almost out of sight.
They are lined top to bottom with books.

>x books

Many of these books look like they haven't been touched in years. Their musty odor tickles your nose.

>ask jane about books
Jane pouts. "I don't like reading. It's boring. Can't we go someplace more exciting?" She rubs her nose. "Besides, this place makes me sneeze."

>smell books
I don't know the word 'smell'.

>read books
I don't know how to read the books.

>get books
You take a book down from the shelf, opening it to skim the contents. You find it doesn't really interest you so you put it back.

As a player, this probably looks very familiar to you. You may encounter text like this over and over and think nothing of it. As an author, I can spot at least three areas where I could make improvements on the game to enhance the experience for the player.

1) Add the synonym 'shelf' to the 'bookshelves' object.
2) Add the ability to 'read' the books
3) Since I make such a big deal about the musty odor of the books, I should add the ability to 'smell' the books.

Finally, and I guess this should go without saying but here I am saying it none-the-less: Listen to your beta testers. If your beta tester tells you that a puzzle doesn't really work, or that they had trouble solving a puzzle, listen to them. Really think about what he/she is saying. If you just ignore it, odds are that you will hear the same from people playing your game and it is much better to fix the problem now than to deal with later releases of your game.

Well, hopefully you found this series helpful, and will use it and the points contained there-in to make better games. For more information, I suggest reading the articles that can be found here:

"Oh no! Beta! Tips and Techniques for Beta-Testing Games in Progress"
http://www.xyzzynews.com/xyzzy.8f.html

"Beta Testers I have Loved"
http://www.xyzzynews.com/xyzzy.8g.html

"The IF Beta Site Info Page"
http://www.plover.net/~textfire/beta.html

"Some Suggestions on Beta Testing"
http://emshort.home.mindspring.com/Testing.html

This Month in AIF by BBBen

I felt the competition this year was very strong with some of the best and biggest AIF games ever. We have learned quite a bit on how to run the Erin awards and so things should operate much more smoothly next year. Thanks to the couple of dozen people who voted. We were hoping for more votes, but we understand why more people didn't participate. If you were one of the people who didn't vote, maybe you could start thinking about the 2005 awards now (coming up around December) and be prepared to vote next time.

Christopher Odhner asked us to mention an IF site – http://www.ifwiki.org which may be of interest to the AIF community. The benefit of this site is, since it is a wiki site, it is free for editing by the public. It has had a rather negative article introducing AIF, but if we participate on the site more we can set the record straight and possibly draw the attention of some of the wider IF community to the higher quality AIF games.

In game news, there was only one new game released this month: *Rachel's Bad Day* by Sly Old Dog. This game caused a heated discussion on the AIF Archive about beta testing and technical quality in AIF. This is not an uncommon topic for debate in the community, with opinions more or less falling into one of two camps:

1. Authors should not release games that are incomplete or technically flawed, because they can be tested and improved and there is no need to actually release them if they are incomplete, OR
2. Authors should be thanked for releasing free games, and not bothered if they want to release a game in any condition.

The intriguing thing about this argument is that it seems to get more and more heated each time, and it keeps cropping up every few months. I think this is primarily because it is an unresolved issue in the community – we bicker about it for a little while and maybe a few moves are made to try and encourage beta testing but nothing really changes, and games that are less technically slick than they could be, keep coming out.

Will this change any time soon? Probably not. Some people take offence on the issue simply because producing good games takes so much damn time and work and they feel a certain guilt by association – that their games are losing respect because other games are earning the genre a bad rep. Other people feel offended on behalf of writers who seem to be shot down after having put forth a work of creativity for the free enjoyment of other people.

There is no real definitive answer to this, both sides have merit and if the answer was obvious then the debate would not still be ongoing. Some people are bound to take AIF a little but seriously considering the amount of their free time and effort it takes up (a large game requires about as much prose as a novel) while it is true that nobody is forcing anyone to play any of these games – if you don't enjoy them then that's unfortunate, but hardly cause to get angry at the author. The one thing that I think everyone can agree on however, is that the more authors work to improve the quality of their games, the better we will all feel.

Incidentally, if you have an opinion to express about a game I would encourage you to write a review for this newsletter. You don't have to have done anything in the community before, just write down your thoughts on a game (the guidelines for structuring a review on our website make this easy) and submit it to us. The game can be one that has been reviewed many times, or never, and you can disagree with what you think the community will say about the game. Short of writing a game, writing a review is one of the most positive things you can do to keep AIF going.

New games for March 2005:

British Fox and the Celebrity Abductions, TADS port -
http://aifcommunity.org/games/tads/british_fox_rls.zip - by Lucilla Frost, 27th Feb 2005 – The TADS version of the original ADRIFT game, with some new content. (NOTE: This game should have been listed last month – my apologies).

Rachel has a bad day - http://aifcommunity.org/games/adrift/version_4.0/rachels-bad-day.zip - by Sly Old Dog, 8th Mar 2005 – Rachel sets out to steal some files from her work for her boyfriend, and finds herself caught up in a series of sexual misadventures.

Why a Newsletter by A Ninny

The efforts of a few determined individuals are combining to make the AIF community grow up. We're becoming more than just a ragtag bunch of porndogs waiting for the next dribble of game to emerge from the few people willing to actually write them. We have a slew of websites, two message boards and, now, this newsletter. It is the newsletter that as it matures I hope will give us the best opportunity to focus and drive the community towards its goals.

But what are theses goals, and how can a newsletter help us reach them? To determine the answer to that, I feel I must take a step back and examine who the newsletter's audience is. The AIF community is a group of people who (let's face it) write and play dirty games. This tends to encourage the idea that AIF is cheap crap and that we're wasting our time by thinking of it as quality entertainment. Despite that some here do hold this attitude, there are hundreds of players and dozens of authors; there are many dedicated long-time fans who love to debate the picayune aspects

of the genre. The one thing that should unite us in the community is the pursuit of high-quality AIF experiences.

A newsletter can promote quality in AIF in a number of ways. To benefit players, it provides reviews of games and announcements of upcoming releases, as well as a forum for thoughtful debate on the merits of sexfest games versus puzzle- or story-oriented games. To benefit authors, it is providing detailed essays on game testing, and will likely become a forum for debating the finer points of different story structures, AIF platforms and the like. It also will serve as the host and archive for open game competitions and the annual AIF awards. I'd like to see enough constant prodding in these pages promoting good AIF that we spawn new authors interested in generating more games of better quality; I hope these authors will be interested in keeping AIF and this newsletter going once most of the 'old timers' drop away.

I believe the newsletter could have another benefit, in that it may improve AIF's reputation and give AIF greater acceptability within the greater IF audience. It is probably the dirty little secret of many IF players that they enjoy AIF from time to time, but certainly wouldn't own up to it. If it starts to look like AIF has it together enough to sustain a newsletter and is making a concerted effort to improve its output, we may yet become recognized enough to draw content from within greater IF.

Continuing improvement in AIF, therefore, means maintaining this newsletter. Currently, there are four people consistently writing material for it, one of whom is considering giving up his editorial position. So volunteer! Contribute an essay; review a game; offer to organize a competition. The more people we get to participate, the more the newsletter reflects the community and the better it can promote the idea that quality AIF is not an oxymoron.

<div style="background-color:orange">**Oldies But Goodies-games that you may not be playing, but should**</div>

This month we are doing things a little different. The review of the classic games is a little more in-depth than previous reviews, it came out pretty good, so I think that I will keep doing them this way.

The game in question this month is a spy game called:

Academy of Spies- A Candy Dashwood Adventure, reviewed by Markaedw

Game info:	*Academy of Spies Version* 1.3 released 17-AUG-2001
Author:	Adam Hendine
Platform:	TADS
Size:	107 KB (zipped)
Content:	m/f, f/f, voyeurism, spanking
Game Type:	T&AIF, with period 1960's
Length:	Medium
Reviewed:	March 2005
Extras:	None

Basic Plot:

The main character is Candy Dashwood, agent for MI6. The game takes place over 2 missions; the first one recovers a computer reel of stolen British lunar mission data and the second mission, you infiltrate the enemy hide out and find out why the tapes were stolen.

Overall Thoughts:

Adam has, to my knowledge, created three games and they are all pretty good, and *Academy* is no different, good but not great, it is a fun way to blow a hour of so, I found it to offer not much else and little replay value. The game is basically a fun adventure based game with some sex thrown in. Adam has always avoided "guess the verb issues" and when a specific command is required it is in the instructions.

Puzzles/Gameplay:

Like I said, the games is fun, there is a walkthrough, but it really isn't necessary, the puzzles consist of looking around a pushing a button or pulling a lever. The game itself is very linear, there is not much to do outside of the game and the other characters have little interaction, so exploration is essentially pointless.

There are few couple of places where you can die, in effect losing the game, but since it's possible to undo and you can try it again in a different way, so it is not to frustrating to play.

Sex:

The real reason you want to play, the sex scenes are a bit of a let down. It's as if Adam concentrated on the game and put in the sex as an afterthought. As an example he makes no distinctions between sitting, standing or lying down. The sex act descriptions are usually nothing more than a sentence or two, with "You continue doing *that*" when repeated. I found it just as easy to shoot the NPC as it was to do the sex scene.

The only really good, and necessary, sex scene is at the end and that is interrupted by the main villain.

Technical:

I thought the game play was easy and I found no issues or bugs, which is good, but it did not push any envelopes either, it is rather mediocre in that respect.

Intangibles:

Adam indicates in other games that his games are connected, so Candy's boss, Mr. D may be Darcy of *Darcy - Peril Skies.*

Final Thoughts:

Although this game isn't bad it isn't great either. I keep it, because it is good way to use up an easy hour or so when I am bored, but it is not worth more than that, and don't bother playing it for the sex; there are other games for that.

Rating: C

And here is review by BBBen of Christopher Cole's *Mount Voluptuous,* which has gathered six Erin nominations

Mount Voluptuous, a review by BBBen

Game info:	*Mount Voluptuous* - released 5th Sep 2004
Author:	Christopher Cole
Platform:	ADRIFT 3.9
Size:	906KB (zipped, including pictures)
Content:	m/f, m/f/f, m/f/f/f, f/f, voyeurism
Game Type:	T&AIF
Length:	Long
Reviewed:	March 2005
Extras:	Limited pictures of each model

Basic Plot:

The player takes the role of an agent for a selection of real-world, busty models. The player seeks to sign more models to his agency, called Mount Voluptuous, and along the way he may get to do more than ogle the busty women.

Overall Thoughts:

I believe this is Christopher Cole's largest game and his experience shows throughout the production. This is a strong example of an AIF game that could, if it had original pictures and a stand-alone engine, be marketed successfully as a professional game.

Probably the most interesting thing about this game is Cole's choice to use real-life busty models that you can go and look up on Google. This may not be a surprise to many fans of Christopher Cole - I first heard of Yulia Nova in *Encounter 3* and Cole wrote a game (*The Studio*) specifically about a real internet model. The game shows a good knowledge of each of the models included (from what can be known about them at least – I enjoyed the griping about Yulia Nova's photographer) and thus would probably be especially interesting to fans of the women.

An interesting side note – Cole chose the models partly based on a poll on the AIF Archive, making this a truly interactive game.

Puzzles/Gameplay:

An interesting element of this game is that while progressing in the game is not difficult (as is standard in Christopher Cole's games) it is easy to miss some of the sex scenes and sexual content when playing. This adds replay value, which is good, and better than tying a player up with a tricky puzzle in an inflexible linear plot. It takes elegance to pull off and I think it did work in this case.

Sex:

The sex is, of course, very well written. It is quite extensive and in fact there is not much in the game apart from sex and the build-up to sex. The scenes have a certain amount of linearity, requiring specific actions before others and reducing freedom somewhat in exchange for an almost game challenge (a very easy game challenge) element to the sex scenes. This is not a criticism, more an observation as it is a perfectly acceptable system and it is not uncommon in Chris Cole's games. Many people prefer this style of sex scene, especially because of the extensive interactivity in the stripping process.

Cole makes sure, considering his particular choice of subject matter, to give good focus to the bosoms of the women in the game. It would be disappointing if he hadn't done this, as I'm sure he was aware. He doesn't neglect other areas and sexual acts however, and many of the scenes have some quite long and detailed passages, which should be gratifying to players.

Technical:

Most people won't even think about an ADRIFT 3.9 game having good technical standards, but this one does. The game plays very smoothly while accomplishing some quite complex gameplay possibilities efficiently and invisibly. The real proof of the game's technical quality was that the game did a range of things that I wouldn't be sure how to do myself, yet I did not think about them while playing.

Intangibles:

My only real complaints with this game (and the reasons why I didn't give it an A+) were intangibles. For a start, the narrative feels a little directionless. Christopher Cole has made it clear that he is more interested in sex romps rather than plot heavy games and I think that's largely what his audience would prefer, but I still feel that even for a sex romp the experience of playing felt a little unfocussed. There wasn't too much to draw the player in to what was going to happen, and the events of the game occur in a sort of random, haphazard way. It is not entirely without teasers at the beginning (you get to see the portfolios of all the girls from the start and there are things you must address right away like Sydney's contract and Yulia's apartment) but there is not a strong "page turner" element to the game. In a way the flow of the game reminds me of some hentai games, but nevertheless it compares quite favourably to these.

The other problem I have is that, compared to some of Cole's other games, *Mount Voluptuous* is less emotionally resonant. To clarify, I think in some of his games, the first and second *Encounter* games for example, there is a strong and convincing motivation behind the characters getting together. In *Mount Voluptuous* the sex is much more casual and based simply on lust, and so it

doesn't resonate quite as well for me as some of his other titles. This is probably largely because the characters in the game are real models, and I am holding the game to a high standard, but still I do feel this is worth mentioning.

Final Thoughts:

An author who has written so many and such lauded titles as Christopher Cole has is inevitably going to find that his later works are less likely to be considered classics than his earlier works. However I do think this is belongs among the best of his titles, and indeed AIF in general.

Rating: A

Pocket Reviews by Markaedw

This month was interesting for the newsletter reviews, some day I knew these things would happen and they both did this month, a game would be released just after the deadline and Sly_Old_Dog would release one of his bugfest games.

This game was actually released on 27-Feb-2005 just after I started on the newsletter, so it ended up in the 31-Mar, we may have to work on this problem.

First off Lucilla Frost gave us her TADS port of her popular game *British Fox and the Celebrity Abductions*

The game, just to refresh your memory, is about the British female superhero British Fox, The Institute is investigating several disappearances linked to the Frost Syndicate.

The game starts off with a sexual encounter with you teammate Welsh Fox, but soon the boss calls and if your late British Fox get a spanking. Then the game moves to the Frost Headquarters where you can then dominate Grace the leader, but if your not careful you get trapped, see some rape scenes before you get out, and finish the game.

The game has several puzzle and items that you need to obtain to complete the game, but none of them are difficult to figure out. The sex scenes are well written and the game has some new content as well as, with the extra time, the game plays a little more smooth. If you liked the ADRIFT version this one is definitely one you want to play.

Now on to the thing I dreaded most when I started as the editor, I would have to review a Sly_Old_Dog game, in this case it is titled *Rachel has a bad day*.

In this one the playing character is Rachel, her boyfriend needs her to get the goods on the company she works for, they are raping the environment and the bosses computer has the proof. So she needs to get the proof out of the building , earn the money for a plane ticket and get past airport security.

It sounds like fun and it would be if anyone else had wrote it but Sly did, so it has enough problems that it more of an exorcise in frustration. To start off , there are the usual guess the verb issues, but those you can work around. Then there is the fact that after the alley scene the game can't be saved and to top it off the game crashes after the scene in the airport ladies room. This is too bad because the sex scenes are well written and they are fun to play, but the coding issue override any pleasure derived from the game. When combined all together, they make the game virtually unplayable and practically unwinnable, for instance there may be a way around the crash but I don't feel like starting back that far back to discover it. So this game that has a lot of promise ends up like all my other Sly_Old_Dog games, in the recycling bin.

Sly_Old_Dog's release of *Rachel has a bad day* and the ensuing controversy at the Yahoo! Forum became pretty heated, and in the end nothing was settled, we simply agreed to disagree. Then David Wyld sent me this piece summing up the discussion, and when you read it; I think you'll wonder, like I did, what were we arguing over, because really we were actually all on the same side.

Markaedw
Editor: Sextra Curricular Activities
There have been minor editing for ease of reading.

AIF: Does It Have To Be Any Good?

There was recently (and will probably still be ongoing by the time you read this) a somewhat heated debate on the AIF Archive at Yahoo. The cause? A game called *Rachel has a bad day* by someone with the unusual name of Sly Old Dog. Was this an incredibly good game and people felt the need to tell everyone how great they thought it was? No. Was it, then, an incredibly bad game and everyone felt like sticking the boot in? No.

It was a game with a lot of bugs.

Now I'm a more a lurker to the AIF Archive than a regular poster but even a lurker gets to hear about Sly and his strange penchant for releasing games riddled with bugs, and his even stranger penchant for not even seeming to care that they're riddled with bugs. You see, he does this sort of thing quite often: releases a game full of bugs. For someone who's been writing games for two years now, that's a pretty sad thing. Most are the kind of simple bugs that are down, more than anything else, to sheer carelessness. We all do this sort of thing. Put a section in a game, don't bother testing it, and assume it'll be fine. Of course, if we're serious about game writing we'll then test the game thoroughly *before* it's released and catch these bugs. Not Sly Old Dog though. Some of the bugs in *Rachel has a bad day* Sly admitted he wasn't sure how to fix but, for whatever reason, he didn't do the sensible thing which would have been to ask for help in fixing them, he just went ahead and released the game anyway. The result? Bugs galore. The game crashes, it can't be saved after a certain point and, the real killer, it's impossible to finish.

A big debate was kicked up over the game, focusing not so much on the game itself but on the bugs within it. The quality, or otherwise, of *Rachel has a bad day*, was pretty much forgotten in the rush to either condemn or defend it, with a lot of hostility and shouting on both sides. A couple of times Sly was even compared to Vachon, which is the kind of insult that digs deep at the heart of anyone wanting to be a serious game writer.

On one hand, I can agree with the comments of the people defending it:

* It *is* a free game that the writer has put out there for people to play.

* He *does* state on his website that it's unfinished and there are problems with it.

* It's an AIF game and they're all crap anyway so what's the big deal?

(The last one is an actual comment someone said, strangely enough. And yes, this guy was defending the game.)

But on the other hand:

* So what it's a free game? Is the argument that providing it's free, it's okay for it to be awful? Can't free games be any good? Check out the yearly IFComps if you want an example of games that are both free *and* good.

* If it's unfinished, why has it even been released? Even worse, it's unfinished *and* it's got bugs and yet, despite all common sense dictating otherwise, the writer goes ahead and releases it anyway. If I didn't know better, I'd suspect he likes being flamed.

* It's an AIF game but that doesn't mean it *has* to be crap. That it's an AIF game is probably a

pretty good indicator that it *will* be crap but, every now and then, it'd be nice to play a game that bucks the trend.

Regarding the last point, the AIF scene has a pretty poor reputation in the wider world of text adventures. I'm sure even its most ardent fans would agree that, outside this group, there aren't many people who give a damn about AIF and wouldn't lose much sleep if it disappeared overnight and was never heard of again.

Why does it have such a terrible reputation?

Games like *Rachel has a bad day* go a long way towards explaining the reason. Now if this was a game by a newcomer to the scene who didn't really know what was expected in a game and had missed out all the things that *should* have been covered, it's likely it wouldn't have generated half as much discussion. In fact, it probably wouldn't have generated *any* discussion because people would just have assumed it was another bugfest from a newbie and not bothered wasting their time with it. Yet this didn't come from a newbie. It came from someone who has written over twelve games.

By the time you reach three or four games, you ought to be getting pretty damn good at the game writing lark. You might have made some dumb mistakes with your earlier games but you've learnt from your mistakes and know how to turn out games that people like. By six or seven games, you're near the top of your field. Your games might not have the extra polish on them that differentiates the true masterpieces from the good games but they're not far off. By ten games, you ought to either be at the top of your field or chomping at the heels of the guy who *is* top of the field.

You really, really, *really* shouldn't be releasing games that are riddled with bugs, that crash, that can't be saved and, worse than anything else, can't even be finished. Has Sly learned nothing from his earlier games? (And yes, they've been criticised for being bugfests as well.) Or, worse, is it that he simply doesn't care? He's happy to bring out games that are littered with bugs and generally looked down upon by almost everyone who plays them?

It's a worrying thing when you think about it that in the AIF world, of the three most prolific writers – Christopher Cole, Vachon and Sly Old Dog – two of them write incredibly quickly and their games are generally criticised for being buggy and not very good. Are their games awful *because* they write so fast and don't spend enough time testing and re-testing them in order to make them better? Is the idea of adding another game to their tally more important, regardless of the quality of said game, than actually bringing out a decent game?

Part of the problem might be that the AIF scene *is* looked down upon by almost everyone outside it. A member of the Yahoo group recently posted a message on the RAIF message boards asking people for their opinions on the genre. Every reply was negative.

Why is the AIF scene given such a cold reception by everyone else? The obvious reason is that AIF is about porn and where porn is concerned, people tend to be a bit reticent about admitting they like it. It's a bit *dirty* and a bit *rude* and it's kinda *childish* writing games with naughty stuff in 'em.

All very true. But then there's the second reason for the cold reception: most of AIF is downright awful.

Pick ten games from the Yahoo AIF Archive and play them through. How many are riddled with bugs? How many are full of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors? How many are just plain unfinishable for one reason or another? More than half I'm betting.

Of the few that aren't riddled with bugs, spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and *can* be finished, how many are actually any good? Any?

I've played probably twenty or so AIF games and of those twenty I've found two that were really good – *The Backlot* and *Ghost Justice* – and one – *The Birthday* – that was reasonable (albeit the spelling and grammar left a lot to be desired). While I'm sure a few other games out there *are* worthy to be called games, the majority are likely to be pretty awful. The reason? Well…

One thing I've noticed from being a long time lurker and infrequent poster is that the AIF community is an incredibly forgiving place. Someone can bring a game out that's almost unplayable and what happens? He gets slagged off for daring to write such unspeakable tripe? He gets a thorough telling off? He gets himself lynched? No. The community just plays his game anyway and, worse still, actually pretends it's good.

The same thing doesn't happen in the wider world. If someone writes a non-AIF game that's full of bugs, he gets thoroughly beaten over the head for it. He generally gets *such* a hard time for it that he either makes damn sure his next game is resoundingly better… or he slinks away and never pollutes the community with another one of his dismal efforts again. As such, the prospect of someone writing one bad game after another in the wider world is unlikely to happen*. In the AIF world, it happens all the time.

* There are exceptions to every rule of course. Check out Paul Allen Panks' games if you want an example of someone who writes a lot and writes badly. But he's an anomaly.

I remember when Vachon (thank heavens!) finally packed up his bags and left. Amidst the cries of "good riddance, pal, your games were bleeding dire!" were a few comments along the lines of "no, don't go! You write great games!" *Great* games? *Vachon?* I forgot who said that but I read it and wondered if either the person in question hadn't played any of Vachon's games, they were deluded, or they were just so desperate not to let the world's worst game writer depart that they lied through their teeth. Or maybe they were joking. I'm sure no one could play a game by Vachon and like it, let alone think it was *great*. And yet, someone said it. Heck, they might even have meant it.

So the reason for the AIF scene's remarkably bad reputation? Quite simply: the people in the scene are just as happy to play bad games as they are to play good games. For most of them, I'm doubtful they can even tell the difference between the two. After all, if someone can accuse Vachon of being a *great writer* then clearly there's something seriously wrong. And with people being happy to play bad games, where is the incentive for the games to improve? Good games are hard to write. Bad games aren't. Anyone can write a bad game. You just sit at the keyboard and bash away at the keys for a while and then unload it without even bothering to check whether it makes any sense or not. You won't get criticised for it because the AIF community doesn't really mind that your game is bad. So why strive and put serious effort into your game writing if people are quite happy to play a game you might have written in your sleep?

Which brings me neatly back to Sly Old Dog. A couple of times now, he's been called the New Vachon (one of the times by yours truly). Unfair? Perhaps. Sly's games are buggy and full of guess the verb and he seems incapable of learning from his past mistakes, no matter how many times they're pointed out to him, but he's certainly a more accomplished game writer than Vachon ever would have been if he hadn't mercifully departed the scene. Yet at the same time, Sly's games fall into the same kind of problems that Vachon's did: errors that lead to unexpected crashes and guess the verb being the main culprits. Also, like Vachon, he seems oblivious to the way his games are received. Quite a few times I've read comments from people who think Sly could actually be a good game writer if he just tried a *bit* harder to iron out the bugs in his games. Yet despite the recent, and lengthy, debate regarding *Rachel's Bad Day*, no updated version of the game has been released so far and, perhaps more puzzling, Sly himself hasn't even bothered to comment on it. Doesn't he care? Doesn't he want to defend the game? Or does he simply figure that as most of the games in the AIF world are bad, why should he put in the extra effort to make his any better?

I'm not a big fan of the AIF scene personally. Part of me *wants* to like it as I'd genuinely like to see a few genuinely well written games with adult content, but the more games I play, the more obvious it is that I'm going to end up disappointed. Writers seem perfectly happy to bring out sub-standard games again and again, and players seem perfectly happy to play sub-standard games.

Wouldn't it be great if all that changed? Hands up anyone who'd like to see every new AIF game that got released be a resounding masterpiece? Or, if not a masterpiece, then at least a well written and erotic piece of game writing?

And then hands up anyone who wants the genre to continue as it does now: crap games being released, people pretending they like them, and *more* crap games being released as a result.

Bring on the better games, I say, and maybe, just maybe, the rest of the world will stop sneering down its nose at the AIF scene.

David Whyld

Something To Look Forward To

This month things were hopping from the Erins to Sly_Old_Dog. Speaking of the Erins look for The Erins 2004 special issue, if you haven't read it already.

Let's see, next month I got an interview with Chris Cole, Lucilla Frost (which I planned on publishing this month but there just wasn't room) sent me a piece she wrote comparing TADS to ADRIFT. I think I'll tell you about the game that started it all Badman's Xtrek

We redesigned the newsletter website into more of a "AIF today" news site, we'll start having current events up soon look us up at http://newsletter.aifcommunity.org/. So we can avoid any game being released at the last minute, starting with the 31-APR-05,the issues will be released on the 3rd of the month.

Until then,
The Staff

AIF Wants You

We are looking for few good artists. I have only the one picture to work with, and I would like more. So if you are good with a pencil and can draw mangaish style girls, send me some of your work, and I will include it in upcoming issues.

Can you draw a cartoon panel? I would really like to see our Erin is some funny situations, are you up to a challenge?

I really need that girl for an upcoming award I am planning. If you can you do a commission, send me an email and I will give you the details.

Last of all I need more articles.

Meet The Staff

Editor	Markaedw has beta tested one game, "Hell in Highwater". He written walkthroughs for "Ginger's Island" and "Hell in Highwater".
Web Master	Darc Nite is a newcomer to the AIF scene. An avid gamer who heard the call for help with the AIF Newsletter.
Staff Writers	A Bomire is the author of several TADS AIF games, including 'Dexter Dixon: In Search of the Prussian Pussy" and "The Backlot". His Games have won numerous awards and Erin nominations.
	A Ninny is an AIF player, author and frequent beta-tester. His one released game, "Parlour" was included in the second AIF Mini-Comp. A few of his numerous AIF testing credits include "Pool Party" by A. Bomire & Christopher Cole, "Tomorrow Never Comes" by A. Bomire, "Crossworlds Part 3 - The Final Far Far Away Frontier" by BBBen.
	BBBen is an AIF author. He has released six games, including the "Crossworlds" series and "Normville High" which won A. Bomire's 2004 mini-comp.

Where to send your stuff in

Please direct all comments articles, reviews, discussion and art to the Editor Markaedw, at markaedw_01@hotmail.com RE: AIF newsletter.