

A Ninny's Review of the games submitted for A. Bomire's 2004 AIF Mini-comp

As an opening comment, I would like to thank the authors for their efforts and complement them for coming up with a fairly creative batch of games this year. I'd also like to thank A. Bomire for hosting the competition and giving us all an opportunity to express our creative genius and a fresh batch of games to play.

I observed a vast difference in quality between the successful games and those which were not successful. I judge a successful game as one which not just scores highly on the various voting criteria, but also one which satisfies the spirit of the competition, which is to create a complete game, but one which is limited in scope to what can happen between two characters in a limited space and time. The difficulty therein is to provide a compelling motivation for the characters to act out the given story within that scope, and for me as a player to want to follow along to see where I am taken. A number of games do meet this criterion admirably well, and the best games were all very close to one another in quality – only 6 total points (using a system in which each of the six categories scored on a 1-10) separated the top four games.

Obviously, other difficulties are inherent in this type of competition. Mainly, and most obvious at a cursory level are the need to create a bug-free game and one that gives the player an immersive environment. With a three room limit, I believe there is no excuse for having not providing complete atmosphere. Also, given the fairly generous time allotted, and the short length of most of the games, I feel there is no excuse for incomplete testing and poor technical execution, even for new authors (myself included).

So, now on with the reviews, listed in no particular order, but note that **Parlour** is not reviewed since I wrote it. Again, numerical ratings are on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being best.

(There are some minor spoilers in the reviews, so if you haven't played the games, I advise you not to read further.)

Normville High, by BBBen, ADRIFT 3.9

Out of the thirteen games submitted for this year's mini-comp (and twelve reviewed here), I felt this one best accomplished its goals and at the same time stayed within the spirit of the comp, that being a small game quickly establishes the story's background, plot line, characters and the motivations for those characters, and at the same time provides an outlet for the author's vision of his character's sexual exploits. To me, a game like this is what the mini-comp is all about. It doesn't feel like a fragment of a greater game, nor a wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am quickie.

I wasn't really bothered by the lack of puzzles, or that most of what you do up until the sex starts is read as events unfold. I think the reason I wasn't bothered is that I could relate to the characters and I wanted to see them get together. So that BBBen took me almost straight there without a bunch of mucking about with guess-the-verbs or poorly thought-out puzzles was

reasonably welcome, especially on my first play-through. On subsequent plays, however, I found it did get to be thin, simply lacking stuff to do.

As far as the sex goes, the sex writing was fairly good, and I was pleasantly surprised that the sex scene was varied and you could move from place to place for different actions based on where you were in the house. One thing I missed was a greater variety of verbs, for instance you could 'lick tits' but not 'kiss tits' or 'suck tits,' but that is nitpicking at this point, especially since nipples were differentiated from tits (almost never seen and I wouldn't have known about it without the readme) and feet were also implemented as a sexual body part.

Normville High scores and mini-reviews:

Concept: 7.5: Well thought-out and complete storyline that was at least fairly realistic.

Characters: 9: Definitely the strong point of this game. I actually really wanted the PC to get together with Sam.

Technical: 7.5. The game is fairly complete but lacks sufficient sex verbs. Also, it is not technically ambitious, hence a reasonably, but not extremely high score.

Playability: 7. Same issue as technical, but I lowered the score since the game has almost nothing to do until the sex scene starts.

Hotness: 8. The sex was more complete than most games, both in terms of the immersiveness of the descriptions and the variety of body parts and settings.

Enjoyment: 8.5. This game scores highly because it very nicely fulfills the requirements and spirit of the competition, and the sex is hot.

Normville High received the most points and is scored **1st** overall in my ballot.

Late Work, by Vachon, ADRIFT 3.9

This game suffers a number of problems, some of which could be solved if Vachon let a native English speaker run through and fix his grammar. Others, however, simply stem from the fact that "Late Work" is just too simple, too quickly written and lacking any depth. The game has potential, however, and could actually come together with more work, simply due to its promising premise: a guy working late is interrupted while reading porn by a sexy cleaning lady. I think that is a good setup! But it needs is good motivation for them to have sex, stronger sex writing and character development, better coding, etc.

In terms of motivation, the game's beginning sex action contains a near-rape, and the NPC goes from asking the PC to stop assaulting her to coming ('cumming', as the author spells it) in the span of one line of text, with no reason given for her acquiescence, though later the PC basically blackmails the NPC into sticking it out. The end game apparently has an ass-rape scene but I couldn't see it due to a bug.

The coding (not the writing – I'll get to that) of the sex is awkward in the extreme. It is necessary to do things EXACTLY IN ORDER and you CANNOT DO THEM MORE THAN

ONCE. The order given is what it is, but doesn't make much sense. Why, for instance, can you lick her pussy before you can rub her tits, or even kiss her?

The writing of the sex scene is unfortunately juvenile, and both Chloe and the PC are lacking any character or reason to be present in the game. Even if you try to look past all the MMMM's and AAAA's strewn in it as filler, the game's sex writing is entirely flat.

“Late Work” scores and mini-reviews:

Concept: 3. The idea is a good one but the execution lets it down.

Characters: 1. There may as well not be any characters in this game.

Technical: 2.5. Poor spelling and grammar drag the game tech score down, as does the lack of options in the sex scene.

Playability: 4.5. No real issues noted, other than the bizarre disclaimers and the problematic one-time-through-sex.

Hotness: 3.5. The game is as about as hot as dry ice, but it is still hotter than some of the other games, hence its seemingly high score.

Enjoyment: 2.5. Not very enjoyable at all.

Late Work is scored **11th** out of 12 reviewed.

Reflections, by Timberwulf, TADS 2

I came away with very mixed feelings about “Reflections,” which was unfortunate because it is a game with an intricately crafted and intriguing story, dark setting, interesting characters, and the atmosphere is very fully rendered.

I thought the story was creative, but it took a big effort for me to suspend my disbelief. To me, the mimesis swap that happened after the fight scene was abrupt, and only on subsequent play-throughs did it begin to seem to flow better – the fogginess in the details in the manor lend a certain surrealness to the surroundings, giving you the impression that you aren't really someplace that exists in the characters' real lives. Once I managed to get my mind around what was happening in the darkest parts of the story, I enjoyed them, mainly because you feel convincing emotional reactions as the main character as you learn about your past.

So why should I have mixed feelings? Well, there are a number of problems with the game, both technical and in the story:

One problem was a stack of bugs. To list a few, in the sex scene, you receive TADS stack overflow errors when you attempt to rub or lick Alisha's tits, you get no response whatsoever when you ask Alisha to rub your cock or to ‘fuck me.’ Timberwulf acknowledges this in his readme, but clothing is also incompletely implemented, but gets in the way of some actions even if not worn. Attempting some sex acts after the mirror is broken also returns no responses, there are ‘ask Alisha about’ subject problems and the list, unfortunately, goes on from there.

Another problem, in my mind, is the brevity of the sex scene. You are given a very limited number of turns to engage in sex acts before the next part of the story begins. Maybe that is ok, simply due to the fact that the sex coding is very incomplete – you do what you can with what the game has in its current state, then move on.

The implementation of the transition story also bothered me. You have nothing to do but wait until the death scene (actually, you are forced to move from room to room at some points to advance the action), and then you need to start sorting it all out, but even then, you need to know exactly what questions to ask to get meaningful or different answers.

All in all, I felt this game can be a very successful game, but it needs a lot of work.

Mini-reviews and scores:

Concept: 7.5. The game had an interesting story and good writing to back it up.

Characters: 8. You really feel like you get to know them.

Technical: 2. Extremely buggy.

Playability: 6.5. Generally the game played ok. Many objects mentioned are not given descriptions, which is always annoying.

Hotness: 4. Sex scene was fragmented and too short, and many commands were not implemented. The sex writing was pretty good.

Enjoyment: 6.5. Interesting backstory and good writing, but tons of errors hampered enjoyment. The game possibly needs more options at the end.

Reflections is scored **6th** overall out of 12 reviewed.

Escape Pod, by LoveLetterstoLove, ADRIFT 3.9

I have two main reactions to this game. The first time I played it, my reaction was “Wow!” but after subsequent play-throughs, I feel my reaction is changing to “This doesn’t belong here.”

First the “Wow!”

“Escape Pod” is a very thorough character study, replete and brimming with information on its characters (especially the NPC), it has creative and detailed sex writing, characters that stay in character throughout and have compelling stories. Jenna is a little sex demon and loves you to get it on with every part of her body, including many that never see the light of day in AIF. Who ever heard of writing sex descriptions for elbows before? In any case, you just want her, and you want her badly.

In some ways, I feel Escape Pod sets a new standard for sex writing in AIF, and this game, along with the multiple sex action layering system implemented in “Parlour” may mean that this mini-comp has just raised the bar for all AIF authors. Everyone is going to be expected to put in more and more detail. In addition, “Escape Pod” is the first game I’ve seen to take on the topic of zero-gravity sex, and in some sex acts succeeds nicely, but in others, forgets to even mention it.

Next, the “This doesn’t belong here.”

Well, it doesn’t. This is not a mini-comp game. This is a huge game that happens to take place in one room. Also, it certainly appears to be a fragment of a much larger game, one that I’m looking forward to seeing, true, but not really belonging in a mini-comp in which games are, by the spirit of the rules, supposed to be self-contained. The expectation is that each game will be more like a short story than a chapter out of a novel. My evidence for this with “Escape Pod” is mainly the vast amount of information contained in Jenna. Why do we need to know so much irrelevant background on her and on the game’s universe when the entire action of the game consists of a) fuck Jenna silly and b) survive being blown out in space in a spaceship’s escape pod?

This dichotomy makes it difficult to score this game. On my first go-through I gave it extremely high marks in all categories, but as I played more, I found that I was wishing it didn’t have all the fluff. Then, once you read all about Jenna the first time you play, you find it doesn’t matter the second time, and the game becomes entirely wham-bam.

In any case, rate I must, so I am going to go with my first reaction and give it some relatively high marks, mainly due to the skill and love with which the game was constructed, and register my complaints in the context of this review.

Scores:

Concept: 7. For all its detail and character development, the game is too limited in scope.

Characters: 8.5. This is one area where this game is over-the-top. The only thing that keeps it from getting a higher score is that the PC is less fleshed than is Jenna.

Technical: 8. I didn’t find any bugs, the bolded topics to talk to Jenna about are a nice feature, and the sheer number of body parts implemented is unprecedented. To score higher, I would have liked to see some more cool tricks.

Playability: 7.5. The game flows nicely and I didn’t see any snags. The only odd thing was it seemed arbitrary when you would have to rest to conserve oxygen.

Hotness: 8. Great number of body parts implemented, good immersive writing and interesting use of zero-gravity sex.

Enjoyment: 8.5. Very nicely done. I’m looking forward to the ‘novel’ version.

Escape Pod is scored an extremely close 2nd overall.

Truck, by Sly Dog, ADRIFT 4

Truck is an extremely simple ‘wham-bam-thank-you-ma’am’ game that takes ‘mini’ to the extreme. The only trickery here is that there are two options for your NPC, either a young Jayne under 22 or ‘middle aged’ Jayne over 22. By the way, if 22 is when middle age starts, then I must be geriatric.

The game has one puzzle and then you can jump Jayne’s bones. As in other extremely simplistic sex games, she has no reason for accepting or rejecting your advances, she just does. This tends

to negate her as a character. The endings are a little more interesting than the beginning, and add a nice twist to the game.

The game has some weird glitches (doesn't seem to know if the cab doors are open or closed), and the usual host of ADRIFT parser oddities, but otherwise plays through without too many problems. In terms of Jayne's parts, you can examine the usual collection of body parts, plus her clothes. The sex writing is about as un-hot as any I've seen. Is it really necessary to describe her tits as 'floppy' and 'droopy' [sic]?

Scores:

Concept: 4. The story is way too basic.

Characters: 2. What makes these characters tick? We never will know.

Technical: 5. Some problems with clothes, but otherwise very middle-of-the-road.

Playability: 6. No real problems, but nothing stellar, either.

Hotness: 3. Uninspired sex writing, but better than others helps boost score.

Enjoyment: 3.5 The cute ending helped boost the score a little.

Truck is scored **8th** out of 12 reviewed.

The Prostitute, by Anonymous Martian, ADRIFT 4

In *The Prostitute*, the player character finds the number of a whore, calls her, she shows up and then he fucks her. Is it possible to be less hot than that? The game's lack of hotness is exacerbated by the fact that her body parts and clothing do not exist when you try to examine them.

The game also suffers from occasional spelling and punctuation problems, making it seem incomplete, and has weird bugs having to do with the player's clothing (is he wearing clothes or not?).

My main objection to this game is that the author seems to have an extremely low estimation of his audience, or an extremely low arousal threshold.

Scores:

Concept: 1. Nothing is less sexy than a prostitute in a crummy hotel room.

Characters: 1. No details whatsoever are provided. They are nothing more than bodies.

Technical: 2 Not terribly buggy, but a lot of things are totally left out, including NPC bodyparts and clothing.

Playability: 5. No issues, but no expectations either.

Hotness: 2.5 The sex writing was ok, but the idea of fucking a prostitute in a fleabag hotel isn't hot.

Enjoyment: 2. No repeat value to this one.

The Prostitute scores **12th** out of 12 games reviewed.

To Score or Not To Score, by David Wylde, ADRIFT 4.0

My main comment about “To Score...” is that once you accept the main premise, the entire game is about trying to solve the running puzzles. I count three main puzzles in the game, figuring out what combines with what in the cauldron, finding all the money needed to get what you need from the store, and working through the conversation trees with Jennifer. I have to admit that it took me numerous repeat plays, sharing puzzle information with another player, before I could solve all the money and cauldron puzzles.

The main issues I had with the money and cauldron puzzles is that they were too random. There was no rhyme or reason I could see what would combine with what in the cauldron. There was also, in my opinion, insufficient feedback from Jennifer as to whether we were making progress getting her warmed up, other than that she obviously appreciates some gifts more than others. We also weren't given any feedback at all about the clothing items (without giving too much away) that was obviously designed to turn her on.

The game also had a fair share of bugs and annoy-isms. For instance, it has a long wise-ass disclaimer that pops up every time you type something the parser doesn't understand. It was cute the first time it appears, but it should have been limited to that one instance and then been replaced with a simple disclaimer. As an example of a bug, it had a sign that could not be read, even though it was obviously supposed to say something.

Finally, this game is all about its puzzles, and a bit about its characters. The sex at the end is one paragraph. Period. Once you've read that one paragraph, the game ends.

Scores:

Concept: 5. This is a fairly good idea, and the puzzles are interesting enough that I didn't really mind too much having to replay the game a bunch of time in order to win.

Characters: 4.5. There is good consistency throughout for what the characters say and do, which is important for a game with multiple scenes between characters.

Technical: 4.5. The game is a little buggy and could have given more detailed descriptions of things.

Playability: 3.5. The glitches and lack of feedback as to whether we are getting close to solving Jennifer bring down this score.

Hotness: 1. All build-up, no delivery.

Enjoyment: 4. Considering the amount of time it took to figure out the puzzles, I consider the game a huge letdown. Still, it held my attention while I was doing it and it had more to offer than a bunch of other games.

To Score or Not to Score didn't score very well, finishing **9th** out of 12.

Freshman Orientation, by Villainy, ADRIFT 4

Freshman Orientation is a game in which you play a college upperclassman who still lives in a freshman dormitory, presumably so he can have sex with newly arrived freshman women for a few days before his own girlfriend returns. Most seniors I knew who lived in the dorms weren't the type of guys who could easily pick up freshman women, so from the perspective of my own cultural bias, the very concept is questionable. But this is AIF, so we take what we are given.

Unfortunately, what we are given here is a game filled with bugs and puzzles with no direction. What leads us to the fact that we are supposed to show Becky the pool? She never mentions having to go swimming, at least not in the obvious things to ask. Once you ask her about swimming, sure... As far as bugs go, the only way to avoid them, it seems, is to know exactly what to type from the beginning through to the end. If you don't, it is easy to get trapped by following a bug path in no-way-out situation. A round of beta testing could have definitely cleaned the game up.

The sex writing is actually better than I expected after fumbling through the opening scene. This is obviously where Villainy spent most of his effort, and it pays in the end – you can almost forgive the poor execution of the game's introductory and puzzle phases. There are decent descriptions of body parts and actions, and the five closing command options are a nice touch.

Scores:

Concept: 6. It's a setting for the PC to meet the NPC. It isn't the hottest, but it works.

Characters: 3 The PC is a little rounded, but Becky is pretty much totally void.

Technical: 2.5 The game has a lot of bugs.

Playability: 4. There are traps related to the bugs from which the game cannot be completed.

Hotness: 6. Better writing than some, especially owing to the final five options.

Enjoyment: 5. Very average effort overall.

Freshman Orientation is scored 7th overall.

Breakout, by Grimm Sharlack, ADRIFT 4

Finally, a game that has a series of puzzles that make sense. You must solve in order to proceed with the game, and they aren't easy, either. Some of the actions leading to the solutions aren't obvious, nor are they 100% bug-free, but in the end result, they ultimately work and you can get through the game.

“Breakout” is also stronger than most in having very good writing, a compelling story, rich game environment, well-described main character, and a plot that, while it revolves around a PC endeavoring to have sex with an NPC, carries us further than just the achievement of that goal. It also carries us further back in the game's history, providing a long introduction and then several newspaper articles that help reinforce the game's setting. The cleaning robot, while

maybe borrowed from the Vogon ship in “A Hitchhiker’s Guide” is a funny touch – it could have had more different actions to it, though.

Where it loses points in my judgment is that the sex is not thrilling enough, especially considering that the NPC is of an alien race known to be the best lovemakers in the galaxy, or at least, “born to fuck.” Given that, I would have hoped for more than run-of-the-mill sex. What could an alien woman have to offer besides a longer-than-usual tongue? I don’t know, but the possibilities are endless and don’t have to be too off-the-wall, either. I would have also hoped to have seen more of the alien taking charge of the sex, considering who she was.

All in all, this author has a lot of imagination, can really write well, and I hope to see more of his work soon.

Concept: 8. this game has a backstory that develops and fits nicely while you play. Also, the writing is smart and mature.

Characters: 7. The PC is fairly well rendered but I still have my doubts about the NPC - and she's a prostitute.

Technical: 7. Objects in the game are described well and have good atmosphere. There are a few weird bugs with a few objects, but I chalk them up to ADRIFT’s parser weirdness.

Playability: 7.5. Only a few very minor problems with objects, and one small bug, but one that can get you stuck in an unwinnable situation.

Hotness: 5. I think that some additional time spent on the sex writing would have paid off greatly.

Enjoyment: 7.5. Good story, writing, tough puzzles, environment & atmosphere. Only the sex drags it down.

Breakout is scored 4th overall out of 12.

The Corruption of Alex, by Dr FanFic, ADRIFT 3.9

This is the only game in the competition that has a female PC. Given this opportunity to stand out, I believe “The Corruption of Alex” falls flat. Guess-the-verb problems and technical glitches are one big issue, but the main problem with the game is that you have a drab setting and empty characters, and puzzles that, while the writing urges you to solve them quickly, end up resulting in a totally anticlimactic ending to the game when you do.

Technically, the game just doesn't come together. Myriad serious guess-the-verb problems make the puzzles almost impossible to solve without using hints, even though the puzzles themselves have straightforward logical solutions. Also, many things about the characters that could have been described simply weren't – the PC cannot even examine her own body parts, nor are any of Mark's body parts described separately from a general description available when you 'x Mark'.

The sex, while seemingly a main aspect of the story (after all, the male NPC becomes a sex-starved maniac after being infected by the powder) is in the end just an aside. You are driven to solve the puzzles in the hope that maybe Mark and Alex will be liberated by the experience and

have sex freely, but instead, once you solve the puzzles, the game ends – a big letdown. If you want to experience the sex in the game, you have to time-out from puzzle solving and insert the sex acts in the middle of the game. The brevity of the descriptions reinforce the notion that there is something more and better to come once you finish the puzzles, but again, this is a false hope.

Scores:

Concept: 5.5. The idea of a space sickness causing horniness is promising, and the puzzles are fairly logical and even interesting. The game just doesn't live up to its promise.

Characters: 2.5. Characters are given initial descriptions and nothing else.

Technical: 2. Nasty guess-the-verb problems and lots of things not described.

Playability: 2. Again, the guess-the-verb issues stand out in my mind as the main feature of this game. The hint file was helpful, but shouldn't have been necessary.

Hotness: 3. The sex is a total sidetrack to this game and the sex act descriptions are too brief and lacking in detail or heat.

Enjoyment: 3. This game could be very good with technical work and a rethinking of the ending.

The Corruption of Alex is placed **10th** out of 12 entries.

The Oval Office, by Faraday, ADRIFT 4

An adaptation of the Bill Clinton sex scandal is as an apt setting for an AIF game as any, and this game takes advantage of and exaggerates preconceived notions about the virility of the former president. At least, as a story, this game is written convincingly and the settings and atmosphere seem plausible.

The sex writing is nicely crafted and I liked the fact that you are moving from room to room and from one situation to the next as the game's sex content advances parallel with its story content. This makes the game very linear, but at least this is held consistent through to the sex acts – you cannot go back and redo a sex act that has already been done, just as you cannot return to the previous scene in the game. The characters are sufficiently detailed, enough so that you at least know why they are there and what they want from one another. The background 'characters' make for nice atmosphere in the game and in the sex, making the clandestine sex acts more convincing – and hotter. Overall, though, I found the sex writing to not be immersive enough for my tastes.

I didn't find any major technical failings or playability issues in the game, which was refreshing. It wasn't overly technically ambitious, but it certainly meets its obligations in being able to be played without causing frustration.

Concept: 7. Good adaptation of historical event

Characters: 7.5. Both characters have good atmosphere and a lot to say.

Technical: 7.5. No issues but nothing too ambitious.

Playability 8. No issues

Hotness: 6.5. Fairly detailed sex writing, but not as immersive as I would have liked, and it is limited to one-time-through.

Enjoyment 7. Good story and complete characters make this game pretty good.

The Oval Office is placed 3rd.

Gotcha, by Ruok, ADRIFT 3.9

Another college campus game, this one is placed above “Freshman Orientation” for having more college-like atmosphere, moderately interesting characters, a voyeurism scene (unique among games submitted), good writing and a story that at least gives the characters a reason to come together for a sex scene. It also has a couple of puzzles that make sense and are challenging but not so difficult as to be frustrating. I also think this game does a good job of fulfilling the competition’s spirit – it is a wholly contained game with a story that begins and ends within the duration of the game.

My reservations, few though they may be, center around the simplicity and brevity of the sex writing. I liked that the game included some domination scenes – again pretty unique in the competition, but all of the descriptions of sex acts were pretty generic somewhat too short, and you get the sense that the author wasn’t as interested in this aspect of his work. Also, some of the sex descriptions and the description of Kristin herself don’t change between Kristin is tied up and when she isn’t, a flaw in detailing and execution of the sex.

There are a number of technical glitches, (game gets confused about when she is and is not tied up, you can see her when you’re blindfolded and other similar minor problems) but is essentially sound.

As a final note, I think this author shows a lot of promise. He has a good sense of how to make a game suspenseful and interesting, how to put fun side notes in context of the larger story, and is a fine writer and designer of interesting scenarios. I look forward to more of his work.

Scores:

Concept: 7. There was a fun reason for the couple to get together.

Characters: 4. Basically flat, especially the PC. The NPC is somewhat more interesting.

Technical: 5.5. A number of errors noted, but all of them pretty minor.

Playability: 7.5. No major problems.

Hotness: 7. Mostly run of the mill writing. The setup is pretty good and the two-option game is a nice touch. The scene where she dominates is a bit hotter, but it is too short.

Enjoyment: 6.5 OK story, OK sex writing but nothing fantastic overall.

Gotcha is scored 5th overall.