The Demon Jar; or, Fosdyke's Folly

A horror short story by Alan Pemberton

The Demon Jar; or, Fosdyke's Folly

This is a retro-style illustrated text adventure game in the format of a horror short story. You play the part of a young gentleman, Oswald Stanley, travelling to visit an old college friend on a fine summer's evening at the height of the Victorian era (see Oswald's letter for a more comprehensive prologue). As the night progresses, events take a sinister turn with the emergence of a murderous evil spirit. What follows will chill Oswald to the very marrow, but will you be able to guide him safely through the night?

WARNING: this game is not suitable for children or persons of a nervous disposition.

HOW TO PLAY

Having loaded the game on your device of choice, it will display an introduction and then leave you free to decide how to proceed. You will issue commands at the prompt (>) in the form of short phrases. In case you are new to the genre, or a bit rusty, here is a brief explanation of how to make yourself understood…

In general terms, you should try and limit your instructions to as few words as necessary to describe what you want to do.

<u>Moving around</u>

You can tell your character to move in any of the eight main compass directions. Just type the direction you want to go, e.g.:

> NORTH (or just N, to go north)

> NE (to go northeast. Note: the parser only understands the first 5 letters of a word)

If you come across stairs, then you can choose to go

> UP or

> DOWN as appropriate

Sometimes you might need to

> CLIMB OUT (of a window, perhaps, or)

> ENTER BOAT (if you want to step into a boat, for example)

There are so many ways you could compose a command to get into a boat that not all can be catered for. Sometimes the way the preceding text is worded gives you a clue.

Objects

You will find some things described in the main text of the location description and other objects specifically listed afterwards. In general, the ones listed afterwards can be used by the player (e.g. taken, dropped, examined, etc.). Things mentioned in the location text only can still be examined, which is always a good idea, as you might find something that was initially hidden, e.g.:

> EXAMINE BED (...you discover a book, which then appears in the object list)

> TAKE BOOK (you can also use “GET” to save typing one letter)

> READ BOOK (to gain useful information)

> DROP BOOK (if you want rid of it)

> INVENTORY (or I for short, will list all the objects you are carrying)

[Note: there is no limit to the number of objects you can carry in this game. If you reach a limit, then you’ve encountered a bug. In that case, make sure you are using the latest version of the game (v1.03).]

Certain objects can be used in specific ways. The verb “USE” is not supported in this game, so you need to use the appropriate verb. This should be obvious from the context, but if it isn’t, keep trying till you find the right one! For example, if you have a boomerang, try to THROW it, if you have scissors, try to CUT something, or if you have a key, try to UNLOCK something.

People

In adventure games, people are just special objects that you (usually) can’t pick up and carry away with you. But you can EXAMINE them (they may be carrying an object of

interest) and TALK TO them (conversation can bring useful facts to light). In this game, you may give things to people and (try to) take things from them.

> EXAMINE ALFRED

> GIVE BOOK TO ALFRED

> TAKE BRASS KEY FROM ALFRED

> TALK TO ISAAC

Saving your progress

Save your progress using SAVE, then load back with LOAD. The exact method will depend on your device of choice. Of course, you can also use a snapshot facility if that is available on your computer / emulator.

Abbreviations

X, EX, EXAM - EXAMINE

R, L - REDESCRIBE (redescribes the current location)

Z - WAIT (do nothing and let events take their course)

Q - QUIT (to leave the game, with option to restart)

PLAYING TIPS

TIP: You will need to follow people around and ideally talk to them in the first part of the game to let events take their course.

TIP: There is more than one type of key in the game. To avoid confusion, it helps to use the appropriate adjective to make sure you use the correct one (e.g. GET SMALL KEY).

SEEMINGLY RANDOM TIP: For non-British players, you may find it helpful to know that in traditional British houses, shutters are usually located on the inside of a window rather than the outside.

General tips are to EXAMINE everything, and as always, SAVE regularly!

NOTE: At various points throughout the game, the action will pause with three dots (ellipsis) "..." at the bottom of the screen, while the computer waits for you to press a key. Please note that the ellipsis is not visible in the HTML version. If you are playing this version, please remember that as long as you don't see the prompt (>_), the game is waiting for a keypress before continuing.

HELP!

You will find yourself facing various life-threatening predicaments as you progress through the game. Therefore, it helps to save your progress often, and treat dying as a learning opportunity. You can also ask for HELP, but that is limited to letting you know whether or not you have found yourself in an unwinnable position.

When you get killed, you will be offered a chance to "Undo" the mistake that led to your demise, and be taken back to a safe position just before that happened, or else you may choose to quit the game at this point. "Undo" allows you to try multiple approaches to solving the problem without wasting a whole lot of time.

GAME NOTES

The current version is 1.03

By design, this game is relatively short and the puzzles are not too taxing, so it could easily be completed by an experienced adventurer in a single session. Of course, if you get stuck, it may take somewhat longer. It was written using the DAAD Ready adventure writing system, and the bespoke illustrations were generated with the help of AI (Google Flow and ChatGPT). The 8-bit versions are text only, apart from the ZX Spectrum 128K one, where you have the choice of text-only or graphics version.

Note that I have "commandeered" the RAMSAVE/RAMLOAD functions to provide the UNDO facility. Typing RAMLOAD will bring you back to the last UNDO position if you have already needed to use it. [In the QL version, RAMSAVE/RAMLOAD remain available.]

CREDITS

I would like to thank David Walton and Andrew Ryals for play testing and Carlos Sanchez for help with DAAD Ready. Plus a shout out to Stefan Vogt, whose "The Curse of Rabenstein" put me in a mind to write a horror short story game of my own, and of course for his part in resurrecting the DAAD system in the first place.

Finally, just in case you get the idea that I'm some sort of whizz kid with all these various computers, I have got to make you aware that the real heavy lifting is done by the DAAD Ready system itself. All I did was come up with the idea for the game and write it once in the DAAD system. The rest is down to DAAD Ready (apart from the QL version*). So a huge thanks to Tim Gilberts and the Aventuras AD team for creating it back in the 1990s.

*There isn't a Sinclair QL version of DAAD Ready, so cobbling together a version of the game in QL BASIC was my own doing, with the help of the following toolkits: CVTONAT by "pjw", DJ_TOOLKIT by Norman Dunbar, PHGTK by David Westbury and QLiberator by Liberaton Software.

Letter from Oswald Stanley to his sister, Isabel:

2nd July, 1888

Dearest sister Isabel,

I do hope that you are keeping well, and that dreadful chest cold that so afflicted you on our last meeting has passed.

I am writing in the hopes that I might impose myself on your hospitality for one or two nights at the beginning of August, for I shall be in the vicinity visiting an old acquaintance, and it would be a pity to miss the opportunity to see you.

The friend, whom I think you might remember, is Alfred Fosdyke. I shared a room with him during my time at Oxford. He has invited me to a rather peculiar gathering on the evening of the fifth day of August. Invited also to this meeting are Isaac Greening and Albert Doyle, who along with Alfred and myself, were firm friends in our Oxford days.

Although I should, in all good sense, save my explanation for the occasion of our reunion, and with my apologies for burdening you with this lengthy account, I find myself in such a state of excitement about the gathering with Alfred and associates, that I cannot bear to hold the secret for a moment longer!

You see, in those Oxford days that I mentioned, the four of us would frequent the inns and public houses of Oxford town on a Friday evening, discussing all manner of esoteric topics. It was quite an exhilarating time. One evening, whilst engaged in deep discussion at The Red Lion, we were overheard by a St John's College don by the name of Rupert Fitzherbert, who eagerly joined us and played devil's advocate to our deliberations in a most adept fashion. We talked until we were escorted off the premises at closing time, and then, on Fitzherbert's invitation, decided to continue our debate at his digs.

These lodgings, it transpired, consisted of an unusually large number of rooms, within which Fitzherbert had amassed a significant private collection of antiquities from the Holy Lands. There was one particular find that he was most keen to show us, and in which Alfred took a very keen interest. This was his "Alexandrian artefact", or as it came to be known, the "Demon Jar".

Fitzherbert described how he bought it in a bazaar in Alexandria, along with some other articles that had recently been plundered from a shipwreck. The seller was reluctant to reveal precise details of the wreck, but Fitzherbert recognised that the finds were of some great antiquity; possibly even as old as the first century.

Once he had shipped his finds back to England, Fitzherbert began cleaning and restoring them, and that's when he noticed that the unusual, small, squat sealed amphora he had purchased bore an ancient Aramaic inscription. It was not possible to translate all of the writing, but one word was unmistakable, and most intriguing to him. That was the word "Belial", which our scholar recognised immediately as that of a demon of ancient lore.

He conjectured that the original owner of the jar believed that the demon Belial had been entrapped within it, and then sealed in place. Indeed, there remained a deep coating of wax securing the lid. Fitzherbert was very proud of his curio, but understood it to be just that. He did not believe for a moment that any demon lay hidden within, and even less in the existence of such a thing in the first place. However, Alfred became enthralled by the notion of the Demon Jar. He could talk of nothing else for months, and it was only the coming of final exams and then moving to London to take up his pupillage to the barrister Sir Henry Goodwin, that caused the fascination to wane.

Now, in the intervening years, Alfred and I have kept in touch through Christmas greetings and occasional correspondence. This is how I discovered that quite unexpectedly, he had inherited a country estate and indeed a peerage too. You see, his uncle, Lord Beesley and

his cousin Reginald, Beesley's son, were drowned in a tragic boating accident. Alfred, the newly titled Lord Beesley, immediately gave up the law and moved to Beesley Hall to run the estate.

Soon after that, he married an heiress of considerable means, thereby becoming wealthier than he could ever have imagined. He set about employing his fortune in acquiring a collection of fine paintings and sculpture, and in so doing, he became a well-known figure at Christie's of London.

Meanwhile, as it happened, the aforementioned Fitzherbert met an untimely death from a recurrence of malaria on one of his Egyptian excursions, leaving his collection of antiquities to be auctioned off. Lord Beesley was not to be outbid on the Demon Jar, despite strong competition on behalf of the British Museum. Now that he has the jar in his possession, he is beside himself with anticipation to open it. And this, my dear, is why he has called a reconvening of the Oxford four on the fifth day of August, for the grand opening of this confounded Demon Jar of his.

I do hope that Alfred entertains us with some theatrics befitting the occasion, as I fear the actual opening will be a great disappointment to his lordship. In fact, this is my sincerest hope!

I look forward to seeing you soon. With my fondest regards,

Oswald