Starship Titanic

Known mainly for his highly popular series Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy, Douglas Adams was *really* interested in technology. The game Starship Titanic was supposed to be a new wave in interactive gaming. Due to some final-final deadlines and an original underestimation of the technical complexity involved, what was promised wasn't quite achieved, but what resulted is still pretty cool.

How Much will That Cost?

As the game opens, a spaceship crashes into your home. You can stick around Earth and call the carpenters, or go aboard.

Unfortunately, the ship is the Starship Titanic, the newest and brightest, and something has gone horribly wrong.

Now, all you have to do is figure out what happened, fix it, and ask the robots in control to drop you back off on Earth.

Where Am I?

Criticism of the game include comments such as: *it's too slow, nothing's going on,* and *what am I supposed to do and why should I care?* In-game help is limited- Information comes from robots and a parrot, the parrot wants a cracker and the robots are… malfunctioning.

Interestingly, these are also the aspects that can make it rather fun. The game is directed almost entirely by the user. Completion of certain tasks leads to new tasks, access to new spaces, and more information, as expected. But guidance is limited. Nothing happens unless the user tries to make something happen (such as calling a robot.) In this way the user is a confused, lost Earthman, stuck on a broken spaceship until he can figure it out and get home.

And in the End, There Was…

Breaking it down, the game itself isn't exactly edge-of-your-seat cool.

What is cool is the narrative. While communicating with characters in the game can be frustrating, much effort was spent in recording some 16 hours of possible dialogue, and some big names were roped in.

So it's funny. The ship is filled with *characters*, albeit the only human (besides you) is dead. Prodding them to discover what possibilities Adams et al. thought of often overshadows the objective.

Easy to see how this system, with a more developed set story (book illustration?) is a great medium for Adams' work.