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Review Article

Why is *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers* Suitable for Adaptation into a Murder Mystery Game? (A Case Study of Zuixue, an Adaptation of the Case of the Speluncean Explorers)

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Abstract

The adaptation potential of *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers lies in its presentation of the same facts through different judicial opinions, thereby keeping the determination of facts distinct from the evaluation of responsibility. A murder mystery game can translate this structure of multiple interpretations of the same case into a participatory process of judgment through multiple roles, asymmetric information, behavioral clues, and interactive mechanics. *Zuixue* uses character backstories, rules governing resource consumption and voting-based elimination, and character-specific skills to translate the original work's jurisprudential debates into concrete interpersonal conflicts and contests of interest. Yet such an adaptation may also reduce the central question to a mystery-solving exercise focused on who inflicted the fatal injury. This article argues that *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers* is suitable for adaptation into a murder mystery game only if clues and post-game debriefings do not serve solely to identify the person responsible. The question of what happened must be treated separately from that of how the conduct should be evaluated.

Keywords: *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers; Murder Mystery Game; Interactive narrative; Ethical judgment.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Case of the Speluncean Explorers is a legal thought experiment created by Fuller (1949). It tells the story of five cave explorers who become trapped underground and, in an attempt to survive, draw lots to determine who will be sacrificed. After their rescue, they face trial. In response to the same case, the judges offer divergent opinions based on their respective interpretations of the law and their differing positions. The work therefore lends itself to multiple characters, competing viewpoints, and divergent interpretations.

A murder mystery game offers a distinctive mode of presentation. Ryan (2009) argues that in playable stories, gameplay is meant to produce the story rather than merely convey it. Instead of merely reading a plot, players assume roles and gradually reconstruct the case by collecting clues, exchanging information, and participating in discussion. Which features of *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers can this game format accommodate? How does *Zuixue* translate these features into a concrete gaming experience? This article compares the original work with its adaptation and considers the limitations that may arise in the process.

2. The Adaptability of *The Case of the Speluncean Explorers*

The original work contains clear and compelling conflicts. The explorers' conduct raises questions about the right to life and legal responsibility, as well as whether legal rules should apply under extreme conditions of survival. This conflict does not depend on elaborate plot twists; it arises from tensions among competing values.

The work also allows for multiple interpretations. Different judges understand the same basic facts in different ways, and later jurists have continued to write further opinions on the same facts (D'Amato, 1980). This suggests that establishing the facts of a case does not automatically produce a single moral evaluation. Readers must compare the grounds for

the various opinions and consider which judgment they find more persuasive.

The work distinguishes facts from evaluation. Whether the explorers committed homicide and whether their conduct ought to be punished are two different questions. Facts provide the basis for judgment, but they cannot replace argument about responsibility and justification.

Taken together, these three features account for the work's adaptability. It offers both conflicts that can drive a narrative forward and positions and reasons that can be distributed among different roles.

3. The Adaptation in *Zuixue*

Unlike the original work, which develops its arguments through judicial opinions, *Zuixue* embeds conflict in specific relationships and game mechanics. Participants approach the case through character dossiers, clue collection, and investigative discussion.

Character backstories provide different motives for conduct. Qian Gurong's (1995) proposition that "literature is the study of human beings" emphasizes that literature cannot be used to understand reality independently of concrete people. As a work of jurisprudence, *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers presents positions that, when expressed only as opinions, may be read as an abstract debate over ideas. In adapting the original work, Zuixue develops individual backstories for the characters, linking them to Li Gong and translating debates in legal philosophy into concrete motives. For example, Lu Jing's physical altercation with Li Gong and Gu Nian'an's act of pushing down the already injured Li Gong appear to escalate the conflict, but are in fact driven by the characters' concealed secrets and motives. These actions function not only as clues but also as expressions of the characters' motives under extreme circumstances. By fleshing out the characters' histories, *Zuixue* transforms the original work's abstract opposition between "people and rules" into concrete grievances between "people and people."

Resource consumption and elimination voting bring the pressure of survival into players' actual choices. In *Zuixue,* each of the eight players begins with seven units of survival supplies. Starting at noon on the second day, two units are consumed each day. Players may give supplies to others or take part in nighttime raids, while subsequent votes may lead to a character's elimination (Zuixue Creative Team, 2026). Players must investigate Li Gong's death while also deciding how to preserve their supplies, win others' support, and avoid being voted out themselves. This mechanism echoes the survival dilemma in *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers. If uncovering the truth might lead to a player's supplies being stolen or to their elimination by a vote, the player must weigh exposing others against self-preservation. The mechanism thus translates the judges' seemingly abstract jurisprudential confrontation into strategic interaction under conditions of limited resources. It is a gamified re-enactment of the thought experiment at the heart of *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers.

Asymmetric information and role-specific skills enable players to actively alter the conditions under which judgments are made. In ordinary reading, readers learn the story in the order arranged by the author. In a murder mystery game, players possess different pieces of information, and *Zuixue* further amplifies these differences through character secrets and skill assignments. For example, the secrets concealed by individual characters relate to their reasons for approaching Li Gong; a single character's materials are insufficient to explain the whole incident. Players must exchange information, check the timeline, and determine whether different accounts contradict one another. In discussing the cross-media transformation of detective narratives, Ye (2025) argues that the presence and spatiality of detective fiction make it especially well-suited to script murder games, where it meets players' needs for agency and interactivity. Players may also attempt to exculpate themselves and, intentionally or unintentionally, to approach or distort the truth. The "jurisprudential scrutiny" skill assigned to a law student can overturn a voting result, while a narcotics police officer's "interrogative intuition" skill can compel the verification of a lie (Zuixue Creative Team, 2026). These skills do more than demonstrate character abilities: they allow players to alter the information available to them and influence the outcome of voting.

Through interpersonal conflict, information exchange, and survival mechanics, *Zuixue* turns the legal debate of the original work into a process of judgment in which players must actively participate.

4. Limitations of the Adaptation

The suitability of *The Case of the Speluncean* Explorers for adaptation into a murder mystery game does not mean that simply adding characters, clues, and puzzles will preserve the original work's intellectual value.

Interest in the plot may distract players from the value judgments that should remain central. *Zuixue* organizes its investigation around injuries, actions, and timelines, encouraging players to use their role-specific skills to work backward and determine who inflicted the fatal injury. This is certainly an important part of a murder-mystery game. However, if the game's ultimate goal is merely to identify the fatal act and establish who was responsible, players are more likely to focus on "who did what" and "how to clear oneself of suspicion" than on "why a person should bear responsibility." Under these conditions, the original work's discussion of the right to life, necessity, and the applicability of law in

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extreme circumstances may be obscured by the puzzle-solving process.

A predetermined answer may also restrict openness. To give players a clear investigative objective, *Zuixue* establishes a relatively fixed sequence of events. Yet the fact that a case has a determinate factual solution does not mean that the question of responsibility in the original work admits only one interpretation. Ethical and legal questions that could otherwise remain open to discussion may consequently be reduced to judgments of right and wrong, limiting the openness of the experience.

Adaptation should therefore connect factual investigation with ethical discussion rather than simply declare who is right or wrong.

5. CONCLUSION

The Case of the Speluncean Explorers is suitable for adaptation into a murder mystery game because it provides an excellent "container for a thought experiment." Through a range of mechanics, *Zuixue* turns jurisprudential debates on the page into choices in which players must participate personally. This transformation, however, is a double-edged sword. By emphasizing the pleasure of solving puzzles and strategic competition for survival, the game may distract players from the ethical questions at the heart of the original work, leaving them focused on identifying the culprit rather than examining how the characters' actions should be evaluated. Future adaptations should preserve not only the pleasure of solving the puzzle, but also the questions that remain after the answer is found.

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