*Inside*ADRIFT
The newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 24   **July/August 2005**

Contents

News and announcements

ADRIFT site gets new server

Campbell Wild has installed a much more powerful web server for the ADRIFT site, including the forum

> **New server specification**
> Dual 2.8GHz Xeon processors
> 2Gb RAM
> 4 x 160Gb Hard drives, RAID 0+1 Array giving 320Gb space
> 1 x 300Gb Hard drive for backups

Fortunately Campbell was able to make the transfer work very smoothly and things do seem to be better. The result is that things whiz along much more smoothly.

Reviews Exchange Issue 5 out now

Issue five has been released by David Whyld and is available from: http://www.shadowvault.net/rex.htm. This issue contains a massive 32 reviews, including many for the IntroComp games, and runs to a printer straining 111 pages of PDF.

> **This month's reviews are:**
> *The Adventure Of Space Boy!* by David Parish – review by David Whyld
> *Escape To Freedom* by Richard Otter – review by David Whyld
> *The Final Question* by David Whyld – review by C. Henshaw
> *The Final Question* by David Whyld – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
> *The Fire Tower* by Jacqueline A. Lott – review by David Whyld
> *Future Boy* by Kent Tessman – review by David Whyld
> *Halloween Hijinks* by David Whyld – review by Robert Rafgon
> *In The Claws Of Clueless Bob* by David Whyld – review by Robert Rafgon
> *In The Claws Of Clueless Bob* by David Whyld – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
> *Lauren's Awakening* by TotalDirt – review by David Whyld
> *Murder Mansion* by Reelyor – review by C. Henshaw
> *Murder Mansion* by Reelyor – review by David Whyld
> *Murder Mansion* by Reelyor – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
> *Must Escape!* by Robert Rafgon – review by C. Henshaw
> *Must Escape!* by Robert Rafgon – review by David Whyld
> *Must Escape!* by Robert Rafgon – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Editorial

The quietness of the spring and summer shows little sign of being broken. Here in England the dull weather has recently been replaced by heat that makes work difficult. Now we have actually had rai, which, many will find hard to believe, has been very rare in recent months

The community is moving along, but not exactly buzzing. Hopefully many are workingon their entries for the Summer Comp, the IFComp, or the 'Finish the Game' Comp, all of which take place in the coming couple of months. Good luck to everyone.

KF

Contact

Send any suggestions, requests or comments about the newsletter to: editor@insideadrift.org.uk

Find the newsletter at: http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/

InsideADRIFT merchandise

You can now purchase an exciting InsideADRIFT mug, if you so desire. It has been updated with the new logo.

The store is really not fully operational, if you are interested look at **www.cafepress.com/insideadrift**

More details can be found on page 7.

Normville by BBBen – review by David Whyld
Outline by Robert Rafgon – review by C. Henshaw
Outline by Robert Rafgon – review by David Whyld
Outline by Robert Rafgon – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
Point 2 Point by C. Henshaw – review by David Whyld
Point 2 Point by C. Henshaw – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
Rift by Red-Sith – review by C. Henshaw
Rift by Red-Sith – review by David Whyld
Rift by Red-Sith – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
Sex Artist by A. Ninny – review by David Whyld
Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand To Lop Nor by C. Henshaw – review by David Whyld
Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand To Lop Nor by C. Henshaw – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)
The Will by Ambrosine – review by Robert Rafgon
Zack Smackfoot: Escape The Jungle Terror by KFAdrift – review by C. Henshaw
Zack Smackfoot: Escape The Jungle Terror by KFAdrift – review by David Whyld
Zack Smackfoot: Escape The Jungle Terror by KFAdrift – review by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

Competition news roundup

ADRIFT Intro Comp 2005

The results of the Intro Comp have been announced on the forum and were as follow.

1. "Silk Road Secrets: Samarkand to Lop Nor" by C. Henshaw (25 points)
=2. "The Final Question" by David Whyld (13 points)
=2. "Murder Mansion" by Reelyor (13 points)
4. "Zack Smackfoot" by Ken Franklin (9 points)
5. "Outline" by Robert Rafgon (6 points)
6. "Must Escape!" by Robert Rafgon (5 points)
7. "Rift by Red-Sith" (1 point)
8. "Point 2 Point" by C. Henshaw (0 points)

A strange result, with the winning and last place entry having the same author, Christy Henshaw. I think that the winner was certainly worthy of the title, looking to be well researched.

InsideADRIFT Competitions

The rules for the Summer and Game of the Year competitions can be found at http://www.adriftwiki.org.uk.

Wider IF Community

2005 Interactive Fiction Competition

As a surprise for no one, this year's IF Comp has been announced and will run under the normal rules and schedule. Already a number of drifters seem to have games in the final stages of preparation, so there is a chance that this year David Whyld will not be our sole representative.

(For more details go to http://ifcomp.org)

Drifters birthdays

August 2005

2 schoolsinger (21)

4 outsider (18)

5 gigabyteman (Corey Arnett)(36)

7 Splink07 (25); loki88 (39)

8 Lena1975 (30)

11 mjbstein (36)

15 Coolkid (17)

18 rocksockm (28)

20 Chenshaw (29)

21 Bacchus (37); malleus maleficarum (32); Scarlettechi (19)

23 Woodfish (17); Damien (19); Mickey Crocker (21)

26 Starstream (60)

27 re_volvo (32); Filthy Bill (34)

30 bdenson (34); Scarecrow (34)

September 2005

1 Astridian (22)

4 RansomDchs (48); cewilson (46); Lailokken (49)

5 Campbell (29); Keeling (30)

10 Lycaon (22); brucehum (34)

13 Chaos (20)

17 Mystery (33); lyonstomb (26)

18 Psyleid (18);ifjames (17)

20 ondre (27)

24Jacqueline (22); Lumin (22); V.A. Spatski (35)

27 MadTom (19)

28 kolya (28); highways (62)

29 phazonstorm (13)

Drifter's Toolbox

Has anyone found a program that has made them go WOW and wonder how they managed without it? If you have then why not share it with us?.

Change of editor for SPAG

After editing the SPAG newsletter since 1999, Paul O'Brian has decided that, after 24 issues, now is the time to hand over the role as editor. His replacement is Jimmy Maher, author of the new Filfre Z-code interpreter and a contributor to SPAG.

Paul does not plan to leave the community, but the birth of his son has given new priorities for his life. (http://www.sparkynet.com/spag)

Forum news

That's better, a few topics this month that lifted the lethargy from the forum and excited some real discussions.

Forgotten genres

This thread proved lively, with over 60 replies, even if it did wander off topic.

The start from David Whyld was:

Anyone notice how few Adrift games there seem to be written in an historical genre? Or romantic? Or futuristic? (...to name but three...)

Do people dislike these genres is it that they feel more comfortable writing about what they know (the modern age)? Or is someone about to spring an historical love story set in the future on us at any moment?

This is quite an interesting discussion as it does reflect the fact that some subjects are easier than others. With historical the problems seemed to be to do with the amount of research required, with Eric Mayer able to give some information from his perspective as a writer of historical novels.

Working from a walkthru: Anybody ever tried this?

This thread started when TDS asked:

Has anyone ever tried creating a walkthrough of their game and then build the game around it? Because lately I've gotten the idea for a short err...romance game that's fairly linear and story-driven. And I'd like to write up a walkthrough and then fill in the blanks as I go along.

The general opinion seemed to be that it was an interesting idea for setting out your ideas and could work. Cannibal said he had tried it without getting round to actually programming it.

Events Diary

How much would you pay?

> **David Whyld also started this topic with:**
>
> *The issue of making commercial interactive fiction has been raised before – mainly by yours truly – but I was curious just how much people would pay for an IF game. Assuming it was well written, and bug-free, and had a decent storyline, would people still be willing pay for an IF game? And, if so, how much would they pay?*

This brought a great deal of input from the forum members with responses varying from the *yes I would buy if it looked good* to *no way would I buy IF*.

The opinion seemed to be that the age of boxed games with documentation was past and that any new IF would be paid for online and downloaded.

Another side of this was put by MileStyle who stated that there was no way an ADRIFT game could ever be good enough to be sold.

Failed Intros

Failed intros 2 by Jason Guest

"Food Glorious Mud"

> **The background**
>
> *As a teenager I was often very busy starting to write adventure games. Unfortunately I was less enthusiastic about finishing them. Recently I powered up my old Acorn Electron and took a look at some of my early efforts for the first time since purchasing my BBC Master Compact in 1988. A strange experience since I have only the vaguest memories of writing them! Most were, as I said, unfinished.*
>
> *The one complete game, titled "Hotel Ghastly", was also the earliest, and easily the worst. Your car breaks down outside a creepy hotel, and you can probably guess the rest. I must have written this game when I was 14 or 15. Written in BBC Basic, it is full of unfair, underclued puzzles and empty locations and contains a completely random maze. Winning the game is childs play provided you have read the code beforehand. If you haven't, you'll probably waste a lot of time trying to find uses for the various objects which, along with 90% of the rooms, appear to be nothing more than window dressing. Highlights included a pot of spaghetti in the kitchen with a hand sticking out, a butler who is described in a location description as walking through the room but whom has always "just left the room" when referred to, and a lot of very funny responses for highly unlikely actions.*
>
> *Much better was "The Adventures of Inspector Macaroon", a game I do remember writing, which actually has a functioning two-word parser. The game (which was inspired by the Pink Panther films and the Rocky and Bulwinkle show) begins with the PC tied to a railway track by the nefarious Mr. Nasty. The PC knows it was Mr. Nasty who did this, so this isn't a whodunnit. Fortunately escape is easy - UNTIE ROPES gives the response "Fortunately Mr. Nasty forgot to tie your hands - you leap from the tracks just in time to watch the train thunder past - Mr. Nasty at the controls!" Obviously I favoured wide games in those days; some fifty locations are immediately accessible along with a eclectic range of*

ADRIFT recent releases

These are the latest releases from the ADRIFT site, why not try one or two?

Complete games

Crazy Old Bag Lady (25 Kb, COBL.zip by Sprite, released Sat 16th Jul 2005
After the ending of the last adventure game you played left you feeling empty and cheated, you realised that the highlight of your adventuring life tends to be the miscellaneous rubbish you find on the street. The giddy thrill of finding old rubbish far outweighs the satisfaction of actually accomplishing anything. Unfortunately, you can't hold it all in your hands, so you must begin your quest for the Golden Trolley!

Escape to Freedom v1.00 (21 Kb, freedom.zip) by rotter, released Thu 16th Jun 2005
(RETRO) Originally written as a game for the Commodore in 1989 by Mario Moeller, 'Escape to Freedom' has been ported to Adrift. As pilot of a downed World War II bomber you must escape enemy territory and make it back to your home country.

marmalade Skies (16 Kb, Marmalade_Skies.taf) by evil_flagpole, released Tue 7th Jun 2005
"You wake up after a deep freeze to find that small escape pod you are in has landed. You suffer from memory loss, but that will have to wait, survival comes first."

The Annihilation of think.com 3 (31 Kb, TAOT3.zip) by Pofty, released Thu 26th May 2005
"The long awaited sequel to 1 & 2 Older drifters will know of this, Woody for example. Dont diss this as its my first "Full" short game. Please put in a good review. Thanks! Poft"

objects, all to be found in the most unlikely places. The alpine landscape is also peopled by characters such as a very stupid bear and a parched rabbit, but unfortunately I hadn't gotten around to coding any puzzles.

Best of all was "Blue Moon", a sci-fi spoof written with AC, the text-only electron version of GAC. This game did, have puzzles, and one or two so good that I'm tempted to re-use them.

Of another sci-fi spoof, "Food Glorious Mud", only the intro survives. The strange name was a fusion of lyrics from two songs; Food Glorious Food from the Musical Oliver! and the line "Mud! Mud! Glorious mud!" from chorus of the Hippopotamus Song. The optimistic line "published by WILD THING Software" is evidence of my genuine, though ultimately doomed intention to enter into the then flourishing world of commercial Text Adventures! Enjoy!

Food Glorious Mud
Written by Jason Guest using Incentive's Adventure Creator
Published by WILD THING Software

You are space bounty hunter Captain Kook of the Galactic Sector Authority. One of those people who laugh in the face of fear and peril, someone willing to risk your neck for a couple of thousand credits. In other words, a complete loony.

You have recently received two distress signals, one from the muddy planet Uliginous 7 and one from the Galactic Police. The inhabitants of Uliginous 7 report that their famous nutritious mud is disappearing, and that if the process is not stopped the planet will become a barren wasteland like Earth.

The Galactic Police have called on you to track down the notorious criminal Glutt the Gastronaut, who has escaped from exile on the Prison Planet, where he was serving a ten million year sentance for eating every morsel of food in the known universe. Is there a connection between these two strange calls? Well, it is up to you to find out, and bring Glutt to justice.

Article by J. J. Guest (c) 2005

Review

The Lair of the Vampire by David Whyld (Reviewed by TDS)

Nobody likes long games. This has been made very clear to us by the IF community as a whole. Opportunities to display your large game come far and few in between. After all, there is no competition for long games. Enter it in the IFComp and points will be taken off, but at least you'll get feedback. You could enter the Spring Thing but if your timing is off your game may end up sitting on your hard drive for a year. If you don't release it in a comp there's a good chance all your hard work will go unnoticed(non-comp + long = little feedback). *Lair* is one of those games.

Key demo (1 Kb, keydemo.taf) by phazonstorm, released Sat 25th Jun 2005
A small demo in which the colour of the key can be changed, affecting which doors it can open

RQ tester (3 Kb, RQ.taf) by Sprite, released Sat 25th Jun 2005
A randomness test, which test to see how random you are by testing your rondomosity. Clear? Good... have fun, people!

Character follows Character (DEMO) (1 Kb, MoveChars.taf) by KF, released Thu 23rd Jun 2005
In this demo one character walks around and is followed from room to room by a second character.

The Lair

You start the game off sitting in a cell with a couple others, and you slowly learn that you are in...the lair of a vampire. The first thing you notice about the game is the top notch presentation and atmosphere. It makes an excellent use of colour and the writing is equally strong. The only thing I dislike about the writing is sometimes things get a little wordy. Some conversations get too long because the npc will start dumping lots of back story on you and some books start to feel like you're actually reading a book. The conversation system is interesting because you type "talk to character" and when the npc responds, words you can ask him/her about will be underlined.

Ø talk to priest
"Truly we are cursed," he mutters bitterly, casting desperate glances at the door. "God himself has cursed us for our sins and left us to rot in this vile castle. I never believed the rumours myself. I'm a good, religious man, and I just never believed that something like the Count could be real." His voice drops to a whisper. "But now I know the truth..."

This takes a lot of hassle out of figuring out what to ask the npc but it also makes for one sided conversations. The writing is still of a much higher standard than your normal adrift game. Vaslock, the vampire that imprisoned you, is made out to be a most despicable villain because he is always talked about but you don't see him until the end of the game. This effects works very well but after a while you realize he is one of the "arrogance is my downfall" type of character. You also meet many different npcs that assist you on your quest to escape. This is a refreshing change from the "solo evil slayer" type of horror games you usually play.

Baffled

Like most large games, the length is increased considerably by puzzles. And the puzzles in this game are a hard. Some are really hard. But most are of the "I overlooked this" or "I never would have thought of that" variety. You really have to pay attention to win this game without a walkthrough. At one point near the end of the game I realized I missed picking up a ring earlier in the game. Without the walkthrough I would have definitely quit the game out of frustration. There are too many of these little things that cause the player to quit the game prematurely. Looking at the walkthrough you'll find that there are things that you wouldn't have thought of, no matter how good an IF player you are. You will inevitably be faced with the task of reading the author's mind to make sense of a situation. The hints are usually no good too.

The Dream
In a shadowy cellar you stand, the walls forever fading in and out of

InsideADRIFT Merchandise

Although this is not intended as a money spinning idea, more a way to create items for me, these items are available for the discerning drifter to purchase.

The boxer shorts, priced at $13.49, with a discreet InsideADRIFT logo on the right leg.

Costing $17.39, the baseball jersey comes in red/blue/black and white.

Also available from
www.cafepress.com/insideadrift *are: trucker hat $11.79; sweatshirt $22.39; sleeveless tee $15.89; women's tank top $15.89; mousepad $11.49; teddy bear $13.79; sticker $2.69; journal $7.69; messenger bag $19.99.*

reality, the floor one moment there, the next gone, the ceiling the night sky and then the bright light of day...
Resting on a plinth near to where you stand is a coffin.

Exits lie: in many directions

Ø talk to vadris
"I fear I cannot help you here."

Ø hint
Talk to the people here and listen to what they say.

Well that certainly cleared everything up! The game is largely nonlinear in terms of what you can do. You are on a set story path but you can are free to do things in any order you like. The story is engaging and it starts off moving and it never stops from there. But further in the game you do start to find more bugs, and in the end you find glaring ones that make you wonder if the author beta tested the game one last time before sending it out. The entire game you can't use the "look" command for some odd reason, you can only type 'l'.

YOUR JOURNAL HAS BEEN UPDATED - PAGE 15John walks towards you from the east.

You'll get spelling mishaps and cases of the author not closing the font tag. You'll also encounter *Use the format "ask [character] about [subject]"* later in the game, which is annoying. Cases of guess-the-verb and other little bugs will also be found.

A Cool Castle

Fortunately, the game comes to a dramatic conclusion and leaves you with a sense of accomplishment. Unless you aren't the author and had to resort to playing with the walkthrough in your hand. I like it despite all the bugs though. It was still engrossing and interesting to play through. It's the type of game that will last you for more than 2 hours. You can stop playing, save, and come back later.

I liked this lengthy adventure and I recommend it to anyone searching for a game to play that'll last a couple weeks. It's surprisingly good even though it seems like it was brushed under the rugs.

6/10

* That may seem like a bad score but for a long game it's pretty good. An interesting fact I found was that *House of Horror* (possibly the worst horror adventure in IF history) was reviewed **twice** as many times as *The Lair*. Yes. Nobody likes long games.

Articles

Drifters think about …. how they will be writing in the future

*In answer to the question **How they see their game writing progressing over the next few years? Do they even think they'll still be using Adrift in a few years or will they have jumped ship and learnt something else instead?** Drifters have responded with the following thoughts*

Eric Mayer says

It's hard to say how much writing in Adrift I'll be doing in the future. The dread "other demands on my time" keep multiplying, as do the equally demanding "new interests." Over the years I've run through a lot of interests. However, I find it difficult to abandon hobbies entirely and typically keep returning to them all, but in a desultory fashion -- something which Adrift makes it easy to do. Just this week I had a spare afternoon and so popped open the generator and wrote a couple rooms for an Adrift game I hadn't looked at in several months. I couldn't have done that with an If language. I would've had to get my brain in gear first.

I'd love to learn an If programming language. Alan I knew pretty well, until it got upgraded on me. I expect I'll play with Alan again when v3 is finally finished. But such a project is even more time consuming than writing in Adrift, and also, for me, it's a different kind of activity. Messing with code can't replace turning out a game with the generator. So it's unlikely I'd ever abandon Adrift to use an If language instead.

My current project is a medium sized historical, which means it might be a long time before it is done. Quite awhile ago I tried to set up a base of tasks and alr stuff, using work by Heal Butcher and Mystery, to try to produce a game that would run smoothly enough to satisfy RAIF tastes. Since I've done so much work already, I'll continue along that path for this game (provided it gets finished) but I've concluded that Adrift is best suited to other game styles. It is wonderful for spur of the moment, "quickie" bite-sized games -- the equivalents of short stories? Also, one could easily compose a longer game of the sort that was so popular in eighties. Those games used very simple commands, had few objects, did not let you examine every leaf on the tree, but often had wonderfully entertaining writing. Adrift automatically does practically all the things that were necessary in those early games, with no need for workarounds. I'd definitely like to write a game like that someday.

Ken Franklin says

I know some will think this is pure fantasy, but my target is to actually finish writing a game. My problem is that I have never been able to stick at things, in the last few days I have had ideas for three games. This means that how my writing progresses is more down to my own personal development as an author.

My hope is that I will still be using ADRIFT for many years to come, but I will test out other systems as they come along and the mood takes

me. If Campbell does develop ADRIFT in the ways most of us would hope, then it does still have great potential.

Learning a "real" IF language seems to be an effort that I am not likely to make. In the early days of my computer life I programmed in BBC BASIC, and was fairly proficient. Even then I hoped to develop and bought a variety of computer languages, such as C, but as I knew BBC BASIC the effort involved seemed too much. This seems to mirror my feelings with ADRIFT. I know one language that does what I want, so why learn something harder?

David Whyld says
I've had a number of hobbies over the years and none of them so far have lasted five years or longer. Saying that, I've been using Adrift for around four years now (August or September 2001 was when I first came across it) and don't really see myself giving up with it any time soon. There have been annoyances with it – lack of information regarding future releases, bugs unfixed and the like – and a couple of times I've started casting favourable glances over to the Inform, Tads and Alan camps, but every time I've come back for one reason or another.

The main reason being that I like writing games without getting bogged down with thousands of lines of code. I'm not a programmer. I don't like programming. As a teenager, I was the kind of kid who would have used the newest, flashiest system around purely because it was the newest, flashiest system around, and I'd probably have openly sneered at anyone not smart enough to master it. How the times change… Now I'm complete happy to leave the programming for the people who are good at it. HTML is about as advanced as I'm ever going to get in a programming sense and I'm still getting to grips with that, so anything like Tads or Inform – or even a 'simpler' language like Alan – is never going to hold any long term appeal for me unless a) someone brings out a far easier version of them, and b) Adrift spontaneously combusts and I end up using Tads/Inform/Alan because I don't have any choice in the matter. I might start writing a Tads game, but if I'm getting stuck every day or two trying to figure out how to code something, it's not going to be long before I'm back using Adrift again.

So Adrift for the foreseeable future then? Hopefully. But will Adrift still be around in five years time? Well…

Quick answer: yes, it'll still be around. Even if V4.1 never shows up and no further updates to V4 appear on the horizon, there'll still be people using the system to write their text adventures. Short of a system coming along that's even easier to use and free and being constantly updated, it's hard to imagine Adrift dying out altogether. The AIF community will probably still be using V3.9 even then.

Will it still be being worked upon? Don't know. Hopefully it will be, and by 2010 will have a wealth of new features added. If we're still using V4 in 2010, though, I suspect the community will be a good deal smaller than it is now, with the bulk of the users probably die hard fans who're

just too damn stubborn to use anything else. Newcomers will be few and far between. Games will be rare. After all, AGT is still around but the fact that it isn't being actively worked upon means hardly anyone uses it these days.

And what will I be doing in five years time? Probably coming up close to 100 games. And if that isn't a frightening thought, I don't what is 😖. Sometime during the next five years, I intend to start work on some huge, epic, uber-fantasy game spanning a couple thousand locations, ten thousand objects, fifty thousand tasks, a thousand NPCs… and with about as much chance of being finished as all the other huge, epic, uber games people announce they're working on from time to time. Expect regular updates on its progress for a month or two and then deadly silence, followed by a brief announcement, after I've been asked a dozen times what's going on with it, that I've decided not to bother with it. Or that my computer crashed and I lost it. Ho hum…

Sometime during the next five years, if I get the time, I'd like to write an Adrift tutorial. I keep meaning to get started on it but every time I come close to beginning the first page, I start thinking about all the things a tutorial would need to cover, how much effort it would be, how long it would take… and wouldn't I be better off writing a game instead? But one day maybe.

A newbie's perspective on ADRIFT by Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

While the Adrift community has its fair share of new users, most of the forum regulars seem to be veteran drifters. My goal for this article is to tell how the Adrift community looks to someone new, and offer some distraction and memories to the readers.

Light at the end of the tunnel
My gaming experience has perished drastically over the last five to ten years. As a kid, I loved to play games, mostly soccer and jump'n'run games. As time passed, Ego-Shooters became the next big thing. But for me, the pleasure didn't last long, as they got too violent for my taste, and around the year 2000 I quit. Since then, I played a few short games, and bought a grand total of three games.

At the beginning of the year 2005, I read about an anniversary edition of the game 'The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy' (1), based on the books by Douglas Adams. As I enjoyed them very much, I just had to try it out. I didn't make much progress, but the style, especially the *direct* method of input and output, appealed to me, and my interest for text adventures was born.

The surprisingly short journey to Adrift
As a person enjoying both reading and writing, I knew playing a text adventure is entertaining, but writing one probably even more so. Making a quick search on the Internet for text adventure authoring systems (I can't remember the actual search term), Roger Firth's IF pages (2) and his 'Cloak of Darkness' demonstration eventually showed

up. The main aim of the site is quite different from what I wanted, but I got a decent yet brief overview of several developing tools, and got to know the term Interactive Fiction (IF) for the first time.

After some further research, I decided to give Adrift a try. It looked like to most user friendly system, required no programming and had the ability to include graphic and music files. Besides, I liked the name. That things were as simple as that also shows a lack of (easy to find) comparisons between the different developing tools and languages.

In order to test Adrift, I tried to create some rooms and write some nifty descriptions for them. After this was done very quickly, I kept on running around my virtual house for some time, until it was time to add more suspense: One of the rooms was locked with a key, which the player - me - had to find first. Even though this hopefully sets no record for further puzzles in my games, I was very proud.

Enthusiastically about my achievement, my interest for IF grew, and I tried a handful of Adrift games. The honour of being my first Adrift adventure goes to 'Darkness' by rotter, as it then was the game on the top spot of the most popular column on the main Adrift site. Again, I didn't advance much into the game, a fate encountered many times thereafter. 'The PK Girl' was the first game I completed, mainly due to its online hints. This also marks my definitive decision to go with Adrift, I just couldn't withstand the magic attraction of this toxic looking green font on black background any longer, so I ordered my copy of the Adrift generator.

When I got my registration key some time later, the Adrift site experienced trouble keeping online, and a little bit unhappy about such a situation, I postponed everything Adrift related until my return from my trip to Turkey and Syria.

Epic plans, humble sequels
Back at Switzerland, I was keen to share all the new images and experiences from my travels, and to pass them via a new text adventure. My first game would be an epic journey, leading the player through many countries, to many historical places. In short, no matter that I didn't even know the benchmark, this would revolt the world of Interactive Fiction.

Happy about investing a few hours in my masterpiece, I took a paper and started to draw a map of all locations. The next day, I was looking at some poor square boxes and a few unreadable notes, and realised how titanic my plans have been. Enthusiasm changed into frustration. I'd never, ever, be able to make my own text adventure!

A good week later, things looked more realistic; a 1000+ room game with hundreds of NPCs probably was the wrong start. Feeling enormously lucky and relieved that I didn't announce the game, I went on with a more humble effort: Making a short, decent text adventure, so I can learn more about Adrift and consequently improve my abilities.

Adrift, the IF community, and everything
While I had glimpsed at the forums from time to time, now with a more solid goal, I felt ready to join the community. As I imagined the first impression to be important, I was very careful about my post to the 'introducing ourselves' thread, although I basically wanted to say 'hi'. The warm welcome I got encouraged me to engage in some discussions, and I found the Adrift forums to be both an interesting and friendly place.

Many arguments have been held about the current and future state of Adrift, so I won't repeat too much of it here. For one thing, being new to Adrift means I don't know how things have been in the past. I cannot judge how 'alive' the Adrift community is at the moment. I can, however, say that for me the community seems to be still alive, even if there's a recognisable core part, built by forum regulars.

Another thing I learnt is that the IF community seems to be separated. Well, even the Adrift community seems to be divided between the 'normal' IF writing and the AIF community. It would certainly be nice if there would be a more vivid discussion between the different IF systems, but then again, I'm not a good example. I'm aware of some IF comps, and I try to read the the two main IF newsgroups (rec.arts.int-fiction and rec.games.int-fiction) frequently.

I'm more comfortable in the static world of IF, and there are many great online resources available. Searching for it can be a little bit frustrating, as it's not always easy to find, and good stuff is hidden between technical and language-wise implementations, but some works (like 'The Inform Designer's Manual' (3)) have proven a very interesting read to me.

Keep moving
Writing my own game is still my goal, and with the more realistic setup, I hope I can finish it; no matter that it probably will be late. Because one of the many things I've learnt is that time is easy arranged and talked about, but that there's always something coming between - more work in real life, sudden lack of motivation or inspiration, trouble and failed attempts.

So it's no wonder that I'm currently at the third attempt to the same game, but at least I seem to have found a way which allows me to keep moving, and at the moment, the game progresses slowly but steadily. I like to think I can build a text adventure like I'd build a house, from the fundament down to the details. I first draw a map of the locations I want to feature, then make a short description with indications of possible plot-devices and puzzles. Then I virtually lay the fundament for the new world, by creating all rooms of every location first. After this, I move from room to room, and write short notes of objects, obstacles and NPCs I want to put in there. One negative aspect of this method is that new rooms which are added later on, are hard to keep track of, as they can't be freely organised.

The biggest problem I face at the moment appears to be the middle of

the game. My image of the beginning and the ending is pretty clear, but the middle part has many open holes. How can they be filled without mindless puzzles? I try to create a sub-plot, but I'm not sure how well this will turn out. But the work, frustrating as it can be at times, is fun and I really enjoy it; almost every aspect of writing is new to me, and it's nice to try something new, especially if it's working. It doesn't matter how simple it may look from the outside, or even in retrospect, it's always a thrilling moment.

This probably costs some time, and I remember looking at a NPC called 'bus' for about ten minutes in delight. The biggest time waster is my habit of trying every new task/event immediately, but at least this reduces the possibility of false dependencies.

One thing which also helps me to understand Adrift better is beta-testing. I think it's a great way to learn about possible mistakes and help fellow drifters. Besides, it's always nice to play good games earlier!

Think IF, act Adrift
Generally speaking, I think Adrift has its place in the IF world. It's a user friendly system designed for fans of Interactive Fiction, and as such surely will attract other new users like me in the future. Of course, to remain a viable alternative to the more established systems, Adrift has to keep moving, too.

While there are some things only Campbell can do, I think that we shouldn't forget that a small community is not only a drawback, but also a opportunity, as each member is able to make a greater impact. And the very fundamental for a (flourishing) community are laid: The Adrift forum is a friendly place for discussions, help and monthly writing challenges; and there is also DriftOn, Reviews Exchange and the InsideAdrift newsletter.

To really make use of them and help Adrift, it probably would be good to engage in the wider IF community, and I'm sure every drifter is welcome on other IF places. But basically, what we can do is why we all are here in the first place: Write some good games, help each other, and have fun along the way.

Notes:
1) 20th Anniversary Edition of 'The Hitchhiker's Guide To The Galaxy' - http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/hitchhikers/game.shtml
2) Roger Firth's IF Pages - http://www.firthworks.com/roger/
3) The Inform Designer's Manual by Graham Nelson - http://www.inform-fiction.org/manual/

When I was a kid my best friend and I had an ongoing argument over Superman's powers. Or to be more precise, the Man of Steel's exercise of those powers. Neither of us doubted that Superman could, for example, blow out a forest fire with his super breath, but we disagreed about how much effort it would cost him.

Johnnie insisted it would be no trouble at all, like blowing out a match. (Johnnie took a lot of interest in matches, and in fact, you can do some pretty exciting things with matches and a roll of toilet paper, but that's another story). I, on the other hand, reasoned that it would take a hurricane to extinguish a forest fire and although Superman could produce such a wind he'd have to put some effort into it. He wouldn't be able to just give a desultory puff, of the sort Johnnie insisted on directing at me, by way of debate -- or maybe mockery.

Just because you are able to perform a task doesn't necessarily mean it will be easy in the sense that it will take no effort. Paula Radcliffe can run 26 miles pretty much at will, but I'd imagine it hurts.

But what, you are entitled to ask, do my friend Johnnie, and Superman and Paula Radcliffe have to do with Adrift, aside from having just filled up a few inches of the Adrift Newsletter? Just this: Adrift makes many of the interactive fiction writer's tasks easy. Not just possible. Easy.

OK. You're probably having a "well...duh..." moment right now, but I think the above statement is worth making (again) because very often, when the ease of Adrift authoring comes up, discussion immediately turns to the question of whether a writer who can use Adrift couldn't learn to use Inform or TADS instead.

Clearly, the answer is usually yes. Adrift employs a lot of programming concepts and it is necessary to puzzle out how to accomplish effects, even though Adrift will take care of the coding. Some things, like verbs, can be trickier to get right in Adrift than in one of the programming languages. I've written a medium sized game in Alan and tiny games in both Inform and TADS. I can write code (in an elementary way, but good enough for most of my concepts) and at times enjoy doing it. In fact, the things Adrift does with least trouble -- creating objects, room descriptions, direction etc -- are, at the basic level, rather trivial in any of the If languages, because the languages were specially designed to make those things easy.

But the fact that you can learn to program isn't necessarily an argument against using Adrift. For me, Adrift is much easier than any If language I've tried. Even though I can write code, it takes me far more mental effort than clicking on menus and filling in boxes in the Generator. Writing code at a basic level is, to me, like blowing out a forest fire is to Superman. Doable, but not without effort.

And there are times, for relaxation, for a hobby, when I'm not looking to work hard. With Adrift, I can type in some descriptions or create a few simple objects in a spare hour, without having to refresh my memory of

either the game or coding. I can do it when I simply don't feel up to tackling coding problems. And I can do it faster. The speed with which a game can be made in Adrift means, for the me, the difference between being able to write a bit of If and none at all.

I'm sure there are some to whom coding has become second nature and every bit as effortless as Adrift but I suspect there are plenty like myself who will never do enough coding to reach that point and prefer the ease of Adrift notwithstanding whether or not we might be able to learn -- or can already use -- a programming language.

Not to say I won't ever try my hand at coding, but usually, when I do so it is because I feel like playing at programming. When I just feel like writing, I prefer Adrift.

Not because Adrift makes it possible for me to do something I could not do otherwise, but because it makes it easy.

You might disagree with me about the relative ease of Adrift and programming languages. Johnnie and I never resolved our dispute over Superman. More than once we attempted to find some common ground by rolling around on the ground punching each other. I hope there is a higher level of discourse in the Adrift Community. By which I do not mean standing up trading punches.

Reference

This brief piece on Task Command Functions, a hardly touched and complicated area of ADRIFT, concludes the Advanced Techniques section of the manual.

Task Command Functions

Task Command Functions supply ADRIFT with additional power to do specific things, in which there are no easy ways to do using pull down menus and lists.

There is currently only one such function built into ADRIFT, but this may well be expanded in the future as the need arises. Task Command Functions are functions that are written instead of a task command. Instead of the text being pattern matched against what the player types in Runner, the function is run and if all the restrictions are passed, the task will execute.

getdynfromroom

Format: # %object% = getdynfromroom(<roomname>)

This function assigns the Referenced Object with the first dynamic object found in room <roomname>.

Example

If you had a room with short description "The Park", you could create the task command function:

> *# %object% = getdynfromroom(The Park)*

This will then assign the Referenced Object to the first dynamic object found in room The Park. Say the Player held an apple and an orange, and dropped both objects.

The first time the task runs, the Referenced Object would be assigned to the orange (assuming it was first in the objects list).

You would typically have in the restrictions for that task that Referenced Object must be in room The Park. You could then have as an action, to move the Referenced Object to Hidden, with the output:

"An old park keeper walks nearby and spears %theobject% with a large prong, and puts it in his bag."

NB. Unpredictability may occur if you have more than one room named the same. In which case, tags within the room names may help.

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