>_*InsideADRIFT* issue #40

December, 2009.

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This issue's contributors include Finn Rosenløv {Cowboy}, Rob Roy {Metron4}, James Webb {revgiblet}, Jaxqueline Huber {Lumin}, and Arthur Winslow {via Mel S}. Edited and with other parts by Duncan Bowsman {Duncan_B}.

>_OPENING STATEMENTS

You open the statements. Inside is a doughnut.

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Novelist, IF author, and Jack-of-all-trades writer, the late, great Douglas Adams once said, "I love deadlines. I love the *whoosh*ing noise they make as they pass by." I'm sure many of us know the exact feeling.

This is not to get on a high horse about deadlines and start blathering on about how they should be ironclad. They shouldn't. ADRIFT is, after all, a small community and one of the boons surrounding that is that we can negotiate, seek consensus, and accomodate each other much easier & faster than one might in a large creative community. And though we might publish to the whole wide internet, our writing can feel more personal because of our size, because we feel free to communicate to and work with (rather than around) one another*. We write and publish among a group of friends, our fellow 'DRIFTers. I wouldn't have it any other way.

*[Note: If you don't feel this way, send me a PM so I can blather at you about H.P. Lovecraft and/or the tastiest cheap tacos. We'll find common ground somewhere.]

All that said, though, I would like to try out a new rule if the 'DRIFTing world sees fit to join me in it.

Have you ever noticed how comps seem to spring up sometimes without warning, derailing authors' projects so they can have a run at the new thing? Ever notice how frantic an author can get over that sort of thing? It's likely it might also be contributing to the lack of art in the WIP lists getting finished.

Here's what I propose. Last year we didn't have *InsideADRIFT*. Now we do, and the calendar section can help organize the community (If someone wants to set up an independent calendar somewhere on the web and share it with us, we would be grateful!). Given a calendar, we can plan events with more ease. But to the point: I think it fair to authors that organizers give notice of their competition the month before they begin accepting entries for it. This would not only give authors more time to work on their

entries (though maybe, hopefully), but to put the spurs
down on their independent work as well.

To this end, I don't think there should be any competitions
in January. I have put a notice on the calendar to reflect
this. The only thing due then will be votes for the End of
the Year Competition, which has had plenty of announcement
(at least since our October issue).

Agreements, disagreements, and thoughts in general to the
forum, please.

On the other side of the coin, though we are a small
community, I think it important to encourage participation
in IF-wide competitions like Spring Thing and the Annual
Interactive Fiction Competition. These competitions give
us a place to provide the visibility to our platform that
ADRIFT needs in order to grow, and they not only offer
prizes, but copious peer review (which we 'DRIFTers
sometimes grumble about not getting). For those who feel
they are not experienced enough, not clever enough, not
dedicated enough, or just plain not good enough to enter
one such a competition for whatever reason, please review
any IF-wide competition from any year. Surely you'll find
someone worse. If not, a little search for Rybread Celsius
won't hurt you.

We have a great issue for you this time around. Putting it
together, I've seen that we 'DRIFTers have some real
characters among us. Have a look at those "About the
Author" sections if you don't believe me.

We come from all over. We come from diverse sets of lives.
We come together to write & play in the sea of IF. We're
all ADRIFT.

Enjoy the issue.

                                   -Duncan Bowsman, editor.

>_X CALENDAR

Deadlines are subject to change. Keep an eye out for these events in the forum!

December 1st, December Writing Spiel will be announced.

The writing spiel is a no pressure opportunity to release a bite-sized work of interactive fiction. Entries need not tell a complete story, but they should be interesting. Not a competition. The theme for this month's spiel is FOCUS. Entrants will receive reviews.

December 13th, extended EvenComp deadline.

EvenComp is the sister competition to last year's OddComp. This year, entries will be built using the even numbers 2, 4, 8, 12, and 14. These numbers must then be applied to the five prime features of ADRIFT: rooms, objects, tasks, events, and characters. For example, a game might have 4 rooms, 14 objects, 20 tasks, 2 events, and 8 characters. Entries which exceed or do not otherwise meet these numbers will not be considered valid.

December 17th, deadline for December Writing Spiel.

Entries must be in to the competition organizer by this date.

December 21st, voting begins for *InsideADRIFT* Awards.

End of the Year Comp is a competition in which entrants are the games made throughout the year and members of the community. Categories include Rookie of the Year, Game of the Year, Most Unusual Plot/Setting, Best Contribution Outside Writing, Best Implementation, and Best New Idea. Winners will receive shiny icons on their IFWiki pages!

Regarding January.

Nothing has been announced for January, so it will be an open month. There will be no competitions in January. This might be a good time to start plotting an IFComp entry, if you plan on entering one in 2010.

January 3rd, deadline for *InsideADRIFT* Awards.

All votes must be cast by this date.

>_IN THE HOT SEAT: LUMIN

This issue's interviewee is Jacqueline Huber {Lumin}. Lumin has been writing with ADRIFT for several years. She was recently honoured with a small cash prize for winning this year's Ectocomp.

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Cowboy: How did you pick your nick name, and what does it mean?

Lumin: I wrote a lot in junior high and high school (we lived pretty far out in the country, so until I got my own car getting involved in extracurricular activities or having a social life of any sort was right out) and the main character in my longest running 'series' was an elf-like alien named Lumin Orb. Thankfully, as far as I know, no evidence of these stories survive to this day because they were absolutely terrible and the character was the worst kind of Mary Sue-- but later on when I joined a writing workshop site in college I used a variation of it as my username, and I've been doing that for anything writing-related ever since.

Cowboy: In the "Work in Progress" thread you mention that you have two games in the making: *Firebrand* & *Nine Kingdoms*. Care to elaborate on the progress of the games?

Lumin: Um...funny thing about those, I've done some more work fleshing *NK* out and trimming *Firebrand* down on paper, but don't believe I've actually gotten around to opening up the generator for more than fixing a couple of bugs since I posted about them. (It's the forum curse, I warned you guys!)

I haven't lost interest though, and I've still gotten farther along with them than most of my other large projects, so one or the other is still lined up to be my first ever full-sized game release.

Cowboy: What is all this about a Lumin Fan club, how did it start and where is it going?

Lumin: Ack, people still remember that?

Hmm... well if I recall correctly, Dan Blazquez started up a great thread that injected some life into the forum during one of its dead periods (here, dug it up for you: http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/f/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6704), which led to people talking about how he was the most awesome newbie ever. I was in kind of a silly mood so I started up a Dan Blazquez Fan club... which unfortunately was locked because Dan had not yet been initiated as a full member into the Cult of ADRIFT and the Elder Nickydude would not allow it. (Iä! Iä! Campbell f... fhta... something or other!)

But then revgiblet started up a Lumin Fan club, where I threw apples at the moon and talked about fanfiction a lot. (http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/f/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=17;t=6720) The rest is (slightly embarrassing) history and a joke that lasted way longer than I thought.

Cowboy: What triggered your interest in adventure games, and do you have a favorite?

Lumin: Well, I'm too young to remember the Infocom days, but in junior high some friends got me into MUDs, so later when I randomly stumbled across my first IF game (I honestly don't even remember how) playing a text game was pretty intuitive to me. Even though I couldn't actually GET anywhere because the game was that *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy* one...stupid Babel fish. I think it was trying to find help for that one that I discovered Baf's and the rest of the community, and actually found out that I liked the puzzles and plot in IF way more than the usual hack 'n slashy nature of MUDs.

As for a favorite, I usually say *Anchorhead* because that's the first I played all the way through and the one that hooked me for life, though I've played so many great games since then it's hard to say which is the 'best'... *Ghost Town* is definitely somewhere in the upper part of that list, though. :)

Cowboy: How did you come up with the game for the Ectocomp?

Lumin: I decided early on I was going to do a plot-heavy game (since my entry last year was focused on a puzzle).

I got the idea to start with a lonely road at night, since I find them pretty eerie in real life and they're a good jumping off point for all kinds of horror stories, but after that I spent quite a bit of time racking my brains for something with the structure of a story that was still short enough to be wrapped up in just a couple of scenes. Getting too ambitious is always a problem of mine with minicomps and I had several false starts.

Lumin: I admit I cheated a little with Harold, since I invented him and his dogs awhile back as potential antagonists in another horror story I never got around to writing (for a little while I even considered recreating a scene from it where the main character got chased through the woods and wound up at his cabin at night, but it wouldn't have translated well into IF and once again was too long.).

At some point I decided to go with the other old standby of a creepy gas station late at night to go with the empty road, and from there it pretty much wrote itself. The twist was kind of a last minute inclusion, I just thought the story needed more closure than 'they got away'... but in the end I was happy with it, I was even considering writing more about Chris' character some time.

My only regrets were that due to the time limit I had to cut out a major scene and a potential gory death... but *whew!* You know, that's a lot of time spent talking about such a tiny game, maybe I'd better move on to the next question.

Cowboy: Are you alone in writing games, or do others in your family/friends share your interest?

Lumin: Yup, all alone. :(I've tried to get various people interested, even convinced a couple that were into writing and reading regular stories to sit down and play through a game with me, but no dice.

Cowboy: I realize that you are quite busy working, you have a tendency of disappearing from the forum for lengthy periods of time. So how do you find time to 'DRIFT and how much time do you spend 'DRIFTing?

Lumin: Typically my schedule is pretty insane, and I've only got serious computer time (as opposed to five-minutes-here-and-there-goofing-off-on-various-forum time) on Sunday and a few hours on Monday. I'll usually try to spend this time writing something, though it's not always IF and sometimes results in me just staring at a blank text box for a couple of hours and thinking.

However, due to recent events that I'd rather not get into, I'll have a lot more time on my hands during the next few weeks, and maybe I'll at least be able to use it to make some more definite progress on a couple of my WIPs.

Cowboy: Do you have other hobbies outside IF?

Lumin: Well, I hate to admit it, but other than a lingering interest in wandering outside taking pictures of random things, at this point in my life most of my hobbies are computer related. So there's regular writing, writing/playing IF, playing other games (such as roguelikes and oh dear God I'm such a nerd it's terrible I think I'll go manage a fortress of emotionally unstable ASCII dwarves to comfort myself...)

I still like to tell people I'm into making soap and jewelry and doing craft shows, although it's been almost exactly a a year since I've last had time for any of that so I'm not sure it counts.

Cowboy: Most authors of IF are male, why do you think that is?

Lumin: It's hard to say...I think most people who play/write games in general are male, though I've always assumed IF would appeal more to readers than gamers, especially modern gamers with their flashy graphics and their facebook and their texting and why won't they get off my lawn?!

Seriously though, a bigger factor might be that most people into IF are a little bit older, and especially during the heyday of Infocom and the like computers were more of a guy thing, so we may have just wound up with more men than women who are even aware of IF, let alone nostalgic about it.

I see a lot more girls into gaming now, but it's changed so
much, and IF is such a niche niche market by this point
that it'd probably be difficult to get any meaningful
statistics either way.

Cowboy: What would your "perfect" game look like?

Lumin: See, I don't like this question. I thought picking
a favorite game was hard enough... but this, I could write
a whole essay about this one, if I could just figure out a
place to start.

For the sake of brevity, and because it's late and I'm
tired, I'm not even going to get into the non-traditional
stuff I think text games could be capable of
(like...detailed simulations, or the indepth stats and
skills system that even the shallowest MUD has transplanted
into a game with a deep plot and characters...).

Within the scope of standard IF, I think the perfect game
at it's most basic level is simply one that makes you feel
like you're there. And I'm not crying about 'my mimesis!'
or 'my immersion!' here... whether the plot is 'learn about
an alien culture and negotiate a difficult peace treaty' or
'collect the magical whatsits for points,' there needs to
be attention to detail and consistency in every aspect.

Not just good grammar and spelling-- that should be a
given, even if unfortunately it often isn't. I'm talking
about, like, descriptions that clearly paint a picture or
set a mood instead of just being a place to list the
relevant nouns.

For an example, I give you a random paragraph I came across
flipping through *Fellowship of the Ring*:

At the south end of the greensward there was an opening.
There the green floor ran on into the wood, and formed a
wide space like a hall, roofed by the boughs of trees.
Their great trunks ran like pillars down each side. In the
middle there was a wood-fire blazing, and upon the tree-
pillars torches with lights of gold and silver were burning
steadily. The Elves sat round the fire upon the grass or
upon the sawn rings of old trunks. Some went to and fro
bearing cups and pouring drink; others brought food on
heaped plates and dishes.

It's just a few lines about some elves in a forest eating
dinner, but it flows so well and gives you such a clear
mental image, this would be a distinctive room in any game.

In the "perfect" game, you would also get a custom response
to trying to climb the trees, touch the torches, grab a
plate, or sit on a tree trunk, even if it wouldn't actually
let you. You could talk to the elves. You're not just
searching for the trigger to move things along, interacting
with the environment would be enjoyable for its own sake.
And the game logic would be, well, logical... you could
trust the author. If you got stuck you would know it's
because you're approaching a puzzle the wrong way and could
enjoy working it out, rather than wondering if you should
just crack open the Generator already because it's probably
a GTV issue or yet another bug and anyway you want to hurry
up and finish this.

Dang it, I am writing a whole essay about this one, aren't
I? Only it's more about general game design than the
perfect game in the first place.... which I've yet to play
even if there are some amazing ones out there. *City of
Secrets* might come close in a lot of ways, if I had to pick
a game off the top of my head. It's got plenty of detail
and consistency and interaction and all that good stuff...
even if the game itself isn't your cup of tea, when you're
playing it you at least get the sense that the author knows
exactly what she's doing.

Cowboy: Do you remember the Alamo?

Lumin: Heh, I actually am a bit of a history buff,
especially Texas history. I love the story of the Alamo,
but sadly, like most real life events it was much more
dramatically satisfying in the movies. ;)

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*This interview was brought to you by Finn Rosenløv ... with
the kind cooperation of Lumin. Be sure to tune in on the
next issue when another 'DRIFTer will take their turn "In
the Hot Seat!"*

>_BLAST FROM THE PAST!

Here there be talk of giants from yesteryear.

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"Memoirs of a Noun-Verb Shuffler," by Rob Roy

Video games are the fickle mistresses of my life. My early
years were spent chasing those five minute pleasures in
arcades and convenience stores around the neighborhood.
Computer games were the province of kids better off than I.

It wasn't until 1987 that I was able to delve into the
realm of text adventures when a co-worker offered to sell
my mom his used Commodore VIC-20, since he had just bought
a brand new 128 (did I mention it was 1987?). She asked me
if it was worth the $40.00 he wanted for it. After I
promised to release my grip on the ceiling begging her to
get it, she did. The VIC-20 harks back to a time when
computer and keyboard were all-in-one, much like the
Commodore 64 that preceded it. My computer came with a
cassette player to load data. In front of it was a slot to
load cartridges. I received two games for it: *Flight
Simulator* and a game on cassette called *KING*, an early
empire-building type sim. I couldn't make heads or tails
of how to play *FS*. I needed paper maps to find the
airports and they weren't included. I got bored of *KING*
after the rats had eaten my grain stores for the hundredth
time.

One day while shopping at a K-Mart, I noticed some VIC-20
titles for sale, like dirt cheap. Two of them were Scott
Adams games; *Adventureland* and *Voodoo Castle*. They came on
cartridges about as wide and thick as a Nintendo DS. When
I solved the first puzzle in *Voodoo Castle*, I was in
heaven. I figured out that the dusty idol was a light
source that let me enter dark rooms. Other memorable
puzzles included figuring out what to do with a crack in
the wall, surviving a room full of exploding potions,
freeing a stuck chimney sweep, and bringing Count Cristo
back to life.

I'll never forget a memorable puzzle in *Adventureland*. A
"very thin bear" blocks your way on a thin ledge. The
solution to passing him still makes me laugh. I learned

that "evil smelling mud" can serve more than one purpose. While collecting treasures, I learned the value of thinking ahead when I dropped a magic mirror from my inventory, only to have it shatter.

After that, I was totally enamored with text adventures. Later, my friend introduced me to a couple of Infocom games he had on his Commodore 64: *The Lurking Horror* and *The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy*. He didn't want to play it because he never figured out the puzzle with the dog and the sandwich. But two heads were better than one and together we figured that one out. The Babel fish puzzle was notoriously hard. After, like, the third attempt we both resigned ourselves to the idea that the puzzle was simply made that way to taunt the player, so we gave up. In *The Lurking Horror*, I will never forget the hilarious images my mind conjured up of an evil custodian riding his floor waxer back and forth, deliberately blocking my way.

I finally got a chance to really immerse myself in the genre in 1991 when *The Lost Treasures of Infocom* was released on CD-ROM. I bought it at a Software Etc. (today known as GameStop) in San Diego. All those games! It was almost too much fun. I spent days playing every adventure. I solved that evil Babel fish puzzle, then ripped out all my hair trying to figure out the "no tea" puzzle. One of my favorites from that collection was *Infidel*, which had a surprisingly original ending. Too bad the box didn't come with any of the feelies, but it did include photo reproductions, as well as map and book repros. If you've never had a chance to play them I suggest you buy the CDs on eBay and relive the glory days.

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Rob Roy is a CAD Manager living in the high desert area of New Mexico. Born on the East Coast yet raised in Southern California, Rob has managed to sample the air all over America. A four-year tour in the Navy exposed him to the exotic cultures of the South Pacific, an experience he cherishes to this day. When he isn't writing about himself in the third person, Rob enjoys traveling the vast interstate highway system in search of hidden treasure.

>_TEST YOUR IFQ

Wrinkle those brain bits. Answers at end of the issue.

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    1) Okay, so IFComp 2009 is over. What games placed in the top three?

    2) The Golden Banana of Discord is an award honoring the game in the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition with the highest standard deviation in scores. This year it went to *Condemned*, with a standard deviation of 2.22. Who first created the Banana, and what game first received it?

    3) The upcoming EvenComp is the sister competition to last year's OddComp. How many entries did OddComp get?

    4) What was "odd" about the voting method used for OddComp?

    5) J.J. Guest is the author of the popular *To Hell in a Hamper* (the only ADRIFT adventure to star a Victorian balloonist), and he also created Ectocomp in 2007. What is the name of his online CYOA project, inspired by his doodling in notebooks?

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*Know something notable or unique about interactive fiction?
Its history? A game, an author, or anything else? If so,
contact the editor via the ADRIFT Forum to publish your
trivia questions in the IFQ section.*

>_OFF THE RAILS

"Sometimes games just don't work out the way we intend. They start positively, they seem like they might well become masterpieces… and somewhere along the way it all goes wrong." -David Whyld

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Mirror, by Duncan Bowsman

I have this thing about text-based games. Conventionally they are supposed to be separated from other videogames because they don't have "graphics." Utter hogwash, says I, because text is still graphical insofar as it is visual, only text acts as symbols rather than icons to represent information. Plus, even that is a limited argument, since there is a little thing we call "parser abuse" that use textual characters *as* iconic graphics (like that text-based *Tetris* game). Unfortunately, my attempt at saying anything about that whole gig through my own ADRIFT game is similarly classifiable as utter hogwash.

I conceived of *Mirror* shortly after playing through Rybread Celsius's *Symetry* (because, all the superfluous *ftaghn*ing aside, I get inspired by stuff like that). Rybread-inspired parser abuse is probably not a popular label, to be sure, but I had an idea that I thought was neat enough. I would use text as a more iconic rather than symbolic means of representing the gameworld, so for example [ ] would represent a desk that the player could search simply by walking up to it, @ would be a portal, and δ would represent a bomb. Using this sort of graphical setup, I planned to tell the story of a man who acquired a specially flawed mirror containing portals that he would pass into, each portal bringing him into worlds at increasing levels of irreality from which he would have to recover his identity and escape.

To that end, I set up a room in ADRIFT where the description was a string of variables, each of which served as a space through which the player (represented initially as an X, but then as ? after he passes through the first portal and loses his identity) could travel. The player moved using cardinal directions which would move the protagonist up, down, left, or right on the screen. Typing "look" would display a description of the room and its contents in text. This was all doable, and in fact I did

accomplish it. I found it inanely amusing to just move the
X around on the screen, between the first and basement
floors of its workshop.

Here's where the planning got tricky, though. In
approximately the middle of the screen would be a
horizontal line. When the mirror was revealed, the area
above that line would be a slightly imperfect reflection of
the action in the portion below. In either of these
sections of the screen might be portals and obstacles. In
some cases the player may have to choose to travel deeper
into a portal in the top or bottom half, thereby choosing
which reality to accept as real and which as a "mere"
reflection. Eventually another reflection would be added
beneath those, for a total of three game screens. Every
passage through a portal would bring the protagonist closer
to some possible escape, be it good or bad, and a new form.

But, yeah, never got past that basement part. Never even
revealed the first portal.

My experience showed me that this sort of thing is quite
hard to do using ADRIFT, bordering on impossible unless
it's kept pretty simple. Keeping track of everything can
get pretty daunting, and it's never difficult for a project
to blow up in one's face. I'm not sure if *Mirror* is a
project I'll ever come back to unless I can think of a way
to make it easier.

Should you ever attempt something similar, I'd be glad to
hear about it. Just be forewarned: it may require copious,
accurate notes to keep the beast under control.

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*Duncan Bowsman is an Americorps VISTA currently working in
Port Huron, Michigan. He holds a Bachelor's degree in
English from Michigan State University. Games consume him,
but he also derives sickeningly uncontrollable joys from
elevator music, especially any mambo in MIDI.*

>_ THEORY FURY

Theory Fury is dedicated to discussing aspects of game design, development, and play. In this issue, Arthur Winslow shows you how it's done. He'd also show you just how handsome he is, but that's not possible in words alone.

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"ADRIFT with Arthur," by Arthur Winslow

Good evening. If you're not reading this during the evening, please stop immediately and come back and read it at 6:00 PM or later.

Is it evening now? Ok, good. I'm famed IF author and Club 54 icon Arthur Winslow, and I'm here to talk to you about the lost art of writing eloquent and thorough descriptions for the objects, rooms, and characters in your game. A wise man once said, "Descriptions are good, for without them, we wouldn't know what things were or what they looked like." That wise man was me, and as I'm sure you'll agree, I was quite correct.

Descriptions can make or break your game. If you're describing a door and you say, "It's a door. Doors are edible and taste delicious," people will think that the door is simply a piece of food, but as you and I both know, they're so much more than that! Your descriptions have to be able to convey the purpose of everything that appears in your game while still managing to do so in an artistic way that doesn't break the atmosphere or seem out of place.

Let me show you an example…

Say you were working on a game featuring a character named Rachel and you had to subtly imply that her eyes were blue as it comes up later in a puzzle. Here's one way to do it:

"Rachel's eyes are blue, that seems important."

Not good. You're too direct and the player will notice the artificiality of the description. Not only that, there's no pizzazz to the writing, it sounds so clinical when instead, each description should read like flowing prose. Here's how I, a professional IF designer, would do it:

"Rachel's eyes are blue, like the colour of the water on the DVD cover for the movie *Jaws 2*. She sees out of those eyes -- lights, colours, shapes, TV shows -- so it's good that she has them otherwise she would not be able to see those things. She may also be wearing contacts, I don't know, it kinda looks like she has some on but I can't tell for sure. But I digress, her eyes are blue...blue like the colour of that diamond in the next room. I wonder if her blue eye colour will somehow play a part in the next puzzle?"

See what I did there? Under the guise of beautifully written poetry about Rachel's eyes, I managed to very sneakily throw in a hint that suggested the colour blue might play a part in the next puzzle. You probably won't be able to do it as you're not up to the level of writing I am but you can still try to learn from your failure at it. Now let's talk room descriptions.

Describing a room is tricky business, you have to be able to highlight the important objects in the area without doing it in a hit-you-over-the-head manner. Let's take a look at an example:

"The incessant banging of the clothes in the washing machine echoes between the thin basement walls. Ancient portraits of gaunt figures wearing surgical masks line the walls, eerie remnants from the previous owners of the house. A large furnace stands silently in the corner of the room, thin metal pipes jutting out of its spine and coiling up through holes in the ceiling to the rooms above."

Do you see what's wrong with that room description? You're right, everything. Let me show you how it's supposed to be done:

"BANG. BANG. BANG. You can hear something banging around in the washing machine, perhaps a decapitated head or a pair of dungarees. A bunch of old scary paintings are hanging on the walls (off of nails) and show a bunch of very scary guys dressed up as doctors looking at you menacingly. OH NO! YOU SEE A MONSTER! Phew, it was just a furnace. False alarm. There are a bunch of metal round things sticking out of the back of that thing leading somewhere else in this dump."

Notice a difference? Yes, being better is one of them, but let's take a closer look at what I did.

"You can hear something banging around in the washing machine, perhaps a decapitated head or a pair of dungarees."
Allusion is an important tool in descriptions. In this sentence, I subtly infer that there could be possibly be a head rolling around in the washing machine, a very scary thought as that's not typically known as an accepted location to store a severed head. I also mention dungarees, not as an allusion, but simply because they are one of my favourite types of pants.

"OH NO! YOU SEE A MONSTER! Phew, it was just a furnace. False alarm."
As with any piece of art, it's always important to elicit a reaction from the viewer. I bet that when you read "OH NO! YOU SEE A MONSTER!" your heart immediately began racing and you broke out in a cold sweat. That's the power of words, or to be more specific, the power of my words. It's always important to inject small moments like that into everything you write so you always keep the player feel like they're emotionally invested in your game. HOLOCAUST! See, I bet I just made you feel sad by typing that out suddenly in capital letters. You're now emotionally attached to this article.

"There are a bunch of metal round things sticking out of the back of that thing leading somewhere else in this dump."
When in doubt, describe something opaquely. I could've easily just have said, "There are a bunch of pipes sticking out the back" but then there would be no mystery or pointless complication to that description. When I describe them as "metal round things", that adds a seductive mystique to them, and as I've said on numerous talk shows over the years, it's always important for furnace pipes to have seductive qualities.

Still struggling with your descriptions? I'll pull out the big guns then. Whenever you hit a wall when writing descriptions, just remember my three main rules:

1. Always use a lot of exclamation points and capital letters when describing something surprising.

Example: "Oh my god... SOMETHING CHEWED THROUGH THIS VENT!!!!"

2. Refer to objects as if they were a living thing to help player grow attached to them.
Example: "I love that chair... me and that chair have had a lot of adventures together ever since we first met at boarding school in 1967."

3. End descriptions with "... or is it?" to make things sound more mysterious.
Example: "This is a laundry room... or is it?"

Well, that's all the wisdom I have to impart today. I'd like to thank you, the reader, for allowing me to take time out of my very busy schedule to come and talk to you, which I clearly did not have to do as I am very wealthy and own numerous Jack in the Box franchises. Keep writing IF, keep reaching for those stars, and simply... keep on trucking.

- Arthur Winslow, An Important Man

        *   *   *   *

Arthur Winslow is one of the most prolific text adventure designers of all time, having designed dozens of classic games such as Revenge of Dracula's Castle II: Return To Dracula's Castle *and the upcoming* Futuredome 3000*. He has claimed to have won 19 Textie Awards although this may be dubious as no one has ever been able to confirm the existence of such an award.*

>_AND NOW, A RETROSPECTIVE…

The Retrospective offers authors a chance to reminisce on personal experiences with their own previously published games.

* * * *

"The Story Behind *Marika the Offering*," by James Webb

It was October 2007, and the entire world was in the grip of IF Comp fever. I had submitted *A Fine Day for Reaping* and was indeed reaping the harvest of my work. The first few reviews had filtered through and the news was not good. A lesser man would have been discouraged, and I am indeed a lesser man.

AFDFR was an ambitious task considering that it was only my second (completed) project. I had rushed it to get it finished in time for the IF Comp, and my poor single beta tester had her work cut out in catching all of my errors. Most of the criticism that the game was getting revolved around parser and implementation issues-- ones that would have been caught and fixed had I been more experienced and organised my time better.

The paradox is, however, that I find even discouraging reviews encouraging. Any acknowledgement of my work tends to spur me on to keep going, so my response to those initial reviews was not to give up, but rather to moderate my efforts. I decided that my next project would be less ambitious and more polished, though I had no idea what that next project would be. Then two things happened that shaped my path…

The first was that I saw *Malefique* on television. It's a French horror film about a group of prisoners who find a journal of black magic hidden behind a brick in their cell. As films go, it's very esoteric and surreal and… well, French, but I enjoyed it and it sparked my imagination. The film was creepy and well done, even though the vast majority of it takes place in a single room-- the prison cell. As my head was full of the IF Comp, I was thinking about IF even while I watched. It got me excited about telling a good story even when confined to a single location.

The second thing that happened was that, prompted by my musings above, I became aware that the One Room Comp was due to run in November. I have, in the past, found the feedback that competitions generate very good motivation for getting things done. It lit a fire underneath me, and now gave me the drive I needed to begin writing something. I decided to write a one room game for the One Room Comp, and my goal was to concentrate on telling a good story while producing something more polished than my previous games.

When thinking about one room games, the category that immediately springs to mind is the Locked Room genre. In these games the player is usually required to escape from a Locked Room before something terrible happens. It occurred to me that it might be a neat twist to turn this idea on its head and force the player to turn a normal room into a Locked Room, namely to keep something out rather than escape. So the story began to form, that of a maiden determined to make her room vampire-proof and end the curse on her village.

One unusual thing about *Marika the Offering* is that I decided to write it without using items. The game contains items that can be examined and manipulated, but every single action is controlled by events. In some ways this required a lot more work (for example, having to create 'examine' tasks for every item in the game) but it was a decision that I made in my quest to produce a polished game. I reasoned that keeping everything as tasks would give me greater control over the parser and the implementation of the game. It produced the unusual situation where the player is unable to pick up any of the items in the game, but thematically I felt that it fitted to have the heroine more concerned with keeping her hands free for action than carrying around a collection of trinkets. The other situation that it created was that I had to try and catch every eventuality with a task. Whatever the player tried to do with an item, I had to make sure that there was a task that covered it. Of course, I was bound to fail in this, but I believe that I was fairly comprehensive. One of the most helpful things in this regard was reading the transcripts of the beta testers and seeing what sort of things that they tried to do within the game. I could then add these tasks to the game before it was released for the competition.

As far as the story goes, I was aiming for a florid Gothic style and probably didn't pull it off. Not being a fifteen-year-old Romanian peasant girl probably went against me in this respect. It did mean that I spent a fair bit of time with a thesaurus trying to find new and interesting ways of describing the flame of the candle that was on the mantelpiece. The most difficult thing about the plot itself was thinking up legitimate reasons for some of the puzzles to be there. The story behind the game, and the ending were rather easy to construct.

Although *Marika the Offering* is probably the least played of my full games, it is probably the one that I am happiest with in terms of implementation and pacing. I believe that I met the goal that I set myself-- to write a decent one-roomed game that was more polished and better implemented than my previous efforts.

      *   *   *   *

James Webb, highly decorated soldier, left the military three years ago to dedicate himself to making scientific discoveries intended for the betterment of mankind. In between his Nobel-prize-winning astounding experiments, he occasionally finds the time to write some interactive fiction. The Sisters, A Fine Day for Reaping, Marika the Offering *and a few other bits and pieces were written under his SAS codename - revgiblet.*

>_ LATEST RELEASES

Which looks at games lately released.

*** COMPETITION RELEASES ***

Ectocomp 2009

Ectocomp is a competition for generally Hallowe'en-suitable interactive fiction written in three hours or less. This year's Ectocomp had three entries, written using ADRIFT 4.

- *The Dangers of Driving at Night*, by Lumin
- *Patient 7*, by Justahack
- *Way Out*, by Rob Roy {Metron4}

  * * * *

Congratulations to all who entered, and to Lumin for her win!

*** NON-COMP RELEASES ***

Tic Tac Toe, by Justahack (ADRIFT 4).

In the midst of giving your naughty kitten a bath, you were inexplicably summoned to the ends of the Universe. There the gods have gathered to have you stand trial for the crimes of humanity. After much deliberation behind closed space, the judgement has been decided:

You are to play one game, to the death, of tic-tac-toe. Your opponent will be an Undead Rob Zombie. If you win, humanity will receive a second chance. If you lose, earth will be annihilated, starting with your cat.

Igor, by TommoHawk (ADRIFT 4).

An adventure with lots of sound and speech. You play Igor, servant of "The Master" whom you have to help create a MONSTER!

Rock Band: Revenge of Gigantor!, by Rob Roy (ADRIFT 4).

Was it too much to ask for a little relaxation and some *Rock Band* after a hectic day at work?

Apparently so.

* * * *

Have any thoughts on one of the games we've mentioned, or maybe one we ought to have written about? Want to let us know what you think? Contact the editor about publishing a review with InsideADRIFT.

>_IFQ ANSWERS

Because you know you need to know.

*   *   *   *

1) Okay, so IFComp 2009 is over. What games placed in the top three?

Answer: *Rover's Day Out*, *Broken Legs*, and *Snowquest*, respectively. Round of applause for all of them, please check these games out.

2) The Golden Banana of Discord is an award honoring the game in the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition with the highest standard deviation in scores. This year it went to *Condemned*, with a standard deviation of 2.22. Who first created the Banana, and what game first received it?

Answer: Andrew Plotkin first created the Banana in 2000. Brendan Barnwell's *The Big Mama* first received it. At the time it was just another competition prize and not awarded for highest standard deviation. Barnwell redonated it the next year with the standard deviation stipulation. That year the Golden Banana of Discord went to *The Gostak*, by Carl Muckenhoupt (better known to some as "baf").

3) The upcoming EvenComp is the sister competition to last year's OddComp. How many entries did OddComp get?

Answer: Last year's OddComp received 11 entries.

4) What was "odd" about the voting method used for OddComp?

Answer: OddComp's voting was "odd" because voters chose the games they wanted for 1st, 2nd, and 3rd place rather than scoring games.

5) J.J. Guest is the author of the popular *To Hell in a Hamper* (the only ADRIFT adventure to star a Victorian balloonist), and he also created Ectocomp in 2007. What is the name of his online CYOA project, inspired by his doodling in notebooks?

Answer: *Escape from the Crazy Place*.