

# **>\_InsideADRIFT      issue #39**

*October, 2009.*

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## **> OPENING STATEMENTS**

*You open the statements. Inside is a yo-yo.*

It's been too long. After a nearly year-long hiatus, several switches of editorship both formal & informal, and lots of talk (some might even say dithering), *InsideADRIFT* returns with issue #39. How about that?

We're kickstarting *InsideADRIFT* with some specific goals in mind. For example, we aim to help the community organize a little better with the inclusion of our "X CALENDAR" section. We aim to create a newsletter consisting of user-generated content: from writings on theory to personal experience to trivia, we want to encourage 'DRIFTERS of all stripes to submit their thoughts to *InsideADRIFT*. We aim to offer a platform for the sort of well thought-out, reflective writing to which forum posts aren't always so conducive-- though we are certainly not closed to the occasional ramble! We aim to help 'DRIFTERS get to know each other better through their own writing and, perhaps more directly, through the interview section. Ultimately, *InsideADRIFT* seeks to encourage creativity, quality, and productivity in the ADRIFT community.

It's quite a list of goals, true, but will it work? Can we really do it? There's only one way to find out, and not publishing was not that answer.

To get us on track to our goals, we intend that our publication will be sensitive to readers' feedback. Want more on a particular section? Have new ideas to suggest? Hate the font? Let us know! You can contact the editor or any of the contributors through the ADRIFT forum, or write your review of this issue on the Adventures page of the main ADRIFT site.

All that said, however, the truth is that this is a humble issue. *InsideADRIFT* veterans will notice the return of some familiar sections, like "In the Hot Seat" and "Off the Rails." Future editions will also revisit the "Critics' Corner" section, where 'DRIFTERS can publish game reviews, constructive criticism, and the like. However, we've also added a few new sections, such as "Blast from the Past!" and "Test Your IFQ." We trust you will discover something in each issue that catches your interest.

What's in the future for *InsideADRIFT*? That depends in part upon response from readers like you. Right now, the plan is to release another issue in December, and to shoot for bi-monthly releases if things go slowly. That

being said, if the community responds well and actively to this issue (with feedback, articles, and musings in general) then we may just try to go for monthly publication.

To old hands, welcome back. To new members, thank you for joining us. Cozy up with your favourite compass and enjoy your trip *InsideADRIFT...*

Duncan Bowsman, editor.

## **> X CALENDAR**

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

### **October 31st, deadline for Ectocomp.**

Ectocomp is a competition for generally Halloween-suitable interactive fiction written in three hours or less. Plan for as long as you want, but actual writing cannot exceed three hours. You may wish to check out some of last year's entries to get a feel for it. Challenging, but rewarding!

1st place will receive \$10. A \$5 2nd place prize will be offered if the competition produces five or more entries.

### **November 14th, Ectocomp judging ends.**

### **November 15th, IFComp results will be announced.**

### **November 2nd, EvenComp begins. (tentative)**

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 1st, December Writing Spiel will be announced.**

The writing spiel is a no pressure opportunity to release a bite-sized work of interactive fiction. Not a competition. Entrants will receive reviews.

### **December 10th, EvenComp submission deadline. End of the Year Comp announced.**

End of the Year Comp is a competition in which entrants are the games made throughout the year and members of the community. A thread may open at some point to discuss potential awards included in the competition, such as Game of the Year, Rookie of the Year, Best New Idea, etc.

### **December 15th, deadline for December Writing Spiel.**

### **December 24th, deadline for End of the Year Comp.**

## **> IN THE HOT SEAT: ABBI PARK**

*This issue's interviewee is Abbi Park {alsnpk}. Her official Scoring Sheet was released with the Twin Comp games this season. The interview was conducted by Finn Rosenløv {Cowboy}.*

**Cowboy:** Could you tell the readers a little about yourself? Where you live, your job, hobbies, why did you choose Abbi as your nick, you know common curious background?

**alsnpk:** I live in the Seattle area. For my job, it's a scheduled work-from-home position where I'm taking calls or chats for a technology support company; we have our particular services we do, so I remote connect to computers and go through the steps for the services or troubleshoot somewhat if anything goes wrong or someone has questions. My hobbies include games (video or otherwise), computer stuff, puzzles, hanging out, random things. As for my nickname, well, my name is Abigail, so my parents got Abbi from that.

**Cowboy:** What brought your attention to IF and the creation of games? How long have you been active on the IF scene?

**alsnpk:** I've always been interested in stories and games, and it was probably near the beginning of high school when I was looking for games and how to make games that I came across IF.

**Cowboy:** Do you have a favorite theme for adventures? (sci-fi, horror, comedy, etc.)

**alsnpk:** Usually comedy, adventure, or experimental games are most interesting to me.

**Cowboy:** Can you name your favorite adventure game? Why is it your favorite?

**alsnpk:** The most memorable adventure games to me would probably be the King's Quest series because I grew up playing them, so they're just classics, and Monkey Island also because it was funny (I actually only played that one recently). I don't necessarily have a favorite out of either graphic or text adventures though.

**Cowboy:** Have you released any games?

**alsnpk:** I released two small games for the Odd Competition last year [*Business As Usual* and *Oh, Human*], plus just the intro to one for the IntroComp this year [*Existence*].

**Cowboy:** What gave you the idea for the Scoring Sheet, and how long did it take you to make it?

**alsnpk:** The scoring system came from wanting a more precise, standard method [for] rating games. I tried to take into account different possible text game styles and keep things as fair as possible. It took the course of a few months to get it right, including several revisions after getting some feedback on it.

**Cowboy:** Do you have other projects in the making?

**alsnpk:** I have a game called *Race Tactics* plus a project called *Memorize* in the works, and at some point I should continue *Existence*, my IntroComp entry.

**Cowboy:** Is there a reason why you use ADRIFT, or was it just handy?

**alsnpk:** I liked it when I tried it, and never really got into any other method of making computer games.

**Cowboy:** Are you planning on publishing it to a broader audience than just the ADRIFT community?

**alsnpk:** You mean the Scoring Sheet, right? Well, I honestly hadn't thought about it until you mentioned it. So I guess I hadn't!

**Cowboy:** Where do you see yourself in two years from now regarding your life and IF?

**alsnpk:** My life as it concerns IF. Hmm. Well, if all goes well, I suppose a nice goal would be to have released a bigger-sized game by then. Or if it takes two more years, I just hope I end up with a really good game to show for it! Ha ha.

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*This interview was brought to you by Finn Rosenløv ... with the kind cooperation of Abbi Park. 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.*

**\*\*\* "About This Section," by Duncan Bowsman \*\*\*0**

Over three decades have passed since Will Crowther produced *ADVENTURE*. Two-- and soon more-- have passed since the dissolution of Infocom. Even *Photopia* is over a decade old, now. Dust off that floppy disk; it's time to look back.

Everyone of us has a unique personal history with interactive fiction, be it as writers, players, or both. Some of us-- the old hands-- started back in the heyday of Infocom, dodging grues and pouring over boxes full of feelies. Others-- relative newcomers to the scene-- found interactive fiction over the internet, one way or another and may have started with a newer title like Aisle. Whatever your history, we're interested in hearing your thoughts about past titles of IF, be they classics, obscure gems, or best-to-be-forgotten bugfests.

Did *Zork* make you fear the grue or picket to ban treasure hunting? Enchanted by *Enchanter*? On the border about *Border Zone*? Whatever your experience, contact the editor via the ADRIFT forum and show us what you think-- or thought-- about yesterday's interactive fiction.

## > TEST YOUR IFQ

*Expand those brain cells. Answers at end of the issue.*

- 1) How many games were entered in this year's IFComp?  
How many of them were written using ADRIFT?
- 2) Conrad Cook runs a blog known as "One Wet Sneaker," on which he has been reviewing this year's IFComp games. What was the name of his IFComp 2008 entry, written with ADRIFT?
- 3) Who acted as the creator/editor of the very first issue of InsideADRIFT, then known as *Drifters' Monthly*?
- 4) Interactive fiction publisher Infocom released one adventure game for the Nintendo Entertainment System. What is its title?
- 5) What was the first year the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition had an ADRIFT entry? What was the title of that entry, and who wrote it?

## > 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*

### \*\*\* *EnTHRALLed*, by Duncan Bowsman \*\*\*

A professor once told me that he only follows two rules in his writing: Rule Number One, save everything you write every time you write. Rule Number Two, *follow Rule Number One*. I whole-heartedly agree with his simple, but incredible advice. Unfortunately, it was a lesson I personally had to learn the hard way.

*EnTHRALLed* was one of the first full-length stories I tried to write with ADRIFT 4 back in... '02? '03? Those early years all blur together, now. The gist of it was that you played as a gentleman spy named Lucas Bristol (British, of course) tracking down a rogue agent who had stolen the THRALL cipher (which contained the landing controls to an obsolete observation satellite) and was using it to hold Buckingham Palace for ransom. Like any IF, it started with our hero getting locked in his hotel room... yawn, I know.

I crammed too much multimedia into *EnTHRALLed* to ever finish it. I included music and sound effects for every one of the games forty-some-odd locations (including a MIDI file of the theme from *Knight Rider*) and included a picture for nearly everything, especially dossiers and a bottle found in the hotel bathroom called "Lax-a-Hammer" (which always made me chuckle). The file size grew to be... well, to be honest, I can't remember how big, but certainly huge! It got so big I could no longer open it in the Generator anyway and without a backup of a previous, smaller version the whole thing got canned.

Later I started creating separate save files for my games each day I work on them. Each file name I mark with its date, and when I work on it next, I only have to change a number in the file name to keep the archive accurate. I generally keep a few month's worth of any project, though I get rid of them if my folders get too cluttered. With a backlog available, I can just go back if the game starts crashing or I manage to screw it up. That way, I can take more risks when I'm writing... and what good has ever been written without some risk?

Do I ever plan to restart this one? Nah. Neat as it was, I just have too much on my plate at the moment to go that far back into the bin. I learned a lot while finding out what tricks ADRIFT could pull off my first time around, though, so in that case I think the experience turned out incredibly productive. From then, I went on to another incredibly massive Did-Not-Finish and again and again until I decided to just start small.

While there are still many others I never finished, theirs is a story for another issue..

## **> THEORY FURY**

*Theory Fury is dedicated to discussing aspects of game design, development, and play. In this issue, Justahack provides a few tips to keep your writing on track.*

### **\*\*\* "Development, ADRIFT, and You," by Justahack \*\*\***

The nature of the creative process is not something easily controllable. The ability to accurately translate complex ideas for ADRIFT to understand is not necessarily a science either, especially when we must translate our machination using the confines of a predefined structure (e.g., tasks and events). In many ways, this is still art.

So it is little wonder that in the world of software development there exist established paradigms and strategies for making as smooth as possible the transition of human ideas into machine instructions. If they work for big companies, why wouldn't they work for constructing your adventure? This article presents a few such strategies that will help you on your quest to complete that next, best, yet-to-be played ADRIFT game.

### **Milestones**

When writing an adventure, set goals for when to complete certain things and stick to said goals. If you decide that by next week that you're going to have all objects, characters, and rooms completely written, then try to stick to this milestone as faithfully as possible. Outlining meaningful milestones is an important step towards converting a potentially stagnating, partially completed game into a playable and finished piece. It defines a goal to strive for and accomplish, step by step.

Endeavor to set realistic goals. Unless you possess the mystical ability to become attuned to the Creative Force able to fashion all manner of descriptions in a precognition-like manner, setting unrealistic milestones and missing them has the potential of causing us to feel discouraged. Enough discouragement over time leads to the possibility of abandoning our work all together or just putting it on an indefinite hold.

With that said, if you do miss a milestone it's not the end of the world. Learn why you missed your milestone in the first place, then reevaluate and reorganize your milestones as necessary.

## **Planning**

Often overlooked by irresponsible participants of reality TV shows, planning is without a doubt one of the first things you should do first when deciding to write an adventure. While this is somewhat similar to milestones, the difference between the two lies in the initially abstract nature of planning that takes on a more detailed nature as time goes on. For example, you might start off planning that your adventure has one and only one method in which your character bites the dust. In later planning stages you might decide that that that one means of dying should be accomplished through irresponsible player choices. The key here is that planning occurs not just once, but in iteration. Ideally, you want to regularly schedule "planning time" to continually flesh out parts of your adventure which might still only exist abstractly.

For me, planning entails typing in notepad various abstract aspects that I intend for my game to have. Here's a short sample list of questions you can ask yourself while in the first few planning stages:

- 1) What is your game about?
- 2) What's the backstory, if any, and how is it presented?
- 3) How many NPCs will be in it?
- 4) How many rooms will be in it?
- 5) What objects does it need?
- 6) Will there be death? Permanent death?
- 7) How will conversation(s) be handled?
- 8) In what ways can the player achieve winning conditions?
- 9) In what ways can the player achieve losing conditions?

Again, a sample and very abstract list of questions which overtime should evolve into becoming more specific and helpful aid in plotting your adventure.

## **Draw Pictures**

Having an idea of what rooms are connected and what transpires in them can be a helpful tool in fashioning an adventure. One need not be artistically gifted to draw simple rectangular areas and connect them with lines in valid cardinal directions. In addition to simplistically rendered rooms, constructing flow charts can be a helpful

device in visually planning out how your adventure will proceed. While this could sound daunting or complicated, flow charts need nothing more than look like, "If player reaches this circle that I just drew, then he has to solve a puzzle. If he solves the circle, then he can go left to this square or right to this triangle."

Remember that humans are visual creatures. Fleshing out direction in a direct and visual manner will potentially help in organizing your adventure better than you might be able to do with sentences.

### **Easy Things First**

You've planned, milestone, and drew a pretty picture of how the adventure is supposed to go. Now what? You have all these things to do and start to feel overwhelmed. Where do we start?

Simply put, when faced with multiple things of varying difficulties to accomplish first, you should generally try to finish the simpler ones as early as possible. Whether it be completing room descriptions, making objects, or whatever else, getting the easier writing completed and out of the way is beneficial in two ways.

First, getting easy things out of the way provides a sense of progress. You see what you've finished and because you have a list of what you must do, it is easier to cross things off the list then add things to it if need be. Of course, this is not to say you can't add more things to your adventure, but that is beside the point. Secondly, with the easier things out of the way, you've paved the way to give yourself more time to complete the complex tasks.

It's easy to lose motivation and enthusiasm when not making any kind of meaningful progress. Rather than get stuck on something which might require more careful planning and additional milestones in later iterations, do the easy things first.

### **Modules**

Related to "Easy Things First," above, modules entail two ideas.

1. Completing the more tangible aspects of your adventure and turning them into modules for possible later use.

2. Focusing on simpler things first such as room descriptions, objects, or characters.

For example, suppose you've released a game and decide you'd like to write a sequel. You plan to return the old cast. Instead of re-writing them all, you can simply export the character module (in the Generator, under File>Export>Module) from the previous game and import it into your new sequel (File>Import>Module).

### **Motivation**

Possibly the most elusive and least considered aspect of completing an adventure. Personally, my foray into adventure writing came about after coming across a random children's show about a baby bear and what I perceived to be his developmentally handicapped perception of the world. While I am sure that the cub's target audience was in the single digits age, I could not help my non-favourable evaluation of the bear's general competence. It was from this moment that Mr. Fluffykins was born.

A lot of times, people get motivated to write adventures after either playing one themselves or after having an impactful experience. Motivation can often serve as a sort of goal which a writer attempts to emulate in some fashion. This is perfectly fine, but in regards to completing an adventure, I would suggest keeping this original source of motivation nearby to serve as inspiration. Maybe it's a song, a movie clip, or a passage from a book. Keeping motivated during un motivating times can be tough, but if you can hold your motivation close, it can be absolutely invaluable to your adventure's completion.

### **Conclusion**

Set milestones. Plan. Draw pictures. Do easy things first. Use modules. Motivate.

These are just a few possible strategies and ideas for use in crafting your adventure game. Hopefully they will prove useful to you. Thanks for reading!

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*Justahack currently resides in New York. In his spare time he tries to become bilingual with ADRIFT, and enjoys reading manga.*

## > **AND NOW, A RETROSPECTIVE...**

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

### **\*\*\* the virtual human, by Duncan Bowsman \*\*\***

It pays to start small. That's something I learned after years of trying in vain to pull together some semblance of completion in any game I tried to write. One day, feeling particularly academic, I turned to a short film for inspiration.

I don't remember exactly how the idea came to me, but I thought that the rhetorical questions given by the narrator in *The Perfect Human* offered one ideal example of differences in the subject positioning of the audience role from one medium (specifically, cinema) to another (specifically, videogames). It took me a while to figure out how to submit the story file properly... I even sent Campbell an e-mail with a desperate cry for help, immediately after which I realised that including the .bak file is unnecessary. I'm not sure how many uploads it took total, but even the final version still has the .alr packed in with it because I thought it wouldn't work, otherwise! Every now-and-then I see another new author do the same thing. It makes me smile.

Most of the game is written in lowercase simply because I didn't want to deal with proper casing and such for any player input, which comes in as lowercase by default. So, I wanted the rest of the text to fit that. I think "July" is still proper-cased in it, though.

While I've had my share of fun with the *virtual human*, I really didn't think the result was anything special-- more a glorified Mad Lib than anything else.

"A short game to play once," I told IFDB. "For a quick break."

It received a warm welcome from the ADRIFT community, however, and made me feel like I belonged in this place. It also gave me confidence to start submitting later games, which have so far also been far from epic length. Published outside any competition, *the virtual human* never ran for any awards, but I did get something for it: a sense of belonging and ease of submission-- a lifeboat on the

great ocean of IF. Certainly, it paid off far more than toiling at any epic I might never have finished.

## > LATEST RELEASES

*Which looks at games lately released.*

### \*\*\* COMPETITION RELEASES \*\*\*

#### **15th Annual Interactive Fiction Competition.**

An IF-wide competition traditionally held for short works of interactive fiction. Each entry should be completeable in about two hours or less.

Releases include two entries written with ADRIFT 4 and one in 3.9, as follows:

- The Ascot*, by Duncan Bowsman (ADRIFT 4).
- The Hangover*, by Red Conine (ADRIFT 3.9).
- Yon Astounding Castle! of some sort*, by Tiberius Thingamus (ADRIFT 4).

Also included are the following:

- The Believable Adventures of an Invisible Man*, Hannes Schueller (Inform 7).
- Beta Tester*, by Darren Ingram (Inform 7).
- Broken Legs*, by Sarah Morayati (Glulx).
- Byzantine Perspective*, by Lea (Inform 7).
- Condemned*, by A Delusioned Teenager (Inform 6).
- Duel in the Snow*, by Utkonos (Inform 7).
- The Duel That Spanned the Ages*, by Oliver Ullman (Inform 7).
- Earl Grey*, by Rob Dubbin and Adam Parrish (Glulx).
- Eruption*, by Richard Bos (Inform 7).
- GATOR-ON, Friend to the Wetlands!*, by Dave Horlick (Inform 6).
- Gleaming the Verb*, by Kevin Jackson-Mead (Inform 7).
- The Grand Quest*, by Owen Parish (Inform 7).
- Grounded in Space*, by Matthew Wigdahl (Glulx).
- Interface*, by Ben Vegiard (Inform 7).
- Resonance*, by Matthew Scarpino (Glulx).
- Rover's Day Out*, by Jack Welch and Ben Collins-Sussman (Glulx).
- Snow Quest*, by Eric Eve (Inform 7).
- Spelunker's Quest*, by Tom Murrin (Inform 7).
- Star Hunter*, by Chris Kenworthy (Inform 6).
- Trap Cave*, by Emilian Kowalewski (Windows).
- zork, buried chaos*, by bloodbath (Inform 7).

### **Twin Comp.**

Releases include two entries by unregistered users, one in ADRIFT 4 & one in 3.9.

-*Crashland*, by !Rocky (ADRIFT 4).

-*Melancholy Blood*, Danny L7773 (ADRIFT 3.9).

### **September Writing Spiel.**

Releases include two entries written with ADRIFT 4.

-*Top Hat*, by Duncan Bowsman

-*Cumberbund*, by James Webb {revgiblet}

### **\*\*\* NON-COMP RELEASES \*\*\***

*Give Me Your Lunch Money*, by DCBSupafly (ADRIFT 4).

Originally intended for the Twin Comp, but pushed out due to a lack of registered entries. A *Home Alone*-style trapmaking romp.

*Where Am I?*, by richarius (ADRIFT 4).

A miniature, escape-the-room style romp revolving largely around a set of doors, switches, and a little secret.

*Twenty-One*, by Rob Roy (ADRIFT 4).

Your whole night goes from bad to terrifying in this horror adventure. What is the meaning of 21?

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It's worth noting that all recent non-comp releases have been by first-time ADRIFT authors. Thanks for your efforts, guys! We look forward to seeing more from each of you.

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## >\_IFQ ANSWERS

*Because you know you need to know.*

- 1) How many games were entered in this year's IFComp?  
How many of them were written using ADRIFT?

*Answer:* IFComp 2009 has 24 entries total. Three were written using ADRIFT.

- 2) Conrad Cook runs a blog known as "One Wet Sneaker," on which he has been reviewing this year's IFComp games. What was the name of his IFComp 2008 entry, written with ADRIFT?

*Answer:* LAIR of the CYBER-COW.

- 3) Who acted as the creator/editor of the very first issue of InsideADRIFT, then known as *Drifters' Monthly*?

*Answer:* Woodfish.

- 4) Interactive fiction publisher Infocom released one adventure game for the Nintendo Entertainment System. What is its title?

*Answer:* Tombs & Treasures.

- 5) What was the first year the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition had an ADRIFT entry? What was the title of that entry, and who wrote it?

*Answer:* Trick question! The first with ADRIFT entries (IFComp 2000) had TWO ADRIFT entries, *Wrecked* by Campbell Wild and *Marooned* by Bruce Davis.

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