

# InsideADRIFT

the newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 17

July 2004

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### News and announcements.

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### Mystery steers O.A.R.S. in new direction

Mystery has spent a lot of her time lately working on a revival of NickyDude's old Online ADRIFT Reference site (O.A.R.S). After spending a bit of time on a standard type of website, she has now begun to work on a website based within a message board.

The new site has the advantage of being fairly straightforward to create as the structure of the board is already there (although it has been modelled to give a fun adventure style to it). I hope this style works as I had something to do with the decision and am working on a similar development for the InsideADRIFT site.

One of the major pluses of working like this is that users can become part of the community and can easily add their comments on the site and their own contributions. To take a look at the impressive amount of information that is already available, go to <http://home.gcn.cx/mystery>

### Competition news roundup

#### InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp 2004

Although the competition judging is still several weeks away, I hope that the early announcement of the competition format has stimulated people to think about their entries.

#### The Three-Hour Game Competition

This basically follows the rules of the previous one-hour competitions, but this time, you must make your game in THREE HOURS or less (give or take ten minutes). Brief planning on paper is allowed - writing it in over three hours then copying it into the Generator in two minutes is not; Game must be made in three hours or less; A minimum of two entries is required; Entries can be made with either v3.90 or v4; Anyone can donate a prize!; You may enter as many entries as you wish.

The deadline for entries is 30th June 2004. Entries must be sent to [driftersmonthly@hotmail.com](mailto:driftersmonthly@hotmail.com)

**Editorial**

*My thanks to those DavidW, Mystery, Tech and Erik, who have contributed to this newsletter. I had thought InsideADRIFT would be a little bit thin this issue, but there support has produced another bumper issue.*

*Is it me or has it been a really quiet period in the ADRIFT world?*

*I don't think it is me, there has been very little activity in the community. Game releases have been minimal, although hopefully work is going on for the various competitions to conclude in the next few months.*

**Contact**

**Send any suggestions, requests or comments concerning InsideADRIFT to [editor@insideadrift.org.uk](mailto: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.

The store is really not fully operational, if you are interested look at [www.cafepress.com/insideadrift](http://www.cafepress.com/insideadrift)

**Wider IF community events**

**IF Art Show 2004**

*Results of the various sections is as follows: Best of Show: Fire Tower - Jacqueline A. Lott; Best of Still Life: Flametop - Dave Malaguti; Best of Landscape: Swanglass - Yoon Ha Lee; Honorable Mention: The Battle of Walcot Keep - Steve Breslin*

*You can download the entries and read the judges comments from: <http://members.aol.com/iffyart/>*

**Third IntroComp**

*The IntroComp is an IF competition where the aim is to write the start of a new work of interactive fiction. The entries, which can range from a title up to a full game, must be in by the 18<sup>th</sup> of July this year, the catch being that to claim your prize a complete version must be release within one year.*

*For complete details of the competition you should go to <http://www.xyzzynews.com/introcomp/>*

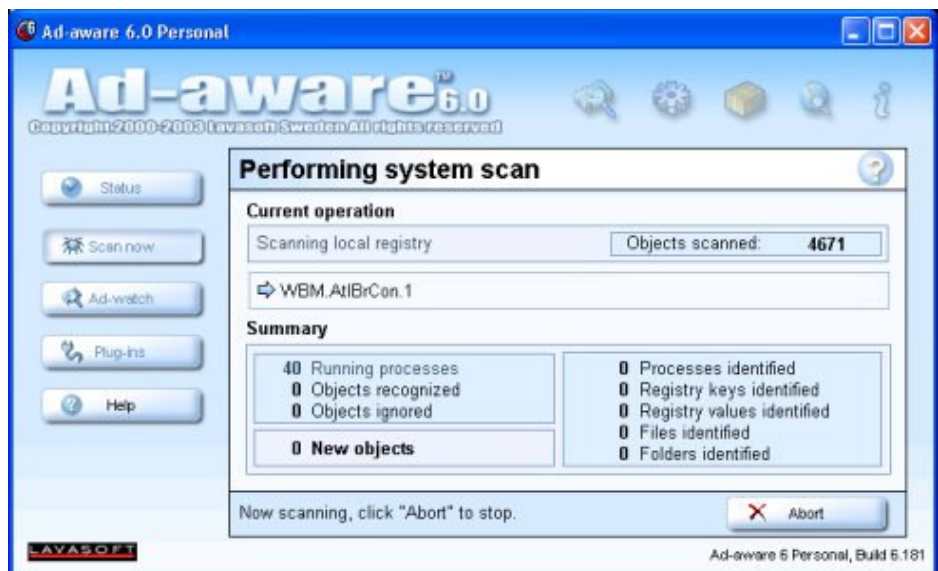
**Forum news**

*Another not overly exciting period on the forum, though there was one of our little spats over moderation of the Adventures pages,*

**Drifters toolbox**

**Ad-aware Standard Edition reviewed by KF**

This is a piece of software that we should all have and use regularly to help or Internet connected computers run smoothly. Here I am just referring to the freeware version, but there are also Pro and Plus versions that you can purchase.



**Drifters birthdays****July 2004**

2 30otsix (34)

8 syke39 (32)

9 The Mad Monk (15); mammoth (36)

15 Tonyg (16)

17 Mel S (18)

18 ejl0007 (30)

22 nick (20); driftingon (24)

29 jonrock (51)

**So what does it do?** It is a program that, when run, scans your registry and any specified drives for any of those lovely programs put on your computer to help the advertisers (normally without telling you).

When you run it you will be asked if you want to check for updates, say yes and it will normally download a new reference file that knows about the latest sneakware.

I suspect most people will find at least 30 objects that Adaware doesn't like. These can be quarantined in an archive, just to ensure there is nothing essential, then they can be removed completely.

It would be a wise move for everyone to have a piece of software like this around, it really is an eye opener when you see how much it spots.

*For more information, and to download Ad-Aware, go to the Lavasoft site at <http://www.lavasoft.de/>*

**Events Diary****May 15, 2004**

**InsideADRIFT Issue 16 out today**

The May/June Issue of InsideADRIFT should be out today.

**22-29 August 2004**

**InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp 2004**

There will be a Summer Minicomp in August. Entries in 22 Aug, judging ending 29 Aug.

**“Storytelling In ADRIFT” by Daniel Hiebert (Tech)**

[The opinions in this article are those only of the author and not necessarily of Campbell Wild (ADRIFT Author), Ken Franklin (InsideADRIFT Editor) or anybody else in the world!]

Like a few other authors on the ADRIFT forums, I've started quite a few more pieces of IF than I've finished. Of the couple of pieces that I have released, I've received a few pieces of precious feedback. Most of the critical feedback received has been that my games have been "too hard". Many times this is attributed to "guess-the-verb" problems and "guess-what's-in-the-author's-mind" problems. "Guess-the-verb" problems can be overcome with judicious use of synonyms, beta-testing and a comprehensive task structure. Other authors have put forth their best ideas on the "guess-the-verb" subject. What hasn't always been talked about is how to overcome the "guess-what's-in-the-author's mind" issue. Now, if it is your intention to be obscure; then so be it. That's your authoring prerogative. Surely there is someone out there that will enjoy your point of view. However, if you find yourself producing game after game where players continually result to your walkthrough, then you might want to rethink your writing strategy.

Object puzzles often lend themselves to present a solution to the player spontaneously. Experienced players get into the habit of picking up and toting around everything not nailed down. They do this in the off-chance that when a puzzle presents itself, they will see a connection between what needs to be done and what

## The (big) idea by KF

### Will there ever be a successful ADRIFT collaborative project?

Over the years there have been many efforts at bringing the strengths of Drifters together to collaborate on a game project. The most successful has probably been the current pass around, at least that seems to have some life in it.

The trouble with collaboration over distance online is that there is no real incentive to push on, and it is easier to do some work on a personal project. It gives no real sense of working together, as it tends to be a loose grouping rather than a team. Indeed a big problem can come where people do not understand their role in the team and waste effort in someone else's area.

In the modern games world team working tends to have leaders, writers, artists and musicians, with a tightly written specification, and a clear knowledge of what each is doing. DavidW did start work on a project with this more organized approach in mind, but as normally happens inertia dragged it down.

I suspect that the fact that most got into ADRIFT as a

role each object can be used in to solve the puzzle. If a connection doesn't present itself, players will often attempt use of each object in some logical way against the puzzle. There are many tried and true copied examples of puzzles that IF players understand how to solve. Authors do a great service to provide at least subtle hints in the response of these actions. Many authors do. This is a great way to guide but not push the player towards the right answer(s).

Situational, plot or character-driven puzzles often don't present the same natural method of trial-by-error discovery of the answer. It is important as authors that we cover character interaction tasks such as, "talk to <character>", "ask <character> about <character /object /subject>" and "give/show <character> the <object>". Given the character's knowledge, new information can be presented to the player. Again, this can be done subtly in order to guide the player to the answer.

Additionally, IF players are not always inclined to initially understand that the game will be advanced by talking to a character. Often the character might need to be written such that the character actually prompts the player periodically to interact with them. Default responses to movement and/or general actions might need to remind the player what is at stake and suggest what the player might need to do next to resolve the current crisis/puzzle.

Finally, if your game tells a story more often than requires a player to solve a puzzle, do not overdue the stories' detail. Descriptive detail is really informative if you back up every noun in your descriptions with a static object. However, the detail that I am talking about here is story detail. Only require those tasks that advance the plot of the story. Don't require the player to perform every minor task in your story to keep it going. If every minor task is required, then several issues could arise. The first is that the flow of the story is too slow for the player. Performing each minor task becomes annoying to the player who already has envisioned the end result of his next three commands. Many players may have an idea how to solve the bigger puzzle/situation facing them. However, they may not have the knowledge or insight on how to perform each minor step in order to get there.

Second, Story detail has the power to complicate the programming of your game. An example of this is a situation where your player is an off-duty fire fighter first on the scene responding to calls of help against a fire that just started.

If you require the player to talk to a character standing outside the burning building to learn that there is a possible victim lost

way of putting their own ideas into an IF world means that collaboration isn't a real practicality. Even if you are good at the graphical side of things, few will be happy to concentrate on the art at the expense of writing themselves.

inside, then you've set yourself up for complications. Now add the fact that the player has the ability to enter a call for support from the local fire department. However, they won't arrive for several turns. Now the player decides to enter the building to rescue the victim on his/her own. In this situation, you may find yourself programming multiple tasks in order to cover the cases where the player waits for the on-duty firemen, where the firemen show up while the player is in the burning building, or even that the firemen show up of their own accord but the player still doesn't know about the victim! After all, why would a silent character outside a burning building set off any additional alerts to the player?

Rethinking how important each command is to the plot and flow of the story is the answer. In the case above, ensure that the player is greeted excitedly by the character and told the important information about the victim. This cuts down the number of optional ways that the story can play out. Making the secondary decision that the firemen always arrive some number of turns after the player enters the building cuts back even more plot branches that you may have to program for.

Another alternative to this last suggestion is to write a premature ending to the game that cuts the player completely out of the loop when the firefighters arrive. Couple this ending with the undesirable outcome that the fire fighters could not reach the victim in time and watch how fast your player jumps into the burning building on the very next play of the game. Overuse of this suggestion; however, can lead to the player feeling like he/she is killed every few turns for no reason.

Critical thinkers to this approach will rightly point out that rethinking how important each command is and incorporating some commands automatically into player actions might lead to more games that "run on rails". To this I say, I didn't say you have to do this for all situations in your game. Just some of the situations that might unnecessarily complicate your story writing need to be changed. Nearly anything is possible in ADRIFT. It is just a question of how long it takes you to do it and how good you are at covering all eventualities. An author sometimes reorders, edits and deletes scenes to improve flow and prevent confusion in his stories. Why don't we as ADRIFT authors use the same techniques?

## ADRIFT recent releases

***This will hopefully be a new regular feature, bringing you the details of recently released games, as described by their authors on release. The details listed here are as posted on the ADRIFT adventures page on Campbell's site.***

**The Curse of Dragon Shrine (dragonshriner43.zip 479 Kb)  
By Mystery, released 10-06-04**

With the weight of two worlds on your shoulders, will you become a hero, or just another victim of the Curse of Dragon Shrine? \*  
Contains Multimedia \*

**Shards Of Memory (shardsofmemory.taf 116 Kb)  
By Davidw, released 02-05-04**

You awaken with no memory of who you are or where you are yet slowly but surely your story will unfold. An ancient evil has returned to the world and only YOU have the power to stand in its way... [winner of the ADRIFT Spring Comp 2004] [genre: dark fantasy]

## From the Demos Page

**Tracking Device (workingtrackingdevice.taf 1 Kb)  
By Mystery, released 21-06-04**

This is a demonstration of a tracking device using a transmitter and receiver. When all restriction are met, it will still give a false reading the first time around. You can get around this by a simple mention of a random malfunction of the device.

## Interview: Mystery questioned by KF

*Mystery, I thought with all that has happened over the past year, it was high time to interview you again.*

*Q1. Currently you are extremely busy both online and offline, how are things going with the music lessons for your sons? Are you regretting including drums in the project yet?*

I don't think they had a clue that it would actually take lots of practice, hard work, commitment, and more practice. For now, they are continuing with the basics, but enjoy their free time with it more. During their free time they both have taken a liking to the drums and are listening closely to their favorite music and trying to learn by listening. I was a little shocked to discover they were actually picking it up rather quickly.

I don't regret for a second getting drums. They must have a natural knack for it because they both can actually play a few different beats rather than just making obnoxious noise. They are having a great time with it, which makes me very, very happy.

*Q2. O.A.R.S. has proved to be a massive project for you. Has it been harder than you were expecting? The new integrated forum format was something we discussed at the time, is it working out as you had hoped?*

Now I really know how NickyDude felt doing this, and have to give him loads of credit, because without him O.A.R.S. wouldn't be possible. It has been a massive project, and at times very overwhelming. I can't even begin to tell you how much time and frustration that has gone into getting O.A.R.S. off the ground again. After being halfway through coding O.A.R.S. in HTML, the forum format was a God send. It has spared me the hassle of having to code everything by hand and is very organized. I thought it would be best to do it this way because it would allow ADRIFT users to share with one another the things they learn, neat tricks, and distribute technical demonstrations of techniques. I thought it would be more interactive.

I am hoping that people will make contributions as well as use it as a resource. Lack of contributions is the main reason O.A.R.S. went offline in the first place. I was hoping that people will contribute this time, but am trying to realistic enough to know that if they don't, I will have build it up by myself. It wasn't meant as a replacement to the ADRIFT forum and site, but rather a one stop resource. It is also very handy to have alternative downloading locations in case one of the sites went down.

**Battle Zone III compendium**  
(battlezone3.zip 10 Kb) By  
Funky Monkey, released 08-06-04

Battle zone 3 compendium features 3 games though this is only the demo. This features 2 games, Soviets and Americans! ENJOY!

**Room Group NPC Walk**  
(npcgroupwalk.taf 0 Kb) By  
Mystery, released 02-06-04

This is a small demo that demonstrates how to get a character to move to a random group of rooms for a specified amount of turns.

*Q3. Your role as fount of all testing knowledge in the ADRIFT role has landed you (in it) as main tester of the new releases of ADRIFT. Do you believe that the need is for more testers to cover all aspects of game testing or does a methodical approach cover them better? With that in mind, how is work on the testing lab project going?*

I don't know if I'm a main tester. I think there are others that test it too and definitely deserve credit. I would love it if there were more testers. It would certainly take some of the work load off. Testing is a very thorough process. Sometimes you can go days without finding any problems, then you can get three or four in a row and can't figure out what the problem is. You get quite frustrated when you've spent hours, days, or weeks trying to solve an issue, just to find out you made a simple mistake. I think more testers would cut down on things like that and we could help each other verify problems when they arise, and double check to make sure it isn't something we created ourselves.

As you know I have started again on a file to test ADRIFT. The problems with testing areas individually is that they don't have a chance to interact with other aspects of ADRIFT, as it would if it were a complete game. So I am trying to do a complete game that tests everything possible that can be tested in one sitting. For some things, they will just have to be tested separately. You also run into problems while creating a testing file in game form. When one thing doesn't work right, it affects several other areas as well, regarding maintaining a plot and how you may have intended on testing certain events, tasks, and character walks. It can be extremely stressful and frustrating while very fun and exciting at the same time. But when a bug does come up, it can halt your progress completely until it is fixed. Then the testing starts all over again.

*Q4. Despite your lament about not writing games much, you have still managed to create entries for most competitions we have held. In conversation recently you talked about not writing games for a while, but suggested you really wanted to do some more graphical work.*

I feel terrible about entering small, rushed pieces of work, that I normally wouldn't even consider releasing. To be honest, I usually do it because I hope that it will encourage more participation from other users, (Or certain people just ask so nicely for a contribution and I just don't want to disappoint anyone.) I just don't have the time to spend on writing games while taking on O.A.R.S. and beta-testing. I do sometimes do it because I just need a break from everything else, but the work

## Failed game intros

Nothing for you this issue, I can't share all of my game ideas with you!

*Do you have a game that has hit the rails, but you would like to share with the community? If so, send it in to me.*

never turns out good. It is rushed, unpolished, and my favorite critics have a field day with it. I'd be lying if I said I haven't thought about quitting testing, tossing O.A.R.S. out, and just focus on writing. But something tells me there would be something else that would get in my way.

Graphics are something that I have always enjoyed. Even before ADRIFT. I find it much more rewarding to create something visual. I have seriously considered creating graphical libraries for ADRIFT. This too would take a considerable amount of time, and would also keep me from writing. (It almost sounds like I'm making excuses). Truthfully, I love making my own graphics using a variety of imaging programs and 3d utilities. To me, it doesn't matter if other people think they are good or not. I enjoy it, and will continue to enjoy it even if nobody were to ever see my work.

*Q5. If you could wave a magic wand, and bring five improvements to ADRIFT and the ADRIFT community, what would they be?*

For me, that is an easy question. First, I would want all areas of ADRIFT to have drag and drop reordering. Especially with NPC Conversation subjects that rely on specific topic ordering. I think having a built in help, like most Windows programs, would be a must- even if it does boost the program file a bit, I think the benefits would outweigh the file-size. Being able to create stand alone games would be a huge leap, that I think we all want. Conversation Trees or an overhaul of the conversation system to allow multiple responses based on tasks, events, object states, and other aspects- and allowing an NPC to initiate a conversation. And last, since I can only pick five, would be to allow full HTML capabilities for text formatting, links, images, sound to be inserted wherever the author specified.

*Q6. Actually, as I know how busy you are with other things, I won't ask you about new games projects as I normally would. I'll just ask if you have anything for the future that you would like to mention.*

Nope. Talking about them openly doesn't make them a reality. Besides, you already know about all the games I have...and have not finished. I think I could give Mile a run for his money on projects on the shelf.

Many thanks for answering my numpty questions for the newsletter, Ken.

You're very welcome. I hope I wasn't too boring.



**Game reviews**

*Last month Jason Guest concluded his reminiscences of the adventure games of yesteryear. In keeping with that spirit David Whyld has provided a couple of reviews of games for the old Sinclair Spectrum computer of the 1980s.*

**The Hobbit**

(For Sinclair Spectrum) reviewed by David Whyld

“The Hobbit” – available from

[http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Hobbit%2c+The\\$&pub=^Melbourne+House\\$](http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Hobbit%2c+The$&pub=^Melbourne+House$)

The storyline of the “The Hobbit” is based only loosely on the novel of the same name by J. R. R. Tolkien. Gandalf and Thorin act as your companions (you play the part of Bilbo the hobbit) but none of the other dwarves show up. A fair few of the locations from the book have made it into the game, although a number haven’t. There is also a different ending in the game: here the emphasis is on finding the dragon’s treasure and getting home in one piece. There is no big battle between the dwarves and the goblins – probably just as well because big battles are a hard thing to handle well in a text adventure. The gold ring shows up in the goblin caverns but isn’t necessary to the completion of the game, although having it with you makes things considerably easier.

Back in the days when interactive fiction (or text adventures as they were known as in those days of yore) sold in vast quantities and it was actually possible to make a living out of writing them, “The Hobbit” was king. It was a very detailed game packed with puzzles (some incredibly hard and quite a few incredibly unfair) and featured several of the characters – Gandalf and Thorin in particular – from the book. It regularly made an appearance in text adventure fans lists of their top ten games and was light years ahead of its competition in terms of complexity. In fact, it’d be a difficult game to produce in ADRIFT today, some 20+ years after it first came out.

So what \*is\* so good about it?

On the face of things, “The Hobbit” seems dated. Several locations come with graphics that were considered reasonable at the time yet these days are the sort of thing that a pre-teenager with a Paint application on his computer could improve on in the space of five minutes. It lacks several things that have become standard in interactive fiction these days: no repeatable

commands by pressing the Up arrow key; examine cannot be abbreviated as “x”; no way of scrolling back up the screen to see what you typed a while ago; very little in the way of descriptive text (the game originally came out on the ZX Spectrum and had to fit inside its limited memory of 48KB so descriptive text had to be sacrificed in order to get the full game inside the size restraints – a common problem with games from that era). Multiple commands on a single line are possible though, something few text adventures at the time could manage.

But bad points aside, what about the good points?

For one of the first times in a text adventure, the NPCs have a mind of their own. Thorin and Gandalf will wander back and forth, often completely independent of the player’s actions. They will pick items up, wander off with them, open and close doors, etc. Thorin will even pick fights with goblins he encounters as well as occasionally sitting down and singing about gold (as every good dwarf does).

It’s possible to order the NPCs around as well, although they don’t always do what you want. Thorin, in particular, will often ignore what you say unless you have the persistence to keep repeating yourself. I was in two minds about this as a feature. On one hand it’s a nice touch as there’s no reason to assume free-thinking NPCs will obey your every utterance. On the other hand, it’s a pain typing in the same command three or four times. The NPCs can be ordered to do pretty any task the PC himself can do (open and close doors, pick up and drop items, fight enemies, etc) but as they often ignore you, it’s generally easier to just do them yourself.

Intelligent NPCs are one of the best things in “The Hobbit”, although they can also be aggravating. I once had to open the main door of my house four times because Thorin, for reasons best known to him, kept closing it. At another time, Gandalf took the map I was trying to get Elrond to examine and dropped it somewhere. Where? I don’t know. I never did find it and this rendered the game unfinishable. There is only one place in the game – the goblins’ dungeon – where the aid of another NPC is vital. In this case it’s Thorin but Thorin, due to his habit of wandering off from time to time, may not with you when you reach the dungeon and you might need to wait for an age for him to show up. Worse still, he might never show up. As said before, Thorin will start fights with goblins when he encounters them and it’s perfectly possible for him to take on too many and get himself killed. If this happens before you’ve escaped from the dungeon... well, you’re finished.

The game also boasts a combat system, although one that is often awkward and confusing to use. Encounters with the same enemies can lead to the PC dying whereas at other times he will breeze through them without a scratch. Combat generally includes all the NPCs in the current area, so pick a fight with one goblin and all the others will join in. It's also possible for combats to last several turns and for other combatants to show up in the meantime, meaning that fighting a single goblin could actually lead to a fight with half a dozen of them.

Bugs? Whether there are bugs in "The Hobbit" depend pretty much on your definition of just what a bug is. For certain, there are more than a few instances that seem like bugs but which could equally be the game designers deciding to throw comedy elements into the mix. For example: hunger plays a large part in the game. Go for too long without eating and you die. Logical, but a pain when you find yourself a long way from food and without the time to get back. There is also the added problem that there are only a limited amount of food items in the game, so take too long and you will exhaust what food there is and starve. The only exception to this is the elf Elrond who will give you food if you wait with him for long enough. Of course, the problem which arises is that Elrond is in a set location near the start of the game and it's quite an inconvenience to come close to the end and then have to return to the start to pick up some more food. Which is where one of the bugs creeps in. The game allows you to carry around other characters and Elrond is one you can carry, thus exploiting the game system into allowing him to give you food every few moves. Food problem solved. Is this a bug or just something the game designers included to see if anyone would stumble across is?

The carrying option can also be used to allow you to haul around more items than you would normally be able to carry (yes, "The Hobbit" is one of those games with a limit on carryable items). But here you can load up an NPC with items till he reaches his limit and then carry him. The NPC himself counts as a single item so no matter how many items he's carrying, it only counts as a single item for encumbrance purposes. If you fancy doing things another way, load yourself up with items and then have one of the NPCs carry \*you\* around.

There are several other notable 'may be/may not be' bugs: Smaug the dragon can be carried in pretty much the same way that Elrond can (a dragon carried by a hobbit?!?!?) and you can order him to kill your enemies. Which he does. I once carried him around the entire game and got him to kill every single enemy I faced. He even killed a few allies that I decided to set him on.

The only definite bug I've found is a strange one where I am told I cannot the building because it is too full. This happens on a mountain path without a building in sight!

“The Hobbit” isn’t a game that is likely to appeal to many of the IF writers and players of today. It has its failings which are all too obvious when compared to the games written nowadays, although I’m sure that a major rewrite of it – bringing it into the modern age so to speak – would be a great idea. However, as far as 80’s nostalgia goes “The Hobbit” still reigns supreme.

Rating: 9 out of 10

#### “Tower Of Despair”

– available from

[http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Tower+of+Despair%2c+The\\$&pub=^Games+Workshop\\$](http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Tower+of+Despair%2c+The$&pub=^Games+Workshop$)

Another classic of yesteryear – at least in my humble opinion – “Tower of Despair” is an epic fantasy game, vividly written, which follows the adventures of the warrior-mage of Castle Argent on his quest to destroy Malnor, Demonlord of Darkness. If that sounds a little corny, well... it *is* corny. But in a good way. And corny doesn’t necessarily mean bad. After all, “Lord of the Rings” involves the destroying of a piece of jewellery by some furry-footed midgets to save the world from an evil dark lord. And that was anything but bad.

One aspect of the game you'll notice right from the start is the font. It’s freakishly big and, if that wasn’t bad enough, not very easy to read. The letters often seem to flow into one another; a nice thing to see in handwriting but not on a computer screen. As such, a lot of the text is difficult to read and sometimes I found myself having to reread the same bit of text a couple of times before I could understand what it said. As this is a game written for the ZX Spectrum, the font is unadjustable and therefore one of those things you have to put up with.

But on with game itself...

“Tower of Despair” is generic fantasy handled well. The part of the warrior-mage, however, is not as developed as it could have been. Indeed, considering that you are a warrior it seems a little strange that you begin the game without a single hand-to-hand weapon to your name. As for the mage side of things, you have a staff which can emit a bolt of lightning and nothing else. No spells are available to you no matter which path through the game you take. Memory restrictions were probably the cause of this as “Tower of Despair” first appeared for the ZX Spectrum with its maximum memory of 48KB. So in the interests of providing a

fairly large game and a sizeable amount of depth, certain aspects had to be sacrificed. The magic system, alas, was one of them.

The original game came with a detailed booklet which gave a recent history of the land in which "Tower of Despair" takes place as well as a Guide Book that contains illustrations for various locations. But the Guide Book was more than just mere eye candy as it often revealed things that were missing from the room description and could not be discovered in the game at all without prior notice of the Guide Book. I can think of several reasons for doing this – it means the game doesn't require graphics, however basic (and when you're restricted to 48KB of memory you need to cut as many corners as you can); lengthy descriptions can be left out because the player will be able to \*see\* what is in the location without reading through a few dozen lines of text; also it cuts down on game piracy as the pirates would have to copy the Guide Book as well as the game – hardly an issue these days with thousands of old games being readily available for free on the internet but a major issue back when this game was first released.

The obvious problems arise when trying to play "Tower of Despair" without the Guide Book. Head into a tavern about midway through the first part of the game. It looks a fairly average place. Examine a few things. That's it. There's nothing else to do or see. Or is there? Look at the drawing for the tavern in the Guide Book and you notice several barrels stacked near the back of the room. Moving these leads to a secret passage which you need to progress along in order to avoid getting killed by an enemy. Playing the game with the Guide Book in your lap, it's easy to see the barrels and guess they might need moving. Play it without and you're well and truly stuck. Unfortunately while the game has survived the years pretty much intact – or as intact as any 80's text adventure can be in the world of today – the Guide Book has not, leaving anyone lacking prior knowledge of the game with a great struggle to get anywhere.

In a couple of other instances the Guide Book is necessary to make any progress. In one you find yourself facing several doors which are unmarked in the game yet given descriptions in the Guide Book – the descriptions are the key to figuring your way past them and you are never likely to guess them without it. In another location quite a bit further on in the game, you find four rooms which bear illustrations in the Guide Book yet nothing in the game itself. Lacking knowledge of these illustrations means the game cannot be finished, although I guess it's altogether possible, though highly unlikely, that you could stumble on the solution through sheer persistence.

While this idea is certainly an interesting one, and even a very good one provided you can find an artist to illustrate a booklet for your games, it makes "Tower of Despair" a frustrating game to play without the booklet. If the in-game text gave indications as to what was there this might not be a problem. But it doesn't. When you've torn your hair out in frustration over trying to figure out just what the game writers were thinking at such-and-such a time, you'll really wish at least of the descriptive text had made its way into the game, even if this was at the expense of extra locations and gameplay.

The land of Aleandor, the main setting for "Tower of Despair", is a vividly written set of locations. Most are empty of little more than a few lines of text, but as these are often immensely detailed they give you a definite feeling for them all the same. Puzzles are exceptionally difficult at times and it would be true to say that most of them will require a \*lot\* of thought to get anywhere with, although in hindsight you might find that you kick yourself in frustration for not figuring them out sooner. Communicating with your manservant is a good example of a puzzle that seems obvious once you figure it out, but which took me several hours to solve. And most of that time was probably spent in typing one command after another on the off chance I hit upon the correct one.

Only one part of the game has ever really annoyed me and this involves the Angel of Death, a demonic assassin you encounter at the end of the first part of this two part game. I'm sure there's a bug regarding the timing of the Angel's appearance as sometimes he seems to show up when you reach the ruined town whereas other times he shows up quite a bit earlier. The problem with this is that nothing you have with you is effective against him and if you fail to reach a certain point in the game before encountering him you have no way of surviving in one piece. This wouldn't be as much of a problem if the Angel only showed up after you had reached the town but he has a nasty habit of showing up earlier. Sometimes a lot earlier. A couple of times he showed up before I had even left the starting locations at Castle Argent which meant killing him was impossible, yet other times I could leave Castle Argent and wander around the game to my heart's content before I caught sight of him. As there's no way of predicting just when the Angel will show up and no way of avoiding him once he's there, and the timing of his appearance is purely random, this is one aspect of the game that could really have done with some tweaking. As the game moves straight into part two as soon as the Angel is defeated, this requires you to complete everything in part one that needs completing before you encounter him. While

this is by no means impossible (provided the Angel doesn't show up too easily), it's frustratingly hard to say the least. A single mis-typed command can ruin everything for you and as "Tower of Despair" counts mis-typed commands as actual turns each one used is one wasted. Hit the wrong key enough time and the game will be over before you know it.

Part two of the game is just a continuation of the first part. In a way I preferred the first part more. It seemed to have more depth and while the encounter with Angel of Death was an unfair one, it was considerably more evocative than anything in part two (although the fight with Malnor's henchman at the bridge is a memorable one).

Alas the climax of the game is disappointing and confusing with little explained and even less understood. Maybe the writers ran out of game memory and just had to leave the ending in the rushed state it is in but it's a real pity such a good game had to end in such a poor way.

Rating: 8 out of 10

#### "A day at the office" by David Whyld (Reviewed by Erik)

As I'm sure you'll all agree none of us have the spare time to play as many text adventures as we would like, especially when there are so many epic games around. I decided to pack some short IF Games onto my laptop in the hope of making a long journey a bit less tedious. The first game I chose was 'A day at the office' by David Whyld. If you are a new convert to Adrift you will probably play a game by David sooner rather than later as he is one of the most prolific writers around.

Although 'A day at the office' appears to be one of David's earlier efforts it's still a great game and one that would be good for beginners. The game begins with your boss, Stigers waiting for you as you arrive at work. The companies best employee has been hurt in a car accident and as the most expendable employee in the company, you have been chosen to complete the reports he has been working on before a group of Japanese businessmen come to view them.

This to me is a wonderful setting as I find games that involve hunting out dragons and fighting off trolls difficult to relate to as it's not something that I often encounter on a day to day basis. Having reports dumped on my desk to finish is something I can however relate to.

As I began my life within the game trying to finish the reports, I found that although the puzzles had been well implemented, one of the puzzles caused great problems. Without the benefit of a

walkthrough I struggled along, eventually coming across the solution. It was at this point that I felt the problem had not been my problem solving skills, but that the puzzle had not been very well implemented. Without trying to spoil the game for others, one of the puzzles requires the same action to be performed twice to produce different results. This may have been fine if for instance you were turning a wheel. The first turn may not yield the desired result, however a second turn may have. When this is implemented into a verb such as look, you would expect to see everything you could see when you first typed 'look'. You would not have expected to see a different object on the second visit.

Anyway, the troublesome puzzle solved, I was easily able to carry on and complete the game. I found that although the game only contained 2 NPC's they were fun and well written and they felt far from static.

In conclusion David has written a very good short game that is very entertaining, even novice players should have no problems completing the game within an hour. I can't wait to move onto the next game of David's that I play. My next review should be the second game that I played on my travels, 'James Bond and the Agents of F.A.R.T'

**Logic: 7 out of 10**

Apart from the one puzzle that I didn't find very logical 'A day at the Office' was logical and most of the actions to puzzles made sense

**Problems: 9 out of 10 (10 = no problems)**

No problems occurred when playing the game

**Story: 7 out of 10**

David's stories are well known for their humour and 'A day at the Office' is no different. The story made sense and the comedy elements were great and had me smirking at my screen. If the BBC are ever looking for a writer to help out with the 13th episode of Faulty Towers then having a writer like David on board would be no bad thing

**Characters: 6 out of 10**

I feel I have to mark this score down as there were not many NPC's for the protagonist to interact with. The 2 that I was able to talk to were very well implemented and made a great addition to the story



## Reference

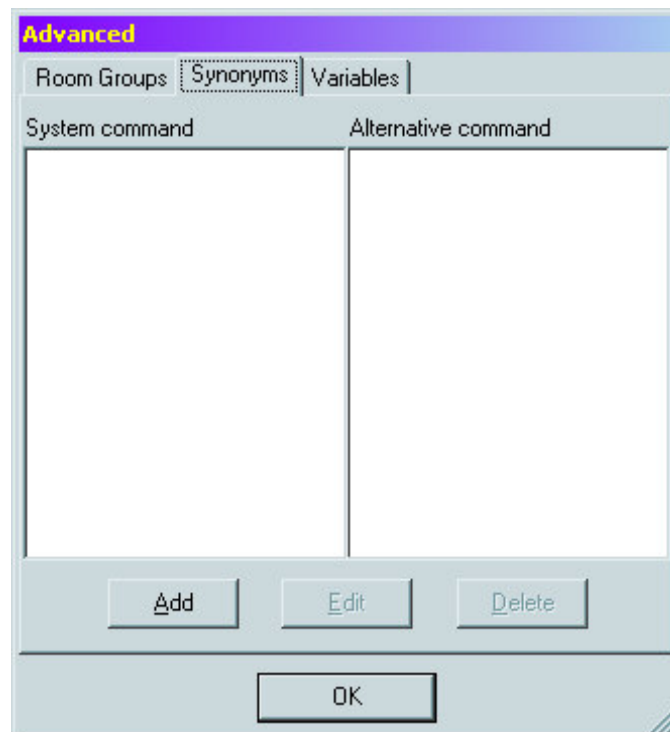
Continuing with what the manual calls *Advanced techniques* we come to synonyms, a way to tell ADRIFT to treat a word (or phrase) that is input as if it is another one. This is a very useful technique for reducing the number of options to be covered when creating tasks.

### Synonyms

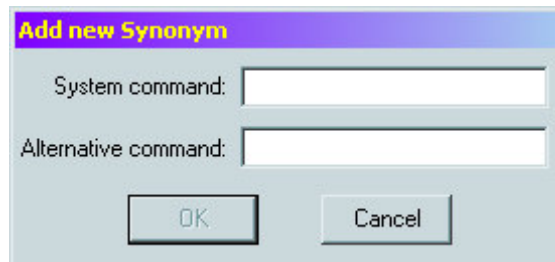
Synonyms are alternatives for commands entered in Runner. By adding a synonym for a command, any time you enter your alternative, it will be treated as though it was the original command.

For example, if you added a synonym of “put” to be “hang”, then every time you typed “hang” in the game, it would treat it as though you typed “put”. So the command “hang cloak on hook” would execute the system command “put cloak on hook”.

To add a new synonym, select Adventure > Advanced... from the menus, and select the Synonyms tab, or click on the button. This will bring up the following dialog box:



Clicking on the Add button brings up the following dialog box, where you can enter the word you want to add an alternative for, and you can enter your new word.



**Add new Synonym**

System command:

Alternative command:

OK Cancel

*NB. One thing to note – if you have a synonym for a word, then use that word in a task command, the command will not match because the word will have been changed to its synonym. So, for the above example, if you had a task “hang \* cloak \* hook”, and this was the only command, the task would not execute as it would be trying to match “put \* cloak \* hook”.*

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Please send any contributions or suggestions to [kf@kfadrift.or.uk](mailto:kf@kfadrift.or.uk).