



Inside
ADRIFT

**The Newsletter Of The
ADRIFT Community**

March/April 2007 - Issue 34

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Editorial

This issue sees the results of the Big ADRIFT Survey. Was it a success or a failure in terms of how many people submitted answered it? Well...

Recently the ADRIFT forum chalked up its 1,000th member. (Which actually works out as quite a bit less than the 1000th *person* to join the forum due to the fact that certain people [guilty as charged!] have registered under several different names over the years.) Still, it's a nice round figure. As the forum is now approaching its 6th year, that works out at roughly 166 people sign up per year. Just under 1 newbie every 2 days in other words. So we're not likely to see member number 2,000 until sometime in the distant future (or 2013 as it's likely to be known).

Out of the possible (about) 1,000 people who have registered on the forum, 12 in total filled out the survey. Disappointing? In a way. But at the same time, it's worth noting that the forum has never had 1,000 active members on it at the same time. (Which is a frightening thought when you think about it.) The active userbase probably consists of no more than a few dozen regulars, with a few dozen others who stop by from time to time to see how things are going on (the comment term is 'lurkers'). So in that context, 12 people taking the time to fill in the survey isn't too bad. A big thank you to the dozen of them.

The results can be found on page 18 (if this is the 'paper' version of the Newsletter you're reading) or by following the directions given in the menu (if you're 'playing' the .taf version.)

David Whyld

There are two different version of the Newsletter available. What you're reading now is the 'paper' version (i.e. you can print it out if you like, though most people will probably just prefer to read it on screen); there is also a .taf version which you can open up with the ADRIFT Runner (Version 4 [Release 46 is recommended though older releases of Version 4 ought to handle it fine]) and play like you would a regular game. Both versions can be found at:

<http://www.shadowvault.net/newsletter/34.htm>

HOT Off The PRESS

Being the latest goings on from the wide world of interactive fiction

Forum Blues

The ADRIFT forum (usually located at <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi>) seems to be having a few problems. It went down on Wednesday, 28th March and at the time of writing this (Friday, 30th March) it still hasn't resurfaced.

Last minute edit: but as of Saturday morning, it seems to be back up. Whew!

More Retro Goodness

If you know who Scott Adams is (and if you're a fan of the IF scene, you really ought to) then the *Scott Adams' Ghost Town Redux* competition might be just the thing for you. The basic idea of the comp is to write a game which is either a remake or an adaptation of Scott Adams' original *Ghost Town*. More details at:

http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_thread/thread/b996130fb8149693/0b1bed86efa8bb5a#0b1bed86efa8bb5a

Multiplayer IF

Recently announced on RAIF is CircumReality, a “multiplayer IF development toolkit”. Multiplayer IF seems to be a popular idea that gets mentioned from time to time, but seldom taken any further. Initial comments on it seem to indicate that it leans towards being more a tool for graphical games as opposed to straight IF, and also only runs on Windows, but if neither of those is a problem for you, check it out at:

<http://www.circumreality.com/>

Spring Thing 2007

The “other” big interactive fiction competition of the year - the Spring Thing - kicks off shortly. On 2nd April, in fact. If you feel like entering and haven't submitted your intent to enter, unfortunately you're too late and will have to wait till next year. But if you feel like playing some of the games, head over to

<http://www.springthing.net/2007/>

and check them out.

ADRIFT Forum

Digest

By Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

This (short) issue of the Adrift Forum Digest covers new threads from January 16 up to March 25. Unfortunately, I was unable to add any further explanations about the selected topics for this issue, but I hope the categories and topic titles are meaningful enough. The next issue should be more detailed again.

Programming Help

Fractions

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5998>)

Variables and Conversations

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5995>)

NPC and Location

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5941>)

NPCs and Movement

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5935>)

Player descriptions

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5916>)

Player Preferences

What's cool to have in an RPG

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5942>)

In The Hot Seat

Interview with Ren

Winner of the Writing Challenges Comp, and biggest contribution by a newcomer award at the recent Inside ADRIFT Awards, this issue we have a few words from none other than Ren.

Q Tell us about yourself - who is Ren?

A Sssh - it's a secret. I'm a non-academic in an English University, and before that was a freelance screenwriter with some very modest but very non-financially rewarding success. So I came to ADRIFT looking for a break from script and report writing.

Q You seem to know a thing or two about programming (at least going by the often lengthy and complicated (to a non-programmer anyway) solutions you post to queries

on the ADRIFT forum), so what was it that prompted you to use a non-programming language for your IF games?

A

Ha - I know nothing about programming aside from some youthful experimentation with C64 basic (of the “make screen go blue”, “print HELLO” variety). I chose ADRIFT initially because the programming languages scare me; however, after a bit of experimentation I’ve come to the conclusion that ADRIFT is a giant database, and I really like databases. I think I would struggle in a programming language, but I know enough about breaking Microsoft Access to pull off a few tricks in ADRIFT. I’m trying to get to grips with module expressions in some of my latest games, because that’s the bit I know least about (and - if it works - has the most potential for coolness).

Q

Let’s talk about your games. Your first - “Jonathan Grimshaw: Space Tourist” - won the Writing Challenges Comp. How did it feel to beat several ADRIFT regulars to the first prize?

A

It made me feel both mighty and powerful.

Truthfully, I’m not really sure. I hadn’t been around ADRIFT long enough to know who was a regular and who wasn’t, and (if I recall correctly) the score were pretty close between games. I liked JGST (though not everyone did) and, while the concept (trying to use all of the writing challenges in a game holistically) was a damn sight better than the execution and, ahem, bug testing, I’m still fairly happy with it as a first game.

Q

“Jonathan Grimshaw: Space Tourist” was originally a short game that was later expanded to full size. As your other two games to date - “3 Minutes To Live” and “Over The Edge” - were also short games, are there plans to expand either of them into full size games or are you intending to work solely on new games from now on?

A

Over the Edge was beefed up a little in a bug-fix version after the comp, but I don’t have any plans to take it further. I was hoping to get *3 Minutes to Live* ready for the

end of year comp as a much large game - *Hero* - but that stalled due to other commitments. It's on the back burner for a while, but I hope it will make it out sometime this year.

Q

Several people (myself included) had trouble with some of the commands in "Jonathan Grimshaw: Space Tourist" and "3 Minutes To Live". Are your games written with the intention of being hard to beat, or do you feel they are perfectly fair and people just aren't 'getting them'?

A

I suppose "getting them" makes sense to a certain extent - in that no matter how good the game, it will always require a little bit of reading-the-author's-mind. It's something I'm (obviously) going to have to work harder at for future games.

I also think that *JGST* and *3 Minutes to Live* are hard partly because I'm not a huge fan of easy games (I like a bit of a challenge - all those gtv-heavy C64 text adventures of my youth, I suppose) but mostly because: (a) they weren't properly beta-tested; (b) *JGST* was my first game; and (c) *3 Minutes* was written in 3 hours. I wanted to give *3 Minutes* a hint system (*Hero* will have one), but I ran out of time. Future games will, I hope, be easier (but not *easy*).

Q

The Spring Thing 2007 is fast approaching (and the IFComp 2007 isn't too far off); any plans to enter either or both of them?

A

The Spring Thing will probably come too soon for any of my games, certainly either of the ones that has the potential to be big enough to justifying entering the competition. If I am going to enter a Spring Thing comp, it will probably be the 2008 one (if I continue with any my games beyond the IF Comp deadline and/or they get huuuge).

Q

Would the entry fee for the Spring Thing - \$7.00 - dissuade you from entering?

Despite being a trivial sum, it's certainly caused some controversy on RAIF over the years. Is \$7.00 too much to pay for the privilege of entering a comp?

A The entry fee doesn't bother me. As you said - it's trivial. And is there anything that doesn't cause controversy on RAIF?

Q ADRIFT competitions. Do you have any plans to enter the Spring Comp (assuming it runs this year) and the Summer Comp?

A Again, the Spring Comp will probably come too soon, and I may enter the Summer Comp, but given the choice I'd rather wait and enter a full multi-platform comp like the IF.

I'd like to try the challenge of a truly large comp, and while I accept that ADRIFT is a weaker system than both TADS and Inform - and I reckon that doing complicated things in ADRIFT is probably more work than doing complicated things in other systems - I can't use the other systems, and I'd like to test myself and ADRIFT against other writers using other systems.

Q You seem to have taken a shine to Gargoyle (see interviewee's article in issue 32). Is this what you will be recommending people use to play your games?

A Yes. It both looks better than the runner and (having experimented with some seriously complex variables) runs better than the runner (which can, under certain circumstances, get 'stuck' and refuse to recheck variable comparisons/expressions in repeatable tasks). At the moment, it requires extra work, as it does not use the most up-to-date version of SCARE and (as I discussed in issue 32) this creates a number of problems that require extra tasks and workarounds. However, the new version of SCARE has a number of fixed these issues, and as soon as Gargoyle adopts this latest version it will be better for everyone.

USE GARGOYLE PEOPLE

Q

What additional testing do your games go through to ensure they are Gargoyle-compliant? Are there any things you have to be especially careful about or avoid doing?

A

The biggest pain in the *current* version of Gargoyle is the fact that SCARE looks for any successful task that runs. The ADRIFT runner will run a manually created task before a system one, irrespective of whether or not it succeeds. So, if you want to override a movement task in the runner only, just use *{go} [north/n]* with the restriction *player must be holding object 'the mole'*, the restriction text *the Gardner stops you, one hand pressed against your chest. 'No-one,' he tells you, 'but no-one, walks my grass.'* and the output text *you drop the mole, who scampers across the lawn and begins to dig. 'Hoy!' screams the Gardner, chasing the rodent. You sneak across the grass while he is distracted* accompanied by an action to move the player north and display the room description for *Crown Bowling Green*.

Type *north* in the runner and it will run the task. Type *north* in Gargoyle and it will run the task if you have the mole, but just run the default *north* task if you don't have it, and move you north as normal. You have to create a separate task for *{go} [north/n]* with the restriction *player must not be holding object 'the mole'* etc etc

You have to do this for *every* task that overrides system tasks. If you're me, that means a lot of tasks. However, as I said, this shouldn't be the case for future games.

Something which (as far as I can tell) hasn't changed is the use of `
`. Adrift doesn't put a line break in when it executes a new task, or describes a dynamic object or character. SCARE does. So the games will appear differently to players using the different playing systems.

Finally, they seem to handle variables differently, calculating them in a different order. I'm not really sure how are why, but the two systems produce different slightly effects with the same tasks. It's something I'm currently exploring, but it is causing much head-scratching.

Q

Tell us about the games you are working on now.

A A sequel to JGST where you can play as more than one character and - gasp (yes, gasp) - both switch character at will, and have one character interact with another.

A small-ish noir game where you can't pick things up.

A potentially huuuuuge noir game with multiple endings and complex npc interaction /conversation.

A survivalist horror where I intend to keep using variable expressions (the game is probably 1/20 complete and I have 300 tasks and about 50 variables) until Adrift explodes.

The revamped version of *3 Minutes* called *Hero*. Same game with a bit more backstory and a second half that follows on from the end of the competition entry.

A game where you play the Hulk, or a non-copyrighted approximation of him. Just because using the ALR to rewrite default expressions is fun.

Q Are there any things you've tried to do with ADRIFT and found it incapable of?

A Well, I was proud to create the multiple character thing (where you can share and swap items, talk, order the other character around etc), though it certainly wasn't easy (and requires 2 tasks per dynamic object plus numerous generic object tasks) and Adrift 5 may quickly make it obsolete.

The only real sticking point is the variables. Adrift doesn't really want to let me use multiple variables expressions in different sets of stepped tasks in the same turn. Which is necessary if you're doing a large number of complex events that cross each other. If tasks that want to test the same variable clash then they stick, and the variables involved become 'set' permanently for all future tasks. I have found some workarounds, but I'm not entirely sure why they work. Fortunately, the issue only occurs in the runner (SCARE is fine with it).

Q If so, have you found acceptable workarounds or are the things you wanted to do simply not going to put in an appearance in your future games?

A I will always find a way! Seriously, with the exception of the above and ADRIFT's mishandling of 'it' (see the help topic threads in the Adrift forum) everything seems to be hackable. That's not to say it wouldn't be easier to accomplish some of the things I want to do *if* (and it's a big *if*) I understood programming, and could therefore use Inform (*English* is a natural language, I7, while easier than I6, is not) or TADS. At all. I do hope to eventually experiment with I7, but I'm taking things one step at a time.

Q What is your ambition IF-wise? Writing the winner of the yearly IFComp? The defining ADRIFT game that makes the rest of the IF community sit up and take notice? Or the guy people turn to when they need advice on how to do X and Y with ADRIFT?

A I like solving problems so the third is always fun, and I suppose my main aim is to write a game I'm genuinely proud of, and that other people play and enjoy. Winning the IF comp would be amazing, but it's not my aim, and I would settle for a decent placing with a decent game.

Q Do you think multimedia (sound and graphics) has a place in an IF game or is it just an unnecessary extra that does nothing more than bloat the size of the original file?

A Mostly I think they serve no purpose. Graphics especially. This is, I think, tainted by ADRIFT, which handles graphics badly. If I was good with graphics, I'd use AGS, the Adventure Game Studio, not ADRIFT - I'd be making Monkey Island-style point 'n' clicks.

Sound effects, maybe. I have sound effects for my survivalist horror, though unless I can get it working properly in the runner, I won't use them (as SCARE doesn't handle multimedia). I am currently developing the game for both the Runner and Gargoyle though. I have a task on the first screen that allows the player to set the game to their interpreter of choice. I also have a variable %r%, set to 0 for Gargoyle/SCARE and 1 for the Runner. In the ALR, the entries are:

r0|<i></i>
r1|

<i></i>produces no output (and so doesn't affect the game).
 produces a linebreak, so I can ensure that games player in the Runner have a similar format to those in Gargoyle where necessary. The Gargoyle selection also replaces all of the fancy texts, justifications and font sizes with something simpler that looks more pleasing to the eye in that interpreter. It isn't actually that much extra work, I just need to remember to type r%r% after key tasks and in certain object descriptions.

Q

What about the playing IF side of things? Have you played any games - ADRIFT or otherwise - that you'd care to recommend to people?

A

Nothing interesting or surprising. The first game I played since my C64 days was *I-0*, which I really enjoyed, though, looking back, I don't think it stands up so well against the likes of *Shade* and *Galatea*.

Q

For you, what makes a good game a good game - storyline, writing, puzzles, original ideas? Something else?

A

They're all intrinsically linked but I think if a game has serious issues with any of them it will put me off. I really want to like *the Potter and the Mould* because the concept is great and it seems to be well implemented, but the writing puts me off every time I try to play it.

Q

Finally, is there anything else you wish you'd been asked in this interview or anything you'd like to add?

A Yes.

AUTHOR PROFILE: REN

- 18 03 06 1) **Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist**
- 12 08 06 2) **Over The Edge**
- 12 08 06 3) **3 Minutes To Live**

Jonathan Grim: Space Tourist won 1st prize in the Writing Challenges Comp in 2006.

The Big *ADRIFT Survey*

The Results

Last issue contained the Big ADRIFT Survey where drifters, and just casual readers of the Newsletter as well, were polled on the main issues of the day. (At least in my humble opinion anyway ☺) This issue we have the results.

And so without further ado...

Q1) **Have many ADRIFT games have you played over the last year?**

- a) **None.**
- b) **1 - 5.**
- c) **6 - 10.**
- d) **10 - 20.**
- e) **More than 20.**

- A1)
- 1. b) 1 - 5.
 - 2. c) 6 - 10.
 - 3. e) More than 20.
 - 4. b) 1 - 5.
 - 5. d) 10 - 20.
 - 6. e) More than 20.
 - 7. b) 1 - 5.
 - 8. e) More than 20.
 - 9. b) 1 - 5.
 - 10. d) 10 - 20.
 - 11. c) 6 - 10.
 - 12. b) 1 - 5.

Most popular answer: 1 - 5.

As there were over 50 ADRIFT games released over the past year, that's a surprisingly small amount, but it's worth mentioning that a good few of those games were adult ones

which aren't everybody's cup of tea.

Q2) How long have you been using ADRIFT?

- a) **Less than a year.**
- b) **1 - 2 years.**
- c) **2 - 3 years.**
- d) **3 - 4 years.**
- e) **More than 4 years.**

- A2)
- 1. e) More than 4 years.
 - 2. e) More than 4 years.
 - 3. e) More than 4 years.
 - 4. b) 1 - 2 years.
 - 5. b) 1 - 2 years.
 - 6. e) More than 4 years.
 - 7. e) More than 4 years.
 - 8. b) 1 - 2 years.
 - 9. c) 2 - 3 years.
 - 10. a) Less than a year. (About 3 days now)
 - 11. b) 1 - 2 years.
 - 12. c) 2 - 3 years.

Most popular answer: more than 4 years.

Most of the people using ADRIFT (or the ones who took the time to fill out the survey anyway) seem to have stuck with it for a reasonable amount of time.

Q3) Do you think commercial IF will ever work?

- A3)
- 1. No.
 - 2. No.
 - 3. Hopefully. Given the right circumstances (decent enough games, a proper forum for feedback, sensible pricing (i.e. don't try to sell a text-only game for the same price as a graphical game)), it could work.
 - 4. Only on a small, niche-market scale between enthusiasts, eg. gimmicked versions, or games sold through paypal. Another non-commercial way for authors to make some money could be via donations.
 - 5. Yes, well I really hope so.
 - 6. No.
 - 7. No.
 - 8. I would like to think it would work, but I strongly doubt that it would, IF has a notable lack of graphic violence and other such properties that the targeted audience laps up.
 - 9. No. At least not 'work' in the sense of becoming a successful business venture.
 - 10. I used to buy IF games before computers had picture capability and I would

like to see them come back, Unfortunately, I believe that most kids today don't want to have to go to the trouble of imagining something when they can have it fed to them.

11. No.

12. I think commercial IF could work right now if someone (or a group of someones) would just sit down and make a serious attempt at it. There's always plenty of talk on the subject but not a whole lot of action. If an author whose work I enjoyed were to actually take the plunge, make a nice website and put a game up for sale, I would buy it, and I can't be the only one.

Most popular answer: no.

No big surprise there. As commercial IF died out a good few years ago, the idea of a commercial revival is probably unlikely.

Q4) Do you think a commercial ADRIFT game will ever be sold?

A4) 1. Doubtful.

2. No.

3. I'd like to think so. I'd even like to write one myself one day.

4. That could happen, but probably only through online channels.

5. No.

6. No.

7. No.

8. I have lurked on the boards for a fair while and have come to the conclusion that there wouldn't be a commercial Adrift game. Bluntly put, the people on the boards who create games do so for the enjoyment of creating a game. If pushed for a solid yes / no answer, then I'd have to say it could only be with v5.

9. Yes.

10. God, I hope so!

11. No.

12. See above. I can't speak for anyone else, but the interpreter used wouldn't matter to me, so at the very least "a" commercial game would be sold if one was ever made available. ;)

Most popular answer: no.

Again, no big surprise. But we can always hope ;)

Q5) Where do you think you'll be IF-wise in 5 years?

a) **Still using ADRIFT.**

b) **Switched to another system.**

c) **Left the scene altogether.**

A5) 1. a) Still using ADRIFT.

2. b) Switched to another system.

3. a) Still using ADRIFT.

4. a) Still using ADRIFT.
5. a) Still using ADRIFT.
6. a) Still using ADRIFT.
7. a) Still using ADRIFT.
8. a) still using ADRIFT. In 5 years I may even get a game out myself.
9. a) Still using ADRIFT. But hopefully better at it!
10. a) Still using ADRIFT.
11. a) Still using ADRIFT.
12. a) Still using ADRIFT. (IF has always been an on and off hobby for me, but I don't see myself ever leaving for good, and other interpreters aren't an option for me.

Most popular answer: still using ADRIFT.

12 replies and 11 of them confirmed they still planned to be using ADRIFT in 5 years time.

Q6) Do you consider yourself to be a writer, a player or a bit of both?

- A6)
1. More writer than player, but do both.
 2. Both.
 3. More writer than player these days. For every hour I spend playing games, I probably spend ten writing them.
 4. Due to a lack of time, 'None of the above' may reflect my current situation better... For the sake of this survey, 'a bit of both' summarises best what I'd like to be.
 5. Writer.
 6. Bit of both.
 7. Both.
 8. A player for certain. A writer, I'd like to think so, although I doubt I'm a great.
 9. Writer.
 10. Most certainly both.
 11. Writer.
 12. Heh. Well...I'd PREFER to think of myself as a writer, but in order to do so and still be honest with myself so I would actually need to finish a few games, so for now I'm either a player or a little of both.

Most popular answer: both.

Q7) How many ADRIFT games do you think you'll write during 2007?

- a) **None.**
 - b) **One.**
 - c) **Two.**
 - d) **Three.**
 - e) **Four or more.**
- A7)
1. d) Three.
 2. c) Two.
 3. e) I have games planned for the Spring Thing, IFComp, ADRIFT Summer

Comp... and a couple others. Although 'planned' doesn't necessarily mean 'released'.

4. a) None.
5. b) One.
6. e) Four or more.
7. b) One.
8. How many I write? Or how many I finish? maybe one.
9. d) Three. And probably lots of false starts.
10. c) Two. (Maybe 3 but I like to take the time for details)
11. c) Two.
12. c) Two (I hope).

Most popular answer: two.

Ah, optimism. I count 25 separate games promised here - and that's just by the people who answered the survey. As this comprises perhaps half of the active ADRIFT community, we ought to be seeing a bumper year for ADRIFT games.

(Yes, the above paragraph was written firmly tongue-in-cheek.)

Q8) Do you intend to enter any of the big IF competitions in 2007?

- A8)
1. No.
 2. Yes.
 3. Yes. Hopefully all of them.
 4. No.
 5. No.
 6. Yes, IFCComp.
 7. Yes.
 8. No, possibly maybe in 2008.
 9. Hope to, yes. Maybe the next one (Spring Thing?).
 10. I'm considering it.
 11. No.
 12. I'd like to, but I've said that before so odds are low.

Most popular answer: yes and no.

5 yes, 5 no and 2 maybes. Not the most definite answer but at least several of us are considering entering the big Comps and showing the rest of the IF world what ADRIFT can do.

Q9) When playing ADRIFT games, do you use the standard Runner, SCARE or Gargoyle?

- A9)
1. Standard Runner and Gargoyle.
 2. Standard Runner.
 3. A mix between the standard Runner and Gargoyle. I tend to find myself

swaying more in favour of Gargoyle because it looks nicer but I dislike how awkward it is to customise. A decent built-in customisation option, and a mapping facility similar to the Runner's, would have me using Gargoyle 100% of the time.

4. The ADRIFT Runner.
5. ADRIFT Runner.
6. ADRIFT Runner.
7. Standard Runner.
8. Standard runner, it works and if its not broke, don't fix it.
9. Standard Runner.
10. Standard.
11. Standard Runner.
12. Standard Runner.

Most popular answer: standard ADRIFT Runner.

Despite the common idea of Gargoyle being superior to the Runner, it seems the majority of people still prefer to use the Runner to play their games. Maybe Gargoyle's lack of easy customisation deters them.

Q10) Which feature do you think ADRIFT lacks most of all?

- A10)
1. Easy if-then statements without having to jump through multiple Event/Task hoops.
 2. Autosave feature.
 3. Editing the game while playing it and having the version in the Runner update itself accordingly would be nice. Error messages specifying exactly which task/object/event/etc has caused the problem would be even nicer. An autosave feature would be nicest of all.
 4. Runner: More polished look. Generator: Let's see what happens with ADRIFT V5.
 5. ADRIFT needs a better Runner. The colours suck.
 6. Being portable, i.e run on Mac, Penguin, etc
 7. An easy way of linking all your verbs (that you would use) with every object.
 8. Public appeal.
 9. A way to handle graphics well.
 10. So far, it would be nice if there was a code library where you could review sample code from other games for specific actions.
 11. Snap-in replaceable modules (like battle systems, conversation systems, etc).
 12. It's hard for me to say, never having fooled around with anything but the basics. A feature that fixes the ambiguity problems would be the first thing that comes to mind though.

Most popular answer: no definitive answer to such a broad question.

Interestingly, while the previous question got results firmly in favour of the Runner, this one seems to favour an upgraded Runner.

Q11) Do you like the default look of the ADRIFT Runner (green text on a black background) or wish it was something else?

- A11)
1. The default is fine.
 2. I prefer white on black background.
 3. My personal preference is white text on a black background, but I think almost anything is an improvement on green text on a black background.
 4. Loathe default look. I use white text on black background.
 5. No.
 6. No, it is crap. Black on white or blue on white would be better default.
 7. Hideous - I have white on black.
 8. Maybe its just me, but I actually find the default look of green on black easier than black on white.
 9. I rarely use the default, so I'm happy with my black on white.
 10. The only change I would make here would be to have it more closely emulate the DOS colors the old ones were in. But this is just for nostalgia reasons.
 11. No, something softer would be nice.
 12. I don't mind it too much personally, but I know there are people who hate it and I don't think it helps much as far as attracting new people to Adrift goes. It would probably be for the best if the default was something like black text on a white background. (Or perhaps even dark green on white, to keep the traditional color in there somewhere without it being so painful on the eyes.) Failing that, just make it easier for the author to set the colors they want their game to be played in.

Most popular answer: no, I don't like the default ADRIFT look.

No surprise there.

Q12) Do you think a game should have hints or are you happy without them?

- A12)
1. Depends on the game, but I vote for hints.
 2. Happy without them.
 3. Depends on whether I get stuck or not. Generally I'm in favour of hints because I'm never very good at puzzles and tend to get stuck quite often.
 4. Hints should be available, although preferably with different layers of help, so that looking at hints isn't the same as looking at worded walkthrough.
 5. Hints.
 6. A game should have hints.
 - 7.
 8. No opinion either way.
 9. Should def have hints.
 10. I really depends on the game. The one that I am writing now requires a certain amount of knowledge about subject matter and hints will be available for those who haven't got that knowledge.
 11. No in-game hints. Need a place to get some, though.
 12. I understand that there could be arguments against a walkthrough, but IMHO there's no reason hints shouldn't be present in every game. There are times when I get

sick of beating my head against a brick wall and quit, when all it would have taken was a nudge in the right direction to keep the plot moving and keep me interested. In the end it's up to the author, but I don't see the point of needlessly frustrating the player. (Especially when a hint is usually needed because I can't figure out the command to type, not because I can't figure out what needs to be done in the first place.)

Most popular answer: hints are better.

My personal preference as well. Getting stuck just isn't fun.

Q13) **Recommend an IF game you've played lately.**

- A13) 1.
2. *Hitchhikers Guide To The Galaxy.*
3.
4. *Madam Spider's Web. Requiem.*
5. *To Hell In A Hamper.*
6. *Vespers.*
7. *Adventure* (Adrift version).
8. The one I've been playing to death recently is *Crazy Old Bag Lady*. 2 reasons, I cannot seem to get very far in it, and the chav checklist. I live in a very small city with a large population of military personnel and a larger chav population.
9. Haven't played anything since the Hourglass comp... hm... Can't really in all honesty recommend anything!
10. I'm still a HUGE fan of Colossal Cave. That is my all-time favorite and I recommend that one regularly.
11.
12. The Last Resort. Sure it's the ONLY game I've played recently, but it's a heck of a lot of fun and satisfying to figure everything out step by step, even if like me you're not usually all that fond of overly 'puzzly' games.

Most popular answer: none really.

Although interesting to note that two retro games were mentioned. The only ones still seem to be favourites with some people.

Q14) **Will you be upgrading to ADRIFT 5 when it comes out?**

- a) **No.**
- b) **Yes, immediately.**
- c) **Yes, but only when all the bugs have been stamped out.**
- d) **Perhaps. I'm going to wait and see what everyone else says about it.**

- A14) 1. b) Yes, immediately.
2. b) Yes, immediately.
3. b) Yes, immediately.
4. b) Yes, immediately.

5. b) Yes, immediately.
6. b) Yes, immediately.
7. a) No (because I doubt it ever will).
8. d) Perhaps. It depends on a large number of things, like it not taking a decade to load on my OS.
9. b) Yes, immediately. Can't wait!!!
10. d) Perhaps. I'm going to wait and see what everyone else says about it.
11. b) Yes, immediately.
12. c) Yes, but only when all the bugs have been stamped out. (Any major bugs anyway, I recognize that it might be a while before ALL the bugs are found.)

Most popular answer: yes, immediately.

*Not quite unanimous, but 8 out of 12 people say immediately, 2 others say perhaps, 1 says when the bugs have been stamped out and only 1 says no (and only then because he/she doesn't believe there *will* be an ADRIFT 5). There you go, Mr. Wild. Incentive to get ADRIFT 5 finished after all :)*

Q15) On average, how many hours a week do you spend writing games?

- A15)
1. Maybe one or less.
 2. 1 - 2 hours.
 3. Depends on the game and whether I've got a deadline to hit with it. This week I've spent about an hour a day on week days and perhaps an hour and a half at the weekend, but when I'm working on a game that's going really well, or I have to finish it before a certain time, I might spend twice as long.
 4. Zero.
 5. 1.
 6. 7.
 7. 2 hours.
 8. Maybe 8, I'm still in the learning by doing stage.
 9. 1 to 3 hours, although sometimes as many as 6, sometimes nothing at all, of course.
 10. Anytime I'm not eating, sleeping, studying or cleaning. Probably about 5-6 hours a day.
 11. 10 hours.
 12. Lately? Um, zero. :(

Most popular answer: 1 or 2 by the look of things.

Q16) On average, how many hours a week do you spend playing games?

- A16)
1. Maybe one or less.
 2. 1 - 4 hours.
 3. Depends on how much time I'm spending writing them or if something has just come out that I desperately want to play. This week I haven't played any games; one week last month I spent 5 - 6 hours on the same game. Generally if I'm working towards a

deadline with the game-writing side of things, I don't find myself with much time left over to play any.

4. On average, something very close to zero. Peaks before (beta-testing) and during comps.
5. 0.25.
6. 2.
7. 2 hours.
8. Too many. Maybe 4 hours a day.
9. Usually don't. But when I do play, I spend a couple hours a week.
10. Maybe about 3-4 hours
11. 1 hour.
12. Sadly only a couple of hours on weekends. I really have been very very busy lately, though thankfully it looks like that might change soon.

Most popular answer: 2 hours.

Most drifters seem to spend longer writing games than they do playing them.

Q17) Is it worth password-protecting your games or are you happy for anybody to open them up and see how they're put together?

- A17)
1. I always learn from "peeking" into others games.
 2. Password protection is a must!
 3. I waver between yes and no. Yes, because you'd prefer people to solve the game fair 'n' square and not just peek in the Generator the first time they get stuck. No, because if people *do* get stuck and you've password-protected the game, they're more liable to quit than keep on struggling with it.
 4. If I wrote a game, I wouldn't password protect it. I do not, however, mind games that do so.
 5. No.
 6. I never password protect my games.
 7. Yes.
 8. I haven't got a valid point of reference on this subject, I'd probably password it and if people want to see how it works then they can mail me and ask for the password.
 9. No. I think password protecting is completely useless. What, are people going to steal your event structure? And if it's a matter of people not cheating, well if they are desperate enough to look at it in the generator, there's probably good reason!
 10. I like to have the code available for other to check out. It helps others to learn new things.
 11. Passwords are good.
 12. I don't see any real pressing reason to protect them, though I certainly hope they'd be bug free enough and have helpful enough hints that no one would ever have to use the generator to figure them out. As for simply seeing how they're made, no one is likely to ever learn anything from my games, except maybe how NOT to put them together in an orderly way.

Most popular answer: no, password protecting isn't for me.

Q18) Is ADRIFT the only system you use for writing IF games?

- A18) 1. Yes, sir.
 2. No.
 3. Yes. I've dabbled with Inform 7 (too much like a programming language for this non-programmer), TADS 2 & 3 (*way* too complicated!), Alan 2 & 3 (couldn't get anywhere with them) and Quest 3 & 4 (*still* no UNDO feature!) but ADRIFT is better for me than any of them.
 4. Yes.
 5. Yes.
 6. Yes.
 7. Yes.
 8. Most of the systems seem to have too much programming to them, I never got past fooling around with a BBC Basic on the old BBC Model A.
 9. Yes.
 10. Yes, at this time it is.
 11. Yes.
 12. Yes. Like many of you I gave Inform 7 a whirl when it was first released, but nothing ever came of it.

Most popular answer: yes.

A bit of a loaded question really. No doubt if TADS or Inform every had their own newsletter, the answer to this question would be equally biased in their favour.

Q19) Have you ever played retro IF games or do you stick firmly with the modern ones?

- A19) 1. First played The Count on a VIC-20. Anything that's good with a theme I enjoy.
 2. Almost exclusively retro.
 3. I'm a huge fan of the retro scene and keep wishing for a retro revival. My fave ever game is *The Hobbit* and I still find myself playing *The Big Sleaze*, *Sherlock* and *Bored of the Rings* from time to time.
 4. Haven't played (as in finished) a single IF game which was released prior to 1998 (*Photopia*).
 5. *The Hobbit* is my fave.
 6. I love proper traditional adventure games like those from Level 9 and Melbourne House, but like the new stuff as well.
 7. I prefer retro over modern games.
 8. I don't mind either way, its my way of escaping and unwinding from the hell of life.
 9. I have, but haven't played any since I first got into IF. I kind of miss it though...
 10. I play both kinds but the retro ones have a special place in my heart.
 11. Played and liked both.
 12. I've played a few older games but rarely finished them. Not that there was anything about them I actively disliked (except for the mazes), it was more about them

being too gigantic and difficult for a person with the attention span of a grasshopper with ADD.

Most popular answer: yes, I've played retro games.

Q20) What's your favourite genre?

- A20) 1. No favourite.
2. Horror.
3. For writing games: comedy. For playing: pretty much anything, though I tend to shy away from arty games.
4. The part about adventure (in any form) in text adventure. Depends more on the overall quality of the story and the writing than on predefined genres. Don't like puzzlefests.
5. Zombie.
6. Sci-fi.
7. Horror.
8. Modern fantasy.
9. Comedy.
10. Fantasy.
11. No specific genre.
12. Horror! And by horror I don't mean monsters and buckets of blood and gore, but genuine honest-to-God creepiness and suspense with a plot that keeps you on your toes and screws with your mind. This might have something to do with the fact that Anchorhead was the game that first got me seriously into IF, but either way it's a genre that I love, particularly because it's so rare compared to, say, comedy games, and seems so hard to effectively pull off.

Most popular answer: horror.

So if you want to write a game that drifters will play, a horror would seem the obvious choice.

Q21) How long should a game be?

- a) **Finishable in less than an hour.**
- b) **Finishable in half an hour to one hour.**
- c) **Finishable in one to two hours.**
- d) **Finishable in two to three hours.**
- e) **Finishable in over three hours.**

- A21) 1. All. Depends on the story.
2. e) Finishable in over three hours.
3. e) The longer the better. I want a game to last for days, weeks, even months! But by 'long', I don't mean there's a really difficult puzzle in every location which takes me days to solve; I mean lots and lots to do.
4. c) Finishable in one to two hours. AND d) Finishable in two to three hours.

5. b) Finishable in half an hour to one hour.
6. d) Finishable in two to three hours.
7. e) Finishable in over three hours.
8. e) Finishable in over three hours is good, means I can fully concentrate on a single game when I relax.
9. d) Although variety is good. But a really, really long game I probably wouldn't stick with to the end.
10. e) Finishable in over three hours. (I love the long ones)
11. e (but I think the question should be "How long, for you, would be an ideal game?")
12. IMO a game, like a story, should be as long as it needs to be, no less and no more. True, a longer game probably won't be played to completion by as many people as a short game, but if an author has got an epic story to tell than I want to experience that epic story, not a rushed summary. At the same time I don't want to play what could have been an amusing five minute distraction stretched out into an empty and tedious hour.

Most popular answer: finishable in over three hours.

The longer the better seems to be the most popular answer.

I Say, I Say, I Say

by David Whyld

Most games have a conversation system of some sort. After all, conversing with NPCs is one of the interactions that have become almost standard in IF games over the years. Those that don't have a conversation system, even a basic one, are generally in a minority.

The majority of games seem to rely on the ASK NPC ABOUT SUBJECT style of conversation, with some using the TELL NPC ABOUT SUBJECT style as well. In the past, I've shied away from this sort of thing because in the games I play I can never usually come figure out the subjects I'm supposed to be ASKing/TELLing people about. I tend to go with the old TALK TO NPC followed by a list of conversation options, which neatly gets rid of the dreaded problem of trying to guess-the-correct-subject-that-needs-to-be-asked-about - often a long and laborious process consisting of much typing of ASK PETER ABOUT followed by every subject under the sun I think Peter might know something about - but at the same time is limited in that you can only cover a certain amount of subjects in this way before the conversation system starts getting bloated out of all proportion. A conversation system which hit the player with ninety conversation options every time they type TALK TO NPC would be unlikely to prove popular.

One conversation system I've seen used in a few games over the past couple of years (**The Elysium Enigma** and **Tower Of The Elephant** from the IFCOMP 2006) struck me as quite an interesting one. You start the conversation off with a simple TALK TO NPC command and then it presents you with a list of subjects you can question the NPC about. Other subjects become available depending on what you ask. So you might have:

```
> talk to Steve
```

```
"Hi," says Steve. "I'm just on my way to the bowling alley to pick up Bianca."
```

You could ask Steve about: Bianca, bowling alley, himself, you.

```
> ask Steve about Bianca
```

```
"Bianca's my girlfriend. We're thinking about getting married one day."
```

You could ask Steve about: Bianca, bowling alley, himself, marriage, you.

> ask Steve about marriage

"Well, not yet," says Steve. "I mean, I need to get that promotion first before I start thinking about marriage. Got a huge mortgage to pay and everything."

You could ask Steve about: Bianca, bowling alley, himself, marriage, mortgage, promotion, you.

The more questions asked, the more subjects become available, enabling a detailed conversation to be had with none of the complications that generally arise when using ASK NPC ABOUT SUBJECT and with more freedom than the standard TALK TO NPC followed by a list of dialogue options. While part of me isn't overly fond of the idea of listing the conversation subjects at the end of each bit of dialogue (if I was a hater of broken mimesis, I'd be coming out in hives at the very thought of it), it's certainly better than leaving the player to figure them out for himself. And, when you think about it, provided the subjects are all things the player would think to ask about, there's no real harm done. It only becomes a problem if you start listing conversation options that give away clues about the game that the player might not be aware of at the time.

A problem that arises in a lengthy conversation is that it sometimes becomes difficult to remember which subjects you've asked about and which still remain to be asked. Particularly with the subjects being listed in alphabetical order, it might be confusing to tell which ones have recently been added and which were originally there. You could always get round this by simply tagging each subject onto the end of the list, but I think alphabetical is better because it allows you to locate the subjects you want to ask about more easily (especially if you've got a lot of conversation options listed there). One way to go about making it less confusing would be to label the subjects you've already asked about. With a few variables and the ALR, you could do something like:

> ask Steve about marriage

"Well, not yet," says Steve. "I mean, I need to get that promotion first before I start thinking about marriage. Got a huge mortgage to pay and everything."

You could ask Steve about: Bianca (), bowling alley, himself, marriage (*), mortgage, promotion (*), you.*

So now you can see at a glance that the conversation subjects *Bianca, marriage* and *promotion* have all been asked about, whereas *bowling alley, himself, mortgage* and *you* are still to go. It takes more effort this way as you need to keep track of the subjects that have been asked about and the ones that are still available, but once you do a few of them it's surprising how easy it becomes.

Putting the subjects in a vertical list makes them even easier to locate. You could have something like:

> ask Steve about marriage

"Well, not yet," says Steve. "I mean, I need to get that promotion

first before I start thinking about marriage. Got a huge mortgage to pay and everything."

You could ask Steve about:

Bianca ()
bowling alley
himself
marriage (*)
mortgage
promotion (*)
you*

The vertical list is easier to do in ADRIFT, as well as looking quite a bit nicer, so probably the one I'd use in a game. Admittedly, it's not perfect as when the list hits a certain amount (20-30 lines depending on your screen resolution, window size and font size), you'd find the list scrolling off screen. A compromise could be made in having the subjects already asked about kept separate from the ones still be asked about.

> ask Steve about marriage

"Well, not yet," says Steve. "I mean, I need to get that promotion first before I start thinking about marriage. Got a huge mortgage to pay and everything."

You have asked Steve about Bianca, marriage, promotion. You have yet to ask him about:

*bowling alley
himself
mortgage
you*

In this way, the list, while growing with each new subject added, should never reach the stage where it scrolls off the edge of the page. Not unless you have a conversation with dozens and dozens of subjects in it, and most people would find that a little daunting and more trouble than it was really worth.

Putting something like that together in ADRIFT is certainly manageable. At first, it might seem complicated. But then, doing anything out of the ordinary seems complicated to begin with. Try a small conversation piece - no more than half a dozen subjects - and once you have that in place and working fine, move up to a larger one. You'll be surprised at how easy it is.

Critics' Corner

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Game: **The Long Barrow**
Author: **C. Henshaw**
Released: **12th August 2006**
Platform: **ADRIFT 4**
Download: **<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/longbarrow.taf>**
Review by: **Nick Rogers**

(I have to admit that when I started this game I was expecting a full game. Half way through playing this game I learned that, in fact, it was created for a speed-IF comp (one or three hour - I can't remember), so much of what I say has to be weighed in that light.)

I'm (not) diggin' it

The introduction was well written, but didn't really grip me. So I'm a lowly archaeology assistant, and have been that way for a while, but maybe I'm about to make it big. So I pick my trowel and try to dig. "I don't understand what you mean." Pardon? I have all this digging equipment, and I can't just "dig"? Hmm. I try digging the ground. I try to scrape the rocks. I try swinging the pick-axe. Grr. On a whim, I try digging with the trowel. Ah! That's what is needed. This game has gone down a peg. I realise that this game was written in a short time frame, but really, if it wasn't going to handle the basic "dig" command, it should have at least lead me to the right phrase and told me to specify what I should dig with. Anyway, second room. Whoops, some bad spelling: a duplicated word "One one side of...", and I believe mortar is spelt with an "ar", not "or". Can I dig with trowel here? Not on your life. At least I can move the rocks. Can I break the brick wall? Can I swing the pick-axe? No. Well I do have a new room to explore. There's something shiny in the corner. How do I examine it? Now, call me picky, but I'm afraid I would never have thought to try "examine something". Yes, I can see that the word was used in the description, but so was "sheens", but that one doesn't work. I tried shining my light on it. In the end I just tried the greatest IF command of all time: "get all". Hey, now I have a gold hoard! Whoo-hoo!

Just another brick in the wall

So now what? I admit I cheated at this point and opened the game in the Generator. With no hints or help online, I didn't really have a choice. And the game was starting to get old really quickly. Getting through the brick wall was a pain in the GTV. You can't use the pick-axe, which, in my mind, would be a natural for knocking down brick walls. The main problem is that you get the standard Adrift response ("I don't understand what you want to do with the pick-axe") for all the wrong tries, which leads you to believe that you can't knock down the brick wall at all. You can, but you have to hit on the right word combination.

And then there's the digging. You need to do some more, and again, you can't just dig. But now you can't dig with an implement, as you needed to do in the first room. Consistency is optional, I guess. By looking at the generator I discover what I'm supposed to type in and move on.

Rock on, dude

That leads me into a tunnel. After a bit of moving around it ends up saying "You can go east and west". Actually, it's lying. I can only go west. So I end up in a large carved chamber. There are some "awesome" carvings on the wall. I'm sure they are, but I couldn't examine them. Or the ceiling. Or the floor. Or the walls. The only thing that is fully described in the room is a large, boring slab of rock. (But remember to enter "rock", because "slab" doesn't work.)

Now, for the final puzzle of moving the slab, sorry, rock. There are four commands that have to be entered to solve it, But there are no hints, no suggestions if you tried "move rock". In fact, "move rock" responds with "You can't move the rock", when the puzzle you have to solve is designed to do exactly that - move the rock. You're just supposed to know. Maybe the items you were given at the beginning were supposed to be suggestive. I don't know. In any case, I don't think I would've come up with that on my own. And then there's the ending. You've just ransacked an archaeological site, and destroyed various parts of it, without a shred of photographic or written documentation on what you did. In the real world, there is no way you would be getting a big raise. You would more likely get kicked out of the archaeological community.

It's a long way to the top...

This game has potential, and so many things suggest themselves as improvements: when the player falls into the room at the beginning, make it impossible to get out. This would create the reason for escaping through the tunnel. Give the player a camera and some recording equipment to document the find. Change the ending if the player moves or breaks things, so that it's bad if they take the gold or silver. And cover some more standard commands. You know, like "dig".

As it stands, I didn't really enjoy this game. As a game written in an hour I guess it's pretty good, but I think I'd rather see something a little more completed. There is some good writing, with the occasional mistake, but unfortunately all the issues I had left me feeling that it was only half done.

3/10

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Game: **Terrified**
Author: **Eric T. Dorrath**
Released: **1st February 2007**
Platform: **ADRIFT 4**
Download: **<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/terrified.zip>**
Review by: **David Whyld**

The sole entry to the aborted NaAdWriMon (National ADRIFT Writing Month) competition I organised, *Terrified* is a very retro game. Which is good and bad in equal parts. Good because it reminds me quite a bit of the games I played as a teenager, and any game that brings back fond nostalgic memories tends to go down well with me. Bad because it has a good number of the flaws which plagued a lot of the text adventures from the retro age.

The game begins with little introduction. You've been running, you've paused because you're out of breath and, somewhere in the distance, there's a mob after you. Why are you being chased? The answer isn't revealed until later in the game and certainly wasn't one I had expected. I think I expected the mob to be a force of evil and the player to be a good guy wrongly chased by them. Boy, was I wrong there...

At times, this is a very unfair game. The player can die without warning and it's very easy to unwittingly go the wrong way and put yourself in a position from which every move leads to your imminent demise. Fortunately, ADRIFT's standard end game sequence is overridden here, allowing the player the option of UNDOing his last move. In a game where death awaits you around every corner, in the most literal sense, this comes in very handy indeed. Quite a few of its puzzles are of the variety that you'll only solve by blundering into them unawares, dying, and then realising next time round that you need to be more careful... so if you're someone who dislikes dying in games without warning, or likes their games to play fair, this isn't the game for you. More often than not, you'll only discover something you need to do after you've died.

Another common theme from the retro period is that most of the items needed to finish the game are lying around conveniently waiting for you to come along and pick them up. This doesn't really do wonders for the game's realism but I suppose it means that they're easier to find this way.

Quite a few guess the verb problems let the game down on the whole. There are several occasions where a certain command will only work in a certain location - try it anywhere else and you get ADRIFT's standard error message. The same error message it churns out whenever you try a command it doesn't understand. So if you tried the command in the wrong location, saw the game didn't understand it, it's likely you wouldn't think to try it anywhere else. At other times, tasks that ideally should have more than one way of being accomplished don't work and the precise wording needs to be used. For example, there's a bonfire where you need to burn some evidence. BURN {ITEM} works but attempts to PUT or THROW the items onto the fire doesn't. Likewise, attempts to burn any item that isn't required to be burnt just hits you with an error message. The first time I tried to burn

something, it turned out to be the wrong item and when I saw the error message I assumed (wrongly) that I couldn't burn anything.

Not a bad game overall, and the constant deaths are frustrating, but it might pass the time if you've half an hour to spare and have a fondness for the retro scene.

4 out of 10

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Games: **Escape From The House** by CJ592; **King's Quest V** by Steve Lingle; **Nami Adventure** by Matthew Jessup; **Something 'Bout A Hex** by Paul Flum Games; **Where's Annabel?** by CJ592
 Released: **1st February 2007**
 Platform: **Quest 3**
 Download: **<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/games>**
 Review by: **David Whyld**

Quest 4 recently came out so when I saw a number of new games had been uploaded to the main site, I decided to try them out and see what the new version had to offer. Unfortunately, two of the games are written with the previous version of Quest so whatever jazzy new features version 4 brings with it won't matter much to them. Oh well, I'd downloaded them so figured I might as well give them a bash and see what was what...

The first one I tried was *Escape From The House* which gave the indication from the very start of being just as bad as every other Quest game that I'd played. The introduction was:

You need to find a way out of this house

Hardly inspires you to play any further, does it? From there it went from bad to worse. The first location description is littered with spelling mistakes, grammatical errors and weird capitalisation. At the end of it, I'm advised

There exit Norh take you to the Small Hall

And this is at the very start of the game where people are most likely to quit if they don't see anything very favourable! Now I can understand being new to the scene and not really knowing what things are standard as far as text adventures are concerned, but even the newest newbie of them all should realise that terrible spelling at the very start of their game doesn't give a good first impression.

Playing a little further, I noticed *Escape From The House* suffered from the usual array of faults which seem to blight almost every Quest game I've ever played. There's a desk with a drawer in it, but the OPEN command isn't recognised; another location has a lavish table that can't be referred to as TABLE or LAVISH TABLE but only as DINING TABLE; many

items mentioned in room descriptions can't be examined and those that can have short, uninspiring descriptions often littered with spelling mistakes; there are items that should be readable but the READ command isn't understood... (1 out of 10)

I went on to another game by the same author - *Where's Annabel?* - not really expecting much and, yes, not really getting much either.

This one had an introduction at least, though the author's spelling and grammar haven't improved much since *Escape From The House*. Nor has his ability to know where capitals are and are not needed. And he's still a long, long way from writing something even vaguely playable...

Quest has the strange habit of displaying the items (both ones you can pick up and immovable ones) in bold type before the main body of the text in the room description, which is a bad idea to say the least and compounded here by the author then going on to repeat most of what you have already been told. So the first room description reads:

You are in the main Garden.

There is a closed **Well**, some **Yellow Flowers**, some **White Flowers**, some **Red Flowers** and some **Blue Flowers** here.

You can go **west**.

You are standing in a small garden. There is a large well here and it is overgrown with colourful flowers

As I've already been told there's a well and some flowers here, is it really necessary to incorporate them into the room description as well?

What age the game is in set I couldn't say. At one time you are given gold coins, which led me to assume it was way back in the Dark Ages, but at the same time you're given a photograph so it's clearly not a medieval game. Unfortunately the author doesn't seem willing to elaborate on things. Then again, little about the game is clear. For a start: who is the player? The background to the game is that someone called Annabel has gone missing (this is detailed in the remarkably clumsy introduction) and you have to find her, yet whether you're a police officer, a freelance detective or something else altogether is never indicated. Part of me suspects even the author doesn't know.

I didn't last long with *Where's Annabel?* Mainly because it was just so bad I was on the verge of quitting before I'd even finished reading the introduction, but also because of the remarkably small amount of commands it understands and the frequent bugs. Not to mention some of the worst guess the verb problems I've ever come across. A good example of this would be:

You're given a photograph of Annabel. Now with a photograph, the logical thing to do would be to SHOW it to people, right? Ah, but the game doesn't understand the SHOW command. It *does* understand GIVE funnily enough but won't let me give it away because I need to keep hold of it. USE PHOTOGRAPH when speaking to an NPC called Baggie produces an unhelpful message that I can't use it here. At this I got stumped and started typing in silly things just to see if I could hit upon the solution by sheer luck. And I did. The command required?

USE PHOTOGRAPH ON BAGGIE

Ah, of course. What an amazingly obvious command. USE PHOTOGRAPH ON BAGGIE is *so* much better than SHOW PHOTOGRAPH.

Okay, enough with the sarcasm and enough with the game. Avoid this one like the stinker it is. *(1 out of 10)*

So onto the next one - *Nami Adventure* - one of the first ever games written with Quest 4. As this was a brand new text adventure system, I wasn't really sure what to expect other than it being an improved version of the old Quest. Improved? Well, in theory...

At first glance, the interface appears the same as the old version. The side panels are still in place (although why they're even there in the first place beats me as they add absolutely nothing to any of the Quest games I've played), the text entry line is still minimal and... that's about it. Whatever other changes have taken place aren't immediately apparent, with the only obvious difference being that some of the buttons now have a nicer box around them than before.

As for the game...

Oh dear god.

For some reason that probably seemed like a good idea to the writer, but sure doesn't to this poor player, the game clears the screen *after every single command*. Yes, every single one. So if you examine an item, the screen clears. If you try to open something, the screen clears. In fact, even if you make a typo, the screen clears just to tell you it doesn't understand what you mean. Now while I quite like screen clearing for moving between locations - it keeps the interface looking nice and tidy - for every command it's just the worst idea possible. Seriously. By the time I quit the game, and it wasn't long believe me, over half the commands I'd typed were LOOK just so I could see where I was.

Unfortunately, this made playing the game a real chore. Location descriptions are as painfully brief as they generally are in Quest games, usually a line or two at most, and Quest has still got the peculiar habit of preceding room descriptions with a list of the items that you can see in bold type. Funnily enough, one of these items is the player character, though why the writer felt the need to list the PC as one of the items in the room is beyond me.

What bit I played of the game didn't impress me one bit. Yet again, it seemed to be a Quest game written by someone without a clue what they were doing, hadn't been tested, didn't have any clear storyline and, burdened by the screen clearing after every command, was just more trouble than it was worth. *(1 out of 10)*

I then moved on to the fourth game, *Something 'Bout A Hex*, which certainly had a better blurb than the previous games but which crashed with an error message whenever I tried to play it. After some experimentation, it seems that this is another Quest 4 game but the error message never indicated this and so I'd blindly assumed it was still the older version.

But I fired it up in the new Quest 4 and tried it. Hey presto! It worked!

To begin with, it didn't seem too bad. The first location had an actual honest to god description which was more than a few lines long. It even listed a huge array of items. Wa-hey! Something to examine, I thought. Unfortunately not... as while there might be items listed in the room description, the writer hasn't bothered providing descriptions for any that I could find. A sample from my transcript went:

```
> X MANTLE
I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE.
```

```
> X PISTON
I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE.
```

```
> X FISHTANK
I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE.
```

```
> X FIREPLACE
I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE.
```

```
> X DRIED ROSE
I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE.
```

Etc...

If one of those had been missed, I'd probably just chalk it down to simple carelessness and leave it at that. If two had been missed, I'd wonder if the writer needed to get himself a better set of testers. But with *all* of them missed... well, if this game even knows what a tester looks like, I'd be very surprised.

(As a side note, Quest now has a transcript command. I figured this out pretty much hit and miss as it doesn't detail it anywhere in the game and the WHAT'S NEW section under the HELP options button doesn't work. On the down side, the transcript is a remarkably poor one as it doesn't display any of the text generated by your commands, only the commands themselves, rendering its use as a transcript tool pretty much non-existent. You also don't receive any confirmation when starting or stopping a transcript and no indication of where the file has been saved. You're not even able to name the transcript which is another failing.)

Leaving the first location presented me with a slight problem: namely that I couldn't return. The exit had, apparently, gone missing. Other locations presented other problems. One had a door which couldn't be opened as the OPEN command wasn't recognised (up to version 4 and Quest *still* doesn't understand many of the basic IF commands that every other system has had for years); another had a desk which I needed to GO TO DESK before I could do anything with it (although even when standing right next to it I was told I CAN'T SEE THAT HERE when attempting to examine it). Many locations lacked anything more than a line telling you where you were and the exits, so any attempts at depth the game might have been going for were quickly lost.

In fact, there were so many things wrong with the game that I was itching to quit it before five minutes had even gone by. For a start, there's no storyline. The intro hints at something about time travel and a hex, which sounded vaguely interesting for a few moments, but the game begins with you pottering around your apartment and won't let you leave because... well, it doesn't say why. Most of the locations are sparsely implemented (and that's being kind) with nothing at all to do in them. Interaction is mainly done via the side panels and involves you clicking one thing then another. Which is a pain. I'd quite like to see Quest lose the side panels altogether or for them to at least be a little more user friendly. Or for someone to write a Quest game that doesn't require their use at all.

It might seem a little harsh to give yet another rating of 1 out of 10 for this, but there's nothing about it I could recommend so that's the rating I'm going to give it. (*1 out of 10*)

And so to the fifth and final game - Steve Lingle's *King's Quest V* - which I decided to make a more determined effort to get on with than the other games. Why? Well, he's written two previous games with Quest and they're far and away the best Quest games I've ever played. (Of course, considering the competition he's up against...)

The introduction was lengthy and a bit flawed in the grammar department what with a fair number of errors showing up (the game lists several testers, though unfortunately none of them seem to know a good proofread when they see one) and some awful colour schemes. Some of the dialogue is in red, some in blue, and with the game's main text being my preferred choice of white, this makes the whole thing seem more than a little gaudy. But a few changes from the top menu, a restart (Quest apparently can't change something as basic as the font colour without restarting), and I was away.

The ever unwelcome side panel (grrr!) is better used here than in most games, but the usual flaws are present, too. The first location lists three items that can be examined - a well, a small pond and some chap called Cedric - yet there is also a town and a house that you can look at as well via the old-fashioned idea of typing in commands. I can well imagine this kind of thing being highly problematic in that if you rely on only what is displayed in the side panel (as seems to be the general idea with Quest), you wouldn't be aware there were other things that could be examined. This could well lead to you missing something vital to completing the game. On the other hand, if you hide the side panel and the item you need to examine is only referred to there and not in the text itself (as has been the case a time or two before in various games) then you're potentially rendering the game unfinishable.

There's an added problem in that not everything mentioned in the side panel can be examined, though it's often not until you've typed in several different things trying to garner a response that you become aware of this. The town location refers to a barrel, a wagon, a silver coin (apparently lying around in the middle of town though only the player has the wherewithal to pick it up) and three shops, yet none of the shops can be examined. Why? Well, according to the panel they're places and not objects and apparently places can't be examined. Hmmm...

Parser problems abound. Normally I'm not too fussed over the whole parser debate, but Quest's parser, and its many flaws, seem to affect every game written with it. For example, Cedric, the named NPC in the first location, cannot be referred to as HIM but, strangely

enough, as IT. Even more bizarre, the sequence X CEDRIC followed by X HIM produces

```
I don't know what 'him' you are referring to.  
I don't know what 'him' you are referring to.  
I can't see that here.
```

On top of that, we have parser inflexibility. GO WELL isn't an acceptable command apparently, but something like GO TO THE WELL is considered fine. Surely Quest can check a simple command like that, realise it's the same as GO WELL and process it accordingly? Then there are the usual problems with perfectly ordinary words not being understood, or with commands displaying an error message if not followed by a noun. So TALK on its own will produce the standard Quest error message, yet TALK TO [NPC] will work fine. (The problem here is that if you tried TALK on its own and got an error message, you might well assume the command didn't work in the game and not try it again.) Oh yes, Quest's parser leaves a lot to be desired and has the potential to turn even a good game into something almost unplayable.

But enough with the flaws of the system. What about the game itself?

It's certainly better written than the average Quest game, though it still suffers from a poor grasp of grammar for the most part. From time to time, the game switches from first person (referring to the player as YOU) to third person (referring to the player as GRAHAM) which is a little jarring to say the least. There doesn't seem to be any real consistency to this and instead it appears to be down more to simple carelessness than anything else.

Instant deaths abound, never a favourite of mine, and here there are far too many of them. The first game (this is the sequel incidentally) featured this idea as well, and no matter how many times someone can espouse on just why it's a good idea to have the player killed instantly and without warning, every time it happens to me I find myself wishing they just wouldn't bother. Why not a simple warning that the player might die? Why not put the player in peril but give them the opportunity to get out in one piece? Why not injure the player or take away score points for mistakes? Killing them every few moves is just a pain. With Quest lacking the vital UNDO feature, dying means clicking on the restore option in the right hand panel in order to go back to your previous saved game position. (Ah, you ask, but what if I've decided to play the game with the side panel turned off? Well, then you're up a certain creek without a certain implement because the command entry line becomes disabled when you die, thus putting you in a very sticky position indeed.) With the sheer number of instant deaths on show here, this can become very tiring very quickly.

The game compensates for this to some degree by including a feature that is every bit as annoying here as it was in the first game: namely a message flashing up on screen from time to time warning you to save your game. As with the first game, this seems like a sound idea in theory but when it happens *every single time* you go a certain way, it quickly becomes a pain.

In style, *King's Quest V* is a very retro game. There are no long, flowery descriptions of locations, no details beyond the very basics, the aforementioned instant deaths and, sigh, several timers that don't really add anything to the game but a fervent wish that the author hadn't felt the need to include them. Wandering around the desert (a remarkably empty set

of locations all virtually identical to each other), I died every four to five moves unless I could find an oasis and drink from it. For some reason, I couldn't seem to find a way to take any of the water with me (the player apparently lives in a world where glasses, bottles and the like do not exist) so this made exploring the desert an arduous and frustrating task. I'd find an oasis then walk around it for a bit until I got a message telling me the heat was getting to me, then run back to the oasis, have a drink, and explore a bit further. Sometimes I'd make it back in one piece. Often I wouldn't. By the time I had the desert sufficiently explored, I think I'd died half a dozen times and spent more time than I care to mention wondering just why the author had included such an ultimately annoying puzzle in his game.

Alarming few commands seem to be covered and sometimes you need to try something else entirely just to get the game to accept the command you want. For example, I can't BUY SLED (buy is another word Quest still doesn't have in its vocabulary), yet talking to the toy shop owner begins a conversation where I try to buy the sled.

I spent quite a bit longer on *King's Quest V* than I normally do with Quest games, hoping that despite its flaws there was a decent game here, but in the end the sheer number of bugs, the frequent problems with the perspective switching from first to third person, the poor standard of testing and, yes, the usual hassles of playing any kind of game with Quest, made me decide I'd be better off playing something else instead. Overall, it's probably a better game than the first one, but it ends up with a lesser score because whereas I once felt Quest had potential as a text adventure system, I now suspect it doesn't; as a result I find myself disliking each subsequent game written with it a bit more than the one before. Maybe it *is* possible to write a genuinely decent game with Quest, but it's not something I'd bet money on and I've pretty much given up any kind of hope of it happening within my lifetime.

While not the unplayable mess that most Quest games are, *King's Quest V* is far too flawed for me to ever recommend it to anyone and while it's probably the most accomplished Quest game written to date, by the standards of any other system it would be ranked as poor indeed. (3 out of 10)

Latest Releases

The following ADRIFT games have put in an appearance since the last issue of the Newsletter.

February

3rd **Crossworlds Part 4: Scream For Me!** by BBen [ADRIFT 4] [adult]

<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/crossworlds.zip>

Blurb: *"What is going on? What is real? Will everyone survive what is to come? Find out in this, the finale of the Crossworlds series."*

1st **Terrified** by Eric T. Dorrath [ADRIFT 4]

<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/terrified.zip>

Blurb: *"Pausing in the middle of the street, nearly bent double, hands resting on your knees you try to catch your breath.*

Pounding hard and irregular your heart feels as if it is going to explode from your chest. Light-headed and slightly disorientated, it feels as if you are going to be sick at any moment.

You seem to have been running forever. You have lost all knowledge of time."

And non-ADRIFT releases:

February

15th **King's Quest V - The Text Adventure** by Steve Lingle [Quest 4]

<http://www.textadventures.co.uk/download/FINAL.zip>

Blurb: *"This is the full version of the text adaptation of the widely popular King's Quest V! For those who played Part One, feel free to use the included saved file to start at the end of Part One and continue the adventure! ENJOY!!!!"*

1st **Escape From The House** by CJ592 [Quest 3]

<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/games/escape.zip>

Blurb: *"This is my first attempt at a game, so I apologise for any problems. The game is*

straight forward. You have to get out of the house."

1st **Nami Adventure** by Matthew Jessup [Quest 4]

<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/games/nami.zip>

Blurb: "This is my first Quest game. I made it so I could have a good laugh. That's why it's silly. And fun. You are Nami. A schoolgirl. Who needs to go to school. Seems simple, but there are a few ways to lose. Made with QDK Lite, so it isn't that fancy. I had fun experimenting with custom room-specific commands and things."

1st **Something 'Bout A Hex** by Paul Flum Games [Quest 4]

<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/games/hex.zip>

Blurb: "What if "A" doesn't necessarily go to "B"? Or even better, you discover "B", then when "A" comes along you think, "Now I get it!". I hope you enjoy this story, as you move back and forth through time to discover something about a hex."

1st **Where's Annabel?** by CJ592 [Quest 3]

<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/games/annabel.zip>

Blurb: "Annabel, a beautiful young girl, waits patiently on a tree stump in the middle of a Forest. She is waiting for her true love, Griswold. There is a rustle of leaves behind her. "Grissie, is that you?" she calls out tentatively. but no-one replies. Annabel gets up and investigates the trees. Suddenly a pair of huge arms appears from the trees and grab her. She cannot scream, she struggles but to no avail. And then she is gone! 'Where's Annabel?' is my second attempt at writing a game. It is a complete game and is designed to use click and drag options."

Reference

Who's Who & What's What

(...being a list of individual sites within the ADRIFT community...)

General ADRIFT Links

<http://www.adrift.org.uk>

The main ADRIFT website.

<http://www.thephurroughs.com/projects/atts>

The ADRIFT Tutorial. (Written for ADRIFT 3.9 but still mostly relevant.)

<http://web-ring.freesevers.com/cgi-bin/webring?showring=K5G14H>

The ADRIFT Webring.

<http://sourceforge.net/projects/jasea>

The homepage of jAsea, a program that allows people on non-Windows systems to play ADRIFT games.

http://www.geocities.com/legion_if/scare.html

The homepage of SCARE, a clone of jAsea which allows ADRIFT games to be run on non-Windows systems.

ADRIFT Fan Sites

<http://bbben.aifcommunity.org/> - "BBBen? Yes!"

AIF writer BBBen's website.

<http://ccole.aftermath.cx/> - "Christopher Cole's AIF"

AIF writer Christopher Cole's website.

<http://www.delron.org.uk/> - "Delron"

Richard Otter's website.

<http://www.geocities.com/shenanda976/garden.html> - "The Garden Of Life"

Renata Burianova's website.

<http://www.groundchuck.co.uk/> - "Groundchuck"
Jason Guest's (AKA The Amazing Poodle Boy) website.

<http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/e107/news.php> - "Inside ADRIFT"
The home of InsideADRIFT.

<http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/news.php> - "KFAdrift On The Web"
KFAdrift's website.

<http://home.epix.net/~maywrite/game.htm> - "Maywrite"
Eric Mayer's website.

<http://mysite.verizon.net/dlgoodwin/bob/pkgirl> - "The PK Girl"
Hanadorobou's website [home of the ADRIFT game **The PK Girl**].

<http://adrift.sitesled.com/> - "Reviews Exchange"
Rafgon's {aka Robert Street} website.

<http://www.shadowvault.net> - "Shadowvault"
David Whyld's website.

CONTRIBUTIONS

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Ren for being this month's Hot Seat victim.

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LOOKING AHEAD

Issue 35 is due out on **Saturday, 26th May 2007**. Fancy having your say on a subject? Writing a review of an ADRIFT game? Have an article to publish?

Contributions to dwhyld@gmail.com prior to the above date.