



Inside ADRIFT

**The Newsletter Of The
ADRIFT Community**

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Editorial

It's been an unusual time for ADRIFT recently.

The last release of Version 4, number 46, came out a long time ago, way back in the mists of time in April 2005. Many people believed, myself included, that this was the final release of Version 4 and that the program as it stood was all we would see of ADRIFT until Version 5 put in an appearance (whenever that might be).

Not so. Out of the blue, Release 47 landed upon us.

But was this good news? Several of the issues with previous releases were now fixed and several enhancements were added. So all well and good. Unfortunately, it wasn't without its problems and no sooner had 47 come out than 48 was with us, which was more of a bug fix for 47 than anything really new.

And as 47 was initially bugged, so was 48. 49 fixed some of those bugs.

And then came 50 which fixed some of 49's problems.

Fortunately 50 seems to be the magical number because there haven't been any further

releases of ADRIFT so, fingers crossed, everything is now stable again and several enhancements have been gained. So all well and good?

Well...

One thing that seems to be mentioned frequently on the ADRIFT forum - it's probably been the most discussed topic for the past year and a half since it was first announced as being a work in progress - is ADRIFT 5. Rewritten from scratch, and with an improved parser that might even gain some ground with the TADS/Inform crowd, Version 5 promises to be light years ahead of Version 4 in terms of power and what it can do. Things that were difficult, or even impossible, to do in 4 will become so much simpler, or simply possible, in 5. But where *is* ADRIFT 5? people ask. Good question. Whatever kind of enhancements Version 4 has, it won't gain much credibility with the rest of the IF world. It's pretty much a final bit of icing on a cake that most people were already content with and only a small fraction of its enhancements will ever be used. Particularly with a new version looming.

So let's get ADRIFT 5 out of the door. Enough delays. Enough working on enhancements to older versions of the program. What we want is ADRIFT 5... and we want it now.

David Whyld

There are two different version of the Newsletter available. What you're reading now is the standard version; there is also a .taf version which you can open up with the ADRIFT Runner (Version 4 [Release 46 or later is recommended though older releases of Version 4 ought to handle it fine]) and play it like you would a regular game. Both versions can be found at:

<http://www.shadowvault.net/newsletter/35.htm>

HOT Off The PRESS

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

ADRIFT: A NEW RELEASE **(AND ANOTHER ONE... AND THEN ANOTHER... AND...)**

It's been two years since the last update to ADRIFT version 4 (Release 46) and then, lo and behold, four updates come out within the space of a few days.

The main changes in Release 47 are:

- Auto software updater in Generator
- Better support for Windows Vista (Sound support plus better error reporting)
- Bug Fixes
- Characters can move to a roomgroup from hidden
- Can use 'he' at the start of a sentence
- Test comparisons on String values should now work
- Deleting rooms doesn't corrupt static object locations (ID 476)
- Subscript out of range error using Referenced Number (ID 469)
- Deleting a variable causes Subscript out of range error (ID 470)
- Direct key retrieval working again

- Items worn at start of game no longer take up 'size' (ID 295)
- Edit/Delete buttons no longer enabled in error for alternate descriptions (ID 477)

And in Release 48:

- Room sound buttons no longer disabled (whoops!)
- Application-defined or object-defined error 339, 51 (ID 168)
- Event starting after 'Any task' should now start
- Sound enabled checkbox setting saved properly

And Release 49:

- Load/Save commands work again (whoops!)
- Fixed 'Evaluate Error' message e.g. when typing "Panel"
- Fixed Subscript out of range error in debugger when no objects
- Fixed Subscript out of range error processing events
- Browser populates without requiring Refresh

And finally in Release 50:

- Browser no longer displayed on File Open
- Corrected 'Type Mismatch' error clicking on rooms in lists
- Map colours default if incorrectly set

AIF MINICOMP 2007

For those interested in the “darker side of IF”, the AIF (Adult Interactive Fiction) Minicomp 2007 has just kicked off. With no less than 12 entries, there ought to be at a few games anyone not completely opposed to the AIF scene will like.

Strangely enough, ADRIFT entries don't dominate the minicomp to the same degree as they have tended to do in previous years. Indeed, of the 12 entries, only 3 were written with ADRIFT. Inform, the popular choice for the IFComp every year, fared even worse with just 2 entries, leaving TADS (generally a distant second to Inform for popularity in comps) as the clear winner with 6 of the entries. The final game was with a system called RAGS.

Full details and the games themselves:

<http://newsletter.aifcommunity.org/>

H. P. LOVECRAFT COMMONPLACE BOOK COMP & EXHIBIT

Another day, another comp. If you've still got time for another competition, be sure to check out the H. P. Lovecraft Commonplace Book Comp at

<http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/if/lovecraft.html>

The idea is to take an idea by famed horror writer H. P. Lovecraft (contained within his Commonplace Book) and make a game from it. The finished products will then be included in an exhibit of Lovecraft's work to be held at the Museum of Science Fiction in Switzerland this October. No prior knowledge of Lovecraft or his works is required; all you need to do is write a game.

The ADRIFT part of the comp can be found at

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6030>

and will be updated every time an intent to enter is received by the curator (which is me incidentally).

IF ART SHOW 2007

The judges for the IF Art Show - a competition intended to promote games without any set goal or puzzles - have been announced on RGIF. And there are prizes for the Art Show, too, so if you were having second thoughts about entering the comp, maybe it's time to have third thoughts. Write a game and make yourself some money!

The RGIF thread is at:

http://groups.google.com/group/rec.games.int-fiction/browse_thread/thread/858483f7f565dbc7/6f4d3e879a892d37#6f4d3e879a892d37

and the IF Art Show website can be found at

<http://members.aol.com/iffyart/>

SPRING THING 2007 - RESULTS

The Spring Thing 2007 - the “other” big comp in the IF world after the IFComp - concluded on 25th April 2007 and the results were announced the following day. They were:

1. *Fate* by Victor Gibsjers (Inform 6)
2. *The Reluctant Resurrectee* by David Whyld (ADRIFT 4)
3. *Starship Volant: Stowaway* by C. Henshaw (ADRIFT 4)
4. *The Epic Origins Of CamelGirl!* by Brandi Wilcox (TADS 3)

TEXTFYRE

Textfyre (formerly Westfield Chandler Publishing (the new name is certainly catchier anyway)) is now getting monthly updates on RAIF, the latest being at

http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_thread/thread/13783ff26c5dc01d/#

The first set of games, written by Anchorhead author Michael Gentry, are to be called:

- **The Chronicles of Toresal: Episode I - Orphan**
- **The Chronicles of Toresal: Episode II - Princess**
- **The Chronicles of Toresal: Episode III - Queen**

Orphan is tipped for release in either July or August and assuming everything goes according to plan, will be one of the few commercial IF games released in the last decade. No prices for the games have yet been announced.

ADRIFT Forum

Digest

By Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

While we witnessed another slow period on the forum, there were also some positive signs. We had new releases for Adrift 4.x, and Adrift 5 seems to be on its way. Also, the last writing challenge had some kind of revival, with seven people participating.

Programming Help

Converting fractions to integers.

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6087>)

This thread, started by ksb, details how Adrift handles fractions - by default, they are rounded. If fractions are needed, a solution would be to scale them up.

Best practices with events

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=6022>)

phkk noticed that events can slow down the Adrift runner considerably. This probably can't be avoided entirely, but a few changes can make a noticeable difference. For example, one should be careful with the number of events and tasks running at the same time, and avoid too many references (esp. to %character% and %object%). Another way is to use a syntax structure for tasks which uses less brackets.

(no female)?

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=6016>)

This is another example of how to override the 'take' command with tasks.

Game Design, Writing Techniques

Game design question

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6090>)

In a scenario where the player is presented with a challenge to solve some puzzles so as to choose the right action, how should wrong decisions be handled? The responses to this question were quite different, with some people in favour of ending the game, while others wanted the author to subtly (or less subtly) bring the player back on the right track. In the end, it always will be difficult to find the right balance between a narrow world model, and a more open one.

Player Preferences

Is fairness in IF games overrated?

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6056>)

David Whyld compares today's IF games to the older text adventures of earlier days. Fairness has become a standard paradigm for modern games - yet many of the classic games treat the player all but fair, and were enjoyed nevertheless. Ralphmerridew set these games up against the Zarfian Cruelty Scale, while others wrote their definitions of fairness, and the difference between a fair but deadly or bad end and an unwinnable state.

Competitions

The Spring Thing 2007 lead to a few interesting discussions on the Adrift forum; most of it concerned Victor Gijbsbers winning entry Fate, and his remarks about his vision for the future of IF games. The threads can be found at Spring Thing Results - (URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6050>) - and Spring Thing 2007 - (URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6018>) - .

Miscellaneous

The Future of ADRIFT and IF

(URL: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=6027>)

A general discussion on where people see Adrift and IF in a few years. The thread had quite a few answers. Most people were optimistic about the new major release of Adrift, and the place Adrift will have among the top tiers IF languages. There was also a wide spread notion that the IF scene will see a stronger distinction between 'classic adventure games' and 'art games'.

In The Hot seat

Interview with Lumin

In which Lumin (Orb) tells us the origin of her username, why she hasn't written more games and a few other snippets of information...

Q

Tell us about yourself - who is Lumin? And where did the name come from?

A

Okay, this one's easy. Lumin is a college student from South Texas who's kind of...not going for any specific degree at the moment, works two jobs that are too boring to mention, and probably spends more time than is healthy playing games, hanging out on various forums and writing. She also thinks the novelty of talking in the third person is wearing off and will switch to first now.

As for the name, 'Lumin' or actually 'Lumin Orb' was the main character in an embarrassingly awful sci-fi epic I wrote and rewrote throughout most of junior high. (I won't go into details here, but trust me, it was bad.) A few years later I used a

variation of the name at a writing site I joined, and since I tend to cluster my forum identities by subject it only made sense to use it again when I came across Adrift not too long afterward.

Q You've written one game to date- "Quest For Food" - but it's the only one that has yet to make it to the finishing line. What was it about this one that saw it finished?

A Well, the obvious reason - it was *tiny*. I could probably crank out a dozen games a week where there's exactly one puzzle to solve and no plot to speak of, but I doubt they'd be very popular outside the context of a three hour comp.

Q And what about the games that, um, fell at the first fence... (okay, enough horse racing jokes now). What about them? And why do you think they didn't make it?

A Honestly? It's probably because I have the attention span of a gnat. Also I procrastinate.

Seriously though, I tend to hop from one half-finished thing to another a little more often than is healthy. First I'm all fired up about playing IF games and writing my own epic masterpiece, then some RL thing comes along and distracts me for a bit, and when I finally get back to my computer I decide to spend a day catching up on some forums, then oh wow here is this neat thing somebody linked to that I must check out, after a little while I realize I really should force myself to get back to that fantasy novel I started a couple of years ago, only along comes a really stressful week at work and I decide I should relax with some RPG that I never got a chance to finish, then it crosses my mind that hey, it's been awhile since I messed with Adrift, hasn't it? Only it's a little difficult jumping back into that epic masterpiece after being away so long so maybe I should start a new one...

Q Do you think you have just one IF game in you that you'll work on for years and years until you're 100% satisfied with it or would you be happier just writing a few smaller ones from time to time?

A Those don't have to be mutually exclusive do they? At the moment it seems I have about *three* big games that might take me years and years until I'm completely satisfied, but there are also some smaller ones that I've been focusing on trying to push out the door despite massive RL opposition (relatives! argh!) and the sudden desire to replay Starcraft now that the sequel has finally been announced.

Q How did you get into IF in the first place? Were you playing it back in the commercial age of the 80's or was it something you came across more recently?

A Unfortunately I completely missed the 'golden age' of Infocom and the like due to spending part of it in the womb and the rest learning to walk and read and write and not eat glue, all of which are necessary skills for playing IF. (except the walking part, that was just a favor for my parents.)

I think I discovered IF in high school when a lucky search for Hitchhiker's Guide related stuff turned up the game. Since I'd been addicted to MUDs since junior high the 'text' part wasn't much of a hurdle for me and as soon as I discovered the rest of the community I was hooked for life.

Q For you, what is the greatest IF game ever written? What makes it so good?

A Ooh, wow. Not sure if I can answer this one. It'd be almost impossible to decide on one single 'greatest' game, and even a simple list of my favorites could get really long really fast. Let me just say that off the top of my head the games that I've enjoyed the most would be Anchorhead, City of Secrets, and the Warlord, the Princess and the Bulldog. Each of them are wildly different sure, but as far as their individual genres go I've never played anything that could top them. Then of course there's the phenomenal Earth and Sky series, Christminster, Savoir Faire, Fine Tuned, and yeah, I think that's enough, better stop here...

Q Are there any games you've played over the years that you'd consider it worthwhile porting to ADRIFT?

A I'm probably not the best person to ask about this. To be honest I've never really seen the point of porting, except as a coding exercise or demonstration. My thinking has always been that if I want to play a game, there's no reason not to play it on the platform it was written for.

Q Collaboration. The idea gets mentioned every now and then and the pros and cons are hotly debated, but however the discussion ends up, nothing ever seems to get done. Have you considered collaborating on a game and do you think you'd make a good collaborator?

A Would I make a good collaborator? Haha...go back and read my answer to question number three. In short, um, no. I deliberately avoid committing any big projects where other people might rely on my because of my aforementioned lack of attention span and because real life absolutely refuses to go away even when it's inconvenient. Even to do something as simple as answer these questions on time (barely)

I basically had to barricade myself in my room and throw the phone out the window.

In theory a collaborative game would be loads of fun, but I don't think I'd ever get involved in anything unless it was something like an extremely casual 'toss a .taf file back and forth and write a couple of descriptions'. That said, I think Sprite's idea of a 'library' game definitely has potential, because at least if I took forever to get my entry done I wouldn't be slowing down anyone else.

Q

The IFComp 2007 is beginning to loom on the horizon. I know in previous years you've said you'd like to enter if you had a game ready. Will 2007 be that year?

A

Historically being all, 'Oh yes I'm *definitely* entering a game this time around!' means it has absolutely zero chance of happening, so no comment for this one.

Q

What was it that attracted you to ADRIFT in the first place?

A

The ease of use was the thing that originally got my attention. I still remember how cool it was to sit down with the demo version for the first time and create a little shack in a forest with a key hidden inside, whereas I'd had to spend a long time reading the manual in order to do something similar in Inform. But what *kept* my attention was the Adrift forum and the community there; I immediately felt right at home, and once I settled in there wasn't much point in dabbling around with other interpreters.

Q

The answer given to the previous question is usually “it’s not a programming language and I’m not a programmer” - would you say that’s mainly the reason people choose ADRIFT or do you think there are other reasons?

A

That probably has a lot to do with it. Very few people *are* programmers, after all, and I’d imagine the number of competent ones who also fancy themselves writers are even smaller; those are skills that use entirely different sides of the brain.

The best thing about Adrift (and arguably also the worst) is that anyone with the ability to string two sentences together can sit down and get the hang of the basics within minutes. Writing a decent game with an interesting plot isn’t significantly different or more difficult than writing a story. And IMO that’s how it should be. If someone has the time and willpower to teach themselves to program then that’s great, but personally I’ve always felt that learning TADS (or whatever) in order to write an IF game shouldn’t be any more necessary than learning to assemble a car before driving yourself to work.

Q

What are your views on Gargoyle? Are you planning to test your games with it in future or will you just assume most people playing them will be using the standard ADRIFT Runner?

A

I think Gargoyle’s a well made program, but since I already have all the interpreters and see loading up a separate one for each game as part of the ‘charm’ of the IF experience I don’t have much use for it personally. It does have the benefit of simplifying things enormously for newbies however, and I’m all for anything that removes one of the hurdles that might keep someone from getting into IF.

I assume that most games released independently or for an Adrift comp will be played by someone using Adrift, but if I was writing a game for a mainstream comp I would definitely test it in both Gargoyle and Scare, assuming I had the time.

Q If there was any one thing about ADRIFT - anything at all - that you could change, what would it be?

A The minor things I'd like changed seem like they *will* be getting changed once 5.0 is released, so there's no real point in going into them here. I guess the ambiguity problems are an issue, and I'd like to see the runner's default colors that are the first thing newbies see changed to something a little less painful on the eyes, but like I said, minor stuff.

Q A recent post made by you on the ADRIFT forum:

"...why would a person even bother putting puzzles in a work of IF if they didn't want it approached as a game with puzzles to be solved? Why bother inviting the player (or in this case I guess it would be "reader") to interact with your story at all if their interaction is meaningless...seriously, why not just write a book?"

Do you think that the modern IF is getting too arty for its own good? Have people forgot that IF games are, basically, games?

A I think at this point that would be too much of a generalization; I can't say that *all* modern IF and modern authors are going down this road, but in the last few years there has definitely been a shift in that direction. The community as it stands seems to have this implicit assumption that a fun game that isn't trying to be anything except a fun game is somehow inferior to a work of IF (not a 'game' mind you, that would cheapen it) that aims to ask Important Questions or deconstruct a paradigm or otherwise go out of its way to impress the player with how highbrow and meta it is. (The darker and grimmer the better, of course.)

It's not that I think there isn't a place for this sort of IF, I would just really, really hate to see it all but replace the enjoyable kind, and it always seems like it would be more at home in an Art Comp or something as opposed to the mainstream ones anyway.

Q

How would you feel about the idea of an ADRIFT Art Show Comp? Is that the sort of thing you would be interested in entering?

A

Well, it's hard to say. I like the idea but I'm unsure about the need for it; there's already a mainstream Art Show that could do with more participation as it is. An Adrift specific version could be seen as splitting up a niche within a niche, probably not the most beneficial thing for the community as a whole...but then again I can't help it, I vastly prefer Adrift comps over most of the mainstream ones. They're more informal and simply more fun, and I can't deny the appeal of forgetting about puzzles for awhile and just doing something weird. (Heal Butcher would definitely have to be tracked down and invited to participate if we were to have one...)

Q

Are you working on any games right now? If so, tell us a bit about them and when/if you think they will be released.

A

I'm working on a *lot* of games right now (well technically I guess only 'working' on a few, the rest are sitting partially finished on my hard drive waiting for either inspiration to hit or the magical IF fairy to come along, wave her wand and complete them).

There's the Big Three that I'm slowly chipping away at; without giving away too many details they are a massive sci-fi adventure, a massive fantasy adventure, and a massive sci-fi/fantasy prehistoric pirate adventure. (I'm particularly proud of that last one. :-D)

But right now I'm mostly trying to finish a small game for the Cthulhu comp and another for the Summer comp.

Q Do you play many IF games or do you consider yourself more a writer than a player?

A Hey are you recycling questions from the survey? :-p Well like I said before, I'd *like* to consider myself a writer, but the reality is I'm mostly a player. Sometimes a little of both, sometimes neither, depending on my schedule.

Q What are your thoughts on ADRIFT 5 (going on what little is known about it at this stage)? Do you think it is likely to change the minds of the anti-ADRIFT crowd, even convert a few of them, or will be used mainly by people already familiar with the current versions?

A My thoughts on Adrift 5 aren't very coherent and when they are they usually go something like 'Adrift 5!!!!!! Glee!!!!!! I can't wait!!!!!! etc., so I'll try and spare your eyes the exclamation points by not going into too much detail here. I don't think it'll do much to change the minds of people who are either against Adrift on general principle or are already comfortable with another interpreter, but I imagine the new and improved interface might do more to impress people who are just beginning to dabble with writing or are new to IF in general. The fact that it'll probably give the current users more options and help them make better games even *more* easily is of course a nice bonus too. :)

AUTHOR PROFILE: Lumin

12 08 06 1) **Quest For Food**

Coming Soon

Being a list (hopefully updated quite regularly!) of works in progress in the world of ADRIFT. Feel like adding your work in progress to the list? Drop me an e-mail at dwhyld@gmail.com with a few details and I'll add it to the next issue.

The Evil Dictator's Secretary

by C. Henshaw

Mr Elton Borumbu is your name. You are a secretary. Not a secretary in the sense of a mere typist, oh no. You are the secretary of the Prime Minister of Laurubon, no less. You have power, as manifested by your stamps, which allow you to deem all kinds of things TOP SECRET, APPROVED or DENIED.

I started this one a while ago, and it was put on the back-burner while I finished my Spring Thing entry. I've gone back to it, and there's about 8 out of 10 chance I'll release it. I'm not going to say too much about the plot, but the game-play will be a mixture of puzzles, word games, character interaction, and cyoa decision-making. All the other games I've announced have died the death, and this time I'm determined to break the jinx! Expected completion date anytime between a month from now and end of the year, depending on how long and complicated I let it get.

Critics' Corner

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Game: **Adventure Strikes When You Least Expect It**
Author: **Dylan Clarke**
Released: **13th September 2006**
Platform: **ADRIFT 4**
Download: **<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/adventure.taf>**
Review by: **David Whyld**

This game is 4 KB in size. Now normally I don't really give two hoots about how big a game is, but when you see something released as a full game that is 4 KB in size, you really have to wonder. I mean... *4 KB?* That's, like, shorter than some games I've played which were written in an hour. It's shorter than the *introductions* to other games I've played. Heck, I might even have written more than 4 KB worth of random responses to various off topic questions in games before. Not by any stretch of the imagination is 4 KB a full game.

But... but let's try it anyway. Let's try to pretend that someone has had the ingenuity to actually write a proper game and manage to confine it to a mere 4 KB of memory. It could happen. It could. Really...

But does it?

Well...

As you might expect, there's very, very little gameplay here. The premise of the game (if you can call it that) simply involves you falling out of your bedroom window, landing

in an adjoining flat and then trying to find your way out again. That's about the game in a nutshell. There are a few puzzles to solve along the way, though guess the verb and trying to read the author's mind hamper almost all of them. One puzzle involves me trying to spray some cheese (don't ask) in order to make it possible for me to smash a window with it. Now unless there's something about spraying cheese to make it significantly harder that I'm not aware of - and I don't think there is as I like cheese as much as the next man and sure I would have heard something - I'm not entirely sure how anyone was expected to figure out that puzzle. For that matter, I wonder, why can't I just smash the window with the spray? Or kick it? It's only a window, after all. I shouldn't need to go around spraying cheese to harden it in order to make an effective window-breaking weapon.

The game's linear. Painfully so. Then again, with so few locations to play around with (five in total) and so little of the scenery implemented (just the bare basics), it's not very surprising that you're forced along such a linear path. The majority of the game (all of ten minutes play time, including checking the Generator a few times to get me past the worse guess the verb and read the author's mind issues) is simply a case of do one puzzle, get an item, do another, get another item, do another puzzle... and so on. Aside from the spraying the cheese puzzle, there's nothing remotely challenging. Figuring out I needed to use the crowbar to open the crate was hardly a brainteaser, and once I had the saw and there's that locked door over there, well...

Of course, you're hampered by the game's tight restrictions and insistence on doing things the way it wants you to do them. The crowbar, for example, can be used to open the crate but there's no real explanation given for why you can't use it to smash the door open, or break the bars in the windows. The saw can be used to open the door, yet why can't it be used on the bars in the windows or any of the other doors? Then again, is there really nothing more to the game than you trying to find your way out of someone's apartment? As far as games that offer something new and challenging, this clearly is not one of them. In fact, this seems much more like a test game someone wrote when he was bored and uploaded five minutes later. It's not been tested. Or, if it has, it's time to shoot the tester 'cos he sure didn't do a very good job.

And where oh where did the hole that I fell into the apartment through disappear to? Is it some kind of magical hole that vanishes the moment some poor chap falls through it? At the very least I ought to be able to take a look at to see if there's a better game lurking on the other side.

I suppose I should finish off by saying that the writing was a step up from the usual stuff in games of this calibre, i.e. it didn't suck as badly as the rest of the game. In fact the game itself wasn't as entirely horrible and without redeeming features as this review might otherwise indicate. It's never going to go down as a game people will look back on fondly and count themselves lucky to have played, but it's certainly not the unplayable mess I've seen by certain other people with their first efforts. It's just, well, not really a proper game at all. When you spend longer writing a review of a game than you did

playing it (in fact, I probably spent longer writing this review than the author did writing the actual game), you really have to question the definition of it being a “full” game. I’ll grudgingly give this one a 3 out of 10, but next time upload the game to where it belongs. The demo section.

3 out of 10

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Game: **S Tar Dus T**
Author: **Amzie**
Released: **12th October 2006**
Platform: **ADRIFT 4**
Download: **<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/stardust.taf>**
Review by: **Lumin**

I was glancing through the games listed on the main site, and I came across one written with 3.9 and released way back in October that I'd never heard mention of on the forum, with an author, Amzie, who was equally unfamiliar to me. On a whim I decided to download it, and thus began my S Tar Dus T experience. (Henceforth referred to as Star Dust, for the sake of both my sanity and the reader's eyes)

Now I'm not ashamed to say that I loaded up the thing expecting the worst, because, well, newbie author and all, but while Star Dust DID have a number of flaws that I'll soon go into, on the whole it showed a lot more promise than most other 'My First Adventure' games I've attempted to play.

The premise seems to be the somewhat tired 'thrust the PC into surreal surroundings where they solve random puzzles just because they're there' cliché; specifically, you play a teenage girl named Jillian who one day got bashed over the head by a crazy old woman and woke up on a giant checkerboard underneath a strange night sky. Heading off in the cardinal directions just adds to the strangeness, leading you to an assortment of completely unrelated locations. Definitely not everyone's cup of tea, and those who insist on mimesis are likely already typing QUIT, but I admit the odd 'Alice in Wonderland'-esque setting started to sort of grow on me before too long. I think it was the pink tea pot and the ominous warning sign that did it.

That's nice, I hear you saying, but how is the actual gameplay? Well...this is where the flaws come in, I'm afraid.

Star Dust doesn't SEEM to contain any obvious game-breaking bugs, and the description

insists that it is playable, but unfortunately this seems to be one of those games where 'READ AUTHOR'S MIND' is a necessary command if you want to have a hope of finishing it. That's right, GtV problems abound; I could easily see what needed to be done to solve at least a few of the puzzles, (leading the old man to a certain location, getting an item from the merchant, etc.) but after trying every command I could think of I was no better off than when I started. There are no hints and using the Generator isn't an option due to password protection, so after struggling for about half an hour with no progress I was forced to give up.

Adding to my frustration were the sparsely implemented NPCs. Each of them just sort of stood in their respective locations and didn't respond to much of anything, not even the most obvious topics. For example, when you TALK TO an old man, you get the following:

As you approach the old man, you can hear him babbling to himself. "... back in the day I killed me an army o' demons, zombies, vampires, weres, and the like, and I was the king of the slayers, and everybody loved and respected me, and now all I have is this Old Nanner, she's been my only friend for decades, and I don't know what I'da done without her, 'cause ..."

Wow, looks like there might be a lot to ask him about, right? Wrong. Asking about any of the above gets you a standard 'Old Man does not respond to your question' reply. He doesn't even have a thing to say about 'Old Nanner' the strange statue that seems rather important to him and is the only distinguishing feature in the room he occupies. In fact, it seems like the only thing he DOES care about is something that's in another room entirely, and that you don't have any real reason to ask him about in the first place. (The only reason I found out about it at all is because I originally played the converted version of the game in the 4.0 runner, which broke a couple of things, including giving away the related puzzle's solution in a room description...though unfortunately it didn't also give away the COMMAND needed to get to that point or I might have actually been able to accomplish something.) It would also have been nice to have been able to ask small unimportant questions like where the heck I was or how I could get home, but hey, baby steps.

There were other small problems and annoyances, (common commands like 'search' and 'show' not being implemented, etc.) but most of them were trivial in comparison.

But as I said in the beginning, despite a number of problems, Star Dust has promise. Or more specifically the AUTHOR does. I stated earlier that I kept playing for quite awhile even after it became clear to me I'd beat my head against the wall in every location and wasn't going to accomplish anything further. Why did I bother? Because the writing was actually GOOD, and if there was equally good gameplay hidden in there I wanted to find it. Well... granted, the merely serviceable and perfunctory plot was nothing to get all excited about, but the meat and potatoes of IF, the scenery and descriptions were well done, charming and amusing and just generally leaps and bounds ahead of what I'm used to seeing in a newbie game. There were a few omissions, but for the most part every

major object mentioned in a room had a description, and a nice one at that.

And this is why I hope to see more from Amzie in the future, because the writing is the hardest part, and she's already got that down. The rest just takes a little experience; playing more games by other people, knowing to go to the forums to get help or ask for a beta tester, and just generally brushing up on the technical aspects of writing IF. So even though I have my reservations about recommending *Star Dust*, I'm sure that once the author spends a bit more time getting the hang of *Adrift* she'll be capable of producing something really enjoyable and fun.

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Game: **Starship Volant: Stowaway**
 Author: **C. Henshaw**
 Released: **2nd April 2007**
 Platform: **ADRIFT 4**
 Download: **<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/volant.zip>**
 Review by: **David Whyld**

One of two ADRIFT entries in the Spring Thing 2007 (the other being mine, so don't be expecting a review of that), *Starship Volant: Stowaway* came a respectable third, trailing *Fate* and *The Reluctant Resurrectee* but ahead of *The Epic Origins of CamelGirl!*

The game is an uneasy mix of regular IF and CYOA (i.e. half of it has you entering commands like you would in any other IF game, the other half has you selecting highlighted commands from a block of text), which is a nice enough idea in itself but the way it's been implemented here leaves a lot to be desired. A good deal of the time you won't be presented with any highlighted commands, making you suspect that this is one of the times when you need to enter regular IF commands to make any progress. Not so. Whatever you try doesn't seem to effect the game one bit and after a few moves have passed, you are presented with a number of highlighted commands. You select one of them and then several moves later, you're presented with some more. A sizeable part of the game is played in this manner and any illusion that you can affect anything aside from the highlighted options is just that: an illusion. Whatever you type (when highlighted options aren't available) you end up with the same thing every time. So in fact the best thing to do when highlighted commands aren't available is bash out WAIT until they are.

Handled better, this could have worked quite well (though I'm not entirely convinced that a IF/CYOA hybrid would ever successfully work). But with too much waiting between the options, it often feels that the game pauses of several moves between choosing commands isn't a good idea. Continually typing WAIT until something finally

happens doesn't work; simply presenting the player with whatever the next set of highlighted commands is would have been a better idea.

The layout of the spaceship is confusing. I played with the standard ADRIFT Runner which displays a map of the game in the top right window but I ended up having to disable this due to constant error messages flashing on screen telling me the map was too complex. The map was also problematic in that sometimes it would fail to correctly list exits that were indicated in the room description.



Most of the game isn't very interactive at all. Once it had begun proper, and the starship was being approached by an alien vessel, the main command I used to progress the game was WAIT. I wasn't able to leave the bridge* and while I could speak to some of the people with me, I couldn't seem to make any progress that way. More annoyingly, when I was asked a question by Mrs Williamsby and attempted to respond, I couldn't figure out what to tell her. YES and SAY YES didn't produce any response and TALKing to her just informed me that she was doing her job and I had nothing to discuss with her. This despite the fact that she had just asked me a question and was sitting there waiting for my response! Attempts at conversing with other crew members had me issuing them orders that I might not necessarily have wanted to issue. Conversation was handled in the TALK TO {NAME} format but instead of merely talking to people, the game took it upon itself to have you issue orders whether or not you wanted to.

* Or, I should say, I don't think I *should* have been able to leave the bridge. At least, that's what I was told when I tried to go EAST or DOWN, but when I went UP the game let me leave. I then wandered around for a while, eventually making my way back to the bridge and then being told I couldn't leave again. The EAST and DOWN commands seemed trapped with the appropriate response, yet UP wasn't. I was also able to bypass this restriction by preceding the direction command with GO.

The HELP command came in handy for getting me past the problem of what to do on the bridge (apparently I could TALK to the alien vessel, which I guess made perfect sense seeing as we had communications devices on the ship but for some reason this had never occurred to me to try), but again most of the action in the game seems to involve a lot of WAITing, followed by a list of options in bold and underline for my next action. When I discovered that I could make progress by typing WAIT over and over again until more bold and underlined text was displayed, things went a little smoother, though I would have preferred something more than waiting around for things to happen.

The game often switches perspectives between the various crew members, though I was never sure why for the most part and I spent a while trying to figure out what the reasoning behind this was. I'm guessing that there are certain tasks that only certain crew members can undertake and so the switching is done for that reason. But a lot of the time I was never really sure just why X could do one task yet Y couldn't. Or why the Captain, the highest-ranking member of the crew, didn't have permission to enter certain cabins on the starship.

There's an option to switch between the various crew members, which was a nice touch... if it worked properly. Sometimes it worked fine, other times I was moved to a room called LIMBO and presented with a list of possible crew members I could switch to. None worked. However, I found that selecting the numbers of certain crew members provided me with hints that didn't really seem to related to any of the problems I was currently facing. From LIMBO, there are no directions and so the only way out proves to be liberal use of the UNDO command. As the game switches perspective completely of its own accord, it's possible you don't need to switch perspective on your own, but it's mentioned in the game that you can and so it's a pity that the game's nicest feature doesn't work. It's also not likely to go down well the Spring Thing judges who are probably going to tear the game apart for this kind of thing. From what I could tell, the switching between characters worked fine at the beginning of the game but once the main game had begun (i.e. after the sighting of the alien starship), something goes wrong and attempts to switch strand you in LIMBO.

The game has hints which only become available as and when you need them. A nice idea but the implementation leaves a little to be desired. One of the hints, dealing with the answer to just why I was being switched from one character to another without warning, didn't work whenever I tried it. At other times, I'm given hints as to what I should be trying to do in each of the various characters I play, but as the switching from one character to another seems uncontrollable, it's difficult to do any of these things. A couple of times I received hints pertaining to other characters at a time in the game when I had already played those characters and had no idea how to get back to them. Other times I switched to another character before I had finished what my current character was meant to be doing (as the engineer I was meant to be fixing a hatch but while wandering around trying to figure out how this should be done, the game abruptly switched me to the security officer)

Aside from when I was stuck in the CYOA side of things and simply selecting the options that were presented to me, I found it difficult to make progress. Certain parts of the game become unavailable to certain characters and others become available, though whether anything needs doing in these parts, or if they're there simply for show, I was never sure.

But despite its flaws, there were some parts of *Volant* I liked. The setting was pure Starship Enterprise, so much so that I expected one of the crew members to sport pointy ears and was mildly when he did not. I also liked the *idea* of the player viewpoint switching to different people, though can't help but feel that being given the choice over whether this happened, instead of it just happening and me being forced to figure things out as I went along, would have made it much better.

4 out of 10

Latest Releases

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

May
10th

The Cell by MrPetrov
<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/new/download.cgi?993>

April
2nd

A Goblin's Life by Burnout & BBBen
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>

2nd

Plains Of Passion by Paul Swift
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>

2nd

Scandal On The Seven Seas by Faraday
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>

2nd

The Reluctant Resurrectee by David Whyld
<http://www.shadowvault.net/rking.taf>

2nd

Starship Volant: Stowaway by C. Henshaw
<http://www.shadowvault.net/games/Volant.zip>

And non-ADRIFT releases:

April
2nd

The Casabian Virus by GoblinBoy [TADS 2]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>

- 2nd **The Epic Origins Of CamelGirl!** by Brandi Wilcox [TADS 3]
<http://www.textadventures.co.uk/download/FINAL.zip>
- 2nd **Fate** by Victor Gibsjers [Inform]
<http://www.textadventures.co.uk/download/FINAL.zip>
- 2nd **The Fiendish Revenge Of Baron Von Glockenspiel** by Girion [TADS 3]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Flexibility** by Fred Feeble [TADS 3]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Hard Core** by Hardcore IF [Inform]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Horse** by A. Ninny [TADS 2]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Lysistrata** by Knight Errant [TADS 3]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **The Second Guest** by ShadowDance88 [TADS 2]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Stalker Neighbor** by Snouff Man [RAGS]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>
- 2nd **Time In The Dark** by Purple Dragon [Inform]
<http://aifcommunity.org/games/minicomps/minicomp2007.zip>

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" {now defunct}
Rafgon's {aka Robert Street] website.

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

CONTRIBUTIONS

Many thanks to:

C. Henshaw for her work in progress in the *Coming Soon* section.

Lumin for being this month's Hot Seat victim and for her review of *S Tar Dus T*.

Shuarian for the ADRIFT Forum Digest.

LOOKING AHEAD

Issue 36 is due out on **Saturday, 28th July 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.