

Inside  
ADRIFT

**The Newsletter Of The  
ADRIFT Community**

**January/February 2007 - Issue 33**

# contents

<b>Editorial</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Hot Off The Press</b> [ADRIFT End of Year Competition, IF Art Show 2007, NaAdWriMo, NaIFWriMo, Quest 4, Westfield Chandler Publishing] .....	<b>5</b>
<b>ADRIFT Forum Digest</b> .....	<b>9</b>
<b>The Big ADRIFT Survey</b> .....	<b>12</b>
<b>In The Hot Seat</b> [Interview with Sprite] .....	<b>15</b>
<b>Hook, Line &amp; Sinker Part 3: The Sinker</b> by C. Henshaw {revgiblet} .....	<b>22</b>
<b>My Very First ADRIFT Game</b> by James Webb {revgiblet}.....	<b>26</b>
<b>Making ADRIFT Look Good</b> by David Whyld .....	<b>29</b>
<b>Critics' Corner</b> [The Last Resort] .....	<b>33</b>
<b>Latest Releases</b> .....	<b>40</b>
<b>Reference</b> .....	<b>41</b>
<b>Contributions</b> .....	<b>43</b>
<b>Looking Ahead</b> .....	<b>44</b>

# Editorial

**A** new year and the first issue of the Newsletter for 2007.

I'll start with a comment that while the ADRIFT forum seems to be a little more active now than it was towards the end of 2006, the ADRIFT game-writing machine appears to have slowed to a very noticeable halt. No games were released in December; usually you get a few putting in an appearance for the End of Year Comp, but this time, for the first year since the Comp began, it was just the older, previously released games that took part. This trend continued in January which saw just one new game (and that wasn't new as such because it was a remake). At the time of writing this, only one new ADRIFT game has been released in the two months since the last issue of the newsletter. Quite a worrying sign.

Perhaps there's no reason to worry. Christmas tends to be a time when people have other things to consider besides game-writing and there's generally a lull immediately following the IFComp, so maybe it's just 'one of those things' and everything will pick up again shortly.

Admittedly, there have been a number of problems with the main site which seems to have prevented people uploading new games or fixing older ones (though now, hopefully, this has all been sorted out). So are there a huge amount of new games out there about to be uploaded now the problems with the site are fixed? Or is it, simply, that people just either

haven't been writing games recently or they're saving them for the various competitions that will occur during 2007?

2007 should, fingers crossed (and I don't have any inside information about this one way or the other) bring about the next release of ADRIFT (version 5), which will hopefully put to rest most of the problems and overcome the limitations that people have reported with the current version. As with every new release of an IF system, there'll be a huge buzz of interest surrounding it. From dedicated ADRIFT fans to newbies who don't even know what ADRIFT stands for to the casual passerby who might just decide to give it a try "because it's there" - all of this will give a much-needed shot in the arm to the ADRIFT world.

Of course, we need to actually get hold of ADRIFT 5 first. And familiarise ourselves with it. And learn what has changed between version 4 and 5 and how best to take advantage of the things 5 offers that 4 didn't. No doubt making the switch won't be as simple or easy as we'd all like. If version 5 were dropped on us this very day, it would be months (at least) before anyone wrote a decent game with it. (Probably only a fraction of the time before a bad game was written however...) But assuming that ADRIFT 5 puts in an appearance sometimes during 2007 - a likely prospect from what I hear - this year could well be a very good one to be a drifter.

*David Whyld*

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

<http://www.shadowvault.net/newsletter/33.htm>

If you're just a casual passerby and don't have ADRIFT on your system, you can download it from:

<http://www.shadowvault.net/adrift.htm>

Just the Runner is required to 'play' the Newsletter; the Generator (and the full install) are only needed if you want to write a game as well.

# HOT Off The PRESS

*Being the latest goings on in the wide world of interactive fiction...*

---

## ADRIFT End of Year Competition

The results for the ADRIFT End of Year Competition were recently announced. They are as follows:

- 1) **Unauthorised Termination** by Richard Otter
- ) **The Warlord, The Princess & The Bulldog** by David Whyld
- 3) **The Potter & The Mould** by Robert Street
- 4) **The Reluctant Vampire** by David Whyld
- 5) **The Long Barrow** by C. Henshaw
- ) **3 Minutes To Live** by Ren

As seems to be evident more and more these days with ADRIFT competitions, participation on the voting side of things was notably lacking. Just five people voted. Considering all of the games had been previously released, and two were very short games indeed, it's disappointing that more people didn't find time to submit a vote.

But then with two games in the top four, you can probably gather I'm understandably chuffed with the results. Well done to everyone who took part.

## IF Art Show 2007

One of the smaller competitions in the IF calendar, the IF Art Show 2007, has recently been announced on RAIF. Unlike most of the IF competitions, the emphasis behind the Art Show tend to be on things such as show, category and honourable mention as opposed to puzzles and intricate storylines. The purpose of the competition, as detailed on its webpage, is:

To explore the I in IF, the Interactivity of Interactive-Fiction (without the obscuring framework of too much structure). To run one's hands over an "IF sculpture". TO EXPERIENCE INTERACTIVITY AS A MEDIUM. This explorative venture is intended to be two-way: for you to explore the various interactive techniques you can use to involve players, and for players to interactively explore your piece in turn.

The Art Show caters exclusively to short game, with a requirement that the games must be finishable in 45 minutes (less than half of the recommended playing time for IFComp entry games) and with an indication that the shorter the game, the better.

So if you fancy writing a game more as an art piece than a standard text adventure, the Art Show might be just the thing for you.

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

## NaAdWriMo

We here at the ADRIFT community are never too proud to see a neat idea someone else has had (see next article) and think "hmmm... we could do something like that". So we did. Or, rather, I did.

January 2007 is NaADWriMo (National ADRIFT Writing Month) - an entire month in which to write a game. Someone on the RAIF community proposed the idea initially and went into great detail about the rules and regulations of it. Writing a game in a month is a daunting prospect for the rest of the IF community as they have all that nasty coding stuff to deal with, but as we drifters just need to make a few clicks with the mouse, tick some boxes and type some text, a month is generally more than long enough to write a fair-sized ADRIFT game.

To write a *good* fair-sized ADRIFT game...? Well, we'll have to see. The results will be announced in the next issue of the newsletter.

If you're reading about NaADWriMo for the first time here, you're probably out of time as the comp deadline is 4<sup>th</sup> February 2007 (to account for the fact that the sluggish comp organiser didn't get it started on time but three whole days later...). Yes, it's a comp. With

prizes. So if you fancied entering and didn't know about it till now, bad luck. You'll have to wait till next time. Unless, of course, you fancy bashing out a full size game in just a few days...?

You can find all the relevant details you need here on the ADRIFT forum:

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5892>

And for NaIFWriMo...

## NaIFWriMo

NaNoWriMo (National Novel Writing Month) is a popular idea that has been running for several years now. That idea? Write a 50,000 word novel in a month. At 1,667 words per day (it is run in the month of November with 30 days), that's quite something. Recently the idea was proposed to hold a similar thing for IF game writing called, not very surprisingly, NaIFWriMo (National Interactive Fiction Writing Month to give it its full title).

[http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse\\_thread/thread/f9f4f1d4e23eb81c/289948016f393d57#289948016f393d57](http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_thread/thread/f9f4f1d4e23eb81c/289948016f393d57#289948016f393d57)

## Quest 4

Quest - the only IF creation tool other than ADRIFT to feature a GUI (graphical user interface) - has just hit version 4. While boasting a slicker interface and supposedly less prone to crashes and bugs than previous versions, it still lacks a number of features found as standard in many other systems - UNDO being the main omission - which will make it unlikely to gather many converts from the rest of the IF world. My original test game also failed to compile due to my not selecting a start room and the pop-up window giving me the wrong information about where I could select this. It's early days yet, though, so hopefully an upgrade will fix this issues.

This time around there is a free version (restricted to 6 rooms and 30 objects) while the full version will set you back a cool \$39.95.

<http://www.axeuk.com/quest/download.htm>

## Westfield Chandler Publishing

The topic of commercial IF seems to be one of those subjects that never goes out of fashion. No sooner has the last debate ended than a new one begins. So it's perhaps unsurprising that there was recently a discussion on RAIF about it. Westfield Chandler Publishing is the name of the company David Cornelson is putting together to market commercial IF games. The bad news from an ADRIFT point of view is that the games will be written strictly with Inform 6 or 7 to give them a uniform look and feel, so if you like the idea and fancied submitting your ADRIFT masterpiece to it... bad luck. Another negative aspect is that the games will be played in a custom interpreter which will not allow the player to specify their own font sizes and styles. An idea unlikely to prove popular among the IF community; although as the target audience isn't going to be the IF community but instead the more casual IF player, or even the people who might be interested in IF if they even knew what it was, this might not be an issue.

However, if one person can succeed at something like this, others can follow. The possibility of a commercial ADRIFT game would move a step closer to reality if a commercial Inform 6/7 game were to be a success. After all, you don't need to be a programmer to write a game with ADRIFT and the target audience for Westfield Chandler Publishing aren't programmers.

[http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse\\_thread/thread/4ec9faacf803366e/#](http://groups.google.com/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_thread/thread/4ec9faacf803366e/#)

# ADRIFT Forum

## Digest 5

By Stefan Donati (Shuarian)

### Programming Help

*General babbling about aliases and synonyms.*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5915>

This rather important topic deals with the use of aliases for custom tasks, and the way Adrift handles these tasks.

*Using "it" in a command*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5868>

Deals with the way Adrift handles 'it' in commands. To paraphrase Ren, 'it' appears to be unbreakable, but at least it's not unhackable, as can be demonstrated by using a combination of tasks and the ALR.

*Bug with %variable1% must equal %variable2%*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5871>

When comparing different variables, Adrift appears to handle them oddly, i.e. assigning a fix value to a variable where it shouldn't.

*Events before room description*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=4;t=5847>

Shows how by using the ALR, one can display events before a player enters a room.

## Game Design, Writing Techniques

### *The Walking Dead*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5917>

How should authors handle unwinnable situations when writing games? Are they a design flaw which should be avoided? Should players be noticed when they are in an unwinnable state?

### *Genre question*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5908>

Can a game always be categorised into genres, or would it be possible to write a story or a game which is completely genre-less?

### *Best / worst puzzles*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5848>

Mirrorman wants to know what kind of puzzles players enjoy, and what kind they loathe. When is a simple puzzle just a nuisance, and when is a smart puzzle too time consuming? Are there any do's and don't when creating new puzzles?

## Player Preferences

### *Inspired by the Bulldog*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5912>

David Whyld's game 'The Warlord, the Princess and the Bulldog' uses a rather unusual graphical presentation. One of the techniques used is the clearance of the screen for every new room. Is such a visually effect worth the loss of the ability to scroll back and read through older parts of the story, and is it visually more pleasing to play such a game?

### *Is lots of detail worth the effort?*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5883>

Do players actually explore the world around them, or are they more focused on the tasks at hand? Do they notice all the small details an author has put into his games, or is this too much effort for nothing?

### *Game Expectations*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5838>

Cannibal asks what expectations players have, and if it's actually manageable to write a game which satisfies all of them.

## Miscellaneous

### *Feedback here vs feedback there*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5919>

This still ongoing thread discusses why the Adrift forum seems less active when compared to the AIF forum, for example. Why isn't there more discussion happening on the Adrift forums, and what could be done to improve that situation?

*Commercial games and EBay*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5869>

While the golden era of commercial IF games is over, David Whyld puts forth the pragmatic idea of selling games directly, for example through eBay.

*Newcomers: Have Your Say!*

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/iB/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST;f=1;t=5829>

It seems only a few newcomers manage to write a decent first game. Most write games which have a lot of room for improvement. Unfortunately, it often happens that amidst all the feedback newcomers get for their first game, many prefer to leave it at. Only few try to improve and do it better the next time. Should games by newcomers be reviewed and judged differently, or is this just a question of showing the right attitude?

# The Big ADRIFT Survey

Curious what other people in the world of ADRIFT are thinking? Want to know what makes them tick? Then fill in the following survey and have your say. One word answers are fine, whole page answers are also fine. Put in as much detail as you like or simply answer YES or NO to the questions. Even if you don't use ADRIFT, feel free to take part. The more, the merrier.

*(Due to the obvious hassles of filling in either a survey in a PDF document or a .taf file, you'll find a nice little text-only version of the survey at [www.shadowvault.net/survey.txt](http://www.shadowvault.net/survey.txt) which can be filled in and e-mailed to [dwhyld@gmail.com](mailto:dwhyld@gmail.com))*

The results (anonymous, of course) of the survey will be announced in the next issue (due date 31<sup>st</sup> March) so you have plenty of time to get your answers in. A big thank you to everyone who takes part.

---

1) **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.**

2) **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.**

3) **Do you think commercial IF will ever work?**

- 4) Do you think a commercial ADRIFT game will ever be sold?
- 5) 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.
- 6) Do you consider yourself to be a writer, a player or a bit of both?
- 7) How many ADRIFT games do you think you'll write during 2007?
  - a) None.
  - b) One.
  - c) Two.
  - d) Three.
  - e) Four or more.
- 8) Do you intend to enter any of the big IF competitions in 2007?
- 9) When playing ADRIFT games, do you use the standard Runner, SCARE or Gargoyle?
- 10) Which feature do you think ADRIFT lacks most of all?
- 11) Do you like the default look of the ADRIFT Runner (green text on a black background) or wish it was something else?
- 12) Do you think a game should have hints or are you happy without them?
- 13) Recommend an IF game you've played lately.
- 14) 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.
  
- 15) On average, how many hours a week do you spend writing games?
  
- 16) On average, how many hours a week do you spend playing games?
  
- 17) Is it worth password-protecting your games or are you happy for anybody to open them up and see how they're put together?
  
- 18) Is ADRIFT the only system you use for writing IF games?
  
- 19) Have you ever played retro IF games or do you stick firmly with the modern ones?
  
- 20) What's your favourite genre?
  
- 21) 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.

# In The Hot seat

*Interview with Sprite*

*A light-hearted chat with none other than Sprite (formerly Cookie), about her current games, her threats of further games in the near future and who (heh heh) certain forum members have at one time or another assumed was either my daughter or my wife... ☺  
[David Whyld]*

**Q**

Tell us about yourself - who is Sprite, formerly Cookie, and what prompted the change of name?

**A**

Actually I registered as Sprite first. My account stopped working, and I had no way to alert anyone to the problem without registering a new name.

My real name is Anna Fruen. I'm 19, I live on the Isle of Wight (England), and at the

moment I'm doing a gap year working for a charity called Youth For Christ. I work with 10-18 year olds, doing bible studies, worship events, all kindsa stuff, and I love it! But that's why I'm not on the forum much any more, I'm working sooo hard... \*snigger\*

I am also David Whyld's honorary daughter. Hi daddy.

**Q**

Despite rumours of new games over the years, you've only released one full size game to date, the strangely-titled "Crazy Old Bag Lady". From where did the inspiration for this game come? (Not real life experiences, I hope :))

**A**

What a good question! Yes, a very good question indeed. I applaud your questioning abilities. Um.

COBL is based on a number of characters, including my mother, but mainly she's just a stereotype. All the characters in the game are stereotypes. She's the homeless lady who carries all her possessions with her wherever she goes. The quest for the Golden Trolley was the logical conclusion of that, really...

I was trying a different way of writing IF; mapping it out first, putting characters and objects into the rooms that I'd drawn up already. For some reason it worked for me, and COBL is the result.

**Q**

Were you pleased with the feedback you got for COBL?

**A**

Not at first! The second people started pointing out the hideous bugs, I ran away from the forum. It must have been about a month before I was emotionally distanced enough to return. After I got over the initial shame, I was very pleased, because people liked the writing and hated the programming, and at heart I'm a writer. Besides, a generally rather critical reviewer (who shall remain nameless, significant glances) wrote that the idea was good, that it was fun, and stuff like that. Overall I'm proud of the writing, and I've grown rather fond of the old dear.

**Q**

Has the feedback, whether positive or negative, made you hesitant about releasing another game? Or do real life issues hold you back? Or problems with ADRIFT itself?

**A**

The only problems are time and commitment. The feedback encouraged me to write more games, but to BETA-TEST THEM THOROUGHLY FIRST. Ahem. I wouldn't say I'm hesitant about releasing more, although I hope to raise the standard of my games, and I have had some ideas... there are games lying around half-finished on my computer, so even with my time limitations you may be seeing more!

**Q**

I know away from the ADRIFT scene, you have some kind of religious background. Have you ever considered writing a Biblical game or introducing some sort of religious message into one of your current projects? Is "The Life Of Jesus" one of your works in progress?

**A**

Heehee the Life of Jesus... I never really thought about it! No, I don't think so. Those on the forums who are Christians (and there are quite a few, the legends) don't need it, and in all probability, those who aren't don't want it. Besides, historical events tend to make quite linear games in my experience.

However... I have snuck little religious Easter eggs into my games! They're from my mind, so of course they're coming from that perspective and you can find evidence of that in the games. Game. Just the one. In COBL, it's one of the responses to sitting on the bench in the first location.

**Q**

Speaking of current projects, what are you working on? What games, if any, do you expect to see light of day in 2007?

**A** I think Wolf will probably be released. I've mentioned it before, it's a horror in theory - I wanted to make sure comedy wasn't all I could do! It's pretty much finished as it is but it's a little thin. People had suggested adding more to it, so of course it's shelved for a rainy day.

FPI - Fairies and Pixies International - may come along a little later, I would love for you all to see that. I've worked so hard on it, it would be a shame to let it fester in some forgotten folder forever. Fuh. It's... fantasy, but of course with a twist. Nobody ever writes fantasy without a twist any more; in fact that would *be* the twist.

Er, yes, FPI. Lots of work on the detail side of things. I just need to work out the plot. Yes, yes, I know you're not supposed to do it that way, but I think I know what's going to happen. It'll just need a little time to work out.

**Q** And any plans to work out the issues with "COBL" and release a final version?

**A** Aheheheh. Yes. I've been doing that on and off, each time swearing to the Drifters that I'll re-release it, but each time I don't quite make it. Um, I'll give it a go, seeing as it's been well over a year now. \*hangs head in shame\*

**Q** What would your dream game be like, assuming you had limitless time and willpower?

**A** Ooooh! And programming abilities, of course; that's never been my strong point! Oh my gosh, a Discworld one. A game based in Ankh-Morpork. Rather than using one of Terry Pratchett's excellent plots, I think I'd make it a fanfic game. They're not done too often. But the sheer amount of detail in the Discworld means that it'd be a pretty big project...

**Q**

What made you choose ADRIFT as your IF system? Have you tried any of the others and found them not to your liking?

**A**

I chose Adrift because I stumbled across it first. Which is really lucky, because I would never have been able to do a thing with a programmer-biased system! I downloaded I7 when everyone was going on about it, started looking through the manual and got no further... being a storywriter means that Adrift is absolutely the best way to go.

**Q**

You entered the last ADRIFT mini-comp (and beat my game incidentally, but we won't go into that...); any plans to enter any non-ADRIFT comps like the IFComp or the Spring Thing? Perhaps anonymously?

**A**

Did I? Ooh, how exciting, what did I enter? \*frantically tries to remember\* Boiled Eggs! Of course! Well, I think I would have liked to enter one of the bigger competitions. I have very little pride, so it's worth having a go on the off chance that it does well. The only reason I've entered Adrift-only comps so far is that I used to live on the forum, as you're only too aware! It's not a loyalty thing, just a laziness thing. And a not-having-a-game-to-enter thing, that too.

Anonymously? Why anonymously? Are you suggested that there is some sort of stigma against the Sprite alias? No, I don't think I'd do that, most people haven't heard of me. When they actively dislike me, I may enter under another name. Maybe Cliff Richard. Then they wouldn't play my records, but they might like my games. Who knows.

**Q**

Tell us about the collaboration idea you proposed on the ADRIFT forum a while back (currently on hold until ADRIFT 5 is released). Do you think it will have more chance of success than the other collaborative efforts that have been attempted over the years?

**A** Of course! Because this time it's *my* idea! No, the real reason I thought this idea stands a chance of working is that everyone gets to do what they do best. Whatever genre, length, style and format people want to do, they can do, and all the games will be tied together into the Library. I think where other collaborations have fallen down is in attempting to make all the writers conform to one storyline, one style; and also in passing the game backwards and forwards between writers. It's bound to stop at one of them.

The advantages of the Library system is that one person would act as the hub, and all the other games can be sent to this one person. That way if one person fails to get their game in, that's their loss, and their book won't make it into the library.

Of course, the system does depend on having a reliable person as the hub, to import all the mini-games as modules and to write and programme the library. It can't have escaped your notice that I am not this person! Any volunteers, feel free to email / PM me.

**Q** Have you considered any other collaboration ideas?

**A** Well, COBL was originally going to be me and Woodfish, but I was having so much fun and he wasn't replying to any of my emails, so it all just sort of got finished without him... sorry Woodfish honey! That's one of the reasons I decided collab's have to be done differently, and there's been so much trouble with them in the past that I didn't really try again until the Library idea.

**Q** Recommend an IF game you've played lately. What was there about it that you liked?

**A** I replay old favourites, and one I'm always going to recommend is Narcolepsy, by Adam Cadre. The first time I played this, I found the storyline engaging and fun; the writing style is friendly and sarcastic; and the dream sequences are totally ridiculous and surreal. I love that. The whole game is quite bizarre, and even after you've played every storyline there is (I think I've found 3 or 4 so far, and every one gives more of an idea

what's going on), it still doesn't entirely make sense.

I seriously think everyone should try it, just because it's something different from all the fantasy / zombie / comedy stuff we're used to.

**Q**

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

**A**

I wish you'd asked me to come back ;/ How upsetting, I guess you people just don't miss me. Well, when I decide you love me enough, I'll be back! I hope everyone's doing well on the ol' forum... has the smacking thread reopened? Is Adrift v5 out yet? Is T.Mul behaving himself, or even present? How are you even surviving with regular doses of controversial-Polly goodness?!

Love to you all. X x

---

**AUTHOR PROFILE: Sprite**

16 07 05    1)    **Crazy Old Bag Lady**  
12 08 06    2)    **Boiled Eggs**

# Hook, Line & Sinker

## Part 3: The Sinker

by C. Henshaw

### **Background**

In the third and final instalment of this little series on writing games, I am going to focus on the game conclusion. I've already covered my thoughts and opinions on breaking the ground with the introduction and first room (the Hook), and keeping up momentum, interest and continuity through the middle (the Line). I don't know if my musings are of any use - some of it may seem obvious - but sometimes it's a good idea to think things through logically.

So - the beginning of the game should not only introduce the story, plot, setting, mood, etc. but hook the player into the game. It should set them off in the right frame of mind to tackle the interactive middle of the game. The middle part is in many ways the most difficult, not only to plan and write, but to retain the interest of the player. So I suggested breaking the plot(s) down into manageable chunks (acts and scenes, for example) where you can focus your creative energies without getting bored or confused about the possible pathways.

Although I have written the series in chronological (so to speak) sequence, the game does not have to necessarily be written that way. You could easily leave the opening scenes to last, or completely rewrite them once you have finished the rest of the game. However, it may be difficult to write the conclusions (other than rough idea sketches) before the body of the game, as the conclusions *should* flow naturally from the main narration, and *will* require the implementation of previously encountered actions, objects and/or characters. In my opinion, conclusions do not stand on their own, the way an introduction can - they are the result of decisions made earlier in the game.

### **The problem**

Of course, in IF there may be a number of conclusions to a single story. This is both an asset and a potential problem area. Anyone who has played a few games will undoubtedly have come across a wide range of endings, often within the same game, some of which work well, and some of which are an unexpected and unpleasant surprise.

Sudden death endings are the biggest problem in IF, mainly due to the annoyance of having to go back to the beginning of the game, or restore a saved game. *But this is what*

*makes a game a game* I hear you saying, *You either win, or lose*. Well, not necessarily. Endings may be a win, a lose (like, death), or just an ending as in a novel. A finality to a storyline. The good thing about writing IF is that you as the writer are in control of how the endings come about, and to what extent they annoy the player. Remember - first impressions are important, but final impressions can have a more lasting effect.

### Losing

'Bad' endings can be seen as losing the game. Except of course, you always have the chance to go back and play it again, so you never *really* lose a computer game unless you quit. Quitting is the one thing you do *not* want your player to do, at least not until they have 'won', perhaps more than once. Still, many times I have 'lost' a game, and then couldn't be bothered to go back and try again because I just wasn't interested enough. This isn't necessarily to do with the quality of the bad ending, but there are ways you can help the player out, and keep them going back for more.

ADRIFT, as you all know, has a built-in ending system where you end the game and a list of scores pops up, effectively ending play until you restart or restore. This is a pain, it makes for a real break in concentration, and, I have to wonder, does *anybody* actually record their scores on these things? Not using this method can go a long way toward encouraging the player to try again. They can undo to a stage where progress is possible, or immediately restore a saved game, without any real interruption to the game play. This is easily achievable by creating an empty room, moving the player there and displaying your ending text along with a series of commands.

That is about it for implementation, but there are lots of ways you can write a good 'bad' ending. First of all, the more you have, the more annoying they become. Less is certainly more, and the more effort you put into writing them, the less the player is likely to dread them.

Endings are a conclusion. In essay writing, the standard advice is to write a conclusion that is 10% of the total word count of the essay. So, for an IF game, it should probably be a couple paragraphs long, at least. Okay, so there may be lots of endings, but each one should be considered as important as any other, as most or all of them will be encountered by the player and suffered through.

*>jump*

*You jump off the cliff and die.*

*Sigh*. Very funny, ha ha. If this was a true ending, it would be highly annoying, if it wasn't then it has no purpose, right? The purpose of the ending is to bring things to a conclusion. A creative conclusion, of course, but it should be considered a real part of the game play, not an add-on to make things harder. Losing endings can be very effective in directing the player toward the 'real' conclusion, but only if they are written carefully and with consideration for the storyline and the patience of the player.

There are so many different ways to create and write endings, I can't even begin to start describing them all, much less critiquing them. But bearing in mind that bad endings are important, can help or hinder continued play (they may be so good, you actually look forward to them whilst playing), and should ease the player back into continuing on with

the game, can prevent them from becoming boring, annoying, too abundant or banal.

### Winning

Under the heading of 'winning' I am going to group both real endings - final conclusions to a story that might be considered the main endings - and any subsidiary endings that aren't exactly 'bad', but interrupt the game play. Again, less is more. There's no point in having lots and lots of endings at various stages of the game, in my opinion - it just detracts from the flow of the story. That isn't to say you can't have several plot strands, each with its own ending. I don't mean to say that all subsidiary endings are bad, just usually not necessary.

>talk to barmaid

**You ask the barmaid if she has a boyfriend. She says 'no'. You ask her out, two years later you are married: the end.**

Not a losing ending, but an ending nonetheless. In a slapstick comedy, where this kind of thing (well-written and actually funny) is the point, such an ending might work. In all other cases: no.

Work on your endings. Don't stick them on because you have to, or as an afterthought. As you write through your plot(s), think about their eventual conclusion(s). If it doesn't come naturally, then you haven't thought out your plot or characters very well. What seems natural and fits into the story? What fits with the mood and setting of the game?

I made a mistake in my very first game, *The House Husband*, where I wanted the endings to demonstrate the horror of the story - but I didn't prepare the ground well because the story itself didn't indicate that there were any horror elements to expect. So I used the endings to bring that element in, but they were just tacked on with little reference to the actual story of the body of the game, and didn't do it any favours.

'Real' endings should tie all the strands of a plot together. Some may introduce a twist, some may reveal a secret, but in essence it's the final denouement to the various actions your player has sweated and GTVed through. Make it worth it. Plan the conclusion carefully, and you may get another run-through from your player - are there other possible endings you could hint at? Are you thinking of writing a sequel and want to leave it a bit open ended, or indicate that there is more to come? No matter what, the ending should leave the player satisfied that the effort was worth it.

At the same time, you don't want to force the player to wade through pages and pages of text - like I said earlier, 10% of the total word count is about right. If you have written two or three thousand words, your ending probably shouldn't be less than two or three hundred words, and not too much more.

### Conclusion

To conclude my little series (and no I didn't count the words in case you were wondering!), I would like to say that creativity doesn't come from a vacuum, and writing games is never easy. If it was, there wouldn't be much point in doing it. For me, the thinking and planning is the best part of writing a game - that is where my creativity can really come into effect because I'm excited by the possibilities of my ideas, not simply putting down words or scenarios at random. An exciting idea is a starting point, but you have to build on it. I hope

that my advice is useful, and if it seems too restrictive, my argument would be that if you think hard enough about writing games, you will probably come up with your own restricted set of guidelines - I would definitely encourage it!

# *My Very First* *ADRIFT Game*

**by James Webb {revgiblet}**

I have a terrible habit. I don't tend to stick at hobbies. Sure, some of them will stay with me to the day that I die, such as my abiding love for video games, but there are just as many that have amused me for a few weeks and then been consigned to the attic (or more recently, eBay - friend of the easily distracted).

Knowing this about me may help to explain why my inaugural ADRIFT offering was about 5 years from conception to birth. ADRIFT was one of my 'other' hobbies. I was going through one of my creative spells, looking for a way of making the stories in my head come to life (without requiring too much effort), and stumbled across some IF tools whilst looking for game creation utilities. I picked ADRIFT, almost at random, because it seemed best to fit my need for easy answers and began fiddling. I sketched out some rough ideas. Something in a haunted house, I thought, because that kind of thing *never* gets old. Scary ghost children made the list - probably due to the fact that, even now, I can't watch *The Shining* all the way through. A lake at the back of the house that may, or may not, contain some hidden mystery. The player running his car off the road at the beginning of the game and being forced to seek shelter in the aforementioned house. Things began to take shape (though I still wasn't clear what the player was doing in the house, let alone how he could win the game) and I began typing.

I had got as far as getting the player lost in the woods when my initial zeal began to wane. It wasn't long before my game, with the working title of *The House* (I know, I know), was gathering dust on my hard drive, as was ADRIFT. And that was that.

Five years passed. In that time I had only returned to ADRIFT once, to start another game which never got further than the block of flats where the player started his quest. Despite this, ADRIFT was always one of the utilities that I downloaded and installed on any new PC, almost as though I recognised some inherent brilliance in it that I would one day return to and unpack further. That time came in August 2006 when, during one of my creative periods, I sat down and opened ADRIFT again. Convinced that there was nothing wrong with a five year old story, I began to recreate the opening steps of the original game. The player swerving to avoid a child in the road and then being trapped by the seatbelt. Reaching the end of the road and seeing the house on the other side of a large lake. Following footprints into the forest where you get lost. Coming across the mound of earth which was supposed to make the player think that someone had been buried there. These features were all refugees from five years previous, but anything after that was new ground

- and I still wasn't sure what the player was supposed to do.

It was at about this point, when the player was finally about to enter the house, that the ending of the game unravelled before me. It became very clear to me why the player was involved in the situation that he was in and what the conclusion would be. The idea of multiple endings and freeform scenarios was not something that ever crossed my mind during the creation. I was still locked into an 'old-school' thought of Interactive Fiction that drove the player along one path to an inevitable conclusion, and to break away from this path was to lose the game. I had an ending that I was pleased with and hoped that the player would find satisfying, so began to create the mechanics of the house itself. Everything that existed had one of two *raison d'être*s - either to unsettle the player and contribute to the atmosphere, or to expand the plot and drive the player forward to the next puzzle.

Progress was fairly swift - mostly due to my naivety which resulted in me creating a fairly shallow IF experience - but I was pleased with the way that things were coming together. I had been forced to register ADRIFT to get the most from the package and ensure that my adventure lasted for more than three minutes, so I thought I would get my money's worth and join the ADRIFT forum as well. This was something of a turning point in the creation of (as it was now named) *The Sisters*.

My previous forum experiences have been something of a mixed bag. On some occasions I have joined a forum, found a thread that was interesting and lively and made a contribution only for it to be ignored. It was like being invited to the world's largest party and finding that no-one wanted to talk to you. The ADRIFT forum wasn't like that at all. People were friendly and helpful. Some of the members even seemed a little *too* excited by my arrival - still that was better than the alternative. I truly appreciate the warm welcome and help given by the forum members, who are due some credit or blame for *The Sisters*.

Whilst on the forum I was reminded of the annual IF Comp. I had seen and even played past entrants - but had never thought of entering myself. I was curious as to what the wider IF community would think of my first creation and really liked the idea of being part of a recognised competition. There was even, I reasoned, an outside chance that my game might actually get uploaded to *The Home of the Underdogs* site, where I had seen and downloaded previous entrants. I registered my game and decided it would be a good idea to have the game play tested first. This is where the forum members came to my rescue.

Several forum members stepped up to the task of, once again, responding to a "Please test my first game" post from a newbie and gave some very helpful feedback. The clearest voice was "Get rid of the maze". In the original version of *The Sisters* the player had to negotiate a maze when lost in the forest at the start of the game. The feedback suggested that although a five-old-plot might be OK, twenty-year-old play mechanics were not. I toyed with the idea of making the maze smaller and easier to navigate but eventually decided that the play testers were probably right and ditched it. It turned out that they were right.

Other helpful feedback was given (some of which I even listened to) and *The Sisters* was uploaded to the IF Comp site. I was pleased with the game and hoped that other players would enjoy it. The waiting began.

The only other entry I had played was rotter's *Unauthorised Termination*, which I helped to play test. It was this game that made me realise quite how old-fashioned *The Sisters* was. *UT* made me wonder if I had actually set myself up for a fall, entering a game without first playing more recent games and getting a feel for what the 'current trends' were. I was still pleased with *The Sisters*, particularly the way that the plot unfolds, but began to realise that there was still so much more for me to learn and do with ADRIFT. I thought that I was doing something new, but in reality I had created a dinosaur.

To be totally honest, the result did surprise me. When I scrolled down the list and saw that I had finished in twelfth place I felt quite satisfied with the result. When I scrolled down the complete list and actually realised how many entries there had been my satisfaction turned to incredulity. I consider it to be an excellent result for what was, on reflection, a fairly average, unoriginal and bog-standard IF game. Most of the reviews I received graded the game somewhere around the 'Average' mark, but a few people enjoyed the story and graded me a little higher. It was these kindred spirits who helped me (over)achieve such a good result with my first game. I was also interested in some of the comments, where people had read things into the game that I had never intended. This is, I think, one of the joys of IF - it allows your imagination to wander and fill in gaps the author didn't intend to leave.

Following the IF Comp I fixed a couple of further bugs (including major one that allowed the player to skip the final few puzzles and proceed to the ending way too early) and uploaded it to the ADRIFT site. Following this I have had some further feedback which I have taken on board.

I have started two new games, both of which have been heavily influenced by my experience of creating *The Sisters*. I intend them to be very different experiences to both *The Sisters* and to each other, and hopefully they will do more justice to the power and flexibility of ADRIFT as a design tool.

Perhaps one of the greatest effects of my experiences creating my first game is that it has ensured that ADRIFT will not be just one of my 'other' hobbies. Had there not been the support from the ADRIFT community, had there not been the IF Comp to drive me to finish *The Sisters*, had my game sank without a trace, had any of these things happened then it wouldn't have been likely that I would have considered writing a second or a third game. So thank you for the welcome and thank you for the encouragement. Now, if you'll excuse me - I've got a game or two to write...

# Making ADRIFT Look Good

by David Whyld

Okay, coming clean time. I've been using ADRIFT for, oh, just over five years now. It's a great tool for writing text adventures with and, with me being a certified non-programmer (even got the certificate to prove it), the *only* tool unless I fancy learning a programming language. And I don't. I'm too lazy and set in my ways. Even the 'natural' language of Inform 7 gives me migraines. So it's ADRIFT for me all the way. I like ADRIFT and like what it can do and like, for the most part anyway, most of the games I've written with it.

But the default ADRIFT interface doesn't look good. No sirree it doesn't.

For a start, we have the default green font colouring. Green? Yes, green. I'm sure it's green for a reason but however much I try to think what that reason might be, I just can't. Sorry, but green text on a black background doesn't look good unless you're terminally colour blind.

It's an easy thing to change, of course. A couple of mouse clicks here and there and - hey presto! - you've got a nice white font on a black background. Better. Or, if you prefer, black text on a white background. Or white on a blue background. Whatever. In short: it's easy to change.

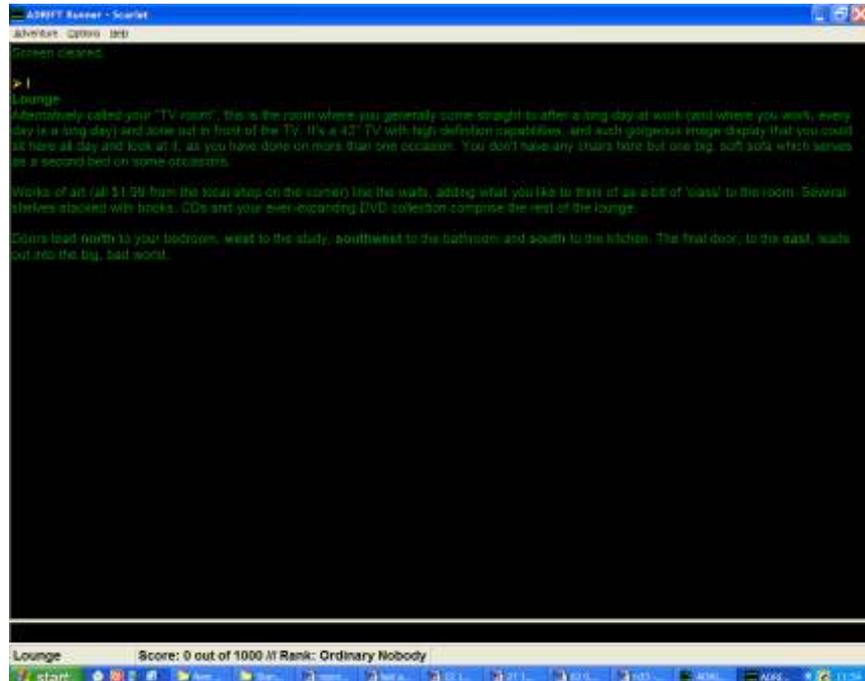
But.

But it's a fair bet that a good few people have seen the default ADRIFT look - green text on a black background - and grimaced. And gone somewhere else. And probably never looked back.

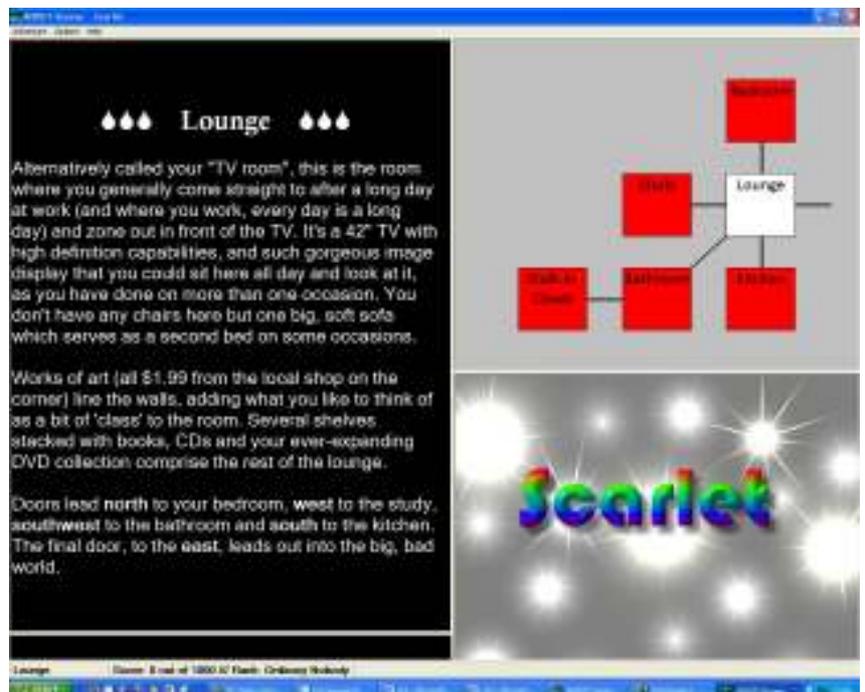
Unfortunately, as an ADRIFT writer you have very limited input in what colour the text on screen can be. Short of introducing a font colour into every room, object, task, etc, in the game, you're pretty much stuck. Even if you were willing to do that, you're still faced with the problem of what font colour to use. If you choose white font and the player has decided to change the background colour to white, then you've got white on white. Doesn't make for easy reading. If you choose black and they've got the background set to black... you see the problem? A more programming-conscious fellow than me could probably come up with

a way to check what the background colour is and then change the font colour so it doesn't clash, but incorporating that kind of thing into every task in a game would be a nightmare undertaking. Hardly practical.

So if you're wanting to make ADRIFT look good, you need to work on not the font colours, but the fonts themselves. Because if you try, ADRIFT *can* look good.



You can go from this



to this

without a huge amount of effort.

Both screenshots are from the same game. The 'before' shot is the ADRIFT default - notice the nasty green colour, the tiny font (some people seem to prefer a font that they have to read with their nose pressed up against the screen), the general blandness of the display. The 'after' shot is with a little experimentation with the fonts - for a start, the text is white which is a definite bonus; it's also easier to read; then you've got the map of the game displayed at the top right (not really necessary as this section of the game is small (just 6 locations) but doesn't it make telling where you are so much easier?); the game's name displayed just below.

Which looks better?

(Of course, the 'after' screenshot isn't perfect. The room description takes up almost the entire available display which is hardly ideal but the font size can certainly be shrunk a point or two to allow more room. Also, the map and graphic on the right hand side can be moved over to allow the room description more space.)

The fancy effects for the room title are achieved with a few lines of the ALR (ADRIFT Language Resource, something anyone who writes games with ADRIFT ought to familiarise themselves with as soon as possible). In the Generator, the short room description with read:

[d1]Lounge[d2]

And in the ALR:

```
[d1][br][br][br][center][B][font face="Wingdings"][font size=+10]SSS[font face="Microsoft
Sans Serif"]
[d2][font face="Wingdings"] SSS[/font]/[center]/[B][font face="Microsoft Sans Serif"][/font
size=-10]
```

Looks complicated? It isn't. Even a non-programmer like myself can get his head around it. Basically, whatever is on the left hand side of the | symbol is replaced with whatever is on the right hand side. So every time you type [d1] in the Generator, ADRIFT actually reads it as [br][br][br][center][B][font face="Wingdings"][font size=+10] SSS[font face="Microsoft Sans Serif"].

All of this will put the room title into a larger font size than the rest of the text (thus allowing it to stand out prominently) and putting the 'teardrops' before and after it. The 'teardrops' are actually just a capital S in the Wingdings font. ADRIFT's handling of graphics is basic at best, but it can display all manner of fancy font styles with ease.

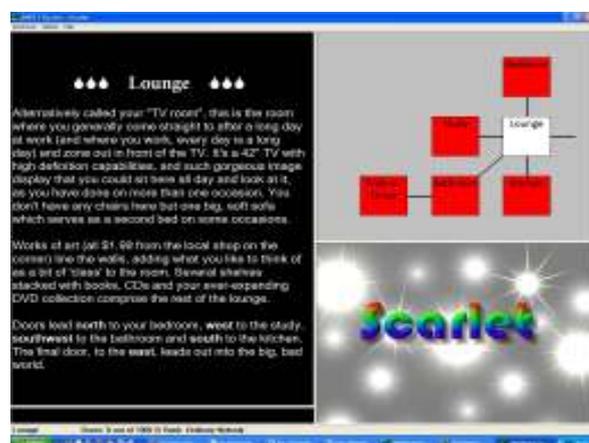
The automap (used to display the locations the player has visited) is a built in feature of ADRIFT. Disabled by default, it can be turned on via the Options menu in the Runner and selecting Display Options. The default colours are different to those in the image above, but with a little experimenting can be changed to whatever you like.

The graphic is one I whipped up with a basic image editing package. Nothing fancy but

something nice to look at. It's incorporated into the room description. By default, ADRIFT will display this in a separate window (don't ask me why) which kind of ruins the effect you're going for, but the option is again there to incorporate it directly into the Runner. As different locations can feature different graphics, you could put whatever you wanted there. Or even change it via a task if you liked.

Which of these you prefer depends largely on whether you like the minimal look of Gargoyle - not to mention the sub-pixel rendering effect which, like Window XP's cleartype, makes everything a lot easier on the eyes - or the flashier look of ADRIFT when you've enabled all the fancy options. The flashier look won't be to everyone's tastes but it's worth noting that when you want it to look good, ADRIFT *can*.

So let's finish the article with a couple of screenshots, firstly from Gargoyle and then from ADRIFT:



I'll leave it up to you, the reader, to decide which you prefer.

# Critics' Corner

< - - - - >

Game: **The Last Resort**  
Author: **Jim Aikin**  
Released: **2<sup>nd</sup> December 2006**  
Platform: **Inform 6**  
Download: **[http://www.musicwords.net/if/if\\_resort.htm](http://www.musicwords.net/if/if_resort.htm)**  
Review by: **David Whyld**

*(Note: this review is based on the first version of **The Last Resort**. Two (I believe) subsequent versions have since been released so it's likely that some of the bugs referred to herein have now been fixed.)*

"The Last Resort" was one of several games recently announced on RGIF in the wake of the IFComp. It's a fairly sizeable game, too, not in terms of locations (although there are quite a few of these) but in the amount of things to do and see. Add on the amount of times I restarted the game after realising I'd missed vital things and you have a good few hours of gameplay here.

The game begins with you - a teenage girl called Diane - being dragged to the town of Eternal Springs by your Aunt Caroline, a novelist, for reasons unknown. She's now locked herself in the bathroom and is refusing to come out, leaving you alone in the cabin and wondering what to do next. Needless to say, this being a text adventure, what you do next is head out of the cabin and explore.

It soon becomes apparent that there are sinister goings on afoot. Your aunt hasn't bought you here for a simple holiday but for something rather more lethal. If you don't get away, and quickly, you might well find you won't be leaving at all.

### Bugs/errors/problems

The only real bugs I discovered with the game seemed to be, ironically enough, right at the start which I would have expected to be the most thoroughly tested part of the game. One of the drawers in the first location contained Aunt Caroline's clothes yet every attempt to take them met with the game thinking I was referring to Aunt Caroline herself and told me that it only understood me as far as wanting to take Aunt Caroline. Elsewhere, I filled a bucket with water and tried to throw it over an awkward dog, but attempts to throw the bucket just dropped it on the ground. Why was I trying to throw it? Well... it seemed like a good idea at the time. In a puzzle which involved me getting past a troublesome canine, throwing a bucket of water over it seemed like a viable solution. Unfortunately not. I also found the bucket quite frustrating in that I couldn't fill it if there was something (like a pill) lying in the bottom. The game seemed to think the bucket couldn't be filled if there were items inside it, although as the items only take up a small fraction of the bucket's total mass I don't see what the problem would be. Oh, and the pill cannot be eaten because, according to the game, it's plainly inedible :)

Other than that, there was a slight wording problem with the mask in Tyrone's hut which, when I covered it with one item, I was informed was actually covered with some wax. (Apparently it's possible to cover the mask with wax, but this is something I only discovered after first covering it with another item and seeing wax mentioned in the mask's description.)

While not a bug as such, some of the default Inform responses to certain commands were a little unusual. Trying to take a drawer out the chest of drawers told me the drawer in question was too heavy which struck me as odd. Either the drawers here are unusually heavy or I'm playing someone who is remarkably weak, but who, at other times, can happily carry around a burlap sack full of items, a suitcase full of items and half a dozen other items in her arms. Not to mention being able to climb through a window while loaded with all this assembled baggage.

Gargoyle, in which I started playing the game, also ran into a problem with one of the suitcases in the closet, crashing on me with an error message when I tried to pick it up. A quick switch to the standard Glulx interpreter fixed this and the game ran smoothly afterwards.

### Annoyances

A further annoyance, though not a bug in the strict sense, is the game's use of an inventory carrying limit. Never a favourite of mine as it always strikes me as an attempt to introduce a realism aspect into a game but never quite manages to succeed. Here it's as flawed as ever. My character seems perfectly capable of carrying X amount of items (including a burlap sack (itself filled with a dozen items), a suitcase (which likewise can be filled with many items) and several other items [quite how she's capable of carrying so many items, unless she has more than the usual number of arms, is in itself baffling]), yet attempts to pick up anything else, even something remarkably small and light, is considered too much for her to handle. Surely small items could be secreted away in a pocket or just popped inside another item to allow me to carry them? There's the added problem that it's possible to carry items on top of other items (the shovel, in particular, can be used to carry items) at

the same time as carrying a dozen other items. Hardly does wonders for the realism factor.

Fortunately there's a burlap sack lying conveniently around in which items can be carried, thus removing the item restriction after a while. On the down side, the sack (and several other items) only show up after a certain point in the game so I spent a while backtracking and retracing my steps before finding them. A slight problem with the sack is that it's perfectly possible to fill the kettle with water, put it in the sack, carry it around like that for a while, and then retrieve it from the sack... all without any of the water spilling out! Damn clever kettle.

After all that, trying to impose something like an item carrying limit is just never going to work out very well.

At times the game is a pain for making you specify exactly what you need to do; even though it understands you perfectly, it will frequently make you jump through hoops just to achieve something relatively simple. There was a bucket I decided to stand on but the game wouldn't let me at first because it was the wrong way up, thus requiring me to turn the bucket over first. Why? It understood what I was trying to do, the item in question was there - was it really necessary to make me turn the bucket over before I could stand on it?

Items mentioned in room descriptions are covered pretty well as far as examining them is concerned, although quite a few slipped through the net, and several commands which I really thought would be covered - climbing the trees being one of them - didn't work. In fact, the game is often quite particular about what it will and won't accept. Sometimes, the DIG command suffices for digging, whereas at other times you need to specify where you want to dig. It's also possible to DIG in certain items (a suitcase and a figurine being two I tried), yet the response given is the same as if you had dug in the ground.

### **Inconvenient and odd restrictions**

A good deal of "The Last Resort" would be easier - probably \*too\* easy - if the player wasn't held back by any number of strange restrictions that seem to be in place not to make the game more realistic or to add depth but to force the player into playing the game the way the author intended. Aside from the previously mentioned item carrying restriction, there are a good number that prevent the player carrying out perfectly logical actions and the reasons given for preventing you doing this are weak to say the least.

There's a white dress in your and your aunt's cabin that you're prevented from taking out of the cabin because it might get muddy and your aunt will be cross. Strangely enough, even after you've discovered the truth of the situation and your aunt's involvement in it - namely, that she's planning to have you killed - the game still refuses to let you take the dress out of the cabin due to the possibility of it getting muddy and your aunt becoming cross over it. In light of what had happened, I would have thought you'd have other concerns than the possible muddying of a dress. I'd also question the common sense of anyone who hangs around like the player in this game does when she knows there are people planning to kill her. Wouldn't she have simply ran at the first opportunity and not looked back?

I was also surprised, and a little frustrated, by the squeamishness of the player who, despite witnessing a murder, seeing a ghost, being attacked by a magical floating dagger

and believing her own life is in danger, is too timid to pick up a dead animal or kill a spider. She's also stopped from taking action against one of the people planning to kill her because "he's a man of God". Violence against other obstacles is prevented as well, generally with a comment that there's probably a better way to do such and such without resorting to violence. I'm guessing the reason for this non-violence stance is to force the player to solve certain puzzles the way the author intended them to be solved, but it's kind of annoying when you're facing death if you don't take some kind of action and get told that you can't physically attack someone or break something open because the game would prefer you handled it another way. Elsewhere, the game won't let me search someone's cabin while he's present because it would not be polite... even though he's just confessed to being part of a conspiracy to murder me. Please, if you're going to stop the player taking action, at least come up with a better reason for it than this.

### Getting stuck

There are no hints available immediately, only via a password which can be obtained upon request from the author as an attempt to discourage people from seeking help the first time they get stuck. I can't say I'm altogether fond of such an idea; given the choice between e-mailing the author (who might not be at the same e-mail address whenever it is you get around to playing the game, which could well be years after it was first released) and posting a request for help on RGIF or hunting around the internet for a walkthrough, I suspect most people would do one of the latter two options first. Still, on the positive side of things it did make me try harder to solve some puzzles that I would otherwise have resorted to the hints to get past if they had been available at the time.

A good deal of the puzzles seem to fall into the "solving them because they're there, not because it makes any sense to solve them" category. (If that \*is\* a category. If not, I've just made it up.) Take, for instance, the spider in the closet. Now in normal circumstances, if I found a spider in a closet I'd either a) kill it or b) ignore it. Here I need to deal with it for no other reason than it's in the game and dealing with it is crucial in order to make progress - dealing with the spider allows another puzzle elsewhere to be solved, this one in turn leading to the solving of another puzzle. The thing is that one of those puzzles - getting the stove to work - struck me as odd because in real life surely there'd be other means to heat things in the cabins. If this was a game set in the Dark Ages and the only source of heat for miles around was in a specific location, I could understand it. But here, in a modern setting, it just seems a little hard to believe that the only way of heating something is with the stove. Another unnecessary restriction imposed on the game to force people into solving the puzzle in a certain way?

The same applies for similar puzzles with a dead animal, a dog and countless items that seem to be lying around for no real reason other than they're required to finish the game. There's no real reason why the main character would give these things a second glance, particularly as she's in very real danger of getting killed at any moment, yet figuring out what to do with them is essential to completing the game. Then again, maybe I should feel grateful for all these items lying conveniently around just waiting for me to come along and find a use for them. Without them, the game would be impossible to finish.

Other puzzles might seem to have a fairly straightforward solution, but, more often than not, the solution is actually a lot more complicated. One location has me trying to take one

item with a magical dagger continually flying at my face every time I make a move. My initial plan was to put something on the dagger to prevent it attacking me, yet the game wouldn't let me and instead told me there wouldn't be anything gained by doing that. (I'd have disagreed as weighing the dagger down so it couldn't move would have seemed like a sensible solution to the problem. It certainly made more sense than the solution used.) More than one way to solve puzzles is an idea I'm fond of as it means that if I can't figure out the main way to do the puzzle, there might well be another way of doing it that I can try instead. As it happened, the solution was one I doubt I would have ever thought to try. The item I needed to solve the puzzle was one I already had in my hands, so requiring me to HOLD it up would have seemed unnecessary had I not been advised by the hints to try this.

### Feelies

"The Last Resort" comes with a nice PDF map which certainly helped me figure out the general layout of the game. A good thing, too, as the layout is sometimes confusing with southwest from one location leading me to another location and north being required to return me to the first one. On top of that are the cabins which have rooms that, on a normal map, would actually be inside other cabins. It took a while to familiarise myself with the general layout and the map helped me get my bearings.

### Unfairness

At times, the game can be very unfair indeed. I didn't find several key items to begin with as I'd neglected to enter some of the cabins and only became aware of these items' existence when someone mentioned it on RGIF; unfortunately, by this time the occupant of the cabin had returned and I wasn't able to enter, thus screwing the game up for me. Equally unfairly, no indication that the game has been rendered unfinishable is given so I played for quite a bit further before realising I wasn't making any progress because there *was* no way to make progress.

As it happens, some parts of the game runs on a series of timed events. Certain locations are only accessible at certain times and if you miss your window of opportunity, you've blown it. Even more unfair, the game requires you to perform three separate tasks while a timed event is running, though it wasn't until a lot later in the game that I realised *anything* needed doing during the course of the event. I'd also question whether anyone who ever played the game managed to figure this out on their first play through, or only realised the timer was relevant and all the things that needed doing before it was over, by first dying a few times. Solving a puzzle by dying several times doesn't really count as solving it in my book. Getting hold of the items I'd missed required me to restart the game and play a sizeable portion of it again to reach the stage I'd been at before.

It's also possible to put the game into an unfinishable position by scaring away the crow, though here at least the game *does* warn you immediately afterwards that you might have made a mistake. Going back to previous saved game positions helped on a few occasions, but quite often I'd discover too late that I'd missed something, or neglected to do something by a certain time. Before I tied up all these loose ends, I think I'd restarted the game half a dozen times or more.

Other examples of unfairness? Sometimes SEARCH and EXAMINE mean the same thing. Other times they produce different responses; something I only discovered later on in the game and which then required me heading back through every location in the game and start SEARCHing things that I'd previously only EXAMINED. I also felt that the amount of items that needed to be looked behind or under was a little unfair. Unfortunately, the unfairness doesn't stop there. When I opened the drawers on one of the bureaus (there was one in every cabin and most were identical), there was nothing to indicate there was anything inside and examining them revealed nothing more than a description of the drawer itself. Yet when I LOOKed IN the drawers, I found an item in there. Surely the game should have told me that there were items inside an open drawer when I first opened it or when I examined it without me needing to specify that I was looking in it as well. Makes me wonder how many other items I missed because I didn't LOOK for them, only EXAMINED and SEARCHed. Or are there other items only available via STUDYing certain things?

The dreaded guess the verb hampers some of the puzzles. The one involving gaining the aid of the crow was particularly bad and was something I'd never have considered if the hints hadn't suggested it. (Yes, I weakened in the end and e-mailed the author to ask for the password for the hints.) The most annoying thing about this puzzle, and several others in the game actually, was that I had the item I needed to solve the puzzle in question but it never would have occurred to me to try the required command.

### Overall

But despite all the negative aspects of the game, there's a lot to like about it as well. A good deal of the puzzles, even the ones I'd label as 'unfair', can generally be figured out if you think about them. Restarting the entire game and keying in commands again when you realise you've missed something vital is a pain, but there's a genuine sense of achievement when you finally get the better of a puzzle you've been stuck on for a while. The puzzles are generally arranged in a sensible fashion in that most of them can be completed in any order and if you can't figure one out, you can always go away and do something else in the meantime. Games that hit me with one puzzle after another and don't let me do anything else until each one is solved don't tend to go down very well with me. Thankfully this is one problem "The Last Resort" doesn't suffer from. This general relaxed attitude towards the puzzle solving also works well because there are times when, having discovered a new item or some previously hidden piece of information you didn't have access to before, you hit upon the solution to a puzzle you couldn't get the better of first time around.

Of course, there are problems with having this kind of freedom towards puzzle solving in that you can quite often end up reaching a puzzle at a stage in the game when it's not possible to solve it. Naturally you aren't aware of this and much time can be wasted trying to solve a puzzle when in fact your chances of solving it at that stage are zero. There are other times when you have the means to solve the puzzle (as with the crow or the dagger) but the precise wording is something you're never likely to try.

But... but I liked it. I kept on struggling with "The Last Resort" long after I'd have given up with most other games and the fact that I went through it to the bitter end, even after being forced to restart several times due to missing key items and running out of time on other occasions, has to be a point in the game's favour. So yes, a game I'd recommend, but only

to people who aren't put off by decidedly unfair puzzles and who have lots and lots of patience.

**6 out of 10**

# Latest Releases

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

## January 2007

10<sup>th</sup> **Classic Adventure** by phkb (*remake*)  
<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/new/download.cgi?973>

And non-ADRIFT releases:

## December 2006

21<sup>st</sup> **First Things First** by J. Robinson Wheeler [TADS 2] (*re-release*)  
<http://jrwdigitalmedia.com/fff/>

17<sup>th</sup> **Getfeldt's Treasure** by Mistext [Quick Basic]  
<http://www.intergate.com/~misal>

16<sup>th</sup> **The Ebb And Flow Of The Tide** by Peter Nepstad [Inform 6]  
[http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/if/games/the\\_ebb\\_and\\_flow\\_of\\_the\\_tide.html](http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/if/games/the_ebb_and_flow_of_the_tide.html)

2<sup>nd</sup> **The Last Resort** by Jim Aikin [Inform 6]  
[http://www.musicwords.net/if/if\\_resort.htm](http://www.musicwords.net/if/if_resort.htm)

## November 2006

30<sup>th</sup> **Moments Out Of Time (Adventure Type)** by L. Ross Raszewski  
[Inform 6]  
<http://streamdive.trenchcoatsoft.com/>

27<sup>th</sup> **Ekphrasis** by JB [Inform 6] {French}  
<http://ginko968.free.fr/jeux/ekphrasis.htm>

27<sup>th</sup> **The Journey Of The King** by Peter Nepstad [Inform 6]  
[http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/if/games/the\\_journey\\_of\\_the\\_king.html](http://www.illuminatedlantern.com/if/games/the_journey_of_the_king.html)

# 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](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

Many thanks to:

- C. Henshaw for the third and final part of *Hook, Line & Sinker*.
- James Webb {Revgiblet} for *My First ADRIFT Game*.
- Shuarian for the ADRIFT Forum Digest.
- Sprite for being this month's Hot Seat victim.

# LOOKING AHEAD

Issue 34 is due out on Saturday, 31<sup>st</sup> March 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](mailto:dwhyld@gmail.com) prior to the above date.