InsideADRIFT
the newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 14	March 2004

Contents

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News and announcements

To hell in a hamper and back (With apologies to Poodle) by KF

Ironically I had this newsletter setup to welcome back several of those who had drifted away. I was further going to welcome the fact that Mercury had instigated some threads that had brought back discussion of IF theory on the forum in a way that we used to have on the old forum. I was discussing things as follows:

Interactivity and nonlinearity got us started on the relationship of these two authoring concepts and the what is defined by interactive fiction. While *Writing* took as it's starting point an article, which Mercury found on Eric Mayer's blog, that details what the author thinks makes a "strong" story.

Sadly Mercury caused an explosive row with some very manipulative tactics, before once again leaving. In emails to the moderators Mercury admitted that he had deliberately stirred up a dispute, targeting DavidW with the aim of getting a reaction which he did. He has since been banned from the forum by Campbell.

I think it is fair to say that we should all feel betrayed by anyone who uses the forum to play mind games. If any of us have problems with other drifters there are plenty of ways of discussing it and hopefully sorting things out without making Campbell's trust in creating the forum seem misplaced.

Unfortunately this was not the end of the dispute and there was an extremely destructive thread where several of us did ourselves and others no favours. I hold up my hands and say I am not really satisfied with my handling of things as a moderator, though at the time my only aim was to bring the forum back to its users.

Some think I overreacted by taking my leave of ADRIFT, and I may have, but at the time I felt tired and deflated by the sheer ceaseless antagonism. As I said at the time it had got to a stage where instead of coming to the forum for fun it was

Editorial

I won't comment again on the forum disputes as they are covered elsewhere. If anyone thinks I should not have included it then I believe it was an important enough matter that it must be discussed here.

You may have noticed that this publication now bears an ISSN, the standard number by which serial publications are recognized around the world. It is a free service and I thought it would signify that this is aimed at being a long lasting publication.

As most of you will hopefully have noticed, I also launched a small consultation exercise on the forum with regards to the format in which I publish the newsletter.

While most respondents were happy with the PDF format, a significant minority had concerns over the speed of Adobe Acrobat Reader. I am now considering the next move and this issue will also be available to read online.

Contact

Send any suggestions, requests or comments concerning InsideADRIFT to editor@insideadrift.org.uk

Find the newsletter at:
http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/

a chore and at times I dreaded what would come next. My only defence for being so sensitive is that anything I was doing was, I believe, with the best interests of the forum members as a group in mind.

What I do regret was taking down the newsletter and my own KF ADRIFT site, for a short time. It was unnecessary and possibly an immature reaction to things.

As so many have found, leaving the forum isn't as easy as saying you are going. Somehow you just can't go cold turkey and have to pop back to see what is going on, even though you try to make yourself step away. So a few short days later I returned, having restored my sites.

Campbell Wild had been away from the forum for a few days, so was only able to look back at it from. My walk out did have the excellent result of having a new moderator appointed and The Amazing Poodle Boy has now joined the team. We have also got updated rules on the forum, which are linked to at the top of the General Discussions forum.

Mystery releases the ADRIFT Beginner's Guide

Early January saw the release of the **ADRIFT Beginner's Guide** which is intended to help beginners get a quick start with ADRIFT. It uses the creation of a simple first program to give beginners a step by step lesson in using the ADRIFT generator. They are taken through the basics of creating and linking rooms, creating static and dynamic objects, creating tasks, characters, and events, as well as teaching how to use variables and the ALR.

This is the sort of project that, when well done as it is, can only help ADRIFT to gain new converts. The approach is initially simple, although Mystery intends to expand it in the future, with each step explained and the user encouraged to expand on the example.

Originally Mystery released the Beginner's Guide using an e-book format, but she has now moved it to the simpler HTML format. The transfer was a simple move of the content rather than a major change.

If you want to get your hands on a copy it is available from the ADRIFT Network downloads page (http://home.gcn.cx/mystery/Downloads.html). It is also available from the IF Archive.

Also release on her site is a very attractive ADRIFT branded skin for the GCN community software.

Forum news

The whole One Room Competition debate dominated the early days of 2004, before ultimately falling at that most frustrating of hurdles lack of entries, and being cancelled.

The end of January and beginning of February also saw us limited to spasmodic access to the forum as it was unavailable for several periods. Campbell's updating of his webserver was to blame for part of the problem, but it certainly brought frustration for many. With some (like DavidW) agitating for a new forum, it should be noted that Mystery's ADRIFT Network forum at http://adriftnetwork.proboards22.com/ is the place to go when our normal home is out of action.

The great schism of mid-February, discussed in depth earlier, has hopefully healed, or at least been put to one side.

An updated forum arrives

Campbell has updated the software used for the forum to the latest available version of Ikonboard, and it provides a slicker performance with a number of improvements. I think it is fair to say the only real complaint about the new look is that the font it is displayed in is rather small.

We now have an events calendar where the moderators can link threads to the calendar, and you can see what is coming up in the next 15 days listed on the front page. Let one of the moderators know if you want this done to one of your threads, or I will try to do it if I see something where it would be helpful.

Competition news roundup

With nearly two months of the year has passed and we can look back on a fractious start to 2004 with the great "what is one room" debate.

For your diaries the dates of the InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp have been provisionally announced as 22-29 August 2004. No details of the competition have yet been announced.

One Room Comp argument over rules

In mid January the competition threatened to descend into farce as there was a great deal of discussion over the rules, most particularly what actually constituted a one room game. While I (and DavidW) tended towards the view that a one room game meant one room in the generator, some wanted it to be that the player was limited to one room, although there could be more rooms he could not enter. Then again others wanted to know whether it could be one room spanning multiple generator rooms. Davidw then finally compromised with words "*The game has to be take place in one room which is defined as one room in the Generator (i.e. no clever use of tasks to make one room appear to be many. No making your character a fly (or something similar) who can enter objects like boxes, cups, etc, as extra rooms.) Other rooms can exist in the Generator but the player is not allowed to enter these rooms.*"

Now all we had left was to actually come up with games to enter!

One Room Comp cancelled

Sadly, after all of that argument over the rules, when it came to it we failed to reward DavidW's decision to run the event. I for one failed badly as I kept on deciding I had a better idea for a one room game. There are now half a dozen more unfinished games littering my computer's hard drive.

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004

With judging at the end of April, there is still plenty of time to make a full game to enter this competition. Further details can be found on the newsletter website at http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/comp_spr_04.html

New One Hour Competition announced

Woodfish has given us a chance to have another go at writing a game in one hour. The last competition of this type brought in 13 entries which was a hugely impressive total.

Users can now set a default colour to have their posts displayed in, making identification easier, of course we may just end up with a multi-coloured forum. You also get a notepad where you can save some notes, an incomplete post or private message for use later.

A change that may not be universally popular is that moderators now have a **warn** link next to each post. Clicking on that link allows us to tell any user that we believe that they have contravened the board's rules. If a moderator chooses to they can raise the warning level of that user, and a small box is displayed next to their posts. Repeated warnings can result in suspension from the forum. Allied with this is the ability to display a link to the forum's rules at the top meaning that no one should be unaware of what is expected of them.

Wow, real game design questions on the forum

Interestingly we also had the return of a number of game design questions on the forum, something that has been in short supply recently. In quite quick succession we had threads about moving a random object, selecting a random character and making a time system for a game.

The random object problem brought several of us the opportunity to play around with the little known (and only available) Task Command Function **getdynfromroom(<room>)**. It

"The rule is that the game you enter must have been written in an hour, give or take ten minutes - that includes all bug fixes, writing and coding. Of course, no-one will know if you've spent longer, so I'm leaving it to you to judge when you've spent round about an hour working on it."
You have until 1 March 2004 to complete your entry and sent it in to driftersmonthly@hotmail.com for uploading and judging.

InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp 2004

The provisional timings for the Summer Minicomp were posted in the ADRIFT Calendar. The competition in the second half of August is for small games, and is designed for those of us not madly trying to get games ready for the Interactive Fiction Competition.

Wider IF community events

Voting for the **XYZZY Awards 2003** *has taken place during February. The way they were organized I couldn't preview them as the announcement came out on 30 January, and the two rounds of voting over the next three weeks. With the way the games up for the awards are arranged we all get our time in the spotlight, as any game launched in 2003, however unworthy they might be, is on the list including the many Minicomp entries.*

The big news is that Poodle's "To Hell in a Hamper" was in the top five in five of the categories. The results are to be announced in a ceremony on IFmud at 13:30 EST on Saturday 28th February.

Drifters toolbox:

Prose reviewed by Mystery

Through our course of adventures, the author often times looks for other programs that might make things a little easier. Over the past couple of years, we've found text editors that help us to create a better, more organized Language Resource file; we've come across word processors that help make the writing easier with spell check features; and there are other programs we try out to help keep our files organized. Either way, we are always on the hunt for something that will make creating IF easier.

I have come across another program that has helped me to create better, more in depth characters. The program is called Prose. Prose was designed for writers to help them better organize their work by splitting it into chapters, allowing for easy editing. It has a built in spell checker with both American and British English dictionaries along with an
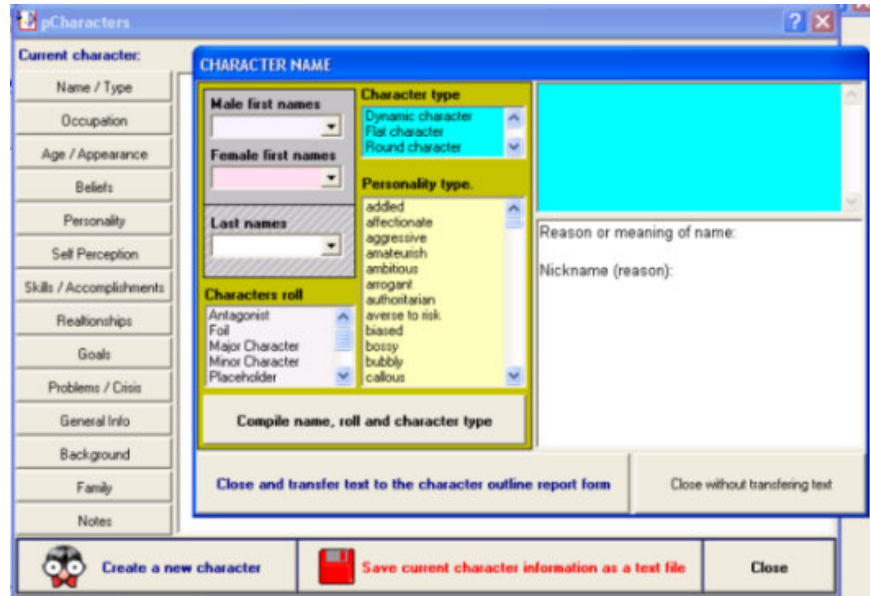
could be useful, but is very tricky to implement successfully.

Random character selection was also awkward as competing theories were put forward, Mystery had one idea involving an invisible object and assigned rooms, while ralphmerridew attempted to explain a method using variables.

Finally Gigabyteman asked about implementing a time system having tried an old one of mine. In this case I knocked up a different demo, and The Amazing Poodle Boy and ralphmerridew put forward some other options. It is safe to say there are many elaborate ways of doing this.

This is what the forum used to be about, the exchange of views on game creation in a spirit of mutual assistance. If we can return to this real community spirit then the future of ADRIFT will be rosy indeed.

Drifters birthdays

March 2004

1 Lyle Brown (19)

3 Black_Mage (13)

4 lizparnell (23)

7 Kerikhan (18); onnodb (19); Pattra (15)

9 Axiom (43)

11 neo (16)

17 Superplonker (20)

20 EdS (35); shadow_2014 (16)

21 icypenguin (20)

25 FireWyrm (21)

26 rgrassi (34)

27 merryjest (25)

28 chocolatecake888 (29)

31 JodoKast (17)

internal link to Word Web. You can also create word lists, keep notes, and it also has an ASCII character viewer that allows you to easily enter characters such as "€" into your text with out the necessity of knowing the ASCII character code.

One of my favorite features of Prose is the Character creation Module. If you have ever had trouble with creating interesting, detailed characters, then you really must give this feature a try. It has built in name generation, occupations list, and personality traits galore. Once you get started, it will take you through a detailed questionnaire that will ask you specific questions relating to your character. By the time you are finished, you will have created a well-rounded, detailed character just begging to be added to your ADRIFT game.

Another one of the great features of Prose is the ability to run outside programs right from the interface. If you need to, you can launch the ADRIFT generator, or runner, or any other program that you like to use when you need it; and without having to minimize or dig through your computer to find it. This is one of the features that I would love to see ADRIFT have.

To sum it up, Prose is a great program for any IF author or any writer. It is feature packed, easy to use, and definitely worth the download.

You can download the latest version of Prose and get the full details from http://www.hyperscribe.ca/prose.htm

Events Diary

March 1, 2004
Fourth One Hour Comp - entries in

Woodfish is organizing the latest One Hour Competition.

March 27, 2004
InsideADRIFT Issue 15 out today
The April issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be out.

April 18, 2004
InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004: entries due in
This is a competition for new ADRIFT games, there is no limit on th game size except that it should be less than 400kb OR if larger it should be hosted elsewhere and a link supplied. Judging will take place in the 2 week period to 2 May 2004.

May 02, 2004
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May 15, 2004
InsideADRIFT Issue 16 out today
The May/June Issue of InsideADRIFT should be out today.

22-19 August 2004
InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp 2004 (Provisional)
Provisionally there will be a Summer Minicomp in August. Entries in 22 Aug, judging ending 29 Aug.

Interview: Hanadorobou questioned by KF

This issue I am interviewing Robert Goodwin, otherwise known to us as Hanadorobou, author of probably the best known ADRIFT game "The PK Girl".

Hi, firstly many thanks for agreeing to answer a few questions for the newsletter. I hope you realise that there was great disappointment within the community when you decided to move on, even if we did understand why you did it.

Q1. *I'll start with the obligatory question of what got you into interactive fiction in the first place?*

Infocom's Zork series was my first exposure to interactive fiction. I remember Zork II being the first computer game I ever purchased, and I loved it. On and off I've been an interactive fiction enthusiast ever since. Interactive fiction is of course a relatively new medium. I find it interesting to watch it continue to evolve.

Q2. *Having been looking around I see the importance of your time in Japan in your life. We have seen the influence of Japan in the graphics of "The PK Girl", but how do you reconcile your use of Manga graphics with the rather unsavoury nature of some of the graphics in that genre?*

Not all Manga art is unsavoury, and certainly not any of the graphics used in "The PK Girl". Thus there is nothing to reconcile. It was one of my goals for the "The PK Girl" that it be enjoyable by the widest audience possible. In particular I wanted younger audiences to be able to play it, and so to include any objectionable material would have been out of the question.

Q3. *When "The PK Girl" was released it very much split the audience with it's theme and graphics. Can you understand why it made some people rather uncomfortable? As it was a big game with the graphics, do you feel "The PK Girl" came out as you wanted, or did you still have to make compromises?*

Yes, I think I can. The very nature of the plot doesn't appeal to everyone. Also, some players detected a sexist attitude on the part of a PC that, they rightly guessed, was supposed to be neutral. Whether or not it was enough to make a player uncomfortable just depended on how sensitive one was to that sort of thing. This effect, at least, was unintended and easy enough to fix in later releases.

The (big) idea by KF

Competitions: do we need them?

As I am guilty of running three ADRIFT only competitions each year maybe I shouldn't be the one looking at whether they are good for the community.

I only ask this question because there has been a noticeable reduction in the non competition games being produced. This also means that the vast majority of games are on the small side, as they are aimed at rule limited events.

As a writer, yes I do try to write games, I find that I can come up with game ideas quite easily for one room games, even if I am as unsuccessful in converting them to the finished article.

What seems to happen is that people throw themselves into a Minicomp game as a break from the game they are writing, but they then find themselves unable to return to their "proper" game.

I still believe competitions give an impetus to game writing, but that they should not be the only games writing that goes on. When I started doing the regular competitions I thought of them as a target for writing, but also something for those of us who will never write something up to the Annual IF Comp.

What I would advocate is that competitions should be planned, not a spur of the moment thing. Reminds me of an old "let's put on a show type musical.

Compromises over technical matters were many. For instance, I had wanted the player to choose the PC's name by means of regular command line input at an early point in the story. In the first release of the game, for technical reasons, I instead had to use the ADRIFT dialog box that prompts for a name as soon as the game is loaded, and wasn't even able to let the player know what the PC's gender was before (s)he chose a name. There were other issues...it was frustrating at times. But all in all I'm pleased with the way the game turned out. Hearing the favorable reactions of those who enjoyed it has been a source of great satisfaction for me.

Q4. *Last year was certainly a difficult year within the community, as we had to be patient while Campbell, quite reasonably, was otherwise engaged. You decided to make the break towards the end of the year to concentrate your efforts elsewhere, was this a very hard decision or did it just feel like the next logical step?*

It was a hard decision. I want very much to see interactive fiction recognized and enjoyed by a wider audience, and I've always felt that by promoting easy authoring tools like ADRIFT we as authors and developers can help play an important part in making that happen. It was one of the main reasons I chose ADRIFT as my authoring tool in the first place. There are of course trade-offs that comes with using any authoring tool. Coming to see that the trade-offs of using ADRIFT were not suiting all that I want to accomplish, I realized that a change was necessary. Though the decision was for the best, now still a part of me misses using ADRIFT.

Q5. *You did come back to the forum and posted early in January. Was this just a one off visit, or do you intend to keep in touch with ADRIFT?*

If I said it was a one off visit I'd look right foolish the next time I post. :) ADRIFT is a special community. Its members are intelligent, friendly, and on the whole quite well-behaved. Internet forums where the topics of discussion are of a creative nature tend to be that way, but even so I haven't come across another community quite like ADRIFT, a community which hardly any member can bare to leave without dropping back in at least occassionally.

Q6. *Having started with a standard question, I will finish with the normal one. What projects are you currently working on/plan for the future?*

It's been my experience that an author's best chance of

ADRIFT recent releases

Paint!!! (paint!!!.taf 54 Kb) By davidw, released 19-02-04

An office decorator has to fight against the odds (including a voodoo witch doctor, an irate Thunder God with a bad hangover and a meteor) in order to get the job done. [one room game] [genre: comedy]

The Last Hour (thelasthour.zip 21 Kb) By Roberto Grassi, released 13-02-04

A short IF written for DavidW minicomp. Probably something unusual... Have fun.

Hammurabi (hammurabi.taf 3 Kb) By Ron Moore, released 31-01-04

Based on the 1969 Merrill/Ahl BASIC kingdom simulation game. While the concept remains the same, the algorithms are completely modified and some new wrinkles have been added.

The Legend of Zelda: Legacy of a Princess (legacyprincess.zip 40 Kb) By Red Jett, released 25-01-04

A game set in the Zelda universe (or perhaps, the alternate Zelda universe). Why has the King been kidnapped? Who wants Link locked up? And what really happened to Sheik? These and other questions will be revealed as you journey through the land of Hyrule. Roughly the size and difficulty of Wishbringer, will last about 10-15 hours play time.

Dead Reckoning (deadreckoning.taf 80 Kb) By davidw, released 04-01-04

Drawn back to your childhood town of Morrow after a distraught call from a friend, you find yourself in a life-or-death struggle against an ancient evil intent on lifting an ages old curse. [Second place in the ADRIFT End Of Year Comp 2003] (genre: horror)

seeing a project to completion is to focus on just that project and not start any others while the current project is still unfinished. Well, I've been breaking my own rule lately, which is probably why the WIP I'm most excited about isn't making very good progress. But I hope to rectify that. This project (unlike my last) will be very story-driven, with a serious presentation, and (hopefully) strong characterization. There is a peculiar element of this story that I am very excited about, but I don't want to say more about it just now.

Many thanks for taking the time to answer my questions.

Game reviews

Humbug by Campbell Wild/Graham Cluley (Reviewed by DavidW)

In Humbug, you play the part of Sidney Widdershins who has been packed off to his Grandad's house for the school holidays. You arrive here not knowing much but it soon becomes clear that everything is not all it should be at Attervist Manor.

Humbug is a sparsely written game for the most part but still manages to derive considerable amusement value from the brief descriptions, although quite a few left me wishing a little extra effort had been expended to give them more depth. The kitchen for example reads:

"I am in a long rectangular room with a heavy wooden table. The walls are covered with pans, dishes and china plates. There is a shallow doorway to my west labelled "Pantry", whist an open archway leads southwards back into the dining room. A kennel sits in one corner of the kitchen. There is a door to my east. Exits are south and west."

Nothing really wrong with this but the literary soul inside of me would have liked the description to be a little less businesslike and a little more interesting. That said, the descriptions are good for the most part and, while not flashy, accurately show what is going on.

Like the writer's previous game, Jacaranda Jim, Humbug is a remake of a Graham Cluley game, although how closely it mirrors the original I couldn't say as I haven't played it. But, as with Jacaranda Jim, the writer seems to have done a

pretty good job of porting the game to Adrift and I liked this quite a bit more than most recent Adrift games I've played. However, enjoyable as it was, it would be nice to play a completely new game instead of a remake. In a way, this was a new game for me as I'd never played the original but for many I imagine it would seem like playing a game they've already played through before with a slightly difference interface. But I guess if you're going to port a game to Adrift, you might as well pick a good one. And Humbug is certainly that.

Alas, it didn't come without its problems. There were quite a few missing examinable items quite early in the game - a long bramble hedge covered in frosty cobwebs couldn't be examined or interacted with. Nor could the cobwebs. Likewise a Viking longboat thrusting up through the ice was unexaminable. As was the ice. Whether these were remnants from the original games or bugs restricted solely to this version, it was hard to imagine how they had been missed in testing. I don't tend to go through games looking for things that should have been implemented but haven't but these sort of things tended to jump out at me.

There were some guess-the-verb issues along the way, the worst culprit being on the Viking longboat where a rope is hanging from the side of the longboat. All attempts to climb the rope fail miserably yet "down" works fine. It also killed me, which I was a tad annoyed about considering there wasn't any kind of warning that this would happen (or if there was a warning it must have been a very vague one because I never saw it).

The puzzles hark back to the text adventures I used to play back in the 80's and most involve finding an item (the majority of which just seem to be lying around for the player to stumble across) and then discovering what needs to be done with them. Most, fortunately, are relatively straightforward and an excellent hints system is there for those who might be struggling to figure out how to defeat the slug (harder that you might think because obvious commands like "kill slug" just hit you with the default Adrift response of "Now that isn't very nice". Maybe not nice but it would have been easier than defeating it the way you have to in the game. And also not nice that a new response wasn't programmed for what was, in my opinion, the obvious action

unlockable, and only responds to a specific item in the player's inventory. In this case, a keycard.

Failed game intros

A Hard Night in Byzantium by Eric Mayer

I have a failed intro. I guess it is failed, since it is from 2001 so it isn't looking like its going to be finished anytime soon:

Rough hands drag you out of a comfortable sleep. Before you realize it isn't a nightmare you're being dragged through the halls of the Great Palace. You're still trying to focus your eyes when the guards toss you through the doorway of Emperor Justinian's reception hall. You're afraid you're in for --

A HARD NIGHT IN BYZANTIUM

Short, but it doesn't say much. That's because I had so much backstory I decided to do an "interactive intro" in addition to the actual intro.
Seven turns in which various things could happen depending on what the player tried to do. Of course, that meant the intro alone was longer than most of my games. Oops.

It goes on:

You smack down hard on the cold floor and slide. When you come to a stop you are aware of the torchlight playing across green marble walls which soar up toward a vaulted roof. The far reaches of the enormous hall, including the exit to the south, recede into shadows.

During the day, filled with clamorous and garishly robed courtiers, the vast room presents a dazzling spectacle of imperial power. At this hour of the night it is just a cavernous space

to take at such time.) Explore the numerous locations (it boasts a daunting 99 of which I've reached perhaps 30) and you'll come across a Viking ship buried in the ice, complete with an uncommunicative Viking called Sven. Uncommunicative in the sense that conversation is handled in the standard Adrift format of "ask [character] about [subject]" and it's often difficult to know in these circumstances just what subjects certain characters need asking about.

In conclusion, Humbug is a wry and witty game, at least the parts I've reached so far, and while a new game would have been more welcome it's nevertheless well worth playing.

Logic: 7 out of 10
Little made sense here, although Humbug isn't intended as a sensible game.

Problems: 6 out of 10 (10 = no problems)
Guess the verb struck in quite a few places (always a bad sign) as well as there being quite a few instances of items not being examinable. Maybe these were flaws in the original game but, if so, it would have been nice if they had been fixed in this remake.

Story: 6 out of 10
Very little background to speak of but once things get underway you probably won't notice. And the introduction, while short, does a good job of setting the scene.

Characters: 3 out of 10
I've encountered several so far but been unable to strike up a conversation with any of them. They're amusingly described yet I felt a little more conversation (or any conversation) would have been nice.

Writing: 6 out of 10
Above average throughout, though lengthier and less formal descriptions could have improved the game.

Game: 7 out of 10
A worthy remake.

Overall: 35 out of 60

like an enormous sarcophagus.

Emerging from the shadows, the Emperor Justinian pads toward you, soundless as an apparition.

Then you can look around and try to do this or that, and different things can happen, but all leading up to you being tossed out into the night, where the real game starts. I didn't realize just how long it was until I copied the stuff out of some broken files to make one possible route through to send to you. Nothing like a 1000 word intro to make you realize you've bitten off more than you can chew, at least in this lifetime. No wonder I got discouraged.

If you have an intro or just an idea you think Drifters might enjoy, why not send it in to InsideADRIFT.

Dead Reckoning by David Whyld (Reviewed by Eric Mayer)

A glance at any list of recent If awards shows there's a school of thought that the highest purpose of interactive fiction is to stretch the limits of the genre, turn it on it's head, confound players' expectations. That's not the school I graduated from. I generally prefer If that's about something other than If. Games that tell stories rather than propound literary theories.

David Whyld's Dead Reckoning tells a darn good story. That's about it...and that's plenty.

In brief, you have traveled to a village to help a friend whose communications have led you to believe he is in some sort of distress.Night is coming on. The place seems eerily deserted. Gradually you learn "The Horrible Truth." I like stories in which there's a Horrible Truth to uncover, especially when there's some originality to the final revelation.

David's a good storyteller. His style is efficient. The words are the sort that don't call attention to themselves, they just go quietly about their job, in this case creating a consistently spooky atmosphere. In If, where a character often spends much time alone, communing only with the surroundings, the setting is often the most important character. This game dripped with darkness and foreboding.

There are enough puzzles to give the story a game feeling, and to involve the player, but they are generally easy and entirely natural. You need only to do what you would likely do under the circumstances. This helps to keep the plot moving. In addition, Davidw employs cut scenes brilliantly to keep shoving the player forward. For me the game had almost perfect pacing. Something very difficult to achieve.

Consider this more a recommendation than a review. Dead Reckoning is a terrific addition to the fairly small list of nicely realized If horror stories. I'm always ready for one of those.

The Last Hour by Robert Grassi (Reviewer Eric Mayer)

The last hour is an effectively disturbing vignette. It is also difficult to discuss without spoilers. You may want to take a few minutes to play it before continuing.

You begin the game looking to escape a nearly bare prison cell. Nothing unusual there. What's different is the character you are asked to play. A foul mouthed white man who is accused of taking part in the murder of a black man. You

know you are innocent. Of course, you are not the monster they say you are. Your memories of the incident are arguably ambiguous. You were drinking. Sometimes an animal being hunted in the night really is just an animal.. But how to prove it? How to escape?

Before long you have the opportunity to converse with a number of characters who appear briefly. Your lawyer, for instance, who shares your conviction in your innocence. These visitors fill in the whole horrific story. The cell is claustrophobic and, it would seem, maddeningly devoid of useful objects. Realistic, in other words. Time passes. Day gives way to darkness. Is the puzzle of proving your innocence truly unsolvable?

There are problems with "message" games. For one, they tend to go in for overkill. I recall a game about spousal abuse from the If Comp a few years ago. From that same Comp I remember a game that displayed another problem...the author insisted he wanted to teach a lesson about illicit sex (or some such) but his relish for the subject was so transparent in his writing he defeated his supposed purpose. Robert Grassi avoids those problems by allowing his protagonist to stay true to himself, not forcing him to mouth anything out of character for the benefit of the author's lesson, and also by the brevity of the game. Indeed the player does not need to be beat over the head for very long to get the point.

This brevity also makes it possible for players like me, who prefer sympathetic characters, to experience the whole game rather than throw it aside after a half hour, as I did Adam Cadre's "Varicella" -- disgusted and fed up with having to act out the schemes of a murderous interior design snob.

A note. It is apparent that Robert Grassi's native language is not English, although his English is perfectly fine by most standards. However, in this game, I found that to be helpful. His foul mouthed characters are just that. Nothing more. They don't speak cleverly. If anything it makes their speech more true to life. Uglier.

All in all The Last Hour is an ugly little game that's well worth playing.

Reference

Moving right along this issues section from the manual is the complete piece on events. Generally the big thing about events is that they are used to add a bit of depth to games. They can be used to trigger things that make it look like the player isn't the only intelligence in the game.

Manual pages 25: Events

Although most of what happens in a game is directly related to what the player does, you may want certain things to happen completely independently of the player. To do this, you will need to create events.

To add an event, either select Add > Event from the menus, or click on the icon.

This will bring up the Add an event dialog box.

Timings

Selecting Event Timings brings up the following window:

You should name the event when you create it. This is not used by anything apart from to reference the event in ADRIFT Generator.

There are three options for when you want the event to start. It can either start as soon as the adventure starts, it can start after a certain number of turns, or it can start once a task has been completed. If you want it to start after a certain number

of turns, you must say how many turns to wait. The event will start at a random time between the two numbers you specify. If you want it to start after an exact number of turns, then you should set both numbers to be the same. The third option is to have the event start once a specific task has been completed. If for any reason this task is cleared (by a task or another event) then the current event will terminate if still running.

You also need to specify how long the event should last. Again, there are two numbers, and the event will last a random time between these two numbers. If you want it to last an exact number of turns, set both numbers to the same value.

There are two more options. You can set the event to restart as soon as it finishes.

This really depends on the type of event you are creating. If you have selected for the event to start after a certain number of turns, then you can get the event to restart after this same delay, once it has finished. If neither of these checkboxes are selected, the event will only run once.

All events will run, regardless of where the Player currently is, but you may only want the descriptions to display in certain places, e.g. if the event was rain starting and stopping, you would only want the descriptions to apply to outside locations.

Descriptions

Selecting the Description tab brings up the following window:

All the descriptions here will only display if you are in one of the rooms selected in the list on the timings page.

When the event starts, you will probably want to say something to announce the fact.

If the event was rain, you could put in What to display on event start: "It starts to rain." This will always be displayed if you are in the selected room(s).

In the box What to display during event if player "looks", this message is appended to the room description. In the above example, you would want to add something such as "It is raining."

You can add up to two extra messages that appear when the event is ending. You specify how many turns from the end of the event the message should appear, and set your message. In the same example, you might want Display this 3 turns from event finish: "The rain eases off slightly.", Display this 1 turns from event finish: "The rain has almost ceased." This will also always display if in the correct room(s). Usually, you will want a message displayed when the event finishes. In this example, it might be something like "The rain stops." Again, this will always display if the Player is in the selected room(s).

Advanced

Clicking on the Advanced tab brings up the following window:

You may want to pause and resume an event, for example, if your event was the Player running out of air when they were underwater, you could pause the event if they find an air supply, then resume it when the supply runs out. This can also be used to permanently stop a recurring event if a particular task has been completed, by just setting the paused task only.

You may want to move objects about when the event starts of finishes. You can move one object when the event starts and two when it finishes. You also have the added flexibility of being able to move static objects, so if you want a task to move a static object, you can use an event to start as soon as the task is complete, which then moves the object.

You may also want to execute another task when the event finishes. This could be for many reasons, but allows you to use the power of tasks spontaneously. An example could be a gust of wind, which blows the Player from one room to another.

The gust of wind could be a random event, but the task the event runs would move the Player or other objects etc.

When the task is executed, it executes the exact task selected in the list, even if there are more than one with the same command. This is a change from previous versions where they were executed as though the player typed the command. If there are restrictions on the task are not met however, the task will not run. If you want to create a form of IF-THEN-ELSE, you will have to create the task as a "master" task.

Get this task to execute a number of other tasks, each sub-task with their own restrictions. Any task that passes the restrictions will execute.
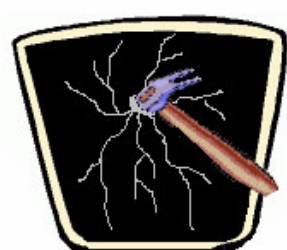
NB. If the event undoes a particular task, and that task started another event, the first event will be stopped.

IF only by Mystery