InsideADRIFT

The newsletter of the ADRIFT Community

Issue 38, July 2008

Contents of this issue

The Latest News From the ADRIFT Community

Adrift 5 release date slips

I don't think any of us where too surprised when it was revealed that the release of Adrift 5 had slipped back from 2008 Q2 to 2008 Q3. Adrift 5 is a complete re-write of the software and as such is a very complicated project for Campbell Wild to deliver.

New Adrift chat room

We now have a new place to go to discuss things with fellow drifters. The new chat room has been created by brain in jar at http://www.chatzy.com/683771555168. It is a simple free chat room that could be a fun way to unwind with (or wind up) others in the world of Adrift.

Forum gets a little facelift

Following on from a re-jigging of the forum in March, I have listened to some comments and tweaked a few more bits and pieces. The major change is the *Help for Players* forum

which is designed for players to ask for help when they get stuck, but is reliant on authors to provide information for the player, in advance if possible.

The Editorial

zzzzzzzzz

The Adrift Community seems to have been very sleepy over the last few months, and I have probably been one of the sleepiest – which explains yet another rather slender newsletter. Cowboy has been doing his best to keep us on our toes with his competition with no name – You will find the results, along with the evaluators' comments later in this newsletter.

The summer can be an odd time online as we all tend to have other interests that seem to drag us away from the computer screens. What sort of wierdos are you that actually want to go out in the sunshine rather than sit slumped before a computer screen? Oh well, each to their own!

Competitions

InsideADRIFT Summer Competition 2008

A full competition for new ADRIFT games. Entries to be in by Sunday 6 July 2008 and judging ends 31 Jul 2008. Note the extended entry period and get your entry submitted.

Details at
http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/f/ikonboard.cgi?act=ST&f=3&t=6514&st=0&&#entry78603

IF Comp 2008

Based on the normal form for this all formats IF competition you will need to register an intention to enter by 1 Sep 08, entries in by 30 Sep 08, judging complete by 15 Nov 08. Entries should be completable within two hours.(http://www.ifcomp.org/)

Birthdays and Events

July 2008 Birthdays

1 proganyl (62)**;** Summer Comp**;** freddo (18)
2 30otsix (38)**;** A_Smiley (21)**;** L.C. (21)
8 syke39 (36)**;** phickman7872 (36)
9 The Mad Monk (19)**;** mammoth (40)
11 3-blind-mice (20)
14 timothybard (26)
15 Tonyg (20)**;** The Bold Slasher (17)
17 Mel S (22)
18 ejl0007 (34)
21 Capital (56)
22 nick (24)**;** driftingon (28)
26 nonesuch (45)
29 jonrock (55)

August 2008 Birthdays

2 schoolsinger (24)
4 outsider (21)
5 gigabyteman (39); Corey Arnett (39); Floyd (39); The Angel Gibreel (30); Trouserpress (22)
7 Splink07 (28); loki88 (42)
8 Lena1975 (33)
10 djchallis (19)
11 mjbstein (39)
15 Coolkid (20)
18 rocksockm (31)
20 Chenshaw (32)
21 Bacchus (40); malleus maleficarum (35); Scarlettechi (22)
22 Teno (23)
23 Woodfish (20); Damien (22); damien8000uk (22); White Divine (24); Mickey Crocker (24); red assassin (18)
26 Starstream (63)
27 re_volvo (35); Filthy Bill (37)
30 bdenson (37); Scarecrow (37)

September 2008 Birthdays

4 RansomDchs (51); cewilson (49); Lailokken (52); Generic User Again (21)
5 Campbell (32); Keeling (33)
10 Lycaon (25); brucehum (37)
11 Rabbinical College of Cordova (65)
13 Chaos (23)
15 Gio (28)
16 M3K0 (23)
17 Mystery (36); lyonstomb (29)
18 Psyleid (21); ifjames (20)
19 Daeranilen (16)
20 ondre (30)
24 Jacqueline (25); Lumin (25); V.A. Spatski (38)
27 MadTom (22)
28 kolya (31); highways (65)
29 phazonstorm (16)

New Releases

Apart from the Comp with no Name entries there was only one game released on the main Adrift site over the past few months since the last newsletter:

THE FOGGY BANANA ADVENTURE (3 Kb) by DaveH, released Sun 22nd Jun 2008
You are an old warehouse man on a foggy wharf. What horrors or riches will the latest cargo contain?

Computing is shrinking
by Ken Franklin

Currently small computers seem to be the new face of computing and I recently picked myself up an Asus Eee PC to carry around. This is an ultra mobile device with a 7 inch screen and a small, but very useable keyboard.
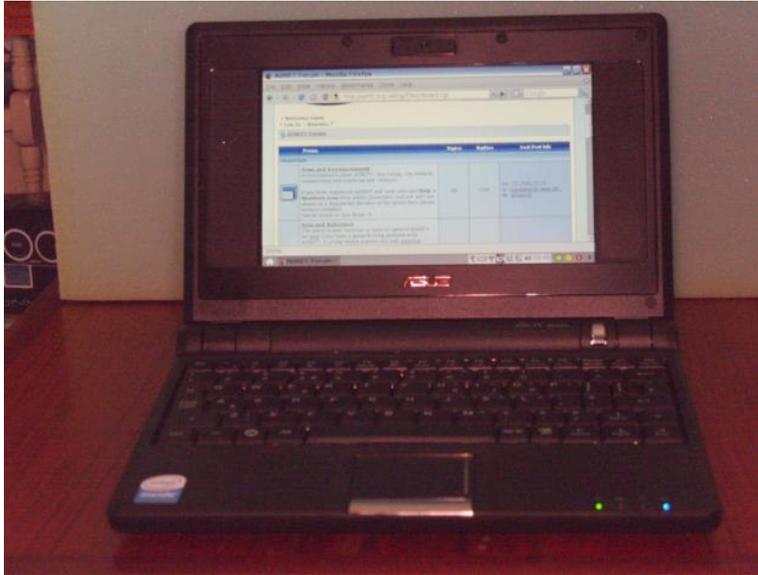
What I was wondering was how such a platform was suited to interactive fiction. This particular machine comes with a version of Linux installed, but can also run Windows XP if required. This article isn't about the practicalities of getting Adrift on such a machine, just the principal of its desirability as an option. How many of us would like to break up a long railway journey by playing away for a while at an adventure, and if we did would our fellow passengers think we were barking mad?

The small memory footprint of interactive fiction seems to fit in well with a device that lacks a hard disc and instead uses a 4Gb solid state memory drive. It comes with wireless networking and a webcam built in for added functionality.

Over the next few weeks I hope to try out the IF options that can be installed, though it will be a test as I get to grips with the different operating system that it uses. I have already been searching around and found people discussing putting Gargoyle on the Eee PC, so that may well be my starting point.

To be continued next issue

The Comp With No Name 2008 result announced by Cowboy

The winner of the Competition with No name is:

"**Beanstalk and the Jack**" by: *DSWXYZ*
(how in the name of xxx do you pronounce this?)

It has been great fun playing the games, and as you can see from the comments they all have potential of being good games You can get the games from: http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi/new/download.cgi?1070

I have decided to publish the comments for each game too. Not because I want to put anyone down, (none of the contestants needs to feel bad about their achievement) but because I think there is a lot of good advice here (Not only to newbie's, but to all game writers).

Evaluator 1:

Beanstalk the and Jack: (Score: 3)

I don't know what it is, but there's just something about fairy tales that makes them a natural fit for IF. And while I'm sure a game based on Jack and the Beanstalk has been done before, the gimmick here (which I won't spell out to avoid spoilers in case this gets posted on the forums) puts a fun little twist on the whole thing.

One of the Big Rules of IF is that every object mentioned in a room should be described, and while this game had problems in that area, on the whole the writing was good and 'Beanstalk' was clearly the most thoroughly tested of all the entries. I'm looking at my notes for it right now and under 'cons', besides the undescribed objects the only thing I have listed is that the mother NPC is completely unresponsive and just stands around like a zombie. This is especially impressive considering that from his forum posts I got the impression the author had to rush to get the game in by the deadline.

Definitely my favorite game of the comp.

The Perfect Spy (Score: 2)

I once played a game I quite liked called Dwenodon that also made use of the 'change into an animal' gimmick, so I was looking forward to some interesting puzzles once the premise of The Perfect Spy became clear. Unfortunately, it turned out to be an otherwise decent game marred by bugs and the dreaded GTV. I got stuck early on because of the latter (the command to get the blue keycard isn't hinted very well, and it didn't help that the game kept confusing it with the red one, even when it was in a different room), and as I wandered around trying to figure out what to do I'd often run into a game-breaking 'You can't go in any direction!' message while simply trying to walk in a hallway I'd been up and down several times before.

The potential for a good game is here, but it needs some more bug-testing and polish first.

Pieces of Eden (Score: 1)

Pieces of Eden started off so well. (Assuming you could ignore the painfully tiny text...) The intro was intriguing, the plot sort of reminded me of David's 'In the Mind of the Master'...but then it all came apart.

To begin with, (though I'm willing to let this slide since it requires what I'd consider an 'advanced' trick and this is a comp for newbies) considering how easy it is to die in this game, it would have been courteous to at least something up to allow the player to 'undo' instead of throwing them into ADRIFTs annoying default pop-up box highscore thingy again and again.

To end with, the command required to win the game is rather GTVish and quite frankly just doesn't make much sense. To make things more difficult, the object you need to examine to even have a chance at figuring it out is easy to overlook, as anything other than literally typing out 'look at' or 'examine' will result in the default 'You see no such thing.' message.

In between the beginning and end are a handful of other small annoyances, such as the fact that all room descriptions seem to contain <waitkeys> and have you doing things like bursting through doors and interacting with NPCs again and again when all you're trying to do is 'look', or the fact that when you come to a CYOA-like choice, you have to type out something like 1.) or 1a.) instead of a simple 1 or 2. (for awhile I thought I was dealing with a broken tasks, and when I did figure it out the game seemed dead-ended anyway due to the aforementioned GTV issue).

But the above easy-to-make newbie mistakes aside, the number one problem with the game turned out to be the one that would have been the easiest to fix. Namely, the lack of proof-reading. The punctuation is kind of...bad, and that just makes it look like the author rushed through all the writing. (The most glaring mistake in this department was "your" being used instead of "you're", over and over throughout the entire game...)

And of course now I feel sort of bad having typed out four solid paragraphs ripping apart a newbie's first game, but I probably wouldn't have bothered if I hadn't seen so much potential here to begin with. Like I said in the beginning, the game started off SO well. The author definitely knows how to write scenes with atmosphere and tension, and I suspect with a little more practice with ADRIFT and some more time put into polishing their games they could be cranking out some awesome spy/action/thriller IF in no time.

Evaluator 2:

Pieces of eden: Score: 1

 First, for some reason, it displayed the main text smaller than usual. My eyes hurt.

I'm really not sure what was going on; the game would need heavy redesign to improve.

Technical errors:

Going east after having paid gave a "you didn't pay" error.

Responding to the man required a specific "1.)" instead of the customary "1".

"examine number" is different from "x number"

The Perfect Spy: Score: 2

Was choosing the name "Stephen Rogers" a deliberate reference to Captain America?

The dog form was completely useless. The idea was good in its own right, but was far too ambitious to do with the unregistered generator; most of the problems could easily be corrected without those restraints.

Beanstalk and the Jack: Score: 3

The winner. While the beginning is confusing, everything makes sense in the end.

It's well-implemented throughout. It's a bit repetitive, but that's forgivable given the fairy-tale nature of the story.

Evaluator 3:

I've played through each game, and examined the source code. I wrote short reviews on each one, and gave them each a score. It was a tough decision.

Pieces of Eden: Score: 1

This work is quite short, though this can be expected for this type of comp. Though still, I feel that it could still have been longer considering the time allotted. It took me only seven turns to actually finish this work.

The writing and prose has some shining moments. The intro in particular is well written, and sets up the whole story and scenery well. Beyond the first room though, the rest seems cobbled together and rushed, which is disappointing, because there was some good detail in the first room.

Some commands don't quite cover enough possibilities. For example, when paying the owner of a diner, you must input "pay Steve." It doesn't understand "pay owner" or "give coins to steve." This little piece of hunt-the-verb could have been avoided by adding a few more input possibilities.

The very end of the game is a broken mess. I'm unsure as to what was even happening, and it used a rather messy choice menu for the final moments of the game. The final, game winning command had no rhyme or reason as to why it even needed to be entered into the parser, and it referenced a coin that I could not possibly have even known about, as it was never mentioned. I had to look into Generator to discover the solution, and even after viewing the source, I still couldn't figure out what the author's intention was.

If the beginning of this game is any indication of the author's IF writing ability, then there is some definite potential, but more time needs to be spent on things, and things need to be thought out better. The choice menu needs a complete overhaul as well.

Perfect Spy: Score: 2
This was a well written game with some clever puzzles. The lack of development time in such a short comp was apparent though, as I was able to do some things that didn't make any sense. For example, I was able to turn into a human from a mouse while inside a small hole with no ill effects, and even as a tiger the cat chases me back into the hole. Also, I'm not certain how a tiny mouse is able to carry electricians tools or throw a ball of yarn, and sometimes, in some forms, the game told me that I couldn't move in a certain direction, when the description says that I can.

Changing into different animals was the most innovative feature of this game, and in one puzzle (The one where you climb the guards leg as a mouse to retrieve the keycard.), it

was used very well, but beyond this, it fell kind of flat. The dog transformation had no purpose whatsoever, for example.

On a better note, the game was well written, with descriptive writing and a relatively smart plot. With some polishing, this game could be fantastic.

Beanstalk and the Jack: Score: 3

Beanstalk and the Jack was well written to fit the theme. It read like a children's book, which in this case is a good thing. It had an interesting concept, in that it was written in the past tense. All events took place before the beginning of the game, which isn't something you see in IF very often.

The only real problem I ran into was probably more of an oversight than a real problem. Many of the directions were accidentally reversed. You had to go "down" in order to climb up the ladder. And you had to go "up" to get back down from the attic. Also, the game says that the town is to the East, only when you go East, you end up in the house, which is to the West. The opposite of this is also true. Looking at the source code, I also noticed that opening the window sets it to closed, and vice versa. These things could be easily fixed with extra development time, and were probably a result of the strict deadline/mild dyslexia, so I'm not going to judge them too harshly.

Overall, I enjoyed the game.

Evaluator 4:

I've played all the games. I thought that they all had some merit and found it difficult to choose a winner. I have to say that 'Beanstalk the and Jack' was my favourite until I came across a bug that meant that I couldn't complete it. This was a real shame, because I would have given this the most points but I never feel right about giving top score to a game that couldn't be completed. I even had a rummage around in the Generator to see if I could fix it and get it to work, but I couldn't quite see what David was trying to do. When the comp winner has been decided I will post some reviews of the games that will hopefully encourage and help the authors along. I'd like to see all three of them write further.

I can't tell you how frustrating it is to put my favourite game in last place, but it's a judging decision that I made when I voted for the last 3 Hour Comp so I have to be consistent.

Firstly, I would like to congratulate all of the entrants in this competition. I enjoyed playing and found things to like in all of the games. It seemed to me that each of the authors possessed an instinct for writing Interacive Fiction that I'd like to see them develop. So, without further ado here are my comments on the games - in the order I played them. (WARNING - Contains spoilers. Big hairy ones)

Pieces of Eden Score: 2

The first thing that I noticed about this game was that GhostofDanzig (henceforth referred to Ghost) had decided to mess around with the default font. I applaud efforts to tinker with the display to make the game a little more unique. David Whyld has often put this to good use in his games. The problem was that Ghost had chosen to shrink the size of the font, making it really hard to read. I think it would have done my head in to play the game in this font, so I ran it through Gargoyle. That was much better.

Now, the game itself. I liked Ghost's Film Noir style of writing, which was effective in setting up the old "Hmmm, I have to play the game before I find out what's going on" player motivation - though I did spot a couple of typos. They sneak in everywhere. Like Heer.

The game started with a fairly simple (but unforgiving) time-based puzzle. It set up the scene and the tension nicely, though I would recommend Ghost gives the protagonist a few more turns to play with. Failure is handled well, with the game spelling out your mistake clearly (and in context) and making replay an easy choice.

I didn't particularly like the way that the unconscious police officer was handled. Although the player character may have no idea why there's a KO'd Law Enforcement Officer outside the cafe, I think that such a discovery deserves more than "The Unconscious Police Officer is here". It was a bit of a "What the...?" moment for me, and his purpose seemed a bit Deus Ex Machina.

When I emerged from the alley, I got stuck. The mysterious figure offered me two options and I found that neither '1' or '2' worked. I had a look at the code in Generator and saw that Ghost actually required me to answer '1).'' or "2).''. If you're going to give the player a list of options, don't make it too obscure for him/her to actually make a choice. ADRIFT gives you the option of having multiple triggers for a task, so use them to make it as easy as possible for the player.

I figured out how to complete this game ALL BY MYSELF, which made me feel good. This game ends unresolved and is clearly not a stand-alone work, expressed by the ending in which Ghost refers to a 'Part 2'. As such this 'game' feels more like an entry for the Intro Comp. This is just an observation, and not a criticism. As it was, although the set-up cannot claim to be original (it reminded me of 'In the Mind of the Master' for one thing), I certainly enjoyed this game enough to want to see what happened next. I don't know if this was Ghost's first game, but I think it is one that he should continue to work on. I'd be really happy to see 'Part 2', for example.

THINGS I LIKED: The writing was very good, and the plot was intriguing enough to make me want to see more.

THINGS I DIDN'T LIKE: The unconscious police officer puzzle broke the spell. Having to go into the Generator to solve one of the puzzles.

The Perfect Spy Score: 3

After the sparse information that you get upon starting 'Pieces of Eden' it was something of a shock to start this game and get a text dump. The introduction sets up the back story, motivation and goal very clearly - unlike 'Pieces of Eden'. I thought that the different ways that GhostofDanzig and Blackmaster introduced their games was an internally satisfying way of showing two different but equally legitimate ways of beginning. I played this one in the ADRIFT Runner, as Gargoyle doesn't like text dumps.

Of all of the entries this game was the most 'traditional', in that it was a clear 'adventure' game with a series of lock/key puzzles standing between the player and his escape. In this case the 'gimmick' was a device that lets the player change into one of four different forms. It's a game mechanic that I've come across before in an as-of-yet unreleased game and one that I considered a variant of in an idea that I had. It's a nice idea (and shows more imagination than the usual inventory-based puzzles I come up with) but really needs to be implemented well to work. I think this kind of ambition suffers when you're working within the limits of an unregistered version of

ADRIFT. There are a lot of different combinations of form/environment that deserve a better response than they get.

For example, the game begins (like 'Pieces of Eden') with you having to act before time runs out. The puzzle is solved by choosing the correct form before the scientists push you into a room. The end-game messages makes perfect sense if you do nothing and remain as a human, but you get the same message even if you change form.

"What? You're pushing me into the room for a meeting? Haven't you guys noticed that I'm a *mouse*?"

Another part of the game has you entering a hole in the wall, which you can only do so as a mouse. There's nothing, however, to stop you changing form once you're in the hole. This resulted in me entering the hole as a mouse, leaving as a dog and *still* being chased off by a cat. The correct solution is to use a ball of twine to distract the cat, but given the nature of the game it seemed a perfectly legitimate answer to turn into a dog and scare it off.

Furthermore, like 'Pieces of Eden', there are some 'guess the verb' moments that resulted in me having to examine the code to proceed through the game. Maybe I'm just blaming the authors for my poor skillz, but tasks being operated by very specific, unforgiving parser commands is one of the things that annoys people most about ADRIFT.

A similar problem occurs with the keycard. Because there are two keycards in the game, it's compulsory to refer to them as 'the red keycard' and 'the blue keycard' even when you are only carrying one of them and do not even know of the existence of the other.

If you can get past these implementation errors (no doubt caused by the limit on tasks that the unregistered version provides) and suspend your disbelief (a mouse that can carry key cards and tools? Awesome!) then you'll enjoy what goes on here. Like 'The Forest House' in the last Three Hour Comp, I thought that this was a great example of how to start writing IF. It's a small game with a well-thought out series of puzzles and a story that, at least, makes sense and does the job of providing clear motivation and a goal.

Also, it seemed to me that one of the forms is a 'red herring' in that it served no purpose in the game. I thought that, assuming that it was intentional, this was actually quite a mature design decision and worked well.

THINGS I LIKED: A solid, traditional IF without any pretentious examination of a tormented inner psyche. I like that Blackmaster tried to do something a bit different (and tricky to code) and thought he pulled it off well.

THINGS I DIDN'T LIKE: Again, tricky parser problems leading me to investigate the code in the Generator.

BEANSTALK THE AND JACK Score: 1

This game went the 'Pieces of Eden' route and begins with minimal details about who you are what you are supposed to be doing. It's all in there, but doesn't become obvious until you've played for a while. This game also seemed a bit more polished than the other two, with mention of a play tester being involved. Hmmmmm. That's promising.

At first I was a little confused. The directions I was being offered in the room descriptions didn't seem to correlate with the actual directions I was going. I was told, for example, that a certain location was the the east but I could only get there by heading *west*.

Easily done, I thought. I've made that mistake myself a few times. But then I noticed that this was happening in every location. And immediately my brain registered with what the author was trying to do, the title and the hint given in the opening about retracing your steps. I was doing everything backwards. I went into my bedroom. The window was open. I tried closing it. Nothing. I tried opening it and was told that I opened the window. Brilliant. Absolutely brilliant.

Once I had the nature of the game sorted it worked out quite well. It was like watching a video of 'Jack and the Beanstalk' in fast reverse. David had stuck very closely to the original fairy tale and it worked really well. I thought it was imaginative, well-implemented and written and generally a great piece of Interactive Fiction considered within the restraints. At times it felt a little repetitive, following the same series of commands with only slight changes depending on the item you were stealing from the ogre, but it was still a lot of fun.

The only problem I had was with David trying to over-ride the default drop command (to prevent the player abusing it or making a mistake), meaning that reasonable commands like 'drop axe' didn't work. You had to tell the character to put the axe down instead. This whole set-up makes SCARE throw a hissy-fit and results in the game being unplayable in Gargoyle. Another one for the Runner.

This game quickly became my favourite, and not just for this competition. I thought it was one of the best pieces of writing from a new author I had seen in a while. However, I ended up docking this game points because I wasn't able to finish it.

I got most of the way through the game, but when I climbed down the beanstalk with the bag of coins and came to part where, I assumed, that I would have to backwards plant the Beanstalk I found that I couldn't do anything.

According to my inventory I was carrying 'Prize0'. I examined my mother only be told [mom=0]. A bit harsh, I felt. OK, she'd not really done anything throughout the game, but calling her a zero? With my immense experience at messing things up I instantly recognised an ALR/Variable combo problem. Rummaging around in the code didn't help at all. I started again, but hit the same problem. I couldn't complete the game and was left frustrated.

In my previous judging capacity I had penalised games that I couldn't finish, so felt honour-bound to do the same to this effort - despite the fact that I thought this game was superb and deserved to win. Integrity won out, and I posted a penalised score for this game, thought I felt guilty and annoyed about it.

In correspondence with my fellow judges I discovered that none of them had the same problem. Just me. Typical.

The end result is that 'Beanstalk' won anyway, a result that I am happy about and think is thoroughly deserved.

Apologies to David for tarring his game with the 'broken' brush when it seems that it's me that's broken. Maybe it's Vista. Yes, that's right. I'm blaming Vista - just like everyone else does.

THINGS I LIKED: An awful lot. A nice spin on a traditional fairy tale, well-told and enjoyable to play.

THINGS I DIDN'T LIKE: That I couldn't finish the game.

So, in conclusion, the game I liked best won - despite my attempts to sabotage the voting. That's not to comment on the second and third place games though. They had plenty to recommend them, and I would really like to see all three authors getting to grips with a registered version of ADRIFT and creating some more magic. I can't stress that enough - I would happily play any future games from any of these authors. ADRIFT FTW!

Thanks to Cowboy for organising the comp.

The ALR: wonderful tool or programmer's kludge?
by Ken Franklin

The ALR (Adrift Language Resource) is something that can be turned to many uses by the game author, but it has been criticised as being a way of making up for the programs design deficiencies. While the criticism may be true, anyone who failed to investigate this feature would probably be making their project a lot harder.

What is the ALR?

It is simply a text file, which in current versions must be created in a separate text editor, that is loaded into the game file using the *File > Import > Language resource* menu selection. The file must have been saved with the .alr file extension. Once the file is loaded it will be incorporated in the game file and does not have to be distributed with the game. To change the file you have to edit the saved .alr file and re-import it.

The file simply contains a number of lines of text that take the form of:

TARGET|OUTPUT TEXT

Here the TARGET is a piece of text that you want to have replaced and on the other side of the | symbol is the text that it will be replaced with and that will be output by Adrift. You can start a line with # in which case the rest of that line will be treated as a comment, which is a useful way of keeping the file readable.

What it can't do

It is important to point out that whatever is done when using the ALR does not cause any change to the working of the game, it only changes what the program shows the player in the way of text.

Simplify your life with the ALR

The ALR can be used to tailor the messages that the game produces without the need for writing tasks. An example would be to make a bed and then instead of allowing the player to lie on the bed you add a line to the ALR file that says:

You can't lie on the bed.|You lie on the bed, but get up as you know you have no time to rest here.

The normal Adrift response to trying to lie on an object is the first part of the line, the second is there to provide a response that moves the player on in a more helpful way, with little trouble for the programmer. An Adrift response can be adapted like this. A useful tip is to cut and paste the target text from the Adrift Runner in edit mode.

An interview
Cowboy answers questions posed by Lumin

Cowboy's WIP Ghost Town has really caught my interest, so he kindly agreed to let me pester him with questions about the project and then send this in to the newsletter. (For those of you who haven't played the demo, it begins with you inheriting your great grandfather's estate, and the finished game will involve solving the mysteries of the town of Battle Creek, abandoned during the Civil War era. It will also be rather enormous in addition to being extensively illustrated, and if the quality of writing stays the same throughout as it was in the demo then perhaps you can understand why I'm excited about it…)

1.) First things first. Care to tell me your phone number, home address, creepy details about your personal life? …no? Okay, well maybe just a little about yourself in general. :-D

I am glad you asked for my phone number and not my bank account number… Y and I'm sorry to tell you that all creepy details about my personal life is currently being investigated by, FBI, CIA, MOSSAD and ATN (Associated Tabloid News) so I am not allowed to discuss the matter.

Myself in general is a little easier... I think

I live in a small town in Denmark, approximately 40km north of Copenhagen (the Capitol)

Click on the link, and keep clicking on the pointer and you will be brought almost to my house… I'll have coffee waiting or a beer if you prefer.

http://maps.live.com/default....Tg0Mzc1

I am 51 years (young) and work with SAS, no NOT Special Air Service, but Scandinavian Airline System, where I am employed as an aircraft engineer (Team leader) I sit at the maintenance office and communicate with the pilots as they approach Copenhagen Airport. They report any malfunctions, and it is my job to do the first trouble shooting on the problem, find out and order the necessary spare parts and assign a mechanic to the task. Quite an exciting job at times.

I'm married 10 years to a sweet American... By the way... Did you know that Marriage is the only life sentence that isn't cut short because of good behavior? *lol*

My hobbies are. Photography, history, adventure writing and solving, reading, playing guitar. Oh yes and aircrafts (of course)

2.) At what point did you discover ADRIFT, or IF in general?

To start backwards… I first discovered IF when a friend of mine got himself a 48K Spectrum and the game "The Hobbit" I was totally amazed that it was possible to make something so advanced, and with such impressive graphic. My friend and I spent hours playing the Hobbit and I found out that I too wanted to create adventure games. I bought two adventure generators, called "The Quill" and "G.A.C" and I actually made a few adventures pestering my friends who obviously had to play them.

After Sinclair went out of business, I got myself an Amiga 500. Adventure games had become more intriguing and the graphics were much better. I found a program called "AMOS" which allowed me to create my own IF again, but unfortunately before I became famous the Amiga too went to the eternal hunting grounds. But it left some pretty good

games. My taste had gone from the text adventure to arcade adventures. Names like "Police Quest", "Space Quest", "Larry" not to forget "Kings Quest" I can't remember how many hours I spent playing those games. And I still consider them the top of adventures. Yes, I know there are many more such as Monkey Island and I am sure that the readers each have their own favorites.

At that time Sierra on-Line was concentrating more on the game play and less on the graphic. I mean everyone that played the early Sierra On-Line games remembers the characters being nothing but blocks.

Unfortunately the world of adventures changed and more and more effort was placed on how to get the graphic looking good and the publisher went from the typed commands to point and click. Even the cursor changed shape when one passed over something that was worth looking at. I wanted to create the "old fashioned" graphic adventures I remembered from the old "Speccy" days and looked around on the net until I somehow stumbled over Adrift, and I've been Drifting ever since.

I can't remember when I discovered Adrift, but I have been a registered member since Moses parted the waters or close to. I checked my registry date and it says June 24 2002 but I think I've been at it for longer than that.

3.) What gave you the idea for Ghost Town, and how long have you been working on it?

I got the idea when my wife and I was on our honeymoon to the US and she took me to the town of Bodie in the northern part of California: http://www.bodie.com

While walking around this old mining town sucking up the atmosphere the idea of making a game about a ghost town came into mind. It wasn't until later when I read a book about Bodie where a young girl wrote in her diary the day before her and her parents moved there. She wrote: Good bye God, we're moving to Bodie that I thought about the story. And then slowly over time the story took form.

I have been working on Ghost town for (hold on to your hat…) a couple of years or more. I know it's a long time, but I had one year when I didn't touch the computer at all because I got ill. Another thing is that I had to wait for the pictures to be done. It's very easy to start making a room description, problem is that when you get the picture from the artist, you find that there are things that need to be changed.

4.) From your name, avatar, and of course your game, I get the idea you have a thing for the Old West. Is this, like, normal for people who live in Denmark? :-P

Oh, I do have a thing for the Old West. I don't think know if it's normal for people in Denmark. I think most boys like Cowboys, and Western movies. I just never grew out of it *lol* But it is an exciting period in American history, and there are so many interesting stories about that time. Just think about the pioneers, what they had to go through, you can't but admire them

5.) One of the unique things about Ghost Town is the fact that practically every scene and location is illustrated. Was there a specific reason you chose to do this?

There were actually several reasons.

One is that I think a picture adds to create an atmosphere of the game. For instance in Ghost town, it gives that extra kick that the player can see the picture of the ghosts and the surroundings.

The other is that the old saying that a picture says more than a thousand words is true. I am not fluent in English, at least not in writing so adding a picture helps me describe a room or an event much better than if I should do it with words alone.

Besides, it forces the player to concentrate more on the game... Not only does he/she have to read the description but also study the picture for hidden clues…

Finally, it gives the author (me) an opportunity to add puzzles to the game…

The drawback is that you have to write descriptions for all the items in the picture. The living room in the cabin of Ghost town is a good example. I could have made a fairly short and yet fulfilling description of the room and left it at that. But by adding a picture I suddenly had to take into consideration that the player might examine all the leaves on the floor, the cracks in the floorboards etc. etc But I think it's worth the extra work.

6.) Can you tell me a little about the artists? Are they IF fans too?

The artists were actually my biggest problem and one of the reasons why it has taken me this long to make Ghost town.

None of them are IF fans except one and he didn't have the time to help me.

I had to search for artists on the net. The first I found "Carola" (She has made the intro picture amongst other pictures) was really a gem. But she decided to go to an artist school in Viborg (a town in Denmark) and had to jump from the project. She is still making a picture every once in a while. After her, I found "Kirsten" whom has made most of the drawings and she is still working on the game.

Creating Ghost town is a hobby, and I am not making any money on it as many of us aren't. This means that I can't pay to have a professional artist do the work. So far I've paid roughly about 1000 Dkr...(100£ or 200 $) This is over two years or so, so it's not that much, but still it's an expense. But then again... is there a thing as a free hobby?

I have to rely on people's good will, and I think I've been VERY lucky so far that I've found people who found the idea interesting.

It's funny in a way, but I have actually never met any of the artists .The procedure is that I write a description of a location or an event, and mail it to the artist. She then reads it, and if there is something that isn't clear to her, she writes me back and I try to explain. She may also have suggestions for changes, or maybe the description I've made is impossible to put on paper... Not even a wizard can look in three different directions at the same time *lol*

7.) You released the demo roughly six months ago and since then have received hardly anything in the way of feedback. Has the seeming lack of interest, or the extended slow period the community's been experiencing in general been discouraging?

Oh no! I will admit that I am a little disappointed that there hasn't been more interest, I mean, 141 downloads is pretty good, I think. But no feedback other than the one from the Beta testers. Another thing is the lack of requests for help.

In the readme file I mentioned that if people got stuck they were welcome to write and ask for hints or help and I would be only too happy to help, and I have even put up a help section in the Forum.

But either the puzzles are too easy (you should know... you were one of the Beta testers Y) or people don't have the patience to continue playing the game if they get stuck.

I hope that the new board on the Forum will help, so players will seek help rather than just discard the game if a puzzle is too hard to solve. In a way I feel it's a little disrespectful to the author, he/she has spend hours creating a game and the player owes it to him to at least make an effort to finish the game. I know that there are some awful games out there, but it should be fairly easy to see whether an author has put an effort into his game or if it's just an "oh, I've got 5 minutes"

The biggest problem as I see it is that the people writing games will stop doing it on the same scale as today if nobody cares to write reviews or give feedback and that's a shame.

8.) According to your profile you've already written around 50 rooms and over 200 tasks. About what percentage of the game would you say this represents? Do you have a rough idea of when it will be completed?

I would say that I'm about 65 – 70% done, and I am pretty sure that I will release the game this year. Again, most of it depends how fast I can get the drawings from my artist. Another of my considerations is when to release it. Should I release it as soon as possible, or should I wait and then try to enter one of the competitions... Well, I guess I'll just go ahead and release it. I'm not sure I have the patience to wait.

Creating a game sounds so easy, but if you want to make a game that matters, there are literally hundreds of things to take into considerations. Without giving away too much of the plot I can tell you that in order to solve the mystery of Ghost town, you will need a stick of dynamite… Do you know how many tasks and events it takes to make the handling of the dynamite realistic? Not only is there the way the player is supposed to use it. But what if he/she lights it prematurely, or if the player decides to blow up something other than the object the dynamite is intended for. What if the dynamite is thrown away, or against something... will it explode or just drop to the ground… it's enough to make your hair gray *lol*

But I am pretty confident that I'll release it this year.

9.) What about other projects? Are you one of those drifters with dozens of WIPs sitting on your computer, or has all your focus been on Ghost Town. What about after Ghost Town?

I have thought about my next project. When I read a book, or watch a movie it often happens that I see a possible puzzle. Just think about Indiana Jones... There are tons of ready made puzzles, just waiting to be converted into Adrift.

But I am focusing on one project at the time. I have learned from the other drifters that if you have a lot of projects you are likely to get none of them finished so I am sticking to Ghost town for now, but I am collecting information and ideas for my next project.

My next project? Well… That's a tough question. Of course I've done a lot of thinking about the next game. But asking me to tell what it isn't nice... I don't want to be impolite or think bad of my fellow drifters, but like a poker player I prefer to keep my cards to myself for now. I would hate to see my idea being used by someone else. Like everyone else I am sure that I have a unique idea that nobody else have thought of…

So forgive me if I'm keeping it to myself for the moment. I can tell you this much, it's going to be about time traveling, and there is going to be a mad scientist.

It is going to be a graphical game too, like Ghost town, but probably much bigger.

Is the reception of Ghost town going to have an influence on whether I will make another game or not, you may ask. Absolutely not. I truly enjoy making games, and will continue to do so. If people like them, it's great and of course I'm flattered if people will play my games. But making an adventure game is actually a game in itself. Just think about all the puzzles you have to solve in order to get things working the way you want…

10.) Anything else you'd like to say?

Nothing much, I guess…. I am looking forward to try out the new V.5 and I'm as impatient as the next guy. But I don't see it as a reason not to keep working on a game. Campbell said that games created with V.4 will be compatible with V.5, which is one of the reasons I have kept on working on Ghost town.

I would also like to thank all the members on the forum for all the help they have been giving me through the years. Being a "foreigner" making a game in English leaves you with some problems regarding spelling (should you use the English phrase or the American?) and also what the various things are called. The forum may be slow at the moment but people are still VERY friendly and helpful.

Finally, a thank you to Campbell for creating Adrift…. A job, truly well done.

I know this has again been a bit short, but the next issue due out on 1 October 2008 could be better – if drifters can add some content!