InsideADRIFT
The newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 26   **November/December 2005**

News and announcements

InsideADRIFT Awards 2005 details on page 5

ADRIFT games make mark in the IF Comp

The recently ended annual IF Comp saw the largest ADRIFT entry ever, and some very respectable results, three of the five entries being placed in the top half of the 36 entrants

Congratulations for Richard Otter who produced the highest placed ADRIFT entry in 11th place. It has been an amazing year for Richard who has was also won the Spring Competition, the Summer Competition (jointly) and the 'Finish the Game' Competition.

The top placings

1 Vespers, by Jason Devlin 7.92 (Z-Code)
2= Beyond, by Mondi Confinanti 7.40 (GLULX)
2= A New Life, by Alexandre Owen Muñiz7.40 (Z-Code)

The ADRIFT entrants

11 Escape to New York 5.77 (Richard Otter)
12 Mortality 5.72 (David Whyld)
14 Vendetta 5.43 (James Hall writing as Fuyu Yuki)
22 The Plague (Redux) 4.98 (Laurence Moore writing as Cannibal)
35 PTBAD6andoneeighth 1.58 (Jonathan Berman writing as Slan Xorax)

A special mention is due to a couple of drifters who entered with non-ADRIFT games. Robert Street (Rafgon) came sixth with his Z-Code game "The Colour Pink". Michael Arnaud (Marno) was a solid 18th equal with "Waldo's Pie" which he wrote in ALAN.

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Issue 27 due out 28 January 06

Editorial

I don't think I have ever been this lazy before in my life. In recent weeks I have felt little inclination to work on any games and it has been all too easy to turn off the computer and slump in front of the television instead.

At least other drifters have been hard at work, many congratulations to those who formed the biggest ADRIFT contingent ever in the IF Comp and produced strong results.

As you can see, in an attempt to stir myself from my lethargy, I have made a few changes to the layout of the newsletter.

Ken Franklin

Contact

Send any suggestions, requests or comments about the newsletter to: editor@insideadrift.org.uk

InsideADRIFT merchandise

You can now purchase an exciting InsideADRIFT mug, if you so desire. It has been updated with the new logo. The store is really not fully operational, if you are interested look at **www.cafepress.com/insideadrift**

News and announcements (Continued)

Campbell admits work on new version of ADRIFT

In a move that will not have surprised everyone, Campbell Wild said on the forum that he was now working on a new version of ADRIFT.

He also asked the drifters, with new features they wanted to see appear, should add them to the bugs/enhancements page of the main ADRIFT website. This is a chance for all to influence ADRIFT's development, though don't expect everything on your wish list to be actioned.

'Finish the Game' Comp 2005 results

The results of this unusual competition, where David Whyld created a skeleton game and others had to turn it into the finished article, have been announced on the forum and were as follow.

1. Pathway To Destruction by Richard Otter – 7.3 average score (66 points overall)
2. Take One by Robert Street [Rafgon] – 7.1 average score (57 points overall)
3. The Demon Hunter by David Parish – 6.4 average score (51 points overall)
4. The Hunter by Red Assassin – 4.9 average score (39 points overall)
5. Shadow Of The Past by Catharine Post – 4.3 average score (39 points overall)
6. Jack Of Shadows by Arnold "Ace" Rimmer – 4.1 average score (37 points overall)

This has been an interesting exercise and certainly looks worth considering running again in the future.

So much chatter

It is funny how, at fairly regular intervals, there is a renewed interest in having somewhere for real-time chatting between drifters.

A few years back it was the chat on MSN where we would gather for some evenings. Then a few of us tried out the Global Communications Network software (GCN) that allowed us not only to chat but also to play a few online games like chess and reverse. There was also a period when the FlasChat room on the InsideADRIFT site was used, and it is still there if anyone wants to use it. Each of these has seemed to have had a lifespan that ended with usage dropping off. Over the past year it seems like most of the conversation has been on MSN's instant messaging.

Lately one of our newer users, VioletDream, once again asked about chat on the forum and has set up chat via IRC, though it has proved fairly difficult finding a setup that everyone is able use.

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition

The rules for the competition can be found at http://www.adriftwiki.org.uk and reflect a few changes that have been made. The most notable is that winners of ADRIFT game competitions and the best placed ADRIFT games in the Spring Thing and IF Comp will game automatic entry to the Game of The Year Competition. As well as this others can still enter another game, either new or previously released this year.

Entries have to be in by December 18th after which there will be a two week period of judging. The winner will be announced at the InsideADRIFT Awards Ceremony that will be held online early in the new year.

Wider IF Community

Spring Thing 2006

For the second year Greg Boettcher is running the Spring Thing, which is basically the Annual IF Comp run in March/April without the two hour playing rule. This means the Spring Things is the only event for larger games.

This year the rule that said that only 20 entries would be accepted has been removed as Greg felt it took too long to administer. There is still the $7 non-returnable entry deposit that proves a little controversial, but helps to create a large prize pot. Last year there were six entries and some $340.00 of prize money as well as three non-cash prizes making it a fairly lucrative event to enter (last place netted $60).

(For more details go to http://www.springthing.net)

Forum news

ADRIFT on Assignment

This was an idea from David Whyld that was taken up by Chenshaw. The basic idea is for drifters to come up with a game idea and meet deadlines to add to their game and gradually develop something to release.

The first phase, Operation GNAT, was to come up with a synopsis for a game and broad outlines for it. This is now complete and seven entries have been posted up.

The second phase, Operation KATYDID, is now underway. The object is to "To write an introduction and at least three full room descriptions; complete your map with all provisional rooms. "

Drifters birthdays

December 2005

3 dove (23)	**20** Sharkie (32) phkb (36)
6 Samo (17) reelyor (59)	**21** Tech (35) LapTop Tech (35) catpost (45)
9 J. A. Hatfield (19)	**23** Massassi (29)
10 szupie (14)	**24** CrypticWizard (34)
11 Op. Katydid	**25** Ravenous (18) Foul Old Man (102)
14 Brighterskyte (25)	**28** Scurvy Sockpuppet (28)
16 TimSon00 (12)	**29** Hanadorobou (31) JemyM (28)
17 Radhagrrl (34)	**30** CyberNinja (13)

January 2006

1 SlimShady (57)	**14** Sockets (5) Rashstash (18)
3 CenturiGuy (44)	**15** Marno (52) Spellcaster73au (33)
6 rotter (44)	**16** Anian (20)
7 steinhenge (35) ReviewsExchange	**27** Lancer Sykera (19) Iron_John (48)
10 Mut (21) Kokaku (21)	**28** ds490 (18) Soothsayer (20) Elf Ranger (29)
11 Ketigid (25)	**30** Andye (21)
13 Captain Obvious (23)	

Events Diary

December 2005

InsideADRIFT Awards 2005 votes during this month (nominations and final voting to be announced)
10th **InsideADRIFT Awards** nominations open
11th **Op. Katydid** the next phase of ADRIFT on Assignment ends
17th **InsideADRIFT Awards** nominations close
18th **InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2005** judging starts
18th **InsideADRIFT Awards** voting starts

2006

January 2006

1st **InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2005** results
1st **InsideADRIFT Awards** voting ends
28th **InsideADRIFT Issue 27 January/February 2006** due out.

March 2006

1st **Spring Thing 2006** initial intent to enter in by today.
25th **InsideADRIFT Issue 28 March/April 2006** due out.
31st **Spring Thing 2006** games must be submitted by today.

April 2006

16-30 **InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2006** (Provisional)

InsideADRIFT Awards 2005 coming soon

Once again the community will be given the chance to nominate those who have contributed most this year.

The categories will be the same as last year when the winners were:

Most unusal ADRIFT setting/plot of the year. Wax Worx by Eric Mayer
Best in game implementation. Choose Your Own by David Whyld
ADRIFT game of the year (winner of InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition). Paint!!! by David Whyld
Best contribution by a newcomer to the ADRIFT community. Richard Otter (rotter)
Biggest contribution to the ADRIFT community (excluding game writing). Jointly Tedswippet and Mystery
ADRIFT author of the year. David Whyld

Nominations will open on the forum on Saturday December 10th and will run until Saturday December 17th when they will close. A thread will be created and everyone will be allowed to nominate up to three people in each category. When nominations close I will add up all the nominations to find the top three nominations* in each category to go forward to the main vote.

In the event of a there being more than three who are level the ties will also go forward unless the second place has more than twice as many votes in which case just the top two go forward. The organizer's decision is final.

The voting process will be conducted via a page on the InsideADRIFT site starting on Sunday December 18th and concluding on Sunday January 1st 2006.

There will be an online awards ceremony soon after the voting ends at which the winners can be congratulated and they will receive a certificate as a PDF to print out and display.

Try the Sudoko challenge

Time to relax a bit and see if you can work out this Sudoko puzzle.

All you have to do is fill in the missing numbers so that each row, column, and 3 by 3 square contains each of the digits 1 to 9 only once.

The solution is at the end of the newsletter, but you wouldn't want to cheat would you?

	3		5		1			8
1		8		4		9		5
		4	7		2		3	
		9		6				
8			9	5	4			2
				1		6		
	9		6		8	2		
2		5		7		4		3
7			4		5		1	

ADRIFT recent releases

Complete games

The Plague (Redux) (97 Kb, _Redux.zip) By Laurence Moore (Cannibal), released Sun 20th Nov 2005
A night out with the girls after work turns into a desperate and bloody fight for survival as a malevolent horror surfaces.

Mortality [version 2] (397 Kb,mortality.zip) By David Whyld, released Sun 20th Nov 2005
Some people kill for love, some for money - Steven Rogers did it for both. But what happens when the person you killed comes back looking for revenge?

Escape to New York v1.1 (70 Kb, escapetonewyork.zip) By rotter, released Wed 16th Nov 2005
Escaping on a New York bound ocean liner, you have a stolen painting worth millions hidden in the mailroom of the ship. With a buyer arranged when you arrive, all you have to do now is avoid capture and fate!
[11th place in IFComp 2005]

Can I do it? (6 Kb, heist.taf) By chillindawg, released Thu 27th Oct 2005
A puzzle game that takes no more than 15 to 20 minutes to play. As you enter the Market, your hand begins to tremble.....

Pathway to Destruction v 1.1 (30 Kb, pathway.zip) By rotter, released Sat 22nd Oct 2005
The last thing you remember is being strapped into the chair in the testing chamber.......
[1st in ADRIFT Finish the Game Comp 2005]

Can It Be All So Simple? (304 Kb,simple.zip) By TDS, released Thu 6th Oct 2005
I awake in the dead of the night, seeking a glass of water for my parched throat...

InsideADRIFT Merchandise

Although this is not intended as a money spinning idea, more a way to create items for me, these items are available for the discerning drifter to purchase.

The boxer shorts, priced at $13.49, with a discreet InsideADRIFT logo on the right leg.

Costing $17.39, the baseball jersey comes in red/blue/black and white.

Failed Intros

This was a game I started work on in August, hardly original, but quite fun. Unfortunately I really didn't manage to do too much more than write this introduction before adding it to my list of failures.

It wakes up by Ken Franklin

This has been a really enjoyable trip, this group of caves is fascinating. Up until now your holiday has been pretty dull, but as you wander through the ancient caves, that run deep into the side of Kinnevelly Mountain, it is amazing to see the wonderful paintings that decorate some of the walls. One in particular catches your eye, it depicts a group of figures running from a strange beast, it is a bit like a giant ape but could be a bear.

Standing in a large cavern, at the far end of which is a dark pool, you swing your foot at a loose stone. Catching the stone particularly well it flies swiftly, skipping three times across the surface of the water, striking the far wall with a strange crack, before landing with a dull plop in the pool.

You wander over to the water's edge and stare across at the far wall, studying the spot where the stone hit. The light is not as good over there as it is in most of the caves. Wires and lights have been run around and fixed to the walls to help the tourists appreciate the caves, but do not go around over the pool.

It looks like the impact of your carelessly kicked stone has made a small crack in the far wall. You wonder if you should let the people who run the caves know about the damage you caused, but decide you don't want any trouble.

Just then a chunk of the wall splashes into the pool, and you can see that it was quite thin, and there is a hole through to another chamber. A quick check of the guide book you are carrying tells you that there is no room shown in it. There is then a second larger fall from the wall, and a small tidal wave washes up soaking your feet.

The opening into the new chamber is now several feet across, and you can make out a large dark mass in the middle of the floor. You are shocked as you think you see the object on the floor move. Was that a trick of the light?

You stare, and your eyes widen as it becomes clear that whatever is over there is moving, very slowly, but definitely moving.

Whatever it is, the thing over there, pulls itself upwards to it's full height. The beast is massive, completely filling the hole your ill-judged kick had opened with the stone . . .

Articles

Drifters think about …. The IF Comp and ADRIFT

I said on the forum:

I would be interested in getting people's thoughts on the relationship between ADRIFT and the IF Comp. How does this massive IF event impact on the ADRIFT community? How seriously should we take it.

The aim is that a number of drifters will each contribute a few short paragraphs from their perspective. This is not a request for reviews of the comp games.

These are the contributions I received from drifters.

Lumin says:

The IFComp does have some effect on the community, but perhaps not as much as it could have. Speaking for myself, I look forward to playing the games, but I'm generally much more focused on the Adrift comps. Maybe this isn't a good thing. Perhaps I *should* pay more attention to what's going on with mainstream IF. This year we had a strong showing with games by Rotter, Cannibal, J Hall, and (of course) David Whyld. Four good games is great, but in retrospect, wouldn't it have been fantastic if that number had been doubled?

The IFComp represents just about the only time when Adrift games are played by a large number of non-Drifters, and probably has a lot to do with how Adrift is perceived by the rest of the community. As such, maybe we should be taking it a *lot* more seriously than we have in the past. This year entries were a good start, but hopefully next year will see even more games entered. (Including my own.)

Then again, why wait for the Comp? Even if they don't have Windows, everyone who voted now has SCARE or some other interpreter on their computer, and more and more people seem willing to give Adrift a chance. Maybe the reason we're about the only ones who play and review Adrift games on a regular basis is simply because not many other people even know about them. We've got the End of the Year comp, the Spring comp, the Summer comp, and various other comps and independently released games throughout the year. Not to mention the newsletter and Reviews Exchange, and all this during what is a relative dry spell for mainstream games. Perhaps if we were just a little more proactive about advertising these things on the newsgroups, we could attract more players and at least a little discussion among the rest of the community.

Ken Franklin says:

It has always been a strange relationship between ADRIFT and the annual IF Comp. We have always seemed to hold it in a degree of awe as it has seemed an impossibility for an ADRIFT game to ever climb to the pinnacle. The ADRIFT community has often been angered by its treatment in the competition and have perceived a degree of bias against our favoured authoring tool, though most comments made are broadly fair.

Reflecting on many of the comments made by competition judges it is clear that many of the gripes they have with ADRIFT games are to do with the way the runner works and also problems with the parser. This makes it hard for an author to make a game that hits the mark and probably Campbell Wild needs to pay careful attention to these remarks and try and address them in future updates. Some of these problems are that some ADRIFT features are not quite the same as the way other systems would react to user input.

David Whyld says:

The Times Are A' Changin' (…with apologies to Bob Dylan…)

As far as the IFComp 2005 was concerned, this was a pretty good year for ADRIFT. Perhaps the best year ever in fact. (Ignore the deliberately bad entry by the troll, Slan Xorox, which I'm sure no one really thinks was a 'proper' game anyway, not even the writer.) And, perhaps more positively, ADRIFT finally seems to be getting a bit of recognition from the RAIF/RGIF crowd – one even gave the top three votes to three ADRIFT games. Comments about the crappy parser and ADRIFT's other 'supposed' shortcomings were still evident but less so than in previous years. We also got a third place in the Miss Congeniality part of the voting as well (games voted for by competition entrants) – another first.

What does this mean for ADRIFT? Well, despite placing three games in the top fourteen, no ADRIFT game came higher than 11th so the best ever placing in the IFComp still remains The PK Girl's 6th in 1992, but it's a refreshing change from the years when ADRIFT games have fared pretty poorly.

Yet the strange thing is that, despite all of this, there hasn't really been a huge amount of discussion on the forum about it. ADRIFT has done better than ever before – shouldn't this be a cause for celebration? For weeks and weeks of discussion about the Comp games and speculation over the future? Unfortunately there have only been a few threads about the IFComp and now, just a matter of weeks later, discussion has died out altogether.

Admittedly ADRIFT didn't win the IFComp this year, and didn't even get a place in the top ten, but considering its usual poor showing I was surprised at the reaction when along comes a year that ADRIFT finally does get a bit of recognition.

Tell me what you love by Shuarian

It might be not a big surprise to learn that I like Interactive Fiction. After all, you're reading the InsideAdrift newsletter. It might be of some surprise, then, to learn that I think many works of Interactive Fiction could be better. I'm not talking about obvious issues like Guess-The-Verb and the like. In fact, I have something quite different on mind. Because I'm talking about your average, decent game. I know you can recognise it. You know it, you've played it. It's a well done game. What was its name, again? Do you still remember?

If not, what would be needed to make the game more remarkable, and more fun to play? Looking at the games I've played so far, a lack of motivation on the author's side doesn't seem to be the reason, nor the luck of writing or programming skills. It is probably not possible to ponder on all different and individual viewpoints on what makes a game great. So my answer is a personal one, reflecting nothing but my opinion: some authors appear to love their games, but under the strain of perfection, story telling and task management forget to put their love into the final game.

Now, I'm certainly not a hippie; love is a handy word to gain attention. I speak about love, interest, for other topics. Your love for chess, for example, or dancing; art, history, architecture; cars, cooking, computers. More examples? You have to tell me about them. Because I don't know; and don't understand. But I want to. Because you are interesting, and so are your interests.

'What?', I hear you cry, 'Should I let my medieval peasants play a game of soccer for you? Should my alien space cadet philosophise about the decline and fall of the Roman Empire?'. And you'd be perfectly reasonable to react in this manner, especially if you are writing on a more serious theme. Changing or dictate you what and how to write is not in my power, and even less my intention. But

don't you think it may be worth to include some more information in your game? I'm sure the extra effort will pay off. If you love to play tennis, have a TV which airs a tennis contest and tell me what's so fascinating about it. If you love a certain artist, put some work of his into the game and describe it to me. Why don't you explain the player how to prepare for climbing high mountains, how to shoot a photo from the right angle, or how to perform some magic tricks?

I'm certain you can find many ways to describe the things you love in your games. And I'd certainly would love to read about them.

>X Isn't Everything by Lumin

A couple of weeks ago I was replaying Eric Mayer's "A Walk at Dusk", and it occurred to me that one of the elements I really liked, one of the things that made the locations seem so *real*, was the inclusion of all the little sensory details. You weren't just looking at this little country road, but could smell the air, listen to sounds in the distance, even feel the sharp little pebbles against your feet. Of course, "A Walk at Dusk" is hardly the typical work of IF, and wasn't even trying to be a "game" per se, but I'd find the opportunity to use all five senses just as welcome in an old-fashioned dungeon crawl.

Just think of it...

*****

>look

You are in the crumbling remains of an ancient prison cell. There is a human skeleton bound by rusting chains in one corner of this tiny room, and in places the damp walls are nearly hidden by patches of bright green lichen. The wall to the east has partially collapsed, and remains of the rotted wooden door leads back out to the south.

>listen

A small rodent or insect is rustling about somewhere to the east. The steady sound of dripping water echoes through the room.

>smell

The stench of mould and mildew is still noticeable here, but not nearly as bad as you'd expect from a place that's been shut out from fresh air for so long.

>feel

The air is wet and chilly. There seems to be a draft coming from the north wall.

*****

Not the greatest examples, but you get the idea. (Leaving out 'taste' since there's not much I can imagine a person wanting to eat in that particular room.) That draft could signal a secret passage in the north wall. That rodent could be lining its nest with a valuable bit of parchment. Sure, these might be things a diligent player could figure out by examining each of the walls in turn, but is that anywhere near as cool?

Text games have always relied primarily on what the character can see, and in the average game the player probably types 'x' ten times as much as any other command. But being able to explore your surroundings in other ways as well would add much more atmosphere to a game, and just off the top

of my head I can think of a variety of ways it could be incorporated into puzzles. Even if the descriptions generated are nothing but window dressing with little bearing on winning the game, they can make the whole experience seem deeper and more immersive.

Of course I can imagine how trying to cover every single possibility could soon become overwhelming for an author, so it may not be practical in anything but a fairly small game. Still, even a larger effort could benefit from including a few unique puzzles relying on senses, as long as the player was properly clued beforehand.

Ever had the power go out and had to feel your way to a flashlight? Now can you imagine how neat that might be in an IF game? How about a poison-detecting puzzle that relies on smell or taste? Eavesdropping on a murder plot? (Though of all the neglected senses, 'listen' at least gets a little more regular use than smell, feel, or taste.) Maybe you've just been injected with a serum that heightens *all* your senses for a short time.

Yet you really don't even have to go through the effort of adding things like sound and smell as puzzles or even extra commands. Both of these can easily be inserted into a regular room description to give it just a little more realism and pizazz. Next time you describe a room, instead of just thinking of what you see, try imagining yourself as really there and describing the entire spectrum of senses. You might be surprised at how effective an extra sentence or two can be.

Reviews

Invasion of the Second-Hand Shirts by Duodave (Review by C. Henshaw)

Cheerful, chirpy, cheeky - hey, that's how I like my games; I'd almost forgot it's been such a long time since I've played one like that ... Duodave's small game starts off with an intro that has nothing to do with the game. Sounds annoying, but there's fair warning. And the beginning of the game got me laughing, so the game started out well.

I quite like the style of the spare, plain locations and descriptions. Some of them belie a certain haphazard programming though. For one thing, too many things are un-examinable. That wiped the grin off my face pretty quickly. There are also sounds that are un-listenable.

At one point you have a brief conversation with Aphrodite (who is, of course, nude), Then it's back to being plagued by non-existent items. A fallen tree is mistaken for the huge tree (which I shouldn't even be able to see from here). In one case, you try to examine something, and it says 'You see no such thing', and then a second later, a message pops up 'Just kidding,...' and proceeds to describe. Cute, but would be much funnier if everything else was implemented, too.

Unfortunately, one of the all-time game busting bugs ever mars this otherwise fun and quirky game: an object that exists in the room, but isn't listed in the room description. A little something to keep the humour up. Oh yes, and there's no real ending, you are (quite literally) left hanging.

Apparently this is a joke game. And I should've guessed, considering the blurb on the ADRIFT site where I downloaded it says 'This is a really bad game. I guarantee you'll hate it.' Etc. Of course, I thought - he's just saying that to get people to play it! But no, it really is bad. Duodave obviously has some comedic talent – too bad he posted it without finishing it.

Solution to the Sudoko

6	3	2	5	9	1	7	4	8
1	7	8	3	4	6	9	2	5
9	5	4	7	8	2	1	3	6
3	4	9	2	6	7	5	8	1
8	1	6	9	5	4	3	7	2
5	2	7	8	1	3	6	9	4
4	9	1	6	3	8	2	5	7
2	8	5	1	7	9	4	6	3
7	6	3	4	2	5	8	1	9

Please send any contributions or suggestions to editor@insideadrift.org.uk.