

InsideADRIFT

The newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 18

August 2004

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News and announcements

ADRIFT 4.0 release 44 arrives

The mythical release 44 of ADRIFT 4.0, mentioned as being out soon two issues ago, arrived on 10 July, after what seemed an eternity of testing. It brings a few, mostly minor changes, but most importantly a raft of fixes for some of those annoying bugs that have troubled some.

An early problem did appear with the map popping up in front of the runner window when an adventure started up. As always there is no way that a limited number of testers, however diligent, can test everything. Once the masses get their hands on things any bugs will quickly surface.

jAsea no longer being developed

Sadly Mark J. Tilford (ralphmerridew), the developer of the JAVA ADRIFT Runner clone, has decided to end development. I would like to register the thanks of the community for his work, which resulted his receiving the unanimous vote for the Most Innovative Drifter Award at the InsideADRIFT Awards last January.

The note placed on the jAsea development site on SourceForge.net reads:

*jAsea (jAsea's ADRIFT Style Execution Application) was an open-source Java program to run ADRIFT games. jASEA is no longer being developed; it has been replaced by Simon Baldwin's splinter project SCARE.
http://www.geocities.com/legion_if/scare.html*

It is always disappointing when such a valuable project runs its course, and we have been very lucky to have people prepared to develop software for free. Such projects help to persuade the rest of the IF world that ADRIFT should be taken seriously by reducing the scope for claims that ADRIFT is Windows only, although that still applies to authoring of games.

Editorial

Wow, doesn't seem a year since I was noting the end of the first year of the newsletter. This issue marks the end of the second volume and I suppose that should bring a little look back and forward

I think I have largely managed the things I planned for in issue 10, by way of the regular schedule for publishing, interviews from wider IF community, and continued input from Drifters.

KF

New (and improved?) newsletter

With talk of revamping the main ADRIFT site going the rounds on the forum I decided that the newsletter, and it's recently remodelled forum site, could do with a facelift too.

This scheme is designed to be lighter on the eye, with dark backgrounds replaced by rules. I think it is easier on the eye, but what do you think? You can give your views on the normal ADRIFT forum or go to www.insideadrift.org.uk

The InsideADRIFT site is gradually evolving with static content pages, being branded InsideADRIFT Extra, adding the extra information that backs up the community.

Of course all of this counts for nothing if it isn't used. So far registrations on the forum have been a great disappointment. Probably should have asked Campbell to give his server a tweak to force people to find somewhere else for discussions. (Sort of joking - honest!)

Not saying you have to register there, just that it means I know people are interested.

Contact

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

Find the newsletter at: <http://www.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

More details can be found on page 10.

Competition news roundup

The Three-Hour Game Competition

The results, posted by Woodfish on the ADRIFT Forum were as follows:

1st Place: Briefcase by Woodfish

2nd Place: Jailbreak Bob by David Whyld

3rd Place: Zombie Cow by Amber Rollins-Walker

4. Lost Souls by Mel S

5. Amulet by Daniel Hielbert

6. Shadrick's Travels by Mystery

7. Annihilation of Think.com by Adam Dundas

Congratulations to everyone who took part for all their efforts, and to all who voted without whom there wouldn't be a result. There are some reviews posted on the Forum.

Drifters birthdays

August 2004

- 2 schoolsinger (20)
- 4 outsider (17)
- 5 gigabyteman (35)
- 8 Lena1975 (29)
- 15 Coolkid (16)
- 18 rocksockm (27)
- 21 Bacchus (36) malleus
maleficarum (31)
- 22 Minicomp
- 23 Woodfish (16) Damien (18)
White Divine (20) Mickey Crocker
(20)
- 26 Starstream (59)
- 27 re_volvo (31) Filthy Bill (33)

September 2004

- 1 Astridian (21)
- 4 RansomDchs (47) cewilson (45)
Lailokken (48)
- 5 Campbell (28)
- 10 Lycaon (21) brucehum (33)
- 11 Rabbinical College of Cordova
(61)
- 13 Chaos (19)
- 17 Mystery (32)
- 20 ondre (26)
- 24 Jacqueline (21)
- 27 MadTom (18)
- 28 kolya (27)
- 29 phazonstorm (12)

InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp 2004

The competition is now approaching fast. In the time limited competition the game must be written during the period 15-22 August 2004. To ensure compliance there will be required first and completion line for the game, as well as a compulsory object to be announced on 15 August 2004.

In the other two sections, the build a better maze event and the games limited to 10 rooms, authors can write them in advance, so are hopefully working hard as I write this.

For more information go to http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/comp_sum_04

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2004

The event at the end of the year to showcase the best of the past years games, and any new games people want to release, will once again take place over the Christmas/New Year period.

I have posted up the rules for the event on the InsideADRIFT site, if you see anything you think is wrong and I may change it. Please check it sooner rather than later as I will not change the rules once we are into September.

Wider IF community events

2004 Interactive Fiction Competition

The huge annual event is now drawing near, with entries in by late September, though you need to have expressed an interest in entering by the start of that month. A number of drifters have expressed their intention of entering, but actually getting the game ready and in is the hard part.

There was a rather odd argument that developed on the RAIF newsgroup when one prospective IFComp author took it upon himself to launch a one man assault on the previously unreleased rule. He allegedly wanted to enter half a dozen games, but had previously made them available to download. Seemed more like someone who wanted to put on a show, and be seen to cause a stir.

IntroComp judging underway

Since the 18th of July judging of the seven IntroComp entries has been taking place, and is due to end on the same day as this newsletter appears.

Events Diary

22 - 29, August 2004

The InsideADRIFT Summer Minicomp in August. Entries in 22 Aug, judging ending 29 Aug.

September 01, 2004

2004 Interactive Fiction Competition
You must have signed up to say that you intend to enter by today.

September 11, 2004

2004 InsideADRIFT 19 Sep/Oct 2004 due out
The September/October issue of the newsletter should be available today.

September 30, 2004

2004 Annual Interactive Fiction Competition
Entries must be in by today.

October 01, 2004

2004 Interactive Fiction Competition
Entries released for judging (ends 15 Nov. 04)

October 30, 2004

2004 InsideADRIFT 20 November 2004 due out
The November issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today

November 15, 2004

2004 Interactive Fiction Competition
Judging ends today. Results announced when organiser has worked them out.

November 27, 2004

2004 InsideADRIFT 21 due out
The December issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today.

Spring Thing revival proposed and announced

On RAIF there has been a proposal that the Spring Thing, an IF competition that ran a few years ago should be revived. One of the main differences from the Annual IF Comp is that there is no two hour game playing limit for judges. This is facilitated by limiting the number of accepted entries to twenty.

The idea was greeted with a thread that has exceeded a hundred posts, with input being generally favourable.

The competitions rules are now posted up and everything is set for take off.

Forum news

Much more lively this month, with quite a bit of discussion over the main ADRIFT website. NickyDude was putting forward the possibility of a facelift for the pages, and this time Campbell agreed that he wouldn't be against an update to the look of the site to modernise it. Campbell has now said (19th July):

Just so you know, I've started working on the 'new' ADRIFT site. Once finished, it will have:

- o Member Logins, for uploading, reviews etc*
- o Full database back-end*
- o Quick-links into Forum*
- o Quick-links to top adventures*
- o Search Site facility*
- o News*
- o Sitemap*
- o Hopefully a much more professional look*

Following my article in the last issue on the feasibility of an ADRIFT collaboration project DavidW instigated a thread which discussed the idea further, considered possible genre's and decided to try to have another go at a joint venture. Good luck to those making the attempt, I am still far from convinced as to how it will fare in what tends to be a fairly solitary community.

December 19, 2004

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2004
 Entries for the Game of the Year (formerly "End of Year") Competition must be in by 1500hrs GMT today. Juggling will take place over the next two weeks.

This event is open to any ADRIFT games released during 2004 as well as any newly written games.

December 24, 2004

InsideADRIFT Review of the Year 2004 due out
 Hopefully the special end of year issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today.

IF Shorts

Little snippets of IF trivia

On XYZZY news there is a small poll "In Honor of IntroComp... Have you ever started to code a new adventure game but never finished it?" It is not surprisingly running heavily in favour of yes, but only by about eight to one. From personal experience I would have expected even more yes votes.

If you want to have your say, go to <http://www.xzyznews.com/> and vote (it's top right as you look at it)

Drifters toolbox

MiniMinder

This is one of those neat little applications that can be a real boon to the busy organiser. It is simply a small window that pops up when you log in and displays whatever events you add to it.



As you can see from the above you can set the period of days that you want to be reminded of the event, and MiniMinder will count down the days to go.

An important thing about this program is that you can set reminders for things like the second Monday of every month etc, which makes a useful addition rather than just having to set the day.

For more details go to <http://www.vellosoft.com/miniminder/index.html>

*Guess we all run out of thoughts, I have had fun with the Drifters Toolbox tossing in bits of software that I think might be of use to you. This month I thought I had nothing useful, then found MiniMinder, but it is becoming difficult.
 If you can think of a piece of freeware/shareware software you have found useful, please make a suggestion (review it yourself if you like).*

Interview: KF questioned by Mystery

In a change for me, Mystery quizzes me on current matters, most particularly the competitions that I organise.

(Q) Before I start, on behalf of the ADRIFT community, and myself I want to thank you for playing such a big role in within the community. Taking over the newsletter was a huge responsibility that you have done magnificently at. You are also very productive in holding competitions for ADRIFT users, and without you, it wouldn't be as much fun. I think that is a good place to begin.

(A) Er, thanks. I only do it because I enjoy doing that sort of stuff.

The (big) idea by KF

Walkthroughs just make the player lazy!

This is a view put forward by Mystery. She feels that walkthroughs make it too easy for the player to look at the solution provided rather than try to work it out.

While I have some sympathy with this view, and am probably as guilty as anyone of reaching for the walkthrough to quickly, I do feel they provide a valuable service to the player. The way I see it, there is little point in writing a game if no one will play it, so the player must be considered.

If you have a tricky puzzle early on, the player might never get past it to look at all the rest that you put into the game. Much better that they give in, and look at the solution you provide, rather than just give in and decide your game is unplayable.

A decent game will have been play tested by more than just the author **but** that still doesn't mean all the bugs will be gone, and all possible command variations covered.

As a way of meeting Mystery's concerns the rules for all of my future competitions will still insist on a walkthrough, but it will only be supplied to the player on request to me or the author. Of course, if hints are well implemented, there will be less of a need to consult a walkthrough.

(Q) The InsideADRIFT Summer of 2004 Competition is just around the corner, and you've switched things about a bit from past competitions. This year, you have decided to essentially have three competitions is one, so to speak. Why did you decide to break away from the traditional set up that you have used in the past?

(A) Just hoped it would spark people's interest, and having the different formats would allow more to have a go and enter.

(Q) One of the categories in the competition is a 10-room game. Do you feel that having size limits for such competitions offers the author a challenge more than it would otherwise?

(A) I have to admit I like this sort of limitation as I think it means that the author cannot get carried away with making a sprawling game area. It encourages them to make sure that each location counts and isn't just padding. I can imagine some would think it was a major restriction, but I often think that it is a nice size for a game. In many ways it is there just to remind the author that this is a minicomp.

(Q) The maze competition is one that has drawn some attention since your announcement of the competition. The majority of people find mazes annoying and quite frustrating to design. There is really no need to explain why. If you have ever played a game with a maze in it, you have likely felt the frustration of navigation first hand. So what made you decide to integrate a maze into the competition?

(A) I think I had just been on RAIF and seen a criticism of a games inclusion of a maze. It just made me wonder if people just have a certain expectation of what a maze is. So I then thought, on the mousetrap line, of a build a better maze game competition. In many ways that turns the old idea of it is a text adventure so I'd better add a maze on it's head.

Another factor was that, as I had decided the competition would be in sections, if no one wanted to do the maze game that was no great loss but if you did enter the section would reward you if yours were the best maze game.

(Q) Following the path for something new this year, you have decided on a timed competition, of sorts, with the details to be announced a week before the competition begins. What made you decide to hold this sort of event in the first place?

(A) Personally, I find the nature of the one-hour comps just too fast for an old timer like me, and also was so open to a certain amount of flexibility in the timing. I am not saying that people stretched their hour, just that their interpretation of what work counted might have been different.

This made me want to make a timed competition that had to include an element that was only known at the start of the authoring period. That said my intention is to make the required elements flexible enough to

Getting connected

Wirelessly online

My best addition this month has been a bit of hardware rather than software, and it probably wouldn't be of use to many of you, only those with more than one computer that you want connected via broadband to the Internet (and each other).



I have just taken delivery of a NETGEAR Wireless ADSL Firewall Router, and a very impressive bit of kit it is. In under half an hour my desktop machine was wired into the box and my laptop was downloading virus updates via a wireless link. Having a proper hardware firewall between my machines and the Internet gives an extra feeling of security. Up until now my efforts at connecting my computers had failed, so in terms of simplicity I cannot recommend this too highly.

work in most genres.

(Q) This is the slow time of year for ADRIFT, on the Forum anyway, were you worried at all about participation? And did you feel that having three in one would encourage more to enter? Were you at all concerned that having three in one would produce shorter, perhaps lesser quality pieces?

(A) When I first held a Summer Minicomp, in August 2001, my idea was that it was something for those of us not involved in the mammoth event that is the annual IF Comp. That was the first competition I had run and had just 2 entries, being won by Heal Butcher's "Silk Noil". That was a time before I had rules on minimum numbers of entries; the next 2 attempts had a total of one entry.

Participation levels are often a matter of timing, which is why I try to announce well in advance. I hope that people will be inspired to enter at least one section, I really simply aimed to move away from a one size fits all competition and to allow authors more choice to pick something that fits in with their authoring style.

I can see why there might be a concern over the quality of entries, but would feel that two out of three sections allow the author plenty of time to work on their games.

(Q) I have seen some of your work first hand, and find your stories quite imaginative. When can we expect to see more of your work?

(A) Thanks, I do hope to produce something sometime, maybe, perhaps! Trouble is I have an idea and rush into it, then work out that I have an idea but no plot, and no idea of how it ends. That said I have from time to time gone down the planning route too, and haven't finished those either.

(Q) You seem to start many projects with wonderful ideas, but nothing ever comes of it. Have you ever considered writing something more linear, since there is also an audience that prefers linear IF?

(A) I think that many of my projects to veer off down the linear route, but they still go the same way into the dustbin of what might have been. In many ways my taste in IF is more down the linear path as well "Unraveling God" being a particular favourite of mine.

(Q) The Annual IF Competition is just around the bend. Do you have any advice that you could share with anyone who is interested in either taking part in the competition or being a judge?

(A) I would first say think very carefully before entering this contest, particularly if it is your first piece of IF. The event is such a big part of the interactive fiction year, and probably accounts for the majority of full game releases in a year, but you should be very confident about the quality of your game to enter. The big number one rule must be to get your game properly tested, this is relatively straightforward and the results will make your game better, which must be good.

ADRIFT recent releases

I hope this brief listing helps drifters spot anything they have previously missed. In the end it is only of any use if something is produced to list.

The Three-Hour Game Competition (3hr_comp.zip 85 Kb) By Various, released 05-07-04

This judging pack contains all seven entries to the competition, with a judging form and various walkthroughs. Update: the competition was won by Woodfish with "Briefcase".

From the Demos Page

Demo of emotions (emotionsv3.taf 1 Kb) By Chuck Smith, released 20-07-04

This is a very simple demo of how an actor's actions (hitting an old man vs giving him a sandwich) can affect his appearance when examining him. Also included is a simple "ask him about life" conversation to show how his response to kindness or cruelty will affect whether he responds or not. Be sure to extract the ALR file to see how it's set up. If you know of a better way of doing this, let me know.

Sword concealed in cane (swordincane.taf 0 Kb) By Mystery, released 15-07-04

This demonstrates a sword concealed within a cane. It uses a task to draw the sword.

Anyone with an interest in IF should be encouraged to be a judge in the competition as they will see what is happening in current writing. By doing so you will be contributing to the wider community, something that we drifters need to do. While judging though you need to try and keep a balance and vote on merit, not just bump up any ADRIFT entries. I know some non-drifters will be biased against ADRIFT entries, although with jAsea and SCARE they have less chance to moan that they couldn't play the games as they don't use windows.

(Q) And last but not least, you are also holding a Game of the Year Competition. In competitions past, the End of the Year Competition included entries of new or previously released games during the year. Is that going to change this time around and if so what criteria do you feel the game of the year should have?

(A) I am going to leave the rules more or less as they were last year as they certainly produced the right result with "To Hell in a Hamper" winning well. My one hope is that people will enter games written before in the year, not just new games. I will probably have a thread on the forum nearer the time that will ask drifters to nominate the games they have enjoyed over the year, then pressurise the authors to enter them.

(Q) Thank you for taking the time to talk with me. We all appreciate what you do for ADRIFT and the community.

(A) Always a pleasure to converse with you. My contribution to our group is only a small part of the whole, but to remain active we all have to play our part.

Three-Hour Game Competition

A report from Woodfish (Organiser and winner)

I was a bit dubious about holding this competition with so many other minicomps in the pipelines, but with words of encouragement from several drifters, I thought I'd give it ago. And I'm glad I did - it was a great competition fuelled by many enthusiastic authors and players (and gave me another competition win under my belt!)

As might know, I've hosted a couple of one-hour competitions which have been quite fun, so I thought why not take the next step up, and make it three-hours? This, I thought, would give authors a chance to spend more time on their games, and be able to produce adventures of a higher quality. As I found out when producing my entry, making a game in three hours can actually be harder than one - you've actually got to put thought into the game, and come up with something that will justify the three hours spent on it!

So the competition got underway, and my early worries that no-one would be interested were soon squashed. In the end, there were six

Running Water (faucets.taf 1 Kb) By Mystery, released 06-07-04

This is a faucet demo that uses hot and cold water taps. You can turn on and off both the hot and cold water. If the hot and cold are on at the same time, the water changes to warm. If both are off, it will display that the water is off. If you find this demo useful, please leave your comments.

Random Puzzle Tutorial/Demo (randpuzt.zip 4 Kb) By Cobra1, released 02-07-04

This is a small demo or tutorial on how a random puzzle can work in a game...or how to make your own. Included is a readme with the full details. Being my first release, feel free to comment here, on the ADRIFT Forums, or even via my E-Mail. I hope it helps...

Failed game intros

Nothing for you this issue, I can't share all of my game ideas with you!

Do you have a game that has hit the rails, but you would like to share with the community? If so, send it in to me.

entertaining entries (with one exception - mentioning no names), and lots of people that got involved with the judging, including quite a few from outside the community. The results, as always in a competition like this, were very close, and the top three underwent much shuffling, but in the end, my entry "Briefcase" won, with David Whyld coming second with "Jailbreak Bob".

Looking towards the future though, I'm planning to give up hosting minicomps, and give someone else a go. I'd prefer just to sit back and work on an entry for one without having to worry about organisation and meeting deadlines (don't know how KF manages it). Thanks for everyone who has been involved with all the one-hour competitions, and particularly this three-hour competition, which has been great fun.

Gamebooks as Interactive Fiction

There was an interesting article on XYZZY News recently ("Old-style books for possible IF?") [<http://www.xyzzynews.com/>] which speculated on the possibility of writing Choose Your Own Adventure style gamebooks as Interactive Fiction.

CYOA (for short) gamebooks, for those who've never heard of them, were a big thing back in the 80's and, to a lesser degree, the early 90's. They were books generally told in second person narrative and split into varying amounts of numbered sections. A set of options at the end of each section would lead to other sections, thereby allowing the reader the ability to choose their own path through the book.

In theory anyway. Quite a few of them were very linear and often offered different options that led, in a round-a-bout sort of way, to the same conclusion. But if you were reading the book for the first time, you wouldn't be aware of this and perhaps would even think that *you* were the one choosing how the book progressed. The illusion that you were in control was a very believable one.

It was an ingenious idea and one which led to the publication of several hundreds gamebooks covering a large number of genres (although sword-and-sorcery fantasy tended to be predominant) and lasted for well over a decade until, inevitably, the idea lost its appeal and gamebooks pretty much died out in the mid-90's.

One problem the gamebooks always had was replay value. Some – (the best of all of them) the Fabled Lands series - had lots of replay value and you could play them a dozen times or more and *still* find things you hadn't seen before. Others you played once (the later Lone Wolf books), saw everything and felt precious little need to play them again as nothing changed between one play and the next. Some books introduced options that allowed you to play the books using different characters (Blood Sword did this to good effect) and others (Lone Wolf and some Fighting Fantasy books) gave the player different abilities to choose from which changed certain of the options presented to you. All

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 mug, priced at \$11.39, has a crisp copy of the new magazine logo. It is large enough for those beverages needed to keep you going through long creative sessions.



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

Also available from www.cafepress.com/insideadrift are: sweatshirt \$21.99; mousepad \$10.99; teddy bear \$13.49; sticker \$2.49.

of these things added replay value but as the books were of a limited size (some very limited), there was only a certain amount of times you could replay them before you had run through every possible combination of options and found yourself playing a game you had already played.

And then the gamebook genre died. Looking back on it, it was kind of inevitable that it was on the way out. Aside from the Fabled Lands series, there were few gamebooks of any great quality released in the 90's and the long-running series were either running out of steam (Fighting Fantasy and Lone Wolf) or reusing the same ideas over and over again (Choose Your Own Adventure). Also, there was the advent of computers and the average teenager, the general target audience for such gamebooks, was far more interested in playing the latest graphical extravaganza than reading a book. So farewell to the gamebook...

But then the XYZZY article caught my eye.

It raised a number of interesting ideas, the main one being how easy it would be to write a CYOA gamebook as an IF game. The platform wouldn't matter as whichever one you chose – be it Adrift, Tads, Inform, Hugo, whatever – could handle the format easily enough and would be more than capable of doing whatever you wanted. The only limit to what you could do with a gamebook as an IF game would be your imagination.

Replay value would be an easy thing to fix. In gamebooks, most of the options you are given are static; i.e. they don't change from one playing to the next. You come to a steel door while you're playing one time and you might, say, be given three options: 'smash the door down – turn to xx', 'try to open it – turn to xx' or 'knock on the door – turn to xx'. Play the book again and arrive at the steel door and the options will be exactly the same.

Admittedly there were ways to vary things even in the gamebooks of old. The option of smashing the door down might lead you to a dice roll to determine whether you're strong enough to smash it down or too weak to manage it. The opening the door option would ask if you had a key. Knocking on the door might produce someone who opened it, or maybe nothing would happen at all. Of course, you could have more options than that: 'listen at the door – turn to xx', 'use an item to open the door – turn to xx', 'set fire to the door – turn to xx' and others besides. But, as gamebooks were of a limited size, the range of options presented was generally limited to the bare minimum. While it might seem like a good idea to have seventy-five sections devoted to various ways of getting the player past a locked door, the player isn't going to be especially impressed if you've just wasted a quarter of the book on just that one scene.

Interactive Fiction has no limits. Or, to put it more accurately, it *does* but those limits are so vast that it's unlikely in the extreme anyone would ever run into them. The largest novel ever written could be

converted to a regular IF game and not come anywhere near the limits of even the most humble system, and as anyone who has played a gamebook can attest few gamebooks could compare size-wise with large novels. Most were little over a hundred and fifty pages and few hit two hundred and fifty. The majority were a lot smaller.

Of course, in gamebooks when you talk about size you're really referring to the number of sections they contain. The more sections, the larger the gamebook. The most I ever saw in one gamebook was 800 which allowed for a vast amount of gameplay. But this was an anomaly more than anything and most of the books were less than half that size. Fighting Fantasy generally came to an exact count of 400 sections, Lone Wolf 350; CYOA varied at around the 100 mark. The others tended to vary between 100 and 300. This meant there was only a certain amount of space to fit the entire book in.

So while those seventy-five sections devoted to opening a door might have been impossible to have in a gamebook (without swelling the size of said gamebook to a page count in the thousands), in an IF game it would be a simple case of putting in as many options as you wanted. To hell with the size requirements. And while seventy-five sections for opening a door is overkill in anyone's book, there's absolutely nothing to stop anyone doing it if they were so inclined.

Another advantage IF has over the standard gamebook format is in allowing for greater amounts of replay value. As said before, gamebooks were very static. Nothing changed from one playing to the next and while differing abilities and powers and characters could give you reason to try them again, as the gamebooks themselves were of a limited size, there was only so much that could be done in them before you were playing the same game over and over again.

Not so with IF. One great thing about IF is the use of variables to randomise the way games play. Say, for example, you're playing a gamebook and you come to a bridge over a gorge. You're given the option of either crossing the bridge or not crossing it. You choose to cross it. Several things could happen here – you might fall off the bridge, you might cross it safely, you might decide to turn back. Other things *could* happen but, with the size of gamebooks being limited, they probably won't.

In IF, you could have dozens of different options. You could assign skills to the player. He might be particularly agile so that when the bridge sways to one side, he has a 2 in 6 chance of remaining on it. He might get attacked by a giant eagle partway across and by using the system's inbuilt combat system could fend off said eagle. There might be a point in the middle of the bridge where a random event could sweep him off into space or just buffet him about a little. The possibilities are pretty much endless. With enough time and effort, the player could cross the bridge a couple dozen times and have a different experience each time.

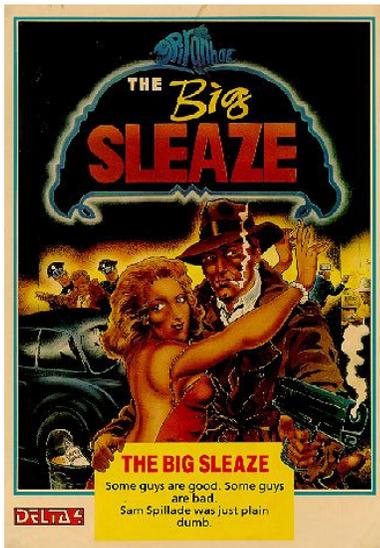
And then we come to cheating.

Yep, cheating was a major problem in gamebooks. The best example I can think of is the use of the combat system that most of the gamebooks employed. You, the player, faced one or more enemies. You struck a blow, he (or they) struck a blow back at you. You roll your dice and see what the outcome of the combat is. If you win, you turn to xx. If you die, you turn to xx and start over again. Only the slight problem with this is, of course, that if the player doesn't want to turn to xx and start over again, he doesn't have to. If he loses the fight and then decides to take the winning option, there's nothing that can be done about it. The option has to be displayed in case the player wins the fight and it is still displayed even if he loses so anyone not unduly bothered by a bit of cheating every now and then could take the winning option every time and not concern themselves over turning to xx and starting again.

Another example (and one no doubt familiar to anyone who has ever played a gamebook) is that crucial time in a gamebook when you are asked if you have such-and-such an item. If you do, turn to xx. If you don't, turn to xx and lose the gamebook and fail miserably knowing that you haven't got anywhere. Assuming everyone plays by the rules, there's no problem with this kind of thing. But how often is it that you come to a door you know you need to open to reach the end of the book and, darnit, you only went and picked the magic sword instead of the key? Oh well, not to worry. You've got the option in front of you to open the door even though you *haven't* got the key. Just take it and head through the door. Everyone probably did it at least once. I know I did. And a lot more than once.

Then you have the puzzles that generally popped up from time to time. They would follow the format of "Work out the sum of xx and xx, multiple by xx, add xx and then turn to the numbered section equalling the result". Usually these were simple and straightforward, sometimes they were confusing. Every time you could bypass the whole process by flicking through the gamebook until you came to the numbered section which starts "Well done, you figured out the puzzle". As this was generally quicker than working out the puzzle the old-fashioned way, it was widely used and made the puzzles a page-flicking annoyance more than anything rather than a test of mental acuity.

Each of those scenarios, and many others besides, could be countered in IF. With combat handled by the system (the player perhaps makes decisions from time to time about how they want to fight), no option would be conveniently displayed for any would-be cheaters to choose so if they didn't win the fight fair and square, they'd be back to the start of the game whether they liked it or not. Likewise the door idea. If you don't have that key you need, you won't be getting through that door no matter how you try and cheat. Sorry. Just not going to happen. And with no way of jumping to relevant section short of figuring the puzzle out



the proper way, there's no way anyone is going to be able to cheat their way past any puzzles they stumble across.

Considering all the above, it's easy to see (ridiculously easy in fact) that a gamebook in IF format would be in many respects superior to anything in actual book format.

So – and the \$64,000 pops up – why has no one ever written one?

Of course, I'm not saying there **aren't** IF gamebooks out there (it stands to reason that there must be a few lurking around the dark corners of the Internet somewhere) but there certainly aren't any that have come to any kind of prominence. I haven't come across any myself and I don't know anyone else who has.

IF takes away the size restrictions that gamebooks in the past has, it allows for vast amount of possible options (whereas before you were limited by how many sections could fit inside the gamebook), it allows for random happenings... The possibilities, as they say, are endless. Someone could write a gamebook that spanned thousands of page and took literally months to play through. Or they could write an old-style book. Maybe even **rewrite** an old gamebook and bring it up to date. Most of the gamebooks that I played, even the best ones, had parts that could be improved upon and several (particularly Fighting Fantasy) seemed to have large chunks of them cut so they would make a certain size. Rewritten as an IF game, they could be improved and enlarged.

So why has no one ever written one?

Game reviews

“The Big Sleaze (For Sinclair Spectrum) reviewed by DavidW

"The Big Sleaze" – available from
[http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Big+Sleaze%2c+The\\$&pub=^Piranha\\$](http://www.worldofspectrum.org/infoseek.cgi?regexp=^Big+Sleaze%2c+The$&pub=^Piranha$)

My favourite of all the comedy classics the Delta 4 software company brought out in the 80's, "The Big Sleaze" is an hilarious take on The Maltese Falcon and detective games in general. I was so impressed with it I even wrote a couple of games based on the general idea myself. As a private detective you are hired by an anonymous lady to find out what has happened to her missing father. Two weeks ago, she informs you, he was due to meet her at Joe's Diner and although she's waited all this time he still hasn't shown. Something is obviously wrong...

Touches of wry humour abound throughout the game although some of the funniest await you in the very first location. Your safe is in the form of a pig, complete with an amusing description of just what has been used as the keyhole. The game also has quite a few responses to various swear words programmed into it and I have to admit that I spent a while when first playing the game trying to see which ones it

recognised and which ones it didn't. Hell, I was a teenager when I first stumbled across the game and typing in "piss" and getting a funny response to it quite made my day.

"The Big Sleaze" covers a large amount of locations but unlike most text adventures of the time these aren't just filler. Part of the reason for the game's size is that it is split into three parts, thereby neatly sidestepping the 48KB memory restriction of the system it was originally written for (the ZX Spectrum). As such, "The Big Sleaze" is considerably larger than most adventures of the time and as the player is able to move back and forth between the various parts it gives the impression of being a larger game still. Compared to some of the monster games written these days it might not seem a particularly impressive size (perhaps the entire thing would equate to around 40-50 KB in version 4 of ADRIFT) but for the time it was large indeed. Unfortunately, even with the game being split into three parts it is still too large to fit within the memory requirements without some serious corners being cut. As such, several locations feature a variety of items which are unexaminable and the game, particularly in the later stages, has a feeling of being rushed. Perhaps a better idea would have been to expand on the available material and make it a four-parter but unfortunately that wasn't to be.

Progress through the game is made via your car which is first seen parked outside your office. Jumpstarting it (quite why you don't have a set of keys to it is never explained) and then typing "drive to [location]" allows the player access to several dozen more locations. At the start of the game, precious few of these are known but by searching the locations you *do* know about, clues leading you to the others soon come to light. Fortunately on replaying the game, you can just jump in your car at the first opportunity you get and drive to any of these locations without having to hunt up the clues again, a time-saving exercise which is worth its weight in gold.

Due to its size, and the fact that it is split into three parts, "The Big Sleaze" is not an easy game. Various parts of a photograph are scattered around the game and these must be assembled into a cohesive whole, the result giving you a clue as to where you need to travel in order to finish matters off. One complication which adds to the complexity of the game is that it plays out in real-time. Each action moves the clock on ever so slightly and a good number of the locations in the game – Joe's Diner, the bank, an office block, and several others – can only be accessed at certain times of the day. Another location – the park – is fatal to enter during the hours of darkness (of course, you only discover this the hard way and once you discover it you're dead. The manner of your death, however, is very funny and worth it just to see an amusing way to die.) As such, on my first few plays through the game, I spent a considerable amount of time getting very frustrated at being unable to find a way into certain locations. I guessed I was either missing a key or simply unable to figure out just what needed doing to

get inside. I only realised the time factor when upon returning to the locations at a later stage I found them easily accessible. In hindsight, there are clues which indicate the passage of time (a bell denoting various times of the day) but I missed them the first time I played the game and I doubt I'm the only one.

Only being able to access certain locations at certain times adds a level of complexity to the game which, in all honesty, is more frustrating than inspired. Okay, it *is* a good idea but with there being no way of knowing exactly what the time is (no clock or watch is provided for the unfortunate player to tell the time) it's an idea that generally ends up being more annoying than anything else. Discovering a clue you think might lead to you progressing further and then being unable to go any further due to a certain location being closed off to you is a pain to say the least. As the game is also time-limited, it's quite likely that you'll still be standing around outside a location waiting for it to open when things roll to a conclusion.

But after a few plays through, things start to fall nicely into place. You'll experience problems with the time system to begin with yet after a while you should be able to predict (roughly) what the time is and how long you have to get done what needs doing before you don't have access to that office block or that bank. And as not every location is inaccessible after the hours of dark, you can soon figure out which ones can be reached at any time and which ones can only be reached in daylight and adjust your gameplaying accordingly.

Killing the player off without warning is never a good idea but in "The Big Sleaze" it's handled in such an amusing manner you can just about let it off the hook. Trying to drive your car without first examining it and finding the present left for you by the neighbourhood kids as payback for breaking up their dinner money racket can have explosive results. And the less said about leaving your office without locking the door behind you, the better. Unless you're one of those people who stops and examines every little thing before proceeding, it's likely you'll be caught out by one or more of these instant kill scenarios. But keep saving the game regularly and you should be fine.

In conclusion, "The Big Sleaze" is one of the most comical games I have ever played and long after the puzzles have been solved you should still be chuckling over the humour. If there's one niggling thing about it that somewhat spoiled things it would have to be the ending. Not to ruin it for anyone who has yet to play the game, but it left a lot to be desired and was certainly not the best ending such a great game could have come up with. Though often frustrating (the time factor still catches me out every now and then and usually at the most awkward time) "The Big Sleaze" nevertheless remains a good indicator of just how great text adventures back in the 80's could be.

Rating: 9 out of 10

Reference

Next we move onto that most contentious and confusing part of ADRIFT, the variable. Many just think it's numbers so its not for me, but miss out on a hugely powerful feature.

Variables

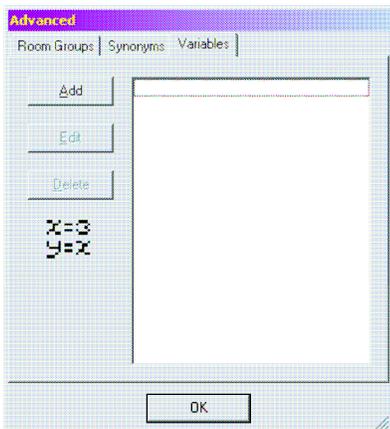


Figure 1: Variables dialog box

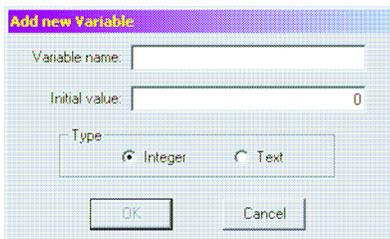


Figure 2: Add new variable

There are two kinds of variables that ADRIFT can handle; Integers and Text. Integer variables can store values from approx. -2,000,000,000 to 2,000,000,000. Text variables store strings of text which can be obtained from the command line and displayed later in the game.

To add a new variable, select Adventure > Advanced... and select the Variables tab, or click on the button. This will bring up the dialog box (Figure 1)

Clicking on the Add button brings up the Add new variable box (Figure 2)

You must give your variable a name by typing into the Variable name box. Click on the Type option to select whether or not the variable is an Integer or a Text variable.

The Initial value box will then be right justified for integers, or left justified for text input. Type in the value for your variable, and click OK.

Displaying Variables

To view a variable within Runner, you have to enclose it within percentage signs (%).

So for example, if you had a variable “money” which starts off with the value 50, you might put something like “Your wallet is leather. Inside are %money% coins.” This would display “Your wallet is leather. Inside are 50 coins.” Text variables work in exactly the same way, except they display their text value.

If you have an integer variable and want the value to appear in text format instead of a number (i.e. “twelve” instead of “12”), then you can append “t_” to the start of the variable name. So for the example above, you’d say “Inside are %t_money% coins.”

This will only work for values from 0 to 20. Anything outside this range will display their numeric value.

Assigning Variable values

Apart from the initial assignment when you create a variable, you can only set variable values from tasks.

In task actions, you have the option to set integer variables to one of the following:

- To an exact value – this simply sets the variable to the value specified.

- By an exact value – this adds or subtracts the value specified to the value of the variable.
- To random value between – this allows you to specify two integers and the variable is assigned a value randomly between the two values.
- By random value between – this allows you to specify two integers, and the variable is added to or subtracted by a random value between the two values.
- To referenced number – this sets the variable to the referenced number. The referenced number is set whenever a task command that includes the text “%number%” is executed – the %number% will pattern match on an integer value. (See References for details)
- To expression – this allows you to set a variable to a value using an advanced expression.

You can change text variables to one of the following:

- To exact text – this simply sets the variable to the text string specified.
- To referenced text – this sets the variable to the referenced text. The referenced text is set whenever a task command that includes the text “%text%” is pattern matched and executed. (See References for details)
- To expression – this allows you to set the text variable to a string using an advanced expression.

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Information is copied and pasted from the manual and while every effort is made to be accurate, there are no guarantees that it is error free

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