



## Letter from the Editor

There appears to be a fairly significant disconnect in this community, between those who take AIF seriously enough to participate and volunteer and vote and those who just play the games and lurk. Now, of course, this is nothing unusual. This disconnect is in place all over the Internet. But I feel that in this community it is amplified by the fact that some of us are AIF authors. Any AIF author can tell you that writing a reasonably decent AIF takes mountains of time, and if you're *not* taking AIF seriously, you'll never be dedicated enough to finish a game. That's why most of the most visible members of the community are the same people who are writing the games. For me, anyway, participating in the community, editing a newsletter, administering the Erins - all these are strategies for

Continued on page 7

## This Month in AIF by BBBen

At the beginning of the month Dew released a game called *Thralled* at the beginning of the month for a brief period in order to allow it to be publicly beta-tested. It was then pulled and has not yet been officially released. This is an interesting strategy for beta testing, although there is the potential problem that the game would be downloaded and played in its beta form and relatively ignored when it is released in its complete and more polished form.

There was quite a lot of discussion about programming issues; I put together a little demo for a die-rolling/stripping game done in ADRIFT 3.9 that I've posted in the usual places. There was also quite a bit of discussion on works in progress and proposed ideas. One idea in particular that seemed to attract a bit of attention from several people was for a Diablo 2 AIF game; the main problem with the ideas in question being that

Continued on page 6

## Interview with Jimmy Maher by A. Ninny

This month I sat down and spoke with Jimmy Maher, the editor of SPAG (the Society for the Promotion of Adventure Games), an e-zine designed primarily to keep the gaming public aware of text adventures and other types of interactive narrative available today. It is published quarterly. Jimmy is also the author of *Let's Tell a Story Together (A History of Interactive Fiction)*.

**AN:** Please give us a brief background on yourself and your interest in IF.

**JM:** My background is really quite typical for an IFer, almost depressingly so. I am a child of the eighties who grew up playing Infocom, Magnetic Scrolls, Telarium, etc., games on my Commodore 64 and Amiga computers. My first IF ever

Continued on page 2

## Contents

Page 1

Letter from the Editor  
This Month in AIF  
Jimmy Maher Interview

Page 7

AIF Author's Log

Page 9

Seven Seas of Thëah

Page 11

Green Summer: Live AIF

Page 13

AIF 101: Dialog

Page 15

O Erin!

Info about *Inside Erin*

## Mission Statement

*Inside Erin* is written and published by people who enjoy AIF. It is done for fun, but we also have some goals that we seek to achieve through the newsletter:

1. To encourage the production of more quality AIF games by providing advice from game developers, and by offering constructive criticism that is specifically relevant to AIF.
2. To encourage activity and growth in the AIF community. We aim to generate a constant level of activity so that there aren't long periods in which people can lose interest in AIF.
3. To help document and organize the AIF community. This is done through reporting on games and events, as well as by helping to organize community-wide activities such as competitions and the yearly Erin Awards.

was *Hitchhiker's*, which I received from my wonderful parents on Christmas Day, 1984, right at the peak of Infocom's (and, arguably, IF's) commercial fortunes. Just as many others in the community probably do, I still feel a palpable rush of nostalgia every time I see one of those old Infocom gray boxes. For a child like me, the experience that Infocom promised, to become an active participant in the sort of fantasy and science fiction stories I loved, was appealing to a degree I don't even know how to express. There is a saying that the golden age of science fiction is twelve. In my case, the same applies to IF. I feel that old sense of wonder every time I fire up a new game to see what sort of adventure it will offer me. Perhaps IF will keep me young.

Infocom's demise coincided, more coincidentally than synergistically, with certain changes in my own life that left me spending somewhat less time in front of the computer and much less time playing games there. In short, I got older, came out of my nerdly shell a bit, and found there was a life worth exploring on my side of the computer monitor. I retained fond memories of Infocom and the other companies whose games I loved, but probably didn't pick up a single game, old or new, for a good six or seven years. Then, around 2000, prompted by nostalgia or just an idle whim, I did a search for Infocom on the Internet and started to explore the results. I of course almost immediately learned that a dynamic if small group of people had not only gone to great lengths to preserve Infocom's legacy, but were actively furthering it with new work of their own. It really did feel like coming home.

For the first few years I was the veritable definition of the passive lurker. I consumed the Infocom catalog all over again, then moved on to other companies of the commercial era and the best of the modern community's work. When I finally felt reasonably caught up, I began to ease myself into a more active role, posting my thoughts occasionally and writing a review here and there. This felt good. (To all you lurkers out there: Don't wait as long as I did. It doesn't take much to contribute, and it will make you feel so good about yourself. This magazine needs reviews, SPAG needs reviews, etc. You don't have to be a programmer or a literary genius to make a real contribution to the form we all love and to encourage its survival and growth. With no commercial distribution model, we are literally all in this together.) I also began to work on a Z-Machine interpreter of my own, partly because I found none of the existing Windows interpreters entirely to my taste and partly because it seemed like such a perfect project, big and ambitious enough to be challenging, but modest enough to not overwhelm.

**AN: How did you come to be editor of SPAG?**

**JM:** I was as surprised as anyone, actually. I had written a few reviews for SPAG, posted a bit in the newsgroups, and finally gotten around to publicly releasing Filfre, my interpreter, but was hardly a prominent community member when Paul O'Brian asked if I was interested in the job. He had a baby on the way and felt that after some six years as editor it was time to pass the reins to someone else, and he obviously saw something in my work that he thought would make me a good choice for the job. I was first shocked, then honored, then a bit daunted, but accepted in the end. I'm glad I did.

**AN: What do you see is your mission as editor?**

**JM:** First of all, I don't want to screw up. For the first two or three issues, this was probably my guiding mantra, actually. SPAG has been around a long, long time in Internet terms. It pre-dates even the first IF Competition that many would point to as the real birth of the community we know and (hopefully) love today. I was and am acutely aware of the place SPAG has always held in the community, and want to continue its tradition of providing balanced, informative feedback to authors and players alike.

Now that I am more comfortable in the position, I can look at other things. I feel like a bit of an IF evangelist at times. I fervently reject the retro-gaming label, and feel that this stuff would be of interest to a larger public. I would love it if others in literary as well as gaming circles could engage with IF through SPAG. I have, however, by no means figured out how to accomplish that.

**AN: What tangible changes have you tried to implement there?**

**JM:** Well, the site that existed when I took the magazine over was probably cutting edge in 1994, but was an ugly, awkward mess in 2005. It perhaps had value as a time capsule of the early days of the World Wide Web, but that is hardly the image I want to promote for IF today. So I immediately started thinking about a new design, but my life is hectic, and so thoughts were all I generated for quite a long time. Early this year, though, a very talented gentleman named Felix Plesoianu stepped forward to help. Felix over the course of several months conceptualized and then implemented the site as it exists now. My role was largely confined to saying yes or no to

Felix's ideas, and to throwing out the occasional "wouldn't it be cool if you could..." We finally rolled the new site out last summer, to generally very favorable reaction. There is much more I would like to do with it, but it is certainly a vast improvement over the old site even now.

**AN: Do you feel you've been successful?**

**JM:** Everything tends to take longer than I would like because I have so many other commitments on my time and probably more passions than is good for me. But overall, I think I have made a good start, and hope to continue from here at a steady, if hardly lightning, pace. The tortoise and the hare and all that.

**AN: In AIF, non-player character interactions are the primary interest for players and authors. That's often the case in IF as well. What attributes, in your experience, do you think makes for strong NPC's?**

**JM:** I don't know that we've ever really seen a strong IF NPC, and there's the rub. We've seen some pretty well drawn characters in their way, but mostly they succeed as characters because their authors find some way to limit the opportunities players really have to explore their (lack of) interactivity. (See next question.)

The thing is about character interaction is, it's hard. It is perhaps an obvious point, but it's one I can't emphasize enough. We've been pretty good at simulating all of the inanimate aspects of the universe in IF for quite a long time now. *Adventure* had the basics down, and Infocom had refined it pretty well by the time they brought *Zork* to home computers. *Adventure* and *Zork* have the perfect structure for IF from a technician's point of view. A solitary adventurer solving a series of physical puzzles and collecting treasures plays to the form's technical strengths perfectly. There is a reason why so many games since have chosen this same rather hackneyed premise... or why it seems that about half of the graphical adventures ever released follow the *Myst* model, for that matter.

Infocom's first non-*Zork* effort was the mystery *Deadline*. *Deadline* raised the bar enormously over *Zork*, not only in its literary objectives but in the technical challenge involved in achieving those objectives. A fairly lengthy discussion of *Deadline* can be found in Chapter 5 of *Let's Tell a Story Together*, so I won't go into that game's strengths and weaknesses here, other than to say that its ambition still makes it a fascinating play today, even as its many failings continue to frustrate. *Deadline* has quite a number of well-characterized NPCs, but they are coded as nothing more than more sophisticated objects in the gameworld. This makes them feel to the player like exactly what they are: automatons. Robots, inexorably following their programming. In the years since, we have created even more sophisticated behaviors for our robots, and added the ability to "ask" and "tell" about more stuff. I really like the conversation model of TADS 3, and feel that as implemented in "Return to Ditch Day" and Eric Eve's two recent efforts in that language it comes the closest I have yet seen to being truly satisfying. But let's face it, we are still not fooling anyone for long. I don't mean to trivialize the work the modern community has done to refine Infocom's model. It is significant, but in the end evolutionary rather than revolutionary.

So, a lot of people much smarter than me have wrestled with this problem and come up with (at best) only partial solutions. This is frustrating. David Lebling once said in an interview that his sorrow at Infocom's demise was mixed with frustration at never being able to solve this particular problem. Still today, the best we can do is try to mask our shortcomings through various clever stratagems.

It's a problem that seems well-nigh insolvable, yet it is one that I think we must solve if IF is ever to really bloom as literature. Characters are after all the very heart of most great fiction. I don't know what the solution is, obviously, or I would be acting on this knowledge. I don't even know if a solution does exist. I do think, though, that we have pretty conclusively proven that our current method of creating NPCs as essentially "super-objects" is not going to get us there. Perhaps it is time for (to use an overworked phrase) a paradigm shift, time to approach the problem in a brand new way. I would encourage everyone interested in this issue to take a look at Chris Crawford's approach to interactive storytelling. Crawford's self-aggrandizement can get a bit tedious, and there are many problems with the model he has so far articulated, as Emily Short pointed out in her response to Crawford's recent book. Still, some of Crawford's ideas may just provide a way forward, or at least the opportunity to fail in an interesting, novel way, which is the next best thing to success... and a possible stepping stone thereto.

**AN: In what way do powerful IF NPC's differ from, say, great characters in a novel?**

**JM:** Not to be facetious, but the answer is obviously that they are interactive. So, they must be memorable, original, believable, and all those other hallmarks of good literary characters, but also believably interactive. A fair number of very good writers have worked in IF, and have achieved the former on a fairly regular basis. When interactivity begins, though, the illusion breaks down.

**AN:** In your paper on the history of IF, you addressed all of AIF in one paragraph. You wrote, “Most [AIF] are of frankly horrid quality in both their prose and their technical merits, often still being written in the hopelessly outdated AGT.” and that “The AIF community is evidently happy with its status quo, though, for it has so far shown little motivation to improve its work.”

I’d be considered remiss by my readers if I didn’t take you to task for this. The mission of this newsletter is to dispel those stereotypes and also to make those stereotypes less true by improving AIF quality (and I’m in agreement that there is some horrid AIF out there, but there’s also some horrid IF).

I can’t fault you for not playing AIF - it certainly isn’t to everyone’s taste - but you may have talked to some of us before writing something so dismissive, and, to be direct, untrue. For example, there hasn’t been an AIF game written in AGT since 2002, and even that game was an aberration, since it had been three years since the previous AGT game was released.

**JM:** Okay. You have some fair points, so let me respond to them before addressing your specific questions. When I put the *Let’s Tell a Story Together* online, I knew that it must inevitably contain many sins of both omission and commission. That is why I asked for feedback and corrections from everyone inclined to provide them. A fairly gratifying number of people have done just that, and I have already updated the work a couple of times to reflect this. You, who are certainly in a position to know, have just corrected my statement about AGT and AIF, and I thank you for that. I will update the work accordingly in due time, and apologize for the inaccuracy. And yes, my research into your community did perhaps leave much to be desired. So, I say to you and all your readers, help me out, and tell me what the world at large should know about your community. Better yet, point me to some sources. I only ask that you keep in mind that AIF will remain essentially an anecdote within my main history. It is indeed, I am afraid, not really to my taste, at least as I understand its current state, and life is too short to spend large amounts of time on things that don’t really interest us. A detailed history and critical overview of AIF may be a very valid and worthwhile project. It just isn’t something I, personally, am inclined to take up.

Now, as far as my “dismissive” attitude toward the general quality of AIF... I can’t just take your word on a subjective judgment like this in the way I can with statements of simple fact. I will, however, make you an offer. Name three works of AIF, chosen by yourself or your readers, that you feel to be of quality. I will play them and give them a fair hearing in a future issue of SPAG, perhaps the very next issue if you can respond fast enough. It actually will make for quite an interesting article that will benefit both communities. And, if my judgment is swayed by my first-hand experience with AIF, I will of course update *Let’s Tell a Story Together* accordingly.

**AN:** So, having heard my rant, can you suggest any strategies the AIF community could follow that would help dispel some of the negative stereotypes? For instance, do you feel it would be useful to cross-load the AIF library to the IF Archive?

**JM:** Well, to be honest, I think you are fighting a bit of an uphill battle here. I guess the first thing to ask yourself is just what you really want AIF to be. Traditionally, the term has referred to textual pornography (or erotica, if you prefer that term). If your goal is to continue in this vein, but just making *better* pornography, that is fine... but I don’t see you ever getting much acceptance within the mainstream community. I will throw out a couple of seemingly random facts to chew on. 1) The Netflix online DVD rental service offers virtually every DVD in print to its customers. Only one type of movie is excluded: pornography. 2) In your local bookstore, you will probably find that erotica is given in its own section away from all other fiction. What I’m getting to here is that society at large has clearly decided that pornography is unique from other genres, and has segregated it away accordingly. Why should we who enjoy IF be any different?

I think the best definition of pornography is as works whose primary purpose is titillation. Since this is an AIF newsletter and we are presumably free and open here, I can be more blunt, and say that if most of the consumers of a product are using it (at least on occasion) as a masturbation aid or to enhance sex with their partner(s), it is probably pornography. Pornography thus has an obvious problem when considered as art. When the primary purpose of a work is titillation, everything else – plot, character, setting, even all too often technical polish – tends to get shorter shrift. Chances are, a movie that is great pornography is not a great film, for instance.

But maybe pornography is not what you want AIF to be? Maybe you want to tell compelling interactive stories that happen to contain sexual content, or that are even mostly about sex? If that is the case, come join us in the mainstream community. I am not a prude, and I don't think most of us are. We don't write about sex much because it drives us headlong into the whole NPC question that we still haven't solved. (The old cliché about the really important sexual organ being the brain definitely applies here.) If you can rise to the challenge and create a truly believable sexual relationship, though, more power to you. If you can make it erotic in the process, bravo.

In short, if AIF is porn it will always remain somewhat marginalized and disreputable, just like all other forms of pornography. You may consider this an unsatisfactory state of affairs, but that's the way human society is in 2006, and I don't think it will change anytime soon. If AIF is not pornography, on the other hand, there is no need for a separate community to even exist. We're happy to take you in.

**AN: You also wrote to me that you feel that AIF has mostly "...static NPCs with lots of fully functioning sexual bits attached...." The 'functioning sexual bits attached' part seems almost a base requirement because IF languages (aside from ADRIFT) are object-oriented. Perhaps rule-based Inform 7 will change that. In any case, do you see any strategies for authors to reduce that 'collection of parts' impression that comes across?**

**JM:** The first question to ask is whether you *want* to change the "collection of parts" aspect of AIF. After all, video pornography and even most literary erotica are essentially about body parts in contact with other body parts. If a textual simulation of a porno movie is your goal, you might very well be on the right track already. I'm not certain I have enough experience with or interest in either form of pornography to really judge.

If you want to achieve something more than, or at least (lest I sound too prejudicial) different from, that, you have chosen a much more difficult task for yourself. See some of my other responses to understand what daunting problems I think you have let yourself in for.

**AN: You are the author of *Let's Tell a Story Together (A History of Interactive Fiction)* How did you come to write it?**

**JM:** A long, long time after I finished high school, I finally enrolled in university in the summer of 2000. I continued to work full-time, so progress was slow, but at the end of last year I was finally facing my last semester before graduating with a BA in Literary Studies from the University of Texas at Dallas. My GPA was good enough that I could graduate magna cum laude if I did a project. I knew that I wanted to write about IF, as I was getting more and more interested in pursuing new media studies at the graduate level. In addition to being a personal passion of mine, IF seemed an understudied form and an excellent way to begin to make a name for myself in academia. I was able to convince one Dr. John Barber to become my thesis advisor. I proceeded to churn out one chapter per week through the spring of 2006, by far the most exhausting writing pace I have ever managed. John turned out to be not just an excellent advisor but also an excellent friend, carefully reading and critiquing each chapter as it was created and offering invaluable advice about my possible future in academia. When the thing was finally finished, John and his wife Dene Gregar even invited me to give a brief talk on IF at that spring's Computers and Writing Conference at Texas Tech University. Now I am a graduate student in the Arts and Technology program at UTD, where I hope to continue to make IF a central part of my research portfolio.

**AN: What primary sources did you use?**

**JM:** I don't want to diminish my reputation as an IF historian, but I have to admit that there is little or nothing really new in the essay. What I really hoped to do was synthesize the large amount of raw data floating around on the Internet into a coherent, readable narrative of IF's evolution from primitive, formative works to the present state of the art. I hope I succeeded in this.

One of the most gratifying aspects of the thesis was receiving unsolicited emails from ex-Infocommies Steve Meretzky, Bob Bates, and Tim Anderson expressing approval of my work. All suggested corrections, which I of course quickly acted upon, but I was very happy to find that all felt that I had gotten the essential history of Infocom right. Quite a few others also offered their help. I am particularly grateful to Graham Nelson for his chapter by chapter comments and suggestions, prepared even as he was in the midst of the madness of Inform 7's initial release.

**AN: Did you attempt to find a print publisher to pick it up? If so, what kind of reaction did you get?**

**JM:** I did think about it, but in the end decided to put it online instead. The only publishers likely to be interested in an esoteric pursuit like IF would probably be academic presses, and (oddly enough for a senior honors thesis) I'm not sure that *Let's Tell a Story Together* is quite "academic" enough in tone to meet their expectations. This was by intention, as Nick Monfort has already covered the academic angle quite well with *Twisty Little Passages*, but it did limit my traditional publishing options somewhat.

I still think putting it online was the right decision. It has made the work available to many who would never find it in some obscure university library, and has allowed me to update it quickly when I find I have screwed something up. It will also allow me to continue to add to it as events happen in the present and as I learn new facts about the past. I am serious about making *Let's Tell a Story Together* a living document, an ongoing chronicle of IF.

**AN: Aside from your ongoing work at SPAG, what IF-related projects can we expect from you?**

**JM:** Lately I have been working quite a lot on my Windows Z-Machine interpreter, Filfre. I decided I wanted to add support for the Glulx virtual machine, which sort of opened up a can of worms. I found that the only practical way to support Glulx was to rewrite everything. I had made too many Z-Machine-centric decisions, you see. But the source was a horrible mess anyway, as this had very much been a "learn as I go" project, so I actually kind of welcomed the opportunity to clean it up. So now I almost have a complete Z-Machine interpreter again, at which point I can start working on Glulx support. Progress is sometimes slowed by the fact that I am not an experienced Windows programmer and am often stymied by things that someone like, say, David Kinder would hardly have to even think about. But it is fun, and it keeps me out of trouble, and having begun the project I want to complete it. There is nothing like the satisfaction of finishing what you start, after all.

I am considering some possible IF applications within my university studies, but nothing I am really prepared to speak publicly about yet. And I really want to write a game, and have what I think is a pretty good idea for one. Maybe next year. And then I have other demands on my time, like a job, and my aforementioned studies, and a wonderful girlfriend who means more to me than everything else combined. Life is full, but that is as it should be.

**AN: Thanks for participating. Your candor is greatly appreciated.**

**JM:** Thank you for some great, challenging questions. It's been fun.

You can find Jimmy Maher's work at the following web sites: SPAG (<http://sparkynet.com/spag/>) and the Jimmy Maher Home Page (<http://home.grandecom.net/~maher/>).

### **This Month in AIF (Continued)**

they would equate to a bloody huge game. If someone could pull it together it would be great, but nobody seems willing to commit to that kind of project, and I certainly can't blame them.

There was also revived interest in the idea of a standard erotic content classification system across AIF. You see, in literotica there are generally classifications like MF (for a sex scene containing one male and one female), MFF (one male and two females), etc., BDSM, rape, and many others, that tell the reader what they are likely to expect. This allows readers to search for the kinks they like, and avoid the stuff they don't like. However, this mostly has to be self-regulated by authors, and so far it hasn't been done (except by me, for my games, I guess). In order to do this for the old games, it would require someone (or a group of people) to actually play through and document all the sexual content in all the games. Unfortunately, that just seems like an unlikely thing to occur, considering the difficulty of getting volunteers involved in our community.

Finally, remember that the Erins deadline is at the end of October, so get your games out now if you want them considered in this year's batch.

### **New Games:**

*Crossworlds Part 0* by BBBen, for ADRIFT 3.9, released September 25th, 2006. A game that

combines the old games *Sleep Over* and *Janey's Diary* and adds significant new content. You have been asked to chaperon your neighbour's daughter Janey Jones as she has a sleep over party, but much waits to be discovered in the Jones household.

### **Letter from the Editor (Continued)**

keeping myself focused on AIF, encouraging me to move my own games forward.

But this disconnect does become problematic when we need to come to the community for input - and we do this with a fair amount of regularity: answering the *Seven Seas of Theah* poll, volunteering to play *Green Summer*, and voting in mini-comps or Erins. This is where it becomes difficult to see that there are a great number of you reading this newsletter and playing the games. I am nearing the release of my new game. I know that I will release it into the Internet and that it will be consumed by a great many of you - most of you will play the game and nobody will ever know it. But I have been taking writing this game extremely seriously - it has dominated my free time for the last sixteen months. Yes, it would be personally gratifying for me to hear from you in response to this new game. More than personal validation, though, I'd like to put this new game out as a challenge for more of you to participate, even minimally, in the AIF community by making your presence known on the message boards and voting in competitions. And if you feel inspired to try to write your own game, all the better.

OK, I'll end my soapboxing now, and talk a bit about this issue. I am extremely happy with this month's interview. Jimmy Maher, the editor of the SPAG newsletter and author of "Let's Tell a Story Together: The History of Interactive Fiction" gave extremely thoughtful responses to my questions. I encourage everyone to read the interview and more than that, to become a SPAG subscriber. It is a great newsletter, aimed squarely at IF players, with many, many reviews and articles of interest to the IF and AIF public.

Finally, and this hearkens back to my rant, nobody volunteered to play *Green Summer: Live AIF* last month. I asked Jessamyn to continue playing and she was willing to do that. I figure I have about one or two months left worth of story to tell, so there are a couple of chances remaining for you to be the player. Since nobody volunteered last month, I'd estimate that if you do volunteer there is a very high probability that you'll be selected. Please write me at [aifsummer@gmail.com](mailto:aifsummer@gmail.com) to toss in your name.

Until Next month,  
A. Ninny  
לשנה טובה 5767

### **AIF Author's Log by Bitterfrost**

Hello, everyone!

Bitterfrost here--poster boy for doing things the hard way--with another chapter of How NOT to Write AIF.

I'm happy to say I actually made a bit of headway on my game this month. Yes! *How I Got Syphilix* inches forward. At this point, any progress is worth celebrating.

Although I've finally built the first consistent momentum on this project in ages, I have to admit I'm having trouble focusing. I keep writing (or rewriting) specific events as they pop into mind. Unfortunately, they tend to be from unrelated sections of the game. Hey, it's progress... in a holistic sort of way. It's a bit like daubing paint randomly on a page: you'll cover it eventually, but there are more efficient ways.

If anyone doubts the validity of string theory, they have only to look at my mind. It's a tangled nest of ratty, old twine. However, I somehow manage to get through the day, so I'm confident I will somehow get through this game.

The only reason this project lurches forward at all is my habit of sorting tasks and keeping checklists. You would not believe my ridiculous framework of command names hyperlinked to corresponding text. Since I don't have large blocks of time, I just can't work on one section consistently. So I've ended up with this bizarre paint-by-numbers approach.

It is, however, lousy for my testers. If I can't get the remaining chapters done in order, I won't have much for testers to do until I suddenly drop the bloated final draft in their laps. Remember,

kids, this is how NOT to write AIF. Do yourself a favor. Stay focused. Do things in order. Follow through. You don't want to end up lost in the maze like me.

I've been writing and writing, turning my back on ADRIFT Generator to work away in Word. You really should keep yourself familiar with your ADRIFT file by toying with it regularly (that sounds SO wrong). I, however, am an idiot. I'm concerned more with the quantity and quality of the game's text at the moment than I am with its mechanics. So I've been typing like mad. Lots of dialogue and sex scenes.

I'm making a concerted effort to make each encounter unique. The last thing I want players to be is bored. Angry. Disappointed, maybe. But never bored. So there will be no repetition, no generic "you fondle Erica's/Jamie's/Lester's breasts for a while" junk. As a player, I'd tune out right quick. C'mon, man! Sex should never be boring.

There are seven encounters in the game, and each one has a specific theme, approach, rules, you name it. It's a lot of work, but it's giving me a chance to explore a bit and to keep the writing fresh.

I know I keep making all of these vague allusions and promises, but I don't want to give too much away. With this column, I'm trying to focus on the process instead of the specific content. Rest assured, I think it will be a decent game when it finally sets sail. This is my one-and-only, so I'm going to make sure it's both solid and satisfying.

And on that note, here's an account of a month in the life of an AIF obsession:

8/30/06

I took an inspection tour of the game in Runner today both to refresh my memory and to check for sinkholes. I discovered that one of the sex tasks wasn't working. ADRIFT Runner patently ignored it no matter how many command synonyms I typed. I went on a bug hunt, convinced that I must have set the task to work in the wrong room, made it dependant on the wrong variable, etc. Unfortunately, the task in question looked fine, with all of its restrictions and such in tidy order. So why doesn't it work? Hmm. Another ADRIFT mystery.

I'm not too concerned because there are dozens of other options in that scene, but it's still strange. I hope it's not a sign of instability (on the game's part or mine). This is the second goofy phenomenon to pop up in recent months. The first was ADRIFT's sudden whim to single out one task and change all of my carefully laid restrictions to "Player must not be in same room as Player." Very cheeky. I'm confused enough as it is, ADRIFT. Don't play mind games with me.

On the plus side, you've got to admire ADRIFT's transcript feature. It does come in handy. Today's trip netted me 150 pages of prime pulp to sort through. In addition to the Word files I keep for each woman in the game, I've got a To-Do doc where I leave notes to myself on things I should add, corrections I should make and peculiarities I should address. I know. I know. Look in the mirror, right? Smartass.

I'll usually scan through a transcript, make notes in Word and then muck into ADRIFT when I've racked up a big laundry list. I'll label finished tasks blue and leave them in the list so I can remember what I've done. Anything purple is a new or fixed passage that's ready to be copied and pasted into ADRIFT. I'll slap red on things that I'd like to do if I had more time and patience.

Yeah, it's anal, and it's a Rube Goldberg means of writing AIF. You have to understand, though, there have been gulfs as wide as two months where I've turned my back on this project. Were it not for my ridiculous color coding system and the schizophrenic notes I scribble for myself this undertaking would've been abandoned long ago, gathering dust and cobwebs in the seedier back alleys of my computer with foot fetish photos and erotic "Dragonball Z" fan fiction. No. Not really.

9/01/06 - 9/03/06

I'm taking a break from the fun writing (the female NPC descriptions, the smutty dialogue, the sex tasks, etc.) to knuckle down and add to character interaction. Specifically, showing and giving objects to NPCs. I really, really wanted to avoid this, knowing it would be a depressing amount of work. But, you can't slack off when it comes to objects in an IF game.

The worst bit is the sheer number of tasks involved. The ranks are swelling. Despite the work and the task wrangling, I have to say it does add a lot to the game, and it's given yet another outlet for funny (or at least smartass) replies.

9/06/06 - 9/12/06

For the most part, this game is linear. It's an interactive story with a plot that chugs ahead. There's no hub. The player is along for the ride. Don't worry--there's plenty to see and do along the way. However, as you advance to the next chapter you move to a whole new map. A certain Ninny who shall remain nameless pointed out that that means any objects you missed will be unattainable unless you start over, leading to frustration, riots and hate mail. I was counting on players to packrat everything that wasn't nailed down, but he raised a damn good point.

So I've engineered several different ways to let players revisit important locations or to have missed objects put in the player's path a second time. The writing and mechanics of this has actually been a lot of fun, and it adds some depth and flexibility to the game. See? I should've asked for help ages ago.

9/14/06 - 9/23/06

My attention span makes the distance between electrons look roomy. I sat down to plug away faithfully on the game's next chapter and wound up on another ludicrous tangent. Work has been a bit dull lately, and I've proven that the most dangerous thing in the world is a graphic designer with time on his hands. Despite the mountain of text and coding in front of me, I put down my climbing gear and decided to do a little snowboarding.

Over the course of a week or so, I played around with my design programs and created some graphics that I think will add nicely to the finished game. I believe it will complement the text and make the game further stand out as an act of lunacy. Although dust is starting to settle on Word and ADRIFT again, I've got to say it's been fun to work on something visual. I don't want to give it away, but I guarantee that when players finally download the whole deal (in 2016, at this rate) they will say, "What the hell is up with this guy?!" Hopefully, they'll be shaking their heads and smiling as they say that.

9/24/06

Well, that graphic diversion really pumped up the old enthusiasm. I'm ready to wrestle with the text again. Now where the heck was I? I checked my To-Do file, and it's chock full of little fixes and cosmetic additions I thought of when I made that transcript several weeks ago. It's time to knock a bunch of these out while I have half a clue what they mean:

ADD <must be holding vehicle key> restriction to [start truck]  
FIX variable restriction <GirlReady must equal to 5> in [play with Cassie's ass]  
FIX object {plush seat}: "black" leather needs to be "sandy"  
ADD shade, bracelet, hair, bikini, beach, herself to Beth's ASK ABOUT topics  
CHECK [give Brooke head] for restriction problems--keeps showing default

Yeah, I know. Exciting stuff. But it's hundreds of these little buggers that make or break it all. There. It took some time, but I've crossed a couple dozen off my list. Now it's time to get back to the fun-n-filthy!

9/27/06

Despite a topsy-turvy week involving a job opportunity, a possible move and a cat with a wheezy cough, I'm still finding the odd minute to plug away at this project. Must... keep... going... Don't let pesky things like real life intrude on your work time. Just keep your head down and your fingers flying. Mumbling to yourself is a sure way to get folks to leave you alone. That's How NOT to Write AIF! Take care, all! See you next month!

### **Seven Seas of Theah: Episode 8 by Christopher Cole**

**OPTIONS: At the end of this story each month, you will be given a number of options. Choose the option that you like and vote in the poll at the Yahoo AIF Archive. The option that gets the most votes will determine how the story continues in next month's newsletter.**

**NOTE: You can read background information and other tidbits about this story here: <http://ccole.aftermath.cx/theah.htm>**

Magnus moaned as he erupted inside Violetta. He held himself deep inside her as his manhood throbbed, spurting his seed. Violetta arched her back and took everything he had to offer, shaking slightly as orgasm took them both. When he was finally empty, Violetta kept him inside her while

their breathing calmed. Finally, she moved away and began to dress.

“We should get some sleep while we can,” Violetta said after a few moments, as if nothing had happened. “I will take first watch.”

Magnus wanted to tell her how much he enjoyed what had just happened, but the look on Violetta’s face told him the moment had passed. He also had to admit that he was extremely tired. He closed his eyes, and was immediately asleep.

He awoke later, feeling somewhat refreshed.

“How long was I asleep?” he asked.

“Three hours,” Violetta replied.

Magnus could hear sounds of a storm above.

“It started nearly an hour ago,” Violetta said, reading his expression. “A powerful one by the sound of it.”

“Think you’ll be able to get some sleep during all this?” Magnus asked Violetta, as he stood and stretched his legs. He had to grab hold of a crate as the hold suddenly swooned violently. A loud crack of thunder rocked through the hold.

“I think I may wait to see if it dies down,” she responded.

“Well, at least she’s a sturdy ship,” Magnus said, getting his legs back. “By the sounds of it, I would have expected to be in a good bit of water by now.”

There were some small trails of water here and there dripping down from the walls of the hold, but no major leaks. The boards creaked ominously however.

“I think we...” Magnus stopped when Violetta waved at him and pointed towards the steps leading up to mid-deck.

Magnus turned and ducked back down behind some crates.

“What is it?” he asked, unable to hear anything other than the storm above and the creaking of the ship.

“Someone is coming,” she said.

Magnus peered over the crates and sure enough, saw a number of armed men entering the hold. They were carrying knives and short swords and didn’t look like they were coming down to check for leaks.

“Crabby saw ‘em som’ere in the hold,” one of them said.

Crabby? Who could have seen them without Violetta spotting them? She wouldn’t have fallen asleep when watching Magnus; that simply wasn’t possible. But somehow someone saw them and now they were cornered.

## **WHAT SHOULD THEY DO?**

- 1) Stay quiet and hope they aren’t found?**
- 2) Attempt to flee?**
- 3) Surrender?**
- 4) Attack the men?**

## **Green Summer: Live AIF by A. Ninny**

*Note: Green Summer is an adult interactive fiction game that will be played out over a few months in the pages of this newsletter. The 'player' in this episode is Jessamyn—many thanks to her for participating. Please refer to the rules at the end of this episode to learn how you may become the next player. To see what happened before this, see the last three months' editions.*

\* \* \*

### **>Finger Carly**

You and Carly fall together onto her foldaway bed, which creaks and shakes unhappily. The combined weight of the two of you causes you to list toward the center of the mattress. "Sorry, this is the most uncomfortable bed I've ever seen," Carly remarks. "Never mind," you say and lay beside her while she rolls onto her back. You kiss her while your hands run down her soft belly to her mound. Her legs spread, seemingly of their own accord, giving you room to press your palm over her sex. You can feel her warm, wet center and you pivot the fleshy part of your hand over it. She sighs noisily into your mouth. Then you pull your hand back and begin teasing her clit and lips with your fingertips, and her hips quiver in response.

### **> Ask Carly about favorite position**

You lift up on your arm and look down on the gorgeous Carly.

"Do you have a favorite position?" You ask her.

"Hmm," she says, making a show of taking your question very seriously. "I'm a-fucking-mazing on top. Cowgirl, you Yanks call it, I think."

"A-fucking-mazing. You don't say. I'm not sure I can take your word for it. You might have to demonstrate."

"Really."

"Absolutely."

### **> Roll Carly on top of me**

"OK," you say, "demonstrate away."

You wrap your arms around Carly and roll her on top of you. She presses her body down on yours and kisses you while your hands roam down her back and grip her ass. She spreads her legs, then pulls her knees up next to your waist so she's straddling you, but her upper body and her mouth still presses on yours.

After a moment, she picks up her head and looks down at you. Some of her hair dangles in your face. She tosses her head so that her hair all goes to one side, and you see a look of intense heat coming out of her eyes. She lifts her hips up, takes your erection in her hand and sinks down onto it. Wet heat engulfs your length. You groan, but she is utterly silent. Her ass lands on your thighs and she sits up completely straight, holding still while you look up at her fabulous body and gorgeous face above you.

### **> Thumb Carly's clit**

You reach down between Carly's legs. She watches with anticipation while you place your thumb on her firm-but-still-giving clit, your fingers pointing up. As you make contact, you feel her thigh muscles shiver under her skin and her legs squeeze your sides. You move your thumb down until it comes in contact with the immobile base of your penis, all of which is completely buried in her pussy. Her soft flesh surrounding you makes a stark contrast to the rigidity of your cock.

You feel a jolt of pleasure come out of nowhere and run through your body, making you gasp. Carly smiles. Did she do that? You look up at her, wide-eyed. She still doesn't move a muscle (as far as you can tell) but once again you feel that - mysterious - burst. You are seriously feeling a-fucking-mazed.

### **>Urge Carly to continue**

Without speaking, you reach behind Carly and lift her ass slightly with your palms. She gets the message and acts as you direct, lifting her ass up and dropping back down. She leans forward and rests her hands on your chest. This allows her to begin using just her hips to fuck you; she uses a easy-tempo back and forth rocking motion that somehow also manages to provide long, long strokes - running her vagina up and down almost your entire length with each one. The two of you make sighing-moaning noises that wax and wane in volume.

You inelegantly half-sit so that Carly's breasts are in your face and you begin sucking and nibbling her nipples while she fucks you. At the same time, you reach under her ass and finger the spot where your cock is moving in and out of her pussy. "Oh, God, that's good," she moans, "Yes, keep that up, ohhh, yeahhhh..."

She starts fucking you a bit faster. She seems to be losing control. She grabs your head with one arm and crushes it to her chest. You feel her nipple getting crushed into your mouth. She fucks you faster still and squeezes her vaginal muscles down hard and that is all you can stand - your body bucks and you groan loudly as you come in her.

Her breathing crescendos for a moment and then she squeals and loses her balance. The two of you go falling onto the bed, you on your back with her body flat on yours. She continues breathing hard and quaking shivers run through her body for several moments. Then she lifts her head gives you an incredibly warm, loving look.

The sound of one person softly applauding shatters the momentary silence. The two of you look up to see Nicole standing in the doorway.

### **>Smile at Nicole and Carly**

You can't help yourself. You look from the gorgeous nude Carly to the fabulous and comfortably dressed Nicole and a smile plays across your face.

It's an infectious smile. Carly smiles. Nicole smiles.

It's a smile of invitation. Nicole walks into the room and sits beside you on the fold-out bed. Carly crawls off you and sits beside Nicole. Both women look at you, still smiling.

### **>Check penis**

Your penis is currently half-erect. It is extremely wet from mixed semen and vaginal fluid.

### **> Ask Nicole about the 'show'**

You half-sit and recline on your arms, then turn to look at Nicole.

"So, Nicole, did you enjoy our little show?" You ask.

"I'm not sure the word 'little' really applies," she says, glancing down at your cock. Her looking at it to have an arousing effect and the waning of your penis is arrested. You begin to get an erection once again.

"Would you like an encore?" You ask her, glancing over at Carly, who glows with anticipation.

"Not really, maestro," is the response. "Perhaps something with a more audience participation would be appropriate."

### **>Kiss Nicole**

"Audience participation coming up," you announce.

You take Nicole in your arms and kiss her. You feel body her stiffen for a second, then relax. Her arms remain at her side at first, but then you feel her palm on your chest and she begins to return the kiss. The tip of her tongue glides softly over your lips, sending chills through your body.

### **> Ask Carly about kissing Nicole**

You break off the kiss with Nicole and turn to Carly. "Did you like seeing me kiss her? Would you like to do it?"

Carly nods. She and Nicole come together and you watch from point-blank range as their lips join, two pairs of warm, moist feminine lips press and deform one another in a loving dance. Their mouths open and you watch tongues exploring. Then the kiss breaks and both women look in your direction.

### **> Ask Carly to help remove Nicole's shirt**

"Carly, would you care to..."

"Absolutely I would."

Nicole lifts her arms up and Carly pulls her t-shirt up and over her head. She's wearing a white bra underneath it. Her upper body is slender and even toned; definitely Nicole someone who

takes care of herself. You note she has some minimal stretch marks remaining from her pregnancy, but that comes with the territory, you figure.

Nicole looks over Carly's body. "Wow, Carly, I knew you were gorgeous, but really, I had no idea."

"She's amazing," you pipe in.

"No, that's a-fucking-mazing, Phil," says Carly who grins while Nicole laughs.

#### > Remove Nicole's bra

You reach behind Nicole to remove her bra, but she blocks you.

"Sorry, guys," she says. "These are reserved for Samantha."

#### >Ask Nicole about oral sex

"I'm sorry," you say, "I should have thought of that. Breast-feeding?"

Nicole nods.

"In that case, how do you feel about oral sex?"

"Feel about it? I love it. Both doing it and receiving it. Although I have to admit I've never done it to a woman before." She glances at Carly and blushes slightly.

#### > Nicole and Carly, lick cock

\* \* \*

Rules:

To be the next player, please send an e-mail to [aifsummer@gmail.com](mailto:aifsummer@gmail.com). I will select one player at random from all those who write in. The deadline for volunteering is October 8<sup>th</sup>. I will notify the selected player and invite them to begin playing. If the selected player does not respond in three days after I send the invitation, I will select someone else.

The selected player will play until I decide that enough turns have lapsed, but I'll start with a target of 20 turns. After all, the game transcript has to fit in the newsletter. The number of turns may be an on-the-fly decision and will be fine-tuned as the game goes on.

I'm interested in hearing what you think about this as the game progresses. If you have suggestions for how to make this a better feature, please write to me at the above address or at [aifsubmissions@gmail.com](mailto:aifsubmissions@gmail.com).

### **AIF 101: Dialog by Johnny Freebase**

*Editor's note:*

*We are re-publishing Johnny Freebase's excellent AIF 101 tutorials that were originally posted on [alt.games.xtrek](http://alt.games.xtrek). It's our feeling that there are enough new community members who may not be aware of the existence of this guide. The tutorial was originally posted as a series of articles and we will maintain that construct here. This is the fifth installment.*

\* \* \*

*I'm going to define dialogue as characterization in action. One of the most fundamental ways players interact with npcs is by talking to them. There are many ways this has been done in IF. I'll provide an overview, but <http://tads.org/howto/convbkg.htm> has several articles on the subject. It is a TADS site, but the first few pages are language independent.*

The simplest conversational implementation is a simple TALK command. The player enters TALK TO [character], and this launches whatever the character's dialogue is given the current game state. This allows for minimum interactivity, and greatly simplifies both writing and playing the game. Its largest downside though is that with only one command, conversational puzzles are impossible to implement.

Some games include menu systems, allowing the player at different points to choose from a limited number of dialogue options. This allows for more options than the simplified TALK TO command, but can be difficult to implement, and still confines the player to a fairly linear conversational story line.

Many games make use of an ask/tell system, in which the player can ask characters about topics (ASK [character] ABOUT [topic]), or tell them about them. This offers the basic conversational functionality, and allows for the player to mine information from the other characters. It is, at the moment, the most powerful and versatile option.

What you choose depends mostly on your game and your needs. If you are using the TALK TO method, all you need decide is what every speaking NPC will be saying at any given point in the game. Minor NPCs may only have one line of dialogue to repeat throughout the game. More complicated characters might change their lines dependant on the game state.

When designing a menu based system, it would be easiest to draw out conversation trees. What dialogue option results in what response, at different points in the game.

I've worked mostly with ask/tell systems myself, so I'll focus for the moment on those. I find that when planning a character's conversation, I work best away from the computer screen with an old fashioned pad of paper and a pencil. First, I make a list of general topics that all characters in the game are likely to know about. These include other characters, the player, events, places, things, whatever. Then, I go through each character and make a conversational web... I write each topic down, and summarize more or less what the character's response to being asked or told about said subject might be. If this offers up additional conversational topics for that character, I'll draw a line from that topic to a secondary topic.

This can be hard to describe, so here's a crude ASCII diagram.

TOPIC 1 --- SUBTOPIC 1

```
| \  
| \  
| SUBTOPIC 2  
|  
SUBTOPIC 3
```

So, for our hypothetical game in progress, we work up a list of general topics.

- The Player
- The Princess
- The Dragon
- The Prince
- The King
- ... etc other characters
- Our Kingdom
- The Princess's Kingdom
- The Castle
- The Port Town
- ...etc other places
- The Ball
- The Kidnapping
- The Marriage
- ...etc other events

Let us assume that we are developing the Prince as a character. We take the first general topic, the Player, and start a web. We decide that the Prince will say the player's an okay sort, but that he should consider retirement. Our web would look something like

PLAYER --- RETIREMENT

This gives us a subtopic for the prince, the concept of retirement. We decide that if the player asks about retirement, the prince will consider it an excellent idea.

Eventually, when you're done with your list, you can figure out the specifics of the dialogue. I like to type all mine up in a word processor for the advantages spell check gives me. Here's an example of the Prince's Dialogue:

**PLAYER:**

"You have served my father well," the prince speaks, "and your deeds are renowned throughout

the kingdom. You certainly have earned a nice, quiet, retirement."

### RETIREMENT:

The Prince perks up at mention of your potential retirement. "Given the matter some thought have you? It is for the best... you're not getting any younger."

Of course, new conversational topics will arise as you continue planning your game out, and your beta testers will indubitably have suggestions for topics you may have missed.

### O Erin! by -3-



This is "O Erin!" #23

All previous strips can be viewed on the AIF Newsletter web site and on -3-'s new site: <http://comics.aifcommunity.org>. Don't miss them!

### AIF Wants You

If you can write game reviews, articles, opinion pieces, humorous essays, or endless blather, we want you. Contact the Editor for suggested content or just write what you want and send it to us.

### Staff

**Editor** A Ninny is an AIF player, author of two AIF games and frequent beta-tester. His *Parlour* received an Erin for Best "One Night Stand" game in 2004.

**Web Master** Darc Nite is a newcomer to the AIF scene. He is an avid gamer who heard the call for help with the AIF Newsletter.

**Staff Writers** A Bomire is the author of several TADS AIF games, including *Dexter Dixon: In Search of the Prussian Pussy*, *Tomorrow Never Comes* and *The Backlot*. His games have won numerous awards and Erin nominations.

BBBen is an AIF author. His games have received two Erin awards, numerous nominations and first place in A. Bomire's 2004 mini-comp.

Grimm Sharlak is the author of two AIF games: *Breakout* and *Of Masters and Mistresses: Abduction*.

Christopher Cole has written many popular ADRIFT AIF games, including *Camp Windy Lake*, *Gamma Gals*, and *Mount Voluptuous*. He is the 2005 winner of AIF's Badman Memorial Lifetime Achievement Award.