inside erin

THE AIF COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER

Contents

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.

A Letter from the Editor
A Ninny

As I posted earlier this month, Yahoo! enforced their Terms of Service (TOS) on my 'sissyninny' account due to what they felt were violations of the TOS in my AIF games index web page that was hosted on their geocities servers. That index is currently located on the web site of this newsletter at http://newsletter.aifcommunity.org/gamelist. As a result of Yahoo!'s enforcement action, my web page was taken down and my account (along with dozens of saved e-mails) was deleted. That enforcement led me to begin thinking about censorship of pornographic content. I realize that Yahoo! isn't the government and as a corporate entity is able to control the content stored on its servers. But that doesn't mean that the government isn't out there, looking to do the exact same thing, or worse.

It should be noted that I'm discussing the U.S. government here. I realize that AIF has a global audience and that a large portion of the readership (not to mention the staff) of this newsletter is not ever going to be contacted by the U.S. Department of Justice. Those of you who are not in the U.S. may now shake your heads in disbelief that a supposedly enlightened country like the U.S. would elect a puritanical nitwit to be the President and a fire-breathing warmonger as Vice President. And yes, you can argue with me about the 'enlightened' part all you want and you'd probably win. I know -- we still have capital punishment. Our government (allegedly) tortures people in secret foreign prisons. Large swaths of the population (including said president) carry guns and don't believe in Evolution. There are fifty million people here who don't have basic health insurance. Etcetera. Given all that, it probably will surprise nobody that the U.S. Department of Justice has an Obscenity Prosecution Task Force.

This Month In AIF
by BBBen

Due to a mix-up last month my column didn't get published, so this month I'll be going over the last two months' worth of events (which makes my job of filling the word limit a little easier). I finally got the final episode of the *Crossworlds* series out in February, but I won't go on about that too much since I don't normally discuss the games very much in my columns apart from announcing them and discussing any issues that arise from their release.

Big news for the AIF Archive: Yahoo has succumbed to public demand and expanded the storage space in their groups from 20MB to 100MB! For those who don't already know, we reached the 20MB storage limit for the AIF Archive quite a while ago and as a consequence the AIF Archive 2 was created as a backup to store new games files. The AIF Archive 2 has no AIF discussion, so it's basically just there for file storage, but this new expansion of the storage areas mean we'll once again be able to store new games in the files section of the original AIF Archive, and it should last quite a while since we've still got four times the original storage capacity to fill. All things told, Yahoo! still isn't an ideal storage space for AIF games, which is why AIFcommunity.org and AIFGames.com are so important as archives for the games (thanks again Matrix Mole and wasexton!). Yahoo! groups can be deleted suddenly and without no-

tice, and that would be devastating to the community even despite the fact that we've made sure to have multiple locations across the internet where the games can be found.

To be honest, not every month's activity seems to justify its own news article, but it's been a while since the last time I looked at the AIF Archive and saw a worryingly low number of new messages listed. It's actually been an unusually vital period in AIF over the past few months, even if the rate of new game releases might not quite suggest it. My perception may be a little skewed since I've been doing so much AIF work lately, but I think the rush of quality game releases before last year's Erins deadline, the emergence of Inform 7, and experiments with gay male AIF and the new RAGS system, all adds up to a certain amount of dynamism that's been lacking for a while. We've also got the mini-comp coming up in a while, so that's something to look forward to. Granted, a period like the beginning of 2005 was probably livelier, but it's still nice to see activity around the place, even if I have to do a chunk of the work myself.

The mini-comp has recently come under scrutiny again, largely triggered by the number of requests for rules clarifications. Generally speaking the "spirit" of the rules is what is enforced, so if you come up with a clever way to use the programming features of TADS to make one room function like and appear to be seven rooms, this would still be outside the rules. It would, however, be possible to code in eight "rooms" so long as they looked and functioned like only three rooms. Probably no games are going to get banned just because they had an extra room or anything, since the "concept" category is used partly to judge how well entries fit the rules.

From all this, questions have arisen: do the rules need a change? Are they getting stale? Are they stifling authors' creativity? We'll get the answer when we see what kind of turn-out we have this year; it's always surprised me how many entries the mini-comp attracts, so I'm hoping it's a format that works well. I personally ventured the opinion that, at least for this year, the rules shouldn't be changed and I'd like to see how this year goes before considering change for next year. I think the restrictions give authors a level playing field that encourages the work of new authors and relieves some of the pressure, whilst still introducing the features of a deadline and friendly competition which motivate a lot of people. Nevertheless, if this year doesn't have the kind of level of entries that the previous three mini-comps have had, then I think a change would be in order.

Anyway, about this RAGS system: it looks fairly interesting, although it isn't as text-based as the existing systems. The argument over graphics in AIF has never really been sorted out, some people like graphics, others say that the presence of images tends to weaken the descriptions. I personally think that while graphics can weaken (or distract from) the prose, it needn't necessarily do so and it can be worthwhile if multimedia is used well. Note that in the Erin Awards we have an award called "best *use* of multimedia", suggesting that it is not just the quality, but the use of the multimedia that matters in the design of AIF. Anyway, RAGS would not be used for games like we know them, it is more a point-and-click style of game engine – give the new RAGS games a try to see what I mean.

So, hopefully next month I'll be back to my normal, once a month column and I'll be continuing my normal struggle to find things to talk about. I'll leave you with this sentiment: mini-comp games take very little time to write, code and test, so if you have a good idea for one give this year's mini-comp a try. The deadline is May 11, so you still have heaps of time!

New Games

Ring of Power – RAGS, by Tina Beitcher, 2nd February 2007. A short game involving gender transformation.

Crossworlds Part 4: Scream for Me! – ADRIFT 3.9, by BBBen, 3rd February 2007. The final episode of the Crossworlds series.

Inheritance – RAGS, by Tina Beitcher, 8th March 2007. The sequel to *Ring of Power*, in which Chris winds up at his rich, dead aunt's mansion, dealing with her sinister ghost. ●

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This is the Task Force's purpose, according to the DOJ web site (see http://www.usdoj.gov/criminal/optf/):

> The Task Force's trial prosecutors and law enforcement agents partner with the Nation's 93 United States Attorneys to initiate and conduct investigations and prosecutions under federal statutes prohibiting obscenity crimes involving the transportation of obscene matter via the mails, common carriers, interactive computer services, or other means or facilities of interstate or foreign commerce. Many of these cases arise from complaints by citizens who have been offended or harmed by the spread of hardcore pornography over the Internet....

In a nutshell, they're prosecuting obscenity crimes, which includes the transmittal of hardcore porn over the Internet. The test for whether something is obscene is based on a U.S. Supreme Court ruling (*Miller v. California)* handed down in 1973 and tests obscenity based on

> Whether the average person, applying contemporary adult community standards, would find that the work, taken as a whole, appeals to the prurient interest (*i.e.*, an erotic, lascivious, abnormal, unhealthy, degrading, shameful, or morbid interest in nudity, sex, or excretion); and

> Whether the average person, applying contemporary adult community standards, would find that the work depicts or describes, in a patently offensive way, sexual conduct (*i.e.*, ultimate sexual acts, normal or perverted, actual or simulated, masturbation, excretory functions, lewd exhibition of the genitals, or sado-masochistic sexual abuse); and

> Whether a reasonable person would find that the work, taken as a whole, lacks serious literary, artistic, political, or scientific value.

Based on that test, some 'reasonable person' (and the DOJ decides who that is, right?) can pretty much decide that any pornography (including our own text-based porn) is classified as obscene and therefore sending it over computer networks constitutes the commission of a crime.

More frightening still, the Task Force's web site has a FAQ page has but one single Q, which is "What Citizens Can Do About Obscenity?" Huh? "What Citizens Can Do About Obscenity?!" Wait – this isn't a question – it's a directive! It may as well be "Rat On Your Neighbors." Would that be *your* only Q for the FAQ? Not a single question about why it is apparently so important to prosecute 'ordinary' porn? I can think of a whole 'who what where why how' list of questions, but the only thing on there is a direction – get this – for visitors to the FAQ to visit the web sites of Morality In Media (www.moralityinmedia.org) and (www.obscenitycrimes.org) and "report adult obscenity ("hard-core pornography") encountered either on a Website or in an e-mail." This Morality In Media, is a (of course) faith based (i.e. right-wing Evangelical Christian), and serves as a proxy for the DOJ's round-up of Internet-based porn.

Over the next couple of months, I hope to provide more information about the Task Force and its activities in this editorial, including, hopefully, interviews with people on the front lines of this fight. In the meantime, this editorial is a good starting point, and makes for much more useful reading than me complaining about having a bad month (sorry about that). In the meantime, take a look at the web sites I already listed, as well as these, which are organizations working to fight the Task Force and have pornographic content protected under the free speech umbrella:

National Coalition for Sexual Freedom (http://www.ncsfreedom.org/)
Internet Freedom Association (http://www.i-freedom.org)
Free Speech Coalition (http://www.freespeechcoalition.com/)

On other topics, I'd like to thank Bitterfrost for helping with the redesign of the newsletter. I think the new appearance is much more professional. Great job, Bitter. I hope we didn't take away too much time from *HIGS*. Finally, we have a new feature premiering this month: "Great Moments in AIF". Each month we will look back and relive one or two great moments from an AIF game. In this premier edition, two portions of *Prom Night* by Sir Gareth and Christopher Cole are featured.

I hope everyone is diligently working on their games for the AIF Mini-comp. I have already received one entry, if you can believe that. I'm looking forward to a great crop of games this year.

Have a great, productive month!

A. Ninny

Ｔhis month we're pleased to present an interview with David Welbourn. David is one of the main editors of the IF Wiki and is a long-time IF enthusiast. We asked him about the Wiki and his thoughts on the state of IF in general.

Interview
with David Welbourn
by A. Ninny

AN: What brought you to IF in the first place?

DW: I've forgotten his name, but when I was at university, there were a couple guys from the high school who hung around the math building and seemed to know everything about the university that was worth knowing. One of them told me about a PDP-11 on the sixth floor where everyone was playing something called Colossal Cave or Adventure. So I found the room, signed in as "jqpublic" and got hooked. Of course, "IF" didn't exist yet. This was something new. Before Rubik's Cube. Before Space Invaders. Before Apple][.

A friend of a friend invented a variant of the B programming language called F (for Fantasy) and wrote a couple adventures in that on the Honeywell 360. My knowledge of B helped me get a co-op job where they needed a programmer for a new language called C, and it was at that job where the boss found a copy of *Dungeon* (the mainframe Zork game) for me to play with.

Back at university, a friend had *Softporn Adventure* on their Apple][and later, *Zork I*. I played *Zork II* in the middle of a comic book store, and bought *Zork III* for a friend's computer. By the time *Enchanter* came out, I had an Apple][c and could play games on my own machine.

When Infocom stopped publishing, it was slim pickin's. Legend Entertainment seemed promising, with its *Spellcasting* series and *Eric the Unready*, but it too went away, and I had to make do with Sierra's *King's Quest* series and similar fare. The dark ages ended when someone suggested I visit the miningco website, where I found Stephen Granade's pages on "interactive fiction", and in time, that led to r*if, ifMud, Inform, Speed-IF, and all the rest of it.

AN: Do you have an 'official' role with the IFWiki (I understand that with wikis what's official is unofficial, but still...)?

DW: Officially, I'm merely one of several people who was given an administrator account when IFWiki was first created by David Cornelson, and that means I can block normal users, protect and unprotect some pages, and do a couple other things that normal users can't.

Unofficially, I'm the driving force behind IFWiki, at least for now. I'm the guy who added the vast majority of the wiki's content and made most of the decisions on how it all should be organized, with very little input from anybody. I've heard very little feedback, either pro or con, so I assume that either I haven't made too many mistakes, or people are quite willing to let me have free rein with IFWiki to do whatever I want with it.

AN: I've noticed the Wiki has begun adding a separate article for every IF (and AIF) game. What's the origination of the idea to do that?

DW: Well, lemme see. The other options would be to not provide any articles on games at all, or only provide articles on some games, yes?

I think I always wanted to see *some* game articles, and it would be a very strange IFWiki that didn't have any game articles at all. And yes, IFWiki was like that at first, mainly because we didn't have any standards on how to present a game article. I had to invent that standard, and then other editors were able to follow it.

And once that standard was in place, I didn't want to discriminate against certain games any more than I wanted to discriminate against certain authors. I really didn't want to establish a prestige system at IFWiki, where only some authors and only some games are worthy of inclusion. And what metric could I possibly invent that would let everyone know where the line was drawn?

Furthermore, as much as I love and appreciate everything that Baf's Guide provides for the IF community, it focuses solely on the contents of the IF Archive and nothing else. It's long bothered me that there wasn't a guide to all of IF that also included the majority of ADRIFT games, the AIF games, the non-English games, the commercial games, and a few handfuls of other games scattered about the Internet not in any archive.

So yeah, I wanna collect 'em all.

AN: How long do you think it will take?

DW: Oh, forever and a day. There a few decades of games already in existence and new ones are written all the time, so it's really impossible to keep up with it all.

However, I do have a secret weapon I haven't really deployed yet. I have my own li'l private database of info, which generates my Key & Compass pages -- Key & Compass is my homesite -- and I plan to eventually autogenerate a few hundred game pages all at once some weekend. I think once we've got a ton of pages for most of the better-known games and all that fussy formating is in place, it'll be a lot easier for casual editors to edit existing pages than try to create a new ones on their own.

AN: Based on the game articles I've checked out, it appears you are including a "how it begins" detail on each game, but not more specific content information. What is the intention behind this decision?

DW: The "How It Begins" section got its inspiration from something I was toying with for my Key & Compass database. At one point, I was considering adding fields about the setup of each game, such as the name of the PC, the initial location name, the initial inventory, and the initial stated goal given to the player. When it came time to invent the game page format for IFWiki, I just carried this idea over, but opted for a more human paragraph form for this info.

Part of the reasoning for choosing this rather than say, a plot summary, was the desire to avoid spoilers as much as possible on the main page for an article, yet still say something non-trivial and interesting. The "How It Begins" section is intended as a bit of a teaser, giving readers a hint of the flavour or direction of the game. I do eventually want spoiler pages on IFWiki, but *those* pages will be in a separate "Spoilers" category. I just haven't built that part of IFWiki's structure yet.

As for "more specific content", that's what the Notable Features section immediately below is supposed to be for. The Notable Features section should ideally be a distillation of the main points raised in reviews for the game, and ought to be one of the more important and interesting sections of a game article.

AN: What kind of assistance are you soliciting and what can we do to help out?

DW: I haven't solicited any assistance. As far as I know, everyone who's ever edited the wiki did so on their own. I'm hoping that people who find the wiki and want to help will do so, but I expect most visitors to the wiki will simply want to look something up.

Everyone (except spammers and vandals) is welcome to help edit IFWiki, either by adding new articles about IF topics or by editing existing articles with new or corrected information. I would prefer new authors to follow the standards previously set in IFWiki, but I can certainly understand the desire to just create a new page now and let someone else (such as myself) fix it up later.

I should also mention that it's okay to create articles on games you yourself wrote; there's no policy against writing about your own games, and some people have already done so. Remember, however, that anyone can edit a page after you, and that we are trying for a neutral "encyclopedia-like" feel to our articles. They aren't your personal pages, you don't own them, and they aren't advertisements. Just so you know.

It also wouldn't hurt to add a link to IFWiki to any IF "Links" webpage. Promotion is good.

AN: You attended the Erins ceremony two years running [though I missed it this year], which says to me that you at least like to follow the AIF 'scene'. Is it purely academic interest on your part (collecting data for the wiki, for example)? How would you characterize your interest in AIF?

DW: I suppose it's mostly academic, although I do enjoy playing an AIF game every now and then. I'm a guy. I like porn. So why not? But most of my need to look into AIF grew from my involvement with the XYZZY Awards, where I compile the list of all the names of all the games for the previous year. For at least a couple years, the list you keep at http://newsletter.aifcommunity.org/gamelist has been very helpful to me. I'd look at that, update my list, and move on.

However, with IFWiki, I needed more than just titles, authors, and dates. I had to actually play some AIF. Usually I would just scope out the beginning then quit, but if the game caught my fancy, I'd try playing it in earnest and maybe even finish the game. I've probably played more AIF in 2006 than I have in any previous year. And read more. I sometimes look at the AIF Newsletter now. I read about the making of *Bob's Garage*. I looked at the source code for *Collision... In Space!* And I saw the AIF interview with Jimmy Maher. So, I haven't entered the AIF clubhouse as such, but I've peeked in the windows a couple times.

I've also given some thought about the unwritten protocols of AIF and what alternatives might be adopted in new games, but I suspect that's a topic for another article.

AN: Which AIF games caught your fancy enough for you to finish them?

DW: The AIF that I've finished are: *Softporn Adventure*, *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* (1 and 2), *Spellcasting 101* and *301*, *Blow Job Drifter*, *I-0* (if that counts), *Eterna Corp*, *Archie's Birthday - Chapter 1: Reggie's Gift*, *Vengance*, *Shamelessly Slutty: Teacher*, *Crossroads Part 0 - The Girl Next Door*, *Gifts of Phallius 1: The Baron's Plot*, *Ron Weasley and the Quest for Hermoine*, and most recently, *Bareback Mountain*.

So it's mostly the comedy and fantasy stuff for me. (I didn't like *Vengance* at all, but it's an extremely short game.) There were several other games I started, like *Santa's Little Helper* and *Ideal Pacific Coast University* (to name two), which I liked well enough, but just got stuck on a puzzle partway through.

AN: That's not an insubstantial list. So what (for you) makes the opening of a game (any game - not just AIF) so engaging that you know you have to play it all?

DW: Tough question. I like to get a sense of enthusiasm from the author, that they've got something interesting to tell me or show me and they're eager to do so. If they can't manage enthusiasm, authors should try for "fun". As I said, I like comedy and fantasy. Those genres relax me and make me feel comfortable. And I know that story and plot is supposed to be important these days, but I still (personally) want a <u>game</u>. Gimme a <u>game</u>, please.

Another quality I want to see early in the game is trust. Part of the trust factor means playing fair with the player. For example, if Leon is here and Leon is three-inches tall, glows in the dark, and flies like Tinkerbell because he's one of the fairy folk, then for pity's sake tell me that when I examine him. If instead I read:

>x leon
  The glowing light hovers slightly over your head. A feeling of happiness overwhelms you when you look at him.

then the author is cheating. He hasn't bothered to tell me what should be obvious to the PC, that Leon is a fairy, and instead I'm staring at the screen thinking 'wtf, what glowing light?'

The other half of the trust factor is diligent world-building. If I find an egg, I might try to break, open, or eat it. If you give me a gun, I'll try shooting everything and everyone, not just the "bad guys". I will close doors, look through windows, look under beds, search sofas, and turn on sinks. Authors should anticipate my actions, know that I'm gonna play with everything, and act intelligently. At least make it obvious you've made the effort. If I can't trust the author to get the basic stuff working, the rest of the game probably isn't worth the look.

I also want to feel welcome. That means letting me participate. When games start solving their own puzzles for me or moving my character to a new location when I'm trying to do something else... this is telling me that the game doesn't really want *me* to be there. It feels like the author has grabbed the keyboard out of my hands because I'm not getting to the next bit of plot or not solving the puzzles fast enough. Well, fine. I'll just play something else where I *am* welcome.

I'm also peculiarly drawn to badly-written games. I don't mean bad-on-purpose or dull games, but... I derive a perverse pleasure in finding gems like:

>x knolge stone
  A purple stone, you can here the knolge of the universe being wisperd from within.

I read something as dire as that, and I just *have* to see what the rest of the game is like. And if the author's command of English is as bad as *that*, I wonder how did he get the program to compile? It just boggles my mind.

AN: Following up on your comment about diligent world-building: This sounds like what I do when I beta-test. When I play for pleasure I am more relaxed so I won't feel like I'm beta-testing all the time. Do you feel like a beta-tester when you play?

DW: I think you're missing my point. Let me rephrase. Pretend I'm a platinum blonde named Alice wearing a white leather jacket and matching skirt over top of a white blouse, none of which does anything to hide her shapely curves. Alice is sitting at the computer, legs crossed, as she tentatively starts playing your game. She is not relaxed. Her "arousal level" with your game begins at zero. But, she's here. She's interested. And she wants to have a good time. But. Alice isn't likely to go "all the way" with your game if her attempts to interact with it keep getting brushed aside. If you won't let her sit on the bed, or look through

a window, maybe she can't trust you to let her kiss you either. Or maybe your game knows what kissing is, but won't let her do that thing she likes to do with an ice cube. A girl's just gotta know just how far "all the way" means in the game, and what options she has to get there. So she's gonna check you out, test you a little, and if she likes what she sees, she'll continue playing your game. (And, y'know, maybe I'll play the game too.)

AN: Hehe. Thanks for telling that in a way even us AIF guys can understand.

David Welbourn goes by the handle dswxyz on the IF Wiki. His web site, which contains a massive collection of IF ephemera, is Key & Compass. It can be viewed at http://webhome.idirect.com/~dswxyz/ifindex.html. We are very grateful for his time and candor. ●

H ello, reader! Bitterfrost here! Slugabed. Atrophy artiste. Pace car for snails. I'm here with tales of another month of wrestling with my stubborn, one-and-only, I'm-going-to-finish-this-someday-if-it-kills-me AIF game.

You know, I didn't think life could get any busier than the time-sucking whirlwind that blew through in February, but March has been one crazy mutha of a month.

Huge projects at work, compounded and confounded by technical problems, pretty much extinguished my free time and my free will. Don't get me wrong--graphic design is a good gig. I mean, it beats hell out of my days in the circus. Unfortunately, when the heat really gets turned up and multiple deadlines overlap, it sucks the energy and creativity right out of me.

How NOT to Write AIF

Author's Log
by
Bitterfrost

So this month, if I wasn't working like a fiend, I was recuperating from work (i.e. slumped in front of the TV watching "Golden Girls" and drinking drain cleaner) or playing around with the family.

I can't name a day where I actually sat down to my own computer. Which is not to say that I don't have anything to share. No. No. I'd make something up if I had to. I'd never let down the one guy in Greenland who's been reading my column. Cheers, Annogakuluuk! I don't know what I'd do without you.

I owe this month's one bit of significant progress to a day spent in the doctor's office. Rather, in the waiting room. I had a number of ten minute tests spread over the course of the day that left me with a lot of in-between time to kill.

Don't worry. It's nothing serious. It's just the smorgasbord of venereal diseases I've been lugging around the last ten years flaring up again. Actually, it was just a boring battery of blood tests (diabetes et al). I'm sorry it's not more dramatic. I'll work on an impressive ailment for next month's installment. Something decorative with severe swelling and spots.

Anyway, I found myself with several chunks of waiting room time to fill. Fortunately, I smuggled my latest game transcript in my satchel. In a respectable black binder, it looked more like a novel or a screenplay than a diary of shabby wit and perversion. So, pen in hand, I enjoyed several hours of intense, focused editing free of interruption. You have to understand, a lump of time like that has been hard to come by the last few months.

So I sat there reading and scribbling, chuckling at the funny bits, smirking at the naughty bits and generally instilling fear and discomfort in my fellow patients. I can't help it. You've got to get your mischievous glee somewhere, right? I've got to admit, it's fascinating to sit quietly and scribble away on something with the potential to amuse, arouse, shock or offend anyone in the room.

I don't know about other AIF authors, but I've always felt that this brand of work brings out the mad scientist in me. Think about it. We spend a ridiculous amount of time in wanton, arcane practices, pouring blood, sweat and cerebellum into something that's misunderstood by the average person and only truly appreciated by a handful of likeminded loonies. Personally, I love it. It's like being in on a really good joke.

Anyway, I wrangled a mess of spelling mistakes and grammar errors, made all manner of notes to add command synonyms, new tasks and "ask about" topics and generally tightened the whole thing up. Why am I buffing the first chunk of the game to a high shine instead of chipping away at the rest of the story?

Search me. Like I have a clue about half of the things I do day to day. I suppose my feeling is that, should I happen to kick off sometime soon, I'd leave behind a polished fragment of AIF for folks to mull over and fully realize my lunacy. How did I get myself way in over my head with this project? Brain damage, pure and simple.

So now I just need to sit down at the computer, squint at my chicken-scratch annotations and make all of these refinements. I need to start drinking Red Bull again to stave off sleep and take full advantage of the wee hours once more. I don't know how, when or where the time is going to manifest otherwise. I need to hire some help. I can't pay, but you can crash on my couch. C'mon, Annogakuluuk! Be a sport!

Here's something that recently made this whole AIF project more interesting. This actually occurred a couple of months ago, but what can I say? I'm slow.

I have to confess that I've been "outed."

No, not in that way!

Although I have to admit that GoblinBoy is real cute, especially perched atop his mountain of (well-deserved) Erin Awards. By the way, I've written a musical version of "Deliverance," and you're perfect for the Ned Beatty part. Squeal like a pig, boy! Bah, I'm just kidding him for putting the mack on all the lovely ladies at the award ceremony. I knew I should've come in drag.

No. No. No. I've been outed to the wife as a purveyor and player of AIF.

I'm not sure what your situations are like out there, but I imagine AIF is a private indulgence for many of you. And we all know that folks without the AIF gene (or those who furiously deny having it) can react to the genre with all kinds of negative feelings, name-calling and frantic arm waving. Of course, carrying that misunderstanding makes AIF that much more compelling, right? It's covert, risky and ever the underdog.

I've been working on my game for over two years now on a whenever-time-allows basis. It hasn't been an escape from my daily life. If anything, it's an extension, an outlet for all of the images and wanderings that occur in the back of my head throughout the day.

I've never been ashamed of it. To me, sex is natural (often hilarious) and deserves all manner of celebration and study, but in our violence=good/sex=bad culture that kind of thinking tends to make people back away like you're a leper. What's so dangerous or disreputable about erotica? Is pleasure really so terrible? It makes no sense, but there it is. We're a peculiar species.

Acting on our fine Victorian ideals, I assumed that my wife would find my AIF hobby excessive and strange, so I kept everything stowed in a plain, brown folder deep in the hollows of my computer. I mean, she's never been shy about sex (where do you think most of my game's content comes from!), but erotica has that self-indulgent stigma that says you have to keep it hidden.

Here's some critical advice if you'd like to keep your AIFing under wraps: don't leave anything on your computer's desktop.

A few months ago, I emailed my ADRIFT file and a goofy game package design to a couple of authors to get some feedback. Since it's such a pain to attach files that are nested way down in your machine, it's easier just to copy them onto the desktop temporarily, right? Whoops.

The next day, I came back from a few hours of appointments and errands to find my wife sitting at the computer with all manner of familiar windows open. While I was out she noticed the curious graphics I'd left on the desktop, made one search and uncovered my AIF stash. Over the course a couple of hours, she'd plumbed the depths of my ADRIFT file and all of its satellite Word documents. Double whoops.

She rotated the chair to look at me, and there was suddenly a moment of silence that stretched on into eternity. You know the kind. The classic "oh shit" moment.

Anticipation knotted up my innards, and I wracked my brain for some kind of explanation, even a really weak one. She appraised me with those clever brown eyes then cocked an eyebrow and put on the most bemused smirk I've ever seen.

"Very interesting," she said. "I'm glad you finally found a hobby."

She's been teasing me for years about getting my head out of video games and books and doing something creative. Well,

there you go. She knew I'd been up to something with my off-again/on-again puttering at the computer and was relieved to find out I wasn't having an affair, exploring a clown fetish or plotting to overthrow the government.

While I believe she'd rather have me working on a novel or even a screenplay for "Robot Jox 3," she finds the whole AIF thing intriguing, amusing and... arousing. I should know never to underestimate the Bittermistress.

Sure, she's a little uncertain about my sharing our sex life in some many words, but she's a bit excited by it, too. Better than all of that, she's accepting. What an amazing woman! Proof once again of what a lucky bastard I am. Not too bright. Certainly not prolific. But damn lucky. I can accept that.

So now she teases me every time we have a particularly memorable night, asking if it's going to carry over to my game.

It's funny, but I was slightly more productive before being outed, when I was the lone mad scientist toiling away in secret. Oh well. It's also more interesting now that I have a willing assistant. ●

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.

Seven Seas of Theah   **Episode 14**

by Christopher Cole

Magnus knew that he wanted to learn where he was, and what had happened to him, but he found his mind was drawn to the strange, beautiful creature that had appeared from the water. A name tickled the edge of his mind; someone he was looking for, but the name would not form and he let it dissolve into mist. He looked down at the woman in front of him; her hands were pressed against his chest.

With slightly trembling hands, he reached out to her and felt the curves of her hips under his skin. His hands slid up her glistening body until he could feel the under curve of her shapely breasts in his hands. He cupped them and enjoyed their weight in his hands. The young woman smiled up at him and moved in to kiss his chest. She caressed his skin with her lips and tongue and each touch created a fire on Magnus' skin. She kissed lower and lower and he watched her slide what was left of his breeches down his legs. His cock was fully hard now and she took it in her hands. Her touch was so sensuous that he felt himself throb in her palm. She stared at his manhood briefly, that little smile on her lips. Then she kissed the throbbing head and took it into her mouth. Magnus couldn't help but yell out in pleasure. She bobbed her mouth up and down his hard shaft. It glistened with her saliva, and she used her hand to help with the motion.

It felt like nothing Magnus had ever felt before. Just before he erupted with orgasm, she stopped. She stood and kissed Magnus on the mouth. The kiss was soft at first, but soon became frenzied and needy. Magnus bent and took one of her nipples into his mouth. It was small and erect and he teased it with his tongue. She arched her back and pressed her large breasts into his face. He took the other nipple into his mouth and moved between the two, losing himself in her bosom.

She pulled Magnus' head up and kissed him again, then she led him to the wall of the cavern. She turned her back to him and placed her hands on the wall, spreading her legs and sticking her behind out. She looked back at him, but he needed no coaching. Magnus moved in behind her and entered her hot, wetness from behind. Again he cried out from the sensation, and this time, her moans joined his. He moved in and out of her, his hard cock throbbing deep inside her and ready to explode at any moment.

He moved his hands from her hips and reached under her to cup her swinging breasts. She slowed his pace, letting his orgasm hover on the verge for as long as he was able. He looked down and watched his cock enter her pussy. He moved slowly, painfully slowly in and out of her. The sight of his hard manhood covered with her slick juices as it slowly moved in and out of her was too much for him and even though he was barely moving now, he could feel and see it start to throb uncontrollably and he started to cum…

WHERE SHOULD MAGNUS CUM?

1) Inside her pussy?   **2) Inside her ass?**   **3) On her ass?**
4) On her tits?   **5) In her mouth?** ●

This month we introduce a new feature: Great Moments in AIF. Each month we will revisit a game we've all played before and select one or two blocks of text that we feel really emphasize what is great about that game. Generally, these will be excerpts from sex scenes, but if we decide that a non-sex moment is particularly funny or vibrant, we will present that as well.

This month's selection is from one of my personal favorites, *Prom Night* by Sir Gareth and Christopher Cole. Susie and Amy were just discovered by the PC having sex in the girls' bathroom. This scene won the 'Best Lesbian Sex Scene in 2003.

>Amy, suck cock
Amy squeezes your cock at the base and then leans over and takes the fat tip into her mouth. You gasp as she slides her warm, wet mouth down the length, deepthroating you. She pulls back and begins to bob her mouth and down your shaft, making sucking, slurping noises.

"Hey Susie," she says, motioning her over, "Come help me out!"

Susie can't stop giggling, but she kneels down beside Amy and the two of them takes turns sucking your cock, passing it back and forth between their mouths.

The sight of Amy and Susie giving you a blow job together is so incredibly arousing that you feel yourself starting to climax. "Oh my God, you guys" you say, as Amy sucks you, "I'm about to come!"

Susie put her hand on your engorged penis and tries to push Amy away. "Hey," she says, "I'll do the honors!"

"No way, girl!" Amy says, giggling as she fends Susie off, "He's all mine!"

Susie pouts. "Okay, but I get to help!" She runs her hand over your balls and lower shaft as Amy continues to suck you.

Their joint effort sends you over the brink, and you thrust deeply into Amy's mouth, crying out with pleasure as you come. Amy swallows your load with a quick gulp, and licks her lips. "Mmm!" she says, "You taste almost as good as Susie here," giving Susie a wink. Susie watches you and Amy with interest, her hands running over her body. ●

Great Moments in AIF

Crossworlds Part 4: Scream For Me!
Review by Grimm Sharlak

Game Info:	*Crossworlds Part 4: Scream for Me!,*
Eeleased	4th February 2007
Author:	BBBen? Yes!
Platform:	ADRIFT 3.9
Size:	370KB (zipped)
Content:	m/f, m/f/f, f/f
Game Type:	Adventure
Length:	Medium
Reviewed:	February 2007
Extras:	None

Game Reviews

Basic Plot:
In this final game of the Crossworlds series, you wake up from an encounter with a Great Gremlin to find that you've lost Janey, you're a teacher at the local college and all is not as it seems…

Overall Thoughts:
The swansong for this series is a fine one, incorporating all the characters we've met before, like Janey, Lin and fan favourite Debbie, while including some new characters as well. *Scream for Me!* has multiple callbacks to all the games of the series, but is a fine stand alone game in its own right and certainly doesn't suffer from "sequel-itis".

Puzzles/Gameplay:

As with all the *Crossworlds* games, the game is fairly plot-driven and linear. The puzzles are never too taxing, with only the occasional awkward piece of syntax to trip up the player. The game progresses through a number of settings and areas, but I never found myself lost for what to do next or to the solution of the puzzles presented to me.

Sex:

Sex scenes are in abundance in *Scream for Me!* and on the whole are a well-written, rewarding experience. You'd think after five games involving some of these characters, the scenes would get a little stale, but you'd be wrong. The initial scenes with Lin and Debbie show that BBBen! hasn't lost his creative flair for a good sex scene.

Technical:

I found no technical issues to speak of, but this game doesn't push Adrift to its limits, either. Overall, a very sound technical implementation that achieves all it sets out to do.

Intangibles:

Speaking of callbacks to the other games in the series, multiple items can be "read" which provide little Easter eggs for the player. This is a great motivation to play the game through and find absolutely everything if you're a fan of the series.

Final Thoughts:

If you've enjoyed any of the previous *Crossworlds* games, you'll enjoy *Scream for Me!* But even if you haven't played any (where have you been?) this is still a fun, sexy stand alone game. Highly recommended.

Rating: A

Ring of Power

Review by A. Ninny

Name:	*Ring of Power*
Author:	Tina B
Platform:	RAGS
Size:	2.1MB
Content:	m/f
Game Type:	Puzzle fest
Length:	Short
Extras:	mages
Reviewed:	March, 2007

Basic Plot

You play a typical bachelor who embarks on a very odd and disjointed series of encounters that end when you obtain the Ring of Power, a magical ring that supposedly gives its wearer hypnotic control over other people.

Overall Thoughts

As this is the first AIF game to make use of the RAGS system, I feel it is necessary to co-review the game along with RAGS as a player interface. A. Bomire wrote a fairly extensive review of RAGS as an authoring system last month, but this is the first time anyone has reviewed a RAGS game here, so I thought I'd provide my thoughts on that as well.

Tina B does mention that this is just a test game, so a reading of my discussion of the game's quality should take that into account.

RAGS has potential. Clearly, the things that Tina B was able to put into this game hints at the possibilities, though it does not actually exploring them very deeply. This game does not have an interactive sex scene, but I saw no reason why one couldn't be created. I did not have a philosophical problem with the point-click interface. The biggest benefit I saw was speed – it is possible to play this game in a couple of minutes. I liked that I had no issues with making typos while issuing commands. The biggest drawback simply is that you always know exactly what the extent of your available commands are. This makes the game feel constricted. With 'normal' IF, you always feel like a game may be replayable if you can think of another command to attempt. There is no matching sense with RAGS. Perhaps the author can hide images or interactive options behind an odd series of command combinations?

I do not know whether to blame RAGS or Tina B, but I really felt like there were always too few options offered at any given

time in *Ring of Power*. While in one sense this is refreshing (no verb-guessing!), had this game been made in a 'real' IF language, I think I would have been guessing at verbs in *Ring of Power* almost constantly. That is because precious few objects had more than basic commands associated with them, most room objects couldn't be examined or manipulated, and NPC's had no body parts or clothes that could be examined. I think with a menu-based system like RAGS, you need to make extra effort to make your game interactively robust. *Ring of Power* doesn't even try.

Puzzles/Gameplay

While not wanting to take a test game to task too much, it is at least worth pointing out that the puzzles in *Ring of Power* really make no sense whatsoever. There is never sufficient motivation or information leading to following a particular path. I think it is useful to give a player an inkling of what a particular item might be used for before you present him with it, especially if the player is forced to spend what limited money he has on it. Furthermore, the money system as it is designed makes it highly likely that you will maneuver yourself into a situation from which you can go no further, simply because your money ran out and you have no way to get more. As a result, once you realize why you may need, say, a depilation cream, it may be that you have no opportunity to get enough money to buy one, and you'll have no choice but to start over.

Sex:

There are no interactive sex scenes in the game. Instead, there are a couple of very *very* short sex cut-scenes and a series of photos of nearly naked women. I don't feel like the pictures replace written sex, and they aren't very interesting photos anyway.

Technical:

In addition to the previously mentioned problem with running out of money, there are numerous bugs and oddities in the game. A number of these simply pertain to the images accompanying the text. I would have expected the written descriptions to match the images, but they rarely did. Also, there were other sorts of bugs: instances when messages should have changed to reflect an action I had completed, but did not; money amounts that were allowed to go negative (when tipping a stripper); and a restriction that I only am allowed to change clothes in one location (not even in my own bedroom) even though I can strip of my own clothes anywhere.

Finally, a couple of gripes about RAGS: It needs an 'undo' feature. And when I tried to save and restore, RAGS did not remember how much money I had before the save, so I had to start over anyway.

Final Thoughts:

The general recommendation authors receive about test games is to keep them on their hard drives. This one was released, which was probably a mistake. I will say that it does well to show off the ability of the author to invent an odd, creative story. It has quite a few elements that are quite inventive and promising. Overall, however, I see a definite need for cleaner, more robust implementation and more detailed, consistent storytelling.

Rating: D

Serving Your Country

Review by A. Bomire

Name:	*Serving Your Country*, release 1
Author:	Fletcher Smyth
Platform:	Inform 6
Size:	136KB
Content:	m/f, BDSM
Game Type:	Puzzle fest
Length:	Short
Extras:	None
Reviewed:	March 2007

Basic Plot

You are a member of the Druin Intelligence, which appears to be a secret organization at work in the cold war between your homeland (Druin?) and Thrandia. You are recruited to work undercover to discover information about a treaty between Thrandia and another country called Romana. Your cover? You are a slave, sent to work for a person called an Owner, someone who keeps slaves for sexual purposes. You are to find anything you can about this treaty, and get out.

Overall Thoughts
This game was written for the IF Comp in 2003. As such, it is very short. The emphasis of the game is on the story and puzzles, and less on the sex. In fact, for most of the game engaging in sex is a sure-fire way of cutting the game short, which is definitely a twist on usual AIF plot lines. It has an interesting, if dark, story to go with it. Bondage and spanking aren't really my thing, but I still found the game interesting.

Puzzles/Game play
The game is timed, with specific actions taking place at specific times. As a slave, you are expected to do things when told, so anything else you want to do has to be done in the few moments of free time that you have available to you. This gives the game an anxious feel, as you need to work out what needs to be done, and how long you have to do it. As a slave, you are expected to be in certain areas and do certain things when your Owner demands it. As such, you very rarely are left wandering around, wondering just what it is you are supposed to do.

In fact, the game is designed such that you cannot "fail". Even if you cannot figure out the puzzles, or work out the sequence of actions you need to do to win the game, you will not be stuck. The game will simply continue on, with you either falling for your Owner, or being punished by the Owner or one of the other slaves. This is fairly nice, as you cannot get stuck, but also frustrating because the game is timed - you don't have all the time in the world to try various solutions. Undo and Save/Restore are definitely your friends when playing this game.

Sex
As an entry in the mainstream IF Comp, I was surprised to see that this game had sex in it at all. The sex isn't terribly explicit, but it is there. The various body parts of the characters are examinable, but not necessarily interactively available. What is oddest about this game, and which some players will not like, is that following your natural AIF instincts will cause you to lose the game. Slaves are expected to be disciplined - nobody has sex without the Owner's permission. And this rule is enforced in a very strict manner. While you can disobey your Owner and have sex with some of the slaves, expect to have dire consequences.

To win the game, you have to participate in a little bondage, but you don't have to go all the way with it unless you absolutely want to. If this is something you wish to pursue, you can spank and whip to your heart's content. This isn't really my thing, so I was glad to see that you can proceed without it if you wish.

Technical
There weren't a lot of bugs that I could find in this game. At one point, I accidentally repeated a command, and found myself stuck and unable to proceed. This happened in the Owner's private quarters. Other than that, the game was pretty bug free.

Intangibles
This game was interesting in that it is one of the few AIF games in which the object *isn't* to have sex with everything that moves. In fact, as I mentioned, following your natural AIF instincts to screw everything in sight will have bad consequences. Also, you can play the game as either a male or female character. I played as a male, and the Owner and all other characters were female. Then, I played as a female and all of the other characters changed gender as well. This dual-gender aspect could be why the sex scenes are so non-explicit – they work for either male or female player characters.

Final Thoughts
This game didn't really do very well in the IF Comp in which it was entered, but that is understandable. The mainstream IF world doesn't particularly care for AIF in general. However, if I were to judge this game based upon our own AIF standards, I would still not rate it very high. Part of this has to do with my own feelings towards BDSM, and individual players may feel differently about the game.

Rating: C-

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.

Submitting your work to *Inside Erin:*

Please direct all comments, articles, reviews, discussion and art to the Editor, A. Ninny, at aifsubmissions@gmail.com.

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

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