

With the 24th annual **IFComp** just around the corner (July 1st) we spoke to the new organizer Jacqueline Ashwell to get some history on the event and what to expect from the overlooked niche.

Q - What is IFComp and what is its purpose?

IFComp, formally called **The Annual Interactive Fiction Competition**, is a game design competition that welcomes all kinds of text-driven digital stories and games, which are made freely available in order to encourage the creation, play, and discussion of interactive fiction.

Q - For the sake of the competition what counts as IF?

The **IFComp** defines interactive fiction in fairly broad terms as *videogames whose player interactions center on text*. We've watched interactive fiction evolve over the decades, and we're not out to constrain that evolution.

Q - The competition has been running since 1995, how do you feel it, and other competitions have affected the IF landscape?

The competitions give authors two key things: structure and venue. Anyone at any time can write and release anything they want to. Some people need a deadline to make that passion project happen, and the comps provide that. Some people, left unchecked, will endlessly add to the scope of their game, possibly to the point that it would otherwise never see the light of day, and the comps can help constrain that sprawl. Some people don't know how to promote their game to ensure people can find it or get the feedback to learn and grow, and the comps help with that.

Q - The IFComp has an interesting prize pool system where donors can enter prizes ranging from cash to food to professional services. Can you give us some examples of the best prizes to be put in the pool?

We've had a pretty awesome spread of prizes over the years, from Punjammies to localizing your game into another language. In 2015, Etienne Vouga made a very generous \$1,000 donation, which he split up and spread among the top 40 winners. That was actually the inspiration for the Colossal Fund, which we began last year as a way to reward entries parallel to the prize pool.

Q - Have any games made for the competition broke out into the wider market?

I think it's not unfair to state that doing well in the IFComp has helped to lend weight to the CVs of some creators who have gone on to be commercially successful, such as Emily Short, Jon Ingold, and Andrew Plotkin. There are particular IFComp entries such as *Shade*, *Lost Pig*, *Photopia*, and *howling dogs* that are now recognized as seminal works of interactive fiction. And there are works like Brendan Patrick Hennessy's *Birdland* that have gained tons of fans outside the "IF Community."

Q - What are your plans for IFComp now that you're in the driver's seat?

I'm planning to focus on feedback and reviews. Last year we asked people to provide feedback with their votes. This year we'll coach them a little bit on how to make that feedback more useful to authors. I'm also mulling over some sort of incentives for thoughtful reviews.

Q - What advice would you give to anyone reading this who wants to take part?

If you're reading about IFComp for the first time, I would probably caution you against being an author this year. Start out as a judge. Download the games when they're released this October. Play, vote, provide feedback to authors. Write reviews, either on your blog or on the Interactive Fiction Database (the IMDB of IF). We do want your games, though, when the time is right. Good luck!