



Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

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Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Contents

Overview	3
Setting	5
Descriptions	5
Objects	5
Behaviours	6
Connections	6
This Goes There.....	6
Combinations.....	7
Player Character.....	7
Non Playing Character	7
Point of View.....	8
Containment	8
Scope.....	9
Appendix A.....	9
Chapter I – The Abbot’s Quarters	10
Map	10
Rundown.....	10
Design.....	11

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Overview

In this document you will gain an understanding of how Interactive Fiction is designed and developed. In some cases we will design the story first and then write the prose, but we can just as easily take the opposite approach and adapt a story to a design working collaboratively with the writer. One common method is to develop a “fake” transcript of an “IF” (eye-eff) story. Something like:

This is the living room of your recently purchased condo. The only piece of furniture in the place is a small love seat, which you are seated comfortably in at the moment. You’re currently engrossed in writing your latest short story on your laptop.

The doorbell rings.

> OPEN DOOR

As you open the door, a monster pushes into the house.

> LOOK AT MONSTER

This particular monster is well-known to you, as it is your husband. You say, “It’s about time you got home. We’re you planning to scare people all night?”

He replies, “Sorry. There was a bunch of teenagers in the cemetery smoking cigarettes and I couldn’t resist. I brought one of them home for dinner though.”

“You’re such a dear, but I think you should let the human go lest our neighbours become suspicious of the haunted house *again*.”

And then from this small transcript, we can infer two setting locations and possibly three (living room, outside of the house, the cemetery). We can infer the player character, who is obviously Mrs. Monster and we have an NPC or Non-Playing Character, Mr. Monster. We have a few objects; the loveseat, your laptop, the doorbell. All of these things are important because in an IF game, they will need to be implemented by a programmer so the reader can interactive with them.

Moving forward, there are nuanced skills associated with writing specifically to this medium and this document will try to pull together some of those skills. It’s likely going to require some practice before it becomes second nature. There are many references from the hobbyist IF community regarding craft and theory.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

We will cover the following subject areas:

- Setting and the World
- Player Character
- Non Playing Character
- Point of View
- Containment
- Scope
- Story Structure

In Appendix A, there is an example of a fully developed design and writing sample from our published story, *The Shadow in the Cathedral*.

Here are some references to external articles important to understanding Interactive Fiction:

- For a historical perspective on Interactive Fiction, please read Graham Nelson's Craft of Adventure. However, it's a bit dated from a craft perspective, so stick to the history. <http://ifarchive.plover.net/if-archive/info/Craft.Of.Adventure.pdf>
- Emily Short's blog. <http://emshort.wordpress.com>
- Craft section of IFWiki. <http://ifwiki.org/index.php/Craft>

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Setting

One of the fundamental aspects of the Interactive Fiction medium is the setting. The setting is the foundation of everything that happens within the story as well as the core of the interactivity. Offering the reader the ability to *move around* the setting is the first way to introduce the reader to your story. It's very common to have a very open and uneventful prologue so that the reader can adjust to the story. In this sense, it's just as important to create a captivating opening setting as it is to write that first page of a novel.

Descriptions

Setting descriptions start with the "room". If you've read the Craft of Adventure article by Graham Nelson in the list of links on the previous page, you'll get the full history of the medium and why "room" is an important moniker. The room is a place where the player can interact with the world. Since we're creating the world, we can allow for anything. But as in any story development, you have to have limits and you have to define everything that you want your reader to see, hear, smell, touch, and taste.

A typical room description will have two and possible three default implementations: verbose, brief, and super brief. Some stories force the reader to see only the verbose description at all times.

The verbose description will tell the reader everything they need to know in the current stage of the story. Did you catch that? The room description *can change*. This is important, because people have really terrible reading habits when it comes to details and as creative-types, we need to abuse these habits as much as possible. This is one of the ways we can implement **puzzles**. We can embed subtle hints and changes into room descriptions that will (if the reader sees them!) help progress the story.

Of course sometimes we want the change to be seamless and obvious, but these are some of the tricks that the writer enjoys in developing IF stories.

Objects

The next important feature in the setting is objects. Objects are a critical aspect of the world you're creating. Each object has to have a description of its own. You may describe some objects in a room description, but you will also have to provide descriptions for examining and searching each object. Some objects are immovable (like a grand piano), some can be carried, some are containers, and some can support other objects. We call immovable objects *scenery*. There is a lot of frustration over implementing containers and supporters, but over the years the hobbyist community has figured out the best ways to handle it in code. There are special objects like *light sources* and *doors* too.

Your objects can have ambiguous adjectives like colors. So you might have a gold key and a silver key and the following transcript:

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

```
> UNLOCK DOOR WITH KEY
Which key, the gold or the silver?
```

```
> GOLD
Unlocked.
```

There are default responses for everything. If you describe an object in your room description and it hasn't been implemented by the programmer, you might get:

```
> EXAMINE LOVESEAT
I don't see a loveseat.
```

But as purveyors of a higher standard of story implementation, we will test every object in the story to make sure it has a useful description and allows for the most obvious behaviours.

Behaviours

Yes, your objects can do things. As noted, a key can unlock something. A ladder most certainly can be climbed, and a car might be able to be driven. But behaviours are only limited by our imagination, so the key might also be a weapon, the ladder might be a bridge, and the car may actually fly. It's up to the reader to attempt these behaviours whenever they deem it logical to do so. It's our job to implement the behaviours and provide both valid and invalid responses. So if someone tries to fold the ladder, we might say, "It's not that kind of ladder."

In cases where the reader tries something generally silly like EAT LADDER, we can let the default response "Not likely," carry the day.

Connections

In order to move about the setting, we have to give the reader some basic logic or system that makes sense. Since all this business of Interactive Fiction started with a spelunking expedition, the compass rose has become the standard mode of movement. That's not to say there haven't been other implementations. Some stories will allow GO TO KITCHEN or FLY TO MOON. Depending on the story, the best method is likely going to be the compass rose, or the eight cardinal directions NORTH, NORTHEAST, EAST, SOUTHEAST, SOUTH, SOUTHWEST, WEST, and NORTHWEST. Add UP, DOWN, IN, OUT, and you have the entire standard set of mapping capabilities.

This Goes There

Inevitably, some of the objects you provide to the reader will be picked up, examined, and deemed useful for some purpose and trust me; your reader will try *everything*. As evil masters, we like to offer hope that some uses are important to furthering the story, but in the end, some things are just *red herrings*. But there will be one or two uses or some subset of "everything" that we offer to the reader so they can accomplish their mission, which is to finish the story and eat lunch.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Combinations

One very important point to make about developing objects; don't make too many objects that would logically work with many other objects. This leads to what we call, *combinatorial explosion*. For every object in the story that can be positioned in the same room, the reader can attempt to do things with each of them together. If you have 10 objects and you add an 11th, the 11th has to have descriptions for interactions with the first 10 and the first 10 have to have interactions for the 11th. Clearly this can become a nightmare. It's highly recommended that writers develop usable objects that have at least one purpose and all of the other objects are either scenery or very simple red herrings.

Player Character

As a writer you should be intimately familiar with your protagonist. In Interactive Fiction, things get a little crazy where protagonists are concerned. When interactive fiction started out in the 70's and 80's, the PC (Player Character) was a humble nameless faceless genderless adventurer. This actually serves some genres well, like treasure hunts. In contemporary IF, it's become fairly standard practice to develop a character for the PC; giving it a name, a gender, and a description. This helps the reader identify with the character and it also helps the writer think from a particular perspective. It also helps the reader see through the character's eyes and make decisions as if they were that character.

Outside of the description, there really isn't much to the player character. Well, unless we use first person, but that's discussed later in the point of view section.

The PC can have many other attributes of course. That's for you to determine.

Non Playing Character

As with any story, the writer will develop characters for which the protagonist can interact. This might be simple action sequences or it may have dialogue. It may be that the other characters take up the story themselves and do things without the protagonist knowing what they're up to. All of these things hold true in Interactive Fiction too.

When developing NPC's, they can have a name, description, the ability to carry things, to offer things to other NPC's or the PC, to ask other NPC's questions, to ask the PC questions. They can even be designed to move through the setting in a known logical pattern. Forget logic, they can be designed to do whatever you want them to do. If you design a ghost NPC, surely a ghost can come and go as it pleases. The rules you've laid down for the PC for moving about the setting likely wouldn't apply. In some cases an NPC might have abilities that the PC doesn't have, leading to interesting opportunities for the reader.

There are some fairly standard interactions with NPC's in IF, including:

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- Conversation – dialogue is tricky in IF. Free form dialogue isn't allowed, but we can direct a conversation fairly well using ASK/TELL, TALK, or a list of conversation topics. For instance, you might ASK ALICE ABOUT BOB or ASK BOB ABOUT THE BLUE KITE or TALK TO JOHN ABOUT PAUL or simply TALK TO RINGO (who knows what you'll get!). Some IF writers like to completely control the dialogue and so they implement conversation topic lists. This shows up in the interface as a list of conversation starters or continuations such as:

1. "So Alice. Do you really think I should talk to Sue?"

2. "Hi Alice. Have you spoken to Mary lately?"

3. "Hey Alice, do you want to go out sometime?"

> 1

Alice says, "I don't think Sue likes you very much."

- Trading – you can GIVE things TO an NPC and sometimes, if they let you, TAKE things FROM them.
- Ordering – you can sometimes command an NPC to do your bidding. This takes the form BOB, KILL THE MOUSE or MARY, ASK SUE ABOUT ME
- Following – you can follow an NPC or ask an NPC to follow you.

Point of View

So just as in normal writing, you can choose different points of view for your IF writing. The most common POV is Second Person although some have been successful with First Person. This is entirely your choice as a writer and the development tools support changing point of view quite easily.

Containment

A lot of thoughtful examination has been done in the Interactive Fiction medium, especially on how to contain a story in a world that can be reasonably implemented before the Sun explodes in a few billion years. A general rule might go like this...

If you have a story with twelve chapters, you may want to select 2, 3, or 4 of them and write them so that they take up the same general setting area. When all of the interactivity has been discovered (all the puzzles solved), the story then moves to a new set of chapters which need to be resolved, and then we do this one more time before ending the story. So you have a sort of 3, 3, 3 or 4, 4, 4 or 2, 3, 4, 3 containment paradigm where you're offering different tasks or goals or set pieces within the same sub-setting.

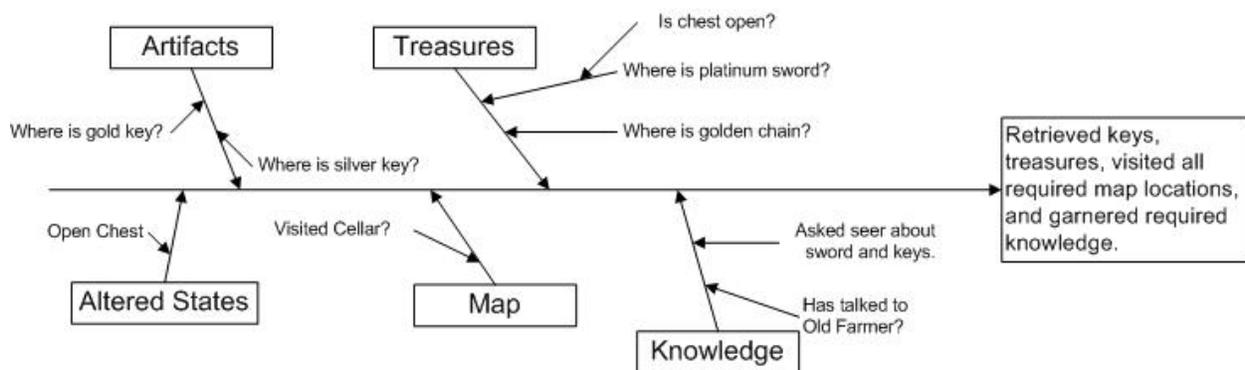
Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Another way to look at Interactive Fiction writing is to change how you think in chapters. Instead of a number of linear scenes, you may offer several scenes, all in the same general area, with different actions and dialogue. When implemented, this gives the *feeling* of a much larger setting and offers the reader the *feeling* that they are taking control of the story.

You can also have a single scene that has multiple goals. The scene doesn't end until all of the required goals are completed. Then you offer a new set of goals.

One of the more difficult, but popular things to write in an IF story are multiple outcomes or branching stories. This is okay for one off stories. If you plan to write a sequel, it's usually necessary to bring the branching narrative back to a single outcome.

The following diagram takes the goals approach. You might implement several cause and effect diagrams throughout a single if story. You might consider one such diagram a parallel grouping of scenes too. Note that the reader can work on any of the items in any order and in some cases at the same time.



Scope

When developing an IF story, you should limit everything you do. Keep your story tight. Every word matters. Every room matters. Every character matters. Every object matters. If you start writing large descriptions with dozens of objects, you will get bogged down very quickly during the design phase with questions about every little detail. I would compare IF writing to writing short stories. In a short story you have only a few thousand words to do your job, so you have to examine each sentence and paragraph and trim as much fat as possible. Interactive Fiction writing is very much the same way.

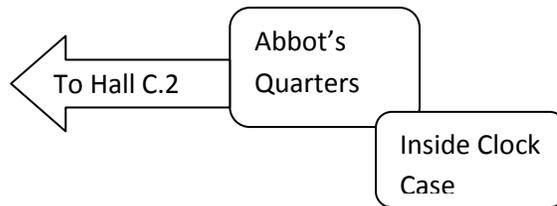
Appendix A

This is an excerpt from the final design of *The Shadow in the Cathedral*, published by Textfyre.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Chapter I – The Abbot’s Quarters

Map



Rundown

You begin the game with your lucky clock key, a rag and a glass tumbler containing a small quantity of wood polish.

The chapter is on a timer.

After the first turn, Calvin and Drake leave the hallway, telling you to polish the clock.

Three moves after game start you hear voices in the hall, prompting you to hide. You also hear these if you try to leave the room. These voices get closer.

Three moves after the voices have been heard, if you’ve not hidden in the clock case already, you hide automatically.

When you hide in the clock case (whether you hid automatically or on your own volition) a five turn event begins while the Figure and Gubbler talk outside. While you cannot leave the clock case, you can perform certain actions between the sections of dialogue.

You can examine the Figure and Gubbler through the keyhole.

You can increase the amount of dialogue you hear by listening with the glass against the door. You can always hear the Abbot clearly; if you’re using the glass, then you can hear everything the Figure says, otherwise you only catch a few phrases and words.

After the event, Gubbler and the Figure leave, and you can exit the clock. You are prompted to tell someone what you just overheard. When you leave the room, Chapter II begins.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Design

1. Before Play Begins: (prologue)

- **Design:** You are in the Abbot's Quarters, where you shouldn't be. You are just about finished polishing the abbot's huge grandfather clock, a duty which is usually far above your lowly rank of 2nd Assistant Clock Polisher, but your superiors Drake and Calvin have gone off into the city to flirt with girls, and ordered you to do it for them. You're honored, but also worried you'll get caught by one of the monks, for the upkeep of clocks in this world is serious business, not to be entrusted to someone the likes of you.

Actual:

"HEY WREN!"

Uh-oh.

"We've got a job for you!"

"Yeah, a promotion!"

This, coming from Drake and Calvin, means something horrible is about to happen.

"You're got your rag, don't you?"

"And your polish?"

"Yes,..." you bleat.

"Course you do. Well, we've got something for you to do."

"Yeah," chimes Calvin.

One on each arm, they march you down the hall, towards the Abbot's door. Are you in trouble? Going to be thrown out of the Cathedral?

"On three!" shouts Drake.

"Dong!" Calvin counts. "Dong! *Dong!*"

They shove you through the door. You fall – into the Abbot's personal chamber. You might not know much about the Abbey – but you do know you *really* shouldn't be in here...

- **Note: this dialogue section finishes after the first turn, see the Events listed as part of the Abbot's room below.**

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

2. The Player Character:

- **Design:** You are Wren, the 2nd Assistant Clock Polisher in the abbey of the Cathedral of Time. See notes in the player character section above for detailing.

Actual:

When the monks who took you, aged six months, into their care, they named you Wren. Maybe because you were small, insignificant and happy to eat any crumbs they threw your way. But these days you're Wren, 2nd Assistant Clock Polisher... and that's a role that's about as important in the workings of the Cathedral of Time as the large deaf man who re-stretches the worn-out springs.

- Inventory:
 - **Object:** Your lucky clock key
 - **Description:** The one thing you've had all your life. You don't remember where it came from: it's always just been there, tied to a string around your neck. Maybe it came from your parents – maybe one day it'll open a treasure-chest or the door of one of the Great Houses of the city. Or maybe it's just something you tried to eat as a baby. Either way, you've yet to find a lock it'll turn or a clock it'll wind.
 - **Command [Drop, Put in/on something, Throw etc]:** What? Lose your lucky clock key? And then what would you have left?
 - **Note: Used in the final chapter. Until then it can be used to try and wind various clocks and mechanisms, but won't fit any of them.**
 - **Object:** Rag
 - **Description:** The tool of the polisher's trade. And this old rag looks like it's been the tool of several polishers before you, too.
 - **Command [Put rag in tumbler/polish]:** The rag is already wet enough.
 - **Note: Can be used to polish objects.**
 - **Object:** Tumbler (with small amount of wood polish inside)

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Description:** A small glass with all that's left of your daily wood polish ration. How you're meant to do all the rest of your chores after this you don't know, but Drake and Calvin didn't seem too worried about that.
- **Command [pour out polish / empty tumbler if inside the clock case]:**
Oh... well, then. You tip the last of the polish onto the floor of the clock. At least that part will shine.
- **Command [pour out polish / empty tumbler if not inside the clock case]:** You'll need to save every last drop. There's twenty more clocks to do today at least!
- **Note: Can be used with the door while in the clock case in this chapter to amplify the sound of the dialogue between the Figure and Gubler.**

3. Abbot's Quarters

- **Description:**

If you thought Abbots lived in luxury, then you were wrong. Even your attic's cosier than this. There's no furniture at all, except an empty desk and a cot, and no decoration except a bust of St. Newton. None of the axle-mounted bevelled mobiles you were expecting. There's barely even any sunlight: on thing window to catch the sun-rise, opposite the door the hallway back west.

St Newton is staring at the Abbot's unpolished clock, a grandfather, with a severe expression.

- **Command [leaving Quarters before Calvin and Drake leaving event has happened]:**

You step back out of the Abbot's quarters. But Drake's there to push you back inside.

"Polish the clock, loose-screw!" he clangs. "And don't come out till it's shining!"

(Note: this is followed directly by the Calvin and Drake leaving event as below, missing out the first line of that event, to avoid duplication of text).

- **Command [leaving Quarters before Voices have been Heard]:** Curses to counterweights! It's not on your rota, this clock, so why should you finish off your polish on it? You head for the doorway – then freeze. Voices, coming down the hall. It's the Abbot himself, coming this way!

(Note: The Voices Heard event has now happened)

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Command [leaving Quarters before Clock Case event has started, after Voices Heard event]:** The Abbot's voice is getting nearer... If he sees you've been in here, he'll have you turning the paddles in the laundry room for a month! You'll need to escape.

- **Command [leaving Quarters after Clock Case event]: Move into Hallway and begin Chapter II**

Text: You're going to have to tell someone what you've heard. A theft, from the Vaults! But if the Abbot's involved, who else might be? After all, the figure he was talking to... could have been anyone...

- **Event [overheard from Quarters, first turn after game begins – this is Calvin and Drake leaving]:**

"And don't come out till that clock's shining!" shouts Drake from the hall.

"Yeah," Calvin says. "It's got to look as good as if we did it!"

"Idiot," Drake mutters. "Come on."

Their voices disappear down the hall.

- **Event [two turns after game begins, if Voices Heard hasn't happened]:** The grandfather clock ticks off a minute with a stately *thunk*. Quickly, you make the sign of the winding gear.
- **Event [overheard from Quarters, third turn after game begins]:** From the hallway outside comes the echo of voices. Too shaky to be Calvin or Drake. More like – oh, no. It's the Abbot, coming back to his room. And if he finds you here, then your springs won't be worth that pins they're sprung to...

(Note: The Voices Heard event has now happened).

- **Event [overheard from Quarters, one turn after Voices Heard when the player is not in the clock]:** The Abbot's voice is getting closer. The old man may move slower than a short hand, but he's definitely coming this way.
- **Event [overheard from Quarters, fifth turn after game begins when the player is not in the clock]:** Oh, widdershins! Gubbler is right outside the door! You'd better hide!
- **Event [overheard from Quarters, sixth turn after game begins, when the player is not in the clock]:** make the player enter the clock case. See the command description on the clock object below.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Object:** Grandfather clock
 - **Description:** No wonder Calvin and Drake didn't want to do this. Abbot Gubbler's Grandfather clock is enormous: the face is the size of a dinnerplate and the cabinet below is big enough to be a wardrobe. Even just polishing the doors will take half an hour. The whole thing might take all day.
 - **Design:** Inside the clock is the pendulum and two counterweights, and the Abbot's spare robe.
 - **Command [opening or searching clock]: [if not open]**You open the clock door and peek inside. **[end if]**For a big clock it's got a pretty small pendulum, about the size of Calvin's right fist. There's enough even space in front of it for the Abbot to hang up one of his spare robes.
 - **Command [polish with rag]:** You whisper the correct mantra against the evils of Friction and Dust, and start polishing. It's taking forever!
 - **Command [polish with rag after Voices Heard]:** If you think the Abbot will come in here, and say, "Oh, good, young Wren's polishing my clock," then you must have come unprung. If he finds you here doing Calvin and Drakes work he'll have you declared unmechanistical, maybe even throw you out of the Cathedral!
 - **Command [enter or hide in clock before Voices Heard]:** You should polish the outside of the clock first, and that'll probably take more than long enough.
 - **Command [enter or hide in clock after Voices Heard]:** Moves player into Clock Case, ends Abbot's Quarters event and begins Clock Case event.

Text: "We'll talk in here," you hear the Abbot saying, from right outside the door. "More private. More quiet. Much better." The old man steps inside the room, followed by a tall figure in grey. In the last tick before his old eyes can see you, you dive inside the gigantic clock case and pull closed the door.

- **Object:** Robe
 - **Description:** It's a thick black woollen habit, with a long deep hood and sleeves big enough to fit a five-and-a-quarter transmission with room to spare. Being the Abbot's robe means it has a softer lining, and a little sewn-in pocket for his tissues, spectacles, and that sort of thing.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Command [wear robe]:** One day, maybe, once you've worked your way up to the status of clock-watcher and can start learning the Twelve Devotions. But not yet.
- **Command [take robe]:** Better not. Your fingers are all greasy with polish.
- **Object: Cot**
 - **Description:** The Abbot's cot is a hard wooden pallet, with no pillow and one small blanket. "Mustn't sleep," you can imagine him saying. "Time doesn't sleep. Sleep is our great weakness."
 - **Command [Enter cot]:** No thanks. It looks horribly uncomfortable. And coming from you, and where you sleep, that's really saying something.
 - **Command [Look under, Hide under cot before Voices Heard]:** There's nothing of interest under the Abbot's cot. No spare polish, for example.
 - **Command [Look under, Hide under cot after Voices Heard]:** The space under the cot is too small for you!
- **Object: Desk**
 - **Description:** Gubbler's desk is bare and old. The surface is scratched a little with geometric designs.
 - **Command [polish desk]:** But you're going to need all the polish you've got for the clock.
 - **Command [hide under/ look under desk before Voices]:** Same response as looking under the cot, but referencing the desk instead of the cot.
 - **Command [hide under/ look under desk after Voices]:** Same response as looking under the cot, but referencing the desk instead of the cot.
- **Object: Icon / Bust**
 - **Description:** You can feel the well-polished eyes of St Newton gazing right down into your workings. Quickly, you make the sign of pendulum and look away.
 - **Command [take bust]:** It's clear from his expression that St Newton disapproves of this idea.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Object:** Window
 - **Description:** The narrow-barred window catches the morning sunshine. The same sunshine that Drake and Calvin are out enjoying while you're stuck in here.
 - **Command [opening or entering window]:** The bars are too narrow to slip through, and too firm to break.

4. Inside Clock Case

- **Description:**

(If listening with the tumbler:)

You're leaning up against the door of the clock, with your ear pressed to the glass tumbler. The pendulum behind is like someone breathing in your ear.

(If not:)

As the phrase goes, you're stuck between a rack and a gear-trace; except here you're in the narrow gap between the clock case door and the heavy swinging pendulum behind. And if that hit you, and disrupted the holy timings... well, there's no way they wouldn't notice if the clock-hands stopped moving.

(Either way:)

A little light shines in through the keyhole, which is almost covered by the Abbott's spare robe.

- **Command [leaving clock case before Clock Case event is finished]:** You've got a spring missing if you think you can slip out, unnoticed, or come up with a decent excuse as to why you've been hiding in the Abbot's grandfather. No, Wren, you'd better stay put and hope nothing happens to make the old man need to change his clothes.
- **Command [leaving clock case after Clock Case event]:** **Return to Quarters and print text commenting on what you just saw and the need to tell someone.**

Text: You spill gratefully out of the clock, gasping for breath as though you've been underwater – but you've just been holding it in, of course. And what you've heard – well, you probably shouldn't have, and the quicker you can get out of here, the better.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

NOTE: For each of the event texts below, there are two possible versions: a complete version that appears if you have used the glass with the clock case door or keyhole, and an incomplete version that appears otherwise. This incomplete version still includes all the important plot words and should be enough to follow the meaning.

- **Event [overheard from Clock Case, first turn after entering]:** Oh, no... That click outside was the sound of the Abbot closing the door. Looks like he – and the grey figure you glimpsed with him – are going to be here for a while.
- **Event [overheard from Clock Case, second turn after entering]:** “I told you now didn’t I tell you?” old Abbot Gubbler is saying, plaintively. “Here? Why here? You shouldn’t have come here.”
 - **If listening with glass:** The Figure says something in reply. With the glass, you can hear quite clearly. “We have been disappointed with your failure. The cause and effect principle, Abbot. Such failure must bring consequences.”
 - **If not:** The Figure says something in reply. You only hear two words, but they’re enough to stop your heart. “Failure,” and “Consequences.”
- **Event [overheard from Clock Case, third turn after entering]:** “But these things, these things are not always tick-tock, they never are,” the old man replies. His voice is quivering, quite different from the steady drone he has when intoning in Chapel. “The – item you asked about – it’s in the Vaults, you see? The Vaults. Even if I could get in, I ...”
 - **If listening:** “Your excuses we find disappointing. Very disappointing. More of this and, Abbot, we may need to unslip your gears completely.”
 - **If not:** The Figure is too far from the keyhole and speaks too quietly for you to hear clearly. “Disappointing,” he says; and then “unslip your gears.”
- **Event [overheard from Clock Case, fourth turn after entering]:** The Abbot is spluttering and choking. You’ve seen him like this only once, when as a young initiate you dropped and smashed an altimeter right before the Archbishop was due to visit.
 - **If listening:** The Figure continues. “Clearly you’re too old to steal the item for us. We have a better mechanism for obtaining it. But you must provide us with the opportunity. Is that understood?”
 - **If not:** The Figure’s quiet voice continues. You make out; “too old to steal”, “a better mechanism”, “the opportunity.”

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

The Abbot nods violently, shaking out agreement the way you might beat dirt from a duster. "My money?" he asks.

- **Event [overheard from Clock Case, fifth turn after entering]:**

There's the clink, of a pouch of golden minutes. A heavy pouch. The Figure, paying the Abbot...? Then suddenly, you hear a third voice. "Sorry, Father, to interrupt, but you said..."

"Get out!" screeches the Abbot. His bearing's lost it's oil, it seems. "Get out, get out!"

"But Father," the monk continues, "it's *time*, you know. You told me to tell you when it was *time*."

"Oh! Of course of course," he mumbles. "I'll... We'll continue this discussion later, then," he says, to the Figure.

- If listening: "We certainly will," the Figure replies.
- If not: The Figure intones something in reply.

The Abbot leaves. You are alone, inside the clock, with the stranger outside. Suddenly you hear his fingers on the door of the clock case. Maybe you nudged the pendulum, he must have seen the hands quiver... but then, you hear the swish of his cloak as he moves away, and then the click as the door closes.

- **Object:** Clock door

- **Description:** The clock door is smooth lacquered wood, finest quality: no knotholes or splinters here! It's covered with the usual springs and levers, and a nice gear-train around the keyhole.
- **Command [opening clock door before Clock Case event has finished]:** Same message as trying to leave the clock before Clock Case has finished (see above)
- **Command [opening clock door after Clock Case event]:** Same outcome as trying to leave the clock after Clock Case has finished (see above)
- **Command [listening or using Tumbler with clock door]:** Now the player is listening with the glass. If the tumbler is not empty, first empty it (as above), then continue as below.

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

Text: You put the glass tumbler carefully against the door, and press your ear to it. Everything seems much clearer now.

- **Object:** Keyhole

- **Description:**

- If not in the case, or if inside the case but the case is open:** It's just a keyhole. It might be only ornamental.

- If inside the case, and Abbot and Figure are not in the room:** Through the keyhole you can see the corner of the Abbot's desk. The Abbot and his guest have gone.

- If inside the case, and Abbot and Figure in the room:** You can make out the Abbot's hands, which are shaking badly. But you can see nothing of the Figure.

- **Command [listening or using Tumbler with keyhole]:** Same as using tumbler with door, as above

- **Command [listening without tumbler at the keyhole]:** You put your ear to the keyhole but the Figure's voice is still faint. But that's right and proper, isn't it? You shouldn't be eavesdropping on the Abbot's private conferences!

- **Object:** Clock Mechanism (pendulum and weights)

- **Description:** The pendulum is a large amount of Holy Brass, properly blessed and bevelled. It swings back and forth, raising the weight of Precision against the counterweight of Slapdashery.

- **Command [Push, turn, move, take etc]:** To stop a clock is like murder. To shift the balance.... that's something even worse still.

- **Object:** Gubbler

- **Description:** You can't see much through the keyhole, except the Abbot's stout waist and shaking hands. Not much good for winding anything now, but if you said as much to anyone they'd you'd be in real trouble.

- **Any interaction command:** Draw attention to yourself? You may be honest, Wren, but you aren't stupid.

- **Object:** Figure

Writing for the Interactive Fiction Medium

- **Description:** The glimpse you caught earlier was a tall – man? – wearing a suit of grey leather and a long flowing cape. Now you can't see him at all – it's almost as though he knows you're hiding, and he's avoiding the cabinet's line of sight.
- **Any interaction command:** Same as interaction on Gubbler.

NOTE: Gubbler and the Figure are only visible during the event. If you stay in the clock case after the event, they are no longer there. Similarly, the description of the room through the keyhole changes to reflect their absence afterwards.