InsideADRIFT

The newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 20   **November/December 2004**

Contents

News and announcements

New publication schedule for InsideADRIFT

From now on the newsletter will be published six times a year instead of nine. I think, as well as freeing a bit of my time, it also is more sensible given the community, we can't really pretend there is too much going on.

Just when everything was working

Mid-November has proved a tricky time with the ADRIFT website going off line. Initially on the 17th through to 18th it was down due to what Campbell reported as a DSL modem problem, which was hopefully fixed. Unfortunately it went down again on the 19thand having returned went down a couple of days later.

It is now up and seemingly working well, everyone cross your fingers that it is still working by the time I put this up.

Reviews Exchange Issue 1 out now

David Whyld has released the first all reviews publication for ADRIFT. This was born out of a forum thread that was looking to improve the feedback on games to the author.

What was decided that people would make a commitment to review other people's games, and in return be guaranteed some reviews for their output. The first issue contained 8 reviews and ran to over 40 pages.

You can take a look at the first issue on David's ShadowVault site at http://www.shadowvault.net/rex.htm. David has written a summary for the newsletter which you can find on page 6.

Editorial

Contact

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

Find the newsletter at: http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/

InsideADRIFT merchandise

You can now purchase an exciting InsideADRIFT mug, if you so desire. It has been updated with the new logo.

The store is really not fully operational, if you are interested look at **www.cafepress.com/insideadrift**

More details can be found on page 8.

Competition news roundup

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2004

Just a reminder that you can still enter a new game for the Game of the Year Competition, as well as any other game released this year.

The rules can be found at http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/comps_win_04

Three-Hour Competition games released for judging

The following games have been entered in the competition run by Woodfish:

- "We are coming to get you!" by Richard Otter
- "Veteran Experience" by Robert Rafgon
- "The Murder of Jack Morely" by Mystery
- "Buried Alive" by David Whyld
- "Snakes and Ladders" by Ken Franklin
- "Zombies are Cool, but Not so Cool when they're Eating your Head" by Mel S

Judging runs until Tuesday 7th December, and from what I have seen so far they are a very varied set of games. They are available to download from the main ADRIFT site or from the newsletter site.

Wider IF community events

2004 Interactive Fiction Competition

The main IF event of the year ended in mid-November and the results were announced.

Vote Summary

Place Game Avg.

1 Luminous Horizon 7.85 94 (GLULX)

2 Blue Chairs 7.39 114 (Z-Code)

3 All Things Devours 7.22 104 (Z-Code)

4 Sting of the Wasp 7.12 98 (Z-Code)

5 Square Circle 7.07 89 (TADS 3)

6 The Orion Agenda 7.01 108 (Z-Code)

7 Mingsheng 6.67 99 (Z-Code)

8 Splashdown 6.62 101 (Z-Code)

9 Gamlet 6.55 101 (Z-Code)

10 Trading Punches 6.32 69 (HUGO)

The only ADRIFT entry "A Day In The Life Of A Super Hero", by david whyld was 23rd out of 36 entries judged. This did seem a rather disappointing return for his efforts.

Drifters birthdays

December

3 dove (22)

6 Samo (16) reelyor (58)

10 szupie (13)

14 Brighterskyte (24)

17 Radhagrrl (33)

20 Sharkie (31)

21 Tech (34) LapTop Tech (34)

23 Massassi (28)

24 CrypticWizard (33)

25 Ravenous (17) Foul Old Man (101)

28 Scurvy Sockpuppet (27)

29 Hanadorobou (30) JemyM (27)

30 CyberNinja (12)

January

6 rotter (43)

10 Mut (20) Kokaku (20)

11 Ketigid (24)

13 Captain Obvious (22)

14 Sockets (4) Rashstash (17)

15 Marno (51) Spellcaster73au (32)

27 Lancer Sykera (18)

28 ds490 (17) Soothsayer (19) Elf Ranger (28)

30 Andye (20)

Spring Thing 2005

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

There has been a rule change with the upper limit on the number of entries that will be accepted being removed.

Forum news

Yet another bust up on the Forum, it is a shame that Mystery has felt the need to resign as a moderator, but I understand why she did.

There are times when I have to question the motives of certain drifters who seem intent on spoiling the atmosphere.

Drifter of the Month Award

After a discussion between the forum moderators, it was decided that it would encourage positive contributions to the forum to have an award for the best contribution each month. At least three drifters will be put forward for a poll on the forum to decide the winner for that month, with the winner announced and a new contest beginning on the 1st of the next month.

Following the initial award, where the nominations came from the moderators only, forum members can send a message to one of the mods when they see a contribution they think merits nomination.

The winner of the first award for October was Nickydude for the monthly description writing challenge. The challenge was well received with many taking part and voting on the winner. Mystery and Cannibal won the first monthly contest jointly.

Writing challenges

We have had some fun stuff going on in the writing discussions board. People seem to have enjoyed the chance to think about the use of words.

I put up a picture for Drifters to suggest a caption to, the limerick competition had a few more entries.

Of course there was also this months writing challenge The setting was a school gym, and the entries had to include: Seats, basketball, a pair of cheerleader pom-poms, a puddle of liquid, a large crash-mat, a brown paper bag. The winner will be decided by a poll on the forum.

Events Diary

November 27, 2004
InsideADRIFT 20 due out

The November/December issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today.

December 19, 2004
InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2004

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

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

Events in 2005

January 02, 2005 InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2004

Judging ends, all marks in by 1500hrs GMT today. Result to be announced on the ADRIFT Forum as soon as possible after that.

January 08, 2005 InsideADRIFT Issue 22 due out

The January/February 2005 issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today

March 15, 2005 Spring Thing 2005 closing date for intents

This is the last day for making a statement of intent to enter the Spring Thing

March 31, 2005 Spring Thing 2005 closing date for entries

All entries must be in by this date. The judging period will be announced when entries are released (will allow about one week for every three entries)

Drifters toolbox

E107 reviewed by KF

I have been completely reworking my websites, KF ADRIFT on the Web and InsideADRIFT, using a content management system called e107. To be able to use this you need some web space with mySQL and PHP on it. MySQL is a freeware database system that is very powerful and PHP is a web programming language that accesses the database, which is used to store all of the information.

The download is pretty small at 1.5Mb, bear in mind this includes a complete website system with forum, chatbox, private messenger, a selection of themes and much more. This has to be unzipped and loaded to your site, full configuration is pretty straightforward if you are familiar with using an ftp program to manage your website. Once the files are loaded you simply open the config file and it will ask you your mySQL database details and set things up, soon after this the plain site is there for you to administer.

While I would never say things are simple with this sort of setup, I found it reasonably straightforward to have something useable in under half a day. Adding content is pretty simple though, and drifters will recognise the markup codes used from the forum.

If you want more from your site you can go to the downloads link on the main e107 website and choose the plugins link. If you register here you can download a huge amount of modules to add to your site, on the KF ADRIFT site I have a few Flash games selectable from a menu. The new InsideADRIFT newsletter subscription management system is another plugin that I downloaded. If you understand PHP you can write your own plugins and share them with the e107 community.

The important thing about using e107 is that it is community software and registered users can have the option of contributing, with an administrator able to give the ability to edit things to others to spread the load.

The (big) idea by KF

Pauses are good and bad

What I am talking about here are the places where the author adds in pauses to their games.

From what I have read, most of us seem to hate to many uses of pauses in a game, especially those games where the text appears bit by bit. Here the author has decided to break up the display with set periods of time.

The other use of pauses is to allow the user to read the text in chunks before pressing a key to move on. Here I think that most people are pro, but only in very limited circumstances. Too many "Press any key to continue" prompts can be an annoyance, but used well they are an aid to understanding.

The correct use is where there is a large block of text and you want to specify where it should be broken. Most of us find that the default ADRIFT action is not ideal as the split isn't usually at the end of a paragraph. Placing a break every few paragraphs allows you to make sure you get something that better fits your hopes for the game.

Whatever we are looking for can only ever be a bodge as we do not know how the player has their version of runner set up. Do they have it in full screen? What resolution is their screen? What font are they using and in what size? As they can overrule what the author set it is impossible to be certain and you can only have a go at what you think works best.

Hammerhead Rhythm Station reviewed by Mystery

So, you want to add some interesting music to your text adventures, but don't have a musical bone in your body? There are many commercial, shareware, and freeware programs available to get you started. In this issue of Inside ADRIFT, we are featuring the Hammerhead Rhythm Station.

Hammerhead Rhythm Station is freeware, developed by Bram Bos in 1997. This program, to keep it short, is basically a drum machine. It has an extremely easy to learn user interface, though it may look intimidating at first. And best of all, no musical talent is required. Within seconds you can create fantastic sounding rhythm loops to use as background, sound effects, or suspense music to your adventures.

You can download it from http://www.threechords.com/hammerhead/download.shtml It installs quickly and easily, and just to show you how easy it is to operate, I'll tell you how to make your first rhythm loop. Once you install Hammerhead Rhythm Station, launch the program by clicking on the hammer icon that should now be on your desktop.

Now, you see those blue and yellow buttons in the middle? Click on all of the yellow ones. They should have a little white line lit up, showing that those are active. Now, click the play button. You created a your first loop, in just a couple of seconds. Now, lets add a little more sound. Click on the Channel 2 button, below the row of buttons in the middle. You'll notice that no buttons are lit up anymore. Below the Channel 2 button, there is a dropdown box. Click on it and scroll down, highlighting 808 snare. Now click on the centre blue buttons all the way across. You can stop the loop from playing by hitting the play button again. To save your first music loop as a .wav file, simply select File-Stream to Disk. Select the options you want, and you now have a simple rhythm file you and load up in the ADRIFT Generator. Make sure you check the box in the generator to loop the sound file.

This is a very fun, and addictive freeware program. If you have kids, even smaller ones, this a great program for them to play with. There are also several User Bank Hubs that you can download to add to your music as well.

ADRIFT recent releases

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

Where are my keys? v1.03 (keys.zip 40 Kb) By rotter, released 10-10-04

After a drunken night in with your friend Mark, you now seem to have lost your car keys. You must now begin an epic journey to retrieve your keys so you can once again return home to your loving wife. Well actually your mother-in-law is coming to stay and you need to get home to decorate the back bedroom before your wife kills you.

Demos

Dope Street (dopestreet.taf 10 Kb) By Sean Wheeler, released 08-11-04

This game is a demo of the seedy underworld of the inner city. This demo shows off some of what the full version will have. **Features of the full version** A invisible money system which you have in the demo version. You will be able to anything you want. Talk to any one you want. Be able to hire your own thugs. Will take place in 3 large sections of the city.

Random Scattering (randomscattering.taf 1 Kb) By Daniel Hiebert, released 26-10-04

This demo shows how you can randomly distribute what objects the player is carrying to a random room in a room group.

Audio in Adventures by Nickydude

Pick your favourite game, any type of game, of any genre (Doom3? Warcraft III? Grand Theft Auto? Half-Life?), not just adventures , now turn down the sound and play it... it just doesn't play the same does it? So why should it be different with text adventure games?

"Eh? Aren't text adventures by their very nature just text?"

Ordinarily yes, but ADRIFT allows you to add images and sound to your adventure, lifting it from a simple text adventure editor into a multimedia text adventure so why should your adventure be just text and not give something more to the player?

The use of sound in an ADRIFT game is divided; on one hand it spoils your imagination when reading descriptions, you don't want some cheesy tune spoiling the atmosphere by constantly droning on plus it can lengthen the file size considerably which is not good news for those on dial-up; on the other, sound enhances the adventure by providing an atmospheric tune that plays on your imagination, spot effects can also provide extra atmosphere.

So what side am I on? The side of audio in adventures, spot effects but not tunes. Having a continuous tune throughout the adventure will spoil everything in my opinion, there's no sense of environment change; village, forest, mountain, caves, catacombs, all will have the same tune playing throughout and what type of tune should it be? happy?, spooky?, majestic?, climactic?

Creating spot effects, on the other hand, can really bring it to life, take the following location description:

"You shelter from the torrential rain in the porch. It seems like this porch has been in disrepair for some time, rotten planks, boards missing, moss everywhere, whoever lives here obviously doesn't expect visitors or doesn't have the time for repairs. Eyeing the door in front of you the north, you notice it is large and foreboding, made of solid oak with intricate carvings, a bit different from the unrepaired porch. A large brass knocker in the shape of a dragon's head holding a ring stares at you, daring you to grasp it. What looks like a frayed bell-pull dangles to one side."

What spot effects do you think would fit here? Let's have a look: **"You shelter from the torrential rain"**, the constant drone of rain with the occasional distant thunder**; "A large brass knocker in the shape of a dragon's head holding a ring stares at you.."** perhaps when the player uses the knocker you could have a few heavy, echoed thumps; **"What looks like a frayed bell-pull dangles to one side."**, the tinkly-clang if the bell-pull is pulled.

As you can see, spot effects certainly do enhance a player's experience if used correctly and I would recommend them at least in one adventure just to see the difference.

I also plan to create the above example with the sound effects so people can judge for themselves.

Tracking Device 2 (trackingdevice2.taf 0 Kb) By Daniel Hiebert, released 11-10-04

This is another extension of the thread started by Mystery and the method discussed by DavidW. A second NPC is moved via tasks each turn to track the movements of another NPC.

Location & Listen (location.zip 1 Kb) By Daniel Hiebert, released 11-10-04

This is an extension of the demo from Mystery about placing a tracking device on a robot. However, in this case, you can know exactly where the player character is each turn without using the visible invisible method. There is no documentation, so contact Tech on the forum if you have questions.

Game reviews

Reviews Exchange - Issue 1. A summary from Davidw

It's no big secret that, as far as reviews are concerned, the ADRIFT community is a little on the lacking side. There's a tremendous amount of encouragement for people to go ahead and write a game but once said game is done, actually finding anyone willing to review the thing and tell you what it's like is a bit harder than finding the proverbial needle in the proverbial haystack.

Then along came Woodfish who suggested the idea of a reviews exchange, with people each agreeing to review other people's games. The idea held quite a lot of appeal for me and Woody himself didn't seem overly eager to organise it himself (I think his comments on the subject, had I bothered asking him, which I didn't, might have been something like "ye gods, no! A man'd have to be mad to take on something like that! Mad, I tell ya! Ma-aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaddddd!") So who stepped forward and took on the mad role when anyone with common sense would have been running for the hills?

Well…

Thus the Reviews Exchange was born. I wasn't sure what the first issue would be like – I had vague ideas of it either being a part of the Newsletter (which wasn't currently being published (hey, I'm full of good ideas)) or perhaps part of the forum or banged on my website somewhere. Or, more than likely, quietly forgotten. In the end it became a PDF document and the reviews I wrote – Mel S' "Murder In Great Falls", Richard Otter's "Where Are My Keys?" and Woodfish's compendium of games with the inspired title "The Woodfish Compendium" – eventually making their way onto the forum.

"I wasn't sure what the first issue would be like" – hmm… Actually, I wasn't even sure there would *be* a first issue when I started doing it. Knowing that getting blood out of a stone is quite a bit easier than getting the average DRIFTer to write a review, I had visions that the first issue would, assuming it even became a first issue, be about three pages long, contain one piffling review and probably finish with a long and somewhat embarrassing rant over how few people write reviews after they've promised they'd write a review and what a tragedy it is to have all these games out there that can be reviewed yet people don't seem to want to review them and so what's the point of having a Reviews Exchange which is about reviewing games if people don't want to write reviews even after they've promised they would write reviews…

Fortunately I managed to avoid the long and embarrassing rant.

InsideADRIFT Merchandise

Although this is not intended as a money spinning idea, more a way to create items for me, these items are available for the discerning drifter to purchase.

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

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

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

A review showed up in my e-mail. An honest-to-God review. And then, about five minutes later, another one showed up. (As it happened they probably showed up at pretty much the same time but I think I was in such shock over actually having received a review that it was five minutes before I got around to checking for any others.) After that, they flew in at the rate of, oh, about one every week or so. In the end there were no less than thirteen reviews, a decent amount by any standards and quite a few more than I ever expected.

There was quite a variety of reviews as well. I reviewed an adult game – "Mount Voluptuous" – which I didn't like a whole lot despite the writer's almost God-like status in the AIF community. Greybear wrote a review of my game "Shards Of Memory" which served to highlight that I really ought to have been a beta-testing mood at the time I wrote it. Myself and Cannibal tackled Mel S' "Murder In Great Falls" which was a fairly decent game let down by some guess some verb problems and lack of any kind of logic. Mel S actually faired quite well with three reviews as Woodfish (freed from the joys of organising the Exchange but willing to contribute a review) wrote one of "The Merry Murders", a jolly game about lots of people getting brutally murdered at a party. There was even a review of my less-than-15KB game "Neighbours From Hell" which is one game I've been meaning to rewrite for a while now. Richard Otter's "Where Are My Keys?" came under the spotlight and fared better than it did during its recent (and unfair IMHO) mauling on the forum. Bugs? Yes. But not so many as to make the game unplayable. And then finally there were the six games in "The Woodfish Compendium", a mixed bag with a few real gems – "Topaz" in particular" – and some downright strange efforts – "Forum" and "Forum 2" take a bow. All in all, a good first issue. The first, fingers crossed, of many.

A big thank you to everyone who contributed and here's hoping the second issue is even more successful than the first!

Reference

This time we are looking at the manual section that covers what are called references. They can be thought of as system variables defined during the command parsing phase.

References

What are References

There are certain circumstances where in order to do what you're trying to do you would need to add potentially hundreds of tasks. More often than not, you can reduce the number of tasks required by using References. References are like wildcards, which return information about what was typed on the command line.

References are supported for the following:

• Objects
• Characters
• Numbers
• Text

How to use them

To use a reference, you have to embed one of the system variables into your task command. This will either be %object% for referenced objects, %character% for referenced characters, or %number% for any referenced number. This must then pattern match on the player's command to assign the reference.

An object example

You drop %theobject%.

That probably wasn't very clear – references are fairly complicated to understand, but once you understand them they are fairly simple to use. Let's say for example that you want to create a task such that whenever you drop an object in a particular room, it drops down a hole and disappears.

You would create a task with the command:

*drop * %object%*

This works in the same way as normal task commands, except instead of requiring the player to type "drop %object%", it will search through all object names to see if they referred to a specific object. The Referenced Object is then set to the object mentioned.

So say you have an object called "a large" "ball" and the player types "drop ball", then Referenced Object is set to "ball", and the task would be executed (assuming it passes its restrictions). You can use this Referenced Object in the task restrictions and actions in the same way as any other object – instead of requiring a specific object, simply select Referenced Object.

So for the example above you would have as a restriction:

Referenced Object must be held by Player

If this is true, the task will execute. You would then want as an action:

Move Referenced Object to Hidden

As a message in your text, you can use the system variables %object% or %theobject% for example:

You drop %theobject%. Unfortunately it falls down a large hole

and disappears.

This would display:

You drop the large ball. Unfortunately it falls down a large hole and disappears.

Characters work in much the same way as objects above. You can also use a very similar method for numbers.

A numeric example

Let's say you want to create a dial, which you can set between 1 and 10. You might set up a task such as:

*turn * dial to %number%*

As soon as a task command pattern matches against this, for example the player types "turn the dial to 5", then the Referenced Number is set to the value the player typed in. You can use this in your restrictions, so you could require that Referenced Number must be greater than or equal to 1, AND Referenced Number must be less than or equal to 10. If these restrictions pass, you could set a variable such as %dialvalue% to Referenced Number.

NB. You can only use a single reference of the same type per task command, so for example you couldn't have a command "put %object% on %object%".

If you needed to create tasks such as these, you'd have to replace one reference for the specific objects.

Referenced Text

Referenced Text works in much the same way as variables. In your task command, you must specify the %text% keyword. This will be pattern matched against the input text, and assigned if it matches.

An example command might be something like so:

say %text%

This would match anything typed on the command line beginning with 'say '. If the player typed "say oranges", then Referenced Text would be assigned to the word 'oranges'.

This can be useful in a number of situations, particularly things like saying passwords, or when being asked questions. You could for example have a character ask where the player is from. You could take this response and assign it to a text variable, then reuse the information later on in the game in a conversation.

In addition to this, if %text% is not matched in a task command, Referenced Text always gets assigned with the entire command

the player typed. This can be then be used for giving default error responses. For example, in the Message when command not understood (see Options section) you could have the response:

I don't understand what "%text%" means.

© Campbell Wild, Oct 2003

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

Please send any contributions or suggestions to kf@kfadrift.org.uk.