InsideADRIFT

Issue 9   **August 2003**

Contents

New web address

There is a new domain for the newsletter it is:
http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/

News and announcements

ADRIFT Network

Mystery has launched her new website, **ADRIFT Network**, which aims to help Drifters new and old. Here you will be able to download the ADRIFT software, as well as a selection of the best games for both versions 4.0 and 3.9. There is also a new message board, with a twist that it has the text from the ADRIFT 4.0 Manual to consult and perhaps expand on. The new site is at http://home.gcn.cx/mystery/

ADRIFT home site problems

The first half of July has seen major disruption of the main ADRIFT home site. It has been down for most of the time putting the forum out of reach, also removing the possibility of downloading the software and games. Campbell's IP address had changed more than once, which always causes problems as it is not pointed to correctly by name servers around the world.

The latest from Campbell Wild is this from the forum on 19th July "*I've now set up dynamic DNS, so fingers crossed, should my IP address change from now on, the internet will catch up straight away, or within a few minutes anyway. I guess time will tell...*"

Mystery has led a number of us to download the Global Communications Network software, which allows for chat and other extras (More in the Drifters toolbox section).

Competition news

The recent minicomp, run by DavidW, was won by the organiser himself, following the example of Woodfish last month. Reviews of the games entered in these two competitions follow later in this issue.

Editorial

Right one issue down, and not too badly received so now to trying to follow it up.

Hopefully this newsletter will form a useful part of the ADRIFT community, but as the saying goes, it can only continue with your support and some of you do some of the work.

Newsletter index

Also available from the website is an index to the issues of the newsletter so far. I intend to try to update this regularly.

Portrait of a Drifter

Thought I ought to share a little about myself.

I am single, 42 and live in flat in the south of England. My proper job is working in a library (though not as a professional librarian).

Ken Franklin (KF)

I have been working with ADRIFT for three years now. The thing I enjoy most is working out how to do something, which is probably why I can start a project, by not get to the end.

Drifters birthdays

The next ADRIFT competition is the Summer Minicomp 2003 which takes place in the later half of August. It is an event for ADRIFT games with no more than 20 rooms. Entries to be in by **24th August**, with voting over the next week. Not forgetting that with this one there is prize money. The rules and entry details can be found on the competition page at http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/comp_sum_03.html

The 2003 IF Competition, the major event of the IF calendar, is approaching fast. Any entrants must have registered their intention by 1 Sep 03, and their games should be near to completion if they are to be tested properly. If you are entering the IF Competition take notice of the advice at: www.strangebreezes.com/if/writings/compguide.htm which is a set of sensible guidelines for entrants.

Then you can start looking to the longer term with the ADRIFT End of Year Competition 2003. This is an event for any games released during the calendar year of 2003, they can be updated for the competition. http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/comp_win_03.html

Tip of the month

Use an Adrift Language Resource (ALR) file to format text in your games. If you do this things are a lot easier if you want to change how you lay things out. I use {QUOTE} and {/QUOTE} to surround speech. Then put

```
{quote}|<I><font color=yellow>"
{/QUOTE}|"</font></I>
in the ALR.
```

Fred said {quote}Wow!{/quote} becomes
Fred said *"Wow!"*

Hopefully you can see that things get easier if you decide the speech should be red rather than yellow.

Another useful one is to use {P} as a paragraph break, which is converted in the ALR to 2 line breaks, with

```
{P}|<BR><BR>
```

Basically, if there is something you may repetitively do in writing the text of your game, use the ALR to make it make simpler to change later.

in August

2 schoolsinger (19)
4 outsider (16)
8 Lena1975 (28)
15 Coolkid (15)
18 rocksockm (26)
21 Bacchus (35)
23 Woodfish (15), damien8000uk (17), White Divine (19), Mickey Crocker (19)
26 Starstream (58)
**27** re_volvo (30), Filthy Bill (32)

Preparing the newsletter

For those who are interested, this is what I use to put the newsletter together.

It is created with MSWord 2000. It is then printed out to a PDF file using pdf995 software, which can be obtained from the following site
http://www.pdf995.com/
bookmarks are added via the companion program pdfEdit995.

The website is put together using Zeta Producer Freeware content management software from:
http://www.zeta-software.de/

Drifters Toolbox: GCN

Global Communications Network (or GCN) is a software package that gives you most of the standard communications programs in a neat bundle. You can set up chat rooms, send private messages, bulletin boards, play board games, communicate with voice and video, collaborate on a whiteboard, listen to media and browse the web. At the moment it is in beta, but nevertheless is an excellent download.
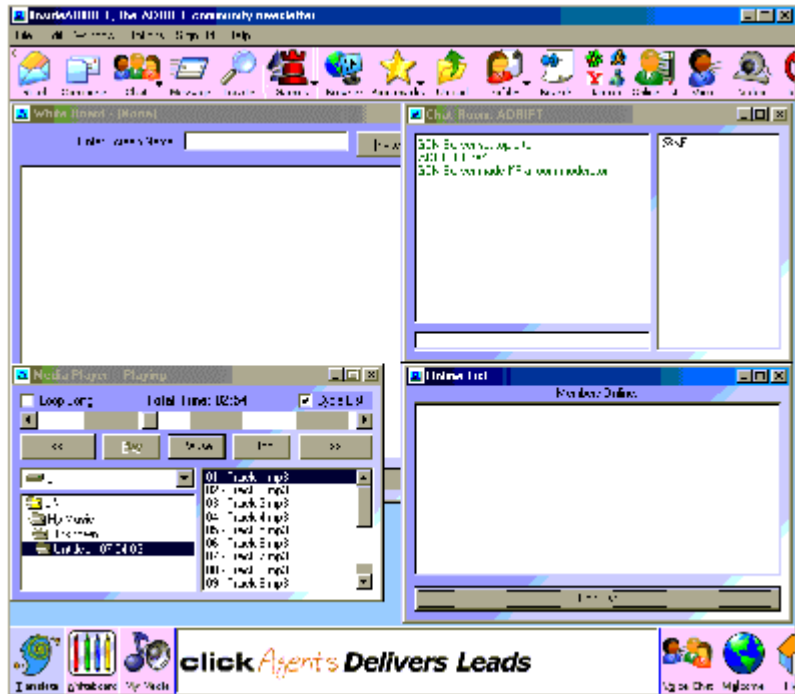
Quick screenshot from GCN

An interesting bonus is the ability to download a co-branding package, that allows you to create your own version. You can have a custom welcome message, choose background and colour scheme, as well as setting default board. Once you have set up your version you are free to offer it as a download.

Give it a go, the idea was to have it as a backup for downtime on other sites, but it is great fun any time.

Downloading GCN

You can find an InsideADRIFT branded package on the website at http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/ or go to the GCN home at http://www.gcn.cx/ for the official download.

The (big) idea

So what would be a good way of helping to promote ADRIFT and encourage new users. I have a few ideas, but I'm sure you will have some thoughts. All I am looking for is something short like this.

An example would be that I recently put forward the idea of an ADRIFT store. There we could buy ADRIFT merchandise, get a little extra money to Campbell, and also be promoting ADRIFT in the wider world.

Think piece by KF

Let's be nice to newbies

More people are coming to ADRIFT all the time, but how can we encourage them to stay.

It is encouraging that so often when you head to the forum you will find a new user who has just found their way there and has a question. What is a problem is making them feel welcome so that they feel able to contribute.

Earlier this year a newbie corner was suggested, where new users could be confident of having their questions replied to, and their work fairly commented on. Too often an old hand will snap at them, and probably put them off using ADRIFT. We are a small community and must grow if we want to see more people playing the games that are put out. Just because someone is new to the community, and might not behave quite as we expect, doesn't mean that they are not going to become a regular.

Only an exceptional author will come up with a brilliant game first time out of the box, so it is important that criticism is fair. DavidW has a reputation for writing hard but fair comments on the games he reviews, and if we comment on a first time author we should take a step back and make sure that what is said will be helpful.

We were all newbies once so should remember that the hardest thing can just be asking for help.

Interview: Emily Short questioned by KF

Thank you for agreeing to answer my questions for the August issue of InsideADRIFT

Q1. Most Drifters will have heard of you and your considerable input into the wider world of interactive fiction. Can you sum up, for anyone else, your main achievements in IF?

Man, I always hate this kind of question in job interviews. Let's see: I've written a number of games, many of which are experiments in improving NPC (non-player-character) behavior or in providing a rich and complex world model. They're not all unqualified successes, but a couple have become talking points for further design discussion, especially my 2000 Art Show entry, Galatea, which consists of one extensively-implemented character.

ADRIFT wordsearch

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E R A W T F O S T Z E L
U Q B O N O C F C R O E
W C H W L Y I A A O W R
N Q Y U U R M L D T C A
O B N B D P K N V A D W
I S J A B Q F O E R R E
T A E E K R D I N E U R
C Y L M D U M T T N N A
I L L L A R I A U E N H
F Y I S T G M E R G E S
O W J K P C X R E V R X
D I N T E R A C T I V E
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This square contains all of the words listed below. See if you can find them. Remember it is just for fun.

ADRIFT
ADVENTURE
CAMPBELL
FICTION
GAMES
GENERATOR
INTERACTIVE
RUNNER
SHAREWARE
WILD
CREATION
SOFTWARE

Q2. You obviously spend a great deal of your time playing and reviewing the new games that come out. Do you have an opinion on the current state of interactive fiction? Is it healthy and flourishing? Are there any trends that you think will be important?
I see some encouraging things developing. TADS 3 is opening up some new possibilities in simulationism and NPC modeling, and I'm eager to see how those will be used in games. Several people are trying their hands at commercial IF distribution, and while I don't know much about their sales success, that may lead to an increased general interest in IF. Every competition and art show seems to contain at least a couple of pieces that try something really new and interesting: new approaches to story-telling, new experiments with multimedia IF, and so on. Even games that aren't entirely successful sometimes open up intriguing new
territory.

Q3. The Annual Interactive Fiction Competition is coming up soon. Do you feel that has become rather to important as a target for releasing games? Is it a great competition or just a way of encouraging authors to finish their games?

As an author, I find deadlines useful, and it's easier for me to write for a competition than for general release at some other time.

What I do think is unfortunate is the fact that it's so hard to get feedback for any game released outside of a competition. Which means that everyone aims for that release date, we don't see many works released during all the rest of the year, and then there's this clump of games that all have to be played and rated at once. I usually start to burn out about halfway through the competition package, which means that I'm less forgiving with the later games and enjoy them less than I probably would if I played them at some other time.

So I'm glad the Competition exists; it's fun (if nerve-wracking) to enter, and it builds a sense of community. But I think it has become unreasonably important in the IF calendar, and I'd like to see it balanced by other venues and other opportunities to get work reviewed
and recognized

Q4. What are your three favourite works of interactive fiction and why?

1. Spider and Web, for the brilliant way that the puzzles work together seamlessly with the plot, and the way you gradually learn how to use the gadgets. It's just simulationist enough to feel as though the PC has some real freedom.

2. Anchorhead, for the extremely well-evoked atmosphere, and because the first part of the game consists of a near-perfect research puzzle. I didn't feel like I was ever too stuck or too much at a loss; I always had some clue I wanted to follow up on, and I usually had some idea how to go about doing that.

3. I have a hard time coming up with the perfect third. I have fond nostalgic feelings for the Graham Nelson games I played when I was first getting into amateur IF -- both Curses and Jigsaw; another pair of contenders, though I haven't played either for years and years, would have to be Plundered Hearts or Wishbringer, which were in my opinion Infocom's most player-friendly games.

Q5. Have any ADRIFT games that you have played come close to reaching the high standards that you seem to expect?

I was impressed with how well Unraveling God succeeded at telling the story it wanted to tell. There are two scenes in particular, which I won't name for fear of spoiling the innocent, that have stuck with me months after playing it, partly because they deal with situations that have rarely been handled in IF before, and they do a good job of it.

I should also say that, while I'm not particularly interested in the genre, I thought the images included with PK Girl were extremely good. Multimedia games are especially challenging, because not only do you have to come up with a design that sensibly integrates your text game and the extra music or images, but you also have to be talented in other media (or have collaborators who are).

Q6. Do you believe that there is a set of dos and don'ts that should be applied by all writers developing their games? Is there a real no no that as soon as you see it turns you off a game?

If there are any rules I can point out, they're pretty obvious things. Beta-test; pay attention to what your testers say, and

don' t be afraid to rewrite if they' ve revealed a fundamental problem in your work. Play the game over and over yourself, and if there are parts that bore or annoy you after a bunch of playings, change them -- they' ll bore and annoy your players too.

Personally I' m fairly sensitized at this point to certain kinds of technical glitches, like large amounts of unimplemented scenery or consistently bad grammar, but these are all things you can catch if you' ve got the right betatesters. And the truth is that even if something does have technical glitches, but is written with enough enthusiasm, I may enjoy it anyway.

Besides, if you' ve done the best job you can of writing the game you wanted to write, you' ll have accomplished the primary goal. What other people think about it is secondary.

Q7. Thank you for your answers. In conclusion, what is your great wish for the future of interactive fiction?

What I want most is for entertaining new games to keep being written, and for there to be enough players and interested critics to make writing worthwhile. It' s not so important to me how that happens, whether we go on having a small community of hobbyist authors or move on to some different format.

Emily Short's website
For more information check out her website at http://emshort.home.mindspring.com/

Review by DavidW
Recent ADRIFT competition entries

Reviews of entries in the two minicomps, excluding DavidW's own entries.

One Hour Competition

by Woodfish

 A strong contender with anything written by Heal Butcher for weirdest ever Adrift game, "Forum" is about… well, the Adrift forum and what happens when a newbie asks for help and drifters all over the world are abducted as a result. You, as Bob the Newbie, are chosen to save the drifters. With me so far?

I' m not sure where the idea for "Forum" came from (I' m not ever sure I want to know) but it's certainly an interesting and original one that I'd never come across before. You, in the role of Bob the

Result of One Hour Comp

1. **Forum by Woodfish**
2= **The Saga of Percy the Viking by DavidW**
2= **Dance Fever USA by MelS**

aforementioned Newbie, have to trek around a strange landscape defeating members of the forum who have become evil and in doing so free them from the clutches of the evil one responsible for all carnage, who happens to be…the person who wrote the game. Still with me?

If you can get around the sheer weirdness of "Forum" it's quite very amusing and witty and contains more than a few decent ideas for a game written in an hour. It isn't a hard game and is very linear but it certainly made me grin a few times.

7 out of 10

"Dance Fever USA" by Mel S

Not quite as weird as "Forum" (then again, few things in this world are) but "Dance Fever USA" is still decidedly strange. The storyline is pretty much nonsense – a dance craze has swept the world and people seem to be affected with a desire to dance and dance and…but I'm sure you get the picture. You have to stop it.

This is one seriously corny game that doesn't miss an opportunity to try its hand at downright tacky humour. That said, it's also very, very funny in places. Relieving yourself in an alley and retrieving a crowbar from a cat are just a few of the strange things you get up to in attempting to stop the dance craze. The ending was strange and seemed a bit drawn out for my liking but right up to there it was definitely worth playing.

6 out of 10

Result of Minicomp

1. **Neighbours From Hell by DavidW**
2. **Thorn by Eric Mayer**
3. **Diary of a Stripper by Christopher Cole**
4. **Monsters by Tech**

DavidW's Minicomp

"Diary of a Stripper" by Christopher Cole

A difficult game to comment on. It wasn't "quite" as explicit as I'd first thought it was going to be but then again it was hardly a game for the easily offended either.

Playing the part of a male stripper, it is your job to… er, entertain a number of lady guests at a birthday party. Storyline-wise that's about it.

The writing was good throughout but the gameplay side really let things down. For the most part there was no real freedom of movement and you seemed to be forced along a very set path; no chance to explore the game was given or any proper interaction with the characters was possible. There was also the added frustration of being given half the commands you needed to complete the game instead of figuring them out for yourself

to complete the game instead of figuring them out for yourself which pretty defeated the whole point of playing for me. Admittedly, most of these commands were non-obvious and I might never have figured them out on my own, but it seemed a strange game that actually tells you what you should be typing. A few subtle hints would have worked better.

4 out of 10

"Thorn" by Eric Mayer

Very well written and a surprising amount of depth for such a small game. I played the game through the first time without really understanding what it was all about and even after finishing it I' m still a little baffled.

The game focuses around something called the Holy Thorn of Glastonbury although just what the Thorn is supposed to do I wasn't entirely sure. There is a strange dream sequence towards the end of the game which seems to imply (though I could very well be mistaken) that the Thorn has supernatural powers and curses all who come into contact with it.

Strangeness aside, this was certainly a well written and interesting game and my personal favourite of the competition entries.

8 out of 10

"Monsters" by Tech

I liked "Monsters" from the start. It was nicely written but failed to be particularly frightening as it should have been concerning, as it does, the monsters that every little kid firmly believes are hiding under their bed. Personally I'd have preferred it if the monsters were heard but not seen because they didn't seem to have the same effect when you' ve seen them.

Guess the verb was bad in a few places: "daybed" says the room description, "bed" is what the game understands. There was also an annoying event which ran every time I seemed to be making any progress whereby mother would show up and carry me back to my bed. This happened a couple dozen times and I began to wonder if it might have been better if there was a limit to how many times this should have happened.

All in all I found "Monsters" a fairly above average game. It's small – as it had to be to fit inside the competition's size limit – but there is quite a decent game here.

6 out of 10

Reference

Returning to following on from where Mystery got to in issue seven we move on to the vexed question of character attributes. This is where you can setup objects so that ADRIFT can deal with the in a standard way, as in making a door lockable with a key.

Manual pages 15-16: Object Attributes

Clicking on the Attributes tab changes the display to show various options about the attributes of the object.
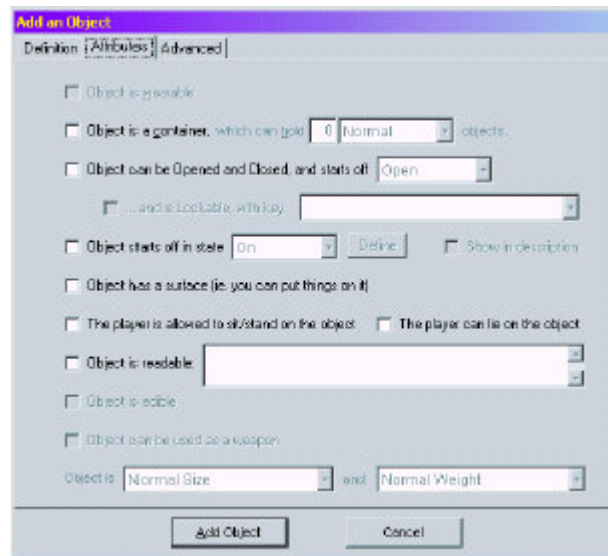
The vital second screen of setting up your objects

You will be given different options, depending on whether the object is static or dynamic.

Object is wearable allows the Player and characters to wear and remove it. You can then restrict tasks depending whether or not the object is being worn. *

Object is a container allows you to be able to put other objects inside it. You have to say how many objects it can contain, up to a maximum of 99, and the size of objects it can contain; If you attempt to put objects inside a container object that is full, you will receive a failure message. There is no limit to the depth of object containers; i.e. you could have a coin inside a purse, inside a bag, inside a box etc.

Object can be Opened and Closed. This can be used with containers, or just on its own (e.g. a door). Tasks can be restricted depending the status of an object. If the object is also a container, any objects inside it are only listed on examining the object if it is open. You must specify from the dropdown list the state you want the object to start off in. If you define the object as being lockable (see below), then you can also start the object being Locked.

…and is Lockable, with key allows you to lock objects. This option only becomes enabled if you've defined the object as being openable. You must select a dynamic object as being a key. You will then be able to lock and unlock the object with that key. If you wanted multiple keys, for example a master key, you would need to do that using tasks.

Object starts off in state allows you to create any state for the object. This defaults to On and Off, but by clicking on Define, you can insert, edit or delete the different states available, so for example, you could have Up/Down. These states can be used in task restrictions. If you want the state to be displayed when examining the object in the format "The <object> is <state>.", then click the Show in description checkbox.

Object has a surface allows you to put things onto the object in the game. Objects on other objects won' t appear in the room description, so the player has to examine the parent object to see if there are any objects on or in it. There is no limit to the number of objects you can put on a surface object.

The player is allowed to sit/stand on the object does just that. This enhances the reality of the adventure, and can be used in task restrictions.

The player can lie on the object does the same as above, except for lying.

Object is readable means that the player can type "read <object>". If you enter a description in the text box, this will be displayed. If not, the same description is given as when the object is examined.
Object is edible means that if the Player "eats" the object in the game, it will disappear. If you want something specific to happen when the object is eaten, you can add a task such as "eat <object>" which would override this option.

Object can be used as a weapon defines the object to be something that the Player could potentially use to attack characters with, although the default message will be that you miss the character. To enhance this, you'd need to use tasks. *

You can define the size and weight of the object from the pull down lists at the bottom of the screen. Each increase in size or weight is 3 times greater than the
previous entry; i.e. a Huge object is 81 times the size of a Tiny object. What these sizes actually mean is relative, and determined by you.

If an object is put inside a container object and the container is dynamic, the container will increase in weight by the weight of the object put inside it but it won't increase in size. Limits can be put on the Player to limit the size and weight that they can carry.

You can edit objects by double clicking on an object, or selecting an object, right clicking, and selecting Edit object.

* When the Battle System is enabled, additional options become available in object attributes.