

InsideADRIFT

The newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 27

January/February 2006

News and announcements

Development of ADRIFT 5.0 announced

With a particularly mischievous thread titled, "I'm sorry...", There will never be an ADRIFT 4.1", Campbell Wild let drifters know that rather than just updating ADRIFT 4.0 he was doing a complete rewrite with .Net technology.

Among the main new features are much fuller implementation of drag and drop between program windows. It will also be possible to have more than one window at a time open, which is quite a simple, but important, advance. The list of features can be found on page 2.

Tasks are getting a major revamp that should bring a much needed boost to parsing of commands. The built in ADRIFT commands have been taken out of the runner and will instead be implemented as a standard library within the generator. Tasks can now be created as General, Specific and System tasks. This means that there will be a standard **GET %object%** task built into the library at the start of writing your game which would perform the normal get operation on any object. The change is that to perform a different action on one or more objects you would create a Specific task, select the General get %object% task from a drop down list, you can then click the object in the command and get a list of specific objects. From there you can add specific restrictions and actions for the specific task.

The downside of the announcement is that we cannot expect to get our hands on a release version for a while. Campbell's projected release date is the third quarter of 2006.

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Issue: 27 (Jan/Feb 06)

Issue 28 due out 25 Mar 06

Editorial

As you will have seen, Campbell is getting into a massive rebuilding programme and rewriting ADRIFT. The downside for him is the impatience that will engender among the masses.

You may also notice that the newsletter has once again received a few changes. I am trying to break it up into sections that will hopefully be easy to navigate (although it might just be an excuse to make a few graphics!)

Ken Franklin

Contact

Send any suggestions, requests or comments about the newsletter to: editor@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

News and announcements (Continued)

ADRIFT 5.0 new features list

This is a quick list of the features that are proposed for ADRIFT 5.0 when it is finally released towards the end of this year.

- Written using newer technology (.NET)
- Tasks have been completely revamped. No longer will you have to "rewrite the parser" every time you want to add a command. You will simply select the default command and override it.
- Any number of restrictions can be given to location movements
- ALRs can be edited within the main application
- Hints have been separated from Tasks, allowing much more control over how and when they are displayed
- Properties can be individually created, then applied to objects
- All windows can be resized
- Multiple windows can be opened at once (e.g. two tasks windows at once)
- Standard ADRIFT commands have been moved from Runner into Generator using Libraries, allowing full customisation
- Multiple referenced objects can be used per task
- The parser has been much improved, giving much better ambiguity resolution
- Drag and drop is supported, allowing lists to be sorted, and also easy building of descriptions.
- Each list can be individually customised, so if you prefer, rather than lists for tasks, rooms, events etc you can have a list containing a room and all objects and tasks for that room
- Much more control will be given over aspects of the game, allowing more specific, advanced tasks
- Events will be fully customisable, with any number of sub-events
- More consistent, easier to use, look and feel

The Spring Comp is dead!

A decision has been taken to end the Spring Competition and to move the Summer Competition earlier in the year. This is partially a reaction to the comments that there are too many competitions, but also reflects the fact that the Spring Thing is again being run in a similar timeframe and that I wish to encourage drifters to compete in this all formats event. More details in The Comp Zone (page 4).

In this brave new world of ADRIFT competitions the Summer Comp will be the event for previously unreleased ADRIFT games.

Richard Otter stars at the InsideADRIFT Awards

This years awards ceremony has taken place, held in the Flash Chat on the InsideADRIFT site on 8th January 2006, and the big winner was Richard Otter who won three awards. The full list of winners is shown below.

- Most unusual ADRIFT setting/plot of the year": Take one by Robert Street" by Robert Street (rafgon); Can it be all so simple? By TDS; Escape to New York by Richard Otter (a 3 way tie)
- Best in game implementation: Richard Otter for "Target"
- Game of the year: The Plague - Redux by Laurence Moore
- Best contribution by a newcomer to the ADRIFT community: Christy Henshaw (Chenshaw)
- Biggest contribution to the ADRIFT community: David Whyld
- ADRIFT author of the year: Richard Otter

Game Scorecards, the way forward?

David Whyld has put forward the idea of simplifying feedback, when you release a game, by including a scorecard to be returned and guides to playing IF in general and ADRIFT in particular. The idea has been generally well received, though the question of how it is delivered has been more controversial. The choices are to include files with the game when it is delivered, which has the problem that it means the same information will be supplied with every game wasting bandwidth and filling people's hard drives, or using a web based system and links from within the game, which would require the development of an appropriate site (or everyone to have the their own web site for their game).



This is the new home of competitions in the newsletter. Here you will find information on competitions past, present and future that are of relevance to the ADRIFT community.

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition 2005 Result

This years Game of the Year *The Plague – Redux* by Laurence Moore (Cannibal), which turned around from a rather disappointing 22nd place in the 2005 IF Comp to beat games placed well above it. Others in the community had commented that it hadn't done as well as they thought it deserved and now Laurence gets his reward from our community.

The placings in the events saw David Whyld taking second place and *Escape to New York* and *Fire in the blood* both by Richard Otter coming joint third.

The event was slightly marred by the very low number of people who judged, just four people, three of whom were judges. A number of reasons have been put forward to try and explain this problem which have included there are too many competitions or the judging period being too short or the voting system being wrong.

Changes to InsideADRIFT Competitions

In view of the comments made after the Game of the Year competition, it has been decided to change events that are run. The Spring Competition has been cancelled and the Summer Competition will be moved so that games will have to be submitted by the last day of June, with them released for judging in July. One of the ideas behind this change is to make the event take place between the two main IF community events of the Spring Thing and the Annual IF Comp, so reducing any conflicts authors might run into.

David Whyld commented on the forum that he was "Sorry to see the Spring Comp go, but I think the idea of cutting down on Comps is a good one. We've had too many in the past* so less is better as far as I'm concerned".

The Summer Competition 2006 will be a game for any previously unreleased ADRIFT game, though AIF games will not be allowed. The full rules will be announced within the next month, so now is the time to get working if your masterpiece is to be ready in time.

In addition the voting system will return to the more standard 1-10 system. While as organiser I prefer the recent ranking system, I accept others are not happy with this. In truth no system will work unless more people get involved and vote.



*All those regular bits and pieces about the community are gathered together in **The Community Pool**. At the moment it is the birthdays list, events diary and list of recent releases, but is there anything else that is missing?*

Drifters birthdays

February 2006

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>4 WhiteLight (19)
 12 Ambrosine (51) Ultrarodimus (25)
 13 rika (15)
 14 Joseph_IV (38)
 17 WeAreLegion (30)
 20 MileOut (27) MileStyle (27) Clauz (35)</p> | <p>21 jvoilleq (33)
 22 redruM (20)
 26 Markjd (27)
 27 ralphmerridew (28)
 28 Faraday00 (40)</p> |
|--|--|

January 2006

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1 Lyle Brown (21) QueenFelix (33)
 3 Black_Mage (15)
 4 lizparnell (25)
 7 Kerikhan (20) onnodb (21) Pattra (17)
 9 Axiom (45)
 11 neo (18)
 17 Superplonker (22)</p> | <p>20 EdS (37) shadow_2014 (18)
 21 icypenguin (22)
 25 FireWyrM (23)
 26 rgrassi (36) doogle (28)
 27 merryjest (27)
 28 chocolatecake888 (31)
 31 JodoKast (19)</p> |
|---|--|

Events Diary

January 2006

28th **InsideADRIFT Issue 27 January/February 2006** due out.

March 2006

1st **Spring Thing 2006** initial intent to enter in by today.
 25th **InsideADRIFT Issue 28 March/April 2006** due out.
 31st **Spring Thing 2006** games must be submitted by today.

April 2006

~~16-30 **InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2006** (CANCELLED)~~

May 2006

June 2006

30 **InsideADRIFT Summer Competition 2006** Entries must be in by today

July 2006

1 **InsideADRIFT Summer Competition 2006** Judging begins, minimum 3 weeks duration

ADRIFT recent releases

These are the latest releases from the ADRIFT site, why not try one or two?

Complete games

PROVENANCE (1057 Kb, provenance.zip) By Corey Arnett, released Fri 16th Dec 2005

*** Walkthrough added. Password removed. Map enabled.

*** Several bugs have been fixed in this latest version.

Even though you know better, some unseen force draws you up the long path towards the house for a closer look. No good can come of this, you are certain, but the attraction is simply too strong. You must investigate. You are beginning to develop an uneasy sense that all is not right here, but that it is somehow up to you to find out. Church bells in the distance sound out four o'clock in the afternoon. It will be dark soon. And with the night comes things that go bump.

The Demon Hunter (19 Kb, TheDemonHunter.zip) By thatguy, released Mon 12th Dec 2005

You have been searching for this place for over twenty years and now, at long last, your hunt for the demon has ended...[Third Place - Finish The Game Comp 2005]

A Spot Of Bother [version 4] (111 Kb, spotofbother.taf) By David Whyld, released Mon 12th Dec 2005

Eccentric old nuclear bomb designer Mrs Moog has collapsed due to the ferocious heatwave the country has been experiencing... and the nuclear reactor she's been working on has just started to meltdown. So the government has called on YOU - Stavros 'The Bulldog' McGrogan, the hardest man the SAS ever produced - to bring her out in one piece. But the cottage of an eccentric old lady and its multitude of death-dealing traps might be a match for even the mighty Bulldog...

Demos

Prompt (1 Kb, prompt.taf) By Hombre, released Tue 24th Jan 2006

This demonstrates how to add prompts to tasks. When you "print file" it asks "which file do you wish to print, the smith file or the johnson file?". Say "smith file" and it prints it. Say something else and a few turns later type "smith file" and it doesn't assume you still meant to print it.

Run task on room entry (1 Kb, RoomEntryTask.taf) By KF, released Sun 15th Jan 2006

This is a way of triggering a task on the players entry into a room. An event triggers a task every turn that runs in all rooms and this task executes another one that only runs in the room the player has entered. The event could simply trigger the second task, but this adds flexibility.

Thousand Years Locked (3 Kb, Thousand_Years_Locked.zip) By Ricardo Ferreira, released Mon 26th Dec 2005

A thousand years locked

A million years mocked

You don't remember why you are in a dungeon cell all your life. You don't know who you are, all you know is that a conjurer feeds you everyday but he hasn't fed for the last tree days...

This isn't complete 'cause I don't have the registered version of Adrift... Look for this when I release it in another text adventure program (probably HUGO).



We have a very lively community for users of ADRIFT, but we are a small part of the wider IF community, and this section is intended to refer to what is going on out there.

What is going on on RAIF?

There is often a certain nervousness about the RAIF newsgroup, and more specifically the attitude of some members towards ADRIFT. Here I will attempt to bring some of the recent threads that have a general IF interest to your attention.

Simulation vs convention vs completeness

http://groups.google.co.uk/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_frm/thread/66b78b6d10a4af1a/9722cb2c85a39fc6?hl=en#9722cb2c85a39fc6

One of those discussions that we have had many times, does everything you describe have to work in your game?

Atmosphere vs red-herrings

http://groups.google.co.uk/group/rec.arts.int-fiction/browse_frm/thread/9709c664a2c38582/9061bedeb6dbf42e?hl=en#9061bedeb6dbf42e

Where things happen within a game will the player see a significance to it that might imply something is more important to the game than it really is. The example used involves a garment that, when dropped outside becomes dirty and when dropped inside will be picked up and washed.

Jet Blue – by Paul Johnson (Reviewed by David Whyld)

This month arch reviewer David Whyld has an Inform game in his sights.

(Available for download from <http://www.johnson46.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/>)

(Before I start this review, I should probably make a point of saying that it contains a fair number of spoilers about the game in question. I've tried wherever possible to avoid giving away anything that might spoil the game for anyone wishing to play it, but when you review a game like this it's often difficult to say much about it that can't in some way be interpreted as a spoiler.)

I recently played House Of The Midnight Sun by the same author and, aside from a few bits where the lack of testing showed through, found it to be a pretty good game. So I decided to give another of his games a whirl. The Ghost Train was another horror, so I went for Jet Blue (a science fiction game) instead.

Initial Impressions

I've never been a big fan of introductions that take an age to get through, and particularly ones that can't be avoided altogether. Jet Blue's introduction is a good example of such an introduction,

requiring you to wade your way through half a dozen screens before the game starts proper. It's also an introduction which doesn't really tell you what's going on in the game. Another point against it.

The MENU command is used here in place of the more common ABOUT or INFO; fortunately I remembered this from playing the writer's previous game and so wasn't stumped this time. The first thing I noticed when checking out the various MENU options were the sheer volume of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. It's like the writer lost his grasp on the English language for a while there. Was the introduction to House Of The Midnight Sun as buggy as this? I don't remember it being so.

The alien planet

The game starts with you lying on the surface of an alien planet, the only survivor of a crashed spaceship. I have to admit to finding this a not particularly enthralling or original way to start a game. Okay, House Of The Midnight Sun hardly tackled new or original ideas, but it seemed to handle them in a better way than this. Jet Blue began looking like it was going to be nothing more than another generic run-of-the-mill game with you shipwrecked on an alien planet.

But I wandered around and checked out my surroundings. There was a jungle comprising most of the locations, and a few items conveniently scattered around that I was able to make use of to gain access to the crashed spaceship. A few oddities occurred that spiced the story up: a hint that the spaceship crashing might not have been an accident after all but an act of sabotage; a crewman who I originally found dead later showing up alive, only to be killed a few seconds later.

Solving the puzzles in the early part of the game seemed to be a case of perseverance. Pass through a location at one time and there will be nothing there, come back later and things have changed. I came to the body of my dead crewman at one stage and made a point of both examining and searching him (after remembering the writer's other game where the two often yielded different responses). I found nothing very useful. However, later on I discovered a hint aboard the spaceship that the dead man might well be carrying something, so I returned and searched him again and, lo and behold, an item which hadn't been there before had mysteriously shown up. Was it there all along and I just didn't see it the first time? Or had the events on the ship somehow moved it to where I found it? Or, as I suspect, was this just a very simple and straightforward puzzle made more complicated by the writer deciding to make the poor player run around for the sake of it?

Armed with what I discovered, I ventured back to the ship and quickly put things into order. And then the story took another strange turn as I found myself back aboard the ship before it crashed and, what's stranger still, the dead crew members are back to life as well.

The spaceship

I was expecting, and hoping, for some kind of explanation of events from the other people on the spaceship, but none were forthcoming. Mention is made of a disease which has swept over the Earth, and there's reason to believe the people on the ship are likewise infected. Of the various crewmates, I only managed to encounter one, and only then with considerable difficulty as the room description doesn't list her as being present so it was only when I tried operating the computer and she spoke to me that I became aware of her presence. The other crew members were locked away – one in the ship's toilet, the other in his cabin (unless, of course, they were also missed from the room descriptions) – and attempts to either reach them or converse with them ended in failure.

The ship itself contains a number of locations but the majority seem either empty of things to do or contain things to do that I was never able to fathom. The toilet, for example, has a lengthy (four and a bit screens!) sign hanging outside (four and a bit screens of text on a sign? Either the sign was huge or the writing was minute!) which details use of the toilet but as the toilet was currently occupied, and

waiting around didn't change anything as far as I could tell, I never got to put that four and a bit screens of information to any use.

Making progress at this stage in the game was made complicated more by the fact that there was never any clear indication of what I should be doing as opposed to the puzzles themselves being especially difficult. I wasn't able to question the one crew member I could speak to, Dian, about what had happened on the planet and most of my attempts at conversing with her met with a blank wall. In the end, stumped as to what I should be doing next, I went back to an earlier location and, for no other reason than the game allowed me to do it, activated the ship's robot. Which promptly went berserk and started wrecking the ship and trying to kill me. As it happens, this was the event I needed to trigger to move the game onto the next part, although what the reasoning behind activating a deranged robot is I can't imagine. (It becomes clear later in the game, but at the time you activate the robot, there's no reason to assume you should need to do this.)

The theatre

This was when things began to get even weirder still. I moved from the spaceship to the stage of a Bolshoi theatre; the same one, as it happens, that one of my fellow crewmates was watching on a TV on the ship before everything went haywire. The deranged robot followed me but fell over and didn't seem to do anything else. And one of the ballerinas, named Psyche, spoke to me and I was able to ask her questions. Getting a decent answer out of her was a struggle, due to the game insisting that I use the ASK [NAME] ABOUT [SUBJECT] type of conversation system. Some of the subjects I asked about just didn't get a response at all; others did, but what I was told was of no use. The transcript I had made of the game proved invaluable here, and after reading through it for key words I might need, I tried them one after another. Bingo!

Things began to fall into place a little at this stage with Psyche providing me with something of an insight into just what was going on. The explanation wasn't an entirely satisfying one, but at least it went some way towards explaining the weird series of events I had just gone through. Causing the robot to go mad and wreck the ship now made sense, although at the time it made none at all.

And then I was back on the ship again.

The ship (again)

What happened to the formatting of some of the text here I don't know what with it being centred, then left aligned, then centred, then back to left aligned again. Whatever the reason for it, it looked a mess.

I returned to the ship, met Dian again (this time she was visible, although not always), and struggled with some game errors and ambiguity problems. What I needed to do – get off the ship without Dian following me – was pretty easy to figure out, but actually doing it was a nightmare. Dian was sometimes listed in room descriptions and sometimes not, so keeping track of her was often a problem. I was convinced I had left her behind at one point but when I tried to leave the ship in the life boat, I still ended up dying because Dian was there with me. Getting rid of her was a pain, complicated needlessly by the obvious command (hitting or killing her) not working.

The ambiguity problems arose with a couple of circuit boards that I needed to swap. I had the first one and the game wouldn't let me take the second, because (I'm guessing) it checked my inventory, saw I was carrying a board and assumed I already had what I was trying to pick up. By the time I'd realised I needed to move to another location, drop the board I had, return to the location of the second board, take that and drop it somewhere else, then go and retrieve the first board... well, I'd ran out of time again and ended up getting killed.

The planet (again)

A good part of figuring out what is going on in Jet Blue is paying careful attention to your surroundings. After the strange incident in the theatre, I arrived back on the planet once more. At first it seemed like the same series of events as before (and I half suspected I'd come across some kind of unfortunate bug) but as I explored I realised certain things had changed. A door, previously locked and which I hadn't been able to find a way to open, was now mysteriously open. Most of the other tasks that I had carried out before could be done again, and I even found it possible to return to the ship once and replay the same series of events that would eventually lead me to the planet.

Some of the events have to be carried out to give you a certain item you need and the sense of repetition is frustrating at times. But there are also some pretty interesting puzzles here, and the repetition is over with quickly enough so that it doesn't seem like you're endlessly repeating yourself. And of course, as you've solved this part of the game once already, you at least know exactly what you need to do.

Up to this stage, Jet Blue had featured a variety of puzzles, some good, some not so good, some just mind boggling (like activating the robot when there was no real reason to do it at the time), but all of them had been fairly easy to figure out when you thought about it. But inside the tomb, it introduced a whole series of new puzzles. And most of them, sorry to say, were of the tedious kind that remind me why I often avoid puzzlefests like the plague. Okay, I'll admit the first puzzle with the door and the letters was inspired and I'm secretly pleased I managed to figure it out (I must be getting better at this sort of thing!) but the next set of puzzles, involving more buttons, letters and another sealed door, just had me grinding my teeth in frustration. Even more frustrating, though, was the fact that the solution (after a quick search on the internet) was another of those in-your-face obvious things that I'm really disappointed I didn't figure out on my own.

End game

And that was just about it for the game. I have to admit to being slightly surprised at the way the game ended. It seemed a little sudden. And the explanation for the weird series of events that had occurred didn't seem to have much credibility either. Had I really travelled in time? Or was it just some kind of hallucination? I'm tempted to think it was an hallucination as that fits in better with the general weirdness of the game, but as I was able to carry items with me through the hallucinations I'm not sure what to think. Was there an explanation buried somewhere in the game that I simply missed or is it just one of those games that isn't meant to be fully understood?

Extra

There are a considerable amount of extras in Jet Blue; in fact, I'd guess probably a third or maybe even a full half of the game's text could be counted as extras. As well as a bit of information about the author (who clearly doesn't believe in spell checks), there's a poem by Edgar Allan Poe (Ulalume, which is mentioned elsewhere in the game on a number of occasions) as well as general hints for the game (generic hints, that is, that could apply equally to any game you've ever played and are of precious little use here) and a guide to interactive fiction in general.

Conclusion

Overall I liked Jet Blue but there were a number of errors with it that stopped me giving it a better score, not the least of which was the huge amount of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. House Of The Midnight Sun was a larger game yet contained far fewer errors, and the majority of the ones in Jet Blue could have been avoided altogether with more thorough testing. Funnily enough, the credits section of the game even has someone listed for proof reading...

The lack of direction brought my overall opinion of the game down, as well as the numerous spelling mistakes that smacked of carelessness. And the ending could certainly have been a better one. But all in all, Jet Blue was a fairly decent game.

5 out of 10

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 boxer shorts, priced at \$13.49, with a discreet InsideADRIFT logo on the right leg.



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

Also available from www.cafepress.com/insideadrift are: trucker hat \$11.79; sweatshirt \$22.39; sleeveless tee \$15.89; women's tank top \$15.89; mousepad \$11.49; teddy bear \$13.79; sticker \$2.69; journal \$7.69; messenger bag \$19.99.

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Please send any contributions or suggestions to editor@insideadrift.org.uk.