

***Inside*ADRIFT Newsletter no 20**

October 2004

Editorial

This is the first newsletter since I stopped editing it, or at least said I would stop with every intention of going through with it! My disappointment is that there was no one else who felt they could do the job as editor.

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Competition news

InsideADRIFT Game of the Year Competition

The competition is still very much on, and details can be found on the InsideADRIFT website.

2004 IF Competition

This huge interactive fiction event is in the all important judging phase, which runs until 15 November. If my counting is correct there were 39 entries at the start, although two of them have dropped out since then.

David Whyld's "A Day In The Life Of A Super Hero" is the only ADRIFT entry, so good luck to him.

Forum news

As the forum calmed down from a bad period, there was a burst of really very interesting threads that were rewarded with a good response.

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 a 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.

Reviews exchange

Started by davidw, from an idea by Woodfish, the exchange basically provides a commitment to review other people's games in return for them agreeing to review yours. This idea has proved quite popular and should increase the amount of feedback available to authors, which will hopefully be paid back with better games as lessons are learned.

Description challenge

Nickydude, with assistance from Mystery, launched the description challenge as a monthly writing event. You are given a location and some objects and have to come up with the best description for that location including the named objects.

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Drifter's Birthdays

November 2004

2 tsm_paul (28)

4 Lannly (20)

7 quantumdaimon (25); jokerjesterknave (22)

11 Malym (36)

15 CJCole (34)

22 AgapeIncognito (31)

25 DuoDave (38)

27 Cowboy (48); Kel-nage (17); qkara (25); desilets (58)

Culled from the forum calendar

ADRIFT New Releases

From the [Adrift adventures page](#)

Full games

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

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.

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.

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Spelling, Grammar, and Punctuation: Getting it right

Written by Mystery

Poor spelling, grammar, and proper punctuation is a very big issue to IF authors and players. Interactive fiction is a text based medium, therefore you would expect spelling, grammar, and punctuation to be high on the list of things that need to be correct. Let's face it, we're not professionals, and it is easy to make simple mistakes, and even miss them during alpha-Testing. It is very important that every author have their games beta-tested by as many people as they can

get. But even before it gets to that point, there are things you can do to before you even send your game out for testing.

Have a dictionary/thesaurus at hand while you are creating your game. There are several online dictionary/thesaurus available for free, such as Dictionary.com (<http://dictionary.reference.com/>) and Thesaurus.com (<http://thesaurus.reference.com/>). However, there are times when you want to work on your games while you're not online. There are several commercial products available, and even a few free ones out there.

The one I use most often is WordWeb (<http://wordweb.info/free/>). You can download a free version of WordWeb that has over 140 thousand definitions as well as 115 thousand synonym sets. You can use it offline, and there are no nag screens, no spyware, no adware, and no viruses. Best of all, it is free for personal non-commercial use. A pro version is also available.

Grammar checkers are a little more difficult. Microsoft's grammar checker is probably what most use, but it misses a great deal, and in many cases suggests incorrect changes. There are several online grammar checkers, but there is no perfect checker that will catch everything. The best advice I can give on this subject, being far from perfect myself, is to learn proper grammar. The Guide to Grammar and Writing (<http://www.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/>) is an excellent place to start. There is a treasure trove of information and you can even take quizzes to see how you have done. It includes sections on punctuation, so you can make sure you have all of your commas and quotation marks in the right place.

The best way to make sure things are correct, is to learn the correct way to write. Spelling and grammar checkers can be useful, as well as having someone or several people proofread and beta-test your games. Do your part as an author and make sure your writing is the best that it can be. You can do it!

This article has recently been posted on the KF ADRIFT website, but deserves a wider audience

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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 webspace 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.

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From the Manual

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.

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Newsletter compiled by Ken Franklin, October 2004