

InsideADRIFT

the newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 12

December 2003

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ADRIFT manual updated

Campbell Wild had updated the manual for ADRIFT Version 4 which is available from the downloads page of the ADRIFT site. While it isn't a huge overhaul, it is very welcome adding some extra detail on the following: a few extra tips; a section on list filtering; formulae for text variables; referenced text section; task command function section; plus a few other nips and tucks.

In the future I will of course be using the updated version of the manual in the reference section of the newsletter.

ADRIFT tutorial begun by Mystery

Mystery has begun the planning of a tutorial for new users of ADRIFT, the idea of which is to guide the user through the making of a simple first game. When she asked on MSN chat about an idea for the first game she received loads of feedback, just didn't like most of them. The beginner will then be walked through the simple steps needed to make a small playable game.

I saw the first couple of pages of Mystery's first draft of the tutorial, in the form of web pages. It was simply done and has great promise. This is the sort of project that ADRIFT needs, but Mystery will certainly find that she has committed herself to a really tough task. Most of the other IF languages have quite an amount of documentation and, while the manual is very good in providing drifters with some detailed information for the advanced user, we have been short of this kind of getting started with ADRIFT information.

DavidW publishes games schedule

DavidW has made a very powerful statement of intent on his Shadow Vault website by giving details of his schedule of games he intends to write. Currently his previews page has ten games listed with some of details of the genres and plot lines.

Editorial

I hope you will enjoy yet another bumper issue of the newsletter. This month there has been a fair bit happening in the news. Also hope you like the new logo, decided something more plain would suit the style of what I am trying to do.

In addition I have interviewed Roger Firth, a name that should register with all IF enthusiasts as he is the man behind the "Cloak of Darkness" website. CoD is a place where examples of the different IF languages can be compared implementing the same game, a really important way to choose one to suit you (Campbell did the ADRIFT version).

The end FT Awards are due to be announced tomorrow. When the voting starts please take the time to make your mark.

Contact

Send any suggestions, requests or comments concerning InsideADRIFT to editor@insideadrift.org.uk

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

Drifters birthdays

December

- 3 dove (21)
- 6 Samo (15)
- 14 Brighterskyte (23)
- 21 Tech (33)
- 23 Massassi (27)
- 25 Ravenous (16); *Foul Old Man* (100)
- 28 Scurvy Sockpuppet (26)
- 29 Hanadorobou (29)

Check out <http://www.shadowvault.net> for more details. Clearly DavidW is trying to be a one man ADRIFT game industry, and also to answer his own article on the dry patch for ADRIFT games.

It will be interesting to see whether he also makes more use of beta testers as he has been asked to by other drifters. His IF Comp entry *Sophie's Adventure* was hit by some bugs due to lack of checking time and testing.

Competition news roundup

We are now into the final phase of the year where we look back and forward, the End of Year Competition is a perfect chance to hone your game and give it a lift, At the same time now is a good time to plan for what you would like to enter in the Spring Competition next April.

The ADRIFT End of Year Competition 2003 is still in limbo as it doesn't get under way until late in December. There seem to be quite a few who are planning to enter, but as organizer I just have to wait and see.
(http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/comp_win_03.html)

Third ADRIFT One-Hour Game Competition was won by The Mad Monk's entry "Apprentice of the Demonhunter" ahead of "Farthest shore" from Stewart J. McAbney, with "Just my imagination – musings of a child" by Mystery coming in a highly creditable third.

I would have to call this a highly successful event with 13 entries, and, considering the time limit of one hour to write the games, the overall standard was high. It is to be hoped that such participation levels will continue on into the End of Year Competition in December.

<http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi-bin/konboard.cgi?s=3f8914273275ffff;act=STf;f=1;t=2211>)

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004 has been formally launched. I have released preliminary details of this renamed competition that takes place between 18 April and 2 May 2004. This is an event for newly written, previously unreleased games, with no limit on size (although if over 400Kb the author may be expected to find somewhere to host the file for download). This is the main ADRIFT only competition for new games, as opposed to the minicomps and other restricted events.

Further details can be found at
http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/comp_spr_04.html

Third ADRIFT One-Hour Game Competition

Full Results

I thought drifters might appreciate a complete listing of the results in the Third One-Hour Game Competition, as organized by Woodfish in October. With thirteen entries the competition was very successful, although the standard of some of the entries brought into question whether they could have been written in an hour. DavidW with three entries, as well as Woodfish and Mel S with two each showed particular dedication to the cause.

The Mad Monk's winning entry, "Apprentice of the Demonhunter" was a very well-constructed game with good plot progression. While it wasn't hugely original, in terms of being a straightforward battle between you and a demon, this was a good game of its genre. Certainly there was a lot of effort put in given the limitations of the competition.

It will be interesting to see whether any of the authors develop the ideas they entered into a full game.

1. "Apprentice of the Demonhunter" by MadMonk
2. "Farthest Shore" by Stewart J McAbney (MileOut)
3. "Just my imagination – the musing of a child" by Mystery
4. "Doom Cat" by Eric Mayer
5. "Forum 2" by Woodfish
6. "Saffire" by Woodfish
7. "The Revenge of Clueless Bob Newbie" by DavidW
8. "The Revenge of Clueless Bob Newbie 2" by DavidW
9. "The Curse of the Revenge of the Ghost of the Evil Chicken of Doom...Returns!" by Mel S
10. "ASDFA (A Short Damn Fantasy Adventure)" by DavidW
11. "Crazy Radioactive Monkey" by MelS
12. "The Pyramid of Hamaratum" by KF
13. "Quest For Flesh" by Tech

The Annual Interactive fiction competition has now finally come to an end, finished for another year or at least until everyone is thinking about their entries for next years event.

The 2003 IF Competition is now over and having seen a drop in entries, this was matched by a lower number of people judging. Over the past three competitions the number of voters has dropped from 216 to 198 and then down to 157. Already the post mortem on the rec.games.int-fiction (RGIF) newsgroup has started as to the cause of this decline.

The summarized results were as follows:

| Place | Game | Avg. | Std. Dev. | No. Votes |
|-------|--------------------------|------|-----------|-----------|
| 1 | Slouching Towards Bedlam | 8.39 | 1.77 | 107 |
| 2 | Risorgimento Represso | 7.76 | 1.70 | 92 |
| 3 | Scavenger | 7.51 | 1.69 | 91 |
| 4 | The Erudition Chamber | 7.32 | 1.79 | 107 |
| ----- | | | | |
| 16 | Sophie's Adventure | 4.97 | 2.02 | 60 |

(Results from a total of 30 entries)

DavidW should not be too disappointed, his placing is very much in the middle, and when compared with other years (except for last years high placing of *The PK Girl* and *Unraveling God*) is a strong result. In 2001 there were three ADRIFT games coming 32=, 43 and 47 out of 51 ,and in 2000 the games placed 39 and 45 out of 53. I think puts this years result in perspective.

There have also been quite a few reviews posted on RGIF from the judges, from which DavidW has been able to glean some helpful remarks and praise.

It is sad that ADRIFT was represented by just the one entry this year after last years three attempts, lets all see if we can turn the tide around.

Italian One Room Competition is still taking place, but you should be aware that the relevant web page has changed http://www.avventuretestuali.com/orgc/orgc2003_eng.html. So far I haven't seen whether any drifters have actually decided to give this a go.

InsideADRIFT Awards

As I announced previously in the newsletter, at the end of this year Drifters will get the chance to vote for their favourites in a number of ADRIFT categories.

This really will only work if people bother to join in. Awards will be useless if there are only five votes. Here you can say well done and thanks to those who have put in an effort to make our community better.

Extra information

There will be an additional **InsideADRIFT award for lifetime contribution to ADRIFT** selected by the editor (me). I don't think I will be causing too much shock when I announce that the first recipient will be Campbell Wild.

Each winner will receive a certificate in recognition of their achievement. They can either download it as a PDF file to print themselves or I would be happy to send them a copy, printed out onto card and laminated.

Awards timetable

30 November – the 3 top nominations in each category will be announced (trying to remove the dafter attempts to rig the vote).

6 December - The voting period starts.

31 December – voting ends.

4 January 2004 - The award winners, along with the winner of the ADRIFT End of Year Competition, which will be game of the year, will then be announced.

There will be an online ceremony, probably on the MSN ADRIFT group chat.

Due to the international nature of our group, I will post on the forum asking people to select from three possible time spans for the ceremony.

Forum news

Campbell asks for detailed bug reports

In a thread that concerned Marno's problems in getting his game to work, and the bugs that were thwarting him, Campbell explained *"Stack overflows and runtime errors are easy to fix so long as I can reproduce them"*. He went on to ask that people give detailed reports of such problems, and send a copy of the offending file to him.

If we can all try to report any such bugs to Campbell, rather than just have a good moan, we may find the stability of future versions of ADRIFT greatly improved. Here I am just meaning that it is easier for us all (yes, we all do it) to rush onto the forum and complain about a bug, without making sure we have enough detail to allow Campbell the chance to work out why it happened and fix it.

WIPA: Works In Progress Anonymous

Tech put forward this idea, which is based on a creative writing group, of having a structured approach to games development. In the initial post Tech laid out a timetable for game writing with the target of completion for the End of Year Competition. The timetable is broken down into four weeks, and then into each day in that week, the weeks are given over to: brainstorming/planning; writing; beta testing; re-writing.

A number of drifters are attempting to commit themselves to projects working to this plan, and another thread was started up in which they started to describe their projects. I am sure we will follow the progress with interest, bearing in mind how hard it is to get a game completed.

Dry patch article gets flood of responses

DavidW's article on the dearth of new full ADRIFT games in the last issue brought a quite heated debate.

Some questioned the value of the statistics he used, and some questioned that statistics have any value at all. It seemed to be generally believed that his numbers for active drifters were very optimistic and therefore greatly overestimated the numbers of games that could reasonably be expected.

For many the debate was more one of it is better to have one really good game than fifty poor ones, a well respected argument. Quite a few drifters took pot shots at how prolific DavidW is, believing that he sacrificed the standard of his

Events Diary

November 29, 2003

InsideADRIFT Issue 12 out today

The December Issue of the ADRIFT newsletter is out today. This is the last one to be issued in 2003.

December 21, 2003

ADRIFT End of Year competition 2003: entries in and judging starts

This is a competition for any game made using the Adrift Interactive Fiction Creation System that was released during the calendar year 2003.

The entries must be sent to competition@kfadrift.org.uk, arriving no later than 15:00hrs GMT on Sunday 21 December 2003. I will then try and get everything together for judging to commence that evening.

December 24, 2004

InsideADRIFT Review of the Year Special Issue due out

A look back on what has been happening in the ADRIFT world over the last year.

January 04, 2004

ADRIFT End of Year Competition 2003 Judging ends

Judging ends today, with marks to reach KF by 15:00hrs GMT on Sunday 4 January 2003.

January 10, 2004

InsideADRIFT Issue 13 due out today

The January/February issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be out today.

February 28, 2004

InsideADRIFT Issue 14 due out

The March issue of the ADRIFT newsletter should be available today.

April 18, 2004

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004: entries due in

This is a competition for new ADRIFT games, there is no limit on the game size except that it should be less than 400kb OR if larger it should be hosted elsewhere and a link supplied. More details will be posted later. Judging will take place in the 2 week period to 2 May 2004.

games by not having them tested by others. A point that he argued vigorously, before conceding that testing could be useful when errors in his latest game "*Halloween Hijinks*" were pointed out.

Detail in description debate

Following a conversation between Mystery and MileOut over a game introduction Mystery had written. The debate is over how much detail you should put into your writing. Mile has always been one for writing quite detailed and artistic words, it is a question of whether you should add a flood of adjectives or leave more up to the reader's imagination.

To cause confusion, the debate once started split into two when Mystery opened up another thread to put the question in a way which she felt better reflected the main thrust of their discussion.

RockSockM releases Temporfell Demo/Beta

In an effort to release something, rocksockm decided to let out him incomplete game as a beta/demo. The early responses have been very promising, with some special word of appreciation for his ANSI text art intro screen. The author has received some helpful transcripts from players and has asked for more.

One sentence story

A quick word for the one sentence story thread, started by Woodfish in the Writing Discussion forum, which developed into a quite comical (or even farcical) tale of genetic research and mutation in a short space of time.

Smacking thread returns

The smacking thread was reopened to give drifters a bit of fun as they have been reasonably well behaved. Unfortunately I found the wrong thread, but Mystery put me right (and gave me a good smacking for my pains). For those not around in the heyday of this illustrious thread, it was very much the ADRIFT play room where people "smacked" others for the silliest reasons.

It is interesting to see that, after a fairly brisk start, the thread was not used as much as it used to be in its earlier incarnation. Is this a sign of growing maturity with the ADRIFT community?

May 02, 2004

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004: judging ends and results

The Spring competition winner is announced and hailed.

InsideADRIFT Awards continued

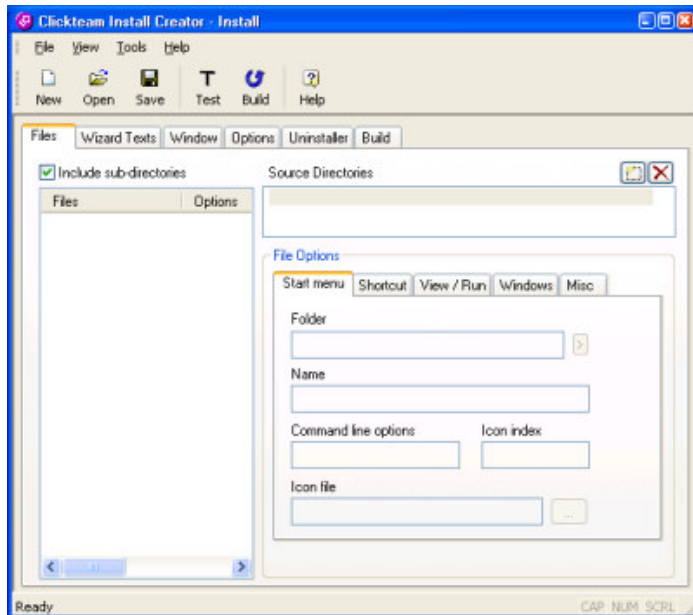
The nominations phase, picking the three top candidates in each category, has continued throughout the month and ends tomorrow (30th November). More information is provided later on in this newsletter (p4).

Drifters Toolbox:

Install Creator from Clickteam

Recently Tech asked on a forum about finding an installer program for something he had written and Mystery suggested he look at Install Creator. Although Mystery hadn't used it herself, she thought as it was free, and the group behind it had a good reputation, it might be worth a look. As I often use an installer, for the competition files that I put up for downloading, I was interested and took a look.

The download is 2.21Mb and, not surprisingly, comes as an installation executable file.



The above window may worry you, I only include it because it shows what is behind the simple to use wizard that pops up immediately you launch the program. With a series of simple questions you can quickly bundle together your files, with an uninstaller, into a single executable file ready to make it available to download.

Feature List from the Clickteam website

Small footprint of the executable

An empty installer is only 100Kb. We cram the complete professional installation program and the complete de-installer in

Real Lives

The wedding of Suzanne Thomson and Campbell Wild

Campbell has posted up a series of colour and black and white pictures of his wedding at <http://wedding.adrift.org.uk/> for us to look at.



The bride and groom in traditional pose.

Mystery moves house

Our very own girl next door has become her own girl next door as she has moved into the larger house next door to her old place. On 1st November she spent her time moving her children and husband into their new place, eventually return to the fold on the third. I am sure that we all send her our best wishes for the future in the new house.

Have you done anything recently in the real world that you would like to share with us?

100kb! Compare that with other installer programs: minimums of 500Kb. We feel it is inexcusable to have a 500Kb installer!

A simple and easily understood interface

There's no complex scripting language, you simply select a directory that contains the files to install and set options for any special individual files and that's it, you're done.

Easy step by step wizard - it's a cinch!

When the project is done, just save the settings and you can recover the project later and update it at your will.

Complete customization

You can change all the texts, choose any bitmaps, customize each screen of your installer - you can preview the look of the install process at anytime during the creation process.

Fully functional freeware version

The freeware version is fully and completely operational. You will not find a better installer at 10 times the price. You have nothing to loose test it out today. All these features sound obvious and standard - don't they? So why do we still find programs on the Internet that decompress the data files onto the desktop (isn't that annoying?). Then there are the programs without proper de-installation routines, and products that create a directory at the root of your C drive instead of directing the files where you want them.

I appreciate some may say what has this got to do with ADRIFT, but I think that ignores the fact that we all often have more than one file we want to keep together with a game.

If I have whetted your appetite for this program, then you should check it out at the Clickteam website (<http://www.clickteam.com/English/installcreator.php>) for more information. For completeness I should say that there is also a Pro version with extra features at a price.

Think piece by KF

Is IF likely to be paid for again?

There are members of the ADRIFT community, Mystery step forward, who are interested in the idea of making money via their hobby. Is it really likely that people will want to actually pay for a work of interactive fiction in the future, after all there is a lot of free stuff out there.

The (big) idea

We do need a collection of the best games to recommend

So often new users arrive and the cry goes up "I'm new here. What game should I play first". This is where we need something a bit more selective than the main adventure page.

Mystery started off on the right lines, but the idea needs promotion so that we can have perhaps a post on the forum with links to the best. They would be described so that people could select a horror, comedy, science fiction or fantasy game to suit their mood and personal preference.

This is something we can all think about and come up with what we like. I don't think we can reasonably say that the ADRIFT world is awash with great masterpieces, but there are some gems.

Having taken another look at the games page Mystery has created (<http://home.gcn.cx/mystery/games.htm>), I would say it fulfils most of what I am asking for and should be promoted. It has games described neatly and divided by ADRIFT version. There are also copies of the game files on the site for downloading.

It is true that, in the early days of computing in the 1980s, text adventures were a part of mainstream gaming. You can however probably assign that largely to the fact that graphical games were still very primitive, whereas now photoreality is the order of the day.

Mickey Crocker started a thread on the forum, and the debate seems to essentially be a matter of what would represent a fair price and what would need to be there. Trouble is there are so many factors to be taken into consideration.

Starting with an obvious pay for feature we have the packaging, it seems likely that it would have to be put on CD to differentiate it from the games that can be downloads for nothing. However you sell it the CD package would need eye catching artwork, a photocopied bit of text won't suffice. If you could also add some extra material, maybe a coloured map to give something tangible for your buyer. The actual cost of this sort of thing isn't massive if you are a big company, but is a bit steeper for small quantities.

You will have to create a market for your game, a fairly obvious thing to do is to make a small playable demo of your game. As suggested by DavidW, this would probably need to be about 10% of the size of the game, enough to give a flavour without the buyer feeling cheated that they have already played most of the game. Another reasonably cheap way of marketing such a game is with something like the Google Adwords scheme where you can get exposure when someone searches on something like fiction, which does at least target things. Put interactive fiction into your search and you probably see on the right:

Remember Text Adventure?

Pentari: First Light

Interactive Fiction is back!

Clearly someone is having a go at the commercial marketing of interactive fiction.

Problem for us is that ADRIFT is not ideal for this sort of project as it isn't possible to make a stand alone game, and having the runner with it detracts from the professional look.

While this is just a short look at this topic, it is something that will keep on coming back until someone actually gives it a go at selling their game. In the end it may be that the halfway house offered by shareware is the way to go as it would allow a game to still be made available online, but give a

The (big) Idea 2

Reviewers are always biased by Mystery

KF and I had a rather lengthy discussion about reviews, reviewers and authors. Now we both agree that most reviewers are not objective and are bias towards certain aspects of games based on the identity of the author.

You could truly write a groundbreaking masterpiece game that is flawless in every area (never know-could happen) but because you rubbed the reviewer the wrong way you get a cruddy review.

I hardly think that is fair for the author, or the intended audience.

I tend not to write reviews for the most part because I of this. And I certainly wouldn't write a review for a game created by a person I disliked. Not because I can't be objective, but I wouldn't want to be accused of doing something that I am strongly opposed to.

You can usually spot disgruntled reviewers. They tend to be extremely rude with their comments and usually focus on the negative aspects of the work.

While a good, objective reviewer will point out the author's strong points and weak points without being rude and sarcastic with their comments.

Perhaps this is why more don't review games. You write a not so gleaming review for one person's game and you get it back tenfold because you've angered the reviewer.

chance of gaining some reward from those honest enough to pay up. The try before you buy principle is fair and, while you will get many who won't pay, some will which is better than nothing. What to charge would be part of the equation, if you go too low people may think it isn't worth the bother, too high and they will think it won't be worth the money, maybe coming in with £7.50-£10.00 as a reasonable compromise.

Interview: Roger Firth questioned by KF

The webmaster for the "Cloak of Darkness" and "Parsifal" websites answers a few questions from your editor.

Hello, thank you for agreeing to answer a few questions.

Q1. *What was it that first brought you into the world of IF?*

Infocom's Planetfall. Not the original 1983 release, but four or five years later when its reissue at an affordable price -- something like £9.99 -- coincided with availability of a PC at work, leading to weeks of enjoyable lunchbreaks. And then Hitchhiker's Guide, and the Zorks, and... until I'd run out of good cheap games, and my interest lapsed.

Until 1998. Working for a large computer corporation, I was hunting for ways of making my group's niche product noticeable to the corporation's salesforce; hopefully, greater internal visibility would lead to more sales. Some form of game would be ideal, but my creative capabilities were clearly inadequate for anything graphical. And then I remembered Interactive Fiction. Web searching on "Zork" lead eventually to the Inform authoring system, and I was astonished to discover a freely-available toolset which could do just what I wanted. Only later did I realise that TADS and Hugo and the other systems were also there for the taking. It was pure chance that Inform came up first in the search.

(I wrote the game, by the way, and it was total and utter rubbish; complete confirmation of the saying that you should always throw away your first effort. But it did the job of introducing me to the possibilities of IF authorship.)

Q2. *You have clearly put a lot of time into your IF pages. Do you begin to enjoy the support work as much, or more than, actually trying to write or play IF?*

I do genuinely enjoy the support side. Partly that's just pragmatism -- I know that I'm not a half-way decent writer of fiction -- but mostly it's because what I do gives me real satisfaction in several areas: getting to the bottom of some

I personally don't hold reviews in that high regard. I prefer to see for myself what a game is like rather than rely on a review where the reviewer has a vendetta against the author. It certainly says a lot about the reviewer when the majority of that person's reviews are hostile and negative.

Mystery's post on the forum after a conversation on MSN messenger

particular topic and convincing myself that I understand what's going on, for instance, and finding ways of presenting that (sometimes hard-won) knowledge in a clear and accessible manner. But the greatest reward comes from discovering that, by flattening out the learning curve, I've helped other more accomplished authors to get started. In many cases, I think, the big hurdle to overcome is that feeling of being overwhelmed by the number of tools and techniques -- editors, interpreters, compilers, basic programming skills, bug fixing and so on -- which get in the way of turning a story idea into a workable piece of IF. So what I try to do is to take the mystery out of those nuts-and-bolts issues, to say in effect "yes, lots of newcomers have trouble with this or that issue, and the best way forward is".

Q3. Your "Cloak of Darkness" site is a highly respected way of comparing the different authoring tools. The clever, yet simple way, that the specification tests out the different languages is ideal to aid a new user to see if a language suits them. Have you ever considered expanding the specification to a second level of difficulty?

It's over five years ago, but I can still recollect my difficulties, in the early weeks after discovering Inform, of getting my mind round what all this stuff was about: how big, if you like, was the iceberg below the tip that I'd discovered. At that time, the standard answer to the regular "which system is best?" questions was "look at a few, and pick on that suits you". I *knew* from personal experience that this advice was unrealistic: just 'looking at' a single system meant a whole load of digging around in various places, and the idea that most people would bother to do that more than once or twice was, frankly, ludicrous; you either lived with the first halfway-decent system you stumbled across, or simply went off the whole idea and moved on to a less demanding hobby.

I think the thing that CoD got roughly right was simplicity. This didn't happen straight off: I scrapped two earlier ideas before coming up with the current model, because they weren't easy enough to describe. The key criteria, to me, were that the game's goal should be immediately graspable by newcomers, that the necessary steps should embody a certain logic and degree of realism, and that its implementation shouldn't be very taxing. This last point was important: the whole site would work only if all the significant systems were represented, and that in turn would happen only if experts in those systems could be persuaded to volunteer good representative samples. Which, happily,

ADRIFT recent releases

This will hopefully be a new regular feature, bringing you the details of recently released games, as described by their authors on release. The details listed here are as posted on the ADRIFT adventures page on Campbell's site

Listed on the Full Adventure page**Sophie's Adventure (Version 2)**

sa.taf (524 Kb) By Davidw, released 16 Nov

For her eighth birthday, Sophie made a wish: she wanted an adventure like none she had ever had before. And an adventure she got... (note: contains updates/fixes from the IComp 2003 version)(genre: comedy/fantasy)

The Star Trek Chain Reaction: Episode 1 - The Hornets' Nest

(thestartrekchainreactionepisode1-thehornetsnest.taf 20 Kb)

By scuey, released 8 Nov

This is just the 1st episode. There will be more fighting in future episodes.

Countdown (countdown.taf 1 Kb)

By Matt (Dark Baron), released 30 Oct

You thought it was a prank-call but no, some physcho had really planted a nuclear missile in this abandoned warehouse on the edge of town.

Halloween Hijinks (hijinks.taf 66 Kb)

By Davidw, released 26 Oct

Trick or treating should be fun, but when you live on Murder Drive it's not so much a case of "will you have a good time?" as "will you live to see tomorrow?" Guide you and your antagonistic sister Lisa around the deadliest street in the world as you hunt for treats. Oh, and try to avoid getting killed if at all possible. (genre: comedy)

proved not to be the stumbling block that I'd feared, and thereby made CoD the single point of comparison that I'd hoped to provide.

All of which is a long way of saying that, no, I've never anticipated much benefit in an extended version of the game. I suspect that, looking at various solutions to the same problem, readers will naturally warm to certain approaches without necessarily appreciating why, and that part of that warmth is the solutions' positioning on the simple-but-limited through to complex-but-flexible spectrum (and I *do* believe that to be a reasonably linear progression). And so the people who opt for, say, ADRIFT or Alan, implicitly acknowledge when doing so that certain effects may be hard or impossible and that, to them, *this doesn't matter*; at the same time, the choosers of, say, TADS or Inform intuitively recognise that the pain *will* be worth the gain. So, demonstrating that 'second level of difficulty' that you mention wouldn't actually add much that wasn't already clear, at least sub-consciously, and therefore would be a lot of effort for little reward.

Q4. *I am sure you follow the way the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition pans out, and it is noticeable that the number of entries seems to be inversely proportional to the number of intentions to enter. Do you think this reflects the community, and the fact that so many come in and expect to produce a complex work first time they write?*

Yes, the gulf between intents and entries is interesting, isn't it? And a little scary, too; less than one in three actually delivered this year -- I think that's an all-time low. I notice that some of the current prizes are at a record level, which I'm sure will have encouraged speculative entries. I suspect, too, that the community *is* growing slightly, with the annual comp a natural target for newcomers wishing for fame, or more likely just feedback, or simply any form of recognition and reaction. Against that, some of the pre-comp debate made it perhaps clearer than usual that a game that was incomplete, or poorly realised, or inadequately tested, should expect to be penalised quite severely; my hope is that many of the budding entrants took this message to heart, and actively chose *not* to enter a game that wasn't ready. Much better to wait, polish, take time to understand today's (pretty high) standards, than to waste energy, ideas and reputation on an unrealistically premature entry. And remember my earlier remarks about the wisdom of letting your first effort out into the wide world.

**Three Monkeys One Cage
(3monkeys.taf 77 Kb)****By Robert Goodwin (Hanadorobou),
released 22 Oct**

Once upon a time in a galaxy far far away a bunch of ugly aliens from another planet decided that they would test the intelligence of the alleged most advanced life form on Earth...just for fun of course. But will the subjects of their experiment find it so funny? "Three Monkeys One Cage" is a multi-part puzzle that I can guarantee you will, on one level or another, detest.

Listed on the Demos page**Temporfell - Demo/Beta
(temporfell_demo.taf 68 Kb)****By Matt Wood (rocksockm),
released 5 Nov**

Have you ever been curious about the purpose of your life? Sam Parker is about to discover his. ----- This is a demo/beta version of my full game Temporfell. The game is not winnable and it is still in beta form. Which means you will run into bugs and you will even run into rooms without proper descriptions. It's still a lot of fun to play and that shouldn't discourage you from playing. Kind souls who wish to submit bug reports or transcripts of their travels should send them to:
rocksockm@rocksockm.com. I hope you enjoy it!

Q5. *I suppose now would be a good time to ask for your opinions on the development of ADRIFT in relation to the IF community. I notice on the "Cloak of Darkness" page that you add ADRIFT in after TADS and INFORM as a language being written for more.*

For reasons which are hard to explain, some systems achieve much greater success than others. ADRIFT shows all the signs of being successful in a way that for example SUDS, a superficially fairly similar system, does not. I have to say that I'm delighted that ADRIFT has found favour with a large number of authors; it clearly appeals to a whole group of people for whom the other systems are not realistic alternatives. Any system which brings more people into the community has to be a good thing; it matters much less what system is used than that the craft of IF continues to thrive.

There is, of course, a small 'But...' lurking in the undergrowth. I'm not very familiar with its current capabilities but, reading rec.arts.int-fiction postings over the months, I get the feeling that, beyond a certain point, making ADRIFT do exactly what you'd like it to becomes increasingly awkward and inefficient. I think it's important for all concerned to recognise and acknowledge such boundaries, if they exist. Authors with previous programming experience generally know when the tool is getting in the way of the task, but I'm less sure that a novice would be able to tell quite so readily; pretending that ADRIFT can tackle *any* IF requirement without admitting that some problems are better solved by using another system entirely isn't really helping anybody. But that's my only caveat: as long as it's a good match for what you're aiming to achieve, I think ADRIFT is an excellent member of the IF team.

Q6. *Once again, many thanks for replying to my questions. I will finish up with crystal ball time, what do you see as the future of interactive fiction?*

I'd like to tell you about the glorious renaissance that I foresee just around the corner... but it wouldn't be true. It's hard to see IF ever being more than a minority interest, rediscovered with delight by a tiny handful each passing year. It's not just that IF doesn't meet today's appetite for gaudy special effects. More, I fear that IF is fundamentally out-of-tune with this generation's impatience for the quick payback, the immediate gratification, the gimme-it-now mentality. There's not a lot of demand for an art form where you have to work pretty damn hard to make any progress, where the norm is some form of rebuff, where what you get

Failed game intros

The stinking alley by KF

This was a game I was working on over the Summer, but in the end (as I normally do) I decided to abandon it as too complicated. Basically it is a fairly standard game about finding yourself in an awkward situation and trying to extricate yourself from.

This is the intro



You awake in a dank and, it has to be said extremely smelly, heap in an alleyway. The smell of rotting vegetation is enough to help you quickly regain your senses, and as you do you cannot work out how you got here. Of immediate concern is the fact that you are naked, save for your pair of union jack Y-fronts.

The last thing that you remember was leaving the pub after a very pleasant evening with your brother Jack celebrating the fact that tomorrow afternoon you were to make your debut as new striker with your local football team. You left the pub at about half past ten, you said goodbye and headed off on the short walk home and a good nights sleep prior to the match.

On closer inspection, your chest has the words STAY AWAY FROM THE GAME scrawled on it in bright red, probably lipstick. Rather perturbed by the implied threat, you resolve that you must get home, and ready for the match, the bullies cannot be seen to win.

If you have an intro or just an idea you think Drifters might enjoy, why not send it in to InsideADRIFT.

out of a game is often closely related to what you're prepared to put into it. Sadly, I foresee no bright shining tomorrow.

Actually, I'm not all that sad. I quite like IF's small-town feel, the community spirit, the absence of commercial pressures, the approval of one's peers being what matters. We've got a splendid thing here, and it shows all the signs of keeping right on going. That's good enough for me.

Roger Firth info box

Roger Firths home page <http://www.firthworks.com/roger/> is a simple resource for interactive fiction users. It links to his well respected Cloak of Darkness page (<http://www.firthworks.com/roger/cloak/index.html>), which allows people to compare the same simple game written in different IF Languages. He also compiles Parsifal, which is a one page set of IF links to all sorts of individuals and groups (<http://www.firthworks.com/roger/cloak/index.html>)

Review by DavidW

Three monkeys one cage by Hanadorobou

Okay, this is a hard game. And by hard, I mean really hard. I don't think I've played many games quite as frustratingly difficult as Three Monkeys, One Cage and, for my health, I kind of hope I never do again.

After that intro you might gather that I didn't like this game. On the contrary, I loved it. Impossibly difficult as it is, offering opportunities for getting well and truly slaughtered as it does, killing the player off every few seconds as it very frequently does – it's also an exceedingly good game. Just a bit on the difficult side.

The premise is straight from a pages of the corniest science-fiction ever written: the average guy off the street is abducted by aliens and placed in a cage with two other monkeys: a chimpanzee (who can prove to be quite helpful if you can only figure out how to enlist his aid) and a mandrill (who is anything but helpful and will tend to be the cause of most restarts unless you can figure out some way to temporarily deal with him). Watching over you are a gaggle of strange alien beings, not to mention a commentator who offers less than helpful comments on your progress (or lack of) and generally makes himself one seriously annoying figure. (Fortunately his chatter can be turned off if you so desire.)

On the face of it, Three Monkeys, One Cage is a game that you will either love or hate. The room descriptions (of which there are just four although the game often seems far larger when you're playing it) are sparse for the main part and at first glance don't appear very involving. But then this is a game more about the puzzles than about lengthy descriptions and the puzzles are, without a doubt, intricate to say the least. Every item seems to have a use somewhere although finding that use – not to mention lasting long enough to actually do it – is another matter.

Death comes quickly, and often, and anyone who finishes the game in a single session is either a lot better at games than I am or a hell of a lot luckier. Most games that result in the player dying every few moves just because a single bad command is entered tend to be games I don't play that much but I made an exception here because this isn't a game you're expected to finish in one go. The puzzles are designed so that you can generally figure out how to solve them the right way by doing them the wrong way the first time (of course, doing them the wrong way results in you dying so it's knowledge you need to remember for the next time you play) and this, as well as the demented lunacy of Three Monkeys, One Cage, is as much a replay factor as anything. There's also a definite feeling that you get slightly further into the game with each successive playing, leading to the kind of thinking: "oh, one more time and I'll be sure to finish it..."

Trial and error plays a large part in regard to most of the puzzles and it's a case of try everything and hope something works out. Avoiding the mandrill becomes a pain after a while but from repeated plays I was, eventually, able to figure out a way to give myself some breathing space away from him. Only temporarily, alas, as he always seemed to be there ready to bother me again. Maybe it was just my bloodthirsty nature getting the better of me, but at one time I was dying for an option to be able to deal with the mandrill once and for all. I even tried assembling a makeshift weapon from the items found in the cage in the hopes of killing him, but no such luck.

How the game ends I don't know as I've yet to reach that point but Three Monkeys, One Cage is certainly one game I'll be playing more than a few times before I put it to rest.

Logic: 8 out of 10

How logical any of the storyline is I don't know but the

puzzles at least made sense.

Problems: 9 out of 10 (10 = no problems)

If repeatedly killing the player could be considered a problem (and some might view it as a big problem) then this game would be riddled with them. Aside from that, Three Monkeys, One Cage played smoothly and I didn't run into an unexpected bugs.

Story: 6 out of 10

A reasonably detailed introduction but this is a game more about puzzles than anything else so a better storyline isn't really called for.

Writing: 9 out of 10

Excellent. And very, very funny.

Game: 8 out of 10

One of the most amusing puzzlefests I've ever played and while the sheer difficulty factor might put some people off this is still a game that deserves repeated playing. A worthy follow on from The PK Girl.

Overall: 40 out of 50

Reference

Continuing our voyage through the most tricky of ADRIFT areas, tasks. First we finish off the first task creation screen by looking at the description area. Here we are also introduced to the fact that restrictions can be applied so that our task will only work in certain circumstances, and actions which are where you can tell ADRIFT to move things about, or even end the game.

Manual pages 20: Tasks continued**Descriptions**

You need to give a reply to a successful command. Enter your message in the box labeled Message upon completion. If the task moves the Player to another room, you would often want to give the description of the new room, so you can select this from the pull down list marked Then show description for room. If you wanted any text to appear after this description, you can enter this in the box marked Additional Message. Usually, you would want to restrict a task to being completed in a particular room or rooms. In the

list marked Tasks can be completed in, you can select which rooms these should be. For tasks that can be completed anywhere, you would want to select the whole list, by clicking on All rooms. (Any new rooms added will automatically be added to this selection.) If you don't select any rooms for the task to be completed in, you will be unable to complete the task.

As well as being typed in by the player, tasks can also be called from events and tasks. It is best to set the command on these tasks so that the player cannot accidentally type it. If you prefix the command with the hash character (#), then it will be impossible for the player to call the task from Runner, as it strips off any preceding # characters. For example, if you wanted a task that kills off the Player that gets called from an event, you could call the task "# kill player". This would then only be executable by the event or a task.

Restrictions

Restrictions are grouped into five sections. These are:

Object location

You can specify that NO object, ANY object, the Referenced object, or a specific object must or must not be in a specific room, held by the Player or a specific character, worn by the Player or specific character, visible to the Player or specific character, inside a container object, or on a surface object.

```
[get/take/pick up] {the} [{green} apple from] {the} {large}
[box/crate]
```

State of object

For openable objects, you can restrict that the Referenced object or an openable object must be open or closed, or locked for lockable objects.

Task state

You can restrict that any task must be completed or not.

Player & Characters

You can specify that the Player, Referenced character, or specific character must or must not be in the same room as the Player, Referenced character or specific character, or that they must or must not be alone. You can also specify that the Player must be standing, sitting or lying on a specific object or the floor, or that the Player or characters are of a specific gender.

Variables

You can specify that the number the player typed, or a specific variable must be less than, less than or equal to, equal to, greater than or equal to, or greater than a specific value or variable. To access existing variables, click on the down arrow to change the text box into a selectable list.

Each restriction is evaluated in turn. The first one that does not hold true will display the message defined in the else display box, and no other restrictions will be checked after this. You can alter the order in which the restrictions are checked by clicking on the up and down arrows.

Actions

Actions are divided into seven sections. These are:

Move object

This allows you to move all held objects, all worn objects, the Referenced object or a specific object to a specific room, to a room group, to inside an object, onto an object, to the same room as the Player or character, or carried or worn by the Player or specific character

Move Player or Characters

This allows you to move the Player or a specific character to a specific room, room group, or to the same room as a specific character. It also allows you to move the Player's position to standing, sitting or lying on a specific object.

Change object status

This enables you to open or close objects.

Change variable

You can change any variable to an exact value, change it by an exact value, change it to a random value (between two values), change it by a random value (between two values), or set it to the referenced number. There is also the option to change a variable to a mathematical expression. This is interpreted directly, and can include variables and functions. An example might be something like: See Expression Formulae for currently supported functions.

Change score

You can change the score by a specific value. If this is negative, the score will decrease. Positive score increments will only happen the first time a task executes if it is repeatable or reversible. Negative scores will occur each time.

End game

You can end the game in one of three states; Wins the game, Doesn't win (Just a standard end to the game), and Kills the Player.

If the Battle System is enabled, **Battle Options** becomes available. (See section The Battle System)

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