



July 2003 – Number 8

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I would like to take this opportunity, as the current editor of Inside ADRIFT, to thank Mystery and her predecessor Woodfish for all their hard work in getting a regular newsletter going. My intention is to start off by keeping fairly closely to the old format, while making a few changes.

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News and announcements

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Forum news
The forum has been fairly turbulent of late, as there has been quite a bit of concern at the speed of ADRIFT bug fixing. Some regulars have been looking at other IF creation systems, but it is hoped that most stay loyal to ADRIFT.

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Things improved late in June with the reappearance of Campbell and a new release of Adrift. Release 40 is mainly aimed at fixing some of the bugs, with a few cosmetic changes. A whole host of bug fixes have just arrived with release 41 on 27th June.

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Kind of busy on the competition front with two comps sneaking in towards the end of June adding to the Summer Minicomp previously announced.

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Runner features

First into the arena was DavidW's minicomp, closing date 27 June 2003, for V4 games up to 15Kb or V3.90 games up to 45Kb. Voting is currently taking place with four entries vying for the top place.

Next issue

The next issue will be due out at the end of July, but a lot will depend on the assistance that I get from you 'drifters out there. I can only produce a newsletter if others can write some articles. Contact me if you have an idea for use.

This was closely followed into the arena by the One Hour Game Competition organised by Woodfish. Closing date for this was 24 June 2003. There were 3 entries and after a vote on the forum the entry by the organizer, "Forum" was the winner.

After these, 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 there is prize money.

On the wider IF front there is the 2003 IF Competition, the major event of the IF calendar. Any entrants must have registered their intention by 1 Sep 03.

Drifters birthdays this month

July

2 30otsix (33)

8 syke39 (31)

9 The Mad Monk (14)
mammoth (35)

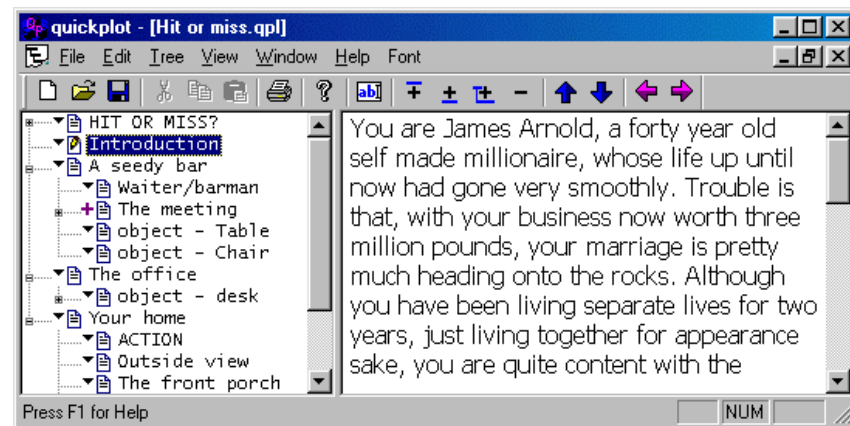
15 Tonyg (15)

17 Mel S (17)

22 nick (19) driftingon (23)

Drifters Toolbox: QuickPlot

Having trouble keeping track of your plot? Take a look at QuickPlot which allows you to put things into a tree structure, and attach the text which can then be cut and pasted into ADRIFT when you are ready. You can move items around as much as you want, until the structure works for you.



*If you are interested, you can get QuickPlot from
<http://www.characterpro.com/quickplot.html>*

Tip of the month

Anything you mention in a description, no matter where in the game, you need to either make an object to account for it, or make a task to fool the player into thinking it is there.

If you are getting a "You see no such thing." message, then you need to add more. There is nothing more infuriating to a player than to find that something you come across isn't actually there.

Where to from here? by KF

Thought I would just put down my hopes for the way ahead in the ADRIFT world. My main wish is to see a stable version of ADRIFT 4.0 available by the start of August at the latest. If we don't have that we are heading for the same problems as last year where IF Comp entries were incompatible, in minor but annoying ways, with the runner. Also the runner was quickly updated in the week before the comp, so that the versions of the runner in the judging packs were out of date.

Next I would like to see some thought put into a kind of development environment, I have been looking at Plug! for TADS which is flaky, but does allow you to put together a map. What is required is a utility that would be a split screen, one side a game map, the other a creation window for rooms, objects and characters. When anything was updated, the map would be too, and you could decide whether the map boxes displayed the start of the description, or had the objects and/or characters they contained. The program would be able to save both in ADRIFT format and as an ADRIFT module to import. If it were possible to add in task construction, based on automated use of verbs and objects, we would have a very handy addition to the ADRIFT environment.

What would be useful to see would be some kind of route map for the future development of ADRIFT. We could be told that no new features will be added to Version 4.0, only bug fixes aim stable by 1 Aug 03. ADRIFT 4.1 development to commence Oct 03, aim of beta release end of Jan 04, with full release within the following four months after full testing and fixing. Listing of major new features such as conversation trees to be released. This is an example timescale and NOT based on any facts.

What do other Drifters want to see? This is just a starting point as I hope we are all equally committed to the future development of ADRIFT.

Interview: Mystery (our erstwhile editor)

Hello Mystery, as we agreed when you interviewed me, here is my reciprocal set of questions.

Q1. *We all know that you are an imaginative writer, but what first brought you to the world of ADRIFT?*

A. During my first introduction to the net, I wanted to find out more about the text games I had been hooked on when I was younger. I happened along ADRIFT, and instantly fell in love with it.

Q2. *Within the community you have put a lot of effort into developing the creative writing side of things. Do you see that as a vital key as to how we can move forward and be noticed?*

A. Unfortunately, writing exercises on the forum have never really taken off as I had hoped. I've noticed that there are a lot of Drifters out there that have the creativity and imagination, but just don't want to put the effort out. I do think that is part of what is going to separate ADRIFT from the big three. Along with future enhancements, I think the authors are going to play a key role in how ADRIFT is seen. Anyone can use ADRIFT, but I think some very talented Drifters are going to help ADRIFT get noticed, by putting themselves on the line.

Q3. *You have always been very active within the community, particularly in urging the increased use of proper beta testing. Are you satisfied with the way testing is happening now, or do you believe more should be done?*

A. Well, there hasn't been a great number of games out recently, and I hope that is because they are being beta-tested. I've played some of the Annual IF Comp games and was shocked at how well some of the games had done when they were littered with guess the verb, spelling errors, and were so lacking in description it wasn't funny. With proper beta-testing things like that should have been discovered and taken care of. It not only makes the author look terribly bad, but it makes the program they use look bad as well.

As for ADRIFT, specifically, I think more need to beta-test. Using the transcript is the best way, in my opinion, as it allows the author to see how different people are playing, what verbs they tend to use, and how their approach to certain situations differ from others.

Q4. *As an entrant in the Annual IF Competition a couple of years ago, how do you think entry in a wider competition affects development of ADRIFT games? Do you think that the focus on the IF Competition can cause a distortion in the authoring process when writers aim to complete their game by September?*

A. That is a tough question to answer. The game I had entered was so terrible, and I was so worried about finishing the game in time, I overlooked so many things. I did have the game beta-tested, but it was very poor, and many things were overlooked. Thankfully, now, a certain fellow Drifter will be completely honest with me and tell me outright if my work is no good.

I certainly think the focus on the Annual IF Comp can blind authors and can certainly rattle their nerves quite a bit too. It is a very hyped competition, with entries from many other systems, and authors from all over the world. There is a lot of pressure on the author, and a desire to do well. I have learned one thing from entering, and doing poorly. I will not write a game specifically for the competition, because I believe the quality of the overall game would suffer. I say write your game as you intend it to be. If it happens to be complete, with proper testing, at the time the competition rolls around, then enter it. It really takes the pressure off.

Q5. *You decided to give up writing the newsletter, I know you felt it took up a lot of your time, but do you have some advice for the mug who took up the challenge ?*

A. My advice would be, if you don' t want to really do it, then don' t. If a newsletter is that important to our community, then more should put forth the effort to support it, contribute to it, an not complain about when the next issue is going to be out. So, my advice is that if you' re not wanting to do it, then don' t. You' ll end up resenting it.

Q6. *Writing with ADRIFT has been frustrating in recent months, particularly with your unerring knack of finding bugs, have you been put off working on games? What methods have you found to help minimise problems?*

A. To be honest, having come across some very annoying bugs well into writing several games, I was very put off and ready to give up, since the bugs seemed to stop the game

production. But I really had to put things in perspective. This is Campbell' s hobby, not his life, not his job, his hobby. Without his hobby, I would not have this hobby. So I had to think, ' What could I do to help?' I could not complain about it, for one. It was upsetting to see much of the forum so stressed about the bugs, and seeing how angry they were about it, only made want to help more. I had to try to help find what was causing some of the bugs. So that is what I did. I have also found a couple work-arounds for a couple of the bugs, until the proper solution is found. I hope during future releases that more drifters, when discovering bugs, will ask themselves, "What can I do to help?"

Thank you for replying to my questions, and being a source of help and advice to the whole ADRIFT community.

Review by DavidW Captive Universe by Mischav Navoritch

In Captive Universe, Mischav Navoritch' s only ADRIFT adventure, you begin the game trapped in a cell, imprisoned there by the local priests when you spoke out against their rule. Everything you know, your whole world, lies in the valley, a large area from which there is no escape; the only way out is blocked by the Boulder, a huge stone dropped there centuries before by the Gods in punishment for an untold crime. No one has ever escaped from the valley before, but you intend to be the first...

Based on Harry Harrison' s novel of the same name, Captive Universe is an engaging, if frequently frustrating, game. Though relatively straightforward to begin with - escaping the cell you start off locked in is childishly simple and says little for the efficiency of the priests - it rapidly becomes a very difficult game to make much progress with due to there being a liking on the part of the writer for killing the player off every five seconds. Often it' s nightmarish just moving from one location to the next without getting yourself killed in the process. Randomised events leading to the player dying add further to the difficulty factor - sometimes traveling through one location is perfectly safe, other times it leads to certain death. Naturally there' s no way of knowing beforehand (at least not that I discovered) just when it' s safe to venture into a specific location and when it' s not. As such I tended to die a lot of times and even though I was saving my game every few moves just in case, it still becomes a pain when it was happening for the fifth time in as many minutes. Admittedly,

there' s a hint right at the start of the game that tells you of the best way to avoid getting killed but as this incurs a whopping 356 score penalty it' s probably not advisable to try it out!

But bad points aside, what of the game itself? It' s well written and has a quite impressive atmosphere. The majority of the puzzles are reasonably straightforward and don' t require too much thought to figure them out although as mentioned before the hardest part of the game involves random deaths. Often it seems you' re just about to make a bit of progress and then a guard appears from out of nowhere and kills you. This might be acceptable if it happened once or twice or if there was some way to avoid it, but it really brings down what is otherwise a fairly decent game.

I haven' t finished Captive Universe yet and haven' t reached the later stages of the game but what I' ve played so far, random deaths aside, was well worth playing.

Logic: 7 (out of 10)

Fairly logical.

Bugs: 10 (out of 10)

None that I could see - unless the random deaths are a bug?

Story: 6 (out of 10)

A fairly engrossing one although the background could have done with a little more fleshing out. The Boulder is blocking the way out of the valley as a punishment for some crime - what crime?

Characters: 3 (out of 10)

Perhaps the least part of the game. There are only two actual characters - your mother and the village smith - and neither have much in the way of programmed responses. None of the many guards who frequently pop up and kill you have anything to say at all.

Writing: 7 (out of 10)

Stylish in places and with a definite flare for description.

Game: 5 (out of 10)

An above average game let down by a penchant for killing the player every few seconds.

Overall: 38 (out of 60)

Reference

This page is included here as it would seem a sensible page for those Drifters entering the IF Competition to add information from for those who are new to ADRIFT.

Manual page 73: Runner features

Auto Complete

To make typing a bit easier, you can select Options > Auto Complete from the menu. This will attempt to guess what you are typing, making it a lot quicker. Aside from making it quicker for the player to type common commands, it can sometimes make the game a bit too easy by giving away object names. Usually this will only happen if the Player has come across them, but nevertheless, the option exists within Generator to disable this feature.

Control Panel

If you select Options > Control Panel from the menus, it will bring up a small control panel with buttons on it. This allows you to navigate the map and do simple object manipulation.

Verbose

If you select Options > Verbose from the menus, then every time you enter a room you have already visited the whole room description will be displayed. If it is not selected, only the short room description will be displayed.

Transcript

If you want to save some transcript to file, select Adventure > Start Transcript. This will prompt you for a filename to start logging the text from the game. Once you click Save, anything you type, and all the responses will be logged to this file. To stop transcript, select Adventure > Stop Transcript from the same menu. You should now be able to access this file which should contain all text in the game in plain text format.

Right-clicking

You can right-click the mouse in the main Runner window for a list of common commands. Clicking on object names will give a different menu specific to that object, and clicking on a direction name will attempt to move the Player in that direction.

High scores

Runner has built in facility to keep track of high scores for particular adventures. To enable this option, select Options > High Scores/Scoring > Enable High Scores from the menu. To view the current high scores for the adventure you are playing, select

Options > High Scores/Scoring > View High Score table from the menu. You can clear this at any time by selecting Clear High scores. If you want to be notified explicitly every time the score changes, select Options > High Scores/Scoring > Notify when score changes from the menu. This will display the score change as a reference (in brackets) every time it happens.

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(revised edition)