

InsideADRIFT

the newsletter of the ADRIFT community

Issue 13

January/February 2004

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ADRIFT 4 gets another updated release

The latest release of ADRIFT Version 4.0, number 43, came out in December and brought us the much requested option to reorganize the list of tasks. Campbell added to ability to simply drag the tasks up and down the list.

This was something that has been asked for many times, but gives the programmer serious headaches in terms of keeping all links correct.

A number of other smaller enhancements were made including buttons to promote/relegate character walks and insert/duplicate tasks works correctly when filters are applied.

Campbell looks to the future of ADRIFT

In a brief discussion following the InsideADRIFT Awards ceremony Campbell Wild expressed his hope that, with ADRIFT 4.0 becoming more stable, he would be able to squash the high/medium level bugs from the bug list.

This would allow him to consider starting development of ADRIFT 4.1, although he made clear "Of course it'll surely be quite a wait for you guys!", so don't get too excited. When asked about the changes he replied "just the major enhancement requests (from the website). Totally revamp events, parts of objects, object classes etc".

Campbell gives us Humbug

Campbell Wild has released his ADRIFT conversion of **Humbug** by Graham Cluley. This is something that Campbell has been working on for quite a long time. It is designed to be as faithful as possible to the original work, including the layout and interface, as a way of demonstrating that ADRIFT can be used for big and tricky projects.

Details of the original can be found on the authors site at <http://www.grahamcluley.com/>

Editorial

2003 ended in style with the conclusion of the InsideADRIFT Awards and the ADRIFT End of Year Competition (more of which elsewhere in the newsletter).

Looking forward we have the prospect that later this year Campbell will be setting out on the mammoth undertaking that is needed to take us through to ADRIFT 4.1. It is clear that we will need patience and mustn't push too hard. Those of us who were around for the launches of 3.90 and 4.0 know that the launch is just the start.

Campbell makes a great effort to fix any bugs that are pointed out as the new versions bed down. We must all follow Mystery's example and be good testers as only in that way can Campbell give us the bug free product we want.

Just keep in mind we are very unlikely to see the new version this year (I think we can be certain of that).

Contact

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

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

Italian resources released

Roberto Grassi has created an Italian ALR and synonyms for ADRIFT that he has called ITdrift 1.0. Roberto admits it is not complete, but seems committed to continuing to work towards as complete a job as possible. He has made it available to download direct from his website at <http://www.robertograssi.net/at/itdrift/itdrift.zip>.

This is the sort of effort from a Drifter that can help to spread the word further by easing the route for others. It has already been suggested that this would be a good starting point for other language conversions.

Mystery updates her website

Having made the decision that she wanted to redesign her own site, rather than use a downloaded template, Mystery spent a while looking around for inspiration. The problem was to get a layout that she liked, without having the feeling of having ripped off someone else's work.

Having attempted to pick another webmaster's brain, only to find it sadly lacking in useful ideas, Mystery finally settled on a simple layout, with graphical links down both sides of the home page. To see what she has come up with go to her site at <http://home.gcn.cx/mystery/>

Competition news roundup

Here we are in 2004 and hopefully all looking forward to entering the Spring Competition next April. This is an event for unlimited size, newly released games

The enthusiasm for ADRIFT competitions, at least in theory continues with another One Room Competition set for February.

The ADRIFT End of Year Competition 2003 is just over now (http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/comp_win_03.html) and the full results and comments can be found on page 4 of the newsletter.

The event was a major triumph for Jason Guest's one room masterpiece *To Hell in a Hamper* which dominated the voting.

One Room Comp

DavidW posted to the forum suggesting that the time was approaching for a new competition, something that I was going to speculate on here.

After some discussion it was agreed that a one room competition would be the fun way to go and DavidW posted

Drifters birthdays

January 2004

10 Mut (19); Kokaku (19)
 11 Ketigid (23)
 13 Captain Obvious (21)
 14 Sockets (3); Rashstash (16)
 15 Marno (50)
 27 Lancer Sykera (17)
 28 ds490 (16); Soothsayer (18); Elf Ranger (27)
 30 Andye (19)

February 2004

4 WhiteLight (17)
 12 Ambrosine (49)
 17 T. Mulkerrins (100); WeAreLegion (28)
 20 MileOut/MileStyle (25); Clauz (33)
 26 Markjd (25)

up some rules for the competition. Then some of us, including me, suggested the initial end of January deadline was too soon and it was changed with entries in by 14 Feb 04, judging to be complete by 21 Feb 04. Details are at: <http://www.adrift.org.uk/cgi-bin/konboard.cgi?s=3ff7da9e6606ffff;act=ST;f=1;t=2403>

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004

With judging at the end of April, there is still plenty of time to make a full game to enter this competition. Further details can be found on the newsletter website at http://www.insideadrift.org.uk/comp_spr_04.html

With the IF Comp over for another year it won't be long before we are thinking about the next one. The next major event of the IF calendar should be the XYZZY Awards in the next couple of months. If you want your game included it would be a good idea to make sure it has been sent for uploading to the IF Archive.

Forum news

Seasonally quiet

The forum was hardly buzzing over the Christmas period, even with a competition and the awards running. There seemed to be some technical problems, with the ADRIFT server unreachable, but in the circumstances it wasn't a major problem.

In the new year things picked up a little with the one room comp announcement, and some discussion on the wider IF community, as represented by the RAIF newsgroup.

Drifters Toolbox: 1st Page 2000

A summary by Mystery

In this issue of Inside ADRIFT, we would like to showcase 1st Page 2000; a 100% free HTML editor. Before you run off, let me explain all that this free editor can do in regards to ADRIFT. I've been using it for some time to create my language resource files. And I can't tell you how easy it is to use. At first glance it may seem a little intimidating, but it really is easy to set up for an ALR.

First, you can download it at the Evrsoft website at <http://www.evrsoft.com/>. Once you have downloaded and installed the program, start it up. You will have the option to choose what mode you want to use it in, easy, normal, expert, and hardcore. If you are a little nervous, maybe starting on easy is the best choice. Now select File>New, then select New Blank Document.

ADRIFT End of Year Competition

Full Results

1. "To Hell in a Hamper" by Jason Guest
2. "Dead Reckoning" by DavidW
3. "Sophie's Adventure" by DavidW
4. "How it all started" by Kevin Treadway
5. "Temple of the Sun" by Mystery
6. "Crimson Detritus" by Mystery

Congratulations to Jason Guest on his triumph in the End of Year Competition. His game "To Hell in a Hamper" is a truly original work, designed for a one room competition, it packs so much into a small place.

This game was a runaway success, and a great demonstration of what can be achieved in ADRIFT.

The competition was pretty close behind our favourite Poodle, with the last set of votes dropping "How it all started" from second to fourth.

DavidW continued to show an amazing ability to get out ADRIFT games, and his IF Competition *Sophie's Adventure* tends to be penalized for it's sheer size. Players often feel they can only scratch the surface when playing it.

It is rather unfair for Mystery to occupy the last two places as her entry was a demonstration of her commitment to ADRIFT. *Temple of the Sun* was put together in a very short space of time, and probably just needed some fine tuning.

You will notice a little menu bar down the left side of the document. If you hover your mouse over that, it will tell you what each symbol is for. I select word wrap, show line numbers, and show gutter. Now you can begin creating your ALR as you usually would. You can even format your text by select Format>Font from the menu. If you select expert mode, you will have a tabbed bar at the top -left of the page, labeled FONTS, and all you will need is just a click away.

When you are finished creating your ALR, select TOOLS> and Check Spelling to spell check your ALR. When you are happy with your work, select FILE>Save AS and save your file as YourALRname.alr

Be sure you select Text Files as the type to save it as. That is it.

Now, if you are into creating websites, this is the best, FREE program out there. It has more features than you can shake a stick at. It has over 450 scripts, including DHTML, Perl, HTML, CGI, and Javascripts/VBScripts. It also has a Complete Web Builder Reference. It is easy for beginners and experienced users alike. I used it to create The ADRIFT Network at <http://home.gcn.cx/mystery>

I'm on dial up and it is well worth the time it takes to download. You'll be surprised just how many things you can accomplish with 1st Page 2000.

Be on the lookout for a new release titled 1st Page 2003 (or 2004) COMING SOON!

Added comments from KF.

Just thought I'd add my endorsement as I have been using this software for several years (and introduced Mystery to it). It is my software of choice for making websites and has a usable FTP program that can be downloaded as an extra.

Although 1st Page 2000 is getting slightly long in the tooth, there are so many great features, including the linked in help, syntax checkers, etc.

One point to note is that some antivirus software report one of the bundled scripts (Six buttons from Hell) as a virus. Even though it isn't you may be wise to delete that script even though it is just annoying.

InsideADRIFT Awards

The awards ceremony took place in the chat room of the MSN ADRIFT Group. It was attended by ten drifters including all but one of the Award winners.

*The Awards proved to be a great triumph for Jason Guest as **To Hell in a Hamper** swept away the opposition to claim three awards.*

*Driftingon took the award for the best ADRIFT game by a new author with **Black Sheep's Gold**, but was not available to receive the award.*

Your editor feels very humble to receive the award for the biggest contribution to the community. I would like to give a special mention to Mystery who was just as, if not more, deserving of the award.

DavidW's contribution of most ADRIFT games released this year, including the only IF Comp entry, was recognized with the author of the year award.

It was good to see the efforts of ralphmerridew rewarded with the Most innovative Drifter award for his jAsea clone of the ADRIFT runner.

*This sort of project pushes ADRIFT into new markets as it allows non-Windows users to play ADRIFT games. Since the awards Mystery has made her **Selma's Will** game playable online on her website using jAsea.*

Campbell Wild was rewarded with the InsideADRIFT Lifetime Contribution Award, there really was no other choice for the first such award.

For those who are interested I have made a transcript of the ceremony available on the InsideADRIFT site.

Think piece by KF

Is it important to be part of the wider IF community?

Often it can seem that the ADRIFT community is something that stands apart from the rest of the IF world. This in itself is a problem as we are really too small to stand alone.

In order to counter the feeling of insularity, I have tried to invite members of the broader IF church to answer questions in the newsletter. This helps to make the point that we are not a minor clique that has no interest in what is happening away from us.

Being a part of the wider community means participation in the rec.arts.int-fiction (RAIF) and rec.games.int-fiction (RGIF) newsgroups. RAIF is the main focus for discussion of interactive fiction authoring and RGIF is aimed at the discussion of actually playing of IF games. While it is easy to dismiss RAIF because the welcome is often less than friendly, it is not that different from the sort of reception sometimes given to new users on the forum. We also have to look at how we announce ourselves in the newsgroup, sometimes arguing your case too hard can make you seem rather arrogant and dismissive.

It may actually be true that our own lovely little forum is part of the divide as we tend to post less to RAIF compared with our active numbers. This tends to mean that only a few of us do post and, unless we are careful, we can look like a few zealots.

Another big part of the wider community is the Annual Interactive Fiction Competition which takes place September to November each year. Representation in this event plays a big part in boosting an authoring systems profile. There is also the temptation, when judging in the IF Comp, to want to promote ADRIFT by marking up any entries. This strategy can in itself be counterproductive as it upsets the others in the community.

As I have written this piece, the feeling has increased that greater ties to the broader community are vital. To this end I have posted on RAIF asking for IF enthusiasts to send in articles or reviews.

Full Results

Best short game: **To Hell in a Hamper by Jason Guest**

Best ADRIFT game by a new author: **Black Sheep's Gold by Driftingon**

Biggest contribution to the ADRIFT community: **KF**

Most innovative Drifter: **ralphmerridew for jAsea**

Most unusual ADRIFT setting/plot of the year: **To Hell in a Hamper by Jason Guest**

ADRIFT Author of the year: **DavidW**

ADRIFT game of the year: **To Hell in a Hamper by Jason Guest**

InsideADRIFT Award for lifetime contribution to ADRIFT: **Campbell Wild**

Finally the Awards have come to an end, I recognize in hindsight they went on for too long. Fairly early in 2004 I intend to have a consultation exercise to make sure that lessons are learnt.

Interview: Jason Guest questioned by KF

This issue our interview is with Jason Guest, known to one and all in the ADRIFT community as The Amazing Poodle Boy.

Jason, first of all thank you for agreeing to this interview.

Q1. An obvious first question is when and why did you come to ADRIFT, and was it your first foray into the world of interactive fiction?

I've been playing text adventures since I was thirteen years old. The first one I went out and bought was Scott Adams' "The Count" which is a deceptively complex game with some wonderfully clever puzzles. The next thing that went through my head was "how do you write one of these things?" I had a book called "Games and other programs for the Acorn Electron" and this had a simple example game which I used as a basis for my own adventures.

Over the next few years I expanded the parser to accept four words instead of two and even reproduced the Scott Adams split-screen display which I so admired! I don't remember much about the games I wrote; one was a fantasy game involving a magic mirror – the good king's evil reflection had taken over the kingdom and your task was to force him back into the mirror and destroy it. Another was a Rocky and Bullwinkle / Pink Panther inspired treasure hunt starring a character called Inspector Macaroon. It was full of corny humour and bad puns!

Then I went to college and forgot all about text adventures for ten years. I first discovered ADRIFT in late summer 2001. My return to the world of IF was inspired by the fact that I had never actually completed "The Count"; the Acorn Electron version was bugged, so I was delighted to discover there was a windows interpreter called ScottFree. Having finally laid Herr Dracula to rest it crossed my mind that there might be others out there with an interest in *writing* text adventures.

I wasn't aware of the phrase "interactive fiction" at that time. I did a Google search for "text adventure authoring systems" and was surprised at just how many pages came up. The first authoring system I tried was CAT, but it wasn't flexible enough for my needs, so I did another search and came up with ADRIFT. The rest, as they say is history. Having written text adventures in BASIC as a teenager I considered myself a bit of a fan but I have to admit that I was completely

Events Diary

February 14, 2004

One Room Comp: entries due in

The competition run by DavidW goes into the judging phase now. All you have to do is write a brilliant game that takes place in just one location.

February 21, 2004

One Room Comp: judging ends

The competition run by DavidW comes to an end 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.

May 02, 2004

InsideADRIFT Spring Competition 2004: judging ends and results

The Spring competition winner is announced and hailed.

clueless about the wider world of IF when I first downloaded ADRIFT. I'd been using it a good six months before I'd heard of TADS, Inform or R.A.I.F.!

Q2. You are the author of some well loved ADRIFT games, "Goldilocks is a Fox!" and "To Hell in a Hamper" being stand outs. These were both competition entries, what is your opinion of competitions as a way of stimulating game creation?

I'm not sure I'd have completed either game were it not for the pressure of meeting a competition deadline! "To Hell in a Hamper" was originally written for my own one-room comp, but ironically I missed my own deadline and decided to enter it in the Spring Comp instead. I was very surprised when it won! Not only do competitions provide an additional stimulus to get a game finished, they're also the best way to ensure that the maximum number of people actually play it. You only have to look at R.G.I.F. - almost all of the games discussed there are competition entries; the rest pass into the archive unnoticed and rarely get the same sort of attention.

Q3. Your style of writing seems to be well suited to producing quality short games in ADRIFT, but do you think ADRIFT is suited only to shorter games?

Not at all; "The PK Girl" and "Sophie's Adventure" both prove that it is possible to produce a good quality big game using ADRIFT. "Sophie's Adventure" in particular is huge. In earlier versions of ADRIFT if you had a large number of objects it could be hard to find the one you were looking for. The ability to filter objects by room was a great innovation that makes the whole process a lot easier. The other improvement made recently that will make writing large games easier is the ability to reorder tasks by dragging and dropping them. This is especially useful if you favour puzzles that use a lot of duplicate tasks, as I do. I wish I'd had that facility when I wrote "Goldilocks"! I'd love to make an epic, but the pressures of work mean that it's hard enough just getting the short games finished.

Q4. After a rather rocky time in the world of ADRIFT this year you have moved the focus of your game development to TADS, while promising not to leave us totally. Can you explain where you believe that using TADS will benefit development?

The flexibility of TADS appeals to me; you never have to think "can it be done," only "am I up to the job of programming it?" Having written IF in BASIC in my youth, I

Real Lives

Guess our real lives have largely been tied in with the festive celebrations recently, so no huge events have come to our attention.

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

The (big) idea by KF

An IF webring is needed

DavidW asked about the ADRIFT webring on the forum, and I had to confess that I had lost control of it.

At that point Mystery put forward the need for an interactive fiction ring that would cover the full breadth of IF material. Her view was that such a ring would spread the ADRIFT message wider.

It may well be the case that what is actually needed is two rings, one broad, and one ADRIFT specific. Since many sites belong to more than one ring this wouldn't be a problem.

took to TADS reasonably quickly and have already made TADS versions of my two previous ADRIFT games. In the TADS versions I was able to add a few features that would be near-impossible to accomplish using ADRIFT in its present form. Pausing character walks during conversations was one. Others included allowing NPCs to interact more fully with their environments; stopping when they come to a locked door, commenting on their surroundings as they move from room to room, etc. In the TADS version of "To Hell in a Hamper" Hubert picks up items at random from those strewn on the floor of the basket; something I'd wanted him to do in the original ADRIFT version but couldn't find a simple way to do it. In TADS it is accomplished in just 22 lines of code, to do the same thing in ADRIFT I would need a task for each and every dynamic object and an event to run them every turn. I daresay it could be done, but only by doubling the number of tasks in the game!

Q5. Can you say what developments in ADRIFT might make it a more potent force in game creation?

First of all, let me just say that I love ADRIFT, it's great fun to use and I really appreciate all the hard work Campbell has put into it over the years. If I've been a little too openly critical of it recently on the forum it's because I want it to succeed and have quite strong views about where I'd like to see it go, but ultimately it's Campbell's baby and he has his own priorities and pressures.

ADRIFT's biggest weakness when compared with other systems is its parser, but since that has been discussed often on the forum and changing the way it works would mean a major re-write of the program, I'll stick to things which I'd like to see in future releases of ADRIFT 4.00. It would be nice to have a greater range of options for task restrictions and actions; it would be great, for example, if under the "state of object" restriction we were able to select "object *must not be*" as well as "object *must be*". Under the "Player & Characters" restrictions you can have "character must be sitting on object" but not "character must *not* be sitting on object" etc. ADRIFT is a lovely program but it is a little inconsistent in places. I've always wondered, for instance, why you can move static objects with events but not with task actions. Ideally, tasks and events should have exactly the same set of resultant actions. This would make programming complex puzzles a lot simpler, eliminating the need to have tasks running events running tasks.

Q6. *We know that you are still working away on the*

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

G7056 (g7056.taf 9 Kb) By Mike Firoved, released 29-12-03

G7056 Welcome to the 7056 We just received word from General Roberts... Outpost 11 has just been attacked. You have 3 objectives 1. Rescue all hostages 2. Restart the power generator 3. Attack Enemy Forces Your plane takes off at 2200 hours. Signal when you have retaken the outpost and we will come pick you up.

Humbug (humbug.taf 72 Kb) By Campbell Wild (Original by Graham Cluley), released 21-12-03

- You, Sidney Widdershins, are sent to your Grandad's for the school holidays.
- Why is Jasper the dentist so desperate that Grandad should sell the manor?
- Why has Grandad hidden a time machine in the cellar?
- Why does the octopus insist on performing the ancient ritual of Wubble-A-Gloop with you?
- What doesn't Kevin the clockwork shark like about your haircut?
- What would you do with a trombone, a terrapin and half a pound of lard? Yes, quite.

All this, and more, is revealed in Humbug. This is a conversion to ADRIFT. Please visit www.grahamcluley.com for the original.

legendary "Gorilla Suit", albeit now in TADS, but what other projects have you got that you can tell us about?

I tend to have a policy of starting a lot of projects at once and seeing which ones stick. Coming up with ideas is never a problem; whether those ideas have legs is another matter entirely. "Gorilla Suit" is a case in point. I've had no end of trouble with that game. Essentially the premise is a simple one - you wake up in a Zoo wearing a gorilla suit that you can't take off because the zip is stuck. How do you escape from the zoo when everyone thinks you're a bona-fide gorilla? The problem is that that premise alone isn't enough to make a game. A game needs to have a hook; something to pull you into the story. With "Hamper" it was the appalling personality of Hubert Booby. DavidW's "Sophie's Adventure" had the dwarves. "Gorilla Suit" doesn't have one as yet. Part of the problem is that I like to build my games around colourful NPCs; in "Gorilla Suit" I can't have the PC talk to people – that would give the whole game away. Neither do I want to humanise the animal characters too much as that would detract from the central idea of a man trapped in a world in which he doesn't belong and can't make himself understood. I have yet to find that missing ingredient that will bind the whole thing together. Some games just naturally "click", like "Hamper" which was made in under three months; "Gorilla Suit", sadly, is not one of those.

I do have plenty of other irons in the fire. I'm very keen to do another game set in the Victorian period and have an idea for one that is very much a black comedy; it's called "Smoke and Mirrors" and it's likely to be written in ADRIFT but I'm not telling you any more than that! I'm also working on a TADS game based on "The Adventures of Baron Munchausen" which will include new adventures as well as ones taken from the original book. That one will take me a long time to write as I'm (rather foolishly, perhaps) attempting to write it in the staccato style of the original eighteenth century novel! Then there's that ADRIFT murder mystery game I've been working on for months, a Miss Marple style comedy set in the same village Hubert Booby hailed from. There just aren't enough days in the week!

A.S.D.F.A. (A Short Damn Fantasy Adventure) (asdfa.taf 27 Kb) By Davidw, released 30-11-03

You're sure it must be a dream. After all, the last thing you remember was going to sleep... and then you found yourself here! While you're not entirely sure where here is - haunted mansions not being your strong point - you're nevertheless sure you are, indeed, dreaming. Of course, what you need to figure out now is what you're going to do about it. How you're going to wake up. And how you're going to try and prevent yourself from getting killed... (genre: comedy fantasy) **(Expanded version of a previously released game)**

Failed game intros

Haven't got one this issue, nothing I feel like letting go of at the moment

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

Review by DavidW

The Birthday by Johnny Reb (Cowboy)

In some ways, The Birthday harks back to the text adventures I remember playing in the 80's – a new illustration for each location – but for the most part it's firmly in the adult interactive fiction market of today. The premise is a simple one: your girlfriend is losing interest in you and you've got to find a way to win her back.

Graphics play a large part in this game, often concealing clues that are otherwise missing from the text. Unfortunately, a lot of what is in the graphics is misleading in the extreme as in quite a few locations at the start of The Birthday there are beds, desks, tables, etc that don't seem to exist in the locations themselves. Indeed, trying to examine them brings up a response that they aren't there! But they are. Definitely so. I can see them in the graphic so I know they are. In theory, this could have been a pretty neat idea – read through the room description then look at the graphic and see what you need to be examining. In practise, it doesn't work anywhere near as well. If the time was spent to draw the items in the graphic then time should also have been expended to put them in the location.

Another frustrating aspect of the game were, unfortunately, the bugs. And there were quite a few annoying ones. Trying to open a window led to me getting killed, and the text informed me that I had died because I had already opened the window fasteners (this I was told whether I'd opened them or not!) Another time, it was possible to look through a window and see my girlfriend in the room beyond, yet upon entering the room via the door there was no sign of her. Head back to the window and look through again and she has mysteriously reappeared! Strangest of all: entering the bedroom shows an empty bedroom yet if you knock on the door beforehand, your girlfriend is there! All this hinted at a game that was, perhaps, a little rushed in the writing and without enough due care and attention given to testing it out beforehand.

The score is one thing I found a little confusing. The maximum is 153 yet when I finished I had achieved well over 160 – this despite the fact that there were a few things I wasn't able to do!

A smattering of guess-the-verb puzzles were evident throughout. In one location "unlock drawer" worked yet "open drawer" didn't. Probably a matter of personal opinion as to

whether this should make a difference but I, for one, felt that the two should be the same. There were also a couple of times when logic took a flying leap out of the window. In the shed I could clearly see a ladder hanging on the wall yet was unable to take it. Upon figuring out a way to light the shed I saw another ladder under the sofa yet was still unable to take it until I had produced still more light. Trying to move or lift the sofa didn't produce any noticeable response.

Overall I found *The Birthday* to be quite an easy and straightforward game for the most part. Items can mostly be found by examining what you see, although the use of all the items isn't always at first obvious. Indeed, by the time I finished the game, I had several items left over and no idea what to do with them. Fortunately there is a pretty good hints system at work here for when you run into those proverbial brick walls, and this, more than anything, got me through the trickier parts of the game.

Logic: 6 out of 10

The game had a frustrating habit of not describing countless numbers of static items. Then there was the strange problem in the shed when I could see a ladder yet was unable to take it without looking under the sofa. Why was this necessary if I knew the ladder was there and I was able to see it?

Problems: 3 out of 10 (10 = no problems)

I found quite a few things with the game that could clearly do with work on. Missing descriptions for static items, as stated above, were a big problem and the text being littered with spelling mistakes didn't help matters either. There were also quite a few times when I'd be told there was a cabinet/bed/desk/etc in the room description yet upon trying to examine it I'd get a message that such-and-such an item wasn't there! Another time the text tells me I've been given some money but my inventory disagrees. It's only upon opening my wallet (which I don't even have to be carrying at the time!) that I find the money.

Story: 4 out of 10

The storyline is one of *The Birthday's* weaker points. The general idea is to win back the love of your life and while there's a reasonably detailed background for setting the scene, there's precious little in the game storyline-wise.

Characters: 5 out of 10

Average for the most part. None really stood out but then none were particularly bad either. Lack of conversation was a

major failing. For the most part, I didn't seem to be able to strike up a conversation with any of the characters. Talking to them advises me to try the "ask [character] about [subject]" mode of conversation, yet I was stumped about what to ask.

Writing: 5 out of 10

The style of writing varied from the good to the not-so-good. At times it was clear that English wasn't the writer's first language yet, saying that, there was nothing horribly wrong and nothing so glaringly bad that I was tempted to give up.

Game: 6 out of 10

Good points and bad points, but I felt the good points won out in the end. The Birthday isn't a masterpiece of a game but it is worth playing and the illustrations, while not masterpieces themselves, are good enough to make their presence here worthwhile.

Overall: 29 out of 60

Reference

Concluding our voyage through the most tricky of ADRIFT areas, tasks. This final bit deals with making tasks repeatable or reversible, and also creating hints to give your players a clue when they get stuck.

Manual pages 23: Tasks completed

Repeatable & Reversible

You may want to make tasks repeatable and/or reversible. If a task is repeatable, the player can type the command any number of times, and the task will execute as normal. You can also make tasks reversible. This will clear the completed status of a task, if it has been completed earlier. Examples of wanting to do this could be if the task was "open door", then the reverse command would be "close door". You could then put a restriction on a movement from a room, to only move if "open door" is complete.

You could then open and close the door as much as you like, but only be able to move through it if it was open.

You can have any number of commands for the reverse command, much in the same way as the initial command, and wildcards and advanced command construction can again be used. Note that when you reverse a task, any actions that the task performed will not be undone – simply the status of the task will be set back to Not Completed.

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Reversible tasks share the same restrictions as the forward part of the task.

If the task is reversible, you can enter in the Message once reversed text box the message when the task is reversed. If the task is not repeatable then you can amend the default message to display if the command is typed again.

You can also make tasks reversible and repeatable. There are probably not many times when you would want to do this, but it allows you to execute the task as many

min(%var1%, 2 - %var2%) * 3

times as you want without having to reverse it. If the task is repeatable and reversible, the Message if task tried again will also be displayed if the player types the command to reverse the task when it has not been completed (or it has been reversed).

Hints

If the task is particularly difficult, you may want to supply a hint for the task. There are three parts to a hint. The first is the question. This is to allow the player to know which problem the hint refers to. When the player types "hint" in the game, a list of all the hints is supplied which can be completed in their current location. For example, if there was a slide that the player wanted to climb, but it was too slippery, you could have a question such as "How do I get up the slide?"

The subtle hint should be enough to get the player thinking along the right lines. So for the above example, you might want to put "Perhaps you don't have enough grip..." This would hopefully be enough to let the player know that they needed some kind of footwear.

The sledgehammer hint should be almost the answer. You don't have to give a sledgehammer hint to a question. In the above example, you may want to say, "Try wearing the climbing boots!"

NB. In the game, if the player uses a subtle hint, they will only score half points for the task. If they use a sledgehammer hint, they will not score at all for completing the task.

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