Lecture 12: Intro to Inform 7

CM 148
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Class Project

• Work in teams of two to create an interactive story using Inform 7

• First deliverables:
  – Warm-up Inform 7 assignment (Assignment #4)
  – Short design doc for your interactive story
What is Inform 7?

• Inform is a language for authoring interactive fiction

• It targets the Z-machine (generates Z-machine bytecode)
  – The Z-machine was the virtual machine originally developed by Infocom for its text adventures
Inform 6 → Inform 7

- Written by Graham Nelson
- Earlier versions of Inform looked like fairly standard procedural object-oriented programming
  - What makes Inform powerful is the large amount of content that already exists as standard libraries
- Inform 7 is a fairly radical departure
  - English-like syntax: uses the same parser for compiling the program as it does for handling player interaction
  - Declarative (rule-based) programming
  - Nice IDE with sophisticated project debugging and browsing support
Declarative Programming

• In computer science, declarative programming is a programming paradigm, a style of building the structure and elements of computer programs, that expresses the logic of a computation without describing its control flow.

• Examples:
  – Prolog, used for logic programming (AI, linguistics)
    • Use language to represent facts and rules
  – SQL for querying databases
Acquiring Inform 7

- On mac, if it says the app is damaged
  - Settings → Security & Privacy → Allow applications from all
Example game:

Birthday by Kathleen Tuite

• Goal
  – Find and eat the birthday cake
  – Get the cats to be in the same room as you when you eat the cake
  – Cats: MPEG and JPEG (formerly Girlcat and Boycat)
  – http://superfiretruck.com/if4adam/
Example game: *Birthday* by Kathleen Tuite

Cover art, made with this tool:
http://mrdoob.com/projects/harmony/

JPEG stealing magnets from the fridge
Inform 7 IDE

• Go!
• Replay
• Error console
  – Read the words!
• Index
  – World
    • See a map of your world!
    • See objects defined in that world!
  – Actions
    • Scroll down to see new actions described in the source!
The Skein

- IDE automatically organizes and stores every previous run. (Super-replay)
- Inform’s approach to testing interactive fiction is to treat it as being like the analysis of other turn-based games, such as chess. It would be prohibitively difficult to work out every possible combination of moves: instead, we analyze those which go somewhere, and look for significant choices.
Two activities of designing interactive fiction

• Create the world as it appears at the start of play
  – Where and what everything is

• Specify the rules of play, which shape how the player interacts with the initially created world
  – Even in an ‘empty’ game, Inform starts with hundreds of standard rules already in place
World-Building Questions

Where am I?

Who am I?

What is that?
Let’s build a space together using the built-in Inform 7 documentation