WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF EAMON CS

[Note: this document is a work in progress]

Now that work on the Eamon CS game engine has been completed, it's time to turn to the documentation set once again. This document is called WorkingDraft, but in fact it will be a giant brain-dump of information – everything I can think of will go in here, complete with screen shots, diagrams, anecdotes, samples, etc.

Please be aware that it will be stream-of-consciousness with little or no attention payed to grammatical correctness, sentence/paragraph structure, or clever segues between topics. It will also be lacking a formality found in most polished documentation sets. You may find that topical material has been duplicated or sprawled across different sections. The scope being discussed may switch abruptly, from wide-angle flyover of the terrain down to the ground at the source code level, then back again.

The hope is that you will get the information conveyed and the fit and finish can be left for later when all the factual bits are written down. To allow you to keep up with the progress of the document, which may grow quite large, I will try to avoid making changes within it to already-written text and instead append all new changes to the end with appropriate datestamps.

I'll start off by adding the text of the now-superseded README.htm document:

This minimal document is intended to describe the various facets of Eamon CS. The real documentation will be a formal set: full source code commenting, a Player's Manual, a Dungeon Designer's Manual and a Class Reference. It will take quite a while to put all that together, so in the mean time, this document will have to suffice.

Eamon CS (ECS) is a port of the Eamon roleplaying game to the C# programming language. It is the production version of a prior system called Eamon AC (EAC), an ANSI C prototype intended to extract Eamon out of BASIC. If you have EAC on your system you should uninstall it before using ECS, as it is now obsolete.

This system is a hybrid of Donald Brown's Classic Eamon and the most modern BASIC Eamon available, Frank Black Production's Eamon Deluxe. It is also directly based on the EAC prototype. Eamon CS borrows liberally from and bears a strong resemblance to all these sources in various areas.

The game has evolved rapidly over its short lifespan, first making the leap to a plugin-based architecture unique to this branch of Eamon, then into the various flavors of Unix, and most recently into the Android mobile device space. Along the way, a small but growing collection of custom-built adventures has been created, and the game engine has improved with each one produced. The different facets of Eamon CS share a common code base, but where necessary it will be distinguished as Eamon CS Desktop for traditional workstations and Eamon CS Mobile for mobile devices.

PROGRAMS, LIBRARIES AND PLUGINS

The plugin-based architecture used by Eamon CS extends to the Main Hall, the Dungeon Designer and all adventures. They are managed by a Plugin Manager program specific to either Desktop or Mobile environments:

| System\Bin\EamonPM.WindowsUnix.dll | Eamon CS Windows/Unix Plugin Manager |
|---|---|
| System\Bin\EamonPM.Android-Signed.apk | Eamon CS Android Plugin Manager |
| System\Bin\EamonDD.dll | Eamon CS Dungeon Designer Plugin |
| System\Bin\EamonMH.dll | Eamon CS Main Hall Plugin |
| System\Bin\EamonRT.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\EamonVS.dll | Eamon CS/Visual Studio Automation Library |
| System\Bin\Eamon.dll | Eamon CS Library |
| System\Bin\Polenter.SharpSerializer.dll | SharpSerializer.Library |

Additionally you have some adventures:

| System\Bin\TheBeginnersCave.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| System\Bin\BeginnersForest.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\TheTrainingGround.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\TheSubAquanLaboratory.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\ARuncibleCargo.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\StrongholdOfKahrDur.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\TheTempleOfNgurct.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |
| System\Bin\WrenholdsSecretVigil.dll | Eamon CS Adventure Plugin |

Conceptually, each plugin can be thought of as a discrete program; it exposes a Program class with a Main method that takes a collection of arguments, much like any C-based program. The difference is that the Plugin Manager is what "executes" the plugin, not the calling C# environment. At the bottom of the software stack, you have Polenter.SharpSerializer.dll which handles loading and saving of the game's textfiles and Eamon.dll which holds code common to all ECS plugins. The EamonRT.dll contains the vanilla game engine used by all non-customized adventures. For customized adventures, the game plugin (eg, TheBeginnersCave.dll) contains custom code specific to that game, built by leveraging EamonRT.dll. It is a "modded" version of the game engine.

This implementation allows the logic for any plugin to be shared with any other plugin. For example, an interesting idea would be to create a "campaign library" that contains common code for multiple derived adventures.

The source code for Plugin Managers and system plugins resides in the appropriate directory under System; for adventures, it resides in the adventure-specific directory under Adventures.

The Main Hall textfiles reside in System\Bin, making them easily accessible to all plugins, while game-specific textfiles (both original and save game) reside under Adventures in their respective game directories.

A final note on the architectural differences between ECS Desktop and Mobile. For Desktop, the plugins reside in the System\Bin directory and are loaded by EamonPM.WindowsUnix.dll only when needed (and reused once loaded). In contrast, when EamonPM.Android-Signed.apk is built, all plugins are statically linked in and all textfiles are embedded, producing a monolithic application. When the .apk is delivered onto the mobile device, only the textfiles are replicated (when appropriate) to the device's file system - the plugins remain part of the application. In spite of this, the plugin managers are very similar internally.

BATCH FILES

The plugins take a variety of command line parameters (which will be described below). However, to get you up and running quickly, there is a QuickLaunch folder (since there is no formal ECS installer, you may want to manually create a shortcut to it on your desktop). Inside this folder is a set of batch files that can be run directly. The batch files are organized into sub-folders based on the underlying plugin they invoke:

| EamonDD\EditAdventures.bat | Edit the flat Adventures database |
|---|--|
| EamonDD\EditCatalog.bat | Edit the adventure category Catalog |
| EamonDD\EditCharacters.bat | Edit the Characters file |
| EamonDD\EditContemporary.bat | Edit the Contemporary adventures category |
| EamonDD\EditFantasy.bat | Edit the Fantasy adventures category |
| EamonDD\EditSciFi.bat | Edit the Sci-Fi adventures category |
| EamonDD\EditTest.bat | Edit the Test adventures category |
| EamonDD\EditWorkbench.bat | Edit the Developer's Workbench |
| EamonDD\EditWorkInProgress.bat | Edit the Work-In-Progress adventures category |
| EamonDD\EditARuncibleCargo.bat | Edit A Runcible Cargo |
| EamonDD\EditBeginnersForest.bat | Edit Beginner's Forest |
| EamonDD\Edit[AdventureName].bat | Edit [AdventureName] |
| EamonDD\LoadAdventureSupportMenu.bat | Load Adventure Support Menu |
| $Eamon MH \backslash Enter Main Hall Using Adventures. bat$ | Enter the Main Hall using a flat adventure database ¹ |
| EamonMH\EnterMainHallUsingCatalog.bat | Enter the Main Hall using a hierarchical adventure database ¹ |
| EamonRT\ResumeARuncibleCargo.bat | Resume A Runcible Cargo ² |
| EamonRT\ResumeBeginnersForest.bat | Resume Beginner's Forest ² |
| EamonRT\Resume[AdventureName].bat | Resume [AdventureName] ² |

¹Run these batch files to create a new character or send an existing one into the Main Hall. The only difference between the two batch files is the nature of the adventure database loaded (the same characters will be available regardless).

²Run these batch files to return to an in-progress adventure.

You can study the batch files to see how various programs are launched; you can also create your own batch files using these as templates if you decide to try your hand at adventure writing, or if you want to run the system in a non-default manner.

Eamon CS Mobile mirrors this QuickLaunch hierarchy using a series of ListViews to provide a similar experience.

QUICK ARCHITECTURAL OVERVIEW

The entire Eamon CS system was written from scratch and aggressively exploits the C# language. This is no port, more like an expansive toolkit used to build games based on the Eamon ruleset. It has more in common with traditional Interactive Fiction systems like TADS or Inform. Eamon CS games are built by subclassing existing classes (in any library/plugin, but especially Eamon.dll or EamonRT.dll) and overriding their behavior, calling back into base classes where the default behavior is needed. Every class in the system can be subclassed, and generic improvements made to individual adventures can be pushed back into the base framework for use by all games. As time goes on, the system will grow in flexibility and power.

The textfile format used by Eamon CS deserves an explanation. The game produces ASCII XML files that represent C# object graphs. This is radically different than any other Eamon, and plays a critical role in the development of customized adventures. Take a look in the MONSTERS.XML file in Test Adventure (a non-customized adventure) and you will see the serialized class is Eamon.Game.Monster (from Eamon.dll). But in The Beginner's Cave, you will see it's TheBeginnersCave.Game.Monster (from TheBeginnersCave.dll). These are two different classes, the second is a subclass of the first, and implements custom code that is used specifically by The Beginner's Cave. Now compare the batch file EditTestAdventure.bat, which contains the command line argument "-pfn EamonRT.dll" with EditTheBeginnersCave.bat, which contains "-pfn TheBeginnersCave.dll". In the first the flag instructs EamonDD to load the base engine, while in the second it loads TheBeginnersCave.dll and uses any customized classes it finds (like the Monster class) when creating new objects. This whole topic is fairly complex and begs to be part of a formal document set, but at least this gives you an idea of how it works.

With BASIC Eamons that use files containing just data, you can bypass the Dungeon Designer program completely and build these files by hand. You should avoid this practice in Eamon CS due to the specialized textfile format. The EamonDD program is instrumental in producing textfiles of the correct format and you should rely on it to do so. However, you can still manually tweak the textfiles with your favorite editor. Just be very careful to ensure the file format is not violated, as the Polenter.SharpSerializer.dll library can be picky.

The EamonRT.dll base adventure runtime takes the form of a Finite State Machine (FSM). For those unfamiliar, this is a technique used to model complex program behavior. The main game loop is 15 lines long; all complex behavior has been delegated to subclasses of the State class. Player commands are derived from the Command class, which itself is derived from State. Customized adventures will almost always subclass various States or Commands to provide special behavior. It is also very easy to create new States or Commands and link them into the FSM if needed. Finally, if you look through the code you will see that special care has been taken to avoid the use of GOTO except in specific circumstances (goto Cleanup). This gives the game engine a clean, deterministic quality.

PREREQUISITES

[20180716]

As mentioned in the README.md, Eamon CS has no formal installer. There are good points and bad points to this. On one hand, it is a simple matter of unzipping the Eamon-CS-master.zip file downloaded from GitHub to set up for play (if you did that, as opposed to doing a Git Clone). Also, it means there is no installer to maintain, which frees time up for other things like engine enhancements, or developing content.

A disadvantage to this approach is the ECS developer/gamer is responsible for ensuring that all prerequisites are installed on their system; otherwise, ECS will not run when you double-click on any of the .bat or .sh QuickLaunch files. This is typically manifested by a console window popping up and then disappearing quickly... caused by a missing dotnet.exe program. If you find that you cannot get Eamon CS to run on Windows, your first order of business should be to download and install the following files (in order):

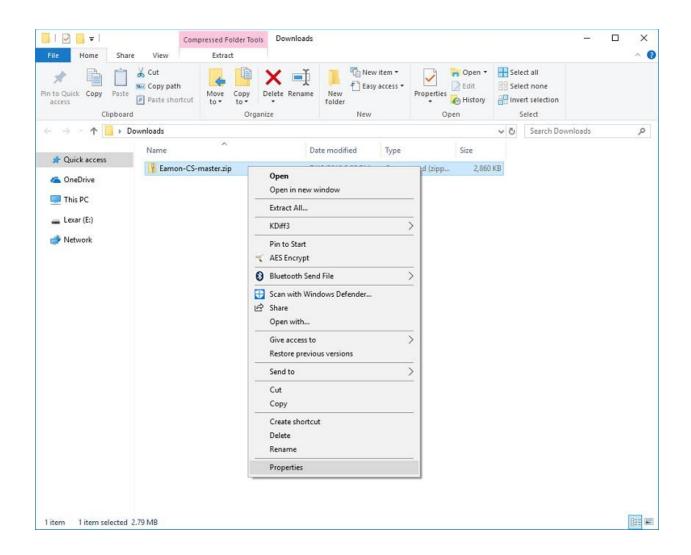
Developers who want to play, step through and/or develop the source code:

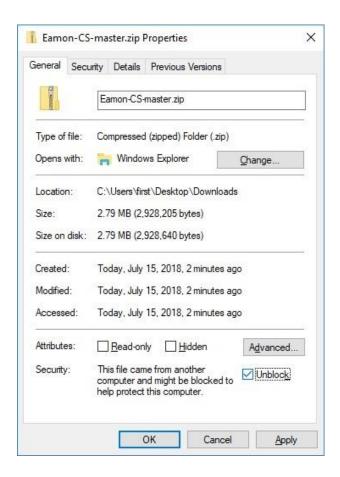
https://visualstudio.microsoft.com/thank-you-downloading-visual-studio/?sku=Community&rel=15 https://www.microsoft.com/net/download/thank-you/net472-developer-pack https://www.microsoft.com/net/download/thank-you/dotnet-sdk-2.1.302-windows-x64-installer

Gamers who simply want to play:

https://www.microsoft.com/net/download/thank-you/net472-offline https://www.microsoft.com/net/download/thank-you/dotnet-runtime-2.1.2-windows-x64-installer

A second disadvantage on Windows leads to a useful tip regarding the downloaded .zip file. You should always right click on the .zip file and select "unblock" to avoid the annoying security warnings, as shown below:





The prerequisites on Unix are similar: a version of Mono that is .NET Framework 4.6.1+ and .NET Core 2.0+ compatible. The means to satisfy these requirements varies from platform to platform, and is left as an exercise for the reader. I have personally gotten the system working in Ubuntu Linux and FreeBSD. There is no reason it shouldn't work perfectly in OS X, though I haven't tried it. This course of action should only be pursued by those who are confident enough to see it through via their own devices.

USING THE VISUAL STUDIO DEBUGGER

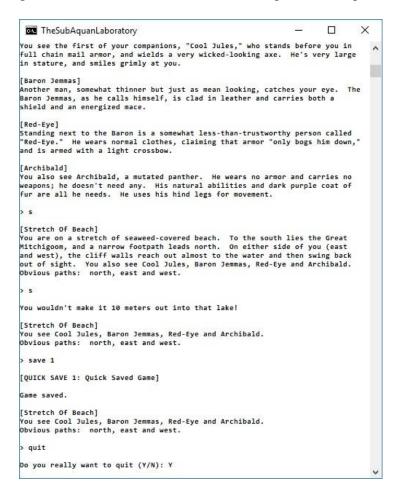
[20180716]

Eamon CS was built using Visual Studio 2017, a powerful, modern integrated development environment used by programmers world-wide. If you would like to debug or step through the game's source code to better understand its inner workings, you can install VS 2017 Community Edition, provided by the link in the Prerequisites section. There are many tutorials on the web that go into detail on using Visual Studio in general; that topic is way outside the scope of this document. If you do some research on your own, make sure you focus on using the debugger, which will be the point of this section. Note: this discussion assumes VS 2017 on Windows, if you're using a different development environment or a different OS the steps may vary.

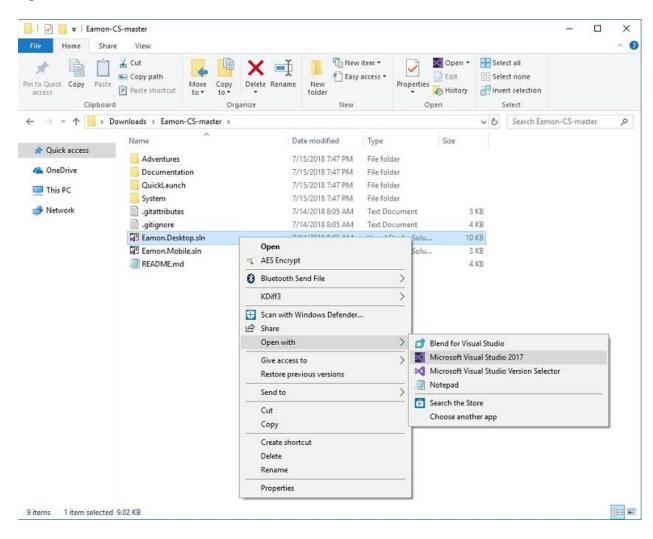
To step through the Eamon CS source code, do the following:

| 1. Make a backup of your repository directory if you downloaded a .zip file. If you Git Cloned the system, you can probably make a new development branch and focus your work there so the original branch (or your gameplay branch) remains pristine. | | |
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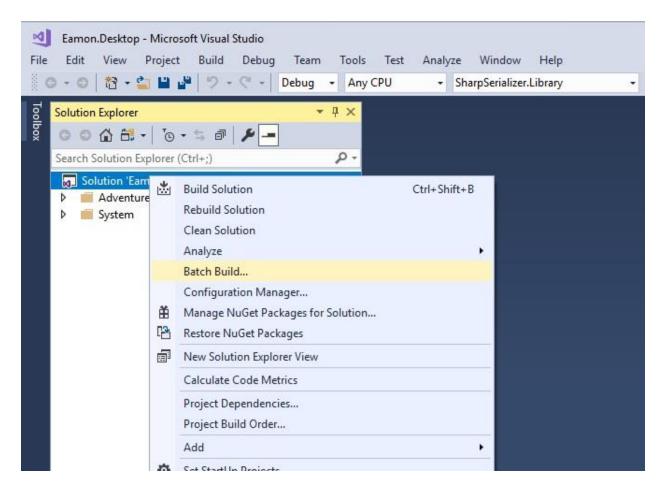
2. In the development directory or branch run EnterMainHallUsingAdventures.bat, and send a character into the adventure you want to step through. You can save the adventure if you wish but it is not required; only that the character remain in the adventure. Quit the game, but don't Quit Hall. In this example we'll step through The SubAquan Laboratory.



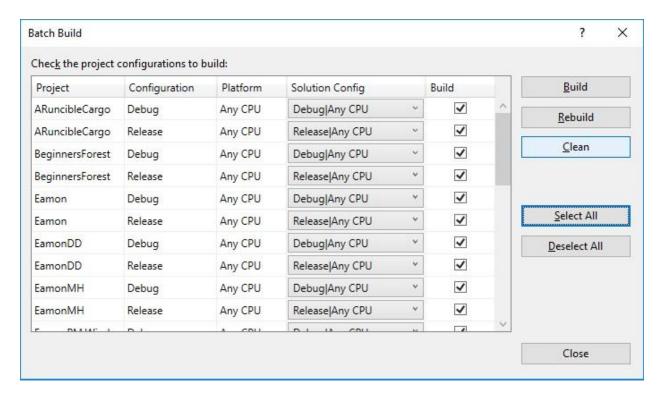
3. Open Eamon CS with Visual Studio.



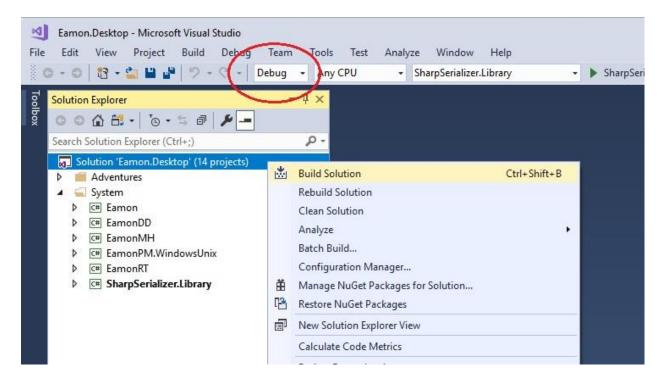
4. Once the game is loaded in Visual Studio, right click on the Solution node and select Batch Build.



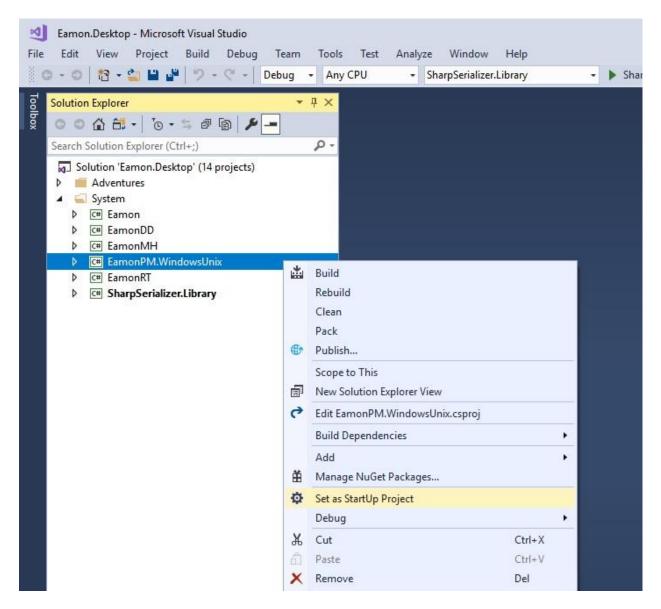
5. Click the Select All button, then click Clean.



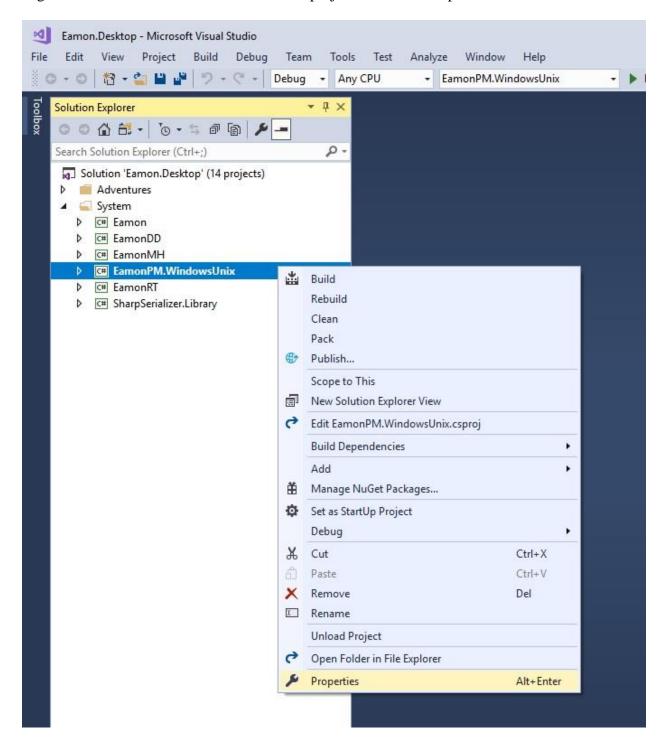
6. Right click on the Solution node and click Build Solution. Be sure the system is in Debug mode (shown inside red circle).



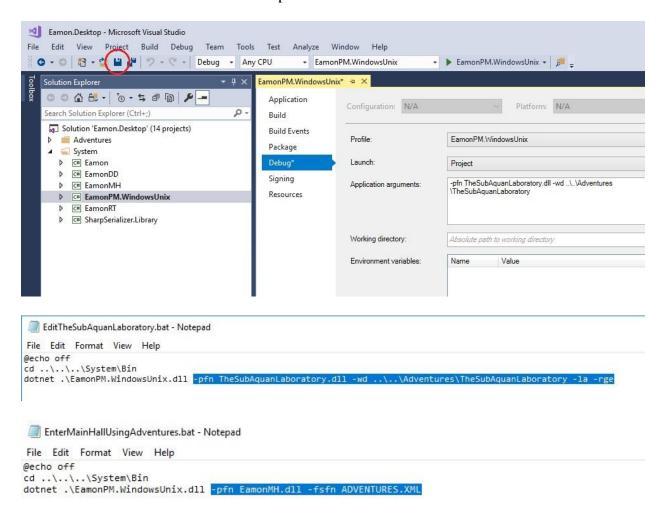
7. There should be no errors in the previous step (see Output Window). Right click on the EamonPM.WindowsUnix project and select Set as Startup Project.



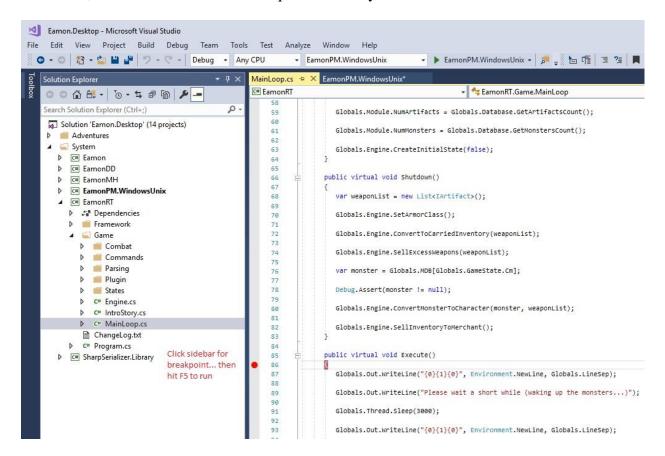
8. Right click on the EamonPM.WindowsUnix project and select Properties.

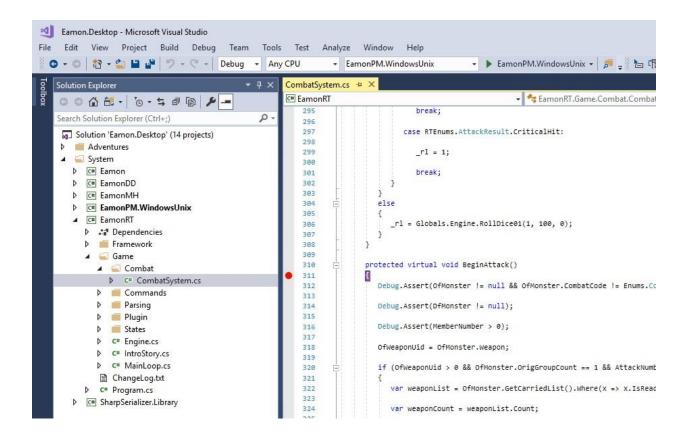


9. Set the Application arguments to the appropriate command line string. In this case, the string was taken directly from ResumeTheSubAquanLaboratory.bat. Make sure you save the changes (click the icon inside the red circle). Side note: you can use any string from any .bat file, depending on which program you want to step through. This includes the Main Hall or the Dungeon Designer. To debug these, you don't need to send a character on an adventure first. See the two examples below.



10. Put your breakpoints in the code. In the following examples, the program will break just as it enters the game's main loop, and also as an attack is made in combat. You can put breakpoints anywhere you like in the running program; in our case here, that includes Eamon.dll, EamonRT.dll and TheSubAquanLaboratory.dll.





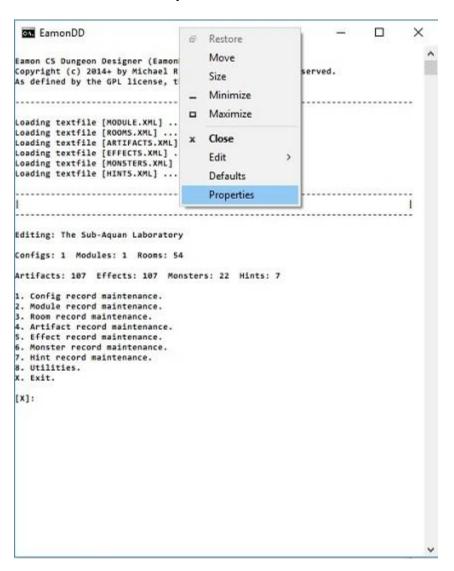
11. Press F5 to run the program. The game will launch just as if you had double clicked the ResumeTheSubAquanLaboratory.bat file. If you saved any games, you can restore them at this point as you normally would. You can also start the program or step through it line by line at any point using F10 (step over) or F11 (step into).

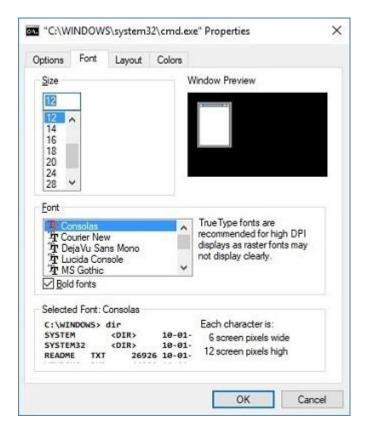
SUGGESTED GAMEPLAY SETTINGS

[20180718]

Eamon CS runs as a set of 64-bit Console applications. It became obvious over the course of development that the default settings for Console windows are not ideal when playing a text-based game. The system tries to adjust the window size to an optimal setting, but you may wish to experiment with the other settings to see what appeals to you. Strangely enough, I've found that these aesthetics make a big difference in the quality of the gameplay as well as the ease of use for tools like EamonDD. Obviously, this entire topic is highly subjective, but the following ideas produced some interesting results:

1. When running ECS, right click on the Console window title bar and choose properties. The following settings are taken from Windows 10; the exact properties available on other versions may differ.





2. Font Tab -

Size: 12-16

Font: Consolas or Deja Vu Sans Mono

Bold: Optional

3. Layout Tab -

Screen Buffer Size -

Width: 80 Height: 9999

Window Size -

Width: 80

Height: 50 (you can adjust this up or down based on screen resolution)

4. Colors Tab -

Screen Text -

Selected Color Values -

Red: 0 Green: 255

Blue: 0

Screen Background -

Selected Color Values -

Red: 0 Green: 0 Blue: 0

Eamon CS tries to set the values on the Layout Tab to those shown above, so you shouldn't need to change them. The Screen Buffer Width and Window Width should always be 80 columns. The Screen Buffer Height is strongly suggested to be 9999. The Screen Text shown above is Green with a Black background. This has a nice, retro-vibe to it, like an Apple II green screen. If you prefer amber the RGB values [255,165,0] might work for you. As time has passed, I settled on a white background with black text, as shown in the various images in this document. Once you have settings you're happy with, click OK and they should persist across ECS programs.

MISCELLANEOUS GAMEPLAY NOTES

[20180718]

The parser of the game has been enhanced to allow more flexible input. You can say stuff like "PUT my sword INSIDE my backpack" or "OPEN that jewelry box" or "ATTACK the rats" or "GIVE the spices TO the hermit". The standard [VERB] [subject1] [subject2] pattern of Eamon Deluxe remains, but ECS will discard the articles before processing further. Even though it is more typing, some players may find it more immersive. Of course, you can always just use the terse syntax if you prefer.

There are a few new commands that have been added to the game engine:

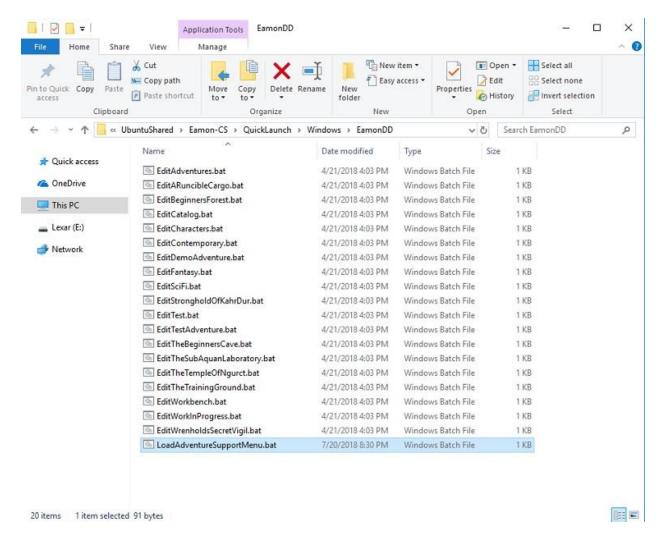
- 1. "INFO" gives information about the adventure being played.
- 2. "VERBOSE" [rooms|artifacts|monsters|all] turns verbosity on or off on the appropriate record type (in practice you'll probably only ever want rooms).
- 3. "HINTS" gives you a list of hints for the current adventure. You should always carefully read EAMON CS 1.4 GENERAL HELP and EAMON CS 1.4 NEW COMMANDS as these hints may be subtly different than their Eamon Deluxe counterparts. Consider the following:
- 4. "GO" [door] allows you to pass through a free standing non-directional door (eg: the overgrown path in Test Adventure).
- 5. "INVENTORY" [container] has been added as a parallel to "INVENTORY" [monster]. This lists the container's contents.

BUILDING NEW ADVENTURES

[20180731]

As with any Eamon, it is still possible to send adventurers to their death for fun and profit, even after all these years! You have the ability to create new games with the tools available to you. If you want to create Standard adventures - that is, those that use the EamonRT generic game engine and have no custom programming - you can build them without Visual Studio 2017 Community Edition installed. But to build Custom adventures (like The Beginner's Cave, etc) the VS tool suite should be on your system. Up to this point it has been a manual effort to bootstrap new games, but great progress has been made towards fully automating the process.

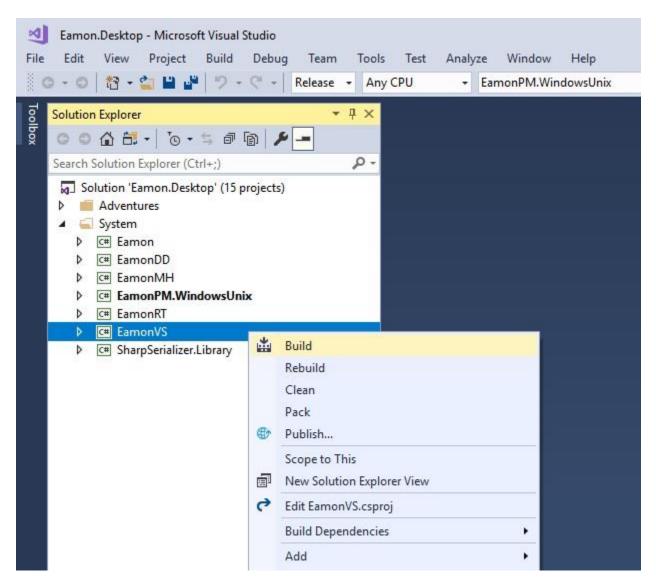
You will find in the EamonDD folder under QuickLaunch a new .bat or .sh file that when run will enable an Adventure Support Menu under Utilities. This is LoadAdventureSupportMenu:



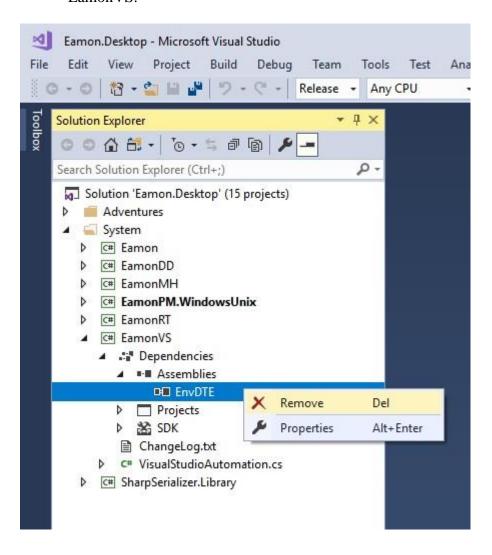
Depending on your system configuration, before launching this menu for the first time, there may be a few manual steps that you must do if you plan to create Custom adventures.

1. There is a new project in Eamon.Desktop called EamonVS that integrates with the Microsoft EnvDTE automation library. EnvDTE is not included in Eamon CS (it is not on Microsoft's redistribution list), but was dropped on your system when you installed Visual Studio. EamonVS includes it as a reference. The EamonDD program uses EamonVS to automate the process of adding new Custom adventure projects to Eamon.Desktop and to recompile the solution. Note the following two scenarios:

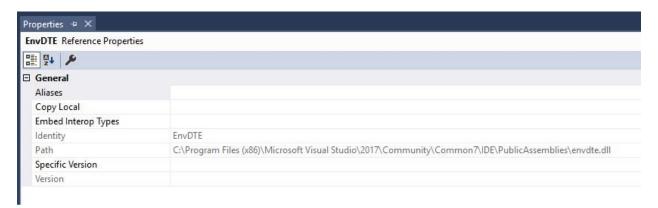
2. Scenario #1: If you are using Visual Studio 2017 Community and it was installed in the default location you should be ready to go right now. Simply open Eamon.Desktop, right click on the EamonVS project and Build it. (If the Build fails with the system complaining it can't find EnvDTE.dll you're in Scenario #2 - see below).



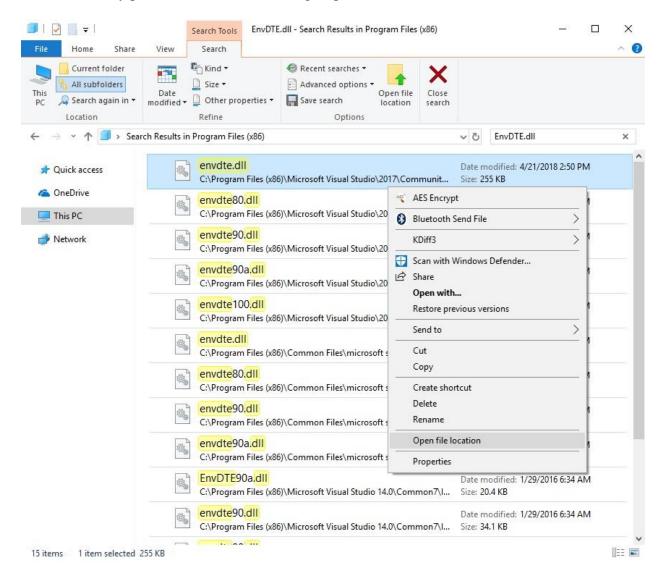
3. Scenario #2: If you are using Visual Studio 2017 and it was installed in a non-default location, or you're using a non-Community Edition (eg, Professional or Enterprise) you will have to remove the EnvDTE reference from EamonVS, locate EnvDTE in your Visual Studio directory heirarchy and re-add it as a reference to EamonVS. The EnvDTE library should be about 256KB in size. Once you do this you should be able to compile EamonVS.



4. Note the path originally supplied for EnvDTE.dll; this will give you an idea on where to look for this library on your system.



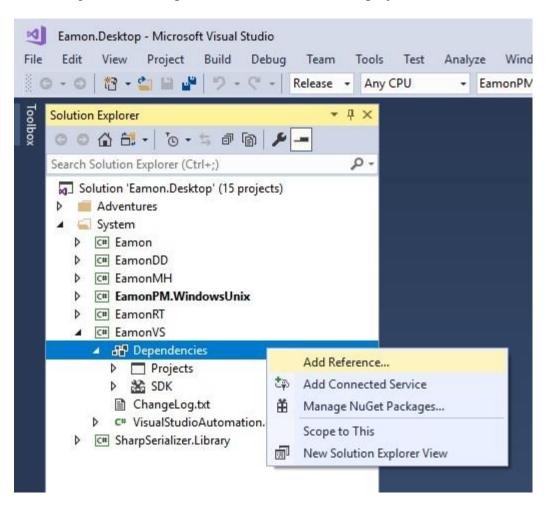
5. The easiest way to locate EnvDTE.dll is to do a file search in the directory hierarchy above your Visual Studio install. For example, here the search is done in Program Files (x86). Then right click on the correct file and choose Open File Location. Copy the full directory path for use in the following steps.



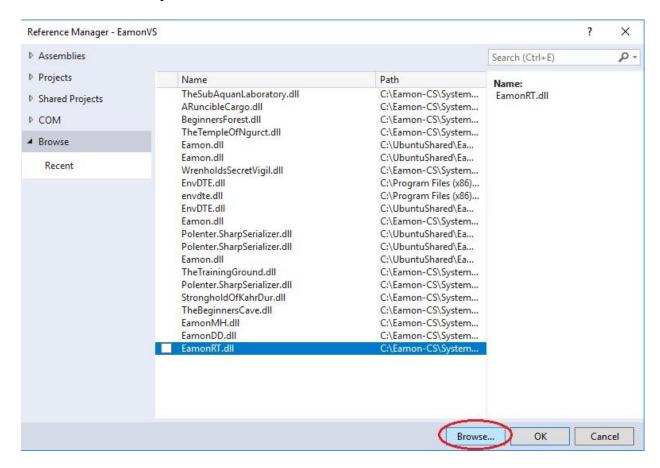
6. There is one additional step you must do for Scenario #2. You need to locate the devenv.exe program, which should be in the IDE directory, immediately above EnvDTE.dll. Edit the LoadAdventureSupportMenu.bat file (but not .sh) and append to the end of the dotnet launch string the -dep command line flag along with the full path and file name:



7. Right click on Dependencies for the EamonVS project and choose Add Reference.



8. Choose Browse to bring up a file browser. You can locate EnvDTE.dll using the path discovered in step #5 and add it as a dependency to EamonVS. Then compile EamonVS as noted in step #2.



Before proceeding further, if you downloaded the .zip file for Eamon CS it might make sense to backup your repository so you can revert if necessary. For those who cloned the repository from GitHub, it might make sense to create a branch for your new adventure so you can back out at any time.

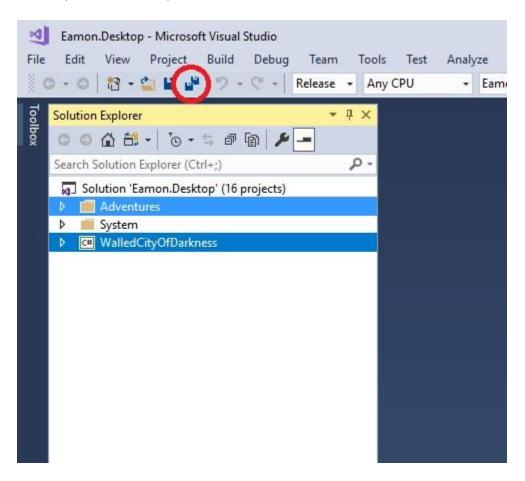
Once you have performed any manual steps listed above, you will be able to run LoadAdventureSupportMenu and create either Standard or Custom adventures (.bat only) by just entering a few key pieces of data. The entire process has been automated by bootstrapping using the AdventureTemplates folder, located under Adventures:

- Creates the game folder under Adventures
- Generates all needed code (Custom adventures only)
- Creates all necessary QuickLaunch .bat and .sh files
- Adds game to appropriate Adventure database(s)
- Adds game project to Eamon.Desktop.sln (Custom adventures only)
- Rebuilds Eamon.Desktop.sln, producing game library (Custom adventures only)

Below we see an example of Custom adventure creation where a new game called Walled City Of Darkness (Eamon #150) is bootstrapped using the Adventure Support Menu.



Notice that the game project is added to the root of the Eamon.Desktop solution. You should load Eamon.Desktop into Visual Studio 2017 and manually move the game project by left clicking on the project and dragging it onto the Adventures folder. Then click the Save-All button (in the red circle).



The only thing you need to do to play your game after all this is run the game's Edit[YourAdventureName] .bat or .sh file and add:

- A Module record
- A Room record

For Custom adventures, a complete set of derived foundational classes (eg, Artifact, Monster, Room, Engine, etc) are generated and available for you to program against. The generated classes should be sufficient for many Custom games but remember you can always add your own new or overridden classes if you need to get exotic. The entire system was built to be overridden so the sky is the limit here. The actual process of customization using Visual Studio 2017 is beyond the scope of this section and will be fully documented elsewhere, although there are games available for you to look at for ideas.

There are two menu options that are awaiting implementation. The first will Delete all traces of an adventure from the Eamon CS system. The second is intended to be run on a game after it has been fully implemented; it should strip out the generated classes that were unused and replace them with their non-customized equivalents (eg, Eamon.Game.Artifact, etc). The relevant game .XML files would also be updated. This is strictly an optimization measure to reduce code bloat.

Finally, a word about submissions. Anyone who wishes to build a game with the intent to submit it for inclusion in Eamon CS should contact me to discuss the matter before beginning any work. The contact info is in AUTHORS.txt under Documentation. Unlike the original Eamon which took a somewhat free-wheeling approach to game submissions, you can only be guaranteed that your code will go into master if we discuss the idea and it is approved. I have yet to fully work out how pull requests against master will work at this point.

Ultimately my goal is to continue to improve the experience for people who discover Eamon CS and play it in the future. Off hand, I think the only stuff from Classic Eamon that wouldn't make it past the gate is the truly infamous content or adventures with no plot and enemies like rat1, rat2, rat3 etc. We're not talking about overly stringent criteria here. The games already written for the system, as well as those to come, demonstrate what I'd love to incorporate.