

asss Development Guide

September 18, 2003

1 Introduction

If you're reading this, you probably already know that **asss** is a server for the multiplayer game *Subspace*, written mostly in C and Python. This document will try to help you to understand how **asss** works internally and how to develop for it.

There are three types of things you might want to do with **asss**: modify the existing source (the stuff in the core distribution), write new modules from scratch in C, and write new modules from scratch in Python. You're welcome to do any of those three things, depending on your goals, but I'd like to encourage people to try to write new modules in Python if possible, and only use C if there's a good reason for it (efficiency concerns, linking with other libraries, etc.). Don't let the fact that you don't know Python discourage you; it's a very easy language to learn. Also don't be discouraged by the current incompleteness of the Python interface to **asss**. It will improve as users submit requests for things that they need added to it.

2 Building

If you want to build all of **asss** from scratch, there are a few dependencies you need to be aware of: Python, version 2.2 or greater, Berkeley DB, version 4.0 or greater, and the mysql client libraries (any recent version should be ok). If you're building on a unix system, you'll need to use GNU make.

The basic procedure is to edit the definitions at the top of the provided **Makefile** to point to the directories where your libraries are installed. After that, running **make** should build all of **asss**, which consists of a binary named **asss** and a bunch of **.so** files containing the modules. Running **make install** will copy those binaries to the **bin** directory one level up.

If you're missing one or more of those libraries, you can still build the remaining parts of **asss**: If you're missing Python, remove **pymod.so** from the list of stuff to build (the variable **ALL_STUFF**). If you're missing mysql, remove **database.so**. If you're missing Berkeley DB, remove **persist.so**.

2.1 Building on FreeBSD

FIXME

2.2 Building on Windows

FIXME

3 Basic Architecture

I had several goals when designing **asss**: It should be modular, so that server admins could plug in their own custom functionality in addition to or in place of any part of the server. It should support runtime loading, so functionality could be added, removed, and upgraded without taking down the server. It should be robust and efficient.

Those goals led to a design that might look a little scary at first, but is actually pretty simple if you put a little effort into understanding it. However, there's a lot of indirection, and it can be difficult to understand the control flow in certain places, because of the pervasive use of callbacks. Hopefully this document can provide enough information that anyone can understand how it all works, and more importantly, can figure out how to modify or extend it to do what they want.

The three main pieces of the architecture are modules, interfaces, and callbacks.

3.1 Modules

Almost all of the code in **asss** is part of a module (just about everything except `main.c`, `module.c`, `cmod.c`, and `util.c`). A module is just a piece of code that runs as part of the server. Modules can currently be written in either C or Python.

Some examples of modules are **core**, which manages player logins and other really important bits, **flags**, which manages the flag game, **buy** which provides an implementation of the `?buy` command, **pymod** which allows Python modules to exist, and **persist**, which provides database services for the rest of the server.

Modules written in C have a single entry point function.

Modules by themselves can't do very much. In order to be useful, modules have to talk to other modules. The two main ways for modules to communicate are interfaces and callbacks.

3.2 Interfaces

An interface in **asss** is just a set of function signatures. They're implemented by C structs containing function pointers (and rarely, pointers to other types of C data). Each interface has an identifier (a string, although a C macro is used to hide the actual value of the string), and the identifier contains a version number. If the contents of an interface is changed, the version number should be incremented.

Interfaces are used for two slightly different purposes in **asss**: they are used for exporting functionality from one module to others, and they are used for customizing a specific part of the server's behavior. Both uses used the same set of functions, although in slightly different ways, so you should be aware of the differences.

The module manager (one of the pieces of **asss** that isn't in a module itself) manages interface pointers for the whole server. It has several available operations, which are exposed through an interface of its own:

- A module can register an interface for other modules to use. To do this, it creates a struct and initializes its fields with pointers to the functions it's going to use to implement the interface. (Almost always, this struct will be statically allocated.) A special macro is used to provide the identifier of the interface that this struct is going to implement, and also to provide a unique name for this implementation. Then the **RegInterface** function of the module manager interface is called.

An interface can be registered globally for the whole server, or registered for a single arena only.

- A module can unregister an interface that it has previously registered, using **UnregInterface**. The same arena pointer that is passed into **RegInterface** should be passed into this function. Note that unregistering an interface can fail! See below about reference counts.
- A module can request a pointer to an implementation of an interface, given the interface identifier, using **GetInterface**.
- A module can request a pointer to a specific implementation of an interface, with **GetInterfaceByName**.
- A module can return a reference to an interface that it acquired with one of the previous two functions, using **ReleaseInterface**.

3.2.1 Reference counts

Implementations of interfaces are reference counted. A module that calls either of the **GetInterface** calls that returns a valid pointer owns a reference to that implementation, and must later return it with **ReleaseInterface**. Calling **UnregInterface** on an interface pointer will fail if there are any outstanding references to that pointer (and it will return the number of references).

3.2.2 Arena-specific interfaces

The functions **RegInterface**, **UnregInterface**, and **GetInterface** all take an optional arena pointer. Interfaces that serve only to export functionality will generally be registered globally for the whole server, and there is only one possible implementation for each of them. To register an interface globally, or to request a globally registered interface, the macro **ALLARENAS** should be passed as the arena pointer.

Interfaces that are used to select among different behaviors might be registered per-arena. Passing a pointer to a valid arena to **RegInterface** makes that interface pointer available only to modules who call **GetInterface** with that arena. If a module calls **GetInterface** with a valid arena pointer, but there is no interface pointer with that id registered for that arena, it will fall back to an interface registered globally with that id, if possible. That allows a module to register a "default" implementation for an interface, and let other modules override it for specific arenas.

3.2.3 Priorities

Another feature available when using the interface system to select among different behaviors is priorities. Priorities should be used when it is expected that multiple implementations of the same interface will be registered globally at the same time. Currently, priorities are used when selecting which authentication implementation to use.

An implementation of an interface may specify a priority (any positive integer) using a variant of the macro used to specify the identifier and implementation name. As long as all implementations of that interface are registered with a priority, `GetInterface` will always return the one with the highest priority (in the absence of priorities, the last one registered will be returned).

Note that to use the priorities feature, *all* implementations of that interface must be registered with priorities.

3.2.4 Example: declaring, using, and defining interfaces

Declaring Here's a sample declaration of an interface, taken from `core.h`:

```
#define I_FREQMAN "freqman-1"

typedef struct Ifreqman {
    INTERFACE_HEAD_DECL
    void (*InitialFreq)(Player *p, int *ship, int *freq);
    void (*ShipChange)(Player *p, int *ship, int *freq);
    void (*FreqChange)(Player *p, int *ship, int *freq);
} Ifreqman;
```

The definition on the first line creates a macro that will be used to refer to the interface identifier (which consists of the string “`freqman`” followed by a version number). By convention, interface id macros are named `I_<something>`, and identifier strings are `<something>-<version>`.

Next, a C typedef is used to create a type for a struct. By convention, struct types start with a capital I followed by the interface name in lowercase. The first thing in the struct is a special macro (`INTERFACE_HEAD_DECL`) that sets up a few special fields used internally by the interface manager. The three fields are declared as function pointers using standard C syntax.

Using To call a function in this interface, a module might use code like this (adapted from `core.c`):

```
int freq = 0, ship = player->p_ship;
Ifreqman *fm = mm->GetInterface(I_FREQMAN, player->arena);
if (fm) {
    fm->InitialFreq(player, &ship, &freq);
    mm->ReleaseInterface(fm);
}
```

This code declares a pointer to a freq manager interface, and requests the registered implementation of the freq manager interface for the arena that the player is in. If it finds one, it calls a function in it and then releases the pointer.

The freq manager interface is of the kind used to select among alternate behavior. For interfaces used for exporting functionality, typically a module will call **GetInterface** for all the interfaces it needs when it loads, and then keep the pointers until it unloads, at which point it calls **ReleaseInterface** on all of them.

Defining This is a trivial implementation of the freq manager interface, used by the recorder module to lock all players in spectator mode:

```
local void freqman(Player *p, int *ship, int *freq)
{
    *ship = SPEC;
    *freq = 8025;
}

local struct Ifreqman lockspecfm =
{
    INTERFACE_HEAD_INIT(I_FREQMAN, "fm-lock-spec")
    freqman, freqman, freqman
};
```

First the functions that will implement the interface are defined. In this case, one real function is being used to implement three functions in the interface. Then a static struct is declared to represent the implementation. The first thing in the struct initializer is a macro, analogous to the macro used in the declaration. **INTERFACE_HEAD_INIT** takes two arguments: the first is the interface identifier, and the second is the unique name given to this implementation. Alternately, **INTERFACE_HEAD_INIT_PRI** can be used, which takes a third argument that is the priority.

3.3 Callbacks

Callbacks are somewhat simpler than interfaces, although they share many features. A callback is a single function signature, along with an identifier. Callback identifiers aren't versioned, but they probably should be.

Like interfaces, callbacks are also managed by the module manager. They can be registered globally or for a single arena. Unlike interfaces, many callbacks registered to the same identifier can exist at once, and all are used. The module manager functions dealing with callbacks are:

- To register a callback, use **RegCallback**, which takes a callback id, a function to call, and an arena to register it to. Like interfaces, use **ALLARENAS** to indicate a globally registered callback.
- Use **UnregCallback** to unregister a callback. It should be called with the same arguments as **RegCallback**.

- To query which callbacks are currently registered for an identifier, use `LookupResult`. They will be returned as a list.
- After using the list, use `FreeLookupResult` to return the memory used by the list.

Most of the time, you can use a provided macro to invoke all the callbacks of a certain type, so you won't need to use `LookupResult` and `FreeLookupResult` at all.

3.3.1 Example: declaring, defining, and calling a callback

Declaring Here's how the flag win callback is declared:

```
#define CB_FLAGWIN "flagwin"
typedef void (*FlagWinFunc)(Arena *arena, int freq);
```

There's a macro (the naming convention is to start callback macro names with `CB_`), and a C typedef giving a name to the function signature. All callbacks should return void.

Defining To register a function to be called for this event:

```
local void MyFlagWin(Arena *arena, int freq)
{
    /* ... contents of function ... */
}

/* somewhere in the module entry point */
mm->RegCallback(CB_FLAGWIN, MyFlagWin, ALLARENAS);
```

Calling There is a special macro provided to make calling callbacks easier: `DO_CBS`. To use it, you must provide the callback id, the arena that things are taking place in (or `ALLARENAS` if there is no applicable arena), the C type of the callback functions, and the arguments to pass to each registered function. It looks like:

```
DO_CBS(CB_FLAGWIN, arena, FlagWinFunc, (arena, freq));
```

4 Important data structures

There are several important structures that you'll need to know about to do anything useful with `asss`. This section will describe each of them in detail.

4.1 Player

The `Player` structure is one of the most important in `asss`. There's one of these for each client connected to the server. These structures are created and managed by the `playerdata` module. (The details of when exactly in the connection process a player struct is allocated is covered below, in the section on the player state machine.)

The first part of the player struct, which contains many important fields, is actually in the format of the packet that gets sent to players to inform them about other players. The benefit of using the packet format directly to store those fields is that there's no copying necessary when the packet needs to be sent, as the necessary information is already in the right format.

The format of the player data packet, and then the main player struct, will be given below, and then each field will be covered in detail.

```
struct PlayerData {
    u8 pkttype;
    i8 ship;
    u8 acceptaudio;
    char name[20];
    char squad[20];
    i32 killpoints;
    i32 flagpoints;
    i16 pid;
    i16 freq;
    i16 wins;
    i16 losses;
    i16 attachedto;
    i16 flagscarried;
    u8 miscbits;
};

struct Player {
    PlayerData pkt;
#define p_ship pkt.ship
#define p_freq pkt.freq
#define p_attached pkt.attachedto
    int pid, status, type, whenloggedin;
    Arena *arena, *oldarena;
    char name[24], squad[24];
    i16 xres, yres;
    ticks_t connecttime;
    unsigned int ignoreweapons;
    struct PlayerPosition position;
    u32 macid, permid;
    char ipaddr[16];
    const char *connectas;
    struct {
        unsigned authenticated : 1;
        unsigned during_change : 1;
        unsigned want_all_lvz : 1;
        unsigned during_query : 1;
        unsigned no_ship : 1;
    };
};
```

```

        unsigned no_flags_balls : 1;
        unsigned sent_ppk : 1;
        unsigned see_all_posn : 1;
        unsigned padding1 : 24;
    } flags;
    byte playerextradata[0];
};

```

Details on the specific fields of the player data packet:

pktype The type byte for the player data packet.

ship The ship that the player is in. 0 for Warbird, 8 for spectator.

acceptaudio Whether the player is willing to accept .wav messages.

name The player's name. Note: this field is *not* necessarily null-terminated.

squad The player's squad. Note: this field is *not* necessarily null-terminated.

killpoints, flagpoints Part of the player's score. Note that **asss** doesn't use these fields as the authoritative score, and in the future, they might be unused entirely.

pid An identifier for the player. Pids are used extensively in the game protocol, but not used much internally in the server.

freq The player's frequency.

wins, losses More parts of the score. See notes on killpoints and flagpoints.

attachedto Contains the pid of the player that this player is a turret on.

flagscarried The number of flags that the player is holding. This field isn't guaranteed to be accurate, and is only used to help the client figure out where the flags are when it first enters.

miscbits Currently, this field is used only for specifying whether the player has a King-of-the-Hill crown or not.

Details on the specific fields of the player structure:

pkt This is the player data packet described above.

p.ship This "virtual" field refers to the ship field of pkt.

p.freq This "virtual" field refers to the freq field of pkt.

p.attached This "virtual" field refers to the attachedto field of pkt.

pid The player id of the player. It should always agree with the pid value in pkt.

status The current state of the player. See the description of the player state machine below. State values are named with an initial **S_**.

type The client type of this player. Possible values are `T_UNKNOWN`, `T_FAKE` (a fake player created and managed by the server, used for autoturrets), `T_VIE` (a Subspace 1.34 or 1.35 client), `T_CONT` (a Continuum client), or `T_CHAT` (a client using the chat protocol).

whenloggedin This field is used by the player state machine to make the proper transitions when a player is logging out.

arena A pointer to the arena that this player is in. It may be null if the player isn't in an arena yet, or is between arenas.

oldarena This stores the previous value of arena when arena is set to null. It's used to make sure scores and other persistent information is saved properly when switching arenas or logging out.

name The player's name, guaranteed to be null terminated.

squad The player's squad, guaranteed to be null terminated.

xres, yres The player's screen resolution. Only valid when arena is not null and for standard (`T_VIE` and `T_CONT`) clients.

connecttime The time when the player first connected (in ticks).

position The last known position of the player. This contains a few self-explanatory fields: `x`, `y`, `xspeed`, `yspeed`, and `bounty`. It also contains a status field, which is a bitfield of various ship equipment.

macid, permid Various identifying values provided by standard clients.

ipaddr A textual representation of the IP address the client is connected from.

connectas If the player has connected to a virtual server that specifies a default arena name, this will point to that name. Otherwise it will be null.

flags These are a bunch of one-bit flags that are used throughout the server:

- authenticated** If the player has been authenticated by either a billing server or a password file.
- during_change** Set when the player has changed freqs or ships, but before he has acknowledged it.
- want_all_lvz** If the player wants optional .lvz files.
- during_query** If the player is waiting for db query results.
- no_ship** If the player's lag is too high to let him be in a ship.
- no_flags_balls** If the player's lag is too high to let him have flags or balls.
- sent_ppk** If the player has sent a position packet since entering the arena.
- see_all_posn** If the player is a bot who wants all position packets.

playerextradata This variable-length array is carved up by the player manager to store per-player data for other modules in the server. See the section on per-player data below.

4.2 Arena

FIXME

4.3 Target

FIXME

5 Memory management

FIXME

5.1 Per-player data

FIXME

5.2 Per-arena data

FIXME

6 Threading

FIXME

7 Persistent data

FIXME

8 The Python interface

FIXME

9 Misc. internals

9.1 The player state machine

FIXME

9.2 The arena state machine

FIXME

10 Reference

10.1 Source code files

FIXME

10.2 Interfaces

FIXME

10.3 Callbacks

FIXME

10.4 The utility library

FIXME

11 Tutorials

11.1 log_console

FIXME

11.2 logman

FIXME