Inside ADRIFT

Welcome to Inside ADRIFT! If you have any content you would like to contribute, please mail me at mysterydrifter@netzero.com

Contents

Announcements!

Another Comp!

Rumors are swirling about perhaps another competition in the works for August. Details are still sketchy at this point, but we'll keep you informed when more information is available. My sources tell me it will be a 20 room mini-comp.

Happy Birthday Drifters!

Incoming=22, gamefreak1020=15, ShogunNz=30, fairyyale=20, azurestone=19, Heal Butcher=29, CowInparachute=14

Drifters Toolbox

Sometimes authors want a little more in their games besides plain old text. The ability to add music to ADRIFT adventures is an added bonus for those who enjoy a little more atmosphere. With Anvil Studio, you can do just that. You can create simple sound effects and create harmonized midi to add that special touch to your game. It is especially kind to those that have no musical talent. Best of all- It's FREE! You can find it at http://www.anvilstudio.com/

News

The ADRIFT Spring Competition has ended. Though there were not many participants this year, the games that were entered were well above the standard. The winning entry was **To hell in a Hamper**,created by Jason Guest . For those that have not yet played the game, I won' t give away the details. But I have to say its amazing that so much could come from a one room game.

The other entries were **Cowboy Blues**, by David Whyld and **House** by Syke39. All off the entries were very well done and it is easy to tell that a great deal of effort went out by all. Congratulations to everyone that entered the competition and thanks to everyone who took the time to participate by being a judge.

New Addition to the Wild Family

There is a new addition to the Wild Family. Her name is Indie, and she is tortoise shell grey/brown/ginger. Some of us were lucky enough to catch a glimpse of her, while Campbell visited us in the ADRIFT Chat on MSN. With any luck, Indie won' t chew the cables too badly, and leave us in chaos!

Breaking Out of Writer's Block - Part 3 *By Apryl Duncan*

- **Use Real Pictures**

  Flip through a magazine. Cut out pictures, headlines, even certain blocks of text. Now write a short story based on your clippings.

  For example, you might cut out a picture of a man riding a bicycle on page 14 of your favorite magazine. On page 22 you cut out a quote that says, "Anyone caught doing this will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

  Your story could turn into one man' s crusade. Perhaps this man' s riding his bicycle across country because he' s outraged by automobile pollution levels. His point is to raise people' s awareness about the effects of pollution.

  Meanwhile, police keep hindering his efforts because the man' s riding his bicycle on the freeway, a violation of the law. So you have a man on his bicycle and the police quote, "Anyone caught doing this will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

- **Doodle**

Yes! You were scolded in elementary school for doodling on your paper. Now you have full permission.

Free your mind while scribbling. No need to think about your character's next move. No plot structures to consider. Just a sense of connecting your pen to paper.

- **Object Focus**

  Take a look around you. Does something catch your eye? Even something as simple as a stapler. Describe an object in full detail. Start with its size, shape, color.

- **Building Blocks**

  Romance. Mystery. Thrillers. All genres have their own keywords. Build keywords from your own genre.

  If you're a romance writer, you could come up with words like love, marriage, betrayal, lust, happiness. Jot down as many words as you can think of.

- **Life Events**

  The birth of a child. Holidays. Graduation. Weddings. We all have our favorite life events. Pick one of your own and write down all your thoughts and feelings about that day. Turn it into a story.

- **Network**

  Many authors beat Writer's Block or avoid it altogether by networking with their fellow writers. Bulletin boards, chats and writer's Web sites all offer you the chance to meet other authors and work your way through the many facets of fiction writing.

  Think of talking with other writers as your own personal support group.

Writer's Block may attack you at some point in your writing career but always remember: WB isn't fatal. Overcoming WB is not impossible. WB's only temporary.

Apryl Duncan is the founder of http://www.fictionaddiction.NET, a Writer's Digest Magazine Top 101 Web Site for Writers. She is an author, workshop instructor and professional freelance writer who enjoys writing everything from mystery novels to how-to articles on the writing craft.

Interview - Special Guest David Whyld

Interviewed by Woodfish

Behind The Avatar: Davidw

One of the most prominent members of our forum, davidw, has always been a bit of a mystery to me. Sure, we're all aware of his great games, and views on ADRIFT, but do we really know the real Davidw? I jumped him last week, as he returned home from work. After some frenzied confusion, I got to hear some of his thoughts, views, and speculations.

First of all, I'd like to know you a little better. Tell me, who exactly is davidw?

Okay, my name's David Whyld. Hobbies I'd put down as ADRIFT, endlessly replaying "Baldur's Gate 2: Shadows of Amn" (you know a game is becoming a bit of an obsession when you've finished it four times and still find yourself yearning for another go) and trying – with the emphasis on "trying" – to write a novel. My job? I work as a legal secretary/trainee domestic conveyancing solicitor. And yes, it really is as boring as it sounds.

So how did you first get involved in interactive fiction, and more importantly, ADRIFT?

I got involved in interactive fiction back in the mid-80's. I don't remember the first text adventure I ever played but I know the first one I really liked was "The Hobbit", which I'd still rate as the finest piece of IF ever written. I just found games like that so much more interesting than the usual stuff that seemed to be around at the time – Space Invaders, Pac Man, Manic Miner, etc, etc – and I remember thinking "one day I'll write something better than that!" Which is something I haven't done yet but one day, who knows…

I first came across ADRIFT in about August 2001. I remember finding some text adventures on a site when I was surfing the internet one day and being quite surprised that IF was still going – I hadn't played a text adventure since the very early 90's and had been under the impression that with the death of the Spectrum and Commodore home computers, the bottom had pretty much fell out of the market. So it was quite a pleasant surprise to find that IF had been carrying on all these years and, even better, there were programs like ADRIFT that took away the hassle of programming (always a horror to someone who just can't be bothered with such things!) and left you to just write your games without the necessity to pour over hundreds of pages of code.

What makes ADRIFT appeal to you more than, say, Inform or TADS?

I guess the main reason most people use ADRIFT: Its ease of use. I' ve never really had the urge to learn a complex programming language such as TADS or Inform for the sake of writing a text adventure, which I look on as more a hobby than anything else. I don't know if the IF market is ever going to pick up again and one day reach the stage whereby you can make a financial living out of writing text adventures so I tend to just approach the whole thing as something that interests me and passes the time.

I downloaded TADS before ADRIFT, but the manual looked to have been written in either some obscure foreign language I didn't speak, or in the kind of techno jargon that has always made me shake my head in bemusement.

So that's a pretty long winded way of saying: I use ADRIFT because it's nice and easy to use. Maybe there are advantages to TADS and Inform that ADRIFT hasn't got, but if you've got to go to the hassle of learning them first that takes most of the fun out of game writing. The best text adventure I'll ever write might well be waiting for me with TADS, yet for some strange reason I can't quite put my finger on, the very idea of spending the next three years poring over code just doesn't really appeal to me…

The games you've written vary in their subject matter quite a lot, from fantasy adventures, to detective crime solvers. Where do you get your inspiration from?

I actually thought the subject matter of my games is pretty similar: comedy, comedy, comedy and one horror! It wasn't intended that way. The first game I wrote was a comedy and I intended to follow it with a fantasy and then a horror, but somewhere along the way the fantasy just lost interest for me and the horror – after sitting on my hard drive for six or seven months – eventually became "Lair of the Vampire". So at the present time I've written about ten games and – with one exception – they've been comedies. I' m not sure why really as I prefer science fiction or horror, but I guess the simple reason is that I find comedy easier to write.

Inspiration? Not sure really. I very rarely watch a film and get inspired to write a game about what I' ve seen, and the same applies to books as well. The idea for "Scene of the Crime" and its sequel "City in Fear" came from an old Spectrum game I was playing when I first discovered ADRIFT called "The Big Sleaze". "YADFA" and "ONNAFA" were just ideas that I had one day – I started writing "YADFA" about ten minutes after I came up with the idea of an adventure in which you go to rescue a princess from an evil sorcerer. Its original title was "Adventure Quest" which was seriously lame and I struggled more with the title than I did with the game itself before finally deciding I'd call it something dumb and leave it at that – "Yet Another Damn Fantasy Adventure" seemed quite an apt title at the time, and an accurate one besides.

You've churned out a fair few games in your time - what's the secret to getting so many done in so little time?

To be honest, I've always wondered at how few games other people write. I don't find writing games difficult and it wasn't until I'd done something like half a dozen games in a year that I began to realise I was writing them a lot faster than other people seemed to be. I guess some of it comes from whether you're a perfectionist or not: are you the sort of person who agonises over every object, task and event in your game? Do you spend hours typing your locations descriptions and then often scrap them altogether because you haven't written something resoundingly spectacular? Or are you the sort of person who just writes the first thing that comes into his head and is happy with it?

Actually, I probably fall somewhere between the two. I don't agonise over every little thing in my games but neither do I just write something and never touch it again. If I'm happy with what I've wrote– and I tend to be because I find it difficult to be critical about anything I've done (even the bad ones)– it generally stays that way.

On average, I write for about half an hour to an hour a day and get around 3-4 KB done (under V4, or about 9-12 KB under V3.9) so if I manage to write something every day – and I find it easier to work on a game day by day instead of in fits and starts – I get about 20-25 KB done a week. So in the average month I could do a 100 KB adventure. Considering that, it's not really hard to write a game every few months. Or, if I was wanting to write smaller adventures, a game every couple of weeks.

What would you consider the best advice to IF programmers? What rules do you try to abide by when making games?

Actually I've probably been guilty of many of the things I'd advise other IF programmers to avoid. My first game – "Blood Relative" – was impossibly hard and suffered the sort of guess-the-verb that I quite often write scathing reviews about if anyone else dares to use it. "Scene of the Crime" had a fair amount of GTV as well, "YADFA" had a tendency to kill the player without any warning – not necessarily a bad thing, in my humble opinion, if you don't overuse it to the extent where the player's dying every five seconds.

But I think I'm getting better as I go along at avoiding the bad things in my games, although of course it's never that easy to judge just how hard you're making a game. (I wait expectantly here to see if Mystery is going to insert a comment about beta-testing…)

The best advice I would give then is: no GTV, if you're going to use puzzles in your game make them straightforward and logical, and always – always – give hints. People often get stuck and if they get stuck early in your game, they're very likely to give up and never come back to it. And don't try to be so clever that you put people off playing your game: there's no big deal about making a game so hard that no one ever finishes it. If it's too hard they'll probably never even try.

Where do you think the future of IF lies? Are you expecting a rise in popularity, possibly it breaking onto the mainstream, or for it to die out completely?

To be honest I can't really see IF competing against the likes of the graphical extravaganzas we tend to get these days, even though the most talked about ones – "Neverwinter Nights", "Dungeon Siege", etc – are pretty naff once you take away the state of the art graphics. The way things are, people tend to look on IF as a novelty that blossomed in the 80's and then died out. Or if it didn't die out, these people think it probably should have. Who, after all, wants to look at lines of text on a screen when you can look at amazingly lifelike 3D graphics? But we can always hope…

I don't imagine it will ever die out though. It might have if the internet hadn't flourished the way it has done, but I think that provided the programs – like ADRIFT – that we use to write adventures continue to improve, there will always be an audience for it.

And ADRIFT?

The future of ADRIFT? I imagine it will rise. I don't think it's looked on quite the same way as it was when I first came across it – I remember almost every forum saying that TADS was the way to go, or Inform, or HUGO – but it's still not considered on a level with the likes of TADS. The root problem with this is that its so easy to use anyone can use it, literally. Someone with mental problems could download it and write a game with it (as has probably happened already considering the state of some of the games you tend to come across) whereas with TADS or Inform, you'd have to learn a programming language first and if you weren't really serious about – i.e. you're only doing it for a laugh or to pass the time because you're bored – you'd give it long before you got your first TADS game done. With ADRIFT you can write a game in five minutes. Unfortunately when you do that the game tends to be downright awful and it's this sort of thing, more than any actual drawbacks with the program itself, that tends to make the rest of the IF community look down its nose at ADRIFT. After all, if you came to ADRIFT and the first game you played was "Death Agency" you're hardly going to be impressed with what ADRIFT can do.

Hopefully though the way ADRIFT is viewed will change over the years. ADRIFT games fared better in the IFComp last year than they ever have before (though that was probably more due to the fact that they were better games than the previous year's entries), and thanks to the likes of "The PK Girl" others in the IF community finally seem to be realising that maybe, just maybe, ADRIFT does have something to offer. What would really be the clincher is for an ADRIFT game to win the IFComp – that and that alone would firmly put paid to all the snide insinuations that ADRIFT isn't as good as the others IF programs.

Finally, have you got any projects under way at the moment? Care to divulge a few?

The game I'm currently writing is called "Cowboy Blues" – yet another comedy, this time about a bank clerk in a town called Stonetomb who has to save the town from a gang of outlaws. I'm planning to enter it in KF's spring comp which, by the time anyone reads this, will probably be well under way. So if I win I'd just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who voted for me and say I knew I was going to win all along. If I lose, well… it was fixed!

After that I'm going to get on with:

"Mind Shadows" – a horror about a writer slowly losing his mind and a place he visits called Markham House where nothing is as it seems.
"Sophie's Adventure" – which I'm intending to enter into the IFcomp this year (wish me luck!) about a young girl who makes a birthday wish for an adventure and gets more than she bargained for.
"Musings of a Foul Old Man" – the FOM's first text adventure. Not a comedy but a serious look at just how hard it is for an ugly, foul-mouthed, deceitful, lying, scandalous, hateful old fellow to make his way in the world faced with the kind of prejudice…. Oh, okay it's a comedy.
And somewhere along the way I'm even going to get on with the collaboration project Soothsayer started a thread about on the forum a while back.

Thank you for your time, davidw.

And as I untied davidw, and he ran away, casting back scared looks as he went, I gazed on at him, happy in the fact that I had got to know him a little better.

Review - Silk Noil *By Heal Butcher*
David Whyld

I've been playing text adventures for close to twenty years and in all that time, this has to be, without a doubt, the strangest one I have ever come across. It's downright weird, almost frighteningly so. And, also, quite brilliant.

Giving a description of just what Silk Noil is about is difficult because, even after finishing the game and playing through it several more times to try and get a better idea, I still don't really have a clue about it. It's one of those games which plays at times more like a strange trip through the writer's mind than a 'real' game in the sense that most of us would define a real game. There are no real puzzles to solve and the game can be completed in less than a dozen moves. The 'objective' – if such a word can be applied to a game like Silk Noil - is to seize a key from the strange Silk King and open a door with it, although quite why is never explained and little is achieved even after the door is opened. But then I suspect that Silk Noil was never really designed as a game in which puzzles need to be solved: the idea was to write something strange and original – and at this Silk Noil clearly excels.

If you persevere with the game and try to overcome the sheer strangeness of it, Silk Noil is quite a captivating little game – the emphasis being on "little" as there are no more than four locations in total to explore although because of the lengthy descriptions given to each and the way part of the description often changes through clever use of events it sometimes seems to be a far larger game than it really is. The writing is excellent from start to finish though at times is pretty hard going. It takes several read throughs before you fully understand just what the writer is trying to say and even then you might find yourself shaking your head in confusion a time or two.

Silk Noil clearly isn't a game that will appeal to a large audience: it's too strange to have mass appeal and the style of writing is offputting when you first start playing it. Also there are the strange references to the Silk King spraying perfume from a phallic shaped bottle onto his crotch whilst being crawled upon by a host of minute women that I can well imagine would dissuade more than a few people. I guess this is the sort of game that will divide players into two groups: those who love it and those who hate it.

Personally I loved it.

Logic: 3 out of 10
The game made no sense whatsoever although I'm sure this was intentional.

Problems: 10 out of 10 (10 = no problems)
Weirdness aside, Silk Noil had no real problems although the game is so strange it would be a challenge noticing them in any event.

Story: 7 out of 10 Bizarre would be the best way to describe it. It held my attention for the time I was playing it although I'd really struggle to give a decent description of what it was about.

Characters: 7 out of 10 Only the aforementioned Silk King who was the strangest character I've ever come across while playing a text adventure.

Writing: 9 out of 10
Truly inspiring.

Game: 7 out of 10
Speaking from the group of people who loved the game, I'm giving it 7 out of 10 although I could well understand people rating it 1. At worst, view it as something different and original and the sort of game you're never likely to come across again.

Overall: 43 out of 60

In The Manual

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Objects

Objects are the substances within games. They are physical things that can be examined and can be manipulated in many different ways.

To add an object, either select Add > Object from the menus, or click on the object icon. This will bring up the Add an object dialog box.

Object Types

There are two types of object in ADRIFT; Dynamic objects, and Static objects. The Player can pick up dynamic objects, whereas static objects are fixed in specific rooms. When you view a room all dynamic objects will be listed, in the format "Also here is ...".

Descriptions

Every object requires to be given a name. This is how you will refer to the object in the game. You should try to keep this as short as possible with any extra descriptions being put into the object prefix. This means that it will be easier for the player to refer to the object during the game, as this will have to be typed every time the object is referenced.

The prefix should contain any adjectives for the object, and determine whether or not it is singular (i.e. "a large", "an", "some purple").

Objects can be given any number of aliases. These are alternative names that can be used in the game to refer to the object. For example, if you wanted to create a red poppy, you would set the prefix to be "a bright red", the object name to be "poppy", and an alias to be "flower". To add multiple aliases, simply type the alias into the box and press Enter.

Objects can be given a description. This will be displayed if the player types "examine object" in the game. If nothing is entered, it will appear in the game as "Nothing special." If completing a task changes the appearance of the object, then you can select the task from the But if task pull down menu, and enter the new description in the second text box. This description supersedes the first one.

Objects and Locations-Look for that in next issue!

Mystery is the editor of Inside ADRIFT. Thanks to everyone who made contributions to this issue and continue to show support. If you have something you would like to contribute, please e-mail me at mysterydrifter@netzero.com