Inside ADRIFT

Welcome to Inside ADRIFT! Getting this newsletter out has been a great challenge. Anything that could go wrong, did! It is finally together and I hope all of you enjoy it. If you have any content you would like to contribute, please mail me at mysterydrifter@netzero.com

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Back to BetaDrifter-Find Beta-Testers for your adventures and learn how you can become a beta-tester too!

Announcement!

The ADRIFT Spring Competition is open for any unreleased, but complete, ADRIFT games. Competition entries must be in by 20 April 2003, with judging taking place in the following week. ADRIFT Spring Competition

Due to a conflict in scheduling, the winner of The ADRIFT One Room Competition for unregistered ADRIFT users, held By Jason Guest (aka- The Amazing Poodle Boy), the winner will be posted at a later date. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Happy Birthday Drifters!

Black Mage-12, Liz Parnell-22, Kerikhan-17, neo-15, Superplonker-19, EdS-34, FireWyrm-20, merryjest-24, chocolatecake888-28, JodoKast-16

Congratulations to MileOut for selecting the name of our newsletter!

News

Excitement is building over the development of jAsea. The program is said to allow ADRIFT games to be played online, and on different operating systems. Be sure to see the interview with Ralph Merridew, jAsea creator.

The XYZZY News Awards have ended. The Awards were held on Sunday, March 2, 2003. Congratulations to everyone who took part and made their vote count. And the AWARDS go to:

BEST USE OF MEDIUM: Earth and Sky 2 (Paul O'Brian)
BEST INDIVIDUAL PC: Pierre, from Savoir Faire (Emily Short)
BEST INDIVIDUAL NPC: Boldo, from Lock & Key (Adam Cadre)
BEST INDIVIDUAL PUZZLE: Setting the traps, from Lock & Key (Adam Cadre)
BEST NPCS: Lock & Key (Adam Cadre)
BEST PUZZLES: Savoir Faire (Emily Short)
BEST SETTING: 1893: A World's Fair Mystery (Peter Nepstad)
BEST STORY: Savoir Faire (Emily Short)
BEST WRITING: The Moonlit Tower (Yoon Ha Lee)
BEST GAME: Savoir Faire (Emily Short)

Breaking out of Writer's Block

By Apryl Duncan

  You stare at the blank page. The white of the page embeds itself in your brain, resulting in your mind going blank. Breaking out of the block doesn't have to be a mind-boggling challenge, though. Explore the causes and the cure and you'll be writing again in no time.

Common Causes

- **Unrealistic Goals**

  If you've decided that you're going to write from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. every single day - no matter what - then you're probably pushing yourself too hard.

  Your writing will become dull and drab. The natural flow you once knew will temporarily escape to Writer's Block Island with the rest of your writing talents.

- **Stress!**

  We all know how stress can affect your mood. But stress can also affect your writing.

  For instance, say all you wanted to do was come home from work and write until bedtime. Your boss makes you stay late. Your supper was a half-cooked hamburger and cold fries from a local fast food restaurant. Your dog wants to go out. And all you want to do is crawl in bed and forget the entire day.

  As much as we try to carry a stiff upper lip, we're still human. External factors can affect our mood and ultimately affect our writing. Our focus shifts to all the bad things that happened in our day and writing becomes the last thing we want to do.

- **Neglecting Our Writing**

  Sometimes Writer's Block comes from not writing! Writing every day is essential to keeping those creative juices flowing.

  You don't have to make an impossible deal with yourself to write 100 pages of your manuscript in one sitting. Taking as little as 10 minutes a day helps keep you writing and words will flow from your mind much easier.

- **Perfectionism**

  The perfect paragraph, word after word, is a carefully constructed piece of art. But hanging yourself up on creating that perfect paragraph will win you an all-expense paid trip to Writer's Block Island.

  If you run into this problem, give yourself and your writing a cooling off period. After a couple of days, re-visit your work and see where or even if it needs improvement. Your mind will be fresh and clear, giving you a whole new perspective on your own writing.

- **Research-Related**

  A lot of writers don't realize how research can even be a hangup. Maybe you can't finish your crime novel because you don't know how police would handle a certain situation in reality.

  Sometimes the answer isn't so obvious and we try to write our way around it. All we really need to do is a little more research.

  Coming Next Issue! Part 2 of Breaking Out of Writer's Block cracks the case on this dreaded word disease.

  Apryl Duncan is the founder of 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 Ralph Merridew, jAsea creator

Interviewed by Matt (Dark Baron)

It recently came up on the forum that a thing called jAsea could be used to play ADRIFT games online. I, Matt (Dark Baron) went to Ralph Merridew, author of jAsea, to find out more.

What is jAsea?

jAsea is an open source clone of the ADRIFT runner. It is designed so it can be run directly or be run as an applet in a browser.

So you could upload it to a website with an ADRIFT game and be able to play the game online?

That's correct. My original plans were only for use as application, but I realized that it would take very little work to make it so it would also run as an applet.

Why were you making jAsea previously then?

During [IF] Competition 2002, I was rather impressed with the amount of detail that Robert Goodwin put into the game [PK Girl]. I thought that the games should be able to run on a wider variety of computers.

So what other systems does jAsea run on?

It should run on any system that can run java 1.1. I'm personally developing it under Linux, and I have reports of it working on Windows and Mac OS.

What implications do you think jAsea will have on the if community?

I'm not sure. For one, it will increase the size of the audience [playing Adrift games], which will change the kinds of feedback that the authors get. It also makes games a bit more available on impulse.

Have you had any help/influence/advice from Campbell about jAsea?

No. I sent him reports of a few ambiguities I discovered while working out the format, but he has not replied. As far as I know, he may not have even heard of the project. Also, my first public announcement of the project was in mid-December, shortly before he went offline, and that announcement was fairly quiet.

How did you work out the format?

It was a fairly straightforward but tedious process. I guessed that he used the zlib / libz format because it is open-source. I downloaded all the documentation on zlib, and found that the compressed part starts with a certain header. I looked through a few .taf files, and found that header 22 bytes in. I fed the data, after that, to a decompressor and was able to get semi-intelligible output consisting of numbers and the game text. Then I made a small file, and changed one thing at a time. I kept doing that until I'd worked out most of the format. (I haven't taken the time to analyze the Battle System related data.)

Have you enjoyed working on jAsea?

Working on the project, I've had mixed emotions. I got very frustrated a few times when the TAF format behaved in a manner completely unlike how I expected. And in late January, due to lack of feedback from any players, I was considering giving up the project completely. Fortunately, before that happened, KFAdrift noticed Simon Baldwin's post and started the "Have drifters seen this on RAIF" thread. There was a pretty large response on the ADRIFT forum when jAsea was first mentioned.

How big was the response on RAIF?

A few people posted responses; Benjamin Fan added some comments to the code. Simon Baldwin used the code as a base for his on clone of the runner. But there really wasn't much of a response.

Where do you see jAsea going?

I'm working towards full compatibility with the official runner, and hope to keep up with future releases.

Thank you very much for your time, Ralph. May jAsea continue to grow.
Thanks. See you.

You can download jAsea from the project's homepage at http://sourceforge.net/projects/jasea If you wish to see jAsea in action, jAsea has been configured to play *When Beer Isn't Enough* at http://wbie.tripod.com Scare is another Adrift runner clone. You can find out more about it at http://www.geocities.com/legion_if/scare.html

Review - Melbourne Beach *By David Good*
Review by David Whyld

Melbourne Beach is different from most ADRIFT adventures (and most text adventures full stop) in that it isn't really a game at all but a tour around the writer's house. Well, it certainly makes a nice change from all those "save the world from evil" or "find the hidden treasure" storylines.

While there's a lot to like about *Melbourne Beach*, it's not without its share of setbacks. The main one I found was that, while wandering around someone's house is interesting enough in its own right, you rapidly find yourself yearning for something to do, and while there are a few tasks that need to be completed, with no real goal defined at the start of the game it's often a struggle trying to figure out just what to do next. When the game starts it's fairly easy to guess what needs to be done: find yourself some clothes and get dressed. But once that's out of the way, what you do next proves something more of a challenge. There are a fair number of locations to explore but none really seem to present any puzzles for the player to solve and before long you'll more than likely find yourself wondering just what else the game has to offer. There are quite a few other things to do but finding them is often more of a challenge than doing them.

On the plus side, the writing is at least up to the writer's usual standard and the locations are nicely detailed. Item descriptions tend to be a pretty much hit and miss affair: some locations are packed with examinable items whereas others contain items galore that upon trying to examine them you find yourself faced with the dreaded "you see no such thing". Perhaps one advantage to this is that the items you can reference tend to be the ones you need to solve certain tasks whereas the ones you can't reference don't serve any purpose, but all the same it would have been nice to have a few more examinable items.

A difficult game to review due to the lack of storyline and lack of things to do, *Melbourne Beach* is at least reasonably playable. It passes the time and is never too demanding on the old grey matter. Overall it's a fair game but hardly one that compares to the writer's other works like *Menagerie*.

Logic: 8 out of 10
Mostly logical throughout although some of the location exits seemed messed up.

Problems: 7 out of 10 (10 = no problems)
A more detailed background telling you the purpose of the game (or at least providing a few hints) would have been a big help. The only actual bug I encountered involved the garage which was impossible to enter even when I'd opened the door.

Story: 3 out of 10
No real storyline as such.

Characters: 4 out of 10
Two characters – the author and his mother – but I was hard pressed to find anything they could respond to. Asking them about each other gave the unhelpful response "[character] isn't here!"

Writing: 7 out of 10
As always above average.

Game: 5 out of 10
Playable but with little actual storyline this isn't the sort of game you're likely to find yourself going back to many times.

Overall: 34 out of 60

In The Manual

Page 9 of the ADRIFT V4 Manual

Rooms
Rooms form the basis of your adventure. They are the locations in which you can visit. You can generally move between different rooms using the cardinal directions North, East, South and West, and also Up, Down, In and Out. Some adventures also have off-cardinal directions, i.e. Northeast, Southeast, Southwest and Northwest. These have to be explicitly enabled in the Options screen.

To create a room, either select Add > Room from the menus, or click on the icon. This will bring up the Add a room dialog box.

The two most important aspects of a room description are the Short description, and the Long description.

The Short description is the label that will appear at the bottom of the Runner screen at all times, to show the player where they are. It will also be the description displayed when revisiting a room, unless verbose has been turned on. You can select to have this displayed in bold before the long room description by checking the relevant box in the display options in Runner.

The Long description is the main description that describes the room in detail. Here, you would want to mention everything about the room that does not change each time you visit it.

You may want to prevent the room being displayed on the map. Typically, this might be because it is part of a maze or suchlike. To do this, check the Don't show on map checkbox.

If you are creating a room for the first time that is all you should need for now. For more advanced changes to the room description, you may want to alter the description depending on certain events. To do this, you will need Alternate Descriptions.

Look for that in next issue!

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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