DRIFTERS MONTHLY

DRIFTERS MONTHLY is an independent newsletter, in no way official and came about just by a bunch of drifters on the forum (www.adrift.org.uk/forum.html) who decided to make one for fun. All work on this newsletter is original content from the respective authors, and please do not copy it without their prior consent.

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the first edition of Drifters Monthly. This is the result of weeks of plotting, planning, writing and chasing up on people. It has all been worth it though, this seems to me like a great first issue. Before you all start reading, though, I'd like to say a few things.

First, I will be posting this issue to several newsgroups and forums, to let everyone know what kind of things you can find in this newsletter. After this, it will be email only, and you will have to subscribe to it to receive the newsletter. To subscribe, send your email address and name to yimcphee@hotmail.com and you'll be added.

May I also add that the site www.driftersmonthly.8m.com is the site for the newsletter, and once each issue has been released, I will be posting it on there too, the only difference being there will be working links and use of HTML. I hope to get this site up within a few weeks.

Anyone can write for Drifters Monthly. I am constantly looking for reviews, previews, letters and articles, and if you would like to submit one, simply email it to me at yimcphee@hotmail.com and I'll put it in.

That's all for now, enjoy the issue!

- Woodfish, 29th August 2002

FEEDBACK

If you have any suggestions or questions about the newsletter, please send me an email (yimcphee@hotmail.com). Or, if you find any errors or anything wrong with the letter, please tell me. Thanks.

MUT'S RANTS

First off, I'd like to welcome all of you to my column, lovingly called "Mut's Rants". For those of you who don't know me, I'm a computer and movie addict with a love for interactive fiction, cult cinema, and all things controversial.

The other day I was sitting in my favorite chair, wondering just what I was going to write about. As this is an IF newsletter, I thought that it might be appropriate to discuss the main subject: interactive fiction.

Why is it that people like IF so much? Is it because of the fact that it uses words instead of pictures, allowing the player to visualize for themselves the game they're playing? Is it because it exercises the mind, entertaining as well as expanding one's vocabulary? Or perhaps some just find it a good substitute for sleeping pills.

Myself, I love the fact that it uses the imagination. Game developers are always bragging that their new game has an "improved graphics engine" or that it now includes "UltraMax bump mapping" or some other such industry babble. Regular computer games have always been restricted in that no matter how detailed their environments may be, no matter how many pixels they can cram onto the screen at one time, they will never be able to achieve absolute realism.

With interactive fiction, the words are simply a guide, a few sentences designed to help paint a picture in the player's head. Consider the following passage:

Stepping out of the door, you emerge onto a great hill overlooking the sea. A light wind blows through your hair, and high above two birds dance through the sky. As the ground slopes downward, the grass disappears, to be replaced by sharp, jagged rocks and hot sand. If you listen closely, you can hear the sound of the waves crashing down upon the shore, and you can almost taste the sea spray ...

You can't actually see the hill, nor can you feel the wind. However, you have managed to visualize an image of that scene in your head. The chances are that if you show the above passage to a friend, you and he will not imagine the exact same picture. Sure, they'll both contain all the elements: the grass, the birds, the rocks and the waves. But perhaps you imagine a hot sun beating down overhead, and he imagines it to be a much milder temperature. By not including the description of the sky, the author lets the player form his own conclusions.

Now imagine how the scene would appear in, say, a first-person shooter such as _Quake III._ It may look pretty, but does it utilize all of your senses? Can you feel the grass beneath your feet, can you taste the salt from the spray? The answer, of course, is a resounding "No". This doesn't mean that regular computer games are bad, it simply means that they cannot compete with IF in the immersion department.

Everyone has their own reasons for liking interactive fiction. Why do you? Is it the words, the imagination, the visualization? Is it because you love reading, or does it just give you something to do when you're bored? Think about that for a while. The answer just may surprise you.

- Mut (Mut2000@Ameritech.net)

LINKS

Courtesy of Lancer Sykera...

Ranchoweb.com Image Hosting
http://www.ranchoweb.com/images/
Good, free image host. Helps when you have images to put on the Forum, such as the Logo competition.

LIlama's Web Site
http://lllama.iwarp.com/
I was amazed she actually got into a college at all... I invite everyone to look around, especially look at the rants, they are really good. I've been following this crazy girl around the web for over a year or two now.

The Site Fights
http://www.thesitefights.com/
Great competition for websites. Takes a lot of hard work and dedication, but pays off in fun and recognition. I have been active in TSF for over a year and a half.

Brass Lantern
http://www.brasslantern.org/
A good all round Adventure Games site, mainly focusing on IF, but still with reviews and news of the wider spectrum of Adventure games. Includes some good articles on game design, reviews and even has a newsletter.

The IF Archive
http://www.ifarchive.org/
The IF Archive - the place to go when you're looking for any IF game. Since its move from the FTP, it's become more easier to use, especially with the Frobozz Magic Searching Tool (there's a link on the main page) which lets you look through for a certain game

KFADRIFT
http://www.kfadrift.org.uk/
An ADRIFT specific site, recently hosted a competition (KF's Summer MiniComp - See Current News or more details) - one of the most informative ADRIFT sites, it contains current news, tutorials and links.

The Official ADRIFT Site
http://www.adrift.org.uk/
The official site for ADRIFT, this holds the ADRIFT game archive - the place all new games get released to. Also, you can download the Generator and Runner from here, as well as keeping up to date with all the new releases.

The ADRIFT Forum
http://www.adrift.org.uk/forum
The Forum is the place for all drifters to go to. Lots of kind and humorous people here, everyone is very informative, always happy to answer any newcomers questions, while having a laugh at the same time. This is the number one ADRIFT site, for me.

MAD MONK'S CORNER

"All right then," I said. "Okay, here we go." I opened my briefcase and realized that I'd never thought beyond this point. The orange leaves were the extent of my lesson plan, but still I searched the empty briefcase, mindful that I had stupidly armed my audience with straight pins."

-David Sedaris in his book, Me Talk Pretty One Day, on the subject of being a writing workshop teacher.

If your life is going nowhere
and your rewards are few,

just remember that the mighty oak
was once a nut like you.

Women's faults are many,
while men have only two.
Everything we say,
and everything we do.

"I doubt if any of them are working now, it's only 9:45."
-Tedd Pierce

Slapsie Maxi Rosenbloom, on seeing his first solar eclipse: "Gee, dat's bad, ain't it?"

~By The Mad Monk~

LETTERS

Off Topic

I have noticed that theres a tendency to get off track regarding the subject stated in the Forum, and a very good example is the Adrift class idea that DuoDave (I think it was) came up with. The first three, four replies actually dealt with his suggestion about making a class, but then it slowly (but surely) turned into common chat about schools, grades and other stuff that had absolutely nothing to do with the subject. I find it very irritating (I use this word because I dont know how to spell anoying *lol*) that when I see a subject that looks interesting and want to read it, I have to sift through all kinds of comments that has nothing to do with anything. I often find myself not even bothering to go through them all and thats a petty. Because there are probably people out there who can benefit from the things that are brought up in the Forum. Sometimes it looks like people are writing comments just to get their name on the page...

I suggest that only replies that are linked to the subject being placed in the forum. If you have something to say to the author, use the e-mail - I guess thats what its there for.

Regards
Finn Rosenløv

CURRENT NEWS

KF's Summer MiniComp

It has come and passed, this time, unfortunately only receiving two entries - but outstanding ones at that. The Amazing Poodle Boy entered his fairytale game with a twist, 'Goldilocks is a FOX!'. This game has received lots of praise, including good puzzles and imaginative descriptions. This came in second place (as well as, coincidentally, last place), but was beaten by only one point by Mystery's latest adventure 'Professor Von

Witt's Fabulous Flying Machine'. This is a good short game, filled with varied puzzles, and multiple endings - keeps the standard of Mystery's games still high. Overall, a pleasing competition, we can hope that the lack of entries means more games reserved for the Annual Comp.

ADRIFT v4, Release 32
This is the latest release, and now there really is no excuse not to download ADRIFT and give it a go.

Logo Competition
The competition for a new ADRIFT logo (for the main site) has now ended, the multiple winners being Holliday Kedik and Timmon. You can see their works of art at www.adrift.org.uk.

RIP Smacking Thread
It may be locked, but it's memory will live on. *smacks davidw for locking it, from the comfort of the Editor's chair*

NEW RELEASES

This past two months summary of releases, by Woodfish.

LAIR OF THE VAMPIRE - David Whyld
(Vampire, horror style)

PROFESSOR VON WITT'S FABULOUS FLYING MACHINE - Mystery
(Winner of KFADRIFT's Competition. Short, puzzlefest.)

THE WOODS ARE DARK - Cannibal
(Horror, suspense-filled story)

STORM TOSSED - David Grigg
(A game based on Shakespeare's 'The Tempest'. Read a review of it later in the issue)

SCREENSAVERS ON PLANET X - Josh Lawrence
(Re-posted by Mystery)

FAR FROM HOME - The Mad Monk
(New release, version 1.2, now in version 4. Remains a classic.)

THE LOST TOMB - T. Mulkerrins
(Puzzlefest set in Egypt. Lots of action.)

ALIAS: UNDERCOVER AGENT - Rainbowscape
(Short, secret agent-style game)

'The Woods Are Dark' A very interesting game. It's actually told in
story form, in the past tense and it works very well. It actually makes
the game seem more like a story that just events happening around you.
The writing and description have obviously had time taken over them -
you can imagine the often spooky scenes clearly, the author managing to
utilise all the senses, while not over elaborating. Definitely a good
game.

INTERVIEWS: MileOut

Stewart J. McAbney, better known as MileOut. Lately his gothic horror piece, Panic, has
been much talked about, and is regarded as one of ADRIFT's best authors. Here is what
he has to say about his works, and himself.

DM: To start with, please tell us a little about yourself. Who are you, and what do you do
for a living?

M: My name is Stewart J. McAbney, and I'm twenty-three years old. I live in Glasgow,
Scotland, and work for an insurance company. My job involves creating reports, data
analysis, and for the most part, building database applications. I have though, also
worked within the British Merchant Navy. I have, for the most part, universal interests
within literature, film, and music - the benefits of this being a great general knowledge that
helps win the local pub quiz regularly.

DM: How did you first get into Interactive Fiction, and then ADRIFT?

M: My IF baptism - so to speak - occurred when I owned an Amstrad CPC/464. I had two
games that I found intriguing but could never really work out. These were Heroes of Karn
and Forest at World's End. I never really played much until years later when, feeling
nostalgic and with an afternoon to spare, I downloaded an Amstrad emulator and went in
search of said games. Finding them, but not being able to work out how to use the
emulator I searched for more IF games, preferably modern ones, and came across
ADRIFT which I promptly downloaded - and loved.

DM: Why do you choose ADRIFT over all the other IF languages?

M: I've chosen ADRIFT as, although I can program, my main love is to write. With
ADRIFT I can spend more time directing my attention towards prose than with
programming. In the future, as my games become better I might look to further their
reader/playership but by that time ADRIFT will hopefully be more recognised.

DM: What compels you to write interactive fiction? What do you enjoy about making
games, and why do you make them?

M: I think I am compelled to write interactive fiction because it is a way to look at some of my ideas that I couldn't turn into short stories and make something worthwhile - or investigative - with them. Enjoyment comes mostly from seeing an idea realised and/or concluded, and getting responses from other users that, although the style or genre may not be their favourite, appreciate it. Originally, I made the games for myself. If you've ever played my first effort, The Shuffling Room then you could see that: it had no story, no plot; just a point to prove about society. After my last game I feel I've chilled slightly, wanting to make games that are more fun and less preachy.

DM: Your latest game, Panic, in terms of completeness and writing, is one of ADRIFT's best. Let's talk about that. First, what was your main aim when you made Panic?

M: Initially I had set out to create a zombie game after watching the Mandarin movie Biozombie wherein zombies overrun a shopping mall. My premise, however, was to trap the player within a church and have puzzles built upon puzzle that continually changed the room's description, with the scenery crumbling away introducing more objects, and more puzzles. Finding a conclusion for such a story was hard so I had to find a new slant, and settled upon writing about the Second Coming. My aim, with **Panic**, was to create a timeless peice that was, in its own way, a message about belief towards Christian chiliasts: that, like panic, the return of a messiah is all in one's head.

DM: What inspired you for the gothical setting, of St. Venerius?

M: I have, by all accounts, a Gothic mindset. I remember, on a school trip to Germany, visiting Der Dom which was an inspirational building, its many stairs spiralling ever upwards. Being at a Catholic funeral a few years ago also had its place in my mind: the nonsense mantras, the liberal wafting of incense, and the pained imagery. Finally, my own disbelief in religion seems to be a driving influence: to explore something to disprove - or believe - it for myself.

DM: What other things give you ideas when creating interactive fiction?

M: I get ideas from everything. Using the old adage that 'every picture tells a story' I sometimes look through books and write about the scenes I find in pictures: sometimes I can expand upon it; others remain as fragments. Other methods are to look through books and find two or three words together that could be a possible title and then let the imagination run with a possible plot.

DM: Looking over your upcoming games, Stig has caught my eye. Surely a game like this will take a lot of work. Why have you chosen to make a game such as this?

M: To begin with, Stig will take an awful lot of work but as I've already said about finishing a game, it will be well worth it. I've chosen to make a game like this after reading a piece about making NPC's more involved with your game, and so I thought: what if the NPC

was the main character and the player was secondary? It's a challenging idea to work with but enjoyable, especially adding in extras as I go, garnishing it all with a darkly comic flavour.

DM: What are your favourite ADRIFT games at the moment? And why do you like them?

M: I must admit that I download every adventure posted to the downloads board, but don't get around to playing every single one of them. However, my favourite ADRIFT games, at the moment, have been: Y.A.D.F.A. and that's simply because it made me laugh, Menagerie because I can see and understand the amount of work put into it, Selma's Will because of its simple storyline and extreme from fantasy adventure, and - always a favourite - Silk Noil because of its overwrought writing, and seeming ridiculousness.

DM: And finally, if you had five things that you could say to all IF writers everywhere, in regards to what makes a good game, what would you say?

M: All my advice goes into the building of a game, and that - I believe - is what will make it good. I'd have to say that authors, when they get an idea, should work out its nuances before stating to make the game. Plotting allows you to scope your game and create landmarks to achieve. Also, don't just write because you are making an IF game, write for other reasons - it's good practice. Understand people, in real life, as the more you do the more you can translate their actions into an IF game. Continually improve upon your vocabulary, learn new words all the time, subscribe to a mail service that sends new dictionary words in email every day, and learn those words. Finally, the best advice I can give with regards to making a good game is to build upon your previous efforts, with practise comes - not perfection - but personal betterment.

DM: MileOut, thanks for your time.

MileOut has written a short story, also included at the end of this newsletter. His next game, Stig, is also previewed.

ARTICLES

LET'S TALK INTERACTIVE FICTION With En Kerklaar and a talking camel

This month's topi: The player character, and what it means to you, the game designer.

CAMEL: Seeing as I'm not a game designer, it means nothing, really.

EN: Come now. Surely as a talking camel you have something to say about this delicious subject.

CAMEL: Delicious in what way?

EN: Delicious in the way that bacon is delicious.

CAMEL: Mmm, bacon.

EN: Mmm, babies.

CAMEL: What?

EN: Nothing.

CAMEL: Anyway... the player character. What does it mean to me? Well, I guess at its most basic level, the player character is simply the vehicle through which the game world is communicated to and explored by the player.

EN: So in essence, even the most minimalist game needs a player character.

CAMEL: Right. In every text adventure ever made, there is at the very least the implied presence of yourself. That is, even if a specific character is not implied or stated, you are at bare minimum taking on the persona of your own identity.

EN: I.e., the persona of the Nameless Adventurer, that is, the persona one adapts in playing a game where no specific persona is implied, is in reality the persona of the person playing the game.

CAMEL: Right. A lot of people like games that achieve only that minimum, because they find being able to define themselves as the player character adds immersiveness. However, most games, even those of the Infocom era, have at least some kind of backstory worked in and possibly a persona of sorts for the player to adapt to; for example, an occupation, such as a pirate, a space ranger, or an Alaskan prostitute.

EN: Now you're just being silly.

CAMEL: Hey, you're the one talking to a camel.

EN: Good point.

CAMEL: Then of course, we have games that take it one step further, and attempt to imply, if not define, a certain personality for the player character. These games are a mixed bag with people; some prefer them over the other kind, while others prefer that kind of game over those with more open-ended PCs.

EN: Those're the ones that usually end up going with the Macs.

CAMEL: Bada-bing.

EN: You can say that again.

CAMEL: Bada-bing.

EN: You can say that again.

CAMEL: You can say that again.

EN: No.

CAMEL: Okay. Um.... where was I?

EN: Open-ended PCs.

CAMEL: Right. The thing is, both those who prefer open-ended PCs and those who prefer more personality-defined PCs usually cite the same reason for liking one or the other.

EN: And what reason would that be?

CAMEL: Immersion.

EN: Whoa.

CAMEL: That's what I said.

EN: You can say that again.

CAMEL: No. Anyway, the point is this. Different people find different kinds of games immersive for different reasons. Or some don't necesarily find certain games more immersive, but perhaps more fun to play. It all comes down to personal taste, and that is what you should excersise in designing your game. Your own personal taste.

EN: God point. How should one go about deciding what kind of PC to use?

CAMEL: It's up to the designer. It's the kind of game you most want to make, and what your focus will be. Generally, the main focus of a text adventure, even if it's not at all obvious, will be either character or setting. Atmosphere tends to be a combination of both, but is contributed to more by one or the other. Thus, character-focused games such as Adam Cadre's classic Photopia tend to have more well-defined PCs, while setting-focused games such as Zork tend to leave more up to the player.

EN: What about games that focus on neither character nor setting, but rather story?

CAMEL: Right. Those, too, can fall in either of the two categories, which is why I only included those two as categories. Even though story is the vehicle of many games, there is still either a character or setting-driven focus that will arise from it.

EN: Okay. So, last thing: how to go about defining character in your games?

CAMEL: Well, for the most open-ended PC, do nothing at all.

EN: Brilliant!

CAMEL: For the rest, there are various options. The most obvious of these is descriptions. Depending on how much you want to define your PC, you can add varying levels of personalization to your room and other descriptions, usually by somehow equating them to the player character's life. For example, in a game of non-defined PC, a sentence from a room description might read, "The bed is here." If you want to utilize that one sentence in saying something about the PC you could change it to something along the lines of, "Maggie's bed is here, but you can barely bring yourself to look at it." Further examing the bed could peice together more of our protagonist's thoughts, feelings, etc. As an added bonus, this tactic will often give more reason to examine things, to see how they are connected to the player character.

EN: Of course, depending on the mood one is trying to create, this effect will either be highly understated or blatanly present.

CAMEL: Right. Everything should be scaled to the needs of the game. Which brings us to a few other ways to reveal character. The introduction will generally contain the seeds of character development, if not all the character development in the game. Another good, subtle way is in tweaking the default responses of your games, to various commands just as wrong directions, jumping, or, uh, attempting to perform sexual acts on NPCs.

EN: Always a favourite.

CAMEL: Yep. So while many designers tweak these responses by making them humorous or even hostile, the designer who wants to define his PC would do well to relate the responses to the character's personality. Michael S. Gentry's Little Blue Men is an excellent example of this. In fact, that game is a good one to check out for new ways to approach the PC in IF in general.

EN: Right. He won an XYZZY for the PC in LBM, didn't he?

CAMEL: You bet a llama's ass he did.

EN: Good show. So, that about does it. Any parting words?

CAMEL: Yeah. Do what you want with your game and your PC, but make sure you do it /for the game/ and not just for yourself. And never kill a mockingbird.

EN: God bless you, Atticus.

PREVIEWS: 'STIG' by MileOut

You are a yattering - one of many - that inhabits the spirit world. Led by their God, the Yatterings are a race of guardian angels living ethereally within a hierarchical structure: the more novice the yattering the lesser the lifeform they are commissioned to protect. Promotion through the structure is based upon performance through protection rates.

Stig, our hero, is a swampling, a breed of green creatures that make their homes within the trees of the swamps. With not much knowledge of the world, they tend to live alone asserting their values upon all they own, and blatantly disregarding the rest. Stig, however, is a breed apart from his fellow swamplings: everything he does is calamitous, and has the potential to become fatal.

The god of all yatterings has assigned you to look after Stig, after finding evidence of an unwarranted attack on his life. Not only is it a chance for promotion, but a chance to prove that you are ready to protect more than flowers.

The only problem is, you are as much a calamity as Stig, and on saving him from an assassin's attack, you unwittingly send the poor swampling on a mission that he has no reason to undertake causing you to continue following him on his quest ensuring that he remains safe throughout. And who knows, with the rewards the situation could potentially reap, saving Stig may elevate you to the High Council of yatterings eliminating you from the on-site protection team.

Features

- o You, as the player and invisible, do not have control over where the adventure goes, but the NPCs do.
- o Fully playable introdction immersing the player in the prologue and allowing a feel for the game before the adventure starts.
- o The game is level based, allowing you to return to the start of each level should Stig die. This ability to try different scenarios allows comedic scope. Around 20 levels are expected.
- o Puzzles increase in difficulty although they are well-clued.
- o The game is ALR extensive, with almost all descriptions drawn from variables, their values themselves decided from numerous expressions.

Problems in making the game

The only problems I see in making the game are the speed issue of how long it takes to make. Every scene thus far, no matter how minor, has had numerous objects placed within it for interaction with, and I'm trying to think of ways players might interact with all these objects and create responses for them too. Object descriptions often reveal more objects which in turn have to be made to create the illusion, and to eliminate all replies of "You see no such thing"..

How accurately the story-line of Storm Tossed follows that of Shakespear's The Tempest (on which it is based) I couldn't say as I've never read The Tempest but, that said, it's an interesting game that keeps your attention well enough.

The game begins with you aboard a ship in the middle of a ferocious storm. You've just awaken with a pounding hangover and must find a way to escape from the ship before it sinks, taking you with it. Wandering around the ship, exploring in the old adventure game tradition, is not a good idea as the ship has a nasty habit of sinking without any warning being given and leaving you in a watery grave.

Once you've escaped the ship and found your way to the second part of the game the island - the adventure opens up quite a bit. Unfortunately I'm not sure whether this is a good thing or not. The island is a confusing place: going east from one location and then back west doesn't necessarily lead you back to the same place. Sometimes you enter a location and find yourself unable to get back to the one you just left while other locations seem to have multiple exits which all lead to the same place. Making your way around is quite nightmarish at times.

Another problem with the game once it reaches the island stage is that it seems to lose focus; whereas on the ship your objective was obvious (get off the ship before it sinks and takes you with it to the bottom of the sea) as soon as you reach the island it becomes much harder to figure out what to do. I encountered Miranda but was unable to make much progress with her - she ran away every time I tried. Caliban just tended to wander around grunting from time to time. As I said above, I've never read The Tempest so what happens once the character arrives on the island I don't know. Maybe someone familiar with Shakespeare would be able to figure out the next move, but this unfamiliar person found himself struggling.

As far as puzzles go, the game had quite an interesting variety of them. There were too many at the start, making the game a little too difficult, and too few once the island was reached, but all in all they were quite well thought out and reasonably logical. There was, thankfully, not too much of the dreaded guess-the-verb syndrome at play here. The hints system, while not giving as many hints as I might have liked, was at least there to help out in the hardest places.

My main criticism of the game overall is the ease at which it is possible to die, often with little or no warning given to aid the player in avoiding his fate. The ship on which you begin the game has a nasty habit of sinking very quickly indeed and there is no way of avoiding this happening and there are other instances - floating around in the sea, fighting with the shark - that seem to end with the player dying quite often. You might think this was no big problem as ADRIFT comes with a nifty little save game facility but it quickly becomes a pain when you're having to do it every three or four moves.

In conclusion, a fairly decent game let down by a little overeagerness on the part of the writer to kill off the player without any kind of warning given.

Bugs: 1.8
Bugs as such no, but the geography of the island was confusing in the extreme and left me wandering around lost for the most part.

Story: 1.2
Started off promising but seemed to lost its way once I reached the island.

Characters: 0.5
Not particularly well drawn and difficult to communicate with.

Writing: 1.5
Definitely the best thing about the game. Locations tended to be well
written and interesting and the overall style was quite impressive.

Game: 1.3
All in all, a decent enough game that should keep you interested for a while.

Overall: 6.3 (out of 10)

' SELMA' S WILL' By Mystery
Review by: Mike0101

Instead of choosing a newer game to review for the first edition of the Adrift Newsletter, I' ve decided to give some recognition to one of the best games (and one of my favorites) made with Adrift. Where other games fall short in either the story, description, or puzzle department, Selma' s Will delivers..

Story: 7/10
For those of you that played the first two Monster in the Mirror games, you are in for a surprise. The storyline has been drastically altered. No longer will you be trying to get home by solving puzzles in a fantasy world (or your dreams), but instead searching for the will of your deceased aunt in her cluttered country home. In hopes of claming the will and the entire estate, your entire abnormal family has turned out to find the will, and drive you nuts. I hope that the family in this game wasn' t based upon the author' s, but hey, at least you can choose your friends...

Writing (descriptions, style, etc.): 9/10
This game has the best description of any game on Adrift so far, and most of it is important. You have be shrewd to complete this game, especially because every object you pick up has a use. The game also flows very nicely. With the amount of detail, you really do feel like you are in an old house. What really sets this game apart from most other Adrift games is that you will be reading room and object descriptions more than once. The only problem is, with all the details you gather about the house, the

family, and your deceased aunt, the more you want to know, and the characters only respond to a few questions each.

Puzzles: 7/10

The average difficulty of the puzzles is medium- easy, depending on how observant you are. Most of them are simply getting the right object and giving to the right family member for something in return. There are a few tough ones which stumped me for a while, but all in all, there's enough puzzles to keep you playing for a while, but nothing to make you really frustrated.

Annoyances (bugs, guess-the-verb, etc.): 9/10

There was hardly any guess-the-verb to speak of, and the only bug that really annoyed me had to do with the door in Selma's bedroom *SPOILER* (it was only in the description before you gave Zeke the candy). Not much to speak of here.

OVERALL*: 8/10

Before you do, check out the first two Monster in the Mirrors. *The overall score isn't an average because I weigh some things more heavily than others.

' THE LOST MINES' by Mel S
Review by: davidw

I have to confess I was never a particularly big fan of Mel S' games in the past. While some of them were quite well written, and others had interesting storylines, they all seemed to fall down at some point - mainly through guess-the-verb - but, with The Lost Mines (an adventure about hunting for hidden treasure), he seems to have hit gold (pun intended).

The best thing about The Lost Mines is its ease of use: it's one of those games whereby you can figure out some of the puzzles right at the start and you don't start in one location and have to struggle to reach the second only to find yourself stuck with an even worse problem. The puzzles were all (fairly) logical (although a couple did require a bit of use of the old grey matter) and quite well thought out. Guess-the-verb surfaced in a few places and was the only real downside to the game; aside from that there is little to actually find fault with here.

I encountered a few bugs but these tended to be fairly minor ones that didn't affect the game too much; indeed, there are a couple (one with the axe, the other with the playing cards) which makes the game considerably easier - the axe doesn't need to be carried to be used, and the task involving the cards can be executed whether or not you've actually found the second pack of cards. So while bugs are always a bad thing in a game, this time they were easy to forgive.

The Lost Mines was unusual in that I don't think there's a single way of die during the game - is this a first? I'm not sure if this is a good thing or not. Dying is generally a pain; it

happens at the worst possible times and if you haven't saved your game previously then a lot of hard work has gone down the drain - but it also serves a purpose in making the game more challenging. A game where the player cannot die is a game that rapidly becomes monotonous. That said, I'd 90% finished the game before I realised you can't die and it didn't affect the gameplay much (if at all) so I'm probably just nitpicking here.

All in all, this was a pretty good game, if a little on the small side for someone who prefers vast epics, and if Mel S can produce more games of this quality I'll be looking forward to playing them.

Bugs: 1.3
One with the axe, another with the playing cards, maybe a few other minor ones, but nothing that really affected the gameplay.

Story: 1.2
Interesting enough although the idea - a hunt for treasure - has been used a lot of times before.

Characters: 1.0
Only two characters in the game that you can interact with which is a pity as the game could have used a little fleshing out.

Writing: 1.4
Certainly the best in any of Mel's games so far. The location descriptions were all well written and the style of writing interesting.

Game: 1.4
One of the better of the recent ADRIFT games although a little more work could have made this a great game.

Overall: 63 (out of 100)

EXTRAS

Life On The Lilies

"I don't think I can make it this time."

Jones slumped on his knees. He could feel his heart coming under pressure from the strain of the activity. Breaths streamed out in uneven, rapid fashion. His forehead shimmered under the smile of the sun.

Shank took Jones' arm, gripping the cloth of his shirt. "You can, stop telling yourself you can't."

"But it's too far this time."

A few metres of stagnant water bridged the gap between the lily that supported them and the next. A few fish silvered the surface, while something larger skulked in the depths, the only clue to its presence the few bubbles that coasted free. Three men stood in similar anxiety on the next lily pad, a few ripples spread outward just before it where someone had obviously not been strong enough to make the jump.

"It's not far at all, Jones. Look, those others have made it."

"Someone didn't." He pointed at the ripples.

"You don't know that for sure. Anyway we've got to make the leap as the others are waiting to land on this pad."

Looking back, Jones saw that indeed, at the previous pad there was four men waiting to make their leaps. The men in front jumped, both were successful in their endeavour.

"Have you noticed how the gaps between lilies are getting wider every time?"

"I try not to think about it."

"Why?"

"I try to keep a positive mind."

Shank took a deep breath and backed off to the rear of the lily pad and then sprinted to the edge making a huge leap. "Come on."

Repeating Shank's actions, Jones made the jump. For the seconds that he flew it seemed as if time had stretched. The breeze slipped by slowly, pulling him down. He forced himself not to look below, to see the water he expected to land in. He just managed to alight on the lily.

Holding out his hand, Shank helped Jones to his feet. "Told you we could make it."

"You did." He looked at the jump, a mammoth gap between the green pads. "But we're not going to manage that."

"Course we can, we did the last one. It doesn't get any harder."

"Yes it does."

"Shh! That's exactly how you don't make it."

"Okay, but I don't even understand why we have to live our lives jumping from lily to lily anyway."
"Why?" Shank face registered something honest. Confusion?

"All we do is jump." To demonstrate his point he hopped on the spot.

"We've always jumped. That's what we do" Shank circled his arm, encompassing the jumpers in front and those behind.

"I don't understand how we can't do anything else."

"We weren't created for anything else."

"But with every leap we make the chances of us making the next are more unlikely."

"Uh huh!" Shank grunted. "It's always been like that."

"So why don't we try developing our lives, taking it into our own hands and doing with it what we want?"

Shank frowned, bewildered.

"Look over there, for example," said Jones. He pointed to the bank. "There's land there, we could go there and give ourselves a proper life."

Indeed, Shank noted, there was a bank by the edge of the river. And on that bank there was grassland and woodland. Trees rose magnificently, and rocks lay in their shadow. Occasionally, small mammals would dart from under foliage collecting nuts, retreating with their spoils to whatever safety the shore provided them.

"Jones, you don't have to stay on the lilies, there's no rule that says you must keep jumping. You can leave anytime. Why don't you swim to the bank?"

The bubbles from somewhere deep down popped and fizzed to the surface.

"I'd surely get eaten by the fish."

Shank nodded, knowing now that ones would understand. "And that's why, my friend, we live our life on the lilies."

ENDNOTE

And so finishes the first ever edition of Drifters Monthly. I really do have a feeling that this stands where other newsletters have failed. Hopefully it will get more people interested in ADRIFT, getting it the recognition it rightly deserves, while giving everyone an interesting monthly letter to read and enjoy. Thank you to everyone who has contributed to the newsletter this month, it has been worth it. Hopefully we can carry this on, if there continues to be content sent in.

Thanks for reading, and see you all next month! - Woodfish, 29th August 2002