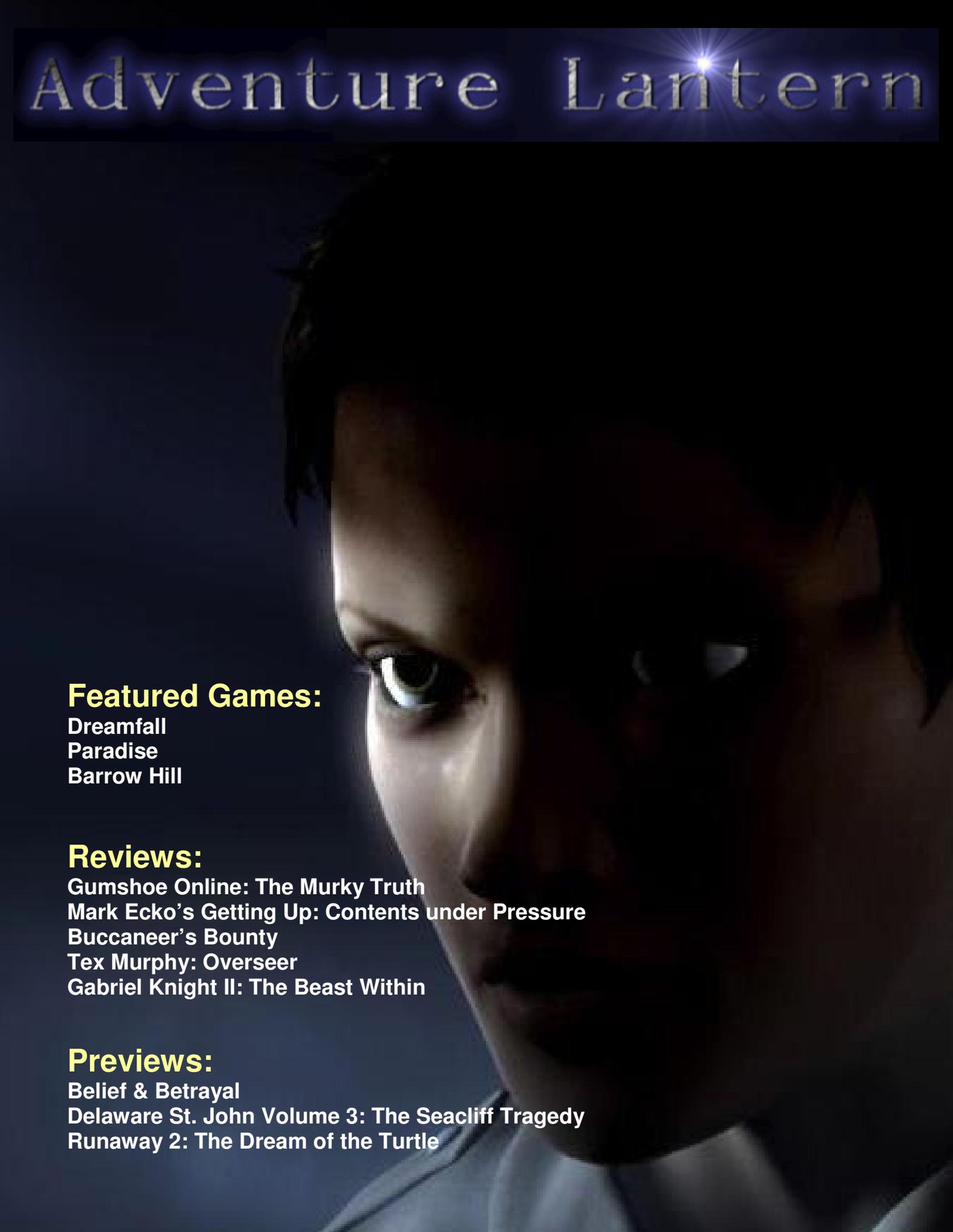


Adventure Lantern



Featured Games:

Dreamfall
Paradise
Barrow Hill

Reviews:

Gumshoe Online: The Murky Truth
Mark Ecko's Getting Up: Contents under Pressure
Buccaneer's Bounty
Tex Murphy: Overseer
Gabriel Knight II: The Beast Within

Previews:

Belief & Betrayal
Delaware St. John Volume 3: The Seacliff Tragedy
Runaway 2: The Dream of the Turtle

Contents

Adventurer's Ravine

Previews

- Delaware St. John Volume 3: The Seacliff Tragedy 5
- Runaway 2: The Dream of the Turtle 8
- Belief & Betrayal 11

Interviews

- Interview with Kheops Studio 13
- Interview with Kheops Studio on The Secrets of Da Vinci 17

Article

- Dizzy is Quite Alive 23

Reviews

- Paradise..... 25
- Dreamfall: The Longest Journey 33
- Barrow Hill 42
- Gumshoe Online: The Murky Truth 45
- Tex Murphy: Overseer 51
- Gabriel Knight II: The Beast Within 58
- That Night Before..... 65
 - Act 1 65
 - Act 2 67
 - Act 3 69
 - Act 4 71

Uncharted Waters

Reviews

- Mark Ecco's Getting Up: Contents under Pressure 73
- The Punisher..... 80
- Buccaneer's Bounty 86
 - Port Royale 2: Cartels, Construction & Conquest 87
 - Patrician III: Rise of the Hanse 95
 - Tortuga: Pirates of the New World 101
- 24: The Game 107
- The Endless Forest..... 111

Editorial

Two weeks ago, a beautiful, warm spring day... A group of young students are slowly entering the auditorium. Some of them seem calm and reserved. Perhaps they are contemplating the end of a chapter and the beginning of the next one. Perhaps they are simply following the rules as obedient students. Others are quietly talking and giggling as they approach their seats. It is highly likely that this is the last time they will all come together. It is their high school graduation.

Watching the proceedings with the rest of the audience, I can't help but wonder where life will take these young students in the next few years. As I try to recall my own high school graduation, a speaker addresses the students. He advises the graduating class not to solely focus on their careers or how much wealth they might accumulate. It may not be the most original commencement speech, but there is wisdom in his words. It is important not to lose sight of balance.

One day later, in a completely different setting, another speaker discusses stress and its effects in the modern world. He points out that we all need to learn to live with our worries without ignoring them or allowing them to overwhelm us. The topic is not necessarily new. A quick trip to the major search engines will get you to numerous articles on stress. But once again the speaker's words carry a great deal of truth and wisdom.

Last month I was surprised we were able to put together a full-sized issue. So many members of our team seemed to be extremely busy. Of course since things have to get worse before they will get better, we had an even more hectic month in May. And the Adventure Lantern staff hardly seems to be the only ones affected. Between final exams, projects getting ready for completion, extracurricular commitments, and family duties, everyone seemed so overwhelmed and so very busy.

It is simply amazing how much so many of us try to accomplish. Of course I am one to talk... Only a few hours after hearing the speech about learning to live with our worries, with the commencement address pointing out the importance of a balanced life in the back of my mind, I was at an airport waiting for my flight. Instead of simply relaxing, I was working on one of the reviews in this month's issue. Because heaven forbid, the sky might collapse if I don't finish the article before getting on the plane.

For the record, I never did finish the article before boarding the flight. Not surprisingly, the skies remain quite intact. But of course, I rectified the situation during the flight and completed the review. After all there is no sense in taking too many chances with the sky.

It is with the realization that we have completed another crazy month that I give you our June issue. With much of our team busy with other commitments, this time around you will have to endure a bit more of my writing than usual. But we still tried to compile a solid collection of video game reviews and previews. Between our articles on a number of recent titles and a series of retro reviews, we hope that you will find something to enjoy in our June issue.

But before we jump into the issue, I am once again overjoyed to introduce new team members to you. Erdalion is joining the Adventure Lantern staff as a reviewer with our sixth issue. You can find his article on the video game based on the TV show 24 in the Uncharted Waters section of this issue. Much like me, Erdalion plays games from multiple genres. As such, you can look forward to his contributions to both sections of our magazine.

If you have noticed some of the spelling or grammar errors that have inevitably eluded me in our past issues, you will be pleased to hear that we are also welcoming a copy editor to our team. Starting with our July issue, Drantin will start proofreading our articles before we publish each issue of the magazine. We are sincerely hoping that having a copy editor with great attention to detail will help us improve the quality of our issues. For my part, I am certainly grateful to have another person to go over our content before it is published.

Here we are on the sixth issue of Adventure Lantern. We are still taking baby steps, but we have also learned from our experience. As another hectic month comes to a close, I am happy that we did not have to postpone our June issue for several weeks. With my thoughts drifting back to the two speakers, I hope an enjoyable summer awaits all of you. No matter how great or small your worries are I hope you will find an opportunity to relax. Remember, we may have destroyed the ozone layer, but the sky will most likely stay above you even when everything seems so incredibly overwhelming and stressful.

Until next month...

-Ugur Sener

Delaware St. John 3: The Seacliff Tragedy – Preview

Written by Ugur Sener

[Editorial Note: In February, shortly after the initial announcement of the game, we had posted a very brief preliminary preview of the third volume in the Delaware St. John series from Big Time Games. Now that we have some more information on the game, we are running an updated preview. As you find out about the changes brought to the series and the storyline of the third episode, you can also take a look at the first set of screenshots available from The Seacliff Tragedy.]



There are callings people cannot help but answer. No matter how dangerous the path is, no matter how many people try to discourage you, it simply what you have to do. For Delaware St. John that special calling is to bring peace to the spirits of the dead. The psychic detective works with his partner Kelly Bradford to help ghosts find relief from eternal torment.

Adventure gamers first met Delaware in The Curse of Midnight Manor. Drawn to an abandoned mansion by his recurring nightmares, Delaware struggled to uncover the terrible history of the building in an effort to free the restless spirits that dwelt within its walls. The second episode took Delaware to Maine, where the detective came upon a town that did not exist on any record. Once again Delaware had to face the paranormal and try to understand the town's secrets.

The third volume, The Seacliff Tragedy, is continuing the story from the first two episodes. The detective is once again haunted by visions of the dead. Reaching from beyond the grave, a hundred voices are compelling Delaware to investigate an abandoned amusement park. The detective will not find peace until he gets to the bottom of this new mystery and discovers what is troubling the spirits of the dead.



A tragic collapse has killed over one hundred people at this amusement park. Shutting down after the tragic event, the site has been abandoned for four years. What is supposed to be a place of great fun and entertainment is now home to terrible dark forces. What was the cause of the terrible

accident? What secrets are hidden within the walls of the Seacliff park? Why is it that strange creatures and apparitions have laid claim to this place? Delaware has to unlock the mystery. The detective has to uncover the horrible secrets of the park. But his job will be harder than ever.

Terrifying monsters known as Shadow People guard the park grounds. Delaware will have to defend himself against these creatures. If he fails, he may lose his very soul. And the Shadow People are only part of the nightmare. A stronger evil force lurks somewhere just out of Delaware's sight. It is waiting for the right time to descend upon the detective. Delaware will need all his wit, psychic skills, and intuition to live through the night.



Fortunately, the detective will not be alone in exploring the terrifying park grounds. His partner Kelly Bradford will join him in the third volume of the series. Where Delaware has his remarkable psychic talents to help with his investigation, Kelly will have access to very special high-tech equipment. Her thermal goggles and EMF counter will help Kelly help Kelly identify areas of high paranormal activity. What is invisible to her human eyes will be revealed through technology.

With the third volume, Big Time Games will be taking Delaware St. John in a bold new direction. Departing from the static backgrounds of the previous episodes, Big Time Games is developing The Seacliff Tragedy as a full 3D game. The implementation of the 3D engine means that The Seacliff Tragedy will not be played entirely as a traditional point-and-click adventure game. However, the game will still be played from first-person perspective. Big Time Games also promises that "the story and game play remain intact from the previous games."



Judging by the first set of screenshots, it also seems to be safe to assume that Big Time Games has maintained the eerie look and feel of the series. The early depictions of the amusement park are promising. In particular, the blurred view of the park through what we can assume to be one of the Shadow People appears to be a nice effect.

The third episode is expected to introduce a number of new features into



the Delaware St. John series. The inclusion of the Shadow People alone should make things very interesting. Big Time Games president points out that players “will control Delaware as he fends off these life-draining monsters in order to investigate the remains of Seacliff Amusement Park.” While it is unclear exactly how Delaware will fight against the Shadow People, their inclusion might mean a fundamental shift in game play. The third episode

could possibly deliver more of a survival horror gaming experience rather than a pure adventure one.

The Seacliff Tragedy is currently gearing up for a November 2006 release. While the game is evolving in a new direction, Big Time Games seems to be dedicated to maintain the storyline and the atmosphere of the previous volumes in the series. It looks like we will be in for another dark and twisted mystery as we investigate the Seacliff Amusement Park. It should be safe to expect plenty of creepy environments and ghost sightings.

Relying on Delaware’s psychic abilities to uncover the secrets of the park should prove to be interesting. The trusty Voice Imagery Communicator or VIC will also be available to take pictures and record sounds as needed. At the same time, having access to new tools and a second playable character through Kelly Bradford could bring new depth to the series. Running away from the monsters stalking the park and outwitting the evil forces will hopefully make for a delightfully scary experience.

Players should also expect to find out more about the greater storyline surrounding the series. It is hard to say how the new features will impact game play. But the preliminary information on the storyline and the setting are certainly intriguing. The Seacliff Tragedy should give us a welcome chance to explore an all new creepy and decidedly haunted location. Here’s hoping we’ll be able to play another successful episode of Delaware St. John this fall.



Runaway 2: The Dream of the Turtle – Preview

Written by Ugur Sener

[Editorial Note: Runaway 2 was among the games we previewed around the time Adventure Lantern was launched. Since our initial preview quite a bit more information has become available about the game. The official site for Runaway 2 is also available at www.Runaway-TheGame.com. If you have not been following the development of Runaway 2 closely, this article should help bring you up to speed.]

Sometimes the smallest thing can change a person's life. Brian was about to set out for college at Berkeley University when he realized he was missing a book. He could either pick up the book from the store himself or have it delivered to him at Berkeley. Brian chose to take the detour and pick up the book. It was a simple decision that forever changed his life.



On his trip to the bookstore, Brian hit a woman with his car. Upon taking Gina to the hospital, Brian found himself at the center of wild adventure. Running away from mobsters, Brian and Gina traveled across the country as they unraveled the secrets of a mysterious artifact. With its colorful characters, entertaining locations, beautiful cartoon graphics, and classic point-and-click gameplay, Runaway: A Road Adventure became a highly successful adventure game.



Now, Brian and Gina are back with Runaway 2: The Dream of the Turtle. We rejoin the duo onboard a hydroplane over the small, but beautiful island of Mala. The sky is clear, the waters below look pristine.

Unfortunately, there is a minor problem. The plane is about to crash! In a desperate attempt to reach the island, Gina and Brian

abandon the plane. With any luck, they should drift across the sky with their parachutes and land safely on the island. Of course things can never be quite so easy. Brian is about to embark on a brand new adventure that will have him traveling all over the world.

With Runaway 2, Pendulo Studios intends to bring back the cartoon like graphics and the humorous style of the original game. Players can also look forward to returning characters, a brand new intriguing storyline, and a soundtrack that is expected to rival the quality of the one from the first game. In a very real way, Pendulo Studios is attempting to recapture the spirit of Runaway: A Road Adventure with all the elements that made the game so charming and popular. But don't think the sequel is nothing more than a rehash of the original game.



While staying true to the style and theme of the first game, Pendulo Studios intends to deliver a better game in every aspect with Runaway 2. Notable improvements have been made to deliver a superior game engine. As noted on the game's official Web site, Runaway 2 features "dynamic lighting, atmospheric effects, real-time

camera changes, and hundreds of animations." Players can expect lively environments brought to life with rich detail and variety of special effects. If you liked the cartoon like appearance and fairly detailed environments of the first game, you can expect to find the presentation of the sequel most pleasing. Judging by the available screenshots and the teaser trailer you can find on the Runaway 2 Web site, the 3D characters have been nicely blended with the backgrounds. The cartoon feel seems to have been maintained while still creating an immersive environment.

The scale of the adventure will be much bigger this time around. Where the first game had Brian and Gina exploring the United States, Runaway 2 takes players to a variety of locations around the globe. You will go from the sunny shores of Hawaii all the way up to Alaska and even further. The game features over hundred locations, which will hopefully be more than enough to keep players busy.

Runaway 2 features over thirty 3D characters. The main characters Brian and Gina are of course back for the second adventure. But since the first game Brian seems to have taken a more rugged look. Other noteworthy returning characters include Joshua and Sushi. It should be great to see what



Joshua what kind of experiments regarding extraterrestrials Joshua will be conducting this time around. It should be safe to assume that the supreme computer guru Sushi will hack into quite a few systems before the end of the adventure. No network is safe whenever Sushi is around a device that can process binary data.

Among the new characters, the former movie star current waitress Lokelani seems to be out to rival Gina with her attractive looks. Players will also have to deal with the trouble-maker Koala and the intimidating Colonel Kordsmeier. Judging by the information currently available, Runaway 2 seems to have a great cast of colorful and quirky characters. It should be great to see what kind of hoops Brian will have to jump through to get anything done this time around.



The Runaway 2 Web site points out that players should expect a solid number of puzzles in the second game. A variety of challenges have been prepared to keep players occupied through the course of the adventure. However, according to the Web site, "Pendulo Studios has also taken care that nobody will get stuck for too long in certain game passages." The developers seem to make Runaway 2 accessible to players with varying levels of adventure gaming experience. Carefully surveying the environments and paying attention to the conversations should be enough to overcome the game's challenges. The overall difficulty level should be comparable to that of the original game.



Overall, Runaway 2 from Pendulo Studios looks quite promising. Players should have a great opportunity to go on another wild adventure with Brian and Gina. With its cartoon like graphics, interesting characters, variety of locations, and lighthearted humorous tone, Runaway 2 could easily deliver a highly entertaining adventure gaming experience.

While waiting for the game's release, you can take a look at the official Web site at www.Runaway-TheGame.com for additional information.

Belief & Betrayal – Preview

Written by Ugur Sener

It all began with a simple phone call. Jonathan Danter could not have anticipated the events that would follow. When he heard voice of the detective on the other side, Jonathan knew something had to be wrong. Why else would the Scotland Yard be contacting him? Everything changed on that gloomy day in November.



The detective told Jonathan that his uncle Frank was found dead. But that was impossible! There had to be a mistake... Jonathan believed that his uncle had died ten years ago. Where had he been living all these years? Why was he murdered now? His head filled with numerous questions, Jonathan headed to the funeral. The pieces were just not fitting together.

After the funeral, Jonathan returned to his apartment. He needed some time to relax; and he needed some time to think. Yet Danter was attacked by an unknown assailant. Fighting for his life, Jonathan managed to send the attacker running. But one thing is clear. Jonathan is in grave danger. And the incident at his apartment is more than likely to be related to his uncle's death. Jonathan has to get to the bottom of the mystery. Unless he quickly uncovers the truth, Danter may not live for much longer.

Developer Artematica and publisher ANACONDA are teaming up to bring us the adventure game Belief & Betrayal. The game starts off with Jonathan Danter's investigation into the death of his uncle Frank. Before long however, Danter will find himself in the midst of a great conspiracy. As pointed out in ANACONDA's press release for Belief & Betrayal, the intricate plot expands far beyond Jonathan and his uncle, reaching "back through the centuries all the way to the day Judas received 30 pieces of silver for betraying Jesus."



Belief & Betrayal thrusts players into the beautiful cities of Europe. Traveling through London, Venice,



and Rome, players will unveil the mysterious circumstances behind Jonathan's uncle's death. As the plot thickens, players will find themselves caught in the midst of biblical secrets and a great church conspiracy. The adventure game promises an engaging plot that will call upon players to question everything in search of the ultimate truth.

The experience will be brought to life in realistic environments that stay true to

the architecture of the cities explored. While players should not expect exact replicas of huge portions of London, Venice, or Rome, Artematica has taken time to conduct research and recreate the environments in a convincing manner. The pre-rendered 3D backgrounds are expected to make for interesting locations to explore. The game will be pure point-and-click adventure offering played from a third-person perspective. While exact details are not yet available, Artematica also promises unique game play elements. The developers have pointed out that *Belief & Betrayal* will feature an innovative inventory system.

While *Belief & Betrayal* is a work of fiction, many of the events in the game will certainly have their roots in history. Historical accuracy will be sustained for certain events. However, the game will also have a great deal of fiction mixed with historical fact.

Judging by the preliminary information released about the game, *Belief & Betrayal* looks very promising. The backgrounds and character models on the initial screenshots look very pleasant. Exploring the European cities while trying to uncover the truth should make for an interesting experience. Moving from a murder mystery to an intricate church conspiracy, the plot should have what it takes to keep players interested.

Currently scheduled for an October 2006 release, *Belief & Betrayal* could certainly prove to be worth the wait. Artematica could easily deliver an excellent thought-provoking thriller that will leave players clinging to the edge of their chairs.



Interview with Kheops Studio

Conducted by Fallen Angel

[Editorial Note: As some of you may already know, our teammate Fallen Angel is also a regular contributor to the Greek adventure gaming site Adventure Advocate (www.AdventureAdvocate.gr). During the past month, Fallen Angel conducted two interviews with Kheops Studio to discuss the company and their recent projects. While the Greek versions of these articles will be available over at Adventure Advocate, Fallen Angel kindly provided us with English versions for our June issue. Please note that the articles are presented here almost entirely in their original form. Only a handful of simple grammar or spelling corrections have been made in order to maintain the original content from Adventure Advocate and Kheops Studio as much as possible.

Adventure Lantern thanks Adventure Advocate and Kheops Studio for this collaboration. We were certainly happy to learn more about Kheops Studio. Without further ado, here are the interviews.]

Fallen Angel: First of all, Benoit, I would like to thank you, on behalf of the adventure-advocate team and the Greek adventure community, for accepting to do this interview. It's always a great pleasure to get to know better the people who are 'behind' the games we admire.

Benoit Hozjan: It's also a pleasure to answer to people interested by what we are doing.

[FA]: Let us begin with something that we are all wondering about: Kheops Studio's who is who! That is: Who are those guys in Kheops Studio that gave us 3 great games in less than 2 years? Who is creating those marvellous chromatic sceneries? Whose mind is hidden behind those fantastic puzzles? Who visualized this innovating inventory format? Who wrote the music for Voyage? Who is making the final decisions so that the games will reach us as they are?

[BH]: So, let's start with the birth of our studio. We were few years ago salaries of Cryo Interactive, after the bankruptcy, the company became DreamCatcher Europe and few months later Dreamcatcher decided to close the internal development studio. It was during the summer of 2003 and then this bad news was the beginning of a new adventure because it was an opportunity to create a new studio. All the members of Kheops Studio were already colleagues at Cryo!

Kheops is a quite small studio, with capabilities in Game Design, Design, Art Direction and programming/integration, the graphical production is done with some partners. We have also some external contributions in Game Design.

Most elements of our games are proposed by our game designer, then he works with a designer and the art director to illustrate his ideas. All development long, the whole team is involved to propose improvement which is something important to be proud of the result, especially when we are working with small budgets games. Puzzles are proposed by the game designer and some other collaborators, the inventory system was a way to combine many objects with a small graphical budget. Yan Volsy used to create the music of our games "Return to Mysterious Island", "ECHO, Secrets of the Lost Cavern" and "Journey to the Moon (Voyage)"

[FA]: Most players -myself included- admit that your games managed to completely immerse them in their worlds. Some of them were fans of this kind of adventuring, others not (mostly those who prefer a rapidly unfolding scenario and stories full of mystery and secrets). However, all of them seem to have become addicted to your games. How do you explain such a deep impact among adventure gamers as your titles have had? Have you (re)discovered the secret of success in adventure game development?

[BH]: I don't think so, we just know that if we want to continue to live and to create games it's important to make quality games. We have smaller budgets compared to older games on which we have worked at Cryo, but it's a challenge. Maybe our games are shorter and with smaller environments, but it was necessary and we knew that it wasn't incompatible with a good game. In fact these constraints help us to push creativity and to find economical solutions. The technical team has also made a great job to optimize our productivity and prepare future evolutions.
So with such a motivated team it's possible to finish 4 games in 2 years.

[FA]: We would love to ask you a little bit about some of your recent games. Both "Return to Mysterious Island" and "Journey to the Moon (Voyage)", had a very engaging and innovating inventory system, which allowed us to combine various items together and then dismantle them in order to try something else. While on the other hand, "ECHO: Secrets of the Lost Cavern" was standing on the exact opposite side; no items were to be combined within the inventory. How come there is such a great difference regarding this aspect of your games?

[BH]: It's true and the main reason is the fact that "ECHO" was done with new collaborators in game design. An old colleague came to see us, he has an idea for a game and was looking for a solution to turn his project to reality. The game concept was interesting, it was a good idea to make a game with a prehistorical background and even if it was a classical small inventory system, it's possible to combine objects directly on some working stones in the game. The way frescoes are used as puzzles was also fresh. "ECHO" is closer to "Egypt 3" than RtMI or Voyage from this point of view. We will continue to use the RtMI inventory system

but we will continue to modify it a little bit. "ECHO" was self-financed by Totem Studio for the game design/Art Direction, Mzone Studio for the graphical production and Kheops Studio for the integration and the coordination. We are working together on another title for early 2006.

[FA]: It's a fact that all your puzzles are logical and have no demands of using our imagination in a 'too creative' way. Moreover, you offered, in JttM (Voyage), a very unique choice to players (for which we must congratulate you!) to select whether they want to explore the environment and obtain little by little the 'master keys' or confront a puzzle right away and 'burn out' their brains. Should we expect such an approach in your future projects as well?

[BH]: We always try to find intuitive and not too difficult puzzles. We used to propose alternative each time and to let many clues. In RtMI it was already possible to make many actions with 2 different ways ("smart" or "brutal"). Non linearity is an important thing for us. It's far more difficult to create and to test than a linear game but more interesting and it offers a way to play the same game again.

The scoring system is a way to quantify if you have done everything or not. The maximum score is not public and it's very funny to see players sharing there experiences and scores on forums.

[FA]: Your games are depending on, as well as defined by, their puzzles. And for that Kheops Studio has now become a synonym for puzzle heaven to many adventure gamers. However, they do not have a breathtaking story to back them up. And please don't get me wrong, I did enjoy their stories. It's just that I couldn't engage myself to a long conversation upon them, as I would do for your puzzles. So, does someone have to compromise to one or the other? Moreover, are you planning on using the same pattern in your future developments?

[BH]: We are working on a new game with a deeper story, everything will be clear but we hope that we will surprise the player! We will continue to have the same kind of puzzles connected to the story and using logic, music, colours and so on. We will also continue to propose alternatives to be sure that it won't be a nightmare for death or daltonian people.

[FA]: The worlds you pulled us in, through your games, were fascinating. Two of them actually were 'borrowed', to a certain extent, from Jules Verne, who is well known for his imaginative ability. What was it that inspired you to create the games within those worlds? And, while we are on it, are you a fan of Jules Verne's work or was it just a calculated strategic move to base a game on such stories?

[BH]: Our publisher asked us to adapt Jules Verne novels. From a marketing point of view, 2005 is the century of the death of Jules Verne and from a creative point of view Verne is a great source of inspiration for game creators. As you have seen, our games are not really adaptations but more a tribute to this author. Verne novels gave us the background and then we keep the spirit with some freedom!

For sure we love Verne; he was not only imaginative but also a visionary.

[FA]: We know that you are currently engaged in the development of two more adventure games. Would you like to tell us a little bit about them? What are they about? Will we encounter any novelties? And of course, when should we expect them to be released?

[BH]: The first one has just been announced, it will be a game on Leonardo Da Vinci and take place where he died, in France at the Manoir du Clou, now called "Le Clo Lucé" close to Amboise castle. This game is developed by the same partners as "ECHO".

The other one will be an investigation and will be our first game with a 3rd person view, real-time 3D characters in precalculated backgrounds (like Syberia, Nibiru...)

These games will be finished during the first and the second quarters of 2006. Shipping dates will be announced later.

[FA]: I guess that wishing you good luck in the future, as a closure to our interview, would be unnecessary. It's certain that you will succeed whether luck is smiling at you or not, since your games are the outcome of such a great job. So, I will simply wish you a fruitful year and invite you to come and visit us here in Greece.

[BH]: Thank you Fallen Angel, I hope to have some good news for our Greek fans very soon! ;-) Hope to visit Greece soon.

Interview with Kheops Studio on The Secrets of Da Vinci

Conducted by Fallen Angel

[FA]: Thank you for taking the time to talk to us again.

[BH]: You are welcome!

[FA]: First of all, I would like to ask you a couple of questions about JttM (Voyage). What is the feedback you are getting on it? Are you satisfied with the sales so far?

[BH]: It's too early for significant sales numbers. Even if the notation on gamerrankings is close to our previous productions (between 74% and 78% each time), we have seen very different feedback for JttM. It was certainly more difficult to enter inside this game and it was also graphically too strange for some players. By the way, players who have finished the game have understood how deep and coherent was the universe we have proposed. Finally, we can see that it is easier to be attractive with realistic world than fantasy world.

[FA]: Now, I have some questions regarding your new project "The Secrets of Da Vinci". To begin with I would like you, if it is possible, to provide us with a clarification on the matter: Is this game based on the best-selling novel of Dan Brown, "The Da Vinci Code"? Lots of people seem to believe so.

[BH]: No, this is totally different, the story takes place where Da Vinci died, at the « Manoir du cloux » a well known place in France, near the Ambroise castle and now called « The Clos Lucé »

[OT]: Indeed, the game does not have anything to see with the well-known book. When we thought of a game on De Vinci, we wanted to center the subject on the character himself and his multiple talents, by respecting to the maximum its historical dimension. Our first step was to propose our project to the "Chateau du Clos Lucé". Not only the place was perfect to imagine an adventure around Léonard,(because it had lived there the three last years of his life), but also allowed us to use historical characters who also had lived there, such as François 1st (King of France), and Marie Babou de la bourdaisière, her mistress. Convinced by our scenario and its respect of the Léonard's works, the "Clos Lucé" has given access to us all the éléments necessary to the development of the game. This partnership have had a great importance and enables us to have an indisputable historical guarantee on "The Secret of Da Vinci".

[FA]: Would you like to tell us a little bit about your new game? What is it about? Is it about the life or the work of Leonardo Da Vinci? Is it about the great artist or the innovative scientist and inventor?

[MT]: “The secrets of Da Vinci” is an adventure which will plunge you into Da Vinci’s universe.

You will embody a young Italian man, who was a pupil in the studio of Francesco Melzi, the heir of Leonardo. To achieve your mission you’ll have to discover and to appropriate Da Vinci’s works and inventions.

[FA]: When does the story take place and where is it situated? Are we going to travel to Europe some centuries ago or in the modern world searching for old secrets?

[MT]: The story takes place in 1522 in the “Manoir du cloux”, near Amboise. Leonardo Da Vinci is dead since three years, when Valdo arrives, looking for a original manuscript which was hidden by Leonardo. It’s not really a historical game, but we try to be as exact as possible in re-creating the atmospher of the century.

[FA]: Would you like to tell us what should we expect of the game’s puzzles? We are awaiting for some quite intriguing ones since many aspects of Da Vinci’s work is a puzzle on its own for everyone up until our days.

[MT]: Some puzzles are based on Da Vinci’s works. For example, you’ll have to understand the mechanism of a turning bridge he has invented, and to repair it. You will also use a cric, a small boat, a flying machine designed by him and you will realise a copy of Monna Lisa!

Some other enigmas don’t use directly Leonardo’s inventions but are inspired by his researchs in optics and hydraulics.

There are also many other puzzles or interactions which are technical, like the water mill, or more practical, like all the recipes you’ll have to prepare (syrup, perfume, smoke, ink...)

The dialogues are very important too and represent a big part of the game. For example, if you want to charm Babou, you’ll have to be very attentive to what you choose to tell her !

[FA]: In “The Secrets of Da Vinci” will we be given the opportunity to face puzzles not necessary for the game’s process? Have you included a point system?

[MT]: Yes, some puzzle are not obligatory to finish the game but if you choose to do it, you will collect some bonus points.

In many cases, you've also the possibility of resolving a situation by different ways. For example, when you need bronze, you can make it with some tin and copper or buy it to Saturnin. Of course, if you choose the way easier, you don't collect any points and you spend your money !

To have a lot of points could be just a challenge, but it also can be useful : the points can be spent to change the level of your gauge of conscience...

[FA]: How about the inventory of the game? Will we be able to combine various objects together as in RtMI and JttM or we will be able to combine them only on specific hot spots that we will come across the game, as in ECHO?

[BH]: RtMI and JttM were designed by our own game designer, Alexis Lang,.around the combination system inside the inventory. You will continue to see this feature inside one of our next games but not in SDV which will use the same hot spots system as ECHO, Marianne Tostivint (TOTM Studio) was also the game designer of this game.

[MT]: Effectly, You'll not be able to combinate objects in the inventory, you'll have to do it directly in the decor. But the inventory and the interface in general are not comparable to the system of ECHO. (A measure system, your personage that you can equip with different accessories, a "briefcase" where you put documents you find during the game, etc...)

[FA]: We have read that the game includes a "good and evil" measure system. Would you like to explain it to us? And, is it true that, depending on our course of actions, we will be able to see different endings?

[MT]: The interface indeed includes a gauge of conscience which evolves according to the choices of the player, and whose level will influence the continuation of the game. The more this gauge will lean dark side, the less the player could be generous, and conversely. Only a relatively balanced gauge makes it possible to choose his way. There is indeed often several manner of solving the same problem.

If he is too nice, for example, he will not be able to strike a guard which obstructs him and will have to divert his attention. But no matter what it arrives, he will always have a solution to be left there.

The players who wish it will be able to also operate this gauge by spending of the points no-claims bonus, gained with the resolution of the enigmas.

The gauge also intervenes in the structure of the dialogues, in particular with Babou and Saturnin which are the two principal characters with which the player will have to discuss.

“The secrets of Da Vinci” is a non-linear adventure, usually the puzzles can be resolved in the order you want and this gauge add to this non-linearity the contingencies of human conscience ! ;-)

[FA]: How will the interface be? So far your games are realized using a first person view. Have you used the same POV in this game as well?

[BH]: Yes it will. We also have a game in preproduction with a third person view but not scheduled for the moment.

[MT]: Even if the inventory system seems to be classical, we tried to make it as original and complete as possible. That’s why we’ve incorporated in it, some new elements.

The interface, which is full screen, is composed of :

- an inventory which can contain more than hundred different objects,
- the gauge of conscience,
- a purse (at the beginning, Valdo has five gold coins),
- a knob to access the interface of the goals (it’s realized like a logbook where Valdo notes progressively all the indications he finds)
- a portrait of Valdo (you can put on this portrait some clothes or accessories helpful for the game)
- a briefcase, where you class the letters and documents that you find. Those documents will be interactive and some of them contain puzzles.

SDV is realized using a first person view because it’s a system well-known by the team, so we had the possibility of working fast and concentrating on other difficulties, like for example the realisation of the “briefcase” in the inventory which contains indications and puzzles.

I think it’s also the system which is the best to favour the immersion of the player.

[FA]: What could you tell us about the graphics and music of “The Secrets of Da Vinci”?

[OT]: Graphically, we have reproduced the "Clos Lucé" most accurately possible, certain parts did not change since the time of Léonard. Others, were modified in XVIIIeme sciecle, like the Studio of léonard, therefore we have invented it, as it could have been at this time, using references of studio of Renaissance’s artists. The mill also was completely invented to be in accordance with the period and useful for the Gameplay. For the sound illustration we have chosen a cinematographic music (Composed by Ludovic Sagnier), to accentuate

the emotion, and to emphasize the strong moments of the game. It is not a music typically "Renaissance", although it have been recorded by a string quintet, there are also winds instruments like a Baryton saxophone.

[FA]: Have you cooperated with other companies, as in your past projects, to bring to life “The Secrets of Da Vinci”? Which are those?

[BH]: We continue to work with our partner Mzone Studio for the graphical production, they know our processes and we continue to improve our tools for an always better collaboration. After « ECHO : Secrets of the Lost Cavern », « Secrets of Da Vinci » is the second collaboration with TOTM studio. They have quickly learned our processes and how to use our tools, so they can express their creativity.

[FA]: When should we be expecting “The Secrets of Da Vinci” to be released? Have you already found a publisher? Moreover, will there be any demo of the game made available?

[BH]: We have found a producing structure, Elektrogames, and a publisher, Nobilis, to finance this project. The game has been released late april in France and in may in most of the european territories. It should be released in june in the US. We have delivered a French demo and we are waiting for the publisher position to deliver a localized version.

[FA]: Could you tell us something about your future games?

[BH]: We will continue to open our production workflow and expertise to new external talents and two more games will be released this year. Safecracker 2 is a puzzle game (like Safecracker 97 or Rhem for instance) developped for DreamCatcher, you will have many more or less complicated puzzles to solve using sometimes clues and sometimes logic. As an expert, you were hired by a family to find the testament hidden somewhere in this house. As the player will discover, the owner was very excentric as old rich men used to be ! ;-). This game should be finished in early july and released in late summer or fall.

We also work on an adventure game for Nobilis scheduled for fall. It will be based on a novel but not Jules Verne this time ! ;-)

Both titles will be with a first person view.

[FA]: You have recently proposed a survey on your website. How does it work?

[BH]: We have received more than 350 answer and we hope to overpass 500. We will study all the answers very soon. It will be a very important source of feedback from players to identify where we need to improve, where we are

wrong or right. It will for sure have an impact on our future developments in addition to information found on reviews and forums. It will definitely help us in our choices during the tuning of the a game.

[FA]: And a final question. You have localized in Greek “ECHO: Secrets of the Lost Cavern”. Are you planning to do the same for “The Secrets of Da Vinci”?

[BH]: Your readers have to know your strong implication for this localisation, thanks again for your contribution. If the publisher and the local distributor are ok, we would look at a subtitle patch if you are ready for this new experience ! ;-)

[FA]: Is there anything else you would like to say to Greek adventure gamers about “The Secrets of Da Vinci”?

[BH]: Well, enjoy yourself !

[OT]: We wanted to make a game which makes it possible to have fun while discovering many things on Leonard de Vinci, its life and its works. We wish that you will enjoy it as much as the public and the French press seems to enjoy it.

[FA]: Thank you very much for your time. We wish you the very best for your new game!

[BH]: Thanks

[BH]: Benoît Hozjan, Managing Director and co-founder of Kheops Studio

[MT]: Marianne Tostivint, Game designer and co- founder of TOTM studio

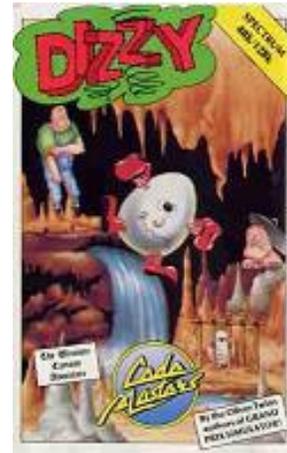
[OT]: Olivier Train, Art Director, Project Manager, co-founder of TOTM Studio

Dizzy is Quite Alive

Written by Gnome

Back in the eighties...

Programmers and game developers craved for Rock-Star fame. They, too, wanted to eat their cereals while sniffing coke from a young, tall groupie's well-formed belly button. They too wanted to act cool while wearing shades. Thus they chose names like 'the Bitmap Brothers' or 'Codemasters' and coded while wearing sunglasses. Unfortunately they never achieved their noble goals. Their only groupies were overweight, underage nerds, and quite apparently this sucked. What didn't suck though, were their games. Simple looking and addictive games, that had so much game play in them, they had to remove some of it during play testing. Games like Dizzy, the 1986 cult arcade-adventure released by the Codemasters and developed by the Oliver Twins.



In case you were wondering, and most probably you were, Dizzy was, and still is, a brilliant game (admittedly starring an egg-shaped thingy named Dizzy), combining simple arcade and platformer game play, an interesting story, and fun characters, with mind-numbing, definitely adventure quality puzzles. Oh, and featuring, as distinctly a cartoon face, as the legendary (but 8bit)

Spectrum would allow. Point is people loved Dizzy. People even loved its great sequels. Heck, people still love Dizzy.

Be the Egg

Playing Dizzy games in the 21st century, really isn't that difficult. Retrieve your trusty old Spectrum, even your Amiga or AtariST, load any of the Dizzy games, smile, play, and enjoy. Unless of course, you don't own a Spectrum, a C64, or an Amiga. Or any home computer for that matter. Then, all you can do is wait for a sequel, which will hopefully take advantage of your ultra-modern PC (fat chance), or try some of the fan-created Dizzy games floating in cyberspace. This way absolutely anyone can be an



anthropomorphic smiling egg that dances around static screens and combines items, without paying any money to any greedy game's mega-corporation.

Having proposed such a cheap course of action, let me humbly suggest having a look at a few short-but-sweet Dizzy games. Namely, Dizzy and the Healing Potio, Dizzy and the Emerald Eye, Dizzy Who: Into the Tardis, or the very brief Dizzy 3.5 remake. All of them fan-games created with DizzyAGE, an aptly named set of tools for creating Dizzy-styled adventures. (All of these games can be downloaded from www.Simion.co.uk/dizzyage/games.html)



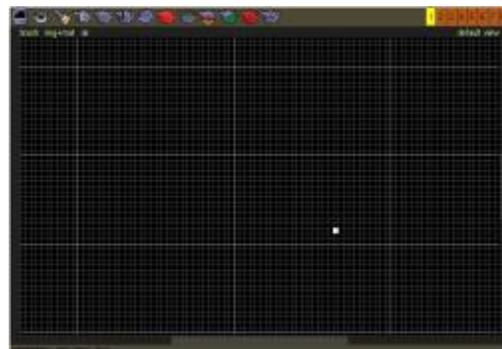
Give me Egg life!



DizzyAGE, from my experience, is the only relatively easy way of creating your own, your very own, your precious, Dizzy games. Even non-Dizzy games are possible, as long as they play in a similar fashion. I, for example, am currently struggling with Paint and DizzyAGE to create my magnum opus: 'The Adventures of Horny, Willie's forgotten frog'. Windows' Paint is the tough part, mind you. Ok, DizzyAGE did require a bit of browsing through tutorials, forums, and the official DizzyAGE documentation, but it really is as simple to use, as say AGS. It is simpler actually.

Still, no matter what you'd like to try your skills on (preferably something with eggs in it), you'd better begin by paying a visit to the DizzyAGE homepage (<http://www.simion.co.uk/dizzyage/>). Then, you should download a nice free zip file (code named: DizzyAGE v.1.1), extract the file, give birth to an interesting idea, create or use some of the pre-made graphics, plot a plot, flesh it out and start coding. DizzyAGE can mostly be of help in the last part (obvious, that), but its rather young and vibrant community will definitely help you mastering the more artistic side of game design. Or Dizzy design.

So...want more? Let me then briefly describe the way DizzyAGE will help your creative juices, not only flow, but take form (eurk!). Simple. There is a main editor and a variety of other minor tools like the setup or the tile management one. Then, you have a rather basic, modestly flexible scripting language. Then again, you'd better find out the rest for yourselves.



Paradise (North American release)

PC Review by Wendy Nellius



When we last heard from Benoit Sokal, he had us dreamily dazed by mammoths, automatons, and the fruition of a life long dream for a quirky little man named Hans and a plucky lawyer named Kate who was destined to help him achieve that dream. Now Sokal is back and he is whisking us off to Africa; Maurania to be exact. Maurania is a veritable paradise filled with many cultures of people and endless varieties of unusual wildlife. However, the

country is in great turmoil. It seems the current ruler, King Rodon, has become a cruel and intolerable dictator. Rebel factions are uprising with the sole goal of overthrowing King Rodon and ending his reign of intimidation and terror.

While the country of Maurania is pure fiction straight out of Benoit's imagination, small details almost have you believing there is such a country. Tourist information is provided in the game manual such as curfew time, required visas, and the necessary need for life insurance before entering the country. There is even a seemingly official Maurania website at www.mauranie-gov.com. However, it is unclear at this time whether the site was created Benoit Sokal or fans.

The story begins with a cinematic cut scene of King Rodon and one of his officials on a rather formidable ship. An intense discussion is taking place about the whereabouts of Rodon's daughter. King Rodon has sent for her and she is already en route. First impressions lead you to believe that the King is truly concerned about the daughter he hasn't seen since she was six years old. Will she still love him? The hint of sadness briefly seen in his eyes quickly disappears as we learn his true plans. He has only contacted his daughter because he needs her to succeed him on the throne and help him in the fight against the rebels. As the discussion continues, the scene shifts for a moment, showing a plane losing power and hurtling toward the ground.

You will play as King Rodon's daughter; Ann Smith. If this seems like an extremely plain name for the daughter of a king, it is because this is not her real name. The plane from the opening



movie has crashed in Madaragane. After the accident, the king's daughter suffers from amnesia. A book written by Ann Smith is found in her belongings; hence she has been saddled with this name.



Ann wakes up from her ordeal at the palace of a prince. She is greeted by a servant and informed that she is in the section of the palace that houses the prince's harem. All Ann wants to do is to find her way home, even though she is not entirely sure where that is. It is here in the palace gardens where Ann meets her future travel companion; a black leopard. Upon seeing the leopard locked in a cage, she is fearful but also feels an instant connection to the animal.

The beginning of the game involves Ann's quest to somehow manipulate the members of the harem in order to gain access to the Prince and obtain her freedom. Then, the real journey begins as Ann travels across the country of Maurania with her leopard in tow. As the story progresses, Ann gets more insight into her identity and faces the realities of being in a country so embroiled in danger.

Paradise is a purely point and click adventure game. The game comes with 3 CD's which load easily and a printed game manual. The CD is required to be in the drive when running the game. Make sure you have updated your video cards with the latest drivers. There's a lot of visual stimulus to take in so you'll want it to look its very best.



For all those who are fans of Amerzone and the Syberia series of games, the big question is: Does Paradise live up to the expectations? Well, the answer is yesandno. There are aspects of Paradise that are truly excellent as you would expect from a Benoit Sokal game. However, some areas completely missed the mark. So, let's go over the good, bad, and the ugly.

Mine eyes can see the glory...

As expected, the graphics are outstanding. The first thing that grabs your attention is at the main menu. The main menu is set up almost as if you're looking into a dark opening in a large animal container. Out of the darkness, the leopard will randomly put his face right up there and check you out. For the most

part, he appears to be irritated at the intrusion. It's highly entertaining and will have you sitting at the main menu for much longer than normal. During her quest, Ann will get to view some truly amazing places. Each location is original and highly detailed.

The Harem: A middle-eastern type harem is definitely not what you would expect to see in an African country. It's unclear as to why, but it is an interesting place to visit. The members of the harem tend to congregate around a large pool which encompasses most of the main room. Ornate tiles, arched doorways, fountains, and pottery surround the pool. A lush garden surrounds a large cage which houses the leopard. The inclusion of a puddle in the garden is a nice touch. Not only can you see Ann's own reflection if she crosses over it, but you can also see the reflection of the trees moving from a slight breeze.



The Town: As with the harem, the design of the nearby town speaks to a middle-eastern feeling. Narrow cobblestone streets dusted with sand trail in between tightly compacted stone buildings. The excellent use of muted earth tones accurately conveys a desert atmosphere. The backgrounds look like beautiful water color paintings. Detail in the foreground is crisp and clear while the background has been faded to convey distance. No complaints here.

The Forest and Mograve Village: Ann will have to travel through the forest to get to the Molgrave village. It's interesting to see familiar sights such as tree limbs that look like snakes. The lush and green forest is filled with hidden dangers and animals that are not happy to see Ann. The village is entirely built up in the trees. Wooden paths (precarious at times) circle the trees leading to small huts with thatched roofs. It's easy to lose your bearings with all the many paths. You will be amazed at how much detail was put into creating this tree community and how well the structures integrate into the trees.



The Zamarat Mines: While it may look like a town on the surface, underneath are tons of caverns which at one time held an endless supply of Emeralds. Muted colors are heavily used here, tinged with green bouncing off the remnants of the emeralds in some

locations. It's pretty empty at the mine, but signs of the busy past remain with each tunnel fully supported with wood to prevent collapse. The lights are still on and supplies litter the whole mine. The level of detail is really outstanding at this location.

The cinematic cut scenes are still fascinating to watch even though most of them did not seem to have the same emotional impact as the ones in Syberia did. Yet, they are still beautiful and graphically meet any expectation you will have. This has always been a positive aspect of any Sokal project.



The character renderings overall were pleasing, but tended to be a bit stiff at times. The military turn seems to be quite prevalent.

Do you hear what I hear?...

Another positive note for Paradise was in the use of ambient sounds. In the harem, you can hear the rippling water in the pool. A different sound is used for Ann's footsteps to reflect when she is walking on tile or on wooden steps. These were quite accurate. If Ann is in an outdoor location, the myriad of wildlife sounds make themselves known. You will feel as though you are in the middle of the rainforest at times. In the mine, there is a definite hollow sound to portray being underground and surrounded by stone. In the background you can hear a faint murmuring of the remaining miners. This is all punctuated by a constant drip of water. It's a good thing you're not there that long or it might drive you nuts as intended. There is so much going on and the ambient sounds are an integral part of creating the atmosphere. Music filled with exotic drum beats also lends a helping hand. You will hear repeated passages, but the music is solid and only enhances the experience. At almost all the locations, you will continue to hear radio broadcasts updating the status on the rebel forces.



The voice acting was also done quite well – not a stinker in the bunch. Almost all of the voices fit well with the characters. Who wins the award for “Most likely to need a good kick”? It is this reviewer's choice to award it to the prince's favorite. She personified the word “condescending” and stood on my last nerve every time she referred to Ann as “Foreigner” as though that was her name. Annoying! Oh, and it was



surprising to meet a mechanic in town who had a very American East Coast accent, but certainly not impossible. What was not surprising was that the Molgrave people only hiss at you. Remember the frustrating “tut tut” conversations you tried to have in Syberia 2? Well, now you get to have “hiss” conversations in which you are presented with all the topics, but every topic only gets you the “hiss”. Don’t think that there is one magic topic that

will get you some miracle answer. You’ll get nowhere fast. Thankfully, you will find those in the village who can translate for you.

Now, you may not consider this necessarily voice acting, but the leopard sounds were also quite accurate. Not actually knowing what a leopard sounded like, it was pure coincidence that during the playing of this game, I saw a documentary television show called “Growing up Leopard” where they raise abandoned leopards from when they are babies and release them into sanctuaries. The sounds I heard in Paradise were just like on the documentary. So, there is my point of reference for the accuracy.

You will get to interact with plenty of characters. The dialog trees for the most part are ok, but there are some weird little glitches. For example, Ann will comment to Aicha that the “Favorite’s” door is locked. Ann wants to get inside and steal the “Favorite’s” robe so she can sneak in to see the prince. Even after Ann has been able to get in the door and get the robe, she will still continue to tell Aicha that the door is locked. This topic should have disappeared after completing the task.



The same type of thing happens in a few other places as well. Also odd, was Ann saying “In fact” as a way to re-enter a conversation a second time with another character. It really made no sense to start off that way.

ARGGGHH!! --- Why won't she turn left?

Here is where we come to the “ugly” in the game: the controls. The cursor is in the shape of a ball. If you can examine something, a magnifying glass will slowly rise out of the ball. If you can talk to someone, little megaphone looking icons come out. Arrows come out to point the direction you should go and small spikes

come out if you can interact with an item further. Sounds simple, right? Not so. First of all, there is no consistency as to how quickly or how slowly these protruding tools will emerge. For the most part, you have to pixel hunt very slowly to even find anything. If you go too fast, you are likely to miss that item because the tool will emerge too slowly and you will have already passed what you were seeking.

The directional tools were the worst. Just because the arrow is pointing left doesn't mean you will be going left. Sometimes it does and sometimes it doesn't. It was extremely difficult in some places to figure out how to get somewhere without going in a complete circle. In one location, the forward direction was clicked. The resulting effect was that Ann went right and got forever stuck in a corner. Ctrl+Alt+Del was required to get her out. Ann is not always as responsive as you would expect her to be, which makes certain puzzles very a big pain. A great example is the sequence where you have to get past nasty alligator hybrids. The correct tool doesn't always appear either. I had conversations using a directional arrow, or no tool at all just because it didn't show up. It is also necessary to point out that there are a couple of places where the directional arrows will show up, but the actual arrow is out of the screen area so it can't be seen.



Worse still are the missing hotspots. Picture this: You're in the mine and all you have left to do is connect one item to another. You are positive that this is what is required. But, there's no hotspot. You spend another half hour thinking you are an idiot who can't figure out something that must be so simple. At the 45 minute mark, you're hopelessly stuck. You quit and begrudgingly decide to consult a walkthrough. You didn't want to because you'll be writing one yourself at some point. But, regardless, you feel desperate, check the walkthrough, and it



tells you to do exactly what you were trying hopelessly to do. Hmm...now you feel like a complete moron. You go back in and spend another half hour trying and trying. On a whim, you decide to load an earlier save. Maybe you missed some small detail along the way. Amazing! The hotspot miraculously appears and you realize you just wasted a ton of time on a now obvious bug.

The game also crashed twice at the most inconvenient times. Remember to save often.



You get to control the leopard 3 times during the game. These sequences take place only at night. There is one task to complete via leopard for each sequence, but it is not mandatory. You can press ESC and bypass the whole sequence if desired. I personally completed the first sequence, and then walked a little bit in the 2nd and 3rd before using the escape button. The leopard can be controlled by holding down the left mouse button and

following the cursor according to the color shown; green representing a valid direction and blue meaning an action can be performed. It's fun for a bit, but quite dark. Occasionally, my leopard got a bit stuck or refused to go where I wanted him to, but considering it was more for fun and did not have to be completed, it's not really a negative.

Time to think outside the box...

As far as the puzzles go, there really aren't any mind bending puzzles. They're interesting; just not very difficult. Just like Kate in Syberia, Ann also runs around a lot getting things for other characters. There are a lot of inventory based puzzles. There are some logic puzzles and some illogical puzzles. As for the illogical puzzles, they should be a piece of cake for the seasoned adventure gamer who's used to trying every single item in inventory until they hit the magic one. Some of the puzzles are mechanical and involve clicking on levers and buttons in a specific order.

You'll have to step on a coconut scale and then duplicate that coconut count on another machine in order to make some bungee cording. You'll have to figure out how to make the plumbing work in order to prepare a bath for the annoying prince's favorite. Similar to Syberia 2, you will do some serious methodical climbing. The only problems you may encounter are with those missing hotspots discussed earlier in this review. Replaying from an older save game is the only way to correct this, but without checking forums or walkthroughs, you likely won't know when something is a bug or whether you just haven't found it yet.

Between Father and Daughter...

The story, while well written, starts out a bit slow. It takes a while to get into the flow of the story, but once you get out of the palace the story picks up its pace

and is actually quite intriguing. But, it leaves you with a ton of questions. In the Syberia series, we were privy to flashbacks which provided a lot of insight and helped us become fully engrossed. Flashbacks would have been quite welcome in Paradise. For instance, why did Ann's mother leave? Why did she not bring Ann back to see her father? What happened to the King to turn him into such a cruel leader? Was it because his family left him? What happened to Ann in Geneva?

The ending is a somewhat of a shock. There is quite a debate in the forums about whether this ending was the right one. I actually liked the ending, but it left me with even more questions. Since this story comes from a series of books by Benoit Sokal, perhaps these questions will be answered in a future installment.

While the game is incredibly gorgeous and the story is definitely interesting, it is the interface that drags the game down. The grade is reflective of this. However, the technical issues are well known and a patch is currently in the works. If all goes well, this game will be re-visited after the patch release and the grade modified accordingly. Perhaps we should be questioning Ubisoft and not Benoit Sokal about why they're release games with so many technical issues. It is, after all, the 2nd game they have published that seemed to lack hard core beta testing. If you remember, they also published CSI: 3 Dimensions of Murder which also had serious technical flaws.



In the end, if you love Benoit Sokal's work and you can tolerate the bugs and glitches, then by all means purchase the game. But, consider waiting until the patch is released which will hopefully solve some of the major issues.

Final Grade: 78/100

<p>Developer: White Birds Publisher: Ubisoft Platform: PC Genre: Adventure Release Date: April 2006 Grade: 78/100</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 2000/XP only Pentium® IV 1.5 GHz or higher 512 MB RAM 64 MB Video Card (limited list) DirectX® 9 Compatible Soundcard 4x CD-ROM Drive Hard Drive space of 2.5 GB</p>
--	---

Dreamfall: The Longest Journey

PC Review by Ugur Sener

Time has a strange way of twisting things. Through the clouded vision of memory, the old days often seem so pleasant. Wherever we are not is exactly where we want to be. As the years go by, we sometimes become wiser, we grow, and we learn. Yet sometimes we lose sight of youthful dreams. We become jaded, irrevocably tired, and disillusioned.

Zoë Castillo wakes up in her father's apartment in Casablanca. There was a time when she was passionate. There was a time she struggled to accomplish something. Now each day seems the same as the last. Completely lost and without direction, Zoë lets her days slip away. But just as time seems to have lost all meaning, Zoë is about to get caught up in the midst of a terrible conspiracy. A great and dangerous journey beckons... And Zoë will have to answer the call.



A world away, time has not been kind to April Ryan. Ten years have passed since April's great adventure. The resourceful, strong-willed, and brave woman once accomplished incredible things. Her passage through the twin worlds of Stark and Arcadia altered many people's lives, leaving an echo that will resonate through generations. But so much can change in ten years. April is now disillusioned. She has lost her faith and her purpose. She may not be willing to accept it, but much like Zoë, she needs a new direction. Will the course of a few days be enough to rekindle the dying flames?



In a different land, born to a different culture, Apostle Kian has no lack of conviction. He believes in the word of the Goddess. He takes his orders from the rulers of his country and follows them without question. Time has strengthened Kian's resolve. It has made the warrior stronger. But the apostle is about to find out how things can change in a few

moments. Can a chance meeting be enough to shake the foundations of his beliefs?

Time is indifferent, time is amoral. Yet its simple passage can alter so much. Nations rise and fall, cities evolve, buildings age, people go from school to work to retirement. Dreams are fulfilled, lost, or replaced. And in a world of constant change, technology can hardly stay still. While it rapidly evolves to become more robust, efficient, and effective, its influence spreads into many facets of life.



It was six years ago when Funcom released The Longest Journey. Featuring an incredibly strong main protagonist and a truly engaging storyline, The Longest Journey delivered an extremely strong traditional third-person point-and-click adventure gaming experience. The Longest Journey did not take any chances with the core game play

mechanics. Yet it still managed to deliver a unique game with memorable characters, a myriad of imaginative locations, and a host of puzzles to keep players busy. But as April Ryan says in Dreamfall, “It has been a long time. Things change...”

In 2006, after three years of development and six years of waiting, Funcom releases the sequel to The Longest Journey. And Dreamfall diverges from the original in every single aspect. Time has brought dramatic change to The Longest Journey saga. The static backgrounds are replaced with fully 3D environments. Instead of a game that made it a point to mention that your character could not die in its manual, Dreamfall brings us action and stealth sequences. We are given three main characters to control in a storyline that weaves many different threads. Even the most familiar locations and characters have a different feel to them. The second chapter in The Longest Journey saga is indeed radically different than the original game. How wonderful it would have been to say that all these differences add up to make Dreamfall a modern yet equally amazing sequel to The Longest Journey. Unfortunately, many of the changes actually make for a significantly lesser game play experience. However, Dreamfall thankfully still has many strong elements to make for an enjoyable adventure.



The story begins ten years after the events in The Longest Journey. Zoë Castillo has just about hit rock bottom in her life. She has dropped out of school and she is wasting her days at her father’s house. But what seems to be a small favor for a friend turns into something much greater. Before long, Zoë finds herself in the

midst of a great corporate conspiracy. Amidst cryptic messages, people who can never seem to give a straight answer, and the twin worlds of magic and science, Zoë searches for the ever elusive truth.

In the meantime, April Ryan's life has been completely altered from what it was in *The Longest Journey*. The former art student is now fighting a war against oppression. Yet her disillusionment and deep sorrow are all too visible. The story is further enriched with apostle Kian and his extremely important mission. It is a quest into the heart of the enemy. It is a journey to question his beliefs and values. As old friends return, familiar locations are revisited, the tale grows even deeper. It is a tumultuous time in the lives of many people living in the twin worlds. The mystery is great and the answers are hard to come across. *Dreamfall* weaves an intricate web that will propel players throughout the game and leave them yearning for more.



The story is without a doubt the strongest element in *Dreamfall*. Ragnar Tørnquist has once again managed to bring a fascinating universe to life with a plot rich in mystery and intriguing characters. *Dreamfall* is the kind of game that will stay in your mind even when you are not playing it. You will want to race through the adventure in search of answers. Yet even before you install the game, you should realize that the mystery will not be completely solved in *Dreamfall*. In certain ways, *Dreamfall* builds on the storyline of *The Longest Journey*. It also opens up new threads and creates an entirely new mystery. But all of these threads are not resolved when you reach the end of the game. If you are looking for a storyline that will be completed throughout the course of the game, *Dreamfall* will disappoint you. The ending will leave you with many questions and more than likely a fair amount of frustration.

However, it is important to note that Ragnar Tørnquist has every intention of completing the story. *Dreamfall* is just a chapter in a large saga. It is Zoë's adventure and the core thread of the story involving her investigation will be completed. The rest of the events simply set the stage for the next installment while giving us great insight into the events that transpired in the ten years since April Ryan's original journey.

While there is a great deal of justification for *Dreamfall*'s incomplete ending, it is worth noting that the developers could have done a couple of things to prevent a great deal of player frustration. Much of the storyline that takes place in Stark, or the world of science, will be resolved at the end of the game. However, critical moments of the story do not give enough emphasis to the parts of the mystery

that are explained at the end. Not having seen the ending, it is possible to focus on parts of cut scenes that will not be resolved during Dreamfall. Small efforts to restructure the presentation of a few events could have made Dreamfall feel



more like a complete game. In addition, the portion of the story that takes place in Arcadia, or the world of magic, is left almost completely unfinished. Just a few more hints and a little bit of explanation would have gone a long way towards easing the irritation players may experience upon finishing Dreamfall.

The atmosphere is also an extremely strong element of Dreamfall. Right from the beginning, the game's universe has a feeling of sorrow and hopelessness mixed with the sense that something is terribly wrong. You sense it as you find out how Zoë has given up on everything that was once meaningful to her. You feel it as people talk about the horrible Collapse or the spreading Static that is disrupting all networks. The government seems have an extremely tight control over the people of Stark. Many people are concerned, many more are in poverty. As you turn towards Arcadia, things are not any better. The beautiful city of Marcuria is hardly recognizable. A place where many cultures and many races once happily coexisted is now dark and twisted. The people are under strict control, unable to freely express their religious views. But there is something greater than economical problems or oppression in Stark and Arcadia. A greater darkness is fast approaching and there are not many that can stand in its way.

Designed as a full 3D game, the PC version of Dreamfall is controlled primarily through the keyboard. The interface is relatively simple and easy to learn. There are two ways to find hotspots. Interactive objects are highlighted with green brackets when you walk close to them. Alternatively, you can use the focus field to find the hotspots. Once you activate the focus field, your character will stand still and a beam of light will project from his or her feet into the environment. By turning your character around, you can search the area for active spots without having to run around.



Once you find and focus on an interactive object, the game will present a context-sensitive menu with the available commands. The commands are presented as icons around a circle. The eye icon that lets players examine

objects is always available. Depending on the nature of the object you are examining, climb, use, or pick-up icons might also be available. If you are looking at another character, you will be able to choose the speech icon to talk to them.

The inventory interface is also fairly simple. You can bring up the inventory with the touch of a button. Clicking on an inventory item for the first time will select it and display a list of available commands. If you are in front of the object where you need to use the inventory item, the use command will be available. You also give items to other characters with the use command. Players can also continue scrolling through the inventory to use their selected item on a different one.



Dreamfall's interface feels like it was designed for a console game. Certain actions would have been simpler if the game was controlled only by using the mouse. However, the keyboard or gamepad controls should still be very easy to master and should not give players too much trouble.

The sequel to *The Longest Journey* brings us a new array of characters and a variety of locations to explore. Fans of the original game will greatly enjoy meeting a number of characters from *The Longest Journey*. It is certainly interesting to see where life has taken these characters ten years after April's adventure. However, *Dreamfall* is not just a parade of characters from its predecessor. Players will have a chance to meet a number of new characters as they journey through Stark and Arcadia. Between the obligatory techie Liv and the eccentric yet amusingly clichéd Chinese shopkeeper, you will encounter a few memorable characters.

Unfortunately, *Dreamfall* has fewer and significantly weaker characters than *The Longest Journey*. Zoë Castillo certainly comes across as an intelligent young woman determined to find the truth. But especially during the very early parts of the game, players also see her as a tardy slacker that cannot be bothered to do just about anything. She does grow into a more determined and more likeable character throughout the course of the adventure, but she is not even nearly as strong a lead character as April Ryan was in *The Longest Journey*. April herself does not fare much better in this game either. Of course the story makes it very clear that April has undergone a drastic change and she is not the person we know from the original game. But nevertheless, adding the fact that players will not see much of April, she makes for a considerably less likeable character in *Dreamfall*.

Some of the other characters are interesting, but they lack the extra spark that many of the characters in *The Longest Journey* carried. No one you will

encounter matches the soft-spoken insightful wisdom of Tobias or the delightfully cryptic yet thought-provoking words of Cortez. There is also a noticeable lack of people from the magical races. While there are story reasons behind the relative absence of the magical races, this sometimes causes Arcadia to feel more like our world stuck in the past than rather than an amazing world of magic. With a few notable exceptions, the characters of Dreamfall are weaker and less imaginative than the outstanding cast of The Longest Journey.

Character interaction plays a critical role in Dreamfall. Dialogues move the story forward, give us insight into the mystery, and help us learn about each character. In general, the voice acting is good and the different characters are brought to life effectively. Many of the conversations are engaging and should manage to keep players interested. Unfortunately, some of the interaction between different characters does leave something to be desired. For a game so focused on conversation, a number of lines do seem a bit forced and awkward. However, this is certainly a minor problem. If you like games with a great deal of character interaction, you will likely find much of the dialogue in Dreamfall to be quite satisfying.



Your adventure through Dreamfall will allow you to visit a variety of different locations. Players of the original game will get to enjoy some familiar locations that are sure to bring back memories. It is great to see how these places have evolved in ten years. Since they are typically in much worse condition than what you will

remember, returning to these locations feels like a bittersweet homecoming. Exploring the world in full 3D can also be very entertaining. Many of the environments are depicted beautifully to enhance the underlying atmosphere of Dreamfall.

However, the places you get to visit are very different than what April Ryan encountered during The Longest Journey. The nature of the story puts players into corporate buildings or apartments where The Longest Journey featured mystical and magical lands. Some environments feel all too generic and not all that different than what you will have seen in an average game set in the not-too-distant future. Players will also see far fewer locations in Dreamfall than they did in The Longest Journey. This is primarily due to Dreamfall's shorter length and the fact that the main characters often explore the same places.

The strong story and atmosphere behind Dreamfall more than make up for minor complaints about weaker characters or fewer locations to explore. However,

there is one aspect of the game that is sure to frustrate a great number of adventure gamers. Dreamfall is greatly lacking in puzzles. The game puts the focus almost completely on the storyline and the dialogues at the expense of challenging players with creative puzzles. Most of the time players will know exactly what they need to do in order to get past an obstacle. Characters will often provide you with very clear hints throughout the adventure. Even when you are not provided with very many hints, the puzzles are relatively simple and experienced adventure gamers should be able to get past them with very little effort. There are only a handful of challenges that might require you to explore an area a couple of times or watch a cut scene for a second time before you figure out what you need to do.



The relative simplicity of the puzzles can be explained by the developers' desire to maintain the focus on the storyline. After all getting stuck on an obscure puzzle that does not even fit into the storyline can be frustrating and take away from the game play experience. However, during many parts of the game, the simplicity of the puzzles goes too far. When the

challenges start feeling like tiresome errands that involve little more than running all over town, the experience stops being immersive. The game also has players solve variations of two lock-picking puzzles several times throughout the course of the adventure. Including just a few more puzzles could have dramatically alleviated the problem without necessarily taking the focus away from the storyline. Unfortunately, those who do not care much about the plot and play adventure games for the puzzles will not find much to enjoy in Dreamfall.

In addition to traditional adventure elements, Dreamfall features a number of action and stealth sequences. Players will occasionally engage in melee combat or move carefully through an area to avoid detection. However, Dreamfall does give players some opportunities to avoid engaging in the action sequences. Before charging headlong at the enemy, players can examine the environment to see if a more subtle approach is available. Sometimes even asking the right questions might keep players out of combat. The availability of alternative solutions is a nice feature and gives the game some replay value. Unfortunately, the action and stealth sequences do leave something to be desired.

The combat system featured in Dreamfall can be rather problematic. First of all, the fights do not feel fluid or realistic. The movements seem clumsy and forced. To a large extent, this is caused by a small but noticeable delay between the press of a button and the actual execution of the attack. Your opponents

frequently resort to constantly blocking against your strikes. Thus, players have resort to attacks that can break through the enemy defenses. The fighting is generally easy and does not really require any kind of strategy. Overall, the combat system ends up feeling significantly underdeveloped.

Fortunately, players do not have to fight too many times during the game.

Thanks to the fact that Dreamfall often offers alternative approaches, players might prefer actively looking for ways to avoid combat. As such, the issues with the combat system only hurt a small portion of the game. Since the fights are generally easy to win, players will hopefully get past the action sequences without too much frustration.



The stealth sequences are also generally on the easy side. In certain areas players simply have to hide behind objects to avoid being seen. In other areas, players will also have to pay attention to where they are stepping and the sounds in the environment. The stealth interface is definitely not the best implementation to date. Many of these sequences will be far too easy for players who have tried games like Splinter Cell. However, sneaking in and out of certain areas does feel very appropriate in Dreamfall. It makes sense that one of the biggest corporations in the world will have pretty tight security. It makes sense to hide from the monsters patrolling caverns. The stealth sequences should not hurt the game play experience. In fact, they may even add more excitement to a few sections of the adventure.



It is worth noting that the action or stealth elements in Dreamfall do not really turn this game into an action adventure. Just because an action game features one or two puzzles, it does not make sense to automatically label it as an action adventure. Similarly, despite the relatively easy puzzles and the existence of a few fights and stealth sequences, at its core, Dreamfall is still an adventure game. It does greatly diverge from traditional adventure

elements. And the extra features have not been very successfully implemented. However, the basic mechanics of the game make Dreamfall feel and play more as an adventure game than a title from any other genre.

In the end, Dreamfall is a game with a strong storyline and a good atmosphere. The characters may not be as strong as the ones from The Longest Journey, but Dreamfall still manages to make players care about what happens to them. There are fewer and perhaps a little less interesting locations to explore, but it is still great to see how the world has evolved after the events of The Longest Journey. Dreamfall is most certainly not without its flaws. The game could have used quite a few more puzzles. The action elements should have been better implemented or completely removed. The character models could have also used some additional work.

Players who are looking for a conclusion with no loose ends will be disappointed by the ending. Yet Dreamfall still manages to deliver a fun experience despite all of its problems. The game manages to keep players interested from the beginning until the end. It builds upon the storyline of the original The Longest Journey and leaves plenty of room for a sequel. If the developers learn from their mistakes in Dreamfall, the next chapter in the saga could be another great success like The Longest Journey.



Dreamfall is in just about every aspect a lesser game than its predecessor, but that does not mean it is a bad game. If you enjoy games with a great deal of character interaction and an almost complete focus on the storyline, you should still not miss Dreamfall. Days after you complete the game, you may still find yourself thinking about the story. As long as you do not go in looking for an unforgettable classic, you may come to realize that Dreamfall can be a very enjoyable game.

The final grade is 83/100.

Developer: Funcom
Publisher: Aspyr
Platform: PC; Xbox
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: April 2006
Grade: 83/100

Minimum System Requirements:
 Windows® XP (with service pack 2)
 Pentium® IV 1.6 GHz or higher
 512 MB RAM
 DirectX® 9.0c Compatible 128 MB video card
 DirectX® 9.0c Compatible Soundcard
 8x CD-ROM Drive
 7 GB free disk space

Barrow Hill

PC Review by Sudeep Pasricha

Ancient stone monuments such as the Stonehenge have fascinated mankind for many centuries. The origins of these stone circles found across the British Isles are shrouded in mystery (some date as far back as 2500 BC). Explanations abound as to what purpose they served. Were these stone circles aligned with celestial bodies to accurately estimate the time of the year? Or could these circles have been used as amphitheaters for early pagan rituals? No one knows for sure. Adding another layer of mystery to this conundrum are “barrows” or burial mounds constructed by ancient Britons. The barrows are far more in number than the stone circles. As many as 6000 of them can be found in the West of England alone. Barrow Hill is an adventure game based on this very subject of mysterious barrows and stone circles.



The game starts with a grainy black-and-white video of you driving along listening to the radio one evening, when suddenly your car develops problems and breaks down near the ancient woodlands of Cornwall County. You get out and make your way through the creepy woods to eventually reach a gas station. Much to your surprise, the place is deserted. A car hums near a fill-up tank, its door open, the occupant nowhere to be found. Various items lie scattered all over the ground. You trudge over to a cafe in the complex, only to find empty tables, chairs knocked over and not a single person in sight. Except for Ben, who’s hiding in his office and won’t come out. Clearly, something is amiss, and you must figure out what has happened here if you are to get out of this place.



Barrow Hill is essentially a first-person perspective point-and-click exploration adventure. You will find yourself wandering around reading pamphlets, journals, and notes scattered about the place trying to figure out what has happened. In due time, you will learn about a team of archaeologists staying at the nearby motel, who’re digging at a mysterious barrow site surrounded by a stone circle. Some of the locals are apparently not all that pleased with these strangers disturbing their ancient land. The only person you meet, Ben, seems to be incoherently mumbling about

something waiting and watching out there, trying to get him. Is there a connection here between all of these? You'll quickly realize that rational explanations cannot account for what you're seeing and hearing around you.



Yes, this game is scary. But there is no blood or gore here, so don't worry if you get squeamish easily. The spookiness stems mainly from the excellent use of sound effects and the eerie atmosphere created by the graphics, especially the brilliant lighting effects. There are moments where you are lulled into a false sense of security and suddenly something will happen to make you jump. It happened more than once, for instance,

when I walked past some trash cans, and it made me jumpy for the rest of the game. Another time, the sudden loud ring of my cell phone caught me totally unawares, as I roamed around dark stretches of the forest with just the sound of my footsteps to keep me company.

I was really impressed with the excellent graphics and sound effects in this game, which help make it so memorably atmospheric. Interestingly, the settings for this game have been inspired by an actual place in Cornwall County in England (you can check it out at the developer's website, <http://www.barrow-hill.co.uk/>). Matt Clark, the creator of Barrow Hill, and the rest of the Shadow Tor team painstakingly filmed on location in the Looe Valley, recording ambient sounds and locations for use in their 3D modeling software. Thousands of photographs and endless reels of footage were shot to create the world of Barrow Hill (as well as future games planned by the team). You will be amazed at the detail that was recreated from various locations across Cornwall, which was incidentally chosen because of all the counties in the British Isles, it is thought to be the richest in folklore, magic, legends, and mystery.



The puzzles in Barrow Hill for the most part require finding and then using items in different ways. I thought that the puzzle integration in this game was one of its biggest strengths. None of these puzzles seemed arbitrary or out of place. And none of them will be too difficult to crack if you pay attention and take notes. It will certainly help if you keep a piece of paper and pen handy to jot down tidbits of information, which will come in handy eventually. There are clues to solve the puzzles all around you, if you only look (and sometimes listen) carefully. You will

also have the opportunity to use several gadgets such as a PDA, mobile phone, GPS device, and electronic metal detector, which you will find during the course of the game. These devices will be essential to solve some of the puzzles, and after a point will also provide a handy map feature, so you don't get lost.

The story in Barrow Hill moves along fairly briskly. There are several notes, pamphlets and journals to read, which will give you a greater insight not only into the myths and legends of Cornwall, but also about what's been happening with the archaeological dig, from the viewpoints of several people (who are strangely nowhere to be found). Your only contact with humanity, aside from Ben (who isn't all that helpful given his scattered state of mind), will be Emma Harry, a radio DJ operating out of an RV from across town. You will hear her voice from the several radio sets you come across, in the café, motel rooms etc. Some of the other stations that you can tune into will have music, psychics telling your horoscope, or really funny advertisements which will crack you up (my favorite was the one for ginger flavored toothpaste).



To wrap up, I really enjoyed playing Barrow Hill. The game is dripping with atmosphere, has some beautiful graphics and lighting effects, and plenty of unnerving sound effects. The storyline is gripping and the puzzles mesh well with the plot. You won't find yourself stuck at any point for too long, unless you've not been paying attention to the myriad of clues all around you. My only complaint is that the game is a little on the short side. I guess I liked playing this game so much, I'm just wishing I could have spent some more time with it. The bottom line is that if you like an adventure game with a lot of atmosphere, plenty of mystery, and a few scares, you can't go wrong with Barrow Hill.

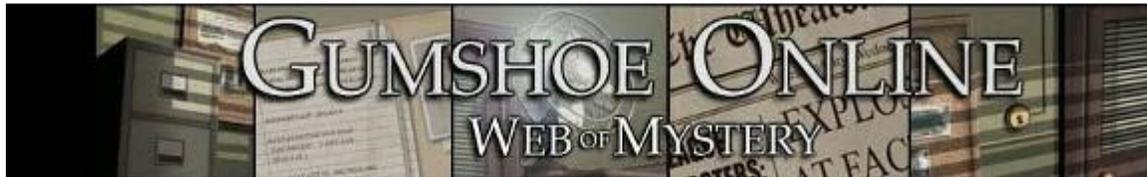


Developer: Shadow Tor Studios
Publisher: Shadow Tor Studios
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: April 2006
Grade: 84/100

Minimum System Requirements:
 Windows® 98 Second Edition
 Pentium® III 450 MHz or higher
 128 MB RAM
 SVGA Video Card with 32-bit color
 DirectX® 9 Compatible Soundcard
 DVD-ROM Drive

Gumshoe Online: The Murky Truth

Online Game Review by Wendy Nellius



I certainly hope all the detectives out there had a nice vacation and a darned good rest since the last case. Hiding Buffalo has released The Murky Truth (their fifth case) and this one is a doozy. So, get your trench coat and Fedora out of the closet and get ready to stick your nose where it doesn't belong, rifle through others' belongings, aggravate some bad guys, and put someone behind bars.

Your day starts out in your office as you wait for clients to contact you. It's been a while and you need the money. Life isn't free, you know. Eureka! You get an urgent telegram from Theodore Nash. Mr. Nash is a successful shipping magnate whose latest venture has been creating a top-of-the-line luxury liner (The Midgard) where the rich and famous could travel in style and have their every whim catered to. Unfortunately, his brilliant business plan has been stopped in its tracks by robbery! Four sets of unknown prints have been found at the scene. Wheaton City is known for its connection to crime, but does that crime extend to piracy? Piracy would seem to be the obvious answer due to the fact that in addition to the precious cargo of wealthy citizens, the ship was also transporting Hungarian antiques on their way to a Miami museum.

Eager to earn some money, you rush right out the door to the Neptune shipping offices. You're greeted by Nash's secretary who informs you that Mr. Nash has left you a letter in his office. Don't think you're just going to waltz up to his office and get the letter. The team at Hiding Buffalo would never allow that. You'll have to solve a puzzle first. When you obtain the letter and another item left for you, the secretary will inform you that Mr. Nash is being detained at the police station. Apparently, the police believe Nash is involved. The situation has become desperate. After speaking directly to Nash, you'll head over to the ship and the investigation will truly begin. It's up to you to clear Nash's name and find the true culprits fast!



Gumshoe-Online is a web based detective game. The entire game is played online. There is no need to download anything. Gumshoe supports the following

browsers: Firefox, Internet Explorer, Mozilla, Netscape, and Opera. If this is your first foray into the Gumshoe world, let me give you a glimpse into what it's all about. You are a detective hired to get to the bottom of the latest crimes occurring in Wheaton City in the 1930's. When you sign up, you get to pick your detective name. Anything goes here; you can use your real name, stick to an old detective classic, or get creative as you wish.



As stated above, this is the 5th case for Hiding Buffalo. The first case (Osbourne Mystery) is a tutorial and is offered for free. The following cases are substantially longer and offered at a minimal cost. Game play is the same for all the cases and is entirely point and click. At the end of the case, you will be required to solve it by choosing the correct suspect(s), motive, and a specific number of clues to prove your solution.

Points are awarded based upon correctness of solution, total number of clues found, and the time taken to complete. You will also receive a letter telling you that you did an excellent job, so-so job, or that you're a disgrace to your profession. When the Gumshoe cases first made an appearance, they had contests running so getting the highest number of points was important for those competing. Currently, there is no contest, so the points will only dictate your rank in the detective world. Likely, most gamers just want the letter telling them they solved it correctly and don't really care about the points. But, for those who are competitive in nature, it's important to note that after purchase, each case can be played an unlimited amount of times. So, you can go in and replay for a better score if so desired.

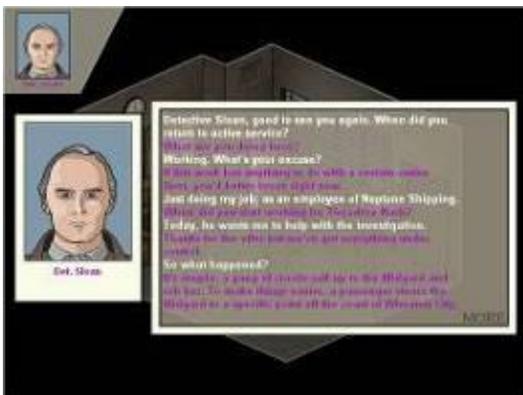
As you conduct your investigation, there will be characters to interact with. Dialog is conducted all in text. When you click on a character, a dialog box will pop up. Topic options will be listed at the bottom. There is a bar along the bottom that details the tolerance level of the person you're talking to. At some point, the tolerance level will hit the red zone meaning you won't get any more out of this person. In previous cases, choosing the topics in the wrong order might have you missing a topic and losing points on your final score. However, unless I missed it, it was not experienced this time.



Even though you have a decent amount of characters to interact with, don't expect all of them to greet you with fondness. Some characters from previous cases make a return appearance and truly seem irritated by your very presence.

They will bombard you with plenty of snide comments. You will get to interact with the police, ship crew members, mobsters, and more.

One of the main focuses for the game is in locating all the clues. Based on the stats provided, there are over 170 clues to be found and over 1200 items that you can examine. Yes, you will pixel hunt and pixel hunt and pixel hunt. As you find each item, a description will pop up and your detective will usually make a comment. Not all items count as clues. All clues truly relevant to the case will be transferred to your notebook. A small icon will appear in the bottom right hand corner of your screen and a “blooping” noise will sound as a clue is transferred. The notebook is located in a separate pop-up window which loads at the same time as the game. The notebook contains all your clues, usable items (such as a crowbar or key), locations you have available, and characters you have encountered so far. You can also find a summary of possible motives based upon what you have learned up to that point. There is even a tab where you can type in your own personal notes if you wish. You will find a lot of clues that turn out to be red herrings. This is done intentionally to keep you guessing until the very end. Your game is saved automatically each time you exit the game. You also have the ability to save your game in the filing cabinet in your office. This allows you to load a game so you can solve again without replaying the entire case.



The game is pretty linear. Certain clues or locations do not become available until you have completed a preceding task. This means that you will have to revisit locations constantly to see if something has changed. For example, in one cabin there is money sitting on a desk. You can't take it and your detective doesn't even acknowledge it's there. Only when another event takes place and your detective needs to find some bribe money

does that money on the desk become available. So, be prepared to do a fair amount of running around. Note that a dial-up connection will slow things down a bit, but settings can also be adjusted to compensate for some of the slow-down. Combining inventory items is also done in the notepad as is solving some of the puzzles.

Oh, the puzzles!! As with the other cases, there are inventory puzzles (finding keys, tools etc.) but there are also logic, math, and message decoding puzzles. In every case, our bad guys always have a habit of tearing a piece of evidence into little pieces and hiding the pieces all over the area. Murky Truth is no exception. Once you find the pieces, you must assemble them in your notebook and they always turn out to be an important clue. The logic puzzles aren't too bad and won't strain your brain too much. That being said; be prepared to have your butt kicked by the math puzzles. The team at Hiding Buffalo kicked up the difficulty level to new heights.



You will spend a fair amount of time on some of the puzzles and pull your hair out on others. Take for example the most difficult puzzle in the game; a fuse puzzle located in the hold of the ship. You have 16 fuses to choose from and they must be arranged in rows of 4 fuses each with the numerical values of specific positions adding up to specific numbers with the last number being unknown. I happen to enjoy math puzzles, so I set up my excel spreadsheets complete

with formulas and spent the next five hours calculating the wrong solution. A little help from a moderator (Thanks to Andre aka Dr. Dee!) and I now had a new correct formula and spent 6 more hours calculating all the possible combinations resulting in five possible correct solutions. What a relief and sense of satisfaction to have finished that one!!! The puzzle has since been adjusted to make it a little easier by limiting the choices of all the fuses in the 1st position and eliminating multiple solutions. Naturally, the new revised version did not match any of my previous solutions so upon replaying, I had to go through it again, but it only took me about 1-1/2 hours to get the answer this time.

The dreaded lock pick puzzle which caused many a gamer distress in the previous cases was replaced by a different kind of lock pick puzzle. You now have 4 lock pick tools that must be clicked in a specific order. The puzzle involves 16 steps. If you choose incorrectly, the puzzle resets and you must begin again. While this is an easier version and only appears once, it is tedious and random. So, if you replay the case, you will have to go through the process all over again. Aghhh! But, it was fun. There are 14 butt-kicking puzzles throughout the case. You may want to ask Hiding Buffalo if there is a headache medicine reimbursement program available.

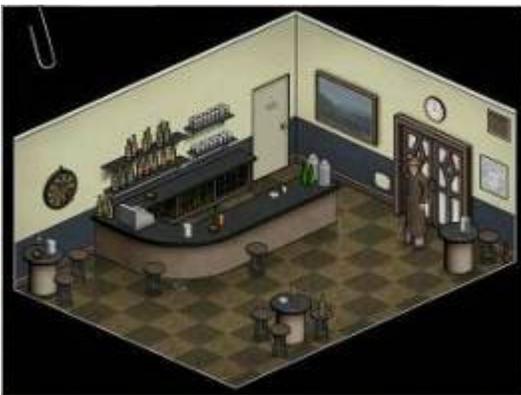


There are 5 different locations to visit. The police station is standard for every Gumshoe case. You'll also make another visit to Pretorio's. Pretorio is the local mob boss and seems to be constantly involved in a lot of shady business taking place in Wheaton City. New locations include Neptune shipping, a bridge and the massive cruise ship location. The cruise ship has a lot of floors and a ton of rooms. Trying to remember where you last saw something can be quite a task on the old memory.



While the graphics are simple in format, they are crisp, clean and thoroughly enjoyable. Each room at every location has hotspots to examine. There could be something hidden around every corner. There are 3 choices of background music which are jazzy and appropriate for the time period, but quite repetitive and you may want to turn it off after a while. While appreciated, you don't really need background music to enhance the game.

Gumshoe Online storylines are always interesting and filled with twist and turns. The same holds true for The Murky Truth. It's really about using your detective, reasoning and logic skills. Again, this is a linear game so information is fed to you along those lines. The only complaint here is that you tend to be left with unanswered questions about the story. For example, there was a lot of mention of the fact that Midgard was not the original name for the ship and that Midgard has some kind of meaning. I personally was not able to find out what that was and am unsure as to whether a clue or a conversation topic was missed. There also was never any follow-up on the Captain's death. You're told that Dr. Brandt (the coroner) has to get back to the lab and make a report, but he never seems to do that. In the end, the motive is understandable, but as you don't get as



much information as you would like on the underlying reasons. But, as some of the bad guys make repeat appearances, one can only assume that some of these questions will be answered in future cases. There are even questions with little items, such as the fact that you will always manage to find a casino chip somewhere in the game. Why? Is there some reason that will be made clear later or is this just to throw us off?

The Gumshoe-Online cases are somewhat different in the fact that there is no walkthrough available. Hints are posted in the forum and solutions are provided through the private messaging feature of the forum. These hints and solutions mainly come from other players who have decided to stick around and help

others. When a new case comes out, the forum is flooded and help is only a moment or so away. The forum community is extremely friendly and there are excellent moderators who ensure it stays that way. You might even make a few new friends. As Murky Truth is new, most hints are provided via private message as to not spoil the experience for others. You may find there is a delay in getting a response on the forum once the rush has died down. There are only a few players who stick around indefinitely to provide assistance. And, it's



important to note that gamers come from all over the world, so you need to be aware of the time differences. You will get a response; however, you may have to wait a bit. Even the best players can get stuck. A special thanks goes out to Bri aka Renik for the sorely needed direction, SarahCA for the damn triangle count and our own AL reviewer Thaumaturge for allowing me to pick his brain dry regardless of whether he was tired or not.

What has been impressive since the beginning is the dedication given to making the experience a positive one. The team at Hidden Buffalo welcomes feedback and suggestions. They pay attention to the gamer and implement changes as necessary. Puzzle suggestions by players have actually been used. They acknowledged the previous lock pick puzzle dread and changed it for Murky Truth. Technical problems are also corrected in a timely manner. It's a great feeling for a gamer to know that they are heard and that their opinions matter. This is rare to find these days.

Game length for The Murky Truth is estimated at about 6-9 hours. However, with the difficulty level of some of the puzzles, you will find that you are playing for days. If you like detective games with a diverse mix of medium difficulty and brain-busting puzzles then you absolutely must try The Murky Truth and all the previous cases. Be forewarned; as many in the forums can attest; Gumshoe Online is very addictive. You really don't get the full effect from the free tutorial case. Once you've tried one of the longer cases, you may find yourself hooked and counting the days until they come up with another. Improvements are made with each new case so the future looks bright for Gumshoe-Online. You can play the game at www.gumshoe-online.com

<p>Developer: Hiding Buffalo Publisher: Hiding Buffalo Platform: PC Genre: Adventure Release Date: 2006 Grade: 88/100</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Internet Connection</p> <p>Browsers: Internet Explorer, Firefox, Mozilla, Opera and Netscape</p> <p>Sound: MS Media Player, RealPlayer or Quicktime plug-in required for sound</p>
--	--

Tex Murphy: Overseer

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It is the San Francisco of the future. Speeders fly across high-rise buildings. The bright lights of the city defy the nighttime sky. It is a city that lives despite the destruction of the war. It is the home of Tex Murphy, a penniless private investigator with a lot of attitude and a penchant for getting himself into trouble. But sleeping in his bed, Tex is far from finding rest and relaxation on this brilliant San Francisco evening.



Visions of the past haunt Tex Murphy in his dreams. Death at the Golden Gate Bridge... A man suffering from intolerable pain... Tex cannot find release from the memories of a time long past. Shaken and drenched in sweat, the private investigator wakes up to the sound of his video phone.

Chelsee is calling to remind Tex of their date. As usual, the tardy detective is running miserable late. Tex hurries over to Chelsee's apartment. Settling down for some drinks, the couple starts a difficult conversation about their relationship. Chelsee confronts Tex about his past relationship with a woman called Sylvia. Before Chelsee and Tex can move forward as a couple, the detective has to come clean and explain what really happened and why he still has a hard time getting over Sylvia.

It is time for Tex to open up and tell Chelsee about his early days as a private investigator. This will not be an easy evening for Murphy. Old memories seem to have a way of coming after him tonight. But sometimes in remembrance, one can find relief. Perhaps sharing the story with Chelsee will help Tex let go of his burdens.



As Tex begins his tale, we are taken back several years. Tex has just opened his own office as a private investigator. The furniture, the filing cabinets, the fancy phone, and the fax machine are all in place. Finding clients on the other hand is a whole different matter. Worried about the success and profitability of his business, Tex is trying his best to pass the time as he waits for a client.

Quite unexpectedly, a striking young lady appears at Tex's office. Introducing herself as Sylvia Linsky, she expresses her interest in hiring the detective. Sylvia has recently lost her father Carl Linsky. The police have concluded that the scientist has killed himself by jumping off the Golden Gate Bridge. Yet Sylvia is not buying this story. She is convinced there is something else going on behind the scenes.



Tex is initially reluctant to take on the case. He doubts there will be much more to uncover. Once he starts gathering information however, Tex will find himself in the midst of a great mystery. The investigation of what seems to be a simple suicide case leads Murphy to a daunting conspiracy. Between top secret research projects, cryptic clues, and extremely dangerous characters, Tex will need every

ounce of his detective instincts to uncover the truth. The path is filled with dangers and the things are never as they seem. But Tex cannot afford to fail. There is much more at stake than what the private investigator realizes.

The intriguing plot is without a doubt among the greatest assets of Tex Murphy: Overseer. The investigation takes players to the early days in Tex's career. At the outset of the game, the aspiring detective is full of hope and optimism. He does not yet carry the burden of years spent chasing criminals. The business may not be exactly at the level Tex wants it to be, but the detective is not about to give up on his dream. But things change as Murphy investigates Carl Linsky's death. Tex witnesses events and uncovers facts that will change him forever. Perhaps the experience leaves the detective better equipped to handle future cases. But it also alters his outlook on life.

On one hand, Overseer is about an intricate conspiracy that involves many different factions. Between many different characters trying to guard their own interests, it is hard to know who can really be trusted. The escalation of events and the evolution of the investigation are expertly handled. Yet on the other hand, there is a much more personal side to the story. Overseer is about how Murphy became the sort of character he is in Under a Killing Moon and Pandora Directive. Sure, his tough-guy attitude and unabashed interest in any attractive woman seems to have been with the detective since day one. But



events of Overseer are in a large way responsible for turning Tex Murphy into the kind of man he is in the earlier games of the series.

As the story progresses, the atmosphere shifts to create a more profound experience. There is always a sense of urgency and a desire to find the truth. The game fills players with questions, compelling them to unlock the mystery and reach the ending. There intense moments where you know that Murphy is in grave danger. One wrong move can be fatal. But there is also plenty of humor in Murphy's sarcastic remarks or ever-insightful descriptions. And then there is a touch of sorrow as Murphy bears witness to tragic events. Throughout the course of the adventure, Overseer manages to maintain the thrill of a detective novel. But there is also an emotional aspect of the game that accentuates and enhances the experience.



Tex conducts his investigation in two primary ways. He either explores various locations for clues or interrogates other characters for any kind of useful information. During the early parts of the game there is somewhat of a heavier focus on the interrogations. Conversations with other characters are handled in two ways. Occasionally, players will be asked to respond to an event or remark by choosing an option from a list. Sometimes the list might include hints about the direction Murphy will take the conversation. At other times, players will be able to instruct Tex to perform specific actions during a cut scene. In many cases, your choices will not alter the ultimate result of the scene. You will simply have a chance to explore different paths of a conversation. But at other times, your decisions might be critical in determining whether or not Tex will be able to obtain information or even survive the scene.



One minor issue with this conversation structure is that players do not get to see exactly what Tex is going to say before selecting an option. While the game offers a short description as to the direction Tex will take the conversation, a little more information would have been helpful in eliminating unnecessary guesswork. Without some experimentation, it is also impossible to know if attempting a certain

action during a cut scene will result in Murphy's untimely demise. Fortunately, the descriptions are typically clear enough to give players a pretty good idea as to what Tex might say or do. Players are also allowed to save during these sequences so going back and selecting a different option is easy.



The second type of dialogue features more of a direct interrogation style. Tex's notepad appears on the bottom right corner of the screen with a list of available topics. By selecting topics, players can find out whether or not the other character has any valuable information to provide. Once you discuss a topic with a certain character, it gets marked with a red checkmark. Thus, if you come back and talk to the same

character again, you don't have to worry about remembering which questions you had already asked. As characters provide you information, new conversation topics become available. Topics will also appear as Tex uncovers important clues while carefully examining various locations. As such, players are encouraged to revisit characters frequently and ask everyone all the available questions.

The characters in *Tex Murphy: Overseer* are brought to life by real actors. Throughout the course of the adventure, you will run into a wide variety of characters. From the chronically irritable police chief Eve Clements to the excessively helpful Delores Lightbody, the cast has a number of interesting characters. You will try to squeeze information out of corporate executives while trying to stay away from a notorious serial killer and trying to figure out the real motives of your client. The acting is not always stellar, the occasional line seems to be forced; some of the facial expressions are overdone. However, the overall performance of the actors remains sufficiently convincing throughout the game and perhaps even makes the game more immersive. Michael York's portrayal of J. Saint Gideon is especially noteworthy as the actor successfully captures the complexity of his character.



When Tex is not talking to other characters, he will be visiting numerous locations and looking for clues that might provide leads on his investigation. Players will control Tex from a first-person perspective. By default, the arrow keys are used to move Tex around each location. Players can also make Tex crouch, look up, or look down. Since all the items are not conveniently located at the eye level, players will have to look at every corner of each location to make sure they have not missed anything. The navigation interface is intuitive and works smoothly. Players should hopefully not have any problems moving around the environments while conducting their investigations.

The mouse cursor changes into a cross when you bring it over an interactive object. Clicking on the object will open up a context-sensitive list of command icons. Tex will give you a description of the object if you click on the magnifying glass icon. If you are looking at electronic equipment, you might see an icon that will get Tex to operate the device. You will also have separate icons to pick-up items or open objects such as drawers, doors, or cabinets.



Dragging the mouse to the right side of the screen will open up the inventory. Here you can examine or combine items. If you select an item and click on an object in the environment, Tex will attempt to use the inventory item. In order to travel between locations, you can bring the mouse to the left side of the screen. A list of available destinations will be presented. Selecting an option and clicking on the 'Go' button is all that is needed to transfer

Tex to a different location. Finally, moving the mouse to the top part of the screen will give you access to the game's main menu. Here you can save your progress, access Overseer's hint system, or change the game's configuration.

Tex's adventure in Overseer takes him to a variety of locations around San Francisco. Players will get to explore office buildings, abandoned warehouses, and a number of high-tech labs. Leaving the cityscapes, players will also have a chance to explore Anasazi ruins. Especially during the later parts of the game where the focus is more on exploration, the environments should keep players interested. The final portion of the game in particular offers a somewhat unexpected but welcome change of scenery.

Overseer is quite rich in puzzles. At each location players will find a number of important clues and inventory items. The game offers a good deal of inventory-based puzzles. As long as you have the correct items, these puzzles should be fairly simple and straightforward. The item combinations should not present too much of a challenge. However, actually locating certain inventory items might prove to be a bit difficult. While most of the objects you need to find are relatively easy to spot, there are a few items that might send you scrambling through various locations multiple times.



In addition to inventory-based puzzles, the game features a number of other challenges. There are a handful of puzzles where players have to put together the pieces of a torn object or document. Tex will also have to solve a few scrambled word puzzles, figure out a way to decode certain documents, and learn a thing or two about Anasazi religion. The game will put your ability to work with different time zones to test. Some basic understanding of chess may not hurt either. There is also one sound-based puzzle. If you are having trouble understanding how to operate a certain puzzle, hitting the F1 button will provide you instructions. A few of the puzzles do have to be solved within a time limit. However, the game lets players try again immediately if you fail to solve the puzzle within the allotted time. In addition, the time limits are usually on the generous side. As such, players should be able to overcome these challenges without too much frustration. The wide variety of puzzles featured in Overseer should be enough to keep players busy for quite a while.



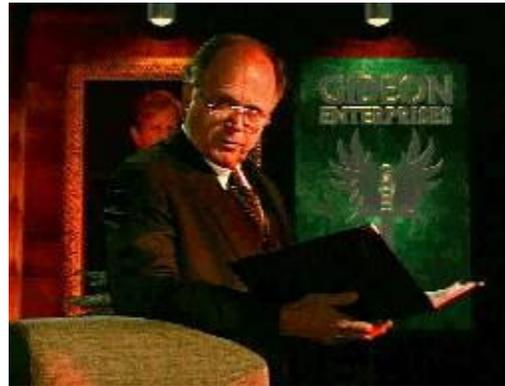
It is worth noting that there are quite a number of ways in which Murphy can die in Overseer. As such, players would be well-advised to save frequently. On the plus side however, it is usually easy to tell when Tex is about to find himself in a dangerous situation, which might help you remember to save. Given the storyline, it also makes sense that Tex would find himself in life-threatening situations during the investigation. If you are breaking into places without permission, making some effort to hide from a guard or trying not to leave any traces behind seems logical. Sometimes, players will be given a chance to immediately try the section again if Tex dies. Unfortunately, this feature is not always consistent. Sometimes players will have no choice but to resume the adventure from a saved game.

At the beginning of the game, players have the option to choose between the 'Entertainment' mode and the 'Gamer' mode. If you are more interested in getting through the storyline and want to complete the game at a casual pace, 'Entertainment' might be the better option. In this mode, players have access to the game's built-in hint system. It is also possible to skip puzzles altogether. If you choose the 'Gamer' mode, the hints are not accessible. Players do have the option to switch from the 'Gamer' mode to the 'Entertainment' mode during the game. However, once you make the change, you cannot go back to the 'Gamer' mode unless you start a new game. During puzzles, the 'Gamer' mode gives players a time limit. If they manage to complete the puzzles during the specified time period, players get bonus points. In terms of the storyline however, your choice will make no difference.

Overseer features a great hint system to help players that get stuck during any part of the game. Accessible from the main menu, the hints grouped into various

categories. Depending on how much progress you have made throughout the game and how many tasks you have successfully accomplished, different hint topics will be available. Once you select a topic, you will see a list of the actions you already completed to accomplish the chosen task. Any actions you are yet to perform will be invisible. Players can click on the button for the next available action to obtain a hint. The hints might provide a great deal of help with various puzzles or locating inventory items. However, players should keep in mind that each time they view the hint directory or buy a hint; points are deducted from their score. By deducting points, the game discourages players from overusing the hint system.

Considering nine years have already passed since *Overseer's* original release, it is especially worth noting that the game does have a cliffhanger ending. The storyline with the Carl Linsky investigation is fully completed. Players should have most if not all the answers they will seek about Sylvia's case by the time they beat *Overseer*. However, the game also sets the stage for a sequel and leaves players with several new questions. With each passing year, the likelihood of a sequel to conclude the story seems to diminish. Of course there are still rumors going around about a potential sequel. Perhaps despite all the odds, one must never give up hope. Nevertheless, if you prefer games that do not leave any loose ends, *Overseer* may frustrate you.



Overall, *Tex Murphy: Overseer* is a great game with a very solid storyline, interesting characters, and a good variety of challenges. The strong elements of the game more than make up for its problems. Once you start getting into the story, *Overseer* is the kind of game that will not let you go until you complete it. The game does an excellent job of showing players Tex's early days while laying a thick plot of conspiracy, mystery, and intrigue. Almost ten years after its original 1997 release, *Overseer* remains a highly playable and greatly entertaining adventure gaming experience. If you missed the game when it was released and if you can manage to get a hold of a copy, *Overseer* is most certainly worth a try.

<p>Developer: Access Software Publisher: Access Software Platform: PC Genre: Adventure Release Date: 1997 Grade: 91/100</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 95 Pentium® 133 MHz or higher 16 MB RAM 2 MB 16-bit Video Card 16-bit Soundcard 4X CD-ROM or DVD Drive 20 MB Hard Disk Space</p>
--	---

Gabriel Knight II: The Beast Within

PC Review by Thaumaturge

It has been nearly a year since Gabriel Knight, bookstore owner and horror novelist, began investigating the Voodoo Murders as part of his research for a new novel. Nearly a year since the heady, powerful mix of love and ancient magic pulled him to the heart of a Voodoo hounfour. Nearly a year since his life changed, shifting with tectonic force. He loved and he lost. He discovered duty and responsibility. He discovered the secret of his heritage – his blood was Ritter blood, and the Ritters were Schattenjäger – Shadow Hunters. Almost a year ago he reclaimed the talisman of the Schattenjäger, atoned for the sins of his forebear, and annulled the curse that had been laid on the Ritter line. Almost a year since Uncle Wolfgang, the Schattenjäger before Gabriel, gave up his life so that the family could regain the talisman and confront the evil that had claimed it.



In this time Gabriel has moved into Schloss Ritter, the ancestral home of the Schattenjäger. With the money taken from the Voodoo hounfour and the success of his fictionalization of his experience with the Voodoo cult he has begun to refurbish and repair the time-worn castle. His bookstore, previously all but empty, has begun to throb with life under the management of Grace Nakimura, whose research was invaluable to the unraveling of the Voodoo cult.



However, Gabriel is frustrated with his attempts at a new novel. Nothing seems to be working. Similarly, the quiet, cloistered life that he has led in Schloss Ritter is a marked contrast to the life of pleasure that he led in New Orleans.

Change is marked by a pounding on the door of the castle. A group of townspeople have come seeking the Schattenjäger. A series of brutal

attacks, seemingly the work of wolves, has reached the Huber family, and through a relative in the town they have come to the Schattenjäger for aid, for they believe that it was no ordinary wolf - it was a werewolf.



With this as his start, Gabriel begins his investigation into the “wolf killings”, and in time into a highly exclusive hunt club. Meanwhile, Grace travels to Germany and, through clues found in the Ritter archives, begins investigating the mysterious Black Wolf and his connection to King Ludwig II of Bavaria. Grace’s investigation seems unrelated to the immediacy of Gabriel’s case, but the two are in fact inextricably linked.

This double story is easily the greatest strength of this game. Both strands have the character of an investigation into the supernatural, rather than the descent into darkness that characterized the first game. This is the logical approach given the position of the characters at the start of the game and follows the progression of their overall story naturally. The main characters are for the most part interesting, especially the members of the hunt club – and most of all the magnetic founder of the club, Baron Friedrich von Glower.

In addition, the characters of Gabriel and Grace are better filled-out in this game than in its predecessor. Their evolution as characters is clearly visible and important to the game. As such, it is a good thing that their evolution is well-handled. The emotions and tensions between the characters are also stronger in this game, which I feel makes for a richer and more compelling story.

Where Gabriel’s section deals with the immediate killings and the people around them, Grace’s section delves into history. While this section, and the amount of exposition that it involves, may deter some players, the story that it tells is, in my opinion, well worth it. This section weaves together elements of real history with excellently-crafted fiction, telling a story that I feel both enhances and supports Gabriel’s section, leading to the final fusion and resolution of the story strands.

Duality is a major theme of the story – it is expressed in the characters of Gabriel and Grace, in the separation of their experiences into separate chapters, and the seemingly unrelated and dissimilar storylines that each follows underscores this. Just as the final chapter brings together the two storylines into one, both Gabriel and Grace will be called upon to achieve this resolution – if either fails, both may fall.



The music that accompanies this story is in general very good, at times rising to beautiful. At its best it is stirring and effective; at its worst it is still at least fitting. While the music disappears in the more mundane regions of the game, replaced by appropriate ambient noises, in the more dramatic scenes it rises to enhance and set the mood, at its most stirring in the most climactic scenes.



Much like the music, the graphical artwork is effective and appropriate to the setting at its worst, while it is simply beautiful at its best. Using photograph-based backdrops and characters, the graphics manage to portray a range of settings from the mundane to the otherworldly beautiful and the darkly ominous. Each setting has a suitable aesthetic and atmosphere, being very well designed and at times using color and lighting to excellent effect. The only serious flaw in the graphics is that the backdrops are often a little static. However, this may well have been a technological limitation at the time that this game was created.

A relatively minor flaw, that may not even be very noticeable, is that at times the characters show that they have been overlaid on the backgrounds through their lack of shadows. In addition, there are a few occasions at which the edges of characters do not merge perfectly with their backdrops, again exposing their overlaid origins to those that notice. One final flaw worth noting is that the CGI werewolves seem inappropriately small at times, given the information that we are given on them.

To match the photographic backgrounds, the characters are all portrayed by real actors. For the most part they are well-chosen, fitting their parts well, and in a few cases they are excellently chosen – the best example of which is Baron von Glower, played by Peter Lucas. The acting, while not in my opinion a match for the best found on the silver screen, is good for a game, especially of its time. Some parts stand out as being very well-played, and again Peter Lucas stands out as the mysterious Baron von Glower. The actor that portrays Gabriel perhaps lacks a little gravity, but overall does a decent job. The dialogue writing is at least competent and at times better, if not stellar.



A minor deficiency is that the volume and quality of the characters' voices is a little inconsistent. In addition, some of the dialogue clips end a little abruptly,

seemingly having been clipped a little short. On a more positive note, written information is read out by the appropriate character – generally either the writer or the reader – and this is done quite nicely.

A nice touch is found in some of the comments made by the characters. In some cases, if the player has already visited particular other locations and examined the relevant items there, the comments made on items in the new area will reflect the knowledge that the character gained in the earlier area. For example, a character might link paintings found in one area with their inspirations if she has already discovered those inspirations. Otherwise, her comments might only reflect what information she has to hand in the area around the paintings.

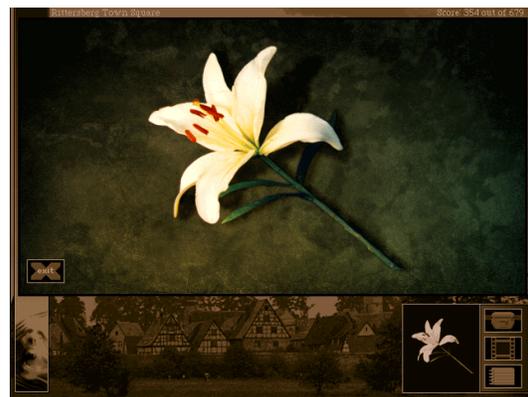


The game is divided into chapters. Each of the first five chapters center on Gabriel and Grace alternately on their very separate story strands. The final chapter calls on both of them to bring the story to resolution. Each chapter lasts until certain actions have been performed or discoveries made, at which point the day ends automatically.

The majority of the puzzles are inventory-based, involving finding creative ways to overcome the obstacles in the game and discover its secrets. These are for the most part not too difficult; a few might require some quite creative thought (or a little luck, of course), but most should not present too many problems.

The other element to advancement in the game is discovery. As the players discover more about the mysteries of the game, new areas, topics of conversation, and items become available. In some cases this relies upon talking about a certain topic with a particular character, while in others it requires examining a particular item. It is worth noting that in at least one case the player is required to examine an item in the inventory in order to acquire a new available destination or topic. It is thus important to examine new items – even if it doesn't yield a new location or topic of conversation, it may yet provide insight or a hint on the item's intended use.

Connected to this is the fact that it is often not possible to take certain items before either Gabriel or Grace has a reason to do so, even then in at least one case not before getting permission. While this may annoy some players, to my mind, it adds to the realism of the game. After all, it would surely be out of character for these people, especially Grace, to steal.



There are a few hot spots that might not be very obvious. However, they don't sink to the level of true pixel-hunting. These hotspots are neither too common nor likely to be major problems.

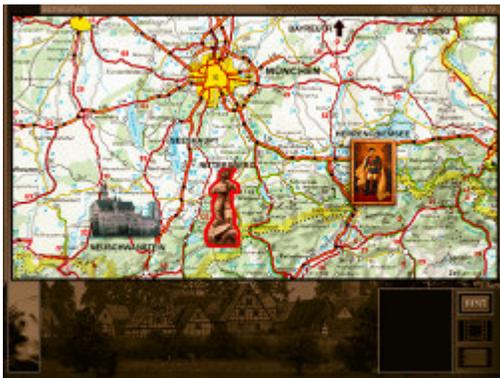
There are very few pure logic puzzles, an exception being the one found in the second-to last puzzle, just before the final confrontation. This section deserves mention for being an interesting, appropriate, and above all puzzle-driven finale. Despite being puzzle-based, it does not lack a tense atmosphere, especially in combination with the music that accompanies it.



It is worth noting that there are a few places in which it is possible for the player to die. Should this happen, a grave is shown in cold blues, along with buttons offering the options to restore a saved game, try the section again (which takes the player back to the beginning of the dangerous section), or quit the game.

Movement between major locations is achieved via an area map. In the case of Gabriel's time in Munich, this is a subway map, with locations shown in colored boxes to match the map style, while the case of Grace's more widely-spread investigation is handled through a road map of the area around Munich with representative photographs to symbolize the locations of interest to her. The styling of these maps feels very appropriate to the locations and characters to which they apply, and in the case of Grace's map, is another example of the artistic quality of this game.

A nice addition to the maps is a hint button. Only available in the map screen, this causes the outlines of areas that have actions still to be completed in a given chapter to flash. This allows the player to acquire a prompt when stuck, without revealing too much. The downside, however, is that it is entirely possible for one to not know what has been missed in a particular area, which could lead to frustration. In addition, if a missed action relies on an inventory item rather than a particular area, area-related hints may be of less value.



Overall, the interface is sleek and efficient. Where the previous game used a number of cursor modes, the cursor in Gabriel Knight II is far simpler. When passed over an area, item or person of interest, the cursor changes into a dagger to indicate

that an action is possible there. In some cases the character will simply explain what is to be seen there; in others they might take or use the item or talk to the person. In a few cases, cursors other than the dagger are used to indicate specific actions. The primary examples of this are the “exit” cursor, which appears when the cursor is passed over a possible exit from the current area or view, and the page turn cursors, which indicate that the player can view the



following and previous pages in a book, letter, or some other document. Also of note is the double arrowhead cursor which can be found at the top left and right of most of the scrolling scenes (where the available area is larger than the game window, and the view moves to follow the character). This allows one to jump immediately to the desired end of the area, making travel through these sections less tedious than it might have been with a different interface.

Some might view this simplicity as a “dumbing-down” of the interface, and they may be right. However, the gameplay relies more on investigation and inventory use than on physical manipulation, so this seems to me to not sacrifice much.

The inventory is accessed via a button at the bottom right of the game screen, the clicking of which replaces the area below the game view window (and to the left of the inventory button) with an inventory box rendered in sepia tones. Clicking on an item in the inventory replaces the cursor with a black-and-white rendition of that item, allowing the player to use the selected item in the game world. When passed over an area of interest, instead of changing to the dagger cursor, the inventory item cursor inverts colors, black to white and vice versa. In addition, clicking with this cursor on the magnifying glass button that appears when the inventory window is opened allows the player to view a full-color image of the object in the main game window, often beautifully shot. This allows the player to examine an object in more detail (at times providing important information, making such examination not only aesthetic but also useful).



Every action (save for some foot travel in the scrolling scenes, and excluding simple descriptions of items) is associated with a generally brief movie clip, depicting the character performing the desired action. This adds to the realism and immersion of the game, when opposed to games that reuse simple animations for many actions or provide no action animation at all.

Should the player wish to review what has already been learned, Gabriel carries a tape recorder which records all relevant conversations, allowing the player to play them back for review, and Grace carries a notebook within which she records her discoveries and observations. While potentially useful, these could also be tedious to work through, so it is perhaps good that they shouldn't be called for very often. However, it is worth noting that Gabriel's tape recorder does offer another feature: that of creating a tape splice from a previous recording. In addition, previously-seen cinematics are also reviewable – again a potentially useful (and enjoyable) feature.



All movies and speech can be skipped with a simple click of the mouse, allowing the player to skip through already-seen movies and speech. However, I would suggest that it may be quite unwise to skip as-yet unseen sections, as these may well contain important information.

In conclusion, Gabriel Knight II is an excellent game. While other games at the time used full motion video as this does, they tended to be fairly poor, lacking the effectiveness of either movies or less realistic games. In this case, however, the movies are well-directed and at least decently acted, and are supported by some very well-chosen actors, such as Peter Lucas in the part of Baron von Glower.



The game play is fun, the story is well-written and interesting, and the characters have advanced nicely from their previous adventure. The graphics are at times beautiful, and the music at its best stirring and dramatic. This is a game that I definitely recommend to any who might find the themes of interest, and would suggest that others at least try if they come by it for a decent price.

Developer: Sierra Studios
Publisher: Sierra Studios
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 1995
Grade: 94/100

Minimum System Requirements:
 DOS 5.0+, Win 3.1 or higher
 486 / 33 Processor or higher
 8 MB RAM
 15 MB Hard Drive Space
 256 Colour SVGA Graphics, at 640x480
 Windows Compatible Sound Card with DAC
 2x CD-ROM Drive
 Keyboard, mouse, speakers

That Night Before – Act 1

PC Review by Ugur Sener

[Editorial Note: All four acts of That Night Before are relatively short and they combine to make a complete game. However, since each episode has a distinct flavor, they have been covered in separate mini-reviews. The last mini-review ends with a note on how the four acts tie together as a complete game.]

You are enjoying a wonderful evening in the park with your girlfriend Natasha. The stars are beautiful in the nighttime sky. The entire park feels so calm and soothing. Yet you can't help being excited. It is the night before the big event. A completely new chapter of your life is about to begin. Suddenly, Natasha exclaims about a bright light in the sky. You turn around to look. In an instant everything goes black.

Confused and dazed, you wake up in your room. Your memories of the previous night are blurred. You cannot remember exactly what happened and how you got to your room. Before you have a chance to recollect yourself, you hear the banging on the front door of your house. Hesitantly opening the door, you are confronted by a police officer. Agent Todd tells you that your girlfriend has been kidnapped. As if that wasn't bad enough, you are the prime suspect.



Once he is satisfied that he has yelled at you enough, Agent Todd takes his leave. You realize it may only be a matter of time before the detective is back with an arrest warrant. You have to somehow piece together the clues and remember what happened last night. You might be the only one capable of uncovering the mystery and finding your missing girlfriend.

That Night Before is a pleasant episodic adventure game from Scurvyriver Entertainment. The game is divided into four chapters, but the story is structured to make each of these episodes feel like a complete albeit rather small adventure game. The first act of the game sets the tone for the rest of the adventure and gives players a chance to meet the main character Roy Haliway.

During the first act of That Night Before, Roy makes for a great character to control. There is something instantly likeable about his confused state at the beginning of the game. His appearance alone makes him come across as an honest, good-natured, yet gullible character. At the same time, he is gifted with the natural intuition and resourcefulness of an adventure game hero. There is no doubting that Roy will figure his way out of any situation. But the kind of trouble

he may cause to himself and others during the process is a whole different matter.



Played from a third-person perspective, the game features a simple point-and-click interface. Three action buttons are placed along the bottom left corner of the game screen. Players can use these icons to examine objects, pickup inventory items, or talk to other characters. Roy's inventory is also displayed along the bottom portion of the screen next to the action buttons.

In order to use an item, players have to click on the use button, the inventory item, and the target object in the environment. If you click around the environment without selecting an action button, Roy will walk to the indicated spot. The mouse icon changes at sections that mark the exit of the area you are currently exploring. A single click will instruct Roy to walk to the exit. You can also double-click to make him instantly leave the location. A map is available to help you travel between different parts of the town.

The puzzles in the first act of *That Night Before* are fairly easy. Roy has a handful of locations to explore around the town as he tries to figure out what might have happened to his girlfriend. In the process, he will of course run into a number of obstacles. Most of the puzzles revolve around finding and using the correct inventory item. A careful survey of each location should reveal all the items you need. Clues for various puzzles are also provided through notes, conversations, or even item descriptions. Experienced adventure gamers should be able to solve the puzzles and complete the first episode without any trouble.

With its cartoon-like graphics, entertaining story, and light-hearted tone, the first act of *That Night Before* makes for an enjoyable adventure gaming experience. Even after taking into account that this is first chapter in a series, the game is a little too short. There also seem to be a couple of problems with the interface as the navigation icons do not always work. However, the positive aspects of the game more than make up for these problems. And if that is not enough, the game is available from the Scurvyliver Web site as a free download. If you can spare about half an hour of your time, there is no reason not to try *That Night Before*. All four acts of *That Night Before* can be downloaded from www.scurvyliver.com.



Developer: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Publisher: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 2001
Grade: 75/100

That Night Before – Act 2

PC Review by Ugur Sener

A flash of white light envelops you. What sort of place is this? How were you brought here? For a moment, you feel lost and confused. Then memories of the past night come flooding into your mind. It was the night before the big event. You were about to begin an exciting new chapter. But things certainly did not go as you expected. Your entire life was altered in the course of a few hours. Just when you thought you had everything figured out, you got yourself into more trouble than ever. And now you find yourself in this strange place. Is this just a weird dream or an important revelation?



Suddenly an apparition appears before you with an extremely urgent message. You are reminded that time is running extremely short. You have to hurry up and set things right. It is all up to you, the eighteen year-old, brave adventure game hero Roy Haliway. In a flash, the apparition and the white light disappear. You find yourself in what appears to be a prison cell. It is time to find a way to break free and get to the bottom of the mystery.

The second act of That Night Before is the story of an escape. The episode takes place inside a small series of tunnels. Your goal is to find your way out of the tunnels and back to the city. Only then you will be able to find the ones that have wronged you. Once you are free, you will be able to claim what is rightfully yours. But before you can leave the tunnels, you will have to figure out how to get out of the cell in which you start the game. Between strange contraptions, mysterious symbols, and a rather exceptional monkey, the second episode should prove to be a fairly pleasant albeit extremely brief challenge.

The second episode has a much different feel than the first one. Instead of traveling all over town and visiting a variety of locations, players are limited to a very small area. The entire episode spans across just a handful of screens. While the small area you are able to explore does improve the sense of entrapment, act two could have greatly benefited from several more rooms and a number of additional puzzles.



The style of the puzzles is also vastly different in the second episode. Rather than interacting with different characters and solving a variety of inventory-based puzzles, players have to carefully observe the environment for clues and figure out how to solve a couple of logic puzzles. The puzzles are somewhat more difficult than the challenges featured in the first episode. Nevertheless, a careful survey of the environment should still provide you all the clues you will need.

The controls are identical to the first episode. You will guide the main character Roy Haliway from a third-person perspective. Action buttons on the bottom left section of the screen help you interact with different objects. The inventory is always visible along the bottom section of the screen next to the action buttons.

The second act of That Night Before is the weakest chapter in the series. Players are confined to too small of an area with only a handful of things to do. However, the second act still manages to maintain the lighthearted and somewhat whimsical tone of the game. A plot twist in the second episode nicely sets the stage for subsequent chapters of the game. Even though it is not the high point of That Night Before, the second act should give you a fairly pleasant fifteen to twenty minutes before you head over to the good stuff in the following acts.

The final grade for the second act is 65/100



Developer: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Publisher: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 2001
Grade: 65/100

That Night Before – Act 3

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It sure took a lot of effort, but you are finally freed from your prison and back in the city. Only a precious few hours remain before the big event. You know it is going to be difficult, but you have to find a way to set things right. You cannot let the bad guys win. You will have to rely on your quick wit and resourcefulness to claim what is rightfully yours. But how can you thwart them when they are so close to victory? You will need a very clever plan. It is time to think outside the box. It is time to explore parts of the city you may have never even dreamed of visiting.



The third act of That Night Before feels like one intricate puzzle. At the beginning of the episode, with a little bit of help, Roy will put together his master plan to defeat the bad guys at their own game. In order to overcome his greatest challenge, Roy has to go all over the city and put the pieces of the puzzle together. There are obstacles to overcome at every turn. Roy's job will not be easy, but the promising reward and the joy of outwitting the bad guys should be more than worth the trouble.

In the third act of That Night Before, Players will have a chance to return to a number of the locations from the first act. These familiar locations have been populated with brand new puzzles to keep players busy. There are also a number of new places to explore around the city. In order to successfully execute his plan, Roy will have to take a trip to the bad part of the town and meet a couple of rather shady characters. Players will have a chance to interact with a handful of new characters as Roy discovers new ways to get into trouble.



The challenges featured in the third act of the game more closely resemble the first episode than the second. There are essentially three parts to Roy's plan. Of course, in typical adventure game fashion, completing these objectives is anything but straightforward. Before he can claim the required items and execute his plan, Roy has to overcome a number of challenges.

The puzzles typically involve finding inventory items and using them at the correct hotspots. With the possible exception of a single and relatively small item,

inventory items should be easy to locate. If you carefully examine each location, you should not have much trouble finding the things you will need. Determining the correct way to use the items should not be terribly challenging either. The third episode of *That Night Before* makes a good job of delivering a variety of inventory-based puzzles that are neither insultingly easy nor too much of a burden to take the focus from the storyline. There are a couple of puzzles where the answer may not be the most logical solution that would come to your mind. But this is a minor problem at best and should not take away much from the game play.

The pleasant atmosphere of the game is fully intact in the third episode. The control structure is also identical to the previous acts. However, the overall feel of the third chapter is noticeably different. The first act was about piecing together clues to determine what happened to Roy and his girlfriend Natasha on the fateful night that launched the adventure. The second episode told the story of an escape. By the time they reach act three, players will have most of the answers. Your ultimate objective in the episode is almost completely clear from the beginning. The focus is on besting the bad guys and completing the smaller tasks to reach your ultimate objective. However, even though you will be keenly aware of your eventual goal, the game still throws in a couple of plot twists to keep you interested. There are also a number of humorous moments that keep the game entertaining from the beginning until the end. Perhaps the most notable of these is how Roy manages to win a rather dubious paper, rock, and scissors game.



The third episode of *That Night Before* is much more engaging and entertaining than the previous chapter. The relaxed atmosphere is accentuated by many humorous moments. It also helps that the episode is significantly longer than the second act and somewhat lengthier than the first one. The chapter feels like a mini-adventure that has its own style and objectives while still fitting nicely into the overall game. As usual, there is a plot twist at the end to spice things up a bit before the grand finale. Even if you did not like the previous chapters of the game, the third episode might get you interested and anxious to see the completion of the adventure.

Developer: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Publisher: Scurvyliver Entertainment
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 2001
Grade: 78/100

That Night Before – Act 4

PC Review by Ugur Sener

On board a beautiful ship, you enjoy the sea for a moment. Just one day ago you were being accused of kidnapping your own girlfriend. Your quest to uncover the clues put you in great danger. Now all of that seems to be so far behind you. It is time to relax and revel in your victory, or so you think.



As the ship sails away from the harbor, you quickly realize you were not as successful as you hoped. You are far from besting the bad guys and claiming your reward. You realize you are in a bigger mess than ever. You do not have many options. You have to keep moving forward and fully uncover the mystery. Maybe then you will be able to find a way to thwart the bad guys.

The final episode of That Night Before delivers a greatly entertaining experience. The vast majority of the episode is an intricate scavenger hunt. Using an odd placemat as your only guide, you go on a quest to acquire a series of items. From an abandoned restaurant to a film studio, you will get to visit a new batch of locations around the city. Your objective may not be initially clear. However, clues are available for those who know how to look. And even the most unlikely character may be able to help you a great deal if you ask the right questions.



Once again, ScurvyLiver has managed to create a game that offers a distinct experience while successfully blending with the rest of the series. By now, the controls will have become second nature to players. The whimsical atmosphere of the series is maintained throughout the episode. From puzzle solutions to the quirky characters, every element of the game once again has a touch of humor.

At the same time, the structure of act four sets is apart from the rest of the game. While you will be exploring the town and predominantly solving inventory-based puzzles as in the first and the third episodes, the nature of your quest is noticeably different. This time you are not trying to regain your memories or focus entirely on outwitting the best guys. Roy's job is to uncover the clues that will help him overcome the last obstacle before he can complete his adventure.

The new set of locations featured in act four are packed with puzzles. In order to uncover all the clues, Roy will have to show a truly great amount of persistence, tirelessly question other characters, and keep his eyes open for anything that might be useful. Overcoming the puzzles will take careful observation and a good amount of creative thinking.

Just like the other acts, the fourth chapter of *That Night Before* is not exceptionally long. However, players should find quite a bit more to do in the final act of the adventure. Individual locations are somewhat better defined in terms of featuring multiple screens and a good amount of interactive objects. Adventure gamers should enjoy uncovering the mystery.

The conclusion of the story is very appropriate for the series. Players will finally see Roy's arduous journey come to its conclusion. Of course, consistent with the rest of the series, the conclusion throws a couple of plot twists to make absolutely sure the game does not conclude exactly as you might expect. There are some noticeable plot holes. Unpretentiously, even the game itself acknowledges this with a joke. You may also be left with a couple of unanswered questions. However, if you just sit back and enjoy the lighthearted tone of the game, any loopholes should be negligible.



That Night Before does not strive to be an instant classic or a radically original and unforgettable adventure game. Instead, the game offers a casual and humorous adventure gaming experience. Especially the fourth episode of the game has many enjoyable moments. Considering the relatively meager download sizes and the fact that the entire series is available free of charge, *That Night Before* is certainly worth a try. Since the fourth act has some of the best moments in the series, it is strongly recommended for players who decide to try the first episode to go through the entire series.

Viewed as a whole, *That Night Before* is better than the sum of its parts. Throughout the four chapters Scuryliver weaves an engaging, greatly entertaining, and pleasantly funny adventure game. Here's hoping that Roy Haliway will make his way back to our computers with a brand new adventure someday.

Developer: Scuryliver Entertainment
Publisher: Scuryliver Entertainment
Platform: PC
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: 2002
Grade: 80/100

Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents under Pressure

PS2 Review by Ugur Sener

Imagine waking up one morning to find the walls of your house covered with graffiti. Would you feel outraged? Would you be furious at the vandals that violated your property? But what if the graffiti was truly beautiful with intricate patterns and brilliant colors? What if you knew the artwork was a statement against oppression and an attempt to unveil the truth behind a terrible conspiracy?



Ignoring his grandmother's warnings, Trane stepped out of the apartment. He did not need anybody to tell him about the dangers of the streets. Ever since Mayor Sung started his "Review, Rebuild, and Renew" program, things had been extremely difficult for graffiti artists. An elite group of police officers, known as CCK patrolled the streets every night. They did not just arrest people who wrote graffiti. The CCK members were violent, vengeful hunters. Resisting arrest could easily mean death. Yes, Trane knew it would be extremely dangerous. But graffiti was the young man's calling.

In the beginning it was all about fame and recognition. Trane wanted to "get up" or get his name up on whatever building, van, or subway train he could find. He wanted a place among the graffiti legends. But it wasn't long before things took an unexpected turn. It all started when that jerk from the Vandals of New Radius gang attacked Trane. Now it was not just a matter of getting his work noticed. Trane wanted revenge and he set off on a crusade against the Vandals. While trying to avoid the police, Trane struggled to prove his superiority over the gang. He went over their graffiti with his own designs. He fought the gang members to reclaim their turf. He was young, inexperienced, overly- confident, and downright foolish.



But in time, Trane would learn and he would grow wiser. The city of New Radius held many dirty secrets. In his struggle to stand against an entire gang, Trane was about to uncover a great conspiracy. The corrupt and twisted city needed someone to speak the truth. Someone had to speak up against the oppression and make the people see past the veil of lies. It wasn't just about getting famous. Graffiti was about to gain a whole new meaning. It was time for a rebellion.



Marc Ecko's *Getting Up* is a refreshingly original game from Atari. In the role of the aspiring graffiti artist Trane, you will be avoiding the police, fighting gang members, and trying to make a name for yourself by redecorating the city. Between numerous graffiti designs, diverse urban environments to explore, and rather unique challenges that rise from the nature of the game, *Getting Up* can easily be an entertaining experience.

Among the strongest elements of *Getting Up* is the game's atmosphere. Ecko Unltd and The Collective have succeeded in bringing a dark and twisted city to life. The police guards patrolling the streets and the mayor's continued propaganda immediately create a feeling of oppression. The quirky gang members and enigmatic graffiti legends you encounter are extremely fitting for the game. *Getting Up* manages to take something many people would consider blatant vandalism and turns it into a form of revolution. Even at the beginning of the game when Trane is only writing graffiti for fame, you will know that something is definitely wrong with New Radius. Why is the mayor so adamantly against graffiti artists? Why are the heavily armed CCK officers necessary? *Getting Up* convinces you that you are making a powerful statement by defying authority. Wandering the dark streets of the city, players will likely find themselves immersed into the game's gripping atmosphere. Once you complete the game, you might even see graffiti from a whole new perspective.

Getting Up also tells a compelling story. The highlight of the storyline is Trane's evolution throughout the game. At the outset of the game, Trane is a hard-headed, self-righteous young man seeking greater glory. During the early parts of the game, story development is fairly slow. Players will spend quite a bit of time simply fighting against the Vandals of New Radius gang. But just when things



begin to get repetitive, *Getting Up* starts revealing the greater plot. Once you begin to understand the reasons behind the strict government control, you may find yourself much more compelled to successfully complete the missions. As the story gets more interesting, the free-spirited rebel Trane also begins to grow. Trane begins to see past gaining fame and recognition. Getting the citizens to see the truth becomes the young man's mission. By the time you reach the end of the game, you may find Trane to be a much more likeable character. Despite

the slow beginning, *Getting Up* has the kind of storyline to keep players interested.

Getting Up is played from a third-person perspective. The controls are intuitive and will be easily mastered by players familiar with action or action-adventure games. However the actual game play in *Getting Up* is very different than your run-of-the-mill action-adventure offering. During the vast majority of the levels, the objective is to write graffiti on a number of key spots. Trane is equipped with a true graffiti artist's intuition. When players enter the intuition view and move the camera to look around the environment, Trane automatically spots the best places to write graffiti. Some of these "sweet spots" make up the primary objectives of the level. In order to proceed, Trane has to find a way to reach and cover each of these areas with some form of artwork. Many of the levels also have spots that serve as secondary objectives or freeform challenges.



Actually getting to the graffiti spots is the true challenge in *Getting Up*. During the early parts of the game, many of the areas will be easily accessible. Trane will encounter small obstacles as the game allows players to get accustomed to the controls. However, once you get past the introductory levels, finding your way around the game's different areas will become noticeably more challenging. Many locations will be swarming with members of the CCK. As security cameras or police helicopters scan the area for intruders, players will have to sneak around and act quickly to avoid detection. In addition, players are required to carefully survey each location to determine the correct way to reach graffiti spots. Quite a number of the graffiti "sweet spots" are high above the ground and may initially seem unreachable. But careful exploration will reveal the correct path. Players can expect to scale a number of buildings, hang from dangerous ledges, and make many daring jumps in order to reach their objectives.



Creating the graffiti does require some direct involvement on the part of the player. At the beginning of each level players have an opportunity to choose the designs they want to be available during the mission. When Trane is in front of a graffiti spot, the game will show a white outline of one of the designs Trane brought for the mission. Most of the time, players can choose the size of the graffiti and switch to a different design. However,

sometimes Trane will be required to use a specific design on special spots.



Upon selecting a template and the size of the graffiti, players can enter the graffiti mode. Trane will position himself in front of the design and pull out an aerosol can. Players guide Trane around the graffiti design and get him to spray from the aerosol can with the click of a button. There is no need to worry about switching colors or actually working on any of the details. When players spray around a certain area, it will automatically fill with

the right colors to create the selected design. However, players do need to make sure they do not spray over a specific area for too long. When too much paint is applied to a specific part, the area will start glowing red. If players continue to spray, Trane will drip paint and part of the graffiti will be ruined. Trane also cannot continue to spray indefinitely. As he continues to spray, the pressure in his aerosol can will decline. When the pressure is too low, players have to stop for a moment before they can continue to spray. When a sufficient amount of the template is filled in, the game will automatically complete any remaining sections and the graffiti will be ready.

If all you want to do is complete the objectives and move onto the next level, you do not need to worry about drips or making the graffiti as pretty as possible. However, players can earn reputation or rep points for each piece of graffiti they complete. The number of points you receive depends on a certain number of criteria. Players will earn extra points for completing a large-sized graffiti as opposed to a small one. Finishing the artwork with no drips will also earn you extra



points. Finally, as soon as you start spraying, a clock will appear on the top right of the screen. This shows the amount of time you are allowed to take to fill in the entire template. If you finish writing within the designated period, you will once again earn additional points. The game also awards writing graffiti on a particularly dangerous spot or going over another piece. However, since the graffiti spots are predefined, players will not be able to influence whether or not they get the “heaven spot” or “going over” bonuses.

The points earned by completing graffiti are used to unlock various bonuses. There are fairly standard bonuses like concept art or additional combos to use in

combat. Players can also enhance the battle arena mode featured in *Getting Up*. The arena gives players a chance to engage in two-player combat against each other. Earning reputation points can give access to additional characters and stages in the arena mode.

As you proceed through the game, different types of artwork will become accessible. At the outset of the game, Trane will only have access to simple types of predominantly text-based graffiti. However, once you complete a few levels, Trane's collection will start to grow. He will start creating more complex pieces and gain access to new tools. For instance, in addition to using aerosol cans, Trane will learn to paint with a roller brush. He will also get a wheat paste squeegee. Instead of painting on a surface directly, the wheat paste squeegee allows Trane to apply glue and cover the area with posters. The wide variety of artwork available in the game keeps things interesting. The slightly different implementation of using the aerosol cans, roller brush, and the wheat paste squeegee keeps the process of creating the artwork from becoming repetitive.



The game is split into eleven chapters. Each chapter is further divided into smaller locations with their own objectives. Each chapter takes place at a different location around New Radius. Starting at the apartment block where Trane lives, the adventure will take players through subway tunnels, gang hideouts, and freeways into high-security government buildings. A true daredevil,



Trane will write graffiti while hanging onto the side of a fast-moving subway cart in one level, while dangling from the dizzying heights of a high-rise building in the next. *Getting Up* succeeds in offering a diverse set of locations to keep players interested without compromising the underlying theme of the game. The environments usually have a dark and edgy feel that reinforces the game's atmosphere and fits well into the storyline.

Exploring urban environments to find the best spots for graffiti is not the only thing you will be doing in *Getting Up*. Since the streets are under heavy police patrol and many members of the Vandals of New Radius gang are at large, Trane will have to engage in a fair amount of combat. Trane is capable of

sneaking, which will allow you to safely navigate certain areas without getting into fights. It is also possible to sneak up on enemies from behind and knock them out with a single hit. However, Trane will frequently be unable to avoid combat. Most of your opponents will engage you in melee combat. Occasionally, especially later in the game, you will run into enemies that will wield guns. Trane is equipped with several punch and kick combinations that will work well against



most enemies. He can also block against attacks, perform a dodge move, or attempt to grapple his opponent. The grappling can be particularly effective when you are fighting a single enemy. As soon as you initiate a grapple, you will have to repeatedly tap the punch button to overpower your enemy. If you are successful, you can hit your opponents several times and inflict heavy damage before letting him or her go.

In addition to a health bar, Trane has a skill bar displayed on the top left corner of the screen. As long as the bar is not completely empty, Trane can execute power moves. These attacks are effective in tearing through enemy defenses and can easily turn many fights in your favor. You can recharge your skill bar by attacking your opponents with regular attacks. Another type of special move Trane can perform is insults. By performing this move, Trane can humiliate his enemies during a fight. When the regular attacks, power combos, grappling, and insults are not enough, Trane can also rely on melee weapons. Quite a number of objects can serve as weapons in Getting Up. Trane can use anything from the lid of a trash can to a crude club made from a broken piece of furniture. Even a basketball can serve as a weapon you can throw at your enemies. Since they inflict particularly heavy damage, it is generally a good idea to use weapons whenever you can find them. The combat in Getting Up is typically on the easy side. There are a couple of challenging fights that players might have to try several times. However, brawling with various gang members or CCK officers is usually entertaining and does not get in the way of story development or take away the focus from graffiti.



While Marc Ecko's Getting Up has numerous strong elements, the game does have a few problems that are somewhat detrimental to the overall experience.

The first problem is the slow story development during the very early parts of the game. While the game does a decent job of introducing players to its core mechanics and the overall setting, very little seems to happen during a few of the early levels. Perhaps it would have been nicer to include more of a detailed sub-storyline before getting into the core plot of the game in the later levels. Fortunately, the excellent atmosphere of *Getting Up* and the interesting story developed in the later levels more than makes up for this issue.

There are also a few small problems with the graphics. For instance, in certain areas, the decorations on the walls seem to disappear if you move the camera. Thankfully, the graphical glitches are minor and do not significantly hurt the experience. But a bigger problem is the camera angle when Trane is working on certain pieces of graffiti. Once players enter graffiti mode, they are limited as to how much they can adjust the camera angle. Unfortunately, some of the fixed angles players have to use while painting make it extremely difficult to see what you are doing. Without being able to clearly see the progress of the graffiti, it becomes all too easy to make mistakes and drip paint. These camera problems do not appear very frequently, but they certainly cause frustration when you encounter them. They should have been avoided altogether.



Overall, Marc Ecko's *Getting Up* is a greatly entertaining game with a lot of style. The atmosphere draws you in and keeps you immersed throughout the adventure. The storyline starts slowly, but develops into an interesting tale of conspiracy and corruption. The game offers a great deal of unique challenges due to its underlying graffiti theme. The voice-acting is nicely handled and the characters fit well into the setting. The movies that unravel key parts of the

storyline are very artistic. If you are looking for an original game that tries to do something outside of the regular genre boundaries, consider giving *Getting Up* a try. It might be a great opportunity to connect with your rebellious side. Since the game leaves plenty of loose ends for a sequel, here's hoping we'll meet Trane again for more death-defying stunts and graffiti.

Developer: The Collective
Publisher: Atari
Platform: PC; PS2; Xbox
Genre: Action Adventure
Release Date: February 2006
Grade: 86/100

The Punisher

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It was such a beautiful day. Frank Castle only wanted to enjoy it with his family. But fate had other plans. It was all a blur once the shooting began. Frank's entire family was murdered right in front of his eyes. He could not protect them; he could not save them. They tried to kill him too. Frank took enough bullets to die. He should have passed away with his family. Perhaps then he would have known peace. Perhaps then he would have found rest. But once again, fate had other plans.



Frank Castle survived the shooting. But something had snapped inside him. Castle would never get over the terrible incident. He would go after the ones that killed his loved ones. Catching the criminals and bringing them to justice was not enough. Frank was going to make them suffer just like they made him suffer. There was no room for redemption. This scum was past rehabilitation. Frank would deliver them their long overdue punishment: death.

Castle's crusade was not only against the ones who murdered his family either. He would hunt down criminals all over the city. Every jerk that ever hurt an innocent would learn to fear his name. In body, he had survived the shooting. But in spirit Frank Castle was long dead. He now lived to bring terror to the criminals. He lived to deliver them the only kind of justice they deserved. Frank Castle was now The Punisher™.



In my office I currently have a rather unusual stress ball shaped like a heart. My wife brought it as a souvenir from a heart walk she attended some time ago. Of course using the stress ball is supposed to simulate the pumping of a real heart and serve as a reminder of maintaining good health. Nevertheless, if you find the thought of squeezing a heart to relieve tension disturbing, THQ's The Punisher may not be the best game

for you. But if you are looking for a solid action game where you can unleash righteous fury upon unsuspecting criminals, keep reading.

The opening movie takes us to a high rise building in New York. Since Frank Castle is here, it is safe to assume the corridors and offices must be covered with the bodies of dead guards. Trying to make his way to the exit, Frank notices that he only has a single bullet left in his rifle. As a group of miscellaneous thugs walk

into the corridor, Frank proves he does not necessarily need bullets to deliver punishment. Unfortunately, walking out of the building Frank sees he is surrounded by about three dozen police cars and around a hundred guns pointed in his general direction. Captured, The Punisher is taken to the Ryker Island prison.



The game tells the story of the events that lead to The Punisher's arrest. As Frank tells two police officers about his actions, players get to go through the levels and discover the mystery that took The Punisher to the skyscraper in the opening movie. It all begins when Frank decides to cleanse a drug house close to his apartment. Several dozen dead drug dealers later, The Punisher leaves the building and is almost run over by a car. As Frank investigates the attack, he is drawn into a conspiracy involving several different gangs and New York's top criminal organizations. The Punisher's storyline may not be astonishingly original, but it does have what it takes to keep players interested throughout the game. There are many twists as turns as you gain a better understanding as to what is going on in New York City.

Players do not need to know anything about The Punisher comic books or movie to enjoy the game. The storyline can easily stand on its own and keep players engaged. However, familiarity with The Punisher movie and the Marvel universe in general might help players appreciate parts of the game a lot better. Several Marvel characters make guest appearances throughout the game. Only the players who are familiar with the comic books will be able to fully appreciate these parts of the story. There are also a number of scenes that will appeal better to players who have seen The Punisher movie.

The game is played from a third-person perspective. The Punisher has access to a number of guns to bring death to his enemies. At any given point, he can carry a pair of handguns and some form of larger gun. From the basic shotgun to the sniper rifle and the grenade launcher, players will have a chance to blast away their enemies with a wide variety of weapons. However, The Punisher is able to do much more than simply shooting at his enemies.



When Frank is close to his opponents, players have the option to execute a quick kill move. With the press of a button, The Punisher will either shoot his enemy in a critical spot or put them out of commission with a melee attack. The quick kills are occasionally rather gruesome. Frank can do anything from breaking his enemies' necks with a rifle to stabbing them with his knives. Perhaps the goriest

quick kill is when Frank stuffs a grenade into his opponent's mouth. As you see the blood splatter all over the walls, you will truly appreciate how messed up Frank Castle must be.

In addition to obliterating his enemies with guns and quick kills, Frank can also grab them to use as a human shield. When players execute this move, The Punisher will put his enemy in a choke hold in front of him. When other thugs shoot at you, their unfortunate ally will serve as an excellent body shield. During many parts of the game, using human shields will keep Frank Castle alive. When a dozen henchmen are shooting at you, it is nice to have some extra protection, as long as you don't think too much about the fact that another human being is dying in the process.



Once you have enemies in a choke hold, you will have the option to kill them with a quick kill move. You can also interrogate enemies at this point. The interrogation interface is a nicely implemented and distinct feature of The Punisher. As soon as you hit the interrogate button, you are given a series of different ways you can pressure your opponent to give you valuable information. Different types of interrogation usually involve threatening your enemy with bodily harm or actually hurting them in some fashion. As you hurt or threaten the enemy, their stress level increases. Part of the enemy's stress bar is colored orange. The goal is to increase the stress level to a point so it is within the orange zone. On the PC version of the game, you increase the tension with simple mouse movements. Every interrogation sequence also gives you access to a small help screen so you can learn the correct way to increase the tension without killing your enemy. Once your opponent is sufficiently tense, you need to maintain the pressure for three seconds. If you increase it too much or allow it to drop below the orange zone, the timer resets. After three seconds, the enemy breaks and gives you a piece of information.

The regular thugs typically do not have much of anything to tell The Punisher. But they might still give a little insight as to what is going on at the location you are exploring. There are also special characters that either give you critical information or help you in some way to get past an area. These special characters are marked with The Punisher's skull symbol over their heads. Once you break them, they might tell you where you will find additional weapons and ammunition. They may also tell you how to open a locked door or even convince the enemies in the next room not to shoot at Frank.

The four basic interrogations include gun tension, punching, face smashing, and choking. But there are many areas in the game where you can apply a special interrogation technique. As you explore the levels, you will see spots with a white

colored skull symbol on the ground. If you grab and bring a thug to these areas, you can initiate a special interrogation. These can include anything from dangling your enemy from a really high area to threatening to fry them under intense heat. Some of the torture methods are truly gruesome. You can also watch some really horrible deaths if you apply the interrogation so intensively that the thug cannot survive it.

In addition to the special interrogation zones, players will also encounter areas marked with a gold skull symbol. If you drag enemies to these areas, Frank can execute a special kill. The developers have certainly thought of many terrifying ways to die. And seeing The Punisher obliterate his enemies in his cold, indifferent manner further intensifies the effect.

An interesting feature of The Punisher is that players cannot regain health the traditional way by finding items spread around the levels. Instead, Frank regains health by interrogating his enemies or rescuing hostages. If the thug has a critical piece of information, The Punisher will regain a considerable amount of health. But even interrogating regular enemies helps Frank recover some energy. As such, players are encouraged to utilize the



interrogation system fairly often. If the Punisher's health drops to a very low level, it automatically regenerates up to a certain point. If players can catch a few calm moments, they might be able to regain just enough energy to complete the level.

If all the carnage that comes through The Punisher's regular weapons, quick kills, or interrogation techniques is not enough, players can also try the slaughter mode. A blue bar under the health bar indicates Frank's slaughter mode meter. As long as part of the meter is filled, players can enter the slaughter mode with the touch of a button. During this mode, the environment turns black and white as Frank goes into a rage. The Punisher takes significantly less damage and regenerates health during the slaughter mode. But more importantly, Frank also becomes very fast and incredibly powerful. Players can charge up to their opponents and finish them with quick kill moves with great efficiency. Frank also automatically targets his enemies with throwing knives. Players can bring down many enemies very easily with the throwing knives before the opponents even have a chance to open fire. Once the blue meter is depleted, the slaughter mode ends. Players have to wait for the meter to recharge as they defeat enemies before The Punisher can go into another frenzy.

While Frank's regular aim will be more than enough to get you through most situations, players will sometimes have to utilize the fine aiming mode. The fine aiming mode gives players more of a first-person perspective. You will be able to move the mouse with far more accuracy and carefully target your enemies. It is

possible to attach a scope to certain weapons, which gives you great accuracy across a large distance. If you have to save a hostage at gunpoint or take out a few enemies from a distance, the fine aiming mode is extremely useful.



Throughout the game, Frank gets to visit a variety of locations across New York. From run-down apartment buildings to high-tech corporate offices, from the docks to night clubs, The Punisher leaves behind quite a number of dead bodies as he tries to understand what the New York gangs are trying to accomplish. The levels in The Punisher feature a mix of small, confined areas and plenty of large open spaces. The design of the levels and the game play mechanics do bring some strategy into the fighting. Sometimes it is best to stay behind a wall and let the enemies make their way to you one or two at a time. At other times, you can be very successful charging headlong into a room and grabbing the first enemy you run into as a human shield. The game also features a number of boss fights that require a certain degree of strategy and careful aiming.

Each level in The Punisher is divided into multiple sections. Upon completing a given section or the entire level, the game saves automatically. Players are not allowed to save the game on their own during the level. If Frank dies, players can resume the level from the beginning of the section they were attempting. For the most part, the sections are small enough that having to replay them should not be too much of a problem. It also helps that Frank can withstand a fair amount of damage before he dies.

Between the levels players will have a chance to visit Frank's apartment. Here they can get additional information about The Punisher's weapons or view newspaper clippings related to the levels they have already completed. Most importantly, players can unlock various upgrades that provide significant bonuses during the game. As he defeats his enemies and successfully completes interrogations, Frank gains style points. These style points can be used to buy upgrades like increased health, longer slaughter mode, increased accuracy, or the ability to carry more ammunition. If you can rack up a mighty four hundred thousand points, you can also go for the ultimate upgrade which allows Frank to regain health each time he kills an enemy.



While The Punisher is overall a very solid action game, it does have a few problems that detract from the game play experience. The first problem is with the interrogation system. Using the interrogation system for the first few times, players will probably greatly appreciate its novelty. During the first few levels the

interrogations are also extremely easy to perform. However, as you proceed through the game, the novelty quickly wears off as successfully completing the interrogations becomes increasingly difficult. Your enemies become more tolerant to pressure and the zone at which you have to maintain their stress levels becomes smaller. As such, it starts taking a little too long to complete each interrogation. Since this is also your primary means of regaining health, the problem is compounded and players end up spending too much time just repeating the same interrogation processes.

The action also starts to get a bit repetitive by the time you reach the end of the game. Once you get the hang of the core game play mechanics, the levels should not pose too much of a challenge. Just like the interrogation system, taking human shields, executing quick kills, or entering slaughter mode is great at the beginning. But by the time you reach the end of the game, you may feel you have seen enough of these features.



Some parts of the storyline also feel a bit forced. For the most part, the Marvel characters that make guest appearances fit into the storyline. But a couple of them especially feel as though they were thrown into the game for the sole purpose of appeasing comic book fans. Players not engaging in too many interrogations might also miss out on a few important clues. Most importantly, during a few sections of the game, it is not entirely clear

how Frank knows exactly where to proceed with his investigation as the player is not shown all the details. However, these are very minor problems and thankfully do not greatly take away from the storyline that should otherwise keep players interested.

Overall, The Punisher is a good action game with a great deal of style. If you are not bothered by intense video game violence, controlling Frank Castle on his self-righteous crusade can be a great experience. The game effectively captures the dark tone of The Punisher and incorporates many interesting features to bring the experience to life. The Punisher may not open a bold new chapter in action gaming. However, much of what the game has to offer is delivered effectively. The Punisher manages to rise above the average comic book-based video game. If you are looking for a decent action game that does not take too many chances, do not miss The Punisher.

Developer: Volition
Publisher: THQ
Platform: PC; PS2; Xbox
Genre: Action
Release Date: January 2005
Grade: 86/100

Minimum System Requirements:
Windows® 98 SE/ME/2000/XP
Pentium® III 1 GHz processor
128 MB RAM
DirectX 8.1 Compatible 64 MB video card
DirectX® 8.1 Compatible Soundcard
2 GB free disk space

Buccaneer's Bounty

Introduction

PC Review by Ugur Sener



Cinemaware Marquee is inviting players to sail across the seas, build truly massive trade empires, and engage in fierce naval battles with *Buccaneer's Bounty*. The collection features three games from the development company Ascaron. The *Buccaneer's Bounty* collection gives players a chance to experience the life of a seafaring merchant in three distinct ways. While the games included in the collection share many noticeable common features, each of them manages to deliver a unique experience that is sure to keep strategy gamers occupied for many hours.

Tortuga: Pirates of the New World takes players to the time of colonization at the Caribbean. As Spain, England, France, and Netherlands struggle to gain power over the region, players assume the role of a new captain looking for opportunities to advance his or her career while building up a massive fleet. The game primarily puts the focus on naval battles and completing missions for governors of various nations.

Patrician III: Rise of the Hanse takes players to Europe. Set in the 1300's, *Patrician III* puts players in the role of an inexperienced merchant. By engaging in profitable trade with neighboring towns, players have to rise through the ranks and establish their trade empires. Through its intricate trade infrastructure, *Patrician III* emphasizes business ownership and town development aspects over naval warfare.

The best title of the package is *Port Royale 2: Cartels, Construction & Conquest*. It is a rich game that features a great number of distinct elements. *Port Royale 2*, successfully merges a well-developed trade interface, many town building features, and engaging naval battles all in one game. While players are encouraged to familiarize themselves with all aspects of the game, *Port Royale 2* also leaves a lot of room for gamers to experiment with different techniques and focus on various elements of the game.

Since the *Buccaneer's Bounty* package features three distinct games with a number of different features, we are reviewing each title separately. However, when viewed as a whole, the *Buccaneer's Bounty* package is an easy recommendation for players who enjoy trading games. While the individual titles are not brand new, they remain more than playable in 2006 and work without any problems in modern systems. Especially considering the attractive budget price of the package, strategy gamers who have not had a chance to play the three games in the past should consider giving it a try.

Port Royale 2: Cartels, Construction & Conquest

Buccaneer's Bounty – Part I

PC Review by Ugur Sener

A nervous aide walks into your office to deliver the news. Your tobacco plantation in Santa Domingo is out of raw materials. The plantation workers are completely idle, unable to perform their jobs. You order to aide to load one of your convoys with the required materials and urgently send a shipment to Santa Domingo. Then you return to the report in front of you.

One of your convoys was attacked by pirates on the way back from Belize. Your brave sailors valiantly fought against the pirate fleet and won the battle. In fact, the captain of your convoy won a duel against the pirate captain and managed to capture an enemy ship. You are relieved that most of your sailors survived and the goods were delivered safely. An extra ship will also be most certainly useful. But the battle left your convoy heavily damaged. It will be another ten days before the ships can sail again. You know that the loss of trade during those ten days will be far more than the cost of the repairs. With a sigh you quickly glance over the rest of your convoys.



Your eyes drift to the date of the report. You vividly remember your recent meeting with the French Viceroy. He asked you to personally help in the war against Spain. You had eagerly agreed to annex a town on behalf of your nation. You only had fifteen days to complete the mission. It was going to be difficult to put together a fleet of battleships strong enough to stand against the town's defenses. But you could not afford to disappoint the Viceroy. If you succeeded in annexing a town, you knew he was going to give you a plot of land. You could only imagine how much you could accomplish with your own town.



Things were not running as smoothly as you would like. You seemed to encounter countless problems at every turn. But looking out to the sea from your office window, you felt proud of you accomplishments. Just a few years ago you had started with a single ship and a small sum of gold. Now you owned an impressive fleet, a number of plantations, and your business continued to grow. Life in the Caribbean was always challenging.

Yet you knew you would make a name for yourself. Your success over the past few years was only the beginning.

If you are looking for a challenging seafaring strategy game that offers great game play variety, you will be in for a treat with Port Royale 2. Combining successfully developed elements from their other games, Ascaron has put together a rather remarkable game. With Port Royale 2, players are offered a chance to engage in trade, town development, and intensive tactical sea battles all in one game. Port Royale 2 can be enjoyed in many different ways, appealing to the styles of different kinds of players.



In Port Royale 2, you will be playing as a business owner in the Caribbean. It is the early years of the 17th century. Many towns have already been established by England, France, Netherlands, and Spain along the sunny shores of the Caribbean. While larger towns are flourishing with thousands of colonists and many opportunities, smaller ones are struggling. As nations go to war for control of the colonies, pirates are terrorizing the seas. It is a dangerous

and difficult time. But it is also a time of great opportunity. For a determined businessman and a brave sailor, there can be no end of success.

Port Royale 2 has been designed to give players a chance to experience many aspects of an aspiring seafaring merchant's life in the colonial Caribbean. The game features eight single-player scenarios. The first four of these scenarios are fairly short and introduce players to different aspects of the game. The second set of scenarios take significantly more time to complete and build upon the concepts introduced during the tutorial levels. As you go through each scenario, the game will provide you with a series of objectives gradually leading to an ultimate goal. If you fail to accomplish any of the objectives, you lose the scenario.

Since the game has a large number of distinct features and takes a long time to master, having completing the eight missions will certainly help you learn how to play Port Royale 2. However, the true highlight of the game is the free play mode. This is where you bring together all the features covered during the scenarios and operate your business to your liking. While you will have to pay attention to the trading aspects, you will also be able to



build up a town, hunt down pirates, or complete special missions assigned by governors.



Unless you are playing one of the scenarios focused on sea battles, you will start the game with a fairly humble amount of gold and a single convoy. In order to establish a successful business and amass significant wealth, you need to transfer goods between various cities. Port Royale 2 features a wide variety of trade items divided into various categories. Each town requires a good supply of essential items such as grains, fruit, wood, and bricks. The

next category includes the raw materials used to produce finished goods. Sugar canes, cotton, hemp, and corn constitute the raw materials. These are used to produce rum, clothing, meat, and rope. There are also colonial goods such as coffee grains, cocoa, dyes, and tobacco. The governor towns are frequently visited by ships from Europe. Since the European convoys are looking to purchase colonial goods, these items are always in high demand in governor towns.

Basic supply and demand economics controls prices in Port Royale 2. If a certain good is available in large quantities at a given town, its price will be relatively low. On the other hand, scarce goods that are in high demand will be very expensive. In order to earn money from trading, you need to sock up on the goods where they are low in place and sell them in towns where they are in high demand. However, the prices and supplies do not stay constant as you engage in trade. As you buy trading goods, their prices will start going up as the town's supplies are depleted. Similarly, as you sell goods, you will increase the available quantity in town, which will reduce prices. Over time, as each town continues to produce goods, the prices will change again. Furthermore, other traders will influence the market. It will take some time for players to get used to the market dynamics and choose the best trade options.



Each town produces five different kinds of goods. The items are typically available in large quantities and at cheaper prices in the towns that produce them. As a merchant, if you have good relations with a given town, you can apply for a building permit. The permit allows you to construct buildings. Each building requires a certain amount of gold to cover the construction costs. You also have to supply the bricks and wood that serve as the building materials. If you do not

have enough wood or bricks in your warehouse, you can buy them from the town. If the town does not have enough either, you will have to obtain the supplies from a different town.

You can construct general buildings such as a hospital or a school to improve the quality of life in the town. But where you will truly want to focus your energies is the construction of facilities that will allow you to produce goods. The production facilities are a great way of obtaining trade goods at a good price. If you can maintain low upkeep costs, the facilities will provide you a steady supply of items to sell. Some of your plants will require a supply of raw materials before they can produce goods. For instance, you will not be able to produce rum without sugar canes available at your warehouse. You will have to obtain the raw materials at a low price in order to bring down production costs and sell your finished goods with a good profit margin.



Each production plant requires a certain number of workers to operate at full capacity. Colonists traveling from Europe regularly arrive at governor towns. If your buildings are at a non-governor town, you can transfer the colonists using your trade convoys. Whenever you deliver them to a town with available jobs, colonists will pay you for providing passage. Each of the workers at your production facilities will have a family. You will have to construct residential areas to make sure your workers and their families have a place to stay.



Trading and constructing buildings are hardly the only aspects of Port Royale 2. Players can also engage in sea battles. As you progress through the game, pirates will appear across the Caribbean. You can equip your ships with cannons to fight against these pirate ships. In each convoy you can designate up to five ships as escort ships. Only the ships designated as escorts will be able to participate in sea battles. Your ships can carry three types of ammunition that specifically damage the hull, the sailors, or the sails of an enemy ship. If you are trying to sink your opponent, attacking the hull is the best approach. However, if you are intending to capture the ship, you will want to go against its crew. If you have significantly more sailors than the enemy, you can attempt to board your opponent's ship. If your sailors manage to overpower the enemy, you will be able to add the vessel to your convoy.

As you hunt down pirates, you will eventually be able to follow them to their secret hideouts. If you catch a spot where the pirate ships seem to approach the shore and disappear, you are probably very close to the hideout. By lingering around the location and keeping an eye out for pirate vessels, you will eventually discover their base. You can then attack the base with your convoy. If you manage to destroy the cannon towers defending the base, you can annihilate the entire pirate gang and claim their treasure.



In addition to fighting pirates, you can also attack convoys belonging to other nations. The countries colonizing the Caribbean will frequently go to war against one another. When a war is in progress, you can obtain a letter of Marque from one nation to hunt down the vessels belonging to another. If you destroy enough of the enemy nation's military convoys, you can tip the way in favor of your nation. You can also donate convoys to strengthen your nation's fleet.

When the balance of power is sufficiently in favor of one nation, you can visit their Viceroy to obtain a mission to annex a town.

In order to annex a town, you will need to attack it with your convoy. You can attempt to tear through the town's defenses in two ways. By attacking from the sea, you can pit your ships against the town's cannon towers. These powerful towers will inflict heavy damage on your ships. But if you manage to defeat all of the towers, you will win the battle and have an opportunity to claim the town for your nation. Alternatively, you can hire a large crew and equip them with swords and guns. If you have more equipped sailors than the town's local military force, you can consider attacking from the land. The land battles play a simplified real-time strategy game. You simply need to lead your troops through the map and engage the enemy. As long as you have the stronger military force, you will easily win the battle.

The biggest benefit of annexing towns is the opportunity to gain your own plot of land. By giving your nation more territory, you will impress the Viceroy and convince him to grant you a small area where you can construct your own town. You will then use the building interface of the game to turn your plot of land into a prospering colony. By maintaining a steady supply of goods, creating businesses, and transferring colonists, you can increase the town's population, make the citizens happy, and encourage other merchants to



trade at your town.

In addition to the complex trade and battle interfaces, Port Royale 2 also features a duel system. Occasionally, the captain of your convoy may be challenged by an enemy captain to participate in a duel. These fights use a very simple interface. By clicking on the enemy with the left mouse button, you will instruct your captain to attack. A right click will block your opponent's attacks. When you make a sufficient number of successful attacks, the enemy will give up and accept defeat.

If all of this is not enough to keep you busy, you can also complete missions assigned by governors, look for treasure across the Caribbean, rescue shipwrecked sailors, take loans from town councils, have your crew blessed by the local church to improve their morale, or try your luck by gambling at inns. Port Royale 2 has enough content to keep you occupied for many hours. The large number of features gives players an opportunity to experience Port Royale 2 in several distinct ways.



Unfortunately, Port Royale 2 is not without its problems. The biggest issue is the tremendous learning curve. The wide variety of features offered makes Port Royale 2 rather complex game. The game's interface includes numerous buttons and menus spread throughout the screen. Learning how to access all the relevant information and where you can find each command will take you some time. Initially, you might feel overwhelmed by the number of menus and different commands you will need to learn. You also have access to good deal of statistical information. You will have to identify which pieces are most relevant to the game play and learn to digest the information quickly.



Before you can make significant gains from trading, you will have to get a feel for the prices of different goods. Without understanding what might be a good buying and selling price for a category of trade items, you are sure to lose money. You will also have to start observing trends in the prices and pay attention to which towns are urgently in need of certain goods. In addition, your ships will gradually wear out as you sail the seas.

You will need to make sure they receive repairs at regular intervals. You also need to keep an eye on the morale of your crew.



In order to win sea battles, you need to get accustomed to the manually controlling your ships. You need to pay attention to the direction of the wind and learn to get the enemy ships to follow you from an angle where you can attack them without getting hit. Learning how to fire your cannons effectively will take some practice. In addition, you will need to make sure your convoys are equipped with enough cannons and ammunition to participate in sea battles. If you want to

board enemy ships or discourage your opponents from boarding yours, you will have to make sure you have enough sailors. However, these sailors will require significant amounts of gold each day, making it difficult to run a profitable business while keeping a full crew on each convoy.

If you want to annex towns for a nation, you will need to learn how to systematically diminish the military power of the enemy while strengthening the fleet of the nation you are supporting. In order to become eligible for building permits, you'll need to improve your relationship with towns by providing them the goods they desperately need. Engaging in any aspect of the game involves a certain learning curve. Before you can effectively run your business and amass riches, you will need to spend a number of hours just trying to understand how everything works.

Fortunately, the scenarios of Port Royale 2 are designed in a way to familiarize players with each aspect of the game. You will start by learning the basic controls and the trade dynamics. Then the game will give you a chance to construct a few buildings and try a number of sea battles. As such, it is highly recommended to try the scenarios before getting into the free play mode. However, despite all the help the game provides, players should still expect to spend a fair amount of time learning how to play Port Royale 2.

It is worth noting that players can also diminish the amount of time required to learn Port Royale 2 by trying other simpler titles from Ascaron. If you're buying Port Royale 2 as part of Cinemaware Marquee's Buccaneer's Bounty collection, the other games in the collection will familiarize you with the two core aspects of Port Royale 2. While Patrician III will help you get comfortable with the trade elements, Tortuga will give you a good



feel for the sea battles.

The game could have also benefited from a few additional scenarios. Players who prefer a more structured gaming experience than what the free play mode offers may not be fully satisfied with the available scenarios. An overall storyline tying all the individual scenarios together would have also been nice. The dueling and land battle features could have been developed a little further since they are rather simplistic. However, the different game play dynamics offered in Port Royale 2 makes for a rich experience that more than makes up for these minor concerns.



Overall, Port Royale 2 is an engaging game that can keep you occupied for countless hours. Players will be required to put in a fair amount of time in order to learn the game. Getting accustomed to the trade interface, learning how to control ships during a battle, and understanding the economics that dictate the prices will require players to have a certain amount of patience before they can truly enjoy Port Royale 2. However, once you get your trade business off the ground, purchase a few convoys and construct a few production facilities, Port



Royale 2 starts really working its charms on you. Between hunting down pirates, annexing towns, and making the most profitable transactions, Port Royale 2 manages to create an immersive and enjoyable atmosphere. If the idea of creating a trade empire in the Caribbean during the colonial times appeals to you, don't miss Port Royale 2. Sailing among the beautiful islands, many strategy gamers may find something to enjoy.

The final grade is 85/100.

<p>Developer: Ascaron Publisher: Cinemaware Marquee Platform: PC Genre: Real-Time Strategy Release Date: April 2006* Grade: 85/100</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 98 SE/ME/2000/XP Pentium® II 450 MHz 64 MB RAM DirectX® Compatible 16 MB video card DirectX® Compatible Soundcard</p>
<p>*Original release in 2004</p>	

Patrician III: Rise of the Hanse

Buccaneer's Bounty – Part II

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It is the fourteenth century in Europe, the time of the Hanseatic League. Many towns spread across the shores of the North Sea and the Baltic Sea. For gifted merchants, engaging in sea trade can be extremely profitable. The myriad of towns are always in need of supplies. The margins you can earn supplying scarce goods is truly remarkable. The path is not always clear and there are tremendous risks to take into account. Nevertheless, opportunities are endless for a trader with a reliable ship and a small amount of savings to get started.



Ascaron's Patrician III: Rise of the Hanse gives strategy gamers an intricate seafaring game in a quest to create the ultimate trade empire. Between complex trade structures, the ability to help with the development of towns, sea battles, and the ability to create your personal production facilities, Patrician III makes for a rich gaming experience.

The game has two primary single-player modes. The campaign mode allows players to choose from a list of seven scenarios. Each of these scenarios have unique objectives that players have to complete in order to achieve victory. Depending on the storyline behind the scenario, your starting assets will vary. While the game's tutorial will provide you the most basic information required to play Patrician III, especially the early scenarios of the campaign mode is an excellent way to hone your skills.



Players also have the option to try the 'Single Game' mode of the Patrician III. Through this mode, players can engage in a more free-style experience. After configuring settings like their characters' hometown or the starting year, players can begin the game with a single ship and a humble sum of gold. It is possible to play the 'Single Game' mode without any objectives. However, if desired, players can also set a goal such as becoming the lord mayor within one or more years.

The core game play element is trading. At any time during the game, you will have access to one or more convoys with which you can transport goods. You



will be able purchase trade goods from any of the towns you are visiting. The price of the merchandise will vary greatly from one town to the next. Simple supply and demand economics are the biggest driver behind prices. If the goods are available in large quantities, you will not have to pay too much to purchase them. As you buy merchandise from a town however, the stocks will be gradually depleted. As the goods become scarcer, their prices will increase. The

opposite is true when you are selling merchandise. With each additional item sold, the town's stocks will increase and the demand for the goods will decrease. As such, the price the town pays for each consecutive item sold will gradually decline.

In order to profit from trade, players simply have to buy the product from a town where it is cheap and sell it to a town where it is in great demand. Of course the trick is identifying where certain goods might be obtained at reasonable prices. In general, purchasing a product from a town that produces it is the most effective approach. Even when you buy the item from the town in large quantities, the stocks will be automatically replenished in just a matter of days.

Players will also recognize that some towns have a fairly steady need for certain types of items. For instance, the town of Luebeck is a strong producer of iron goods. As such it is possible to buy iron goods from this town at a reasonable price and sell them at a number of other towns for a considerable profit. However, the production of iron goods requires pig iron. As such, Luebeck can just about always use a few extra crates of pig iron. If players can obtain the raw materials from another town at a reasonable price, they can sell the goods at a terrific profit margin in Luebeck.



The buying and selling interface is fairly straightforward. Once you initiate a trade with a town, a price chart is displayed. The chart contains a list of all the different types of goods available in the game. The alphabetized list contains a variety of goods ranging from fish and grain to spices, timber, whale oil, pottery, or wine. By default, the game will display the price of buying and selling a single unit of the product. Using the toggles at the bottom of the price chart, players can modify the number of goods exchanged with each click on the buy or sell buttons. This tremendously helps with reducing the amount of time required to buy or sell goods at large quantities. The price chart always shows the average price of buying or selling a single item. As such, if you set the interface to buy five

units with each click on the buy buttons, the price chart will be automatically updated to show you the average price of a single item in a lot of five.

Each ship in Patrician III can only carry a certain amount of goods. When you select the ship, you can see the size of its cargo hold on the right side of the screen. Goods come in either crates or barrels. Each barrel takes one unit of space in your cargo hold. The crates on the other hand occupy fifteen units. Given the limited amount of space in their ships and the different amount of space occupied by crates and barrels, players will have to pay close attention to how much of their cargo holds they are using as they buy merchandise.



In towns where you have a trading office, it is also possible to store goods inside a warehouse. When a ship is docked at the town's harbor, players can transfer goods from the vessel directly into the warehouse. It is also possible to engage in trade directly between the town and the warehouse. The ability to store a large quantity of goods in your offices can be extremely useful. To illustrate, once again

consider the town of Luebeck with its steady need for pig iron. Occasionally, you may arrive at Luebeck with your ship's cargo hull loaded with the merchandise, only to find that the town does not urgently need to goods. If you have a trading office in town, you can just transfer the goods there and wait to sell them when the transaction would be more profitable. Supplying your warehouse with the goods that serve as raw materials is also critical when you start building your own production facilities.

Travel between various towns occurs on the sea map. With the click of a button, players can leave the town view and bring up the map. Cities are marked with blue or red circles on this view. The circle that is completely filled with blue indicates the town where your home office is located. Other towns where you have trade offices will be marked with a small blue circle placed inside a red one. Finally, completely red circles denote towns where you do not have an office. Instructing convoys to travel between towns is a simple matter of selecting the convoy and clicking on the destination town. The convoy will automatically start heading in the indicated direction. If you do not want to wait for the convoy to get there, Patrician III features a fast forward feature that will come in very handy. Clicking on the fast forward button will move time rapidly until some significant event occurs. This may include anything from your ships arriving at their destination town to one of your convoys getting attacked by pirates.



In Patrician III, players improve their relationships with various towns by providing them goods. The citizens divided into three categories according to their wealth. The largest part of the population will consist of poor people. A smaller segment will make up the wealthy people. Each town will also have a relatively fewer number of rich people. Citizens will demand different goods depending on their income levels. By selling products to the town, you can improve the citizens' overall view of you as a merchant. Providing a steady supply of basic goods such as grain or beer will improve your standing among the poor people. On the other hand, catering luxury items such as wine or wool will appease the rich people.



If the town is running low in a particular category of merchandise an icon will appear next to the town's name on the sea map that denotes the scarce product. Providing a fresh supply of these scarce goods will dramatically improve your relationship with the citizens. However, players should be careful in using this feature. The information communicated with these icons has a time delay associated with it. Even as you hurry over to deliver the goods, another merchant might be just about to unload their cargo. If you are too far from the town when you decide to respond to the icon, the goods may no longer be scarce by the time you complete the journey.



Improving your relationship with the citizens has direct impact on the game play. First of all, after supplying a town with goods for a certain amount of time, you may be granted permission to build a trade office. Since the trade office is required to store goods in a town or to construct production facilities, these permits are invaluable for expanding your business. Maintaining good relationships with citizens also improves your ranking in the game while making it easier for you to get into a guild. You may even get nominated to serve as the town's mayor. Patrician III is structured in many ways to create an attachment between the player and their home town. Helping your home town or even other towns prosper, you can make an income on the economy and watch the towns continue to grow. Turning a small town with a handful of houses into a bustling city can give you a great sense of accomplishment.

Patrician III allows players to construct production facilities to support their businesses. In towns where you have a trade office, you can develop various production facilities to start making your own goods rather than buying everything

from the town. Since each production facility needs workers, you may also need to construct residential areas in the town. In order to create goods, you will also need a steady flow of raw materials. For instance, the brickworks and the pitch maker require timber as their raw materials. In order for these buildings to function you will have to have a supply of timber in your warehouse.



The benefit of producing your own goods comes in the form of cost management. If you can supply raw materials at a cheap price, your facilities will produce goods at a much cheaper unit costs than the prices available in each town. In addition, the residential facilities you create to house your workers will provide you rent income. Finally, having employees who work for you will improve your status in the town.

In addition to the basic trade elements and the ability to construct buildings and engaging in town development, Patrician III has a host of other features. For instance, you will occasionally encounter pirates terrorizing the seas. When you are attacked by one of the pirates, you will have a chance to engage in a sea battle. If your ship is not equipped with any cannons, all you will be able to do is to attempt to outrun the enemy. If you do have cannons however, you can engage in real-time tactical combat. By paying attention to the direction of the wind and the speed of your vessel, you will have to carefully maneuver to get clear shots at your opponents. With successful hits from your cannons, the enemy vessels will be damaged and eventually sink. Players can also attempt to capture an enemy vessel. Capturing enemy ships involves your crew engaging in a direct fight with the enemy crew. If your sailors manage to overwhelm the enemy, the ship will be yours.

Still other features of the game include the ability to buy and sell stocks of your own company. Selling stocks is a great way to get a cash influx. However, this also means that you will have to occasionally pay dividends to your investors. From time to time, players will also be offered the services of a matchmaker to find a worthy suitor for your character. For a small fee, the matchmaker can find you a potential spouse that will bring a very handsome dowry to aid your business. Players will also have an opportunity to expand their convoys by ordering additional ships. Maintenance of your existing ships will be yet another aspect of the game. Sailing across the seas will gradually wear down your ships. As such, every once in a while, you will need to get them repaired.

If all of these features are not enough, Patrician III gives players the option to join a merchants guild to participate in auctions, invoke the services of pirates to secretly terrorize the seas on your behalf, or go to church to feed the poor or support the church through donations. Players will also have the opportunity to take on special tasks such as delivering a predetermined quantity of goods to a

town for a fixed price. Less ethical business opportunities will present themselves as well.

By the time you have a handful of trading offices and quite a few ships sailing the seas, things will start getting a bit chaotic. In order to help players Patrician III does have some automation features. You can set trade routes or hire trade office administrators to automatically purchase goods for your business. The automation may not be exceptional, but it may prove to be very useful when you business truly grows.



The biggest problem with Patrician III is the notable learning curve associated with the game. Players should go in expecting to spend quite a few hours simply learning how to play the game. Getting used to all the different menus certainly takes a certain amount of time. Understanding the dynamics of trading and learning how to construct buildings may take you a certain amount of time. The game does provide nice tutorials to give you the basics, but they are far from giving you all the information needed to effectively operate your business. Becoming a successful merchant takes a good deal of practice, patience, and perseverance. A better organization for the key structures would have also improved Patrician III. Critical buildings can blend in with other buildings a little too much, making it slightly, but unnecessarily difficult to spot them. Finding where you can access some of the game's features is not always easy either. There are many different structures where you can accomplish a variety of tasks. Learning where you can find all the different options will certainly take some time and require you to click on each different building to explore the various commands available.

Patrician III is a complex game that can easily appeal to strategy and simulation gamers looking for a challenging trading game. There are many aspects to running your business that are sure to keep you occupied for a great number of hours. Between the trading goods, constructing buildings, and improving your standing as a citizen, creating your massive trade empire will be an engaging undertaking.

<p>Developer: Ascaron Publisher: Cinemaware Marquee Platform: PC Genre: Real-Time Strategy Release Date: April 2006* Grade: 81/100</p> <p>*Original release in 2003</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 98 SE/ME/2000/XP Pentium® II 450 MHz 64 MB RAM DirectX® Compatible 16 MB video card DirectX® Compatible Soundcard</p>
--	--

Tortuga: Pirates of the New World

Buccaneer's Bounty – Part III

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It is yet another beautiful day along the shorelines of the Caribbean. Your ship is almost ready for departure. The crew is loading the last supply crates as you stare out to the sea with your spyglass. The sky is bright blue and the wind is strong. You check your maps one more time to and verify the course you need to take. Your ship is small, your crew is inexperienced.



Most of your gold spent towards the purchase of the ship and the necessary supplies, your coffers are almost completely empty. Dangerous pirates lurk around the islands you are planning to visit. Your nation is at war with the other countries colonizing the Caribbean. The waters are certainly not safe for a new captain with limited resources. Yet you can't help feel great excitement as you gaze into the deep blue sea. You are determined to take your nation to greater glory. Your enemies will learn to tremble at the mere sight of your ship. Your name will become a legend among sailors. Your destiny lies in the clear waters of the Caribbean and it is time for you to embrace it.

Tortuga: Pirates of the New World takes us back to the sixteenth century. It is a time of adventure and discovery around the Caribbean. It is a time of exploration and colonization. Many towns are flourishing along the shorelines. Colonists are arriving ever rapidly to claim a part of the new world. Pirates are hunting down unsuspecting trade ships. Nations are at war to dominate the newly discovered territory. It is a hard and dangerous world. But there is incredible opportunity for a captain brave enough to sail the waters and face the dangers lurking around every corner.



You start the game at one of the major towns around the Caribbean. You are a new captain under the employ of one of the four nations colonizing the territory. You have a single small ship with a handful of cannons and a limited amount of supplies. Serving England, France, Netherlands, or Spain, your ultimate goal is to annex a number of towns within a ten year period. Yet your nation's governors will not immediately entrust you with annexation

missions. First you have to prove your mettle by completing a number of simpler



tasks. As you successfully complete missions, your reputation will improve with your chosen nation and eventually you will be assigned harder tasks. If you are successful, you will have a chance to command magnificent ships and amass riches beyond your wildest dreams.

Tortuga mixes light strategic resource management and trade with tactical combat in the open waters. Players interact with the game through three major screens. The town view is used to acquire missions and purchase supplies for your ship. The ocean view allows you to sail across the seas, traveling between towns and encounter other ships. The battle mode allows you to engage enemy captains or lay siege to towns in real-time combat.

You will be spending a fair amount of your time visiting towns. Each town has a small number of important buildings that you can visit. The market place is used to buy supplies to feed your ship's crew. You can also purchase additional cannons and different types of ammunition to use against your enemies. Trade goods are available at different prices in each town. Thus, it is possible to buy certain items at a cheaper price in one town and sell them for profit at another. The local tavern offers you a chance to gamble for a few extra gold pieces. The docks help you repair your damaged ships and sell the unneeded vessels in your convoy.

The bulk of the micromanagement you will need to maintain your fleet takes place inside the towns. In addition, the game can only be saved while you are visiting a town. Tortuga's simple structure prevents the management efforts from becoming overly time-consuming chores. For the most part, players will be able to take care of repairs and the purchase of supplies with a few clicks and return to the seas where the real action takes place.



Leaving a town puts players in the ocean view. Here players can freely roam the Caribbean and sail to other towns. Other vessels can be frequently spotted across the open waters. Trade ships regularly transfer goods between various towns. Military ships belonging to the enemy nations or pirate ships might attempt to engage you in combat. When another ship tries to attack your fleet, you have the option to accept the challenge or attempt to flee. If you choose to flee, the game automatically determines whether or not you manage to

outmaneuver the opponent. If you fail, you are forced to enter the combat screen. Thankfully, it is possible and often very easy to flee from a stronger enemy in the combat mode.

When you get into the vicinity of a different ship that is not already trying to attack you, the game prompts players to choose an action. Players can simply sail on, greet the other ship, or choose to attack it. Greeting the other convoy might provide you some valuable tips. Attacking the fleet takes you to the combat mode where you engage the enemy in a real-time tactical battle. It is possible to turn off the encounters so the game will not prompt you each time you come close to a ship during a long journey.

All towns are labeled on your world map from the very beginning of the game. This allows players to locate areas they have not already visited fairly easily. If a mission orders you to complete a task at a town you have never seen, it is nice that you do not have to sail the entire Caribbean in search of the colony. However, the information about the current ownership of various towns only becomes available when you sail close to them for the first time. From the ocean view, players can click on various towns to get detailed information about the daily consumption of trade goods as well as the town's economic status and population of the settlement.



There are two kinds of battles in Tortuga. The first type takes place in the open seas and puts players against a number of opposing ships. The game allows players to add several different ships to their fleets. However, during a battle, you have to select a single flagship that actively participates in the combat. The



fighting consists of strategically maneuvering your ship to stay out of the range of the enemy cannons while successfully firing your own. You can defeat an enemy vessel by inflicting enough damage to the ship's hull to make it sink. It is also possible to board enemy ships. If you have more crew members than the enemy, your sailors will overwhelm the opposition and take over the ship.

Ships are capable of firing three different types of ammunition. The heavy-shot is most effective against the opposing ship's hull. If you are trying to just sink the enemy ship, this should be the ammunition you should use during the battle. The

scatter-shot can be decimating against a ship's crew. If you are trying to eliminate the enemy sailors so you can more easily win the battle by boarding the opponent's ship, the scatter-shot is the ammo of choice. Finally, the chain-shot targets the sails. With heavily damaged or destroyed sails, the enemy becomes unable to move, making it an easier target.



The presence of different kinds of ammunitions and two ways to defeat enemy ships makes it possible for players to employ a number of different strategies in battle. Each time you fire the cannons, they take a certain amount of time to be reloaded. If you have a full crew on board the ship, the reloading time is relatively short. But when you have a small number of sailors left, the reloading times get very long, making it extremely difficult to

effectively fight. It is also possible to change the kind of ammunition you are using at any time during the battle. However, loading a different kind of ammunition takes a considerably long time, forcing players to use this tactic selectively. The direction of the wind also plays a factor in combat. Your ship understandably moves extremely slowly if you try to go against the wind. It is important to pay attention to the wind and use it to your advantage.

While it is nice to have a number of different options in battle, Tortuga fails to take full advantage of them. After participating in several battles, players will quickly realize that a single strategy will not only result in the best long-term gains, but also ensure that you win just about any battle. First of all, it is impossible to buy ships in Tortuga. Thus, the only way to get your hands on better ships is to capture them. Ships can only be captured by having your sailors board them. In order win the ensuing automated melee fight when you have your sailors board an enemy ship, you need to use the chain-shot to thin down the enemy ranks. As such, in most situations it is recommendable to attack the enemy vessels with the chain-shot and attack board the ship when there are only a few opposing sailors left standing. On top of this obvious strategy for capturing ships, you can also take advantage of the wind to make the battles even easier. If you simply sail in the direction the wind is blowing, the enemy ships will give you chase. While cannons can fire slightly to the back, they cannot fire directly forward. Thus, with the enemy vessel trailing behind you, it becomes easier to target your opponents without getting hit. This generic strategy is not enough to get you through the entire game. There are



situations where you will be faced with too many enemies to effectively employ it. Lack of ammunition or too much damage on your sails and hull may also keep you from moving fast enough to take advantage of the wind. However, all too many battles can be won throughout the course of the game by using the same tactics, which can eventually make the battles tedious and not as entertaining as they should be.

The second type of battle featured in Tortuga involves laying siege to towns. The towns have a number of powerful stationary cannons. In order to win the siege, players have to destroy all the cannons defending the town. Since the town cannons are so much stronger than the ones mounted on ships, their fire is truly devastating. However, players do have an edge to help them in the siege. If the ship they are initially using to attack the town is destroyed or forced to flee, players are allowed to resume the assault with another ship from their convoys. Thus, players can use their entire fleets to overcome the enemy town's defenses and annex it for their nations.



The game play in Tortuga is centered on completing missions. While players are certainly welcome to sail the seas and engage in random encounters with other vessels, truly advancing through the game and increasing the amount of gold in your coffers requires players to successfully complete missions. Governors assign the scenario missions that allow you to complete each campaign. However, it is also possible to acquire missions from citizens. Sometimes, upon docking at a town, a citizen will automatically request your help for a task. You can also look for citizens in need of help at the town inn. Finally, governors may ask you for personal favors besides the scenario missions they assign. The actual quests vary from simple delivery tasks to sinking convoys. Sometimes you will be asked to just visit and assess the strength of enemy towns. At other times, governors will request that you blockade a town, sinking any trade ships approaching in an effort to destroy the enemy town's economy. Hunting pirate ships or carrying citizens from one town to another are also among the popular missions.

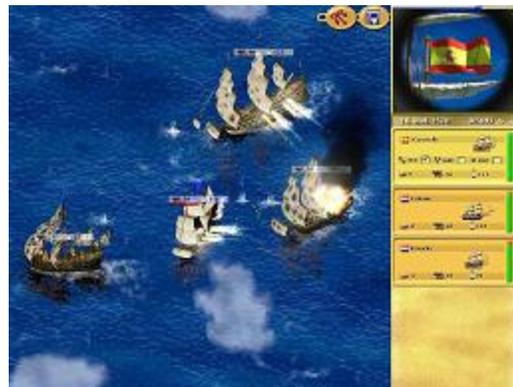


Since you will be attempting to complete a large number of missions in each campaign, it is a good thing that Tortuga has a variety of different quests. The game features four different campaigns that require players to annex a set

Since you will be attempting to complete a large number of missions in each campaign, it is a good thing that Tortuga has a variety of different quests. The game features four different campaigns that require players to annex a set

number of towns. Players are required to successfully complete a handful of other missions between each annexation. Thus, each of the four scenarios takes several hours to complete. In addition, it is possible to choose different nations in the second, third, and fourth scenarios. This gives players some incentive to play the scenarios more than once. Unfortunately, by the time you finish the four scenarios in Tortuga, you will have probably had more than enough of the game. As much as the developers tried to provide variety of tasks to complete, the simple combat structure and the considerable amount of sailing you are required to do in each scenario can make the game rather repetitive. Tortuga would have certainly benefited from having a few additional things for players to do. For instance, the ability to construct unique buildings in your nation's towns or a feature to upgrade your ships would have helped the game.

Tortuga: Pirates of the New World provides a simple and relaxing gaming experience for real-time strategy players. The sea battles are initially highly entertaining. Experimenting with the use of different kinds of ammunition can be interesting. Claiming larger enemy vessels for the first time can be satisfying. Moving from a simple ship with sixteen cannons to a mighty galleon with forty-six cannons feels like a great upgrade. The diversity of



missions will be initially sufficient to keep you interested. However, once you get a good grasp of how the battles work, you will easily identify ways to win most fights. Even the more difficult third and fourth scenarios may not provide enough of a challenge. The amount of time you will be required to complete each scenario may also make the game drag for too long. The initially engaging missions can quickly generate into tedious chores you have to complete before you get to annex a town. Fortunately, if you are looking for a simple strategy game with a pirate theme, Tortuga might still be worth your consideration. Despite its considerable problems, the game does have a number of good features that can make for an entertaining adventure as you sail the waters of the Caribbean.

The final grade is 73/100.

<p>Developer: Ascaron Publisher: Cinemaware Marquee Platform: PC Genre: Real-Time Strategy Release Date: April 2006* Grade: 72/100</p>	<p>Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 98 SE/ME/2000/XP Pentium® II 450 MHz 64 MB RAM DirectX® Compatible 16 MB video card DirectX® Compatible Soundcard</p>
<p>*Original release in 2003</p>	

24: The Game

PS2 Review by Erdalion

When it comes to game conversions of famous TV/movie franchises, it probably would not be an exaggeration to say that most people have become somewhat weary of them.

Companies seem to rely on the sales guaranteed by the name of the franchise and completely ignore the quality of the game. I

don't think I have to mention any specific games, since I'm sure that most of you have been unlucky enough to play at least one terrible game based on a popular film or TV show over the years.



Lately however, a welcome new trend has appeared, in which the gaming companies actually devote their resources into creating a solid gaming experience, worthy of the franchise's name. 24: The Game promised to be one of these games, featuring voice-overs from the actual cast of the successful TV show 24 and a story created by some of the show's writers. Sadly however, despite the obvious effort, while the game does have the show's style, it is sadly lacking the show's substance.

For starters, while the presentation of the game mimics the structure of a TV episode, with every "level" of the game by starting with a voice-over by Kiefer Sutherland and covering roughly one hour, the way time passes in the game is completely arbitrary and does not fit in with the "real time" premise of the actual show (the show isn't 100% in real-time either, but that's a different matter altogether). What makes matters worse is the fact that at the end of each time zone, there is none of those devious plot twists found in the series, which are what make the show as addictive as it is. While the story still has decent pacing,



it is definitely lacking the frantic pace of most TV episodes. And that's a shame, because the story is really good, and offers some deeper insight to long-term fans of the series on the events that took place in the huge gap between seasons 2 and 3. Indeed, the fact that 24: The Game covers such an important period of the 24

mythos can be seen as an excellent offering to loyal fans of the series. Either that, or as a perfect cash-in attempt, depending on how cynical you are. Moreover, this also means that people who are not acquainted with the show will have a hard time associating with all the different characters that are presented in the game.



The rest of the aesthetic parts of the game are also a mixed bag. The graphics are far from ugly. The character models in particular are detailed and true to their real-life counterparts. However, while their animation is really good during cut-scenes, the in-game animation is considerably worse. The first time

you'll see your character sprint, you'll probably wonder if there's something really wrong with them. The backgrounds don't make things any better, since they are for the most part are bland, or even dull. At least, while playing you will not be paying much attention to them anyway so their quality is passable.

And then there are the cinematic cameras and the use of the split-screen technique, taken straight from the TV series. These are masterfully done in cut-scenes, staying true to their TV roots, and they really help with portraying the multi-threaded storyline. However, when they are used in-game, the result is not always that good. Sometimes the screen is split in the middle of a fight, so you don't have enough time to look at the other screen if you don't want to risk missing the fight. Worse yet, the fact that the screen in which you're playing becomes smaller will sometimes mean that you won't be able to see who's shooting at you. It goes without saying that this can become really annoying in some fights.

The audio part of the game is slightly better than the visual one, but it still suffers from some annoying flaws. Music is only heard at key points of every level, and while that helps make those points more exciting, the rest of the game feels a little boring in comparison. The sound effects



are realistic, with some trademark ones such as the CTU ringtone taken straight from the original source, but ultimately they couldn't make or break the game. On the other hand, the voice-overs do help make the game better, as they really help flesh out both the characters and the story. It certainly helps that the actors

behind the series are responsible for these voice-overs, as they have had a lot of experience with their characters and thus for the most part they are capable of giving some really good performances. Sadly, it seems however that some of them weren't used to doing voice-overs as opposed to performing in front of other actors, so they come off as a bit timid, with Chloe sounding the least convincing of all. But then again, she is Chloe...



This leaves us with the last aspect of the game, which is also sadly its weakest one, the game play. There are so many different game play styles in 24, from shooting to driving and from sniper missions to puzzle-solving. They are all so simplistic that I can't help but wonder if the game would be better if the developers

had focused on one style instead. The driving levels especially stand out, since the controls are really clumsy. Thankfully, you won't spend too much of your time driving. The puzzle mini-games are definitely more fun, but sadly there are so few types of them that I couldn't help but feel that they become repetitive and boring by the end of the game. The sniper missions on the other hand are excellent, the controls are solid and the action is well-paced. In fact I wish there were more of them.

The last style featured, and the one you will spend most time playing, is the third-person shooter. During these parts of the game you get to control some of the most famous 24 characters, though you will usually control the protagonist of the series, Jack Bauer, which should help fulfill the fantasies of most fans of the show. Unfortunately, the action is not worthy of Jack. The level design is very linear, and while that's hardly a crime for a shooter, the real problem is the opponents' AI, or lack thereof. They rarely even try to fight back and that makes the game all too easy. Once you figure out their hide/shoot pattern, you should have no problems killing them with minimal effort. The only thing that makes things somewhat difficult is the clumsy camera, which, coupled with the split-screen method mentioned before, often keeps you from seeing who is attacking you, and manually moving it with the right stick is usually too slow to be any help. The problematic camera also means that you will be having a hard time targetting your melee attacks, so much in fact that I usually depended on luck to hit an



enemy, well luck and his bad AI.

That's not to say that 24:The Game is a nightmare to play, however. The fact that it's so easy should help make the game more accessible to fans of the show that aren't experienced gamers, and hey, you get to shoot terrorists as Jack Bauer! That counts for something. And generally, the game is still enjoyable in its simplicity, despite its flaws.



In the end, 24 falls victim to the same "curse" that has plagued game conversions of famous franchises. While it has a lot of potential, a definite lack of polish means the game is only above average. Fans of the series will definitely find something to love in this game, as it has all the characters they've learned to love, and an intricate storyline worthy of the original show, but those who have had no contact with 24 so far should steer away from this game. For them, the negative aspects of the game will far outweigh the positive ones, so if are one of them and you want to see what the fuss about 24 is, you're better off renting the first season on DVD. Just make sure to have the rest of the day off, this show is notoriously addictive for a reason!

The final grade: 60/100



Developer: SCEE
Publisher: 2K Games
Platform: PS2
Genre: Action
Release Date: February 2006
Grade: 60/100

The Endless Forest

PC Review by Donna

People often seek a second life in video games. Some even live it. Jump into the boots of a great assassin and slay everyone and everything in your sight when you're angry or grab a bag full of magic potions and heal everyone on a great battlefield. Sell enchanted swords, run for the money, hurry up to kill as many as you can... All of this in order to level up, to *progress* in the game. A quest to show you're better than anyone and everyone else.



In the end, these games that were supposed to be fun end up being plain frustrating, or even worse – deadly. If you are looking for a peaceful place to run to in the end of the day, The Endless Forest is a place for you.

First of all, The Endless Forest is a MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game) – but you don't necessarily need to be connected in order to play. You install it as a screensaver, but you can download a simple launcher and run the game like any other. After you've downloaded and installed the game, it's time to register. The name you register with is not that important, because no-one can see your *name*. What they see is a glyph, a little symbol you choose for yourself in the process of registration.

Game installed, name registered – good! It's time to launch it and play with numerous options (if you're up to it, of course). The first thing you will see in the options menu is the latest news, so you will be informed about the newest version of the game as soon as it comes out. Among other options are the standard ones – display, sound, controls. The Display tab is the most amusing one, in my opinion. You can adjust everything to the tiniest details – model detail, environment, reflections, shadows... The most beautiful option is softness, or blur. If you're going for a more realistic look, just turn it off completely. If you want a dreamy, magical look, just push the slider up! Be mindful not to go overboard or you will not be able to



see what the heck is happening on the screen. Once you're satisfied with the way your game looks, it's time to play.

You start as a male deer. If you are logged in, the glyph you chose will shine in-between your beautiful antlers, and you will be able to see other players. The forest you are about to explore has many beautiful regions and many secrets. Follow the little icons placed in the border around your screen and you will find The First Forest, The Ename Ruin, The Pond and a local hangout, a forest disco of some sort, and The Old Oak.



Encountered a deer or two on your little trip around the forest? *Excellent!* This is where you whip out the actions strip located at the bottom of your screen and test some Forest Activities. Greet the other deer by bowing, give them puzzled looks if they look funny, dance (the more deer dancing, the louder the music) and roll around the grass laughing. The fun has just begun!

You might want to use Forest Magic to change other deer's faces, body, antlers, or completely morph them. That's right – YOU choose the other deer's looks, and they do the same for you. Each time you use magic, you get a different (and completely random) result. One can acquire magical powers by eating a yummy mushroom, or sleeping next to another deer. If you want the ultimate power – morphing – you will have to find an enchanted mushroom circle and lay still for a while.



If there's no-one around to change you, explore the forest because it holds many, many secrets that are up to you to discover. Good news is: collision is off. You will be able to walk through trees and stones, a puffy cloud surrounding you. If you decide to walk through another deer, a pretty gold shine and a garland of flowers will appear around you. Beautiful, isn't it?

Once you've had enough of being transformed (or wearing vintage vinyl players on top of your head – don't ask...), just find the pond and dip your deer counterpart into cold water and swim among the water lilies. All magic will wear off in an instant and you'll come out clean and refreshed.



Being logged in has many advantages, Abiogenesis being a huge one. It is a system that allows the creators to control the game and change it to their likings in real-time – you won't know what happened until you've logged in! They control day and night, rain and sun, even nature. The other day, I ran into a field of giant dandelions and mushrooms. I had the luck to run into the first

Abiogenesis Festival on my first time playing the game. It's the time when Twin Gods (giant deer) appear and perform miracles. There were fireworks, rainbows, huge disco balls, and a rain of petals. The gods danced among other deer and changed them into white doves at some point. It was breathtaking.

I find this game incredibly soothing. When I'm sad and tired, I take a run around the forest or sit inside the Old Oak, listening to gentle music. If I'm lonely, I connect and dance with other deer. If I feel like *being* lonely, I log out and walk around all alone. There's something amazing about spending time in a forest, even if it's a virtual one. I love zooming in and admiring all the tiny details creators put in – emerald frogs, doves, sparkly fireflies and butterflies flying around flower fields. The atmosphere is simply *amazing*.

The only serious problem with this game is the log-in issues. The server crashes every now and then, making it impossible to log in. But there's always good in bad – the creators are constantly in touch with other users through the official game forum and are working on improving the game on a daily basis. If you experience any problems, or have suggestions, just post them there – your idea just might get accepted. This is one big thumbs-up to the creators – just keep it up! It's nice to know that the Twin Gods are watching over us night and day.



You can visit www.tale-of-tales.com/TheEndlessForest to download the game.

Developer: Tale of Tales
Publisher: Tale of Tales
Platform: PC
Genre: MMORPG
Grade: 95/100

Minimum System Requirements:
 Windows® 2000/XP
 2 GHz Processor
 256 MB RAM
 128 MB Video Card
 DirectX® 9.0c
 Internet connection for online play

A Final Note...

As I complete formatting the last article to make it into the magazine, I scroll through the pages wondering if I should try to squeeze in one more article. Then I remember it is already the 6th of the month. It is time to let the issue go. Not without writing the 'A Final Note' section of course.

It is the end of another absolutely crazy month. Everybody on our team seems to be going through an exceptionally busy period. I am not faring too much better either. By now I am pretty much convinced that a mysterious gang of elves are piling up work behind my back. Here's hoping you will excuse us for getting the issue out to you a few days later than our usual deadline. Maybe we will have a smoother month next time around so we can make up for some of the last days and release the July issue in less than 30 days.

Especially since some of our teammates have had to temporarily stop contributing articles, I'd like to take a moment to reiterate that we are still looking for additional reviewers. If you are interested in joining the Adventure Lantern team, please feel free to e-mail me at Ugur@AdventureLantern.com with a small sample of your writing. As always, comments on the content of the magazine, requests for reviews, or just a couple of friendly lines are also more than welcome.

In our July issue, we are hoping to continue our coverage on the Tex Murphy series with a review of Pandora Directive. As a follow up to our Dreamfall review, we are also hoping to take a look at the beginnings of the series with an article on The Longest Journey. A number of projects that will be released by The Adventure Company or ANACONDA are pending for previews. We should be covering these games in the next few months. Finally, we are planning to take a look at the newly released independent adventure game Lunar Deep.

I hope you enjoyed reading our June issue as we start working on the next one.

-Ugur Sener