

Adventure
LANTERN

50

THE STORY OF ADVENTURE LANTERN

Friends,

This month represents an important milestone for Adventure Lantern. Our April 2014 PDF is the 50th issue of our magazine. We came a long way since the first edition of AL that was released eight years ago. During those eight years, Adventure Lantern went through many changes. There were periods where we were extremely active and growing. There were also months of silence where other aspects of my life had to take priority over the magazine. We had a plethora of excellent contributors and two exceptional individuals that took over all editing and formatting duties in my absence. Looking back now, it is hard to believe how much content was produced and how much time was put into the magazine.

Ugur Sener

I wanted to use this month's editorial to celebrate what came before and acknowledge all the hard work that has gone into the magazine over the years. I also wanted to peel back the curtain a little and explain what it has been like to work on AL. This is the story of AL, told through my personal experiences with the magazine. This is also a thank you note to all those that ever worked on an issue of AL or downloaded a copy. Without your support, AL would not exist.

FROM WRITING REVIEWS TO RUNNING A GAMING SITE...

During the summer of 2003, I had a wonderful opportunity to work as a computer programming intern at a large corporation and learn about Web development. It was my first job as a computer programmer. My supervisor, a truly exceptional

gentleman and a great boss, structured the experience so that I could produce work that would be of value to the company while I continued to improve my proficiency in writing code. It was during that summer that I moved in with the girl that would eventually become my wife. It was also during that summer that I met Randy Sluganski and wrote my first review for a video game. Randy was the distinguished owner and editor of *Just Adventure*, a site I frequently visited to get my adventure gaming fix. On my request, Randy kindly agreed to let me submit the occasional review and contribute to his site. For me, writing those early reviews was a fun hobby and a great outlet. I stayed on the *Just Adventure* staff for several months, sending in the occasional article.

Toward the end of 2005, the owner of a Turkish adventure-gaming site

saw my name listed among the staff members of *Just Adventure*. She contacted me to ask if I would be willing to write review and preview articles in Turkish. I gladly agreed, happy to contribute to a fledgling site and have a chance to practice writing in my native language on a regular basis. Over the weeks that followed, the site owner and I became friends. Though we never met in person, we eventually decided to launch a brand new site that would provide adventure-gaming content in both English and Turkish. At the time, I was done with my undergraduate studies and working full-time as a programmer. I had plenty of time in the evenings to play games and write reviews.

I bought the Adventure Lantern domain in December 2005. Though I had plenty of Web development tools available at work, I did not have access to any of them for



personal use. As such, Adventure Lantern was designed entirely using a text editor. It was written in HTML alone, with no fancy graphics, animations, or dynamic content. I tried to come up with a simple straightforward layout that would be easy to maintain. My partner and I started to recruit contributors and put together content for our first issue, which was to be released in January 2006. In the meantime, we uploaded a few review and preview articles so readers could browse through some content before we released the first PDF.

THE FIRST PDF

A few weeks before we planned to publish our first issue, my partner and I had an unfortunate argument that resulted in the termination of our agreement to work together. Looking back so many years later,

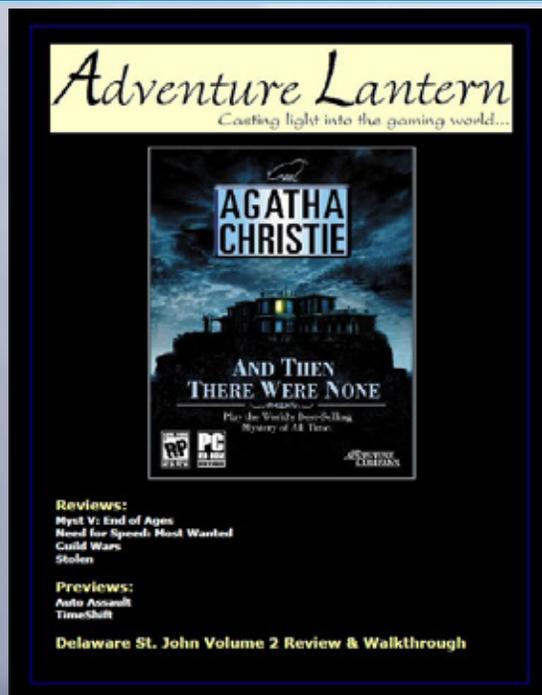
the details of that argument seem entirely trivial. However, since the Adventure Lantern domain was under my name, my partner walked away and focused on her own site, asking me to take down all of the content she had produced.

January 1st was merely a few days away and I was left with an important decision to make. AL was a brand new domain. We had no established readership and virtually no traffic. Hardly anyone involved with the gaming industry knew about the site. I could just regard it as a failed effort and let the domain subscription expire without producing any more content. After all, I had only signed up for producing a monthly PDF thinking I would have a partner to help me edit and format the articles.

However, Adventure Lantern represented the fulfillment

of a dream from years ago. I remembered how a few friends and I had attempted to produce a gaming magazine in high school. At the time, we were overly ambitious and very unrealistic about budgeting, scheduling, and expectations from each other. The project failed before it even gained any significant traction. Yet, the idea of writing game reviews and eventually having my own magazine never truly left me. I had already written several reviews for another site. Here was my chance to run the show and make Adventure Lantern my own.

I decided to keep the domain, but only produce content in English. Editing articles in two languages and assembling two PDFs each month did not seem feasible. Having been away from Turkey for so many years, I felt more



comfortable writing in English. During that time, there was a Web-based adventure game series called *Gumshoe Online*. The game had a strong player community with rather active forums full of people interested in adventure games. I knew about the series thanks to the review of the first three *Gumshoe* cases I wrote for *Just Adventure*. I read through the game's forums, looking for people that seemed to have a real passion for the adventure-gaming genre. It was on the *Gumshoe Online* forums that I met Wendy, Suz, and Neetie for the first time. I asked them if they would be willing to write for a new adventure gaming magazine. All of them agreed and proceeded to write content for our first issue.

On the evening of December 30, 2005, I was visiting my wife's family in Texas. All of the articles

for the first PDF were completed except for the editorial. Wendy had written reviews of *And Then There Were None* and *Delaware St. John Episode 2* along with a walkthrough for the latter game. Suz provided a review of *Myst V* while Neetie wrote an article on *Stolen*. I had put together a sampling of reviews as well. All that was left was to edit the articles and assemble the final PDF. I finally had a chance to begin formatting late into the evening. Unfortunately, there were issues with the wireless connection at the house we were staying. As such, I had to use a LAN cable to connect to the Internet. There was no desk I could use either. As the evening wore on, I was working on the PDF hunched over a chair with my laptop on my knees.

I did not have access to any tools specifically designed for putting

together magazine or newspaper layouts. With nothing but good ol' Microsoft Word and Paint, I started piecing together the articles. It took me the entire night to edit all of the content and assemble the issue. I finished writing the editorial and uploaded the PDF to our server as the first light of day came in through the window. I was exhausted and elated at the same time. The issue was out there for people to find and download. What would the readers think? How would they react? Was my writing good enough? Was my editing sufficient?

ADVENTURE LANTERN AS A BRAND

Randy Sluganski continued to lend me support during those early days of Adventure Lantern. He ran an ad on the JA forums for an entire month after we published our first PDF to

direct some traffic in our direction. He also offered some advice about how to handle comments from readers. Through the years, in my own small way, I tried to return the favor by sharing some articles I wrote for AL so they would also be posted on *Just Adventure*. I never had a chance to meet Randy in person. Our exchanges were usually brief, all conducted via e-mail. Yet I appreciated his support tremendously. He was a great writer, editor, and mentor. Losing him was akin to losing a family member. I am forever grateful for everything he did for me. Though I wish he was still with us today, I'd like to think that he is in a better place.

It was on the *Just Adventure* forums that I got the first bit of feedback about Adventure Lantern's first PDF. Some people had nice things to say about the quality of writing. Others correctly complained about the game genres covered in the issue. They pointed out that a site called Adventure Lantern should dedicate more space to the adventure genre. Looking back, I would indeed agree that the first issue featured a few too many non-adventure games. The comments made me pause and consider Adventure Lantern as a brand. What did I want people to think when they opened an Adventure Lantern issue? What should they expect to find? What was the audience I was targeting? What did I personally want to get out of putting together the magazine?

From the beginning, I knew that AL was not something I wanted to do for financial gain. It was supposed to be a hobby. A way for me to be more involved with the gaming world. I had no lofty ideas about competing with bigger sites

or becoming the go-to place when it came to gaming. I knew that I liked to write, but I was aware that outside of a few college classes, I had no formal training in writing. I even hesitated to refer to myself as the site's editor, thinking that I lacked the qualifications such a title may imply. Though I did not know how else to describe the person that was supposed to read through all the content and make corrections.

Accepting AL as a hobby in those early days helped me relax about the content of the site. I could afford to overlook the occasional grammatical error that slipped through the cracks. I did not have to feel pressured to immediately cover every new release either. We could afford to take our time with our reviews. We could also have fun with our articles, looking back at games we enjoyed years ago while still providing coverage for current adventures.

I also knew that adventure games always held a special place for me. If I were to be responsible for an online magazine, it had to be primarily focused on adventure games. While we were free to pick the games we wanted to cover each month, this focus meant that I would need to carefully balance the overall contents of each issue, making sure the adventure genre was always strongly represented. However, since I did enjoy playing other genres, I did not want to completely limit the magazine to one type of game. I still wanted to write about role-playing, action, and strategy games.

A NEW VISION FOR THE LANTERN

A couple of weeks after publishing AL's first issue, I was in my

apartment in Oklahoma. My job at the time allowed me to spend the majority of my time working from home. In addition, the company offered a wonderful flex system where employees could work an extra hour each day for two weeks in order to have the Friday at the end of the period off. I had a few assignments to wrap up that Friday morning. In the afternoon, I signed off from work and sat in the living room with my laptop in front of me. Several of the articles that eventually made it into the February 2006 issue were already completed. I was staring at the documents, thinking about how to structure the magazine.

I eventually decided to split the magazine into three sections. Each issue would start with Adventurer's Ravine, which would be completely dedicated to the adventure genre. Moving forward, I decided that I would try to include news and previews only for adventure games. I deliberately chose the word 'ravine' because I felt it invoked a sense of mystery and adventure. Yet it also invoked a sense of time, of waters that slowly carved through rock over eons to form a valley. The other genres were relegated to the Uncharted Waters, a space for our team to write about gaming in general, with the understanding that these reviews were from the perspective of people that primarily liked adventure titles. 'Uncharted' was again chosen very deliberately, in acceptance of the fact that this was unusual material for a site called Adventure Lantern. Finally, I wanted to keep including walkthroughs in our issues, putting them in a section called The Guiding Beacon with the title meant to bring to mind an image of a lighthouse.



ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

UNCHARTED WATERS

THE GUIDING BEACON

I spent that Friday afternoon and evening designing the new layout and writing the set of preview articles included in our February 2006 issue. It was a tremendously memorable experience, setting a new direction for the magazine and giving thought to what I wanted Adventure Lantern to represent. It was also during that evening that I contacted several developers to tell them about our publication. Adventure Lantern would always remain a hobby, but to the fullest extent possible, I did want our magazine to keep a pulse on the adventure gaming world, announcing projects in development and trying to cover new releases.

Eileen, Gnome, and Fallen Angel joined the team and wrote reviews for AL that month. It was a delightful experience to meet each of them. Gnome contacted me to

congratulate me on the launch of the magazine, which in turn helped me discover his excellent blog on gaming. I immediately loved his witty writing. He not only offered the articles he had previously written on his blog for publication in AL, but also became a strong supporter of our site, announcing each of our issues in his blog and helping us spread the word about the Lantern. Fallen Angel was involved with *Adventure Advocate*, a well-established Greek adventure site. She agreed to periodically translate her work so we could publish it in AL. Her excellent writing was a great boon to our site. Eileen was a big fan of adventure gaming in general and the *Nancy Drew* series in particular. She agreed to become our designated *Nancy Drew* reviewer, starting with *Last Train to Blue Moon Canyon*,

which is the thirteenth game in the series. With Wendy, Neetie, and Suz stepping in to help as well, the February 2006 issue came together as a 119-page behemoth.

ADVENTURE LANTERN GROWS

Our team continued to grow in the following month, with Sweetpea, Dona, and Paul contributing their first reviews. Following Paul's suggestion, I also started accepting e-mail subscriptions and sending out notifications announcing each issue. It was an absolute blast working on the third issue. I had a great time playing through and writing about *Delaware St. John Volume 1: The Curse of Midnight Manor* and *AGON - The Mysterious Codex*. Working on *The Mysterious Codex* walkthrough was especially fulfilling, with the Web version of the walkthrough quickly becoming one of the most-



You stroll outside and are delighted to see the sun just clearing the eastern horizon. It is a beautiful autumn morning and the air feels brisk as you take a deep breath. Across the way, you spot a jogger just before they disappear into a grove of tall ash trees. As you squint in the direction of the jogger, your eyes come to rest on a concrete park bench sitting by the road with its ominous advertisement for a mortuary. Despite your repeated press with the title to have it changed, it remains. You end your casual survey of what the morning has brought you with a quick glance across the sleek red body of your sports car. It is a relief to see that the increasing vegetation in the area has once again passed you by.

Chris Bove

Copyright 2006, Mike Tolar



Adventure Lantern

Featured Games:

Agon - The Mysterious Codex Review & Walkthrough
Hope Springs Eternal Review & Walkthrough

Reviews:

Bone
Clink
The Moment of Silence
Last Half of Darkness: Shadow of the Serpents
Delaware St., John Volume 1: The Curse of Midnight Manor
Ultimate Spider-Man

Previews:

Scavenger Hunter
Darkstar
Lunar Deep
Last Half of Darkness: Beyond the Spirit's Eye
Star Heritage 1: The Black Cobra



frequently visited pages on the site and multiple people sending very nice e-mails about the quality and thoroughness of the guide. It was very satisfying to help fellow adventurers get through a game.

However, years after publishing the March 2006 issue, what stands out the most was my experience of playing and reviewing an HTML-based text-adventure called *Clink*. It was a simple, but beautiful game with a charming story about what may be hidden in one's own backyard. I still remember completing the game on a Sunday afternoon, with that bittersweet feeling that comes with finishing a good novel. The game's Web site has been shut down for a long time and I have no idea what the developer Mike Tolar may be up to these days. Though I hope somewhere he is continuing to write.

In the months that followed, Adventure Lantern continued to grow. We had a plethora of wonderful people that joined our team. Some of them only stayed for a few issues. Some of them made substantial contributions and even went on to help with editing. Working on Adventure Lantern issues provided excellent opportunities for gaming and writing. I loved going back and playing through *Shivers 1* and *2*, writing reviews that made me think of old friends and simpler times. Taking a tour of three *Tex Murphy* games were a special treat. Having a chance to voice my opinion on *Under a Killing Moon*, *Pandora Directive*, and *Overseer* was very fulfilling. I was tremendously honored when the good folks at *Big Finish Games* chose to link back to my reviews of *Pandora*

Directive and *Overseer* when they started the *Kickstarter* campaign to bring back *Tex Murphy*. Adventure Lantern also helped me discover the occasional gem of a game I would have otherwise overlooked. Perhaps the best example is *Space Rangers 2*, a game whose soundtrack can still be occasionally heard from my office when I study.

AN INTERNATIONAL TEAM

Over time, I came to appreciate the challenges of coordinating multiple team members living in different countries. Our team members were spread throughout the world. Some lived in the U.S., some in Greece, some in Britain, some in other parts of Europe, and one in South Africa. Coordinating all of our schedules and making sure content was available to publish in a timely manner was challenging. There were several times

when I had to step in at the last minute to write an extra article to better balance the contents of the magazine. There were other times when team members went the extra mile and delivered articles well beyond what I could reasonably expect.

Our arrangement to work together was informal. Adventure Lantern did not occupy an office building. Our contributors were not paid for their writing. Each and every one of them worked as volunteers. Other than the occasional free game, nobody was compensated for their efforts. Despite that, many of our team members proved to be incredibly dedicated and dependable.

During that first year, Wendy, Thaumaturge, Gnome, Erdalion, Paul, La Primavera, and Southern Belle in particular were reliable as clockwork. They always delivered their reviews on time. They always lent their support when needed. They went beyond being mere team members, becoming trusted friends and allies.

I would often gather all of the articles and assemble the final PDF overnight. One spring evening in 2006, when I was up late at night in Oklahoma, putting together one of our PDFs, nearly the entire team stayed up with me. We had a private staff member section of the forum that was once available on the Adventure Lantern site. I started a thread there to post about the experience of compiling the PDF. Through the night, I periodically posted updates, letting my friends know how the issue was coming along. They too spent hours in front of their computers, providing words of encouragement along the way. Perhaps they were playing a game or working on the side. Perhaps they were watching TV or writing a review. All I knew was that many of them

stayed up with me and supported me for hours. It was an absolutely profound, beautiful experience. When I finally published the PDF in the early hours of the morning, I felt as if they were standing right there in my room, their hands on my shoulder, cheering me on.

As 2006 ended, Adventure Lantern had become much more than a simple hobby. Countless hours had been dedicated to the production of our issues. People from all over the world worked on the magazine. At the same time, our readership grew, with many of our readers sending kind e-mails to offer their support. Showing exceptional camaraderie, individuals involved with other adventure gaming sites provided tremendous encouragement as well. Some of our content was translated to Polish and published at *Adventure Zone*. Fallen Angel from *Adventure Advocate* continued to provide articles when she could. Our amazing friends at Adventure-Treff helped announce each and every one of our new PDFs, sending significant traffic our way every month. We also found allies in *Game Boomers*, *Mystery Manor*, *Spyglass Game Guides*, *Adventure Point*, and *Adventure's Planet* to name a few. Some of those sites are gone today. Some are still chugging along. Without exception, everyone I met that was involved with another gaming site was supportive of Adventure Lantern. I felt connected to our team members, readers, and the folks doing their part to spread the love of adventure gaming at other sites. I knew that Adventure Lantern would forever be a part of my life.

THE START OF A DIFFERENT DREAM

The incredibly rewarding first year of Adventure Lantern made me think

of another long-lost dream. It was a dream I had since I was eight years old when I woke up after surgery and realized I could hear better than ever. The thought that I would one day do for somebody what my doctor had done for me. It was a dream I had to abandon at age eighteen for financial reasons, choosing a shorter path to achieve some sense of security and stability.

If Adventure Lantern could be successful after a failed attempt to start a magazine in high school, could I go back to another lost dream? Could I hope to keep my job while finishing premed classes? Did I have a chance of getting admitted to a medical school despite being much older than the average applicant? I contemplated these questions as I flew from Oklahoma City to Dallas for work one November morning.

It took two months to research my options and make the appropriate work arrangements. As the spring 2007 semester started, I was once again a student. My coworkers understood my desire to seek a different career. They allowed me tremendous flexibility in my work hours, letting me take classes at any time during the day, as long as I finished my work assignments in a timely manner. Thus, I started taking three premed classes a semester while keeping my full-time job.

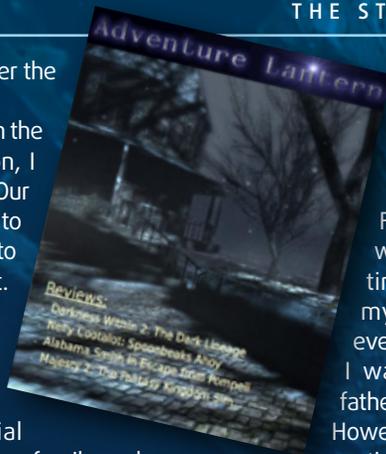
It was a crazy hectic time for my wife and me. She too understood why it was important for me to at least try to go to medical school. At the time, we only had one car. I did not even have a valid U.S. driver's license. My wife took me to school every single day and then drove to work. She picked me up every single evening. Thanks to the availability of WiFi, I was able to work on campus between classes and while I waited for my wife to arrive in the evenings. It made for many remarkably long days. I had to be smart about how

Together, we put together the August 2010 issue.

As I started working on the September 2010 edition, I started medical school. Our classes were structured to allow for an adjustment to being a medical student. During the first course, we had relatively few lecture hours, allowing plenty of time to master the material and still have time for my family and writing. Thus, I put together another PDF and got it published. We welcomed two new team members in that issue: Jennifer and Jonathon. Both of them had great blogs about gaming. They were no strangers to writing reviews. With them on board, I felt like we once again had a robust team that could accommodate varying work schedules and deliver consistent content.

Jonathon sent me his first AL review after seeing the request for new writers to contact the editor on our home page. I still remember opening that e-mail. Just like the night I assembled the very first AL PDF, we were in Texas, visiting my wife's family. I instantly liked Jonathon's direct, succinct, no-nonsense writing style. He had a very accessible friendly tone. I could tell he had the potential to go far as a reviewer. As I recall, we immediately hit it off, exchanging several e-mails within hours of my reading his review of Hammerfight. Though at the time, I had no idea how important he would eventually be for our site.

Following the publication of the September 2010 issue, my classes became significantly more demanding. Lecture hours dramatically increased moving from the first course to the second. The material became denser, requiring increasing amounts of study time. I started spending the majority of my days at home, watching lecture videos



by myself, trying to find a way to keep up with the large volume of information. Fortunately, there was still plenty of time to play with my daughter each evening and feel like I was present as a father and a husband. However, there wasn't any time left for playing games or writing about them. Thus, Adventure Lantern went dormant for a few months as I completed the first year of medical school.

JONATHON

During the summer between the first and second years, I volunteered at a research facility. It was a great opportunity to learn how a molecular genetics lab worked. It was also a relaxed time that allowed me to write again. Jonathon, Jennifer, Dona, Gnome, and Rob once again joined me. Together, we put together the June 2011 issue. In the following weeks, Jennifer, Dona, Gnome, and Rob were available to varying degrees, their busy work schedules and other commitments keeping them occupied. Thus, Jonathon and I started to work more closely. The two of us worked together to produce three more issues.

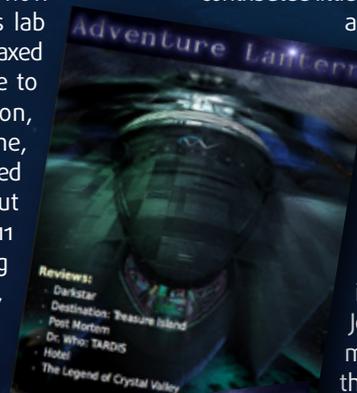
It felt wonderful to be working on Adventure Lantern again. Sure, the

issues were shorter than what they had been during our first year. However, Jonathon and I worked well together and kept the magazine alive during a time our other team members were not available. When classes became more intense during the second year of medical school, I did not want to see the magazine fade away once again. Jonathon had time and time again proven his dedication to the magazine, reliability as a friend and coworker, and talent as a writer. It seemed natural to ask him to assume a leadership role and take on the editorial duties of the magazine. I would remain behind the scenes, contributing content when I could.

Thus began the most consistent publishing cycle in Adventure Lantern's history. Jonathon started formatting AL issues with the December 2011 PDF. In the six months that followed, Jonathon tirelessly worked on the magazine. I contributed little more than the editorial

articles at the beginning of each issue and the occasional interview.

Working with a very limited staff and with Jonathon doing the vast majority of the work by himself, we deliberately kept the issues short. However, Jonathon did a great deal more than continuing the simplified format I introduced in 2010. He put his own imprint on the magazine by starting a massive news section. Chock full of adventure gaming info, his news pages quickly became my favorite portion of the magazine. Thanks to him, even during months when I do very little gaming, I feel



connected to the adventure community. During this time, Gnome continued to lend his support to our publication. We also got contributions from Nick, who has time and again proven himself to be a gifted writer. I am very thankful that Jonathon ran into Nick's blog and suggested that I recruit him to our team.

CONSTANTIN

With our July 2012 issue, we turned another new page for Adventure Lantern. Constantin Starodub contacted me and asked if we would like help with the layouts of our issues. After seeing the sample articles Constantin provided, Jonathon and I were both very excited about having this new team member handle the layouts. When Constantin finished the July 2012 PDF, the results far exceeded my expectations. The issue looked simply stunning. Since then, Constantin has continued to do the layout for our PDFs. He was later joined by Igor Tokin, who formats our hefty news section every month.

Thanks to the efforts of Jonathon, Nick, Constantin, and Igor, we have been publishing Adventure Lantern issues nonstop for many months. It has been absolutely wonderful to see the magazine going strong and remaining active at a time when my involvement remains limited. In the meantime, I am approaching the end of my time in medical school. If all goes well, I will be graduating in May 2014 and start residency in July.

During the past several months, thanks to the flexible fourth year medical school schedule, I had more free time to dedicate to the magazine. It has been very fulfilling to at least write the editorials and contribute a review or an interview each

month. Jonathon, Nick, Constantin, and Igor continue to turn in amazing work every single month. We were even lucky enough to get a few articles from Rob.

THE END OF ONE JOURNEY...

It is hard to believe this issue is the 50th PDF we publish. It is a great milestone and one that fills me with a profound feeling of satisfaction. When I bought the Adventure Lantern domain in 2005 and when I made the decision to start publishing the PDFs without a partner eight years ago, I could have never imagined how far the site would go or what it would come to mean to me.

Today, my life is very different than it was eight years ago. I am no longer a programmer, but a medical student a few months away from graduation. I am no longer in my twenties. The past eight years have changed the way I think, the way I look at the world, and the way I approach people. I have gone from being a fiancé to a husband to a father. My lovely daughter was born in 2010. It is hard to believe she is four years old. She constantly amazes me with her sharp mind. In 2013 my wife and I were blessed again to have a wonderful son. He may be only a year old, but I can already tell that he has a kind heart. His gentle smile and calm demeanor brings me joy. I can't imagine having better children or being a prouder parent.

Time has also altered the way I see

with all the scores I gave or comments I wrote if I played through all the games I reviewed again. Through all of that time though, Adventure Lantern has been with me. The experiences from 2006 are just as vivid as they

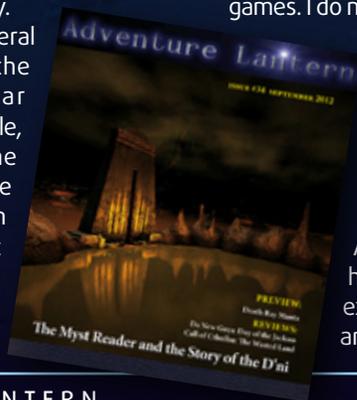
were when they first happened. The stories I chose to highlight here are but a few moments from a plethora of fond memories. Working on this magazine and this site has brought me great satisfaction. From the exceptional individuals I met along the way to the great games I got to play, Adventure Lantern has given me something far more valuable than the hours I dedicated to the site.

...THE BEGINNING OF ANOTHER

Whether they provided numerous reviews or just a single article, I am thankful to anyone that has ever written for Adventure Lantern. With the sole exception of Wendy, I have never met a single one of them in person. I have no idea what they look like – from the color of their skin to the styling of their hair. I have no idea how they sound or what kinds of homes they have. Yet I feel bonded with each and every single one of them.

I am likewise thankful to anyone who has ever downloaded a single issue of Adventure Lantern. It is the support of our readers that makes the journey so worthwhile. The occasional supportive e-mail we receive brightens my day in such a way that it is hard to describe. Thank you for reading. Thank you for helping our light continue to shine.

I do not know what twists and turns my life will take as I complete my residency training during the next four years. It is hard to predict what Adventure Lantern may look like at that time. However, no matter what becomes of the site or the magazine, no matter how many issues we publish and how active the site is, I can say that the Lantern will always be in my mind and in my heart. Here's hoping one day I get to write the editorial for the 100th issue. ●





Cover Image:
50th issue

ADVENTURE LANTERN
#2 (50) april 2014

OWNER/EXECUTIVE EDITOR
Ugur Sener

OTHER EDITOR(S)
Jonathon Wisnoski

ARTICLES BY
Fallen Angel
Jonathon Wisnoski
Ugur Sener

NEWS BY
Jonathon Wisnoski

LAYOUT/DESIGN/ASSEMBLY
Constantin Starodub
Jonathon Wisnoski



NEWS

UPCOMING RELEASES	14
NEW RELEASES	15
UPDATED RELEASES	15
NEWS FROM THE BIG BLUE CUP	16

ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

AGON: THE MYSTERIOUS CODEX	18
BROTHERS: TALE OF TWO SONS	24
THE DARK EYE: CHAINS OF SATINAV	30
THE SECRETS OF ATLANTIS: THE SACRED LEGACY	36

UNCHARTED WATERS

ZENO CLASH II	40
---------------	----

A Year of Adventure #3: Space Quest I & II**2013 Aggie Awards****Rock, Paper, Shotgun: Why Games Should Enter The Public Domain****ScummVM: Voyeur****The Best Horror Video Game Franchises That Should Have Been Movies!****Fear of Twine****Puzzling (mis)adventures: Stick It to the Man, Tiny Thief****Upcoming Releases****Syberia 3 (Benoit Sokal)****Dead Synchronicity (Fictiorama)****The Book of Unwritten Tales 2 (KING Art)****The Journey Down: Chapter Two (Skygoblin)****The Starry Expanse Project (rebuilding Riven)****Gods Will Be Watching (Deconstructeam)**

Blackwell Epiphany (Wadjet Eye)
Tales from the Borderlands (Telltale)
Alone With You (creator of Home)
Ether One (White Paper)
The Witness (Jonathan Blow)



New Releases



The Walking Dead: S2E2 - A House Divided (TellTale)

1954: Alcatraz (Daedalic)

The Matter of the Great Red Dragon
(Jonas Kyratzes)

Broken Sword 5 (Revolution)

NaissanceE (Limasse Five)

Whitewash (Ouse)

realMyst:

Masterpiece Edition (Cyan)

The Wolf Among Us (Telltale)

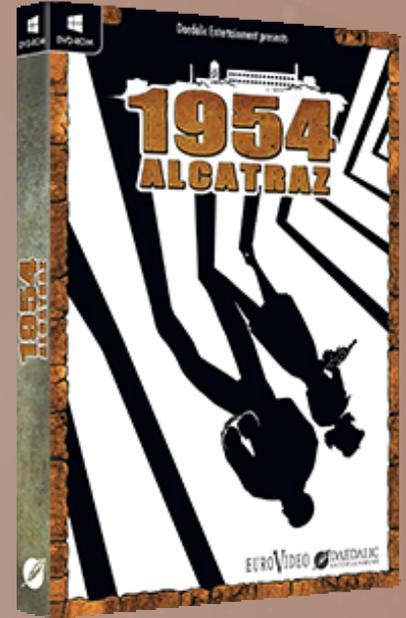
Detective Grimoire (SFB)

Following Freeware:

Nov/Dec 2013 Releases

Following Freeware:

January 2014 Releases



realMYST
MASTERPIECE EDITION

Updated Releases

Gone Home (Fullbright Company)

Syberia (Benoit Sokal)



News From the Big Blue Cup



February

A-Mused (LostTrainDude) - A short tale about inspiration and lack of it. MAGS January 2014 entry.

Fight for Life (Strangechicken) - Fight for life is a surreal horror story, Jason's brother is dying from an incurable disease, after a sudden outburst. Jason rushes to the hospital to see his sickly brother... that's when things start to get bizarre.



Essia (Relaxed Possum) - Essia is a little point and click game about piecing together your memories in a 'noir-like' environment. Inspired by Mnemonic and Derek Brand during double fines amnesia fortnight.

Mission Futura: The Mindless Menace (Sparkiller) - A short point and click adventure created in 2011. You are Sparki, the underpaid aide of chief editor Daniel Klapowski. Having just arrived at the office, you notice that he is behaving very peculiar. Trying to find out the cause you discover a threat that might endanger the whole planet! what is going to happen, and perhaps stop it.



Bodi Pripravljen (Viktor) - The game follows scout Peter. Scouts need to live by the scout law and Peter is about to learn what the fourth scout law means.

Pick of the Month: Heatwave

Awesome retro music and graphics, 1337-speak and a furry in a tight suit - what else do you need for a cyberpunk adventure?

Heatwave has this all and even more. Dive into this dystopic world and its likeable characters and help our nerdy protagonist to get along in real life during a blackout.

Chosen by cat
Developed by Scavenger



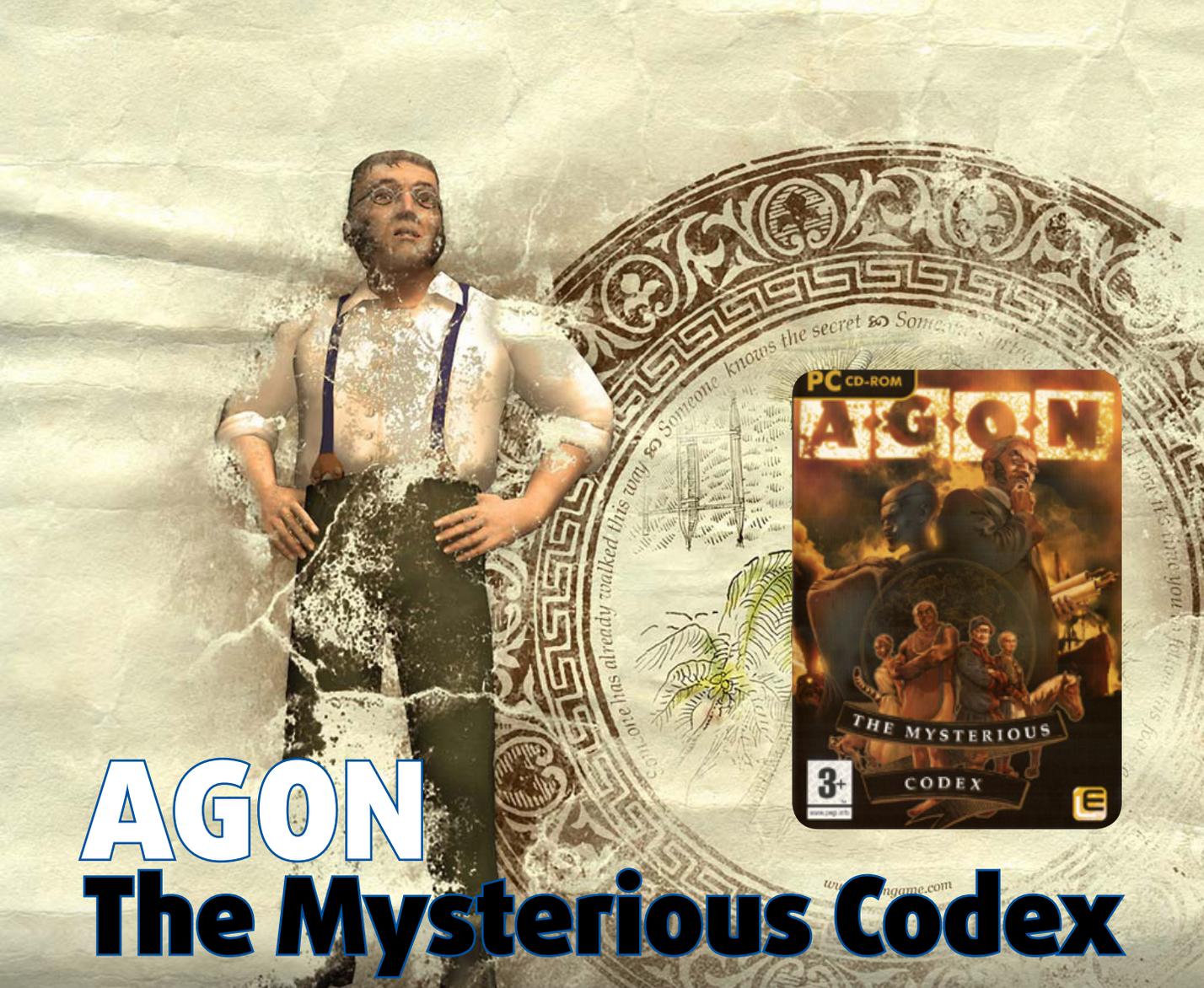
A-Mused (LostTrainDude)



Essia (Relaxed Possum)

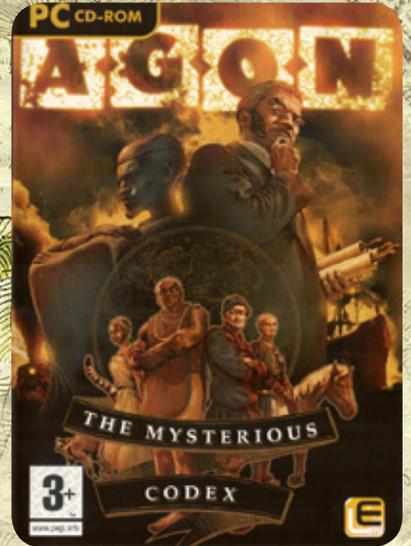


Bodi Pripravljen (Viktor)



AGON

The Mysterious Codex



Genre: adventure Developer/publisher: Private Moon Studios Release date: 2004 Platforms: Windows, Mac OS X
Website: <http://gamedev.privatemoon.com/en/fomenu1/agon-a-rejtelyes-kodex-description>

My first experience with AGON started with *The Lost Sword of Toledo* (the fourth episode), which I tried to play a few years back when I decided that the series as a whole sounded very interesting. I thought starting with the most modern iteration would improve the chances that I would fall in love with the series and then be able to overlook flaws or overly hard gameplay in the earlier games; And of course games are always made capable of standing alone, so that anyone can purchase and play latter chapters irregardless of having played the earlier ones. Well, *The Lost Sword of Toledo* can stand alone, but unlike many other games it does not accomplish this by hiding its heritage, nothing could be further from the truth.



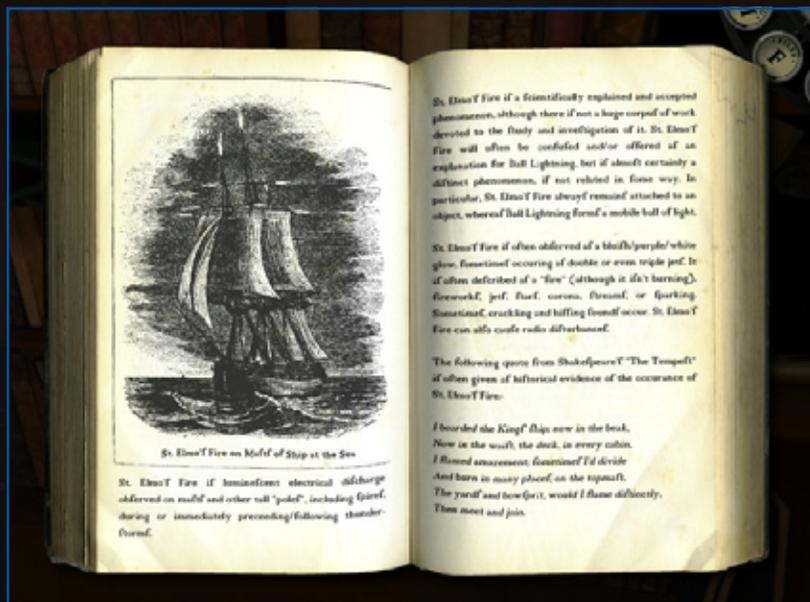
Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Starting *The Lost Sword of Toledo* for the first time, and browsing the extras before wrestling with the main campaign, I was immediately greeted by a table full of letters, and even a book. You see, most of the finesse parts of the *AGON*'s story are told this way, with a copious amount of reading immediately before and/or after the gameplay of an episode. This is just one of the fourth episode's attempts at getting us caught up on the story; You do not necessarily have to read any of it, but you will miss out on most of the story and, if you are like me, feel guilty if you do so. While, I reiterate, *The Lost Sword of Toledo* is designed from the ground up to be standalone, I definitely felt at that point, staring at an impenetrable ocean of backstory, that perhaps starting at episode four was not such a good idea after all. I decided to put

The Lost Sword of Toledo on hold at that point, until I had played *The Mysterious Codex*, the anthology of the first three *AGON* episodes, built into a standalone single game.

What first drew me to *AGON*; which, by the way, stands for *Ancient Games of Nations*; Was the intriguing fourteen episode format, each designed around some exotic but authentic board game. These board games were the original sole focus for these developers, in the concept phase of development, and remain incredibly important. In fact

the developer's website used to allow online play for purchasers, but sadly now we are left with just the "replay against the computer" menu option and an iOS app for both AI and human play. Each episode has you acquiring one of the thirteen pieces of some stone tablet and a page of an ancient mysterious codex, as you follow a string of clues around the globe. This extremely ambitious game is the first by the small indie developers, *Private Moon Studio*, who are based in Hungary. The first three episodes



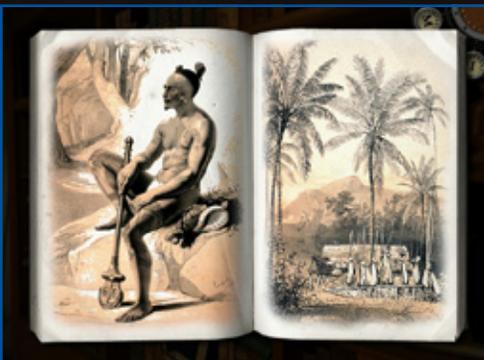
Finland, shortly thereafter; And finally *Pirates of Madagascar*, which brings you to a tropical rainforest on an island off of Southeastern Africa. A land inhabited by the indigenous tribal natives, and which used to support a large pirate population. These games, being made back to back over a short time, are very similar in style but quite different in their scenarios, and work very well when combined into a single game. All three are dedicated *Myst*-likes, with a surprising amount of polish. *The London Scene* introduces the mystery with loads of randomly readable books, only a small number actually useful, and a ton of thinking and observation skills needed. You need to be able to identify the important information hidden in the mountains of text and work with it, in addition to solving a few object puzzles, to uncover this mystery. Next you are off to a remote frozen railway station in *Adventures in Lapland*; Where you come across the home of an ingenious tinkerer and inventor, and must unravel his puzzles to progress onto the few other locations in this episode. In this episode, you eventually come across the board game *Tablut*, an ancient pre-400 CE game of Viking origin, whose exact rules are forever lost to history. The game involves uneven attacking and retreating forces; The outnumbered and surrounded defenders, whose only goal it is to help their king to safety, and

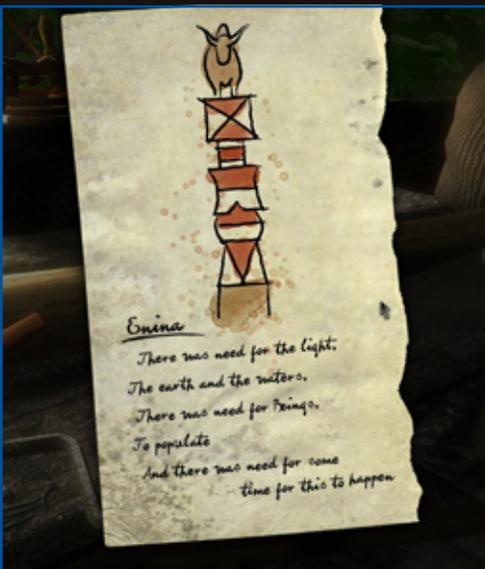


the attackers who are trying to capture this king. Finally, you come to the large (with respect to these mini-episodes) open world of *Pirates of Madagascar*, where you have to decipher a decades old mystery from a long dead pirate; Solving riddles that he left behind, as well as just generally exploring the island and overcoming obstacles with inventory items. This episode ends with the board game *Fanorona*, which I would describe loosely as a two player,

head to head, peg solitaire like game; That is also not unlike checkers, except it is far easier to capture opposing pieces. The game is indigenous to the island, and has been a very popular game their for thousands of years.

Overall, the story is very intriguing, and the individual scenarios are very enjoyable; But so much of the story is told through letters, with little to no effort really expended to make them easily enjoyable. The game is just like





"here, read for the next hour and a half straight". I like the idea of the letters, etc In general, but in practice they are beyond tedious. Quite a lot of important plot points seem to be discussed in these letters, and yes you can skip them, but doing so will leave you somewhat confused, and ill informed. These letters are first displayed to you in a mini cutscene showing a map of your travels on a table; They do the whole Indiana Jones thing with the red indicator tracing your travels. What they really needed to do is narrate the important bits into this scene, so that no matter what the player does or does not read, they are kept up to speed. Also a narration of the text, both in the game and in the post game reading session would of helped tremendously.

Like most *Myst*-likes of that era the gameplay is quite interesting and enjoyable, when it is not being obtuse and frustrating. There is a lot to like about *The Mysterious Codex*, but there is also a lot of complex logic to overcome. Each episode could take you anywhere from an hour to ten, depending on your ability to make those rather



complicated logical leaps. None of it is overly absurd, unreasonable, or illogical, but all of it is difficult. Additionally, I would not call the gameplay polished; There is a certain sloppiness to it, with too many areas where it would of been quite simple to make it a lot less frustrating and more enjoyable. There is one area, for example, where you must navigate a maze with the help of a monkey, over and over again; The first time was definitely enough. Even with that said, I had some amazing times

with this game; Even when I wussed out and consulted a walkthrough on many occasions, those occasions were still enjoyable. I think the puzzle I enjoyed the most would have to be decoding the morse code message in episode two. You could call it tedious, but I just love when adventure games mix real world skills and tasks into their gameplay. But, the biggest highlight of each game, after the first, is clearly the board game. They have put a lot of effort into these; The board games

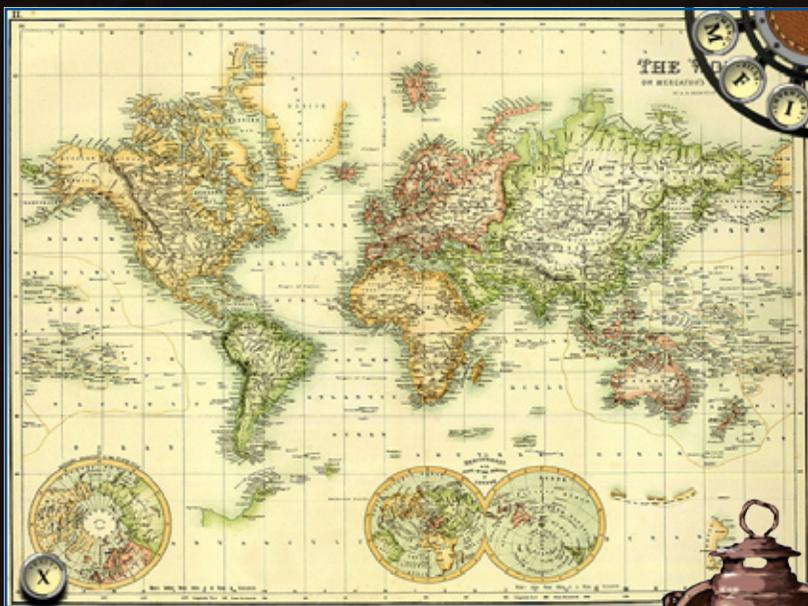




are just great, being real board games which have entertained thousands for thousands of years. I am sure that the AI would show it's limitations against someone experienced, but as something designed to give a fair challenge to someone just learning the game, they are all excellent. Learning these diverse and different games was just a treat, and was very enjoyable.

The presentation of *The Mysterious Codex* is fantastic. The game has great, beautifully detailed, low resolution graphics. The style is great, very classic *Myst*-like, with great polish; Including surprisingly well done foliage, reflections, and other animations on top of the static backgrounds, as well as great minimalistic cutscenes. The voice acting is similarly polished and superb, if not used nearly enough; And the subdued soundtrack is great, as well.

AGON: The Mysterious Codex is a solid *Myst*-like, which I would heartily recommend to all fans of that sub-genre. Similarly to a lot of *Myst*-likes, the game is not going to be for everyone; The gameplay can be quite frustratingly challenging, which is sure to put off some people. But for those who can get past that, there is a lot of love, and a lot of uniqueness to enjoy. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The board games and unique fourteen episode structure.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The repetitive, monkey lead, maze navigation.

VERDICT:

An interesting and unique classic *Myst*-like.



Brothers

A Tale of Two Sons



Genre: adventure Developer: Starbreeze Studios Publishers: 505 Games Release date: August 7, 2013
Platforms: Windows, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 Website: www.brothersthegame.com

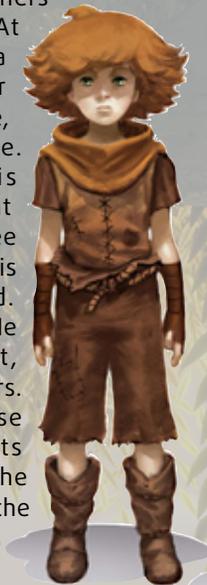
“ Our dead are never dead to us until we have forgotten them. ”

The most intense feelings are usually born in silence, where there are no words, no explanations, no blabbering. A boy loses his mother in front of his eyes; he doesn't say a word, but he's grieving. A man loses his wife and child in a fire; he's not saying a word either, but he's also grieving. Many feelings thrive in silence, and manage to worm deep into us. Swedish director Josef Fares knows this all too well, and having the artistic vision needed, he manages to tell a real tale of sorrow that punches us in the gut without ever saying a single word.



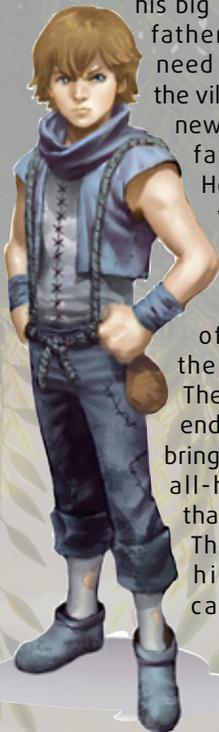
Review by Fallen Angel

Fairytales don't always begin by talking about a princess, and they don't always end with "...and they lived happily ever after". Some fairytales are sorrowful, even mournful. Some fairytales begin with a death; others end with one. At the edge of a huge cliff, under an enormous tree, there is a grave. A small boy is kneeling in front of it. You can see he is grieving. His eyes are closed. He remembers. He needs to forget, but he remembers. He is living those fateful moments all over again. The storm is raging, the boat is rolling in the waves,



his mother is overboard, he tries to reach her, but she sinks under the dark waters. He wants to see her again; he needs to hug her.

He's brought back to reality by his big brother's. Their father is sick, they need to take him to the village healer. The news are bad: their father is dying. However, the two young brothers will not give up that easily. They will set off looking for the spring of life. They will reach the end of the world to bring their father the all-healing water that will save him. They will not lose him too. They can't afford it.



First things first: *Brothers* can be frustratingly tricky and quirky if you try to play it without using a gamepad. However, you need to find a way round this problem as you actually do want to play this game (even if you don't know it yet). It is not only immersive, it is a means for you to travel to worlds of fantasy far beyond your everyday lives and routines.



(To the end of the world, and beyond! That's how far you go for those you love.)





Puzzles are amazingly connected both to the story and the environments

As you may have already guessed, this is not a point 'n' click adventure. It doesn't include a single riddle or traditional puzzle. But it does include many challenges for your mind. It includes many keen, though easy, challenges that have been amazingly integrated within the game's world and story. In this adventure, you don't have to solve a puzzle just because you came across one. On the contrary, you constantly overcome challenges

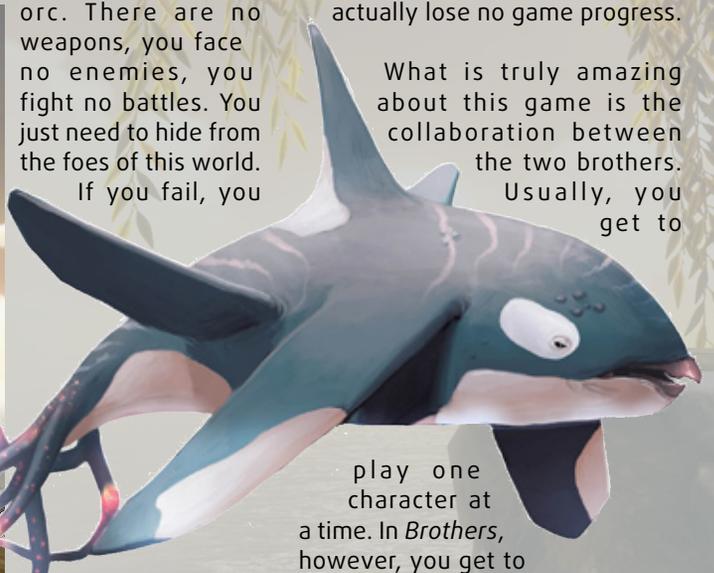
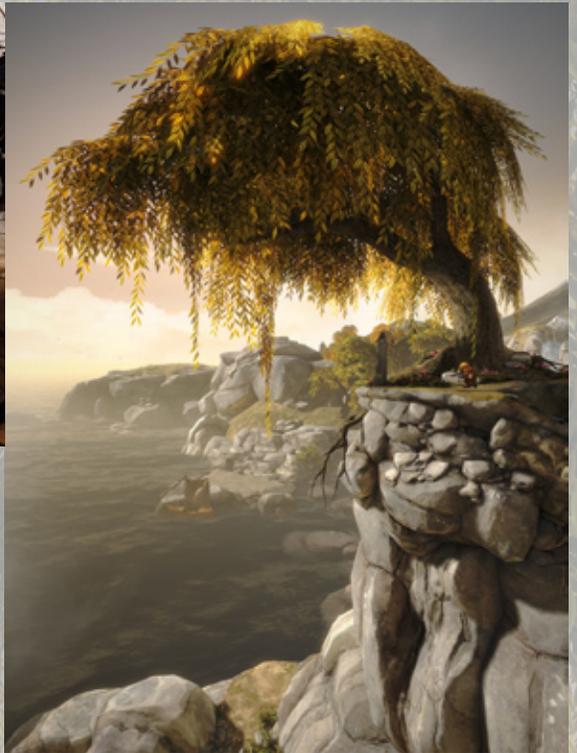
as you move along, often without even knowing that you have just solved a puzzle. How is this achieved? You have to find a way to get across a cliff or walk through a waterfall.

You have to find a way to free a prisoner without being seen (actually, without being caught) by the green, mean, murderous orc. There are no weapons, you face no enemies, you fight no battles. You just need to hide from the foes of this world. If you fail, you

die. Yes, there are deaths in this adventure. However, you restart at the exact same point you were prior to your untimely demise, so you actually lose no game progress.

What is truly amazing about this game is the collaboration between the two brothers. Usually, you get to

play one character at a time. In *Brothers*, however, you get to





The brothers will meet both friends and foes on their path play them both simultaneously. As a matter of fact, the brothers can't stray far away from each other, and you need to move them almost in parallel. Down the road, this proves to be quite interesting as the two brothers react in their own way to each and to every situation. The big brother has his mind set on their goal, he's serious

and focused. The younger one, on the other hand, is your typical little brat who will make fun of people and annoy them every way possible just to have some fun.

The interplay between them is not only restricted to the way they move, however. On the contrary,



it is a fundamental element of the gameplay that you will have to exploit in order to overcome obstacles and clear the way. Usually, you know where to go next. Both brothers help you to that end by showing you the path you must follow. Another help you get is... well, benches. Benches made of rock or wood, placed in various areas in the game, actually help you move forward. How is that? If a brother sits on the bench, you get a panoramic view of the area, thus being able to figure out where and how to move next. "How to" is the tricky part here. Both brothers will have to jump, climb, swing, and swim to move forward. And that is a challenge when you have to synchronize their movements with extreme accuracy. Collaboration between them is the only way to do this. The older brother's muscular strength and stature will allow



you to move heavy things and lift weights. The younger brother's tiny silhouette and agility will get you in narrow places where you would otherwise have no access to.

Swedish director Josef Fares proves yet another time that games are a modern form of Art. His art direction creates an unearthly world inspired by Scandinavian landscapes of breathtaking beauty. There will be times that you will catch yourselves looking around dazed by the scenery instead of proceeding in the game. You feel awe when gazing vast land and gigantic mountains. You feel charmed by rivers and waterfalls. You gasp at unbounded areas covered in snow and icebergs floating around. Your sorrow vanishes in this fabulous and mostly colorful world inhabited by friendly as well as hostile creatures varying

from men to giants and from trolls to dragons. The attention to



Swedish director Josef Fares' art direction is impeccable

detail is bound to drift you away, in a world of fantasy and beauty.

The visual banquet is completed by the fascinating music score composed by Gustaf Grefberg. Music plays an even more important role in this adventure. You see, it is required to fill in the silence, a gap left there on purpose by the creators. You do not hear a single word in this adventure. Characters speak an

incomprehensible language like the one in SIMS. However, they tend to move in ways that help us understand what they want by reading their body language. On top of having no speech, the game also has no text, and very few cut-scenes. Yet, rich and full are the only words that pop into mind when asked to describe it. This is a triumph of "less is more".

What is not here should not be here, as it would be redundant. What is here is rightly measured and balanced. The result: perfection.



Although it is quite short (3-4 hours), *Brothers* delivers an emotionally charged story, which concludes with a stupendous ending. Everything has been perfectly designed down to the tiniest details by Swedish film director Josef Fares, and his intention to awaken our emotions has been achieved. Once you play this adventure, once you experience this adventure, it is impossible not to feel a diversity of emotions. In some cases sorrow and sadness overcome us; in others, heroism and hope. However, the one feeling that prevails is love. Not that love shown in movies, romantic novels or even fairytales - no. This is a story where true love sweeps everything and marches towards self-sacrifice and death. ●



The Dark Eye Chains of Satinav



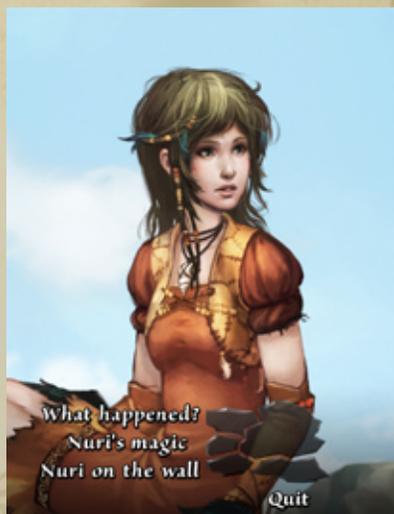
Genre: adventure Developer: Daedalic Entertainment

Publishers: Deep Silver/Daedalic Entertainment Release date: June, 2012

Platform: Windows Website: http://www.daedalic.de/en/game/DSA_Satinavs_Ketten



After numerous battles, the kingdom of Andergast was finally on the verge of making peace with Nostira. To negotiate the peace, the queen of Nostira was on the way to Andergast. In order to celebrate this joyful occasion, the king of Andergast put forth a challenge. Four oak leaves were hidden for each young man in town. The first lad to find all four of his leaves would be granted an audience with the king. A bird catcher named Geron intended to win the challenge. However, unbeknownst to Geron and his fellow Angergastians, darkness brew over the horizon. An old evil was returning to the kingdom. As death and desolation descended upon the town, the fate of the kingdom would rest upon the shoulders of a humble unassuming bird catcher.



Review by Ugur Sener

Developed by *Daedalic*, *Chains of Satinav* is a point-and-click adventure game that takes place in the setting of the German pen-and-paper RPG called *The Dark Eye*. While the game has a few issues with character development and animations, *Chains of Satinav* delivers a highly fulfilling adventure-gaming experience with its gloomy atmosphere, engaging storyline, plethora of puzzles, and well-utilized fantasy setting.

The game begins with Geron being harassed by two of his fellow townsmen as he tries to win the oak leaf challenge. It

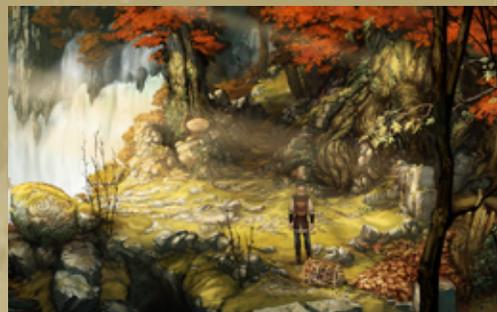


seems Olgried and Ulfried are bent on terrorizing Geron because they believe the bird catcher will bring bad luck upon Andergast. However, Geron manages to free himself from the bullies and sets off to win the challenge. Of course, his quest to gain audience with the king is simply the beginning of a much bigger adventure.

It is not long before Geron leaves the town behind, entering the woods in search of a fairy named Nuri. It is after Geron meets Nuri that the story really takes off. Together, Nuri and Geron embark on a great journey in search of a fairy scholar. Even as darkness falls upon Andergast, the two manage to push forward. Geron, haunted by a recurring nightmare, is trying to find a way to save Nuri. The fairy, new to the world of humans, sees nothing but wonder in everything she encounters.

Through many twists and turns, what begins as a light-hearted adventure becomes gloomier and much darker. Beyond Geron's struggle to keep Nuri safe, *Chains of Satinav* tells a story about magic, dreams, corruption, and defying

fate. Though you travel through a land where magic is real and you encounter whimsical creatures such as a talking raven and a pesky imp, *Chains of Satinav* is hardly a joyful game. As you progress through the adventure, the environments and the story become increasingly dark and haunting. The game





However, for me, the best part of the story comes after the completion of Geron and Nuri's initial journey. The plot twist leading into the second part of the adventure is somewhat predictable and expected, but in my opinion, it is also extremely well-executed. The game effectively leads Geron into a new environment and delivers several highly entertaining challenges. The climax of the adventure is likewise very well-handled. With the exact nature of the darkness threatening Andergast known, it is nice to see Geron step up to the task and remain resolute until the end.

The only issue I had with the game's story was the occasional problems with pacing. While the game successfully intertwines a love story with the theme of challenging destiny, some portions of the adventure do seem a little slow and arbitrary. For instance, the oak leaf challenge at the beginning of the game drags on a little longer

very effectively transitions from the feel of a carefree fantasyland to a world with real danger and difficult choices to win a seemingly impossible quest. The core storyline does not carry a tremendous amount of depth, but it is certainly compelling enough to nudge players forward.

The game plays up the differences between Geron and Nuri's personalities nicely. Neither character receives a substantial

amount of development through the adventure. However, there is a nice contrast between Geron, who is haunted by visions and has a fairly bleak look on life and Nuri whose unabashed naiveté and childlike approach to everything is equally charming and frustrating. Even though it is entirely predictable, the bond that forms between the two protagonists is still heartwarming and has a welcome feeling of innocence.





than it should. Similarly, some of the situations Geron and Nuri encounter along their journey are not essential for the underlying story. Some of these segments serve as little more than random obstacles that must be overcome. Unfortunately, this drags down the pace and takes away from the core story. While it is understandable that the developers wanted to throw Geron and Nuri into a number of challenges to show how the two bonded over a period of time, it would have been nice if all legs of the journey felt more connected to the overall theme of the adventure.

The game could have also made better use of the supporting characters introduced throughout the adventure. There are several potentially interesting characters that are only present for brief periods. They never get much

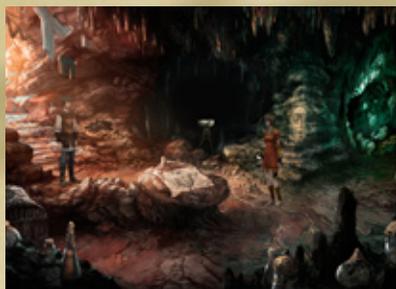
in the way of development and personality. As such, some of them feel as though they are little more than stepping stones along the path rather than fully fleshed out characters that add to the story.

As expected from a *Daedelic* game, the visuals are stunning. *Chains of Satinav* features absolutely beautiful backgrounds. Whether you are going through the town or exploring a fairy realm, the background and character art is consistently detailed and outright gorgeous. The style fits the fantasy setting and the game's tone very well, augmenting the atmosphere

and making the experience more immersive. While the majority of the animations are also handled nicely, it is worth noting that there is the occasional movement animation that seems choppy and inadequately detailed. Perhaps these issues stand out a little more than usual because the rest of the game looks quite amazing. Fortunately, the animation problems do not significantly detract from the experience.

Played from a third-person perspective, *Chains of Satinav* utilizes a simple control scheme that will be familiar to adventure-





gaming veterans. The left click is used to interact with the environment, move between locations, and speak with other characters. The right click is used to examine objects and characters. The inventory is accessible at the bottom of the screen where items can be combined or selected for use on objects in the environment. All hotspots become highlighted upon pressing the spacebar, though

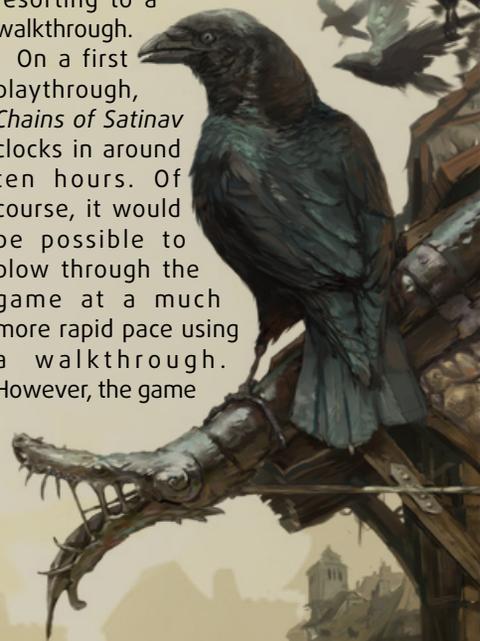
this hint option can be turned off if you do not want the extra help.

The vast majority of the puzzles in *Chains of Satinav* are inventory-based. Since players are typically confined to a small number of screens at a time, these puzzles are very manageable. The solutions are often logical, though the game does present some off-the-wall whimsical challenges, especially when you visit the fairy realm. There is also a small sampling of dialog puzzles where you need to figure out the correct way to navigate through conversation options.

One thing that stands out regarding the game's puzzles is the use of magic. Through the course of the adventure, Geron has access to two spells. During certain puzzles, the game makes excellent use of these spells, challenging players to come up with fairly novel solutions to typical adventure-game challenges. In general, the game also does a great job of introducing players to a given area and outlining your goals. I was never at a loss as to where I needed to go or what I should be trying to accomplish. On the whole, I thought the puzzles were engaging without being overly simple or unnecessarily frustrating. Veteran

adventurers can expect to get through the entire game without resorting to a walkthrough.

On a first playthrough, *Chains of Satinav* clocks in around ten hours. Of course, it would be possible to blow through the game at a much more rapid pace using a walkthrough. However, the game





still has a satisfying amount of content and it is well worth the effort to solve the puzzles on your own. At the end of the adventure, Geron's primary quest gets completed. Players are left with a clear understanding of Geron's visions and the darkness surrounding Andergast. The ending itself is a little abrupt, but still rather touching. The game nicely sets up for its sequel, *Memoria*, which is already available at the time of this review. *Memoria* picks up right where *Chains of Satinav* leaves off, though the majority of the sequel is focused on a new character named Sadja.

Taken as a whole, *Chains of Satinav* is a fun adventure with a good variety of inventory-based puzzles and an engaging story that makes great use of its fantasy setting. The game nicely takes players from a humble town and lighthearted quest to a much darker and haunting place. It may have some issues with pacing and character development, but *Chains of Satinav* delivers a satisfying adventure-gaming experience. The game is most certainly worth a look if you are in the mood for an adventure with a fantasy setting. Geron and Nuri's journey is tragic, intimate, and ultimately very fulfilling. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The highly amusing selection of puzzles in the fairy realm. The final confrontation at the end of the game.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The pacing and character development could be better during certain portions of the game.

VERDICT:

A compelling adventure with great visuals and a simple, but memorable story.



The Secrets of Atlantis The Sacred Legacy



Genre: adventure Developer: Atlantis Interactive Entertainment Publishers: Nobilis

Release date: November 3, 2006 Platforms: Windows, Mac, iOS

The Secrets of Atlantis is the fifth and last title in the *Atlantis* series that was started over nine years prior with *The Lost Tales*. Released in 2006, *Atlantis 5* was to be the final title from *Atlantis Interactive Entertainment*, as well as the last game in the series, to date; But neither of these were planned, and in fact the game was only the first title in a new story arc.



Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

In my opinion this game really gets the series back on track, with an interesting story, great gameplay, and good graphics. This fifth title revolves around a group of Atlantian descendants, who are convinced by a rich businessman to find their birth right; All-round a very similar story to Atlantis: The Lost Empire, a Disney film from 2001. In the game, you start out on the Hindenburg in 1937. Latter, you move onto

the impressive Empire State building; And from there to a mysterious Chinese gambling barge, a majestic Indian palace, and finally a Middle Eastern temple and village.

During this adventure you travel through many great locations and get into many enjoyable, and some downright weird, situations. Sometimes, I think the game is being sarcastic. In one instance you must use an item to break the glass on an

emergency compartment to get at a glass breaker. Latter, you must pick a lock and crack a safe to get access to a key; If you are capable





of picking locks, why do you even need the key? We also have a segment where the protagonist seduces three women in the same building. But these weird, strange, and nonsensical scenes are the minority, not the rule.

The Secrets of Atlantis goes in a new graphical direction, with graphics that are decidedly comic book in style, though not overly so. They are nice, and very dramatic; Even if they do not stand up to the best on the series, but then nothing

fares well compared to the best graphics the Atlantis series has to offer. They have completely done away with the node translations this time around, but make up for this with loads of cutscenes. Also, there is a full cast of good voice actors. Overall, the game does nothing technically outstanding,

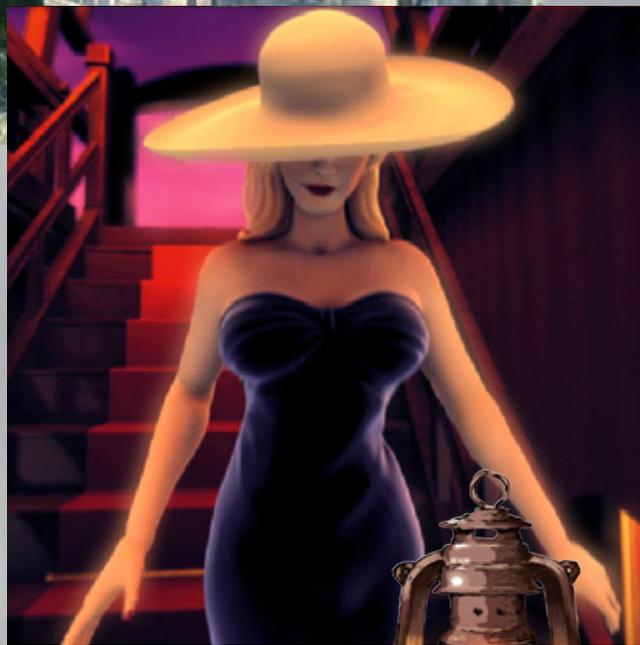




except for its locations. The choice of these locals simply is the best part of the game, and offers the player dramatic scenes of every variety, from the mysterious Far East, and awe inspiring mountaintops of India, to the commanding Empire State Building and the technological marvel of the Heisenberg zeppelin.

The gameplay is pretty standard, with loads of inventory puzzles, and many ingenious logic puzzles. It is all-round enjoyable, with many spectacular parts, but with the occasional ambiguous challenge, and a few overly tedious ones. There is one particularly tedious Sudoku puzzle that requires you to enter in a 45, 2.5 dimension logic based, combination to proceed; As a trait of Sudoku, make one mistake and it carries through. But still, in general, I would say that logic is one of its strongest areas.

Atlantis 5 is a good solid adventure that revitalizes the series. I would be very excited to see where this new story arc goes, if it did not look like there will never be a sequel. Still, with all these Kickstarters and other revivals of old dead series, I would not be surprised to see some Atlantis title in the future; At least I hope to see one. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The dramatic and historic locals.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The Sudoku puzzle, specifically.

VERDICT:

A solid adventure that puts the series on an exciting new track.





Zeno Clash II



Genre: action-adventure Developer: ACE Team Publishers: Atlus Release date: April 30, 2013
Platforms: Windows, PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 Website: www.zenoclash2.com

Zeno Clash 2 is the 2013 sequel to the 2009 cult classic by *ACE Team*. This sequel, quite stereotypically for a sequel, takes the gameplay that was such a success in the first game and put it into a open-world action-adventure. Specifically, I would call it a first-person, fighting/brawler, action-adventure; With RPG elements, in an open-world setting, but with generally linear objectives. The game is also set in the same amazingly unique world, with a similarly styled continuation of the storyline from the first game.

“Ghat, escaping his crime against Father Mother, ran away to the very end of the world. There he met Golem.”

Persuaded by golem to return home to the anarchic city of Halstedom, Ghat came back from exile to confront his family.

Ghat's return brought an abrupt end to Father Mother's family, dissolving his own ties with his brothers and sisters.

With Ghat came Golem, but what does Golem bring to Halstedom?

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

What I really want to stress in this review is the world of *Zeno Clash*, and the story we explore within. The *Zeno Clash* series is set within the remarkably complex and interesting land of Zenozoik, a land completely without even the concept of law, and with examples of even minimal governance few and far between. It is a land almost completely without a history. Which is not to say that there is no civilization; There is one major city, Halstedom, and many distinct tribes and cultures. Without the rule of law, or any organized leadership, the people of Zenozoik use violence to work out their differences, and it is not uncommon for two strangers, from different tribes/cities, to just attack each other on sight. The people are also incredibly physically unique; They are all bipedal humanoids, but come in a varieties of sizes and shapes. There are many different types of animal men, men with beaks and feathers, very large men with the head of an elephant, and many others of less familiar features.

The main protagonist in both games is Ghat, one of the legion of sons and daughters of the incredibly influential Father-Mother. In the first game he discovered that Father-Mother was not actually his biological parent, and instead had kidnapped both him and every one of his siblings from their parents. Because of this a confrontation between him and Father-Mother occurs, and he is chased away from Halstedom and hunted across Zenozoik. All while in the company of one of his sisters, Deadra. Eventually, they make it to the End of the World where they meet Golem, who already knows about Father-Mother. Ghat, then, returns to the Halstedom, where he confronts Father-Mother, and many of his siblings, in a ferocious battle, defeating them. Ghat

chooses to spare Father-Mother, and keep his secret, but Golem reveals it anyways, and tells any who ask where they can find their real parents.

Zeno Clash 2 takes place a month into the future of Zenozoik. Golem has introduced the concept of a jail to Halstedom, guiding the formation of a group of enforcers, who lockup Father-Mother, as well as many others. Golem is apparently trying to civilize this land, and plans on guiding it towards law and order. After the revelation, about Father-Mother, by Golem, most of Ghat's siblings have left in search of their birth parents, but Ghat and Rimat never asked about their real parents, and are still in Halstedom. They still feel connected to Father-Mother,

and Ghat in particular hates the changes that the Golem is creating, so they team up to break Father-Mother out of jail. They quickly accomplish this; But to permanently save Father-Mother from the threat of the enforcers, and defeat Golem, Ghat and Rimat will have to first overcome the power that Golem has over everyone; Specifically





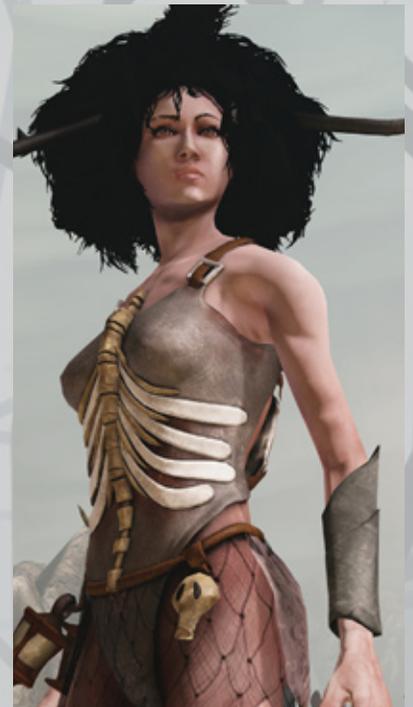
that he is able to link to anyone he has met and share his pain with them, making direct conflict with Golem impossible. To this end, Ghant and Rimat travel to the far reaches of Zenozoik in search of the Golem's secrets. What they find, and the adventure they have, in both getting there and saving Father-Mother, is a truly unique and interesting story.

What makes this story particularly provocative and

compelling is its unique view into a underrepresented ideological philosophy, Anarchism. Halstedom is a perfect example of a lawless, leaderless, society; With the rest of Zenozoik's diverse cultures being apparently lawless, while the question of leaders often goes unanswered. These are textbook examples of individual/libertarian anarchism; And wisely *ACE Team* has completely side-stepped the fractious and ever-present question in Anarchism of economic systems; With buying, selling, and the providing of basic necessities left completely



unmentioned. The game also, as a necessity, ignores all concepts of non-violence and non-aggression in Anarchist thought; With fisticuffs being



the primary means of settling everyone's differences. Ghat in particular is a pure libertarian anarchist, who in addition to always opposing the Golem's changes, once lived among, and continues to admire, the wild Corwid of the Free; The name given to the people who seek absolute freedom in the Corwid Woods. People who have attained a life without the irksome obligations of society, who just do whatever they want; Who even ignore their own needs, considering them a sort of slavery. One very interesting thing I came across when researching this article was the the first *Zeno Clash* prototype was originally heavily invested into pacifism, but it did not work out for various technical and player expectation reasons. I think it is obvious that this Anarchistic ideology, at the core the *Zeno Clash*, is not an accident,



but a planned and deliberately implemented feature.

The visual style of Zeno Clash reminds me a lot of *Pathologic* (2005); With maybe a little of *Ice-Pick Lodge's* other game, *Cargo!*, mixed in. It is strange, unique, wacky, and very dynamically beautiful. It is also simply gorgeous, with tons of style, and decent technical specifications behind it all. The soundtrack is also quite good, complimenting the rest of the game well. And the many cutscenes, and great voice work really round off the experience; Making it clearly a profession endeavor. Being a first person brawler, *Zeno Clash* has you get up close and personal with not only buildings and environmental features but characters as well. And the art continues to hold up even under these circumstances. It does not matter how much you zoom in, or that a character is flailing about after you punched them in the face, the art technically and artistically holds up and completely belies the small indie nature of the

developers. This discussion is out of the breadth of this article (entire huge articles have been written about this), but suffice it to say *Zeno Clash* has been described as an "Art Game", and is universally praised by its, somewhat niche, fanbase.

Zeno Clash 2 is a much bigger game than the original, but the gameplay has not changed very much; And the up close and personal, visceral, first-person,

brawler, combat is as enjoyable as it was originally. Think of it as a 2D brawler, like *Mortal Combat*, just in 3D. This 3D world, more than anything else, quite literally adds an extra dimension of complexity and strategy to the gameplay. Not only do you have hills, and cliffs, and stairs, and choke-points, to outmaneuver your many enemies with, but you often also fight with multiple allies, and wield a bunch of unique weapons and powers. The biggest change to this game is the



follower system. For every major battle you can choose to include or not, two companions, both or either-or. Rimet is always one, but you also get to choose one more companion to travel with, who will help you in fights. The drawback is that after being in a fight, and getting hurt, they take time to heal. Ninety percent of the game is straight-up fistcuffs, but there is also some weapon mechanics. This time around the guns have extremely limited ammunition, they have no ability to reload, and break very easily; But they are decently powerful, and contain enough ammunition to get a few kills in. One major problem with them, in my opinion, is that you have no option to unequip a gun, putting it away for later use. Often you just want to punch an enemy, but if you have a weapon equipped you only have two options;

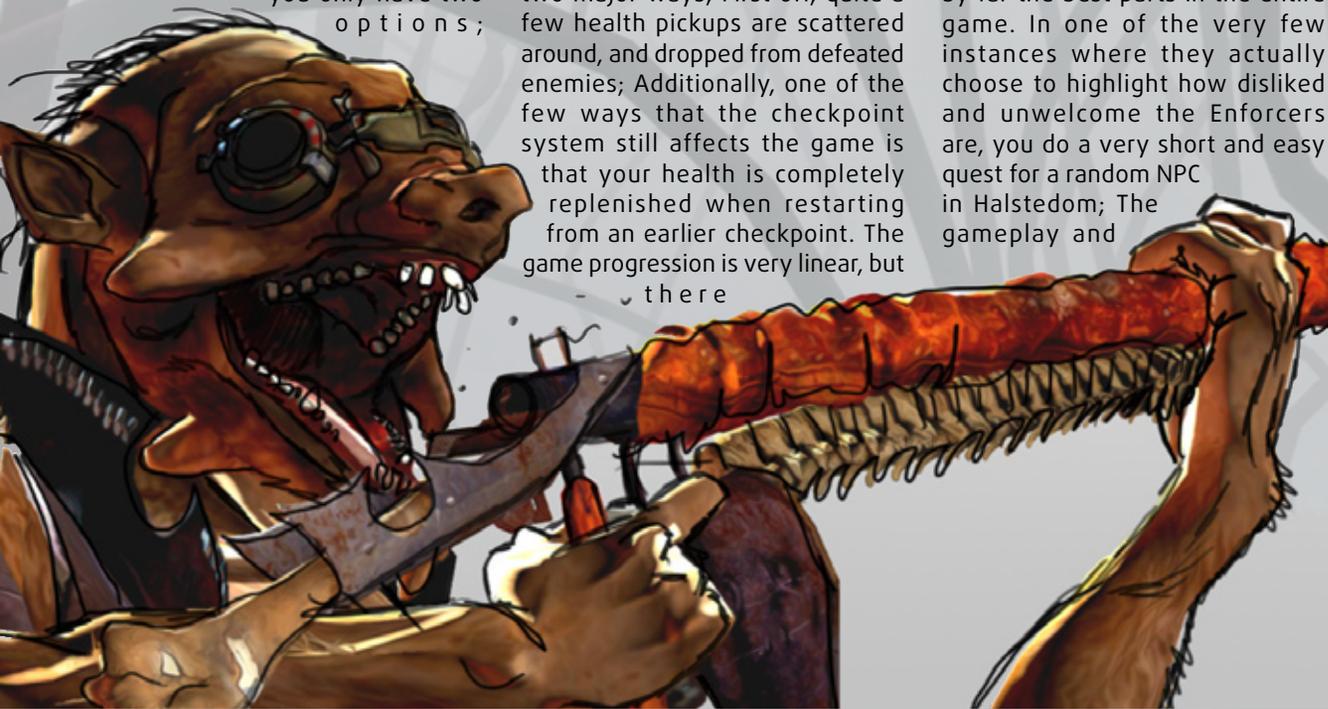
Throw the weapon away, probably breaking it in the process, or use it. There are also a few melee weapons, which function simply as large hammers, allowing for slower, more powerful attacks, for a limited time, until the weapon breaks. More relevant though, is your secondary weapons, which you use all the time. There are four of them, which you unlock one by one. You start off with just grenades, but with up to five this time. Later on you unlock more unique and specific, weapons/powers.

The game uses three meters. One for health, which does not refill overtime. One for stamina: running, punching, blocking, etc. And a final one for special charge, which you fill by performing combos. The health refills one of two major ways; First off, quite a few health pickups are scattered around, and dropped from defeated enemies; Additionally, one of the few ways that the checkpoint system still affects the game is that your health is completely replenished when restarting from an earlier checkpoint. The game progression is very linear, but

there

are a few optional side-quests, and a moderate amount of collectables. The most important object to be looking for as you wander around Zenozoik are the Skill Totems, which give you skill points to level up some basic abilities. But you will also be looking for moths, for one side-quest NPC, and rune-cubes. One of my biggest complaints with how the open-world system works is the decided lack of side-quests. There are around five in the entire game, and most of them have been designed to be completed as you complete the main question line, with none of them sending you far off, to out of the way locations. And of these ~five~, only two of them are fleshed out to to have any real motivation from the story.

The side-quests that they do add a little story to are fantastic, by far the best parts in the entire game. In one of the very few instances where they actually choose to highlight how disliked and unwelcome the Enforcers are, you do a very short and easy quest for a random NPC in Halstedom; The gameplay and





circumstances of this quest are far simpler and less involved than any of the main storyline quests, but it does a wonderful job of motivating you as well and making the city of Halstedom come alive. Later on you are given the option of rescuing some friends who were taken by desert raiders, and what follows is head and shoulders my favourite part of the entire game. It is long, it is involved, it takes place in a 100% unique location (with unique strategic elements), and the story is terrific. You invade the raiders city/camp, see how they live, interact with them (by bashing and few heads together), all while your guide explains the intricacies of this unique culture. It transforms the game-world from one where you walk around punching people, to a living breathing world, that you live in.

Zeno Clash 2 is a great, stylish game, set in one of the most unique worlds ever conceived. This review

has been my attempt to describe why I think it is a truly great game because of its interesting philosophy and unique world based on real world principles. But this only scratches the surface of *Zenozoik*, as there is just as much reason to love it as an "Art Game" for its truly unique technical and stylistic graphics; Or for its unique and well done first-person melee game mechanics. This sequel marks a huge broadening of the franchise's' scope, but it also proves that *Zenozoik*, and *ACE Team's* mechanics, still have a lot of room to grow, expand, and evolve. There is no reason that *Zeno Clash 3* could not be a huge open world RPG, like *The Elder Scrolls*, or even be made into a massively multiplayer online game. Whatever they do next, I will certainly be playing it. ●

BRIGHT MOMENTS:

One of the most unique, stylish, worlds I have ever played in. And an interesting look into an underrepresented philosophy.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK: None.

VERDICT:

A great action-adventure, with solid, well designed, core mechanics.



Adventure Lantern

