

Adventure Lantern

ISSUE #39

FEBRUARY 2013



PREVIEW:

- Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective

REVIEWS:

- Analogue: A Hate Story
- Conker's Bad Fur Day
- Lucius

EDITORIAL

February brought us another month of great announcements and releases for adventure gaming. We saw the start of crowdfunding for a new *Land of Dreams* game by Jonas Kyratzes, *Ithaka of the Clouds*; A whimsical title that sounds like something *Studio Ghibli* would come up with. This month also saw the launching of *Planescape Torment* sequel's website, with loads of goodies revealed as well as the beginnings of a crowdfunding campaign (they have not started taking money quite yet). *The Asylum* Kickstarter also started and met its goals, and is now running on a Paypal campaign to fund some stretch goals. And *The Longest Journey* sequel Kickstarter start with a goal of \$740K, which it quickly broke, and with so many days until it finished on March 10 who know how much more it will raise.

On February 11th the industry got, what I would call, the biggest news story this month; Unfortunately, it was not quite as good news as most announcements and releases we get. In the form of an open letter *Amanita Design*, *Colibri Games*, and *Daedalic Entertainment* posted a tale of woes involving the publisher *Lace Mamba Global* to the world; Just a few days prior to this CBE, developer of *J.U.L.I.A.*, had come forward with similar allegations. Apparently, *Lace Mamba Global*, one of the most active publishers of adventure games over the last few years, has been ignoring the contracts it has with these previously mentioned developers, not paying them, and selling their games in places that they were not authorized to. The publisher in question has come back with a general announcement about there have been some problems that they are working to fix, but also a lot of denial and blame shifting. Right now, *Amanita Design* is starting up legal action to get paid, but this whole issue has brought to light just how pervasive these non-payment issues seem to be, with many unknown small studios almost certainly affected. I have since heard that Jonathan Boakes had similar issues with these guys a little while back; And I have read many comments from small indie developers claiming the exact same thing happened and continue to happen to them, and that they simply had no money to do anything about it.

In addition to these news articles, among many others, we also have four new feature articles from our writers. these articles include reviews of the somewhat recently released games *Analogue: A Hate Story* and *Lucius*, as well as a review of the classic platformer/adventure *Conker's Bad Fur Day*. This month we also include a first impressions article of the new *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* remake. *Conker's Bad Fur Day*, like Nick mentioned in his article, is a very mature game and I think quite possibly the most mature title in the entire N64 catalog. I remember when *Rare* first launched their TV advertisement campaign for *Conker*, they must of been the most mature commercials on regular daytime TV in 2001, and are still hold up to this reputation in todays television.

– Jonathon Wisnoski

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Cover Image:
CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY

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2012 Aggie Awards

The 2012 AdventureGamers.com award ceremonies for best adventure game, the Aggies, in any one of 17 categories has started with the staff nominations and reader poll already posted. No single game seems to dominate the rankings, but most of the games nominated appear in more than one category. Most of the picks are what you would expect, but I even saw a few games I had never heard of before.

The AdventureGamers.com Aggie awards for 2012 are over with The Walking Dead being announced as the overall winner.



AGS Awards

Voting is open until the 10th of March, so head on over and vote for your favorite game in any one of the many categories. Resonance really swept the nominations this year, with it appearing in every single category. Strangely I don't see Primordia anywhere, which would of gotten my vote for most of the categories.



Lace Mamba

The developer of the JULIA adventure game, CBE, come forward a little while ago with some very substantial and damning claims against Lace Mamba the publisher. Specifically, that they never paid or reported any earnings, earning that they were contracted to report and deliver from the sale of the JULIA games. Then Amanita, Colibri, and Daedalic went public together

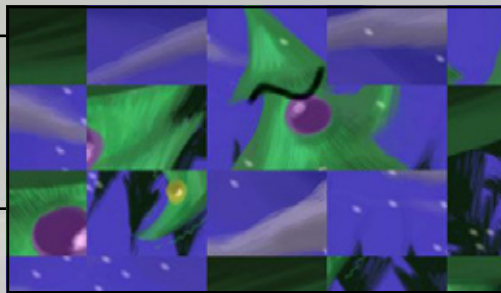
with similar stories of non-payment.

Lace Mamba has come forward and admitted to "some reporting and accounting issues in the past" and apparently some work is being done to rectify this situation; Though I doubt that they even have the capital to pay off years of back-payments to multiple development studios. And while these issues are new to most of us, they are

years in the making for the companies involved, four major companies, that we know of, have already done without payment for a long time (starting in 2009 for Amanita) and have turned to legal actions only after exhausting all efforts to resolve this situation peacefully. Furthermore, Lace Mamba Global claims that the issue is not with them specifically, but Mamba Games a "separate" company, a claim that seems to be in opposition to the carefully worded letter from Amanita, Colibri, and Daedalic. Apparently, when we talk about Lace Mamba Global we are not talking about one company but three: Lace Mamba Global, Lace international, and Mamba Games.

If Not Puzzles... What

Adventure Gamers talk about the puzzles in our very favorite genre in their latest editorial.



Announcements

**Homesick**

An exploration based, open-world, 3D adventure. In it you explore an abandoned building, solving puzzles and opening new areas; At least during the daytime. At night the game apparently plays very differently, with dark nightmares plaguing your sleep.

A hugely successful Kickstarter finished on the 18th with over two times the original goal of \$8K, which included a \$10 pre-order tier. The game is also running a Greenlight campaign.

Voodoo

The very first game by indie Spanish studio Ayramen, Voodoo is scheduled to be released later this year for iOS devices, but a Windows and/or Mac port is a definite possibility. It is a stylish third-person adventure, with beautiful hand-drawn graphics that are somewhat reminiscent of Machinarium, which you can check out in its already released trailer.





(un)Lucky7

Don't let the JRPG visual style of this puzzle filled adventure fool you. We have been assured that the puzzles, and to an even greater extent, the story will predominate in this game. I also do not think that these visuals mean that the team have been mostly ignoring the graphics, as some of the screenshots look quite stunning.

The, two Polish, developers categorize the game as a "horror, sci-fi themed, JRPG-view, story-driven, pixel art puzzle game". They are currently running a flexible funding campaign on IndieGoGo for \$60K, as well as a Steam Greenlight campaign. Even if the campaign brings in no money the team plans to continue development, but will have to do so in their spare time and will not necessarily ever get all the features they want fully completed

Ithaka of the Clouds

Jonas Kyratzes has just launched a Lands of Dreams crowdfunding campaign for \$12,000. AS the sequel to The Sea Will Claim Everything, if not direct, Ithaka is

guaranteed to be a humorous, hand-drawn, politically charged, adventure. You can pick up a pre-order for just \$10 until the 24th of March, when the campaign ends.



Inherit the Earth 2

This upcoming sequel to the 1994 anthropomorphic adventure had a Kickstarter campaign, but it has failed far from its \$135K goal. The developers have not given up completely, and are currently rethinking how they will be able to bring this game to fruition.



The Vanishing of Ethan Carter

From some of the people behind Painkiller and Bulletstorm comes this detective adventure. As a detective you must use supernatural as well as cognitive abilities to figure out what was behind a trail of corpses and find a kidnapped boy in a beautiful mountainous forest.



Crimes & Punishments

Frogware is at it again with another upcoming Sherlock Holmes adventure. This game promises a new graphical style, more choice with real consequences, eight cases to solve, and twelve possible endings.



Torment: Tides of Numenera

InXile has announced their upcoming sequel to Planescape: Torment, Torment: Tides of Numenera. They have already released some details about the world the game will be set in as well as announcing their intention to fund production through crowdfunding.



Upcoming Releases



Dreamfall Chapters: The Longest Journey Kickstarter

The sequel to The Longest Journey series has made it to Kickstarter. They are looking for \$850K and with 24 days to go, at the time of this writing, they have already raised over \$1,060,000. The campaign ends on March 10th.



Rose

On track for a march release for PC and Android, with an iOS version to follow shortly after; Rose is an adventure that puts you in control of a twelve year old girl who enters a long abandoned house with a group of friends. A house shrouded in a local myth about the death of a wife and disappearance of a husband 30 years ago.



Asylum Kickstarter

The upcoming game from the creative genius being Scratches, after being Greenlit on Steam (as well as getting accepted onto Desura and GOG more recently), has come to Kickstarter to fund making the game the very best that it can be. Senscape are asking for \$100K with \$15 being charged for digital pre-orders, which we are told is less than the the finished game will cost. This Kickstarter ends on February the 28th, and have already accumulated over \$70K at the time of writing this, the 13th. There is already a teaser demo and a few trailers for those interested.

But even more exciting is the fact that every tier including and over \$15 includes keys for all three of these platforms: Steam, GOG, and Desura as well as a digital download. That is right, not only is the game cheaper than it will be on release day, but you are getting FOUR copies of the game! You would have to be insane enough to need an asylum to pass up on that deal.

The Witness

Jonathan Blow's upcoming first-person puzzler *The Witness* has gotten itself a new trailer and announced its intention to be released on the PS4 alongside the PC and iOS, apparently at PS4 launch.



The Rabbit's Apprentice

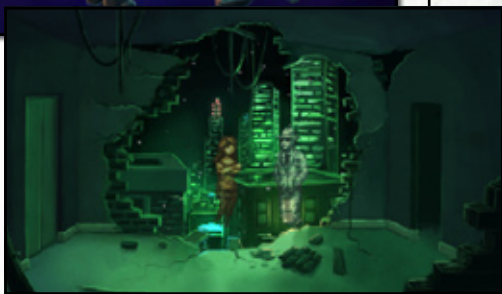
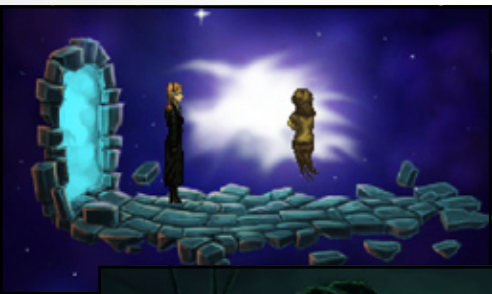
Daedalic Entertainment's upcoming adventure has gotten a name change to "The Night of the Rabbit".



Forge

The upcoming sequel to *Loom* is approaching completion with bugs being taken care of in its beta phase. The game will be free, and to some extent is being developed off of donations, and will include five story chapters.





Blackwell Epiphany

The fifth game in the series is well into development and looks amazing thanks to Ben 304.

Here is what Wadjet Eye Games has announced so far about this upcoming game's story: "A dead man's soul cries out against the force of a ferocious blizzard. He cries for help. He cries for answers. Then he screams as he is torn apart like damp tissue paper.

This wasn't the first time, and it won't be the last.

The police are powerless to stop it, so the duty falls to the only who can. What force could be so powerful - and so malevolent - that it would destroy the very core of a life in order to get what it wants?

Rosa Blackwell and Joey Mallone mean to find out, even if it means risking themselves in the process."

New Releases

Richard & Alice

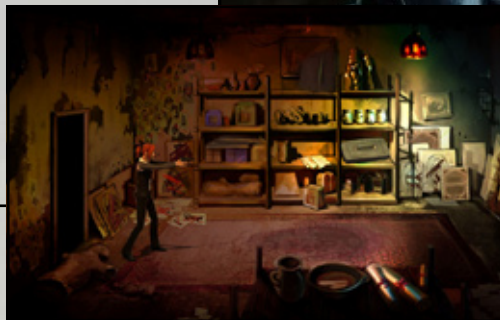
Richard & Alice has been released onto GOG, Desura, and IndieCity. The developers describe the game as: "A mystery story about family, desperation and the weather, set to the beat of an indie adventure game."



Cognition: An Erica Reed Thriller

Episode 2: The Wise Monkey

The second episode of Phoenix Online's Cognition has been released and can be picked up for \$9.99 or as a package deal of episodes 2-4 for a discounted price of \$19.99.



Updated Releases

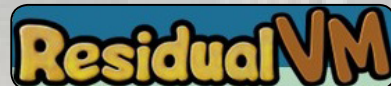
The 7th Guest

Trilobyte Games has started a Greenlight campaign to bring the classic 7th Guest to Steam. I am not sure if this means a port or any changes to get it running better on modern systems or not; There are many games on Steam that do not work well on modern systems and Steam leaves it up to the individual users to play around with settings.



ResidualVM

The Grim Fandango interpreter has gotten a big update with loads of bug fixes, including 14 fixes for problems with the original game. So, while it is not quite there yet, ResidualVM promises to be a better and more polished Grim Fandango experience than even the original game was.



Atlantis 3: The New World

Anuman Interactive have ported the third Atlantis title, Atlantis 3: The New World, to the Kindle Tablet and made it available for \$3.99 on Amazon.



News From the Big Blue Cup



Reality on the Norm: Reality Check (Oldschool_Wolf) - In this latest RON adventure David Has-selhoff is back to cause more trouble! Retail worker Paul must team up with some of Reality's favourite characters to save... well... Reality!

The Path of the Pumpkin (PuNKKoMmAN-DO77) - The Path of the Pumpkin is the prequel of the freeware italian graphic adventure Space Hunter. The interface is in the classic "Sierra style", with the pop-up inventory in the middle of the screen and the icon bar with the basic interaction: talk, interact and look on the top.

Skar the Pumpkin and his assistant Mr.FeeFee, are two well-know detectives fro Treshopolis. One day, their dreary routine is shattered by an out-of-the-ordinary mission, that will take them on a hunt for a girl who as be kidnapped and forced to marry against her will. The two "detectives" have to do their utmost, in order to bring the case to a conclusion, but... this is only the beginning of something much bigger and much more involved!

Reon Quest Episode 2: Escape From Bully Island (Jaffles) - After the antics surrounding the Mysterious Aluminatti Society, the Principal of Reon Elementary School has had enough! With the big PTA Meeting on the horizon and his school's reputation on the line, he orders Draco and his "merry band of idiots" to be thrown into the newly built juvenile detention center, Bully Island. After this fiendish decree, our heroes are blindsided by an army of Hall Monitors and are swiftly thrown behind bars. But Slugamor, being slippery as he is manages to escape the prison. But the others are not so fortunate. Now it's up to Slugamor and Draco to work together to free their friends and Escape From Bully Island!

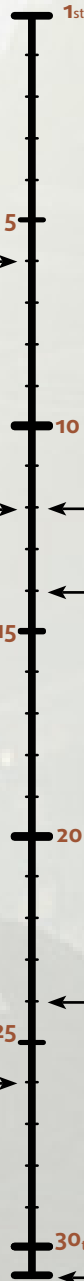
Lilly the Wizard (Cogliostro) - Lilly has just graduated as a wizard, now she needs to roam the land trying to right wrongs and help people. She finds herself in Valeria, a village which seems to have more than its fair share of trouble.

ELF: The 4 Elements (slasher) - Join Elfie the Elf once again as he is called upon to stop an evil alliance between a 'circle of Fairies gone bad' and Melkor 'The Dark One' who was condemned 1800 years before by the Elf gods and is now a prisoner in a cosmic cave! The Fairies have found a way to tap into Melkor's powers and use them for their own ends!!

Baldy's Adventure (Hernald) - Baldy's day doesn't start well; his dog has gone missing and he has shut himself out of his house. In sorting out these problems he confronts the unsavoury Mr. Grimes and deals with a dragon and a Dark God!

Troll Song - Verse One [DEMO] (CaptainD) - The (short) playable demo of Troll Song - Verse One - the first part of an episodic freeware adventure game series by Tino Bensing and Dave Seaman. This game will show you the troll race as you've never seen them before, taking on an epic journey of self-discovery and salvation from a terrible betrayal.

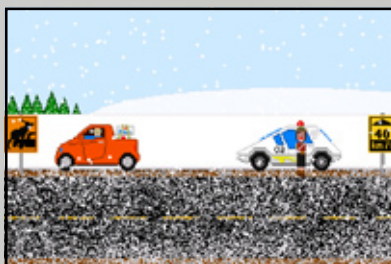
2034 A.C. (After Canada) [MAGS] (Ponch) - This MAGS game follows the adventures of Paige Rowsdower, the newest member of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as she tries to maintain law and order in a world that is collapsing into chaos and anarchy. Of course, since this game is set in Canada, the apocalypse is very well-mannered and polite. Jokes, donuts, beer, hockey, and snow. It's as close as you can get to being in Canada without actually going there!



Pick of the Month January - Sheep Quest

A long term project finally completed, Sheep Quest is a colourful, cute and well made game with some interesting puzzles and finishes off with a very well coded mini-game.

It's not the longest adventure, but the presence of optional puzzles, the fun graphics and the developer's attention to detail make Sheep Quest one to play! - (Chosen by ThreeOhFour)



2034 A.D. (After Canada)
(Ponch)



Troll Song - Verse One
(CaptainD)



Lilly the Wizard
(Cogliostro)



ELF: The 4 Elements
(slasher)



The Path of the Pumpkin
(PuNKKoMmAND077)



Reon Quest Episode 2: Escape From Bully Island
(jaffles)



Reality on the Norm: Reality Check
(Oldschool_Wolf)

Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective *First Impressions*



Genre: adventure Developer: Zojoi Publisher: Zojoi Release date: September 18, 2012
Platforms: Windows, MAC OS X, iPad Website: <http://zojoi.com/sherlock.htm>

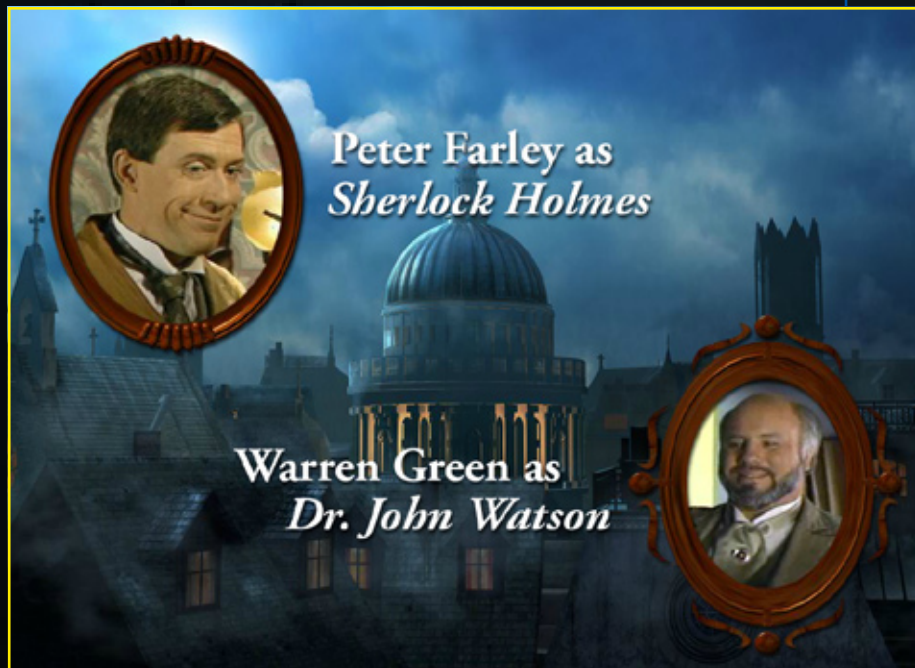
Preview by Jonathon Wisnoski

When I first heard of the *Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective* series remake on *Kickstarter* I thought it sounded amazing. I am a huge fan of the Sherlock character and universe, and the game description definitely sounded unique. The basic idea is, and was explained as: a basic interface imparts the clues with video cutscenes and text, mostly from reading the daily paper and interviewing people. You use these clues to go after more clues and eventually work out the mystery.



Original's interface

What I did not realize, until I started to play the first episode, was that the remake is simply a remastered version of the original 1991 game. It is just as hard and frustrating as it was back then; Hard and frustrating like only an early video game can be. As far as I know, the actual gameplay is identical to the original, and old walkthroughs probably work on this new version. The problem is that this lack of polish and frustrating





gameplay is no longer generally accepted. For someone without a lot of nostalgia, and a thick skin, it is simply not a playable game.

What the remake has done is greatly improve the resolution of the cutscenes as well as enact sweeping interface, graphical, and audio changes. Unfortunately, these changes are not all for the better. The interface is simply worse than the original's, with far more steps between sections; A casualty of all interfaces these days being designed for consoles or (in this case) mobile devices, with no effort ever being put into porting them to the PC.

But worse than any of my previous concerns is the general concept of the game. *Sherlock Holmes* is about investigation, a

thorough examination of the facts around a crime scene. This is in direct opposition to, say, Hercule Poirot's investigational style; Which focuses on interviewing everyone in the vicinity, developing alibis and testing them. This *Sherlock* style is *Sherlock Holmes*, you cannot have a real *Sherlock* adventure without it. *Consulting Detective* does not follow the normal *Sherlock* style, the entire game is about interviewing people, and in fact being as incomplete as possible; As you are supposed to complete your investigation with as little effort as possible. In practical terms, the gameplay seemed more about memorizing every name you hear and guessing which are red herrings and which are important necessary leads than anything else.



Sherlock Holmes: Consulting Detective is really only for the nostalgic. It is an interesting idea, but it is just not executed in a way that the industry finds acceptable any longer. ●

(The preceding opinion is based just the very beginning of *The Mummy's Curse*.)



Analogue: A Hate Story



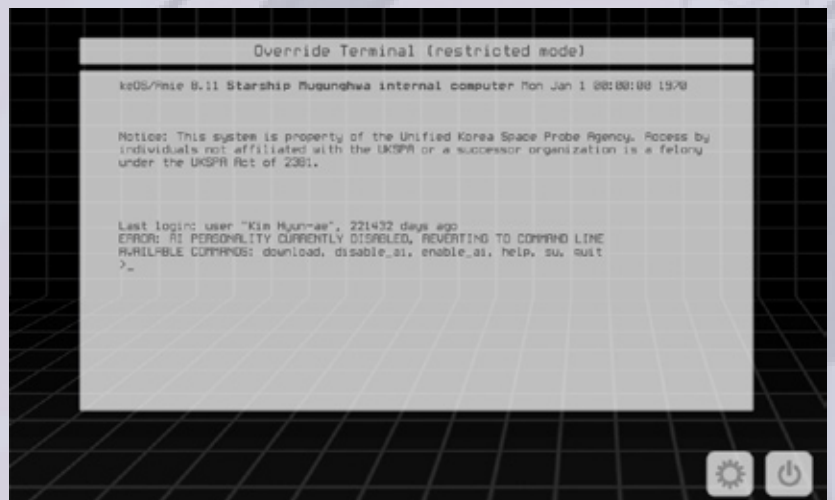
Genre: visual novel Developer/publisher: Christine Love
Release date: February 1, 2012 Platforms: Windows, Mac OS X, Linux
Website: <http://ahatestory.com/>

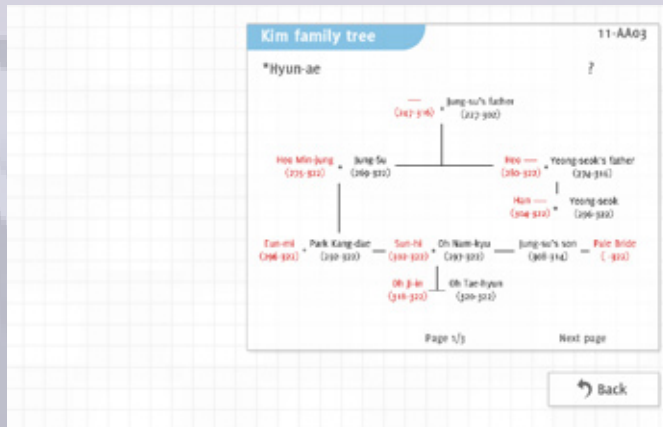


The spiritual sequel to *Digital: A Love Story*, which I gave a perfect five star review in 2011. *Analogue*, like its predecessor, is a visual novel style interactive story, and was released in early 2012. It was released later that year on Steam and is one of the first and only, if not THE first and only, visual novel so far released on Steam. A direct sequel is currently in the works called *Hate+*, which will be in the form of significant commercial DLC for the original game.

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Analogue's story is told through a series of text messages from a wide array of people, over an approximately ten year time period. These are a sampling of the logs from a generational space ship and as such cover many topics and often are only used to give more details about someones character or the world this story is set in. These are not told chronologically, for the most part, and to make matters worse everyone has foreign (I imagine traditionally Korean) names; Which does not



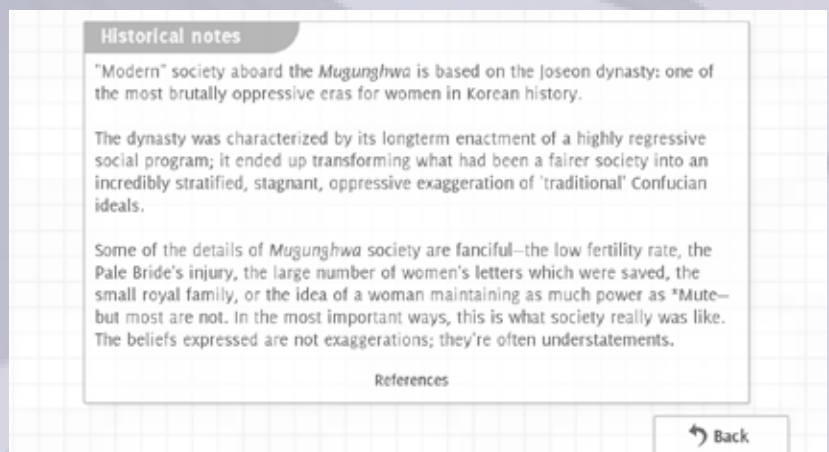


make remembering everyone any easier. I simply found it completely impenetrable and confusing for the entire first half of the game. But I did get and remember little snippets of stories that eventually fit into the mosaic that is *Analogue*. This mosaic style is quite wonderful when it is significantly complete or finished, but when there are just a few tiles on the board it is rather dull and monotonous. These logs are revealed by talking to the two AI characters, *Hyun and *Mute. With *Hyun being the love interest of the game, who has a liberal modern day culture, while *Mute, and the rest of the characters in the logs, have a viewpoint in-line with the culture in the society in which the text logs are from, a culture based on medieval Korea.

Analogue starts off with a long lost generational spaceship, the Mugunghwa, being discovered and you being sent to retrieve its logs and figure out what happened. The Mugunghwa was one of the very first ships sent out to colonize distant planets, and at some point in this extremely long voyage a culture shift occurred and much knowledge and skills were lost, including the ability to control the navigation of the ship itself. The resulting society

was modeled, by the developer, after the medieval Joseon Dynasty of Korea. A culture controversial for its distinct gender roles and Confucianism, or more specifically a secular version of Confucianism called Neo-Confucianism, which served as an ethical and cultural rulebook. The story is based around a young girl with a terminal illness;

Who long ago was put in stasis in the hope that a future, more advanced, society could cure her. Unfortunately, this does not come to pass and instead she is woken up in a future which has lost much of its technical and health-care related knowledge and no longer understands why she was put in stasis or that anything is wrong with her. We then learn about





her last years as she struggles with this new and very different culture.

The biggest problem I have with *Analogue* is the message behind its story, which is both obvious in the game itself and verified in what the developer has said. The game is about hate, and is so strong in this regard it almost appeared sarcastic, to make a point, until I read some of the developers comments. The game is about how horrible the Joseon Dynasty of Korea and its secular version of Confucianism was to women. Basically, everyone in this oppressive culture is

evil, and if you disagree you are wrong. This is brought to a ridiculous degree when you realize that if you do not agree with all of your love interest's opinions you not only lose the game but are granted the achievement "Abusive Jerk"; When all you have really done is disagree that a long list of people and cultural norms are evil, horrible, and stupid. All the Men are uninteresting, stupid, and evil; And all the women are victims or equally evil and stupid. What is strange is that the story is told from both sides; We see how both cultures are unable

to understand each other and to communicate effectively. And how both turn to hate when confronted with something so different that they fail to understand it. But the moral message here is that the 21st century culture is the right one, and the one based around a century old Korean culture is wrong. How turning all women into victims, or externally judging a culture in which the developer has absolutely no common ground, makes any kind of logical sense or is supposed to achieve anything other than spreading hate is beyond me. The interesting thing is that if you took out the AI characters, the developers notes, and the achievements, the story by itself could be interpretable as a comment reaffirming the common relativistic idea that "one cannot judge another culture by one's own culture"; And expand on that with the idea that any difference in a culture or individual is commonly deemed as something bad and evil, which of course is where the judging instead of learning and understanding comes into play.

Analogue is presented as a mostly traditional visual novel, with, if anything, less graphics than you often see. The only real graphics in this case are the two AI characters; Without any real backgrounds or anything of that sort. Most of the game, other than the text messages, is comprised of the menu system and command-line. The menu system is rather minimalistic since its sole purpose is to display and archive text logs, and seems decently put together. Every so





often you need to use the command-line; It is pretty much what you see in most in-game command-lines, being quite minimalistic and lacking most of the modern conveniences. It is somewhat of a pain to work with, but is utilitarian enough and you do not have too much time on it anyways.

Visual Novels normally do not have any gameplay and are comprised completely of a series of choices which shape the story progression. The gameplay of *Analogue* is actually rather interesting, although it is contained in one, less than 20 minute, section of the game. About halfway through the game you are confronted with an imminent challenge and given 20 minutes to save the ship or cut your losses and run. It has you use a command-line interface to try and fix a failing ship; A clunky interface but still enjoyable and mentally challenging. Another interesting and unique feature is that the Visual Novel style choices do not really change the story or even the angle that it is presented to you. There is a rather limited number of text messages that you can unlock, and while a single playthrough will

not get you all of them, the ones that matter are shown every time; Except that you might not get to see all of the important ones and get all the details depending on some of the choices you make. What does change is the AI's reaction to you, but they both talk about pretty inane things anyways; Either your love interest likes you, or she does not and she yells at you for being stupid.

Analogue: A Hate Story is an interesting experience with a unique and enjoyable story. It might be a insensitive and offensive judgment of a long gone culture, but the story

by itself could just as easily be considered a comment on the inability for different cultures to understand each other and the relativity of ethical values. For a single full playthrough you can expect it to take about four hours, with around eight needed in total to unlock every conversation. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The unique story and inventive gameplay.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The long time it took for the story to start to take shape.

VERDICT:

A unique experience if nothing else, with as many reasons to hate it as there are to love it.



Conker's Bad Fur Day



Genre: adventure/platformer Developer/publisher: Rareware
Release date: March 5, 2001 Platform: Nintendo 64 Website: none



Ever since its release back in 2001, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* has been lauded as one of the best games on the Nintendo 64 and is considered by some to be *Rareware's* best game. *Rareware* and *Microsoft* liked it so much they remade the game for the original Xbox in 2005 in the form of *Conker: Live & Reloaded*. For some reason, the game never appealed to me when I was younger (I guess because it had a cartoon squirrel as the protagonist and I didn't really know what the premise was supposed to be about), and as such I never played it. Until now.

Review by Nick Burgener

The fun bit of trivia behind *Conker's Bad Fur Day* is that it was originally intended to be a family-friendly platformer in the same vein as *Conker's Pocket Tales*, a lighthearted child-friendly game released for the Game Boy Color in 1999. *Conker's Bad Fur Day* started out as *Conker's Quest* and was later renamed to *Twelve Tales: Conker 64*. After comparisons were drawn to other "cute platformers" that populated the N64 at the time (including some of *Rare's* previous work), *Rare* supposedly decided to rework





Conker 64 to give it a more unique, stand-out identity. Thus the crude, foul-mouthed, drunken Conker for mature audiences was born.

This is probably one of the most "mature" games I've ever played. By today's standards its mature themes are pretty mild compared to things you see in movies and television, but this is a game that deliberately did everything it could to push the envelop for its time. *Perfect Dark*, for instance, is rated M for blood and violence; *Conker's Bad Fur Day* has gratuitous blood and gore (in a morbidly graphic, cartoon extreme), intense violence, partial nudity, strong language,



strong sexual themes, and strong use of drugs, alcohol, and tobacco. On top of that, it features a lot of crude toilet humor that most sensible people should find somewhat offensive. It's definitely not the kind of game a parent would want their child playing.

Conker's Bad Fur Day begins with Conker calling his girlfriend, Berri, from a bar to inform her that he'll be a little late for their date. He ran into some old friends who were shipping off to "fight some war somewhere" the next day, and wants to celebrate with them. They spend the night drinking, and Conker stumbles out of the bar in a drunken stupor, trying to walk home in the dark and through the roaring thunderstorm. When he comes to a fork in the road, he heads off in an ominous direction and gets himself lost. He wakes up the next morning with a bad hangover, trying to find his way back home again.

Meanwhile, the fabled Panther King sits on his throne, struggling with a frustrating problem: his end table is missing a leg, so whenever he places his glass of milk on

the table, it tilts and knocks the glass over. He summons his mad-scientist-of-a-weasel to find a solution to the problem, who, after thorough experimentation, realizes that the glass keeps falling off the table because it's missing a leg, and the only way to fix it is to get a red squirrel to hold up the broken leg. It has to be a red squirrel because red squirrels are the only animal the exact height of the table.

That's the entire extent of the story. Conker has to get home, and to that end he explores and does





favors for random people while the Panther King wants to capture a red squirrel to fix his table. There's literally nothing more to it. It's about the most bare-boned story I've seen in a long time. They set up the premise early on and then forget about it entirely. Conker doesn't seem to have an actual drive or desire to get home and just goes along with the adventure, and the Panther King doesn't really try to capture Conker. The whole game is just going to the next place and doing the next chore for the next person with no ultimate goal in mind.

Like a lot of good platformers, Conker doesn't really need a strong narrative to be enjoyable. Super Mario 64, for example -- arguably the greatest 3D platformer of all time -- has even less of a story than Conker but it has more driving

force behind its gameplay because it gives you a clear goal: rescue the princess. Everything you do in *Mario 64* is a step towards that ultimate goal, and they give you numerous smaller objectives ("collect 10 stars to unlock the next part of the castle") to work on in the meantime. Conker constantly sets you up with small goals and objectives (which are themselves pretty satisfying), but there's no emphasis on an over-arching goal or narrative to lend the game momentum, and I feel like the game would've been more enjoyable with a little more of that emphasis.

Conker's world is designed similarly to a *Zelda* or *Metroid* game; after playing through a linear beginning area, you're presented with a sort of central region that branches off in several

different directions. Most of the other branches are unlocked via cutscene by progressing through the main game sequence and effecting things in different areas.





goals, but you've also got a basic attack button to smack things with a frying pan. Jumping on platforms and navigating terrain is a crucial element in Conker, but just as important (if not more so) is the game's emphasis on puzzles. Instead of trying to platform your way to some important thing, more often you're trying to manipulate the environment to produce a desired effect.

In one scenario (and this should be indicative of the style of humor in the game), you're trying to get a ball of poop for some inexplicable reason, so you have to find a way to get cows to defecate for you. They put you in a circular room with a raging bull, some cows, and a huge vat of prune juice, so you have to find a way to get the cows to move over to the trough of prune juice by manipulating the bull. In another scenario, you're trying to rescue Berri from a dancing club where she's been made into a cage dancer, so you have to get drunk and urinate on rock men, so that they curl up into a ball, and push them onto switches with your stream. Not the most cerebral puzzles, but they present enough problem-solving to be satisfying.

Solving puzzles and navigating the terrain is assisted by the

Each branch has its own distinct theme and unique gameplay elements, so it's pretty fun to go along with the game to see what new surprises await as you progress to each new area, but the actual act of exploration isn't that great because the game doesn't always give you a good sense of direction.

You can spend a few hours exploring multiple regions in one chapter of the game only to end up back in familiar territory with no indication of what should be done next (in part because there's no over-arching narrative/goal); the game forces you to wander around just hoping to trigger a cutscene that will open a new area. At one point Conker comes to two different areas and says he could go either way, but he'd rather go to the right because the left smells like poo. In this instance, the game does tell you where to go, but if you go to the left, you can make it all the way to the end of multiple different branching paths only to find that you can't do a single thing there, and then have to

backtrack. As such, the game is deceptively linear, which is a little disappointing when you're first introduced to that central region.

On the surface, Conker is a platformer similar to *Super Mario 64*, *Donkey Kong 64*, and *Banjo-Kazooie* (except without all the mindless item-collecting). It's played in third-person, features a controllable camera, and you go into various thematic "levels" or "worlds" to solve puzzles and advance to new areas. You can jump and climb to achieve your



relatively unique "context sensitive button." Scattered throughout the world are various "context sensitive pads" that, when stood on, allow you press the B button to perform some action unique to that context. In one spot, the pad may let you pull out a slingshot to shoot acorns at enemies; in another, it lets you turn into an anvil to pound the ground; in another, it lets you use a pocketwatch to hypnotize a dinosaur; in another, it lets you do acrobatic somersaults while firing machine guns. These things show up all over the place and, for the most part, they do a really good job of spicing up the gameplay, because you never know what you'll be doing next, and because they make sure what you're doing matches the theme of the area.

At the same time, however, the context sensitive button can be a little annoying. Whenever you're able to perform a context-sensitive action, a lightbulb lights up above Conker's head; this is important for knowing that you're supposed to do something when there isn't a pad on the floor, but it doesn't do this until you're in the exact position to perform the action, and if you don't accidentally stumble into that specific spot you have no clue what to do. For instance, you climb all the way to the top of a very tall structure and the lightbulb doesn't show up until you're in mid-air, having taken a leap of faith off the ledge with no idea what you're expected to do. So it's either annoying that the pads aren't there to tell you to do something, or it's annoying that the pads only allow you to perform actions in highly specific locations.

The game sends you to a variety of thematic locations which really set the tone for this absurd,



wacky adventure. Things start out in a pleasant set of green, windy hills, and then before long you're exploring a barn and the surrounding farmland. Next you're exploring the inside caverns of a giant mountain of poop, and then you're off to a prehistoric

area complete with volcanoes, dinosaurs, and hoverboarding cavemen. Then you visit a zombie-infested graveyard and a haunted mansion, and then you're off to a World War 2-style battlefield. The further you get into the game, the more ridiculous the scenarios get,



and it's really fun just to see the exotic variety of locales you can visit.

Each thematic area comes with a variety of sub-levels to complete, each with a series of goals to complete. In the farm area, for instance, you have to make a mouse leave some characters alone so that you can climb up onto the roof to activate a switch to open the barn door. Once inside, you have to defend yourself against a foul-mouthed anthropomorphic pitchfork and his buddies the paint can and paint brush. After throwing a lever inside, you have to climb up to the rafters and navigate narrow support beams while defending yourself against

bats. Then you have to fight a giant anthropomorphic pile of hay. These goals are usually very clear once you're in an area, and they all stream seamlessly one into the next so you're always occupied with some engaging task and problem-solving, which makes progressing through the game really satisfying.

The different areas also bring about totally unique gameplay elements, in part due to the context sensitive pads, which make it so that your actions match the theme of that area. When you're in the great poo mountain, you're defeating enemies with toilet paper, and when you're in a WW2 battlefield, you're doing it with a rocket launcher. But even

beyond that, Conker implements elements from different genres of games, so at one point you find yourself on a hoverboard racing through canyons like *F-Zero* or *Episode I: Racer*; later on you're in a haunted mansion fighting zombies with a shotgun like *Resident Evil*; later on you're shooting nazi teddy bears like *Medal of Honor*. It's also got a couple of underwater levels and a flying level, too.

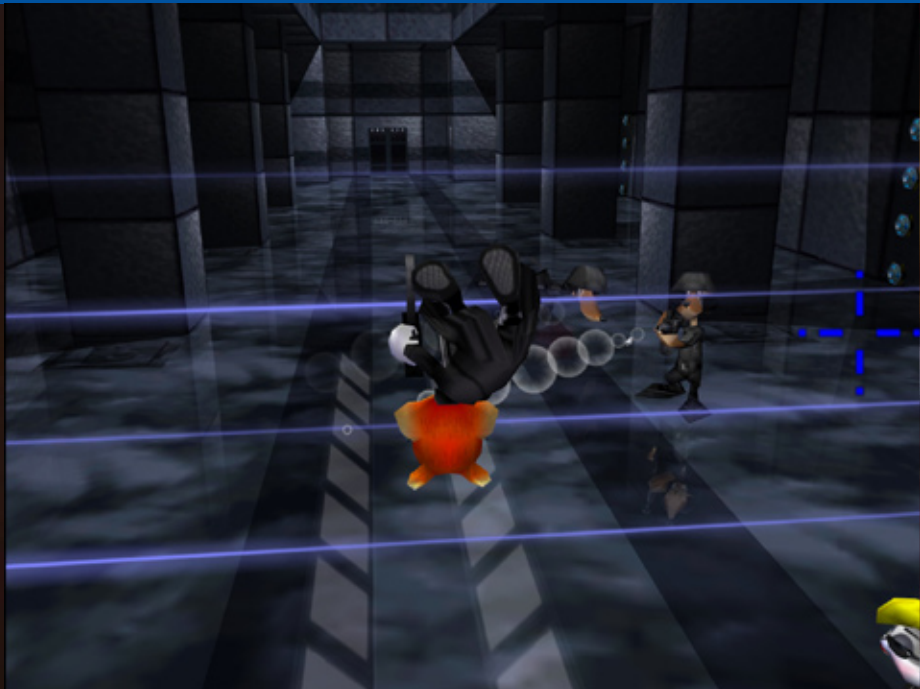
Back in 2001, *Conker's Bad Fur Day* was being hailed as the funniest game ever made, and even lots of modern "Top 10" lists still put Conker near the top. I'm sure I've played funnier games, but whether you find Conker funny



will depend on whether you can appreciate things like a giant opera-singing turd, or a bee pollinating a big-breasted sunflower. Even despite the low-brow toilet humor, there's a lot of witty, amusing dialogue, and Conker himself is a particularly fun protagonist since he's frequently playing the reluctant hero. The game also makes frequent references to movies; a lot of scenes in the game are straight out of movies like *A Clockwork Orange*, *Saving Private Ryan*, *The Terminator*, *The Matrix*, and *Aliens*, among many other quotes and smaller references.

Technically speaking, the game is rather impressive. The graphics may be the best on the N64, which is even more impressive since it doesn't even require the memory expansion pack. Conker has some really nice lighting and shaders for the N64, and even features complex lip synching and facial animations during dialogue, and individually-animated fingers on certain characters. Compare this to *Perfect Dark*, a game that required the expansion pack and had characters with typical N64 block-fists and no facial expressions or mouth movement whatsoever. There are a ton of great sound effects and music as well, including fully voice-acted dialogue, yet another feature that's relatively unheard of on the N64.

Where Conker shows its age is in its camera. Like all 3D platformers of the N64 / Playstation era, the camera is sometimes your biggest enemy. Depth perception is a major problem in certain areas of the game, and at times when you most need to take control of the camera to get a sense of depth and distance, the camera



will inexplicably remain at a fixed angle. At other times, the camera seems to deliberately prevent you from seeing critical things in the environment, or it starts moving and panning unpredictably while you're walking along a narrow, winding platform. When you're swimming underwater, the camera gets even worse and you end up flailing around uncontrollably because you can't tell where you're going or where you're aimed at because of all the distortion and its occasional insistence on fixed angles.

I had particular problems with the WW2 chapter of the game, which takes place right before the finale sequence. That's the section where the game turns into a third-person shooter and requires a lot of precise aiming, but I was playing on an emulator using a PS3 controller. I pretty much suck at aiming with a control stick anyway, and it was virtually impossible to come up with a decent button layout that would facilitate both the normal movement and the over-the-shoulder aiming /

movement scheme at the same time. So the emulated controls didn't help, but I'm not convinced using an N64 controller would've fully solved the problem, because there'd still be annoying issues with slow transitions between normal movement and aiming modes, and awkward turning/strafing while aiming.

Finally, I have to say I really enjoyed the ending. Despite saving his own skin and becoming king of all the land, Conker fails to save Berri's life; he sits on his throne, surrounded by various characters he met in his adventure who celebrate the new king, while Conker delivers his final monologue in a sequence that mirrors the intro in reverse: "So, there I am. King. King of all the land. Who'd have thought that? Not me. I guess you know who these guys are now, cause I certainly do, but I don't want to know them. And yep, I may be king, and have all the money in the world, and all the land, and all that stuff, but you know, I don't really think I want it. I just want to go home, with Berri, and, I dunno, have a bottle of beer. Hmm. It's not gonna happen. It's true what they say, 'the grass is



always greener,' and 'you don't really know what you have until it's gone.' Gone.... gone...."

I always like sad and depressing endings, and this one really resonated for me. After all the absurd, crazy adventures, it was nice for the game to settle into a serious message at the end, where the protagonist doesn't

get everything he wants and realizes all he's lost. I connected a lot with Conker as the main character throughout the game, just because he was the reluctant hero constantly thrust into crazy scenarios, but I really sympathized with him at the end, and the game managed to touch my heart in a special way that few games ever do. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Lots of great gameplay variety, fun writing and humor, and top notch graphics and sound for its time.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Sometimes poor camera control, and it might have benefited from more narrative cohesion.

VERDICT:

A unique and refreshing take on the 3D platformer that's still fun to play today.



Lucius



Genre: adventure Developer: Shiver Games Publisher: Lace Mamba Global
Release date: October 26, 2012 Platform: Microsoft Windows
Website: <http://lucius.shivergames.com/>



A recently released "adventure" from *Shiver* and *Lace Mamba* for the Windows operating system. *Lucius* is a 3D, third-person, video game which puts you in control of the six year old son of the Devil, Lucius. He is tasked by his father with killing the residents of his natural family's manor. I had been looking forward to the game for quite some time, as playing a serial murderer has always seemed like an interesting concept.

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Lucius has always been portrayed as an adventure game with a horror story; But it is obvious that it also contained elements of stealth and action, with very action-adventure seeming powers. The truth is that while the game world and engine is that of an action-adventure, none of the challenges use this. While it would be completely possible to smash a TV over someones head with your telekinesis, it would not cause any effect other than to alert the person to your powers. Which is not to say it has





no action, because it does, there is a significant scene at the end were you do use action-adventure style powers (or more specifically one power) to fight a couple of people. The game also has quite a bit of stealth gameplay, with you sneaking around the manor at night. Another problem with categorizing it is it does not really feel like an adventure either; Yes it is all about using powers or objects on people or objects; Settings traps or just outright killing people. But the objectives are so precise, it just takes you through what to do one step at a time. And the challenges themselves are so simple and to the point, and yet completely specific; You are not solving problems, but following instructions. Otherwise you would have leniency in how you kill people, or at least need to come up with some of it yourself. So in a way it is completely unlike the adventure genre as well, because there are no puzzles, nor

any choices. Interactive film might actually be the closest genre; With elements somewhat resembling stealth, action-adventure, and adventure. The stealth aspect of this is really the only thing it does well enough to actually resemble other games in that genre.

The graphics of *Lucius* are 3D, neither minimalistic nor detailed. They are bland, and completely ruined by a significant lighting issue. The lighting does not make any sense. For me, the first half of the game was completely pitch black, for significant sections. It did not matter that it was the middle of the day and I was in a room filling with open windows and many turned on lights, with a flashlight in my hand; You still could not see more than half of a foot in front of your face, and even that was just barely visible. The second half is the complete inverse. The game is bright, very bright, even though there is no reason it should be any different. The problem with these graphics is that they appear washed-out and horrible looking, like they just lightened the dark shadowy graphics. Which is not to say that it never gets it right. There are scenes and levels that have the correct amount of lighting and these look decent. *Lucius* is somewhat graphically mature, but really not in any interesting ways. There is nudity



and even sex, and every murder is accompanied by a close up view of gore and death. But neither is well done, or worth watching.

The basic setup is of an action-adventure. You have a third-person view, can open and close doors, and turn on and off lights. You are able to pick up and use items, as well as using your powers on items. You gain these powers overtime, after a certain mission is completed you are simply granted another one. These powers are: Telekinesis,





Mind control, Memory Erase, and Combustion. Telekinesis is your main power and you use it to do most of the things you do. You can use it to freely move items around and turn on machines; Not that this is ever used in such a free manner. Mind control is used on people when you have them in a specific situation and will cause them to kill themselves or others. Memory Erase is used in stealth missions to erase the memory of people

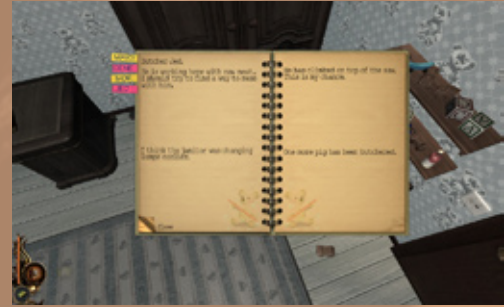
who see you. And finally, you are only allowed to use Combustion in very specific situations and only three times in total; It is a standard fireball attack, that you can charge for more power. While these powers are very open and action-RPG-ish even, with the exception of Combustion, they are used as simple inventory items. In a very specific and prearranged situations you can click on an object or a person with these

skills selected and will progress with that particular challenge. The challenges themselves are the epitome of boredom, and they sure do not play like puzzles. They are all completely linear and incredibly specific, there is no overcoming of an intellectual challenge since every death is required to be a completely specific and arbitrary way, with most of it explained in specific detail by your journal/objective



Lucifer: Lucius... There you are, and here I am. Finally, face to face.





list. Most of the challenge in these challenges is created through item fetch quests; You often have no idea where an item is in this giant mansion and yet you have to find it somehow. Another feature that relies on these fetch quest almost completely is the sidequests or chores. Every so often you unlock another chore you can do, which when completed gives you points with your parents towards your next toy; there are three of these toys, all of which serving some utilitarian purpose.

The completely disappointing aspect of the game is that the engine allows far more freedom. You can pick up a toy car and place it at the top of a flight of stairs, this just has no effect. You can smash a TV over someones head, but this will do nothing. And so many of the murders are completely contrived and rely far to much on Lucius being able to make people do specific things. Additionally, there is no reason most of them could not be available from day one to complete in any order, they simply are not.

So you would think that since the game is completely linear and does not contain any notable gameplay that the story must be good. In fact it hardly even exists. You are charged by the Devil to kill everyone in you manor, that is it. Every mission is a new unexplained

kill, perpetrated for no particular reason, that is other than your objective list told you to do it. And nothing ever happens, eventually you kill everyone and the game ends, no twists, tension, or development.

The question is not "is this a shitty game?", but instead "is

this one of the shittiest games produced this decade"? It has an interesting concept but they could not of gone about making a more bland game. It is just a very bland, specific, and boring series of linear short interactive experiences that have a gore shot at the end. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The concept.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The entirety of the execution, of said concept.

VERDICT:

A game without a single redeeming quality.



Adventure Lantern

