

# Adventure Lantern

## AL EMMO AND

## The Lost Dutchman's Mine

### Featured Games:

Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine  
Secrets of Da Vinci: The Forbidden Manuscript  
Moscow to Berlin: Red Siege  
Lunar Deep

### Reviews:

The Tulse Luper Journey  
Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney  
The Longest Journey  
Shady Brook  
X-Men Legends

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# Editorial

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The world is truly a small place...

It has not been that many years, but it still seems like it was a lifetime ago. I remember climbing up several flights of stairs to get to my classroom every morning. Always with an unnecessarily heavy backpack on my shoulders. Because heaven forbid, I could never leave any of my books at home or in my locker. Whether I needed them or not, they came with to school with me every morning and back home every afternoon.

Yes, it was a long time ago, but the memories are still vivid. And sometimes a pleasant reminder finds me when I least expect it. Just a few days ago, a curious e-mail pops up in my mailbox. A fellow graduate from my university is wondering if anybody else is living in Turkey. After a couple of e-mails, it turns out someone from my college is going to be a teacher at my old high school.

It seems obscure and strangely appropriate at the same time. While I traveled across the world to go to college in the U.S. years ago, someone journeys in the opposite direction to become a coworker to my old teachers. It brings back memories and sends me searching for that old backpack. One of the only relics remaining from an years ago. It is torn in more places than I care to count, but it is still safely tucked away in my closet. Having endured years of abuse, it is determined to outlast its owner. No, there is no way it could be used for much of anything. It is just a reminder of the old. The one thing that didn't get thrown away or replaced in all these years.

I can't help but wonder what kind of memories the new teacher will make at my old high school. The whole thing is nothing more than sheer coincidence, but it still reminds me how things of the past always have a way of coming back. And it shows me how in some way, I don't want those reminders to go away. Whether it is a torn backpack, a CD you know will never run on your new computer, or just a simple memory.

A touch of the past always mixed with the present to ultimately move forward. It is part of why the magazine is packed with articles on old games mixed with brand new ones. It is part of why we'll jump over hoops to play those old games today or sometimes enjoy reading about them.

Until next month...

-Ugur Sener

# News

Compiled by Gnome and Ugur Sener

Starting a new section in Adventure Lantern, our fearless Gnome and I have scoured the Internet in his quest to deliver you a compilation of adventure gaming news (three quarters of the credit belongs to Gnome). Especially those of you who do not frequently visit other adventure gaming Web sites to catch the latest updates will be able to come here for a compilation of the previous month's highlights. Without further ado, here is what Gnome and I caught this month...



## The Sacred Rings:

This should be great news for people who enjoy their first person puzzlers, as The Adventure Company has launched the official site for "The Sacred Rings", the sequel to the quite entertaining (in a frustrating way of course) "Aura: Fate of Ages". And if you must know more, pay a visit to [www.thesacredringsgame.com](http://www.thesacredringsgame.com). It's admittedly enlightening.

## Announcing SPHINX:

In SPHINX, a recently announced AGS adventure, you play as Ravi, a travelling puppeteer and charlatan. On the other hand, Ravi could be something else entirely. You (yes, even you) can also help shape Ravi, as this seems like the first mass created adventure game ever. Intrigued? Then help make this game become a reality! Contribute your writing skills, your artwork, your ideas or even your well-meant enthusiasm. Have a look at the Wiki, the place where the Sphinx project lives: [www.americangirlscouts.org/snarkywiki/index.php](http://www.americangirlscouts.org/snarkywiki/index.php)



## More Phoenix Wright Adventures on the DS:

According to videogamesblogger, ([www.videogamesblogger.com](http://www.videogamesblogger.com)) the excellent Phoenix Wright attorney-simulation-adventure thingy of the Nintendo DS will soon get a new sequel, at least in Japan: Phoenix Wright 3 or for some peculiar reason Gyakuten Saiban 4. It will hopefully get an English translation too.

## King's Quest 3, the Remake:

The famous team of "Infamous Adventures" has just (well, in June at least) released their excellent remake of Sierra's King's Quest III. Changes include a brilliant (VGA) graphics update, a new musical



score, an icon driven interface, and even a reworked PDF manual. Mind you, that this is -of course- a freeware release, which means that you'll pay nothing. Nada. Nichts. For the second best King's Quest ever. Fancy, that.

Grab it at <http://www.infamous-adventures.com/index.php?page=kq3>



#### **Until I'm Gone is still around:**

Faraway Studios inform us that they have not fallen off the face of the earth. The creative team behind the Until I'm Gone project announces that development efforts are continuing. However, the project release date has been moved from May 2006 to winter 2006. Swing by

[www.FarawayStudios.com](http://www.FarawayStudios.com) to learn more.

#### **New Gumshoe Online case announced:**

Hiding Buffalo announced in a newsletter that they will be releasing a new free Gumshoe Online case to celebrate the community reaching 25000 members. The team has also overhauled the Gumshoe Online forum as well as adding new locations and challenges to two of the available cases. Take a trip to [www.Gumshoe-Online.com](http://www.Gumshoe-Online.com) to check out the latest updates.



#### **Contest at Himalaya Studios:**

Visit the Himalaya Studios Web site to participate in the Wild West Giveaway contest. Fifty prizes are up for grabs if you can convince the Himalaya Studios team that you are the right person to win the contest. To find out more, visit [www.AEmmo.com](http://www.AEmmo.com).

#### **It's Patch time!**

The flawed Paradise, B. Sokal's latest creation, has at last received the patch treatment, which thankfully fixes the more infuriating problems (including the non-responding cursor) and quite a few of hideous bugs. The patch (all 12MB of it) can be download at 3dGamers ([www.3dgamers.com/news/more/1096485118/](http://www.3dgamers.com/news/more/1096485118/)).

The Daemonica patch on the other hand, is much smaller (less than 3MB), fixes a few of the game's barely noticeable problems and adds a new font. Download it from Meridian4's website ([www.meridian4.com/games/Daemonica/support.html](http://www.meridian4.com/games/Daemonica/support.html)).

Ah, yes... One more thing... Keepsake got patched too. Again. It's now matured to version 1.6. You can download the update from GamersHell ([www.gamershell.com/download\\_13878.shtml](http://www.gamershell.com/download_13878.shtml)).

## Undercover: Operation Wintersun – Preview

Written by Ugur Sener

The year is 1943. World War II rages across Europe in full force. This is the greatest and most destructive war mankind has ever seen. Millions of soldiers and civilians have already perished. The estimated death toll is simply horrifying. But many more are yet to lose their lives. It will be a long time before this horrible war comes to an end. Countless more people will have to suffer. No matter who you are and no matter where you live, this is a dark and dangerous time. But the war, the open conflict between the nations is only what is on the surface.



The allied forces believe that the Nazis are conducting a top secret weapons research project. The details are scarce, but if the Nazis are allowed to successfully complete the project, the consequences could be truly disastrous. Something must be done to foil their plans. The project must be stopped at all costs.

In a desperate attempt to put an end to the Nazi research efforts, the British secret service agency MI6 enlists the services of Dr. John Russell. The physicist will have to travel deep into the enemy territory. As part of an undercover operation in Berlin, Russell will have to infiltrate Nazi compounds and discover what the Nazis are researching. The project is nearing its completion with each passing day. With the help of a few other spies, it will be up to Russell to find away to stop the development of the secret weapon before it can be completed. His expert knowledge as a scientist might be critical to the mission's success.



Even in a time of peace, breaking into a top secret military research facility would be no walk in the park. But this is a time of war and Berlin is a very dangerous place for experienced MI6 spies, let alone a physicist. Yet this is not a mission Russell can choose not to undertake. Far too much is at stake here. One way or

another, John will have to find out more about the project and bring it to a halt. Perhaps his scientific knowledge, keen eye for detail, and deductive reasoning skills will be enough to thwart the Nazis before the weapon can be deployed.



Currently under development by Sproing Interactive Media and scheduled to be published by ANACONDA, Undercover: Operation Wintersun invites adventure gamers to embark on a journey to Berlin and take on the role of John Russell. As part of the critical MI6 mission, it will be up to you to get to the bottom of the Nazi research efforts. You will have to outsmart enemy soldiers and find a way to sneak into their facilities.

Judging by the early preview build of the game, the setting and the atmosphere may easily be among the strongest elements of Undercover: Operation Wintersun. The preview version begins outside the building where John Russell learns about his mission for the first time. It is a bright and sunny day as if to prove that the weather is completely oblivious to the war. You can barely hear that a conversation is going on inside the building. Your first task is to find a way to eavesdrop without revealing your presence. Perhaps you might be able to catch a few more details about the mission before you take off for Berlin.

Once you arrive in Germany, the game truly begins and starts giving you a feel for its atmosphere. The nighttime sky is eerie. The quiet yet unsettling music is making you nervous. You can make out two soldiers in the distance. They are guarding the facility that you need to infiltrate. You have to find a way to distract them. And then you somehow need to break in, find the information you need, and get yourself out all in one piece. Without burdening the players with annoying time limits or a cumbersome stealth sequence, the game manages to create tension. As you start exploring the immediate area, you half expect the soldiers to come running down the street and fill you with bullets. The game manages to capture your interest and make you curious about what you may be about to discover. It will hopefully prove satisfying to see the storyline unfold and understand what exactly is going on in the release version of the game.



Undercover also looks very promising in terms of its graphics and presentation. Played from a third-person perspective, the game features very crisp looking backgrounds brought to life with various special effects. Standing in front of a building you are about to infiltrate, you can see snowflakes slowly falling from the sky. Occasionally one of them drifts close to the camera, revealing its intricate details. At the same time, smoke is coming from the roof of an adjacent building. The torn down walls tell you the story. The building must have been bombed recently.

The light post on the right flickers on and off as the banners on the building you are about to enter gently dance with the wind. It is a quiet night, bombs are not falling from the sky, an air raid is not about to take place. Tanks are not shaking the ground as they travel through the streets. Yet the little details communicate the weight of the war. They convey something about its dreadful darkness and gloom.



The preview build of Undercover primarily features inventory-based puzzles. For the most part, the challenges seem to fit with the story and the underlying setting. It makes sense that there will be guards in front of a military facility. It also makes sense that you should find a way to distract them since you can't very well walk up to them and kindly ask if they will let you enter the building. When you are not sure what to expect on the other side, it stands to reason that you should find a way to open a door as quietly as possible. While it is far too early to speak for the entire game, Undercover could deliver puzzles that fit well into the storyline. It also seems that the available solutions will be appropriate for John Russell's character.



It is also worth noting that John Russell will not be completely alone in his mission. Players will have a chance to interact with other spies as they explore the enemy territory. Dialogues with other characters can give the plotline more depth and help set the tone of the game. Meeting experienced spies, having their help during the mission, and proving your worth to them as a scientist could make for some interesting game play mechanics



Undercover features a simple point and click interface. Players can move Russell around the screen with a simple left click. If you have the mouse hovering over a hotspot, John will make a comment about the object. You can attempt to use the object with a right click. This is also how you initiate conversations with other characters.

The inventory is accessible along the bottom portion of the screen. You can scroll through the available items and combine them as needed. In order to use an inventory item, you have to select it with a right click. This will change your mouse icon to the item you have selected. Once you bring the object to the desired spot, you can attempt to use it with another click. The simple and intuitive interface of Undercover will hopefully make the game accessible to all players.

Undercover: Operation Wintersun is currently scheduled for an October 2006 release. Judging by the portion of the game available in its preview build, Undercover could be a successful adventure game with a rather intriguing setting. Combining the historical background of World War II with an original storyline, Undercover could deliver a memorable gaming experience. With its potential to deliver a promising storyline, engaging atmosphere, and interesting puzzles, Undercover sure seems to be worth putting on the radar. If the completed product lives up to the expectations, Undercover could be real treat.



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## The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll – Preview

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Written by Ugur Sener

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Well over a decade ago, Trilobyte released an adventure game that has most certainly left its mark in the genre. Taking players through the rooms of a cryptic mansion, The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest put the focus almost entirely on the puzzles. Each room had a different twisted puzzle. As you moved from one challenge to the next, additional rooms became unlocked and the story unfolded through visions of ghosts. The old man Stauf's mansion made for an eerie, surprising, and sometimes downright corny place to explore. While The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest hardly scored any points for its incoherent plotline, its distinct structure and devious puzzles nevertheless made it a significant and quite successful game.

After three years of development, The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour followed The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest. Giving players another chance to explore Stauf's mansion, The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour offered puzzles similar to what was available in its predecessor along with hunt sequences where players went about the house looking for various items. The story was not meant to end with The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour, but alas the game performed poorly in terms of sales and the third chapter in the series was never completed by Trilobyte. But dedicated fans of the series have taken it upon themselves to change all of that and create a new sequel.



The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll will reunite players with Tad, the seventh guest in the original game. Tad has managed to survive the events, but he is now institutionalized. And the images of the past continue to haunt him. Tad remembers the ones he could not save. In a different time and at a different place, he is disillusioned and has just about given up all hope. Going back to the mansion and setting things right seems like an impossible dream. But the current is changing once again. And the right time might finally be at hand.

It all begins with the arrival of a new doctor. This young man could be just what Tad needs to get out of the asylum. As the doctor and the patient meet, everything hangs in balance. Can this really be the opportunity to vanquish Stauf's evil once and for all? Or will the madman's evil triumph over Tad and the doctor? It is hard to guess what the outcome might be. But one thing is certain. The cryptic mansion and Stauf's treacherous games beckon once again. It is time to explore the crumbling old house one more time. Perhaps this time it will be possible to set everything right.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll is a very ambitious project to deliver a new sequel to The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest and the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour. A small group of fans have come together to create an experience similar to the original games while adding a touch of innovation.

Among the most interesting aspects of The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll is the fact that players can choose to control either Tad or the young doctor. As detailed on the official Web site for



The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll ([www.t7g3.com](http://www.t7g3.com)), the choice is far from being superficial. Depending on which character you choose, different rooms and different puzzles are planned to be available. Going through the game as Tad or the doctor should provide a unique perspective into the events. In addition, each character's story arc is expected to have multiple endings giving the game significant replay value.

While The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll is being conceived as a 3D game, the actual game play mechanics are expected to be close to what was featured in the first two games. Players will utilize a mouse-driven interface to navigate through the game. Being



a chapter in The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest series, players should also be able to expect a healthy dose of tricky puzzles to solve. Viewed from a first-person perspective, the game is also expected to feature real actors just like the first two installments in the series. While Stauf will undoubtedly be an important part of the game, it is unknown whether or not Robert Hirschbeck will reprise his old role.

The official sequel for the 11<sup>th</sup> Hour was supposed to be called The Collector. Yet years after the original announcement about the game it should be pretty safe to assume that The Collector is firmly lodged in the ever-growing list of games that

were planned but never completed. While the development team behind The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll is quick to point out their venture is not meant to be an official sequel, it is great to see a talented group of people take it upon themselves to continue the series.

When it is completed, The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll will be released as a freeware game. Taking the intriguing storyline and the promising graphics into account, it might come as a surprise that this game would be offered as freeware. With two playable characters, multiple endings, and plenty of game play time, The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll sure seems to have the makings of a commercial release. However, primarily due to potential copyright issues with the creators of the original games, the development team seems adamant of providing the game as freeware.

The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll is a project that has already been in development for quite some time. However, the official game Web site seems to have an active community and the developers seem to be intent of completing the project. As the members of the development team are working on The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll entirely as a volunteer effort, it might be a while before we get to play the game. There is no official release date. As is the case with many independently developed freeware games, The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll will be ready when it's ready.



Nevertheless, based on the information currently available, The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll looks quite promising. Attic Door Productions could easily end up delivering a remarkably successful fan game. It should be very interesting to see what will be end result of this tremendous undertaking by a small number of dedicated fans. And who knows, maybe The 13<sup>th</sup> Doll will even shed light on some questions you may have left unanswered in the first two games of the series.

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## **Interview with Britney Brimhall, CEO of Himalaya Studios**

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**Conducted by Ugur Sener**

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*Himalaya Studios is getting ready for the full-release of their first game, **AI Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine**. As the official **AI Emmo** site at [www.AIEmmo.com](http://www.AIEmmo.com) is already accepting preorders for the game, we interviewed Britney Brimhall, Chairman and CEO of Himalaya Studios. Miss Brimhall gave us detailed information about her company and their first project. Before you scroll down to Wendy's detailed review on **AI Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine**, here's your chance to learn more about the creation of the game and Himalaya Studios.*

**[Ugur Sener]: Can you tell us a little about the birth of Himalaya Studios? What was the transition like from AGD Interactive to Himalaya Studios?**

**[Britney Brimhall]:** While making remakes at AGD Interactive, we were frequently asked by the fans to create a completely original project. Additionally, both Ken Williams and Josh Mandel mentioned in interviews that the best way to help the adventure genre was to create new material. Also, we felt the need to continually challenge ourselves, and making a game from scratch was a step forward.

For these reasons, we decided to work on an original project which came to be known as "AI Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine". We felt it would be best to separate our original projects from our Sierra remakes, and started up our commercial branch called Himalaya Studios, LLC.

The transition from AGD Interactive to Himalaya Studios was not a difficult one from a development standpoint, since we had already learned the process of making games by working on Sierra remakes. Setting up a registered business, writing up contracts, budgeting, keeping good financial records, and motivating workers to believe in our vision, when they had no idea what the finished product was going to be like, was a unique challenge which we learned to deal with one step at a time.

**[US]: What can you tell us about your team at Himalaya Studios?**

**[BB]:** The Himalaya Studios team is composed of dedicated and talented artists who all love adventure games. Many of them were hand selected for their top-notch performance on previous AGD Interactive projects. For other positions, we scouted out workers with an impressive portfolio.

The team members live throughout the world, from America, to Australia, to Europe, and we work together via online forums. Several times during the development process, we traveled to one another's homes to work alongside one another on the game.

**[US]: What are your goals for Himalaya Studios? How do you see the company evolving after the release of your first game?**

**[BB]:** The main goal of Himalaya Studios is to produce awesome, entertaining, classic style adventure games reminiscent of the Sierra and Lucas Arts titles from the 80s and 90s. We'd also like to prove to publishers that there is still a niche market for these games, because in doing so, more adventure game projects will be supported. But in order to prove that there is still a sizeable market, we need to show that people are still willing to buy such games.

We'd love to continue making adventure games since this is a passion for us. If "Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine" is well received, there is a good chance we will produce more classic style adventure games.

**[US]: Your first project, Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine is gearing up for a July 2006 release. What was the inspiration behind Al Emmo? When did you start developing the story?**

**[BB]:** I am from Arizona, and much of the inspiration for "Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine", from the setting and characters to the puzzles, came from my homeland and life experiences. The tale of the Lost Dutchman's Mine is a local legend, and elements of the game are loosely based on that as well. I started developing the story several years ago while living in Germany and being homesick for Arizona. Since that point, several team members have contributed their own ideas, and the story has evolved tremendously.

**[US]: There are a number of adventure games that take place in the Wild West. What is it about the era that made Himalaya Studios choose it for its first game? What do you think the draw of the period and the setting is for the players?**

**[BB]:** "Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine" isn't a typical western, by any means. It does contain some elements that other Westerns include, like cowboy types, Indians, and a town sheriff, but outside of those basics, the game is pretty unique.

The southwest has a very different connotation for me than it does for a lot of other people. To me, this region is my home. I grew up in the desert, learning about the local flora and fauna and Indian tribes in school; we visited museums and studied cacti in the desert. I even worked for some time rehabilitating wildlife native to Arizona. These experiences have given me positive feelings toward my delightful desert homeland and a lot of insider knowledge about the region. The wild west to me doesn't necessarily follow the typical stereotypes that most people have become accustomed to. The setting of this game encompasses a

much more personal, cultural experience, and will hopefully be considered a fresh, new idea to most people who play.

**[US]: The game takes players to the desert valley of Anozira, which has a curious resemblance to the name of the state where your company is located. Are there locations in the game inspired by real places?**

**[BB]:** Yes! Many of the locations in the game are inspired by real places with a lot of artistic freedom thrown in. You'll find plenty of red rocks in the game, which were inspired by the red rock country of Sedona. The town of Anozira is based loosely on Goldfield, a ghost town which lies at the foot of the Superstition Mountain Range in Apache Junction. Bubba's Barn was inspired by a decorative house on the mini golf course at my family's amusement park. Even Kevin's Saloon has a basis in reality. I knew an English man by the name of Kevin who worked at a coffee shop in Germany. His friendly service, amiable chats, and his ability to basically run the café on his own inspired me to create a similar local hangout in the town of Anozira. The list could go on and on...

**[US]: While AI Emmo is taking us back to classic adventure games, it also features detailed 3D models. What can you tell us about the technology supporting the game?**

**[BB]:** We wanted to keep "AI Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine" true to the classic style, while also improving in areas where we felt the classics could have been even better. By utilizing 3D character models, we could go all out on animations, creating loads of detailed, fluid, and humorous animated sequences. Additionally, we were able to use these models to create immersive cutscenes which further draw the player into the story. The game itself was created with Adventure Game Studio (AGS), a feature intensive game engine developed by Chris Jones, which is specialized for creating adventure games.

**[US]: Can you tell us a little about the game's atmosphere? What kind of characters can players expect to meet? What kind of tone does the game have?**

**[BB]:** The game is a fine combination of humor, adventure, danger, and sentimentality. You can expect to meet very unique, zany, off the wall character types, similar to what you might find in a Seinfeld episode!

**[US]: What can you tell us about the main protagonist? What are his motives? What is AI Emmo's personality like?**

**[BB]:** AI is not your typical hero. What I love about AI, is that by starting out vulnerable, he has a LOT of room to grow. In most games, you start out a hero, and then throughout the game, you do what's expected of you—you commit heroic deeds. In "AI Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine", you can witness the

tremendous growth of Al's character and watch him become a respectable, confident, and likeable guy. In the beginning of the game, he's a source of humor, and you can laugh at him. By the end of the game, you'll be rooting for him.

**[US]: What was your goal with Al Emmo? What kind of experience is the game aiming to provide? Who would you expect to enjoy the game the most?**

**[BB]:** We set out to make a completely original, high quality game that would satiate a gamer's hunger for a classic style adventure. We wanted to make the game solid, enjoyable, really humorous, logical, and easy to enjoy for everyone who plays. I think anyone who liked the Sierra or Lucas Arts classics is going to love "Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine". For anyone who didn't play the classics, I'd suggest it to anyone who enjoys an immersive story, an adventurous and scenic journey, and the chance to use their thinking caps. The game would appeal to both males and females, teenagers and up.

**[US]: What can you tell us about the availability of the game? How will adventure gamers be able to purchase the completed product?**

**[BB]:** The game will be available through our online store, which can be accessed through [www.himalayastudios.com](http://www.himalayastudios.com) and [www.alememo.com](http://www.alememo.com). Gamers can place an order and have a physical copy of the game shipped to their home. Additionally, the game will likely be available via other channels, like the Just Adventure Store. At some point in the future, we may even have "Al Emmo" localized and available in other countries as well.

**[US]: What was it like working on Al Emmo? Do you have any stories to share with us about the development experience?**

**[BB]:** Making "Al Emmo" has been a long yet rewarding endeavor. The development process has spanned across the globe, and for a period of time, much of the development team lived in one home, working around the clock to bring the game to completion. We even had a company mascot, in the form of a behemoth Great Dane, which lived in our small headquarters!

Many times during the development process, we'd work 18 plus hours a day, for months on end. At one point, I believe I even worked myself to a nervous breakdown. But, the results are worth it!

We will try to release a "Making of Al Emmo" article in the near future which will discuss the development process in further detail. Be sure to look for it on our site!



**[US]: Do you have any other projects currently in the works?**

**[BB]:** We have started preliminary work on a potential future project, but we plan on assessing the reception of “Al Emmo” before committing to any future endeavors.

**[US]: The best of luck to you in your development efforts. I hope everything goes smoothly for the release.**

**[BB]:** Thank you! I’d like to mention, a complimentary demo version of the game is available for everyone to try out; for more information, please visit [www.AIEmmo.com](http://www.AIEmmo.com). Additionally, “Al Emmo” now has a MySpace account at [www.myspace.com/alememo](http://www.myspace.com/alememo), so please add him to your friends list. Finally, we’d like to invite you to our Himalaya Studios Community Forums at [www.himalayaforums.com](http://www.himalayaforums.com).

See you there!

*Adventure Lantern thanks Britney Brimhall for providing us insightful information about Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman’s Mine as well as Himalaya Studios. Here’s hoping we will get more detailed information about the company’s future projects soon. Starting with the development of their Sierra remakes, Miss Brimhall and her team already has quite a bit of experience under their belts. It should be interesting to see the direction Himalaya Studios will take with their next project. In the meantime, if you want to hear more about Al Emmo, Wendy has brought us her review of Al Emmo in this issue.*

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## **Interview with Ingrid Heyn on the Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign** **Conducted by Thaumaturge**

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*The Gabriel Knight series is notable for its dark, well thought-out plots, interesting characters, intelligent use of supernatural themes, and erudite blending of historical fact with fiction. The third game ended with questions unanswered, an arc that had extended throughout the series incomplete. A fourth game would seem to have been originally planned – but no such fourth Gabriel Knight adventure appeared. The Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign was therefore created with the hope of convincing Vivendi Universal to produce a fourth game in the series. Ingrid Heyn, Project Coordinator for the Campaign, agreed to talk with us about the Campaign, and about the Gabriel Knight series in general.*

**Thaumaturge:** First of all, I'd like to thank you for taking the time out to give us this interview. To start with, can you please tell us what the Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign is, and what it aims to do?

**Ingrid Heyn:** The Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign is a project that arose out of discussions on the Vivendi official forum for the GK games when we heard that GK4 was being talked about in "serious discussions". We did not know with whom these discussions were, although clearly both Jane Jensen and Robert Holmes were involved in the discussions. It put heart into the fans, and with the help of willing volunteers, after I was asked to head the project, I put together a website, and we began planning how we could facilitate any further attempts to have GK4 made.

The campaign is thus the major fan-based project to encourage the making of GK4, giving fans our best ideas for promoting GK4 and the entire GK series and providing non-fans with a wealth of information to get them interested in the series so that they, too, would be interested in seeing GK4 made.

We aim to raise awareness of the Gabriel Knight series among those who have not played it, thus increasing the demand for GK4. We also aim to provide fans of the series with the tools they need to be part of our efforts to encourage the making of GK4.

**[T]:** Ah, I see. Tell me please, do you know when these discussions took place, and have you subsequently learned who was involved (aside from Jane Jensen and Robert Holmes) and what, if anything, came of them?

**[IH]:** To date, the information remains unspecified as to when the discussions took place and with whom they occurred. Because of the lack of clarification, it's our opinion that these may have been conducted, and continue to be conducted under a non-disclosure agreement. Were such an agreement not in place, there would be little reason for the lack of specification.

However, I must stress that we have no confirmation on this, so we are truly speculating. The signs are good, though. And I have just received a communication from Robert Holmes in which he thanks us for our continued support and reiterates that he and Jane Jensen are doing everything they can to further the series and GK world.

**[T]: Very interesting - and have you heard anything from Vivendi Universal?**

**[IH]:** To date, the only thing we have heard from Vivendi Universal occurred prior to the report about GK4 being discussed very seriously. In conversation with one of the Vivendi representatives, the moderator for the forum received an invitation to send a letter addressed to Vivendi, via him, on the subject of why GK4 would be desirable. All of the forum members participated in contributing their comments and ideas, and the reply went through several hands before being finalized and sent. Nothing was communicated to us about the effect of the letter, save that it was received.

However, we are in the process of attempting to arrange an interview with a Vivendi Universal representative on the topic of GK4 and adventure games. It would be an intriguing interview.

**[T]: Certainly - I would very much like to see what comes of that. However, should VU turn out to not be interested, is there any possibility of approaching another developer or publisher? If copyright becomes an issue for a commercial game, could a freeware fan-project possibly bear fruit?**

**[IH]:** Any fan-based game would certainly need to be negotiated with Vivendi for permission to create the game. We saw recently how the KQ-based fan game, now called "Silver Lining", ended up receiving permission from Vivendi Universal because of the incredible fan support. That sort of effort would need to be made if a fan-based project were to take off. But there are problems in this scenario. Firstly, the KQ-based game was very close to release, which gave it that huge fan support. A game *in vitro* would not have nearly the same "pull", so we would need to see a fan project very close to completion. Secondly, would Jane Jensen involve herself in a fan-based project, knowing that it may NOT receive permission? Especially considering she is a professional writer and game designer who needs to gain an income from her work? She can't afford to put the immense time and effort into such a project unless it's a paying proposition, I'm sure of that. Thirdly, would Robert Holmes also put his talents into such a fan-based game under the same conditions?

I seriously doubt this. The game might not receive permission to be released, and there it would be... everyone's efforts spent working on a major project that would never see the light of day. And were a further GK game to be created

without Jane Jensen's and Robert Holmes' involvement, it would be like abducting someone else's child.

I strongly believe that Jane Jensen must be the writer and director for any GK game, and that Robert Holmes must be the game's music composer. It is certainly possible that Vivendi may sell the rights to an independent company, but I fear the price would be very high.

**[T]: Good points, certainly. Coming back to the Campaign itself, how would you characterise the current status of the Campaign?**

**[IH]:** With the major articles and information points in place in the Campaign (although we are still writing information to be included, such as a true history of werewolves, and the real truth behind Rennes-le-Château), we are currently at the point where the campaign is going public. I've contacted several game magazines with article ideas, and we hope to receive positive responses which would publicize the campaign among the game world. We're in what I call "Launch Phase".

**[T]: I see - and what comes next, then?**

**[IH]:** Once the articles are accepted for publication, both online and in print magazines, I am encouraging everyone involved in the campaign to do the "street-work". That is, get out onto the streets and near computer game shops, obtain permission from game shop owners, and speak to game consumers about GK and the possibility of GK4. An information pack will standardize what sort of information is disseminated, and alert those who are not aware of the campaign to visit our website and see the range of activities they can involve themselves in to support the campaign.

Some of it is fairly standard: write a letter to Vivendi (we have a pre-written example including address, etc., which people can download and edit to their taste); e-mail Vivendi (again, we have a prepared e-mail ready to edit and send), and a link to the online petition run by yet another fanbase for GK; but also we're encouraging writers to get involved, write articles and have them published (we include a list of contacts), for graphic artists to get involved by contributing fan art for viewing on the site, for people to hold GK parties to which they can invite friends who have never played the game but would be happy to don costume and become aware of the game. We also include suggestions for running GK-based or adventure-game-based fairs or activities to get entire communities or large parts of a town involved.

The more activities, the better.

**[T]: Quite an undertaking! You certainly seem to be sparing no effort in the cause. In that case, how much support have you had from the community,**

**and how great a segment of that support do you expect to be active - that is, to be taking part in at least some of these activities?**

**[IH]:** Quite a few have contributed magnificently in the writing of articles and in other ways. We've had excellent graphic artists become involved by permitting their work on the site. And there have been a few outstanding supporters who have been strongly involved in getting ideas and carrying them out. In particular, Andrea Santorio - which is why he's listed as "trusty lieutenant". Some other fans have bewailed their inability to contribute so far, so this phase will give them the opportunity to help as they've not had the chance to do before.

In any campaign, I know many more will express interest than carry out their interest, but the desire to see Gabriel Knight 4 made is so strong that I believe the percentage of helpers following through will be higher than usual.

**[T]: Excellent then. And what of the Campaign's past - what has the progress of the Campaign been like thus far?**

**[IH]:** We conceived the idea of the Campaign during December of last year (2005). In the design phase, I needed to be working alone, although as soon as I had something to show the other campaign members, they were swift to give feedback and ideas in the development of the site's structure. Once the structure was in place, I was inundated with offers to help with reviews, (reviews of films, books, games, and music relevant to those who enjoyed GK), with writing of articles which would contain unique content researched and written by campaign members, and with graphic design work for the site. People on the forum were enthused and swift to offer their help in many ways. We've even had reviews written in languages other than English, translated into English - literally people all over the world have been desirous of helping.

Currently we have in mind the intention of having the main pages of the site available in a number of different languages. This will probably take a little time, but it's certainly something we want to do.

We're fortunate in having Russian, Italian, Czech, German, Spanish and French speakers involved.

**[T]: Excellent - and when do you expect these translations to become available?**

**[IH]:** I have to reply with the standard developer's reply: "When they're ready!" I will be involved myself with the German and French translations as soon as the outstanding articles are in place. I'm currently working on the history of that quiet little village, Rennes-le-Château, which has involved delving into primary sources from the fourth century and so on. To be realistic, the translations will probably

have a lead-time of two to four months. I'd love to say it would be sooner, and perhaps it may be... but I know that the 2-4 months' timeframe is more realistic.

**[T]: Fair enough. Your article on Rennes-le-Chateau sounds intriguing - can you tell me a little more about that please?**

**[IH]:** It's certainly intriguing! It's been the subject of a storm of controversy, and subjected to amateur treasure-hunters hoping to find the secret treasure mentioned in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, and popularized even more by Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*. But before Dan Brown ever thought of using RLC in fiction, Jane Jensen did so with intricate and engrossing storylines and characterizations. This led me to believe that our site must include the REAL history of this isolated village.

The area was in the hands of the Romans, the Gallo-Romans, the Visigoths, the Franks (from whom came the Merovingian bloodline who were considered the first rulers of "France"), and the Carolingians. And from then on the village's most famous moments came when a hot-headed priest named Bérenger Saunière became *curé* of the village. His extravagant lifestyle and secretiveness about the source of the immense funds he spent needed to be researched, and the truth was bizarre indeed.

But at present, I am pursuing whether or not Pharamond, a purported king in the Merovingian line, actually existed...

Finding the primary sources that mention him is frustrating. It's one of the problems of checking anything online. The internet is certainly a hotbed of information, but it's also a hotbed of disinformation.

**[T]: Certainly true - but how does Pharamond tie in with the mystery of Rennes-le-Chateau?**

**[IH]:** That's why I always pursue primary sources. I need at present to ascertain whether Prosper Tiro (or Prosper of Aquitaine) ever mentioned this Pharamond, or whether the reference occurs in a much later (500 years later) chronicle written by someone else and mistakenly attributed to Prosper. Pharamond is important in the RLC mythology because modern pseudo-historical theorists believe the Merovingian line is related to Troy, to Christ, to Atlanteans, and so on. They need, in other words, a connecting figure between a known chieftain of the Franks, and the first verified king of the Merovingian line. Pharamond is that link.

Other links are also used, but they are clearly apocryphal and not nearly so problematic. In assuming that RLC is the site of a fabulous treasure, continuity is needed in the story of who lived in RLC.

All sorts of wild claims have been made, including the story that Blanche de Castile, who acted as regent for her son Louis, King of France, lived in the castle of RLC.

**[T]: And on what do proponents of this claim base this?**

**[IH]:** Many of the claims are based on deliberate misinformation fed by one of the most intriguing and bizarre characters of the twentieth century. A man named Pierre Plantard, who wished to "prove" his fantasies of being an important French figure, decided to "go for gold" and claim he was the legitimate ruler of France. Nothing like aiming for the top, is there? In support of this claim, he collaborated with another prankster who thought the whole idea extremely amusing and a wonderful practical joke upon France, and together they created fake documents, fake riddles, fake references to books that never existed, fake writings and extracts which they deposited in the National Bibliotheque in France under false names (usually the name of someone who had just died and thus couldn't contradict them) and so on. The truth behind their efforts is one of the most wonderfully outrageous true stories I've ever investigated.

Plantard took the notion of the various possible sources for the "treasure", based upon existing extravagances claimed by a man named Noël Corbu who bought the wonderful domain built by Saunière, and turned it into a hotel. To make the hotel more profitable, he came up with the idea of embellishing the local Saunière legend.

And it was he, Corbu, who first proposed a possible source or two for this treasure. The legend was further vastly embellished by Plantard, working very much behind the scenes.

**[T]: Very strange indeed - it seems as though you have quite a project before you just in researching Rennes-le-Chateau!**

**[IH]:** The research of RLC was certainly bigger than I ever realised. I am eternally grateful to Jane Jensen for using the wonderful mythical elements in GK3, so that I and no doubt others became intrigued with what lay behind these myths.

**[T]: Indeed. Moving on from Rennes-le-Chateau and from the Campaign, let's discuss the Gabriel Knight series itself, and the as-yet unrealized Gabriel Knight 4.**

**First of all, why Gabriel Knight? What is it that appeals to you about this series enough to undertake so great an endeavor as the Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign, and what do you think the series' strengths are?**

**[IH]:** Gabriel Knight is a series that combines so many elements that appeal to me (and obviously to many others). The hero - a flawed, wisecracking, not-exactly-saintly bad-boy with attitude and a surprising amount of courage and an interesting way of going about solving things that are mysterious - is immensely appealing. The mysteries he faces are a combination of classic whodunit style mysteries, the supernatural (expressed in terms of the light and the darkness, the hunting of the shadow-world that seeks to destroy the light), the historical elements (using well-known figures and turning their stories around), and simply terrific story-telling.

The mood is extraordinarily attractive. The puzzles are intrinsic to the story. The way in which the games progress the plot is very attention-grabbing and engrossing. The atmosphere into which each games seep the players, a combination of the powerful writing of Jane Jensen and the superbly moody music of Robert Holmes, and the graphics (which were for their time fabulous), make the games classics.

And the story is progressive. The player is drawn in... wants to know what will happen next... The games up to GK3 finish on a cliff-hanger.

It's like a cry in the wilderness of the narrative imperative. We **MUST** know what happens next. Without this resolution, there is a sense of emptiness and lack of completion.

The only one who can resolve this tension is Jane Jensen. The games are also so compelling in those elements which are so incredibly popular today that I have no doubt these are the games to bring adventure games in general back to their place.

And that place is in the forefront of computer games.

**[T]: And do you think that a Gabriel Knight 4 will offer this completion, or is it more likely that it too will end on a cliff-hanger, leaving fans hungry for more?**

**[IH]:** I believe that, like all good resolutions in such a complicated story, which has its own world and its own internal motivations, there will be a completion in part, that will lead to further possibilities. I believe that Jane Jensen has said there's a great deal more to the GK story, and I hope she is given the opportunity to pursue that. I would not like to say that GK 4 should resolve the story, but it must resolve the current plot tension.

And from then on... I'd be happy to wait upon Jane Jensen's vision of the series.

If it goes further, how wonderful! If it leads only to GK4, then so be it. But GK4 at **LEAST** there must be...



**[T]: Fair enough. What about the characters? Are there any that you'd like to see returning from the previous installments of the series, aside of course from the eponymous hero?**

**[IH]:** There have been some fascinating characters throughout the series. I know many fans (and I'm among them) want to see Grace returning, not only because she's one of the aspects of the story arc which we consider uncompleted, but also because in herself she is such a wonderful character. I'd like to see Moseley return, and I have no doubt he will. I would also be fascinated to see some of the smaller characters return, but I also appreciate the way in which Jane Jensen has created a fabulous array of "bit parts" in each of the games, which somehow helps to create the entire atmosphere of the game. I must also admit that I'd be extremely interested in seeing some of Gabe's ancestors appear. Obviously this would need to be dealt with in a less than straightforward way...

**[T]: Do you have a favourite "bit part" character?**

**[IH]:** When it comes to "bit parts", I think my favorite was the mime whose antics helped Gabe in the very first game. Somehow, that appealed immensely to me... He had nothing to say, but his actions...!

**[T]: Certainly an unexpected choice! What about the technology - would you like to see Gabriel Knight 4 utilizing a 3D engine, as did Gabriel Knight 3 (albeit presumably more advanced), or would you prefer a return to full motion video, or even sprites, as used in Gabriel Knight 2 and 1 respectively?**

**[IH]:** As far as the look of it went, I think none of the games outdid GK2. It looked simply beautiful and I found the engine perfectly comfortable. GK3's use of the 3D engine was, I think, a nice idea that just never quite worked. There were of course continuing problems through the game's development pertinent to the engine. However, I think to be a game that will make its mark, the technology must be ground-breaking and innovative, using the most powerful and effective of modern design elements and game engine developments. Adventure games used to lead the way - let it be so again.

**[T]: But surely that risks leaving behind - and possibly thus alienating - those with less powerful computers?**

**[IH]:** That's an interesting consideration. But I do remember that my major drive in upgrading my computers was always, "Oh no, this particular game won't play on my computer. I'll have to upgrade." Upgrading in order to be able to play one's favorite games is nothing new. But it may be possible to create the game in such

a way that even those with computers that are not quite the very latest can still play.

I would imagine any game developer would be focusing on creating games that will appeal to the widest demographic.

**[T]: One would hope so, with perhaps the occasional exception.**

**[IH]:** While I myself would have no personal qualms in a game using decades-old technology (I'd love it, in fact - I'm a nostalgia buff), attracting other game players might then be a problem.

**[T]: Of course. Tell me, is anything known about what the story for Gabriel Knight 4 might be?**

**[IH]:** We do know that Jane Jensen has always had in mind a truly fascinating idea for GK4. She intends the game to centre around ghosts - a hot topic in films and television series today. And it being Jane Jensen, I know it will be ghosts as no one else has ever created them before.

She also mentioned, in conjunction with ghosts, notions of past regrets, things left undone... It sounds tremendously exciting, and I believe she envisaged GK4 as occurring in England.

There are hints of this in the in-game computer, SIDney, when one inputs "Gk4". But there's also the tantalizing possibility of India as the setting for at least part of the game.

Grace, after all, has left for India after a pivotal moment towards the end of GK3.

**[T]: It certainly does sound interesting; the two themes sound as if they should be quite complimentary.**

**[IH]:** Indeed, these are elements that seem created in a feedback loop that I'm sure will energize the story immensely.

**[T]: The ending of Gabriel Knight 3 is noteworthy for its scope and daring - do you think that a fourth game will succeed in bettering it?**

**[IH]:** With many other writers and for many another series, I'd have doubts. But one thing about Jane Jensen that's captivated all GK players: she seems to reach one plot crest only to go on to further and even more intriguing crests. So far, she has not disappointed with the Gabriel Knight story. One is tempted to say the revelation at the end of GK3 couldn't be topped...

I think Jane Jensen will not try to "top" it in the same way. She'll turn the story into another direction, lead us to yet another unexpected development so that once again, we will gasp and say, "I didn't see THAT coming!"

If GK4 has its storyline of the same high standard maintained so far, and the look and feel that takes advantage of the best elements today, and puzzles integrated into the game as cleverly as in games 2 and 3 in particular, this could be the adventure game of all time.

It certainly has that potential.

**[T]: Beginning to conclude, we return to the topic of the Campaign - how optimistic do you feel about the Campaign's success?**

**[IH]:** I've been optimistic from the start that we couldn't do anything to HARM the prospect of GK4! But the response has been very good to date (in spite of a setback due to hacking), and it's certainly alerted a number of people to the games who had never really been aware of it before. With the continued information we have received from sources, I remain optimistic that we are doing something positive, that is already raising awareness of GK, and that is impelling people to write to Vivendi Universal with a plea for GK4 to be made. These are positive things, and it can only get better from here on. I'm cautiously optimistic from here on.

**[T]: That seems to be a reasonable point of view. Finally, how did you come to be involved with the Campaign?**

**[IH]:** I've been in love with adventure games for years, and when I finally got hold of the GK series and began playing it, I was riveted by its storyline and atmosphere. I'd heard a lot, even before playing the game, about how the fourth game had never been made. I'd heard, also, about petitions that went nowhere. I thought... if we want this game made, a serious fan effort needs to be made. When we heard that discussions were underway, even though we didn't know the details, I was galvanized and decided to share my enthusiasm with the other fans on the forum. This eventuated into our mutual campaign, with everyone contributing ideas on what to call the campaign, what to include, our strategies and so on. Probably because I'm a project-oriented person (I undertake things and like to see results), and passionate about the excellent GK series and other adventure games, I was asked to spearhead the campaign.

**[T]: Thank you very much Ingrid for sharing this with us, and for giving us your time and taking part in this interview. Good luck with the Campaign, and may it prosper under your leadership.**

**[IH]:** Thank you - I enjoyed the opportunity to talk with you and share our exciting vision. It's been a great pleasure to discuss these with you.

# Al Emmo and the Lost Dutchman's Mine

PC Review by Wendy Nellius



As I listen to the first few moments of dialog, I am transported to the past in a flash. I had played plenty of text adventures in school, but not having a computer at home put me at quite a disadvantage. It wasn't until the mid 90's that I realized just how much I was missing. I have to thank my brother-in-law who sold me his old "upgraded to the max" 486. He also lent me my first non-text game ever:

Full Throttle by LucasArts. This was followed immediately by the purchase of The Secret of Monkey Island by LucasArts, Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards, and Sword of Shannara by Legend Entertainment. I spent the next month staring at the monitor in awe. I had so many questions. Was it wrong to have this much fun on a computer? Could it be illegal to laugh this much? How could all these characters carry so many inventory items on their person? Isn't it wrong to steal? I have to combine what?? with what????? That just doesn't make sense... Sure it does. Hence, an adventure game addict was born. And, I have never looked back.....until now. From Himilaya Studios comes an enchanting adventure that will have you laughing your way down memory lane.

Make sure you watch the introduction before starting actual game play. It's on the main menu as a separate selection. The introductory cut scene begins as we see Jacob Waltz and Eduardo Peralto in a mine deep within the mountains. They are close to finding the lost Aztec gold. But, Jacob is sickly and can not continue on. They confirm secret promises they have made to each other. The danger of the situation is clear.



Fast forward 2 years as we watch a train journey across the desert to its destination. Al Emmo, our main character, is on a quest to snag himself a wife. Shouldn't be too hard, right? Well, Al does have a lot of factors riding against him. First of all, he's middle-aged, balding and still lives with Mommy and Daddy. Add being vertically challenged with a high-pitched whiney voice that could rival

nails on a blackboard and the challenge of this quest becomes quite obvious. Wanting to make his parents proud, Al orders himself up a fine woman from one of those mail order catalogs. All he has to do is pick her up. She's arriving by train in Anozira; a small run-down western town set in the heart of the desert. It's a long trek from New York to Anozira but this is all worth it to Al. He's going to have a wife. In fact, she'll be the first woman he's ever had. Sad, isn't it?



So, the day is here. Al's life is about to change. He arrives in Anozira by train and heads over to Kevin's saloon where he awaits his new bride. Ahh....the dainty damsel arrives. Ivanna has high hopes of living the good life with her new rich husband. [Insert sound of screeching halt here]. It seems there has been quite the miscommunication. Al has money???

Well, sure.....if you count the allowance he gets from his parents. But, at least Al has a good job, right? Uhmmm.....wrong. Alas, Ivanna is not into charity work and beats a hasty retreat out of there. Poor Al... He'll have to head home empty handed. But not so fast! Heading home expeditiously will require a train station that has frequent arrivals and departures. It's just not Al's day today (or really any day for that matter). So, it's off to find some accommodations for the night.

Back at the bar, you can almost hear the choirs sing as Al gets his first glimpse of a real-life angel; Miss Rita Peralto. Does the last name sound familiar? It should. You saw her father in the introduction. Rita is a fiery Latin beauty desired by all the town's men. She's so popular, there's even a flyer listing her attributes and hints of the ways to her heart. Only the cream of crop will have a chance at winning her hand. Considering Rita is working furiously to keep from losing her family home, it might also help that the eligible suitor has some money. Cream of the crop and money???. That certainly knocks our poor little Al out of the race. Wait! He couldn't possibly be thinking of trying for Rita, could he? Our Al is a plucky little guy and determined to make the most of his foray into independence. His quest has now taken on a whole new light. He will do everything in his power to help Rita save her house and win her love. Try not to laugh too hard, but you (playing as Al) will be in charge of making it happen. Let the game begin.



Al Emmo and The Lost Dutchman's Mine is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person entirely point and click adventure created using the Adventure Game Studio (AGS) game engine. It is the characters and the dialog that truly bring Al Emmo and The Lost Dutchman's Mine into a class of its own. Each 3D character has a dialog portrait that pops up any time a conversation is initiated. This allows you to see the characters in close-up detail. All the renderings were great and fit well with each character's voice and personality. Yes, they may not have the smoothest body movements, but this does not detract from the game at all.

The voice acting is outstanding. I was surprised to see John Bell listed in the credits. If you remember, he did a lot of the voice acting for Lifestream and Shady Brook. My wish to see his voice featured in more games has been granted. John supplies (in classic TV game show fashion) the voice for one of the most prominent (non-seen) characters in the game; the



narrator. Hah, bet you didn't think there would be a narrator. The narrator's job is to provide verbal detail for every clickable item in the game as well as to torture Al by constantly picking on him. These descriptions and witty comments are gloriously funny and will have you clicking on every inch of the screen just to hear what he says. Chris Warren provides the voice of our quirky little Al. The voice is a bit off-putting at first, but hang in there. It is the perfect voice for Al and by the end of the game, I couldn't imagine any other. As enjoyable as the voices were, I could list off every voice actor; but then there are credits for that. Overall, well done!

There are a lot of characters to interact with in this small town. Antonio Bandana (sound like any movie star you know?) is Al's arch nemesis. He's a slick Latin romeo and just happens to be royalty. He always seems to be there to thwart Al's attempts at romance with Rita. He has that sexy accent that makes women swoon. But, he's not perfect. The ever so sexy Antonio has an even more prominent lisp. The mayor of the town could use a good hearing aid. His correct answer ratio is about 50%. Koko, a local store owner speaks to you in



chopped up sentences. It's almost like English is his second language by choice although he doesn't know any others. His store's claim to fame is in stocking next to nothing on the shelves. He's sure this strategy will pay off. The local hospitality house has another familiar character and will have you chuckling. I won't spoil it by saying who it is. There's a snot-nosed geek working over at the post office. If

rudeness could be sold, this kid would be a millionaire. At least he'd be able to afford some Proactive acne solution for that face of his.

A huge thank you goes out to Daniel Stacy for the superb writing. I haven't laughed this much in a long time. The one-liners, innuendos, and witty banter come at you like rapid fire. The humor is dead-on from beginning to end. It is this aspect that will truly take you back to the days of old. It really cracked me up when Al got a certain delivery via "Fed Up" who promptly insulted Al and threw his package on the ground.



Sometimes I think my packages get that same treatment in real life. The story itself is engaging and will keep you interested up to the end. Al is a true underdog and we all love to root for the underdog. So, while your brain may be saying "Come on Pal, give it up already", you'll continue to help in hopes that Al can get some happiness for once.

According to the official website, the backgrounds have been hand-painted with acrylics and pixel edited in Photoshop. That being said, the backgrounds are wonderful. They have a cartoon-like feel to them and are so bright and rich with color. The small town feel has been conveyed well. The landscape is filled with red rocks and appropriate vegetation for the area. Having been to Arizona which Anozira is obviously modeled after, I can say I saw miles and miles of those backgrounds. You have to pay attention or you might miss the rays of sun filtering across the landscape. You also will see the little swirls of dust and sand kicking up here and there.

The local bar is like home base for Al and he will return there often. The town has a Sheriff's office, Hospitality House (you can guess about that one), post office, train station, Bubba's barnyard, Rita's house, the Mayor's house and other locations. Outside the town, there is a beautiful oasis pretty much consisting of a 2 ft. deep body of water, Indian encampment and of course, a mine.

Each location is quirky and brings a sense of fun to the game. In addition, there are numerous animated cut scenes which bring depth to the story. My only complaint is that at certain places, they were a tad blurry. I kept checking my glasses to make sure it wasn't me. But, they were still enjoyable and provide a lot of entertainment. The game is divided into 9 acts. At the end of each act, the storyline is moved along to the next act with the use of comic book cut scenes.



This was a surprise and quite the refreshing change. It would be great to see more of this technique in other games.

The puzzles in Al Emmo are mainly inventory-based and quite logical. Of course, no one just gives something to a character like Al. He has to work for it. It's truly a scavenger hunt here; hunting for some obscure flower to figuring out some way to trap termites. Remember, almost everything you see on the screen can be clicked on. There was the dread of having to solve a cryptogram and knowing that in order to get a hint, I'd have to go talk to that jerky kid over at the post office again. You'll be constantly running off to find some weirdo item to complete your tasks. I'm not even going to mention what Al has to do at the Hospitality House, but I will say I almost fell off my chair laughing. And, although you have to complete certain tasks before you can move on to the next act, game play is non-linear. You can take items left and right even before you have a use for them. The puzzles up their difficulty level in the last chapter. Beware --- you can die near the end of the game. I won't spoil it, but be warned that you're going to need a little speed. All the puzzles fit well with the environment and the storyline. Oh.....must not forget the easter eggs! Everyone loves easter eggs. Due to a shorter time frame of getting this review done, I didn't have time to really look for them. I managed to find one of them by accident. That's ok.....this is a game fully worthy of a relaxing replay.



Navigating through Al Emmo is a piece of cake. The cursors are classic. There is one standard cross like cursor which you can place anywhere on the screen and have Al move to that spot. Placing it an exit location will provide transition between the screens. There is a large set of teeth used for conversation. A large hand is used to use or pick up items. Oversized geeky glasses are used to examine items. The

correct cursor can be chosen by clicking on your right mouse button to scroll through the options. You can also move your cursor to the top right hand side of the game screen and get the options for eye, hand, mouth and inventory. Clicking on inventory will allow all the items Al has collected to appear at the bottom of the screen. Items are easily selected for use simply by left clicking on them. One of the most amusing features in the game involves the inventory and how....or rather where Al holds everything. It's amazing how many items can be stuffed down the front of one's pants. The top left of your game screen is where you access the main menu (Setting). It is here that you can load, save or quit your game. I'm assuming there are unlimited saves but I never used enough of



them to find out. You can alter the volume for music, speech and overall sound volume. Special effects can be turned on or off. Subtitle options are also available. Players can choose text only, text and voice, or voice only. A most welcome feature is the addition of a map. While AI does a fair amount of running around in the beginning of the game (yes, you can double click and make him run), once he has visited an important location once, it will appear on the map. He can then click on that map location and be instantly transported there.

The accompanying soundtrack provides a flavor all its own. The music practically screams Old Wild West in some location. Each location has its own particular flair. At the oasis, it makes you think of mellow Beach Boys and those Gidget beach movies. At the Indian encampment, the music is tribal at its best. It's strange that even though the music was decidedly original and made for this game, I felt as though I was listening to a Monkey Island game. The music has that same feel to it. Perhaps it's just an old school classic feel that I'm clinging to. But, that is what's so wonderful about this game. That classic adventure game feeling permeates from every corner of the game and all the many elements meld together as one.



As you can probably tell, I found this game to be absolutely delightful. My trip down memory lane was as rewarding as ever. There are gamers out there who may not fully appreciate the retro feel of this game. Games are a lot different these days as companies compete to see who can blow the other out of the water with dazzling special effects and killer instincts. In the midst of all the madness comes AI Emmo, bringing us back to our roots and reminding those of us who have been around a while what a true adventure game was and should be; just pure fun. It took me about 16 hours to play, but I didn't even cover everything that I wanted. I suspect that I will get even more from the game the 2<sup>nd</sup> time around. The fact that this game made me laugh from beginning to end is ultimately what determined its stellar grade. Fantastic humor, outstanding writing, and fabulous old-school graphics make this game a must for every adventure collection. Do not let this one pass you by.

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|---|--|
| <p><b>Developer:</b> Himalaya Studios<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Himalaya Studios<br/> <b>Platform:</b> PC<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Adventure<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> July 2006<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 96/100</p> | <p><b>Minimum System Requirements:</b><br/> Windows® 95/98ME/2000/XP<br/> Pentium® 800 MHz or higher<br/> 128 MB RAM<br/> 32-Bit Color Display (1MB Video RAM)<br/> DirectX 5 or above (9.0 recommended)<br/> CD-ROM Drive<br/> Hard Drive space of 350 MB</p> |
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## Secrets of Da Vinci: The Forbidden Manuscript

PC Review by Fallen Angel

### A unique and especially talented man:

Before saying anything about the game itself, I would like to say a few words about Leonardo da Vinci. I'm sure that you all know him -or at least you have heard a few things about him. However, since lately his name has been mixed up with mysterious affairs, conspiracies and religious intrigues, because of a talented novelist, I would like to make it clear that Da Vinci was a man worthy enough to cause a storm in our brains even without being caught up in such affairs. A man who represents the incarnation of the Homo Universalis, who with his brilliance and unlimited imagination worked on various fields of the Arts and Sciences, and for that has deservedly won recognition. A man with multiple talents who worked on -besides painting- architecture, music, researching the natural world, anatomy, design of war machinery, and more. A man who has left such a major lifework that, even until today, centuries after his death, scientists, historians and art critics are passionately studying his works.



Kheops Studio, wishing to honor such a unique and truly remarkable mind, as Da Vinci's, decided to create an adventure dedicated to the man, the artist, the scientist, the inventor. Not the occultist and the hypothetical member (I do not know whether it is a fact or not) of a religious cult. And I find this really wonderful! This is a game that tenderly involves some secrets, but it definitely is more a game with which you will remember and come closer to the major

inventor, the artist, the scientist, and generally the unique mind of Leonardo da Vinci through some of his notes, works and inventions.

### Story:

Valdo, a young man from Florence, visits the last residence Leonardo da Vinci had, Manoir du Cloux, which now is being occupied by Marie Babou, the lover of the King of France according to many rumours. His purpose is to study Leonardo's inventions and to find and take back to his master and Leonardo's heir, Francesco Melzi, the drawing of 'Battle of Anghiari'. Or so he said to Madam Babou in order to gain access into the manor and most of its apartments. His real purpose is obviously a different story since he is no longer a student of Melzi. Six months ago Melzi had dismissed Valdo when he discovered that his young pupil

had copied one of Da Vinci's paintings and had sold it for an important sum of money. Valdo's real purpose is to discover -without drawing any attention on himself- where Leonardo hid a forbidden manuscript before dying three years ago. For whom he works for, what is the context of the manuscript, and why his employer wants it, is of no interest to Valdo. His natural curiosity and his attraction to actions slightly immoral are enough to keep him going.

Valdo will meet Babou, a woman who is quite fond of Da Vinci's work and knows a lot about it, but who, at the same time, is rather cold towards Valdo. So he will have to gain her trust through gifts and favors. He will also meet Saturnin, a man responsible for the preservation and the maintenance of everything in the manor. Valdo will find him suspicious from the very beginning. Moreover, he will meet the King's trusty Hector, as well as the King of France himself. What was their relationship with Leonardo? Which of these people can Valdo trust now? Where is the forbidden and much desired manuscript hidden? And mostly importantly, what is contained within the manuscript? While trying to answer these questions, Valdo will come across many clues Leonardo left behind, and even more enigmas that surround them. If he wants to succeed, he will have to understand Leonardo's work, his way of thinking, and the codifications and tricks he so much liked to use as to protect his thoughts.



## Puzzles:

Once more Kheops Studio presents a game that is being characterized by its inventive, lovely, and rational puzzles. This time the stunners are the puzzles that you have to solve in the inventory. And of course I do not mean the simple combination of items in order to create a new one. Besides, SDV follows the



steps of ECHO, where you cannot combine any items in the inventory. On the contrary, in the various hot spots that you come across you will be expected to combine two or more items in order to create a new one, like gold coins for example. So, what kind of puzzles do you have to solve in the inventory?! Part of your inventory's screen (the central upper part to be exact) consists of a briefcase in which all of Leonardo's notes, that you find

while exploring the Manoir du Cloux, are being added. However, those notes need to be processed if they are to reveal their hidden context. In some cases you just have to decrypt them while in others you have to reconstruct the drawing of a mechanism or unveil the well hidden information that they contain on a page that seems blank and unwritten at first glance. Last but not least, Valdo himself is depicted in a portrait in the upper right corner of the inventory screen and you need to 'readjust' his appearance (his clothes and the accessories he is bearing) in order to solve certain puzzles in the game.



Another stunner is the gauge of conscience that SDV includes. This gauge leans towards either good or evil depending on your actions while playing. The way you will choose to obtain certain objects, to react with the game's characters, and to collect valuable information determines the values of the gauge. Depending on what the values are on the gauge, the game enables or disables some courses of action (something which I have not seen

personally since I have not had the chance yet to play SDV again). This of course could not be functional if you could not resolve a situation in different ways. And indeed you can. Let's see an example: say that you need sugar for some reason. Are you going to search for the necessary ingredients to create sugar in the laboratory? Are you going to buy some sugar from Saturnin without tormenting yourself in searching the area? Or maybe you are going to steal the needed component so that you will obtain some sugar without wasting any of your few valuable little gold coins? In any case, this is not a walk in the park, and you will have to face the consequences of your actions. You want to create sugar in the laboratory and do everything yourself? You will have to search for all the necessary ingredients. You want to buy anything you may need? Sooner or later you will have wasted all your valuable gold coins and you will have to find ways to obtain new ones. Maybe you prefer to steal everything and not lacerate yourself? Then deal with your meager score in the point system! ;-)

There is one feature that I think is common in all of Kheops Studio's games: their difficulty level. So once again, the majority of the game's puzzles are between easy and medium difficulty, and few puzzles are fairly more demanding. In my opinion, the most demanding of all is a puzzle regarding the Mona Lisa. Among other things you have to do in order to solve this puzzle (copy the Mona Lisa that



is!), you have to confront a slider puzzle, which I must admit was quite hard since the picture you have to recombine is rather blurred. Nonetheless, even this particular puzzle is lovely since it engages you to the copy of such an ingenious piece of art. Surely it was not easy for Da Vinci to paint this portrait. Should it be easy for you to copy it? Maybe it should; and maybe the fact that there is a slider puzzle -especially a hard one to solve- will get on your nerves. Personally, however, I loved it even though it frustrated me for quite a while. Maybe just knowing that almost each and every puzzle in SDV is based on the notes, the inventions or the paintings of Da Vinci, is a challenge powerful enough to make you get down to solving any puzzle you come across without ever complaining about anything. Who wouldn't want to have Da Vinci's notes in his or her hands and mess about with alchemy or manufacture things based on the Master's very notes?

In short, SDV is a game rich in puzzles. Not only mandatory puzzles that you need to resolve in order to proceed with the story, but optional puzzles as well that you can solve in order to (besides the eternal joy of solving a puzzle) raise as much as you can the score in the familiar and beloved point system, which always provokes you to reach the maximum score possible. However, do not let yourselves be disappointed if your score is not that high. Perhaps the maximum score is not what you suppose it is! ;-)



### Graphics - Music:

SDV is realized using a first person 360° view. The locations one visits in the game, though few in number, are well-designed, full of detail, and incredibly harmonious to the era that they represent. One of the graphic's details that I personally enjoyed a great deal is the plethora of Da Vinci's paintings, drawings and drafts that adorn the whole game. Da Vinci's paintings and the various tapestries adorn the walls of the manor while revealing one of Leonardo's most vivid characteristics: his artistic nature. His personal apartments are graced with an abundance of Da Vinci's drawings and sketches, reminding other aspects of his restless spirit, like those of an explorer, an anthropologist, an astronomer, a mechanic, an inventor, and in general those of a scientist. What's more, within the inventory all the extracts of his writings and the way in



which he used to encrypt them so that not everyone could decipher them -or just because he was left-handed, define him to us as a man who was truly unique. I feel that all these graphical details give the mark of Leonardo and render the game an intellectual challenge just by this aspect. Finally, the music background of SDV, having calm periods and tense moments to point out the powerful scenes of the game, is satisfactory, without being, however, anything extraordinary.

### In conclusion:

SDV is a (rather short) game that wants to present you or remind you of a unique man: Leonardo da Vinci. A game that offers the opportunity to everyone who admires Leonardo's multifaceted mind, to buckle down with his encrypted notes, to recreate the most famous of his paintings, to see a large sum of his sketches and paintings, and to rebuild or repair some of his inventions.

In conclusion, I would say that this definitely is one of the better-designed and remarkable games from Kheops Studio. A game that will sweetly lacerate you with its puzzles while presenting you Da Vinci and part of his work.

However, I'm afraid I have to say that this is not a game which I would recommend to every adventure gamer. Those of you, who prefer story based adventures and strong characters, will not find much of a challenge in this game. The rest of you... get ready for another adventure full of challenging puzzles!



The final grade is 85/100.

**Developer:** Kheops Studio  
**Publisher:** Nobilis  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** June 2006  
**Grade:** 85/100

**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Windows® 98SE/ME/2000/XP  
 Pentium® III 800 MHz  
 64 MB RAM  
 CD-ROM 16x  
 64MB DirectX 9 compatible Video Card  
 1.2 BG free disk space  
 Mouse and Keyboard

# Lunar Deep

PC Review by Ugur Sener

You were surprised to find the strange canister. Hesitantly, you opened it to reveal a mysterious message. The parchment spoke of an ancient civilization. Many years ago, a group of people had turned away from the rest of mankind in fear of oppression. In order to preserve their race and their belief systems, these moon worshippers sought solitude in a series of underground tunnels.



They carried their entire civilization into the caverns. In order to stay alive within the tunnels, they built an intricate machine. The technological marvel provided heat, light, and air to the underground civilization. Without the machine, the people would surely perish. It was the life force of an entire race. But even the most intricate work of technology occasionally needs maintenance.

The message told you that the systems that supported the caverns were failing. And to make things worse, the members of the ancient race no longer remember how to repair the device. With each passing day, staying alive inside the tunnels becomes more and more difficult. On the brink of extinction, they attempt to contact the surface world as a last resort. Perhaps someone of superior intellect would come across the message. Perhaps they would be able to get into the caverns and repair the machine.

Could the message be real? Could there truly be an ancient civilization that survived underground for so many years? The note spoke of a secret entrance to the tunnels. It could only be opened during a lunar eclipse. Nervously, you made your way to the location of the entrance. As the moon began to cast its soothing light across the nighttime sky and the time of the eclipse drew ever closer, you knew you could be on the verge of an incredible discovery. But more importantly, you could be the last hope of a dying race.



Lunar Deep is a first-person adventure game from AncientRein Gaming. Designed and developed entirely by a single person, Lunar Deep is a pleasant

game of exploration and discovery. It is about revealing the secrets of an ancient civilization. You will be traveling through mysterious caverns and trying to understand the inner workings of strange machinery.

The strongest element of Lunar Deep is the presentation. The game may not have a bleeding edge 3D engine, but it does carry a good deal of style that enhances the experience. From the moment you solve the first puzzle and make your way into the tunnels, the game gives you the impression that something is not quite right. Subtle hints communicate that the life-giving machine is indeed in dire need of repair. Ominous ambient sounds create an uneasy tone. At the same time, the intricate mechanisms used to lock doors or help with the transportation across the tunnels give you the impression that you are in a strange and unusual place. The curious lack of people inhabiting the caverns intensifies the effect. Where are these people that were so desperately in need of help? You encounter a couple of people, but where are the other representatives of the race? The caverns seem inviting and foreboding at the same time.



Traveling through the underworld civilization has a feeling undeniably akin to Myst. Played from a first-person perspective, Lunar Deep focuses on quiet exploration in a strange environment. Character interaction hardly comes into play. You are almost completely on your own to search through the caverns and try to find a way to fix the machine. Clues are provided through documents scattered around the caves. Careful examination of the environment and deductive reasoning is required to make progress.



The game features a very simple mouse-driven interface. Intuitive mouse icons are used to depict available actions. The default hand icon turns into a pointing finger when it is possible to turn or move towards an indicated direction. A clenched hand icon is used to depict interactive objects like levers and switches. The inventory is accessible through a bag icon on the top left corner of the screen. When you bring the mouse over the bag, you will

be able to see available inventory items across the top portion of the screen. In order to use an item, you have to select it and drag it over a hotspot. It is also possible to combine items within the inventory.



Lunar Deep offers several inventory-based puzzles and a series of logic puzzles that typically revolve around manipulating switches to gain access to an area. The puzzles are not especially difficult. Clues are provided through the documents you will find, the conversations you will have with the two other characters, or sometimes directly on the puzzle itself. Finding required inventory items should be fairly easy as long as you carefully survey each room. However, there are a couple of hotspots that are rather small and might be very easy to miss the first time you are going through an area. Overall, Lunar Deep is not extremely challenging, but it is not a total walk in the park either.



The only problem that truly hurts Lunar Deep is the game's length. The entire game spans over a relatively small area and does not give players very many places to explore. Just as you really start getting into Lunar Deep, the game abruptly ends. While the experience is pleasant and the ending does have an unexpected twist, the game would have greatly benefited from a few additional rooms and puzzles.

Lunar Deep has an interesting concept that compels players to explore the caverns. The graphics, sound effects, and the voice acting are all sufficient to get the job done. There are a number of fun puzzles to solve across the tunnels. Unfortunately, the short length of the game and the abrupt ending does significantly detract from the experience. However, it should be noted that Lunar Deep was released at a very reasonable retail price. Available through the official Lunar Deep Web site, the downloadable version costs a mere six dollars. As such, despite its short length, if you are looking for a puzzle-driven adventure game to spend the afternoon, consider giving Lunar Deep a try. Sure, it's not brimming with the latest technology, but Lunar Deep is still a charming game that should offer adventure gamers a pleasant couple of hours.

The final grade is 73/100.

**Developer:** Ancient Rein Gaming  
**Publisher:** Ancient Rein Gaming  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** May 2006  
**Grade:** 73/100

**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP  
 Pentium® III 600 MHz  
 128 MB RAM  
 True Color Video Card  
 Windows Compatible Sound Card  
 Mouse, keyboard, and speakers

# The Tulse Luper Journey

PC Review by Thaumaturge

He was a traveller, wandering the world, and an observer to the twentieth century. He was many things to many people: a lover, an artist - even a spy.

Tulse Luper was a prisoner for most of his life, yet he was present for events that shaped the world in which we live.

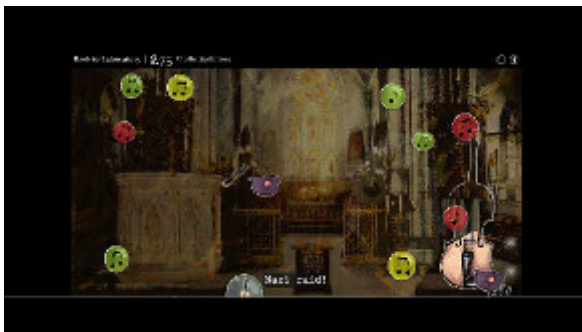


To posterity, Tulse Luper left a strange chronicle of his life: ninety-two suitcases, scattered around the world, each containing its own enigmatic collection. Now three major research centers around the world are studying Tulse Luper's life through the suitcases. As they are uncovered, each suitcase is sent to one of the Nordberg Institute in Norway, the Huyen Centre in Japan, or the Capmid Research Facility in the United States, where researchers try to puzzle out the mystery behind their contents.

Why would Tulse Luper pack one suitcase with fifty-five men on horseback, and another with the pencils used to draw a prophecy? What does the radio equipment in yet another suitcase mean? This is the puzzle behind the puzzles of the Tulse Luper Journey.

The Tulse Luper Journey is part of a greater body of work by Peter Greenaway, a project spanning multiple media, from book to film to game, all centered around the figure of Tulse Luper.

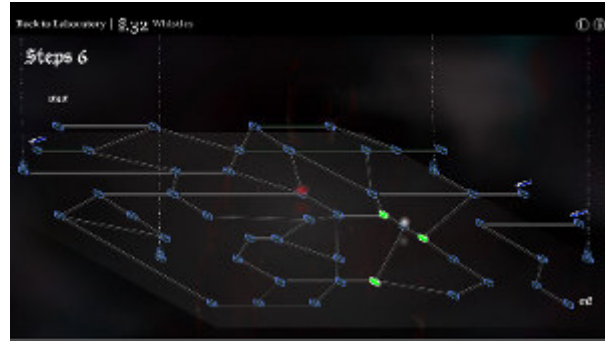
This part of the project takes the form of an online browser-based game, in which the players take the part of researchers attempting to solve the mysteries of the ninety-two suitcases.



To unlock a suitcase, the player is first required to play a short game, based on the theme of the suitcase's contents. In each game, the aim is either to complete a task or set of tasks, or reach a particular score, sometimes with a time limit. For the most part, these are small puzzle games, but a few call for skill with a

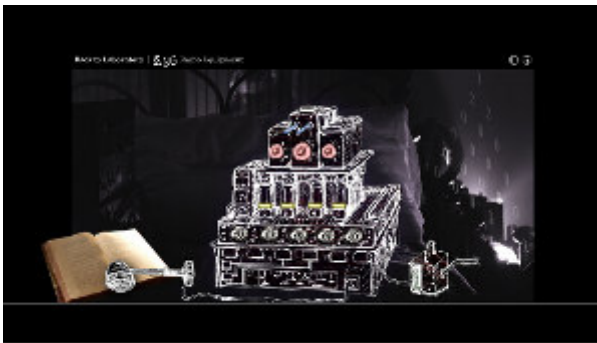
mouse or the keyboard. While some of these games may well have very familiar inspirations to some players, they often have their own particular twist on the idea, and many are highly imaginative.

From flying through clouds collecting letters, through popping colored bubbles while avoiding fascist masks or fighting your inner villains, to using logic to traverse glowing connections, to collecting whistles while avoiding your would-be spiritual captors, the games cover a wide range of game play types. The themes are similarly varied, running from mundane tasks, to matters of survival and even spirituality, as well as other, sometimes stranger topics.



While this variety prevents any particular play style from becoming tiresome, it does run the risk that a player will encounter a game type that they will dislike, which can potentially result in frustration. In particular, it should be noted that some games call for speed or skill with a mouse, and one involves typing quickly and accurately.

The atmosphere of the puzzles as a whole – and of many of the puzzles themselves – is highly surreal. They bear no real relation to the operation of opening suitcases, seeming rather to serve as representations of the contents of the suitcase in question, and of the event, time or place from Tulse Luper's life that the suitcase marks.



While it is possible to lose at a suitcase game, and in some cases loss takes the form of death, this “death” does not transfer to the player character. Instead, the player can simply replay the game, as many times as they like, regardless of the losses. Indeed, in at least one suitcase game the player is “shot” how well they do –

but achieving a certain score before the shooting results in the case being unlocked. In effect there is a separation of the larger player character, the researcher, and the player characters in the suitcase games, who are created at the beginning of a game, each time it is begun, and do not exist beyond of it.

The overall quality of the puzzles is very good, in terms of game play, creativity, design and aesthetics. In addition, for the most part the controls are good, although in a few cases they leave something to be desired.

Each of the ninety-two suitcases is associated with one minute of a ninety-two minute movie. In unlocking a suitcase, the corresponding minute is also unlocked for viewing – with a catch. Succeeding at the suitcase game only



provides one of three layers of the clip. With only one layer, large parts of the clip will be missing.

Succeeding at a game earns the player credits, at a rate of thirty credits per success, regardless of how often this is done. The first main use that these credits have is in travel. The suitcases are distributed

between the three research centres mentioned previously, and their game may only be attempted when the player is at that research centre. Travel is limited by cost: each journey between research centres costs the player one hundred credits; if not enough credits are available the player is effectively restricted to the current centre until sufficient credits have been gained to be able to leave.

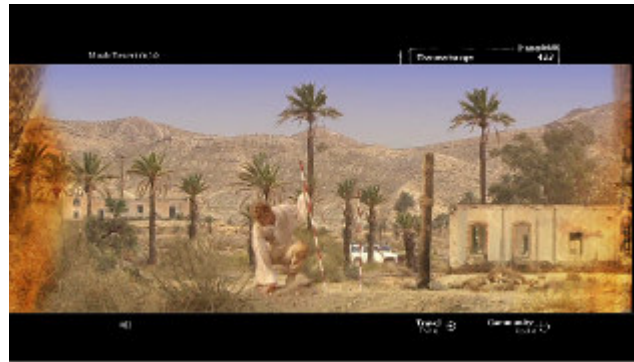
The second use of the credits is in trading. Unlocking the suitcases only earns the player one of the three layers of a given segment of the movie. To acquire the remaining layers, players must trade.

To do this, players enter the community area of the game. Here players are represented as silhouettes, red in the case of the your own character, and either blue or black in the case of other players. Above each silhouette hovers player information, a button which allows you to send a message to a player, and a button which initiates trade with that player. The player information includes name, whether they're busy or not, their rank (at time of writing, researching enough suitcases can grant the rank of "junior researcher"), and their "status" - where they are in the game, such as the laboratory or the community area. Clicking on the trading button brings up a trading table, on the other side of which you can see a larger silhouette of the player with whom you are trading. On either side are inventories of both players' film segments. Your own inventory will appear to the right and the other player's will be on the left.



To make a bid, the player simply drags items from both inventories, and even credit, onto the table, indicating the desired exchange. This is then sent to the player being traded with, who is notified of the desired trade and, on responding to the notification, is shown the same interface, and may choose to accept the offer, decline it, or modify the deal in the same way as described above and send the modified deal back as a counter-offer. It should be noted that trades are taxed in credits, depending on the amount being sent.

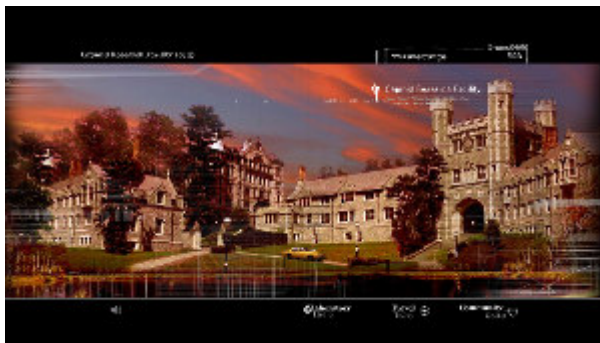
Above your character's head, in place of the information presented above other players' heads, is a text input line and a chat bubble. Entering text into the line and pressing enter causes the text to be "said", or become visible to all others in the room. Other players' messages (and the player's own, when viewed from another's perspective) appear in a small window above the information hovering above that player's virtual head. In this way simple group chats can occur, a feature that can be very useful, especially in allowing established players to help newer ones in-game.



As has been mentioned, one of the pieces of information given on players is rank, which at the time of writing has only two levels. Advancing in level by unlocking suitcases opens up a new travel destination, in addition to the three research centres: the Moab Desert. In this location a series of short movies about Tulse Luper's time in the area can be uncovered. Each movie is uncovered by locating an active area and clicking on it. Finding and watching the first movie makes another one available, and finding and watching that makes yet another available, until a final sub-location, and its attendant movie, becomes active. I found that these two elements – searching for the active areas and, on finding them, unlocking a new area – instills a sense of exploration, of mysteries opening to the player. In addition, the movies themselves are well-made, and (to my mind, at least), pleasantly strange, and certainly in line with the overall feel of the game. They add interestingly to the information given about this unusual

man: Tulse Luper. On the downside, there is occasionally a hot spot which might easily be missed.

The execution of the game is overall very professional. The graphics are for the most part realistic, albeit often slightly surreal or stylized, and are generally very



appropriate to their subject and its themes. Sound and music is minimal, but it is generally used well and appropriately, although there are a few cases of intrusive or potentially annoying sounds. Finally, the writing is fairly good, although some errors in spelling and grammar were noted.

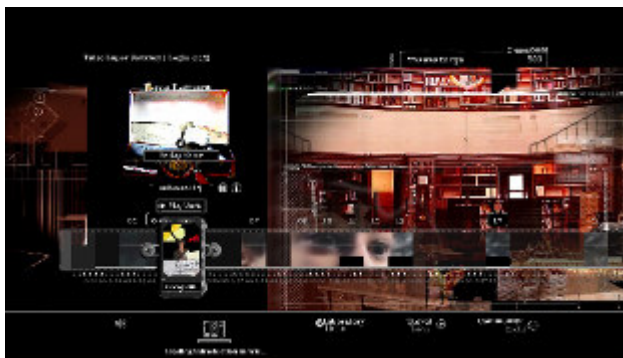
It might be noticed that little has been said of how the story comes through via the game play. This is because it is entirely possible to play the game, as described thus far, with little or no regard for the story. However, for those who wish to delve into the strange myth of Tulse Luper, another aspect to the game exists.



The Tulse Luper forum serves as a venue for discussion about the man and the suitcases, allowing players to discuss theories, post links to interesting articles, and in general to speculate about the meaning behind the suitcases. In this way, those who are interested in the greater myth of Tulse Luper can explore it with other players of the game.

In addition, the forums allow players to request help, not only with the game on a technical level, but also to ask their fellow players for help for tips in the suitcase games themselves.

Finally, there are a few technical issues which should be noted. Primary amongst these is the fact that this is a web-based Flash game which, given the size of some of the content, can lead to notable loading times on slower connections. An occasional problem has been difficulty in contacting the game server when loading suitcase games - again this seems to be related to slower connections, although this is uncertain. Finally, minor glitches do occasionally rear their heads, although these seem to be for the most part transient.



In conclusion, the Tulse Luper Journey is overall a very good game, and, what's more, it is free to play. The suitcase games can at best be a great deal of fun, although a few may be frustrating to some. While the individuation of the game play into stand-alone games decreases the possibility of extended immersion, it does have the advantage of allowing the

player to choose a preferred pace. Since one game does not explicitly lead on to

another, and most games are fairly short, the Tule Luper Journey doesn't press for long periods of play-time, while still allowing those who desire just that to indulge.

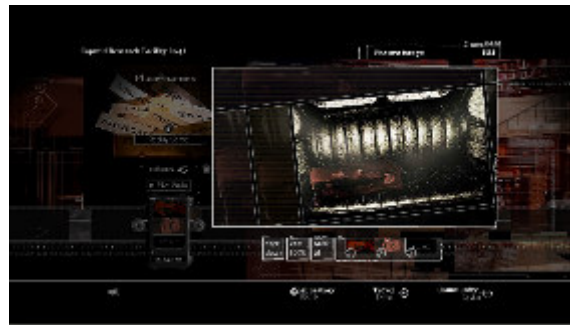
Even though the story may not appeal to all, it is largely optional, and may add a great deal for those who do enjoy it. A score system attached to the suitcase games, as well as the desire to earn credits for travel, trade, and any special events that may appear, add incentive to replay previously-completed games. Technical issues do detract, albeit primarily for those with slower connections, but these issues should not prevent potential players from giving this game a try, especially if they enjoy the game style or are intrigued by the ongoing myth of Tulse Luper.

At time of writing thirty-eight of the ninety-two suitcases have been released; new suitcases are announced once per week, with occasional exceptions.

Finally, it should perhaps be noted that this game does include a minor amount of nudity, and some strong language.

All in all, the Tulse Luper Journey is a game that I would certainly recommend.

Final score: 87/100



**Developer:** SubmarineChannel  
**Publisher:** SubmarineChannel  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** 2006  
**Grade:** 87/100

**Minimum System Requirements:**  
Pentium® III 1 GHz  
64 MB RAM  
56k Modem, access to the internet  
Flash Player 8  
Screen Resolution of 1024x768  
Keyboard, mouse

# Curse of Atlantis: Thorgal's Quest

PC Review by Ugur Sener

A brave archer stands alone staring at the sea. A great storm is raging across the waters. The wind is fierce and the waves are dangerous. It would be suicide to set sail in this weather. The Viking warrior prays for the storm to end soon. Thorgal simply wants to go back home and be with his family.

Knowing full well that he cannot leave the village through the sea anytime soon, Thorgal walks into the chieftain's hut. He intends to find an alternative way to travel out of the village and towards his island. Just as Thorgal is about to give up all hope of leaving that night, a magician walks into the hut. Nolan has traveled across a great distance to meet Thorgal. The wizard carries the burden of a dark prophecy. Nolan instructs Thorgal to look into a mirror to see the vision of a possible future.

The mirror shimmers for a moment as an image forms. Thorgal finds himself looking at his own house. His beautiful wife is hard at work just a few feet away and his son seems to be walking towards her. At first it looks like this might be just another peaceful day at Thorgal's island. But then the Viking warrior sees himself. He shoots an arrow to kill his own son! Thorgal is terrified by the vision. While he does not know exactly what the vision might mean, the warrior knows that he has enemies more than capable of changing their appearances to imitate him. He does not know when the vision might come to pass. But one thing is clear. Thorgal has to find a way out of the village. He has to reach the island as soon as possible to save his son's life. A dangerous journey lies ahead.



Curse of Atlantis: Thorgal's Quest is the story of a journey. On a desperate quest to save his son, Thorgal will have to make his way out of the village and navigate a dangerous forest. But the Viking will see much more than trees and a gang of bandits on his journey. The warrior will have to pass through magical lands and glimpse into the realm of shadows before he can reach his island.

Played from a third-person perspective, Curse of Atlantis has a simple mouse-driven control structure. The only slightly tedious aspect of the interface is that you have to click interactive objects twice to use them or hear a description. When you click for the first time, Thorgal will approach the object. You have to



click for a second time to hear a comment, use the object, or pick it up to put it in your inventory. The game does feature great looking backgrounds that make the environments more pleasant to explore.



The voice acting remains good throughout the game. Thorgal in particular has a fitting and pleasant voice that gives the character some welcome depth and a touch of emotion. While the sound effects are passable, the soundtrack is another solid element of the game. There isn't a huge variety of music available, but what you will hear is always fitting for the overall theme of the game and helps enhance the atmosphere.

The game starts with a fairly simple, but nevertheless engaging premise. Seeing the mysterious vision immediately sets a tone of urgency. As Thorgal's journey continues, players have to overcome a number of obstacles and find more about the warrior's past. The Viking's origins are key to the mystery behind the prophecy. Unfortunately, the storyline never gains any kind of true depth. The game is far too short to allow that.

Curse of Atlantis is one of those games that can be easily completed in one session. Sure, the warrior goes through a handful of different locations, but there isn't much of anything to do at any of them. Players are usually limited to a small number of screens they can explore at any given time. There is usually some kind of major obstacle keeping Thorgal from making progress. By solving a couple of simple puzzles, you



overcome the obstacle and get to explore the next set of screens. While confinement to a relatively small area is not inherently a problem, having only a few things you can do to proceed through the adventure makes the game rather simple and easy. By the time you really start getting interested in Thorgal and want to find out more about the setting, the adventure is over. And once you complete the game for the first time, there is essentially no reason to go back and play through it again.

It is truly a shame that Curse of Atlantis is an extremely short game since some of the environments can be quite interesting. Thorgal meets a small number of

colorful characters and gets to deal with a handful of magical contraptions. It would have been great to have a few more things to do, richer environments to explore, and see more of the game's world. The second part of the game is particularly strange and interesting at the same time. Thorgal travels through a mystical land where we gain a little more insight into his character.

Part of this section seems straight out of a science fiction novel. Admittedly, traveling through a technologically advanced environment in the middle of a fantasy-themed game seems very strange. And it is easy to tear the game apart by questioning how Thorgal is not more surprised by what he is seeing or how he knows what it takes to operate some of the devices. However, there are story reasons for the inclusion of this environment and the fact that it is so out of place actually makes it appropriate considering that Thorgal is already in a magical land. Once the brief foray into science fiction is over however, you are treated to the true highlight of the game. Thorgal explores an interesting and imaginative magical realm that is easily one of the best segments of the game. Unfortunately, it is a true letdown to realize there is so little to do in each section you get to explore. The game would have immensely benefited from more locations or at the very least a few more puzzles.



The challenges you have to face through the course of the adventure also leave a lot to be desired. The biggest problem is the fact that archery comes into play in far too many puzzles. Twice in the game you will have to prove Thorgal's skill as an archer by shooting at some kind of target. During several other sections, you will need a carefully fired arrow to make progress. There are also times where you have to rely on your archery skills to survive a fight. The sheer number of times Thorgal relies on his bow and arrow in this short adventure almost makes the game feel like a tribute to archery.

The action sequences in the game can also be rather irritating. A few times during the adventure, Thorgal will have to face an opponent. But you will not be fighting against your enemies in the traditional way. Getting past the fight depends on finding an indirect way to defeat your opponent. As the enemy is trying to kill Thorgal, you will have to make him run around the screen while you try to find the trick to winning the fight. Instead of being engaging and exciting, these challenges often seem a little tedious if not somewhat silly. It is questionable whether or not they add any real value to the game.

It should also be noted that the name of the game can be a bit misleading. Hearing a name like Curse of Atlantis, you might expect to spend a good chunk of the game at the lost city. However, the only connection the game has to Atlantis is through Thorgal's origins. Thus, if you are looking for an opportunity to rediscover the city for the umpteenth time in a video game, you will be disappointed.

A technical problem encountered playing Thorgal's Quest on newer systems is also worthy of noting. Modern video cards seem to have trouble displaying the character models and the interactive objects. When you try to play the game, you



might see character models starting to disappear into the background or important interactive objects turning invisible. Needless to say, this makes it extremely difficult to play through the game as you might miss a critical object because you couldn't even see it. Fortunately, the problem does not seem to exist on older systems. If you decide to try the game, it is highly recommended to play it on a system fairly close to the system requirements.

Curse of Atlantis: Thorgal's Quest is a difficult game to recommend. It starts with a fairly interesting premise, but the plotline never gains any kind of real depth. The adventure is far too short for a commercial release. Too many of the puzzles rely on the use of Thorgal's archery skills and offer no real challenge. There are annoying fights and timed sequences in place of puzzles that really make you think. As long as you take the time to carefully examine each location, the game should be a breeze as the puzzles will be extremely easy as long as you have the right items. The positive aspects of the game are unfortunately greatly overshadowed by its problems. With more places to explore and additional puzzles to solve, Curse of Atlantis could have been a good game. As it stands however, it can only be recommended to players who must own every single adventure game. Even then, you should look for a very good bargain.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> DreamCatcher Europe<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> The Adventure Company<br/> <b>Platform:</b> PC<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Adventure<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> June 2003<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 64/100</p> | <p><b>Minimum System Requirements:</b><br/> Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP<br/> Pentium® II 450 MHz Processor<br/> 64 MB RAM<br/> 12x CD-ROM Drive<br/> 16 MB DirectX® Compatible 3D Video Card<br/> DirectX® Compatible Sound Card</p> |
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# The Longest Journey

PC Review by Donna

“The Longest Journey this, The Longest Journey that” is all I’d been hearing for *years*. Everyone kept talking about it and yet I was unable to find the game... until a friend sent it to me as a birthday present. I was completely overwhelmed – I finally got it! I installed it (works like magic on Windows XP), played a little, then got carried away by real life. It wasn’t until a month or two later until I resumed playing. Within a few minutes, I got completely sucked in. Ditching the school work, I let myself get lost in the beautiful world of The Longest Journey.



One thing you have to know about TLJ is: it’s a story. It’s one long, beautiful, dreamlike story. And it goes like this...

The Divide between twin worlds has been kept safe by the Guardian of the Balance for thousands of years. But now, the Guardian has left his tower and the armies of Chaos are about to destroy everything that exists. There is only one person who can save the twin worlds and restore the Balance...

Her name is April Ryan and she lives in a futuristic Venice in the United States. Centuries away from our time, she lives in the Border House with her friends,



leading an average student’s life. April is an art student, working at a café in her free time. Everything seems alright until her dreams start haunting her and even coming to life. There’s a mysterious man, Cortez, who seems to know a lot about the dreams she’s having. Bit by bit, the story unfolds – April discovers she’s a Shifter, a person who can step between the twin worlds unharmed. And once again, the fate of the world... pardon me, worlds, rests on an average girl’s shoulders.

What is really interesting about The Longest Journey is the variety of locations you will visit. There is a very neat balance between the modern sci-fi world of

Stark and the fairytale-like world of Arcadia. You will get to visit April's school and working place, discover the new DNA-based ticket system in the subway, rescue a rubber ducky, trick a powerful wizard, swim underwater, fly in a floating fortress, meet winged people, and use magic... And that's just a small list of what TLJ has to offer.



There's a very subtle, but effective, personal story going on. It involves April's childhood, her feelings towards her friends, April herself. It's interesting that she grows as a person, but stays the same old April at the same time. Her witty jokes will make you laugh without a doubt.

The Longest Journey, however, is not a game you'd get for your eight-year-old niece. While the story initially seems very cute and innocent, it's not that way throughout the game. Some characters swear a lot, one of them particularly likes to abuse the f-word. And by "abuse" I really mean *abuse*. Apart from swearing, there's quite a share of sexually-oriented themes. If homosexuality bothers you, well... you'll either have to live with it or skip some of the dialogue.

The Longest Journey, however, is not a game you'd get for your eight-year-old niece. While the story initially

There is one more thing about the storytelling, but this one's good: expect lots of spoofs. April is a very sarcastic character and her clever replies are often connected to something from 'our time', referring to famous literature, books, and movies. My favorite one is probably the TLJ version of Tolkien's "The One Ring" poem from *The Lord of the Rings*.

Speaking of dialogue – expects lots of it. Lots and lots and LOTS of it. If you're one of those who tend to skip over whatever the characters are saying and move on with the puzzles, it ain't gonna work. Dialogues are long, informative, fun, and very important for the story. You'll find out lots of thing about each and every character and even get to listen to a few beautiful stories!



There will be times when you'll be overloaded with new information. I'd just sit in front of my screen, trying to sum up everything I'd heard in that one long reply. But have no fear, you won't miss a thing – do you know what diaries are for? Well, April has one, and it's quite useful. Each time something important

happens, she will sum everything up in a page, maximum two. Her entries are often humorous. There are times when someone spends ten or so minutes explaining something and all she does is sum everything up in a sentence or two. I admit, it made me want to bang my head against keyboard a couple of times... But I'm not complaining because I love dialogue in games.

Most of the puzzles are inventory-based, so be sure to carefully search areas and examine the items in your inventory. Like I said earlier, the game is heavily story-based, so the puzzles are insanely easy. Just put the object you'd like to use over an area and if it glows, it's a bingo. If it doesn't... well, try something else and search around. There are a few harder puzzles, of course, that require the use of deductive reasoning and logic. You might be banging your head over a couple of them, but they shouldn't keep you stuck for more than a few hours, a day at the most.



The interface of the game is pretty simple: 3D models on 2D background and a cursor. It's your classic point-and-click adventure: the little arrow changes into a glowing sword-like arrow if you can interact with environment/characters, giving you options to examine them, talk (or eat!) to them or just plain use the object. The cursor morphs into a glowing eye if there's something to just examine. Double-clicking will make April run.

Graphics are simply beautiful. The game dates back to 1998, so it's not a surprise that the resolution is locked at 640x480 pixels. But the graphics still look amazing, in my opinion. Backgrounds are beautifully painted, with lots of small details and objects to interact with. Character models look a bit weak and not as detailed as the environment, but they still serve their purpose. April changes her outfit more than once, so don't worry about getting bored of her standard outfit.



Music... the wonderful music. Some of the themes will stay stuck in your head for a while, some you won't even notice. Sound effects are awesome and the game is full of them – from distant crowd's murmuring to swamp mosquitoes' buzzing to gentle wind blowing between the rocks.



What really stands out is the voice acting – it's perfect. What really struck me when the credits rolled was the fact that there are only a handful of voice actors voicing dozens of different characters! They've done an amazing job.

Now, the bugs... I've encountered some of them. My game locked up once when I tried to save, which was very frustrating. More than once there was

highly annoying stuttering sound during some of the longest conversations in the game and that was not the most pleasant thing in the world. But, I have good news: the design team is staying in touch with the fans and releasing new patches as soon as someone reports a new problem. After installing it I didn't encounter a single problem, so that's one huge thumbs-up to the TLJ team.

Once you finish the game, you will be awarded with the Book of Secrets. You can unlock it at one point in the game, but you don't have to. The Book of Secrets is a small book full of concept art, a soundtrack including some of the music that wasn't used in the game, and – my favourite – a collection of voice recording sound clips. Voice actors having fun, trying to say one line over and over again, warming up, joking... it really makes the playing worthwhile.

In conclusion, The Longest Journey is a classic adventure game true adventurers should not miss. It's one of the greatest stories ever told, including amazing (and very different!) characters and locations. Don't let the long conversations scare you – if you like storytelling, this game's for you.



**Developer:** Funcom  
**Publisher:** Tri Synergy  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** 2000  
**Grade:** 93/100

**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Windows® 95/98/ME/2000/XP  
 Pentium® 166 MMX  
 32MB RAM  
 4x CD-ROM drive  
 640\*480 SVGA high-colour (16-bit)  
 video card with 2MB RAM  
 Windows-compatible sound device  
 300MB HDD space

# Lifestream

PC Review by Wendy Nellius

Christopher M. Brendel (Unimatrix Productions) originally conceived the story of Lifestream back in high school. It wasn't until 2004 that he brought that story to life so that we, the adventure starved of the world, could share in his vision and look forward to this new independent developer.

## Prologue

Lifestream begins with a troubled Randolph Holton. We hear his thoughts as he feverishly writes in his journal.

Had I known my research would come to this, I never would have begun. The interest is gone – my time wasted – driven away by feelings of rage and hate. The research controls me now...though I suppose I am its willing victim. The end result isn't what I expected, however, the outcome is far greater than I had ever imagined. For my supreme protector is also my ultimate jailer. Truth, deceit, love and hate. They are ALL here, all mixed into one uncontrollable sensation. THAT is my greatest trial...and my utmost desire. Truly, this is both Heaven and Hell. But my grand fear is yet to come. For is the Lifestream manages to protrude further into the existent world, then doomed are we all....

There is an immediate switch and you will begin play as John Holton. John has just arrived at his father's house. It seems that his father, Randolph Holton has been missing for 3 weeks. Interestingly enough, John's father is a "Father" or more clearly; a priest. Now, for all you Catholics out there, you're probably thinking that Father Randolph should not have a son, right? Don't priests normally take an oath of chastity? You would be correct. Father Randolph certainly seems to have one huge secret to hide. His son, John, is also aware



that if anyone found out, it could ruin his father's career in the priesthood. So, in essence, investigation of his father's whereabouts will prove more difficult and disallow the involvement of local law enforcement. John will have to pursue this investigation on his own.

Your first task is to get in the front door, but of course, it's locked. Looks like you'll have to find another way in. Hence,



you will encounter your first puzzle. But never fear, it's a pretty easy one. Ok, so now you've managed to make it into the house. You'll only have access to a couple of rooms at this point which is enough to begin finding clues. Just as you think you're on to something, the prologue ends and we proceed to Chapter 1.

## Chapter 1 – A Place of Worship

In Chapter 1, you will get to play as Father Randolph and see events as they happened in the past. We watch Father Randolph getting ready for mass. His sermons haven't been the best as of late and Father Grandl (one of the creepiest priest I've seen) has been helping Randolph to improve them. Father Randolph is also scheduled to handle today's confessions. During one confession, a strange voice whispers from



the other side. The person claims they are being followed and rattles off some weird instructions about the post office. A key is left and the mysterious stranger takes off. Father Randolph takes it upon himself to investigate this mysterious event. He stumbles upon secret information pertaining to something called the Lifestream. The Lifestream is parallel universe co-existing with ours. Could this truly be possible? Or perhaps it is a hoax? There must be a way to find out more. Fortunately, Father Randolph has left behind pages to his journal and a lot of clues that will help to decipher some of the mystery.

And so, the story continues. With each ensuing chapter (ten in all), you will switch back and forth between the present playing as John and the past playing as Father Randolph. John will need to uncover all the clues left by his father in order to solve the mystery.

Lifestream comes in a jewel CD case with one CD. The game can be played with or without the CD in the drive. There are a few technical glitches here and there during game play, but I found that removing the CD from the drive



corrected them for me. Chris has also provided patches for all known glitches on his website.

Lifestream is a 1<sup>st</sup> person primarily point-and-click adventure. The game progresses through the use of chapters. Completion of all the required tasks will close the current chapter and allow for progression to the next chapter. You can save your game as often as you like and

have the option to overwrite an older save or create a new save game. The save, load game and exit features are accessed by right clicking anywhere on the game screen which will highlight a toolbar at the top of the screen. These are the only options you have available. No adjustments can be made to the display or sound.

There are quite a few characters to interact with on your quest. There are other priests, of course. Father Dan has been around a long time and is the one to consult when faced with a difficult problem. Father Grandl is supposedly Father Randolph's friend. Now, it's not nice to judge a book by its cover, but Grandl looks shifty and sounds it too. If you were in the same position, you wouldn't trust him as far as you could throw him. There is Anne Rose whose very presence seems to be a catalyst within the story, although it is not intentional and unclear as to why until much later in the game. Anne Rose is a parishioner who hasn't come to church as often as she should and would like to change that. There are a few incidental characters that also appear such as a clerk and a couple of seeming ghosts. Or are they? The character renderings are commendable. Initiating conversation is what activates the animation of the characters. After the conversation, the character will return to a still picture state. It will remind you of many of the Nancy Drew games. Facially, the characters looked pretty darn good, but they all did have very stiff arm movements and positions similar to the way a puppet would move. The voice acting, however, was extremely good. John Bell, one of the primary voice actors in Lifestream, should grace us with his presence in more games. His talent is well noted. The choice of music was also notable. The music was unobtrusive while enhancing the mood of the game at the same time. Just the right amount of tension was provided in the music for the final scene.



Lifestream has been created using Adventure Maker. Adventure Maker is a game engine that is available to all aspiring game creators. There is a limited free version available and a small price tag for the full version which can be used to create a commercial game. Adventure Maker primarily utilizes slideshow still frames/pictures as backgrounds. While the backgrounds in Lifestream are not overly detailed or particularly amazing, they accomplish the task at hand. Most of the backgrounds are dark in order to convey the darker mood of the story. Some are more



detailed than others. The primary locations you get to visit are Father Randolph's house and the Church. Within each of the main locations there are quite a few rooms to investigate. A nice job was done on the church in conveying how large it actually is. You could almost hear the room's acoustics just by looking at it. Also infused into the game are some cinematic cut scenes. These are actually done quite well and are enjoyable to watch. The only negative aspect of the animations is the transitions used to convey movement within the game. They tend to be blurry and do not add to the game. It would have been better to not have a transition. If you're a stickler requiring your games to have mind-blowing graphics, then you may be disappointed. The focus of this game is on the story and the journey to the truth. It is in this aspect that Christopher Brendel has successfully made his mark. What is most interesting is that the story, which seems to start out as a simple "missing person" kind of search, just gets weirder and weirder as you go along. There is nothing cliché in Lifestream.

Getting around the game is pretty standard. You have arrows to provide you with direction. One cursor is used to examine, pick-up and use items. Inventory is stored at the top of the game screen. Running your cursor over the word inventory will allow the inventory to be viewed. There is a magnifying glass which you can click and drag over any item to view it further. Inventory items can be combined by just dragging them over each other.

The puzzles in Lifestream for the most part are on the easy side for the seasoned adventure gamer. But, they manage to throw in a couple of more difficult ones to mix it up a bit. There is a classic slider puzzle and a tic-tac-toe puzzle. You will get to play a little music on the organ. One puzzle that was particularly difficult for this reviewer was a Pentagram Folder Puzzle. It involves clicking on corners within the pentagram to make a gem



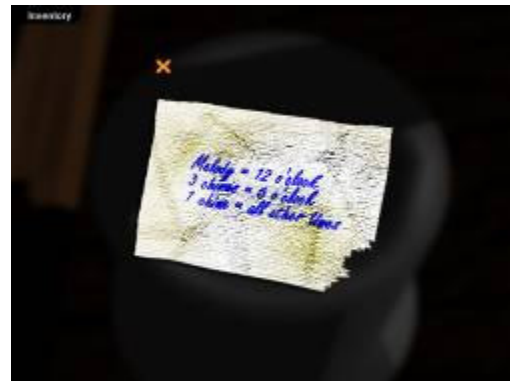
appear. Subsequent clicking will slide a gem over to a different space that is connected by a line. You must find a way to get all the gems (8 in all) to appear using the connecting lines. This puzzle was frustration in a nutshell. There are also notes to decipher and plenty of clues to be read. No mazes, you ask??? Hah, before you breathe that sigh of relief, it must be noted that there are two mazes. That's right.....two. One actually isn't that bad once you figure out the puzzle behind it. But, you'll need to make sure your speakers work correctly as it involves your hearing. And, make sure if you're using headphones, you have them on correctly (right side – right ear). Not doing so (as someone did) will result in utter confusion. The other maze is a downright confusing -- all the walls look the same! -- where the hell is the exit? -- type of maze. All in all the puzzles were interesting, diverse and quite a bit of fun.



Also available through a separate purchase is the Official Companion Guide. This was the first time I had ever seen a companion guide offered by an independent developer that was so detailed. It contains character profiles, puzzle hint section, complete walkthrough, story notes and a full list of in-game easter eggs. I wouldn't recommend using the guide the first time playing unless you're stuck. The guide is best right before playing for a second time. You will gain deeper insight into the plot as well as learn the locations of all the easter eggs. The easter eggs are one of the coolest features of the game. However, without the guide, it would be impossible to know that clicking on an item 6 times will give you a special surprise. One such easter egg has Father Randolph surrounded by psychedelic lights performing a strange song/dance. It is extremely humorous to watch and you will definitely get a kick out of it.

## Epilogue

Unlike a lot of other games, Christopher Brendel was kind enough to provide us with an epilogue. It is here that all the major questions are answered. And, believe me, you will have a lot of questions. What was particularly enjoyable about the epilogue is that it provided a definite (although surprising) conclusion to the game while still allowing for possible further continuation of the story in the future. I can think of quite a few games that could have used an epilogue.



Lifestream turned out to be an impressive first game by Christopher Brendel consisting of a solid storyline, fun puzzles and an original ending. The novice and the seasoned gamer will be able to enjoy the game and appreciate what independent developers have to offer.

**Developer:** Unimatrix Productions  
**Publisher:** Unimatrix Productions  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** 2004  
**Grade:** 84/100

### Minimum System Requirements:

Windows® ME/2000/XP  
 Pentium® III 733 MHz  
 64 MB RAM  
 24-Bit Color Display  
 Windows Compatible Soundcard  
 4x CD-ROM Drive  
 Hard Drive space of 700 MB

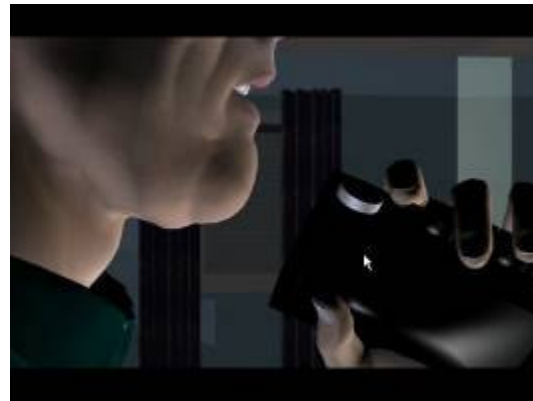
# Shady Brook

PC Review by Wendy Nellius

After much success with Lifestream, Christopher Brendel is back with another tale to tell; this one decidedly creepy and thoroughly enjoyable at the same time. In the companion guide, Chris explains how Shady Brook was originally intended to be the script for an independent horror film. The film was to be a compilation of short stories that were all horror influenced. Due to mismatched timing and the filmmaker ultimately deciding to scrap the project, Chris made the decision to give the story its life through the adventure game. While the making of Shady Brook was an undertaking fraught with obstacles, Chris still managed to make it happen. We're glad he did.

## The Opening Scene

"My name is Anthony Clave. If you are hearing this, then I am likely dead. But, don't worry about that. I know they're on to us. It's too late to do anything about it. But, it's not too late for you. What I am about to say may seem far fetched. But, I assure you it is the truth. This town is not safe. There are certain events that take place here....terrible events. The proof is there. I am positive of that. Look if you must, but get out. Get away from this place and never look back. They found me!"



After watching this mysterious cut scene introduction, the scene and the mood immediately changes direction. We're now watching a car rolling into town accompanied by some great county flavored driving music. Over the hills and through the mountains we go! We get a brief glimpse of a sign by the side of the road welcoming us to Shady Brook.

You will play as Jake Tobin, a writer who needs some peace and quiet in order to rejuvenate his creative juices. It seems Jake is writing a story about a small town. Shady Brook seems like the perfect inspiration. Jake's not alone either. He brought his father along so he could spend some quality time with him. Jake's father has been blind since birth and Jake figures it will be a nice change for him to experience a new place.

So, this all seems pretty nice, right? You walk around town and meet the locals. Everyone seems so nice. It's a little odd that the last owner of the house seemed to have just disappeared out of the blue, but maybe he had debts or relationship

trouble. Surely, it's nothing to worry about. Well, hold on to that comfortable feeling for as long as you can. You'll soon find out that this town is not what it seems. Everyone here has a secret and they're not too keen on you finding out any of the details. The more you get to know these people, the more you're sure something really bad going on. Even more disturbing is the suicide of a local who seemed to be estranged from the rest of the townsfolk. Everything in Jake's head is telling him not to get involved, but his heart is telling him he must. What peril awaits Jake? Well, if I told you, then you wouldn't play the game.



Shady Brook is a 1<sup>st</sup> person point and click adventure/horror. The game comes in a jewel case with one DVD-R. This is important to know as the game will not play in a CD-Rom drive. And, there have been some problems with older DVD drives not being able to read the game. It is important to visit the website at [www.unimatrixproductions.com](http://www.unimatrixproductions.com) to determine if you will be able to run the game before purchasing. Having run this game on a newer system, no problems were encountered during the install. The game did freeze up a couple of times, but corrected itself in a couple of minutes. After installing the game you have choices that you must make. The first is a choice of censored or non-censored. Having chosen the non-censored mode, I can tell you that there are a couple of curse words, some nudity and some graphic (horror wise) cut scenes.

Obviously, the censored version would limit these features. I personally was not offended by the non-censored version, but this is up to the individual. I wouldn't recommend it for younger gamers. The next choice you have to make is in choosing whether to play the timed and non-adventure puzzles. If you choose Adventure Only mode, these timed/non-adventure elements will be skipped completely. To be honest, these puzzles were not really difficult and pose no real scare requiring you to skip them.



This time around, we have a lot more characters to interact with. There is Jake's father of course. He's rather quiet so you won't be doing a lot of talking to him. Every character you meet has something odd about them that you just can't quite put your finger on. The first member of the town you get to meet is Tim Richardson. He's one of those guys who wants to be your best friend right away and is quick to offer any help. He will remind you of a used car salesman. Can he be trusted? There is the town doctor who lives with his Mother. He's not

married and unlikely to be with such a non-existent dating pool in town. There's just something not right about him. His mother or Mom; as everyone in town calls her; is the town's authority on gossip. Be that as it may, she never truly spills much dirt. Most of her conversation is spent gushing about her son. Ethan Morrow is the town's priest. You'll want to take a shower after speaking to him. There is an icky vibe about him that almost seems as if it would rub off on you. There are quite a few obnoxious bullies. Curly is the most notorious. It's always amusing when a bald headed man uses a name like Curly. Curly is always ready to fight and he's the most hated person in town. The Sheriff, who you expect to be a little nicer, is extremely guarded and has quite the attitude. The only people who seem normal are Nick and Kate Ekan. Kate seems to be quite genuine and kind. The same goes for her husband. Well, it ends up being true for only one of them. Which one will be for you to discover. These are only some of the characters you will encounter in good old Shady Brook.



In comparison to Lifestream, there has been a great improvement in the animation and rendering of the characters. There are more distinct looks to each of them and the close-ups are really great. They still have a few odd body mannerisms, but on the whole, this element was well done. There is a decent amount of dialog in Shady Brook. Moving the story along relies on it. The story



is broken up into 5 days (Monday thru Friday). There are specific tasks to complete before you can move on to the next day. Most of these tasks are dialog related. It would have been more preferable to have the dialog have a more natural flow. A lot of it consists of options such as "Tell me about the town", "Tell me about the gas station", "Tell me about the Church" etc... At least phrasing the question in a different way would have made it more

interesting. But, the information you receive comes across more naturally. And, it really only happens at the beginning of the game where Jake is trying to learn the most information all at once. Most of the voice acting was excellent, but Jake's voice left something to be desired. There wasn't much vocal inflection and he sounded as though he took an overdose of some medication. This also could account for the less than natural tone to the questions as mentioned above.

When I first played the game last year, I kept wondering why Chris would choose that voice. It wasn't until almost a year later that I stumbled upon an interview with Chris over at Just Adventure. It was there that I learned that Chris originally had a professional voice actor who ended up quitting half way through. So, the new voice was the replacement voice and not one that Chris was entirely happy with. Nevertheless, he had no choice but to go forward with it. Fortunately, the other actors' excellence makes up for this. Of special note was the voice acting for Kate. Truly believable and moving!

Like Lifestream, Shady Brook has also been created using Adventure Maker. Adventure Maker is a game engine that is available to all aspiring game creators. There is a limited free version available and a small price tag for the full version which can be used to create a commercial game. Adventure Maker primarily utilizes slide-show still frames/pictures as backgrounds. In similar fashion to Lifestream, the backgrounds are pretty simplistic. The



The mountains and the grass were quite odd looking, but they serve their purpose. However, there are more locations to visit in Shady Brook. Aside from Jake's house and one of the neighbor's houses, there is the local bar, a general store, a diner, a Laundromat, a church complete with cemetery and a few others. Besides, small towns are usually understated anyway. Of note was the church location. It was very nicely detailed. And, Chris really put a lot of effort into those cut scenes and it was well worth it. They were so enjoyable to watch. Drama! Again, just like Lifestream, the real beauty of the game is in the story. The music is an added bonus for this game also. The piano composition at the beginning of the game was downright beautiful. I would have loved to hear the whole piece, but alas it was cut short. It then transitions into some cool down home driving music. Great use of music! It started the game off just right. Ambient sounds were also appropriate and fit well.



While some may debate me on this, I actually liked the story in Shady Brook even better than the one in Lifestream. After you see the first cut scene, it's already in your head that something is wrong. So, when you meet the first characters, you're already looking at them funny and wondering what the story will be. Are they all related and inbreeding? Are they some kind of clone? You just can't help yourself.



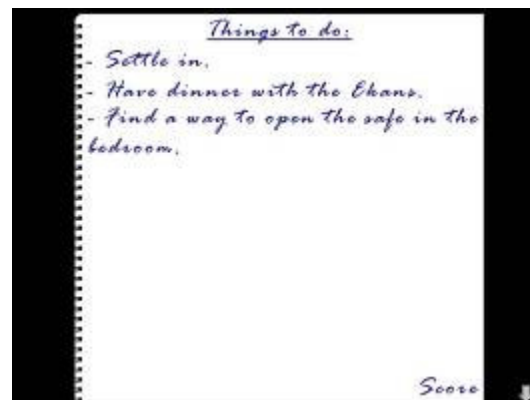
Shady Brook is not a happy tale by any means. The whole game is clouded in mystery and ends up being quite sad in places. There was one particular part of the game towards the end that had me slightly devastated. Near the end, you start to get an idea of what the finale will be like, but you won't be sure of why or how.



As for puzzles, some may be disappointed. There aren't many to speak of. Lifestream certainly had many more of them. For the most part, the puzzles are on the easier side for a seasoned gamer. I spent a decent amount of time on a strange box puzzle that involved opening a lock by putting small screws into the correct place. It seemed like it would be a piece of cake, but wasn't. You will get to decode a message and

figure out a mirror puzzle that involves getting a beam of light to reflect in the right direction. If you chose the non-adventure mode, you will have to fight Curly. Fighting is not normally my forte but triumph was easily accomplished by rapid alternate clicking of both mouse buttons. Also in the non-adventure mode is a pipe puzzle similar to something you'd find in a Nancy Drew game only timed. The pool game ended up being the most frustrating. You'll have to play Nick in a game of pool. You use your right mouse button to rotate the cue stick and the left button to shoot the ball. It doesn't seem so bad until you're left with only the 8 ball. Getting that damn ball in the hole was a nightmare. And, since Nick isn't that great a pool player either, it can take quite a bit of time. Fortunately, if Nick does win, you get the option to get an automatic win for yourself and move on. There are a few inventory puzzles as well, but they are pretty logical.

Most of your time will be spent figuring out where to go next and who to talk to. You will spend a fair amount of time running back and forth in your quest. A helpful tool provided is a checklist. The checklist provides current details on what tasks you need to complete for the day. During game play, the list is updated as new objectives are added and completed objectives are removed. The checklist can be accessed in your inventory by dragging the examine icon onto the list. For those of you who are competitive in nature, points are also awarded for each objective completed. Due to the fact that objectives can be completed in a non-linear fashion, it is possible to miss some. But, you can still



move on to the next day. I ended up about 40 points short of the total. Not bad in my estimation. You'll be happy to know that with all that running around you will be doing, the transitions from node to node are no longer animated making for a much faster travel pace. Getting around is simple. There are clearly marked large directional arrows. There is a set of lips to indicate conversation, a magnifying glass for examining, and a small hand for picking up items. Inventory is accessed by running your cursor over the word "inventory" at the top of the game screen. A right click will access the area where you can save, load or exit the game. You can save as often as you like.

Like Lifestream, Shady Brook also has an Official Companion Guide offered on the website for purchase. It contains character profiles, complete walkthrough, story notes and a full list of in-game easter eggs. Thanks Chris for providing us with those hilarious easter eggs again.



In conclusion, the high points of Shady Brook are the immersive and dark storyline, interesting characters, good music and worthy cut scenes. It would have been great to see more puzzles in the game. Those who are really into games with a lot of puzzles will likely be turned off. Those demanding top notch graphics will also be disappointed. But, if the high points listed above fall into your gaming niche, then head over to the website at [www.unimatrix.com](http://www.unimatrix.com) and

get yourself a copy. I'm glad I did and I look forward to more of what Christopher Brendel has to offer us. His games are unique and add needed flavor to our gaming world.

Final Grade: 80/100

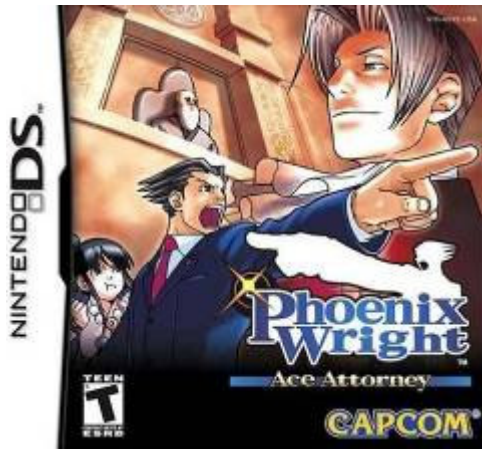
**Developer:** Unimatrix Productions  
**Publisher:** Unimatrix Productions  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** 2004  
**Grade:** 80/100

**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Windows® ME/2000/XP  
 Pentium® 1 GHz  
 512 MB RAM  
 24-Bit Color Display  
 Windows Compatible Soundcard  
 DVD-ROM Drive  
 Hard Drive space of 350 MB

# Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney

Nintendo DS Review by Erdalion

Phoenix Wright, called Nick by his friends, is a fledgling defence attorney and the star of this quirky adventure game, on a system that is rapidly becoming the console of choice for adventure gamers, the Nintendo DS. Even though the Phoenix Wright games are a long-running line in Japan with four GBA games released already, this game was released for the DS in the United States last year and only recently released in Europe. Was it worth the wait? Most definitely.



The first thing that strikes you about the game is its unique visual style. Borrowing heavily from the Japanese manga genre of comic books, the design of the characters is what you would call “over the top.” The animation of characters is quite limited, for the most part they only have a few frames, however they do have a lot of personality in them, and they all seem to have at least one trademark mannerism, like Nick’s sweating when he is stressed, or Larry Butz crying his eyes out, almost literally! Adding to the unique presentation is the style in which

every trial is conducted. The music becomes more and more dramatic along with the trial itself, and even though the DS is somewhat limited sound-wise, the music is still quite good. But the thing that sticks out the most is visual presentation of the trial. During the cross-examination sequence, we are given a close-up of the defence attorney and the prosecutor, in a way not dissimilar to a fighting game. In fact, during the more intense parts of the cross-examination where you’ve cornered the opposition, the presentation and music will remind you a lot of boss fights in action games, people react to arguments against them as if they were physically hit, and you’re almost half-expecting someone to throw out a dragon punch or two. All this makes the game very enjoyable, since while it does become silly at times, it never stops being amusing to watch. Unless that is, you despise all things manga, in which case you may find the visual part of the game a bit too much.

However, despite its appearance, Phoenix Wright is actually a pretty mature game, with a storyline geared towards older audiences. Each case opens up with a murder, characters usually have complex relationships with each other, and cases often deal with the corruption found among lawyers and police officers. Still, Phoenix Wright is a game done in manga style and not Serpico, so there is always a comical occurrence (with Detective Gumshoe providing most of them with his horrible sense of timing) before things get too serious. However, that is

another of the game's strong points; it never takes itself too seriously so it avoids becoming corny, yet it is still serious enough to ensure that it doesn't become superficial either.

There are five cases to be solved in the game, four from the GBA original, and a completely new one, created specifically for the DS and taking full advantage of its functions, giving you the opportunity to examine inventory items in 3D, and dust for fingerprints among other things. The four original cases also have uses for the touch screen and the stylus pen, but you may also use the regular D-pad and buttons for them as well. The cases, each divided into chapters, are not similar in length, with the first one in particular being more of a tutorial, but they get progressively longer and this makes Phoenix Wright quite lengthy by adventure game standards. It is also worth noting that even though the latter cases are significantly longer than the first ones, they never feel unnecessarily drawn-out just to make the game longer.

This brings us to the game play, which as mentioned above has two different parts, the trial and the investigation. The latter is the usual adventure faire, with you along with a trusty sidekick investigating crime scenes for evidence and interrogating people, while the former is more unique as you are required to cross-examine witnesses in trials and point out errors in their testimonies. This part is usually a case of trial (no pun intended) and error as you will find yourself pressing the witness on every given opportunity and presenting all sorts of evidence, but usually, if you look at a case close enough you can find out through logic where the flaw is in the testimony. Even if you do end up solving a puzzle in this part mostly by mistake or blind luck, the solution will always make sense in retrospect and you are more likely to find yourself wondering why you had not thought of that earlier, rather than scratching your head and thinking how that solution is even possible.



A word of warning, there are a lot of "Game Over" scenarios in the game, but then again, given the fact that Nick Wright is so over his head with all evidence against his client in every single case, it does make sense in the context of the game. When you are presenting evidence to the court, you are only given a limited amount of times to get it wrong, though the only time you are likely to use all of them is when you are stuck and trying every single option. However, there are a few times where choosing the wrong dialogue option will get you the "Guilty" verdict, but they are always too obvious. To be more precise, if the judge

is about to give a negative verdict, always object, even if you are not sure what you are objecting against! However, in case you do get it wrong, you are able to save the game at almost every possible point of a chapter, even though you are forced to quit right after saving. Thankfully, loading times are practically non-existent, so you can get back on track in no time. The only problem with the save system is the fact that you are allowed only two saves, one at the start of each chapter, and one during a chapter as mentioned before. To make matters worse, once you have finished a case, the saves at the start of each chapter are deleted, so there is no way of replaying certain parts you liked unless you start the whole case from scratch. Hardly a game-breaking flaw, and somewhat expected, given the fact that Phoenix Wright is a cartridge game.



The game also utilizes DS's built-in microphone, which you can use to press a witness, make an objection or present a critical piece of evidence, all by saying "Hold it" "Objection" and "Take that" respectively. It is a bit gimmicky of course, and you will have to have a very clear voice in order for your phrase to be recognized at the first try, but it is really satisfying shouting "Objection!" when you are sure you have found a critical flaw in the opposition's argument. Provided of course that there is no-one around, or you are bound to get some really weird looks.

The part where the game really shines is the quality of the writing and its sense of humor. All the main characters are brilliantly written and the way they develop throughout the game is also excellent. Moreover, they are also quite... unique, for lack of a better word, since they all have certain traits which make them stand out from each other and make them more endearing to us, like Nick and his loser personality and even the cynicism typically associated with adventure game protagonists, the psychic in training Maya, the ever under-achieving Detective Gumshoe, and Emma, the somewhat geeky teen girl obsessed with scientific procedures and proof.

As for the humor, well, I have to confess that there were times when I had to put my DS down and pause the game because I was laughing too much. The humor is as wacky as the game's characters, but it is so well-written and it provides with some outstanding one-liners, it is just too hard to keep yourself from grinning when playing. Most of the humor comes from the characters themselves (just wait until you meet the "leet" speaking director of the Steel Samurai show) and their interaction with each other, particularly between Nick and his occasional sidekicks, which are some of the most fun and charming moments of Phoenix

Wright. It does not stop there however, since the game also makes fun of itself, an example would be the hilarious reactions that some characters have to Nick's and prosecutor Edgeworth's patented "slam hand on the desk to look important" mannerism.

Another thing about the quality of the writing is the identity of the real perpetrator in each case. If you pay close attention to the clues every time (as you should, after all), you will probably have at least a really strong suspicion of who the real murderer is halfway through the trial. At first, due to this the plot felt too predictable. However, when I was stumped while trying (and failing) to prove why I believed that a certain man was the killer, it hit me: that is the beauty of it, it is not enough knowing who the murderer is, you also have to prove it, with facts. It makes you even more determined to examine the prosecution's case or the witness's testimony and find out where the flaw is. There are the occasional hiccups, where you do have proof about a definite flaw and you cannot present it to the court at all, or you can and they do not accept it, but I guess providing critical evidence is a matter of timing as well.



All in all, it was a wonderful initiative of Capcom's to remake this game for the DS and release it over to our parts of the world, since it is not only one of the best DS games yet, but also one of the best adventure games released in recent years, in consoles or otherwise. To make things even better, the Japanese sequel to this game is also planned to be released on the DS early next year, with an all-new case as well, so that is something to look forward to. In the mean time, if you like adventure games, you should definitely take a look at Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney, because it is certainly worth your time. Scientifically speaking, of course.

The final grade is 94/100.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> Capcom<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Capcom<br/> <b>Platform:</b> Nintendo DS<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Adventure<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> September 2005 (U.S.A.)<br/>           May 2006 (Europe)<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 94/100</p> |
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# The Lurking Horror

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PC Review by Gnome

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Text is a weird beast. It doesn't dance or jump up and down, doesn't change colors, produce richly animated 3D photo-realistic landscapes or get (even remotely) close to a true multimedia experience. On the other hand, it does invoke images only your (your very own) imagination can bring forth; images, sounds, smells and feelings that no PS3 will be able to match. Text, you see, is so powerful a medium that has stuck around for more than 4 millennia. As Infocom –a text dependent company- used to put it (apparently describing their use of text) “We're unleashing the world's most powerful graphics technology. Your brain”. And they were right, even though they are also quite bankrupt.

But, who were they? Who were those Infocom guys? Well, if you don't know, you're a youngling and Google is your friend. I'll just give you a tip: Zork. You see, oh dear reader, besides plain old typed text, or even new-ish appearing-on-a-screen text, there has also been an interactive kind of text, a computerized version of novels, the aptly named text-adventure or interactive fiction games. And Infocom was the producer of the greatest.



## Learning to read. And write.

Text adventures had, and actually still have, the most intuitive interface one could wish for. The player is presented with –astonishingly– a piece of text that describes the situation he or she faces, the surroundings and anything else the developer fancies. The player then just types what he or she wants to do. Simple as that, but an example should help everyone get it.

Imagine you are standing in front of your PC, as indeed you ...er...are. Ok, scrap that. Imagine the screen goes black, and then –magically– a text adventure is

loaded. Guess what you'd see. Correct. Something like this (only with white low-res fonts on a black background):

```
Terminal Room                               Score: 0                               Moves: 0
Not to mention jumping at every shadow, what with all the recent
disappearances. Time to find a free machine, get to work, and write that
twenty page paper.

THE LURKING HORROR
An Interactive Horror
Copyright (c) 1987 by Infocom, Inc. All rights reserved.
THE LURKING HORROR is a trademark of Infocom, Inc.
Release 203 / Serial number 870506

Terminal Room
This is a large room crammed with computer terminals, small computers, and
printers. An exit leads south. Banners, posters, and signs festoon the walls.
Most of the tables are covered with waste paper, old pizza boxes, and empty
Coke cans. There are usually a lot of people here, but tonight it's almost
deserted.

A really whiz-bang pc is right inside the door.

Nearby is one of those ugly molded plastic chairs.

Sitting at a terminal is a hacker whom you recognize.

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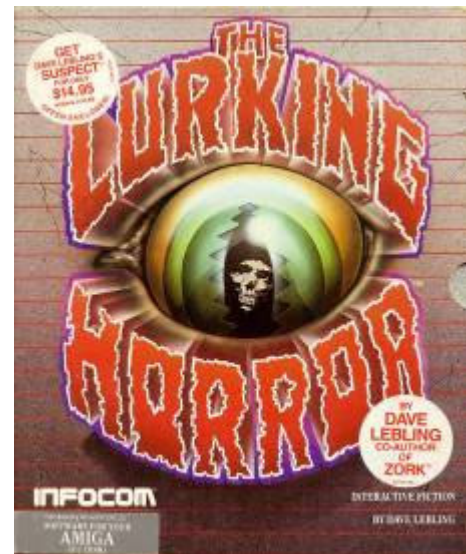
“You are standing in front of the magical door everyone has been talking about. Everything else around you is barely visible, even though you can make out a cat, a glass of wine and an old shoe. What will you do?”

Then, you would be quite literally prompted to take action, by typing something appropriate

after a nice old fashioned prompt “>”. There you would type something like “Drink wine and kick cat” or “open door and kick cat”, even “take cat” and the game would respond appropriately with something along the lines of “the cat is in your inventory” or more often than not with “I don't know the word cat”.

## The Horror's true form

The Lurking Horror, the game under our ever dissecting eye (the game being reviewed to cut the prose), was one of Infocom's last games, released in 1987 just a few years before its final collapse, and following a series of immensely successful and quite legendary games, like the aforementioned Zork, The Hitchhikers Guide to the Galaxy, Sorcerer and the rather risqué Leather Goddesses of Phobos. Its author, none other than Dave Lebling of Zork fame, tried to create the first ever pure horror Infocom adventure game. Oh, and the first Infocom game, perhaps the first text-adventure ever, to incorporate sound. But more on that later.



For now, let's be as frank as the mists of nostalgia allow. The Lurking Horror is a very good game, which uses a mature, though still quite limited, version of the Infocom parser, and manages to infuse the player with an (admittedly false) sense of true freedom. Sometimes of dread too, as this game oozes atmosphere like an ooze oozes ooze. The rather loose and at times disjointed plot, that besides its shortcomings does a great job of being interesting and involving, puts you in the shoes of a GUE (George Underwood Edwards) student, in a typical dark and stormy night, one day before an assignment is due. The apparently



desperate struggle to prepare the said assignment soon turns into a dangerous journey to the GUE Alchemy department, through the old and Lovecraftian underground corridors of the University. Then you get to die a lot and experience quite a lot of weird and some (wisely few) quirky little funny moments.

Puzzles, on the other hand, are not necessarily deadly, varied, imaginative and definitely not as difficult as one might expect from the era of the (beautiful but expensive Infocom) hintbook, even though saving often can be a damn good idea. After all, dying horrible and unexpected deaths isn't a rare incident in the dark underground corridors, as all you have to do is switch off the lights and something creepy will dismember you. In a nasty way, of course. Other than that, there are some brilliant riddles to be solved, and some, thankfully very few, incredibly silly puzzles –like operating the bleeding microwave– to be endured. Mind you, and that's one of my minor Lurking Horror gripes, that at times it's just not clear what you're supposed to be doing.

### **Atmosphere. And plastic worm-thingies.**

Atmosphere. Yes, atmosphere. The secret ingredient that, along with that "gameplay" thing, used to be found in almost every game of yore. An elusive, and nowadays rarely achieved goal, which also happens to be The Lurking Horror's strongest asset. Everything my dear point-and-clickers has been carefully calculated. The game's box is an impressive and very physical beginning in your immersion in the world of Lurking horror (you even get a disgusting little red plastic bug-worm hybrid), which will only intensify when you read some excellent prose that is dramatically connected to very well thought-of sounds, eerie chants, screeches and unexpected bangs. Sound, a genre innovation, is used sparingly, at excellently chosen times and admittedly to great effect. Usually just when you've forgotten this game features any. Even the copy protection is perfectly blended to the game's tone (it does feel like an actual puzzle), let alone the manual...



Thus, to experience the full monty, I do believe that a bit of e-Bay hunting is necessary. To experience the light, prop-less but still very engaging version try your luck with Google. You'll get lucky.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> Infocom<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Infocom<br/> <b>Platform:</b> Amstrad CPC, Apple II, Amiga, Atari ST, Mac, PC, C64, Java<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Text Adventure<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> 1987<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 83/100</p> |
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# The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest

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PC Review by Ugur Sener

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Every once in a while, a game comes along that does things differently and pushes the boundaries of its genre. Offering unique experiences, these games can lead to the development of subgenres. Brought to us by Trilobyte and Virgin Entertainment, The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is one of those games. It is not a perfect adventure game by any means, but it has a unique structure that makes it quite a fun ride nonetheless.



The game opens with a lengthy movie introducing the enigmatic Stauf and his mansion. In his younger days, Stauf was little more than a common thug. Living on the streets, he stole whatever he could to keep himself alive. But one night, a vision came to him that changed everything. Stauf dreamed of a beautifully carved doll. When he woke up the next morning, he created the doll that appeared in his vision. Stauf traded the doll for food and a place to stay. It was the beginning of a highly lucrative business.

It wasn't long before Stauf had a second vision. This time he dreamt of a puzzle. Once again, he constructed it exactly as he saw it in his dream. His dolls and puzzles showed remarkable craftsmanship. Children were fascinated by his toys. Stauf quickly grew rich and famous. But something was terribly wrong. The children started getting sick. As the innocent lay dying in their beds, they clenched their Stauf toys ever closer. Nobody knew what was happening. Nobody understood what caused the epidemic that was affecting the children.



Stauf had one last vision. This time he saw a dark and foreboding mansion on top of a hill. It wasn't long before the mansion was constructed. But this was no ordinary place. Stauf filled the rooms with devious puzzles. Then he invited six guests to the mansion. They all came with a different purpose. They each had secret desires they wished to fulfill. And then there was the mysterious seventh guest, the one who held the key to

everything. Strange things took place at the mansion on the night the guests arrived. And now, it is your turn to visit.

Years have passed since the arrival of the guests. But the mansion still manages to stand still, defying time itself. Apparitions and visions of the past haunt the corridors now. Strange unnatural sights wait at every turn. It does not matter if you want to get out of the house. You have to explore the rooms and you have to solve the puzzles. It is time to understand what happened at Stauf's mansion and put an end to this twisted man's evil.



As the introduction movie concludes, you start the game at the ground floor of the mansion. There is no denying that this is a creepy place. The gloomy corridors, the dark entryway are telling you something is wrong. You see ghosts of the guests that visited the mansion years ago. You see objects moving through the air, guided by some invisible force. Strange secret passages connect the rooms. Unless you keep to the corridors, you never know

where you might find yourself. But *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest* is not about exploration. It is almost entirely about puzzles. In each room of the mansion, including the entrance hall and the upstairs corridor, a puzzle is waiting to be solved.

At the beginning of the game, some of the doors around the mansion cannot be opened. As you explore the rooms and start tackling the puzzles, more of the mansion opens up and starts revealing its mysteries. As you proceed from one room to the next, visions provide you insight as to what happened to the guests at the mansion.

The puzzles featured in *The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest* show a great deal of creativity. While there are similarities between some of the challenges, there is most certainly a good variety to keep players entertained. Solving each of the puzzles will not be a simple matter either. Some of the earlier puzzles are on the easy side, but once you unlock a few additional rooms, you are bound to face a couple of real challenges that will keep you thinking for a while.



For the most part, the puzzles put your deductive reasoning skills to test. For instance, you will encounter a cake puzzle at the beginning of the game. The cake is divided into small square sections. Some of the sections have small skulls on top of them while others have tombstones. The remaining pieces just have icing. The challenge is to figure out a way to split the cake evenly between six people so each person gets a piece that has the same number of skulls and

tombstones. Solving this relatively simple puzzle is just a matter of carefully examining the cake and deducing the correct way to split it.

The game also features three chess-based puzzles and a couple of word puzzles. There is one maze and one of the challenges is more of a board game than a puzzle. Overall, there is a fairly good variety to keep you occupied for quite a few hours as you explore the mansion. If things are getting a little too difficult, the game does have a hint feature to help you.



One of the rooms in the mansion contains a book that has hints on all the puzzles. If you attempt a puzzle but do not successfully complete it, you can go back to the book to get a hint. The first hint is usually a little obscure. If you go back for a second time, you get a more detailed hint. If you still cannot solve the puzzle, it is possible to go back one last time to automatically solve the puzzle. In addition to the book, your character will occasionally make helpful comments as you attempt to solve a puzzle. While these comments will not give you the answer, they may help you understand the rules of the puzzle.

The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest features a remarkably easy control structure and what has to be some of the most memorable mouse icons. A skeletal hand helps you navigate the mansion. If the mouse is over an area with no available actions, you will see a wagging finger icon. If you can move or turn in a given direction, the mouse icon turns into a beckoning hand. A highly disturbing icon depicting a brain throbbing inside a skull denotes puzzles you can attempt to solve. You will also occasionally come across areas where the mouse turns into a drama mask or chattering teeth.



The mask indicates that you can view cut scene showing the ghosts that haunt the mansion. The chattering teeth icon marks supernatural events that you can trigger. Once you activate these events, you may see anything from silverware floating through the air to a skeleton cheerfully playing the piano.

The structure of The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is what made the game unique when it was originally released in 1992. The strict focus on puzzles gave The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest a different feel than traditional adventure games. Yet for all its innovation and influence, The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is far from being an excellent game.

The biggest problem that hurts the game play experience is the way the story is communicated. During many points in the game, it is possible to enter different

rooms and attempt a number of puzzles. The story is told through visions that appear as you enter a room or successfully solve a puzzle. Having the ability to solve the puzzles in various different orders initially sounds like a nice feature. In practice however, it means that you may not see visions of the ghosts in a coherent matter. To make things worse, the game does not even come close to explaining all the details about the storyline. When you complete The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest, you are quite likely to be left confused and have many unanswered questions. From the outset of the game, one of the biggest questions is who exactly your character is supposed to be. You will at least get the answer to that question. However, many details about the guests or the exact nature of the mystery behind the mansion are left to the imagination. The end result is a storyline that can easily feel rather incoherent and difficult to follow.

The game's atmosphere also frequently misses the mark. While the mansion does initially feel eerie and creepy, certain elements significantly detract from the overall tone of the game. For starters, some of the acting feels rather over the top and forced. The supernatural events you can activate are sometimes overly comical rather than being creepy. And the fact that you need to actively trigger them almost completely takes away their creepiness. Stauf's incessant taunting throughout the game gets irritating from time to time. It is sometimes hard to tell whether the game is trying to be scary or comical.



The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is a game that should be almost exclusively played for its puzzles. The game has very noticeable problems with its storyline and its atmosphere. However, if you like solving puzzles, the game can still be a great deal of fun to play. It is a distinct experience that remains surprisingly playable to this day. The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is also significant for its structure and intense focus on puzzles. It will not be the best game in your collection and it certainly does not have the plot depth you will enjoy in many other adventure games. However, if you missed this game when it was originally released and if you like adventure games that feature lots of puzzles, The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest is definitely worth a look.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> Trilobyte<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Virgin Interactive<br/> <b>Platform:</b> PC<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Adventure<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> 1992<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 77/100</p> | <p><b>Minimum System Requirements:</b><br/> 386DX/25 MHz Processor<br/> 2 MB RAM<br/> 16-bit SVGA with 512k Memory<br/> Sound Card w/FM and PCM Sound<br/> Microsoft compatible mouse<br/> 10 MB disk space</p> |
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## Thy Dungeonman 3: Behold Thy Graphics

PC Review by Gnome



Blessed are the amnesiacs, for they'll never cease to be amazed. Blessed too, are all god's creatures (great and small, every nasty hornet, every snake that bites etc), and especially the western human children, that have been extra-blessed with access to the internet (and apparently an abundance of food and water).

They might be carrying the burden of feeling bad after too much staring at screens, will never lay their greedy hands on the 100\$ (well, 130\$ actually) laptop, but they also get to play 'Thy Dungeonman 3: Behold thy Graphics!!'. For free and in their nice browser's window. Preferably by following this link (<http://www.homestarrunner.com/dman3.html>).

Dungeonman 3, just like its predecessor, the appropriately named Dungeonman 2, is an adventure game. A text adventure game, or to be more precise a piece of interactive fiction. Some would even go as far as calling it a post-meta-text-adventure, others might add it was developed by Videlectrix. Point is, you get to type commands, and get mostly sarcastic responses from your PC. You also get to look at retro-themed graphics and experience something like PC-beeper sounds, and an Apple II's disk drive humm between screens. So far so good.

What's really special about this game though, is the brilliant writing. Playing DM3 will help you live some of those rare and rumored instances, when you actually laugh in front of your monitor to the sheer astonishment of your lovely companion or your hated boss. Well, at least I did. Of course. I also tend to find white walls extremely amusing. Oh, and the cliched fantasy, Dungeons and Dragons parody setting. The parser isn't that bad either. It is a bit limited though.

Anyway. It's a great game. Really. If you ever enjoyed Zork, then play Dungeonman 3, if you really believe that text-adventures live and die on their writing, then play Dungeonman 3, if you have never played a piece of interactive fiction, then play Dungeonman 3, if your connection isn't fast enough, then play Dungeonman 3, if you've got broadband, then play Dungeonman 3, if you can't read/write English, then don't. It's in English.

Conquering the ever-elusive "yon flask" (the main objective of DM3) might last something less than a couple of hours (it's not so difficult, and we've even got a nice walkthrough for you), but it will be the laugh of your digital life.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> Videlectrix<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Homestar Runner<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Text Adventure<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 100/100</p> |
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# Moscow to Berlin: Red Siege

PC Review by Ugur Sener

It is one of the darkest times in human history. It is a time of war; it is a time of suffering. Countless people are dying for their countries. Terrible stories and images of unbelievable cruelty will be with us for decades. This is a war we may never forget. A black stain in human history...



But it is also a time for heroism and bravery. It is a time when people rise and fight for their beliefs. In the midst of all the terror, this is a war where we can also find stories to inspire us for many years. Stories of survival, perseverance, resilience, and unfaltering determination... The year is 1941. It is the time of World War II.

Moscow to Berlin: Red Siege takes us to the Russian front of World War II. Split into three campaigns Moscow to Berlin covers the story of the war from the perspective of both armies. The game begins with the initial advances of German troops into Russian territory in 1941. The Nazis have already invaded much of Europe. The invasion of the Soviet Union is about to begin. The first campaign focuses on Operation Barbarossa, recounting how the German army rapidly advanced through Russian territory only to have the massive assault fail within sight of Moscow.



The second campaign focuses on the battles that took place across Russia between 1942 and 1944. Players will get a chance to see how the German army attempted to continue to advance but ultimately failed to defeat the Russian troops. The second part of the campaign will have you take control of the Russian army in a series of important battles as you fight to reclaim the lost territory.

The last campaign takes players to 1945 as the Russian army completely turns the tide and starts advancing towards Berlin. As the German army continues to lose battles, you will take Russian soldiers across Prussia, Hungary, and Poland before finally reaching Germany and the conclusion of the game. Through the

twenty missions of Moscow to Berlin, you will have a chance to experience many parts of the Eastern theatre of War.



Moscow to Berlin is a real-time strategy game that focuses on tank battles. Rather than building up a base and producing units at the battlefield, you will be limited to a certain number of tanks and infantry units in each mission. You will not have to worry about gathering resources and creating an army stronger than your opponent's. Instead, players are expected to use the available resources carefully to accomplish challenging objectives.

The fourth installment in a series of strategy games from Monte Cristo, Moscow to Berlin's appeal is in its intense tank battles. Players will have access to a series of authentic units from World War II. Many different models of tanks are available to wreak havoc upon your opponents. However, the limitation on the number of units available in each battle will mean that you will have to use your resources conservatively. After all, even the most heavily armored and destructive tank will eventually succumb to continued bombing.

Successfully completing a mission might often depend on trying to determine where the enemy is located and identifying weak spots in their defenses. Carefully exploring the map without revealing your presence might be an important factor in some of the missions. In addition to looking for any potential weak spots, you will also have to identify targets that make sense to take out first. For instance, while they can inflict very heavy damage on your tanks, artillery units have relatively weak armor. If you can manage to approach them and destroy them first, battling enemy tanks can become easier. Your strategy in utilizing your units and maneuvering them across the battlefield will be critical to your success. You will have to learn when to push forward and when to withdraw to repair your available resources.



Moscow to Berlin does not allow players choose which army they will be controlling. Rather than focusing exclusively on the German or Russian perspective of various parts of the war, Moscow to Berlin's campaigns and missions are grouped by the chronological order of events. This gives the game more of a focus on the history of the war rather than the side you are controlling during any given mission. The chronologically ordered missions are also an



effective way of retelling the story of the war without any confusion as to the order of various missions and how they fit into the greater war.

However, this design choice also hurts the game in several ways. Due to the way the missions have been grouped, you will have to switch sides between Germany and Russia as you proceed through a given campaign. This makes it very difficult to have an attachment towards your troops or the side you are controlling. Just when you are getting used to leading German tanks, you will be in charge of Russian troops in the next mission. Besides being somewhat disorienting, this structure also prevents the game from having as engaging a story as it could have. You will not get to meet key characters or experience a storyline from the perspective of a Russian or German commander. Instead, you will just play one mission after another with nothing but a historical background provided during the briefing to immerse you into the underlying setting or make you care about the side you are controlling.



Fortunately, while the storyline might disappoint some players, Moscow to Berlin can still be a great deal of fun to play. The tactical aspects of the game do occasionally become very engaging. Having the opportunity to control authentic units from the war can also be a treat for history and real-time strategy buffs. But the strongest asset of the game lies in the design of some of its levels. While every single mission in Moscow to Berlin is not shining with brilliance, the game does have a number of very well-designed and especially engaging levels.



For instance, there is a mission that takes place at the Sebastopol harbor.

Controlling a small group of German units, your task is to take out a series of Russian bunkers in the area. Carefully exploring the location to find all of the bunkers gets quite intense as you also try to survive against Russian tanks, artillery, and mine fields. On a different mission, you get to control a sizeable force of Russian units on a major offensive

against Germany. The mission has multiple objectives and a time limit. Starting at different parts of the map, your troops have to capture a series of flags. As soon as you complete one of the objectives, the timer resets and you have to move onto the next one. Before the end of the mission, you have to cover a large area and close up on the final set of flags from all sides of the map. Seeing your

troops successfully move towards the center is quite engaging and instead of becoming an annoyance, the time limit serves to make the mission very exciting.



Moscow to Berlin also has a few devious missions with multiple objectives that can become quite challenging. One of the early missions in the game will have you capturing a number of Russian flags as you command a small German attack force. As soon as you capture the last flag however, you have to pull your remaining units together around the central flag and defend it for fifteen minutes against a sizeable Russian counterattack. While you get a few reinforcements to help you out, your battle-

torn attack force may still have quite a difficult time holding their position. And don't expect the mission to be over after you survive the fifteen minutes. You will also have to push forward and capture one last flag with whatever units you have left on the field.

During a different mission, you will be in charge of a Russian attack force. The idea behind the mission is to inflict heavy damage upon German units and then rapidly pull back to protect your own army. As such, your initial objective is to move to the opposite side of the map and assault a strong group of German units. Once the initial objective is completed, you have to complete a difficult retreat as German troops flood the area. The challenging missions with multiple objectives and rapidly changing battle conditions go a long way towards keeping players interested.

While Moscow to Berlin does not allow players to construct their own units, the game does feature some interesting ways in which you can command your army. The use of infantry units in the game is of particular interest. In a game that focuses on tank battles, your riflemen or officers may initially seem useless. However, Moscow to Berlin allows players to enhance the vehicles under their control through the use of infantry. Players have the ability to dictate which units control a vehicle. Putting different types of units in charge of a vehicle can result in



bonuses that might help turn the tide in your favor. For instance, you can replace one of the riflemen in a tank with a machine gunner. Doing so will increase your tank's rate of fire. Similarly, putting an officer or a scout inside a tank will give you additional bonuses that are not available when you use regular troops. As such,

the game encourages players to take the time to assign the correct troops to your vehicles.

Players also have access to infantry units that can be useful in certain situations. The simplest example is the medic that can heal your soldiers during battle. However, the single most useful infantry unit is the sapper. The sapper's ability to detect and disable mines can be crucial while you are moving through certain areas. Sappers also have the ability to use remote charges to remove certain obstacles on the battlefield which can greatly aid your tanks in navigating certain areas.



In addition to managing their infantry units, players can give their tanks some special commands. One command that is particularly useful in defending an area is 'dig'. When you click on this command, the selected unit becomes immobile. However, the soldiers inside the unit immediately deploy sandbags along the front side and the front corners of the vehicle. These sandbags greatly improve the tank's defensive ability against attack coming from the front. By carefully arranging your tanks and using the dig command, you can create an effective defense line that is easily able to withstand heavy attacks from the enemy.

Players also have the option to order their units to target a specific portion of an enemy vehicle. When you are fighting tanks, you can attack their caterpillars to render them defenseless. Similarly, you can attack the weapons attached to a tank to cut off its firepower. One benefit of using these special attacks is to potentially get the enemy infantry to abandon the vehicle. Soldiers inside a tank that can't fire its guns might step out to challenge you directly. If you manage to take out the troops however, you can claim the empty tank for your own army. This will be invaluable when you have some means of repairing the destroyed weapons or the caterpillars on the captured enemy vehicle.



Since players are restricted to a relatively small number of units, repair trucks play a critical role in the game. In many of the missions, if you can catch a calm moment, you will be able to pull your forces back and have them patched up by one or more repair trucks made available. It is great that Monte Cristo has made sure the repair times are relatively short. As such, it does not take too long to

slow down your progress and fix your equipment. The real challenge is making sure your army is truly in a safe spot so you do not get bombarded by artillery while you are trying to get your tanks ready for another skirmish.



Without a doubt, Moscow to Berlin has a number of positive aspects that can make it an entertaining game. Unfortunately, the game also has a series of problems that seriously take away from the overall experience. Chief among these problems is pathfinding. Your units, particularly your vehicles, have a considerably hard time navigating the map. Especially when you order them to traverse a long distance or go around certain obstacles, they frequently get stuck and cause you no

end of frustration. Getting larger groups of units to cross bridges is particularly cumbersome. Unfortunately, the design of the levels can sometimes compound the effect. If there are a lot of trees and buildings surrounding the road, your units might have a harder time finding a path. To make matters worse, if you ever happen to give your units orders to move in opposite directions and cross each other along the way, chances are pretty good that they will run into each other and get stuck. Moscow to Berlin would have immensely benefited from some improvements to unit navigation.

Viewing the battlefield can also lead to some, but thankfully relatively minor problems. Just like many other real-time strategy games, Moscow to Berlin allows players to pan the camera as well as adjust the zoom level. It is possible to close in on the battlefield and see things in great detail. This makes certain effects like trees falling over or phone lines collapsing a lot more fun to watch. Unfortunately, players are rather limited in how much they can zoom out. While this



is not a big problem for the most part, it would have been very helpful to be able to see more of the battlefield in certain situations. It is occasionally difficult to manage your troops when you can't see them and the available targets on your screen at the same time. Sometimes your units may destroy enemies before you even have a chance to find them by moving the camera. On occasion, attacks coming from enemy units that are off the screen can also catch you off guard.

Another aspect of the game that might frustrate some players is the artificial intelligence of the enemy units. More often than not, their strategy seems to

consist of holding their ground. Even when they are on the offensive, the enemy units frequently enter firing range and just stop. They do not try to outmaneuver your tanks. They also do not seem to try to attack from the sides or the back as often as they should. While their numbers and firepower alone is usually enough to give you a challenge, it would have been very nice to see the enemy units occasionally employ clever tactics or at least attempt to retreat to a safer location when you overwhelm them with your troops. Thankfully, since the game is already fairly challenging on the normal difficulty level, this does not make the game too easy by any means.

However, if you do not want to deal with tough missions, it is possible to attempt campaigns at a low difficulty level in Moscow to Berlin. Setting the game on an easier difficulty makes the enemy much more vulnerable to your attacks, making your job very easy. In fact, a mission that can easily take an hour in the normal difficulty mode can be completed within a few minutes on easy. The noticeable variation makes the game accessible to beginner strategy gamers while still offering a decent challenge to experienced gamers.



Overall, while Moscow to Berlin does deliver some entertaining moments, it falls short of becoming a great strategy game. Some of the missions are quite engaging and the battles occasionally do get pretty intense. However, problems with navigation and the view of the battlefield hurt the experience. The game could have also benefited from a somewhat different mission structure as switching sides throughout the campaign tends to take away from the atmosphere and the overall feeling of immersion. Nevertheless, playing through the twenty missions and participating in key World War II battles on the Russian front can be a fun experience. Especially given the bargain price of the game, real-time strategy buffs can consider giving Moscow to Berlin a try. Just don't go in expecting the next big thing since Dune, Warcraft, or Command & Conquer.

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| <p><b>Developer:</b> Monte Cristo<br/> <b>Publisher:</b> Cinemaware Marquee<br/> <b>Platform:</b> PC<br/> <b>Genre:</b> Real-Time Strategy<br/> <b>Release Date:</b> June 2006<br/> <b>Grade:</b> 74/100</p> | <p><b>Minimum System Requirements:</b><br/> Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP<br/> Pentium® 1 GHz processor<br/> 256 MB RAM<br/> 1.2 GB Hard disk space<br/> DirectX® 9.0C Compatible 64 MB video card<br/> DirectX® 8.1 Compatible Soundcard<br/> Mouse and Keyboard</p> |
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# Demon Stone

PS2 Review by Ugur Sener

A lone and weary warrior treads down the winding path leading to Damara. Rannek did not travel in search of riches or glory. He carried with him the burden of guilt. He had failed in his task. He had been unable to prevent the slaughter. Now he traveled on his own, seemingly lost and without purpose. But a strange force called to him, inexplicably drawing him closer to Damara. As he approached a series of mines, he saw a battle raging in the distance. Innocent villagers seemed to be in danger. Rannek drew his sword and charged into battle.



Zhai was a stranger her entire life. Her mixed heritage meant that she would have a hard time fitting in no matter where she went. She was half wood elf and half drow. She did not belong among the wood elves in their peaceful village within the beautiful forest. But she would be out of place in the twisted and evil underground city of the drow as well. Zhai sought a way to change all of that. She wanted to undo the prejudice against her drow heritage. Yet ill fortune had her captured by the orcs. Now in the middle of a battlefield she waited for an opportunity to escape. And the nearby mines inexplicably called her.

The sorcerer Illius never felt like he belonged in his own family. They could never appreciate his remarkable talent for magic. Thus, the young sorcerer had set off alone to seek training and learn how to use his power. He found a mentor in



none other than the famous mage Khelben Arunsun. Yet as Illius continued to develop his skills, he felt an irresistible pull towards Damara. Something beckoned him to travel across the lands and the sorcerer obeyed. He arrived through a portal to find himself in the midst of a battle. Whatever destiny awaited him, before he could find it, Illius would have to fight for his life first.

Three strangers, three lost souls, all drawn to the same place by a strange force... Rannek, Zhai, and Illius could have lived for decades without ever

running into each other. But a strange force brought them together. Someone had plans for them. Whether they liked it or not, the trio was going to have to learn to work together. Only by learning to trust each other could the three vagrant souls undo the will of the dark conspiracy that brought them together.



Stormfront Studios and Atari bring an engaging third-person party-based action game with *Demon Stone*. Set in the well-known *Dungeons & Dragons* *Forgotten Realms* universe, *Demon Stone* combines a compelling storyline and solid action mechanics to offer an entertaining experience. The game may not be perfect, but especially players familiar with the *Forgotten Realms* setting can expect to find a lot to enjoy.

The story behind *Demon Stone* comes from the best-selling author R. A. Salvatore. The author of many novels that take place within the *Forgotten Realms* setting Salvatore is perhaps best known as the creator of the famous dwarf or dark elf character Drizzt Do'Urden. In *Demon Stone*, Salvatore brings together an unlikely trio and pits them against two extremely powerful adversaries. The story takes players to a number of different locations across Faerun, or the world of *Forgotten Realms* as the three heroes look for a way to undo the harm they inadvertently cause.

Meeting in the middle of a battle, Rannek, Zhai, and Illius are forced to work together. Trying to stay alive against hordes of orcs, the three heroes chased into the Gemspark Mine. Just when they reach safety, Rannek, Zhai, and Illius discover mysterious symbols. Each with a special meaning for one of the characters, these runes block the entrance into the heart of the mines. Without understanding what awaits them behind the runes, the trio foolishly opens the pathway to discover a truly remarkable gem. Within moments, the two spirits trapped inside the gem are released. As terrible evil forces once again begin to dwell upon Faerun, the heroes realize their terrible mistake. Now, it is up to them to find a way to set things right.



While the story behind *Demon Stone* may not exactly be on par with Salvatore's work in his best-known novels such as the *Icwind Dale Trilogy* or the *Cleric Quintet*, the game still presents an interesting plot with twists and turns along the

way to keep things interesting. In addition to the core storyline revealed through the game's ten levels, players can unlock extra features to learn additional details about each of the main characters. The distinct characters and the engaging plot should keep players interested throughout the course of the game.



The best aspect of Demon Stone is the ability to control all three of the main characters in the battlefield. At the beginning of the game, players will go through small sequences where they get to control each character separately. After the introductory sequence however, Rannek, Zhai, and Illius join their forces. As soon as the party is united, you will become able to change the character you are controlling on the fly.

Each character has unique strengths and weaknesses based on their profession. The warrior Rannek is skilled with his sword. He is very effective in melee combat and he can take on a large number of opponents at the same time. Serving as the powerhouse of the group, Rannek also has the greatest amount of health. With his formidable combo attacks, Rannek can destroy his enemies with great efficiency.

The rogue Zhai is the fastest character. Carrying an inherent grace from her elven and drow heritage, Zhai rapidly moves through the battlefield bringing death to her opponents with her daggers. Yet her greatest asset is her ability to hide in shadows. Whenever you are controlling Zhai, shadowed areas of the level will be displayed with special silver sparkles. When you move Zhai into one of these areas, she automatically covers herself, turning completely invisible. The invisibility does not immediately go away when you step away from the shadows. Zhai can avoid being detected for a precious few seconds. During this time, it is possible to move behind enemies and execute a sneak attack. Zhai strikes a critical part of her opponent's body, killing him or her instantly. Especially when you are overwhelmed with a large number of tough opponents, Zhai's sneak attacks can become indispensable.



While Illius is a talented fighter with his staff, his true strength comes from his sorcery. His ranged spells can be extremely useful when you are facing enemies at a great distance. While Rannek and Zhai do have ranged weapons, they have very limited ammunition. Illius on the other hand can cast his spells indefinitely.



Players do not have to worry about having enough mana to power the spell. Unlike the Dungeons & Dragons pen and paper RPG, they are not restricted by a certain number of spells per day either. As such, Illius can easily use his spells to defeat opponents unreachable by melee attacks. He also has access to spells that give the party extra protection against the enemies. Finally, Illius has the ability to cast charm spells on the monsters, making them much easier to defeat.

The ability to switch the character you are controlling with the touch of a button makes it possible to take full advantage of each character's talents. If a large group of enemies are surrounding the party, Rannek might be able to defeat them easily with his strong sword attacks. If a group of archers suddenly appear in the distance, you can switch to Illius and unleash powerful ranged magic attacks to defeat them. If there are shadowy corners nearby, you can switch to Zhai to take advantage of her ability to unleash sneak attacks. The characters you are not actively controlling still remain on the battlefield and greatly assist you in combat. Having all three of the characters fight against the enemy at the same time brings a much welcome intensity to the fighting.



Switching characters is also extremely useful in staying alive. You lose the game if any of the characters die. However, the characters you are not actively controlling are extremely good at keeping themselves alive. As such, the active character is starting to run low in health, you can try using a different character and keep yourself from losing the level. The transition is always instant and very smooth. It is possible to rapidly go back and forth between active characters without disrupting the intensity of the battle.

Between each character's specialized attacks and the ability to switch characters, you might think that controlling the game would be challenging. However, Demon Stone features a fairly simple interface that should not be difficult to master. Each character has a primary and a secondary attack. With the tap of a button, you will execute a simple melee strike. Simple combos can be executed by hitting the primary or secondary attack buttons multiple times. The heroes are also have access to super attacks. Each of the characters has a hero meter. As you successfully hit your enemies and defeat opponents, you will see the hero meter fill up with energy. When the meter is completely full, you will be able to execute a super attack with the active character. These super attacks hit a number of opponents, knocking them back to make it easier for you to repel their assault. When all three of the heroes have their hero meters charged, it is

possible to execute a team super attack. Rannek, Zhai, and Illius will unleash their super attacks at the same time, inflicting massive damage on nearby enemies

A block button is available to defend against enemy attacks. While holding down the button will protect the active character, it is worth noting that each character cannot block all types of incoming attacks. A finishing move button is available to finish off enemies that are knocked down on the floor. In order to use a ranged attack, players have to hold down the targeting button to lock onto an enemy. Once you have a target, all you have to do is to tap on the primary attack button.



In addition to their regular attacks and special skills, each of the characters have access to special actions. Early in the game, players will discover three key items that will unlock these special actions. Zhai will acquire the ability to jump. In quite a number of areas, having the ability to jump gives Zhai access to otherwise unreachable areas. Sometimes reaching these areas are

essential in advancing through the game. At other times, Zhai will discover a secret treasure chest containing gold, a healing item, or an experience tome. Rannek on the other hand gains the ability to execute an extremely powerful charged attack. This move is highly useful in destroying obstacles that might be blocking your path. Similarly, Illius gains access to magical items known as Beads of Force. The sorcerer can drop these magical beads and make them explode, inflicting significant amounts of damage to obstacles.

The combat interface is very nicely implemented in Demon Stone. The scenery is depicted through beautiful and often richly detailed visuals. The controls are very smooth and the battles are often very intense without being overly chaotic. During many parts of the game, the developers have managed to create a great atmosphere. Occasionally, you will truly feel as though you are in the middle of a large conflict. You will be able to tackle large numbers of enemies with great ease. Yet at the same time, the game does offer a pretty decent challenge at the normal difficulty level. Hordes of tough enemies will occasionally threaten to overwhelm you. Some creative boss fights may also really put your action gaming skills to test. It also greatly helps that the fighting is not completely mindless. You will have to vary your tactics against different kinds of opponents. You will have to learn to utilize each character's skills effectively in order to complete the levels. Thankfully, individual levels are divided into smaller sections

to make things a little easier. If you happen to fail an objective or if one of the three characters dies, you are simply taken back to the last checkpoint.

The game is divided into ten levels. At the end of each level, players are given a chance to upgrade their characters with experience points. As they defeat enemies, each character will gain experience points. No matter who you are controlling, each character gains the same amount of experience. In general, the upgrades are designed to assist each character in their profession. For instance, Rannek will be able to increase his maximum health level quite a few times. He can also buy a number of powerful combos to assist him in combat. Illius on the other hands will be able to acquire more powerful spells. Dungeons & Dragons players will probably appreciate seeing many familiar spells as available upgrades for Illius. From everyone's favorite simple level one spell magic missile, Illius will eventually be able to move onto far more powerful spells such as cone of cold or power word kill. Zhai also has access to plenty of combos to use in battle. However, she also has upgrades that noticeably improve her ability to sneak or increase the effectiveness of her special jump attacks.



In addition to improving the skills of your characters, you can also buy them equipment to make them more effective in battle. Just like experience, gold is shared across the party. Each character earns the same amount of gold during each level. The gold can be used to purchase different types of items. You can equip your characters with better armor or better melee weapons. It is also possible to add enchantments to armor and weapons. Once again, Dungeons & Dragons players should appreciate the available options. Many popular items from the pen and paper are available such as a ring of protection or a belt of giant strength along with familiar weapon enchantments like shocking burst or flaming burst. During the early levels, you will have a limited amount of gold allowing you to only buy less powerful items. However, Demon Stone has a nice feature that keeps you from wasting your gold. When you buy a weaker item such as a ring of protection +1, when you have some more gold, you can trade the first item in for a more powerful version of the item. You do not lose gold for selling back the original item you purchased. As long as you are buying a more powerful version of the same item, all you have to pay for is the difference in price. When you do have a powerful item, it is also possible to downgrade your equipment. This allows you to get your fold back so you can use it towards different items. Once you do decide to buy any version of an item however, it is not possible to completely return it and get all of your gold back.

The biggest complaint against Demon Stone is that the game is far too short. Even though parts of the game can be fairly challenging, players can expect to finish the game in about eight to ten hours. Experienced action gamers may even take less time to beat the game. To make matters worse, once you do complete the game, there is not that much of an incentive to go back and play through the levels again. Some effort to introduce replay value would have been welcome.

Since it has a Forgotten Realms setting and features familiar items, skills and spells from the Dungeons & Dragons role-playing system, Demon Stone could have also benefited from featuring some additional RPG elements. Having a few optional side quests or some opportunity to actively interact with non-player characters to advance the storyline could have been interesting. Yet at the same time, focusing purely on action does allow Demon Stone to maintain its intensity throughout the game.



Demon Stone is a greatly entertaining action game with many high production values. R. A. Salvatore tells a fairly engaging story that should keep players interested. The three main characters are quite likeable with their colorful background stories. The visuals are very pleasant and it is a great deal of fun to explore different parts of Faerun. The voice acting is good

throughout the game. It is especially great to have Patrick Stewart voice Khelben "Blackstaff" Arunsun. Switching between the three characters in the heat of battle makes for very interesting game play mechanics. The action remains very smooth and exciting throughout the game. Had it featured a few more levels and offered a few more hours of game play time, Demon Stone would have been a great hit. As it is, the game's relatively short length makes it difficult to recommend it at full retail price. Fortunately, if you have not played it yet, since Demon Stone was a 2004 release, it should not be too difficult to find it for a reasonable price. If you are looking for a solid action game to keep you occupied for a few hours, do not miss Demon Stone. Especially fans of the Dungeons & Dragons RPG system or Forgotten Realms novels may have a great deal of fun playing the game.

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|--------------------------------------|
| <b>Developer:</b> Stormfront Studios |
| <b>Publisher:</b> Atari              |
| <b>Platform:</b> PC; PS2; Xbox       |
| <b>Genre:</b> Action                 |
| <b>Release Date:</b> December 2004   |
| <b>Grade:</b> 84/100                 |

# X-Men Legends

PS2 Review by Ugur Sener

For decades now, the X-Men comic books have continued to entertain and inspire their readers as a team of brave mutants faces one threat after another. Three movies, dozens of cartoons, and thousands of comic book issues later, the X-Men still manage to remain interesting and continue to spread a message against oppression and prejudice.

For the uninitiated, the underlying premise is fairly simple. Carriers of a special gene, a number of people from all over the world start demonstrating incredible talents. Their powers allow these mutants to fly, heal rapidly, teleport, telepathically communicate with other people, become virtually indestructible, or charge objects with kinetic energy to the point that they explode on impact. Humans regard the mutants with fear and suspicion. At the same time, a group of mutants believe that it is their destiny as 'homo-superiors' to rule over the rest of mankind.



Yet under the guidance of Professor Charles Xavier, another group has a vision of peaceful coexistence. Professor Xavier opens an institute where mutants can learn to control their extraordinary powers. The powerful telepath also creates the X-Men. A team of mutants consisting of some of Xavier's most gifted students, the X-Men fight to turn the professor's dream into reality. In the process, they also save the world from miscellaneous super villain threats on a weekly basis.



X-Men Legends is most certainly not the first game based on the popular comic book series. From a number of fighting games such as X-Men Next Dimension or X-Men Mutant Academy to the action-adventure game Wolverine's Revenge, the mutant team has been brought to our consoles and PC's many times. Unfortunately, many of the games carrying the X-Men license also had considerable problems and failed to deliver a

great experience. Thankfully, developed by Raven, X-Men Legends breaks away from the mold and offers a remarkably entertaining action-RPG. Bringing many members of the X-Men to life, this engaging game is a real treat to the fans of the

comic book. But even those who know absolutely nothing about the X-Men might find something to enjoy.

The story begins with the discovery of a new mutant. Alison Crestmere's powers have surfaced for the first time. There is a great upheaval in the young woman's neighborhood. As police officers are arriving at the area to restore order, two members of The Brotherhood of Mutants are sighted. Among the X-Men's worst enemies, the Brotherhood undoubtedly wants Alison for some foul purpose. It will be up to the X-Man Wolverine to travel to the area and find Alison before she is captured by the Brotherhood.

The first mission puts players into the streets of New York City and Central Park. Controlling Wolverine, you will have to overcome the local law enforcement and miscellaneous Brotherhood thugs before you can reach Alison. Halfway through the mission, Cyclops will join you to give the first impressions of what it will be like to control a team of X-Men.



Upon reaching Alison, the plot will start to thicken. It turns out that the Brotherhood is carrying out other secret operations at various locations. Lead by the X-Men's arch-nemesis Magneto, the Brotherhood is planning something huge. Millions of lives might be in danger if the X-Men fail to stop this threat. In the meantime, a terrifying government project is in progress. The project may bring back the mutant-hunting robots known as Sentinels. As if

that weren't enough, there seems to be trouble amongst Morlocks, the group of mutants that live within New York City's sewer system. To make matters even worse, an old enemy of Charles Xavier is waiting for the right moment to return.

How does Alison Crestmere fit into all of this? Why did the Brotherhood want to capture her in the first place? What exactly are the evil mutants trying to accomplish this time? What is the true extent of the secret government project? Starting as a simple rescue operation, X-Men Legends weaves a pretty intricate plot that should keep players interested throughout the game's lengthy campaign. The journey takes players to many different locations within the Marvel universe. From government bases to the Morlock tunnels, from the Xavier institute to the Moira Island, the game will have you visiting a host of familiar and new locations. Several different factions get involved in what turns out to be a rather tumultuous time for humans as well as mutants. While the game has a relatively slow start, events escalate to a scale fitting for the campaign and the game delivers many great moments to appease the fans of the comic books along the way.

X-Men Legends plays as a series of missions. Upon completing the first mission, you will be taken to the Xavier institute. While exploring the institute, you will be controlling Alison Crestmere. The new mutant in many ways plays a key part in the story. This tremendously powerful young lady has the ability to create magma. She carries vast supply of energy that can make mutant gift extremely dangerous unless she learns to control it. While the inclusion of a new mutant and focusing parts of the storyline on Alison might put off long-time fans of the X-Men, the game actually manages to make it work very well.

First of all, Alison can be a rather charming character to control. She carries a great deal of youthful innocence that sets her apart from many members of the X-Men team. The fact that she is new among the ranks of the X-Men also creates a perfect opportunity to introduce the other members of the team. For instance, you can engage in a conversation with the experienced X-Man Nightcrawler about his origins and one of the first times the X-Men encountered the Sentinels. Doing so not only gives you insight into Nightcrawler's character, but also triggers a small flashback mission. A similar scene might have felt somewhat awkward if it had been between two older members of the X-Men who should by all means already know the story. Exploring the Xavier Institute with Alison and rediscovering familiar locations and characters in Raven's adaptation of the X-Men universe should be entertaining.



It is also worth noting that the entire storyline certainly does not revolve around Alison. She is the character with which you will explore the mansion. You will always control her exclusively during story sections in between the missions. And she does have an important part to play during the later stages of the game. However, she will not be part of the regular team for the first set of missions. And even when she is available to control, you have the option to leave her out as you will be choosing an active field team from a group of X-Men. As such, it is very possible to go through practically all of the missions with your favorite X-Men.

A few of the missions in X-Men Legends does restrict players to a specific set of characters. Of course, there are good story reasons behind this restriction. For the most part however, players can customize the active team in any way they wish. At the beginning of the mission, players are given the opportunity to choose four mutants from the available roster. A good number of characters are available pretty much from the very beginning. You will be able to select some of the best-known X-Men including Wolverine, Cyclops, Jean Grey, or Storm. As the game

progresses, additional characters such as Gambit or Colossus will become available as part of the storyline. With the exception of two characters that appear rather late in the game, you will have to ability to spend quite a bit of time with a considerable number of X-Men. While the game most certainly does not feature all the characters that ever put on an X-Men uniform, there is a decent selection that should give comic book fans many of their favorite characters without overwhelming newcomers with too many available team members.



Once you select the active team, you will be transported to the area where the mission takes place. The core game play consists of real-time combat against various groups of enemies and exploration. The team-based combat can be extremely fun and engaging. Since you will have a great deal of freedom in choosing the active team, it is possible to

deploy a group of X-Men focused on melee or ranged attacks to help you out against certain types of enemies. In general however, it will make a lot of sense to mix and match the different skill sets of the available characters.

The star in your selection of melee fighters is without a doubt Wolverine. With his devastating adamantium claws, Wolverine makes an excellent fighter. Once he gains a few levels and you add a few ranks to his healing factor, he truly becomes a killing machine on the field. Just like he does in the comic books and the movies, you will be able to charge him headlong into battle and rip your opponents apart. Once the fight is over, his healing factor will see to it that Wolverine recovers automatically. Of course, the experienced X-Men is not the only good melee fighter. Characters like Rogue and Colossus are also available to get up close and personal with your enemies as needed.



However, even an incredibly useful team member like Wolverine is not effective in every single situation. Occasionally, you will encounter heavily armored units with a great deal of resistance against physical attacks. In these cases, having a ranged fighter with energy attacks will be essential. While Cyclops can rapidly take out opponents with his optic beam attacks, Storm can wreak havoc with her lightning bolts. Against certain types of enemies, Cyclops and Storm can clean out entire rooms in seconds where your melee fighters will struggle.



It is also possible to greatly benefit from characters that can add elemental damage to their regular attacks. For instance, the powerful telepath and telekinetic Jean Grey can add mental damage to her melee attacks. This makes her punch and kick combos quite effective even against enemies who have resistance against physical attacks. Similarly, Alison can add fire damage to her attacks, which makes her an effective fighter.



The actual fighting is quite engaging even though it incorporates a simple interface. At any given point, you will be actively controlling a single character while the rest of the team will be controlled by AI. You will have access to two melee attack buttons. Another button is reserved for picking up and throwing objects or your opponents. While weaker characters can only lift smaller objects, characters with the 'might' attribute are capable of lifting and tossing larger objects like cars. It is also possible to make your characters jump over certain obstacles. A few characters have the ability to fly if you double tap this button.

While your active character is likely to be doing most of the work, AI controlled characters are still quite effective. They are also good at keeping themselves alive during battle. It is very easy to configure their behavior so they automatically use healing items when their health reaches a certain level. If you are getting surrounded by a large group of opponents, it is possible to call your allies to get closer with the tap of a button. This also helps in the execution of combo attacks against your enemies which inflict significant damage and give you additional experience points.

Each character in X-Men Legends has unlimited access to their regular melee attacks. There are also no restrictions on the benefits of some of their powers.



For instance, Wolverine's healing factor is always active. The bonus elemental damage added to Iceman or Alison's melee attacks is also available with no restrictions. The use of their truly devastating super powers however, burns up energy. For instance, Cyclops will require some energy to create his optic blasts. Nightcrawler will need energy for his teleportation-based attacks. Rogue on the other hand will need to use energy to turn on her damage resistance. The

characters that are meant to stay behind and fight with ranged attacks are typically in greater need of a larger energy pool. Since a melee character like Colossus or Wolverine is already quite effective with their regular attacks, you may not use their superpowers as often. Nevertheless, potions are spread throughout each level to help you regain energy. Each character's energy pool also automatically regenerates over time. It is also possible to find healing potions to patch up your characters and help them stay on the battlefield.

The implementation of the superpowers is nicely handled. Each character has access to four different types of powers. The simplest one is typically either a ranged attack or a melee attack that inflicts extra damage. Many characters also have the ability to enter some type of super-powered state. For instance, while Rogue can trigger additional resistance against damage, Wolverine can go into rage causing him to move faster and execute more powerful melee attacks. Alison on the other hand can turn go into her lava form which helps her cause extra damage and increases the potency of her other superpowers. Between all the different characters, there are quite a number of superpowers. While there are undeniably certain similarities and some of the characters fit into specific melee fighter or ranged fighter templates, there is still enough variety keep things interesting throughout the game.

It is important to note that all super powers will not be accessible from the beginning of the game. Even signature abilities like Wolverine's healing factor will not be unlocked as soon as you start. This is due to the fact that each character starts the game at level one. As you proceed through the game, defeat enemies, and complete important objectives, you will gain additional levels. Fortunately, you will level up quite a few times throughout the campaign, so before long you will gain access to all of your favorite mutant powers. While the active team members are always slightly ahead in terms of experience and character level, all available characters will continue to gain experience. Thus, if you decide to try out a different X-Man in the middle of the game, he or she will be on par with the rest of the team.



The actual process of leveling up is quite entertaining. At each level, the available characters will gain one or two points that can be used towards improving their skills and attributes. The attributes include strike, agility, body, and force. Adding points to strike improves your ability to inflict damage in melee combat. Increasing agility makes your character better at defense. The body score determines how many hit points your character will have. Similarly, the force attribute determines your characters' available energy points. Depending

on the type of character you are building, the way you spend the available points should vary. For some characters, the choices are obvious. For instance, Storm will need a lot of points in her focus attribute so she can frequently use her super powers that allow her to control the weather and bring down lightning bolts or tornados. The strike ability on the other hand would be important to a character like Beast who will be frequently engaged in hand to hand combat. On the other hand, some characters are effective in multiple ways and you will have to spend points in several different categories. For example, Jean Grey can be extremely useful with her telepathic powers that allow her to confuse enemies. But she is also helpful in melee combat since she can add mental damage to her regular attacks. If you give her a good balance among her attributes, she might end up being effective in many different situations.

Each character also has access to a large number of skills. All X-Men have four super powers that can be unlocked. These are the powers that give your characters special attacks or valuable bonuses over short periods of time. In addition, there are general skills that give extra bonuses to your character's energy pool or give them the ability to fly. Other skills give special abilities like the healing factor or elemental damage bonuses to melee attacks. While you have a great deal of freedom in how you spend available skill points, there are some restrictions. Each super power, special ability, or general skill has different ranks. You can acquire additional ranks by spending extra skill points. However, many of the higher skill levels have strict level requirements. Before you can buy the next rank in a given skill, your character will have to gain a certain amount of experience and level up a number of times. While this might seem too restrictive, since each character has access to quite a number of different skills and you gain levels rather frequently, it should not be much of a burden.



The very idea of your characters starting at level one and having to earn experience points to unlock their signature powers might seem odd. After all, readers of the comic books know all too well that the X-Men have had their abilities for many years. However, it is important to note that the most common abilities of each character will become accessible very quickly. For instance, you will have the option to buy Wolverine's healing factor or Cyclops's basic optic blast the first time you level up. By the time you get to add the rest of the team to your party, many of them will be at a high enough level to have their core superpowers accessible. In addition, it is quite fun to watch your team gain experience and reach their full potential. The developers have successfully managed to deliver the experience of controlling a team of mutants with

extraordinary talents from the beginning of the game while also leaving plenty of room for your characters to evolve and become much more effective on the field.

The levels typically span across fairly large locations divided into smaller sections. You may have to complete certain key objectives before the game will let you proceed to the next area. These objectives may range from acquiring key objects to rescuing civilians. You will also have to destroy some critical pieces of equipment. At certain points, the game has been designed to require the use of some specific superpowers. There is usually more than one X-Men with a power that can get past the obstacle, which improves your odds of having the right



person on your team. For instance, if you come across a wide gap, Iceman can build an ice bridge to provide the team passage. If you do not have him on the team however, you can use Jean Grey as a substitute. Using her telekinetic powers, she can also construct a bridge. In the event that you do not have anybody on the team with a power that can overcome the obstacle, you will have to use an Xtraction point.

Each level contains one or more Xtraction points that allow players to manage the active team. Through these points you can switch active team members. This is extremely useful if you need someone with a particular power. But more importantly, you can use the Xtraction point to replace teammates that have been knocked out in battle. You can also revive these teammates with tech points you earn by defeating opponents or destroying various objects in the environment.

Once you make a little progress in the game, you will also be able to access Forge's Workshop and the Healer's Den through Xtraction points. It is possible to equip your characters with certain items to enhance their abilities. Simpler items may just give you a bonus to various attributes or offer protection against a certain type of damage. Other items may give your characters to regenerate a certain portion of their health automatically or improve the rate at which your character regains lost energy. There are also unique items that give you multiple bonuses. It is possible to find all this equipment by defeating your opponents. However, you can also purchase items from Forge's Workshop using your tech points. Similarly, you can visit Healer's Den to buy potions that help your characters regain lost health or energy.

The action aspects of X-Men Legends are rather strong. The battles become quite engaging as you make use of the unique talents of your characters and unleash their potential as a team. The game generally does a good job of keeping you busy and keeping the action intense without becoming overly difficult. However, it is important to note that the RPG elements of X-Men

Legends are not limited to gaining levels and spending attribute or skill points. It is definitely not the focus of the game, but X-Men Legends also leaves room for some character interaction when you control Alison at the Xavier Institute in between the missions. You can explore the school and meet a number of different X-Men outside of the missions. Chatting with them is quite entertaining and even gets you access to a handful of flashback missions. It would have been very nice to have the ability to discover additional side quests by talking to other characters. Some additional dialog choices to give the feeling of actually playing the role of Alison would have also been welcome. But even the simple act of exploring the mansion and meeting the different characters gives makes the game world feel fully realized and brings it a little closer to role-playing games. The game also has a tactical aspect through the selection of active team members and the options available for spending the points earned by gaining levels. Even though many of the level up paths might be obvious, having the opportunity to customize your characters adds to the game.

One fun aspect of exploring the Xavier Institute is the Danger Room. The battle training grounds for the X-Men, the danger room is a marvel of holograms and virtual reality. Able to simulate any battle situation, the Danger Room has been crucial in preparing the X-Men for active field duty in the past. In X-Men Legends, you can send the team to the Danger Room to complete various courses. As you complete the classes, you gain credit. There are different levels of classes and higher levels are accessible only when you complete qualifying exams. The qualifying exams require a certain number of credits, encouraging you to complete all the courses. While not essential to completing the game, the Danger Room courses can be seen as fun side-quests to pick up a few extra experience points. But more importantly, they are excellent for replenishing your stock of healing items as anything you find in the Danger Room carries with you to regular missions. This is especially handy since the Danger Room is accessible from many of the Xtraction Points. Thus, if things are not going well in the middle of a mission, you can take a quick trip to the Danger Room, find some more healing items and return to the battle. While this may not be realistic, it is certainly helpful in completing what might prove to be a difficult mission.



While X-Men Legends is a very solid game, there are a few glitches that take away from the experience. One minor issue is that the pick up of healing items does not always register. You are supposed to be able to walk over a health or energy potion to add it to your stock as long as you have not reached the maximum number you can carry. When you do this, you are supposed to be able to see the potion move from the battlefield into stock denoted by a small icon on

the side of the screen. Unfortunately, sometimes there is a small but noticeable delay between the time you walk over the item and when the game acknowledges that you have taken it. This is a very minor problem and it does not occur very often, but it can still be confusing in the middle of a fight.

Another minor problem is that on rare occasions your teammates will get in your way. Fortunately, switching the active character is all it takes to take care of this problem. A third small glitch has to do with character interaction. When you are exploring the institute, characters that have something to say to you are supposed to be highlighted with a yellow exclamation mark. When you talk to them, the indicator disappears. Unfortunately, if you leave the area and come back, the indicator reappears even though the character has nothing new to say, which can be slightly misleading. Fortunately, these are very minor problems that do not take away much from the game play experience.



It is also worth noting that some of the levels in the game can drag out a little too long and fighting the same enemies over and over again can become a little repetitive. Thankfully, this is once again a small problem. In general, the game does a decent job of keeping the action intense and keeping players interested.

Overall, X-Men Legends is a very solid game with a lengthy campaign that is just short of being a complete hit. The

game has many positive aspects. The graphics are very pleasant and stylish. The environments are fairly detailed and interesting. The voice acting is appropriate for all the characters and having Patrick Stewart voice Professor X is a nice treat. Controlling a team of X-Men can be quite entertaining. Their superpowers make for some highly engaging game play mechanics. It is also nice to have a good number of characters available with various unique powers all nicely depicted with special effects. The game does carry a few small problems and the load times can get a little too long. Nevertheless, X-Men Legends is a fun game that is easily recommended to anyone who enjoys action-RPG's. Fans of the comic books or the X-Men movies will be in for an extra-special treat. There is something remarkably fun about seeing the X-Men on the field tackling one foe after another and working as a team.

**Developer:** Raven  
**Publisher:** Activision  
**Platform:** PS2; Xbox; GameCube  
**Genre:** Action-RPG  
**Release Date:** September 2004  
**Grade:** 88/100

# The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers

PS2 Review by Ugur Sener

The darkening skies are the harbingers of doom. With each passing day, the forces of evil grow stronger. Massive armies are waiting to descend upon the people of Middle Earth. The fellowship is torn apart. The companions are separated. Yet even in this darkest hour, there are some who continue to struggle. And hope is waiting to be found in the most unlikely places.



The Two Towers is the second chapter of J.R.R. Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings trilogy. Continuing and expanding the storyline from The Fellowship of The Ring, The Two Towers is a captivating novel for any fantasy fan. The original novel and the movie adaptation provide more than enough material a variety of video games. There are intense battles, engaging fights, fascinating environments, interesting characters, and of course a gripping storyline with a great atmosphere. Especially considering the tremendous success of the novels and the great anticipation for the movie, it was inevitable that a video game would be released based on The Two Towers.

Unfortunately, video games based on novels or movies rarely seem to truly capture the essence of the original material. Especially the games based on movies all too often feel rushed and lacking in polish, perhaps the result of an effort to get the game into the stores right before the release of the movie. The action title based on The Two Towers movie is by no means an excellent title. However, it still manages to break away from the mold and deliver an entertaining experience in several ways.



The original novel and The Two Towers movie weave a complex storyline with multiple threads. Picking up right where The Fellowship of the Ring left off, the movie depicts the second leg of Frodo and Sam's perilous journey. In the meantime, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli set out on a quest of their own. Events escalate through the course of the movie and the desperate nature of the battle against evil becomes clear.

Instead of trying to capture the entire storyline of the movie or the novel, the video game focuses on Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. The game opens with a tutorial level that takes players all the way back to the beginning of the saga.

Scenes from the beginning of *The Fellowship of the Ring* are used to set the tone of the game and familiarize players with the storyline. The early levels of the game are also based on events that take place in the first movie. But the game eventually moves into the storyline of *The Two Towers*, pitting the three heroes against armies of orcs and goblins. From Rohan to Helm's Deep, players get a chance to relive key moments of the movie by participating in the action.



*The Two Towers* is a pure action game played from a third-person perspective. During the tutorial level and the first regular level, players do not have the option to choose which character they control. However, in each of the remaining levels, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli are available as playable characters. The pure hack and slash game play pits players against hordes of monsters

across a variety of locations. In a number of the levels, other characters will join you to help you out in combat. However, you will have to face the majority of the encounters alone.

There are a few differences between the playable characters that bring some diversity to game play. Each character comes equipped with a melee weapon and a ranged weapon. Not surprisingly, the fastest character is the graceful elven archer Legolas. He is deadly with his twin daggers and unfaltering bow. He is also able to carry significantly more ammunition for his ranged weapon than Aragorn or Gimli. The stalwart dwarven warrior Gimli on the other hand is the master of the battleaxe. Even though he is noticeably slower than Legolas, Gimli can withstand a more damage. His attacks also deliver the most damage. The skillful swordsman and brave ranger Aragorn is somewhere in between the other two characters. While he does not match Legolas's quickness or Gimli's raw strength, as the well-rounded character, Aragorn is highly effective in just about any situation.



The game has a simple control schema that makes it very easy to fight your opponents. Each character has a speed attack that is effective against enemies that do not carry shields. With a series of speed attacks it is possible to mow down weaker troops with an almost disturbing efficiency. The fierce attack on the other hand works well against tougher opponents or enemies carrying shields. The powerful strikes are effective in knocking the monsters back or destroying their protective gear. The characters are also equipped with an attack that



knocks back opponents. Finally, an extremely useful move is available for quickly finishing off opponents who have fallen on the ground before they can get up and continue fighting.

Rather than providing a defense button players can hold down to block enemy attacks, *The Two Towers* requires more involvement on the part of the player to fend off enemy attacks. Each character can attempt to parry enemy attacks. A well-timed tap on the parry button can deflect a blow that is about to land on your character. Players can also make their characters jump backwards as a form of defense.



Continually hitting enemies without sustaining damage fills up your character's skill meter. Depending on how full the skill meter is, your character gets a rank for each enemy killed. If you have only landed a couple of successful consecutive blows, you will get a 'fair' or 'good' ranking. If you manage to charge up the skill bar further, you can achieve an 'excellent' ranking. When the skill meter is completely filled, your character's weapon will begin to glow. For a few seconds, your attacks will deliver extra damage and each kill will get you a 'perfect' ranking. The rank you get with each kill determines the amount of experience points you receive for defeating the enemy. Higher rankings give players more experience points. Racking up experience points will increase the level of your characters and give you access to the various upgrades available.



At the end of each level, players are given a chance to spend the points earned by defeating monsters to buy upgrades. The bulk of the upgrades give players access to various combo moves. The relatively simple combos require players to press the various attack buttons in a predetermined sequence. The resulting attacks can be extremely devastating and rapidly fill up your skill meter.

Each character has a different set of upgrade options. For instance, Gimli has several upgrades to increase his maximum health, making him able to withstand greater amounts of damage. Legolas on the other hand has the most available upgrades to increase the damage done by his arrows. Thus, as you proceed through the game and power up each character, the differences between them should be further accentuated.

Including the tutorial and the secret mission that can be unlocked, *The Two Towers* features a total of twelve levels. While the levels provide players an opportunity to experience some of the key moments of the movie, each of them are fairly short. There are typically very simple key objectives such as protecting a gate, finding your path through an area, or just repelling waves of attacks until the game decides it is time for another cut scene.



Even though the levels are relatively small and do not last for too long, some of them are quite challenging. Especially towards the end of the game, when players have to defend areas against enemy attacks, hordes of monsters can easily overwhelm you. Some levels are divided into smaller sections. If your character dies or if you fail to complete an objective, you are taken back to the last checkpoint and you

do not have to play through the entire level again. However, especially in some of the later levels, checkpoints are not available. As such, if something goes wrong, you will have to start the mission from scratch.

The strength of *The Two Towers* is in its action mechanics. The developers have successfully managed to provide a simple control structure while still delivering an engaging combat system. Defeating various enemy types will require you utilize different tactics. You will also feel the heat of the battle in some of the game's levels as you and a handful of allies try to stand against a tremendous enemy force. Unfortunately, *The Two Towers* is not without its problems.

The single biggest problem that hurts the overall game play experience is a remarkable lack of coherence. When the game starts with scenes from the first movie and throws you in the heat of the battle for the first time, it seems as though you are about to experience a complete retelling of the story. However, all you will really get is a series of disjoint moments from the first and the second movie. The cut scenes that are supposed to tie together different parts of the game do not give you any kind of sufficiently detailed explanation of the plot. Players are simply expected to jump from one level to the next with hardly any effort to communicate the underlying story.



Of course it should be noted that the developers simply intended to provide gamers an opportunity to relive certain moments of the movies. As such, their efforts seem to have been centered on recreating a number of locations with a

great deal of detail rather than tying everything together coherently. Unfortunately, the end result is a game that can only be enjoyed by players who have seen and liked The Lord of the Rings movies. While there is plenty of strong source material to tell a solid story, it seems a shame that more of an effort was not put forth to communicate it in the video game adaptation of The Two Towers.

The game is also a bit too short. Getting through the entire game with one character should take about six hours. It is possible to go back to previously completed levels and play them with different characters. As an added bonus, reaching level five with each character unlocks an interview with the actor that plays him in the movie. Once you complete all of the regular missions and gain ten levels with one of the characters, you can also access the secret level. Finally, it is possible to unlock a secret fourth character. However, once you play through each level for the first time, it is doubtful that you will want to go back and play them again with a different character. While they are entertaining the first time around, the levels are just not engaging enough to be played over and over again. The attempts at adding replay value simply does not make up for lack of solid game play time.



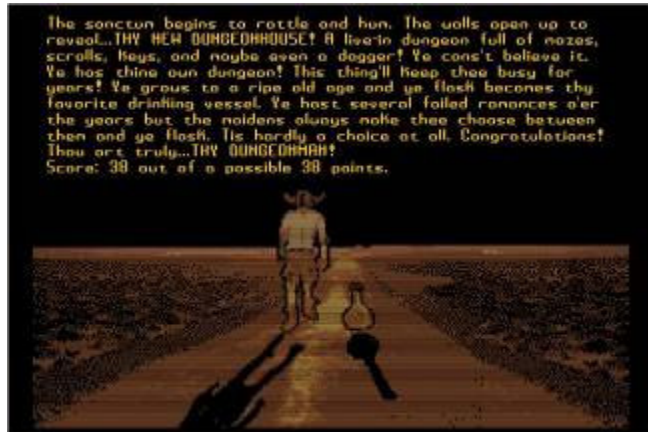
The video game implementation of The Two Towers delivers very well on certain elements. The action is solid and the combat is indeed quite engaging. Some of the environments have been recreated with obvious care. The game occasionally succeeds in capturing the chaotic nature of the battlefield and makes players feel like they are in the middle of a war. Unfortunately, the feeling is quickly lost due to a lack of coherence between the individual levels. The excellent storyline of the movies and the novels is portrayed very poorly in the game. Some of the levels span over too small an area. Especially the part of the game that takes place within the mines of Moria should have included more of the tunnels than the single room where the companions fight against the cave troll. In general, players will most likely not be satisfied with the amount of game play time available. In the end, The Two Towers is a game that is made for fans of the movie. It offers good action mechanics and an opportunity to actively participate in some key moments of the movie. In that regard, The Two Towers is better than the average sloppy movie adaptation. However, in terms of delivering a complete game, The Two Towers falls short of the mark.

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| <b>Developer:</b> Stormfront Studios |
| <b>Publisher:</b> EA Games           |
| <b>Platform:</b> PS2; Xbox; GameCube |
| <b>Genre:</b> Action                 |
| <b>Release Date:</b> October 2002    |
| <b>Grade:</b> 75/100                 |

## Thy Dungeonman 3: Behold Thy Graphics - Walkthrough

Written by Gnome

Do you like the picture on the right? Want to see it live, on your very own computer, but are having trouble finishing the excellent Dungeon Man 3? Fear no more, for I, the almighty and quite pathetic gnome, will offer you a walkthrough. The bloody walkthrough of DM3...



Before you go on, you might want to actually try playing the game through <http://www.homestarrunner.com/dman3.html> or even thinking for yourselves. It really is worth it, and Dungeon Man 3 is quite an easy adventure too. Anyway, on to the solution:

You start in a Dungeon. That's not good. Look around. Use the claws and then take the bone. Use or throw the bone on the wall.

Now try taking that ever-elusive flask. Oops.

Go north, and then north again to enter the monastery. Take the stein and escape by simply going south. Now go south to the crossroad and then west to the forest. See the log? Look inside it and get the money. Now go east and one more time east to the overlooking place (thus, the overlook). Use the money you got to buy some corn. Go back to the monastery and give the corn to the bird.



Go south (crossroad), east (overlook) and east to enter the village. The village has a pub, a tavern and a sandwich shop. Enter the pub, use (fill, actually) the stein to get your beer and learn (pay attention here) the name and the description of a man who hangs out in the tavern. Go to the tavern and talk specifically to the aforementioned man. Pick him out from the other guys shown to you and he'll give you a map. Now go

to the sandwich shop. Look around and then knock on the window. Look at the condiment bar. See the blood? Good. Knock again and ask the guy for blood. He'll give you a bottle of ketchup.

Leave town and go the forest (where the log was). Now that you have the map go west. Talk to the hag. Use the ketchup on your head. Look carefully at the scrapbook. Each page of the scrapbook is important. The first shows the hag's holiday place, the second her birthday present and the third the number of small hags. Talk to her and she'll ask you three questions. If you paid attention to the scrapbook, you won't have trouble answering them and getting a nice flask-grabbing glove.

Now, go all the way east to the crossroad. Go south. Talk to the troll. Use the bird on the troll. Go south, open the dungeon door and enter your beloved dungeon. Use the flask-grabbing glove, and try to grab the flask. Play the (easy) arcade sequence, win and be rewarded.

The end (of this walkthrough, at least)...



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## A Final Note...

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Here we are at the end of another issue. After the chaos that was the last two months, things seem to be finally getting back to normal. It was great to read Gnome going on about text-adventures while Thaumaturge gave us great insight into the remarkable undertaking that is the Gabriel Knight 4 campaign. Wendy's Shady Brook and Lifestream reviews certainly increased my anticipation for Christopher Brendel's latest project Stonewall Penitentiary while Erdalion has just about convinced me to go out and buy a Nintendo DS.

Since I was unable to complete it for our July issue, I'll be working on a review of Tex Murphy: Pandora Directive to go out on the August edition of Adventure Lantern. We also have plans to complete a number of additional previews and take a look at the Schizm series. Since we covered The 7<sup>th</sup> Guest and X-Men Legends tonight, it would only be proper to follow up with a review of their sequels, The 11<sup>th</sup> Hour and X-Men Legends II in August.

As we bring the seventh issue of Adventure Lantern to a close, it is good to see the magazine starting to function a little better. For the first time, two editors, Drantin and I, were able to look over most of the articles before we released them. Hopefully this will help deliver you a more enjoyable reading experience.

As always, many thanks to the Adventure Lantern team for making the July issue possible. And many thanks to our readers for their continued support. Be sure to tune in next month for a new issue.

-Ugur Sener