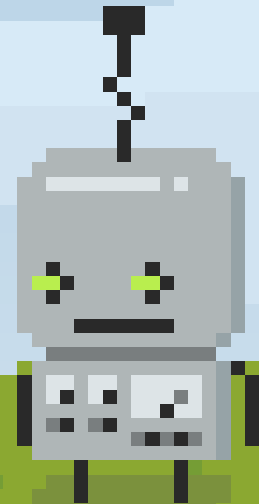


Adventure Lantern

ISSUE #32 JULY 2012

REVIEWS:

- **Botanica**
- **Metal Dead**
- **Lume**
- **Scratches: Director's Cut**
- **Adam's Venture ~ Episode 3: Revelations**
- **The Walking Dead ~ Episode 2: Starved for Help**



This last month Ugur Sener has been extremely busy with other parts of his life so has asked me, Jonathon, to temporarily step in and write this editorial. The following is my attempt to do so, and while I do not expect to succeed in filling his shoes, I can promise the rest of the magazine remains or transcends our usual quality.

I want to start off with apologizing for our late delivery, an extra busy month for Adventure Lantern and a few of its members has made this unavoidable. But we are counting this issue as a delayed July issue and fully intend to release another issue late this month.

For this, delayed, issue we have some BIG announcements. Constantin Starodub, a very talented magazine layout designer, has joined our team and working mostly alone has completely revitalized our design. While, Adventure Lantern retains all of its regular content and Adventure Gaming theme, the layout of this content has been reimagined from the ground-up. There are far too many changes to mention here, but I will go through the list of changes that I thought were most needed. The aspect of AL most needing an update, in my mind, was all the whitespace. We simply had way too much of it, and it was all white, some background was clearly needed. We also needed a way to differentiate the sections of AL (Adventurer's Ravine, Bandit's Cove, etc.). All of this and much more was addressed with this makeover.

I think this redesign was a huge success, and I am sure that all of you will also. It is strictly better and while it mostly sticks to a simple minimalistic design we do

have a few unique elements. While I might be biased, being the designer and all (the initial idea came from Constantin), I am particularly pleased with the somewhat unique contents page and AGS section, with its timeline. This timeline is somewhat restrictive, but ultimately a very nice looking and easy reading design that adds a distinctive look to the page.

Taking some inspiration from the visual changes we also decided to do a few tweaks to the content. We no longer show the entire list of System Requirements, and instead list only the Platform. And in a belated acknowledgment of how important the web has gotten to gaming, we have included the game website URL in all reviews. We also added a new subsection to the News, for stories that previously did not really fit anywhere.

In addition to all these changes, and a huge news section, we are serving up a decent handful of reviews; It is really no wonder we are so late in delivering it to you. From Nick we finish off the puzzle, platformer, adventure trilogy Adam's Venture with its third entry, Revelations. He also contributed the second episode of Telltale's The Walking Dead series of adventure games, Starved for Help. I contributed three reviews, two very small ones for Lume and Metal Dead, as well as the Director's Cut of Scratches. We had previously reviewed Scratches, but this Director's Cut is a substantial addition to the game with upgraded both graphics and added some additional hours of gameplay, to name a few of its features.

– Jonathon Wisnoski

Cover Image:

ROBO QUEST (p.17)

NEWS

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Jack Houston and the Necronauts is the clear winner here. It is a pulp sci-fi adventure, which puts you on the first rocket to a savage alien world.

UPCOMING RELEASES

Against the Wall really caught my eye last month. It has a very interest world concept, where instead of being horizontal, the ground is a huge vertical wall, which trees and entire cities clinging to.

NEW RELEASES

UPDATED RELEASES

NEWS FROM THE BIG BLUE CUP

Sleeper hit, the unofficial Black Sect Remake retains the originals graphics while making the game easier.

METAL DEAD

Metal Dead is the successful attempt to combine heavy metal, the zombie apocalypse, comedy, and retro point and click gaming.

SCRATCHES: DIRECTOR'S CUT

Scratches is a horror title rapped up in a mystery and filled with suspense and tension. It is a point and click adventure game released in 2006 by the small Argentinian company Nucleosys. This team went on to release a director's cut of *Scratches* the following year. Nucleosys has since shut its doors, but one of its co-founders, Agustin Cordes, has gone on to found Senscape, which is currently working on *Asylum*, an adventure game with a similar style.

THE WALKING DEAD

EPISODE 2: STARVED FOR HELP

The Walking Dead. Episode Two: Starved for Help is less about zombies and more about human relations in the wake of an inhuman apocalypse. Set three months after the conclusion of *Episode One: A New Day*, Lee Everett and his band of survivors have taken up residence and barricaded the Travalier Motel. The problems start when they run low on food.

There sure was a lot of awesome happening over the last month, both for Adventure Lantern and Adventure gaming in general. Kickstarter, and other crowd funding sites, continue to draw out some great looking adventure game concepts; And even outside of the crowd funding scene there are numerous exciting new IPs and sequels in the works. And Adventure Lantern continues to acquire new talent and undergo improvements.

In the world of classic game series, we have a remake for Abe's Oddysee, a demake for The Curse of Monkey Island, and a sequel to the Broken Sword series announced. The two biggest projects on Kickstarter got funded last minute: Project Fedora, and SpaceVenture. And a few completely new projects come into the light; Including Necronauts, the pulp sci-fi adventure, Against the Wall, and Nicalas Eymerich, Inquisitor: The Plague, the game based on real life history. But perhaps, the biggest mainstream news his month is the release of Deponia and The Dark Eye: Chains of Satinav.

ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

BOTANICULA

Botanica is *Amanita Design* style incarnate, it is *Samorost* taken to a whole new level.

LUME

The graphics are what really define *Lume*. In *Lume*, beautiful 3D scaled sets are constructed out of paper, cardboard, and a few other building materials and props. These sets are then filmed in HD. The minimalistic characters are then superimposed on-top of these scenes. The result is quite visually striking and very tactile.

ADAM'S VENTURE

EPISODE 3: REVELATIONS

The third and final episode in the *Adam's Venture* trilogy, *Revelations*, brings closure to Adam's quest of uncovering the secret of the Garden of Eden and putting a stop to the Clairvaux Corporation's evil schemes. Left for dead in the crumbling tomb of King Solomon, Adam loses consciousness and experiences a flashback of how he met his partner, Evelyn, and how they came to be involved with the Clairvaux Corporation. When he comes to, he feels reinvigorated in his promise to protect Evelyn, and sets out to rescue her from the clutches of the Clairvaux leader.

There sure was a lot of awesome happening over the last month, both for Adventure Lantern, Adventure gaming in general, and me personally. Kickstarter, and other crowd funding sites, continue to draw out some great looking adventure game concepts; And even outside of the crowd funding scene there are numerous exciting new IP and sequels in the works. Adventure Lantern continues to acquire new talent and undergo improvements. And personally, I am very excited to announce that I was one of the five winners of a Lace Mamba competition.

To celebrate Lace Mamba's new website they held a contest a short while ago, where the first 100 subscribers to their newsletter would be put into a draw where five would be chosen to receive a pint glass, a t-shirt, and three games of their choosing from Lace Mamba. I was one of these recipients and chose Desponia, Black Mirror 3, and the upcoming Lucius! Yay me, and Lace Mamba.

I would also like to mention the arrival of a new team member to Adventure Lantern, Constantin Starodub. He is our very first layout and design expert and has been working hard to make our magazine look as good as it reads; And, personally, I think his work has been a huge success. In addition to these visual changes, I have added a new category to the news section, Updated Releases; This section hosts all the new additions to previously released adventure games, such as DLC, new platform ports, and major updates.

So, finally to actual Adventure game news. In the world of classic game series, we have a remake for Abe's Oddysee, a demake for The Curse of Monkey Island, and a sequel to the Broken Sword series announced. The two biggest projects on Kickstarter got funded last minute: Project Fedora, and SpaceVenture. And a few completely new projects come into the light; Including Necronauts, the pulp sci-fi adventure on Kickstarter, Against the Wall, with its very interesting concept and world, and Nicalas Eymersch, Inquisitor: The Plague, the game based on real life history and containing real historical characters; I love adaptations. But perhaps, the biggest mainstream news his month is the release of Deponia and The Dark Eye: Chains of Satinav.

– Jonathon Wisnoski

Till the 5th of July, GOG is hosted a series of sales. Every day two games went head to head, with the winner, decided by votes, getting 60% off the following day, and the loser 40%. It is too bad that we were not able to tell you about this sale event before it was over, but I am hoping this article convinces you to follow follow the interesting happenings over at GOG's site more closely, that is if you are not already.

Announcements

BROKEN SWORD

Broken Sword 5

According to a Facebook comment by Revolution Software, *Broken Sword 5* is in the works and will be returning to the series 2D roots.

1954: Alcatraz

Daedalic Entertainment has announced the upcoming 2012 release of *1954: Alcatraz*. In it, players will need to help a thief named Joe escape "The Rock".

Alcatraz promises 90 hand-painted, fully researched period locations in San Francisco, North Beach and Alcatraz, over 20 characters to interact with, and a non-linear plot with alternate endings.

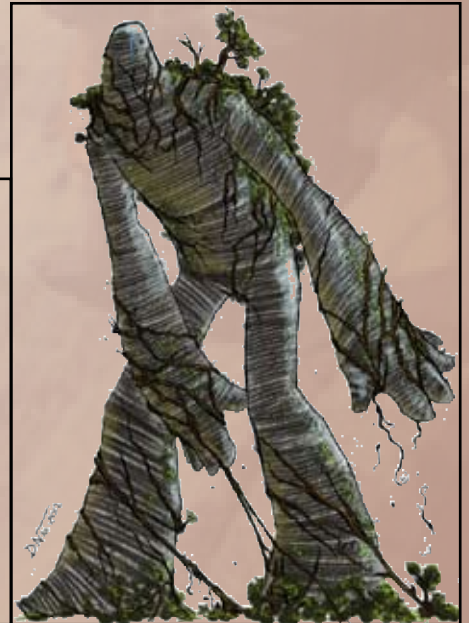
**Abe's Oddysee Remake**

The very first title in the Oddworld series is getting a ground-up remake, by Just Add Water. *Oddworld: Abe's Oddysee* is a 2D, side-view, puzzle platformer, where your objective is to get Abe through a series of screens. The Oddworld universe is a unique one with a strong emphasis on its pro-environmental/anti-cooperation storylines. At this point it is not entirely clear if Abe's Oddysee remake is entirely accurate; There is talk of remaking both Abe's Oddysee and Abe's Exoddus in one go, or possible making a parallel game to Abe's Oddysee.

Coma: A Mind Adventure

In *Coma*, the main character is in a deep coma after a terrible accident. The scenarios, humans, and entities you encounter are a representation of the feelings of the character; everything in *Coma* happens in his head. He did something terrible in the past (many years ago) and to get out of the coma he will have to forgive himself by finally accepting who he is and what he did.

The player has the ability to change the climate and the weather; And to solve the puzzles you will have to use these abilities! You are the one who decides if it's nighttime, daytime, if it rains, if the skies are clear, if there is a terrible fog, and in any one of these states the environment changes radically. There are zones in the environment that are sensitive to the player and certain objects, and the player must use the characteristics of each macro climatic state to combine them and solve the puzzles.





HeXit

HeXit will be a point-and-click adventure game with pre-rendered graphics. The team love sci-fi (*Blade Runner*, *Total Recall*), exciting stories, and police procedural television series; And are trying to create a game that combines all of these elements, while focusing on a compelling storyline with twists and exciting adventures.

The team aims to create a spectacular sci-fi world that exists as a realistic, richly-detailed, and interactive atmospheric environment. Several side-stories and detailed in-game worlds await those who enjoy exploring everything in a game. There will be countless usable items which can be combined, several mini-games, And English language voice acting for all in-game dialogues. *HeXit* is planned as an episodic adventure, with 6-10 hours of gameplay per episode.

The Kickstarter is looking for \$75,000 to fund this first episode, with the funding period ending on July 10th.



Quest for Infamy

Quest For Infamy is a classic point and click adventure game, in which you assume the identity of "Mister Roehm" a man trying to start over after running away from a shady past. He's come to the little town of Volksville only to discover there's so much more going on in the valley than meets the eye! Come along and take a walk on the wild side with Roehm - and discover just how bad you might be.

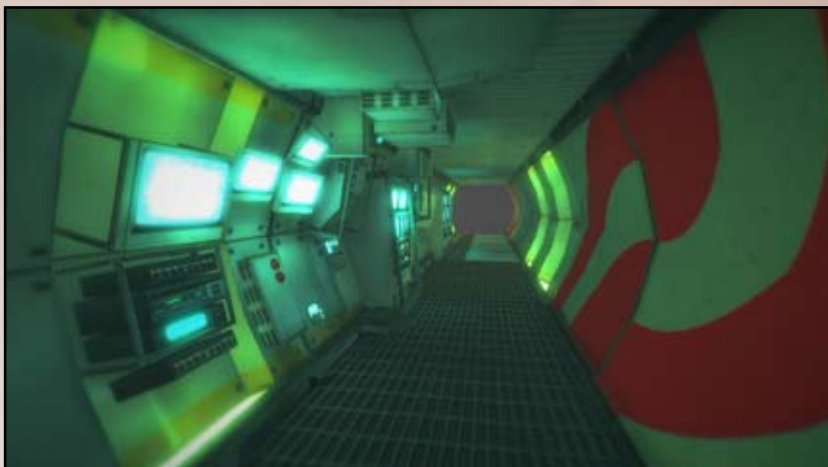
Featuring three different character classes, why not take on the sly and cunning path of the Rogue, or behold the wonder and limitless power of the Sorcerer. Or maybe you'd prefer the brute strength and brawn of the Brigand. Each class takes you on a different course throughout your quest making it ever so unique. *Quest for Infamy* will have a fully orchestrated soundtrack, voice acting and stunning hand painted backgrounds and animations.

Quest for Infamy doubled its \$25,000 Kickstarter goal, and now that it is funded has a early 2013 release date.

Captain Disaster

An acquaintance of mine is creating a sci-fi comedy adventure game series based on his series of Captain Disaster short stories. He has already released a collection of these short stories, in ebook format, through lulu.com and a few trailers for his upcoming game as well. The first in these adventures is to be called *Captain Disaster in Death Has A Million Stomping Boots*. In it Captain Disaster takes a job delivering a package from Acturus-1 to Proboscis Major - having no idea what's inside it, and a condition of the job is not to ever look inside the package.





New Robert Yang Project

An, untitled, upcoming project by Robert Yang, designer of the *Radiator* series of adventures/visual novels has gotten itself announced with a few interesting looking screenshots.

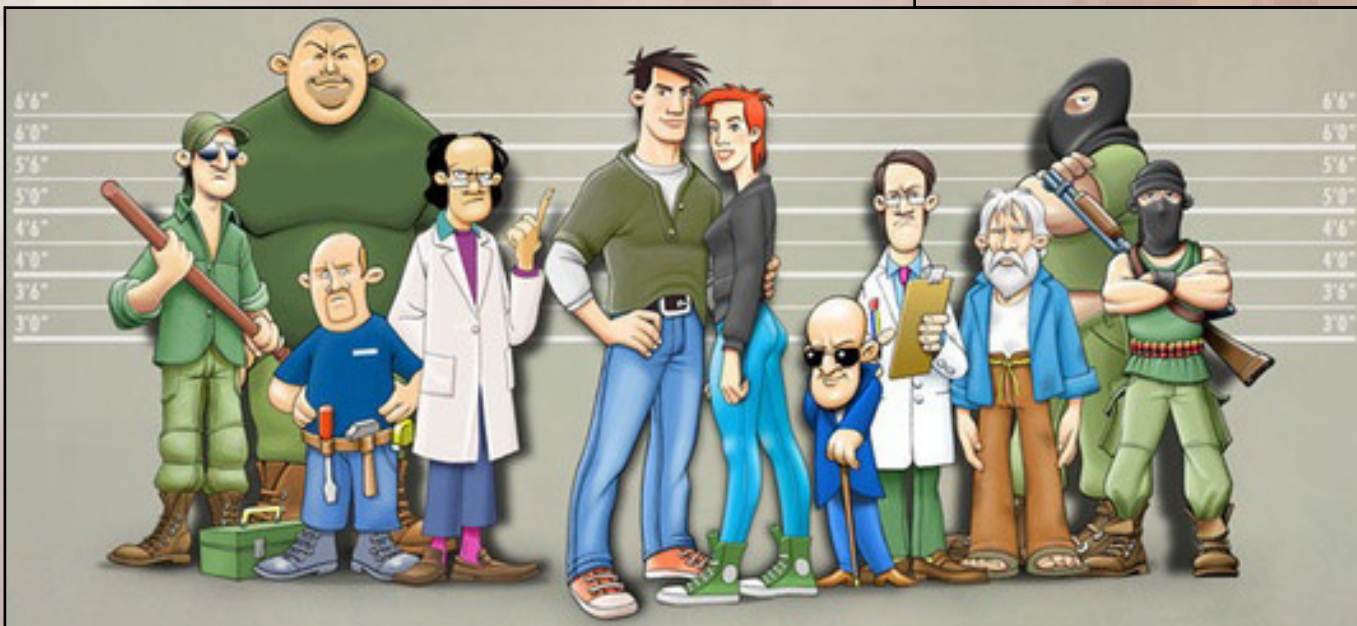
Vampires!

The company behind *JULIA* has announced their next project, and it is a fast-paced puzzle game about guiding vampires through labyrinths of traps. It is coming to PC, iOS, and Android; And based off of the debut trailer, it appears to share some similarities with *Lemmings*.



Reversion on Indiegogo

With the freeware release of their first chapter, *The Escape*, the small indie Argentinian company is looking to develop the next chapter, *The Meeting*, which will be a commercial release. To go about this, they have launched a Indiegogo campaign to help finance it. For a measly \$4, you can pre-order the next chapter and help fund their goal of \$4,000.





Secret Files 3

Nina and Max will return in *Secret Files 3*, due out September 14th. This classic PC point and click adventure features a cinematic story, a variety of locations, and much more.

It should be the happiest day of her life, but Nina's anticipation of the upcoming marriage with Max is being clouded by terrible nightmares of an apocalypse. Could this be related to the events that took place in Tunguska? As further incidents transpire and Nina comes across some major secrets, she realizes that she has just stumbled onto a new epic adventure.

Jack Houston and the Necronauts

Necronauts is a pulp sci-fi inspired adventure game where you portray Captain Jack Houston on his deadliest mission: to man the first rocket to explore a savage, alien world!

Jack's adventure takes place not far from home, on our neighboring planet of Venus. But this isn't the lifeless planet we know today, this Venus is

Sine Requite Anno XIII

While we have not yet even seen anything from Dreampainters, the developers of *Anna*, they have already announced their next project, *Sine Requite*; At least that is its working title, I imagine an English title will replace it eventually. *Sine Requite* is an adventure RPG set in the world of *Sine Requite Anno XIII*, an Italian pen and paper RPG.

This world is centered on a dystopian Rome, ruled by the Vatican, and populated by zombies. No word on how much adventure will be in it yet, but it does have a (likely tentative) end of 2013 release date.



a sweltering vine jungle teeming with strange beasts of horn, tooth and claw. This is the Venus imagined by science fiction authors and artists in the first half of the century, the legacies of whom include John Carter of Mars, Carson of Venus, Buck Rogers, Flash Gordon, Tom Corbett: Space Cadet and many more.

The Kickstarter, which is looking for \$56,000, is running till the 9th of August and has pledged 5% of the profits to go back into the kickstarter community.

Upcoming Releases



Against the Wall

A video game set in a very unusual world of an infinite vertical surface composed of irregularly-sized white bricks. Entire civilizations and ecosystems cling for survival on the side of The Wall, everyone and everything existing under the constant threat of tumbling into the endless sky. In order to travel in this hostile environment, one needs to manipulate the bricks in a way that forms ledges, stairways, and roads.

You control a solitary character who is struggling to return to a village located miles above the starting point. Along the way, you'll encounter strange sights, abandoned settlements, expansive castles, dangerous creatures, and complex mechanisms that will help or hinder your progress.

Against the Wall already has a pre-order set up for \$10, and an active development blog.



Blackwell's Asylum Demo

The award winning stealth-horror demo from DADIU, titled *Blackwell* (now *Blackwell's Asylum*), has gotten a Steam demo, which is in addition to the previous browser embedded Unity version.



King's Quest 4 Remake

The Perils of Rosella, the fourth title in this classic point and click adventure series, is getting a remake by Unicorn Tales. They don't really have a proper development site/page set up, but do have a gallery of beautiful development photos.

Anna

The upcoming horror adventure, set in a fully 3D, open, and changeable world, is finished production. We are waiting on a release date as Dreampainters are still in negotiations with some digital distributors.

The first game by the Italian developers Dreampainters, *Anna* is a point and click psychological horror adventure game (of the type with a sanity meter) with quite a few interesting and unique features. The game features, almost, photo-realistic graphics, faithfully recreating the real world location of D'Ayas Valley, in Valle d'Aosta, an Alpine region in north-western Italy; And is based on an authentic folklore tale from that location.

It is in a free roaming first-person view and has a very realistic physical world. Doors and drawers are interacted with using natural mouse movements; And the world is full of objects you can pick up and put down anywhere, but only a few of these are actually useful for solving the puzzles. You can beat the game in around three hours, but since it contains a branching plot and three endings there is supposed to be about nine hours of gameplay here to explore.





The Deadly Sunsets: A Sam Preston Adventure
 Set in 1940 post-war, the player takes the role of Sam Preston, a private eye. In addition to a handful of beautiful screen-shots, we do not really

Amnesia 2: A Machine For Pigs
 The upcoming game from The Chinese Room and Frictional Games has finally given us some concrete information in the form of a trailer. Look for *Amnesia 2* early 2013.



Lilly Looking Through
 The enchanting puzzler for all ages has blew past its goal of \$18,000 and managed \$33,516 by the end of its funding period. These additional funds will be going into more content, so hopefully a longer, better, and more detailed game.

have much information about the game, other then it is a "classic noir tale of DECEPTION!, INTRIGUE!, PASSION! and MURDER!", and is planned to be released later this year.





Nicalas Eymerich, Inquisitor: The Plague

An episodic adventure game which puts you in the shoes of Nicalas Eymerich, a real-life, historical Italian inquisitor, and the main character in Valerio Evangelisti's science fiction series. In production these last three years, *Nicalas Eymerich, Inquisitor* is scheduled for release in November; with a deluxe edition containing the first four episodes: *The Inquisitor, The Village, The Demon, The Abbey*; coming in 2013.

In *Nicalas Eymerich, Inquisitor* you will find strong narration, many fleshed out characters, about four hours of gameplay per episode, and many challenging puzzles. But most uniquely you can turn these puzzles completely off in an Interactive Novel mode that allows you to experience the story without any obstacles.

"With a will of steel, heart of stone, intelligence as sharp as a knife and wisdom deep as oblivion", Eymerich is called to investigate an obscure case, beyond heresy, that reveals a new face of evil. He will tackle many arduous tasks, make many painful choices, and take on terrible creatures. But his burning determination will overcome the Plague and his worst nightmares.

Historically, Nicolas Eymerich was born in Girona, Catalonia, A.D. 1320. He was the author of the *Directorium Inquisitionum*, the text that turned torture and unlimited power of the Sacred Inquisition into law; And was the sort of man to which the ends always justified the means and human life was meaningless. He dedicated his life to battling Satan and defending the Catholic Church during the point in history when the Pope resided in Avignon and the Hundred Years' War raged.



SpaceVenture

The spiritual sequel to the *Space Quest* series, by the original developers (who do not have control of the SQ intellectual property), is definitely getting developed now that its Kickstarter funding campaign has ended in success. \$539,767 of the \$500,000 needed was raised, with it surpassing its goal just barely in time.

there is a proof of concept demo available, a few trailers, and interested parties can still get in on the Kickstarter rewards/pre-order through a Paypal system the developers have set up.

Additionally, in an inspiring show of fan loyalty, a group of dedicated fans have created *Pledge Quest I: The SpaceVenture Adventure*; An adventure game where you play Bea and tackle a series of puzzles culminating in pledging to the *SpaceVenture* Kickstarter.

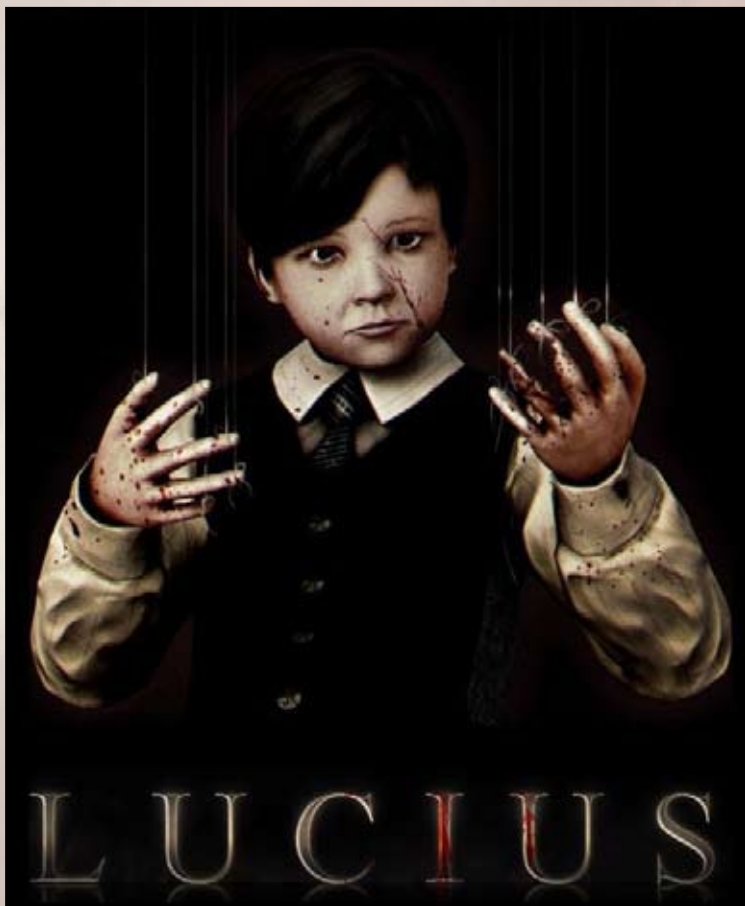


The Curse of Money Island Demake

The third title in the prestigious *Monkey Island* series of classic adventures is getting a fan-demake, and a pretty good looking one if I am any judge. This particular demake has been in the works for a few years now, but was put indefinitely on hold a few months back, only to be picked up by a new programmer recently. The basic idea of this demake, is to remake *The Curse of Money Island* in its entirety with the graphical style of the first two games in the series.

Lucius

This upcoming adventure game, due out October 2012, has you play as a demon in the guise of a child and sets you the task of killing off the other characters in the house in a series of gruesome and inventive ways has gotten a new trailer.



Project Fedora

The sequel to the preeminent classic adventure series *Tex Murphy*, *Project Fedora* made its Kickstarter goal of \$450,000 with hardly any time to spare, but somehow did manage to make approximately \$600,000.

Tex Murphy is an old-school P.I. living in a dystopian future who relies on questionable charm, good intentions, old-fashioned detective work and, often, dumb luck to solve thrilling, epic cases. *Project Fedora* takes this classic adventurer and put him in a true 3D world with a branching storyline and multiple endings.



New Releases



The Dark Eye: Chains of Satinav

The latest Deedlic Entertainment game is available for purchase as either a digital download or a box. Like their other offering, The Dark Eye is a hand-drawn adventure set in an immersive fantasy land. It is set in the European pen and paper RPG world of Aventuria,

you play Geron a young trapper who is prophesied to bring the end to Aventuria. So when a plague of crows start attacking he sets off on an adventure to clear his name and save the kingdom.

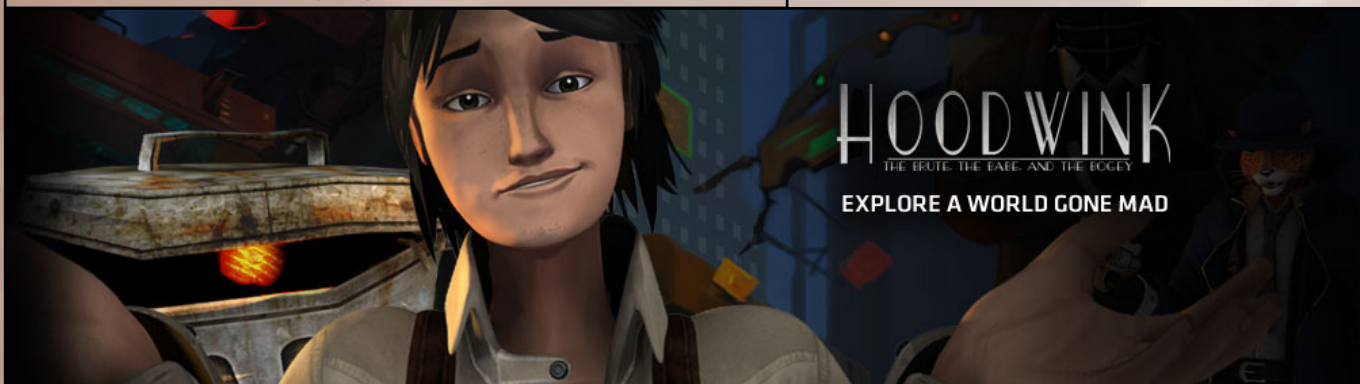
Hoodwink: The Brute, the Babe, and the Bogey

This adventure just released from E-One Studio is set in a dystopian, post epidemic, future and has you assume the role of Michael Bezzle who is on the run from the government/ruling corporation in the decaying metropolis of Global-01. *Hoodwink* is designed after the classic adventures of our past, with a emphasis on witty dialogue and story; And is chalk full of quirky characters and dark humour.



Deponia

The adventure from the two biggest names in mainstream adventure gaming, Daedalic Entertainment and Lace Mamba, has finally been released. Set in a beautiful hand-drawn world with the surface entirely covered with garbage and with floating cities for the upper class; You play Rufus, an ill-tempered surface dweller who formulates a plan to get into one of these cities when a privileged girl falls from the sky.



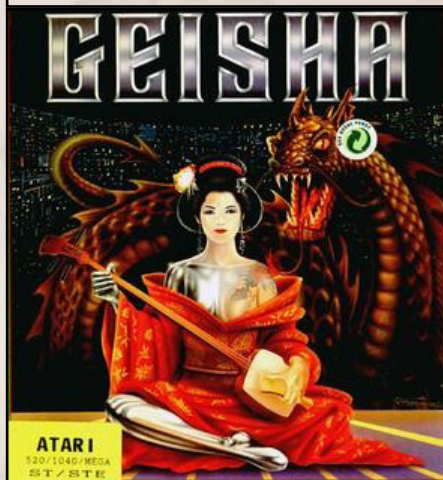
Updated Releases

Analogue: A Hate Story

Christine Love's sequel to *Digital: A Love Story* has gotten a Steam release; Some free DLC, Science and Tradition; And potentially a Korean translation.

Geisha on ScummVM

The wonderful people over at ScummVM have added the ability to play *Geisha* to the daily builds version of ScummVM. Still likely in a buggy state, a full release is likely to follow.



아날로그 ANALOGUE A HATE STORY

realMyst on iPad

realMyst, the definitive edition of *Myst*, is now available for the iPad with a limited time introductory price of \$6.99. *realMyst* is *Myst* with a new additional age at the end which ties into *Riven* better and is even mentioned in *Myst IV*. But its main feature is the open 3D world with real-time graphical effects.



Botanicula

A short while after its release, *Botanicula* has gotten a demo and it is playable directly from your browser.



The Journey Down: Chapter One

This fantastic adventure has gotten itself a price cut and its soundtrack released. The game was on the expensive side, but now with it permanently at 50% of its original price, at \$6.99, if anything it is little cheap. But do not worry, original purchasers, your dedication has not gone unseen, and everyone who purchased the game at its original price will be getting the soundtrack free of charge.



News From the Big Blue Cup



Pick of the Month - June: Shifter

You have to impersonate the townsfolk to get things done in this game, but first you have to learn everything about them. *Shifter* is an escape the town point and click adventure with a twist!



Wages of Darkness



Black Sect Remake





ROBO Quest (Glauzer, AdMz44) - Robot crashes on an unknown planet, he must repair his "home" to continue the journey.

Drugs and Aliens (ig299) - Hall is a typical teenager came to his friend's to hang out, but he got lost and saw things that he couldn't believe in. So now he has to deal with them in order to find his friend and have a party.

Wages of Darkness (vanwijst) - Winner of the April 2012 MAGS competition, theme: distorted senses. A top secret experimental military facility has a primary power failure. Marina, a plucky young soldier, wakes up in the middle of the crisis, injured and disoriented by the absolute darkness. Recalling her training, she must make it to the Shelter before her commanders invoke protocol 13. Along her way she uncovers clues about the fate of the facility as she grapples with her own evanescent sense of self.

Split Fighters (Pierrec) - A story game dressed up as a fighting game. This is about a girl, Severine, who just broke up with her girlfriend. Now she has to confront her friends and family to make them understand that decision...or just to kick their a**. *Split Fighters* contains three endings and many paths.

Potato Head: Sweet Attack! (step toe) - As Potato Head, get as many sweets and cakes as you can by jumping, leaping, swimming and using your Inventory items. Five levels to keep you going for a while.



Black Sect Remake (HandsFree) - The people of Issegeac believe that their good fortune depends on the spell book that has been in their village for over nine centuries. When the keeper of the text, your grandfather, is killed and the Grimoire stolen, the villagers ask your help.

This remake contains time-flow based on player actions, removing the dead ends, and two cursors which light up over interactable areas. Additionally, extra puzzles have been added to the game, as well as an updated hint system, new sound and music. The game does retain most of its original artwork and animations, as well as its day and night cycle.

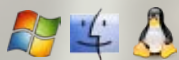
Lankhor's *Black Sect* was and is a great game. It however did have a few features that were normal in 1993 but aren't so popular today. The game is timed, has dead ends, only five save slots, 20+ action icons, there are dead ends, and you can die.

Resonance (Vince Twelve) - The much anticipated Wadjeteye and xii game *Resonance* was released last month to GOG, the publishers site, and Steam. It has gotten a bunch of good reviews and there is a demo to try, with a \$9.99 price tag for the digital download version.

L'Affitto (Stefano Caporale) - *The Rent* is a graphic adventure in which you'll have to help GG finding money for the rent.

Reon Quest Episode 1: The Mysterious Aluminatti Society (Jaffles) - After a Pudding Bomb is detonated late one Wednesday night in Reon Elementary School, Draco (a reptilian prankster with a heart of gold) is unfairly blamed and placed in Sunday detention. Through the help of a decidedly smug letter, Draco discovers that he was in fact framed by the Mysterious Aluminatti Society. Swearing revenge, Draco must now break out of detention and bring justice to the Aluminattis. But unfortunately for Draco, things aren't quite as simple as they seem.

Botanicula



Genre: adventure **Developer:** Amanita Design
Publisher: Amanita Design **Release date:** April 19, 2012
Platforms: Windows XP, Mac OS 10.6 or newer, Linux
Website: <http://www.botanicula.net/>



Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Botanicula is Amanita Design style incarnate, it is *Samorost* taken to a whole new level. It was released into a Humble Indie Bundle just a few months ago and is currently available through the Humble Indie Store for only \$10.

In *Botanicula* you control a group of five creatures best described as little tree friends. Most of the time that it is a group does not matter, you do not often use the characters and they do not ever really separate. But there are times where the individuals come into play; During some scenes the solution to the puzzle is to pick the correct playable character to solve the current predicament. These five tree creatures are on a mission to escape their home tree which is being attacked by evil parasites, and bring a tree seed with them to start anew and grow a new home.



Much of the charm of the game comes from none of it being boiler plate. There is no "that does not work" response or any generic behaviour at all in the game. So players are encouraged to explore the world and much of the gameplay is actually optional bonus

material that you uncover as you explore this unique environment. This bonus material that I speak of is mostly interesting objects and NPCs that you uncover though interacting with the environment, usually requiring a specific series of interactions. After you uncover these bonuses you are given a card as an indicator of the achievement.

The graphics are all very unique and beautiful. *Botanicula* uses a mix of cut-out style graphics and drawn artwork, which include a mix of very abstract with very realistic and detailed. This is all seamlessly combined with really the only similar features being the constant use of nature as a guide and inspiration.

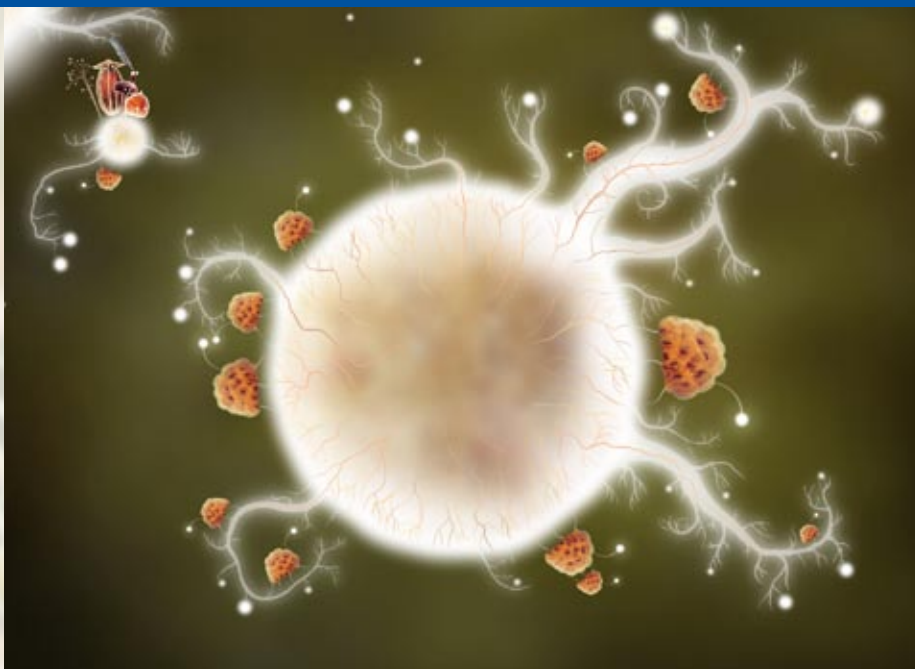
One "problem" with the game is that it is so removed from reality. In *Botanicula* there is no, or very little, concrete logic. Most puzzles are solved by clicking everything on the screen a few times; It does not matter if you have great insight or have ever played the game before, there is no logic (convoluted or otherwise) to ascertain. Some of



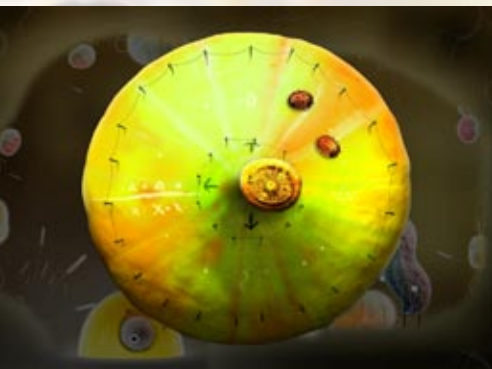


the more logical puzzles give you a hint of logic, by giving you a concrete goal and a way to work towards it, but they almost always have some kind of random physics that mean that you have no real way to understand what any move will do until you do it. Puzzles are often (but far from always) put together logically, but since there is little to no logic for the user interaction it is at best an abstract logic that required far more experimentation than thought. The puzzles are still fun and rewarding, at lease up to a point; And you get a great exploration vibe from them specifically because of this abstract logic. It is not for everyone, but at the same time I believe it makes the game very user friendly.

Most of all I would call *Botanica* a charming and endearing game.



You are probably not going to be excited by the gameplay, intrigued by the puzzles, or spend too long admiring the artwork; the story will likely not engross you, or the characters interest you all that much; But, every single one of these elements is saturated with charm and extremely endearing. I would not want every adventure game to be like this, I would not even want this to become a new sub-genre, but at least for this one game it does work and is very unique. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Its overall charm, which drips from the endearing characters and fantastical environments.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The lack of concrete logic could turn off some people.

VERDICT:

A fantastic casual game dripping with charm.



Metal Dead


Genre: adventure **Developer:** Walk Thru Walls **Publisher:** Walk Thru Walls
Release date: December 19, 2011 **Platform:** Windows
Website: <http://www.walkthruwalls.com/>

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Metal Dead is the successful attempt to combine heavy metal, the zombie apocalypse, comedy, and retro point and click gaming. I think it is safe to assume that it is also the first and only such game. It was released during the end of 2011, and was good enough to get nominated into two Adventure Gamers categories: "Best Writing - Comedy" and "Best Independent Adventure Game".



car, in front of a large medical research building that is attracting the attention of all the zombies in the area, and he is killed. You then embark on a short puzzle solving and exploration sequence which concludes with you carrying around your friend's head, which acts as a hint system, and occasionally advances the storyline. The story evolves moderately naturally from there as you attempt to survive and escape the aforementioned medical research center; While meeting, working with, and rescuing a variety of interesting, comedic, and exaggerated characters. There is a rather strange twist at the very end, but it does not get weird until then.



In *Metal Dead* you play Malcom who, with his ever present friend Ronnie, is a metal-head. They love heavy metal, and in particular Ronnie believes that the zombie apocalypse is the most metal thing to ever happen. During the opening sequence you crash your



While the story of *Metal Dead* is superb in my opinion, the gameplay/puzzles are far less so. They are really just the standard inventory fare, though they do have you doing some interesting things at times, namely killing zombies. The one proper logic puzzle in the entire game is one of the worse examples of its kind, and the detective, clue finding and code breaking, puzzle was not much better. But for the most part the puzzles are fine, they are simply not the focus of the game. One feature I was mildly surprised by was the use of a multiple cursor system, with the standard: interact, look, talk, and walk cursors. I cannot say that I agree with their decision concerning this feature; It is not that I dislike this type of interface, though in general I do, but that it is never taken advantage of. Other than requiring you to spend time clicking through your options between interacting with the environment (interact), moving about (walk), and talking to people (talk) you never use the system; You simply never «interact» with a person, «talk» to a object or room, or «walk» (kick) an undead.

The art is simple hand-drawn and crude, but charming and very good accompaniment to the rest of the game. Its one unique aspect is the level of blood and gore, of which there is no shortage. You are shown everything, from the shambling dead, dismemberment, piles of corpses, zombies feeding, guts, and brain matter. None of it is particularly «graphic» because of the art style, and it is not overly mature in any other area, so I do not think that the

game should really be considered objectionable to any age that is OK with the concept of a zombie.

I think any classic adventure fan will love *Metal Dead*. It is a great recreation of the traditional adventure model with a modern and very unique concept. To be honest, I believe that the gameplay dropped the ball a little bit, and was quite drab in its implementation, but this is easily overlooked and hardly noticeable while playing. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The zombie subject matter is so well done and well integrated into the retro styled adventure model.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The multiple cursor system is never utilised enough to justify having it.

VERDICT:

A retro style adventure with a modern, undead, twist.



Lume



Genre: puzzle, adventure Developer: State of Play Publisher: State of Play

Release date: May 9, 2011 Platforms: Windows, Mac OS

Website: <http://www.lumegame.com/>

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The graphics are what really define *Lume*. In *Lume*, beautiful 3D scaled sets are constructed out of paper, cardboard, and a few other building materials and props. These sets are then filmed, with some panning and the like for entering and exiting a scene; But really there is very little movement, which is my only real complaint; They just do not put the 3D set to much use. The minimalistic characters are then superimposed on-top of these scenes. The result is quite visually striking and very tactile.



This first chapter in the paper and cardboard adventure was released in 2011. It is currently going for \$6.99 on Steam, which considering its length of 1 to 1.5 hours is a little (or a lot) on the

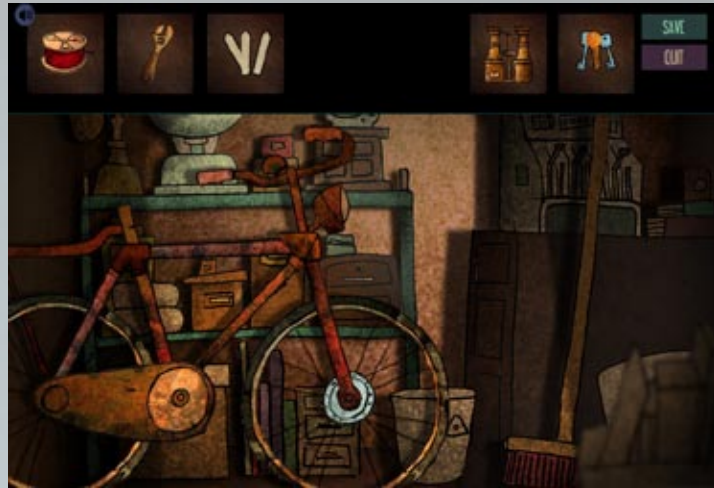
expensive side. Comparing the game to *The Dream Machine*, the only other modern adventure game with tactile graphics, that I know of, it comes off as very expensive as you can get



a chapter from it for \$4.99 and that is with significantly more gameplay per chapter and with the initial short chapter being offered for free.

The game has you in control of Lumi, a bright young girl visiting her grandfather's house. He has gone to town to investigate a recent power outage and left you a note asking you to finish setting up the alternative power generators for his house. As such, you must construct a wind turbine, finish setting up a solar panel system, and connect them both to the house to restore power (but first you are going to have to figure out the combination to the lock on the door).

That is pretty much how the game goes. Your grandfather has filled his



house with an array of interesting and imaginative locks and puzzles. This gameplay is enjoyable but not of a very consistent difficulty. Some puzzles are straight forward and very easy, others require the use of some ambiguous clues. In particular, there is this one puzzle that is very ambiguous

compared to the others. The game otherwise comes off as casual, but if you are not paying close enough attention and are ready for some lateral thinking then I could see many simply never getting this one. Not that I would warn the casual crowd away; I think in this particular case a casual adventurer has just as much chance with the puzzle as anyone, as it can be easy given the right thinking.

I love *Lume's* graphics, I liked its gameplay, and its plot was surprisingly enjoyable; It is a charming game from top to bottom. But it is really short, and does not contain anything all that substantial. I am eagerly awaiting its sequel, and particularly if you can find *Lume* on sale, it is worth your time. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The great tactile graphics, and endearing storyline.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The price. By any metric, it is too expensive, and this effected the rating.

VERDICT:

A great little adventure, more of a proof of concept than a full game.



Scratches: Director's Cut



Genre: adventure **Developer:** Nucleosys Digital Studio
Publisher: Got Game Entertainment **Release date:** May 23, 2007
Platform: Windows **Website:** none

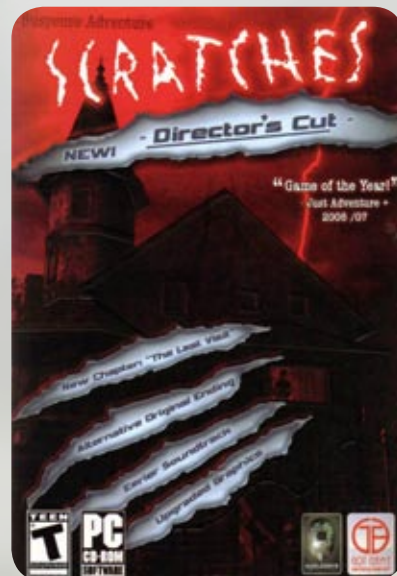
Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

Scratches is a horror title rapped up in a mystery and filled with suspense and tension. It is a point and click adventure game released in 2006 by the small Argentinian company *Nucleosys*. This team went on to release a director's cut of *Scratches* the following year. *Nucleosys* has since shut its doors, but one of its co-founders, *Agustin Cordes*, has gone on to found *Senscape*, which is currently working on *Asylum*, an adventure game with a similar style.



The director's cut, named simply *Scratches: Director's Cut*, is pretty much what you would expect from a director's cut. With it you get an alternative ending to the story; The

original ending I believe, before they remade it to be more ambiguous. This ending no longer quite fits into the story, and is of course non-canonical, but interesting to



experience nonetheless. We also get a whole new mini-sequel called «*The Last Visit*»; Which has you playing as a journalist who has stuck into Blackwood Manor, ten years after your fateful stay there. But, perhaps more importantly than all these little additions, are all of the improvements made to the main game. We get completely overhauled graphics, with higher supported resolutions, and improved detail and lighting; A, similarly, remastered soundtrack and sound effects; And a much improved interface. There has also been work done on the Hint System, and Michael has gotten a Journal in which he shares his innermost thoughts and which acts to remind you of objectives at times.

The 7-8 hour game takes place in Blackwood Manor, an old Victorian house, and on the surrounding grounds. Blackwood Manor is an old abandoned house with a dark and mysterious past. Originally, a pillar of the community and a prominent engineer, Mr. Blackwood, lived there



for a cleaning crew to get the worst of the dirt cleaned up before you moved in. The electricity and water do not even work yet, and you are all alone, with only a telephone and the post service to connect you to the outside world. In the following three days Michael explores the manor and gets more and more obsessed with the mysterious events in its past. But is he the only one here? His dreams are filled with nightmares and shattered by a mysterious scratching noise. Can you uncover what really happened here all those years ago? Is something or someone from its dark past still lurking in the house? What is causing those Scratching noises at night?

with his wife and maid, and even had a son on the way; But a series of horrible and unexplained events have left a dark cloud hanging over the entire region, the house abandoned, and fuelled rumours and myths of every variety. It all started with what should of been a happy occasion, the birth of their son, but this quickly turned into a tragedy when they announced that he had died. Latter, Mr. Blackwood is accused of murdering his wife and burying her on the premises; The police wanted to investigate but with the help of his best friend and doctor Christopher Milton, their combined esteem and the suicide of their only suspect, Mr. Blackwood,

put the case permanently on hold. Christopher Milton then inherited the estate and moved in, but soon became a hermit and eventually disappeared entirely.

This is where you, Michael Arthate, come in. You are a horror writer looking for some inspiration to help you finish your latest book. You have acquired the house, and moved in immediately, with only a few hours

This story is beautifully told and uses the classic element of ambiguity. You are encouraged to think about what you see, hear, and read and come up with your own explanations. You need to explore and pay attention to uncover the truth; It is possible to entirely miss very important clues and sources of information while plaything through the game, so there is a



big emphasis on exploration. The game's atmosphere is great for this, it inspires a sense of exploration, and I needed no more incentive than that to explore every inch of the manor. Most of the game is open and fully explorable from the very beginning, but as you progress through the game what you are doing is slowing opening up new sections and uncovering new parts of the mystery.

Scratches: Director's Cut adds to this story with «*The Last Visit*», a new sequel chapter that takes place ten years after you originally explored Blackwood Manor. This, approximately one hour long, mini-sequel has you play a journalist gone to the house to dig up a story and uncover the mystery before it is demolished. What he encounters is a scene of ruin, of vandalism, graffiti, and of looting. Much of the grounds and house are not even accessible. It is a short addition, with only two disappointing simple multi-step puzzles, and is overall rather disappointing in how little is revealed. You get a few explanations to previously ambiguous questions; But if anything the added precision only hurts the story, ruining the open ended interpretable aspect of it. It also does not do any better at ending the story of *Scratches*; Nothing is resolved, in fact it has very much a similar ending to the original story. One saving grace is that it answers the only real complaint I had with the original game; The game is now 100% narrated, and while there is far less reading in this chapter, all of it is voiced.

The world of *Scratches* is node based and allows your choice of slideshow or 360 degree view. In my opinion, the 360 degree view is obviously the better view and



the one you should use. It works fabulously, being easy to use and a great way to show off the beautiful game. Also, you really do not have to worry about making it harder to spot items. There is no pixel hunting; All, hotspots are quite big, and useful items very easy to spot. There is one exception to this, in my opinion, but the item is so close to where it is needed that I would not expect it to cause much trouble.

The gameplay of *Scratches* takes second stage to the story and atmosphere. All of the puzzles are obvious extensions of the storyline and are incorporated because of the story. This makes for very logical and simple puzzles; most of which are inventory based. The game does not really even use any inventory combination puzzles, with the few times that you do combine items in the inventory being so obvious that I would not consider them puzzles. Unfortunately, the game does get off on a rather bad start where the puzzles are concerned; The very first challenge you have is trying to figure out where to put your suitcase, with



absolutely no direction. It does not go on the bed, it does not go on the desk, there are no interactable areas on the ground. Eventually, I figured out where to put it, but I could not help thinking that in no sense should this puzzle exist. Another feature of the game worth mentioning is how much the inventory builds up over time; Most items are not used more than once, but unless using an item logically destroys or leaves it then it is kept in the inventory long past its last use. On the one hand this seemed unnecessary, but on the other it did not ever cause me any problems because the puzzles are always so logical. You never have to



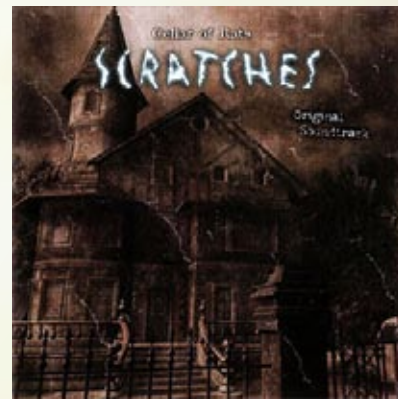
try all your items on this one elusive challenge, if you see a problem you pretty much know what you need to solve it, and either have to look for the item or simply take it out of your inventory. Even the keys had pretty obvious doors to which they belonged, and just by looking at their icons and you could tell which door they would unlock. One thing that *Scratches* does well is mixing a linear storyline with non-linear gameplay. Yes, the game is linear, but at the same time you have multiple avenues to explore, almost all of the time; There is enough give

that I was never stuck behind this one tiny roadblock that needed to be cleared before the story could progress.

The two features of *Scratches: Director's Cut* that I never really explored are the Hint System and Journal/Diary. I played with the Hint System off, but apparently, the hints are seamlessly integrated into the comments and Journal; It does not seem to be the type of Hint System that you can use for a particular puzzle that is causing you trouble, so much as just generally making the game easier while you play. The

Journal, in my opinion, works mostly as an objectives list. And in this way, it is good to make the game easier to come back to after enough time has passed to forget what you were doing. The problem I have with it is that, if you want to read it on an ongoing basis, it is not made easy. I read it a few times at the very beginning of the game, but soon got wrapped up in the story and completely forgot about my Journal. The game really should inform you of added entries, and provide a quick and easy way to read these new entries when they are written. Additionally, the game often gets the timing of entries a little off; There were a few occasions where I was given a Journal entry for something that had not yet happened, or in fact never happened.

The sound of *Scratches* is one of its more advertised features. It has a great unique, eerie, and solemn soundtrack from *Cellar of Rats*, that fits into the atmosphere perfectly. It also offers a limited amount of voice; For all dialog and cutscenes, you have voice from the few characters in the game. Unfortunately, the vast majority of the game does not contain dialogue, but instead writing, and does requires loads of reading. There are numerous journals and

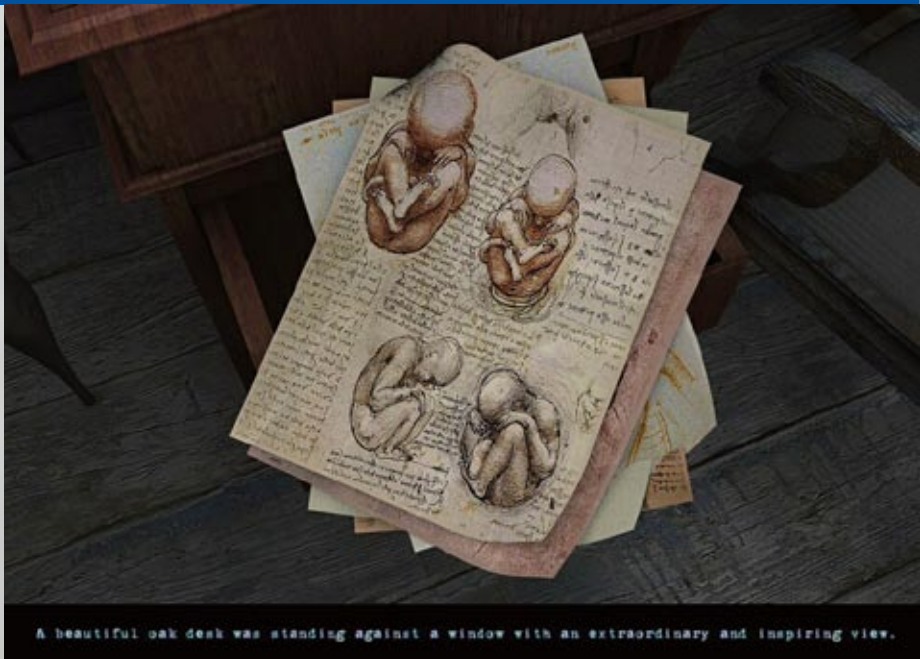


letters spread around the house to find and read, only available as text, and object descriptions and other text narration. All of these would have benefited from voice, but worked well without it.

The visuals are just superb. They are not ultra detailed, breathtakingly beautiful, fantastically unique, or anything like that; But as part of the greater story I do not think you could ask for better. The visuals show a brooding environment, and they show it well, both indoors, where most of your time will be spent, and outdoors. It is dark, it is eerie, and, at least for specific locations, scary. You even get rather good foliage, a difficult graphical area to get correct; In-fact some of my favorite locations were outdoors. These visuals are just another aspect of the wonderful and menacing atmosphere permeating the entire game.

So let's talk about the horror aspect of *Scratches*. I am normally not at all a fan of horror, but in this case I made an exception and have not regretted it for a second; And therefore think there is something here for every type of adventure or story lover. *Scratches* is primarily a game about suspense, atmosphere, and story telling; You are NOT going to be jumping out of your seat because something just jumped out at you. The suspense and scare slowly builds over the course of the game, as you uncover new details and get closer to solving the mystery. In fact I was most scared after the game was over, simply from thinking about the creepy and demented story.

Scratches: Director's Cut is primarily a great story. Taken individually any of its elements are only average, mediocre, or pretty good. None of the puzzles are particularly fun, in and of themselves; If there were



A beautiful oak desk was standing against a window with an extraordinary and inspiring view.



A useless array of random items, of every imaginable size and colour, occupied all the corners of the attic.

not visuals and a story to go along with them, they simply would not be worth doing. The visuals are nice, but without a backstory to flesh them out they would still be forgettable. And even the story, while the

primary focus of the game, would not be this memorable or enjoyable if not told well; The magic comes from having all these elements compliment each other. Together these elements create a great game,



with memorable locations and story, and a great atmosphere. I was riveted from the very start, ready and willing to explore every nook and corner of Blackwood Manor, read every letter and diary found within, and contemplate its story long after the credits rolled. And if you are looking for a story driven classic adventure, then there is not a single one I would recommend higher than *Scratches: Director's Cut*. That said, it is not a game for everyone; There is a lot of reading, and the game relies completely on its story, both of which cut down its potential audience.

For Adventure Lantern's review of the original *Scratches*, look in our April 2006 issue. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The story is fantastic, and keeps you guessing.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:


More voicework would of been nice, and cut down on the large amount of reading you have to do.

VERDICT:

A great story focused adventure, that really gets nothing wrong, and a lot right.



Adam's Venture Episode 3: Revelations

 **Genre:** adventure **Developer:** Vertigo Digital Entertainment
Publisher: Iceberg Interactive **Release date:** March 9, 2012
Platforms: Windows Cloud (OnLive)
Website: <http://www.adams-venture.com/>

Review by Nick Burgener

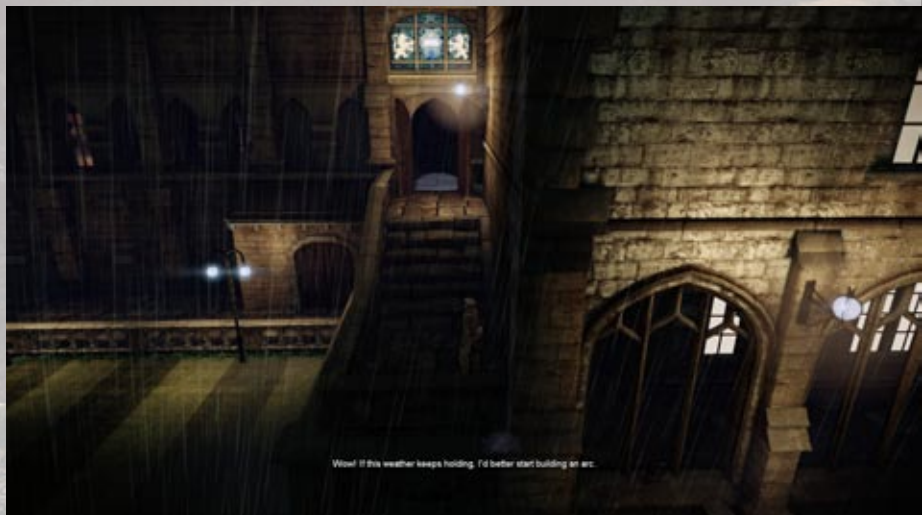
The third and final episode in the *Adam's Venture trilogy*, *Revelations*, brings closure to Adam's quest of uncovering the secret of the Garden of Eden and putting a stop to the Clairvaux Corporation's evil schemes. Left for dead in the crumbling tomb of King Solomon, Adam loses consciousness and experiences a flashback of how he met his partner, Evelyn, and how they came to be involved with the Clairvaux Corporation. When he comes to, he feels reinvigorated in his promise to protect Evelyn, and sets out to rescue her from the clutches of the Clairvaux leader.

The majority of *Revelations* takes place during the flashback, as Adam explores the hidden depths of the University of Oxford, the French town of Luz, and a Templar mausoleum. While the flashback offers some backstory to the game's premise, it doesn't offer much newfound depth to any of the characters. Interactions with Evelyn, Adam's father, and Professor Saint-Omair scarcely go beyond the mechanical necessities

of what needs to be said or done to advance to the next puzzle or location. Learning how Adam met Evelyn doesn't prove to be all that interesting because their depictions remain as flat and shallow as cardboard cutouts.



Once the flashback has concluded, the rest of the game is over with so quickly that it leaves the entire experience feeling abrupt and underwhelming. After regaining consciousness, you watch a few cutscenes while solving the same two puzzles over and over again, and follow extremely linear paths to the next cutscene or puzzle. At one point the villain just flat-out tells you his evil plan in a matter of just a few sentences. Nothing in





They just feel obligatorily mashed into the game.

To make matters worse, many of these puzzles get repeated ad nauseam. During the flashback, one puzzle gets repeated five times, and another gets repeated three times. Once you're back in the present, reawakening in Solomon's tomb, two different puzzles are repeated three times, each. They don't seem to be designed with increasing tiers of difficulty, expanding and becoming more complex with each rendition; they just seem to be the exact same puzzle, but with a slightly different solution. It was so tedious to me that I immediately consulted a walkthrough for later renditions of certain puzzles, because I just did not care to do them over again.

When the puzzles aren't coming off as random, abstract challenges, they feel really contrived. You're tasked with getting a book from a library, but the door is locked; instead of going back and asking for a key, you have to solve a series of obscure puzzles to open it. You're driving through France, and your path gets blocked by a

this episode really builds towards this big revelation – it just comes out of nowhere for one fleeting moment, so it feels cursory and unsatisfying. To top things off, once you solve the final puzzle, the game's practically over with no real resolution to everything that has happened.

The puzzles, meanwhile, feel too detached from everything else. Most of the time you're staring at a close-up view of some abstract interface with an entirely self-contained logic puzzle, typically

the kind where you have to deduce some type of pattern on a grid for some ultimate effect. These puzzles can be somewhat satisfying within their own rights, but they just don't integrate with the flow of the gameplay. You could completely remove them from the context of the game and they'd make as much sense without it, because they're not tied to the environment (or even the story) in any significant way. It's kind of like exploring a cave and then having to solve a Rubik's Cube to advance.



broken-down automobile; instead of just pushing it out of the way, you have to solve a puzzle to get it working again. Someone tasks you with getting a delivery package up onto his roof, and instead of

him having a practical elevator system, it's the most complicated and inconvenient thing ever. These puzzles are awkwardly forced into the game and don't always feel natural, so it's pretty exasperating at times.

Some of the puzzles can be pretty frustrating, too. In some cases, the directions are vague and unclear, so it becomes a two-step process of first figuring out what you're even supposed to be trying to accomplish, and then figuring out the specific solution. It's too easy to feel stuck relying on brute force trial-and-error to deduce the game's intended logic, because it doesn't always provide feedback for why your intended solution didn't work. There's one area in particular that's intentionally cryptic; it drops several dead-end, unsolvable "puzzles" solely to distract you from the actual puzzle, which is discreetly hidden in a separate screen. If you're not fortunate enough to stumble into that screen, you can be left totally clueless about how to proceed.

Besides the puzzles and the dialogue cutscenes, you spend the



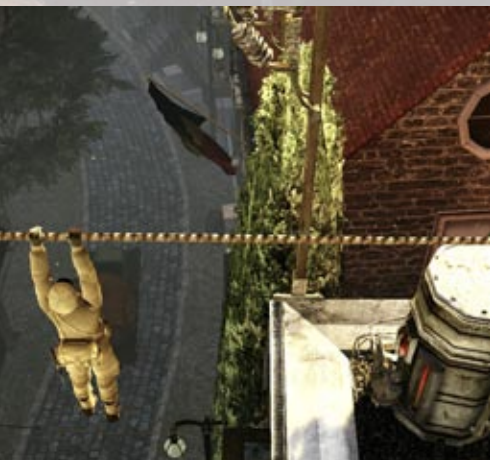
rest of the game navigating Adam through dangerous environments by jumping, climbing, and crawling around obstacles. With the game's emphasis on non-violent gameplay and being accessible to all audiences, these platforming sequences are pretty easy-going. Most of the time there's an invisible barrier preventing Adam from falling to his death, which makes the platforming a simple matter of pressing the jump or crouch key in the appropriate hot spots. Although not very challenging, these actions provide a nice opportunity to feel more tangibly involved with the environment and to lend you a feeling of greater control over your character.

Unfortunately, this episode doesn't allow you to explore, which is a missed opportunity to immerse yourself further in the character, setting, and environments. You visit a lot of really interesting locations in the flashback, all beautifully rendered with exquisite detail, but it's a little harder to feel part of these environments when you're always stuck on linear paths that only exist to lead you to the next puzzle. You just mindlessly

go forward, instead of getting to actually explore these wonderful locations. Furthermore, all of the game's best puzzles leave you in full control of Adam, moving about and performing different actions, so it would've been nice to have more puzzles emphasizing movement and exploration.

Revelations presents several interesting locations, maintains a good atmosphere throughout the entire game, and also provides a nice hands-on approach to the gameplay – all of which is held

back by tedious puzzle designs and a lackluster story. As the final episode in the trilogy, it almost feels like it was rushed, ending too quickly without any development in the plot or even a worthwhile resolution to the story. Rather than being a strong, climactic finale to the series, *Revelations* just kind of peters out at the end. It's not a bad game by any means, but the overall experience feels a little too shallow, repetitive, and underwhelming to recommend unless you're dying to know how the series ends. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Great graphics and interesting locations with a nice hands-on feel to gameplay.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Shallow, repetitive puzzles and a lack of proper story development or resolution.

VERDICT:

A pretty underwhelming finale that's perhaps only worth playing if you need closure to the series.



The Walking Dead

Episode 2: Starved for Help



Genre: adventure, action, role-playing

Developer: Telltale Games **Publisher:** Telltale Games

Release date: June, 2012

Platforms: iOS, Mac OS X, Windows, PS3, Xbox 360

Website: <http://www.telltalegames.com/walkingdead>



Review by Nick Burgener

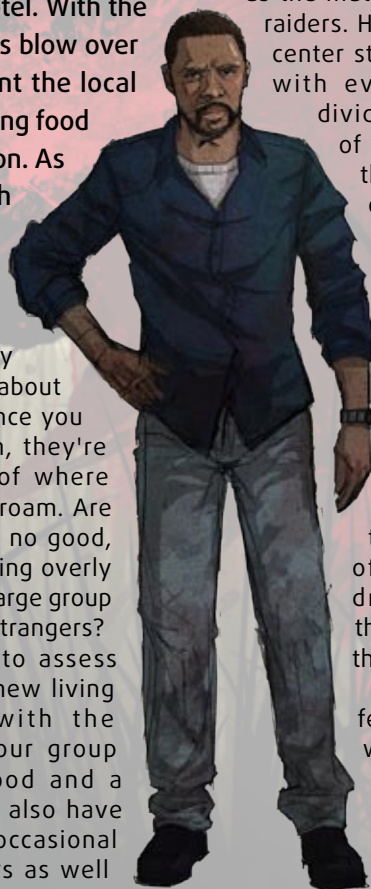
Much like its source material, *The Walking Dead. Episode Two: Starved for Help* is less about zombies and more about human relations in the wake of an inhuman apocalypse. Set three months after the conclusion of *Episode One: A New Day*, Lee Everett and his band of survivors have taken up residence in the Travalier Motel. With the walls barricaded, they seem set to survive until things blow over – until they start running low on food. Forced to hunt the local wildlife, tensions mount on how to ration their remaining food supplies and whether or not to set out for a new location. As the group becomes more restless and malcontent with their situation, they meet a pair of brothers who own a dairy farm, and offer to trade gasoline for food.



The rest of Episode Two plays out like a suspense thriller as you try to gauge whether the St John family is trustworthy, and whether their farm (with its gasoline-powered electric fence) is really as safe from the zombies (and bandit raiders) as they claim it is. On the walk

to their farm, the brothers ask oddly specific questions about your group, and once you arrive at the farm, they're rather selective of where you're allowed to roam. Are the St Johns up to no good, or are they just being overly cautious around a large group of heavily-armed strangers?

Besides trying to assess the potential for new living arrangements with the St Johns, with your group desperate for food and a safer shelter, you also have to contend with occasional zombie encounters as well



as the mutual threat of bandit raiders. Human conflict takes center stage in this episode with even more tension dividing the group. All of your decisions from the previous episode carry over into this episode, meaning that characters will hold different opinions of you based on your prior actions within the group, and these tempered relationships get pushed to their limits in some of most tense and dramatic moments the series has offered thus far.

The story makes a few twists along the way to keep things interesting. Even though I had a feeling right from the beginning

where everything would go, which ultimately proved pretty close to being correct, I was pleased with how subtle the build-up was. There was a lot of room for different interpretations as I went along, which kept me thinking hard about what I was choosing to do.

A few unknown variables got thrown into the mix, one of which almost pulled a bait and switch and had me second-guessing my prediction of the plot.

Several new characters are introduced, including a few new group members. The most prominent new face is Mark, whom Lee and company rescued from a nearby air force base. The food he supplied from the air force commissary is what the group has been getting by on, but it's starting

to run out. I was kind of annoyed at how they introduced a new main character completely off screen. The first few minutes of dialogue in the woods, as Lee and Mark hunt for food, suffice to fill in the gaps of what happened in the three month interim between episodes. But it's clearly just there to tell the audience how the characters and situation have developed, rather than letting you see, feel, and experience it for yourself. It's not a big deal, but it stood out as the weakest moment in the story-telling – everything else was engaging.

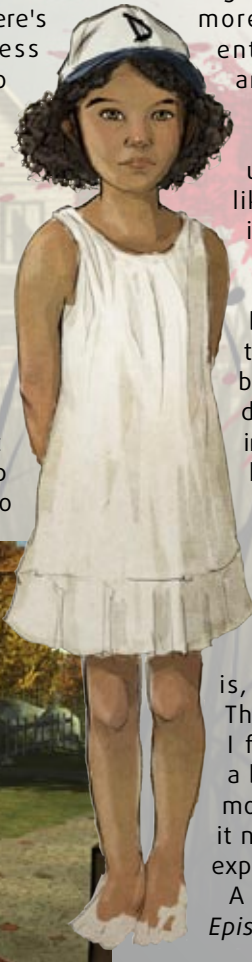


Gameplay-wise, *Episode Two* plays identically to *Episode One*: you move around the screen with the WASD keys and you click with the mouse to use or observe things in the environment. During more action-heavy sequences, the game uses quasi quick-time events to let you perform more cinematic actions. Like *Episode One*, these quick-time events are very well-implemented, because your input controls almost always reflect the actions your character is performing. You're usually clicking on plausible spaces of the screen to interact with things, or using movement keys to move at a one-to-one ratio. It does a pretty good job of making you feel part of the action, even though you're basically only clicking to advance a cutscene.





With *Episode Two's* greater emphasis on its story, there's a minor feeling of less interactivity. Compared to the previous episode, it feels like there are fewer opportunities where you're really in control of Lee, because you're often just watching cinematic cutscenes, occasionally selecting something from a list of options. There are even fewer puzzles this time around, so most of your actions end up being relegated purely to



dialogue or story decisions, with more direct actions being entirely straightforward and devoid of satisfying problem-solving.

Starved For Help ultimately feels more like you're watching an interactive movie than playing a video game. Some people may be turned off by this, but for what it is, this episode manages to be engaging and engrossing despite its relative lack of interactivity. It feels kind of like watching an episode of the *Walking Dead* television series, except with better pacing, more interesting plotlines, and a greater feeling of impact because there is, in fact, interactivity. There are moments when I feel they could've done a better job of leaving you more in control of Lee, but it never took me out of the experience.

A large part of what makes *Episode Two* so engaging is

the fact that your decisions feel so much more grave than they were in *Episode One*, and even those decisions felt pretty grave at the time. In retrospect, a lot of your decisions in *Episode One* were sort of arbitrary; Do you side with this person or that person in an argument? Do you save this person or that person when they're both about to die? There was a lot of weight to your decisions because people often lived and died by your actions. This is still true of *Episode Two*, but this time the options appear far less clear-cut and give the implication of far deeper consequences.

One of the first decisions you have to make in the game is whether to rescue someone caught in a bear trap when you already have too many hungry mouths to feed. In any other game I would've been on the spot trying to disarm that trap, but in this game I found myself hesitating, actually considering leaving him there to die just because I didn't think we could afford taking even more people under our roof. Once the zombies showed, I started panicking and decided I would try to rescue him. The game immediately suggested I'd have to chop his leg off, but I wasted so much time trying every other option that, by the time I'd made it halfway through his leg,

we were overrun and had to flee. I left him there to be eaten by zombies after putting him through excruciating pain.

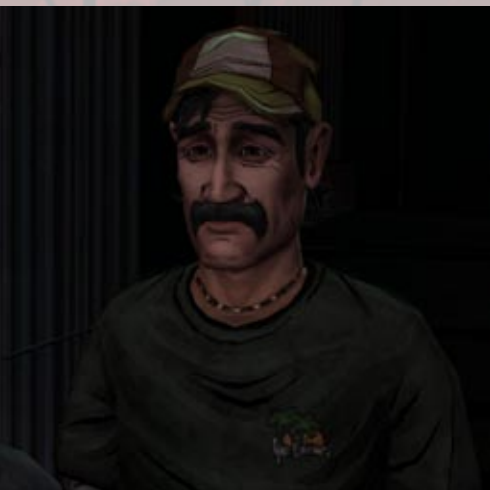
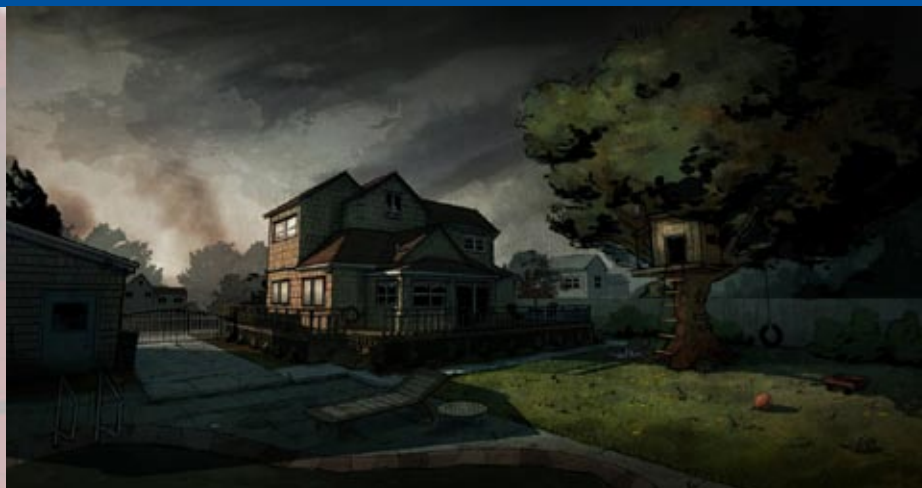
In the aftermath, I found myself feeling extremely guilty about what I'd done. I hadn't been able to save him, and I made his death even worse. I wondered what I could've done differently, if maybe I'd been quicker or tried something else, and if it was even possible to save him at all. Then part of me thought that maybe it was for the best, since we couldn't afford to feed one extra person, anyway. This decision weighed on my chest so much more than any previous decision I'd made with other characters' lives, because there was so much more involved than just making one arbitrary click of a button.

Other situations are far less graphic, but carry equally serious consequences. Rather than just being decisions about whose life to save, or whose side to take in an argument, your decisions are influenced more by what kind of example you want to set for Clementine, your «adopted

daughter,» and how far you'd be willing to go in order to survive. When you have to dole out four pieces of food to ten hungry people, how do you decide who gets what? When you find a deserted car loaded with food, do you take it for yourself, even though it's possible the owner is still alive searching for gas? Do you try to be as open and helpful as possible with the St Johns, or keep your distance and lie about yourself?

When it comes to these kinds of decisions, there's even more railroading than in the first

episode. If you replay the game, it becomes evident that, in many cases, the same net result will occur regardless of which decision you make. There are times when



you're outright forced into doing something when the game gives you the clear choice not to, and none of your decisions have quite as much of an impact on the gameplay as, for example, the decision of saving Carley or Doug from the previous episode. None of this is really apparent when you're playing for the first time, however, because this episode is much better at masking the apparent outcomes of your decisions. No choice is easy to make, and there's rarely ever a right answer.

Finally, one of the best aspects of *Episode Two* is that it had me rethinking the way I was role-playing Lee. In the first episode, I thought I had it all figured out in terms of which characters I wanted to support and how I was going to handle myself. Things become more complicated in Episode Two, and I found myself going against my previous affiliations because of the compassion I held for certain characters in certain situations. Everyone's characterizations become deeper and more nuanced in this episode, including my own character. I had intended to play as a good guy, and watched as I unwittingly turned into a cold-hearted survivalist. My own change of character (perhaps a consequence of necessity) was one of the most dramatic elements



of the game, making the entire experience far more tragic and poignant.

Minor technical issues still present themselves this time around. I ran into problems with cutscenes freezing in place for the odd, sporadic moment, much like they did in the first episode. I also had an unusual glitch where I was having a brawl with someone

and watched the cutscene as I successfully fended them off, then for some inexplicable reason, the game told me I had died and had me restart the fight. Other than occasional mouse clicks not registering when I wanted to observe something in the environment, thus requiring a second click, I didn't run into any other problems, and these weren't



significant enough to hinder the experience.

One nice improvement *Telltale* have made with the game's interface is that they've now separated the story hints (which tell you exactly how your actions have affected things for the immediate moment) and the item hints (which show icons for all of the things you could interact with on screen). Previously, it was either both or none. When I played the first episode I remember wanting to see the item hints, just to save me time hunting around looking for things to interact with, but I wanted to turn the story hints off for greater immersion, so it's nice that they've now made the option to enable them separately. And they've now added proper mouse and keyboard descriptions in the controls menu.

On the whole, *Starved For Help* is a definite improvement upon the first game. The writing is better, the story is more engaging, the character relations are deeper, and your decisions are even more grave. It explores the darker side of humanity that the comic series is known for; It stays very close to its source material. I wish there was



some way to make the game even more interactive while retaining its cinematic feel; While not a big issue in practice, it's something to hope for in later episodes. Whether

you're a fan of *The Walking Dead* or not, anyone who enjoys a good story with serious player decisions should find plenty to enjoy with *Episode Two*. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The story is rather gripping, offering some really dramatic moments and player decisions.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

There are practically zero puzzles and not a whole lot of actual gameplay.

VERDICT:

Episode Two improves on each of the series' strengths. If you liked Episode One, you'll love this one.



OWNER/EXECUTIVE EDITOR:

Ugur Sener

OTHER EDITOR(S):

Jonathon Wisnoski

REVIEWS BY:

Nick Burgener

Jonathon Wisnoski

NEWS BY:

Jonathon Wisnoski

LAYOUT/DESIGN/ASSEMBLY:

Constantin Starodub

Jonathon Wisnoski

