

Adventure Lantern

ISSUE #46
SEPTEMBER 2013



REVIEWS:

- Atlantis: The Lost Tales
- The Experiment
- The Mystery of the Nautilus

EDITORIAL

It was 1997, during my first year of high school. My father had just returned from a business trip. He had been gone for a week. He opened his suitcase and handed me a box. He explained that he had run into a video game store while he was taking a walk after work one evening. *Atlantis: The Lost Tales* was at the window. He walked inside to take a look at the game. An employee explained to him that it was a new adventure game. Looking at the box art and the screenshots printed on the back, he decided *Atlantis* seemed like a game that I would like and bought me a copy. This was one of those rare times a friend or family member ventured to buy me a game without my input. Knowing that I have peculiar tastes and a fairly large collection of games, people usually prefer to ask me what I want instead of trying to guess what I might like. However, in this case, it turned out that my father made an excellent choice.

I installed the game and started playing it that evening. The game opened with sequence depicting the main character, Seth, arriving at Queen Rhea's palace in Atlantis on a mysterious aircraft. I was immediately enchanted by the beautiful scenery. By the computer graphics standards of 1997, *Atlantis* looked absolutely stunning. I also found the main character very likable. Seth had the right mix of naiveté and bravery befitting an adventure game hero. I wanted to discover the world of Atlantis with him. Unfortunately, I did not get very far into the game that evening. At a time when I was still fairly new to the adventure genre, *Atlantis* was far too challenging.

It was a few months later that I finally got my hands on a walkthrough for *Atlantis*. I reinstalled the game and started playing through it. After a week, I eventually reached the ending with more than a little help from the solution I had found in a magazine. Though the puzzles were punishingly difficult at times, I absolutely loved playing through the game. Journeying alongside Seth to a variety of locations across the globe all depicted with stunning backgrounds was an absolute delight. The story, which far transcended its humble beginnings, was consistently interesting and entertaining. I loved discovering the secrets of *Atlantis* and uncovering an intriguing tale about the origin of all mankind. Yet what stood above all was the soundtrack. Pierre Estéve and Stéphane Picq had succeeded in producing a soundtrack that beautifully complimented that game and captured its mystical undertones. In fact, I purchased CDs of the soundtrack several years later and still listen to it from time to time.

Without a doubt, *Atlantis* had its share of flaws. There were a few too many ways you could lose the game. Some of the challenges seemed to defy logic, with the player essentially left to randomly stumble upon a solution or consult a walk-

through. However, for me, the story, setting, atmosphere, characters, and the music combined to overcome all the negative aspects and created a very memorable gaming experience. In the fifteen years since my father first bought me a copy of the game, I played through *Atlantis* many times and introduced it to several friends. Screenshot of the flyers featured in the game decorated my room for several years.

When we launched Adventure Lantern in 2006, *Atlantis* was one of the games I knew I eventually wanted to review. However, I deliberately did not include a review of the game in our first three issues. I wanted to gain a little more experience writing review articles before trying to tackle a game to which I had such a strong emotional attachment. I wanted to be sure I could look past my personal feelings about the game and portray it in at least somewhat of an objective light. It was in our April 2006 issue that I finally decided to write about *Atlantis*. That 126-page monster remains as one of the biggest editions of AL we produced to date.

Seven years and many issues of Adventure Lantern later, I once again find myself in a position to actively contribute to the magazine. I am once again able to play the occasional adventure game and write a few reviews. Thus, it seems all too appropriate to revisit *Atlantis* in this issue with Jonathon's review. It is rare that we write a second review for a game, but publishing Jonathon's review of *Atlantis* in the issue seems like a nice way to bring Adventure Lantern's past and present together. It is also great to see how *Atlantis* holds up more than a decade after its original release.

During the months when my role with AL was limited to serving as the site's webmaster, Jonathon and the rest of our team did an amazing job of keeping the magazine going. It was my pleasure to watch them produce excellent content month after month while I made the occasional small contribution. Many thanks to you and all of our other readers for continuing to support our publication. It is both exciting and humbling to join you and the rest of the AL staff once again and take on a more active role in the production of the magazine. I do not intend to rock the boat in any way. You will still see the excellent work the team has been producing. There will just be another voice added to the mix on a more regular basis.

It is with great pleasure that I can once again say "here's hoping you will find something to enjoy in the following pages".

Until next time,

—Ugur Sener



Cover Image:
ATLANTIS:
THE LOST TALES

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ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

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Following Freeware: July 2013 releases

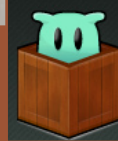
AdventureGamers.com has released another freeware list. We have already covered most of the individual entries, but there are a few unique entries, and great writeups for all of the games.



Myst: 20 Years of Point-and-Click Adventuring

Tony Smith of The Register has written a long and involved article

looking back at the classical adventure game *Myst*, which he describes as "The genre-defining game that made us all buy CD-ROM drives".



Bundle In A Box

Pay what you want and grab a box of excellent PC games

Bundle in a Box: The Indie RPG Bundle

The Indie RPG Bundle, has finally gone live and is featuring 13 role-playing games (and loads of unlockable extras), that is, until October first. As always gamers will also be supporting an important charity and indie developers via the Indie Dev Grant, as well as more exclusive Droidscape: Basilica content.

Pay anything above \$1.99 and enjoy:

Hack, Slash, Loot: a contemporary roguelike indie classic!

Unemployment Quest: fight the monster of unemployment in a modern-day RPG.

Frayed Knights: The Skull of S'makh-Daon: huge, humorous 3D RPG.

The Siege of the Necromancer: horror choose-your-own-adventure RPG.

Styateg: a strategy based RPG with a strong narrative.

Inaria: today's Ultima, complete with retro pixel-art and wild ideas.

Dungeon Fray: you have never seen a roguelike play this fast.

Beat the average price and you will allow you to also play with:

Empires and Dungeons 2: Tactics and dungeon-crawling.

Call of Cthulhu: The Wasted Land: Lovecraftian, turn-based horrors.

The Wizard from Tarnath Tor: a gloriously illustrated and highly polished gamebook.

Northmark: Hour of the Wolf: stunning RPG card game.

The Wizard's Lair: RPG with roots in classic Roguelikes and the Mystery Dungeon series.



Announcements

Conspirocracy

Described as "A Canadian point-and-click adventure game about lost identity in a bureaucratic world. A project for the Foundation Fighting Blindness". Conspirocracy was on Indiegogo until September the 27th, looking for \$5000. At the time of this writing it is still ongoing, with \$2000 raised and 4 days left.

For \$10 you can grab a copy of this strange, quirky sounding, adventure.

"Conspirocracy starts in an exaggerated, highly-bureaucratic re-imagining of Toronto, Canada. Medical droids serve as gatekeepers between patients and doctors. The activities of beggars and buskers are regulated and tasked. Airport security is taken to an more extreme, disconcerting level. As the player, you will have your work cut out for you finding what you're looking for



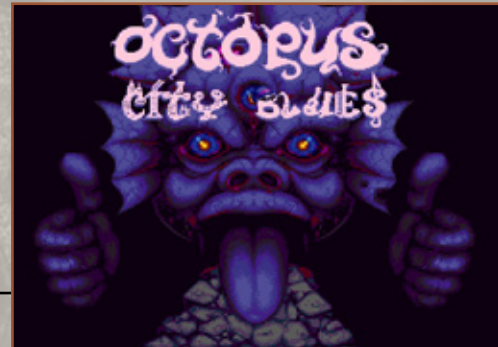
when the system is stacked heavily against you."

Octopus City Blues

From its Kickstarter: The authentic Octopus City simulation for Windows, OS X and Linux. A surreal adventure game about everything and nothing.

Assume the role of Kaf Kafkaryan, a cowardly middle-aged octopus blood junkie and tentacle trimmer, living in a city built around

a giant octopus. Kaf has been experiencing bizarre dreams about a world populated by twisted creatures. To help the inhabitants of his dreams, he must learn more about the people of the city and explore the underside of the towering metropolis. Along the way he becomes entangled in a conspiracy with far-reaching implications for Octopus City.





Candle

Set to be released early 2014, for pc, mac, and linux; After getting greenlit and a successful kickstarter campaign. Candle is a mixture of the graphic adventure and platformer genres with handmade visuals from real watercolors and ink, and frame-by-frame animations.

Upcoming Releases

Tesla Effect: A Tex Murphy Adventure

A new trailer has come out for the upcoming Text Murphy sequel, Tesla Effect.



NoseBound

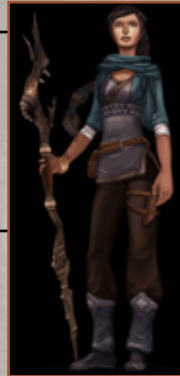
NoseBound, an amazing looking old-style, detective noir, point and click adventure game. The game will have an episodic structure. Each one will contain one case, one story, always noir, always bizarre, obscure and corrupt.



New Releases

Memoria

Daedalic Entertainment has released their latest adventure, and the sequel to last year's *The Dark Eye: Chains of Satinav*. Revisit the universe of *The Dark Eye* for \$20 on Steam.



Cognition

Episode 4: The Cain Killer

In this intense finale of *Cognition*, the Cain Killer resurfaces and Erica must work with someone she cannot trust to finish what she started three years ago. But when the time comes to face her brother's murderer, what lines will Erica be willing to cross? Which will she choose: justice or revenge?

Huntsman: The Orphanage

A horror adventure had just been Greenlit and is available already in a beta state for \$15. The developers have the following to say about it:

"This is a game from a first-time Indie studio that gives you rich dialogue, complex characters and atmospheric setting at the same time as it takes away violence as your only way out.

We call this 'alt horror' because it has no graphic violence, blood or guns. As the player, you have no defense... however, you must show empathy to save the twelve missing orphans. This is a game for people who like to explore, listen, think and solve. Listen to the nineteen personal creepypasta-style stories to piece together the mysterious events of that fateful night in 1898, when twelve orphans simply... disappeared!"



The Raven: Legacy of the Master Thief - Chapter Two: Ancestry of Lies

The second chapter out of three of The Raven was released on the 27th of August. The Raven: Legacy of a Master Thief is a thrilling crime adventure from the creators of The Book of Unwritten Tales. Full of twists and turns, it immerses you in both sides of the story, combining thrill-of-the-chase whodunit with the risk and reward of a heist story.

The RAVEN



Updated Releases

Dark Fall 1&2

Two gripping horror adventure games sporting a thick atmosphere with more than just a hint of ectoplasm, are returning to GOG.com today, for only \$5.99 each.

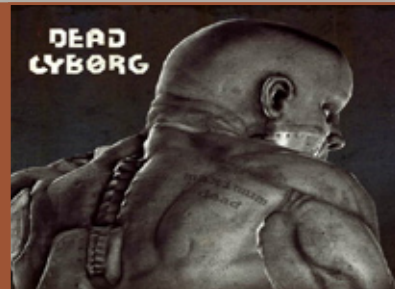
“Dark Fall: The Journal and Dark Fall 2: Lights Out are a shining example of paranormal activity-focused storytelling in gaming. Each of the games tells a gripping story in which the protagonist becomes involved in events that go far beyond our mundane understanding of the world. They create a first-person perspective experience that masterfully captures the eerie atmosphere of a ghost hunt, where the presence of strange forces feel very real and close. With immersive story and many intriguing puzzles these games should satisfy anyone looking for some chill-inducing adventure. Both games were available on GOG.com in the past, but had to be temporarily excluded from their catalog.” - (GOG)



Dead Cyborg

After getting stalled because of a lack of donations, it looked like The Dead Cyborg episodic adventure series would never get finished. Then suddenly, It got itself Greenlit last month.

Dead Cyborg is described by the developer as “a first person view sci-fi adventure game for Windows, Linux and Mac. The story is about the meaning of life... and death... in a rusty post-apocalyptic metal and concrete world. Check the homepage for more information.”



I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream

According to GOG, IHNMaIMS is a nerve-wrecking sci-fi classic point-and-click adventure game based on Harlan Ellison’s award-winning short story.

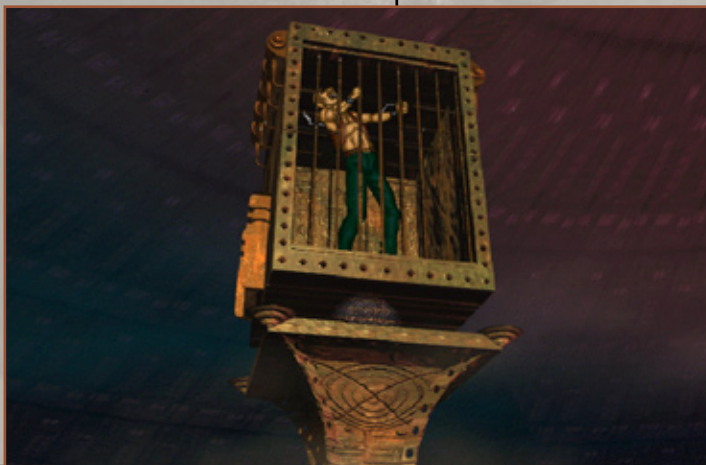
“I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream is a rare breed of an adventure game: it poses questions that require a lot of courage to answer. Are humans worthy of life? Has our civilization made any moral progress at all? Or do we skip forward from one atrocity to another. And, finally, where does it all end? Enter the nightmarish reality of Harlan Ellison’s futuristic post-apocalypse where the remnants of human race are nothing but tortured play-toys for the sadistic experiments of the rogue Allied Mastercomputer responsible for the near-extinction of mankind. To stop this malicious AI from wreaking eternal vengeance upon humans you will have to lead five different anti-heroes on a quest for redemption, through their traumatic, computer-generated past full of grotesque im-

agery and soul-grinding regret. On the way to one of four (grim, grim, grim, and, well, a little less grim) endings the game tackles extremely mature moral dilemmas stemming from topics like genocide, insanity, and paranoia. If you like your games thought-provoking and drenched in inventive macabre be sure to pick up I Have No Mouth and I Must Scream, a timeless example of evocative storytelling from one of the masters of the sci-fi genre.”

It is available on GOG.com for only \$5.99.

The Cat Lady

The mature horror adventure from Screen 7, The Cat Lady, has been Greenlight, and is coming to Steam. The Cat Lady is a full length adventure with stylized art and animation, over an hour of original music, and a cast of 21 voice actors.





News From the Big Blue Cup



Betrayal (Bulbapuck) - A man wakes up in an empty room with no way out. The only thing he can see is a key, but what does it unlock? Made in one week for the "OROW 8" competition.

1st

5

10

15

Dorian Gray and The Revolution Secret (shadowface) - Dorian Gray's girlfriend had moved a bunch of strangers with her. Now he doesn't want here to find out about his secret. Help him out.

20

Summer Woes (Adeel Sohail Ahmed and Oldschool_Wolf) - It's the hottest summer. This summer's so hot, in fact, that it has broken all the previous records. Hot Summer brings some woes with it. Eric - The Protagonist, i.e, you are also facing some problems? But will you be able to solve them? Will you able to get what you want?
MAGS August 2013 Winner!

25

30th

Captain Disaster in The Dark Side of the Moon (CaptainD) - Sleepwalking through an open StarGate isn't the best of ways to end up on a distant moon, especially when the StarGate closes behind you before you wake up. With innumerable references to classic adventure games, science fiction and of course Pink Floyd, Captain Disaster in "The Dark Side of the Moon" is a light-hearted point and click adventure game which will exercise both your grey matter and funny bone. It's the first full adventure game to feature the Captain Disaster character - two more (commercial) games are in development, and hopefully many more to come in the future.

Ben Jordan and the Dark Cults (shadowface) - A fan game based on the series by Francisco Gonzales. This game takes you into the events of the weird dream Ben Jordan is having.

Pick of the Month:**Ancient Aliens - The Roots of Sound**

Game follows the exploits of a jazz musician whose life turns upside down when his father dies. It's a traumatic event in itself, but when people start showing up and being intensely interested in the research that his father had sent him, things start to get complicated. Can the beautiful woman who claims to have been a colleague of his father's be trusted? Who are the henchmen who are now after him? Just what is his father's mysterious research project that can apparently change the world anyway?

Beautiful graphics, a moody jazz soundtrack and intelligent puzzles make this an encouraging start to what promises to be a very interesting game series. There is some unnecessary innuendo and the game is admittedly very short, but it's highly enjoyable and certainly makes you want to find out what's happening in the next episode.

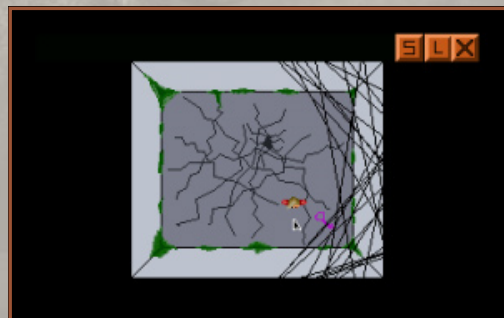
(Chosen by **CaptainD**)



Summer Woes
(Adeel Sohail Ahmed and Oldschool_Wolf)

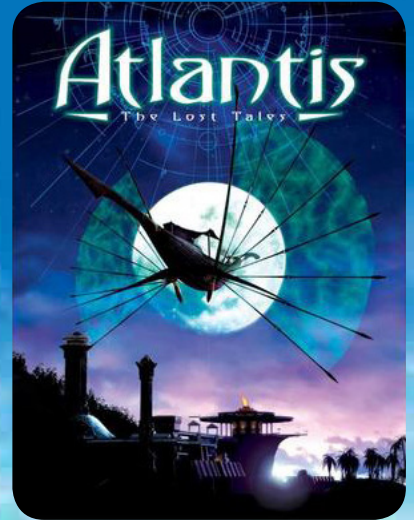


**Captain Disaster
in The Dark Side of the Moon**
(CaptainD)



Betrayal
(Bulbapuck)

Atlantis The Lost Tales



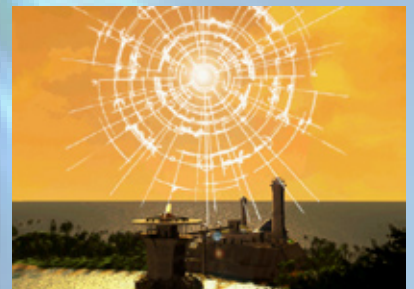
Genre: adventure Developer: Cryo Interactive
Publisher: DreamCatcher Interactive Release date: September 30, 1997
Platforms: Windows, MS-DOS, Sega Saturn, PlayStation
Website: http://www.gog.com/game/atlantis_the_lost_tales

Atlantis: The Lost Tales is a 1997 *Myst*-like adventure game based around the myth of Atlantis, and is the first title in one of *Cryo Interactive's* more well known, and likely most successful, gaming series; A gaming series that eventually made it to a total of five titles spanning over almost a decade. In fact, after *Cryo* closed down, some of its developers went on to found *Atlantis Interactive Entertainment*, whose sole development was the last two *Atlantis* titles. *Atlantis* is an interesting and complex game that I think is one of the hardest I have yet encountered to rate and compare to other games; And I honestly think that absolutely hating it or absolutely loving it are both likely and legitimate responses.

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The game is just surprisingly unique, even while sticking quite doggedly to a classical gameplay style. The way it is designed, and I am not the only one who thinks this, you absolutely have to use a walkthrough; No amount of care was

given to making the puzzles logical in any way. What they have done is given you an interactive, completely linear, story; Interactive even when most parts of the story require arbitrary actions that you have no reason to perform, and no hints are given. So I prefer to think of it as a guided interactive story, where all of the importance was put





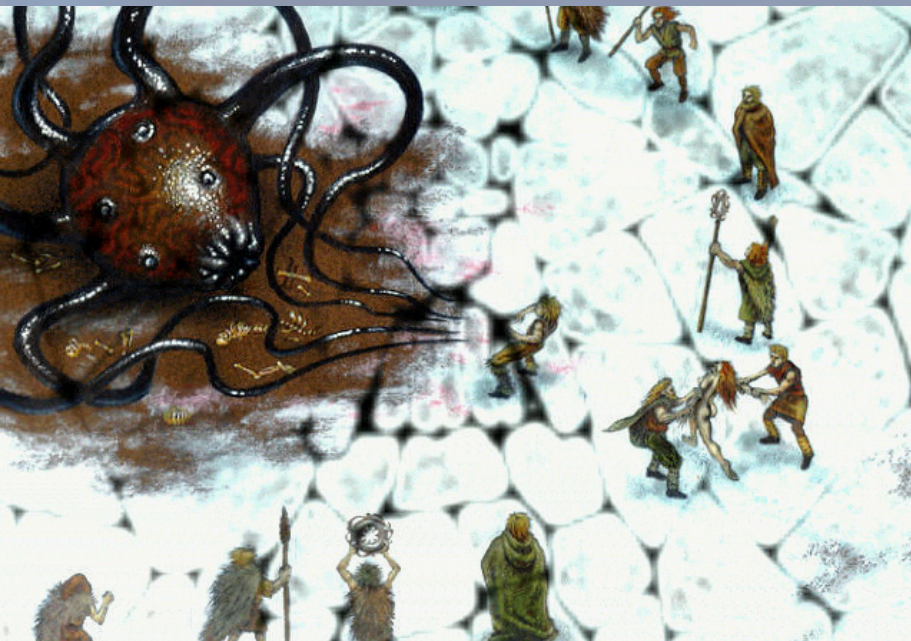
on the complex story, requiring the protagonist to perform actions that are often not obvious in any way, and where the ubiquitous use of a suitable walkthrough is part of the experience. I am even told that *Cryo* had originally released an official walkthrough on day one of the release (and that this was a very uncommon occurrence).

Sometimes a walkthrough does not even help; For example, the infamous crab racing puzzle, near the end of the game. There are quite a few infamous puzzles in adventure gaming history, but none of them even compare to the atrocity that is crab racing. Crab racing, in *Atlantis* anyways, is a completely random affair, where you pick a crab and then watch it race a competitor across a small trap filled track. Some traps throw the crab forwards while the others throw the crab back, which even causes it to continue traveling backwards for quite some time; So a single misstep can cause a crab to go from right in front of the finish line to back at the starting line. These matches take at least five minutes to complete, but are completely random, and unguided; And I have seen a single match where the crabs were thrown backwards over ten times in a row, and then got stuck in a corner

together for about fifteen minutes (creating a thirty plus minute match). You, and your competitor play for the best out of five, and these matches are completely unskippable, and

trying to will cause you to forfeit the game. For me, this translated into the absolute worst gaming experience I have ever had, spread out over about one and a half hours of agony.





The Lost Tales is a large game, in a large interconnected world. It is displayed in 3D panoramic view with node based movement. Most of the node transitions are accompanied with beautifully done animations, and most of the world is traversable; I think about half of the nodes exist simply to exist, and are never used for any practical purpose, not even as a transition between used locations. Specifically, there are even nodes that have you leaning over ledges, looking down and around; These are never used, but give you a different perspective of the world,



and are just fun to find and try out. The gameworld is so big that exploration, and a good sense of direction, are important skills throughout most of the game. The world is comprised of five main areas, some of which you visit only once and only for a short while, and others that you visit many times and spend hours and hours at. Two of these areas are very large, with many interconnected pathways, and huge unused areas to explore or ignore.

The story in *Atlantis* is a complex, long, fantasy adventure. It explores the Atlantis myth of an ancient race of super advanced humans, who lived on a small island, along with all of their technology and magic, until the island sunk beneath the sea, destroying and burying their civilization. You play as Seth, a young man who has just been appointed a Queen's Companion, and as such has just arrived at the capital city. The Queen is the traditional ruler of all Atlantis, who takes a temporary Consort as a second in command, and has many Companions, who act as guards. Every

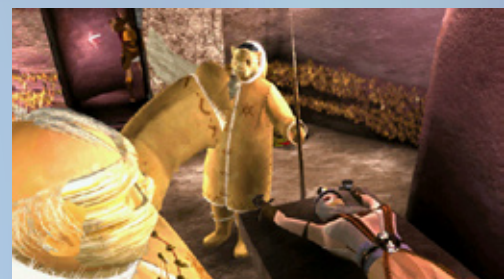
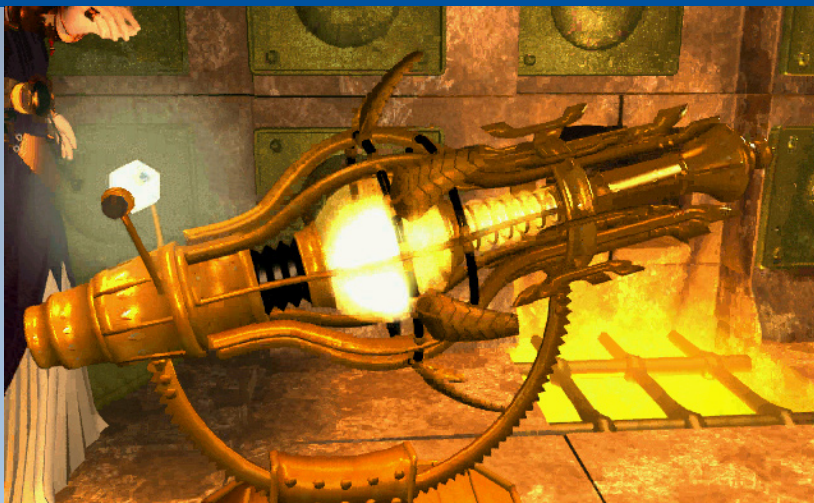
seven years the Consort must undergo a challenge, in which either he wins and continues serving as Consort, or he loses and dies. When you arrive at your new assignment, his seven year stretch is drawing to a close, and you are told that the Queen has just been attacked outside of the city, she is missing, and that most of the companions are dead. The attack is blamed on outside barbarians, and you are warned that all investigations will be done by the Consort's guards. Undaunted, and feeling that you have a responsibility to the Queen to investigate, you start poking your head into the events. Your adventure to save the Queen and your society will take you across the breadth of your civilization and beyond. Eventually, learning about, and even traveling to the historic roots of your people.

Atlantis: The Lost Tales is beautiful even to today's standards; And at the time of its release, over fifteen years ago, it was breathtakingly beautiful, a technological marvel of its day. The graphics are very varied, but often are comprised of wide open views, in cities, forests, on tiny islands, and frozen arctic wastelands; As well as within many buildings, palaces, and caves. The main view is 360 degree panoramic and slightly grainy, with node based movement. This view has no default cursor, and the interactive areas are actually quite small, so it can be frustrating to try and center objects and interactive areas by eye alone. Between most of these nodes are crisp, less grainy, beautifully done, transitional animations, that show you walking, climbing, etc. between the two nodes. Additionally, you also get full cutscenes, at times, and up close body and face shots, during dialogue sequences. And this last case is where things get interesting. There is somewhat more skin shown than in your average adventure game. The Atlantians do not seem like a particularly modest race, and their climate appears

to be warm enough to make cloths not technically necessary. We adventure gaming fans do not get all that much sex appeal in our games, so I think *Atlantis* is a nice change in this department. Note, no actual nudity is ever shown.

The Lost Tales is fully voiced, and contains a large soundtrack. The voices are actually very good, from all of the characters, of which there are dozens. There is simply a lot of dialogue in *Atlantis*, from a lot of characters, and they did a great job of getting this all voiced. But one of the best features of the entire game is its soundtrack. This is an epic score spanning almost two hours, and over twenty tracks.

The gameplay of *Atlantis* is extremely varied, but all completely incomprehensible. There is no point in even trying to figure out the solution to 90% of the puzzles; They are just completely random, and most of them were never designed to be worked out. And of the ones with a logical solution, many of them still require near random guessing to come to it anyways; You know exactly what you want to accomplish, but there is no algorithm or cognitive thought process to get you there, instead you must dumbly try hundreds of possibilities, or look up the solution. But sprinkled throughout the game are puzzles with both logical solutions and logical ways to get to these solutions, which provide a nice engaging counterpoint to the rest of the game. The game also contains many quicktime events that mostly have your specific movement as the puzzle. You need to follow a very specific trail, all in a limited timeframe, and perform some simple actions along the way. The one specific solution is all very arbitrary, and failure is always instant death. Luckily the game has quite a good auto-save feature, that instantly reloads you to the beginning of the puzzle sequence. Counter to reason, this gameplay can be



enjoyable, at least in conjuncture with the story and graphics; But there are a few absolutely abysmal sections of the game. Like mentioned previously, you must sit through the crab racing, but also the solar puzzle got pretty tedious on the third time through.

Atlantis: The Lost Tales is an intriguing game. I cannot explain exactly why but I enjoyed it quite a bit, and if it was not for the crab racing this experience

would be almost completely unmarred. There is not much technically good with the gameplay, yet it is still evocative and enjoyable. Estimates vary, but I have seen up to twenty to thirty hours, if not more, for a playthrough, and I think these are pretty good estimates; Though with the use of a walkthrough, eight to ten is also a doable estimate. ●

BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The evocative story, graphics, soundtrack, and voice-overs.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The impervious gameplay logic.

VERDICT:

A great game, with many problems.



The Experiment



Genre: adventure Developer: Lexis Numérique Publisher: The Adventure Company
Release date: September 2007 (Europe), February 2008 (North America)
Platform: Windows Website: none



A ship that was once home to a group of scientists is now moored at an uncharted island. The scientists were engaged in a research project that had the potential to change the world. With an unprecedented potential for cellular regeneration, their work promised a cure for many diseases. Unfortunately, something went horribly wrong. The ship is now stuck in the sand. The laboratories are all shut down, infested with animals and overrun by vegetation. Yet one member of the research team survived. Years after the project was terminated, she is still on board the ship.



Review by Ugur Sener

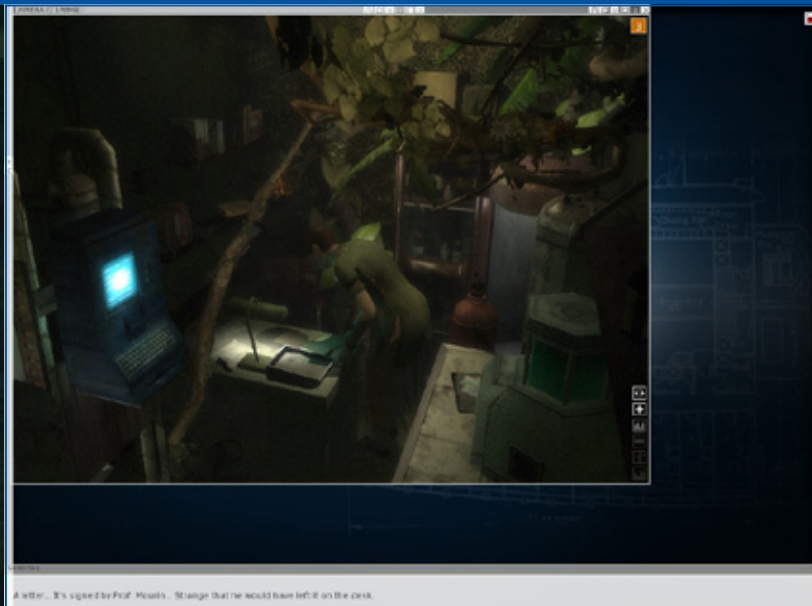
Lea Nichols wakes up from a coma to find herself in a decrepit room inside the research ship. She pulls out the IV line attached to her arm and sits up in the bed. How did she get here? What happened to the rest of her team? How long has she been

sleeping? Confused, she starts looking around for answers. A note at the side of her bed speaks of a terrible event that destroyed everything. What happened at the base? Lea is confused and scared. She knows that her life might be in danger. She needs answers.

Lea notices a security camera turned toward her bed. The camera

is working. Somewhere somebody is watching her. Did somebody else survive the events that transpired on the ship? Lea can't speak to the person on the other side, but she needs someone to help her explore the ship. Someone needs to help her search for clues, unlock doors, and help her understand exactly what happened to her research team. Lea has little choice but to trust the stranger on the other side. Thus begins an unlikely alliance, with Lea doing the actual legwork and her ally helping her access different parts of the ship using a computer system.

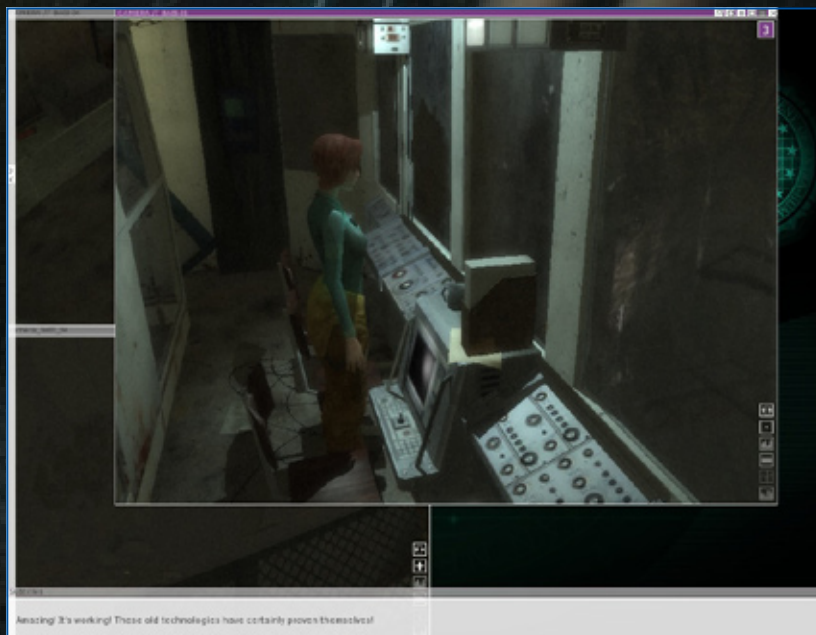
The Experiment, released as *eXperience 112* in Europe, is an adventure game developed by *Lexis Numerique*. Originally released in Europe in 2007 and North America in 2008, the game immediately stands out with its unique control scheme and intriguing premise. While *The Experiment* suffers from a number of problems with its puzzles and overall structure, the



unique indirect control mechanics and the interesting relationship that develops between the player and the protagonist alone can still make the game worth a look.

The game begins with Dr. Lea Nichols waking up in a bed on board a research ship. At first, the ship

appears to be completely abandoned. However, Lea quickly notices that the security camera in her room is online. Somebody is able to see and hear her. She has little recollection of how she ended up in this room. She is unsure what happened to her teammates. She needs to explore





The Experiment puts players in the role of the person using the security system and watching Lea's actions through cameras. You cannot directly tell Lea to explore an item or go to a specific spot. Instead, you switch lights on and off, make telephones ring, and open doors to direct Lea's attention toward certain areas. There are many cameras placed throughout the ship, giving you different views of the rooms. It is up to the player to use the cameras to examine each location and direct Lea toward places of interest. To help you determine where Lea needs to go, you have access to a map that shows all the light switches, cameras, and other tools of interest in a given area. You click on lights, cameras, doors, and other devices on this map to interact with them and get Lea's attention.

Fortunately, your involvement with the adventure is not restricted to flicking light switches on and off. You also assist Lea by accessing the research lab's computer system. You will need to sift through personnel files to look for information that can help Lea learn more about what happened to the ship and gain access to new areas. Early in the game, you find out that the research team had 21 members. To fully understand what happened on the ship, you will gradually need to gain access to the personal records and files of each of these team members. You will need to read through the documents they stored in their private drives and read the e-mails they exchanged with other team members.

As you read through these documents, you will begin to appreciate the relationship between the various team

the ship to get some answers. However, she is unable to gain entry to the different areas of the ship on her own. She has little choice but to ask the person on the other side of the camera for assistance. She teaches her mysterious companion how to use the research lab's computer system. She explains how the cameras, lights, and doors can be remotely controlled. Lea and the person behind the camera will need to work together to discover what happened to the ship and its crew.

There is something immediately compelling about *The Experiment's* setting. While an abandoned research facility may not be the most original idea in the history of gaming, the implementation in *The Experiment* is very successful. The game immediately creates a sense of mystery and compels you to explore. The ship itself makes for a great setting for an adventure. There are a large number of areas waiting to be discovered.

As the adventure progresses, you gain access to several different locations and come to understand the full scope of the research project. With their gloomy overtones, the environments you get to explore are consistently intriguing and help create a great unsettling atmosphere. While some of the tracks can get repetitive, the soundtrack is also successful at further augmenting the atmosphere with dark and alluring tunes.

It helps that Lea Nichols is a strong protagonist. While you will not know much about her background at the onset of the adventure, it is clear that she is a strong-minded and tenacious woman. She can seem overbearing and pushy at times, but she also has a great take-charge attitude mixed with moments of vulnerability that makes her very interesting to follow. You may find yourself genuinely caring about what happens to her and invested in the outcome of her adventure.

members. As expected, there was a lot going on aboard the ship that didn't have anything to do with the research project. From a drug-dealing doctor to a technology officer obsessed with encryption, the research base personnel makes up a fairly colorful cast. While many of the documents you find are superfluous and add little to the core story, it is still fun to find out about the different team members and their quirks.

Beyond reading electronic files and giving Lea directions, you also take direct control of various devices to solve puzzles. While the puzzles are not exceptionally challenging, they often do require you to do some reading so you understand the purpose of the machine you are controlling and know exactly what you are trying to accomplish. These sections serve as nice breaks from the indirect approach to the remainder of the action.

At times, the game also makes very clever uses of the cameras available for you to observe the events. Some of the cameras seem to have been intentionally placed so that you feel like you are invading Lea's privacy. You can feel as though you are spying on her rather than helping her solve a mystery. This creates a very deliberate sense of discomfort. It seems the developers wanted players to be very aware of the fact that they are watching an attractive woman dressed in a provocative gown through security cameras. Even after Lea finds a different and far more modest outfit, you may still have the feeling that you are engaging in voyeurism. While this setup creates an uncomfortable feeling, it also augments Lea's sense of isolation and helplessness, improving the game's atmosphere.

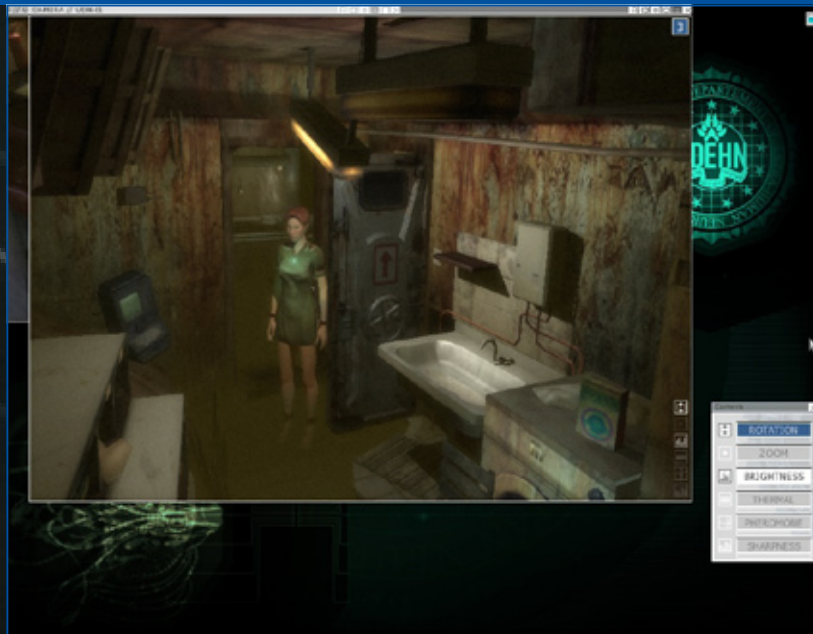


Unfortunately, despite its great premise, interesting protagonist, intriguing setting, and unique approach to gameplay, *The Experiment* suffers from a number of issues that ultimately take away from the overall experience. First of all, despite its novelty, the control system can get rather tedious after you get through the first few hours of the game. Through the course of the adventure, Lea has to cover a pretty significant amount of territory. After a while, it becomes a bit of a chore to

direct her by flicking light switches on and off. While in theory this approach is not terribly different from clicking on the location you wish to go to in a typical point-and-click adventure game, there are times when Lea does not seem to notice a given light, which can be very frustrating. In addition, she can only move one light at a time, even if there are a series of lights positioned in a row clearly within her field of vision. You cannot click on the light at the end and skip the ones in the middle. This means



Lea... if you're reading this letter... it means you've survived



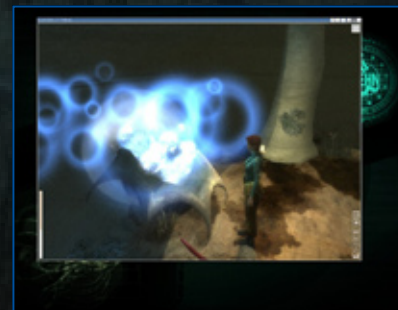
you have to tediously flip each light along the way. I could not find a way to quickly send her from one end of an area to another, even during sequences where the game required some backtracking. To make things worse, Lea walks at a fairly slow pace, making you watch as she grudgingly moves from one room to the next.

Managing the various security cameras can get irritating as well. The game allows players to turn cameras on and off directly. You can also configure the game so that cameras automatically turn on when Lea gets close to them. However, regardless of what setting you choose, you have to do some manual camera adjusting to keep Lea in focus and get a good view of the action. After playing the game for a few hours, I found the need for these adjustments increasingly irritating. During certain points, I gave up on watching the events altogether, simply clicking on lights to make Lea walk from one place to the next.

Another issue is with the sheer number of personnel files you need

to access. While it is great to have a colorful cast of characters, it's not like you actually have meaningful interactions with any of these people. All you do is learn about them by reading various documents. Despite the fact that the developers included some interesting details about these characters, having to read documents for 21 people gets a bit irritating. The mysteries surrounding most of these people are not particularly deep either. I would have preferred a smaller cast with better developed characters. It would have been more satisfying to learn several interesting details about fewer individuals rather than one or two facts about a larger cast.

The sense of tedium is also eminent in a few of the game's puzzles. While it is very nice to step away from the indirect control system and gain access to various devices, some of the puzzles feel too much like chores. For instance, at one point in the game you gain control of a vehicle. You must



navigate what essentially boils down to a small maze using this vehicle. Then you need to bring the machine in perfect alignment with three areas and enter some access codes. Unfortunately, the vehicle does not have the friendliest controls, making navigation rather irritating. It doesn't help that Lea very vocally complains every single time you make a mistake. It would have been much better if the sequence was significantly shorter or if the machine had better controls with the process of entering the access codes simplified.

The game also squanders some of the more novel puzzle ideas. For instance, at one point in the game, you gain access to documents that teach you about a language. You are then required to use this knowledge in several puzzles. Some of these are very well implemented. However, there is one puzzle during a key moment of the game that also utilizes the language which fails to deliver. Rather than making interesting use

of the language mechanics, the puzzle ultimately tests how quickly you are able to click on buttons on the computer interface.

To make matters worse, *The Experiment* has some issues with pacing. Getting through the adventure for the first time can easily take up to 15 hours. While this is a rather satisfying length, some segments of the game drag on a little too long. For instance, immediately after you complete the first major section of the game and gain access to a new area, you are sent on a highly irritating fetch quest. The quest adds very little to the overall story, but requires a good deal of backtracking. Rather than exploring the new location you just discovered, you have to sit there and watch Lea walk from one end of the ship to the other and then slowly get back to the new area. It is a little hard to comprehend what such tedious sequences add to the game.

The ending of the game also deserves mention. After you play the game for about an hour, you will likely have a pretty good idea about why Lea cares so much about figuring out what happened at the base. You will also have some sense about something she is trying to find. From then on, the entire game builds up toward a final meeting. In fact, the last batch of puzzles is specifically designed to take you toward this climactic moment. Unfortunately, right when you think you are about to witness the grand reveal, the game abruptly comes to an end. The most crucial moment of the story happens off camera. All you get is an explanation of what happened and Lea's decision about how to handle the situation. After you put in fifteen hours to get through the game, this



conclusion feels like a slap in the face. There is one decent story reason to keep the climax off camera. However, ending cinematic could have still been expanded to take players right up to the final encounter with a more thorough explanation provided to justify Lea's final decision.

In the end, I enjoyed *The Experiment* despite its flaws, but also left the game with a good deal of ambivalence. The novel control system, the excellent premise of the story, solid lead character, alluring dark atmosphere, several unique puzzles, and the vast



amount of area you get to explore are all great features and make up a game that is worth trying. However, the tediousness of the indirect control structure, the chore of adjusting cameras, a few frustrating puzzles, and the disappointing ending are difficult to overlook. With a little bit of polish, *The Experiment* could have been something truly exceptional. As it stands, the game falls a bit short of the mark. However, if you think you can put up with the irritating quirks, the unique gameplay mechanics alone may make *The Experiment* worth a try. ●

BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Interesting setting and protagonist. Excellent dark and gloomy atmosphere. The initial novelty of the indirect control system.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Controlling the main character and manipulating the cameras can become chores as the game progresses. Too much reading that does not meaningfully contribute to the story. Quirky puzzles that detract from the game.

VERDICT:

A truly interesting game that does not live up to its full potential. Still worth a look for its novel features alone.



The Mystery of the Nautilus



iOS



Genre: adventure Developer: Cryo Interactive

Publisher: DreamCatcher Interactive

Release date: April 29, 2002 (original)

Platforms: Windows, Mac OS X, iOS, Android Website: none

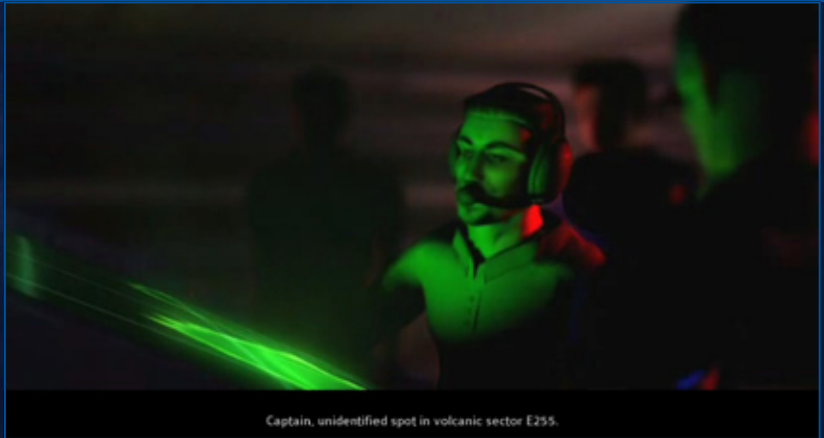


Normally, I become somewhat of an expert on a game before I write a review on it; At the very least I know when it was published and by whom; But in this case, I am woefully ill prepared. *Cryo Interactive* originally released the *Myst*-like *The Mystery of the Nautilus* (aka *The Secret of the Nautilus*) back in 2002. It received mixed reviews, but regardless of if you loved it or hated it, it was obvious that it contained some of the worst features of the point and click genre. It contains tiny hotspots, for objects which are indistinguishable from the background, and some of these objects are not in places you would normally even face. Add to this infamously challenging puzzles that do not necessarily even give you any reason to try the correct solution, and you get one of the best examples of the problems with the genre. At some time, either when it was originally released, or long afterwards, a casual version of the game, attempting to fix all of these issues, was released. This version takes the original game and removes much of the gameplay and many of the game's features, as well as adding a few hint type features; The graphics and plot are identical, and the puzzles are similar but with many of their steps removed. This casual version is the one I am reviewing here.

Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

In all versions of the game, you are presented with 360 degree panoramic *Myst*-like graphics. Quite grainy, and mostly static, but also stylish and very nice; Very steampunk and sci-fi. I love this classic style, and how well the designers managed with such a limited resolution. In my opinion, these graphics are one of the main reasons to play *The Mystery of the Nautilus*. There are also quite a few video cutscenes, of similar quality; Somewhat higher res, but with a small decrease in detail and style. The soundtrack and voice work are OK, it would be hard to describe them as any better than that, but they are better than nothing.

One of the features added to this casual version is constant hotspot indicators. Every navigation hotspot, every object that you can pick-up, every interactive area is highlighted by an indicator on screen. Still, this does not mean that everything is easy to find, and that navigation is effortless. Many objects, and some navigational directions, are in out of the way places, that you will likely not



see at first glance. For people familiar with the full version, I shall also mention what features and gameplay elements were removed. Specifically, the menu/

inventory system has been scaled back considerably; Everything is autosave and auto-load, and many ingame menu screens have been taken out, only leaving the

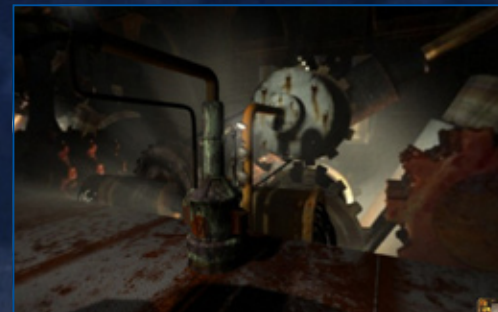
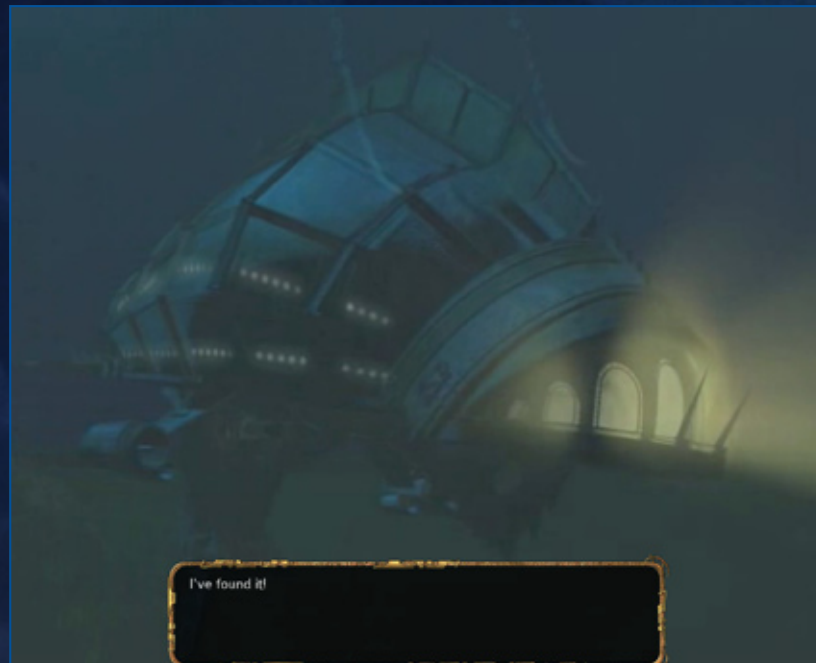




inventory; No PDA, no character to equip items on, just the absolutely bare essentials. Additionally, pretty much every puzzle's length and difficulty has been cut in half,

and some of the puzzles have been completely removed. This is done, mostly, by removing items, and the need to use them, and at times entire puzzles; This is done

quite well, as you can still play the game using an old original version walkthrough. Overall, this new difficulty level seems pretty good, it is pretty much what the



average adventure game of today would put out. A lot of content has been removed, and this is unfortunate, however I also know that I would not want to attempt a walkthrough-less playthrough of the original game, as it stood; And there is still loads of content in this casual version to fall in love with, and it is still an average length adventure game, being something like six hours long.

The gameplay of *The Mystery of the Nautilus* is decent. There are problems with it, and I would never call it well designed, but it is not unenjoyable. There are a few logic puzzles next to many inventory puzzles. The problems come about mainly because there is not really a logical game flow. Some doors and puzzles just seem to randomly become unlocked at a certain point, without any clear reason why. And while the difficulty is maintained at a decent level, some of the solutions are far from logical or expected. And the only reason that the game does not become impossible is because the number of inventory items is kept small enough to try a few random guesses.

What makes this game worth playing is its subject matter and setting. Who would not be excited to explore the Nautilus of Jules Verne's *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*; The legendary vessel of captain Nemo and his crew. In *The Mystery of the Nautilus* you explore an abandoned Nautilus, and uncover its history and why it is here, mostly through playing video logs left behind by captain Nemo. I would not call this story great, but with a subject matter like this, it does not have to be, to still be interesting.



The Mystery of the Nautilus is an interesting game. It has defects, and problem areas, but also a lot of interesting content. It has a good difficulty level, and while you lose a lot of content in

this casual version, from what I have seen of the full original version, this version is the version the average person is going to want to play. ●

BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The classical sci-fi literature setting and Myst-like graphics.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The gameplay.

VERDICT:

An interesting little game. Worth playing if you find its premise intriguing.



Adventure Lantern

