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Editorial

I step out of the hotel room to take a quick break from writing. It is a beautiful summer night in Dallas. It's neither too warm nor too humid. There is a gentle breeze cooling down the city at the end of another hot day. The sky is clear and the full moon looks pristine.

The coffee shop that was my original destination has already closed for the evening. I walk a little farther to the nearby gas station. As I pay for my drink, I notice that the guy behind the counter is obviously very tired and ready to get out of there. He starts spinning the change I used to buy my drink on the counter. I wonder how long he will be playing with the coins after I leave.

On the way back, I notice that the lights are on in an office across the street. I wonder if someone is working hard to finish up a project. On a different floor, the cleaning crew seems to be hard at work. At the same time, a cab pulls up in front of a bar. Four people step out, most likely about to grab a few drinks and relax. The sports bar across the street seems quite crowded.

What is going on around the rest of the world does not seem to matter here. Everybody is somehow absorbed in his or her own world. Whether it is spinning a penny on a counter, working late into the night, or having a few drinks with some friends to unwind, it is all in here. In less than a mile radius...

I get back into the room and get absorbed in my own hobby. There is still some work to do before Adventure Lantern's August issue will be ready to publish. I think about how much things will slow down outside in just a couple of hours, only to start back up with the first lights of the morning. The same thing is true for the magazine of course. Once the issue is out, it will be time to rest for a couple of weeks. Then it will start all over again.

It's been eight months, by now the process is becoming a routine. Something reflected in many other aspects of life. Except for the occasional breaks and the start of a new routine… Sometimes the change is terrifying. An accident, a war, the loss of something meaningful and significant. Yet sometimes it is beautiful. Like the wedding reception I attended in just a few days. A delayed celebration of my own marriage.

But now it is time to finish up this month's issue. Here's hoping you'll enjoy this issue reaching you right after what was an exceptionally special day for me.

Until next month…

-Ugur Sener

News

Compiled by Gnome and Ugur Sener

Mr. Smoozles Goes Nutso demo available:
Juniper Games announced that a demo is now available for their upcoming game Mr. Smoozles Goes Nutso. The demo is available through the Juniper Games Web site at http://www.juniper-games.com/smoozles/downloads.htm. Download the demo for a chance to help Ed fend off the invading Goragons.

Law & Order Criminal Intent: The Vengeful Heart
Legacy Interactive is giving players another chance to assume the role of Detective Robert Goren from the famous television series Law & Order: Criminal Intent. The Vengeful Heart is the first episode of a four-part series of downloadable games. Giving players a chance to investigate crime scenes, recover evidence, and interrogate witnesses, The Vengeful Heart sets out to put your detective skills to test. For more information, visit the Legacy Interactive Web site at http://www.legacygames.com.
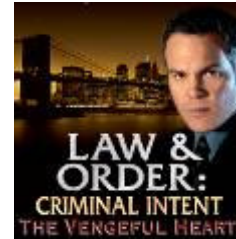
Safecracker Has Gone Gold:
The Adventure Company has announced that Safecracker has gone gold. The game puts players in the role of a security expert hired to find an eccentric billionaire's deed to his property. Accomplishing the task will require players to crack thirty-five different cases.

Sequel to Spooks Confirmed:
Several months ago, Thaumaturge had brought us a review of an independent freeware adventure game called Spooks. In light of the first game's success, a sequel has been announced. With the sequel, Erin Robinson will be taking the game in a new direction and introduce a new main character.

A Vampyre Story Finds a Publisher:
A Vampyre Story is finally geting ready to walk down dark Victorian alleys, as Bill Tiller's (of Curse of Monkey Island fame) Autumn Moon Entertainment got itself a publisher. And this time the publisher, Crimson Cow, has actually published quite a few games, albeit mostly in Germany. One of them was Runaway, which can only bring tears of hope to our Lucasarts

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remembering eyes! For more information on A Vampyre Story, visit
http://www.amegames.com/vs or read Adventure Advocate's interview with Bill
Teller which is reprinted in this issue.

Diamonds in the Rough Announced:

Diamonds in the Rough has been announced, following
the creation of Atropos Studios. Diamonds in the Rough,
a sequel of sorts to Alkis Polirakis's first freeware AGS
game (Other Worlds), is trying to introduce a few
innovative gameplay aspects to our beloved adventuring
genre quite, like for example knowing what the protagonist is thinking... Other
than that it will be a traditional 3rd person point and clicker, with strong story
elements. To learn more about the project take a trip to the Atropos Studios Web
site at http://www.atropos-studios.com/diamonds.html.

Evil Days of Luckless John:

Evil Days of Luckless John, a Russian adventure game,
and one that tries to incorporate quite a few arcade/fighting
elements, should be ready for release any moment now
(Q3 2006 they say).The developers, namely Akella,
decribe it as "a remarkable mix of adventure, arcade
shooter and amusing fighting" and go on to add that "the
game is based on comics, cartoon and humorous action scenes which are
integrated in a suitable manner into the overall intricate story". Additional details
are available at http://www.akella.com/en/games/raiders.

ScummVM 0.9.0

On a side note, it's been quite a while since the brilliant ScummVM version 0.9.0
has been released, adding support for "The Legend of Kyrandia" and "The
Feeble Files" games, and tweaking and fixing the program where appropriate.
For the two of our readers who haven't heard of ScummVM (shame on you!),
let's just say it's the only proper way to enjoy LucasArts adventures of yore on
current PCs (and Macs and DCs and quite a few platforms really).

Restless Announced:

It's supposed to be scary, it definitely is quite British and
its website has just gone live! See it here:
http://www.restlessgame.com/index.htm.
Oh, and for those who simply can't stand not knowing,
know this: Restless will be a 3rd person adventure, as
well as a "supernatural thriller".

Mock'n Bird Swamp Announced:

After releasing Lunar Deep only a few weeks ago, AncientRein is working on a
second project called Mock'n Bird Swamp. Additional details are available at
AncientRein Gaming's new Web site: http://members.aol.com/ancientrein.

Yoomurjak's Ring – Hands-On Preview
Written by Ugur Sener

Have you ever wanted to simply go away and leave everything behind? Did you ever seek refuge in a journey? To find peace in a distant land, away from the constant stress and the worries of everyday life…

Jonathan Hunt is at a turning point in his life. His mother has recently passed away. He is unable to get along with his girlfriend Allison. He is not faring any better at work either. The journalist is having trouble with his publishing company. Jonathan is feeling trapped in New York. He is in need of a change. He needs to get away from all aspects of his life and find a new purpose.

It is a good time to get away from New York. Jonathan seeks to discover his mother's homeland. Thus he crosses the ocean to visit Hungary. But he is not interested in the capital city Budapest. Jonathan's destination is Eger. He wants to visit the city where the famous Hungarian novel *Stars of Eger* took place. Yet more than his fascination with the novel has caused Jonathan to pick Eger as his destination.

Jonathan's copy of the book is a gift from his ancestor Samuel Hunt. Twenty years ago, Jonathan has acquired two letters along with the novel. Written by a man called Pal Abray, the letters are addressed to Samuel. The contents are most certainly interesting. The details are obscure, the information is unclear, but the letters speak of a wondrous machine and a tremendous discovery.

Jonathan does not really believe in the invention mentioned in the letters. But he still wants to find out more information about Abray. Perhaps this quest will offer the journalist an escape from his everyday life. Perhaps it will help him find descendants of Abray, a connection to Jonathan's past.

But there is more to the journey. Jonathan is in dire need of a significant change. There could not be a better time to discover his mother's homeland. The journalist travels halfway across the world to find himself. As Jonathan puts it, he "will soon arrive home, where [he has] never been…"

The game begins as Jonathan arrives at his hotel in Eger. He is fascinated by the town's beauty. He revels in the peace he is able to find at the heart of the city. But he has hardly traveled all this distance to waste his time in a hotel. Thus, he sets out to track down Pal Abray. Perhaps the locals will be able to provide him some information.

It is not long before Jonathan makes his way to the information center. One of the employees, Julianna Sarosi immediately proves to be extremely friendly and helpful. But when Jonathan asks Julianna about Abray, he unexpectedly gets help from another visitor at the center. It turns out Mihaly Jambor knows quite a bit about Abray. Apparently, the old man's grandfather was Abray's assistant. Mihaly believes that Abray's invention was real. He also believes that it was successfully used at least once. The old man arranges a meeting with Jonathan to show him definitive evidence. Unfortunately, Mihaly has a heart attack the night before the meeting and passes away at the hospital.

Jonathan is shaken by the loss of this connection to his ancestors' past. But he is not about to give up on the investigation. What was it that Jambor wanted to share with Jonathan so badly? Why did the old man dedicate twenty years of his life into researching what happened to his grandfather? How does the novel *Stars of Eger* and its author tie into all of this? It will be up to Jonathan to get to the bottom of the mystery. Perhaps the journalist can find the truth where Jambor failed. And perhaps in the process Jonathan will discover a sense of purpose and a new motivation to embrace life.

Yoomurjak's Ring is an adventure game being developed by Private Moon Studios. The team behind the successful episodic AGON series is this time bringing us a first-person adventure game with real actors and locations. Yoomurjak's Ring is inspired by the novel *Stars of Eger* written by Geza Gardonyi. However, the game is most certainly not a simple retelling of the story.

Yoomurjak's Ring has an original storyline that puts players in the role of the American journalist Jonathan Hunt. The young man originally arrives at the city of Eger looking for long-lost connections to his past. But what starts as a few simple questions asked at the town's information center quickly turns into an interesting adventure with a mystery around Pal Abray's invention and the famous Hungarian novel.

The demo version of the game used for this hands-on preview deviously ended just when the plot started to thicken. However, based on what was offered during the first part of the game, Yoomurjak's Ring could deliver an engaging storyline. Combining the historical background of Eger, the issues that lead Jonathan to the city in the first place, and the mystery regarding Abray's invention, Private

Moon Studios could offer a plot with several twists to keep players interested throughout the game. It should be entertaining to see the questions raised throughout the demo version get answered as the adventure progresses. Yoomurjak's Ring could also give the underlying mystery a much more good perspective by showing players how Jonathan changes throughout the game perhaps finding motivation to carry on with his life in a new direction after he unlocks the mystery.

Yoomurjak's Ring features an interface that should be instantly familiar to those who have played the first three episodes of the AGON series. The game is played from a first-person perspective. To move the camera, players have to move the mouse while holding down its left button. The mouse icon changes to indicate various actions are available. The icon turns white to indicate that you can move in a given direction. Gears appear when you bring the mouse over a hotspot. Here you can either attempt to interact with the hotspot directly or use an object or an item from the inventory. Unlike AGON however, Yoomurjak's ring uses photographs of real locations to create its environments. Presented as 360º panaromas, these photographs portray a most pleasant town to explore. The streets of Eger seem to offer a mix of the old and the new, creating a peaceful yet interesting setting for the game.

Five buttons are available on the top right corner of the screen. You can save your progress, load a game, or return to the title screen by using the menu button. The 'I' button opens up the inventory. Just like the AGON games, the inventory is displayed across the top portion of the screen. You can select items with a simple left click. If the item is a document, you will see it in a close-up view and be able to read its contents. Otherwise, the mouse icon will turn into the selected item so you can use it on a hotspot. The 'M' button brings up the map interface. Acquired within the first few minutes of the game, the map allows players to instantly travel between locations in Eger. As you learn about different locations, other characters will mark them on your map. As always, this feature is

a nice time saver, preventing needless wandering around the city. Using the 'N' button, it is possible to view transcripts of the conversations you will have throughout the game. Finally, the game has an encyclopedia function that will be available in the full version of the game.

The cutscenes in Yoomurjak's Ring are brought to life in full-motion video with real actors. Judging from the demo version of the game, character interaction will play a very significant role in the game. In fact, especially during the very early stages of the game, going to various locations and talking to different characters will take up the bulk of your time. Based on the scenes available in the demo, the acting seems to be appropriate. The original Hungarian voice-acting also seemed to fit the characters. However, since the English voice-acting was yet to be incorporated into the demo, there is no telling how it will sound.

Of course having plenty of character interaction doesn't mean the game will not feature the kind of puzzles AGON players will have come to expect from Private Moon Studios. The demo version included one puzzle where players had to decipher an encrypted message. The process of gathering clues to solve the puzzle and actually breaking the code was certainly reminiscent of the AGON series. Players should be able to expect plenty of other puzzles to keep them occupied in the final version of the game.

Based on what was available in the demo, it seems Yoomurkak's Ring is shaping up to be an interesting title. Exploring the town of Eger and investigating the mystery behind Pal Abray's invention could make up for an entertaining experience. There were a couple of minor issues in the demo such as some awkwardly worded sentences or misspelled words. If these issues are ironed out before the final release, Yoomurjak's Ring could deliver a pretty solid adventure gaming experience. If you find the setting and the preliminary storyline details appealing, Yoomurjak's Ring could prove to be worth to wait. Especially players who like to see a solid amount of character interaction in their adventure games could find a lot to enjoy in Yoomurjak's Ring.

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The Silver Lining: Part I Shadows

A Modest but Almost Complete Feature   **Written by Gnome**

Questing Kings and the Story So Far

It was 1984 when Roberta and Ken Williams, the creators of adventure gaming legend Sierra, released an innovative little game that was meant to showcase the graphic capabilities of the IBM PC junior. It went by the title of "King's Quest: Quest for the Crown" and it was unlike anything gamers had ever seen. It was after all a behemoth that took (almost) $1,000,000 and 18 months to produce, and this during an era of bedroom programming and average budgets of a few thousand dollars.

Thankfully, and despite King's Quest's rather generic fantasy setting, its 16 color graphics, and the fact that the world had never seen a full-fledged graphic adventure before made sure the game was an astounding success. A success that single-handedly established the contemporary adventure game genre and one that spawned quite a few sequels, which were constantly improving over the original title and pushing adventure game boundaries. The King's Quest series, Sierra's emblem and pride, was after all one of gaming history's most marketable pioneers…

King's Quest reached its maturity during its sixth incantation, which was co-designed by none other than Jane Jensen of Gabriel Knight fame, only to die along most of Sierra's franchises during the late nineties and the adventure crisis era. The last attempt at a King's Quest game, the dreaded King's Quest 8, a rather dull 3d combat-infested adventure/RPG hybrid, was a commercial and critical flop, that simply could not breathe new life to the whimsical land of Daventry (the traditional setting of King's Quest).

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Enter TSL

Thankfully though, the cult following of King's Quest has always been strong. This was of course more evident than ever after the official death of the franchise. You see, some games just can't be forgotten, and the thriving indy adventure community did its best to keep the world of King Graham alive, by producing excellent remakes of King's Quest I, II and III with updated graphics and point and click interfaces.

Just, have a look at the websites of AGD Interactive (http://www.agdinteractive.com) and of Infamous Adventures (http://www.infamous-adventures.com), and you too, oh dearest of readers, will be able to enjoy those wonderful freebies.

Then again, updating an existing game is one thing, while expanding and evolving a much loved franchise is another. That's exactly what the talented and quite ambitious team of Phoenix Online set off to achieve. Take the whole King's Quest series further by actually producing King's Quest 9. The harsh realities of copyright and Vivendi's legal team initially stopped the project, but in typical dialectic manner the mass fan based movement finally led to the game being renamed and allowed to continue its existence under the name The Silver Lining.

The Silver Lining will be an adventure in three parts, namely Shadows, The Two That Are One, and Eternities, following the endeavors of King Graham in a brand new 3d environment. The game will feature more than 400 distinct characters, 1500 pages of script, a really amazing musical score, tons of spoken dialogue and around 300 locations, easily surpassing the scope of every independent adventure ever released. Phoenix Online's more than 40 artists, programmers and designers have also been kind enough to provide the whole epic free of charge. Nice lads and gals, aren't they?

As far as the storyline is concerned, here's the official synopsis: "A joyous celebration in the Land of the Green Isles turns to despair when a terrible curse befalls the land, compelling King Graham to once again don his adventurer's cap to fulfill a quest to reverse this enchantment. Soon, Graham and his family become caught in a plot involving the wizards of the Black Cloak Society, who have plagued the royal family of Daventry in past adventures, and the never-

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before-seen Silver Cloak Society. At the heart of this intrigue lies an ancient prophecy that connects the events of all previous King's Quest adventures and which will force hidden secrets from the past to be brought to light…"

The Hands-On Experience

The 30th of July was the day the first playable demonstration of TSL was released and a day when Phoenix Online's claims of brilliance were proved to be quite true. The immediate release of a patch (in just 3 days!) that fixed some major problems of the demo, helped instill more enthusiasm in the ranks of King's Quest fans. I strongly believe this will be a game to forever change the independent gaming scene in general.

I will not go into the details of the game in this article, as this was just a first demo lacking cut-scenes and quite a lot of polish, but I'll just give you a brief idea of what to expect.

First of all, The Silver Lining sports a traditional point and click interface, highly reminiscent of the one the good people of Sierra used themselves. Gameplay-wise it seems like a mostly inventory-based affair, presented in glorious 3d, albeit with fixed camera angles. The (still unfinished) graphics are of professional quality, though not yet comparable to the likes of Dreamfall, featuring rich textures, interesting and lavishly illustrated locations, and quite a few of modern lighting effects. The soundtrack, on the other hand, is of the highest level and one of the better I've enjoyed in recent games, while the voice-over is generally good if inconsistent. There are still a few bugs, mind you, but the overall quality is most reassuring. TSL will definitely be a solid offering. After all it's not everyday when you can play as King Graham on the beautiful Green Isles and have the game track your score in the oldest of adventuring traditions.

These first impressions were based on the patched version of The Silver Lining (v.1.0.1.) that can be downloaded at the TSL website (http://www.tsl-game.com).

A Parting Interview

[Adventure Lantern]: Would you be so kind as to give us a brief description of how work on TSL began?

[Phoenix Online]: This is difficult to say, since the original founders have long since left the project and our Art Director is the only one who remains from the original team. However, I assume it started by people who were not impressed by the final official game in the series "King's Quest: Mask of Eternity", and felt that fans needed proper closure.

[AL]: How about now? How are you managing to keep such a big (and un-paid) team coordinated?

[PO]: It is a very complex process. As one of the Project Directors, I use various concepts, styles, techniques and princples I've learned in Software Engineering, Business Management, Applied Psychology, and Software Project Management. We use everything from Work Breakdown Structures, Progress Reports, Gantt Charts, Project Plans, etc. However, regardless of size or budget, there are simple key concepts to succeeding with any project: team work, communication, leadership, and hard work!

[AL]: From your experience so far, would you be thinking of changing anything in the TSL project?

[PO]: Actually, I wouldn't change a thing. However, now that we are granted legal status, we have a ton of opportunities to shape and mould this game however we feel is best.

[AL]: What do you consider TSL's greatest innovation?

[PO]: Production-wise, I would say that even though our game is point-and-click and adventure genre, we have taken it to 3D and incorporated cinematic techniques from plot structure all the way to both in-game and pre-rendered sequences. As I've told our Project Director, Cesar Bittar years ago upon first reading the script, this game immerses you like you are watching a movie, and who knows, perhaps one day TSL may even inspire one to be made!

Publicity-wise, I would have to say our website. We've evolved its design, style, implementation, features, and structure over the past 4 years, and I love the way it is today, since it continues to improve. It has directly attracted the hundreds of thousands of fans we have today, because our game has not yet been released to the public.

[AL]: So ... The Silver Lining will be quite a major freebie for every King's Quest and adventure game fan... Any ideas for developing original - perhaps even commercial- I.P.?

[PO]: Definitely! Our next projects will be commercial and original non-Sierra owned intellectual property. We cannot reveal any details on these projects at the present time, but you may see some Phoenix Online Studios prior and/or during the release of Shadows.

[AL]: When should we expect a demo (we didn't actually have one at the time of the interview…)? Are you going straight for the release of the first episode?

[PO]: We've actually just released our first Public Demo RC1 on July 30th, 2006 during our Major Event. You can expect minor updates and fixes to this demo to be released soon in RC2. To download the TSL Public Demo demo, please visit: http://www.tsl-game.com/trilogy/.

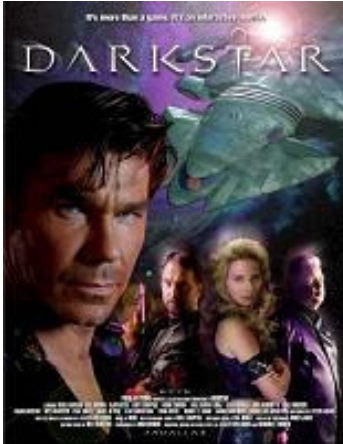**[AL]: What would you say the future holds for the team?**

[PO]: The sky's the limit. As I mentioned before, thanks to our legal status, a whole range of possibilities and opportunities await us.

Thanks for speaking with us, Adventure Lantern. :)

[AL]: The pleasure is of course ours. :).

Interview with Jeff Williams on Darkstar
Conducted by Ugur Sener

Imagine waking up in a cryogenic sleep chamber inside a highly technologically advanced spaceship. You cannot remember anything of your past life. You feel dizzy and disoriented. The ship's computer soon informs you that you have been asleep for over three hundred years. The systems have not been designed to sustain passengers for such a daunting amount of time. The very fact that you are alive at all is a miracle. Despite the loss of your memories, you feel a distant sense of purpose. There is something you must do. Something extremely important. Lingering in the endless ocean of space, you are on your own to find and fulfill your destiny.

This is the experience Parallax Studios is preparing to deliver with their ambitious project Darkstar. Adventure Lantern's March issue had featured a preview article on the game. As the production of Darkstar nears completion, we interviewed project leader Jeff Williams to obtain detailed information about this highly promising game.

[Adventure Lantern]: How would you describe Darkstar? What sets it apart from other adventure games?

[Jeff Williams]: Darkstar blends cinematics with first person adventure in an Interactive Motion Picture. There are literally hours of cinematics with first notch, movie quality animation and special effects, over 40 live actors, a music track supplied by the Canadian rock legends RUSH, and a world to explore. Think of Riven or Myst with 360-degree panoramics at each stopping point tied together with fully animated walk-betweens. There are puzzles and things to be solved before you can proceed, and unlike the Cyan games, you can die if you do something wrong. Darkstar is very difficult to describe because there is very little to compare it to. One thing it is not is a first person shooter.

[AL]: What was the inspiration behind the story?

[JW]: I've always been fascinated amnesia based storylines. Your character has an opportunity to completely rediscover his reality, made more interesting when done under duress and outside pressures. I also am fascinated by time travel

related themes, they open a lot of doors from a plot-related standpoint. I don't think any ONE thing inspired the storyline, but instead a conglomeration of books like Arthur C. Clarke's "Rama" series, Bradbury's short story "The Sound of Thunder", and Kubrick's 1969 film "2001: A Space Odyssey". Darkstar originally formed in my head as a screenplay, but the interactive element seemed a whole new thing to do, so I adapted the script more in that direction.

[AL]: When did you first start working on the story? How much of it was completed before you began production on the game? Has the story evolved during production?

[JW]: The story began in my head in 1992 with a treatment, but I didn't actually begin writing the screenplay in earnest until 2000. The script was complete prior to any actual production as were detailed storyboards. The character detail evolved somewhat after production began as I expanded the screen-time and presence of the actor who plays the "player", Clive Robertson (Starhunter and Aaron Spelling's Sunset Beach). Originally I had intended to see the actor very little on screen in lieu of the game-like, first-person approach. As I looked closer at the script's blocking direction and some of the early interactive models and

sequences I began to see an opportunity to integrate the "movie" side of the project with the "gaming" side even more intricately. This basically means that as the player walks about our world, the camera view (like in a movie) will change from time to time to show the "player" as actor Clive Robertson doing as you do. Then returning to first person so that you may continue. In the end, the whole idea is that both the game and the movie are basically storytelling tools.

[AL]: Darkstar portrays quite a bleak future for humanity. What can you tell us about the historical background of the game's universe?

[JW]: Earth is destroyed in the first 30 seconds of Darkstar during the opening credits that begin just like any other movie would. Peter Graves (Mission: Impossible/Airplane/A&E's Biography) narrates obliquely, setting the stage for our hero to wake up after 312 years of cryogenic sleep. There are 11 chapters of back story movie that explain what happened to humanity, and ultimately disclosing what the Darkstar mission is to the lead character. To see all 11 chapters, the player must progress through the spaceship and unlock each, one by one. The whole idea is that if the player is successful in his mission, none of the tragic events will ever occur to begin with.

Without giving away too much, Earth's government (now one global entity) unites humanity against anything they deem unacceptable or "evil". All nuclear weapons, waste, guns, explosives and tools of war are loaded up on unmanned

freighters and shot into empty space. Years later, they cross the path of a massive asteroid composed of unknown materials, collide, and create a huge, swirling rift in space later dubbed Darkstar. All undesirable people are likewise banned from the Earth, sent to a prison colony on Mars called New Australia. An exploratory ship to Darkstar reveals its primary disposition, which is a frozen place in time and space. In other words, if an object or person passes into the hole they come out the other side at the exact moment the cloud was created by the collision. So it is a portal to the year 2118. Years later, there is a revolt on Mars at the prison colony, and the inmates take over, and after 80ish years of preparation, they return to Earth for revenge. Earth's military has long been dissolved, and they are completely unprepared to defend themselves. So in the six months they wait for the arrival of a deadly armada from Mars, they come up with a plan, and a way to utilize the strange properties of a purple, swirling storm in space they call Darkstar.

[AL]: Can you describe how you envision John O'Neil would feel upon waking up from his cryogenic sleep? Realizing his memories are irrevocably lost, and even his personality traits are diminished, what are his initial thoughts and feelings?

[JW]: That is exactly the exercise I wish to force upon the player. The changing camera views allow us to see John O'Neil cinematically respond to countless situations and objects he finds on the ship. I did not let the amnesia-induced opportunity slip by to spring a bizarre twist ending that I'm pretty sure no one will see coming. Keeping it under wraps will be the toughest thing I have to successfully do in this long production. I have written a few alternate endings that will not be used, so very few know the outcome.

[AL]: What can you tell us about John O'Neil's character? How will he evolve going through the adventure?

[JW]: I love the nature of your questions being so story based...it means someone out there gets it! John learns about mankind's past, as well as his own, as he explores his broken starship. He also learns about the other three crewmembers, and slowly realizes that there is someone or some thing that are bent on him not making it to Darkstar.

[AL]: What about the other key characters in the game? What kind of a role will they play in John's adventure?

[JW]: Three "Mystery Science Theater 3000" actors round out the rest of the crew. Trace Beaulieu (Dr. Forrester/Crow T. Robot) plays First Officer Perryman

who is one of John's best friends. Beez McKeever (Behind the scenes "prop diva" and onscreen extra on several episodes of MST-3K) plays pilot Paige Palmer who is a potential past love interest of O'Neils back when he still had his memory. And last is Frank Conniff (TV's Frank on MST) who is the murdered Navigator. You get to know him through his log entries, and see his gnarly corpse in the broken sleep chamber. Frank also voices a quirky robot named SIMON whom O'Neil has several interactions with onboard the Westwick.

[AL]: What is the "Darkstar" that gave the game its name?

[JW]: Darkstar is the stormy space anomaly created by a man-made explosion in deep space. It turns out to be a time hole to the year 2118, the year it was created.

[AL]: The game starts on the spaceship Westwick. What can you tell us about the spacecraft?

[JW]: Westwick is one of four ships sent to reach Darkstar. The sister ships have all been destroyed. It is an unusually large ship for one manned by only four crewmembers. It is completely locked down after an outside attack, and it is damaged. There are many levels, secret doorways, mechanisms to be figured out, and lots of things to see. The ship has four cabins (one each for the crew), a large bridge section that can be separated from the rest of the ship, recreation areas, shuttle bays, a shuttle that the player takes down to the planet, an EVM pod needed to repair the coolant tank outside the ship, and much more.

[AL]: The Darkstar Web site indicates the game will feature locations outside the spaceship. Can you provide some more information about these locations?

[JW]: The player must go down to the planet to get something to fix the ship. There is an alien sacrificial temple that houses a dangerous being. There is a landed Mars ship that is seemingly deserted that has followed you across the galaxy which you may enter.

[AL]: The Darkstar universe features some fascinating technology. Can you describe some of the technological advancements you envisioned taking place since the 21st century?

[JW]: Actually most conspicuous is a technology I did NOT include. One is faster than light capability. I thought it more interesting (and realistic) that Earth had six months to sweat out the imminent attack from Mars, and that it takes a long time

to travel in space, facilitating my crygenic units that go wrong and lead to the loss of O'Neil's memory. I prefer Kubrick's technology which is just a skip and a jump beyond today's NASA...though I did cheat and provide for artificial gravity. The technology to create gravity by centrifuge or centrufigal force made for a butt-ugly spaceship, and I wanted something sleek and semi-aerodynamic for aesthetic purposes. This all despite the fact a ship needs no aerodynamics whatsoever to operate in the vacuum of space. One excuse is that the bridge section is capable of flight in an atmosphere. Another cheat is that there is no sound in space in reality, but my stellar background is populated by engine noise, explosions...and oh yeah, loud RUSH music.

[AL]: Can you describe the actual game play mechanics? How will the players explore the world of Darkstar?

[JW]: Point and click. You pull the view around using mouse or controller to look around in full panoramic view. Even straight up or down. Click where you want to go and you animate there. If you want to press a button, pull a lever, or pick something up, you click on it. If there is a hotspot, the cursor changes, so you can feel around for items of interest.

[AL]: What kind of challenges can players expect to find?

[JW]: The puzzles are not too awfully hard. Most people get through an hour or two of Riven and they are hopelessly stuck. I didn't want puzzles to bog down the story too much, but I didn't want it to be a cake walk either. Really, it's all common sense. You just explore everywhere. Experiment. Risk death...actually the death sequences are some of the coolest. so I recommend dying in every way possible so you can see those movies. I can't really say too much without giving too much away.

[AL]: The videos available from the game depict a considerable amount of space combat. Will this actually factor into game play?

[JW]: NO. All of the combat scenes are from the back-story movie. There is only one confrontation between O'Neil and an unidentified nemesis at the end of the game where a gun is involved. The player must make the correct choice in how to deal with the enemy, and will have to have picked up the correct items along the way or he's toast.

[AL]: Darkstar has a sizable cast and a considerable amount of video footage. Can you tell us a little about the filming experience?

[JW]: Greenscreen is always challenging to shoot. I storyboarded each scene so that the actors could see exactly what, where and who they were playing against. Many scenes were shot with actors interacting in a scene with another actor that they never met. Like most film productions we leased our own soundstage for the duration of production. We also leased studios in Los Angeles when needed. Directing a project with multiple endings and forks in the plot is very challenging...continuity becomes an issue at every turn. My biggest fear was to paint myself into a plot corner by shooting something wrong or by not thinking of every contingency. So far this has not happened. A lot of care had to be taken when writing, blocking out and shooting Darkstar so that I was not forced to shoot several parallel versions of the story based on minor details that could force that. An example is John's costume. The entire costume includes a blue jacket that is the formal uniform that John awakens in. I realized that at some point I wanted him to shed it so that he could move more freely...but where can he take it off without leaving it to the player, and forcing me to shoot tons of the same thing with and without jacket. I had him take the damn thing off the second he got out of the cryo unit.

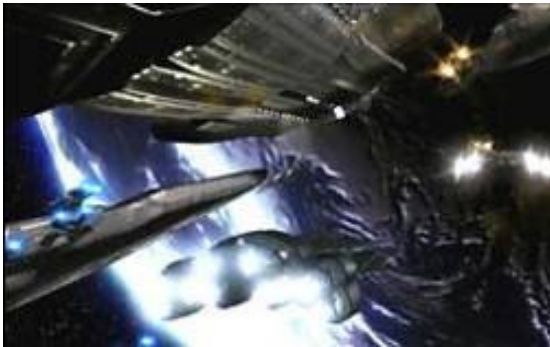**[AL]: Can you tell us about the game's soundtrack?**

[JW]: Four letters. R-U-S-H. The legendary band has given us open reign on their HUGE discography and we chose 24 of their greatest songs as the score for much of DS. It is scary how well the music edited into the action, and how Geddy's voice singing Neil's lyrics matched the story so well. Rush music is cinematic WITHOUT benefit of a secondary story or special effects. In addition to the RUSH tracks, we produced over 30 pieces of music that adds ambience to the lions share of the interactive section of DS, whereas the fab three's music is mostly in the backstory cinema and the grand finale.

[AL]: What is it like to lead a project like Darkstar? How would you describe a typical day working on the project?

[JW]: I began Darkstar at the same time Pixar began working on CARS, a movie that just hit theaters last month. They have 300 animators. I have two. I personally have animated 99% of Darkstar, the rest is done by my childhood idol, animator and artist Richard Corben (Heavy Metal). My support staff changes as the production moves from stage to stage. In preproduction I needed other writers to help punch up the script, costume designers, modelmakers, and the

whole plethora needed to create everything necessary prior to saying roll 'em. During production I needed the actors, several camera operators, lighting folks, continuity people...the big list. During the shoot period of DS, which went on for nearly 2 and a half years, I employed the largest amount of hired guns to do the countless tasks required. This was also the most tightly scheduled period in order to get everybody together, pulling in folks from Minneapolis, MN, New York City, Los Angeles, CA, Arizona, Canada, and even Wales in the UK to get some VO tracks. When DS moved into post production, it became a much smaller, core, intimate group. Sound studios, mastering studios, musicians, and voice talents went to work right away doing a myriad of tasks ranging from sound effects to cleaning up audio. We also began compositing our shot footage over the animated world we'd created prior to shooting, editing the scenes together, and mixing in 5:1 Dolby Digital audio. During this period we attended two E3 Conventions, the second of which we were guests of George Lucas' THX studio, in order to get a glimpse of what the gaming industry's cutting edge had to offer. Basically we learned that NOBODY was doing anything like what we were doing. Our conclusion? This is going to flop or be absolutely HUGE. So far, industry insiders have assured us the latter is true, but warn us that marketing it to the right players will be crucial. So now it's down to a lot of animation and panoramics for the gaming part, more sound effects, and the genius of a guy named David Ferrell (Coder for the Star Trek Starfleet Command Games) who is sewing all this stuff together into one cohesive product.

[AL]: Based on the information available on the official Darkstar site, Parallax operates somewhat differently from a typical company. Can you tell us a little about Parallax and the rest of your team?

[JW]: Parallax is a small, intimate group of artist types. Some musicians, some animators, some artists, some computer geeks, all drawn together out of sheer boredom derived from doing decades of advertising related products, the only kind of regular production work available in the midwest mainstream market. We'd all made a great living at it for a very long time, and we all decided at about the same time to do our dream projects. We all have them, Darkstar happens to be mine.

[AL]: Are there any other projects you are working on that you can share with us at this time?

[JW]: I've always got other animated projects going on. I just finished a very elaborate medical production financed by Glaxo Smith Klein that will educate doctors on how to treat migraine. I've also done animation for some pretty cool

websites (check out www.ggandv.com), and produced a few music videos and TV commercials. Probably none of this have you (or will you) see where you sit, but that's fine...it's not sexy stuff. I've done projects for Coca-Cola, Lucasfilm, and French's (the Mustard company)...again, nothing very sexy, but good paying jobs.

[AL]: Is there anything else you would like to share with our readers?

[JW]: I wish that I could sit down with each and every one of them and watch them Beta test what we have so far...I'd give a million dollars to hear what they like and don't. Unfortunately that would be a hot check, as everything is wrapped up in this project! I would love to hear what your readers think of the ideas, the concept, and the graphics they can see at www.darkstar.gs. I hope to hear mostly supportive reinforcement, and that this is something that they'd like, because here in these post production days there is little I can do to change the course of this Leviathan...I hope you love it. I promise it will be like nothing you have seen, and it will be stunning to look at.

Adventure Lantern thanks Jeff Williams for providing us detailed information about his upcoming project Darkstar. As the release of Darkstar draws ever closer, the game looks quite promising. Jeff Williams seems to have crafted quite an intriguing storyline for the game full of interesting characters and unexpected twists. Exploring the spaceship Westwick to discover humanity's bleak future and the true nature of O'Neil's mission should hopefully make for an interesting experience. Given its considerable scale and interesting premise, Darkstar certainly seems to be worth putting on the radar. Science-fiction and FMV adventure fans in particular might be in for a real treat.

For additional information on Darkstar, more screenshots, and trailers, visit the official Darkstar Web site at www.darkstar.gs.

Interview with Bill Tiller on A Vampyre Story
Conducted by the Adventure Advocate Team

[**Editorial Note:** Our friends over at the prestigious Greek adventure gaming site Adventure Advocate (www.AdventureAdvocate.gr) recently conducted an interview with Bill Tiller on his project A Vampyre Story. The original article is available at http://adventureadvocate.gr/html/page.php?file=VampyreEN.php. Adventure Lantern thanks Adventure Advocate and Bill Tiller for giving us permission to reprint the interview on our August issue.**]**

[Adventure Advocate]: Hello Bill! First of all, we would like to thank you for taking the time to talk to Adventure Advocate about the most anticipated adventure game of the last years. Here are our questions:

Could you tell us a few things about Autumn Moon Entertainment? Like: how and when it was founded?

[Bill Tiller]: Well I founded Autumn Moon myself, even though I wanted to found it with other Lucas Arts and former Lucas Arts artists and programmers. But for some reason or another people couldn't do it either because they already had good jobs, didn't want to take a risk, or didn't want to make adventure games anymore. I don't blame them. Starting up a company is risky, especially if you have a house to pay for and have children, like I do. But I did it anyway because it is makes the most sense to me to do it.

So I quit my good job at Stromfront Studios as Art Director on EA's The Two Towers, cashed out my 401k retirement money I'd been saving for ten years and started on the A Vampyre Story 2d prototype. The images of Mona in 2d are from that prototype.

Some people said to me "What are you doing? Are you crazy? You are risking your home and security! Go get a safe, REAL job." I appreciate their advice, but they just don't understand. I HAVE to do this! Why? Because it just seems like the natural next step in my life. I love illustration. I love animation. I love computer games, and I love story telling. Well, adventure games combine all the things I love into one!

So naturally this is what I want to do for the rest of my life. It only took me 38 years to figure it out.

The timing seems to be right too. Lucas Arts has abruptly decided to do Star Wars and action games only for console and pc. Though I think a new Monkey Island game would do well especially with the Monkey island Movie coming out (Ron Gilbert is right. The Pirates of the Caribbean movie is really a Monkey Island movie).

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So the type of game Lucas used to make only two companies, in the USA anyway, are doing it. Tell Tale and Autumn Moon. It is interesting to note that even though we are both doing adventure games, they have followed the path of getting existing licenses such as CSI, Sam N Max and Bone. Whereas Autumn Moon is going the route of making original stories and licenses, though I'm sure Tell Tale will get around to doing an original game, and we would love to do games based on certain licenses. Lucas Arts did both back in the day, but now two spin offs are filling the gap.

[AA]: How many people make up the team? Are there any other former Lucas Arts employees?

[BT]: Depends on when you ask me. Right now there are only three, me and Dave Harris. We are writing and designing the game. But next week we will have Bill Eaken and Aaron St John on, and then Craig Rundles in a few weeks after that. When in full production this fall, we will have ten probably. But to keep costs down, we roll people on and off when they are needed, and bring them on if and when the schedule requires it.

So here is the list of Ex Lucas Arts People who have worked on my game so far:
Kyle Balda
Anson Jew
Bill Eaken
Gary Brubaker
Paul Mica
Maria Bowen
Mike Levine
Craig Rundles
Yuan Wang
Tony Burquez
Dave Harris
Ed Chin
Amy Tiller

A few other Ex Lucas people have helped a ton too. A lot of other non-Lucas Arts people have worked on the game too such as Brooks White, Jeremy Koerner, Aaron St John, Zach Quarles, Charles Beirnaert, Alan Hause, and a few other secret employees. And I am sure I'm forgetting somebody, so I apologize to them.

[AA]: How and when did you come up with the idea of "A Vampyre Story"?

[BT]: I love Halloween and scary movies, anything to do with macabre and 'goth' stuff like that. One of my favourite artists is Edward Gorey (http://www.goreyography.com/west/west.htm). Now if you don't know who he is, run out and buy Amphagorey and Amphagorey II, or The Gashlycrumb Tinies.

He does these great black and white ink drawings of Victorian aristocrats in macabre and funny situations. He is the main inspiration, along with Dr.Suess for Tim Burton.

So back in 1995 I was on my honey moon, sailing on a cruise ship in the Caribbean. It was about a month before I was to start on Curse of Monkey Island. And I was on deck with my sketch book and started sketching some Edward Gorey-like drawings. I love vampires so I decided to draw an Edward Gorey-like vampire woman, and I named her Mona de Laffite, after the loading dock in the ride Pirates of the Caribbean ride at Disneyland.

I gave her a bat companion, whom I named Froderick, after what Igor in the movie Young Frankenstein called Fredric Frankenstein when they first met.

She and Froderick stayed in my sketch book for four years while I worked on Curse of Monkey Island and Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine, and the ill fated Full Throttle II: Payback (not Sean Clark's Hell on Wheels). Then I tried it o pitch it to Lucas Arts, but politics kept me from pitching it officially, and in a way that was a smart move because anything I pitched to Lucas Arts they would have owned. I did show it to Hal Barwood, Jonathan Ackley and Larry Ahern AFTER they quit, and they all loved it, especially Hal. So that was encouraging.

I left Lucas because I could see that after Full Throttle II: Payback was shelved, Lucas was not going to do well. So I hopped around a bit and couldn't find what I was looking for. So one night I decided to make what I was looking for, a company that was going to produce adventure games the Lucas Arts way- thus Autumn Moon.

Originally we were planning on making the game in black and white, using the Edward Gorey pen and ink style. But we abandoned it when it became clear the color version looked better. I still want to do short flash pen and ink looking mini adventure game, maybe some day.

[AA]: Could you tell us a bit about the game's story, characters and interface?

[BT]: What would happen if you were turned into vampire, but you really wanted to do something completely different? A Vampre Story's story is really a lesson in perseverance and making due with what life has given you. It is like the old adage "if life gives you lemons, you make lemonade." So we have a young opera student, the best in her class, becoming the object of obsession for a psychopathic, and slightly pathetic, vampire. He turns her life upside down, first, by kidnapping her and taking her from Paris to fictional Balkan country of Draxsylvania, and second by killing her, and thus, making her a member of the

undead, magically enslaved to her vampire master. And on top of that she knows virtually nothing about being a vampire, nor does she really want to. She would rather be singing at the Paris Opera, not turning into bat, sleeping in a coffin all day and sucking on people's necks at night.

[AA]: Are there any action sequences in the game?

[BT]: Yes, right now we plan of at least three. But we aren't done with our production plan yet, some may get cut. But they won't be too difficult and will let players who don't like action in their adventure games to skip past them.

[AA]: How do you feel that some people believe that putting so much action elements in adventure games really helps and renews the genre?

[BT]: No, I don't believe that. What will renew the adventure game genre are better adventure games. They need to have better stories, non-frustrating but challenging puzzles, be funny, and have great art direction. THAT will renew the genre.

And I also think the games need to be in story genres that are popular. Take Grim Fandango for example. It is a great, great game, but in a story genre that a lot of main stream gamers didn't find appealing. That being said, Grim still sold a heck of a lot of copies, it just wasn't the mega hit many at Lucas at the time thought it should have been.

I think vampires are in a popular genre so I think the game will appeal to many more mainstream buyers than some for the more obscure story ideas. At least I hope!

[AA]: Could you describe to us the kind of puzzles we will encounter in the game?

[BT]: No, not with out giving it away. But logically they are going to be very similar to Lucas arts puzzles, because those are the kind of games I worked on, and the kind of games people expect us to make. The only new twist on the puzzles is that Mona has vampire powers and restrictions, so some unusual solutions to problems will arise out of this new twist.

[AA]: How far into the game are you? When should we expect it to be released?

[BT]: We are 80% done with the game design, 5% done with the background art, 10% done with music, and 35% done with the engine programming, 50% done with the FMV scripts, 30% done with the character designs, 15% done with the storyboarding, 5% done with the animation and 3d character modelling, 1% done

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with the prop models, and 0% done with the game scripting. As you can see not very far, but we just started on full production in the last two weeks.

Why'd it take so long to start? Blame California and the fact we are not a technology company like Tell Tale. First California is expensive so we need twice as much money to do the same length game as many developers in less expensive parts of the world. We are in California because that is where Lucas Arts was, and thus we all live there.

We can't get major capital investor's because we are not making game engine to sell, nor are we publishing any games. So investors don't want to invest in unproven new story ideas, nor in a hit based business strategy - too risky. They'd rather invest in companies that make technology they can sell, or in companies that have optioned established licenses such as Bone, Sam and Max or CSI. Since we aren't creating a brand new engine and are creating a risky new story idea, the millionaires with money don't want to invest.

But luckily for us there are a lot of smart German publishers who are pretty convinced this game will sell really well in their own country and in Europe as a whole. I thank them whole heartedly and agree 100%!

[AA]: Have you found a publisher? If not, are negotiations coming to a conclusion?

[BT]: Yes, we have, but details and announcements about this will be coming out soon. For now I can't say anything beyond that.

[Editorial Note: Since this interview was originally conducted, the German company Crimson Cow has been announced as the publisher of A Vampyre Story. This should put Mr. Tiller's answer to the previous question into better perspective.**]**

[AA]: "A Vampyre Story" (really, why write it with a 'y') has been under production for quite some time now and several release dates have been announced from time to time, which unfortunately were never to be the actual release date of the game. Why is that?

[BT]: Money. No money no game. Now we have money so there should be a game. People want to know when we will finish the game so I give them my best guess. So I have decided to stop. But I can tell you we will not be working on this first game past the end of 2007. When the game will actually be released is up to the business guys at the publishers and what they think the best strategy is for a release date. They have coordinated it with the marketing and PR team. So release dates get moved around quite a bit. It is pretty typical in the game industry. Hopefully as we mature as an industry we won't have those kinds of problems in the future.

The first vampire novel written in English was called The Vampyre and was spelled with 'yre' instead of the modem 'ire.' So we spelled it the same way in honour of the book that created the whole romantic vampire genre.
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Vampyre

[AA]: Is there any adventure game which you would say that "A Vampyre Story" resembles? If yes, in which aspects of the game?

[BT]: Sure, The Curse of Monkey Island and the Secret of Monkey Island, just in the horror genre instead of pirate genre. The art will be a lot like CMI, but I'll be the sole art director on this time, so the character design may be a bit different compared to CMI. But the puzzle structure and the types of puzzles will be very The Secret of Monkey Island like, because it is my favorite adventure game of all time.

[AA]: How many hours should it take an average adventure gamer to beat the game?

[BT]: We are shooting for 15 hours, at least as long as Full Throttle.

[AA]: Have you really enjoyed playing any recent adventure games? If yes, have you been inspired by them in any way?

[BT]: Siberia, Runaway, Tony Tough, and Bone. I really loved the feel and look of Siberia and the story. And with Bone I really liked what they have done with the interface and GUI. And the animation is great. I have Dreamfall on my shelf though I haven't played it yet, and I'm planning on getting episode 2 of Bone, because it got great reviews and looks fun. I loved the art in Runaway and it inspired me to keep pursuing my game. Tony Tough had some good atmosphere and wonderful character designs. But I have mostly been going back and playing old Lucas Arts games. I just went through CMI once more, and I plan to play through Sam and Max again this month.

[AA]: Nowadays, adventures are not as popular as they used to be in Lucas Arts times. Nonetheless, you have decided to create an adventure game. What led you to that decision? And, what do you expect the reaction of the game community to be towards your game?

[BT]: No I think they are just as popular as they ever were. The best selling adventure games, numbers wise, are selling the same as they did. There are just more game buyers now and the cost to make games is a lot higher. Syberia sold 161,000 copies in the USA, more than Grim Fandango's 99,000 back in 1998, and Curse of Monkey Island's 106,000 in the United states alone. I don't have European numbers but I bet they are the same if not better.

But there were less game buyers in 1997 than there is now in 2006, so adventure games percentage of the market shrank, but the total number of adventure game buyers stayed the same. The big problem is costs. The cost of living went up, cost of software, the size of the teams. And wages went up too, so companies had to invest in games that sold more units then, say, 500,000 world wide. Thus you get Halo and Grand Theft Auto, and endless amount of movie tie-in games.

So this hurt adventure games too because the high priced talent went to the bigger higher paying games. That is why Tim Schaffer is making action games, why Larry Ahern is making flight sims, why Jonathan Ackley is making interactive attractions at Disney. I'm not paying high costs either. So the trick is to lure people to work on your project without using money as the sole motivating factor. They way I have done it is offer them a chance to work on a fun game. Almost all of my team members have worked on big name games, but the games are so big and so serious that they aren't all that fun to work on.

Whereas I offer them a small, more intimate company with more chances to contribute to the projects, and I offer them a fun game to work on. Plus we are all friends so we get along great. How often do you get to work on a small game, for a small company where all your friends work there too, and it is funny game in a fun genre? That is how I get high quality talent to work on my game.

Sorry to write such a long answer but this is a complicated issue, but there are same basic trends behind it. So many people just want to say adventure games are dead. They aren't at all. That is just a simplistic answer to complex issue. People make careers out of making simplistic assumptions that are always wrong.

[AA]: It's a fact that, as years pass by, games have become much easier comparing to the good old times (LucasArts). Are you going to follow this path too, as far as the game's puzzle difficulty level?

[BT]: It is so hard to gage the difficulty of puzzles. I thought for sure power plant robot puzzle Sean Clark and I designed in The Dig was easy- just program where you want it to go and the puzzle is easily solved. But no, all my friends got stuck right there. Like I said earlier we are going to have puzzles very similar to Secret of Monkey Island and Curse of Monkey Island. I'm not sure if people consider those hard games or not, but that is what we are shooting for.

[AA]: How do you feel about the fact that major companies that produced some great adventure games in the past (Lucasfilm, Sierra and others) have now turned their backs at the genre?

[BT]: Sad really. I was hoping Tell Tale or Bad Brain would actually get the rights to finish Sam and Max: Freelance Police. At one time Disney was in deep do do. Then they hired Michael Eisner. Everyone said that animated feature films were dead; no one would go see them anymore. Fox and the Hound was so so, The Great Mouse Detective didn't do well because of the lack of any real marketing budget, and The Black Cauldron was just bad.

But Eisner was smart. He saw that the revival of the animated feature was at the core of revitalizing the company. He thought they would lose money, but he needed to create new intellectual property, or IP. And they'd make money off the toys, merchandise and the rides at Disneyland. But the same time Disney had an image problem. They were thought to be just for kids. So Eisner knew there was money to be made making R rated, more mature films. So he created a new company owned by Disney called Touch Stone. Under that label they put out R Rated hit after hit, such as Down and Out in Beverly Hills. Then Oliver And Company came out and did well, making good money. Roger Rabbit was a big hit. And these were feature animation, and new IP, which according to the industry experts wasn't supposed to sell! So they put some extra money into The Little Mermaid and even marketed the movie to adults, and boom! It was mega hit! This spawned an animation renaissance that is still going today.

There is a lesson to be learned here. It isn't the genre that is bad; it is the quality of the product in the genre. Remember when they said fantasy movies wouldn't sell because they were all bad. Lord of the Rings proved again, it isn't the genre, it's the quality of the product.

 There is room for the mature games and the sequels and the movie tie in games, but companies really need to invest in quality new IP and games that are not all violent, such as adventure games. Lucas could have and should put out Sam and Max: Freelance Police. Maybe because of the money they spent on it would have been a lose finically, but it would have shown Lucas Arts to be a

creative place rather than a factory spewing out Star Wars and Indy sequel after sequel. By putting out Sam and Max they would have said to the industry and potential employees "We are not just about action games and Star Wars. We respect our history and are going to keep it going, just like Disney did in the mid 1980's." Right now, if you're a creative genius, why go work at Lucas Arts other than for the cool Presidio office and great benefits, unless you just want to make Star Wars or Indy games. If you are truly a creative person, go work at Pixar or Cartoon Network, where cool new ideas are actually appreciated.

[AA]: What does the future hold for Autumn Moon Entertainment? Are there any other plans for another game on the works?

[BT]: Oh yeah, for sure. I have eight other games I want to do, and new ones pop up in my head all the time. But A vampire Story first, and any sequels. Then we will get to other games. We are thinking about expanding to two teams and two projects in a year or two, but right now we are just concentrating on A Vampyre Story.

[AA]: Sorry for the HUGE set of questions but we really wanted to learn a lot of things about this great game you are making!!!

[BT]: No problem. Glad to do it.

# Gnome's Adventure in the Land of Budget-Priced Adventures
PC Review by Wendy Nellius

The rather complicated theory of value has existed for more than a hundred years and has been striving to help people understand how value is produced, estimated and divided in the subcategories of 'use' and 'exchange' value. The one thing the theory of value, being rather vintage as far as theories go, can't really explain is why budget priced adventures are actually some of the best money can buy. If of course you manage to actually find them, but guess that's what the whole www thingy is for…

What follows is a list of a carefully selected, humbly presented, much played, quite a bit enjoyed, bitterly fought over adventures. Apparently they are all budget priced. Gasp! One could even call this article a top 10. Go on, count them.

The Monkey Island Series

Well, you just can't go wrong with the Monkey Island games (especially if you focus on numbers one t(w)o three, that is). The first two, namely Secret of the Monkey Island and LeChuck's Revenge, brilliantly crafted by Ron Gilbert along with quite a few of Lucasarts' most talented designers, are the apex of humorous adventure gaming, while the third one, Curse of the Monkey Island, is the best looking of the whole saga, masterfully illustrated by Bill Tiller. I strongly believe, and may the gods of game design be my witnesses, that actually reviewing such masterpieces would be an act of desecration; a heretical attitude curable only by death or by never again playing another FPS.
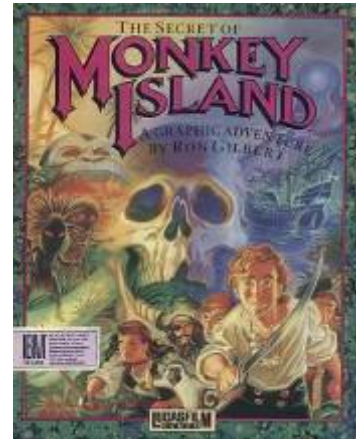
Thus, quite unfortunately, all one humble (death fearing) gnome may do is simply remind the existence of these games (the Monkey Island, not the FPS ones) every now and then, and perhaps even point out that it's usually easy to get all three first MI games in one nice bundle. Then a gnome should add three words: insult sword fighting. Then another two: spitting contest. Finally a rule of thumb: whenever you see a Monkey Island game you buy it. Unless it's Monkey 4. In this case you'd better think. Do you care for mediocre 3d artwork, derivative humor and Monkey Kombat? Still, it's a decent game by all standards, just not worthy of the name methinks.

Gabriel Knight III: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned
Gabriel Knight III, was the first adventure ever to successfully enter the
mainstream word of 3d graphics and arguably the best horror / metaphysical
adventure to grace our banal little planet. The story of GK3 is excellent, well
presented, perfectly integrated with the puzzles and years ahead of Dan Brown's
mediocre book. Mind you, the "Serpent Rouge" riddle-puzzle-poem is the best
one I've ever encountered. It even beats the Hitchhikers
Guide to the Galaxy Babelfish puzzle. Yes, that good!
Other than that, Gabriel 3 is a rare Sierra adventure that
doesn't allow you to die or get stuck, and one that
features a brilliant and intuitive interface, that sadly didn't
influence the industry.
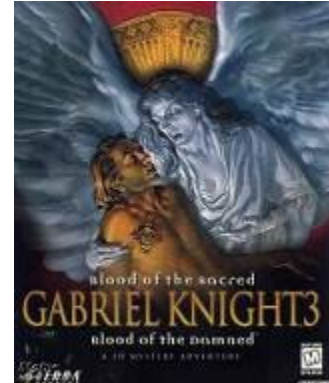
Anyway. GK3 is Jane Jensen's magnum opus. You just
have to play it, if only to experience an interesting (for a
change) Holy Grail related story. Just beware of the
vampires and make sure you buy the full boxed version,
the one that includes the typical GK graphic novel.

Discworld Noir
Terry Pratchett. What a star, eh? Not only a brilliant humorist in the best of
English tradition, but also a man who wears interesting hats, Mr. Pratchett never
objected to having his work transferred to the video gaming medium. Discworld
Noir, a weird parody-tribute to film-noir detective stories, was the latest and
admittedly more interesting Discworld game. It's funny,
has innovative gameplay, good puzzles, highly
atmospheric backgrounds and unfortunately horribly
animated characters. Oh, and it's not a bastard on the
difficulty front.
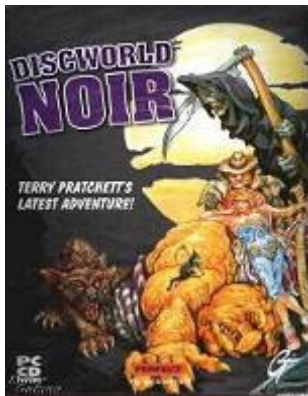
Set in a '20s styled Ankh-Morpork (that's the Discworld's
greatest, filthiest, sprawling-est metropolis) and
accompanied by a terrific soundtrack, this is game that
brilliantly manages to combine a detective story, a
vampiric barman, a dwarf, a bunch of werewolves and a
smart troll into one coherent and humorous whole.

Runaway
Runaway is a typical 2d point and click adventure fashioned after LucasArts
humorous and much-loved classics, which in a peculiar twist of fate managed to
single-handedly revive traditional adventuring. Well, almost.

The way I see it, the game is as funny as a German distributed game can get,
looks great, has quite a few memorable characters, but just doesn't feel 100%
right. Something's missing. Innovation of any kind actually, but you shouldn't

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notice such trivial matters when budget shopping. You will instead notice a few transvestites in the desert. And the fact that you're cruisin' USA, which just isn't everyone's cup of tea.

On the other hand, the cartoon graphics are really cartoony and quite on the high resolution part of thing. All in all, a decent buy.
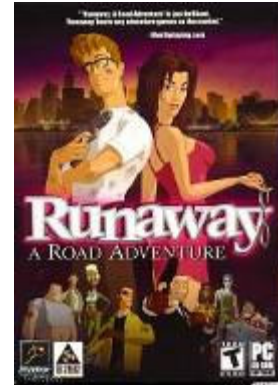
Salammbo
That's a weird one. It's an adaptation of the comic-book version of the novelization of a faux-historic story. Things though get even stranger. Salammbo, might be set in ancient Carthage, but the looks of it strongly suggest a Sci-Fi setting and bring forth memories of unforgettable Gigeresque landscapes. Thankfully 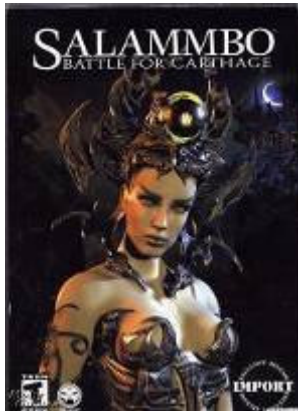the whole visual part of the game is quite impressive, even though at times let down by the utilized Myst-style graphics engine.

Just to peak your interest I'll be kind enough to let you into a few more of the game's secrets:
a) the playable character is a wholly anti-noble, neither good - nor evil, poor devil trying to survive
b) there is an impressively illustrated logbook that records your progress, and
c) the developers included a rudimentary but enjoyable strategy game.

The Longest Journey
It's Dreamfall's illustrious predecessor and one of the longest adventures ever. Quite a bit of a journey too, as this should be the only adventure I've played that lasted me more than 30 (as in "thirty") whole hours, despite my (admittedly sparse) using a walkthrough! Talk value for money…

Add a majestic storyline spanning two totally different worlds, a non-slutty female lead character, some interesting puzzles, quirky characters, a great artistic style and nice music, a simple standard 2d interface and behold the best selling adventure game of the last five years. Well, besides Myst, that is.

Necronomicon: The Dawning of Darkness
Necronomicon, the fabled booked penned by H.P. Lovecraft's imaginary mad Arab and a mediocre but atmospheric French adventure game. The Necronomicon uses a typical node based movement model and features mazes

(a very-very bad idea) in a satanic attempt to frustrate players and keep them from actually discovering its few but quite fulfilling merits. You need only apply if you are a truly dedicated Lovacraft fan (I for example have gone so far as to even read big parts of his correspondence).

Then again, let's be frank here. The brand new Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth or the hard to find and quite retro Shadow of the Comet are better games. Try them instead…

Syberia I & II
If you enjoy a good story and breathtaking visuals, but lack average adventuring skills, both Syberia games are what you should go for. Benoit Sokal's artwork is really excellent, the cut-scenes are more than pleasing and the story is interesting. Not everyone's cup of tea perhaps, but interesting nonetheless. Problem is there isn't much gameplay in any of the Syberias, as most puzzles are on the easier side of things and generally uninspired. The games aren't too long either.
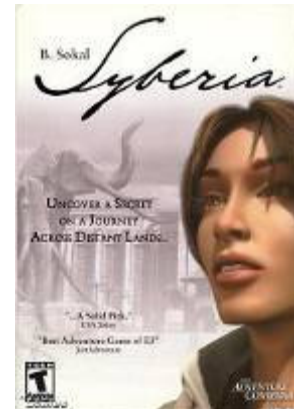
Oh, and there are quite a few screens that have to be (slowly) crossed, offer no interaction whatsoever and don't add anything to the story. Syberia (and Syberia 2) can be dull and slow and actually lives or dies on its story. Like it and you'll love the game, hate it and you won't. It's all about automatons, old inventors and strange places. Sort of melancholic.

Dracula 2: The Last Sanctuary
Dracula 1, was easy, over in a breeze and frankly just not scary. It had of course excellent cut-scenes and a distinct animation style, but it simply wasn't a good game. Dracula 2 is quite an improvement, even though the story doesn't really respect the magnificent romantic novel we all affectionately know as Dracula. Don't expect the adventure game of the year and you'll be rewarded with a decent puzzler, interesting plot twist, lots of atmosphere and –as expected- impressively animated cut-scenes.

The Myst Series
Love 'em or hat 'em the Myst games changed it all. The original went on to sell quite a few millions of copies, thus creating a new adventuring sub-genre: the point-and-click slideshow puzzler. Personally I hate it, but guessed I could do worse than let you know that most of the Myst games are now budget priced and/or in compilations. Have a look, see what impressed all those people.

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The Wheel of Plots: Adventure Game Pre-Empting Da Vinci Code
Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign Article by Ingrid Heyn

A quiet French village lies sleepily under a sardonic sun, as seemingly innocent and frank as any other place on earth. The Rennes-le-Château, which one hundred years ago had afforded its villagers considerable astonishment when the bizarre behaviour of the Abbé Saunière had upset the quiet tenure of its daily life, has fallen into apparent silence… until an ages-old secret demands to be heard. One man alone has a destiny to discover the shocking truth. One man alone stands like an angel guarding the light and doing battle with the darkness, little knowing that his line has for centuries carried a wonderful, a terrible mystery…

Sound familiar? Well, it's not The Da Vinci Code.

Years before Dan Brown thought of using elements of Rennes-le-Château and the invented society Priorie du Sion in his novel, the village and its wonderfully fanciful recent history (as well as the wild speculations that grew from the local tales and intriguingly created reports that form its most fantastical characteristics) were stunningly used in a computer game by writer and game designer, Jane Jensen, author of Millenium Rising and Dante's Equation. The computer game was the third in the series called Gabriel Knight, surely one of the most riveting and award-winning adventure games ever created.

Fans of the Dan Brown book who have been a tad disappointed by the book's ending may well be enthralled to know that Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned has one of the most powerful and astonishing endings that has ever graced a computer game. The character of Gabriel Knight, too, is more intriguing than the protagonist of The Da Vinci Code, being a more fully developed personality with real character flaws, enough charm to launch a thousand barges, and a witty and darkly heroic courage that takes him to some of the darkest places of the foe. He is of an ancient lineage of men called to be Shadow-Hunters (Schattenjäger), and his story has gripped many thousands of players who immersed themselves in the games, looking forward eagerly to the fourth game… only to be cruelly disappointed.

The Gabriel Knight series was one of the fallouts of the sale of Sierra, the world-famous computer game company whom many think of as the undisputed king of adventure games. The genre has fallen into some disrepute during the last few years, mostly because more action-oriented and multi-player games have shot to the forefront and have had money, development and publicity poured into them. But a growing number of people have been hoping for a game revolution – one that will bring adventure games back to the spotlight, with the best game engines and finest graphics lavished upon them, as well as a first-class storyline.

Gabriel Knight seems ideally placed as the hero of this hope. Its substantial fan base, its unfinished storyline, its flawed but sexy bad-boy hero and the superb design ability of creator Jane Jensen make it the game of choice for the adventure genre comeback. Indeed, rumors are flying about that there are discussions in hand concerning Gabriel Knight 4, which Ms Jensen had planned to centre around the subject of ghosts, the supernatural, the continuing historical mysteries whose effects bleed into the present, and the powerful motif of regrets and things left undone. The continuing importance of the bloodline of Gabriel Knight, the Holy Grail and the Priorie de Sion (used in a very different and deeply satisfying way in the Gabriel Knight games than that seen elsewhere) are such riveting aspects of this game series that it's no wonder fans have been clamoring for a sequel for years.

Vivendi Universal Games, the current holder of the Gabriel Knight copyright, isn't saying what's happening at present. It's known that interest has been expressed (according to a reliable source), and that interest has led to the creation of the Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign, whose website is encouraging even wider interest in the existing games and promoting further encouragement for the making of Gabriel Knight 4 (www.gabrielknight4campaign.com).

With the current intense interest in things supernatural and mysterious, the Gabriel Knight story could scarcely be more ideal. The character has been voiced by Tim Curry and Dean Erickson, both of whom brought a wonderful sense of lazy New Orleans charm to the arrogant yet appealing character of Gabe. He's faced a voodoo cult, a bloodthirsty idol, werewolves, vampires, all manner of dark creatures. He's traversed the dark corners of his own soul. He's experienced the terror of his life-long nightmares, and confronted his own destiny to find the courage within himself. As an investigator into the mysterious, he finds his life twisting into strange paths.

The main question now is: will Gabe get the chance to continue his investigations? Will Jane Jensen be designing further Gabriel Knight games? Those who have played the first three in the series know the games have set high standards. The storyline and the look of the games have been benchmarks in the industry, with lavish location shots creating a very rich experience for the player. Gabriel Knight 4 would have the task of surpassing even those past achievements, to create a game by which all other computer games today will be judged.

If it happens, it promises to be one of the most exciting comebacks in the gaming industry. The value of a truly captivating and richly detailed storyline, combined with the most stunning graphics, music and game engine, would make Gabriel Knight 4 a serious player in the world of players.

Nancy Drew: Danger by Design

PC Review by Wendy Nellius

Nancy Drew is back for the 14th game in a series by HerInteractive. I remember when I purchased my first Nancy Drew game. There was a bit of a lull in between new releases of adventure games. I scoured the shelves at the local game store hoping against hope that there was some gem hidden in there that I hadn't played. I needed to feed my game fix and feed it fast. Hmmm…there in the discount section was the first game in the Nancy Drew series. Ages 10 and up? Darn. This game is for kids, I thought. Well, what the heck. I'm desperate. I'm sure I'll just breeze right though it, but that's better than nothing at all. Besides, I read all the books when I was a child. Maybe it will be a cute diversion until something else comes out.

I was quite surprised by the game. It had quite a fun story and amazingly, I didn't breeze right through it. And, I can't even count how many times I died before I could get my butt in gear and move a little faster. Learning later on that I wasn't the only adult playing this game was an even bigger surprise. There's a humongous number of adults playing the series and loving it! Ahh…who knew! I now own the full collection. And, while I still maintain a public premise that I'm saving them for when my nieces are old enough to enjoy them….it's all a lie. I'm a full-fledged Nancy Drew junkie just waiting for my twice yearly fix. (That's right --- I preorder them too!)

This time around, Nancy is off to Paris. She will be interning for an American fashion designer named Minette. Nancy has been hired by Amy Grunhild (Minette's biggest financial backer) to secretly find out what's going on with Minette. It seems Minette has been pretty much freaking out lately. She has temper tantrums, fires people left and right, and wearing a weird face mask every day. Ms. Gunhild is very worried about her investment. So, there is a definite difference to this installment already. Usually the other person is aware that Nancy is going to investigate.

The game starts out with a full tutorial. This is also a new feature to the game and very nicely done. We get to see Nancy's headquarters; umm…actually….her bedroom. Her desk is the center of operations. You can click on a scrapbook and see a synopsis complete with pictures of all the previous 13 games. The case file provides Nancy will all the details she needs about this newest case. There is also a book entitled "How to be a detective". This is where the tutorial is located. Clicking on a topic such as What's New, Inventory and Tools, Camera etc… will provide you with instructions on how to use each feature in the game. You will even get to try features out so you can get used to the controls. If this is your first Nancy Drew game, be sure to check this out. For those of you who have played before, you have the option to skip the tutorial and click on a plane ticket. This will start the game.
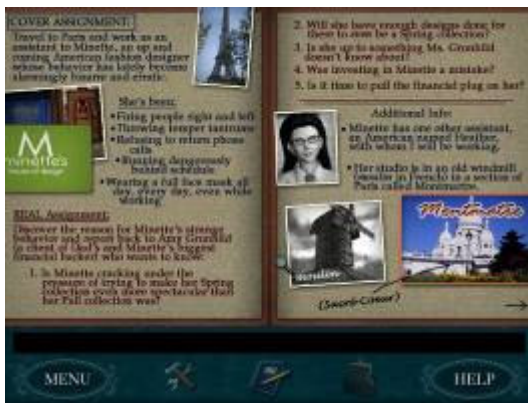
Nancy arrives at Minette's and is greeted by Heather (Minette's assistant) and a high piercing scream from Minette. You will get a sense of what a nut job Minette is. Heather explains that Minette is under a lot of pressure due to the fact that she's severely behind schedule. Minette is also getting death threats from a mysterious stranger. Who could hate Minette that much? Could it be a competitor? You will get a To-Do list from Heather with the major responsibility being to do whatever Minette wants. Great….lord only knows what that's going to be. You'll obtain a metro pass that will take you anywhere in Paris for free. Meeting Minette is person is not exactly fun either. She's not very personable and she has that stupid mask on.   You'll immediately get your first puzzle to complete. Then, it will be off on the metro system to get that To-Do list done.

It is not clear at first what exactly is going on. Bits and pieces will lead you to information on a certain Noisette Tornade. Noisette worked as spy during World War II. The interesting part was that she worked for both sides. There were rumors that she stole precious art and stowed it away. This caused her country of France to hold her in moral disregard. It seems no one has ever found this supposed artwork. The

connection to Minette becomes clearer when you learn that the building Minette's studio is in was owned previously by Noisette Tornade. Nancy will end up splitting her investigation in two pieces. She will need to uncover what's going

wrong with Minette. Don't forget the hidden artwork. Nancy is always intrigued by that kind of mystery.

Danger by Design comes in a DVD case with 2 CD's. They load up with absolutely no problems. No technical problems were encountered either.   Danger by Design is a first-person mostly point and click adventure. There is a certain puzzle in the game that requires the use of your keyboard. Upon starting the game, you will get to choose your detective level. Junior level is easier and allows Nancy to call her friends for hints. You'll get more hints with this level. Nancy's personal To-Do list is also a feature of the Junior level.   Senior level (which I chose) ups the difficulty of the puzzles, provides fewer hints and has no To-Do list.   The game offers 35 games slots. The main menu allows you to adjust the volume of the voices, music or special effects. You also may turn off the text.

Getting around is quite simple. There are large yellow directional arrows to indicate where to go. In some locations you can turn in a 360° fashion. For this installment, a map of the metro system has been incorporated. Whenever you leave a location, you will go directly to the metro system and the map will pop up. Accessible locations are clearly shown and clicking on one of them will transport you to the next location. Most gamers would agree that a map is indeed

preferable to endless walking. At the bottom of the game screen you can access the main menu, inventory, Nancy's notebook, and a change purse that contains Nancy's money. All options can be accessed by left clicking on the desired one. The standard cursors have not changed. Nancy has a magnifying glass that will turn red when she can examine something. A hand icon will glow red when you can interact with or pick up an item. Speaking to a character is denoted by a speech bubble over the character.

Facially, all the character renderings are done well and are consistent with the Nancy Drew style. You could see more of the bodies on a couple of characters. Heather looked a tad unnatural; not necessarily in the way she moved; but in the way they looked. It reminded me of watching an animated clay figure that has rounded edges that are perfectly smooth. When you move the talk cursor over any character, they are brought to life immediately and they are ready to talk.

Heather is always at her desk and will spin around to talk to you. I must say I made her spin a dozen times "just because". There are a few characters to interact with. Minette is the obvious wacko. Heather is her saintly assistant. One prominent character is Dieter von Schwesterkrank. He is a photographer who used to date Minette until she suddenly dumped him. His grandfather used to date Noisette Tornade. What's his real relationship to Minette? Was it all just a farce? Does he know about the hidden artwork? You'll meet Jean Michel Traquenard. He writes fashion articles for all the major magazines. He's quite full of himself and not easy to please. You'll pretty much need to kiss up to him for the sake of Minette. JJ Ling is a plus size model and is graciously allowing Nancy to stay at her apartment. JJ is nice enough to Nancy, but she doesn't have the best reputation in the fashion business. She can be difficult to work with. There are a few vendors in the park that you'll do a lot of business with. Other interaction is done with characters by phone.

Almost all the voices are great. Nancy (Lani Minella) is the voice we've come to know as Nancy. Quality is always top-notch. Another voice for Nancy would be just unthinkable. Minette and Heather were also done well. The German

accents were a little questionable. Having worked 8 years of my life at a German company with a German boss & German co-workers; the accents just weren't completely believable to me. Mind you, they weren't horrible or anything. They just were a bit cliché. Dieter was ½ and ½. At times, he sounded just like one of my co-workers. At other times, it sounded over the top. The French accents, on the whole, seemed much better. Although someone who is French may disagree. Who knows?

The background graphics are crisp and clear and fully representative of the Nancy Drew style. As expected, they are rich in color and fun to look at. There are six locations in the game: Minette's studio, JJ Ling's apartment, Dieter von Schwesterkranks, Café Kiki, Square Du vert Galant (park) and underground catacombs. Secret passages lurk everywhere. It's just a matter of finding them. It would have been nice to have Nancy do some sight seeing. Of particular note is a small piece of animation in the game where Nancy walks through a tunnel with a flashlight. It may seem like a small thing, but it was really done

wonderfully. It manages to make you feel as if you were walking that tunnel yourself.

There is not a lot of music in the game. Ambient sounds are more prominent and truly hit the mark. When you're in the park, you can hear the immediate sounds like pigeons and other wildlife normally found here. But, in the distance you'll also hear the faint sounds of the city like police sirens. At the metro station, you hear the sound of people walking, metro trains, doors opening etc.. An inordinate amount of time was spent on small details. If you work on the computer, you will hear the sound of a double click when Nancy opens a program. Spinning Heather around in her chair to talk will produce the accurate sounds of an office chair on a hardwood floor. This is only just a sampling of all the different sounds. All in all, they were just plain excellent.

Nancy's investigation in this game primarily involves puzzles. Previous games had a more even mix of dialog investigation and puzzles. It's important to know that there are four puzzles that are timed and will involve the "2nd Chance" option. That's right…..four of them! In addition, there are 2 other timed puzzles but at least you don't die on those. So, that's 6 timed puzzles in one game. Tired of having all the time in the world to figure out a puzzle? Well, this is the game for you. Trust me, it was frustrating. There is an underwater maze that Nancy has to swim through. The timed portion involves the amount of air Nancy has left in her lungs. If you hate mazes on solid ground, you're going to hate the swimming puzzle. And, I'm not sure if this was a glitch, or if I'm just deficient on the brain cells. But, when you get through swimming to your destination, you'll have a cryptic message to figure out. Now, you may remember reading something about it in one of your books. So, naturally you'll want to read that book again to refresh your memory. Well, you can't. You can't access any inventory items. And, the major clue you need isn't in this location. So, you'll have to swim through that damn maze again to find your answer. Then, swim back. Arrghhh! I ended up saving my game after I made the first swim. Then, loading a previous save to get may answer.

There is a timed bomb puzzle that involves switching fuses around in order to comply with specific criteria. This puzzle is best worked out on paper and takes

quite a while to figure out. So, be prepared to get blown up quite a few times. There are the customary Nancy Drew puzzles where you'll have to make cookies and parfaits. There's a cockroach catching puzzle that will require some speedy clicking. A lot of puzzles involve cryptic messages and codes that needed to be deciphered. Luckily, you'll have a decoding machine to help with a couple of them. The rest will rely on your own brain power, a pen and paper. Overall, the difficulty level and amount of puzzles has been stepped up. So, be prepared. This isn't the same old Nancy Drew game.

The only downside to increasing the number of puzzles is that the story lacked a little in its development. In previous games, Nancy was a lot nosier which led to a lot more questions. This helped to draw you into the story and start identifying obvious suspects in your mind. Nancy did ask some questions in this game, but they just weren't as in-depth as what we're used to. It could also be the fact that Nancy is investigating in secret (meaning no one in Paris knows she's a detective) so while the story is interesting, it just has you feeling slightly disconnected.

Danger by Design is still a blast to play. While there seemed to be too many timed puzzles, it sure did up the difficulty level from what we're used to. And, if you prefer more puzzles to dialog, then this will be right up your alley. There were also a lot of new features introduced to this newest installment. If you're a fan of the series, then you be happy to add this one to your collection. And, you get to look forward to the 15th game in the series being released this year.

Final Grade: 84/100

Developer: HerInteractive	Minimum System Requirements:
Publisher: HerInteractive	Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP
Platform: PC	Pentium® 400 Mhz
Genre: Adventure	64 MB RAM
Release Date: July 2006	16 MB Video Card
Grade: 84/100	Stereo Sound Card
	12x CD-ROM Drive
	Hard Drive space of 300 MB

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Daemonica

PC Review by Ugur Sener

They are serial killers, mass murderers, rapists, and arsonists. They are vile creatures that revel in the pain of others. You cannot call these foul beings human; they are beasts. And you are the one who brings them justice. Others question your methods. They regard you with suspicion, fear, and even disdain. Yet you exist to make the world a little safer. You are Nicholas Farepoynt, Haresh al-Dorem. You speak to the dead through Daemonica, the language of demons.

Your mystical potions allow you to reach the realm of the dead. You seek the truth in places ordinary people cannot reach. Emotions are far from your world. As a physical reflection of your journeys to the realms of oblivion, you bear scars that will never heal. You may never know true joy or happiness. But your grim existence serves a greater purpose. You deliver punishment to the worst criminals. You solve cases others cannot hope to crack. You are a Beast Hunter and you have been called to take on a new quest.

Your arduous journey is almost at an end. You are just a short walk away from the town. You take another look at the letter that has summoned you here. The mayor of Cavorn is deeply concerned. Two of the town's residents, Greer and his wife, have been missing for several days. Disappearances are not common in this small town. Mayor Saintjohn needs your help in finding the lost couple. You try not to think about the past. You try to forget the burdens of the guilt you carry as you walk up to the gate. You are here for a mission. You have to find the missing couple. Yet it is not long before you find out that new developments have occurred since you received the letter.

Mayor Philip Saintjohn is all too thrilled to inform you that he has already solved the case! A young woman named Elanor Woodbridge has been murdered since the disappearance of the Greer and his wife. Elanor's fiancé, the town's undertaker Roger Duncombe, has been found with the dead body. Convinced that the undertaker is guilty for both Elanor's murder and the old couple's

disappearance, Mayor Saintjohn has already ordered Duncombe to be hanged. After all, why bother with a detailed investigation when you have a suspect whose hands are covered with blood and unable to speak coherently right next to the dead body?

The mayor now wants to hire you for a different task. You are to find definitive proof to back up Saintjohn's hasty judgment. Yet even as the mayor speaks, you know that something is not quite right. You've seen far too many people that got convicted and killed for crimes they never committed. Can the undertaker be truly guilty of killing his own fiancé? What would have been his motive? What about the disappearance of the old couple? Why would the undertaker want to kill them? Had he simply gone insane or is there something else, something much darker going on in this town? Yes, you know something is not quite right. And you have to get to the bottom of the mystery before more people die.

Daemonica is a third-person adventure game brought to us by RA Images, Cinemax, and Meridian4. Set in the middle ages, Daemonica is a murder mystery with a distinct macabre theme. As you investigate the death of Elanor Woodbridge, you will not be employing ordinary methods. As Nicholas Farepoynt, you have access to the realm of the dead. By risking your own life, you will have to become the instrument of justice.

When you look at the screenshots alone, it is easy to assume Daemonica is an RPG. The isometric third-person view is certainly comparable to games like Diablo, Neverwinter Nights, or Baldur's Gate. Seeing the health meter on the corner of the screen and the sword on your character's back, it is also easy to assume that there are a lot of action sequences in the game. However, while you will have to get into a few sword fights in the game,

Daemonica is most certainly not an action game or an RPG. Progressing through the game involves interrogating other characters and looking for clues to solve the case. There are overwhelmingly more adventure game elements than anything else in Daemonica. As such, despite the presence of a few fights, Daemonica is first and foremost an adventure game.

The entire game takes place in the town of Cavorn and its surrounding areas. After the opening sequence, players are free to explore the town at their own pace. You control Nicholas with a fairly simple interface. You move Nicholas by clicking on an open area on the main view. The inventory is accessible in two ways. You can browse through and select items by using the buttons on the lower left corner of the screen. Alternatively, you can bring up the inventory view with a tap on the 'I' key to take a look at all of your items. You can also use keyboard shortcuts to open up the map or Nicholas's diary.

The bulk of the investigation is conducted by interrogating the town's citizens. While Cavorn is a very small town, it still has a number of distinct and interesting inhabitants. There is of course the sleazy Mayor Saintjohn. He is the sort of person you distrust from the moment you meet them. The mayor's wife Helen is hauntingly beautiful, yet she seems so distant and troubled. Doctor Clement Baker and the blacksmith John Codd regard you obvious suspicion, taking you for little more than one of the mayor's lackeys. Haunted by visions, the town witch Maud Litcott constantly speaks in riddles. Regardless of their backgrounds and motives, there seems to be a dark air surrounding every resident of the town. Something is terribly wrong here and you have to figure out what it is before it's too late.

While it starts as a simple murder investigation, Daemonica has a fairly engaging plot that should keep players interested throughout the game. As you get deeper into the investigation, the game offers a few plot twists to keep things interesting. You immediately get the sense that something is wrong with the town and its citizens. The recent murder and the disappearances are not the only things bothering these people. Yet you can't quite put your finger on what is wrong. And nobody seems to be willing to give you a straight answer. In the end, the mystery is not astonishing and it may not be completely unexpected. But nevertheless, Daemonica will most likely have what it takes to keep your interest as you conduct the investigation.

Among the strongest and best-implemented elements of Daemonica is the atmosphere. The game does a rather successful job of communicating its macabre theme. Before you even talk to the characters and start getting into the investigation, the game manages to create a somber and unsettling tone. It is

clear from Nicholas's description as he approaches the town. He remarks on the dark clouds and the surprisingly cold rain. Everything seems to be strangely quiet. Even as you hear the ambient sounds and see the town's residents, the whole place somehow seems to be devoid of life. A deep sense of gloom covers everything.

The grim nature of your investigation adds to the effect. As a beast hunter, it is simply part of your job to make contact with the spirits of the dead. The dark ritual involved with achieving this communication certainly adds to the game's atmosphere. Your closeness to the lifeless bodies and spirits serves as a constant reminder that death is everywhere. And in order to unlock the mystery, you have to become intimate with it.

While you will not hear it very often, the soundtrack of Daemonica also boosts the atmosphere. The haunting tunes fit very well into the underlying theme of the game. The only problem is that the music seems to play randomly as you explore the town. As such, it does not always highlight critical moments of the game as well as it could have. The game could have also benefited from a couple of extra tracks that play as you explore the main areas of the town. Nevertheless, the music that is available should still help enhance the experience.

Before you even start the game, it is highly recommendable to read the background story accessible through the game's main menu. The short story will provide you important details about the main character Nicholas Farepoynt. You will gain insight into his early days and how he came to be a beast hunter in the first place. While many details of the background story will not directly factor into Nicholas's adventure in Daemonica, you will be able to appreciate certain scenes a lot better if you know about the beast hunter's past. In addition, having some information about the nature of Nicholas's work should be helpful at the beginning of the game when you are trying to figure out how to proceed with the investigation.

It is important to note that reading will be a large part of what you do throughout your adventure in Daemonica. The background story is most certainly not the only chunk of text that will be presented throughout the course of the game. As part of his investigation, Nicholas has to prepare potions and speak to the spirits of the dead. In order to learn how these processes work, players are required to read entries in Nicholas's diary. Dialogs with other characters are presented in

text format as well. Voice acting is available only in a small number of sequences. Since you will be spending a lot time talking to other characters, be prepared to do quite a bit of reading.

The conversation interface featured in the game is fairly simple. Once you initiate a conversation, a list of questions or comments become available at the bottom of your screen. You simply select a topic and read the other character's response. On occasion, as the conversation unfolds, you will have to make decisions. How you choose to respond to other characters will have an impact on the game. At times you may be able to prevent fights by selecting the correct responses.

Your investigation is hardly limited to talking to the living citizens of the town. After all, Nicholas Farepoynt carries the title Haresh al-Dorem, which means he can speak to the spirits of the dead by traveling to the realm of demons. The process of finding and talking to the spirits is perhaps the most interesting aspect of Daemonica. As detailed in his diary, Nicholas first has to prepare a potion called Soulgreep. Upon consuming the potion, Nicholas's spirit is able to access a special chamber. Here the beast hunter performs a ritual to call forth the spirit. If everything is done correctly, Nicholas is allowed to talk to the spirit. The ritual works like a puzzle, testing how well players know the character whose spirit they will be summoning. The entire process nicely fits the tone of the game and makes for a rather unique experience. It seems as though the development team has put quite a bit of thought into the ritual and the realm of spirits.

Another fairly uncommon feature of Daemonica is the preparation of potions. Since it is required for the ritual that allows you to talk to spirits, the most important potion you have to make is Soulgreep. But Nicholas will have to prepare other potions to aid him with his investigation as well. For instance, Nicholas can make two types of healing potions to recover lost health. The recipes for these potions are recorded in Nicholas's diary. Each potion requires a number of different types of herbs. Once again, the diary will provide information about each type of herb and where you might be able to find it. Players are required to collect the herbs and prepare potions by combining them according to the instructions in the recipes.

The process of preparing the potions is quite straightforward. Players simply have to select the correct combination and quantity of herbs from a short list. The fact that you have to read through the recipes and look for the herbs yourself does initially make the process more involved and even quite entertaining in the beginning. However, trying to find the elusive herbs can easily cause a great deal

of frustration. While the descriptions in the diary are helpful in trying to figure out where to look, players still have to essentially wander all around the town looking for strange plants at each corner. Some of these plants are fairly common and should be fairly easy to find. However, players can easily have a rather hard time locating the rarer herbs. They can be at just about any random corner, potentially forcing you to run around the town over and over again.

It is not enough to find the herbs and prepare the potions once either. As the adventure progresses, you will have to prepare some potions several times. The herbs Nicholas uses for his potions seem to be some seriously fast-growing plants. The story in Daemonica spans over a number of days. With each new day, the supply of herbs around the town magically gets replenished. Thus, when you realize you need to make a fresh batch of Soulgreep or require a healing potion to recover some hit points, you have revisit a bunch of locations and try to find some extra herbs.

It is worth noting that the potions do not require the herbs in massive quantities. Since the town is quite small, you will not be forced to search through a huge area either. However, once you have tried out the potion making process, it can get very annoying to search through the game world several times looking for herbs you had already found and used in the previous day of the adventure. It is highly likely that you will get to points in the game where you will

know exactly what your next step should be, but you will not be able to make progress until you find a specific herb.

Since you will be spending a good deal of time interrogating different characters, it is a good thing that Daemonica has a helpful map feature. As you explore the town, key locations will be automatically marked on the map. You can then bring up the map and instantly travel to any of the marked locations. It is also possible to set temporary markers on the map. You create a marker by clicking on a location denoted in the map. As soon as you set the marker, a green arrow will

become visible in the game world. Using the arrow as a guide, you can reach the selected location. Even though the game world is quite small, it is still nice to have the map shortcuts and the marker functionality. The shortcuts in particular should save you a good deal of time as you move around the town talking to different people.

The size of the game world is another aspect of the game that can be frustrating to many players. During the majority of the game, you will be confined to the town of Cavorn. Even when you throw in the surrounding areas, this amounts to a considerably small area to explore. Of course Daemonica is not exactly the first game to take place in a small location and every single game does not need to span a myriad of unique places. However, when it is possible to run across the entire town in just a few minutes, it is easy to feel too confined. A few extra locations and several more characters would have probably greatly helped Daemonica.

Nicholas Farepoynt does have to do some fighting throughout the course of his adventure. However, the combat system in Daemonica is fairly simple and should not be too challenging to master. The fights are always in the form of a duel. You can either swing your sword or guard against incoming attacks by holding down the space key. It is not possible to block attacks indefinitely. The moment you press the space key, a shield icon appears over Nicholas. Each time your opponent tries to hit you, the shield icon will fade. Eventually, you will not be able to fend off the attacks. Thus, after you block your opponent a couple of times, you are encouraged to launch a counterattack. If your opponent fails to block your attacks, you will start depleting their hit points. Once you hit the opponent enough times, you will win the fight.

Nicholas starts the game with thirty hit points. Each time you get hit during a fight, he will lose a small portion of his health. The game does have a feature in the options menu that makes the fights easier. Especially with the simplified combat option activated, you should be able to get through most fights without losing too much health. When you do need healing, you will have to make potions that will replenish your lost energy. Unfortunately, having to prepare these potions can add some tedium to the game. In the event that you barely survive a fight, you would be ill-advised to proceed before healing Nicholas. After

all, if you neglect to heal the beast hunter, you may find yourself in another fight with very few hit points. As such, every time you lose a good chunk of your help, you will be almost forced to find the required herbs and patch up your wounds. Thankfully, the combat is fairly simple and there isn't that much fighting in the first place, which reduces the need to make the healing potions.

Without a doubt, Daemonica has some strong elements and it can be an entertaining experience. The storyline is interesting and the atmosphere is fairly strong. The game manages to capture your interest and create a dark, unsettling mood. There are some nice features that make the experience colorful. The ritual for talking to spirits is fairly imaginative and should be entertaining to perform. Towards the end of the game, there some optional mini side quests you can complete to change parts of the game's ending. You also make a decision at the very end that determines the ultimate outcome.

However, Daemonica suffers from several problems that significantly hurt the experience. The game world ends up feeling too small and restrictive. While it is initially interesting to make potions, looking for herbs can easily get very tedious and frustrating. The amount of character interaction and reading involved may be far too tiresome for some players. There are also a few points in the game where it is not quite clear what you are supposed to do. You need to essentially wander around the town until you quite randomly stumble upon something that will progress the storyline. Adding minor annoyances like occasional badly constructed dialog trees, somewhat lengthy load times, and a limited number of save spots to the mix, the game starts to get rather difficult to recommend. With more locations to explore, additional game play time, and a more refined potion-making process, Daemonica could have been a remarkable game. Unfortunately, despite all its strengths, it ultimately falls short of the mark. Nevertheless, if you are looking for a murder mystery with a macabre tone, some interesting features, and a great deal of character interaction, consider giving Daemonica a try. It will not be the greatest adventure game in your collection, but it can still be a fun ride if you can manage to overlook the game's problems.

Developer: RA Images / Cinemax	**Minimum System Requirements:**
Publisher: Meridian 4	Windows® 98 / 2000 / ME / XP
Platform: PC	1GHz Pentium® III
Genre: Adventure	256 MB RAM
Release Date: April 2006	DirectX® 9.0 compliant 64 MB video card
Grade: 72/100	DirectX® 9.0 compliant sound card
	4x CD-ROM
	900MB hard disk space
	Mouse & Keyboard

ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

ADVENTURE LANTERN

Atlantis Evolution

PC Review by Ugur Sener

Lying on the deck, Curtis stared into the sky. It seemed to be such a pleasant June night. With the stars flickering in the distance, Curtis was not worried about anything. The landscape photographer was on his way back from a successful assignment in Patagonia. Soon he would be back home, perhaps getting ready for an exciting new assignment. Or so he thought…

The storm seemed to come out of nowhere. Within minutes the boat was struggling in the midst of massive waves. One of the sailors informed Curtis that the captain ordered the photographer to wait inside his cabin. But this was not a storm the ship would survive. In a flash, Curtis found himself on a small boat trying to row away from the sinking ship. He was completely alone in the middle of the sea, unsure he would live through the accursed storm.

Within moments, Curtis's boat was getting sucked into a whirlpool. It seemed the young man's life was about to end. Yet his boat did not get capsized. Curtis did not drown. The whirlpool transported him to a mysterious realm. It was part of our world, yet it was different. Before the photographer even had a few minutes to take in his surroundings, a strange aircraft appeared above him. A beam of light lifted Curtis and his boat out of the water. The photographer was trapped inside the strange machine.

After a short journey, the aircraft landed on an island. Armed guards greeted Curtis. The photographer was not about to receive a warm welcome. They were calling him a "deviant", claiming that the young man had strayed from the "Beaten Track of Humility." They had one thing right, Curtis was confused and disoriented. Yet the young man gathered that this place was supposed to be New Atlantis. Apparently, those who fled from the wreckage of original Atlantis had formed a new civilization.

But none of that was going to matter if Curtis failed to find a way to get away from the guards. They were talking about strange gods. Evidently, Curtis was beyond the gaze of some deity called Enna. While that alone sounded like a bad thing,

Curtis was more concerned about the prospect of being recycled! He had been deemed far too deviated from the "Beaten Track." Realignment as out of the question, Curtis was to be recycled. And that certainly did not seem like a pleasant experience. The photographer did not truly understand why he was being called a "deviant" and why the Atlanteans felt a need to recycle a human being, but if he wanted to stay alive, he had to run. Curtis would have to discover the secrets of New Atlantis and outwit the guards before he could find a way home.

Atlantis Evolution gives players a chance to rediscover the Atlantis universe in a whole new way. While it is part of the series started by Atlantis: The Lost Tales and continued by Beyond Atlantis I and II, this adventure game marks a new beginning in many ways. The developers have moved away from the storyline in the Beyond Atlantis games. You will not be traveling to different parts of the world, discovering ancient and mystical places in search of greater truths. Instead, Atlantis Evolution explores what happened to the inhabitants of the mysterious city from the original game that started the series.

While it has a different structure than the Beyond Atlantis games, Atlantis Evolution is a much more direct sequel to the original game. Players finally get a chance to find out what happened to the inhabitants of Atlantis after the events of the first game. Players who enjoyed Atlantis: The Lost Tales will most likely enjoy discovering the depth of the connection to the latest chapter especially in the later stages of the game.

One noteworthy aspect of the relationship between Atlantis Evolution and the first two games of the series is the soundtrack. Pierre Esteve is back as the composer in Atlantis Evolution. If you have played Atlantis: The Lost Tales and Beyond Atlantis, you will quite likely notice some similarities in the musical style. You might even catch remixed versions of a couple of tracks taken from the previous games. Even as the storyline evolves and shift focus throughout the series, the music helps establish a connection between the new and the old.

The game takes place in the mysterious island that is the new home of the Atlanteans. A long time has passed since Seth's adventure in Atlantis: The Lost Tales and the people seem to have established a rather peculiar new civilization.

The guards and the aircraft you encounter at the very beginning of the game clearly show marks of highly advanced technology. Yet the villagers seem deprived of all but the crudest tools. They are expected to work extremely hard to appease their gods. Confined to their humble homes, they are denied all forms of luxury and even the simplest tools that would make their jobs easier. Their lives are monotonous. Even the thought of straying from the ordinary is considered heresy.

A strange pantheon of gods reign over the Atlanteans. These so-called ascended beings command tremendous respect from all citizens. They do not openly dwell among the citizens, but the gods are still ever-present and always watchful. Zanat is honored as the grand creator. The indisputable leader of the pantheon, Zanat is the maker of the sun. He is the one who has given the gift of light to the civilization. His sister Enna constantly watches all Atlanteans. She is the one who makes sure the citizens do their jobs and do not deviate from the "Beaten Track". Sama, the goddess of the sun brings daylight to the Atlanteans each morning. Her sister Kama is the goddess of the moon, casting her pristine light across the nighttime sky. And then there is Cosmo, the god of death. He is the grand punisher. Nobody can escape the god's wrath. He delivers justice to those who would dare to deviate.

New Atlantis is a land of oppression. Independent thought and innovation cannot be a part of this civilization. The citizens are expected to obey without question. The people are obligated to be humble and unfaltering in their faith in the pantheon. This would be a difficult world to comprehend for any stranger. Yet things are even worse for Curtis. He is hunted by the authority for being different, for being a "deviant." Surviving the island and finding a way back to his old life will not be an easy task.

Atlantis Evolution is played from a first-person perspective. The game features a simple mouse-driven interface with 360 degree panaromas. You move the mouse to look around the environment. An arrow icon is used to indicate that you can move in the pointed direction. If you can interact with an object, the mouse icon turns into a cross. The inventory is accessed with a right click and appears at the bottom of the screen. A right click on an inventory item brings up a detailed close-up view. Once you select an item with a left click, you can close the inventory and attempt to use it on the environment.

The storyline is the strongest element of Atlantis Evolution. Discovering New Atlantis and understanding the island's culture is an interesting experience. As you come to learn more about the oppressed inhabitants and the gods who rule over them, the story gradually grows more engaging. But the best parts of the plot are not revealed until the last stages of the game. When you finally unlock the mystery behind New Atlantis and gain a thorough understanding of the events that lead to the current state of the island, the true quality of the plot is revealed. Despite the relatively slow middle section of the game, interesting plot twists in the later stages and the imaginative history of the civilization makes for quite an entertaining and at times even fascinating tale. Unfortunately, other elements of the game severely hurt the experience, ultimately making Atlantis Evolution a difficult game to recommend.

The problems begin to emerge at the early stages of the game. When you start exploring the island and meet some of its inhabitants, you quickly realize that much of the dialog does not bring any value to the game or add to the complexity of the storyline. The conversation system is simple and will be familiar to players who have followed the Atlantis series. Clicking on a character brings up a list of conversation topics represented by icons. Players select individual topics, which causes Curtis to ask a question or make some kind of comment. Most of the time, the other character responds with a couple of sentences. On some occasions though, the conversation goes back and forth for a small amount of time, revealing more details. If you have heard all the other character has to offer about a particular topic, the corresponding icon gets dimmed on the conversation list. Conceptually, this system works fairly well. But there are some problems with the execution in Atlantis Evolution.

The biggest issue is that in many cases all the topics of conversation are not really necessary. Regardless of which topic you choose, you get a variation of the same response, offering no concrete details. Thus you can end up asking about several allegedly different topics to obtain virtually no new information. The problem is occasionally further augmented when multiple characters give you almost identical responses. Of course some of this can be justified by the fact that the citizens of New Atlantis are extremely fearful of their gods and seem very hesitant to make any statement that might upset the deities. The developers may have also been trying to make sure players would obtain key details by making them available through multiple characters. Yet no amount of justification may be enough to completely overlook the problem. Especially in several cases, Atlantis

Evolution could have benefited from the characters offering intelligent responses instead of reiterating the same information.

The voice acting leaves something to be desired as well. While the voices do for the most part seem appropriate for the characters, the intonation should have been handled better. In many cases, it sounds as though the characters are unnecessarily raising their voices. Especially in the early parts of the game, Curtis fairly frequently sounds like he is yelling instead of asking a question to someone less than two feet away. The guards you meet at the beginning of the game sound as though they are constantly screaming. It seems the intention is for them to speak in harsh tones to the outsider who is asking a bunch of strange questions. Yet in reality they simply sound irritatingly loud.

Given the interesting storyline revealed in the later parts of the game, the problems with the conversations can be overlooked. But Atlantis Evolution also has some considerable problems with its puzzles, further hurting the overall experience. First of all, Atlantis Evolution overuses sequences where you have to avoid capture by the guards. Especially frequent during the first stages of the game, these sequences typically involve some accurate timing and quite a bit of trial and error. While it is usually easy to figure out what you are supposed to be doing after a couple of attempts, players should still be prepared to die quite a few times through the course of the adventure. Thankfully, the game is kind enough to automatically send players back to the beginning of the sequence so you don't have worry about losing too much progress. There is nothing fundamentally wrong with occasionally putting players into dangerous situations. And when done correctly, stealth sequences can be quite entertaining. The problem with Atlantis Evolution is that the sections where you are evading the guards appear all too frequently given the relatively short length of the game and fail to be engaging or interesting. Rather than giving you a thrill and keeping you at the edge of your seat, they can easily leave you annoyed and wanting to punch your monitor every time you hear a guard say "Halt deviant!"

During certain sections of the game, part of the challenge is to find your way through a specific area. These quasi-mazes can be yet another problematic feature of Atlantis Evolution. The areas you need to navigate are never huge and their layout never gets extremely complicated. The path usually branches a relatively small number of ways, minimizing the amount of backtracking. As such,

on the surface, the maze-like sequences seem like they should be cakewalks. Unfortunately, due to the way the screens are presented, that is hardly the case. For one thing, individual screens in the area you are supposed to navigate can at times look remarkably similar. To make matters worse, the game does not

feature movement animations to allow players to see the path unwind from one screen to the next. Instead, you directly jump to the next screen, which can be quite disorienting when you are trying to find your way through a maze. As if to further augment the problem, the positioning of the camera when you arrive at the next screen can also be confusing. You will not always be facing the direction in which the path continues and at times it is possible to accidentally turn back and go in the wrong direction. When you add the fact that you will need to find inventory items or try to avoid guards as you navigate these areas, you have a complete recipe for a rather frustrating experience. The saving grace is that, the navigational problems truly affect only a couple of areas of the game. During the bulk of the adventure, finding your way should be fairly simple.

The last problem with the Atlantis Evolution's challenges is the frequent arcade games that you have to play. It almost seems like the developers were on a quest to let adventure gamers experience the joys and frustrations of a number classic arcade titles presented under the guise of weird Atlantean machinations. During your journey through Atlantis Evolution, among other arcade sequences, you will be treated to a riveting game of Pong and Tron. You will also get to play

an old-fashioned shooter game where you will control an aircraft and fight against ground targets and two bosses. There is really nothing wrong with the actual implementation of the mini-games. They work fairly well and can even offer fair challenges without becoming overly difficult. The problem is with the fact that they do not really fit into the game. Any experienced adventure gamer will have encountered plenty of obscure mechanisms to do simple things like

keeping doors locked. But when you have to play a Tron against the computer to close down some shutters, the feeling of immersion gets lost. If Atlantis Evolution had been a truly lengthy game that featured a good number of logic puzzles, it would have been easier to overlook the arcade sequences. One or two of them might have even offered a nice break from the routine puzzles. Yet given the relatively small size of Atlantis Evolution, the mini-games really stand out and make very poor substitutes for puzzles that challenge players intellectually. While some of the sequences are indeed essentially puzzles, there are too many arcade adaptations for the scope of Atlantis Evolution.

The frustrating aspects of Atlantis Evolution without a doubt significantly hurt the gaming experience. Yet the game does fortunately have its redeeming qualities. The best parts of Atlantis Evolution are hidden in the later stages of the game. Once the secrets behind New Atlantis are revealed, the game gains a whole new perspective. And as the storyline reaches its climax, players get to experience the highly imaginative and greatly entertaining last chapter of the journey. The game not only offers interesting plot twists, but also throws in creative puzzles that take great advantage of the unique situation created. It is a crying shame that the rest of the game is simply not on part with the very last stages. The problems encountered early on can even discourage many players from continuing the game.

Atlantis Evolution feels like a missed opportunity. The pleasant graphics, the interesting civilization with the curious pantheon of deities, the intriguing mysteries of the island, and the highly entertaining puzzles presented in the last part of the game are greatly overshadowed by problems that should have been easy to avoid. The mini-games do not truly fit into the game, avoiding the guards becomes tedious, navigating certain areas becomes an unnecessary chore, and some of the conversations fail to sound realistic or add true value to the game. Yet if you can be patient during the early parts of the game and the premise sounds interesting, you might still find something to enjoy in Atlantis Evolution. All hope is most certainly not lost for the series. Parts of Atlantis Evolution show that the development team is indeed capable of creating an entertaining experience. Hopefully, the serious problems that hurt this game can be avoided in the next installment in the series. In the meantime, Atlantis Evolution will have to do, assuming you can put up with its considerably frustrating aspects.

The final grade is 67/100.

Developer: Atlantis Interactive Entertainment	Minimum System Requirements:
Developer: Atlantis Interactive Entertainment	**Minimum System Requirements:** Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP
Publisher: The Adventure Company	Pentium® III 850 MHz or Equivalent
Platform: PC	64 MB RAM (128 MB Recommended)
Genre: Adventure	24x CD-ROM Drive
Release Date: October 2004	32 MB DirectX® 8.0 Compatible Video Card
Grade: 67/100	DirectSound Compatible Sound Card
	4.0 GB Hard Disk Space

ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred Blood of the Damned
PC Review by Thaumaturge

It began in New Orleans, with the Voodoo Murders. Gabriel Knight, bookstore owner and novelist, delved into the murders as research for a book and found himself drawn deep into their dark heart by powerful ties of love and duty. With the help of Grace Nakimura he cut out that dark heart, destroying the power of the Voodoo hounfour, redeeming the sins of his fathers and regaining a great power lost to his family.

In the shadows of the Voodoo Murders Gabriel Knight discovered the secret of his heritage: that his was Ritter blood, and that the Ritters were Schattenjägers, Shadow Hunters, charged with hunting the creatures of Darkness. Though he lost a very great deal in the final conflict, Gabriel Knight discovered responsibility and duty, and a reason to fight for something.

After the events in New Orleans Gabriel moved to Schloss Ritter, the ancestral home of his family in Germany, leaving Grace to run the bookstore. It was in Germany that his next trial discovered him: a little girl was brutally killed – the latest in a series of similar "animal attacks" - and the girl's family called on Gabriel Knight, the Schattenjäger, to aid them. The girl's father had seen the beast that had killed his daughter, and while its form may have been lupine, he insisted that its eyes had been human. Gabriel's investigations led him to an exclusive hunt club, and the new Schattenjäger found himself both hunter and hunted. Flying over from New Orleans, Grace began researching the connection between Gabriel's case and King Ludwig II of Bavaria and a figure named the Black Wolf – a connection that proved to be Gabriel's salvation.

Since that salvation, Gabriel seems to have begun to show Grace and her research far more respect. She too has moved to Schloss Ritter, and has begun attempting to organise Gabriel's approach to Schattenjäger cases. She has introduced fingerprint kits and, most notably, a laptop running a program called SIDNEY: the Schattenjäger Informational Database, which includes a database of the supernatural, occult and obscure, powerful image and text

analysis tools, a section in which suspects can be entered and data such as fingerprints linked to them, and even a fake ID generator.

A new case is presaged by an invitation from Prince James of Albany, inviting Gabriel and Grace to spend a weekend in his manor in Paris. The invitation comes as a surprise – what could Prince James of Albany, heir to the Stewarts of Scotland, want from a Schattenjäger? At first it seems that the answer is "nothing"; None of hunts, polo or dinner with nobility serve to explain the invitation. For Gabriel and Grace the weekend seems a waste. That changes, however, when Prince James requests a private conversation with the pair, away from the ears of others.

For centuries, he reveals, the Stewarts have suffered a most unusual malady. On some mornings they awake tired and pale, examination revealing severe anaemia – related, there is little doubt, to the two small puncture wounds that the victim also acquires. The "night visitors", the Stewarts have come to call their unknown assailants. Nothing has been found to stop them – not guards or dogs, who are overcome by sleep, nor locks, which break. When it was his own suffering, Prince James could accept the visitations – but it no longer is, as the prince demonstrates by introducing Gabriel and Grace to his infant son: Charlie. It is for Charlie that Prince James called the Schattenjäger.

That night Gabriel and Grace sit guard in the baby's room, a dog their only wakeful company, aside from each other. The Schattenjäger remarks that they could be on watch for months – only to discover that sleep has stolen over Grace, and that the dog lies similarly sleep-bound upon the floor. A window opens, and before Gabriel manages to so much as move from his spot a figure has stolen into the room and abducted the child. Gabriel gives chase, following the abductor out of the window; the night visitor takes to a car, and the chase continues through the streets of Paris, Gabriel's motorcycle headlights at times revealing two men in the vehicle before him.

The car stops at a train station, but again the Schattenjäger is too late – the car is already empty. A man in the station points Gabriel to a train, and he jumps aboard to resume his search. At last he finds a cabin in which sits one man, and on his luggage rack, a large trunk – a trunk with a great many holes aerating its side. Gabriel realises that he has found his quarry – but has little chance to act as a blow from behind renders him unconscious.

When he awakes the train is at a station. Staggering onto the platform, Gabriel is greeted by a lantern-bearing conductor, who confirms that a pair of men carrying a large trunk had disembarked at that station. Noticing that Gabriel is still groggy, the man tells him that there is a taxi outside, and a hotel to be found in the nearby town of Rennes-le-Château, a town that turns out to hide the keys to an incredible secret...

The next morning the investigation begins anew, as Gabriel meets the people in and around Rennes-le-Château. Many of the people that he will meet will prove to have their own agendas, often working counter to each other. Any or all of them could be involved in the kidnapping, and there are those amongst them with much to hide – although their secrets may not be what the Schattenjäger at first suspects. And somewhere in this eclectic group a kidnapper – and much worse – lurks.

When Grace joins Gabriel, she too begins an investigation. Researching the town's mystery, she attempts to decipher the myriad hints and clues that abound in the town and its surrounding landmarks – as well as other, far more unexpected sources. In doing so she will uncover an incredible secret, a secret hidden deep beneath earth and riddle – a secret that proves to be deeply intertwined with the kidnapping of the child, with the predatory night visitors – and even with the Schattenjägers.

The more either delves into the mysteries of the people and places around them, the more intricate and detailed the story becomes, multiple strands weaving into an interesting and cohesive whole. Jane Jensen, the writer behind the stories of the Gabriel Knight games, does a good job of managing a complex story, building a strong atmosphere of mystery without being too often unsubtle. She describes an engaging, creative and

believable cast of characters, best of whom are Gabriel and Grace themselves. Neither is a perfect hero, and neither alone solves the full mystery. Each is human, flawed, and only by the use of their individual talents and interests do they prevail. In addition, the relationship between the pair is far from perfect, and their frustrations and uncertainties with regards to each other adds another layer of depth to their characterisation. This makes, in my opinion, for more interesting and engaging protagonists, which draw the player in and hold the player's

attention well. In addition, Grace plays a far more immediately active role than in the previous two games. While her focus remains on research and logic, she now also takes some part in the direct investigation of the people and places in and around Rennes-le-Château. The impression is given that Gabriel and Grace are a far better-integrated team than on their previous cases. Indeed, Grace's research seems to receive far more respect from Gabriel in this case than in the previous two – perhaps because her research saved Gabriel from the werewolf curse, and probably his soul in the process – in the previous case. The overall impression is of a relationship that has evolved since the last case, and in a way that I found very believable and true to the characters.

Thus the greatest strength of this game is almost certainly its story, one notable not only for its writing but also for the scope and daring that it displays. As with the previous games in the series, Jane Jensen does an excellent job of weaving her story from well-researched history and intelligently-crafted fiction, building one on the other, tying them together so tightly that the distinction between one and the other can become nigh invisible to those not already well-versed in the relevant histories. Rennes-le-Château is a real place, the mystery is one that others have speculated about – perhaps most notably Dan Brown in his novel *the Da Vinci Code*, although it is perhaps worth noting for those that might think this game a copy of Dan Brown's work that Gabriel Knight 3 was created before *the Da Vinci Code* was released. In addition, some of the entries found in SIDNEY's database were taken from a real online encyclopaedia of the occult, The Mystica (http://www.themystica.org).

Where the first Gabriel Knight game was depicted via the the traditional medium of sprites against a two-dimensional backdrop and the second game employed full-motion video, Gabriel Knight 3 makes use of a 3D graphics engine.

The character, item and environment models are good, if not perfect. The slightly limited model detail leaves the models a little inexpressive and at times stiff (especially in terms of the characters' hair) to my eye. The textures – the images that are applied to the models to give them colour and detail – are, however, better. With the exception of a few textures (the grass texture perhaps most notably), the textures are for the most part very good, and add well to the realism of the settings and items. One

limitation that the textures face is that they do not seem to have levels of transparency – so, for instance, a fountain's water cannot be seen through, and the edges of its streams have abrupt edges, rather than softly fading into transparency. For the most part, however, this is not terribly noticeable, although it in some places it is more so.

Characters' facial textures change to describe emotion and their lips animate as they speak, and while this system is certainly not perfect, I feel that it does enhance the effectiveness of the graphics. Given the story- and character-driven nature of Gabriel Knight 3, I feel that this ability to portray emotion adds a lot to the effectiveness of the characterisations.

The acting on the part of the 3D characters is not perfect, but it is decent, and their actions are well-animated. The voice acting is better, with a few of the voice actors being especially good, and backed up by good dialogue writing. Overall the acting succeeds in its portrayal, both on the part of the graphical models and the voice actors behind them.

Overall the 3D graphics engine used is a success, working very well to depict the game's setting, emotions and action.

At certain points in the game – most notably the beginning and the end – there are short movies to portray events in better quality than the in-game graphical engine produces. These are in general nicely acted and well-scripted, and employ to good end effects not available to the in-game engine, although they do suffer from the model and expression issues mentioned for the in-game graphics.

In terms of artistic merit, the graphics in the game are very good indeed. They have a strong artistry that suits the themes and tone of the game very well, employing appropriate imagery and effectively evoking a sense of the supernatural, and, when appropriate, even of wonder. Furthermore there are in places some very nice details – textures or movie effects, for instance – that are especially good. Worth noting, for example, are the images presented at the start of each time block, which are at times beautiful and show a strong artistry, to my eye at least.

The game's music too is very good indeed. It is appropriate and not overbearing, even being absent in areas where no music is called for, being replaced by realistic ambient noise. When it does appear, it supports and enhances the atmosphere of the game very well indeed, and at its best it is beautiful, and very appropriate to the mood of its setting.

The game takes place over the course of three days, each separated into several time blocks of a few hours each. In essence the time blocks act as chapters, separating the ideas and goals of one section from the next. This has two effects: first, it segments the game, the virtue of which is debatable, and second and more definitely positive (to my mind, at least), it introduces a sense of the passage of time while at the same time preventing the player's missing important events due to that passage: each time block ends only once the player has achieved the main tasks or discoveries for that time block.

However, this does not mean that ancillary matters cannot be missed; indeed, there are many events which are not absolutely essential to completing the game that nevertheless provide clues and contribute to the plot, but which are entirely possible to miss – in fact, some can be quite tricky to discover. The player may not think to return to a particular place, or may not arrive in time to witness a character's actions, or perhaps miss a suspicious sound at some point, or fail to investigate in time. Knowing that these events exist adds to this game's replayability, to my mind, providing in the challenge of uncovering all of the pieces extra incentive to fully explore the game subsequent times, attempting to find the way to be in the right places at the right times, and noticing those smaller clues in seemingly minor events that lead to additional insights or information. This is a game in which completing the game missing nothing is much more difficult than simply completing the game.

The end of a time block signals change in the game world; it is now a new time of day, and the various characters will quite likely be engaged in different tasks. In addition, in a few cases completing a certain action or making a certain discovery causes time to advance within a time block; this is indicated by a brief ticking, and again indicates change in the game world, albeit of a lesser scope – someone may have moved on to a new place and task, for instance, and a new event may occur, while ones unwitnessed may have been missed.

Since time blocks end once the requisite actions have been taken or discoveries made, it is possible for a time block to end before the player has made all of the secondary discoveries. This can potentially lead to frustration, as a time block ends before the player feels that everything intended has been attempted. For the most part, however, this should not be a major issue, especially as, should a sufficiently recent saved game exist, it can simply be loaded and the desired actions attempted before the final requirement for that time block is met.

One nice feature is the option to save at the start of a time block, before entering it. This allows the player to have a safe save at that point, after the decisions of the previous time block but before those of the new one.

Once the player has reached the point at which they can leave the town of Rennes-le-Château hints become available at the map screen. Clicking on the "hint" button (present in the selection of buttons that appear on clicking the right mouse button) causes a white halo to flash around locations on the map in which events important to the time block remain uncompleted – although it should perhaps be noted that not all of these events are always necessary to complete the time block. In addition, the same button is again active for Grace's *Le Serpent Rouge* puzzle, this time taking the form of her musings on the section of the puzzle on which she is currently working.

The game is controlled via an unobtrusive and overall rather good interface. The player interacts with the environment primarily via the mouse (although the keyboard is used for those areas that call for typing, such as entering search terms when using SIDNEY). When the mouse cursor is over an object or place that can be interacted with an either yellow or blue outline appears around the cursor arrowhead. In this case, clicking the left mouse button causes a small bar of square icons to appear near the cursor, indicating possible actions for that object or place, and a subsequent click on one of these icons instructs Gabriel or Grace (as the case may be) to attempt that action. So for instance, clicking on a cat might produce an icon representing petting it, a food item might have icons for smelling or eating it, and a potential inventory item might allow

the player to examine the item or take it – naturally, the "examine" icon is probably the most commonly encountered. While there may be some cases in which the icons are a little ambiguous, moving the mouse over one of them causes a terse description (often a single word, such as "examine" or "pet") to appear for that icon.

If the object in question is a character, one of these icons often depicts either an empty speech bubble or one containing a question mark – the former indicating simple chatting, and the latter indicating conversation or interrogation. Clicking on either of these will (with a few minor exceptions) begin a conversation with that character. Conversation topics are chosen in the same manner as normal actions, via a row of icons depicting the available topics of conversation. The only real flaw to this otherwise very clean and efficient system is that it can at times be unclear as to what, precisely, Gabriel or Grace will say based on simple icons (or their brief descriptions).

As the characters speak the camera angle changes appropriately, generally framing those engaged in the conversation.

Walking is accomplished similarly; a simple single click instructs the player character to attempt to walk to that spot, or, in the case of area exits (to indicate which the cursor changes to a directional arrow), to leave the current area and enter the indicated area.

Clicking the right mouse button opens the options menu. From here the player can open the inventory (which is also accessible via pressing the 'I' key), view the various predefined camera angles specified for the current area, save the game or load a saved game, access a hint (when applicable), as well as setting the various options for the game.

Finally, the middle mouse button (or the escape key) can be used to skip automatic sequences or to have the player character skip to their destination while walking. However, this option should be used with some caution – not only is important information conveyed though some of these sequences, they also

add to the narrative, and so it is highly recommended that players allow these to play out at least once before considering skipping.

Unusually, the camera through which the player views the world is not fixed with respect to the player character; rather it is moved and oriented separately, using either the keyboard or mouse (or a combination thereof). This has one major advantage: the camera moves much faster than the characters walk, and so it allows the player to explore their environment at a comfortable speed without resorting to having characters who move with unnatural speed. When an action is performed having left the player character well behind, that character often walks into view as if they had been standing just out of view, a very nice feature that can remove a number of potentially boring waits while Gabriel or Grace walks to the point of interest.

However, this camera system does have its flaws. It is entirely possible to fly through an area and miss something worth noting, especially small items in close quarters. For this reason it is sometimes worth examining areas and objects carefully before concluding that all available actions of interest in an area have been taken.

Since the locations of the game lie not only within Rennes-le-Château but in the surrounding area, the protagonists engage in some small amount of travel. This is executed quite well via an area map which shows all known locations that might be of interest at the time. When the mouse cursor is placed over one such, it acquires a soft white halo to indicate its selection, and a left mouse button click on the location has Gabriel or Grace travel there all but instantly (aside, that is, from a brief pause as the new location is loaded).

The majority of the puzzles are investigative, involving the various characters in and around Rennes-le-Château. Most have their secrets, for good or ill, and discovering these secrets, and the connections between a number of the characters, forms a large part of the storyline. Much of this lies with the conversations between Gabriel, Grace, and those that they encounter. Other, less direct methods make up the means for another large part of Gabriel and Grace's discoveries: conversations overheard – or intentionally eavesdropped upon – trailing someone unseen, bearing witness to events intended to be kept hidden, searching for fingerprints, and much more. The result is an excellent atmosphere of mystery and investigation, although without the feel of an over-

regimented official investigation – Gabriel's methods are intuitive, opportunistic, and often unbound by legal concerns.

Oftentimes these puzzles are at least in part inventory-based, involving the use of items that either Gabriel or Grace has discovered in their explorations, sometimes in rather creative ways. While these are for the most part logical and good, there are one or two examples of inventory puzzles that some might consider to be a little more unrealistic than the setting suggests.

Like Gabriel, Grace faces a number of inventory-based and investigative puzzles, but while Gabriel's side of the investigation does have a few logic puzzles, these are to a much greater extent Grace's province. Indeed, the most outstanding puzzle of the game (to my mind, at least), the extensive, fascinating and multi-part *Le Serpent Rouge* puzzle, is a logic puzzle that Grace is faced with, based on an intriguing and mysterious document – *Le Serpent Rouge* – that Grace encounters. In fact the *Le Serpent Rouge* puzzle stands out in my mind as a favourite puzzle, not only from within this game, but in general. It is extensive without becoming tedious, involved, and both creatively and intelligently crafted.

Both supporting and being an integral part of these logic puzzles is the aforementioned SIDNEY. Words, phrases and concepts that arise during the investigation can be researched via searches of SIDNEY's database, and doing so can provide important clues to the puzzles of the game, advance the story and provide informative background to the concepts and organisations that form part of the rich weave of Gabriel Knight 3. At times either Gabriel or Grace will encounter either images or texts relevant to the investigation; again SIDNEY shows its worth, analysing these and extracting hidden geometries or encoded messages, which can then be used in subsequent puzzles. SIDNEY can even find anagrams and translate text and audio. Overall SIDNEY's design and usefulness are excellent; my only (minor) complaint regarding it being that the bars used for scrolling long pages are not always as easy to interact with as they perhaps should be.

A final set of puzzles worth noting is the sequence found directly before the final confrontation. These take the form of physical logic puzzles, seeing Gabriel navigate a series of deathtraps using logic. To aid him he has a two-way earpiece connecting him to Grace, who is able to provide hints to the challenges that he faces. The puzzles themselves make for a good end-game, being creative and at times clever, and make good use of the three-dimensional

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environment available to them. They are also, however, quite deadly (in some cases horribly so), and in a few cases may prove frustrating until the means to overcoming them is determined. Should he die, however, the player is presented with a death screen, and given the options of retrying the sequence that proved deadly (by returning to a relatively safe point just before it), restoring a saved game, or quitting.

Just as she has a more active role in the game, Grace has a more active presence (albeit remotely) in this end-game than in either of the two previous games (save the very last scene of Gabriel Knight 2), and this, together with the fusion of logic and physicality in these final puzzles, can perhaps be seen as symbolic of the far more harmoniously symbiotic relationship between Gabriel and Grace than in their previous encounters with supernatural danger.

Overall, Gabriel Knight 3 is an excellent game. From a story that easily betters on the previous two games (which were themselves very good indeed in terms of narrative) to beautiful artwork and stirring music, the creativity and intelligence behind this game shows. The 3D graphics are very good, albeit perhaps held back a little by the technology of the time, and suit the game very well. There are a few puzzles that might call for slight leaps of logic, but for the most part these are the exceptions rather than the rule, I feel, and the puzzles are overall very good. The game has a good duration that fits the story well, feeling neither rushed nor padded, and is one that I would certainly recommend, especially to those with interests in the supernatural, secret societies, or mystery. Additionally, the introduction is told via a graphic novel which, while not perfect to my eye, is nevertheless a very good and fitting introduction to the story.

Final score: 95/100

Developer: Sierra Studios	Minimum System Requirements:
Publisher: Sierra Studios	Windows® 95/98
Platform: PC	Pentium® 233+ MHz (166MHz with a 3D
Genre: Adventure	accelerator with 4+ MB RAM)
Release Date: 1999	32 MB RAM
Grade: 95/100	SVGA Graphics Card in High Color (16-bit)
	Windows® Compatible Soundcard
	4x CD-ROM Drive
	Keyboard, mouse, speakers

Tex Murphy: The Pandora Directive

PC Review by Ugur Sener

The year is 2043. It is the San Francisco of the near future, a city that still bears the burdens of the third World War. As speeders fly over the buildings and the city lights glimmer, it seems like just another ordinary night. But that is hardly the case for the young woman lying dead on her bed. The vicious killer rummages through her bedroom. Dressed completely in black and wearing a mask to cover his face, the killer is desperately trying to find something. It must be something extremely important. So important that a college student had to lose her life over it.
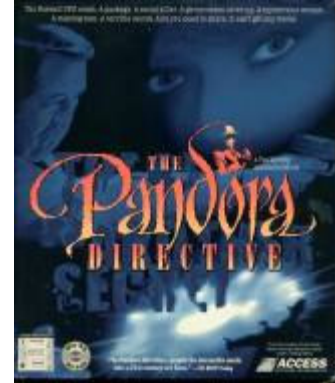
A few nights later, on a different side of the town, Private investigator Tex Murphy is at his favorite diner, the Brew & Stew. As the detective talks to his friend Chelsee, a gentleman walks into the restaurant. It is not long before the stranger sends a drink to Tex's table. It turns out Gordon Fitzpatrick might be in need of the detective's services.

It sounds like a fairly simple investigation. Fitzpatrick is trying to locate an old friend called Dr. Thomas Malloy. Seeing his former colleague's picture on the newspaper has inspired Gordon to find the scientist. Through some research, Fitzpatrick has already discovered that Malloy was most recently working at San Francisco Technical University. Unfortunately, even with the picture, Gordon has been unable to obtain any useful information from faculty members or other students. That is until he received a curious phone call from a student named Sandra who apparently knew Malloy under a different name.

Fitzpatrick attempts to meet Sandra to obtain additional information. Unfortunately, the young woman never shows up for the meeting. Gordon has a single lead left to find his friend. Malloy's last official address is at the Ritz Hotel, the very same building where Tex has his office. Yet Gordon is worried. He fears for Sandra and Malloy's lives. A dark mystery surrounds Malloy's disappearance. It will be up to Tex Murphy to get to the bottom of it.

The fourth game in the Tex Murphy series, The Pandora Directive from Access Software tells a remarkably engaging story. Without a doubt among the strongest elements of the game, the story has humble beginnings, but with interesting characters and a number of plot twists, it elevates into a memorable experience. Even at the outset of the adventure, something about Fitzpatrick's words immediately draws you in and raises your curiosity. Why exactly is Gordon looking for a friend he has not seen in twenty years? Is this simply the eccentricity of an old man or does the gentleman have ulterior motives? Why is Malloy so hard to locate in the first place? Why was he working at the university under a different name?

As you get into the game and start discovering some clues, the plot gradually thickens. The Pandora Directive does an excellent job of giving players a solid setting and some direction from the very beginning. Once you start getting into the mystery however, you will quickly realize there is much more to the game than a simple missing person mystery. Different characters gradually become involved, each with their own private agendas and motives. The investigation takes many twists and turns before you reach the end of the game. The Pandora Directive is about government conspiracies, the abuse of authority, and about unlocking secrets buried in time. Yet there is also a personal side to the story. Critical to the progress of the game, the interaction with other characters not only provides opportunities for discovering a number of details, but also reveals the human side of Tex Murphy. The Pandora Directive offers a very solid storyline that should appeal to science-fiction and detective mystery fans alike.

Just like the previous chapter in the series, The Pandora Directive is brought to life by real actors in full-motion video. The game has quite a large cast of rather colorful characters. A number of Tex's friends and neighbors from Under a Killing Moon are back to assist the detective or give him a hard time and in general make his life more difficult. While it is not necessary to have played any other Tex Murphy game to follow the storyline in The Pandora Directive, familiarity with some of the characters will most likely

make the experience more pleasant. But there is a whole host of new characters Tex meets as part of his investigation. There is Crazy Gary constantly preaching about his vegetarian religion to his imaginary followers. The new club that has opened just down the street from Tex's office brings us the attractive singer Emily and her overprotective boss Gus Leach. As you get deeper into the investigation and start uncovering the underlying mystery, additional characters get involved with their own unique agendas and motives. The diversity of characters goes a long way towards keeping players interested.

The quality of acting in The Pandora Directive is noticeably better than Under a Killing Moon. The actors playing the returning characters seem to be more comfortable in their roles. The actors portraying the new characters seem to be in tune with their roles. While you will not see a shining example of drama in The Pandora Directive, the acting is for the most part fairly convincing and manages to immerse players into the game. Especially as the adventure proceeds and as you get to know the characters a little better, you might find yourself fully absorbed into the game's highly interesting and imaginative world.

The Pandora Directive is played from a first-person perspective. The game features two separate modes for moving Tex and interacting with objects in the environment. In the movement mode, pushing the mouse forward makes Tex walk in the direction he is facing. The speed at which you move the mouse forward determines how fast Tex will walk. To turn around, players have to move the mouse to the right or to the left. It is also possible to make Tex look up and down using the arrow keys, which is essential for spotting some inventory items. Finally, players can make Tex crouch or tiptoe.

A tap on the space key activates the interactive mode. While this mode is selected, players can click on objects to examine them. Inventory items can be picked up, certain devices can be turned on or off, and some objects can be moved with simple mouse clicks. While having to switch between the movement and interactive modes might sound like a hassle, it should still be fairly easy to get used to the game's interface. Much of the interaction with the environment occurs through the mouse and players do not have to worry about learning an overly complex keyboard layout. After a few minutes of playing the game, many players will probably be already used to switching between the two modes.

The inventory appears as a paginated list of items on the top right section of the screen. In order to use an item, players have to click on the use button on the

game's interface and select an object from the list. The examine button brings up a close-up view of the selected item. Tex will often provide a detailed description of the item when you examine it. He might even manipulate the item in some way that will allow you to use it. You will also be able to read the contents of documents you might find. Some of the items will contain puzzles. Once gain, the examine button allows you to take a closer look at the object so you can attempt to solve the puzzle. Finally, clicking on the combine button brings up thumbnail pictures of the items in your inventory. Through this view, you can use items on one another to create new items.

You will be exploring various interesting locations as part of your investigation. The Pandora Directive features a number of venues around Tex's neighborhood that players will remember from Under a Killing Moon. However, things have changed in Chandler Ave. since Tex's previous adventure. While a couple of old

locations are closed down, many new areas have been added. The flashy nightclub Fuchsia Flamingo is the most notable addition. There are also alleyways and sewer tunnels that were not accessible in Under a Killing Moon. But there is far more to see in The Pandora Directive than Chandler Ave.

Tex's adventure will take him into several different buildings spread around San Francisco. The most interesting locations however, are outside the city limits. Tex will have to travel quite far from his office before he can get to the bottom of the mystery. The Pandora Directive offers players a considerable number of environments to explore packed with important clues as well as small details that make the investigation very colorful.

The map feature has been improved from Under a Killing Moon to make it easier to travel between available locations. The places you can visit are grouped into three main categories. There are a number of locations around Tex's office that are listed as part of the Chandler Ave. category. Places in the greater San Francisco area are listed as a separate category. Finally, locations outside the city can be viewed through a map of North America. Once you click on the travel button, you can select your destination from a map of Chandler Ave., San Francisco, or North America. If the location includes several rooms, you will be occasionally able to select the specific room you wish to visit. This saves a great deal of time as you hop back and forth between places.

The developers have also tried to alleviate the burden of switching discs. Since the game ships on a mighty six CD's, you will have to do a fair amount of disc swapping before you finish The Pandora Directive. However, the developers

have tried to group parts of the game on individual discs to minimize swapping. For instance, a number of times during the adventure, you will have to call other characters on Tex's video phone. Chances are, when you call one of these characters to ask about a topic, you will also want to call the others to ask the same question in hopes of getting additional details. As such, it helps that all phone conversations are recorded on the same disc. In addition, the locations that are on the same disc as the one currently in your CD-ROM drive are marked with a red cross on your travel map. So if you need to interrogate a number of people or revisit certain locations, you can start with the ones on the current disc to minimize the amount of time lost by switching CD's.

Interaction with other characters occurs in several different ways. Players will get many opportunities to ask questions directly to other characters. When you choose to interrogate a character by clicking on the "Ask about…" button, a list of topics will appear on the top right portion of the screen. Clicking on the listed topics, you can hear what the other character knows about them. If the person you are interrogating has valuable information to offer, additional topics may become available on the list. You may even receive inventory items as a result of your diligent questioning. It is also possible to ask characters questions about the items in your inventory using the "Offer from inventory method."

On many occasions, players will be given a series of answer options in response to a question or comment from another character. The responses you choose typically determine what kind of approach Tex will use in order to get information out of the other character. You will dictate how pleasant Tex will be throughout the conversation. In Under a Killing Moon and Overseer, the ability to choose Tex's responses only has an impact on the current conversation. In The Pandora Directive however, your choices are far more important.

Depending on how you treat other characters, it is possible to put Tex on one of three different paths during the adventure. If you are kind and thoughtful towards other characters, Tex will end up on the Mission Street path. Successfully getting on this path includes settling your debts with other characters and treating Tex's love interest Chelsee properly. You also need to make sure your responses are in general polite and respectful. If you choose the most insulting and disrespectful responses, you end up on the Boulevard of Broken Dreams path. You have to play Tex as a selfish and rude character. Knowing the detective from the other games in the series, the Boulevard path does seem awkward for

Murphy. After all, his deeds in Under a Killing Moon alone demonstrates that he is thoughtful and concerned about doing the right thing. However, it still stands to reason that the detective could be disillusioned and extremely bitter after years of struggling through life and being broke. And since the decision is up to the players, you can always stay away from the Boulevard path if you feel it is not appropriate for Tex. The third and final path is Lombard Street. Somewhere in between the Mission Street and Boulevard paths, here you play Tex as more of a neutral character. For instance, you may get a few things right with some of your friends, but treat some other characters poorly.

The path selected by your decisions determines the ending of the game. If you treat the other characters well and always try to take the high road, you will end up with a more positive ending. If you play Tex as a total jerk however, you will get a much darker ending. It is great that the multiple endings are not dependent on some arbitrary choice you make at the end of the game. You have to plan your progress through the adventure and choose your answers carefully in you want to get to each of the different endings. In addition to your how you structure your responses in regular conversations, you will also be faced with a handful of critical decisions throughout the adventure. How you choose to act may play a huge factor in the ending you get to see. The three different paths leading to multiple endings gives Tex Murphy: The Pandora Directive a great deal of replay value.

However, it is worth noting that the path leading to all the different endings is not entirely clear. For instance, my first time through The Pandora Directive, I was convinced that Tex had to be on the Mission Street path. Much to my surprise, ended up with a Lombard Street ending. As it turned out, one of the critical conversations could go in two distinct but equally positive ways. However, the events triggered at the end of one path hurts Tex's relationship with a key character. The second path leads to a much more pleasant cut scene, which makes a great deal of difference between the "best" ending of the game and a Lombard Street ending. As such, the path to each of the different endings is not always entirely clear. Players are encouraged to experiment with different options and see how the events unfold as a result of your actions. Even if you do not get an entirely different ending, you may find that a number of critical events can unfold in several different ways, giving you an incentive to try out all the options.

On occasion, it is also difficult to figure out what Tex is actually going to say when you choose a dialog option. During conversations, the choices presented

do not show the exact wording Tex will use. As such, you might choose what seems to be a polite response only to hear harsh words coming out of Tex's mouth. For the most part, the dialog options give you enough of a hint on how Tex will word his response. As you progress through the adventure, you will also begin gaining insight into the conversation patterns, which should make it easier to make your decisions. However, it would have still been nicer to see the exact wording of Tex's response to avoid surprises. Thankfully, the game does have a feature that greatly alleviates the problem. You can save the game during conversations. As such, if you are unsure as to how events will unfold as a result of your choices, you can save the game and try the conversation again until you are satisfied with the results.

The Pandora Directive has a solid number of entertaining puzzles. As expected, some of the challenges are inventory-based. Tex will have to combine items or use them on other objects in the environment to uncover important clues or gain access to other areas. The game is usually fair in the placement of inventory items. If you carefully examine each location and remember to look inside each drawer, you should not have too much trouble.

There are also a good number of other types of puzzles. You will have to figure out how to get past an electronic lock, break into a safe after decoding the number combination, and determine how to gain access to a couple of computer files. Many of the other puzzles feature a Mayan theme, which is in conjunction with the main storyline. If you haven't already become familiar with it by now, you'll get a chance to learn about the Mayan numbering system and familiarize yourself with their highly sophisticated calendar. There is one slider puzzle, but it has been specifically designed to be fairly easy to solve. Many of the pieces are identical and can be used interchangeably, making it fairly simple to manipulate the puzzle. One of the puzzles towards the end of the game is sound-based and involves matching tones. However, even if you are completely tone-deaf, it is still possible to overcome the challenge with a simple trial and error approach. There are also several jigsaw-like puzzles. While the developers have gotten quite creative with some of these puzzles, the game might have been better off if some of them had been replaced with altogether different types of challenges.

There is one maze that players have to navigate towards the end of the game. But the developers have obviously thought of players who do not like to go through labyrinths. First of all, the structure is not overly big and it should not be extremely challenging to learn how to navigate it. This is especially a good thing

because you have to find items throughout the maze and not just reach the exit on the other side. It is also possible to obtain a complete map of the maze before you get too far into it, which makes the navigation much simpler. But more importantly, some of the most entertaining puzzles of the game are available in rooms spread throughout the maze. This provides a nice break from the task of finding your path. It also helps divide the maze into smaller sections, making it easier to traverse. Overall, there may be a couple of puzzles in The Pandora Directive that may not appeal to the tastes of individual players. However, the game is quite lengthy and it does feature a considerable number of unique puzzles. As such, most adventure gamers can expect to find a solid dose of entertaining puzzles throughout the course of the investigation.

There are several ways in which Tex can die during the adventure. A few sequences are timed and it is possible to make some fatal mistakes. It would have been very nice if the game allowed players to try the sequence again right after Tex meets his untimely demise. However, players are required to start from a saved game with the exception of the very last puzzle in the game. Fortunately, these situations are relatively few in number and it is usually fairly easy to figure out the correct thing to do. More importantly, it is always very clear that Tex is about to get into a dangerous situation. As such, players will have a chance to save their games in the event that they do make a mistake.

It is possible to play The Pandora Directive in two different modes. At the beginning of a new game, players are asked to choose between the Game player mode and the Entertainment mode. The Entertainment mode is intended to appeal to beginners who are going through the game for the first time. Fewer number of points are available throughout the adventure, but you are given access to the game's excellent hint system. In addition, some of the puzzles are removed to make the game a little easier to complete. However, all key components of the storyline are still present and you will not miss out on the good stuff.

The Game player mode on the other hand is intended for more determined players who are looking for a greater challenge and who are prepared to solve the entire case on their own. While many of the same puzzles are present in both the Gamer and Entertainment modes, the Game player mode features some extra content. There are a few small additional places to explore and some extra puzzles to overcome. In addition, when you attempt many of the puzzles in the

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Game player mode, you can potentially earn bonus points. Some puzzles feature a time limit. If you manage to solve them in the allotted time, you earn quite a number of extra points. Other puzzles challenge you to complete them in a specific number of moves to gain some additional points.

The point system in The Pandora Directive is not only used to give you a score at the end of the game. Tex will start the adventure with an advance check from his client Gordon Fitzpatrick. Players can use this money to pay off Tex's debts and purchase some items Tex will need throughout his adventure. The initial sum of money is not quite enough to cover all of your expenses and debts. Fortunately, there are a few things you can do to get your hands on some extra cash. If you are really running short on cash however, the point system is your last resort. It is possible to convert your points into dollars. While this is without a doubt unrealistic, it does offer you an easy way out and keeps allows you to proceed with the adventure if you do not want to waste time looking for money.

The Pandora Directive features a great hint system that might help you out on several occasions. The hint system is only accessible during the Entertainment mode. However, if you started the game on Game player mode, it is possible to switch to the entertainment mode to gain access to the hint system. Once you switch to the Entertainment mode however, you are stuck with it until the end of the adventure.

The hint system works by listing topics that correspond to Tex's investigation. Depending on where you are at with the adventure, different categories will be available. For instance, if you are trying to gain access to a specific location, it will be listed as a topic. Once you select a category, you will get to see a list of actions you need to perform to complete the task. Any actions you have already completed will be visible. You will be able to spend some of the points you earned to see view the next available action on the list. As such, instead of giving you the complete answer, the hint system only shows you the next step. When you complete that step, you can try to proceed on your own. If you still do not know what to do however, you can click on the next available action to see how you should proceed. Thus, if you are hopelessly stuck, the hint system does give you a way to eventually obtain the solution and proceed with the investigation.

However, it is important to note that while the hint system will guide you through the investigation and help you overcome the inventory-based challenges, you are on your own when you are solving the puzzles. You will be offered a hint that

should offer you some help with the puzzle, but you will not find detailed step-by-step solutions. Instead, the game tells you what a cheat that can be used to skip the puzzle, but resorting to these will reduce your score significantly. If you want to actually solve the puzzle, you have to do it alone or consult a walkthrough.

Overall Tex Murphy: The Pandora Directive is an absolute triumph. The game has a very engaging storyline that pulls you in from the opening cinematics and maintains your interest throughout the adventure. The events escalate with a number of good plot twists to keep players guessing. A great mystery about government conspiracies, hidden secrets, and an ancient civilization is nicely spiced up with a touch of humor and romance. There are many likeable characters with their strange quirks and secrets to make the experience more colorful. Entertaining puzzles across a myriad of locations promise to keep you occupied for many hours. As if that wasn't enough, the game also has multiple endings and your decisions play a huge part in the outcome. There are a couple of minor issues here and there, but they do not by any means significantly take away from the experience. The great storyline, excellent atmosphere, interesting characters, and diverse locations add up to make a truly amazing adventure. The Pandora Directive is without a doubt one of the very best adventure games I have ever played. If you are looking for adventure games with lots of character interaction and an emphasis on solid storylines, the Tex Murphy series is most certainly worth a look. But The Pandora Directive in particular is a very strong title that adventure gamers should not miss. It remains an extremely enjoyable ride years after its release and promises to keep you occupied for many hours.

The final grade is 96/100.

Developer: Access Software	**Minimum System Requirements:**
Publisher: Access Software	486/66 MHz CPU (Pentium® recommended)
Platform: PC	Windows® 95 or DOS 6.0
Genre: Adventure	8 MB RAM installed (16 MB recommended)
Release Date: 1996	Sound board (supports all major boards)
Grade: 96/100	2X CD-ROM (4X recommended)
	20 MB available hard disk space (30 MB recommended)
	Keyboard, mouse, and speakers

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The 11th Hour

PC Review by Ugur Sener

Investigative reporter Carl Denning Jr. sits in his living room staring at the TV. The news report is speaking of Robin Morales, the producer for his TV show Case Unsolved. Morales had mysteriously disappeared while conducting an investigation into the strange happenings at a mansion in upstate New York. Bizarre tales of disappearances surround the mansion that was constructed by the toy manufacturer Henry Stauf.

The toymaker was known as little more than an eccentric man. Guided by visions he received in his dreams, Stauf's lineup of toys had been incredibly famous at one time. But it all ended shortly after the appearance of a deadly virus that only seemed to target children. Henry Stauf sealed the doors of his mansion, seemingly choosing a life of solitude.

Yet one night Stauf invited six guests to his mansion. Each of them had a different motive; each of them had a different secret desire. The guests came with great hope, but strange events took place at the mansion on that fateful night. All of the guests and Henry Stauf himself simply disappeared.

Even as Robin Morales started her investigation, the mansion stood empty. It seemed to be abandoned and forgotten. Crumbling into dust after the mysterious disappearance of its owner… But it also seemed so dark and foreboding as though it was possessed by strange forces. Perhaps Stauf had not completely left the building. Perhaps the mansion existed to fulfill a dark purpose.

Morales started the investigation with great reservations. Strange stories had been told about the mansion. It did not seem to be a safe place to explore. Yet it was her job to unravel the mystery. She wanted to find out the truth behind this cryptic mansion in the small town of Harley. She was going to somehow pry the information out of the reluctant residents of the town. Unfortunately, she never returned with answers. She never delivered a great story for the show.

Watching the news broadcast on TV, Carl Denning cannot help but feel guilty. Morales had been his lover. And the couple had not exactly parted on good

terms before Robin took off to investigate the mansion. Carl had been a total jerk and he may have lost all opportunity to make things right.

Suddenly, the doorbell rings. Carl hurries up to the front door only to catch a glimpse of a delivery van. Looking down, he sees a curious package containing a portable computer labeled as GameBook. As you he tries to get the device to work, Morales appears on the screen. Her clothes are torn and she appears to be lightly injured. But it is the tone of her voice that really touches Carl. Robin is desperate for help.

The image vanishes as soon as it appears. But it is clear what Carl must do. It is time to go to that mansion. Morales must be in grave danger and she needs Carl's help. Jumping on his fancy motorcycle, Carl takes off for town of Harley. Perhaps he will be able to overcome the evil mansion and rescue his producer.

The game begins as Carl enters the mansion. The GameBook beeps as you receive a cryptic message from Stauf himself. What is going on here? How can Stauf be around after so many years? Is this some twisted joke or is an evil being truly at work here? As Stauf mercilessly begins taunting Carl, it is clear that this will be a very long night at the mansion.

The 11th Hour is Trilobyte's sequel to their highly successful adventure game called The 7th Guest. Originally released in 1995, the game is a product of three years of development. While attempting to respond to complaints about the original game's incoherent and unclear plot, The 11th Hour gives players a chance to return to Henry Stauf's mansion. Given the fairly interesting premise of the game and the possibility of discovering a whole new batch of devious puzzles, The 11th Hour initially seems like it is going to be a fun game. Unfortunately, The 11th Hour is one of those games that never quite reaches its full potential. Some extremely frustrating gameplay mechanics combined with a few additional problems ends up making the game a rather disappointing experience.

Structurally, The 11th Hour bears a remarkably close resemblance to The 7th Guest. The entire game takes place inside Stauf's mansion. The mouse is used to navigate the mansion. Just like The 7th Guest, the default icon is a skeletal hand. A beckoning skeletal hand is used to indicate that you can move in the specified direction. A throbbing brain icon is used to indicate a puzzle waiting to be solved. When you are working on a puzzle, an eyeball icon is used to denote pieces that can be moved. Once you select a piece, if it can be moved in more

than one direction, the icon will turn into a throbbing eye, prompting you to choose the destination.

At the beginning, only a small number of rooms are accessible and there is a puzzle to solve in each of them. As you solve the puzzles, more rooms gradually open up offering a new batch of challenges. Most of the rooms accessible in The 7th Guest have been recreated. However, since many years have passed after the events of the first game, the mansion is now old and crumbling. As such, the environments look somewhat different.

But the puzzle featured in each room is not all you have to worry about as you go through the mansion. You also need to deal with the game's "Treasure Hunt" sequences. As soon as you step into the mansion, Stauf will send a riddle to your GameBook. To "solve" the riddle, you have to click on one of the numerous objects spread throughout the house. The riddle Stauf sends to your GameBook provides the clue for finding the correct object you need to click. The riddles are often fairly obscure and many of them should require quite a bit of thinking before you can decipher their meaning. Some of them include decoding an encrypted message while others include anagrams. You will have to think about phonograms or try to come up with synonyms that might have another meaning.

Even when you decipher the riddle however, finding the right object will not always be easy. There are a considerable number of clickable objects around the house from the very beginning of the game. As you solve puzzles and open up additional rooms, even more objects will become available. You will have to try to remember what items are available in each room as the game does have players revisit rooms to find the correct object to solve a "Treasure Hunt."

The story is gradually unraveled as you solve the "Treasure Hunt" sequences. After finding the answer to many of these riddles, a short cinematic sequence becomes available for view in the GameBook. The 11th Hour is divided into chapters that represent individual hours of the time you will spend at the mansion. Once you solve a series of riddles and puzzles, the game provides you to a final riddle that leads you to a mini-game. You play these mini-games against Stauf himself. When you manage to win the game, the current hour ends and a new one begins. You also get to view a compiled version of all the

cinematic sequences that were revealed during the hour. Some additional scenes are added to what you have already seen to provide a fairly detailed recounting of Robin's investigation.

The storyline in The 11Hour is much more coherent than what was offered in the previous game. The details of Robin's investigation are communicated in a fairly clear manner. Players will likely have many questions during the early parts of the game as they are shown clips with multiple characters that have no apparent connection. However, as you continue to solve the puzzles, things will become quite clear and you will begin to understand what exactly is going on at the mansion. Players do get to make a decision at the very end of the game that determines the outcome of the adventure. While it is by no means exceptionally deep or detailed, the storyline in The 11th Hour should at least manage to keep you interested throughout the game. And while you may not find the answer to every single question you have about the cut scenes that appear throughout the game, you should still be left with a pretty good understanding of the core plot.

However, it is worth noting that the structure of the story can frustrate some players. The vast majority of the plot develops through visions into the past. As such, you may get the feeling that the character you are controlling takes on a secondary role in the game. It can also feel awkward that visions of Robin's investigation are magically getting downloaded into the GameBook for no apparent reason. But then again, The 11th Hour is not the kind of game to be asking too many questions. After all, in order to enjoy the game in any way, you have to come to terms with the fact that solving puzzles opens up rooms in the mansion and clicking on random objects progresses the storyline. The absurdity of it all certainly does not result in the most atmospheric and immersive game you will encounter, but it at least seems to hold together within the scope of the adventure.

Much like The 7th Guest, the highlight of The 11th Hour is the puzzles. There is a good number of entertaining puzzles to keep adventure gamers occupied. A considerable chunk of the puzzles are focused around rearranging objects in some form or fashion. For instance, one of the early puzzles in the game challenges players to arrange the books on a shelf in a specific sequence by using a limited number of moves. Another puzzle will have you switch the places of four knights on a partial chess board. Later in the game, you will encounter a puzzle that involves a toy train. You have to use the locomotive to rearrange letters by pulling or pushing them one at a time across a small section of tracks. Of course there are other types of puzzles as well. There is the obligatory slider puzzle and a couple of puzzles where you have to deduce the correct sequence

in which to objects. While many of the puzzles can be quite entertaining, the game could have used a little more variety.

What truly hurts the game play experience in The 11th Hour is the "Treasure Hunts." The problem begins with the very concept. It's not just very fun to run around the mansion looking for a specific object. All you have to do is click on the object. Many of them are not part of the storyline in any kind of significant manner. You do not take them as inventory items to use later. They are no more or less than the answer to the riddle. The arbitrariness of the exercise disrupts the game's atmosphere and takes away the feeling of immersion. Regardless of how much you try to justify the existence of these sequences with the overall tone and format of the game, by the time you reach the end of the game, their tediousness definitely hurts the fun factor.

The actual execution of the "Treasure Hunts" is rather problematic as well. Having to remember the different objects around the house is a chore. And if you happen to forget where things are located, you are likely to find yourself wondering from one room to the next until you stumble upon the object you are supposed to click. Sometimes, the object you have to track down is not clickable at all. Items in many of the rooms become clickable only after you solve a puzzle. Of course you can easily remedy this problem by making sure you solve all the available puzzles first. But when several rooms with unsolved puzzles open up at the same time, you end up having a number of objects in each room that might be the answer.

The fact that the riddles can be quite difficult does not make your job any easier either. Of course there is nothing inherently wrong with a game featuring some challenging puzzles. In fact managing to overcome challenging puzzles without consulting a walkthrough can often lead to a welcome sense of accomplishment. However, in The 11th Hour the challenging nature of the riddles can inadvertently mislead you into drawing the wrong conclusions. You can easily find yourself running through the house looking for an object that is not even the answer. Since the whole exercise already feels arbitrary and rather unnecessary, getting confused about the answer becomes all the more frustrating.

The game does feature a hint system to make things a little easier. A mysterious "techno-psychic ally" is able to contact you through the GameBook. You can get tips by clicking on the "Help" button on the GameBook. If you are in the middle of solving a puzzle, your ally will provide tips that might help you find the solution. She will try to explain the puzzle so you understand its underlying rules. If that is not enough, you can also get your ally to solve the puzzle for you. If you are

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working on a mini-game, your ally will offer to make the next move for you instead of automatically playing the entire game from start to finish. When you are not working on a puzzle, the ally will provide you tips on the current riddle. For instance, she can help you identify and solve the anagrams in the riddles. Through her hints, it will become much easier to determine what object you need to seek around the house. However, she will not tell you exactly where you will find the item. You are still on your own to track it down and click on it.

One important aspect of the help system is that your ally has limited power. The game's manual clearly indicates that she becomes slightly weakened each time you ask for help. Your ally also gets weakened when you click on an incorrect item while trying to solve a "Treasure Hunt." This is supposed to limit the amount of help you can obtain from your ally in the later stages of the game. However, if you can manage to solve the mini-games and the puzzles on your own, you seem to be able to get all the help you need on the riddles. Similarly, if a couple of the mini-games or the puzzles are giving you too much trouble, you can have your ally solve them without having to worry too much about the consequences.

The 11th Hour has a map feature that helps players keep track of their progress through the mansion. The map marks the rooms in which you have solved the puzzles, giving you an idea as to where you need to go in order to find the next puzzle. However, the developers have refrained from providing what would have been the biggest benefit of having the map. When you are going through The 11th Hour for the first time, you cannot click on the rooms on the map to instantly travel to them. As such, you have to waste time walking through the corridors moving from one room to the next. Yet surprisingly, when you complete the game, you are allowed to revisit each room by clicking on them through the map. The idea is to give you easy access to each of the puzzles. But once you complete the game, unless you just loved some of the puzzles, there will be little use for this feature. It is a shame it was not provided during the adventure to save players some time.
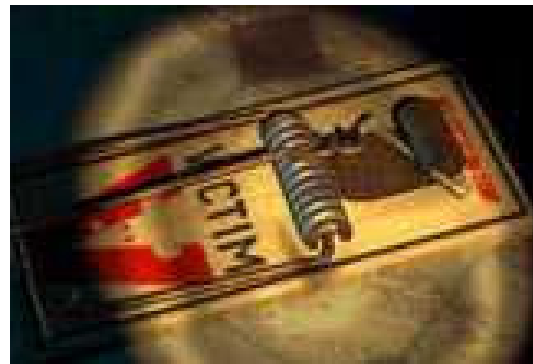
The mini-games you get to play against Stauf can also be frustrating from time to time. The developers must have heard the complaints about the difficulty of the microscope game in The 7th Guest. None of the mini-games in The 11th Hour feature as tough an AI opponent as the one players had to face in The 7th Guest.

However, that does not mean any of the mini-games are a walk in the park. Your opponent still makes rather intelligent moves and tries to take advantage of your mistakes. Winning the games generally takes a good strategy and a solid understanding of the rules.

Unfortunately, the mini-games are not really on par with some of the creative puzzles featured in The 7th Guest or The 11th Hour. While it might be fun to play Connect Four or Pente against old man Stauf, well-crafted puzzles would have probably been more appropriate as the ultimate challenge of each chapter. In addition, since the AI opponent is not exactly easy to beat, the games can easily become frustrating if you end up having to play them multiple times.

In the end, The 11th Hour is little more than a frustrating experience. It is very clear that a great deal of effort has gone into the game. Eleven years after its release, the graphics still look quite pleasant. Navigating the mansion is a simple matter. There are a number of puzzles that should be quite entertaining to solve. But the game is lacking in too many other aspects. While the storyline is more coherent and clearer than the previous game, it is somewhat lacking in depth. There are a number of fun puzzles, but the mini-games you play against Stauf can easily become frustrating. Despite the presence of some cleverly constructed riddles, the "Treasure Hunts" boil down to annoying exercises that test your patience. The game fails to create the kind of atmosphere that draws players in and creates a feeling of immersion. It just feels like a series of puzzles with a number of puzzles thrown in between and a storyline that focuses more on past events than your own actions. Players do not even get to discover new rooms in Stauf's mansion. The 11th Hour will only appeal to players who have truly enjoyed The 7th Guest or those looking to enjoy a few puzzles without regard for the other elements of the game.

Developer: Trilobyte **Publisher:** Virgin Interactive **Platform:** PC **Genre:** Adventure **Release Date:** 1995 **Grade:** 64/100	**Minimum System Requirements:** Windows® 95 or MS-DOS 5.0 486DX2/66 processor (Pentium® recommended) 2x speed CD-ROM drive 8 MB RAM 4 MB hard disk space Sound Blaster, Roland, Media Vision, Gravis Ultrasound, or 100% compatible sound card Local Bus video card capable of displaying thousands of colors Mouse and speakers

Trace Memory

Nintendo DS Review by Erdalion

Unearth conspiracies that will change your view of the world. Find and arrest demented serial killers that threaten the lives of innocents. Confront spirits from other worlds. Fight wars with all manner of creatures, alien or otherwise. Save the world. Save multiple worlds. Save multiple worlds while fighting alien creatures and unearthing conspiracies that... well, you get the idea. What do all the above have in common? They have all been, at one point or another, the main focus of storylines found in adventure games. These themes have in fact become so common that nowadays players may cringe at the mere sight of yet another adventure game with such a storyline. That is where Trace Memory (A.K.A Another Code: Two Memories) comes in.
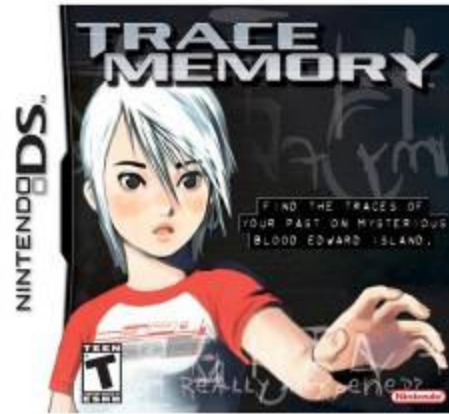
At the heart of its story, Trace Memory is simply the tale of an apparently orphaned fourteen year old girl, Ashley Mizuki Robins, and her journey of finding her father, whom she thought dead for years and who has at last decided to contact her, asking her to meet him in the abandoned island of Blood Edward. However, Ashley's journey is also about finding herself, and about taking that very important first step from childhood to maturity. Sure, it is true that before long you will encounter (and befriend, interestingly enough) a ghost, and also confront not one but two conspiracies, one in the past and one contemporary to our protagonist's time, but when the game takes place in an island called "Blood Edward", did you expect any less? Still, ghost stories and conspiracies are not what this game is about, as the focus of the story remains on young Ashley, and her quest to finally find her father, even if that means undertaking an adventure that would test the courage of grown-ups.

From a technical point of view, the game is quite accomplished, especially for a Nintendo DS game, given that its hardware is not exactly state-of-the-art technology. The graphics are divided in two different parts, two dimensional drawings of the main characters as well as pre-rendered backgrounds make up for the puzzle-solving part of the game, while fully three dimensional graphics are used for the

exploring aspects. As for the graphics themselves, they are for the most part really beautiful, since both the two dimensional drawings of the characters and the pre-rendered backgrounds are excellent and really add to the game visual quality. The only ever so slightly negative aspect of the graphics are the three dimensional character models and background which are not at the same level of quality as the rest of the visual part of the game, especially when compared to modern PC games, but that is due to the DS's limited hardware and not because of the developers' fault. The music is mostly comprised of moody and almost haunting tunes, which help create the game's somewhat brooding atmosphere but you are unlikely to remember any of them once you have finished the game.

Trace Memory has a very unique style, which is unlike any other game of its kind, even on the same gaming system. When comparing Trace Memory to Phoenix Wright, the other well-known DS adventure, it is easy to see that the two are both unique and still charming in their own rights, as they do not share a lot between them. If we were to make an analogy through human personalities, Phoenix Wright would be more like the extrovert kind of person, with its vibrant personality and an attitude that grabs you from the throat and never lets go, while Trace Memory is the introvert of the two, with a more introspective view of things, and perhaps, as a game, with a deeper meaning. As mentioned before, Ashley's tale is one of self-discovery and of finding the father figure that her life has lacked, with all the repercussions that this may have for our young protagonist. Change, especially abrupt change as the one presented in this story, often leaves behind its marks on people, and that is a recurrent theme in the game. At the end of each of the game's chapters, Ashley reflects back on the events that unfolded during it, in a playable sequence so the game does not become a slide-show, where the player has to answer questions regarding said events as well as Ashley's past. The reason behind this contemplation is Ashley's effort to retain her memories throughout her whole ordeal, and retaining her memories means retaining her personality. Our heroine, despite her young age, has realised that the changes taking place in her life could affect her personality in a fundamental way, to such a degree where she would essentially lose herself. It is this fear of the loss of her identity that makes Ashley cling on to her memories, a very realistic fear for anyone going from childhood to puberty and then on to maturity. The theme of lost identity is also evident on other characters, such as D the ghost's tragic tale and his quest of regaining his memories, and also even with the mystery of who Ashley's real father is, who she imagines him to be and who he actually turns out to be. I could go on and on about how this theme is explored

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in the game, but you are better off experiencing it for yourself, trust me. As you may see, Trace Memory's story emphasises on issues not commonly found in games, especially console games. Due to this, Trace Memory has been somewhat overlooked and dismissed by some as uninteresting, which is really unfair to the game as it provides a different experience to most other representatives of the genre.

Another aspect of the game that adds to its uniqueness is its interface, which effectively combines the features of both first-person and third-person adventure games, all thanks to the dual screens of the DS system. As mentioned above, graphics come in two different styles. On the lower screen, you have the typical third-person representation with you, the player, exploring your surroundings, while on the top screen, whenever you reach a location of interest, the screen changes into a first person view of that location so you can interact with it in more detail. This is also the part where you will be solving puzzles, and they reflect puzzles found both in third-person games, meaning mostly inventory and dialogue puzzles, but also typical first-person adventure game puzzles, such as Myst-like mechanical puzzles. If the sound of the latter type makes you flinch, there is no need to worry. Trace Memory takes full advantage of the DS's touch screen technology, so you can always manipulate objects through the stylus rather than moving a mouse cursor around, and this makes for a more involving procedure, so you should rarely be bored of this sort of puzzles. In fact, thanks to the excellent use of this technology, Trace Memory provides with some actually new styles of puzzles, something really refreshing since puzzles in adventure games have more or less been rehashed over and over again in the last ten years or so. This new style of puzzles involves the player interacting with their environment in a way not possible in a typical PC adventure point and click game, and it definitely makes things more interesting as it forces the player to think outside the box so to speak, given that you cannot hope to solve some puzzles in a typical way. I wish I could provide with actual examples of such puzzles, but in doing so I would spoil their solutions and that is something I want to avoid, since it is really satisfying to solve them on your own. I will say this, however, when you will be asked to remove dust from an object in the game, expect to react as you would in real life, rather than wagging a cursor all over your screen, as you would in a usual adventure game.

However, sadly not everything is of the same high quality in Trace Memory. If there is one major flaw with the game, it is the fact that is really short. It took me

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a little over six hours to finish the game, and did I spend a lot of time exploring my environments and paying attention to every line of dialogue. Of course, I would much rather play a short game that is consistently good throughout than play a game full of tedious parts the only point of which is to make it last longer, but six or seven hours of play time is still on the short side, in the end you are

likely to be left wanting more from the game. Still, once you finish the game, some of the files found throughout are changed to provide more information on the background of the island and its former residents, so that is one incentive to replay the game, something usually missing in adventure games. Another somewhat negative aspect is the fact that during the last part of the game puzzles are almost non-existent, and you are just moving from room to room and watching cutscenes, a problem that plagued Dreamfall as well, though it is not as bad in Trace Memory's case since there is still some interactivity left. That, and also you are likely to be so engrossed in the story by the time you get to the end that you may not care about the lack of puzzles all that much and focus on the story a lot more. Lastly, movement in the exploration parts of the game is limited, as the path that you can take through areas, especially the outdoor ones, is fixed and you cannot stray from it, and thus the actual exploration that you get to do is also limited. This may not be that big a problem for people who like linear games, such as myself, but for people who like to explore their environments in games, it may prove to be a quite annoying issue.

In closing, Trace Memory: Two Memories is a special game, with a touching and emotional story as well as a unique and innovative puzzle system that should make it attractive to both old and new fans of the genre. Moreover, it is also one of the best DS games released to this day, providing solid evidence that adventure games can not only flourish in console systems, but also create new ground for the genre. Developers Cing have already announced that they are working on a new adventure game for the DS system, called "Hotel Dusk: Room 215" and offering a noir-style police story, so hopes are high that they will manage to impress once more.

Developer: Cing
Publisher: Nintendo
Platform: Nintendo DS
Genre: Adventure
Release Date: June 2005
Grade: 91/100

Ben Jordan Case 1: In Search of the Skunk Ape

PC Review by Thaumaturge

Benjamin Jordan is 22, and a recent college graduate in International Relations. But now that he has his degree, he finds that a career in this field is not what he wants to do with his life. Instead, and against the desires of his family, he has decided to enter a world that holds much more interest for him. He has decided to follow his heart and become a freelance paranormal investigator.

His first case begins with a 'phone call from a park ranger in the Florida Everglades. The Paranormal Investigator is called upon to investigate the Skunk Ape, believed to make its lair in the park - and the presumed culprit behind five deaths, each body found with limbs broken, head crushed, and liver torn from the body. The Skunk Ape itself is described as large – seven foot tall – powerful, and, most distinctly, seems to carry with it a foul smell, described as resembling a mixture of rotten eggs, mouldy cheese and dung.

The search for this creature will be Ben Jordan's induction into the world of paranormal investigation – and it will not be a gentle one. The story told is not the best or most complex or ever devised, but it fits the length of the game well, and the writing is decent enough.

The graphics used to depict this story, are, on average, acceptable, if little more. This is not a game whose great strength lies in its graphics; rather they are a flaw to be overlooked in favour of its better elements, although some scenes are to my eye of particularly poor quality. The character portraits used are a little better, but are still not the best ever to grace a screen.

More effective is the music, which is often quite good, suiting the theme and settings of the game well and supporting the atmosphere of each scene effectively.

The player interacts with the game world entirely via the mouse (with the exception of typing in titles for saved games). The player instructs Ben to act by a simple click of the left mouse button, and the nature of the action performed is determined by the mouse cursor at the time. There are available four main cursors, corresponding to the four main types of action that Ben can be told to perform: walking to a spot, using an object, looking at his environment or the objects in it and talking to people, represented by a small Ben in mid-stride, a pointing hand, an eye and a speech bubble containing an exclamation mark, respectively. These cursors can be selected from via either an icon bar at the top of the screen, or by repeated clicks the right mouse button, which causes the mouse cursor to cycle through the available options.

The icon bar at the top of the screen holds another icon associated with interaction with the world, but this does not itself directly alter the mouse cursor. This icon is a representation of a pocket, and clicking on it will open Ben's inventory. In the screen opened are represented all of the items that Ben has in his possession (at least, those relevant to the game), and here the player can examine or select any of them. When selected for use, the item in question becomes a fifth mouse cursor in the form of the selected item, indicating the use of that item on the object or place on which the player clicks (including within the inventory itself, on another inventory item). This new cursor too becomes available via right mouse button clicks, meaning that if an item is selected for use, and another action (such as walking) is performed before its intended use, the inventory need not be opened a second time to use it as the player can simply click the right mouse button until the inventory item cursor reappears.
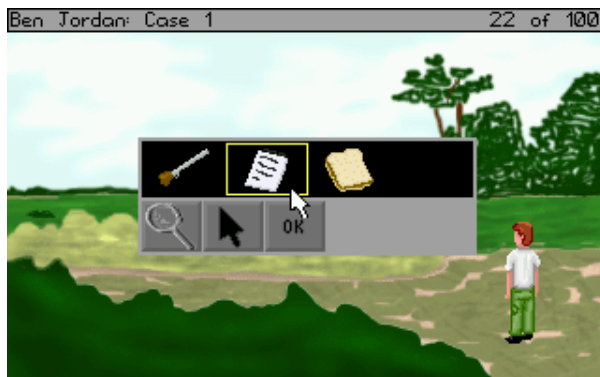
The puzzles are for the most part fairly simple, and while it is not impossible to become stuck problems should in most cases be rare, brief and fairly easily resolved. While points are awarded for discussing important topics with the characters met in the game, these conversations are not, to my mind, complex enough to be termed "puzzles" - simply exhausting all topics should suffice to gain all conversation-related points. Those excluded, the

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puzzles in Case 1: In Search of the Skunk Ape are entirely inventory-based, and solving a given problem takes at most two items, more often only one.

Should the player forget a goal in the game, a notepad has been provided which keeps track important items of information. This is certainly a good idea, although given the brevity and simplicity of the game most players will probably have little cause to make much use of it until, possibly, the later, more complex games in the series.

This first Ben Jordan case is brief: an experienced adventure game player should be able to finish it in half an hour or less. In a longer game, Ben Jordan 1's shortcomings might have been a real hindrance, but in this short opening chapter, I feel that they can be for the most part overlooked. This game and the second can perhaps best be viewed as an introduction to Ben Jordan and his world; while interesting, they seem to me to add little to the overall story arc, other than perhaps establishing of a playable history for Ben Jordan and credit for the character in his world. The major overarching story arc seems rather to begin in earnest with the third case (this is based on events revealed as of the fifth game; it is possible that the events of this first case may become directly relevant to future cases).

Overall Ben Jordan Case 1: In Search of the Skunk Ape is a fun game. While it certainly has its flaws, it functions acceptably as an introduction to the character. While not a game that I feel has much to recommend it in and of itself, I would recommend that players intending to play the series give this game a shot, if only to play all of the series and see where Ben Jordan came from. In addition, it is free, and a fairly small download at around 6.4MB.

Overall Score: 67/100

Developer: MonkeyGames Entertainment (Now Grundislav Games) Publisher: Grundislav Games Platform: PC Genre: Adventure Release Date: 2004 Grade: 67/100	Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP Pentium® 600 MHz 128 MB RAM Video Card Capable of 320x200 or 640x480 in 16-Bit Colour Windows® Compatible Soundcard Keyboard, mouse, speakers (Note: This game may well run on slower machines than listed above)

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# Ben Jordan Case 2: The Lost Galleon of the Salton Sea

PC Review by Thaumaturge

At 22, having just finished college, Ben Jordan realised that a life in the field of his degree – International Relations – was not what he wanted. Instead, and against the wishes of his family, he plunged into the world of paranormal investigation.

His first case called him out to the Florida Everglades, where the mysterious Skunk Ape was the suspected culprit behind five mutilated corpses. When Ben investigated, he discovered that there was more behind the deaths than random predation. His successful resolution (and survival) of the case earned him money on which to live and the start of a reputation for paranormal investigation.

As with Ben's first case, a telephone call summons his aid. His caller this time is Annie, a woman living in the town of Dunesberg, California, calling on the paranomal investigator to find her husband George, who journeyed to the Salton Sea in search of a lost Spanish Galleon and has not returned.
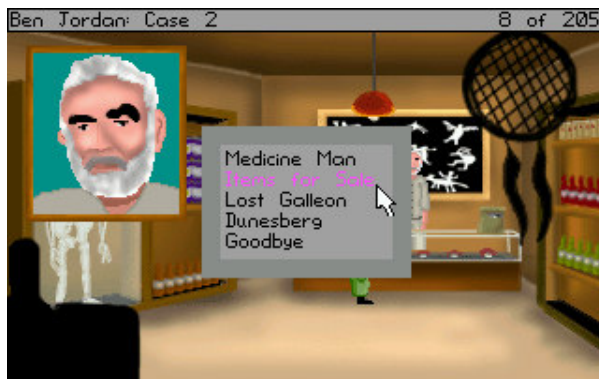
Thus begins Ben's second case as a paranormal investigator. Once he has gathered the local lore on the Lost Galleon and acquired medicine and bandages against poison or injury, Ben will travel out to the Salton sea himself, attempting to discover the fate of Annie's husband...

This story, while still not one that I would likely recommend to the literary halls of fame, does improve over that of the first game in my opinion. Where Ben had little searching to do to uncover the Skunk Ape, he will face a greater challenge in discovering the Lost Galleon – not to mention in leaving it.

The graphics likewise improve over those of the previous game, especially in the quality of some of the backgrounds, although they are nevertheless still not of high quality to my eye. They are once again a flaw that holds this game back;

while they could perhaps be worse, the game would, I daresay, benefit from an improvement in this area.

Once again the graphics are bettered by the music, which once again sets and supports the mood of the scenes well. One tune that particularly stands out in my mind is that used in The Drunken Scorpion, a bar in Dunesberg. This song struck me for being at the same time pleasantly odd (to my ear, at least) and appropriate to the atmosphere of the bar, and is, I feel, a very nice choice for inclusion in this game.

The interface is largely the same as that used in Ben Jordan Case 1, exclusively controlled via the mouse, aside from the typing of names for saved games. The player directs Ben's actions via single clicks of the left mouse button, the nature of that action being primarily determined by the mouse cursor at the time. Once again there are four main cursors, indicating walking to a spot, using an object, looking at objects or places and talking to people, represented by cursors in the form of Ben in mid-stride, a pointing hand, an eye and a speech bubble containing an exclamation mark, respectively. These cursors can be selected via an icon bar at the top of the screen or by repeated clicks of the right mouse button, the latter of which causes the mouse cursor to cycle through its available options. The inventory is accessed via another icon on the icon bar, this one representing a pocket. When the inventory is opened, the player can examine or select any of the items available; selection of an item allows that item to be used, either within the inventory or in the game world at large, with the item's image becoming a fifth mouse cursor (and one which also becomes available via right mouse clicks).

The one difference between the interfaces of this game and its predecessor is in the notepad. Where in Case 1 it was found in the inventory, and on examination produced a series of notes containing information that Ben had learned, Case 2 has given it an icon of its own on the icon bar, and on clicking it produces Ben's notes in a single list on a large white backdrop. Unfortunately this feature is perhaps not used to its best effect, as important information does not seem to always be added to this notepad. Nevertheless, the notepad is a good idea that, with more information recorded in it, could potentially have been quite useful.

The puzzles in The Lost Galleon of the Salton Sea are on the whole fairly easy. They are almost entirely inventory based; as with Ben Jordan Case 1 some points are awarded for covering important topics with characters, but these conversations do not, to my mind, have the complexity to earn the appellation of

"puzzles". The puzzles do, however, improve on those found in the previous game in terms of quality I feel, with a few that I additionally enjoyed for being a little odd (such as a rather interesting idea for correcting Ben's poor aim with a thrown knife).

On the negative side, there was one item that I found to be a little inobvious, and one area exit that I didn't notice at first; however, most of the objects and exits should be fairly easy to spot (extremely so in the case of a particular snow globe...) Additionally, some of the objects and characters seems a little arbitrarily (and conveniently) placed to my mind.
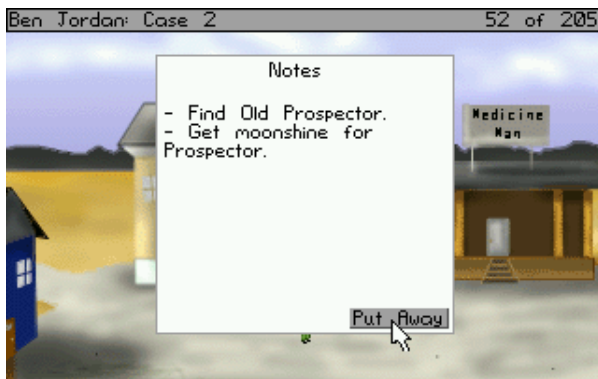
In conclusion, Ben Jordan Case 2: The Lost Galleon of the Salton Sea is an improvement on its predecessor. The graphics seem to have improved a little, the puzzles have become more interesting, and the music retains its quality. In addition, while it is still not very long, this game is longer and a little more complex than the last, overall providing, in my opinion, a more satisfactory experience. As with the first in the series, this game might best be viewed as the second half of an introduction to Ben Jordan and his world, in which the series starts to come into its own, and in which the eponymous paranormal investigator proves himself ready for the trials of his third case. Case 2 certainly has its flaws, but these are, in my opinion, easier to overlook than in Case 1.

The game is free, and at nearly 9MB it is a reasonable download, even for those of us still using dial-up connections. While not a game that I would recommend without reservation, I would suggest it to those intending to play the rest of the series.

Overall Score: 69/100

Developer: MonkeyGames Entertainment (Now Grundislav Games) Publisher: Grundislav Games Platform: PC Genre: Adventure Release Date: 2004 Grade: 69/100	Minimum System Requirements: Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP Pentium® 600 MHz 128 MB RAM Video Card Capable of 320x200 or 640x480 in 16-Bit Colour Windows® Compatible Soundcard Keyboard, mouse, speakers (Note: This game may well run on slower machines than listed above)

ADVENTURER'S RAVINE

Ben Jordan Case 3: The Sorceress of Smailholm
PC Review by Thaumaturge

At the age of 22, having just finished college, Ben Jordan found that International Relations, in which he had his degree, was not what he wanted to do with his life. Against the opinions of his family (save for his grandfather who alone supported his chosen interest) he began a career as a freelance paranormal investigator.

His first two cases both took place in his native America, which is what might be expected for someone just starting out in the field. He acquitted himself well in both of those; in the first he tracked down the Skunk Ape and undid the cause of the Skunk Ape's unusual behaviour, while in the second he rescued a man who disappeared while searching for Lost Galleon of the Salton Sea.

These performances notwithstanding, a call from Scotland, asking the paranormal investigator to uncover the secrets behind the murders of two small children, thought to be the work of witches, is unexpected – Ben hadn't thought to have any international cases so early in his career. Nevertheless, he accepts the case, and books a flight to Scotland, his destination: the small town of Smailholm.

In Smailholm he will discover a mystery deeper and darker than either of his past two cases. This is a case in which he will become personally involved, and two of the people that he meets will have a great impact on his life.

This story is a definite improvement on those of the previous two games, in my opinion. The characters (aside from a few supporting characters) are now more believable; not everyone tells the truth, those who are trusted may betray our hero while those at first disliked may prove themselves allies at the end. What's more Ben will begin two relationships of great importance to the story arc over-arches the series, one personal and professional, the other very personal. The writing of these parts, while not perfect, does, I feel, portray the characters and their situations effectively. What's more there seem to be fewer characters placed for the purposes of providing information or an item, rather than being a part of the plot.

The graphics that support this story are acceptable; while not the best that I have ever seen, and at times poor, they on average seem to me to continue to improve a little on those of this game's predecessor.

The music retains the quality that it had in the previous games. It is often good, evoking an appropriate atmosphere to the scene in which it is found, from the homely and comfortable feeling of a cottage to the eeriness and tension of supernatural danger.

One place that shows marked improvement is the introduction to the game. In the previous two cases, this took the form of a few words describing Ben's situation until that point, followed by a scene in his bedroom in which he received the telephone call that summoned him to the case in question. While the telephone scene is still present in Ben Jordan 3, it is prefaced by a scene set under a bright full moon, in which we learn that Ben is expected in Smailholm, by others than those that he might like to expect him.

The interface remains for the most part unchanged from Ben Jordan 2. The gameplay is almost entirely mouse-driven; one puzzle calls for the use of the keyboard, as does entering names for saved games. The player directs Ben via the left mouse button, with the type of action intended being determined by the mouse cursor at the time. The mouse has available four main cursors, indicating walking to a spot, interacting with the world, examining Ben's environment and talking to people, represented by cursors in the form of a miniature Ben in mid-stride, a pointing hand, an eye and a speech bubble containing an exclamation mark. These cursors can be selected in two ways: via an icon bar that appears when the mouse is moved to the top of the screen, where they are selected via the first four icons from the left, or through simply clicking the right mouse button repeatedly until the desired cursor is found, as right clicks cause the mouse to cycle through the available cursors.

Also available via the icon bar is the inventory, represented by an icon of a pocket. When clicked on, the inventory is displayed for the user's perusal, and, if desired, examination. Selecting an item in the inventory makes its image the

active cursor, indicating a fifth type of action: that of using an item in the world. If so desired, once selected (and until something occurs to deselect it, such as using the item or selecting another) this cursor is also available through right clicks.

Again carried over from the last game is the notepad, which can be opened via yet another icon on the icon bar. As before this causes a white "page" to appear on the screen containing Ben's notes on the case. While they are a little sparse in some places, where the player is effectively without their use as a reminder, since no new notes have been added, they are perhaps a bit better than in the last case, and may be found to be useful for what they do cover.
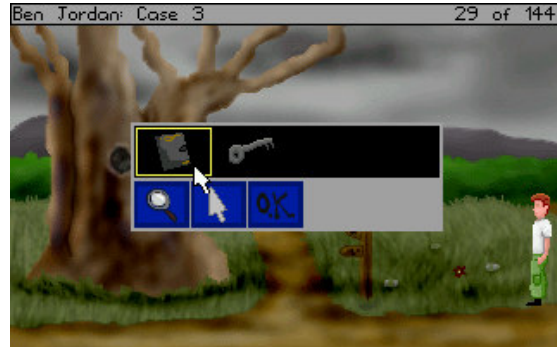
A nice touch is found in the details to be found in the surroundings, which Ben can look at, but which are not directly relevant to the story. In addition, some of these can even inject moments of mild levity into the experience, which can be welcome in the otherwise quite serious mood of the game.

Another nice feature is found in the fact that Ben Jordan 3 features two slightly different endings, found via a branching of the story towards the end and having a different set of puzzles. Ben discovers much more in one of these endings, but it is nevertheless fun to play the other, shorter path as well – and if the shorter path is found first (and it is the easier of the two to find oneself travelling down, I would say), the presence of the longer provides incentive to replay at least the end of the game to discover more. Whichever path is taken, the creator of Ben Jordan 3 has been kind enough to mention the presence of an alternate path once the game is done, thus reducing the chances that people will not realise that there are in fact two endings.

One final feature of note is not, in fact, in the game itself, but rather comes with it. This is the Paranormal Investigator's Handbook, or rather an excerpt therefrom, covering the subject of witches. This provides interesting information and background, as well as useful clues for two of the puzzles (albeit indirectly for one of these), as well as a small amount of foreshadowing. The Handbook is a nice addition, with writing that, if not wonderful in my opinion, is acceptable I feel.

The puzzles encountered in Ben Jordan Case 3 are, I would say, better than those found in the previous two games. I found them both fun and interesting, especially enjoying the two examples of the "Witch Code" encountered in the game. They are for the most part inventory-related, with conversations providing some points and deduction having a small place too, and are on the whole not terribly hard.

On the negative side, I found one object to be a little small, and three others (two of which are found at once, making for two instances) to be perhaps a little inobvious.

It is perhaps worth noting that it is possible to die in the final scene; if this happens the player is returned the a point just before the dangerous encounter, allowing the player to attempt to overcome the problem without reloading a saved game.

In conclusion Ben Jordan Case 3: The Sorceress of Smailholm is a good game, and, I would say, a definite improvement on its predecessor. It appears to be the point at which the major story arc of the series as a whole begins; Cases 1 and 2 seem to me to be effectively interactive introductions to the character and his world. Furthermore it develops a more interesting and, for me at least, immersive atmosphere than do the previous two games. While the graphics are still not a highlight of the game, they do seem to be improving a little, slowly over the series, and the music remains a more positive aspect of the game. Overall, I found the game to be very enjoyable.

Ben Jordan 3 is of moderate length, is free to download, and at 26.5MB is not, I would say, too large for those of us still using dial-up connections. Given all of this, this is a game that I would recommend to those who enjoy supernaturally-themed adventures.

Developer: MonkeyGames Entertainment (Now Grundislav Games) **Publisher:** Grundislav Games **Platform:** PC **Genre:** Adventure **Release Date:** 2004 **Grade:** 74/100	**Minimum System Requirements:** Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP Pentium® 600 MHz 128 MB RAM Video Card Capable of 320x200 or 640x480 in 16-Bit Colour Windows® Compatible Soundcard Keyboard, mouse, speakers (Note: This game may well run on slower machines than listed above)

Interview with Carl Johnson on Maelstrom

Conducted by Ugur Sener

The year is 2050. An ecological disaster has devastated Earth. The planet is a shadow of its former glory. Water is the most valuable resource in this desolate planet. The people who have managed to survive the disaster are divided. The two factions continually fight against each other to gain control of the water supplies.

The Remnants seek to protect the world from corporate domination. They fight against the corporations for a world where people can be truly free from oppression. The Ascension represents the epitome of mankind's technological progress. The most influential corporate entity, the Ascension seeks to dominate the entire world, putting an end to the Remnants through the use of superior weaponry.

Yet the humans are not the only ones who want to rule Earth. Just when it seems internal conflicts could not get any worse, alien invaders descend upon the planet. The Hai-Genti are looking for a new home. They seek to exploit Earth's resources for their own benefit.

A massive war is about to begin. The already-devastated surface of the planet will be torn further as the three factions collide. There is no telling which side will ultimately prove superior. Can the sheer courage and willpower of the Remnants be enough? Can the Ascension reign over the world with its superior technology? Or is the human race doomed to end at the hands of the Hai-Genti?

Maelstrom is a real-time strategy game currently under development by KD Vision Games. Scheduled to be published by Codemasters in Fall 2006, the game promises an engaging storyline, an interesting setting, and plenty of promising game play mechanics that could make for a greatly entertaining experience. As the publish date of the game draws ever nearer, we conducted an interview with Carl Johnson, the lead game designer for Malstrom at Codemasters. Mr. Johnson provided us with a great deal of detailed information on Maelstrom's storyline as well as its overall game play mechanics. Without further ado, here is the interview:

UNCHARTED WATERS

[Adventure Lantern]: What can you tell us about the setting of the game? How is Earth envisioned in the year 2050?

[Carl Johnson]: The Maelstrom refers to a period of time on Earth where horrific ecological and nuclear disasters have left the planet devastated. You can expect the Earth itself to be malformed and degraded from the ecological effects. The environment is post apocalyptic in the classic sense.

[AL]: What was the nature of the ecological disaster that left the planet ravaged?

[CJ]: Well without getting too far into detail, the Earth is struck by an asteroid in the early 2010's which sets off a terrible chain reaction. From the initial impact we see tsunamis, earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, you name it. Essentially the Pacific Rim is destroyed in the wake. From that point on, the ecosystem of the planet takes a nosedive.

[AL]: What are the origins of the conflict between the two factions of humans? How does the war connect to our history?

[CJ]: Before the Maelstrom hit there was a great deal of corporate power building, large companies became more like nations than the nations themselves. They began militarizing and eventually were waging wars on themselves. When disasters ceased and the survivors came back topside, the only remaining corporation was Ascension Industries and the few survivors who became the Remnants. Ascension Industries is led by Arlan Khan who is a tyrannical dictator who wants to rebuild in his image, while the Remnants want freedom and peace. So as you might imagine, they've had a bit of a disagreement. As far as our history, I don't think it connects in history so much as the future. The game isn't meant to portray any sort of overt message, but I don't think you need to be selling an ideology to realize companies are getting bigger everyday. Maybe someday these corporations will get so big that something like this happens, who knows.

UNCHARTED WATERS

[AL]: How about the alien invaders? What are their motives? What makes humanity unable to forget their misunderstandings and unite against the common threat?

[CJ]: The Hai-Genti is the alien race that wants to take over Earth and make it their own. It's interesting because the Hai-Genti developed very similarly to humans, although they are from another star system. Their planet's ecosystem had been destroyed by their careless use of technology. There was a civil war between those looking to save the planet and those hungry for power and refusing to stop using advanced technology. Eventually the "good" won out and they began revamping their entire race, bio-engineering everything from buildings to themselves. Unfortunately they were unable to save their planet, and as a last ditch effort, set out to find a new home. When they arrive at Earth they see what has happened, and realize that the humans are in disarray, fighting amongst themselves and are ripe for the picking.

[AL]: What can you tell us about the structure of the storyline? Will there be separate campaigns with different interpretations of the story or should players expect a plot that gradually unfolds over a series of campaigns as in Starcraft?

[CJ]: The story is totally linear so it'll be working itself out over the 23 single player missions, broken down over 4 campaigns. You'll play first as Remnant then Ascension, etc. Once the player has worked their way through the first three campaigns, there is a fourth and final campaign with plenty of surprises.

[AL]: The Remnants faction is lead by the former US Naval officer James Buchanan. Can you discuss his position in the conflict? How do you envision Buchanan approaching the war? How does he expect to triumph over superior technology?

[CJ]: First and foremost James Buchanan is a military man; James joined the Navy at a young age and quickly moved into working with the infamous SEAL team 6. In the Navy he became well known for his staunch stance on military over corporate control. His views often ostracized him amongst his peers and superior officers. Throughout his career as both a

UNCHARTED WATERS

Navy SEAL and Commander of the USS Tiger in the North Pacific James made many friends, contacts which felt the same way he did about Corporations replacing nations and especially their militaries. When the Maelstrom struck, James found himself reaching out to his contacts, finding survivors and gathering them at Twenty-Nine Palms where they took shelter from the nuclear fallout. That

day he gave a speech, dubbing the group "the Remnants of a great people" – the name stuck. When they resurfaced and realized that Ascension had survived as well, James knew there would be trouble. Never a fan of corporate power and certainly not one to bow out of a fight, James and his Remnants scavenged and scraped together an army to take on the Ascension. James is an older man who has seen a great deal in his time, both in military scenarios and in humanity. He's wise in his tactics and knows the terrain well. The Remnants tend to utilize guerilla tactics against the highly organized Ascension, planning sneak attacks and ambushes over head on conflict. James knows they can never take out the powerful weapons of the Ascension in a head on attack, but he also realizes the fragility of technology and plans to exploit it fully. *cough* hackers *cough*

[AL]: What can you tell us about the interaction between Buchanan and his two key commanders Marcus O'Neil and Sasha Antonova?

[CJ]: Buchanan and O'Neil met through the Navy and fostered a student-teacher relationship from the start. However, for Marcus it's often a bit more. Marcus lost his family to a terrorist attach when he was 16, so he has always viewed Buchanan as a father figure as well. They have great trust and mutual respect for one another, Marcus is the second in command of the Remnant forces. Sasha, however, is a former Russian Mafia Queen who allied herself with the Remnants rather than wage all out war with them. She is highly intelligent and uses her wits to get whatever it is that she wants. In the beginning Marcus doesn't trust Sasha, but she begins to grow on him as time moves on.

[AL]: How would you describe Arlan Kahn and the Ascension faction under his command? What were some of the key technological developments that lead to their success?
What kind of a regime does the faction impose upon humans?

[CJ]: Arlan Khan was born into a very wealthy family, and showed his intellect at a very young age. He had the best education that money could buy, but was never really cared for by his parents. As he got older he discovered his love for Bio-technologies and opened his own small, but very profitable Ascension Industries. Over time he became convinced that it was his calling to save the world through better technology. Utilizing his company, he orchestrated hostile takeovers of smaller competitors and eventually enveloped his parents KhanCorp under the Ascension umbrella. One of the key advantages that the Ascension has is the brilliant Kie Fujishima, head of research and development. Her genius has allowed for the transforming, cryogenic and electric technology that drives the Ascension war-machine. These advancements allowed Ascension to become the premiere corporation on Earth before, and after the Maelstrom. In the current day, the Ascension plan on rebuilding society in Arlan's divine vision - bio-engineering and perfect technology, whether the people like it or not. In Arlan's mind he is "saving the world" but to the people being used in his experiments and harvested for bio-matter, he is hardly a savior.

[AL]: Can you describe the core gameplay mechanics? How will players be able to wage war upon their enemies? Will there be base building and resource gathering aspects? What can you tell us about the balance between resource management and tactical conflict on the battlefield?

[CJ]: Anyone who has played an RTS before will be able to jump right in and, we've modeled the control scheme after some of the best out there, so hopefully core gameplay will be easy to learn and familiar. We've tried to make it as accessible as possible. You will be required to build a base and gather resources in order to fund your exercise on the field. You'll build your force, defend your base and depending on your mission objectives you can carry on from there. The tactics and methods you use on the battlefield are really only limited by your imagination, the advanced gameplay options allow for a myriad of choices and countless outlets. Resource management will often drive your military actions, since water is one of the key elements and must be captured and held in order to derive its benefits.

[AL]: What are some of the innovations Maelstrom is bringing to the real-time strategy scene?

[CJ]: There isn't much one can do to change the core of an RTS, there will always be units meeting each other in battle, most of the time with a base and resource management to boot. However, we've gone in another direction that we feel has never been done (or at least, done well). We've made the environment itself into a variable within the game. The environment is completely destructible, which adds another dimension to gameplay. Not only is it entirely destructible, but also malleable, build mountains, dig valleys, it's up to you. On top of that we've included natural disasters (tornadoes, meteors, etc.) as viable weapons in the fight against your enemies. Imagine summoning a tornado and running it through a group of invading enemies, just to see them get sucked in and hurled across the map! The third person elements also set Maelstrom apart – it is nice change when a mission requires you to control a soldier or tank on the ground, and you get to have an intense up close battle.

[AL]: The development team behind Maelstrom previously worked on an innovative RTS title called Perimeter. How would you describe the game when compared to Perimeter? What are some of the key elements that have changed? How do you expect this to affect the overall experience?

[CJ]: On Perimeter we worked with KDV Games (formerly KD Labs), and we really enjoyed the experience. They had some really great insight into what could be done to progress the RTS genre. They used their Vista Game Engine which was terrific, and gave us some great user-friendly design facets. Perimeter utilized some of the terraforming that we're working with on Maelstrom, but not really to this degree. In some ways, this game is a graphically polished, much more in-depth version of Perimeter that raises the bar and steps into a league of its own. Perimeter was the precursor for Maelstrom, so a lot of the things that worked we kept, and luckily for us a lot of what we put into Perimeter worked! We even managed to keep that "perimeter" feel through a Hai-Genti ability that activates a force field around their central base buildings. Perimeter was a cult hit, but we wanted to expand and reach out to not only our cult fans, but a bit more mainstream as well. We took some of the popular mainstream aspects of

RTS games out there and fused them with the originality of our Perimeter ideas, and voila – this is what we came up with. Hopefully when people get their hands on the game they'll be able to appreciate what we've done.

[AL]: The game promises highly destructible landscapes. Can you describe how this will impact the tactical aspects of gameplay? Can you discuss the implementation of terraforming in Maelstrom?

[CJ]: The actual Earth itself has become a prime player in the game, adding a fresh angle to the RTS genre. The fact that any faction, can at any time, "terraform" the land gives the players great opportunities to experiment and see what works and what doesn't. For example, you could easily use terraforming to build up a protective barrier around your base leaving one opening, sort of a choke point, where you could mount heavy defenses. Now your enemy comes to attack your base, goes towards the choke point, and voila you've got great base defense. Another great use for terraforming is in conjunction with the other environmental forces such as water. Many times, when facing a Hai-Genti opponent you'll find yourself faced with flood waters throughout the map. In order to drain the water away, create channels and watch as the battlefield is drained and you even the keel once again. These are just a few examples of terraforming that you can use in the game, it really is up to the player, we just give them the tools.

[AL]:   In Maelstrom players will be able to upgrade their units. Can you give examples of how this system will work? How will players be able to incorporate the upgrades into their strategy on the battlefield?

[CJ]: With the exception of Hero/Key characters, most units are upgraded through the common "tech tree" method. You'll have a laboratory on your base where you can research new technology and have it implemented out on the field. For example, you will be able to upgrade weapons and armor for your infantry and vehicles, which will be automatically enabled. There are certain abilities and upgrades that are unit specific, once unlocked in the lab they must be manually activated by clicking on the unit and upgrading (such as Trooper to Marauder upgrades). Special characters, James Buchanan, Auriga, Maximilian, etc. will gain experience and unlock new levels of abilities that you must choose to activate. For example, Marcus O'Neil will level up and gain the ability to heal friendly units around him.

[AL]: What are some of the distinct units players can expect to control?

[CJ]: The units we've created are very unique, especially when it comes to the Hai-Genti. As far as the Remnants go, they represent a military force much like those in the world today. You can expect tanks, Humvee-style vehicles, etc. One of their signature weapons is the Paladin, which is modeled after the Paladin tank currently used in the US military. It is armed with a large howitzer, and used as a long distance artillery weapon. The Ascension have highly advanced technology, and at the heart of it is their transformation tech. Almost all their vehicles are capable of transforming, creating a duality of function that is unsurpassed in any game out there. Their Crusader tank is capable as a fully functioning, laser equipped tank. However, when need be it is transformed into a bipedal mech armed with a long distance, high powered laser rifle. The Hai-Genti are fully bio-engineered, so rather than vehicles, they have a second and third tier of even bigger beasts. Their Crusher unit is a large, bug-like creature with immense forward mandibles capable of grabbing units and crushing them. Their breath is corrosive as well, which can cause even more damage to anyone unlucky enough to come in contact with it.

[AL]: Will commanders actively participate on the battlefield?

[CJ]: Each faction has hero/key characters, which we've already talked about a bit. They're both key to the storyline as well as gameplay. James Buchanan is the both strategic commander as well as field commander, being of military background he prefers to be on the front lines with his soldiers. Arlan Khan however, prefers to lead from the rear, utilizing his son Maximilian in the field. For the most part you will be able to control all of the key characters on the field at some point.

[AL]: What kind of tactics would you expect players to utilize while controlling the different factions?

[CJ]: Each of the factions utilizes their own set of tactics, like I mentioned earlier the Remnants tend to use guerilla methods, compensating for their lack in modern tech with their knowledge of the landscape to their advantage. They have some interesting tactics such as hacking enemy units as well, if you can't beat em – steal em! Special units called Hunters can hack into and take control of any opposing machine, turning it into a friendly unit. The Ascension really focus on their overwhelming technology to drive their forces on the battlefield. They have cryogenic troops that can freeze water, allowing for troops to cross

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over the ice or freeze their enemies in place while their comrades finish the job. Finally the Hai-Genti are a race that is totally engineered from start to finish, and all are connected to one central Overseer, thus they have the hive-mind mentality. They rely on overwhelming numbers and wide variety in their troops. Like an ant colony coming to attack a beetle, they will swarm and attack with no reverence for your life or their own.

[AL]: What can you tell us about the multiplayer aspects of the game?

[CJ]: We've got the standard online/LAN multiplayer setup for 1-6 players, as well as a few added modes to spice things up a bit.

[AL]: Is there any additional information you would like to share with our readers?

[CJ]: First, we're planning on having a demo ready and online by late August/early September. I hope everyone can get online and take a look at that, get a taste for the Maelstrom. Secondly, we've put a lot of work into this game and I really hope that everyone can appreciate the originality and unique approach we've taken. Maelstrom is one of the most amazing games I've ever worked on. From the graphics to the gameplay to the level of customization given to the player, it really is an astonishingly beautiful and well rounded game.

Adventure Lantern thanks Carl Johnson for providing us highly detailed information on the upcoming Codemasters project Maelstrom. Judging by the aspects of the game discussed in the interview alone, it looks like Maelstrom could deliver a quite unique and memorable experience. With its interesting setting and imaginative gameplay mechanics, Maelstrom could be a real treat for real-time strategy buffs. If you want to find out more information about the game, visit www.Codemasters.com/Maelstrom.

X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalpse

PS2 Review by Ugur Sener

It never really ends. There is never time to relax. Just when they have dealt with one major threat, the X-Men have to respond to another. The members of the mutant team possess truly impressive powers. But the dangers they face are equally great. Facing nearly insurmountable challenges, the X-Men risk their lives to protect the innocent. Perhaps it is the desire to serve the greater good, perhaps it is the pursuit of Charles Xavier's dream of a world where mutants and humans live in harmony, or perhaps it is simply the thrill of the danger and the rush of the fight. Whatever their individual motives might be, when they are united as a team, the X-Men are a force that cannot be taken lightly.

The team of mutants have just stopped Magneto's insidious plot that put the entire planet in grave danger. But far from the X-Men's home in New York, a new threat is about to be unleashed. It begins when the X-Men's leader Professor Charles Xavier and the powerful mutant Lorna Dane, a.k.a. Polaris travel to the International Convention for Mutant Awareness. Both mutants are abducted.

In the meantime, Magneto is back at the mutant nation of Genosha. A terrifying assault shakes the country. Lead by Apocalypse and Mr. Sinister, two of the most dangerous people alive, Genosha is struck with deadly force. Magneto responds to the attack and a terrible battle ensues over the skies of the Dead Zone.

The situation is getting desperate. This is one of the boldest attacks Apocalypse has ever launched. It seems the five-thousand year old being is also responsible for Xavier and Polaris's abductions. Neither Magneto and his brotherhood of mutants nor the X-Men can fight this against this threat alone. The enemy is too dangerous. And thus, a shaky alliance is born.

The guard outside the compound where Charles Xavier is being kept can not have anticipated the attack. As he silently watches over the complex, he sees in terror that the bolts holding the door

behind him are being ripped apart by an invisible force. It is only a matter of seconds before Magneto completely opens the gate. The guards are no match against Magneto, Mystique, and Sabretooth. The three mutants march through the complex heading for the chambers where Xavier is being kept. Three members of the X-Men team, Cyclops, Storm, and Wolverine, are coming from the opposite side. The six mutants join forces to take out the remaining guards. Professor Xavier has been rescued.

But this is only the first step. Apocalypse and Mr. Sinister have a terrible plan. They are going to descend upon mankind in full force. People will bow before Apocalypse, honoring him as their rightful leader. Only the strong will be allowed to live. And open conflict is only one of the X-Men's concerns. Apocalypse's secret plan can bring about the destruction or subjugation of the entire world.

Brought to us by Raven Software and Activision, X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse refines the formula of the original game and delivers a highly entertaining experience. Following Apocalypse's attack on Genosha and the capture of Professor Xavier, the X-Men and the Brotherhood decide to join forces against the common threat. Shortly after saving the Professor in the opening sequence of the game, the mutants realize Apocalypse is plotting something huge. The exact details are unclear, but Apocalypse's plot seems to involve a number of different mutants. The X-Men and the Brotherhood have to find out what is going on and somehow stop Apocalypse before it is too late.

While X-Men Legends II does have an original storyline, it is most certainly heavily influenced by the X-Men comic books. And at least a certain amount of familiarity with the X-Men universe is just about required to truly enjoy the game. Knowing the nature of the conflict between the X-Men and Magneto makes it that much easier to appreciate the nature of the alliance. More importantly, many key events in Rise of Apocalypse are rooted in the comic books. Long-time

X-Men readers will most likely appreciate how a number of key events that took place in the Marvel universe several years ago were reinterpreted for X-Men Legends II.

The game begins in Genosha. The X-Men and the Brotherhood have established a temporary base for their operations. A remarkable ensemble of mutants have come together to fight against Apocalypse. Long-time members of the X-Men such as Cyclops, Jean Grey, Storm, Wolverine, and Nightcrawler are here. But this time they are also joined by Magneto, Juggernaut, Toad, and Scarlet Witch. It is a difficult alliance at best. The past conflicts between the two teams cannot be easily put aside. The X-Men cannot fully trust the members of the Brotherhood. The hatred goes too deep. Yet against an opponent as powerful as Apocalypse, it is imperative that the two teams learn to work together.

The first quest is to enter the Dead Zone and locate the mutant known as Blink. The young mutant has the ability to teleport across great distances. Unfortunately, she is lost somewhere in the Dead Zone and a team must be assembled to save her. Even as you start working on the first quest, the game slowly starts introducing the underlying greater plot. The basic facts will not change throughout the game. X-Men Legends II is all about the X-Men and the Brotherhood's alliance against Apocalypse. But there are quite a few twists and turns to keep things interesting.

The game is divided into five acts that essentially employ two different structures. Sometimes, players start the act with a single and at least theoretically straightforward quest. Going through the initial areas however, you either trigger events or stumble upon new areas that open up additional quests. As such, the entire act unfolds as a coherent unit. On occasion however, players are asked to embark on individual missions that are reminiscent of the original game's style. These missions take place in remote locations, dividing the act into clearer segments.

At the end of each act, the X-Men and the Brotherhood change their base of operations. Far from being arbitrary, these moves are necessitated by the storyline. Just like the original game, X-Men Legends II offers players a chance to explore a wide variety of locations across the Marvel universe. From the wreckage of Genosha, players will eventually move onto the depths of the Savage Land and New York City. X-Men Legends II offers

improved level designs and more interesting environments to explore than the previous game. The developers seem to have taken care to incorporate several

many different styles into the design of the game's levels to keep things interesting.

In addition, players have access to more secrets that can be found by carefully exploring each level. Each act contains four hidden "homing beacons" and "data discs". Finding all four "data discs" increases the maximum number of healing items you can carry. The "homing beacons" on the other hand allow you to access bonus areas. There is a pretty obvious but nevertheless pleasant surprise if you manage to unlock and complete all the bonus areas. In addition, by carefully going through the levels you will run into plenty of extra equipment, experience bonuses, and healing items. X-Men Legends II greatly rewards players who are willing to take the time to thoroughly explore its levels.

Combat will without a doubt take up the bulk of your time as you go through X-Men Legends II. Most fortunately, this is among the strongest components of the game. The controls are identical to what was featured in the first game. At any given time, you can only have four characters deployed on the field. Three of these characters are controlled by the AI, leaving the player to directly play as a single mutant. On the console version of the game, the active character can be changed at any time with a tap on the directional pad.

Some basic actions are available for each character. You can make the active mutant jump over obstacles or throw objects at their opponents. Each character also has two simple attacks. These punch and kick attacks can be used in a number of combinations, allowing players to inflict greater damage, knock back, or pop up their enemies.

What makes combat truly entertaining is the implementation of a diverse set of mutant powers in X-Men Legends II. The original game essentially offered players four different powers for each character that could be activated as long as the mutant had enough energy. There were also passive powers that provided significant bonuses for melee combat or defense.

Rise of Apocalypse improves on the original game's formula by offering players many new super powers they can utilize. Mutant powers are acquired by

spending skill points. At each level, your characters will earn new skill points that can be used to improve existing powers or acquire new ones.

There are certain restrictions in terms of which powers players can improve. In order to purchase new skills or enhance existing powers, players first have to meet level requirements with the corresponding character. In addition, some powers cannot be unlocked unless you have already purchased a different one.

X-Men Legends classifies mutant powers in various categories. All characters have access to simple offensive powers. For instance, Rogue's most basic ability is super-powered melee strike called "smash." Similarly, Cyclops has a simple ranged attack that dispenses a small amount of energy called "optic beam." There are also offensive powers that target multiple enemies at the same time. For instance, Gambit has a radial attack called "staff slam" that can hurt several enemies that are nearby. On the other hand, Rogue has an extremely useful power called "torpedo strike." Using this power sends wrong flying at great speed at the direction she is facing. She hits all enemies on her path, dealing massive amounts of damage.

X-Men Legends II also features powers categorized as traps. Jean Grey's "mental guardian" skill summons a psychic entity that deals damage to enemies that pass by the area. Similarly, Magneto can use his "magnetic shell" ability to create metal shards that will damage any enemy that comes near. Other categories of abilities include buffs and debuffs. As the name suggests, buffs give the active party some king of bonus for a limited amount of time. Magneto's "supremacy" skill is among the prime examples of the buffs featured in Rise of Apocalypse. "Supremacy" increases the entire party's skill levels for a limited

amount of time, making their super powers more effective. Debuffs on the other hand are used to make enemies weaker. Wolverine has a particularly entertaining debuff called "scream." Not so much a super power, "scream" is more of an expression of Wolverine's animalistic nature. Having a ferocious looking man with adamantium claws roar has the quite expected effect of making enemies run in fear while reducing their defense ratings.

Some of the skills featured in the game have uses outside of combat. For instance, Jean Grey's basic telekinetic ability can be used to build bridges. Iceman can also accomplish the same thing with his powers. In addition, he can put out fires. Storm's lightning bolts can be used to charge certain objects whereas Rogut's "might" skill can help get some obstacles out of the way. In addition to his teleportation-based attacks, Nightcrawler can use his mutant power to pass through walls and reach otherwise inaccessible areas. During several quests, having access to certain characters' super powers even offers alternate solutions to the game's challenges.

Using many of the skills featured in the game the mutants to spend energy. However, there are also plenty of passive skills that give various bonuses in combat. While "mutant mastery" can improve a character's energy generation rate, "leadership" will increase the party's critical attack chance and the amount of bonus experience earned when two characters use their super powers at the same time. Other passive skills are available to give characters significant bonuses to their melee attacks. Iceman's "cold mastery", Storm's "lightning mastery", and Gambit's "energy combat" skills all serve this purpose.

While combat is certainly the focus of X-Men Legends II, the development of your characters and the creation of a balanced party are also important. Each character has four primary stats. The "body" stat determines the number of health points a given character will have. This stat also dictates the chance of the character receiving double HP from a health potion. Similarly, the focus stat determines the amount of energy available and the chance of gaining double the amount of energy from using a potion. The "strike" stat increases the damage dealt through melee attacks. Finally, the "speed" stat dictates a character's attack and defense ratings.

As you proceed through the game, your characters will quite rapidly gain levels. At each level, you will be able to spend a number of points towards improving your characters' stats. Depending on the nature of the character's mutant powers, improving certain stats will most likely make more sense. For instance, since Wolverine is a melee combat character, it is natural to improve his strike ranking. On the other hand, Cyclops, Storm, and

Magneto heavily rely upon ranged attacks. Since all the ranged attacks require energy, there is value in making sure these characters have good focus ratings. On a number of characters, how you develop their stats might also depend on how you want to spend their skill point s. It is possible to improve Jean Grey's "psionic combat" skill, giving her a significant mental damage bonus in melee combat. As such, if you want to make full use of the "psionic combat' bonuses, it might make sense to improve Jean Grey's "strike" stat, making her an overall better close-combat character. Alternatively, you can also focus on Jean's super-powered attack skills, giving her more of a need for a high focus rating.

The configuration of your team might also be important in many situations. In general, it is always a good idea to have at least one character with a special power that can give you access to various areas. This will prevent unnecessary trips to "xtraction points" where you can modify the team's configuration. Furthermore, having characters that specialize in different types of attacks can prove to be extremely useful. While Wolverine, Rogue, Colossus, or Juggernaut might be remarkably effective in melee combat, when you are against a tough opponent with a resistance against physical damage, it will be useful to have somebody that can unleash ranged energy, mental, or elemental attacks.

In addition to rewarding balanced teams, X-Men Legends II also gives players bonuses for special combinations of characters. One amusing example is combining Jean Grey, Cyclops, Gambit, and Rogue on the same team. This provides a "double date" bonus which gives back twenty health points per knockout.

The AI in X-Men Legends II generally does a great job of keeping the three characters you are not actively controlling alive. Rise of Apocalypse also gives players the ability to take further advantage of the game's AI. It is possible to let the game automatically level up your characters or distribute the equipment you find among the active party members. In addition, players can dictate when party members should automatically use health potions.

One particularly handy feature is the mechanism for extra health potions. If your potion inventory is full and you happen to walk over a healing item, the game can automatically check to see if anyone in the party needs help. If some characters are not at max HP, the game will automatically use a potion from the inventory and pick up the one from the ground. This prevents you from having to worry about the health condition when you find extra potions.

While X-Men Legends II has many positive elements, the game does have a couple of minor problems that are worth mentioning. Fist of all, if you get into the habit of using the same four characters across multiple quests, the remaining mutants can be left too many levels behind. Rise of Apocalypse allows players to return to previously visited areas to fight additional opponents for extra experience. As such, it is entirely possible to make the underused characters catch up without spending too much time. Being a few levels behind also does not necessarily mean the mutant will be completely ineffective against the enemies you are currently fighting. Nevertheless, it would have been by far preferable for inactive characters to gain levels at a more rapid pace and remain closer to the team you use frequently. This would make it much easier to reconfigure the team without any need for backtracking.

It is also worth noting that mission briefings can be skipped in X-Men Legends II. Essentially, as you work on a quest or talk to other characters at the base, additional tasks will become available. You will not need a briefing to know what you need to be doing next. As such, the developers have made full-blown mission briefings optional. The downside is that it is far too easy to forget about the briefings even if you do care about them. It always seems to be a hassle to return to the base when you have been informed of what you should do next. Unfortunately, when you skip the briefings, you will also miss out on the interaction among the team members, which is among the entertaining aspects of the game. The game might have benefited from finding more of a middle ground and offering the briefings as soon as you hear about the quest without the need to take a trip back to the base.

One last qualm about the game is with the distribution of a few quest items. Sometimes, these items are dropped by your opponents and it is quite easy to overlook them. On very rare occasions, this might even lead to backtracking through several areas as you try to figure out what you are missing. Fortunately, all the problems pointed out about X-Men Legends II are minor issues. None of them truly hurt the overall experience.

 X-Men Legends II: Rise of Apocalypse is quite a remarkable game. Almost from the get go, players have access to fifteen different characters. Having the ability to use members of the X-Men and the Brotherhood in the same party is highly entertaining. There are also three hidden characters along with two extra characters exclusive to the PC version. The game has an interesting storyline that will nicely remind players of some important events in the Marvel Universe. A myriad of super powers are available, making for some truly engaging game play mechanics. The combat is fluid and creating an effective team to fight against the constant barrage of enemies can be quite fun. The levels are for the most part entertaining to explore and do not become tedious. At the same time, the game offers a fairly lengthy campaign with plenty of bonus content waiting to be uncovered. Rise of Apocalypse does have a few minor problems, but they do not significantly hurt the experience. X-Men Legends II is a must-have for all fans of the comic books. But action-RPG gamers with only a casual interest in the setting should also find quite a few things to enjoy in Rise of Apocalypse.

The final grade is 90/100.

Developer: Raven Software **Publisher:** Activision **Platform:** PC; PS2; GameCube; Xbox **Genre:** Action-RPG **Release Date:** October 2005 **Grade:** 90/100	**Minimum System Requirements:** Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP Pentium® 1.2 GHz processor 256 MB RAM 1.2 GB Hard disk space DirectX® 9.0C Compatible 64 MB video card DirectX® 9.0C Compatible Soundcard 2.5 GB Hard Disk space

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Heretic Kingdoms

PC Review by Ugur Sener

The scar on your face is not the result of an ordinary accident. You have carried it your entire life. It is a special mark that appears on newborn children. The scar is the symbol of a dead god. It is said that those born with the mark can acquire tremendous power. In the guise of a simple scar, the mark can be a harbinger of great destiny.

Yet even though you carry the symbol of the dead god, your very mission is to destroy religion. In the realms of the Heretic Kingdoms, religion is considered heresy. You are a member of the Inquisition. The organization exists to destroy all forms of religion that remains in the world. The Inquisition's motto is simple: "Religion is death. And death to religion." A devoted member of the organization, you are now on a journey to destroy an artifact of tremendous power.

You arrive at the monastery to find it in ruins. The attack must have happened recently. Fires are still burning in the courtyard. Master Valkarin sends you in to look for the sword. You have come here to destroy the legendary Godslayer. In the hands of the legendary here Arkor, its power once brought upon the end of a deity. Later, the same sword gave a descendant of Arkor the opportunity to seize control of Heretic Kingdoms. Drawing power from the mighty sword, Taryn the Theocrat ruled the lands for almost three hundred years.

The weapon is too dangerous. It is a force that should not be wielded by any single being. With the death of Taryn, the opportunity to finally rid the world of the Godslayer seemed to be finally at hand. But with the monastery in shambles and all the monks butchered, your journey may have been in vain.

As you look through the ruins, it is clear that the attackers have done a thorough job of annihilating all the monks that were guarding the sword. You quickly make your way into the inner chambers. But it is too late. The Godslayer is missing. You can only assume the attackers stole the weapon. A terrible evil might be on the verge of being unleashed upon the world.

You return to the gate to tell Master Valkarin the sword is missing. Your mentor knows that there is no time to waste. You have to track down the weapon. Yet there aren't many clues left among the ruins of the monastery. Ordinarily, it would have required a more formal ceremony. But there is no time for any of that right now. You have to be inducted into the way of the mage. You have to discover the Dreamworld, the realm of spirits. Valkarin helps you open your inner eye. It comes so easily and naturally. You watch your surroundings transform as you step into the Dreamworld for the first time. Now you are able to see the spirits of the dead. Perhaps you will find answers in this mystical realm. And thus, your journey to find the missing Godslayer sword begins.

Developed by 3D People, Heretic Kingdoms: The Inquisition is an RPG set in a highly imaginative world. Taking a quick look at the screenshots, it is easy to dismiss Heretic Kingdoms as a typical medieval fantasy affair. But there is a lot more to the game than that. The realms of the Heretic Kingdoms have an interesting history revealed throughout the course of the game. Instead of nations making war upon each other in the name their religion, we are presented a society where belief in gods is shunned by the authorities. Playing as a member of the Inquisition makes your character directly contradict clerics or paladins present in many other RPG's, offering unique motivations and a distinct perspective. At the same time, methodically spreading the word of the Inquisition does not feel altogether different than preaching the words of a prophet. It is quite interesting to see how different races have managed to cope for their need for spirituality while trying to obey the Inquisition. Throwing a conflict between two powerful factions into the mix makes for an intriguing setting.

While it may not be exceptionally well-crafted, the story behind the game should still manage to capture your interest. As expected, the journey to find the missing Godslayer sword does not prove to be an easy one. Twists and turns wait along the way to question your character's belief systems and motivations. While some of the plot twists may not be entirely unexpected, the game still has its great moments. It also helps that players get to make decisions with regards to how they handle certain quests in the game. Some of these decisions are relatively minor and do not have a very significant impact on the overall storyline. And the biggest decisions you face are not revealed until the very end of the game. Nevertheless, having

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an opportunity to dictate how your character will influence other people's lives is still a plus.

Along with its unique setting, Heretic Kingdoms also distinguishes itself with its character advancement mechanics. The character creation process is simple and straightforward. The game's story requires players to control a female character. At the beginning of the game, you are given eight hundred points to distribute across for key statistics. In addition, you have to choose two starting attunements to give your character advantages on the battlefield.

Heretic Kingdom does require players to choose a profession or class for their characters as they would in a Dungeons & Dragons setting. Players will not have traditional stats like intelligence, stamina, dexterity, or charisma either. Instead, you improve your characters effectiveness on the battlefield by increasing your rating in the melee, ranged, magic, and speed stats.

Predictably, the melee stat dictates your effectiveness in handling close-combat weapons whereas the ranged stat determines your proficiency with bows. The magic skill indicates your adeptness in casting spells and applies to all the different schools of magic featured in the game. Finally, speed determines the rate at which your character will be able to attack her opponents. By improving your stat in melee, ranged, or magic you will be essentially choosing what type of character you will be controlling. It is possible to fully focus on only one of these skills, making your character an effective warrior, archer, or sorceress. It is also possible to create a more balanced character by improving multiple stats.

You start with a score of F in each skill. You will have to distribute the starting eight hundred points to prepare your character for the adventure. The cost of improving a skill by one rank is one hundred points. For instance, spending one hundred points of magic will improve your rank from F to E-. Another hundred points is required to increase your ranking up to an E. Before you can get to the D ranking, you are required to attain E+ and D- first. Continuing in this pattern, it is possible to raise each of your skills up to level S, which happens to come after A in Heretic Kingdoms' stat system.

While it may seem tempting to distribute your starting points evenly to create a well-balanced character, there are great benefits to specializing in melee,

ranged, or magic. It is also recommendable to enhance your character's speed. As such, while technically four different stats are available and the game allows for improving more than one style of fighting, you will most likely focus on only two skills throughout the game. After all, why try to deal with the strongest enemies as a mediocre archer and sorceress when you can unleash the full potential of each skill by exclusively focusing on it? The stat system can be overly simple for gamers used to more complex mechanics from other RPG's. But thankfully, Heretic Kingdoms brings in additional complexity and a great deal of customization opportunities with its attunement system.

Each item you can equip has a certain attunement that can be unlocked. The idea is that after using the item for a certain amount of time, you learn how to unleash its inner magical power. Once the attunement is unlocked, you can start actively using it after the next time your character sleeps. Players are not required to keep items equipped to benefit from attunements. Once you unlock an attunement, you permanently have access to it.

There are a large number of attunements that offer various different benefits. In general, the type of item you are using dictates the benefit. For instance, certain melee weapons will help you unlock the outclass attunement, which reduces the chance of your enemies to block or dodge your attacks. Another melee fighting attunement, called way of the warrior, increases your chances to land a critical strike. A particularly strong attunement called soulthief allows you to recover some lost health each time you attack an opponent.

In order to learn magic spells, you will have to equip focus items imbued with different elements. The four schools of magic include fire, water, air, and earth. Each focus item that carries the mark of one of these elements is by default capable of releasing small bolts to hurt your opponents. Once you unlock the attunement from these weapons however, you will be able to cast powerful spells. Four spells are available for each different element. While each spell inflicts damage upon your opponents, they also have specific effects based on their element. Fire element is the most destructive one. On top of the considerable damage inflicted with the initial attack, fire spells also allow players to set their enemies in flames, delivering heavy damage over a period of time. On the other hand, water magic spells allow you to slow down your enemies, which can be a

great advantage in certain situations. As expected, the first spell available for each element is relatively weak and deals damage to a single enemy. On the other hand, the powerful fourth spell of each school hits all the enemies in the nearby area.

Casting spells is not the only way to take advantage of elemental powers. There are melee and ranged weapons available that are also imbued with different elements. By using these weapons, it is possible to unlock attunements that deliver extra elemental damage to your enemies. For instance, the thunder arrow attunement allows you to deal lightning damage when you equip a bow imbued with the air element.

On top of all the different weapon attunements, you can also take advantage of powers accessible through equipping different types of armor, shields, and other miscellaneous items. Various shields will give you access to the quick study attunement, which gives you a bonus to the amount of experience you earn. The luck of the rogue attunement reduces the damage dealt by your opponents. The exceptionally powerful fortitude attunement doubles your hit points. You can also unlock certain elemental powers by equipping magical rings. For instance, the air-based levitation attunement allows you to avoid traps. By mixing and matching different types of items, it is possible to find a great array of powers that will give you significant advantages in combat.

The process of acquiring and using attunements does have some restrictions. In general, you will earn a number of attunement points each time you strike an enemy. If you have any equipped items with unlocked attunements, these points will be automatically spent towards revealing the hidden powers. However, for you to be able to earn the points, you have to meet the requirements defined for the item. For instance, some attunements require that no

elemental powers are equipped. Others call for you to equip heavy or light armor. You may even encounter some items with multiple requirements. These requirements force players to carefully choose the types of items they equip in order to gain access to different attunements. There are a large number of possible combinations, leaving plenty of room for customization.

Once you unlock an attunement, using will also have certain restrictions. For instance, even if they are unlocked, you cannot cast fire spells unless you equip

a fire focus item. Similarly, ranged attunements will not work unless you are fighting with a bow. The game also restricts the total number of attunements that can be active at any given point. As you gain levels however, you are allowed to activate more attunements at the same time.

The process of unlocking, activating, and successfully using attunements may initially seem confusing. Once you play the game for a while however, you should get the hang of the system and realize the degree of customization it makes possible. Naturally, certain combinations of powers will be more effective than others. Nevertheless, there are a good number of viable options giving players a chance to experiment. The game also helps players by color-coding attunements. If a power will not work with your current equipment, it will be listed in red font, warning you that you can't take advantage of the attunement unless you make some adjustments.

In addition to exploring the realm of the living, players will have access to the dreamworld in Heretic Kingdoms. With a simple tap on the D button, you will be able to step into a parallel reality. If you have played any of the games in the Soul Reaver series, this will most certainly look familiar. As you step into the dreamworld, things shift and you are presented with a warped reality. Just like

the spectral realm in the Soul Reaver games, the inhabitants of the dreamworld are magical creatures. Even an area that is perfectly calm outside of the dreamworld might be infested with these magical beings. As expected, the creatures are highly hostile and will attack you if you enter their realm. In addition, certain creatures who are powerful magic users are visible in both the real world and the dreamworld.

Besides the obvious benefit of offering an alternate dimension to explore and more enemies to defeat for extra experience points, players have three main motivations for stepping into the dreamworld. First of all, you will encounter the occasional non-hostile spirit in this realm that may be able to help you with a quest. In addition, every creature you kill in the dreamworld releases essence. When you collect the essence, it is converted into attunement points. Thus, by fighting in the dreamworld, you can unlock attunements much more quickly. Finally, there are a myriad of hex marks spread throughout the dreamworld. These hex marks give you extra points that can be used to advance your key

stats. Each hex mark is worth ten points. When you acquire one hundred points by using ten hex marks, you can improve one of your key stats by one rank.

Of course, accessing the dreamworld to find hex marks is not the only way available to earn advancement points and improve your skills. As you earn experience by fighting and completing quests, your character will gain levels. At the early stages of the game, you earn one hundred advancement points with each level. As you become stronger, it will take a lot more experience to gain a level. However, you will also be awarded more advancement points.

While Heretic Kingdoms certainly has many interesting aspects, the game is not without its share of problems. For starters, there seems to be some minor but nevertheless frustrating stability issues. Despite the multiple patches released for the game, occasional crashes to the desktop were experienced on the system used to play the game for this review. Fortunately, it seems to be possible to work around these problems by fine-tuning the graphics options. Even though patches have been released to specifically address this issue, the load times can still be a bit too lengthy at times. Luckily, the technical issues are relatively minor and should not take away from the experience.

Heretic Kingdoms also has a number of problems with its interface. First of all, the attunement list should have been presented in a better format. The available attunements are simply presented in a lengthy list. There are no dividers or headers to identify different groups of attunements. This is not much of a problem at the beginning, but by the time you reach the end of the game and acquire a long list of attunements, it might get rather difficult to find a specific one when you are configuring you are selecting active attunements. The game would have also benefited from a map feature. There is a large map that can be used to travel between different locations. However, it would have been great to see smaller maps highlighting key spots once you actually arrive at a city or town. Fortunately, these are once again minor problems and should not hurt the game play experience significantly.

If you look at the box for Heretic Kingdoms: The Inquisition, two highlighted features are the game's six available endings and fifty different quests. This information can quite easily lead you to believe that Heretic Kingdoms is a lengthy RPG where decision-making is very important to the progress of the storyline. Unfortunately, while you will indeed have to make a few decisions throughout the course of the game, Heretic Kingdoms does not really create the impression that you truly have a great degree of control. The biggest decision is reserved until the very end of the game, making it almost trivial that Heretic

Kingdoms has multiple endings. A larger number of decisions made throughout the course of the game leading to the ultimate conclusion would have made the experience more fulfilling and given the game additional replay value.

The fact that the game has around fifty quests does not really mean much of anything either. A large number of these quests can be completed very quickly as they require a very small amount of exploration or sometimes even a single fight. There are relatively few quests that are truly involved and put your role-playing skills to test. The game could have benefited from a few more places to explore and some more detailed quests. Nevertheless, Heretic Kingdoms does feature a highly entertaining segment that takes place in a city. The section puts the emphasis on role-playing and investigation rather than fighting. You get to talk to a variety of different characters as you seek information to aid you in your quest. You become involved in a conflict between two criminal factions which leads to a number of small quests and offers some rather entertaining sequences.

Heretic Kingdoms is a fairly entertaining game that is somewhat lacking in polish. The mouse-driven controls are simple, the graphics are good enough to get the job done, the combat is relatively fluid and very easy to learn. The game takes place in an imaginative setting, offering a fairly engaging plot. The attunement system and the dreamworld make for some interesting dynamics. Players have access to a good amount of customization for their characters. But at the same time, the game has some minor stability issues, somewhat lengthy load times, and an attunement list that becomes difficult to manage. Some of the environments you explore could have been a little more detailed and a number of the quests should have been a little more involved. The decision-making involved could have also been spread throughout the game in a better way. Heretic Kingdoms is not exactly a hallmark RPG experience. Nevertheless, especially considering the game's highly reasonable current price, it might still be worth a look. Without a doubt, some good ideas have gone into Heretic Kingdoms. Especially if the game's setting and the attunement system sound interesting, consider giving Heretic Kingdoms a try.

Developer: 3D People	**Minimum System Requirements:**
Publisher: Got Game Entertainment	Windows® 98/ME/2000/XP
Platform: PC	Pentium® 1.2 GHz processor
Genre: RPG	256 MB RAM
Release Date: 2004	2 GB Hard disk space
Grade: 78/100	DirectX® 8.1 Compatible 32 MB video card
	DirectX® 9.0a or later

Nancy Drew: Danger by Design - Walkthrough

Written by Wendy Nellius

The game begins with an introduction to Nancy's world. We get to see her bedroom and her desk. For the newest game, there are several items on the desk. First is the scrapbook. All 13 previous cases are in the scrapbook. You can look flip through the book for a trip down memory lane. There is a book on "How to be a Detective". This is a tutorial. It will walk you through all the mechanics of the game. It will tell you about new features and such. Most importantly is the case file which will tell you all you need to know about the case Nancy is about to crack. Click on the plane ticket and start the game.

DAY 1

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer office– Speak to Heather. She will provide Nancy with a Metro pass. She has provided a list of to-do items on Nancy's computer. Minette requests to see Nancy. At this point, you can either go to the desk and check out the to-do list or you can go see Minette. I handled Minette first. So, turn to the left and enter through the wooden door.

Minette's office – Speak to Minette. She seems aggravated that Nancy is here. She wants Nancy to make her some herbal tea. To the left of the door is a tea station. Read the note card to find out how to make the tea correctly.

Tea Puzzle
There are a lot of criteria to follow when making this tea. Based upon the notes on the card, these are the important items:

1. If Minette is right handed add all herbs in the Gaviforme family. (Turn around to look and see that she is)
2. If Minette is not humming, add herbs with a potency of 7 or greater. She's not humming.
3. If Minette says her favorite color is red, add all herbs that grow in marshy areas.

So, here is the correct list of ingredients:

Boojum – rating of 10
Breland – marshy
Callicula – Gaviforme
Fennellery – Gaviforme
Gibbering – rating of 22
Hog Bone – Gaviforme

Macrophylla – rating of 7
Phyrigia – rating of 9
Pipsweet – rating of 8
Yellow Buttons – Gaviforme.

Place them in one by one. Then, click on the teapot to make the tea. Exit the tea station and then exit the room. If you've done it correctly, Minette will call Nancy back into the room and tell her the tea was totally "rude".

Now Minette wants Nancy to go to Pont Neuf and buy more items with identical qualities to what she has collected. All the items seem to have circular qualities and the colors are red, orange, blue and green. Exit the room.

Outer Office - Time to check out Nancy's desk. Examine the drawer on the left hand side first. Note the Koko Kringle bars in the drawer. If you've played all the ND games, this should look familiar. Pick up the blue notepad. Note the many references to Carol & rude. The most important pages are the 3rd & 4th page. The 3rd page shows a computer with the words Carol & rude coming out of it. The 4th page has some kind of codes written on it, but also has instructions about a plotter.   Turn to the right and examine the rest of the desk.

Computer
Click on the computer.   You can check out Jane's Game Portal if you like. The user name is Carol & the password is "rude".

Click on email. Read all the emails by clicking on each line under "From". After you have read an email, you can click on "Back to Inbox" to return to the main email screen. From some of the emails, you can tell the Minette is difficult to deal with and that there are others out there who do not like her. Click on the "X" in the corner to exit.

Click on the "To Do" List:

1. Pick up envelop from JJ Ling (11085 Rue Malus, Metro stop Place Monge)
2. Pick up fabric photos from Dieter von Schwesterkrank (the corner of Rue du Bac and Boulevard St. Germain)
3. Deliver photos (see above) to Jean Michel Traquenard at the Café Kiki (on Rue des Mauvais Garcons, Metro stop Hotel de Ville)
4. Fix plotter
5. Do whatever Minette tells you to do and do it fast.

Exit out of the list and get started on the list.   Turn to the right and see the plotter against the wall.

Plotter:

As the last page on the blue notebook explained, in order to calibrate the plotter, you will have to adjust the levels of the Vertical (V) and Horizontal (H) pitch. You will also have to adjust the ink (I) intensity.
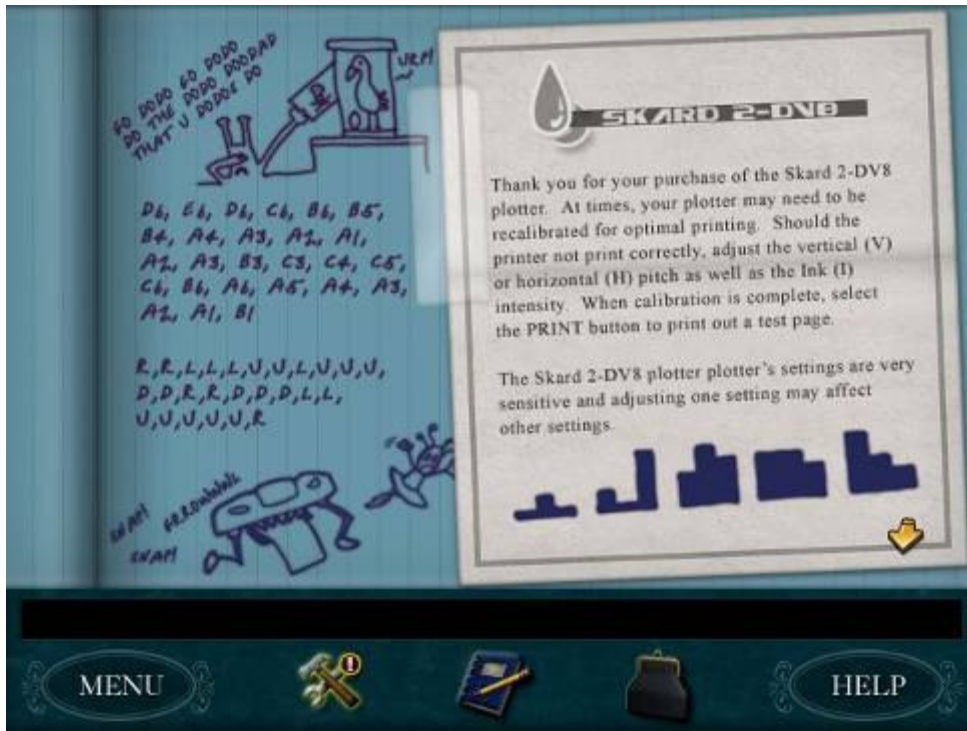
Change the settings as follows:

Click on Print.   The test print should have ABCD on it.   One item on the "To Do" list is done.

The phone rings and Heather will tell Nancy to get it. Go to the desk and click on the phone to answer it. It is a woman from the Modern History Department asking about Noisette Tornade. Heather will tell you what to answer. The phone number will be added to a Zippy calling card which will automatically pop up so it will be available if Nancy needs to call that number again.

Turn to the right and examine the drawing table. It's a project Heather is working on. You won't be able to do anything with it right now.   Turn to the right again and speak to Heather.   Find out about the studio, Minette's mask and Dieter von Schwesterkrank. You'll also get to learn about Jean Michael Traquenard who you will have to deliver photos to and that you'll need to be extra nice to him.

Examine the coffee table and check out the GlamGlam Magazine. Read about Jean Michael. Turn to exit the building and someone will slip a note under the door. Read the letter. It seems Minette has been getting death threats for quite a while. Heather wants Nancy to put it in the DoDo box (which is supposed to deflect the negative energy). No matter what you choose, Nancy will do as requested. Exit the building again.

Map - Choose Rue du Bac.

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's (Rue du Bac on map)

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's – Speak to Dieter. He doesn't have the pictures ready yet. He will allow Nancy to do it herself. Turn to the right and read the book next to the fish tank. You won't be able to take it with you so take some notes.
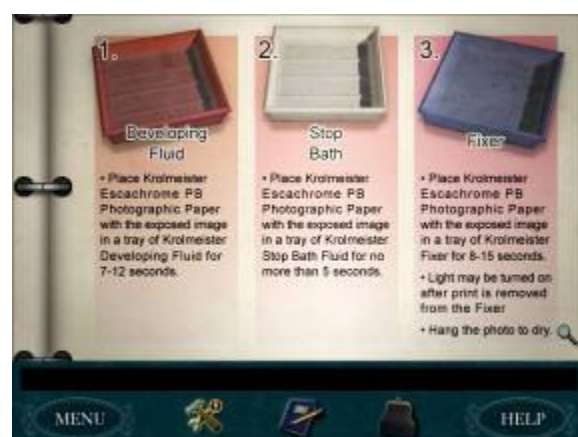
Walk to the door with the red circle on it.   Before you enter, check out the camera on the table to the right of the door. Click on it and Dieter will let Nancy borrow it. Take the camera.

Dark Room Puzzle.

1. Pick up the first negative from the tray.
2. Place it in the machine up top.
3. Turn out the light (switch is on the wall above the 3rd tray)
4. It's important to use your tool bar and a guide.   Place your cursor on the right side of the menu button and go straight up until you see the "hand cursor". Click and the light will turn on. Count to 5. Click again to pick the photo up.
5. Now, place your cursor in between the tools and the notepad. Go straight up until you see the red highlight. Click to dunk into the first developing fluid. Count to 7 or 8. Click to pick the photo up.
6. Stay at the same height and move to the right until you are over the money purse. Click to dunk into the stop bath. Count to 5. Click to pick the photo up.
7. Move your cursor so it sits on the EL of Help. Move straight up until it turns red. Click to dunk into the Finisher. Count to 10. Click to remove. Nancy will say, "All Done". Click on the photo once more and she will hang it to dry.
8. Start the process all over from 1. Be sure to choose in order the way you saw the negatives lying in the bin the first time. Some of the negatives don't disappear even after you've processed them leaving you to believe there are more. You only have to do 4.

Exit the dark room and speak to Dieter again about all topics. Exit Dieters. Another task complete

Because it's completely dark and is difficult to figure out where the trays are, the pictures below show the exact locations:

Map – Choose Hotel De Ville

Café Kiki (Hotel De Ville on map)

Café Kiki – Enter the café and speak to Jean Michel Traquenard. Nancy will give him the photos. Learn about Hugo Butterly who is Minette's biggest competition. Nancy will get Hugo's phone number. Jean Michel lets Nancy order food off the menu for free. I chose Crème de Glace because it's ice cream. Finish the conversation with Jean Michel and leave. Another task is complete. Exit the Hotel De Ville and

Map - choose Pont Neuf.

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Walk forward and examine the monument. Note the dates on the cross monument (1940-5). You will need this later. Choose the path on the right and walk all the way down to the other end of the park. You can, if you choose, check out the water fountains or art pieces along the path.

Monique's stand - Buy the orange cone. I offered 3 Euros for it.   I also bought the Lava lamp for 15 Euros.

Malika's stand – I bought the green rings for 8 Euros.

Monsieur Marchard's stand – I bought the blue movie reel for 42 Euros.   He will offer Nancy some money for painting reproductions. Accept and do as many as you want. You will get 15 Euros for each one. There are only 2 different pictures but you can repeat them.   All you have to do is match the colors from the original to the blank one. Click on a color with your paintbrush and then click on the spot you want to color. Exit the Park.   It's a bit late so Nancy will automatically go to JJ Ling's.

DAY 2

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's – Meet JJ. She will spin a story about the airline losing her luggage for 5 years. Don't believer her.   Exhaust all conversation with JJ.   Get the envelope from JJ. Check out the book on the table next to the phone. Learn about the catacombs underneath Paris. Exit through the front door.

Map – Choose Abbesses.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office – As soon as you walk in the door, the phone rings. Pick it up. It is Prudence Rutherford who someone you spoke to on another case. She's looking for some designs. Finish up the call and exit the phone. Try to get into Minette's office. Heather tells Nancy that Minette is playing an online game and will be hard to talk to. Go in anyway. Minette is trying to get the high score.

Model Match Game

Go back out to your desk and log into Jane's Games. Play model match. You have to line up 3 of the same model's faces in a row either across or down. Click on a model's face and click on any other model's face to switch their places. There is no way to give the solution for this as it is random. However, if it's taking too long to find a match, always click on "Mix it up" to give you new choices. You'll need to get over 1,000 points. When you've done that, Minette (who is also playing as Carol) will think she got the high score. She'll call Nancy in.

Minette's office - Talk to Minette. She looks at all the stuff you've bought and will take the cone, lava lamp, green rings and movie reel.   Exit the office.

Outer office - Speak to Heather.

Drawing Table Puzzle
Click on the book and Nancy will ask Heather if the designs she's supposed to finish for Prudence Rutherford are under there. They are. Click on the book again and see what Minette designed for Prudence. Click through the pages until you get to the last page. Read the detailed notes from Prudence:

Summer:

1. Chromatic consistency; 3 pieces of clothing must be of the same color
2. No purses!
3. Nothing white, blonde or Yellow.
4. I want my feet to be furry.
5. Need some sun protection on body
6. No patterns and no leather.
7. Rain gear would be completely inappropriate
8. Need green on legs and head.

Cruise:

1. No skirts
2. Show as much skin as possible
3. Must not include any clothing or accessories from my summer outfit
4. No jeans
5. My head and face must be consistently themed
6. No primary colors or yellow
7. One item that's tropical
8. Nothing black.

Fall Ensemble:

1. If my outfit contains something black, it must also contain something white.
2. The clothing I wear as a top cannot be a single color
3. No red for fall
4. A boa would be inappropriate
5. Only 1 piece of rain gear
6. Nothing sporty
7. No dark sunglasses and no braids
8. No clothing that would make me think of animals or plants
9. Black or white is ok – but not above the neckline
10. No short sleeves or short pants.

The 3 outfits are done.   Go to Nancy's desk. Minette will be freaking out because she can't get JJ.

Map - Go to Place Monge.   Nancy will say it's too late and the day will change.

DAY 3

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's house – Walk forward and read the paper on the kitchen table. Find JJ in the kitchen again and speak to her. You can play hangman with JJ if you like. Keep choosing letters until you guess the word before she draws the full picture of the hanging man. This is a diversion game only. It serves no purpose. Tell JJ that Minette wants to see her right away. She'll only go if Nancy makes mint cookies. But, Nancy will have to go out and find some mint. If you chose the ice cream when you saw Jean Michel last, you'll remember a sprig of mint on it. (Other option is to go buy some at the park, but it's much cheaper if you get the ice cream).

Café Kiki (Hotel De Ville on map)

Café Kiki – Go to the hotel and speak to Jean Michel Traquenard. Find out a little more about JJJ.   Order Crème de Glace which is ice cream. Click on the money tray to pay 5 euros for it. It will be decorated with a sprig of mint. Take the sprig of mint, eat the ice cream and go make cookies.

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's House – First thing to do is put the mint on the counter. Nancy will automatically chop it up. Then, go to the cabinet to the right of the oven and get some molasses. Put in on the counter as well. Now, we're ready to bake.

Here's the recipe:
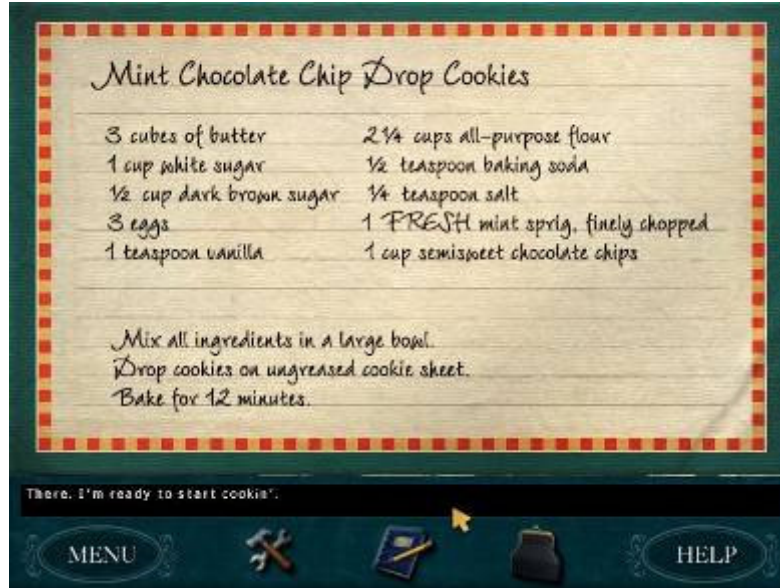
Enter all the ingredients just as the recipe states.   To add an ingredient, you must first click on the measuring cup or spoon & then click on the item you wish to add. Click on the bowl and Nancy will mix it in. Now, remember that you don't have brown sugar. JJ told you there was a way to substitute with molasses. You can get this information 2 ways. I actually looked it up on internet cooking site. But, I found out later that Monsieur Marchard has a cooking substitution book for sale at his stand. Either way, brown sugar is the same as white sugar with a little molasses for coloring and flavor. So, the conversion would be ½ cup of white sugar and 1 teaspoon of molasses.

After adding all the ingredients, click on the baking tray and Nancy will put them in the oven. If you've made them correctly, they will look like this:

JJ will immediately phone and want to verify the unusual way the cookies look. Once she hears that, she will be satisfied and head over to Minette's as required. Let's get out of here and get over to Minette's.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office – The phone will immediately ring. It's a man with a German accent who wants to speak to Minette. Either tell him Minette is unavailable or put him on hold, but she'll be unavailable anyway and he will hang up.

Go to Heather's desk and check out her design book. Go to Nancy's desk and read the pink note from Heather. Nancy has to go to Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf) and buy a stuffed parrot.

Minette's office – Speak to Minette. Ask about the mask and about why Minette broke up with Dieter and she will get very upset. Exit her office and the studio.

Map – Choose Pont Neuf

Square Du Vert Galant – Head for Monsieur Marchard's booth. Nancy will see Dieter sitting on a bench. He takes off pretty quickly. He leaves some things on the bench. Pick up and read the newspaper article about Noisette. Also pick up the watch. Go back to Monsieur Marchand's booth and purchase a stuffed parrot. I paid 15 Euros for it. Go back to Minette's.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Minette's office – As Nancy enters, Minette is screaming. Someone sent her a box that was filled with bugs. The bugs are all over her office. Nancy will have to catch them all. Enter the room and pick up the box the bugs were in. One bug will be running around. Try to click your cursor close enough to it to catch it. Turn left and see another one. You will also find a letter from the Lynn Manrique of Dept. of Modern History. She still wants to talk about Noisette Tornade. Noisette was of great importance to the French Resistance and owned the old windmill that Minette has made her studio in. She is planning to visit and hopes Minette will let her wander around. Take the letter and continue the search for bugs. I just kept going in circles until I found 8 of the nine bugs.
One bug will be found on Minette's desk. Examine the note about fonts. Also check out the red dress. Check out the wall that has red paint splattered all over it. Examine the magazine on the coffee table. If the bug sighting seems to slow down, try and leave the office. Minette will slam the door. She won't let Nancy leave until she has caught them all. You should find the remaining ones quite quickly after that. Now, Nancy can exit the room.

Outer office - Go back to Nancy's desk. Call Lynn at the Dept of Modern History (Zippy #). She will explain how Noisette supposedly hid art work somewhere and that she dated Dieter's grandfather. Before she died, she kept muttering red, left green. Use the phone again to call Hugo Butterly. You won't get much out of him, but it was worth a shot. Exit the office. Exit the studio. It's late so Nancy will head home.

DAY 4

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's – Read the newspaper on the kitchen table.   Exit JJ's.

Map – Choose Pont Neuf

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Click on the box of cockroaches in inventory and Nancy will release them. Exit the location.

Map – Choose Abbesses

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Minette's office – Speak to Minette. She has no idea who would have sent her the box of cockroaches. Exit the room.

Outer Office - Speak to Heather.   She'll ask if you've got the parrot. Ask Heather about the paint on the wall. Exit the studio and go see Dieter.

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's (Rue du Bac on map)

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's – Dieter is in the darkroom. Speak to Dieter through the darkroom door. He tells Nancy the little clock opens a panel next to the bookcase.   Find the brown panel section that has a small indentation in it. Use the clock on the circular indentation and the panel will open.

Clock Puzzle

The goal is to get all the clocks point at 3:00. Changing one clock may cause another to change. A couple of the clocks affect only themselves. So, first click on all the clocks to see what each one moves.

Clock 1 moves 2, 4 and 6
Clock 2 moves 7
Clock 3 moves 6 and 9
Click 4 move 7
Clock 6 moves itself only
Clock 7 moves 9
Click 8 moves 1 and 3
Clock 9 moves itself only

Click on the clocks in the following order: 8,8,1,4,6,6,7,7,9,9,9   A secret passageway is opened up. Enter the passage.

Passage - Follow the passage until you come to a small metal panel on the wall. Open the panel. The clue is: The year when the despair ended - the year when my despair began. If you remember the cross monument in the park, it had 1940-5 on it.   So, enter 1945 by clicking on the arrows to the left of each number. Get a diary with the letter "N" on it. Could this be Noisette's diary?   Read the diary. Take the paper that is in the front of the book. See the picture of the machine and the code beneath it.   Turn the page and take the instructions on how to use the M380 coding machine.   Exit the passage and Dieter's place.

Map – Choose Abbesses.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Minette's office – Check out the round objects that have the blood all over them. They look just like the dials on the M380 machine.

Outer Office - Go back to Nancy's desk and use the phone to call Zu. His phone number is 01 01 61 45 60. He's the one who you read about in the magazine at JJ's. Ask him about the symbol you saw in the passage. He wants an autograph from JJ that you must deliver to him in the catacombs.   Exit the office.

Map – Choose Place Monge.

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's – Ask her for an autograph. She won't give it. She's afraid someone will steal her identity.

Map – Choose Hotel DeVille.

Café Kiki (Hotel De Ville on map)

Café Kiki – Ask Jean Michel Traquenard if the picture he took of Minette was cropped. Ask to see the un-cropped picture. In order to do that, he wants you to make parfaits for the owner of the café..

Parfaits Puzzle

For each parfait, look at the picture in the book and duplicate it.

1. Aixois -- Whipped Cream, Strawberry ice cream, caramel ice cream, bananas, caramel ice cream.   Ring bell.
2. L'enfer – Chocolate ice cream, Whipped Cream, Chocolate ice cream, Whipped Cream, strawberries. Ring bell.
3. Tropical – Bananas, colored candies, strawberries, strawberry ice cream, chocolate ice cream.
4. Corbeau – Chocolate ice cream, caramel ice cream, bananas, caramel ice cream, chocolate ice cream. Ring bell.
5. Mystique – Colored candies, Strawberries, Bananas, Whipped Cream, Colored Candies.
6. Fantaisie – Strawberries, Vanilla Ice cream, Colored Candies, Strawberry Ice cream, whipped Cream.
7. Loulou – Bananas, Caramel Ice Cream, Bananas, Caramel Ice Cream, Bananas

Jean Michel shows you the picture. Each of the stone circles has roman numerals on them. There are arrows pointing to specific numbers. Starting from the left: 9, 5, 3

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office - Call Lynn at the Department of Modern History. Find out that Noisette was a translater for the Germans by day and a decoder for the French by night during World War II.   She also had an affair with a German soldier – Hans von Schwesterkrank. Before she died, Noisette kept muttering red, left, green. End the call and leave the office. Nancy will automatically end the day.

DAY 5

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's - Talk to JJ. Play hangman with JJ. Choose the letters so that JJ will write "Zu my love Jing".   JJ will give Nancy the paper.   Now we can go to the catacombs.

Map - Choose Denfert Rochereau.

Catacombs (Denfert Rochereau on map)

Catacombs – Walk forward until you see the skull. Use JJ's autograph on the skull.   Exit the catacombs.

Map – Choose Abbesses

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office – Call Zu on the phone. He tells Nancy the symbol is a Noisette and there is another Noisette in the catacombs. You will need to lift the skull and press a wet button. But, the actual location is underwater. Nancy will need to buy a wetsuit.   Exit the office.

Map – Choose Pont Neuf

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Go directly to Monsieur Marchand's stand.   Purchase the wetsuit.   I paid 63 euros for it.   Remember, if you run low on money, you can always paint more pictures. Buy the coding book for 8 euros. See the decoding machine. Marchand won't part with it for anything less than a bottle of Mouton Fouette 1968.
Make sure you take a moment to read the coding book. You will need the information later. See how codes can be made from metro stops and addresses or dates.

The temptation will be there to go to the catacombs right away, but I did and realized I had missed something. So, go to Dieter's place first.

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's (Rue du Bac on map)

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's – Knock on the dark room door. Dieter says he's too busy, but if you take some photos for him, he'll answer your questions.   Get the list from Dieter's desk. Unfortunately, it's all in French. You'll need a dictionary. Head over to Pont Neuf and see if anyone has one.

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Go to Monique's stand. Buy the dictionary for 23 euros.   Go back to Dieter's place.

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's (Rue du Bac on map)

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's – Read the list again and look each item up in the dictionary. The items you have to take pictures of are:

Agrafeuse - stapler
Araignee - spider
Bougie – candle
Crane - skull
Croix - cross
Theiere – teapot

Well, it looks like we're going to be going all over the place to take these pictures. Just great!!! To use the camera, click on it in inventory. Press on the biggest button at the top. You will get a square box that serves as your viewfinder. Center each item and click your left mouse button to take the picture.   Start by going into the secret passage again. Upon entry, there is a spider on the right hand side. Take a picture of the spider.

Exit Dieter's.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office – Take a picture of stapler on Nancy's desk.

Minette's Office – Take a picture of the teapot sitting on the tea station.

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Take a picture of the cross monument in the park

Catacombs (Denfert Rochereau on map)

Catacombs – Take picture of the skull. I took picture of all the candles just in case Dieter was picky.

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's (Rue du Bac on map)

Dieter von Schwesterkrank's – Dieter will now be standing at his desk. Talk to him about JJ and Noisette. He will give Nancy a postcard that his uncle gave him. His uncle couldn't remember what it meant. Find out that Dieter began

dating Minette to find the art Noisette supposedly hid. But, he ended up falling in love with Minette.

Examine the postcard. There are 4 keyholes each with a symbol. The one with the clock is the one you solved already at Dieter's. Now , Nancy will need to find the others. Turn the postcard over. There are a whole bunch of eyes in different colors with the eyes looking in different directions. While the postcard is viewable, open your inventory and click on the grid that you found in Noisette's book. It will be placed over the postcard. Remember what the woman at the Museum of History told Nancy. Noisette's last words were red, left, green.

So, the way to solve the puzzle is to click on all the red eyes that are looking to the left and all the green eyes. You will get the following message: Sous Lorraine 4154.

Exit Dieters and the day will end.

DAY 6

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's – Read the newspaper on the kitchen table. Exit JJ's.

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant – Examine the date on the cross monument. The numbers can now be changed. Your last clue was Sous Lorrain 4154. Change the numbers on the cross to read 4154.   The section will flip down and reveal another clue.   There are 3 pictures:

These pictures relate to the art scattered around the park.

Singing Puzzle:

The goal is to get all 3 mouths to reflect what is shown on the cross. To do this, you will need to turn the handle 10 times. They should look like the picture below:

Pinwheel Puzzle

The cross shows the purple fan is the one you want to be top dead center. To do this, you need to turn the crank handle 6 times. But, there is a problem. As soon as you turn around, a squirrel will jump down and reset the pinwheel.   You'll need to get rid of the squirrel.

Malika's Stand – Purchase a stake for 10 euros and string for 5 euros.

Monsieur Marchand's Stand – Purchase a pie tin for 5 euros.

Pinwheel Puzzle Continued

Place the stake to the left of the pinwheel. Then, use the string and pie tin on the stake. This will scare the squirrel away. Reset the pinwheel by turning the crank 6 times again.

Water Fountain

Go to the water fountain and press the red button. The fish's eye will light up and a passage way will open up underneath the fountain. Enter the passage but realize it's too dark.

 Monique's stand – Purchase a flashlight for 10 euros.

Secret Passage – Enter the passage. Walk forward and Nancy will automatically use the flashlight and travel through the tunnel. Examine the small chest at the end of the tunnel. Take the key. Exit the tunnel.

*** Important – Save your game now. In the catacomb puzzle, you will need to refer to something later and it will be important to return to this save***.

Catacombs (Denfert Rochereau on map)

Catacombs – Enter and find the skull. Click on it to get to the red button underneath. Click on the red button and a passage will open up on the right. Enter the passage on the right. If you hear the police coming, turn around and go back into the darkness until they pass.   Go straight across the plank to the other side until you can't go any further. Make a right. Walk to the end, make another right. Go straight until you reach the open again. Turn left, go straight 2 times, turn left and you will find the water.

Swimming Nightmare

Enter the water. In the first room you'll have 3 tunnels to choose from. Choose the top one on the left. When you enter the next room, turn right and head for the #2. Go up for air. Go back down and make an immediate left. Go straight to the fan. Take the bottle of Mouton Fouette 1968. Turn around and go directly towards the #1 so you can get some air.

Go down, Right, Straight, Left, Straight 6 times and you will be back at the beginning tunnel to get some air, but facing the wrong direction. Turn around and go down under the water again.   This time go straight to the bottom left tunnel.   Go straight through and go right, straight, left , straight, straight, right,

straight, left, straight   Take the 2nd tunnel on the right hand side. Go straight, left, straight, straight, straight through right tunnel, straight, left, straight, straight, right, straight. See the #1 and a ladder.

Go up the ladder. See the Noisette symbol on the wall. Open the panel. Click on the puzzle. Nancy will read the French phrase written there.

Noisette Puzzle

En Europe, pres de Pont Neuf, habite Blanche neige dans un Chateau Rouge
In Europe, near the new bridge, Snow White lives in a Red Castle.

Since Noisette was into codes, you'll want to check out the code book in your inventory.   Now, I remember reading in the code book that they used number lines and metro stops to make up codes. There is no way that I could see that you can open up the code book right now or figure this out without leaving so as I suggested above, **save your game here** and open your last save.   Open the book and take another look. Then exit the location so you can see the map of the metro station.   The important words are Europe, Pont Neuf, Blanche & Chateau Rouge.   See what train line each word is listed under.

Europe: 3
Pont Neuf: 7
Blanche: 2
Chateau Rouge: 4

Load the saved game that had you right at the Noisette puzzle. Enter the number 3724. The panel opens. Take the windmill looking item.   Go back down the ladder.

Swimming Nightmare in Reverse:

Once you hit the water go left, straight, straight, right, straight, straight, straight, straight, right. Straight, left, straight, straight, right, straight, left, straight, straight, right, straight left, straight to the end.

Climb out of the water. You will see Nancy's clothes on the floor. Take them and she will change out of the wetsuit.

To get out of the catacombs:

Go straight, right, straight, straight, right, straight, straight, left, straight, straight, left, straight across the plank to darkness. Click on the door and Nancy will open it.   Exit the catacombs. Nancy is tired and goes home.

DAY 7

JJ Ling's (Place Monge on map)

JJ Ling's - Read the paper on the kitchen table if you want. Exit JJ's.
Remember, we have that bottle of wine Monsieur Marchand wants.

Map – Choose Pont Neuf Go to Pont Neuf on the map.

Square Du Vert Galant (Pont Neuf on map)

Square Du Vert Galant - Speak to Monsieur Marchard. He gives Nancy the
coding machine.

Coding Machine Puzzle:

You will need to set the dials first. Click on the short bar which is underneath the
letters. From the picture you looked at, the dials should be set at 9, 5 & 3 starting
at the left.

Click the up arrow to go back to the keys. You will need to use your own
keyboard for this puzzle to type. In Noisette's book, there were 3 lines of what
seems to be a code. You will need to type all 3 lines on your own keyboard. If
you make a mistake, the machine will reset and you will have to start all over
again.   Here are the 3 lines of code. In the book, it kind of looks like they wrote
a #1, but it is actually and "I". A circle with a line through in the book it is a zero.

XTI0SMKPQQLNOREZ
A7LXTI0SMKPQQLN
OR3AS7LXTI0SMK3A

The decoder will give you this message: Rouge Blanc Rouge Bleu Rouge: Red, White, Red, Blue, Red.   Hmmm….not sure what that means. But, let's check in at work.

Minette's Studio (Abbesses on map)

Outer Office – See something on the door to Minette's room. It's a bomb. Nancy will need to disarm it before Minette tries to open the door.

Bomb Puzzle:

The first thing to note is the instructions provided on the left hand side. It's telling you what scenarios are ok for fuses that are next to each other.

The same shape, but 2 different colors is ok.
The same color, but 2 different shapes is ok.

You can trade fuse places by clicking on one fuse and then clicking on the fuse you want to trade positions with. A horizontal fuse can only be traded with another horizontal fuse. Vertical has to trade with vertical.

Below are detailed explanations of the thought process to determine some of the fuses. Once you understand the concept, you will be able to figure out the rest of them by continuing along the fuse lines. There will be some trial and error.

Fuse #1 -- To start you off, trade the green triangle for a green circle.

Fuse #11 – This fuse is connected to a red circle and a yellow square. Look at the horizontal fuse choices.

Blue and green triangles – these do not fit any of the correct scenarios.

Red Triangle – This would work with the color scheme for the red circle but will not work with the yellow square.

Blue circle and blue square – Blue circle would work with a red circle, but won't work with a yellow square. Reverse that for the blue square.

Yellow circle – This is the only one left. It works because it is a circle so it works with the red and it's yellow so it works with the square.

Fuse #4 – This fuse is connected to a yellow square and a yellow triangle. Since they are both yellow, a yellow vertical shape should work here. You have a choice of a yellow circle or yellow square. This one is hard to tell right away. I actually chose the circle first, but ended up switching when the other position didn't work with the square. So the answer is a yellow vertical square.

There will be trial and error. So, you should work this out on paper. The puzzle is timed, so you will end up dying while you try to solve it. So, draw it out on paper. There are some fuses that will only have one possibility. Mark those down. When you have 2 possibilities, mark them both down so you know what to change if it doesn't work. Just so you don't feel so frustrated, I did finally solve this, but I died about 20 times. I would just let the time run down so I could stare at the puzzle and work it out on paper.

Here is the final solution:

Minette's Office - Walk straight ahead and see the post to the right of the blue barrel. This is where you put the wind mill thing you got from the Catacomb Noisette. Put the windmill thing on and a puzzle will pop up.

Column Puzzle:

You need to change the colors. Each row has one large colored block with 2 smaller colored blocks on each side. You only need to worry about the large blocks of color.

From the top, change to red, white, red, blue, red.

The whole building starts to move and a trap door opens.

Secret Passage - Enter the new tunnel and follow it all the way around until you reach a steel door. Use the key you got from the small chest you found underneath the fountain. Enter the room and see all the stained glass. Walk forward and see a stand with a small glass top. Click on it and take the letter.

Nancy will read the letter written by Noisette about everything that happened. It's signed NT and has XIVIII written at the bottom.

Exit out of the letter and the stand will turn and Nancy is now locked in. Click on the gate and it looks like you have to figure out another code.

Final Noisette Puzzle:

It says Une Derniere Enigme, Cher Ami

Remember, Noisette's book had Cher Ami written on the picture of the M380. So, 380 is an important number. There are a couple of pages devoted to using a certain number over and over again to code and decode. So, first we need to try and decode the first message.

On a piece of paper, write out the message and repeat 380 over and over as shown:

```
U   N   E   D   E   R   N   I   E   R   E   E   N   I   G   M   E   C   H   E   R   A   M   I
3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0
```

Like the books tells you, move each letter to the right the spaces listed underneath it.
So, U moved 3 spaces right in the alphabet would be X.   Where it says "8", move the letter forward 8 places. For the "0's", the letter would stay the same.

Here is the translation:

```
U   N   E   D   E   R   N   I   E   R   E   E   N   I   G   M   E   C   H   E   R   A   M   I
3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0   3   8   0
X   V   E   G   M   R   Q   Q   E   U   M   E   Q   Q   G   P   M   C   K   M   R   D   U   I
```

Now, you will need to use the decoder to translate it to completion.   Noisette gave you the dial settings in her letter: X IV III   So, set the dials to 10, 4 and 3

Type on your own keyboard the 3rd line listed above. You will get:

Deux..Un…Cinq…Sept = 2 1 5 7.   Enter this number into the door puzzle and it will open. Go up the stairs and click on the trap door. Nancy will overhear a conversation between Noisette and 2 men. Nancy needs to get her hands on the red dress.

Minette's Office – Go through the trap door and go right to the red dress. Touch it and Nancy will be confronted by Minette. She wants to fight. Your goal is to block her punches. Minette has a specific fight phrase for each location.

Knowing the phrases will help you to anticipate where she'll hit you.   This puzzle is timed also so you may die a few times before you can beat her.   This is a picture of the phrases and the punch locations:

Once you beat Minette, the game will end.

A Final Note…

Here we are at the end of our usual assortment of video gaming-related articles. While Wendy gave us a detailed tour of Nancy Drew's last adventure, Thaumaturge completed his articles on the Gabriel Knight series with a review of the third chapter, Blood of the Sacred Blood of the Damned. Of course if the Gabriel Knight 4 campaign led by Ingrid Heyn is successful, we might have more writing for Thaumaturge to do on a brand new installment in the series.

Through Gnome's budget game suggestions and several archive reviews, we also took a look at some older games. Yet there are plenty of new games to be excited about as Darkstar, A Vampyre Story, Yoomurjak's Ring and other adventures near their completion. It looks like we might be headed for quite a busy fall and winter.

Since we took a look at The 7th Guest and The 11th Hour, it seems only natural to follow up with articles on the Shivers series starting with our September issue. Assuming they will agree to run on my current computer, September will mark the beginning on a series on the Police Quest games. We should also be covering the newly released Safecracker. Over on our Uncharted Waters section, we are planning to go back and take a detailed look at Perimeter before the release of Maelstrom.

As we begin work on our next collection of articles, I hope you enjoyed the August edition of Adventure Lantern. Be sure to tune in next month for a fresh batch!

-Ugur Sener