

Adventure Lantern



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- [Still Life 2](#)
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Editorial

Several weeks ago, I had the pleasure of attending a wedding in a small town called Kilyos. The town is on the European side of Istanbul. It is known for its beautiful sand beaches facing the Black Sea. Kilyos is a place I visited many times during my high school years and remember with a good deal of fondness. Returning to the town for the wedding of a former classmate felt very appropriate. As I walked into the house where the ceremony was being held, I was a little nervous. Many old high school friends were in attendance. I had not seen any of them for several years. Few of them knew my wife. None of them had met my daughter. We were practically strangers. I was getting ready for a potentially awkward evening.

As the evening went on, I started talking to one of my best friends from high school. At first, the conversation felt a little forced. The times when we would spend the majority of our day together were over. I did not even know the most basic things about his life. Asking where he lived and where he worked seemed bizarre. Distance and time were all too real. We did not live in the same country any more. We had not spent a significant amount of time together for years. Whatever connection I had to him seemed irrevocably lost.

I was all but certain the conversation would be over in a few minutes. We would walk over and have another awkward chat with different people. But then he said something that would only be funny to the two of us. It was nothing more than a simple joke. He was merely reminiscing about the old days, but it was enough. As I laughed, I realized there was no point in dwelling on how far apart we lived or how frequently we saw each other. We were there, together, that evening. For a few hours, time and distance didn't have to matter. There was no reason not to have a great time.

That night, I walked away from the wedding with a big grin and a very full heart. My friends and I went our separate ways the next day, but for one evening, we reconnected. As I write this, Kilyos is once again an ocean away. Years may pass before I can return for another visit or see any of my old classmates again. Yet a small part of the friendship will always persist.

Tonight, even as I reflect on the wedding, my thoughts are also with another old friend. I met him nearly a decade ago, while I was surfing the Web. We do not write to each other very often. We have never met in person. If you have been involved in the adventure gaming community, you probably know him too. He is a great writer and an excellent editor. He has a good sense of humor and he never seems to be afraid to speak his mind. He also runs a Web site called [Just Adventure](#). His name is Randy Sluganski. Over the past several months, Randy had to deal with significant health problems. I believe he can ultimately overcome his challenges, but they have caused financial difficulties to Just Adventure.

In order to remain online, the Web site needs financial support from its readers. Randy has setup a Paypal account that can be used to make contributions. All the information you need is available from the [JA home page](#). If you have any questions, you can ask them on the JA forum. If you enjoyed visiting Just Adventure over the years, please consider making a donation. The Web site has been a tremendous resource for the adventure community for a very long time. The humblest contributions could keep JA from fading away.

Before cutting you loose, I'd also like to take a moment to welcome two new members to our team here at Adventure Lantern. Jennifer McMurray is responsible for the excellent adventure gaming blog called [The Adventuress](#). She agreed to let us reprint reviews from her blog here in our magazine. You can read her articles on the first two Doctor Who episodes in this issue. Jonathon Wisnoski also maintains a great [blog](#) about PC gaming. You can read his review of Hammerfight in this issue. It is a great pleasure to welcome them to our team.

As I welcome new friends into the fold and keep old ones in my thoughts, I hope you will find something to enjoy in our September 2010 edition. See you again when the leaves turn brown.

Until next time,
Ugur

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Interview with Teemu Vilén on Alpha Polaris conducted by Ugur Sener

Alpha Polaris is an upcoming horror adventure game that invites players to an oil research station in Greenland. In the role of Rune Knudsen, players will explore the station and struggle to survive against the forces of nature. Alpha Polaris will be the first game from the independent Finnish development company called Turmoil Games. As the game nears completion, project leader Teemu Vilén kindly agreed to answer a few questions about the adventure. Judging from the information Mr. Vilén provided, Alpha Polaris is well worth putting on your radar...

[Adventure Lantern]: *Alpha Polaris takes place at a research station of the same name. What can you tell us about the location? What kind of research is being conducted here?*

[Teemu Vilén]: Alpha Polaris is situated at a remote glacier in northern Greenland. The only way to get there is by air - so people working there must be very self-sufficient. An old US outpost, nowadays the station is used by Euler Petroleum to conduct oil exploration.

[AL]: *What can you tell us about the storyline? How does the adventure begin?*

[TV]: The game tells the story of Rune Knudsen, a Norwegian biologist, writing his thesis on Alpha Polaris. The story begins with something being uncovered from the glacier. The game follows the station crew fighting for their lives as the ion storm of the century sets off strange happenings.



[AL]: *How would you describe the overall atmosphere and the horror experience?*

[TV]: From early on, we decided we want to make our horror more restrained and psychological, with the supernatural things used as metaphors for the human psyche and changes the Arctic is going through. There is violence and blood, but they are not just used for their own sake.

[AL]: *For me, a crucial element in horror adventures is to create a feeling of helplessness and isolation. Have you explored similar themes in Alpha Polaris?*

[TV]: Yes. In its core, the story of Alpha Polaris is about human emotions stemming from isolation, night terrors and loss. In many ways, Rune is helpless against his own dreams and a primordial, supernatural threat. At this point, I want to note that horror adventure games create an interesting dilemma: in classic horror, characters are indeed helpless. But in games, the player needs to have a heightened feeling of agency, of accomplishing things. We've answered this by carefully crafting our puzzles around the mystery, Rune's thesis, oil exploration and survival. Rune is an outsider in the station, but shapes up to be the only one who can really face the primordial horror.

[AL]: Will character interaction play an important role in the game? Is Rune on his own to face the challenges?

[TV]: Rune needs to work with other characters in many of the puzzles, and human-to-human drama has the utmost importance in the game. We explore the warmth between the crew members and the loss of it. So in addition to the distant setting, isolation also refers to the growing emotional isolation of individuals on the station.

[AL]: What kinds of puzzles can players expect to encounter? Can you describe the game's interface? How will players control Rune?

[TV]: The interface is reminiscent of Secret Files series, with context sensitive left mouse button and right button as "look". We have made our own improvements however. I don't want to spoil too much, but when solving the mystery, a simple "use everything on everything" approach is not going to hack it. Rune will solve realistic puzzles that will fit in his role and in the setting.

[AL]: What can you tell us about the project team?

[TV]: Including me, there are six people working on the project. We have a great team! We are situated in the Arctic Circle, so we are no strangers to Aurora Borealis or snow.

[AL]: How did the idea of Alpha Polaris come about? How long have you been working on the project?

[TV]: The original idea was developed two years ago, and we have worked actively on it for a year now. The idea got started from a desire to convey a realistic, atmospheric horror story, which would really have something to say to people.

[AL]: When can we expect the game to be released?

[TV]: The game will be released early next year. I want to thank you for your interest, and wish my best to all of your readers. Some strange happenings on the horizon!



Adventure Lantern thanks Teemu Vilén for taking the time to answer our questions. Based on Mr. Vilén's responses, Alpha Polaris is shaping up to be an enticing adventure offering. Working out of the Arctic Circle, the development team certainly appears to know their subject material. Keep an eye out for Alpha Polaris. We might be in for a unique adventure gaming experience.

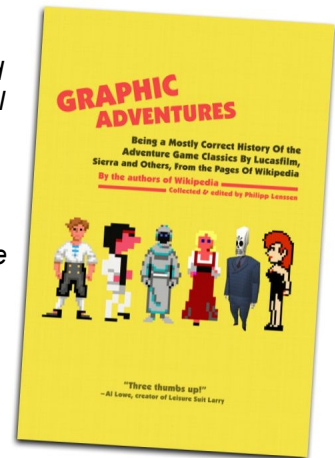
To find out more about Alpha Polaris, visit the [Turmoil Games Web site](#).

Interview with Philipp Lenssen on Graphic Adventures, the Book

conducted by Ugur Sener

Names like *King's Quest*, *Monkey Island*, *Tex Murphy*, or *Gabriel Knight* will mean something to most Adventure Lantern readers. These titles represent the early days of adventure gaming, bringing back fond memories full of VGA, MS-DOS and floppy disks. Decades may have passed after their release, but modern games still get compared to the standards they established. Philipp Lenssen's book, *Graphic Adventures* gives us a chance to learn more about many of these adventure games that started the genre.

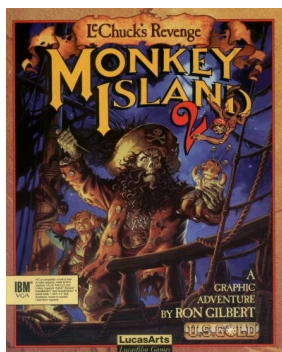
The subtitle for *Graphic Adventures* is 'Being a Mostly Correct History of Adventure Game Classics by Lucasfilm, Sierra, and Others, from the Pages of Wikipedia'. *Graphic Adventures* represents an accumulation of content from Wikipedia, edited and streamlined by Mr. Lenssen so it could be used in book format. As such, the book might be 'mostly correct', but it still provides a great look into the genre. Mr. Lenssen also included a number of interviews with game developers to provide insight into the creation of several adventure classics. Having just published the book, Mr. Lenssen agreed to answer a few questions and give us more information about his work.



[Adventure Lantern]: Tell us a little about the contents of the book. What can adventure gamers expect to find here?

[Philipp Lenssen]: The book *Graphic Adventures* is a mixture of detailed encyclopedic articles about a whole lot of classics of the genre, mixed with interviews I conducted with game creators. So if you ever wanted to find out more about graphic adventure games like *Monkey Island*, *Leisure Suit Larry*, *Loom*, *Zak McKracken*, *Myst*, *Space Quest* and many, many others, you can grab this book and make yourself comfortable on the couch or in a cafe. In the interviews with people like Al Lowe (*Leisure Suit Larry*) or David Fox (*Zak McKracken*), I asked a lot about the processes and methods and ideas that went into the games back then.

Personally for me, it was the book I wanted to read but wasn't able to find at Amazon at the time, so I went to compile and edit it myself. (At the time, I had just finished reading the great book *Rogue Leaders* on the history of Lucasfilm Games, but was looking for much more details on some of my beloved games.)



[AL]: What can you tell us about the process of gathering the information from Wikipedia? What kind of challenges did you encounter?

[PL]: My general approach was to use the Wikipedia articles I found as basis, and then do a whole lot of editing to make them work better in book form, and find new information for articles where I wanted more depth. I also added screenshots for every entry, and tried to find things that would make it fun to read, basically.

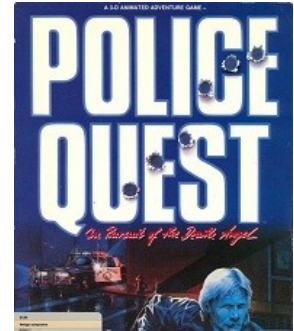
Originally, I had figured that this is a small project. "I want to read this type of book, well, let me create it then... won't take too long, right!" However, after I took out a pen to correct the first, merely roughly edited draft of the book I had sent to myself, I realized I needed to go back to a more thorough editing phase, because there were just too many "odd" paragraphs. So this is what I did, and the project took

much longer this way, but I wouldn't want to publish something I'm not personally happy to look at as a reader.

A big part of the challenges of publishing a book like this – I'm self-publishing with Lulu.com – is about all the small things you need to take care of on the side, like font licensing or conversion issues or table of contents creation. But compared to what book publishing headaches must have been like some decades ago, I'm sure we can be lucky to have services like Lulu.com these days!

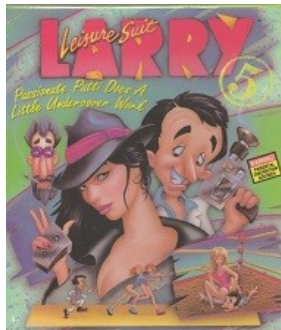
[AL]: *The subtitle of the book tells us this is a 'mostly correct history'. During your research, did you encounter any entries that were blatantly incorrect and could not be included?*

[PL]: First of all, I think the genre of graphic adventures lends itself to this kind of Wikipedia book experiment. Why? Because there's not a lot of political agenda involved, but rather a lot of fans doing edits. I would not have felt comfortable doing such kind of book when the base articles are about fiercely debated issues, where there are a lot of groups on either side trying to push their world view on Wikipedia. (Admittedly, some of the most fiercely debated topics also get a whole lot of eyeballs on Wikipedia, which often equals thoroughness and fact-checking.)



That being said, even given the rather "friendly" topic field, I wouldn't have felt comfortable including specific biographies of people in the graphic adventures fields. Because nobody wants to see a book talk about their life and then have it be only "mostly" correct. That, people might take personal, and rightly so. (Not incidentally, nearly all the "Wikipedia got it wrong!" news reports are about biographies.) If on the other hand there's a mistake in the book like, say, the number of disks with which Monkey Island shipped on the Amiga 500, it will be unfortunate, but it's not the end of the world (and it is disclaimed right in the book's subtitle). If any of you do spot errors, please let me know about them, though, as that is helpful for an errata for the book.

So, did I encounter articles that were blatantly incorrect? To my knowledge, none, though I remember one or two articles had been worded in odd ways, and it looked like they were copied from other sources. For those articles I tried to do some extra editing and checking. Generally speaking however, many, many paragraphs I had to completely remove, or completely reword, because they didn't work in book form. That was the main work for the book, to make sure things would be interesting and readable given the source material.



[AL]: *The book also contains several interviews with adventure game creators. Tell us a little bit about meeting these developers. Were any of the interviews particularly memorable?*

[PL]: I enjoyed all of the interviews. Many people agreed to participate and talk about their memories from back then. It was interesting to interview people from different sides of the adventure gaming world. For instance, the Lucasfilm and the Sierra world. Where a Sierra creator might have emphasized how important it was for the immersiveness of their game rooms to be freely walkable in all directions, a Lucasfilm Games creator said they wanted to make specifically sure that being able to walk in too many directions in a game was not part of the game challenge, because it's not at the core of things... because, say, falling off a staircase and then dying is

not a typical everyday challenge in real life, and shouldn't be a core part of the puzzles.

Most interviews were conducted via email. The interview with Al Lowe was done over the Skype telephone, so it took some extra time to transcribe it, but it was also definitely worth it. Al Lowe is a very fun guy to talk to!

[AL]: *How long did the project take?*

[PL]: All in all over a year, but not a full-time work year. I am doing different projects side by side, and also

needed to wait some weeks for draft print versions of the book making it to my snail mail box and so on. Simple things as changing the font -- one early prototype feedback was that the original font I used wasn't too nice -- involved things like asking around for good fonts, doing some research in that area, ordering the font, reformatting the book, generating a new version, uploading it and waiting for it to arrive here.

A lot of time with the book was spent figuring out layout and file conversion issues to make it all print ready. Lulu.com, with whom I did the self-publishing printing process, are easy enough to use, but I had to switch to offline HTML editing instead of the original Google Docs editing due to file size and printing format issues. Google was helpful in supporting some of the issues but in the end, there were still too many unsolved details. In the end this book was layouted using CSS, Cascading Stylesheets, as we use it in websites, attached to a giant HTML file on my hard disk, which I edited in rather simple text editors. The printing was then a multi-step process involving some converter software, and some manual table of contents and page headers adding, but it was workable.



[AL]: *What has been the reaction to the book so far?*

[PL]: From the people who saw it, generally positive, though perhaps not a lot of people who might be interested in this subject know about this yet. So sales-wise, the book didn't even, say, cover the costs for licensing the font used in the book. But that's not important. This is a hobby project where I'm happy if a dozen people get something out of it.

Some people were wondering if we can take Wikipedia material as basis for other works. The answer is that not only are we allowed to (per the GNU Free Documentation/ Creative Commons license)... but that this agreement -- that the whole world may freely use Wikipedia material -- is the basis for all our edits we do with this encyclopedia. The Wikimedia Foundation doesn't personally own and author the material and hand out permission slips to parties it

prefers. Rather, we as Wikipedia authors who do edits all cooperatively own the material, and we do so under the assumption that it's fine for everyone to mix, mash and republish this material. (Republish under a set of base rules, that is; for instance, republications must credit the source and its authors, and themselves attach a GNU or CC license to the new work produced.) This way, our efforts at editing there can bring the greatest use to the world. I hope more people will make active use of this right and themselves mix and mash Wikipedia in new ways... just like they can mix and mash the book I published, because it uses the very same license of the Wikipedia articles.

[AL]: *What can you tell us about yourself?*

[PL]: I'm a German living in China, and I'm currently focusing on creating iPad two-player games, which I think is a fascinating genre. Two-player games as in: two people sitting next to each other and playing something akin to a digital board game, with "magically" moving pieces... have a look at VersusPad.com, which just went live yesterday with my first App Store game of this nature, Ogs.

Other than that, I'm generally a work-from-cafe creator, and I love doing websites and games, including the different parts involved... like programming and artwork. An overview of my websites can be found at OuterCourt.com. Also, some years back I made QuestML.com, a language and editor for creating text-based Choose-Your-Own-Adventure games (we read and loved a lot of those types of books as kids).

When I was younger, I played a whole of games on my Amiga 500. Including, of course, endless hours spent on many graphic adventure games. It's not the only computer games genre I love but it does have a special place in my heart. Perhaps that's because you often get touched by the stories, and you find yourself completely drawn into these fascinating, odd worlds.

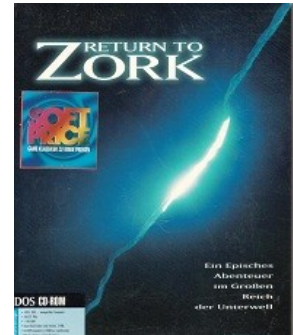
[AL]: *When did you first start playing adventure games? Was there a specific game that got you interested in the genre?*

[PL]: My first encounter with the genre, as far as I can recollect, was Leisure Suit Larry, which we played at my friend's house. We were still young kids and the nature of the game probably wasn't really fit for kids, but it was a game, and our curiosity definitely won. The first thing we had to do was to guess our way through the opening "adult check", which asked some questions only adults were supposed to know. But with some repeated guessing you get through that, and then we could try walk around the rooms of the game and so on. We never got very far in the game!

As an older kid, I mostly loved to play less-text-based-input graphic adventures (though I also had my Infocom text adventures treasure box phase as a teen!). I fondly remember games like Zak McKracken, Maniac Mansion, Indiana Jones, Monkey Island, and Loom.

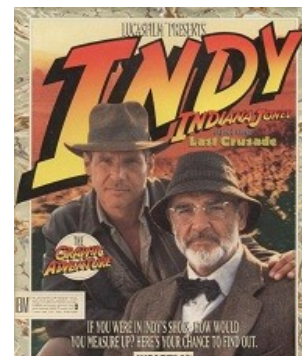
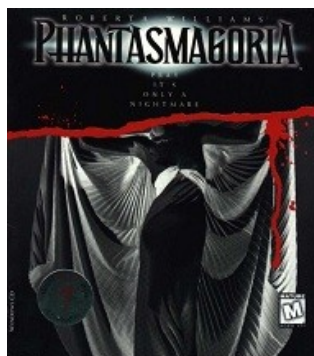
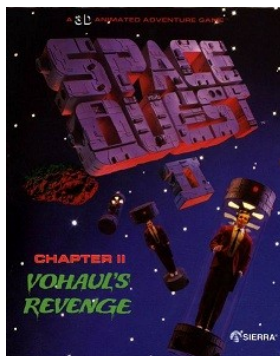
[AL]: *Having just compiled a book on adventure gaming history, what are your thoughts on recent adventure titles?*

[PL]: I am interested in how the genre converts to different new hardware, like the iPad or the iPhone. I don't generally play adventure games these days, though... mostly I'm fascinated with the creation side of games these days (admittedly, I also play a lot of casual games on my iPhone/ iPad). One thing I pondered and which I think could be fun is an online (team-based) adventure game creation system, resulting in browser-playable (perhaps multiplayer) games.



[AL]: *Are you planning to undertake similar projects in the future? Perhaps a book on more recent titles?*

[PL]: For now, I'm looking at the feedback this book generates. This will likely influence further steps. I hope people enjoy the book, and that it gives something to fans out there!



Adventure Lantern thanks Mr. Lenssen for providing us information about his book. It is great to see a compilation providing details about many adventure games that had a significant impact on the genre. The history of the games and the interviews with the developers will likely be of interest to many adventure fans.

To learn more about the book, [click here](#).

Still Life 2

review by Ugur Sener

In 2005, Microïds released an excellent adventure game called Still Life. It was the rare kind of game where all the elements worked together successfully, resulting in a truly captivating experience. Still Life featured a gripping story, interesting characters, and engaging puzzles that could easily leave players chained to their computers for hours. The game gave players a chance to control two characters in two separate time periods. In modern-day Chicago, players investigated a series of murders in the role of FBI agent Victoria McPherson. A parallel story unfolded in 1920s Prague, where Victoria's grandfather Gus was trying to stop a murderer. As the game progressed, it became clear that the two investigations were not isolated. There were striking connections between Victoria and Gus's cases. The cleverly-written script urged players to reach the game's conclusion. However, the ambiguous ending left a major question unanswered, leaving room for a potential sequel. The wait finally ended in 2009, with the release of Still Life 2.



The sequel reunites players with Victoria McPherson. The adventure begins in a hotel room in Los Angeles, with Vic going over information from her investigation in Chicago. It seems as though you will continue working on the case from the first game at a whole new location. However, in a few minutes, it becomes clear that the scene in LA is merely a short flashback sequence. The enigmatic killer with the black cloak and white mask is in Victoria's past now. She is working on a new and equally challenging case. Vic is hunting the 'East Coast Killer', a psychopath that has been on a killing spree for months.

The 'East Coast Killer' kidnaps young women and makes videos as he tortures and brutally murders them. He dumps the bodies at locations where he knows they will be found by the local authorities. The footage of the killing gets delivered to the media. The bodies are always carefully cleaned. There is not a shred of evidence that would give away the killer's location. The media is pressuring McPherson to catch the murderer, but there are hardly any leads to follow.



Things take an unexpected turn when the killer kidnaps reporter Paloma Hernandez from her hotel room. Paloma is taken to a remote location and forced to participate in a series of sick games. As the young reporter tries to escape, McPherson combs through her hotel room and tries to find clues. Vic knows something is different about the kidnapping. This is not the murderer's usual MO. Perhaps the 'East Coast Killer' has finally made a mistake. Perhaps there will finally be enough information to discover the psychopath's location and save Paloma before she is murdered.

Just like the original game, Still Life 2 is played from two perspectives. Players alternate between controlling Paloma and Victoria. While Paloma tries to escape the killer's house and survive his numerous traps, Vic looks for clues that may help save the reporter and catch the killer. Still Life 2 also uses several flashback sequences to tie up the loose ends from the first game. However, similarities between the two adventures end there. If you are looking for an adventure that substantially builds on the story of the original Still Life, you will not find it here. The main

question remaining from the first game is answered, but the Chicago case is not developed any further. More importantly, the sequel represents a marked departure from the atmosphere and style of its predecessor. The elegant stylish environments and the art themes explored in Still Life are gone. Instead, the sequel draws inspiration from horror movies. The end result is a game that lacks the level of polish and sophistication attained by the original. However, that doesn't necessarily mean Still Life 2 is a bad game. Adventurers that enjoy crime thrillers and horror movies will find something to enjoy here.



During the early portions of the game, you take control of Paloma as she is forced to participate in the killer's games. These sequences are reminiscent of movies like Saw and nicely fit into the horror movie themes explored in the game. The twisted puzzles and traps are very effective at creating a sense of imminent danger and hopelessness. It is abundantly clear that Paloma is at the mercy of a ruthless murderer. Possible routes for escape are nothing more than sick jokes. The killer is in control. Paloma needs all of her wit just to stay alive.

As the reporter struggles to survive, Vic desperately tries to find clues that will help her locate the reporter. She searches each location with the help of her CSI toolkit. There is a nice contrast between the elegant tools available to Vic and the makeshift equipment Paloma has to utilize inside the killer's house. Using the kit, Vic can collect and immediately analyze fingerprints, footprints, blood, and other relevant clues. Other FBI agents are available to provide assistance as well. In particular, Vic's partner Garris and lab technician Claire play important roles in the investigation. The storyline progresses as you discover important clues and come closer to determining the identity of the killer. Once Vic discovers several critical clues, the story

picks up the pace. The plotlines begin to merge and the level of suspense increases. Still Life 2 is good at maintaining a sense of danger and urgency throughout the majority of the adventure. Part of this can be attributed to the rising difficulty level as you proceed through the game. The initial challenges you have to overcome are relatively easy. However, during the later stages, the environments become more dangerous. An increasing number of timed sequences and deadly traps force players to carefully consider every move. While the inclusion of such segments is normally a cause for complaint in an adventure game, Still Life 2 generally uses them effectively to create a strong suspenseful atmosphere. Some of the plot twists are predictable and the revelation of the killer's identity borders on ludicrous. Nevertheless, the game gets the pacing right. The shifting perspectives between Paloma and Vic and the cleverly-injected flashback sequences compel players to reach the ending.



The vast majority of Still Life 2 takes place inside a single house. The puzzles typically involve gaining access to a portion of the house, avoiding a trap, or spotting clues. For the most part, the challenges are well-integrated into the storyline. The game also features several puzzles where multiple solutions are acceptable. For instance, during an early portion of the game, it is possible for Vic to gain access to an area of the house in two different ways. At a later stage, you have to deal with several traps. The preferred solution is to carefully approach the areas with the traps and disarm them. However, if you don't want to bother disarming all of the traps, it is also possible to trigger some of them and use a first aid kit to heal the character you are controlling.

Despite the availability of multiple solutions in certain situations, many of the challenges in Still Life 2 can prove to be difficult. Some of the hotspots are quite

easy to miss. There are also plenty of codes you have to figure out in order to access all the areas of the house. Finding some of these numbers may prove to be challenging. The timed sequences also increase the level of difficulty. Players are typically given plenty of time to complete the objectives, but the timer does occasionally start without any kind of warning. It's generally advisable to save the game before you attempt the segment. Without spoiling anything, I would also recommend taking the game seriously when you are told you will only have one chance to do something.



Confining a large chunk of the game into a single location does introduce a significant problem. You will have to do a fair amount of backtracking as you play through Still Life 2. Several rooms have to be explored multiple times. You will even have to unlock the same set of doors more than once. There are story reasons for some of the repetition, but it still gets fairly tedious. As you proceed through the adventure, you will gain access to new puzzles and a few new rooms. However, the relatively minor changes around the house do not sufficiently alleviate the feeling of tedium and entrapment. A larger house with more rooms or a greater number of unique locations would have been appreciated.

The backtracking issue is further magnified by the inventory system utilized by the game. Unlike many adventure games, Still Life 2 does not allow players to carry all the items they find. Instead, Still Life 2 borrows the system seen in games like the Resident Evil series or many RPGs. Vic and Paloma have an inventory that consists of 16 cases. Each item you can pick up fills one or more of these cases. A large item, such as a mattress, takes up the entire inventory. Because of this limitation, you have to decide which items you want to carry at any given time. Cabinets are spread throughout the house to

store the inventory items you can't take with you. In games like Resident Evil, such an inventory system serves something of a purpose. Players have to balance between carrying inventory items required to solve puzzles, weapons that are needed against monsters, and healing items. The restriction increases the challenge level. Unfortunately, in Still Life 2, the small inventory is only successful at creating unnecessary tedium. You are never sure which items you should bring before you move on to the next area. You can't predict how much empty space you should leave in the inventory for new items either. The very next room may have a new item that you have to use immediately or require you to have a trinket you picked up earlier. As such, the inventory restriction leads to a considerable amount of backtracking. It might be 'realistic' to limit the number of items Vic and Paloma can carry, but the resulting tedium substantially detracts from the overall experience. Realism in a game should never come at the expense of entertainment value.



Still Life 2 also suffers from some presentation issues. Some portions of the house where you spend the majority of your time lack detail and polish. A few of the rooms are almost devoid of furniture. Some of the killer's games and traps also feel a little generic. To a certain extent, this meshes well with the prominent horror movie themes in the game. The decrepit old house makes a fine backdrop for the suspenseful story. At times you really feel like you are in the middle of a slasher movie. However, compared to the stylish backgrounds of the original game, the locations you get to explore in Still Life 2 occasionally feel dull and underwhelming.

Still Life 2 features a simple mouse-driven interface. The inventory and Vic's toolkit are accessed with a right click. The inventory screen also contains a list of your current objectives. Important documents

automatically get saved into Vic's phone so they can be reviewed later. Vic and Paloma move with a single click on the left mouse button. A double click makes them run. The camera angle changes automatically as you get close to the edge of the screen. In general, the interface works fairly well. It is easy to move the characters around and access your items. However, there are a few occasions where the camera proves to be problematic. The angle does not change as early as it should and it is possible to miss a couple of items because you have not seen the area from all the available perspectives. Fortunately, this issue does not significantly hurt the gameplay experience.



Overall, Still Life 2 is an engaging adventure that is

hurt by several issues. Shifting perspectives between Paloma and Vic makes for a very compelling experience. Especially toward the end of the game, you may find yourself really caring about what happens to the two characters. The game offers plenty of great moments as you struggle to keep Paloma alive and help Vic catch the killer. The suspense level nicely increases as you go through the adventure. The game also offers a good deal of cleverly-designed challenges. Between avoiding traps, finding clues, and unlocking different portions of the house, you will find plenty to keep you busy in Still Life 2. However, confining the majority of the game to a single location and adding a cumbersome inventory system introduces a great deal of backtracking. Some of the rooms feel dull and uninspired. Still Life 2 does not fully build on the original game either. The flashback sequences are handled well, but they take up a very small portion of the game. Players looking for a significant expansion of the storyline from the first game may be disappointed.

In the end, Still Life 2 is certainly not a bad game, but it does not carry the same level of elegance as its predecessor. It is worth considering if you enjoy crime thrillers and like the idea of controlling two characters. Just don't go in expecting to find a timeless classic.

Still Life 2

PC Adventure



Bright moments:

Compelling story. Switching between Vic and Paloma's perspectives is very engaging.

Fumbles in the dark:

Cumbersome inventory system. Significant amounts of backtracking. Dull environments.

Verdict:

An interesting adventure that lacks polish. It does not match the sophistication of its predecessor, but it's worth considering for fans of crime thrillers.



Developer: Gameco Studios

Publisher: Microids

Release Date: April 2009

System Requirements:

- Windows® 7/XP/Vista
- Pentium IV 1GHz processor
- 512MB RAM
- 128B graphic card compatible with DirectX® 9.0
- 5 GB HD space

Doctor Who: City of the Daleks

review by Jennifer McMurray (originally published at [The Adventuress](#))

The first episode of Doctor Who: The Adventure Games is available now for free for residents of the United Kingdom, as part of the programming paid by the BBC licensing fee, and for \$2.50 as part of a package with episode two for those outside the UK. It is considered by the executive producer of the Doctor Who, Piers Wenger, to be an interactive episode within the fifth series.



The story definitely holds its own among the other stories of the current season of Doctor Who. The game is meant to take fans places that aren't possible on the show due to budget constraints, and this episode lives up to that goal. The episode starts in a destroyed London on Earth in 1963. Nearly the entire human population has been destroyed, and within the first moments of the episode the Doctor and Amy discover the Daleks are behind it all. The Doctor takes the TARDIS to where the destruction began, the capitol city of the Dalek planet Skaro, Kaalaan, which is shown for the first time. Phil Ford, the writer of the 2009 Doctor Who special *The Waters of Mars*, has done an exceptional job with this story. All plot holes that I thought I noticed in the story were addressed as the story unfolds. It's a complex weave of time travel, paradoxes, and the exploration of human determination. Which is everything you'd expect from Doctor Who.

The presentation is also everything you'd expect from Doctor Who. The episode begins with a non-playable intro that sets up the story, and cuts into a real time version of the series five opening credits. The graphics are similar to the level of detail present in the episodic adventure games by Telltale Games, as the developers have aimed for as many computers to be able to play the game as possible. You won't find

mind blowing graphics that will match the computer imagery found in the television show, but the developers have gone to great lengths to ensure that the digital characters match their on-screen counterparts as closely as possible given the technical restraints.

The voice acting doesn't quite live up to the story and presentation, but it's definitely not bad. The parts of the Doctor and Amy are played by their on-screen actors, Matt Smith and Karen Gillan, and it's clear they don't have much voice-over experience. For the most part, the lines are read well. But there are points where the lines are read with little emotion, and come across sounding duller than you'd hear in the show. It's never to the point of being bad. Even the lines lacking in emotion are better than a lot of adventure game voice acting, and thankfully the really dull lines are few and far between.

The music, however, is just what you'd expect from the show, as it uses music composed by the composer from the television show, Murray Gold. The music is quiet in moments where the duo are trying to not be seen, but gets more intense upon detection by enemies.



Presentation aside, the gameplay is what separates an episodic game from a television show, and this game is quite playable. The developers have tried to keep all types of adventure game players happy. The game is controlled via direct control of the playable character, which alternates between the Doctor and Amy. The default option is control via the keyboard and the mouse. The keyboard controls the movement, and the mouse controls the camera and allows the player to click on objects. Like Telltale

Games, Sumo Digital has provided an option to control the character entirely with a mouse. In this game, the player can be controlled similar to the control found in racing games. With the click of a mouse button, the character will move forward, and then can be turned using the mouse. Once the mouse button is released, the character will stop.

There is stealth-based action in City of the Daleks, but it works surprisingly well and in my opinion it doesn't cause the game to enter into action-adventure territory. If you mess up and are shot by a Dalek or bitten by a Varga plant, you don't get a game over screen. Like Full Throttle or Broken Sword: The Angel of Death, you are simply returned to the beginning of the section to try again.



As this game is intended for players of all ages, the puzzles in this game are not difficult. They consist entirely of pattern recognition and puzzles using basic motor skills. There is one block-pushing puzzle, but it is very short. The one flaw the game has is in puzzle repetition. The maze puzzle was the major offender in

this department. It was an OK puzzle the first time, but not great. I enjoyed the wire and pattern puzzles since they seemed like something the Doctor would actually do. But the maze puzzles seemed a little weird, since I couldn't imagine the Doctor pushing little circuits through electrified mazes. If it would have only been done once, I would have let it slide and just chalk my dislike of the puzzle up to fangirl nitpicking. However, they put in three pattern puzzles (but it actually made sense why there would be three of those in the storyline). Then they put in three of the maze puzzles, which were the weakest puzzles. The final puzzle, however, was quite entertaining. Like the episodic adventures by Telltale Games, the boss battle at the end was a puzzle. It wasn't a brain teaser, as it was a simple puzzle testing basic motor skills. However, it was the most memorable puzzle of the game since it fit into the world of Doctor Who so well.

Despite its flaws, The City of Daleks is an entertaining game. The story, presentation, and music make this really feel like an interactive Doctor Who episode. The voice acting, while never truly bad, is a bit dull at times, and does detract from the overall feel. The repetition of puzzles also detracts from the experience. However, for a game that is free to the majority of its audience, it is quite good. If the next episode continues the impressive presentation but improves upon the voice acting and adds more variety to the puzzles, it has the potential to be a great adventure game.

Doctor Who: City of the Daleks

PC Adventure



Bright moments:

Story and soundtrack are very fitting for the show.

Fumbles in the dark:

Puzzles are repetitive. Voice acting leaves something to be desired.

Verdict:

Entertaining despite its flaws. A promising start to the series.



Developer:

Sumo Digital

Publisher:

BBC Multimedia

Release Date:

June 2010

System Requirements:

- Windows XP/Vista/7
- Intel Pentium IV at 1.6 GHz
- 128 MB video card
- 512 MB RAM / 1 GB for Vista & Win 7
- 3 GB of free Hard Drive space
- DirectX 9.0 compatible sound card

Doctor Who: Blood of the Cybermen

review by Jennifer McMurray (originally published at [The Adventuress](#))

The second episode of Doctor Who: The Adventure Games is now out worldwide. As with the first episode it is available for free to residents of the United Kingdom, as part of the programming paid by the BBC licensing fee, and for \$2.50 as part of a package with episode one for those outside the UK. The last episode proved that it had the story and presentation worthy of the Doctor Who title, but the gameplay and voice acting wasn't quite as good as it could be. This episode corrects some of the short-comings of the first, but it still isn't as good as it has the potential to be.

The story and presentation are once again top-notch. This game finds the doctor answering a distress call in the arctic. Once there, he finds an archeological dig taken over by cyberslaves, human beings whose cells were converted by nanomachines to mimic the cybermen, who they serve. The creature behind this conversion is a Doctor Who enemy who has not been seen since the Tom Baker era. The episode once again opens with a non-playable cold opening that reveals the enemy and cuts to the real-time version of the series five credits.

The music is once again great, and fits the scenes perfectly. The voice acting is the sore point again in this episode. It hasn't really improved from the last episode, but once again it's not so bad that it's unbearable. The line reads of the Doctor and Amy are just lacking in emotion, and really aren't up to par

with the way the characters sound in the TV series.

The puzzles here are designed better. There aren't any maze puzzles this time, and the puzzles all really seem like something the Doctor would actually do to solve a problem. There is one returning puzzle from the previous game, but thankfully it is one of the better ones. It only appears once, and it happens near the beginning of the game. The block pushing puzzles return, but they do fit into the story, so I didn't find them at all distracting.

The stealth gameplay returns later in the game, and it is done as well as it was in the first episode. It doesn't make up the majority of the gameplay, and even most of those who don't like action in their adventure games shouldn't be too turned off by it. Like Full Throttle or Broken Sword: The Angel of Death, if you mess up in the action sequences you don't get a game over screen. You just restart the section again as many times as needed.

Blood of the Cybermen keeps the high level of excellent story and presentation of City of the Daleks. Unfortunately, the voice acting still leaves a lot to desired, and the repetition of puzzles still mars the experience somewhat. This episode improves upon the short-comings of its predecessor a little, but there is much room left for improvement.

Doctor Who: Blood of the Cybermen

PC Adventure



Bright moments:

Top-notch story and presentation. Great soundtrack.

Fumbles in the dark:

Issues with voice acting and repetitive puzzles continue into the second episode.

Verdict:

The series is getting better, but there is still room for improvement.



Developer:

Sumo Digital

Publisher:

BBC Multimedia

Release Date:

June 2010

System Requirements:

- Windows XP/Vista/7
- Intel Pentium IV at 1.6 GHz
- 128 MB video card
- 512 MB RAM / 1 GB for Vista & Win 7
- 3 GB of free Hard Drive space
- DirectX 9.0 compatible sound card

The Clockwork Man 2: The Hidden World

review by Gnome

A Clockwork Man is apparently both the steampunk equivalent to C3-PO and the innovative built-in hint system for the latest game by total Eclipse: The Clockwork Man 2 - The Hidden World (hence CM2). A pretty rare adventure-hidden object game hybrid, that seems to be the first (supposedly) casual game I've enjoyed in the last five or so years. Shocking, isn't it?

Well, not particularly, no, as I've never really disliked pixel hunting and had even enjoyed one hidden object game back when the genre was younger, but more on that later. Better give you an idea about the game's plot first.

You (yes, you, dear discoverer of all objects hidden) are cast as a most adventurous girl, whose parents have been possibly murdered or at least gone missing enough to have earned themselves rather convincing graves. Interestingly, the last time they were seen they entered an abandoned mine, while probably searching for the titular Hidden World in a roughly Victorian-era steampunk version of the British Isles. It is up to you to discover what happened to them, what they were so feverishly researching and do something about everything. Any otherworldly places you might happen upon should be considered a hefty bonus and the result of your teenage curiosity. Though CM2 does feature an intriguing, well told and quite original story with likeable characters.

Happily, the game also nails its atmosphere, as, despite the hit-and-miss voice casting, the artwork is

consistently brilliant, the writing is close to greatness and the soundtrack far better than I ever expected from a game that mainly targets the casual market. Actually, this is such a polished and aesthetically pleasing offering, any fan of the hidden object genre will fail to find fault with it. They'll probably love it and its animated, zoomable, scrollable (complete with parallax scrolling effects) and at times static screens.

What's more adventure gamers will probably love it too, as CM2 is equal parts proper adventure game and hidden object thingy. You'll get to solve a variety of inventory based puzzles using the objects you've pixel hunted to discover, explore many perfectly drawn locations, experiment with an assortment of weird mechanical contraptions and solve an impressive selection of pretty original and properly puzzly puzzles. Yes, fear not, that's definitely something even the more ancient readers of this very magazine will definitely appreciate.

As for the pixel hunt and object-spotting bit itself, it is oddly enjoyable too. I really can't begin to understand just how much effort has been put into hiding stuff in plain sight, and making clicking around an enjoyable activity. Thankfully, the steam powered android, the Clockwork Man, provides with a fantastic and gradually upgradable hint system to ensure things never get boring and the pixel hunt never gets desperate.

Visit the [Gnome's Lair](#) for more gnomish ramblings.

The Clockwork Man 2: The Hidden World

PC Casual Adventure



Bright moments:

Guiding a brilliant Nautilus-like submarine to the Hidden World.

Fumbles in the dark:

There are points where searching the screen for a ton of tiny and quite similar objects can be quite boring.

Verdict:

A very good and incredibly polished hidden object game that is deep, varied, and interesting enough for adventure gamers to appreciate and enjoy.



Developer: Total Eclipse

Release Date: Q3 2010

System Requirements:

- OS: Windows® XP/Vista
- CPU: 2.0 GHz or faster
- RAM: 1GB RAM
- 270 MB hard disk space

Swords

preview by Ugur Sener

As our long-time readers will know, Adventure Lantern is a magazine primarily focused on PC adventure games. We offer some coverage to other genres, but do not make an effort to review every mainstream video game release. However, on the rare occasion, we do get a chance to take a look at a non-adventure offering before its release. Swords presented such an opportunity.



Swords is an upcoming Nintendo Wii game developed by Panic Button and published by Majesco Entertainment. As the name suggests, the game emphasizes one on one sword combat. Using the Wii Remote and Wii Motion Plus, the game tries to create a realistic sword fighting experience.

The Wii Motion Plus is an add-on for the regular Wii controller. The device improves motion capture accuracy. Only a few developers seem to be embracing the technology, but the add-on is required for several Wii games. It was used very effectively in games like Red Steel 2. Swords will also require Wii Motion Plus to be available on your system.

In Swords, players will grab their enhanced Wii remotes and take control of a warrior. The game pits

players against eight characters from different time periods. Each fighter has a unique style that matches his or her own era. From the Viking Rognir to the knight Sir Lancelot, a wide range of styles are covered.

Winning fights unlocks new swords for your character. The swords come with abilities that may prove useful in future battles. Players also have the opportunity to acquire new skills and combos for their characters. In addition to the regular tournament mode, Swords gives players an opportunity to mow down a horde of zombies or engage in split-screen multiplayer action.

On the surface, Swords looks like a fairly straightforward fighting game. However, accurate sword control with the Wii Motion Plus could make for some interesting gameplay mechanics. Considering the \$29.99 price tag and potentially interesting one on one swordplay, the game could certainly be worth a look. Keep an eye out for Swords. The game is due for a September 14th release. More information is available through the [Majesco Entertainment Web site](#).



Hammerfight

review by [Jonathon Wisnoski](#) (originally published at [Jonathon's blog](#))

Hammerfight (formerly *Hammerfall*) is a physics action adventure game available for the PC on [Steam](#). It is one of the most innovative games I have ever played, and that is saying a lot. The graphics are good, very good actually for such a small title. Additionally, it has a branching plot that is universally praised and adds quite a bit of replay value. The physics are great and quite a bit of the environment is destructible.

You play as a little battle copter thing, moving it around with your mouse, with a 2D side view. You can attach various battle implements to your machine, including shields, swords, maces, guns, and throwing weapons. Your main attack method is to fly in circles at the right speed and angle to swing the weapon and hit your opponent. There is a lot of skill involved. It is not easy to get the weapons swinging properly and there are different ways to go about trying to do so. Additionally, your weapons can be used to disarm your opponent or to block their strikes. Hitting an enemy's weapon just right and with enough power can knock it off of their ship, giving you a huge advantage. Your weapon is the most sturdy and indestructible part of your ship. It is excellent at blocking and deflecting blows. Also, instead of going for a strong hit you can try to push the enemy into a wall, damaging him and lining him up for a devastating attack, or into another foe, damaging and entangling them both and throwing them out of position.

The main game consists of a series of area battles, some with hordes of enemies poring into the area, others with a few hard enemies, and still others which

are boss battles. Periodically you are asked to make a choice, your answer dictates which path you follow. Additionally, how you do in some battles and challenges dictate your next branch. In addition to the main game there are a few very fun mini games, that will give you weapons and upgrades if you do well in them for use in future mini games or the main game. The most notable of these mini games is one modeled after a simplistic version of baseball and another similar to soccer. If you are interested in multiplayer, you can play with up to four mouses hooked up to one computer.

The weapons are very diverse and interesting. Not only can you attach singing stones to add special attributes to your weapons, but all the weapons play very differently to begin with. The swords are very sharp but short, you need to get closer to your enemies and will not be able to build up as much energy in your swing. Conversely, the maces, in general, are connected to your machine with a chain (which enemies can pass through) and are blunt and heavy, allowing you to give a huge punch to anyone in a wide circle around you. Multiple weapons/armor can be attached at the same time, the limiting factor is mostly their weight, the more you pile on the heavier and therefore slower you will be. The game is moderately loot/upgrade based, you can acquire weapons and upgrades by either winning them in a match, picking them up from your fallen enemies, or buying them. These weapons are stored in your own personal armory, with a spot for one of every weapon in the game.

Visit [Jonathon's blog](#) for more articles on PC gaming.

Hammerfight

PC Action



Bright moments:

The physics system. It just consistently works perfectly.

Fumbles in the dark:

The strain on your wrists from repetitive constant movement

Verdict:

An amazingly fun, completely unique, great looking, physics action game. A must have for any fan of unique, indie, physics, or action games.



Developer: Gkosh

Publisher: Kranx Productions, 1C

Release Date: October 2009

System Requirements:

- OS: Windows 98SE/ME/XP/Vista
- CPU: 2 Ghz
- RAM: 256 Mb
- DirectX: 8.0
- Hard Drive: 150 Mb
- Video Card: 64 Mb