

## Overclocked

A History of Violence

## Preview

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Howard Sherman  
Malinche Entertainment  
& AdventureCon 2008

### Reviews:

Sam & Max: Night of  
the Raving Dead  
& Chariots of the Dogs

Something Amiss

Portal

Mass Effect

Heavenly Sword

Jeanne D'Arc

### Walkthroughs:

Sam & Max: Night of the Raving Dead

# Editorial

At my middle school, students were required to submit a project during the spring semester of each year. We were allowed to work in groups and put together the project in a subject of our choosing. These assignments were considered equivalent to a regular exam. Traditionally, teachers were somewhat lenient in grading, giving students a chance to improve their grade in one subject.

The real goal of the projects was to teach students how to conduct research and write papers. Among the student body however, learning was hardly the objective. The focus instead lied on finding a way to earn the best possible grade with the least amount of effort. In my first year of middle school, I teamed up with two of my friends and selected Turkish as the subject for our project. Our instructor was also our homeroom teacher. She was the one who had told us teachers did not usually grade the projects very harshly. She would certainly go easy on us. It seemed like a sure bet that we would get an A.

Before starting work on the projects, students were required to meet with the instructors. The teacher would provide a list of acceptable research topics. Students could either choose from the list of recommendations or submit project ideas of their own. My friends and I were convinced that we had the perfect idea. We wanted to put together a magazine. It took some convincing, but our teacher agreed to let us prepare a single issue as our project.

We did not have a theme. We had not considered a particular target demographic. We were not sure what types of articles would be included or how long the magazine would be. In fact, our vision for the magazine did not go beyond piecing together a collection of articles with a few pictures and a shiny cover thrown in for good measure. After all, how much work could possibly be involved in producing a single issue? We had two months to get it done; some magazines released new editions every week!

Several weeks went by as we made virtually no progress on the magazine. My friends wrote a couple of articles and I came up with a short story. Before long, we only had a single weekend left before the project was due. We arranged a meeting at one of my friends' houses and tried to write some additional articles. By now, it was quite clear that our content was failing to create a cohesive whole. There was no overarching subject matter or tone that connected our work. After struggling for several hours, we decided to cut our losses and piece together what we had.

This was before personal computers became an ordinary commodity at nearly every house. Many of our classmates had limited access to a computer outside the information technology class we attended once a week. Our group was no exception. One of my team members was lucky enough to have a computer, but he did not have a printer. As such, we would not be able to type our articles and turn in a printed version of the magazine. We had to do everything by hand. Our publication tools consisted of scissors, glue, coloring pens, and pictures 'borrowed' from real magazines.

We assembled our articles by gluing the pages. The cover consisted of a random sampling of images we had clipped from newspapers and magazines. After spending an entire day working on it, our 'magazine' resembled little more than a sloppy attempt at making a scrapbook.

# Adventure Lantern

The pages kept coming apart, the pictures on the cover simply refused to stick. Late into the evening, we agreed to complete a couple more articles on our own and assemble the last set of pages just before turning in the project. Editorial changes were going to have to include whiteout. Changing the sequence of articles was not an option.

By the time we turned in the project, we knew we had greatly underestimated the amount of work involved. It had taken a great deal of time just to come up with the content. We should have given much more thought to how we might actually assemble the magazine. Scrambling for glue and newspaper clippings at the last second was not exactly indicative of good planning.

However, despite the low quality of our final product, we had fulfilled a big part of the project goals. Sure, we had not seen how a real magazine was produced, but we had still gained some insight into the amount of effort and planning involved. Most importantly, we had learned how to function as a team. Calling what we produced a magazine was certainly a stretch, but we were nevertheless proud of our work.

I do not know whether our teacher actually enjoyed our 'magazine', appreciated the amount of effort we put into it, or just took pity on three children. Whatever her reasoning, she gave us an A. It was the lowest possible A, but we were not about to argue.

Thirteen years after I worked on that assignment, Adventure Lantern is three years old. It started out with an amateur spirit not altogether different than what I shared with my friends more than a decade ago. Amidst millions of blogs and more gaming-related sites than I can keep up with, Adventure Lantern has been our channel to talk about something we love.

Now, with Wendy at the helm, our issues look more professional than ever. However, actually printing any magazine I am involved with still seems to be quite impossible. At least nobody has to decipher my handwriting or rely on my skills with a stick of glue any more.

We are making a bit of a late start to 2008. But as always, the team has really come through for this issue. Wendy has done an excellent job of putting everything together. And what better way to start off our third year than welcoming a new member to our team? Be sure to check out Tino's first AL article as you browse through the magazine. Thank you for your continued support and patience. Here's hoping you will enjoy our first issue of the year.

Until next time,  
Ugur

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# IN THE NEWS...

Apparently adventure gaming is alive and kicking, and thus those new releases keep coming. So, be happy, find out what's going to come our way and prepare for some brilliant adventure games ranging from the traditional to the utterly innovative. Cheers!

-Gnome

## First Resonance Screenshots Sighted



Finally! [Xii Games](#) released the first screenshots of its hotly anticipated, wildly innovative, indie point-and-clicker. They are all very atmospheric, very pixel artsy and quite frankly very beautiful. Just like the one I've posted here for your viewing pleasure. For further eye candy and detailed info on the game visit the xii site/blog.

## Ron Gilbert is definitely back!!

Or, to stay on the more informative side of things, Ron Gilbert (and Mr. Kauzlaric) is back and will soon be unleashing DeathSpank upon us. Now, besides sounding all silly and naughty, DeathSpank will be an episodic adventure/RPG hybrid, that's being described as Monkey Island meets Diablo.

Have a look here:  
[www.deathspank.com](http://www.deathspank.com)



## The Whispered World Lives

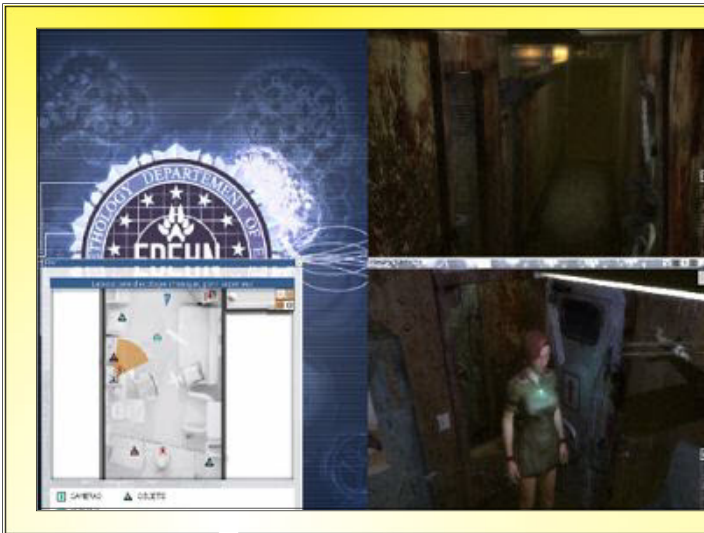


Remember this one? It was the promising freeware cartoon adventure that was soon grabbed by the frankly hilarious (and now defunct after releasing exactly zero games) Bad Brain and almost banished to oblivion. Thankfully Daedalic Entertainment came to the rescue and the game will finally be released in a very ambitious and quite impressive form probably sometime in 2008.



## The Adventure Collection: Volume 1

A lovely adventure compilation by the Adventure Company has recently been released and it really seems like a jolly good idea. The games included are: Dead Reefs, Keepsake, Return to Mysterious Island, Nibiru: Age of Secrets and The Secret Files: Tunguska. Hopefully more publishers will help establish a new compilation trend...



## Das Experiment

Well, ok, go on, call it The Experiment. Call it Bob, for all I care. What really matters is that the Americanized version of the brilliant Experience 112 should already be available in stores across the US. Find out more on this atmospheric, graphically impressive and highly innovative adventure over at its official website:

[www.microapp.com/contenus\\_propres/sites\\_plus/experience112](http://www.microapp.com/contenus_propres/sites_plus/experience112)

There's also a demo you can download, that will definitely be unlike anything else you've ever played.

## Dracula Origin: Website Unveiled

Probably the hundredth Dracula inspired adventure to ever grace our dearest of genres and it's got a brand new official website too. Have a look at the cunningly selected [www.dracula-origin.com](http://www.dracula-origin.com). Seems like quite a promising new Frogwares title too. Highly atmospheric graphics are to be expected.



## Daedalic announces Edna & Harvey



Finally! A game set in an insane asylum that's actually NOT morbidly depressing. Enter Edna & Harvey (Harvey being the talking stuffed bunny). Could she really be wrongfully incarcerated in an asylum? Again, Harvey....talking stuffed bunny. Hmm. Guaranteed twisted humor for all!

[www.daedalic.de](http://www.daedalic.de)

## TAC to publish Sherlock: Nemesis



The Adventure Company has announced that they will publish Sherlock Holmes: Nemesis in North America. As is the TAC way, the name has been changed; developed by Frogwares and originally titled Sherlock Holmes versus Arsene Lupine. Though the name change may drive you nuts, another AG release in N.A. should help ease the pain. Look for it in April 2008.

## Myst Online is no more



Actually, it still *is*, but unfortunately GameTap have been in a shocking mood and announced that Myst Online: Uru Live will no longer be hosted on their service. Still, it will probably last for a tad more than a month before it's finally taken down. For shame...

## AGS enters the .NET world



AGS, the popular free tool that has already helped talented people create tons of excellent –mostly free-ware- adventures, has finally reached version 3.0. Major changes include a fully rewritten editor all in the .Net Framework, a vastly upgraded graphics engine, Vista compatibility, a shiny new look, better multilingual font support and a script debugger. Grab yourselves a copy from the lovely Adventure Game Studio website

[www.adventuregamestudio.co.uk/](http://www.adventuregamestudio.co.uk/)



## Interview with Howard Sherman Part 1: Malinche Entertainment/Saint in Sin City

Conducted by: Wendy Nellius



Ah, the 1970's. For those of us who were around then, it was certainly an interesting time. There were a lot of things going on at the time. I won't get into the political events since this is supposed to be an entertaining article, right? There was the emergence of disco and heavy metal music, the fashion horrors of bell bottom pants, spandex and sequins, the innovativeness and absurdity of the pet rock and so much more.

But, for all the gamers out there, the 70's brought about the beginning of the ultimate time consuming form of entertainment we could ever imagine.....the adventure game; specifically the text adventure. I don't think the intention was to turn us all into AG junkies. But, junkies we are and proud of it! Nowadays, it's all about graphics, graphics, graphics.

Do you ever wish you could go back to the time where imagination and story blended together seamlessly? Games where we had multiple endings based upon OUR actions? Well, you can. Howard Sherman of Malinche Entertainment has been doing just that since 2002.

In addition to keeping the text adventure genre alive and kicking, Howard Sherman is also the organizer of AdventureCon 2008, a gaming conference dedicated fully to Adventure Games. Because AL had so many questions for Howard, we decided to split the interview into 2 parts to cover it all. Be sure to check out Part 2 of the interview featuring AdventureCon.

Adventure Lantern thanks Howard for giving of his valuable time to answer our many, many questions. We thoroughly enjoyed reading his answers and wish him much success with AdventureCon and continued success with Malinche.

--Wendy

**[Adventure Lantern]:** Please tell us a little about yourself and how Malinche Entertainment got started.

**[Howard Sherman]:** I'd been kicking around the idea of firing up a modern interactive fiction publishing company for years. In the mid to late 1990s, I decided to take action and made some excellent progress before I hit a brick wall.

My professional life as a senior executive got in the way of my earliest plans. Before I hit the "pause" button, I had completed the Pentari prequel and roughly 20-25 rooms of Pentari: First Light. Some years later, I just picked up where I left off when more free time presented itself.

**[AL]:** What made you decide to focus Malinche on interactive fiction?

**[HS]:** Because nobody else made any attempt to cater to the countless number of "orphans" out there left stranded after the first age of commercial text adventure games came to a close.

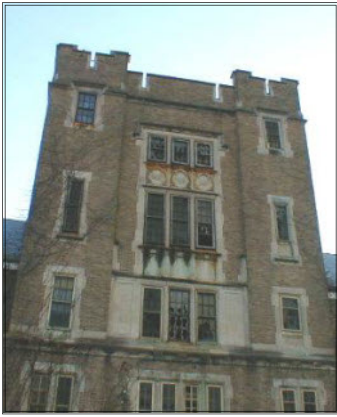
The fans were there but there was no one around to cater to what the fans wanted. There are those in the amateur movement out there who are probably jumping up and down in hysterics right about now.

Good. Maybe that will motivate them to write interactive fiction that most people could actually enjoy. Perhaps interactive fiction with mass appeal can one day be produced by someone other than me. Until then, Malinche Entertainment stands alone in the commercial interactive fiction world because Malinche gives people what they want.

And so the second age of commercial text adventure games is here - made possible by what we're doing at Malinche Entertainment.

**[AL]:** What is the primary difference between a text adventure and interactive fiction? Or is there one?

**[HS]:** While text adventure games and interactive fiction



are functionally identical at a primal level, the differences become distinct when the adventurer delves deeper.

All works of interactive fiction fall under the umbrella of text adventure games in the larger sense. But not all text adventure games make the cut to be distinguished as interactive fiction.

To me, interactive fiction has to be fully immersive to the player. The strength of the writing has to be as powerful in creating mental imagery in the player's mind as the power of a graphics engine in generating the pretty pictures the point-and-click players have come to expect. The power of possibility in the story has to be there too; how much can the player do? Do interesting things happen (or almost happen) when they try something?

Text adventure games are almost always entertaining; interactive fiction takes that core value to a higher level.

**[AL]:** There are some out there who may not even be aware of text adventures. I'm sure I'm showing my age because I remember them well. Which text adventure game stands out in your mind as the one that had you hooked?

**[HS]:** Any of my fans out there already know the answer: Zork. On the TRS-80 Model III. In a Radio Shack store in Brooklyn, NY. I was 12. It was late winter turning to early spring.

My life would never be the same.

I just had to figure out what the folded piece of plastic did.

I was euphoric after reaching the rank of Junior Adventurer. I roared in triumph when I finally killed the thief.

Zork grabbed me and pulled me in within a few seconds because the vivid descriptions, highbrow humor and the promise of adventure all came together.

Other games that really shined through for me are Beyond Zork, Suspect, Lurking Horror, Softporn Adventure (which

spawned the massive Leisure Suit Larry franchise), Adventureland, Return to Pirate's Island 2 (for being WICKED hard!) among many others.

**[AL]:** Do you write all the stories yourself? Or do you employ others to do so?

**[HS]:** I write every word myself. Malinche staff and diligent volunteers help immensely (especially with testing) but when it comes to the writing, it's all me. Sometimes, a play tester will make some suggestions about a puzzle or a patch of prose and I'll make changes that help the title flow better.

**[AL]:** Do you have a personal favorite when it comes to the type of story? Science Fiction, Detective, Horror etc.?

**[HS]:** That's a tough one. I'm a fiction fan from the word go which makes it hard for me to pick one favorite. Let me try a shortcut to an answer; there is not a single romance fiction title in my personal library.

**[AL]:** When you released Pentari: First Light, what kind of reaction did it get?

**[HS]:** Explosive! The tremendous, positive response from fans and game distributors along with glowing media coverage told me I scored a direct hit in targeting the text adventure game market for a commercial comeback.

**[AL]:** Do you find your fans to be more bookworm, gamer or both?

**[HS]:** Definitely both. I think enjoying good fiction and appreciating a good game experience is a prerequisite for fully enjoying the interactive fiction experience.

**[AL]:** Your latest project is Saints in Sin City. Can you tell us a little bit about the story?

**[HS]:** Saints in Sin City is a crossover work blending the most exciting aspects of a spy thriller with the classic elements of a murder mystery. The player is a senior member of MI-6 slipped into the scene under cover as



"merely" protecting the Prime Minister who is attending the opening of the multi-national Opimo hotel, resort and casino.

But the player's job goes far beyond that; The CIA and MI-6 are positive that multiple terrorist cells are converging on Las Vegas to take out the Opimo. Why? The Opimo is the world's first \$1 trillion piece of property so, naturally, its grand opening with several heads of state in attendance is getting an unprecedented amount of international media coverage.

And that's exactly what the terrorists want.

Taking out most of the world's high-profile leaders who are coming to celebrate the latest addition to global decadence with the cameras rolling is as good as it gets if you're a terrorist.

By throwing global terrorism into the mix, Saints in Sin City has appeal to for almost anyone in perhaps three different fiction genres.

**[AL]:** Sin City refers to Las Vegas. I know you have created a real-life travel guide for Las Vegas. What took you so long to base one of your stories there?

**[HS]:** Saints in Sin City is my first serious attempt at an interactive fiction title set in Las Vegas but I have had the idea before...

I dabbled with Las Vegas in a previous text adventure game some years ago. It's entitled BOFH: Interactive Fiction Edition and I co-wrote it with the legendary creator of "The Bastard Operator from Hell" himself - Simon Travaglia.

Parts of my BOFH text adventure game take place in a top-of-the-line casino resort as a result of the player, a new BOFH, scoring a very serious junket under the flimsy disguise of a business trip.

**[AL]:** Will there be a lot of twists and turns in the storyline?

**[HS]:** Oh yes. With the global terrorism dimension, the player can take the story in a dozen different directions at almost any point in time. Then, there's the complication of several dead bodies showing up all over the property at precisely the wrong moment which gives the player a murder mystery to solve to keep the local police out of his way.

Just in case the player still wants more to do, the spy thriller aspects are always there; attachés from a couple of dozen countries are at the Opimo too. Some are obviously on his side and others are quietly working against him.

Just two things are working in the player's favor; they have a "get out of jail free" card to do whatever it takes to stop the terrorists without exception and they have full run of the property - including the private villas where the billionaires stay to the security room and the surveillance cameras to the less glamorous, but very useful, service corridors, laundry rooms and parking garages.

**[AL]:** How much do we really get to interact with the story?

**[HS]:** A lot. So far I've implemented The Vault; the trendiest tri-level nightclub in Las Vegas, I'm nearly done with the expansive lobby and most of the casino area.

The level of interaction at different points is going to be in-depth but not to the point where the player is distracted

## Excerpt from Pentari: First Light



pentari.z5 - Frotz 2.43

Entrance Hall Score: 5 Moves: 12

It's considered a breach of protocol to enter the compound of another company while training. You wisely decide to not step on any toes this time.

> walk north

**Charlie Company Barracks**  
If the Army of Boswin were to publish a new edition of the soldier's handbook, a picture of this barracks should be included as the example other companies should follow. The floors are polished to an almost blinding shine while each of the bunks lining both sides of this building are perfectly made. Every locker next to each bunk is closed and locked. Not a single scrap of paper, not one article of clothing, nay not even a dust particle looks out of place. The powerful smell of high quantities of pine cleaner nearly burns your nostrils. Damn, you run a good company.

You can see a Pentarian Transporter here.

> east  
You can't go that way.

> west  
You can't go that way.

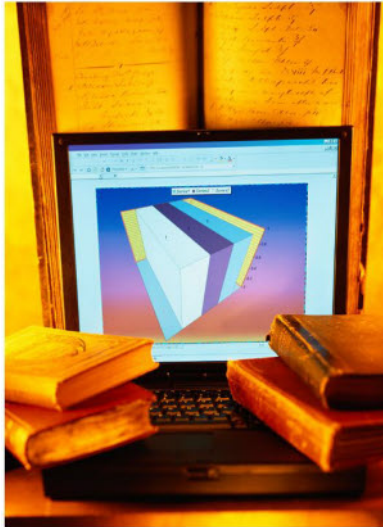
> examine transporter  
One of the many wonders the Wizards of Pentari have developed is the transporter. The older, time-consuming methods of travel have been obviated by this elegantly simple device which can send the traveller over any distance in mere seconds simply by stating your destination after entering the booth.

As you are in an Army barracks and not a five star hotel this is one of the simplest models available. It's nothing more than a three sided booth pre-programmed to a single destination. A sign directly over the booth bears the simple legend 'City Transporter' over it.

> enter transporter  
You get into the Pentarian Transporter.

> city

Interactive Fiction is a Fusion...



...of Fiction Books & Technology.

from achieving their objectives.

On the other hand, it just occurred to me that Las Vegas is the Mecca of dalliances so the player getting side-tracked for too long in a Blackjack game might be a good, if unfair, idea where game play is concerned.

**[AL]:** What is the basic interface? Keyboard and black screen? Or perhaps it's blue?

**[HS]:** The interface is keyboard, like always, for the game interaction. Since I've fallen in love with the Gargoyle interpreter for Windows, the player will not be seeing a blue screen unless they really want to. (Windows users should never have the misfortune of seeing a blue screen, pun intended...) Thanks to Gargoyle, the player is treated to a crisp display that's easy on the eyes. The keyboard is essential for the player to tell Sin City what they want to do in plain English.

**[AL]:** Do your stories always end neatly? Do you ever end with a cliff-hanger?

**[HS]:** I like neat. My desk doesn't always exhibit this preference but I do tend to wrap things up. Saints in Sin City will have a couple of minor character crossovers (Commander Davis from Endgame is scheduled to make a cameo appearance, for example) but I'm intending it to be a stand alone title which doesn't leave a lot of room for cliffhangers.

**[AL]:** With all the emphasis in the gaming world placed upon outstanding graphics, how are you able to compete?

**[HS]:** I don't even try. For the graphically minded gamer

there is a simple formula: games=graphics.

I just write the very best game text possible. I continually study my craft and improve my performance to make better and better games in every way text adventure games are measured.

**[AL]:** When are you expecting to release Saint in Sin City?

**[HS]:** This year. Probably. [grin] I'm notorious for missing self-imposed deadlines so I just tend to go with the flow. I'm thinking of a summer launch but it'll probably be more like fall.

**[AL]:** For those who have never experienced text adventure/interactive fiction, what are they missing out on?

**[HS]:** Interactive fiction is the next level in the evolution of the book. Lots of people like a certain kind of book. They can enjoy more of everything they like about their favorite kind of fiction when they play interactive fiction

**[AL]:** Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

**[HS]:** If there's one thing I could impress upon people who have a choice between visual entertainment and textual entertainment it is this: try and pick textual entertainment more often.

Sure I have my own selfish reasons for saying this; I'd love to move as many copies of Saints in Sin City as the latest sports game on a game console. Much more than that, though, is my desire to see people get smarter. Playing a virtual baseball game or shoot 'em up on a game console is not going to make you smarter. Reading a book will do that.

Interactive fiction kicks that up a notch because you're not just reading; you're thinking about every turn the story can take and every decision you can make. When people tap into their critical thinking skills like this, they can count on astonishing gains in mental capacity.

**Malinche Entertainment**

The Novel of the Future is Here.

Malinche Interactive Fiction titles are compatible with all versions of Windows, any version of Mac OS X, Linux, Unix, the entire Palm family, Windows Mobile devices, most smartphones, Classic iPods, and Nintendo DS.

For more information, check out the whole Malinche site at:

[www.malinche.net](http://www.malinche.net)

# Interview with Howard Sherman

## Part 2: AdventureCon 2008

Conducted by: Wendy Nellius

Calling all Adventure Gamers far and wide! AdventureCon is back on and we have the interview with all the details. Let part 2 of our interview with Howard Sherman begin!



### Tentative Schedule as of 24 March 2008

This Schedule of Events is Subject to Change Without Notice.

#### August 29, 2008

Private Reception Party for VIP Celebrity Guests and AdventureCon Attendees Staying at The Water Club

Live action adventure begins!

#### August 30, 2008

Al Lowe

Lori Ann and Corey Cole

#### August 31, 2008

Scott Adams

Along with many others, I received the first email announcing that official planning has begun for AdventureCon 2008. First, can you please tell everyone what AdventureCon is all about?

AdventureCon is destined to be a magical event adventure game fans will cherish always. From the dawn of the adventure age with Adventure International, Infocom and Sierra Online to the most modern releases of companies like Malinche Entertainment and Dreamcatcher Games, there will be something for everybody at AdventureCon.

Some may already have heard of it via AdventureCon 2007 which unfortunately did not come to fruition. I don't think everyone fully understands the amount of planning that goes into an event, especially a brand new event. Like a game, you can get hit with a bug that causes a minor hitch or multiple bugs that brings it to an impasse. So, what's the short story on what happened last year?

Bugs? Oh yeah, we had bugs to work out. It's been over a year and we're still in beta!

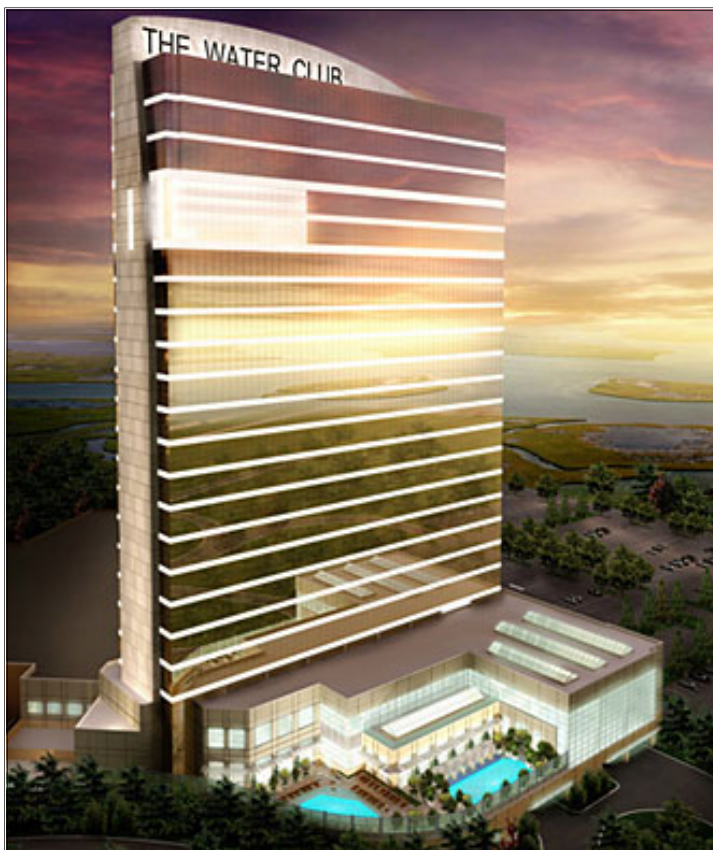
The short story? AdventureCon 2007 was a journey of discovery for me. I am an insane entrepreneur in the sense that when I have a good idea I get fired up and get to work. Obstacles in front of me are briefly considered then immediately shrugged off.

I had absolutely no idea what I was in for when I set out to plan AdventureCon! [laugh]

Venue selection was brutish but fun. What's not fun about visiting Las Vegas and deducting it as a legitimate business expense?

Negotiations with The Mirage hotel were exhausting but rewarding. I got them to change all the terms (the food and beverage requirement being the true deal killer) and the space allocations to drive the price down to what I calculated to be possible. Possible means: covering all the costs for renting the venue space, flying in all the VIPs, putting them up in hotel suites, wining and dining them, and catering to all of their wishes during their stay in Las Vegas. Thank goodness I have an accounting back-





ground. I ran a dizzying array of calculations assuming different models of attendance and activities.

Then there was the really big question: when would AdventureCon happen? Determining show dates bordered on the impossible since most VIPs had conflicting calendars. I made it an outright requirement for Scott Adams to be there which meant that a VIP or two had to be excluded. Why must Scott Adams figure into my equations? Scott Adams is the man responsible for launching not just the commercial adventure game market but the commercial computer game market altogether. We owe it all to him.

I'm faced with this same dilemma this year; Grandmaster Adams can attend AdventureCon over Labor Day weekend but he cannot make it July 4th. The legendary Jane Jensen is considering attending but she can only do so over the July 4th weekend.

It was a shame to lose her to scheduling. If we ever do an "AdventureCon II" I'll make it a point to set it for July 4th and invite Jane Jensen first. Then Ken and Roberta Williams.

**I can tell that you are not one to let setbacks stop you from reaching a goal. Why is AdventureCon so important for the adventure gaming community and why did you decide to take on this venture?**

"Somebody has to do it so it might as well be me!" [grin]

Seriously, the adventure game world should not be treated like the bastard stepchild of the greater gaming industry. Why do we have to settle for being a footnote at other shows like GDC or Leipzig?

I am dauntless, resourceful and as you so graciously put it, relentless to boot. I'm also not averse to taking risks.

**I remember last year's planning had you collaborating with Randy Sluganski of Just Adventure. Will the same be true this year?**

Unfortunately, it looks as though Randy will sit this round out. Randy is grappling with very serious personal challenges so it seems I'm going it alone. Randy is always welcome to jump in whenever he wants to - IF he wants to. And, if he can't or won't, I completely understand. I'll carry the torch and make sure he gets all the credit he deserves for laying tremendous groundwork last year.

**Word is that you're aiming for Atlantic City, NJ as the venue location this year. Is there a benefit to an East Coast vs. West Coast location?**

Big time. When we first discussed a venue Randy voted for Pittsburgh and I voted for Vegas with Atlantic City as my alternate choice. Randy expressed concern at Vegas since most people would need to fly in. But I wasn't hearing it. I was thinking BIG. I always think big, come to think of it. What bigger or better place to host AdventureCon? As we learned, hosting AdventureCon in Las Vegas wasn't in the cards.

Atlantic City really is the ideal city; it's within driving distance of several major population centers, has rail, bus and airline service as well as immediate proximity to a major highway.

Picking which hotel to host it last year was a separate set of problems. Most of the big resorts wanted nothing to do with a weekend convention.

This year it's easy: The Water Club at Borgata. They can accommodate our dates and all of our needs while delivering a superior experience. Our confirmed VIP guests can't wait to check in. Neither can I.

**Price seemed to be a big issue of debate last year. How difficult is it to try and satisfy so many different opinions on what the price should be?**

Virtually impossible, it seems. I hope that prospective attendees understand that AdventureCon cannot be done on a dime. Not to burst anyone's bubble but nobody should expect a \$49 weekend pass. Our VIP guests will not stay in a cut-rate hotel and have dinner at a diner up the street.

## CONFIRMED!

### SCOTT ADAMS

The first person known to get an adventure game onto a personal computer: Adventureland. He is also credited with starting the computer game industry we enjoy today.

[www.msadams.com](http://www.msadams.com)

### AL LOWE

Best known as the creator of the infamous Leisure Suit Larry Series. During his 16 years with Sierra, Al contributed to many legendary games such as King's Quest III and Police Quest.

[www.allowe.com](http://www.allowe.com)

### LORI ANN & COREY COLE

This husband and wife duo got together and created Transolar Entertainment. They are the brains behind the Quest for Glory series and Shannara.

[www.transolar.com](http://www.transolar.com)

### CHRIS JONES

Yet another legend in the gaming world. Chris is best known as the creator (along with Aaron Connors) of the Tex Murphy series of games.

Bringing our guests in from all over the country, putting them up in luxury accommodations and keeping them fed and happy is not cheap. On average, it will cost approximately \$3,500 per VIP. That's \$3,500 EACH. Line up Chris Jones, Al Lowe and Scott Adams and we're starting out with a \$10,500 up front expense before we rent even one square foot of show space. Then if Steve Meretzky confirms (he's very interested but needs to get his summer schedule settled) that's another \$3,500 bringing VIP costs to \$14,000. With Lori Ann and Corey Cole confirming we get a two-for-one special so it's "only" another \$3,500 to get them both in. At this point we're looking at \$17,500 in costs to cover for our celebrity guest list alone.

**Such a small question, but so big: Food or No Food?**

And a very fair question at that! I am very happy to say that AdventureCon 2008 does NOT come with a meal plan! It's not even an option.

As a public service announcement I must add that I heartily encourage everyone to eat three square meals every day to keep their energy levels up. Since we're not providing any food to attendees, everyone is on their own in deciding which of the Borgata's 19 restaurants they want to eat in when hunger comes calling.

**What is your vision for AdventureCon 2008? Will there be workshops? How about the live-action adventure game? Any plans for that in 2008?**

Everything we planned for 2007 is on the table for 2008. That would be workshops, a live-action adventure game on the Borgata property, an adventure game museum, autograph opportunities and more.

**Who is on the invited guest list so far? It's really early in the planning stages, but have you received any confirmations yet?**

Quite a few. Al Lowe and Scott Adams were the first to sign on. Lori and Corey Cole are on board. And in just the past two days I heard back from Chris Jones and he's confirmed he'll be there. There's a very strong possibility Steve Meretzky will attend, assuming he can settle his summer calendar. He's got a lot of balls in the air at the moment. Ken and Roberta Williams have declined but I am doing everything I can to persuade them to attend. I encourage everyone to join me in trying to change their minds. I am flooding their mailbox with copies of fan requests I've received. JOIN ME! :) There's a second list of VIP guests we're putting together now in response to fan requests. We'll go in order starting with the most requested celebrity.

**Are you inviting developers, publishers or both?**

Both. I think But, I'm not sure. I'm tempted to leave them out of the picture but I know that's not realistic. Last year, everyone was flaky. Two publishers first committed immediately to becoming major sponsors then never followed through on their commitments. That's part of the reason why we had to postpone AdventureCon last year.

One major publisher (who I won't name even though I should) will not participate in a weekend event because, as he put it, "it's unfair to our employees and their families to keep them away for a weekend." My response then and now is -- "Isn't it unfair to expect your CUSTOMERS to take off from work during the week to come to a convention?" Weekday fan conventions won't work. My own experience attending dozens of conventions should've told me that. It took Al Lowe to shake some sense in me. This fat cat developer has no clue. I'd love to name names but my sense of professionalism prevents me... barely.

Another powerhouse in the adventure game world won't lift a finger to support the event because, as the head honcho put it, "We're not releasing any adventure games

this year." I don't follow that logic entirely; if you're building a brand you're always putting your name out there. Other publishers never committed to attend (or even bothered to inform us they were thinking about it) but then were bummed out when they found out we had to cancel. Randy and I were amazed by this.

If you're a developer or a publisher and you want to be a part of AdventureCon then you have to step forward and sign up! Every time a company signs up, a fan's cost to attend goes down exponentially.

If publishers and developers want AdventureCon to succeed then their participation and support of AdventureCon could make all the difference. I urge all interested parties to contact me and make arrangements. Even the clueless guy. I'll forgive and forget. Let's all unite and make AdventureCon happen.

**For those developers and publishers out there working hard for the adventure community, why should they get involved with AdventureCon?**

BECAUSE they are working hard for the adventure community. What better way to show your customers and prospective customers that you're serious about adventure games than to throw your hat in the ring and support AdventureCon?

I am committing 100% of Malinche Entertainment's resources to this project. From the girls who answer the phones, to my sales director and even the technical support staff, we are all committed to seeing AdventureCon succeed. I am paying everyone overtime to work AdventureCon and deliver an enchanting event.

I am personally clocking insane hours every day to make AdventureCon happen.

Clearly, Malinche is demonstrating its commitment to its core audience. Why would my peers in the adventure game industry do less? Can they afford to?

Consumers are smarter today than ever before. It wouldn't take much detective work to deduce which companies didn't step up and support AdventureCon. Customers would be well within their rights to wonder if such publishers are truly committed to their satisfaction as adventurers. Consumers could then feel free to vote with their wallets accordingly.

Apart from the omnipotent force of customer loyalty, publishers and developers can also look forward to powerful networking opportunities with other industry leaders as well as the customers who make our industry possible.

**For the gamers, why should they attend?**

For years adventure gamers had only one primary medium to interact with each other: forums and bulletin boards. Now a whole new playing field is possible. Isn't it time we took our affinity to the next level?

Getting the chance to meet and talk with the people who made their favorite adventure games has never been possible before now. Come and meet the legends of the adventure game world. Test your mettle as an adventurer in a real-time adventure game and let the world know you are a very serious adventurer.

I am implementing the real-time adventure game personally and I promise every player an adventure they will never forget.

What's almost as good? Swag! Score some free adventure games and other sweet freebies.

Meet other fans all over the USA and the world and share war stories over dinner. Get your games signed by the people who created them. Hear them talk about their time at Sierra, Adventure International and Infocom...

In a word: Get involved with AdventureCon and experience magic.

**Is there anything else you'd like to share with us about AdventureCon?**

I can't do this alone. I can rent the hall, I can start the music, but we need people to show up and dance.

AdventureCon is for adventure gamers. I think it's critical that everyone even remotely interested in adventure games stand up and be counted.



Don't miss out on AdventureCon 2008. To get notified of updates, visit the official AdventureCon websites

[www.adventurecon.org](http://www.adventurecon.org)

Be sure to sign up for the AdventureCon newsletter!



# OVERCLOCKED

## A History of Violence

Preview By Wendy Nellius



Rain, Rain, Rain. It has been raining for days straight and the city is restless. Violence has increased likely due to its residents being cooped up inside.

Five distressed souls stumble into the streets of NYC, seemingly suffering from some untold horror. What happened to the 3 men and 2 women now being held at the Staten Island Forensic Hospital? That's what everyone would like to know. Unfortunately, amnesia encompassing all 5 subjects will hinder the flow of information tremendously; possibly permanently. There are many experts who specialize in cracking amnesia cases and Dr. David McNamara, a former army psychiatrist, may be the one to do just that.

In *Overclocked: A History of Violence*, you will get to play as David McNamara as well as all five patients at the hospital. Your job as David will be to somehow help these patients retrieve their memories (presented as flashbacks) one snippet at a time. You'll need to find just the right trigger through evidence collected throughout the game sometimes in conjunction with hypnosis. What is most intriguing about the storyline is that you will be working backwards through time

beginning with the most current situation. During each flashback, you will play as that particular patient and experience their memory yourself. You'll experience their conversation, their challenges and their emotions.

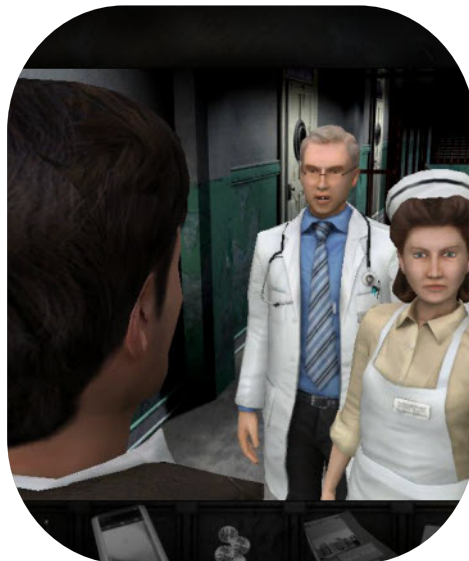
Unfortunately for Dave, his job is not going to be as straight-forward as he would like. David is plagued by multiple personal problems and will also have to deal with an antagonistic doctor and his assistant at the hospital. You would

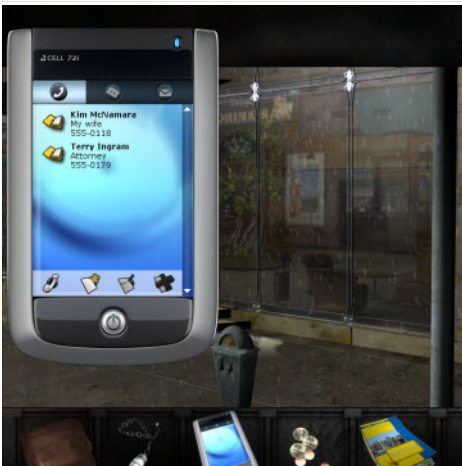
think they would be happy to have the help, but this isn't the case and it will take the entire game to understand why. Add in the fact that the patients are so traumatized they can barely speak and one is extremely violent. This will not be an easy task.

This 3<sup>rd</sup> person point-and-click adventure by House of Tales begins in a New York hotel room. Quickly examine the room, check the answering machine, make a few calls and you're on your way.

In order to help with your task, David has a PDA which will allow him to contact NPCs, record patient sessions and check voicemail/email. Inventory scrolls at the bottom of the screen and involves only one click in order to use an item.

Getting around is made clear with large directional arrows. Pressing the space bar will allow you to see all available exits. Double clicking will allow you to run during gameplay and also move immediately from one node to another. Some of the interface items in the main menu were still under construction in this preview but are expected to be corrected in the final version.





You will get to converse often with NPCs during the game. And, while you get to choose the topics courtesy of “topic bubbles”, that’s where your participation will end. The ensuing conversation will take place via an animated cutscene. So, those who don’t want to mess around with choosing dialog should be happy. Skipping dialog or a cutscene altogether is accomplished with the Escape button. However, unless you’re replaying, it’s really not recommended as you will miss important details.

The puzzles range from easy to medium level of difficulty. No real stumpers. There are inventory puzzles and logic puzzles. A lot of the game focuses on finding those memory triggers. While I don’t think there were any real stumpers, as we’re all better at some puzzles; worse at others, I’ll leave this for you to decide.

The preview copy provided to Adventure Lantern is voiced in German with English sub-titles. This was a little difficult to get used to and the text would have been better placed at the bottom of the game screen, but this should not be an issue when the game is fully translated into English.

Lip syncing is on point....at least for the German version. The voice acting seemed to be fitting (I think...well...perhaps...ok, I have no idea if they were good or not) but this will all change once English is supplanted into the game. We’ll just have to cross our fingers and hope that care is taken to do this right.

Since David’s job takes place primarily at the hospital, he doesn’t have as many locations to visit. But, more locations are available through the memories of the patients. And, House of Tales most certainly has a way of making 2D background come alive. And, these have to be the best damn water & rain effects I have ever seen. Look, a lot of games out there have rain, right? But, there are few and far between who actually take the time to make the ground look wet and shiny with puddles in conjunction with the falling raindrops. The turbulent ocean seen from the dock had exactly the right movement to make

it realistic. In fact, all the backgrounds are immaculately detailed.

House of Tales also uses camera angles to enhance the storyline and bring emphasis to the seriousness of the story. It works. Also employed is the use of split screens. So, while you’re watching a patient in the throes of a flashback, the memory will be played out on the right side of the split screen. This adds a whole new dimension to the storytelling. They’ve also added a special technique to a couple of cutscenes to crank up the drama factor in a touching kind of way. You’ll have to play the game to see what I’m talking about, but I loved it. Sound or lack of sound plays a big part in the immersion process. There is something you will also experience with one of the patients based upon sound and also the way he looks that leads you to believe he’s going to pounce and kick your ass at any second. Seriously, I found myself saying that out loud.

House of Tales has a fondness for immersive storylines and Overclocked: A History of Violence does not disappoint. You will WANT to know what has happened to the five disturbed individuals. You may even find yourself questioning the motives of all others in the game and David himself. Keep in mind that the game does contain mature content so it may not be for everyone.

Overclocked has already won an award for innovation in Germany. Lighthouse Interactive has taken on publishing in North America. If the full conversion to English goes well, this unique game will have a strong showing for both House of Tales and Lighthouse-Interactive and be a most welcome addition for the adventure gaming community.

**Developer:** House of Tales  
**Publisher:** Lighthouse-Interactive  
**Platform:** PC  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Est. N.A. Release:** Mar 31, 2008



# SOMETHING AMISS

## Chapters 1 & 2

By Thaumaturge



The MRI scan was supposed to be routine. The events that followed, however, would seem to be far from it.

Sedated for the procedure, Alice Shelter wakes up to find herself still in the MRI room, alone, and she discovers, with the exit door locked. She waits, and three hours pass with no release.

Where are the doctors? Perhaps more sinister, why does a nearby plasma screen include the word “experiment”?

At last Alice decides to find her own way out – and it is here that our game begins.

The first chapter is concerned with that goal – escape from the confines of the MRI room. The second chapter picks up where this leaves off, with what Alice discovers on escaping the room – which is not at all what one is likely to expect on exiting a room in an urban hospital.

Thus far little of the story has been

revealed, but each chapter offers new mysteries. Few, if any, answers are as yet available, but hints are present. Depending on the direction taken by, and the writing found within the subsequent chapters, this could become a rather interesting story (although I hesitate to say too much, for fear of spoiling the revelations of these first two chapters).

A few spelling errors aside, the writing is decent, and serves its purpose well.

Unfortunately, I do have two criticisms: First, the main character is not terribly well-written, I don't feel – specifically, she seems to show a lack of response to events around her, which can lead to her feeling a little “empty”.

Second, I noticed a few points that seemed to me to be a little illogical – such as a mention in a diary of dropping a compass in order to lighten a party's load. Just what was this compass made of, and how big was it, that dropping it resulted in a noticeable lightening of load, and one that made

the subsequent loss of direction an acceptable price?

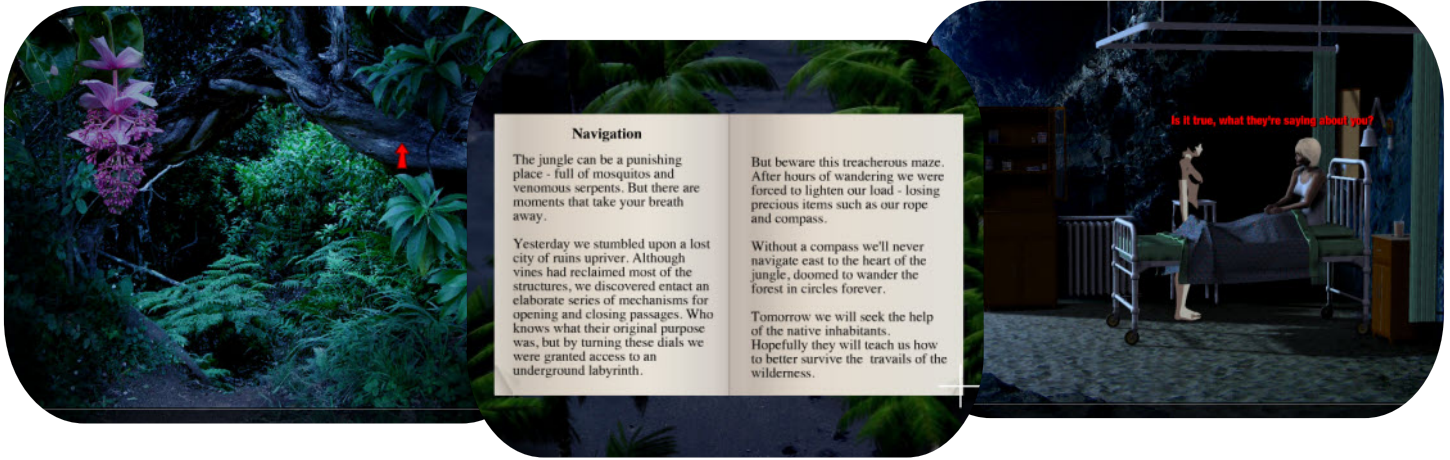
In terms of interface, the game is simple, effective, and primarily mouse-based.

Within the game world, a single click of the left mouse button instructs Alice to walk to the indicated point. When held over an exit, the mouse cursor becomes a red arrow, and in these cases a single click initiates a transition from the current region to the next region.

The player also has an inventory, located at the bottom of the screen, and

**Developer:** Tucker Bowen  
**Publisher:** Tucker Bowen  
**Platform:** PC Online  
**Genre:** Adventure  
**Release Date:** 2007 (Sequential)





opened by moving the mouse cursor below a certain line. Within this panel, a single click on an inventory item selects that item for use, the cursor taking on the image of that item. A double-click of the left mouse button cancels the selection of the current item, returning the cursor to its normal form.

Objects or areas that can be interacted with (including inventory items) are indicated by the cursor becoming red and the object or area's name appearing at the bottom of the screen.

Interaction with such items or areas is performed via a "verb disc", a small, circular panel that appears when the left mouse button is held down for a short time while the cursor is over an active object or area (again including items in the inventory). The verb disc holds three icons: a mouth to indicate talking, eating or drinking, an eye to indicate examination, and a hand to indicate interaction (including the act of taking an item). Selection of one of these options is performed by moving the mouse cursor over the appropriate icon (with the button still held), which should result in that icon becoming highlighted, and then releasing the button.

One element of the game's interface that I rather liked was the page-turning system, used when a book is read. This involves clicking and holding the mouse button while the cursor is over one of the lower outside corners of the pages, and then "dragging" the cursor towards the opposite side. This

**Navigation**

The jungle can be a punishing place - full of mosquitos and venomous serpents. But there are moments that take your breath away.

Yesterday we stumbled upon a lost city of ruins upriver. Although vines had reclaimed most of the structures, we discovered entact an elaborate series of mechanisms for opening and closing passages. Who knows what their original purpose was, but by turning these dials we were granted access to an underground labyrinth.

But beware this treacherous maze. After hours of wandering we were forced to lighten our load - losing precious items such as our rope and compass.

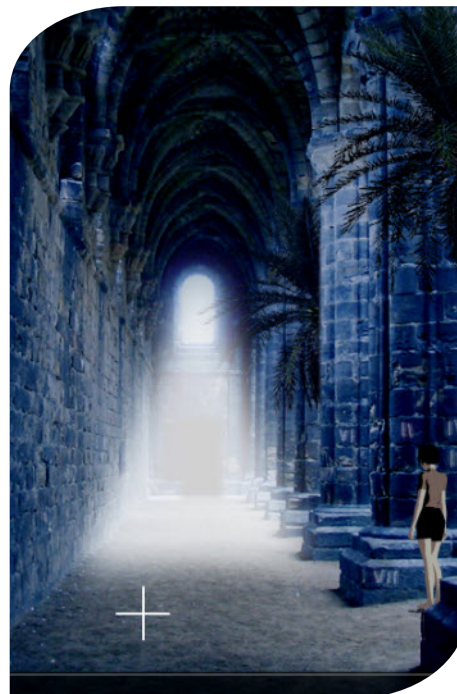
Without a compass we'll never navigate east to the heart of the jungle, doomed to wander the forest in circles forever.

Tomorrow we will seek the help of the native inhabitants. Hopefully they will teach us how to better survive the travails of the wilderness.

causes the page to follow the cursor, starting from the selected corner, and turning back or forth as the mouse is moved, settling to show the new page if the mouse button is released after turning the page beyond a certain degree.

In a few cases Alice will have the opportunity to converse with another character. This is handled very simply: a selection of possible topics of conversation is presented at the bottom of the screen, and clicking on one of them produces a brief piece of conversation, that in some cases advance events.

Finally, the game menu can be accessed at the press of a key on the keyboard (any key, it seems) - al-



though the game warns to not do this while a region loads. And indeed, I found that disobeying this injunction seemed to result in glitches, albeit ones that were easily resolved (I think that simply re-entering the menu and then once again exiting to the game resolved them).

Two types of puzzle are to be found in Something Amiss. Most are inventory-based: certain items found during the player's explorations can be collected, and most of those come to later be used in the solution of some obstacle (although there are some inventory items that seem to be either plot hints or puzzle red herrings). Others are logic puzzles, involving the manipulation of elements of the environment in order to achieve a specific state (or series of states).

For the most part these are reasonably fair, and not terribly difficult. A few do seem to me to have solutions that are a little odd, but, I'm glad to say, not problematically so - I don't recall any instances in which I felt that I was required to "read the designer's mind" to determine the appropriate course of action.

Better yet, the game includes a built-in hint system, available via the game menu, which offers progressively more explicit hints for the situations encountered.

On the down side, I found a few items to be either a little small or unobvious; thankfully I don't believe that any actually caused problems for me, but I can



see them being potentially problematic.

lights, giving the feel of anime or cartoon (the former especially).

Graphically, *Something Amiss* provides mixed quality. On the positive side, the graphics overall look good – a number of the backgrounds in the second chapter in particular look very good, and while others are less well-done, they are nevertheless generally at least decent – although Alice’s rendered perspective seems to me to be a little off in some scenes.

This at first may seem to be an odd choice, but it does seem to have some advantages. For one, it helps Alice to stand out in her environment. Perhaps more saliently, however, it highlights the fact that Alice herself would seem to be somehow different to the rest of her world – although in what way that might be is thus far less clear than her difference in graphical representation.

It is in animation that the game’s graphics are weakest, however. Many animations do not seem entirely natural and convincing in their motion. Perhaps worse, Alice’s movements, while generally vaguely appropriate to the action being taken, seem to use only a few, non-specific animations throughout the game, resulting in a rather generic feel to the character’s actions.

As with the graphics, the sounds encountered in *Something Amiss* offer a mix of quality (outside of those encountered in cut-scenes, which are handled well).

On a lesser note, when Alice walks her pace does not always match her movement speed, resulting in her seeming to “slide” a little.

The first chapter’s sounds are less than perfect – while of good quality, they are not always entirely fitting to the events that they accompany. The second chapter, I am glad to say, features more fitting sounds, which remain of good quality – if perhaps sparingly used.

An interesting point (to me, at least) is that Alice has been rendered in a style different to that of the world around her. Where the game environments and characters are portrayed in a realistic style, Alice is instead rendered in the style of “cell shading” – hard-edged shadows and minimal high-

The game’s music and ambient sounds are good, if perhaps not always *perfectly*-fitted to the situation.

Finally, I did encounter one glitch aside from that mentioned previously. Sometimes, when first loading the game menu before starting the game itself, the menu will not appear, al-

though the backdrop does. This, however, is easily solved by reloading the page.

Overall, *Something Amiss* is an enjoyable, if imperfect game. That it is free to play forgives to some degree its flaws, I think,, leaving it a game that can be recommended to those looking for an enjoyable adventure, even if not one that I would recommend above all others. Additionally, depending on the direction taken and quality of the subsequent chapters, this could become a very interesting story.

It is perhaps worth noting that the first chapter, which is the weaker of the two available at the time of writing, is quite short, while the stronger second chapter provides the majority of the game as reviewed here.

Two notes:

1) *As of the time of writing, only chapters one and two of Something Amiss have been made available; it would seem that the chapters are being released in a sequential manner.*

2) *This game is available to play online, via one’s browser. While the options dialog of the game does mention an “offline version”, I have yet to find a way of acquiring it – it may be that it has not yet been made available.*



**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Flash 8 or higher  
 (Flash 9 recommended)  
 Web Browser  
 (Firefox recommended)  
 Mouse



# SAM & MAX

By Wendy Nellius

## Night of the Raving Dead



## Chariots of The Dogs



Sam & Max...oh... Sam & Max. Where have you been all my life? I'm a little late to the series; got season 1 for Christmas and smacked myself for waiting so long.

Born from a comic book, Sam & Max has been adapted for a cartoon, initial computer game and eventually morphing into the current version wowing fans every month as they drool over a new episode. Unlike some other developers, Telltale promises new episodes and actually delivers. My credit card got a little workout as I strove to get up to speed after being a slacker for so long.

The episodes are short (about 3-4 hours of game time), so I have no intention of ruining the fun by providing too many details. But here we go.

### Night of the Raving Dead:

Well, really, who doesn't love a flamboyant red-headed vampire whose fashion flair extends to prominently

displayed nipple rings. Ouch! But, you'll meet him later. First priority is to saving the town from being overrun by zombies. After a brief cutscene with Jurgen (the latest nemesis), a flashback will ensue to show how this whole drama began.

The game will begin at Sam & Max's office just like all the other episodes. Sam is on the phone being informed of the recent Zombie attacks and Max is bathing in holy water. Neither of them is paying attention to the zombie who has strolls right past them and steals Jesse James' hand right off the wall. Zombies sure are bothersome. Sam & Max get right on the case.

Some familiar characters will re-appear in Raving Dead like Abe, Mr. Featherly, and Agent Superball. Sybil, of course, reappears with another new cracked life plan; this time to find a good man. Bosco, our paranoid buddy, does not appear. He's gone M.I.A. Could it have something to do with T.H.E.M? Well, that's a mystery

that won't be cleared up in this episode.

Where will you go this time? The office, of course, along with Sybil's, Stinky's and the TV Station. But, the main focus of your journey will be the Zombie Factory, although it's more of a haunted, vampire thought invoking, Halloween inspired Castle with a special surprise inside.

### Favorite Moments:

- ❖ If you've even seen the movie "Karate Kid" – Jurgen in the "Crane" fighting position
- ❖ Sam & Max dancing their butts off.

Developer: [Telltale Games](#)  
 Publisher: [Telltale/Gametap](#)  
 Platform: PC  
 Genre: Adventure  
 Release Date: Feb and Mar 2008



## Chariots of the Dogs

For a new twist, Chariots of the Dogs does NOT begin in Sam & Max's office. Bosco's Inconvenience Store is where your journey will begin. Seeing as how Bosco went missing in the last episode, it's time for our duo to begin the search. Could his disappearance have something to do with T.H.E.M? With Bosco's obsession, it certainly would make sense. Wonder about the bathroom at Bosco's? Don't lie...you've wondered. Well, no more. The urinal tour begins. And, that's all I'm going to say. Chariots of the Dogs is an episode that begins the process of tying up storylines that have been in progress all season and there are surprises at every turn. To expound on them would likely ruin anticipation for those who haven't gotten to this episode yet. Oh...ok. One more tidbit. Time travel. Now, use your imagination.

Are there repeat characters? Yes. Which ones? Can't tell you, but I will say that they are not the ones you would expect.

*Favorite Moments: Too many*

## Both Episodes

Puzzles (of the logic and inventory nature) are warped, crazy and innovative. While not tremendously difficult (but more difficult than Moai Better Blues), you do have to think outside the box to solve them. There were ones in particular towards the end of both episodes that had me quite stumped for a while. The Sam & Max requisite DeSoto mini-game makes another appearance as well in Raving Dead, but has disappeared for Chariots. But for the mini-game in Raving Dead, if you've done well with the previous episodes, this should prove to be no problem. Even if you do get stuck, there is an in-game hint system that can be adjusted in the options menu to give you varying degrees of hints from very little to the most possible. While the hint system hasn't always provided the best of help, Telltale has



worked on it in each episode and the result in Chariots is much improved.

All the Sam & Max episodes are 3rd person point and click. The mouse is your primary tool. However, in episodes with a DeSoto mini-game challenge, you do have the option to use the arrow keys on your keyboard. There are a ton of clickable items to check out in every episode; each bringing up witty dialog. Exits are easy to find.

Something new in Chariots is mode of transportation. In Raving Dead and previous episodes, Sam & Max would saddle up the DeSoto to get to different locations. No need to do that in Chariots. But, the mode of transportation is part of the surprise so you'll have to see for yourself.

Graphically, both episodes are outstanding. Pure color-popping eye candy! There is just a feeling of fun and whimsy in every single episode. Truly original.

One element that bothered me in all the episodes up to Chariots was the longer load time when moving between nodes. At first I thought it was my computer, but then realized it was the game. I was pleased to note that the load time was much shorter in Chariots. Thank you to Telltale for that.

What makes the Sam & Max series such a success is the outstanding comic timing of the dialog and the outlandish stories. Really, who thinks these storylines up! I have laughed out loud so many times that I had to come off headphones and allow my husband to hear it as well. He's not



even playing and he's laughing at the hysterical banter which is Sam & Max. But, dialog won't work without the right voices and Telltale hits the mark again and again in this aspect.

While Raving Dead brought you to a conclusion at the end of the game, Chariots will leave you hanging and pissed off that the final Season 2 episode is not out NOW. What I like about the series is the continued improvement. Did I think every single episode was stellar? No. There will always be episodes that just shine more than others when they're putting out so many of them. But, each and every episode has brought me laughter and fun.

I find that I have been taken over by the Sam & Max phenomenon and will open up my wallet without hesitation for each and every episode. If you haven't yet taken the plunge, do it NOW. The laughter alone is worth every penny.

## Raving Dead



## Chariots



### Minimum System Requirements:

Windows XP, Vista  
1.5 GHz processor  
256 MB RAM  
32 MB 3D-Accelerated Video Card  
Mouse, Keyboard and Speakers

# PORTAL

By Tino Thompson

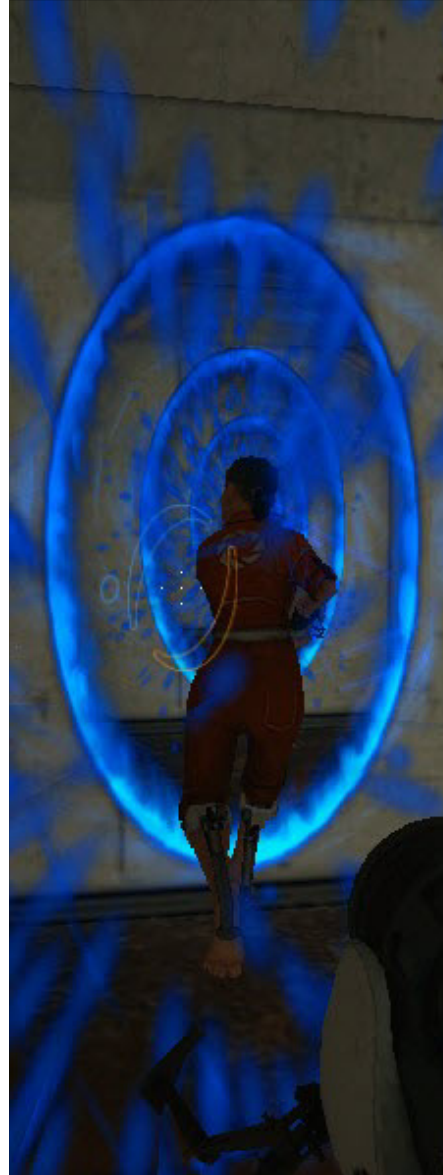
Valve software, the creators of this head-scratching teleportation game, need little introduction to anyone who's played games on a PC any time over the last decade or so. But this quirky and highly enjoyable puzzle-based offshoot from the Half-Life publisher's stable of curiosities merits closer inspection...

Let's begin with a little question of definitions. In a typical game, especially an adventure, we'd expect to find gameplay involving the discovery of new and exciting lands, the collection of unusual objects, participation

*"Making serious mistakes, you are warned, will result in a black mark on your record - and your death"*

in a world-altering story, and more character interaction than a particularly violent session of a South American parliament.

Portal has none of those things. There is no adventure to be had, with what well-written but simple story it does have being more of an afterthought than a driving force. What you do get, before you turn away in horror, is one of the finest collections of engaging and original puzzles ever seen in a single game. This is an out-and-out puzzle game, hearkening back despite its technological sophistication to the days of desktop puzzle games released for early versions of Windows. There is only one drawback to the game as it appears fresh out of its package: its briefness. But that isn't going to weigh too heavily on it because in today's remarkably busy modding world, in the time since the first reviews of this game were written,



dozens of players' own levels have now made their way onto a crop of [fan websites](#).

The origins of Portal stem from its indie-game predecessors: the now freely available [Narbacular Drop](#) from which several of Portal's design team originated, and the whole sub-genre of the "laser game." In these often cunningly constructed games, the player's task was to guide a laser from

an emitter into a receiver by placing mirrors and other obstacles to deflect the beam, since it could not be touched directly.

Portal takes that idea and transfers it to full first-person 3D, and adds several twists. Standing in the way of the swirling energy balls that have replaced lasers, or foolishly slipping into the mire at bottom of some levels will result in, your increasingly cranky host tells you, "a black mark on your record – and your death." Guiding an energy ball to a receiver will activate some device, be it a sliding door, a moving platform, or a piston – allowing you to pass over chasms and murky dangers and past gleaming-eyed sentry robots.

The greatest twist of course is the portal gun itself. The in-game story has a funny little Half-Life universe explanation about Aperture Science developing these teleportation devices to rival the dominance of the Black Mesa Corporation, but basically these are like the devices seen in the shooter Prey, only put to ingenious use in that they take bullet form. Your gun fires out two portals which can be positioned separately and which are permanently linked: anything you start pushing through one, including yourself, will immediately begin sticking out of the other. So you can fire a portal on either side of yourself to see how you look (the only way to do so),

**Developer:** [Valve](#) (Team formed from former DigiPen members)

**Publisher:** Valve

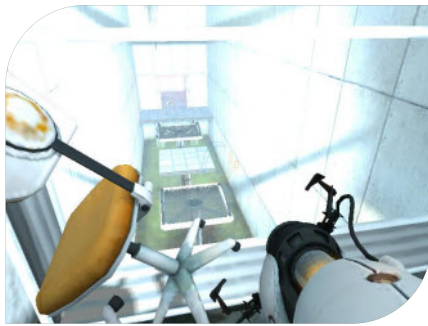
**Platform:** PC DVD/Download

**Genre:** Puzzle Adventure

**Release Date:** October 2007

Game can be purchased by itself or as part of Orange Box.

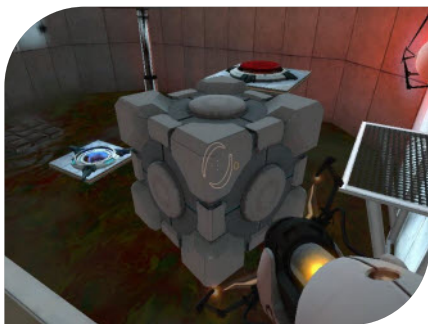




*Behind the frosted glass you find... office equipment. And there I was expecting 'Fascist Pigs' Wives Monthly' magazines everywhere*



*This little guy is literally bolted to the ground. No wonder he's pissed*



*The advanced chambers knock things up a notch*



*Cake - apparently a highly-prized commodity in the portal universe*

or you can pump one into the ceiling and another into the ground and take a never-ending free-fall.

Inaccessible ledges at the edge of vision suddenly become just a few feet away or even nearer when you realize you can fire a portal at the ground beneath your feet. As well as that, with a very smart application of skewed physics, your momentum is preserved when you fall down into a portal. This lets you pop madly up out of the exit portal like a rocket-powered gopher, hopefully finding yourself exactly where you need to be.

The actual puzzles are impressive in number, with the later stages requiring you to make use of many of the little tricks you've learned so far and for you to daisy-chain them together. On top of that, since making mistakes and killing yourself in silly ways is just as much fun as getting it right, you won't find yourself getting bored.

The level design is very smart, with the unlockable developers' commentary confirming that their intention was provide a gradual learning curve – to the extent that the entire purpose of certain level layouts was to coach users for tougher stages later. This really works very well, so you hardly feel the transition from “Put the box on the switch” to “Keep yourself flying by repeatedly firing portals in mid-air and guiding yourself through them.”

The small storyline that develops is worth praising for its originality of approach and the coherent level design that supports it. But it's not going to have you calling up Valve for the novel rights. You begin in a tiny glass-walled room next to your bed, alarm clock and a coffee mug waiting for you to use. You can't help knocking the mug over and breaking it. Your surroundings are a worrying aesthetic blend of minimal art gallery, solitary confinement cell and laboratory, and the audible presence of a sinisterly cheerful voice-over soon confirms you are doomed to carry out purposeless tasks under supervision like the lab rat you are.

The voice belongs to a female-voiced computer called GLaDOS, and she's not just the story's strong point, but really the only character. The player's own character isn't gone into at all except for the fact that you control a woman called “Chell” (whose name is only mentioned in the credits). Just that name and the fact that she wears springs on her legs to cushion her falls are all you learn about her.

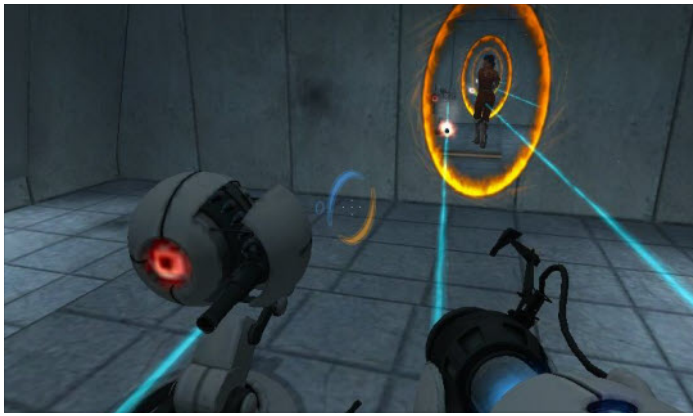
*“Good writing doesn't add up to a great story”*

Returning to GLaDOS, she is the only reason this game has any kind of a story at all. The game has naturally enough been designed to show off the portal technology in stages of increasing complexity, and the voice is just there to join up gaps between levels. Having said that, very few first-person games have the benefit of a full narration, and a plot does start to appear from it. The humor is consistently sharp throughout, with some pretty hefty demands placed upon the voice actress Ellen McLain, who also does work on the Half-Life episodes. She produces a wonderfully varied set of readings, somewhere between a computer voice from an 80's movie, a cantankerous headmistress and a peevish girl. The voice's sociopathic descriptions of the pain, bloody injury and death you may expect to suffer rarely fail to amuse.

Sadly good writing doesn't always add up to great story, and this is a classic example, with the short game length and lack of visual support for the narrative except in the last two areas of the game making a full story especially hard to construct. Just as things start to get good, it's all over.

As you've probably looked down at the score by now, you may have realized that this game isn't up there with the best, although few games entirely based on level after level of puzzles





*Portals can work against you if you're not careful*



*Doing silly things with portal tends to be quite addictive*

score this highly. The thing is that its outstanding puzzles and the high quality of its soundtrack – not every game has a song released as a [single](#) – are balanced out by a distinctly average performance in other areas. A classic game would have elements that appeal to every kind of player – but if you're not the kind of person who likes methodically trying dozens of solutions to a puzzle, this game has little to offer you.

It would be conceivable for such a short game to make it among the best, but it would have to make use of every second of screen time it had – something Half-Life notably did despite being a much longer game. Think of all those scientists marching to and fro in their absent-minded way, those aliens scampering away with bodies, whole sections of levels disintegrating in

front of your eyes . . . that's the right way to fill out the moments where nothing vital to the plot is really happening. But Portal doesn't have those elements, and it takes too long for anything you might call plot, as opposed to Aperture Labs backstory, to arrive. Let's hope that in future Half-Life episodes there are sections where you move through areas which are destroyed around you, and you are totally stranded there, but can then use your portal gun to hop between neighboring buildings to escape, disable security systems, then to sneak up on sniping enemies, or even to launch grenades back at their throwers. Valve can really take this a lot further than Portal did.

To me it just doesn't feel like a game I'd want to replay, and I think many will feel the same way; would you rub out a crossword or Sudoku and start

again? Still, the many puzzle fans and fans of novelty gaming, among whom I have to count myself, are not going to be disappointed with the five to ten hours of mold-breaking gameplay it has to offer, and the huge potential for downloadable add-ons.

Some Laser games:

[www.gamelinkage.com/game/laser/](http://www.gamelinkage.com/game/laser/)

Narbacular Drop Official Site:

[www.nuclearmonkeysoftware.com/narbaculardrop.html](http://www.nuclearmonkeysoftware.com/narbaculardrop.html)

Portal fan level communities:

[www.thinkingwithportals.com/](http://www.thinkingwithportals.com/)  
[www.myaperturelabs.com/](http://www.myaperturelabs.com/)  
[www.portalmaps.net/](http://www.portalmaps.net/)

- Story**      ★★☆☆☆☆      The irony-laden humor of the game's maniacal and faceless overseer adds color and many a giggle, but not depth. Adventure fans will not be impressed by the late-developing story.
- Puzzles**    ★★★★★        These are the game's meat, and its two veg. too, and rate highly for their originality. Enough for a hearty meal for puzzle-starved ex-Dreamfall players. Downloadable levels up the ante for serious puzzle geniuses.
- Graphics**   ★★☆☆☆☆      While underpinned by the technologically sharp and older-machine-friendly Source engine, the actual design is mostly functional and minimalist. Fair enough for a puzzler.
- Sound**      ★★★★★        The story's loss is the audio's gain. Every action gets an amusing response from the superbly voiced overseer. Effects are excellent, and the shriekingly bossy voices of the sentries also deserve a special mention.

**Review in one line:**      Mold breaking, but not world shaking.



**Minimum System Requirements:**  
 Windows 2000/XP/Vista  
 1.7 Ghz Processor  
 512 MB RAM  
 DirectX 8 compatible graphics card  
 5 GB Hard Disk Space

**NB:** Internet Connection required for authorization of both download and DVD-Rom versions

# MASS EFFECT

By Vhayste



Deep space. Humans. Aliens. Advanced technologies. These are normally the essential elements in sci-fi movies, books and most of all, games. Bioware's offering last year became a hit and a target of controversies. Yet, it is still one of the most popular titles of 2007.

Mass Effect is a story where humans are at the pinnacle of their technology. The galaxy is not just an uncharted place anymore. A galactic community has been formed, with free trade and communication to all advanced alien species.

Galactic space travel wouldn't be possible without the artifacts left by an ancient race, called the Protheans. They suddenly vanished, almost without any evidence of their existence. The human discovery of a Prothean ruin on Mars pushed forward human technology by 200 years, enabling space travel and colonization of distant worlds.

Players start the game as Commander Shepard, who can either be male or female. Aside from the two default character models, players will have the option to customize how their character looks, to the minutest detail possible. Then players will choose which character class they would like to play as. There are several classes to choose from, each with their own strengths and weaknesses. Furthermore, there are also options available to provide the created character with a historic and personality background. Depending on the character's background, side missions and responses during conversations may vary between each playthrough.

Mass Effect has a very engaging story. The plot is somewhat dark and serious. It's not your normal hero-saves-the-universe formula but something much deeper. The storyline alone is so very well written that players will be immersed completely in the game while delving into the deepest secrets

the universe has to offer. There are many choices in the game and progress will always depend on how the player interacts with his/her team members and NPCs. Each team member has their own story; some of them can trigger side quests. In-game dialogs and conversations are great as well. The developers really put that much detail into every alien species; not just in the way they look but also in the way they speak. Solid background and story elements help players understand how things work in the fictional world of Mass Effect.

Developer: Bioware Corp

Publisher: Microsoft GS

Platform: Xbox 360

Genre: RPG

Release Date: Nov 2007





One of the unique features of the game is that players can choose how to respond in a conversation. They can be courteous or outspoken. They can answer calmly or violently. Players will even be subjected to morally challenging situations, such as killing or releasing captives, enemies, etc. Additional choices will be available if the player increases his/her Paragon (good rating) or Renegade (bad rating) levels. Higher Charms or Intimidate skills can convince

Mass Effect is a third-person shooter with RPG elements. Character weapons include a submachine gun, a pistol, a sniper rifle and a shotgun. Though all character classes can equip all weapons, some can only use specific weapons that their class is most proficient with. Weapons are customizable and have infinite ammo, since they utilize energy rounds. Players can equip accessories and ammo enhancements on their weapons. From enhanced stability to armor piercing rounds, players will have a lot of options to customize their weapons and change them on the fly.

There are six party members that players can choose from, with their own classes and skills. Players can only bring any two of those members when exploring planets and cities/colonies. There are achievements in the game that can be unlocked by using two members all throughout the campaign. Hence, players will need to avoid switching characters if they want to get these achievements.

Players also earn experience points. Upon level up, they will gain skill points that they can allot to unlock or upgrade available skills for their character class. Skill points vary by level; on lower levels, more skill points are rewarded upon level up compared to higher levels. There are various types

of skills that can be unlocked. There are attack or support skills that can be used in real time. There are also passive skills that take effect all the time. Proper knowledge of when and how to use those skills can be the lifeline of the player's party during heavy firefights.



through negotiations or brute force during a conversation. Either way, players can choose which approach they would want.

The game features several main missions and a lot of side missions. These include visiting different worlds and exploring colonies, caves, abandoned settlements and even ancient ruins. The navigation itself is quick and simple. Players will just need to browse through their galaxy map, inside their ship, the Normandy. The whole game is restricted only to within the Milky Way galaxy. Players won't have problems finding a mission since the location is also mentioned as part of the objectives. Once they locate their mission, all they need to do is select the target and land there.

The ability to save anywhere (but not during firefights) is also a major plus. There will be no need to look out for save points. Aside from that, moving from one area to another saves the game automatically. This neat feature ensures players that they have an updated save file every time.

The game's visuals are stunning. First, there is no degradation in both actual gameplay and cutscenes. The game boasts great graphics and detailed environments. Players can enjoy ex-





ploring alien worlds or cities with so much detail that they can be easily immersed and appreciate the surroundings. Facial expressions of the characters and NPCs are excellently detailed and can be clearly seen. Alien NPCs are intelligently structured and created so that each of them bears the similar characteristics of their species. Battle effects are also another thing. From explosions to recharging shields and even disintegrating enemies, players will be taken right into the action and intensity of the firefight.

Yet even with that strength, character models are quite limited and players may notice that some human NPCs look strikingly similar to each other. The audio features of the game are great as well. The voice acting alone is a testament to this; it's like playing a movie itself. Ambient sounds and great background scores further enhance the overall gameplay. If players land on a stormy planet, all they will hear is the engines of the Mako, the unforgiving tempest ravaging outside and of course, the isolating feeling of silence. The combat sound effects are

really good. Explosions, energy shots, enemy death screams, everything; they all add life and intensity to the game.



<b>Graphics:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	Excellent visuals, beautifully rendered worlds and environment design are the game's main strength in this category. Though the game has issues in recycled or limited character/NPC models, the game's overall graphics score is still great.
<b>Sound:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	The voice acting of the game is absolutely magnificent. Players will be drawn into the conversations easily. Even the battle effects and background scores will immerse the player.
<b>Controls:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	The controls are simple and easy to learn. Using skills, changing weapons and interacting with the environment is just a touch of a button away. The button configurations are very user friendly. Even the interface for using skills and changing weapons is easy to launch.
<b>Playability:</b>	<b>80/100</b>	The actual battle system and character customization is easy to grasp. Missions are basically straightforward. However, character classes may confuse first time players a bit since the true potential of each class can't be used unless players have proficient knowledge of how/when to use their skills and what those skills do.
<b>Replay Value:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	Most of the achievements for this game can only be unlocked by repeating the game two to three times. Some achievements can also be unlocked by using two party members consistently on all missions. With a lot of character classes and ally combinations available, the game has great replay value, especially to players aiming for the achievements.
<b>Overall:</b>	<b>84/100</b>	Mass Effect is probably one of the greatest titles released for the Xbox 360. With superb gameplay, storyline and replay value, players will surely come back for more.

# HEAVENLY SWORD

By Nuggy



Oh God of War, how gamers eagerly salivate over your promising entry unto the PS3 or XBOX 360. Oh well, the much-anticipated distraction that is Heavenly Sword will have to suffice, sadly as a teasing rental. This heavily-hyped, hack and slash, action-adventure for the PS3 has been dubbed a must-own since it's proposed release on the Xbox 360 and PC platforms, however, because it is an astonishingly short title, Ninja Theory's newest game actually falls short of being anything close to heavenly.

## STRUCTURE: (STORY, GAMEPLAY, CONTROLS)

As the main character, a beautiful, yet bitter Amazon warrior Nariko, gamers will cut, slash, slice, and gash their way with a mythical blade called the Heavenly Sword in order to stand against the maniacal tyranny of King Bohan who craves the sword for himself as he commands a vast, blood-thirsty empire. Through narration, gamers are led from Nariko's death on the battlefield, to her earlier battles

introducing the ancient, life-draining sword, then inevitably back to her supposed death. It's a very interesting way to play a game, though it's a storytelling device that could have been further built upon. When players hold the L1 or R2 buttons, the sword itself will switch from its normal Speed stance to two additional stances, Range and Power respectively, to deal stylish damage interchangeably to opponents. Each stance is identified by color and since enemies use these stances often, players will have to match stances in order to successfully counter. If not, they at least have the option to dodge using the right analog stick. As the story progresses, Nariko will continue to unlock more combos and what are called Super-Styles, these very cinematic (and very sexy) finishing moves that not only kill the target, but also help clear the field of surrounding opponents, (though a jump button for Nariko would have made air combos a little easier to pull off). What really helps the fighting is that as long as players don't mess with the embarrassingly impersonal

camera, they won't have much of a problem seeing the action in all its blade-swiping glory.

Heavenly Sword succeeds in incorporating a bit of strategy when facing adversaries so it is not *entirely* a button-mashing title. If gamers don't feel like activating a combo, they can just press Square and Triangle all day. Works in theory right? Well, the problem lies in the fact that the same kind of enemy tends to show up all too often. You got your standard sword-soldier, some heavy-armor-wearing bastard wielding a huge hammer, some archers, some blue ninja girls and these hefty creatures that look

Developer: Ninja Theory  
 Publisher: SCEA  
 Platform: PS3  
 Genre: Action  
 Release Date: Sept 2007



like a cross between a bear and Wolverine. And after a while, swinging that awesome-looking sword starts to get a little repetitive. Luckily, *Ninja Theory* tries to rectify this problem by allowing gamers to pick up and throw weapons, dead bodies, even hats for some reason.

With the use of SIAXIS motion-control or left analog stick, players can properly guide their projectile into the face, buttocks, arm or even the crotch of their poor, unsuspecting foe. In some cases it's a neat little feature but ultimately, because motion-control chops time in half, it can be very time-consuming, not to mention frustrating whenever gamers are forced to chuck hats (which operate clumsily) into gongs in order to open up gates.

It wouldn't be an issue if using this obviously genius "hat-to-gong" formula wasn't a paramount factor to completing the game. Levers and turn-wheels are actually present when opening doors and gates. Being easier and comparatively an enjoyable relief to enable, the levers and turn-wheels provide balance against the scores of enemies impeding players from actually utilizing these devices.

Next on the hindrance list is Nariko's whimsical, yet strange sidekick, Kai, a sort of Gabrielle to our Xena-esque protagonist. With Kai, gamers will launch arrows via crossbow at their enemies which again can be controlled with SIAXIS or left analog stick. *Ninja Theory* uses both characters to establish a bit of diversity to the title's intended hack-and-slash focus and this actually works for a time. I particularly love fighting boss Whiptail with Nariko, while midway through switching off to Kai in order to snipe oncoming guards from a high tower to protect Nariko's ailing father. The so-called balance would actually be welcomed with opened-arms if not for Kai's abundant reappearance. As a scrappy, but scrawny little girl, poor Kai is constrained to using crossbows and must stay away from melees. This constrains the player to guiding



their projectiles into multiple targets in near-slow-motion, thus making it appear as if more time is spent shooting instead of fighting. Coupled with Nariko being forced to throw weapons in a similar, and much more maddening fashion, Kai's missions tend to slow the fun-factor of an already short game.

Heavenly Sword clocks in at a measly six to eight hours which is worrisome considering the amount of attention the game created before its release.



Sure, gamers are given the ability to press buttons in cinematic sequences which allow passage to unreachable areas, gaining an upper hand in battle, or simply pushing the story along, but many times, the game itself allows little time for input, causing players screw up easily. They'll get another shot, but once these sequences are unlocked, the game puts players at the point right before they have to input commands again. Convenient yes, but it does nothing to stretch the game's length. Nor does it help that games like *Resident Evil 4*, and above else, *God of War*, have already incorporated this method, except markedly better. Even tutorial notes that explain combo operation and mission objectives do not stay on the screen for very long, prompting the question "What the hell am I supposed to press?" Panic causes button-mashing. Button-mashing causes an under-sized game to become easier. Though the game certainly boasts a large level of variety and fun-value, *Heavenly Sword* doesn't allow itself very long before becoming a little over-done and even frustrating at times. And before you know it, there's no more game left to play.

## PRESENTATION (GRAPHICS, SOUND, DESIGN)

*Ninja Theory* has done an incredible job in most cases with in-game mod-





els. Textures are highly detailed, though some creases can be seen up close, and instances are rare when models will suffer the dreaded "load-pop". And thanks to the motion-capture directing talents of Andy Serkis (Sméagol/Gollum from "The Lord of the Rings"), characters act with a sense of fluidity and much-enjoyed purpose. Oh, how I do so love Bohan's generals in this game. Their bizarre yet imaginative design brings new life to a tired "I'll get you next time" cliché of villainy. From Roach's hideous, albeit adoring facial expressions to King Bohan's hilarious one-liners, insane monologues and nonchalant gestures, Heavenly Sword takes the cake as to how antagonists go about their daily activities in treachery. Still, one can see how much attention certain characters received in animation (Bohan and crew) as opposed to others like the sometimes rigid Chen and even Nariko. There are many instances where Nariko's hair, a fundamental element to her identity, just flows dumbly and robotically. It doesn't take away from playability but it's glaring in some instances where strands will sort of jump upon surrounding objects before trying to glide smoothly in reaction to gravity. Gamers will notice sudden drops in frame-rate as more enemies appear on the screen, a little weird for a PS3 title, not to mention 30-second to 1-minute loading times before a mission begins.

Voice-acting is top-notch, and it shows that Heavenly Sword was sup-

posed to feel like a Hollywood summer action flick. Though Nariko can feel like a stale character sometimes, her monologues during scene-select are oddly haunting. Even Kai, as strangely upbeat as she may seem, benefits from scenes where she's scared out of her wits. Environments are thought-provoking and in a lot of cases, soothing. There have been many occurrences where I just stood on a bridge and marveled at a far-away waterfall. However, level design as a whole is atrociously linear. There is little to entirely no room for exploration whatsoever; players just take in the scenery and go straight. They might have to solve a puzzle or two but unless they're guiding pointless objects into other pointless objects, then they'll spend all of 5 minutes fighting their way through an obstacle before moving on. While its art style is highly detailed and cinematic, Heavenly Sword is basically a series of bridges and scaffolds that idiotically seem to point the gamer into the right direction, posing no real challenge. If challenge is what you're looking for, Heavenly Sword is not the game for you.

**In A Nutshell (Opinions, Possible Improvements, Total Review)**

I wasn't expecting another God of War. In fact, I'm not even a fan of the series. I've played through Kratos' violent campaign for all of five minutes; it just didn't strike me as special or anything different. While I wanted to actually give a fair chance to a title with so many similarities, Heavenly Sword doesn't last long enough to be as enjoyable as it makes itself out to

be. Sure, gamers will marvel at the motion-capture animations and the meticulous amount of detail put into models, textures and backgrounds, but the game itself becomes repetitive because of the low-enemy roster and remains too simple because of a dim-witted level-design. Gameplay can feel a bit unbalanced because of prominence geared towards throwing/launching weapons, especially during Kai's missions. Perhaps if she had combos of her own that actually dealt with using the crossbow or even if she had varying abilities instead of just jumping over objects, it wouldn't leave gamers constantly pinning for Nariko... and no, not in that way. While it makes every effort to take itself seriously, the potential is lost on this title. But don't give up Ninja Theory! It wasn't a bad game, just a really good rental. I'd love to see Bohan and his creeps again!

*A latent blockbuster that should unfortunately be returned to Blockbuster.*



# JEANNE D'ARC

By Vhayste

A girl finds a legendary armband that gives her magical powers and saves her homeland from an evil entity and its army. Sounds familiar?

Though the story may sound more like a generic RPG or anime theme, Jeanne D Arc is actually loosely based on the French heroine, Joan of Arc with a fantasy twist of course.

This last year's offering from the developer that made such hits like Rogue Galaxy and Dark Cloud, Jeanne D Arc is a S-RPG (strategy-RPG) exclusively for the PSP. Level-5 is known for the excellent cel-shaded visuals in Rogue Galaxy and players can appreciate the same in Jeanne D Arc.

The story revolves around a young peasant girl who, under a twist of fate, finds herself in the possession of one of the five legendary armlets used by five heroes to suppress an evil entity named Gilvaroth. In the same night, her village is attacked and burned to the ground by enemies (the English and their monsters). With her two loyal friends, she sets out in a quest to defeat the English and defend her homeland.

## Gameplay

Jeanne D Arc is a strategy-RPG. Players will still enjoy the elements of an RPG game but the interface will be much more different.



Players won't need to run around to explore places; they will be unlocked during the course of the story. Players can also do limited things like engage in free combat, shop and continue with the plot.

Battles are fought in a stage which is divided by tiles or panels. Character and enemy movement depends on their movement range; basically the number of panels they can move around. Attack range and area of effect is defined by the number of tiles as well.

The battles have a fixed number of turns. Players will lose the game if they do not meet the victory conditions or the set number of turns has already lapsed. A single turn consists of the player phase and the enemy phase.

Aside from the normal allies Jeanne has in her party, there are also other heroes that can wield an armlet like Jeanne. There are five of them in total. What is interesting is that these heroes have an additional option available from their normal menu; they can

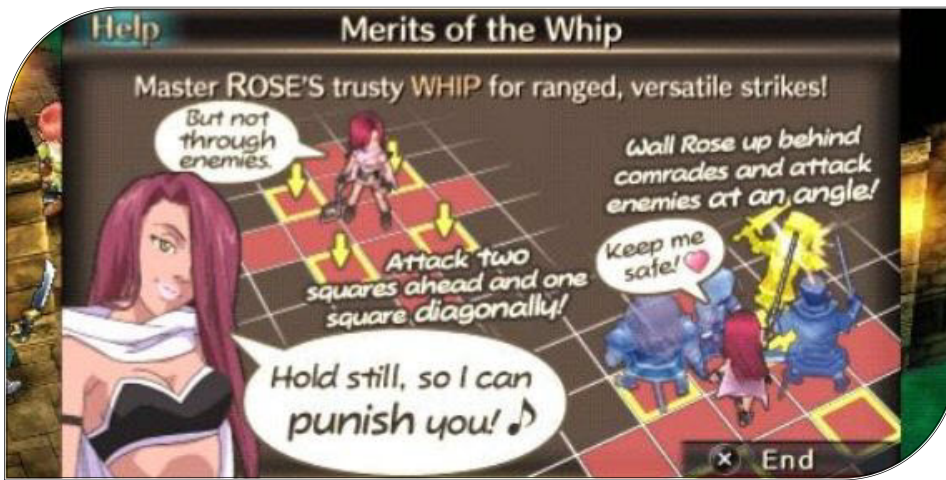
transform into a holy warrior of sorts with enhanced stats and a powerful special attack. More transformations are made available by acquiring additional gems. These gems can be collected during the course of the story or as prizes for free stages.

Character skills needed to be equipped in order (in the form of Skillstones) for them to be used or active. Characters can have a maximum skill slot of 6. Skillstones have different categories. Some skills enable characters to use special attacks with varying damage and range. There are also innate skills (which are always active during the battle), spell skills and support skills.



**Developer:** Level-5  
**Publisher:** Sony Computer  
**Platform:** PSP  
**Genre:** Strategy RPG  
**Release Date:** Aug 2007





**Graphics**

The game features smooth, cel-shaded graphics and beautifully rendered anime cutscenes. The battle effects are great, and even the stages are carefully crafted and detailed. The small character models are intricate enough to appreciate their attires, weapons and statures.

**Sounds**

JDA's voice acting is great. Though the character voices are limited during actual battles, the voice acting for the animated cutscenes was excellent. Players can even appreciate the accents of the characters, further giving them life and immersing players in the actual story. The musical scores were not too shabby either. The BGMs (background music) were just right for specific scenes and places. Sound effects as well as great visuals bring battles to life.

**Controls**

The game's controls are pretty much elementary. Since there is no running around or free exploring as with a conventional RPG, the controls are very easy to learn, without using a manual.

Battle controls are smooth and painless. Like almost all strategy games, characters will just move around on the panel where the player chooses.

**Playability**

Even first time players won't have any problems playing the game. There are in-game tutorials that will pop up at the moment players may need to know about something. All the player needs to do is to read it.

The interface is easy to understand, and the options are basic. Even the navigation and battle controls are easy. Players won't be left in the dark

as to what their next objective will be. The game has the option to directly show on the world map the next location the player must visit in order to continue.

Furthermore, the learning curve one will encounter to fully enjoy the game will just take less than half an hour.

**Replay Value**

After the ending credits, players will have the option to save the game. If they continue using their cleared saved game, they will be taken back right before they enter Paris Castle. From then on, free stages and combats will have tougher enemies and better item rewards. The Cemetery (which contains the strongest armor in the game) is a free stage that will be available and the Coliseum will start its second and third seasons, after the player clears it per season. The game, however, loses its magic after completing all the secrets and extras.

**Final Thoughts**

Jeanne D arc is a must-have for most PSP players. Engaging gameplay and good storyline is enough to keep itself ahead of some titles released during its time



<b>Graphics:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	Excellent, cel-shaded graphics and awesome anime cutscenes will keep players occupied while threading the path of Jeanne and Co.
<b>Sound:</b>	<b>80/100</b>	Awesome voice acting and great musical scores immerses players in the environment
<b>Controls:</b>	<b>90/100</b>	Controls are simple and easy to understand.
<b>Playability:</b>	<b>85/100</b>	Game mechanics are easy to grasp. First time players won't have any problems playing and learning at the same time since tutorials are given along the way.
<b>Replay Value:</b>	<b>60/100</b>	The game does not feature a New Game + feature but it does allow players to continue their cleared game, with access to a new free stage, more battles at the Colosseum and upgraded enemy levels/ rewards on original free combat locations. After that, the game

# SUPER MARIO BROS. 2



By Nuggy

Almost every gamer knows that Nintendo isn't exactly known for its hefty Role-Playing Game library, so it's no surprise when the Big 'N' releases one based loosely on one of its major franchises. A long, long time ago, (1996) Nintendo and Squaresoft (before it became Square-Enix) joined forces to create "Super Mario RPG: Legend of the Seven Stars" on the Super Nintendo, a little after a more popular collaboration called "Chrono Trigger". SMRPG is still hailed among fans as one the best Mario games to be released, but ever since that dreadful falling-out between Nintendo and Square soon afterward, fans have been left high and dry for a sequel. Near the end of the Nintendo 64 era, the "not-so-official" sequel "Paper Mario" hit shelves in 2001 courtesy of Intelligent Systems and, creating a brand new Mario franchise, though not as deep as SMRPG, implemented much of it's "timed-hit" gameplay within a pleasingly unique "2 1/2 -D" graphical style. Seven years later, "Super Paper Mario", the third entry into the series (succeeding "Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door") has since become available for all the

Wii owners out there hoping for some Platformer/RPG action. But the question is... should they even bother? Ultimately and unfortunately, unless you're an avid fan of the series, you might want to pass on Intelligent Systems' latest foray into Mario.

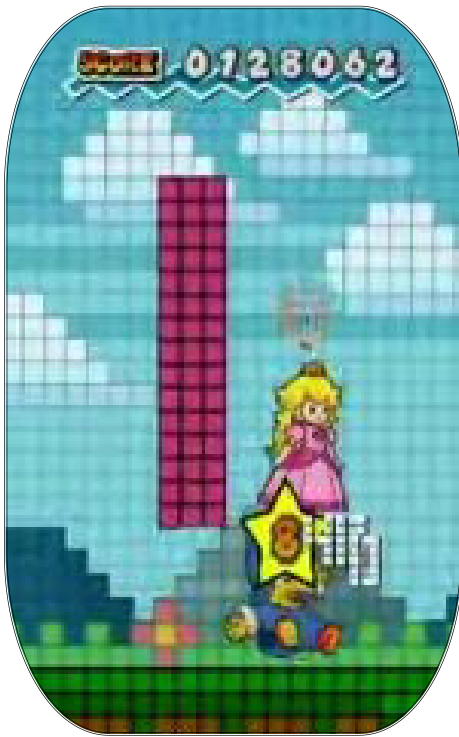
**Gameplay: 71%**

In this Mario game, it isn't Bowser who kidnaps Princess Peach but by a mysterious Count Bleck who, through actually marrying off Peach and Bowser, unleashes "The Void", an inter-dimensional tear in reality threatening to destroy the entire universe. In order to stop this dastardly plan, Mario has to collect eight Pure Hearts throughout different levels with the help of spectral beings called Pixls. Basically, a little more of the same when it comes to Mario RPG's; nothing terribly new. In the Paper Mario's of old, players controlled a sprite of Mario within an isolated 3D environment. When players ran into let's say, a Goomba, a turn-based RPG battle would ensue, allowing players to control Mario, and an additional party member out of five others to fight the opposing team of Goombas. For you non-RPG players out there, basically what this meant was when it was the player's turn to attack with either Mario or ally, they chose whatever attack they wanted off a menu and pressed an additional button in order to execute more damage to the opponent. A bit redundant wouldn't you say? Shouldn't the player just attack the Goomba when they see it on the



**Developer:** Nintendo  
**Publisher:** Nintendo  
**Platform:** Wii  
**Genre:** Action Platform  
**Release Date:** Apr 2007





field? Intelligent Systems was thinking the exact same thing apparently and removed that element in this PM installment.

Now, when players wield Mario, Peach or Bowser on the field, they do damage to enemies via stomp, turtle-shell, fire-breath or whatever items they come across in their adventures in order to add points to their score which in turn, raises their experience level and strengths. It's kind of like the old Mario games from the NES to SNES era... except for one twist; with Mario chosen, a push of a button allows players to switch from a 2D view of their environment to a 3D view, giving them access to hidden items, enemies, shortcuts and other additional means to clearing the chapter (level) that they would otherwise miss. Not so old-school now, is it? Though it's a unique element to the very familiar "run and jump" formula, the problem is that Mario's the only character that uses this flip function; as for Peach and Bowser, players have to huff it in 2D-mode which kind of defeats the purpose of having 3D in a 2D game. Add to the fact that the levels mostly offer a straight-ahead view instead of a full-fledged environment (as opposed to some of the spacious areas of older PM's), this new flip

element, though refreshing at first, can get incredibly stale, incredibly quick. Enemy encounters even lose flavor after a time; having to flip back and forth from holding the Wii-mote in classic NES fashion for run-and-jump capabilities to regular remote style in order to execute timed-hits and score bonuses becomes little more than a gimmicky waste of time. Many enemies can be defeated with a quick-stomp or fire-breath.

Then there's the Pixls, these colorful, annoyingly talkative little critters that add more abilities to the character roster. I say "more" instead of "new" because these floating, helper characters simply take up space. Do we really need a Pixl to help Mario execute a Ground Pound when he's been doing it since Super Mario 64? At first these Pixl guys are adorably helpful, providing information for specific areas, making players nearly invisible, even allowing them to hover across long distances... but as level designs become more complicated, (literally) more linear, and less enjoyable, players will find themselves opening up the menu over and over again in order to figure out which Pixl can help clear an obstacle, prompting the question "Can't I just perform this move on my own?" Until now, I've honestly never known a Mario game to utilize such useless features while at the same time forcing them to be useful. Maybe if Intelligent Systems only made a few Pixls and actually allowed Mario and

the gang to learn their own moves leveling up, it would at least vary the gameplay a little more. Giving Players access to assigning moves to certain buttons would've also made choosing abilities less hectic. Though Intelligent Systems may have wanted to keep the menu option as a means of retaining the RPG style, because there's no turn-based battle system, the adventure/platforming elements can feel few and far between, making this old-school Mario experience, though nostalgic, feel very slow.

**Sound – 75%**

Simple, quirky and oddly reminiscent of those aging internet MIDI's, the music and sound effects of Super Paper Mario are fitting for this entry. Never annoying, and always somewhat fanciful, the game gives players crisp remixes of the old tunes they grew up with, from the star-man theme to the classic Mario anthem. Even the sound effects from the old Paper Marios are back. New themes however... well, they're not bad, but about a day after playing the game, I forgot them altogether. The music in some instances will bring back enjoyable memories and overall, the general tone of the music is oddly relaxing. However, players looking for those catchy, upbeat tunes Mario games have been known for will be disappointed. Not that Nintendo is recognized for voicing character dialogue in its cutscenes, but because Super Pa-





applaud the development team for being able to push so many polygons at once even though it doesn't look it. There are few instances where players will run into a slowdown in frame-rate and those are usually when they use items on multiple enemies (fire-flower, shooting stars). My favorite, the Star-Man feature (where characters revert back into their NES counterparts, except as giants) looks very cool even though characters only look like pixels. Much kudos Intelligent Systems, but you could've gotten more.

**In A Nutshell...**

per Mario is an RPG of sorts, a genre that is familiar with taking its time in story-progression, it would've been nice to hear more small voice samples from other characters other than yelps and grunts from Mario, Peach and Bowser. The standard N64 text-gibberish is pretty annoying too; it makes Count Bleck and his batch of cronies feel bland since their cutscenes are what pull the overall story along. Though not bad by any means, there were so many opportunities where Intelligent Systems could've made the audio more engaging.

**Graphics – 80%**

Let's be honest. Graphically, Super Paper Mario isn't "Halo 3" nor "Final Fantasy". Heck, it isn't even "Jak and Daxter". But the light-hearted, flipbook style is what captivated fans of the series in the first place. Intelligent

Systems revamped the whole Paper Mario package, giving characters more of a highlighted look as they traverse through a 2D perspective of 3D levels and though the characters and levels look flat and sometimes uninteresting, it's all very stylized three-dimensional artwork. The game itself feels like a giant book with more pictures than story but there are times when line art and "rotating" 3D planes can only do so much visually. Lighting effects and particle instances are especially few in this game and that's not nitpicking either; paper does reflect light slightly, just like any other object. Though Intelligent Systems were going for a slightly cartoony look, that doesn't mean polygon work should be the sole focus. The graphical work in Super Paper Mario isn't horrible but much like the sound category, there are areas where Intelligent Systems could've spent more time. I

Paper Mario has come far from its N64 beginnings, but I worry if Super Paper Mario is the falling point in the series. While the N64 and GameCube had their limitations, I was surprised to see Intelligent Systems try to accomplish so much while really accomplishing very little at the same time. At the end of the day, gameplay is the culprit. While the title proves old-school elements can still be fun, there isn't an exciting or stable balance between platforming elements and role-playing elements. Super Paper Mario is enjoyable and very creative... but only for so long. In this instance, paper can only do so much.



<b>Graphics:</b>	<b>80/100</b>	For a game about paper, it looks extremely good. But character animations are limited and lighting effects and particles seem constantly absent.
<b>Sound:</b>	<b>75/100</b>	A lot of tunes you've heard before but none very memorable. Goombas still don't have their own noise? Count Bleck doesn't at least have a laugh? Old-school, yes. New-school, no.
<b>Gameplay:</b>	<b>71/100</b>	Flip-flopping from 2D to 3D would be more fun if it wasn't constrained only to Mario. A weird abundance of menus and lacking level design causes the game lose its edge.
<b>Overall:</b>	<b>76/100</b>	<b>Fun while it lasts but you really should save up for Super Mario Galaxy anyways.</b>



# SAM & MAX 203

## Night of the Raving Dead

By Wendy Nellius



Gameplay begins in the office. Zombies are running wild around the city. You can take another look around the office to see what has been added since last time. Exit the office.

### [Home](#)

#### **Street**

See the zombies wandering all around. Examine the beer stein near the parking meter. Try to enter Bosco's, but it's closed.

#### **Sybil's**

Sybil is busy interviewing future boyfriends. Talk to Sybil about all topics. Look at the pictures on Sybil's desk. Examine the soul mater. Poor Abe has been crossed out of the pictures. Check out the presents and the chocolate heart. Examine the ticket dispenser at the front door. Talk to "Harry the Mole" about all topics. He's pretty much a Sybil stalker now. Exit Sybil's.

#### **Stinky's Diner**

Talk to Stinky about all topics. You can try ordering food, but you don't need to. Make sure you ask about the sunlamp. Stinky will give you permission to take it. Head over by Abe and take the bulb from the sunlamp. Examine the pictures on the wall. Talk to Abe who is wallowing in the corner of the diner.

#### **Garage**

Talk to Bob, Curt and Bluster Blaster. Keep talking until you're offered the chance to win an antenna. You'll have to use the CD launcher to help market the antenna. Agree to begin driving. The object of the test is to shoot the launcher and hit each zombie with a CD. Drive close to the curb and right click to shoot. Shoot 10 and get the antenna. I found I could hit the zombies further away if I pulled the trigger when the target was about 1-1/2" before the zombie. You can go back and try again to get some decals.

#### **Desoto**

"Let's go to Stuttgart!"



### Stuttgart

#### **Outside the Zombie Factory**

See the zombies waiting in line. Examine the gargoyle on the wall right before the line of zombies. You can talk to the zombies, but you won't get very far. Click on the entrance to the castle. It's blocked by Agent Superball. Find out that you have to wait in line. Look in the trash bin next to the door. Automatically take the clove cigarettes.

Walk around to the side of the castle. Examine the open coffin. Examine the tomb. Examine the open grave and Sam will pick up a brain. Examine the Sarcophagus and the gravestone. Go back to the front of the castle. Use the brain on the zombies. It seems they're really, really interested in it. Find the gargoyle on the wall. Use the brain on the gargoyle. The zombies will leave the line. Superball will yell "Next".

You can't get in with the clove cigarettes. Use them on the trash container to throw them away. Click on the entrance.

#### **Inside the Zombie Factory**

Meet Jurgen. Talk to him. Learn that Midtown Cowboys is a big hit in Germany. Learn that the zombies love Jurgen's rhymes. It's open mic night at the Zombie Factory. Jurgen challenges Sam & Max to a competition. Accept. Choose the following lyrics:

We'll knock you out deader than Bela Lugosi  
Our world is endless torment and sorrow.  
Cause all creation ends in death and decay

The zombies love it. You won, but Jurgen steals your rhymes and then bites Max on the head. Ouch!

Walk around the factory. Examine the axe by the door. Walk to the right. Examine the spotlight up above the bookcase. Examine the bookcase. Walk right. Examine the portrait of Jurgen above the fireplace. Examine the fireplace. Walk to the right. Take the typewriter ribbon from the table. You won't end up needing it, but what the hell. Go back to the entrance. Walk to the left.

Examine the bookcase to the left of the entrance. There is a poem that has been worn down – you can't



read it. Examine the coffin. There is a poem on the coffin.

My dark mistress longs for death  
To return to her velvet sepulcher  
Her only passion the void's embrace  
Or else she'd reply to my letters.

Walk to the left, past the DJ Booth to the bar. Take a bottle of water. Examine the aquarium. Walk to the right and examine the DJ Booth.

### **DJ Booth**

In the center are 3 rows of colored buttons. Push them one by one to hear the word attached to each. The word will then be displayed instead of just "button".

Refer back to the poem on the coffin. Press the buttons representing the last word in each line: Death, Sepulcher, Embrace, Letters

### **Inside the Zombie Factory**

The coffin will open. Enter the coffin and end up on the balcony near the spotlight. Examine the spotlight. Use the sunlamp bulb from the inventory on the spotlight. Go back to the DJ Booth.

### **DJ Booth**

There are 5 blue buttons on the bottom. Press the 2<sup>nd</sup> one from the right. The spotlight will hit Jurgen and burn him. Exit the factory

Take the clove cigarettes from the trash bin. Get in the Desoto and go to the WARP TV Studio.

### **WARP Studio**

Seems like they've been waiting for Sam & Max for quite a while. Talk to Featherly. Find out what he's been up to. Get some acting tips. Learn about improvising. You can try to talk to Bessie, but she won't talk back. Examine the bag on the floor. There is a bottle of Malt Liquor in there. Talk to the director. Tell her you're ready to film.

Watch the scene. Find out that Featherly promotes whatever product is in the bag on the floor and sales go through the roof. Hmm... maybe you can do that with something else.

Use the clove cigarettes on the bag. Talk to the director and tell her you want to film it again. Looks like clove cigarettes are a big hit. Exit the studio.

## [Home](#)

### **Sam & Max's Office**

Go to Sam & Max's office. Use the water bottle on the ceremonial urn. You now have a bottle of holy water.

## [Stuttgart](#)

### **Outside the Zombie Factory**

At the front entrance, give the holy water to Max. He'll drink it and get a halo over his head. Throw the bottle away in the trash container. Enter the factory.

### **Inside the Zombie Factory**

Immediately challenge Jurgen to a rhyming contest. You can use the same rhymes as before or skip the sequence. Jurgen will retaliate by biting Sam on the head. The holy water doesn't sit well with him. His zombies turn on him and he runs through an entrance in the fireplace. Follow him through the fireplace.

The bad news....

Sam & Max get crushed by the spikes in Jurgen's machine and are now zombies.

### Outside the Zombie Factory

Talk to Zombie Abe Lincoln. Walk to the front of the castle and talk to the zombie outside the entrance. Learn that Jurgen keeps all the souls in the VIP lounge. Enter the factory. Abe follows you in.

### Inside the Zombie Factory

Try to talk to a zombie and Flint Paper bursts through a window looking for Sam & Max. Try to talk to Abe Lincoln. Try to take his brain and Flint Paper will block you. You'll need to get rid of Flint. Enter the fireplace.

### VIP Lounge

Examine Jurgen's monster, who is strapped to the table. Examine the monster diagrams. Examine the power socket and the batteries. They're dead. Take the bolt cutters from the floor. Examine the alchemy machine. Walk towards the fireplace. Examine the books on the table. Examine the alchemy book. See a page on turning chocolate into gold. Examine the wooden stakes on the wall. Sam will take one. Examine the painting of "Literate Jurgen". He's standing in front of the bookcase where the poem is worn off. You can make out two complete words and 2 partial words:

Abyss  
ors  
Pain  
rents

### DJ Booth

Go to the DJ Booth. Look for words that would fit with the 2 partial words you saw in the picture of Jurgen. The correct answers are:

Abyss  
Razors  
Pain  
Parents

Press them and the bookcase will open.

### Inside the Zombie Factory

Enter the bookcase. Come out the other side of the bookcase and startle Flint. Sam will take the brain.

### VIP Lounge

Go into the fireplace and use the brain on Jurgen's monster. You'll see a bunch of parts next to the monster. Try using different combinations on the head, heart and brain to see what each one does. Put Abe's brain back in and pull the lever on the machine behind the monster. Talk to the monster and find out he's lonely. Invite him to meet Sybil.

### Home

### Street

Watch a Jesse James' hand run across the street into Stinky's Diner. You can follow the hand or go directly to Sybil's.

### Sybil's

The monster is already at Sybil's along with Harry and Featherly.... all potential suitors. Sybil has come up with 3 questions that will help her determine who is the best choice.

Click on each question on Sybil's desk.



- Question 1: How would you prove to me that you have a heart of gold?  
Question 2: How would you show me you are good with your hands?  
Question 3: What would you say in a romantic moment?

Our monster friend doesn't really do so well answering the questions. So, you're going to need to build the monster with parts that help him answer the questions better. He already has Abe's brain which should be good for question 3. For question 2, he will need an actual hand. For question 1, he needs a gold heart.

Let's work on question 1 first.

You'll need to obtain a heart. There just so happens to be a chocolate heart sitting on the table by Harry. Click on Question #3. When Harry is answering, try to take the chocolate heart. Harry will freak out and say something that's perceived as his answer to Sybil. He gets kicked out. (I felt kind of bad for him). Take the chocolate heart. If you remember the alchemy book, the page you looked at was for turning chocolate into gold. Let's get over to Stuttgart.

### Stuttgart

#### **Outside the Zombie Factory**

If you remember, the batteries were dead on the alchemy machine so you'll need a power source. Use the bolt cutters on the antenna on the car. Enter the factory.

#### **VIP Lounge**

Use the antenna on the alchemy machine. Pull the power switch on the other wall. Lightning will shoot over to the antenna and power up the batteries on the alchemy machine. Use the chocolate heart on the alchemy machine. Voila – a heart of gold.

Use the heart of gold on the monster's heart. Now we need to get a hand. There's one running around at Stinky's.

### Home

If you try shooting at Jesse James' hand, you'll notice that it jumps. Take note of the tar cake on the counter. It looks pretty sticky. Perhaps you can get the hand stuck in it. Stand at the left end of the counter where Stinky is tied up. Shoot at the hand until it jumps back near the cake cover and won't move anymore. Talk to Stinky and she'll shriek. The hand will shoot at her and move right in front of the cake cover. Shoot at the hand once more (this will be animated) and the hand will get stuck. Take the hand and go to Sybil's.

#### **Sybil's**

The monster should already be there. He's really quick. Use the hand on the monster.

Go to Sybil's desk and click on the questions one by one. The monster wins..... but loses. Sybil runs off to find Abe. Take the soul mater and go back to Stuttgart

### Stuttgart

#### **VIP Lounge**

Go inside and enter the fireplace. No need to do anything. The souls will automatically fly into Sam & Max. But, they go into the wrong bodies. So, Sam is Max and Max is Sam. Jurgen will jump out and challenge you with the "crane" pose.

Give the soul mater to the monster. Pull the switch on the soul sucker. Quickly enter the soul sucker. Sam & Max's souls will transfer to the monster.

As the monster, go to the wall and grab another wooden stake. Use the stake on Jurgen.

Watch the final scene

While it may have taken us a little longer to get started, we're proud to release our 16th issue of Adventure Lantern Magazine and our first in 2008.

With this issue, we welcomed a new staff member: Tino Thompson. We are most certainly happy to have him on the team and look forward to many more reviews. Here's a little bit about him:

*Tino is a grad student making his way in the world of journalism. He's to be found educating himself in journalism- and editing-related practices, scheming on a PhD to be unleashed upon the world at some unspecified time in the future and, as you can see, fiddling about far too much on the Internet.*

*You can view his Blogger profile [here](#).*

We will be welcoming another new member to the team with the release of his first AL article in our next issue.

We have so many games to look forward to in 2008. It looks to be a promising year for gamers. And make sure you all mark your calendars for AdventureCon 2008.

We hope you enjoyed this issue. And, as always, thank you to all our readers for your valued support.

Wendy

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