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The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only



THE WESTERNER

PREVIEW AND INTERVIEW
WITH THE DEVELOPERS OF THE
WESTERN UPCOMING ADVENTURE

INTERVIEW WITH
PENDULO

The Inventory

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Prologue

So what happened to us during January, many of you might wonder. We were dead, that's what happened. I had taken the decision to close down The Inventory for a number of reasons. And if it was not for Randy Sluganski and Just Adventure, the 12th issue of The Inventory would never exist. So if you feel like thanking someone for the existence of The Inventory, Randy is the man.



It would definitely be a sad tale to see our magazine going down in the year that is expected by many as the best year for adventures in a long time, with master storytellers like Jane Jensen and Benoit Sokal getting their works in the spotlight again after a long period. But here we go again dear readers, and let's start with the contents of The Inventory for the month of February.

The return of The Inventory has a Latin 'flavour' all over it, featuring interviews with the Spanish-based Pendulo and Revistronic, developers of Runaway and The Westerner respectively. The Westerner is a 3D point and click comedy set in the Wild West due to be released worldwide soon. You also have a chance to read a preview of the game under the previews section. Runaway is of course the famous point and click cartoon adventure that has sold very well around the world, and is reported to have already sold more than 400,000 copies in Europe alone.

Jack the Ripper is the review of the month. We are going to check out if Galilea managed to produce a better title than their previous Cameron Files series. Conspiracies a Tex Murphy-like adventure produced in Greece, is under Justin's microscope this month. And last but not least, the second part of The URU review is finally being published in our magazine. So was this game really innovative or was it one of the biggest adventure-scandals ever? Find out in our review.

As you will probably notice yourself, this issue is a bit 'lighter' when it comes to content, compared with our older issues. This is going to happen only in this issue, and from issue 13 in March you can expect the usual amount of pages. Columns like The Hydra, the puzzle page and the Al Lowe Show are going to be back. Actually issue 13 will be one of the most interesting issues to date, but more on that during the epilogue.

For now on let's move on to Fenimore Fillmore and his adventures in the Wild West!

Dimitris Manos
Editor



2D or not 2D? 2D or not 2D? That is the question nowadays in the adventure genre. According to the Spanish based Revistronic the answer is not 2D. The developers of The Westerner are trying to give us probably the first serious attempt at a point and click 3D adventure since Gabriel Knight 3. Will they manage to succeed in creating a user interface that is suitable for the adventure genre? We will find out the definitive answer to this question when we get the chance to play the full version of the game, but for the time being let's see what are the first impressions one gets after playing around with The Westerner for a while.

We recently received preview material from Revistronic that included a preview version of The Westerner along with a CD full of screenshots and concept art sketches. Unfortunately the demo was in Spanish, and it is probably the same demo that was available online not so long ago. Due to me being incapable of understanding the Spanish language, it will be difficult to comment on the story of the game or the voice acting, but there are other issues like graphics, music and interface that I will be able to talk about in this preview.

The **introduction** starts with Fenimore Fillmore, the hero of The Westerner, riding his horse during nighttime towards a farm. For some reason that is either never explained or I never got to understand (since I do not speak Spanish) Fenimore checks out



Are you big enough for this saloon?

what is happening in the farm. At the same time 3 men, apparently the 'bad guys' of the story, also arrive at the scene bearing shotguns.

The farm belongs to a man called Joe Bannister who lives there with his wife Stella and his little child. Joe grabs a gun and goes outside as soon as he realizes that the men are heading towards his farm. The bad guys engage in a heated conversation with Joe Bannister and although Fenimore eavesdrops for a while, he eventually decides to leave the place since he senses that the situation is getting out of hand. Fate however had a different opinion.

In his attempt to escape, Fenimore walks backwards, so he does not notice the cactus tree behind him. One little pinch from the cactus and Fenimore suddenly jumps outside of his hiding place, while Joe Bannister and the bad guys were at gunpoint. A little bullet time effect – resulting in an intended matrix parody scene – and Fenimore manages to turn the bad guys away from the farm.

Joe invites Fenimore for dinner at his farm and offers him a place to stay. The game begins the next morning and you take control of Fenimore. The first tasks that you are going to face in the game are inventory based and the main goal is to get the horse ready for riding, in order to leave the farm.

I guess the most important question at hand is how does the **interface** work in The Westerner? I would like to refrain myself from commenting on that with certainty for the time being. But I can say that from the little part of the game that I managed to play in this preview version, it seemed like the most comfortable and suitable interface developed for an adventure game since Gabriel Knight 3 was out. Actually this is probably the first 3D adventure that you can play with only one hand! No manuals necessary, no key configuration, no bumping into walls. All players will be



The Westerner features lots of wacky characters

ready to go from the first moment they load the game.

When you click at a location on the screen Fenimore will walk to that point. If you cross the cursor over a hotspot, the cursor will turn into a magnifying glass. Now, you can either left click and look at the object from a first person perspective, or you can right click and turn your cursor into a hand. Now if you left click Fenimore will try to make an action with the hotspot you just clicked (pick up an object, talk to a person, open a door etc).

When you pick up an object it gets added to your inventory. You can check your inventory by moving the cursor to the top of the screen. When you talk with someone you get several options on the right part of your screen, which appear as Fenimore's faces on a film roll. When you cross the cursor on top of them you see in text what question will that option generate.

The reason why I am not so certain regarding the functionality of the interface, is that there were two or three times when it was difficult to get Fenimore to go to the place where I wanted him to go. This happened only outside of the farm, and only 2 or 3 times so I will refrain from commenting on how well the interface works until I play the final version of the game.

The **graphics** of the game are a treat to the eyes. As you can see by yourselves from the screenshots The Westerner could easily be a game adaptation of Toy Story. However, the game's story and atmosphere make it distinctive enough, and after a couple of minutes in the game you will forget all about Pixar and their movies. Technically, the graphics could be a bit sharper but it still looks way better than other cartoon 3D games, i.e. compared to the upcoming Larry-like game, The Westerner has better looking character models as well as better coloured backgrounds.

You see the game from a 3rd person perspective and



The dialogue interface

when you move the cursor towards the edges of the screen the camera will also move slightly to left or right (depending on which edge you move the cursor towards). However, this is the only control you have over the camera. The camera angles change automatically depending on your location on screen.



Point and ... blow

The cartoony graphics along with the humorous atmosphere of the game, reminded me of old adventures from Lucasarts and Sierra. It is actually nice to see a cartoon comedy after a long time. And on top of that, it is even a western, something that you definitely do not see every day in the adventure (and not only) genre. Maybe Al Lowe's wish for more humour in adventures during our interview with him 2 months ago is finally being granted?

The **music** of The Westerner, will probably not win any special awards nor does it blow you away, but it serves its purpose and it fits the western theme of the story, at least if the music heard in the beginning is representative of the music throughout the whole game. The voice-overs were done in Spanish so it is difficult to comment on them, but they sounded adequate in general. However the lip-synching was poor and sometimes the characters lips would start moving some time after the actors would have already started speaking. Let's hope that this will be corrected in the final English version.

The first impression I got of The Westerner was rather promising and there is a lot of potential for this adventure to give something that is really missing from the adventure genre right now. An adventure that is fun and comfortable to play. We will have to wait to see if Revistronic will succeed in their mission, but on the meantime you can move to our Lounge and read what the developers of The Westerner have to say about their western adventure.

- Dimitris Manos

ADVENTURE GOSSIP

Benoit Sokal presents Lost Paradise

Before even the second gem of the Syberia series is released, Benoit Sokal, the artistic talent behind Kate Walker's adventures, is hard at work on his new adventure called Lost Paradise.

The company that he and other members of Microids founded, White Bird Productions, take on their first development endeavor with an adventure game that seems quite similar to Syberia in many aspects. The lead is female again, only this time she is not a lawyer from the western world, but a daughter of a fierce dictator. And instead of an automaton, this time it is a leopard that will accompany the new adventure heroine.

The setting is also much more ...tropical than Syberia, since Kate Walker's successor will travel to the heart of Africa to take the leopard back to his birthplace. For more information and some early artwork of the game feel free to visit www.whitebirdproductions.com.

We wish White Bird Productions the best of luck on their new venture.

Return of Monkey Island 5

According to the latest British edition of PC Gamer, there is a *Monkey Island 5* in the works.

"Continuing in the vein of unannounced-but-in-the-pipeline

games, The Spy's LucasArts informers let the monkey out of the bag: there is, apparently, a fifth Monkey Island game in production. The adventure genre continues to cheat death."

Quest for Sierra's Old Glory, is Ken Williams back?

The newly appointed Chief Executive Officer Bruce Hack of Vivendi Universal Games, owner of Sierra Entertainment is willing to setup a face-to-face meeting with Ken Williams -based on Ken's offer to help VU/Sierra- in order to facilitate his experience in shaping VU/Sierra's future in the - adventure- games market!

Communicating with the founder of Sierra's glory has never been carried out by any of the previous management people at Sierra, thus this step indicates how smart and open minded the new management of Sierra Entertainment is. Hopefully this could give us a hope that we might be able to see titles such as Gabriel Knight 4, Space Quest 7, etc...! Or maybe even a new breed of original classic adventures.

Ken informed Sierra's fans of this wonderful news through his personal website: www.sierragamers.com

"I did get through to the VU Games CEO, a gentleman named Bruce Hack (who I've never met before).

Actually... the VU Games people have, thus far, been amazingly nice and accessible. They seem very open to talking. I think they were nervous at first that I had some ulterior

motive in contacting them. It has taken several emails to convince them that I really am not looking for a job - nor money of any sort. I understand how they feel. I can't imagine, that during my tenure at Sierra, I would have believed it if someone had said "can I help?" Sad as it is, few people ever say that and really mean it (in the big-business world).

Specifically, I told them that if they were a public company, I would be lobbying to be put on the board. I'm not ready to settle down and work a regular job. I feel bad that people might think I'm being lazy -- but, I worked HARD for almost 30 years (nearly 18 of which were at Sierra) -- and, I need some time to relax. Roberta and I spend most our time traveling now, and are having a blast. As I write this, I'm in Rio for Carnival. Life is good...

Anyway....

The next step is for us to meet "face to face". That will take a month or two to make happen, but I do believe that we are on track for me to have some voice at Sierra. I'm excited thinking about it, and hope that it works out for them, for me, and most importantly: for all the people who want great games. It's way too soon to say what will emerge from these discussions, but the indications are very good.

I'll report more, as I know more...

-Ken W"

Bruce Hack was appointed as Chief Executive Officer Of Vivendi Universal Games January 12, 2004. Hack has a long and successful track record in the entertainment industry,

as Vice Chairman of Universal Music Group -the world's largest music company- from 1998 to 2001, and Executive Vice President and Chief Financial Officer of Universal Studios from 1995 to 1998. Most recently, Hack was a key negotiator in the \$14 billion sale of VU's Vivendi Universal Entertainment assets to NBC.

Let's just hope that he is as successful with Sierra as he was with Vivendi Universal Entertainment.

King's Quest IX launches new site

The team behind the promising King's Quest IX has recently launched a new website, which you can find on the familiar address, www.kq9.org. The site includes a mystical introduction, featuring some concept art that was used for the purposes of the game. We will have more substantial information about the game soon.

New QFG2 VGA screenshots

AGDI (former Tierra) recently released two new screenshot from the long awaited Quest for Glory 2 remake. The first screenshot is showing a battle between the hero and what appears to be Uhura, in front of the eyes of Rakeesh and Uhura's baby. The second screenshot is also from a battle sequence, and it shows the hero facing some serious trouble with a desert scorpio. Check out the screenshots on the designer journals available at their website: www.agdinteractive.com

On a similar note, there have been rumours around the AGDI forums, that the team might start developing

their first original (and probably commercial) project soon, which will probably even mean that we might not see another remake from AGDIInteractive. It has to be emphasized here that nothing of that is official, but pure speculation found in the forums of AGDI. However we at The Inventory think that it is high time those guys got something in return for their efforts!

Leisure Suit Larry–Magna Cum Laude “considerable turnover”

Alex Rodberg, Leisure Suit Larry–Magna Cum Laude Brand Manager was laid off, in a move that was expected based on what Al Lowe – the founder of our beloved Larry – posted on his website January 12, 2004.

“Today I received a phone call from VU's Eric Hayashi, Executive Producer of the new Larry game. He said that there had been "considerable turnover" of people involved and they were regrouping. He also said they wanted to restart negotiations with me in order to get me involved, possibly as early as next week. Stay tuned to this page.”

The current contact person for Leisure Suit Larry based on Alex's out-of-the-office auto-reply message is Rozita Tolouey. “Please contact Rozita Tolouey for all questions about Leisure Suit Larry.” Rozita Tolouey has been credited with the roles: Box & Content, Support, Brand Management, Production and Programming as early as 1995. Tolouey has been credited on games developed by companies such as: Monolith Productions, Inc., Piranha Games, Radical Entertainment, NovaLogic, Inc. And worked on many –non adventure- titles:

Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance II, No One Lives Forever 2 and The Simpsons Road Rage to name a few.

As for VU's Eric Hayashi, Executive Producer of the new Larry game, he has been credited with the roles: Production, Support and Programming as early as 1995 as well. He worked on many titles – also non adventure- such as Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom (Sierra), Empire Earth: The Art of Conquest (Sierra) and Star Wars: Monopoly (Hasbro Interactive).

Still, there is no word from Al Lowe to assure us whether he'll be directing and leading this upcoming installment of one of the most classic adventure games to a tremendous success as he did with almost all of his previous games or if he will be setting among the many eager adventure gamers praying that this installment would help bring us the adventure games genre back.

The Adventure Company announces Aura

Aura is a new 1st person point and click adventure, which is going to be published by The Adventure Company. Aura's story is based on an ancient legend that decrees that four sacred rings will bring great strength, power and immortality to he/she who collects them. Players must embark on a journey across four magical worlds as they search for the elusive rings. As they find each ring, another world opens up a route to completing this mystical quest. Aura's release date is June 2004. For more information visit:

<http://www.adventurecompanygames.com/tac/aura/>

- Rani Hasan & Dimitris Manos

Interview with Revistronic

The move to 3D has been a bothersome one for adventure games. Most adventure developers are still trying to figure out how to incorporate an adventure-suited interface in a 3D environment. With the exception of Jane Jensen and Gabriel Knight3, most solutions seen so far have disappointed adventure fans around the world. Now Revistronic is ready to take on this challenge with The Westerner, which is probably the first serious attempt for a pure point and click interface in a 3D environment since Gabriel Knight 3.

Apart from that though, it is also a humorous adventure, something that we do not witness very often as of late, and something that is definitely missing from the market. Let's see what the developers behind The Westerner have to say about their upcoming adventure and the future of adventure games.

Yourselves:

- Could you give us some background on yourselves?

We are developers since 1994 and our first title was an adventure, called 3 Skulls of the Toltec, that was released by Warner Interactive world wide in 1996. This was a "classic" type adventure, with 2D cartoons. From then on, we develop 3D games. In the first place, we started with racing car games. In five years, we have published three 3D games, two in cartoon style, called Toyland Racing and Tooncar, both with cars, and another called Grouch, in which the hero has to fight monsters with his sword, sorting a lot of perils in many stages in order to rescue his girlfriend. Well a sort of barbarian, you know.

- Do you play adventure games in your spare time? If so what are your favourite ones?

Of course we do, we love this genre. Our favourites are classical adventures like Monkey Island, Grim Fandango, The Day of the Tentacle, Blade Runner and of course 3 Skulls of the Toltec.

The Westerner

- Could you tell us what the story of The Westerner is about?



First of all is the plot. My brother Rodrigo, who also wrote the screenplay of Three Skulls of the Toltec, started writing the background story about four years ago. The story is about a cowboy, or a gunman, if you want, anyway, Fenimore Fillmore, a wandering man in the Far West, who reaches a lonesome farm one day. The farmers have problems with the powerful cattle raiser of the place, and Fenimore decides, or, better to say, he is almost obliged to help them.

- Talk to us a bit about the main character of The Westerner, Fenimore Fillmore.

Fenimore Fillmore is a bit innocent and very curious or more well I would say that where there is a little gossip, he goes there and puts his nose where nobody calls for it, and this is the origin of his adventures.

- Will the players get to control any other characters apart from Fenimore?

Except one scene, you only get control of Fenimore. But in future sequels you will get the full control of other characters.

- How many characters and how many locations should we expect to meet and visit?

There are about 30 characters and 7 main locations, a Town, two Farms, a School, a Bridge, a Fair and a Mansion.



- Is the story of the game linear or will the players be able to finish the game through multiple paths?

It is not linear, you can solve some things before others. It doesn't matter if you first rob the bank or blow the bridge.

- I think the last time a western adventure was published was some ten years ago and that one was Al Lowe's Freddy Pharkas, a hilarious adventure. It is of course nice to finally see a concept that is not cliché and used to death. Tell us the reasons behind your choice to use a western theme for your game.

Cause we just love westerns, and you should know that we really have made a very funny adventure, released in 1996, also about the Far West, and also with Fenimore Fillmore, with Warner Interactive. But the game was not released in the States because of some alcoholic, but very funny, sequences with the indians.

- Why did you decide to use a full 3D environment for the Westerner?

The times are changing, as Dylan says. Also, with 3D we can make a more cinematographic game. Our new generation engine, called "PICTuRE", is a graphics and physics engine, with power to manage with millions of polygons creating a scene in real time similar to the cinema. Also, it can cope with the facial expressions of the characters, giving emotions to them. Last, but not

least, the engine also can manage the illuminations and shades giving the graphic artists the possibility to create any ambience without any restriction. In the physics way, the engine manages without problems any element in order to make the scene a part of the whole.

- From the first moment that you published screenshots for the game, adventure fans and press worldwide spoke of a heavy Toy Story influence in the game's style. Were you really inspired by Toy Story when you made The Westerner or is the similarity just a coincidence?

Our company always have made cartoon style games, and, in 3D, it is not difficult to be influenced by Pixar, and Toy Story, but the similarity between the main characters is just a coincidence. Before Toy Story, when we were making the game, people used to ask if the influence was Lucky Luke, but it was not either. The real reference is John Wayne in Stagecoach, just take a look at his clothes and you will see (in B&W). Talking again about Pixar, we are making, in real time, what Pixar is doing after many hours of rendering.

- What is the highest resolution that the game's graphics will be able to reach?

Each character has more than 40.000 polygons. So, very high.

- Adventure fans have been waiting for a long time now to play a 3D adventure with an interface that actually works. Do you think The Westerner will give them what they are looking for and if so why?

We think that we have found a very easy to use, and very intuitive, interface. Just point and click. Easy to play, that's the idea. You'll have an inventory, but not a commands bar. You just need to pass the pointer of the mouse about the screen and click it when you find something of interest. Fenimore will tell you something about the screen objects, like in the classic adventures, but, if someone is near, he will respond with funny sentences, like "Yes, is a bottle, but not of whisky, my boy, but of gin".

And everybody will comment, when Fenimore went to some place many times, looking everything, picking up things and talking to nobody, that's the player, you know, about that he is a strange boy, a little mad, very curious guy. The chats with the characters will be very funny but not useless, not intricate but direct, in order to help you to advance in the game. The camera will move following Fenimore, and, when it is required, just

like in cinema films, there must be shortcuts, zooms, travelling and panoramic.

- What kind of tasks will the players have to accomplish in the game?

Little things, like, as we say, rob a bank, blow a bridge or free a jail prisoner, or hard things like cultivate carrots, extract molars, fix wheels, or just light chimneys.

- If you had to choose between easy, medium and hard which one would you pick to indicate The Westerner's difficulty level?

The difficulty is a really good balance. You always, by talking to characters or just seeing at things, know what you have to do. Now, the question is how. So, its very helpful for the "novice" players, but is at the same time very interesting for the expert ones.

- Will the game include any action sequences?

Yes sir. A couple, sir.

- How long will it take approximately an average player to finish The Westerner?

As long as this interview, or perhaps more. About 30 hours?

- What kind of music will the game have and how long will the soundtrack last?

The principal scenes have their particular music themes, and later in the game, there are some background music tracks, that last as much as you are playing.

- Most recent adventures feature very amateur voice acting compared to adventures of the past or games from other genres. Will you take any measures to avoid that with your game?

For the moment (February 2004), the Westerner have been voiced in 4 languages (Spanish, French, Portuguese and German), and all them have been done very, very good from professional main actors. In the English version, anyway, we will take special care in order to have voices, at least, as good as the previous four versions.

- Do you know when will The Westerner be available in English? Have you found publishers yet for Europe and North America and if so do you know of any release dates in those areas?

Well, of course it will be available in English. We are very, very near to make a deal with a very important American publisher, you know, and The Westerner will be in all the English speaking countries as soon as possible, perhaps by May.

- The game is already available in Spanish. How has it done so far in terms of sales and reviews? What do the players seem to like the most about the game and what are they critical about?

Well, very well in all the fronts, sir. The Westerner has been scored from 8 to 9, from 0 to 10. The sales are going well also, as the game have been in the 3 of the Top Ten PC games charts.

- How many copies does the Westerner have to sell worldwide for you to say that the game did indeed well.

About half million copies for the PC market, because we are thinking of making versions in other formats.

- Will there be a Westerner 2 in the future?

Sure, the thing is that he is making his start right now.

- How much time did it take and how much did it cost to develop The Westerner?

About year and a half, with a cost not so far from a million bucks.

Revistronic / General

- Talk to us about Revistronic. When and where was it founded?

Madrid, Spain, 1994.



- Have you created any other products apart from the Westerner?

- Three Skulls of the Toltec, adventure 1996 (published in English in many countries, like UK, Australia, Canada, but not in the States)
- Toyland Racing cars game, 1998 (published in many countries, also in USA)
- Grouch, sword and platform game, 2000 (published in USA as RockoQuest)
- Tooncar Racing, cars game, 2002 (published in USA as Tooncar: The Great Race)

- What are the future plans for Revistronic? Will you continue developing adventure games in the future?

Yes, we have plans in order to conquer the world. And, for the moment, we will be making adventures, and other kind of games.

- Do you already have any other adventures in development?

Yeah.



- What do you think of the current state of adventure games?

The current state is not so bad, we think. That'll be the day in which the entire world must be full of our adventures.

- Do you think adventures could become more popular than they are nowadays and what is the key for that in your opinion?

The key is a secret.

- Direct control vs point and click. Which interface suits adventure games best in your opinion?

Point and click, as we have made this superb adventure with point and click.

- Where did previous adventure developers go wrong when they developed 3D interfaces in your opinion?

We don't like to say bad things about our comrades, adventure developers. They are all wonderful people, just like us.

- Adventures lately have become shorter and easier than what they used to be some years ago. Do you see any particular reason behind this trend?

Perhaps because the people of those days were smarter than the people nowadays. We don't know really.

- Since Sierra and Lucasarts stopped producing adventures we do not see as many humorous adventures as we used to in the past. Do you see the situation changing anytime soon and do you think there is a place for humorous adventures in the market?

We hope so, at least. The sense of humour has been in very low state since a couple of years ago, as everybody knows.

- It seems as if the largest percentage of new adventure developers come from Europe. Why do you think this is happening? Is the European culture more adventure-friendly in any way than the American culture?

Perhaps because America is in a very peculiar situation right now, in all senses. And you have no time to make this kind of games, and prefer others. Anyway, Europe has always loved, and will love in the future, the great American adventures, and people like Larry or Guybrush will be always in our prayers.

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

We would like to thank everybody in advance for buying this particular game, and remember, the piracy is not legal. Or at least in not legal in the West. If you do it you can be lynched and hanged, man. Or get shot, or at least they will put tar and feathers on you. And the indians will cut your head of hair, or bury you in a swarming. And you will loose all your money in a poker game. You know the West is a dangerous but very funny place, man.

Interview with Pendulo

Runaway was probably the adventure that had to pass through bazillions of obstacles before reaching the shelves of game stores around the world. When it did manage to get published however, it became an instant hit. Especially in Europe, where according to this article (http://www.mcvonline.de/?article_id=268141) Runaway has sold already more than 400,000 copies(!!!) making it one of the most successful adventures of recent times along with The Longest Journey and Syberia (source: www.adventure-treff.de).

It was therefore inevitable that a second instalment of the point and click cartoon adventure would come up sooner or later. We invited Rafael Latiegui, one of the creators of the Runaway series, in our Lounge to discuss the successful road adventure. We also tried to 'fish' some information around Runaway 2, but naturally due to the early stage of development do not expect a lot of substantial details!

Yourselves:

- Could you give us some background on yourselves?

We (three partners of Pendulo) were born in Madrid 34 years ago. Ramón Hernández and I met at the university while studying computer science, whereas Felipe Gómez Pinilla, a physicist, was a schoolmate of Ramón's. You might say that we are good friends, as well as partners. Since I was a teenager, I had always dreamt that I would work in the world of video games, but I never imagined that it would actually happen.

- What were your favourite adventures from the golden days of Sierra and Lucasarts?

I have great memories of those adventures. Although I think I played nearly all of the games Sierra put out back then, I especially enjoyed the Space Quest saga, the first Quest for Glory games and the two adventures of Laura Bow. As for Lucas, it developed true gems, including The Secret of Monkey Island and, later on, Day of the Tentacle.

- Do you play adventure games nowadays? Have you played any adventure games recently that you thoroughly enjoyed?

I don't play as many games as I used to, and the main reason is that I don't have much time. However, I do enjoy sitting down from time to time to play as many of

the adventure games that come out as I possibly can, of course.

Runaway 1

- When did you start developing Runaway 1?

In the summer of '98. That is when we started to create the first sketches of what would end up becoming Runaway.

- What was the initial purpose of the developing team? What were you planning to achieve with Runaway?

In our minds, Runaway was supposed to be an adventure in the same spirit as the classical adventures, but at the same time very visually appealing, with a more modern look, while also being very different from





what was being created up to that time in the field of video games, in which everybody had started to use 3D as if there were no other possible path to take.

Plus, it was appealing to introduce more adult-oriented elements and attempt to tell the story of Brian's mental evolution. In the beginning, he is quite a "square" who has planned out exactly what his life will be like, leaving no room for improvisation, but in the end he becomes a much more free and spontaneous person.

- Do you think you reached your goal with the final product?

Yes, though there are always rough spots to work out that never turn out exactly as you had wished. However, if you consider the difficulties we went through during the game's development, we achieved what we wanted.

"It was appealing to introduce more adult-oriented elements and attempt to tell the story of Brian's mental evolution"

- It is well known that you faced a number of difficulties finding publishers for Runaway. What were those difficulties exactly? Why didn't publishers want to sign Runaway in the beginning? Did the fact that the game includes some mature content (i.e. drag queens and use of soft drugs) have anything to do with that?

The greatest difficulties have undoubtedly been the economic troubles Dinamic went through. It was the distribution company that owned the rights to Runaway. These difficulties, which had a direct influence on the development and marketing of the game, led Dinamic to bankruptcy just two months after Runaway was put on shelves, which completely ruined the product, blocking its sale not just in Spain but throughout the world. After a long, hard year of

negotiations, Pendulo was able to recover rights to the game and began to license it in the different countries where it has been published.

At the same time, it is also true that certain distributors did not want to take a risk on the product and paid more attention to such details as seeing the World Trade Center off in the distance (the game was, after all, developed prior to September 11), or the fact that some of the characters were drag queens. Curiously, they at no time seemed to care that other characters were killers.

- Fortunately you managed to find publishers eventually in most countries around the world, and I am certain that most of them have not regretted their decision. How many copies has Runaway sold around the world so far?

Even though the game is still selling well in some countries, and in others it has only been in stores for six months, almost 400,000 units have been sold in the PC version, which in all honesty is wonderful.

- Why do you think Runaway was so successful in terms of sales? What made it so appealing to customers around the world in your opinion?

Basically, I believe that the key to Runaway's success is that it is a game you can enjoy from beginning to end, and therefore word of mouth has been important in its

case. A good marketing campaign was also carried out for Runaway, but it is very well-known that no matter how strong such a campaign is, sales will plummet in one month if the product does not live up to expectations.

- In which areas of the world was Runaway most successful?

Germany and France are undoubtedly the places where the game has been a huge success. In France, in fact, it was chosen PC Game of the Year, which was particularly important to us, because the game probably had a budget eight to ten times lower than that of the games it was competing with. It has been quite successful in other European countries, as well, like

Spain, where it sold 100,000 units in just one weekend as part of a newspaper campaign.

In countries such as the United States, where adventure games are still a pending topic for distribution companies, it hasn't done badly at all.

- The trend lately is to create games in full 3D graphics. You decided however to use 2D backgrounds and the results were excellent to say the least. Why did you decide to not use full 3D graphics?

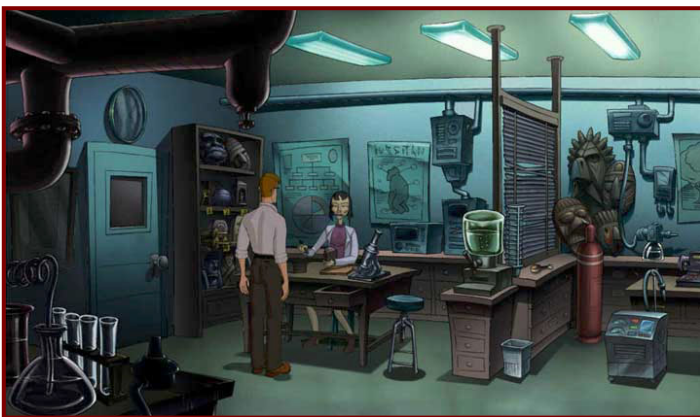
Because when we design and plan our games, we always try to put ourselves in the place of players and think about what we would like to find when we purchase a game. And a 2D adventure was what we felt like. It's as simple as that.

“The different points of view from the distributing company regarding Runaway’s publication in the UK have kept the game from being put on sale as of yet”

- Truth be told, the in-game graphics of the game were of much higher quality than the graphics seen during cutscenes, which were kind of blurry. What was the reason behind that?

In Runaway, there are a lot of videos, over 60 minutes, and if we hoped to stick to the maximum number of 3 CDs that our publisher was demanding, we couldn't use the same graphic quality in the cinematic scenes as in the playable sections. In this respect, we managed to “get the thorn out of our side,” because a DVD version will soon be published in France, with videos that have the same quality as the playable parts.

- Runaway’s theme is performed by a band called Liquor. Could you tell us a little bit about the band



and how you came in contact with them?

The band had worked with David, the person responsible for the soundtrack, and when we started to listen to demos by different bands to find one that fit in with what we were looking for, we really liked Vera's voice. Even though she was living in New York at the time, we decided to wait for her to come back and record what was going to become the main theme song of the game here.

- The game has been well received by both press and public, but it also received its share of criticism, especially when it comes to its gameplay. The most common criticism of the game concerns the sometimes excessive pixel hunting that a player has to resort to in order to find certain items in the game. Do you agree with that and what is your

take on that? Was pixel hunting an initial intention of yours in order to make the game more challenging?

At no time did we think of using pixel hunting as a puzzle except on two occasions. One of them was in the small hospital storage room, and another is in the nail in the cave. Both scenes were reduced, and we believe that it was alright to use this type of puzzle. As for the rest, I do not think there is any more pixel hunting than in other graphic adventures nowadays, but in any case we have taken note of the fact that it is something people do not like very much. Personally, I believe that when you enter into a screen and you do not see what objects you can interact with upon a first glance, it is more of a quality than a defect.

- Great Britain is one of the biggest gaming markets in Europe but Runaway has not been published there yet. Are there any news from that front? Will British adventurers get the chance to play Runaway anytime soon?

The different points of view from the distributing company regarding Runaway's publication in the UK have kept the game from being put on sale as of yet.

- Near the end of Runaway 1 Sushi gives an e-mail address to Brian. Is this e-mail address an actual address or is it an imaginary one?

The e-mail address is real. In other words, Sushi is at the other end of the line in cyber-space, ready to respond. It is something we thought had not been done before and has turned out to be a big success. Sushi has become a true psychologist. She gets e-mail messages all day long and from all over the world. In fact, she even got a message from an American soldier stationed in Iraq.

“Pixel hunting may not be something that everybody likes, but I think it would be a mistake to go to the other extreme”

Runaway 2

- One of the biggest merits of Runaway 1 was the large number of unusual characters. Will we also get to meet a large number of characters in Runaway 2 and will we get to meet some of the characters we are familiar with from Runaway 1?

In Runaway 2, there will be quite a few new characters, but they will be along the lines of those in the first part. Some will be friends, while others are foes. However, I am certain that players are going to love them. Amongst this diverse group, you may even recognize a few faces you are already familiar with, though for the time being I cannot say which characters.

- Is it going to be a point and click adventure?

Yes. I believe that Runaway is associated with this type of game control, and we do not want to let down our followers who enjoyed this in the first part.



- Are you going to take measures in order to avoid pixel hunting this time or will gamers still have to scan their screens in order to find certain items?

We are going to try to keep anyone from feeling frustrated because of this, but I cannot promise, if you need to obtain a nail for instance, that the nail will shine and sparkle every five seconds in order to draw the player's attention. As I said before, pixel hunting may not be something that everybody likes, but I think it would be a mistake to go to the other extreme.

- Do you think it will be easier to find publishers this time?

I am convinced that it will be somewhat easier. After all, the situation has changed since we tried to sell Runaway, when it was a completely unknown game.

Adventure Games / General

- What do you think of the current state of adventure games?

I think the high level of production is a clear sign of improvement over recent years, and that it is vital for the shift to consoles to take place in an intelligent way. If adventures remain outside of the console circuit, it will become a more and more marginal genre.

- Do you think adventures could become more popular than they are nowadays and what is the key for that in your opinion?

I hope so, although what I am convinced of is that the concept of the adventure will be diversified much more and will become broader so that more players are able to take part. Obviously certain players like a denser, more literary game so that they can get more involved in the story and drive themselves crazy trying to find the solution to puzzles. But others are more attracted to a more visually appealing, spectacular and less interactive product. Like with the movies, some people prefer Luis Buñuel's El Angel Exterminador while other would prefer to see Freddy vs. Jason by Ronny Yu, and both choices are equally respectable.



- 3D backgrounds vs. 2D backgrounds. What is your opinion?

Both. I think that each one has its own magic, and its own advantages and disadvantages. Personally, I prefer the touch of 2D backgrounds, but depending on the story and the look you are attempting to create, 3D can be a much better choice.

- Direct control vs. point and click. Which interface suits adventure games best in your opinion?

Point and click.

- Adventures lately have become shorter and easier than what they used to be some years ago. Do you see any particular reason behind this trend?

Expectations about the look of games have risen enormously in recent years, and the cost of producing a long adventure that maintains the current quality of graphics and animation is incredibly high, which keeps most producers from getting involved. At the same time, I sincerely believe that the fact that, at present, almost all players have access to solutions and help forms on the Internet is having a big effect on making adventure players perceive games as easier and shorter than before.

- When and how was Pendulo Studios founded?

Pendulo was created ten years ago in Madrid. We were a group of friends who developed our first game in a complete amateur way. You might say that we taught ourselves everything.

- What is the future for Pendulo Studios? Do you plan to create more adventures after Runaway 2?

We plan to ally ourselves of Purple Tentacle and take over the world!!!! Just kidding... Who knows what the future holds? Of course we would like to continue developing adventures.

- Since Lucasarts stopped producing cartoony adventures in favour of 3D ones, there has been almost no company producing such adventures. Do you think Pendulo will take the open space Lucasarts has left?

That is quite a compliment. In any case, I believe it is good that several companies are dedicated to developing adventures. Diversity is always the best, so that users can choose what they like the most.

- It seems as if the largest percentage of new adventure developers come from Europe. Why do you think this is happening? Is the European culture more adventure-friendly in any way than the American culture?

Clearly, in general terms, the tastes of Europeans and Americans when playing games are not the same. Nor are there too many points in common with Asians. Why? I suppose there are thousands of reasons, but it is clear that societies are different, and we should not think of this as something bad, but rather as a form of enrichment. In any case, it is a matter of fact that more adventures are sold in Europe than in the US, though one might wonder if this is caused by the players' tastes or the product lines created by distributors.

- Speaking as a company who had to overcome a lot of obstacles to see their product published in many areas of the world, do you have any advice to give to newcomers in the adventure game industry?

That they should not lose hope, because it is a tough world, much more so than it seems from the outside. And at the same time, working in what you love is amazing.

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

I would like to thank everyone that has played Runaway and of course thank you for the interview, and for the effort you put into publishing The Inventory for the adventure gaming community.



The most fearsome serial killer
is back at work.

Jack the Ripper New York 1901

Will you be able to put
an end to his atrocities?

Jack the Ripper is not the first and probably not the last adventure either to feature the most famous serial killer to walk the streets of London. This time however, Jack decided that he needed a change, so he moved to New York to start a ... not so new life. Bad habits never die, do they? Thus, this 1st person adventure of Galilea takes us to the streets of New York more than a hundred years ago to try and put an end to the bloodthirsty fiend.

Story: You are James Palmer, reporter for the New York Today. Women of ill repute are being found dead with certain organs being removed from their body. The people of New York are afraid that the man responsible for the murders might be the dreaded Jack The Ripper himself.

This kind of news is a goldmine for newspapers, and no one knows this better than James' editor. Jimmy is being assigned the investigation of the murders and since the Daily Illustrated, the biggest competitor of the New York Today, has had a couple of exclusive articles already on the killings, Palmer faces quite a task ahead of him.

It is evident that Galilea tried to put much more focus on story telling than what they did in their previous titles, the Cameron Files. In general the story of the game is satisfactory and it keeps your interest high. There are also quite a few unexpected twists during your investigation. However, the storytelling of Jack The Ripper is not all that perfect. It has its fair share of faults. A few of the characters are underdeveloped, and the most shining example of that is the main character.

James Palmer lacks personality and this is quite vital in such a storytelling experience.

This however is not noticed when it comes to secondary characters, who are surprisingly many – truth be told we are not used to meeting so many characters in most 1st person adventures – and most of them fit well the scenario. Prostitutes, bouncers, policemen and tramps will often get in your way to either help you or make your life more difficult. Their appearance and personality is distinctly adapted to the epoch they live in.

A second disadvantage of the game's plot is that many events of the story are portrayed in a very short manner, and sometimes you miss big chunks of storytelling. It happens a lot of times that while something is going on you will see a very short cutscene lasting 2 to 6 seconds with a few strange screens thrown



He is a ... key person.



They are all kings.

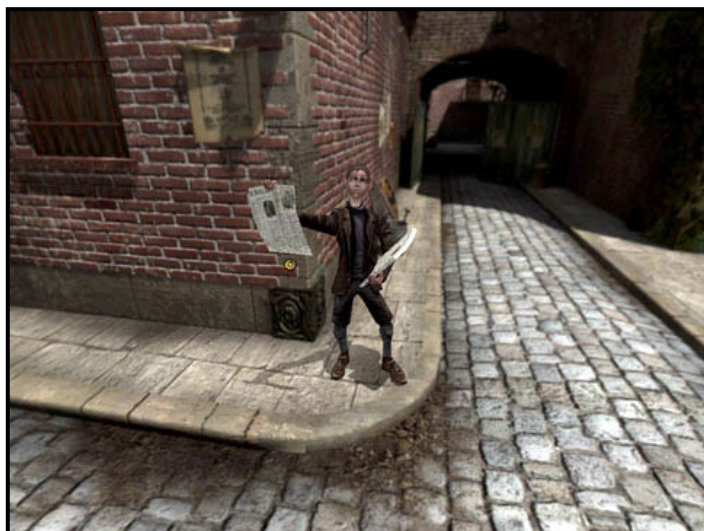


Abigail is rehearsing

in here and there to convey a whole event that would need either a longer video or actual gameplay. And then you find yourself wondering ‘what did just happen’. Jack the Ripper also features some other minor inconsistencies but nothing that will spoil the general feeling that you get from the overall story. The ending seems very rushed and the game would deserve a rather longer ending. Although I have to make it clear here that I personally enjoyed the way the story ended, I was just a bit disappointed with the presentation of the ending itself and the short length.

The whole game’s length on the other hand is long enough. It took me more or less 15 hours to finish it and although a few cutscenes or gameplay events would have benefited from some more content, Galilea produced quite a lot of content nevertheless for today’s standards.

Graphics: The game is seen from the 1st person perspective. Galilea used a new technique this time, that incorporates Real Time 3D characters in pre-rendered backgrounds. The results were rather interesting and



Every reporter needs a messenger boy.

although the models could have had a bigger variety of animations it still looked more natural than the 3D models of Cameron Files did. So one could say that Galilea took a leap forward when it comes to characters. Unfortunately you cannot say the same thing when it comes to the navigational system of Jack The Ripper. The game makes use of the same outdated ‘teleport from one node to the next’ navigational system that many 1st person adventures have. While playing the game one cannot help but to think how immersive and realistic it would be to explore the pubs, the crime scenes and the offices of the game wandering in a full 3D environment. It would have made the experience much more intense and enthralling.

We conducted an interview with Philippe Gaudè, the producer of Jack The Ripper in our previous issue (no 11), and when asked about the graphics engine, Philippe answered that they prefer this technique because it makes the system requirements of the game lower, thus there is a bigger target audience in the market. I wonder though, if they might be missing some of the market share by producing a game that is technically inferior to games of other genres and therefore receiving lower review grades. Food for thought maybe?

Sound: Let’s start with the music. I have one word for you people. Phenomenal. It is this kind of soundtracks that make you wish you had a third ear! Singer Djazia Satour, who has worked with Galilea before on *Cameron Files: Pharaoh’s Curse*, gave once again an astounding performance. Her ballads ‘*The Three Ravens*’ and ‘*Come live with me*’ will probably go down in the adventure history as two of the best songs ever written for adventure games and could easily be featured in a multimillionaire Hollywood production. A truly astounding female voice that through the shows of the mysterious Abigail made the nights of investigation in the Lowside district all the more interesting.

The rest of the tracks are also well suited for each scene and make up for an eerie experience. The voice overs are generally well done, which was a nice surprise, considering how many bad examples of voice acting we have seen as of late in adventure games. The sound effects are also quite realistic and appropriate, although some of them become a bit repetitive after a while. A new and rather intuitive innovation of Jack The Ripper, was the use of sound for solving a puzzle. But I cannot give more details about that without spoiling the story so I would better stop here.

Gameplay: Galilea deserves congratulations for creating one of the few adventures lately that did not include a slider puzzle, neither a push the key to the newspaper puzzle at all throughout the whole game. And not only that, but the tasks in the game are intertwined with the story. You are not faced with any kind of illogical mechanism or obscure contraption that you have to figure out in order to enter a door. So to a certain extent the developers of Jack The Ripper managed to create an adventure that escapes the familiar drawbacks of previous titles. But alas, the developers failed in other parts of the gameplay.

First of all the dialogue interface is totally inappropriate for a game so heavy on dialogues. You always can choose two topics, one called mission and the other called community and often you get the addition of a third question. Usually the word community has nothing to do with the question Palmer asks. Sometimes it is not clear what the player has to do next in order to advance the story. What you have to do is most often not difficult, but you don't know what that is, and you will find yourselves wandering in the different locations asking yourself what should you do



One of the ladies in the Blue Velvet

next. The game would have also benefited from higher interactivity since there is not much to do on each screen.

General Info: The version of the game we played was filled with bugs but as it turns out, it was not the final version that is being sold in stores, so we cannot really comment on the bugs. If the bugs that we faced on the game are not resolved then it is a big drawback for the game. The box cover of Jack the Ripper is simplistic but at the same time very attractive and elegant.

In a few words... A quite pleasant adventure that misses small touches and final details. It is innovative in some ways (logical tasks that are intertwined with the story, RT models). On the other hand developers should finally understand that it is time to move on to a free roaming navigational system and leave this confusing navigational system to the past.

- Dimitris Manos

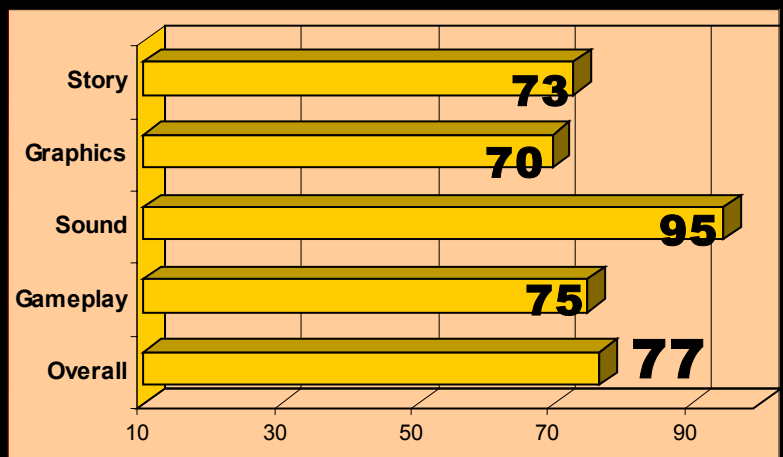
Jack The Ripper

Game Info:

Developer: Galilea
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 1st Person
Difficulty: Easy
Site:

http://www.adventurecompanygames.com/jack_the_ripper/index.html

System Req.: Win 95/98/2000/ME/XP,
 Pentium III 500, 64MB RAM, 16MB
 DirectX Video Card, DirectX 7 Sound
 Card



NICK DELIOS

CONSPIRACIES



Conspiracies is bad. Very bad. Painfully bad. Gigli bad. Every part of this game, from the horrible acting to the cheap CGI effects to the incomprehensible story to the asinine puzzles, all combine to make an utterly horrible gaming experience. One that I would not dare wish on my worst of enemies. And I paid \$30 for it, fully under the impression that I would enjoy it, and have a pleasant review to write. Oh cruel fortune, how you mock me...

Now this puts me in a very interesting position because, as much fun as it would be to thoroughly rip this game to shreds, it would not be very productive. The biggest disappointment while playing this game is the pervading feeling all throughout it that it really *should* be so much better than it is. The “Tex Murphy” model for games (a mix of 3D and Full Motion Video) is not inherently a bad one, provided it is done properly. This game, unfortunately, is a thorough example not only of how to make a bad “Tex” style game, but a bad Adventure game all around.

Story: You are Nick Delios, former medical researcher, recently turned private detective. After losing the last of your spending cash at a craps table you are summoned to the offices of Dimitris Argiriou, the man who got you fired from your research team and called off your marriage to his sister, Anita. Argiriou has taken on all your unpaid debt to various people, and has offered to tear up the checks if you agree to perform a favor for him later on. At the same time, your old friend Police Investigator Thanos Pekas has asked your

help in investigating the murder of a small time crook. You accept both jobs, unaware of intrigue, deception, and inevitable plot twists to follow.

All that exposition happens in the first ten minutes of gameplay, after which you spend another fifteen minutes hunting around your apartment for the components to make yourself a cup of coffee so you can let yourself out the door. This is the first problem with the story, that it wavers between being extremely complicated and convoluted, and being as dull and boring as slightly moist dirt. It’s hard enough to get into a story that is either of these, and damn impossible when it’s both.

In an apparent attempt to make the story more interesting, it gets increasingly complex as the game goes on, to the point that nothing much makes any sense. Aliens, Drugs, Time-travel, Replicant Cyborgs and a dozen other totally random topics are introduced



Nick is making coffee, the excitement is palpable



Check your tuning guys, you seem a little flat...

to further the story and then just completely forgotten about. This is not the way to tell a story.

Gameplay: The interface is likely the best thing about the game, and that isn't saying much. The control scheme is very similar to a first-person shooter style game, where the mouse rotates around your perspective, and you move forward, back, and strafe left and right with the arrow keys. This actually works well enough if you're accustomed to the concept, and is a perfectly reasonable device to grant the player the freedom to explore the game world as they see fit.

Unfortunately, that's about the only thing they did get right. Past that, the game is simply a chore to play. The three deadly sins of adventure gaming (Pixel-hunting, random deaths, and limited inventory) are committed en masse in this game. Just about everything smaller than a human body can be placed into inventory, and only about half of it is ever used for anything. Items containing one piece of information, such as a brief message or a phone number, are eliminated completely after just one viewing. Minuscule objects like business cards and scraps of paper will be hidden in ridiculous places that you will never be able to find without a walkthrough, and there are dozens of ways to die that you will never see coming. It is truly remarkable just how much this game can do wrong.

To call the puzzles simply awful would be to miss the perfect opportunity to call them atrocious, appalling, abominable, abhorrent and... hold on, let me get my thesaurus...ok, abysmal. Solving puzzles will require you to look at every pointless little thing in every location to find one small irrelevant item to use in one illogical place to get *another* irrelevant item for *another* illogical puzzle. For example, allow me to solve the following puzzle for you, which I swear I am not making up; find the locksmith's business card which will unlock your cupboard, get the cereal, and feed it to the talking plant (which doesn't talk) to get an iron bar that will open a manhole cover. This is just about as



Nick's friend Thanos helps complicate the plot.

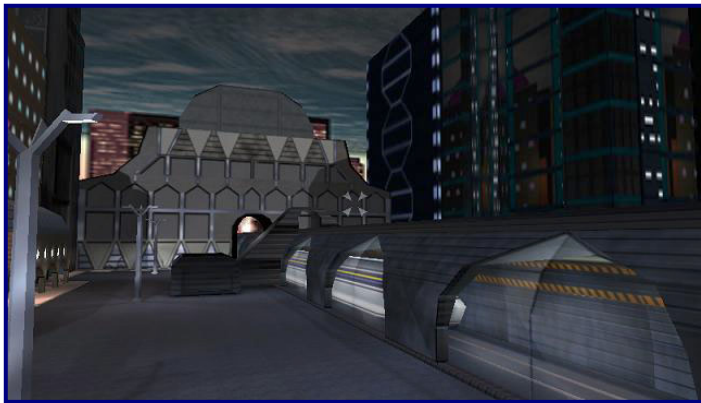
obtuse as a puzzle can get, but it doesn't stop there; there are doors locked with tile puzzles, nonsensical database passwords, and a hedge maze in a space station. I think I can speak without exaggeration when I say that there is not one sensible puzzle in the entire game.

Graphics: The in-game graphics are serviceable, though by no means impressive. I realize that the graphical quality of an Adventure game is a rather irrelevant factor, but this is barely up to the level of *Under A Killing Moon* in '94. People and objects are two-dimensional cardboard cutouts in a world built of very drab textures and unimaginative room design. I'm not asking for life-like realism here, but anything would be better than this. Combine the low-end graphics engine with uninspired room design and you get, well, "serviceable."

The movies are extremely poor quality, owing to an overuse of chroma-key (blue-screen) technology. Blue-screen, in case you don't know, is where you film actors in front of a large blue sheet, and later use video software to remove the blue area and replace it with other background footage. While I can see how it would be necessary for some scenes, this is used in almost *every* scene in the game. And it's poorly done too. The problem with Blue-screen is lighting it right so the actors don't cast a shadow on the screen, because the shadow can't easily be removed, so in most of the



That's one evil looking goatee



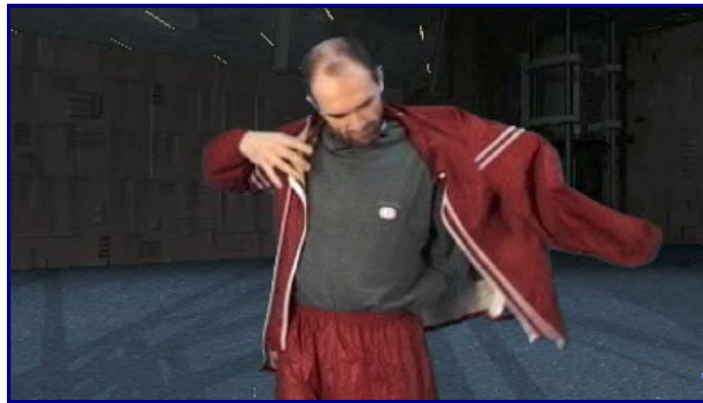
Behold, the cheaply rendered world of the future!

chroma-key scenes all the actors have this grey/blue hue surrounding them. This *really* looks bad, and the bad acting doesn't make it any better.

Sound: As the game and its movies were produced in Greece, the movies had to be dubbed over in English. It's not the fact that the lips don't match the words being spoken that bothers me here, it's that the translation itself is bad. None of the voice artists seem professional in the least, and most of the time it sounds as if they'd all rather be doing something other than reading the script.

Making things worse is that all the actors seem to be trying to unsuccessfully mimic a Greek accent, which is both unnecessary and awful sounding. It's at its worst when they say someone's name because, the game being Greek, the names are also Greek sounding, so it's very difficult to tell what they're talking about. For five minutes I thought Prokopiou was a city until I met him.

By contrast I barely noticed the music, and I'm not sure whether this is a good thing or not. None of the tunes were great, but none were really that bad either. Most



He's putting on, I swear, his Time Travel Jogging Suit

of the songs sounded the same, which I guess is fine, as it gives me more energy to devote to all the other flaws with this game. The sound effects too are serviceable without being noticeably good or bad. While neither makes the game any worse, they don't enhance the experience in the way they should.

Conclusion: I hope that future Adventure game developers will see this not simply as a scathing review of an awful game, but also as a catalog of the numerous mistakes that it is possible to make in the production of a game. I beg you, please learn from the tragic example of Anima Interactive, and do not make the same horrible mistakes they have.

For the average Adventure game player, I say this: If, for whatever reason, you feel the masochistic urge to experience for yourself just how bad an Adventure game can be, then by all means pay \$30 for Conspiracies. Otherwise you'd be better off tracking down Tex Murphy: Overseer on Ebay.

- Justin Peeples

Conspiracies

Game Info:

Developer: Anima PPD Interactive

Category: Point and Click

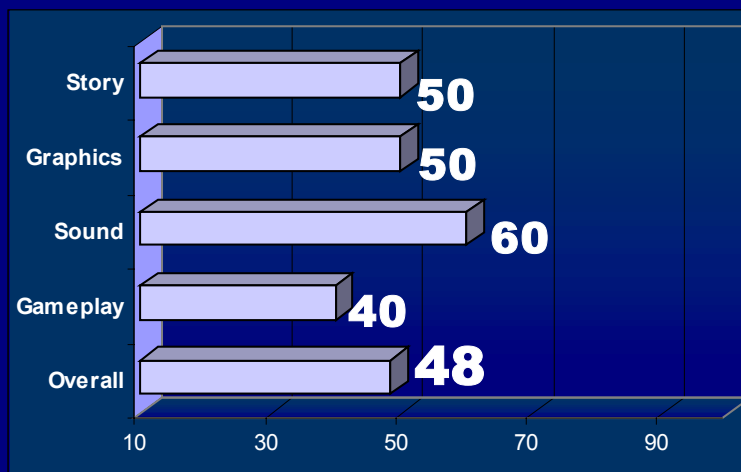
Perspective: 1st Person

Difficulty: Hard

Site:

<http://www.gotgameentertainment.com/conspiracies/>

System Req.: Win 98/2000/ME/XP,
Pentium II 400, 64MB RAM, 1,5 GB HD,
CD-ROM, 16MB DirectX 8.1 Video Card,
Sound Card



URU

AGES BEYOND MYST.

This is the second part of the URU review. The first part can be read on The Inventory 10. Back then we had talked about the amazing technical characteristics of URU. Graphics that impressed even the most demanding gamers with breathtaking locations and excellent lighting effects. The game's sound was also unique, with the developers taking full advantage of the Creative Labs EAX system, which provides advanced environmental effects. These characteristics of URU brought a world to your computer screen like never been done before.

The fact that URU live would be launched a short time after the game was released made us decide to split the review in 2 parts and give the game a final score after playing both versions of the game (single player/online). Unfortunately though, Cyan proceeded in one of the most controversial actions a game company has ever taken and decided to close down the live version of the game before it was even properly launched. Hence a) people who are not aware of that will go to the stores and see boxes of URU promising a unique live version b) we do not have much to comment upon other than the gameplay of the single version. Which is totally opposite in terms of quality compared to the technical aspects of the game.



Pillars are often seen in the ages of URU

Gameplay. First of all, traditional Myst players will probably need some time to adapt to the new, and admittedly flawed interface of the game. You can either use the mouse or the keyboard to move your character. But the mouse controls have a much more 'direct control' feel to them than point and click. You turn your character by moving the mouse pointer towards the edges. Then if you click your character will move towards the direction he/she is looking at. If you cross your cursor over a hotspot, the cursor will change colour and if you click your character will interact with the certain hotspot.

When I first started with the game I preferred the mouse controls, and it worked quite well in the beginning, when walking out in the open. When I had to move to closed spaces though, the mouse controls were inadequate to steer and guide my character properly. So I changed to the keyboard controls, which mind you were not great, but were a bit better than the mouse controls. The main problem is that it is very easy to fall from edges and to miss certain jumps – and yes you read right...jumps – while you try to get from one location to another. Even action games offer sometimes the possibility to the players to ensure that they won't fall from an edge by pressing a certain key. What's the point of introducing action elements in adventure games and making them even more difficult than in action games is honestly beyond me. Especially when some of these jumps are very essential for the completion of the game.

And to make things even worse the developers decided that a normal saving function was not appropriate for adventure games and chose to give the players the possibility to save their location only once when they ... touch a Journey Cloth. Maybe there would be some reasons for that in the live version, but could someone please explain to me why can't we have a normal saving function in the single player version? I'd be really interested to read the logic behind that.

So now if you miss a jump – which believe you me, is highly likely – not only do you have to be frustrated by



You'd better not be drunk

the fact that you have to resume the game and wait during the really slow loading times, you will also have to start over all the actions from the beginning of this age. Sweet, right?

The interactivity of the game is rather minimal. You cannot pick up objects and there's not much life around to interact with (something that would be apparently different in the live version). You will mostly spend your time running around the – admittedly – gorgeous landscape looking for journey clothes, or trying to find a way to make some obscure contraption work. And obscure is a word that will come many times to your mind while playing URU. Most of the puzzles have very very minimal to non-existent feedback.

URU dead: Before Cyan brought down the live version, I had the chance to log on a couple of times to the online world of URU. This was a puzzle by itself, because I'd have to make loads of attempts before a connection was finally established. What I found was a



The backgrounds are detailed indeed

world filled with people who would wander around, dance, play games and chat but that was about it. There had been no missions tailored for the online version when I was there. It was quite fun while it lasted anyway.

In a few words... One more adventure is being added to the long list of 'could have been great but' adventures. The potential was great indeed. Amazing 3D graphics, great audio and the prospect of a world where adventurers from around the globe could meet and interact with each other. Cyan did not manage to come up with a comfortable interface and to make things even worse they introduced one of the worst saving functions in the history of gaming. Add to that failure to deliver the live version and there you go. URU in a nutshell is a tour through a beautiful and captivating but at the same time lifeless and almost non-interactive world.

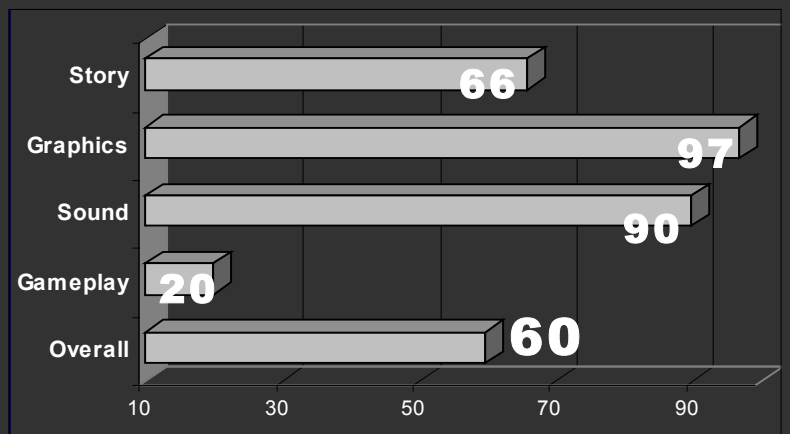
- Dimitris Manos

URU: Ages Beyond Myst

Game Info:

Developer: Cyan
 Category: Direct Control
 Perspective: 3rd/1st Person
 Difficulty: Hard
 Site: <http://uru.ubi.com/us/>

System Req.: Win 98SE/2000/ME/XP,
 Pentium III 800, 256MB RAM, 2 GB HD,
 4X CD-ROM, DirectX 8.1 Video Card,
 DirectX Sound Card



Time to see what our readers had to share with us in The Invento-mail. Riana from Jakarta talks to us about her craving for more adventures in her area. Honza gives his view on the voice-overs of the Czech version of The Black Mirror. Jason made some constructive criticism on the magazine. Now let's move on to the actual letters!

Hi Dimitris :)

I'm Riana from Indonesia (a definitely non-English speaking country, so please forgive my bad English). I'm a newbie in adventure games, or should I say I didn't really play PC games before, until my husband brought home games of CSI and Law and Order: Dead on the Money knowing that I'm a huge fan of those TV series. Now the strategy to grab the TV series fans to play the game and eventually love the genre worked on me like a charm! After those two games, hubby brought me Syberia. Boy, did I fell deeply in love...

I really enjoyed your magazine, but at the same time it makes me feel I've missed a lot by being a beginner when the golden age had long passed! :(I envy all of you who had played the legendary Quest for Glory, King's Quest, Grim Fandango, Myst series, etc., for I cannot find any of those anymore in local stores. I had to search local stores and scrutinize their collections like crazy until I finally found The Longest Journey, and the shopkeeper went like, "What? This game is still here?", and the rest of the people in the store stared at me like I'm one of the zombies in the action games they were buying.

Anyway, I just want to say thank you for what you are doing with this magazine, it is definitely a source to me. I will keep downloading and reading your next publications while hoping that one of the great games in your review is available in the local stores in my country. Thank you!

Riana in Jakarta - who craves to play those legendary adventure games everyone's talking about all the time! Aarrrrgh!!

The Inventory: Hello Riana, thanks for writing to us. I totally understand your craving for older classics. It is indeed a pity that such gems are so hard to find. There are certain ways however that could help you find older classics. One is by checking out e-bay, www.ebay.com where people from all around the world sell items they do not need anymore. Many people find older adventures over there. Be careful though, because not everyone in ebay is an angel. It is even possible to find some of the older adventures on the net available for download. If you search well enough you might be surprisingly rewarded for your efforts. I am happy to see that the strategy to grab TV series fans worked on you. Tells you a whole lot of things about marketing, doesn't it?

Hi Dimitris,

I just wanted to say one very important thing about the Black Mirror. I have the original (Czech) version of this game (Posel Smrti) and the Voice acting there is really superb! Really, it's voiced by very good Czech actors, and it really helps the atmosphere a lot. Unfortunately it didn't arrive to english version, for obvious reason.

No one would be here able to pay the good foreign actors. From your review I got the sense, that the game was voice casted by some language school teachers (it will make sense then, why it's so bad). So just take it as the other view from my experience.

Honza

The Inventory: Hello Honza and thank you for sharing your experiences with the Czech version of the game. I personally think I would rather hear the Czech voices with English text rather than listening to bad voice acting. It is high time companies understood the importance of acting in their games.

Dimitris,

I hope this letter does not come across as mean spirited, because I definitely do not write it in that matter. I have been reading your webzine since the very first edition, and am very happy that you have chosen to take it upon yourself to carry on the adventure game torch. I read a fair amount of computer game magazines, in addition to yours, so I have quite a bit of experience reading the literature. My main complaint is with The Inventory's strong bias toward Lucas Arts / Gabriel Knight / Syberia. Granted every reviewer is biased toward whatever they like. The best reviewers are able to look past their personal bias and still give a critical review, positive or negative, of a game not within the author's preference. If I wrote a review I would have a hard time not comparing every game to Myst / Riven / Buried in Time. That is my preference while yours is Gabriel Knight. Trouble is there are thousands of readers who could care less what our favorites are.

I realize you are one of the sole people who maintain The Inventory, and therefore your opinion will be dominant. However, your love of Jane Jensen, et. al. starts to taint your review of other games. There are hundreds of adventure games that I have played that were fun and different, not great, Monkey Island, Dracula, and Schizm to name a few. I feel that if a game didn't have Jane Jensen's name or star Kate Walker you would simply say "The game was merely ok, but it was no Gabriel Knight". Try to keep the reviews simple to the game being reviewed. Comparing it to your favorite old time Lucas Arts title is not fair.

Keep plugging away, Dimitris, I eagerly await each issue of The Inventory.

-Jason Kolodziej

ps. I don't anticipate you will published this, but I wanted to offer you some constructive criticism.

The Inventory: Hello Jason. First of all don't worry; all constructive criticism on the magazine is more than welcome. I actually think those e-mails are very interesting as long as their purpose is not to bash the publication or certain individuals and your e-mail is obviously not such a case. I will speak for myself now, because as I understand it your comments are about my own reviews, so this should not reflect on the rest of the reviewers of The Inventory.

I personally believe that an objective review is a utopian dream. I do not think there is such a thing as an objective reviewer. Review is just a fancy word for opinion. Apparently all games are more or less liked by some people and disliked by some others. Some like easy adventures, others like difficult ones. Some people would put story before puzzles, others would put puzzles before story. Some like 1st person adventures better than 3rd person ones, others prefer the exact opposite.

Being objective in my book, means writing a long row of reviews where you take everyone in consideration, thus falling in a situation where all games are graded from 70 to 90 percent. If all reviewers did that, it would be worse in the long run for the consumer, because whose opinion would you trust in the end if all products received almost equal grades. I think the best you can do is find a reviewer that you trust and you can identify with when it comes to adventures. I think my perspective is more or less known after several reviews I have written in the magazine and of course I do not expect everyone to agree with them.

As far as the comparisons are concerned, I have the opinion that I have done that in appropriate situations. I.e. the similarities between games like Journey to the Center of the Earth and Syberia or between Gabriel Knight 3 and The Watchmaker are obvious. It is very hard to not compare such games. Grades are after all formed by comparing each game with the rest of the options in each market. For example if you see a game with 256 colours nowadays it will probably receive a very low grade for its graphics. But if this game was out 20 years ago it would be the state of the art game everybody would be talking about. So sometimes it is natural for me as a reviewer to compare a game with – what I consider – the best game of a similar nature.

Fan Fiction

In this new section we include stories written by fans based on adventure games. This month we continue with Ugarte's Lost Wind, with chapters 4 and 5. The story is based on the legendary Quest for Glory games. If you have written a fan fiction story that you would like to get published in our magazine then submit it to us by e-mailing us at theinventory@yahoo.com and if we find it interesting we will contact you as soon as possible. But for the time being let's move on to Ugarte's story.

LOST WIND

Madrick Doomslayer is a Fighter who graduates from the Famous Adventurer's Correspondence School in Silmaria. As an avid adventurer, he journeys to the land of Mariunia, a place he believes to be a paradise. However, things turn out more grim than expected. As a Hero, Madrick tries to bring peace to two feuding towns, help a group of Dwarves, and battle fierce insect creatures. He also meets Trolls, wumus, and a beautiful woman named Sidra. Madrick's adventure takes him through danger and excitement on the road to becoming a Hero and a Paladin.

CHAPTER 4: TEMPEST OF DESTRUCTION

A few hours later, the sun began to set and fade away from the good-natured kingdom of Silmaria. In the town, the merchants began to close their stands. The Bank of Silmaria locked its doors securely to keep out thieves. Many other places locked their doors in response to the waning of the bright sun, including Salim's apothecary, the F.A.C.S., and Sharka's magic shop. However, there was one place, unlike all the others, that opened its doors: the Dead Parrot Inn.

Madrick, happy about getting his degree and the Doomslayer sword and shield, gave a Drachma to the fat Shapierian guard Abdull in front of the Dead Parrot as he went down the steps into the bustling tavern. He strutted with a tremendous feeling of joy and danced to the music in the place. He went up to the bar where drinks of all sorts were served. There, the overweight female bartender Budar noticed the tall and proud figure of Madrick approaching. Nearby is Nawar, a beautiful harem girl with brown hair and a splendid face, stood in front of the counter and, like Budar, glanced at the heroic-looking man. The two women smiled at Madrick, who returned it with a smile of his own.

"Hello there," greeted Budar. "Would you like today's special? It's a Satyr-day Nite Special."

"Well," said Madrick. "I'll settle for just a mug of Greek coffee. I avoid alcohol."

"Sure," said Budar.

"And how are you this evening?" asked Nawar.

"Just fine," answered Madrick. "How about you?"

"Well," said Nawar. "It's getting somewhat boring here. Nobody is playing the Wheel of Fortune tonight. Only Budar is keeping me company."

"I see," said Madrick. "Why don't you meet some men?"

"I can answer that," said Budar as she handed Madrick the mug of Greek coffee. "She's feeling down since she doesn't see the Prince of Shapeir much. He chose to be King and married Elsa, so she's the Queen."

"Don't worry about me," said Nawar with a slight frown. "There are many men to meet, but our King was such a wonderful man. It's hard to find another like him."

"I'm sorry, Nawar," said Madrick as he drank his coffee. "But I do believe that most Heroes have one thing in common."

"What is it then?" asked Nawar.

"Compassion," answered Madrick. "Most show some concern for others. Few are selfish."

"Like Magnum Opus," said Budar.

"True," said Nawar. "By the way, word has spread that you earned your Fighter's Degree from the Famous Adventurer's school."

"So another Hero has visited this tavern," said Budar.

"I'm flattered," said Madrick. "I want to go adventuring soon."

"Where to?" both women asked simultaneously.

"I'm thinking Mariunia," said Madrick. "It's a paradise island a long way West from Silmaria. The island is said to be three times bigger than Marete."

"I've never been there," said Budar. "But it seems like a beautiful land."

"I wish I could travel as much as you," said Nawar.

Madrick returned the mug to Budar. He did come to celebrate, but he was still tired and wanted to rest. He only came for just a quick drink and a little chatting. Importantly, he wanted time to make preparations to go to Mariunia.

"Well," said Madrick. "I think I'll go now. It's wonderful to talk to you two."

"OK," said Budar. "Come back anytime. Tell me about Mariunia sometime."

"Take care," said Nawar.

Madrick returned to his home above where Wolfie's stand usually stood. After closing the door behind him, he went into his bedroom with a lively expression of euphoria on his face. Although he was tired, he wanted to take time to recognize the man that he had become. He wanted to keep thinking of the pride in the Famous Adventurer and his grandfather. He looked in the large mirror above his chest of drawers. He smiled at the handsome and worthy man in the mirror. The black hair split in the middle and combed to the back and side made him admire himself more. His brown eyes and shaved face radiate with flawless charm. His slightly muscular body presented his strength and prowess along with the valuable inner qualities shown by his attractive face. Madrick had soon begun to like himself and considered himself very noble.

Madrick looked at the blade of Fireblade as he held it in the dim light in his room. He also held up Soulshield and looked carefully at the gold flame design against the blue color. He looked in the mirror as he held the two items as if he were in battle. He definitely looked like a valiant Fighter and, someday, a true Paladin. Monsters and vicious creatures were on his mind, and he hoped to encounter some on his adventures to prove his excellence. Having a tiring day of fighting Bearmen, he put away his sword, shield, helmet, and chainmail armor. He got into bed and closed his eyes. His body was somewhat stiff and sore, but it was natural for someone as active as a Fighter. His mental strength was drained as well as a result of the physical exhaustion. The last thing he did was to take a good look at the degree he hung on his wall across the bed. Madrick soon drifted off into a dreamless and blissful sleep.

A few days later, Madrick was at the Docks of Silmaria after spending those days making preparations for his adventure to Mariunia. He bought enough food from Marrak for about one week. In addition, he purchased several amphorae from Wolfie and filled it with clean water from a barrel he had in his home. He oiled Fireblade and Soulshield to make it look shiny and new. There was one more thing that he purchased from Wolfie: a map of the island of Mariunia. After all the preparations, he made sure to say an emotional goodbye one last time to both his grandfather and the Famous Adventurer. Madrick stood on the dock in front of a large, spacious sailboat as Andre, the only Silmarian fisherman, finished loading Madrick's stuff, including a small chest filled with 2,500 Drachmas, which Madrick had saved for many years. After several minutes, all of Madrick's food, water, and money supply were loaded onto the sailboat. Andre smiled at his pleasure of seeing someone set sail from Silmaria.

"This boat of your grandfather's is very suited for long distance travel," said Andre.

"And it's a nice day to sail, isn't it?" asked Madrick.

"From my experience as a fisherman. The current conditions could not possibly lead to terrible storms. You should also be able to reach Mariunia in less than a day."

"So I must have picked a perfect time to travel."

"I sure hope you like Mariunia. I hear it's a lovely island."

"Thanks. I hope so. By the way, how are you doing with your studying with Julianar?"

"Wonderful. I'm half way through my learning, but I'll soon become a Healer like I've always dreamed."

"Is Julianar a great instructor?"

"Yes, of course. She is very attentive, and I learn much from her. Right now, I'm learning how to help a severely injured warrior who may come in to get aid."

"That's pretty good," commented Madrick. "Well, I think I'll be off to Mariunia."

"OK," said Andre. "When you return, tell me all about it."

As Madrick started to get into the sailboat, Andre untied the rope securing it to the dock. The calm breeze heading away from the dock pushed the boat slightly, and Madrick's boat began to propel forward. Madrick waved goodbye to Andre.

"Be careful," called out Andre. "But I hope you enjoy what you're looking for."

"Thank you," yelled Madrick, holding up his sword and shield. "Farewell."

"And the same to you," shouted Andre.

Madrick sailed out for several minutes and looked behind him again. The docks were a distant blur and the island was becoming a thin line along the horizon. He realized that he was already far from Silmaria, his home. At the same time, he was optimistically looking forward to the nirvana known as Mariunia. The sky was crystal clear and light blue. The effervescent sunlight penetrated the lucid waters of the Med Sea. The wind was strong enough to move the boat well, yet calm enough to not make Madrick shiver. Madrick looked all around him and had faith that the trip and his adventure in Mariunia would be exciting and memorable. He felt like this for a few hours.

However, his cheerfulness later started to diminish. He saw the color of smoke gray appear as a large patch in the distant sky just above the horizon. The patch of gray, in a short amount of time, got significantly larger, and Madrick's fear had replaced his hopefulness. He sat and watched it grow in size. He definitely knew something was terribly wrong, for the gray color had spread to the sky just above his head. A closer look revealed that these were dark clouds covering the sky. Before long, the entire sky that Madrick could see was concealed by the dire clouds of darkness. Madrick wrapped his arms and legs tightly around the pole of the sailboat that held the sail. At the same time, his hands held the large bags of food and amphorae of water. As for the chest of money, he gripped it between his feet. His sword and shield were already secure to him. It was time to hang on for his dear life.

Madrick waited for the imminent destruction to do its deed. A loud boom of thunder roared across the sky at the same time that a thick lightning bolt flashed in the sky above him. Madrick's heart pounded with a frequent rhythm and his skin had goosebumps from the cold air. The storm became absolutely overwhelming as a horrendous wind from out of nowhere blew the boat around the water. The wind also created large, deadly tidal waves that made Madrick somewhat seasick. He continued to hang on, despite his tendency to let go and let it all end. Water poured into the boat in large amounts, threatening to submerge the boat completely. The wind was terribly mighty and another lightning bolt flashed above him. The deafening thunder combined with the chill of the wind and water created a very nasty storm. Madrick did not see it coming, for nothing acted as a sign of the storm's arrival.

Madrick's mind was beginning to flash back to earlier parts of his life: his childhood, escaping a war, coping with his father's death, and living with his grandfather. One thing did seem to stick to his head for a while. He remembered his grandfather telling him a legend about how every warrior's pride is balanced with a horrible event happening to him or her. Most of the time, the unfortunate thing happening would occur when the person is alone and looking forward to a time of great joy. This time of bad luck was often referred to as the Tempest of Destruction, and only ones with the strongest wills to live would survive. Madrick soon realized the nature of the storm; it was his Tempest of Destruction. The boat was rocking up and down much more intensely, but he told his mind that he would live no matter what the outcome would be. The wind and water raged on. Madrick began to lose grip of the bags and the chest. The Tempest's wrath seemed relentless. After a few moments, Madrick's time to die was near.

The pole of the sailboat creaked loudly from the fierce wind, and then it cracked at the bottom. The force of the wind abruptly broke the pole from the boat, and it flew into the dreadful sea, taking Madrick with it. His body became shocked with the chill sent down his spine, and he coughed up water that unexpectedly entered his mouth. He no longer worried about his supplies; he was fighting for only his life. Madrick was hugging the long broken pole as he saw the boat overturn. The sea seemed to swallow his supplies in one gulp, but he didn't care. He was riding the terrible waves with all of his might and endurance. Death was a likely outcome for him, but he only thought of the chance to live. He moved up and down with the waves. One large wave lifted him and the pole really high, and the pole descended rapidly. Madrick still hung on, but everything went black.

He hit his head against the pole after falling quickly. His body lied still on the pole. After a few moments, his body slid to one side, and the water pulled him down. Only the pieces of the boat were visible on the surface of the sea;

Madrick and his belongings were nowhere to be found. The Tempest kept stirring up chaos. The wind still blew the water into huge waves. The lightning still blinked brightly, and the thunder still roared across the storm. The Tempest of Destruction had finished its work.

CHAPTER 5: UNTRUSTWORTHINESS AT GROMYL

The assertive, yet unharmful, waves from the sea repeatedly washed onto the bright sandy beach. The trees behind the beach stood tall and proud towards the glowing sun high in the sky. A breeze blew gently over the wide blue sea and through the green leaves of the trees. A few colorful birds, ranging from bright white to intense black, flew overhead. It seemed like an ideal paradise for anyone. Madrick lied still on his back in the damp sand. One arm was over his head and the other rested alongside his body. Both of his legs were oriented in a straight manner. Water had soaked him all over. His hair and clothes were cold and wet. His sword and shield were the only items that survived with him, and they were nearby his seemingly-lifeless body. The sun, wind, and water kept trying to bring him back to reality.

A few minutes later, a burst of air erupted from his lungs, followed by a series of wheezing coughs. Madrick's head jerked upward and his eyes suddenly opened to his new surroundings. Even with the soreness that made his whole body ache, he still managed to get up onto his feet. He picked up his sword and shield, the only two possessions that he saw. His mind entered a whirlpool of confusion as soon as he saw where he was. Madrick didn't know where he was, nor was he awake when he was shipwrecked to this place. He assumed that the viciousness of the Med Sea had swallowed his boat along with his food, money, and water supply. With that in mind, he needed to find some ways to survive. There must be civilization nearby that he could check out. The place that he was at seemed like a beautiful place to explore.

He walked towards the forest that lied behind the beach, seemingly to expand forever. Upon entering it, he was relieved that the trees weren't too closely planted to each other. In fact, sunlight could easily penetrate the canopy of the forest and reach the floor below. A short time later, he noticed a trail in the dirt that seemed man-made. Stopping to look, he figured that the path must have started from the beach somewhere. He got onto the path and continued in the direction he was going. These trees were pretty ordinary, he thought. They looked like the ones all over Marete back home. Madrick was amazed by the beauty of some of the birds that flew overhead. He saw a red bird fly overhead as well as a royal blue one. There were no multi-colored birds, but birds of single color were still interesting to see. As he continued along the path through the forest, he wondered about the exact number of those birds were known in the area.

Up ahead, Madrick saw that the path seemed to abruptly slope downward. He reached that point and looked down. His eyes and mouth became wide open in awe at what he saw. There was a town below that had a thick, tall, gray stone wall surrounding it. The buildings were mainly of wood and stone. The gray stone formed the walls of the edifices, and the brown wood made up the doors, roofs, and window frames. They were all arranged in an array so that straight streets went through the town. Madrick saw people walking through the streets doing their daily business, although they appeared as tiny specks from his eyes. The whole town sat in a valley-like basin. It was as if a giant chunk of land was scooped out of the area for the town to settle in. Madrick was excited to see civilization after his disastrous encounter with the storm at sea. He proceeded down the path leading up to the town's massive gates. While working his way down the slope, a pungent odor nearby struck him in the face. He looked around and then found the source of it. A rotting body of a young light-skinned man in brown clothing lied next to a tree. The face was down in the ground, and its arms and legs were straight and parallel to the body. A long wooden shaft of an arrow protruded from a blackened wound in the back. Looking at the smelly flesh made Madrick a little sick.

The tree that the body rested next to had a large hole in the trunk. There seemed to be something inside of it, and Madrick decided to take a look. Reaching into the hole with one hand, he pulled out a leather bag. Upon opening it, he saw numerous coins of various sizes. They were either silver or bronze. Among the silver coins, there were five different ones with different numbers stamped: 1, 5, 10, 50, and 100. The backs of those had the same imprint: a bald old man with a mustache and goatee. The bronze coins were all alike. One side had the face of a young man and the other side had three swords in a triangle with an eye in the center of it. Madrick decided that the money

would surely help him out. He took the bag with him as he descended the sloping trail. After several minutes, the tall stone walls of the town loomed above him. The gates in front were massive wooden doors, and two guard towers stood on each side. A large sign fixed to the stone wall said "Gromyl," which Madrick presumed was the name of the town. One of the two guards, armored men with slightly dark skin, broke the silence.

"Who comes forth?" asked one guard with a loud voice.

"I am Madrick," introduced the young Fighter. "I've come all the way from Silmaria on the way to Mariunia, but I've gotten shipwrecked here."

"Hmmm," grumbled the guard. How do I know that you're indeed an outsider?"

"I don't know," said Madrick. "Perhaps the current condition of my clothes is proof?"

"The truth is," said the guard. "We don't trust outsiders very much. Our town was once peaceful, but now we are very wary of strangers."

"You see," said the other guard. "We are cautious of a possible, imminent war with our enemies."

"I understand," responded Madrick. "But what would it take for me to show that I indeed bring no harm?"

"Anything that would make us feel easy," said the first guard. "Or do you only have proof of your own stinking kind?"

"You can show any indication of your affiliation with someone here," said the second guard. "Or are you just an ugly bum emerging from a really bad storm?"

The comments of the two guards boiled Madrick's temper. He had never been referred to as someone from a deteriorated race. He also wasn't sure about how the guards knew about his predicament in the sea. Despite the objections stirring in his mind, he calmed himself down before he got out of control. After all, every Doomslayer Paladin, like any other Paladin, had learned patience and honor in the beginning. He never forgot the lesson from his father. Madrick, appearing to have nothing to say, still needed some way to convince the guards to trust him. The guards, without hesitation, each held up a bow and arrow and loaded the arrow. They pulled their arrows back as they aimed straight for Madrick's torso. He had his arms slightly raised, ready to make any move in a flash. The eyes and the faces of the guards seemed to show hatred and evil towards Madrick. They smiled as they were ready to make their kill.

"You must be one of them," said the first guard.

"And you shall die," said the second.

At the moment the arrows were fired, Madrick's hands reached for Fireblade and Soulshield and held their handles tightly as the arm holding the shield swiftly lifted up. While his left hand with the sword swung back, Madrick raised the shield to face the incoming arrows. He crouched slightly and hid his face in the back of the shield. His heart pounded rapidly while he waited for the sharp points of the arrows to meet his thick sheet of metal. Madrick heard two clanging noises and felt the shield vibrate as the arrows made contact. From behind the shield, he saw the two guards gasp in surprise, and they immediately lowered their weapons.

"I am terribly sorry," said the first guard, who soon disappeared from the tower.

"We didn't realize who you were," said the second guard with guilt. Like the other guard, he also disappeared.

Madrick also lowered his weapons, confused and bewildered about the guard's reactions to his shielding of an attack. He sheathed his sword and tied the shield to his belt. He waited for a moment, and then he heard a loud creaking sound. The gates were slowly opening up. Ahead was a long street with identical looking buildings on both sides. The two guards, both wearing silver armor suits, appeared before him. They approached Madrick in a more friendly manner. To Madrick's surprise, the two guards had identical faces.

"Is your last name Doomslayer?" ask one guard with curiosity. When Madrick affirmed reluctantly that he was; both guards seemed possessed with wonder.

"By the way," said the same guard. "My name is Konius. This is my twin brother Monulus."

Madrick shook hands with Konius and Monulus.

"So you must be a Doomslayer Paladin," said Monulus.

"Well," said Madrick. "I just got my Fighter's Degree. I'm really just a Fighter still."

"Ah," said Konius. "But you seem to have much honor in you. You could definitely become a Paladin."

"Thank you," said Madrick. "Tell me. How far is it to Mariunia from here?"

Konius and Monulus laughed in response.

"This IS Mariunia," said Monulus. "If you indeed get shipwrecked here, you're lucky to reach your destination."

Madrick laughed along as well.

"Wait a minute," Madrick realized. "How did you figure out that my last name is Doomslayer?"

"Your shield," said Konius. "The gold flame against blue is famous for being passed down the Doomslayer line."

"Ralakus Doomslayer had it," said Monulus. "Sadly, he died in that war many years ago."

"Ralakus?" asked Madrick. "He's my father."

The guards were shocked once again.

"So you're his son," the guards said simultaneously.

"Yes," said Madrick.

"What are you here for?" asked Konius.

"I've always wanted to explore this place," answered Madrick. "People have said that this place is a paradise."

"It still might be," said Monulus.

"Might be?" asked Madrick.

"You see," said Monulus. "There's a town up north called Akros. The people there are different from us in that their skin is of a light complexion, which was why we mistook you for one of them."

Madrick calmly listened and understood.

"They're our enemies," said Monulus. "Because they've attacked us in recent years. They tried to kill many of our townsfolk out of pure madness. Now, Gromyl is not really safe anymore. After those raids, many of us helped out to build the stone wall surrounding the town today. We can no longer trust any stranger who comes here."

"What were relations like with Akros before the attacks?" asked Madrick.

"All I can say is that we shared a couple of resources with them," said Monulus. "Now we don't care about them anymore. Nobody knows why they turned against us."

Madrick finally realized the reason for the guards being suspicious of him, and his curiosities were satisfied at last.

"So what are you going to do now, Madrick?" asked Konius.

"I'm just going to explore this town," said Madrick. "Is there an inn here?"

"Right down the street," said Konius. "Do you have money?"

Madrick showed Konius and Monulus the coins he found from the tree up the hill. Both guards looked at them with peculiarity.

"The money we use here," said Konius. "Is the Silver Gromylian Dollar. These Bronze Akrosian Dollars are not our currency. Where did you get this?"

"I found a dead body up the hill," said Madrick. "He must have stashed his money in a nearby tree."

"He must be another one of those Akrosians we killed," said Konius. "So you can only use the silver coins here."

"I understand," said Madrick. "Well, thank you, Konius and Monulus, for allowing me to enter."

"No problem," said Konius.

"You're welcome," said Monulus. "We're going back up the towers now. If you have any further questions, ask us or any townsfolk you meet."

Madrick smiled and shook their hands as he slowly walked down the street. The guards closed the large doors and returned to their guard towers. After a moment of misunderstanding, Madrick had managed to make two good friends upon his arrival at Gromyl. He couldn't wait to explore the town and get the supplies he needed. Most importantly, he needed an inn for sleeping at night. His mind focused on those tasks while pondering about the conflict with the town up north.

His passion for adventure would not stop him.

Epilogue

Well dear readers, this is the end of the 12th issue of The Inventory. Next month we will be back to the normal amount of content we used to have before our temporary death. Actually the next issue will shape up to be one of the best to date. If we receive the game soon enough, we might have a review of the most awaited adventure for the year 2004, Syberia 2! It's been a very long time since we granted a recently published adventure with a score over 90% so it will be interesting to see if Benoit Sokal & Co. will be able to steal one of those score-babies.

Apart from the anticipated Syberia 2 the next issue will also be a must read for those of you who want to get a scoop on what's happening in the independent developers scene. We will feature interviews, special articles and reviews of indie games. If you still underestimate those games, we have a good feeling you won't do that after next month's special issue.

And before I close this issue I should add that we are looking for people to contribute to The Inventory. Here are the qualifications you need:

- Lots of free time
- Will to spend lots of your free time on The Inventory
- Excellent English skills
- Punctuality
- General awareness of the current adventure scene (either commercial or indie)
- Ability to work in a team environment
- Ability to speak a second language apart from English is a merit but not a requirement

You need to send us a review of an adventure you like, a review of an adventure you are not so fond of and a list with your favourite adventures. Send your applications to theinventory@yahoo.com . If you can think of a new column that could appear in The Inventory and that you would be able to write let us know. So if you want to join the team that brings The Inventory to life, get those keyboards to work!

Oh yeah...I also forgot to write about The Inventory going on tour. But I can't spoil all the surprises now, can I? So until next month...

Dimitris Manos

Editor

P.S.: It feels good to be back

The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only

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