

No. 13 Mar. 2004

The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only



**THE FANS
STRIKE BACK**



REVIEWS OF
• THE APPRENTICE
• IP & COSMO
• PATRIMONIUM
• OUT OF ORDER

INTERVIEWS
WHITE BIRDS PRODUCTIONS
DREAMCATCHER EUROPE

The Inventory

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Michel Bams, Lorraine Lue

Prologue

Hello fellow adventurers. Instead of wasting our time with the cancellation of Sam and Max and writing articles about how Lucasarts is a dead company when it comes to the adventure genre like the rest of the adventure community suddenly understood (it took everyone 5 years but they finally got it), we prefer to focus on the people who actually hold the torch of the adventure genre high. So this month we have a special issue on independent adventures. If you want to read our opinion on Lucasarts and co. we might as well refer you to an article of The Hydra in The Inventory 7 (March 2003) called Churches, the fan revolution and adventure/adventure, where we discussed what everybody else found out about a year later.



Back to things that actually matter now, and we are of course talking about the independent developers out there. This month we have reviews of The Apprentice, The Adventures of JP and Cosmo, Out of Order and Patrimonium. All of them little gems that show beyond doubt that independent developers are the future of this genre. When commercial adventures introduce worse styles of gameplay year by year, and stories that bring the term cliché to a whole new level, a few dedicated adventurers around the world prove with their work that the mediocre commercial titles we've paid for so many times will soon be unnecessary.

So before you find yourself solving the 8th crate puzzle or solving the 5th slider puzzle in the latest commercial adventure that you spent 50 euros / dollars for, try to visit those games' sites and download the aforementioned adventures for **free** and see what the difference is between doing something for the love of the game and just doing what your publisher or the mainstream press told you to do. This month is just the beginning of our special on independent adventures, as next month we will feature interviews and previews of upcoming independent adventures. Something that was supposed to be done this month, but due to some 'communication' problems they had to be postponed for next month.

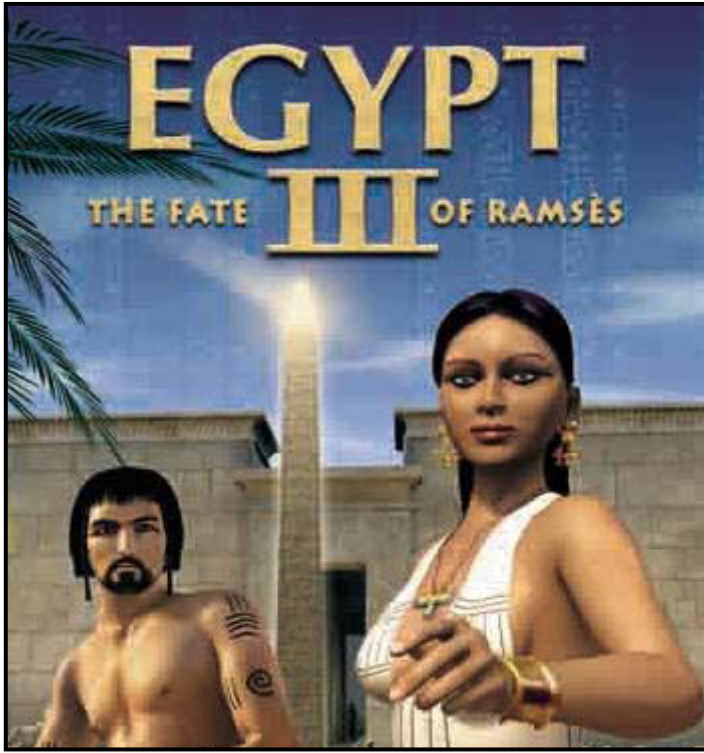
This month you will also have the chance to read our first interview with White Birds Productions, the company that was founded from the creators of Syberia, where they reveal some information on their upcoming Lost Paradise. You also have the chance to read an interview with Dreamcatcher Europe where we discuss their previous and upcoming titles. Both interviews were conducted live in the headquarters of the two companies in Paris and they are the first live interviews we ever conduct. We hope to have more such goodies for you in the future.

Last but not least you also get the chance to read a preview of Egypt 3, a 1st person adventure from the Adventure Company. I also want to welcome Rob Hamilton on board, and to welcome back Mark Lovegrove and his column, Talking Dead.

Dimitris Manos

Editor

The Inventory



It was a couple of years since I last played Egypt 2: The Heliopolis Prophecy. Although I was never really fond of Cryo's adventures, this one had something different about it that made me enjoy it. The puzzles were much more logical and intertwined with the story than the rest of the previous Cryo titles and the main character was also well developed. The game was also much better paced and featured a lot of intriguing events like having to infiltrate rooms of Egyptian nobles.

Now from the same developers, who have formed their own company comes the third instalment of the Egypt series. This time around you do not get to control Tifet, the heroine of Egypt 2. The heroine of Egypt 3 however is a very similar character who is called Maya. Maya prefers to use spells instead of potions that was Tifet's specialization and she seems like an interesting character. During our visit to The Adventure Company in Paris last month we got the chance to see some of the game in action. Lorraine Lue of TAC showcased the game for us before we conducted an interview with her that you can read in our Lounge later on. Lorraine said about the **story** of Egypt:

The old Egyptian belief is that the Pharaoh is very closely related to the gods. He's almost as a god himself. So if something happens to the Pharaoh this will affect the Egyptian people. Rameses is at the age of 60, he is dying and he is afraid that if he dies the glory of Egypt shall fall. So he goes to one of the Egyptian gods, Amon Ra, and asks for the god's help. He asks Amon Ra if there is anything he can do to extend his legacy and his life so that Egypt and the glory that it is shall continue. Amon Ra says yes but what Rameses has to do is he has to make sure that they rebuild

the temple of Amon Ra and also construct the most magnificent obelisk of any of the other temples. And if he succeeds to do this then everything will be alright, Rameses will be granted a longer life and Egypt will continue. But if he fails then of course Rameses will die and Egypt shall fall. The player takes control of Maya who is a priestess but she is also favoured by the gods.

The developers of the game are the same developers who created the previous Egypt games. Here is what Lorraine Lue had to say about the Cheops, the company behind Egypt 3.

What makes Egypt III different is the exploration of the mystical side of Egypt. Everything is based on reality, real facts, from architecture and clothing to the magic that you use in the game. It's all based on real Egyptian facts. The developer is a studio called Cheops Studios and they are based in Paris. They work with a gentleman called Jean Claude Bouvaine, who is an archaeologist expert, sort of an Egyptologist, and he was the one who validated all the artwork, storyline, facts and everything that happens in the game. But is Egypt 3 going to be heavy on history details as its previous instalments were? She answered that: It has a historical adventure side of it, which is in line with games were released by us before like Pompeii, China etc. But the focus is switched more to the gaming side rather than the historical side of it. So there's still the in-game encyclopaedia which has all the facts in the game, but the side of the game that is going to be more appealing to adventure gamers in general is that you use magic, you cook up spells and hypnotize people and it's all based on real facts.

Apparently the developers wanted the player to visit a much wider variety of locations this time than in the previous Egypt games. Lorraine said: *You can see that there's the Egyptian desert but the player will also get to walk around and explore the worlds of Isis, Osiris, P'tah a lot of Egyptian gods. You will get to go to the actual kingdoms of these gods. Cheops has created these environments based on what legend says and Egyptian documents that kind of recount what the Egyptians envisioned in dreams. This time around you are not just discovering and exploring the pyramids but are travelling along the Nile to different physical areas in Egypt and furthermore you are travelling to the kingdoms of the gods. So there's a lot of exploration in different environments.*



Maya is listening to her mission



You will need a lot of items to cook up the various spells

The **sound** and the **graphics** of the game were, for better or for worse, what we have been used from TAC. The graphics used the dated 1st person engine that uses pre-rendered backgrounds and teleports the player from one spot to the other. The backgrounds themselves were beautiful and detailed but the outdated engine showed its flaws. The soundtrack was absolutely magical, as most TAC titles out there. Voice-overs were also satisfying and especially Maya's voice is done very professionally.

When it comes to gameplay Egypt 3 seems to be generally on the easy side. For example, once during the part of the game we saw, the screen itself turned to a hotspot that would interest Maya as soon as she entered the screen and Maya made a comment pointing to that position. Lorraine said: *When you compare this game to for instance Schiz̃m 2 ... Schiz̃m 2 was mainly for more experienced adventure gamers. Egypt 3 is more on the other end where the average casual gamers. People who are just starting adventure games, or someone that just loves classic adventure games. The engine is point and click that adventure gamers know, whereas*



This little girl will aid you in your quest



The sands of Egypt ... that adventurers visit quite often

Schiz̃m 2 was using a real time 3D engine. So this is something that you could easily pick up, start playing and start enjoying things like great graphics, great story, watching beautiful cinematics. There's a lot of hints but they are built into the game so it makes it very pleasurable for the player. The developers are the same developers who created Egypt 1 and 2 so they are very experienced with the series. And this time around they have improved the puzzles, and the puzzles are more logical and more integrated in the story than before.

The right click button brings up the interface, which is aesthetically very beautiful. On the left there's the inventory and on the right there are the spells that you learn. One example of those spells would be one scene where you have to go through a guard and you use a spell to hypnotize him. A new feature of the game will be the diary that at the end of the game will recount all your steps. This will be very useful in case you fail in your mission. Yes you read right, there are two different endings of the game depending on how well you carry out the mission given to you by your Pharaoh. In that case you can go back in the diary and see where you actually went wrong. Apparently the only way to go back to the spot before you did the mistake would be your saved games, so save often!

Adversaries of mazes will not be so happy to know that there is a maze in this game. Things get even more complicated as you will have to move through a grid and there's a copy of yourself on the other end that you have to avoid. There's also the son of Rameses that is there to help you and teach you new spells. He will also travel to you through the Nile to different locations. On average the game will last 20 hours. In general terms Egypt 3 seems to be a nice title that is not going to be anything revolutionary for the genre but it will please fans of historical 1st person adventures.

- Dimitris Manos

ADVENTURE GOSSIP

AGDInteractive Special Interview

The talented and highly skilled people behind two – soon to be three - professional remakes of Sierra's old classics had been interviewed at their own site AGDInteractive.com – formerly known as Tierra Entertainment. Good news is they are putting all of their efforts, working almost 75 hours a week to bring us a remake for one of the most original Adventure/RPG classics in a colourful VGA suit Quest For Glory II: Trial By Fire.

One of the developers was asked about the reason of putting all of these efforts to remake such old classics, "I love the games, and I also love the game development process!" he answered. An amazing fact revealed during this interview that shows interest in adventure games in numbers "Downloads for KQ1VGA and KQ2VGA have been continuing as strong as ever, with 20,000 for KQ1VGA and 15,000 for KQ2VGA in **the past three months alone.**" As for when the remake of Quest For Glory II: Trail By Fire will be completed the team was quite positive it would be available -freely to download- before the end of this year.

When asked for a final note to the fans - anticipating that QFG2VGA will be their greatest remake yet - the team had to say: "Thanks for your patience. This game will be worth the wait, though! It's really shaping up well. In the meantime, get your copies of QFG1 out, dust them off, play through the game again--get a character prepared to play through QFG2VGA with. We've taken the best aspects of the original game

and incorporated them with the new point and click interface. If you look hard enough, you might even notice a few little additions here and there! We're planning on making QFG2VGA highly reminiscent of the other VGA games in the series, and doing them justice will take some time. But it's coming!"

The White Chamber

As Randy Sluganski wrote in his latest Eye on Adventure for the Just Adventure site, a new point and click adventure called The White Chamber is currently under development. The website of the game reveals some interesting information regarding the story of the game.

So according to the website White Chamber will be a psychological horror adventure that will be available for free. The story of the game is about a little girl who finds herself waking up in a strange coffin in a glowing room. She has no idea of where she is or even who she is for that matter.

White Chamber will feature anime style graphics (original indeed for the adventure genre), ambient music



and hand drawn animated cutscenes. The gameplay will consist of exploration and puzzle solving. For more information on this thoroughly interesting project you can visit the game's website at <http://www.studiotrophis.com/wc.htm>

Another Adventure Joins The Freeware Games list (Thanks ScummVM)

Flight of the Amazon Queen a graphic adventure similar to LucasArts classic Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis -in terms of graphics, theme, controls and playability-, has made it to the growing list of freeware games. The game comes in two versions, a CD -talkie- version (35 MB) and a floppy version (7 MB). In order to play this game you need ScummVM.

ScummVM is a 'virtual machine' for several classic graphical point-and-click adventure games. It is designed to run: Adventure Soft's Simon the Sorcerer 1 and 2; Revolution's Beneath A Steel Sky, Broken Sword 1 and Broken Sword 2; Flight of the Amazon Queen; and games based on LucasArts' SCUMM (Script Creation Utility for Maniac Mansion) system. SCUMM is used for many games, including Monkey Island, Day of the Tentacle, Sam and Max and more. Both Flight of the Amazon Queen and ScummVM are available for download at www.ScummVM.org. While you are at it you might want to check/download Beneath A Steel Sky; a highly recommended original

classic available as a freeware in two versions also, CD and Floppy.

It's highly recommended to apply filters to your games when playing using ScummVM since it offers several anti-aliasing filters to attempt to improve visual quality. So for example, if the game originally run at a resolution of 320x200 (typical for most of the SCUMM games), then using a filter with scale factor 2x will effectively yield 640x400 graphics. Likewise with a 3x filter you'll get 960x600.

Filters recommended are:

- super2xsai - Enhanced filtering, factor 2x.
- advname2x - Fast. Factor 2x.
- advname3x - Fast. Factor 3x.
- hq2x - Very nice high quality filter but slow. Factor 2x.
- hq3x - Very nice high quality filter but slow. Factor 3x.

Adventure Games on the Mobile, Now a Reality!

Thanks to the ScummVM, games like Monkey Island 1 & 2, Sam and Max and Day of the Tentacle can be played right at your Sony Ericsson P800 Mobile. For this to happen you need to download Sprawl's EScummVM and upload it to the mobile. EScummVM is a Sony Ericsson P800 version of ScummVM. For instructions and downloads:

<http://dre0.org/p800/escummvm/>

Fate of Atlantis II Engine Test!

The Amberfisharts team have released an engine test (IP-SCUMM2) showing the quality and type of control that will be used for their upcoming Fate of Atlantis sequel, hopefully the game will be

available as a freeware in Q3 of this year. Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis is a classic adventure created by LucasArts. The engine test for FOA2 is available at <http://www.amberfisharts.com/foa2/downloads/default.asp?id=80> and for more information about this promising fan based sequel visit <http://amberfisharts.com/>



Point and Click Re-Make of Leisure Suit Larry 2

All fans of LSL Larry can enjoy the point and click version of Leisure Suit Larry 2 created by one of the fans using the AGS gaming engine. The point and click remake is like an exact copy of the original with different controls only, replacing the text parser which not everybody enjoys. The game is available for download freely at

<http://www.agsforums.com/games.php?action=detail&id=356>.

New PDF Adventure Magazine in Germany

The German site Adventure Treff that used to host the German version of The Inventory while this was still alive, launched last month their very own PDF magazine. The first edition featured a review of The Westerner, previews of Moment of Silence and Syberia 2, news on games like Runaway 2 and

Fahrenheit plus many more articles. Those that can speak the language can download the magazine from www.adventure-treff.de. We here at The Inventory wish the new PDF magazine the best of luck with their endeavour.

More Legacy Screenshots

Razbor Studios, the developers of the promising Legacy: Dark Shadows have released new screenshots in their website. Screenshots also include photos taken from the recording sessions of the game. Furthermore a new music track has been added which you can download and hear for yourselves. You can find all the aforementioned goodies at www.legacythegame.com



Indy Fountain of Youth gets new website

The long awaited freeware Indy adventure has moved to a new web address. The team behind the game has also added a pinboard where they post the latest news around the development of the game. So if you want to check out the latest news around Screen 7's adventure head over to www.barnettcollege.com

- *Rani Hasan & Dimitris Manos*

Interview with White Birds Productions

White Birds Productions was founded by the people who brought to us the Syberia series. They are already working hard on their new title, Lost Paradise. We paid a visit to their headquarters in a suburb of Paris and we had the chance to view some, confidential for the time being, footage of the game. After the presentation of the game we had a pleasant chat with Michel Bams, responsible for the Sales and Marketing department of White Birds Production. You can read the transcript of our chat in our Lounge this month, and we might have a little surprise for you as well. We have video taped the conversation with Michel and as soon as we manage to convert the video in AVI files you will be able to download them from www.justadventure.com. But now let's move on to the actual interview and let's see what Michel has to tell us about Lost Paradise and White Birds Productions.

Tell us a bit about yourself.

My name is Michel Bams and I am working in this industry since 1992 with several companies in the video game business and in August 2003 I was one of the cofounders of White Birds Productions, with Benoit Sokal, Olivier Fontenay and Jean Philippe Messian. We started the company in August last year.

Lost Paradise

Let's move on to your upcoming game now, Lost Paradise. Could you tell us a little bit about the story of the game?

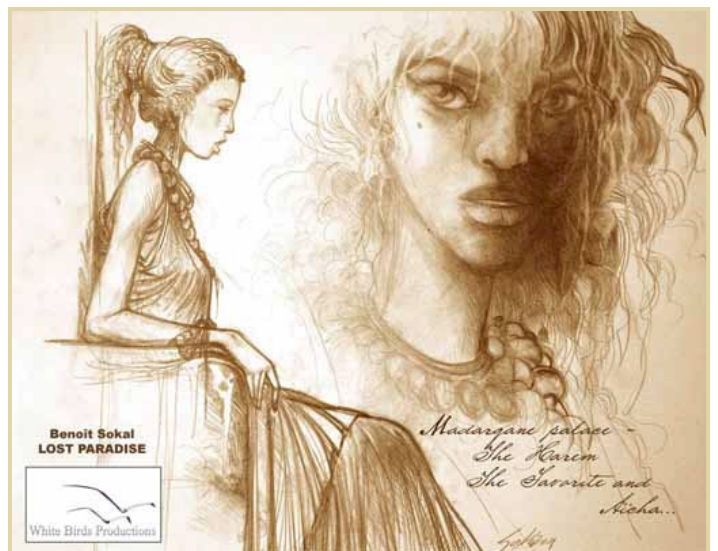
The story basically is the story of a young girl who is the daughter of an African dictator. It takes place in a very big country. You have to imagine a country as vast as today's Zair, with the Northern border which is the Sahara deserts and the South borders which is the deep part of black Africa (animals, savana, falls). There is a river running across this country on which the dictator has a kind of floating palace. And this boat is a kind of boats that is at once his palace, a city on its own with Merchants. His own army is also on board.

Without saying too much, this young girl in the beginning of the game has a plane crash. She doesn't remember who she is or where she is. She has lost her memory. And she's found in the place where the plane crashed by people and they bring her to a city. In this city there is a sultan and he tells her a story. He says 'I have a leopard here, this leopard should be brought back to where he was born. So if you would take care of this leopard and can bring him back to the place of his

birth then that's a mission for you.' She says yes and this is the beginning of the story. Little by little she will remember things.

Could you tell us a bit about the main heroine of the game?

Yes. Let's say that for the gamer, during the main part of the game, her name is Ann.



Are there any similarities between Ann and Kate Walker?

No. Apart that they are both women, that's it. But Ann is in her early 20s. She's 22, 23. She's not a lawyer, she's not from New York.

What about the leopard? Is the player going to take control of that character during the game?



Sometimes but the idea is without telling too much about it, Ann and the leopard have a kind of strange relationship. Sometimes at nights, Ann is like in the leopard. And you will discover through the game that they have a strange relationship. And the main point that was interesting for us is to say that there are things a leopard can do and humans can't.

For example, obvious things like a leopard can jump high, a human can't. That's easy to figure out. Second a leopard sees at night while humans can't. Also a leopard can be very silent and frighten people. Imagine that during the day you have to enter into a place and there

“Ann is like in the leopard. And you will discover through the game that they have a strange relationship. And the main point that was interesting for us is to say that there are things a leopard can do and humans can't”

is a guard. And you can't because he won't let you in. Maybe with the leopard you can frighten him. Maybe you can jump onto the roof and enter via another way or maybe you can be silent enough so he won't hear you. This allows for a new part of the gameplay that we want. But it's not a gimmick. You will not play half of the game with Ann and half of the game with the leopard. Sometimes you will manage to control the leopard.

How many characters will the game feature?

Lots! There is one absolute main character, which is the heroine. Then there are 3 main characters. And more than 25 secondary characters. Characters that you will be able to talk and discuss with.

Are the graphics of the game going to be 2 and ½ D like Syberia (2D backgrounds with 3D characters on top)?

Yes. For the moment same graphics.

What is the highest resolution the graphics will reach?

We are not thinking resolution. We're thinking of the computer the average gamer will use. The game is to be released mid 2005, this means that maybe we are looking at 1024 as a resolution. We're not sure, maybe 600 or 800. It will really depend on the machine.

There has been talk of action elements in the game. Could you give us an example of these action elements?

We have to be careful of this notion of action. The problem with this industry is that you are always looking at things with a name on, like action, adventure, 1st person shooter. Something that is strange with this industry is that we're always talking of 'hmm-like'. A Myst-like, Doom-like. I don't know. In literature you are never talking of a Hemingway like book. You're just talking of a book or movie.

Action? No. It's not like Ann will be in a bar and she have to fight by boxing another guy. That's something which doesn't work in the kind of games we are thinking of. It's more like what I told you before. Maybe there's a part or two where you will have to manage a correct jump. Maybe there's a part or two where you will have to pull something on a given rhythm rather than just finding a key to open the door. But that's it. It will be an adventure game, and not an action game of course.

Will the interface be point and click or direct control?

Point and click.

Will it be similar to Syberia or are you planning for some enhancements?

So far it seems that the best way to control a 2D/3D adventure is a point and click. So no. Maybe there is a step that we will make that for the next game, that will be 3D real time and maybe this will use the keyboard, but for the moment point and click.

Will you follow the *Syberia* paradigm where story comes first and the gameplay is there to serve the story?

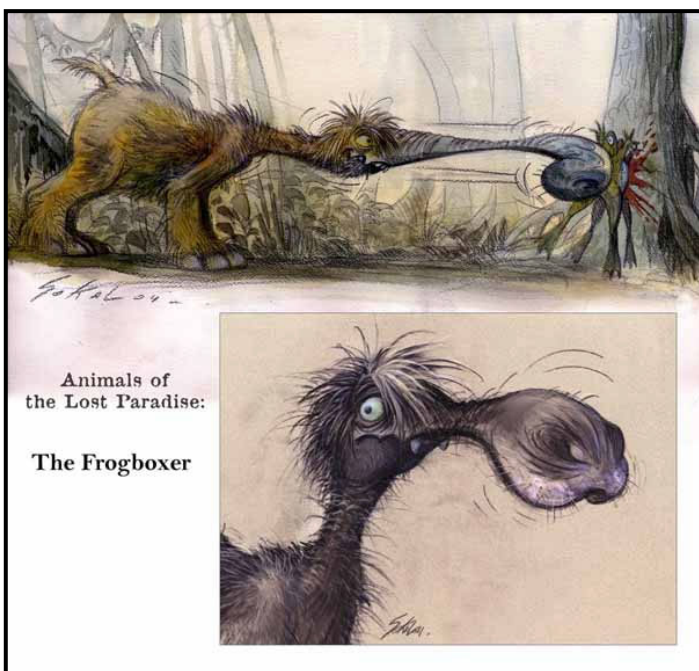
Yes. We don't know if we are right or wrong with this but it's the way we manage to make the game. We are here to tell a story, which is a fantasy story. What we want the player to do is to think 'what's next'. We don't

“We are here to tell a story, which is a fantasy story. What we want the player to do is to think ‘what’s next’. We don’t want him to say ‘Well done, I’ve made that kind of move right’ like in sports or action games, we want the player to say what’s coming next”

want him to say 'Well done, I've made that kind of move right' like in sports or action games, we want the player to say 'what's coming next'. 'What's the next thing I will discover, what's the next place I'm going to discover, the next person I'm going to meet'. We don't think we are making difficult games.

Will the dialogue interface change?

Yes. We are working on that. We are trying to find a more easy way. Every new step is supposed to be a better one. We found that some of the dialogues in *Syberia* and the system used were too limited. And we



also want to avoid the situation where the main character saying this door is closed all the time. We're still working on that.

Will the main heroine make more comments as she finds items or as she enters a new place? Because some people claimed that in *Syberia* Kate Walker was too silent.

If she talks, it has to be meaningful. It's kind of funny because we always think there is too much talking in our games. So maybe...

White Birds Productions

Is white Birds Productions and Microids related somehow?

No, I mean White Birds Productions was founded by people who were previously employees for Microids. I was an employee for Microids for more than 3 years. So was Jean Phillippe, and Olivier Fontaine. Benoit was also from Microids. Microids has no share in White Birds Productions. Microids is of course a publisher and we might work with Microids as a publisher, but there is no immediate link.

So White Birds Productions is just a developing company, not a publishing company.

We call it a producing company but I mean yeah, it is developing.

What is the reason for the foundation of the new company?

Two reasons. One which is the fact that Benoit, Olivier, Jean Phillippe and myself know each other for almost ten years now. We've been working together in a company before Microids that has disappeared now. We were working together in Amerzone, that was a long time ago, in 1996. Well we are good friends. We think that we have a vision of the market which is the

same and that was a reason why we started the company. Benoit is a storyteller. And we think that he is able to tell a stories in the video game area. But certainly in others. He is a cartoonist. He made the move from cartoons to video games. We think that there is a move he could make in the movie business and we're trying to do that.

Second reason is that we were quite happy at Microids and things were fine but then Microids went into severe problems and one day the company had to close down. We were in front of our own destiny and we said ok, let's move on. Then finally Microids found someone to restart the company but in the meanwhile we were gone. So that's why.

“We have a second project called Aquarica. It's a project that is a game and hopefully a movie. And it's a story about giant whales.”

Apart from Lost Paradise, do you have other games in Production right now?

In production no. In pre-production yes. We have currently 3 projects. The most advanced one is Lost Paradise, which is at the stage of mock-up, characterisation, scenario is all written. Then we have a second project called Aquarica, which is at a starting stage. We have the story and we know what it's about but that's it. Then we have a third project which is also at the stage of thinking. But we are really focusing on Lost Paradise. We think that once of the company has found its rhythm, we will probably have two projects simultaneously. Maybe 3 but that's a lot really. Two seems fine.

Would you be able to give us any information on Aquarica right now?

Hmm...really small. It's a project that is a game and hopefully a movie. And it's a story about giant whales. Sorry, at this stage it's difficult to tell more.

Is it going to be an adventure game?

Yeah. But this notion of an adventure... Some people say that Myst is an adventure game, some people say that Tomb Raider is an adventure game. We don't want to say that the games we are doing are THE only ones of their own, but it's true that there are not a lot of games that look like the games done by Benoit. Maybe the right word would be novel games, or movie games.

We are not focusing on things like, how long should the game be for example.

We have many journalists that ask us, ok how long is the game? It depends. It can take hours, it can take days. An experienced player usually finishes the games that Benoit is doing quite fast. Because you know that if you find the keys that open a door somewhere you know that you have to find the door and use the key there. But for a lot of people who play these games it's not so obvious. Microids as a publisher was very interested to see the questions that some players were asking via internet or the phone. They were stuck on places that you or I would easily go through. So 'how long is the game' is a difficult question to answer.

That's maybe the toughest part of the job, to find a balance in the difficult level. Ideally in the perfect world we would like our games to be like the Disney resorts. In Disney resorts there is a system in the queues. When you queue, you never stop, you're always walking to the final attraction. You're never static, you're always walking a little bit to your final goal. While if you are in the movies, you are in the queue, you have to wait when the door is open. We're trying to do something like the Disney resorts.

Are you trying to introduce new players to the genre by this way? Because as we all know adventure games are not the best selling genre out there right now. Do you think it's a good strategy to introduce new players? Do you have any strategy plans to get more people to play adventures?

No because if we knew the answer to that we would be rich and famous. We think that today the game market is dominated by some categories that are on the PC, FPS or strategy, on the console sports or action and it is true that adventure is not the leading genre. But it's also true that it's a young industry. If you look at what was the beginning of the movies, it was already fabulous for the people to just see images move. Little by little you put another layer of scenario.

I think on one side, and I'm sure on the other, that the people who are playing games like today Syberia or tomorrow Lost Paradise are a mix between people really liking video games and happy to play FIFA in the morning, Quake at lunch time and Syberia in the night



and people who honestly play only games such as *Syberia* and *Lost Paradise* and no other kind of games.

We think that some people who play our games are not really players of video games. Some years ago it was the kind of people who were playing golf games on their computer. I think it's a mix. I don't know if it's a good strategy or not. The fact is that *Amerzone* and *Syberia 1* and *2* published by Microïds were quite good sellers so hopefully there are people who like that.

Do you know how many copies *Syberia 1* has sold so far?

Nearly 500,000 copies. That's good for a game which is not mainstream.

Have you received any feedback for *Syberia 2* yet?

No. It's going to be out these days, but honestly no. You should ask Microïds.

Would you like to talk to us a bit about the future plans of *White Birds Productions*?

I talked a bit about it already. We'd like to make a move to the movie industry if we can. But we have to be very humble with this. Our own profession record is video games. We know the video games industry. We don't know the movie industry. We just think that today for the first time since a long time, everybody was talking of 'Ok all those medias are going to the same place

between image and sound'. This time it seems to be true. When you are making a very good 3D animated movie, you are really using the same tools as for making a game. What is the difference is the length, because if in a game if you are trying to put 45 minutes of cinematics it's a lot, and the quality. On a big movie screen the quality is higher. So it's a question of money in the end.

Making a movie in 3D is about 10 to 15 times a budget of a game. But you find investors that know the movie business. Strangely it's not the difficulty of finding half the amount of a video game or half the amount of a movie. It's about the same difficulty. Because in the movies people are used to bigger figures. When you tell them you want to make a movie that will cost 20 or 30 million euros they say yes ok, I know that's the price. When you are talking of a video game of 3 to 4 million euros they say yeah ok sure. So we'll try. So in my dreams, in 5 to 6 year time we will have made one movie in 3D and it will be a success. But that's a kind of dream.

Is there anything else you would like to add?

No if you don't have any more questions that would be it.

Thank you very much and the best of luck with *White Birds Productions*.

My pleasure. Thank you.

Interview with Dreamcatcher Europe

During our trip to Paris we also visited the headquarters of Dreamcatcher Europe and discussed with Lorraine Lue, International Product Manager for The Adventure Company several interesting issues around their upcoming titles and the adventure market in general. The interview is a great read for those who would like to get some insight on the way things work in the adventure game industry. So now let's see what Lorraine had to tell us.

Dreamcatcher Europe has released the following titles in Europe Law & Order 1,2, Schizm 2, Darkfall, Thorgal: Odin's Curse and Salammbo. How well were they received?

Law & Order 1 globally has done very very well. Law & Order 2 has been released only in the UK It will be releasing I think across Europe in May. But generally speaking in terms of sales things have been going very well, especially in the UK I would say for instance that TAC tries to segment the adventure game market. We think that a lot of people think that adventure games are all the same. But in fact this is not true, they're very different.

I.e. Law and Order is an adventure game but it's drastically different from Schizm for example. Its closest competitor would be CSI. CSI on the other hand is similar to Law & Order and it's the same genre, but I don't think it is in direct competition, cause this is the only game out that looks at the investigation in detail and trial in detail, while CSI looks at the investigation more on the scientific side. And I think that the age group is a bit older and more mature for the Law & Order series versus CSI that would be a lot younger. I would say Law and Order would be 25 and up, while CSI would be a bit younger like 17 and up.

Regarding Schizm 2, we are only just releasing it in Europe right now, so I have no figures on that one. Dark Fall 1 has already been released and it kind of surprised us because it is selling very well worldwide, including Germany and the UK. A lot of the reason for that is, I think that XXV Productions, the developer, spent a lot of time on creating an ambience. Even though it's supposed to be a frightening game, there's nothing gory. It's just playing with your imagination and I think that that's what a lot of players like. You don't have to show ghosts flying around, you just have little kind of inklings that create an environment that makes

your imagination run wild. That's something that adventure gamers like.

There is a sequel coming up, Dark Fall 2 that is going to be released at the end of September. You'll see one of the characters Polly, who was in the first one and is now in the second one. The other characters aren't. The gameplay has changed a little bit. You are looking at Polly in a modern world, I guess this is 2004, and there is kind of a parallel storyline going with another character from the 1800s. You'll get more information on that game as we move forward.



Are there any sequels planned?

Right now in terms of sequels, Law and Order 1 & 2 will probably have, we have Schizm 2 just released, Dark Fall 2 will have a sequel. Thorgal and Salammbo will most likely not.

How come?

Both games were very good games but they didn't do well in terms of sales. We can talk about them separately, I grouped them together because they are both based on French comic books and subject matters that I guess are more tailored to the French market whereas in North America they didn't do very well. North American players didn't really associate very

closely with the characters. There was too much of maybe what the gamers call the French touch. I think it had a lot to do with it.

Salamambo is a very beautiful game, I've played a bit of it. I even met Druillet. I've met him and it's amazing the work he does as well how closely he works with the development team to create the environments, that it's unfortunate that more adventure gamers didn't play it.

Thorgal on the other hand I think is just a different style, different style of graphics to what they are used to. The gameplay is still adventure but there's a little bit more of an action side to it. It's unfortunate that they both didn't do better.

How can developers come in contact with you?

What we do is that we have an actual international acquisitions team, and they work on behalf of both the European office as well as the North American office. The head of that department is mr Robert Stevenson, he's VP Product Development and Acquisitions (rstevenson@dreamcatchergames.com). Developers can come in through that way.

“It's been very strange for me to see how different it is doing marketing and business in Europe, because all countries are very separate, very different.”

So what happens is that it comes in to the system, you send it in (any kind of demo or build they may have) and it goes through the acquisitions team. Robert has producers that are working with him, as well as QA people, evaluation staff. etc We have an evaluation person here as well as over there that focuses only on evaluation. And once it gets past them then they suggest it to the acquisitions team and then it just moves forward.

What is the relation between the North American and the European department.

I'll give you some background. The headquarters are based in Toronto, Canada and they focus mainly servicing Canada and the US. And the Paris office focuses on not only Europe but also all other territories including South East Asia.

Is there a strong market for adventure games in South East Asia?

It's tough. We have a distribution partner right now in Singapore so they have already released games like The Omega Stone, Law and Order 1 and a few other of the adventure titles. It's a very different market. Completely different from North America and Europe.

What are the future plans of the European department?

Myself coming from the Toronto office it's been very strange for me to see how different it is doing marketing and business in Europe, because all countries are very separate, very different, but then you have to figure out a global perspective of how to market and sell a product so that it appeals to everyone, no matter how different their tastes are. So I find it more challenging to do marketing in Europe than it is just focusing on USA and Canada, because Canada and the US are very close in terms of culture and what customers like. Geographically North America is enormous but their likes and dislikes are pretty much the same, while the European continent is practically the same size as North America but it's a patchwork of so many different counties that it's very interesting.

Adventure games are doing very well in France. In Germany it's starting. I would say that the last five years, things have changed a lot for adventure games in Europe. I think a factor is that no of people that are now getting into PCS not just using them for work but also using them for gaming, is growing and more customers who never played a game ever before, are starting with adventure games.

So I think the growth for the adventure gaming market is now in Europe, because the Adventure Company has developed a very strong community distribution base and very close ties with press in North America that we, The Adventure Company, have cornered, and in order for the company to grow we are exploring the European market now. I think there's a lot more new casual gamers in Europe whereas North America they are such a huge community. People know in North America, that if they want an adventure game they come to The Adventure Company. In Europe it's still a

new market, people don't really know who we are, they are starting to, but that's where the growth is I think.

To describe how the two offices work, from a marketing perspective, I would work very closely with Renata Richardson, who is the brand manager of TAC in North America. I am handling the brand in Europe. We talk everyday. We have sometimes challenges where things won't work in terms of positioning for a game in North America, but it will work for us in Europe. So we have to work together to make sure that TAC titles have some sort of consistency when we launch globally.



Where does the decision-making process take part mostly?

It happens in both ends. When it comes to general operations of the company as finance that's headquartered in Toronto. But in terms of marketing and sales it's very separate. Even though we work very closely with the North American market, because the markets are so different, sometimes we need to take a title and say 'this is what we're going to do with it' and 'this is what you are going to do with it', and then we come to an agreement that ok it may be different. Because it's too difficult when it comes to adventure games, to just launch the same packaging, with the same title, the same marketing plan. Because sometimes it doesn't work. For instance people in the UK generally think that because both countries speak English it should be natural that we sort of can just release a US game into the UK market directly without making any changes. This is sometimes false. I find it more challenging for the adventure game side of the business rather than a shoot 'em up or a strategy game because a FPS first of all, it's just a shooter.

Adventure games have to do with the story, it's deeper, it goes to the storyline and characters. People want to be able to relate to a character that maybe is in their 50s

rather than a character that's in their 30s or 20s or a teenager. There's just different ways of judging an adventure and an FPS. So therefore each marketplace is different. Scandinavian territories or countries also like adventure games a lot, Italy and Greece as well. But the Greek market is very different. The decision-making, it depends on the situation or the marketing perspective but from a general operations point of view then yes it comes from Toronto.

What we want to do with TAC Europe is to duplicate what we've already been able to do in North America and continue to sustain that. That means when people think of adventure games, they think of TAC. They know where to go. When they go to the store and they are looking for a new adventure game, they see the TAC label and they know they are going to get a good quality game, at a reasonable price and that we are dedicated at the adventure gaming market. So what we want to do is to replicate the same positioning and the same brand awareness in Europe.

Dreamcatcher the company has only been in Europe for just over a year now. We have a lot of work ahead of us, but we have a good stronghold in the European market.

What are your relations with the gaming /adventure press?

In North America, we have very close contacts, for instance we work with Randy (Sluganski). We've known Randy for years. I think since our first year, when the justadventure.com website was very small, so were we, and we've kind of grown together. I know that Renata Richardson brand manager of TAC Toronto, she as well as Annette Bechamp who is one of the acquisition managers for TAC they've known Randy forever and every E3 they lunch together. Among all other contacts we have very close press contacts.

When it comes to the adventure community in general, in North America we've done a very good job of building a community. In terms of sending out newsletters which are diffused monthly, we have our official TAC website, where we have message boards, and we also have online sales. A lot of times we have competitions or surveys, contests to bring people back to the website as well to keep people updated as to what's coming on with adventure games.

On the European side we work differently. We work through distributors, because as I was saying Europe is such a patchwork that not only in language and geographically are separated. We work very closely with

our distributors and our distributors then work with us and press contacts that we have in each territory. So we have a press agency in Germany that works with the distributor and us to make sure that we're building TAC label as well as trying to build a community.

So we're still in the infancy stages of trying to create a European adventure gaming community but we think a lot of adventure gamers in Europe are happy going to the North American website for many years now. So what we've been discussing is how can we open an online store for Europe. I've seen many emails from people that come from Spain emailing the Toronto office, asking 'how can I get your games, what stores is it in?'. It'd be much easier to just service those clients out of a European online store. So that's what we've been talking about but I don't have an expected time of when it's going to be launched. But I can assure you that we will be servicing our European customers.

In which countries do you publish games?

1. United States
2. Canada
3. Germany (Flashpoint)
4. France (Nobilis)
5. UK (Mindscape UK)
6. Benelux territories (Mindscape Benelux)
7. Italy (ATARI)
8. Spain (VirginPlay)
9. Greece (Centric)
10. Poland (Cenega)
11. Russia (Akella)
12. The Netherlands (Disky)
13. Czech Republic (Hype)
14. Australia (QV Software)
15. Singapore (New Era)
16. Portugal (Porto Editora)

There are even more but those are the ones I know of. We are very well distributed. It's only been a year so we have a lot of work ahead of us. We have some very good distribution contacts and partners that we are working with and there is so much more growth available for adventure games in Europe.

Why is it so difficult to get information on sales numbers for adventure games?

In North America it's very simple cause we have one tracking system. So everything that goes through the vendor with any kind of video game is tracked. So we know what's happening in Canada and the US. In Europe for instance each territory and each country

doesn't necessarily have the same system and if they do it's not always 100% correct. So we depend a lot on our distributors to keep track of that information when it



goes to retail but it's one of the challenges that we face as a publisher in Europe, trying to manage each territory, making sure that if these territories don't have the software or a system that is used globally within their country by video game companies then it's up to them to call each account on a weekly or monthly basis to get the sell through number.

And then for us we're reading and sometimes we're waiting for 3 months before we get a sell through. So it's a tough process that we're always trying to improve on. But it's not as easy as in North America. There you know you get a monthly report where you have the live numbers. It's always hard to get the real numbers.

So you never really actually know how many copies each game sell?

Sell-through? No. Sell-in? Yes. Sell-in to the stores, what we actually sell in we know. But in terms of what is actually sold through retail we try and get the information on a monthly basis. But sometimes we have to wait a little bit longer because certain territories are slower on getting the information. For example if we need the numbers for March sometimes we don't get the information until two months later, or another country will give it in the end of the following month.

So it's just a matter of giving a 3 to 4 month window to get one month of a sell through to have it as accurate as possible. But I guess it's just depending on how developed the market is. In terms of video games it will also generate industry standards and it will make things improve faster.

OUT OF ORDER

Most good adventure games feature memorable, often unforgettable characters. George Stobart, Nico Collard, Gabriel Knight and Grace Nakamura immediately spring to mind. It now appears that we have a new, if somewhat reluctant, hero vying for our attention. Step forward Hurford Schlitzing, who may well be the first game character to appear dressed in night attire since Arthur Dent attempted to stop an intergalactic highway passing through his front room.

Story: The game opens with a cut scene during a violent storm. Nothing too unusual is happening, although Hurford does feel a slight electrical twinge which he hopes will not diminish his appetite as he mentions he's feeling "a bit peckish". He leaves his bedroom, talks to his mother, and even puts the cat out. Everything it would seem is completely normal. Hurford returns to his room and you can now interact with him and his surroundings.

The first indication that all is not quite as it seems is the strange behaviour of the door knob, which appears to be defying the laws of gravity. And that leads to the first problem. How to exit the room and discover exactly what is going on? You may also notice that Hurford's CD "collection" consists of one solitary CD – but don't dismiss that because, without giving too much away, that particular CD will prove to be very useful with a problem that occurs later on.

Once out of his bedroom Hurford finds both himself and his room have been mysteriously transported to an alien environment. Several strangely shaped doors of various sizes situated on the alien landing indicate that our hero is not the sole occupant of this alien world. Hurford's quest is threefold. To find out exactly where he is, why he is there and how he can effect an escape. Rather a daunting series of tasks when you are carrying a brass door knob, wearing a green dressing gown and plodding around in a pair of oversized fluffy slippers.

Hurford's first encounter is with a talking computer with attitude who is quite willing to issue him with a travel pass. Unfortunately, and somewhat illogically, Hurford cannot remember his name – hence, no pass. In order to progress Hurford must discover his name. This can be quite a frustrating part of the game as without the pass you cannot make any progress at all. You will therefore have to use logical thinking to discover where Hurford's full name might possibly be found. The exchange between Hurford and the computer is done with great humour and you will, I'm sure, find yourself laughing out loud at certain points. Humour in some games can be quite forced and artificial but Tim Furnish, the developer of this game, has struck an excellent balance throughout the whole game. Although, if you do get stuck at a particular location the same humorous conversation over and over again can become quite tedious. But that, I think, could quite easily be levelled at most games.

However, most of the puzzles you encounter in the early stages of the game are quite logical and even novice adventurers should not have too many problems progressing. Another interesting point is that the title of the game "Out of Order" is not just a title picked at random. It actually relates to a point later in the game



The theatre entrance

where something is literally “out of order” and has to be fixed so Hurford can progress towards the conclusion. The game world is relatively small, but because there is so much to occupy the player, both mentally and physically, this is of little consequence. You will meet plenty of weird and wacky characters as you progress through this alien town and not all of them will be as helpful as you would wish. It took me about 10 hours to finish it, which is a reasonable amount of gameplay for a commercial release, but quite astonishing for an independently produced game.

Graphics: This game plays in full screen, hi-resolution 2D with mostly bright and colourful backgrounds. Although this is an independently produced game the animation and high production levels do have an overall air of professionalism with detailed and appealing graphics of a far higher quality than the majority of independent releases.

It is worth bearing mind that the developer of this game originally intended to release it as a commercial game but apparently changed his mind at the last moment. A lot of hard work has gone into this game and it really does show. However, one man can only do so much and, as well produced as this game undoubtedly is, without the backup and resources of a major software company it is simply not possible to produce a game of true commercial quality.

On the downside some characters have blurred edges, including Hurford as he moves into close up, and in some locations the backgrounds are rendered in a rather blocky and amateurish manner. However, this is really being overly critical as none of these shortcomings distract one iota from the gameplay. Because this game plays so well it is hard to believe that you are playing it for free, and the graphics, which are obviously not as sophisticated as the latest commercial releases, are, in



Are you ill?

the main, quite acceptable.

Sound. I have to say I wasn't particularly enamoured with the music soundtrack featured in this game and, at times, found it quite distracting. Once again one has to bear in mind that this is not a commercial release and should not really be judged against some of the recently released commercial games with soundtracks that would put some Hollywood movies to shame.

Music appeals to individual tastes and although the music in “Out Of Order” is not to my particular taste it did not, in any way, make the game any less enjoyable. The lack of digitised speech in this game is, on reflection, probably a good thing, because without digitised sound the game does not fall foul of one of the worst aspects of adventure games. Poor voice acting.

Gameplay: Although “Out Of Order” has plenty of zany humour the game is perfectly paced for both the novice player and the seasoned adventurer. It is a traditional 2D point and click with a very friendly and



Hurford Schlitzting's bedroom



Not your typical pub

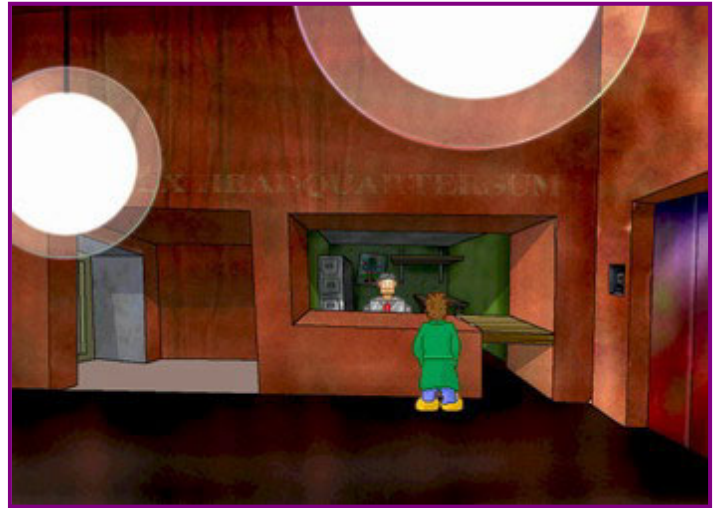


A spooky cafe

intuitive interface. The large cursor lights up when you pass over a hot spot and with a simple click of the right mouse button you can cycle through the various functions such as walk to, look at, use, pick up and talk to. Pressing the space bar brings up the inventory screen, ESC allows you to save, load and quit, and you can also press "S" for a quick save.

There are some very inventive puzzles in this game which will test even the most experienced player. One particular puzzle which requires you to combine several items in the inventory to produce something else will either have you head butting the monitor screen in frustration or sitting back with a smug expression etched on your face. Tim Furnish has a fiendishly logical mind which will tax most people's powers of logic to the full.

Another important plus is that you will rarely find yourself ambling around wondering what to do next. Such is the inventive nature of the game design, puzzles, and consistently humorous dialogue, progress moves forward very smoothly.



Another office

General info: Having played right through this game I did not detect any bugs and the whole thing had a very stable feel. Tim Furnish wrote this with his own game designer called SLUDGE (Scripting Language for Unhindered Development of a Gaming Environment) and the game has won several awards since being released in late 2003.

Another important plus with this game, apart from the several walkthroughs, which have appeared on the Internet, is the players' forum which is hosted by the author of the game. So if you get really stuck you can join in the discussions with other like minded adventurers.

In a few words... Finally, if you want to assist Hurford Schlitzting in his quest to escape an alien town dressed in his green dressing gown, fluffy slippers and carrying a doorknob this could be the game for you. Not just because it is free to download, but because it is a game that will have you shouting for a sequel – it really is that good. You can download it from <http://www.hungrysoftware.com/>

- Rob Hamilton

Information

Title: Out of Order
Developer: Tim Furnish
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 3rd Person
Difficulty: Medium
Site:
www.hungrysoftware.com
System Requirements:
 VGA Screen

The Verdict

Story:	85
Graphics:	90
Sound:	65
Gameplay:	95
OVERALL:	85

* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6

THE ADVENTURES OF JP AND COSMO

A FRIEND INDEED...



Originality. A word that is seldom used when reviewing commercial adventures nowadays. Fortunately though thanks to the new breed of independent adventures we have the chance to play games with fresh ideas made from people who do not need to jump to any market bandwagons. The adventures of JP and Cosmo is an isometric point and click adventure created by an AGS designer known as Darth Mandarb in the AGS community. Let's examine this little gem a little bit closer now.

Story: The introduction shows a news reporter broadcasting a shocking story. An asteroid is headed towards earth and there is only half an hour left before everything goes kaboom. You take the role of JP and as every other human being you have to find a bomb shelter if you want to survive the collision.

JP remembers that his friend Cosmo has a bomb shelter, so he heads over to his place. Unfortunately Cosmo is missing so now JP has to find the entrance to the bomb shelter in Cosmo's house. The length of the game is very short, and you will probably complete the game from half to one hour. The game only features 3 characters, JP, Cosmo and the news reporter. The short length of the story is one of the two minor complaints one can have from JP & Cosmo. The story is quite obviously light hearted and the humorous theme of the story is reminiscent of adventures we used to play during the 80s and beginning of 90s. There are a couple of references throughout the game to the AGS community and to amateur developers in general.

Graphics: The graphics is the biggest highlight of The Adventures of JP and Cosmo. The isometric view used in this adventure is very refreshing for adventures in

general. The only adventures that come to my mind using a similar viewpoint are Sanitarium and the Desktop Adventures of Indiana Jones. In RPGs this viewpoint has been used much more often in a lot of legendary games like Baldur's Gate and the Ultima series.

Both characters and backgrounds are very detailed by AGS standards. The backgrounds are colourful and each room is decorated in full detail. The characters are very sharp and they stand out in comparison to other amateur games. Darth Mandarb did a great work with the graphics of the game indeed and it might as well spawn a new breed of adventures with this viewpoint. The developer has actually handled the physical difficulties presented by this viewpoint very professionally. When your character goes in a room that is covered by a wall this wall becomes transparent so you never face any difficulties exploring the areas of the game.



Cosmo's house



The isometric view is quite refreshing for adventures



The two heroes of the game

Sound: The sound department of the game is probably the least taken care of. Music is not played at all throughout the game (apart from the beginning where the song itself is not an original piece composed by the developer but a midi mix of an older pop song). Sound effects are seldom played as well. Actually it is almost only during point collection when there is some sound heard.

Gameplay: The puzzles of JP and Cosmo are all well integrated to the story and you will never get the scratch your head syndrome you get from commercial adventures wondering what the developers were thinking. When you right click your cursor changes to Walk, Look, Interact and Take. If you move your cursor to the left part of the screen you have all the aforementioned options plus Pockets (Inventory) and the several options of the game.

The interface is simple but could have been implemented better. To begin with the aesthetics of the interface are not up to par with the rest of the game's graphics. The cursor is a bit too large compared to the rest of the graphics and not too beautiful in terms of

design. Furthermore you have no idea where there are hotspots on the background and it is a bit unclear sometimes where you have to click in order to interact with a certain object. Some kind of text floating on top of your cursor when it crosses over a hotspot would be more than welcome. Of course that is simply nitpicking when it comes to a game that you play for free and is otherwise great fun to play, but it is meant mostly to be constructive criticism than anything else.

General Info: The game itself screams for a sequel and Darth has promised that he will make one in the future but this is not his next project right now. There are a couple of bugs in the game according to the website of the game but I personally didn't come across any of them.

In a few words... Bring on the sequel!!! The adventures of JP and Cosmo was a great little game to play and the isometric view makes it a very unique experience. A few details like length, sound and interface could improve but nevertheless you're up for a great time playing this game. Are you still reading this? Go and download it now!

- Dimitris Manos

Information

Title: The Adventures of JP & Cosmo
Developer: Darth Mandarb
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 3rd Person / Isometric
Difficulty: Easy
Site:
<http://www.twin-design.com/friendindeed/>
System Requirements:
VGA Screen

The Verdict

Story:	73
Graphics:	95
Sound:	20
Gameplay:	89
OVERALL:	73

* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6



Patrimonium

an oldschool adventure game



Patrimonium is, as the developers themselves say, an old school adventure game. In contrary to the most independent adventures that we review this month, this one is made with the AGAST engine. Another game that used this engine and that has been featured in our magazine before is *Ozzie and the Quantum Playwright*, a very fun to play adventure game. Moving back to *Patrimonium* now, it has to be said that the game is split into acts, and this month we review the first act of the game.

Story: You play the role of Julian Hobler, a 23 year old student of applied quantum-physics who has a habit of ... forgetting to pay his bills. The game starts one morning when Julian checks his mailbox. He finds more bills, which he does not pay much attention to, and also a letter from his professor and friend Peter Wonciek.

The professor is informing him of some top secret research going on in Egypt and invites Julian to travel over there and help him out, since apparently Julian wouldn't have anything better to do. At that exact moment two black suited pumped up agents arrive in the scene and Julian understands that they are after him. He hides himself in the building and manages to get out through the window. However the agents decide to wait for him outside his house and they also prepare a deadly trap for Julian. Now Julian trapped behind his house, has to sneak his way out of there and travel to Egypt by using a ticket that the professor enclosed in the envelope.

The main character of the game seems to be inspired (at least visually) by CMI's *Guybrush Threepwood*. The first act features in total 8 characters and only two playable locations. The story follows a humoristic theme. There are a couple of references to the movie *Pulp Fiction* in the beginning. There are also a couple of occasions where use of tobacco and mention of marijuana are shown in the game so the easily offended crowd out there might find this annoying. For the more

liberal-minded people however this will probably be no problem at all.

As with most amateur games the biggest disadvantage of the game seems to lie in its short length. Bearing in mind though that the game comes in acts it is kind of consoling that the story will continue and when all acts will be available the game will probably be a true (and long) joy to play.

Graphics: The graphics of the game are very pleasant. The characters especially are very professionally done and they reminded me of characters you see in famous cartoon series. The backgrounds are also well done, though of slightly less quality compared to the characters themselves. There are some graphic glitches here and there. Sometimes for example the character might appear overlapping an object that is supposed to stand in front of him. Actually I remember that the same problems were evident in *Ozzie and the Quantum Playwright*. Of course these problems are only minor complaints and they do not distract for long. Perhaps this is a problem of the AGAST engine? It is difficult to tell without further inquiry. One thing that the developers could definitely work with is the animation as it seems that the frames per second during characters' animation is very low.



Julian at the airport



Believe me they are not selling anything

Sound: The sound of the game unfortunately does not reach the levels of quality that the graphics did. We do understand of course that we are talking about an independently made project but still compared to other independent adventures out there the music is of lesser quality. For the most part they do not fit the current scene you are playing and the theme of the game in general. Sound effects are non-existent.

Gameplay: Everyone who has played one of the former Lucasarts adventures, will feel right at home with the game's interface. On the bottom left corner you have nine icons for the commands give, open, close, pick up, talk to, look at, use, push and pull. On the right side you have the inventory where you can see the items that Julian collects. The developers also made sure to use the right mouse button for default selection of commands that are suitable with each hotspot. I.e. if you want to open a door you don't have to click the command open and then click on the door, but you can just point the door and right click on it. The obvious command (open) will be selected by default.

The puzzles of the game manage to keep the balance between challenge and entertainment. They will keep you stuck for a while but some logical thinking and some keen observation will probably do the trick. A nice feature that was noticed once in the game is that



A mysterious character

when you tried to do something a couple of times and it didn't work, Julian gave you a hint on what you have to do in order to proceed. A nice feature that we will hopefully see more often in the following acts. In general terms the gameplay is phenomenal. The interface works flawlessly and the puzzles are logical and fun to solve.

General Info: This is only the first act of Patrimonium and more will follow in the future. You can download the English version of the game (which is originally German) for free in the independent developers section of Just Adventure at www.justadventure.com

In a few words... Patrimonium is another great gem from the independent developers out there. The gameplay could be a seminar for the "professionals" out there and the graphics will give you the sense you are playing an old Lucasarts classic. Its short length and its not as good soundtrack are probably the only aspects of the game that you will be slightly disappointed with but bearing in mind that you get the game for free, you are in for a real treat! It might be a good idea to wait for more acts to be available and play two or three of them together before you wait for the next bunch of acts. I know I am waiting!

- Dimitris Manos

Information

Title: Patrimonium
Developer: Oldschool
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 3rd Person
Difficulty: Medium

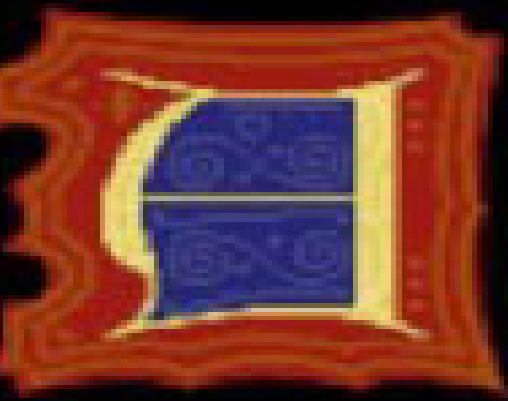
Site:
www.justadventure.com/IndDevelopers.shtml

Sys Req: 400 MHz GPU
 3D DirectX 9.0

The Verdict

Story:	72
Graphics:	86
Sound:	27
Gameplay:	96
OVERALL:	75

* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6



Apprentice

While working on their game “The Find”, amateur adventure developers Gregor and Ian Schlaepfer, hereafter known as Herculean Effort, planned to write another, more brief game before tackling their larger project, if only as an exercise in scripting in AGS. Over time, the game grew, and they decided to finish and release it, and thus was born... (cue drumroll) The Apprentice!

Story: You are Mortimer “Pib” Pibsworth, a young man troubled by strange dreams during your apprenticeship with the village wizard. The morning after a particularly nasty one, the wizard charges you with gathering the components for casting your very first spell.

The only problem with the story is that it stops there. It’s a very short game with only one big puzzle dominating it, and it does *suggest* a much deeper story, but it isn’t actually *in* the game. The sequel, due out this summer, promises to build upon the world introduced, but never really explored, in the game.

That isn’t to say that the game is not well written, quite the contrary in fact. The story, though brief, is explained quite well, and humorously, and the character dialogue is consistently entertaining and funny. To be frank, the game is so well written that being so short is a severe downfall.

Gameplay: The interface is easy enough to understand, basically being an abridged adaptation of the SCUMM engine, reduced down to four commands (Look, Take, Use, and Speak) on a menu bar that rises from the bottom of the screen when the mouse approaches it. While effective and simple, it is not particularly convenient.

Usage of the second mouse button to, for instance, cycle through commands, would have been both welcome and easy to implement, and yet is strangely absent. The inventory, which appears as an open book with a single item per page, is not very convenient

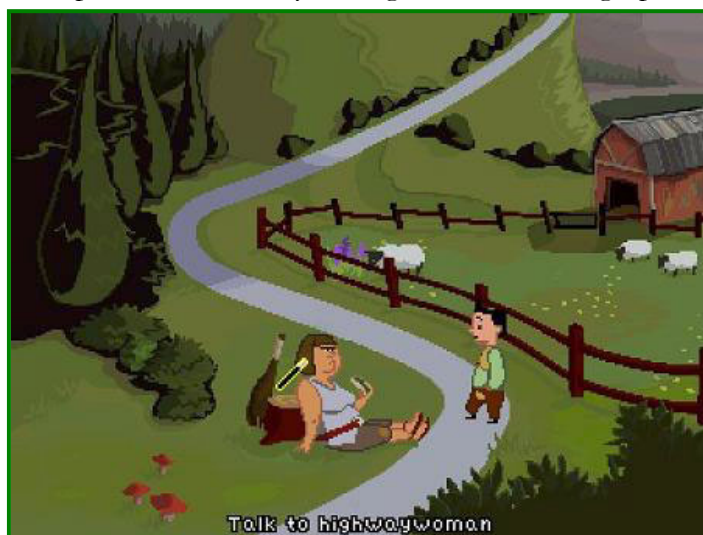
either, as accessing any item requires several page turns. Neither is a major problem, but both might have been easily fixed, and likely should be by the sequel.

The puzzles can be solved with relatively simple logic, though they are not necessarily easy, and all are plausibly tied to the central quest/puzzle of the game, though more gameplay, as always, would have been greatly appreciated. I know, I’m stuck on this shortness thing, but seriously guys, longer game next time, okay?

Graphics: The game really shines graphically, especially by AGS standards. Backgrounds and characters are drawn in a pleasant cartoonish style, and animations are both thorough and fluid.

The only real concern is with Pib’s walking sprites. The legs just look strange, misplaced and out of proportion, and Pib’s walking forward animation has him going just slightly to his left. Small concerns, I know, but you notice these things. They’ll probably retool these for the sequel.

Sound: Apprentice has earned numerous well deserved accolades for its musical score, including the 2003 AGS Award for best music. The tunes are befitting of the time period and fantasy setting, while still being upbeat



Talk to highwaywoman
Enough with highwaymen



The interface of The Apprentice

and peppy. It's the kind of music you don't mind getting stuck in your head all day. Being in high quality MP3 format as opposed to Midi is just icing on the cake.

In A Few Words... I hate that I keep harping on the "short" thing here, but that's really the only thing keeping this from being a truly great game. Good writing, good graphics, good music, and good puzzles; there's really nothing bad to say about this game except the length. I am looking forward to Apprentice 2: The Continuation, knowing that it will be as entertaining as this game, and hoping that it will be much longer. The game and the trailer for the sequel are both available at Herculean Effort's website.

The Sequels: The story of Mortimer "Pib" Pibsworth does not stop with Apprentice 1. Herculean Effort are working hard already on the trilogy! The second part of The Apprentice, called 'The Knight's Move' will start where the first instalment left off. This is what the developers say about the story of the game on their website: "*As the story continues, the black horse of war looms over the land, with the ominous Lord Ironcrow at the reins. Because Pib's apprenticeship*



The statue in the barn

makes him vulnerable to the military draft, attaining wizardhood becomes imperative. From ocean diving to winning at the races, this adventure explores the land of Willowbean that lies beyond the Wizard's hill. New characters range from the Book Wyrn, a dragon-like being with a taste for literature, to Seacookie, the puniest contender at the centaur races."

The sequel will feature the same Graphic User Interface as the first game did. Apparently the developers made notice of the fact that their first game was quite short and they intend to correct that for the sequel, since as they say it is going to be twice as long as the original. This time around Pib will also be able to use real spells.

The developers also intend to release a third part of The Apprentice, called Checkmate. When will this game be available is still unknown, but Herculean Effort speculate that they will start development sometime in 2005. For more information on those two titles and for a free download of the first Apprentice check out the developers' website.

- Justin Peoples

Information

Title: The Apprentice
Developer: Herculean Effort
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 3rd Person
Difficulty: Easy
Site:
HerculeanEffort.AdventureDevelopers.com
System Requirements:
VGA Screen

The Verdict

Story:	80
Graphics:	95
Sound:	95
Gameplay:	85
OVERALL:	87

* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6

TALKING DEAD

CANCELLATIONS

Without a doubt we've all been subject to a cancellation of a project that's really, REALLY annoyed us. I won't mention any names or any companies like LucasArts, but cancelling a project can cause quite a ripple of effect, as we've clearly seen.

But what about independent developers, whom after time believe that they don't want to continue a project? Is this a problem? Of course it isn't. Like the opposite sex, you'll more than likely get through many before you find one to settle down with – and it's the same with your projects. You'll have some great initial ideas, which will slowly fizzle out until you're left with something you really cannot be bothered to make.

Lots of people often start to wonder whether they are going to see the completion of their game, or *any* game – I'm a sucker for this, I've started and given up on more projects than I've had hot meals – but that doesn't mean something good won't come out of it.

When you're working on a project, you should really envisage the possibilities of completing it whilst you're *dreaming* it, (the stage when you're writing down ideas and so forth). It is understandable, however, that the work load and that direction of the project will be very hard to decipher at such an early stage, but if you don't think you'll be able to handle a project then I suggest thinking twice about it.

A lot of people choose to create projects over the internet, with other internet folks. Now, that's all good and well but what do you do when your lead background artist disappears? Or what about when YOU have to disappear for a year? Why, you have to be *determined* of course!

What is it I'm driving at? Cancellations can be just sometimes, and sometimes perhaps they can't. There's no reason why you couldn't hand your project over to someone else to lead it whilst you're away, and there's no reason why you shouldn't advertise for more staff if someone quits... Putting a project on "hold" will also give you time to re-develop ideas etc, until you're fully satisfied with what's going on. If your project is looking quite successful and is generating interest – you're guaranteed to get a flood of email when you cancel!! (Just ask LucasArts).

What drives independent developers to cancellations though? I have no proof of this, but I can only imagine it would be excessive amounts of emails or forum posts where people just want to know when the game is ready, etc, and it all gets too much for the developers. There's no reason to agonise yourself over these matters, you, as one of the development team needn't show yourself in the public forums or what not if you fear it will only drag you down.

Finally, avoiding cancellation. So you've got a project on the go, it's deteriorating a little bit and you're not having much fun. Shop around for people to help out. Big boosters are when development "rolls" smoothly, i.e. you're not waiting six weeks for a background etc. Also, keep the project well managed. If however you do feel the project is getting pretty awful... Put it on hold!

Why? Because there's lots of other people that would be happy to make your project for you. It's been done many times before! If only the commercial companies saw it that way!

See you soon!

- Mark Lovegrove

THE HYDRA

The Hydra was a fearsome monster in ancient Greek mythology with many heads. If somebody cut one of its heads two more would grow out of its place. The Hydra represents the adventure genre that simply will not die no matter how much it is being fought.



The Hydra will be a column where you will be able to read thoughts and opinions on the current proceedings in our genre. Last month The Hydra was taking a break but this month it is back, with an article written by Justin Peeples. So this month the topic of the Hydra is:

THE COMMANDMENTS

A month ago, I hesitate to admit it, but I felt my faith in the Adventure Game beginning to decline. Two years of releases that were adequate at best had tragically left me unwilling to believe that the genre was, as many had been saying, dead. It got so bad that, at one point I even considered becoming, dare I say it, an RPG fan. But I resisted the temptation, and sought to renew and strengthen my faith.

And so did I make my pilgrimage to the holy mount Adventuropolis. The Journey was long and hard, but well worth the effort, and upon reaching the peak, I knelt before the crude altar made of melted King's Quest 6 floppy disks, sacrificed a copy of Maniac Mansion, read a prayer from the book of Zork, and asked "Oh God of Adventure, what can be done to rescue Adventures from these daunting times, and insure their prosperity in the times ahead?" And the God of Adventure spake unto me, commanding me to deliver these...

◀ TEN COMMANDMENTS OF ADVENTURE GAME DEVELOPERS ▶

Thou shall give no cause for the player to hunt yon pixels, for it is unnecessary, and furthermore frustrating to do so.

Thou shall create puzzles that are logical and sensible to follow, and do not cause thy player to rip hair from thy skull.

Thou shall create a story that fits the game, comes to a sufficient conclusion, and succumbs unto no cliché s.

Thou shall not give thy player inventory items that serve no function within thy game, for it just makes unnecessary clutter.

Thou shall deny thyself the Maze, the Game of Mastermind, and the puzzle of the Sliding Tiles, for they are forbidden.

Thou shall not use thy secretary and mailroom clerk to do thy voice acting; thou shall bloody well hire a professional.

Thou shall shun the inclusion of action arcade sequence, for they belong not in an adventure game. Duh.

Thou shall not kill thy player character without first giving thy player cause for caution, and the chance to save thy game.

Thou shall keep thy dialogue and cut-scenes relevant and concise. If thy player wished to watch a movie, they would rent one.

Thou shall not forsake thy player, for they are thy god and thy potential market, and are annoyed very easily.

And I spake again unto the Adventure God, and I asked “Oh God of Adventure, how can I, your humble servant, hope to be a better player? What can I do to renew the strength of my faith to as it once was.” And again the God of Adventure spake unto me, saying “Warning, Sound Card configuration error, reinitialize sound drivers.” And then was silent. Quickly, I reinstalled VDMSound and updated the DirectX drivers, and asked again, and this time the God of Adventure did respond, in full 3D audio, and bade me deliver these...

✧ TEN COMMANDMENTS OF ADVENTURE GAME PLAYERS ✧

Thou shall shun the walkthrough, for it becomes a crutch.

Thou shall take thy time and explore the game environment, for therein surely lies the solution to thy puzzle.

Thou shall not complain about so few adventure releases; thou art lucky there are any adventure games out there at all these days.

Thou shall shun the walkthrough, for it kills the fun of the game.

Thou shall not pay fifty dollars for any game thou dost find upon Ebay. Honestly, what were thou thinking?

Thou shall play games from other genres, for there is much you are missing if you insist on playing adventures exclusively.

Thou shall shun the walkthrough. Seriously, I ain t kidding.

Thou shall stop praising or complaining about Myst; it hath been ten years now people, thou need to drop it already.

Thou shall not let me catch you with that walkthrough

Thou shall quit thy whining every time another claims the adventure genre to be dead; it has been said before, and will be said again, but fret not, for those strong in faith shall receive their just reward.

...and it was good.

- Justin Peebles

The Invento-mail

It is time to see what our fans had to say in The Invento-mail. Umed from Tajikistan wrote to us to tell us how he became aware of adventure games. Jenniren wonders how our rating of Jack the Ripper would be affected if the final version of the game includes the same amount of bugs with the version we got to test. Hvo Jung, Kim has some suggestions regarding our layout, while Mattsius from larrylives.com has some kind comments to make on our interview with Al Lowe. If you want your letters to appear on The Invento-mail send us an e-mail to theinventory@yahoo.com. Let's move on to the letters now.

Hello Inventory(DMITRIS) I write you from Dushanbe Republic of Tajikistan . My name is Umed I find you magazin last year.

I a lates adventure man becouse my parents buy me a PC only in 2000 y but before I play tv games but there I search games not usual arcade a spesial (in future I can call this genre QUEST) I find but not enough. In 1996 My Uncle open Information Agency (ASIA-PLUS if you interested) and they buy a 5-8 PC. When I meet my Uncle I ask him to go to office in weekend's. I begin to learn PC. One suny day one of workers bring to office game a don't remember(and can't if you kill me). That SUNDAY was my BEST weekend's. The game was great I play play (but it was not easy).

Before that time I play many games but not like that In 2000 may parents make me happy (PC) I buy same INTERNETCARD's and bagin to search the games lake that. First I find Space Quest (THAT WAS A GAME!!!!) I can practise my English and my IQ. After I finde More more and I cant stop. I make some forums about QUEST's(ADVENTURE) in Tajik net but no one didn't come than I close this theme in site. I didnt want offend Tajik Adenture players may be Here (Tajikistan)lot of Adventure Funs but the Havent Opportunity enter to INTERNET.

I have to satisfy thirst of My QUESTOMANIA And in www.questzone.ru (BEST site in RUnet) I found INVENTORY. DMITRIS THANK YOU VERY MATCH.

P.S: AND THANKS to russion version

Alex ASP

Lonesome

Student

Vera Medar

I can give INVENTORY to my friend's

P.S of P.S: Pardon me for my English

The Inventory: Hello Umed, thank you for taking the time to write us this letter. It is great to see that our magazine reaches people as far away as your country. The team behind the Russian version are doing a great job indeed. Feel free to give The Inventory to as many friends as you want. And I hope you can also find adventures in the stores over there so that you can buy them and show in this way your support to the people who create them. Thanks again and warm greetings to all the fans of the Russian version.

Hi, Dimitris!

Considering how many gamers are having trouble with bugs in Jack the Ripper and that your copy was not more buggy than anyone else's, how would that affect your grading of the game.

Jenniren

The Inventory: If the final version contains as much bugs as the version I got to play, then the grading should fall 30 to 40 points, which means I would rate the game 37 to 47. You can still play the game to the end, unlike In Memoriam where the bugs made it impossible to complete the game, but even so, it is way too unstable to have a pleasant experience out of the game.

Hello, My name is Hyo Jung, Kim. I'm Korean. (South^^). Well, recently, I join in a sort of community in Korea, named 'Post adventure' and.. I saw the 'Inventory', in Korean. Even though, I like adventure, very much. But I don't know that kind of community, or, I have never interested that kind of community. (so poor;;) So, I didn't notice your magazine; I read your magazine with interest. There are so many interesting archives, and I like it.

Well, anyway, I had experienced in editing community in Univ. So, whenever I see any of documents, magazine, web documents, or newspapers- I always think about its arrangement and editing skill. Reading the Inventory, I have some kind of ... discontents. Of course, all of you are very hard to made it, and screwed up, I know. I can't imagine how many people printing the document and read it. In paper, your article's paragraph disposition is very good to see. but, Read in computer screen, it is little difficult. What about doing not to device the paragraph? Hmm. maybe, it's result will be shown Big sized document;; but, Scroll down and up is little annoying;; I will be very happy if you accept my idea.. Or.. please just think about it. Thank you for read.

Ah, and one more, I think when you insert a kind of subtitle, the article which is divided will be connect to the upper the title, not below the title. Don't you think so?

like this:

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--1- ==3=          --1-- --2-
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Sub Title          Sub title
--2- ==4=          ==3= ==4==
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Well, sorry for my poor explanation; I think, it will be more readable. But, it's only own my idea. Thank you. Bye~

The Inventory: Hello Hvo Jung, Kim. I am sorry to say that we intend to keep the text split into two columns, which is what you are talking about if I understood correctly. The layout of the magazine is very important to us. We want The Inventory to feel more like a magazine than a web page. As for your second suggestion I didn't really understand what you mean. Thank you for your suggestions anyway.

Hi, Dimitris!

A little introduction may be in order, so my name is Mats Biström A.K.A. Mattsius, co-founder of LarryLives.com and in general a big fan of adventure games.

Actually I don't have anything really important to say to you, only that I enjoyed your interview with Al Lowe in the latest Inventory very much and I thank you for doing it. I hope that you bring us Larry fans some more goodies on the upcoming LSL game in the future and continue your work on The Inventory. Well, I won't disturb you any longer. I'll just wish you a Happy New Year and maybe I'll see you again someday.

Mattsius

The Inventory: Hello Mattsius and thank you for the kind words. I am sorry to say that we do not intend to cover the new Larry-like game. Our magazine is a magazine for pure adventures only and we will not cover grand theft auto – clones where you have to go through a story by playing mini-games. So unless it turns out that the new Larry game will actually be an adventure (which Sierra has denied a lot of times in their articles) we have no intention of covering it. Great job on the larrylives.com site by the way. Keep up the good work.

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 6 and 7. 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 6: GETTING HIT WITH ROCKS

Madrick Doomslayer walked forward with a sense of euphoria even shortly after his little misunderstanding with the guards Konius and Monulus. He looked at the beautiful sky and the busy little town that lied ahead. People, all with dark or tanned skin, were happily living their daily life with chatting, entering the shops, and walking around. Most of the men wore brown leather pants, boots, and shirt as well as a white cotton shirt. The women were mainly in cotton dresses of various colors and design patterns. From where Madrick was standing, it was an area with fairly large buildings for different specialized shops. He wasn't sure about where to go first.

After deciding for a few minutes, Madrick chose a building with a sign that said "Shamir's Dry Goods." He admired the simple, yet artistic structure of the edifice and entered the small door in front. The first thing that Madrick noticed were the numerous long shelves that lined the walls and were also neatly arranged in the middle of the room. Goods of all sorts, from clothing and weapons to books and map scrolls, filled the shelves to make themselves available for anyone in need of them. At a counter in the back of the store stood a friendly-looking Katta in blue clothing. The style of the clothing was well known in Shapeir, for it was the homeland of the Katta. As Madrick approached the counter, the Katta expressed a radiant smile.

"Good day," said Madrick. "I do like your establishment here."

"Thank you, my friend," said the Katta. "My name is Shamir. Is there something that you are in need of right now?"

"Well," replied Madrick. "I do have a few things in mind. By the way, are you suspicious or fearful that I am a visitor to Mariunia?"

"Not at all," answered Shamir politely. "I walked outside for a moment to get some fresh air. I couldn't help but overhear you talking to the guards. I immediately became convinced that you intend no harm wherever you go."

"I see. Well, I hope that everybody else will believe the same thing."

"Don't worry, Madrick, my friend. I saw that a few other people were nearby, too. Chances are that they'll spread the word to everyone they know. Gromylians here love to spread gossip."

"Wonderful. I often get nervous about people suspicious of my presence."

"So what do you need to buy?" asked Shamir.

"Oh, I forgot," responded Madrick. "I think I need some new clothes since mine are damp right now."

"No problem. I have plenty of newly-made clothes for people of all types. For warriors like yourself, I have black leather boots, blue pants, brown vest, and a white cotton shirt. The boots cost 20, the pants are 10, the vest is 15, and the shirt is 5. Together, they will cost 50 Silver Gromylian Dollars."

"I think I should be able to afford that. I also notice that you have maps on the shelves as well."

"Yes, we have maps for other nearby lands, including Silmaria. I do have plenty of maps for Mariunia itself. It would be perfect for you being an avid adventurer."

"Great. How much does that cost?"

"Each map of Mariunia costs 150 Gromylian Dollars." Madrick checked the money pouch he recovered from the dead body and saw that there were plenty of Gromylian coins with the number 100 stamped onto them. He then picked out the clothes he needed and a scroll with a map of Mariunia from the shelves. He took out two coins with the number 100 on them and handed them to Shamir. The Katta thanked Madrick for the purchase.

"Come back anytime," said Shamir. "I'll be glad to do business with you anytime."

"I will, my kind friend," replied Madrick as he left the dry goods store.

He felt that his pouch had enough money to keep him alive and satisfied for a week or two, provided that other shops would not charge steeply for their items. Walking down the street to another shop of interest didn't take long. Madrick stopped as his eyes fixed their gaze on another shop sign: "Kavulin's Food Shop." Seeing the sign made him feel hungry and reminded him of the fact that he hadn't eaten for a long time. He figured that he could get rations to survive the next several weeks. Madrick opened the door of the quaint little shop that looked typical of the town's buildings. What he first saw quickly took his breath away. There were fresh fruits and vegetables, including apples, carrots, radish, and pears, arranged neatly in a shallow bin. The smell of raw meat displayed in another part of the store permeated Madrick's sinuses. White containers of milk and bags of grains took up the space of a separate section. Finally, delicious cakes and pies were lined up on a counter near the shop entrance. The shop was like a safe haven for all the food known in Mariunia.

"Can I help you?" asked a dark-skinned man behind the counter. The man was bald, but young and vibrant. His face gleamed with an essence that would make anyone feel comfortable around him. His slight muscular build showed a man with a passion for exploration and adventure. Most importantly, he acted in such a gentle manner that even a vicious enemy might succumb to his charm.

"Yes," said Madrick. "You must be Kavulin. By the way, I'm Madrick Doomslayer."

"I know," said Kavulin as he laughed. "The rumor of your benevolent presence has spread quite rapidly."

"So they now know and trust me?" asked Madrick.

"That's right," replied Kavulin with a warm smile.

"Anyway, I see that you supply foods of all kinds here. Tell me. Do you have any rations for travelers like myself?"

"Sure I do, my good friend." Kavulin gestured towards a shelf besides the counter with small boxes, each containing enough dried food to be equivalent to a full meal. While not moist and juicy as typical food, Madrick still had an appetite for them. He had learned to appreciate food rations and developed a liking of them. Madrick took about 20 small boxes and walked to the counter. He asked Kavulin the price of each package, which Madrick presumed to be cheap.

"2 Dollars each," said Kavulin.

"OK," said Madrick as he handed Kavulin four coins with the number 10 on each, totaling 40 Silver Gromylian Dollars.

"Perhaps I'll see you around sometime," said Kavulin.

"I hope so, too," replied Madrick as he left. "It is very wonderful to meet you."

The street that Madrick walked through so far looked quite monotonous, because each building that he passed by looked very identical to the others. Only by looking at the signs on each could he see the minute differences among them. Of course, it was a small town, so the streets were not very long at all. There weren't too many buildings to walk by. A lot of them were shops that didn't interest Madrick too much, including a toy shop and a blacksmith's shop. A little later after leaving Kavulin's shop, he entered another shop that caught his interest: "Verliva's Shop of Magic." While the outside did not look peculiar in any way, the inside of the shop, when Madrick entered through the ordinary-looking door, was a cave of darkness even if it didn't appear creepy to him. Magical artifacts and objects were everywhere on the ground. A crystal ball sat next to a pile scrolls. Madrick also saw a bizarre drum, a bone xylophone, a shelf on one wall full of magical potions, and a large mirror. His attention was fully drawn to a light-blue spiraling portal in the back part of the room. He stared at it for a few moments, and a woman in a green dress and with long wavy black hair soon faded gradually into existence from out of nowhere.

"Greetings, wanderer," echoed the woman. "You are most welcome in the presence of Verliva, sorceress of Gromyl."

"I am thankful," said Madrick. "I am quite amazed by what you have here."

"All who have entered here," said Verliva. "Have looked upon this place with wonder and awe."

"Sounds interesting," said Madrick. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Madrick Doomslayer. I've come all the way from Silmaria to explore this wonderful island. I am just simply starting to see where everything is at."

"You are a very adventurous man, Madrick. You are very eager to see what else lies on the island of Mariunia. You will eventually learn what is found here."

"I am flattered by your remarkable insight into another's character."

"And I know a little about what you will explore, but I don't have all the answers."

"You see the whole land? What can you tell me about it?"

"Everyone sees a paradise, filled with tranquility and permeated by vast beauty. What few can see is dark and mysterious."

Madrick's mind wandered to his eagerness to journey to Mariunia after his pride of earning his Fighter's Degree. He became a bit more worried about darkness within Mariunia when he remembered the terrible storm that shipwrecked him to the island. Fortunately, he calmed himself down by telling himself that he didn't know everything yet. Only time would tell it all.

"The storm," continued Verliva. "Is a sign. The fact that you were brought here in a nearly-lethal manner foreshadows evil here. I may know the source of it, but I can't tell."

"You can't tell?" asked Madrick with an expression of surprise. "What do you mean?"

"Gromylian philosophers have had one proverb that I always follow. It is better to be thrown many little rocks than to be thrown one big rock."

"In other words?"

"In other words, the truth is best learned gradually rather than be told completely at one moment, which would likely be more harmful to one's well-being."

"I see. Can you tell me anything more?"

"I suggest that you return later, Madrick. You need time to think things over."

Madrick agreed with the sorceress Verliva and said good-bye to her as he left the shop. Although the benign ambience of the outside returned to brighten Madrick's day, it had no effect on him. He stood in the street, looking up in the clear sky above. A slight sense of fear stood with him. Was Verliva right about Mariunia having a hidden dark side? Madrick had no clue. He just wanted to get settled in the town and go adventuring after a few days. He continued to walk down the street, hoping to find an Adventurer's Guild in town. Madrick had many questions that needed some answers.

CHAPTER 7: MARIUNIA REVEALED

Once again, Madrick was on the same dirt street that he set foot upon since entering the gates of Gromyl. He already bought what he needed: clothes, a map, and food rations. He had no idea that he would feel intrigued by someone as magical as the sorceress Verliva in the magic shop. There was plenty of confusion in Madrick's mind, for he didn't know much about the island of Mariunia. Whether the rumor of Mariunia being a paradise is not true seemed quite possible. Madrick wondered where he would go next. He was thinking about his adventure on the island. Even with his disappointment of Mariunia having a hidden dark side, he was excited that this could be an adventure for him. He looked forward to slaying tough monsters and saving innocent lives. The idealistic vision of him changing Mariunia forever boosted Madrick's confidence. Of course, he thought suddenly. There must be an Adventurer's Guild somewhere in the town. He walked forward down the street, past more buildings of wood and stone. Soon, he saw a somewhat moldy wooden sign that said "Adventurer's Guild of Gromyl." Madrick immediately opened the door and entered.

Inside, he saw a very spacious brown room with a small desk for a large logbook, a bulletin board on a wall with only outdated announcements, a few comfortable chairs, and a large round table. There were also three exercise machines. One was a Carl Atlas stair climber with two buckets of weights suspended on ropes hung over two pulleys in the ceiling. There was also a treadmill for running. Along with those two exercise machines was a machine consisting of two buckets of weights tied to ropes that were hung over two more pulleys in the ceiling. The other ends of the ropes were both tied to a long, straight wooden bar. Madrick figured that it was used to tone the upper part of the body. Madrick's attention then turned to the many plaques on the walls. Each plaque had some part of a monster that was slain in the past, mainly a head. One plaque had a giant brown beetle's head with a plate that said

"Rock Beetle, slain by Horus Gamage." Another presented a large pair of thin wings; its plate said "Giant Dragonfly, slain by Weldon Shar." He especially liked one that displayed two huge, shiny black pincers: "Grass Scorpion, slain by Elius Mandur." Madrick remembered that Mariunia was known for having plenty of large insect creatures inhabiting the island. In fact, the name "Mariunia" meant "land of the insects."

At the table, an old man, with slightly dark skin, a thin coat of black hair on his head, and typical Gromylian clothes, slept in one of the chair. Madrick decided to sign the adventurer's logbook before waking him up. He did so with a sense of pride and read back what he wrote: "I, Madrick Doomslayer, shall adventure the island of Mariunia and keep the line of Doomslayer Paladins the respected line that it is." As he put the pen down, he heard the sounds of the old man waking up from his nap.

"Well," said the old man. "I haven't had a visitor here for years."

"Really?" asked Madrick. "I would think many heroes would come here. I am Madrick. You are the guild master, right?"

"Yes," said the old man. "I am Abusham, the guild master here."

"I've come all the way from Silmaria."

"Yes, I've heard. The rumor that we have a visitor who's a Doomslayer has reached me as soon as the guards met you."

"Everyone I've met already know who I am."

"Why don't you sit down, my friend?" asked the old man, pointing to a nearby chair.

Madrick went over to the chair and sat down.

"I am sure that you would know a lot about this place," said Madrick.

"I sure so," said Abusham. "You can ask me anything."

"All right. Let's begin with Gromyl. What can you tell me about this place since I'm new here?"

"First of all, the town is divided into two parts. One is for all the homes in town. The other is for businesses. We have all kinds of shops: toy shop, blacksmith shop, food store, dry goods, even hardware. There is only one of each kind, so we really don't have any competitors in business."

"What other places of interest are there?"

"There's also a tavern here in town called 'The Praying Mantis.'"

"I see. Now I know about the whole town itself," said Madrick as he opened his scroll containing the map. "I am curious about the conflict between Gromyl and Akros up north."

"I can answer that," replied Abusham. "It just started almost a year ago. The Akrosians just attacked us for reasons we do not know. They attacked our town twice so far, but we managed to defend ourselves both times."

"Have the Gromylians waged war?"

"Well, no. You see, we pretended to avoid retaliation. In fact, we are currently training some troops for a surprise attack on them."

"Tensions must really be strong."

"That's true. In fact, some Gromylians have formed a hate group called 'Gromyl Pride.' They are some of the soldiers preparing for this secret retaliation. I do believe in peace, but it's impossible with the maliciousness of the Akrosians."

Madrick stopped to think about what Abusham said. He became aware of the tension between the two towns and what the Akrosians had done. What slightly twisted Madrick's stomach was that the Gromylians were contemplating an effective strategy to attack the Akrosians for their dirty deeds. There was also some wondering going on in his head, because the causes for the Akrosians' attack on Gromyl were unknown.

"What is found outside town?" asked Madrick with an expression of curiosity.

"Unlike here," answered Abusham. "There's mostly beauty outside the town walls. Much of the northern part of the island is forest with sparsely distributed trees. A smaller area of grassland lies south of it. Then there's only beach along the coast."

"Are there any notable land features?"

"Somewhere in the forest is a maze. Anyone who can figure out the way through it will end up in a place of beauty and magic: Erana's Orchard."

"Erana's Orchard? That's interesting. I only heard of Erana's Peace in Spielberg and Erana's Garden in Mordavia."

"She truly has a heart of gold, helping everyone in any way possible."

"What else is there?" asked Madrick.

"There is a river," said Abusham. "It runs from the north through the forest and grassland to the Med Sea to the north. It's called the Aphid River. Many can see a waterfall that comes out of the mountains to the north. It's so high that nobody has ever been to the top of the waterfall."

"You say that there are mountains here?"

"Yes, and they are very tall. In fact, visitors to Mariunia can only get here from the South, Southwest, and West parts of the island, because these impassible mountains run along the North coast and the East coast."

"I see. Has anyone climbed the mountains before?"

"Not really. The risk of death from fatigue and lack of air is tremendous. Everyone is happy just living in this area."

Madrick smiled with fascination and awe from Abusham's description of the major features of the island of Mariunia. He loved the idea of luscious forests and green grass contrasting the dead rock of the gargantuan mountain range. The Aphid River seemed like something worth visiting as well as Erana's Orchard. Madrick could not stop asking questions.

"Are the mountains beautiful to see?" asked Madrick.

"Yes, indeed," answered Abusham. "There is one interesting feature of the mountain range. One of the mountain peaks appears to be a perfectly smooth cone. We call it the Cone of Mystery. Very unusual, but nevertheless beautiful."

"What kinds of creatures live here on Mariunia?"

"There are dwarves on the other side of Mariunia as well as Trolls. Both keep to themselves. We keep to ourselves, so nobody has really visited the other side of the island."

"Perhaps I can see."

"Maybe."

"What about dangerous creatures?" inquired Madrick.

"Insects," answered Abusham. "There are some giant insects that live there. They aren't many in number, but they can still be deadly. Rock Beetles and Giant Dragonflies are the common ones. There are other species of giant insects on Mariunia. One is the Killer Bee, big as a boulder. There's also the Grass Scorpion you see on the wall. Those are pretty much the ones you commonly see. There could be more, but no stories have been told about them."

"Interesting," said Madrick. "I've always enjoyed hearing about the Crocs of Tarna, the Wyverns of Mordavia, the Goblins of Spielberg, the Granglers of Silmaria, and even the Elementals of Shapeir that a great hero once encountered. He's currently the Prince of Shapeir and the King of Silmaria. Elsa, the Queen of Silmaria, was someone he met in Spielberg and met again in Silmaria during the Rites of Rulership."

"You seem fond of this Hero," commented Abusham.

"Yes, I am," said Madrick. "I've looked up to him to this day. The Famous Adventurer, my teacher at the Famous Adventurer's Correspondence School where I graduated from, has always talked about him. He's a Hero in five lands."

"He sounds like a remarkable man," said Abusham. "So what are you going to do now, Madrick?"

"Well," answered Madrick. "I think I'll check out the tavern you mentioned just to explore. I'm not really a drinker. Where's the inn, by the way?"

"It's straight down the street," replied Abusham. "It's called the Ladybug Inn."

"All right," said Madrick. "Well, thank you so much for telling me about Mariunia."

"You're very welcome," answered Abusham with a tender smile. "Come back anytime."

"I will," said Madrick.

Madrick said good-bye to Abusham and left the Adventurer's Guild. He smiled after meeting another friendly citizen of Gromyl. He hoped to go adventuring for a while and tell Abusham about it. Madrick was glad to meet wonderful people like Shamir, Kavulin, Verliva, and Abusham. He had the impression that Gromyl was quite a friendly town despite the deep hatred for the Akrosians. As he walked down the street to look for the tavern, he looked forward to a great and exciting adventure in Mariunia. Madrick Doomslayer was a brave man on a quest for glory, just like the King of Silmaria at one time.

Epilogue

The 13th issue is over. We hope you enjoyed our new layout, and the contribution by our new writers like Rani Hasan, Rob Hamilton and the return of Mark Lovegrove. We also hope that you will give the adventures we reviewed this month from independent developers a go because you are really missing something if you have not tried them yet.

Last month we had said that we would probably review Syberia 2 on the 13th issue of The Inventory, but a due to a mailing problem we did not receive our review copy in time, so this is postponed for the next issue instead. Hopefully we will receive our copy in time and we will manage to give you our take on the most awaited sequel of the year.

We will of course continue to show our support to the independent developers scene by featuring previews and interviews on their upcoming adventures. You should also expect a review of Flashback, another great AGS adventure that would be included in this issue already but due to lack of time we had to postpone it for the next issue. The revolutionary – in terms of graphics - Schizm 2 will also be one of the reviews for The Inventory 14.

Our interview with Michel Bams from White Birds Productions is videotaped and we might upload it on Just Adventure very soon in AVI format. We'll do that as soon as we find a cable that is necessary for transferring the video from the camera to the PC. But it will happen sooner or later.

If any of you readers have any column in mind that would be a good contribution for our magazine (apart from reviews, previews and articles that already exist) please let us know and who knows, you might join the team that brings adventurers around the world the magazine that they can't find in their newsstand.

Not much more left to say from my side. Keep sending your comments, suggestions and questions to theinventory@yahoo.com and change our magazine the way you want it to be. Until next month dear adventurers...

Dimitris Manos
Editor
The Inventory

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