

# The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only

## PREVIEW

BAD TIMING

## INTERVIEWS

KING'S QUEST IX  
CHRIS JONES

## REVIEWS

- CIRQUE DE ZALE
- SYBERIA 2
- SOPHIA'S DEBT
- FLIGHT OF THE AMAZON QUEEN
- CASE OF CRABS



## SEALED LIPS

ARE YOU A  
3D MODELER?  
COME AND JOIN  
OUR VERY OWN  
ADVENTURE  
PROJECT

*Jon Scott*  
*Mahel Fritzsche*

# The Inventory

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## SPECIAL THANKS:

Phoenix Freeware, Chris Jones, Erwin Broekhuis



## *Prologue*

Hello fellow adventurers. I am glad to announce that we have a splendid issue to offer to you this month. More reviews than ever before (5 to be more exact) and interviews with the King's Quest IX developers as well as the father of the AGS engine that has given us so many adventure gems to enjoy, Chris Jones.

Our choice for the review of the month might seem a bit controversial. Although we review Syberia 2 this month, the 'review of the month' spot was won by Cirque De Zale. Why? Because it is our philosophy here in The Inventory that storytelling and gameplay come first. That is not to say that graphics and sound are not important, quite the contrary actually. Story and gameplay however is what we play adventures for in the first place.

If you remember last month we had a special on independent development and we featured numerous reviews of non-commercial adventures. This month we continue our special on independent developers with even more content! First of all, we feature a preview of Bad Timing, a Day of the Tentacle – like adventure from Empty House Entertainment.

We continue later on with an interview with the developers behind King's Quest IX, that looks more and more impressive as time passes by. They are not the only guests in our Lounge however, as this month we also feature an interview with the creator of the AGS engine, Chris Jones, that has given us great masterpieces like the King's Quest remakes, Apprentice, Cirque De Zale and The Adventures of JP & Cosmo.

Our reviews section is also featuring a lot of non-commercial projects. Apart from Cirque De Zale that won our review of the month spot, we feature reviews of Case of the Crabs and Sofia's Debt. While not an independent project, Flight of the Amazon Queen is another adventure-gem that you can download for free from the net, so it is sure worth a try. We also reveal some information on our upcoming adventure project, Sealed Lips and we also give a call-out to any 3D modellers who would like to join our development team.

And last but definitely not least, from this month you have the chance to contribute to our efforts for bringing this magazine to life every month, by donating some money to us if you so will via Paypal. It is an effort that takes many hours from our every day lives and we would be grateful if you could contribute to that. So for those of you who want to help you can visit [www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com), create an account (if you don't already have one) and send as much money as you would like to, to [theinventory@yahoo.com](mailto:theinventory@yahoo.com). Thank you in advance.

But enough with the prologue. Let's move on to our contents.

*Dimitris Manos*

*Editor*

*The Inventory*



It should be well understood by now that the future of adventure games lies in the fans' dedication and creative skills. Epic games like King's Quest 2 remake or shorter gems like The Apprentice and The Adventures of JP & Cosmo have given adventurers a small glimpse of what is about to come. Upcoming adventures like Shadowplay, King's Quest IX, Indiana Jones and The Fountain of Youth have already teased our imagination through the pages of our magazine. Prepare to add one more adventure to the list above. Bad Timing.

Bad Timing is a point and click comedy adventure featuring classic hand drawn graphics and animation with a style that will probably please fans of Day of the Tentacle. It is being developed by Empty House Entertainment. The project leader is Erwin Broekhuis, who gets help from various people in the development team like Mark Lovegrove (project Leader of Indiana Jones and the Fountain of Youth & author of our Talking Dead column), a group of voice actors, testers, dialogue editors and a few programmers.

The **story** of the game begins when a woman and a one-eyed alien from the future crash their space shuttle in Brett Brenneman's back yard. Brett is the main character of Bad Timing. He is a 23 year old average guy who lives with his parents in a boring suburban neighborhood. Brett's parents are away on a two-day

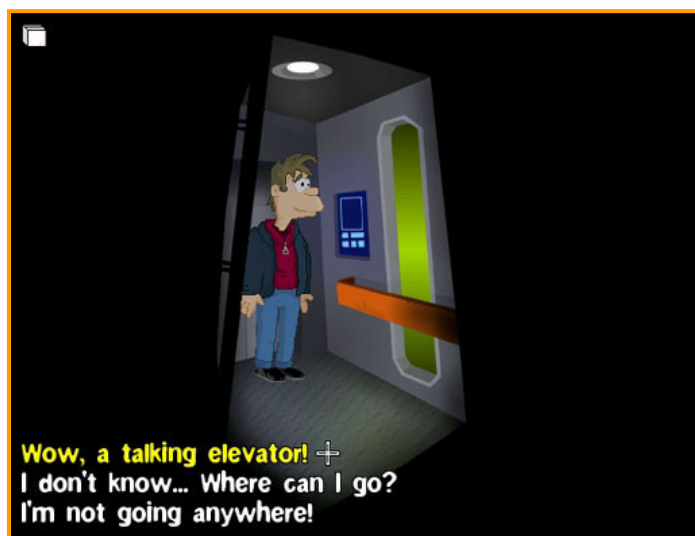
trip out of town when the space shuttle crashes. Brett, offers to help the two unlucky creatures from the future to get back to their time. If he manages to do that in time, he might also be able to fix the lawn of his parents before they return from their trip out of town.

**\*Spoilers\*** Things however are not that simple (when are they in adventure games anyway?) Brett will accidentally end up in the future himself. Everything will get just more and more complicated as Brett will get into more trouble than he could ever imagine. This includes a missing starship crew, a potentially dangerous device, an insane scientist and a spoiled alien wife abusing her influential husband (and ruler of a great Empire) to take over an entire planet; with the purpose of turning it into her private holiday resort. Apparently the game will be full of such wacky situations and Brett is definitely a guy who always ends up in the wrong time at the wrong place. **\*End of Spoilers\*** In the game you will get to meet more than 40 characters and you will get to visit over 80 rooms.

Let's take a look now at some of Bad Timing's main characters. Brett is a slob who at 23 years of age, is still content with living in his parents' house in a suburban neighborhood. Somewhere deep inside him though there is something telling him that he must live an adventure that he will never forget. Captain Jane



Brett's favourite activity



An example of the dialogue interface used in Bad Timing



Look at

**Looking at the double-sunset. Double-romantic.**

Anyway, is a soap opera fan who is too much into her looks and is totally bored because as she says ‘in space nothing ever happens. Lieutenant Krod is a one-eyed pilot on board of USS Unreliable who is able to perform a descent take-off but has never managed to land his space shuttle flawlessly. What do you get when you put these 3 unreliable individuals together to solve a problem? This we will have to wait and see for ourselves when the game becomes available. Developers also make mention of corny parodies and references to famous sci-fi movies and TV series.

The **graphics** of the game are hand drawn and the style is very reminiscent of past cartoon point and click adventures like Day of The Tentacle, as you can see by yourselves in the screenshots. The screen resolution will reach 640x480 pixels. We did not have the chance to see any actual footage of the game but the developers make mention of ‘*rich and detailed animation that brings characters to life*’. It seems that Bill Tiller’s tutorials that were available on the Adventure Developers site when



**You will even get to meet ...one-eyed characters**



Walk to

**Bad Timing could easily pass as a former-Lucasarts product**

they were still online started to pay off.

Empty House Entertainment pays a lot of attention in the **audio** of the game as well. Bad Timing will feature over 30 different music tracks. As for the voice overs, they seem to be very professional. You can get a taste of the actors’ voices on the website of the game which is:

<http://www.justadventure.com/IndependentDevs/BadTiming>

As you can notice from the address this game is being hosted by Just Adventure in their independent developers section. They are looking for more voice actors so if you are interested don’t hesitate to contact the developers, and who knows you might be the voice of a Bad Timing character. According to Empty House Entertainment the game will feature hundreds of lines of spoken dialogue. Erwin Broekhuis, project leader of Bad Timing said: ‘*I’m particularly proud of our musician and our excellent cast of voice actors.*’ As mentioned earlier, the musician is Mark Lovegrove who has worked for the soundtrack of many fan projects and is also the project leader of Indiana Jones and the Fountain of Youth.

Regarding the **gameplay** of Bad Timing now, the developers state that ‘*We’re trying to implement as many different types of puzzles as we can. There are, however, some puzzles that won’t appear in the game which are, for example, mechanical puzzles and mazes. We also don’t like pixel hunting, so we’ve kept that to a minimum too. That doesn’t mean we present every useful object on a silver platter, though. The majority of our puzzles are inventory based. Bad Timing is going to use a progressive style of difficulty. Things won’t be very difficult in the beginning of the game so we can give our players the chance of becoming familiar and to gently introduce them to our game world.*’ The main character won’t be able to die during the game so you won’t have to worry about that.





**Brett in some sort of hangar.**

The interface of the game will be a verb-cycle point and click interface as seen in most of Sierra's games but without the menu of icons visible on the top of the screen. The available commands are walk to, look at, use and pick up. These options are accessible both by mouse and keyboard shortcuts and almost every action you can perform with the mouse has a keyboard shortcut. On the bottom of the screen you see the action that your character wants to perform written in text.

The dialogue system is the familiar system used in the Lucasarts adventures of the 80s where dialogue options are displayed in a classic tree system, in which you can select the lines of text you want to say. The inventory can be accessed by clicking on the white box icon on the top-left corner of the screen (you can also see it in some of the screenshots that Empty House Entertainment provided for us). There is an unlimited amount of save game slots available. But as the developers said *'What happens when a user saves more than 10000 games has yet to be tested, though ;-)*

The game is programmed using the SLUDGE engine, created by Tim Furnish. The same engine was used for Out of Order, an adventure that we reviewed last month. Bad Timing is not going to be released as freeware, but the developers said that they will try to keep the cost as low as possible (the site suggests something from 10 to 15 dollars but that's only a rough estimate), to cover at least the production and shipping costs. When I think about what prices adventurers have to pay for really mediocre titles out there then this sounds not just reasonable but actually an injustice to the developers (as long as they deliver what is being promised). Whether the game will be published by a known publisher or Empty House Entertainment is yet to be determined.



**Khad must be either bored or really unfriendly**

There is no release date set for the time being, since the development team is working on the game on their spare time, meaning that development doesn't proceed at a constant speed. However, you should all expect soon a small playable demo that will give you a first impression of what Bad Timing is going to look like.

Bad Timing seems to have all the ingredients that make a game classic. An unusual story, minimal pixel-hunting and puzzles that make sense, great looking cartoon graphics and professional voice-overs. Whether the developers will deliver what they promise is yet to be seen, but one can't help but long to play Bad Timing.

Lucasarts is dead. Sierra is dead. But it is projects like this one that make us shout 'Long live the adventure genre!' It is time for everyone to understand that independent developers are the future of the genre.

**- Dimitris Manos**



**Something tells me he shouldn't press that button**

# SEALED LIPS

Some time ago we made a call out to developers who want to join our efforts in creating our own adventure game. I am happy to say that things have been progressing very smoothly. We have formed a competent team which is hard at work at bringing this game into life. But we still need:

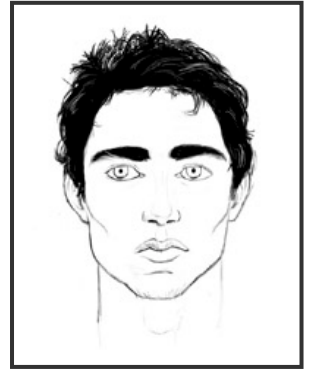
- 2 more **3D modellers**
- 1 more **coder**

to join our efforts. I am sure that many of you might be wondering what our game is going to be like so here comes some short information that we can release right now.

*Sealed Lips* (working title) is a psychological thriller. The plot is inspired by many movies such as *American Beauty*, *Good Will Hunting* and *Donnie Darko* but it still has its own unique identity. The game's story is very important to us and character interaction will be the main focus of the game. The game will certainly have more than 40 interactive characters and probably even more non-interactive ones. Players will get to control two main characters. Kevin, a 16-year-old student and Robert, a 40-year-old psychologist.

*Sealed Lips* will feature full 3D graphics that will be seen from a 3<sup>rd</sup> person perspective. It will still be screen-to-screen like most 2D adventures in order to give us the opportunity to use a point and click interface that will not feel cumbersome to adventurers. By using full 3D though we will also have the opportunity to create a cinematic feeling by swapping camera angles during dialogues and cutscenes. Camera

angles will change automatically so that the user does not have to worry about direction and can focus on the gameplay instead. The interface we are going to use is very similar to the interface used in games like *The Longest Journey* and *Curse of Monkey Island* but with a few new features that will give an end to the annoying pixel hunting once and for all and that will make inventory interaction simpler than ever before.

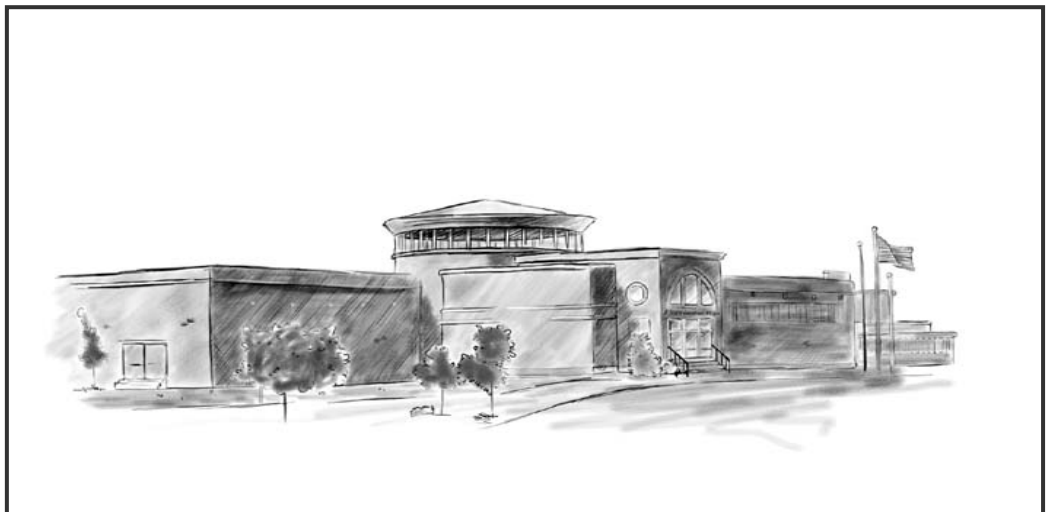


We will use the open-source engine Neoenine ([www.ncoengine.org](http://www.ncoengine.org)). The game will be available as a commercial product but since we do not have a budget to begin with there will be no salaries given until the game's release. For more information contact us at [sl\\_adv@yahoo.com](mailto:sl_adv@yahoo.com). Please give also links to your art on the net instead of attaching images due to the limited space of our email account.

*Guarantee no 1: Sealed Lips will feature no slider puzzles, no mechanical puzzles, no newspaper under the door to get the key puzzles, no action elements and the only time you will ever turn a switch will be when you want to turn on the lights.*

*Guarantee no 2: Templars have nothing to do with the game's story. You will also not get to travel to Egypt and the game's title won't include the name Atlantis in any territory that it will be released.*

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# ADVENTURE GOSSIP

## GMX supports adventures

The UK-based publisher GMX has recently announced a number of publishing deals with several upcoming adventure games. First of all they secured the rights for Martin Mystere, a 3<sup>rd</sup> person point and click 3D adventure game based on a popular TV and comic series license. The story of the game begins when Professor Eulemberg, an important researcher of M.I.T., was found murdered. Someone is working on an incredible machine, capable of changing the world's destiny... Somewhere, an old sick tramp reveals he is Martin Mystere, something that seems impossible.



Furthermore GMX signed recently a deal with the developers of Great Journey. Great Journey is a 3<sup>rd</sup> person point and click 3D adventure for children with colourful characters and vibrant prerendered backgrounds. Annie and Tony, the game's main characters are 10 years old and live in a town called Old Port on the edge of a small continent. They have lived many adventures in their lives, and through these adventures they got to make lots of new friends and got to visit lots of distant locations. One day the postman of Old Port brought Annie and Tony a letter

from their friend the Penguin in south pole. The letter asks them to come and help the penguins of the north pole to get rid of a person who comes and leaves garbage at their area. Tony and Annie set out on a journey to help their friends in need.

Apart from these two games they have also acquired the rights for Black Mirror and Conspiracies, games that we have reviewed in previous issues as well as Journey to the Center of The Earth, which we have previewed in the past. It seems like the adventure genre has found a publisher that supports it in the UK. Let's hope that more publishers will follow GMX's example.

## Myst IV in production

Myst fans who were disappointed with URU can finally rejoice, since Ubisoft recently announced that the fourth instalment of the Myst series will be available. Myst IV: Revelation will give answers to questions that have been left hanging since the beginning of the Myst series. Ubisoft will showcase the game in E3 (Electronic Entertainment Expo) 2004 in Los Angeles.

It seems that developers turn back to the 1<sup>st</sup> person perspective, prerendered backgrounds and FMV cutscenes after the bad criticism URU has received from Myst fans. You can check out the first screenshots and trailer of the game in the official website:

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

## Project Joe is looking for publishers

The developers behind the 2D point and click 'Still Unnamed Project Joe' are looking for publishers so that they are able to work on the game full time and speed up the development process.

So if any publishers are reading this, check out their work on:

[http://php.hku.nl/~jeroen16/synthetix/project\\_joe/](http://php.hku.nl/~jeroen16/synthetix/project_joe/)

## New professional look for the AGS site

The official site for the AGS engine and games created by AGS has recently received a whole new design by Darth Mandarb (developer of The Adventures of JP & Cosmo, reviewed in our previous issue).

To see the new features of the website pay a visit to:

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

## AGDInteractive has new forums

The team behind the King's Quest 1 and 2 remakes made a jump to a new forums provider. To visit the new forums go to:

<http://www.agdiforums.com/forum/>

- Dimitris Manos



# Interview with the KQIX development team

*In the 7<sup>th</sup> issue of The Inventory we featured a preview of the most ambitious fan project out there, King's Quest IX. The early screenshots made adventure fans admire the work being done on this project, work that even commercial titles would be jealous of. The fact that the game will feature full 3D graphics gives an even more interesting tone to the project.*

*Promises of a point and click interface and no action during the game erased the fans' fears of a King's Quest 8 repeat. This month we invited the team behind the KQIX project to come in our Lounge and give us all the latest details behind their project. So let's turn our attention to these dedicated King's Quest fans/developers.*

## Yourselves:

- Talk to us a bit about yourselves?

**Saydmell Salazar:** About myself, I'm the PR and Web Co-Director for KQIX development team, my major is Business Administrative in Design, I've been working for the KQIX team for about many years by now, started as an artist, then PR, now I lead PR and Web department with my department director Dean Pantelios. About the team, it was originally started by small group in 2000 as a good idea, but since then it has evolved and captured the imagination of an extremely diverse and talented group, César Bittar was hired as a writer and he took over leading the project in 2002, where you will find the KQIX development group of nowadays. We are a creative group who works seriously as a company even if we are not making any profit; we have a solid work scheme, responsible and skilled directors and talented and unique artists from all over the world cooperating in this production.

**César Bittar:** My name is César Bittar, Project Director of King's Quest IX. I have been writing since I remember and over the course of years, I have taken different courses at universities on communications, writing and film. I have a love for all things creative, and I am happy I have now been able to fulfil some of my dreams with the King's Quest IX team.

- Have you played any recent adventure games? Which were your most favourite ones?



**CB:** A good adventure is very hard to find lately. I have played a couple of different games lately. Some put me to sleep and frustrated me as how bad can a game be (Black Mirror, Post Mortem). However, there are two games I have played recently that have impressed me on different levels. Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon is one of these titles. Through a new take on the genre, the designers managed to create a game both immersive and smart. The other game I want to mention is actually an Action-Adventure game. I have never been too much of a fan of these kinds of games, but Beyond Good & Evil is a true rare gem. Telling a great story in such a heart-warming way, this game managed to steal my heart away and make me consider it the best Action-Adventure game I have ever played. I would recommend this game to anybody, adventure follower or not.

**SS:** With ending university, real life work and working full time with kq9, it is rare to find free time to play any

games nowadays. I must admit I'm love with KQ and QFG games myself

**- Which King's Quest is the best one in your opinion?**

**CB:** King's Quest VI. I can clearly see Jane Jensen's intervention in it. It's the best in the series by far.

**SS:** KQIX all the way!



**King's Quest IX**

**- Let's begin... at the very beginning. How did you come up with the idea of creating a sequel for the King's Quest series?**

**SS:** The current staff didn't originate the idea but did develop the whole concept. It was due to bitter aftertaste that KQ8 left on many of the fans because they openly admit it wasn't quite true to the KQ story line. Hence it is a good game just very different to what the fans loved. Then, the original creators decided to put a team together to throw ideas in and see who would be eager to create a sequel true to the KQ world, eventually César was hired in 2000. He started as an ordinary writer, then he got in charge of the team in 2002, which was when the real and current team gathered and the story shaped up.

**CB:** It was actually not my idea. I was just surfing one day and found the project. They were looking for writers and I told to myself "why not?" The founders of the project are no longer with us.

**- How long has it been since you started creating the game?**

**CB:** Officially, sometime during October of 2000. I joined during November of the same year. The project

was dead for the most part until January 2002, when I became the Project Director and started organising the team. I do not intend to take all the credits to myself, however. I would not be here if it was not for the incredible team we have.

**SS:** As César said, the "idea" was from October 2000, the "team" though was scattered; it had no structure. There were no teams (art, programming, and such), so it lacked of coordination and direction. When he took charge he created the departments, he selected directors and progressively it became the strong development team we are nowadays. As I've mentioned before, we do work as a real company even though we are not paid, which leads to research, coordination, direction, guidelines and related.

**- So far you have been quite secretive regarding the story of the game. Would you perhaps release some information around the plot of the game now?**

**SS:** We are secretive because there is something good we wouldn't wish to spoil until we consider the right moment for it. We let it go because we like you and we appreciate the support The Inventory has given us... We don't like to give out spoilers much, but this is a special case.

**CB** Well, since you ask nicely... The game begins with Graham, as he travels through the Green Isles looking for a way to break a dark enchantment that has befallen the lands. However, as he delves more and more into it, he starts finding there is much more to what he thought was a simple enchantment. From this point on, the game explodes into a rollercoaster of different adventures, as he and his twin children, Alexander and Rosella, learn a shocking truth about themselves, Valanice and Graham's past, a prophecy that has been expanding for a thousand years and that revolves around the twins, and two strange societies, acting as a mirror to one another, to which they are intrinsically tied.

**- You decided to take a 'darker' and more sinister approach with King's Quest IX compared to the previous titles of the series. Why is that?**

**CB:** I personally felt that the series had gotten to a point where they needed an escape. I remember reading Roberta William's comments on an interview carried by Just Adventure on this subject. She insisted that the series needed to be revamped, and that such was the reason for "Mask of Eternity". She continued on saying that maybe she was not right with "Mask of Eternity", but if experiments were not made, things would be only





a frustrating repetition over and over, and the genre would become less and less appealing to the public. When I studied how we could revamp the series, I figured that because the fans of the series had grown, a darker, more mature story would now be well received. Many ideas flowed at the time, but I can say today I am really pleased with the results of the (huge) script.

**SS:** More than “dark” per se, I rather see it as an in-depth plot, which leads to a unique story that gathers the sense of KQ as well as brings new fresh elements to gather up the story. It is as good as to appeal to non-KQ fans and that is the reach of it: a wider target that includes everyone who likes adventures and a good story.

**- Why did you choose King Graham, Rosella and Alexander as the main characters of the game?**

**CB:** Taking a look at past King’s Quests, they have been the main characters over the course of eight games, with the exception of Connor in “Mask of Eternity” and the part Valanice played in “Princess Bride” (next to Rosella). It only felt right that they each had a role in what we think is a closure to the saga.

**SS:** I personally like the selection, because each plays a role in each of their moments, so it collides with the whole story and gameplay.

**- Will the player take control of each character on-demand or will the character control change automatically?**

**CB:** For the most part, the player will control each character on demand. However, there are occasions when two or the three characters will be in the same place at the same time. The player needs to use their wits and each character’s skills to solve the puzzles in conjunction.

**- How many characters will we get to meet in total throughout the game?**

**CB:** Ugh... A lot! At least 400!!

**SS:** That was a nice try to get to know all the chars... But you will see once the game is out.

**- Could you talk about any other familiar characters we are going to meet apart from the royal family of Daventry?**

**CB:** Because the game starts in the Green Isles, you can expect to see most of the characters found during “Heir Today, Gone Tomorrow”. There are other characters from other games that will also make it. To name a few of them: Sarah, from “Mask of Eternity”; Pan, from “Perils of Rosella”; Crispin, from “Absence Makes the Heart go Yonder” and others.

**- How many locations will players get to visit?**

**CB:** There are around ten different lands to be visited, including a whole exploration of Castle of Daventry inside.

**- Why did you decide to use full 3D graphics and not go for a 2D/3D combination?**

**CB:** This was a decision of our Art Director. At first, I was not so sure if this was a good idea, but seeing how the graphics are turning out to be and the features 3D can give you (as in moving cameras, zooming, etc), I am very pleased with the results.

**SS:** I agree, at first I was also a bit skeptical about it, but once the real 3D development started I saw it was good enough, I must admit the graphics are stunning and it is coming along very nicely indeed.



- Will the game feature a large number of cutscenes?

**CB:** Yes. The game has a very cinematic feel to it and will feature many, many cutscenes that help the plot advance.

**SS:** Correct, in fact, the cutscenes are eyecandy! I must admit they have very interesting parts of the plot, good moments.



- You used the open source, Crystal Space engine for the purposes of the game. What are your experiences with the engine? Has it been a helpful tool in the development of the game?

**CB:** We recently made the decision of switching over to the Torque Engine. The decision basically came because once we really tried Crystal Space, we found it contained many bugs and lack of updates. We are now happy with Torque, and the programming functionality is no longer an issue.

**SS:** I must add the fact that there is no problem about the change of engines, since the adaptation is easier in Torque and the programming flows better and it's coming along much better actually.

- How much time of music will KQIX feature in total?

**CB:** At this point is hard to tell, as we stopped music production until we can give musicians something to work on, but making a wild guess, I would not be surprised if it was over four hours of music.

**SS:** The music is wonderful, it has a good direction regarding the quality and feel to our game.

- Will the game also feature any tunes heard in previous King's Quest games?

**SS:** All the music made so far has been completely original and composed for this KQIX exclusively, we also don't consider this option in the future either.

**CB:** No. We once had a rendition of Cassima's theme from previous games, but at the end, we decided against it.

- You held an audition for voice actors in New York a while ago. How did that go?

**CB:** It was a wonderful experience. We had many people come over, fans and not, and they were all pretty excited about being part of the project. We had people from different parts of the US (and Canada), and even one of our members from The Netherlands that came to New York just to be able to audition. We had lots of fun and lots of work as well, as we cast people within the hours that followed the auditions. We now have a complete "main" cast, and we will soon start the voice-recordings.

**SS:** The promotion about the NY auditions was released about a month before it actually happened. The feedback we had for people scheduling it to attend was overwhelming. We had many fans coming from all over, very talented and eager fans willing to help out the project. Once they met some of our team members over there in NY they were totally excited about the project. For those who couldn't make it to the live auditions held in NY, we had something else especially prepared for them. We are currently holding Online Auditions which are pretty much the option for you to read some parts we have available in our website, record your demo and send it to us though the same website. We developed a php form sheet, as well the guidelines to this process. It is easy and quick for you to be part of the project even if you couldn't make it to NY, although the same standards hold for the Online Auditions. We have a Voice Director who coordinates the talents and is in charge of this whole production for the team.

- How many actors will you use eventually for the purposes of the game?

**CB:** We have 45 actors for the main parts! And that's not counting the people that will be cast online!

**SS:** We have minor roles and supportive ones for the online auditions, yet we do plan to get as many as



needed from the online auditions.

**- What file format will you use for the music and audio of the game?**

**CB:** At this moment, we are using .ogg format. That may change as we keep on development.

**- Could you describe to us the interface you plan to use for KQIX?**

**CB:** Point and click. Very much like old Sierra's interfaces. With the inclusion of the magic system, it would be fair to say that it is an upgraded "Quest for Glory" interface.



**- Why a point and click interface?**

**CB:** There were no reasons why to change it to something else. If the game had called for something else, we would have had a different approach, but since the old-school interface works great, we stayed with it.

**- How are you going to handle the dialogue of the game?**

**CB:** Topic conversations, as in the Gabriel Knight and Quest for Glory series.

**- Is there going to be action and if yes in what form?**

**CB:** If you have played Phantasmagoria, you will understand what kind of "action" we will use in this game. The Chase Sequence part of that game was source of inspiration for a couple of sequences that take place in our game. Other than that, we have a couple of sections with an arcade feel to it. We decided to use

them in some key places as they enhance the overall tension of the sequences they are part of, and add to the gameplay.

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

**CB:** There is a little bit of everything. For every chapter there will be a "progress report" in the way of whatever task they are completing. For example, if the player has to travel from location A to location B, a map will be displayed as the Progress Report of that area. If the case is collecting a list of ingredients, a list with these ingredients will be such Progress Report. As for the puzzles themselves, there are a wide range of these. Some of them come in the way of Inventory Puzzles - Use this with that-, some others come as Magic Puzzles (which is an upgraded version of the Inventory puzzles) -Cast such spell on such object-, and there are a couple of "head-breakers", where you really need to sit and think, as luck will definitely not help.

**- Is King's Quest IX going to be generally easy or difficult?**

**CB:** There is a little bit of everything. Most of the puzzles are natural, but like I mentioned on the above answer, there are some puzzles that are *really* hard.

**SS:** Because of the in-depth story I believe this is different than the other kq's, which may add some difficulty to it.

**- How do you plan to distribute the game?**

**SS:** As far as we consider currently it is going to be available to download at our website <http://www.kq9.org>, where we not only will have the game available for free download but as well as any other technical or support for the gamers.

**- Have you contacted Sierra about the game and in that case what was their response?**

**SS:** We have not contacted Sierra.

**- If one day you receive a letter from Sierra saying that you have to shut down the project, how are you going to respond to that?**

**SS:** With a lot of respect of course agree to the terms, because they still own all their rights regarding KQ's games and we don't want to trouble anyone, nor get anyone in trouble.

**CB:** They have the rights to it. There would not be much we could do other than change the names and locations and release it as a different game.

**- How long will the game be?**

**CB:** I believe longer than any Sierra adventure game ever. To put it in another way: I am right now finishing the walkthrough for the game. I am still missing two chapters and it is already 40 pages long!

**SS:** It will be long because it is going to be interesting and time consuming. It may take a bit less than expected if you really get involved with the game and commit to playing it nonstop.

**- And when should we expect to see it released?**

**CB:** When it's done. ;)

**SS:** Our production has been increased since last year, which leads me to believe it may come soon enough (or sooner than we thought of) but the fact is meanwhile we have a lot for you to get involved with it. We have kq9 contests, which help fans to participate in some real features of the game such as collaboration, as well as it keeps the fans entertained. The fan community has grown so much since 2004. There are games, and a lot more to get in touch with the project and the team before it gets released, so it will be a nice waiting. Everyone can be part of it and everyone should at least check out all the things we have for our fans at kq9.org.

**- Do you plan to release a demo or a trailer some time before the official release?**

**SS:** We don't have certainty that we will release publicly any demo, but what I can tell you is that we will have something unique coming though that will show that 2004 is definitely the year of KQ9. There are a lot of things coming out before the official release that will not disappoint our fans or anyone who looks forward to seeing this game.

## Adventure Games / General

**- Does your team have a name?**

**SS:** We are known as Phoenix Freeware Online.

**- We held interviews with Jane Jensen and Al Lowe recently and they were both critical to fan-made sequels, prequels and remakes without the**

**permission of the copyrights owner. What do you have to reply to that?**

**CB:** I understand their position. However, I think that if no one at Sierra is ever going to bother on continuing the franchise, we are at least doing a favour to the many fans that would love to see a sequel. After all, we are doing this for the fans.

**SS:** At this point it is hard not to be biased, of course it concerns us a bit, but as Cesar very well says, it is understandable their position. But we get to understand the fan statement as well, because this is a fan game being made by fans and for fans. Even though we are not making a single penny out of it, it doesn't stop us from making it good quality (or the best we can achieve) in a very professional way with the best hopes and will.

**- Have you tried to contact Roberta or Ken Williams about your game? If so, what was their reaction?**

**CB:** Yes. They both had very nice things to say about our game. Roberta Williams actually sent us a heart-warming letter excited about our project and wishing us the best. But before anyone asks, no, she is not involved in the project in any way.

**SS:** We appreciate Roberta's comments and her letter was a year ago I believe. She wished us the best and of course that she wasn't taking any position of the development because obvious reasons of course. Ken also gets a lot of questions about us in his site from many fans, and his comments toward us have been really nice so far. It is great to see that even though the current situation of being a fan project and such, we do have a lot of great support with nice comments.

**- What is your opinion of the current state of adventure games?**

**CB:** I believe it is a shame, really. My belief is that the adventure community is sometimes guilty because we are such conformists. The Adventure Company has not produced a great quality game in a good while. Some very good games out there are overlooked because they dare to break with some conventionalities.

We are awed by games with such a smart tint to it such as Syberia, yet we do not act as a voice to turn this into a must. I applaud designers such as Benoit Sokal and Charles Cecil because they dare to do something different than what have been previously stated; and



they succeed because they blindly believe in the directions they take.

With this, I am not saying that I like all experiments done, but as long as we keep on believing that the only way to make Adventures is the way Sierra and LucasArts did in the 80's and 90's, the adventure genre is not going to shine again as it used to.

The best example I can put is the Role-Playing genre. It took ten years and a whole revamping of the genre for it to finally come back to its full glory. Today, we enjoy the different alternatives of it (Final Fantasy, Baldur's Gate, MMORPGs) and also the RPG old school (Morrowind). My point here is that we should not undermine these experiments, as they may be the only way to bring the adventure genre back to its full glory, thus giving room for old school adventures with bigger budgets seeing the light of day again.

**- I think it would not be an exaggeration to say that there are more independent projects out there than commercial ones. Do you think that the future of the genre lies in the fans' own hands?**

**SS:** That is a bit ambiguous to tell right now, but I don't quite believe it is. The genre has been in decay because business-speaking, nowadays they don't see the potential of the market because they would rather stay safe as opposed to accepting the risk of investment. Currently if you do a potential market research study, you will find out that every single top game is whichever, but not adventure genre related. Besides the entirely adventure genre as a unique single one that says action or strategy has sort of disappeared; its all about action/adventure (example MoE) which leads the fans of course to feel somehow let down.

Even more the die hard fans of adventure genre, but this is not a bad thing per se. Even though I believe we wont "revolutionize" the whole genre and believe commercially- speaking we would be a hit, there are still hopes in groups like us, and many other developers trying to achieve a great accomplishment with fan game developments. It is not a bad thing. I believe it is certainly unique that we get to achieve those things because it shows natural and new talent that is refreshing, because they don't do it for profit. They do it for the love of it, which as you see, does not cut off talent but somehow innovates it.

**CB:** No. Sadly, fan-made projects will not make a real difference, as they cannot compete against commercial products with real budgets. I believe it is time to really

take a look at the adventure genre and start experimenting with it. See my answer above.

**- Have you played Tierra's remakes of King's Quest 1 and 2? If so what is your opinion on them?**

**CB:** Yes, and they were ok, in my opinion. The King's Quest 2 remake was much better as it expanded on the story and that was good, but I still do not see as reason as to why they need to use the same graphics as King's Quest V and VI, and not opt for a better resolution. I still, however, applaud their entrepreneurship, as it is the best fan game team out there –with released products-.

**SS:** I haven't played it but I heard nothing but good comments from everyone.



**- Roberta Williams vs Jane Jensen. Who is your favourite game designer?**

**CB:** That is a hard question. Roberta Williams deserves merit for being a precursor of the genre. She brought many new ideas to the genre and computer gaming in general. As a Designer, I would choose her over Jane Jensen. As a writer and plot/character development, I would definitely go with Jane Jensen. I must add that the Gabriel Knight series are my favourite ones.

**SS:** If I had to choose between them both, of course I say Roberta Williams.

**- Former Lucasarts vs Former Sierra. Which company was the best in creating adventures in your opinion?**

**CB:** Again, another hard question. Sierra had more games, but not all the games were good. LucasArts, on the other hand, released one or two games a year, but you could rest assure they were going to be great games. They were both great companies, but I believe, in the

end, without explaining it too much, I would go with Sierra.

**SS:** Former Sierra. Currently, I would choose neither company.

**- The King's Quest IX team is probably the biggest team among independent developers. How did you manage to recruit so many members for your cause and how do you manage the processes within the team?**

**SS:** Thanks for quite recognition; it certainly means a lot to us! It is a lot of hard work, commitment, communication, skills, talent, strong will and a good team to work with. It is hard to work on something that consumes a lot of your time as well as not providing any income. We do have real life as well, work, college and many related, so it takes a strong will to know how to administrate your own time and be responsible about it. To commit to sit down and do it no matter how long/hard it takes but to get it done on time. To have your talent at our disposal to get though and to adapt to our concepts and rules. To have top communication and organizational skills to manage.

I can sincerely admit that we, directors, rarely get to "take a break" on this because we are truly committed on the development of each one of our departments, sided to the operational duties of each department we have as well administrative duties for each. For example each director has to evaluate though an interview their applicants previously selected (just like a real job), eventually they get a trial time and once they pass they get on the team.

As well as we as directors have duties with Phoenix as the creative group we are. We need to communicate among ourselves, and for example César is the one that should keep track not only of departments of also of the whole development. As well as Dean Pantelios (our other PR director) and myself the co-directive of the department, and because César as Project Director has the duty to guide not just his team but also a whole, and us as PR to know how to promote and be that link among the team and with third parties involved. We are always looking for talent, so I invite everyone to check out our Join page and see if you can be a part of our team as well.

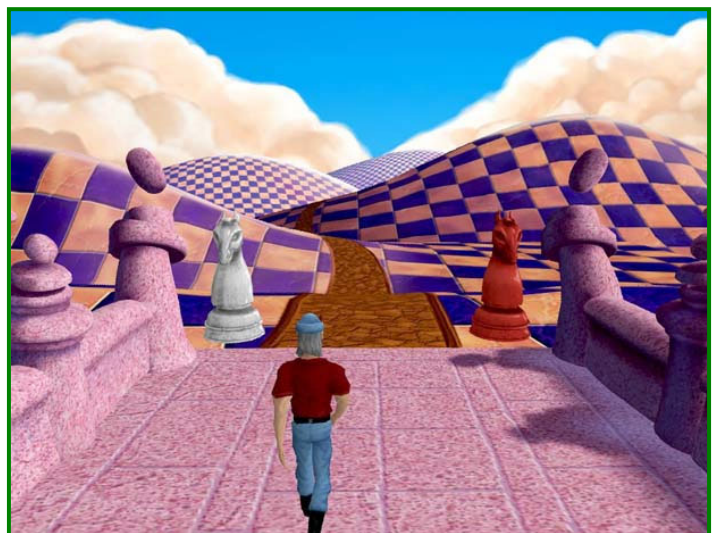
**CB:** It is very hard. If you get distracted, as a director, the team will disperse and no production will be made. You have to sometimes be on top of your team players. Communication is a big factor here and keeping some kind of organization. It has to come from directors, and

directors need to keep organized, otherwise it will be reflected on the rest of the team. It means basically, other than our daily responsibilities, we spend all of our free time working on this. Not everyone is willing to make this sacrifice. As to how we managed to recruit so many members... we receive a lot of applications to join our team. On occasions, people believe this is a paid project, but our PR team has done such a great publicity job that we get people applying to our team almost on an every day level. We can now choose who will be among our ranks, which is very different to how it used to work before, when we hired whoever sent an application.

**- What advice do you have to give to the rest of the adventure fans out there who want to achieve something similar to your project?**

**CB:** Keep it short!!! But, seriously –though what I just said is true-: Make sure, as a Project Director, that you are willing to sacrifice all of your free time into this project. Work with deadlines, and make sure you stay on top of your people. The job as a Project Director (and he/she and the other directors are the keys in not letting the project die out), is to keep the team organized, maintain the level of production, but most importantly, keeping your team members motivated, and to do this you need to be able to communicate with them, both collectively and individually.

I would also make sure the Project Director is not doing any other task. In my circumstances, writing the plot sometimes kept me from doing a good manager job (and it stills keeps me). I would recommend also, that you have the script completely done by the time you start a project like this. If you are willing to do all of these things, your team will run smoothly. On the times that I have dedicated only to manage, the production rate is impressive. Now I am adding the last touches to





the script so I can go back to that. The key here is in the directors of each department and how these directors keep the team members both informed and motivated about their jobs! If you are willing to do this, you will have plenty of fun on the way.

**SS:** A lot of commitment, open mindedness, communication, knowledge of your field and how to use/apply your knowledge to make your life easier and everyone's else to do something good in the right amount of time. Understand the responsibility and grace that is to be a team player. Connect and adapt yourself to a group, not be selfish as it leads to nowhere. You have to understand and be giving with those ones that work with you. Motivation on a large scale to believe in what you are doing and to whom you are doing it for. Organization and administration of resources and talent, without it you go nowhere. You need to understand and keep track of the things done and by whom, as well as to know who can do what and related. And most important of all, to keep on going till you get it done.

**- Do you have any more projects planned apart from King's Quest IX?**

**SS:** We have considered that of course, and there is something going on, but we can't publicly discuss about that yet.

**- Do you think that your future projects will be commercial ones?**

**SS:** I invite you to ask us in the near future about this.

**- The King's Quest series has had the biggest appeal to fan projects so far. What is it so special with this series that makes the fans create their own games in order to see it continue?**



**CB:** I believe the fact that it is such a huge world with so many possibilities, and without anything set on stone. It is difficult to carry on, say, the Gabriel Knight series because of the already complicated characters, but the King's Quest universe is so huge, that is, in a way, easier to delve into.

**- Recently you launched a new website. What kind of updates do you plan to feature in your new website and how do you plan to keep your fans up to date with the latest news around KQIX?**

**SS:** Dean and I had this project since last year, it was hard to manage to form a whole new strategy to approach and turn our fan game site into a professional site. It has given us direction and a lot of perspective (as well as great comments and even more fans). Everyone loves our new look, and our updates are quite obvious right now: we have a Newsletter (it is not the Four Winds, that's our fan fiction), we have KQ Flash Games created by my assistant in PR, Neil Rodrigues and myself which have prizes for the highest scores.

We have the KQ9 Contests to help the fans participate in the development with fresh ideas merged into the community, the Online Auditions, Art of the Week (the renewed Sketch of the Week) with weekly 3D art, scenarios, and other beautiful art. A journal where only directors and assistants post about real progress. We also have new look, new scheme, more promos, more fancy features in the Forum for our fans. We have many new amazing features coming each month, next month will be KQIX Haven and KQIX Chamber (everyone is invited to the Chamber opening specially you Dimitris) and there is a new contest coming as well.

We currently have dedicated weekly updates and monthly updates. On the weekly updates we have the Art of the Week, the Weekly Poll and many other





miscellaneous to update. On the monthly update we have features; usually we release around 2nd to 4th or such each month. For example one month we launched the Newsletter, the next the Games and so forth. Personally, I invite all the fans to join the community. We have a lot of great things already launched and we also have so much more to come, you can subscribe to the Newsletter to get all the news emailed to your inbox about monthly and weekly updates, as well as special news about us. Register in the Forum so you can participate in the Flash Games and win the special prizes. You can also participate in every single KQ9 Contest without subscription, and many goodies coming on the way.

**CB:** We have restructured the way we did PR, both inside and out the King's Quest IX site. We are not only creating a place for people to come in and look for information on the game, but we are also creating a community that grows with each day. An online portal, you may say, where the community role is not only that of a spectator, but also part of its development to some extend.

**- Your game was featured in a recent issue of Game Informer. What was the article about?**

**SS:** I must take a moment to thank Joe Juba for his amazing article. He dedicated 2 entire pages to us, with that amazing interview. He was very nice to have interest in us and we were very pleased to help him out with that part of the article. We were mentioned as "the most promising fan-made continuation to the King's Quest series to date", we are very proud and excited to be claimed as that in both The Inventory as well as GI so far. Thanks a lot for the great support and PR is always pleased to help out with magazine editors.

**CB:** It was about the state of today's adventure and how fans have taken action over the lack of these golden series sequels.

**- Do you know what is the circulation of Game Informer? Has the number of your website visitors increased since the release of that issue?**

**CB:** It is within the top computer games magazines in the United States, and yes, like I said, our community keeps growing by the day. We are soon becoming from just a "Fan-Game" to some sort of a Portal. I am not implying that the number one interest of the people is not the game itself, but for many of our fans, the King's Quest IX website has become a part of their life, and as long as we can continue giving them what makes them happy, we will.

**SS:** I can tell you a rough estimate of 8,000,000+ hits since January till now, and a range of around 32,000+ visitors. We have increased a lot in website movement, fan community, and in a large scale of course. That has been since November last year that we started to do the updates weekly and monthly. Ever since, it took off really high in January. And since our feature in last May's issue of The Inventory, we've had a massive amount of new members registering in the forums, resulting in a lot more visitors, and of course more hits.

**- Is there anything else you would like to add?**

**SS:** Thanks a lot to the Inventory for their constant support, thanks a lot to also all the fans that write about KQ9 and many of our own forum members to keep up the spirit and support. We have one of the nicest online communities thanks to everyone that respects us and support us one way or another.

I want to add please visit [www.kq9.org](http://www.kq9.org) for further info, as I said above we keep monthly updates (the Flash Game prizes, Journal, Newsletter, and surprise features) also weekly updates for our fans to discuss, get entertained and be part of the team. Subscribe to the Newsletter; join the fun and the forum community. We have a lot of great things for our fans and adventure gamers in general. For any special request you may visit our site or contact me directly at [saydmell.salazar@kq9.org](mailto:saydmell.salazar@kq9.org). Thank you for everything, we appreciate it.

**CB:** Thank you for the interview. The only thing I can add is for everybody out there to keep an eye on us. There are a lot of surprises coming in the near future, both regarding King's Quest IX: Every Cloak Has A Silver Lining, and other issues beyond this project.



# Interview with Chris Jones

*Commercial adventures disappoint more and more adventure gamers as time goes by. A lot of adventurers nowadays find comfort in adventures created by the genre's own fans. This has become possible thanks to some user friendly engines created especially for development of point and click adventure games. The most popular of these engines is AGS, created by Chris Jones.*

*This month we invited the creator of the AGS engine to come to our Lounge and give us his insight on the AGS community, and the future of his popular adventure engine. Let's turn to Chris now and see what he has to answer to our questions.*

## Yourself:

### - Tell us a bit about yourself.

Hi, my name's Chris. I live in the UK, I'm in my twenties and some of my special skills include listening to S Club 7 for longer than is healthy, trying to bring myself to go to the gym, and at this time of year, eating Creme Eggs.

### - It is rather obvious that you like adventure games. Could you tell us some of your favourites (commercial and non-commercial ones).

There have been loads of good adventures over the years. I have particularly fond memories of Space Quest 4, the Quest for Glory series (especially the first one), and also a couple of lesser known ones such as Bioforge. Bioforge was a very interesting game at the time because as I recall it was pioneering the use of 3D characters moving over pre-rendered 2D backgrounds, and managed it surprisingly well considering the hardware available at the time.

## AGS

### - Tell us how it all began. When did you start with AGS and what made you create an engine of your own?

It all started back in the mid 90's after I had re-played Space Quest 4 for the umpteenth time (I can't

remember why I loved that game so much – I mean, thinking back, it had its merits but it was hardly an award winner). Anyway, I'd played it through and thought to myself "I wish I could make a game like that". So, I took my paltry Turbo Basic skills and started on a game. I coded about two rooms, including lovely line-art 16-colour backgrounds, before I got fed up. I thought, "there has to be an easier way than coding all this by hand". And promptly got bored and played Command & Conquer.

But then, a couple of years later (this would be late 1996 by now) I returned to the idea with my freshly learnt C++ skills, and decided to try and make a program to help me make my game. So, Adventure Creator v1.00 was born. I then started using it to make a game (which later became Demo Quest) until I quickly realised I didn't have the art or story-telling skills necessary to make anything worthwhile. So it sat on my hard drive gathering dust.

Then, in mid-1997, I first got access to the internet. I thought it would be cool to have a website, so I set one up (on the now-defunct xoom.com) and uploaded Adventure Creator and a few other bits and pieces to it. To my surprise, I started to get a few e-mails about it; people seemed interested in using it for themselves. So I added a couple of features that people had requested ... and the rest is history.

### - What was the very first AGS game?

I'm pretty sure that the first 'full' game to be released was a game called Lassi Quest. It was quite bizarre, and I don't think it's still available for download anywhere

that I know of. However, it has since then obtained something of a cult status in the AGS community. ☺

**- Since that the AGS community has grown rapidly. Do you know how many AGS games have been created so far?**

I don't have an exact count; but the AGS Games website is currently listing over 330 games and I'm sure there are more that aren't listed. It's quite a tally ☺

**- And approximately how many visitors does your site have each month?**

Last month it had over 60000 unique visits (or 3.5 million raw hits). The monthly bandwidth has also just exceeded 20 GB for the first time.

**- The current version of AGS available for download from [www.agsforums.com](http://www.agsforums.com) is 2.6 SP1. Do you have a new version in the works and if yes what improvements will this version feature compared to the current version available?**

The next version, 2.61, is currently in development and a beta version is available on the AGS forums. After the 32-bit colour support added in 2.6, this version doesn't have many major new features – it mainly consists of refinements to existing features, minor new additions, and various bug fixes.

**- There are some other engines out there created specifically for point and click adventure games like AGAST and SLUDGE. Do you know what are the advantages and disadvantages of AGS compared to these other engines?**

I'm not well-versed enough in these other engines to a level where I could tell you what the advantages and disadvantages of each of them are. Generally, which engine is the best choice for someone will depend on the individual – how much they like coding vs IDE's, feature preferences, and so forth. It would be interesting to see an independently-written article by someone knowledgeable in all three, comparing and contrasting their abilities.

**- How easy is it to use AGS? What kind of programming knowledge must one have in order to create a game in AGS?**

AGS attempts to make life as easy as possible for the game maker – but it's no walk in the park. Scripting will be required to create anything but a very basic game; but if you have a logically-thinking mind, it's quite easy



to pick up. Some people have come to AGS with the expectation that creating a game is child's play, but that is definitely not the case – a lot of time and dedication is needed if you're to be successful.

**- What are the current limitations of AGS that you would like to see gone in the future?**

There aren't any major limitations that I can think of – but of course there are tons and tons of feature requests and refinements to be done. I think one of the things that is most requested is to improve AGS's built in area masks editor to allow zoom and transparency, for instance.

**- What is the future of the AGS engine? How far can it reach in terms of user friendliness?**

Well, there are always trade-offs between user-friendliness and customisability. When AGS was originally created it was with the aim of being as easy as possible to use – but at the price of a lot of functionality being hard-coded into the engine. This meant that if you wanted to create a stock Sierra-style game it was very easy indeed, but attempting to do anything else was nigh-on impossible. Since then I've tried to make it customisable while still maintaining the ease-of-use, but there are always things that could be done better. In other words, the "Make My Game" button is still some way off!

**- Do you think that the AGS engine will continue to be free of charge or do you plan to create a version sometime in the future that users will have to pay for?**

Funny you should ask – this year's April Fools joke on the forums was that I was making AGS into 30-day limited shareware. You'd be surprised at how many people fell for it, and how many people directly told me they would pirate it ;-)



Whether it'll ever happen in reality is another thing. Whilst I would never rule anything out, I have no plans to make it pay-for software. I have a full-time job which pays my bills, so I don't really need to start making money off AGS as well. Besides, I think the main thing that has allowed AGS to grow such a thriving community is that the software is free, so there are no restrictions on who can use it.

## AGS games

**- What are in your opinion the top five adventures created with AGS? Which one of them is the best and why?**

Hehe, oh no, I'm not getting involved! I hate to answer questions like this, because there's always one really good game that I forget to mention and then feel bad about afterwards.

**- Have you published games of your own in AGS or have you collaborated in some AGS games that have already been published? (If yes) Which where those?**

No, my only claim to fame is the original Demo Quest game, which used to come with AGS. I'm a firm believer in sticking with what you're good at – though I may make a game one day, just for a laugh. It would probably help me see the glaring problems with AGS that everyone else just puts up with 😊

**- In what ways do you think AGS adventures could improve in general?**

Considering that people are making these games in their own time and for free, I don't like to criticise. But if there's one thing that can really bring you out of a game, it's spelling mistakes – proofread your text, people 😊

**- We have seen one or two attempts to release AGS games as commercial products (like Fatman). Do you think it is possible that we will see companies in the near future turning into profitable businesses by selling AGS adventures?**

It would be interesting to see someone try. But let's be realistic – the market for adventure games seems to be in quite a poor state these days, so I wouldn't recommend that anybody give up their day job. However, if someone did decide to go for it by

releasing an excellent 2D adventure to the marketplace, it would be very interesting to see what happened.

**- In the AGS forums developers show their early work on the adventures they are developing. Do you keep an eye on upcoming AGS adventures? If so, which ones are you looking most forward to in the near future?**

There are several projects that are looking promising, and it'll be great to see how they turn out. Sometimes when you see a sample of the story and artwork, you can't wait to see it all in action in a real game 😊

## General

**- We have seen some new layout suggestions in the AGS forums for your website [www.agsforums.com](http://www.agsforums.com) Are you going to update the website soon? In that case could you describe to us some of the new features of the future website?**

Again, funny you should ask – the new design was uploaded today, courtesy of Darth Mandarb, one of the forum members. It definitely looks more professional than the previous design, and I hope you guys enjoy it.

**- The AGS engine make it easy for developers to incorporate the interfaces used by the old Sierra and Lucasarts games. In your opinion which company created the best adventures in the 80s / early 90s?**

I was a Sierra boy, born and bred - in fact, I didn't even play Monkey Island until 1996. I think it shows in the way AGS was developed ;-). As for which games were actually better – well, both companies produced some great games. Sierra probably has the dubious honour of producing more absolute stinkers of games, but then they did make a greater number overall, so let's say they're even.

**- A lot of fan made adventures are unofficial sequels, prequels or remakes of well-known titles like King's Quest, Indiana Jones and Space Quest without consent from the copyright holders, something that has been a controversial issue among the adventure communities for quite a while now. What is your opinion on the issue. Should developers continue the legacies that Sierra and Lucasarts 'killed' or should they forget about their old loves and try to come up with new projects instead?**

Making a remake or sequel is a great way to start out in game-making. Because the story and characters are already there for you, you can just concentrate on actually making the game, and see how good you are at doing so. In fact, many remakes have started out this way. You don't even have to release it to the world if it doesn't turn out well – just use it as practice.

Once game developers are skilled though, I do think it's a shame to continue remaking games rather than coming up with their own concepts. AGDI struck a good balance with King's Quest II+ VGA, using the original game as a base but enhancing it in many ways, and almost re-writing the story.

Aside from this, when done well, remakes are a gift to those of us who can no longer run the original games on our computer, or who find the text parsers immensely frustrating. AGS forums member redruM has recently finished a point-and-click remake of Leisure Suit Larry 2, and Timosity is currently working on LSL3. Coupled with the AGDI remakes of KQ1 and 2 (and soon to be QFG2), this is giving people an enormous amount of freedom to re-visit their classic games.

**- Point and click vs direct control. Which one is in your opinion the most suitable interface for adventure games?**

Personally I'm a believer in point-and-click, because it has always been the conventional way. However, I'm sure that opinion would change if I played a game where direct control was really done well. I'm sure it's possible to suit it to adventure games, it's just a matter of finding the right way.

**- After being the 'father' of the AGS adventure scene for over 9 years now, what is the most important advice you have to give to all the**



**adventure developer wannabes out there?**

Blimey, has it been 9 years? Well, I guess it's 6 years at any rate ... I feel old. As for the magic words of wisdom, they'd have to be "start slow". Don't rush in expecting to create the next Monkey Island on your first attempt. Make a small game to test the engine's, and your own, abilities – and to give yourself confidence that you can achieve your big project when the time comes.

**- Commercial adventures nowadays seem to disappoint the fans and there is a certain 'magic' missing, a special kind of magic that adventures of the 80s and early 90s used to have. A lot of adventure fans seem to agree that nowadays companies seem to focus too much on 'spectacle' and too little on gameplay and story. What is your opinion on that? What do you think is it that is missing from recent adventure games?**

I must admit I haven't played many of the recent commercial adventure games, but story and character development are definitely essential parts of adventure games that can get forgotten by the big companies. I'm a believer that puzzles should never stand as an obstacle in your way, but rather just as a means of progressing the story. The best adventures are ones where we really want to know, and care, about what happens next.

**- Do you think that the adventures created by the AGS community can bring back the classic entertainment that fans used to get some years ago?**

Certainly – whilst many AGS games don't have outstanding graphics or audio, entertainment is something that they do have by the bucket-load. Take Larry Vales, for instance – to be honest, it had pretty shoddy graphics and it didn't even have any sound, yet it's a classic simply because it is a fun game to play. And, at the end of the day, isn't that what gaming is all about?

**- Is there anything else you would like to add?**

Thanks to you guys at The Inventory for giving us a great read over the months – keep up the good work. Thanks to everyone at the AGS Forums – its been over 4 years now and we still haven't had a massacre. If anyone happens to stop by, be sure to console AGA that it really is ok to be Welsh. :-P

# CIRQUE DE ZALE

Rebecca Clements. Keep this name in mind. She is the developer of one of the best adventures made with the AGS engine. Our choice for review of the month will probably be a bit controversial, since this very same month we review Syberia 2 as well, but after having played both, Cirque De Zale (and actually many more fan-made adventures) are way much more entertaining than the dull sequel of Microïds.

But what does this little Cirque De Zale adventure have so much to offer, coming out of nowhere to steal Syberia 2's position as review of the month? It is a point and click 3<sup>rd</sup> person adventure that has a funny story, unique characters and an entertaining gameplay. Let's see each part of the game under close scrutiny.

**Story:** You are Alexander Zale. Occupation: The circus poop boy. Never seen that before in a CV? Well you see it now in Cirque De Zale. One day when Alexander does his work and cleans the elephant pooh out of the circus, he decides that he's cleaned way too much crap in his life and he has had enough of being slapped around by his ringmaster, Astoundo. He therefore decides to pull a prank on his ringmaster and fills his magic hat with elephant crap. Astoundo gets humiliated in front of his audience and in return he sends Alexander to another dimension using magic.

Alexander now finds himself in the middle of a quite weird town, and decides to head for the palace where he finds the king of this land. The... double-headed king tells Alexander about how according to an old prophecy, he is the one person that has been chosen to save this land from the tyrant who has kidnapped the king's daughter. Alexander of course doesn't give a rat's ass about prophecies and kingdoms. All this guy wants is to be the ringmaster of his own circus. Therefore he ignores the king's requests and starts looking for a circus ... to steal and circus employees to recruit.

Fortunately for him this dimension is full of people who could work in a circus.

On his unusual quest, Alexander, will meet a whole bunch of unique and funny characters. The humor of the game is its no 1 strength. It is quite mean-spirited, so if you have a problem with this sort of humor, it might not be your cup of tea. If you do not mind some strong language here and there however, then this game is going to keep you laughing until the very end. It also contains the best knock-knock joke I've ever heard – and which is also making its way around my university campus as we speak. But don't expect me to tell it to you over here, play the game and get to read it over there. Generally speaking, the dialogues of the game are top-notch.

Some of the unusual characters Alexander gets to meet, include some... hanging children, an impolite fisherman, some cricket players, a lousy comedian, a blind xylophone tuner, a giant bird and Welk among others. Who's Welk you ask? A gullible creature that you'll have to meet, trick and fool in order to complete your mission. Alexander himself is obnoxious, mean-spirited, arrogant and cares only for himself but hey, if you worked as a poop boy I'd bet you wouldn't be



The double headed king





You'll have to get rid of those guys

much better yourself now, would you? The length of the game is also satisfactory. It took me roughly speaking 3 to 4 hours to finish it. I was disappointed when the game was finished, not because it was really short, but because it was really fun to play and I craved for more.

**Graphics:** Well if you've played Monkey Island 1 or 2, you get the idea. The characters look excellent and if you are a pixel-fan who longs for Sierra/Lucasarts kind of games like myself you'll feel right at home with this one. The backgrounds range from great looking to they could have been given a bit more detail here and there.

I think that Cirque De Zale is the closest any adventure made with AGS has reached to the original games of the former Lucasarts – with the possible exception of Indiana Jones Fountain of Youth, but this one is not ready yet. Rebecca Clements also went the extra mile and designed a new image for the GUI of the game, based on the Lucasarts interface but adapted for the theme of Cirque De Zale.

**Sound:** Probably the only part where the game feels incomplete is its audio. The game has only a few music

tracks here and there, and these of course are not the best you've ever heard, but taking into consideration that this whole game was made by one woman alone and that it is being distributed for free, it feels even unnecessary to complain. There is no speech throughout the game, but from the choices poor voice acting and no voice acting at all, the no voice acting at all is definitely the way to go.

**Gameplay:** The gameplay and the story is where Cirque De Zale (excuse our language) kicks ass. Especially after completing the move-these-levers-around-with-no-clues-whatsoever-Syberia 2, Cirque De Zale felt like an oasis among the desert. It seems like all the money you are paying for when you buy a commercial adventure game, goes to the graphics artists and the musicians behind a game. But this little complaint of mine apart, let's go back to Cirque De Zale.

First of all the tasks of the game are logical (within the context of the story) and also very fun to complete. You always know what you have to do next since the goals of the main character are always clear from what he says himself.

The non playable characters will mostly need a favour from you in order to give you something back or join your circus and if you forget what each character wanted you can always go back and ask them again. Overall, the feedback that the player receives from the game is always adequate and the player usually does not have to resort to trial and error or guessing.

But even if you get stuck at some point there is so much different fun actions to try that you never get bored by playing it. The pace of gameplay becomes therefore very smooth and you won't find yourself stuck looking at a still picture. The interface of the game is the well-known and successful interface used in the older Lucasarts games. Rebecca Clements also made



What an unbearable conversationist



Not the best audience ever



These children could come in handy

sure to use the right mouse button for default choice of command, something that sometimes AGS developers don't pay much attention to. Although it is a small detail, it makes the game much more comfortable to play. You can save and load games by pressing the F5 key from your keyboard. You are offered 99 save game slots which should be more than enough and this large save slot availability is definitely more than welcome, especially for those who like to replay certain parts of their favourite adventure games.

**General Info:** The game is available as a free download from <http://www.anime.com.au/Katt/misc/cirque.zip>. It is a pity that it is available for free if you want my personal opinion because it is certainly much more entertaining than other adventure titles available for purchase in your local stores.

I encountered two minor bugs while playing the game. The first one is that if you try to press escape or F5 during the very beginning of the second part of the introduction (just when Alexander is transported to the other dimension) the game crushes. The second one occurs in a couple of locations when you try to enter a door, Alexander will walk to the center of the room



Alexander will face some difficult situations as well

instead - but he will still enter the next room, so in essence none of them is a big deal and none of them detract from the overall experience.

**In a few words...** Since the King's Quest 2 remake this is the most entertaining adventure (and I include both commercial and non-commercial adventures) I have played. It is a must play for Monkey Island fans and fans of Lucasarts adventures in general.

I hope and wish that Rebecca Clements plans to release more adventures in the near future, whether they are sequels to Cirque De Zale or totally new adventures. She has the knowledge and expertise of story-telling and game design that many developers lack nowadays.

The only advice we could give to Rebecca is maybe a bit more detail to the backgrounds and we hope that some people with music and voice acting talents could support this woman's fantastic talent in game development. Other than that, we hope that she will keep up the excellent work.

- Dimitris Manos

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Information</h2> <p><b>Title:</b> Cirque De Zale  <b>Developer:</b> Rebecca Clements  <b>Category:</b> Point and Click  <b>Perspective:</b> 3rd Person  <b>Difficulty:</b> Easy  <b>Site:</b>  <a href="http://www.anime.com.au/Katt/misc/cirque.zip">http://www.anime.com.au/Katt/misc/cirque.zip</a>  <b>Sys Req:</b> Windows, VGA Screen</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Verdict</h2> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td><b>Story:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">95</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Graphics:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">88</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Sound:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">45</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Gameplay:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">93</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>OVERALL:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; border: 2px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px;">85</td> </tr> </table> <p><small>* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6</small></p>	<b>Story:</b>	95	<b>Graphics:</b>	88	<b>Sound:</b>	45	<b>Gameplay:</b>	93	<b>OVERALL:</b>	85
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Have you ever heard of The Matrix Syndrome? According to this syndrome each sequel on a series of movies is considerably worse than its predecessor. Until some years ago this did not account for adventures, since the advancements in technology offered new tools for developers to work with and new ways to tell stories. Unfortunately this changed when we got King's Quest 7 & 8, Monkey Island 4, Broken Sword 2, 3 and Simon the Sorcerer 3D. I am afraid to say that Syberia also falls in the same category of sequels that are considerably worse than their predecessors. Not for the same reasons as KQ8 or MI4 but still a great disappointment that strayed off totally from the original idea of Syberia 1.

**A little recap:** Syberia 1 was the first adventure we reviewed in The Inventory. It featured Kate Walker, a lawyer from New York, who embarked on a journey to Europe with the intention of signing a deal that would pass the rights of a toy factory from a French woman called Anna Voralberg to a big conglomerate. Things didn't turn out to be that simple however as Anna Voralberg passed away prior to Kate's arrival in Valadilene, the French village where Anna lived. Syberia 1 was revolutionary in many ways, since it switched the focus from puzzle solving to story telling. Characters were in focus while the puzzles were intertwined with the plot and were there to advance the story and not to hinder it.

Combined with some excellent marketing, this style of game design made Syberia 1 the most popular adventure of the last 4,5 years along with The Longest Journey, selling almost 500,000 copies (source: Whitebirds Productions interview in The Inventory 13). It even managed to draw a new breed of adventure gamers, since its logical tasks made it accessible for people who do not enjoy spending 2 or 3 hours trying to figure out what a bunch of levers do.

Was it perfect? Certainly not. Syberia received its share of criticism, some of it completely justified in my opinion and some of it unjustified. Examples of justified criticism would be that there were too many empty screens where there was nothing to interact with. The game was too short. Kate was just walking for big parts of the game. It took a lot of time to walk from one place to the other and she was also very 'quiet', meaning that she did not make any comments during important events of the game.

Then there was also a lot of unjustified criticism as that it was too easy. Since when are adventures supposed to be hard to finish? I was not aware of such a 'rule' anyway. Another example of unjustified criticism was that there was no real 'villain' and that no story is interesting if there is no 'bad guy'. Unfortunately some people face difficulties to realise that there are other sorts of interesting and actually more complicated and by far more original stories than the ones where the hero has to beat Darth Vader and save the galaxy. Alas the developers appeared to take into account all the unjustified criticism made to Syberia 1 and ignored completely the justified one. But I will come back to that later on. Let's get back to the facts pertaining Syberia 2's release.



Kate and Hans on their way to Syberia





Kate 'Trinity' Walker

Microïds announced that they were working on a sequel short after the release of Syberia 1, making its fans glad that they would see Kate continuing her journey. Screenshots and interviews that were made public increased the hype around the sequel even more, as the production values of the game seemed to have been raised a notch or two. Unfortunately I have to say that Syberia 2 did not live up to the expectations. Let's see why.

**Story:** Syberia 2 starts where its predecessor left off. Therefore if you have not played the first one yet, most of the details you are about to read might be considered as spoilers, so proceed with caution. Kate, Hans and Oscar are on the train heading to Syberia. The train stops in the train station of Romansburg, a little Russian town. They have to wind up the train in order to proceed. When Kate does that however, the train does not move at all. It seems that our trio has run out of coal, and Kate will have to find a way to get them moving again.

The problem with Syberia 2's story is that the developers apparently in an attempt to please everybody made a mess of a story, especially after the middle part



Kate 'Indiana Jones' Walker



Kate 'E.T.' Walker

of the game. The first Syberia had a cult plot, full of offbeat characters, sophisticated symbolisms and intricate personality development for the main heroine. The second Syberia has none of that and instead is a mix of failed attempts for an action-packed scenario.

**\*Spoilers\*** You will see Kate (a lawyer, who in the first part did not have the strength to lift a rowing paddle for crying out loud) using a rope to hang from one side of a roughly 10 meter wide chasm to the other one, climbing a wall of ice, and running down a snowy slope inside a coffin and conveniently following the path just between all obstacles that would bring her and Hans to death

**\*End of Spoilers\*** They might as well have included a sticker on the box saying 'suitable for fans of movies like The Fast and the Furious, James Bond or Charlie's Angels'. Why alter the sequel's storytelling style for the sake of a demographic that will never be interested in adventure games (and I personally hope that they never will) is beyond me.

Apart from that, the developers appeared to have taken into account the unjustified criticism regarding the absence of a 'villain/bad guy', and decided to add 4 or 5 of them in the story. **\*Spoilers\*** One of them is a



Kate 'Spiderman' Walker



**The Youki follows you almost everywhere**

detective sent by Marson, Kate's employer, to find Kate and bring her back to New York. Apart from the fact that this is just totally illogical - considering the expenses that Marson would have to pay to send out a detective all the way to Russia without even being remotely sure where Kate is or if she wants to come back - it also feels so tacked on it seems like a waste of production time and money. It has nothing to do with Kate's story and it does not affect it in any way. The detective never makes it to Kate and therefore the time and cost spent for the numerous cutscenes featuring Marson and the detective could have been used to cover some of the many plot holes the game left with its ending **\*End of Spoilers\***

Furthermore the story this time is much shorter than the first game's? Is the game going to take you less time to finish? Certainly not. Especially if you play without a walkthrough. But this is not caused by a lengthier story but by some illogical, obscure and dull to say the least puzzles, which we are going to talk about later on. The storyline itself is much shorter. The number of characters this time around is much smaller than the first game. Dialogues are shorter, and there are less things to do. Storytelling this time around seems to be left out of focus, especially after the first two parts of the game, and Syberia 2 ends up being a puzzle-marathon with some cutscenes thrown in here and there.

The ending itself was also a bit disappointing and left a lot of questions raised during Syberia 1 unanswered. Was there anything positive with the story of Syberia 2? Well the beginning of the story was excellent and in par with the story of Syberia 1. There were some very interesting characters to meet and interact with. Even the puzzles were better intertwined in the story at that point. You got to meet some interesting characters as Malka a little gypsy girl who will be of help a couple of

times, the Russian storekeeper who is also going to help Kate, and a couple of mysterious Monks. This is also when you will first get to meet Youki, a strange sort of animal that will follow Kate everywhere she goes. The fact that there is less reading documents this time around is also quite positive.

To sum up though, Syberia 2 seems like a game without a soul. The attempt to 'force' action-oriented events in the storyline feels out of place. The storytelling in Syberia 2 comes as a big disappointment compared to the first game.

**Graphics:** The graphics of the game are phenomenal and I don't think it can get much better when it comes to 2D backgrounds. There is a lot of animation during the game. Snow falls, birds and animals pass around, non-interactive characters move minding their own business etc. The 3D models are crisp clear, and you can forget about blockiness or polygons. The camera angles are also very well handled and it was a nice surprise to see different camera angles during conversations, since it made the game look more cinematic.

Cutscenes are numerous and they have nothing to be jealous of 3D movies created for the big screen. The direction is amazing and each scene appears to have been perfected to the very last detail. It is a pity that such beautiful graphics have to adorn a lousy story and flawed game design.

**Sound:** The sound of the game is also satisfactory. The music is composed professionally, although I personally enjoyed more listening to the tunes from Syberia 1 rather than the tunes from Syberia 2. While in the first part, the music was rather sad and melancholic, suiting the atmosphere of the game, the tunes heard in the



**Malka, one of the few interesting characters**



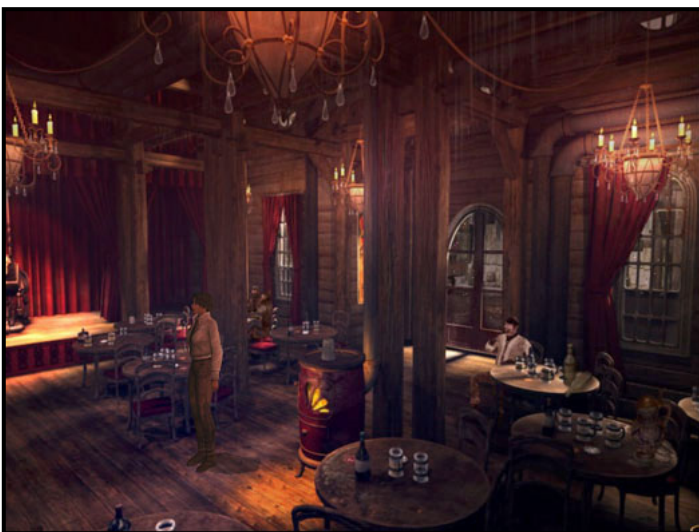


Characters blend in perfectly in the 2D backgrounds

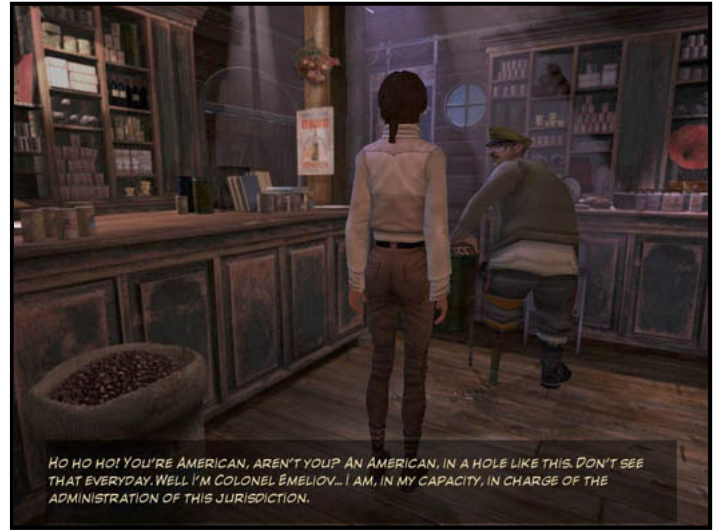
second one sound more like tunes you would listen in a fairy-tale. Even if I personally think that the music of the first game captures the story of Syberia better, the music of the game is nevertheless of high-standards and there is a slightly larger variety of tunes this time around.

Voice acting is also professionally performed. The voices of Kate, Hans and Oscar are performed by the same actors that portrayed those characters in the first instalment and their performances are again excellent. Some new characters in the game are also well suited for their characters. The actor who portrayed Igor, the slow-thinking brute, gave a memorable performance.

**Gameplay:** Microids had mentioned numerous times in previous interviews on adventure and non-adventure press that their intention with Syberia 1 was not to create something like Schizm that most people never even got to complete due to its illogical puzzles. The developers now seem to have taken a 180° turn from



A cozy pub in the Romansburg village



The storekeeper of the Russian city Romansburg

the philosophy behind the gameplay of the first game. Although the puzzles are not as illogical and obscure as the ones from Schizm, they are still quite horrendous in many terms.

First of all, somebody has to tell the developers that there are other puzzles than mechanical ones. The second half of the game is filled with mechanical puzzles. Apart from the fact that it is quite illogical, **\*Spoilers\*** since Hans who apparently was the creator of the automaton technology had not reached Syberia before **\*End of Spoilers\***, it becomes repetitive and dull and shows that the level of creativity behind Syberia 2 was not that high.

Presenting the player with gadgets and machines that have 10 buttons or 5,6 levers and requiring from them to figure out what they are supposed to do with minimal to non-existent feedback will certainly increase the playing time but it will also certainly decrease the overall entertainment level of the game. And the entertainment level of Syberia 2 during the second half of the game hits ground zero.

**\*Spoilers\*** A shining example that shows how obvious the attempt of the developers was to 'force' mechanical obscure puzzles into the game's design was the part when Kate has to wake up Boris. Boris, the cosmonaut from Syberia 1 arrives at some point – something that felt totally out of place by the way – in Kate's path to Syberia and has an accident with his aeroplane. As he ejected himself he gets hung from some trees and he falls asleep. Kate tries to call him but he won't wake up cause he has his headphones on. Now the obvious and logical thing to do, would be to grab a snowball – if not something else – and throw it at him to wake him up. But no, the developers thought that the player should first enter Boris' cockpit, make the aeroplane controls





Kate in her first outfit during the game

work again by randomly turning 10 to 15 switches until the right combination is found to show which frequency his radio works on, so that they can go to a radio station – which is conveniently located only some metres away from the spot he landed, oh the level of realism intrigued me more and more...d’oh – and send him a message through the radio!!!! **\*End of Spoilers\*** Puzzles like this make me wonder sometimes if the genre really deserves being called ‘dead’ after all and being a niche market.

What makes things even worse is that in order to solve some of these mechanical puzzles you are required to go back and forth to distant locations, and if you were tired of empty screens in Syberia 1, things in Syberia 2 are even worse. Unfortunately Microids seem to have ignored paying attention to the justified criticism of Syberia 1 as empty screens, Kate’s silence and low number of hotspots make their appearance in a much larger degree in Syberia 2. Especially the Youkol village has all the above flaws in extreme occurrences. Add to that a case of insane pixel-hunting during that part and you’ve got yourselves a nice excuse to look for a

walkthrough on the net and relieve yourselves from some wasted hours.

The interface has been slightly modified. The ‘exit’ cursors now have an arrow showing where each exit leads to. During dialogues, options disappear after you talk about them once, so you do not have the chance to ask about the same topic twice, unless you learn something new about it in the meanwhile. Kate seems slightly better responsive now to your mouse-clicks than in the first game. A nice addition is that the player gets to choose if they want to play using the mouse or the keyboard. I was always a fan of mouse control in adventures, but giving an option to players is always the way to go, since different gamers have different preferences.

**General Info:** No bugs encountered during the game. A nice addition is a recap video of Syberia 1, which will accustom new players with the first instalment of the series and will remind the old ones of the events that took place.

**In a few words...** One of the biggest disappointments in the adventure games history. In all fairness, it is a descent game to play, especially for its visual and audio spectacles but considering what a masterpiece no 1 was, one cannot be anything but disappointed.

Microids took the adventure genre by the hand and made it walk again with Syberia 1. With Syberia 2 they let the genre walk a bit and then they shot it on the leg. Microids and a lot of other developers out there should stop focusing on spectacle and remember that no matter how good a game looks and sounds, if there is not a good story and gameplay to back it up, it will always be a disappointment to the adventure fans.

- Dimitris Manos

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Information</h2> <p><b>Title:</b> Syberia II  <b>Developer:</b> Microids  <b>Category:</b> Point and Click  <b>Perspective:</b> 3rd Person  <b>Difficulty:</b> Medium / Hard  <b>Site:</b> <a href="http://www.syberia2.info">http://www.syberia2.info</a></p> <p><b>Sys Req:</b> Win 98/XP/2000/ME, Pentium II 350MHz, 16 Mb Direct 3D Video, 64Mb RAM, 16x CDROM, DirectX 7 Sound</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Verdict</h2> <table style="width: 100%;"> <tr> <td><b>Story:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">58</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Graphics:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">98</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Sound:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">96</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>Gameplay:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right;">46</td> </tr> <tr> <td><b>OVERALL:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; border: 2px solid blue; border-radius: 50%; padding: 5px;">67</td> </tr> </table> <p><small>* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6</small></p>	<b>Story:</b>	58	<b>Graphics:</b>	98	<b>Sound:</b>	96	<b>Gameplay:</b>	46	<b>OVERALL:</b>	67
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# Sofia's Debt

The proliferation of adventure game engines, which require minimal programming skills, have enabled many would-be adventure game writers to produce some excellent games, some very bad games and one particular game called “Sofia’s Debt”, which defies any sort of logical description. I can understand the author of this game wanting his family and friends to play it, but I cannot understand why he would he want to release it into the public domain?

**Story:** The premise of this story, which is revealed in an opening screen of block type, is, initially, quite intriguing, if perhaps a little hysterical. You are Ana, eight months pregnant and soon to become a single mother. No problem there. The adventure game world is dominated by female heroines, although none of them appear to have the depth of problems facing poor Ana. She has to care for herself because her father died recently – oh, and her grandmother and mother killed themselves at some unspecified time in the past. Is this a Greek tragedy about to unfold in front of your very eyes? Well, not quite.

The opening screen dissolves and you find yourself in Ana’s apartment which appears to consist of a single



One of the beautiful paintings

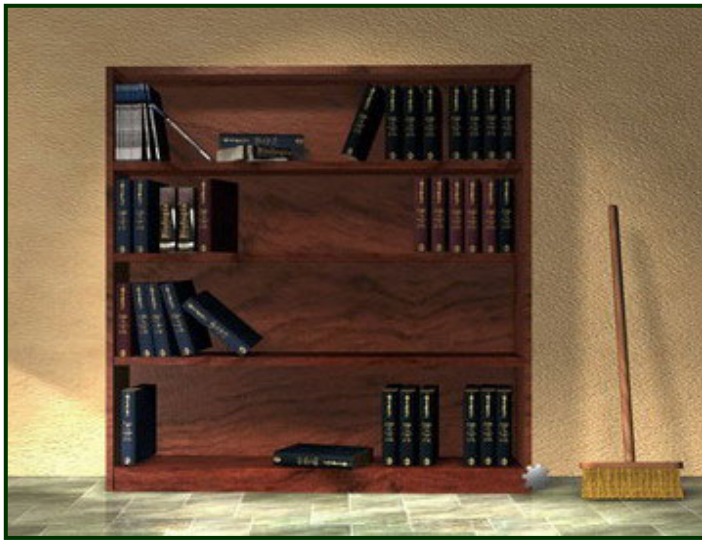
room. In one corner is a table containing a framed photograph, a key, a mobile phone, a watch, a bottle of water and a glass. At this point it may occur to you to wonder what the objective of this adventure might possibly be, as there is no obvious indication where this game is leading.

But, no matter, as all seasoned adventurers know, if in doubt, interact with your surroundings. So, pick up the mobile phone and you are given a list of people you can call. Now we’re getting somewhere. Cross off the pizza house and the work number because Ana doesn’t want to call them, which begs the question, “Why are they on the list then?”

After holding conversations with several of Ana’s “friends”, who are singularly unhelpful, if not downright rude, you put the phone down and realise that Ana is even more alone than she first thought – but, more to the point, you still have absolutely no idea what you are supposed to be doing. There is a key on the table, and there is a door on the other side of the room, but no matter how hard you try, you cannot pick up the key at this moment – presumably it is glued to the table. There is another item on the table which you can pick up and use – but I’m not going to tell you what it is. It shouldn’t take you long to work this puzzle out (which is actually the only puzzle in the game, yes, the ONLY puzzle!) as there are only two items on the table that will interact with each other.

To the left of the table is a stereo system with three CD’s lying beside it. And it is at this point that we stumble upon subliminal suggestion. The first CD is “Les Miserables” which suggests Ana’s miserable existence. Then we have “Miss Saigon” – is Ana about to find herself in a conflict? I hope so because nothing much has happened up to now. The final CD is “Phantom of the Opera” which suggests a supernatural element to this story. Each CD will play a short snippet from the musicals in question, but, unfortunately, and





A library

for obvious copyright reasons, it really is only short snippets.

There is also a bookcase in the room. Although you can't interact with any of the books they do give a good indication of Ana's literary tastes and background education. The only other items available in the room is the birch broom, which is used in the first puzzle, a rocking chair, also connected to the first puzzle, and some very nice art works, one of which conceals the secret of Sofia's debt.

Eventually you will find Sofia's diary hidden somewhere in the room (Sofia being Ana's Grandma) which has a series of entries detailing her life. And that, unfortunately, is that. All the background material, phoning friends, reading along the bookshelf, staring at the art work, wondering where this is all leading, in fact, everything you have done up to this point now becomes completely meaningless and irrelevant. Read the diary, get the key (which has magically unglued itself from the table) answer the knocking on the door, step outside – and the game is finished, over, kaput.

The diary is the core of this "game" but it is just pretentious nonsense which makes no logical sense if you really try to work it all out (If Sofia gave birth to a boy and killed herself then Ana's mother must have married into the family, so why did she suffer from the congenital schizophrenia affecting the rest of the family?) – but my advice is, don't bother, it's not worth the effort. The most unfortunate part about "Sofia's Debt" is that there really is a germ of a story here, and had it been properly developed, it could have been very interesting indeed.

**Graphics:** The game is played in the 1<sup>st</sup> person, with full screen 1024 x 768 hi-resolution, photo-realistic

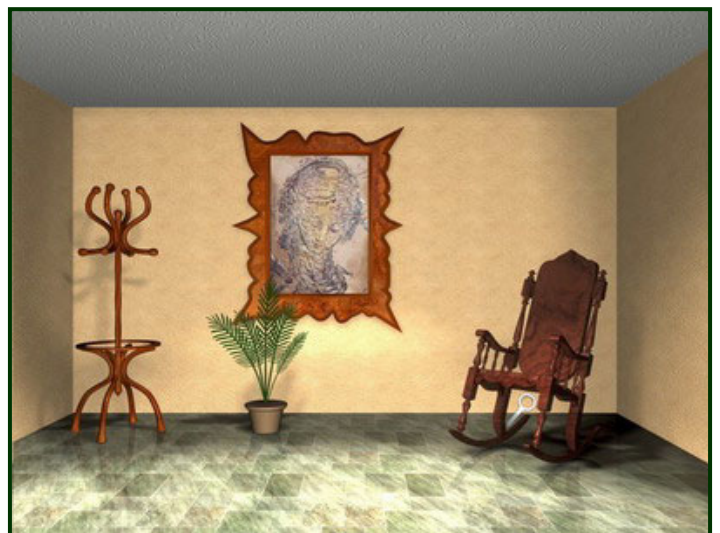


Another painting

renderings, which are, I have to say, very impressive. There are a couple of famous Salvador Dali paintings on the walls which are rendered so well that you can, if you feel so inclined, stand back and admire them. In fact, every item in the room is well presented, which makes it even more frustrating that most of them cannot be manipulated. If the author of this game could match the quality of the graphics to a story with more game play and depth he would have something very special on his hands.

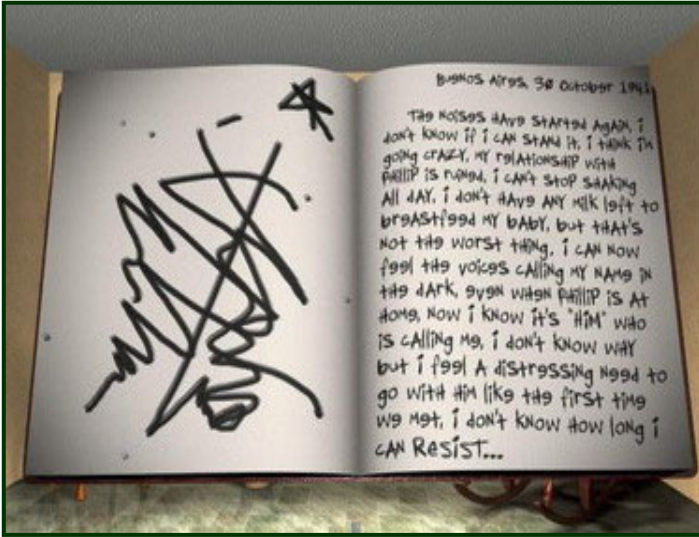
**Sound:** Like the graphics, the sound in this game is very well done. I was particularly impressed that the music provided more than just an audio backdrop. For instance, when reading Sofia's diary the tone of the music changes to indicate something of particular interest contained within a written passage. Excellent.

Apart from the background music, which contains some wonderful classical cello and piano pieces, the music also indicates which painting is holding a secret



...and another painting





Some scribbles in a book

by becoming more dramatic as you approach it. Some commercial games would benefit from using music to more imaginative effect. So, well done to “Sofia’s Debt” for showing some of the big boys how music should be used to enhance a game.

**Gameplay:** “Sofia’s debt” has a simple, but effective, interface which works very well. A flashing arrow indicates which way you can move, right click to bring up the inventory, left click to use items. Pressing ESC or F1 brings up “Save”, “Load”, and “Quit”.

This game was translated from Spanish into English, but unfortunately, some of the dialogue is very poorly translated. For instance, I have absolutely no idea what the phrase “The final result could be unstable, I prefer not.” means, but it crops up with unfailing regularity. Another phrase that appears repeatedly is, “It could be that four you that’s inspired, but I find it nonsense.” When you see that pop up for the forty-seventh time it is hard to suppress a scream.

There really is no game play to talk about. Solve the single puzzle, get the diary, read the diary, game over. The game world consists of a single room with four walls within which you spin around through 360 degrees – and that’s it, one room.

**General Info:** I played through this game in under 15 minutes and found it incredibly frustrating. This was mainly because the initial story premise appeared to offer a deep insight into various aspects of a life lived under duress, loss of parents, pregnancy, a single mother coping with harsh realities, and yet sadly, it delivered none of these things.

This game was written using the Wintermute engine, and as a demo would be acceptable to promote what this particular game engine is capable of producing. However, “Sofia’s Debt” was released into the public domain as a complete and full adventure game, which it patently is not.

**In a few words...** Despite the good graphics and music I cannot recommend downloading “Sofia’s Debt”. It is grossly under developed, lacking in gameplay and frustrating to play – not to mention completely illogical in parts. There are so many excellent independent games available for download nobody need play through bad games. However, if you have Broadband which will download 9mbs in a couple of minutes then you can find “Sofia’s Debt” at

<http://www.justadventure.com/IndependentDevs/SofiasDebt/SofiasDebt.shtm>

- Rob Hamilton  
(xaedac@aol.com)

Information	The Verdict
<b>Title:</b> Sofia's Debt	<b>Story:</b> 10
<b>Developer:</b> Santiago de Matos Lima	<b>Graphics:</b> 70
<b>Category:</b> Point and Click	<b>Sound:</b> 70
<b>Perspective:</b> 1st Person	<b>Gameplay:</b> 10
<b>Difficulty:</b> Easy	<b>OVERALL:</b> 30
<b>Site:</b>	$\text{Overall} = (2 \times \text{Story} + 2 \times \text{Gameplay} + \text{Graphics} + \text{Sound}) / 6$
<a href="http://www.justadventure.com/IndependentDevs/SofiasDebt/SofiasDebt.shtm">http://www.justadventure.com/IndependentDevs/SofiasDebt/SofiasDebt.shtm</a>	
<b>Sys Req:</b> Windows	

# FLIGHT OF THE AMAZON Queen

“Flight of the Amazon Queen”, originally released in 1995 by Australian software company Interactive Binary Illusions, was a brave attempt to take on software giant LucasArt, who were, at that time, producing such classic adventures as “Monkey Island” and “Indiana Jones”. Unfortunately, “Amazon Queen” could not easily be made to run on Pentium computers and lapsed into obscurity.

Copies of the game could be picked up relatively cheaply on eBay, but if you wanted to play it you needed to tweak your computer to within an inch of its life, and even then there was no guarantee it would run. Now, thanks to the guys at ScummVM, “Amazon Queen” is available as freeware and can be played, without any problems, on their ScummVM interpreter.

**Story.** “Flight of the Amazon Queen” has been described as “an irreverent pastiche of the adventure serials popular during the 1940’s” and I would certainly not disagree with that description. The game opens with a lengthy cut scene in an abandoned Buenos Aires warehouse at 11:58 and 36 seconds; the ticking alarm clock sitting atop a bundle of dynamite is set to detonate at midnight. The opening cut scene introduces the characters and cleverly foreshadows the dramatic



The 24 hour general store of Trader Bob

events which are about to unfold.

It is 1949 and you take on the role of Joe King, a jobbing cargo pilot. The first thing you notice about Joe is not only his accent, he sounds as though he has just vacated a downtown Brooklyn bar, but also his depreciating sense of humour. Although he’s tied to a post, the girl he’s with, Rita, also tied to a post, gloomily suggests that, “Not much we can do now, Joe.”, to which Joe optimistically replies, “Well, Rita, how about one for the road?” And I don’t think he’s talking about a Bourbon and soda!

In traditional “b” movie style, with one bound, and not a little help from Sparky, Joe’s mechanic, they escape in the nick of time, and move swiftly into the main body of the story. Joe remembers he has to fly a temperamental movie star, Faye Russell, to a photo shoot in the Amazon jungle. Unfortunately, one of Joe’s business rivals, Hans Anderson, also wants to do the same job, and you find yourself locked inside a magician’s dressing room with no obvious means of escape, while the dastardly Hans goes off to meet Faye.

I have read reviews of this game which suggest that this opening section, which involves escaping from the magician’s room and leaving the building, is easy. Well, I didn’t find the opening particularly easy. There are several interconnecting puzzles you will have to solve before making any significant progress, all of them completely logical. As Joe himself might say, “Hey, easy this ain’t – but entertaining it sure is.” Once you are out of the building rapid progress can be made. You can sort out the despicable Hans Anderson with a swift right cross and fly away with Faye and Sparky on board. Unfortunately, your troubles are only just beginning as the plane is hit by a lightning bolt and crash lands in the Amazon jungle.

This game is big, very big. You will meet, among others, hungry piranha fish, a parrot that squawks a cryptic





Wanna play?

message about a kidnapped Amazon Princess, a gorilla that wants to play charades, tall pygmies who initially refuse to talk to you, Trader Bob, who runs a 24 hour general store in the middle of the jungle, and, of course, the obligatory mad scientist, who in this particular case, is seeking world domination by injecting dinosaur DNA into woman. Don't ask!

If all this sounds a bit silly that's because it is. There may be times during this adventure when you will be completely baffled, times when you will become frustrated, and times when you will become angry trying to work things out; this game will take you through a whole gamut of emotions – but one emotion you will never encounter is boredom. There is something for everybody here. Yes, some of the jokes are corny, some are inspired and some will have you shaking your head in disbelief.

The majority of the puzzles are quite logical, even if they do make the old grey cells work a bit harder than usual. One or two of the puzzles may drive you to distraction, but, overall, the sense of achievement one feels when solving some of the more obscure problems make it worth all the effort. I know it can be frustrating following all the conversation branches in a game, but



A nice view



There she is, the Amazon Queen

most of the conversations in this game are entertaining, in an off-beat and quirky way, and some are vital to the progression of the game – neglect speaking to characters at your peril!

I said it was a big adventure. Well, how big is big? Most good commercial games usually take anything from twenty to thirty hours to complete. I played “Amazon Queen” several hours a day for a solid week before reaching the end; this is a game that is worth playing slowly and diligently because there are so many good characters and situations worth taking the time to interact with, and so many little gems that are easy to miss. I also liked the idea of climbing a pinnacle in the jungle and surveying the entire map spread out before you, thus avoiding endless trudging through the jungle seeking out relevant locations.

**Graphics:** Because this game is played using the ScummVM interpreter you have an option to play in full screen mode or in a box. I would recommend using the box because the graphics, in full screen, are slightly pixilated and lacking in clarity. The graphics are not bad, just dated. Anybody who has ever played a LucasArt game will immediately recognise the style of graphics and animation in this game which is, don't forget, approaching ten years old; a lifetime in computer terms.

In no way does the slight lack of clarity in the graphics detract from the playability. If you play the game in the ScummVM box you will find that the graphics are, in the main, very bright and colourful. The characters are well drawn, especially in the cut scenes when everything becomes almost cartoon-like, and the gameplay is so absorbing you will hardly notice any perceived deficiencies at all; if you are pulling your hair out trying to find a way past hungry piranha fish or a confused gorilla, a slightly pixilated screen isn't going to worry you too much.





The interface of the game

**Sound:** When I came to write this section and thought about the music content I had to take another look at the game to determine if there actually was a soundtrack – I think that says it all really. There is a soundtrack but it's abysmal – it is music, but not as we know it, Jim. I think the producers of this game used up their budget on coding, scripting and voice actors – they certainly didn't spend a great deal on any of the musical aspects. But do you know what? It matters not one iota.

However, what does matter – to me at least – is the voice acting. Poor voice acting, and I don't care how engrossing the story is, it goes straight back on the shelf to gather dust. In "Flight of the Amazon Queen" once you've heard Joe King, Sparky, Hans Anderson, Dr Ironstein (the producers of this game certainly liked a pun on names!) and several other characters speaking, you can sit back and just enjoy the experience. The voice acting is as good as anything I have heard and lends real atmosphere to the game.

**Gameplay:** "Amazon Queen" is a traditional 3<sup>rd</sup> person point and click and click and click – yes, I hated the control system. You cannot cycle through the usual commands such as, "Use", "Talk", "Pick up" etc, by simply clicking the right or left mouse button. No, that would be too easy. Each individual command has to be assessed from the row of icons at the bottom of the screen, clicked and then clicked again to actually implement it, and then you have to remember whether to use the right or left mouse button, both of which have different functions. There has to be an easier way of doing this – and there is. Take a look at "Broken Sword I" or "Broken Sword II" to see how it should be done.

"Saving" and "loading" is another eccentric function. There is a ledger in the inventory into which you place entries. These entries are your saved games, although it took me a few moments to work that out. To load a previous game you have to "read" a previous entry. It adds absolutely nothing to the gameplay and I still cannot figure out what's wrong with using the words "Save" and "Load"?

**General Info:** To play this game you need to download ScummVM (Script Creation Utility for Manic Mansion Virtual Machine) from <http://www.scummvm.org/> where you can not only download a freeware copy of "Flight of the Amazon Queen", you can also download several other classic adventure games – and they say there's no such thing as a free lunch!

**In a few words...** There is no excuse now. "Flight of the Amazon Queen" is freeware and available for download. Get it immediately, play it, enjoy it...

- Rob Hamilton  
(xaedac@aol.com)

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Information</h2> <p><b>Title:</b> Flight of the Amazon Queen  <b>Developer:</b> Interactive Binary Illusions  <b>Category:</b> Point and Click  <b>Perspective:</b> 3rd Person  <b>Difficulty:</b> Medium  <b>Site:</b>  <a href="http://www.scummvm.org/">http://www.scummvm.org/</a>  <b>Sys Req:</b> Windows, ScummVM</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Verdict</h2> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Story:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">85</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Graphics:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">70</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Sound:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">60</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Gameplay:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">75</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>OVERALL:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;"><b>75</b></td> </tr> </table> <p><small>* Overall = (2X Story + 2X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6</small></p>	<b>Story:</b>	85	<b>Graphics:</b>	70	<b>Sound:</b>	60	<b>Gameplay:</b>	75	<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>75</b>
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<b>Gameplay:</b>	75										
<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>75</b>										

A Nick Bounty  
Mini Mystery

# A CASE of the CRABS!

- Hello publisher X. I am developer Y and I would like to create a noir point and click adventure with a humoristic touch.

- Hmmm... let me check the charts... hmm... I'm sorry I don't see any noir point and click adventures in the top ten selling games this month so apparently your game is not going to sell either because you know, we need a bandwagon to jump on like all the other publishers.

Well developer Y it is about time you gave publisher X the finger and developed your game, as you want it to be, like so many other adventure fans are doing. Otter Archives brings us an online flash adventure that not many publishers would dare bring us to the stores. And to be even more original, Otter Archives decided to create this adventure game with Macromedia Flash, the famous web based media creation tool that is mostly used for website design and online videos.

**Story:** You are Nick Bounty, a P.I. who despite his talent in solving enigmas and puzzles still remain unemployed. One night however, a fish salesman is

stabbed on the back as he was trying to enter Bounty's office. It is up to Bounty to find out who killed the fish salesman and untangle the conspiracy behind ... the crabs mystery!

The game features 8 interesting characters that could have been taken out of a noir movie, and plenty of locations to visit. The game can take up to 2 hours to finish, though it is not because of its lengthy story but because of its difficult (and occasionally slightly illogical) puzzles. It is nevertheless a rather enjoying experience and it could be an excellent way to spend some free time during a quiet afternoon.

**Graphics:** All graphics are obviously in black and white and are very stylish. Combined with the amazing music (that we are going to talk more about later) they make Case of the Crabs one of the most atmospheric freeware adventures out there right now. Backgrounds and characters are both nicely drawn.

The developers however had to pay the price of rather sloppy animation by choosing to create this adventure in flash. The low framerate make the game's animation seem not as smooth as we have seen in adventures created with other engines/programming languages.

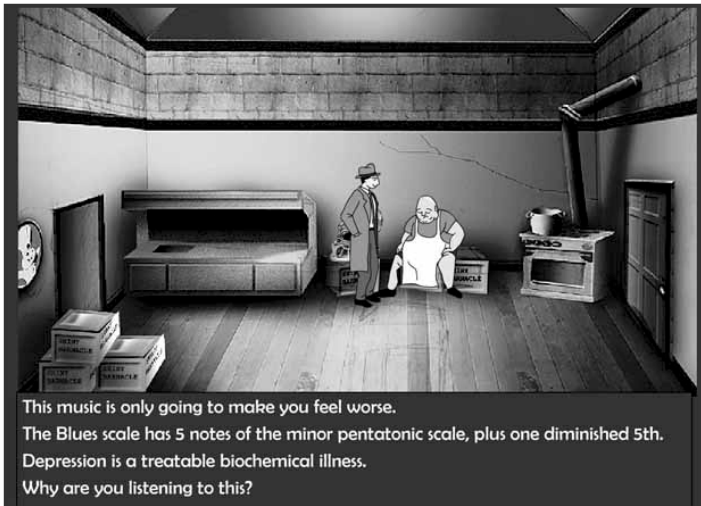
**Sound:** Here the developers surpassed themselves. Both voice overs and music will make you wonder how is it possible that a non commercial product achieves a much better audio experience than most of the commercial adventures has got us used to (especially when it comes to voice overs – find it hard to believe? Play Black Mirror in English). If you are a fan of the blues then expect to be surprised in a good way when you visit the kitchen of the Blue Crab Café.

**Gameplay:** The interface of the game is similar to the SCUMM interface of the older Lucasarts games. The



Down at the harbor





A conversation about the blues

developers themselves pay tribute to the old Lucasarts developers during the credits (but make sure to also bash the new Lucasarts management – my personal comment: that’s the spirit!!!). On the lower left corner of the screen you have six commands for look, talk, get, move, use and shoot while on the lower right part you can see your inventory items. The dialogue interface is also similar to the familiar Lucasarts interface.

As far as the tasks that you will have to carry out in the game are concerned, they consist of dialogue with characters and interaction between the gameworld and your inventory items. There are quite a few challenging puzzles throughout the game. However some of them are a bit illogical, and although they seem funny in retrospect one or two hints here and there could have been used to make it a bit less obscure to the player. **\*Spoilers\*** Let me give you an example of such an obscure puzzle. At some point you have to read a book about fingertips that the character finds too much to read. In order to continue, you need to ‘cut down’ the amount of information by using a... knife. **\*End of Spoilers\***

**General Info:** As I wrote previously the game is



It’s not that easy to get into this cafe

developed using Macromedia Flash, so you will need to install the Macromedia Flash Player that you can download for free from [www.macromedia.com](http://www.macromedia.com) After you have installed the flash player then you can either play the game directly in your browser while you are online, or you can download the game to your computer and play it whenever you want without being connected to the Internet at all.

The version of the game I played did not have a Save/Load function but since then the developers have updated the game and have incorporated a Save/Load function something that was definitely necessary. I encountered no bugs while playing Case of the Crabs.

**In a few words...** A case of the crabs was an enjoyable mini adventure and it is a must for noir fans that do not mind a bit of humour in their stories. The developers deserve congratulations for creating a very atmospheric adventure using a new development tool. A few things that the developers could work with in the future are puzzles and story length.

- Dimitris Manos

<h2 style="text-align: center;">Information</h2> <p><b>Title:</b> Case of the Crabs  <b>Developer:</b> Otter Archives  <b>Category:</b> Point and Click  <b>Perspective:</b> 3rd Person  <b>Difficulty:</b> Medium  <b>Site:</b>  <a href="http://www.otterarchives.com/bountygame.html">www.otterarchives.com/bountygame.html</a>  <b>Sys Req:</b> Windows, Flash Player</p>	<h2 style="text-align: center;">The Verdict</h2> <table style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Story:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">81</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Graphics:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">70</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Sound:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">91</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>Gameplay:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;">62</td> </tr> <tr> <td style="padding: 5px;"><b>OVERALL:</b></td> <td style="text-align: right; padding: 5px;"><b>74</b></td> </tr> </table> <p style="font-size: small;">* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6</p>	<b>Story:</b>	81	<b>Graphics:</b>	70	<b>Sound:</b>	91	<b>Gameplay:</b>	62	<b>OVERALL:</b>	<b>74</b>
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# Talking Dead

## DON'T WORRY, BE HAPPY

If there's one thing that can safely be said, it's that independent adventure games are stronger now than they ever have been. Four years ago, a new independent adventure game would be released once every couple of months or so, but four years later – today – more than three or four are released every week, some of which are of such high quality even commercial companies would be proud.

So why do people still say that the point and click adventure is dead? How can it be? Surely now it's even better than it ever was – because 90% of the adventure games released today are *free*!

This dramatic increase in independent adventure games being released must be down to the resource of the Internet. Now, just about anyone can find an engine to suit their needs, whether it is AGS, Sludge or AGAST. Just about anyone can find someone else to help them, whether that help is needed in the field of art, music, storyline or what not.

Forums have made it easier for teams to work together and websites have enabled more people to make their projects known, and upload them for us lucky souls to download them for free.

But are more people going to step into the commercial light? Is the point and click adventure *commercially* dead? There haven't been many commercial point and click adventures developed by independents so far – but I feel there are more on the horizon. More independent developers are interested to see just how well their creations will sell.

Never the less, the future of point and click adventures is more than promising. In the next few years we'll have seen more commercial projects made by amateur developers and I'm certainly interested to see whether this will spark even *further* interest – possibly even from publishers.

The number of developers has risen ten fold since four years ago, so the fan-base can only have done the same. If anyone says the point and click is dead, they're either lying, or just trying to promote their first person shoot `em up.

- Mark Lovegrove



## The Invento-mail

As you will read from the first e-mail, we might have forgot publishing one or two e-mails sent to us. If you sent an e-mail to us before February and you haven't seen it published, please re-send your mail. And don't stop writing your comments and questions to the team of this magazine at [theinventory@yahoo.com](mailto:theinventory@yahoo.com)

Hi there Dimitris - I wrote to you last year in Dec and you replied that you would publish my letter in a month's time, in either edition 12 or 13. I think that was the Jan issue which for some reason I don't think you published. I would love to hear you reply to my letter so maybe you can put it "back into the system". I would also be pleased to hear what you have to say about the change in the Uru policy and how good the new "add-ins" are. In case you can't find my letter I enclose it, and your reply below. Thanks and best regards.....

\*\*\*\*\*

### SENT 2003 Dec 14

I wonder, first of all how a Greek guy like yourself winds up in the freezing North?? I come from England (also toooo bloody cold) and have lived almost all my life in nice warm Africa (about 50 years!!). Now that make much more sense - as I write this to you it is about 35C here and I love it!!

Next my congratulations on your magazine (e-zine??), I was told about it by Jennifer Miller of Just Adventure, have downloaded them all AND read them all. They are great - all I can say is keep it up. Two comments however - first I find about two thirds of your pictures to dark to even see what they are!! This needs looking into. Also although you push the "Print it out and read it in front of the fire with Hot Chocolate " I prefer the read it on the screen and "Save a Tree" !!! Because of this I prefer the single column layout of the Prologue and Epilogue, because with two and three column layouts on-screen you spend your time scrolling up and down like a Yo-Yo. Think about it. Next suggestion - why not start a notification service to email us when the next issue is ready for download - that would be nice.

Now the main reason I am writing - I must be a funny kind of Adventure fan!! I first started with this kind of game back in the "Good Old DOS Days" when Adventure Games were Text based only!! Do you remember this?? (There was a great one where you started in a crashing space ship and had to get down on to a planets surface and then explore hundreds of tunnels in an underground ruined city - - - What was it called?) But it was the greatest - Theater of the mind - the best. All 1st person, "do your own thing" it was the best. For me the only improvement on this is to add Graphics to this basic concept. Therefore the Myst type of adventure for me is fantastic - 1st person, 3D, no action just things to explore and find and work out the whole story etc etc. For me that's the way it should be. Cartoon 2D graphics don't do it for me. Reacting with people doesn't do it for me either and I find the Religious and Supernatural / Historic themes very tiresome. You should be on your own "doing your own thing" working out the plot and the puzzles and as someone once said "the mind is the greatest theater" thats why good books are - even today - still so popular - the mind can take you anywhere.

Because of this I feel that Myst type adventures should have there own category (Myst-ique??) and I would like to see a list of other similar programs (as mentioned by Carla Melloni in TI9 - "The game was MYST, a title that would be imitated, - even cloned- though rarely equaled,"). Can you list these clones for us please. Last of all why not ask all people who write in to list their best 3 games and you keep a "Top 10 -20" in the Mag?? That would be interesting. Mine naturally have to be Myst, Riven and Exile. Well this email is now long enough, I do not expect you to publish this letter but please I ask you to consider some of the suggestions and at least answer me if you don't mind.

Have a great Xmas,  
Ian Whitfield

*The Inventory:* First of all I sincerely apologise for forgetting to include your mail in one of the previous editions. I really have no explanation to give, somehow I skipped it. The problem is that I receive all emails in the same folder (from publishers, developers, fans etc) and there is usually a big mess. Actually I think it is about time I organised my folders a bit better. Sorry again about that. As for your comments/suggestions: It is the first time somebody mentions a problem with the brightness of the screenshots. I will ask more readers on forums and see if I can do something about it. As far as the double columns are concerned I am quite strongly opinionated about that, since we want The Inventory to have more the feel of a magazine and less the feel of a webpage.

Although I also started in the 'Good Old Dos Days', I probably started in the later Good Old Dos Days, so I have never played a text adventure. My first adventures were Lucasarts' Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade, Zak McKraken and Sierra's King's Quest 3 and Hero's Quest. I do not have much space left to write my personal tastes in adventures but let's suffice to say that I enjoy all graphical styles (3<sup>rd</sup> person/ 1<sup>st</sup> person **continued -->**

2D, 3D, cartoon, FMV etc) as long as there is a good story and an entertaining gameplay. I have to admit though that I have a slight preference to 3<sup>rd</sup> person adventures, probably due to my own early days, but this has not hindered me from enjoying adventures like Dracula or Egypt 2. I would also probably enjoy far many more 1<sup>st</sup> person adventures if they moved to a full 3D environment where the navigation system is much more comfortable.

As far as the URU policy is concerned I think it is preposterous to market a game with the promise of an online version and bring it down only a couple of months after its release. I have not tried the add-ons yet so I cannot comment on them. Regarding your notification service suggestion, we are thinking about it and we might go ahead with it quite soon. Sorry again for not replying earlier and I hope you have a nice time down there in South Africa! Thank also Jennifer on my behalf for the recommendation ☺

Hello Dimitris,

I am Abdullah from Bangladesh. Let me begin by saying that I am grateful to you and the crew involved in the making of the Inventory, the one of a kind adventure game magazine. I have downloaded all its releases. I am an adventure game fan but to my utter disgust, the stores are always filled with crap action games where the only thing you basically do is shoot. The Inventory is the best way of knowing about adventure games and also keeping in touch with people who love them. I hope your magazine continues to be available for a long long time.

By the way, in the Inventory 11, you mentioned about a booklet relating to The Inventory awards 2003. I would like to know how I can get a copy of it over here. The only way I could send my payment is through a foreign currency DD. Please provide me the necessary info to make such a transfer possible and also the total amount including shipment (in case of a printed version) that I need to pay for it. I would love to contribute towards your sincere efforts.

Through this letter, I would also like to express my intension to collect old playable CDs or DVDs of the following titles that are not available in Bangladesh. Anyone interested to sell such items may contact with me through email. The titles are: Amerzone, Beyond Atlantis (Atlantis 2), Beyond Atlantis 2, Obsidian, Discworld Noir, Lightbringer/Cydonia (DVD), Morpheus, Reah (DVD), Riven (DVD), Schizm- Mysterious Journey (DVD), Mystery of the Nautilus, Tex Murphy: Overseer (DVD), Riddle of the Sphinx

Please reply ASAP. Thank you for everything. Goodbye

Regards,  
Abdullah Al Mahmud Khan  
Dhaka, Bangladesh

*The Inventory:* Hello Abdullah and thanks for writing. I did not post your email address on the magazine because you probably do not want to get the amount of spam mail we get. If someone is interested in selling you one or more of the titles you requested above I will be happy to forward him your e-mail address. As far as the Inventory Awards 2003 booklet is concerned we never published it because this was the time when we faced some problems (financial and time-consuming ones mostly) and we were actually 'dead' for a short while. Thanks to Randy Sluganski from JA however we managed to overcome those and continue with The Inventory.

If you still want to contribute to our efforts however now you can do so through Paypal ([www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com)) If you have an account you can send a payment of as much money as you want to [theinventory@yahoo.com](mailto:theinventory@yahoo.com) Thank you for your letter and I hope you will be enjoying the future issues of our magazine. And don't feel alone, the situation in the gaming market worldwide is similar to the situation in Bangladesh.

Hello,  
congratulations on the high quality "Inventory" magazine you bring to the adventure gaming community. A cool feature on your website, would be to provide a newsletter subscription, through which you would announce the release of new "Inventory" editions.

Best regards,  
Regis Villemin



*The Inventory:* Hello Regis and thank you for the kind comments. We are seriously thinking of implementing this feature somehow but it will probably be done after our summer break. Well until it is implemented however, you might want to know that The Inventory is usually published on a Friday and most usually in one of the last two weeks of the month. Thank you and we hope you continue enjoying our magazine.

Dear Dimitris: I was going to do a little evangelizing for The Inventory today, but circumstances conspired to prevent it. Due to a glitch with the printer I was using at my University, I got the first 14 pages of a back issue in duplicate. Thinking to make the most of it, I decided to leave the extra pages at an opportune spot at the local mall, so that maybe - just maybe - someone with a latent interest in our favorite genre might pick them up. Alas, the fact that all the seating was taken by the local teen population - thus robbing me of any fit place to leave the pages - together with some preemptive nasty looks from a vigilant mall guard convinced me not to go through with it. Besides, I was late for my bus. Oh, well. I may yet give it another go - wouldn't want those pages to go to waste.

But what I really wanted to write about is this: I feel the most valuable service The Inventory does to the adventure gaming community is give us a sense of the passage of time. Many of us tend to live in the past, replaying the classics - and who can blame us, if the classics are more appealing than some of the more recent offerings? - Reading and writing about the golden days, etc. But your magazine - in my view a real magazine, not an e-zine - keeps coming out at more or less regular intervals. And this serves to mark time.

Marking time, having milestones to reach, savoring this moment and then moving on to the next - I think all this is really vital for any community that hopes to last, because living in the past is really a form of slow death. Don't get me wrong. History is immensely important, but not as something to live in. Ideally it should be something that brings perspective and wisdom to life in the present - the only life we have any control over. Or so I have come to feel.

Your magazine helps our specialist gaming community to do that. Thank you for that. There is one forthcoming title that I believe has the potential to do the same at an exponentially larger scale, to breathe fresh life into a genre that can sometimes be dangerously static and introverted. That game is Project Jane-J.

Simo Sakari Aaltonen

P.S. Also wanted to mention that I have just launched a new adventure gaming site. The Adventure Companion seeks to enhance the adventure gamer's enjoyment of selected titles by offering various companion materials for them.

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

*The Inventory:* Hello Simo and thanks for your email. Good luck with spreading out our magazine. That was actually one of the reasons why we want The Inventory to be available in a 'magazine form'. It probably looks more appealing in 'paper form', maybe it could arouse someone's interest if seen on a desk or on a table next to a sofa. Who knows? Good luck with your new site. I hope that it grows and that you have a lot of visitors. I am also very excited about Project Jane Jensen.

Hello!

I would like to join the Nordic Adventure Guild! I am a huge fan of adventure games. I have a large collection of Sierra games. At this time I am playing Broken Sword - The Sleeping Dragon. Today I come across The Inventory magazine on the kq9.org website. The magazine is very good. I liked the interview with Jane Jensen, because I am a big fan of the Gabriel Knight series. Keep up the good work with The Inventory! :-D

Greetings,  
Jon Magnus Vold  
Oslo, Norway

*The Inventory:* Hi Jon Magnus. I am sorry to say that we are not running the Nordic Adventure Guild anymore. There was not so much interest from the members to conduct any activities so I decided to stop with NAG and concentrate on The Inventory instead. Thank you for the kind words and we hope that you will continue enjoying our magazine.

## 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 8 and 9. 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](mailto: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.*

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# 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.

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## CHAPTER 8: THE STING LEECH SPY

The sun heading down towards the horizon indicated that it was the middle of the afternoon. Madrick's stomach was grumbling loudly from a long period of not eating. It was a reminder of the shipwreck that destroyed his boat and everything on it. He decided that he would eat a huge meal as an early dinner. He also needed to loon for the inn that Abusham mentioned earlier. After all, he needed a place to put down the food rations, the map, and the clothes that he bought. Madrick walked further down the exact same street he'd been walking on since entering Gromyl.

There were more specialty shops that any tourist would want to visit and buy from, but Madrick already had something in mind. His mind also turned to the mental picture of the island of Mariunia that he developed from Abusham's description of the land. He was eager to see Erana's Orchard, the Aphid River, and the Dwarves on the other side of Mariunia. At last, he saw the sign of the Ladybug Inn.

He opened the small front door and walked inside. The spaciousness and artistic quality of the interior was definitely something to be amazed by. There were several large round tables with wooden chairs, and in the middle of the tables were brightly lit white candles. There was a warm fireplace on one wall with a large glowing flame giving off heat. A doorway led to what Madrick presumed to be the kitchen. A flight of stone stairs led to the upper floor where all the rooms were. All the doors of the rooms were of mundane wood. At one of the tables was a large bearded Centaur with a gentle face. Madrick immediately approached the friendly creature.

"Greetings," said Madrick. "May I ask where the innkeeper is?"

"You're looking at him," said the Centaur with a very warm and deep voice. "I am actually the one who keeps the inn. By the way, I am called Rebus."

"I am pleased to meet you, Rebus," replied Madrick. "I am Madrick Doomslayer."

"And like many others," commented Rebus. "I already know who you are after that incident with the guards."

"It's hard to believe, though. Tell me. How much is the rent for this inn?"

"Ah, the price. We have this inn for any traveler who seeks to gaze upon the beauty of Mariunia. However, the rumors of the tensions with Akros have spread, so nobody really comes here anymore."

"Strangely, I never heard of them."

"And I have never had a visitor here in a very long time. The cooks here as well as I make this our home, and without visitors, it's not an inn."

"But you still maintain this business."

"Yes. This is now just like a place to eat, but in addition, Kavulin, who runs the food shop, is very generous. He makes much money that he donates it to me from time to time. As my guest who has made this an inn again, you can pay a price of one Gromylian Dollar per week instead of 25."

"Really? Are you sure you don't want more?"

"No, keep it. We've gotten used to the way we live, and it feels great to have an outsider after so many years. It's my way of saying thank you."

"Oh, you're welcome," answered Madrick. "By the way, what about dining here?"



"Go ahead and sit down," offered Rebus. "My cooks are preparing something wonderful."

Madrick sat down at a chair at a nearby table and took out one Gromylian Dollar to pay Rebus. The Centaur smiled as Madrick handed him the coin. Rebus then called out to the cooks in the kitchen to prepare a plate of spicy chicken. The Centaur explained that trade was done once in a while to get products from outside Mariunia. While Madrick waited for his delicious meal, he decided to chat with Rebus to kill the time.

"So business must be tough," said Madrick.

"Yes, it is," said Rebus. "My brother, who sells weapons in Silmaria, tells me this a lot."

"You mean Pholus?" asked Madrick with a slight expression of surprise.

"Yes, Pholus," replied the Centaur. "Oh, I remember. You are from Silmaria, right?"

"That is correct," said Madrick. "I remember buying a few nice weapons from Pholus, despite how rough he seems to be."

"Of course," laughed Rebus. "My brother does seem to be arrogant and very masculine."

From out of the kitchen, a lovely female Katta in pink Shapeirian clothes walked with a large tray. It had half of a chicken baked to a crispy texture and spices cooked into it. There was also a few slices of steamed carrots and broccoli as well as some tasty brown bread. For drink, a wooden cup containing hot coffee was carried separately by her twin Katta sister, who was behind her. Both of them smiled at Madrick as he expressed anticipation for culinary delight.

As the two Katta set the food and drink down, Madrick thanked them for the meal. Rebus watched Madrick as he tasted every bite of the food with intense approval. He became more and more satisfied with every mouthful of appetizing food he ate. The Centaur smiled with joy. Madrick also drank his coffee somewhat vigorously. Overall, the meal was the product of someone very talented with the art of cooking. Madrick finished his meal in no time, and no longer felt the hunger that struck him before.

"Which is my room, by the way?" asked Madrick.

"Oh, I forgot," said Rebus. "Your room is Room 1. And here's your key."

Madrick took the key from Rebus and proceeded up the stairs. The first door he reached had an indentation in the shape of the number one. He inserted the key into the knob and opened the door. As he entered, Rebus wished Madrick a wonderful stay. Madrick thanked the Centaur once again for his generosity. The room wasn't exactly a luxurious suite, but it was still homely for Madrick. There was a large, soft bed as well as a bulky chest in front of it. A set of empty drawers stood against one wall with a blue porcelain vase containing lovely pink flowers on top of it. The light for the room came from an oil lamp that was next to the vase. While the whole room was very minimal, it was nevertheless a safe haven.

Madrick opened the chest in front of the bed and immediately put Fireblade, Soulshield, and the food rations into it. He then changed out of his damp musty clothes and put on the clean ones he bought from Shamir. After setting the clothes on the bed for them to dry, he closed the chest and unrolled the map scroll he held.

Madrick admired the excellent quality of the map as he sat down on his bed. The map showed a very large island surrounded by the Med Sea. The North and East coasts of the island of Mariunia were occupied by a great mountain range. It was labeled the Hornet Mountains. The peaks were typical rough and jagged cones, but one stole Madrick's attention: the Cone of Mystery. It was noticeably smooth and somewhat larger than all the peaks. He remembered Abusham's mentioning of it and wondered if he could find out more about it.

From the middle of the mountain range was a thick, bold line that seemed to have large smooth curves as it went down the map, but a closer look revealed that there were many twists and turns. Madrick saw it labeled as the Aphid River, also mentioned in the Gromyl Adventurer's Guild. He imagined it as a wide and beautiful stream for all of nature to love. The only other thing that he noticed was that there was a waterfall drawn at the top end of the line. Could it be something, he asked himself.

About two-thirds of the remaining land was occupied by the Ant Forest, indicated by a dark horizontal region on the map. There wasn't really anything too special, except for a lighter enclosed region within the dark region. The words "Erana's Orchard" were neatly written in calligraphy by it. Madrick made a mental note to visit this during his adventure. He also hoped to explore the far eastern part of Mariunia to see Dwarves and Trolls. There was also a symbol of a tower in the western part of it, marking the town of Akros. Madrick planned to make a visit there first.

The rest of the island was nothing more than a thin strip of grassland south of the forest and a very thin band of light brown along the South coast representing the beach. A tower symbol due south of Akros marked Gromyl, where Madrick was. Once he carefully scanned the whole map, Madrick made a plan. He would leave Gromyl to visit Akros and find out more about the conflict. Afterwards, he would make a journey to the Aphid River and Erana's Orchard.

If he could, he would find out what lies on the eastern part of Mariunia. For now, his first goal was to try to stop the likely war with the Gromyilians and the Akrosians. He remembered that his father had taught him a lot about being a warrior. His

memory returned to one particular lesson from him: a Fighter can take care of himself, but a Paladin can take care of others. Madrick saw this feud as an opportunity to prove his worth. He thought of this as he put the map in the chest, closed the chest, and left the room with only his key in a secure inner pocket in his brown leather vest.

Madrick Doomslayer left the entrance of the Ladybug Inn and headed down the same street in the same direction as before. The sun in the sky turned a more vivid orange as it approached the distant horizon. The brown wood and gray stone of the buildings he passed by seemed to darken slowly into the color of pitch black. The tavern must be around here somewhere, he told himself. Madrick didn't have to walk long, because he reached the very end of the street. In front of him was a typical one-story building with a wooden sign that said "The Praying Mantis."

What was unusual about it was that there was a considerable amount of dissonant noise coming from behind the small door. He opened the door in a natural, but cautious manner and stepped inside. There were a few large wooden tables shaped as rectangles with benches on either side. Several dark-skinned men were drinking mugs of beer and having a great time with their playing cards and gambling chips. On the opposite end of the room were a few more ordinary looking men in brown leather clothes. They were throwing darts at a wooden dartboard hung on the wall.

Finally, the long bar and many stools lined up along the back wall with a muscular man serving drinks from a couple of shelves that had alcoholic beverages of all kinds. The ambient chatter all around the tavern stopped abruptly as several men from the tables and the dartboard area stopped what they were doing.

Soon, all faces were turned towards Madrick, the only white-skinned figure in the tavern. Madrick shook lightly with tension, although he didn't show it. To his surprise, all the men simultaneously greeted him with a warm welcome. Madrick returned the greeting and became relieved of his fear. Everyone then returned to what they were doing. Madrick approached the bar and sat down on one stool. The bartender came up to him with a smile.

"You want anything?" asked the bartender firmly.

"No, thank you," replied Madrick.

Madrick simply sat and looked around. The tavern exhibited a nice atmosphere, even if it got wild at times. There didn't seem to be anything wrong, except there was one thing that he didn't see before. At the benches was a figure in a dark blue cloak. Madrick noticed that all the others around the mysterious man were wearing the normal Gromylian clothes. He wondered who that man was. For some reason, he couldn't help but watch him, even if he just stood still. One Gromylian spoke to the cloaked stranger.

"So why are you in a cloak?" asked the Gromylian.

"I don't want to show my face," said the cloaked man. "I have so many cuts and bruises on it. I'm very sensitive about it."

"Don't be," commented the Gromylian. "Here, allow me."

The Gromylian proceeded to remove the hood of the cloak from his head. It was done quickly enough for the cloaked man to not react in time. When the face was revealed, all the Gromylians in the tavern stopped abruptly like before, except that everyone seemed to show an expression of hatred. It was not the fact that the uncloaked man did not have cuts and bruises. It was the fact that his face was very light.

"It's an Akrosian!" hollered one Gromylian.

"Sting leech!" yelled another.

"You spy!" shouted another angry Gromylian.

Soon, everyone shouted all kinds of derogatory names at the white man. All the Gromylians stood up as if ready to fight the man. Madrick felt a strong sense of horror as he watched the intense situation with his own eyes. As a young child, his father taught him to never hate anybody. The memory of the lesson churned Madrick's stomach. What he was seeing was hatred in action.

"I'll leave if you want me to," begged the Akrosian with desperation.

"No!" screamed a Gromylian. "You will die for trespassing!"

"No, please!" cried the Akrosian. "Let me live!"

"Kill him!" yelled another Gromylian.

The Gromylians nearest the white man viciously grabbed his arms and legs to prevent him from moving. Several more threw hard punches and kicks to the Akrosian's face, stomach, and groin. The poor victim screamed in agony and pain and knew that his life was over. Madrick's chest was almost ready to heave with the furious urge to cry. He nearly choked on his own saliva as the Akrosian bled severely from his lip. Afterwards, the chaos stopped.

While the white man was still held to the wall, the rest of the Gromylians moved out of the way, except for one bulky man. He slowly unsheathed a sharp dagger and walked towards the Akrosian. The shine of the metal blade made the Akrosian,



as well as Madrick, shudder with unbearable fear. The tall Gromylian then smiled at the Akrosian, whose mouth was open with terror. Then, the blade struck.

The Gromylian clenched his teeth with strength and madness. The Akrosian let out a deafening scream. The pain from his stomach, where the blade stabbed him deeply, was too much for him. Madrick felt as if he was that same victim, wanting to die and avoid seeing what was being cruelly done. A few moments later, the Akrosian's pleas for help softened to nothing. The Gromylian pulled out the red blade, and the Akrosian fell.

His breathing and his heart had stopped. All the Gromylians in the room felt relieved and proud. Madrick could not believe his own eyes through the entire incident. Never before did he see a man get killed by another. He only heard stories of human warriors dying from monster attacks. While those tales were exciting, Madrick didn't see the killing in the same way. It was a wake-up call for the madness to stop. He realized how much the Gromylians hated the Akrosians. Madrick became more determined to stop this once and for all. Until then, he had to cope with his trauma for several long minutes.

## CHAPTER 9: GROMYL PRIDE

The bloody dead body of the white man lied still on the floor, draining its dark red blood onto the floor of the tavern. Its eyes were closed, its mouth was wide open, and its arms were raised above its head on the dusty bar floor. A few large Gromylians picked up the heavy corpse and dragged it out the tavern.

Some started to cheer at the one who had successfully thrust the knife into their enemy. Afterwards, all of them joined the others in the celebration. They all left the tavern in a cheerful mood to follow the ones carrying the dead man, leaving Madrick and the bartender alone in the Praying Mantis.

Madrick still remained stiff and fixed to the stool with the relentless shock he experienced. There was also a raging guilt that threatened to painfully tear his heart in half. Why, Madrick madly asked himself in his mind. Why didn't he intervene if he truly believed in sparing the man's life? Madrick realized how much a fool he was, considering how he forgot a few vital lessons from his father that would have helped him deal with the situation.

He chastised himself for not remembering that a death is wrong until it is justified with proof; otherwise, Madrick would have tried to do something. He also felt bad about forgetting what he remembered in the inn: a Fighter takes care of himself, but a Paladin takes care of all. He always wanted to be a Paladin, but he missed his chance to prove himself during the killing.

"Something wrong, Madrick?" asked the bartender, who suddenly awoke Madrick from his thoughts.

"Uh, yes," hesitantly replied Madrick. "Well, seeing someone killed with my own eyes is very difficult."

"I know," said the bartender. "But we can't risk those damn sting leeches ruining our secret attack plan. They are our enemies, you know."

"But don't we all want peace?" asked Madrick, almost ready to cry tears.

"Yes," answered the bartender. "But how is it possible if they attacked us twice without reason?"

"Maybe we can negotiate with them," suggested Madrick.

"No!" yelled the bartender in anger. "It's useless! Especially with those insane devils!"

"There must be a reason for their madness," said Madrick.

"I don't think so," interrupted the Gromylian. "We were friends with them for years, but they suddenly changed."

"Maybe I can help," said Madrick.

"I said no," grunted the bartender. "Just go. I don't want to discuss this anymore."

Madrick felt apologetic as a result. Nevertheless, he respected the man's wish and said good-bye to him. The bartender was very disturbed and only waved his hand to Madrick in response. As the bartender looked at the wall with a feeling of depression, Madrick headed back out of the Praying Mantis. He looked at the bartender, feeling sorry that he seemed very hurt. Madrick decided to return to the Gromyl Adventurer's Guild to speak with Abusham again.

He had never felt so ashamed in his life and began to worry about displeasing his grandfather and all the souls of the Doomslayer Paladins in Hades who have made a difference for many. Madrick refused to confront the risk of cutting off the family line. He struggled to get his mind to think positively and optimistically. There was still another chance to redeem himself.

Madrick set foot into the guild again and greeted Abusham with the same noble manner as their first meeting. He decided to use the arm exercise machine to build up a little strength. Abusham the guild master looked concerned about Madrick, because he did not exhibit the same mood this time.

"You seemed troubled," said Abusham.

"I am," said Madrick. "Death is so difficult to see when it involves hate."

"Oh, yes. I've heard about the killing of the Akrosian as many of the men were walking by. I stepped outside to find out what happened."

"I could have done something, but I couldn't."

"And why not?"

"I, was, I was too scared."

"Scared?"

"I never seen someone murdered before, but I think that will help me. Experience is invaluable compared to skill, my father has always told me."

"That sounds like a good lesson. What would you have done if you felt like intervening?"

"I would just save the man."

"It's hard. Most of us hate them so much that we just kill any Akrosian we see."

Madrick took a minute to stop his exercise, take a deep breath, and make himself absolutely determined to bring peace no matter what the costs were. Shortly after, he vigorously exercised his arms again.

"I wonder," said Madrick. "Why do you all call the Akrosians 'sting leeches'?"

"Good question," answered Abusham. "The sting leech is a small, but harmful insect here on Mariunia. It's small, but what's unusual is that they are white, not dark brown or black. This insect lives in fresh water, especially the Aphid River. It sneaks up to its prey and stings it with poison. If the poison is not countered, the prey will die, and the leech will consume it."

"So the Akrosian spy was like a sting leech because he was sneaky?"

"Exactly. Nobody saw it until it was almost too late, so we didn't take any chances."

"I'm also curious about this group called Gromyl Pride that you mentioned before."

"To clarify, the secret army we have are members of this hate group. Just about all the men here are willing to fight the Akrosians for revenge. Naturally, we've decided to recruit them for our secret assault. Konius and Monulus are the ones training and leading these men."

"Where do they gather?"

"Outside of town about this time."

At this point, Madrick was feeling very sore in his arms and chest. He tiredly walked to a chair and sat down. He then brought up the thought that he tried to keep.

"Is there anything I could do?" asked Madrick, still puffing for air.

"Hmmm," said the guild master. "Well, it's possible, but not necessarily easy."

"But I still want to be a Hero and make a difference," commented Madrick.

"Then I hope you can help," said Abusham, smiling. "You're the next in line among the Doomslayer Paladins."

"Really?" said Madrick excitedly.

"Yes," said the guild master. "What's strange is that nobody knows why the Akrosians attacked us. Perhaps if you try to find out."

"I will," interrupted Madrick. "I do believe that there is a cause."

"And you'll make us realize our ignorance," said Abusham.

Both of them laughed at the remark, and Madrick started to smile again. He had a new hope for bringing good to all and becoming a Paladin just like his father, Ralakus Doomslayer. It seemed very hard to alleviate the intense hatred of the Gromylians, but all Madrick cared about was possibility.

As long as it was there no matter how small, he ignored risks. Madrick got up, said good-bye to Abusham, and left the guild. The sun was halfway below the horizon, and the streets seemed to have a hazy orange color. Madrick headed for the town gates to find the gathering of the Gromyl Pride. He made up his mind to return to the inn afterwards. Despite his exhaustion, his curiosity made his decision to go outside Gromyl.

As soon as Madrick reached to massive gates, he noticed that there were two Gromylian guards in the towers flanking the double gates, but they weren't Konius and Monulus. They were two other guards. Even so, Madrick asked them to open the gates for him to leave temporarily.

"What for?" asked one guard.

"The Gromyl Pride gathering," said Madrick. "Where is it, by the way?"

"Turn left and just following along the wall," answered the second guard.

"But you must not intervene," said the first guard.

"I won't," said Madrick as he left the gates.

Madrick turned left immediately after leaving the gates and walked along the tall stone wall. The gray wall was composed

of large stone blocks neatly stacked on top of each other. They were stuck together by hardened brown mud. His walk didn't seem long, because Madrick started to hear the noise of a crowd. He started to run toward the noise, and it grew louder in his ears. Upon arriving, he stopped running and looked at the crowd. Hundreds of tall, dark Gromylian men in silver helmets and chain mail armor were socializing with each other.

Each of them held a large silver shield with a red claw in the center as well as long, sharp swords. Besides the armor, all the soldiers wore comfortable brown leather outfits. There wasn't anything else to notice, except a large boulder on the other side of the crowd, on which stood Konius and Monulus. They were first discussing things with each other, but soon, they all turned to face the crowd.

Konius raised a long pole with a flag on it; it was a red claw against a green background. A few seconds later, all the Gromylian soldiers became quiet and attentive to the two guards on the boulder. Konius nodded in approval and put the flag down. He took a deep breath and broke the silence made by the soldiers.

"Gromyl Pride!" yelled Konius.

"Gromyl Pride!" repeated the crowd.

"Death to the Sting Leeches!" boomed Konius.

"Death to the Sting Leeches!" shouted the crowd.

"You all know why we are gathered here tonight. We are all united by whom we want damned to hell! Many of us have been harmed, not by monsters and magic, but by the leeches known as the Akrosians! And we are here tonight for one reason. Monulus and I have gathered all of you for a most important task: the task of paying back the Akrosians the infliction they put on us! Gromyl Pride!"

"Gromyl Pride!"

"And we have trained you hard! I am very proud of your commitment, determination, and willingness to become the great soldiers you are now. Monulus put you through the exercises: close combat, distance combat, and the element of surprise. Tonight, you have proven your worth! And we will all develop a plan for our attack! We want this to be a surprise on the Akrosians! Are you with me?!"

"Yeah!"

"Gromyl Pride!"

"Gromyl Pride!"

Monulus then pulled a dead body from behind the boulder onto it. Konius stepped off the boulder as the crowd watched with a fixed stare. They gasped as they realized that it was the Akrosian spy who was killed in the Praying Mantis. Monulus then picked up two sticks from the ground and rubbed them hard to make a fire. The sticks were already burning brilliantly.

"After the incident in the bar tonight, do we want this to happen again?" yelled Konius.

"No!" shouted the crowd of Gromylian soldiers.

Monulus threw the burning sticks onto the dead Akrosian. The body smoked a little, and then it engulfed in a hellish inferno. As the flesh of the dead man burned away, the crowd proceeded to cheer for their devotion to Gromyl. They raised their swords and shields high, yelling "Gromyl Pride" at the top of their lungs. The vision of the Akrosians' defeat possessed the soldiers' minds. The flesh of the dead body of the Akrosian continued to blacken and strip away from the bones. Madrick nearly became deaf from the uproar of the crowd.

In fact, nobody even noticed him scream in slight agony, because he stood far away enough to not be noticed. He immediately ran away from the crowd and towards the town gates. The guilt he had for not saving the Akrosian returned to haunt him after seeing his body burn. The gathering of Gromyl Pride was an accurate representation of the Gromylians' hatred for Akros. As soon as Madrick started contemplating the reality of it, his stomach twisted violently. He wanted to forget about the events since his visit to the tavern. Until the next morning, all he wanted was a good night's sleep.

- Ugarte



## *Epilogue*

Here ends one more edition of The Inventory. We hope that you enjoyed what appears to be one of the most content-packed issues we have released so far. If you want to support our efforts feel free to contribute financially through Paypal ([www.paypal.com](http://www.paypal.com)), by sending any amount of money you wish to [theinventory@yahoo.com](mailto:theinventory@yahoo.com) . All contributions, small and large will help us continue our efforts to keep you informed of the latest news in the adventure genre.

Next month we will feature reviews of some more commercial products that had to be pushed back due to superior competition from the independent developers scene. Some of the games we might review next month are Crystal Key 2, Midnight Nowhere, Schizm 2 and Quiet Weekend in Capri, depending on availability of time. Of course we will keep our eyes open for any adventures that might surprise us from the independent developers scene like Cirque De Zale did this month.

It is a real pity that Syberia 2 was such a let-down. Let's hope that the folks at White Birds Productions will be able to produce games that are closer to the cult Syberia 1. Truth be told, there are not many developers out there with their know-how when it comes to visual and audio presentation so the adventure genre needs good adventures from them.

As most of you probably know, the next issue will be the last one before we take our summer vacation. Therefore we will try to prepare something special and exclusive for our fans through our previews and interviews. After the summer we will be back on September with more issues of The Inventory.

If you are a 3D modeller who would like to enter the adventure game industry, we would appreciate it if you would like to join our efforts with Sealed Lips. You can apply at [sl\\_adv@yahoo.com](mailto:sl_adv@yahoo.com). If any publishers are interested in financing our efforts don't hesitate to contact us at any time. We are always looking for more writers so if you would like to write for The Inventory and you think you are skilled enough in the English language, have the appropriate knowledge when it comes to adventures and have the free time to contribute by all means send us your application letters and one or two reviews (or other articles if you want to write something else apart from reviews) to [theinventory@yahoo.com](mailto:theinventory@yahoo.com)

That's all for now. Take care until next month fellow adventurers.

*Dimitris Manos*

*Editor*

*The Inventory*

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