

The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only

PREVIEWS

- LEGEND OF THE LOST LAGOON
- GREAT JOURNEY

INTERVIEWS

- ARTEMATICA
- REBECCA CLEMENTS
- DTP

REVIEWS

- NO-ACTION JACKSON
- MIDNIGHT NOWHERE
- SCHIZM 2 - CHAMELEON

BLACK MIRROR COMIC STRIP



The Inventory

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Prologue

This month we start a new cooperation with GMX Media. GMX Media is the UK based publisher that has given the chance to many adventure developers to see their games in many game stores throughout Europe. From now on we will advertise their products in The Inventory. If you click on those ads your Internet browser will open up and the webpage of their online store will pop up. If you buy one or more of their games through that page you also contribute to our efforts with The Inventory, since GMX will pay us commission fees for games that were sold through links from The Inventory. So you buy an adventure game and you support our efforts to keep The Inventory a charge-free magazine.

Your help will be greatly appreciated. Their store contains a lot of adventure games like Black Mirror, Journey to The Center of the Earth, The Watchmaker and soon to come Martin Mystere, Great Journey, Conspiracies and Runaway. Black Mirror especially is released on the 28th of May and it's one of the best adventure titles out there right now. (Check our review in The Inventory 11).

Moving on to the contents of the magazine now. This month we feature reviews of the spooky Midnight Nowhere, the hilarious No-Action Jackson, and the brain-buster Schizm 2. We also feature quite a few interviews in our Lounge this month. First of all, the developers of Martin Mystere, the upcoming point and click adventure based on a TV and comic book hero, will tell you everything there is to know about the game thus far. Rebecca Clements, the developer of last month's surprise, Cirque De Zale, is also here to discuss with us her recent AGS masterpiece and her future plans as a developer. Last but certainly not least, DTP, the German-based publisher that has shown great support to our genre and has helped it prosper in the German speaking regions visits our Lounge one more time. They talk about the recent success they've had with their titles Black Mirror and The Westerner.

DTP was also kind enough to provide us with an English version of the Black Mirror comic that they published on the German official website of the game. (Maybe some North American publishers should watch and learn how to market adventure games?). DTP will return next month to our Lounge as well to talk to us about their future projects. In the previews section now we take a look at Great Journey, a new light-hearted point and click 3D adventure due to be published by GMX Media. Also we preview Legend of the Lost Lagoon another AGS gem being in the workings as we write these lines.

Well that's about it for now, I hope you enjoy our 15th issue.

Dimitris Manos

Editor

The Inventory

THE LEGEND OF THE Lost Lagoon

The adventure masterpieces created with the AGS engine are being brought into light faster than Lucasarts is cancelling their games. Dan Clarke and Domenico Sanna are the latest addition in this extremely long list of developers out there who possess the passion and the dedication to produce an adventure game that has nothing to be jealous of the ex-Lucas/Sierra adventures.

Dan and Domenico thought one day that they wanted to make an adventure game of their own, with retro graphics. After a lot of ideas and joking, they came up with a base for a plot. This is how the developers described the 'birth' of Lost Lagoon's concept: *The game was born out of an MSN conversation between myself and Domenico Sanna (the other half of the game's two strong team) after the discovery of AGS. We both have a love for Lucas games, and decided it would be great if we could make our own game. We discussed story ideas, and joked about amusing characters to include, and we got stuck on this idea of a Lagoon type town. From here it was just a case of adding more ideas over time until we got something we could call a rough plot.*

It went quiet for a few months, then I joined the AGS forums, and decided that I would create a look for my character. It wasn't even down on paper, just a quick doodle in AppleWorks paintpot. People seemed to like the look so it's just developed from there. The original ideas that we had aren't too far from what we have now, although there were a few slight changes. Our original main character idea was a boy of about 18, with a similar personality to us both. But we decided against it, as the character needed to have all round appeal (even though we are both all round great chaps :D). It took us some time to develop a main



Gloria Lapoint at your service!

character, but we both eventually decided a young girl could be an interesting idea. We named her Gloria Lapointe (the last name coming from a girl I used to know, I always thought it was a cool name.)

Thus the two AGS members decided to have a girl as their main character. Miss **Gloria Lapointe** is 12 years old and a student. She's above average when it comes to intelligence amongst other 12 year olds, and she has a strong personality. Gloria doesn't care much about her appearance and she is more of a tomboy. If a boy called her a name, she'd more than likely punch his lights out. She is not popular; on the contrary she's more of a geek. To make a good adventure game main character, there has to be certain ingredients, and Gloria possesses them. She's got common sense, curiousness and a courageous heart. The developers also described her humor as dry and sarcastic.

The **story** starts when Gloria is sent away to her grandparents' house for the holidays. They live in a little and boring fishing village near the sea, called Lamprey. Although Lamprey might seem just another boring little village, the truth is far from that. The town is immersed in a dark history with strange inhabitants, bitter political feuds and the tragic tale of the family who lived in the house on the hill.

Gloria and her grandfather go fishing one day in Lamprey Lagoon, and peculiar things starts to happen. Arguments and fights, strange disappearances and several other things hang over the city like a thick fog, and Gloria takes the mission of solving it all. Will Gloria unearth the town's dark secret? Will she ever find her way back home? Or will she fade into the mists of time in Lamprey Lagoon? The developers said: *The story itself is quite traditional, in the 'lost in another world and finding your way home' sense, but it's inside this story that we've tried to add some interesting concepts. I don't want to give too much away, but I think there'll be a lot of people surprised at how dark some of the content is.*

The game will be published in parts, and yes, it's for free! When publishing it in parts, the creators have better time to come up with new ideas, spend more time on details and considering reactions from the gaming world. *"The game will be free to download, as it's more an experience for us, rather than a money making exercise",* says Dan. Part 1 will find you arriving in part of the town, and meeting a few of the more amusing characters. The main purpose of the 1st part will be to give people a good deal of info on what's happening, as well as easing them into the game in terms of puzzles. The developers think it's important that the player learns a good deal



During night time

about where there character is and what's going on around them at an early stage.

Both the **graphics** and humour will be in a Lucas Arts style, but there will be twists and twirls that will make the game seem unique. Regarding the game's graphics Dan Clarke said: *We're basing the look of the game in a (hopefully) Lucas-style, but the story will have some really dark humour, some quite dark plot points and twists. You could say we're attempting to do a LucasArts game in the way we'd like to see it. For the characters, my main inspirations are the Lucas games, and I'm constantly referring to them when I create new characters. I create all the sprites and characters using AppleWorks (the Macintosh equivalent of paintpot) and animate them in Adobe ImageReady. The backdrops are a mixture of Lucas-style and my own touches, and they're created using scanned line art and Adobe Photoshop. As I write this I'm awaiting the delivery of a Wacom Tablet, which will be used for all the future backgrounds. Things like fonts and inventory styles will all be Lucas styled too (as if you had to guess ;)*

As the game is still in quite an infancy in terms of development the developers are still discussing with a number of people the subject of music for the game. Dan also invites anyone who would like to contribute in the music department to contact him. There are no current plans to do speech, as the developers want to



One of the secondary characters of the game



From the game's introduction

concentrate on getting the game finished and its not essential, but as they said they won't dismiss the idea.

"The Legend of the Lost Lagoon" will be a classic adventure game with a Sam and Max-like point and click style. Gloria carries with her a rucksack, which functions as an inventory. The action system will be also near identical to that of Sam and Max as you'll be able to scroll through your actions on screen. When planning the gameplay of Lost Lagoon, the developers tried to avoid blatantly obvious puzzles but on the other hand they also try to avoid the opposite extreme, i.e. puzzles that make no sense at all. Dan said: *'We don't want to try and make it too clever, as we'd rather do a simple job well. We found that when writing for the game, the most difficult bits to plan are the bits the player doesn't think about, e.g: you have to make sure the player is informed of certain things, or you have to make sure that the player doesn't do this before they do such and such a thing, so we're still learning in that respect.'*

The developers decided to add a new concept to the gameplay of Lost Lagoon. Along with the puzzles, Gloria will be collecting cards. This is a game that the children in her town have, and of course, some cards are more valuable than others. So if you're stuck on a puzzle, you can always spend your time looking for cards, and thus making the experience all the more interesting! *"In terms of puzzles, we're trying to avoid the blatantly obvious, but at the same time not go too far the other way and have puzzles that make no sense"*, says Dan Clarke about the gameplay. There will be a nice balance between obviousness and illogical things in the puzzles.

"The Legend of the Lost Lagoon" will have some surprises, original puzzles and good, old Lucas Arts kind of graphics. What else could an adventurer wish for? Dan and Domenico, you'd better get back to work right away cause we sure can't wait!

- Yngvil Runde & Dimitris Manos



Typically, when a company tries to make a game “for the kiddies” they only go as far as making a plain and simple game but slapping a famous brand name on it to sell it to the kids (Nancy Drew and Spongebob come readily to mind) or try to manufacture a kid-friendly icon for themselves (Pajama Sam and Putt-Putt also come readily to mind). It is refreshing then to see a company like Rebelmind try to generate a game more than merely a marketable brand name. This focus on youth-oriented gameplay has generated Great Journey, an enjoyable game that fulfills a child’s innate need to explore and achieve without insulting their developing intelligence.

Tony and Annie are 10 year old siblings with an itch for adventure. They’ve been all over the world with their friend, the Captain, seen wonderful things and met fascinating people. They live in the town of Old Port, and everything was great for them, until one day when a letter arrived from Penguin, a pen-pal in Antarctica. It seems that someone has been polluting the island for some time, but hasn’t been caught yet. Penguin asks his friends to come and help him, and the kids, ever ready for a new adventure, quickly accept, making their way to the South Pole. The environmentalist feel is somewhat akin to Sierra’s old Eco-Quest games, but there is more to the story than that. During the journey Tony (Or Annie, depending on which character the player chooses to play as) goes to numerous places,

making friends and solving problems. It’s a kind of edutainment that doesn’t involve teaching facts, but rather concepts friendship, teamwork and achievement. The game rewards curiosity and exploration by making it a necessary part of solving every puzzle; players, through a simplified one-click interface, will have to examine their entire environment to find clues, necessary items, etc., and each clickable area animates the background in some peculiar way. Clicking on a lamppost will cause it to twist itself around like rubber, for instance. I am reminded of Cyan’s classic Cosmic Osmo, which was more of a playground than a game, in that there was no real winning goal to it, but the entire environment could be played around with.

The backgrounds (and their animations) are thoroughly rendered in a soft child-like cartoonish style, helping build upon the kid-oriented atmosphere of the game. Everything is bright and pleasant looking, yet not so much so that it gets too, well, childish. It’s surprising then to see how little time seems to have been spent on the character models then. Particularly from close up we can see how angular people’s heads are, and how basic their textures are as well, putting them in stark contrast with the high-detail, high-resolution graphics of the backgrounds.

Currently there is no scheduled American release for Great Journey, and only a European release has been verified by GMX Media. Rebelmind seems to have some problem finding North American publishers for their game, which is a shame for a game so well made (I suppose they just can’t imagine being able to sell a game to kids without Spongebob on the front) but if and when you can find it, Great Journey promises to be a fun and educational adventure for kids.

- Justin Peeples



You can just point and click your way through



Great Journey features colourful graphics

ADVENTURE GOSSIP

Project Jane Jensen Cancelled

In one of their worst movements ever, Dreamcatcher decided to abandon Project Jane Jensen. Just Adventure published the news a little before E3 this year, shocking the adventure community worldwide. Truly a pity to see a company that was claiming to support the adventure genre, wasting probably the best chance they ever had of producing a title that would bring back the edge that's missing from commercial adventures nowadays. We wish Jane Jensen the best of luck finding the financial boost that she needs to produce one more classic title as she has always done before in the past. Here is the original article by Just Adventure:

<http://www.justadventure.com/articles/JaneJensenNews/JaneJensenNews.shtm>

New game from the creators of Black Mirror

Future Games, the creators of the Black Mirror adventure are hard on work on Nibiru, a remake of their first adventure game ever. The new adventure will be released in the German territories by DTP. The German site adventure-treff.de has recently conducted an interview with Martin Malik, CEO of Future Games where they asked him about Black Mirror, Nibiru but also Ron Loo, yet one more adventure using the same engine with Black Mirror. Read the whole interview in English here:

<http://www.adventure-treff.de/artikel/interviews.php?id=21&lang=eng>

Still Life announced from Microids

Although Benoit Sokal and other key members of Microids left the company a while ago, Microids seems to be satisfied with the financial success of the Syberia series and recently announced a new horror-adventure called Still Life.

The game seems to be a mix of Microids previous titles Syberia and Post Mortem. The graphic engine is similar to the one used for Syberia (3rd person perspective, 3D characters on prerendered backgrounds) and the story of the game belongs to the horror genre. You can see a short teaser from the game at the official website:

<http://www.stilllife-game.com/>

Indiana Jones FOY demo coming soon

In Fountain of Youth website it is said that a playable demo of the game will soon be available for public download. In the forums of the game, Mark Lovegrove, author also of our Talking Dead column, has stated that FOY might have a score composed and performed by a live orchestra.

The team is also looking for people who sound like Indy, which hints to the fact that a speech pack might be in order some time in the future if suitable actors are found. Very ambitious plans from a dedicated team. Check more about Indy FOY at:

<http://www.barnettcollege.com/>

Support The Inventory

As you will notice from this month we start posting advertisements of adventure games in our magazine. When you click on these advertisements your Internet browser will open up and you will be linked to a web address transferring you to the online stores of the company that sells these adventures. Through this address the company selling the games can track that you are coming from The Inventory. When you buy one of these games or any other title through the link that the advertisement pops up we get a percentage of the purchase you make. Therefore you buy an adventure and support our efforts to provide you with a free PDF magazine for adventures every month.

Important: It is essential that you make the purchase from the exact webpage that pops up after clicking on the advertisement. If you visit the companies' main sites some other time on your browser without clicking our ad we will not receive any of that money. So if you want to support us it would be best if you just clicked on the advertisement and made your purchase there. Your support will be greatly appreciated.

Telltale formed by ex-Lucasarts employees

Telltale games is a new company formed by ex-Lucasarts employees who worked for games like Grim Fandango. They state on their site that they are working on narrative-based cinematic games. Will we see some pure adventures from these guys? Only time can tell. For the time being you can check out their website at:

www.telltalegames.com

- Dimitris Manos

PC
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"The Black Mirror excels in providing a suspenseful story, beautiful graphics and some very exciting gameplay!"

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89%



HORROR ADVENTURE



HORROR ADVENTURE

THE BLACK MIRROR

the past is a diverted mirror of your soul

Out May 28th

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- 5-hours of spoken words
- film sequences
- dark atmosphere

www.gmxmedia.net



FUTURE
GAMES



Interview with Artematica

One month ago, GMX Media announced that they secured the rights for a 3D point and click adventure called *Martin Mystere*. It was the first time that information was released publicly about this new game. We invited Riccardo Cangini of Artematica in this month's Lounge to talk to us about their upcoming game, which is based on a TV and comic book series. Let's see what Riccardo has to tell us about this exciting new adventure.

Yourselves:

- Talk to us a bit about yourselves?

Artematica was founded in 1996 in Italy, precisely in Chiavari a sunny city of the Ligurian Riviera's, from Riccardo Cangini (myself), one of the Italian historic developer (he is first graphic designer at Simulmondo, first dev. comp born in Italy). We started as a small but really skilled team (moreover the same team that with Cangini has developed on Amiga 'I Play 3D Soccer' first 3D Real Time Soccer in the history of entertainment!) Artematica became one of the most important and prolific Italian S.H.. With the development of the PC and XBOX versions of *Martin Mystere*, Artematica confirms 2 important aspects:

- Determination to continue adventure game development as one of the strategies of the company.
- Growth on multiplatform development.

- Do you play adventure games in your free time? If yes what are your favourite ones?

Unfortunately I don't have too much time to spend with games of other companies... But I have found the time to play *Broken Sword*, I believe an interesting new approach on adventures games.

Martin Mystere

- Martin Mystere is based on a TV series. How well is the TV series doing in the countries where it is broadcasted?

The fact is a bit different because the cartoon TV series is based on the comic character of MM of which our game is based; besides the game is nearer to the

original character then the cartoons. Anyway the cartoon series are sold and are selling really worldwide, enough thinking that in Canada the MM cartoon's are now at the number 1 of the classify while in USA the comic of MM was published by Dark Horse (but also in France, Germany and many other countries)

- And if we understood correctly from what is written on your website, the TV series was based on a comic strip first. Is the creator of the comic strip or the people behind the TV series involved in the development of the game in some way?

As told above you have well understood but the French cartoon's creator, Marathon company, is not involved in our production because our project is born before and, moreover, our MM is nearer to the comic strip character. Of course the game, the cartoons and the comics are linked together by MM, partners and strange mysterious situations.

- Do you think that the fact that Martin Mystere will be a TV tie-in will help the game to sell more copies? Will you try in some way to 'pull' the audience of the TV series to the adventure game (i.e. commercials during the show etc)?

Sure, I believe it's inevitable and I don't dislike the



situation... Could be possible that with help from the MM author, the clever Alfredo Castelli, we could establish a partner with Marathon (that is pushing a lot in marketing). Anyway any choice will be taken with the agreement of GMX.

- Could you tell us a little bit about the game's story?

It's a story based on man's recurring dreams: everlasting youth immortality. Human mind perversion often leads to odd dark situations that, regardless, trample on human ethics and life universal principles. What would happen if somebody invented a machine capable of transferring a man's mind with all of his memories his sensation his conscience into another man's? Prof. Eulemberg, an important researcher of M.I.T was murdered in his country house...perhaps he had discovered something to reach this dangerous and mysterious dream.

- Is the story an original one created solely for the purposes of the game or are you going to use a story that has been seen in an episode of the TV series (or in the comic strip)?

The plot is based on 'Operation Dorian Grey', one of the best stories of the comic strip but, of course, it's adapted and enlarged by our designers to guarantee the best enjoyment of the players.

- Could you describe to us the main character of Martin Mystere.

Martin Mystere is a particular detective specialized in any kind of strange mysteries like Avalon city, Excalibur, UFOs, aliens, who is Santa Claus, time travels and so on. He is a mixed hero, partly like Indiana Jones partly an incredible savant, graduated in many disciplines and arts; he is also the first Italian comic character that as the years go by gets older.



- How many characters will we get to meet in Martin Mystere and how many locations will we get to visit?

Up to 20 characters with a special guest: Angie, a special beauty female friend of MM...

- Will the story be linear or non-linear?

It's linear enough, I can't tell more!

- Let's talk a bit about the game's graphics. Is the game seen from the 3rd person or from the 1st person perspective? Does Martin Mystere feature prerendered backgrounds or real time 3D backgrounds?

The game is a 3rd person with Real Time characters moving inside 3D prerendered backgrounds; note that we are trying to obtain a high quality 3D comic style, not too realistic but much detailed and with a new spicy style. So any graphic background is developed in 3D and retouched with Photoshop to get many specific and warm sets.

- What is the highest graphics resolution the game can reach?

The graphics for PC version is fix to 1024x768 while for Xbox is 640x480.

- How many polygons are you using for each character?

A lot... Using a prerendered background we can use more polygons for characters, for example MM use more than 5.000 polygons.

- Let's move on to the sound of the game. Are you planning to use music tracks from the TV series for the purposes of the game or are you going to produce an original soundtrack?

No, both music and voices are original and followed by Jinglebell Studio, the company that in Italy is the most known studio involved in localization of videogames, specially adventures (for example the Italian localization for Syberia, Broken Sword Sleeping Dragon but also many other titles). Of course we are giving to the audio section an important space to create a strong pathos, so music and sound FX are developed from skilled professionals and recorded in Dolby Digital system.

- Are you going to hire new voice-talents or do you plan to use some of the actors that give their voices to the cast of the TV series?

Yes we are going to use new voices and we have just chosen the voice for MM, a typical Indiana Jones voice!

- And last but definitely not least let's talk a bit about the gameplay. What kind of tasks will gamers have to accomplish in Martin Mystere in order to complete the game?

There are many different kind of rebus to solve, always typical of adventure, starting from easier arriving to the more challenging (but never impossible) quests.

- From the screenshots it seems that you are going to use a point and click interface. Could you describe to us how the interface of the game is going to work?

We have received a lot of constructive criticisms from our precedent Druuna Morbus Gravis players, so we have obtain for a point and click interface with automatic descriptions under the pointer that is a polyfunctional tool; so operating with right mouse click you can select what you want to do: take, observe and use an object, talk to characters selecting the phrase from a list or still go in a determinate position.

- What about the dialogue interface, how is that going to look like?

As told above, speaking with a character is possible to select what you want from a list of different phrases, of course the player need to understand the best approach to reach the desired result.

- Will the gameplay contain action elements or is it going to be a pure adventure?

At first we were thinking of adding some action elements but it seems that many players prefer pure style adventure so at the end we have designed a pure

adventure game with a right compromise among new and old style.

- One thing that most gamers despise is pixel hunting. Do you plan to use any special techniques to avoid extreme pixel hunting? Many adventures recently suffer from illogical puzzles. Will players be able to complete Martin Mystere without scratching their heads and looking for walkthroughs on the Internet?

I understand and I share! ;) No the actions that the player will have to do will be determined with naturalness. For example if you find a key it will be spontaneous to operate on a safe. The important thing is that the game design was built considering that any action and any quest are based on motivations; so where the player finds an element he finds it in the right probable place.

- What are the minimum system requirements for Martin Mystere?

A standard PC, with a Win O.S. and a 3D accelerated graphic card; we have hesitated to request a strong configuration also because the character of MM probably could interest many occasional players. Of course with a good configuration the game will result more enjoyable.



- When will Martin Mystere be released?

Unfortunately cause of some improvements we had to make there has been a small delay, so we foresee to finish the PC version for September.

- And do you plan to release a demo or a trailer to the public before that?

It's not impossible and we are just discussing this possibility with GMX.



Adventure Games / General

- Where is your development team based and when were you founded?

See above!

- Have you created any other titles before Martin Mystere?

Yes, we have developed in 2001 Druuna Morbus Gravis, a PC adventure based on another international comic character (perhaps first game with audio certified in THX) and some kids platform games based on known characters of international literature: Pinocchio, Robin Hood, Alice Underground's adventures and 20.000 League Under the Sea.

- Why did you choose to create an adventure game?

Because we love contents and the adventure genre is the best way to say a complex story.

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

In this moment there aren't many adventures, many publishers and developers don't want to invest on this direction; vice versa we believe that contents will never die. We think that in near future the adventure genre will probably see some changes in the manner of creating adventures.

- Lots of adventure gamers complain that recent adventures are significantly inferior in terms of gameplay and story compared to games of the 80s and 90s. Do you agree with that, and if you do what kind of changes do you think adventure games need to produce more entertaining titles?

Yes I agree but new technologies needs today a lot of money investments than some years ago and now taking a long story is really binding. Anyway it could be possible that the adventure genre could follow in some manner the way used by Revolution Software with Broken Sword III.

- You have signed a deal with GMX Media for certain countries in Europe. What do you think of your co-operation with GMX Media so far?

We have found in GMX a competent and reliable company; we hope and believe that this is the beginning of a long partnership.

- Have you found a publisher for the American market yet?

I'm really writing from Los Angeles where the E3 Expo has taken place, we have been discussing with some publishers that are interested both in publishing in USA/Canada as well as publishing the Xbox version. We'll keep you informed ;)

- Do you plan to release more adventures in the near future?

Of course!

- How many copies does Martin Mystere have to sell for you to say that the game was a financial success?

We don't fly too high...(I don't know if this expression exists in English), we believe that if our game will be a financial success we'll have taken correct decisions.

- Is there something else you would like to add?

Yes, I hope that my English could be intelligible almost at 50% ;) A special thanx to you and a big greeting to all your readers.



Interview with Rebecca Clements

In our last issue an adventure called Cirque De Zale came out of nowhere to steal Syberia 2's place of Review of the month. The game has received great feedback from adventurers so far. With influences from Monkey Island and Simon the Sorcerer, Cirque De Zale managed to bring some of the old glory of adventures those who played it, even for a short while.

This month we invited the creator of Cirque De Zale, Rebecca Clements, to our Lounge. We are happy to report that as you will read in the interview, Rebecca is already working on the sequel to Cirque De Zale. Let's see what this promising developer has to say about her recent success, independently developed adventures and the state of adventure games in general.

Yourself:

- Tell us a bit about yourself.

I'm a hot, little communist cowgirl currently studying Japanese at a university in Brisbane, Australia. I care for sick kittens in my spare time, as well as drawing semi-(non)profitable Japanese style comics. I discovered AGS while making castles out of my millions of dollars one day, and have made one incredibly successful game since then. I now spend my time travelling the world and teaching others how to make games and find love on the stock market. Sometimes I lie, sometimes I don't. I'm one of the few chosen ones on this earth that know Queen are the greatest band ever. My two great loves are rugby league and karaoke (though sometimes I think karaoke is just playing with my feelings).

- What are your all-time favourite adventure games?

I'm glad you didn't ask me to pick one. Obviously, the first two 'Monkey Island' games are hard to go past, and 'Grim Fandango' is amazing. I love almost all of the old Sierra titles too, particularly 'Quest for Glory' and 'Kings Quest'. I have a special little place in my heart for 'Simon the Sorcerer' though.

- Have you played any recent adventures that you enjoyed?

Well, due to almost no decent adventure games

being released commercially these days, lately it's been all AGS games. 'Odysseus Kent' is one of the more atmospheric AGS games and it'll always be one of my favourites, though I recently played both '5 Days a Stranger' (by the creator of 'Odysseus Kent') and 'Pleurghburg' and I'd be hard pressed to find many commercial games that could beat those for entertainment value.

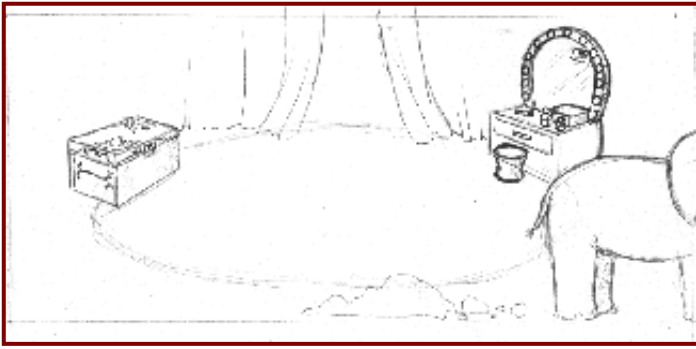
Cirque De Zale

- When did you first think of creating an adventure game?

I think everyone who played all the early adventure games had a secret little dream to create their own. I know that while I was growing up, Roberta Williams was one of my first idols and as a result I got it into my head to learn programming (a dream that was thankfully crushed as soon as I started learning and I realised how utterly boring it was). In December of last year I really started thinking seriously about making a game, though I had no idea how I would handle the programming side. Thankfully, I had a couple of friends that knew about AGS and it was probably no more than an hour after I discovered the software that I started scribbling notes for Cirque.

- How long did it take you to create Cirque De Zale in total?





Total? It's hard to say since if another bug pops up, I'll still technically be working on it. Though, aside from little touch-ups, the whole thing from conception to first release probably took a little over 4 months. The bulk of the game was created in 3 months, though I was spending an unholy amount of hours each day working on it as I was on my summer holidays.

- How did you come up with the ... poop boy profession?

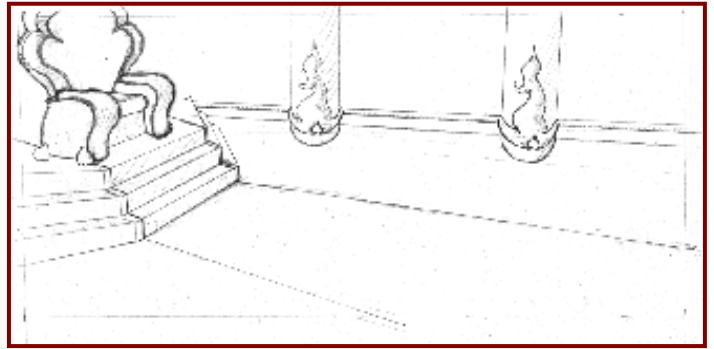
I had to give Alexander a humiliating and degrading job (it's always fun to be evil to your main character) as well as putting him in the circus environment so it made sense that he might want to aspire to be the ringleader. I think working with excrement is pretty degrading, though... I mean no offence to all those hard working sanitation worker types out there – you guys rule!

- Did you have any inspirations when you created Cirque De Zale?

I guess anyone would be able to see that Monkey Island and Guybrush Threepwood were my main inspirations so I won't go on about that. Simon the Sorcerer was also a huge inspiration, I loved his anti-hero sentiment when I first played 'Simon the Sorcerer 2'. I think everything else came from various game and movie stories that I've encountered over the years and have wanted to completely screw around with.

- Alexander Zale is quite obnoxious and mean-spirited. Was this a way to escape the stereotype hero framework that most writers work with or did you think it would just be more fun?

Hmm, both! I've always loved stories where they make fun of the usual narrative conventions and stereotypes so I wanted to do a bit of that but of course I wanted to make the game funny as well. I guess that's just my kind of humour. I'm sure anyone who knows me will agree with that. I think Alexander's the kind of guy I'd like to be if I were an 80 year old man (and I really can't wait for that day!).



- During the development of a game it is quite often that the story of the game has to change due to quite a few reasons (i.e. time restrictions, developer realizes some parts of the story don't make sense etc). Did it happen during production of Cirque De Zale as well? Did you have to change the script somehow compared to the original plan or did you stick to the initial idea?

For the most part, I managed to stick to the original idea. There were times during those long, lonely nights in front of the monitor that I was tempted to knock out a couple of rooms and shorten the story, but in the end I'm glad I stuck with it, because I'd be getting even more complaints about the length of the game otherwise! There were quite a few instances of minor script changes here and there but I don't think the game suffered for it. As precious as I am about these things, I managed to let them go.

- Why did you decide to use a Lucasarts-style interface?

I don't know if a Sierra style game was really my style. As much as I love playing those games, what I wanted for Cirque was for it to be a tribute to 'Monkey Island'. I wanted people to get a real sense of nostalgia as they played it, which is exactly the kind of game I'd love to play. It just follows that I give it the same basic GUI as MI and try to make the sprites, dialogue and backgrounds look similar. I really have to thank Proskrito for the template, because there's no way I'd be able to program my own GUI like that.

- What programs did you use to create the characters and backgrounds for Cirque De Zale?



Paint Shop Pro all the way, man! I've never managed to use another paint program. Photoshop in particular I find too... messy. PSP is a great, simple and it's just perfect for the kind of art I typically do.

- Is there any chance we might see a speech add-on for the game?

It's always a possibility that I may lose my mind one day. Really, I don't think so. I've had a few offers from people to do voices for it. I'd like to do other games in the future that use speech and I've got some great people in mind to do the voices when I do, but like I said before, Cirque was supposed to follow in the footsteps of Monkey Island and other Lucasarts games, and so it just wouldn't seem right. Personally, I love being able to imagine the voice you think suits the character yourself. It's been incredibly interesting to hear some of my friends do quotes from the game in voices I never would have imagined. I think that's a nice advantage of text-only games.

- What do you think of the feedback you have received so far for your adventure?

I was –extremely- flattered at the sheer number of compliments I got! I didn't expect that many people to play the game (especially outside of the AGS community) and I thought most of the feedback would be criticism but most people are fine with accepting that it's an amateur game and my first attempt so they forgive a lot of mistakes and shortcomings. The criticism has been great too because now I know exactly the kinds of things I need to work on next time. I don't think, to this date, anyone has said, "It's crap"... which makes me happy.

- If you could develop Cirque De Zale all over again from the very beginning, what would you do differently?



Go through all that horror again? My god... I guess the only thing I'd do is more beta testing before I released it, and spend a bit more time on Alexander's walk cycle. You people just won't let that go!

- How many times has Cirque De Zale been downloaded so far?

I have absolutely no idea. It's available for download in a few places now, so it's impossible to say. The only link with a counter is on the main AGS page, and that's currently sitting on 1432. I suspect it's a much higher number than that from some of the other links though, especially considering that's it's available at Underdogs (though when I last checked, it was listed as 'Cirque DU Zale').

- Is there ever going to be a Cirque De Zale 2?

Most definitely! I've already written parts of it and I'm going to work towards making it a more professional looking game (and longer, too). I might have done so with the first game if I'd known it was going to get this much attention. Who knows what WACKY things Alexander will get up to next time?

AGS games

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

Oh, gee. OK... in no particular order, 'Odysseus Kent', 'Pleurghburg', '5 Days a Stranger', 'Kings Quest II+' and 'Garfield'. Picking the 'best' is impossible because they all fit into different categories. 'Odysseus Kent' has the coolest and most nostalgic feel to it. 'Pleurghburg' is HUGE and has the best replay value. '5 Days' is the best made amateur game I've ever played (and spooky to boot). 'Kings Quest II+' is the best 'spoof' of a commercial game, and 'Garfield' is without a doubt the best 'Garfield' game ever made and great if you're a fan of the original comics. Sorry, I just couldn't pick one, I piked on your well thought out question.



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

I believe Chris said it in his interview last month, but I have to agree – script editing! One of the most off-putting things when you're playing a game is seeing a lot of spelling mistakes, bad punctuation and grammar, or just not being able to read the text easily. I don't mind if a game has a few mistakes here and there (I'm sure Cirque has a few!) but it's such a small thing that makes such a difference to the atmosphere of a game. Story-wise, I think a lot of AGS users are doing –fine– and when you're playing a fun game, the graphics don't matter that much.

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

I doubt it, sadly. I just don't see much hope for adventure games in the commercial world these days, be they friend or foe... sorry, I mean amateur or professionally produced. I'd love nothing more than to see a resurgence of adventure games in today's market, but I just don't think it has a chance. Prove me wrong,



kids! Prove me wrong...

- 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?

I keep one eye open, for sure. I never play demos though, because I'd rather just see the finished product. I am looking forward to FantomeLeChiekh's Monkey Island game (the art is marvellous), Blackthorne's 'Quest for Infamy' (mainly because he stole my idea – the jerk!) and Mar's 'Sam & Max: The Case Gilbert' (because I need my S&M fix badly!).

General

- Will we ever see a website exclusively for your own productions in the future?

I'm sure you will, I keep telling myself I'll make one. Mind you, don't expect it to get updated more than once a year... I have a terrible record with the webpages I currently own.

- Do you see yourself co-operating with other AGS developers to create bigger productions in the future or do you prefer to work alone?

I prefer to be in charge! Not necessarily alone, though. At the very least, I plan on getting together with a couple of rather talented friends of mine to produce a game or two one day.

- Do you plan to create new adventure games in the future?

Er, yes. I've already mentioned the sequel to Cirque and a game with friends. I have at least 3 other ideas for



games I plan on making at some point so let's hope I get time to do them. Maybe my fans could start supporting me financially...?

- Former Lucasarts vs former Sierra. What's your opinion?

Noooo! My god, they're in totally separate categories, man! That's like asking me which of my children I like best, except that Lucasarts and Sierra aren't mine and I'm infertile thanks to an accident involving a sharp fence and a horse. I'll say Lucasarts' are typically the funnier games, and Sierra's are the more... adventurous.

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

You know, I'll always say point and click except in the case of Grim Fandango. That game is just perfect the way it is.

- After your experience with the development of Cirque De Zale, what would be the best advice you would give to a developer-wannabe?

Plan EVERYTHING on paper before-hand but leave room for improvisation. Also, don't get hung up on making it perfect, just try to make it fun by imagining what kind of game you'd like to play yourself.

- 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'm one of those people for sure. I'd rather play 'Kings Quest 1' 100 times than fork out money for some of the games that get released as 'adventure games' today. I think the problem is partly that game developers look at the tools available to them, and from that decide what kind of game they can make that uses all of them.

You have to imagine how a game should be, and then work out what you can use to make it like that. Mind you, you have to look at the market for games these days and wonder whether a game like the original adventures would be profitable. I doubt it, but I don't think it would have hurt Lucasarts to give it a go with the new Sam & Max game. If anything would have made it, that game would've.

- 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?

I think it already is, in all honesty. I've had a great time in the past 6 months playing some fantastic adventure games, some of which (in my opinion) are close to indistinguishable from an old-style commercial adventure game. Keep it up, everyone!

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

43 + 106 = 149 ... no, wait! Look out for 'Cirque de Zale II' and other future games coming from the Mushroom Republic. Keep breathing, people!



Interview with DTP

*Some time ago we featured an interview with one of the biggest publishers for adventure games in Europe, DTP. DTP specializes in the German-speaking countries, which is one of the strongest markets for adventure games worldwide. Recently they have published *The Westerner* and *Black Mirror*, two adventures that proved to be huge successes for DTP, both financially and critically.*

This month Christopher Kellner from DTP will talk to us about their recent success with these two titles and in our next issue they will talk to us about their future projects. Our advise to developers who might be reading this interview...send them a mail, they do know how to market adventure games.

The Westerner

- It seems that the *Westerner* has received a great feedback from press and fans in Germany. Can you tell us some of the review scores that it has received in paper and online press?

C.K.: The *Westerner* has been rated as one of the best adventures ever. It achieved scores from 85 to even 90 % - this exceeds even the high rankings of *Runaway*. Plus a lot of awards, even from Germany's biggest Magazines PC Games, Gamestar and PC Action, who normally tend to be very strict in rating adventures. In the ComputerBild Spiele, which belongs to the biggest game-mags as well, we got a 2,44 (which means "good" in Germany, as 1 would be the highest mark) – but only because you can't change the controls on the keyboard...well...as you know, *The Westerner* is all mouse-controlled.

- What is the feedback you have received from customers? What did they like most about the game and what did they wish it were better?

C.K.: They liked the humor in the game most. There are so many funny details you just can't stop smiling when playing the game. What they didn't like is the somehow predictable plot – but hey, it's an homage to all the old Western movies, what plot did they expect? A French art-movie?

- How long has it been since you first released the game?

C.K.: We came out at the end of February.

- How many copies has it sold so far?

C.K.: We are very satisfied. Please don't ask me about concrete figures as I can't give them to you – because there are actually international negotiations running. But as the German charts show, *The Westerner* is a very successful adventure.

- Are you satisfied with that number?

C.K.: See answer above ;-)

- For the readers who do not know much about the *Westerner*, could you describe in short what the game is about?

C.K.: It's a 3D-third person-adventure with point & click-control, placed in a Western-setting. You play the cowboy Fenimore Fillmore, who supports some farmers in their fight against an evil land owner trying to chase them off their land. You see, a typical Western-story. But, as the game develops, you learn that it's not a very serious Western-setting you're in...

- The *Westerner* is a comedy-adventure and there are not so many of those around anymore? Do you think that the success of *The Westerner* proves that games with a comedy theme are a viable market?





C.K.: Of course, as the success of Tony Tough and The Westerner shows. But adventures with a more serious outline do even better, that's true. I think both categories have their fans and therefore have a future.

- The first edition of the game in Spanish was notorious for its numerous bugs. Did you manage to get rid of these problems before releasing the game in the German market?

C.K.: We got rid of most of the bugs in the game and even managed to implement better graphics – for example we got real mirror-effects in the water, a feature the Spanish version has not.

- Do you know if we are going to see a sequel for The Westerner in the near future?

C.K.: As I want to keep my head on my shoulders, I'm silent for now...

- For the adventure Black Mirror (we will talk about it later) you published a web comic on the game's official website (which we re-publish here in The Inventory in English). Do you plan to do something similar for The Westerner as well?

C.K.: As the big hype about The Westerner is already



over here in Germany, I'd say no. But who knows?

Black Mirror

- For the readers who do not know much about the Black Mirror, could you describe in short what the game is about?

C.K.: Black Mirror is a classic 2D point & click Adventure, as we know and love it. You play Samuel Gordon, a young English noble, who had left the home of his ancestors – the dark castle Black Mirror – 12 years ago and didn't ever want to return, because his wife died in a fire there.

But now his grandfather has died under mysterious circumstances, and Samuel does not believe that it was suicide, as everyone in the castle tries to make him believe. So he returns and starts to investigate. He wanders through the beautiful, but dark castle and its neighbourhood – to reveal an ancient and terrible family secret.

- Could you tell us some of the review scores that the Black Mirror has received in the markets where you published the game?

C.K.: Black Mirror got marks between 80 and 90 %. As it is technologically not as revolutionary as The Westerner, the big game-mags gave marks from 80 to 83 %. Online, Black Mirror did even better. Most reviewers were stunned by the story, the dark but beautiful settings and the atmosphere.

- Black Mirror contained a number of strong scenes. What kind of rating did it receive in the German speaking countries?

C.K.: It got a "USK 12", (USK= Unabhängige





Selbstkontrolle, independent self-control) which means you are not allowed to sell it to children under the age of 12. But that's very liberal. Actually, you don't kill anybody in the game and there is neither much blood nor gore.

- How long has it been since you first released the game?

C.K.: We came out at the beginning of April.

- How many copies has Black Mirror sold so far?

C.K.: Black Mirror sold extremely well, but for the same reasons as with The Westerner I am not allowed to reveal concrete numbers.

- Are you satisfied with that number?

C.K.: We are very, very satisfied with it. Black Mirror has developed from an unknown game to some kind of spring-surprise in the German-speaking countries, crushing into the charts right between titles as Battlefield Vietnam and Far Cry who were mega-sellers over here. On amazon.de, we even were at the top of the pc games-charts in the first week of April.

- The English edition of the game featured some horrible voice-overs, which many adventurers complained about. Did you manage to find suitable actors for the German edition and how did they do based on feedback from press and fans.

C.K.: We knew about the horrible voice-overs in the English version and decided to avoid this mistake by all means. For Samuel, dtp even started some kind of poll in the Internet, in which we put a list of well-known "German-voices" of great actors like Robert de Niro, Al Pacino, Kurt Russell and Johnny Depp. As we hoped and expected, people chose David Nathan, the German voice of Johnny Depp.



If you look at Samuel and remember Johnny's look in "Sleepy Hollow", it was just the right choice. Nathan did an excellent job, and the other voice actors – all of them professionals who have been in the business for years – as well. This was one of the aspects of Black Mirror the press and the fans liked most.

- As stated previously you published a web comic based on Black Mirror. What have fans thought of this marketing strategy so far and do you plan to do something similar for other future titles as well?

C.K.: Nearly for all our games we plan something special like this. For Robin Hood: Defender of the Crown we had a deck of cards with German castles on it, for Black Mirror we decided to make a comic, for Tony Tough we published a useful information like "pigs can't vomit" every day, selling it as "Tony's wisdoms".

The fans love it, and for many who still hadn't decided whether to buy the game or not it was just the right "appetizer". dtp plans similar stuff for all big titles in the future, but we don't know yet if it's going to be a comic again

- What is the feedback you have received from customers? What did they like most about the game and what did they wish it were better?

C.K.: The feedback we get on the different German boards is great. Everyone seems to love the game. They all like the dark setting, the beautiful graphics, the atmosphere, the localisation. Some of them didn't like the end.

I say, Black Mirror is a mysterious game in every aspect. And not all mysteries are being solved in the end. That's what some people on the boards wrote, but others considered it as some kind of "anti-Hollywood-ending" and loved it for that.



Adventure Games / General

- You seem to have cornered the adventure market in the German speaking countries. In our last interview when we asked you if you have any plans to publish games outside of the German-speaking areas you answered that you have some associates that you co-operate with in other countries. Has anything changed since then, and do you plan to broaden your operation in other countries as well?

C.K.: We are still based on the German-speaking countries and cooperate in other territories with partners like GMX in England or Focus in France.

- Are there any adventures you have not signed yet but have your eyes upon so to speak?

C.K.: We have our eyes on some of them, but I really like my head sitting on my shoulders, as I told before...

- There are many independent developers out there who create fantastic adventure games which do not have the same state-of-the-art technology that commercial titles usually have (no speech, low resolution), albeit they are much more enjoyable to play than many of the commercial titles that we find on the game shelves. Some examples of those games could be Cirque De Zale that we reviewed

last month or No-Action Jackson that we review this month. Do you think it would be possible that some day these developers could come to an agreement with publishers to release their titles as small-budget products (maybe even with online distribution)?

C.K.: That could certainly be a possibility. But it's not so easy as one might expect. You have to keep an eye on your reputation as a publisher only publishing high quality adventure. It was a hard struggle to get the press and the customers to the point where they can't say "adventure" without saying "dtp" and then saying "high quality".

If we would suddenly publish low-budget adventures who lack the quality concerning the graphics and the sound, we would destroy our reputation in the press. It's difficult. Many fans would be glad about it, but many as well would punish us for publishing games that do not resemble the high standards we claim for ourselves.

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

C.K.: If you are a developer and looking for a German publisher, just write me an Email: c.kellner@dtp-ag.com. We are always interested in new games and have a fair look on it. To all others: keep on adventuring...

The Black Mirror comic you see on the next page was provided to us kindly by DTP. The comic first appeared in the German website of the game in German (obviously) but we have been given the English version. We split the strip in 2 parts due to the fact that the file size of the magazine should be as low as possible so that readers without a broadband connection do not have to wait for hours until they download the magazine. Next month we will publish the second and final part. For those of you who want to learn more about Black Mirror you can read our review in The Inventory 11 while if you want to buy the English version of the game you might want to do so by clicking on the advertisement on page 6 of our magazine and ordering it from the online store of GMX Media (it is released on the 28th of May), thus supporting also financially The Inventory as well.

BLACK MIRROR

The Prologue



1970



NO ! ...

ARGH...THESE DAMN NIGHTMARES... MY HEAD...



OH NO...WILLIAM...WHY FOR GOD'S SAKE HIM? BUT I MUST NOT EVER RETURN TO BLACK MIRROR...



AS I WAS THINKING ABOUT THE DEATH OF MY WIFE I LOOKED AT THE SMALL TABLE BESIDE MY BED. I HAD NOT OPENED THE OBITUARY NOTICE ON IT YET... FOR OBVIOUS REASONS...

BLACK MIRROR

The Prologue



#2

by *Lighting*



AGAIN, IT WAS ONE OF THESE CLOUDY DAYS ON WHICH I HAD TO MAKE A SERIOUS DECISION.



THE MORE I THOUGHT ABOUT IT...



WHY SHOULD WILLIAM HAVE COMMITTED SUICIDE?

...THE MORE I UNDERSTOOD THAT I HAD TO RETURN TO BLACK MIRROR.



THE PLACE OF MY DARK PAST...

...HAD FINALLY CALLED ME BACK!



WWW.BLACKMIRROR-GAME.DE

then I have to tell you – it isn't. It works wonderfully well.

The complexity of the puzzles, which include combining items in the inventory, raises this game far above others of its type – the puzzles are clever enough to test the grey matter, but not so difficult as to hinder progress. Although having said that, this is by no means an easy game to solve. All the puzzles and problems you encounter in this game are, with the exception of one problem which drove me potty trying to solve it, completely logical and eminently solvable.

The cleverest part of this adventure game is the structure – and if you are totally immersed in the game you probably won't even notice how this whole thing has been put together. It is known as retrospective flashback – each cut scene moves the story forward along the timeline. In other words Jackson, from the very first cut scene, is telling the story retrospectively. Difficult to grasp, I know. But how many amateur game writers would even attempt this? I have only ever encountered this type of structure in professionally produced games with development budgets of millions of dollars.

If you are a lateral thinker you will enjoy this game. Although some of the dialogue branches don't lead anywhere in particular, it is important to talk to any character you encounter because, occasionally, you will be rewarded with either an item for your inventory or a clue that will help you progress.

There is a whole cast of characters involved in this game, including a cat called Rufus, but the most interesting character is Jackson himself. He is a complex young man who expresses his fury, angst and rebellious nature in no uncertain terms. He hasn't changed the sheets on his bed for – well, a long time. When you ask him to open the window in his bedroom he complains



The DOTT influence is obvious

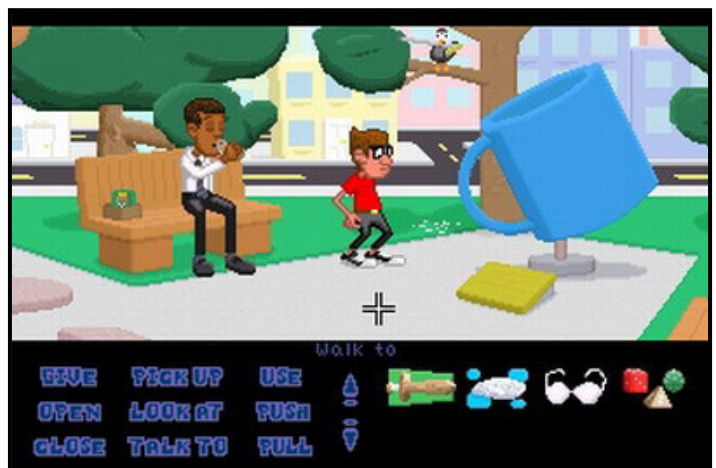
that the fresh air will dilute the musky odour. When he's told his grandparents are arriving he states that, "I can't waste time patronising relatives." If you are a teenager, or the parent of a teenager, you can probably hear bells ringing right now – how close to the truth is this?

Graphics: The game plays in full screen, hi-resolution 2D graphics. No, it's not eye-bleedingly sharp, state-of-the-art graphics – because it doesn't have to be. The graphics are reminiscent of LucasArt circa 1993, and it works for Jackson, much the same as it worked for Bernard in "Day of the Tentacle". No-Action Jackson has a cartoon feeling about it, which is amazing when you consider that this is an amateur game – and I use the word "amateur" in the sense that the author has not been paid, the writing is certainly approaching a professional standard. The amount of work invested in the graphical side of this project is astonishing and should be applauded.

The animation is excellent. When you move Jackson around, I don't know what he's on, but he responds with lightening reflexes – even if he does look as though a horse has bolted from underneath him. On



Rufus the cat



No Action Jackson is full of characters



Sometimes you can laugh just by looking at the graphics

the downside I found it strange to watch half the face moving when characters spoke. Another strange anomaly is the speech captions above the characters' heads which move across the room as the characters' move – slightly odd when you see it for the first time.

I am sure that the author of this game is a DOTT fan because Jackson is a spitting image of Bernard, even down to the nerdy spectacles – but, hey, who cares?

Sound: The sounds in this game are very interesting. The music content is almost non-existent, except for the odd sound of a flute (?) or tapping drumsticks – it really is difficult to describe what instrument is making the sound. (I give up, Britton, what is it?)

However, the sound effects are a different matter. At one point Jackson's mother is vacuuming the landing. As Jackson moves in and out of range, the sound of the Hoover rises or decreases in tone – how clever is that? Not only is it a clever effect it also adds to the gameplay – it's all about atmosphere, isn't it?

Gameplay: Everything about this game works well and is perfectly paced. If you use logical reasoning you will never find yourself stuck or wandering about in a

bemused daze – there are clues everywhere, but you really have to look for them.

The interface is the usual LucasArts version, well known to a generation of adventure gamers. Left click on the range of icons represented at the bottom of the screen, right click on anything you want to "Look at". The Escape key brings up "Save", "Load" and "Quit". Unfortunately there is only one slot for saving – which means you cannot select the point at which you enter the game. Sometimes when you play an adventure game you just know instinctively when the environment, the interaction with the characters and the storyline feels right. And from the first moment you sit down with Jackson and his mates to play "Slackmaster" you just know that this game is a winner...

General Info: Unfortunately, there are several bugs within this game. It crashes unexpectedly in several locations. For instance, try picking up the chopping board that grandma is using in the kitchen and the game drops into windows, stating smugly, in a neat little box, that it is the game that is at fault and not the AGS interpreter. It should be clearly noted that the author of this game has listed it as a beta release, and has every right to say that the game is still in development. Can't wait for the final release...

In a few words... It is not often that game players, or even grizzled game reviewers like myself, are privileged to witness the birth of a true adventure game talent. With the release of "No-Action Jackson", even in its raw beta state, I think we have seen the beginning of something that takes adventuring on to a new level – and, boy, does this genre need an injection of new talent! If you consider yourself to be an adventure gamer, don't hesitate – download this game immediately. You can find it at <http://66.96.236.220/noaction/>

- Rob Hamilton

Information	The Verdict
Title: No Action Jackson	Story: 96
Developer: Britton O'Toole	Graphics: 91
Category: Point and Click	Sound: 60
Perspective: 3rd Person	Gameplay: 92
Difficulty: Medium	OVERALL: 88
Site: http://66.96.236.220/noaction/	* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6
Sys Req: 320x200 VGA card, Windows	

MIDNIGHT NOWHERE

Midnight Nowhere is a 3rd person point and click adventure from the Russian-based Buka Entertainment. I have just finished it and I must say I am surprised. One does not hear many good things about it but it turned out to be one of the few good adventures that are available out in the market right now. Beware though, if you are offended by nudity, strong language or gory images this game is definitely not for you. If however you do not mind any of the above you're in for a good experience. Let's see how Midnight Nowhere rates bit by bit.

Story: The year is 2015 and the place is Black Lake, an imaginary city with strict rules and tight government control. The city has been plagued by the presence of a serial killer who has spread terror among Black Lake's citizens. Almost everyone tries to flee the city with any means possible. However, the authorities have set up a wall that no one is allowed to pass. It is rumoured that if you escape the wall you're being taken into quarantine, although some people believe that you're being killed instead so that the authorities are sure that the serial killer will not escape the city...alive.

You wake up in a morgue. You do not know who you are or why you were packed in a bag among several other dead bodies. As you try to make your way out of the hospital you discover more and more dead bodies and no one is there to clear out the situation for you. Therefore your main task is to get out of this hospital-graveyard and to find out who you are and how you ended up in that place. The story of the game is magnificent (condition: if you are not offended by nudity, strong language and gory images). It is the driving force of the game. You will be discovering little pieces of information on a constant pace, some of them will give some of the answers you're looking for, some of them will give birth to even more questions.

Even though there are not many alive characters to talk with, the main character of the game comments almost on everything, and you feel very immersed in the gameworld due to this commentary. I can imagine that some of the comments will be considered by some (especially female gamers) far-fetched and sexist but if you are prepared to look over that, you will find a great deal of hilarious puns and jokes in spite of the horror theme of the game.

There might not be many characters who are alive as we said before, but there are many dead ones, whose mysteries and secrets you will have to unravel by tracking down their documents or by examining the objects they were holding. There are a few characters that you can talk to as well, and they are rather interesting.

Midnight Nowhere scores very high when it comes to atmosphere. The great storytelling in conjunction with the creepy settings create a world reminiscent of adventures like Dark Seed and Shadow of the Comet. It



Why would someone block the exit?



Your previous neighbour



Trust me, he's not taking a nap.

would probably be a great entry-adventure for people who like survivor horror games like Silent Hill and Resident Evil, so if you know any of those people and they ask you what recent adventure would you recommend for them to play, Midnight Nowhere is the answer you should be giving them. What I really enjoyed about Midnight Nowhere is that instead of the moronic and 'supposedly' scary-jumpy moments with sudden and loud sounds that Hollywood movies try to scare 12-year-olds with, the developers used an ambience instead to create an unsettling and startling feeling in every new location you visit.

Don't expect me to tell you the ending, since my reviewing ethics don't allow me to do something like that, but I could say that the finale gives you a 'must play it twice' kind of feeling, due to some questions being either unanswered by the developers' side or not completely understood by my own side.

The story is full of symbolisms and references to books,



Exploring the abandoned hospital

movies, authors and even computer games, among which you can even spot the famous Larry games. You can also see some images-parodies of well-known companies, i.e. a phone whose name is Hokia (Nokia) or a company named Iceberg with a logo featuring an interlaced mountain peak (Sierra).

Graphics: The graphics of Midnight Nowhere, while not spectacular, serve the purpose of the game just fine. It uses 3D characters on pre-rendered backgrounds. There are usually 2 or even more camera cuts within each room. The camera is frequently placed near to the point of action, hence it does not take much time to walk from one screen exit to the next and it also makes you feel more immersed in the gaming world. The opposite example when it comes to camera placement would be Syberia and The Longest Journey where the camera was often placed far away from the main point of action and sometimes you had to watch a tiny 3D character running from one screen exit to the other.

The 3D models are not the best you've ever seen, sometimes the character's bodies and heads seem slightly blocky. Although the graphics are not state of the art, they manage to achieve what the developers aimed for...to creep you out. The backgrounds are usually very dark. The walls of the buildings you are going to visit in the game are filled with freaky and provocative posters or paintings, featuring people with deformed body parts or naked women. You do not see non-interactive cutscenes that often but when you do the videos used are very well made. More of them would have been definitely welcome for creating a better cinematic feeling.

Sound: It was a nice surprise to listen to a well-performed voice casting. Buka entertainment have probably showed that finding professional actors is not

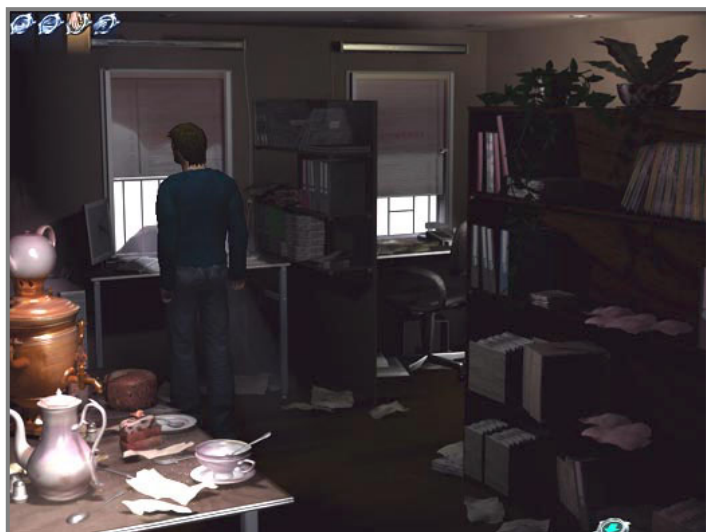
about how much money you are willing to spend but instead it is about how much time and effort you are determined to devote for finding the right people for the job.

The music tracks used are of the ambient sort mostly. Especially the track heard during the 'fan-room' was one of the creepiest I've heard recently. Something that is annoying though is that the tracks tend to loop continuously and after a while they become quite tedious and boring, especially if you have to spend a lot of time in a certain room looking for clues or trying to solve a puzzle.

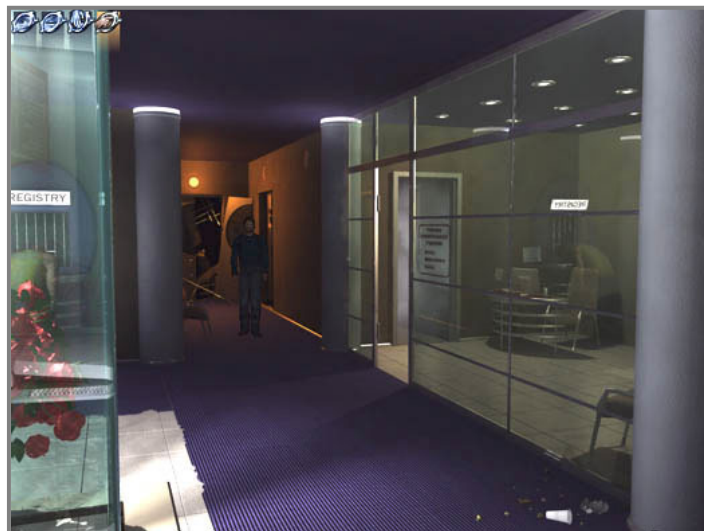
Gameplay: Like most other recent adventures gameplay is probably the part where *Midnight Nowhere* does not deliver as it should have. First of all the interface becomes more of an obstacle than anything else. Let's start by describing how it works. You have four icons on the top left corner of your screen representing the commands Look, Talk, Pick up, and Push/Use. ***Spoilers*** Later on in the game you get another icon as well that opens a PDA that our main hero uses for keeping notes. ***End of Spoilers***

For some reason the developers decided that hotspots would not appear with any of the commands that you choose. That means for example that if there is an object that can be pushed, let's say a button, and you have chosen the command 'pick up' instead when you cross your cursor on the screen, the game will not let you know that there is a button there that you can interact with even if you pass over it with your cursor. You would have to select the 'push/use' command first, scan the screen again with your cursor and then you will know that there's a button there that you can push.

On top of that, during the game the actions Pick up and



Want to see what's behind the window?

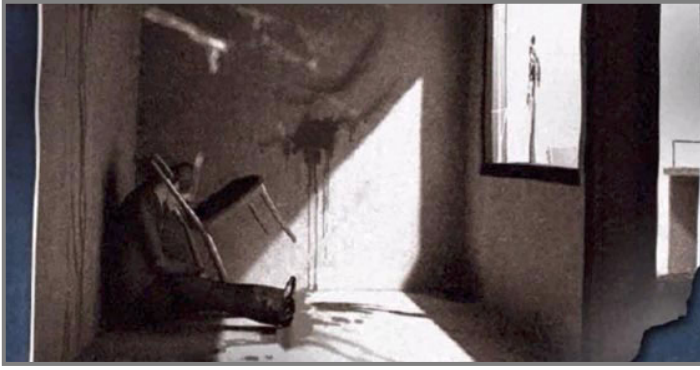


The setting is getting lighter, but not for long

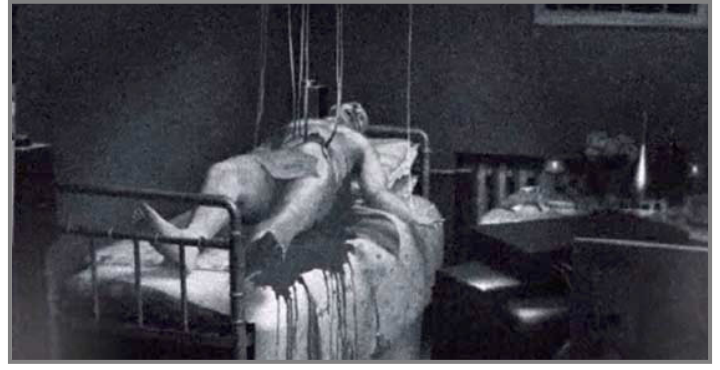
Use/Push are being confused. Sometimes you will get to pick up items from bodies using the 'Pick up' command while some other times you will have to select the Use/Push command instead. This becomes irritating when for example you scan a body with your cursor by selecting one of the above commands to see if you can get an item, and then if you don't find anything it either means that there's nothing there or that you might have to use the other command, therefore you have to pixel-hunt the same area twice. Things get even worse by the fact that when you do actually choose the correct command you will have to click on multiple spots on the same object and sometimes multiple times in the same spot/object to receive all the items you need. This makes it easy to miss an object that you need to proceed in the game.

The game's tasks will seem quite interesting and original at times but after a while they get a bit repetitive and you might lose the initial excitement. You will spend most of the time looking for passwords, keys and access codes that will give you access to confidential information or that will let you enter a locked room. In the end of the game you will probably be sick and tired of passwords and keys. Another thing that is annoying with the gameplay is that some of the hints given in the game are placed in poorly seen places and a few times they are not even hotspots, therefore easy to miss.

Last but definitely not least in the negative side, I encountered one of the worst tasks I have ever encountered in adventure games, and if it weren't for a walkthrough I would have never passed this point. ***Spoilers*** There is a room with four beds and a couple of guys there where you have to look at the top left bed, immediately after that at the bottom left bed, immediately after at the bottom right bed and then exit the 'close up' you're in when you look at these beds and



From the introduction



And yet another dead body

talk immediately with one of the guys there. You get no feedback whatsoever that you have to follow this order. If you talk to the guy by doing anything else apart from this exact sequence I talked about he will not respond to you. ***End of Spoilers***

The gameplay however is not all that bad. It is easy to move from one place to another as the camera is placed close to the action. Some of the password puzzles are actually quite smart in the beginning of the game, but they tend to repeat themselves much more often than they should, resulting in non-diverse gameplay.

When you don't open doors and finding passwords however, there are actually some really innovative tasks that you have to accomplish. Well let's just say that you will do some things in this game that you haven't done before in adventures (or maybe even in your lives). So to sum up there are times when you will enjoy the gameplay despite of the flawed interface, but Buka should better pay more attention on the gameplay of their future projects.

General Info: The game comes in 2 CDs. I encountered two bugs while playing the game and both of them were graphical glitches. Those were: a) not

being able to look at an inventory item in a close up (but fixed it by playing around with the graphic configurations) and b) in 2 locations the character's animation turned really strange with the character starting to moonwalk on the bathroom tiles (or maybe it was one of the jokes the Buka guys pulled making fun of Michael Jackson?) and his neck, arms and legs stayed stiff while he kept on moving. Strange but at the same time quite funny.

In a few words... Midnight Nowhere might not be the best adventure ever and is certainly not suitable for people who do not tolerate mean-spirited humour, drug use showings, nudity or gory scenes. It's certainly not a game you'd buy your children for their birthday.

But for those however who are ready to look past that, there's a great story to be told and a great atmosphere to be experienced. It's a pity that the gameplay did not measure up to the story cause in that case we might be talking about a classic right now. We hope that Buka Entertainment will give us more games with similar strong plots, albeit with a much-improved interface and gameplay.

- Dimitris Manos

Information	The Verdict
Title: Midnight Nowhere	Story: 94
Developer: Buka	Graphics: 84
Category: Point and Click	Sound: 81
Perspective: 3rd Person	Gameplay: 47
Difficulty: Medium	OVERALL: 75
Site: http://www.buka.com/game/Game_14.htm	* Overall = (2 X Story + 2 X Gameplay + Graphics + Sound) / 6
Sys Req: Windows, Pentium 2 400MHz, 1GB HD, 64MB RAM, DirectX Video	

SCHIZM

II

CHAMELEON

Adventure gamers – let’s gather round the flickering embers of the campfire and think this through. Do you like colour puzzles? Do you like number puzzles? Do you like frustratingly boring and inane mazes? Are you a Master of Science in Mathematical or Statistical Analysis? Do you, perhaps, have a Diploma in Linear Algebra or Advanced Calculus? If you answered no to any of these questions “Schizm II – Mysterious Journey II: Chameleon” will grab your brain, screw it into a little ball and shove it through the nearest trouser press. You don’t believe me? Read on...

Story: You play the role of Sen who awakens aboard a dilapidated space station to find he has no conscious memory of his past; he’s suffering from amnesia, which is probably a good thing because a hologram informs you that Sen is solely responsible for betraying his people and destroying his World. Not much pressure there, then!

Sen has been in a cryogenic state for over 200 years as a punishment for his alleged crimes. He is now told that the space station’s orbit is decaying and in a short time it will crash into the planet below. So you’d better get your act together, matey, whizz down to the planet, and sort out the mess for which you are quite clearly responsible. Ah, if only it were that easy...

Most of the actual adventuring is done through lengthy cut scenes, which removes you, the player, from the equation altogether – sorry, you’re just here to solve the puzzles! And there we have one of the main problems. Mathematics was my worst subject at school and as soon as somebody mentions “Base Numbers” my eyes slowly glaze over. In this game some colour puzzles are seemingly intractable, some convoluted number puzzles with base 4 or base 12 content are completely unintelligible (to me, anyway!) and some locked door puzzles would appear to be unsolvable for the average adventurer, who, let’s face it, just wants to play a game.

From the first moment you step foot on the planet you are confronted with an baffling array of puzzles

presented to you in an Alien language of which you have absolutely no knowledge. There are no clues or hints, no guidance of any sort – you either solve these puzzles or you do not make any significant progress at all. And don’t bother reaching for that walkthrough because some of these enigmatic problems have random consequences which change every time you play. A friend of mine said he played the game and it *only* took him five hours to solve one particularly gratuitous brain teaser – d’oh!

The story was written by professional Sci-Fi author Terry Dowling and while the story is not one of the most original ideas for a Sci-Fi story – technology versus nature – it certainly could have been developed into a more than acceptable concept for an adventure game. However, this does not happen because the designers of this game appear to have reached some sort of impasse in the development phase. Perhaps the conversation at Programming Central went something like this: “Hey, Guys, Terry’s storyline only gives us about 5 hours of actual gameplay. Maybe we should make the problems so obtusely, ridiculously, mind-numbingly difficult that it will take the average player forever and a day to finish this game.”

And that is exactly what they did. The game is a



The alien world of Schizm 2

cerebral nightmare, and it certainly could take forever to finish – if you can be at all bothered to wade through the plethora of ambiguous and arbitrary situations! Clearly, and unlike some adventure games, the designers want players to fail dismally in their quest; if not, why else would they make the puzzles so incredibly difficult to negotiate.

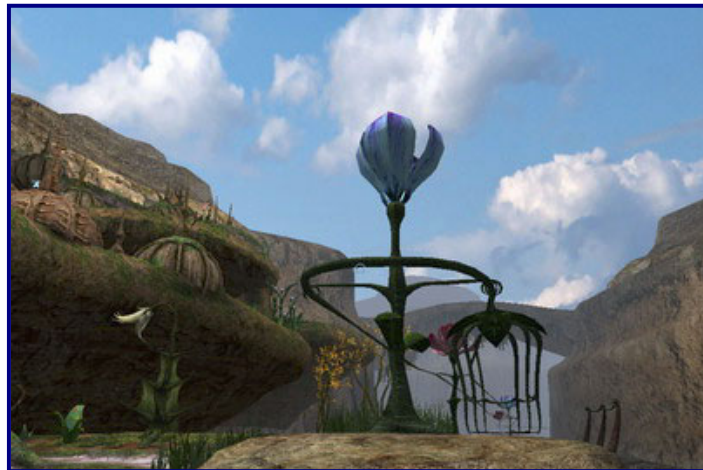
The storyline of any adventure game should engage the players and draw them into a world of suspense and action – every thought, every action, should have a consequence. Not so in this case. You don't have to collect many items for your inventory, or even combine items, all you have to do is solve an array of sublimely difficult puzzles that are placed before you. But there are so many intractable problems facing the average adventurer in this game that many will find themselves wandering around hopelessly adrift in a maelstrom of mind-numbing confusion.

This is a game that lacks multi-character co-operation – at times you feel completely alone in an alien environment wandering from one deserted location to another. The only significant conversations are portrayed in cut scenes, and although you are given chameleon-like powers, the lack of interaction between the characters is quite tangible. Most adventurers want to explore their surroundings, discover usable objects, talk to interesting characters and progress towards a discernable destination. Unfortunately, that is not possible within this particular game as you have to overcome almost impossible odds to make insignificant amounts of forward progress.

Graphics: The 3D graphics in this game really are stunning and can be configured to most screen resolutions. Unfortunately, if you want to experience the full graphical extravaganza you need to have a T&L Card installed in your computer.



A full 3D world in all its glory



Strange objects fill the world of Schizm 2

What is a T&L Card? I have absolutely no idea. All I know is that I do not have that particular card installed, and the odds are that you probably don't have that card installed either. Watching the graphical performance of this game on my computer, which is less than a year old and way above the minimum spec required for this game, was like wading through strawberry jam wearing a pair of size 14 deep sea diver's boots.

The cut scenes were clipped and the frame rate in the main body of the game dropped to unacceptable levels. The animations were jerky and everything else just clunked along – I know I need a T&L card, but I'm not buying a card to play a single game. And that, of course, is just one of the problems. How many people will rush out and buy a specific video card to play a single game?

Sound: The sound effects in this game are excellent. If the experience of having your grey matter flayed from the depths of your skull by a myriad of unrelated puzzles begins to lose its allure just stand back and listen. The sound of the wind, the birds, running water – the ambient environmental sounds are probably the best I have ever heard in any game.

The orchestral score, which is also very well written, is used to enhance the mood and compliment the action. Music can make or break a game; too much, and it becomes intrusive; too little, and the atmosphere is lost – this particular game gets it just about right. I did notice that during a particularly fraught time trying to work out some of the puzzles the music disappeared and only the sound of my head banging rhythmically against the nearest wall was audible.

The voice acting was, in the main, quite good. There was one character who sounded as though their voice had been provided by somebody dragged in off the street to make up the numbers, but other than that it all worked very well.



Full 3D allows you to actually walk instead of 'teleport'

Gameplay: This is a 1st person game with a very simple but effective control system, and is probably the way forward for future games released in this genre. Either the mouse or the keyboard (the WASD combination used in most FPS) can be used to navigate around the alien landscape but I suspect most players will be inclined to use only the mouse. This is not a game that could be described as point and click, although you do have to use the point and click method to activate the ubiquitous puzzles.

The Escape key is used to bring up the menu from which you can implement several actions, including saving and loading. You can also pull up a transcript of the conversations that appeared in cut scenes, which is useful if you think you may have missed something. I would have welcomed a journal/notebook which could have been used in-game, rather than the reams of foolscap paper I used to prove how inept I was as a mathematician.

General Info: It seems that the designers even had problems settling on a title. They obviously gave up and



One of the few characters you will meet

tagged the game with the most confusing and illogical epithet they could come up with – which seems about par for the course.

I am not even sure who this game is aimed at – a Professor of Advanced Logic at Oxford University might be a target, but only if he has installed a T&N card! Most adventure players look for a strong story with interesting and varied characters, an interaction with the environment and the objects contained within, and a satisfying conclusion – sadly, this particular game was lacking in all those things. Yes, the graphics were stunning and the control system was a joy to use, but these two things alone will never compensate for poorly implemented gameplay or a cliched storyline.

In a few words... "Schizm II – Mysterious Journey II: Chameleon" retails at around \$20 – if you can convert that price to a base 12 number, square the result, and do it with alien instructions, you will probably love this game...

- Rob Hamilton

Information

Title: Schizm 2
Developer: Detalion
Category: Point and Click
Perspective: 1st Person
Difficulty: Extreme
Site:
<http://schizm2.tacgames.com/>

Sys Req: Win 98/2000/ME/XP, Pentium 3 800MHz, 64MB T&L Video, 128 RAM

The Verdict

Story: 55
Graphics: 85
Sound: 83
Gameplay: 30
OVERALL: 56

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

The Invento-mail

It's time to see what our readers had to say to us. And keep sending your comments and questions to the team of this magazine at theinventory@yahoo.com. This month as usual we have emails from people who love our magazine but also e-mails from readers who had a different opinion than we had on certain issues. But first of all we start with Harry Fougiaxis from Greece who was kind enough to donate a certain amount of money to our magazine through Paypal.

Hi! I've sent you x [edited] euros to support your efforts with The Inventory. I'd like to draw your attention that PayPal gave me a warning that "Your payment was funded with a credit card. The ability to accept credit card funded payments is reserved for Premier and Business account. Since the recipient of your payment has a Personal account, he will be asked to upgrade to a Premier Account in order to accept your payment."

All the best
Harry
Athens - Greece

The Inventory: Thank you very much Harry for your contribution. Unfortunately not many other readers were as supportive as you were so we decided to move on and try advertisements instead. We are doing our best to keep The Inventory a no-charge download. It takes a hell of a lot of time to create each issue and we have to make a living as well. So I truly hope that our readers will understand that and try to help us keep this effort alive for as long as possible. To do that you can just click on one of our advertisements and buy an adventure from the webpage that pops up. By that way one gets an adventure and supports The Inventory at the same time. If some readers want to send us money through Paypal however they are more than welcome to do so to the address theinventory@yahoo.com (and by the way we have updated to a Premier Account now). Thanks again for the gesture Harry and we hope you will enjoy our future issues!

Hello there,

Reading your last issue of "The Inventory" I was quite surprised in finding a review of Patrimonium in there. As for the fact we did release the english version just a short time ago, you must be very up-to-date with your research on everything happening within the community. Now I just wanted to mention our official homepage www.patrimonium.de. There is also an English version of the page since we released Act 1 German last December. Unfortunately we could hardly work on Act 2 since then, because we are doing our A-Level exams right now. But don't worry, the worst part will be finished in about four weeks and than there will be much time for the work on Patrimonium".

Yours sincerely
Bernhard Altaner

The Inventory: Hello Bernhard and thanks for writing. Patrimonium was a great first attempt and we're looking forward to act 2. I am also the project leader of an adventure game development team right now and I know how hard and time-consuming it is to create a game. We appreciate your efforts and hope that you will find the time for completing this series.

Hi!
I just wanted to tell you how much I LOVE reading the Inventory every month. It's so nice to have a magazine dedicated to adventure games. I am so glad you did not fold the magazine. I think I would have cried if you had, anyway keep up the good work. I look forward to the next issue.

A very grateful adventurer,
Lisa Hamblin
Nova Scotia, Canada

The Inventory: Hello Lisa and thank you for the kind comments. As I've said before Randy Sluganski from Just Adventure played an important role for us to still be in 'business' so he's the one to thank. We hope you enjoy our future issues!

Hello there!

I have browsed through the 13th issue of the inventory, and I must say I am a little disappointed. While the idea of having an issue dedicated to amateur adventures is a good one, the execution was not the best one, at least in my opinion. You see, when you rate these games, you take the fact that they are free, and thus overrated every single one of the games. In the last issue, you gave The Black mirror a score of 83, and in this issue you gave apprentice and out of order higher scores. I leave the decision of which is better to you. Also, you said in the "commandments" that you dislike cliché plots. Now the plots of JP an cosmo and Apprentice were nothing but exactly the same. Still, you've given them high plot score. At the end of the day, I think that reviewing amateur adventures is a good thing, but do not overdo it, and review only the very best – like King's Quest II VGA. I was a very disappointed not to see a review of a commercial game too.

Cheers!

PS: BY NO CIRCUMSTANCES DO YOU REVIEW FLASHBAX WITHOUT PLAYING IT TO THE END. You can see my review here: http://www.twin-design.com/agsezine/issue4_flashbax.cfm . Looking forward to reading your version.

The Inventory: The feedback we received for our 'specials' on independent developers were indeed diverse. Many thought that we overrated independent projects while many others complained that we rated them too low. There is no way to please everyone and believe me when I say that this is not our intention at all. While other adventure-related press have decided to rate high all new commercial adventures with a large fan base, we have decided to not go down that way.

We are a bunch of dedicated adventurers whose intention is to provide you with the latest news on real and pure adventures and give you our honest opinion about each game we happen to review. And in the contrary with other press we do not judge games solely by graphics and music but we put great focus instead on storytelling and gameplay. If you agree with our opinion fine...if you don't fine as well. All we do is put it out in the open for you to agree or disagree with.

Now regarding 'amateur' adventures as you call them...a term that I actually object to since many of the independent projects out there have proven to be far more professional than commercial ones. We are not going to rate independent projects and commercial projects under the same scope and rules. Most of the independent games are available for free, while commercial games require you to pay 30,40 or 50 euros in order to play them. There's a 'what you get for what you give' analogy here that we always take in consideration. Unless of course one pirates the commercial adventures in which case we don't give a crap about his/her opinion.

You also state that we graded the Apprentice and Out of Order higher than Black Mirror. First of all you have to notice here that these games were reviewed by 3 different reviewers, and different people have different opinions. I can't really speak for the rest of the reviewers, I think they do that for themselves in their own reviews. But I repeat The Apprentice and Out of Order are games available for free, while The Black Mirror costs some money. The commandments were not written by me, but by Justin Peeples, however I totally agree that cliché plots are awful. I think you lost the point when it comes to JP & Cosmo though, since the game's story is in the genre of comedy and is not supposed to be taken seriously. I haven't played Apprentice to the end, but what I played didn't seem cliché to me either.

For your information we never review games we haven't played to the end and I have read your review of Flashbax and I must say that I totally disagree with you and I thought Flashbax was a great adventure. You have to remember that some games are targeted to adults and as such might be a bit more provocative sometimes.

Hey Dimitry!

First thing first - I LOVE your magazine. The articles are always well written, interesting and to the point. Also, the mere existence of the magazine enables me to show those little in faith that the adventure genre isn't dead and will never BE dead! So thank you very much for all of your hard work, without people like you, this genre would have died ages ago!

But now for the real reason behind this email. A few issues back you wrote a review about 'In Memoriam'. Now, when you wrote that review (if some of you don't remember, the game received a horrible grade due to some serious malfunctions and bugs in the game which made it impossible to play) I had't yet had the chance to play it, but it was one of those games I was really looking forward to play. So the bad review made me feel real disappointed. However, since I was waiting for the game for so long, I figured I'd give it a try, anyhow. I'm just so glad I did! It's weird, since I played the game shortly after you did (according to the time the review was published) but I haven't experienced any serious bugs. In fact, the only bug I experienced had to do with the sound in the game, and that also, although a bit tedious to be fixed every time - was easily fixed and entirely worth it (in my opinion, anyway).

Personally, I take 'In Memoriam' as one of the best games I have ever played. The puzzles are fairly hard (and in this day and age, hard puzzles are quite rare to come by) and demand some real thinking. Besides, the usage of the internet in the game really gives the player a free hand in the process of coming up with the solution (I've had cases in which I came to the right answer in a completely different way than other friends who were playing the game at the same time!) and also enables you to find different facts that you would have never discovered before. Using the players' email is without a doubt an added bonus which really enriches the game and makes it much more fun. The plot is original and it seems (to me, anyway :)) as if every little detail was taken care of. Other than that, the game is just well made. The graphics and sounds are excellent, the video bits fitted into the game are also good, and the acting is very believable. The only minus to the game, as far as I can see, is that sadly in a couple of years, it would become hard to play (since it relies on the ever changing internet).

My point? Quite simply, to everyone who read the review and decided to avoid the game - don't let go of this game so quickly! In my opinion, its a real gem - and don't real gems deserve a second chance, every now and then?

Anyway, those are just my two cents, have a great day, and keep up the good work!
Racheli.

The Inventory: We have received a lot of feedback regarding that review of In Memoriam. So I think that an explanation is in order. I installed the game the first time. After I created an account and started playing for 30,40 minutes the game would crash everytime in different locations. I uninstalled the game and installed it again. I create a second account because the first one had been totally messed up. I play it from the very beginning and after a while it crushes again. I decide to uninstall it and install it again and then look for a patch in the game's website since I read on the JA forum that there was a patch available. And when I clicked on the link of the website to download the patch I got a file not found error.

Therefore I had no chance to finish the game even though I restarted it three times. For everyone's information I bought this game myself, as I have done with many of the adventures we have reviewed in 'The Inventory'. So I really know how it feels like to pay so much money for a product that you cannot use eventually. This is why I rated the game so low. I heard also that the bugs appeared mostly in systems that used Windows 2000, while XP users usually face no problems at all. But since the game's requirements include Windows 2000 I found this as no excuse at all.

Believe me when I say that I was expecting this game as much as you did, since I am one of the biggest fans of FMV adventures. But the final outcome did not allow me to give the game a better grade than that. I mean what good is it if a game is great...but you just can't play it? We might try to give it a second go in the near future, bearing in mind that some new patches have been released. But still it is sad that such efforts are being ruined by sloppy QA. Thanks for giving us your view on the game and we hope that you will enjoy the future issues of 'The Inventory'.

THE HYDRA



The Hydra was a fearsome monster in ancient Greek mythology with multiple heads. If somebody cut one of its heads two more would grow out of its place. The Hydra represents the adventure genre that simply will not die no matter how much it is being fought. The Hydra will be a column where you will be able to read thoughts and opinions on the current proceedings in our genre. This month the topic of the Hydra is:

IS THE ADVENTURE GENRE DYING?

The cancellation of Project Jane Jensen by Dreamcatcher was probably the worst news for the adventure community in the last 5 or 6 years. Adventure gamers all around online forums are expressing their disappointment with the new commercial titles. More and more adventurers turn to either independent developed products or they prefer to replay the oldies instead. It is evident that something is going wrong with our genre, especially when it comes to commercial products and especially in the North American market. Maybe it is time that everyone in the adventure community looked themselves in the mirror and tried to realise what's going wrong.

So if we suppose that adventures become a less and less viable market could we pinpoint one and single entity that is responsible for that? No. Everyone is responsible. From the publishers and developers, to the adventure fans and the adventure press. Let's see one entity at a time.

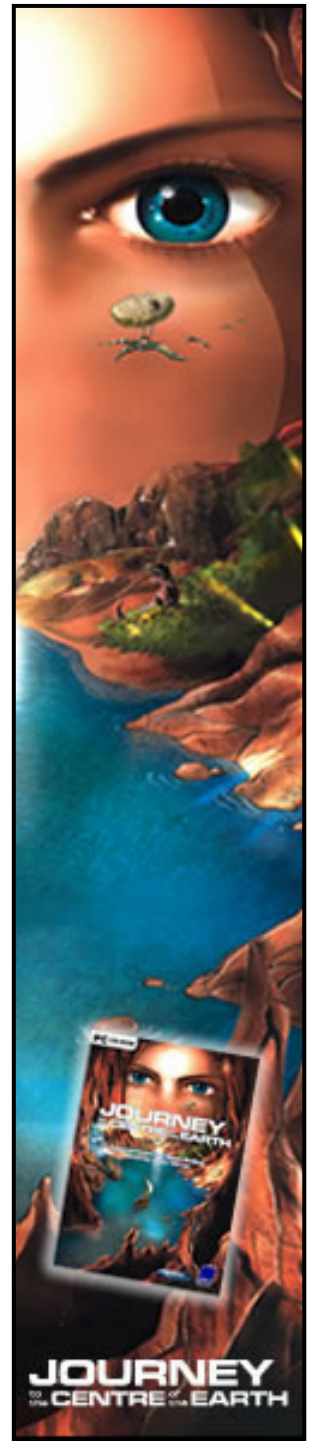
- Publishers

Generally speaking I would say that publishers specializing on adventure games are doing a very bad job when it comes to marketing their products. With a few exceptions, like DTP for instance in Germany, publishers keep targeting the wrong kind of audiences. How many years do you have to conduct market research dear publishers, to finally understand that not even 1 out of 10 people, who visit a game store in a constant basis to buy Far Cry or Max Payne, will ever be interested in the narrative-focused style of the adventure genre. Maybe it is time to try and change the 'market' instead of trying constantly to follow it. Maybe it is time you came up with new PR campaigns, where people interested in other sorts of narrative-based entertainment came in contact with adventures.

Maybe it is time you reached out to alternative media outlets other than Gameagents and Gamefanatics and Gameplayers and Gamestars (imaginary names). How about newspapers or press that covers cinema, movies and books. Have you ever tried to introduce new customers to the market or are you going to be content with mediocre sales for producing mediocre adventures? And what happens when larger and larger portions of this market get tired of the same old recipe?

- Developers

It is well known that it is a much more costly effort to create an adventure nowadays than what it was several years ago. But unfortunately the problem with adventures is not in the money. Does it really cost a lot of money to create a different gameplay to the 'put the newspaper under the door and push the key' or 'get this machine with a bunch of levers and find out how to make it work with 0 feedback' ones. Does it cost a lot of money to come up with a story that is not about the Templars, Atlantis or Egypt? Does it cost a lot of money to create an interface that actually works? And if you are unable to do that then



try something that has been used with success. Games from the late 80s and the early 90s featured way much better interfaces than most of the ones that recent adventures do.

Also how long will it take developers to understand that incorporating action elements in adventure games: a) Does not evolve the genre, it changes it instead to a completely different genre. It's called action/adventures. b) You irritate adventure fans cause most of them dislike action elements, and you irritate action fans cause most of them dislike a slow narrative style. Eventually in your vain attempt to please everybody you please no one.

- Press

And yes it is very much our fault also. I will admit to the fact that when we started with The Inventory we had a 'developer-friendly' approach like most (or maybe even all) adventure related online press are doing. But for some months now we have tried slowly but steadily to change our approach from 'developer-friendly' to 'fan-friendly'. Because if you think about it, who do we really write all these articles, previews, reviews, news for in the long run, if not for the adventure fans? So my fellow reviewers, editors and whoever else may be concerned I want you to ponder if it is really productive and creative and beneficial for our genre to overrate adventure titles because

- the X game has a certain fan base that might visit our site more often if we write a positive review
- we met with the developers of the X game in the Y convention and they bought us drinks and they gave us all these exclusive interviews and screenshots, and since then we exchange Christmas greetings?
- oh well it's an adventure and we are an adventure site so we will give a couple more extra points for the good of the genre.

I'll admit that I myself had slightly overrated a couple of adventures when we first begun with The Inventory, i.e. *Syberia* and *Zelenhgorm*. I consider the fact that *Zelenhgorm* was the review of the month in issue 2 instead of *King's Quest 2* VGA the biggest mistake we have done on the magazine and I take full responsibility for that. But I have done my own thinking and I try to become better as time goes by. Maybe it's time for other members of the press to do that as well? Maybe it is time to rethink our duty and maybe we should set a filter between what we're being told from developers and what we transfer to our public.

- The fans

Last but certainly not least it is us (I include myself to) the fans. How can it be the fans' fault? Last month we previewed *Bad Timing* of Empty House Entertainment. The game will be available for purchase for the price of 10 to 15 dollars. I was surprised and slightly annoyed to read a couple of individuals complain about that. One person wrote a comment in the adventure-treff site that he is disappointed that fan-made adventures start asking for money. Another person in the JA forums complained that the price is too steep. 10 to 15 dollars. Wait a minute while I scratch my head.

So these guys want the developers of *Bad Timing* to bust their (excuse our language) asses making an adventure game (and if you want to see what a painstaking experience it is, please go ahead and try to make one), to create a title that is probably going to be 10 times more entertaining than your average 30, 40 dollars *Atlantis XVII Dissolution* title out there, and you also want them to give it to you for free. Would you like also a coffee with that sir, or will the game be enough? Dear adventurers it is about time you understood that the game industry is an election, and you vote with your wallet.

There's always going to be good and fun free adventures to play but if you want the 'something more', the adventure that you play and then you go to bed and you're still thinking about it, dreaming about it and then you wake up and you want to play it before breakfast, then I am sorry but you have to help in the developers efforts as well. Those who deserve it, that is.

- Dimitris Manos



Epilogue

The 15th issue of The Inventory is over. Last month we said that this would be our last issue of The Inventory before the summer holidays, however we have changed our mind and we will publish an issue for June as well. Next month we will try to feature reviews that for one reason or another have not been published yet like Crystal Key 2 and Flashbax.

Next month we are also going to publish the second part of the Black Mirror comic submitted to us by DTP, one of the biggest adventure publishers in Europe. DTP is also going to talk to us about a lot of their upcoming projects. All adventure developers out there looking for a reliable publisher should better send these guys a mail.

We are constantly looking for new writers who are fluent in English, have enough time to spend on writing about adventures and possess the will to contribute to our magazine with articles and reviews so don't hesitate to send your applications if you think you have those skills.

We might become a bit tiring when we ask you to support our efforts financially but the sad truth is that it takes an amazing amount of time to create and publish this magazine and it would be difficult to continue without financial support. Don't stop sending your comments, suggestions or questions to theinventory@yahoo.com , we love hearing from you whether your letters are positive or negative. We would also like to know if you are interested in hearing news about our project Sealed Lips on a constant basis or if we should hold the news to ourselves until a later stage of development.

As usual we will make sure to spoil you with lots of previews of upcoming adventures and interviews with prominent people from the adventure community. Until next month then, I hope you all have a fantastic beginning of summer and I hope that you will be in a better place than the one I'm going to be at (in front of my PC).

Dimitris Manos

Editor

The Inventory

ONE MUST FALL
(BATTLEFIELDS)



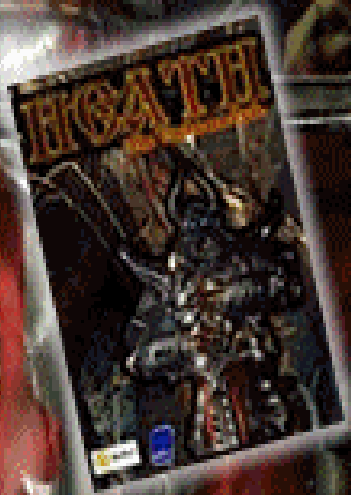
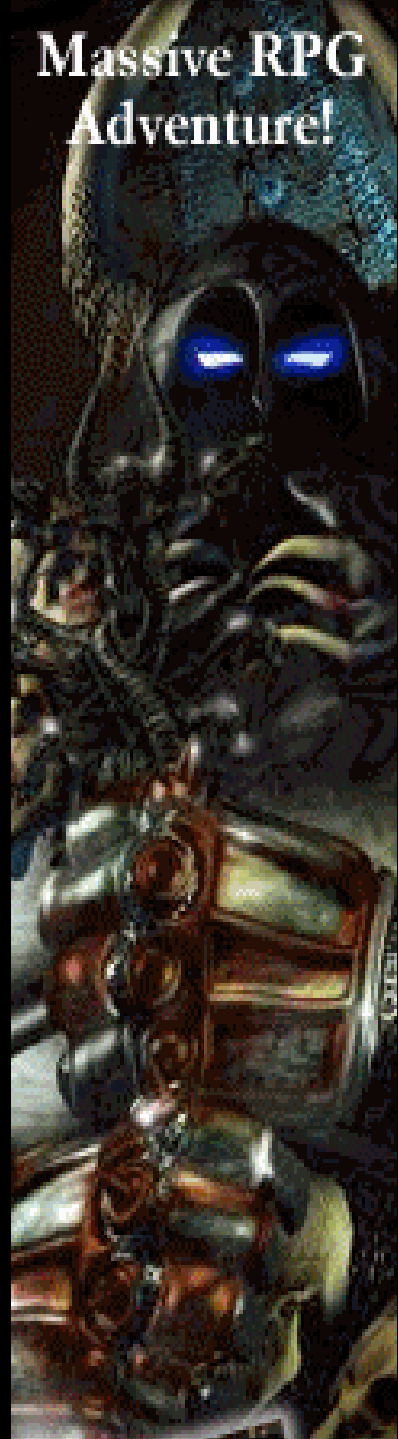
FREE
T-SHIRT



ONE MUST FALL
(BATTLEFIELDS)

HEATH

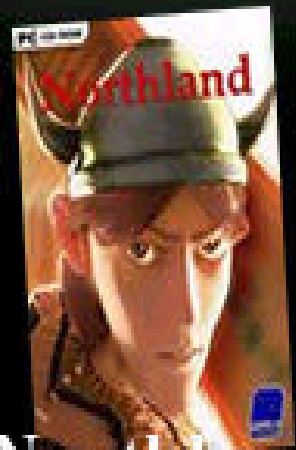
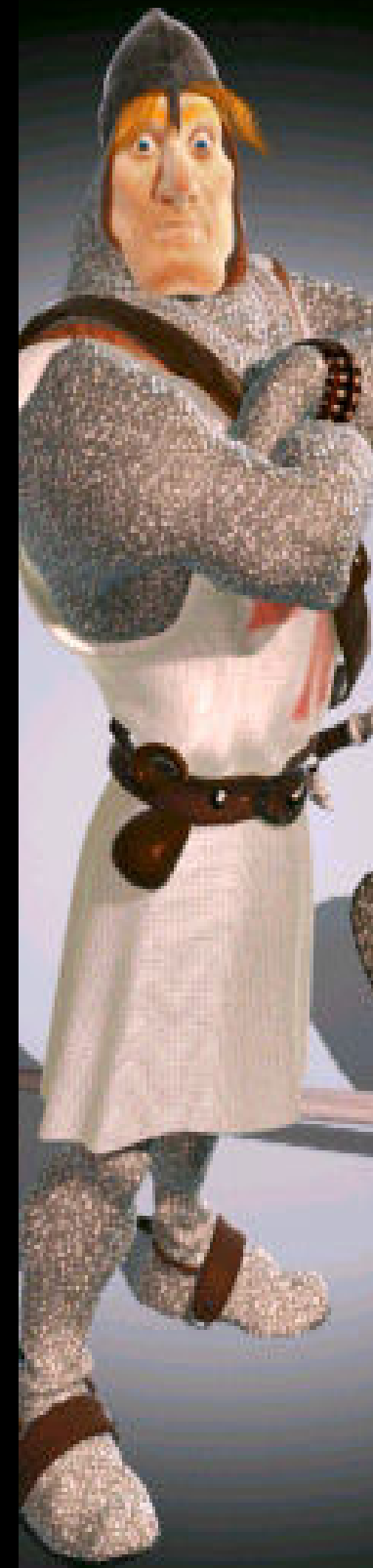
Massive RPG
Adventure!



HEATH

Napoleon

Historical Real-Time
Strategy



Northland