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The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only



Nibiru Special

Preview and interview with
the developers

Still Life

We preview this hot upcoming
thriller from Microids

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Prologue

A word of warning, this is going to be a short issue. This is due to several reasons. First of all the editor (that's me) has been very busy with two new endeavours...both adventure-related. You will learn about both of them - and trust me they are both very very exciting - soon. Second of all, a member of our staff received some review copies later than we expected. Third of all, after a request from Prograph we had to put an end to the Tony Tough comics.

But no need to worry, there are still quite a lot of interesting contents in this issue. First and foremost we have a preview of Nibiru by Oliver Gruener. Oliver got to play a German preview version and he tells us all about this anticipated adventure from the makers of The Black Mirror. We also feature an interview with the developers of Nibiru in our Lounge, conducted by PTGamers, the leading Portuguese gaming site.

I received a preview version of Still Life from MC2, the European publishers of Still Life. I know that a few of previews have already made their appearance on the net, but after reading them they seemed more like press releases than an actual report of the game's attributes so I tried to give a more balanced view of this long awaited thriller.

In the reviews section you get the chance to read what we thought about the CSI add-o...emm sorry I meant to say new installment of the CSI series, CSI: Miami. Justin Peebles gives a good lesson to the Crystal Key 2 student (younger brother of Crystal Key 1). Later on Oliver Gruener talks about everything you need to know before you buy a new PC monitor. But before, that let's see what he thinks of Nibiru...

Dimitris Manos

Nibiru:

Messenger of the Gods

Oliver Gruener from Germany got the chance to play a preview version of Nibiru and he is telling us what he thought of the game. Make sure to read also the interview with the developers in our Lounge.

Does anybody know the adventure "Posel Bohu"? It was the game of the year 1998 in the Czech Republic. The developers earned worldwide fame only last year with their hit-game Black Mirror. By the way Black Mirror was the most commercially successful adventure game in Germany in 2004. A good reason for publisher dtp to also release Future Games / Unknown Identity's newest title: NIBIRU - Messenger of the Gods.

But what the hell is "Nibiru" or what does it stand for? According to more or less scientific legends there is a tenth planet in our solar system: Planet X. Some astronomers believe there may be a large body in the Oort cloud which is disrupting the orbits of some of the long-period comets. In 1976 Zechariah Sitchin published a book called The 12th Planet (including sun and moon into the count). Totally ignoring the laws of physics and misinterpreting some Sumerian archaeological discoveries Zechariah Sitchin brewed up his own theory about a colossal planet he called Marduk or Nibiru that is supposed to pass the inner solar system every 3600 years and is inhabited by wonderful aliens who are supposed to be our origins and responsible for example for parting



Martin's uncle resides in a huge mansion

the Red Sea... Those interested in more background information should have a look at <http://www.badastronomy.com/bad/misc/planetx/>. The world and as an image also the internet are full of freaks who have the weirdest theories and some - at first sight - even look plausible. With time and anticipation myth can become truth as history shows us all the time. So Future Games thought of taking such a fable and weave an interesting, fantastic story. After all this made Indiana Jones famous and also Dan Brown with his books (i.e. The Da Vinci Code - next year in theatres with Tom Hanks as Robert Langdon) is very successful.

Late at night Archaeology

student Martin Holan gets a telephone call from his uncle, Prof. Wilde who tells him that an old tunnel had been discovered at the construction site of a new motorway. The tunnel, as he thinks, was built during the Second World War by the Nazis and might lead to a secret underground research facility. Martin travels back from France to his homeland to meet an informant on the famous Charles Bridge in Prague. That's where the player takes control of Martin Holan. Of course the informant isn't there but a street painter tells him that a woman obviously had been waiting for someone. After some easy tasks consisting of searching for a note and talking again



The porter won't let you in



A scene outdoors

and again with the painter, the painter tells Martin that it looked like someone had been following Barbora (the informants name). Martin leaves for her apartment after calling Prof. Wilde with his cell phone. Once inside Martin is knocked out cold. When he wakes up the next morning the flat looks like a battlefield and Holan makes a horrific discovery inside the bathroom. It looks like someone has high interests at the tunnel and what may lie at its end and it is important enough that they will kill. This is the prelude to an adventurous cat and mouse game, amazing discoveries and a very promising game. Maybe already a candidate for the adventure game of 2005 title?

Nibiru features 80 beautifully rendered locations in 1024 x 768 pixels. The highly detailed screens come to life when a tram drives by or neon signs light up. Nibiru's graphic style is completely similar to that of Black Mirror alas the technology behind it has advanced. The motion capture animated, features 35 characters that are real-time 3D models, spiced up with volume effects and anti-aliasing, that blend perfectly into the 2D backgrounds. A feast for the eyes! A minor drawback in the preview version was that the player's character couldn't run by double clicking so it took ages to move over the screen, this should

be fixed in the final version. Left clicking an object brings up a description, right clicking examines it further. The inventory disappears into the lower border when not needed. In other words the interface is well tested and approved.

Our preview copy didn't have voices, yet but dtp promised excellent actors once again. Martin Nolan will be dubbed by Matthias Hinze, the German voice of Matt Damon also on board are the voices of Doug and Carrie Heffernan well known chaos-couple from the sitcom King of Queens.

The most important part of an adventure game, next to the story, is the puzzles. The preview version featured the first two chapters of the game and I was already presented with a wide variety of

diverse brainteasers starting with conversations over password cracking and item combination. The difficulty level starts quite simple but becomes more and more demanding - very good! Let's just hope that the rest of the game will be also so well balanced.

My first impression of Nibiru - Messenger of the Gods is that Future Games / Unknown Identity and dtp have a certain hit candidate in line. Dialogues are short and to the point, riddles are old school and proved point and click adventure style and the graphics looks fantastic, altogether a brilliant package. In other words: I can't wait to lay my greedy claws onto the final result.

- Oliver Gruener

The graphics are very similar to Black Mirror



Still Life

MC2, the European publishers of *Still Life*, sent us a preview copy of this anticipated thriller. Lets see what this sequel of *Post Mortem* (or spin off as *Microids* likes to call it) will have to offer when it is released in April.

Some years ago, when *Microids* released the first trailer of *Post Mortem*, extremely excited adventure fans began counting every single second till the day that the game would be released. The fact that *Microids* had released the award winning *Syberia* only a short time before the trailer was published was one more reason for the overall excitement. The fanfare however was brought to an end when the first reviews started coming out.

Some illogical puzzles combined with an inconsistent dialogue system and an outdated graphics engine added *Post Mortem* in the 'could have been great if...' list of adventure games. Now *Microids* attempts to bring the *Post Mortem* universe back to life, with a light touch of *Syberia* to the graphics. The technical aspects of the game impress from the very beginning. The introduction is one of the most awe-aspiring cutscenes you have watched in gaming in general. The marriage of classical music and gory pictures set the mood right from the start.

And since we are talking about images and music, let me tell



Victoria outside of the crime scene

you first what you already knew for months now...the graphics are great. As great as graphics with pre-rendered backgrounds can be done anyway. The animation is slick, and the backgrounds are very detailed. The 3D models are very well designed. The only complaint here is that some models don't have equal quality as some others. This is mostly evident with the main character, Victoria, whose facial details are

much clearer than those of other secondary characters. Another graphics feature that could have been implemented better are the videos that are somewhat blurry. These comments however are very strict nitpicking, and the game's overall performance in the graphics factor is amazing - this should come as no surprise to anybody who has played adventures from *Microids* in the past. The burning question with *Still*



Top: In the elevator heading up to her office

Right: Inside the interrogation room



Life, is how do the gameplay and the story fare? The previous titles of Microids (Syberia, Post Mortem) were not really perfect in those aspects. Well at first glance, Still Life seems to be avoiding some pitfalls that Syberia and Post Mortem fell into.

Victoria McPherson, is a young FBI agent. It appears that a serial killer means business, with the body count having reached five already, and the killer being still on the run. When the game starts you take the role of Victoria investigating the latest victim of the serial killer. Later on in the game, you will also get to play a second character, Gus McPherson, that was also the main hero of Post Mortem.

In Still Life there are not that many 'empty screens', with nothing to interact with, a certain improvement to Syberia. While it is not exactly 'interaction-heaven', there is something to do in most screens. In the little time I had the chance to play around with Still Life, I found no extreme cases of pixel-hunting which is also a plus. The interface is a mixed bag. It is simple, but at the same time, a tad too simple. You

can choose whether you want to play with a mouse or with a keyboard. I really doubt that there would be many people who would choose the keyboard option when they can play with the mouse, but giving options to players is always the best way to go. The cursor will change into different symbols whenever you can interact with something on the screen, like in Syberia. So all you have to do is to search the screen for an interactive spot and then click on it.

As for using items on other objects or people within the game, that's a bit more complicated. The developers have decided to follow a different approach to what we have been used to recently. Normally in most adventure games you choose an item from your inventory and then you click on the object or person in the world that you want to use that item on. Well in Still Life, it's the other way around. First you get to choose the object or person from the gameworld that you want to use an item on - you do that by looking at the object/person - and then you select the item from your inventory. Think of it this way. If Still

Life was a text adventure, instead of typing USE SWAB ON BLOOD POOL, you would type ON BLOOD POOL USE SWAB. To be honest it felt kind of weird, and although I got used to it after a while, I still prefer the usual method of selecting an item first and then the object or person that I want to use this item on.

Another slight drawback in the interface is that the Inventory is a separate full screen, so everytime you want to use an item you have to watch this green screen, which results in you getting 'outside' of the gaming world quite often. It is obviously not a very immersion-friendly feature. The dialogue interface is simple...actually way too simple, to the extent of getting boring after a while. You either click the left mouse button if you want to talk about something relevant with your case or the right mouse button if you want to have a discussion with a character that is not necessarily connected to the game's overall story. A little icon on the bottom right corner of the screen shows you if you can click the right mouse button or the left mouse button at any given moment during a conversa-

tion. I really don't see the point in 'clicking through' a conversation. It would feel different if there was some text showing what the character is about to say, that I could click on. In this case I feel like I have a choice. But to click just in order to continue a conversation, that just felt redundant. It's not really a showstopper or anything nor does it detract from the overall fun of playing the game, but it doesn't feel very creative either.

The gameplay is very reminiscent of late investigative games based on TV-series like CSI and Law and Order, but with more elements of 3rd person adventure games. You have to look for clues and gather evidence while at the same time you will have to overcome certain obstacles by using other items on them. All the problems that I had to play through seemed pretty straightforward.

The music of the game was

of high quality - I still can't get the introduction track out of my head - and the voice overs were very professionally performed. The dialogue lines however vary from very interesting to so and so. Some vulgar language is used, and although I have no problems with vulgarity itself - point of proof is that one of my favourite characters ever is Burns Flipper - I think there is a difference between using vulgar language because it fits and using vulgar language just for the sake of using it. To bring a movies parallel, some movies that featured vulgar language appropriately in my opinion were Pulp Fiction and The 25th Hour, while on the other hand in The Matrix Revolutions vulgar language was used just for the sake of it. From the little time I got to spend with Still Life, I'd say that the way vulgar language is used in the game is inappropriate and it is there just for the sake of controversy. But I'll

have to hold judgement on that for the final release of the game.

I will try to sum up my feelings about the game by answering some questions. Will Still Life be the really innovative title that will bring a new renaissance in adventure gaming? I highly doubt that. Will it be a very enjoyable experience? It looks so. Will it be better than Post Mortem and Syberia? My impression is that it will be a much better game than Post Mortem and Syberia 2. Syberia 1 on the other hand was the first adventure from Microids that featured high production values and it came at a time when the only alternative options in the market were low budget Myst clones. So I am not sure whether Still Life will give us the wow factor that Syberia 1 gave us back then but I will have to hold judgement on that one for the final version of the game.

- Dimitris Manos

Talking to your partner



How thoughtful of Victoria to bring coffee for everybody



Fenimore Fillmore 3 first screenshot

It appears that the sequel to The Westerner (winner of our Best Adventure 2004 award) is already in production according to the website Mr Bill's Adventureland. They also posted the first screenshot of the game, and by the looks of it, Revistronic will be using their fantastic 3D engine once more for the purposes of the game. You can find the screenshot here:

<http://www.mrbillsadventureland.com/reviews/0-9/3skullsR/fenimore3R.htm>

Star Wars fan-made adventure demo

A group of Star Wars fans are working on a 3rd person point and click adventure called Shadows of the Empire. The team behind the game has also recently released a very interesting tech demo. The mission in the demo won't be featured in the final game. You can download the demo, which has already exceeded 2000 downloads as we are writing this newsbit, from the website of the game:

<http://dsgames.guerrestellari.net>

Sequel to The Moment of Silence

The other big winner of The Inventory Awards 2004, The Moment of Silence, also seems to be getting a sequel sometime in the future. During a developer's chat at Gameboomers, Martin Gantefoehr, project leader of The Moment of Silence, announced that they will be developing a sequel to

TMOS but it is not the next title they are working on. Here is the link to the thread: www.gameboomers.com/ubboard/ultimate-ebb.php/topic/33/10.html

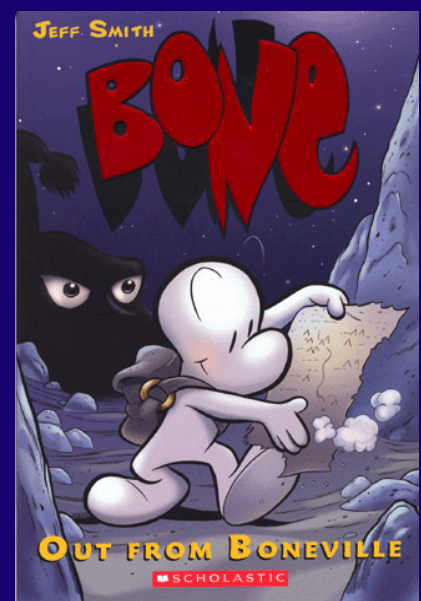
Orgastic 4 prequel for mobile phones

Bad Brain Entertainment announced that in co-operation with Magixoft they will release a prequel to their upcoming Orgastic 4 adventure game. The prequel will be playable in a wide range of mobile phones. The editor of The Inventory is also working on an adventure game for Magixoft, called The Exchange Student. To learn more about the cooperation between Bad Brain and Magixoft visit:

www.bad-brain.com
www.magixoft.com

Telltale Games announced Bone

Telltale Games announced Bone, a 3D adventure based on an award winning independent comic book. According to the press release: *Telltale, a company that takes you to the worlds where characters like Bone play and invites you to play with them, will be creating new episodes for PC gaming. "Detailed rich characters and incredibly immersive story telling are everything to us," said Telltale's CEO Dan Connors. "We are proud that Jeff Smith and Cartoon Books have decided that we are the best partners to bring Bone to life in a series of PC games. The Bone world has so much texture and depth and combines a unique blend of superb adventure, mystery and humor – it is a great first license for Telltale."*



Interview with Future Games

Future Games are the developers of the popular point and click horror adventure, The Black Mirror. The Black Mirror has been very successful both in terms of sales and critical acclaim, and Future Games are now working on an adventure that is similar to The Black Mirror when it comes to graphics and gameplay style, but with a different story setting. The name of their upcoming title is Nibiru. The interview was conducted by the Vitor Braz of PTGamers, the leading gaming Portuguese site, and is featured both in The Inventory and in their website (translated in Portuguese) as part of our co-operation agreement. So let's see what did the developers of Nibiru have to say to PT Gamers.

Yourselves

Tell us a bit about yourself, and Future Games: How did it all begin, and how many people work there?

Future Games s.r.o. is a private company, established in the year 1999 for the purpose of computer games development. Over the time we were dissatisfied with the service, that was offered to us by the distribution companies (our product was mostly simply "placed" in the distribution only) and in order to provide ultimate support for our games, we founded a division for distribution, which is specializing in distribution and support on the international scale. Based on our experiences, we know that it is better to choose creating a distribution company, so that your product isn't only being "thrown" in the line as another product in a row, but it will really take a good care of the distribution with regards to all aspects, which are making the specific game interesting for the players. And this is just our philosophy. And I think that Black



Mirror is the living proof that the road we're walking on is going in the right direction. Out of our games that we released in the past, we could name for example Boovie, Posel Bohu (messenger of Gods) or Bubwiny. At this time we are putting out on the market the adventure game Nibiru and action adventure Bonez Adventures. We have in development several other projects. Currently there are 22 employees working in Future Games s.r.o.

The Black Mirror is the adventure that made us - and a lot of European gamers - accustomed to Future Games. Is this your favorite kind of game, or are you

also action gamers?

Basically most of the people who work in Future Games s.r.o. like adventure games. On the other hand some of us play different games as well. I personally also play strategies and action games as well, my business partner doesn't play other games than adventures, our musician plays only rpgs ...

Adventure games aren't considered the most profitable genre in the market, especially in the USA. Why did you choose this genre instead of another FPS / RTS / RPG?



“We focused during our work on Nibiru above all on the story and on the gaming atmosphere. During the game, we will visit interesting places like Prague at night, a deep forest, a secret German shelter, France and Mexico.”

We had an interesting story in our hands and our intention was to implement the atmosphere of the story into the game without compromises. Later on we found out that only one way how to do it is to make an adventure game. Our goal is to make games which players will like to play and that's why the most important thing in our decision-making process was to create the good game and not which genre is currently most popular ...

Is Future Games going to focus solely on adventures, or does the idea of developing a game of another genre sound appealing to you?

Of course we can. You know it - never say never.

Did you receive a lot of feedback from the players of The Black Mirror? Are there any plans for a sequel?

Yes, we did. It's always a pleasure for us when we are able to read that people from all over the world know our game. It's also

very important to us because based on feedback we are able to learn what players like and dislike on our games. Such information then helps us to improve our next projects in line by adding what the players prefer.

Nibiru: The Messenger of the Gods

Nibiru: The Messenger of the Gods is your next and soon to be released adventure game. Tell us a bit about it.

In contrary to the horror story Black Mirror, Nibiru is an adventure game. But as in the case of Black Mirror, we focused during our work on Nibiru above all on the story and on the gaming atmosphere. During the game, we will visit interesting places like Prague at night, a deep forest, a secret German shelter, France and Mexico. The player will live through the story of Martin Holan, a Czech student who studies thanks to support of his uncle in France. Martin's uncle Professor Vilde asks him for help with a seemingly routine investigation considering a newly discovered German tunnel from the end of the World War II. The story will bring Martin to the path of an extraterrestrial civilization that visited the Earth a long time ago.

One of the strong points of The Black Mirror was the mystery in its storyline. Is Nibiru going to be as suspenseful, or will it have a clearer and more direct

approach to things?

BM was a horror story so it logically exploited more the dark tension. Compared to that, Nibiru rather exploits the adventurous atmosphere, but magical moments won't be missing either. You can just imagine the dark and silent corridors of an old German tunnel or the magical atmosphere of secret spaces inside the Maya pyramids.

The Black Mirror is a game with a dark and somewhat gory setting. Is Nibiru on the same trend, or are things less heavy this time?

As we already suggested, Nibiru exploits a different kind of story, so things won't be so dark this time. But you will definitely not miss dramatic turnovers in the game.

The engine for Nibiru is the same used on The Black Mirror, but upgraded. What are the most

noticeable changes?

There are several changes. Many of them are hidden behind the "facade" of the engine and the player won't recognize them. The most important changes of those that are not hidden to the player are the improvement of graphics resolution to 1024/768/32bit and full 3D characters that set the standards of graphics processing of our games much higher. But there are of course other changes as well - the possibility of anti-aliasing, more detailed shadows of characters, atmospheric effects supported by 3D, graphic position Save and Load.

Is Nibiru going to have some action sequences mixed in the gameplay? Are you for or against it in general?

There are some "action" sequences in the game, but we say it intentionally in quotation marks because these are not typically action issues

like jump here, move objects etc., but rather moments when the main character Martin must face confrontation or danger. The solution to these situations is, however, always adventurous. We do not resist action components in adventures, but they cannot be the main aspect of the plot in adventures.

How different will it be comparatively from The Black Mirror? Is it a bigger game, with more dialogues, cutscenes and puzzles?

As for dialogues, we think that the recent trend is to play more and to talk less. Reactions we received from players that we already mentioned above confirm the above. Gaming time should not be much shorter than in the case of Black Mirror (but less dialogues will have some impact). But it of course depends on the "experience" of each player how quickly will he be able to overcome particular puzzles.



“When you seize 3D correctly, it can benefit an adventure game and its playability. But we do not consider Broken Sword 3 to be a turning point in the adventure genre.”



We play as Martin Holan. Do we get at any time in the adventure to control other characters?

No, the whole story is a story of Martin Holan and we therefore play only as Martin Holan.

Other questions

What are your thoughts on adventure games in full 3D, like Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon? Do you think that it benefits or hurts the gameplay? Is this a path you may take in the near future?

When you seize 3D correctly, it can benefit an adventure game and its playability. But we do not consider Broken Sword 3 to be a turning point in the genre of adventure. We think this also on the basis of the fact that our Black Mirror (that didn't by far have such a marketing support as BS3) overtook Broken Sword 3 both in terms of players' evaluation and number of sold pieces in several countries. We have some plans concerning 3D adventu-

res for the future but everything will depend on the work that we are doing in this direction now and also on whether we will believe that such a change will bring something to the players. But now it is too soon to speak about this more.

What are the adventure games that you really enjoyed?

Mhm... Without any order, I can mention the following ones: Monkey Island1, Curse of Enchantia, Gabriel Knight the Beast Within, Phantasmagoria, Pandora1+2.

Is there any movie or book licence that you'd like to see converted to an adventure game?

Sure. The first thing I have in my mind is the work of E. A. Poe and his wonderful stories.

To be considered a hit, or even to deserve a sequel, how many copies does an adventure game have to sell?

This is a tough question. We do not think that a game must necessarily be a commercial blockbuster in

order to deserve a sequel. But if you still want to hear a number from me, then I would say that it pays to consider it from 250,000 sold pieces.

Finally, how do you predict the future of adventure games? Do you think they'll captivate more and more players, or stay in a small spot in the market?

Our opinion is that adventure games are slowly gaining back popularity among the players. This is also proven by the wide variety of titles that are in development at this time and will come to life within two years. Adventure genre is not dead as it was believed in the past and the good times are still to come. We are glad that our games are helping out in its resurrection.

Thanks for your time.

Thanks a lot to you as well. Also we want to wish to all your readers and players all the best (especially a lot of entertaining games).

CSI: Miami

Ubisoft released a while back the third title based on the CSI TV series. Does this installment have something new to offer, or is it more of the same?

CSI: Miami the game is based on the TV CSI spin-off series. The previous CSI games featured great voice overs and some good story-telling but on the other hand the graphics were as outdated as they could get and the exploration factor of the game felt very limited due to the graphics engine used. Unfortunately Ubisoft decided that instead of improving on the aspects where the previous games failed, they would rather release an identical title. A strategy that reminded me a lot of Electronic Arts and their annual sports games instalments (NBA Live, Fifa and NHL series) that feel more like add-ons than new original games.

Story: Even the story feels a bit like you have heard it all before in the previous games. There are five cases again, and the last case is connected to the previous ones (oohhh surprise). You take the role of an intern and you team up with a CSI agent in the beginning of each new case. You have to find who is behind the crime committed by collecting evidence and talking to witnesses / suspects. Miami is of course a much warmer place than Las Vegas, where the last CSI games were located, therefore lots of the cases take place in quite different environments than the previous CSI games. The dialogues are pretty



A lot of the cases are based on family problems

interesting as most of the characters, but the identical way of plot development between CSI: Miami and the previous CSI games will make you tired of the cases quite soon. At the beginning of each case there are 3 to 6 suspects, and the game throws quite a lot of red herrings towards you - a member of the CSI crew even makes a joke about it later in the game - and in the end you find the person who committed the crime with the help of evidence. If you haven't played any CSI games before you might find it exciting but if you have played CSI: Crime Scene Investigation or CSI: Dark Motives, you will feel like you are just replaying one of those two.

Graphics: If these were the 90s I would say that the game's graphics are spectacular. But the thing is... we are not in the 90s. As in the previous CSI games, the graphics engine in CSI: Miami is one of the most prohibiting in terms of exploration you have ever seen in adventure games. You cannot move freely in a room, you cannot look up or down. All you can do is look around yourself, as if someone placed some glue underneath your shoes and tied a collar around your neck that prohibits you from moving your head up or down. Animation? Unfortunately, the only animated object on your screen seems to be your mouse cursor! Well, unless you



You can't have a CSI game without interrogations



At a golf club in Miami

Developer:
369 Interactive/Ubisoft
 Perspective:
1st person
 Interface:
Point and click
 Site:
www.csigame.net
 Difficulty:
Easy

“If you have played CSI: Crime Scene Investigation or CSI: Dark Motives, spare yourself the money and just replay one of the aforementioned games.”

Highs: Some improvements in gameplay

Lows: Use of a restrictive and non-immersive graphics engine once again, no animation, feels like replaying the previous CSI games

The Verdict

Story:	70
Graphics:	35
Sound:	88
Gameplay:	75
Overall:	69

*Overall = (Story x 2 + Graphics + Music + Gameplay x 2) / 6

want to call trembling bodies and mouths opening and closing without any synchronization animation...in that case yes there is some animation. To be absolutely fair, the 3D models themselves are designed in great detail, but the fact that the animation is non-existent makes CSI: Miami look more like a tour in a wax museum than an immersive gaming experience. The reconstructions videos are nice once again, but this time they are shorter than in the previous games.

Sound: In contrary to the game's graphics, the voice casting is once again stellar. Both the main characters from the TV-series and the secondary characters are very appropriately acted, and it is a pity that the graphics engine is not up to par with the acting, cause in that case we would have a very cinematic experience. The music of the game is nothing special and nothing that will stay in your memory forever, but the little of it that there is in the game, serves its purpose quite ok.

Gameplay: I really feel like I have written all this before and I am not even sure this game deserves a review of its own, I could as well have referred you to the review of Dark Motives since the games are

almost identical. But anyway, let me say once again that the main flaw of the gameplay is interconnected with the limitations of the graphic engine. There are a few minor improvements in CSI: Miami compared to the last CSI games. If you have set the difficulty level at its lowest, your cursor becomes highlighted when you cross over a hotspot, even when you are using a tool for evidence detection. Thus the pixel hunting seen in Dark Motives is not a problem anymore in Miami. That was a necessary addition, but one that could not 'save' the day for CSI: Miami. One more small addition is that sometimes you will have to reconstruct a torn picture, a puzzle that we have seen also in some Law and Order games.

In a few words: If you have played CSI: Crime Scene Investigation or CSI: Dark Motives, spare yourself the money and just replay one of the aforementioned games. If you haven't played them, then you might want to give CSI: Miami a try, you will probably enjoy the storytelling and the performances by the actors. It is high time however that the developers updated their graphics engine for the CSI license.

- Dimitris Manos

The Crystal Key 2

Justin Peeples reviews this sci-fi first person adventure released by The Adventure Company.

Hello class, and welcome to Remedial Being-A-Good-Adventure-Game 101. You are here because you have failed, in the past, to be either enjoyable, playable, entertaining, or... I'm sorry, Conspiracies, I see you in the back there, are you chewing gum? Did you bring enough for the rest of the class? Hey, Alfred Hitchcock's Final Cut, put down that comic book. And Traitors Gate 2, I will not hear that language used in class! You can all sit down and be quiet or its detention for everyone again.

Now we have a new student today; please welcome Crystal Key 2. Crystal, you can go and take the seat next to your older brother on the left there and... I'm sorry? You don't think you belong here? Oh really... well lets just look at what your report card has to say.

Story: Now, I'm not familiar with your brother's work, but if it's anything like what you turned in, you must come from a dull and confusing family. Now we start off with this fellow named Call Lifeson, whose home planet of Evany has succumbed to some kind of zombie-illness that Call is, by stroke of fortune, immune to. What are the odds, right? And this strange woman mysteriously appears through a magic portal, gives a fraction of a message, and is taken

by faceless soldiers, let's call them Storm-troopers. Call follows, ends up on this alien planet, finds out that other planets have been infected, and must now find a sage who lives in the desert and work to save the entire universe from this evil, menacing, yet perpetually off-screen character Ozgar.

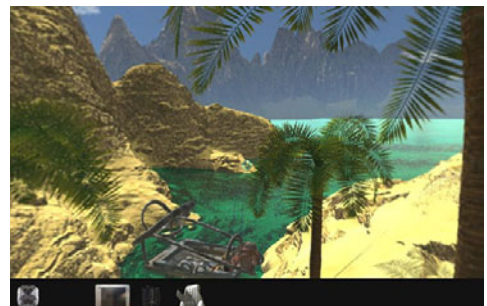
What's wrong with it? Well ignoring the sloppy parallels to Star Wars, there's the issue of relevancy. If the means to save the universe all exist on this planet you travel to, and it has citizens who actively want to save the universe, then why do they bother bringing you into it? Taking it to plot points, why is Call immune to the zombie disease? Why did Evany contract it? What was it like before, and why should we care about it now? My point, Crystal, is that this is just plain lazy story writing. You didn't even try, and that's really what's so disappointing.

Graphics: Now honestly, I would expect this kind of graphic work from your brother. He is five years older, expectations were lower, then. But this is just laziness on your part. Poor character renders, drab textures, motionless worlds; honestly, am I supposed to enjoy looking at this game? And the graphical glitches just compound matters. I don't know how you managed to make so many mistakes when all the other games in

Developer:
The Adventure Company
 Perspective:
1st person
 Interface:
Point and click
 Site:
www.adventurecompanygames.com/tac/crystal_key2
 Difficulty:
Medium - Hard



The models are not what one would call state of the art



A nice view



A futuristic living room

your class, with the exact same project (3D pan from unmoving point) at least managed to do it passably.

That said, I can see a sense of visual style here, but it is one in need of serious refinement. It says something interesting but unflattering that you can create such elaborate architecture, and leave the buildings barren and lifeless. That you can make lush greenery, and such ugly little creatures to inhabit it. You really need to work on that a lot before you try again.

Sound: Well, you could've done much worse. Ambient sound is well done, music is decent without being intrusive, sound effects are fine and voice-over work is competent. Nothing outstanding, mind you, but sufficient. It is sort of telling of the rest of your scores that the best job you can do is when you don't really aspire to anything great. Ordinarily I'd say not to let that discourage you, that it's always better to try harder and do your best, because its more rewarding, but all things considered you might have done better if you didn't even apply yourself in all the other fields too.

Gameplay: Now here is where you do really poorly. I'm noticing here where your instructor penciled in "Pixel-Hunting." Now haven't we talked about this? What is the first rule of being a quality Adventure game? Class? That's right, "Pixel-hunting is evil, evil, evil." I'm sure I don't need to tell you why, and I hope I don't need to explain this again. He also said there's just too much distance, as in putting two different parts to a puzzle solution on entirely opposite sides of the planet, and then having the player

walk there, and walk back.

Which brings us to the puzzles. A representative sample: To gain access to a doctor's house, you need three different door codes; one code is on a medical robot, the other in a submarine, and the third on a shipping crate. This might make some sense as the doctor built/owns all three things, but why write the three different door codes in these three different things? And for that matter, why should the player expect them to be written there? Do you see the problem? There's no real pattern there, there's no logic, and it was just plain silly of you to do that. Also there's the roasted nuts incident. What's that? Well sure it makes sense to roast nuts in a pot over a fire, but if the nuts are in a can already, and your standing at a fire pit, why should you need to seek out an entirely different fire and metal container just to roast them? This is just unnecessary backtracking through twenty screens just to solve a problem that should be so much easier. See, here you're just being difficult, and not in a challenging way, but in a belligerently irritating way.

In a Few Words: Now I hope you don't take this personally, it's just that these are things you're going to need to know if you're going to be a good, playable Adventure game. You have a lot of potential, and I hate to see it wasted. If you want, I can get you a tutor. Sure, Myst is usually pretty busy, but I think Aura could teach you a thing or two, being of the same general format. Alright now, just take your seat. Class? Please open your texts to page 177: History of the Great Underground Empire.

- Justin Peoples

"Now I hope you don't take this personally, it's just that these are things you're going to need to know if you're going to be a good, playable Adventure game. You have a lot of potential, and I hate to see it wasted."

Highs: Mercifully short, and it's under \$5

Lows: Bad Puzzles, Lame Story, Sub-par Graphics, and I think the game even gave me food poisoning

The Verdict

Story:	60
Graphics:	65
Sound:	75
Gameplay:	50
Overall:	60

*Overall = (Story x 2 + Graphics + Music + Gameplay x 2) / 6

BITS AND BYTES

THE HARDWARE CORNER



In the last issue Oliver talked about RAM. Now in this issue Oliver talks about flat screens and gives you some advices on what to look for if you are about to buy one. 'You are what you are looking at...'

Certainly the most important interface between man and machine is the monitor. Recently LCD panels (LCD = Liquid Crystal Display) have become cheaper, bigger, more brilliant and faster. So it no wonder that when most people consider getting a new monitor they decide to buy an LCD-screen since good 17' and 19' displays have become affordable and even bigger screens rapidly drop in price. The year 2005 certainly will be the year of the flat screens, in fact it might already become difficult to fetch a fine traditional CRT.

Before going on let's make a short comparison between LCD's and the "old-fashioned" CRT's (Cathode Ray Tube). LCD monitors need less power and space, the picture usually looks sharper. CRT's on the other hand are still less expensive, have zero response time and can display more colours and more vibrant - no print magazine's layout is made on a TFT but on traditional calibrated CRT's. But TFT's are catching up faster and faster. For example it took the manufacturers not even a year to drop the response time from 12 to 8 millise-

conds, of course these numbers are very exaggerated in reality most 12 ms displays don't even reach 20 milliseconds but 20 ms screens also are much slower so these numbers are sort of comparable even when they aren't true.

But before we get into more technical detail lets have a really summarized look at the history of the flat screens. In the late 19th century the Austrian botanist Friedrich Reinitzer discovered the liquid crystals that consist of an almost transparent essence showing equal signs of liquid and solid material. About 40 years ago scientists found out that electric charges would change the molecular alignment and therefore the way light bypasses the crystals which ultimately led to the first LCD screen in 1971.

Today there are two kinds of LCD displays common for computer screens, DSTN (Dual Scan Twisted Nematic) and TFT (Thin Film Transistor). I'm not going to babble much about the technology behind the first kind since DSTN screens used as computer monitor almost have died out and are only



A cheap LCD display might do when space is rare and mostly office work is done. For gaming their response time is too bad

used in very cheap notebooks nowadays. TFT panels themselves again can be separated into two kinds, the ones using IPS (In Plane Switching) and the ones using (M)-VA ((Multi-) Vertical Alignment). Both methods have their pros and cons. In IPS panels the crystals are arranged horizontally which improves the viewing angles at the price that two transistors need to be used for every pixel resulting in less display transparency so that a brighter backlight is needed and that again consumes more power so they shouldn't be used in notebooks. VA only needs one transistor per pixel. The liquid crystal molecules are aligned at a 90 degree angle when power is off, resulting in a perfectly black image and when power is applied the molecules turn horizontal producing a white image. This technique offers a very good viewing angle of about 140



A digital LCD television is a good computer screen alternative and perfect for couch potatoes.

degrees in all directions. Another advantage is a maximum contrast ratio of 300:1 without the consequence of using more power.

Especially older graphic cards only deliver an analogue output signal so many LCD screens offer analogue, digital or both inputs. The disadvantage of an analogue signal is that first the graphics board has to translate the digital signal into an analogue one and the screen has to convert it back which logically results in big losses. Analogue displays are cheaper even though they additionally need the A/D converter. When buying a display it is strongly recommended to only get a digital one.

Graphic cards that have the required DVI (Draft Visual Interface) port start at around 50 Euros/Dollars. In contrary to CRTs, TFTs work with a frequency of 60 Hertz, due to the technical differences this is more than enough while tube screens need at least 85 Hz to be ergonomic.

One very important thing that needs to be mentioned is that TFT displays have only one native resolution! Usual 15' displays 1024x768, good

17' displays 1280x1024 and quality 19' 1600x1200 pixels. Many cheaper panels offer less resolution with 86 dpi (dots per inch) which isn't recommendable anymore because a high resolution with 100 or more dpi results in a very sharp and clear picture and of course a lot of space on the desktop. Only drawback is that even the latest Windows was programmed many years ago and adjusting the font size so it doesn't appear too small often results in cut off text in dialogue boxes especially with poorly programmed third party software. Today's displays can run other resolutions than their native one either by putting a black border around it (very small or cut off picture) or by scaling to fit the screen. The latter often results in a bad picture because one pixel either has to be displayed by more than three cells (lower than native) or even worse some pixels share three cells (higher than native). Three cells is one pixel, one for red, one for green and one for blue (RGB). Luckily manufacturers develop better and better scaling methods nowadays. Another problem is the aspect ratio. Ordinary screens have an aspect ratio of 4:3. 16:9 or 16:10 screens however have to rescale the image so it doesn't appear stretched or butted. Also many displays shine too bright in their standard setting. This is a good thing when working on the computer during summer

on the porch but will hurt the eyes after a short while in a dimmed room.

Someone who is interested in buying a modern flat screen perhaps should try one out for a few hours at a friend who already owns one. By the way the best TFT displays I've seen so far are from Eizo, their prices of course display this very good, too. Compared to other brands they are often 1/3 more expensive.

Some basic advice for shopping: The potential buyer should view exactly the unit s/he is going to buy because LCD panels very often have pixel errors and since this is a common manufacturing fault the companies made it a policy that a few always black or always white pixels are no reason to exchange the screen even though it is really annoying. Also don't save at the wrong place, a pair of glasses in this day and age is pretty expensive and your eyes will thank you!

- Oliver Gruener



A good high end TFT display is the highlight on every desk. I wish I owned such a beauty ;-)

Invento-Mail

This is the part of the magazine where you can make yourselves heard. Send your emails to info@theinventory.org and we will reply to you in this section in one of our future issues. Now let's move on to the mails that we received lately

Hi,
i have a question since you do game tunes on your website. in syberia - the character helena sings a song - an opera russian aria. i wanted to know the name of the song she sings?

thanks
naz

The Inventory: Hi Naz. A long time ago someone told me the name of that song. But I don't remember it and I don't have contact with that person anymore, so instead, I will start a topic at the forum and I hope that one of our forum members will answer your question there.

Hi There,

I just wanted to pass my congratulations on to you and your team for taking the time and trouble to publish an magazine that focuses on only adventure games.

When I was a kid (I'm 26 now) I always loved the LSL series, Sam and max, full throttle, Spycraft etc. Despite a period there where I turn to the dark side (playing games like doom etc.) I have come back and now have played syberia 1 + 2, the longest journey, moment of silence, dark fall lights out etc. I have also just purchased some games I missed out on back in the old days such as Grim Fandango and Maniac Mansion which I am looking forward to playing.

Thanks once again as your magazine has had some impact of my rekindled love of adventure games.

Glen Hastings
Melbourne, Australia

The Inventory: And thank you Glen for your kind words. It is always great to get such feedback from our fans and it gives us more strength to continue with The Inventory. I hope you enjoy our future issues as well. Greetings to Australia!

Hi..this is the first time i read your on-line magazine.Very good work.Excellent!!! I didnt know that there is such a good place with the games i love the most.You bring me back to the good old days.thank you!

Konstantinos Tsofas
Greece-loannina

The Inventory: Wow, someone from my birthtown! Thank you Konstantine for your kind words. We hope that you enjoy our future issues as well, and soon we will have one more website for European adventurers, so even one more good place with the games you love the most ;-)

Hi Dimitri,

Please to read you and your team every month. Thanks for this great job. I just read The award 2004 booklet. It is very interesting, specially the indie section. But i'm surprised and disapointed (i must admit) not to find the game i developed called Atlantzone. I just can't keep out of my mind the last poll Just Adventure made a few days ago about Best Independant games in 2004. Here are the results: Apprentice 2 (50) 5% , Atlantzone (406) 44% , Brain Hotel (44) 5%, Case of the Crabs (189) 21%, Cirque de Zale (40) 4% , Lifestream (45) 5%, No-Action Jackson (18) 2%, Other Worlds (87) 9%, The Arrangement (39) 4% Total Votes: 918

Sincerely,
Yves Robin
Atlantzone project
<http://atlantzone.free.fr>

The Inventory: Hello Yves. First of all thank you for your kind comments. Now regarding your game. There were many indie adventures released last year and it was not possible to play all of them. Unfortunately we did not have the chance to play and review your game in 2004. But we will try to review it as soon as possible. Thank you for letting us know of your project, it looks quite interesting.

I have been reading the recent issues lately and I think the magazine is too much oriented towards the commercial market of the adventure genre. While this is great and it is the commercial games that need the most support in these days, I think there are two adventure "scenes" that get the short end in the monthly publication but still cover the "pure adventure" requirements - those are the indie adventure games and the always neglected interactive fiction (text adventures). Both are doing great on their own, with some surprising commercial ventures such as the acclaimed text adventure 1893: The World's Fair Mystery, but are always outside the perimeter of major publications such as The Inventory... and are always in need of more publicity. Maybe you should try to get in contact with people at AGS and other independent development communities, and also IF magazines as SPAG (which gets a huge amount of reviews thanks to the strong review-writing community on Usenet) and ask if they would like to publish one or two pages worth of material in The Inventory. I can assure you that even if they will not need articles from your magazine in exchange, this is the free advertising of their "scenes" they so much need. I speak from my own experience as four months ago I published an article on text adventure scene in our magazine; after that a lot of readers have tried to contact me, surprised that text adventures still exist and that they are doing so good. If The Inventory can do it's job to pull those two scenes from obscurity (okay, semi-obscurity for indie adventures and total obscurity for text adventures) it would be a great thing. And the magazine will grow in size with little or no effort from your side as both parties will be interested to supply you with information and reviews to make their scenes more popular. Let me know what you think about it, even if my suggestions won't fit in your plans.

Apostol Apostolov
PC Club Editor

The Inventory: Hello Apostol. Trust me when I say that The Inventory has treated indie adventures with more respect than any other adventure publication. We have featured long interviews with the likes of Rebecca Clements, AGDInteractive and Peter O'toole, we have featured several detailed previews of indie adventures (Sam and Max: Case Gilbert, Quest for Glory 2: Remake, Shadowplay, Legend of the Lost Lagoon etc) and we were the first publication to feature reviews of King's Quest 2 VGA, Cirque De Zale, The Apprentice 2, No-Action Jackson and more. I think these facts alone speak for themselves. On the other hand our space and time is quite limited, and in the months prior to xmas we have a lot of commercial adventures to cover. After xmas, commercial games are not released that often and then we have the chance to turn our attention to the fan scene. For example our next issue will be a special on indie adventures with lots of surprises to come. I am afraid however that we do not have the time to cover also text adventures, we can hardly cover all the graphic adventures released as it is. Thanks for your email Apostol and good luck with PC Club :).

Epilogue

Some of you are probably wondering: Is this the end already?!?!? I suspect that especially our long time fans might be a bit disappointed. I hope that you will see 'why' sometime between April and March, when one of the endeavours I am working on will be hopefully completed. And I also hope that you will think it was worth it.

But The Inventory is coming back next month with a special on independent developers. We will have lots of contents on indie games, previews, interviews and reviews. Actually one of the previews we will feature is one of the most anticipated indie games for a couple of years now! We will also try to get the rights to new comic strips, because we know how much you love the Adventure Comics feature.

But until our next issue, keep supporting us by clicking on the Google ads at our front page (www.theinventory.org). If you do that, we get some money in return. Let us know what you think of our magazine by either writing to info@theinventory.org or by writing in our forum (www.theinventory.org/forum). Speaking of our forums, you probably want to check out the Keepsake forum which is redesigned. Wicked Studios also started a new Developer's Journal which will be updated often. If you think you could contribute to The Inventory from the position of a writer, then send us an email with some idea on what would you like to write. We are especially looking for original ideas.

Well that's all for now. Until next month, happy adventuring and keep visiting the Inventory forums for the latest news on our magazine.

*Dimi*tris Manos

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