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The Inventory

A magazine for adventure games only



Special On

***INDEPENDENT
DEVELOPERS***

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Prologue

Independent developers have been a reason for several heated arguments within our readership. We have received emails accusing us of focusing too much on independent developers, we have received emails accusing us of focusing too little on independent developers. In forums people complain why we rate indie adventures so high. Others claim that we rate indie adventures too low, and that we should be more lenient towards them.

We'll prepare to start typing emails again, cause here comes an issue completely dedicated to independent developers. We are happy to be the first ones to release in-game screenshots for one of the most anticipated indie releases, Rise of the Hidden Sun. Read everything you would like to know about this 'Indiana Jones meets Broken Sword' adventure in our 4-page preview.

Ever wondered why Lucasarts never released a Star Wars adventure? The answer to that question is...who cares. Death Star Games are working hard on what Lucasarts never delivered, an adventure game based on the Star Wars universe. Check out our preview to see if you should keep an eye on this title.

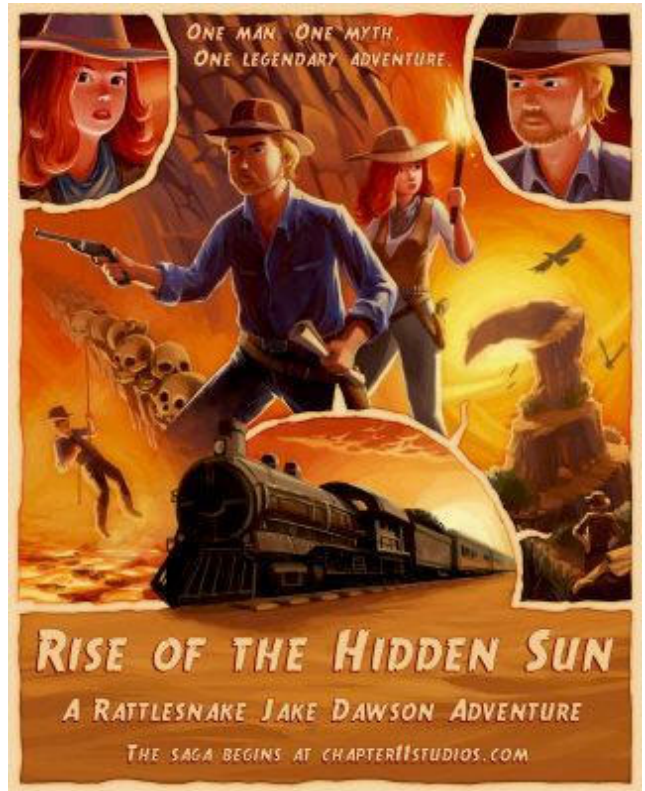
Herculean Efforts won numerous awards this year, such as our Best Indie Runner-Up and just about every TCN award, for their sequel to the Apprentice, The Knight's Move. The developers are now working on a new adventure game called The Find and we invited them in our Lounge to have a little chat about their future plans.

Our new reviewer, Mike Anderson, tells us his thoughts on Two of a Kind. You can also read reviews of Five Magical Amulets and Catacombic. Now let's see what Josh Roberts and his gang of developers are preparing for the adventure fans out there.

Dimitris Manos



Left: Rattlesnake Jake Dawson, the main hero of *Rise of the Hidden Sun*. Right: A poster for the game



Rise of the

HIDDEN SUN

'Rise of the Hidden Sun: A *Rattlesnake Jake Dawson Adventure*' by Chapter 11 Studios has been one of the most anticipated indie titles for the adventure community. The Inventory is proud to present to you the first in-game screenshots of the game within this in-depth preview.

Rise of the Hidden Sun is a comedy-adventure set in the Wild West in the 1860s. The story is very much inspired by the Indiana Jones movies and adventure games, as some of you might have already understood by looking at the screenshots. The game is divided into four separate (but very connected) episodes, each of which will be published separately. The developers opted for the episodic approach so that they could publish the

game in stages instead of waiting for the entire thing to be completed. This technique seems to become more and more popular for independent developers due to the large amount of time it takes to create an adventure game. Each episode will end with a cliffhanger, and the next episode picks up where the previous one left off.

The tone of the story is comedy-adventure, the main plot is sort of serious and the characters will also take their mission seriously but as we all know during a treasure hunt there can be many hilarious events. Think *Broken Sword* meets *Indiana Jones*. The main character of the game is Jake 'Rattlesnake' Dawson, a down-on-his-luck cowboy turned treasure hunter. In the beginning of the game, Jake comes

into possession of a tattered old treasure map scrawled with strange symbols. With nothing to lose, and hounded by the law, he begins to sift through ancient Indian legends en route to making the greatest (and deadliest!) discovery in the history of the New World. The treasure he is hunting for is the legendary Seven Cities of Cibola. Cibola is the American Southwest's version of El Dorado (The City of Gold). Josh Roberts, the project leader of *Rise of the Hidden Sun* said: *The idea for this treasure is based off of a real legend told to the Spanish Conquistadors when they explored the Southwest in the 1500s, but the, um, embellishment of the legend is entirely my own.*

As every self-respecting hero, Jake likes to spice up his

Even the GUI is professionally designed



theinventory.org

A golden vulture in an underground cave



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adventures with the presence of a pretty woman by his side. Mary Jane Clayton is a cowgirl and also a leader of a pack of bandits who have a secret hideaway on the outskirts of Old Sierra Valley, where the game actually begins. Mary Jane's father spent his life searching for the Lost Cities of Gold.

Although the creators thought that the game would include around 80 locations during the initial plans for the game, it turns out that we will get to visit over 100 different locations. Some of the most interesting locations that you will get to visit in the game are: an abandoned (and according to legends haunted) goldmine, a Wild West boom town called Old Sierra that has fallen apart since the gold dried up, underground cities, temples, tombs and rivers, a remote abbey holding secrets of a 16th century Spanish mis-

sionary, ancient indian cliff dwellings and very strange rock deformations among others.

Rise of the Hidden Sun will feature traditional handdrawn 2D graphics. The highest screen resolution will be 800x600 at 16-bit colour depth. The graphics style is very reminiscent of the early Broken Sword games. This is what Josh had to say about the game's graphics: "When I first came up with the idea of Rise of the Hidden Sun, I knew from the start that I wanted it to be something special. I also wanted the game to have a sort of organic look to it, so I stayed away from purely computer-generated images, which are easier to create but lose a little of the grittiness I wanted to establish for this beat-up, dusty old Wild West world I was creating. Instead, I used a technique that I learned while working at Marvel

Comics. I sketch out an area of the game and break it down into a number of screens, to give the "real" artists a sense of what I'm trying to get at with the scenario. Then another artist will take my light pencil sketch and redraw it, creating a darker, more solid screen that's pretty close to the final layout. Finally, we scan in the final pencils and then use Photoshop to digitally paint the screens, letting the pencil lines show through a bit to give it an organic look that I think works really well for the game's setting."

A full musical score is produced for the purposes of the game, complete with in-game background music and a musical overture. Each location will have its own unique theme music, while the developers also pay a lot of attention on the sound effects. As far as voice-overs are concerned, the development



Jake will have to overcome obstacles using his wits



A guest appearance by none else than the great Murray from CMI



The hand drawn backgrounds are truly amazing

team has not decided yet whether they are going to use actors for the game or not. According to Josh Roberts: *"The best "classic" games didn't have to have voice actors for them to work really well, but modern gamers do tend to expect them. Likely what we'll do is release an expansion pack at some point after the initial game release. If we do voices, I want to do them right. Bad voice acting can absolutely kill an otherwise good game"*.

When it comes to the gameplay of Rise of the Hidden Sun, purists have nothing to worry about. This is what Josh Roberts had to say about action/adventure elements and timed sequences: *"Well, first and foremost, I hate timed puzzles, and I hate action-based "move the crate" type puzzles. I also hate death sequences--I think it discourages experimentation and cuts into the opportunities for humor. Half the fun in this game is seeing how Jake survives what should be certain death on more than a few occasions. He's pretty indestructible, even if he does get dusted up from time to time"*. The developers claim also to be very careful to make sure that there won't be any dead-end puzzles, pixel-hunting or mazes. Prepare to face numerous inventory-based challenges but also some logic puzzles as well, which will be easier to solve for those who pay attention to small details.

The interface will be a blend between the interfaces used by Sierra and Lucasarts during their heyday. The interaction with the environment (walking, talking, using items etc) is done in the Sierra point and click style, where you scroll through different icons on your cursor. The dialogue interface however will be reminiscent to the games of Lucasarts with the familiar dialogue tree method. At least one response in every conversation thread will be a little off the wall.

Regarding the game's difficulty level, the developers would describe it as medium. Josh Roberts said: *"I threw in a few real brain teasers in the second episode, but all of the puzzles throughout the game are very logical and blend very nicely into the story and the game world. There's nothing in here*

that will make people throw their computer out the window in frustration, but it's also not a walk in the park."

The development team behind the game is called Chapter 11 Studios and it consists of several talented members. The founder of Chapter 11 Studios and project leader of Rise of the Hidden Sun, Josh Roberts, started his career with an editorial position at Marvel Comics. He started Chapter 11 Studios about 2 years ago with the sole purpose of creating freeware adventure games. The art director, Marc Fortin, has an extensive background in visual arts and special effects. His past work can be seen everywhere from TNT's recent Evil Knievel movie to The New Adventures of Ren & Stimpy. The lead colourist, Dan Lee (who also did the cover art for this issue of The Inventory), is already a minor celebrity in the underground game world for his Monkey Island fan art. His color work on the early background scre-

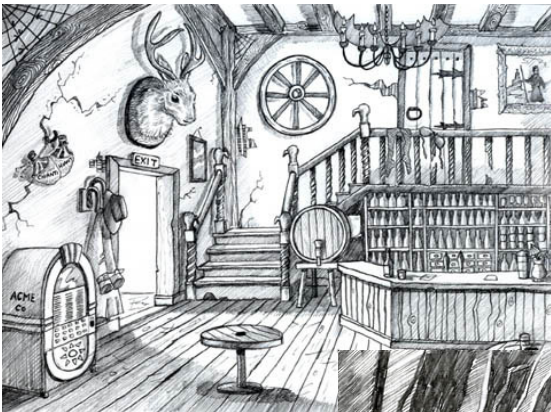
ens for Rise of the Hidden Sun helped set the graphical tone (and raise the bar) for the entire project. Jane Stroud, another of Chapter 11 Studios' colorists, worked on Revolution Software's Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars, which is one of my favorite games of all time. And Eric Joyner, who colored the lion's share of backgrounds in the first episode, is an award-winning artist who's past clients include Warner Brothers and Mindscape. On background pencils (line art), the aforementioned Marc Fortin, as well as Hazel Mitchell, Paul Schmalenberg, and Frankie Washington are the artists who are creating the skeleton upon which the entire game world is built. Nick Warseck, takes care of everything audio-related, from the adventurous soundtrack down to the simplest sound-effects.

Rise of the Hidden Sun is yet another adventure to be using the AGS Engine by Chris Jones. Josh Roberts said: "Since we're

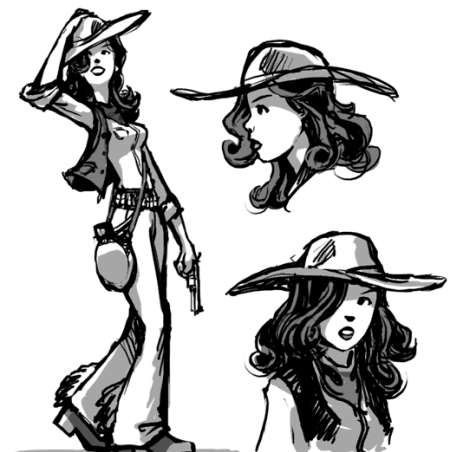
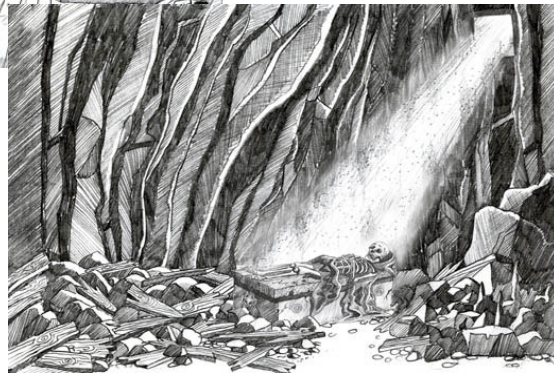
using Chris Jones's Adventure Game Studio (AGS) engine to build the game, we have a tremendous amount of freedom from programming the smaller details, and that provides us with a lot of flexibility for design and GUI."

Chapter 11 Studios is looking for even more talented people to join their team, especially animators. The game will be available for free and the developers expect the first episode to be available either Q4 2005 or Q1 2006. When all four episodes are released, the team plans to release a special edition CD with some cool bonus features and a sneak peek at a possible sequel tentatively titled Curse of the Hidden Sun. You can find out more information about Rise of the Hidden Sun and Chapter 11 Studios at their website: www.chapter11studios.com

- Dimitris Manos



Some high quality concept art from the game





The poster for Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire by Death Star Games

Most adventurers would argue that Lucasarts during the 80s and the 90s was one of the most creative companies to grace our genre. Who could ever forget great titles such as Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis, Loom, Sam and Max and Monkey Island. One has to wonder however, how come the company that was mostly known for its adventure titles and its Star Wars license, never released a Star Wars adventure game. Now a team of independent developers called Death Star Games, is working on the adventure game that we never saw from Lucasarts.

Shadows of the Empire is actually not a completely new story. It first started as a project by Lucasarts sometime before the release of the Special editions and the prequels. The SotE story made its way to several mediums, it became a novel, a comic-book, a game and Lucasarts even released a soundtrack, but it never became a movie. The purpose of SotE was to tie the loose ends between the films 'The Empire Strikes Back' and 'The Return of the Jedi' by giving answers to several questions raised by

the last film. Here is what the developers had to say about the plot of SotE: *The task of SOTE is to tell the crucial events between The Empire strikes back and Return of the Jedi: the vain attempts to rescue the carbonite frozen Han Solo from Boba Fett, the transformation of Luke Skywalker from a reckless apprentice to a true Jedi Knight, after the cruel revelation of Darth Vader, but also the transformation of Vader himself, who starts finding signs of his old ego inside his own tortured soul; and also, the events leading to the construction of the Second Death Star, the bothans' sacrifice, and many other details (why Leia arrives at Jabba's palace dressed as bounty hunter Boushh? where did she get that thermal detonator? How did Luke build his new green lightsaber?).*

All those things are told while introducing a new, memorable villain in the tradition of the Star Wars saga: Prince Xizor ("Sheesor"), ship owner of the biggest merchant fleet but, above all, leader of the most fearsome criminal syndicate in the Galaxy: Black Sun. Shadows of the Empire repre-

sents a vital moment in Lucas' saga, managing to get into the true core of the beloved and unforgettable Classic Trilogy; it catches the characters in the middle of an evolution otherwise taken for granted at the beginning of ROTJ, and satisfies every fan's curiosity about what happens in the meantime, not answering with the lexicon of the uninspired "expanded universe" but looking back at the most pure world of the classic films, both in visual terms (thanks to Lucasfilm's preproduction) and in the narrative style."

The only difference between the SotE novel and the graphic adventure will be the first chapter. This is completely created by Death Star Games, and it will describe how Luke Skywalker trains to become a better Jedi and how he builds his new lightsaber. Most fan-productions are rather short due to the vast amount of work that it requires to create a game. Death Star Games however are aiming for a full length game. SotE will feature 4 playable characters (Luke, Leia, Dash Rendar and Lando) some NPC-sidekicks (R2-D2, C-3PO, Chewbacca) and a very large num-

ber of in-game characters to interact with. Each character will have his/her own special characteristics and abilities. And listen to that... the game will feature no less than 250(!!!) locations on no less than 14 planets. 50 of those locations have already been developed. The developers said that the game's length will be similar to the length of Zak McKracken or Monkey Island 2.

Death Star Games released recently a tech demo of the game. The tech demo featured gameplay that will not appear in the final version. It was a good way to show the public how the game is going to play and feel without spoiling the story of the final game. One could wonder why don't commercial companies try this strategy as well. The demo starts with Luke Skywalker, the famous blonde hero of the original Star Wars movies, looking for... Chris Jones' blue cup. Those of you who just went 'Chris who's what?' ...apparently you are not a member of the AGS community forum that you can find at adventuregamestudio.co.uk. Chris Jones is the creator of the AGS engine, which is also used by this title as well. The developers of Death Star Games decided to pay a little homage to this talented and dedicated programmer with this tech demo.

The demo showed a lot of potential. First of all, the guys who create the game have a very good sense of humor. I found myself giggling throughout the demo, from beginning to end. Naturally, to understand most of the jokes, you have to either seen the Star Wars movies or played previous Lucasarts adventures (being a member of the AGS community will also help). If you haven't done one of the above, you might not get the inside jokes. If you get them though,



SotE uses photorealistic graphics

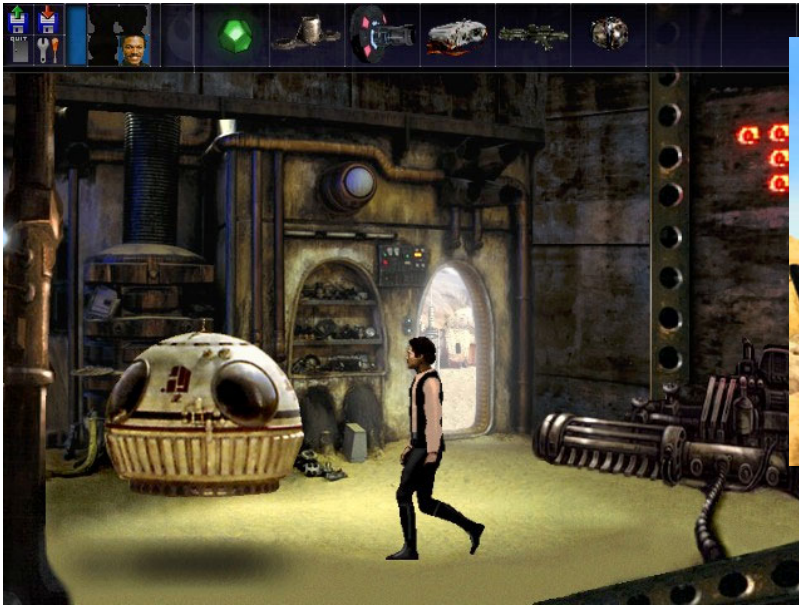
prepare for a very funny experience.

The graphics of the game are absolutely gorgeous and they are quite unique. The only commercial adventure I can remember that featured a similar graphics style was Police Quest IV. The artist of Death Star Games, uses a mixture of photo-editing, digital colouring, photocomposition of pre-existing images with additional elements painted over pixel by pixel and use of many filters. So the graphics are not created from scratch but the outcome is very impressive indeed.

The music of SotE is also 'stolen' and you don't hear any original tunes in the game. However, the tunes that are 'stolen' are used in an appropriate way within the game. Death Star Games claim that: "*Like SW fan-films (that are not-for-profit works of fans as our adventre) we're going to use John William's score and, in this particular case, even Joel McNeely's Shadows of the Empire score. How can you imagine Star Wars without the legendary Star Wars music? The whole adventure project may exist thanks to the tolerance policy applied by*

Lucasfilm to non-profit initiatives like this, that require an enormous amount of non paid work of passion that doesn't damage in any way the legal rights owners. That's part of what we state in our disclaimer."

The interface is quite different to what we have seen before. When you pass the mouse cursor over an interactive character/item you can examine them by left-clicking and you can interact with them by clicking on the right mouse button. When you move your cursor to the top of the screen you can see the game's options, 4 small windows showing the faces of the playable characters (you can see only the ones that you can choose at that certain point in the game), the force icon, and the inventory. When you click on the force icon, Luke will try to use the force to achieve his goals. This was a very interesting feature. It takes some time to get used to the interface, especially the inventory, since in most games you usually left click to choose an item, but in the case of SotE you have to right click instead. Once you get used to it however, the interface



Left: Lando, one of the playable characters of Sote. Right: Background graphics from the game.

seems very functional and somewhat innovative. Regarding the interface the developers said: *The SOTE user interface was born after hours spent analysing many adventure games GUIs of the last 10-15 years, from the glorious SCUMM system to the "Broken Sword"/"Syberia" modern interfaces, passing through "The Dig" and "Beneath a Steel Sky". After many discussions about advantages and disadvantages of each interface, and hundreds of lines of code, we are proud of our interface, featuring intelligent cursor, non-blocking interactions, mouse and keyboard shortcuts...* As for the prospect of a speech pack, the developers claimed that they do consider producing one right now because they would rather focus on developing the main game without voices.

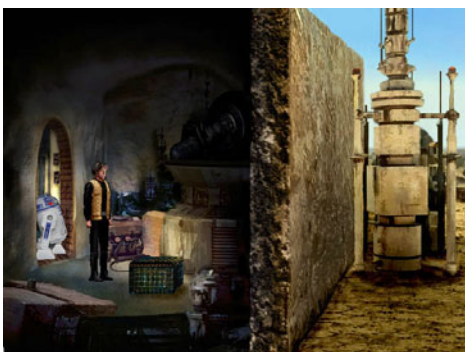
The gameplay in the demo felt fun and for the most part straightforward. My only complaint was some occasions of 'blind-pixel-hunting'. What's that you ask? It's when you pixel-hunt an area you can't see. In the case of SotE Demo, that's looking for items in a chest, whose interior you can't see.

Spoilers Normally if you try to pick up the items that your cursor

shows you in the chest you will pick up something but there's also a sonar that you have to pick up by moving your cursor carefully over the chest until you find it (even though you are looking the chest from the outside) ***End of Spoilers*** Apart from that though, everything else was A-ok, using the force was great fun and the interactions with your sidekick R2-D2 were very entertaining. The developers stated: *In the LucasArts great classics tradition, there won't be "dead ends" in the game; and you'll always have a way to get out of a situation. Some puzzles will be solved in team mode.*

Like Rise of the Hidden Sun, Star Wars: Shadows of the Empire will be released in chapters as a free download. The release date of the first chapter, that the developers are aiming for is fall 2005. They hope to have the whole project ready by next Christmas. Until then, feel free to visit their website: <http://dsgames.guerrestel-lari.net/> and download their fantastic tech demo.

- Dimitris Manos



Screenshots from the tech demo released by Death Star Games

We are looking for new writers

Would you like to write for The Inventory? We are looking for new writers to join The Inventory team. Writing for The Inventory will give you the chance to affect the adventure game industry through your articles and your criticism. You will also get to receive free copies of new adventure games. You have to be fluent in English. Writing for The Inventory takes a considerable amount of time, so unless you are certain that you have the time for it, do not bother writing to us - you would probably waste both our time and your time as well. Applicants should send 2 review samples to info@theinventory.org. One of the reviews should be a game that you really enjoyed and the other one a game that you didn't like.

Something big has just happened...

...and very few people know about it. Prepare for some big news in the very near future, that involve one of the most popular adventure game developers. Something changed... Whether it's for better or for worse, that only time can tell.

Ankh announced

Rebel Games in Germany announced a new 3D point and click adventure called Ankh. The game is being developed by Deck 13 Interactive and is the sequel to the seven years old "Ankh - The Tales of Mystery", that was however never released for PCs. The release date is September 2005 and we will have more news on this title soon.

King's Quest IX footage

The developers of the unofficial King's Quest IX, Phoenix Freeware, sent us some videos with in-game footage from their upcoming title. The impressive videos convinced us that the KQIX project is one of the most ambitious (if not the most ambitious) freeware adventures out there right now. The developers were also kind enough to provide us with some exclusive screenshots from the game for our dedicated readers.



Interview with Herculean Effort

Herculean Effort is an independent development company that gave us the award winning Apprentice series. They are currently working on The Find and in the future they plan to release also the third and last episode of the Apprentice series. We invited them in our Lounge this month to talk with them about The Apprentice series and their title in production, The Find

Yourselves:

- Could you tell us a little bit about yourselves?

Ian: I'm a 21 year-old college student who will be graduating this May. I enjoyed varsity fencing, where I earned all-American status twice. In addition, I like weightlifting, creative writing, and expressing myself in several artistic media.

Greg: I'm 18 years old, and am also attending college as a music major. When I'm not playing at concerts, writing music for adventure games, or slaving over AGS scripting, I study Chinese and work on 3D modeling and graphics.

- Name some of your favourite adventure games.

Ian: I love the old-school Lucasarts adventures. Day of the Tentacle is my ultimate favorite, mostly because of its unification of style across media. The graphics, music, sound-effects, and writing all support the narrative while contributing to a singular style.

Greg: My favorites are the Monkey Island series (in particular Monkey Island 3) and Grim Fandango. I think that's mainly because the



music in those games are so awesome. Sam & Max is pretty cool, too.

Apprentice

- What inspired you to start a series like The Apprentice?

Ian: Apprentice began as a bite-sized project we could learn from while we developed our skills to make our flagship project, The Find. I mainly drew from Lucasarts games like DOTT and Sam and Max for the gameplay style.

Greg: We were always trying to make games. We were pretty ambitious, too. Ian would design these really cool games, but my little knowledge of QBasic didn't take us

very far. And then I discovered AGS through a Google search. We started making The Find at once. But then I remember a little later Ian asked me how to make a winding staircase in AGS for one of his secret projects he had been working on. He attempted to explain the room design over the phone so I could help, but I really didn't understand. When he came home for Summer vacation I took one look at the screenshots and immediately volunteered to script it for him.

- When did you first start developing The Apprentice?

Ian: Spring 2003.

- Are you satisfied with the feed-



back that you received for the first two games?

Ian: We've received a lot of compliments, and some good criticisms. I read one complaint about how the story didn't really move in either of the two games. Another good critique involved the puzzles' lack of relevance to the plot. But as far as graphics, music, and gameplay goes, everyone seemed more than happy.

Greg: I got many nice compliments regarding the music I made for the games. Feedback is really the main motivation for me. It's great to hear how excited people are about our upcoming games.

- How is the Deluxe Version of The Apprentice 1 coming along?

Ian: Everything is finished and in the game except for a few lines of dialogue.

Greg: I'm also trying to put in a few translations before it's released. The voice and new music really add a lot to the game, and will add much more personality to the characters (as if there wasn't enough already).

- Are there any plans for a Deluxe version of The Apprentice 2 as well?

Ian: Currently, there aren't any. It took us nearly a year to produce voice for the first Apprentice, which has maybe a quarter of the lines (and way fewer NPCs) than Apprentice 2 does. With other projects on our plate right now, it would be an unrealistic undertaking. But then again, we know what's involved now, and we do have some very dedicated and talented voice actors, so I wouldn't completely rule out the possibility.

- When do you plan to release the third and last part of the series?

Ian: We're planning it to start it after the release of the Find, so we don't really know. I haven't done any work on Apprentice 3 besides writing out bits of the storyline, puzzles, and locations. As of right now, I'm not sure whether it'll be in the same graphical style as the first two. I'm considering making it high-res, similar to the Curse of Monkey Island.

- Do you plan to use voice-overs for the third part as you are going to do for The Apprentice 1 Deluxe?

Ian: I'm not sure yet. We'll decide once we've made the game whether or not we'll make a voice pack to go with it.

Greg: I think if we decide to make all new hi-res art for Apprentice 3, it might be cool to go all out and get voice acting, but we'll just have to wait and see.

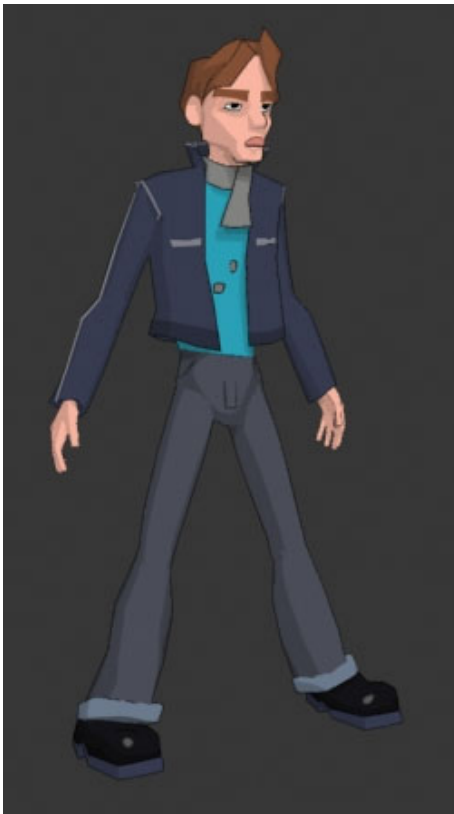
- Could you talk to us about the premise of the plot for the third installment of the game?

Ian: During the third game, Pib must escape from Ironcrow and journey to the Capital to plead his case before the King. Along the way he runs into an insane provincial lord, a village terrorized by a werewolf, and a carnival run by the gods.

- Will you keep the same interface for the third part or do you plan to modify it in some way?

Ian: We plan to incorporate some form of spell system in addition to the item book Pib uses in the first two games. This will lead to puzzles that can be solved through the traditional means (objects, etc.) or through Pib's knowledge of magic. We hope this feature will lend some replay value to the game.

Greg: From my perspective, the spell system is reminiscent of Loom's puzzles. I think that's what inspired the idea.



“We're actually aiming for the 3d cel-shaded characters to look like they were drawn in 2d. It'll be cool because then we can have 8 angles of smooth walking and many other character animations.”

The Find

- Could you describe to us the plot of The Find?

Ian: The Find follows the adventures of an underground entrepreneur, who runs his own business delivering illegal items. He also holds items for other people to pick up, simplifying exchanges so the two parties won't have to meet in person. A small mistake leads him headfirst into a national conspiracy. Chased by overzealous government agents and a cult of alien worshippers, he must discover the secret to a site of ancient ruins.

- What is the main character like?

Ian: Percival Digger is your average newcomer to the world of crime, exhibiting the accompanying paranoia. He spent most of his life in the city, avoiding his dendrophilia. Because he's wound up tightly, he relies on nicotine to get his bearings. During these brief moments of relaxation, he can try to see things in perspective.

- After reading the game's website one gets the impression that the game will have full 3D graphics. Is this correct? And if it is why did you decide to use 3D graphics for this title?

Ian: The finished game will have 3d-rendered, cel-shaded characters moving over hand-painted backgrounds. The game will be high-res and animation-heavy, so by using 3d models we can reduce the tedious amount of time I will spend pushing pixels.

Greg: We're actually aiming for the

3d cel-shaded characters to look like they were drawn in 2d. It'll be cool because then we can have 8 angles of smooth walking and many other character animations. However, I don't want the character's animations (especially the walking) to end up sluggish. In a few other adventure games I've played that have 3d characters I noticed that the walking was really smooth, but agonizingly slow. That's something that we're going to try to avoid.

- Are you going to use the AGS engine for The Find as well, and if you are, could you tell us what are your first impressions on the engine's capabilities with 3D graphics?

Greg: Well, we aren't doing any real-time 3D, so AGS is perfect. I've also gotten to be pretty fluent with AGS, so it wouldn't be wise to switch engines.

- Could you describe to us how the interface is going to work?

Ian: The interface will rely on both mouse buttons without a permanent on-screen GUI. Left click will execute an action or walk to a spot on the screen. Right click will cycle through available actions, but only if your cursor is over a hotspot. The available actions depend on the nature of the hotspot. This system will eliminate nonsensical commands like: "Talk to the drawer." Instead you can "Open the drawer."

Greg: The interface is also very iconic, which besides being artistic, makes any translating a lot easier.

- Could you give us an example

from the gameplay of *The Find*, could you describe some challenges that the main character has to overcome?

Ian: We'd rather keep the details confidential, but at one point, Percy hijacks a small plane from the rock group, Spyderbite.

- When do you think that the game will be ready?

Ian: At this point, it's too early to tell.
 Greg: I don't want to rush this game. I want to take as much time as it needs to make *The Find* as awesome as possible.

General Questions

- Name some of the best indie adventures you have played recently

Ian: Recently I was impressed with *Principles of Evil*, *Two of a Kind*, and *Keptosh*.
 Greg: I really haven't had the time to play many adventure games lately. I started playing *Two of a Kind* a few months ago, but I never finished it. Oh, I recently beat *5 Days A Stranger* and *7 Days A Skeptic*, which are both excellent games.

- Do you think there is a possibility that independent developers will eventually sell their future releases so that they can also make some profit out of their work? Is this something you are thinking of?

Ian: Considering game design as a hobby that would be undertaken regardless, a designer could definitely profit from the underground adventure game market. Eventually, we both would like to earn some money from our hard work.

- How do you think independent adventures could become better in general? What aspects of most of these freeware games would you like to see improved?

Ian: I'd like to see generally better writing. More interactions, less filler. Also, if puzzles and puzzle systems were to deviate from what everyone knows, that can't be a bad thing.
 Greg: I'd like to see people getting away from the traditional and somewhat clichéd puzzles. When *Day of the Tentacle* was released, those puzzles were new and original, but now a lot of the puzzle ideas have been overused. I find the best puzzles are ones that are very specific to your game.

- What do you think are the most important lessons you have learned as developers since you started developing adventures?

Ian: Start with a small project and only make a game if you have an idea. Set lots of goals and make checklists, otherwise the sheer amount of work to complete your game can overwhelm you.
 Greg: Yeah, start out small. Get used to finishing games. Once you've gotten used to finishing things that you start, making a longer game is easier.

- What commercial adventures are you mostly looking forward to in the near future?

Ian: I'm looking forward to *A Vampyre Story*, *Bone*, and *Runaway 2*.
 Greg: *A Vampyre Story!*

- Is there anything else you would like to add?

Greg: I will say I'm very excited about the adventure game genre. I think there are a lot of great games in production, and I can't wait to play them!



Five Magical Amulets

Five Magical Amulets is one of the most pleasant surprises I had so far this year. To be honest the very first time I heard about the game, I was a bit sceptical about it, due to the amateurish nature of the graphics. Having just completed the game though, I can recommend Five Magical Amulets to all fans of fantasy adventure games without any hesitations.

Story: Like all good fantasy stories, this one also begins with the words 'Once upon a time...'. The game takes place in a small country called Nyron, in an ancient world where magic and sciences co-existed. The enchantress Twelga, was one of the most prominent residents of Nyron. Twelga was the holder of one of the 5 magical amulets, the green amulet of Earth. With her spells and the help of the amulet she took care of Nyron's nature and the people of Nyron lived happily in equilibrium with their surroundings. One day as Twelga was taking a stroll in the forest, she found a baby girl that was apparently abandoned by her parents. Twelga decided to adopt the baby. She named her Linda and she gave her everything she needed for a proper upbringing. The game starts on the day of Linda's 18th birthday. Linda is now an adult and she studies sciences in Tyr, a city far away from the place that



Linda and Twelga in a scene from the introduction

Twelga lives. However that very day, she decides to visit Twelga who she hasn't seen in a while. Twelga informs her daughter of some very worrying events that have taken place in the country of Nyron.

Zarkyran, a powerful wizard, aspires to collect all the five magical amulets for himself, so that he can rule all over Nyron. He has already managed to acquire the red amulet of Fire, and he uses it to destroy the nature on the surrounding lands. The problem is that Zarkyran has become the most powerful wizard of Nyron, and no other wizard will dare to oppose him. Twelga wants to bring an end to Zarkyran's evil plans before it is

too late. She asks from Linda to take the green amulet for Earth because it is not safe in Twelga's hands anymore and to give it to Tveiran, Twelga's son. Tveiran however, lives in a land far away called Gadmor, and Linda will have to embark on a long journey to fulfill her mother's wish. To make things even more complicated, Twelga disappears all of a sudden the very same moment she hands the amulet to Linda.

The plot is very interesting and it gets even more exciting as the story unfolds on your computer screen. Both Linda and the secondary characters of the game -and believe me there are plenty of them



Left: Linda in the local tavern of Gadmor and an example of the game's inventory.

Top Right: The fountain of Gadmor.

Bottom Right: The members of the circus, some of them are friendly some of them are not.



- are very well developed. There are some clichés and most of the names sound like someone opened up a Tolkien book and just changed some syllables here and there, but originality is definitely not what light-hearted fantasy stories are intended for in the first place. The developers did a great job in creating characters that you care for. Most of them have their own ambitions and special characteristics that make them unique.

The locations that the main character visits are plenty and the player feels like they are really undertaking a great adventure to save a mythical land. Linda will get to visit the forest, a desert and locations covered in snow among others. One more thing that the developers should be commented for is the length of the game. This is one of the lengthiest freeware adventures you have ever played, offering 8 to 10 hours of gaming. This is usually how long commercial games last nowadays.

Graphics: The graphics of the game are not its best feature. Of course, we can't complain, I mean remember, you don't pay anything to play this game. But a review, is a review and when we have seen other indie adventures reaching very professional standards it is difficult to avoid the comparison. The colours are very vibrant but the characters and the backgrounds could look better. Somehow, they look as if they were hand-drawn by a non-professional painter. There are outtakes of the game, that you can watch as soon as you complete Five Magical Amulets for the first time. During those outtakes you can see how the game looked in 2003 when the development team just started and how it looks now in 2005. The difference is huge and I hope that Off Studio will improve even more before their next title. And if they do, I think it would be high time they released their titles commercially, cause they would be worth it.

Developer:
Off Studio
 Perspective:
3rd person
 Interface:
Point and click
 Site:
offstudio.fabry.cz
 Difficulty:
Easy

Below: Inside Zarkyrans' castle





This depressed fairy needs Linda's help, otherwise she will die

“Five Magical Amulets is a wonderful fantasy adventure and certainly one of the first contenders for our Best Indie Adventure 2005 award.”

Highs: Memorable characters, a gripping fairy tale, long story length, excellent gameplay, song written and performed for the purposes of the game

Lows: Graphics seem amateurish, a couple of tunes could have been left out

The Verdict

Story:	90
Graphics:	59
Sound:	71
Gameplay:	95
Overall:	83

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

Sound: I would not describe the game's music stellar either. During the beginning of the game especially, some of the tunes made me feel as if a doctor would suddenly pop up behind me, say 'it's time for your medicine again' and force the prozac pills down my throat. However, during the end credits, there is a song - in Czech - that was created specifically for the purposes of the game and this one is very professional. And some of the in-game tunes during the second half of the game are not that bad, but again nothing spectacular either. Never forget though that the basic word here is: free!

Gameplay: Somebody please send a copy of the game to all adventure developers out there so that they might get an idea how to make fun adventure games. The gameplay of Five Magical Amulets is simply said, fantastic. Most of the solutions to the problems you face in the game, make absolute sense, without being too easy. Tthe gameplay is based mostly on inventory/gameworld interaction and character interaction. There

are however some well integrated logic puzzles as well, but nothing of the 'here's a slider to prolong gameplay time' sort. The logic puzzles in the game are very well integrated to the story. Pixel-hunting you ask? None, nothing, nada, I didn't have to go back to a screen once to look for something I might have missed. I only had to look at a walkthrough once, during Linda's visit to Gadmor. ***Spoilers*** Linda has to carry out some tasks before a molehill appears, and some of those tasks have nothing to do with that molehill, so I was at a loss

there for a while ***End of Spoilers*** The overall pace of the gameplay is wonderful, you are never stuck for too long in one location and you get to visit new places at a constant pace, keeping the interest for the overall story at a high level.

General Info: The game is available for free from Off Studio's official website as well as other sources online. Five magical amulets was made with the Wintermute engine and makes use of vector graphics. Off Studio is based in the Czech Republic.

In a few words... Five Magical Amulets will wake up sweet memories to any adventurer lucky enough to have experienced the King's Quest series, the Kyrandia series or the Quest for Glory series. A fairy tale that will keep your interest high from beginning to end and that will make you wonder how come the commercial adventure developers never manage to create something similar in terms of gameplay nowadays. Five magical amulets is a wonderful fantasy adventure and certainly one of the first contenders for our Best Indie Adventure 2005 award.

- Dimitris Manos

Two of a Kind

I have an announcement to make. After a long and meaningful discussion at The Inventory HQ we have decided to broaden the content of this magazine by covering not only adventure games, but card games as well! So, I present you a brilliant poker simulation "Two of a Kind"... Yeah, of course I'm kidding (like they would take any of MY suggestions). Here's the real deal: Two of a Kind is a fresh piece of independent point & click adventure coming right out of "Epileptic Fish" kitchen. Although it's not perfect, it sure has a dose of charm and you will certainly enjoy the few couple of hours that you will need to complete the game.

Story: In the early XIV century a small meteor hit the Earth. Five hundred years later, pilgrims founded a town on the very same place. Bluff City grew and prospered undisturbed for generations. Even though it looked as any other city, there was something that made it different. Residents of Bluff City received a variety of strange abilities that went from turning water into wine, to ability to attract money. Our protagonists are fraternal twins Tiffany and Timothy Walters. While Tiffany is fond of stuffed animals and brings "cheerful" to a whole different level, Tim is in a little darker mood. He

is sloppy, sarcastic and he likes to rock. They make a living by running a detective agency that investigates small cases like "find the missing cat". As most of the citizens of Bluff City they have supernatural powers. Tim has the power of levitation and Tiff has the ability to talk to animals. So, they were hanging around in their office when the curator of the local museum called them and hired them to find an ancient Egyptian crystal that has been stolen. They gladly accept the case and so their adventure begins...

The whole plot is a little silly but so is the whole game, so it fits perfectly into the atmosphere. Dialogues are filled with humor that resembles to Monkey Island type of humor. I could really catch a smile on my face when I encountered the Oracle which is an obvious parody of the Matrix.

Graphics: Two of a Kind has state-of-the-art retro graphics, which reminds us of simpler times when adventures were at the peak of their power and 3D acceleration was nowhere to be seen. Ah, those were the days... Anyway, it's probably the best you can make out of resolution 640x480. There are lots of objects and hotspots that have only decorative purpose and that are only there to entertain us.

Developer:
Epileptic Fish
Perspective:
3rd person
Interface:
Point and click
Site:
davelgil.com
Difficulty:
Easy



Tiffany and Timothy in their office



The story delves into the paranormal



Does the store's name sound familiar?



Timothy at work

“Two of a kind is a funny adventure that deserves to be played, in spite of few little setbacks. Dialogues and comical situations are definitely the bright spot of the game.”

Highs: Wacky story and lots of humor

Lows: Bugs. They made me play a large portion of the game again because the characters disappeared.

The Verdict

Story:	91
Graphics:	85
Sound:	83
Gameplay:	77
Overall:	84

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

One of them is the blue cup that is the symbol of Adventure Game Studio and it's a nice way to say: "Thanks Chuck Jones!" I also liked the appearance of GUI and the credits.

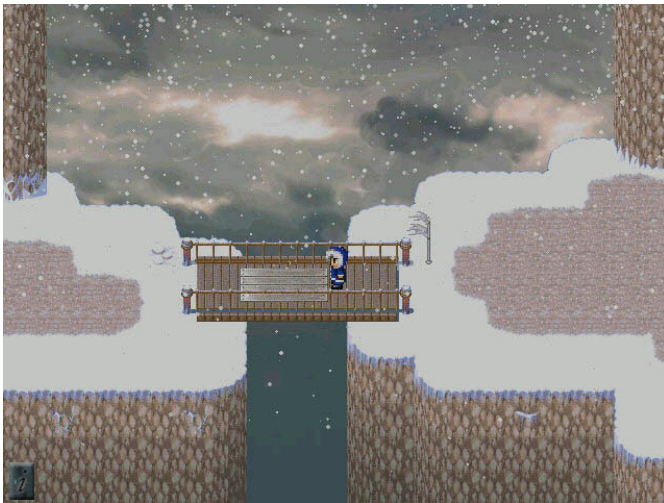
Sound: I liked it. I really did. The tunes were catchy and charming and everything was OK until I entered that blasted mansion. That tune is probably supposed to be tense and scary but it's actually irritating when you spend more than two minutes listening to it. But then there were lots of other tunes that were just great and the music from credits that really sounded first-class. It's a song called "Itchy eyes", composed by Allister Howe, and if you want to, you can download it from their site www.davegil.com. There are even a couple of sound effects to spice up the atmosphere.

Gameplay: This is the part that didn't exactly thrill me. The game was made using the AGS engine. It is 3rd person, point & click interface and it has a good looking GUI. The GUI is maybe well designed but I think that it would have been much more practical if they only made a right-click shortcut for the obvious actions like "open the door", "talk to person" etc. The

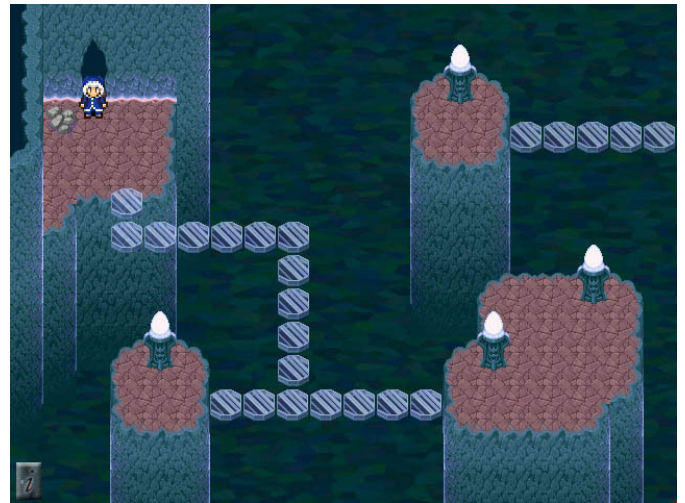
puzzles aren't too difficult, but that's not a minus. In fact, I find that they were funny and inventive, especially the ones that require team work or use of super powers. It's really refreshing to see a new approach to solving a puzzle. Another thing that disturbed me is large amount of bugs. There were so many of them that I was tempted to spray the monitor with insecticides. Maybe I'm too harsh. Maybe I'm just forgetting that this is an adventure made by a group of adventure-fans and that I can't expect it to be like some high-budget commercial title (and to be honest, those aren't flawless either).

In a few words: Two of a kind is a funny adventure that deserves to be played, in spite of few little setbacks. Dialogues and comical situations are definitely the bright spot of the game. I especially liked that part in the ending when Tim and Tiff find out that they are adopted and that they are not actually twins. Maybe I should've put that "spoiler" thing, but I didn't feel like it... Hey, easy with the gun, it was only a joke... No, really, that's not the real ending! Oh, you don't have the guts to sh...

- Mike Anderson



Howard's desktop adventures?



A fun puzzle from Catacombic

Catacombic

Catacombic is a short-length adventure (very, veerryyy short actually) but it provides players with quite some fun while it lasts.

Story: Well don't expect to play the Iliad of games, after all the game lasts only a couple of minutes. You take the role of Howard, some guy who is trapped in a shelter on the top of a mountain. Howard has to free himself and stop a wizard cult from summoning a great evil force. I know it's not your typical award-winning story, but hey, have you played Aura? That one is sold for 20 dollars! Catacombic costs...oh wait, that's right, it costs nothing.

Graphics: This is not your typical AGS adventure. The developer used RPG maker to create the graphics and used AGS for the programming. The result is actually quite nice and it will remind you of some desktop adventures that Lucasarts used to make or even JP & Cosmo, another AGS adventure released last year.

Sound: There are some tunes in the game that fit quite nicely.

Nothing mind-blowing but it gets the job done.

Gameplay: Catacombic features some original puzzles, some of them are well integrated, others are just thrown in there for the sake of puzzling. An example of a well-integrated puzzle is a room later in the game where you have to set some light bridges in the right position in order to be able to reach the end of the room. On the other hand, a puzzle that was just added for the sake of puzzling, was a 'battleship' sort of puzzle where you have to place some stones in the right position on a board, and if you do a door will open. There was minimal feedback for this puzzle and it didn't make much sense that a sect of magicians would set a battleship-puzzle on a door to protect the passage-way.

In a few words... Catacombic is a fun short adventure and it will provide you with some minutes of relaxation and entertainment.

- Dimitris Manos

Developer:

The Makers

Perspective:

3rd person

Interface:

Point and click

Site:

www.candles-weblog.us/index.html

Difficulty:

Medium

"Catacombic is a fun short adventure and it will provide you with some minutes of relaxation and entertainment."

Highs: Sweet looking graphics, fun puzzles to solve

Lows: Very short, a battleship puzzle

The Verdict

Story:	50
Graphics:	85
Sound:	65
Gameplay:	81
Overall:	68

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

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

Nothin' but support man!!! INVENTORY IS THE GRATEST THING THAT HAPPENDS TO ADVENTURES SINCE FIRST P&C GAME!!! I have one or two wishes, do more 'n' more reviews of old-school games MI 1,2 , "LOOM" (everyone should know how good that game is), "Larry suit Larry in the land of the langue lizzards"(Game that started revolution)... But wait a second why am i talking this 2 ya, you allready know this. Cause i want it in INVENTORY not for me, for all real wannabe G's in da world!!! 'N' wherre i can find(download) "Big red adventure"(allways wanted to play that game) Allmost 2 forget continue 2 support AGS-ers, like you did 'till now!!! 'N' make a preview of the "Indiana Jones and the fountain of youth" by Barnett Collage(AGS) I said all this cause it's sad that i am one of the lasts adventurers in SERBIA(Da land of chaos)!!!

In case you post this letter in INVENTORY i must say somethin' 2 my girlfriend(MAJENA VOODOOJIM TE OVOOJIKO--i--!!! I VISNJE, TRESNJE I NAJLEPTIRSKIJE!!! ZAUVEK TVOJ I ZAUVEK MOJA ZAUVEK NASI!!!)

WhiteNigga have nothin' but RESPECT 4 YA DIMITRUS!!!
Dusan Radojevic

The Inventory: This was hands down the most passionate letter of support we have received :) . Thank you for the kind words Dusan. As for your wishes, I can't really promise more reviews of older adventures (although I would love to). The problem is that I am all out of time (and money but that's another issue) and some of the current members of our staff have not been that active lately, this is why we are looking for new writers to join our staff team. Greetings to you and your girlfriend.

Thank you for the game-music station. It is very nice (& nostalgic) listening. I do note, however, that I am receiving it at (an uncommonly high rate of) 80K MPEG, yet the sound quality is strictly 28K-RealPlayer level. It may be due to the mono signal. Please do what you can to make good fidelity use of all that bandwidth. Thanks.

Paul Posa

Hi this web is fantastic, I saw this link in Micromania in february...Always hear the radio but You know how I can get or have sings of the radio. You know somelink,...where I can download music of loom,7th....Thanks

Robert Guerrero

I love the radio station for theinventory! However, Musicmatch keeps cutting out on me after about ten minutes. Is there another player or format that works better? What a great idea of having a radio station for advneture game music.

Andy P

The Inventory: Hi Paul, Robert and Andy and thank you all for the comments on our radio station. Unfortunately due to lack of time I have been unable to take care of some issues for the radio. Here are answers to some of your questions though. I personally use winamp to listen to the radio, you can download winamp at www.winamp.com . You cannot download songs from our radio, we would rather only play them online due to legal issues. Paul I am not sure I understand what you mean but I'll contact our webmaster and let him know of your letter. Thank you all for writing and we hope that you will continue supporting our magazine and our radio station.

Epilogue

This is the end of the 23rd issue of The Inventory. In our next issue we will focus again on commercial adventures, and if all goes as planned then we will feature no less than 3 exciting pre-views! We will also feature a review of Microids' thriller Still Life, DTP's Nibiru and some other commercial games that would not suit this special issue on independent developers. It looks like the comics section will be returning as well.

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). As you already read in the gossip section we are looking for new writers. 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 you would 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.

Dimitris Manos



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