

If I had been in charge on Hoth, we would have won

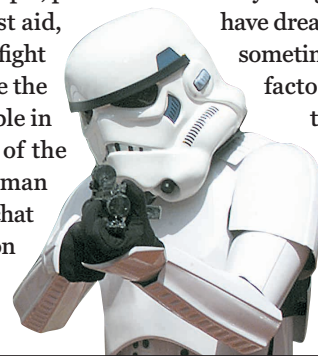
REVIEW

Whether it be as a young child or a (supposedly) mature adult, many gamers have fantasized about playing a heroic role in the epic battles of that galaxy far, far away. Thanks to Pandemic and LucasArts, *Star Wars: Battlefront* (rated Teen, out for Xbox, PlayStation 2 and PC) can plop you right into the middle of some of the most fantastic skirmishes to span the *Star Wars* movie saga, and some new areas besides. The scale of this action title is impressive, as the entire map, including Hoth, Endor, Geonosis, Yavin 4, and more, teems with life of all kinds. Whether you're playing on or offline, the emphasis is on team tactics. Controlling one of four factions (the

Clone Troopers, Separatist movement, Rebel Alliance, or Galactic Empire), you assume the role of a grunt in that faction's foot troops, fighting hectic battles against your hated enemies. Later you can fly or fight in most of the vehicles featured in the movies. The design almost resembles a simulation — well, as much as it's possible to simulate a science fiction universe — with five types of playable units on each force's roster. Each specific character type has its own unique strengths and weaknesses which must be coordinated at a pressured pace with the actions of all

your teammates and enemies. For example, pilots can repair vehicles and distribute first aid, making them key back-up units in the fight to hold Command Posts and eliminate the enemy onslaught. Online play, available in all three versions, is clearly the star of the show, as nothing beats the thrill of human opposition and companionship. Voice chat capability enables beautiful organization of attack routines with fellow players. Sadly (though understandably), single

player mode can potentially become numbingly repetitive. The controls are quite stiff, which is a touchy thing for such an intense game. Vehicles have dreadful handling, and the characters are sometimes jerky (especially with Internet lag factored in). Graphics are excellent at times, and stale at others. And it wouldn't be *Star Wars* without the John Williams music. This is an intriguing game, but those without online capability may want to think twice. ★★★ (out of four). *Patrick Kelly, National Post*



The man who sent Leisure Suit Larry looking for love thought he had a loser on his hands

Larry's one-track mind

Next week, Sierra Games releases *Leisure Suit Larry: Magna Cum Laude*, the ninth in a humorously erotic series that goes back 17 years. G3's Marc Saltzman sought out Larry's creator to find out how the lovable loser got his start.

BY MARC SALTZMAN

In an age when video games consisted of heroes protecting earth from an alien onslaught, or adventurers determined to rescue a kidnapped princess, a new kind of lead character was born, one whose goal wasn't quite as ... er ... noble. Larry Laffer just wanted to get laid. And the poor schmoe simply had no clue how to go about it.

Created by the affable Al Lowe, *Leisure Suit Larry in the Land of the Lounge Lizards* debuted on June 1, 1987, as a graphic adventure that let gamers control a lovable loser setting out to look for love in all the wrong places.

Players typed in responses to situations as they came up, such as "open door," "call cab" or "give rose," and the actions unfolded onscreen, usually with comedic results.

Not an overnight success. Though this franchise would go on to spawn eight sequels and sell millions of copies worldwide, the original *Larry* game first bombed at retail.

"We released the game to the worst sales that Sierra had ever seen to date — barely 4,000 copies," says Lowe, from his home near Seattle, Wash.

"So I just hung my head and thought 'Well, I just wasted six months of my life,' not to mention I [had] told Sierra not to pay me anything up front, just royalties."

Little did Lowe know that by the fall of the same year, the game (which shipped on two floppy disks!) would be doubling its sales month after month until it became a Top 10 best-seller well into 1988.

This DOS game was soon available for other operating systems, such as the Apple II, Commodore 64, Amiga and Atari. It was translated to multiple languages and re-made with 256-colour graphics in 1991.

The story actually began in 1986, when Lowe agreed to update *Softporn*, a risqué text adventure game published by Sierra in 1981.

But times were very different, the sexual revolution was about done, and Lowe says he realized the

only way to redo the game was to make fun of the central character, who wasn't

aware that promiscuity was no longer acceptable.

"I said 'Softporn is so out of date it should be wearing a leisure suit,' which got a lot of laughs during the meeting so we decided to run with it," says Lowe.

He came up with a lead character, modelled after a real "lounge lizard" at Sierra who bragged about his sexual exploits. Lowe also tapped Sierra artist Mark Crowe, who was working full time on *Space Quest*, to create graphics for the game night and on weekends. It only took Crowe four weeks.

Much of the humor in the first *Leisure Suit Larry* game was a dead during the three months of testing. "I tracked everything our testers typed in the game, collected all the files and anything that people typed I had

a funny answer for them" says Lowe.

The funniest response? Lowe says a TV producer was once considering a show based on this character and during a demonstration of the product, Larry walked into a bathroom and someone playing along told Lowe to type in "masturbate."

The game's response? "You know, Larry, the whole idea of this was to STOP doing that!" Lowe says he forgot he had come up with that.

Despite its racy content, Lowe says Sierra only received three pieces of mail about the title.

"Any backlash we received on the game, which was virtually nothing, was all from people who never played the game."

The box also clearly stated the game contained mature content, long before the Entertainment Software Rating Board came into effect.

"I could have gotten away with a lot more than I chose to," Lowe says. "I didn't try to push the envelope, instead I wanted to make people laugh by putting them in funny situations."

And it's humor that keeps Lowe busy today. After a 16-year stint with Sierra, the retired 58-year-old offers a free "joke of the day" subscription email service, *CyberJoke 3000*. (www.allowe.com/Humor).

Lowe says he isn't involved in the new game, which stars Larry's college-bound nephew, though he held discussions with Sierra about working on the project.

"I was smart to save my Larry bucks," says Lowe on his early retirement. "So now I'm sharing jokes and happily playing bad golf."

National Post
gameguy@rogers.com



G3 gaming, gadgets and gizmos

START MENU

TOP 10 RENTALS

Top console game rentals for the week ending Sept. 25. The number in brackets is last week's rating.

1. (-) *Star Wars: Battlefront* (PlayStation 2)
2. (-) *Star Wars: Battlefront* (Xbox)
3. (-) *NHL 2005* (PS2)
4. (2) *Fable* (Xbox)
5. (-) *Def Jam Fight for NY* (PS2)
6. (-) *NHL 2005* (Xbox)
7. (1) *Burnout 3: Takedown* (PS2)
8. (-) *Def Jam Fight NY* (Xbox)
9. (-) *Tiger Woods PGA 2005* (PS2)
10. (3) *Burnout 3: Takedown* (Xbox)

Rogers Video

WIN WIN WIN

This week at www.NationalPost.com, you can win a copy of *NHL 2005*, by Electronic Arts Canada (worth \$50 each), for PlayStation 2, Xbox or GameCube. (Please specify which you want). To enter, go on line and fill out the form.

PC users prepare to sacrifice hundreds of hours to the magic of Myst

REVIEW

Myst IV: Revelation
Windows and Macintosh
Teen

BY MARC SALTZMAN

The latest incarnation in the multi-million-unit-selling *Myst* franchise is not only the most life-like adventure in the series to date, but it's arguably the closest thing we've seen to virtual reality in a computer game.

The environments in *Myst IV: Revelation*, which took more than three years to create at Ubisoft's Montreal studios, are so lifelike that you'll want to touch the water, trees and rocks.

In fact, you can.

Resembling a small hand, the mouse cursor lets users interact with the world, such as by drawing a letter "s" in the water or grasping a drawer handle and pulling back on the mouse to open it. Look up in the sky and the sun's rays pierce through drifting clouds. More than 70 minutes of full-motion video, including actors who walk and talk with you, add nicely to the realism.

This is certainly a departure

from the 11-year-old *Myst*, a game that, while popular, was condemned by some critics as an interactive coffee table book. It felt lifeless because of the static images gamers had to click-through, not to mention there was no one to interact with. No such problems here.

For the uninitiated, the *Myst* games are best described as a point-and-click adventure played from a first-person perspective, where players must use the mouse to navigate around a surreal island and through various "ages," all the while solving tough brainteasers in order to accomplish the game's goals. Puzzles vary from pulling the right levers and gears to reading notes and applying the correct clues to manipulating an object.

The tough puzzles remain in *Myst IV*, but now players can adjust the level of hints (or take none at all) so no player should get stuck on the journey (after all, there's a reason why the original *Myst* hint book sold more than a million copies). Also designed to help gamers along is a new "amulet" feature in the game. Players can find objects that offer clues to solving the riddles,

including audio or video clips.

Players can also use a camera to take photos of objects, diagrams or book text for future reference. Descriptive text can be added to each snapshot, if so desired. This journal becomes an integral part of the adventure.

Even still, trying to electromagnetically charge the "Rockship" to reach its docking station in the Spire Age proved near impossible. And this was only a couple of hours into the game.

The story surrounds the two evil brothers introduced in the first title, Sirrus and Achenar, who remain trapped in separate prison worlds for committing unforgivable crimes. Their father, Atrus (played by *Myst* co-creator Rand Miller) suspects their involvement in the disappearance of Atrus's young daughter, and you're asked to travel to various worlds to solve this mystery. *Myst IV* isn't as linear as previous editions, now player decisions can affect the storyline, outcome and ending.

The game's music is as impressive as its visuals. Pop singer Peter Gabriel has teamed up with composer Jack Wall to provide a beautiful ambient sound-



UBISOFT MONTREAL

Myst IV is arguably the closest thing to virtual reality you'll find.

track.

Myst IV Revelation ships on two DVDs, therefore a Windows or Mac computer with a DVD-ROM drive is required to play the game. And get this — the full install requires a whopping eight gigabytes of hard drive space on your computer, while the partial install is 3.5 gigs.

(8GB is huge. By comparison, *Madden NFL 2005* is 2GB, *Full Spectrum Warrior* is 1.7GB and *Chessmaster 10th Edition* is 570MB.)

A third disc containing 2001's *Myst III: Exile* is also included in the box as a bonus. Incredible production values notwithstanding, gamers who do

not have the patience to solve tough conundrums shouldn't invest in this adventure game.

But for fans of the *Myst* series or those who prefer a slower-paced journey with challenging puzzles, you won't find a better PC game this year. ★★★½ (out of four)

National Post
gameguy@rogers.com

RE_INVENTING RADIO

Through Necessity

Through Innovation
Through Design
Through Audio
For Travel



Emergency Plug-In AM/FM Radio with Blackout Alert

FR100 Blackout Buddy

Plug the Blackout Buddy into AC sockets around your home. When the power fails, Blackout Buddy automatically shines to the rescue, with a brilliant beam of light that illuminates the room and its AM/FM radio to give you breaking news. Blackout Buddy also makes a perfect AM/FM clock radio & LED flashlight for everyday listening around the home.

- Automatically turns on radio/flashlight during power outages
- Super-bright LED flashlight
- Illuminated multi-function blue LCD screen and nightlight
- Patent-pending plug-in design recharges internal battery
- AM/FM radio with telescopic antenna
- Headphone jack and FM antenna input
- AC plug folds down for easy transportation

Dimensions: 3" W x 5" H x 1.4" D
Weight: 10 oz.
Power Source: AC power (direct plug-in)

BatteryPlus

etón

RadioShack

FR100

To order the FR100, please call us toll free at 1-888-889-4384 ext. NTLPT001

The FR100 is \$39.95 plus Shipping/Handling and applicable taxes.

www.etoncorp.com
© Copyright 2004 Eton Corporation. All Rights Reserved.

NECESSITY