

## Arcanum Underworld : Journey to the Center of Arcanum

Imagine wandering the subterranean worlds below Arcanum in a first person perspective – sneaking up behind someone to backstab them, the only sounds being their breathing and your light steps on the ancient walkway beneath your feet. Or smooth talking a native and seeing the reaction to your words on her face. And, of course, the sheer delight of gunning down disrespectful NPC's in cold blood!

*Journey to the center of Arcanum* is the first collaboration between **Valve software** and **Troika Games** – bringing the action of the Half Life 2 engine into the world of RPGs. Not since Ultima Underworld has there been an RPG that combines the action of the first person perspective and the immersioniveness of a fully realized RPG world!!

- Multiple solutions to problems and puzzles
- A Stat/Skill system seamlessly integrated into the playing experience, an intuitive extension of the gameplay.
- Extensive side quests that don't involve main story, and emphasize the choices the PC makes about his character
- Scripted events that the PC can be involved in and affect the outcome
- ~~Half Life's feeling of being immersed in the world extended to include being immersed in the character you are playing, by having the world react to the choices the player makes~~ While *Half-Life* immersed you in the world, *Journey goes one step further and has the world react to the choices the player makes*
- An intriguing storyline:

Journey to the Center of Arcanum revolves around the search for an ancient metal, used to create the Vendigroth device in **Arcanum: Of Steamworks and Magick Obscura**. Whoever controls this metal that combines the power of both Magick and Technology will have ultimate control over the precarious balance of power in the world of Arcanum. *Journey* will take the player to unimagined realms of suspense, terror and excitement by using the Half Life 2 engine to make-bring to life the mysterious world beneath Arcanum-~~come-to-life~~. Whether ~~he is~~-beset by one of the many groups out to control the metal and recruit him to their cause, or ~~is~~-confronting some ancient civilization, the player will have to decide on whose side he is fighting.

- Exotic locales:

*From the Arcanum Guidebook:*

The adventure begins in Tarant, the most technological of all the cities of Arcanum. Walk beneath the architectural wonders of the day, where the use of the steam engine has allowed buildings of monumental scope and stature. Where the gnomish aristocracy of the day walks along the broad avenues, watched closely by their ogre bodyguards, and the technological intelligentsia show off their latest gadgets, from the newest Steamhorse to the hulking automaton, replete with a top hat and monocle. Or perhaps a visit to the seedy streets of the Boil, the industrial section of Tarant, where the old buildings and shops are stacked atop one another like cordwood, pipes hang over and across the street like vines. Feeling a little adventurous? Grab a crow bar and open the nearest manhole, and climb down into the old sewers of Tarant, some of which are hundreds of years old. Who knows what a chap might encounter down there. Or who?...

From there, set sail to the furthest reaches of the Serpentspine Islands. You'll port at Hopes End, largest city on Dragonhead, westernmost of the isles, and the last vestige of civilization during your travels. Here you'll find the usual assortment of brigands and cutthroats, as well as the rough-cut adventuring types, looking for the next bloke to walk by with a fat purse and his sights set on the island's interior. You might also run across the members of the Four Families, the original settlers of Dragonhead, whose wealth has accumulated through land and shipping speculation, and without whose permission is nothing accomplished in Hopes End. It is here, in Hopes End, where a man might gather a hearty crew and enough provisions to brave the face what awaits on the rest of the islands.

Once outside the confines of Hopes End, there is all manner of evil creatures and primitive tribesmen to test the mettle of even the most seasoned of adventurers. Try your sword against the dreaded Fire Giants and their pet lizards, inhabiting the volcanic Bonespur Island. Or perhaps the Lava Wyrms are more to your liking? Just a bit further east is Claw Island, with the primitive and warlike Baga Men, rumored to be cannibals and speakers with dead. Brave souls who have returned from Claw Island, oftentimes less an arm or a leg, tell that the Baga homes are constructed of human bones, and that their village is protected by something so terrible that they have to sacrifice their virgins *and* their firstborn in order to appease it. If you have any limbs left, you might take a short day trip to the barren Fang Island, where the evil sorcerer Wermian Dred has ruled for 1000 years. His castle, The Grimoire, stands bleakly atop a long-dead volcano, on whose slopes nothing will grow.

Only the truly skilled and adventurous will pass Wermian Dred and travel to the last of the islands. The Wyrmtail. And here, in a hidden lagoon on the east end of the island, is something truly amazing. Just beneath the surface of the crystal-blue lagoon waters, is an ancient structure, whose greenish metal seems untarnished after what must have been thousands of years in this forgotten place. Barnacles and coral encrust it on all sides, but there is an opening where one might enter if they can find a way to dive to it. And inside this ancient wonder,

the remains of what must have once been a mining facility, with technology that far surpasses that of the current day. Gears and pipes larger than entire buildings, electrical devices and much, much more. Who were these people? What were they doing here? And, most importantly, where are they now?

And those with the backbone might travel even further, even deeper, down into the massive mineshaft leading Arcanum's core, where there are endless caverns and entire worlds to discover. A subterranean system of rivers that leads you to a long-forgotten tribe of dwarves, who live in a cavern so vast that it seems a world unto itself. And then, finally, the secret of the miners and what they were looking for, and a final discovery that might just change the world of Arcanum forever.

So! Travel on, brave adventurer!

## **GAMEPLAY**

In JTCA (Journey to the Center of Arcanum), we hope to incorporate the best aspects of the most popular first-person RPG's on the market, as well as include a new direction, one that is inherently Troika's. If Arcanum has proved anything, it is that we know how to craft a well-balanced RPG, with memorable characters, a compelling story, and a character-development system that is second to none. The dichotomy between magick and technology gave us a perfect game environment to create an almost infinite number of playing styles, and we hope to translate that same environment into a 3-D world.

We hope to achieve a similar gaming environment as was presented in Half-Life or Deus Ex. The complexity of the levels in Half-Life, as well as the obvious care that was put into their design, created a game that was both fun and challenging at all levels. The use of puzzles and the intelligent placement of enemies helped players learn the use of the items presented to them, as well as increasing their skill in items they previously had. The puzzles in JTCA would make the best use of these items, offering multiple solutions for every puzzle.

Imagine taking the weapons in Arcanum, such as the Tesla Rod or the Elephant Gun, and wielding them in a 3-D environment. The technological gadgets in Arcanum will almost drop into a game like this; lay down the Bear Trap and watch your enemies being trapped, struggling to get away while you pull out your Compound Bow and pick them off from a distance. Items like the Flow-Spectrometer could alter the game-view (think infrared-vision), where Mages and magickal items glow different colors and intensities, depending on their power. Mages will have an enormous number of spells at their disposal, and the size and power of those spells is basically limitless once we've moved into 3-D. A summoned Water Elemental could look just like flowing water, leaving behind puddles when it walks, exploding when hit with electricity or dissolving quietly when it dies otherwise. Fireballs, spewing flaming embers (particles), could track

follow enemies around corners. And all of this in the world of Arcanum, with its industrial-age cities and magickal kingdoms and deep, dwarven mines and dungeons. The possibilities are endless.

As thieving in Arcanum very important, we hope to incorporate the best game-play mechanics of games like Thief and Thief 2. By allowing the player to move in the shadows, and to move quietly among enemies, we hope to offer a different kind of playing style than the mage, warrior or technologist. Strategy and success will be rewarded with audio and visual cues. Story elements will also support this playing style, as the Thieves Underground did in Arcanum.

Imagine having to enter a building, guarded by ~~3~~<sup>2</sup> three men. ~~Two guards~~ are on foot patrol, but walking which takes them past the back door. The other man sits on a bench, near the front door. A skilled thief might stick to the shadows, timing his movements with those of the guards out back, pulling out his lockpicks at just the right moment and sneaking inside undetected. Or perhaps he'd sneak up behind them unguarded, Backstabbing them or covering their mouths with a Laudanum-soaked Rag. This might be the easier way to go, especially when the player notices that the guard out front falls asleep every so often. He snores loudly. There will also be magickal and technological items that will facilitate being a thief, from magickal Silent Shoes to an Auto-skeleton Key. Again, the possibilities for fun and interesting scenarios are limitless.

Lastly, we hope to accomplish in JTCA what these others seem to lack; an interesting and intuitive dialogue system. Troika knows how to craft an RPG, and we believe that the use of dialog and quests is very important to developing an interesting story. We hope to take the best parts of what we learned from the dialogue system in Arcanum and incorporate an economical and intuitive framework that propels the story, while not getting in its way. This will make possible the diplomat characters that are so popular in the genre. It also offers a different route for the player who doesn't necessarily want to fall back on the combat solution. In the Troika tradition, we want to offer three distinct paths for the player; combat, thieving and diplomacy. We feel we can do this without compromising the overall integrity of the title. Accomplishing this will put us above the existing titles on the market, who have sacrificed dialogue complexity for other game mechanics. For a successful RPG you need both.

Interface is an important part of any game, and we want ours to be as intuitive and transparent as possible. We know the pitfalls of making an RPG, and one of the largest is how the game system is translated into the game's interface. Hotkeys and shortcuts, as well as the use of drop-away, transparent interfaces will help to immerse the player in our world. Having oversized gauges and menus constantly in view takes the player out of the created reality we want to establish; JTCA will be created from the ground up with these issues in mind.

## **CLOSING**

Arcanum, with 120,000 downloads of a 250 meg demo in only two weeks and an Editor's Choice award from PC Gamer, seems ready to establish a new RPG franchise. This, and Troika's RPG expertise coupled with cutting edge Half Life 2 technology will reopen a too long neglected aspect of RPGs not seen since Ultima Underworld – the first person, immersive RPG.