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y Michael M. Eilers

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Royal Navy submarine prowls beneath the Arctic ice fields. As part of a heroic secret mission, a brilliant archeologist and his cargo are rescued from Nazi forces. As the sub sneaks away from battle, it becomes apparent that their prize, the archeologist Hamsun and his crates, may prove deadlier than the Nazis ever were.

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So begins Prisoner of Ice, an adventure game that originates in the late 1930s and spreads over the globe and forward through time, in a quest to stop the Nazis and control the dreaded Cthulhu, a demon of the underworld who has been set free from his underwater prison. You are a Secret Service operative serving as a lieutenant on board the H. M. S. Victoria, sent to assist operation "Polaris:" rescue Hamsun from the Nazis and uncover the secrets of his archaeological finds.

[A Polished Surface](#)

First impressions are everything, especially with games, and this one makes quite an impact. The opening "trailer" features some spectacularly realistic hi-resolution animation, complete with a dramatic soundtrack and special effects. The credits and intro scenes are very nice to look at, and it was a relief to see that the game was created with high resolution graphics (640x380) rather than the VGA blockiness that usually plagues games ported from the PC side.

An Improbable, but Interesting Plot

Comparisons to the Indiana Jones series of movies (and Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis) are inevitable—after all, there are archaeologists, Nazis, ancient relics, submarines, and supernatural forces involved. Not having played Indy FOA in depth, I can't comment on that particular comparison, but overall the plot seems to escape being purely derivative. Your character is very different from the Indiana Jones stereotype, taking the role of a thinker and a sleuth rather than a swashbuckling adventurer. Teamwork and craftiness, not blunt heroism, seems to be the path to victory.

Eye and Ear Candy Ahoy!

Technically, this game is quite impressive. Optimized for Power Macintosh, the graphics and animations are fluid and crystal clear. Movies played smoothly and with synchronized sound on my double-speed CD-ROM drive. As with every CD-ROM game I have played, frame rates suffered terribly with virtual memory or CD acceleration software (i.e. CD-ROM Toolkit, Speed Access) enabled.

Prisoner of Ice is a third-person "cross-section" game similar to Indy FOA and The Dig, where you observe your character from afar and direct him from place to place with clicks of the mouse. Occasional shifts of the camera perspective, including close-ups and overhead shots, help to break up the monotony of that viewpoint.

The characters, from shipmates to hellspawned demons, are all computer-animated and 3-D rendered. Evidently I-Motion employed motion-capture techniques while creating these characters, as their movements are eerily lifelike and quite convincing. Large and nicely detailed, the characters duck to get through portals and clamber up ladders with very natural, graceful motions.

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Interestingly enough, while the characters and movies are rendered in 3-D, the "sets" and backgrounds are hand-drawn. They have the soft, sketchy look of pencil drawings scanned in and colorized in Photoshop. This affects the game in several ways. First, it allows for much more detail in the backgrounds—no matter

how far 3-D artistry has advanced, it always seems austere and simplified compared to hand-rendered compositions. Second, it gives the game a hand-crafted, authentic feel. 3 D rendering seems appropriate inside starships, but submarines are a little grungier and rough around the edges. Some close-ups have the pixelated look of VGA, but have been anti-aliased to remove that "feature."

Each room is "cached" in memory so that once you have visited it, the screen does not load from the CD-ROM again, which greatly sped up gameplay. At some points the transitions from room-to-room were nearly instantaneous on my 7100/66.

Music plays continuously in the background, a sort of Wagnerian synthesizer loop that does an excellent job of approximating adventure movie music. The music also changes to fit certain events in a context sensitive manner, enhancing the movie-like feel of the game. Voice narration (available in both French and English) is crisp and generally well-acted, though the half-hearted attempts at British and Spanish accents by the (obviously) American actors produced some unintended laughs. Also, the game's French origin occasionally reveals itself in some strange translations: a wheel became an "axis," and a wall bracket was translated as a "chest."

[A Mix of Puzzles](#)

What little gameplay I experienced was a nicely-balanced mix of fast, time-dependent puzzles and slow logic-based tasks. As with most adventure games, a lot of the play involves talking to other characters and slowly gaining new information or pieces of the puzzle. Some of the puzzles depend on reaction time (put the fire out before it melts the ice on the crates, or die) but others must be solved before events can move on, so time effectively "stops" until you trigger the next series of events. A particularly nice feature auto-saves the game just before you begin a critical (i.e. life-threatening) sequence, so that even if you become demon fodder you don't have to work through the puzzles all over again.

[A Spanner in the Works](#)

Unfortunately, the game suffers from a version of the "Darkseed Complex." Darkseed was severely lambasted in IMG for having the outcome of the game depend on a single-pixel clue that was nearly invisible, reducing the game to simple hunt-and-click. Prisoner of Ice does this several times during the narrative, once sending me looking for a literal needle in a haystack.

I found these pixel-hunts so annoying I have included solutions for them in the Tips & Tricks section to save others the annoyance I went through. It is too bad the designers relied on such a tired device for some of the puzzles—other scenarios in the game are quite fresh and innovative. At several points I found myself slowly cruising the arrow over each screen methodically, hoping to find something new to click on. Very, very annoying. I got so badly stuck at one point I had to consult a MacPlay playtester! These "puzzles" trimmed a full joystick off of my rating for this game.

he gameplay was generally episodic and linear, meaning that your actions set off a chain of events that had only one path. Many people complain about "linear" games, but I've never considered that a drawback. Fixed story lines certainly haven't stopped me from reading fiction or going to movies, and they have a place in games as well.

Saving and loading games, setting preferences, and other mechanics are easily accomplished, although I had to lean on the mouse button to get many of the toggles and buttons to react. The interface is ugly, but functional.

... Like Being In a Movie

Once things began to move along, the narrative was quite compelling. Obviously I can't tell you much without giving away the plot, but let's just say that there were plot-twists-o-plenty, and I was quite astonished at times. The pacing is quite good and the characters are often funny (both intentionally and accidentally.)

Prisoner of Ice is a great addition to the MacPlay product line, and to Mac adventure games in general. A practically flawless port with good speed, the game is as strong technically as it is in story line. Despite the annoying reliance on "find the 1-pixel clue" puzzles, this game both intrigues as it entertains. Besides, all good games are frustrating. . . Right?

Pros

- Sharp high-resolution graphics and high-quality animations
- Original musical score
- A well-balanced mixture of puzzles, from find-the-object searches to time-dependent fights for your life
- Lots of interaction with fellow characters in a smooth and unobtrusive manner
- Animated backgrounds and rooms that change over time
- Hand-drawn "sets" give the game a warm, authentic feel
- Save anywhere/anytime, and the game auto-saves at critical moments
- easy access to inventory items and a completely mouse-driven interface

Cons

- Occasional reliance on "needle-in-haystack" puzzles
- "British" accents (and attempts at Scottish and Irish and Spanish) test the limits of the voice actors
- No option to set the level of dif.

o Definitely not compatible with any type of virtual memory or CD ROM acceleration software

Publisher Info

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