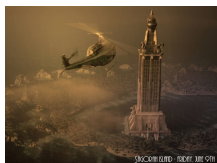


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The hotel

[Sinking Island](#)

Benoit Sokal brings us another mystery adventure game

As a big fan of [point and click adventure](#) games, I got really excited when I heard that there's a new title coming from the creator of Syberia - Benoit Sokal. Because that game was a masterpiece, a feast for the eye and the soul, a perfect game overall. I was expecting the same from Sinking Island, I was expecting to fall in love with the characters, like I did when I played Syberia, I was expecting to be fascinated by the story and play it for 20 hours straight, just to see the end of a beautiful story. And, probably, this is the biggest mistake a gamer can do - start playing Sinking Island thinking about Syberia. In this case, you will be extremely disappointed. However, this is not a bad game. But it's not perfect, it's not even great, it's not something you could finish and say afterwards: "Benoit Sokal is the man!". You would rather say that you've just played a strange combination between a CSI game and any of the [Sherlock Holmes](#) titles (which doesn't mean that it's a bad thing, right?). And probably forget after a couple of days that you ever played such a game.

Unfortunately... **The Story** You are Jack Norm, a police inspector who arrives on a strange island to investigate the murder of a billionaire named Walter Jones. This strange man, who has a well hidden past and a bunch of enemies even within his family, owned a huge hotel on the tropical island of Sagorah - a poor beach resort that nobody wants to visit and, on top of that, a place that is also being hit by a hurricane. This is the reason the game's name is Sinking Island: the island is literally sinking, because the huge hotel/tower is too heavy. Cool, huh? Still, you'll meet there all the suspects peacefully awaiting and start your adventure. The story is the most important thing for this kind of games - it has to be fresh, it has to be exciting, it has to be a mystery for you to solve. In Sinking Island, as you can see, we don't have that. Yes, it is a mystery you have to solve, yes, you've never heard this particular story before, but still... I was expecting more. Even worse is the fact that you will already know who the murderer is halfway through the game's length, but you've got no button like "Got it!" to press. So this game kind of loses its "mystery" status too early. The story unfolds as you interrogate the suspects and you find out that everybody on that island had solid reasons to hate Walter Jones. He was a person that thought money can buy anything, had an obsession for a very young girl, didn't care about his large family, upset the natives - he was pure evil, to keep it short. However, the game does not manage to accomplish its goal - to make you hate Walter Jones. So you could sum up the whole thing pretty easily: a millionaire died, everybody hated him, you investigate the case, find the killer, game over. And that's about it. **Gameplay** First of all, you will realize that the game is very easy. You advance by solving pieces of a puzzle, each being represented by a conclusion you will make and which will allow you to proceed to the "next" level. Most of the "quests" (or, better said, puzzles) are inventory-based and very easy to solve, even though a bit frustrating sometimes. I say that because you will have to run from a corner to another to get the item that allows you to proceed. So you will actually spend more time running after the right object or declaration instead of thinking about the solution for the puzzle. As Jack Norm, you will gather pieces of information in your PPA (Personal Police Assistant) and reorder them in there to draw your conclusion. Although a nice feature that makes you feel more like a real detective (it has fingerprint analysis, a compare feature and everything), it simplifies your work even more. At least it is better implemented than it was in other detective adventure games (take a random pick from any detective title from The Adventure Company, for example). Also, your PPA stores all the documents you will find, which will give you more details regarding the story - but you don't have to read them unless you are really into this kind of things. Probably the innovation brought to us by Sinking Island

is the use of a "real time" aspect: there are two modes of play, the classic adventure (with no time limit) and the "race against time" (you have three days to solve the mystery and all the suspects become more irritated as the time goes by, thus making your detective's life harder). In other words, you have 72 hours to solve the case. Also, this real time aspect comes with other two "bonuses" which, unfortunately, will only drive you crazy: you will receive phone calls from your wife, especially when the night is coming and you will get hungry every now and then (and you'll always eat a huge sandwich). Whenever any of these events occurs, you will be taken from wherever you were to your apartment or to the dining hall. And you won't be automatically transported back to the place you were before - you have to run, again, and lose valuable minutes from your real life. And this implementation brings nothing but frustration. Especially because it seems that certain events can only occur after you get hungry or you get a phone call which, in other words, means that if you are stuck at some point in the game, you are not actually stuck - you just have to wait to get hungry. So get ready to do a lot of running around - you will cover hundreds of miles, probably, just to get from one point or another. And no, you won't have the option to right click and skip the running animation, as most of the newer adventures games have. But the scenery is nice, at least. As I said, most of the puzzles are inventory based (get an object, use it on another object and use the result somewhere) and the few real puzzles you'll really have to use your brain for are easy to solve (excepting, maybe, the library puzzle in the later stages of the game). And really, now, even though I understand that being a detective doesn't mean pulling levers in a particular order or mixing ingredients to make a strange potion, I find it plain boring to run and run and run just to get a little item, or a picture, or a declaration. Also, another thing that will be frustrating after a few hours is represented by the bunch of characters. Each has his own personality (and this is a good thing), but they are all so different that this whole thing will seem a little too overreacted - you'll meet the loving son, the rebel, the independent, strong woman and so on. But they don't seem natural. Not to mention the fact that you'll have tons of dialogs to exhaust in order to proceed, and all the repetitive intro phrases can not be skipped, so you'll learn a few lines. But listening to nothing is not my idea of fun, honestly.

Graphics Visually, there are two different perspectives in Sinking Island: the character's and the environment's. The environment is stunningly beautiful - you have great sceneries, you have palm trees shaking in the wind, a cold rain that never stops, sand blown by the wind on the beach and so on. When Jack Norm is outside, you really tend to grab a coat and put it on (in real life, I mean) - that is how good the stormy environments look like. And, yes, bring a towel, too, because you'll most likely feel wet all the time, even though nobody in there seems to care about the rain. The characters, however, are something else. As I said, each is quite unique and you won't get the feeling that any single one of them looks like another (but maybe they should, at least a little bit, since half of them are brothers and sisters, for God's sake!). Still, the level of detail comes as a contrast to the way the environment looks like and you'll most likely have the impression of talking to string dolls after you see them move. Also, their faces will tell you nothing. Nada. Zero. Hollow eyes, almost no mouth movement, no facial expression. Good thing they're moving their hands, otherwise you could feel like talking to rocks or something.

Sound Just like the graphics, the sound should be analyzed from two perspectives. What makes me think now: could it be possible that two different teams created the game? Probably not, but this is the impression Sinking Island gives you. Poor dialogs, repetitive, unsynchronized with the (few) mouth movements and a below-average voice acting. However, the sound of the wind blowing, the rain and all the other sounds you'll hear (when nobody else is speaking) is great, adding to the great, intense, hostile feeling of Sagorah. Unfortunately, you'll have to start a dialog and everything will be kind of ruined.

Multiplayer Well, this is a point and click adventure game, so unless you bring a friend to help you solve the puzzles (but since they're really easy, there would be no reason to do such a thing), you'll never feel the need for multiplayer. Not that the game offers it, not that anybody could imagine a multiplayer point and click game. Still, since I've mentioned

that already, a friend near you wouldn't be such a bad idea, after all: Jack Norm will have to do some running, so another person to talk to while he runs all over the island might be great.**Conclusion**Sinking Island could be considered a game for adventure fans only, but it's too easy. For the casual gamer or for those who can't call themselves adventure game fans, it will probably be just "that game where I had to run too much". And it's still easy. For me, it is kind of a disappointment: I was expecting more from the person that brought Syberia to the entire world. But I think that, even if I wouldn't have played Syberia, I'd still consider Sinking Island mediocre.