

Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars

Studio: **Revolution Software**

Designer(s): **Charles Cecil**

Part of series: **Broken Sword**

Release: September 30, 1996 (original) / March 21, 2009 (Director's Cut)

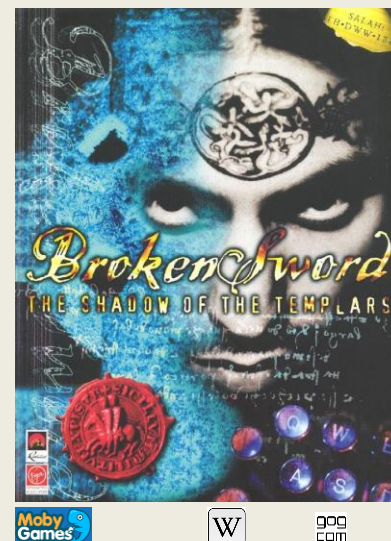
Main credits: Producers: **Charles Cecil, Chris Dudas, Steve Ince, Michael Merren**

Writers: **Charles Cecil, Dave Cummins, Jonathan Howard**

Art: **Eoghan Cahill, Neil Breen, Mike Burgess**

Music: **Barrington Pheloung**

Useful links: [Complete playthrough](#) (Director's Cut; 9 parts, 574 mins.)



Basic Overview

Once upon a time, there used to exist an entire colorful industry of adventure-themed comic books, in which all sorts of sympathetic, sprightly, somewhat naïve, and, well, adventurous characters roamed the world to solve its many mysteries and unravel its darkest conspiracies. This industry still exists, of course, but it's been a long time since it looked the way it looked in the pre-post-modern era — simple and innocent, sometimes sadly tainted with the vices of commonplace colonialism, Orientalism, and plain old racism, but just as often offering its customers beginners' lessons in how to fight all these things. The genre was more European than American, since in the States the chief emphasis had always rather been on crime-fighting superheroes, yet it was loved all over the world, and even your humble servant remembers with fondness his childhood hunt for all the volumes of Hergé's *Adventures of Tintin*, which were completely unavailable in the Soviet Union at the time.

In the world of movies, the single greatest tribute to those young and innocent days was arguably Lucas' and Spielberg's *Indiana Jones* — but in the world of adventure games, somehow, despite the word «adventure» itself, no such tribute really



existed as late as the mid-1990s. Of course, there *had* been plenty of adventure games in which your characters roamed the various corners of the world to unravel the mysteries — in fact, LucasArts made two adventure games based on Indiana Jones himself — but they did not really have the light, old-fashioned, wide-eyed babe-in-the-woods attitude of one of those ye olde comic books like *Tintin In The Congo* or something like that. You could have your Roberta Williams fairy-tale, your Ron Gilbert smarty-pants post-modern grin, some nice detective story or a spooky bit of horror, but there was most definitely a niche waiting to be filled.

In stepped Charles Cecil, a young British game developer whose early childhood, somewhat ironically, had been spent in the Congo (which his parents had to flee after Mobutu Sese Seko's coup in 1965). He and his company, Revolution Software, had already made a name for themselves in the video industry with their two first games, the fantasy tale *Lure Of The Temptress* (1992) and the dystopian sci-fi adventure *Beneath A Steel Sky* (1994). Yet neither of the two was good enough for Cecil to become the love of his life (though he did return to sci-fi thematics with the sequel, *Beyond A Steel Sky*, as late as 2020). What he *really* craved for was an Adventure game with a capital A — one that could immerse the player in a colorful, old-fashioned, china-shop-meets-dark-alley universe like *Tintin's*, of which Cecil is a self-acknowledged fan (and you could tell it in a flash just by playing the game, without even reading any of his interviews).

For his principal subject matter, Cecil chose the Knights Templar — not exactly a fresh subject, but one that had been recently refreshed thanks to *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, as well as properly fattened up with the 1982 publication of *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*, the quintessential nonsense book to have inspired so many juicy works of art, from *The Da Vinci Code* to Jane Jensen's third Gabriel Knight game. Charles Cecil, however, was there first, though he barely scratched the surface of the intrigue — which, admittedly, was more than enough for the genre he wanted to reflect in his game.

For his principal location, Cecil chose Paris — not so much the actual Paris of 1996 as the mythologized, idealistic bourgeois Paris of French textbooks and, well, comic books — however, there would naturally be multiple other locations in the game, since Adventure with a capital A is quite impossible without lots of travel. Yet for the principal character who would be doing most of the travel, Cecil preferred an American rather than a Frenchman — either to make the game more marketable for an American audience, or to make it more fun by means of the trusty «an American in Paris» cliché, or, most probably, both. In any case, meet George Stobbart ("two B's and two T's", in George's own words), the friendly and nosey American intellectual who would go on to star in no fewer than five *Broken Sword* games and become one of the most iconic protagonists in the history of story-based video games (and a sixth one might well be in the works).

The result was a smashing critical and commercial success — *Beneath A Steel Sky* had already established the reputation of Revolution Software as a serious player, but *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars* (for some reason, originally titled *Circle Of Blood* in the States) singlehandedly put the company on the same level with such top competitors as Sierra On-Line and LucasArts (both of whom it would actually manage to outlive by playing it smart and avoiding risky business decisions). Reviewers praised almost every aspect of the game, buyers were delighted, and for a brief while it really seemed that point-and-click adventure games might have found a new, highly promising direction, breaking up the solid, but already predictable and somewhat obsolete formulae of the old giants. That hope did not last long — in fact, much of it was extinguished already with the second game in the series — but the reputation of *Templars* has endured, and even today rare indeed would be a best-of adventure game list that would forget to place it somewhere close to the highest ranks.

I myself was very late to the party, having mostly lost interest in adventure gaming with the demise of Sierra and LucasArts, and did not pick up a copy until much later, already after Cecil had revived the title with a special *Director's Cut* (in 2009), remastering the game for consoles and higher-end PCs, redesigning its interface, and throwing in lots of additional sections, primarily those in which you also have to play as Nico Collard, George's journalist sidekick and future love interest. My review will, therefore, be centered around the special rather than the original edition, though I did at least watch some gameplay of the original version to understand the main differences; they *will* affect those suffering from childhood nostalgia, but it is clear that if the game will live on into the future, it is the *Director's Cut* that most people will be playing — and while I certainly do not think that this is the best adventure game ever made, I have no doubt that it does deserve to live on into the future.

Content evaluation

Plotline

Just like one of them good old *Tintin* adventures, *Shadow Of The Templars* begins relatively low-key — as a murder mystery (a double murder mystery in the *Director's Cut*, with Nico Collard witnessing the shooting of one character and George Stobbart accidentally caught up in an explosion causing the death of another), which gradually escalates into something far more complex and sprawling, ultimately revealing a megalomaniacal plot to take over the world which George and Nico have no choice but to stop in its tracks. The plot will take both of them all across the posh and the slummy



areas of Paris, as well as across the border to Ireland, Spain, Scotland, and even a remote village in Syria, where they shall meet all sorts of colorful characters, uncover enough mystical secrets to fill up an encyclopedia, risk their lives on countless occasions, and (in the case of Nico) even have the opportunity to reassess their family history.

Let me get this out of the way first and foremost, though: the *plot* of the game — and this applies even more strongly to all of its sequels — is fundamentally crappy, and I have no doubt that Charles Cecil himself is well aware of that. I am not even going to waste space and time on going into details (just play the game or consult Wikipedia): all those Neo-Templar cults, idols of Baphomet, murders, burglaries, and conspiracies largely just recycle old pulpy clichés which were hardly brilliant in the first place. Even some of the *Tintin* adventures, with Hergé at his best, could have more character, soul, and invention to their plots than Cecil, to whom the story in these games always takes third, if not thirty-third, place to everything else.

Nor does the author give much of a damn to historical depth. Apparently, Cecil did travel to Paris and conduct some research on the Templars, but whatever he may have learned was not integrated too seriously in the game. All we need to know, ultimately, about the Templars, is that they'd discovered a MacGuffin, and that their modern day followers are looking for the MacGuffin to help them rule the world. If you want a game that attempted to take the Templar lore with a bit of actual respect, look no further than *Gabriel Knight 3*; this game approaches the subject with about as much delicacy as Hergé approached the topic of the Soviet Union in his *Tintin Au Pays Des Soviets* at the earliest stages of his career.

Arguably the only general strength of the plot lies in its amazing diversity, almost unprecedented for an adventure game of its time. Already the Paris section swiftly moves its characters from the gaudiest locations of the city to regular «bourgeois» living quarters and from there, to dirty and unpleasant sewers — or to places where funny and unexpected culture clashes take place, such as George's encounter with an aristocratic British lady who helps him overcome the stuffiness of a typically French clerk ("an Anglo-American alliance that actually worked!", in Lady Piermont's own words). Less than midway through the game, George is whisked away to Ireland, where you have to help him sort things out with the everyday customers of a classic pub; from there, we are taken away to a lively market in Syria, then to a remote mansion in Spain, and then, finally, to a rundown stone castle in the depths of Scotland.

Ultimately, there is just so much happening that you actually have to step back a bit and assess the general picture to understand that none of what you see makes much sense, that none of the characters may be taken seriously (at least, not as far as they are related to the main story), and that there is nothing genuinely outstanding about any of the twists and turns that the plot takes along the way. But if you thought that Charles Cecil himself might take offense at you for feeling this way,

the ending of the game, hopefully, will reassure you of the opposite. Once you get to the final climactic denouement, it is over in less than five minutes (perhaps a bit more, depending on how much time it takes you to crack the final puzzle), as abruptly as things typically come to an end in a Hitchcock movie — and subsequent games would make this even more obvious, totally cutting out any farewell scenes or epilogues, to save you from the danger of taking the time to read something much more than necessary into the story. It was all about the suspense, the action, the intrigue, the characters, the atmosphere, and, in Cecil's case, the puzzles — it was never about «what is the philosophical significance of what just happened?» (Of course, you *can* discuss the philosophy of Hitchcock, but it is found in the *personalities* of the characters rather than in their *actions*).

As frustrating and disappointing as this shallowness might come across, there are certain angles from which Cecil could even be commended for making such a light-headed, simple-and-stupid game precisely at the time when adventure games, armed with recent technological advances, seemed to be taking a sharp turn towards depth and maturity — Cecil, on the other hand, made use of exactly the same technological advances (graphics, sound, voice acting) to create an unabashedly retro experience, practically a love letter to those strange times when the grass was greener and complex issues could be handled simplistically without anybody complaining. What is even more admirable is how the man, with the tenacity of a veteran bulldog, managed to carry that aesthetics almost unchanged through the next two decades, sticking to his guns through thick and thin the same way Angus Young sticks to his school uniform.

Curiously, *The Director's Cut*, in its introduction of Nico as a playable character, did seem to try and make a very small step in the direction of giving more depth and sense to the plot and at least one of its heroes. Unlike George, who is mostly all about solving the mystery and staying alive, Nico is shown as somebody deeply concerned over her family history, shocked by the awful revelations about her own father, disturbed by at least some aspects of the murders and betrayals going on around her, and tends, on the whole, to behave more like an actual human being than a completely conjectural, cartoonish character. On their own, these additions work reasonably well — but there is a huge dissonance between them and the rest of the game, not to mention Nico's personality in subsequent games, which displays none of the psychological complexity of the *Director's Cut* additions (unsurprisingly, since all but one of these subsequent games were produced before, not after the *Director's Cut*). It is, therefore, not surprising that not all veteran fans, judging by their Web reactions, were all that fond of the additions. Imagine James Bond, after disposing of yet another of his SPECTRE enemies, substituting the expected one-liner for "was it worth the tears of a tortured child?" (Better yet, *don't* imagine it, or you might end up in the director's seat).

It is not, of course, as if the typical adventure game of the 20th century was generally distinguished by a masterful and meaningful plot — but I do wish to emphasize just how much *Shadow Of The Templars* went against the grain of the time,

taking a sharp turn into the oncoming lane with its retro aesthetics. The fact that it went on to achieve such unexpected success should, by itself, be inspirational to all who want to make their personal mark upon the world but are too afraid of not finding their audiences and end up latching on to current trends and losing their identity. And, of course, the personality of *Shadow Of The Templars* has nothing to do with its story — it is all about its atmosphere, which we will get around to shortly.

Puzzles

Shadow Of The Templars did not revolutionize the established puzzle mechanic models of the point-and-click adventure game, but it did put its own subtle twist on them. First, unlike the typical Sierra and LucasArts game in which actual puzzles (logic puzzles, construction puzzles, mazes, etc.) were always extremely limited as compared to situational challenges, solvable through dialog and object manipulation, *Shadow* explicitly acknowledges such puzzles as being more or less on par with everything else. The game is not exactly *Myst*, but you *will* have to spend lots of time wrecking your brain over grotesquely complicated locking systems, linguistic codes, chessboards, and optical phenomena to get where you're going, and if you are a seasoned adventurer who tends to think of such things as nuisances, not fun, *Shadow Of The Templars*, as well as all of its successors, are definitely not for you.



Of course, in a game that tries to follow in the footsteps of *Tintin* and *Indiana Jones*, franchises that more or less assume that the entire world population is split into two halves — our ancestors, who design insanely complex traps for future generations, and future generations that try to show themselves worthy of the mighty intellect of their ancestors — in such a game, logic puzzles are to be expected as the norm. I remember almost rage-quitting at being unable to crack the very first one in *The Director's Cut* (where Nico has to dismantle two locks which some Parisian dumbass has constructed as tricky sliding puzzles), but from a reasonably impartial standpoint, most of these puzzles seem to be fair — at least, to the player who knows a thing or two about them and is not mathematically / geometrically challenged, like I am — on the other side, with my linguistic background and all, I quite enjoy the code-breaking puzzles, which may well be a thorn in somebody else's backside. *That* is actually the treacherous circumstance: in his admirable attempt to make the puzzles as diverse as possible, Cecil made sure that there will most probably be at least one or two moments of absolute impasse for any given group of players. Oh well, at least we know that the Internet is for walkthroughs.

The «regular» puzzles are not too difficult; apart from the usual necessity to pick up everything that is not nailed down and manipulate your inventory to find the right solution, success frequently depends on talking to the correct character at the correct time to receive the right cue, and, occasionally, on proper timing. It was, of course, the latter that was responsible for the infamous «[Goat Puzzle](#)», which allegedly cost the nerves of miriads of adventure gamers back in 1996, when Internet walkthroughs were hard to come by — a challenge based on properly timing your way out of a tricky situation. (For *The Director's Cut*, Cecil simplified that puzzle to the point of making it trivial — which was doubly silly, since /a/ by that time, anybody could look up the solution on the Web and /b/ he could have at least replaced it by something more logical, yet still worthy of a challenge). But in reality, what makes the Goat Puzzle so difficult is precisely the fact that the *other* puzzles are generally quite trivial in comparison; since you do not have to bother about timing your actions right until your meeting with the goat, it catches you unawares and messes you up.

That said, trivial or not, nobody could deny that Cecil really makes you work for your money (literally). While about half of the game will have you simply talking to its characters, the other half will be all about thinking your way out of situations — and in most cases, the challenge will amount to much more than just picking up an object in one location and giving it to another character in another location. Most of your tasks — how to get into Khan's room at the hotel? how to get money to pay the Syrian driver? how to break through to the ailing witness in the hospital? — can only be solved in several stages, at least one of which will not be logically obvious in the least («bad design», some will say, but that's debatable — if all the puzzles were always logically obvious, what would be the challenge in that?). In the modern world, I just do not see how anybody could be patient enough to get through it all without a walkthrough, but hey, that's classic adventure gaming for you.

At least Cecil loyally follows the LucasArts formula — there are very few situations when you can die in the game (and you are immediately revived anyway), and no situations where you could get deadlocked because you forgot to pick up an object in Ireland that you needed in order to solve a puzzle in Syria, or something like that. However, there are also no multiple paths or solutions — other than a few red herrings here and there (don't forget to give the demon statue at the end of the game a smoking pipe, for a laugh), your trajectory should be quite straightforward, meaning no real replay value. Occasionally, you get to make a choice in one of your conversations, but these are included just for a bit of atmosphere (as they are in LucasArts games), and even when one choice is obviously «right» and the other just as obviously «wrong» — for instance, letting the restaurant waitress drink alcohol after the explosion knocks her out, while refusing her a drink leads to you getting some extra information — making the «wrong» choice never penalizes you too seriously (the waitress does not know anything particularly important anyway).

Overall, the puzzles are more or less what you'd expect from a game that takes *Tintin* as its ideal — browse through the early volumes of Hergé's works and you will find out that the young Belgian reporter used more or less similar (and sometimes, similarly ridiculous) tricks to get himself out of difficult situations, except that he did not have to solve goddamn sliding puzzles in real time.

Atmosphere

Oh yes, baby. *Broken Sword: Shadow Of The Templars* is not really a game about the Templars. It does not teach you any significant moral lessons (other than that of staying away from short-tempered goats). It will probably not make you love sliding puzzles and chess compositions more than you already do (or do not). But if it does not enchant you with the shapes, colors, manners, and speech patois of its universe, it is then and only then that you will know it has truly missed its mark — although, admittedly, I can very well understand how a typically 21st century mindset might be wired to sweep all of that aesthetics under the carpet, given its decidedly pre-1960s flavor.



Although, to the best of my understanding, the game is set to take place in modern times, the only things about it that look «modern» are the occasional hi-tech gadget, the occasional hi-tech vehicle, and the occasional jet plane. Cecil's Paris is by no means the Paris of 1996 — it is the Paris of Hergé's *Tintin* from, say, the 1940s or the 1950s, and with strong echoes of an even earlier Paris, the legendary mythical imperial Paris of Napoleon the Third or something like that; at least, 90% of the architecture you see around you comes from the times of Baron Haussmann — and since there is not a lot of traffic in the game to impede your progress, you might as well use your imagination to draw in a bunch of horse carriages to complete the picture.

The people usually match the place — police officers, such as the comedic Sergeant Moue, walk around dressed like pre-World War I gendarmes; Inspector Rosso (*sic!*) wears a classic trench coat and probably comes right out of a Georges Simenon novel; representatives of the working class are all middle-aged, grumbly, sarcastic, and heavily mustached; clowns and jugglers provide street entertainment for children and parents alike; and, of course, Paris is presented as a land of absolute racial purity, with every last store clerk and ditch digger looking like the proud descendants of ten generations of proud Norman farmers.

Absolutely the same concerns every other place in the game as well. Ireland is, of course, the place of funny-talking stout little ale drinkers, gruff, burly, suspicious of strangers, but potentially friendly if you can find the right touch. Syria is one huge colonial bazaar, half of it occupied by stupid Western tourists and the other half by crafty local entrepreneurs making money off stupid Western tourists. Spain is the slowly dying territory of obsolete aristocratic legacy — probably just what Paris would become without all the tourists to keep it alive. And Scotland is the land of slightly more helpful and less stuffy Celts than Ireland, green hills, and lonesome deserted castles that harbor terrifying secrets.

All of this could be very offensive — and I have no doubt that, to many people, it is — if it were taken just a tad more seriously than it is. But it is absolutely impossible to mistake the fantasy world of *Broken Sword* for something even remotely reminiscent of the real universe; it is no more realistic, in fact, than the world of *The Witcher* or even *The Lord Of The Rings*, just as the world of *Tintin* was not realistic when Hergé painted it on the pages of *Le Petit Vingtième*. Nor is there any realism in the game's caricaturesque villains — and even its sympathetic figures are odd concoctions of a unique imagination.

Naturally, this does not mean that characters in the game are not relatable, or that their personalities and their sense of humor cannot be connected to our own issues in this here day and age — on the contrary, precisely the fact that Cecil allows himself to be completely free of realistic conventions and go whenever he wishes to go is responsible for most of the game's atmosphere. When playing the game, by no means should you be tempted to hurry it up and miss all the optional conversations with ordinary people on the streets — this is what gives the game most of its character, and this is usually where most of the hilarious jokes are buried, too. (George: "I'd be glad to talk with the Inspector, but I don't want him working his psycho weirdness on me". Sergeant Moue: "Ah, no, m'sieur. You are confusing the science of parapsychology with witchcraft." George: "Oh yeah? What's the difference?" Sergeant Moue: "We don't do sacrifices".)

Arguably the most memorable NPC in the game is Nejo, the Syrian street vendor boy who, instead of a country bumpkin, unexpectedly turns out to be quite smart, sarcastic, and extremely well educated in Anglo-American pop culture (even having learned his English from tapes of *Jeeves And Wooster*), meaning that the word «Templar», for him, is most closely associated with works by Leslie Charteris. He is still a little stereotypical, a bit of a cross between Disney's Aladdin and the Artful Dodger, but his entire schtick is symbolic of Cecil's constant struggle to transcend stereotypes and surprise the player with unpredictable personality features — a struggle in which his failure-to-success ratio is about 50/50, but Nejo is his crowning achievement in this line of work. If there is one thing in which Cecil's work is, after all, more modern than that of Hergé's, it is in the sphere of wittier and more educated dialog. (Nejo does have the honor, after all, of posing the most brilliant question in the game — "What good is a Picasso, sir, if you cannot bounce it off a wall?")

Much, if not most, of the game's humor is based on culture clashes: although the character of George Stobbart certainly transcends the stereotype of the «uncultured American tourist», his simply being American already activates the image in the minds of everybody who he comes across (George: "*Don't shoot! I'm innocent! I'm an American!*" – Sergeant Moue: "*Can't make up your mind, huh?*"), and the poor guy has to carry that cross all the way until Syria, where he finally is relieved of his burden by a couple of *genuine* uncultured American tourists (the ultra-annoying Duane and Pearl Henderson, cursed with subsequent appearances in every single *Broken Sword* game). Meanwhile, Nico has to carry the cross of posing as the French Femme Fatale, as deadly as she is beautiful and all that, though most of the time she only gets to inflict her beauty and deadliness (deadly humor, that is) on George (even in *The Director's Cut*, her added parts are mostly solitary).

If there is one glaring flaw in Cecil's universe, it is the inability of its characters to engage with credibility and heart in any sort of romantic scenarios. Admittedly, this, too, may be inherited from *Tintin* (whose hero was always notoriously asexual), but we are definitely introduced to the idea that there *is* something between George and Nico (there is even a third component in this triangle, an obnoxious Templar scholar called André Lobineau, who keeps inserting himself between the two lovebirds with the subtle insistence of an 18-year old street thug) – yet Cecil is too afraid that any realistic romance will break up our immersion into his fantasy world of old-fashioned irony, so anything explicit is limited to a brief kiss at the end of the game, and (only in *The Director's Cut*) a final picture of our heroes atop the Eiffel Tower (I mean, where else would a Parisian journalist celebrate her affair with an American tourist?).

The relationship between George and Nico certainly brings to mind a similar cat-and-mouse relationship between another famous adventure game couple – Gabriel Knight and Grace Nakimura – but even though in Cecil's universe the two actually *do* become lovers, unlike Gabriel and Grace (whose embarrassing one-night stand in the third game ended in tragedy), it is unlikely that you will ever feel a thing for the couple, whose union is more of an artificially arranged engagement than a natural affair. Romance in *Broken Sword* is usually handled with the same old-fashioned irony as anything else, which begs for the question of whether it wouldn't have been better to leave it out altogether. I mean, there is absolutely no *need* for George and Nico to develop any feelings for one another – but perhaps Cecil thought that future fans would crucify him if he did not make them do it, so he did make them do it. Not that it's a huge criticism or anything: the entire romantic line in the game takes up maybe 1% of it. Nothing fatal.

Ultimately, *Broken Sword* is all about the little things. One aspect of the game that most players are not likely to explore is the option to try out all your objects on all the NPCs with whom you are able to converse – in the *Director's Cut*, this is made convenient by having all of your inventory arranged as potential topics of dialog (if a particular object has already been used

up, it is shown blotted out). The absolute majority of the resulting conversations are completely unnecessary for progressing in the game, but it is often within them that you will see concealed the most hilarious, most absurdist, most ironic, and most dark-humored bits in the game.

Show the Clown's Nose to the stern Eastern European professor, for instance, and he will tell you that "*in my country, we have no use for clowns... they were dealt with most severely in the last cultural cleansing*" (George: "*What about the mimes? Did you get them too?*" Professor: "*All gone. Our streets are mime free.*" George: "*It sounds like heaven...*"). Thus, in one absolutely irrelevant exchange you get (a) an "I hate clowns and mimes" joke, which is always nice to have if you hate clowns and mimes (and you should), (b) a subtle reminder about the totalitarian practices of the Eastern block (never mind that the game takes place in 1996 — remember, it is an alternate universe in which Woodstock, Watergate, and the fall of the Berlin Wall never really took place), and (c) who knows, maybe even a slight jab at progressivism (embodied by George) which is so often ready to align itself with totalitarianism whenever their interests intersect? Okay, (c) might be taking things too far, but it's still amusing that this silly bit of dialog took my train of thought to that place.

I do realize that a game whose primary (or, at least, one of the primary) selling points is the ability to have diverse conversations about drain cover lifting tools and to try out your shiny electric buzzer on the hands of everybody in the neighborhood (not that they ever fall for that, the bastards) *may* be questionable as to whether it can have any lasting impact or replay value. So do not take my word for it — if you have not done so already, just play it for yourself, and see if the combined magic of a brightly colored idealistic reflection of our planet imposed upon a lifting key as used by Parisian sewer workers convinces you that *Broken Sword* opens up a special path to perceiving the meaning of life... or maybe not.

Technical features

Graphics

If you are creating a dollhouse universe in the style of *Tintin*, you'd better make sure that your visual art be up to par — otherwise, people might not even catch on to the game's legacy. Fortunately, by 1996 this was technically possible. In terms of graphic resolution, *Shadow Of The Templars* was a huge improvement over Revolution's previous game, *Beneath A Steel Sky* (640x480 vs. the latter's 320x200), and while de-pixelation and upscaling in *The Director's Cut* made it look even better, I must say that I have few qualms about the way the original looked; 640x480 can work wonders for 2D comic-cartoon style, and it actually did for both of the first two games in the series. (Then they switched to 3D, and everything began to suck, but

let us not get too far ahead). More precisely, the resolution gives you *exactly* the kind of detailisation you need to match the spirit of a colorful Belgian comic book circa 1950 — anything less and you're digitally screwed, anything more and you begin going for extra realism which you don't really need.

Cecil's art team did a fantastic job bringing to life his idealistic fantasies. The bright colors of an autumnal Paris, all brown and red and sepia; the lush green of Ireland and Scotland; the yellow sands of the Syrian desert — the game is visually resplendent in a way that no Sierra or LucasArts had a proper chance to be. The level of detail is incredible — the leaves, the cracks in the pavement, the small blemishes in old wall paint, the chimney smoke, the rich interiors in Parisian luxury apartments and ethnographic museums, the overturned chairs and broken lamps after the cafe explosion, everything looks like it was drawn straight from the heart, making the fantasy world fully believable and well worth escaping into, rather than from.



The cartoonish characters are also rendered sympathetically; higher resolution allows them to have changing animated facial expressions and realistic walks across the screen, as well as be scalable depending on their distance from the player. George is a dashing young fellow (though, strangely enough, a bit hunchbacked) looking precisely like an *intelligent* American tourist should; meanwhile, Nico has the smoothest and sexiest walk of any female protagonist in an adventure game up to that time (and much later, for that matter, since most adventure games would very soon be in 3D, and it would take a *loooooong* time before 3D characters in adventure games would begin walking without suffering from quantum disorder).

One significant difference between the original version and *The Director's Cut* concerns the fate of close-ups. In the original game, large images of characters were only present during occasional phone conversations, when George and his phone partner would loom over the entire screen; otherwise, conversation would simply be illustrated with large subtitles over the characters' heads. In *The Director's Cut*, every time you strike up a dialog with somebody, you get small cut-out profiles of the characters near the top of the screen, allowing you to closely scrutinize their facial expressions — strange enough, the profiles are not animated (was there not enough budget to make them move their mouths?). However, phone conversations, like everything else, are also now represented by cut-out profiles rather than full-screen images, which, I think, was a mistake — there's no reason we can never look at a full-screen George Stobbart.

Some of the game's most climactic events are transferred to animated cutscenes — a limited number of cartoon videos with

predictably low quality (unfortunately, they were not properly remastered for *The Director's Cut*) which still do a good job of more closely familiarizing us with the principal characters, as well as bring in bits of speedy and turbulent action, making the generally static game more lively. *The Director's Cut* throws in even more of these, particularly in Nico's opening segment and during the ending (where we have that tacky romantic scene with Nico and George atop the Eiffel Tower), but while they are definitely more hi-res, they also look surprisingly more stiff and comic-bookish than the little animated sequences designed by the original team (this is probably the biggest stylistic incongruence between the original game and the new edition).

Overall, I think it would not be much of an exaggeration to state that *Shadow Of The Templars* is simply one of the most beautiful, most lovingly crafted 2D adventure games of all time. The uniqueness of its art logically stems from the uniqueness of the combination of its components — the «mythical realism» of Ye Olde Dear Europe as represented by a classic comic book drawing style in relatively high resolution. Other games would give you one or the other part of this ensemble, but never all of it at once. I mean — where else have you seen Paris pictured quite like *that*? Nowhere, that's where.

Sound

For all the beauty of *Shadow's* visuals, there was surprisingly little work done on the music soundtrack. You would probably think that a representation of semi-mythical quasi-1950s Paris would *scream* for some Edith Piaf or, at least, some instrumental cabaret music; but, apparently, authentic French music was too expensive to license, and nobody at Revolution Software could compose French music in the first place. The hired composer for this game was Australian-born Barrington Pheloung, whose chief claim to fame was incidental music to the British detective series *Inspector Morse*; for *Broken Sword*, most of the music was quite incidental, as well, as the themes are usually delivered in short, concentrated bursts at the beginning of the scene, and then tend to be replayed after a carefully measured out period of silence.



I certainly do not hold the opinion that, with the arrival of proper sound cards, all games should have music playing at all times — honestly, both adventure games and RPGs that do that often tend to get on your nerves, replaying the same theme over and over while you are stuck over a puzzle. So there is nothing wrong with much of *Broken Sword* taking place in relative silence, with only marginal sound effects like chirping birds and whistling wind accompanying the action (or lack of it). The problem is, *some* interesting, evocative, and memorable music themes would be nice to have, and there are none. Pretty much

everything that plays out is just sweet background phonation, usually orchestrated. Even the Syrian themes do not sound particularly mid-Eastern, and the Irish flavor is only represented by an annoying fiddle part churned out by a fiddler in the pub.

The Director's Cut fares even worse in this respect: for some of the new segments, as well as Nico's radio station at her apartment and the final titles, Revolution contracted the services of jazz guitarist Miles Gilderdale and young soul vocalist Jade Herbert. While both of them are obviously competent (though nothing too special to my ears), this new music does not stylistically fit in with the rest of the game *at all* — it is so immersion-breaking that I'd rather turn the sound off altogether (fortunately, nobody is obliging you to turn on that radio, and those final credits... who watches them anyway?).

If the music in general is a disappointment, the voice cast certainly is not, though, again, unlike the graphic art, it is not outstanding. George is voiced by Rolf Saxon, a TV and stage actor whose role in all five *Broken Sword* games still remains his chief claim to fame; Saxon brings in just the right amount of effort to make his Stobbart a little ironic, a little naïve, a tad cynical and a tad idealistic — more or less the same psychotype as Tintin, except that George is also a bit more attracted by the opposite sex. Nico, who, unfortunately, did not have the luxury of being voiced by the same actress throughout the game, is here represented by Hazel Ellerby, to whom falls the task of also making her both cynical and idealistic at the same time while always maintaining a heavy French accent — a job that she does reasonably well.

Most of the other actors do a solid job as well, although they usually just latch onto the assigned stereotypes, delivering the required combinations of French / Irish / Spanish etc. accents with specific emotional states — the police inspector has to be Suspicious about everything, the British lady has to be Victorian-Eccentric, the East European professor has to be Stern, the Syrian driver has to be Eastern-Suave etc. I do not remember any specific voice part that would really stand out or defy expectations... well, maybe Fleur, the clairvoyant lady selling flowers and telling fortunes next to Nico's doorstep, does a slightly more subtle and creepy job than the rest (she is voiced by Rachel Atkins, whom most people now probably know as Dolores Umbridge from the *Harry Potter* movies). But on the whole, this is precisely what you should be getting — all of these characters were conceived as fixed stereotypes, and trying to give them Shakesperian depth would inevitably lead to failure.

Interface

Although the gameplay mechanics of *Broken Sword* do not exactly shatter the foundational principles of point-and-click adventures, Cecil clearly took some time aside to think about design. For the standard playing mode, he chose the two-option mode — in the original game, you could switch between «Look» and «Pick up / Operate» options, while in *The Director's Cut*

you just have a single-shaped mouse cursor hovering over the object, which you can click on with the left mouse button to «Operate» it or with the right mouse button to get a description of it (this actually took me a bit of time to discover without reading the instructions — for the first hour of the game, I was stupidly not even aware that I could «Look» at anything, despite the cursor icon consisting of two parts, a moving «Cogwheel» for operations and a blinking «Eye» for inspection). This certainly limits your playing options, but at least it's a little better than Sierra's option-less programming of the mouse cursor for most of its games since *King's Quest VII*.

Somewhat more innovative is the dialog system, which is cleverly integrated with your inventory window — after the initial conversation with the nearby NPC is over, you are given a list of potential topics for discussion, all of them represented by icons rather than words (arranged in a row at the top of the screen in the original game, and in a special pop-up window in the remake). Already explored topics are either shaded out or removed to save you from clicking on them again. Somewhat confusing is the fact that some topics can actually be explored twice or even thrice, but in order to do that you have to close the window and strike the conversation up again, which some players may probably forget to do (admittedly, most of these second-time options are laconic and optional).

This design is certainly more convenient than, for instance, a typical Sierra game like *Gabriel Knight*, where, in order to get an opinion on or a reaction to any object from your inventory, you had to open the inventory window, select the object, close the window, click the object on the NPC, then rinse and repeat for all other items in your inventory without knowing which ones are bound to trigger a generic "you can't do that" response and which ones will be significant or at least hilarious. On the other hand, you could certainly argue that this makes the game more predictable and less challenging. God be your judge in the matter.

The mechanics for solving the game's tile, code, and other such puzzles are pretty self-explanatory and need no comment — if you like these puzzles, you won't be frustrated by their implementation, and if you do not, no amount of smooth mouse control will save the day. Saving and restoring is pretty easy and commonly available, though the amount of save slots is limited (which is not a big problem anyway, considering that you cannot get hopelessly stuck or hopelessly dead). And since all the locations in the game are conveniently chopped up into small clusters, joined by an insta-travel map, you won't ever have to worry about tedious backtracking upon forgetting to pick something from somewhere. In short, Charles Cecil takes real good care of his customers!

Apparently, *The Director's Cut* takes even more care of its customers with an integrated hint system which, honestly, I never

used (whenever I do get stuck, I just find a walkthrough — yes, I'm totally a renegade these days when it comes to adventure gaming). There are other subtle ways as well in which it simplifies the game (you can find many a grumble from old veterans of the series on the Web), but I still cannot bring myself to openly recommend the original over the remake — not that you are ever forced to make a choice, since most places where you can buy the game today offer both versions bundled together, with the original as a free bonus.

Verdict: *The finest in lightweight, old-fashioned entertainment — and with so much brain, who really needs soul?*

Although, as I have already pointed out, *Shadow Of The Templars* has pretty much become an unshakable part of the gaming canon (no list of best-of adventure games of all time ever dares to cut it out), surprisingly few people go to the trouble of trying to explain what precisely it is about the game that makes it so endearing. The cartoon art? The jokes? The tile puzzles? The, uh, adventure? We do have hundreds of marketed titles that do all that, don't we? Almost nobody points out the *aesthetics* of the game as its chief selling point — maybe, at least in part, because delving in deep discussions of the game's aesthetics can actually lead you out into somewhat dangerous waters. Yet, want it or not, this game is all about aesthetics — take Cecil's imaginary, mythical, pre-modern take on the universe out of the game, and you are left with a painfully average, clichéd, predictable mystery whose only intrigue will come from purely mechanical puzzle solving.

Even when it was originally released, back in 1996, the game was not so much behind its time or ahead of its time as it was *out* of its time — which is, kinda sorta, the precise thing that unites it with *Gabriel Knight*, whose author (Jane Jensen) has a lot in common with Charles Cecil, despite the many formal and official differences between George Stobbart and the Schattenjäger. *Gabriel Knight* is a game steeped in tragedy; *Broken Sword* is a comedic series. *Gabriel Knight* wants you to care about its characters; *Broken Sword* wants you to admire the stylish coolness of its characters. Both series, however, want to place you straight in the middle of an alternate version of our universe — a little brighter, cleaner, and more old-fashioned on the surface, but also a little darker and more mysterious on the underside, dealing with the timeless battle of good against evil that is only tangentially related to modern events.



It would not be right to state that Cecil does not at all want you to take his universe seriously, though — it's just that any of the depth in this game has to be uncovered from its witty jokes, once you separate them from the chaff of the corny ones. *Shadow Of The Templars* boasts a level of sharpness that Cecil would never be able to repeat — in fact, most of the subsequent games in the series feel more like reflections of impressions from their average players and reviewers rather than reflections of the same vision that the series' creator had in store for the first and best title. Lightweight as it is, there are many, many points in the game that might make you want to stop and think, and find much tighter parallels between this imaginary existence and the actual world we live in than you thought there were at first. And it is for these parallels, not for the goat challenge or the sliding tile puzzles, that the game is truly replayable in our time, or, presumably, any time that might follow.