

Broken Sword II: The Smoking Mirror

Studio: **Revolution Software**

Designer(s): **Charles Cecil**

Part of series: **Broken Sword**

Release: October 17, 1997 (original) / September 7, 2010 (Remastered)

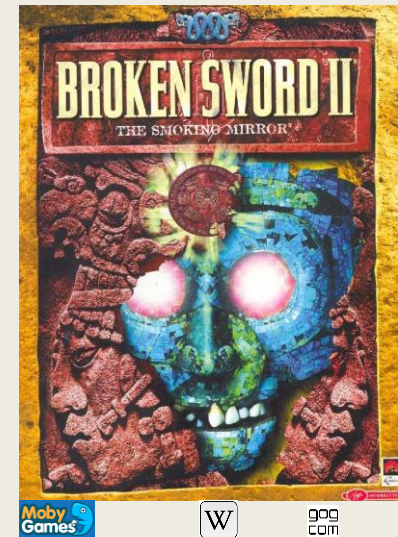
Main credits: Producers: **Steve Ince, Michael Merren**
Writers: **Charles Cecil, Dave Cummins, Jonathan Howard, Steve Ince**
Art: **Eoghan Cahill, Neil Breen, Amy Berenz, Lee Taylor**
Music: **Barrington Pheloung**

Useful links: [Complete playthrough](#) (Remastered; 6 parts, 380 mins.)

Basic Overview

The full work cycle on *Broken Sword: The Shadow Of The Templars*, the game that truly made Revolution Software into a household name in the adventure game industry, took almost four years — starting with Charles Cecil's research on the Templars that he did in Paris in 1992 and ending with the game's final shipping in the fall of 1996. In comparison, work on its immediate sequel, *The Smoking Mirror*, was all begun and completed in less than one year — a mammoth rush undertaken in the wake of *Shadow's* critical and commercial success, and one that Cecil probably regrets in hindsight (at least, judging by the many improvements introduced in the *Remastered* edition 13 years later).

Of course, with most of the framework for the franchise already worked out for the previous game, the technical amount of work to be done was much smaller. More or less the same gameplay interface working on the same engine; the same graphic artists applying the same principles; the same composer and (at least some of) the same voice cast — *The Smoking Mirror* made absolutely no pretense at breaking any new ground that had not already been broken in *Shadow*. Even so, just a bare assessment of the length of the game, which is about at least one quarter shorter than its predecessor (probably one third



shorter if you count the expanded *Director's Edition*, though this would be cheating), clearly shows that Cecil was not as heavily invested in the story as he was the first time around, and that, unfortunately, it was rushed out more to appease the hungry newborn fan community of *Broken Sword* than the insatiable artistic drive of the franchise's father.

However, the worst thing about *Smoking Mirror* — a contextual thing, since the game itself is not that bad — is not the time rush that led to many of its imperfections. The worst thing is that with *Smoking Mirror*, *Broken Sword* became a limited formula, locked in onto itself, with almost no capacity of transcending its self-imposed limitations; meanwhile, Revolution Software would go on to lose any moral rights to that proud moniker, essentially becoming a predictable conveyor belt for the never-ending *Adventures of George Stobbart and Nicole Collard*. By 1996, the company had three successful game titles to its name — an original fantasy story (*Lure Of The Temptress*), an original dystopian sci-fi parable (*Beneath A Steel Sky*), and an equally original tale of mystery and adventure (*Shadow Of The Templars*). Of the seven games released by Revolution in between 1997 and 2020, a whoppin' *four* would be in the *Broken Sword* series, and the other three would be quickly forgotten because they were not *Broken Sword* games anyway.

One could reasonably object that, at least in theory, there is nothing wrong with that — some artists begin by trying out different ideas and even different paradigms, then eventually settle into the one groove that they feel is really *them*, and milk it to their and their fans' hearts' desire; think George Lucas and *Star Wars*, or, heck, even Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes. However, at their best these fictional universes are capable of expanding both in width and in depth, adding new, sometimes unpredictable, strokes to their characters, finding answers to previously unanswered questions, and staying, as best as they can, in touch with changing times. Heck, even *Tintin*, which we might safely regard as the main spiritual influence of the *Broken Sword* series, underwent a whole set of metamorphoses in the 50 years of its existence, never treating the universe as a vacuum but, instead, always finding inspiration in what went on around for its stories, from stunning archaeological discoveries to World War II to the space race.

Alas, this is not the direction that Cecil chose for the *Broken Sword* franchise. At least *Shadow Of The Templars* was loosely based on the conspiriological nonsense recently published in *Holy Blood, Holy Grail* — this does not make the game specially relevant for modern times, but at least provides a weak link to the world outside of *Broken Sword's* fictional universe. With *Smoking Mirror*, which placed most of the action in a fictional version of Central America, the franchise became an exercise in full-time escapism, with no connections whatsoever to anything outside your window and with the exact same formula applied in exactly the same ways to its fixed-in-stone, never-evolving title characters, the always ironic, but positive George Stobbart, and the always cool and impenetrable Nico. Apparently, it was a formula that worked for the fans — who typically preferred to

complain about the technical issues of the games, such as the unfortunate switch to 3D for the third and fourth installment — but if we are here to primarily evaluate these titles on the strength of their world-building and story-crafting techniques, I am afraid the fans will have to swallow some bitter pills.

From what I can gather based on a skimpy Wikipedia summary and on a brief perusal of several surviving reviews, the original game had a more or less mixed critical reception, at the very least, incomparable to the level of admiration flung at the first title — though most of the criticisms concerned the relative shortness of the game and the easiness of its puzzles rather than the bigger issues at the heart of the franchise. Nevertheless, it sold quite well, demonstrating that *Broken Sword* had earned itself a stable niche position and could allow itself to go the *Star Wars* or the *James Bond* route — no matter what kind of crap you come up with, *someone* is going to eat it up, because Big Brand and all. (I mean, had Ken Williams not made the rash decision to sell Sierra to a bunch of crooks, we would probably get new *King's Quests* every couple of years, too).

I write all this in an atmosphere of light sadness rather than acute hatred: on the whole, I enjoyed playing *The Smoking Mirror* (which would be harder to say about the two games that followed), and if you exhaust everything that it has to offer, rather than just stick to the core story, it will be clear that Cecil's wit and humor still resides in many of its pores. Together with its beautiful art style, now tested on a series of entirely new locations, and a few really cool (though sometimes abused) puzzles, this allows not to write off *Smoking Mirror* as a complete disaster, but rather to accept it as an inevitably predictable disappointment. People are weak by nature, and only a few of them are capable of producing masterpiece after masterpiece, permanently topping themselves in a race with their own abilities. And Charles Cecil is, after all, just a person — at the very least, we may be sure that he never secretly picked up the Sword of Baphomet for himself. (Then again, maybe he *did*, and this is precisely why all of his subsequent output looks as if it's been put under a curse).

Content evaluation

Plotline

One might think that it would be hard, if at all possible, to come up with a storyline even *more* old-fashioned than that of *Shadow Of The Templars* — but that would mean grossly underestimating the brain cogs of Charles Cecil. Leaving aside the Templar legends for a while, the man shifted his attention to pre-Columbian America (a subject that had also been explored by Hergé in such *Tintin* adventures as *The Seven Crystal Balls* and *Prisoners Of The Sun*) and put together a rather messy save-the-world story, playing fast and loose with chunks of Mesoamerican mythology.

Any beginning Mesoamericanist, or, in fact, just about anybody with access to encyclopaedic information will quickly discover that «fast and loose» might actually be an understatement. *The Smoking Mirror* is, in fact, the correct English translation of the name Tezcatlipoca — the evil deity which acts as our heroes' principal behind-the-scene antagonist; trapped inside a mirror with the power of three magical Mayan stones, the bad dude is supposed to remain there forever, but after the stones get plundered by Spanish conquistadors and scattered all over the world, it is only a matter of time before a nefarious organization comes up with a plan to retrieve them and use their power to release Tezcatlipoca into this world... which means, of course, that it is up to George Stobbart and Nico Collard to get the stones before the competition does and make sure that the demonic force of Tezcatlipoca remains confined for eternity.



It hardly matters, of course, that, although the stones are always called «Mayan» and George learns all about their history in a supposedly «Mayan» village from a «Mayan» shaman, the name *Tezcatlipoca* is actually Nahuatl in origin, and the deity is a product of Aztec, not Mayan, culture. Nor does it matter that he was called *the Smoking Mirror* not because he was imprisoned in a smoking mirror (actually, the mirror in the game *is* smoking!), but because of his associations with obsidian, the mineral used for making mirrors in various Mesoamerican cultures. Nor does it matter that Tezcatlipoca, the Aztec deity, was hardly the Mesoamerican analog of the Anti-Christ, but rather one of the most revered figures of the pantheon — sure, he demanded human sacrifice like any other self-respecting Aztec god, but only for the greater good, you know. Turning the poor guy into an embodiment of pure evil would be like discovering that Benjamin Franklin had been a secret agent of the British Crown all through the Revolutionary War.

Had the game been released a couple of decades later, *and* had it been something more than a humble point-and-click adventure title, with a limited fanbase and scarce media coverage, *The Smoking Mirror* would have probably been lambasted and destroyed for its cartoonish and clichéd coverage (or «appropriation», if you want to use a trendy word) of Native American cultures; not even Hergé, Cecil's idol, could allow himself to distort historical and cultural reality so much while sending Tintin all around the globe to explore all sorts of exotic civilizations. Surprisingly, Cecil got away with that — most of the reviews I have seen for the game barely even mention the ridiculous twists of the plot and the audacious handling of native culture elements, preferring to save their critical arrows for the more technical aspects. (I do suppose that most of the

reviewers would hardly be able to suspect that «Tezcatlipoca» does not sound particularly Mayan).

That said, I do not believe there was any intentional harm done in the matter, and you gotta give credit for the creative reinterpretation of Tezcatlipoca's name, at least. If there really is a major quibble I have with Cecil's story, it is probably the introduction of a supernatural component. *The Shadow Of The Templars*, even if it constantly toyed with the idea of demonic forces, ultimately remained on the realistic side: even the final climactic confrontation somehow managed to avoid having us meet face-to-face with Baphomet, implying that, perhaps, all of that evil still lurks within the hearts of men rather than is injected into them by mythical authority figures. *The Smoking Mirror* manages to hold on to the «realistic» model for most of its duration as well, but at the end Cecil just cannot resist the temptation of showing us that Tezcatlipoca is *real*, if only for just a few seconds — yet these few seconds are enough to completely overhaul the genre of his creation. This trend would be continued (to even more absurdity) into all three following games in the series as well.

This decision, in my opinion, is quite clumsy — about as clumsy as writing five acts of a romantic comedy and an epilogue in which all the leading characters kill themselves. Like its predecessor, *The Smoking Mirror* is essentially a comedic game, all the heroes in which exist mainly for you to laugh off their stereotypical features and funny accents; when the very few last minutes of the experience tell you that you have *really* been saving the world from destruction all this time, you kind of feel like somebody who's just been handed a million dollars for helping a little old lady cross the street (well, I mean the «no shit» part of that feeling, not the «holy moly I'm rich» aspect of it). That's definitely not the way it happened in *Tintin*.

Admittedly, it is hard to get truly offended at an ending which is less than two minutes long out of a game that takes six hours of pure gameplay. The action itself, this time around, rather quickly gets Nico and George out of Paris — first, to Marseilles where Nico was abducted, then to the fictional town of Quaramonte in Central America, then to an island in the Caribbean (with Nico making her own brief detour to the British Museum), and finally back to Central American jungle. Overall, the pacing is quicker and more action-packed — unlike the rather leisurely opening of *Shadow*, here you find yourself in a serious drag right from the start, where George finds himself clubbed, tied to a chair, and left inside a burning house with a huge venomous spider in front of him *all at once*. Unfortunately, all this speed and action largely come at the expense of what made the *Broken Sword* games worth playing in the first place — colorful interaction with colorful characters.

The differences are mainly quantitative rather than qualitative: you do spend most of your time alternating between tense action sequences, tricky puzzle-solving, and weird dialog with corny NPCs, but there is simply much less of the latter than there used to be, with the resulting impression that the focus had somewhat shifted to «game» from «interactive world».

Nevertheless, Cecil still manages to introduce a bunch of cleverly drawn parodic characters, such as the pretentious art critic Hector Laine (who would go on to have a much bigger part in *The Serpent's Curse*); the snarky and impertinent tomboy gal Emily Ketch, probably modeled after Pippi Longstocking; and the braindead bunch of Hollywood actors that George encounters in the least expected of his travel locations.

Arguably the best segment of the entire game takes place in Quaramonte, a setting which Cecil uses to depict, in a rush of satirical inspiration, the classic conflict between Spanish military bureaucracy and the oppressed population of peasants and natives in a typical banana republic, where all indigenous music has been officially banned and replaced by «easy listening», all local activities are determined by the will of the sleazy and suave General Raoul Grasiento, and all the actions of General Raoul are further controlled by his power-hungry mother («Señora la Presidente»). The entire topic, I think, might have also been picked up by Cecil from his fond memories of *Tintin* (Hergé had explored Latin American politics many times, from *The Broken Ear* back in 1935 and all the way to *Tintin and the Picaros* forty years later), but he was able to put his own spin on it; the relations between General Grasiento and his mother, the ultimate control freak, go a long way toward exposing and ridiculing the dictatorial psychology of those kinds of leaders.

Unfortunately, the exact same Quaramonte section, in addition to several other nice story elements (such as the subtle jab at gender reversal strategies with the character of Conchita Garcia, the male-hating president of the local Mining Company who makes all her male employees sit in their offices without their pants on), also introduces a major bane of all the *Broken Sword* sequels — returning characters with their running gags. In Quaramonte, George comes face-to-face with Duane and Pearl Henderson, the obnoxious couple of American tourists which he had previously encountered in Syria — and, sure enough, they remain as obnoxious as ever, because this is precisely the reason for which they have been introduced (to always be exactly the same). I don't know about you, of course, but to me, the first set of Duane-centered jokes was more than enough, and I could easily do without the predictability of the second. Again, this problem would become seriously worse over time, as the number of memorable characters multiplied and more and more of them needed to make their own comebacks — but even this single segment is disappointing, just because it so forcefully reminds you that what you are dealing with here is FORMULA.

Also, more and more side branches of the story make less and less sense: as much as I enjoy the character of Emily Ketch (with the extra sinister twist of her *probably* meant to be an actual ghost), the entire story of her aunts Mina and Frost and their being swindled by a crooked surveyor feels artificial, unfunny, and downright stupid all the way to its conclusion (with the surveyor left dangling on a flagpole and the offended sisters tickling him as punishment). More and more of these lines simply appear as contrived fodder for throwing in a few extra puzzles, rather than contributing anything to the main story or

to the overall quirkiness of the *Broken Sword* universe.

Still, on the whole, at least the general number of the new characters vastly overrides the number of those returning, and the general quality of Cecil's dialog remains sharp. The romantic side of the story was almost completely cut out: even if George does refer to Nico as «his girlfriend», gets jealous about her feelings for the fanfaron André Lobineau (another character who should have been left behind in the first game) and seemingly cares for her after she suffers an accident in the Central American jungle, this is about as far as it gets, with most of the dynamic duo's relations taking on a strictly business nature. This I count as a strong side of the proceedings — the less sentiment in a *Broken Sword* game, the better, no?

Puzzles

Given that the game follows the *Shadow* formula quite precisely, and that both games run on the exact same Virtual Theatre engine, designed by Revolution Software for all of its original 2D titles, it is hardly surprising that the basic mechanics of the puzzles in this game remains exactly the same, as is its overall ratio of object-based «classic adventure» puzzles to various brain-wrecking challenges of the «prove your IQ» variety...

...well, actually, correction: the only puzzles of the latter type are two specific challenges that you encounter near the end of the game (actually, now that I think of it, a great many such challenges in *Shadow Of The Templars* were actually only added in with *The Director's Cut*, for the Nico-driven segments of the story). One — where, as George, you have to progress through a little maze by pushing levers to open and close doors — is abysmally tedious. The other, where you have to, as Nico, open yet another passage by putting together complex symbols out of smaller constituents, is much more fun, with but one caveat — once you have figured out the basic principle of how it works, the rest of the puzzle, where you just have to turn more and more wheels and click more and more panels, quickly becomes just as tedious. (Something that would become a common problem in the rest of the games as well — for some reason, Cecil's puzzles always tend to mix together intellectual challenge, fun, and boring grind).

As for the regular puzzles, there is not much to comment on. Having probably learned from the Goat Puzzle scandal not to make things *too* confusing for the player, Cecil usually refrains from tricks such as time-based puzzles for *The Smoking Mirror*, and this means that the game may be completed in a reasonably short time without the need for a walkthrough. In his interviews, Cecil rarely forgets to mention how much emphasis he always placed on realism in his puzzles, but, of course, he



exaggerates: the more realistic a certain puzzle is in a point-and-click adventure game, the easier it is for even a complete dunce to solve it, and if all the puzzles in the game were «realistic», it wouldn't even be a game. So, for instance, the puzzle where you have to get a stubborn stuntman to do his stunt by setting a swarm of angry bees on him is not particularly realistic, but it is fairly logical, and just a tiny bit more complicated than the rest of them.

On the whole, as long as you dutifully explore all the hotspots on the screen, talk to characters on all topics, and learn how to combine objects in your inventory, you have nothing to worry about. Arguably the most difficult challenge is finding the hidden Easter Eggs in the game, one of which (when playing as Nico in the London Underground), when triggered, will take you to a short (and humorously horrific) scene in the parallel universe of Revolution's *Beneath A Steel Sky* ("they don't make animations like *that* anymore", remarks Nico as she resumes her questing). On another occasion, in a subtle tribute to the Goat Puzzle, George can actually have a short talk with a real live goat in Quaramonte — and again, both of the eggs can be triggered simply by experimenting on different targets with different objects, no crazyass unguessable key combination required. Just a friendly reminder that trying out really absurd combinations remains a requirement in this game if you do not just want to beat it, but want to try your best to experience it as an art form.

(Actually, speaking of Easter eggs, there is another way to bypass the tedious wheeling and clicking of the door puzzle in the Maya temple — but since it involves finding a particular hidden hotspot, this is one you shall probably never guess without specific hints. It is also a bit embarrassing for poor Nico.)

Atmosphere

On its own, the world of *The Smoking Mirror* is not half-bad, but when compared to its predecessor, it becomes clear that this time around, as it often happens with sequels, Cecil's strategy is more about advancing the plot than about atmospheric world-building. The decision to move most of the action out of Paris was understandable — like Tintin, George Stobbart is expected to travel all over the world in order to expose it to his awesome Stobbartness; but neither Cecil himself, nor anybody in his team manage to display as much love for any other location (or even a mythologized version of those locations). George's brief stay at Paris at least allows you to revisit Place Montfauçon from the previous game, where you can meet up with yet another old acquaintance, but this is no more than just a brief nostalgic jab.



Your next step is Marseilles, which could have been an opportunity to expand the game's French palette with seaport elements, but is instead served up very pragmatically — there is only one small dock area with one solitary watchman and his dog; you can chat the watchman up a bit, but you won't get much out of him, and once you get past him, all you have to do is rescue Nico from a nearby warehouse. Although the graphics are pretty and the watchman is a suitably gruff fellow, this is not really an area which one would love to explore and admire — just a brief stop on your way elsewhere. And this sets up the entire scene: you move from place to place, most of which have their clearly defined roles and functions but rarely, if ever, can be appreciated as anything special.

The only exception to this rule, which I already mentioned, is the town of Quaramonte. Although, like all other locations in the game, this one is also quite small, its central square, swarming with merchants, artisans, musicians, policemen, and even a talking goat, manages to come alive, and it is *extremely* recommended to make a full tour of the place before proceeding to investigate the suspicious Professor Oubier and confront the nefarious General Graciente. Actually, this is your last chance to properly mingle: the Mayan village is totally restricted to its loquacious, but largely perfunctory shaman, and Ketch's Landing in the Caribbean, where George spends most of the second half of the game, is fairly solitary as well. They are all prettily painted, for sure, but nothing really comes alive as successfully as that little square in Quaramonte.

And what about the dialog, which was the leading source of entertainment, inspiration, and sometimes even education in *Shadow Of The Templars*? Well — as long as the game does not fall prey to the curse of running gags (which it does every time that Duane Henderson appears on the horizon), the dialog manages to retain some of that value, yet on the whole, I would qualify the writing as a noticeable step down from the quality of *Shadow*, at least in that there are few, if any, lines, quips, aphorisms, retorts as memorable as some of the stuff you can get from Sergeant Moue or the Syrian boy Nejo in the original game. As I said, there are some well written characters, but no particularly *great* characters — and the game rarely gets more funny than, say, the girl Emily Ketch constantly mispronouncing George's name as 'Jaws', or the vapor-brained Hollywood actor on Zombie Island called 'Haiku McEwan' because "when I was born I was so small and perfectly formed I reminded my mother of a Japanese poem". Well, huh, okay, whatever you say.

It's not *terrible* dialog, for sure — you'd have to wait until the third game in the series for some truly serious embarrassments — but I *was* surprised to still see Cecil credited as primary writer, because I could have sworn that the dip in quality would be most easily explained by the emergence of a different writing team, which was not the case, so, apparently, it was just a matter of rushing through the game and not taking the time to think things out properly. The end result is the same, however: *The Smoking Mirror* works better as a game — and not a great game at that — than it does as a natural, meaningful, and

convincing expansion of the wond'rous quirky little universe of *Broken Sword*.

Technical features

Graphics

The art team for the second game remained largely the same as for the first one, and since the comical-cartoonish 2D style was to be retained, *The Smoking Mirror* generally looks the same way as its predecessor — and quality of the art is one aspect of the game where I would be hard pressed to lodge a complaint. The bright colors, the lighting and shadows, the detalization (that market at Quaramonte almost looks more appetizing than any actual fruit market I'd seen!), everything looks top notch — from the dark and dreary dock areas of Marseilles to the lush green tropics of Zombie Island.



I must state, however, that I have only played the *Remastered* edition of the game; unlike *The Director's Cut* of *Shadow Of The Templars*, Cecil and Co. have not bothered expanding it with too much extra content, but they did add support of higher resolutions, depixelating the original graphics and cleaning them up for the new, more demanding generation of players. The most visible difference, however, are the close-up mugs of characters added during dialog — not only are they now fully animated (it was weird seeing them talk in *The Director's Cut* without moving their lips), but they are clearly drawn at higher resolutions from the start, and thus contrast somewhat uncomfortably with the original graphics (much like the hi-res VGA character cutouts in *King's Quest VI* looked oddly out of place against the lo-res sprites waddling across the screen). But this is just a kind of temporary weirdness to which you can quickly get used.

As a humorous side note, I should probably remark that for the second game, George and Nico actually change their clothes depending on their location (more precisely, on the climate of their location) — three different outfits for Nico, and two for George. I am not a big fan of their Central American / Caribbean garb — Nico in green pants and an undershirt kind of loses all her *femme fatale* mystique, and George in his yellow shirt, shorts, and shades looks too much like a clueless tourist, but I guess it was all intentional. Want it or not, even Tintin used to change clothes to adapt, and watching George wear the exact same green suit to Syria as he wore in Paris *did* seem a bit weird, particularly if you're a deep-thinking clothes man.

Sound

Similarly to the graphics, sound in *Broken Sword II* follows the exact same principles as in the first game. The main soundtrack is once again by Barrington Pheloung, and once again it consists of mostly short, unintrusive, ambient-ish compositions that spring up as you enter a particular location, die down, then reemerge after a while when you are least expecting them. Given that this time around, most of the action takes place in «exotic» locations, the themes may have a bit of Mexican flavor to them, or a bit of Caribbean, which makes the overall atmosphere more reliable and believable, but certainly does not make the themes into masterpieces. (I have seen reviews which were all but gushing with praise for the soundtrack to both games, but I do not really get it — *The Witcher 3* is a game that gets its ambient-ish soundtrack right; *Broken Sword* simply works better because it has a soundtrack, but it is not a soundtrack that is going to haunt you after the game is over).

The only actual «song» specially composed for the game is a rather idiotic and cloying calypso tune that is first heard as an instrumental composition when George arrives at Ketch's Landing (or was that *Zombie Island*? really don't remember) and then, unfortunately, as a fully voiced song, performed by a certain Bob Sekar, under the title "Happiness Is An Inside Job" at the end of the game. The worst thing about it is that it simply does not suit the *overall* mood of the game — it could be suitable enough at the end of, say, some dumb teenage romance comedy taking place in the Bahamas, that kind of thing (lots of sun, cocktails, bikini-clad girls at the beach, dirty sex jokes, you know the drill). But when it comes at you right after you have just saved the world from destruction by an evil Mayan deity with an Aztec name... well, it's like winning top prize for an essay on string theory and receiving it from the jury to the grand sound of Imagine Dragons.

Not much can be said about the voice acting, either, all of which is quite up to the standards of *Shadow Of The Templars*, yet those standards were never all that high in the first place. Importantly, Rolf Saxon returns to reprise the role of George, which pretty much cemented this function — he would return again as Stobbart for the entire duration of the series, merging with the character the same way that Dominic Armato would merge with Guybrush Threepwood; however, since the game added almost nothing by way of developing George Stobbart as a character, so was nothing in particular added to Saxon's performance. On the other hand, the voice actress for Nico (Hazel Ellerby) was replaced by Jennifer Caron Hall, also setting up a tradition where Nico would always be voiced by a different person — each trying their best to imitate a cute, but stern French accent, which at least helped them all sound more or less similar to each other.

All the other voiced parts are even less distinctive than in the first game, relatively competently portraying the stereotypical characters and their French, Mexican, or Caribbean accents, but hardly memorable — not that they are given many

opportunities to be memorable, since the dialog is consistently mediocre and the length of their appearances is usually short. General Graciento, acting as the most frequently appearing of the game's villains (and also the only one with some character development along the way), could have potential if they'd found somebody like Tim Curry to voice him; unfortunately, his voice actor is so bland and one-dimensional that he cannot even give his character a properly intimidating aura for any duration of time. Overall, you know your voice acting ain't no great shakes when the single most memorable thing about it turns out to be the creepy giggling of a couple of Japanese tourist girls which George and Nico run into in European museums.

Interface

Since the game runs on the exact same engine as *Shadow* (Revolution Software's «Virtual Theatre»), there is little to add about its interface structure and game mechanics that was not already mentioned in the previous review. The point-and-click algorithm remains the same (left click on an object / person to operate / talk, right click to get a verbal description); the inventory window merges with various dialog options when you strike up conversations, eliminating the need for blindly testing all your possessions on people you interact with; and the game is once again structured in a way that prevents dead ends or large numbers of pointless deaths (though you *can* die in a few critical situations).

The *Remastered* version introduces more or less the same changes as *The Director's Cut* of *Shadow*, including a redesigned inventory window, condensed text bubbles for dialog, a diary to keep track of what's happened, and an integrated hint system (which I never used, so I can't really tell you how helpful it is). As with the first game, veteran players tend to grumble about most of these changes, but I think it is mostly a matter of being accustomed to one style or another — or, at the very least, of very minor nit-picking. It is true that both games were made just a tad easier in the newer versions, with a few of the puzzles being simplified and the hint system put in place, but both games still remain challenging, and the world-building aspect, which is the reason number one why I am playing them and writing about them, is not impaired by the changes in any way, so why should I give a damn?

Verdict: *First stage of turning a brilliant idea into a formula: inspiration mostly gone, quality control still retained.*

Some sequels are lucky enough to have their own place on best-of lists along with their predecessors, even if they do not exactly take the franchise into a different direction. *The Smoking Mirror* is not a lucky winner of this lottery: although it feebly tries to expand the universe of *Broken Sword* by taking us to a different corner of the globe and tapping into a completely different mythological tradition, it fails to make any truly substantial contributions to the basic rules of this universe, expand or vary its character roster, or even fully maintain its witty humor. «More of the same, but a little weaker» describes the game in a nutshell, and saddest of all is the fact that it pretty much killed off Charles Cecil's own evolution — from a visionary artist who could put his own stamp on several genres, from fantasy to sci-fi to detective mystery, he pretty much turned into a lifelong biographer of George Stobbart... which, arguably, is far from the worst imaginable career, but, also arguably, far from the best imaginable career for such an inventive and original designer as Cecil.

That said, the only good result that came out of the game's rushed production and release was that, having been designed in the exact same style and manner as its predecessor, it managed to retain all of its «vintage», Tintin-esque 2D charm, meaning that it is *really* «more of the same» in the good sense of the word. Obviously, going in the direction of full motion video (which was already on its way out by 1997) was a no-go for this kind of wild adventure tale, but trying out the newly nascent 3D style already *was* an option, and it is at least good enough that Revolution managed to hold off on that until 2003, by which time 3D renders were beginning to look a little less awful than they were in the pre-*Half Life* era. And by the time Cecil came to his senses and returned the franchise back to glorious 2D with the fifth game, the old art team was gone, along with its unique drawing style — meaning that in some small way, *The Smoking Mirror* closed an era after all. Ultimately, its charms are too many to brusquely proclaim it a bad game — disappointing, yes, but still good to have as a clumsier, but earnest young companion to its superior predecessor.

