

# Lure Of The Temptress

Studio: **Revolution Software**

Designer(s): **Charles Cecil; Dave Cummins**

Part of series: —

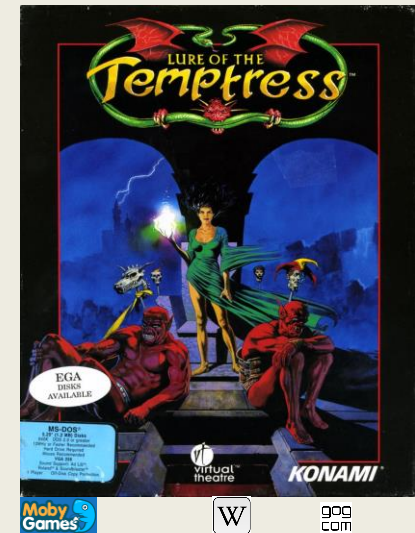
Release: June 1992

Main credits: Producers: **Daniel Marchant**  
Writers: **Charles Cecil, Dave Cummins**  
Art: **Stephen Oades, Adam Tween, Paul Docherty**  
Music: **Richard Joseph**  
Programming: **David Sykes, Tony Warriner**

Useful links: [Complete playthrough](#) (4 parts, 208 mins.)

## Basic Overview

One thing that can be really fascinating about checking out the history of old video games (if you are too young to have lived through that period) or refreshing it in your head from today's perspective (if you were there when it all happened but did not pay too much attention) is how, sometimes, it can really give substance to all that normally-bullshit motivation of «*never settle for anything but the very best!*» or «*dream big because you deserve to!*» that typically fills the world with a lot more inadequately narcissistic assholes than adequately confident creative geniuses. Just as sometimes a banana is just a banana, most of the time «dreaming big» simply stays «dreaming big» unless there are also certain external conditions that allow to turn dream into reality — and for the video game industry it could be argued that these conditions were never better than in the mid-Eighties-to-early-Nineties era, when technological progress boosted artistic creativity to such an extent that every once in a while, artistic creativity ended up outrunning technological progress, resulting in a painfully inspiring, beautiful BDSM-mess of a game.



**Lure Of The Temptress**, the adventure game that put Revolution Software on the map and bravely attempted to start up a «British Invasion» of sorts on the adventure game market, is a classic example of what people could get away with in that weird, uncharted era of trying out new ideas no matter what. Never even suspecting that it existed before I started playing the **Broken Sword** series about a decade ago, and having only played it out once, out of sheer historical curiosity, through the ScummVM emulator on PC, I hated every second of it while at the same time admiring the creativity and braveness of its designers — which was more than enough of a stimulus to clench my teeth, hold back the tears of frustration, and plough through to the very end (fortunately, it is a very short game on the whole). This is *probably* not something I would have done for any modern title, although, admittedly, most modern titles typically compensate for the generic nature of their plots and the formulaic aspects of their gameplay systems by making the game run as smooth as possible for the consumer. If a game like **Lure Of The Temptress** were to be released today, 99% of gamers would have probably declared it «unplayable» in the first five minutes and never returned to it again.

Yet in 1992, a game like that could not only garner a handful of generally positive reviews, but even sell enough copies to give Revolution Software a firmer standing, allow it to relocate from their cramped, slummy headquarters in Hull to much nicer offices in York, and get enough of a budget to make their next title (**Beneath A Steel Sky**) feel almost luxurious next to the humble initial effort. So there must have been *something* special about **Lure Of The Temptress**, at least making it a game worth *remembering*, if not necessarily worth playing (or, at least, beating until the disappointing finale).

That particular something began when Charles Cecil, a young game developer and publisher who'd mostly been known for designing and producing a set of text adventure games for the short-lived Artic Computing, took a serious look at Sierra and LucasArts — who, by 1990, pretty much monopolized the market in between them — and decided that there must be enough ground for radical improvement in this sphere. All those Sierra games like *King's Quest*, thought he, took themselves way too seriously, while all those LucasArts games like *Maniac Mansion* did not take themselves seriously at all; there had to be some middle ground between «predictably bland» and «outrageously post-modern» that could satisfy a more balanced taste. In addition, the established point-and-click system, while certainly more user-friendly than Sierra's old parser, was a bit too stiff and restrictive; there had to be ways to give the player more freedom of action and, consequently, more personal involvement in those exciting alternate digital universes.

To make a whole new adventure game based on a whole new adventure game ideology was quite a big dream indeed, and one that might have forever stayed a dream if not for Cecil's mother, who generously helped her son to dream big with a 10,000 pounds loan (ah, if only we all had mothers like that!). Apparently, that was enough to rent a work office in Hull, put together

a small team of about ten people, get a deal going with Mirrorsoft Publishing, and then re-negotiate it with Virgin Interactive after Robert Maxwell, the owner of Mirrorsoft, infamously fell from his yacht and, in the process, *almost* ended up leaving us without George Stobbart and Nico Collard in the future. Oh yes, and, of course, produce the game in question, together with a whole new game engine to which Cecil and his programming pal Tony Warriner gave the posh name of «Virtual Theatre».

Consciously or subconsciously following in Sierra's steps, the first graphic adventure game released by the new company would also take place in a fantasy setting — ironically, it ended up as the *only* Revolution Software adventure game to take place in a fantasy setting; to the best of my knowledge, no ideas of a sequel to **Lure Of The Temptress** were ever presented, which is a bit of a drag since the overall setting was pretty inventive for a fantasy game, and there was even enough lore floating around its short duration to be expanded into something bigger in the future. It may be so that Charles Cecil and Dave Cummins (the game's official designer and the second most important person in Revolution Software through its classic era) were not really all that fond of games whose fictional universes lay completely outside our reality, and chose a fantasy setting for the first title simply to show the world the idea of an «anti-King's Quest» game, or maybe it's just that they needed it to sell and thought that fantasy would sell more copies than anything else. Who really knows?

In any case, regardless of how much love the creators here had or did not have for their own creation, the final product truly looked so unlike almost everything else at the time that it managed to charm the pants off most critics, and, as I already said, sell enough copies to allow Cecil to continue charting the Revolution Software ship into unexplored waters — something that, by the way, he is *still* continuing to do thirty years later, with the company alive and well decades after its Goliath-esque competitors have all bitten the dust: truly no mean feat for a small videogame enterprise in the 21st century. But while the company is doing alright, the same can hardly be said about **Lure Of The Temptress** — the original glowing reviews have gradually given way to the game's status as a historical footnote, important as a missing link but dated and largely unplayable by anybody except the most dedicated retro-gamer.

No sequels, no remakes, no «Director's Cuts» for this one: available today as abandoned freeware, it now feels a little like that bright young kid who showed so much genius promise at school and then ended up as a crazy hobo on the streets through an unfortunate turn of circumstances. At the very least, then, I feel like the game is deserving one last hot meal and a night in a warm bed, which this particular review shall strive to be an approximate equivalent of — for better or worse.

## Content evaluation

### Plotline

Almost every single aspect of the game leads to a mix of interest and frustration, and the plot is no exception, as it manages to somehow be disarmingly simple and annoyingly complex at the same time. At the core lies a very simple and classic situation: a young lad finds himself stranded in an unknown city, recently taken over by a tyrannical ruler whose minions terrorize the local population, and has to find a way to help the good residents take down the tyrant. This is pretty much how the game might have started: "Hello! My name is Diermot, that's probably Dutch for *Deermoth*, whatever it might mean in English. Fate has brought me to your lovely town of Turnvale, which I find squeezed in the iron grip of the sorceress Selena and her armies of cannibalistic Skorl monsters. And, uh, I ain't much for speeches, I'm just here to point and click, so let's go kick us some sorceress butt!" Loud and clear.



Instead, we get a rather convoluted intro that tries to «explain» how this guy Diermot got into this situation in the first place. The King decides to pay a visit to the small village where Diermot lives, employing him as a beater for his hunting trips. On one of those, the King's guard is ambushed and intercepted by an inhuman army, the Skorl, raised by Selena to support her in her uprising. Everybody, including the King, is killed, except for Diermot, who is knocked unconscious and taken to a dungeon in the town of Turnvale, which Selena has chosen as her headquarters for the uprising. Nothing else is ever heard again about the King or his potential inheritors, and the whole thing seems to have been invented (and told in a series of text screens and poor-quality graphic intermissions which all bear a suspicious resemblance to the style of late-era Artic Computing text adventure games) merely to justify why you begin the game trapped inside a Skorl dungeon rather than on the streets of Turnvale itself. The description is so laconic that you'll probably miss most of the points anyway.

The actual plot of the game largely follows in the same manner: simple as pie in its basic outlines — save an innocent victim of Skorl brutality, use her aid to get access to the magic artifact that can give you an edge over the villain, then get access to the villain herself and defeat her — but loaded with a litter of extra details and characters, some of which and whom make sense



and some feel rather superfluous. In this respect, Cecil's hope of achieving something a little more sophisticated than **King's Quest** succeeds only partially, not to mention that Sierra's *true* leading fantasy enterprise at the time was rather the **Quest For Glory** series, whose post-modernized revitalizations of fairy tale tropes easily blow **Lure Of The Temptress'** ambitions off the stage. Even so, there are a few fairly eye-raising moments in the game, at least if you pay close attention.

For one thing, the Turnvale fantasy universe is already saturated with a healthy deal of irony and even cynicism, which would be a trademark feature of most of Revolution Software's titles. The people of the land, with a few exceptions, are presented as a rather backward bunch of characters, whose egotistic arrogance, stupidity, greed, and hedonism hardly make them worth saving from any sort of evil tyranny — in fact, the majority of them do not even pay much attention to the fact that they *are* ruled by tyranny, as long as it still allows them to make a profit, spew out ignorant nonsense, or drink themselves to death. In the end, there is precisely *one* «pure» NPC for whose sake the Lord could be persuaded to spare the whole place — the young herbalist girl with whom Diermot falls in love — and he is not even allowed to get her in the end, as she goes off to marry the town's blacksmith and "*grows plump and content with babies*" (somebody's been reading too much *War And Peace*). This is *definitely* not the kind of plot for a family-friendly Roberta Williams game, and it might even be a bit too much for Lori and Cori Cole (even if their **Quest For Glory** universe does have plenty of unpleasant characters who you are supposed to rescue from harm for no apparent reason just as well).

For another thing, the actual «evil» is rather understated. The main villain of the game, Selena, only appears once in a brief confrontation at the very end — without even speaking a word — meaning that most of the time, the «evil» will be represented by her brutish guards, the Skorl, and those guys are not as much harmful as just plain dumb; the only thing they think of is getting soused, and although there are a couple of situations where you can actually die from carelessly invoking their wrath, for the most part they present more of an aesthetic annoyance than anything else. The underlying message is that the «rule of evil» has not upset the usual life in Turnvale all that much — "*meet the new boss, same as the old boss*" — and, in fact, there are quite a few people around who actually welcome Selena's new rule, for one reason or another. The problem is that the understatement ultimately goes over the top: your hero never gets any sufficient motivation for his heroic actions, and both the in-game tension and the post-game payoffs don't have much meaning because, really, nobody gives a damn. If there is one *truly* novel idea that **Lure Of The Temptress** brings to the save-the-world table, it is that of your utmost and absolute significance in the utterly not-so-grand scheme of things. You're just a meaningless little pawn in the meaningless game of life, bound to do heroic actions because Mother Nature gave you a moral compass for her own amusement... aw hell, that one actually struck closer to home than I'd be willing to admit.

Amusingly, the very title of the game is thoroughly misleading — since the «temptress» herself only shows up at the end of the game and her only aim is to destroy you rather than seduce you, there is no real «lure» to speak of. Clearly, the title was thought up as bait for those who might have hoped this would be something along the lines of a **Leisure Suit Larry In The Kingdom Of Daventry** (it would make sense to suggest that a serious percentage of the sales was due to the box cover) — although, hilariously, there is a moment in the game when it is *you*, for a short while, who can go around casting your «lure» on the town's bedazzled residents, in a gender-bender moment when Diermot transforms himself into Selena in order to help with Goewin's escape from the Skorl. (The important thing is not to go to the prison right away, but exhaust all conversation options with the townspeople first). Not that the actual transformation has any sort of symbolic purpose, other than making the game a little more precious to the field of gender studies, but *yes*, come to think of it, it does bring it one step closer to the humor of **Leisure Suit Larry**, particularly if you remember Larry's transformation into a bikini-clad blonde girl to avoid capture by the KGB agents in the second game.

In any case, it is clear that **Lure Of The Temptress** is neither designed and written well enough, or even *long* enough for a particularly original and sensible plot. For Cecil, Cummins, and the rest of the team what mattered more was the overall atmosphere of the game, its universe and characters, and the manner of the player's own interaction with those characters; the plot hardly mattered more than any «main plot» in a classic RPG game, where *what* you did never ever mattered as much as *how* you did it. This was not necessarily a good thing — in fact, already their second game would show much more concern for the actual story — but under the right circumstances, it could be a forgivable thing, so let us check the circumstances.

### *Puzzles*

Challenging or intellectually brilliant puzzles would never be a particularly strong part of Revolution Software's games — in this department, I am not sure they even made a conscious attempt to beat their chief competition (LucasArts). **Lure Of The Temptress**, in particular, is such a short game that it does not even have that much *space* for arranging a cool puzzle — most of the game, in fact, will probably be spent wandering around Turnvale in search of something to do, with the game's next segment usually triggered by falling upon just the right



NPC who will, at this particular point, provide you with useful advice or a valuable item. Once you do that, it usually does not take much to figure out what to do — so you do it, and then once again get stuck until another NPC gives you more advice on your next step. Rinse and repeat.

There was *one* interesting feature introduced by Cecil and Co. into their Virtual Theater engine that did distinguish **Lure Of The Temptress** quite substantially from every other adventure game around — the ability to give certain NPCs, such as Diermot's temporary sidekick Ratpouch or his temporary love interest Goewin, highly specific orders. Some of the game's puzzles are impossible to solve on your own, like, for instance, a door that can only be opened through a cooperative effort. In such situations, what you must do is click on your buddy hanging around and select the right verbs and objects to put together a request (*OPEN DOOR*) which can even be recursive (*OPEN DOOR and then PULL LEVER and then GO OUTSIDE and then finish*). This is a gameplay element that, for some reason, failed to be implemented properly even in the old parser days of Sierra On-Line; in a way, it is not that much different from the «team play» in LucasArts' **Maniac Mansion**, but there, such team play was made possible by the player being in complete control of three main characters; here, it is more of an «exert your influence on the NPC» kind of thing, and it's pretty cool...

...except that, like most of the other innovative ideas in this game, it is severely underexploited. There are maybe three or four situations in the entire game where bossing other people around is obligatory for further progress; otherwise, this option is constantly available but is essentially meaningless. For instance, instead of going to some remote area of the town to pick up a flower, you can try and send Ratpouch to do this for you, issuing a nice and juicy string of orders that he will attempt to faithfully execute. However, after he goes off you can never properly tell when and to where exactly he will return, or whether he will return at all, or whether somebody shall bump in his path, derailing and mixing him up — ultimately (just like in real life!), it will *probably* pay off better to just do the job yourself rather than entrust it to somebody else.

As far as I know (I have not spent too much time myself experimenting with this system), the actual number of such orders is limited, and most of them have no consequences whatsoever. Theoretically, the possibilities are endless — you could ask Ratpouch to jump in the fountain, make out with a Skorl, drink a transformation potion, or dance on his head — but none of those exciting options have been accounted for, and those that *have* been accounted for yield little satisfaction. Why should Ratpouch open a door if you can just do it by yourself? Why give somebody an object for safe keeping if you have no weight limit and can carry everything around by yourself? Why have the option of these long recursive commands if most of them are misunderstood and/or lead to action failure? In a classic clash between ideals and reality, the dream of freedom got wedged in practical realization — and was ultimately abandoned on the side of the road in future productions.

Non-verbal-based challenges in the game were few and rather disappointing. At one point, you have to open a series of cave doors by finding the right combinations of skull positions (one of those challenges where you cannot succeed without external help from one of the NPCs) — it's not too difficult, but a little confusing and not entirely logical. At a couple of other points, there are «action sequences» — a trivial system of point-and-click combat that does not even match the design quality of a **Quest For Glory** game, let alone any random beat-'em-up title from that era. (You *do* need halfway decent reflexes to win those two battles, though, which is rather frustrating because the game in no way psychologically prepares you for that). Fortunately, «action sequences» would be forever banned from Revolution's games from then on, and the brain-wrecking puzzles would get significantly better in future releases.

Design-wise, there are a couple rather annoying dead-ends in the game which, I think, ended up there through negligence rather than principle — for instance, if you prepare the wrong potion for the Dragon, prepare to be dead and buried, as there is no way to go back and try a different one (which *could* normally be expected in a real-life situation). You can also die quite a bit, but only in truly dire situations; Cecil was not a fan of the «Sierra Random Death» trope where misfortune could await you at any corner. (Most of those deaths are rather monotonous and boring, though). All in all, as long as you remember to save regularly, **Lure Of The Temptress** will not attempt to mess you up *too* much, but the less-than-perfect implementation of the original Virtual Theatre does lead to encumbrances, some of which I'll cover later on in the «Interface» section.

### Atmosphere

In terms of any specific «color» of general locations and such, **Lure Of The Temptress** is not particularly evocative. Most of the action takes place in the severely limited space of Turnvale's exteriors and interiors, which are not all that exciting either visually or aurally, and dialog options with the various NPCs are few and far in between. A small selection of dungeons and caverns generally fails to produce an intimidating effect — probably due to an absolutely minimal amount of actual threats to your character — and then there's the factor of a thoroughly disappointing finale, which amounts to a few seconds of automated combat, a lightning-fast resolution, and a couple screens of text on how the situation was resolved. (This Hitchcock-style negligence for providing a «proper ending» to the action is





something that would characterize *all* future Revolution Software games — apparently, Cecil's credo is that when the *game* is over, it is truly over, and there is no need whatsoever to entertain / bore the player with a lengthy outro section).

In compensation for this minimalism, approximately 99% of the game's atmosphere is created by the implementation of the Virtual Theatre system — Revolution's best-known, if somewhat controversial, contribution to the world of video gaming. Unlike the majority of Sierra or LucasArts games, in which all of the NPCs were usually found assigned to specific positions — standing, sitting, lying around, chatting with each other on a street corner, etc. — **Lure Of The Temptress** introduces a much more dynamic situation, where tireless NPCs constantly roam around, leading regular daily lives of their own. The blacksmith, for instance, is not chained to his smithy, but occasionally takes a break to wander off to the nearest pub for a mug of beer. The local matron makes regular trips between a faraway tavern and the grocery store on the market square. Other NPCs, such as the ever-silent monks, simply take walks from one part of the town to another for no apparent reason other than exercise — and, of course, creation of the illusion that you are experiencing the actual hustle-and-bustle of a living and breathing town, rather than crossing over from one lifeless mannequin to another.

Furthermore, the NPCs interact with each other (or yourself) whenever they cross paths, usually with simple remarks like «*Hello, sir*» or «*Get out of my way!*» (depending on their personality), but sometimes with more colorful dialog, especially in stores and taverns. Some of them, such as Ratpouch, can make short snazzy comments on various objects if they happen to bump into them during their random wanderings — another subfeature that would persist into future Revolution games (last I checked, it was even present in 2020's **Beyond A Steel Sky**). During the early hours of wandering around Turnvale, I caught myself sometimes wishing to follow the daily routes of some of those NPCs just to experience all of their conversations with each other — it even felt more intriguing and exciting than actually trying to solve the game's challenges... that is, of course, until they all started repeating themselves, at which point excitement gradually gave way to tedium.

The problem, of course, is once again with the technical means of implementing the system. With all those NPCs scurrying around you, you soon understand that they really have a very limited set of activities — and after about half an hour of playing, the hustle-and-bustle thing becomes more of an impediment than an atmospheric blessing. Pretty soon you understand that, if you actually need to talk to somebody, you might have to hunt for that person all around the map — or, for instance, just when you want to buy a drink or chat up your friendly bartender, somebody comes in and initiates a lengthy dialog with him / her that you have already seen half a dozen times, and now must patiently wait for to come to an end before being able to do anything. Eventually, I understood that on a subconscious level, one of my chief goals while moving around Turnvale was to *avoid* bumping into anybody, e.g. sneaking inside stores and taverns while secretly praying that nobody else would be there to

waste my precious time, or making it as fast as possible from one end of the screen to another before it began populating with NPCs impeding my progress. I can only guess that Cecil and Co. were so thrilled to see their little universe in such wonderfully dynamic action that the very thought of all that action eventually sucking out the enjoyment out of the game never even entered their minds — and who knows, perhaps for the average adventure gamer around 1992 this very thrill blocked out any negative reactions that could ensue from hours of playing. But judging by how much this system was «toned down» already in the very next Revolution game, **Beneath A Steel Sky**, I have a suspicion that quite a few people reacted to the excesses of Virtual Theatre in much the same way as I am reacting thirty years later.

I mean, games such as **The Witcher**, for instance, or other modern RPG games whose systems of NPC behavior ultimately owe a lot to the original breakthrough of **Lure Of The Temptress**, can easily get away with this stuff because of the hugeness of their open worlds, in which each NPC is but a tiny figurine, allowing you to concentrate on him / her if you so desire *or* completely ignore by putting miles of distance between him and yourself. Most of their activities are also recurrent, repetitive, and monotonous, but they never get in your face as much as the NPCs in this game. Imagine being confined in a tiny cell with a fellow prisoner who has the annoying habit of constantly walking around the perimeter of the room while muttering the words to 'Sweet Home Alabama' or 'American Pie' — hours upon hours upon hours — and that's pretty much what the Virtual Theatre is offering you. I cannot help but wonder just how many of the critics raving about this mechanism back in the day were capable of playing the game to its *end*. Probably no one. And why should they?

Where the game's atmosphere is actually *successful* — though it will take getting used to the game's flaws to properly admire its virtues — is in the psychological coloring of its many characters. Although it is tedious in the technical aspect, the biggest fun one might derive from the game is simply walking around Turnvale and talking to everybody. The plot unfolds in several time blocks, each one completed after an important action has been performed, and after each time block the town's residents shall have a different set of topics to discuss with you — unfortunately, if you miss talking to them about something during a particular time block, that topic shall never come up again, so if you want to completely exhaust the game's «content», most of your playing time will be spent just running around from one NPC to another.

But quite frequently, this is worth your while. Character-wise, those NPCs, in their cynical-comical roles, are clearly more influenced by the irreverent approach of LucasArts than the comparatively more «bookish» approach of Sierra, yet with an occasional extra touch of snide British humor on the side. Each has an individual personality, typically defined by such traits as arrogance, irritability, stupidity, ruthlessness, greed, cowardice, and hypocrisy — just the right people, all in all, to motivate the protagonist into doing selfless good unto all of them. Here's a typical exchange between Diernot and the not-so-lovely lass

Edwina at the local inn:

**Diermot:** *I hear Goewin's in trouble and I'd like to help her.*

**Edwina:** *You're a stranger around here. Take my advice and stay out of our affairs. If she's broken the law she must pay for it. That is the best way – payment in blood!*

**Diermot:** *But what has she done to deserve punishment?*

**Edwina:** *It doesn't matter. Retribution is the key to a sound judicial system. If a man fails to pay his taxes he loses his ears. If he steals a chicken he loses his arm. Adultery – both arms!*

**Diermot:** *That is a brutal and outmoded concept!*

**Edwina:** *Nonsense! Anyway, it's good for the tourist trade.*

Well, maybe the quality of the dialog is not quite **Grim Fandango** level (then again, it was still 1992, not 1998 – how many video games around the time had genuine quality dialog in them?), but many of these conversations reflect a post-modern Monty-Python-meets-*Princess-Bride* attitude that sometimes go deeper and cuts sharper than **Monkey Island**, which was at the time something like the gold standard for post-modern spoofs of classic fantasy stereotypes. Unfortunately, one thing they completely forgot to add was any sort of personality for Diermot – he ends up being a completely eviscerated copy of Guybrush Threepwood, just as perfectly able to bring out the best and the worst in every single person around him but *never* able to put his own spin on whoever or whatever he bumps into. He might be a cathalyst for the overall atmosphere, but he sure as hell ain't part of the atmosphere himself. (This would be a fairly common thread for *Revolution* – even their most famous protagonist, George Stobbard of **Broken Sword** fame, is really a bit of a nudnick next to all the colorful individuals he bumps into on his travels).

Be it as it may, the overall feel of Turnvale is probably the best part about the game experience – if we are talking about the parts that *actually work*, as opposed to «supposed to work in theory, but get broken in practice». It's just too bad that there are so many obstacles you have to brave if you want that feel to wash all over you, and most people will either be too annoyed to brave them, or too angered at the game's many technical flaws to let themselves be wooed by its substantial benefits. It's also true that cynical post-modern representations of medieval or mythological fantasy worlds have become quite commonplace since then (just look at **The Witcher!**), yet there is still something delightfully and uniquely «minimalist-irreverential» hiding inside **Lure Of The Temptress** to justify the need to remember it. Perhaps it's the lightweight touch – since the game never tries to take itself *too* seriously while still brushing upon serious issues, you never really get to *hate* all these nasty characters the same way you quickly learn to hate and despise the filthy egotistic peasants in **The Witcher**.

## Technical features

### Graphics

**Lure Of The Temptress** is a pretty short game taking place in a pretty confined and restricted environment, and stunning audiences with dazzling visual imagery was one of the last things on anybody's mind during production. The graphics are basically what might be called «first generation VGA», a bit too heavy on the brown and gray side of things, perhaps, but I guess it fits the intended atmosphere of medieval dungeon brutality (gray) and filthy peasant dirt (brown). A few of the backdrops are quite lovely (particularly the one at the scene of the final monster battle on the drawbridge — the yellow desert landscape has a shade of *Dune* to it), but overall, the game would have definitely benefited from a slightly thicker budget in the art department. At least what little there is stands comparison with the average Sierra or LucasArts visual art of the day, which is, I guess, as much of a compliment as could be dished out for a little independent studio in the middle of 1991's nowhere.



Likewise, the small character sprites are designed and animated pretty well — enough, at least, to discern the alluring shapes of Selena's (more precisely, Diermot-as-Selena's) figure, the pure innocence of Goewin, or the vulgar brutality of the Skorl. This is particularly important since there are almost no cutscenes with close-ups: amusingly, you only get to see what Diermot *really* looks like if you allow him to die at the hands of the Skorl, and the only non-sprite image of Selena you'll ever see is on the box cover (apparently, her sexiest attribute is always going barefoot, for those who cherish their foot fetish). In all other cases, you'll just have to entertain your imagination.

### Sound

Not much to be said in this department, and of that which *can* be said, the less said, the better. Naturally, Revolution did not have the money or resources for voice acting at this early date (which is a pity, because I'd love to hear some of the game's snappier dialog being voiced with those stereotypical British accents) — and the «music», credited to Richard Joseph (quite a prominent composer for various action and adventure titles in the 1980s and 1990s), is nothing much to write home about,



just a tiny bunch of short pseudo-medieval themes cropping up at crucial points in the game — and a rather annoyingly nagging ambient accompaniment throughout Turnvale, usually bugging me so much that I just turn it off. Honestly, though, music has never been the strong point of *any* Revolution Software game (some players have an unholy reverence for Barrington Pheloung's work on **Broken Sword**, but I usually find it either too comatose or too corny), so let's just move on.

## Interface

Of all the technical characteristics of the game, it is inarguably its gameplay interface and mechanics — powered by the much-lauded Virtual Theatre engine — that are its most memorable assets, though whether the associated memories will always be *pleasant* is a matter of serious doubt. Like many other digital innovators at the time, Cecil's team went through a «two steps forward, one step back» stage — meaning that **Lure Of The Temptress** dares to be far more bold than any other Revolution game ever made... and suffers from it.

To begin with, the game's mouse-driven play system was somewhat counter-intuitive. The basic idea, retained by Cecil for most of his next games as well, was to have the left mouse button perform the *LOOK* option whenever you drag the cursor to a highlighted hotspot, and the right mouse button to perform the *OPERATE* option, which, in this particular case, usually opens up a window of assorted verbs associated with the object, from which you can choose — but, of course, I always end up confusing the buttons anyway. The choices offered to you in the menu are generally useless anyway, because, as a rule, you can only perform just one action with any particular object.

The much hyped system of commands that you can issue to your sidekicks such as Ratpouch or Goewin has already been touched upon above — it is exciting and imaginative only in theory, but not in practical execution. To paraphrase the Eagles, you can check out any sentence you like, but you can never get your sidekick to go buy you a copy of *Hotel California*, even if one were available at Turnvale's general merchandise store. The system was implemented all right, giving you an illusion of almost unlimited choice, but the illusion was so easily shattered that they had little choice but to remove it altogether for the following games, probably fearing retribution from justly offended players.

Similarly, the pompously advertised mechanics of «living, breathing NPCs» fails miserably upon realisation. The AI of these



NPCs is largely limited to regularly moving from Point A to Point B, following a clock mechanism, and their only obligation is to try to avoid you or other NPCs which arise on their path — usually leading to catastrophe. Since I only played the game through the ScummVM emulator, rather than in its original PC DOS-based incarnation, I am not entirely sure that the problem was just as persistent back then, but I have a deep suspicion that it was. Whenever Diermot is issued the command to talk to an approaching NPC (who never stand still), one can only hope and pray that their paths will interlock properly — if they do not, prepare to spend thirty seconds of your time while the NPC stays frozen in one spot and Diermot moves in complicated zigzags across the screen, trying to reach that sweet spot of facing his intended companion and always failing. Even if you simply bump into an NPC on your way from one end of the screen to another, this will often set Diermot in some sort of Brownian motion, reeling around the screen like a whiskerless cat until you step up to correct his movements.

Worse, if you spend a bit more time in one exterior location of Turnvale than intended, the screen will soon become filled up with NPCs moving all over the place, crashing into each other and impeding your progress with annoying pop-up windows in which they say things like "*Out of the way!*" or "*I'm sorry, Madam*". Do not even try to send Ratpouch or Goewin on a mission through that mess — most likely, they will get caught up in it and forget what they were told to do in the first place. In short, what the «Virtual Theatre» is in its original incarnation is a bloody, bugged mess — and it is quite ironic to see how it was *seriously* toned down for **Beneath A Steel Sky** and then pretty much liquidated altogether for **Broken Sword**. Indeed, the road to gamer Hell is paved with revolutionary intentions.

**Verdict:** *A fascinating success of a failure that could only happen in its very special time frame.*

**Lure Of The Temptress** is not an easy game to recommend to even a dedicated retro-gamer. As you can see, it is beset with problems on all sides — the basic plot is clichéd, the puzzles are un-inventive, the visual and aural aspects dated, and the truly «revolutionary» elements of the gameplay system tend to be either unintuitive, uncomfortable, or downright bugged. Spending a few minutes with it for general reconnaissance purposes may be okay, but setting out to beat it will most likely end up in frustration. The good bits of the game were never sufficient to make me forget, even for a second, just how much of a



sacrifice for the greater good of humanity I was performing by bravely struggling until the very end.

And nevertheless, there *were* the good bits, scattered throughout the game's somewhat unique sense of humor, its rather bitter cynicism, its ironic take on gender-bending, and its commitment to try and give you maximum possible freedom in the severely restricted world of point-and-click fascism — a commitment whose realization was much less than perfect, for sure, but one that at least gave some hope for the future. Alas, Revolution Software would soon nip that hope in the bud; instead of developing and perfecting the framework they invented, they instead began to cut back on it, eventually retreating to the more or less generic point-and-click system of **Broken Sword**, comfortable indeed for the average player but an evolutionary dead end in itself. Which, for better or worse, leaves **Lure Of The Temptress** as a relatively unique experience — a noble failure, if you wish, well worth inscribing in the annals of history.