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| Title: | Amerzone: The Explorer's Legacy |
| Developed by: | Microids (http://www.microids.com) |
| Published by: | Ubi Soft (http://www.ubisoft.com) |
| Reviewed By: | Tim Maxwell |
| Official Site: | (http://www.amerzone.com) |
| Overview: | <i>Amerzone's</i> original storyline and dazzling graphics prove that point-and-click adventures are not dead; but should they be? |
| Genre: | Graphical Adventure |
| System Requirements: | Pentium 166 or equivalent, 32 Mb RAM, Windows 95/98, DirectX 6 or later, DirectDraw compatible video card with 2 Mb video RAM, Mouse and Keyboard, 4X CD-Rom, 60 Mb hard drive space. |
| Supports: | DirectSound, 3D Sound and FS Surround compatible. |
| ESRB Rating: | Everyone |
| The Good Press: | Killer graphics, gripping storyline, superb ambience. |
| The Bad Press: | Monotonous point-and-click gameplay, it can be difficult to determine the proper path at times, be prepared to do <i>a lot</i> of reading. |
| Ratings: | Graphics: 9/10 Sound: 9/10 Getting Started: 7/10 Documentation: 6/10 Value: 7/10 |
| Tips: | Although it gets cumbersome, it is important to read every document you come across. Most will contain vital information about your quest. It can be difficult to see where the exits are in certain dark areas. If you're having trouble, try adjusting the brightness on your monitor or video card. |

Before I begin this review, I think it's important to point out that I've never been a big fan of static graphical adventures. To put it bluntly, *Myst* bored me almost to tears as did its popular sequel, *Riven*. That, of course isn't to say that these games were bad, but it takes a certain type of gamer to fully enjoy them. That being said, I didn't have high hopes for *Amerzone: The Explorer's Legacy* when it arrived at my door a few weeks ago. And though I must admit that it's intriguing storyline and beautiful graphics turned my head a bit, I wouldn't trade *Half Life* in for it.

The complicated story of *Amerzone* revolves around a legendary explorer named Monsieur Valembois and you, a young French journalist. Your only mission in the beginning is to conduct an interview with Valembois to find out more about his explorations of Amerzone, a storied South American city. It seems that Amerzone was the habitat for an extremely rare white bird – a bird that never stops flying according to the natives. Circumstances intervene and Valembois is faced with a tough decision – to remain with his new girlfriend or embark on a journey to find the lone remaining offspring of this mysterious bird.

Eventually, his adventurous side takes over and he returns to Europe with the egg and awaits his hero's welcome. Unfortunately, the museum sees the egg as nothing more than an ostrich egg and Valembouis is dismissed as a crackpot. Hurt and dismayed, Valembouis goes into a life of seclusion. His requests for grants for future exhibitions have been declined and he's moving on in his years. That brings us to today – a brief conversation with Valembouis marks his final words. In one last gasp, he pleads with you to return the egg to its rightful home in Amerzone and thus, your adventure begins.

The game's interface is quite simple. Your mouse pointer is an arrow to move your character around and changes accordingly if the environment can be manipulated in any way. Fans of *Myst* or *Riven* will find the interface very familiar. The tab key opens up your inventory and if you want to read/use one of your items, you simply click it with the left mouse button. *Amerzone* manages to spice things up a bit by animating actions such as opening a door or looking at a chart. I didn't have any trouble navigating, but, as in any game of this type, it is rather easy to miss something important if your mouse pointer doesn't happen to hover over it.

If a graphical adventure such as this hopes to have success, it must deliver some impressive visuals. Luckily, *Amerzone* really shines in this department. A technology known as Lightwave (which was used to create special effects in the movie *Contact*) was used to render all of the scenes in the game. The results display some eerily realistic looking backdrops and environments. The visual beauty is immediately evident as you draw near to and enter Valembouis' dingy mansion. The skyline is dark and threatening (what else would you expect given the adventure facing you?), and the inside of the mansion is a poster child for exquisite light sourcing. Since we're not concerned with FPS, *Amerzone* is able to offer all of this eye candy without having to require through-the-roof system requirements. This should be a breath of fresh air to those of you who can't afford the state-of-the-art systems required by most current games.

One thing you might not expect from a game like this is impressive sound effects. With this in mind, I was pleasantly surprised with the audio in *Amerzone*. Standard effects such as the creak of an old gate or the distinctive sound of footsteps on a rotting wood floor all sound great but what really stands out is the atmospheric ambience. A good example of this is when you wander around the streets on a stormy night. Your ears will be filled from all directions with the sound of the wind whipping through the trees and wolves howling in the distance. Once you enter a structure, the door closes on the outside sounds and you're greeted with effects such as ticking clocks or voices from an unattended television. If you've got 3D sound hardware and a good set of speakers, you'll be in for a treat with *Amerzone*. With all the effort that went into the graphics, it's nice to see that Microids didn't shove audio to the backseat.

Despite great efforts in the graphics and sound department, *Amerzone*, just like any other game in this genre, suffers from one glaring flaw – boring, monotonous gameplay. In this age of raucous action-packed games like *Quake* and *Half Life*, not many gamers want to waste time reading multi-page letters or searching for hours upon hours for an elusive switch that allows them to continue. Of any game out there, I can't think of another title that requires as much thought, patience and time as *Amerzone* does. The puzzles are confusing, and often times, you'll find yourself backtracking just because the path you're looking for isn't as obvious as it should be. Obviously, this leads to undue frustration and makes a long, cumbersome game even longer and more tedious.

Overall, I couldn't help but be pleased with *Amerzone's* original storyline and eye-popping graphics. Although the game will be boring to some, judging by the sales numbers achieved by *Myst* and *Riven*, there is still quite a demand for a mind-numbing adventure like this. If you are a *Myst* fan, you have no excuse for not buying this game and it will no doubt breathe new life in a dying genre. If you didn't like *Myst* and prefer to use your reflexes more than your brain while you play, give this one a miss.