

## Preview: *Tunguska: Legend of Faith*

**North American Distributor: GT Interactive/Affiliate Label Program (<http://www.gtinteractive.com>)**

**Publisher: Project Two Interactive (<http://www.project2.com>)**

**Developer: Exortus (<http://www.exortus.com>)**

**Release: 4Q '99**

What do you get when you cross the mind-numbing puzzle action of *Myst* with a long, harrowing adventure similar to *King's Quest: Mask of Eternity*? Well, one of two things depending on whether or not you're into this kind of game. Either (a) a throbbing headache, or (b) a mind-bending, thought-provoking epic of a game that takes you months to complete. The latter is what GT Interactive is striving for when they release *Tunguska: Legend of Faith*, for PC later this year.

In *Tunguska*, you take on the role of Jack Riley a convicted, death-row felon who is actually only guilty of being a good Samaritan. In 1912, after a huge explosion rocked the Tunguska taiga, several monks living near the disaster find a machine-like artifact that they believe is a gift from God. Soon, the monks start worshipping the artifact in the hopes of gaining impressive knowledge. Unfortunately, the artifact gets greedy and demands human sacrifices and that more machines are built. When the number of sacrifices increases, creatures appear from these machines and act as the new guardians and do not allow access to the monks. When the sect (which includes Jack's girlfriend) decides to have a suicide ritual as a final sacrifice, Jack takes matter into his own hands and rushes into a burning church to rescue his girlfriend. He's not able to save her in time and ends up unconscious in the process. Thought to be the mastermind behind the sect, Jack is held responsible for the 32 people who have perished in the fire and finds himself strapped in the electric chair. Some moments later, he wakes up in a castle, wondering if this is heaven. Hours later however, he finds that it's more like hell.

Thus, your adventure begins. After a brief intro movie, you see yourself standing outside an immense castle. The first thing you'll notice is that *Tunguska* isn't up to par with other adventures in the graphics department. The structures and backdrops look bland and the characters generally lack detail. The game does boast 3D acceleration and realistic light sourcing, but it never seems to fully utilize either of them. Hopefully Exortus will further refine the graphics engine before the game is released.

Control of your character is handled in the third-person (ala *King's Quest*) using the keyboard to move around and perform other actions such as running, leaping and combat maneuvers. The mouse is also used to manage your inventory, pick up items and open doors. The game also has a distinctive *Myst*-like feel at this point as you'll have to solve many challenging puzzles in order to proceed. One example would be finding three sundials, remembering the engraved symbols and pictures of animals on each one, going to the town and comparing the horns with the animal shown on base of each sundial, then moving the corresponding bar to the proper symbol. Sound complicated? This proves that this game won't be best suited to the casual gamer, but judging by the popularity of *Myst* and its sequel *Riven*, there is obviously quite a following for this type of game.

Perhaps the most distinguishable aspect of *Tunguska* is its unique combat system. Unlike most adventure games, a distinct strategy is required during a battle to escape with minimal harm. You begin the game with no weapons to speak of besides your fists and expertise in martial arts. As you progress further into the game, you'll find some impressive weaponry including swords and axes. Enemies appear in predetermined areas and can take quite a beating before they'll finally go down. Expect to spend a minimum of a minute or two to defeat each enemy. Despite its puzzle nature, engaging an enemy in battle is the most enjoyable aspect of *Tunguska*. Using various keystrokes, Jack can perform a myriad of moves including roundhouse kicks, leg sweeps, uppercuts and defensive maneuvers. The enemies are also quite adept in martial arts themselves so you'll have to time your attacks and defense mechanisms wisely. As you might guess, this all comes with a fairly steep learning curve but once you get the hang of things, you'll be hacking and slashing your way to victory in record time.

Overall, *Tunguska* appears to be a promising title that should satisfy puzzlers and adventurers alike. Combine that with a unique, entertaining combat system and an enthralling storyline, and GT Interactive just might have a winner on its hands. The question remains whether or not the game can overcome graphical inadequacies and some control problems. If so, look for *Tunguska* to turn some heads this winter.

