

Grim Fandango

LucasArts flexes their storytelling muscle in this near-perfect adventure game.

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By IGN Staff

Most gamers today think of adventure games as endless repetitions of the same puzzles and storylines pieced together with some flat screen graphics (or worse still, some FMV) and some voice talent. Sadder still, for the most part, they're right. But one company has been doing it right since the beginning: [LucasArts](#). While other companies were aiming for watered down licenses that would spawn four or five adventure games in the same world, these guys have been creating games that are as deep and rich in and of themselves as any feature film. Four of these adventure games, Maniac Mansion, Day of the Tentacle, Sam and Max Hit the Road, and Full Throttle have become classics of the genre by standing as shining examples of game design, smooth puzzle incorporation, humor, and plot development respectively. Now, with [Grim Fandango](#), the company has brought all of these features together in one title that stands miles above any yet released in the genre.

Yeah, yeah, I know, that's an awful lot of hyperbole in one intro, but [Grim Fandango](#) deserves it. Let's start with the game's storyline. You play Manny Calavera, a mid-level worker at the Department of Death (the DOD) who's trying to work off his sins in life so that he can get to his final reward. As a reaper, Manny frees incoming souls from their shrouds, finds out what kind of underworld travel packages their goodness in life has earned them, and then sends them on their way. Unfortunately, business hasn't been very good for Manny of late. As the game begins, Calavera is told that he must sell a premium travel package to a soul or lose his job. In his search, Manny uncovers a hideous plot, a beautiful woman, and a crew of loyal friends (not necessarily in that

order). The world is a rich one, complete with its own laws, its own personality types, and landscapes.

The really ingenious thing about this game is that, unlike most adventure titles, at no point in Grim Fandango do you find yourself getting bored with what you're doing. The game takes place in four parts that switch up not only the environment that you're in, but also the goals that you must accomplish. Puzzles are complex and challenging, but so well integrated into the story that you never feel like you're doing busy work with cut scenes as your reward. Non-player characters in the game do a great job of prodding you along when you've been hanging out in one place for too long with helpful hints that never give a puzzle away, but that will at least give you an idea of what you should be trying to do. With a couple of irritating exceptions, most of the puzzles in the game are intuitive and make sense once you've figured them out. Sadly, there's no real way to go into more detail without ruining part of the game... You'll just have to trust me.

Presentation-wise Grim Fandango is unmatched. Not only have the designers created a world unlike any you've ever seen, they seem to make it all seem very realistic. All of the art in the game (characters included) feels like a Dia de los Muertos parade come to life. This art style is enhanced by subtle strokes and lines that enable you to tell all of the different characters apart at a glance. While this may not seem like that big of a deal, please consider that all of the virtual actors in the game are nothing more than skeletons in suits. Somehow the designers manage to make female skeletons beautiful, sleazy skeletons repulsive, and above all, the good skeletons loveable.

This incorporation of character into what would normally be inanimate objects is furthered by Grim Fandango's fantastic soundtrack and voice acting. A far cry from the 'hey, grab that secretary' feel of many adventure titles, Grim Fandango uses dozens of different voice actors to make sure that every character in the game has not only a unique voice, but also one that supports the specific character concept perfectly. Special kudos must be given to Alan Blumenfeld who provides the voice of Glottis, a comic relief character that will have you in stitches all the way through the game. Not satisfied with stopping there, LucasArts has put together a film class soundtrack that uses a blend of simple jazz and classical Mexican themes to add depth to the atmosphere of an already fantastic title. Not only is the soundtrack not annoying, but once again it is used

to reinforce the emotions delivered in various sequences of the game.

So if all of this is true, why didn't Grim Fandango get a 10? Well, as sad as it is, the game is not perfect. There were a few movement bugs in the game (especially around the elevators, which would have a tendency to double open, or in more severe cases, require you to walk through them backwards), as well as a few more serious errors that would render your character immobile or actually kick you back out to Windows. Most of these problems only surfaced a few times though and, as long as you save your game fairly frequently, you probably won't have too hard a time with them. We also had a couple of gameplay issues with puzzles that required you to accomplish some goal within a fairly short amount of time and then stuck you behind a large group of obstacles with a poor camera view. Even so, the game does offer you the opportunity to change your camera view and, once the task had been accomplished, it didn't really seem like all that big of a deal.

Look, the bottom line is that Grim Fandango is hands down the best adventure game we've ever seen. If you're into adventure games, you've probably already bought this title, but if you're not I urge you to give this one a try. Even if you find yourself bored to tears by the idea of having to pick up objects and carry them from one place to another, you'll love Grim Fandango's incredible art, storyline and character development. This is a game destined for every gamer's all time favorite list.

-- *Trent C. Ward*

In This Article



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Summary: Based on various legends of Mexican folklore, Grim Fandango is packed to the hilt with dancing skeletons, crime, romance, and much more. Take on the role of Manny Calavera, a...

Genres: Adventure

Platforms: PC

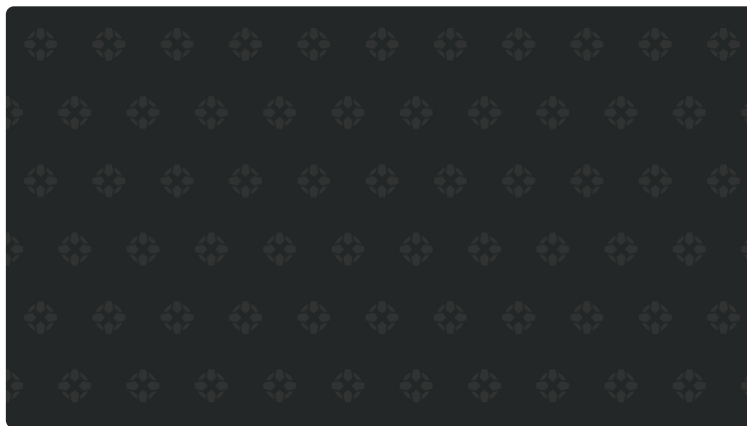
Developers: LucasArts

Publishers: LucasArts

Features: Number Of Players, Memory Card

Release Date: N/A

GRIM FANDANGO



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EDITOR'S CHOICE

AMAZING