

The Sierra Chest



The Sierra Chest Newsletter: Issue 1, April 2009

Intro by the admin

Dear Sierra fans,

Friday, March 13th 2009 was the day that represents the end of an era. The official Sierra forums, after having existed for well over a decade, were finally shut down. Ironically this occurred almost exactly 10 years after Black Monday (February 22, 1999), when former Sierra On-Line ceased to exist. Luckily the community knew in advance about the forum shutdown and they took unprecedented steps to secure not only the Sierra community's survival, but also to reunite many Sierra fans, whom were scattered on different fansites and forums all over the internet. Sierra fans, many of which have been fans for over a decade, put their hands together and created the Sierra Gateway (www.sierraforums.com).

The Sierra Gateway is a site, which connects several fan-based websites together, merging various fan-based Sierra communities, providing immediate access to different sites, which cover different aspects of Sierra games. Currently 12 sites became members of the Sierra Gateway since its inception in November last year. There are member sites, which already exist for many years, such as the Gabriel Knight 4 Campaign, the Sierra Vault, Terra-Arcanum, Sierra Planet, or the Unity Headquarters. And there are also several new sites, which came to existence since the Activision-Blizzard merger. Among these sites are the Nontoonyt Times, the Police Quest forums, and the Sierra Chest. Some sites of the Sierra Gateway provide general coverage on Sierra games, such as the SierraHelp pages which focuses on technical assistance to make classics run on modern systems, others focus on single game series such as the Quest for More Glory and Janitorial Times sites and forums. All these members are connected with each other through the Gateway, so feel free to explore.

The Sierra Chest was launched in October last year. The aim is to provide as many details as possible about all Sierra games, from the day Roberta Williams wrote Mystery House on her kitchen table in 1980 until as far as today, covering nearly 30 years of gaming history. While this is indeed a massive undertaking, it is very much happening. Almost each game will be provided with video walkthroughs, strategies, background stories, unit information, box art pictures, and lots more for the visitor to get the best picture possible of the games. In addition, Sierra's history will be covered, along with biographies of those people who are behind the games, hopefully with interviews in the near future. There are also some downloads already available, such as wallpapers and demos. However do NOT ask for full game downloads, as we are strongly opposed to piracy.

The Sierra Chest newsletter is one way to stay updated, not only to what is new in the Sierra Chest site, but also what is going on with other Sierra related events. I hope you will enjoy reading it, and please provide feedback, so that it can further be improved over time.

Enjoy!

Rudy Marchant
Sierra Chest admin

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<http://www.sierrachest.com>

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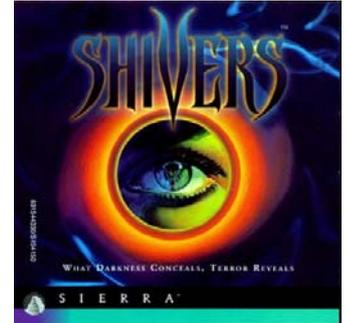
Recently completed sections

What Darkness Conceals, Terror Reveals



Shivers, the adventure puzzle game, designed by Marcia Bales, is completely inserted in the Sierra Chest. Do you dare to spend one night in a museum, where people disappeared 15 years ago and which has been abandoned ever since? While exploring the museum, you need to solve many puzzles and will soon find out that you are not alone...

Included in the Chest are a complete video walkthrough, a list of vessels and Ixupi, puzzle hints and solutions, maps and the background on how the concept of the game came to existence and how the game was made.



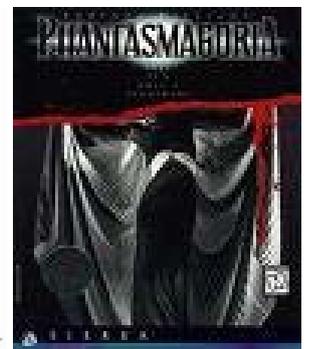
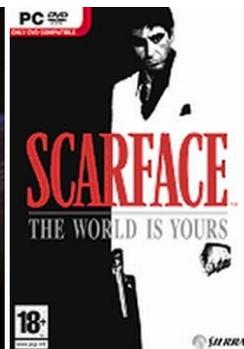
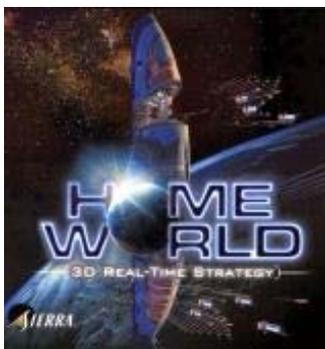
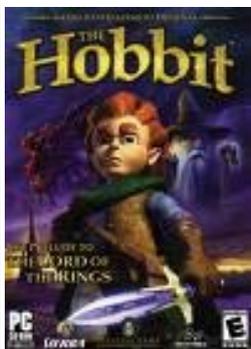
Assault Heroes

The first arcade game to be inserted in the Sierra Chest. In Assault Heroes, designed by Wanako games for Sierra On-Line, the player needs to proceed through 5 levels, either by vehicle or as a foot soldier, defeating countless foes and heavy bosses, while having 3 main weapons, grenades and nukes at his disposal.

The Sierra Chest contains the entire video walkthrough, a list of all medals and hints on how to achieve them, information on all enemy units, upgrades and more.



Some more games to check out in the Chest



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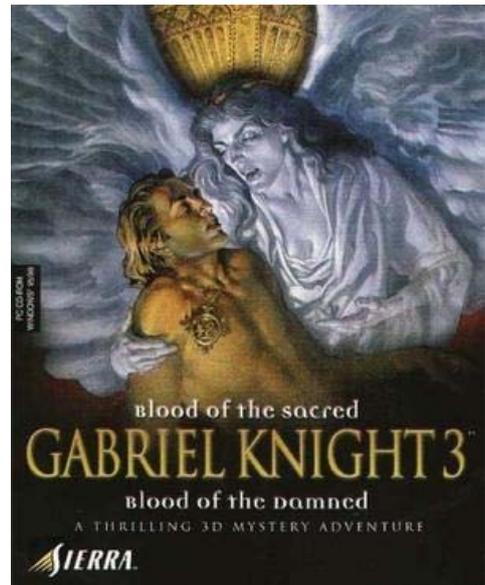


Sierra Chest: work in progress and what more to expect in April

Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned

At this point we are working on Gabriel Knight 3: Blood of the Sacred, Blood of the Damned. In this masterful adventure game, written and designed by Jane Jensen, Gabriel and Grace go to a French town, Rennes-Le-Chateau, to find the kidnapped child of prince James. Soon the case becomes far more complicated as Freemasons, the Church, Templars and even vampires all come in the picture and fit into the plot.

As usual, the entire walkthrough of the game is being recorded on video. It should be completed around April 6. In addition to the video walkthrough, there will also be character descriptions, a hint section, a fiction versus reality section, and of course the background on how the game itself came to be, hopefully with video interviews from Jane Jensen and Tim Curry (voice actor for Gabriel) if we manage to find those. If you would like to see the progress on the videos (or any other Sierra Chest videos for that matter), you can subscribe to my profile on Youtube, where my username is ruudje1976.



April: Month of King's Quest

A Sierra fansite is not a Sierra fansite if it lacks King's Quest. Afterall, which game, aside from Mystery House, is more significant to Sierra history than the adventures of king Graham, queen Valanice, princess Rosella and prince Alexander? If it weren't for King's Quest, Sierra would have ceased to exist back in 1984. Just imagine all the titles you would miss out on if it weren't for this game's success, which saved the whole company from imminent bankruptcy! So yes, we're going classic, and the entire series will be covered, including Mask of Eternity.

Aside from video walkthroughs and other gameplay-related information, these pages will also have a significant background history section. There are plenty of video interviews with Ken and Roberta Williams, so we'll attempt to make a nice video compilation there.



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Any takers for some nice IPs?

On July 29th 2008, shortly after the Activision-Blizzard merger, Activision announced that it would retain only a handful of games. Those were Crash Bandicoot, Spyro the Dragon, Ice Age, Prototype and another yet to be announced franchise. Whichever the “yet to be announced franchise” was, we are still guessing. Perhaps a franchise based on the recently released animated film “Monsters versus Aliens”? Nevermind, I’m just guessing here.

The Sierra community was quite shocked to hear this news, because it meant that many titles, including some which were already quite far in development (most notably the Ghostbusters game), all of a sudden went in limbo. Luckily those titles were not going to be canceled all together, and other game publishers have shown up to proceed with their publication. So here is a quick summary of what happened (or is still happening) with some of the titles which were once feared to never be released.

Who you gonna call?

Atari! No, hold on, that ain't right... It must be said though that Atari has been pretty active acquiring IPs from Activision. In addition to Ghostbusters, they also acquired Assault on Dark Athena (see further). The development of Ghostbusters appears to be going well, with a planned release date on June 16th for nearly ALL platforms (PC, PS2, PS3, Xbox360, Wii and Nintendo DS).



In addition to the original movie cast (Harold Ramis, Dan Aykroyd, Ernie Hudson and Bill Murray), Alyssa Milano has been selected to assume the role of Dana Barrett, originally played by Sigourney Weaver. We also know that the game will have multiplayer and that the game engine is the Infernal Engine by Terminal Reality.

Bourne reborn

The 3rd-person action shooter Bourne Conspiracy was probably the last game released before the merger completed. And while the developer, High Moon Studios (owned by Activision), intended to make a series out of it, that idea did apparently not survive the merger, or did it? After offering the rights to Vivendi in 2005, Ludlum Entertainment received the rights back after the merger. At that time Ludlum Entertainment stated it was looking forward to continue the gaming franchise. They stood by their words because on February 3, it was announced that they offered EA games the exclusive worldwide rights to the franchise. And yes, a new Bourne game is already in development, this time developed by Starbreeze Studios. Starbreeze must be pretty occupied since they just finished Dark Athena, but we are glad to see the game in their capable hands.



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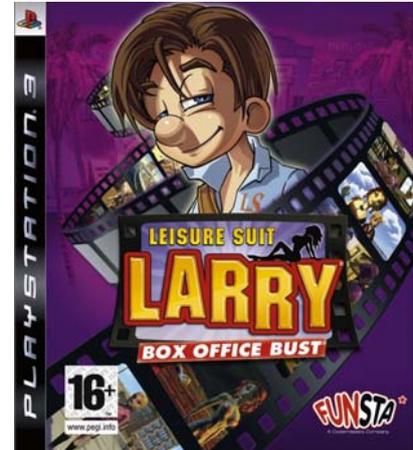
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Codemasters releases “Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust”

Many people wondered if the new Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust would ever hit the shelves since Activision-Blizzard put the title in limbo shortly after the merger was completed. However, while the game’s webpage was no longer updated with new material, the developer, Team17, stated that things would go on as planned. And indeed it did. On February 23rd, the Codemasters, who have their US headquarters in the former Sierra On-Line offices in Oakhurst, announced that they took over the title with the aim to release it early this Spring.

New screenshots were released, interviews with voice actors Carmen Electra and Jay Mohr were made available and a new gameplay trailer hit the internet. The trailers and interviews are also available on the Sierra Chest site. The game should now be available on the shelves for the Playstation 3, XBOX360 and PC-DVD.



Of course the main question is whether it is any good, or at least better than Magna Cum Laude. As High-Voltage (the developer of MCL) was replaced by Team17 (mostly known for their “Worms” games), and the executive producer claimed that they had learned from the mistakes of MCL, there was a spark of hope. However, as Al Lowe, the creator of the original Leisure Suit Larry, was once again not involved in the project, the fans of the classic Leisure Suit Larry series pretty much knew what to expect: “they wouldn’t recognize an adventure game when it hits them in the head”. True enough, despite being labeled as an “adventure game”, Box Office Bust is in our opinion far from it. An action role-playing game, yes, an adventure game, no.

Fans of Magna Cum Laude may enjoy it though. From the bit of gameplay we have seen so far (available in the Chest), the repetitive mini-games, which were the trademark of MCL, appear to be out and replaced by an open world where different tasks need to be accomplished. Another first impression we had from those gameplay videos, is that the player as more physical control over Larry Lovage, lots of jumping, climbing ladders and the like. The official trailers also indicate that violence is part of the game, which is confirmed by the game’s M-rating specifications: “blood and gore” and “violence”, among others. So yes, Box Office Bust certainly deviates from the previous titles, including Magna Cum Laude. We are looking forward to the reviews and ratings, which should soon shed more light on this new brand-new release.



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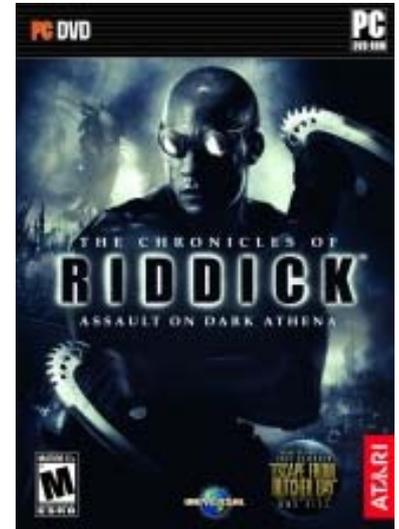
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Chronicles of Riddick: Assault on Dark Athena

Another title, that went into limbo last year, was the much anticipated sequel in the Riddick saga: Assault on Dark Athena, developed by Starbreeze Studios in conjunction with Tigon Studios, the same developers that made the award-winning Butcher Bay 5 years ago and are currently working on a Bourne sequel. Atari took the first-person shooter over from Activision-Blizzard in October last year. They were however not just going to remake Butcher Bay, but add a lot of new stuff to it. According to IGN, development of the game was completed on March 20th and multiplayer has been added with six online combat modes, including the Pitch Black mode. In addition to a HD-remastered version of Butcher Bay, a whole new Dark Athena campaign has been added aswell.

The game is expected to be released for the Xbox 360, Playstation 3 and PC on April 7th in North America, and on April 24th worldwide. However a demo can already be downloaded for the Xbox 360 and Playstation 3.



Whatever happened to WET?

Whatever happened to Ruby, the new action hero with pistols and a samurai sword ? The only thing we have heard from this athletic vixen since the announcement of the game WET in August 2007, was that it was among the titles that would not be published by Activision-Blizzard. That was not exactly a surprise to the gaming community, since the only thing that was ever made public were a few screenshots and a teaser trailer, now nearly 2 years ago. Then, finally, in early January, new screenshots were released, but no additional info. We found it curious that, although the IP is apparently still not transferred to another publisher, the developer of the game, A2M (Artificial Mind and Movement), still has it listed on its website, planned for release this year on the Xbox360 and Playstation 3. Whoever will publish it, is at this point still a question mark.



On an interesting sidenote, A2M, which also developed »Mummy: Tomb of the Dragon Emperor«, last year acquired Wanako Games. Who is Wanako Games, you ask? Wanako Games was the young Chilean game developer, which created the arcade game series »Assault Heroes« and »3D Ultra Minigolf« for the Sierra On-Line branch of Vivendi Games. Another interesting note is that they have also developed games for, you guessed it, Activision. Curious to see how this all will turn out.

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The gossip

And the license goes to... the highest bidder?

An article in Gamespot about the Nascar license caught our eyes on March 11. But what is new about Nascar? The last good Nascar, by many considered the best Nascar game off all, was Nascar 2003, developed by Papyrus and published by Vivendi under Sierra On-Line name. Unfortunately the license went out of Vivendi Games' hands in 2003, so they discontinued the blockbuster series, and Papyrus Group was closed in May 2004. EA Games took over the license but now theirs is coming to an end aswell. While it is possible that the Nascar license gets renewed, speculation exists that Nascar may be looking to widen their target range. According to Sporting News, it seems like NASCAR itself, which has been exclusive to EA since 2003, is looking to go non-exclusive. The reason for this speculation is that Nascar, the actual sport, has not been doing too well lately, with television ratings dropping and the Daytona 500 race not selling out. Selling the license on a year-to-year basis to the highest bidder could be a good thing for them.

According to Gamespot, a few of the obvious candidates who might have interest are Activision, THQ and Codemasters. Yes, the Codemasters, the guys who just published Leisure Suit Larry: Box Office Bust. The Codemasters is seen as a potential candidate because, according to Gamespot, they already acquired the Formula 1 license last year, so the Nascar license would provide them a pretty powerful portfolio of racing licenses. What makes the Codemasters particularly interesting, is that their US headquarters are in the former Sierra building in Oakhurst, and several of their employees are former employees of Sierra On-Line.

But, whoever buys the license, we doubt new Nascar games are going to be anything like Nascar 2003. The reason for our doubt is that the source code of Nascar 2003 was purchased back by David Kaemmer's company, "iRacing.com Motorsports Simulations" (formerly "FIRST LLC"), which he founded in 2004, a month prior to Papyrus Group's demise. David Kaemmer was also the founder of Papyrus and developer of the original Nascar games. And while iRacing's game engines are partially based on the one of Nascar 2003, we doubt iRacing would be the company going after the Nascar license. Would be nice though...



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Tribes 1 is coming back!

Say what?! Yep, according to Garage Games, Tribes 1 is indeed coming back. Who is Garage Games? The new owner of the Starsiege Tribes IP... along with all other IPs in the entire Starsiege Universe. They intend to release it as a browser based game on their Instant Action web site. In an official announcement on March 17th, Garage Games explained they had bought the intellectual property from Activision at the end of last year, and I quote: » We have obtained the IP for the entire Starsiege Universe including Tribes 1«. Now the question is, what do they mean by the entire Starsiege Universe? Does it include the Missionforce Cyberstorm series, Hunter Hunted, Earthsiege? That is unfortunately not specified in the statement, and according to one of the Sierra Chest forumites, an avid Starsiege fan, Garage Games has not denied nor confirmed which IPs are involved, when they were asked about it on their forums. He believes that the whole reason for the purchase is publicity related, to bring more gamers to their own franchise, a game which appears to be very similar in concept as Tribes, a game called »Fallen Empire Legions«. If publicity was their idea, then they surely were successful at getting our attention.



You can help the Sierra Chest!

Nearly all the content in the Sierra Chest is currently put in there by 1 (one) person. That would be... erm... the same dude who's currently putting this newsletter together. But hey, nothing ambitious about designing a fansite which covers all 500+ Sierra games with videos and all that, right?

So yes, if you have reasonable Paintshop skills, or a game strategy you would like to add, or a demo which is not yet in the download section, or anything else you believe you can help with, please contact me at the Sierra Chest forum or at ruudje_1976@yahoo.com. I welcome any assistance with open arms. Of course you will be credited on the Sierra Chest site for your contributions.

Also, if you find any interesting newslines related to Sierra On-Line or their games or their people, do let me know. I'm sure many more things happened over the past few months, and a hundred eyes can see far more than just my lousy pair ;-).

Thank you!

Your feedback matters!

Since this is the first Sierra Chest newsletter, we have no idea if the readers will like it. We'd like to improve things as much as possible, so please provide us your opinions. Is the news coverage sufficient or not? Is there something crucial missing or are there sections which you believe are not necessary? Would you prefer longer or shorter articles or are they good as they are? And so on, and so on.

The Sierra Chest on Youtube

Subscribe to be immediately informed about new videos.

Launch date: 10/26/2008

Username: ruudje1976

Current number of videos: 149

Current number of subscribers: 29

Channel views: 2,140

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