

Why 'Monkey Island' creators returned to 1990s classic game

September 23 2022, by Kilian FICHOU



"Return to Monkey Island" (Retour sur l'île aux Singes), nouvel opus du jeu vidéo culte "Monkey Island", le 20 septembre 2022 à Paris, sur une console de jeux portable.

When Ron Gilbert and Dave Grossman first let loose their swords,

voodoo and pirates epic "The Secret of Monkey Island", it was sold on floppy disks and released for long-forgotten home PCs like the Amiga.

Three decades later, they are back at it with "Return to Monkey Island", a sequel with flashier graphics and orchestral scores that is only available as a download.

"Back in 1990 we had an office and we were all in there all day long sharing space," Grossman told AFP in a joint interview with Gilbert.

"Now we're all remote—and not even just because of the pandemic, we're going to be remote anyway."

The two men worked together on the first two editions of the game, released in 1990 and 1991, before the group disbanded and went their separate ways.

The second edition ended on a cliffhanger that has never been resolved, with the hero, Guybrush Threepwood, facing off against his nemesis LeChuck.

And the secret alluded to in the title of the original was never divulged.

It has kept fans on tenterhooks ever since and gave Gilbert and Grossman a reason to come back to the franchise 30 years later.

"I think there's unfinished business for Guybrush because he never found the secret, and I think there's unfinished business for Dave and I as well," said Gilbert.

'Coloured by nostalgia'

The fan fervour around last Monday's release showed just how strong the

feelings still were for a game with blocky graphics and text prompts.

Although most of the reaction was positive, some took exception to the cartoon aesthetic of the new game and vented on [social media](#)—something 1990s creators did not have to contend with.

"Adventure game fans have always been very nice and I felt like they kind of turned a little bit," said Gilbert.

"It does affect you on some level but it's not going to change how we think about the game at all."

Slick graphics were never the appeal of "Monkey Island"—instead players solved puzzles and riddles and advanced through strange landscapes with surreal humour and pop-culture nods aplenty.

It largely set the template for adventure games that were to follow, but the "Monkey Island" franchise petered out with a few later entries published without the involvement of Gilbert.

Although the pair are polite about these subsequent editions—"we would never pooh-poo the canon", said Gilbert—their new game picks up the story where the 1991 game ended.

But before they could even start thinking of the story, they had to negotiate licensing the rights to the game from Disney.

"It was a long process, just because lawyers get involved and then everything takes a long time," said Gilbert.

A core team of 25 people then spent two years beavering away on the game, dealing not only with the rigours of game design but also 30 years of expectation among fans.

"Their memories are unrealistically coloured by nostalgia," said Grossman. "That makes a sort of an unreachable goal for us."

Instead, they decided to make a game that they themselves would enjoy.

'Golden age'

Despite beginning their careers when the [gaming industry](#) was still in its infancy, Gilbert and Grossman are still hugely inspired by the current landscape.

"Nearly anyone can just get three friends together and make a [game](#) in their garage, go on the internet and find an audience for it," said Grossman, calling it "the golden age of video games".

Their original 1990s games have already found a [second life](#) in this golden age through apps and online emulators.

And both creators are quietly confident that "Monkey Island" will continue in some form in the future.

"I think we should do one of these about every 10 or 15 years," said Grossman.

"Yeah, see you in 2035," replied Gilbert.

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