

## **Curious Expedition 2 review.**

**By Chris Getliffe.**

It's the 1880's and I've set sail for adventure. I'm accompanied by a small group of like minded pioneers venturing to a as yet uncharted island. My mind brimming with possibilities. We plunder ruins, fight hyenas, and meet the questionably portrayed indigenous tribes. They warn me not to touch the strange stone in the North – So naturally I touch the strange stone in the North. I don't want to spoil the opening, so I'll just say that the tribes people probably should have been more insistent, as their quality of life is soon to rapidly deteriorate. In fact, as the game progresses, I can't help but feel that I must be the single worst thing to ever happen to these cultures. As I systematically corrupt, steal, and inadvertently kill almost all of them. All in the name of science, profit, and good manners.

Curious Expedition 2 is a roguelite role playing game with a focus on character interaction as much as combat. After the strange phenomenon that befalls the tutorial island, the adventurer you play takes a step back. Deciding rather sensibly to send others to their almost inevitable doom. You choose who you want to be, based on a diverse range of abilities and personality traits, then head to the local tavern to find those who have the skills that will compliment your own. You're given a choice of expedition based on difficulty, then it's off to explore one of the randomly generated islands.

Once landed you have a main basic task such as, map the island, or talk to natives, along with additional options to raid and plunder the lands for curios to take back. Which will raise your standing with one of the three guilds back home. They are the ones fitting the bill for these expropriation endeavours, and they want to see a good return on their investment. The ultimate goal being to learn how to return to the first island, and discover what actually happened there.

Exploring these mysterious islands takes it's toll on your party, their ability to continue is measured by a sanity meter. Even the simple act of traversing the land will drain your party of their good will. Resting helps in keeping sanity high, it also provides an opportunity for your party to interact with one another. Mostly though these interactions end in personal drama and conflict. Although the occasional romance can sometimes bloom. Unfortunately none of the characters have any personality outside of their distinctive look. So when they start bickering, I found myself ignoring the reasons why they were fighting and just focused on the annoyance that another random statistic will be declining.

Randomness as a whole is central to Curious Expedition 2. The success of almost any action is based on rolling 3 coloured dice. I want to explore the alter we have stumbled upon. I roll and hope a green dice lands face up. It doesn't, and a companion stubs his toe, losing both health and loyalty to me. I'm surprised my party have any loyalty left for this indecisive, dice-rolling madman. Games of chance don't feel the most concise way to conduct an expedition.

The turn based combat uses a similar system. All the party members roll their dice, and what action graphic shows up, (if any), determines their actions that round. You may have spent a lot of money acquiring a rifle, but if "shoot" does not show up on a roll, you're forced to just "weak slap" the alligator that's biting at your feet. As you might imagine this quickly gets frustrating, and makes combat a slog. Characters perform different combat roles, but you can never rely on any possible synergies between party members due to these random outcomes. Your enemies however have no problem consistently performing

their attacks and buffs. It diminishes the fantasy of being an intrepid explorer when a pack of hyenas appear to be more organised than you.

Curious Expedition 2's hand drawn art style would not look out of place in a 1920's comic. Environments are varied, and give a great sense of atmosphere and place even though they are mostly static. Likewise the character appearances are diverse and give a good indication of their roles and possible temperaments. It's a shame that they are so poorly animated, they move more like marionette dolls rather than an animated cartoon. Yet I did find it to have a certain goofy charm.

The writing is consistently entertaining. It fleshes out the world commendably, and there are a lot of unique situations narrative wise to explore. It does a good job at hiding that most missions just boil down to you having to find a place on the map. If only this writing would extend to the people in your party. If there was more meaningful interaction with them and with each other, then I'd see them as comrades, people who I cared about, rather than just a dice collection.

Nevertheless, I did have fun. It manages to be better than the sum of its parts. Depending on your tolerance of randomness, there is an enjoyable adventure to be had, with many sights to see. You just may have to provide your own fan fiction and grit your teeth.

Review Score  
7/10