



Lost Horizon 2 REVIEW

The Good:

Intricate story combining mythology, historical facts and fiction; multi-city world tour; beautiful art and dramatic cutscenes; good soundtrack and voice acting; the emotional bond and camaraderie of father-daughter duo Fenton and Gwen.

The Bad:

Weak script with very little conversation and character development; haphazard plot progress through limited environments; aging platform weakens technical performance; banal mini-games; focus on lackluster Anna instead of Fenton and Gwen a big miss.

Our Verdict:

Despite embarking with a sound plan for another beautiful globe-trotting adventure, *Lost Horizon 2* suffers from weary execution and assorted technical limitations, eventually losing the way to greatness and ending up in the land of the average.



Scoring System - Editorial Policies

Written by [Shuva Raha](#) — June 3, 2016

It's 1942, and Dresden in eastern Germany is in the grip of the Second World War. A panicked professor hides his young daughters in a crawlspace and hastily burns his research as the Nazi Secret Service hunts for him in the decaying apartment building. Minutes later, it's all over... and the saga begins, of families torn apart by cruel lies and bitter truths, spanning decades and nations. The story resumes in Egypt during

the Suez Crisis of 1956, with British Air Force officer and returning hero Fenton Paddock rushing to prevent the indiscriminate bombing of Port Said by his own troops. He is rescued during the messy operation by Mossad agent Anna, on a mission to expose Nazi atrocities by raiding their secret treasure troves. On paper, *Lost Horizon 2* unfolds over a grand canvas of historical facts and intriguing fiction, but hackneyed execution and average production quality woefully limit its impact. It's not a lost cause by any means, but by the time the credits roll after seven-odd hours, any ardent fan of the very popular [Lost Horizon](#) will likely have a disappointed hole in their heart about what could have been.

Once again developed by Animation Arts, *Lost Horizon 2* is a somewhat tired attempt to continue the classic adventure series. It invokes the staples of the genre: conflict of personal lives and professional duty, scenic locales steeped in history, and maniacal villains ratcheting up the body count. But with only a few wooden characters, ultra-brief dialogues that rarely venture past the tasks at hand, only two or three screens per location, bland jigsaw- and match-based puzzles, stilted 3D animation and some silly bugs, the game never hits its stride. Instead, you are hurriedly segued from one short scene to the next by stylish but blurry cutscenes with neither conversation nor quests to keep you invested in the people or the events. Despite my keen interest in the series I was often distracted, which is a great pity considering the immense potential of the sequel given the foundation it was building over.

The story tries to link several disparate events, people and mythologies together, but doesn't delve deep into any aspect, choosing instead to dole out tiny bits of information between brief bursts of activity. This choice, to withhold information as the ruse to create curiosity, does not work for *Lost Horizon 2* as the goings-on are simply not riveting enough make you anxious for explanations. On the contrary, you get mired in the tedium of opening doors and fiddling with McGuffins stuffed with rusty keys and telltale notes. In fact, for a large part of the game, Fenton just sits in a plane wondering about the whereabouts of his young daughter Gwen. Anna knows where Gwen is, but instead of telling him upfront, she drags him through flashbacks of the tasks she did that summer while on her artefact-hunting mission. Which *could* have been interesting, but proves not to be.

The gameplay involves a lot of manic globetrotting stitched together by a handful of inventory quests. The six chapters cover locations as far-flung as Port Said, Moscow, Jersey, Gotland and even the mythical Asgard, but the frequent flying – in seaplanes, helicopters, jittery old airliners – yields little more than air-miles. With just a couple of scenes each, Moscow and Jersey feel tacked on, but even key scenarios like Port Said and Asgard are typically set indoors, severely limiting opportunities to explore these exotic locales, interact with the local folk, and imbibe their influence into quest design.

Progress is linear and compartmentalised by location, to the extent that almost all objectives are solved with items within your immediate reach. The mechanics are easy: left-click to walk, pick up objects and talk to people, and right-click to reveal hotspots. Each screen has only a few interactive objects, however, including the purely cosmetic ones. The inventory is accessed by rolling the mouse over the top edge of the screen, and usually comprises a dozen or so items that may be combined with each other or onscreen counterparts. Several can even be opened or dismantled to get new ones, adding to the scrolling clutter of sundry already-used and useless objects arbitrarily left in the stash. The protagonists do not run, but double-clicking exits hastens the pace. A few timed sequences require either some dexterity, like a high-speed escape on a motorbike that needs you to correctly click onscreen buttons, or proper planning to execute tasks in sequence while the clock ticks down. I found the game quite buggy as well. It crashed on occasion, and without an auto-save function, if you don't save frequently you can end up re-playing sizeable chunks. Also, doing simple things like dialing a rotary telephone or finding a door in a forest can become frustrating due to in-game glitches.

Some of the inventory quests are intuitive and well-designed, like decoding a cypher hidden in paintings, or another lengthy inventory-puzzle combination to unveil the mystery of Asgard. The game does make an effort to occasionally mix things up with top-down perspectives to navigate some maze-like areas, like a run through a derelict Port Said bathhouse, and also pitches in a couple of brief but fun-while-they-last tandem play sequences between Gwen and either Anna or Fenton. But the rest of the time you have to contend with childish puzzles like making tea or assembling documents by matching the few ordinary items you collect – or worse, swiping the cursor repeatedly across the screen to ‘wipe down’ surfaces to discover clues. The complexity of quests is uneven as well: while opening a simple grate can take numerous items and iterations, it only takes a quick minute to infiltrate a fully-reinforced KGB facility in Moscow. If you do get stuck, you can consult the in-game walkthrough for short, step-by-step solutions.

Another weak area is the characterisation. Though the game relies heavily on the bloody history of the Nazis to create both emotional stress and the treasure-hunt plot, this angle is less than effective as it gives Fenton precious little to do till the very end, and Anna is bland and mechanical to the point of being robotic. *Lost Horizon 2* is essentially Anna’s opus as she leads the investigation into the Nazis, and there was fantastic scope to partner her with Fenton and amp up the action by leveraging the collective competence of two trained operatives. Instead, the statuesque blonde is relegated to searching for mundane items and solving puzzles in between terse expositions to connect the dots. We get negligible insight into her personality beyond her ‘secret agent’ shtick, and her unidimensional persona leaves the affable Fenton (we see glimpses of his chipper old self in a brief segment with his spy-friend Tamer) with little room to manoeuvre.

Fenton himself is a shadow of his maverick avatar in *Lost Horizon*. Middle-aged, world-weary and sporting a scruffy beard, he is now estranged from wife Kim who has tired of his reckless adventuring and stays away from the sequel. He is also suffering from intense guilt for being a mostly-absentee father to his tween daughter Gwen, and it’s poignant to see him struggle with the growing realisation of his scant familiarity with her life and personality. Gwen, on the other hand, is the brightest spark of the game. She’s not only smart, sensible and resourceful, but also the emotional fulcrum that keeps both Fenton and you invested in the events. She understands and accepts her father’s personal foibles as well as his commitment to his job without prejudice, and over time she gently persuades him that there is hope for their family yet. She also has clearly inherited her father’s fearless gene, bravely confronting every challenge thrown at her by assorted adversaries. Unfortunately, besides the three leads, no character has enough role or relevance to leave any sort of lasting impact.

The beautifully designed, richly-hued scenes, however, do make a great impression. There are some remarkable locations, like the desert city of Port Said on a moonlit night, a traditional German villa with its aged gray stone exterior set off by vibrant autumn foliage, and an ominous World War II bunker, a haunting relic of the past decaying in a lush Bavarian forest alive with twittering birds. The strange, icy world of Asgard, with its massive statues and ancient engineering, is another visual treat. Light and shadow are used expertly to give depth, whether flickering torches in dungeons or sunlight dappling through leaves. Most cutscenes are cinematically grand, like the Nazis storming the professor’s house, the dramatic outcomes of solving key quests, and the various flight scenes. Technical issues mar the overall finesse, though, as the cutscenes are blurry at high resolution and often the transitions to and from the game screens are afflicted with artifacting. The dated and inefficient character animation also leaves a lot to be desired, with stiff and awkward movements, people skidding across the screen instead of walking, and objects passing through the sprites.

The classical, movie-like soundtrack helps build up the grandness of the settings. The instrumental scores are pleasing and impressive; they're understated in-game, but particularly effective due to their sparing usage. With many scenarios unfolding against quiet backgrounds, sound effects become important to create the ambience, and the game's rustling breezes, grinding stone surfaces, waterfalls, chirping insects and birds, and footsteps on various surfaces are effective enough.

The voice-overs are also generally good-to-great, especially for the leads. The older Fenton is suitably gruff, more so when he goes into Dad-mode and lays down the law for Gwen, but his wisecracks are still laced with his inherent mischievousness. Though she rarely utters a superfluous word, Anna is pleasant and practical, while Gwen's voice reflects her vivacity and rapidly-changing adolescent moods, from excitement to consternation to the occasional whining. With a large part of the game set in Germany, the heavy German accents of the supporting cast sound natural, and the same goes for the British voice-overs in Jersey. But when the action shifts to other locations, like Moscow, the affectations become noticeably artificial, though within bearable levels.

Lost Horizon 2 is one of a steadily dwindling stock of classic adventure games that rely upon the time-honoured techniques of intricate storytelling, in-depth characterisation, larger-than-life canvases, and traditional inventory quests and puzzles. It sets off with the right intentions and makes a valiant attempt to bring together these key elements to tell a grand, emotional tale. But a weak script, poor character development, and aging technology hobbles the execution, with the final product ending up just about *good enough* for a play-through, but nowhere near the epic it had the potential to be. Given its heritage, it also faces the uphill task of being compared to its own more accomplished predecessor, and unfortunately comes up short. The open-to-interpretation ending leaves the chronicle of Fenton and Gwen on a cliffhanger, with ample scope to tell more of their story. All practical issues notwithstanding, this sequel establishes a warm bonhomie between the father-daughter duo, and I still look forward to a fresh adventure on the horizon, albeit with a more cautious optimism than before.