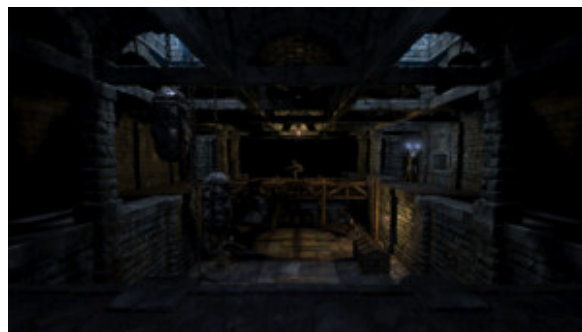


Legend of Grimrock 2

2014/12/12



Classic dungeon crawling (with different heights!).

Legend of Grimrock 2 is a fun game to play and in almost every way an improvement on Legend of Grimrock. In this review I'll describe why that is so and highlight some things I didn't like about this second game in the series. For those of you that never heard of it, Legend of Grimrock is a grid based, 3D, real-time dungeon crawler. You control a party of up to four characters and move through the environment one tile at a time, while fighting monsters and solving puzzles. This makes it a rather niche title in the action rpg genre, just like it's predecessor. A comparison to older title's, especially Dungeon Master, is also apt as it's gameplay is strongly based off of those. The game was made by Almost Human.

Do note that this will contain some (very minor) spoilers, so if you don't want to know anything before playing it, don't read on. Also for reference, I played the game on Hard mode (no ironman) and I generally play these games as a completionist, so I got most of the Steam Achievements. It took me a total of 57 hours and the version I played is the Steam version 2.1.13 (22-10-2014).

What I liked



Yes, outside.

The open world

One huge difference from its predecessor and a lot of other title's in this genre, is that it's more of an open world game than purely a dungeon crawler. There are roughly a dozen outside area's with dungeons being both under and above the ground. It's not completely an open world as you do need certain items / to solve certain puzzles to progress in certain directions, but it's pretty close. I wondered how I'd like this, and somewhat to my surprise I generally liked this experience. If you get stuck somewhere you almost always have somewhere else to go to explore / do things. And it makes it feel much more like a real world. The only thing I disliked is that it can become somewhat overwhelming as you initially have so many loose ends / so many places to go to. Tip: It can indeed be useful to first go somewhere else if a certain point is too difficult.

The combat system

I feel like they have done a good job with how the fighting is implemented. A small thing that made me happy is that there is a nice mix of old adversaries together with a bunch of new one's. A slightly bigger thing is that they gave most of the new monster type's a specific characteristic which makes it harder to just continually circle around them and hit them at will (some in example hit to the side, others are too fast, etcetera). The monster AI also is improved from the first game. All this makes it necessary to be a bit more intelligent about your tactics then just strafing around a monster group in a four tile square. Note: Purely long distance combat doesn't seem very effective due to most monsters being pretty fast. Another new feature which really contributes to the fighting experience is the introduction of boss battles. These all require some kind of specific tactic to defeat and you can see their health bar at the top of your screen. A great new addition. Their difficulty level is also good, generally I only had to redo a boss battle once maximum (this includes the final fight, which can be difficult apparently). Finally there's one epic battle (which I won't spoil) which for

me was easily the best moment in the game. You'll know it when you see it.



There are *a lot* of puzzles.

The puzzles

If you are going to play this game, expect a huge number of puzzle's. Pretty much every map has a number of them. In general I feel these were well executed. There is good diversity in the kind of puzzles that are offered and almost none were too difficult or very frustrating. However, honestly I feel there was a bit more room for slightly more difficult puzzles (the Iron Door puzzles in Grimrock 1 in example felt harder). Most of the puzzles here are self-contained and require nothing else then what is present in the room / dungeon map. I should also mention that there were two puzzles that were quite frustrating. One is the cemetery entrance puzzle, which in my opinion is badly designed. Another is the storage puzzle in the Archives which instruction has one word too much which confused me greatly (hopefully they'll patch these).

Other new features

I liked the new skill system. You can maximize a single skill in five levels (instead of taking the entire game to maximize one skill as in 1) and you have great flexibility in choosing what kind of character you want to build. My warrior in example ended up learning alchemy and my battle mage firearms as I didn't have an alchemist. Another fun new thing is that there are quite a number of 'story' events that happen when specific points in the game are reached. These often involve surprise fights which I found to be great fun as they are often in an open area and they really liven up the places you already visited. Finally there are some new minor features like, ropes, ladders and the shovel. I generally liked these as well, as it made for more diversity in what you could do. It did mean I ended up keeping pretty much every unique item just in case it could also do something cool. A fishing rod would have been nice (although it's not needed).

What I disliked



Not a death trap, but a puzzle.

Deathtraps

There are quite a few situations where you are suddenly dropped in between many monsters. While these were definitely exciting, they (for me) often resulted in an unpreventable death. One reason this is probably done is that even though combat was improved, one on one monsters still don't stand a chance against a mobile party. Still I felt this particular mechanic was used a bit too much throughout the game and I'd have preferred either clearer warnings or more creative deathtrap's then just putting the party in a closed room with a large number of monsters. It would have certainly cut down on my death count / how much I cared about dying (initially I played much more carefully but after a number of 'unfair' deaths that care went largely away).

The spell balance

There are four schools of magic, Fire, Earth, Water and Air. Sadly Fire and Air are superior, while Earth and especially Water are much worse. This is mostly because there is no reason to get Earth and Water above level 3, other than the damage bonus, as there are no spells now that require that. Fire instead has the best damage dealing spell in the game and most enemies seem to be weakest to that element anyway. I'd be pretty ok with this, if there were other reasons to get the other schools, like in example good utility spells. Which brings me to my second point, some very obvious choices for extra spells aren't included. For example water walking, water breathing or a healing spell. Tip: There is no scroll of Frost Bolt in the game right now, but it can be cast (water 3, air 1). Also invisibility (which I never used) can be pretty useful in boss fights as it will de aggro monsters if they are sufficiently far away. The force field spell is a nice addition!



The user interface is very polished, just like in 1.

Puzzle overkill

This was something I experienced nearing the end. I started getting the feeling of going from puzzle to puzzle. Each time having to solve an easily solvable new puzzle every few minutes. Some more diversity, in example by having more stories going on, puzzles being linked together or more people in the world would have been pleasant. I'm somewhat conflicted about listing this point as puzzle solving is pretty much the definition of how this genre operates, but it is something I ended up disliking a bit. Also for reference: There is a storyline. It is not bad. I'd rate it comparable to the story of Legend of Grimrock 1 (both in terms of depth as quality).

Secret spotting

This is another point which is pretty much a staple of this genre, but I noticed a trend that I was often first clearing an area of the monsters and then meticulously walking by all walls to check for secrets. This ended up feeling as pretty much a chore as once you know how the secret buttons look like you'll find all of them, but as a completionist I naturally had to look by every single wall carefully. I think I would have preferred a search skill or something like that so that I can finally stop checking each wall for every single thing I missed. Tip: Secret buttons only appear on man-made objects, so there's no need to check for secret buttons on trees or underwater (although there are other things hidden there ofcourse ;)).

Conclusion

As I said in the beginning, the game definitely improved on its predecessor and I had fun with it. I'd definitely recommend the game if you're a fan of the genre or looking to try it out. I'll probably not play any expansion / custom-made dungeon's

though as the itch to play this kind of game has gone away again. Note: There is an editor included for those looking to make their own dungeons.

Legend of Grimrock 2 playthrough (hard mode, with commentary):