

An
INSIDE LOOK
at Sierra's new
mystery thriller!

LAURA BOW II THE DAGGER OF AMON RA



by Josh Mandel



The Murderous Matter of Making a Mystery.

Making a murder mystery work on the computer screen is a killer experience.

Trust me. It's been over two years since Sierra On-Line released *The Colonel's Bequest*, easily Roberta Williams's most controversial game design to date. Unlike conventional adventures, events unfolded whether the player witnessed them or not. This made for a more realistic game world, but also a less structured one: the game could be as complicated or as simple as the player wanted it to be. It's entirely possible to play through the game and never learn about the secret walkways behind the walls, the hidden panels, the bodies in the basement, or all the underground treasure.

There was also something slightly scandalous about the main character, Laura Bow, a college student on vacation in the misty bayous of 1920's Louisiana...she was independent, attractive and a bit of a snoop.

In early 1991, Roberta Williams decided to bring Laura Bow back to the small screen. Roberta, Creative Director Bill Davis, and I met to discuss the possibilities. It would be, naturally, another mystery, maintaining the flavor of the 1920's, and should have the same chilling, creepy feeling as the



When an artist's sketches come to life(?) the results can be frightening. When a victim is found stabbed with The Dagger of Amon Ra, Laura must hurry to find as many clues to the murder as possible.

first Laura Bow game. New game technology and an increased pool of creative talent, however, gave us the opportunity to really serve up an exciting little thriller.

We wanted the game to expand Laura Bow as a character. She'd again be facing an unknown threat, but perhaps this time she'd become the focus of the threat rather than an impartial observer.

As for the setting, the key feeling we were looking for was claustrophobia, the sense of being trapped in a confined space...yet not so confining that the player wouldn't have ample opportunity for exploration.

Some of the locales we considered were an abandoned movie studio, a cruise ship, and a zeppelin. Finally we chose the echoing halls of a museum at night. A natural history museum, in particular, would contain a gold mine of scenic elements: stuffed and preserved animals, all kinds of skeletons, mummies, shadowy

corridors, seedy dioramas with creepy mannequins, ancient torture devices, and hidden spaces behind the exhibits for museum personnel. Better still, the 1920's were a time when Americans became fascinated with all things Egyptian (as reflected in the Art Deco art and architecture of the period), so it was logical to have an Egyptian exhibit as part of the museum.

In contrast to the quiet isolation of the museum, we settled on noisy, frantic New York City as the game's general locale. There's so much imagery connected with NYC and the twenties: prohibition, speakeasies, gangsters, jazz clubs flappers, and a free-wheeling lifestyle that would be wholly unfamiliar to the naive, young reporter Laura Bow.

Once we'd chosen the location, the basis for the mystery came easily. One of the key elements in making a mystery work is spreading the suspicion around. A museum exhibit containing priceless



Laura Bow, cub reporter and amateur sleuth. This time she may be in over her head. Can she solve this raucous 1920's mystery...without becoming its victim?

artifacts would be the prime target of thieves — perhaps a variety of potential thieves with differing motives: greed, religious outrage, patriotism, rivalry. Naturally, poor Laura (who seems to always attract trouble) would get caught in the middle.

As our discussions continued, Bill Davis knew instinctively which artist would

fit the mood perfectly: J.C. Leyendecker (see sidebar on page 33). Leyendecker's work inspired such famous artists as Norman Rockwell; his illustrations are crisp and highly stylized, with stark and dramatic backgrounds that offset the intricately rendered characters.

At this point in the early development of the project, designer Bruce Balfour took over the in-depth design duties. Bruce's experience was ideally suited for the task: among the fiction he's had published in various books and magazines was a comic book series based on Jack the Ripper. He took hold of the story concept and transformed it into a rich, exotic mystery:

"Museums have an interesting, unique atmosphere, and the variety of exhibits brought all kinds of puzzle possibilities to mind. Then we just needed a reason to lock Laura in a museum with a cast of eccentrics, and throw away the key. Since Egyptology was trendy in the 1920's, we put an



The artists first make rough sketches of the main character in action. These drawings depict the emotional changes Laura Bow will experience on her mystery solving quest.

You'll be astonished...

near fainting...

puzzled...

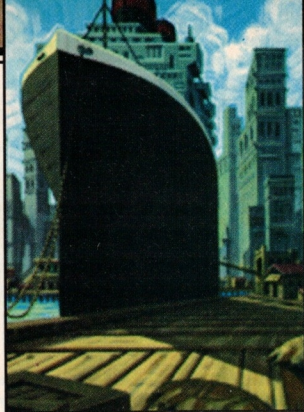
and at times in deep thought.

Egyptian Exhibit in the museum dominated by the priceless 'Dagger of Amon Ra,' then we had it stolen. Having just started a new job as a newspaper reporter, Laura Bow is assigned to write the burglary story. Then, when Laura arrives at the museum, people start dropping dead all over the place."

Bruce delved into his research, covering Egyptology, hieroglyphics, museum security and interesting methods for doing away with people. San Jose's Rosicrucian Egyptian Museum turned out to be quite a valuable resource, as did used bookstores. Bruce adds:

"Trying to be as realistic as possible, while still maintaining some humor in the game, I worked out a variety of ways to kill people, using books on criminology, poisons and related subjects. Considering the limited forensic technology of 1926, criminology was still an infant science based on observation of the crime scene and the corpse. Today, you can analyze the DNA from a dried blood sample, learning almost everything you need to know about the murderer, including his current address and his favorite food. However, evidence in this game had to be based on things Laura could find with her naked eye, such as bits of fabric, hair, notes, and objects normally associated with particular characters."

Storyboarding and art began on the game, and the artists avidly latched on to the sophisticated, cosmopolitan look of the Leyendecker art. For the backgrounds,



You'll see magnificent, large-scale hand-painted graphics of the opulent society of the 1920's. Several characters arrive from Egypt along with priceless artifacts.

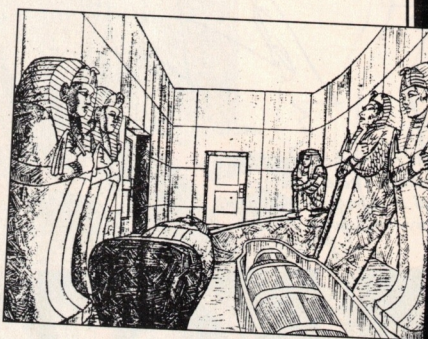
Bruce and his team turned to the Warner Brothers photo archives. Anyone with access to those archives might be able to pick specific locations and buildings out of the extraordinary background paintings.

To create the characters, Production Designer Andy Hoyos created rough sketches of how the characters might look, Leyendecker-style, to reflect their personalities. To bring these

characters to life and to ensure realistic movements, actors were hired and authentically costumed. They were then videotaped and touched up in a method known as "rotoscoping" to bring out the fine details that may have been lost in the transition from tape to computer. Footage was taken of every actor performing every conceivable motion in the game; this generates a massive amount of animation art. The end result is incredibly lifelike animation that beautifully recreates every nuance of action and emotion.

The overall feel of *Laura Bow II: The Dagger Of Amon Ra* is a fascinating combination of realism and whimsy. Authentic period music, costumes and locations are melded seamlessly with Art Deco styling and dramatic storytelling. The effect is one of total immersion in the period.

You might say it's the sort of classic you'd find only in a museum. 



In the Leyendecker style, Andy Hoyos created rough sketches of the characters that would play a role in this Laura Bow mystery-thriller. Then, each character was animated using Sierra's advanced video-capture technique to produce life-like movements and realistic acting throughout the entire game.



Laura arrives at Grand Central station by train as a cub newspaper reporter. Unknowingly she's stepped into the mystery of a lifetime.



Victims are sometimes found murdered by strange and bizarre methods. This is one bird dropping that's murder.



You'll explore the dark, dank storage rooms of the museum, and who knows what you may find. Ancient Egyptian artifacts, animal skeletons, and fearsome mummies.



You'll attend a posh social banquet in the rotunda of the museum where a massive ancient Egyptian exhibit has just opened. But there are more untold secrets to discover...



Joseph Christian Leyendecker

was born March 23, 1874, at Montabour, a tiny village on the Rhine in southwest Germany. Leyendecker's father brought him, his brother, sister and mother to Chicago in 1882.

J.C. Leyendecker was a very private individual, and little is known about his personal life. The brief self-profile of his early life he provided for *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1938 is a rare and touching look at the artist:

"The Leyendeckers are of Dutch ancestry, though we came to America in 1882 from Montabour. I was eight at the time and was already covering school books with rudely colored examples of my work. At home I kept myself busy with more pretentious paintings which, for want of canvas, were done on oilcloth of the common kitchen variety.

"When I was sixteen, I felt I'd reached the saturation point in the oilcloth field. So I decided to find a job and gain some practical experience in the profession of being an artist.

I still remember boarding a cable car one windy day with three large canvases wrapped in newspaper and fighting my way through the crowded streets to an engraving house where I showed my samples.

The boss inspected a stag at bay, a chariot race and a Biblical subject with amusement, but he did tell me to report for work. I was an apprentice without pay—with a chance to learn the art business."

One of the leading illustrators of the age, his artwork is still as loved and respected as it was in the 1920's.

HOW TO CREATE A MYSTERY:

The Recipe for The Dagger of Amon Ra

by Laura Bow, Cub Reporter



Ever since my near-demise at Colonel Dijon's plantation last year, people have been asking me what it was like to be in the middle of a murder mystery. My best advice is for you to cook up your own.

If you really want your mystery to be good, you need a mysterious setting, like a huge, imposing, spooky museum. Why, anything could happen there!

Next you will need a spicy mix of suspicious characters. Take a look at the people below for a saucy sampling.

Now it's time for a crime. The theft of a priceless Egyptian artifact, for instance. But don't expect it to end there! Some people would kill for The Dagger of Amon Ra...

Next, throw in a multitude of motives, a slew of suspects, plenty of plot twists,

and the occasional red herring for flavor. Seal the building, and mix well! Be sure to give it plenty of time to heat up, and let the tension rise...Hmm, there's something about that particular mystery mixture that makes me uneasy. I can't quite put my finger on why...Oh well. Have fun making your own mystery!



The eerie atmosphere of a haunting natural history museum sets the stage for an edge-of-the-keyboard murder mystery. Each echoing step brings you closer to solving a murder or becoming a victim.



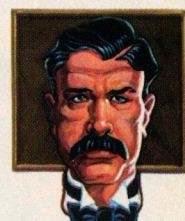
Dr. Archibald Carrington III:
Mysterious museum president.



Countess Lavinia Waldorf-Carlton:
Merry widow or black widow?



Dr. Olympia Myklos:
Curator with a taste for the macabre.



Pippin Carter:
Oddball archaeologist.



Dr. Ptahsheptut "Tut" Smith:
Egyptologist with a past.



Ryan Hanrahan O'Riley:
One of New York's Finest?



Laura Bow:
Hey, I'm not suspicious!



Wolf Himmler:
Museum security chief with an attitude.



Steve Dorian:
Romantic interest or ruthless rogue?



Yvette Delacroix:
Loyal friend or shady lady?



Rameses Najeer:
More than just an accountant?



Ziggy:
He'll tell you anything for a price.

Laura Bow II: The Dagger of Amon Ra will be released in Spring 1992!