

The Book of Skulls

By David Hutchison

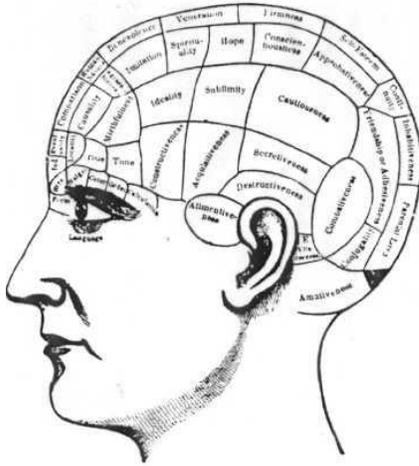


Image from <http://www.phrenology.com/> accessed 29.3.10

Premise

A third-person mystery/action/adventure with some shooter elements, designed for the Playstation 3.

A student doctor investigates a series of gruesome murders in Edinburgh's Old Town.

Over the course of the game the protagonist discovers clues which seem to lead to a phrenology obsessed antagonist. But all is not what it seems... is the killer even human?

Storyworld

Set in an alternative late 19th Century Edinburgh. The old nickname for Edinburgh was "Old Reekie" because of the smoke from ubiquitous coal fires. The city is permanently smothered under a blanket of smog, a combination of coal smoke and east coast haar. This is a gloomy Edinburgh, where the sun never penetrates.

It is also a world of Victorian invention, manners and attitudes.

As we go through the different levels of the game we travel literally deeper into Edinburgh's underbelly, through forgotten cellars and dank dark tunnels that eventually lead to an enormous stygian lake, left over from the Nor Loch.

User objective

The user takes on the role of protagonist student doctor Liz Moliette. Although Liz is the cleverest student in her class she cannot graduate because she is a woman. Liz is told by one of her teachers, Professor Atticus, that he will try and persuade the medical board to let her graduate, if she can help the police to identify a headless corpse found in Greyfriars Kirkyard.

When further mutilated bodies turn up her mission develops into finding out who or what is responsible.

Target User Group

Over 18's. Although the protagonist is female the game is aimed at both sexes. There are both problem solving and shoot-them-up features to the game so the game should appeal to a broad spectrum of clients.

Because of the graphical violent nature of the murders the game is for over 18's.

Core Mechanics

Glide

Because of her wide skirts Liz seems to glide rather than walk.

Super glide

Equivalent of running.

Smile

A smile can gain more information when trying to get information from someone.

Grab

Handy for picking up items to be used later eg The Book of Skulls, lunettes.

Heal

Liz can help cure minor ailments to gain information or money. The control vibrates when Liz realigns dislocated joints.

Shop

Liz can build up her wardrobe by ordering clothes from a tailor on the Royal Mile.

A change of clothes helps Liz to gain access to eg the Opera, or a ball, for information gathering.

Disguise

If Liz has the right clothes she can disguise herself as a man to gain access eg to the Men's club.

Scan, Shield, Attack (see Accoutrements)

Accoutrements

Scan

Special lunettes are worn to discover extra previously unseen evidence. The control vibrates when Liz uses the lunettes to scan a crime scene.

Shield

Liz's umbrella can be used as a shield.

Attack

The umbrella handle is hollow and contains 6 curare tipped arrows. The "blow pipe" is the rod of the umbrella.

Visual Style



Liz Moilette's lodgings off the Canongate, Old Town
Photograph taken by David Hutchison and digitally manipulated.

A dark and foreboding world of crumbling medieval architecture, Victorian cobbled streets, gas lamps, narrow closes, arches. Everywhere is covered in a creeping, clinging smog. The rich go past in horse drawn carriages wearing velvet frockcoats and other sumptuous clothing, while the poor beg in rags. The narrow squalid streets are open sewers crawling with rats. Servants gather round water pumps. Preachers rant about the end of the world and eternal damnation at street corners. Markets selling sheep, pigs, goats, cows, hens, stalls of butchered meat., oysters, fish from Leith.

This is also the time of great medical achievements and Edinburgh medical school is at the centre of it. The scandal of Burke & Hare has never really settled down and the occasional body snatcher wanders the dimly lit closes.

Doctors, laboratories, strange new electrical inventions, medical instruments, experimental surgery, body parts preserved in formaldehyde, mercury, leeches.

Underground, tunnels, claustrophobia.

Film and television influences such as numerous films and documentaries based on Jack the Ripper. Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll & Mr Hyde, and camp classic film adaption Dr Jekyll & Sister Hyde, detective stories, film noir.

The Talons of Weng Chan (Dr Who) where an alien is controlling a stage show magician in Victorian London and draining young ladies of their essence.

Dr Who and the Loch Ness Monster, where aliens use duplicate humans in their plans.

Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes stories.

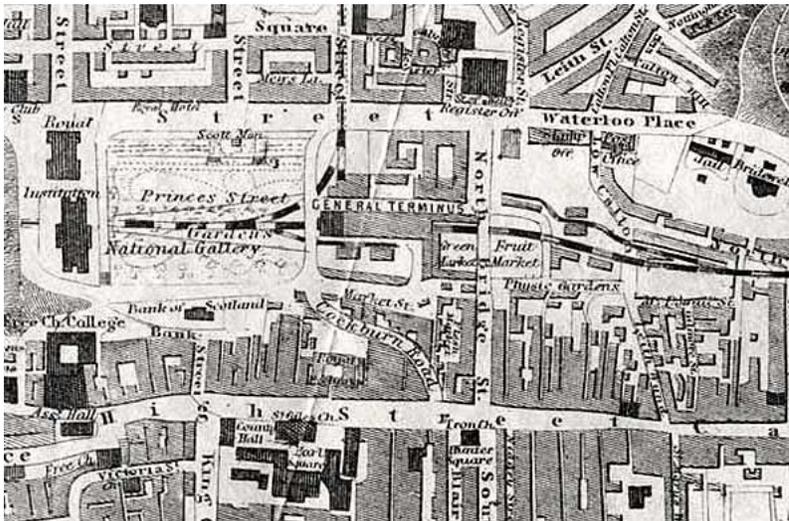
H.P.Lovecraft's Cthulhu mythos.



Alien creature in Canogate. Photo taken and manipulated by David Hutchison.

By setting the game in an alternative Edinburgh the world does not have to follow the rules of an accurate historical copy. The medical world is also a world of false theory and quack doctors.

As the game progresses the world becomes increasingly mythical. Liz is similar to the character Scully in the TV series X-Files. She is medically trained and does not believe in aliens or the supernatural, but over the course of the game she discovers hidden worlds and impossible things.



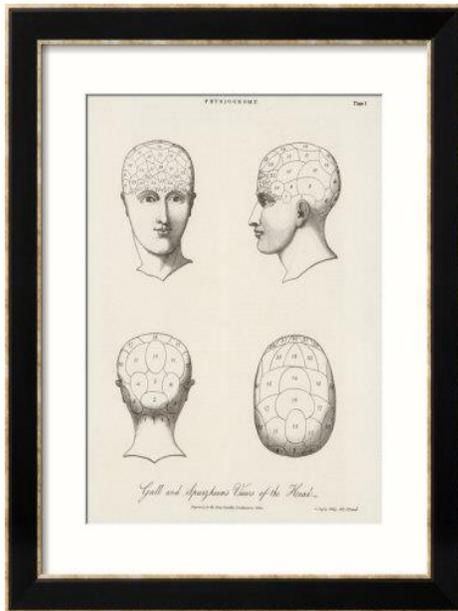
1860 map of Edinburgh

As with games like Assassin's Creed there will be access to an aerial map of the city, pointing out murder scenes.

On the third level there will also be available a map of underground Edinburgh. This will be accessed via the Book of Skulls menu icon.

Phrenology

The study of the shape and protuberances of the skull, based on the now discredited belief that they reveal character and mental capacity



Tone

Dark, aspects of horror, mystery, detective.

Structure

There are several murders to investigate in level 1 before moving to stage 2.

Level 1

Cut scene introduction where Liz Moilette is at graduation day. We learn that although Liz is cleverer than her male colleagues she is not allowed to graduate. Liz needs either to find a sponsor who will help her to overturn the rules. She has one ally in Professor Atticus. If she can solve the recent spate of murders the professor will help her to graduate. Professor Atticus gives Liz a pair of special lunettes. The lenses help to scan for clues.

Liz Molliette meets Inspector MacLeod at St Leonards' police station. She looks at the body of the man with head missing. Liz notices that the man is wearing clothes that inmates of Craiglockhart asylum wear.

Identify

Liz visits the asylum and meets Dr Emrie. A Jack McCall has escaped from Craiglockhart asylum the day before. Liz looks in Jack's cell. On the wall of the cell Jack has painted a hideous demon.

Cut scene. There is another murder.

Liz Molliette visits the crime scene at the Physics Gardens. Woman with head missing. Woman's hands are stained. Inspector MacLeod suggests that she was a leather worker.

Liz goes to the leather worker shop. Jessie Coutts, a leather worker has gone missing. Liz goes to Jessie's flat. Finds an appointment card for Dr Emrie.

Cut scene

Liz revisits the Craiglockhart asylum. Dr Emrie fobs her off with a story about Jessie visiting her insane brother.

An orderly with a sprained arm shows Liz out. Liz can use her healing powers to cure the orderly's arm and to gain knowledge from the orderly. If she does this she will find out that Jessie Coutts never had a brother.

Cut scene

Town crier shouts out that there is another murder, near where the new Waverley Station is being built.

Liz Molliette visits the crime scene. A workman with his head missing is found where an old tunnel has been unblocked.

Liz puts on the lunettes and discovers a clue; a book that has been left on the old railway line in the tunnel. It is the Book of Skulls, drawn and written by a Dr Kyle, a disgraced phrenologist who has disappeared several years ago.

A workman hobbles past. Liz can use her healing powers to cure the man's leg and to find out that the workers have been hearing strange noises since the tunnel has been opened up several days ago.

Liz visits Professor Atticus but the housekeeper says that he is at his club. Liz goes to the club but is not allowed in.

Liz tests her Man Drag mode. She is transformed into a young gentleman. She is then allowed into the club. She shows the Book of Skulls to the professor. The professor invites her to a private study. She is offered a drink.

Liz wakes up in a laboratory. She is back to being Liz again. She is tied to an autopsy table.

Cut scene

Professor Atticus tells her that he recognised her perfume so wasn't fooled by her disguise. His eyes glaze over and in a trance-like state he says that he is actually Dr Kyle and that he gets patients from Dr Emrie for his research into phrenology. He has been collecting interesting skulls to prove a theory and thanks her for returning his book. He opens the doors of a cupboard and shows her a shelf with rows of skulls. He says that she will be a fine addition to his collection of skulls. He has to leave her for a while to lecture in a class but will be back soon.

Liz has to escape before the doctor returns. The way to do this is to knock over a glass jar and use the broken glass to cut through her ropes.

When Liz manages to cut through the ropes she looks for an exit. A door leads back into the club. A window looks down on the street far below. Liz can use her Man drag mode to leave or she can exit from the high window by detaching her bustle, throwing it down to the street as a soft thing to land on.

In either case she meets up with Inspector MacLeod. They go to the lecture hall but Professor Atticus has been tipped off and has disappeared.

Liz and Inspector MacLeod visit the asylum but find that Dr Emrie is dead. Liz uses her lunettes to look for clues. She finds a map of underground Edinburgh.

Level 2

CUT scene.

Liz and Inspector MacLeod go back to the tunnel at Waverley station. Inspector MacLeod gives Liz an umbrella that has 6 curare tipped arrows in the handle. He demonstrates that the hollow tube of the umbrella is used as the blow pipe, by shooting a rat.

Liz and Inspector MacLeod explore the tunnel. Different tunnels branch off.

One tunnel leads to a hidden exit at Greyfriars Kirkyard.

Another tunnel leads to the Physics Gardens.

The other tunnels lead off to dead ends. Sounds of the alien creature echoing down the tunnels but never seen, fills Liz and Inspector MacLeod with a sense of dread.

They eventually reach a vast underground cavern with a huge lake (perhaps a remnant of the drained Nor Loch), visible by strange luminous fungi covering everything. After looking around the shores of the underground lake they come across a boat. They take the boat across the lake.

Cut scene

Something huge with tentacles overturns the boat. Inspector MacLeod is dragged under. Liz is sinking.

Liz removes her heavy skirts and floats up to the surface. She swims to the far shore. She finds the boat washed up. She picks up her umbrella.

There are three tunnels.

One tunnel leads to a pit of molten lava.

One tunnel leads to the asylum.

One tunnel leads to an ancient strange spacecraft, embedded in volcanic rock.

Liz explores the spacecraft. In a room she finds Professor Atticus wired up to a strange machine.

Cut scene

Professor Atticus wakes up. He tells Liz that has been trapped here for ages. He tells her that he did change his name from Dr Kyle and came to Edinburgh to set up a new life. He had turned his back on phrenology but was visited one evening by another secret phrenologist Dr Emrie, who drugged him and he ended up here. Dr Emrie was recruited by this alien creature as it needed human live brain tissue to fuel its spaceship. The alien creature crash landed here millions of years ago and went into hibernation. It awoke when some of the tunnels were being made and has been harvesting brains ever since. The situation suited Dr Emrie as the alien did the killing for him and he had the skulls to study afterwards.

A door opens and a duplicate Professor Atticus enters. He attacks Liz with a stream of green sludge that flies from his mouth. Liz fends him off with her umbrella. He transforms into a tentacled alien creature. Liz shoots him with the curare tipped dart. He slows down. Liz fires all the darts into him.

Cut scene

The alien creature is dying

Noise of machines.

Professor Atticus tells Liz that she has to get out before the tunnel fills with lava. Liz helps him out of the machine. He shows her another exit. The lava starts pouring down the tunnel.

Liz and Professor Atticus climb up a ladder.

They open a trapdoor and find themselves in a cellar. They go up the steps out of the cellar and find they are in a room under the North Bridge.

Cut scene

Liz is at a special public graduation ceremony. She receives her certificate from Professor Atticus.

End of first story.

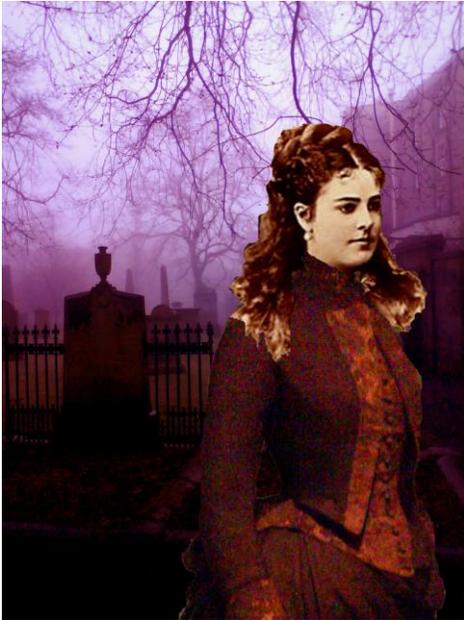
Sound and Music

Natural background sounds eg noise of horses on cobbled streets, footsteps on flagstones, animals going to market, people selling their wares, town crier, buskers (song, fiddle, penny whistle, hurdy gurdy, bodhran). Clocks ticking , hum of electricity, roar of a fire.

Eerie echoing sound of footsteps in tunnel. Dripping water. Bubbling lava. Machinery.

The sound of alien creature. Based on the sound of a sea creature resampled.

Characters

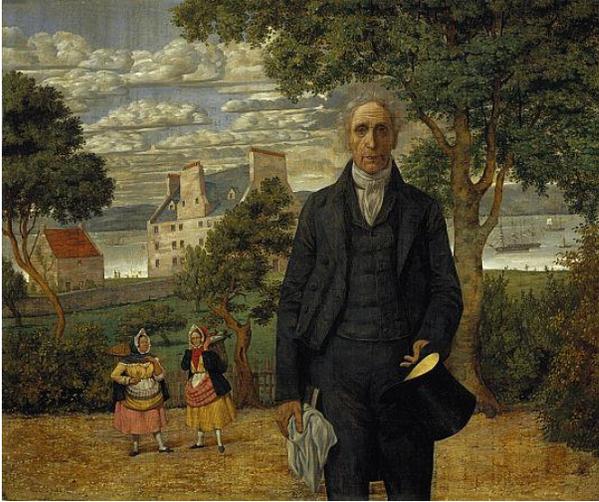


Collage by David Hutchison 2010.

Player character :Liz Molliette

Liz Molliette was abandoned on the steps of a church as a baby. She was brought up in an orphanage run by nuns in Paris. She does not know anything about her family history. Unusually for her time she wanted to become a doctor. Being extremely bright she gained a scholarship to Edinburgh Medical School. She was top of her class over the next few years but was not allowed to graduate because the institution is sexist.

At the start of the game users can change the way Liz looks. Throughout the game users can return to Liz's lodgings and change clothes or get new clothes made up from tailor on the Royal Mile.



The Alienist by Richard Dadd.

Non-player major characters: Professor Atticus, 60.
He is based on the painting by mad artist Richard Dadd. He is Liz's main help.

Dr Emrie
In charge of the asylum.

Inspector MacLeod, 40.
Not the brightest of policemen but loyal and a bit of an inventor. He gives Liz his special dart-firing umbrella.

Alien creature.
Shapeshifter. Trapped on Earth for milleniae.

Non-player minor characters:

Asylum Orderly with bad arm.
Workman with bad leg.
Street urchins.
Street buskers, beggars.
Various people going about their business on the Edinburgh streets.
Stall and members of the men's club.
Liz's classmates.
Shopkeepers, market stall holders.

Walkthrough (3 mins)

Turn on Playstation 3.

Load program.

A screen comes up with the title The Book of Skulls.

Click on the start button.

A 3D animation begins :

Camera pans across Courtyard of the Medical School, Edinburgh, 1873.

A young woman in a brown dress watches on as male graduates go up and receive their certificates. Noise of clapping.

Text comes up.

“1877 It is graduation day at the Medical School Edinburgh. Liz Moilette is the cleverest person in her class, outperforming her male colleagues, but yet here she sits watching, unable to receive her prize. Women have only recently been tolerated at the medical school and King’s & Queen’s College Dublin is the only university that will give a female medical student her degree. Liz has no money left and can’t afford to go to Dublin”

Male graduates continue to go up and receive their certificates

Icon of a joystick appears beside Liz Moliette.

User moves joystick on playstation controller.

Liz gets up and walks around the courtyard. Everyone she goes towards ignores her except an old man in a blue velvet frockcoat Professor Attcus. When Liz goes close to Professor Attcus a square icon appears .

The user presses the square icon on controller.

The professor hands Liz a folded note.

Liz clicks on the note with the square button.

The scrap of newspaper unfolds to reveal

“Reward for the identification of a corpse found at Greyfriars kirkyard. Please enquire to Inspector Forbes at St Leonard St police station.”

Liz moves around the courtyard but finds no more clues. She moves out of the courtyard and walks along Nicolson Street.

She turns down East Causeway Side and into St Leonard St.

She walks up to the station.

She enters.

A sergeant is at the front desk.

Liz goes up to the sergeant. He ignores her. A square icon appears

User presses the square button on controller.

Liz hands the scrap of newspaper to the sergeant.

Competition

Bayonetta and Assassin Creed are influences on the game but are different enough (more orientated to shooter games) so that they are not in competition. Heavy Rain was also an influence and the idea for the lunettes came from there.

Sources of Revenue

The game will link to a website where extra levels can be downloaded. Mercandise eg T shirts, mousemats can be purchased from this site.

The Future

Liz Molliette will become involved with a group of female doctors called the Edinburgh Seven. She will answer a new call to adventure and travel to Paris to uncover her mysterious past.