

Review

Professor Layton and the Diabolical Box

By: Adam Wells

After solving the mystery of the Curious Village, Professor Layton and his young tagalong, Luke, return. This time they are trying to uncover the secret behind the strange Diabolical Box that is said to kill any who open it. For those who have played the original, *Diabolical Box* follows essentially the same formula. Use the stylus to lead Layton and Luke around from NPC to NPC to find clues relating the overall mystery. These NPCs are, more often than not, inexplicable puzzle-addicts reluctant to divulge any information unless you help them solve some sort of brainteaser. For each puzzle you solve, you will earn a form of money called "picarats" that is essentially useless except as a score counter. The brainteasers themselves come in great variety from math to sliders to Chinese Solitaire. Players will require more than just basic mathematical skills to complete the story so parents should be advised against purchasing *Professor Layton* for elementary school gamers. When feeling less clever (or perhaps just lazy) many of the puzzles can be solved with simple trial and error, though you will earn fewer picarats for each failed attempt. For each puzzle you can buy up to 3 hints with "hint coins." These coins are hidden throughout the game in large quantities and you will likely never be at a loss. A few of the puzzles suffer from poor wording which leads to frustration when you realize that the puzzle had been asking for you to complete a really simple task.

If puzzles are your thing but you don't want to sacrifice a good story like you would with *Brain Age*, *Professor Layton* is a great way to get your fix. There are 135 puzzles in the storyline of *Diabolical Box* and an additional 18 Challenge puzzles that can be unlocked by completing certain side quests. These side quests include tea brewing, taking pictures and, my personal favorite, forcing an obese hamster to exercise. These side quests add more variety and extra gameplay to *Diabolical Box*, which is always welcome. Be forewarned, however, that the Challenge puzzles are noticeably more difficult and will most certainly require patience and dedication.

Instead of being limited to a single village, Layton and Luke explore multiple all-new areas, giving players a better sense of progress. Backgrounds are beautifully drawn while NPCs are stylistically disproportionate, sometimes having superimposed facial features. It gives sort of a contrast between truth and fiction.

The music is very much the same as in the original, providing a French sound that mixes well with the British characters. A little tactful variation might have been nice though. Most of the dialogue is text-only, but there are a few voice-over sequences, all of which are well done. Luke is still the stereotypically annoying sidekick. I feel like if I hear him say the word "posh" one more time I'll make him solve the puzzle of putting his teeth back in place.

If you're a fan of *Curious Village* and are looking to follow Layton as he continues his adventures, then *Diabolical Box* is an obvious purchase. If you haven't played the original, I would recommend it over *Diabolical Box* as it has a more memorable storyline and will explain some plot elements in the sequel that may otherwise be confusing.

