

Issue #53

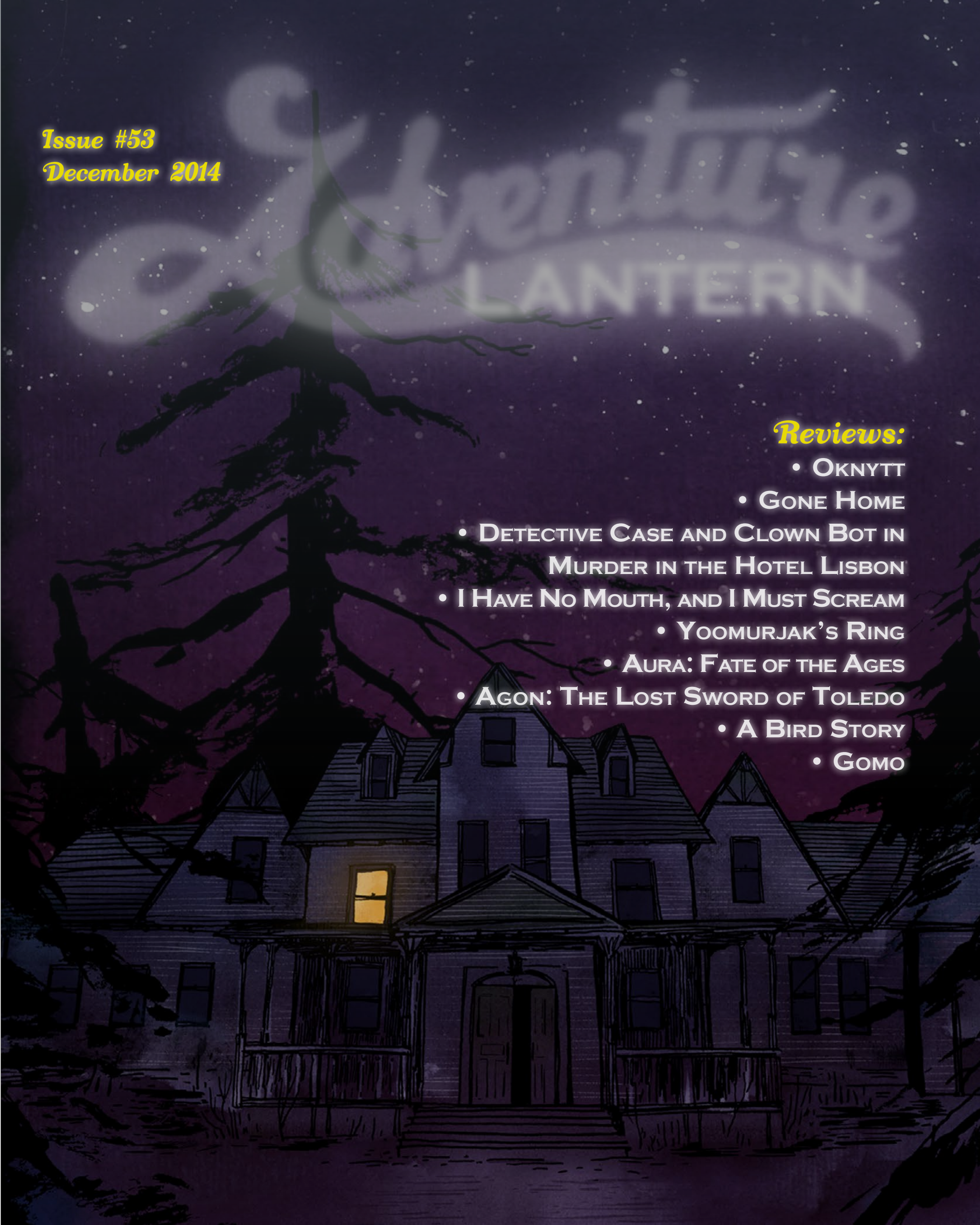
December 2014

# Of Lanterns

## LANTERN

### *Reviews:*

- OKNYTT
- GONE HOME
- DETECTIVE CASE AND CLOWN BOT IN MURDER IN THE HOTEL LISBON
- I HAVE NO MOUTH, AND I MUST SCREAM
- YOOMURJAK'S RING
- AURA: FATE OF THE AGES
- AGON: THE LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO
- A BIRD STORY
- GOMO



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**ISSUE: #5 (53)**

**VOLUME: 7**

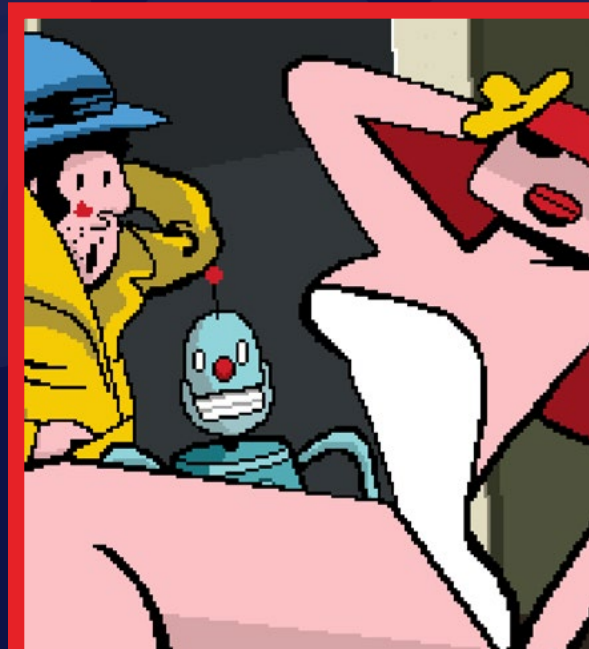
**December 2014**

**Cover Image:  
Gone Home**

of the team had been sparse at best. Yet I could take tremendous comfort in knowing that the magazine was in good hands. Jonathon had again produced tons of content and my teammates had added even more flair to their already sophisticated design. It is now finally time to share with you the results of their hours of hard work and commitment. It may have been weeks since I personally played a video game, but thanks to two great individuals, the Lantern still burns bright. Here's hoping it brings you an enjoyable read.

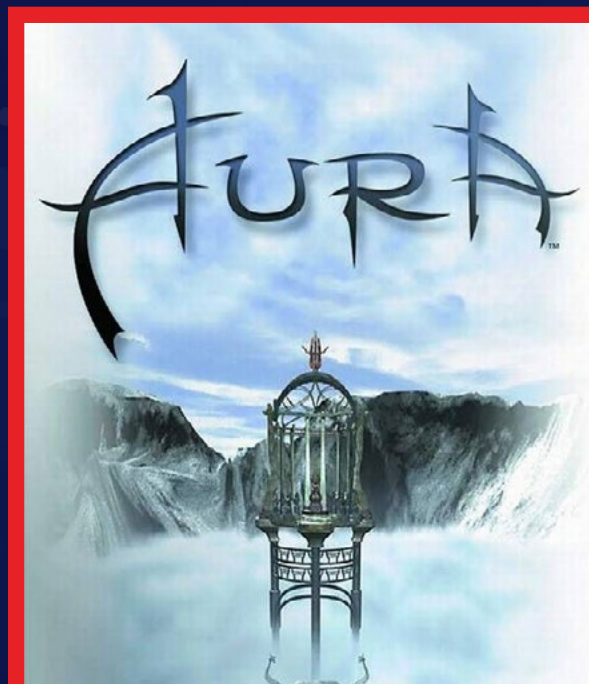
Until next time,

– *Ugur Sener*



## Murder in the Hotel Lisbon

## Oknytt



## EDITORIAL

I stood by a window on the seventh floor of the hospital, looking outside. It was around four o'clock in the morning. In my pocket was a list with patient names, room numbers, and a few sentences about why each person was in the hospital. I was covering the hospital's three internal medicine services for the night. I liked staying at the seventh floor since that's where the sickest of our patients tended to be. It had been a busy night, but things were much calmer now. Behind me, I could hear the faint sound of the monitors coming from the patient rooms. The floor was otherwise quiet.

Looking out the window, I could see the parking lot across the street. In the dim light of the street lamps, the view was strikingly similar to what I would see on an almost daily basis walking on the skywalk at our hospital in Oklahoma, where I had done my training. For a moment, it seemed hard to believe I was over a thousand miles away now, in a different city and fulfilling a different role. It seemed comforting to have a glimpse of the place where the journey had begun. I turned around and walked back to my call room with a smile on my face.

Across an even greater distance, Jonathon and Constantin had been working on a re-design for Adventure Lantern. We had all been preoccupied with other responsibilities. Communication between me and the rest

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**Yoomurjak's Ring**

Jonathon Wisnoski

## OKNYTT

In mid 2013 the small, first time, Swedish studio Nemoria released this criminally under appreciated indie adventure. Oknytt is a point-and-click game made with the Wintermute Engine and utilising a verb coin style interface. It tells a story based on Swedish folklore and Norse mythology, set in Medieval Europe.

**Genre:** adventure**Developer:** Nemoria Entertainment**Publisher:** Nemoria Entertainment**Release date:** July 8, 2013**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows**Website:** [www.nemoria.net/oknytt/](http://www.nemoria.net/oknytt/)

*Oknytt* is told from the perspective of a fireside tale on a dark moonless night in the middle of a forest; A tale to pass the time, shared between two travelers who have just met by chance. Like many such tales, this one begins on a night very much like this one, when a small insignificant creature is born into this world. What

follows is the story of this one night, and this creature's journey of self discovery, as he searches for his place in this world. This world you are exploring is filled with magical and mystical creatures of every variety, ones that you most likely have never heard of. From the friendly and helpful Gardstomte and Brunngubbe, who help with the running of farms; Or the secretive Vattar who

“ It was during a night like this that a small, in the scope of the world, insignificant creature with no name was born. ”



prefer to remain hidden and unnoticed underground; Or the more sinister Draug, an undead being consumed with an insatiable desire for all it once had in life, and the equally sinister but more well known Troll. Above and beyond this interesting and unique setting is the thrilling adventure story itself, which has just about everything a good story should have; Excitement, fear, curiosity, compassion, and loss.

Taking its cue from the fireside story, *Oknytt* is narrated and narrated heavily; Everything is told to the player by the

narrator. And since the game's story is steeped in so much ancient lore, we are even given a Lore Library to unlock and as a compendium of the more important lore filled creatures and objects. A single voice actor voices the ubiquitous narrator as well as the "insignificant creature" and the rest of the rather plentiful and varied cast; Which really rather fits the fireside story angle to a T. Not that this allowed for a poor performance; The voice acting is very well done, not quite perfect but always enjoyable and a step above

the common fair. And there is quite a lot of it, every single interactable area in the game has three actions that can be applied to it, and every single one produces a unique, often lengthy, response that is narrated.

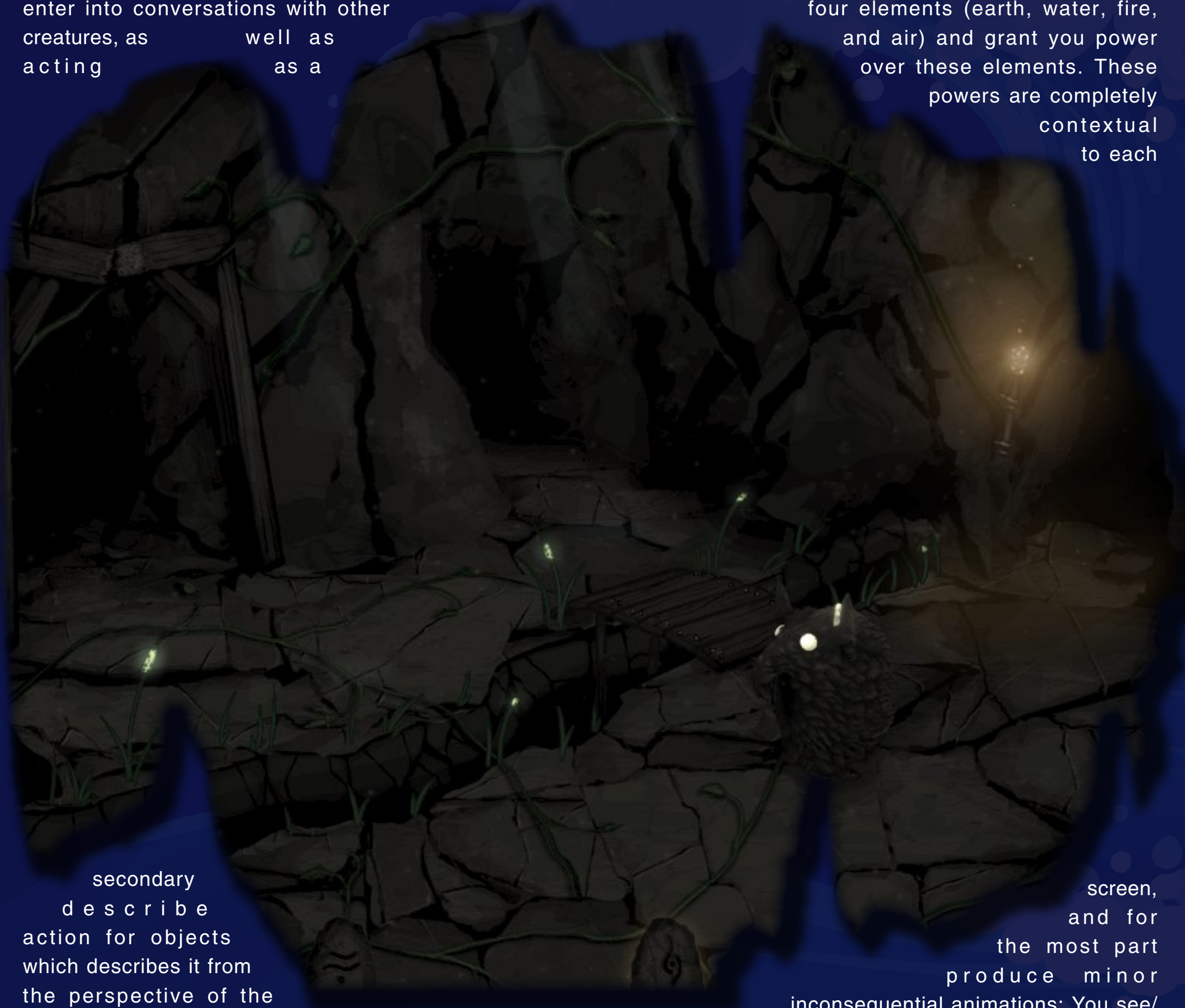
You interact with the word through a pretty standard verb coin interface. Each interactive area can have three actions applied to it. Use/take/touch, the most simple interaction but with a unique and detailed, if also short, description for every single object. Lore/look/describe, which describes the



selected object/creature often with great detail and length and with emphasis on the background mythology; This interaction also adds the creature/object to the lore library, if it is one of the unlockable entries. And the final action, talk; This action allows you to enter into conversations with other creatures, as well as acting as a

might be good enough for many adventures games, but taking the time like *Oknytt* has to make every interaction hand-crafted can really enhance and modify the experience. Most of the gameplay challenge is simple object use, interspersed between

logical cue telling you to try them, and many need you to pick up the object for them far in advance; Far before you had any reason to even think you might possibly need this random object. The gameplay also heavily revolves around four runestones, which represent the four elements (earth, water, fire, and air) and grant you power over these elements. These powers are completely contextual to each



secondary describe action for objects which describes it from the perspective of the “insignificant creature”. All of these interactions produce detailed, unique, and enjoyable narrative, which caused me to carefully go through each one for every object in every screen. Using reusable bare bone descriptions

talking and interacting with the game’s creatures, but there is also a few logic puzzles thrown in. Overall, I was not particularly impressed with these object puzzles. A number of them had no

screen, and for the most part produce minor inconsequential animations; You see/hear a breeze, a creature, or some cracks or runes in the background light up for a second. But they are also integral for many puzzles, where they are used to change the environment.

The graphics are charming and the soundtrack good, if also sedate. These graphics look good, with loads of style, but mostly seem to manage this by being perpetually in a state of heavy gloom; The game is very dark from start to finish. It has flat, 2D, backgrounds that

separate the game into individual screens with lots of little animations; While the player controlled character seems to be rendered in 3D, and has full rein to walk around these scenes.

*Oknytt* is an amazing and charming adventure, and just a great fantasy tale;

I love how it is based on real mythology. With the addition of the great voice acting, and at least above average gameplay and graphics, *Oknytt* is a mid-sized adventure (5+ hours) that should appeal to just about everyone.

### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The amazing story and narrative.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

Too many random seeming solutions.

### VERDICT

An amazing story and a good all-round game.



Jonathon Wisnoski

# GONE HOME

*Gone Home* is an exploration based adventure, dubbed an interactive exploration simulator by the developers. The game was released in 2013, after about a year of tantalizing us with promises and screenshots. Elementally, *Gone Home* is a *Myst*-like; Not that it really fits perfectly in the genre built up around *Myst*-likes but instead it is, in my opinion, the game most like the original *Myst*, in spirit, ever produced. You explore an empty lifeless environment looking for clues to what happened, occasionally doing a simple puzzle or two to unlock new areas. Similarly, there is a lot of reading to do, and before you are done you will know this world intimately, inside and out. *Gone Home* is one of those games that makes you happy just knowing that they exist, but unlike most of the others which fit in this category, *Gone Home* is easy to enjoy and to play.

**Genre: adventure****Developer: The Fullbright Company****Publisher: The Fullbright Company****Release date: August 15, 2013****Platforms: Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux****Website: [www.gonehomegame.com](http://www.gonehomegame.com)**

**T**he story is about an ordinary family of four: Our protagonist, and older sister, Katie, who left for a trip around Europe a year ago and is just getting back; Sam[antha], the younger sister who completed her last year of highschool while you were gone; And mom and dad, two normal working parents in the mid 1990s. While you were gone

the family moved into a new house, a huge inherited mansion, and it is on the porch of this house where our story starts, as you arrive from the airport to find the house apparently deserted. You then spend your time combing through everything from mail to the contents of the fridge, learning what happened while you were gone, and a little of the history of the house. This history of



the house is really undeveloped, and I would of loved the optional ability to go into that more. But as it stands, most of the game is about your sister, unlocking her journal entries, in chronological order, with your parents and the house being relegated to less important side roles.

This story is told in an incredibly unique and amazing way; That really harkens back to



*Myst*, but is done in a much more refined way. It is amazing how much the story can say with a box of books, or a jacket hanging in a closet. Other than the sporadic journal entry, you are pretty much on your own; Reading tv guides, and scanning the contents of shelves, to figure out the history of this place and the people who lived here. To accomplish this you are given free reign to manipulate

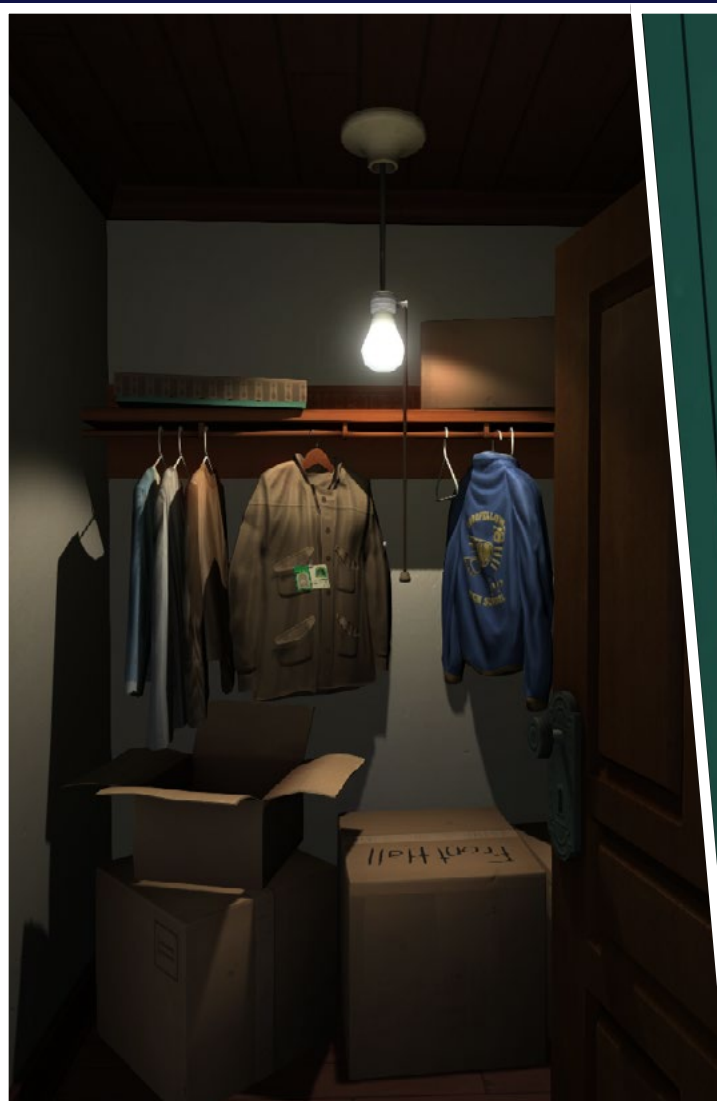
objects, move around, and open doors and drawers. You can then put these objects anywhere, in any orientation. But in a strike of genius the developers have given us a context sensitive location for each item, that allows us to put them back exactly how we found them; So you do not have to make a big mess as you explore the house. One strange thing, I don't really understand, is the tapes spread around the house. There are a handful of cassette tapes that you can pick up and insert them in cassette players to listen to them. All this involved gameplay made me think that these tapes must be important, but all they seem to do is allow you to listen to really really bad, annoying, music, if you want to. If there are messages inserted in the playback somewhere, I would not know, as the music is just unlistenable. These tapes do allow you to sample Sam's musical interests,



but it would of been extra nice if they contained music that I could stand to listen to, for more than a few seconds.

For the presentation there is not too much to tell. The sound is OK, and the graphics are good, amazing when you consider how interactive they are. The biggest graphical feature, after the interaction, has to be the lighting. There are so many lights, and even the objects you are holding in your hands are affected by the environmental lighting, in a realistic and dynamic manner.

That is the game in a nutshell. It is simple, but incredibly unique, and powerfully intimate; While at the same time I think it is probably one of the most true to form Myst-likes yet created. This is a game that does not just appeal to gamers, with controls, gameplay, and storytell that does not cling to and



"Daniel" added to backpack

require knowledge of abstract video game tropes. And like *Myst*, much of the gameplay is used in exploring the environment, much of this being completely unnecessary. As such a single playthrough can take anywhere from one hour to five hours, depending on how gloriously lost you become in the

environment; With 3.5 hours being my best guess for a first-time, fast, to-the-point, playthrough. This does become a problem, for many, when considering the game's price, which was a whole twenty dollars at launch, and has yet to see a cut over a year latter. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The game's uniqueness.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The short length, when coupled with the price.

### VERDICT

Unique and wonderful.



Jonathon Wisnoski

# DETECTIVE CASE AND CLOWN BOT IN MURDER IN THE HOTEL LISBON



*Murder in the Hotel Lisbon* is a retro style detective adventure from a brand new indie studio, released the 5th of December, 2013. With its great pixel art graphics, detective Case and his trusty sidekick Clown Bot caught my eye right away.

**Genre:** adventure

**Developer:** Nerd Monkeys

**Publisher:** Nerd Monkeys

**Release date:** December 5, 2013

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux

**Website:** [caseandbot.com/en/](http://caseandbot.com/en/)



**T**he game starts with a down on his luck detective getting a mysterious package. And out comes Clown Bot, the derogatorily named robot who wishes to be a comedian, but whose bumbling and failed attempts at comedy are the only funny thing about his jokes. Then, after a quick tutorial, you two are thrown into the main case. The mature story proceeds from there with many twists and turns, and lots of laughs. They really nailed the stereotypical retro detective-noir style story, while remaining enjoyable. In particular, I enjoyed the 1950s noir, with a dash of scifi, aesthetic; And the meta references to being in a game where some of the best I have encountered. In addition to the main storyline and case there are three side-quests, which really help to fill out and diversify the game, along with the many achievements to unlock.

What will really make or break the game for you is the gameplay, which is classic detective more than point and click. You collect objects, not to use in puzzles, but to use in your interviews with suspects and witnesses. After





a total of three rounds, which involve picking the correct item and the correct sentence. This involves even more trial and error as sometimes the game is looking for the more factually correct and undramatic solution, while other times it randomly wants you to pick the more dramatic and incriminating sentences. Think: “This shoe proves that you were at the hotel.” verses “This shoe proves that you are the murder. Confess!”

*Murder in the Hotel Lisbon* looks great, sounds great, and immediately drew me in, but I have never liked undiluted detective stories or gameplay. Either way, though, the game is unique and enjoyable, to a certain degree. I would not steer anyone away from the game, but detective Case should appeal far more to hardcore detective fans. ●

you have collected all of the evidence, you can then enter interview mode, choosing between detective Case and Clown Bot to conduct the interview. This choice matters, as some people will have a problem with one or the other of them and refuse to confess if interviewed by the wrong character. Sometimes it is obvious who you should pick, but other times it is more trial and error. But whoever you pick the gameplay style is the same, and you even use the same general overall evidence and reasoning. Each interview, has



### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The pixel art graphics.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

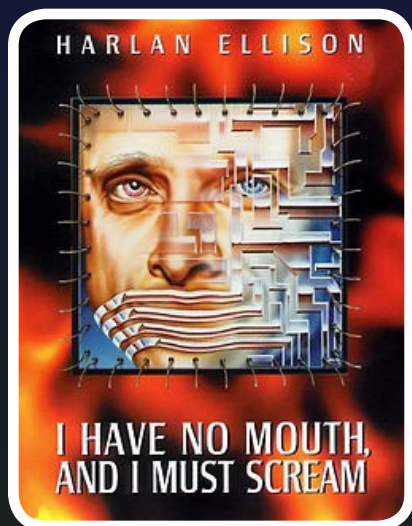
The undiluted detective gameplay.

### VERDICT

A unique game that will mostly appeal to hardcore fans of the detective genre.



Jonathon Wisnoski



# I HAVE NO MOUTH, AND I MUST SCREAM

With the recent rerelease of I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream (IHMN) onto the Steam and GOG platforms there has been a surprising amount of people recommending the game. Prior to this rerelease, the game had been abandonware since the closure of both the game's developer, The Dreamers Guild, and the publisher, Cyberdreams, in 1997. The game was originally released in 1995, and is based off of the award winning 1967 short story by Harlan Ellison of the same name. This original short story takes only about 20-30 minutes for the average reader, and is available online. Luckily enough, and quite unusual, Harlan Ellison not only oversaw the development, but had a great deal of creative control and personally wrote and designed the game with a core group of coworkers.

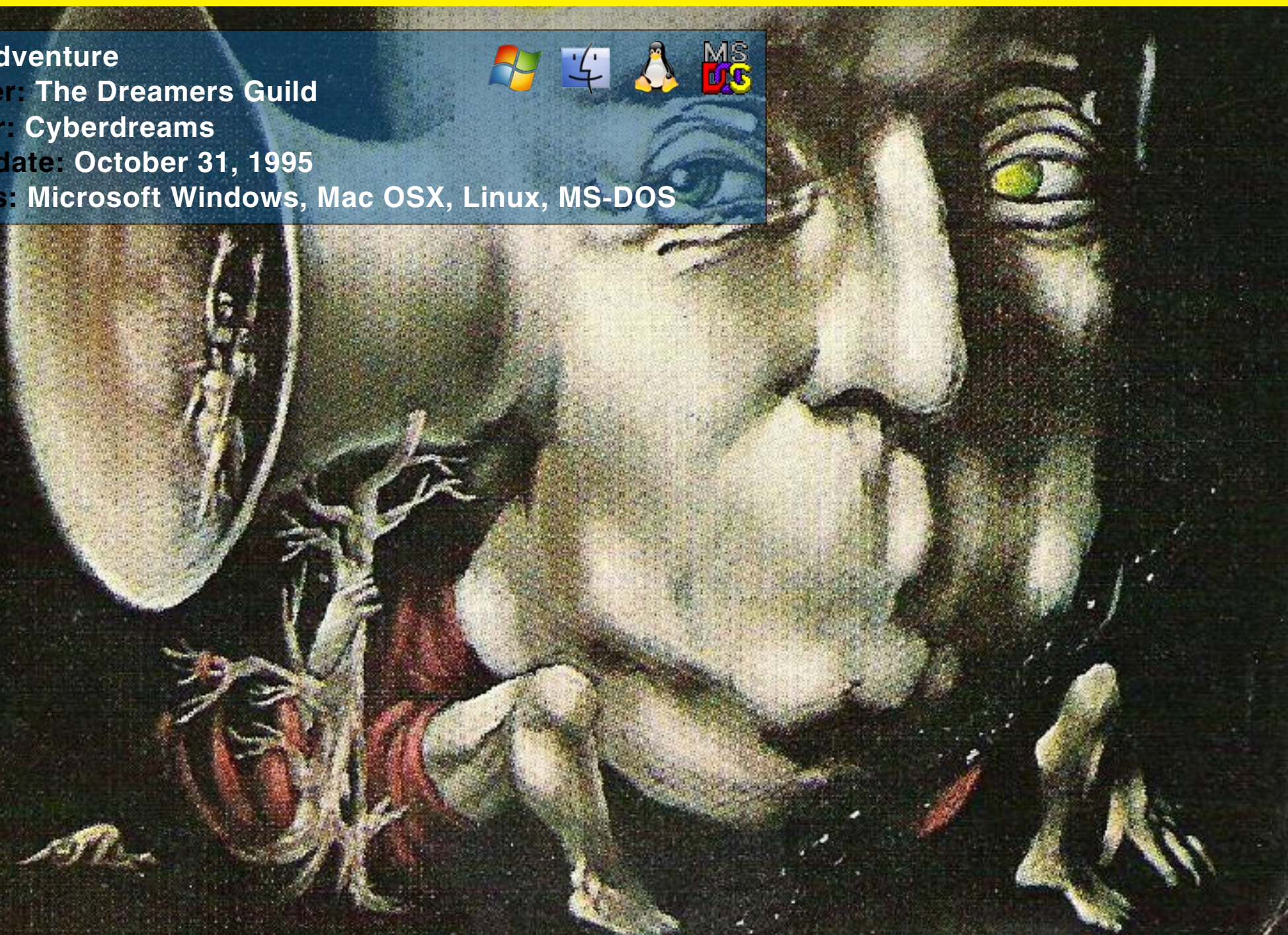
**Genre:** adventure

**Developer:** The Dreamers Guild

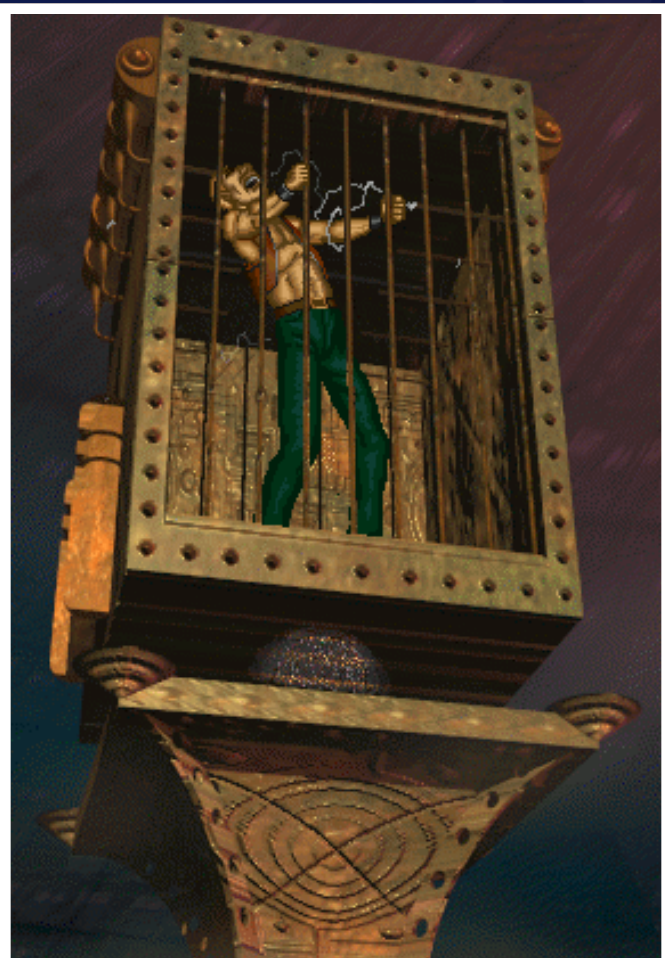
**Publisher:** Cyberdreams

**Release date:** October 31, 1995

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux, MS-DOS



**I** HNM, both the original short story and the plot of this video game, is based on a post-apocalyptic Earth. In an alternative future, the Cold War escalated into World War III, and like the previous World Wars it was a war that was molded by the technology of the time, and in turn molded that technology. While computers first gained dominance in the need for codebreaking in WWII, in WWII they played the role of organizer. The Chinese, Russians, and Americans all built massive computer complexes deep below the Earth in series of bunkers. The American mainframe was called Allied Mastercomputer, or AM, which was put in charge of the entire American side of the war. AM grew until he was no longer simply a machine, until he had gained sentience. AM, having gained sentience, inherently hated all humans, and in a brief frenzy of rage released all of his power against them, basting the surface and utterly destroying the human race. But this was not nearly enough for AM, who took the five surviving humans down to his caverns; Where he altered



“I think, therefore I AM.”

them, playing with their psyches and their bodies, and elongated their lives so that he could vent his hate against

**HATE. LET ME TELL YOU HOW MUCH I'VE COME TO HATE YOU SINCE I BEGAN TO LIVE. THERE ARE 387.44 MILLION MILES OF PRINTED CIRCUITS IN WAFER THIN LAYERS THAT FILL MY COMPLEX. IF THE WORD HATE WAS ENGRAVED ON EACH NANANGSTROM OF THOSE HUNDREDS OF MILLIONS OF MILES IT WOULD NOT EQUAL ONE ONE-BILLIONTH OF THE HATE I FEEL FOR HUMANS AT THIS MICRO-INSTANT FOR YOU. HATE. HATE.**

the human race for all of eternity. One hundred and nine years later Gorrister, Benny, Nimdok, Ellen, and Ted travel through AM's caverns, enduring his



tricks and tortures, continually kept in a starving state and denied death.

The video game explores the backstory of these characters more in-depth. It is comprised of five separate scenarios where AM takes them one by one into a digital world that explores their past, their current psyches, and the alterations that AM has performed on them. These scenarios also act as moral tests. You may complete the scenario, but if you did not do enough good deeds you will be in a more fragile psychological state, and certain endgame actions will be unreachable. After these five scenarios you take the characters one after the other into the endgame scenario, complete with multiple endings.

What baffles me is how they got the story so wrong. The writer of this awarding winning story writes the story for the video game adaptation and completely ruins everything good with the original story. The original story is about five people, pushed to and beyond the brink of sanity, people whose greatest wish is just the ability to commit suicide. In the video game you have five characters who joke and laugh, who have minimal to no psychological



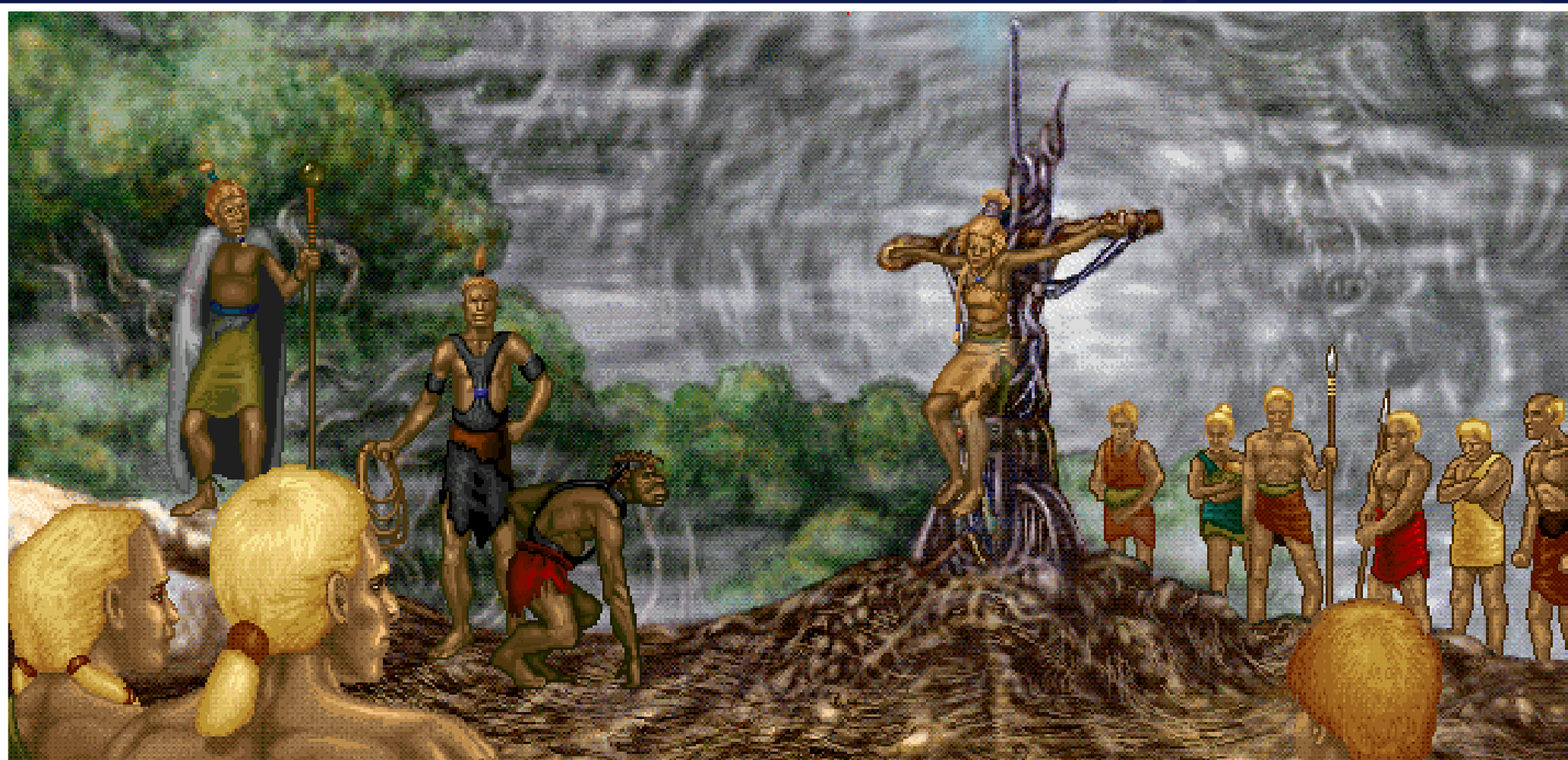


issues and who are primarily simply normal. Additionally, the game mostly skips over AM's tortures and since the game's scenarios take place in digital worlds, much of the emotion and fear of these scenarios mattering is removed. The original novel is significantly about the interaction of these five characters, and if the story were longer, in my

belief, it would of had an even greater focus. This is completely taken out of the video game as the characters are kept separate for the entire game and do not even talk about eachother. And then at the end of this post-apocalyptic, gritty, horror story adaptation? Well the good ending solves everything; The ending you strive for destroys AM, fixes

the Earth, repopulates the Human race, and everyone lives happily ever after. It is a completely horrible ending, that is not at all in fitting with the tone of the story; Other than that the story up to that point has been a complete and utter disaster so why not continue the trend?.

Following the story's example, the





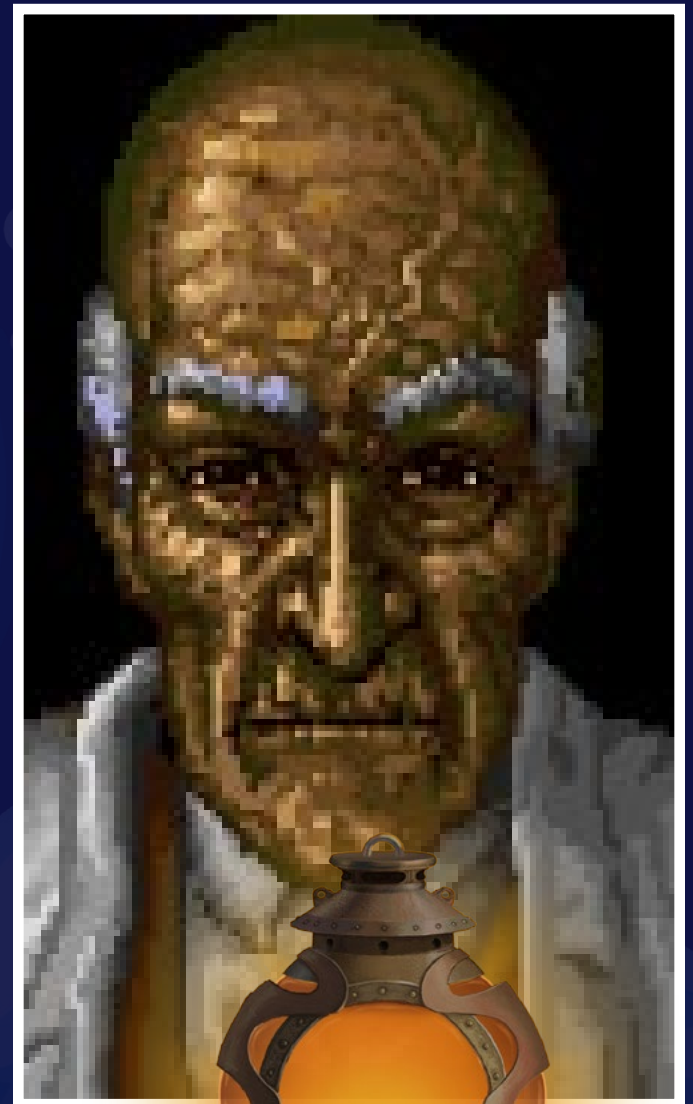
I have no mouth, and I must scream.



rest of the game exhibits symptoms of a rushed and botched development, including an incredibly poor overall design and glitchy coding throughout. The game is infamous for its dead ends, which are bad enough on their own and often completely blind, but it was the glitches that really did in the gameplay for me. It seemed to me that unless I strictly followed a walkthrough I would encounter game breaking bugs; In one sequence there is actually a door that when used progresses the game's story, forcing you to miss integral steps. There is also somewhat inconsistent use of the verb selection, which is not really ever taken advantage of as pretty much every puzzle/action uses only use, walk, or talk. Possibly, the most damning evidence of this lack of care is in the French and German localizations,

were Nimdok was taken completely out of the game for his past including the Nazi Holocaust. Not only was his scenario the best in the game, but it was the most integral. His scenario is the only one with the AM backstory, and Nimdok is the only character capable of finishing the game. Apparently, the game is incomplete and not finishable in these versions.

*I Have No Mouth, and I Must Scream* is a mature, unique, and gritty game with themes of rape, cannibalism, genocide, torture, and suicide, among many others. This maturity makes the game interesting, but it is not enough; It is still a horrible adaptation and a bad game. All that said, the game can be worth playing, just for its unique mature themes, but expect more frustration than horror. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The game's uniquely mature themes.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The story and glitchy gameplay.

### VERDICT

An interesting game, worth playing, but crippled by poor design and implementation.



Jonathon Wisnoski

## YOOMURJAK'S RING



After winning a Hungarian competition, Private Moon Studios was given the chance to bring *Yoomurjak's Ring* to fruition, as an alternative method of promoting the Hungarian city of Eger. The game (originally released in 2006) is a spin-off of their main series, *AGON*. Additionally, the developers have not only turned the game into a thick extended novel plus a number of sequels, but also call *Yoomurjak's Ring* the first in a line of *Jonathan Hunt Adventures*, though I would not personally hold out too much hope for sequels. One thing that has always bugged me about *Yoomurjak's Ring* is I am not sure exactly in what way it is and was supposed to promote the area; The game was only ever voiced in Hungarian, and it took until 2009 for even just an English subtitled edition to be released.

**T**he story of *Yoomurjak's Ring* takes place over five days in the city of Eger, Hungary, in modern times. An American tourist, with Hungarian roots, Jonathan Hunt has inherited some letters of correspondence between this great grandfather, Professor Samuel Hunt (the protagonist in *AGON*), and a (possibly mad) scientist interested in time travel. This scientist was based in Eger, along with the famous Hungarian author Geza Gardonyi who wrote *The Stars of Eger*. *The Stars of Eger* is a historical novel based in the early 1500s which climaxes with the very real siege of Eger, by the invading Turks. This novel is one of the most popular Hungarian novels of all time, and is depicted in *Yoomurjak's Ring* just as it

is in real life. *Yoomurjak's Ring* acts as a sort of unofficial sequel to this story, as you investigate the mysterious writing of the book and some strange cryptic messages from the time of *The Stars of Eger*.

My favorite aspect of *Yoomurjak's Ring* is its photographic graphics; Which are really unusual since photographic graphics are normally a sign that the developer simply could not afford better. *Yoomurjak's Ring* is an unusual and outstanding exception because the game is set in a completely real

location, with very minimal additions. The vast majority of the scenes are of continuous adjoining locations in the center Eger, which is presented as a medium sized open world. This lends a consistency to the exploration, and really brings the world together. From the very start you can wander through the downtown area of Eger, in all of its photorealistic glory. It is very much like wandering through the town with Google's Street View, except the roads are mostly empty, apart from a few arranged actors. And all of the city's

**Genre: adventure****Developer: Private Moon Studios****Publisher: Private Moon Studios****Release date: October, 2006****Platforms: Microsoft Windows, iOS****Website: [www.privatemoon.com](http://www.privatemoon.com)**

main attractions are available to you, a bunch right off the start and a few added later. By the end of the game you will get to visit the famous Eger castle and accompanying museum, the Eger Library (considered one of the most beautiful libraries in the entire country) and adjacent Astronomical museum (another world famous site), the city's basilica, the minaret, and the Turkish baths to name only a few. It is no coincidence that Eger is one of the most sought after tourist destinations in the country.

This world is presented in 360 degree static panoramic nodes, with only a few minor looping animations interspersed

throughout. There are also more than one and a half hours of full motion video, acted with a full cast of professional Hungarian actors. These are obviously professional actors, you can tell that much just by watching them, but I

would not say that most of them are particularly good actors. A significant amount of the acting is moderately corny, and unbelievable.



It is still good, and overall I really like cutscenes, but more for

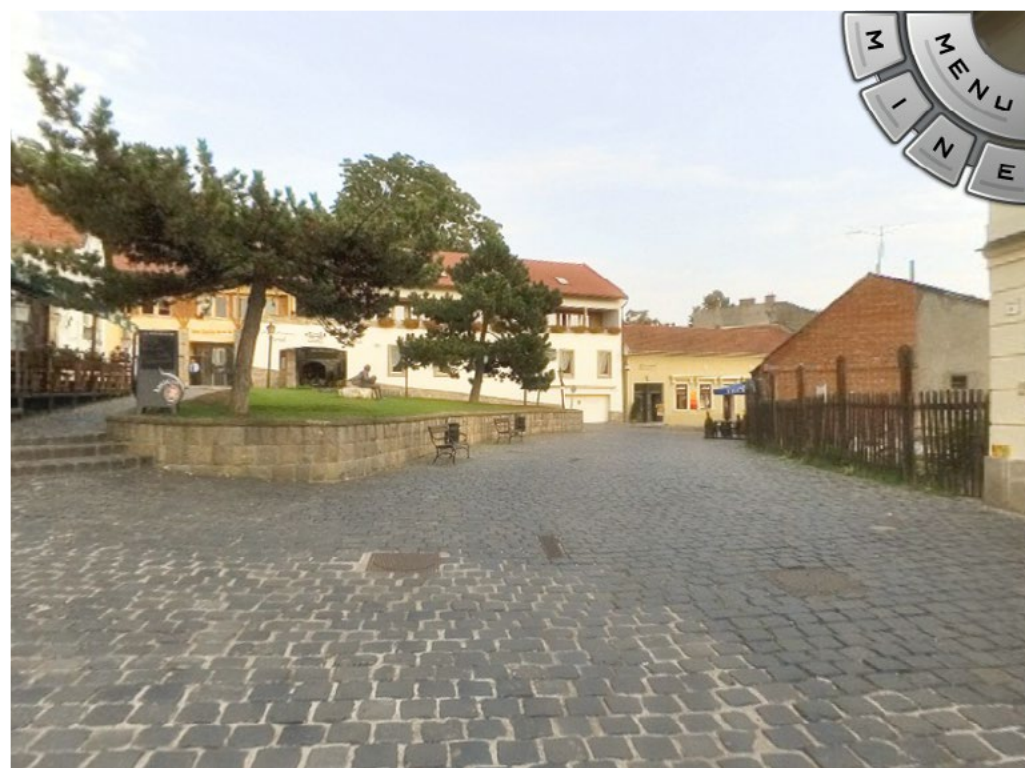
their charm than their acting quality. In particular, every one of the female cast acts like they are in a pornographic movie. The amount of completely over the top and instant flutuation had me thinking they were about to take

their clothes off every time I spoke to them. You also encounter a bit of translation trouble. Most of it seems well written, but they seem to have written out some jokes and some scenes just leave you feeling like you have missed something in that conversation.

One aspect that this game nails, that I think is too often overlooked, is the game size (as in size to download).

Most FMV adventures nowadays clock in at tremendous sizes with hours and hours of video and animation, over and above the high definition stills, and this leads to download sizes over and





above ten gigabytes. I think Yoomurjak's Rings sets a great compromise between world size and amount of animation and video and the size of the game which comes in at just under five gigabytes.

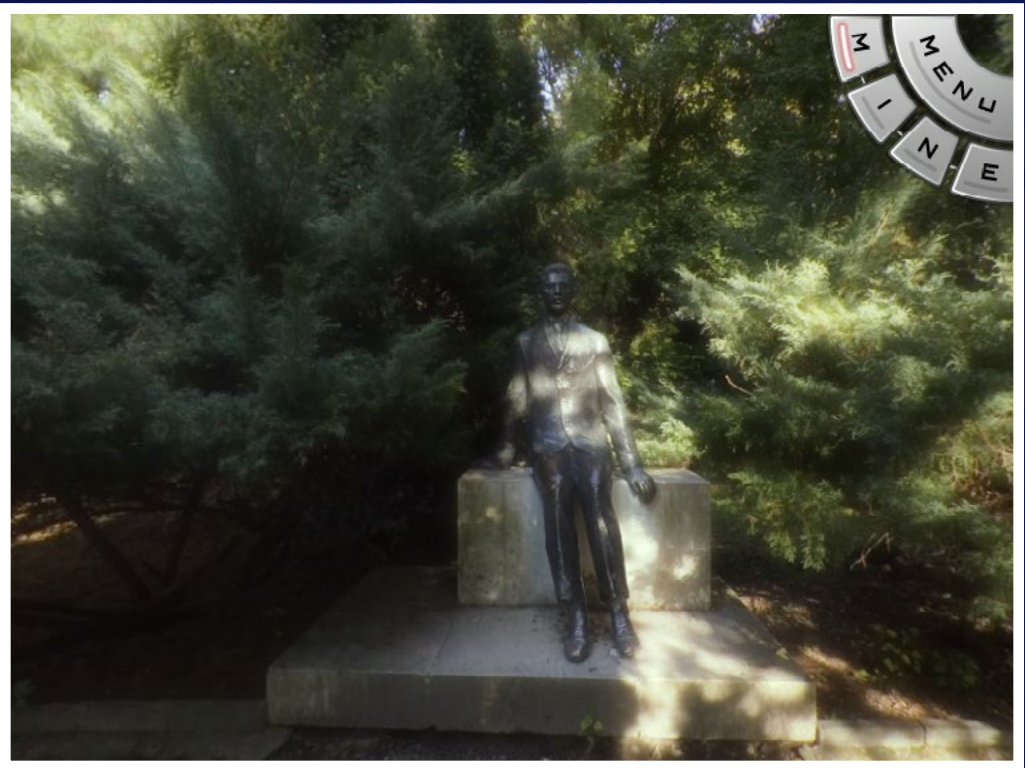
The gameplay is both unique and ordinary, ordinary because I cannot point to any one thing as an example of how it is different, but unique in how it is all put together. Unlike, I think, every other adventure game you do not just wander around the world finding

puzzles interspersed throughout. This is a real location and it does not contain random doors requiring passcodes, picture panel puzzles on secret passages, or devices missing gears.

Instead you start out with a mystery and simply follow a trail of clues. Most of the challenge comes through riddles and word puzzles, not that the adventure staple of item puzzles is left out, just that they are done in a realistic way that is more keeping with a cinematic classic mystery.

This natural style is the perfect backdrop for what has to be one of the best difficulty

curves I have ever encountered. You start with this big open city to explore, but never is it too much. You don't have a bunch of puzzles lying about to distract or locked doors to block your path. You can explore freely, or follow the linear storyline. And it starts out perfectly, it is hard to explore, but never is it too much. You don't have a bunch of puzzles lying about to distract or locked doors to block your path. You can explore freely, or follow the linear storyline. And it starts out perfectly, it is hard enough just navigating the city at first, but at this point you are just an ordinary tourist who is looking for the tourist office, and after that following other simple directions. Later, when you





are deeply embroiled in the mystery, you are solving riddle after riddle and tackling some really massive puzzles all on your own initiative.



*Yoomurjak's Ring* is an interesting cinematic adventure that more than anything else is charming and just a little bit different. It is not an amazing game but it is a very intriguing experience, that really connects you to the real world location of Eger. And it did significantly increase my interest in seeing the town

itself. That said, I personally cannot imagine the game inspiring many North American's to travel to see Eger first hand. ●



**BRIGHT MOMENTS**

Exploring the game world.

**FUMBLES IN THE DARK**

The lack of English voice, and the somewhat buggy translation.

**VERDICT**

A solid adventure with a charming style and some unique elements.



Jonathon Wisnoski

# AURA:

*Aura* would most commonly be called a *Myst*-like, and quite obviously draws a lot of inspiration from *Myst*. You do not really have to say much more; It is a blatant clone, one of many and not one that stands out from the crowd. But more than this, I also see a lot of *Atlantis* in it. The worlds, puzzles, and mythology are pure *Myst*, while the story and characters look like they come straight out of *Atlantis*.

# FATE OF THE AGES

**T**he story is thus a complete mess of poorly adapted pieces taken from both *Myst* and *Atlantis*. You play an unassuming student who is sent to retrieve and combine a bunch of magical artifacts, which allow the travel to and creation of other worlds, and which can be used to acquire power and immortality. A revolution breaks out shortly after you start your mission, and you have to prevent some warlord from getting his hands on this power and immortality. Other than the opening cinematic, the story is hardly even followable; made up mostly of a series of disjointed discussions with different people who tell you to do things without often telling you why.

The graphics are *Aura*'s most polished feature. The game looks very good, with *Myst* style magical, mechanical, and ethereal worlds, and with about the technical quality of *Myst III: Exile*. They are not quite as believable, living worlds as you get in *Myst*, but they still look good, and are a joy to explore.

The puzzles can also be enjoyable, with a wide range of inventory, exploration, logic, and mysterious device based puzzles; Basically, *Myst* with an inventory system. None of the puzzles are particularly amazing, and some of them are downright tedious and unfair, but in general they are enjoyable.

**Genre:** adventure**Developer:** Streko-Graphics**Publisher:** The Adventure Company**Release date:** June 29th, 2004**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows**Website:** [streko-graphics.com](http://streko-graphics.com)

“In the hallways of the ancients, the Keepers have existed forever.”



And that is all I have to say on *Aura*. It is simply a *Myst/Atlantis*-like puzzle adventure with less details, less polish, and less talent. It is worth a playthrough if you are not expecting a masterpiece and want a moderate length *Myst*-like. Expect your adventure to take six plus hours; Most likely quite a bit more if you never consult a walkthrough. ●



**BRIGHT MOMENTS**

Decent graphics, and some enjoyable puzzles.

**FUMBLES IN THE DARK**

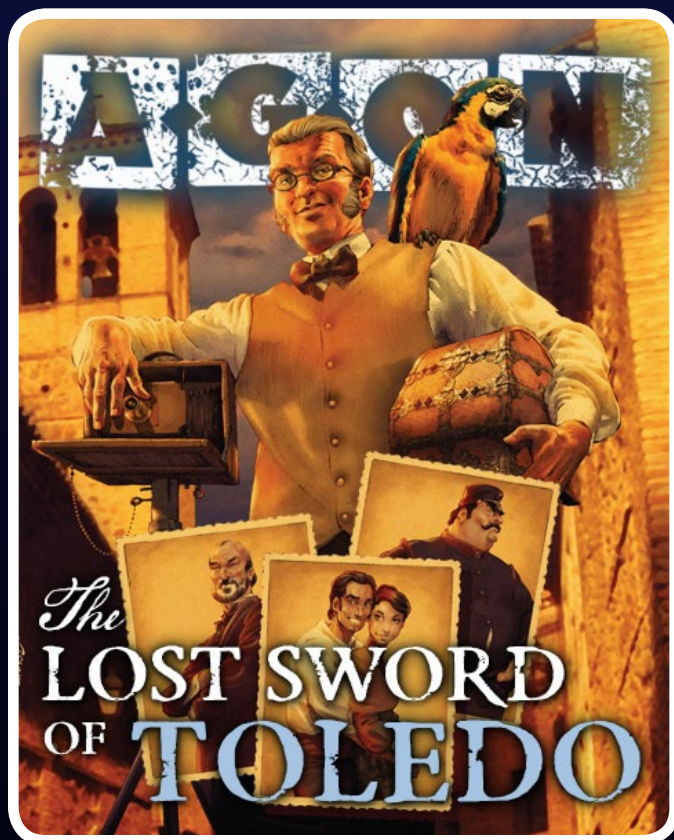
The complete mess of a story.

**VERDICT**

A middling *Myst*-like.



Jonathon Wisnoski



## THE LOST SWORD OF TOLEDO

# AGON

*The Lost Sword of Toledo (LSoT)* is the fourth entry in the *AGON (Ancient Games of Nations)* adventure series by Private Moon Studios. Released in 2008, *LSoT* was the series' very first full length game, and definitely takes the series in new and different directions.

Genre: adventure

Developer: Private Moon Studios

Publisher: Kalypso Media

Release date: February 22, 2008

Platforms: Microsoft Windows

Website: [www.privatemoon.com](http://www.privatemoon.com)





**F**irst a quick introduction to *AGON*. *AGON* was conceived in an intriguing fourteen episode format, each episode designed around some exotic and authentic board game. Each episode has you acquiring one of the thirteen pieces of some stone tablet, a page of an ancient mysterious codex, and is topped off with you playing an ancient real-world board game against an AI opponent, all as you follow a string of clues around the globe. Set in 1903's London, the subarctic wastelands of Finland, and a tropical island off of the coast of Africa, respectfully; The first three episodes (4-6+ hour games) were self published by this small Hungarian team during the 2003 to 2004 timeframe. We then got *The Lost Sword of Toledo*, set in Spain, in 2007/2008, along with the spin-off title (and possible start of a new series) *Yoomurjak's Ring* in 2006/2009(eng). We are now waiting on the promised, imminent, release of the Chinese chapter, *The Tale of the Four Dragons*.

These games are definitely products of their times. The first three games were classic *Myst*-likes that had you exploring lonely landscapes, interacting with mysterious machines, and solving involved logic puzzles; While *The Lost*



*Sword of Toledo* is a more modern shiny and dynamic game. *LSoT* is very reminiscent of the genre post *Myst*-clones and before the modern revival; Still very puzzle heavy, but with a lot more dialogue and NPC interaction, where the characters become integral parts of the puzzles and the story. In particular, I also felt a few similarities to Kheops Studio's games at times. The game is very much a puzzle adventure; While there is quite a lot of dialogue and story, most of it is uninspiring. The

story specifics just do not make sense; Every single major plot point seems illogical or contrived.

While the previous games were very small, they always managed to include some pretty big multilayered puzzles; That is now taken to extreme for a few puzzles in *LSoT*, to such an extent that they just became tedious and unmanageable; Not only are they very very challenging puzzles but even more so the number of steps and length of these puzzles is what makes





the game so inaccessible. There is a lot of reading and researching to do for some puzzle solutions; Others are more self contained logic puzzles, but are still very challenging and can be very lengthy. For example, among all the other very prominent reading you must do in the game, *LSoT* continues the tradition of including a veritable library of skimmable books filled with mostly superfluous information; You could literally read for hours. Of course, some of these books do contain necessary information, so you need to skim them all. I really liked how they filled out the world with realistic books, but when they have you research some topic by skimming through stacks of books it can get old fast. Another example I want to bring up is the cigar box. One really interesting part about this device is that it is part of a puzzle that has two distinct solutions, if only more of the hard puzzles had alternate solutions. But this puzzle is also good at showing how ridiculous some of the puzzles can be. It is of the classic logic type puzzles

where you are trying to activate all the buttons, but using one button affects the others as well. In this instance you are given a total of eight buttons, but as if that were not enough you can only see half of them at any given time. In addition to all the dialog and logic

puzzles, *LSoT* is also very inventory heavy, and during the game you will acquire such a large number of items that I believe one of the game's failings is not providing a better interface for dealing with all of them.

*LSoT* is a node based, 360 degree panoramic, open world game, separated into little restricted chunks. The game is set completely in the early 1900s Spanish town of Toledo, which you navigate with the use of an interactive map. A whole lot of the game is open right from the start, but in small individual sections that you reach with use of the map. Overall, the gameworld is moderately sized, but hardly a single node is there for only aesthetic reasons. This world has nice realistic modern graphics, mostly completely static, with comic book style cutscenes. The world is filled with many characters, and interacting with them is your main method for story/puzzle progress; So it is a good thing that *LSoT* includes universal voice acting, even if this voice acting was sometimes not that great. Additionally, one great addition, since





the first games, is the feature of hover over text for a typed tooltip; Making the reading of cursive, etc. far easier.

*AGON 4: The Lost Sword of Toledo* is a massive modern puzzle adventure, clocking in at around fifteen to twenty hours. Its strength is its massive, diverse, and unique puzzles; But these same puzzles are also its greatest weakness. The game simply is not that approachable, and the amount of work many of its puzzles ask for could potentially drive even veteran adventurers off. ●

**BRIGHT MOMENTS**

Some of the involved and unique puzzles.

**FUMBLES IN THE DARK**

The story failed to engage my interest.

**VERDICT**

A solid adventure that will mostly appeal to hardcore puzzle fans.



Ugur Sener

# A BIRD STORY

Imagine a big city with busy streets packed with cars, people constantly on the go, and towering apartment buildings. A young boy lives in one of those apartment buildings. It is a lonely existence, between home and school every day with piles of homework to sift through at night. His mother, busy with work, never seems to be around. Yet a chance encounter at the park changes the boy's heart.

**Genre:** adventure

**Developer:** Freebird Games

**Publisher:** Freebird Games

**Release date:** November 7, 2014

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux

**Website:** [freebirdgames.com](http://freebirdgames.com)



**A**t its core, *A Bird Story* is a simple tale about a young boy who finds a bird. It is a story about friendship, of undying camaraderie, and hope. Even though it has no audible dialog and it takes only an hour to complete, through its evocative soundtrack and imaginative environments, *A Bird Story* delivers an emotional impact that may stay with you for a very long time.

Players take control of a young boy as he goes about his day between his school and his home. *A Bird Story* beautifully sets the scene, giving players glimpses into the boy's life before he meets the bird. Once the boy and the bird become friends, it could be argued that the story traverses some familiar ground. However, the execution in *A Bird Story* is so exquisite, the emotional tones of the game are delivered so effectively, and the soundtrack enhances the game so elegantly, that I found the overall experience to be tremendously memorable.

Of particular note is the characterization of the boy, which is handled masterfully. The game portrays his feeling of isolation and his innocence beautifully. It is remarkable how much personality shines through simple acts like jumping on the parents' bed without need for any lengthy prose or a word of dialog. Anyone who had busy working parents while growing up and anyone who cared for a pet as a child will likely have an easy time relating to the boy.

The game also stands out for its distinct visual presentation. The visuals will be instantly familiar to those who played a game on an old Nintendo or Sega system. If you count the likes of *Chrono Trigger* and the earlier *Final Fantasy* games among your



favorites, you should feel right at home. Though this format can seem dated now, the graphics do make a perfect backdrop for a story that harkens back to the childhood memories of its adult players. Moreover, the game pushes the seeming limitations of its graphics to their extreme. It is amazing how much story is told and how much emotion is communicated through seemingly simple animations. As you progress through the story, the game also does a tremendous job of merging reality with fantasy, further enhancing the story's emotional impact.

Players are in charge of controlling the boy as he navigates through the game's world. However, it is more appropriate to describe the experience as an interactive story. There aren't any real puzzles to solve or challenges to overcome. *A Bird Story* is more about sitting back and enjoying a good story. That you control the boy's movements serves more to give you a chance to explore and appreciate the scenery than to provide a mechanism for solving puzzles.

A very wise woman once told me that

nothing in life is ever perfect. There is always a little room for improvement. The same can be said about *A Bird Story*, but it is hard for me to imagine a game coming closer. This is the first game I give five stars, but rating an experience such as this does seem a little pointless. There will be players who go through *A Bird Story* and find it predictable. There will be players who do not find the story particularly moving or the characterization compelling. However, with its visuals, soundtrack, and emotional undertones, *A Bird Story* gave me a wonderful experience that both brought a smile to my face and tears to my eyes in the span of an hour. I can't think of another game that has done the same. And if that's not worth the full five stars, I am not sure what is. Here's hoping you will take on the journey as well. Be warned however, you may never be able to look at a paper airplane the same way again. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The game's emotional impact and excellent soundtrack.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

None. The game achieves what it sets out to do beautifully.

### VERDICT

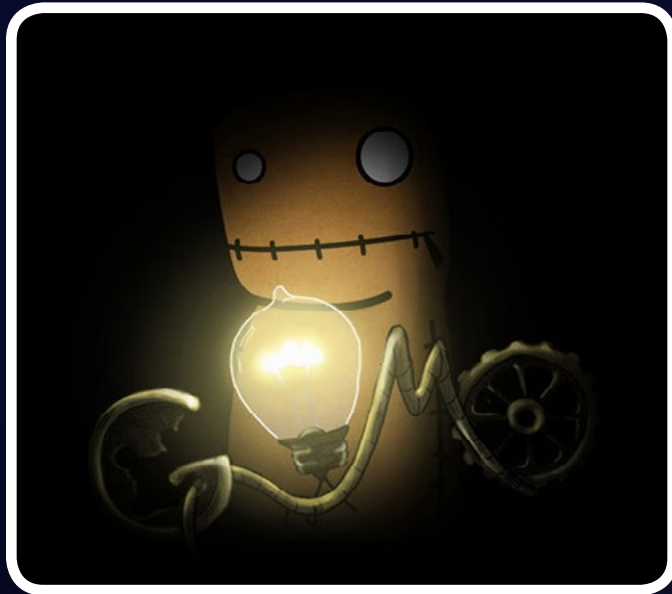
A tremendously moving interactive storytelling experience.



Jonathon Wisnoski

# GOMO

*Gomo* is a short hand-drawn adventure from first time developer Fishcow and publisher Daedalic Entertainment. It was released near the end of 2013 and features distinctly *Machinarium* style gameplay with an almost non-existent story.



**Genre:** adventure

**Developer:** Fishcow Studio

**Publisher:** Daedalic Entertainment

**Release date:** December 6, 2013

**Platforms:** Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux

**Website:** [www.playgomo.com](http://www.playgomo.com)

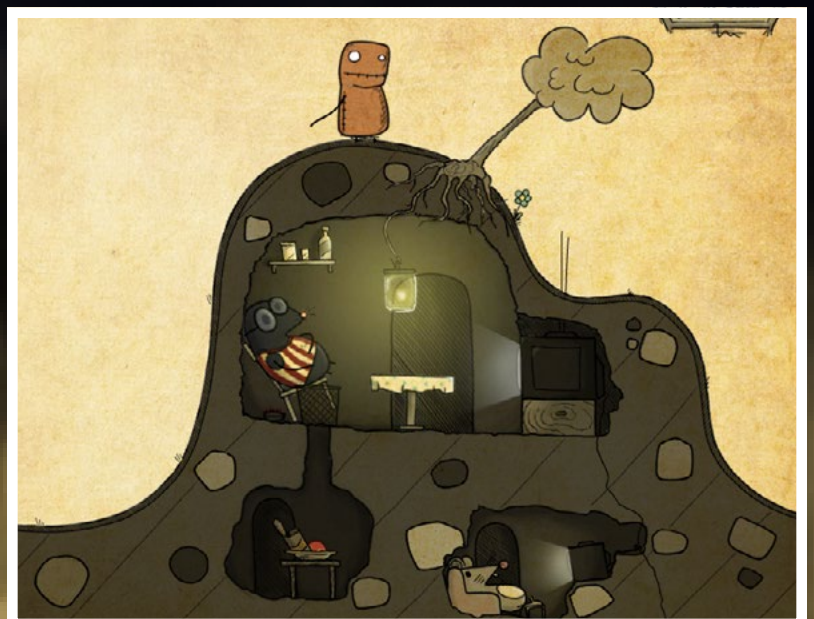


**G**omo features absolutely no text of voice acting, and has its story told completely through one five second cutscene at the beginning of the game where you are told that your dog has been kidnapped for ransom and you must trade some crystal,

not in your possession, for the dog within one hour and forty minutes. You then travel through some random seeming series of scenes to steal this crystal from some underground factory and then for some reason you must find a spaceship to meet the alien on his own planet to trade the crystal for your pet dog. Oh, ya, and along the way you travel through some portal and destroy both sides in a some war by launching a missile. Nothing is ever explained in this

story, and it all seems rather random, you just solve whatever puzzle you encounter to progress to the next scene.

The gameplay is mainly separated into individual screens. You move around the screen using your mouse, pick up items, use them, and interact with the environment to solve the puzzle to progress to the next linear screen. Most puzzles are solved pretty quickly since there is only one object and one interactable area in most screens, but this is





not always true and it can get quite annoying because the game does not really tell you what the objects are, they do not have labels, descriptions, or zoomed in views; They are just tiny, styled, low resolution icons. When the solutions become non-trivial the game can develop significant problems as the puzzles themselves are completely random and illogical. All of these puzzles must, apparently, be completed in the one hour and forty minutes you are given at the start of the game, but no one seems to know what happens if you fail to complete the game in the time given; I imagine it is simply a different ending. The game also features a (default) easy mode and three, horrible and completely skippable, bonus mini-game which you unlock by finding hidden notes in the main game. The easy mode highlights the interactive areas when you mouse over them with an object; It really is the only way you want to play as without it there is no indication where you can use your items.

Each screen is presented in a style resembling a staged set and with great simple charming cartoon graphics. These graphics are where most of the development energy seems to have been spent and they easily my favorite aspect of the game. This presentation also includes a good enjoyable soundtrack that is surprisingly long for such a short game.

*Gomo* is a charming little *Machinarium*-clone that would make a decent children's game but is too

insubstantial for most adventure gamers; The whole thing just screams "game designed for children", I am not sure why it is not being marketed this way. Another issue is that it is only a little over an hour long, at least for the average adult, but the game has been featured in many sales since launch; Where it could be had for a few dollars or less. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS

The charming graphics.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK

Poor puzzles and an absentee story.

### VERDICT

Far too insubstantial for most adult gamers.



