

Issue #56
November 2015

Adventure LANTERN



Reviews:

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**Cover Image:
What Makes You Tick**

not be surprising to anyone that has spent time around gaming sites, it is still unfortunate.

After all, it is not possible to meaningfully capture the full experience offered by a game with a single letter or number. There is tremendous inherent subjectivity to such an assessment as different individuals will invariably react differently to a given selection of puzzles, characters, environments, or story elements based on their prior exposure to gaming and even the setting in which they encounter a given title. As others and I have argued before, the true value of a review lies not within the

final grade, but within the body of the article that explains the author's opinion. However, the grades all too often grab the sole focus and invoke what seems to be quite a visceral reaction. Understanding not all readers will have time to read the full text of every single article, the ratings are here to stay. Nevertheless, hearing the full details of what Jonathon or another reviewer has to say will always interest me more.

Here's hoping you'll find something to enjoy in this edition of AL. Thanks again to Jonathon for his tremendous effort.

Until next time,

– *Ugur Sener*

EDITORIAL

We have been quiet for several months, but Adventure Lantern is back with another release. This issue is another representation of Jonathon's hard work and dedication to our magazine. Jonathon has brought us reviews of a selection of adventure games, nicely highlighting the broad range of adventure experience that is readily available today.

Reading through this month's articles had me thinking once again about the value of including grades in our reviews. For instance, Cradle reviewed on page 14 got three stars and is the one game in this issue I immediately wanted to play. On the other hand, AR-K got a better grade, but I won't be rushing to buy it anytime soon based on Jonathon's description of the adventure. Having heard what Jonathon had to say about both games, I'd probably grade them similarly myself had I written the reviews. Yet there is something about Cradle's visual design and what it tries to be that I think will appeal to me on a more personal level. That kind of assessment simply can't be captured by any rating system.

Indeed, having seen all too many online arguments about the score given to a particular game, I thought about removing the grades from our reviews in the past. The idea would be to let the body of the article be the focus of conversation rather than a letter or number. The two cases where scores seemed to take a life of their own that particularly stand out for me are the reaction to the Scratches review over at Just Adventure and our own review of Al Emmo. When those games were released years ago, there were many pages of heated forum discussion regarding their scores. While that will



AR-K



AR-K



Perils of Man

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BANDIT'S COVE

CASUAL SAILING

UNCHARTED WATERS

GUIDING BEACON

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Cradle

Jonathon Wisnoski

PERILS OF MAN



Released earlier this year, *Perils of Man* is a modern point and click adventure in the typical *Broken Age* mold; with both an iOS and PC version available. The game is built in 3D, with free movement, but with fixed camera angles to give a quasi-retro look. In *Perils of Man* you play a young Swedish girl, Ana Eberling, with a stifling mother, and a mysterious family past. A long line of scientists, with an equally long line of disappearances. Years ago your father disappeared in the middle of a crowded theater, minutes after saving everyone from a freak accident; Now on her 16th birthday Ana has decided to find out what happened to her father, and if he could possibly still be alive.

Genre: adventure

Developer: IF Games

Publisher: Vertigo Games

Release date: April 28, 2015

Platforms: Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, Linux, iOS

Website: <http://www.perilsofman.com/>



Built around a touchscreen interface, and very obviously in Unity. *Perils of Man* is a modern adventure game that embodies much of what is wrong with the modern adventure game industry. Being built for mobile devices, the controls (“click” and “click & drag”) feel awkward when using a mouse and keyboard, particularly when working with inventory objects. And the absence of any type of “look/examine” command (a longstanding feature of adventure games) is very noticeable. The character movement is also ungainly, with your character even sometimes walking off the side of the screen, most of the time because you missed a hotspot; Which are sometimes a huge pain to find. There are doorways





that only have a tiny hotspot in one random location for interaction, instead of the entire opening being clickable.

We don't get much better in the gameplay front. The game tries to be unique by offering a first-person-view game mechanic, but ultimately falls flat with this feature being underutilised. Sort of billed as the main mechanism around which the game turns, this view allows you to see into the future in a limited fashion. Specifically, you see the potential risk objects cause. So this view is used to give you your marching orders, the things you must fix to end the chapter. How it works is that while in this mode you are stationary but can look around; The objects that are particularly risky are highlighted in red, and you get a little narrated spiel from the protagonist when you look in their general direction. Unfortunately, this setup can be a little finicky with multiple risk narrations firing off at once. The puzzles are all simple object puzzles,

very basic, nothing you are going to get excited over; All mostly logical but with a few inexplicable ones thrown in.

The story was interesting, up until the ending where it just got weird. The game really goes out of its way to portray that "they all lived happily ever after"; But none of the major questions you start off the game with have been

resolved. You still have no idea what happened to your father, and there is still the mystery surrounding most of your relatives and if they succumbed to natural accidents or not. Furthermore, the conclusion cinematic just did not make any sense for a myriad of reasons that are impossible to get into without spoiling the entire story.

All that said, and I expect this to be shock, it is a fun, enjoyable game. There are a lot of details I am quibbling over, but at the same time I was never bored or overly frustrated. None of the elements are all that impressive alone, but they come together to create a decent experience. *Perils of Man* is a short, small, game; Expect to spend around four hours overall. You are only going to be visiting around 24 scenes, which include closets, and in general you will encounter one challenge in each of these locations. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS

The ingame visuals cinematics are rather good.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The interface designed for the lowest common denominator.

VERDICT

A decent modern scifi adventure.



Jonathon Wisnoski

WHAT MAKES YOU TICK: THE TALKIE SERIES



Originally, all the way back in 2007, Lassie Games released a short story freeware adventure entitled *What Makes you Tick? (WMYT)*; It was three years latter that they used their brand new custom made Flash adventure game engine to release the full length adventure *What Makes you Tick?: A Stitch in Time*, a sequel to the original *WMYT* game. This indie game was sold on their website as well as having a physical release to retail, primarily in Germany, is my understanding. But with the upcoming obsolescence of Flash they have decided to not only release the game for free but have been working hard to update both to include full voice-overs.

Genre: adventure

Developer: Lassie Adventure Studio

Publisher: Lassie Adventure Studio

Release date: July 14, 2015

Platforms: Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX

Website: http://lassiegames.com/games/wmyt_series/





The *What Makes You Tick?* series is set in an early 20th century Franz Kafka's *The Castle* inspired world.

The entire series revolves around the now disbanded Smith Institute of Ravenhollow; An organization of nine the world's leading scientists and inventors. The first game opens with you, Nathan, arriving in a small rural environment. You have been sent to find and tell Dr. Coppelius (a member of the now closed institute) that he is in grave danger. The story spirals into mystery and danger from there, ending in a cliffhanger. *A Stitch in Time* takes place immediately after the events of this first where the new protagonist meets up Nathan and Dr. Coppelius at the docks of the nearby village of Ravenhollow. But this game's story takes tangential path; In it you play Nigel Trelawney, the long estranged son of another member of the Smith Institute, come to Ravenhollow to to settle his father's estate. But all is not well, thugs from the castle have taken over the town and a system of tyrannical rules and taxes have been placed upon the townsfolk; with any who dare complain ending up changed. Nigel must navigate this



town, and will spend most of the game gathering the signat rings of the Smith Institute's nine scientists. But the game picks up speed by the end when he is thrown back into the main storyline alongside Dr. Corpellius and Nathan.

Even eight years later *WMYT* still looks amazing. It is a beautifully illustrated world filled with bright and detailed static backgrounds and the occasional animation. *WMYT* brings

alive the village of Ravenhollow and its surrounds, the castle Northwest, the Smith Institute, and all of its delightful characters. The soundtrack is fantastic, and the star of this review, the voice overs are well done. The voices are good, professional, and consistent; And are used for all of the game's dialogue and narrative; Overall I would not say that they make a huge difference on the overall experience, but they do



well in particular with the fun and loose sections of the script. *WMYT* has loads of alternative dialogue, easter eggs not part of the storyline but hugely entertaining in their own right; quips and jokes unlocked by trying ridiculous item combinations and general fulling exploring everything that add tremendously to the experience. These side remarks are probably what profited the most from these added voice overs.

The *What Makes You Tick?* series is a pretty standard inventory heavy adventure game, filled with heavy item combining and use. It is fairly difficult but logical, and set in an open world



with quite a lot of nonlinearity to its puzzles. None of the puzzles are particularly enjoyable, but instead are designed to serve as logical extensions of the story, and in this aspect are superb.

What Makes you Tick and *A Stitch in Time* tell an engaging and unique story, filled with interesting and enjoyable characters. The setting is fabulous, and the graphics beautiful. Allround, it is a fantastic series that I enjoyed immensely on both my playthroughs. And now with the voice cast and free price, there is absolutely no reason not to play it. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS

The story and setting.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK

Lacking any right click ability make item and hotspot interaction slightly more cumbersome.

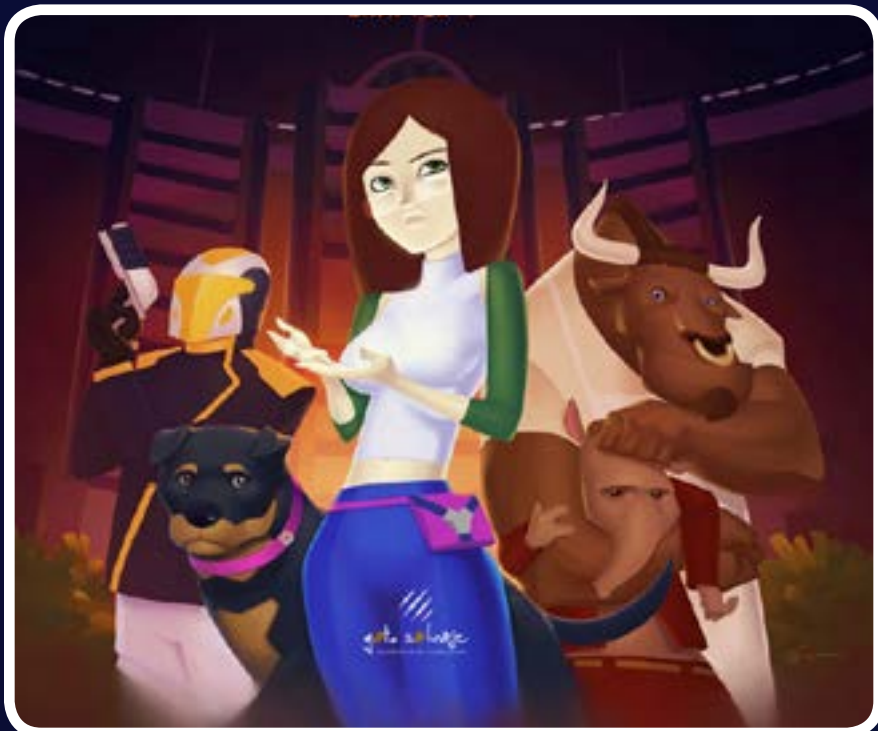
VERDICT

One of my all time favorite adventure games.



Jonathon Wisnoski

AR-K



The *AR-K* series is a four episode epic with what is quickly becoming one of the most hackneyed and hollow gimmick in all of adventure-gamedom, being defined as a classical point and click adventure with a modern twist. Way back in 2011 the first episode, *Gone With the Sphere*, was released, which eventually lead to the successful Kickstarter campaign in 2013 (which raised just over \$100K). Since then *Episode 2, The Girl Who Wasn't There*, was released in 2014 and on July 14, 2015 we got *Episode 3: The Great Escape*.

Genre: adventure

Developer: Gato Salvaje

Publisher: Gato Salvaje

Release date: July 1 2011 - 14 Jul, 2015

Platforms: Microsoft Windows,
Mac OSX, iOS, AndroidWebsite: <http://gatosalvajestudio.com/>

Set on a utopian space station, the permanent residence to a great many people, *Gone With the Sphere*, starts the series off with an adventure game reimagining of *Dude, Where's My Car?*. Alicia Van Volish, a journalism student, wakes up with a killer hangover and with little memory of the night before; She then precedes to spend the rest of the episode tracking down the mystery man she slept with as well as trying not to fail her class. The game covers basically no part of the overarching story you will eventually get to, but instead serves to introduce you to just how unlikable the main protagonist is while interspersing a gratuitous amount of titillating animations and outfits. Episode two takes place a short time latter. The one night stand from episode one has developed into a relationship, and most of the episode revolves around investigating this boyfriend. In addition



to this you are still having class trouble, and spend a small amount of time dealing with this. Episode two definitely shows an improvement in the story's plot, and does finally get to some interesting developments, but it still quite dull overall. *The Great Escape*, the series third and second to last episode, is where the everything really picks up. The story in this episode is exciting and meaningful, original and thoughtful, it is a whole other world from the previous games.

One feature that really makes *AR-K* stand out is its graphics. It has fabulous dynamic 2D environments that really pop, that are populated with professionally animated 3D characters. Additionally, the games are filled with detailed little cutscenes throughout. While the series has changed quite a bit in every episode so far, the graphics have remained an



integral aspect and one of its most well done and consistent features. Coupled with the serie's great voice talent, and just general professional handling of the sound and soundtrack, makes for a game that really shows off well and looks polished.

While all three of the *AR-K* episodes are fairly standard inventory adventures in form, but in practice come out quite differently. Some of these is due to Interface changes. Episode one starts the series off with a selection of all the character in the inventory. This allows





them to be used like items on other characters, which is the only way the game allows you to ask about other people. It is a weird and awkward way

to do it. The gameplay does not get any better from their in episode one, as it is filled with illogical and confusing puzzles and scenarios. Episode two cleans this

up a little, and while it suffers somewhat from illogical gameplay, it does so to a far lesser extent. Additionally, it improves the inventory screen by replacing the character list with an idea list. There are certain important ideas and scraps of information, you encounter throughout your adventure, and Alicia will need to combine these, ask other characters about them, and use them to solve problems. In this way, Episode two is really setup mechanically like a detective or journalist's investigation; And overall this feature works fairly well and in a unique and entertaining difference to the rest of the series. And finally, episode three simplifies and polishes everything, as well as opens up the game world. In episode three your inventory is pruned down to the bare minimum, a list of your current items. And all idea, info, and other characters you might want to talk about with other characters is listed in the conversation screen. These changes have made the game a lot simpler, and removed much of the possibility of confusion.





Furthermore, the gameplay in episode three is so much better; It's logical, it's exciting, it's open and nonlinear, and in a first for the series it is actually fun.

Spanning three episodes and 10+ hours so far, the *ARK* series gets off to a very rocky start but manages to pull off a hail mary in episode three. In my opinion, episodes one and two are simply a bore, but overall, regardless of if you want to playthrough the first two or just skip them, this series is worth a try for someone looking for charming and modern soft- scifi adventure. Expect to spend a little over five hours on the first two episodes together, with the third coming in at around five hours by itself. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS

The graphics and cinematics.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The first two episodes, in their entirety.

VERDICT

An interesting and unique modern adventure, eventually.



Jonathon Wisnoski

CRADLE

Genre: adventure

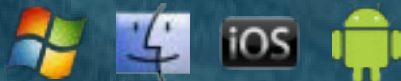
Developer: Gato Salvaje

Publisher: Gato Salvaje

Release date: July 1 2011 - 14 Jul, 2015

Platforms: Microsoft Windows, Mac OSX, iOS, Android

Website: <http://flying-cafe/>



I was very excited for *Cradle* to be released. The game looks absolutely stunning, with a high-res, open, 3D world, and incredibly interactive environments, where pretty much everything can be picked up and moved around. It looks like the absolute most technically impressive point and click adventure ever released. The very first effort from a small indie team, Flying Cafe, *Cradle* was released July 24th, and has generated quite a bit of discussion among its playerbase.

With all this promise, *Cradle* really only had room to disappoint. And many people believe that it does disappoint, perhaps unfairly. Flying Cafe created this incredibly detailed and large world and then hardly scratched the surface of it. They created these great generic game mechanics of running, jumping, picking-up, and using objects and then really never use them. It feels like it should be twenty hour long puzzle and plot filled romp through the plains of Mongolia, instead you get four hours of minigames.

Cradle, as mentioned previously, is set in a wide open Mongolian valley; Centered around your lonely yurt. There is also a long abandoned amusement park with a mysterious past, and a train line that cuts through the valley. The year is 2076, and

with androids, consciousness transfers, and cloning the game explores various transhumanist ideas as well as other assorted zany scifi concepts; While telling a story deeply steeped in Buddhist folklore. Waking up in your empty yurt with no memories, you explore your surroundings, try to fix a mechanical girl, and figure out the history of this place and yourself. While you have two characters you talk to occasionally your discussions are rather limited, mostly being used to give you your next objective, leaving the backstory to be





told almost exclusively through random notes and articles.

These notes and articles are, in my opinion, one of the worst done features in the game. They are the only real explanation of the world, and in that

way *Cradle* could be compared to *Gone Home* and *Analogue: A Hate Story*.

Except both of those game's frame their notes in context, in the case of *Gone Home* entire scenes are literally setup to help make sense of them, in addition

to displaying them in a reasonable order. *Cradle* meanwhile literally just has you read a few select articles from random newspaper waste strewn across the floor, and the occasional note, advertisement, and journal entry. The vast vast majority of this writing is located in your small one room yurt, with a small but important portion spread around the valley. Unfortunately, the valley is, for the most part, a completely barren location. There is no reason to explore this empty waste, so spreading these articles, articles necessary to understand this world, around locations you have no reason to ever visit is absurd. To further complicate matters, the story told appears to be based around Eastern Buddhist stories and legends, cultural knowledge that is completely lacking in the vast majority of English speakers. Knowledge necessary to make sense of the story. Out of the dozens of people discussing the game online, I only saw one with the necessary knowledge of Buddhist stories to understand what was going on.

Adding to its problems, the puzzles are not well done; That is the only way



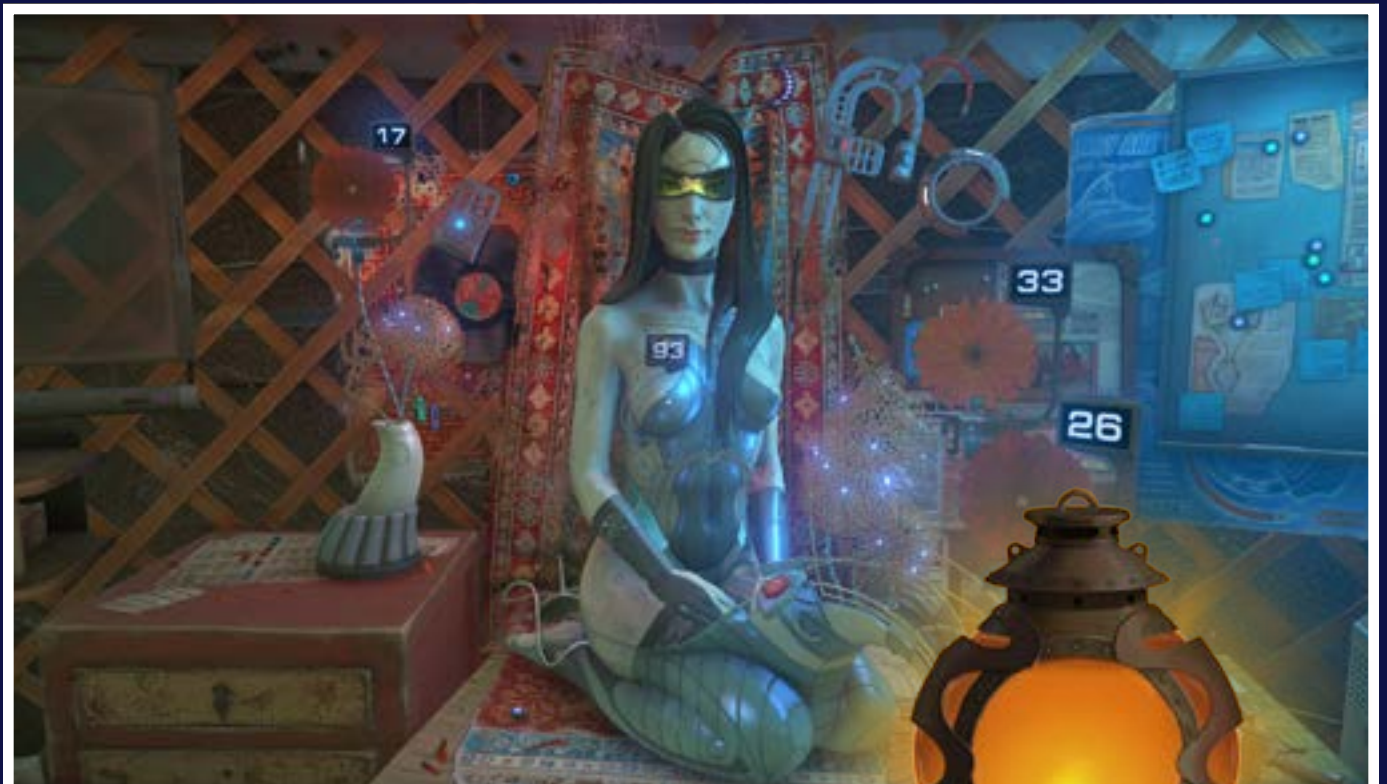


to put it. The game world is setup such that it would work fabulously as dynamic puzzle filled adventure, with natural plot based puzzles. Instead we get four hours of minigames, exhibited in a strictly linear fashion. There are one or two, poorly done, examples of natural plot based puzzles (throwing sticks at trees to get fruit down), but your main challenge is the series of progressive, skippable, holodeck minigames; Where you run around in a pixel themed arena collecting different colored blocks.

Cradle is not a horrible game, and with its unique setting and story it has inspired a few devoted followers. But there is simply not enough time given to explain this story or the world,

and the game does less of exploring transhumanist ideas and this world than briefly mentioning them in a few

instances. It is a game with a load of potential, but it was not the game I was expecting, nor the game I wanted. ●



BRIGHT MOMENTS

The absolutely visually stunning world.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The minigames.

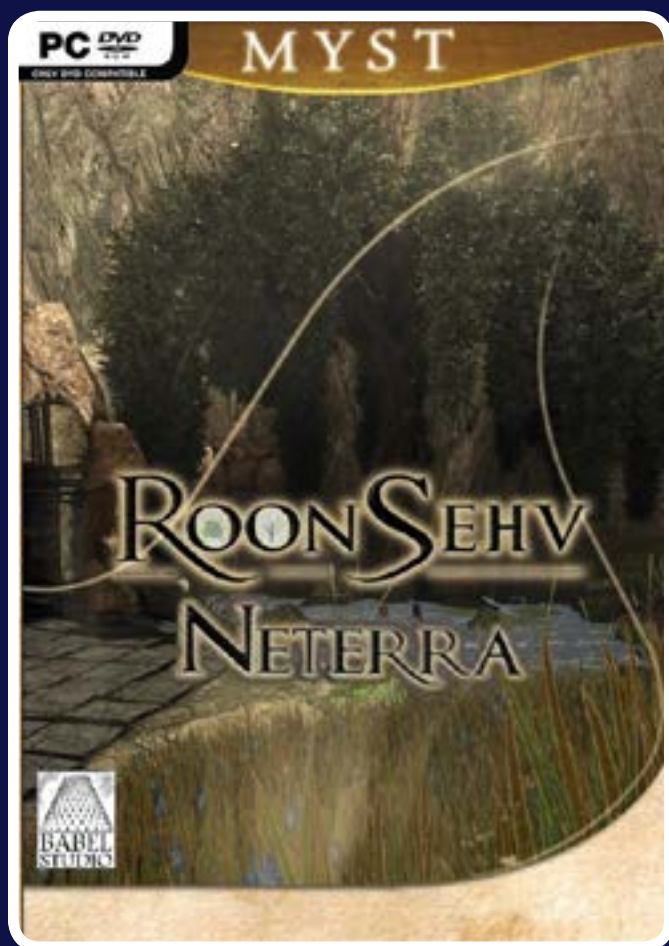
VERDICT

A unique experience that will not appeal to the average gamer.



Jonathon Wisnoski

ROONSEHV



Made by the seven person team, Babel Studio, *RoonSehv* is a free amateur fan game billed as a side-story to *Myst*. *RoonSehv* is set in the same universe and takes place in the same general epoch of time as the *Myst* series; But tells a parallel story that is worlds away (literally) from the original. It fixes itself in the universe of *Myst* by recounting some of the events from *The Book of Tī'ana*, but it does not appear to be connected to anything mentioned in this book and that is where the story diverges (many years before the events of *RoonSehv*).

Genre: adventure

Developer: Babel Studio

Release date: March 14, 2015

Platforms: Microsoft Windows

Website: <http://roonsehv.blogspot.fr/>



Unfortunately, there is not much more I can tell you about the story without entering major spoiler territory. Being a *Myst*-like the story is pretty minimal and mostly told through journals. Overall, I did not find the story particularly well done. The game leaves pretty much everything unexplained, even going so far as to throw two giant mysteries into the last few minutes and ending with zero closure on these or any of the other questions that pop up throughout. Additionally, the game was originally written in French, and the conversion is far from perfect, but actually probably the worst aspect is that half the characters talked about in these journals have very similar names, and I just could not keep

everyone straight. This storytelling is also hampered by most of the writing being clumped together. You have pretty much nothing to read for hours, and then suddenly you have two whole journals with page after page to read. It is just too much all at once, and is extremely boring.





The game is played in a first person view, with free movement and view. The graphics are good, not great, and they are far away from the revolutionary graphics, that push what the current hardware is capable of, *Myst* is known for; But they are generally in a *Myst* style and are pretty, if unevenly well done. The game takes place entirely in a small cave system and the immediate surrounds. This makes it easily one of the smallest games, and one of the few set almost entirely in a single age.

Roonsehv would be a rather short game if not for the incredibly complicated puzzles, and they are really really complicated. Technically, all these puzzles appear to be logically laid out, but in practice I have only ever heard of people brute forcing most of them. I don't want to call them bad, and they are certainly *Myst*-like, they do not seem to be necessarily poor puzzles, but I simply did not enjoy them.

I found the entire *Roonsehv* experience to be unenjoyable. It does not appear to be a particularly bad fan-game, and many people really enjoyed playing it, but I was not one of them. *RoonSehv* is freely available in a French, English, German, and Italian, and should take you between four and twelve hours to play through. ●

BRIGHT MOMENTS

Some of the visuals are very good, and reminiscent of *Myst*.

FUMBLES IN THE DARK

The poorly told story, comprised of boring journal entries and lacking any and all closure.

VERDICT

As a free fan game, it is decently well designed but it will always be a niche game.



