

# Adventure Lantern

#08 (33) AUGUST 2012

## REVIEWS:

- Bell's Heart
- A Grain of Truth
- Deponia
- The Walking Dead  
Episode 3: Long Road Ahead
- Mirror's Edge

# EDITORIAL

As promised, and looking like it will be on time this issue, here is the August issue of Adventure Lantern. It is a rather short issue, with only five articles; But, if I do say myself, they are quality articles and I am quite impressed we could compile even this many in so short a time. Again, Ugur asked me to write the editorial this month as he got too busy to likely be able to finish it on time, but he will be back in active development of AL as soon as his schedule permits.

This month we review Mirror's Edge, the first person platformer from 2008; Deponia, the brand new adventure by Daedalic and Lace Mamba; The next chapter in Telltale's The Walking Dead series; And the two games that make up the Trader of Stories series, Bell's Heart and A Grain of Truth. I stumbled across A Grain of Truth a short while after release, and while it looked interesting, as a rule I do not play browser based games. Well, as luck would have it, I soon found myself without anything to do, and with my laptop and an Internet connection. And in what must be the first browser based game I have played this year I found a truly interesting world. A Grain of Truth and its predecessor, Bell's Heart, are set in the universe called The Big Old Tree that Dreams. This universe consists of a island continent called ForestBed and The Great Oak which inhabits this land. It is a very unique and detailed world with a fantasy-punk style. We also deliver a big, fourteen page, news section;

Containing the many interesting new happenings and events in adventure gaming. I won't go into much detail here, because I already wrote a nearly full page introduction for the news section and cover pretty much everything important in detail.

Finally, I would like to announce a new series of articles that I plan of starting next month, or hopefully the month after that at the latest. This series will cover everything Myst related, starting from the The Myst Reader books and working its way up the video game series. We already have a review of Myst and Myst 5: End of Ages, but there is definitely room for a Myst: ME and real Myst review, and an additional opinion on Myst V is always an option. For my first article I plan on a general information and story article, which will serve as a review of the Myst Reader trilogy.

Myst is undoubtedly the most controversial game in all of adventure gaming, and quite possibly the most controversial game in any genre. Some people absolutely hate it, others love it; But everyone tends to recognize it as one of the most famous examples of early computer gaming. Well these articles will explore all of these issues and more, and give an opinion on if these games are worth playing today, and discover how much impact they have had on the genre.

– Jonathon Wisnoski



Cover Image:  
A GRAIN OF TRUTH (p.20)

**ADVENTURE LANTERN**  
#08 (33) august 2012

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A few interesting things to report this month. Péndulo Studios has launched a crowd-funding campaign to fund the adventure game *Day One*. In addition to this being interesting simply because I like their games, it will also be interesting to see how it works out, as this is the first instance I have seen of a currently producing studio trying to crowd-fund a game very much like other games it funds using conventional methods. Also of note is *The Inner World*, an upcoming, charming looking, cartoon fantasy adventure from Germany. Not too much new to report, but a few details have changed with the addition of the publisher Head Up Games. Sales are hard to report on in a monthly magazine. They are almost always done by the time you publish. So this month I belatedly post about the PWYW sale Groupee site, which routinely includes adventure games in its bundles.

Most surprising this month to me was the release of *1953: KGB Unleashed*; This name sounded ever so slightly familiar, and then it clicked. A few months ago I had been researching the developers of the very enjoyable *Process* and found that they were linked to the Russian developers Phantomery Interactive, creators of *Outcry*. Back then I noticed that they either had or were developing a new game *Phobos: 1953*, but while a release date was posted, that had long since past, no confirmation ever made their news feed, and no other information was readily available. But this similarity in name could not be a coincidence, and sure enough it was this title I had tried researching a few months prior, and to this day they still have absolutely no official announcement or information available past that pre-Russian release date of a few years ago. Truly the absolutely worst marketing I have ever seen, but I am still excited to try this new adventure.

Also included this month is more news about the very interesting *Nicolas Eymerich, Inquisitor: The Plague*, which is based on a very real historical Christian and inquisitor. There has been a lot of activity on their development blog, most interesting their article about the illustrative 2.75D game artwork and another about the game's text parser. A text parser in a modern, partly 3D, fully graphical, third-person adventure? Apparently, not that I imagine it will ever be necessarily to use. It does make a rather intriguing marketing ploy if nothing else; But it does bring up an interesting subject, is it possible to harness the power and infinite diversity of the text adventure style text input and have this in a modern style graphical game? Personally, I think more experimentation is needed, and have high hopes that, particularly, a first person text input adventure is possible. You could use the environment exploring abilities of the first person perspective and the camera to select objects, you then do not have to worry about nouns and simply describing actions. And in todays always online world you could even have users constantly submitting synonyms for puzzles and getting constant mini-updates so that every possible logical way to solve a puzzle quickly gets found and incorporated.

There have also been quite a few full length general articles that I found a delight to read this month. There is a very interesting one about the past, current, and potential future of Text Adventures; A post from the original creator of the *Myst Movie* project which talks about what has been going on during the last long silence; And an interview with Ron Gilbert with some surprising and nostalgic revelations for myself, and I am sure at least a few others. One thing I was not expecting to learn when reading though the Ron Gilbert interview was that he had in-fact been one of the original founders of Humongous Entertainment, the developers of the the many series of adventure games for young children. They developed such notables as *Putt-Putt*, *Freddi Fish*, *Spy Fox*, and *Pajama Sam*; All games I remember fondly from my childhood, and are totally worth digging up if you have any young relatives or children of your own.

– Jonathon Wisnoski

## Announcements



### Day One

Well this is sure interesting. The famous developers of the classic adventure game series Runaway and many new singular adventures, Pendulo Studios, has entered the realm of crowdfunding with *Day One*. *Day One* will be a dark comedy, with loads of sarcasm and adult humor. The project is looking for about \$370,000 to fully fund the game and \$15 will get you a pre-order; But there are rewards all the way over \$10K for those interested in giving more. It has only received 13% of said funding at the time of this writing, but, with 30 days left on the clock, anything is possible.

The big difference with this project to most of the others out there is the developers. Pendulo Studios is a big and very active development team who make just this type of game all the time. So this is not funding a game that would necessarily never have been made through normal channels, but instead seems like they are testing the waters to see if crowdfunding is a good alternative to publishers even when publishers are an option.

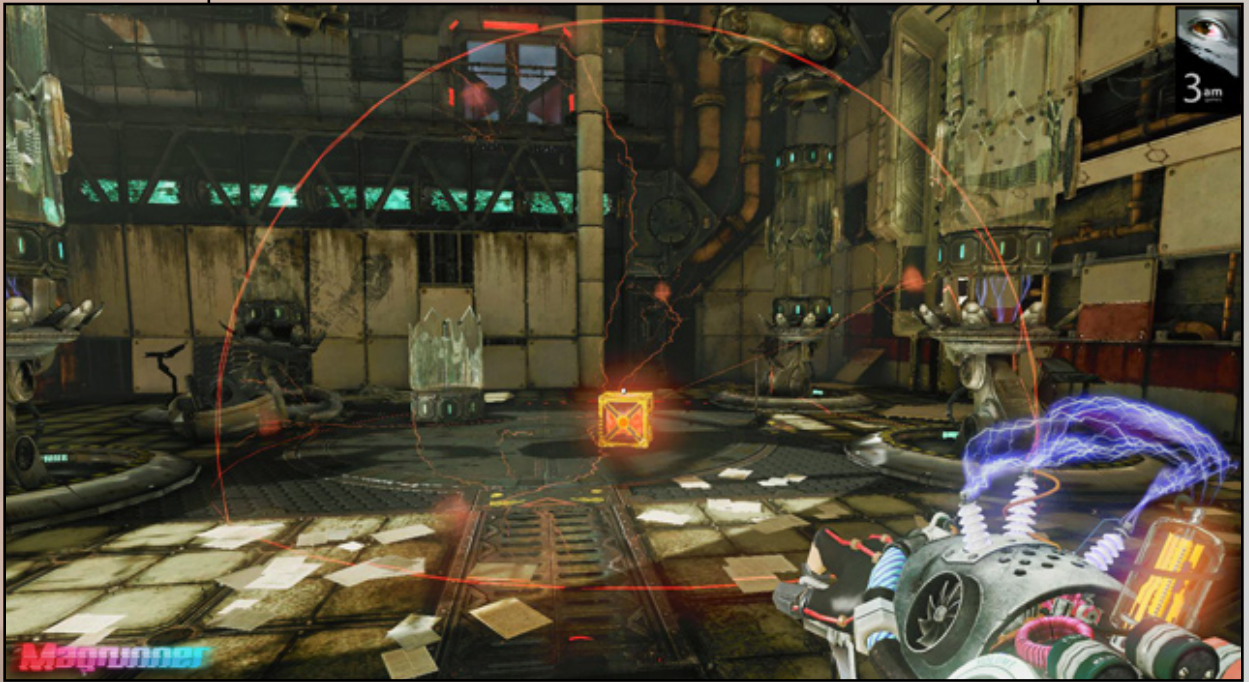
### The Inner World

While most of this has already been announced, some details seem to have changed a little and few more announced. *The Inner World* looks like it is a fabulously stylish and quirky adventure which the developers describe as "twisted". It is set inside a huge hollow space called Asposia and has great looking cartoon visuals. The release date is currently set at the second quarter of 2013, for a worldwide PC, Mac, iPad and iPhone release.



### Magrunner: Dark Pulse

The *Portal*-like, or first-person action puzzler, *Magrunner: Dark Pulse* has succeeded in raising over \$130K to fund continued development. It is set in a cyberpunk dystopian future world that is inspired by H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos and costs \$19 for a pre-order.



### Everybody's Gone to the Rapture

*EGtR* is an upcoming first-person adventure game, or possibly visual novel might be more correct considering the developers history of pure story driven games. It is being developed by thechineseroom as a spiritual sequel to *Dear Esther* and has a planned release date of Summer 2013. While the game will supposedly be very similar to *Dear Esther* in style there are some major changes as well. *EGtR* is set in one big open world and as such is inherently non-linear and heavily focused on exploration. You will also get to interact and effect the game-world, with the storytelling and world adapting and changing to your interactions. Not much word on the story yet, but it is apparently set in a post-apocalyptic world containing six main characters who serve as the main elements of the story. Additionally, the game is designed to play significantly differently based on your choices and actions in game, so multiple playthroughs will apparently be in order.



# Welcome To The

# ETHER

## Ether

*Ether* is set in an alternative history world where mental disease and illness can be cured by individuals who possess the unique gift of ethereal projection. These so-called 'restorers' can delve into the minds of their clients to fix their broken memories. In *Ether* you play as a restorer who has become lost in one of his client's minds, a mysterious woman named Jean. The restorer, now unsure of his own identity, will only recover his knowledge of who he is by exploring Jean's memories. This, however, can only be achieved via the discovery of three unique artefacts that eventually lead the restorer to understand his historical link with his client.

## Experiments

Waking alone in a mysterious enclosure representing Jean's mind, you, the restorer, quickly come to realise that all is not what it seems. You will have to ask uncomfortable, unnerving questions about your own identity, your reasons for being where you find yourself, and your link with Jean's past. Only through the exploration of your environment will you find your answers - via artefacts that lead you into Jean's deep, broken memories. Strange, desperate scrawlings written by the mysterious 'T', and long forgotten marker stones found sparingly throughout Jean's mind will provide you with the clues you need to piece together who you really are, and who Jean really is to you.

Featuring a distinct visual style, first person explorative game play, narrative-driven puzzle challenges and strange mysteries that can be lifted from the game via QR-Codes, *Ether* is set to tell a mature and fascinating story that will keep you immersed until the very end.



# Dominique PAMPLEMOUSSE

in

*"It's All Over Once The Fat Lady Sings!"*

## Dominique Pamplemousse in *It's All Over Once the Fat Lady Sings!*

A unique and offbeat stop motion musical detective adventure game. Yes, you read that right, it is a musical, and as such has loads of singing and dancing. But it is also a detective adventure game, so you are in control of the protagonist. I am not exactly sure how this will work, but it sounds interesting, and very unique. It currently has a Indiegogo campaign running and is looking for \$9,500 by August 31st, with a \$5 game pre-order, and loads of other rewards for those interested in donating more.

## Upcoming Releases

### The Cave

Ron Gilbert was interviewed by Rock, Paper, Shotgun to find out a little more about *The Cave*. *The Cave* is an upcoming adventure platformer that has been described as being very much like *Maniac Mansion*. Starting of, you have seven characters to choose from; You can take any three of them on your adventure through the cave.

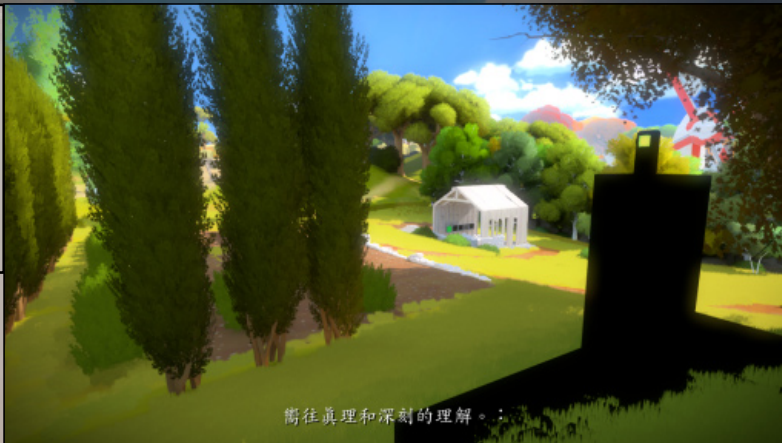






### The Witness

A recent development update from the developer of *Braid* has released a new early concept view and map of the island. It is sure getting crowded and interesting looking. We also got some of the first player point of view screenshots in the post "Fun with Subtitles".



### The Stanley Parable Remake

While we still have no word on a release date, *The Stanley Parable* remake is already looking amazing, and happily seems like it will have a lot of new content. The only news thus far are two trailers on their youtube account, [thisisthestoryofofof](#), definitely worth checking out. For those of you unaware of *The Stanley Parable*, it was arguably the biggest mod of last year; And made quite a splash with its wonderfully voiced narrator and meta themed visual novel gameplay.



### HeXit

Unfortunately this pre-rendered, sci-fi, point and click adventure game's KickStarter campaign fell far short of its goal. But the teams morale was not broken, and development has begun.

### Amnesia 2: A Machine For Pigs

The upcoming collaboration project between the people responsible for *Dear Esther* and the team behind the first *Amnesia* has been pushed back from a Halloween release to a early 2013 over quality and polish concerns.

While *A Machine for Pigs* is not a direct sequel, and contains a whole new cast of characters, it is set in the same world, about 60 or so years in the future. The world is much changed at this point and is "in the thick of Victoriana – empire, invention, social revolution, spiritualism. Rampant industrialization along with the attendant issues of dehumanization, poverty, disease, racism. It's right at the turn of the century, so there's that panic of what's coming next, and then there are these powerful industrialists pushing society forward, without any real thought to consequences." - (GameZone interview). The story focuses around Oswald Mandus, a wealthy industrialist who made his fortune in the livestock industry. He is taken ill during an expedition in Mexico and when he wakes up from his fevered dreams discovered some of what he has been dreaming has come to life.



**Jack Houston and the Necronauts**

This terrific looking Kickstarter has been fully funded and a similar Paypal based system has been started up to allow the continued funding of development.

*Jack Houston* is described by the developers as "The Dig, if Ben from *Full Throttle* gut-punched Boston Low and commanded the mission in his place. The interface will be a fairly streamlined verb coin point & click system. The setting should be familiar to anyone who's seen Tom Corbett: Space Cadet or Perry Rhodan: bubble helmets, rockets 'n ray guns galore."

**AR-K: A Dark Acid Adventure Comedy**

This episodic adventure game series recently come to my attention through its, now failed, Kickstarter project. But do not worry, it looks like KS was only an option, and they are going ahead with the

development of this series and already have Episode 1 released (price: \$12) with Episode 2 to be released sometime soon. The series is described as having "Acid humor, intrigue, even some romance and good 3D animation."

# GONE HOME

**Gone Home**

RPS held a interview with The Fullbright Company on *Gone Home* and what games they draw inspiration from and share similarities with.

**Detective Grimoire**

Originally this 2D cartoon adventure game was strictly planned for the iOS and Android market but the developers expanded their scope to include all three major computer OSes. Set in a mysterious swamp, *Detective Grimoire* looks to be a classic detective adventure, having you hunt for clues, interrogate the suspects, solve puzzles, and ultimately uncover the secret of the swamp. Its Kickstarter did good closing at nearly \$30,000 (\$5,000 over what they were asking for), and in it you could have purchased a pre-order of the game for a measly \$4. Right now a tentative September release has been announced by the team.





### **Ourfir**

*Ourfir* is another game that had a failed try a Crowdfunding, but undeterred it is still in development. It is described as a “3D adventure game inspired by classical point and click adventure games, with action elements set in a fantasy world” and looks quite interesting.

### **Nicolas Eymerich, Inquisitor: The Plague**

This upcoming adventure game has had a lot of activity on its development blog recently and more information about the game has come to light. They describe the graphics as 2.75D and use this restricted 3D to built a “pictorial and illustrative look”. Additionally, in a homage to MUDs and early text adventures they are including a full text parser in the game.

The first episodes are scheduled to come out in November.



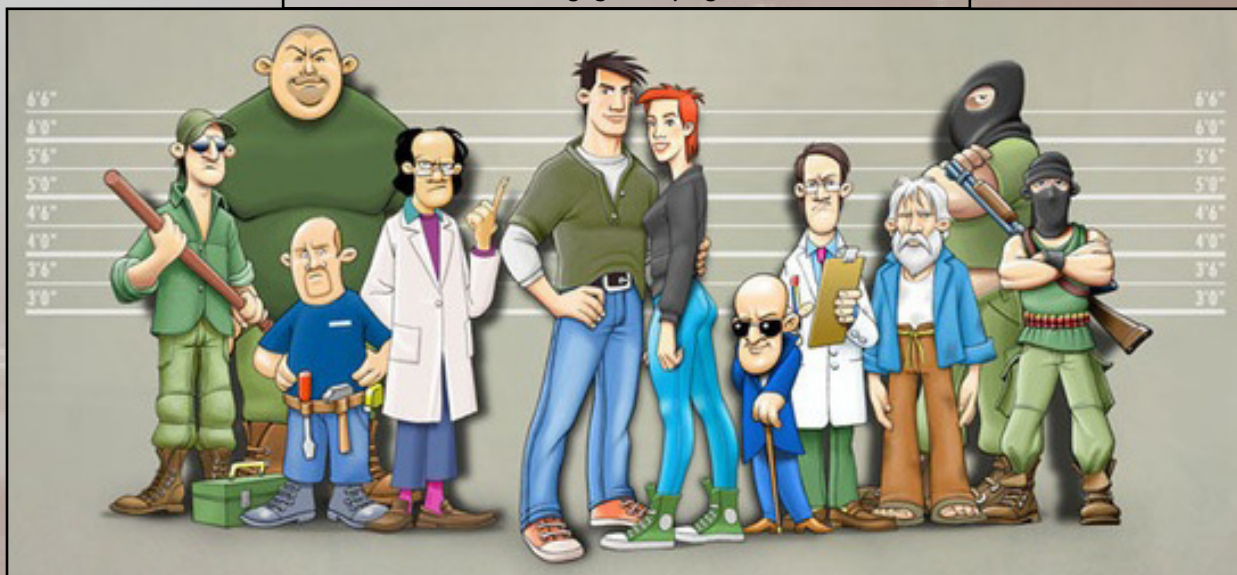


### Lifeless Planet

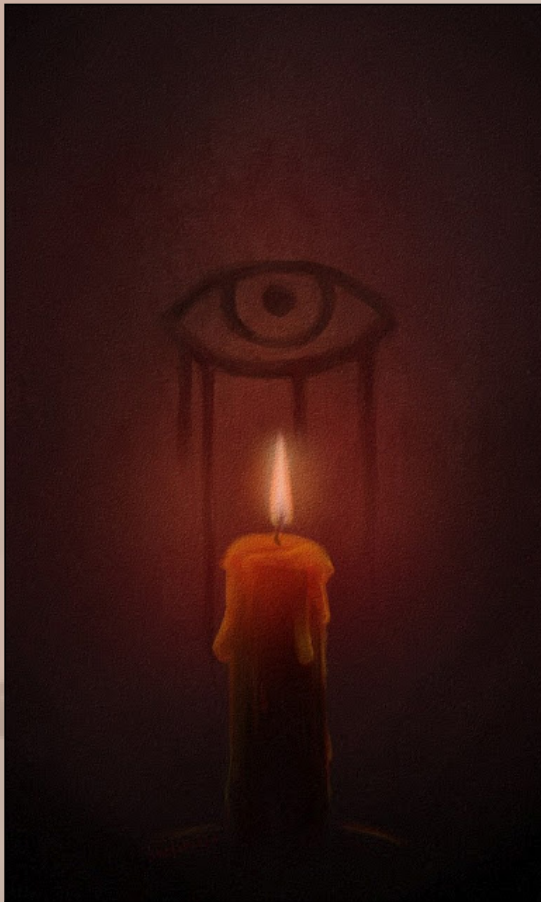
Scheduled for release by the end of 2012, this exciting 3D action adventure builds its story around some mysteries of the space race during the Cold War era: Traces of a Soviet presence have been found on a distant planet, 20 light-years away from Earth. You'll slip into the moon-boots of an astronaut crashing on that planet, finding the disturbing hints of a former human presence – including an abandoned Soviet-era lab – and suddenly realize that this planet doesn't seem to be so lifeless after all. Soon, your quest for answers turns into a survival mission.

### Reversion, Episode 2: The Meeting

The Indiegogo campaign for this second episode of the *Reversion* adventure series has succeeded in its goal of raising \$4K. The first episode is already available, and for free, but this second episode is commercial and cost \$4.00 through the Indiegogo campaign.



## New Releases



### Anna

The open 3D world physiological horror, adventure is out and available in both boxed and digital download from many distributors. The initial reviews indicated a rather interesting and unique game plagued by many issues, though many of these have since been dealt with in a major patch released July 31st.

### 1953: KGB Unleashed

From the developers of Outcry, the very stylish, surreal, and Horror-ish adventure from 2008 comes *1953: KGB Unleashed*, or *Phobos: 1953* by its original Russian title (which seems to have been released a few years ago). *Phobos* is also somewhat related to the adventure *Process*, which we reviewed a short while ago.

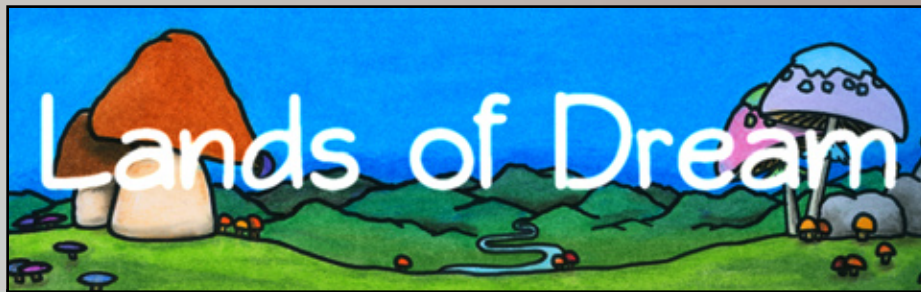
### ÚRQUEL: The Black Dragon

A HTML text adventure by David T. Marchand that you can play directly in your browser. It appears to be fantasy tale, but not much seems to be written about it.

The following is the very first scene as described by the game: "A big, ruined castle stands before you, Víctor the Tenacious, and it is your mission to enter it and rescue Princess Sonia from the bloody claws of Úrquel, the black dragon."



## Updated Releases



**Return to Mysterious Island**  
The Jules Verne inspired, *Return to Mysterious Island* has been added to the GOG catalogue and listed for \$9.99. *Return to Mysterious Island* is the first in a two part series and together they were both developed by Kheops Studios.

**The Sea Will Claim Everything**

This adventure game with an emphasis on characters and storytelling and with gameplay centered around exploration and details has finally gotten itself a trailer, two in-fact! If these trailers interest you, you can always check out the demo or purchase the full game for \$10, and fund continued independent development of new games.

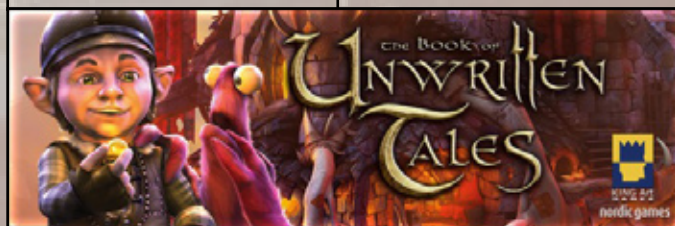
**Runaway 3: A Twist of Fate**

The third and final *Runaway* adventure has finally made its way to GOG and is now available for \$19.99

**To the Moon**  
*To the Moon* has gotten a physical boxed release and is available alongside the soundtrack for \$21.13.

**The Book of Unwritten Tales**

*TBoUT* has made its way to Steam, so for all of you still holding out on an actual purchase I am sure awesome sales are to follow. The game is currently selling for \$19.99 with a glorified soundtrack set at \$9.99, but if purchased together you can get them for the total of \$24.99.





## News From the Big Blue Cup



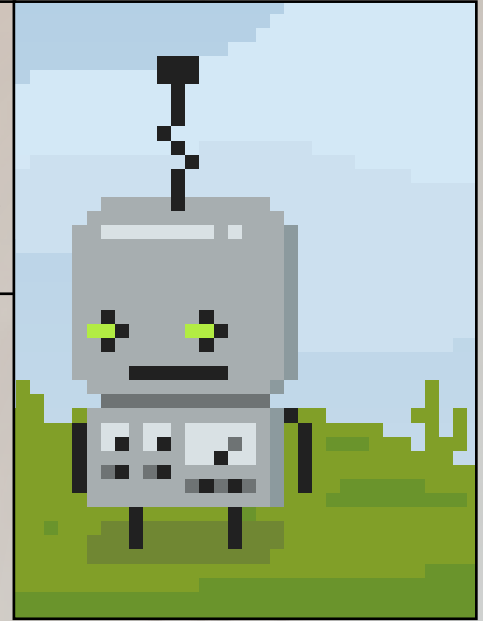
### Pick of the Month - July: Robo Quest

*Robo Quest* is a cute, colourful, pixelated delight. You play a robot whose flying house has crashed, and find yourself needing to repair it. With charming graphics and puzzles, this is a lovely (if brief) creation that is sure to make you smile. Try *Robo Quest* today. - (Ben204; game by: Glauzer, AdM244)



### Anastronaut II: The Dark Side

After the commercial launch of *Anastronaut: The Moon Hopper* the developer got right on production of a sequel. *Anastronaut II* already has lots of content about it posted on the development blog, including a teaser trailer and numerous scenes and background art.



QNz





**I'm Free (Akkad Estudios)** - This is the first game of a science-fiction series called Tales from other Universes. In this adventure, you're Aldoux, a slave who's traveling to his new job in a quarry of an unknow planet. The ship crashes and Aldoux appears in a planet with a strange note that he can't read.



**The Shadow Avenger: It's Personal! (Steptoe)** - *The Shadow Avenger* is an adventure game about avenging your murdered parents. Find the gang responsible and kill them off in the most horrific ways.

**QN2 [Demo] (Midian Design)** - The second title in the Quantumnaut series, and set three years in the future. Bob has managed to get himself promoted to the rank of captain and get his very own ship, Higgins One. What follows is a comical sci-fi tale. The full game will be commercial, and available in December of this year.



**Journey to Hell (Bleeding Romeo)** - A fantasy game about sorcery and the first appearance of crop circles back in 1678. *Journey to Hell* is a long game, with interesting looking graphics, and lots of content, including: arcade mini-games, magic spells, and day/night cycles.

# Bell's Heart



**Genre:** adventure **Developer:** Rudowscy **Publisher:** Pastel Games

**Release date:** October 3, 2010 **Platform:** browser (Flash)

**Website:** [http://www.pastelgames.com/index,games,flash\\_game,91.html](http://www.pastelgames.com/index,games,flash_game,91.html)



## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The first game in Rudowscy's *The Big Old Tree that Dreams* series/world; *Bell's Heart* is a graphical adventure game made in Flash, and set in his fantasy punk world. *Bell's Heart* was co-created/published by *Pastel Games* and released in 2010, and currently is available to play on many Flash portals. It is a moderately short, story heavy, game with a few unique elements and a lot of style, with a unique, almost sandbox, openness. *Bell's Heart* was given a sequel in 2012, *A Grain of Truth*, and has a additional upcoming entry made in the *WinterMute Engine* entitled *The Trader of Stories*, which has been in development since 2009, but continues to be far from finished, although a playable demo is available.

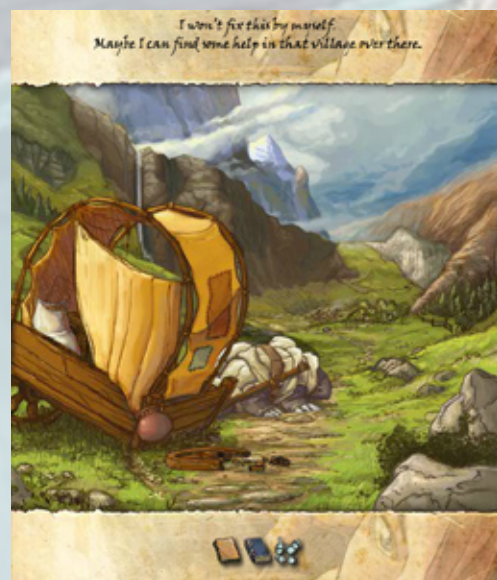
The world of *The Big Old Tree that Dreams* was first dreamt up by *Marek Rudowski* in 2005, but it took him five more years to produce this first finished project (not that most of that was spent in development). The *Big Old Tree that Dreams* is a world in which the continent of *ForestBed* resides. *ForestBed* is a continent with a gigantic oak in the middle of it called *The Great Oak*; whose roots span from sea to sea, whose branches surpass the clouds, and whose giant trunk is big enough to to seen from the far corners of this magical land. The

*Great Oak* is, understandably, prominent in this lands myths, legends, acting as a sort of god figure, and even features prominently in every day life. This world is filled with fantastic lands and creatures, including Sauropod-like *Cloud Eaters*; *The City of Bark*, surrounding *The Great Oak*; And *Husks*, large and ever growing lizards-like creatures with shells, that many people use as beasts of burden.

*Bell's Heart* takes place entirely in a small village close to *The Mountains of the Ice Butterflies*, and has a history of being in contact with these fairly like creatures. You play *Myosotis*, a *Trader of Stories* who is looking for the story of her own mysterious past. She was on her way to the *Cradle*, the highest peak of all of *ForestBed* and part of the *Ice Butterfly*

mountain range, when her wagon breaks down in front of this village. To pay her way in this village, and get her wagon repaired, *Myosotis* is charged with discovering the story of one of the village's past citizens, *Derrida*, who mysteriously died a generation ago.

The game is fairly short, and made up mostly of plot, dialogue, and cutscenes; It is laid out in a rather open world, sandbox, fashion, with shops and currency. The puzzles are all inventory based, but all dialogue is required to progress the story and finish the game, as well as visiting certain locations, not that most of





these are not required simply to acquire and use the inventory items in the first place. As you play the game, and uncover the story of Derrida, your Book of Stories fills up with the details you have found thus far, as well as an accompanying illustration, which fills out alongside this text.

The presentation, both audio and video, is fantastic, if obviously less

polished than its sequel. It is very obviously hand drawn, but also just as obviously well drawn and detailed; Every single scene is a pleasure to behold, and the visuals are, in my opinion, one of the better done elements. The interface is rather normal, with an inventory bar on the bottom. And while the music is limited to only one or two tracks



they are very nice and well suited to the rest of the game.

*Bell's Heart* is a terrific little gem, and while it is missing some of the polish of its sequel it is, if anything, a more personal game with graphics every bit as beautiful. It is a short story based adventure, with (proportionally) loads of dialogue, cutscenes, and story. Additionally, the shop system and very open world lends it an almost sandbox feel; And while its Book of Stories, which chronicles your collection of the story of Derrida, is not fundamentally different to a normal adventurer game journal, its style and perfect fit into the story and character makes it one of the more interesting and unique aspects of the game. ●

**BRIGHT MOMENTS:**

The wonderful fantasy punk world.

**FUMBLES IN THE DARK:**

Very short, particularly on a second playthrough.

**VERDICT:**

A great adventure game, with a few unique features, a wonderful world, and a lot of charm.



# A Grain of Truth



**Genre:** adventure **Developer:** Rudowsky Brothers **Publisher:** Rudowsky Brothers **Release date:** May 31, 2012 **Platform:** browser (HTML)

**Website:** <http://www.zamolski.com/agot/>



## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

*A Grain of Truth* is the second game set in the fantasy world, The Big Old Tree that Dreams. In it you play a young woman Trader of Stories who is searching for her own past in the Plains of the Endless Grass. It is a point and click adventure game made completely in HTML, with JavaScript used to dynamically load images, text fields, and other normal HTML content, and was released in May of 2012. Because it is a HTML game, it is playable, at least theoretically, on any device capable of displaying a web page; But if the developers have not accounted for different, small, screen sizes it is entirely possible that many mobile devices would make it impossible/nearly impossible to play.

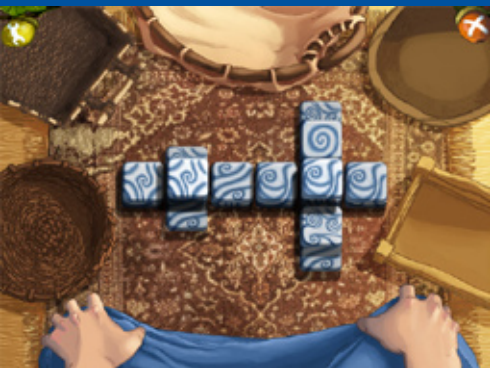
The Big Old Tree that Dreams is a fantasy punk world that revolves around a gigantic oak tree, called the Great Oak, which covers the size of a mountain range and is many times taller. This tree, which is viewable from the far corners

of the world, is venerated as a god and understandably is in their many stories, legends, and myths. The world is filled with interesting and unique lands, like the city of Bark encircling the Great Oak, but this story is set completely in

the Plains of the Endless Grass; Where, stories claim, there are floating rocks and a wise man, who knows every story ever told. This world is fantastic, and I am happy to see that this is neither the first nor last game planned for it. It is very unique and uses an over-stylised punk style, but does not conform to any particular sub-genre that I am aware of.

After a long journey through the Plains, Myosotis, our protagonist,





finally finds some floating stones, and this is where *A Grain of Truth* starts off. Right off the bat, you meet a team of cloud harvesters, who harvest clouds, to make into bed-cloths, right out of the very sky. They do this cloud harvesting on the back of a giant living Cloud Eater, a Sauropod style creature which they brought from a far away land. This cloud ship is one of the more prominent locations that you visit and you will be coming here over and over again, in your search for the truth of your past, and your quest to find the old Wiseman.

While *A Grain of Truth* is not at all normal behind the scenes, HTML games are not common, it does a great job of presenting it in a very classic style. The game offers beautiful static backgrounds, lots of text dialogue, a soundtrack, an inventory system that involves combining items, a cursor that changes over interactive areas, and a way to highlight all of these areas on any given scene, a save game system, and even a map of the game world that allows instant travel to every scene you have visited in the past. The artwork of this game is one of its better features. The world, and the people in it, are beautifully illustrated and while these images are all static they really bring the world alive.

The gameplay consists of some pretty normal inventory based



puzzles, and a few abstract logic puzzles, with some very unique challenges thrown in. One series of puzzles has you collect keywords throughout the world by talking to people and inspecting the scenery; These words are then used to form questions, gaining insight into this world and the people you meet. This segment is required to beat the game, but runs parallel to the rest of it as you are not required to ask a single question before the very end of the game. Similarly, you must collect 18 thoughts throughout the game and

arrange them to finish the game. But, the most unique element of all is completely optional and available only at the very end. You get to talk to the Wiseman and ask him anything you wish, the game provides a text input and he has programmed responses for a number of relevant topics.

*A Grain of Truth* is a fantastic game. Not only does it have a wonderful story, but delightful graphics, decent puzzles, and a great interface. It is a type of game that just grabs you right off with its charm, and at least in my case never let me go. ●

### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The wonderful vibrant world in which the game series is set.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The complete lack of animation, but honestly the graphics almost seem alive even without any animation.

### VERDICT:

A fantastic game that immerses you in the wonderful world.



# Deponia



Genre: adventure Developer: Daedalic Entertainment

Publisher: Lace Mamba Global Release date: June 29, 2012

Platform: Windows Website: <http://www.daedalic.de/en/game/Deponia/>

## Review by Jonathon Wisnoski

The child of the two adventure game behemoths, *Daedalic Entertainment* and *Lace Mamba Global*, *Deponia* is the one of the latest 2012 adventures and one of the games I was most looking forward to this year. The game is the first in the trilogy and is set in a world where the surface is entirely covered with garbage and with a floating city, Elysium, for the upper class.



In *Deponia* you play Rufus, an almost completely unlikable, arrogant, and incompetent rogue obsessed with leaving the junk filled surface world and reaching Elysium; And not a single person on the surface world would miss him. Soon after the start of the game, an Elysium girl (Goal) falls from the sky, and Rufus devises a plan, using her to get

into Elysium. What follows is a comedic adventure across the surface world with some sexual innuendo, meta content, and every so often a narration/song by a delightful banjo playing hobo. In general terms, I would say that the story dragged a bit at the beginning; While this allowed a lot more non-linearity and complex puzzles it also got boring

quickly with the non-progression of the story. But this was very much made up for with its terrific ending that absolutely stands alone and does not need a sequel; I see where a sequel will fit and how it will work, but, if anything, worry that it will ruin the already powerful and interesting story and current ending. But it was not until the end that I started to



skippable, because more of them make no sense than ones that do. There are still some that, even though I know the solution, I have no idea how it was arrived at. The inventory puzzles are not always much better. Some of them use a rather convoluted adventure game logic that the adventurer should not be expected to guess. You also get some wonky controls, with the interface seeming to act up every so often and a few particular cases where the it did not conform to the rest of a game, one example being having to look at an open chest to get the items inside.

*Deponia* is a decent game. It has good graphics, decent animation, OK voice acting, and a fine sound track. The inventory puzzles are good, the logic ones confusing but decent, and even the game length is a decent average length, with a decent story that has both good and bad elements. All in all I think *Deponia* was a little rushed, it does not appear to be quite as good as most of the previous offerings from its developers. ●

really like *Deponia's* story, throughout the entire rest of the game I simply went from boredom to accepting its decent but lackluster nature.

The visual presentation of *Deponia* is, rather surprisingly, hit and miss. *Daedalic Entertainment* are known for their beautifully hand drawn 2D backgrounds and great accompaniment animations. *Deponia* does not quite live up to these high standards, with rather undetailed, good but not terrific, backgrounds and animations that almost look out of place. All of this is not to say that the visuals are at all bad, they just do not rise above decent, and are far and away lacking from what

the developers normally produce. I also found the video cutscenes rather skippy, just slightly noticeable, but still annoying; And this on a computer that should have no trouble at all. Add to this uninspiring, decent, voice acting and an OK sound track; and the best part of the entire presentation for me became the new inventory system that has you use the mouse wheel to open and close the inventory window, saving you time and becoming very intuitive.

The gameplay is not much better; It is a combination of inventory puzzles, including item combination, as well as some skippable logic puzzles. It is a good thing that the logic puzzles are



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

The 2D hand-drawn backgrounds are quite beautiful at times, but not without their own faults.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

The very slow development of the story at the beginning of the game.

### VERDICT:

A decent game with a lot of decent elements.



# The Walking Dead

## Episode 3: Long Road Ahead



**Genre:** adventure, action, role-playing

**Developer:** Telltale Games **Publisher:** Telltale Games

**Release date:** August, 2012

**Platforms:** iOS, Mac OS X, Windows, PS3, Xbox 360

**Website:** <http://www.telltalegames.com/walkingdead>



### Review by Nick Burgener

*Long Road Ahead* marks the third entry in *Telltale's The Walking Dead* series, continuing the story as Lee Everett and his band of survivors set out from the motel in search of safer lodgings. Compared to the previous episode, this one feels like its ambition is a little reeled in -- it's not as thrilling or exciting as *Starved For Help*, but it provides a satisfying experience that keeps the pace moving all the way through.



The story this time around seems pretty straightforward, but it manages to feature some of the most emotionally engaging sequences of the series thus far. A few moments were particularly shocking to me (much more so than the previous episode's twist with the St Johns), and

others handled a somber, morose tone so well that they had me sincerely empathizing with the characters. As it turns out, I care a lot more about these people than I've cared for most other video game characters.

The third of five episodes, this one serves primarily as a transitional period

in moving the group from Macon, Georgia, to Savannah -- towards the coast. The group puts up with usual threats from bandits and zombies (including a possible traitor among themselves) as they realize the Traveler Motel is no longer a viable option for survival, so they take to the road. Relationships reach an ultimate climax as the group starts falling apart and their numbers begin rapidly dropping off. This episode marks the most dramatic change in the group's composition since *Episode 1*.

Despite the greater emphasis on character development, your decisions feel more streamlined than in either of the first two episodes. Previous decisions still impact how





certain characters feel about you, but none of the decisions truly branch out this time, and virtually all of your previously branching decisions now converge to the same eventual conclusion. Consequently there's not much replay value. It's a little disheartening to see it evidenced so clearly in this episode that none of your decisions really matter in the grand scheme of things, but that doesn't make them any less engaging during the moment of action.

Perhaps the nicest thing about *Episode 3* is that it makes a few attempts to implement more traditional gameplay and problem-solving. A minor problem I've had with the series thus far is that it tends to feel more like an interactive movie than a video game, when there's clearly potential for some more engaging gameplay elements. This is still largely true of this episode, but a handful of sequences have a more hands-on approach, and others more closely resemble a typical adventure game puzzle than anything in the previous episodes, so consider that at least a step in the right direction.

The series started out at a pretty high point with its first episode, *A New Day*, and climbed even higher with its second episode, *Starved For Help*. *Long Road Ahead* doesn't really continue that upward climb, but it doesn't mark

a decline, either -- it just feels like a necessary lull between two major chapters in the story. In that sense, it's still a satisfying continuation in

the story that, with a few twists and teasers at the end, promises some interesting development in the next episode. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

Gameplay has been improved slightly with more hands-on sequences and a little bit more elaborate puzzle design.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Decisions don't feel as dramatic or as impacting as a result of the more-streamlined story.

### VERDICT:

It's just as engaging as the previous episodes and has some good emotional involvement of the series thus far.



# Mirror's Edge



**Genre:** first-person action-adventure, platform  
**Developer:** EA Digital Illusions CE **Publisher:** Electronic Arts  
**Release date:** 2008 (PS3, Xbox 360), 2009 (Windows), 2010 (iOS)  
**Platforms:** PS3, Xbox 360, Windows, iOS  
**Website:** <http://www.ea.com/mirrors-edge>

## Review by Nick Burgener

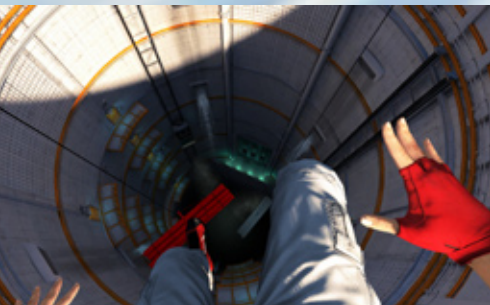
Grab your running shoes, because we're jumping straight into *Mirror's Edge*, the 2008 running simulator from DICE. This first-person platformer was a fresh face in a market saturated with serialized franchises and dark, gritty shooters, but it wasn't without its problems. Disjointed flow, unpolished combat, an underdeveloped story, short length, and sometimes excessive trial-and-error hold it back from perfection, but the rest of the game is so good that it's still worth playing.

*Mirror's Edge* is set in a sort of utopian future where there's no crime, but the government monitors and regulates everyone and everything. In order to bypass the government scrutiny, an underground movement of «Runners» was established to send messages and deliveries, and to perform intelligence operations. Runners operate on foot, running along rooftops and through alleys to avoid detection. You play as Faith, a runner back in the business after a nasty fall, who gets in over her head when her sister is framed for the murder of a mayoral candidate.

The rest of the game is about getting to the bottom of the coup by spying on police agents, meeting with informants, infiltrating security bases, and doing a lot of running. A sub-plot arises about mid-way through, wherein it's revealed that a private security firm has been hired to infiltrate and eliminate the runners. But your main objective is to rescue your sister and prove her innocence.



Unfortunately, there's not very much weight to the plot. You meet with a couple of characters and follow leads, but their names and





faces are all forgettable because you don't spend much time interacting with anyone or being involved in the plot. Most of the time you're just a passive recipient who's told things before going off on another running assignment. The backstory isn't developed at all; we don't really know what's going on with the government or why they're supposed to be the bad guys. It's not a major issue because the gameplay is fun enough, but the overall experience could've been better with a more engaging plot.

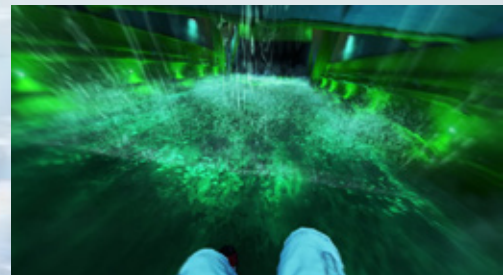
The gameplay is a hybrid of platforming, action, and adventure. As a runner, you have to get from point A to point B as quickly and efficiently as possible, jumping from building to building, balancing along pipes, sliding down cable lines, wall-jumping, climbing up pipes, and bounding around obstacles. This makes up the bulk of the experience, and it's extremely fun to cruise through the levels, landing your jumps and bounding around obstacles in one fluid stream of momentum.

The first-person perspective adds a lot to the thrill, because it gets you closer to the action and makes you feel more involved in it. It's kind of a double-edged sword, though, because it limits your ability to see platforms and things in the level, which can be frustrating at times,

but that's really the magic of what makes it so fun. Taking a leap of faith based on the level cues adds a lot of tension that's quickly released once you make your landing.

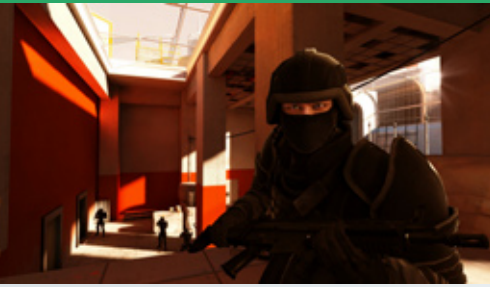
These cues are represented as «runner vision,» a feature that highlights key objects in the environment with a bright red hue. If there's a block that will be extra helpful to vault onto a ledge, it'll be red; if there's a platform that you need to jump from, it'll be red; if there's a pipe you need to climb, it'll be red. This is pretty much essential to figure out where you need to go, since you don't always have time to stop and think about where you're going.

You're often being chased by armed police agents, and the game



commands you to just keep running, which is why you need to take those leaps of faith and trust the cues sometimes. If you stop to look around, they'll close in and shoot you to death. This is another twist that helps to make the game compelling and exciting; not a lot of games encourage you to run from fights (except slow, suffocating survival-





horrors). Just going through the levels can be exciting on its own, but it's made even more so when you know that certain death is behind you.

But this is also where the trial-and-error comes into play, because despite the runner vision, it's not always clear where you need to go or what you need to do. You inevitably have to stop in a few levels to poke your nose around the environment in order to get a feel for what's going on, meaning that you'll eventually get shot and start from the last checkpoint. At other times, the frantic pace has you jumping towards

platforms that you can't see until mid-air, and it becomes a rote process of dying, learning the level layout, and running it again.

*Mirror's Edge* encourages you to avoid combat whenever possible, just by running away, but there are times when you're forced to fight enemies. This is also a double-edged sword, because it can be really satisfying or really frustrating. It's basically impossible to take on more than two enemies at a time, and even two's likely to get you killed, so you're expected to isolate enemies and fight them individually. Your options are to either beat them unconscious with punches and kicks, or to steal their weapon and knock them out in a single, carefully-timed, «execution» maneuver. That is, when the enemy's gun flashes red, you can right-click to take it and knock him out in one fell swoop, or should you fail, you get punched in the face several times.

There's a reflex feature that allows you to toggle slow-motion to time these maneuvers more accurately, but I swear the system is broken and inconsistent. Many-a-time I clicked when the enemy's weapon flashed red and got killed immediately afterwards. If you can get a gun, though, you can use it to shoot other enemies. You're limited to one

magazine per gun (and you can't manually check how many bullets you have left), so you have to swap guns out on the fly. It's not supposed to be a first-person shooter, so the shooting mechanics are primitive, but it gets the job done for its limited purpose. I thought it was really fun disarming enemies and shooting them down.

It adds a lot to the tension knowing that you're actually fairly vulnerable and unarmed. Even when you have a gun, your ammo is limited and your ability to run, jump, and dodge gets reduced. You feel empowered with a shotgun, but you have to sacrifice it sometimes in order to move more effectively. There's no health meter, when you take damage the edges of the screen turn red and your vision blurs. If you take too much damage too quickly, then you die, but health regenerates if you can avoid taking damage for several seconds. The end effect is that combat actually feels tense with each and every encounter, and is actually more exciting than many purely action-based shooters.

Another noticeable problem comes from the disjointed flow. It alternates between frantic chase scenes, close-quarters combat, unrestricted exploration, first-person cutscenes, and two-dimensional cel-shaded





cutscenes. The idea, I suppose, is to give you some variety to mix it up, but you run into situations where the pacing bogs down completely. Every chapter has one or two elevators where you just stand there for 60 seconds doing nothing, which takes you completely out of the flow of the game. At other times your flow gets disrupted when the runner vision fails to properly cue you what to do, and your momentum comes to halt as you stop and wander around looking for a platform.

The game's visual aesthetic is very pleasing and constitutes a large part of what makes the experience so refreshing. While a lot of games have been striving for dark, gritty atmosphere, *Mirror's Edge* goes for bright and crisp visuals. The buildings are a clean white with contrasting blues and reds. There's also a ton of bloom, lens flares, refraction and reflection. It's all very pleasing to look at and feels uniquely memorable. The music, a sort of synthetic, electronic-sounding ambiance, compliments the visuals very well.

*Mirror's Edge* is also surprisingly short. Steam clocked me finishing in about 7 hours, though you could probably beat it in 5 if you know what you're doing. I thought a 10 hour campaign was short, but this might be the shortest full-priced game I've played.

*Mirror's Edge* has its problems, but what it gets right is bloody well done. There's really nothing else like it. The platforming is fun and enjoyable, the combat can be really tense and exciting, the atmosphere is pleasing

to be in, and the feeling of bounding over obstacles and leaping over huge chasms in one fluid stream of momentum is so deeply rewarding that it makes up for all of the other shortcomings. ●



### BRIGHT MOMENTS:

First-person platforming has never been this fluid or engaging before, with lots of exciting action and tension.

### FUMBLES IN THE DARK:

Some moments rely too heavily on trial-and-error, and the story is not as developed as it ought to be.

### VERDICT:

It's pretty short and has a number of flaws, but the atmosphere and overall premise is so unique that it's absolutely worth playing.



# Adventure Lantern

