GGHOSTDREAMM

ARKHOUSE

COMMENTARY BOOK
2016
ARKHOUSE

GOOD NIGHT.

"Good Night and welcome..."
In case you wonder - the surreal-ized head above is myself.

"What do you prefer, coffee or tea?
I like both. You?"

In case you wonder the capital of Australia is indeed Canberra. Not Sydney.

In case you wonder... this text is supposed to be a prologue to my book.

Alexey Tsvelov
/Arkhouse

GGHOSTDREAMM

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It's a "real-time book", so to be honest I don't know myself what the contents of this book are... but the list above should be more or less accurate. That's the plan at least...

GHOSTDREAM

Let's start with the article I have written for my Indie DB page. It was meant to be an "alpha version" of this book, so it should work well as an "introduction" to the more detailed commentary, which may follow right next after it...

>>Initial Concept

I believe the idea is good if after an hour or two of thinking about it, I manage to express it in just one simple sentence. I can always develop it further later on, but in the very beginning it must be interesting enough for me in its simplest form. In this case I simply wanted to create "a world, only slightly visible through the darkness". Not stylish black and white Limbo style, but a pretty colorful world, although covered in eternal darkness and so barely visible.

So the first thing I did was this room:

GHOSTDREAM

Now I want to do something similar with the characters too — they must be barely seen, or not seen at all. Ghosts fit perfectly — you see only clothes, but not their bodies — they don't exist and the clothes are simply their remaining memories, which might be imaginary:

<<That is Reader, Ghostdream's protagonist. His only memory of the physical world is reading a book. This is why they call him Reader.

READER

back   front   side

GHOSTDREAM

The world must have the same logic too — it's there, but barely seen. This actually reminds me of nearly all of my dreams — when I awake I remember only few details — everything else feels like that eternal darkness I'm trying to portray. The atmosphere of dreams is something to always have in mind here — it will probably end up looking like some old surreal art, but that is only natural:

It feels exactly like my dreams... and as expected it reminds surrealism. More than that... it IS surrealism. Fine with me - it's been a while since my last experiment in this style...

So... we have "a world, only slightly visible through the darkness" + bodiless ghosts + surreal dreams. Nice combo. Interesting enough for me to dedicate some time of my life to it.

>>Graphics

Preferably at least 50% of every room must me dedicated to "eternal darkness", even more if possible.

Everything must move chaotically all the time. Not a single moment without movement (excluding texts, which must be readable).

Resolution isn't very big (640X400), so I can't make it very detailed, but I can work much faster in a smaller res- olution. Since I have no budget... "faster is better" — it isn't even a choice, unfortunately... Still, some rooms have quite big objects in it, detailed enough:

Success. *The game looks exactly as I want it to look.*

The only problem is...

The only problem is monitor settings — depending on the display settings the game can look either extremely dark or too bright on the contrary. And I don't want to start the game with the annoying "calibration settings"... people are not idiots, they can manage their own monitors without me telling them:

100-90% darkness
The balls are barely visible
You should see this ball quite well

You are ready for Ghostdream

>>Music

Naturally it must be dark... and dark music is my thing. This is why I want to do something different this time. Dark only slightly, but by any means not scary. The spectrum of emotions associated with darkness is much wider than fear — it may also be sadness or even sexual desire. I am much more interested in sadness in this case. Blues is the answer. Classic Blues wouldn't fit perfectly though — I need a different version of Blues, my own Blues, dark Blues, familiar yet different. Dark but not scary again. At any given moment I want to remind the player — it is dark, but it isn't a horror game — nothing will appear here suddenly — if something frightens you it's accidental. Music can serve me well for this matter — you always hear it.

GHOSTDREAM

Success. *The soundtrack is big and quite rich both in arrangement and melody — I even have a fake chip-tune track for the sci-fi episode (you can have sci-fi dreams, so it works well as a part of the world).*

My only problem as always is the sound quality — I'm using some old software and I have no money for professional mastering. I know it sounds exactly as I want it to sound on my equipment and I have no idea how it will sound elsewhere. That's "hit or miss" unfortunately, but of course — <u>headphones are recommended</u> for this game (or any other game ever made).

>>Story

First rule: <u>no human world connections.</u> My characters are ghosts living in a dream world. They know about their past life experience about as much as we know about ours. They are blind kittens with no history. When I write the dialogues I imagine 5-7 years old children (only if they would knew more words to express themselves). My ghosts are in fact even younger than 5 years old and there are no adults to tell them what they must do.

I want the story to be the same way. I imagine a kid leaving his house to buy some candy in the shop, but half way this kid sees something peculiar on the other side of the street and simply forgets about the candy. Then he meets another kid, who tells him "Hey, I know a cool place! Follow me!". And once again the kid forgets about "peculiar thing" and runs to see the "cool place" he knows nothing about. Imagine how far this kid could go if he would have an absolute freedom (the kind of freedom only ghost can have). That's the kind of story I want to tell.

Success. *"The kid's logic" is there, but I needed to change my first rule once. Some ghosts believe in existence of scary "physicals", who can possess the ghosts and control them for their evil deeds. Naturally, this "physical possessing a ghost" is the player, controlling protagonist. I think it's a nice touch, worth changing the rules for. I especially like how the ghosts imagine us. The most bizarre thing about physicals to them is that physicals cannot fly diagonally. Why they believe we can fly vertically I have no idea.*

>>Gameplay

At first I was planning it as a "Ghost World RPG", but very soon I've realized the only part I'm really interested in is the town with all of its characters. I still believe it could work well as an RPG — some would even call it unique, despite the archaic game-play, but it seems that "Ghost World Adventure" is simply more inspiring for me to think about.

>Structure of the game

Normally there is one big location in adventure games with all the events revolving around it. Usually it's a city. Exploring this city you find the paths to lesser locations while constantly back-tracking to some kind of center. Surprisingly it can be very addicting to do this — it feels like you are gradually becoming a part of this world, living and evolving with it. "Returning" is a very important element for building the "atmosphere".
My idea is different. I wanted Ghostdream to be an "Arcade style Adventure game". I'm not talking about the action elements here — by any means no... All I wanted is to borrow the structure of classic arcade games. That means: game-play consists of several linear episodes (usually called stages), no back-tracking possible, "boss" event at the end of each episode (slightly more advanced game-play element, usually unique).

GHOSTDREAM

Here's the plan for the very first stage of Ghostdream:

Boss Event

Stage itself

Gather the clues in the main section and go to the "boss event" room (main puzzle of the stage). Once "the boss" is beaten you go to the next stage. You will never return to this place again.

>Puzzles

Any puzzle ever made in a point and click adventure game is a disguised password menu, consisting of the two parts: "interface" and "key" (or "clue"). No matter how it may look it's a sequence of typical actions. Normally puzzle designers are concentrating on the interfaces of their passwords, trying to disguise it well enough for you to never understand it's a password. My idea is the opposite.
<u>*Simple interfaces and advanced clues:*</u>

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PUZZLE 2

CLUE A

PASSWORD MENU

front
back
depart

CLUE B

CLUE C

cover
page x
depart
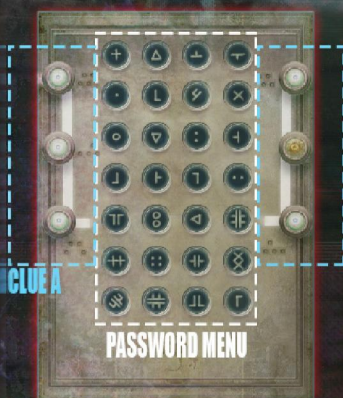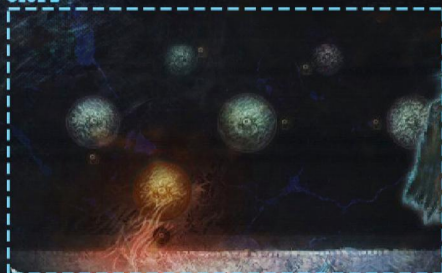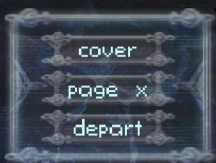
The rest of the clues are given in the dialogues.
(I will also add "solutions" section to the art book...

You can clearly see it's a simple password menu and the clue to it is quite complex. Two good things about it:

>**1.** You don't need to wander from one room to another just to press a button/push lever/turn a wheel/etc... you simply press the buttons on one compact menu.

>**2.** If you happen to know the solution, you can input it in a second. May be it's your second time playing, or you simply don't like solving puzzles in adventure games...

— — — — — — — — — — — — — — —

The most complex clue of Ghostdream is symbolically represented in a structure of the rooms you'll find it in. For that trick to work I needed to make 9 extra rooms... and just one simple menu with 9 buttons to solve it.

>>Extras
I'm always drawing more than I need just to have some material left for an art book. I'll start working on it for real right after I'll finish the game, but I already have enough art to fill the pages:

GHOSTDREAM

READER

Another popular "extra feature" nowadays is a so-called "Commentary Mode". I can understand why people like it — if I love the game I want to know everything about it and just googling it is rarely enough for me. "Commentary Mode" should be the perfect answer, but... why do I hate it so much?

Because it ruins the atmosphere of the game. The worst thing that a game can do is to tell you in the face — "I am a game". And this is exactly what this commentary mode is doing — each minute or so you hear developers talking about how they created this game (at the time you are playing it!). It's a horrible experience for me as a gamer.

My answer is: separate commentary mode from the game and put it into... the art book. The only reason I'm calling it "Art Book" is because people can tell right away what it is without any additional explanations. I should be calling it "Commentary Book" instead — the concept arts will be put "into the comments", not otherwise.

Lastly, if the game will sell well, I have a DLC in mind, but it's too soon to dream about it...

This concludes my long article.

— — — — — — — — — —

COMMENT:
Now I think I would rather
concentrate on the sequel.
No point in castrated DLCs.

GHOSTDREAM

GHOSTDREAM

DETAILED COMMENTARY

(STARTS HERE...)

GHOSTDREAM

CONCEPT

The idea of this darker than night ghost world is probably one of the oldest video game "dreams" I ever had. I think I've started to think about it from about 10 years ago — I was still a student at art academy and my life was unreasonably hectic, so it was hard to find enough time to actually work on it. I was merely dreaming about it and in my dreams it was supposed to be an RPG (and I'm still planning an RPG sequel to Ghostdream — I may explain why later...).

GHOSTDREAM

(It isn't Singer...

GHOSTDREAM

Ghosts & Demons: The world of DEAD DREAMS , Ghost DREAMS

(Primary Concept SIDE A
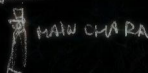
Chol Призраков

DEMO "REQ"
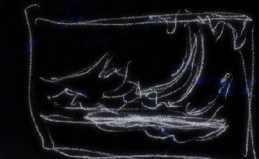
TOTAL STATS : 6 ACTS

12 - 6 CHARAS

1. BUTTON PRESS
2. TEXT INFO BAR
3. DEMONIC REVERSE
4. LOC INSIDE
5. ITEM INSERT
6. SUPER COMPLEX (3 per one slot).

6 +0 MAJOR puzzles
10 +8 simple.
12 +6   52 LOCS

×12
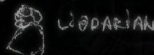
~10 LOCATIONS (OUT OF 100)
1 PUZZLE (OUT OF 10.8)
4 CHARAS (OUT OF 20)

MAIN CHARA   DEMON

LIBRARIAN   DEMON2

SILENT GIRL
+~

1. DRAGONS
2. THE MAZE - BOOK
3. FOREST BUTTONS (PIXEL EXITS)
4. SECRET WORDS (VOICE HEAR)
5. QUEST (1-6)
6. SECRET ROOM
7. PIXEL HUNT CARD
8. TALK A LOT SECRETS
9. GREET THE RIGHT CROCK(?)
10. PAPER MAZE DOOR (/CARD)
11. DOPPEL'S (TRUTH/FALSE)
12. POINT+CLICK DAMBATCH
   - SUDOKU
   - CHESS
   - ATE
   - MUSICAL puzzle

PAPER MAZE DOOR / CARD

BOOK
3 - ⊙
6 - ☆
4 - △

"FOUNDATION"

« OPEN MY BROTHER'S »

BOOK.

SILENT GIRL (UMBRELLAS)

DEMON PUZZLE

DEMO GOES HERE.
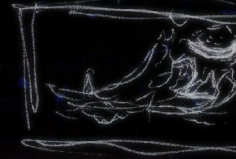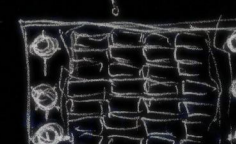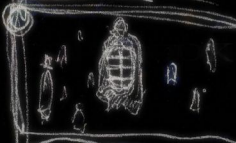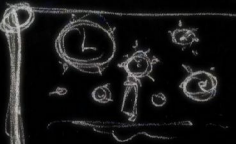
ALL SYMBOLS ARE REVERSED, BECAUSE... NEVER TRUST DEMONS!

GHOST DREAM

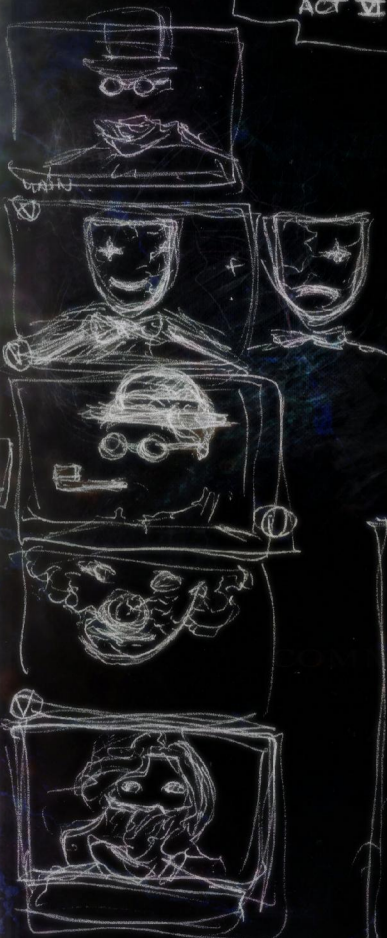ACT I D TOWN OUTSKIRTS (5)   MINI 34 CHARA   HIDDEN GHOSTS (PIXEL HUNT)   640
JAKOB   N 6 LOCS   STEAM   480
ACT II ~ UNDER SIDE (6)   EXTRAS
ACT VII D TOWN
ACT IV DRAWN BOOK
ACT V FOREST ~ (DEMONIC)
ACT VI DREAM WHITE

* EXTRA CARDS (TOTAL) /10
* SECRET DIALOGUE LINES
* SECRET LOC. (DRAWN WORLD)
* PIXEL HUNT ALL PAGES

MAIN

GHOST DREAM
Ghost Dream
GHOST DREAM
GHOSTDREAM
GHOST DREAM

* MUSIC   D OVERALL FEEL? * SATIE
* TITLE   MINIMALIST
* PROLOGUE
* LOCATIONS ; 1/2
* BOOKS/PUZZE
~ 5 TOTAL

STORY
* PROLOGUE
* MONOLOGUES D CLICK ON
* 5 CHARA DIALOGUES (SHORT)

CHARAS
1. LEADOV
2. WRITOV
3. ACTOR A
4. ACTOR B
5. STUDENT (GIRL) SINGER SONGSTRESS
6. KNIGHT /FIGHTER
7. CLOWN (ENTERTAINER) COMIC
8. DEMON
9. DEMON ~ CHINESE
10. DEMON
11. DEMON
12. DEMON

GHOST DREAM

GHOST DREAM

GHOST DREAM   INTRO   GHOSTDREAM ACT I

SYMBOLS

TRUST

HELLO THERE? ...

GHOSTDREAM

This RPG origin has influenced Ghostdream in many ways that may be hard to notice (yet). For example each character belongs to a certain class. The most common ghost world classes are: ghost, demon, holy spirit and god. There are also sub-classes like genie — genies are somewhere in between gods and holy spirits. Another thing worth mentioning is the cards — in an RPG version the cards will give you certain stat boosts, additional abilities and once in a while you would need to equip a certain card to progress further in a dungeon.

(original concept...

GHOSTDREAM

RPG connection should also explain why the ghosts look this way — they are just floating items, "equipped" on invisible body. This is why I believe it's an awesome concept for an RPG world — most RPG games I happen to enjoy are all about items. I believe it can be fun experimenting with various item combinations, seeing no character whatsoever. Story-wise the items represent memories, but we may talk about the story later...

As you may know RPG games are usually quite long and require a lot of work even in its most minimalist of forms (excluding RPG maker "template-everything" type of games). Still... it seems I can't afford even a fraction of the time I need to actually make the game I'm dreaming about. The solution to this problem was obvious: dissect the story into parts and start with the smallest one, which is... Ghostdream.

ART
————————————

Finishing Ghostdream in just 6 months (actually even less than 6 months...) would be absolutely impossible if I wouldn't have some content ready for the RPG version of it. Of course, saying "I was merely dreaming about it" was an exaggeration on my side. I was also drawing a lot. Not daily... but quite often still. In these 10 years I have managed to produce enough visual content for the whole trilogy (and that's the plan).

My only paranoia was about the constant darkness and constantly blue-ish colors. I though it might become extremely monotonous and boring very soon. This is why I have started experimenting almost right away, drawing backgrounds for Act 2 — I needed to confirm I can create enough variety, without breaking the mood. The best way to test it was to try and create the room, based on a different color, but with the similar level of darkness. That's the result:

————

I have noted it as "success" in my still fresh "to do list", but... I wasn't sure. I needed something else... At the same time I have started preparing some extra concept arts for this book and the best one I did was this:
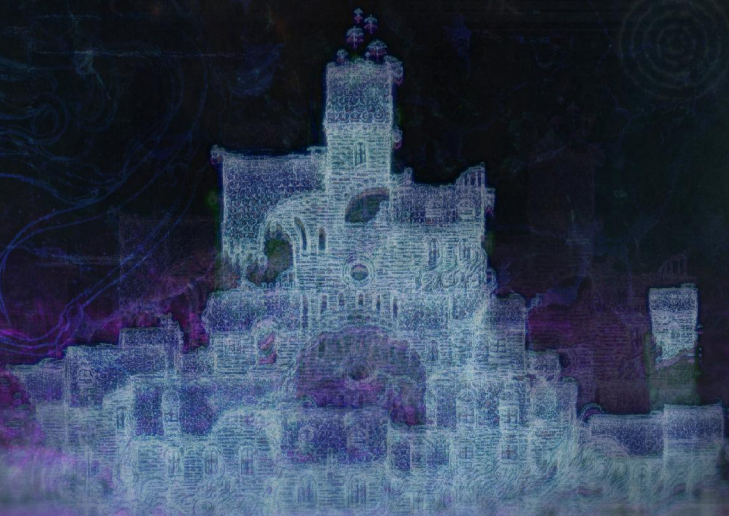
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Might not be the best in fact, but I saw potential. I wanted to have this "hand-drawn" slightly brighter feel for at least one episode of the game. And that was Act 3 — the town:

(The town...

For act 4 I wanted to test my "dark drawn world" style — I'm planning to use and develop it further in my next game (not related to Ghostdream), so testing it first was important to me for more than just one reason. I absolutely like the result and I see a lot of potential here for my next game, (which hopefully I'll demonstrate to you relatively soon).

GGHOSTDREAMM

Later I have started to feel the need to return to the initial style of the game — "dark-blue-ish" like act 1. Act 5 is getting darker, but not exactly blue-ish and act 6 looks like a perfect continuation of what I have started in act 1.

Other Side episode needed to look more or less the same as the rest of the game, but with inverted colors. So it's mostly white, instead of black. It's the other side of darkness after all:

MUSIC

—————————————————

I found the right words for my newly-invented musical subgenre it seems. I call it... <u>Noir Blues</u>. Yes, yes, it's the same as "dark blues", as I was calling it before, but Noir Blues definitely sounds cooler. I may explain later why this Noir Blues is so important for me, but for now... I think the "music section" is detailed enough in my initial article — not much I can add (except telling you it's called Noir Blues now), so I would rather talk about sounds effects here. Not even sound effects... but the acting (which in my case is still mostly about "playing with the effects" on Audacity).

First of all, I never thought I'll need to do this... "acting thing" myself. Being childishly naive, I thought I'll start an incredible crowd-funding campaign, and I'll use the real money to hire the real actors. Well, it never happened (more on that in the "secret section" I might add later on...). I needed to do this myself. I needed to talk as several different characters at the same time — female characters among them.

Ohh...

...it felt like a nightmare.
But it never felt absolutely impossible.
I knew I can do this...
...in one way or the other.

The key word is _effects_. I thought it would sound unnatural if the ghosts would talk like normal human beings — they don't have the necessary equipment to sound human. So the initial plan was to add a tonne of effects to every dialogue line to the point that nobody will be able to tell what they hear. But when I have started recording my own voice... I thought two things: first — it sounds nothing like me; and second — hey, I like the way this guy talks! So I have decided to use fewer effects and so I believe I have achieved a quite interesting effect with this: if you just hear the audio you'll probably won't understand that much, but if you read and listen at the same time... it starts to make sense! I like that effect — it only adds to the mystery.

But the true challenge was the 2 female characters. Audacity is a magical tool for doing that kind of work, but still... it was tough doing this. If you'll talk in your normal voice (and mine is pretty low...) and then try to make it higher on the software you have, it will probably sound too exaggerated. So you need to talk as high as you possibly can — my idea was simple: if you talk while having very little air in your lungs you get the lowest voice possible; if you talk while having max air your lungs can afford you get the highest voice you can produce. But that's not enough. You also need to sound in a female way... I mean manner. Again, my idea on this is simple: men talk like they don't care about anything in the world; women talk like they care about everything that ever happened. I think that's the key difference in the manner men and women talk. I might be wrong about this of course, since I can't say I'm absolutely happy with the result. But I did it good enough. I'm satisfied.

STORY

You have probably noticed that English is not my first language. And I have heard one person saying that this "foreign English" feel actually adds something to the atmosphere of the game, that it feels just right coming from this alien world. Ehh... sounds rather ugly without the context, but that was the intention. I wanted the characters to sound alien to "physicals".

I always had a feeling that my bad English (and the lack of desire to master it) can someday evolve into a certain style — yes, yes, anything to justify the laziness sounds like a "good style" to me. But jokes aside, I simply can't understand why my characters (or myself) sound foreign to native English speakers. I don't have the slightest idea in fact, so "It's a style" will be my honest excuse from now on. "Telling you — it's a style" yours truly will say to you.

GHOSTDREAM

Another thing I want to talk about a little is the timeline of my ghost story overall.

Ghostdream is neither the first, nor the last episode of the story, but it was the most convenient part to make a separate game based on it. The ghostdream zone is known to be as "memory-stealer" of the ghost world — the moment the characters enter it (this is where Ghostdream begins) they all loose most of their memories — it's like all of them have amnesia all of the sudden. In other words ghostdream is purgatory — it steals everything that is left of the spirit so it would be able to move further...

...to the outer space, where the last episode begins. But that's the story for another day...

Also...

The person Reader meets in the very end is not Reader.

If you thought Reader have met himself in the very end — you are right to think this way — Reader himself must believe he saw his own body. Except it's not him. There is a reason indeed he needed to be there, but this reason cannot be explained at the moment.

Too much story is still untold...

GAMEPLAY

I have noticed that often I like the things in games that normally people hate. ...or rather it becomes a "good taste" to hate certain things in video games (that I happen to enjoy) — like "pixel hunting". So much pointless hatred and not a single idea on how to solve the problem (except avoid it at all costs, of course...). Personally, I think pixel-hunting is horrible only when you are not informed you need to pixel-hunt.

In Ghostdream I have tried informing the players about pixel-hunting in 2 different ways. First, I gave player a map (a plan to be more precise). Second, I gave player the coordinates and the rulers. If you still hated it, I must tell you I did it this way because I thought it's awesome — not because I wanted to torture you. I think this "coordinate+rulers" combo may be used in many different ways for various detective or supernatural-hunting stories.

GHOSTDREAM

Another thing I wanted to try in Ghostdream is combining at least 2 different perspectives.

Most of the game you play in the 3rd-person view. In act 5 I was trying to "mimic" the first-person view and I must say I like the result (especially how it's explained in the story). In act 6 I was trying to do something I would describe as... 2nd-person view. You had almost no control over anything — you saw the tramway, but you weren't controlling it directly. I wanted this part to feel like the actual "on-rail" experience with almost no game-play. Again, I like the result — I wanted players to stop pressing the buttons to watch and analyze what they see to solve the puzzle.

In the end I have done almost everything I ever wanted to do in this genre. I still have some interesting (I hope...) ideas for adventure games, but I believe I'll have another opportunity to try these.

GHOSTDREAM

This concludes the DETAILED COMMENTARY section

PUZZLE SOLUTIONS

(SPOILER ALERT...)

I

II

III
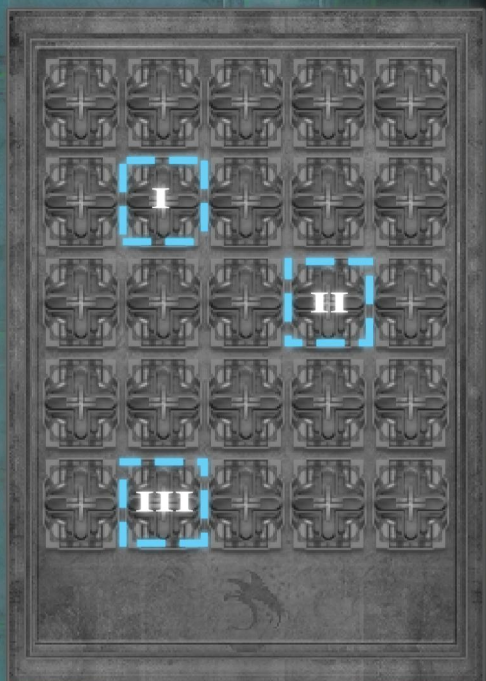
3 headS oF thE dragoN!
F.A.Q:
What it means?
No idea!
Is it blood?
Ha ha ha ha... no idea!

WANDERER CARD:
Very simple drawing-based puzzle I had in mind for years... Analyze and compare.
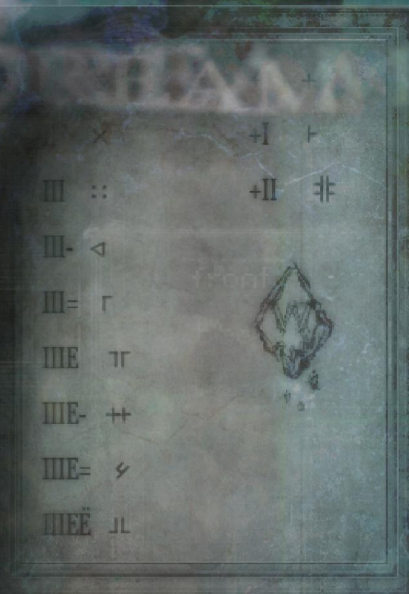
BLOODY KNIGHT CARD:

This one is rather complicated, but not much.
Clocks show the time, ghost book shows the symbols, the
card itself shows the order.
The time = the symbols.
Red clock is demonic, so the right time is the opposite of
what it shows.
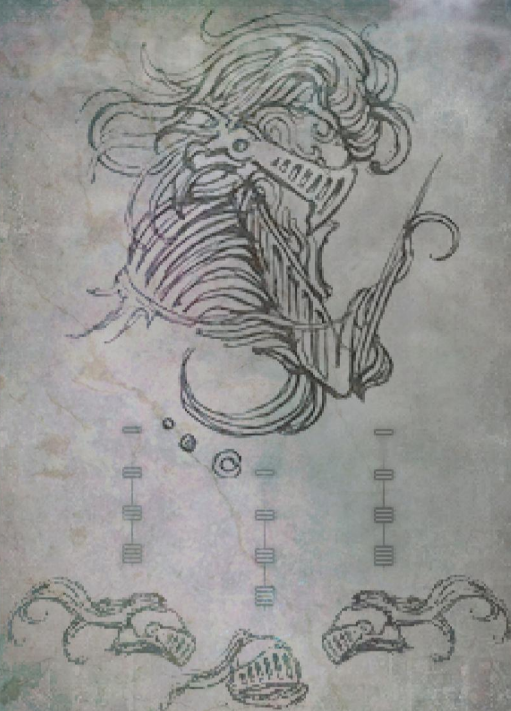
BATTLER'S RANKS PUZZLE:

*Analyze the given info (shinystones),
structure the info as shown in the ghostbook
and find the right answers, based on the structured info
you have obtained.*

-BARRUIN
-BARRON
-BARROS

(example...

WHITE JINN CARD:

The card is the plan, showing the locations of the hidden lights with lines (directions) and circles (objects). There are 7 of them total.

((Notice the white lines too...

IT'S CANBERRA
(The map of Australia was found on Wikipedia
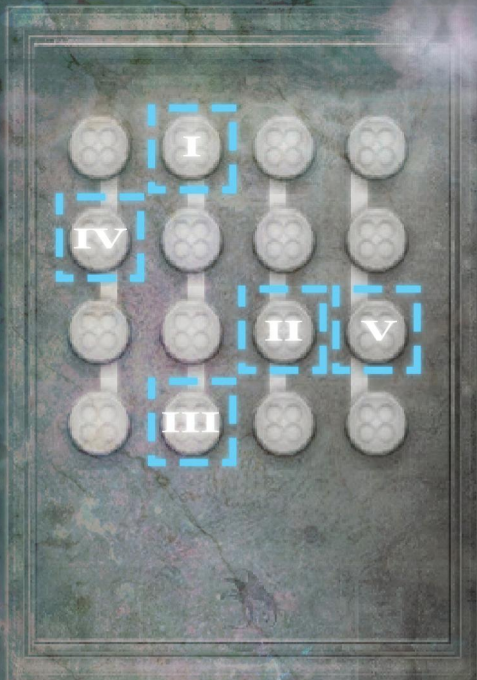
dragoN leviathaN!

F.A.Q:
Q: Dragon again?
A: Yes, I'm a dragon nerd.

Q: Is that supposed to be 3D? Doesn't work...
A: It works if you have to ask...

Q: Is this actually "frequent"?
A: Ha ha ha... ha ha ha ha...

WESTERN WITCH CARD:

Musical puzzle. Dragon shows the order of the notes; it shows how high or low the notes are in comparison.

COMMENT:

At first I wanted to make a more complicated puzzle, by giving a clue in the form of two dragons — one "ghost dragon" and one "demon dragon", but then I thought maybe it would be too much...
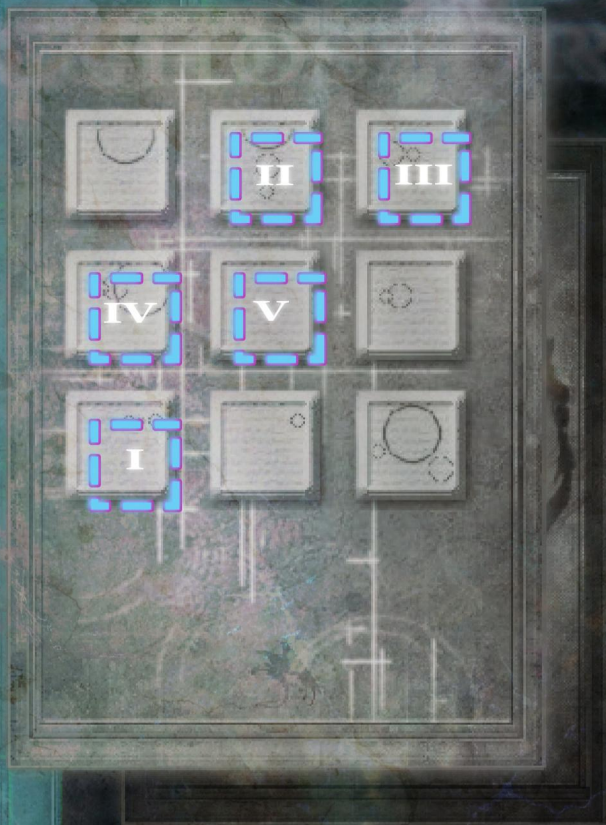
GOLEM CARD:
One of my favorite types of puzzles.
There are 9 rooms and 9 buttons. Analyze what you see
and find the connection.
"Lights" show the order, planets show the positions of the
buttons on the card (and otherwise).
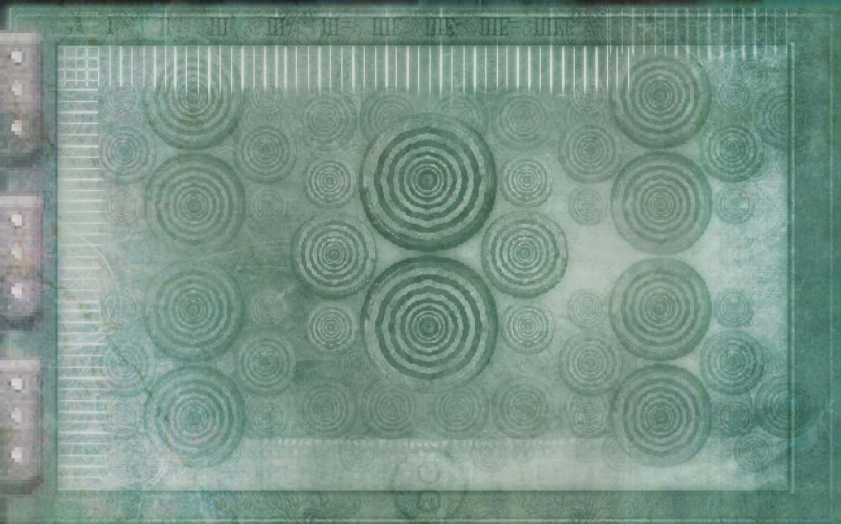
OTHER SIDE NAVIGATION:

Another "pixel-hunting" puzzle.
Read the "info blocks" to get the coordinates and use the
rulers for better orientation.

Cursors

Move to...

Look on...

Interact with...

Talk with...

Left Mouse click
–Action–

Right Mouse click
–Change Cursor–

x

RE: TUTORIAL:
Just in case you need it back :)

GGHOSTDREAMM
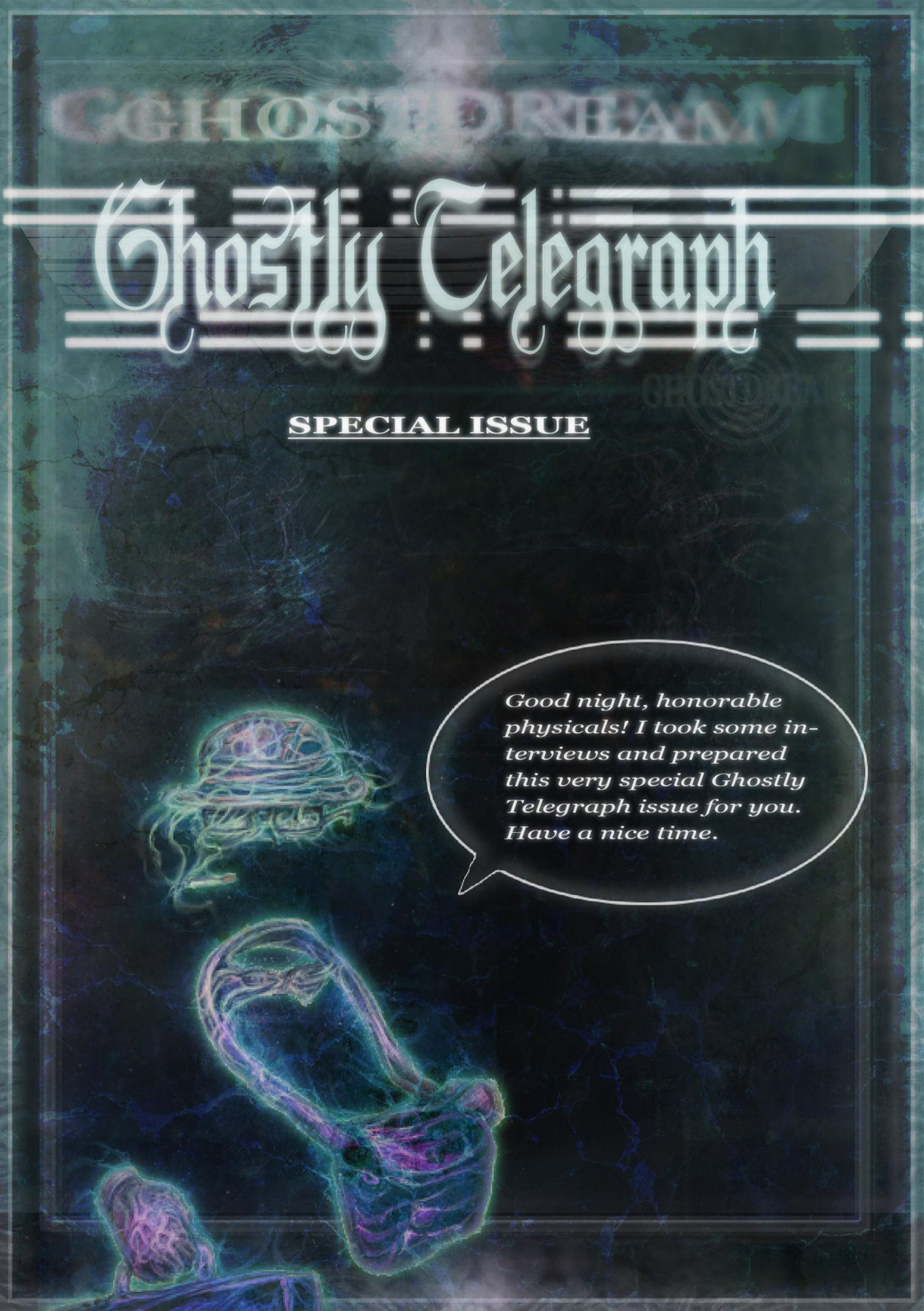
GHOSTDREAM

The very first art of this project.

GGHOSTDREAMM

Ghostly Telegraph

To be honest I hated being the protagonist of this game at first, but at some point... I started to enjoy it for no apparent reason.

GGHOSTDREAM

Ghostly Telegraph

Choo
Choo
Choo
Choo
Chooooo!

GHOST DREAM

Actor and Organ Grinder

Looking at this I understood
one important little thing...
but I won't tell you
lolololol!!!!111!!!

It seems I still have two pages left and nothing's left to talk about... But don't worry: it feels exactly like all the dates I ever had, so I'll just use my common lines.
...
...
...

———————————————————————

Ehh... what kind of music do you like?
...
...
...

———————————————————————

I don't know what you have replied, but I like Blues!
...
...
...

———————————————————————

Ehh... what's your...
...
(no, no, no, no... they will think I'm a geek if I'll tell them mine's Star Wars.
May be I should say something different?
Like what?
Harry Potter?
Oh, I love Harry Potter movies!
But that's hardly any better...
OK, OK, just say something already!
...
...
...

———————————————————————

———————————————————————

GGHOSTDRREAMM

Ehh…
nice dress!
…
…
…

—————————————————————

Suits you.
…
…
…

—————————————————————

That's a damn nice dress on you!
…
…
…

—————————————————————

Damn nice lolololol!!!!1111!!!
…
…
…

Congratulations!
You have reached the other side of the book.
Was it boring? Monotonous? Wordy? Because
I have no idea...

ARKHOUSE

COMMENTARY BOOK
2016
ARKHOUSE