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## Her story plot explained

Now that Her Story [the official website] is available, Adam, John and Pip have gathered to discuss the structure and plot of the incredible FMV crime game. There are spoilers throughout and as much as the game revolves around secrets and lies around criminal cases, please don't read on if you haven't already played. Our spoiler-free reviews and interviews will help you decide if you want to play. Final warning. Spoilers coming in. Adam: I'm currently playing a game about the World's Greatest Detective (Ed – reviews delayed until Batman Returns). I'm talking about Batman, a guy with a car so big that it destroys another car just by being in the same zip code as them. Her Story is a completely different type of game but involves detection. Confusing over clues. Alibi. Crime. That kind of thing. I've written quite a lot about it so let me ask you this, first of all. Wot do you think? Pip: I think this is the best game I've finished so far this year. Probably the best game I've played this year as well. John: I think it's a very good game, and a very clever game - a very clever game - but I can't trumpet its glory as hard as anyone else. That leaves us with two choices. Pip – we can get our horns out and parp so loud that John can't be heard. OR we could ask John about his reservation and see if we find an interesting conversation somewhere between the horn section and Walker's solo. Oh, I thought you'd go for the trumpet option. Right, yes. Again, with provisos I constantly say out loud, My goodness this is so clever. How did they ever do something so clever?. I just don't like the acting. I never believed him. Not least because this girl is supposed to be knocking at 17 and from this crazy background sounds like, and has manners, from someone who just walked out the front door of RADA. And because the whole game is his acting - that has something influential. Adam: I love the performance, as you know, and I wonder if this is anything more than dissent - I wonder if it shows a difference in the way we look at the game. I am fully aware of my own prejudices, from a critical point of view, and I know that I look to the (often meaningless) intellectual side of things, sometimes to the extent that I ignore the emotional impact. Now, your criticism is not about the emotional nature of the show but I wonder if there is anything to be said for the fact that I enjoy the physicality of acting, because it is an actor who plays someone who is in a situation that requires his own theatricality not outright deceptive, and since it works for me at THAT level, I don't really care about finer details. Does that make sense? Anyone? It just strikes me as anything but finer detail. I mean, I dealt with it - I put aside my problems to let the game shine. But even in then the recording, he is still RA RA I RAISED IN MADNESS RA RA RA. Adam: I think of it as one of two things. That she taught herself to play other roles so well - from the first exchange in and out of the existence of others in her early life - that she had become a role. And/or that there is intentional obtuscation, a case of uttering words but disguising the truth from them. I agree that there is something very jarring about shipping, in relation to content, but I think it is very intentional. Maybe I'm totally wrong on that Pip! What do you think? John: yes, enough with my negatavisng - Pip, why does it stand out so strongly? Pip: I think it's theater and sometimes that pulls you out of the experience a little bit, but I just really like how it drips your mystery. You can't predict exactly when you're going to get a little disclosure or aha moment but there are enough clips that make the clips you play - whatever your order of digging things up - will make them happen regularly. It's really satisfying and for me that pleasure overrides the small oddity in the show. It's just incredible how it delivers the plot. How to only know one word at the beginning will run the whole experience, but it's still open to me in perfect order, the realization opens up a new direction, when I start putting it together, then learning that no, it's also snapping, and actually it's about THIS, and then chasing, and on and on. It makes me afraid to think about how much effort should go in to get that right – to make sure the clip is cut off perfectly, perfectly written to read in two or three different ways, and then certain words don't inadvertently offer a bit of a story you haven't prepared. Pip: I watch a lot of daytime murder mysteries and police procedurals and read a lot of whodunnits and with those senses of discovery is because you allow the author to lead you through, in some cases shutting down the part of your brain that will do some dedusification and others just knowing the information is being deliberately withheld to get satisfactory results from the discovery at the end. It happens in detective games as well - you do some work for them but often it's just a case of having an interactive element to those dripfed experiences. In Her Story you can actually make discoveries. Adam: I find it interesting that it works really well at that level. Before I played it, I thought it was more likely to be a game about the idea of mystery than a game about mystery itself. Because I'm a silly fool who finds it easier to follow Umberto Eco's novels than Christie, I think I fit the structure rather than the solution. I am terrible at figuring things out in a logical way, which is why I have a lot of notes at the end of Her Story. I can't keep track of simple things unless I write them down or put them in some sort of sequence, physically. My brain leaks facts. Very busy looking at the theory. The story surprised me because it was both on facts and theories. As Pip says, when watching the ridiculous amount of procedural crimes I commit, it's important to be able to turn off your brain not to damage it. Like, for goodness sake, don't see an actor who gets a little too many lines in about 11 minutes in an episode of Castle or Elementary, or it's spoiled. But here it's all about switching my brain back, which is like a treat. But then, like Adam, I had to do that by taking notes – I had this ludicrous page about 100 words all scribbled down then ticked when I was going to look for them, as well as an honest mind-to-goodness map that actually pulled out to keep track of it all. Pip: I'm just doing a word list instead of an event. I have a page in my workbook right now that is really full and that's - Saturdays, wigs, fairy tales, tea, Peter, tickets.... With the story itself I like to add the reliability of my own memory to the mix. I've kept the broad points of the story straight in my head but it has been fun chewing specifics just by trying to revisit the older clips mentally that I think of in a different light thanks to more recent revelations. Adam: There are a lot of things I believe in - facts that I think are supported by a lot of evidence - but there are a lot of details that I just have a hunch about. And then I remembered that I hadn't seen any real evidence. I've heard references to evidence, I've made connections and heard statements, but I've also made a lot of assumptions about smaller things and maybe some bigger things as well. It's not so ambiguous, because there are some truths to be found, but there's a lot to chew on afterwards. There are characters that we know next to nothing about and events that happened many years ago that it's impossible not to speculate about even though we might be dealing with both lies and false memories. I really wish we could learn more about life with Florence. Boy, there's another whole game in there. Okay – so here are two other really stupid parts you can argue not stupid. First, it makes the keyboard sound as you type – I TAKE CARE OF THANK YOU IT. Second, the song. There's A SONG. Oh, for the next interrogation of your husband's murder, can you take your guitar and play us some ditties? Pip: You know what? That song made me think of The Sailor's Dream - a mobile game by Simogo. I'm not saying it makes sense that you'd hand over the suspect's guitar and ask for folk songs during interrogation, but the thing here is that his story wore an episode of The Bill in the early nineties, but it had all the fairy tales or fantastic for that. I'm going to sneak into thinking of it as this weird dream park at the time. Or maybe it was the song that caused me to tip into my way of thinking. John: Oh - the nature of the song is brilliant, and the clues are hints it may be a heavy-handed touch, but it's very nice. I especially liked that I just found the first half with a lead by tripping in the second half, and then looking for a refraction. It was, I think, my favorite moment. But still, a SONG. Adam: I love that it was there so much, for all the reasons you both mentioned, that I worked hard enough to justify it as a real thing that could happen. And, yes, I don't really like doing work to justify something but I'm so glad it's there so I love making the effort. But we all agree that the key vote is ridiculous. (Although, I assume, the vestigial residual of the tablet version.) What about the monitor glare? I didn't realize that I could turn it off and I'm glad I didn't but look a lot different when I die! John: I realized that I could be direct, and couldn't stand it – it needed to be done in order for the whole game to work, I think. Pip: So I assume we all take a slightly different route through the story and I'd be interested to know your favorite or most memorable AHA moments because I think they'll vary because of the different paths. If that helps, I was when I realized that I had done a lot of searching around hot drinks because of the cups on the table and that the tea/coffee preferences suited different people. It was a small thing but VERY SATISFYING! It also led to a few moments where I felt somewhat pulled out by the acting (a spill that seemed too fake and the moment of asking for one sugar as she took the sugarlump from the cup next to her) if you were wondering about them than before. It! Fuck! Mine is a very small thing. Saw the clip Why are you talking about Eve?, where she sings her head on the table and taps her fingers BEFORE I see the clip about The Knock Code. Then accidentally stumble across the previous clip again and realize, OH! Oh, my God. And I forgot to save the clip where he tapped, so spent AGES finding it again, re-using the old search. Did you translate it? Pip: I can't find it anymore so no, but I had the same moment from OH! What did he tap? He knocked, LOVE U. But much more sinister was the second set of wiretapping. He made a mistake, but knocked, BYD HANNAH. Which makes me pretty sure that he killed her. Adam: Did either of you (or you two) play Aisle, Barlow's interactive fiction from the yonks of the past? No, not Pip: No, but I'm thinking about it based on this. Do they look alike? Adam: You both have to play it because it's brilliant but you also have to play it to see how he uses some of the same technique in a completely different way. Everything is that you get one command and then the game is reset. A guy shops at the supermarket and wants to buy some gnocchi. Type buy gnocchi and he does. You learn nothing and then you're back in the Hallway again in square one. There's No that command seems meaningless but you can collect so much of his backstory, the details of his life, in one command using the memories and thoughts you take elsewhere. And you can also make her dance or talk to people in the supermarket. It's a game that relies heavily on language as a means of extracting information, like Her Story, and it's also a story that you find in a nonlinear way, in fragments. John: I try to remember my AHA moment, and really fight for. I remember that tattoo was a big part of it for me - that it was snakes and apples, etc. But I forgot when it really clicked. Adam: Do any of you think it's going to be a story about a separate personality who doesn't understand at all how a split personality works? I had a moment's fear. Exacerbated by the fact that I found the idea really interesting on some level but was sure it wouldn't and couldn't really work. Pip: I don't but I think the way part of the story unfolded for me started with something relatively concrete. I can't remember exactly what it was, but from the point that I realized there were two different named personalities involved I assigned them to different people - does that make sense? That's right. I remember that at one point I had them completely the wrong way around. On my spider diagram, I've crossed out Hannah and Eve and swapped them. I like that it was ambiguous enough for a long time for me to make that mistake, before it became concrete. Adam: It was a central disclosure and I guess that's where the surprise of most AHAs would fall, but I don't think the story was too dependent on it. In that case there's a lot of interesting things – it's not a Big Twist Story with another one there. Who would have thought Eve pushed Florence down the stairs? I do. Adam: Because I seem to be the worst kind of police chief, who would chew people out for not going with a book, I choked on my cigar and said We had no way of knowing it! And it somehow pushed my feelings about it into the basement (not Simon's) dissatisfaction. I think he might have done it. Pip: There's a question mark over another set of parents as well... John: Oh Eve poisoned them FOR SURE. I'm sure because Hannah said they were found after a few days, but Eve said it the next day. Now I'm typing that I'm not sure why I'm sure, but I think being in the attic, seeing Hannah get everything, and get married, and know their world is falling apart - I'm sure she did. Adam: Is this about the Original Sin and its assignment in some way? John thinks Eve is responsible for all the evil in the world? As long as I am, Adam, error-free, that might be acceptable. John: Hehe. It's obvious you're complicated. But geez, I really like the theme of fairy tales, rapunzel stories come up, the way they create the most disturbing fairy tales themselves – they are the daughters of the darkest Grimm/Anderson story. Pip: Some of it is redundant but then you just get a mention of fairytale staples - mirrors and apples and mushrooms and terrible things that happen to parents and happy quests forever. There was also an obsessive, tragic love that made me think of something specific that I couldn't put down and it made me crazy. It's a very specific sensation that I get from a particular story or movie or something and I want to get it done. You mean their love for each other, or for Simon? Pip: Each other. Definitely. Simon's kind of an observer in some ways. Eve and Hannah sort of tried to escape each other at points and the relationship was very damaging but they were part of each other in an inescapable way. Are they heavenly creatures? It reminds me of that a little bit. Adam: It reminds me of the Heavenly Being too – which is, once again, a crime story by escaping into fairy tales and fantasies. Fiction in fiction – although Heavenly Being fiction is based on a true story, isn't it? Terrible, yes. Pip: There must be a Heavenly Being feel. The thing I thought had a tragic end in that I thought one of the two died and then the other couldn't live without him. There's a sense they have no choice but to do what the others are doing. Some plays and stories have done that riff but this is a certain mood. If I remember I'll tell you. Adam: Another thing that reminds me is A Tale of Two Sisters, which is a very creepy and sad Korean horror film. I thought about that, too! Scariest movie I've ever seen in a movie theater. Adam: YES! I adore him. um... I can't do a tangent. I have to go so I can be Batman soon. There's for bop, villains for biff and hints to kick square in the jaw. And I have to write Dote Night. Should we just say CASE CLOSED in capital letters and assume that signifying us is over? So we all hated it then, because of EURGH, a woman. Don't be silly. We all hate it because of EurGH, the folk song. Also, I kind of want to end by saying the jury will adjourn because when the hell again I can use the word delay. Come on, say it. Pip: CASE CLOSED

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