

# Postmortem: The Journey of Ignorance

## What is this?

*post·mor·tem (pst-môrtm)*

*noun. Definition 2: Informal analysis or review of a finished event.*

As part of my progress and development as an artist, I'm committed to completing my projects - part of that is creating postmortems for games I make. Post-mortems are very candid documents about game details, so if you don't want a game's experience spoiled, reading these before you play the game might not be in your best interest.

## Game Summary

*The Journey of Ignorance* (or TJoI) is a kinetic (linear) visual novel. It is about two women who journey from Toronto to rural Ontario, Canada in order to film a documentary, learning about themselves along the way. It's a collaboration (I did the art and programming, and my friend Megan wrote the story). It is my second game, and my first visual novel.

*What is a visual novel? A visual novel (VN) is a medium in which a story is told using text dialogue/narration (sometimes with voice acting) and still pictures (or sometimes, fully animated sequences) using a digital format. Visual novels are considered a type of video game. Although some visual novels give the players choices (known as branching paths) and different story endings (similar to Choose Your Own Adventure books), others are completely linear and give the player no choices (known as kinetic visual novels).*

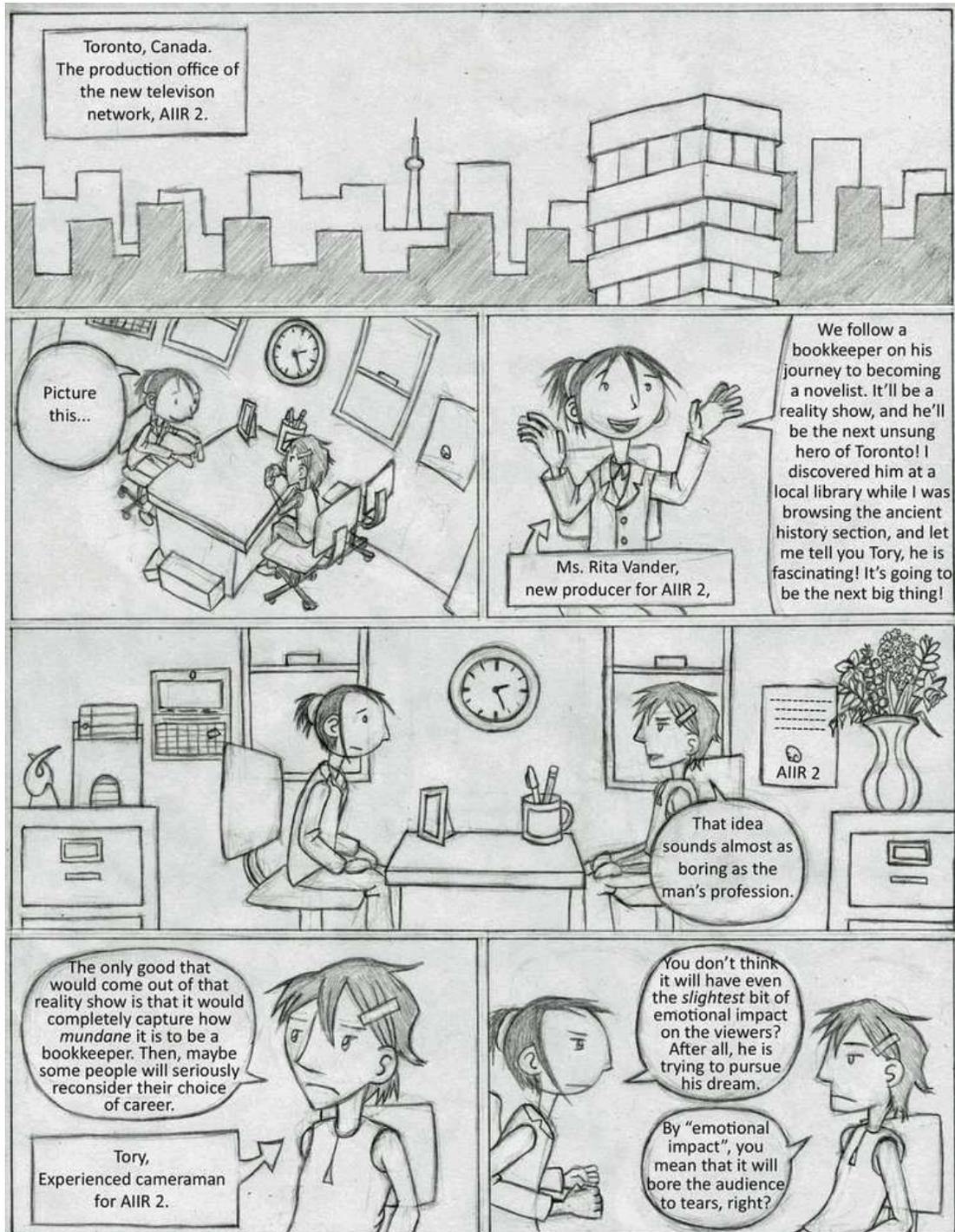
*Other than that, there really aren't any other "rules" to what makes a visual novel a visual novel.*

## What went right

1. Finishing: This may sound silly to list as a key point, but *The Journey of Ignorance* went through several changes before being completed as a VN which made completing it challenging. It originally started as a webcomic. I even posted a few pages on my deviantART account, but I quickly realised as I was trying to storyboard/plan out the webcomic that adapting Megan's text into a comic would be very challenging for me. TJoI is a slice-of-life story, with little action and a lot of dialogue. This, generally, is not good for a webcomic... but then I discovered what VNs were.

TJol took several months (about a year) to complete, mainly due to having to work on it on and off, and then switching it into an entirely new medium (from webcomic to VN). I'm glad that I was able to complete it despite these changes and the challenges adapting this VN had.

Below: One of the webcomic pages. [1]



Below: Tory (left) and Nellie's original character designs for the webcomic [2]



In retrospect, adapting it into a VN instead of a webcomic was a good design decision. The high amount of dialogue and lack of physicality (due to the plot being a slice-of-life story, rather than an action story) made it difficult to try and adapt into an interesting-looking webcomic, but was a lot easier to adapt as a VN. I hardly needed to make any changes from Megan's original text.

**Throwback:** Originally, *The Journey of Ignorance* was written in third-person perspective. I changed it to first-person perspective for the visual novel adaptation.

2. Art: I tried to make a different "main pose" for each character, which showed their personality (see image below). Rita has her hands on her hips (showing her confidence),

Nellie has her arms behind her back (shy), and Tory has her arms crossed (defensive). I also had fun designing the characters' outfits. I wanted the artwork to add to the characters.



*Note: As you can see, Tory's facial expression and eyes were originally slightly different.*

I used a different art style and art process than I usually do. I usually draw on paper, scan it, and then colour it in digitally (keeping the pencil lines included in the final drawing). This time, I sketched directly into the computer using a drawing tablet, and then inked and coloured it in digitally. It was an interesting method to experiment in.

I'm not sure if I'll ever use this art style again though. I was definitely influenced by anime (the type of art style that most VNs use), but I feel that VNs can have different, other types of art styles.

TJol is also the first time I've shown drawings of elderly people, which I found interesting to practice drawing. Additionally, I had fun researching Beaverton, Ontario for some of the backgrounds, such as The Strand Theatre location.



*Above image: The Strand Theatre depicted in TJoI.  
Below: A photo of The Strand Theatre in real life. [3]*





*Above image: Scene from the visual novel during the Toronto setting. Note the CN Tower in the distance (circled).*

3. Reception:

I'd like to thank the people who took the time to play TJoI and give me feedback on it.

[VNsNow!](#) (a website that I've been following) was nice enough mention TJoI in their *Here Is The News!* section (Date: 11/22/13). Imagine my surprise!



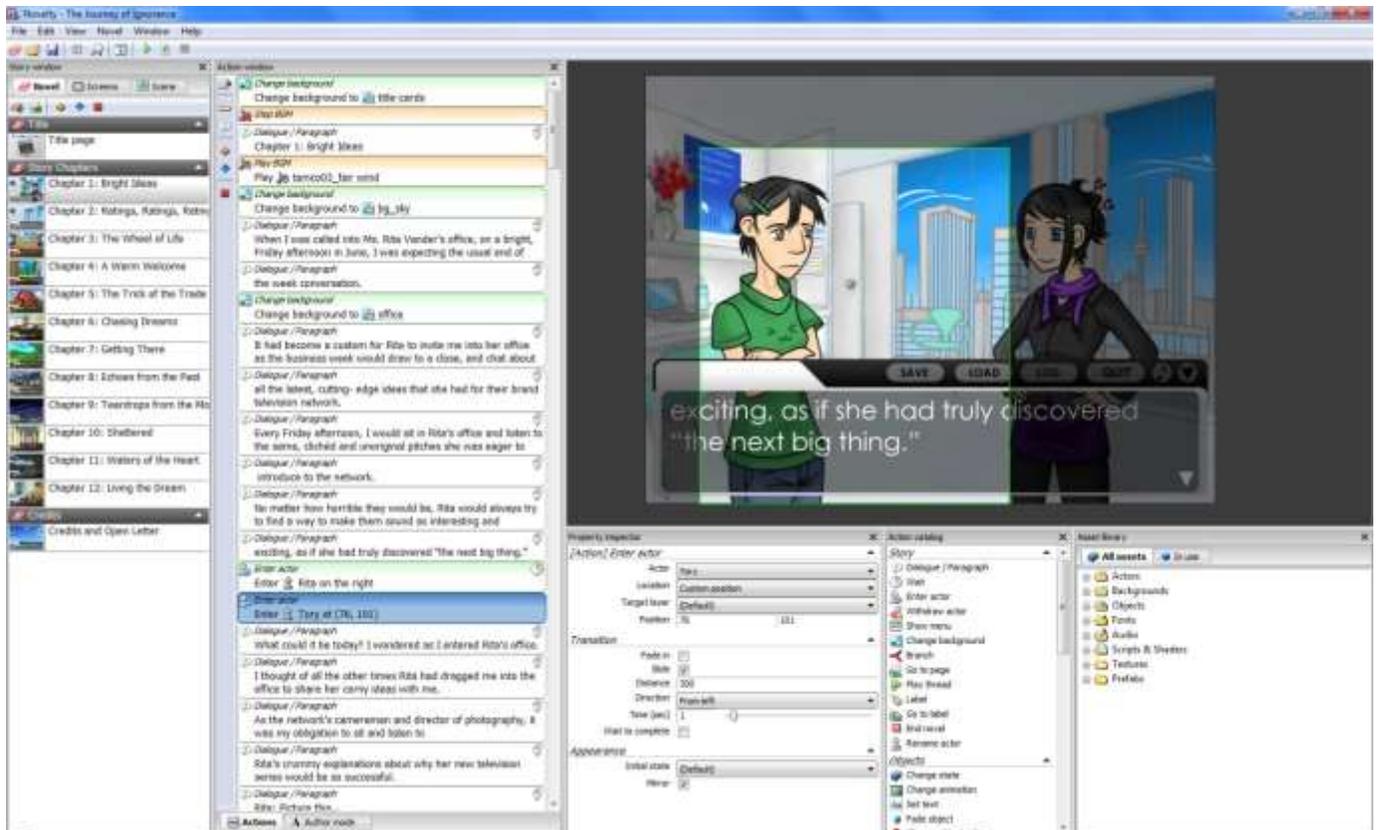
Journey of Innocence - Katy133

This week we have three new releases to talk about. *Twist 01 - Timun Mas*, by [Hiruma Kawamata](#), is the story of a girl being pursued by an ogre and how she will face this foe. Although it is a sequel to *Twist - Majapahit*, which currently only has an Indonesian language version, playing the first title is not required to understand the story in *Timun Mas*. It is a commercial release priced at 5 USD; you can buy it [here](#). The next is *The Journey of Ignorance* by [Katy133](#). It is a kinetic novel journey of discovery to rural Canada for two women from Toronto. Created using Novelty, it is available for Windows as a free download. Lastly is *ReSet Ep 2 : Under the Golden Sun*, by [Memento Mori Productions](#). It is part two of seven in an episodic modern fantasy visual novel series about a pair of supernatural detectives that are chasing after demons. It is available as a free download.

*Featured in an article on VNNow! [4]*

#### 4. Using Novelty:

Novelty is the visual novel-maker program I used to make TJoI. It has an easy-to-use interface, with very little coding knowledge needed.



What TJoI looks like the inside Novelty, a visual novel maker.

## 5. Finding a great collaborator:

I happened to be talking to Megan about some story ideas I had, and we eventually talked about making a comic together.

Our workflow went something like this: I came up with very loose, vague story idea → Passed it to Megan → Megan wrote the story → I read it and gave feedback → I adapted the short story into a VN script → I made the art → I programmed and edited it into a VN.

We basically separated the work load as “I do A, Partner does B”. It helped organise things. It also allowed use both creative freedom of what we worked on. As most people who have had experience working on a collaborative art project, working with another person can be very challenging. Finding the write collaborator is rare. I feel very lucky to have done a collaboration with Megan. I’m very happy with Megan’s work.

*Throwback: I chose the title “The Journey of Ignorance” after a novel called The Garden of Ignorance, by Marion Cran (published in 1924). It was an account of a*

*couple trying to build a Victorian garden, finding it a lot harder than they thought it would be, and being helped through the kindness of strangers.*

### **What could have been better**

1. Time it took:

It took several months to a year to make TJol, which takes about forty minutes to play. Again, I spent a lot of that time trying to adapt the story into a webcomic, but that is still a long time. Like I said in my Portal 2.5 postmortem, I want to be able to make future games that have a longer playing time, yet are made in a shorter amount of time. Hopefully, through practice (and now that I'm more familiar with Novelty), I'll be able to do so.

2. Timing of the Launch date:

TJol is set during the Summer, and yet I posted it in November. That's like the film *Jaws* being released to theatres during Winter. I would like to have been able to have completed the VN in time for Summer, but Fall/Winter was when it was ready.

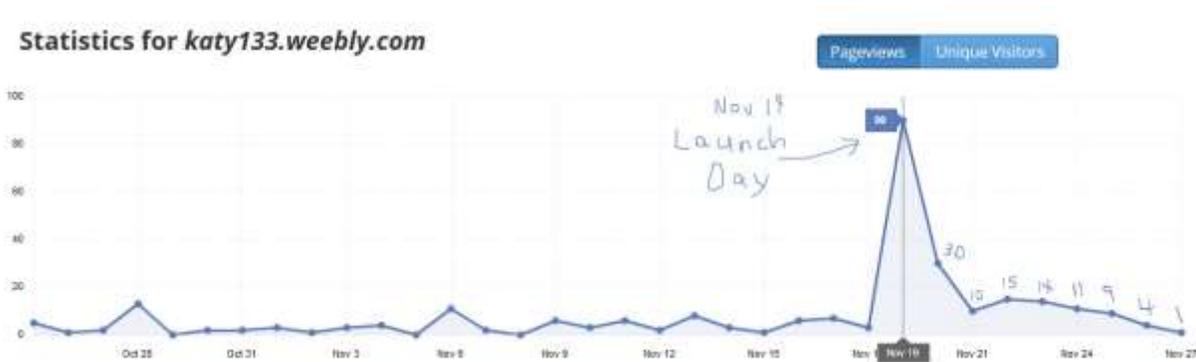
3. Unfamiliarity with Novelty:

As I said earlier, I used Novelty to make this VN. It's very easy to use, but I still had some problems because I was unfamiliar with it. Figuring out how to create and code the characters (termed "actors" in Novelty) with different facial expressions and creating buttons for the menu interface were probably the biggest challenges. I was fortunately able to find some very helpful video tutorials.

4. Directing people to the Game:

After making Portal 2.5, I learned some other places to direct people to games I make. I posted links to TJol on Tumblr, Youtube (I made a trailer), deviantART (and dA groups), my website, and VN forums.

I still however feel like I could not reach all the people who would have been interested in playing TJol.



Above: My website's page counter. Launch day had about 90 visitors.

### 5. Technical Errors:

Whenever a VN is made using Novelty, the program automatically puts an exit and quit button at the top of the screen (as a grey toolbar). If the player quits using this button (rather than using the menu's quit button), the VN will crash. I, so far, haven't been able to contact the dev team or Novelty's forums about this (I can't become a forum member until the dev team registers me).



The grey bar (listing "Game" and "Options").

Another error that was pointed out to me by a Lemmasoft's forum (a forum focused on Ren'py-made VNs) member was that if you reloaded a saved game, the background will not appear (instead a black background appears). [5] I went back into Novelty and fixed the majority of that error in TJoI. I've also figured out how to solve this problem (you replace the black "default" background to each of your VN's "pages" in Novelty with a custom background) completely for future games.



A screenshot of the bug causing the background to disappear. [5]

6. Representation:

For fun and science, I put TJoI through the 2013 EVN Bingo test:

<b>EVNBINGO</b>				
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Kinetic Novel	Kemonomimi (Animal Ears)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Anime-Influenced Artstyle	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> All-White Cast	No Music
Nameable Protagonist	No SFX	One-Person Team	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Tsundere Character <i>Tory</i>	Characters Are in High School
Music by Kevin McLeod / Incompetech	Romantic Themes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FREE SQUARE The VN has text	Ren'py Basic UI	Gay Option
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Female Protagonist	Creator's First Game	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Character is Older or Younger Than Appears <i>Maybe?</i>	Fantasy or Supernatural Elements	Setting is Japan
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Setting is America / Not Japan <i>(Canada)</i>	Characters Are Voiced	Bonus Content Unlockable	Game is a Demo	Male Protagonist

Above: *The Journey of Ignorance* when put through the EVN bingo test. The circled tiles are the tropes TJol includes. [6]

Although *The Journey of Ignorance* doesn't get a "Bingo", TJol still has a few "EVN tropes" (the bingo sheet lists a few of the most common features found in English VNs). Although just about every EVN will get at least one stamp/circle (as none of these things are meant to be inherently bad), these "tropes" are still worth considering.

My biggest issue I felt when I saw this was that TJol has an "All-White Cast". While you probably shouldn't have coloured characters just for the sake of it (because that can result in the "Token Minority" character cliché, which in itself has its own unfortunate implications), I feel like I missed a huge opportunity to experiment in designing different characters and making an EVN with good representation. After all, the story starts off in Toronto, a city known for its diversity of people. This is something I should think more about for future VNs.

7. Lack of EVN knowledge:

The main reason why I hadn't thought of adapting Megan's story into a VN at first was because I didn't know what VNs were before. I had come across a few of them (such as *Air Pressure* on Newgrounds) without knowing that they were called visual novels. Visual novels are more well-known in Japan than they are in the West. I've also compared visual novels to Choose-Your-Own Adventure books (though, unlike those books, some VNs are linear and don't have choices).

*The Visual Novel Database* [7] and *VNsNow!* were sites that I looked at to learn more about VNs. Thanks to those sites, I now know more about what visual novels are, what visual novels in the past have had their plots centred on, and examples of visual novels people have remembered and enjoyed playing (as well as what VNs I've personally enjoyed playing).

8. Reception:

It's my first VN, so I expected to learn a lot from this one.

The Visual Novel database gave the game a rating of 4.77 ("So-so to Weak") based on 3 votes. [7]

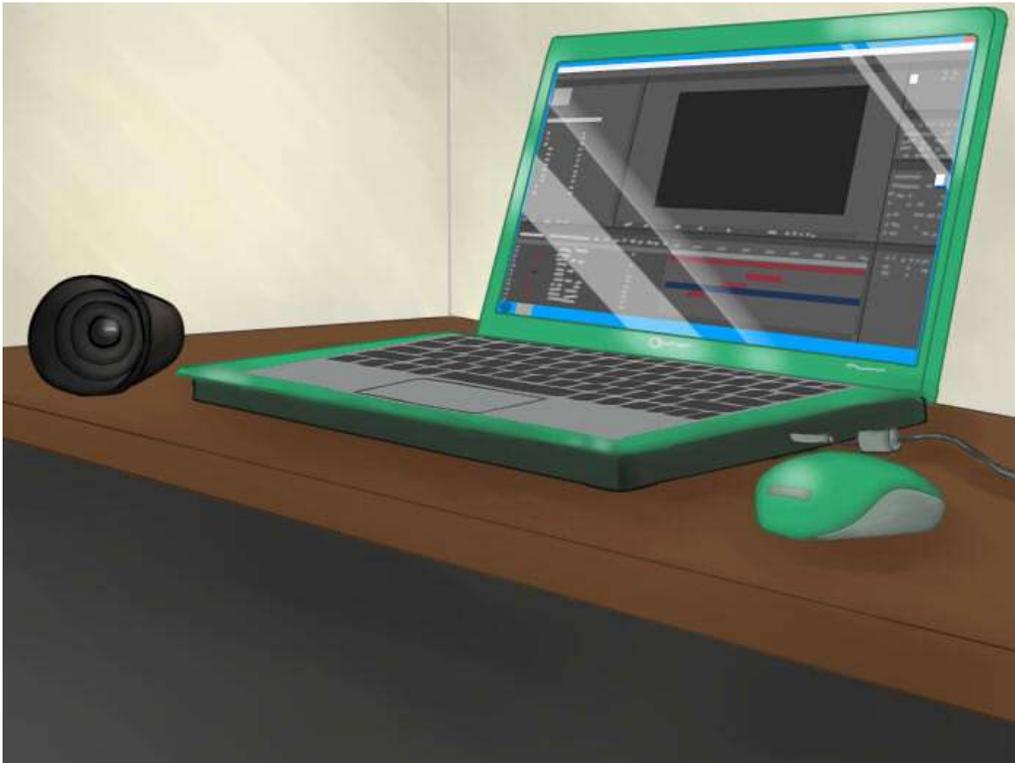
9. Art:

I would have liked to have had more time to make more poses for each character. I didn't because of time and because I didn't realise that Novelty allowed different body

poses for the same character (and not just different “faces”) until I finished the character art and started coding the actors in Novelty.

Deviantartist CarrotDwarf made a very good point on the lack of different body poses (in a very useful comment posted on TJoI’s deviantART page [8] ), as well as noting that my CGs should have been less sketchy, and that my backgrounds need to focus more on having better perspective. I’ll need to work on that for my next project.

There are several CGs that I rushed to finish, and it shows. On the one hand, you see images that I took my time with, like this:



But then you see CGs that look like this:



*Ugh...*

In retrospect: If I can't make a CG look good in the time I give myself, I shouldn't include it in the final game. When in doubt, leave it out.

### **What I Learned**

1. How to use Novelty:

Again, Novelty is a very easy-to-use program, but now that I've made a kinetic VN with it, I feel more comfortable using it for future VNs (that could be longer and include branching paths).

2. I found out I liked VNs and Novelty:

VNs are a medium that is versatile, and Novelty is a program I now feel more comfortable using. They both allow me to add a combination of static images and animated sequences (I discovered this late in the making of TJol, and added an animated menu to the VN almost last-minute) to a written story. There's a lot of untapped potential in this medium that I'd like to see explored in my future VNs and others' EVNs.

3. Collaboration experience

4. Learning how to design a visual novel and the workflow/pipeline used to finish a VN.

## Things to consider further

### 1. Sentimentality: Is it still alive?

There's a lot of negative implications to the word "sentimental". I'd like to make it clear that I'm using "sentiment" as a positive word. Remember that "weakness" or "being overly emotional beyond logical reason and reality" or "overly sentimental" are not the same as "sentimental". It may help if I explain my personal definition of sentimentality as this:

*"Making a direct appeal to the emotions using positive/nostalgic ideals".*

Yes, some stories can be "too sentimental", but it's similar to saying that a story is "over-acted". There's really no such thing as "over-acting"—There's only acting in a certain way that feels false/dishonest to life. Once that happens, the audience doesn't believe in the story. Art isn't meant to be exactly like life, but it's meant to *ring true* to things *in life*. And I'll give you a quick example from the film *Shrek*:

What isn't exactly like life: Seeing an ogre in a swamp.

What still rings true to life: Seeing a person who has isolated themselves away from the rest of the world.

The reason why I mention sentiment is because I think TJoI has sentiment, but I'm still unsure as to whether or not it's "overly sentimental" to the audience. It's one of the bigger questions I have about this VN. It's a story about two women going on a journey. One learns about the place she grew up in as a child, the other learns about the importance of following her dreams. These are very idealised/nostalgic/sentimental themes.

A lot of writers are generally worried about writing stories like this—stories that keep its sentimentality played straight all the way through—because it's so easy for the story to accidentally become "overly-sentimental", and not ring true to life. I'm probably one of those writers: I often will try to ease the tension on a sentimental moment by having the characters add a joke, or have a character who hates emotional displays (and will try desperately to end it). Therefore, I may write a sentimental scene, but I probably won't "play it straight" all the way through.

If I had written *The Journey of Ignorance*, the story would have ended a lot differently. The character Rita probably would have gotten the travel documentary she wanted, much to Nellie and Tory's chagrin. The documentary would have still been a success, but

not in the way Tory and Nellie wanted. You would have ended up with a slice-of-life comedy similar to the travel documentary, [An Idiot Abroad](#). [9] [9a]

So, does *The Journey of Ignorance* use sentimentality without being “overly sentimental”? I think it does (use sentimentality in the positive sense, I mean), but perhaps, as Agatha Christie put it, the creator may not be the best judge of their own work. Are players of TJol accepting that the VN plays sentimentality straight from beginning to end? Does it “work”? Does it feel honest, or clichéd? You tell me.

### Conclusion

*The Journey of Ignorance* is a visual novel that I’m proud of making. It may have gone under most people’s radar, but I still learned a lot from it. I hope to make visual novels in the future that learn for the strengths and weaknesses of this first one.

*Below: Development screenshots I posted on my Tumblr account [11] :*



*Above-left: The office hallway (without the paintings added in). Right: Tory with Nellie in the car. Note the work-in-progress menu button interface.*



*Note the differences between the old menu interface, left, and the final version, right.*

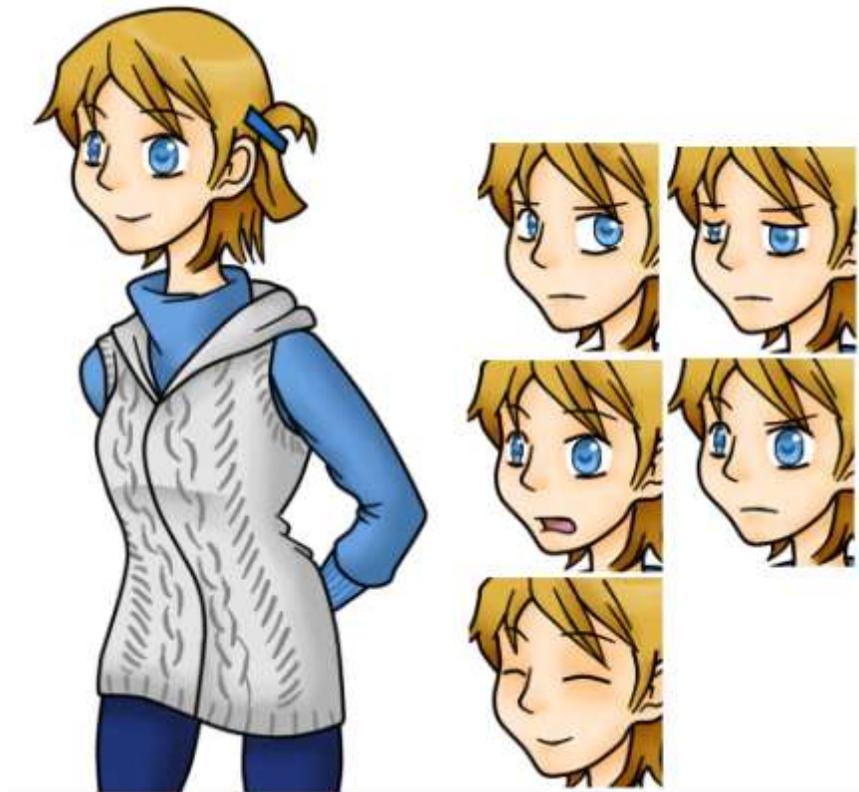


*Left: Tory holding a camera. Right: Tory holding a phone.*



*Left image: Arnold and Mr. Anderson's character sketches were sketched in SAI.*

*Right image: Rita's face set, Mrs. and Mr. Anderson.*



*Nellie's face set.*

Notes:

[1] <http://katy133.deviantart.com/art/The-Journey-of-Ignorance-Page-3-337051155>

[2] <http://katy133.deviantart.com/art/The-Journey-Grey-318801567>

[3] <http://www.flickr.com/photos/oldcurmudgeon/3784793577/>

[4] Source: <http://www.vnsnow.com/1/post/2013/11/heres-the-news-112213.html>

[5] <http://lemmasoft.renai.us/forums/viewtopic.php?f=11&t=24042&sid=d73f2c6b4930cd902c8989fd896f1433>

[6] Blank EVN Bingo Sheet Source:  
<http://insistonplot.tumblr.com/post/47547178151/nanoreno-competitive-bingo>

[7] <http://vndb.org/v14002>

[8] <http://katy133.deviantart.com/art/The-Journey-of-Ignorance-Visual-Novel-414597552#comments>

[9] [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An\\_Idiot\\_Abroad](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/An_Idiot_Abroad)

[9a] <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpePyoqbtJ0>

[10] <http://katy-133.tumblr.com/tagged/The-Journey-of-Ignorance>