

Game Narrative Review

Your name: Julie Arcala

Your school: Drexel University

Your email: jla343@drexel.edu

Month/Year you submitted this review: December 2019

Game Title: Ib

Platform: PC

Genre: Adventure

Release Date: February 27, 2012

Developer: kouri

Publisher: kouri

Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer: kouri

Overview

In the early afternoon, under a gray sky...
Ib and her parents were on their way to an art gallery...

*Ib*¹ is a 2012 horror adventure game by a Japanese developer named “kouri”. Ib, a 9-year-old girl, visits the local art gallery with her family to see the retrospective of Weiss Guertena, a painter and sculptor.

As Ib wanders through the vibrant art gallery, she stops to look at a painting titled with a word she doesn’t know: “???? World”. Suddenly, the lights go off -- and when they come back on, everyone seems to have disappeared.

The lights flicker on and off in the now-dull gallery as only Ib’s footsteps echo through the rooms while she tries to find anyone else. Holding onto the handkerchief her mother gave her,

¹ To prevent confusion, *Ib* in italics refers to the game, “Ib” refers to the titular character. It is pronounced like the name “Eve”, but with a “B” (Eeb).

portraits seem to blink and reach out to her as she walks by. She wanders back around to ????
World to see blue paint dripping out of the frame, forming letters.

*"come down below ib
ill show you someplace secret"*

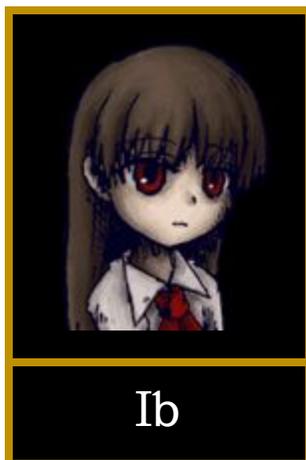
Ib walks down to the bottom floor where footsteps of blue paint lead into the massive floor installation titled "Abyss of the Deep".

Ib steps into the abyss, exiting the Real World, and plunges into the ???? World -- the Fabricated World -- where she will encounter new friends and fears. The decisions made by the player, as Ib, will consequently affect Ib's relationships and their fates.

Ib takes the player on an emotional rollercoaster-- **but only if the player chooses to ride it**. In the form of dialogue and action choices given to them, no matter how unimportant they may seem, the player decides these characters' freedom from or imprisonment in the Fabricated World. The game utilizes the concept of **character attachment** established through story dialogue and character action, most prominently in Ib, who is only a 9-year-old child. Protecting or hurting these characters translate into endings with uplifting optimism, missed opportunities, or crushed spirits that leave the player wishing they could have done something differently.

Once you go in, there's no going back.
All your time here will be lost.
Will you still jump in?

Characters



The protagonist of the game. She is a 9-year-old girl who visits the art gallery with her parents. She is reserved but well-mannered.



An effeminate young man from the real world, trapped in the Fabricated World. Although he is frightened easily, he assists Ib and protects her.



Mary

A young girl from the Fabricated World who loves to make friends and play games. She hides a dark secret that she is actually a painting. She yearns to cross the border from the Fabricated World into the Real World.



Weiss
Guertena

A prolific artist who passed away an unknown number of years before the game's events. His artworks are on display at the art gallery.



A small doll that Garry says to be scary, but Mary calls it cute. They have red eyes and are filled with some kind of red substance, possibly (hopefully) paint.



A nurturing woman who seeks the best for Ib and a kind man of few words. They take Ib to the art gallery.

Breakdown

Throughout the game, *Ib* utilizes dialogue and interaction choices and behind-the-scenes “counters” (explained later on in this section) to gauge the player’s character attachment, and translates it into each character’s fate by the end of the game. The game’s story as explained here does not cover every story beat; instead explaining events most important to the game’s game-narrative mechanics that give the player agency alongside the context of these choices, whether good or bad.

How the player makes these decisions is related to how attached they feel to the character. They will be inclined to choose what seems to be the best choice to see them out of the haunted gallery, especially if they want to see them thrive. On the other hand, the player may grow to think differently of certain characters and give them justice via *Ib*’s actions and replies.

The Story

In *Ib*, *Ib* must go through sections of the Fabricated World², solving puzzles in order to advance to the next section.

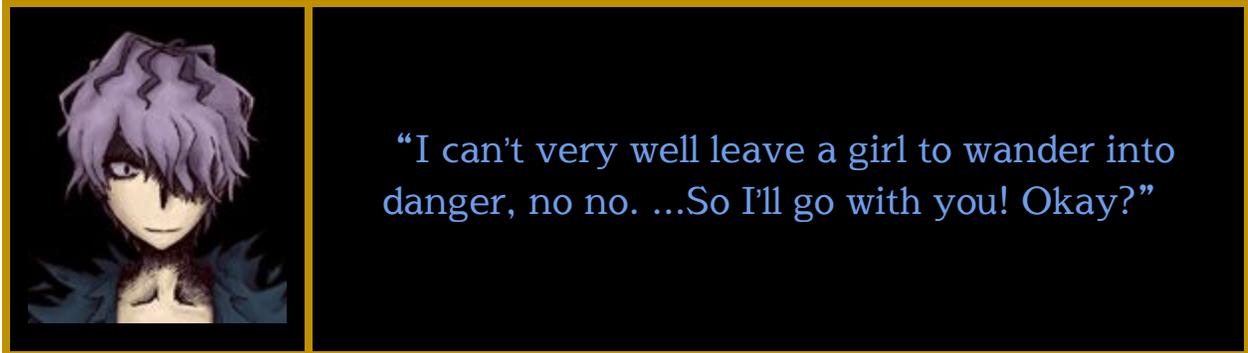
Upon crossing into the Fabricated World, *Ib* acquires a red rose with five petals, which represents how much health she has. The player feels guilt as losing or destroying *Ib*’s rose to enemies literally means losing *Ib*’s life. The consequence of being careless with *Ib* is established early in the game when a headless sculpture traps her in a small room. Should the player not escape in time, the game will result in a Game Over. With this in mind, the player is essentially given custody of *Ib* and must take care of the child in this unknown world.

“You and the rose are unified. Know the weight of your life.”

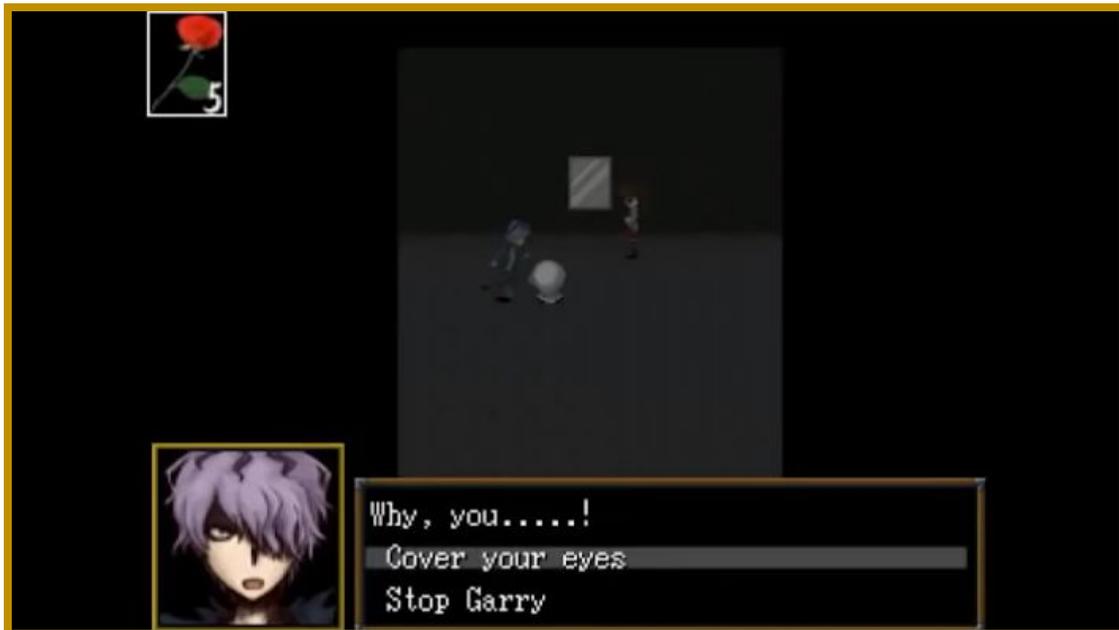
Ib encounters a man who is unconscious in a hallway. When *Ib* steals a rose from an enemy painting called Lady in Blue and restores its health by dipping it into a vase of healing water, she

² Also called the “Haunted Art Gallery”. “Fabricated World” and “Gallery” may be used interchangeably.

presents it to the man, who is now rejuvenated. He introduces himself as Garry and takes it upon himself to join Ib and assist her through the Fabricated World.



Ib and Garry continue on to the next section of the Fabricated World, and solve puzzles in which they are chased by Ladies in Red, Yellow, Green, and Blue. In one particular room with a mirror, Ib and Garry will encounter a mannequin head that sneaks up on them. In fear and anger, Garry will attempt to kick the mannequin head, and the player will be given the choice to let Garry kick it, or have Ib stop him.



If the player allows Garry to kick the mannequin, Garry’s **Doom Counter** will increase. The Doom Counter is unseen, and factors in several decisions made by the player throughout the game to determine Garry’s fate. Depending on the amount of “Doom Points” the player acquires, Garry will either live or die by the end of the game.

As Ib and Garry venture through the next section, Ib collapses of exhaustion. Ib wakes up on the floor in a “safe room”, wearing Garry’s jacket. Garry tends to Ib, and offers her a Candy in his coat pocket. The player can choose to return Garry’s jacket to him personally. Similar to the Doom Counter, the **Bond Counter (Garry)**³ will increase if the player chooses to do so, affecting Garry’s fate. The counter can be raised in optional conversations with Garry when interacting with bookshelves and looking at certain paintings. The Bond Counter also factors into Garry’s fate at the end of the game, but unlike the Doom counter, it is skewed positively towards Garry’s chance of living.

Ib and Garry bump into Mary, another young girl who is searching for a way out of the Fabricated World. They form a party and advance through the Fabricated World together.

Separation and The Doll Room

Ib, Garry, and Mary encounter a room with a large painting of a cute rabbit titled “Red Eyes”, with rabbit statues littered on shelves in a room. However, in Garry’s perspective, Red Eyes is a blue monster with red eyes and ragged hair. Instead of rabbits on shelves, he sees small monstrous blue dolls with red eyes, and is wary. A book in this room titled *Ruin of the Heart* reads:

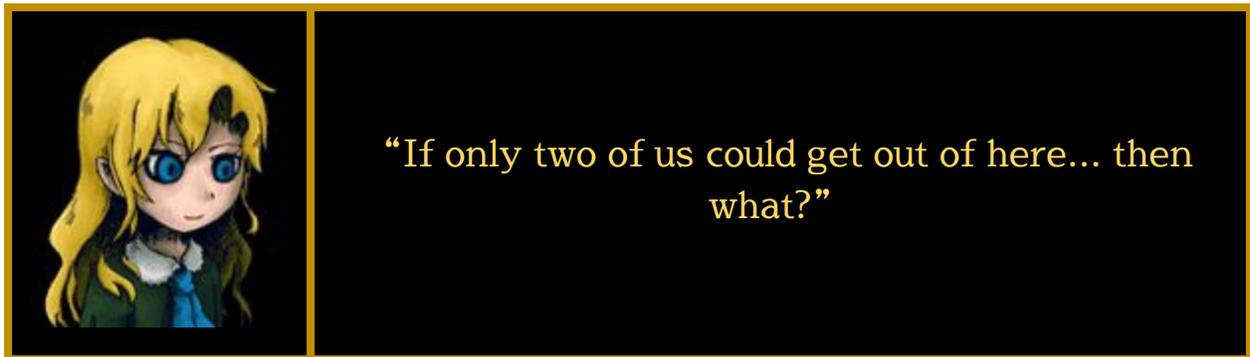
“If your mind suffers too much, you will soon start to hallucinate... And in the end it will break apart. And more worrying yet is that you will not even be able to recognize that fact.”

Implying Ib is hallucinating, Mary sees the rabbits as dolls the same way Garry does, but deems them “cute”.

³ There are two Bond Counters, one for Garry and one for Mary. Their respective counters will be parenthesized to distinguish them.



Out in the hallway, roots from a painting titled *Flowers of Jealousy* sprout out of the ground, separating Garry from Ib and Mary, allowing for asymmetrical gameplay to view the Fabricated World as either Garry or Ib. Here, the player must solve puzzles with Ib and Mary separate from Garry, and vice versa. To advance to the next section of the Fabricated World, Ib and Mary must assist Garry in finding seven balls of paint from the other side of this section of the gallery. While finding clues, Mary picks up a palette knife “just in case”.



At one point, Mary asks Ib to choose if only two can leave, would she pick her or Garry? Choosing Garry will raise his Doom counter and cause Mary to feel jealous of him, becoming defensive saying the question was just a “what if”. Choosing Mary will raise her Bond Counter, and prompt her to talk about what kinds of games they can play and candy they can eat when they escape. The player can abstain from choosing either and state that Ib would sacrifice herself. Mary promises Ib that they both will leave the Fabricated World together.

Mary will start making casual conversation with Ib and ask her questions about her life, but talking to her is entirely optional. If the player does speak to her, it can raise the Bond Counter (Mary). These questions seem particularly invasive, like how she feels about Garry, asking if she has friends, and how she feels about her parents. When asking Ib if she loves her father, Mary will reply that she misses her father and wants to “find him but can’t”, leaving the player to pity Mary. Mary furthermore preys on this pity by telling Ib that she doesn’t have friends and asks if she can be her friend.

As Garry traverses another side of the gallery, he is bothered by Blue Doll, who begs for his friendship. The player can choose to interact with the doll violently by kicking it away, raising the Doom Counter, or push it aside safely. On Garry's side of the gallery, Red Eyes, the painting he and the girls saw earlier, can appear in rooms peeking over walls, searching for Garry.

Garry continues searching for clues to find the remaining balls of paint. In a library, he finds a book containing a chilling statement:

"Via a trading of existences, the imaginary can be made reality."

Afterwards, Garry encounters a book on the history of Guertena's paintings, and finds a familiar face in the section labeled "M":

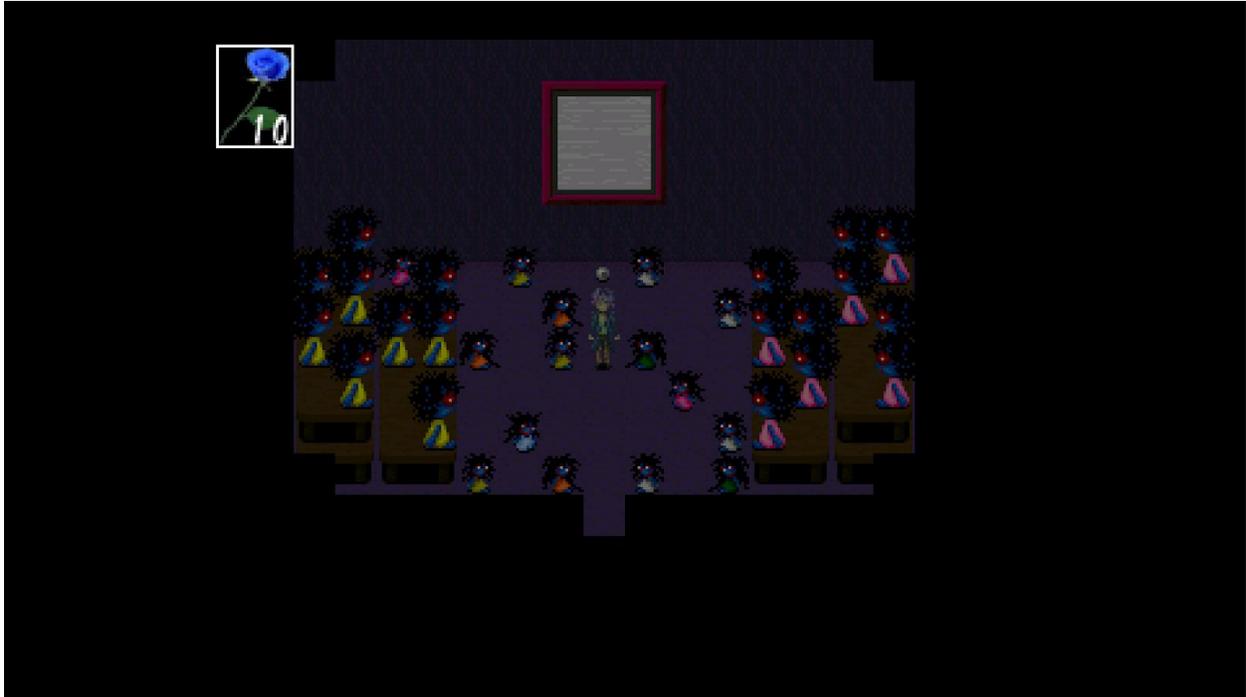
Mary ([Year Unknown]).
The last work of Guertena's life.
While the girl appears almost lifelike, she is not based on a real person.

Shocked, Garry immediately worries for Ib. Garry now understands completely what the trading of existences means, and the player understands the reason for Mary's question: **only two can leave**. It is at this point that the player's opinion of Mary is formed fully. Does the player feel sorry for Mary, who yearns for friendship? Or do they feel contempt for the Mary that will do anything in her power to escape, even if that means someone else doesn't? Mary's question of which two get to escape was not asking Ib, it was directed to the player.

Garry then encounters Blue Doll, containing a ball of paint. After it is ripped apart, Blue Doll runs off into a previously locked room, the Doll Room, where the final ball of paint is located.

In the Doll Room, the dolls trap Garry and, if the player chooses to do nothing or fail to find the key to the door in time, he breaks down. Ib and Mary find him in a daze, having a conversation with the dolls (In Ib's view, they are rabbits). Ib slaps him, and can slap him back to reality or call his name. If the Doom Counter is high enough, she also has the choice of staying silent and

staring at him continuing to speak to the dolls. If Garry's Doom Counter or Mary's Bond Counter amounts are sufficient enough, two endings can be encountered here: **Welcome to the World of Guertena** or **A Painting's Demise**.



Assuming the player has successfully completed the Doll Room or has saved Garry after failing it, Ib, Mary, and Garry can reconvene and advance to the next section of the gallery.

Two scenarios can happen after the Doll Room:

- **If the player failed the Doll Room:** After Mary accidentally drops her rose, Garry will pick it up. Mary will threaten him with the palette knife and try to wrestle the rose from Garry. She then will fall over, knocked unconscious, separated from her rose.
- **If the player escaped the Doll Room:** Mary will run off, leaving Ib to head to the next section. Mary can be seen stabbing a mannequin head in her way with the palette knife. Mary will catch up, then try to attack Ib, angry that she tried to go off alone and broke the promise they made of leaving together. Garry will separate the two, and Mary will stumble to the floor, dropping her rose.

In both, only Ib and Garry advance to the next section of the Fabricated World.

Sketchbook and The Toy Box

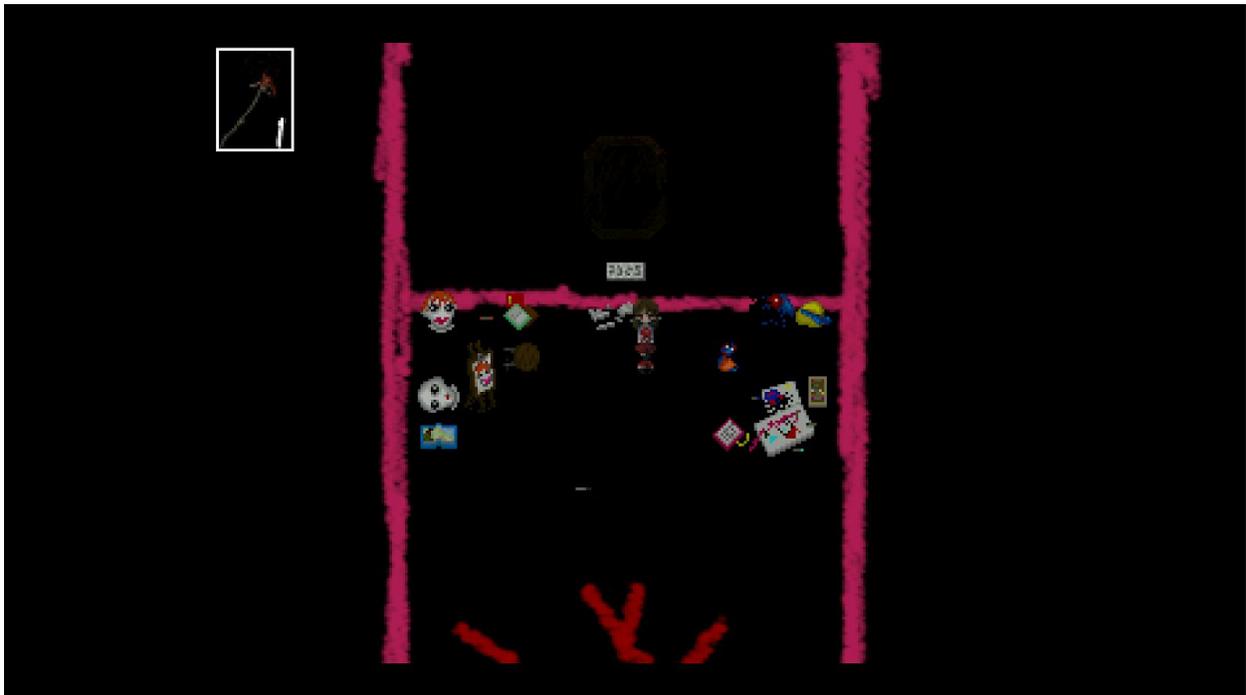
Ib and Garry arrive in the Sketchbook, which is made of crudely drawn crayon art. In one room, on one side of walls are drawings of a happy Ib, Mary, and Blue Doll holding a yellow rose, and a sad Garry with a wilted blue rose, frowning. Here, Mary shows her disdain for Garry and her attempts to separate Ib from Garry. Mary, now awake, will be seen searching for Ib and Garry, brandishing the palette knife.

Ib and Garry are led to the “Toy Box”, where a key to the next section is located. Mary will push them into the Toy Box, a void filled with Blue Dolls. Ib and Garry will fall in and lose their roses.

Should Garry’s Doom Counter be high enough, he will regroup with Ib but then slow down of exhaustion, telling her to go ahead. Ib continues on to see Mary pull off the petals of Garry’s rose. Ib can return to Garry, now collapsed on the ground “sleeping”, to pick up his lighter, but not before consuming the Candy Garry gave to her earlier.

If Garry’s Doom Counter is low, he and Ib can enter Mary’s Room, which houses the frame of the painting Mary emerged from.

From here on out, the endings not encountered in the Doll Room can be obtained.



Multiple Endings

Upon completing the main story, the player will be presented with one of seven (7) endings⁴ (with the exception of **Welcome to the World of Guertena** and **A Painting's Demise**, which happen in the Doll Room about halfway through the full game), all dependent on the actions the player has taken during the game.

Promise of Reunion



Ib and Garry burn Mary's painting with Garry's lighter, destroying her. Garry injures his hand in the process, and Ib lends Garry the handkerchief her mother gave her at the beginning of the game.

Ib and Garry head to the last section of Fabricated World, where a large-scale painting of the Real World is hung. The frame of the painting disappears, allowing them to escape. A fake version of Ib's Mom tries to beckon Ib to come with her, but Ib grabs Garry's hand and they return to the Real World.

Ib arrives in the Real World with no memory of the past events in the haunted gallery. She encounters Garry in front of the *Embodiment of Spirit*, a large sculpture of a rose. Ib asks Garry about the sculpture, and he inadvertently says her name, which Ib confirms is her name. Finding this odd, Garry finds Ib's handkerchief in his pocket. Ib finds the Candy Garry gave her in the Fabricated World in hers.

⁴ Specific conditions and Doom/Bond Counter amounts for getting certain endings can be found on the English translation page here: <http://www.vgperson.com/games/ib.htm> [1]

They remember their time together in the Fabricated World. Garry promises to clean Ib's handkerchief and return it to her, finding each other again some other day, promising their reunion.

This ending is obtained if the player has sufficiently filled up the Bond Counter (Garry), and has lent the handkerchief to Garry after destroying Mary's painting.

Memory's Crannies

After burning Mary's painting, Ib and Garry find their way out into the Real World. They speak with each other while looking at *Embodiment of Spirit*, but they do not recollect what has happened in the Fabricated World, and part ways.

This ending is obtained if the player has sufficiently filled up the Bond Counter (Garry), but has **not** lent the handkerchief to Garry after destroying Mary's painting.

Ib All Alone



Variation 1

After burning Mary's painting with Garry, Ib's Mom will appear, trying to convince Ib to come with her. The player chooses to go with the Ib's Mom instead of going with Garry to the Real World. Garry will call to Ib, and the screen will reveal that Ib is not following her mother. Ib was following no one at all.

Variation 2

After burning Mary's painting when Garry is dead, the player chooses to go with a fake Garry when given the chance to return to the Real World.

Variation 3

After burning Mary's painting when Garry is dead, the player will be given a choice to return to the Real World, or step away. If the player chooses to step away, the frame of the painting will reappear and stop her from leaving, preventing Ib from escaping the Fabricated World.

Variation 4

In a New Game+ mode, Ib can sleep on a sculpture of a bed called *Final Stage*. The player has three chances to wake Ib up when sleeping on the bed. If the player chooses not to wake her up, Ib will dream of her 9th birthday where she received the handkerchief and a stuffed rabbit from her parents. At the end of the dream, Ib's rose will be revealed to no longer have petals.

Forgotten Portrait

Ib destroys Mary's painting, and crosses the threshold from the Fabricated World into the Real World by herself. Ib arrives in the Real World, having no memory of what had happened in the Fabricated World.

Ib looks at the paintings, where noticeably one of them has been replaced with a painting of Garry with his eyes closed, possibly dead or sleeping. Ib's Mom asks Ib to come with her to see the rest of the paintings, and Ib looks back at the Forgotten Portrait once more before she leaves.

This ending is obtained with Garry's Doom Counter high enough that he has died in the toybox, and the player chose not to go with the fake Ib's Mom.

Together, Forever



After pushing Ib and Garry into the Toy Box, Mary finds Ib and Garry's roses, intending to keep them. Garry tells Mary that the red rose is Ib's and asks her to return it, and the player will be given a choice to agree with Garry or not. If the player agrees, Mary will ask to trade to keep

Garry's rose. The player must allow Garry to give Mary his rose. Mary will then run off and pluck the petals from Garry's rose, weakening him until he collapses.

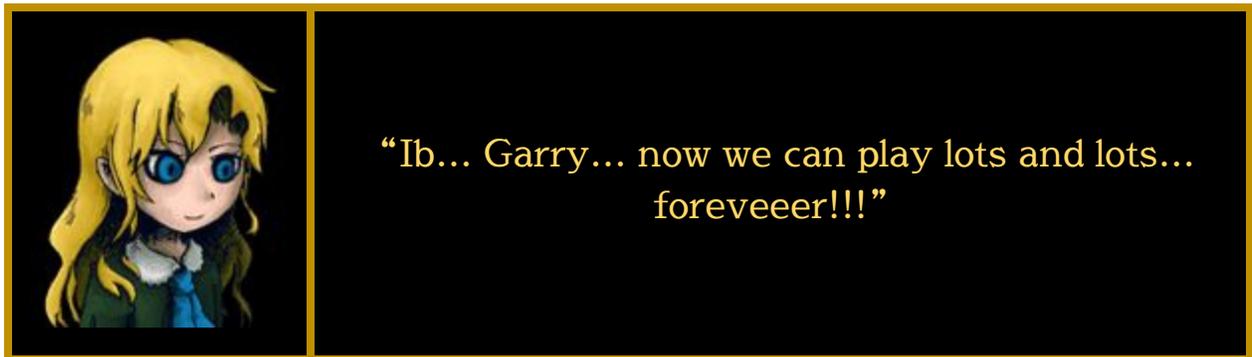
Ib crosses the threshold from the Fabricated World, and arrives in the Real World. This time, she enters the gallery with her parents, and Mary, who is now her sister.

To obtain this ending, the player has succeeded in the Doll Room, Garry's Doom Counter must be high enough and the Bond Counter (Mary) must be low enough.

Welcome to the World of Guertena

After failing the Doll Room, Ib and Mary will find Garry speaking to rabbit sculptures. When Ib confronts Garry, the player must choose to be silent instead of slapping him or saying his name. Mary states that there is something wrong with Garry, but Ib will sit next to Garry, silent. Mary tries to snap Ib out of her trance, but goes on without her. Mary will leave the room, then return, saying that even though she wanted to leave the Fabricated World, she doesn't want to treat her friends badly because of a book she read about friendship. Mary invites the paintings in the gallery to welcome Ib and Garry's forever stay in the Fabricated World.

To obtain this ending, Garry's Doom Counter must be high enough for him to die, and the Bond Counter (Mary) must be as high as possible.



A Painting's Demise

Ib and Garry are trapped in the Doll Room, and Mary ventures out of the Doll Room to try to find out how to escape the Fabricated World. She finds the exit, but cannot escape. Lonely, she cries out for Ib and Garry. With no response, she futilely weeps for her father.

To obtain this ending, Garry's Doom Counter must be high enough and the Bond Counter (Mary) must also be high enough.

After completing the game once, a New Game+ mode will be available, allowing the player to play the game again, but adds a new section to the Fabricated World to explore. On completion of the New Game+, a location called the True Guertena Exhibit is revealed, offering the player another look at the artworks they encountered in the game, alongside descriptions of the paintings without the ???? words she could not understand.

All in all, the endings deliver what the player wanted, taking the choices and actions the player decided on in the game. The player can either be satisfied with what they got, or wish they did something differently; The New Game+ option gives them this opportunity.

Character Attachment

The nature of character attachment towards Ib is because she is a vulnerable child in the face of danger. It is instinctual to feel the need to protect children, and as the player guides Ib through the twists and turns of the Fabricated World, the player becomes more attached to her. The game gives the player agency throughout to either hurt or protect Ib in the form of interacting with certain enemies and choices that can impact her and/or the other characters. When Ib rescues Garry from a rogue painting, Garry takes it upon himself to protect Ib. In this case, Garry is the player by proxy. The player's personal involvement with Ib is represented in him *in addition to* Ib herself. Because he and the player have the same goals (protecting Ib, seeing Ib escape) the player takes on the role of Garry as the "adult in charge". While Ib's actions influence everyone's fates, Garry's actions specifically influences Ib's fate.

In *Immersion, Engagement and Presence: A Method for Analyzing 3-D Video Games* (2003), Alison McMahan states games allow the player to engage with the scenarios they are involved with. Their personal involvement translates to a source of companionship, or even a substitute for it. [2]

Furthermore, in Bowman, et al.'s article *"I'm Attached, and I'm a Good Guy/Gal!": How Character Attachment Influences Pro- and Anti-Social Motivations to Play Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games* (2012), the concept of character attachment was researched in the context of morality and massively multiplayer online role-playing games.

[Players] are asked to become present in the virtual world, creating an illusion of nonmediation with the mediated environment. Gamers do not merely have a felt connection with their characters, but there exists an "actual, tangible connection between the gamer and a fully functional, completely controllable avatar." In many ways, video game play can be understood in terms of a "melding of minds" between the player and the character, either through a player growing closer to an established

character over time or through a player creating a unique character as an expression of self to enter the game world. [3]

The game melds the minds of Ib and the player by inviting the player to cross into the “Fabricated World” of the game, and emerge as Ib herself. Simply put, the game forces the player to establish a connection between themselves and Ib so she will not die. With lives at stake, the player with Ib and Garry as their avatar makes decisions in hopes of helping the characters escape the haunted art gallery.

Both Garry’s Doom/Bond Counters and Mary’s Bond Counters factor into their outcomes at the end of the game. The Doom and Bond Counters themselves, although unseen, enhance the experience of character attachment. The player will (hopefully) make choices congruent with their morals to help the characters they like to achieve their goals. The characterization in the form of optional dialogue when Ib is with Garry or Mary can contribute to these counters, and allow the player to use that information to weigh their choices when the time comes.

As Garry, when learning Mary’s secret, the player may be inclined to antagonize Mary in the choices involving her to protect Garry. However, the choices made beforehand combined outweigh the choices after the Doll Room, with little room to change the result unless they achieve conditions which seem unreasonable (one example is talking to Garry six times standing in the patch of fake sunlight in the Sketchbook).

Embodiments of Spirit

“Beautiful at a glance, but if you get too close, it will induce pain.
It can only bloom in wholesome bodies.”

While symbolism is not greatly used in the game, a largely used symbol is the rose, primarily seen as the health point counter for the characters. First seen in the Guertena Art Gallery in the form of a large red rose sculpture, it is titled “Embodiment of Spirit”. Ib’s rose is red, Garry’s is blue, and Mary’s is yellow.

For the Japanese art of *ikebana* (flower arrangement), the colors of flowers hold specific meaning. In *hanakotoba*, or, the Japanese language of flowers, these colors symbolize different concepts[4]:

- A red rose means “beauty, passion, and love”.
- A blue rose means “mystery, attaining the impossible, and love at first sight”.
- A yellow rose means a “decrease of love, jealousy, and friendship”.

Ib’s red rose represents her courage (passion) and caring nature for her new friends. Garry’s blue rose represents his desire to escape the Fabricated World and return to reality which seems impossible, as well as his responsibility to take care of Ib. Mary’s rose clearly shows her jealousy of Garry, and her yearning for friendship. The painting which separates Garry from Ib and Mary titled *Flowers of Jealousy* can also be symbolic of Mary’s intentions.

The Unseen Character

Alongside Ib, Garry, and Mary, *Ib* also has an unseen character in its cast: **Weiss Guertena himself**. Hidden in one of the sections of the haunted art gallery, Guertena’s Diary can be found, speaking about his art:

"It's said that spirits dwell in objects into which people put their feelings...
I shall immerse myself in work, so as to impart my own spirit into my
creations."

In his statements, it’s implied that Weiss Guertena *is* the haunted art gallery itself, giving a part of his spirit to make his artwork alive. However, the game never provides an official answer as to why the Fabricated World pulls Ib in.

Several books seen in libraries throughout the game explain his intentions in his works. A page on *The Lady in Red* states that he had based the woman in the painting on “the ugly, haughty women who attempted to court him for his inheritance.” Shooing away potential wives thinking they were only interested for his wealth, he threw himself into his work. It’s assumed that Guertena never married or had children by the end of his life... or at least, “real children”.

A New Game+ mode after completing *Ib* once allows the player to complete the game once more and find the True Guertena Exhibit, a collection of all of the artworks he had made/found in the game. Here, Mary can be seen saying she wants to oil paint “like my dad!”, obviously Guertena. This is also supported by her saying in the main game where she states that she misses and is searching for her father, and her calling out for him in **A Painting’s Demise**.



It can be implied that Guertena had become lonely over the course of his life and painted Mary to keep himself company. For her happiness, he imparted his spirit into his works, and created a Fabricated World with toys, dolls, and her own room and pulled in people for her to be friends with.

By considering this, Mary's characterization is even more dynamic, and can change the way the player feels towards her and what they want her ending to be.

Strongest Element

By forcing the player to make decisions that depend on these characters' lives, they must carefully analyze their attachment to the characters. With Ib under their guidance, the player should feel accomplished in protecting her, and devastated when they do something that results in her or another character's injury or death. Even though the player can make "good" choices for their safety, the agency given to the player lets them act on their ambivalence or morbid curiosities if they so choose. Whatever ending the player gets is what they deserve because of the decisions they made in the game.

Unsuccessful Element

An unsuccessful element of the game is the placement of puzzles in relation to the game's narrative. More often than not, the player will find themselves in chase scenes, which only serve as a quick way to get to the next section, or "filler" puzzles which exist to pad out gameplay (fetch quests, riddles, etc). While the puzzles in and around the Doll Room contribute significantly to Mary's intentions and Garry's perspective of the gallery, certain puzzles-- especially ones solved by Ib and Garry before meeting Mary-- feel unneeded both to the overarching story and Guertena's characterization.

Highlight

The Doll Room presents the pinnacle of character attachment for the player, as it tests how much they "care" about Ib, Garry, and Mary. Depending on the choices the player has made before this event, the outcome can greatly affect which ending the player encounters. After this event, the chance of an ending where Garry dies is higher.

Two of the worst endings can be achieved here (**Welcome to the World of Guertena** and **A Painting's Demise**), and failing the Doll Room exponentially increases the chance of Garry dying in the Toybox if Ib is able to rescue him come from choices of inaction. Namely, these include being silent in response to Garry's questions during times of stress or separation, and siding with Mary instead of Garry when Mary interacts with Ib. Particularly, **A Painting's Demise** shows the demise of all three characters, but depicts Mary having a tragic ending where she is unable to achieve her goal of making friends, and is implied to die a lonely death.

It is here where the game asks to confirm the player's intentions with their previous choices: **"What do you want to happen to these characters?"** The game answers back with one of the seven endings, **"This is what you wanted. Are you happy with it?"**

Critical Reception

With *Ib* being a rather obscure Japanese indie game, it can be difficult to find critical reception and reviews of the game. Nonetheless, writers laud the game as a story with lovable characters and an ominous environment. The characterization of Ib, Mary, and Garry and even Guertena assist in crafting the game's ending with how the player feels towards them, along with a path to it that continuously engages the player.

"It's very much an ethereal experience, where one truly feels removed from the world as a whole. Simply put, you've never played a game like *Ib* before – and no matter what you think of the outcome; the journey will [be] more than worth it."

- 9.5/10, *The Grim Tower* [5]

"The dialogue and writing are highly endearing. **Garry and Mary's characterizations are distinct and lovely.** Their motivations show through their dialogue and choices in the game, as do yours."

- Scarlett Shiloh, *Emertainment Monthly* [6]

"**The story and characters were both fascinating and I was drawn into the ominous setting throughout.** I really have to praise the game's effectiveness at lore building considering that I thought Guertena was a real life artist at first, and I have to give similar praises to the game's artwork."

- Annie Gallagher, *Guardian Acorn* [7]

Lessons

- **Character attachment creates intimacy.** Developers must make their characters appealing in not only character designs, but also in goals. For *Ib*, it is to get her out of the Fabricated World; For Garry, it is to help protect *Ib*; For Mary, it is to see her be happy with friends.

Additionally, this intimacy will entice players to strive to see other outcomes of the characters and replay the game, allowing for replay value. In *Ib's* case, the New Game+ provides this opportunity, along with an option to delve deeper into the game's lore

with a new section of the Fabricated World to discover and a section dedicated to Guertena's life's work.

- **A little bit of agency can still impact the story in large ways.** Agency comes in the form of dialogue choices and interactions, sometimes optional but still important. However, these actions have consequences in the multiple endings, some more tragic than others.

Even if a developer decides to not let the player's actions affect the story's outcome, telling a linear story should still give some agency to keep the player engaged. This can come in the form of dialogue choices, choosing which location to go to, and interacting with characters that do not necessarily impact the story.

- **Visual storytelling conveys character.** Ib is a girl of few words; her text actions and sprites were able to depict her emotions. Although Guertena was never shown in the game aside from an abstract self-portrait, his personality and life story was shown through his works of art.

Ib's simplistic pixel art style is able to tell a lot in its limited visual detail. No matter the presentation, a game should show enough to help the player understand its characters and environment. Games should lean less on dialogue, and more on the ever true phrase "show, don't tell". Guertena shows his character despite not being seen in-game. Additionally, symbolism can help to show deeper character traits, especially if they are treated as foreshadowing.

Summation

Ib's narrative impact on the player depends on the action or inaction they take and attachment or detachment they feel towards the characters. Hopefully, the player will make choices that help them, but can experience, say, or do things that can hinder any of them getting out of the Fabricated World alive. With each choice crafted carefully to dictate the ending, it is up to the player to end the game how they choose, literally.

Ib's story has spawned many like it, causing a boom in indie developers creating horror or horror-inspired games in RPG game engines for nearly a decade. The most striking similarity between *Ib* and its "spiritual successors" are how they handle the story-- namely, how the characters interact with each other and the player, and the endings that spawn from these relationships.

The player makes their presence known to the game by embodying the spirit of Ib, Mary, and Garry, choosing their actions and determining their fates. By the end of the journey, if the player gets too close to these characters, it can sting like the thorn of a rose.

Citations

1. <http://www.vgperson.com/games/ib.htm>
2. McMahan, Alison. (2003). Immersion, engagement, and presence: A method for analyzing 3-D video games. *The Video Game Theory Reader*. 67-86.
3. Bowman, Nicholas & Schultheiss, Daniel & Schumann, Christina. (2012). "I'm Attached, and I'm a Good Guy/Gal!": How Character Attachment Influences Pro- and Anti-Social Motivations to Play Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games. *Cyberpsychology, behavior and social networking*. 15. 169-74. 10.1089/cyber.2011.0311.
4. <https://hananokotoba.com/the-language-of-flowers/>
5. <http://thegrimtower.com/game-review-ib/>
6. <http://emertainmentmonthly.com/index.php/look-artists-mind-rpgmaker-horror-games-ib/>
7. <https://guardianacorn.com/2019/09/29/quick-review-ib-pc/>