



Anna's Quest REVIEW

The Good:

Well-written, emotion-packed story with many twists; rich characterisation all around, particularly of the intrepid yet vulnerable heroine; lovely storybook-style art; excellent voice acting; nicely interlinked puzzles; substantial play time culminating in a haunting final chapter.

The Bad:

Some lengthy expositions and cheesy sermonising; a few visual glitches; may be too easy for seasoned gamers.

Our Verdict:

Anna's Quest is an enchanting mélange of superb production quality, engaging gameplay, and a poignant saga of heart and heartbreak that will linger with you long after the adventure is over.



Scoring System - Editorial Policies

Written by **Shuva Raha** — July 17, 2015

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there lived a little girl named Anna and her Grandpa on a farm at the edge of the deep dark woods. She was a happy child, smart and helpful, and she loved her Grandpa very much. And though she wondered why he always warned her to stay out of the woods, she was a good girl and never broke the rule. But everything changed the day Grandpa fell ill, and Anna was left with no choice but to venture into those ominous woods, all alone, to find him a cure. Sure enough, as soon as she

entered the forest she was waylaid by the wicked witch Winfriede and locked up in a haunted high tower. Winfriede had vile plans for Anna and did terrible experiments on her, but to no avail... or so it seemed, until the tortures unleashed Anna's secret power to move things with her thoughts. Now Anna must engineer her own escape from Winnie's clutches, unaware that her flight will set unraveling a decades-old saga of shattered dreams, magic and mayhem.

The first episode of *Anna's Quest* was released by designer Dane Krams back in 2012, and was [well-received](#) for its spirited heroine, dark humour and attractive art. Daedalic Entertainment subsequently collaborated with Krams to finish the full game all at once, and the result is quite fantastic. *Anna's Quest* is a well-written and beautifully illustrated adventure with a poignant story that comes full circle in a bittersweet finale. It has superb production quality and over twelve hours of fun, fluid gameplay. It is amazing to watch the intelligent yet achingly naïve Anna, brought up in a cocoon of love and trust by her Grandpa, shed her endearing innocence and learn to trust her instincts as she navigates the real world of good folks and evil ones. Her journey, as she hurtles from one risky situation to another in an unknown world of enemies and allies – humans, animals, and mythical monsters like dragons and trolls – is a rollercoaster of emotions, and a fabulous cameo by young Winnie is sure to haunt you long after the game is over. Though there are some lengthy expositions on the backstory and the tasks are quite easy, the potent storytelling, high production quality and entertaining gameplay together make *Anna's Quest* a truly epic one.

The adventure is divided into six chapters based on location. Anna's ordeal starts in her room in the high tower, where Winfriede has kept her captive under CCTV surveillance while subjecting her to literally mind-blowing experiments in an effort to harness her latent telekinetic ability. The witch eventually succeeds in triggering the special power, but this ironically works to Anna's advantage instead, as it gives her the wherewithal to do certain things that were too difficult for her as a regular child, like reach high places or move things otherwise too heavy for her. Cheered on by a whiny teddy bear and a sort-of-friendly ghost held captive along with her, Anna uses her wits and newfound ability to escape the tower and reach the town of Wunderhorn, where the adventure begins in earnest.

The picturesque Wunderhorn is where Anna expects to find the wizard who presumably has the cure for her Grandpa's illness. Here the playing area expands into multiple locations like a cozy inn, a charming little church, an antique store run by an obnoxious snob, an abandoned mill where *another* old hag is squatting, and a cursed lake which hides the ghastly Weisse Frauen (a triad of killer sirens) and some of the darkest secrets of the town. Anna also gets to visit the Devil's domain, a hellish locale of bubbling lava and mounds of paperwork run by bureaucratic trolls, as well as the lavish royal castle where Winfriede is all set to marry the king and gain total control of the realm. There is also a brief but memorable flashback to young Winnie's life as a student of the local school of magic.

The point-and-click mechanics are very basic. Right-clicking the mouse lets you inspect an item, while left-clicking does the single default action, such as to take or use it. The inventory stays off-screen, and is opened by scrolling the mouse wheel. In the early chapters, Anna has many objects in her stock, but over time this dwindles to only a handful at a time, making the largely inventory-based quests dependent more on gathering the items from complicated situations than finding creative ways to use them. Anna does not collect items without reason, but does mention when something may be of use in another situation. She also is very reluctant to steal or resort to trickery, which makes collecting even generic tools quite the task. For a game based on magic, most of the objects are mundane, like scissors and crayons and books and photos. The space bar serves as a hotspot locator, but useful items are usually easily discernible. Areas are made accessible or cordoned off as the story progresses, which reduces backtracking, and some

chapters also have built-in shortcuts for local teleportation. While Anna is free to explore all available locations and do some of the tasks in random order, progress is generally linear, with nicely interlinked quests that lead intuitively from one to the next without requiring the aid of a journal, or even hints.

Each chapter has multiple objectives that all have several mini-quests. While the tasks are not individually difficult, when strung together they do need time and logical thought to solve in the right order. Anna is sent on numerous errands by her friends and foes, with duties ranging from finding someone's lost father to evicting some goons illegally occupying a house. Her own to-do list is just as extensive: she must escape assorted jails, collect ingredients for spells and potions, and gatecrash Winfriede's wedding, alongside sundry gems like extracting a hairball from a sink and conjuring up a ghost. There are some standalone puzzles as well, and these are a mixed bag, involving trial-and-error, educated guessing, and occasionally calculated chess-like movements. A minigame to send a pigeon off with mail, and another to adjust hanging bear cages using a set of levers are fun, but a swordplay sequence without any evident logic is just annoying. Helpfully, minigames that you don't like can be skipped. There are also a couple of fairly easy timed sequences.

While the steady flow of tasks keeps you entertained enough, Krams's narrative and characterisation are the real game-changers. The pretty, candy-coloured storybook art is an illusory foil for a grim story that tackles harsh realities like ruined childhoods, ungrateful people, cruel authority figures and relentless bureaucracy with unflinching directness. There are no leniencies for the weak or the meek in this world, and often you are left to watch, distressed, as Anna is misled or cheated simply because she is too young to know better. In fact, a key asset of the game is that the characters are believable. Anna and the other children act according to their ages, with just the right amount of competence; they are smart and resourceful, but never unduly so. The game also does not take the facile good-versus-evil route to help you pick sides: characters are all tinged with grey – even tiny, pristine Anna, a self-confessed goody-two-shoes. The moments when she is compelled to make unpleasant choices in dire circumstances, knowing full well the damage to be caused by her actions, make you feel genuine regret at times – and even undue hope, because you expect a game that looks and sounds like a fairy tale to have some easy outs.

The supporting cast is also comprised of well-developed personalities. Winnie the witch starts off as a cackling hag but is slowly fleshed out as a villain, her machinations driven by much more than simple greed. Several characters, like Joringel the caddish ghost in the tower, and Hans, a devoted ally, at first appear to be one-time interactions, but are eventually drawn neatly into the storyline as the game teases out why Winnie wants Anna's telekinetic ability. Reynard, a crafty vegetarian fox, is another character that evolves nicely over time, though Ben the talking bear remains just as whiny from start to finish. Irreverent jester-girl Ernestine adds some much-needed levity into the increasingly grim proceedings, and provides a couple of laugh-out-loud moments, as do the two castle guards tasked with arresting Anna and Ben. The game also includes special appearances by fairy tale legends like Hansel, Cinderella and the Three Brown Bears as a tribute to its inspiration.

The story of *Anna's Quest* is far more complex than it appears at the outset, linking together many characters and events in a domino effect of actions and reactions set off by one little girl's determination to fight her destiny. The game is driven by its conversations, some lengthy and expository, some crisp and funny, and others made up of the banal yet necessary chatter of daily life between friends and acquaintances. The script is intelligent but unpretentious, and draws you slowly and surely into the mystery, each little reveal increasing your curiosity about the next. It creates some moments of genuine tension, like when Anna starts to feel compelled to give in to the irresistible lure of the Weisse Frauen, or when she is *almost* caught for stealing something. But just when things get too intense, it effortlessly

lightens the tone with random silliness, like Anna's confusion at the incongruous dish antenna on the roof of Winfriede's tower, and her comical exasperation at the hijinks of her ornery companions. The best part about the script, however, is that it does not take sides. It refuses to create any one-sided battles, and works constantly to add layers to the characters to make them well-rounded personalities instead of insipid caricatures. It also uses Anna's telekinetic power with great restraint, using it to only enable her to do things an adult could do normally.

The delicately outlined, pastel-shaded hand-drawn cartoon art is designed to resemble a children's storybook. Wunderhorn in the twilight is particularly charming, with its medieval architecture, amber lamplight, church windows made of beautiful stained glass, and an attractive fountain in the town square. A house on the sparkling Glass Mountain, Hans's treehouse science lab, and the inn are also nicely detailed. The character sketches are drawn with simple lines yet loaded with personality, like the brusque Winfriede, the elegant Jannike (queen of Wunderhorn), Reynard the fox, and even the creepy old hag in the mill. Anna's pink frock and matching barrette are adorable, as are her spindly legs that serve her surprisingly well in her many escapes. The chapter interludes are styled as an album of animated pencil sketches of scenes from the story.

Like the art, the animation too is deceptively simple yet top-notch. The action-packed cutscenes are showcased with dramatic viewing angles, and even in-game animations like ghosts materialising, a red dragon swooping in, and people going about their business is smooth and realistic. Many little touches infuse life into the game world, like slugs feasting on leaves, moonlight wavering on the dark waters of the cursed lake, and will-o-wisps flitting about the night forest. There are a couple of graphical glitches, like Anna walking through a locked cell door, but these are rare exceptions.

The classical background music is understated and sound effects are used judiciously, which allows the voice acting to really shine through. Sophie Le Neveu does a tremendous job as Anna, perfectly expressing every little emotion – fear, uncertainty, despair, hope, determination – felt by the brave little girl over hours of conversations. She also enriches Anna's snarky wisecracks and witty repartees with her impressive comic timing. Another outstanding performance is the smart and assertive, yet deeply vulnerable, young Winfriede, who almost steals the show from Anna despite her limited role. Ben's hammy stuttering, which takes up quite a bit of airtime, soon gets tiresome, but most of the other voices are well-matched to their characters.

Anna's Quest is one of those rare games that gets all its elements just right. It has a rich, haunting story of courage and determination in the face of overwhelming odds; an intelligent lead who's empowered enough to confront any challenge, yet at the same time genuinely vulnerable to the harsh realities of the world by the simple fact of being a child; excellent art and voice acting; and quests that flow seamlessly, packing just enough punch to keep you engaged without tripping you up. Seasoned gamers may find the going fairly easy, and the script requires you to pay attention through quite a lot of expository text to keep up with the extensive backstory, but if you are searching high and low for a good old-fashioned adventure with heart and heroism, this quest is for you.