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The Ezine!

HBGAMES.org's Official E-zine!

Issue #9 December 2009

Ahriman's Prophecy

Game Design

## Ancients Forgotten



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Welcome, fellow HBGamers, to the second of the new releases of eZines. Just to confuse you this is the first serious release after the six former issues, which are actually seven, so is either the second, seventh, or eighth issue!

Whatever you decide I hope you like the issue this month, it's taken a lot of hard work to put together. Thanks to all the contributors who have helped over the month, I'm sure next month's will be even more spectacular.

This month we have two reviews. One is a real blast from the past - I decided to go back and play a game I haven't played for years but which I completed on initial release: *Ahriman's Propheet*, the game to which *Aveyond* was a sequel to and the second game created by Amanda Fae / Amaranth Games. The second review is a more serious one (and holy fucknuts it's a long one), by ebhz, of a game downloadable from the Completed Games section. It really highlights some of the games available on the forums these days, hope you can check it out!

There are some easter eggs and inside jokes hidden throughout the magazine. If you see them enjoy a happy little chortle to yourself, if not don't fear, we're oldbies, let us have our fun wot wot.

Thanks for reading, I hope you enjoy the second issue of the new eZines.

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### REVISED EDITION

This issue of the ezine has been recut and edited to a different format to what it was originally released in. The original version should still be accessible at [www.hbgames.org](http://www.hbgames.org), but this issue, created in May 2013, is more accessible and more professional in it's appearance and composure.

I'd especially like to thank ebhz and Reygekan for their contributions to this issue, they were really special.

Thank you to all those who contributed to the original issue, and to all those who read this revision.

*Amy Pond*

# Ahriman's Prophecy

I've been in the RM world for five years now and following the launch of an RMX.net based forum theme, I felt it was time to delve back in the past. The first RPG Maker game I ever played, and indeed probably the first independant game I played, was Ahriman's Prophecy. Little known nowadays, but in it's time it was huge. Perhaps more famous is it's sequel, the Aveyond series; Ahriman's Prophecy was made in RPG Maker 2003 and features Looseleaf graphics (usually referred to as "Mack & Blue").

As I download the file for the first time in half a decade it suddenly reminds me how much simpler things were then. The whole game is 9.9 megabytes!

The first thing that strikes you as you play this game is the amount of detail in the maps, which are uncluttered and easy to roam. As Talia walks through the village she is met by chickens roaming the place, butterflies fluttering around, animated smoke and doors, often neglected in games today.

The battle system is my favourite part of this game. It is essentially an ABS, but it doesn't



try to be flashy and overcomplicated. Spacebar attacks; in the bottom-right corner we see our health bar. The thing to remember is this is RPG Maker 2003 - all of these features were made with events!

Aveyond has become somewhat of a hated game in the RM world, for various reasons, but if my memory serves me correctly Ahriman's Prophecy was a great game and fun to play. I ended up completing it! The storyline may be cliched and leave little to the imagination but the game itself was fun, the systems unique and imaginative, and I could tell a lot of work and effort had been put into it's "50+ hours of gameplay" (which by the way is not a made-up figure, this game really is that huge).

It just goes to show how the RM world has changed over the years. Maybe I'm just a deluded nostalgic, but people seemed to churn out a lot better games back then... mainly because the games were made for fun, and not for glory and/or profit. I have yet to play any of the Aveyond franchise (I got bored at the start of the first and never went any further), but it's turned too commercial in my opinion. Just an opinion! All the games are released with the next deadline in mind, and the next paycheck. I have no problem with someone making money from a game and it's petty to think a game is bad just for the commercial aspect, but I say let me be petty.

But...

My enthusiasm for AP comes down with a crashing blow. As I play it now... it's, to be blunt, "a bit shit".

**VERDICT:** Let the past stay in the past.

Perhaps that's the thing. Back five years ago when I first played Ahriman's Prophecy it was an outstanding game because I wanted it to be. I wasn't making games then, I didn't have absurd standards, I played AP because I wanted to play a good game all the way through.

We all talk about how good RMX.net was, when in reality it had low postage (~30 posts a day compared to our ~400), had a relatively poor userbase (a few gems, among thousands of tossers) and well, ultimately, it died after only being active for a year and a half. The admin proved to be unable to run the site and... I'm going on a major tangent here, but you get what I mean I hope.

In short, because we are all developers, we will find RM\* games shit. We will laugh at their inferior mapping and their shoddy storylines. We will tear our eyes out at the RTP or overused graphics, and the pretentious advertising. We will tut and turn away in shame at their use of graphical overlays for lighting and whatnot. But we will never enjoy the games we used to enjoy... that is our curse. Ahriman's Prophecy was a good game and I recommend it to anyone who hasn't become plagued by the elitist mindset which making games gives you.

And that's why Aveyond is so popular. People play Aveyond as a game, not as a critical analysis of our game making inferiors.

Have we really... lost our... way...

A bit of fun after that downer. Can you find the names of all of these staff and ex-staff?

M	R	E	I	N	I	M	U	L	U	L
I	M	E	A	T	S	C	C	O	A	O
M	R	Y	R	G	G	E	Y	R	E	L
E	A	G	S	F	N	R	N	D	C	A
S	V	A	R	D	I	O	I	G	N	I
O	E	R	S	A	W	T	A	R	A	T
N	N	S	U	R	T	I	P	A	N	E
G	T	E	R	D	E	H	S	D	O	N
K	D	H	M	E	L	K	E	I	S	E
C	A	O	U	D	O	C	D	E	S	V
U	S	I	C	F	C	U	L	N	I	E
T	D	L	K	A	H	S	O	T	D	H

1. Global moderator twice, before leaving forever
2. Nevermore, she quaff'd
3. American ex-admin who will evolve with a Fire Stone
4. WE ARE LEGION!
5. Literature mod who left with #1
6. Projects mod, short spindly arms but a big roar
7. He's the reason we're all here now
8. Forum mommy
9. Japanadmin
10. More like might be a model
11. Good till the last drop
12. Needed for flying
13. Dark Zero
14. She's still here and is never gonna leave (or I will >:|)

# Ancients Forgotten Chapter 1

So this is my first review for an RMX game, the game in question as you can see from the title is Ancients Forgotten, the first chapter only. From the thread that Dustin, the games creator, posted up this does look like an interesting bit of work, due to his own wizardry with Blender he's managed to get some nice 3D into the games title screen, world map and one of the areas in what's been released so far. The characters and story as described by him don't seem anything to rave about but there seems to be more underneath what he's put up so I won't hold it against him. So far looking good, now onto the actual game, the demo isn't too large just under 50 MB so anyone on a broadband connection should have no trouble getting it.



The first few minutes feature a nice introduction to the main villain Vliro, the red eyes and dark armour a dead give away, he doesn't seem like much of an evil character seeming like comic relief from his first impression but soon after shows his true colours when he cuts down 3 people in a few

few seconds. Nice. After this we get to see the hero Graham practising alchemy, we get a quick explanation into one of the games unique aspects and set loose into town to find the King who is requesting an audience with me. I spent a good few minutes looking around the town and have to say it's wonderfully designed, despite one buggy bridge it's quite harmonious and isn't bare and even though there are a few NPCs set to move at random it does seem as alive as a 2D game can be. There are also lots of items potions and ethers mostly but quite a few gizmos that can be used for alchemy floating around so at least you don't walk around for ages with no reward.

I locate the King and he tells me that Nadya hasn't arrived, she was supposed to have come through a mountain pass, sounds like Vliro got to her first. He gives me two of his soldiers and sends me out to find her, despite there being a typo here, the first and last, the language isn't bad at all. I head out of town (saving at a crystal which doesn't replenish health) and meet the very pretty world map, it's full 3D and makes travel a lot simpler than having it as a normal map would have, I head to the only other location which is the mountain pass.

Just before my first chance to fight on a map I see Vliro and the others taking their spoils from it, Vliro who in the first scene I thought seemed to regret killing the woman by bowing his head then kneeling down over her when she dropped dead it turns out was doing nothing of the sort, he was taking a book off her which he is now reading.

He says it's "History of the Peace" but mentions to his fellow bandits that there's 4 chapters instead of 3, reading into it he discovers that the location of Durgas (A demon sealed 50 years before) and decides to head there as it's nearby.

Here I get to battle for the first time which is done in a pretty interesting way, you see the other monsters on the map eliminating random battles which do get frustrating when you're exploring and instead as they walk around you can approach or avoid them. They're not as quick as you so you can avoid a battle or two if you're low on health or want to move onto the next map. There is also the first strike/back attack system, this means that if you run up to their back you get a first strike which means they have to turn around on that turn and don't get to defend or attack. But it also works in reverse meaning should you get lax they can run up to your back and attack you without you being able to defend, strangely though they get in two rounds of attacks, one which you're surprised, the other where you've recovered from being back attacked but can't do anything strangely. Maybe it's a bug or just more punishment for getting back attacked, either way it didn't happen to me often so it wasn't much of a problem but could be a drawback further into the game when the enemies are harsher.

The battle system itself was a basic edit of the default system with only a change in menu and the addition of alchemy, alchemy was a nice mix up to skills with you not having to rely on MP to perform them and if you have an excess of the items from searching or buying them you can get through battles with a lot more ease than relying on the attack option. One of my problems was once I ran out of items I couldn't find any to replace them in the dungeons, I could find one of the two needed to perform heal or fireball but none of the

other so I had to hack my way through with the attack option, with two helpers though it's no trouble to get through the first dungeon.

When I do finally stumble upon the cart it turns out the guards who were cut down where friends with my escorts and they even have names. Here I did experience another bug, I could walk through the cart, which wasn't very game breaking but did spoil the mood a bit. Nevertheless I continue on and find the corpse of Nadya. Graham swears revenge on her murderers and the game gets more cinematic. The following scenes reveal more of the events surrounding the main story and builds up the characters a bit, there is a very nice panorama on the map where Durgas is sealed and the shifting focus between scenes works well and makes the storytelling engaging and the music also helps set the scene whether it's the creepy melody which accompanies Vliro or the lack thereof at Nadya's funeral.

When we return to gameplay there is another short cut-scene before we get to go into the second dungeon which is a lot deeper and actually quite challenging but as I didn't stick around in the first dungeon to train much the jump in difficulty was deadly and I did actually die. I had to train quite a lot before I could make it to the end (I even died two more times) there wasn't much progression in the movement of enemies either, despite there being more on the map they still followed me around and had me give them the taste of sword. There were a few crafty places in the way of map design where passageways were hidden and there were a lot more crafting materials around which helped quite a bit but there was something missing from it which would've made it really engaging. Puzzles. There were non existent and having a few to rack my

brains if even a little would've certainly been a plus to the game and changed up the formula of explore and battle.

The graphics themselves outside of the world map and the end of the second dungeon are purely RTP, the sprites for the main characters included. Having Aluxes in blue armour as the main hero may be off putting to some people but it shouldn't be something to hold you back. The mapping certainly does bring up the quality of the game as a whole and I'm sure if all the graphics were going to be made in Blender then the project would be too much of an undertaking for just one person. The blender graphics themselves set this apart from other projects in visual style as they give the game character and show that effort has been put in to add his own art.



So onto the actual numbers, first and foremost the Gameplay, very generic but something has been done to deviate from the script and there is alchemy as well which could have a bigger role in combat rather than a different set of skills and having monsters as visible enemies does make dungeon exploration a little more interesting, I'll stretch this to a 3/5.

Graphics next and this is the ones used and how, there is a lot of RTP but it is used well and the maps are certainly not boring or half cooked, I quite liked exploring the town and the dungeons themselves didn't have me craving the next cut-scene in 5 minutes which is a plus. The additional use of Blender for the world map and one of the later maps in this chapter certainly boosts this so I'll give it a 4/5, good work.

The Music used in the project was quite pleasing, the pleasant music for the town fitted purpose as well as the exploration themes in the dungeons but it shone

through best in the main cut-scenes in which it was used sparingly and worked to great effect. I'll give this a 4/5 as it wasn't spectacular but worked well.

Last but not least is the Story, one problem I had with this was that the main character wasn't developed along enough, we didn't get any moments in the events where we got to see what he was thinking and he didn't express how he felt to others much either so it's hard to see what kind of person he is. The story itself unfolds well and Vliro the villain certainly shows his true character quickly, if the main characters could do the same I could give this more than 3/5.

Overall this was a fun game to play so it gets 14/20, I suggest you definitely give this a play and look out for updates later on, this looks like something that's going somewhere and within further releases we could see improvements made to what's lacking from this.

Ancients Forgotten can be found in the Completed Games Section.

- ebhz.Ash.4rm

Out now - [www.Afar.ws](http://www.Afar.ws)

# Afar



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# Game Design: Slippery Slope

Slippery Slope is called positive and negative feedback in the more professional setting, but slippery slope is a more well known term so I'm going to use it here. Slippery Slope is when losing makes you more likely to lose. For example, Chess. You lose a piece, and your opponent scores points, but now you're even more disadvantaged because you've lost move options. Because of this, you're more and more likely to fall behind- you'll find a lot of surrenders in high-level Chess for this exact reason. It's often not even worth playing the rest of a match after the first piece is lost because the game can often be decided after the first few points are scored.

Slippery Slope is bad. Although some games manage to be good despite it- Starcraft and Chess for example- it still becomes a large flaw, and can completely ruin some games. Imagine, for example, if in Street Fighter every time you got hit you lost a move. Or if in Basketball, every time you scored your opponent lost a player. They'd simply be terrible games to play. It's because it strikes a blow to player equality.

One of the benefits of playing a video game is it's an almost complete mental competition, in a good game the influence by reflexes is minimized or removed completely (although fighters tend to be an exception... although they really shouldn't be, more on that some other time). In order to adhere to this, games need a fair set of rules to be played with, and luck is a factor that should be monitored very carefully while designing the game (although this only really applies to competitive gaming). Slippery Slope destroys the concept of player equality and downplays most of the game- the beginning becomes the most important part

and the rest is simply tolerated. But is Slippery Slope always bad? Not necessarily, you can have a more dynamic kind of Slippery Slope. I like to call it the Staircase Effect. It's an extra temporary disadvantage, that can be removed by fulfilling a certain requirement (using a spell or item on it) or by waiting a certain amount of time. Let's say my Magician casts Silence on an enemy. They are now at a disadvantage because they cannot use spells. However it's not a slippery slope for a few reasons:

1. You cannot be more silenced. Therefore, I can't stack a disadvantage with it.
2. Silence dissipates after a few turns. Therefore, the disadvantage is gone, and the playing field is even. Although the move did remove equality for a bit, it's still a fair move as it doesn't make or break the game.
3. My opponent can cure it with an item

The fact that most of the time status effects are temporary means they're fair game. They also take a move, remember, so you're giving something up to cause it, like how you'd have to give up a move to do damage (like scoring points). More than that, because you can't usually stack the same disadvantage by repeatedly doing the same thing (using Silence more than once shouldn't cause the enemy to wait an extra y turns. If it does, something needs to be tweaked or you're going to have to make sure your system is properly built, but usually it's a really bad idea) so it's not so much a slope as it is a stair. You're either above or below, there's only two levels.

The Staircase Effect is a very tricky thing to use however.

It's easy to make something utilizing the Staircase Effect completely broken, for example, status effects that don't leave, or have long turn requirements (especially bad in fast games, where it'll have a longer effect), a staircase that's too big (there's a reason why RPG's have bosses that can walk off poison, silence, death, doom, stop, etc.,) stacking a disadvantage, etc., Something that utilizes the Staircase Effect shouldn't be easily spammable (preferably not spammable at all) so that the playing field remains equal for a majority of the game, but so that using a Staircase tech will allow for some kind of follow up or a set up. Stun effects in fighter games are usually great examples of a Staircase tech.

Although, if we're talking about Slippery Slope, I should mention it's opposite. It's the Comeback Effect. That's when the losing player is granted some advantages while the winning player is disadvantage. Mario Kart uses this (it does it badly, but it really is a good example) with items and even kart speed- if you're losing your kart will actually be faster than if you were winning, and you'll also get good drops. The Comeback Effect is a good thing in games, it makes matches closer and allows for dozens of mental battles instead of just one. It simply makes matches more exciting (and exhausting).

The Comeback Effect can be even more broken than the Staircase Effect though. It's an amazing system and really the best of the three that I've discussed, but it's also a very fragile one. It's easy to break your game with the Comeback Effect, because balancing such a thing is difficult. Mario Kart, for example, has a completely broken Comeback Effect. Staying in first the entire match is actually a disadvantage, because items (ESPECIALLY in Mario Kart Wii) will simply destroy a player (and his/her family). The advantage given to the losing player allows them to surpass the

winning player too easily (although considering this is Nintendo, they were most likely trying to bridge the skill gap between players- breaking the system worked brilliantly for casual game design, but do not attempt to mimic this with a competitive game, a single player game, or an extremely skill based game).

So let's sum some things up.

**Term:** Slippery Slope -When losing gives you an extra disadvantage, making you more likely to lose.

**Usability:** Avoid it, it's gaming poison. Minimize or remove systems that cause Slippery Slope if possible.

**Term:** Staircase Effect -When a technique or input puts a player at a slight disadvantage, but it's temporary, unstackable, and minor enough to serve as a catalyst for depth.

**Usability:** Use the Staircase Effect, but be careful with it. Allow it to be used as a follow up or a set up, but make sure it doesn't lead to anything game beaking.

**Term:** Comeback Effect -When a losing player is given an advantage and a winning player a disadvantage, to keep the game close and to add value to the rest of the match.

**Usability:** Spam it in casual games, treat it with caution in more competitive games (although it's still good to have, fighters that let damage fill up a special bar are good examples of it in use in the competitive scene) but make sure it doesn't break your game (or if you're Nintendo, make sure it breaks your game).

~ **Reygekan**

# ARBITER

como: First I want to talk about the forums... What made you want to run an RM site in the first place?

blink\_: \*shrugs\* Dunno man, it was just given to me so I took it.

como: Hmm. Do you find running a site to be hard or challenging?

blink\_: Not really. I mean like there's people who never seem to understand anything, so you gotta keep telling them, but other than that, it's quite easy.

como: Would you say you need to know how to use the forum software or does that just all get learnt on the job?

blink\_: Well it's helpful to know the software in advance but you can learn it along the way.

como: Let's talk about IRC. How long have you been an IRCer?

blink\_: About 6 years, probably more.

como: How long was it until you knew how to run your own shits?

blink\_: Pretty soon; was one of the first things I did.

como: What do you reckon to the people who say RM IRC channels only serve to bring drama and don't benefit a site?

blink\_: I say lol... Basically the IRC should be for chat which means there is always drama. It shouldn't be about RM, hence why HBGames never really talk about it. It uses the IRC in the good way... general chat, drama, trollins, etc. They always benefit the site though.

como: Do you think an on-site chat, say a chatbox or shoutbox, could ever replace IRC?

blink\_: Fuck that shit. Chatboxes are for pussies who can't handle the slightest bit of drama, and you can't use IRC clients to connect, which makes it really fucking gay.

blink\_: Beware kids: chat boxes make you gay.

como: Seeing as IRC networks cost you money to run, and don't have any benefits or ads for yourself, why do it?

blink\_: You mean how? It helps if you have money, but to be honest it doesn't really cost much to run an IRC network.

como: I mean more... why do it?

blink\_: Because... I <3 irc.

como: :D

blink\_: ;D Plus, it saves me social engineering an admin to give me flood exempt >.>

## GOSU CONTEST RESULTS

*Dahrkael wins by default as the only entrant.*

## Forum Games!

**Following much debate, the Forum Games board is back.**

**Use it, have fun, but don't abuse it!**



It is with great regret that I, the beloved Symposium Board, am leaving.

tried to make us work, our relationship. O, you might even say I put effort into my discussions and tried to squeeze even the smallest ounces of debateful spirit out of you. In short my time with you was short lived and, I feel I can be with you no more.

Is this the end? No. While both boards have been growing with the rest of the forum I felt... I belonged in General Discussion. Heated debates and religion and o what else you are so happy to throw at me will now be enjoyed by my colleague over here.

And so, as I bid you my final farewell, I say, this is not the end of me, this is the beginning of a new relationship with a new board as your friend.



We hope you enjoyed this first serious issue of the eZine since the hiatus, and heartily thank everybody who contributed, whether directly, or by posting awesome content to the forums - we wouldn't be here without you! Keep an eye out for future

issues, which should be out monthly, for more reviews, tutorials, forum talk and other rubbish tossed in.

We've got a big contest going at the moment to celebrate our 5 Year anniversary (RMP.net, 2004) so be sure to get your entries in, the results will be shown in the next issue. Look out for more great contests in future, too!

If you fancy writing for the eZine you're more than welcome to send your submissions to any staff member, or post them to the forums with a message saying you'd like to appear in the 'zine. Not everything will be featured, and it may be subject to editing by Satan, but it's a great way to get your work out there!



*"That's all folks!"*

*...and this image isn't just here to waste space, honest!*