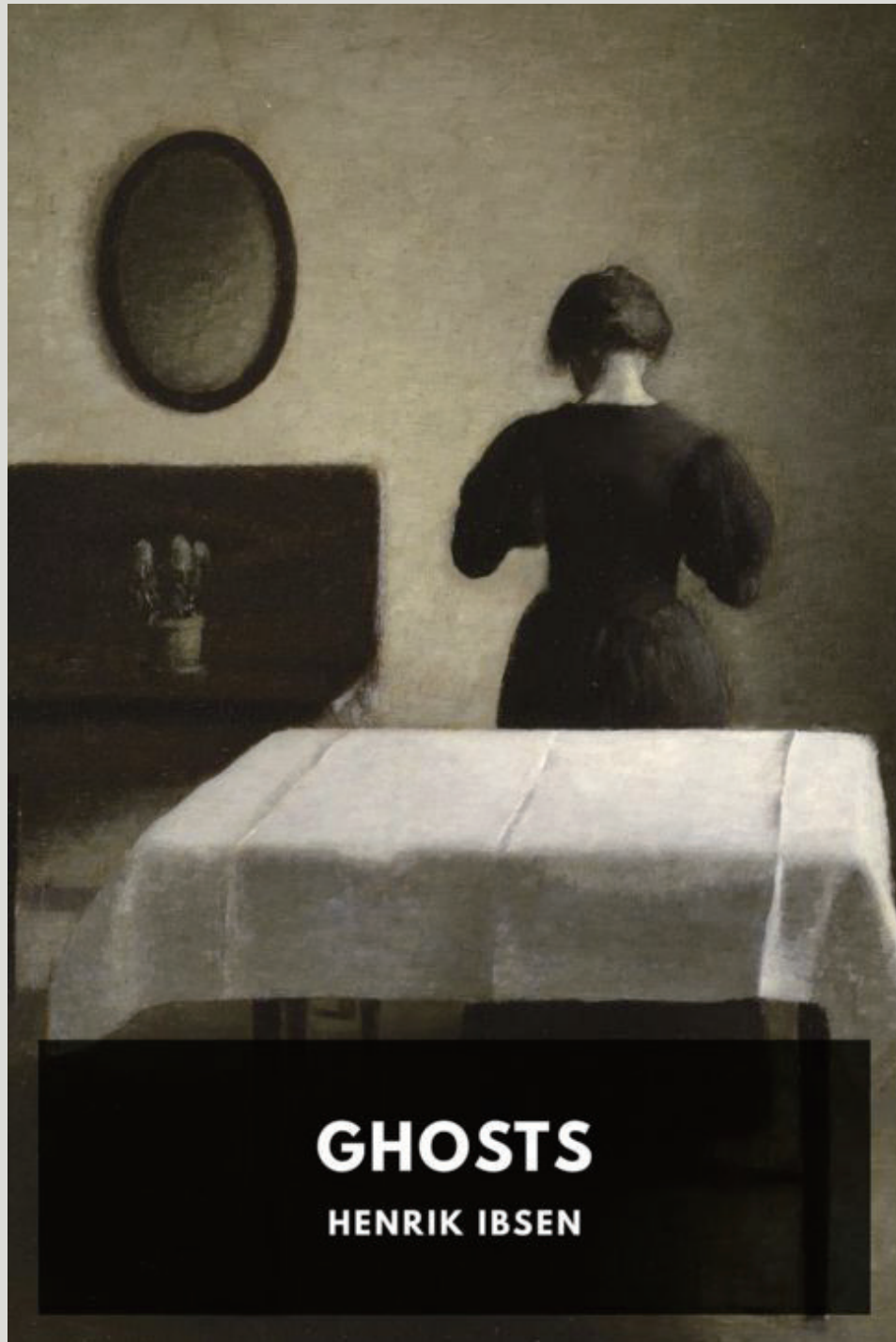


DRAMA

When people are out of balance in their lives, they seek ways to change their current situation. However, sometimes people fail to break through the impasse because of their helplessness before overwhelming realities.

'Ghosts' written by Henrik Ibsen vividly portrays a woman suffering under a patriarchal tradition which impedes her path to a break through. Author Chen Yutong writes a prelude to 'Ghosts.' In this short play, you may find new insights that aid in understanding Ibsen's 'Ghosts,' as it unfolds a prehistory for the relationship between the play's central characters Mr. and Mrs. Alving.





GHOSTS

HENRIK IBSEN

Introduction

"Ghosts" is a play written by Norwegian playwright Henrik Ibsen in 1881 and was performed in the following year. It is a story about a wife, Helen Alving, who is haunted by her deceased, indecent husband and her son who inherits syphilis from his father. The drama explores how societal norms influence the lives of ordinary people in the late nineteenth century. What follows is an imaginatively conceived to Ibsen's original play.

A Prelude to Henrik Ibsen's "Ghosts"

Rainie Chen

CHARACTERS

CAPTAIN ALVING,
late Chamberlain to the King.

MRS. HELEN ALVING,
wife of Captain Alving.

JOHANNA,
the maid.

OSWALD ALVING,
their son.

PASTOR MANDERS.

The action takes place at Captain Alving's country house, beside one of the large fjords in Western Norway.

[A spacious garden-room, with the main door ajar. Two doors on both sides. One leads to the garden and the other leads upstairs. A round table is in the middle of the room with several books on it, including a Bible. A stove stands next to the table and the crackling of burning wood can clearly be heard. There is an old pendulum clock in the right corner of the room and a chest next to it. Mrs. Alving stands beside the glass window to the left, watching the dim dusk slowly cover the fjord.]

[JOHANNA, the servant-maid, hesitates for seconds and then knocks on the door of the garden-room.]

JOHANNA. Ma'am.

MRS. ALVING. Yes, come in.

JOHANNA. *[Walks into the room.]*

MRS. ALVING. You've been working here for a long time. Four years, I guess.

JOHANNA. Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. ALVING. Have you ever thought of moving to the town and finding a job there? Also, wouldn't it be better if you could get married there.

JOHANNA. Yes, Ma'am, but—

MRS. ALVING. Actually, I've already found a place for you in the town, with consider-

able pay, of course.

JOHANNA. Thank you, ma'am, but I can't—

MRS. ALVING. [*Turns around.*] You know what I'm talking about, Johanna.

JOHANNA. Ma'am—

MRS. ALVING. I would say this is my final decision. Maybe you can start off next Monday.

JOHANNA. [*Voice trembles.*] Sorry, ma'am, sorry. You know I never thought this would happen—ma'am, I don't expect you to forgive me—but there is something I must tell you; maybe, before I leave. [*Sobbing.*]

MRS. ALVING. I know what you're going to talk about, so, in my view, this is a decision good for all of us: you, Mr. Alving, and me. Now, you can get out.

JOHANNA. Sorry, ma'am, but I can't leave, at least not now because—I'm pregnant—sorry, ma'am. It's all my fault.

MRS. ALVING. [*Shocked, turns to Johanna.*] Say it again?

JOHANNA. [*Sobbing.*] Yes, ma'am. I'm with child.

MRS. ALVING. [*Walks around in the room and breathes heavily.*] God, God. See what he did! A child! My husband and my maid! [*Sneers.*] How ridiculous!

[*The sky is totally dark and the pendulum clock strikes six times heavily. It's six o'clock at night.*]

JOHANNA. Sorry, ma'am—you know Mr. Alving—oh, I never expected this to happen—

MRS. ALVING. I should have expected this to happen.

[*MRS. ALVING walks to the table and lights the lamp.*]

JOHANNA. It's all my fault! Ma'am, as soon as I know how to deal with the child, I will leave at once—

MRS. ALVING. No, it's not your fault—

[*Someone is knocking at the door violently.*]

MRS. ALVING. Who's that?

[*The door is pushed open and CAPTAIN ALVING comes in, with a wine bottle in his hand.*]

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Takes a look at JOHANNA.*] What are you doing here?

MRS. ALVING. You came back just in time.

MRS. ALVING. [*Walks to JOHANNA and whispers to her.*] Go out through the side door now.

[*JOHANNA leaves from the side door, still sobbing.*]

CAPTAIN ALVING. What the hell are you two doing?

MRS. ALVING. [*Walks to CAPTAIN ALVING.*] This is what I should be asking you. What are you two doing?

CAPTAIN ALVING. What do you mean by this? You must be insane. [*Walks towards the stairs.*]

MRS. ALVING. [*Pulls him back.*] What do I mean? [*Scornfully*] You know very well what I mean. Do you remember why we moved to the countryside? Look at you! Still being so dissolute—now it's even worse—having an affair with the maid!

CAPTAIN ALVING. I don't know what you are talking about. These absurd ideas slipped into your mind only because you do nothing every day. Find something to do tomorrow. I'll go to bed.

MRS. ALVING. [*Sneers.*] Sleep! I do wish you could sleep well tonight. My absurd ideas—hah! I might as well tell you the truth. I once overheard you flirting with

Joanna in the garden.

CAPTAIN ALVING. You must have misheard.

MRS. ALVING. [*Nearer.*] Now you still think you can hide everything from me? Did you just see Johanna? She has confessed everything to me—everything—including her pregnancy.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Open-mouthed.*] What? Who's pregnant?

MRS. ALVING. Johanna. [*Contemptuously.*] Hah, how interesting! I knew even before my husband that he had had a child with another woman!

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Angry.*] Damn it! That fucking woman!

MRS. ALVING. Damn? Who on earth is the shameless one? So funny! So easy to blame your fault on an other! Now, here I tell you. [*Stares directly at CAPTAIN ALVING.*] I won't meddle in this matter. Deal with it by yourself. Just let others gossip about this thing—let others—know what kind of person you are.

CAPTAIN ALVING. That's impossible.

MRS. ALVING. Impossible? Wait and see.

CAPTAIN ALVING. Do you really think that affair has nothing to do with you? Do think that people won't realize that you can't manage your family? You do think that they won't regard you as the reason for this—shameless thing? Wait and see. Do you think you are punishing me? You are punishing yourself.

MRS. ALVING. Then I will leave here—never come back again. Just let them judge me.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Laughs.*] Leave me? Just like several years ago—go to find Pastor Manders? Do you think he would accept

you—a woman who abandons her duty to her family and her child? I think you must have forgotten how he sent you back last time you left home. [*Points to the ceiling.*] And don't forget that Oswald is here—right upstairs. [*Walks to the chair and sits down.*]

MRS. ALVING. [*Turns her back to CAPTAIN ALVING.*] I won't find anyone else this time. I'd rather live alone. Nothing could be worse than the life with you.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Puts down the bottle and lights a cigarette.*] Can't be worse? You are actually going to your ruin. Think about it—everything you eat, drink, and own is from me. The house, the garden, the child—are all named Alving. [*Takes a puff of the smoke.*] I'd like to see what your own life would be like when you step out of this house.

MRS. ALVING. [*Buries her face in her hands.*] You—you brigand. I wish I hadn't married you!

CAPTAIN ALVING. Never mind, just bear in mind that your last name is Alving and you are nothing but a wife.

MRS. ALVING. [*Desperate.*] Wife, wife—who'd be a wife if she has other choices? God, God—Why should one suffer like this?

[*MRS. ALVING walks to the wall and tries to lean against it; however, she falls down.*]

CAPTAIN ALVING. Listen, what you should do next is to send this woman away—the further the better.

MRS. ALVING. [*Tired with dull-looking.*] What should I do? The child. What about the child? Poor child. Poor mother.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Snorts.*] Just send her to

the town.

MRS. ALVING. What if she insists on staying?

CAPTAIN ALVING. Give her money. Let her take the money and find her own way. Oh, don't let her talk to anyone about the whole thing—either the child or the money.

MRS. ALVING. [*Slowly.*] What an evil and in-different person you are! Look, God, it is he who ruined others' lives; but now, he's

only concerned about his reputation.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Puts out the cigarette.*] She's just a bitch. It's kind enough for me to give her money.

MRS. ALVING. [*Sneers.*] Kind, kind, kind enough.

CAPTAIN ALVING. [*Stands up.*] I don't want to see her in this house next week. That's it. You women are so annoying. I'm tired, and I will go to find my son.



[CAPTAIN ALVING goes upstairs through the side door. MRS. ALVING is still sitting on the floor. The stove fire is dying out and the room is deadly quiet with only the ticking of the old clock.]

[Day is breaking. The lamp is worn out. There is no book on the table and only charcoal and some unburned papers were left in the stove.]

[MRS. ALVING walks over to the chest, pulls open the drawer, and pulls out a bag of money.]

MRS. ALVING. [Speaking to herself.] Three hun-

dred dollars for Johanna and the rest of it must.... Everything shall come to an end. I will take the reins into my own hands—and have total control—over you and everything else.

[The old pendulum clock strikes six times heavily. When the sun shines through the window, words on some unburned papers in stove are faintly visible. They read: "The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases."]





Photograph by Jialin Yan



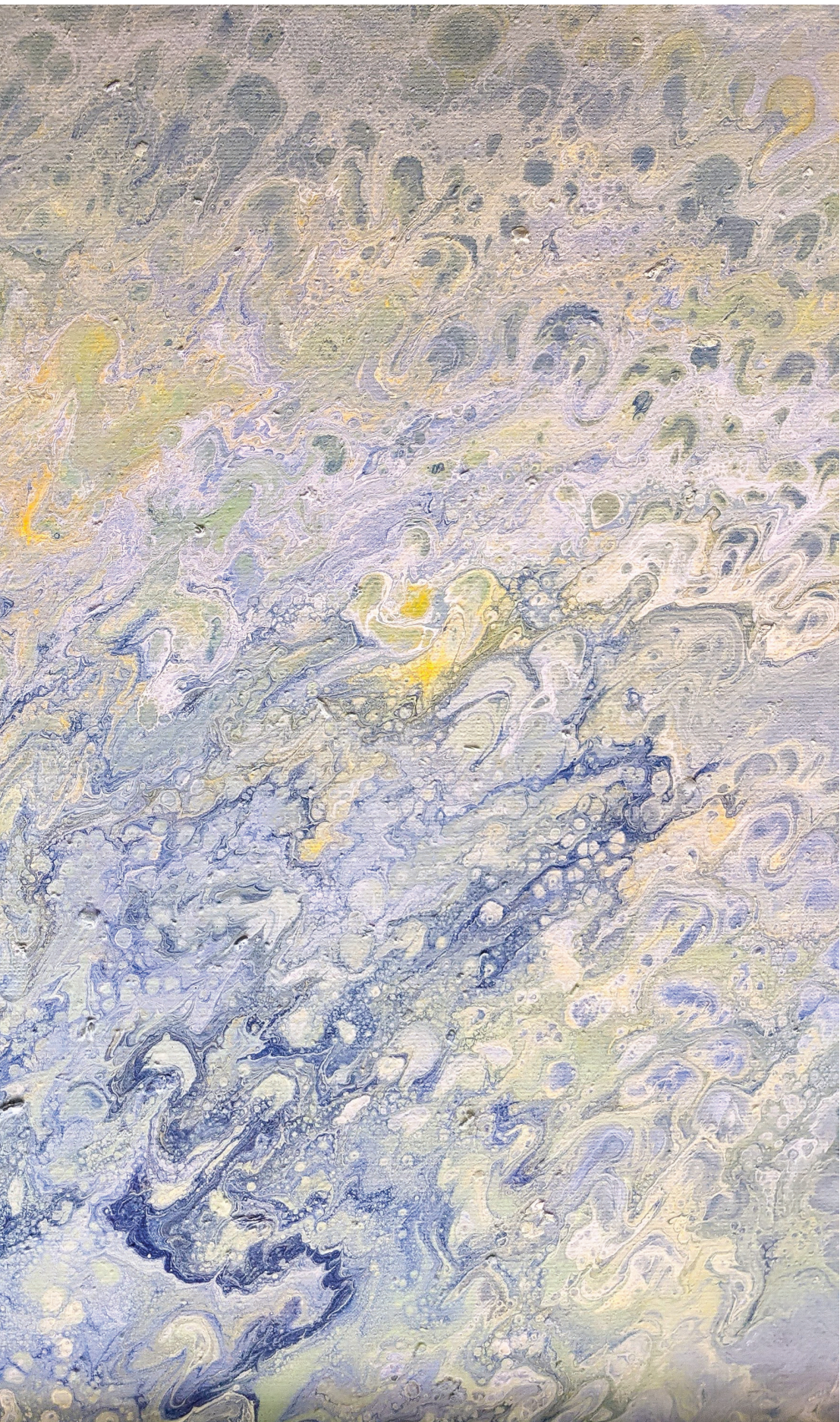
Photograph by Jialin Yan

*The bright sun was extinguish'd, and the stars
Did wander darkling in the eternal space,
Rayless, and pathless, and the icy earth*



Photograph by Jialin Yan





RECOMMENDATIONS

The Deal of a Lifetime

Recommended by Remi An

Type: Novella

Author: Fredrik Backman

Country: Sweden

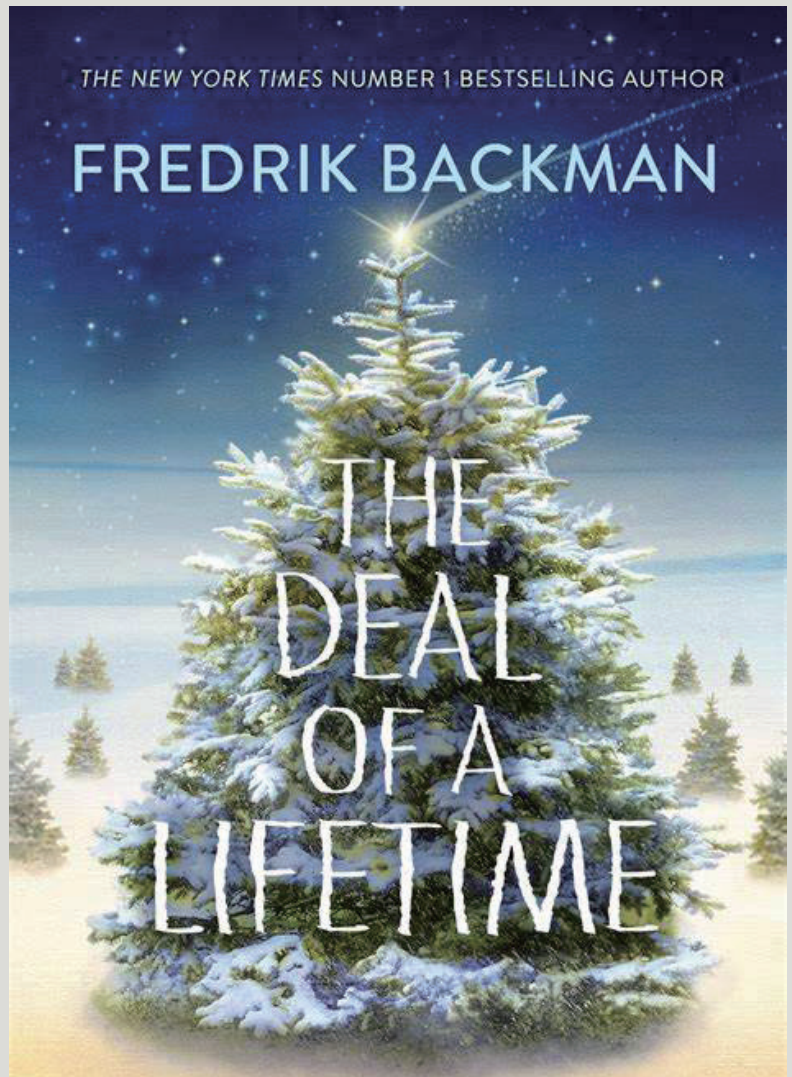
Year: 2019

Language: English

“The only thing of value on earth is time. One second will always be a second, there’s no negotiating with that.” So says the speaker in *The Deal of a Lifetime*, a novella about time and choice by Swedish author Fredrik Backman. The book is short in length yet abundant in connotation. Written in the form of a letter with a calm and serious tone, the author tells a distressing but heart-warming story.

The protagonist devotes his time and life to his business because he believes that wealth is the only way to measure his success. He becomes a successful 45-year-old man with a career and capital, but his wife and son leave him. Cancer sends the man to the hospital, where he meets a five-year-old girl. Death is looming, but the girl is still expecting her mother’s bedtime stories and her birthday party as always. She reminds the protagonist of his son, the son who once belonged to him completely. His heart is torn open when the Messenger of Death comes to take the girl away. He proposes to exchange his life for the girl’s life, but the Messenger of Death also asks to erase all traces of the protagonist’s presence in the world. “How exactly,” he asks, “have I spent the past 45 years?” A reckoning with the past makes him finally understand what time really means.

What has time given you? And what have you chosen to give back to time?



We often lament that time flies past, but we forget to think about what we have created, achieved and enjoyed in our limited time. The way we spend time redounds to our experience. This is the deal between time and our life—and, in many ways, it is a fair deal. In family relationships time is a minute-by-minute companionship that accumulates into irreplaceable emotions between relatives. Our use of time may become an experience of breaking through, but this experience occurs little-by-little with struggle and suffering that builds the perseverance and courage to break out of our cocoon. If you are trudging through the desert and cannot see the hope of an oasis, keep going. Time will prove to you that your choices and persistence are worth it.

Swimming Out till the Sea Turns Blue



Recommended by
Jenny Gao

Country: China
Year: 2021

There has been a huge break through taking place in China in recent years. Economic development has totally changed the landscape of China. Commerce, technology, and media have replaced the old ways of living. Our lives have greatly improved, but we still feel at a loss. Have our lives really gotten better? Under Covid 19 when our lives have stagnated, and the question of the meaning of existence has become even more prominent. Where are we now, and where are we going to?

Swimming out till the Sea turns Blue is a documentary directed by Jia Zhangke. The theme is about the countryside, the city, literature, reality, and the past and present in China. Told from the perspectives of four authors who write from their own villages' points of view, the documentary allows us to learn about normal village people's daily life in the old days and how those people are living now. There is no plot, and the narration is plain. Individuals' mundane lives intertwine with the relentless flow of history. Several clips compare the past and present in the same place, showing no big difference except for people's clothing and the tools they use. It tends to illustrate the reality that nothing has essentially changed in rural Chinese people's way life.

The reason why the name of this documentary first caught my eyes was that it forced an interesting paradox on me. The title is Swimming out till the Sea turns Blue, suggesting that the sea is not blue. However, it is common sense that blue is the color of the sea. It turns out that Hua Yu, one of the authors interviewed, says in the documentary that the color of the sea close to his hometown is yellow. As a child, he learned from a book that the color of sea is blue. Since then, he kept wondering why he could not see the blue color in this sea. Therefore, one day he swam for a long time in the yellow sea, hoping to see the blue color.

That moment was striking and thought-provoking. The color Blue here implies an ideal world that Hua Yu longs for. Perhaps the goals people pursue are ridiculous and the efforts made are meaningless. However, we live by hope, by assigning meaning on life, and by trying to break through barriers. This is what makes us who we are today and tomorrow. We keep swimming until we see the future, though there might not be one. What matters is that we keep questioning and trying to find the answer.

Weight of the World

Recommended by Fion Yang

Country: Japan

Year: 2017

Compose: Okabe Keiichi

Version: Japanese, English, Nouveau-FR
Version.



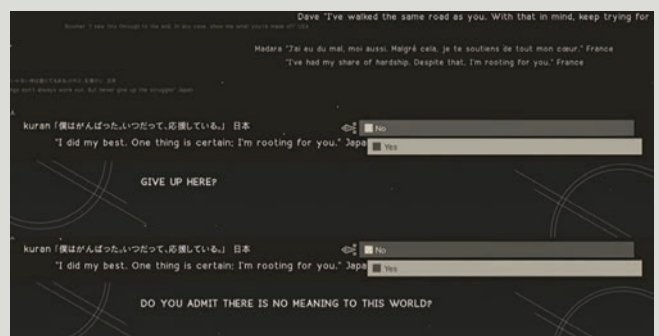
*Maybe if I keep believing my dreams will
come to life
Come to life..."*

Weight of the World is a song that comes from a Japanese ARPG called NieR:Automata. It comes in three different versions, Japanese, English, and the Nouveau-FR (the language the game is made in). It structured like a pop song, but it will give you an epic experience that pop songs do not afford. When you listen to it in the game, you will feel its weighty meaning.

Forgetting about the background of the game, let's just talk about the song itself. The song gives me a feeling of tenacious hope. It has a consistently low pitch interspersed with small rustling sounds like the rubbing of sand paper and the hum of insects. It evokes a picture of a man walking in silence, with nothing but the sand blowing by, and the humming bugs around his head. The sound of the guitar and the piano also help to create a feeling of emptiness. The emotional register of the song is low in the early part of the song, but it starts to rise later on. When it comes to the chorus, the emotional register rises and breaks out like lightning. It seems as if it is animated by a strong heart that constantly pursues the last glimmer of hope. This is also clear in the lyric. For example, in the English version, it says:

*"Cause we're going to shout it loud
Even if our words seem meaningless
It's like I'm carrying
the weight of the world
I wish that someday, somehow
That I can save every one of us
But the truth is that I'm only one girl*

These lyrics are meaningful in the context of the game it comes from. You will hear the lyrics in all three languages, when you get to the ending of the game. In that part of the game, you will be forced to play a barrage episode to save the characters in the game. The game is nearly impossible to win when you do it only by yourself. You will fail again and again, and the game will keep asking you if you really want to keep going after all the failure. And suddenly, the 8-bit version of the Weight of the World changes into a sung version, and you start to receive messages and data from other players who are also playing the game all over the world. Each player's data set will block a bullet from the enemy on your behalf, and their data will be broken for your benefit. In this phase of the game, it feels like people from all over the world are sacrificing themselves just to help you to face and fight hopelessness. As the lyrics in the Japanese version says: "We keep singing the song of this broken world."



It Takes Two

Recommended by Tracy Cao

Country: Sweden

Year: 2021

Language: English, Chinese



This game's story is about a couple who often argue and dislike each other. Their names are Cody and Xiaomei. These two humans were transformed into dolls by magic and trapped in a wonderful world. Under the instruction of Dr. Harkin, a love mentor, Cody and Xiaomei begin to try to mend their broken feelings and, together, face all kinds of games and challenges in this fantasy world.

"It Takes Two" is an adventure and action game designed by the famous American entertainment company Electronic Arts in 2021. You can download it on Steam game platform or its official website, for the price is ¥75.

As the name indicates, this is a two person game. There are two characters available for

manipulation. The two players need to cooperate with their partner to understand and use the attributes of their character to accomplish the various tasks. If the player dies during the adventure, he or she will be resurrected in situ and continue his or her challenge. When one player is resurrected, another player will not be affected. However, when completing the task, it must be the accomplishment of two people—one person can't handle everything.

In order to break through and win the game, Cody and Xiaomei have to go through seven scenarios. One is sent in a shed, one in a tree, one in Rose's room. They also take place in a snowy landscape, a garden, an attic, and one involves a cuckoo clock. Using their knowledge and accumulated wisdom to overcome difficulties, they must defeat each boss before they can unlock the next scenario.

In each scenario, almost all combat and decryption information revolves around a certain theme. Players need to use various items scattered on the game's map to open a way for themselves. In addition, each level of the game has a different number of small games. Players can compete with their partners in these small games to increase their game experience.

If you love adventure, making breakthroughs, and want to refuse the lonely experience of playing games by yourself, then this game will be a very good choice for you!



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