



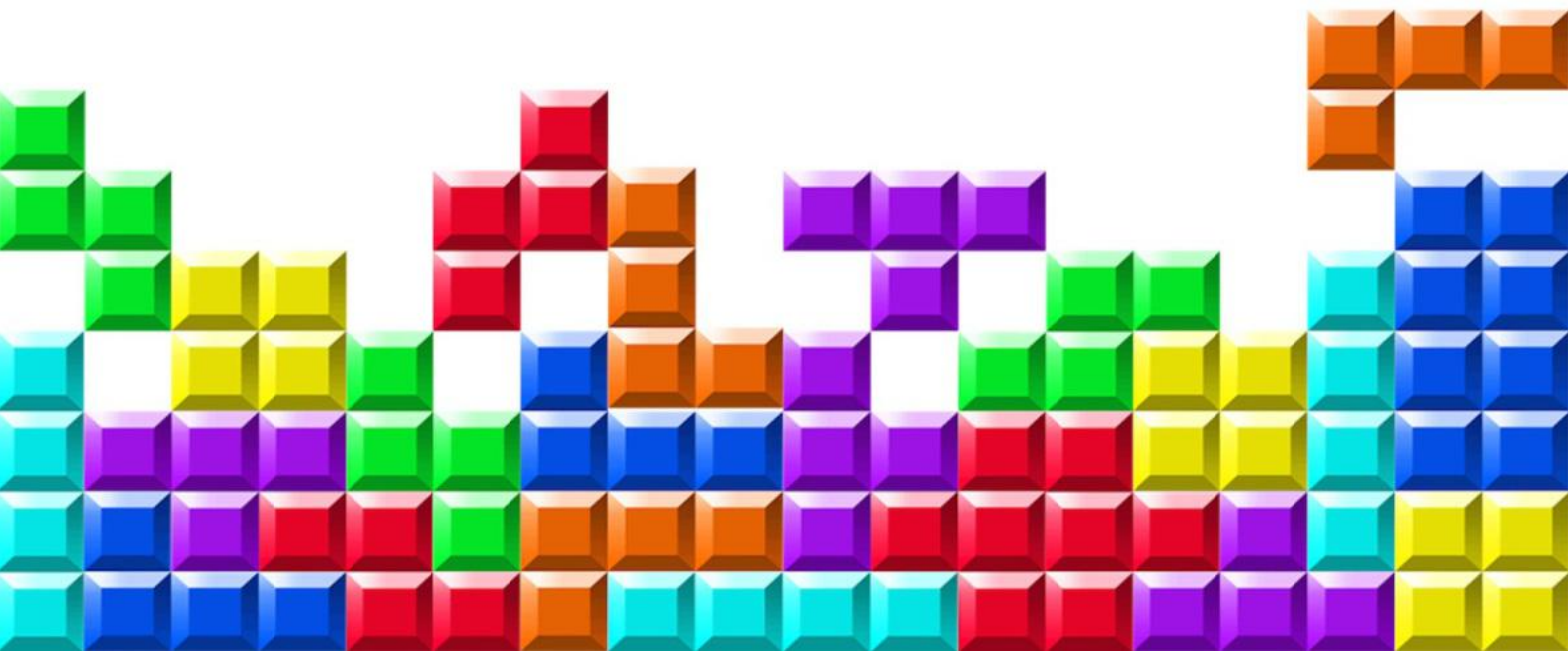
NEWSGAMES

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PREFACE

The News Frontier is a start up that specializes in making newsgames. A newsgame is like a regular game, only the narrative is not fictional like most games. It is based on a real life event. I think it is necessary to realize that only bigger events will make it into a game, because of the time it takes to make a game. Also, the subject of the newsgame might be more about a background piece of the event, than the real "news" you find on CNN.

Together with co-founders Alka Anna Goos and Kaja Bouman, I have tried to find out the best way to make a newsgame. What would grasp the audience? Last year, we attended the pilot Game Design in Eindhoven. This was a minor for students who want to design games. We met students who want to become a game designer or developer. Also, they play a lot of games themselves. Soon we found out that most of them did not want to make a non-fictional game with just some choices like "would you go do this or that". They wanted dragons and magic spells.

The topics mentioned above are things I take in consideration while I am writing this research about newsgames. This will hopefully bring me closer to finding the way in newsgaming-world.

Before I proceed, I would like to thank some people who helped me with this research:

I would like to thank my professors Bart van Teeffelen, Jan Hein de Gruijter, Clement Tonnaer and Ron van Dooren for assistance when I lost the way. Tomas Rawlings, Marcus Bösch, Luca Dalcò, Pete Bottomley, James Burton and Lorenzo Conticelli, thank you for telling me all about the development of newsgames and games. Also, I would like to show my gratitude to all the people I spoke to at EGX Rezzed in London. And last but not least, Alka Anna Goos, Kaja Bouman and Robine Roordink thank you for starting The News Frontier with me.



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I. INTRODUCTION

"Gamers are super empowered hopeful individuals. These are people who believe they are individually capable of changing the world. And the only problem is that they believe they are capable of changing the virtual world, and not the real world." (McGonigal, 2010) These are the words of Jane McGonigal, who works for the Institute of the Future in California. In this TED Talk of 2010 she argues why gamers can change the world.

Right now, we spend 3 billion hours a week playing online games worldwide. And if we're talking only about the game World of Warcraft, the game McGonigal uses as an example, all players of this game have invested 5,93 million years in the world of Azaroth. This is the place they experienced *epic adventures*.

The research from McKinsey & Company in 2015 shows how the news consumer is transferring from traditional media to digital media. They suspected that in the beginning of 2017 there would be more money spend on digital media than traditional (McKinsey & Company, 2015).

"You are not competing with only news anymore", Tomas Rawlings explains. He is a design and production director at Auroch Digital, a game development studio that makes newsgames. "In one minute, someone can decide to close your news app and go to Facebook, Candy Crush or something else. You have to keep the user engaged and you can do that using all kind of gaming methods." (Rawlings, 2017)

The News Frontier wants to bring news in a new and exciting way. I see the possibilities that games bring: gamers are engaged with the game and seem to know all about the world and characters. The difference between the game story and a news story is that the first is fictional. Would it be possible to provide in depth background stories through a game and would the same audience still play this game?

A great deal is being written and said about newsgames. There have been multiple researches explaining why journalism can (and should) be combined with games and I also interviewed Tomas Rawlings and Marcus Bösch about this. Bösch is co-founder of The Good Evil, a game development studio based in Germany, which develops games with 'a purpose'. He helped organize the first Newsgame Hackathon of Europe. These people already stated that newsgames would be the next step for newsrooms to innovate and keep consumers engaged. This research tries to go a little further than this, which brings me to my main question:

HOW DO YOU CREATE A NEWSGAME THAT WOULD WORK FOR A SPECIFIC AUDIENCE?

In the next chapter I will explain what I am focusing on in the research and what are the limits of this research. First, I will clarify how games operate at all. Following, I will determine what our target audience expects of a game. The following sub-questions will bring me closer to finding the resolution of my main question:

- How does one make a successful game with a longer narrative?
- What is the balance between the game(play) and the narrative that occur in games?
- What does the audience expect of a game?
- What aspects are most important when making a newsgame?



2. DEFINITIONS

According to Marcus Bösch a newsgame is simply defined as a game put to use in the context of journalism. Newsgames serve the interests of journalism - in the broadest sense, he says. "From a playable political cartoon to a simulation of Osama bin Ladens death." (Bösch, What?!, 2017) For the purposes of this essay, I would like to make the term newsgame a little less broad.

It is true that a quiz about the news or a little puzzle is also taken as game elements occurring on news websites nowadays. These games draw in a significant audience, Tomas Rawlings explained during a Newsgame Hackathon in 2014 (Cresci, 2014). But right now, I will not take these smaller games into consideration.

Newsgame

A newsgame is a computer or mobile phone game which is used to participate in the public sphere with the intention of explaining or commenting on current news, Miguel Sicart points out in his paper *Newsgames: Theory and Design*. "I will define newsgames as those games that utilize the medium with the intention of participating in the public debate", Sicart adds (Sicart, 2017, p. 27).

For the purpose of this research, I will specify the term newsgame some more, because there is a great difference between making a quiz and a video game. In this research, the term newsgame refers to a video newsgame. This example might clarify why. As Jane McGonigal said in her Ted Talk gamers have spent over 5,93 million years in World of Warcraft (McGonigal, 2010). This was in 2010, by now it of course has become a lot more than that. In 2013, people were waiting in a queue outside in the rain for hours so they could be the first to play Grand Theft Auto V. And as Business Insider pleads: "All gamers have their favorite Zelda game." And Silent Hill is still the scariest monster in town, according to Game Revolution.

All these games are well known by the whole gaming community (and beyond) and the games still contain narrative - in one game more than the other. The narrative in video games is for now mostly fictional. I went to EGX Rezzed in London and a lot of narrative-driven games were exhibited here as well, but still, all the stories were fictional. That is why I am curious to explore the possibilities of a game with a non-fictional narrative. That is the kind of newsgame I will be referring to in this research.

What will "work"

For this research I will take two successful narrative-driven video game as example. That way, I can draw the line why that game worked for that audience. Ether One and The Town of Light will be the two example video games, because the narratives in these games are not that far from reality. Both contain a different story. Ether One is a puzzle adventure game about dementia. The Town of Light is an adventure horror game about mental illness. The goal of a newsgame is to engage people. Also, a newsgame can participate in the public debate. The narrative of both games mentioned have the same kind of goal.

When is it successful? Steam is a platform on which you can buy all sorts of video games. The platform has had at least 7,566,731 concurrent users and at the very most 13,289,239 concurrent users in the last 48 hours. With every game on the platform, every customer can leave a review. Ether One has 268 reviews in English (343 in total) and The Town of Light has 261 in English (531 in total). After that, visitors of this site can rate the reviews for how helpful they have been. The ten



most helpful reviews are on top. These reviews discuss what they liked and disliked about the game. Also, the game gets a thumbs up or thumbs down, which signifies whether people would recommend this game. These twenty reviews are in appendix G and H - I will analyze them to see what this audience finds important in a game.

Audience

According to a survey from Pew Research Center 49 percent of American adults ever play video games, but only 10 percent call themselves a "gamer". This survey had 2,100 participants, all of them 18 years or older. Most people taking the survey (60 percent) believe most of the gamers are men, but in reality there are equal numbers of men and women who have played video games (Duggan, 2015). This is why I will not make a distinction between male and female players in the target group I am talking about.

According to Entertainment Software Association the average gamer is 31 years old. They are getting older, even a study amongst people older than 50 shows that 48 percent play video games on at least one device. Jason Allaire, co-director Gains Through Gaming Lab, says he's excited about these results. It shows that people of all ages play video games. "There is no longer a 'stereotype game player', but instead a game player could be your grandparent, your boss, or even your professor. Older adults will keep on playing games and the percentage will grow as Baby Boomers enter retirement. That will also increase the focus on positive effects of playing games", he suspects (Entertainment Software Association, 2013).

The report of Pew Research Center about the modern news consumer in the United States shows that TV remains the dominant screen from which people gather their news (57 percent use TV for news). But amongst younger adults (people from 18 to 29 years old) digital newsgathering is the largest by 50 percent, followed by TV with 27 percent (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016).

Computers remain the top device used to play a video game on with 38 percent, but games played on console are gaining ground. In 2014 only 10 percent of all games were played on console. This year it is 19 percent (The NPD Group, 2017).

Based on this information I have defined the target audience for this research as follows: people from 18 to 29 years old, who gather news online and sometimes play video games.



3. METHODOLOGY

By empirically examining games and newsgames, we hope to produce a more complete understanding of how to make a newsgame that will work for the target group.

This research is based on literature about games and newsgames, which will be used for all questions. The reviews of games will be used in this research to see what gamers like the most about The Town of Light and Ether One and what they didn't like. This information will be used to answer the question 'what does the audience expect of a game'. In depth interviews with experts, developers and gamers will be used to answer the questions 'how does one make a successful game with a longer narrative', 'what is the balance between the game(play) and the narrative that occur in games' and 'what aspects are most important of a newsgame'.

This all will lead to answering the main question: how do you create a newsgame that would work for a specific audience.



4. HOW DOES ONE MAKE A SUCCESSFUL GAME WITH A LONGER NARRATIVE?

For this question I will use literature and I will base my findings on the interviews with game developers and newsgaming experts that are included in appendix A, F and G.

Game construction

Just playing around does not make something a game right away. The book *Gamestorming* gives the example of two boys kicking a ball around. It starts as 'just playing', but it becomes a game after a few basic components enter (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010). When you look closely, you will notice these components in every game.

1. Game space: The rules of the ordinary world are temporarily suspended and replaced with the rules of the game in this particular space. The game creates an alternative world, according to the authors of *Gamestorming*. "If someone wants to enter that world, the players must agree to abide by the rules of that space, and they must enter voluntarily. By agreeing to a set of rules, players enter a shared world. Without that agreement, the game would not be possible." (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 1)

2. Boundaries: "A game has boundaries in time and space." There is a time when a game begins - when the players enter the game space - and a time when they leave the game space, ending the game. The game space can be paused or activated by agreement of the players (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 2).

3. Rules for interaction: The game rules define the constraints of the game space. "Players agree to abide the rules that define the way the game world operates, and they cannot violate those rules. If they do, it is called cheating." (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 2)

4. Artifacts: "Games use physical artifacts (or in the case of a video game: virtual artifacts); objects that contain information about the game. These objects might be needed to play the game or to the track progress and to maintain a picture of the game's current state. To keep track of the score, you could use another kind of information artifact. Also, the positions of the players in the game are artifacts, in the sense that their position can hold information about the state of the game, as seen in chess." (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 2)

5. Goal: There must be a way for players to know when the game is over. "This is the end state that they are all striving to attain should be understood and agreed to by all players." The game can be timed, like in football, or the game can end when the first player reaches five points (Gray, Brown, & Macanufo, 2010, p. 2).

How a game engages

What makes a game so engaging? A lot of gamers at game festival EGX Rezzed told me they liked it when a game is competitive and when they can control the game.¹ Gamers get rewarded by winning a game and that makes the game even more encouraging. The developers do not make it effortless to complete a level, so when the gamers complete a level it is a real accomplishment. Furthermore, games can be a social activity. Board games make people talk about the activity they are doing and

¹ Appendix C



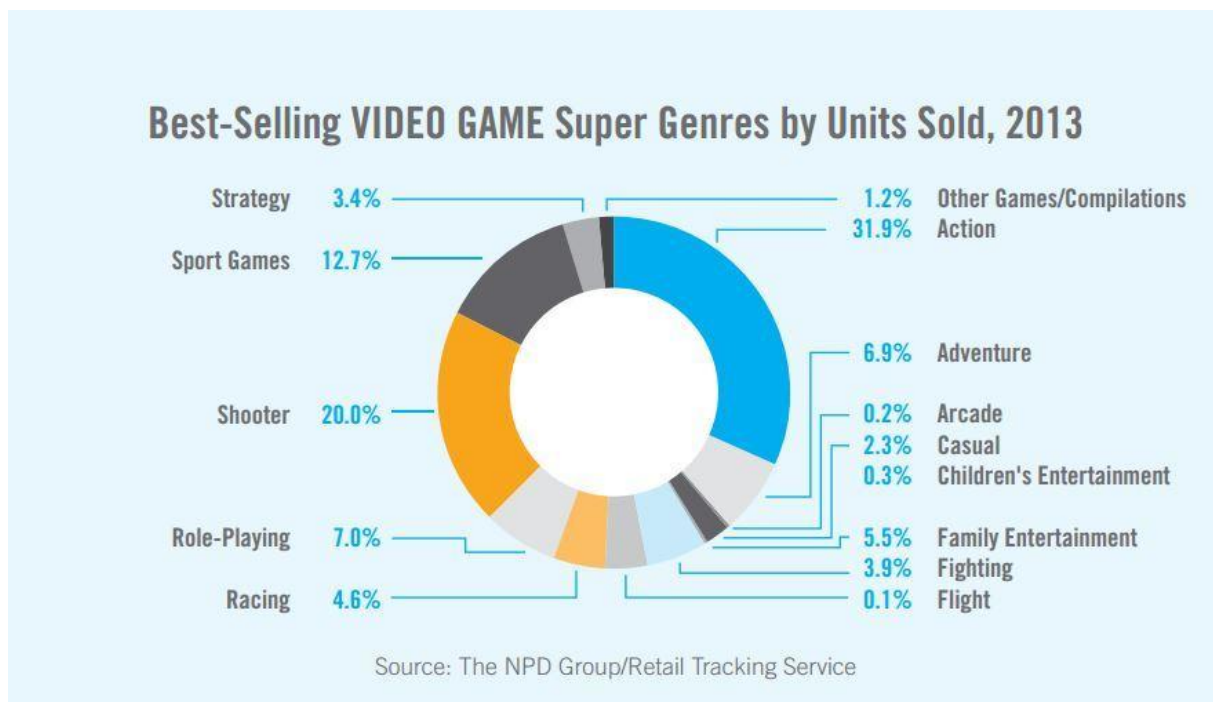
also in video games it is really easy to talk to other gamers throughout the game (Gray, Brown, & Macanuso, 2010).

Ennomotive - an alliance of different companies working on innovative challenges - provides suggestions to make a game as engaging as possible. They believe that people should learn by playing games and gamification (employing game principles and techniques in connection with non-game components) can be used in all industries and they encourage everyone to do so. Ennomotive presents tips to make an engaging and successful game:

- "Encourage the user to keep going by rewarding both small and big accomplishments."
- "Make it social: give people the opportunity to share their accomplishments, so you add significance to their achievements."
- "Make it challenging, but not frustrating: games that are too easy are boring, but those too difficult are frustrating."
- "Feedback: tell the gamers what they did wrong or what they could have improved."
- "Know your target audience: a killer (people who are motivated by leader boards), an achiever (people who are motivated by clear goals), a socializer (people who are motivated by friends) and an explorer (people who are motivated by discoveries)." (Ollero, 2015).

The best genre

According to The NPD Group, which does consumer research in more than twenty industries, shooter games and action games are the most sold genres.



It is now clear what components all games should possess in order to be successful.

Newsgames

Why would games + news always be a good idea? Well, it is not. "I am strongly against making a game of everything", Marcus Bösch pleads. "Some normal things are not fit for a game. But I think



people look for 'snack able' content on their mobile phone, even in news apps. So that would be a good place for a little game." (Bösch, co-founder of The Good Evil, 2017)

Also, he says games brings people together, because they have shared experiences while playing the game. "With games you can dive directly in the subject and learn a lot about the system." Other branches are picking up gaming techniques as well. "The military is using gaming techniques in every single textbooks to make the content engaging." (Bösch, co-founder of The Good Evil, 2017) ²

Tomas Rawlings agrees. "You are not competing with only news anymore." News media are also competing with Candy Crush and Facebook, he says. You should keep your consumer engaged, otherwise they will close your news app for something else. "The game should stay with them. There are so many gamers out there and we can get them involved in newsgames."

Rawlings is a gamer as well as a game developer, so thinking in the form of a game is like second nature to him. He thinks people who say games are not the proper medium for telling the news are wrong. "If it is okay for the newspaper, music, films and TV to tell serious stuff through, why can't game design do serious stuff as well." (Rawlings, 2017) ³

Let us now turn our attention to the games The Town of Light and Ether One, considering these are the narrative-driven games I will talk about in this research.

Narrative in games

The Town of Light is a first person psychological adventure game about a sixteen year old girl called Renée. The game includes some horror elements. It takes place in the first half of the 20th Century and it is based on real stories of people who spend time in a mental asylum in Volterra. Even though, Renée is a fictional character. Lka.it is a game development studio in Italy and developed this game. "The only horror you will find in this game is the truth: a blow to the solar plexus, much more intense than any supernatural presence", Lka.it says on its website.

Renée is mentally ill and because she is "a danger to herself and a cause of public scandal", she has to go to a home for the mentally ill. She has to go to the mental asylum in Volterra, a place that really existed. The developers of Lka went to this place and the asylum in the game looks exactly like the real place.

Luca Dalcò wrote the narrative of the videogame. "In the beginning I like to write the story as linearly as possible, as a list of events, then, I start to sort, hide and add to obtain a more interesting flow." The beginning and the end of the story need to be approached differently, Dalcò thinks. They need "special attention", they are the engagement and the farewell, the two most thorny moments.

"The thing I love the most is writing the text that the player finds in the game, I try constantly to write them emotionally, it's something like acting in a certain way. I try to put myself in the shoes of the person who is experiencing the story, it could be the main character, the player, other characters, it depends on the moments, then I write as it comes and eventually, after several days, I correct it as little as possible in order to maintain a sense of reality, given by the imperfections of a fast, emotional writing."

² Appendix E

³ Appendix D



For Dalcò it is important to tell the story with a gradually growing emotional involvement. This way the player keeps engaged in the story (Dalcò, 2017).⁴

The reason why Lka.it chose for this story is simple: "It's a story that needs to be told", Lorenzo Conticelli says.⁵ He is the 3D artist and developer of Lka. "You get an insight in someone who is mentally ill and it is an important subject to talk about. We should be talking about it, and still there're people who are afraid to tell they are depressed."

Why did the team of Lka.it choose for the character to be fictional, if there were people in this asylum they could have based their story on as well? "We didn't want to hurt anybody", Conticelli says. "It's a very personal story and there is still family left of people who went to that asylum. We didn't want to hurt them."

Ether One is a first person adventure game, that deals with the fragility of the human mind. There are two paths in the world you can choose from. In this game, the player is the 'restorer' who is tasked with the investigation of the mind of Jean Thompson. She is a 69 year old woman diagnosed with dementia. The player has to retrieve her lost memories.

"At its core is a story exploration path free from puzzles where you can unfold the story at your own pace", the site of Ether One adds. James Burton, one of the developers of White Paper Games (the studio that made Ether One), tells me that the story of Ether One contains some plot twists.

White Paper Games is an independent game development studio. They were at EGX Rezzed, the game festival, with their new game The Occupation. This game is about a whistleblower journalist discovering something about an Act in the constitution. "Ether is about dementia, and we have all been in touch with dementia one way or another", Burton says. "That's why we wanted people to feel engaged and a game is a perfect platform for that. I guess, we chose for these stories in The Occupation and Ether because we find them important." James Burton is one of the developers of White Paper Games.⁶

Pete Bottomley is a game developer at White Paper Games and co-wrote the narrative of Ether One and The Occupation. When writing the narrative he starts with the "core arc". "These are the high-level narrative beats we want to hit. In the instance of The Occupation, it is a conversation spanning over a 30 minute period which we intermittently present to the player via a cut scene which sets the game's pacing."

The Occupation is different, because the game happens in real-time, which means that if you go outside and sit down on a bench the game will keep simulating and people will go about their lives. "This makes it hard to know where the player is going to be and therefore hard to deliver narrative. Next, we have the protagonist who is providing the general gameplay 'objectives' through your earpiece. We call this 'directional dialogue' and that can be the script that requires the most iteration. It's incredibly hard to deliver what the player needs to do in a succinct way and we rewrite and re-record these lines the most out of all script in the process."

"We then tackle the scripted events which happen throughout the game which deliver a very specific narrative through NPC interaction with each other. We also have things to bring the world alive

⁴ Appendix F

⁵ Appendix A, interview 6

⁶ Appendix A, interview 1



through general 'water cooler chatter' or phone conversations; basically anything that brings a personality to a character and you get a sense of who they are and their life outside of the game."

But how do you keep your narrative interesting in the videogame? "I don't think you ever really know if the end user will find the narrative interesting. You try to hit your high-level 'core' beats. So for the people that do not care about everything in the world and just want their objective, that is the first layer and the most concise that you try to get right. Other than that, I think the variation and the life people feel around is the most interesting to us as a team. When a player experiences an interaction or conversation between two people that their friend did not see, that is a really personal gameplay moment so having lots of content in the game which a lot of people may miss, for us, is the most interesting aspect of game development." (Bottomley, 2017) ⁷

Replayability

Both Bottomley and Burton talk about the replayability of their games, and about how important this aspect is for them. "For The Occupation we sat around the table and just discussed what kind of aspects we wanted in our game", Burton says. "One of that was the 'replayability', a player has full control and can replay the game as many times as he wants. If he does something different, something different will happen."

On the other hand, Sicart does not think replayability should be an aspect in a newsgame. "Newsgames are designed to accompany a specific piece of news", he pleads in his paper about newsgames. "This implies that newsgames do not have the intention of surviving in the collective memory for a long time, nor they have a replayability requirement. Newsgames illustrate and comment the news, and are as perishable as the news themselves." (Sicart, 2017)

The paper also admits that newsgames have the ambition of transmitting important notions about news events by means of their rhetoric. In this way, you could compare newsgames with public broadcasting, Sicart says. "They [newsgames] are not for direct profit, and they want to go beyond the limitations of pure entertainment, challenging their audiences to different experiences." (Sicart, 2017)

⁷ Appendix G



5. WHAT IS THE BALANCE BETWEEN THE GAME(PLAY) AND THE NARRATIVE THAT OCCUR IN GAMES?

As said in the chapter before this, both the team of Ether One and The Town of Light thought it was urgent to talk about the subject they chose for their game. But how do you achieve the perfect balance between the gameplay and the narrative? Should the game have a lot of narrative, or more gameplay?

Nathaniel Jordan Apostol ⁸ wrote the narrative for The Occupation (the newest game of White Paper Games about a whistleblower journalist) together with Bottomley. He designed the audio and worked on the composition of the game. "Some people are just watching the news and they forget what they saw the minute they turn off their TV", Apostol says, about why they chose for the subject of The Occupation. "They go play a game and forget what they saw on television. With this game we wanted to show them that - the whistle blowers and everything - is the real world."

The balance in video games

Luca Dalcò (who wrote the narrative of The Town of Light) and Pete Bottomley (who wrote the narrative of Ether One and The Occupation) struggled with finding the right balance as well.

Dalcò: "It [finding the right balance] has been one of my main concerns. is a lot of chatting around narrative games, the derogatory definition 'walking simulator' perfectly reflect the situation." The phrase walking simulator implies that there is basically nothing to do in the videogame other than walking around. The phrase has a negative sound to it for some developers and gamers. "As a developer you cannot ignore that. You must try to find solutions, you must keep it in mind for all the development process."

"I do not know if I've really found the right balance", Dalcò expands. "I think it is a very subjective matter indeed. I have chosen to start the game with more gameplay and more freedom, and then reduce them gradually as the player becomes emotionally involved in the story of Renée."

For Dalcò it all depends on what the player is expecting from the game. That is his starting point. "At the beginning you will find yourself in a new environment, knowing nothing about the game. Your main interest is very likely to explore the environment, interact with it to find out clues and starting to figure out what the game is about."

"When you will be emotionally involved in the story you will be concerned about the fate of Renée and shocked about what she has experienced. I guess that your interest will change, you are more likely interested in hear more about Renée rather than in solving some puzzle."

"It is definitely a challenge", Pete Bottomley says, about keeping the right balance while writing the narrative of a game. "It is something the team loves putting into games and game development is an incredibly hard process. I don't think balancing is necessarily hard and it is very dependent on the type of experience you want to create and who you're creating the game for."

Bottomley noticed that creating the narrative was a constant evolution of the gameplay and story. "We start with the main narrative beats we want to hit. What type of story is this? What do we want to happen? Then I try to fit it into the gameplay structure - Is it level based? How do we deliver

⁸ Appendix A, interview 2



the narrative to the player? Is it linear or open? Once you have high-level narrative and gameplay questions answered, you can start to work into both. Each are a constant moulding to fit each other and both areas need tweaking to get feeling right, however, more often than not, the core outline of what we first established two years before, generally holds true to the end of development. Execution and technical implementation is the most time-consuming to get the world feeling believable and consistent."

The balance in newsgames

Ian Bogost is a game designer and wrote a book about newsgames together with Simon Ferrari and Bobby Schweizer. He acknowledges that one of the ways games can immerse players is through a "well-crafted narrative structure". Bogost takes the game of Gonzola Frasca as an example. In the game *September 12th* Frasca made a simulation of the origin of terrorism. Simulation lends itself to multiple playthroughs, a wide variety of end states, and a flexibility of values, therefore Frasca suggests you should focus on simulation instead of storytelling. "Avoiding narrative also contributes to the casual nature of current event games, making them 'easy to pick up and easy to put down'," Bogost explains (Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer, 2010, p. 21).

According to Sicart in his paper *Newsgames: Theory and Design* (2017) there are some more things you should keep in mind about the narrative of newsgames. Newsgames have a political agenda and an editorial line, but those are presented as an open space for discussion, he claims, which means that newsgames let people think about the subject and form their own opinion about it. "Political and persuasive games appeal to the partisan, newsgames appeal to the citizen. But newsgames are not, and should not be ideologically neutral. Like any other form of discourse addressed to the public, these games have an agenda, which is presented not as truth, but as arguments. Newsgames are computer games that engage in a public discussion, articulating discourses using procedural rhetoric." (Sicart, 2017, p. 29)



6. WHAT DOES THE AUDIENCE EXPECT OF A GAME?

In this chapter I will expand on what gamers told me while I was at EGX Rezzed.⁹ Also, I will base the results of this question on the twenty reviews about The Town of Light and Ether One¹⁰.

The audience I am targeting in this research are people from 18 to 29 years old, who gather news online and sometimes play video games.

The reviews: The Town of Light

Steam is a digital distribution platform for all kinds of games. You can find the Steam page of The Town of Light through [this hyperlink](#). I will use the ten reviews rated most helpful to retrieve the pros and cons mentioned. If a pro or con is mentioned multiple times, I will acknowledge that in the table beneath the asterisk. This way, I will know what people liked about The Town of Light or disliked.

Likes	*	Dislikes	*
You are able to see mental hospitals in 20th century	3	It is too short	1
Based on real events	4	Depressing and shocking	1
You feel empathy for Renée	3	Slow pacing (no sprint button makes it too slow)	2
Nice music	4	Occasional bugs	1
Nice graphic	4	Sometimes things get lost in the translation (but rarely)	1
Psychological horror (no jump scares)	3	Lots of invisible walls	1
You have control of where you want to go	2	Voice acting	1
Really good story	8	Graphics are uneven - sometimes really good, sometimes not	1
You feel this game and the oppressive mood (depressing)	5	Abrupt ending	1
Makes you think about life	2	You might not like it if you do not like walking simulators	1
Developing characters	1	Nothing for children or teenagers	1
Slow pacing (pro because: it gives balance and it is a representation of how you feel)	2		
Nice voice acting	3		
Intense ending	1		

⁹ Appendix C

¹⁰ Appendix H



The reviews: Ether One

You can find the Steam page of Ether One through [this hyperlink](#). I will use the same method in displaying all the likes and dislikes of Ether One as mentioned with The Town of Light.

Likes	*	Dislikes	*
Nice graphics/visuals	5	It is too complex at times (the first time you might not understand)	3
Nice music	2	Finding items to solve puzzles can be frustrating (when they're far away)	1
Good voice acting	4	Puzzles are hidden too well	3
Puzzle adventure game (with nice puzzles)	4	Much of the items you've collected have no use at all	2
You do not need the puzzles to proceed in the game	2	Predictable ending	1
Complex and emotional story (with some horror elements)	3	Story starts subtle, then gets boring	1
Replayability	1	The clues are way too obvious	1
Duration is good	1	Game is incoherent	2
Good narrative	5	Boring gameplay	2
You learn something from playing the game	2	Too simple graphics	1
You feel empathy for the characters	1	Bugs	2

Different gamers

At EGX Rezzed I interviewed five people about the narrative in a game. They were randomly selected, but everyone was between 18 and 29 years old. This way I could ask them more specifically about their likes and dislikes.

Robin, plays mostly strategy games

Pros	Cons
Control everything	Games with fixed characters
Choose your own character	He knows some people do not like all the reading in a game
Action in the game	
Narrative and background story	
Fictional games	

Aitor, plays all kinds of games

Pros	Cons
Surprising effect	A fixed narrative
Story with plottwists	



Indre, plays mostly competitive games

<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Control	
Fun	
Story is not needed for gameplay	

Chris, plays mostly adventure games

<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Narrative	Sometimes the story does not grab you
Fictional (like different universes)	Non-fictional (because he wants to escape reality)
RPG	
Backgroundstories	

Andy, plays mostly adventure or platform games

<i>Pros</i>	<i>Cons</i>
Platform: just about skills and levels	Non-fictional story: the story has to be right
Platform: you have to improve to finish	
RPG: exploring the world, have control	
Can escape in the game	
Both fiction and non-fiction	

When you look at the pros and cons mentioned in the reviews on Steam you see what people find most important regarding the games they were playing. In addition to this, I also interviewed five gamers at the EGX Rezzed Game Festival in London, mentioned above. This way I could ask them open ended questions and they would take all the games they like in consideration, not just one game. After I found out what kind of games they played and what they liked about it.¹¹

Simulate the narrative

In *The Town of Light* eight out of ten reviews mentioned that it had a really good story. Reviews about *Ether One* showed five out of ten people thought the game had a good narrative. This is mostly integrated in the experience. You will not just read about the mental asylum in the 1900's, but you will see it through the eyes of a mentally-ill patient, who experiences psychosis. It is a simulation of the experiences and through that you experience the narrative.

This corresponds with the basic components mentioned in *Gamestorming*, such as the component 'game space' (Gray, Brown, & Macanuso, 2010). In video games a new world opens for gamers, free to explore.

Ian Bogost in *Newsgames: Journalism at play* has the same theory, mentioned in the chapter before this: "Simulation lends itself to multiple playthroughs, a wide variety of end states, and a flexibility of values, therefore Frasca suggests you should focus on simulation instead of storytelling." Avoiding narrative also contributes to the casual nature of current event games, making them 'easy to pick up and easy to put down'," Bogost explains (Bogost, Ferrari, & Schweizer, 2010).

¹¹ Appendix B shows all the questions I asked



Online news audience

In this research I took *The Town of Light* and *Ether One* as an example. These games are both played at PC. In addition, you can play *Ether One* on PS4 (console) since 2015 and *The Town of Light* is available on PS4 since this spring (2017). Also, the gamers I spoke to at EGX Rezzed mostly talked about games they played on console or PC.

On the other hand, one argument against this cannot be ignored: in the research about the modern news consumer the Pew Research Center shows that 79 percent of the people who get their news through online media gets it via desktop or laptop. This usage holds steady, but the number of people using their mobile phone to gather news is growing rapidly: 54 percent online news gatherers used their phone in 2012, while 72 percent use their phone in 2016.

Furthermore, 66 percent of the online news gatherers get their news on both mobile phone and desktop. And here is the part I think is necessary to take in consideration: among people who get news on both desktop and mobile 56 percent prefer mobile as opposed to 42 percent who prefer desktop (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016).



7. WHAT ASPECTS ARE MOST IMPORTANT WHEN MAKING A NEWSGAME?

Let us now turn to the newsgame aspect. In the previous chapters it became clear what makes a game a game, what is the right balance between narrative and gameplay and what the audience wants from a game. In this subchapter, I will expand on important aspects of newsgames and successful and unsuccessful newsgames.

Goal of newsgames

Tomas Rawlings worked on several of its own interactive news titles, such as *Endgame: Syria*¹². When he started with making newsgames he expected a lot more controversy. "I mean, we got some controversy, but a lot of media were really positive about newsgames. Years ago, no one would have expected that newsgames would be a thing. But when TV news just started, it was a no go to show the face of the reporter as well. Right now, we cannot imagine news on TV where the news reporter is nowhere to be seen. That is now the normal way. Things change. The expectation of people changes and technology is changing. We should use that. We have to keep the news consumer engaged, otherwise we will lose them."

For him it is important to keep the right goal in mind while making the newsgames. He wants to engage the player of the game first. The game should stay with them, they should think about it. "For me, thinking in games is like my second nature. And there are so many gamers out there who think the same way and we can get them involved in newsgames", he said (Rawlings, 2017).

Know your audience

Marcus Bösch emphasizes how important it is know your audience really well. "Think about them before you make the game. Do you want to attract teenagers or do you want to attract a sixty year old woman living on the country side. That is a very crucial point."

According to Miguel Sicart, newsgames can be effectively used to participate in the public debate. "Newsgames are an editorialized, not persuasive genre of political games or serious games, developed in connection to a specific piece of news", Sicart states in his paper *Newsgames: Theory and Design*. Serious games are games with a different goal than just entertainment. They have a purpose. "Not using computer games for engaging, and even creating public debate to the illustrated digital public is missing an opportunity for making history with a genre." Sicart thinks newsgames are a hint of the future of computer games, mainly because of their role and influence in our culture (Sicart, 2017).

Should the story be unbiased?

This is also a question Rawlings had to face: "No one expects a news report to cover every side of a story. That just isn't possible. That is why a newsgame will not cover every side of a story either", he says.

For instance, in *Endgame: Syria* you play the rebels, the game will not cover the whole Syrian war. But it will be portrayed genuinely. "Every journalist is a curator of information. If you have two minutes of news on TV, there might have been hours of material that is not used. It is the journalist's job to

¹² The complete interview with Tomas Rawlings is to find in appendix D



portray it genuinely, and that can happen through a game as well. Game designers have the same intention. They want to show the most important points of the story." (Rawlings, 2017)

Keep the game mechanism basic

Sicart expands in his paper about the basic game mechanisms in newsgames apply. This is because of the brief production time, but it is an advantage, he argues. "Typically, players of newsgames will not use much time learning new controllers or mechanics, so the access point has to be relatively well known for the average target group user." Newsgames typically do not have a lengthy production time because the news still has to be relevant.

Bösch says that very simple ideas for a game work for the audience. He noticed how people loved their newsgame in the form of the old mobile phone game 'Snake'. In this game, the snake is the cabinet member who wants to keep collecting data from other people on the internet. You "eat" the data and that is how the Snake grows.

But it is not as easy to just pick a hugely popular game and just add some news content to it, Bösch warns. "You have to have game mechanics that perfectly suit the narrative. Our job as game designers is to dive deeply into the content and suit the mechanics to that. Think about the goal you want to achieve and fit the gameplay to that." Bösch gives the example of a Pac-Man newsgame, with some content shoved into (Bösch, co-founder of The Good Evil, 2017).

More tips

The Guardian co-hosted a newsgame jam at the Rezzed Game Festival in 2015 and as build up they created a guide to making a newsgame in collaboration with Tomas Rawlings (Stuart, 2015).

1. Choose the right subject: "You need to choose a topic where you can deliver something that the linear media cannot or is not", says Rawlings. Also, make sure the subject is not going to pass in a couple of days, because the production time is longer than this.
2. Make the most of interactivity: "It is all about replayability", Rawlings argues. This is where he is disagreeing with Sicart. In the first chapter we already went into the replayability of a lot of videogames. This is where Sicart said that newsgames do not have the intention of surviving in the collective memory for a long time, nor they have a replayability requirement. "Newsgames illustrate and comment the news, and are as perishable as the news themselves." (Sicart, 2017)
3. Choose the right platform: "If you want rapid dissemination, the web is still the best way", Rawlings claims. He clarifies: "We've developed smart phone apps, but the Apple App Store takes seven days. The Android store is better, you can pass something through in a couple of hours, but the web is immediate."
4. Market it through social media and on game sites: "You need to distribute widely", Rawlings argues. Auroch Digital had a version of *Endgame: Syria* on Facebook, in the Android Google Play app and there was a free download version on sites like Indiecade. There is still a novelty factor to newsgames, so use it for the marketing, is his advice.
5. Be prepared to defend your work: As Rawlings was telling me in the interview, when you release a newsgame, there is controversy (even though he expected even more controversy than that). When Auroch Digital released *Endgame: Syria*, it collided with journalistic issues to do with bias. Some



people said the game was on the side of the regime, while other criticized it for being on the side of the rebels (Rawlings, 2017).

But there is also the issue of it being a game. "That happened a lot with *NarcoGuerra* [newsgame about the Mexican drug war] – people said 'how dare you treat this serious issue as a game'. You have to be prepared to stand by your work, even more than if you'd have written a song or an essay. You need to say, no, a game can be sensitive to the material." (Stuart, 2015)

Examples

As successful newsgames Marcus Bösch points to the quiz of The New York Times where you enter what kind of phrases you would use in a conversation. For instance: how would you address a group of two or more people? If you answer all these questions, the quiz reveals what part of the United States your accent belongs to. "This was a very good way to bring people together. They have shared experiences."

A less successful newsgame he mentioned was one in the form of Pac-Man. The developers of this game took packman and put journalistic content in it. "But you shouldn't just throw some content in a game. The game is really confusing. You have to think about the content and how to get this content across to your audience and choose the right gameplay through this", Bösch argues (Bösch, 2017).



8. CONCLUSION

In this research I tried to find an answer to the main question: 'How do you create a newsgame that would work for a specific audience?' For this purpose, I empirically examined games and newsgames, interviewed developers and gamers and used literature about games and newsgames.

When creating a newsgame, make sure you know your audience really well. This is the first important aspect that you have to keep in mind while developing a newsgame. For this research the target audience is people from 18 to 29 years old, who gather news online and sometimes play video games.

Choose the right subject for your newsgame. This can be a subject that can participate in the public debate, as Sicart said in his paper. In this way people will play a game and start thinking about the subject (Sicart, 2017). According to Conticelli, the developers had the same reason for developing *The Town of Light* (Conticelli, 2017). They wanted people to think about being mentally-ill. From my point of view, the story of the character Renée could have been non-fictional as well, and with some more connection to current events regarding depression, it might have been a relevant newsgame.

You should choose a subject for your newsgame that sticks around for a while, because a newsgame takes more production time. But I think a broader subject, such as dementia, mental illness or disruption in the Middle East, is always relevant.

According to Sicart a newsgame should be "as perishable" as the news. They do not have a replayability requirement. It is just a way to illustrate and comment the news. I do not agree with his statement. I agree with the game developers of *White Paper Games* who wanted their game to be replayed. This way, people really think about the different outcomes and they are probably more intrigued by this subject.

Tell the narrative through some kind of simulation. When I read the reviews of people who played *Ether One* and *The Town of Light*, I noticed how people really got the full experience because the story was told through a game. The game was not just a story written down, but gamers could really experience the feelings of the characters through the simulation. This all came down to the voice acting, the mood, the music, the graphics and the gameplay that directly connected to the story.

Also, the narrative corresponds with the gameplay. For instance, *Ether One* is about dementia and you have to solve a lot of puzzles and *The Town of Light* is about mental illness where you have to follow the thoughts of Renée and the walking goes from fast to slow related to what state her mind is.

Keep the goal of your newsgame in mind. Do you want to engage people with your newsgame? Do you want people to think about the subject? Make sure that every choice you make corresponds with the goal you set for your game.

Determine what would be the platform that fits your audience. Do they like to play on console, desktop or mobile phone? People who play games already play video games mostly on PC or console (The NPD Group, 2017), but people who are more interested in the news are more likely to spot your newsgame on their mobile phone (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016).



9. REFLECTION

I would like to use this opportunity to apply the outcome of this research to my own newsgame design. In this chapter, I will expand on what kind of newsgame I would make and how I would make it.

Audience

The audience I am targeting is people from 18 to 29 years old, who sometimes gather news online but mostly play video games. They preferably play videogames on console or desktop. I think the people I met at EGX Rezzed or who wrote the reviews about the narrative-driven games are a perfect target audience for this game, because I noticed not all of them are interested in news, but it would be great to bring important issues to them through a game.

Goal of newsgame

I think newsgames are perfect for participating in the public debate. Because people can really experience the subject through a game, they will think about it and they will form their own arguments on that. The game has to engage people in the story so they learn more about the subject and start thinking about it.

Subject

I think climate change is a perfect example of a long-lasting subject that is very broad, so it is possible to take a year to produce a really complex game (together with developers) with nice graphics, music and voice-acting. You have time to create the perfect setting and mood and you can make a simulation of the characters experiences. This is time consuming, but I think this would connect very well with this target group.

Side note: I think it is important to keep on testing the game throughout your entire process. This is the process like in a Hackathon: start with (paper)prototyping and have your target group test it. And while developing the game, let your audience test your game multiple times. If something does not work for your audience, you know it before you spend a lot of money on it or base the entire story on it.

Narrative

For this target group it could work really well if the game would start fictionally, in a post-apocalyptic world. I think this because a lot of people told me at EGX Rezzed they liked escaping to a game, to another world.

The story would contain a character that bumps into a very old woman who knows what the world was like when it was still intact (before earth was ruined). She would tell the story of how the apocalypse happened. The main character goes back in time to save the world. He/she would go to the year 2017 and travel around the world to create something to slow down climate change. The old woman would be the narrator throughout the game.

Gameplay

It is a first person adventure game with puzzles. There are puzzles that you have to solve to find out more about climate change or the slow down the change. The character could create things with



these puzzles that are being developed right now to adapt climate change. This is all based on real events and real things that are being developed.

I think this is an engaging gameplay so people will keep playing it and learn a lot about climate change and form their own opinion about it.

Replayability

In the reviews and at EGX Rezzed, some gamers or developers mentioned they liked being able to replay a game if you want. It makes you able to see every possible outcome based on the choices you make.

Platform

White Paper Games first produced Ether One to play on PC. Then it got picked up by PS4, and they converted the game to console as well. This would take extra time, so I think it is important to start with PC and see if the game is requested a lot for console as well.

What if it were a different audience?

It could be a quick platform game too, for people who like to play games on their mobile phone. This would be completely different. I think the best example is [Vic de Vitaminevreter](#). This is a game made by the Centre of Nutrition in the Netherlands (Voedingscentrum) and it is a platform game like Super Mario. You control Vic, who has to gather food supplements and you have to avoid the empty calories. In the start of the game and between levels, you get information about why you need to eat vitamins and minerals. I think this is in some way possible for this subject as well, only for a different audience.

Time consuming

A game like Vic de Vitaminevreter would be less time-consuming to produce than creating a complete video game like Ether One or The Town of Light. For newsrooms it might be more feasible to create less time-consuming games. For games like Ether One you have to collaborate with a game development studio and a lot of time and money would get spend here.

I can imagine this kind of newsgame is better to be released by a game publisher like other video games. It could be sold on Steam or in stores. But I do not know how profitable this is, I would have to research that.



10. DISCUSSION

Validity

For this research twenty reviews on Steam have been used to determine the likes and dislikes of the audience. Steam is a platform on which you can buy all sorts of video games. The platform has had at least 7,566,731 concurrent users and at the very most 13,289,239 concurrent users in the last 48 hours. The reviews on the game pages are rated on how useful they are, this is why the ten most useful reviews of *The Town of Light* and *Ether One* are the foundation of explaining why this audience likes and dislikes a game.

The Town of Light and *Ether One* are games with the same kind of goal a newsgame has: engaging people and participating in the public debate. This is why these games are a good example of possible newsgames and also why the audience of these games is possibly similar to the audience of a newsgame.

Tomas Rawlings and Marcus Bösch are both experts abiding newsgames, because they have made and learned from making newsgames themselves. This is why I ground some of the results on their statements.

The developers I spoke to at EGX Rezzed in London are experts in developing games, so I just used their information as background knowledge. The developers of *The Town of Light* and *Ether One* explained how they wrote the narrative of their games. This explains how one should give shape to a narrative into a (news)game.

Expectations

Before writing this research I had some assumptions about newsgames and their audience. First of all, when I imagined gamers, I knew it did not only cover gamer boys anymore, which was the stereotype for a long time. But what I did not know is that the age of someone who games does not matter as much as I thought.

According to Jason Allaire there is no longer a stereotype gamer. "It could be your grandparent, your boss, or even your professor." He suspects that older adults will keep on playing games and the percentage will grow as Baby Boomers enter retirement. That will also increase the focus on positive effects of playing games, he says (Entertainment Software Association, 2013).

The idea I had about newsgame development before this research was that a lot of journalists see newsgames only as a way of portraying a news fact and giving the consumer some multiple choice options of what to happen. When the consumer chooses something, that happens and it has an effect. I thought that were the only gaming aspects journalists were using, and for some time now I am thinking it is not enough. I wanted to see what would happen if you put a real narrative driven video game such as *The Town of Light* together and made something like that into a newsgame. That is why I choose to compare two narrative driven games with newsgames.

However, I also noticed during the research the newsgames like *Endgame: Syria* and *NarcoGuerra*. These newsgames are more advanced than the ones I had seen so far. I still think it is possible to expand these to the length of how *The Town of Light* and *Ether One* took shape, because the



graphics and narrative here are, in my opinion, really good, but these two games had also more time to be made and these relied on more developers.

Limitations

I see this research as kind of the second step into researching newsgames. While the first step has been a question for a long time (are games and news a good combination), for this research I assumed the question was yes - even though there are still people who contradict this point. But as Tomas Rawlings said: "Be prepared to defend your work." When Auroch Digital released *Endgame: Syria*, it collided with some journalistic issues to do with bias. Some people said the game was on the side of the regime, while other criticized it for being on the side of the rebels.

And there is also the issue of it being a game. "That happened a lot with Narco – people said 'how dare you treat this serious issue as a game'. You have to be prepared to stand by your work, even more than if you'd have written a song or an essay. You need to say, no, a game can be sensitive to the material", Rawlings said (Stuart, 2015).

This research explained how to make a newsgame for this audience, but I still think there are some steps to take to research newsgames. Another research question could be if a newsgame has too much of a crusader role. It is as Miguel Sicart said in his paper *Newsgames: Theory and Design*: Newsgames have a political agenda and an editorial line, but on the other hand Sicart does think newsgames are presented as an open space for discussion. "Political and persuasive games appeal to the partisan, newsgames appeal to the citizen. But newsgames are not, and should not be ideologically neutral. Like any other form of discourse addressed to the public, these games have an agenda, which is presented not as truth, but as arguments. Newsgames are computer games that engage in a public discussion, articulating discourses using procedural rhetoric." (Sicart, 2017)

According to the Pew Research Center the number of people gathering their news through mobile phone is growing rapidly, while the number of people who use the computer to gather their news keeps steady (Mitchell, Gottfried, Barthel, & Shearer, 2016). The platform used for games is different though. More people play games on PC, and console is growing, according to The NPD Group (The NPD Group, 2017). This is a contradiction between games and news and it is why I think it would be useful if there is a research about newsgames on mobile phones as well.

Additionally, there is this last question that preserves my brain for a while. Games like *Ether One* and *The Town of Light* took one to two years to create. What if we took more time to create newsgames as well? I think the quality would improve, but would people play a newsgame with an event from two years ago? Or would it be possible to choose events that take place for multiple years and develop the game around that? Would that still be interesting?

I would like to figure these questions out myself as well, but for now I have answered how to create a newsgame that would work for this audience and I think this is a perfect starting point for my next researches.



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APPENDIX A - DEVELOPERS

In appendix A you will find the interviews I have had on Thursday 30th and Friday 31st of March 2017 in London. This is where EGX Rezzed took place: a game festival to exhibit all kinds of new games for console or PC. Altogether, around 220 games were exhibited and 15,000 visitors attended. In this appendix you can find the interviews I had with some of the attending developers. This appendix might contain some spoilers of the games discussed.

In deze bijlage staan de uitgeschreven interviews die ik gehad heb op donderdag 30 en vrijdag 31 maart in Londen. Hier vond op dat moment EGX Rezzed 2017 plaats: een gamefestival waar allerlei nieuwe games gepromoot en vertoond werden. In totaal stonden er meer dan 220 games en er waren meer dan 15.000 gamers die het evenement bezochten.

A.1. The Occupation is a game made by White Paper Games. The game is "a politically driven, first-person, narrative game set in 1980's North-West England". When you play the game, you are a whistle blowing journalist.

The event in the game is happening in real-time. The next 4 hours will determine the outcome of an important act: The Union Act. If you do nothing, the world is still happening. "You are the reporter, you decide the narrative. You must make decisions based on the evidence around you", White Paper Games explains on their website.

The Union Act is a fictional act.

James Burton did the technical art for The Occupation and part of the White Paper Games team.

Could you tell me what The Occupation is about?

"The game is about a fictitious act - it's called The Union Act - which threatens the civil liberties of the British population. It's to seek for terrorists, but it allows the government to check the whole population. You're a journalist and you hear something isn't right with this Union Act. You got four hours to sneak around, find out what's wrong and interview people about it. This means you can also do nothing at all, you can just sit on the couch and watch the world happening around you."

Why did you choose for that concept?

"I really like to play a game that I control with how I play it. For instance, when I play Dishonored [an action-adventure game in a fictional world, ed.] first I play how I want to play it, I'm a bit cautious. But when I play it again, I want to see what happens if I would've played the complete opposite. This way, a game is replayable, and that's what we wanted with The Occupation as well."

How many people are on your team?

"White Paper Games is an independent game development studio and the team consists of 8 people. With the whole team we worked on The Occupation for 12 to 14 months, but it took 18 months in total to make this game. At first, some of our team were still busy with transferring our first game Ether to console."

Ether One is a narrative-driven game as well, isn't it? Why did you choose for this?



"Ether is about dementia, and we've all been in touch with dementia one way or another. That's why we wanted people to feel engaged and a game is a perfect platform for that. I guess, we chose for these stories in The Occupation and Ether because we find them important."

"And for The Occupation we sat around the table and just discussed what kind of aspects we wanted in our game. One of that was the 'replayability', a player has full control and can replay the game as many times as he wants. If he does something different, something different will happen."

The Occupation will be released in 2017.

A.2. Nathaniel Jordan Apostol wrote the narrative for The Occupation together with Pete Bottomley and is audio designer and worked on the composition.

Where did the idea of this story come from?

"Some people are just watching the news and they forget what they saw the minute they shut down their TV. They go play a game and forget it all. With this game we wanted to show them this - the whistle blowers and everything - is the real world."

A.3. Tim Börrefors is part of the team that made the game Planet Alpha. It is an adventure game that takes place in a world with aliens and you have the ability to manipulate daytime. "To survive on this strange planet you will have to be observant of how the environment and the wildlife behaviour changes depending on the time of day", Planet Alpha explains on the website.

The game is completely fictional and you create your own story. Börrefors explains:

"You're on this alien planet. Robots are invading and you have to defend yourself. During the daytime you have time to discover the planet and you have to observe the environment. While during the night, you have to fight off the aliens."

How is there a story in this game?

"Well, this is kind off a spoiler, but first of all, you are creating your own story. And second of all, there are this murals that show the future. You don't know that at first when you see them, but it shows an event and later in the game, that event will really happen to you. That's how the story is told, there is no voice-over telling you which way to go or what to do."

A.4. Graham is part of the team that made Stellaris: Utopia. The Utopia version is an expansion of Stellaris, a space-strategy game. Graham tells about the game and how to play it:

"You got all these different planets and there are little stories throughout the game telling about these planets or stuff you find in the universe. You start off by choosing who you are, like a RPG. This determines your gameplay for the rest of the game. You can be a materialist, or a xenophobe or a xenophile. If you love other aliens in the universe, you will want to explore the whole universe. While a xenophobe would want to kill every alien."



"You can rule as many planets in the universe as possible, or you just establish alliances with other planets for food and stuff. Or you use the species on one planet as food for the rest of your planets. It's all up to you."

Does this game contain a narrative?

"You stumble upon all these little stories throughout the game. Sometimes you will find a million year old relic, while the other time it might be thousand year old trash. Or you might stumble upon a new planet and the story will give an indication if it's a planet you want to possess."

A.5. The first game of Fear Effect was released in 1999. The developer at that time was Kronos Digital Entertainment. The prequel - Fear Effect 2 - was released one year after that.

Now, the characters return for Fear Effect Sedna, created by the French independent development studio Sushee. Thibaut, Julien and Benoit tell more about the game Fear Effect.

Do you think the story is important for the game?

"Yes, yes, I think it's very important. We were just talking about it yesterday and we believe that the design of a game comes first. Then the story, the narrative. After that, the gameplay."

Why is that?

"Well, you can get inspired by the story for the gameplay. For instance, if the guy has had a history of violence and he knows how to street fight because of that, you have that skill in the gameplay as well."

A.6. Lorenzo Conticelli is 3D artist of Lka.it, a development studio based in Florence, Italy. Their first project is The Town of Light, a first person psychological adventure game about a sixteen year old girl called Renee. It takes place in the first half of the 20th Century and it's based on real stories, but Renee is a fictional character. Lka on their website: "The only horror you will find in this game is the truth: a blow to the solar plexus, much more intense than any supernatural presence."

Renee is mentally ill and because she is "a danger to herself and a cause of public scandal", she has to go to a home for the mentally ill.

"It has a great impact on her life", Conticelli says. "She doesn't understand why she is there and no one explains it to her. The nurses strap her to the bed and it's during the time of the electrical shocks and everything. It was cruel how the mentally ill were treated at that time."

How does The Town of Light tell this story?

"You are Renee and you arrive at the asylum [psychiatric hospital, ed.]. This is a place in Volterra and it still exists. There really were mentally ill who went there during the first half of the 20th Century."

Lorenzo shows pictures of the asylum. The whole team of Lka.it went there to see what it was like. Also the research is based on this asylum and the asylum in the game looks exactly like the real one.

With how many people did you make this game?



"We were with five, but we had a lot of help from the outside. With the music and that kind of stuff, we got someone from outside. I'm one of the two developers on this game. Luca is the creative director who also wrote the whole story."

Why did you choose for this story?

"It's a story that needs to be told. You get an insight in someone who is mentally ill and it's an important subject to talk about. We should be talking about it, and still there're people who are afraid to tell they are depressed."

Why did you choose for the character to be fictional? It looks like there were examples in the asylum in Volterra to base the story on as well?

"We didn't want to hurt anybody. It's a very personal story and there is still family left of people who went to that asylum. We didn't want to hurt them."

During the game, it gets darker and darker. It's not real horror, but it's your own mind you cannot trust in this game. Lorenzo: "We didn't make it spookier or anything. It's just a real story of someone who is mentally ill."

A.7. For ten years, Chris Hunt worked on Kenshi, a single player adventure PC game with RPG elements. The first six years he worked alone. In 2013 he could finally afford to get a small team together. That's when Lo-Fi Games started.

Kenshi has its own world where you have to create your own character. You are in a world of cannibals and bandits. Everything is fictional.

"I wanted a game where I had full control. I like it when I can choose my own characters in a game. I want to influence everything. I don't like games in which the narrative has full control. Sometimes the narrative forces you to go somewhere, even though you don't want to go there."

What came first for you then? The story or the gameplay?

"The gameplay came first. I thought about all the things I wanted to be able to do in a game and made a gameplay around that. Then I created the world, with all these different areas you can walk in. After that, the story came."

Why did you want the players of your game to have full control on the narrative?

"I don't like it when the whole story is in the grid already. Like, you are this person, you feel this and that. I want to influence that myself. I like it to be my own character, I choose what the personality is and what the special skills are. The story and the gameplay depend on that."

A.8. Natalie Hunt is the sister of Chris and wrote the story for Kenshi (see Appendix A, interview 8). The whole story of Kenshi consists of 200,000 words. She is a gamewriters for Lo-Fi Games. Part of the gameplay in Kenshi is that you can choose what your character says to another person.

How do you write a story for a game?



"The balance between realistic and cool is really difficult. You want it to be as real as possible. But your reaction might be really boring if it was the real world. So it was a real trial and error to find out what kind of things were cool and realistic."

"I got my inspiration from these tough samurai soldier culture. And also I took personalities based on characters in books or films. I would ask myself: what would they say in this situation."

Do you think the narrative is important in this game?

No answer yet

A.9. Battalion 1944 is a first person shooter, like Call of Duty. The team made the game in one year with 22 people in total. Also, 8 people from the outside were involved. There is no story in it, it's a competitive multiplayer game. Howard Philpott is the creative producer of Bulkhead Interactive and says:

"With this game we went back to the beginning of Call of Duty. A lot of people felt like Call of Duty lost that, so we went back to the basics."

This game has no narrative, so what do you think about narrative in games?

"Narrative is massive important. We made two games before this, two puzzle games. That contained a lot of story. But it was also because we didn't have to animate. We used a narrative so you wouldn't need animations. We used the resources we had, and we didn't have an animator."



APPENDIX B - QUESTIONS

This is appendix B, where you can find the standard questions I asked visitors to EGX Rezzed in London. This is a gaming festival, around 15,000 visitors attended.

What kind of games do you play?

What do you like about it?

What do you think about the narrative in games?

Why?

Would it have to be fictional?



APPENDIX C - GAMERS

In appendix C you can find all the interviews I had with people who visited EGX Rezzed, people who game their selves. You can find the questions I asked in appendix B.

C.1. Robin

He likes to play strategy games. He prefers to control everything. It makes him feel more connected to the character if he can choose the character himself. "You build them yourself and you see their progress throughout the whole game." He likes action games as well.

He likes the narrative in a game. It helps you with the context and you will talk to other people because of that. Also, if he gets the back story of one planet, when he sees them again, he might bond with them rather than another planet. "I like all the reading of the back stories, but I know some people don't." Robin has never played a game that isn't fictional, and likes it that they are fictional.

C.2. Aitor

"I like games to surprise me." Aitor plays all different kind of games. Sometimes he likes a game with a narrative, sometimes he doesn't. The story should be surprising and good. It should grasp me. How exactly? Aitor likes plot twists.

C.3. Indre

Indre plays mostly competitive games like League of Legends. She likes the control and wants her game to be competitive. She thinks the story that League of Legends contains is fun, but it's not necessary for the gameplay. You don't have to read it. "But it's nice."

C.4. Chris

Chris plays mostly fictional adventure games with a narrative. "I love that kind of crap", he says. The RPG he plays have a lot of story and he loves to find out more about the world and the characters. He likes different universes. "I cannot put my finger on it what helps me get hooked on a story and what doesn't." He gives an example of a very popular game, but it didn't grasp him somehow. "The story has to fit."

The narratives are mostly fictional, Chris loves to go into that stuff. Why? "That's the point of escapism, isn't it? I want to escape reality."

Chris also has played Spec Cops: The Line. This is a third person shooter, but suddenly you get to know more about soldiers with PTSD. He liked that as well.



C.5. Andy

Andy plays mostly RPG/adventure games or platform games [like Super Mario, ed.]. The platform games are fun because they're just about skills and levels and you just have to get better to finish them.

He loves to play RPG because he wants to explore this world and the characters. It can be anything as long as the story has been done right. There was a game - One Man's Sky - that wasn't perfect, but Andy liked the world. Even though there were a lot of critics.

"Games are kind of an escape." For Andy that can be both with fiction as non-fiction. As long as the story is good. He has never played a non-fiction game before. "It would be cool if the story is right for it. It depends."

After that, he asks himself: "Or maybe war games are kind of non-fictional?"



APPENDIX D - TOMAS RAWLINGS

Tomas Rawlings is a design and production director at Auroch Digital. This is a game development and consultancy studio based in Bristol, UK. He spoke at the first European Hackathon about newsgames and Auroch Digital worked on several of its own interactive news titles, such as Endgame: Syria. This interview took place April 24th 2017 via Skype Video chat.

Why would news and games be a good combination?

Games are perfect for a non-linear story. So it allows you to do things that are non-linear. Normally, journalists only tell a story linear, but this is the perfect way to tell it differently.

Why would you want to tell it differently?

Because you're not only competing with other news media right now. There is a situation where news media also compete with all the other apps on someone's phone. In one minute, someone can decide to close your news app and go to Facebook, Candy Crush or something else. You have to keep the user engaged and you can do that using all kind of gaming methods. You are not competing with only news anymore.

It is true that a newsgame is more likely to be something like a history game, because you cannot use something that just happened. But choose your event - a lot is possible. It can be a larger subject or an event from some time ago.

In Endgame: Syria you play the rebels. Aren't you afraid someone isn't getting the whole story?

No one expects a news report to cover every side of a story. That just isn't possible, so in Endgame: Syria you play the rebels, but it doesn't cover the whole Syrian war either.

How do you develop a newsgame?

It depends on the game. If you're making a funny newsgame, a game with humour, the gameplay comes first. That has to take shape before the rest. But when it's a serious game, the narrative is really important and the gameplay is based on that.

What do people tell you when you tell them about newsgames?

I expected a lot more controversy. I mean, we got some controversy, but we a lot of media where really positive about newsgames. Also, games are a natural medium for gamers, like an instinct, and this way the news is delivered to people who play games a lot.

Years ago, no one would have expected that newsgames would be a thing. But when TV news just started, it was a no go to show the face of the reporter as well. Right now, we cannot imagine news



on TV where the news reporter is nowhere to be seen. That is now the normal way. Things change. The expectation of people changes and technology is changing. We should use that. We have to keep the news consumer engaged, otherwise we will lose them to Facebook and Candy Crush.

What is the goal of your newsgame?

We want to engage them first. The game should stay with them. For me, thinking in games is like a second nature. And there are so many gamers out there who think the same way and we can get them involved in newsgames.

Every journalist is a curator of information. If you have two minutes of news on TV, there might have been hours of material that isn't used. It's the journalists job to portray it right, and that can happen through a game as well. Game designers have the same intention. They want to show the most important points of the story.

Some people would say games are not the proper medium to tell the news through. What do you tell them?

Well, I think they're wrong. If it is okay for the newspaper, music, films and TV to tell serious stuff through, why can't game design do serious stuff as well.



APPENDIX E - MARCUS BÖSCH

Marcus Bösch is co-founder of The Good Evil, a game studio developing games with 'a purpose and playful experiences' based in Germany. He blogs about newsgames at www.newsgaming.de and helped organise the first newsgaming Hackathon of Europe in Cologne, Germany. This interview took place April 19th 2017 via Skype Video chat.

Why do you think journalism and games are a good combination?

What you see on the internet now, the content, it is nearly the same as years ago. You see text, little bit of film and pictures and some visualisation. While computers are fit for more than that. Games are suited for interaction, games suit the computer perfectly.

With games you can dive directly in the subject and learn a lot about the system. Sin City is a good example, you learn so much about the planning and everything while playing the game.

On the other hand, other areas are picking up game mechanisms to bring knowledge. The military is using gaming techniques in every single textbooks to make the content engaging.

Do you think the news consumer wants news in the form of a game?

First of all, I'm strongly against making a game of everything. Some normal things in real life aren't fit for a game. When you buy a ticket for the train, you just want the ticket. So I think newsgames aren't fit for breaking news. But I think people look for 'snack able' content on their mobile phone, even in news apps. So that would be a good place for a little game.

When you look at the game of the New York Times, they made a quiz and that was a very good way to bring people together, to have a shared experiences.

What did you learn making newsgames?

It is really crucial to take care of the different audiences. Think about them before you make the game. Do you want to attract teenagers or do you want to attract a sixty year old woman living on the country side. That is a very crucial point.

And then we have learned that very simple ideas definitely do work. So we once copied the concept of the old mobile phone game 'Snake' and people loved it. (In this game, someone was a cabinet member who wanted to keep on collecting data from other people. In the end you have so much data, just like the end of Snake.)

But how do you take such a simple game and put journalism in it?

Well, that is not as easy as it looks maybe. You can't take a hugely popular game and just add some content. That doesn't work at all, then people don't have a proper game and no proper content. You have to have game mechanics that perfectly suit the narrative. Our job as game designers is to dive



deeply into the content and suit the mechanics to that. Think about the goal you want to achieve and fit the gameplay to that.

What did you learn during the newsgaming hackathon?

It's very interesting to see all these different people together, designers, journalists and programmers. Also, we now use the same method when we make a game. You can think about it a lot, but if you just try it out and do the paper prototyping, you can test your game right away.

What would be the right balance between the gameplay and the narrative?

That's an ongoing discussion. It really depends on the game and what you are aiming for. So think about the goal of your game first. What do you want to achieve with your game?

Do you have an example of an unsuccessful newsgame and why is it unsuccessful?

There is this newsgame that is kind of like a complex form of packman. But you shouldn't just throw some content in a game. The game is really confusing. You have to think about the content and how to get this content across to your audience and choose the right gameplay through this.



APPENDIX F - LUCA DALCÒ

Luca Dalcò wrote the narrative of the videogame *The Town of Light*. In this interview he explains more about narratives in games. This interview took place April 14th 2017 via e-mail.

The Town of Light is a narrative-driven game. How do you keep the right balance between the narrative and the gameplay?

I do not know if I've really found the right balance. I think it's a very subjective matter indeed. I can try to explain you the way I've faced this thorny problem. I have chosen to start the game with more gameplay and more freedom, and then reduce them gradually while the player start to be emotionally involved in the story of Renée.

Why? It all depends on what the player is expecting from the game, this has been my starting point. At the beginning you will find yourself in a new environment, knowing nothing about the game. Your main interest is very likely to explore the environment, interact with it to find out clues and starting to figure out what the game is about.

When you will be emotionally involved in the story you will be concerned about the fate of Renée and shocked about what she has experienced. I guess that your interest will change, you are more likely interested in hear more about Renée rather than in solving some puzzle. I hope this has been a good choice!

Did you worry about finding the balance? Was it hard to keep the right balance?

Yes, it has been one of my main concerns. There is a lot of chatting around narrative games, the derogatory definition "walking simulator" perfectly reflect the situation. As a developer you can't ignore that. You must try to find solutions, you must take it in mind for all the development process.

How do you write the narrative of a game?

From a technical point of view I write it on scrivener. I've tried other instruments for non linear writing, but I felt them inappropriate, usually too poor. Scrivener is a bit rough, but it has a lot of potential.

But writing is mainly a creative act rather than a technical fact of course! I use several steps, from a rough list of events to a detailed screenplay. At the beginning I like to write the story as linearly as possible, as a list of events, then, I start to sort, hide and add to obtain a more interesting flow.

The start and the end of the story need to be faced differently, I think they need a very special attention, they are the engagement and the farewell, the two most thorny moments.

The thing I love the most is writing the text that the player find in the game, I try constantly to write them emotionally, it's something like acting in a certain way. I try to put myself in the shoes of the person who is experiencing the story, it could be the main character, the player, other characters, it depends on the moments, then I write as it comes and eventually, after several days, I correct it as



little as possible in order to maintain a sense of reality, given by the imperfections of a fast, emotional writing.

How do you keep the narrative interesting so it will be a successful game?

As I told before, I've tried to tell the story with a gradually growing emotional involvement. The story arc is divided in three different parts, each one of them try to answers, with gameplay, to a specific question.

Q: Who is Renée?

A: A lot of clues to find and documents to read.

Q: What has happened to her?

A: A strong emotional narrative, unsettling images, growing involvement.

Q: Can I help her?

A: Not at all, you can only be a witness, she is alone, this is the drama.



APPENDIX G - PETE BOTTOMLEY

Pete Bottomley is a game developer at White Paper Games and co-wrote the narrative of *Ether One* and *The Occupation*. In this interview he explains more about writing the narrative of a serious game. This interview took place April 13th 2017 via e-mail.

Ether One and The Occupation are both kind of narrative-driven games. How do you keep the right balance between the narrative and the gameplay?

It's definitely a constant evolution of both. We start with the main narrative beats we want to hit. What type of story is this? What do we want to happen? Then I try to fit it into the gameplay structure - Is it level based? How do we deliver the narrative to the player? Is it linear or open? Once you have high-level narrative and gameplay questions answered, you can start to work into both. Each are a constant moulding to fit each other and both areas need tweaking to get feeling right, however, more often than not, the core outline of what we first established two years before, generally holds true to the end of development. Execution and technical implementation is the most time consuming to get the world feeling believable and consistent.

Did you worry about this? Was it hard to keep the right balance?

It's definitely a challenge, but not hard. It's something the team loves putting into games and game development is an incredibly hard process. You're balancing lots of different disciplines and everyone should have the opportunity to put their stamp on the game. I don't think balancing is necessarily hard and it's very dependent on the type of experience you want to create and who you're creating the game for.

How do you write the narrative of a game?

I have a bunch of different documents pertaining to different sections of the game. We start with the 'core arc'. These are the high-level narrative beats we want to hit. In *The Occupation's* instance, it's a conversation spanning over a 30 minute period which we intermittently present to the player via a cut scene which sets the game's pacing.

The Occupation is a little different in that the game happens in real-time. Therefore if you go outside and sit down on a bench, the game will keep simulating and people will go about their lives. This makes it hard to know where the player is going to be and therefore hard to deliver narrative. Next, we have the protagonist who is providing the general gameplay 'objectives' through your earpiece. We call this 'directional dialogue' and that can be the script that requires the most iteration. It's incredibly hard to deliver what the player needs to do in a succinct way and we rewrite & re-record these lines the most out of all script in the process.

We then tackle the scripted events which happen throughout the game which deliver a very specific narrative through NPC interaction with each other. We also have things to bring the world alive through general 'water cooler chatter' or phone conversations; basically anything that brings a personality to a character and you get a sense of who they are and their life outside of the game.



Finally, we have 'barks' which are things like coughs, sneezes, people humming to themselves or it can even be things like 'Hey, who is that over there?'. They're all I liners to ground the characters in the world and helps make them feel believable.

How do you keep the narrative interesting?

That's possibly the hardest question and one that we don't know that we're achieving yet! I don't think you ever really know if the end user will find the narrative interesting. You try to hit your high-level 'core' beats. So for the people that don't really care about everything in the world and just want their objective, that's the first layer and the most concise that you try to get right. Other than that, I think the variation and the life people feel around is the most interesting to us as a team. When a player experiences an interaction or conversation between two people that their friend didn't see, that's a really personal gameplay moment so having lots of content in the game which a lot of people may miss, for us, is the most interesting aspect of game development.



APPENDIX H - REVIEWS

You can find the Steam page of Ether One through [this hyperlink](#) and the Steam page of The Town of Light through [this hyperlink](#). The reviews are retrieved at April 12. The first ten reviews of both games are used in this research. These ten are voted as "most helpful" by users of steam.

Overall, Ether One has 268 reviews in English and 74 percent are positive. The Town of Light has 261 reviews in English and 72 percent of them are positive.

The reason for these ten per game to be used in this research is because these are voted most helpful by users of Steam.

Ether One

gusgreco7	9/10
83 out of 90 people (92%) found this review helpful	+ very nice presentation, art is awesome, runs great on max settings + nice music, good voice acting + point and click adventure game with some very hard puzzles, that are not essentially needed to proceed, meaning you can just explore the environment and complete the story without solving almost any puzzle. this is NOT recommended - the puzzles are extremely well designed, they are mostly about reconstructing a memory by reading and finding relevant items, cracking safes etc. - great idea about moving between the 2 worlds of the game and storing items or reading the important documents you found so far
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
15 October 2014	
Played it for 12 hours in total	+ complex story, emotional at times , with some horror elements, very interesting though you will want to see what happens + controls and gameplay mechanics flawless + good duration, replayability (as it is very hard to complete it the first time by solving everything) - playing for the first time you might not understand exactly what you have to do or how to solve the puzzles, if you have the patience to proceed a bit you will be rewarded though - it could be a bit more beginner friendly - sometimes finding items needed to solve puzzles is frustrating, they might be far away from the scene or even in a totally different location (item or hint) one of my favorites adventures of the year, very professional work, highly recommended to those who like adventure and puzzle games in general with a good story hint: don't forget to hold left mouse button on an object (that you can get) to read its description/name, this is vital for some puzzles

marianne-	I just finished Ether One. It's a brilliant game with an exceptional story. It reminds me of the Adventure games of yore where it is best to take notes, make maps, draw diagrams and exam everything. I took my time and I worked on a section at a time trying to complete it before moving on. The puzzles can be challenging, but your note taking efforts will greatly help. This
75 out of 82 people (91%) found this review helpful	



<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	also comes in mighty helpful when it is necessary to go back into an area. These efforts will help to complete the game as it should be completed and the rewards for doing so are three-fold. The story is in-depth with a lot of substance. It's also a teaching experience. I finished with tears in my eyes, a filled heart and a mind enveloped in wonderment. This is, by far, one of the best games i have ever played. Outstanding !!
3 July 2014	
Played it for 56.1 hours in total	

Fresh	<p>Stunning visuals, incredible audio and a genuinely moving narrative</p> <p>Whether you play only for the main plot, ignoring the games many puzzles, or you take it slow and uncover all the mysteries Pin Wheel has hidden behind its spooky and unsettling atmosphere, Ether One will impress.</p> <p>An independent studio boasting a triple A quality game, highly, highly recommend.</p>
81 out of 92 people (88%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
26 March 2014	
Played it for 3 hours in total	

TheSparrowsJourney	<p>http://www.youtube.com/watch?annotation_id=annotation_656882913&feature=iv&index=3&list=PLBqXrq67D6oqHjOXJ2ip90P_IDS2kbtO&src_vid=rt0yflvDEvk&v=6glTHczG4p4</p> <p>I now write this review as I finished the game (main story). Gotta say: mind blowing. Without trying to spoil anything, let's just say the game puts you on somebody's shoes living a terrifying experience, one impossible to picture, unless it actually happens in your life at some point (hope not). It's an indie game delivering completely different experiences, the ones you don't find in most AAA games. Great adventure.</p>
145 out of 196 people (74%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
22 March 2014	
Played it for 10.7 hours in total	

Kryyss	<p>Did you ever have somebody tell you about a movie they saw or a book that they read, saying it had so much depth and was so thought-provoking that you knew it must be worth a look. But when you did, you saw none of what this person described? That's Ether One.</p> <p>This is going to be a spoiler free review, largely because there isn't much to spoil so it is easy to avoid.</p> <p>When you start the game, there is a great deal of promise. Presentation is good and the pacing is decent. Voice actors are good. The art-style is interesting and the environments well designed.</p> <p>But it doesn't take long before you find yourself in a game where you find</p>
94 out of 119 people (79%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she didn't recommend the game</i>	
4 September 2015	
Played it for 10.1 hours in total	



	<p>yourself casually walking through the clearly marked core of the story but completely unaware of side-quests which make up the bulk of the content. When you start to understand that mundane objects have a larger significance you turn into a kleptomaniac, expecting to encounter some truly ingenious puzzles which remind you of games like Resident Evil or Myst, but suddenly discover that the developers have hidden the puzzles so well that half the time you're walking past them or completely clueless about where to start. So you start poking everything randomly to see if anything happens. Not to mention that much of what you've been collecting doesn't actually have a use at all. It's like buying one of those Lego kits and then discovering you have loads of bricks left over and actually feeling like somebody intended to use them for something but never did.</p> <p>Ether One pitches itself as a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma. What you get is a short-story which starts off being subtle, then gets bored and screams all its secrets at you part way through the story resulting in an anticlimactic and utterly unsatisfying ending which you unfortunately saw coming if you were paying any attention to the many blatant clues peppered throughout the game. I get the impression that the developers had all these ideas in their heads but didn't really understand how to deliver them. So to ensure players didn't miss the point they painted the 'clues' in neon pink, wrote them in capitals and also attached sirens and bells to make sure you saw them.</p> <p>For a game intended to convey how confusing dementia is for a sufferer of the condition, the developers have clearly gotten too close to their source material. Because the game itself ended up being as incoherent and haphazard as the memories of a typical dementia patient. I actually worry that they intended to make the game like this on purpose and completely forgot that it was still meant to be about having fun.</p> <p>I really cannot recommend that anyone hands over money for something like this. If you want to have a game like this I'd actually recommend Master Reboot.</p>
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MrNinjaSquirrel	<p>It's not easy to properly comprehend the effect debilitating diseases have on people until you experience their effect yourself. It's easy to see them as terrible but improbable occurrences, something that clearly happens but is impossible to envision yourself suffering from. And yet, dementia scares the hell out of me. The idea that there's this invisible force that has no cure, no prevention, that will almost certainly affect you at some point in your life and only becomes more likely the longer you live somehow feels so much more real to me than cancer, or ebola, or any other life threatening disease that I could come in contact with.</p> <p>Perhaps that's due partly to how much dementia affects not only yourself, but the people around you. Watching your grandparents forget you along with themselves is a cold shock to reality that puts things into startling focus the way statistics and symptom lists never could. And it's the inescapable nature of something you can't predict or counteract that makes it difficult to just push the thought out of your mind that one day you might wake up and have forgotten who you are.</p>
45 out of 51 people (88%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
28 January 2015	
Played it for 10.4 hours in total	



Ether One isn't really about a hypothetical cure for dementia, or the life of someone finding slowly losing themselves to it. To me at least, it's about giving that human perspective to something in all likelihood we will all go through. Inhabiting the memories of someone undergoing experimental treatment, you travel through their life learning the events that shaped them and then watching them fall away as the disease takes hold and they struggle to hang onto even the moments most important to them.

It's depressing but not in a way that makes you sad, so much as it causes you to feel empathetic as you watch a character you've become emotionally invested with have everything taken away from them. Reading through personal letters, town events, job descriptions, and fidgeting with character belongings, you get to know these characters to even their most mundane and ordinary level. Life is often unfair, but Ether One captures the sense of uncontrollable tragedy and desperate attempts at resolution that's almost painful to see because it's so understandable.

Ether One has built a world so close to our own, but given it a purpose and a life that makes every scrap of paper and ordinary item feel meaningful. I wanted to know more about these characters, to pry into their emotions and personal thoughts to try and understand what they were going through, and Ether One allows you to do this in a way that doesn't feel intrusive or emotionally manipulative. You're trying to help your character remember who they are; trying to put things back together in a desperate hope to save their memories, and prove the procedure a success so nobody will have to go through something so destructive

Ether One's only real problem is that it tries harder than it probably needs to to be a more traditional game than first-person exploration games are often considered, and ends up making it incredibly hard to see most of its content that it hides behind obtuse puzzles and logic that's often difficult to understand. There are a lot of objects you can interact with, but just enough which you can't that it's often incredibly difficult to know which items are for solving puzzles and which have been included just as a means of world building. My solution to this was to attempt to scavenge everything I could pick up, but that makes for an extremely cluttered and impractical playstyle that still often left me clueless when it came to solving an actual puzzle.

I say puzzle, but the projectors you need to reassemble in Ether One were often more comprehension barriers than logical conundrums. I was at such a loss as to know even where to start that even with the answer typically staring me in the face it was nearly impossible for me to solve anything without the help of a guide. In a lot of ways it feels very much like the sort of obtuse puzzles found in a lot of old adventure games, and I imagine people missing those games will feel right at home, but in my case I was more frustrated at trying to parse an endless stream of relevant and irrelevant information than I was satisfied by actually managing to solve one.

And it's a shame because it makes it extremely easy to miss huge swaths of content for those less inclined to sit and ponder solutions or look them up online, content which gave a larger context to the story that I feel is important anyone playing the game experience. Where in any other game I'd have likely given up and just skipped to the end, but Ether One deserves



	<p>more than that. I felt like I owed it to the game to see all it had to show me, no matter how trivial it might be because even meaningless documents and items could eventually serve some significance.</p> <p>Ether One certainly hasn't dissolved my fears of dementia, but it definitely helped show me that I could be doing more for those affected by it instead of turning away because I'd rather not deal with the emotional trauma of someone you have to reintroduce yourself to every meeting. What that might be I'm not entirely sure of yet, but I feel Ether One is important for even daring bring these ideas up, and I hope they won't be lost on others who play it.</p>
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SABINA	<p>While I appreciate the originality of the idea and theme, the execution of the gameplay falls flat. Simply put, it's boring. And when it's not boring, it's just frustrating, two qualities that will ruin a game every time. Why do I play games? For fun. This game misses that mark by a longshot. The voice acting is good. There is not much else I can say that is positive.</p> <p>Despite the use of Unreal Engine, the rendering is cartoonish, stylized and outlined as if it were hand drawn. I understand if this was a creative decision, but it's a shameful waste of Unreal Engine's potential. Texture resolution is extremely low, even on max settings. Regardless of this, performance is not great, indicating shoddy construction and poor use of the engine's resources.</p> <p>It is never clear what can be interacted with and what can't be, and the interact mechanic often doesn't work, so you end up clicking on something multiple times before discovering if it's static or not. Solutions to puzzles are arbitrary, counter-intuitive and make no contextual sense, so that it becomes a random guessing game with a lot of back and forth experimenting. It has that old-school Hidden Object Game feel to it, where you end up trying every possible combination with everything in your inventory. Except you don't have an inventory. You can only carry one item at a time, while other items you have collected are stored in a separate location that requires a loading screen upon entry and exit. Why they thought it was a good idea to exchange an inventory for a stash room that requires a double loading screen for the retrieval of each individual item, I do not know. But tedious is an understatement.</p> <p>If the point of the game was to get you to feel the frustration of memory loss and dementia, then it succeeds. It could have more appropriately expressed itself with logic and memory puzzles. The mind is a use-it-or-lose-it faculty, so a game designed to exercise it, while addressing the issue in the story, may have been the admirable goal of the developers. They over-reached, and fell miserably short.</p> <p>Worst of all, achievements that I earned did not unlock for me. That was the final straw that prompted me to write my first ever Not Recommended review. For the price, there are many more far superior games to choose from.</p>
190 out of 288 people (66%) found this review helpful	
He/she didn't recommend the game	
3 April 2015	
Played it for 3.8 hours in total	



itsALICEduh	<p>Ether One is a first person adventure where you play as a restorer and it's your job to restore the memories of a patient suffering from dementia. There are two paths you can choose, one where you casually experience the story and another where you test your own mind by solving the many optional puzzles sprinkled throughout the game.</p> <p>Puzzles became challenging (at least for me) which I loved. The pacing of the story is perfect and I never felt rushed through the experience. I was able to go at my own pace and fully enjoy the Bioshock meets Half Life art style and the triple A quality voice acting. I defiantly recommend checking Ether One out for yourself, especially if you love a good puzzle and a look inside the human mind.</p>
40 out of 48 people (83%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
27 March 2014	
Played it for 6.3 hours in total	

Communist "Joseph Ballin" Layton	<p>In this game, you play as a professional puzzle solver, who has travelled to a curious village to help a bunch of helpless villagers who have all conveniently lost the fourth slider wheel from their combination safes, broken all of their projectors, and rearranged their homes and workplaces into Myst-like puzzles. The game does a good job of capturing that classic Myst feeling of wandering around an expansive puzzle-filled area for 20 minutes, flipping a lever to test it out, flipping it back after wondering whether or not you were actually supposed to flip it yet or not, and then exploring for 20 more minutes until everything finally starts to come together.</p>
41 out of 50 people (82%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
12 July 2015	
Played it for 19.3 hours in total	

XenonBlu	<p>This game, has to be one of my all-time favorites, amazing world, amazing story, and one of the few times I've really cried during a video game and to that I say, just play it for yourself. But before you do play it, just some words of advice for you to get the most out of this game. You can complete this game just by finding these ribbons throughout the game, which kind of trivializes the entire experiences. There are optional puzzles in this game and they provide a lot of the story along with notes that you find throughout the world and both make the world feel as though it's living and breathing. I encourage you if you want to truly fully experience this game, complete the side puzzles and read the little bits of exposition, and if you get stuck do not hesitate to look up a guide, I repeat DO NOT HESITATE TO LOOK UP A GUIDE to 100% this game. You get so much more out of the story, and trust me the story is amazing, it may seem nebulous at the beginning, but once you have all the info you can scrap from the world it all comes together in a beautiful narrative, that is really, really worth the time and effort. Also if you do 100% this game there is a second ending, and it adds to story just that much more and really makes you understand everything. Sometimes the puzzles while they are really interesting are just really obtuse, and don't feel bad if you don't get it, just try it out for yourself, and if you aren't figuring it out, use a guide.</p>
29 out of 31 people (94%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
23 July 2015	
Played it for 21.2 hours in total	



	<p>Also one big flaw with this game, there are some bugs in it, not like game crashes or graphical bugs, but things that won't let you progress and you can't seem to figure out why, like you just needed to re flip a lever to progress. For this, again, LOOK UP A GUIDE, a video guide may help a bit more here, but most of the time, you won't be able to realize the bug, but once you see how things were really supposed to go you'll be able to see what went wrong and how to fix it in game no problem.</p> <p>All that said, if you like, say, old point and clicks, or games with really deep stories, than this game is a must, but even if you don't like those kind of games but are still interested, than still try out this game, it may be an awesome experience for you. Really this game is amazing narratively, it's just a matter getting past the sometimes annoying quirks/bugs and getting past the sometimes fairly obtuse puzzles to enjoy the narrative fully.</p> <p>TL;DR: This game is awesome, but take the time to 100% it, and DON'T BE AFRAID TO LOOK UP A GUIDE, can't stress this enough, but if you put in the time and effort the game will give back like no other.</p> <p>EDIT: The Ether One Redux is included if you buy this game, which may fix some bugs and definitely will make the game run much better, as it now runs on a newer version of Unity than previously in the game. Now I can't confirm if this will fix the bugs in it since I have not played through the redux version.</p>
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The Town of Light

Eliiaa	<p>Right now I have absolutely no words for this awesome game.. i finished it for some minutes and it blows my mind.. its such an amazing game! Sadly its a really short one but one of the best games I've ever played!</p> <p>But now more about the game: Yes, why it blows my mind? Just because the story of this game is so so sad and fascinating too. The saddest thing at all is that it is a real story, thats why it makes me so sad! It's an awesome game because you can see, how mental hospitals were in the 20th century and even i dont want to say now much things i can say its really really horrible!</p> <p>Renées story make me cry so hard i just cant believe this all was real!</p> <p>To went around in the mental hospital as Renée and to find out all about her past and her stay there was one of the best things I ever did in my whole life! I really felt like i would stay there for my own and felt so hopeless too etc. Its so rare that I really feel something in games but this game..Wow.. I learned a lot in this game and tbh: I'm always a person whos in struggle with himself, but now I see that it can be soo much worse than this things I complain about everyday!</p> <p>Well, i should say more about the game directly :D :</p> <p>really awesome grafic! nice music! oppressive mood (but it fits really good) + little bit of horror too you don't have to go one strict way, you can walk mostly where you want to walk one of the best story games I've ever played</p> <p>You just FEEL this game. You feel the depressions and the horrible mood in</p>
15 out of 17 people (88%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
17 March 2017	
Played it for 5.8 hours in total	



	<p>there, you feel the sickness of all this persons in there, you feel the hopelessness of everybody, you feel the sadness, etc..</p> <p>So, yes, i can say this game is a really great one and I recommend it to everyone who like sad games with a little bit of horror. :)</p> <p>I give 11/10 for this awesome game!</p>
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PhobosBFG	<p>The Shindlers list of gaming, seriously this game is depressing and shocking. It's based on how mental hospitals were back in the day. Its more psychological horror. I jumped in expecting spooky ghosts and monsters but i got depression and a plethora of emotions that made me think about life....</p>
8 out of 9 people (89%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
16 March 2017	
Played it for 2.7 hours in total	

Wertyman99	<p>Beautiful, dark, disturbing and twisted. Will screw with your head and make you think for days after</p>
6 out of 7 people (86%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
24 March 2017	
Played it for 6.2 hours in total	

luna	<p>Honestly, if you appreciate good storylines and developing story/characters, by all means, get this game. I hardly play /creepy/ games because of my own anxiety, but there are no jump scares or whatsoever, only the darkness areas. It's basically confronting your own fear and attempting to shove it all aside for the sake of playing the game.</p> <p>The way you collide with the character is done amazingly. Don't wanna spoil too much on that part.</p> <p>Some people have spoken of the slow pacing (literally; the walking) but I think it gives the ballance and appreciation for the environment that it needs. It suits this game, which incidentally also makes it one-of-kind. It's more a walking simulator with creepy-ish underthemes, but the moment you manage to keep your fear in check, you'll realize this is a game with a fantastic story that's well worth the money.</p>
5 out of 5 people (100%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
28 February 2016	
Played it for 2.8 hours in total	



fOrmality	I don't really know what to say. I guess let's start with the obvious. If you are looking for a scary game, this is not it, if you are looking for a game at all, this is not it.
141 out of 156 people (90%) found this review helpful	I suppose you could call it an experience, but it is not something to enjoy. It's dreadful. It'll make you feel sick to your stomach, you'll cringe, cover your eyes, and wonder why the hell you're even doing this.
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	It accomplishes exactly what it wanted to. It's essentially, a first person experience of the memories of a patient from before mental illnesses were treated properly, and the consequences that it has on said patient.
29 February 2016	At times it almost feels like a documentary, one that you're doing yourself, other times it feels a bit like Shutter Island. But the whole time has this atmosphere - it isn't a scary one necessarily, but a filthy one. Both physically, emotionally, mentally, morally, you feel dirty playing this game. Like you need to take a shower afterwards, or maybe sit in the fetal position at the bottom and cry.
Played it for 5.8 hours in total	<p>Sure, it's tense, but mostly you'll be wrestling with emotions. Sometimes it's disgust, sometimes it's pity, or confusion, I didn't know how to take any of it. Because nothing that occurred was anyone's fault, it's just a culmination of so many problems, that nobody knew how to deal with. It's hard to witness something so horrific without someone to blame.</p> <p>I could relate it to reading on the Nazi concentration camps, but the difference is there's someone there to blame, to hate for it all, but here, I just don't know. And the game knows that too, offering certain options which exempt everyone of responsibility, or blame certain parties, but as onlookers, we can't know for sure, and to claim otherwise is just ignorant.</p> <p>To the simpler things:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the graphics are beautiful - great optimization (120fps most of the time, occassional drops to 80) - solid voice acting - a story that sticks with you - thick atmosphere, wonderfully realized setting - multiple paths through certain chapters - sometimes things get lost in translation but it's rare - there are occassional bugs - lots of invisible walls - difficult to decide where to go, especially if you're prone to exploration - no sprint button makes things very slow, annoyingly slow on occassion <p>Look this, "game," is wonderfully terrible. It's meant to be something that's tough to stomach and that often disturbs you. It's an analysis of what Outlast simply wore as a costume to jump out and yell "boo!"</p> <p>Do not buy this if you're looking for a scary game. But if what I've described sounds like something you might want to try, then absolutely buy it. But be warned, this is a phenomenally horrific thing to have to witness.</p>



AestheticGamer	
94 out of 105 people (90%) found this review helpful	The Town of Light is a first-person exploration psychological horror game about a woman named Renée, who after many years returns to an old mental asylum she spent her teenage years at, and reflects both on her past and her present. During the process, the game deals with a number of interesting, but disturbing, themes in explicit detail, ranging from the sense of identity of self from going through such an experience, if you can truly feel like you're 'you' in a situation where the world tells you who you are is wrong, sexual identity and exploration while in a locked-in facility, and being taken advantage of in a number of ways when people try to exploit and empower themselves through your lack of ability to defend yourself.
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
19 June 2016	
Played it for 4.3 hours in total	<p>If any of what I just said peaks your interest, I would recommend checking it out. It's a narrative-based journey, and it explores its themes with a level of tact and maturity, but also know it doesn't censor itself and there is graphical details that many may not be comfortable with or want to experience. As a narrative, it succeeds, not to be shocking, revolting, or even specifically to shake you up, but it simply tells a series of true stories and scenarios people experienced in mental asylums in the early 1900s, specifically that in Italy, and the sad fact the scars these places left on the people inside to make it the only place many of them ever knew as a home. The narrative is mostly straight-forward, and there is but one ending, but there is actually a few branching paths and sections with different levels or variations of levels in the second half of the game based on some gameplay choices you make.</p> <p>It is also worth noting the game does well with its audio, maybe with the exception of voice acting (which is a little rough, but also not very frequent), but the music fits the moods of the scenes well, with a few stand-out tracks. Ambiance is also ripe in the title, and there are all sorts of small yet interesting environmental sounds.</p> <p>Now, while what it does narratively I feel it succeeds at, I think it does have a few rough edges. Graphically it is a bit uneven, with some areas looking pretty good, and some coming off as quite rough. The game isn't always entirely clear in what you need to do next, which will lead to moments where you may spend some time wandering, looking for whatever it is you missed. Take so long, and she'll tell you directly where to go (and you can enable choice hints to activate at any time), but it feels there could of been some clearer and more intuitive ways to do this. I also feel some people will not be satisfied by the ending, as it does seem to come a bit abruptly and not really climax well to the point, but I liked it for what it was and the sort of story it was trying to tell.</p> <p>Also do know the game has some graphic depictions. It doesn't shy away from these really detailed and gruesome pictures of how to perform surgery, everything from dissecting a hand, to peeling back the layers of someone's skull. They're morbid, and not all will swallow these old procedures in visual detail well. Likewise, the game doesn't shy away from the graphical depiction of nudity and sexual harassment/abuse. Worth noting, but also know it does handle these themes with a level of tact and doesn't use them for shock value.</p> <p>In the end, what the game should be experienced for is its narrative. There are interesting scenes and a few light puzzles, but it goes to put you in the</p>



	shoes of a woman coming to terms with herself, and on that front, I feel it succeeds. It is very much a walking simulator with light gameplay elements and puzzles, and a few scenes of surrealism edge you go through, but it stays mostly grounded and explores an unfortunate history. If that's what you're looking for, there is a lot to like here, and its execution is mostly well done, and both explores its story and history with respect, yet doesn't shy away from some of the harder to swallow details. Yet, despite the harshness of it, it also gives off a strangely warm vibe in an overall sense. An interesting journey for those who want a narrative-driven exploration game.
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Kjah4201	I rarely ever write reviews for games....maybe once or twice, out of the nearly 200 games I've played on steam. But this game man....this game was one the most beautiful, most well done, amazingly acted and written, yet most disturbing games I've played (in my opinion) on steam ever. Not one of those many, if not most, jumpscare and in your face horror games. No...the horror you feel is 100% psychological and leaves you feeling cold inside, the only true horror I've ever felt from a video game in my life was just now with this amazing work of art. Money well spent and worth every penny if not more if I had to. I just completed the game 20 minutes ago, and tomorrow I'm playing it again, because it's THAT incredible to me. 10/10 PLAY THIS GAME!!!!
63 out of 80 people (79%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
28 February 2016	
Played it for 3.5 hours in total	

Tristetee	<p>When i first started up the game i didn't expect too much. I have to admit i've already grown a bit weary of the horrorscene in gaming with their endless, cheap jumpscare, gory and bloody scenery and running away from monsters to stay alive, another jumpscare and rinse and repeat. I'm not saying i don't enjoy those, but after the game is completed thats about it and it didn't offer me that much of anything new as experience and i'll just start up another game.</p> <p>Then there is The Town of Light, if you're looking at something that will leave an impact after you've finished the game, you don't have to look further. A fresh view as psychological horror in first person view. You'll be forced to deal with humans for a change. More specifically, very rarely handled subjects of mental health, child abuse and institutionalising to a psychiatric hospital. On this you really have to give praise on the research and storytelling. One aspects where this game really shines.</p> <p>Story goes around on just that, you're wandering around on an actual abandoned psychiatric hospital as Reneé, our maincharacter, picking up grim pieces of your past and trying to discover what actually happened. Flashbacks, pieces of medical journal, letters all adds up to the story which you'll want to finish in one go.</p> <p>However. Eventhough this personally for me is one of the best i've tried out so far in 2016 and while the story, soundscape and graphics are just astonishing. It basically falls in the category of walking simulator and if you do not enjoy a good story, there isn't much else to do in this game and it might not be suitable for you.</p>
56 out of 71 people (79%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
14 March 2016	
Played it for 23.9 hours in total	



	All said, the story on it's own makes this one of the better if not best psychological horror games i've encountered in my life, it will make you crawl in your chair and feel uncomfortable from time to time, and i can suggest it to anyone who wants to enjoy something new.
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[slckr]robilar5500	<p>The Town of Light is an interesting title developed and published by LKA. Utilizing what appears to be the Unity 4 engine (from what I can tell anyway), this is a walking simulator/psychological horror game which explores a mental institution in Italy circa the 1930's/1940's. As you may or may not be aware, mental health facilities at the time regularly employed electric shock, extremes of cold and heat, lobotomies, and other harsh methods to try and cure mental disabilities. Unfortunately, many of these did more harm than good, and The Town of Light explores this archaic method of "healing" (I say archaic, but many of these methods are still employed today, with arguably the exact same results).</p>
34 out of 36 people (94%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
22 November 2016	
Played it for 4.5 hours in total	<p>This game is available to be played normally or using a VR headset. I played the normal version using a 360 gamepad.</p> <p>Story</p> <p>As mentioned above, The Town of Light focuses on mental health as it was dealt with during the WWII era. Specifically, you travel through a decrepit and empty mental health facility in Italy, experiencing everything through the eyes of a mysterious Renee. Is she a ghost or is she simply perceiving the world around her differently? Is she even Renee? Are her personalities split or is she speaking to spirits? Throughout your exploration of this facility and the surrounding grounds, you will explore these questions and more. I found the story to be fascinating, somewhat creepy, and definitely incredibly sad. This game has feels, and for those of you are incredibly sensitive, this will be a tumultuous experience. Even those with hard hearts will feel something by the end. In fact, that ending....I wont spoil it for you, but that ending was pretty intense.</p> <p>This story was handled incredibly well, and I give it a straight 10 out of 10. I found no flaws in the story telling and the story itself was memorable and compelling.</p> <p>Gameplay</p> <p>The gameplay in The Town of Light is classic walking simulator/psychological horror fare. You wander around, exploring the institute and the surrounding grounds. As you explore and solve some minor puzzles, more of the building will become accessible, and with that, memories will be unveiled which reveal more and more of the story. You achieve this by interacting with various objects found throughout. Some objects can be examined but have no impact other than to flesh out the world, while others are integral to the games progression.</p> <p>The pacing was interesting. At first (the first two chapters), The Town of Light moves very slowly. I think during this intro period, this game loses some of its audience. However, from that point on, the pacing in this game is</p>



	<p>near flawless. At times, you move about slowly, and these tend to be the more introspective moments. At others, your pace increases to match your desperation or excitement. This is a subtle but effective gameplay mechanic.</p> <p>That's about all there is to things gameplay wise. I experienced no technical issues during my playthrough with one exception. There is a playground in the game, and at a certain point, you return there. At that point, when I interacted with the swings and such, it deactivated my gamepads R3, and when I switched to k/m, nothing changed. This means you lose your field of view and can only look straight forward. I had to go back to the previous save to fix this (and not touch anything in the playground afterwards). Fortunately, the autosaves are generous and you can manually save as well.</p> <p>All told, with the one bug notwithstanding, I give this category a 9 out of 10. Arguably the best handling walking simulator/psychological horror game I've played</p> <p>Graphics</p> <p>The graphics in The Town of Light were stunning. As I made mention of in my intro, it looks like they used the Unreal 4 engine. While I might be mistaken, there is no mistaking the amazing level of detail in this game. Every blade of grass, every splash of light is done to perfection. Within the institute itself, this buoyant images change to dark and foreboding, weathered and decayed. At every moment, this game displays an astounding mastery of graphics to evoke different emotions.</p> <p>An easy 10 out of 10 here.</p> <p>Audio</p> <p>To the degree where ambient sounds factor in, I thought they were handled well in The Town of Light. For the most part, they stayed exactly where they were supposed to: in the background. The music was perfect for the tone and setting. In fact, Madama's Dorè Chorus did a wonderful job at breathing life into the setting via their wonderful orchestrations.</p> <p>What I found most compelling however was the voice acting. This was incredibly well done. Given the topic matter and desolation involved both in setting and story, the voice acting made a difficult task sound easy. The English voice actors were: Flaminia Fegarotti (who plays the main character: Renee) and Cryaotic (who handles the male voices in the game). Obviously Flaminia's is the voice you hear throughout the majority of the game, and she manages to sound both familiar and yet deeply disturbed all at once.</p> <p>I think 9.5 is the perfect score for this category.</p> <p>Verdict</p> <p>The Town of Light is a compelling and relevant title that will change your outlook and give you insight into mental health issues from a very unique perspective. You will likely care deeply about the main character, Renee, and will develop a connection with her that you will contemplate for a while afterwards. It took me about 4.5 hours to complete, and there is replay</p>
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	<p>value, going back to see a few different story arcs (although they all lead to the same ending). I would call The Town of Light a must play game and one of the most relevant games to release in quite a while.</p> <p>9.6 flashbacks and memories leading to one inevitable conclusion out of 10 possible.</p>
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Buffy	<p>Story about a woman trapped for 7 years in a mental institution. It is honest, realistic and most of the time quite hard to endure. It's nothing for children or young teenagers as it contains some really disturbing topics and images. Nevertheless it is flawlessly done. :)</p>
35 out of 40 people (88%) found this review helpful	
<i>He/she recommended the game</i>	
19 June 2016	
Played it for 3.0 hours in total	

