Seven Weeks on Earth

Mengqi Gao, Lu Yang, and Yipeng Xiao

Seven Weeks on Earth is a narrative game inviting players to experience life as an alien, who was thrown on Earth by accident and had to adapt to a whole different world. Though the in-game, fantasized Earth is no stranger to aliens from different planets in the galaxy, there are still plenty of challenges to handle. Through adopting divergent attitudes or perspectives in various scenarios, players will have a chance to navigate love, academics, and corporate life as a newcomer alien, while discovering secrets buried deep in Earth. However, whether to adjust or not, no matter their strategies or values, in order to fit into this cold, blue, and beautiful planet, is the player's choice. We want to capture the alienation that exists in the immigrant identity in this work, as the creative team echoes with the view of Sapach (2021) in her work Let's Play with Trauma. Alienation here is not what's usually defined as shifting from "species essence" caused by capitalism and replacement of morals and values by legal rationalization; it's a relation with a major deficiency between the self and the self, and between the self and the others, which emphasizes not the lacking but the status of a relation. While ways to solve this alienation are constructed into our rich plot lines and mind-twisting choices, as indicated by Jaeggi (2014, as cited in Sapach, 2021), they are not textbook happiness. Instead, they require the realization of the self to gain back control of life and be the dynamic forces of change in their lives.

Game Demo Downloading Link (Windows Version)

https://pigeon-and-rat-studios.itch.io/seven-weeks-on-earth/download/LPvMtNAVl_1Ql_le5MJMLrr12DP_uHEI7KZfEzYT

Works Cited

Sapach, S. C. (2021). Let's play with trauma: An Autoethnographic Study of Traumatic Experience, Alienation, and Control in Video Games. ERA. https://doi.org/10.7939/r3-k5mn-2c94

Mengqi Gao

Marist University

Mengqi Gao is an artist, game designer, and writer. She makes abstract art, games, poetry, fiction, and electronic literature; they are also interested in playing and mixing different mediums in their work. Her art explores the topics of mental health, feminism, queerness, racism, bilingual texts, and translations. Their recent exhibitions include a solo show in New York City delving into mental health issues through abstract art and a modded tarot project, *Through the Abstract Cosmic Future*, that explores the ambiguity and openness to the future, reflecting on the boundaries between present and future within an ever-changing reality.

Lu Yang

Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Lu Yang is a Ph.D. student in the Critical Game Design program at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and holds an MFA from New York University. His research focuses on queer game design and interactive narratives, exploring themes of romance and gender fluidity in existing games. Their work combines methodologies such as textual analysis and narrative interpretation to investigate the socio-cultural implications of video games, aiming to contribute to the dialogue on the intersections of gender, sexuality, and interactive media. His experimental narrative games *Waiting For the 6 Train* and *I Tried Being a Human*, published on itch.io, address topics such as mental health issues, asexuality, and transgender experiences.

Yipeng Xiao

Westcliff University

Yipeng Xiao is a dreamer and passionate storyteller dedicated to creating works that resonate with individuals often overlooked by mainstream media. They craft narratives and visual pieces as representations for minority groups and small gestures of warmth, hoping their work might bring comfort to someone's heart in a fleeting moment.

Their creative portfolio includes fanfiction inspired by Mamamoo members, sketches capturing the beauty of Southern California landscapes, and aesthetic dashboards born from their career in data analysis. Through these diverse mediums,Yipeng Xiao seeks to balance personal expression with meaningful connections, embodying their belief in the quiet power of art to uplift and inspire.

Ready or Not, it's a Final Girl; Adapting Film to Board Games (Demo)

Nadia Formisano

My demo showcases an adaptation of a film narrative (Ready or Not) into analog game format. The medium allows the narrative to become interactive and change with player choice, serving as an example of how to retain a plot and a particular impact on an audience (in this case, one of tension) through adaptation. The demo is an expansion of the single-player board game Final Girl, the existing expansions of which were stripped into individual components (i.e. cards, tokens, etc.) and charted to determine how the mechanics function and apply these principles to the new version. Important point of the film's plot were identified for adaptation and mechanics were adjusted to allow for them to exist in the game and have a similar effect on a player as they did the protagonist of the movie.

The game shows how narratives can be adapted across mediums while still retaining their influence on the intended audience, and the methods of breaking down both game mechanics and narrative points can be extrapolated to more complex scenarios to allow for the immersion of an individual in a narrative which they might not be able to otherwise experience, including ones from other cultures or marginalized identities.
The expansion is currently complete and playable, though the new game elements are still working towards a final aesthetic design. At the time of the conference, all elements will be able to be handled and played with on-site so that attendees can experience the immersive narrative.

Demo Link

https://youtu.be/-CbNGGEBh6o

Works Cited

Porfirio, AJ. Final Girl. Van Ryder Games, 2021.
Gillet and Bettinelli-Olpin, directors. Ready or Not. Searchlight Pictures, 2019.

Author's Statement

Nadia Formisano (M.A.) is a recent graduate of the University of Waterloo's Rhetoric and Communication Design program. She is a member of the Canadian Association for Italian Studies and a community member at the Games Institute. Her research focuses on the effects of translation of a text on different language groups, seeing translation as a form of adaptation. She is currently exploring how to adapt a cultural narrative into different languages and mediums. Nadia participated in CAIS' 2023 annual conference as a panelist for the roundtable "ChatGPT and AI Tools Beyond Plagiarism" and recently presented her paper (Climate) Changes in English to French Translation at SAGE's Dis/Connections symposium.

Demo of Tactile and Immersive Card Game Controller/Simulation

Andrew Oster and Chia Lo Chen

Physical card games have a layer of immersion and tactile sensations that aren't present in Card Games played in a virtual environment. The controller is designed to replicate these immersive sensory experiences using a variety of hardware components in conjunction with the Demo Build Interactive Scene which is a low-fidelity prototype of a card game that showcases the functionality of the controller. The main sensory experiences that the controller simulates are the motion of drawing a card using a slider potentiometer and the motion of placing a card using RFID technology. There is a blank RFID card that communicates with an RFID Scanner located under a small pedestal on the controller that simulates the action of placing and removing a card in the game space. The controller also features a series of input buttons and a joystick that allows the user to interact with the game on a more technical level. There is also a series of LEDs that communicate different states to the user and a small motor to provide more feedback when drawing a card. The Demo Interactive Scene features a repetitive game loop that consists of multiple phases that require the player to interact with the different components on the controller. The main objective of this project is to allow people who can only play card games in a virtual setting to get the same immersive experience that's present in a physical environment with physical cards.

Demo Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Hc-Lim6AQ0

Author Statements

This immersive controller demo's authors are Andrew Oster and Chia Lo Chen. The design, planning, and iterations were done by both while the electronics assembly, controller, and Demo Scene programming was done by Andrew. The CAD work and modelling was done by Chia Lo Chen. They are currently students in and affiliated with the Game Development and Interactive Media program at Ontario Tech University. This controller was created as an assignment for the class Industrial Design for Game Hardware. The demo that is being showcased is a controller that uses different electrical components to simulate the tactile

sensations and immersion of a playing a card game in a physical environment while playing in a virtual setting.

Mine

Joel White

Mine is a demo for a management simulator that challenges the genre's tendency to reify idealized narratives about capitalism. In management simulators, the player is often the worker and owner of the means of production and is neither alienated from their labour nor used to extract surplus value. Rather, by repetitively working various game mechanics, the player is rewarded through capital accumulation of which they are the primary beneficiary. While narratives of stable, fair, and rewarding work may be especially appealing as an escape from the precarious labour conditions of neo-liberal capitalism, they do not offer players an escape from capitalism's underlying logic. Mine offers players such an escape by encouraging them to rebel against the game itself and its demands for their labour.

In Mine, the player character contracts to take care of a water mining and spaceship refuelling facility on a remote asteroid; the player agrees to remain at the facility until their loan from its owners is paid off with interest, an estimated three months. They must complete a regular list of tasks that include depositing water, fixing machinery, and transporting drills. Their goals and progress toward repayment are communicated through a diegetic, company-owned user interface. As the timeframe for repayment continually extends, the player must disobey their UI-assigned routine and manipulate facility equipment to escape, helped along by coded notes from the previous caretaker.

A longer demo of Mine is currently under development for CMCT 6300 at York University.

Demo Link

https://thethirdmedium.itch.io/mine

Joel White ICGAN Author Information:

Joel White is a master's student in the Communication and Culture program at York University. His research examines a wide range of topics related to digital gaming, such as the creation of player narratives through game mechanics, the dynamics of different types of player-avatar relationships, and the accessibility potentials afforded by having digital games in public libraries. His published games writing includes the narrative essays "PSA: Take Care of Your Horses" in *Unwinnable Exploits* and "Conquering the Curriculum" in *Play the Past*, as well as a forthcoming academic article in *Press Start* titled "How 2B[?]: The Narrative Mechanics of Posthumanism in *NieR: Automata*." Though Joel especially loves roleplaying and turn-based strategy games, he's more than happy to chat with anybody about their favourite games and research.

C'est la vie! A demo proposal for ICGAN'25

Jonathan Lessard

Gameplay video link : https://youtu.be/k9J2yqpJSak (3min)

C'est la vie! takes literally the idiom that one has to play with the cards that life deals them. Concretely, the game is a card-based life simulation in which the player chooses life events and circumstances presented as a hand of cards. More positive cards requires spending "cosmic credit" while negative cards earn them—in other words, players are required to accept unfortunate situations to make better ones accessible. Each life stage is presented as a "level" in which players need to maintain their character needs above zero and achieve a certain number of age-relevant aspirations.

The game project *C'est la vie!* emerged as an attempt to explore the peculiar aesthetics and playful potential of recent image and text generators. The pre-generated illustrations of the cards focusing on relatable and mundane events highlight the uncanniness of data-driven machine visual "imagination" presenting an imagery that is both familiar and weird, very human and alien at the same time. At each life stage, players are rewarded with a new online generated character portrait and a poem, both taking into account the specific cards that were played. In both cases, the expressive range of modern machine learning models go way beyond previous procedural portrait or grammar-based text-generation systems. On the other hand, images and text obtained this way are much less predictable and reflect the ingrained social and cultural biases of their training material, while raising question of data acquisition and exploitation ethics.

C'est la vie! is developed in the Unity engine. All the pre-generated card images were created in conversation with ChatGPT (which acts as an interface to DALL·E 3) in a process not unlike working with a concept artist ("more like this", "less like that"). The portrait images generated live when playing the game are also sourced from a direct call to DALL·E 3 with a prompt reflecting the cards played until then. The poems are sourced from GPT4o. My goal is to move from these general closed-sourced models to hosting fine-tuned ersions of open models (and ideally ethically sourced models as claimed by "Public Diffusion").

Author Statement

Jonathan Lessard, Phd.
Behaviour Interactive Research Chair in Game Design
Associate professor
Department of Design and Computation Arts
Concordia University

Jonathan Lessard is a game designer, researcher, and professor at Concordia University; and current Behaviour Interactive Research Chair in Game Design. For the past ten years as founder of the LabLabLab, he has been exploring the playful affordances of various technologies and concepts such as natural language processing and possible worlds theory. His main research interests include emergent narratives, complex simulations, and game design history. He has published in world leading journals and conferences such as Games and Culture, Foundations for Digital Games (FDG), and International Conference on Interactive Digital Storytelling (ICIDS)

Think Box: Exploring the Intersection of Accessibility and Asymmetric Game Design

Author Keywords:

BCI, Game, Non-Verbal, Disability, Communication

Authors

Lauren Olivier, 3rd year Undergraduate Student in the Game Development and Interactive Media program at Ontario Tech University.

Michael Quecano, 4th year Undergraduate Student in the Game Development and Interactive Media program at Ontario Tech University.

Lucas Abramczuk, 4th year Undergraduate Student in the Game Development and Interactive Media program at Ontario Tech University.

Abstract

This demo explores the integration of Brain-Computer Interfaces (BCIs) with cooperative asymmetric game design through our Think Box game prototype. Think Box is a two-player game combining tactile, digital, and neuroadaptive technologies to foster inclusivity, particularly for individuals with non-verbal communication challenges.

In Think Box, Player 1 interacts with a physical puzzle cube, solving tactile challenges on four of its sides, while Player 2 uses a BCI and virtual interface to guide Player 1 by communicating problem-solving cues through neural feedback. Tasks include symbol matching, activating sequences, and colour alignment, with success relying on effective collaboration between the players despite asymmetrical communication methods.

The design builds on prior BCI research focused on accessibility and communication, introduced as a playful, game-based approach. Developed iteratively, the system combines 3D-printed prototypes, Unity-powered digital interfaces, and the NextMind neural interface to interpret and transmit Player 2's intent to an LCD textbox. This unique blend of physical manipulation and neural feedback creates a platform for exploring non-verbal communication in an accessible, collaborative gameplay scenario.

Think Box highlights the potential of neuroadaptive gameplay to bridge communication gaps for individuals with non-verbal conditions, such as cerebral palsy. By integrating BCIs into an engaging, recreational environment, the system reduces cognitive and emotional strain while fostering meaningful connections. Think Box merges assistive and recreational technologies, showcasing its implications for inclusive design, therapeutic applications, and broader accessibility innovations.

Link to Demo Video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EX2SkReuOHE

DEEP DIVE

Craig Fahner, Matthew Waddell, Peter Nichols, and Mathew Lindenberg

We are submitting DEEP DIVE as a playable demo for the 2025 ICGaN Conference.

Digital communication technologies play a significant role in determining the limits and possibilities of contemporary sociality. Increasingly, the social world is shaped according to the interests of monopolistic digital platforms. The experience of life via platforms is asymmetrically skewed according to mechanisms that collect personal data on users, classifying them according to their potential as consumers within the attention economy. With Deep Dive, we reconstitute the surveillant and commodifying mechanisms of platforms so they can be brought into critical focus for our audience.

Deep Dive is an interactive game that explores the operation of algorithmic classification systems in an immersive underwater 3D environment. Deep Dive uses a gaze detection mechanism to determine when a player has looked at a particular object. Eventually, the game environment becomes increasingly populated with related objects, to the extent that everything the player sees is a result of the things they have looked at in the past. This replicates the action of recommendation and classification systems like Facebook's News Feed, which enclose users inside "filter bubbles" that reproduce users' own individual interests and tendencies rather than reflecting a neutral public sphere. To examine and represent this phenomenon, we created a GPT-based backend that continuously collects information on what the user has looked at, generating new objects based on the machine learning system's output. As the player moves through the game, they observe the way that they are being classified according to the things they consume. After moving through an increasingly uncanny algorithmically constructed world, the player is confronted with a representation of their body as a network of collected data, which is destroyed by successfully navigating a labyrinthine series of "dark ux" riddles. The game is playable in the web browser and will work across a variety of platforms.

Demo Link

https://elfs-end.itch.io/deepdive

Author Statements

Craig Fahner (he/him) is Visiting Assistant Professor of Integrated Design & Media at New York University's Tandon School of Engineering. His research and creative work questions and reimagines the ways that media technologies shape everyday life. His work has been presented in museum exhibitions, concerts, publications, and open source software repositories. Recently, his work on artistic models for alternative communication platforms was published in a volume entitled You're Muted: Performance, Precarity and the Logic of Zoom edited by Mark Nunes and Cassandra Ozog (Bloomsbury, 2024). He is co-investigator in the Data Fluencies project, a Mellon Foundation-funded research initiative that is working to establish critical public literacies around the impacts of data-driven technologies. He is a member of a collective called Deep Dive featuring artists Mat Lindenberg, Matthew Waddell and Peter Nichols, which is producing video games that challenge the economies of attention that shape the affordances of the contemporary internet.