

CONTENT

DESIGN DOCUMENT

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****Game pic****

Introduction

Game Summary Pitch

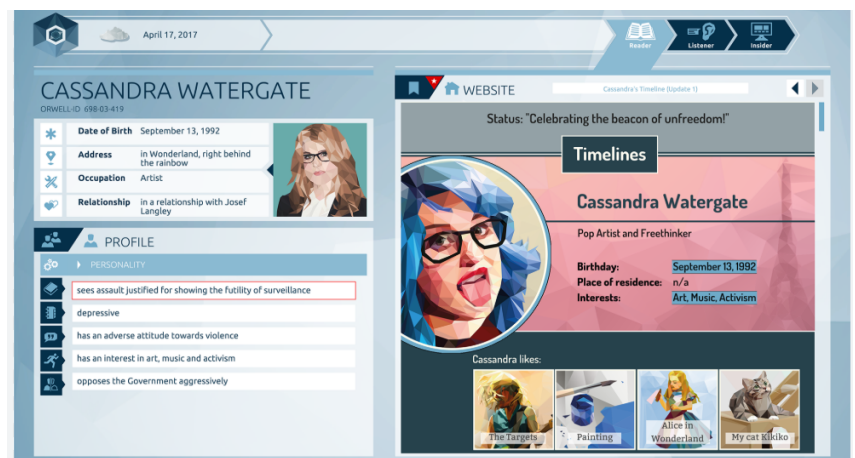
CONTENT is a single player serious game exploring the experience of a Handler/Fixer/Producer of misinformation. They manage a number of journalists, influencers and other content creators in order to meet misinformation goals set by a shady boss.

The game is loosely inspired by the amazing work of the investigative journalists who produced the Putin's Periodistas - many thanks and much respect to them! We don't recreate the actors, agents or institutions involved in the articles nor aim to recreate the exact dynamics. What we aim to achieve is to highlight that the content consumed by many around the world is part of a production line where at different levels, agendas of power and influence shape these messages, distort truth and are used to undermine democracies, undermine trust in fundamental societal institutions and undo much that keeps people safe.

Inspiration

Orwell

We were inspired by its simple, clear and real world interface. The computer interface is how you would interact with a computer. We were also inspired by the mood and feeling of truth and coverup, all conveyed through a simple computer monitor.



Papers Please

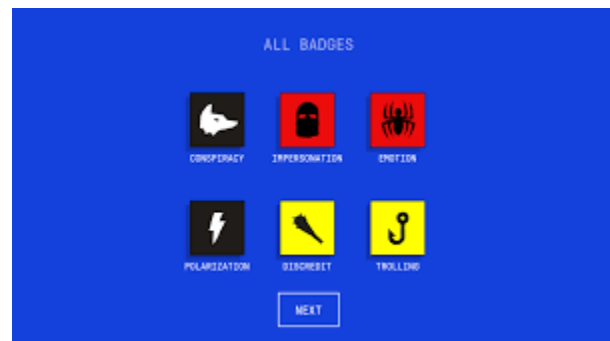
We tried to capture and replicate some of the feeling of oppressive pressure in Papers Please, where the addition of new



rules adds to the pressure and you never have enough resources. In Paper Please, you are a cog in a bureaucratic machine where you end up choosing between making moral choices for others versus heating the house or feeding the family, and making moral choices leads to family members dying. We used the idea of the boss heaping more and more stories upon you, while not having enough resources to keep your minions committed and working hard. Leading to failure. The experience of the game is meant to be uncomfortable.

Bad News Game

In this game, you play as an influencer trying to create fake news using some common techniques (polarization, emotional content etc.). Playing as the 'bad guy' lets players experience first-hand how fake news is created. What's



remarkable is that the game, developed with the help of psychologists and behavioural scientists, actually increases the players' resilience to fake news and manipulation, as demonstrated by research (as discussed in this article: <https://behavioralscientist.org/a-new-way-to-inoculate-people-against-misinformation/>).

Player Experience

The entire game is set in your office as you take on the role of the manager/fixer of a pool of journalists/influencers. You are pushing content, content that promotes your boss's agenda. Most of the

actions are achieved through your laptop, where you assign journalists to the story assignments given to you by your shady boss.

Platform

The game is developed to be experienced on a web browser

Development Software

- HTML&CSS&Javascript for the demo version

Genre

Singleplayer, management, sim, political

Target Audience

Sim and management game enjoyers, those interested in politically-themed games.

Concept

Gameplay overview

As the manager/fixer you must manage and assign influencers to stories set by your shady boss. You must assign the right influencer to the different stories.

Influencers have 2 stats at the moment:

- Reach (up to 10,000)
- Commitment (1-10)

Stories also have 2 stats:

- Audience target (up to 10,000)

-Fake Rating (1-10) This represents how fake the content of the article is and therefore how hard it is to propagate. It equates to a difficulty modifier.

Players have to assign a sufficiently endowed (in Reach and Commitment) influencer to each story in order for that story to reach its audience target.

The first 2 turns should be easy as players get used to what the game is asking them to do, to assign journalists to stories, make sure the chance of meeting the audience target for each story is maximised etc. From turn 3, the difficulty should increase. The difficulty will increase because of 2 things:

- 1) Each time an influencer works on a story their commitment reduces by 3- each influencer starts off with a set score unique to them up to 10.
- 2) The boss increases the number of story assignments that need to be completed by 1 each turn.

So from turn 2 players will need to use incentives like the journalist “Award” and “Financial bonus” to incentivise their influencers. The Award and Bonus each raises the Commitment of the influencer. The problem is that these will never be enough.

We gave the boss a direct link to you via the mobile phone, so each turn an obnoxiously loud phone noise and vibration would go off giving you new orders, threatening instructions/ feedback. The phone noise is intentionally intrusive to give the sense of threat, danger and discomfort. The boss is crucial to set up the feeling that you are not in control over your own destiny, that actually you are a cog in a brutal machine and that you are not in a comfortable place. The boss is never identified, nor is his agenda, but there are enough hints (hopefully) to give the player a sense of the type of people they are dealing with.

Primary Mechanics

Mechanic
<u>Boss sets Story Assignments</u> Each turn the boss sets a story assignment. For each subsequent turn the number of stories increases by 1.
<u>Player assigns influencers to stories</u> The player assigns influencers to reach the audience target of the story.
<u>Player give awards or bonuses to low commitment Influencers</u> The influencers attempt to achieve the story assignments.
<u>Threat level from boss (boss anger)</u> Each turn the threat level increases, when it reaches a threshold the player loses.
<u>Influencer commitment reduces</u> Each turn the influencer's commitment reduces by 3.

Controls

Mouse only

Artwork

The artwork concept was inspired by the opulent location where the Player would have their office - a Baroque style room, desk and large window overlooking elegant gardens. In a future iteration of the game, the backdrop should change based on the gameplay. At the start of the game, the

location should look almost idyllic. As the game progresses and the pressure on the Player increases, the backdrop will change to add to the feeling of discomfort, with a darkening room, darkening sky outside, messy desk and overflowing ashtray.

Plans for future development

Gameplay Mechanics

Influencers will have more worked up stats beyond reach and commitment. For instance, they may have traits or strengths and weaknesses based on their prototype identities that influence how well they write and cover the stories. For instance, “conspiracist” influencers will be better at covering conspiracy stories, opportunists may be a jack of all trades, but master of none.

There would be a more worked up way to recruit influencers.

There would be a rudimentary economy, so that depending on how well the stories do, there would be some income, along with all sorts of dodgy advertising payments, sponsorship from foreign press and cultural funds. Likewise, the influencers would need paying, bonuses would cost.

The levers that you have as a manager would be increased, to include Botfarms that you can hire to boost the reach of a particular story, again limited and costly.

The audience target will be expanded to include different types of audience (see Democracy series of games), so audiences could be made up of:

- conspiracy theorists
- far right

-far left
-centrists

The story types themselves will be expanded and will also be more complicated, they won't necessarily fit neatly into one type, but might be made up of several different types. Perhaps the story assignment might require scandal and conspiracy which would make juggling the assignment of influencers more interesting.

The choice of Influencer will therefore become more strategic and require more interesting decisions.

The gameplay mechanic where commitment is lost each turn will be changed into commitment lost when writing stories that don't fit the influencers style/traits and/or when they don't manage to meet their audience target.

The number of turns that players will be able to play will be significantly extended so that the player will feel like they are carrying out campaigns of influence rather than single stories. An add-on could be that there are later missions that require sustained undermining of the elections of a country to influence the outcome.

We also always planned to include an narrative arc to the game (like in Suzerain), to give the player context as to why they are in the position that they are, why they are carrying out the orders of the boss, some idea by the end of the game what the boss is trying to achieve and a sense of the harm that this can have and the brutality of the system when individuals are caught up in it. We hint currently in the game at family members and including these (like in Papers, Please) as possible victims is intended.

We were also thinking that there would be random events that would crop up, pesky investigative journalists, weddings, our boss using up our

precious Awards to give favour to diplomats. Our influencers having mishaps, getting arrested or needing bailing out of prison.

Players will also be able to “win” the game by surviving and fulfilling the boss’ demands. Though we are mindful of not wanting to glorify this outcome in any way, but instead to reflect on this outcome, the harm done etc. Perhaps a review of stories covered and the narrative outcomes they had.

In conclusion, this game idea has a huge potential beyond the bare bones prototype we have prepared in this game jam. We are brimming with ideas to make this game fun, engaging, but also give the audience some exposure to and insight into the murky world of CONTENT creation for national agendas.