

Ava D - Proposal

by Ava Daniels

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BA GAMES – Project Proposal – ACCA6020

Independent Project

By Ava Daniels

"How does narrative environment design influence the appeal and immersion of isolated quests or journeys undertaken by a solitary protagonist in video games?"

Various game genres have solitary protagonists, each having different feelings to the game. Examples include survival games, adventure games, RPGs, walking simulators, post-apocalyptic titles, exploration games, platformers, and horror games.

Research Questions:

1. How does environment design affect player immersion and convey the game's story and lore?
2. What significance does a solitary protagonist hold in games, and how does this impact the game's appeal?
3. How do apocalypse or post-apocalyptic settings facilitate solo survival journeys, and which is more popular among players?
4. Can a survival game enrich the story and narrative experience more?
5. How can the above narratives draw from real events or genuine threats and the effects?
6. Does the game's appeal change when the journey is not completely solo, a lone survivor?

Aims and SMART Goals:

1. **Goal:** Identify why players engage with solitary journeys in terms of immersion.
 - o **Specific:** Research environment design methods to enhance immersion.
 - o **Measurable:** Quantify player preference for specific types of worlds/narratives.
 - o **Achievable:** Conduct tests based on existing research to determine immersion techniques.
 - o **Connection to Research Questions:** Investigated immersion and environment design and their impact on appeal.
2. **Investigate Game concepts:**
 - o Explore survival games in homesteading vs. traveling examples.
 - o Analyse how narratives unfold through journeys and how environments support stories.
 - o **Connection to Research Questions:** Addresses the significance of solitary protagonists, and appeal of survival games.
3. **Understanding Popularity:**
 - o Investigate the popularity of post-apocalyptic games among players and designers.
 - o **Connection to Research Questions:** Ties to the popularity of post-apocalyptic vs. traditional apocalyptic settings.

4. Player Experience:

- Explore how post-apocalyptic media teaches survival, while games offer choices within set mechanics.
- **Connection to Research Questions:** Links to how narratives can reflect real events and how appeal varies with levels of solitude.

These goals are feasible because of existing studies, books and video documentaries.

Evaluate on how narratives can balance player freedom with storytelling to enhance immersion. This project provides a fresh perspective on solitary experiences, which could help game designers build compelling stories and environments.

Examine the ethics of dystopian settings and their impact on players. Do these narratives create pessimism about the future? Research will be conducted on how games make believable narratives while revealing their purpose and how apocalyptic themes affect players' views of reality.

To conduct this research, I will use a diverse group of participants aged 16-60, including both gamers and non-gamers, to ensure a comprehensive understanding of immersion in survival narratives. Data collection will involve surveys and gameplay sessions, which will be analysed using qualitative methods to identify key themes. I hope to complete most of the research by term 2 to create and test my environment, and then analyse the results. I expect to find a connection between popular single-player games in post-apocalyptic settings and higher immersion in narratives inspired by real events.

By the end, I'll know how to design environments that maximize immersion and enhance the story, connecting with themes of isolation. I'm interested in exploring game flow and ludology in these experiences. My deliverables will include a study of my hypothesis and related areas to build a solid knowledge foundation.

I'll apply this understanding to create a rich environment that supports my narrative for a game idea. My initial concept imagines a future after an apocalypse, with overgrown buildings and a positive coexistence of remaining humans and surviving animals.

This project addresses ethical concerns in narrative presentation and the portrayal of solitary protagonists. I aim to avoid outdated tropes, ensuring characters are well-developed and prioritize player well-being through mindful gameplay over repetitive mechanics.

I will explore psychological and social messages while ensuring careful world-building to prevent cultural appropriation. If violence is depicted, it will be approached thoughtfully, prompting reflection on its impact. I'll also investigate how various media have historically influenced public well-being, using examples.

As a game designer, I must come at these themes carefully to create a respectful experience and not cross a boundary. My choices will shape the design and narrative.

I'm drawn to survival media for its creativity and escapism, often feeling better prepared for own solo survival. I'm particularly interested in video games featuring solo journeys, envisioning my own adventures away from society. Survival games focus on basic survival rather than thriving, appealing to those who crave time away from societal pressures.

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the challenges of isolation. In survival and post-apocalyptic settings, characters confront survival responsibilities, free from social constraints. This reflects my

thoughts on anti-consumerism and a desire for simplicity outside capitalism. These narratives offer an escape from societal expectations and encourage a deeper connection with the world around you.

Brief Literature Review

Through Google Scholar, I've identified key Literature that align with my research interests, including:

1. **End Game** [1]
Lorenzo DiTommaso's overture, "Videogames and the Contemporary Apocalyptic Imagination," discusses the history of apocalyptic themes in games.
The essay by Gi Soo Kim and Lorenzo DiTommaso, "Determinism and Human Instrumentality in Apocalyptic Video Games," examines apocalypticism and human agency, highlighting its effects on players.
I am also interested in Emma Fraser's essay, "Cities of the (Digital) Apocalypse," and Oleksandra Kuzmenko's work on "Anthroponyms, Apocalyptic Dualism, and Identity Formation," which explores narrative conflicts in post-apocalyptic settings.
2. Danah Boyd. "Finding Hope Within Hopelessness: An Exploration of Critical Dystopia." This discusses interactive narratives and immersion, relevant to my world-building strategies.[2]
3. Kelly, Shawna & Nardi, Bonnie. "Playing with Sustainability." This examines game mechanics and their social, economic, and environmental representations, aiding my understanding of survival dynamics.[3]
4. Pamela Maria Schmidt the "The Garden of Humanity." This investigates post-apocalyptic hope and cultural commentary.[4]
5. "Secrets, Stealth, and Survival: The Silent Child in the Video Games Little Nightmares and Inside." By Emma Reay, for a study on the above games. [5]
6. Reid, Samantha & Downing, Steven. "Survival-Themed Video Games and Cultural Constructs of Power." This discusses cultural attitudes towards optimism and pessimism in the context of survival games.[6]
7. **Studying Videogames** by Julian McDougall & Wayne O'Brien. Specifically, Chapters 1,3 about Game and media concepts and the social effects.[7]

Additionally, I'll will try get access to **Broken Mirrors** to read *Post-Apocalyptic Play* by Emma Fraser[8], as well as continuing to read *How Games Move Us* by Catherine Isbister[9] and *The Meaning of Videogames* by Steven E. Jonas[10].

Selection of Relevant Models & Concepts

I will analyse aesthetics in game design, emphasizing narrative and setting's role in player immersion through the 4Cs: context, challenge, choice, and control. By examining similar games, I aim to identify effective design choices and explore flow theory for creating immersive environments. I'll delve into narratology to understand how narrative design shapes player agency and emotional connections. I'll study thematic consistency, world-building techniques, and emotional design

elements to ensure depth in my game. Existing games and design projects will serve as references, informing my methodology and analysis.

Games I Will Be Exploring

I will research the following games: **The Long Dark** [10], **Subnautica** [11], **Green Hell** [12], **I Am Alive** [13], **Fallout** [14], **Grounded** [15], **Raft** [16], **Near Death** [17]. For their survival themes specifically. While I haven't played all these, I'll use my first gameplay experiences of some for research. I'm also in awe of the titles from Playdead, like **Limbo** [18] and **Inside** [19], for their creative narratives. Other games I've enjoyed that touch on themes I want to explore include, **Journey** [20], **Arctico** [21], **Little Nightmares** [22], **Planet of Lana** [23], **Firewatch** [24], **Everybody's gone to the rapture** [25], and **The Stanley Parable** [26]

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Ava D - Proposal

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

66/100

BA GAMES – PROJECT PROPOSAL – ACCA6020
INDEPENDENT PROJECT (5%)

Student Ava Daniels_____
Mark__66

Intro / A&O (500 words)

Project title; Identification of a specific problem to be investigated; Well-defined aims and SMART objectives; Explaining why this project is worth doing; Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success; Description any deliverables that will be produced at the end of the project A project title has been proposed with clear and concise aims and objectives including SMART objectives and goals.	40	28
Background to the Project (500 words)		
Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review; Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project Identifying what has already been done within the field; Topic familiarity; Brief literature review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters rather than just websites; Selection of relevant models & concepts Suggestions for a number of literature sources are provided, with a rationale for inclusion – these are more of a list than a mini-review but this was	40	25

following advice given by supervisors. Interesting comparisons made between isolation, survival and Covid-19 – this might be an interesting aspect of the research to explore. The project's scope may need to be discussed at this point as it feels the proposal is quite ambitious, but this is a good place to start from – we can isolate the most interesting lines of inquiry and focus on these in the coming weeks. A long list of potential games has been provided as sources to investigate for case studies and/or examples to draw inspiration from.		
Document Presentation		
Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation; Flow of narrative/fluency; Coherence; Word processed ; Correct use of referencing with bibliography; Strict word limit A more traditional introduction and conclusion would be good to see with an introduction leading the reader in to the Aims and Objectives and SMART goals and a conclusion providing a short summary. Research intentions are communicated well in the	20	13

document.		
TOTAL	100	66

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