

# PLAYING ON THE EDGE OF THE ABYSS

How do narrative, game mechanics and violence intersect in the video games *Spec Ops: The Line* and *This War of Mine* to create meaningful aesthetic experiences?



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Year 4

BA Liberal Arts and Sciences  
(International Relations)

Independent Research Project  
(20 credits)

Supervisor: Dr. Gregory Salter

# How did I get here?

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## My background:

- International Relations (major)
- Music
- English Literature
- Game Studies

# How did I get here?

## The ludology/narratology debate

**Game Studies** the international journal of computer game research volume 1, issue 1 July 2001

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### The Gaming Situation

by Markku Eskelinen

#### 1. Introduction

The first point of departure for this article is a kind of paradox or contradiction. Outside academic theory people are usually excellent at making distinctions between narrative, drama and games. If I throw a ball at you I don't expect you to drop it and wait until it starts telling stories. On the other hand, if and when games and especially computer games are studied and theorized they are almost without exception colonised from the fields of literary, theatre, drama and film studies. Games are seen as interactive narratives, procedural stories or remediated cinema (1). On top of everything else, such definitions, despite being successful in terms of influence or funding, are conceptually weak and ill-grounded, as they are usually derived from a very limited knowledge of mere mainstream drama or outdated literary theory, or both. Consequently, the seriously and hilariously obsolete presuppositions of Aristotelian drama, commedia dell'arte, Victorian novels, and Proppian folklore continue to dominate the scene. To put it less nicely, it's an attempt to skip the 20th century altogether and avoid any intellectual contact with it, a consumerist double assassination of both the avant-garde and advanced theory. The final irony is of course that in the long run such a practice may turn out to be even commercially incorrect.

In any case, in what follows I'll try to make some sense of what I call the gaming situation by trying to pinpoint or at least locate the most crucial and elementary qualities that set it apart from dramatic and narrative situations,

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Excerpts from his early fiction were published in The Review of Contemporary Fiction (Summer 1996) according to which he's also "easily the most iconoclastic figure on the Finnish literary scene."

He has given paper and other presentations at various international conferences, including the series of Digital Arts and Culture conferences and the ACM conferences on Hypertext and Hypermedia.

# The interdisciplinary approach

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Eliminating the binary between games and other art forms

- It's incorrect

- Limits what we can learn about games

- eg. How they borrow from/develop other

art forms



# Dissertation aims

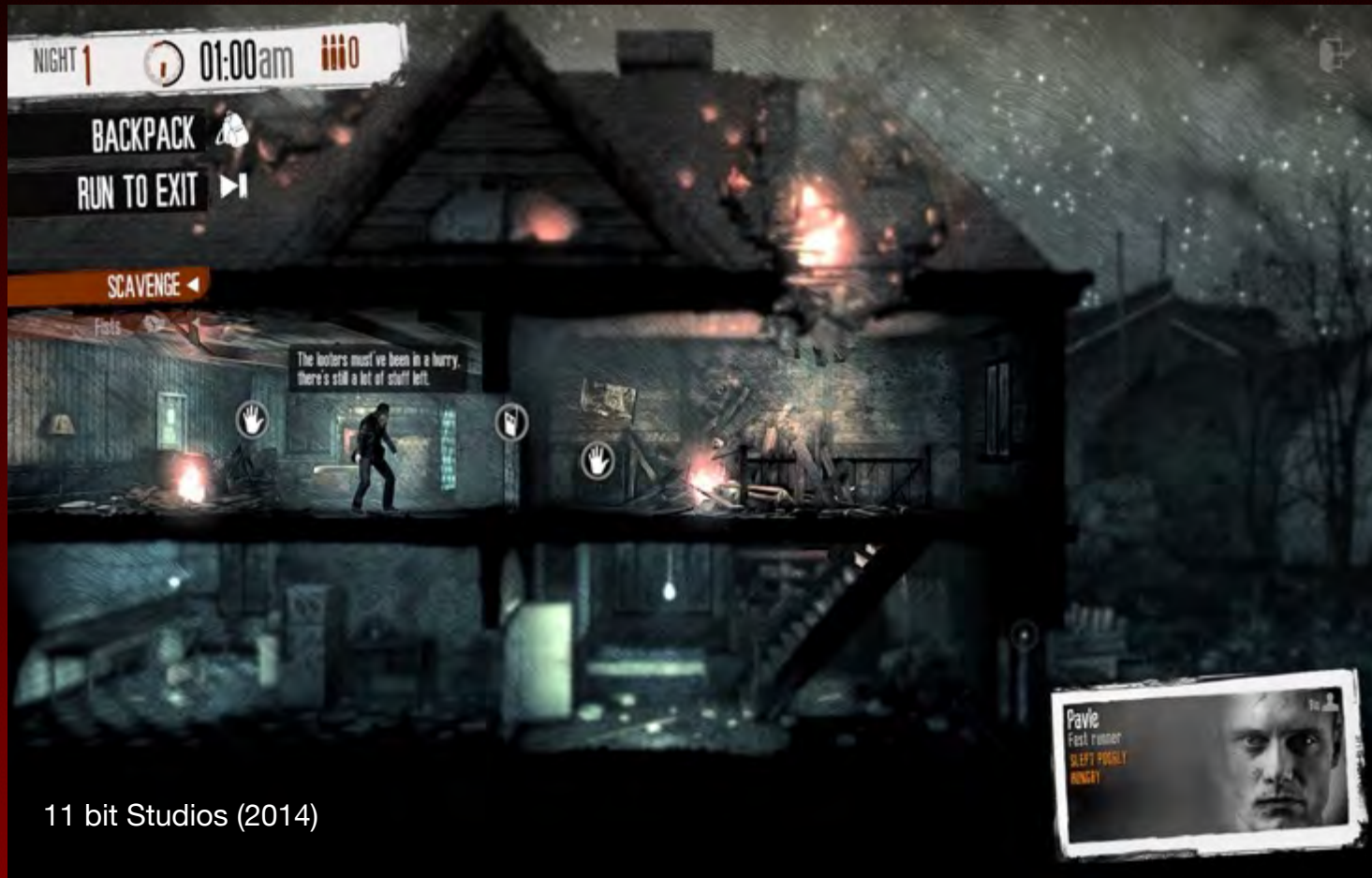
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To demonstrate that video games should be studied using an interdisciplinary approach

To use my background to bring a fresh perspective to the study of video games

To help legitimise video games as an art form

# The interdisciplinary approach in practice



# The interdisciplinary approach in practice

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## Game Studies

Procedural Rhetoric (Bogost, 2007)

Ludonarrative Dissonance (Hocking, 2007)

Game Emotions (Rusch, 2009)

## Literature

Unreliable narrator (Booth, 1961)

Function of storylines (Singer, 2004)

Death of the author (Barthes, 1967)

## History of Art

Aboutness (Danto, 1974)

Post-1960s performance art (Fluxus group, John Beuy)

Abjection (Kristeva, 1941)

# The interdisciplinary approach in practice

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Game Emotions (Rusch, 2009)




'Abjection' (Kristeva, 1941)



Combined, can explain why the experience of *This War of Mine* is so powerful for players




# The interdisciplinary approach in practice



Grimno » Reviews » This War of Mine

6,833 people found this review helpful  
352 people found this review funny

 **Recommended**  
0.0 hrs last two weeks / 17.1 hrs on record

Posted: 15 Nov, 2014 @ 1:43am  
Updated: 15 Nov, 2014 @ 1:45am

Entered a building with other people.  
The building's description had said "Danger" which ment hostiles. Bandits.  
I grabbed my knife and was ready for those bandits.  
I saw one bandit and after breaking in through a window, she ran calling for backup.  
One guy showed up with a shotgun and chased me off but I waited.  
He searched, and couldn't find me and then I got the drop on him.  
We fought, he couldn't shoot, and three stabs later he fell.  
I grabbed the shotgun and went inside.  
My friends needed food, and these bandits were killers. They deserved what they got.  
I grabbed food, supplies, and another bandit showed up!  
I fired at them with the shotgun, and they dropped with a gurgling scream.  
One bandit ran after me! Surely they had a knife!  
No... she ran past me to the man's corpse.  
She was crying. She called me a murderer.  
I fired again and she dropped.  
There was silence then, and I had to hurry up and grab the rest of the supplies before more bandits showed up.  
I opened a closet, and snagged the food.  
But, the inventory of the closet said "Private"  
Someone owned this wardrobe?  
I looked outside toward the other building, and between the two.. a garden someone built?  
One guy had mentioned they were running low on meds.  
This.... no.. it couldn't be, It just couldn't be!  
This wasn't... this wasn't an abandoned building being picked clean.  
This was another group's safehouse.  
These people are.... were.... survivors!  
...and "I" was the bandit.

# The benefits of an interdisciplinary approach

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Allowed me to construct unique, new arguments

I could draw on knowledge from across my degree

Appropriate for the art form being analysed

**Thank you for listening**





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