

**WALK SIM**  
**WALK SIM** 

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# Walking Simulators

An emerging genre of video games, a heavily narrative driven experience with minimal player agency [You can look and walk around.] in a video game space. Many people have a problem with calling them video games instead, opting to make fun of them by referring to them as "walking simulators" or "screen-shot generators" if the games are graphically pleasing enough. Despite the negativity of the name it was co-opted and it stuck as the genre title.



# Why

It started with The Beginner's Guide. It wasn't my first walking sim I've played but this one struck a chord with me. When I went online I found that a lot of other people felt the same way. Critical perception was positive, however the whole perception of the game was polarized. It was either hated or loved. The critical reaction simply comes from how new video games are as a medium—how the language for them is underdeveloped. In essence, nearly any interactive experience could be considered a video game. Pong is just as much a video game as World of

Warcraft is, and yet any person can tell you they are entirely different things. Despite not having the right language, what makes these "walking simulators" so successful?

Personally, they're incredibly engaging, an overarching narrative, spoken or written or found in the environment, while you simply explore. Despite being in one "genre", each is as varied as the last. Part of the consensus seems to be simply that because they're so different from current "standard" games, praise is

given for straying from these typical conventions. Though there has to be more, and it's easy to know you like something, it's something else entirely to break it down and put it into words and research.



# Design Challenge

How do you make a game while simultaneously dissecting the genre you're analyzing it in?



# Audience

There's a tricky nuance to a target audience that plays games, especially to those that play smaller indie titles. The audience will range from 18-35, as a general range, though this by itself is far too hopeful, even if over half of the people in this age group play games they're not likely to play what's been described. The problem with the gaming community is that despite a long held standard of "the average gamer" there is in fact no such thing. The average person is more inclined to own only a few games and still likely to only play as much as half of those. Though it's not necessarily correct the phrase "Core Gamer" will be used to describe the audience. Core Gamers are what people would consider as "the average gamer". These are the people who play

lots of games, they have at least 100 games in their library and these are the people you want. They make up roughly 1% of the game playing population. Despite being a small percentage, 1% makes up well over a million people.<sup>10</sup>



# Research

Research has revealed an interesting take on player agency in games, a reason it's included as part of the overall project presently. Different games will have entirely different relationships with their audiences depending on the amount of player agency or co-authorship the player feels they have.<sup>1</sup>

While other articles have found that the strongest part of any walking simulator is its ability to lie to the audience. Despite insisting we love things to be clear and straightforward we still love an unreliable narrator. A twist in perceptions, in ideas; it's mysterious, it's human. "I had to try again the next day, and got an opening bit of narration that was entirely different to what it

had been the day before. I was confused, and also incredibly intrigued, like waking up with a hangover inside your flat but finding your keys on the doorstep. The mystery compels us to solve it."<sup>2</sup>

Some have pointed toward the worlds built for these games, our innate curiosity to reach out and discover, "what happened here?" [In other words, environmental storytelling.]<sup>3</sup>

Another points toward the unique relationship of player to game. How a person doesn't [can't] put themselves entirely into a game [it simply won't happen, though they can certain-

ly be immersive there will always be a degree of separation.] Neither will they entirely separate themselves from the game, only treating it as an object. They adopt a unique relationship with the game instead. "...a player-subject that is created by the game as a 'skin-subject,' adopting the avatar of the game as a skin in order to perceive the game, in which this player-subject acts according to the power structure of the game's rules. This player-subject has an ambiguously defined relation to the player outside of the game, of which it is either a subset among multiple subjectivities, or the temporary subset of one greater moral being."<sup>7</sup>



# Proposal Outline

There's an emerging genre of video games, if you can call them video games, a heavily narrative driven experience in a video game space. Many people have a problem with calling them video games instead, opting to make fun of them by referring to them as "walking simulators" or "screenshot generators" if the games are graphically pleasing enough. Despite a lambasting reaction from many who play games, these same games are lauded by critics, reviewers, and many others.

The critical reaction simply comes from how new video games are as a medium—how the language for them is un-

derdeveloped. In essence, nearly any interactive experience could be considered a video game. Pong is just as much a video game as World of Warcraft is, and yet any person can tell you they are entirely different things. Despite not having the right language, what makes these "walking simulators" so successful?

Personally, they're incredibly engaging, an emotional or comedic overarching narrative, spoken or written, while you simply explore the environment. Just like video games, despite being in one "genre", each is as varied as the last. Some tell

incredibly dramatic stories, fragmented stories, some are comedic, others sad and hopeful, and some are just people trying to understand themselves. Part of the consensus seems to be simply that because they're so different from current "standard" games, praise is given for straying from these typical conventions. Though there has to be more, and it's easy to know you like something, it's something else entirely to break it down and put it into words and research.

The largest and most pivotal part of this project is the research, everything needs to be researched as much as possible, without



it the final product will hardly be achievable. Gathering qualitative data, as quantitative won't be nearly as effective in the scope of this project. Exploring narrative archetypes will fit into this, figuring what is and isn't successful in these regards. After sufficient data has been collected it will be inserted into an "explorable" 3D environment. Taking advantage of the same techniques researched to explore and extrapolate this data into its own entity of similar form and makeup. How this is done precisely is largely up to the data collected.

Simply: what makes a walking simulator so successful? Breaking down several of their key components and finer minutiae.

To understand what makes them so successful [or not]. Then create a standalone game, likely centered around featuring this data while using what's been learned and building a story off all of it.



# STEEP

In the larger world, the realm of digital games have only grown more and more prevalent with the advent of new markets [e.g. Steam, App Store, Play Store]. With these growing markets more and more people are found to be playing games, about half of everyone is playing something. Games used to be niche and narrow, now they've come into the mainstream, the zeitgeist and they're here to stay. With the increased accessibility of playing games there's been a parallel increase in the availability of game making tools. Free or inexpensive options to create games and game assets has led to a boom in independent game development. With that has come a variety of new and inspired games and most importantly an emerging market for these games, including walking simulators.

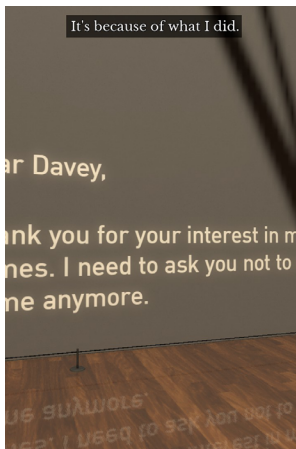


# Inspiration

My biggest sources of inspiration were mainly three games:

- The Beginner's Guide
- The Stanley Parable
- Dr. Langeskov, The Tiger, and The Terribly Cursed Emerald: A Whirlwind Heist

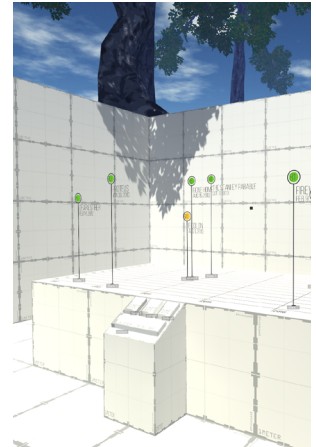
Two developers, William Pugh and Davey Wreden, made The Stanley Parable together before splitting and creating Dr. Langeskov and The Beginner's Guide, respectively.





# Practice

This hadn't been the first time I'd used Unity but even if it's not the first, Unity finds a way to make things difficult. With that and the limited time span in mind I practiced creating and working in Unity.





# Branding

Branding is something important to me, it's a level of presentation and craft that's been heavily emphasized for me and I needed to extend that thinking to this project. I initially landed on PigoPago as the typeface but didn't feel it captured the game. After consideration, I chose to modify League Spartan into a wordmark for Walk Sim Walk Sim, along with creating a small walking person icon to accompany.



[Above] Fall Semester

#333333 OR #E5E5E5

[TITLES/DISPLAY]  
LEAGUE SPARTAN

[Quotes/Soft Text] FreightMicro Pro [Book]

[Body/Small Text] Acumin Pro Condensed [Regular]

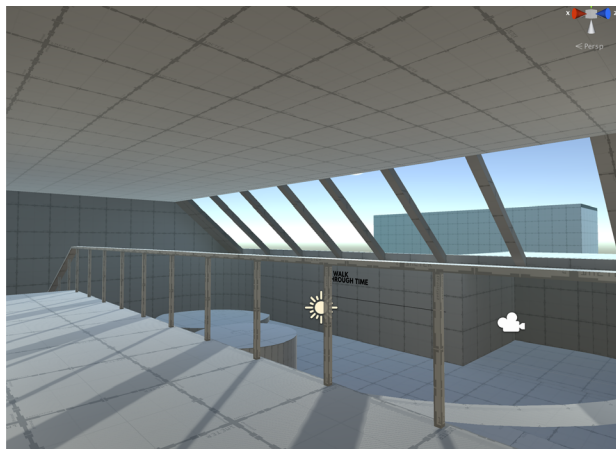


[Above] Spring Semester

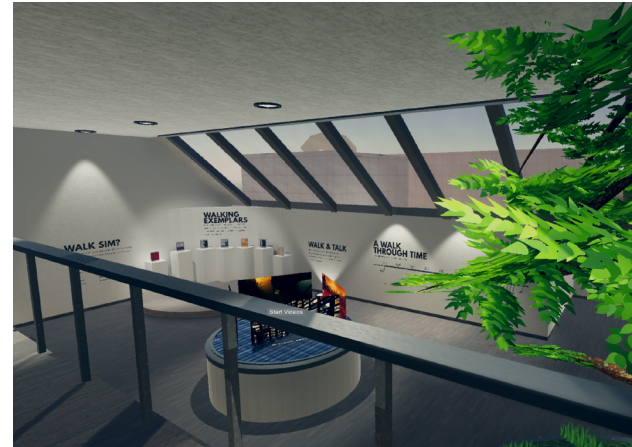


# Early Game Progress

To get going on the game I had to simply start it, I began with the museum space, a simple, and cursory explanation of walking simulators.









# Level Design

Although WSWs is technically one “level” I still went about designing each area in a particular way, I chose to focus on the meanings behind basic shapes and use those to inform the level design. Using Probuilder I mocked out levels using basic geometry and went from there.

Level 1:  

Level 2:  

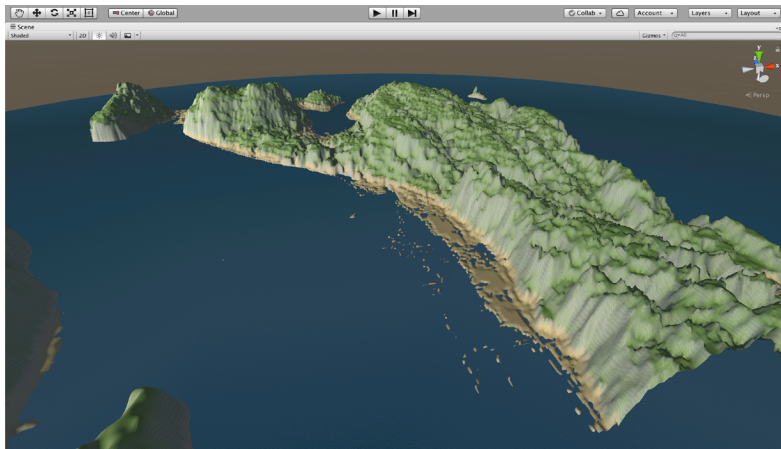
Level 3:   

Level 4:  



# Terrain Design

Because it's nearly impossible to simply "sculpt" terrain into something that looks inherently natural, I took a rough height-map of the Seattle area and put it into the terrain asset. From there I populated it with trees, removed the ones in the water, and set about painting the terrain textures on the playable areas.





# Texture Design

A process wherein I took a photo, used a custom Illustrator live-trace for minimal colors and stylization, ran a script to remove "noise", ported the vectors to Photoshop to be recolored or gradiented. Then I simply laid the original image on top of everything and changed to layer mode to blend them into its vector.



*[Above] Photo*



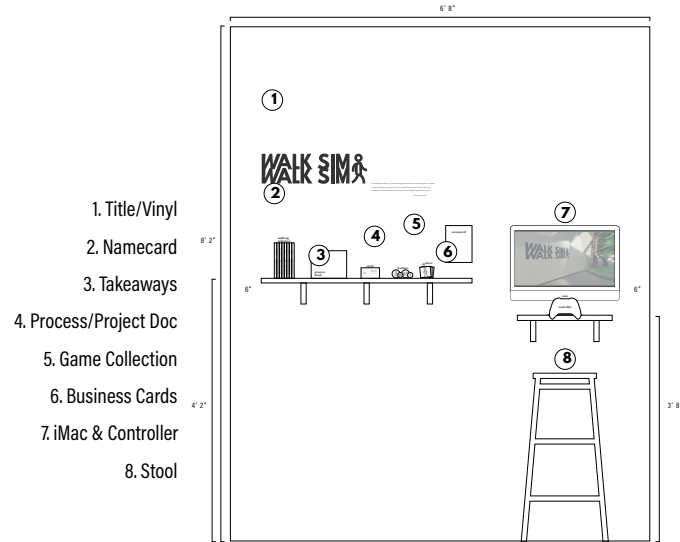
*[Above] Livetrace*



*[Above] Photoshop.*



# BFA Exhibit Plan





# Walking Collection

A supplementary collection of six games to compliment the release of Walk Sim Walk Sim. Each is featured in some way in the game. Each box design has the original logos, company emblems, copyrights, game description copy, the Walking Collection band, with new vector art.



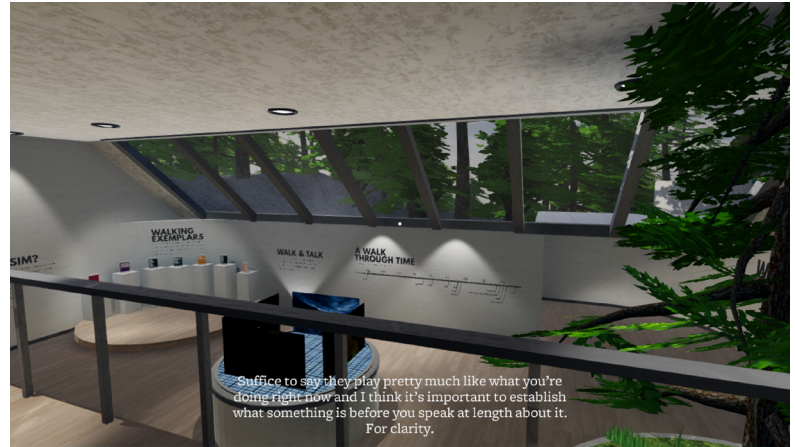


# Walk Sim Walk Sim

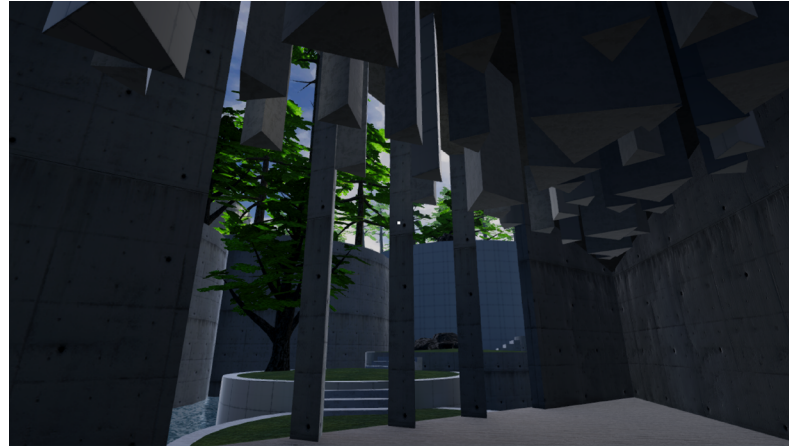
I'd learned a lot from making a full fledged game, at least as full-fledged as two semesters will allow. There's a lot I'd do differently, better, and I still might. I want to see how people respond to it, where I can take it from there, maybe this can see a bigger, full release somewhere down the line. In the meantime I intend to shore up some the smaller problems in the game, keep an eye on [walksimwalksim.com](http://walksimwalksim.com) for now.



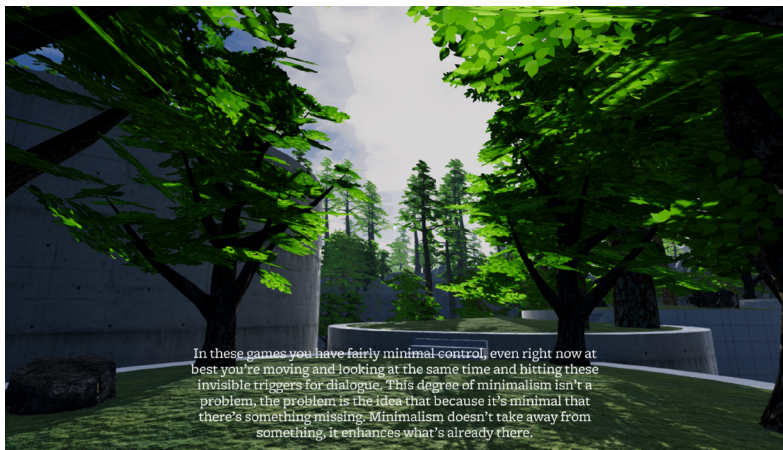




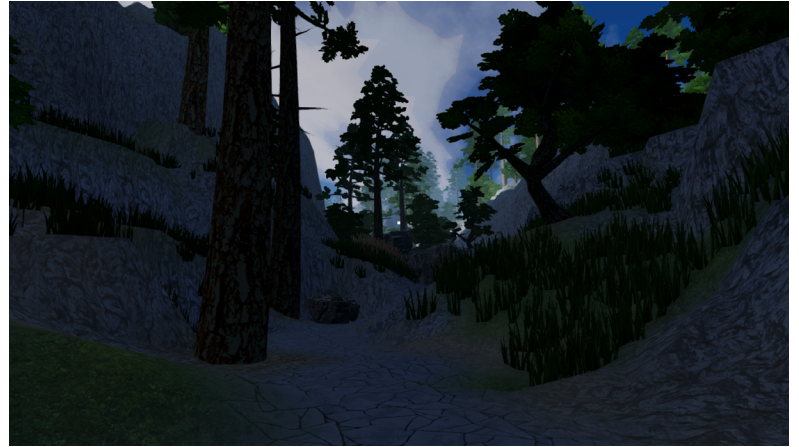
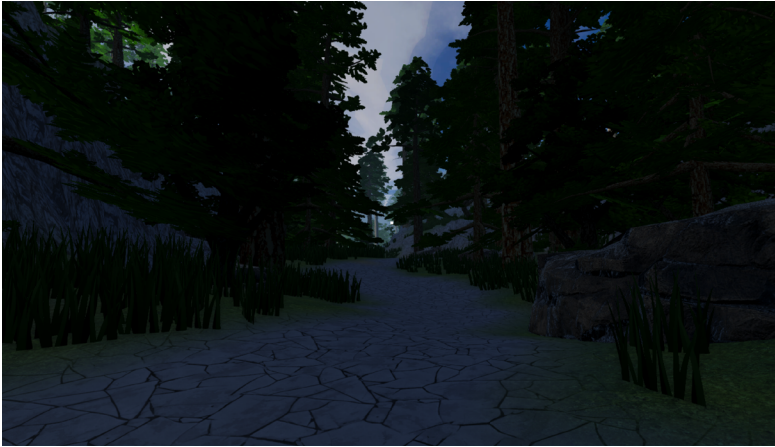




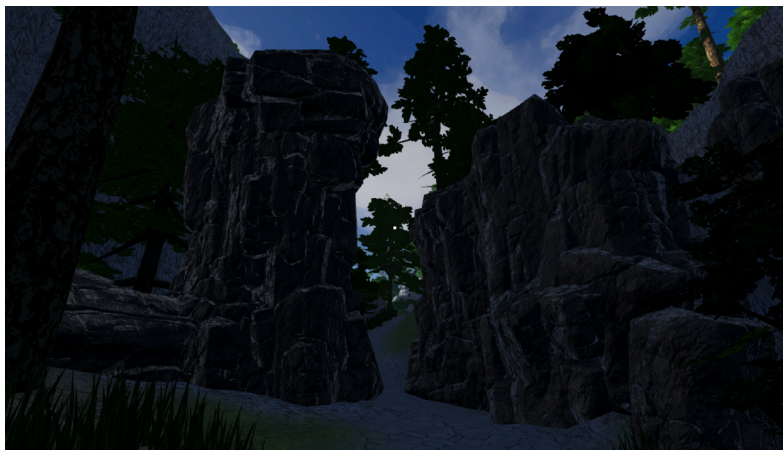
















**THANKS**  
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