

Antidote To Chaos - The Game

Game Design Document

Version

2.0

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1. Summary

In 2019, Dr Jordan Peterson published a book titled “12 Rules for life: Antidote to Chaos” (Peterson, 2019) which outlines a set of 12 principles for bettering one’s life. Despite receiving some criticism from the popular press, it quickly found its place within the self-help literature. Despite its popularity however, the book contains 448 pages, which can be daunting and intimidating for many potential readers, even if they are interested in Dr Peterson’s work (from his lectures on Youtube & his podcast). Therefore, “Antidote to Chaos - The Game” aims to provide a light-weight, condensed version of the information provided in the book in a more engaging and interactive format.

The game will guide players through a narrative sequence of events, each requiring the player to learn new information regarding these life principles, and then pass a test based on the newly acquired knowledge. Through this game, we hope that players are able to learn the core ideas of the book, and how their lives might be improved if they take the principles to heart.

In this document we outline the structure of a serious 2D role playing game. The game’s setting is a mixture of reality and fantasy, where the player mainly avoids obstacles, collects knowledge and progresses through the game in a sequential manner. Content has been generated by extracting information from the book and scripted to fit the game. While the game captures the core ideas, the mechanics and gameplay is fairly simple (i.e avoid monsters, collect gems and pass the levels). In the future, this can be expanded to include a more interactive combat system, player attributes, level-up options and, finally, additional information from Dr Peteron’s newer books.

2. Serious aspects of the concept

Serious goals and intended experience

This serious game aims to introduce its players to the 12 Rules of Life written by Jordan B. Peterson, which will be gradually taught throughout the game. These rules were designed to ease the struggle between personal order and chaos, therefore providing inner balance. The game also addresses a major underlying theme of the book : that through improving oneself, the world as a whole can also be set in its proper place, improving the lives of everyone around.

We believe that the transition from the relatively safe and secure setting of the parent’s home, to the unfamiliar and complex world outside, is a difficult process for many young people, regardless of their demographic background. It is often considered a tough period in life, overwhelmed by anxiety and worry (Gao et al, 2021). The intensity of the perceived chaos from this transition may differ between individuals. For some, a little more discipline, hardwork and focus could do the trick while for others, it could be a steeper hill to climb.

We intend the game to be a reflective experience. Once the player is done with the game, they can look back at what they learned and try to apply it to their lives. They will also receive a written list of the rules and how it might apply.

The 12 Rules of Life are listed below, with each rule briefly elaborated:

1. "Stand up straight with your shoulders back."
Suggests individuals to improve their confidence and self-esteem.
2. "Treat yourself like you are someone you are responsible for helping."
Suggests individuals to treat themselves and others with equal respect and worth.

3. "Make friends with people who want the best for you."
Informs individuals to select their closest companions carefully.
4. "Compare yourself to who you were yesterday, not to who someone else is today."
Informs individuals to work on self-improvement in a healthy mindset, solely basing on their former self.
5. "Do not let your children do anything that makes you dislike them."
Preventing people close to you from engaging in unfavorable traits and habits, therefore aiding others' positive personal growth.
6. "Set your house in perfect order before you criticize the world."
Suggests individuals to focus on continuously improving their own process, faults, shortcomings and growth.
7. "Pursue what is meaningful and not what is expedient."
Encourages individuals to focus on finding the meaning in life, in order to obtain a sense of fulfillment and purpose.
8. "Tell the truth – or, at least, don't lie."
Encourages individuals to be true and honest to themselves and others.
9. "Assume that the person you are listening to might know something you don't."
Informs individuals to stay curious and knowledge hungry.
10. "Be precise in your speech."
Suggests individuals to show and illustrate their needs, wishes and ideals.
11. "Do not bother children when they are skateboarding."
Encourages individuals to take risks, in order to get familiar with the potential chaos that comes with it. This allows individuals to have less negative associations with risks.
12. "Pet a cat when you encounter one on the street."
Encourages individuals to first focus on the present, and what is currently in front of them, and to not linger too much on the past or distant future.

The game's intent is primarily to be an educational player experience, focusing on self reflection, self-exploration and growth, mainly for late teens to early 20s. Furthermore, the concept of the game aims for players to work through various abstract scenarios, which are mainly set in a fictitious fantasy setting. The gameplay aims to portray parallels between the fictitious fantasy realm and reality: the life lessons learnt in the game, parallel to the obstacles and circumstances in real life which could be improved.

The player

The intended target group for our game are late teens to young adults who are interested in Dr Peterson's work and self-help in general. Late teens consist mainly of those who are about to enter their early adult life, face responsibilities and a certain degree of independence. We are not assuming nor requiring any prior game related experience or knowledge from individuals. This game aims to be player and beginner friendly regardless of one's prior game experience, therefore, it aims for everyone to hopefully equally benefit from the game. For example, we envision the possibility of this game being played in the office of a high school counselor, whose job it is to help students transition into adult or university life.

It should also be noted that even though one persona of a potential player is an average high school / early college student transitioning from the “safety of home” to adulthood, we believe that the game can be useful for those who come from difficult backgrounds as well.

3. The story & theme

Story

The story is mainly set in a fictitious fantasy setting, which aims to be parallel to the reality of the player. The main story concept of the game focuses on the player escaping from this fantasy realm, back into their reality. In the prologue of the game, the player starts off in their “real world” in their run down home, living a bleak, bland yet chaotic life. The town within which the home is situated is similarly run down. This will be portrayed as having limited options to choose from when interacting with NPCs and objects in the environment.

Once the player explores the bleak environment, the main arc will start by prompting the player to return home, which results in the player being transported into a fantasy realm when he goes to sleep. Within this realm, the player has to traverse several levels. The theme of each of these levels will be based on each of the 12 rules respectively, with the main goal of teaching the player the true message of each rule upon successful completion of each stage or level. The player must successfully clear one level in order to unlock the next level in sequence. Therefore, learning all the 12 rules upon completion.

Once the player clears the last level, they will be returned back to their “real world”. However, to indicate personal growth and the skills acquired from the 12 rules, it will be portrayed as allowing players to have access to all the options which initially were blocked off in the prologue. Lastly, the change will be further depicted through visual cues, such as the environment, in this case, the player’s room changing appearance: e.g. a messy room turns into a clean room, the room becomes more vibrant and lively and has more personal aesthetics and flair, etc.

Look & feel

The game will be a 2D role playing game, created in the program ‘RPG-Maker’. Its’ visual style and feel will be similar to popular old school games, mainly from older generations of handheld consoles: e.g. Nintendo DS, Gameboy, etc. The intention of the selected visual style is to purposefully stray away from a hyper-realistic game environment. Therefore aiming to provide a more fun, abstract and childlike feeling, in order to portray a less gamey, less intensive or less complex environment. This is a countermeasure to prevent inexperienced gamers from being intimidated by the game.

Furthermore, the simplicity of the graphics would allow it being played on any device that has access to a browser: e.g. a computer in a counselor’s office or a smartphone, etc. The game's player perspective is viewed from an overhead third-person which allows for players to have a clearer view of their environment and their objectives. It allows players to feel a degree of control and less uncertainty. An example of the visual aesthetics of the setting and characters are shown below, in figure 1.



Figure 1 : Example of graphical user interface



The audio will change depending on the level, stages and environment of the game. In the prologue and beginning of the game, before the player has learnt any of the rules, the background music is somber and quiet, while the colors of the environment are monotone. Within the “fantasy realm” each level would have a different soundtrack, becoming more cheerful as the player progresses through the game. The color scheme of the environment will change from monochrome to more vibrant throughout the game as well.

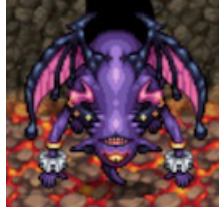

Ultimately, these changes will remain reflected even upon the player’s successful escape from the fantasy realm. The change will be depicted in the player’s room, upon return to the real world: e.g. a colorless monochrome room turns into a room with vibrant colors, eerie silence or somber background music turns into lively cheerful music, etc. These visual and audible cues, combined newly unlocked choices interaction post-game, reflects the change and personal growth that the character has been going through. It visualizes the progress one has made after completing the 12 Rules of Life.

Characters

The player world consists of the characters as described in table 1 below.

Table 1 - Characters in “Antidote to Chaos - The Game”

Character	Appearance	Control	Attributes	Example
The hero	2-d customizable human character	Arrow keys to move, enter to interact with items	Lives (max 3)	
Virgil - the guide	2-d non-customizable human character	Not controllable, follows the hero in the fantasy world	Same as the hero. Dies when the hero dies	

Gatekeepers	2-d non-customizable fantasy monster	Not controllable, tests the player with questions when approached	none	
Monsters	2-d non-customizable fantasy monsters, each level has a different type	Not controllable, moves in a pattern within the environment. When contacted, removes a life from the hero	none	

4. Gameplay

High level game flow

The main genre of the game is RPG. The player assumes the role of a customized avatar in the game in which they maneuver through the environment. The main aim of the game is for the player to return from the “fantasy realm” to the “real world” within the game. This is parallel to returning from the chaotic former self, to the newly found order within oneself.

To do this, the player must navigate through 12 different levels, each corresponding to a rule they must learn. To pass into the next level, players must answer the questions of a gatekeeper. Players are able to approach the Gatekeeper whenever they want but will be dismissed if they don’t have the appropriate knowledge gems. The player is guided through the environment by an omni-present ghost called Virgil who educates the player when they collect a knowledge gem. The information Virgil provides will be from the actual real world.

Knowledge gems can be collected by exploring each level. Each level has monsters that are roaming around the map that must be avoided while collecting the gems. The monsters are other players who have lost the game. Everytime a player hits a monster, they transform a little bit to look like the monster they hit. After a certain number of hits, they transform completely and its game over. At each level, the difficulty will be scaled slightly so that the monsters are harder to avoid, you get power ups etc. At each level, the player is introduced to one of the rules from the game. The game flow is shown in figure 2.

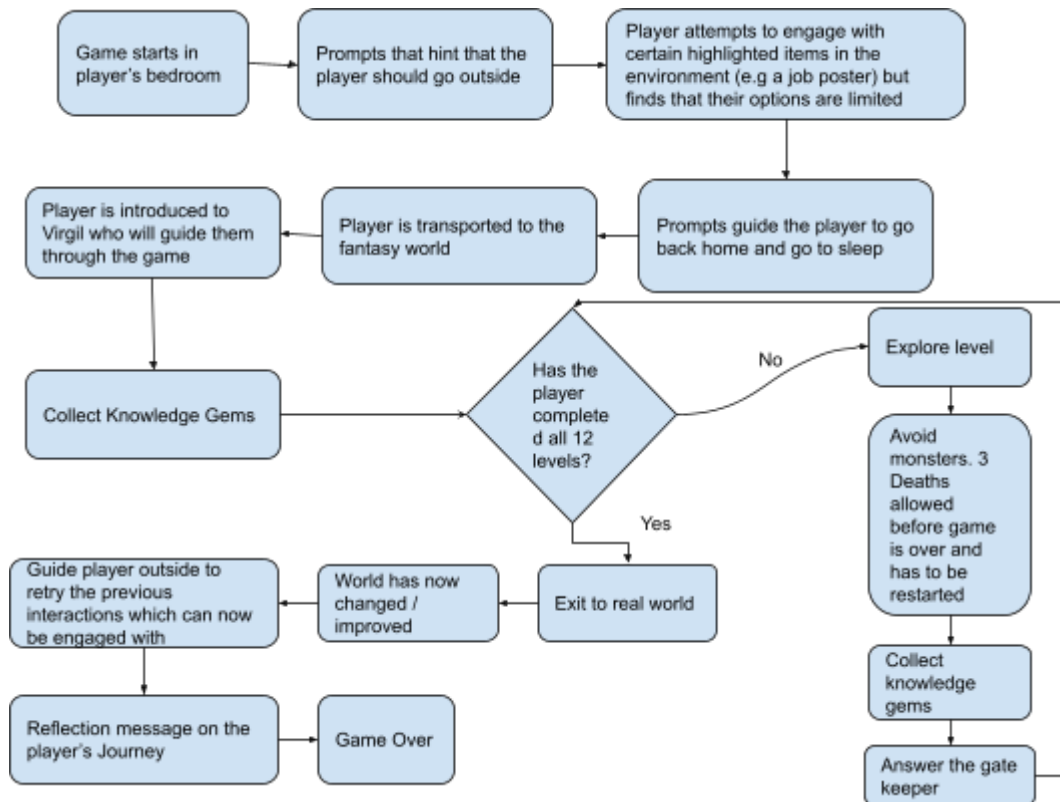


Figure 2 : Overarching game flow

Rules

The game's space will be dictated by the level or stage the player is in. Different story points have different scenes, and even though the player is encouraged to explore the openness of the game world, they are still confined within the boundaries of the current level. As mentioned above, in order to advance to the next level in the story, the player must collect gems and successfully beat the Gatekeeper, through passing their trials. The Gatekeeper evaluates if the player has collected all 5 knowledge gems of the level and whether they truly have understood, and whether they are able to apply the given knowledge. Thus, the player must have all the gems to progress from one level to the next. Furthermore, game related consequences are more concrete, such as the possibility of losing life points, and losing progress and momentum within the game whenever players get hit by monsters.

The passage of time of the game is mostly continuous. This means that the player moves at the same time as their environment, thus mimicking real time, with the exception of cutscenes. Cutscenes are meant to bridge the gap between levels or key points in the game, whenever characters interact with other characters or when a significant event happens.

The core operational rule of the game is story and level-driven, meaning that the player may only advance if certain level quests are met (i.e. gem collection to get past the gatekeeper). The player is therefore required to explore and tackle the challenge of avoiding getting hit by monsters in order to make any sort of progress. One of the intrinsic/constitutive rules is that through collecting gems, the player unlocks the knowledge required to defeat the gatekeeper through answering its questions correctly. Virgil will also act as a helper that displays messages that contain hints and instructions.

The subgoals of the game are to advance through the different levels, and that determines whether the player is advancing or not, while the ultimate goal is to complete all the levels and for the

main character to return to his home world - that is where the story ends. There is obviously a deeper and serious goal, making the player aware of their life choices and motivating them to take action. The lose-state of the game is reached when the player gets too close to the monsters and becomes one of them, or when is defeated by a gatekeeper. This lose-state takes the player back to the beginning of their quest or the beginning of the level depending on the situation.

Mechanics

The player controls one character and is able to move on the 2-dimensional map (up, down, left and right). The core mechanics are movement on the map , engagement with the characters/objects in the environment and decision making (path selection and question answering).

Table 2 - Mechanics

Core mechanics	Movement in x and y axis
	Activation of gems (automatically placed in the inventory upon interaction)
	Activation of conversations with NPCs
	Avoiding monsters
	Answering questions (in to NPCs)
Secondary mechanics	Player avatar customization

The mechanics are designed to provide a sense of mastery of the environment and the knowledge that the player is expected to learn. It is intended that the mastery of the environment is developed as a consequence of successfully avoiding the monsters. As the players traverse the different levels, they will gain a sense of how the monsters move. To keep the game interesting, each level will increase the difficulty level of avoiding monsters (e.g by making them move faster, seeking out the player, etc). A mastery of the knowledge is developed as a consequence of answering the questions posed by the Gatekeeper correctly. Together it is hoped that these make for providing the player with the experience of improvement and competence building, which is core to the idea of the 12 rules.

Instead of providing players with extrinsic rewards (for example arbitrary points, new customizations, etc) we aim for the rewards to be the acquisition of the knowledge gems in and of themselves. The player is “rewarded” with access to higher levels of the game which will be more interesting and difficult. The player is “punished” by having to restart each level (upon 3 deaths) or being denied advancement due to lack of not collecting the necessary gems. This is meant to echo the idea of the 12 rules that to move up means to progressively become more competent, starting at the simplest level (where you now live) and moving further up.

Controls

The general controls of the game are similar to other 2D RPG-games, as it will be created through RPG-maker. RPG-maker has a wide variation of supported controls and has plenty

compatibility options regardless of platform or devices. Therefore, the game could be controlled through both keyboards, as well as PC-supported game controllers and a mouse.

Regarding the keyboard controls, the WASD- and arrows-format will be used in order to move your character, as well as to navigate through different options within the game, whereas other keys could initiate submenus (M) and inventory (I) or bag (B). However, when opting to use a mouse to play the game, the player could move their character through clicking to their desired area within the game axis, or through clicking on the on-screen arrows. When using a compatible controller, the controls will slightly change depending on the selected and preferred controller-format (Nintendo controls/Xbox controls/Playstation controls).

5. Diversity and inclusion

The game will provide the freedom for players to customize their characters at the start of their game so that it can better resemble who they are. The customisation aims to allow a range of possible identifications and appearances. The player will be addressed almost entirely in the 2nd person so that the pronouns usage is the same across all players, therefore it will be completely gender-neutral. Given that our team comprises members of the actual target group (late teens, early twenties), we believe that our game fits the demographic. This allows for the target demographic to be fairly easily accessible through acquaintances, classmates, friends and colleagues. Our team is predominantly male (with one female member) which might lead to some blindspots and biases. Our team consists of members from different cultural backgrounds and ethnicities which further minimized the chance of a bias towards a specific group.

One specific consideration that may need to be taken into account is that no one in our group (as far as we were all willing to disclose) were from a severely disadvantaged background with regards to conditions at home and during upbringing. It may be the case that individuals who most need the information encapsulated in our game are those from difficult circumstances for which our concept may be ill suited, even insulting. For example, telling someone who was subjected to childhood abuse that they just need to “learn some rules and things will get better” might not resonate. However, we believe that the very approachable and disarming nature of the game (simple 2-d graphics, fantasy setting) will help to ease engagement with our concept to the benefit of the player.

6. Evaluation

Prototype description

The demo was created using RPG Maker MZ. The demo was a high-fidelity creation of the actual game with few limitations. All player experiences as described above are implemented to a high degree (minus the caveats that follow). The starting level (the initial rundown room and town) and the end level (repaired room and beautiful town) are as they would be in the complete game. You start in a world in ruin and end up at the end of the game in a repaired, better world. Limitations of the demo are as follows.

- Limited to one rule

- The demo is limited to teaching the player just one (the first) of the 12 rules. This means that the fantasy world contains only 1 dungeon level after which the player returns to the end state.
- At each level the monsters would change and the difficulty level would increase which is not implemented.
- Limited characters in the ruined (starting) town and end town. Ideally there would be more characters roaming around who would talk more about how bad or good the world is. There would also be more interactable opportunities within the environment.
- The player customization is limited to hair color and gender.
- Changes in appropriate scoring (music) for each level is not implemented.
- The player would ideally look different between the real world and fantasy world, which is not implemented.
- Ability to check the inventory of gems to re-learn the information is not implemented.



Figure 3 : Starting state of the player's home

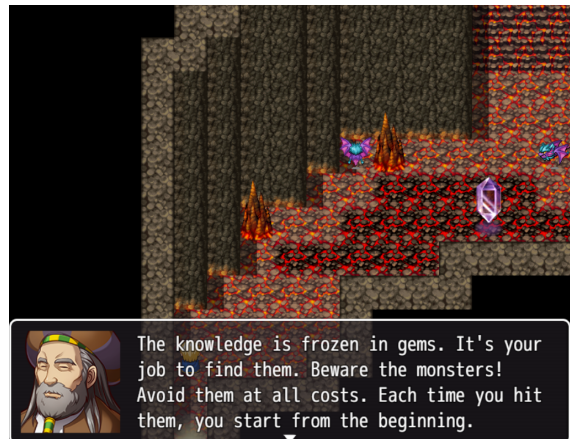


Figure 4 : First level of the fantasy realm



Figure 5 : First Gatekeeper



Figure 6 : End state of the player's home

The demo encompasses the start state, one level of the 12 rules, and the end state. The player is guided as shown in figure 7.

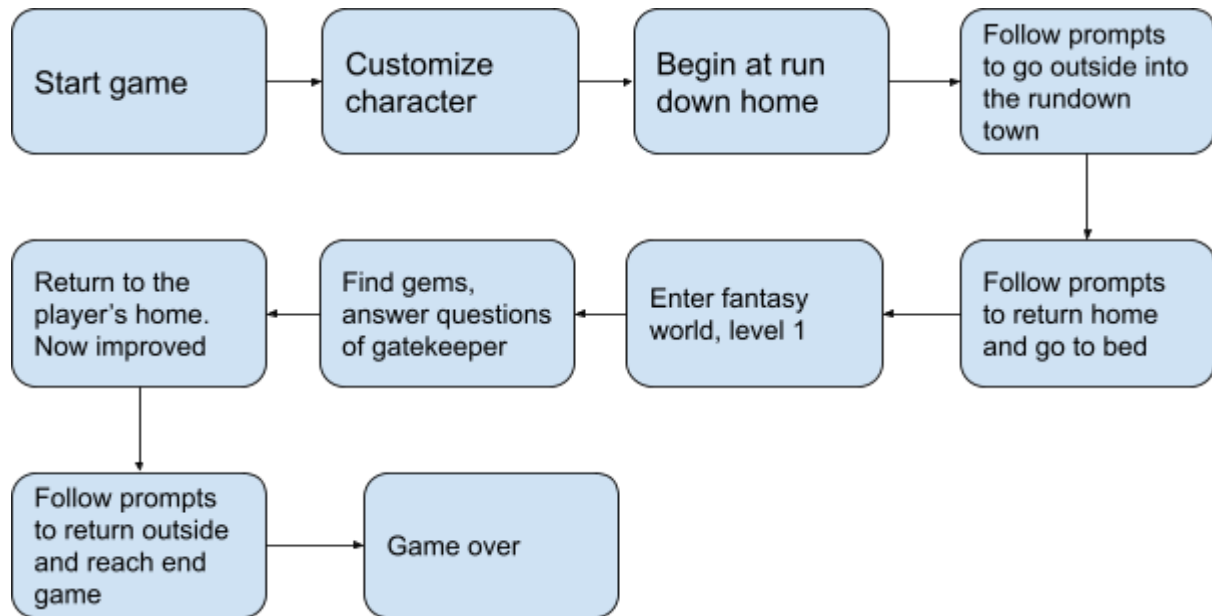


Figure 7 : Path of demo play using the prototype

Approach

To measure a player's experience of the game, their perception of it, and the quality of the game, and the level of achievement of a set serious goal, a questionnaire was filled out by six participants after playing the demo version of Antidote To Chaos: The Game. The questionnaire focused on a set of six Likert scale questions aimed at the participants' perception of the demo's amusement, aesthetics, narrative, mechanics, immersion, and "bleed", such as "To what degree do you see yourself as the protagonist in this game? (1 - Not at all., 10 - Completely, this game is about my life!)". The questions were based on Högberg et al's. (2019) paper, which aims to measure the perceived gamefulness of system use. After these questions, open-ended questions followed, allowing the participants to further explain their opinions and answers. Overall, including demographics, six main questions, and follow-up questions, the participants were asked to answer twenty questions. All while one or more members of our team were present in the room. The results are shown in appendix A.

Results

The six participants generally really enjoyed the game and really liked the aesthetics; they also liked the narrative and mechanics, felt immersed, and experienced the "bleed" effect. They mostly explained their immersion by being able to customize their character (naming them and making them look similar) and generally understood the serious goal of the game and found the provided information useful in real life. Additionally, some of the participants felt the story was about themselves.

However, two of the participants could not fully immerse themselves, sometimes did not know what to do, and did not fully understand the serious goal of the demo. Based on our observations of the participants' gameplay, one possible explanation for such results could be their lack of experience with videogames. Meaning, people who do not play video games or have only

played a little might struggle with the game or not understand the serious goal of it, resulting in the game not achieving its goal.

Suggestions for future work

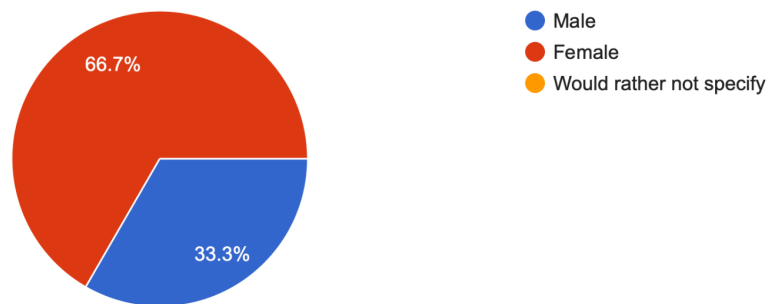
Since the participants played the demo version of Antidote To Chaos, they could not get the full experience of the game, missing more levels and more information that could give them more insight into the serious goal and help them understand it better. However, the main mechanics were included, and therefore, similar results could be expected with the full game. As already mentioned, the game should take into account non-gamers more by possibly giving them more instructions. To enable players to immerse themselves more, additional personalizations could be provided. More immersion could be achieved in the full game by having more personal side characters, which were intended for the final game but not included in the demo. Such characters would be personalized based on questions asked at the beginning of the game, and depending on the answers, the characters would be the closest people to the main character, meaning the player.

One of the participants also suggested less text and more focus on the “learn by doing” approach. That could be taken into account by modifying levels and making them less focused on text and story and putting more emphasis on teaching the serious goal via actions. Even though it would possibly be a better approach, it is difficult to achieve such a goal with limited time and resources. However, in the case of an actual game being released, that could be the case.

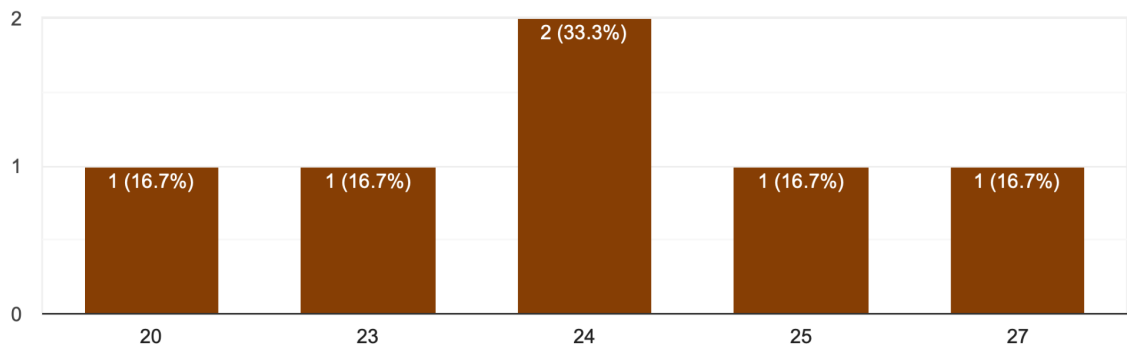
The demo testing revealed that the game and its serious goal were generally on track, but few changes could be made based on the responses, as previously stated. Nonetheless, more extensive demo testing would be required to get more objective and corresponding results.

Appendix A

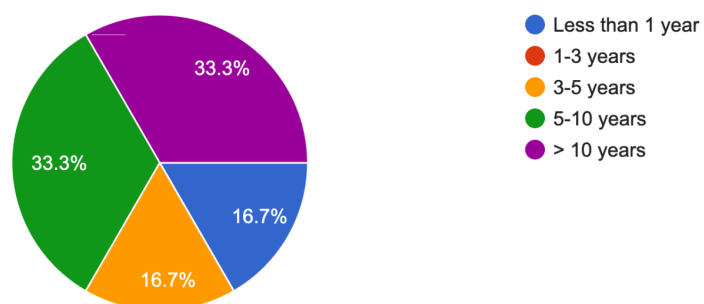
Gender
6 responses



Age
6 responses



How long have you been playing video games?
6 responses



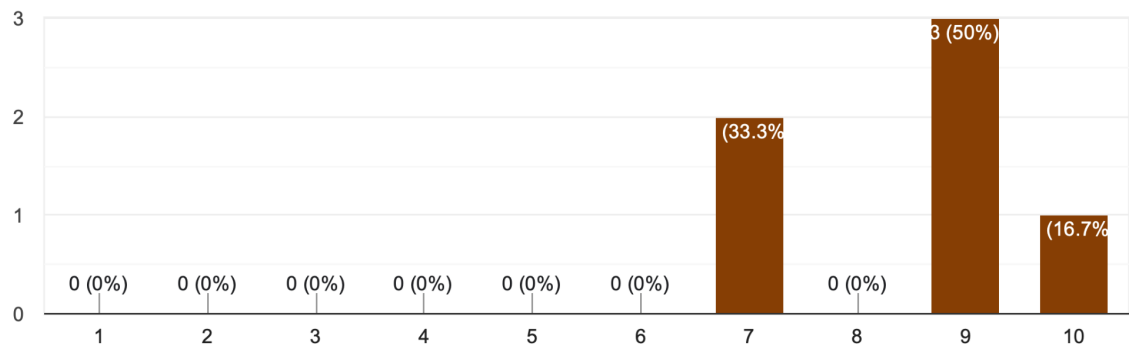
How familiar are you with Role-Playing Games (RPGs)?

6 responses



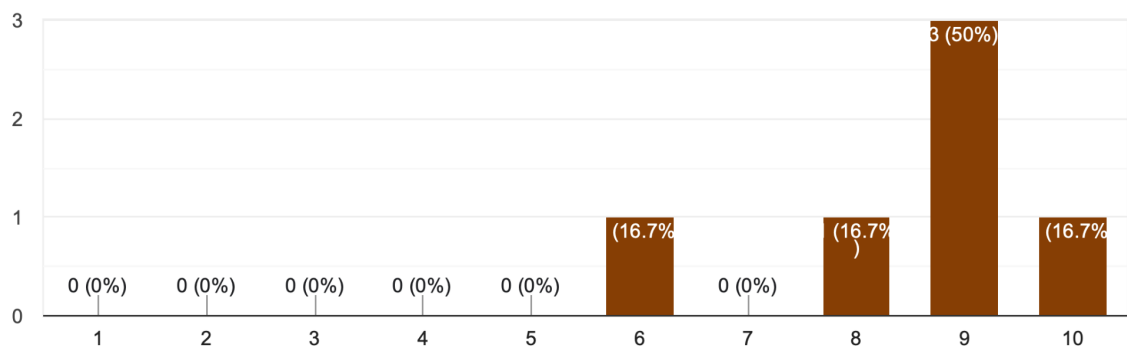
How much did you enjoy playing this demo?

6 responses



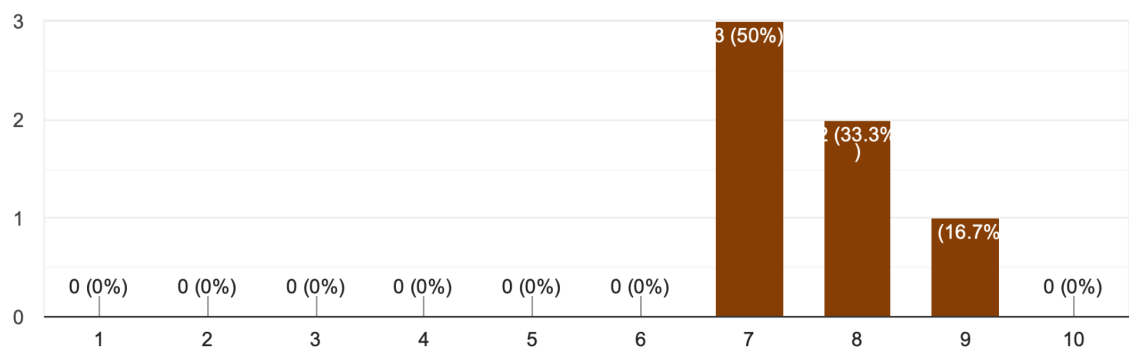
How would you rate the game from a visual/aesthetic viewpoint?

6 responses



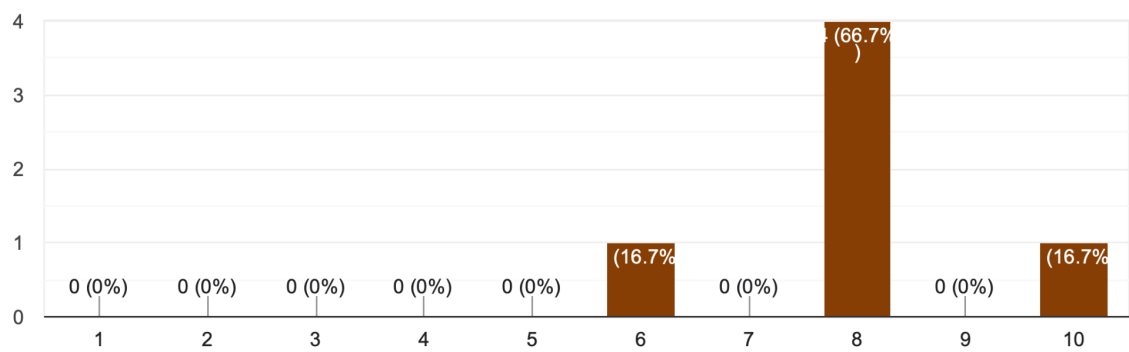
How would you rate the game from a narrative viewpoint?

6 responses



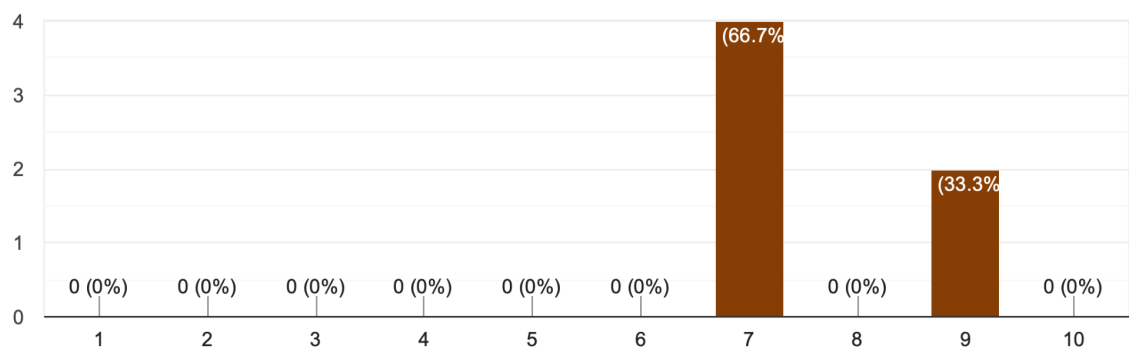
How would you rate the game in terms of mechanics?

6 responses



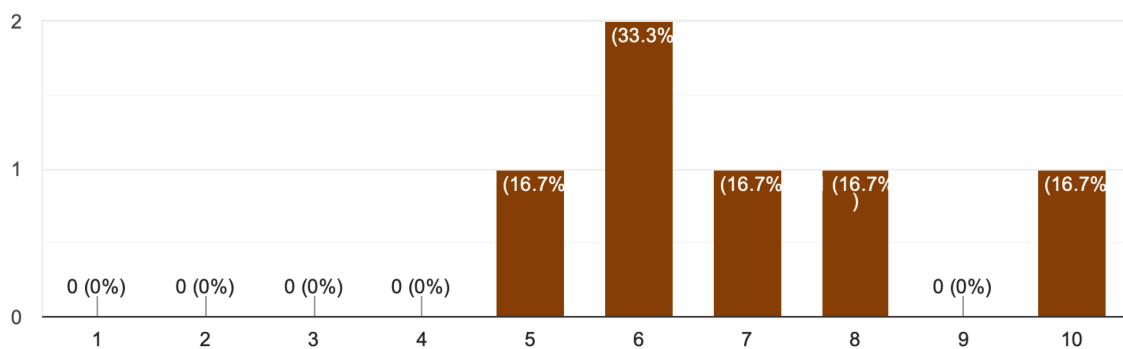
How immersive would you rate your experience?

6 responses



To what degree do you see yourself as the protagonist in this game? (Do you feel a 'bleed' effect?)

6 responses



Can you describe why or why not there was a 'bleed' effect present?

6 responses

By making my own character, I felt this story was really about myself

We were not dying and did good

The fact that I could create my own character and name him caused a nice bleeding effect

You should relate to the character

Because I could not immerse myself completely

I was told to do certain missions

Could you see a parallel between the 'fantasy' world and the 'real' world in the game? If yes, explain.

6 responses

Yes, I think the advice from the gems could help me in real life if I were to be in this position at the bottom of society

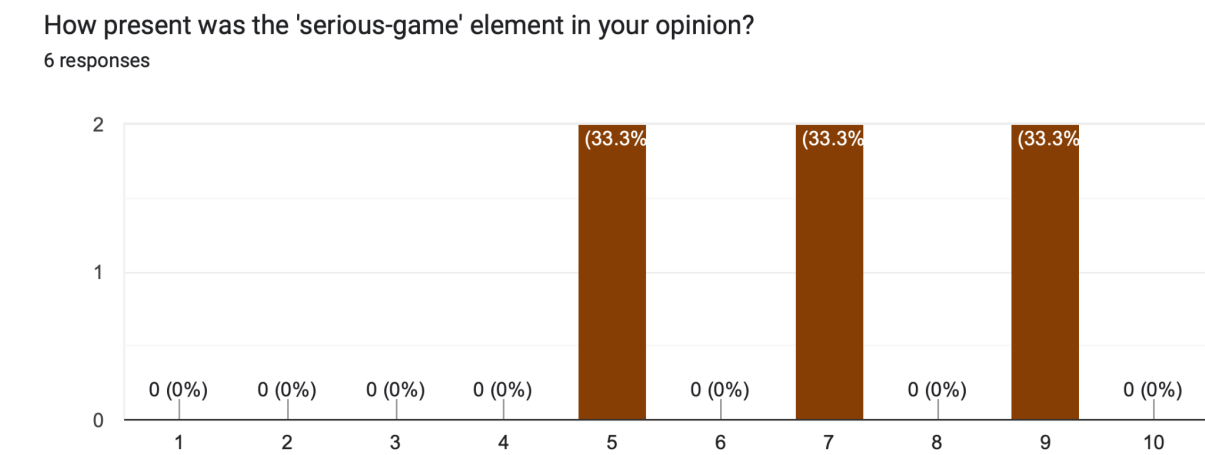
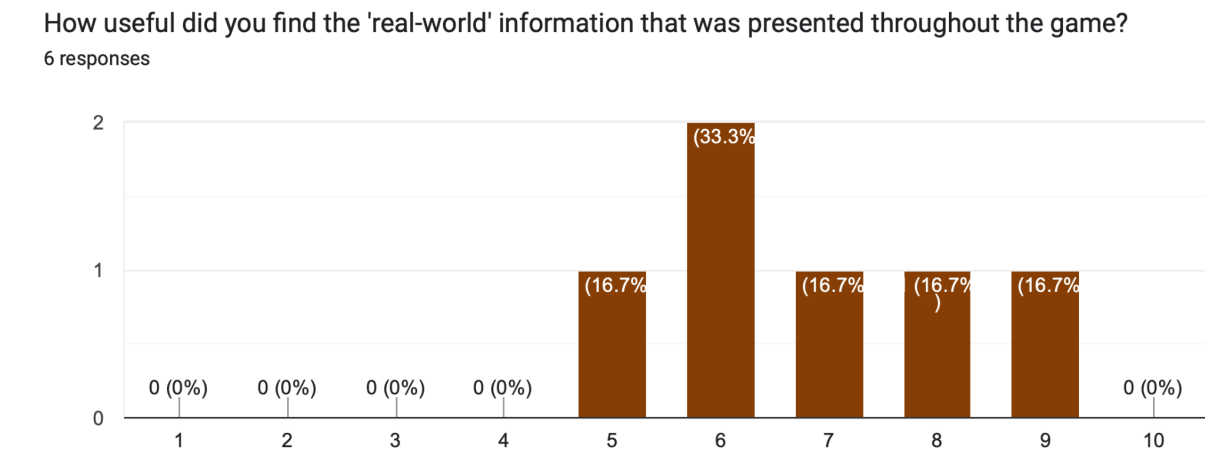
Yes because the world gets better if you open your eyes

In the fantasy world there were similar kinds of problems to the real world, like having a messy room

Yes, things you can improve in your current life

No

It was a bit vague, I'm not sure which is dream, the broken home and town or the beautiful version, or the world with gems and monster



Please explain your answer to the question above.

6 responses

The narrative perfectly direct me towards to serious goal of dealing with stuff like being more, ill, hungry etc

Is was present but not all the time and i didn't put the link at first. Because you liked playing it. And than after the game you realize it!

The game was fun to play but also had some useful lessons that were presented as I progressed through the game

It is an important element to think about in live. Good to be aware of

I thought it is was nice but very confusing

i had to finish a quiz

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Do you think that such a game could help someone improve their life? Explain.

6 responses

Definitely, also because you start at a very ugly, messy house which in my opinion immediately gets the point across what position you are in

For sure!

It could help if I was depressed and needed some motivation to move on with my life

Maybe, if the tips en text get repeated more

Maybe

not a huge impact, but i guess it would help a bit, more or less

Did you learn anything from this game? If yes, explain.

6 responses

Yes, for example that you sometimes need to make sacrifices in order to improve in life

Yes to open your eyes to the world: and stand with your shoulders to the back

I learned that small things are a good way to start with making big changes to your life

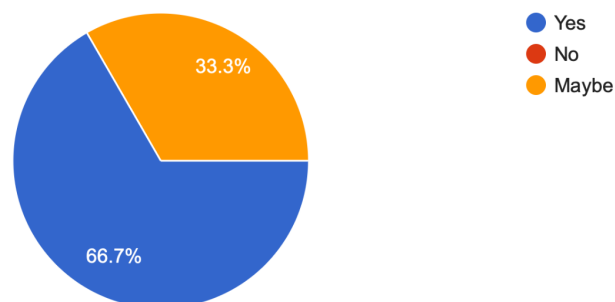
No

Yes

be confident, and small changes lead to big changesss

Would you play the full version of the game if it became available?

6 responses



If you have any other feedback you would like to provide, you can do so here.

2 responses

Maybe implement "learning by doing" a bit more instead of just learning from the text. Good luck, very nice game

It looks really good and the story behind it makes it even better!

References

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