



## Assignment 1

# The beginner's guide to Videogames



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## Introduction

Davey Wreden is the director of the game I am going to study in this report “The Beginner’s Guide”, abbreviated to TBG since now. Wreder was first known as one of the developers behind the successful and awarded game “The Stanley Parable” (NAVGTR 2013). Wreden formed the studio Everything Unlimited Ltd. and released “The Beginner’s Guide” the first of October 2014. In this report we will discuss if “The Beginner’s Guide” is an actual game by following multiple definitions that have been published on the topic.

## The game

The Beginner’s guide main objective is the narrative. The game conducts a story and the red thread is a set of mini-games. To study this game, I will describe the plot and the mini-game.

## The story

TBG is narrated by the actual developer of the game, Davey Wreden. He wants us to follow him through several small games made by a friend of him, called Coda, that is having a bad moment in his life. Davey will tell us as we play, what the games mean, because the games were not made for public consumption, so we need an extra hand to understand what is happening. Davey will modify the games, so we are able to see things that we would not be able to do it, for instance, deleting walls so we can see through or skipping a tedious labyrinth.

What the player ends up discovering is that Davey has made more modifications to the games than we thought. He wanted the games to have a meaning for him, so he changed them, like adding lampposts to the minigames as goal to reach when there is none. When Coda gets to know that Davey has been sharing his games and altering them, he makes a last game for Davey and stops game development and communication with him.

The last game is unplayable, it is impossible to solve unless you cheat your way. Davey do so until we reach a room where we can read a message from Coda to Davey, telling him to stop talking to him. Davey confess that TBG was made for Davey to reach Coda and apologize so he comes back to making videogames and give Davey the feeling of being a part of something.

## The minigames

The minigames are presented by date of creation (from 2008 to 2011) and title. Most of the games have no termination condition, just since the fifth game, made in March 2009, the lamppost appear in Coda’s games. The actual games, if they were unaltered, would have no termination. The firsts games are small maps with little mechanics, where the player can only walk. We can see how in November 2008 Coda creates the game “Escape from whisper” where the player holds a gun, but there are no enemies and



the victory game condition is killing your character. From that moment Coda's minigames become dialogue games, however the dialogue the player picks have no importance because it does not change the state of the game, it will continue with whatever line you pick. Until the last game, he makes "The Machine" in May 2011 where the player can use a gun and interact for the first time with the environment, by destroying it and destroying the game. The last game Coda made in June 2011 was specific to Davey and it has multiple puzzles impossible to solve and a personal message to him.

## Discussion

At first sight we can conclude that TBG it is, indeed, a videogame. It has some mechanics and immersion and the goal is clearly the story. However, after looking to the actual mechanics of the game, is it possible that we are being lied all this time? We have a clear story that Davey is narrating, but are the presence of the minigames enough to call it "a videogame"? are the minigames actual videogames?

At the end of the game we discover that Davey has been adding lampposts to Coda's games to make them more conclusive, so we can assume then that the real games had no lamppost, and so that most of Coda's games had no challenge, termination nor victory state.

As Adams defines, videogames require achievement, challenge and drama (Adams 2013) and Coda's minigames have none, there are no repercussions nor way for the player to do it wrong or right and few times there will be no end at all and you will have to shut down the minigame to exit. During the game we can listen to Davey talking about what a videogame is and needs.

This is something he and I used to argue about a lot, you know, whether a game ought to actually be playable, whether it means anything if no one can get through it, and I would always defend that, you know, all this work goes into the game, why not make it playable and accessible?

(Wreder 2013a)

Davey looks as the typical player-driven developer, that wants to prioritize the playability of the game, while Coda disagrees. We don't know if Coda disagrees because he is more focused on designer-driven games or because his games are in fact mere tests and should not be playable, not receptor of interaction.

Costikyan explained that a game must have interaction with a purpose, provide goals, create endogenous meanings in some kind of fiction and establish a structure that makes the player struggle (Costikyan 2002). Coda's games have no decision and the player is a mere observer in a linear structure that has no challenge. We could argue that the story by itself is the goal but also books share this statements and they are not considered games.



Following these requirements, the game must be in some way, no real, allowing the player to pretend. TBG breaks this fourth wall since the first second. The developer is the narrator, there is no actor behind him and is well known that Davey Wreder went through difficult moments in his personal life after the success of his game *The Stanley Parable* and with his friend and co-developer William Pugh (Wreder 2014). However we will assume that Coda and Davey as the narrator do not exist, but the similarities between Davey-Coda and real life Davey-William are beyond the fantasy.

Costikyan says that a good game provides considerable freedom for the player to experiment with alternate strategies and struggle with their decisions (Costikyan, 2002). This is impossible in TBG, there is no options, no strategies, no risks nor challenge. By following all this definition, it is clear that TBG is interactive entertainment as an interactive storybook. So why shops, developers and the media keep talking about TBG as a game? Well, because even after all of this, it is.

Let's start again. TBG has so many layers of meta that may confuse the player. At the last part of the game we get to know that Davey has made a lot of modifications in the minigames, so we discover that all is a lie, that everything he has been telling us is a lie and indeed the narrator is not "real-life" Davey Wreden and Coda never existed. Yes, a part of Davey Wreder and his experiences with *The Stanley Parable* are there, but the story tell us not to care. Maybe Davey likes good stories or as Davey-narrator concludes, maybe Coda had no problems, "Maybe he just likes making prisons." (Wreder 2013b).

There was no Coda behind the programming but a team of 9 persons. Minigames were meant to have a lamppost, they were meant to have conclusion and a goal to reach them. What is special about them is that they make the player to fall deep into a narrative immersion and forget that we are playing. TBG is imaginative, it has coherence and the experience is so smooth that some players did not believe that the story was made up by the studio (Steam, 2018). The pattern of this game: Story, exploration, few to none puzzles follows a pattern that has been defined already from the industry.

Adventure games share common points with TBG. They have a strong value on story but it has a part of puzzle-solving dynamics that are missing or at least, not focused on. However, there is a sub-genre that fits our game: narrative games or *Walking Simulators* (Clark 2017).

Environmental narrative games mechanics move farther away from traditional games, and their strong point is the narrative and the environment with few puzzles (if there are puzzles at all) and there is no need to have a win condition (Wikipedia 2018). The beginner's Guide follows the description to be a narrative game so we can conclude that indeed TBG is a game, a narrative game, and a real good one.



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