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The Foghorn – Design Document

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# High Concept

*The Foghorn* is a narrative-based game which shows the proliferation of fake news from the perspective of a malicious media owner, as he rises from a small-town newspaper owner to a mogul with a media empire spanning print, television and new media. Players will be able to single-handedly spin and craft the news stories to impact world events to their profit, and manage growing numbers of staff as their organisation rises from obscurity to worldwide notoriety.

# Genre & Type

Gameplay-wise, a media-based tycoon game with human resource management, inspired heavily by Weappy Studio’s *This is the Police*. Narratively and aesthetically speaking, a neo-noir with dark comic-book visuals. Like *This is the Police*, *The Foghorn* is also a simulator of a daily public service in a comic-book-illustrated, deeply cynical world which involves staff management and the use of random events, involving the evolution of multiple secondary storylines based on the player’s actions. However, in this case, the player is a newspaper magnate and eventual media mogul, instead of being a police commissioner, and the player’s fight against an undeniably heroic government agency.

A close up of a sign

Description generated with high confidence A screenshot of a video game

Description generated with high confidence

*In the game ‘This is the Police’, the player, as a police commissioner, must manage police work in an immensely corrupt city. The Foghorn is inspired in many ways from TitP, from its cynical tone, its comic-book visuals, its smaller storylines running throughout the main plot (the serial killer case), and the amount of*

# Setting

The game world is essentially our world with minor differences. The player operates in urban environments only, but beyond the insides of media offices and printing presses, not many environments are seen beyond storytelling ‘cutscenes’. The world scenario, however, is turbulent, with events reflecting contemporary real-life events, including, but not limited to, terrorist attacks, religious fundamentalism, racism and classism, belligerence, internet culture, and the rise of the ‘alt-right’. Several stories are going on throughout the time the player runs the news, including:

* The disappearance of Amber Jordan, a young teenager.
* Potential flooding in the country due to climate change.
* A potential international deal between the US and an unnamed Islamic country.
* Significant friction between the US president and the opposition.

The player’s actions will contribute to this scenario, typically negatively, as the player character seeks to exploit this chaos to rise to power.

The newspaper, originally, is based in the fictional town of Highbury, Connecticut. As the player’s media empire expands, it spreads into the nearby big city of New Haven, before expanding into the entire state, then the entire country, and finally, just before the climax, going international. This is represented by multiple maps showing the areas of operation of the Foghorn changing as the game proceeds.

# Characters

## Keith William Murrow

A person wearing a suit and glasses

Description generated with very high confidence A person wearing a suit and tie

Description generated with very high confidence

*The character is inspired by Rupert Murdoch (left) in terms of character and plot development, but in terms of looks, is closer to John Kasich (right) in terms of appearance and likability.*

* Age: 40-50
* White, with blonde hair starting to gray. Blue eyes, can be defined as ‘cold’ and ‘intelligent’
* Reasonably good-looking, considering his age. Slightly overweight, but nowhere near obese. Perennially dressed in black suit with dark green tie.
* No major facial deformities.
* Heredity: WASP
* Class: Upper-middle, proceeds to upper as time passes and his situation improves.
* Education: UC Berkeley, Journalism (Masters)
* Religion: Born Protestant, not particularly religious. Very sceptical of people who are overly religious.
* Nationality: United States
* Home life: Not particularly noteworthy. Father, William Edward, owner and editor of *The Foghorn*. Mother, Kathryn Jessica, homemaker. No significant marital strife.
* Married, happily enough.
* Political Affiliations: Kind of variant. Leans right-wing overall, but no real handle can be placed.
* Skills: Fluent in seven languages.
* Hobbies: Enjoys watching horseracing and boxing.

The main player character, Keith William Murrow is the protagonist of the game’s story. An ambitious person, he wishes to use the unstable political climate to further his rise as the owner and chief editor of The Foghorn, the Highbury town newspaper. Events conspire to propel his newspaper to notoriety, and Murrow takes advantage of them to expand The Foghorn into the internet, exploiting rapidly spreading memes to gain a new audience. As the story proceeds, we get to see exactly how ruthless Murrow is willing to be to further his aims.

As the player character, Murrow is created to show the audience an unscrupulous character that is power-hungry and single-minded in his goals. At the very least, the man honours his promises and treats his staff well if they don’t turn against him in any way.

## Brandon Andersen

A person wearing a suit and tie

Description generated with very high confidence

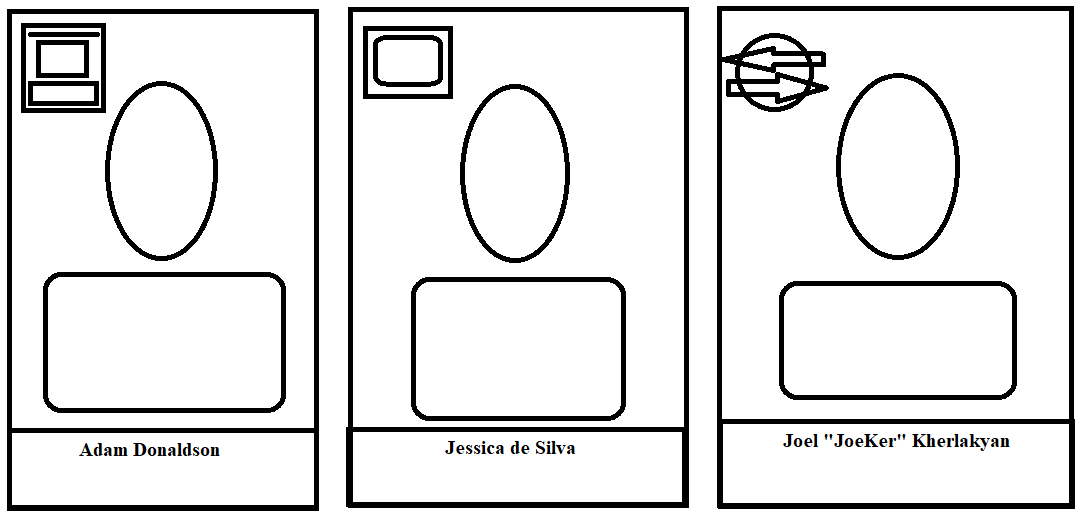
*Andersen is intended to look like Zac Efron, but slightly older. Personality-wise, however, he is a very normal, slightly naive assistant editor of The Foghorn.*

* 30-35.
* Good-looking, very neat person.
* Middle-class, moves to upper-middle-class as game progresses.
* Columbia, English Literature, and significant experience in the news industry as a reporter and editor

As Murrow’s assistant editor and only friend, Andersen serves as a somewhat sympathetic character as part of the Foghorn staff, and generally appeals to Murrow’s better side. Frankly, the character only exists to display misgivings at Murrow’s increasing ruthlessness, and to show how much his quest for power has managed to drive away the ones close to him.

## Foghorn Staff

The staff of the Foghorn are mostly randomly generated people, with different names. While Andersen manages the lower-level staff, the player character is responsible for hiring and managing major and most visible staff members. Initially this is limited to editors while the player is limited to a newspaper alone, but as the Foghorn expands into different forms of media, this will involve different portfolios, including TV presenters and social media personalities. Each of these people have stats, and as per their stats, they will be entitled to a certain portion of sales. They will also have certain hidden stats, which will affect their involvement in random events. For example, a more eccentric social media personality may be prone to going on a social media rant about how he/she believes that the earth is flat or something, which will have to be handled by you to ensure that the Fog faces as little fallout as possible.



A person wearing a suit and tie smiling at the camera

Description generated with very high confidence A person holding a microphone

Description generated with high confidence A person sitting in front of a computer

Description generated with high confidence

Figure . Sample staff representation. Each of these staff members are of different types, as shown by the icons on the top row (not final) - they are, from left to right, an editor, a TV presenter, and a social media personality. Personalities will be imagined to be similar to real-life editors such as Sadanand Dhume (left, bottom row), television presenters such as Megyn Kelly (centre, bottom row), and internet personalities such as Daniel ‘Keemstar’ Keem.

## The Press Regulatory Agency (PRA)

The Press Regulatory Agency, or PRA, serve mostly as an antagonistic force to Murrow’s rise to power. As a government agency, the PRA serves to ensure that the press is held accountable for their statements, and hence are empowered to act against news agencies which print falsehoods or inflammatory news. As such, they can sanction you in various ways should your paper publish news that is incorrect and/or excessively inflammatory, with punishments ranging from a mandatory front-page apology, to a strike against the organisation – three strikes and your organisation is forced to shut down, causing an instant game over.

The PRA serves as the idea of how fake news may be stopped, but also illustrates the potential dangers of having the government regulate news, once Murrow takes over the agency at the climax of the story.

## Maya Robinson

A person smiling for the camera

Description generated with very high confidence A person smiling for the camera

Description generated with very high confidence

*The character is inspired by Kamala Harris(left) in terms of appearance and plot development, but in terms of looks, is closer to Elizabeth Warren(right) in terms of appearance and likability.*

* Age: 40-45.
* Black hair, tied in a short ponytail. Brown eyes.
* Fairly good-looking. Average weight, not obese, not model.
* African-American
* Upper-middle-class, and stays so throughout the game.
* Religion: Protestant Christianity. Wears a crucifix, and somewhat devout.
* Education: Yale, Political Science and Journalism
* Likes reading and watching movies.
* Talented and disciplined, but occasionally impulsive. A trait that could very easily be exploited by Murrow.

As chief of the Press Regulatory Agency, Maya Robinson serves as Murrow’s natural opponent as he rises through the halls of power. She carves the regulations that restrict Murrow, and considers him to be the personification of everything she considers wrong with mass media. While she is not a perfect character, she is by far a better person than Murrow.

As the PRA would oppose the Foghorn as an organisation, Robinson opposes Murrow personally. While they never ever shout at each other, it is clear from their interactions that both consider the other a threat. Maya would also be the face which would symbolise the defeat of the player, should the player fail by being shut down by the PRA.

## Citizens

The voice of the people is represented by Citizens’ Letters, a section of the Foghorn where readers of the Foghorn (and eventually viewers of Foghorn TV and website visitors to FogHornline.net, in separate sections) can express their opinion of the news and articles everywhere. These letters function as a sort of feedback to the player, as well as a plot-level indication of how the public are falling victim to Murrow’s and the Foghorn’s malicious reporting. These letters will typically be procedurally generated based on the articles selected for publication.

# Story

* Keith William Murrow owns a newspaper, The Foghorn, in the town of Highbury, CT. Coming from old money, he has been reduced to a life of comfort but obscurity, but that is not enough for him. He wants, almost needs, the limelight, and hence is trying to build his newspaper to greater fame.
* As a movement, the Foghorn expands into the internet with FogHornLine, and this is commemorated with a small party in Highbury’s Town Hall, where the game begins.
* After that day, Murrow delegates the website to Andersen while he pays attention to the newspaper (functions as the tutorial)
* A terrorist ring, completely unknown to anybody in the town, is apprehended in Highbury, and the Foghorn’s prompt coverage, for a good while the only source of the event, means the Foghorn gets a sudden and significant rise in fame. Murrow realises how important the quick coverage provided by the internet website was, and takes FogHornLine under his control directly.
* Murrow then proceeds to continuously print regarding the terrorist attack, including repeated references to the community of the members of the terrorist ring, including insinuations that they are all agents of the unnamed Islamic country. These actions start triggering violent reprisal against the community and its members, including vandalism, #GoBack chants and assault in the streets. Andersen is notably uncomfortable with such news, but it is certainly a lucrative strategy.
* Murrow’s actions attract the attention of the head of the PRA, Maya Robinson, and the two clash significantly over the course of the rest of the game.
* Murrow works to ensure that the rise of the Foghorn and FHL aren’t temporary, moving their offices to the city of New Haven nearby. They open new offices, where a guest gives Murrow the idea to move into television. Andersen is opposed to this, but relents, increasingly starting to fear Murrow’s ruthlessness.
* Murrow eventually starts up his news channel, Foghorn TV, and goes full-on propaganda channel in support of Charles Meyer, a senate candidate who is supportive of him, and against the player. It is at this point that Andersen decides to completely break with him, and the company flounders for some time as Andersen goes to the PRA.
* Murrow exploits internet culture and utilises memes to connect with his audience, exploiting a ‘ClownHorse’ meme to woo the internet to his cause. This helps Meyer win the election, and a vote from him is crucial in the country going to war against the Islamic country.
* In the climax, Murrow sets out to destroy Robinson completely after she publicly holds the Foghorn responsible for the war, painting her as a traitor for opposing the war, and succeeds in getting her removed from the PRA, putting one of his friends in the position instead. The game ends with Murrow getting everything he wants. He may have lost his friend, but he doesn’t care.

# Gameplay

Initially, the game starts with the player, the chief editor of The Foghorn, a small newspaper in the town of Highbury, CT, assembling the front page out of the news that is being reported today. The news day starts at 6 pm and continues until 12 am – where each hour is 20 seconds in real-time – and new news stories keep showing up every in-game half-hour (i.e. every 10 seconds in real-time). The stories enter the list of stories automatically as the time proceeds. The player may drag and drop the stories onto the newspaper pages, and the impact of the newspaper story would vary depending on where on the front page the story is placed – for instance, the story that is the main story, the headline (top and centre) would obviously be the story with the most impact, while any story on the edges and bottom right would have the least importance. These stories are rated in several different ways – for factual content (which may be required to some extent on the front page, depending on the Press Regulatory Agency regulations you face at your current level), for public inflammation (news articles which provoke outrage among the public, and/or are controversial in some way), and for public adoration (news articles which are heart-warming and/or engage the public in some way or other). The stories will be affected by the player’s reportage on them, as the newspaper will affect public perceptions of these stories.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description generated with very high confidence

Figure . A basic image description of the gameplay system for newspapers. Individual news items (on the right) can be dragged to the position deemed appropriate, as new stories keep coming in every 30 minutes (10 seconds). The timer above indicates how much time the player has before the paper is sent to print.

Good-quality editors for the newspaper, in later levels, will help you with arranging several articles for the desired public impact, but these may cost a significant amount. Lower-quality editors may also do so, but their work may be less satisfactory.

After the end of the day, the player will be able to see their public goodwill, sales, and any kind of action taken against them by the PRA, if any. Public goodwill usually translates into more sales in the future and is seen in the public letters to the editor, sales is the actual money received from newspaper sales, advertisement revenue, etc, which will go to you and your employees – major employees will receive direct percentages of sales, and any money left over will go over to you. PRA action would generally be taken if the PRA finds that the paper is not reporting enough factual content and/or is reporting news in a highly inflammatory manner, and can range from a simple fine, to a mandatory news article on the front page that reduces public goodwill, to a strike – and three strikes mean you will lose your press license for an instant game over. Periodically, the player will be able to see letters to the editor from the public, to give them an idea of how the public feels about their coverage. These letters will be procedurally generated based on the articles that the player has published.

As time goes by, the player expands into multiple media sources, such as television and new internet media. These media involve different challenges – while TV news points take some time to change, webpages can be changed immediately. However, both media cater to different markets – especially the new media to teenagers and young adults – and hence the player will have to utilise different types of articles on the website home page, as well as the TV screen, such as clickbait articles and quizzes for the former, and breaking news alerts for the latter. The player will also have to hire new staff to help them with these media, such as television presenters and internet personalities. These employees will help you spin certain news stories in certain ways, to ensure that your media has the desired impact on the public.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description generated with very high confidence

Figure . An illustration of the UI of the TV channel. News items (headlines, in this case) can be arranged into both the BREAKING NEWS tile, as well as the ticker tiles, each with different focus. The player may also select the presenter to ensure that their message has maximum impact. There is no timer in this case, however, there is a bit of a time lag between finalising the items and their impact being seen.

Certain random events will occur throughout the gameplay. These may include events such as:

* Employees wanting to leave
* Employees wanting a pay increase
* A politician asking you to help him deface an opponent.
* Employees acting out in strange ways.

These events depend on plot points as well as hidden attributes of your staff. These random events have set responses, each of which will Based on how they are tackled by the player, these random events can alter any number of metrics, such as public outrage, public adoration, sales, etc.

A screenshot of a cell phone

Description generated with very high confidence

Figure . A demonstration of a random event. The four options will, if selected, all lead to different options. For example, if the ‘Sack’ option is chosen, you will regain a bit of public adoration lost due to the event, but the employee will be lost. Accusing the victim of lying, however, would mean you would increase public outrage, lose adoration, and the employee would be more likely to perform such acts in the future, typically to a greater degree.

The game will also have plot-based events, which will affect these metrics significantly. These will typically trigger at set points in the game, usually based on the amount of certain metrics. For example, at one point, the player may need to collect a certain amount of money to bribe a certain politician, and hence the plot trigger will only occur once the player has collected the money required and is willing to go ahead with the story. Other metrics used for triggering plot events could be public outrage, typically, as it would make sense for outrage to boil over into a major incident, or public adoration, which would imply that the paper’s popularity has improved to the extent that the newspaper can expand significantly.

# Features

* Play as the chief editor for a newspaper, and expand your media empire to television and the internet!
* Spin the news to elicit different reactions from the general public and alter the progression of news stories due to changed public perception!
* Manage your staff, including editors, television presenters, and internet personalities!

# Target Audience

The target audience for this game is generally everyone above the age of 13. It shows young adults that can begin to understand the nuances of the world the way in which their perspectives of the world can be skewed by malicious misreporting of the news. It can also be played by adults, who will be able to see many parallels between the events and themes of the game and real-life controversial topics and events.

# Outcomes

I expect the audience to take a step behind and see how the tactics employed by Murrow (and as such, the tools available to the player) would be crucial to the manipulation of the public through the news media. I would personally consider it a success if the player would find it difficult to play past a certain point, as they would be unable to support Murrow’s actions in any way. However, I would trust my audience to come to their own conclusions – I don’t believe that dropping the message of the game on their head like an anvil would help.

# Summary

*The Foghorn* has a theme that would resonate with a contemporary audience, and will be a game that is both fun to play, as well as a subtle cautionary experience talking about the dangers of fake news. The last few years have been a direct witness to how fake news can and has changed the world, and this game will be both an important testament to this age, and an interactive cautionary tale of how public perception can be altered by the mass media, which is still fun to play.