

After being hit by a drunken driver, the protagonist awakens in a curious plane—somewhere between life and eternal rest. A guide offers the protagonist the opportunity to move on to restfulness, but they choose instead to wait in the purgatory for their beloved dog. Noticing the many lonely animal spirits, the ghost begins to collect and care for the restless creatures. As the protagonist learns their stories and helps move them through the scars from life, the animals grow more comfortable, confident, and loving. Eventually, the human ghosts catch wind. They, too, are lonely. The protagonist learns about the ghosts, connects the animals and humans, and helps guide them to a loving state where they can pass on together. Eventually, the protagonist will reunite with their dog, but until then, they will help foster that loving connection between the many ghosts stuck in the in-between.

This game draws inspiration from *Spiritfarer*, *Love*, *Ghostie*, and *Pocket Stables*, which all create impressive relationships between the player and temporary characters that the player loves and cares for. Like *Spiritfarer*, this game offers diegetic character minigames that move the plot through game premises that reflect character progress and growth. Likewise, like *Spiritfarer*, this game will address death and fulfillment through the care of passed souls. Like *Love*, *Ghostie* and *Pocket Stables*, this game will take place in a confined 2D space where energy used determines the passing of time. Along with the passing of time, energy limits how many minigames can be played each day, and minigames unlock story information, improve ghost relationships, and increase ghost stats. As described by Bogost, the structure of this game will go a long way in communicating its meaning and determining its significance. However, since the game *will* explore death, grief, and sadness, the player's relationship to these topics will have a great deal of impact on the game's worth. Though not specifically "play," these variations support Sicart's idea of the player's value in determining a game's significance.

While the "goal" of this game is to help animal and human ghosts reach their final resting place, the "purpose" is to explore how animal-human relationships can release grief and loneliness through love, vulnerability, and connection. Stat blocks and minigames will act as the primary obstacles to challenge users to engage with the game. Generally, this will be a "cozy game," so there won't be any glaring physical challenges to test dexterity or reaction speed. However, users will be encouraged to pay attention to the memories and personality traits that reveal themselves through the minigames. Those pieces of information will pay off down the line through greater stat increases, better memory scenes, and better activity scenes for the ghosts. The theoretical "means" of the game will be harmony. The player looks for narrative, personal progress, and apt relationship matches. The obstacles and format will help serve this purpose. Energy, stat barriers, and relationship win conditions will form the primary rules of the game, excluding the minigames. These rules will guide what the player can do and when, encouraging them to care and reflect thoughtfully on the characters and their needs. If they don't care, they won't progress.

“In games, on the other hand, the form of our practical engagement is intentionally and creatively configured by the game’s designers. In ordinary life, we have to desperately fit ourselves to the practical demands of the world. In games, we can engineer the world of the game, and the agency we will occupy, to fit us and our desires” (Nguyen).

I appreciate Nguyen’s ideas here and largely agree. However, I feel that Nguyen’s rhetoric could benefit from emphasizing the role of consent within these dynamics. Nguyen jumps from game configuration to a player’s ability to “engineer” the world in which they interact. In many cases, players will not have the option to actively change or influence a game’s narrative. Hence, Nguyen’s description of one’s ability to have agency, to “engineer the world,” feels to be, at most, an incomplete claim. A player may not be able to entirely control the game’s circumstances, but they can consent to the circumstances. *Spiritfarer*, I feel, is a wonderful example. Every spirit will inevitably leave, and the player has little agency in influencing that outcome. While *Spiritfarer* often evokes a lot of pain, as described by Nguyen, a player has the option to either engage or disengage with these hurtful thoughts and emotions. The game provides a confined space for players to experience these complicated emotions. While the player exerts a certain degree of agency in their story, they are more specifically consenting to the game’s premise.

I understand why “agency” is largely the correct word to use in the context of Nguyen’s article, but “consent” provides a specificity that illuminates why players choose to undertake challenges in game worlds, especially when the game’s experience is not explicitly positive. People are less afraid to explore painful emotions if they understand that they are consenting to the experience. In real life, people rarely get the chance.

In class, we discussed whether or not agency is possible in *The Stanley Parable*. The game never ends—well, it does, but not really. However, players get the essential opportunity to consent to this game and its subsequent lack of direction or agency. With that act of consent, players are more comfortable and willing to release some degree of control over their own story.