

= Her Story (video game) =

Her Story is an interactive movie video game written and directed by Sam Barlow . It was released on 24 June 2015 for Microsoft Windows , OS X and iOS . In the game , players search and sort through a database of video clips from fictional police interviews , and use the clips to solve the case of a missing man . The police interviews focus on the man 's wife , Hannah Smith , portrayed by British musician Viva Seifert .

The game is Barlow 's first project since his departure from Climax Studios , after which he became independent . He wanted to develop a game that was dependent on the narrative , and avoided working on the game until he was settled on an idea that was possible to execute . Barlow eventually decided to create a police procedural game , and incorporate live action footage . He conducted research for the game by watching existing police interviews . Upon doing so , he discovered recurring themes in the suspects ' answers , and decided to incorporate ambiguity to the investigation in the game .

At release , Her Story was acclaimed by many reviewers , with praise particularly directed at the narrative , character performance , and unconventional gameplay mechanics . The game has sold over 100 @, @ 000 copies , and was nominated for multiple year @-@ end accolades , including Game of the Year awards from several gaming publications .

= = Gameplay = =

Her Story is an interactive movie game , focusing on a series of seven fictional police interviews from 1994 . As the game begins , players are presented with an old desktop , which contains several files and programs . Among the programs are instructional text files , which explain the game 's mechanics . One of the programs automatically open on the desktop is the " L.O.G.I.C. Database " , which allows players to search and sort video clips within the database , of which there are 271 . The video clips are police interviews with a British woman : Hannah Smith . The interviews are unable to be watched in their entirety , forcing players to view short clips . In the interviews , Hannah answers unknown questions to an off @-@ screen detective , prompting players to decipher the context of the answers . Hannah 's answers are transcribed , and players find clips by searching in the database for words from the transcriptions , attempting to solve the case by piecing together information . As players select clips , they can enter user tags , which are then available as searchable terms . One of the files on the desktop is a database checker , which allows players to review the amount of clips that have been viewed ; as a clip is viewed , the red box in the database checker changes to green . The desktop also features the minigame Mirror Game , based on the strategy board game Reversi .

= = Plot = =

The interview tapes feature a woman who introduces herself as Hannah Smith (Viva Seifert) , whose husband , Simon , has gone missing , and is later found murdered . Hannah admits that the two had a difficult relationship , but has an alibi placing her in Glasgow at the time after an argument . As more pieces of the interviews are discovered , it is revealed that " Hannah " is actually two women : Hannah and Eve , identical twins separated at birth by the midwife . The twins were unaware of each other 's existence until years later , at which point they decided to act as a single person , keeping a common diary and a set of rules defining their actions as " Hannah " .

Hannah eventually began dating Simon , whom she met at a glazier where they both work . Despite their rules , Hannah sleeps with Simon and becomes pregnant , which upsets Eve , who makes an effort to get pregnant but is unable to do so ; Hannah miscarries in the eighth month . Years later , Simon meets Eve in a bar . The two begin an affair , and Eve becomes pregnant ; by this time , Hannah is infertile . On their birthday , Simon gives a handmade mirror to Hannah , but they have an argument , and Hannah reveals that she has a sister who is pregnant ; Simon realises he is the father . The following day , Eve has an argument and flees to Glasgow . Hannah , wearing Eve 's

wig , confronts Simon . Unaware that she is Hannah , Simon gifts her another mirror . Hannah becomes furious , shattering the mirror and accidentally lodging it in Simon 's throat , killing him . When Eve returns , the two agree to hide Simon 's body , and use Eve 's trip to Glasgow as an alibi . At the end of the interview , Eve notes that Hannah is " gone " , and asks to speak to a lawyer .

As players uncover enough of the story , a chat window appears asking if they are finished . Once players answer affirmatively , it is revealed that they are Sarah , Eve 's daughter . The chat asks Sarah if she understands her mother 's actions , and asks to meet her outside .

= = Development = =

Her Story was developed by Sam Barlow , who previously worked on games such as Silent Hill : Origins (2007) and Silent Hill : Shattered Memories (2009) at Climax Studios . Barlow had conceived the idea of a police procedural game while working at Climax Studios , but decided to become independent to create the game , in order to develop a game that is " deep on story " . He became frustrated by publishers using kitchen sink realism as the reason behind rejecting game pitches , and found that becoming independent allowed him to create his own game of the sort . He also wished to become independent after playing games like Year Walk (2013) and 80 Days (2014) . Barlow avoided development until he had an idea that was possible to execute . " I could probably quite easily have gone and made an exploration horror game ... but I kind of knew that there would be big compromises there because of budget , " he said . Barlow spent his savings to work on the game , allowing him a year of development time . He followed through with the concept of Her Story , as it focused on an " intimate setting , dialogue and character interaction " , which he found was often dismissed in larger titles . Barlow felt particularly inspired to develop Her Story after seeing the continuous support of his 1999 game Aisle . When referring to how Her Story challenges typical game conventions , Barlow compares it to the Dogme 95 filmmaking movement , and Alfred Hitchcock 's 1948 film Rope .

Her Story was approved through Steam Greenlight , and was crowdfunded by Indie Fund . It was released on 24 June 2015 for Microsoft Windows , OS X and iOS . Barlow wanted to launch the game on all platforms simultaneously , as he was unsure where the audience would be . " If I 'd just gone for just one I 'd have lost a lot of the potential audience , " he commented . Barlow found that playing Her Story on mobile devices is a " ' sofa ' experience " . He also noted that it felt " natural " for it to be released on mobile devices , as they are regularly used to watch videos and search the internet ; similar tasks are used as gameplay mechanics in Her Story . The iPhone 's smaller pixel size of 640 × 480 as opposed to 800 × 600 led to Barlow 's doubts of a release on the platform , but he was influenced to release it upon receiving positive feedback through testing . As development neared completion , the game underwent testing , which allowed Barlow to " balance some aspects " and " polish items together " . An Android version was released on June 29 , 2016 . Her Story runs on the Unity game engine .

= = = Gameplay design = = =

Barlow 's immediate idea was to create a game involving police interviews , but he " didn 't know exactly what that meant " . He then conceived the idea to involve real video footage , and the ability to access the footage through a database interface ; he described the interface as being " part Apple II , part Windows 3 @. @ 1 and part Windows 98 " . The interface design was inspired by Barlow 's appreciation of the police procedural genre , commenting that " the conceit of making the computer itself a prop in the game was so neat " . He also compared the searching mechanic to the Google search engine , and wanted to " run with the idea " that players are " essentially Googling " . The game 's concept was inspired by the TV series Homicide : Life on the Street (1993 ? 1999) , which Barlow found depicted police interviews being a " gladiatorial arena for detectives " . Barlow intentionally made the game 's opening screen to be " slightly too long " , to immediately notify players of the slow pacing that would follow .

Inspiration to work on Her Story stemmed from Barlow 's disappointment of other detectives games

: he felt that L.A. Noire (2011) never allowed him to feel like " the awesome detective who was having to read things and follow up threads of investigation " , and he called the Ace Attorney series (2001 ? present) " rigidity " . When Barlow began development on Her Story , he added more typical game aspects , but the game mechanics became more minimalist as development progressed . The initial plan for the game was for players to work towards a definitive resolution , ultimately solving the crime . However , when Barlow tested the concept on pre @-@ existing interview transcripts of convicted murderer Christopher Porco , he began to discover themes surfacing within the interviews , particularly relating to the concept of money , which was ultimately a large factor in Porco 's trial . He took this concept of recurring themes and threads , and decided to " move beyond the clearly scripted stuff " when developing Her Story . Barlow felt that the story 's appeal was the ambiguity of the investigation , comparing Her Story to the podcast Serial (2014 ? present) , which he listened to late in development . He found that the attraction of Serial was the lack of a definitive solution , noting that " people lean towards certain interpretations ... what makes it interesting is the extent to which it lives on in your imagination " .

= = = Story and characters = = =

Barlow decided to feature live action footage in the game after becoming frustrated with his previous projects , particularly with the technical challenge of translating an actor 's performance into a game engine . Barlow set out to work with an actor on Her Story , having enjoyed the process while working at Climax Studio , albeit with a larger budget . He contacted Viva Seifert , whom he had intermittently worked with on Legacy of Kain : Dead Sun for a year , before its cancellation . He felt that Seifert is " very good at picking up a line and intuitively pulling a lot of the subtext into her performance " , which led him to believe that she was " perfect " for the role in Her Story . When Barlow asked Seifert to audition , he sent her a 300 @-@ page script , which he managed to reduce to 80 pages , by altering font size , as well as some dialogue ; she accepted the role . Seifert began to feel pressure midway through filming , when she realised that " the whole game is hinging " on her performance . She described the shoot as " intense " and " rather exhausting " , and felt as if she was " subtly being scrutinised " by Barlow , which helped her performance . Barlow also felt that the intensity helped Seifert 's performance , taking cues from director Alfred Hitchcock , who would upset his actors in order to achieve the greatest performance . Seifert felt that there were small nuances in her performance that may have " added some twists and turns " for players that Barlow had not anticipated . The game 's seven police interviews were filmed roughly in chronological order over five days , in a process that Barlow called " natural " . Barlow travelled to Seifert 's home county of Cornwall to film . He felt that finding the locations for the interrogation rooms was the simplest part of production , because " everywhere has crappy looking rooms " , with footage being recorded in a council building in Truro . When filming was complete , Barlow wanted to give the impression that the videos had been recorded in 1994 , but found digital filters were unable to capture this time frame appropriately . Instead , he recorded the footage through two VHS players to create imperfections in the video before digitising the video into the game .

Barlow played the part of the detectives during filming , asking scripted questions to Seifert 's character , but is never featured in Her Story . When watching police interviews for research , Barlow found himself empathising with the interviewee , which inspired him to exclude the detective from the game . He stated that the interviews typically feature " double betrayal " , in which the detectives are " pretending to be the best friend " . Barlow felt that removing the detective from the game empowers Seifert 's character , allowing players to empathise . When conducting research for Her Story , Barlow looked at the case regarding the murder of Travis Alexander , which made him consider the manner that female murder suspects are treated in interrogations , stating that they " tend to be fetishised , more readily turned into archetypes " . This was further proved to Barlow when studying the interviews of Casey Anthony and Amanda Knox ; he found that media commentary often ignored the evidence of the investigation , instead focusing on the expressions of the suspects during the interviews . Barlow conducted further research by studying texts about psychology , and the use of language .

After conceiving the game 's main mechanics , Barlow began developing the story , conducting research and " letting [the story] take on a life of its own " . To develop the story , Barlow placed the script into a spreadsheet , which became so large it often crashed his laptop upon opening it . He mapped out every character involved in the investigation , including their backstories and agendas . He spent about half of development creating detailed documents charting the story 's characters and events . He also determined the dates on which the police interviews would take place , and what the suspect was doing in the interim . Once he had determined the game 's concept more precisely , Barlow ensured the script contained " layers of intrigue " , in order to interest players to finish the game . Barlow often replaced words of the script with synonyms , to ensure that some clips were not associated with irrelevant words . When writing the script , Barlow generally avoided supernatural themes , but realised that it would involve a " slight dreamlike surreal edge " . Working on the script , he often found that he was " very much in the moment , writing from inside the characters ' heads " . He found it difficult to create a new idea for the story , as detective fiction has been explored many times before .

== = Audio == =

When searching for music to use in Her Story , Barlow looked for songs that sounded " slightly out @-@ of @-@ time " . He ultimately used eight tracks from musician Chris Zabriskie , and found that his music invoked nostalgia , and had a " modern edge " . He felt that the music " highlights the gap between the ' fake computer world ' " and the game . The " emotional intensity " of the clips also influences the music changes in Her Story . Barlow also intended to feature a song for Seifert to sing in some of the clips that fit within the game . He settled on the murder ballad " The Twa Sisters " , which he felt would trigger the mythical elements of the game . Seifert and Barlow both altered the ballad , to fit the game . Barlow intended for the sound design to be " all about authenticity " . He used an old keyboard to provide sound effects for the computer , using stereo panning for the keys to have the correct 3D position in playback .

== = Sequel == =

In January 2016 , Barlow confirmed that a sequel was in development , under the working title Her Story 2 . Barlow considered it a " spiritual successor " to Her Story , with a narrative unrelated to the first game , though it will continue to use full @-@ motion video as its central gameplay element .

== = Reception == =

== = Critical reception == =

Her Story was well received by critics . Review aggregator Metacritic calculated an average score of 91 out of 100 based on 10 reviews for the iOS version , indicating " universal acclaim " , and 86 out of 100 based on 49 reviews for the Windows version , indicating " generally favorable reviews " . Metacritic ranks the game within the top 20 iOS and Windows games released in 2015 , and GameRankings ranks Her Story within its top 100 iOS games of all time . Praise was particularly directed at the game 's narrative , Seifert 's performance , and gameplay mechanics . IGN 's Brian Albert called Her Story " the most unique game I 've played in years " , and Steven Burns of VideoGamer.com named it " one of the year 's best and most interesting games " . Adam Smith of Rock , Paper , Shotgun remarked that it " might be the best FMV game ever made " ; Michael Thomsen of The Washington Post declared it " a beautiful amalgam of the cinema and video game formats " .

Critics lauded the game 's narrative . Kimberley Wallace of Game Informer wrote that the " fragmented " delivery of the story " works to its benefit " . She appreciated the subtlety of the narrative , and the ambiguity surrounding the ending . Polygon 's Megan Farokhmanesh noted that

Her Story " nails the dark , voyeuristic nature of true crime " . Chris Schilling of The Daily Telegraph was impressed by the coherence of the narrative , " even when presented out of order " . Eurogamer 's Simon Parkin found the effects of the narrative to be similar to well @-@ received HBO thrillers , particularly in terms of audience attention . Stephanie Bendixsen of Good Game was disappointed that large plot points were revealed early in the game , but attributed this to the uniqueness of each players ' experience .

Seifert 's performance in the game received high praise from reviewers . GameSpot 's Justin Clark felt that the performance " anchored " the game . Katie Smith of Adventure Gamers wrote that Seifert is convincing in the role , particularly with small details such as body language , but was startled by the lack of emotion . Game Informer 's Wallace echoed similar remarks , noting that Seifert " nailed the role " . Rock , Paper , Shotgun 's Smith wrote that " the whole thing might collapse " without Seifert 's " convincing " performance . IGN 's Albert named the acting " believable " , stating that Seifert 's performance is " appropriately both grounded and absurd " . Joe Donnelly of Digital Spy wrote that Seifert 's performance has the potential to inspire similar games , and Andy Kelly of PC Gamer called the performance " understated , realistic , and complex " . Burns of VideoGamer.com felt generally impressed by Seifert 's performance , but noted some " occasional bad acting " .

The unconventional gameplay mechanics also received positive remarks from critics . Destructoid 's Laura Kate Dale felt that the game 's pacing and structure assisted the narrative , and Wallace of Game Informer found that making a connection between key points in the narrative was entertaining . Burns of VideoGamer.com praised the game 's ability to make players realise their own biases , and challenge their " sense of self " . Albert of IGN felt that the searching tool was " gratifying " , and positively contributes to the pacing of the game , while The Washington Post 's Thomsen wrote that the database mechanic created " contemplative gaps between scenes " , allowing for " poignance and power " within the narrative . Bendixsen of Good Game described the desktop as " appropriately retro " , noting that she was " drawn in immediately " .

The game sold over 100 @, @ 000 copies by 10 August 2015 ; about 60 @, @ 000 copies were sold on Windows , with the remaining 40 @, @ 000 sold on iOS .

= = = Accolades = = =

Her Story has received multiple nominations and awards from gaming publications . It won Game of the Year from Polygon , as well as Game of the Month from Rock , Paper , Shotgun and GameSpot . It received the Breakthrough Award at the 33rd Golden Joystick Awards , Debut Game and Game Innovation at the 12th British Academy Games Awards , the award for Most Original game from PC Gamer , and the Seumas McNally Grand Prize at the Independent Games Festival Awards . At The Game Awards 2015 , Her Story won Best Narrative , and Seifert won Best Performance for her role in the game . The game won Mobile Game of the Year at the SXSW Gaming Awards , the award for Mobile & Handheld at the British Academy Games Awards , awards for excellence in story and innovation at the International Mobile Gaming Awards , and Best Emotional Mobile & Handheld Game at the Emotional Games Awards , while The Guardian named it the best iOS game of 2015 @, @