= Escape from Woomera =

Escape from Woomera is an unfinished point @-@ and @-@ click adventure video game , intended to criticise the treatment of mandatorily detained asylum seekers in Australia as well as the Australian government 's attempt to impose a media blackout on the detention centres . In the game , the player assumes the role of Mustafa , an Iranian asylum seeker being held at Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre . Mustafa 's request for asylum has been denied , and , fearing that he will be killed by the Iranian government upon his repatriation to Iran , he decides to attempt to escape Woomera . Mustafa must explore Woomera and speak with other individuals at the centre to devise and execute an escape plan .

The game was developed in 2003 and 2004 by a team of Australian video game industry professionals and an investigative journalist , using Half @-@ Life 's GoldSrc engine . The developers received an AU $ 25 @,@ 000 grant from the Australia Council to make the game , propelling the project to national attention , where the idea received a predominantly negative reception . The Australia Council 's decision to fund the game drew condemnation from both Minister for Immigration Philip Ruddock and Australian Human Rights Commission leader Dr. Sev Ozdowski . Unable to secure further funding , a full game was never developed , and the playable prototype was made available free of charge online .

= = Plot = =

Escape from Woomera opens with three screens of text that explain the game 's background . Players assume the role of Mustafa , who paid smugglers to bring him to Australia after his parents were killed by the Iranian secret police . After the boat transporting him crashed in the Ashmore Reef , Mustafa was brought to the Woomera Immigration Reception and Processing Centre , where he was given the identification number " RAR @-@ 124 " . After three months , Mustafa was informed that his request for asylum was denied , and that he would be repatriated to Iran . Believing that he would be tortured and killed upon his return , Mustafa decided to escape Woomera .

Because the game was never completed , only a small portion of the intended gameplay exists . During the playable segment , Mustafa , through conversations with other detainees , discovers that another detainee is planning an escape but needs a pair of pliers to make the attempt . Mustafa must join a work detail to gain access to the pliers , hide the pliers in a garbage can to prevent them from being found during a search , recover them at night (which requires Mustafa to find a way to pry open the area that the garbage cans are stored in) , and deliver them to the other detainee . The playable section ends when Mustafa delivers the pliers . Other interactions during the playable section include speaking with a detainee who , after complaining that a guard threw her copy of the Quran to the ground , mentions the existence of a partially built tunnel from a previous escape attempt .

= = Gameplay = =

Escape from Woomera is a point @-@ and @-@ click adventure game . The player , controlling Mustafa , explores the Woomera centre , which is populated with non @-@ player characters ? computer @-@ controlled individuals that move about the facility on their own . Some of these characters can speak with Mustafa , giving him information about the facility , sharing their backgrounds or experiences at Woomera , or directing him to find and retrieve objects scattered throughout the facility . Speaking with characters and completing their tasks allows Mustafa to progress towards his goal of escaping the facility .

The game has a meter that tracks Mustafa 's hope . As he completes tasks that take him towards the goal of escaping , the meter increases . Listening to the experiences of fellow detainees , which in some cases is required to gain access to other information or tasks , drains Mustafa 's hope . If he is caught breaking rules by the guards , Mustafa is placed in solitary confinement , which also drains

hope . Should the hope meter run out , Mustafa loses the ability to continue to attempt an escape , and is deported .

= = Development = =

The idea for a video game centred on asylum seekers in Australia came to Katharine Neil , then an developer at Atari 's Melbourne studio , in the aftermath of the 2001 Tampa affair . Neil spent a year and a half assembling a team to work on the game and securing initial funding for the project . Fourteen people contributed to the game , with a core development team of four . Many of the Australian members of the development team , including Neil , contributed to the project anonymously to protect their jobs .

Neil stated that her motivation for the project was a desire to create a video game in which the asylum seekers were the heroes . The purpose of the game , according to Neil , was twofold . The team wanted to criticise the treatment of detained asylum seekers in Australia , and they also wanted to prove that video games were capable of the task . At the time , the idea that video games could convey political topics in a serious manner , and that they were a form of culture worth being taken seriously , had not caught on strongly . The game also was a statement against the Australian government 's attempts to suppress media access to , and coverage of , the detention facilities .

The original plan for Escape from Woomera involved several choices in playable detainees , each with a different story about how they came to seek asylum in Australia . The game would have players " battle the bureaucracy and try and survive day to day " while working towards any of several escape strategies . As originally envisioned , players could attempt to escape through the legal channels , using lawyers and activists , or could attempt to flee by scaling fences or digging tunnels . The development team worked to create the most realistic depiction of the Woomera centre possible , despite the media not being allowed in the facility . The team utilised interviews with former detainees and activists , existing press reports , and a copy of the facility 's floor plan obtained from a member of the Department of Immigration . Kate Wild , an investigative journalist hired by the development team to conduct research , was able to visit Baxter Immigration Reception and Processing Centre . She witnessed guards using spotlights and helicopters to keep detainees awake throughout the night , and police on horseback trampling over tents . Aside from Woomera and Baxter , Port Hedland Immigration Reception and Processing Centre and Villawood Immigration Detention Centre were also used as influences . Details from the daily lives of detainees , such as their being referred to by number and communicating with the outside world through payphones , were incorporated into the game . Tasks that players had to complete , as well as the escape strategies themselves , were also based on the experiences of real detainees .

Initial funding for the development of Escape from Woomera came from the Australian government 's arts funding organisation , the Australia Council for the Arts . The Australia Council gave the developers AUD $ 25 @,@ 000 , intended to get the game developed to the point that it could secure funding from other sources . While a playable section of the game was developed , the developers never received additional funding . The playable demo , which was built as a modification of the video game Half @-@ Life , was made available for download on the game 's website .

= = Reception = =

The Australia Council 's decision to fund Escape from Woomera was poorly received . The game received heavy criticism before development even began . Australia 's Minister for Immigration , Philip Ruddock , released a statement saying that the " decision reflects poorly upon the Australia Council and its judgement , that the organisation should lend its name to the promotion of unlawful behaviour " . Kate Wild , in a 2013 interview , recalled that she was surprised at how strongly Ruddock attacked the game , a reaction she attributed to the government being sensitive over the issue of detainee treatment . The leader of the Australian Human Rights Commission , Dr. Sev Ozdowski , released a strongly worded statement accusing the game of misconstruing asylum

seekers as criminals , and saying that " The idea of using issues in detention for entertainment is simply sick . " Chairman Michael Snelling of the New Media Arts Board , the branch of the Australia Council that granted the development money , defended the decision to fund Escape from Woomera , stating that the game 's purpose was not to promote crime . He characterised the team 's application for funding as both strong and closely aligned with the New Media Arts Board 's goal of promoting cross @-@ disciplinary media .

In the 2010s , the retrospective view of Escape from Woomera is significantly more positive . In 2013 , the Australian Broadcasting Corporation called it " one of the first ? and still one of the most important ? politically @-@ focused videogames " . The textbook The Alternative Media Handbook used the game as a case study in culture jamming , and categorised it as an early example of video games carrying a political message .