

= TouchTone =

TouchTone is a 2015 puzzle video game for iOS devices by Mikengreg , a two @-@ person indie game development team made up of Mike Boxleiter and Greg Wohlwend . The player monitors phone calls as part of a government surveillance program to find public threats . The player unlocks chains of emails by completing a series of puzzles wherein a beam is reflected around a room to a set destination . TouchTone 's core concept grew from a two @-@ day game jam immediately following their 2012 release of Gasketball , but only found its hacker theme following the mid @-@ 2013 Edward Snowden global surveillance disclosures . The tone of TouchTone 's story grew from satirical to serious over the course of the game 's development .

The game was released on March 19 , 2015 . Review aggregator Metacritic characterized TouchTone 's reviews as generally favorable . Critics praised the game 's visual style and story , but criticized the way the game did not allow players to skip puzzles . Reviewers found the light @-@ bending puzzle premise unoriginal , but appreciated its thematic connection .

= = Gameplay = =

As part of a government surveillance program , the player monitors phone calls to find public threats . Apart from infrequent interaction with their handler , the player is left to solve puzzles in pursuit of one such lead . The puzzles are based on the " reflection puzzle " popularized by role @-@ playing video games wherein the player moves mirrors to reflect a beam of light about a room . In TouchTone , the player swipes the screen to move pieces that redirect incoming beams , symbolic of phone signals , into specific locations . The waveform beams are displayed in different solid colors and must be matched with the destination " node " of the same color by passing through moveable pieces that reflect and split the beam . The pieces do not move individually but as rows and columns in cardinal directions .

The levels are displayed in an overworld with a branching , tree structure . The player must pursue multiple branches to further the story . Optional , side @-@ story branches do not advance the main plot but have the hardest puzzles . The story is told through chains of emails , which are unlocked by completing puzzles . The player assumes the role of an American Muslim National Security Agency agent who determines whether the hacked emails are pertinent to national security . The ethics of government surveillance are a core theme of the game .

= = Development = =

Mikengreg , an indie game developer duo of Mike Boxleiter and Greg Wohlwend , released the 2010 Solipskier and 2012 Gasketball together before TouchTone in 2015 . After Gasketball 's release , Boxleiter and Wohlwend planned a celebratory road trip to a game jam in Victoria , British Columbia . Gasketball turned out to be a " financial flop " , and so Boxleiter wanted to use the jam to create " something new , ... something really small and perfect " . By the end of the two @-@ day jam , the core mirror reflection mechanics of TouchTone were in place , though it would take two years of sporadic work to finalize the remainder of the game . During this time , the two also worked separately , and Wohlwend released the well @-@ received Threes with Asher Vollmer in 2014 . Wohlwend tried to fit audio signal elements into TouchTone 's nascent theme of light , lasers , and prisms . They felt this direction was unsuccessful , like a " boring Flash game " , and that the game too closely mimicked " a hacking minigame from a bigger AAA game like BioShock or System Shock " .

TouchTone found its theme following the Edward Snowden global surveillance disclosures in mid 2013 , as Mikengreg felt they could provide satirical commentary through the " hacking " element of the game . The story shed its jocular tone as it and its political content grew deeper and more serious . Boxleiter wrote most of the script , which totaled over 20 @,@ 000 words in length . It was his first effort at professional writing , and it took him five months . He and Wohlwend would conference after each chapter for coherency . Boxleiter wanted the story to explore the " questions

... floating around the national consciousness " rather than be " heavy @-@ handed " and prescriptive . Despite this work , Boxleiter felt that the story and the gameplay " don 't necessarily interact with each other " , with the story serving to drive those less interested in puzzles through the rest of the game . They playtested the game in public at the theater in Logan Square , Chicago , though they acknowledged difficulty in playtesting the story 's private experience . Mikengreg decided against including an option to skip puzzles , which they felt would spoil the game and the player 's capacity to adapt to increasing difficulty . They attribute this game design philosophy to Derek Yu of Spelunky .

TouchTone was released as an iOS universal app for both iPhone and iPad on March 19 , 2015 . It received a front page feature on the iOS App Store upon its release .

= = Reception = =

TouchTone received " generally favorable " reviews , according to video game review score aggregator Metacritic . It received Pocket Gamer 's silver award .

Reviewers praised the game 's aesthetics and criticized its unoriginal puzzle concept . TouchArcade 's Shaun Musgrave wrote that the game 's " striking " visuals and " politically charged " message were not completely reconciled but were " individually strong " . He described its art style as similar to Wohlwend 's previous work and its political statement as indicative of Mikengreg 's strong opinions . Musgrave praised the game 's writing but thought the actual puzzles were weaker . 148Apps 's Jordan Minor found the " clinical , minimally @-@ colored cyberspace " and 1970s thriller film aesthetic " chillingly appropriate " for the theme 's tension . He also chided the puzzles for not being " a reward unto themselves " and the gameplay 's " monotony " for being similar to that of Papers , Please without serving the same dehumanizing point . Minor called TouchTone " essentially a series of the hacking minigames ... [from] BioShock , Deus Ex , or Watch Dogs . " Pocket Gamer 's Craig Grannell appreciate how the game " often forces a kind of upside @-@ down thinking " and compared its message to that of Blackbar . Gamezebo 's Jim Squires said that TouchTone is " perfectly designed for a certain set of mobile gamers " and compared its gameplay to the 1987 Deflektor . Despite the game 's similarity to " countless light @-@ bending puzzle games " , he found Mikengreg 's implementation " fiendishly clever " in the way the player moves rows of tiles rather than one at a time .

Reviewers did not like the inability to skip puzzles . Musgrave wrote that moments of being " stuck on a mandatory stage " detracted from the player 's investment and sense of immersion in the story . Grannell of Pocket Gamer wrote that TouchTone 's linearity was its " only downside " , though he also wished for options to " undo " mid @-@ game choices and to save puzzle progress upon leaving the game . Multiple reviewers appreciated the game 's story . Wired 's Kyle Vanhemert felt that the act of determining whether messages were pertinent to national security was a " powerful experience " . Squires of Gamezebo considered the story one of the game 's strong points , and unusually so for a puzzle game . He wrote that there was sufficient " intrigue " to want to finish the story , and that the reward of more story encouraged him to get through the harder puzzles .