

Nineteen Eighty-Four

Based on the classic novel written by George Orwell
and published by Secker & Warburg (1949)

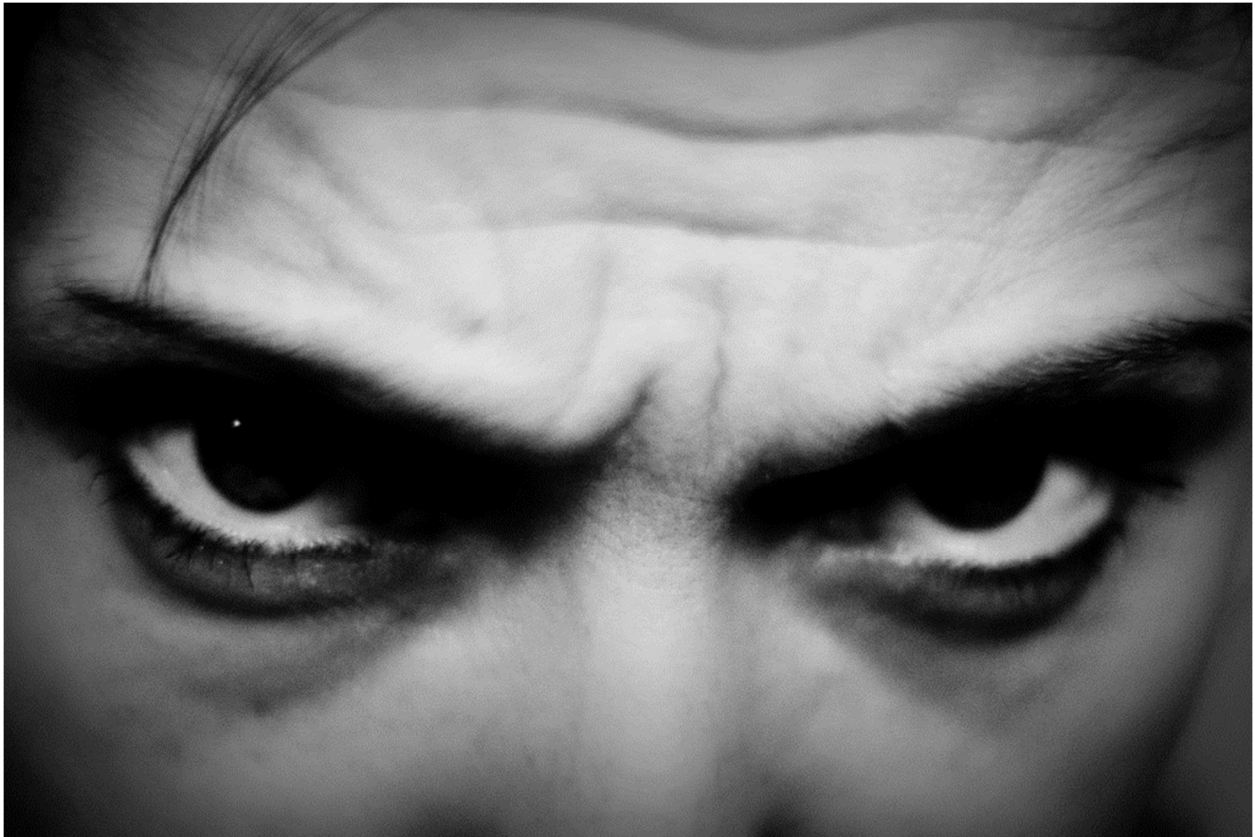


Photo "Angry Eyes" by flickr user Bas Leenders (2008)

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Story Overview

The year is 1984 (or at least you think it is), and for as long as you can remember, the world has been divided into three perpetually warring super-states, Oceania, Eurasia, and Eastasia. You live in London, Airstrip One (formerly Great Britain), a part of Oceania.

London is war-ravaged. Everywhere along the streets are ruined, boarded-up buildings that are lucky to have functioning heat and electricity. Plastered on every wall are posters of the mustachioed government Party leader Big Brother with the caption “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.”

Oceania is a totalitarian state that continuously transmits propaganda and monitors the public through its ubiquitous “telescreens.” This constant surveillance maintains control over the population through fear of getting caught committing the one act that is illegal: thoughtcrime. Thoughtcrime is any sign or act that implies that you are not an exemplary, obedient citizen, and – if caught by the Thought Police – is punishable by torture, death, and complete erasure from history as if you never existed, also known as vaporization.

The Thought Police are operated by the Ministry of Love which deals with law and order. It is one of four government ministries. The others being the Ministry of Peace which deals with war and defense, the Ministry of Plenty which deals with the economy, and the Ministry of Truth which deals with news, entertainment, education, and art.

The population is divided into three hierarchal class groups: The Inner Party (governmental elites), The Outer Party (the so-called middle class), and the Proles (uneducated working class). As history currently states, prior to “the Revolution” or post-civil war reorganization of the country and absorption into Oceania, there were only a few rich Capitalists that ran everything and everyone else was a slave, forced to wallow and fight in their own filth like animals. The Revolution toppled the evil Capitalist government, thereby “freeing” the population and simultaneously creating the Party structure that now exists. However, many still consider the Proles as animals. And as such, since Proles pose no real threat to the Party as it is, they are not as surveilled as the rest of the population of Oceania.

You are a member of the Outer Party working as an editor for the Ministry of Truth. Your job is to rewrite records (news articles, government communication, etc.) to change history to reflect

what the Party wants it to reflect at any given time. You are in your late twenties or early thirties (you no longer remember your birthday), have no friends or family (only a handful of neighbor and work acquaintances) and have been married once. Your spouse has since separated from you as divorce is not permitted by the Party, and they now live somewhere else in Oceania. You have not been told where.

You live in a very small, one-room flat with minimal furnishings and a prominent telescreen that can see almost all of your apartment, except for one tiny corner. You have begun using this corner for some small privacy since the perpetual surveillance is starting to eat away at your sense of self, and more and more you are feeling as though something is very wrong about the world you live in, even though you can't remember it any other way. You bought a journal a few weeks ago (a suspicious item to have) while wandering a Prole neighborhood (a suspicious thing to do) and so have decided to begin writing in it, using the corner in your apartment as a shield from the eyes of the telescreen.



Photo "Senate House" by flickr user Secret Pilgrim (2008). Model for Orwell's Ministry of Truth.

Game Overview

Players become an everyday, working, Outer Party member who, through careful investigation, attempts to discover how to escape the oppressive government found in Oceania. Using the style and elements of classic **graphic adventure** games like King's Quest (1984), and Legend of Zelda (1986), players will have to interact with other characters, search their environment, and complete puzzles in order to win the game.

But players must be careful. Any suspicious activity in front of a telescreen or the wrong NPC could arouse the attention of the Thought Police. The *Suspicion* meter lets players know if they've asked too many questions, poked around for too long, or lost themselves to thought and without knowing it changed their facial expression to something other than peaceful satisfaction.

Using the keyboard as an input device on a PC or a basic controller on a home console, the players will move from location to location interacting with the game to perform everyday tasks, conduct covert investigations, and avoid the Thought Police.

Core gameplay features and interactions include:

- Non-linear game progression

- Dialog trees with other characters
- Item sharing with characters
- Combining items
- Recording notes and clues in a journal (this action will also save the game)
- Completing puzzle types of varying difficulty
 - Word puzzles that translate newspeak, the Party's official language that replaces oldspeak, or the traditional, inefficient way of speaking
 - Broken picture/object puzzles that re-assemble antiques and other "destroyed" items
 - Logic puzzles that test a player's understanding of relationships – historical, personal, or other
 - Lateral thinking puzzles that can be used to evade the Thought Police

Players will have a small inventory that they will control both on their person (pockets) and at their apartment. But again, caution is key. Being caught with suspicious items or contraband (while not illegal per se) will nevertheless attract the unwanted attention of the Thought Police if they question the player.

Thought Police and child "spies" (also keen on turning the player in) are controlled by the computer and randomly patrol areas around Airstrip One. If suspicious behavior is caught and, after questioning, leads to the arrest of the player, the game will essentially end, following an appropriate cut scene detailing the transportation to the Ministry of Love, the player's (implied) torture, (implied) death, and subsequent erasure of their memory from public history.

Winning the game involves the player obtaining and assembling clues that lead them to Emmanuel Goldstein, who then helps them escape from Oceania. Goldstein will be a character "hiding in plain sight," meaning the player will almost always have access to him, but will not know his identity until the right clues are unearthed. Goldstein will need to be presented with the correct combination of items and dialog from the player for the winning sequence to activate.

The game will take players to locations around Airstrip One including but not limited to:

- Their apartment and local neighborhood
- Their desk/office area at the Ministry of Truth
- Ministry Cafeteria
- Community Centre
- Inner Party neighborhoods
- Outer Party neighborhoods
- Prole neighborhoods
- Various shops and cafes
- Ministry departments

Major characters the player will encounter include:

- Emmanuel Goldstein - a former Party leader now leading a counter-revolutionary group called the “Brotherhood” and author of the banned book *The Theory and Practice of Oligarchical Collectivism*.
- O’Brien – an Inner Party contact at the Ministry of Truth
- Charrington – a Prole shopkeeper selling antiques
- Mrs. Parsons – a neighbor with two obnoxious, nosy children
- Julia – a coworker at the Ministry of Truth
- Big Brother – the face of the Party and ruler of Oceania
- Various other neighbors and coworkers
- Child “spies”

Game Design

The game is thoroughly designed to recreate the feelings invoked when reading Orwell’s classic novel: suspicion, fear, mistrust, sadness, helplessness, and isolation. Dark minimalism and futuristic grime were key themes, as well as attention to as much detail as possible as described in the novel itself. For example, all Outer Party members are clothed in the same blue overalls, dingy, light-colored shirt, and brown boots as the novel portrays.



Screenshot of gameplay, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, Cafeteria at the Ministry of Truth. Created using free software at <http://makepixelart.com> by XOXCO, Inc. (2014)

generated that allows player interactions. In this interaction window, people and objects are brought into more pixelated detail. After the investigation, they are sent back into the facelessness of the pulled-back pixelated view.

The game art is styled after classic early 3D pixelated adventure games developed during the 1980’s and early 1990’s. The low-resolution, blocky style underlies the grotesque facelessness of the places and people. Detail is only afforded to those with whom the player becomes familiar. When people and objects are investigated, a pop-up “window” display is

The game's music and sound effects also reflect the classic midi style from early adventure games. The music is generally hushed, with dark melodies and plodding work-tones. It is meant to represent a kind of incessant droning of the Party's propaganda emanating from the telescreens. Sound effects are equally hushed in most cases, unless when used to draw attention to an important action or event triggered by the player.

To invoke a heightened sense of isolation, the game world is designed as a series of segmented sections of the map that appear on the screen one at a time. Progression through the game involves the player moving from "room to room." This means that exiting one area will load a new screen with the player in the new area. Exploring requires the player to form a basic understanding of the layout of the map of Airstrip One, as none is ultimately provided. This small detail simulates the fear of the unknown that keeps Oceania's citizens in compliance. However, the player can manually record details of the map in their new journal to keep track of where they have been.

Marketing

The game, much like the novel it is based on, contains dark themes like nationalism, futurology, censorship, and surveillance that younger players may find at best confusing and at worst distressing. This combined with the designer's intent to produce feelings of fear, helplessness, isolation, and sadness in addition to suspicion and mistrust would require players of a mature enough age to put such themes and feelings into context. This is not just to secure the player's well-being, but also to increase their ability to actively role-play as the protagonist in the game.

As such, this game is recommended for players ages 12 and up who enjoy role-playing adventure games, classic or early adventure games, puzzles, and/or dystopian fiction.