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The machine upstairs

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THE MACHINE UPSTAIRS

BY

JACOB FRIEDFELD

with

Matthew J. Meredith & Wen-To Chan

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN, COLLEGE OF COMPUTING AND
DIGITAL MEDIA OF DEPAUL UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE RE-
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CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

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MFA Thesis Verification Form

This thesis has been read and approved by the thesis committee below according to the requirements of the School of Design graduate program and DePaul University.

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ABSTRACT

Immersive simulation design, broadly speaking, is a game design philosophy centered around player expression, emergent gameplay, and dynamic narrative. Contrary to what the phrase may imply simply by reading it, immersion in and of itself is not necessarily enough for a game to be classified as an “immersive sim” (or IMSIM for short). Many different types of games can utilize immersion to great effect, but immersive simulations require a level of flexibility and rule/system-based approaches beyond the scope of games that occupy similar genres.

The Machine Upstairs represents an exploration of the immersive simulation philosophy and an investigation into its unique strengths and challenges for both player and designer.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As a designer with little to no engineering/programming skill, it was imperative that I find a programming partner able to meet the challenges of *TMU's* design. **Matt Meredith** has been that partner and then some (he also voiced the male version of the player character!).

The insight and support of my thesis committee has been invaluable. **Brian Schrank**, **Jes Klass**, and **Dan Bashara** contributed to the development process in ways big and small, but certainly in too many ways to list here.

Wen-To “Eddie” Chan provided an incredible amount of 3D art for the game. He also lit the entire game environment. His feedback on our weekly Zoom calls was integral to the development process.

Benjamin Andrew Moore, my fellow immsim enthusiast, helped a great deal over the last two years, providing design support, testing, and even some voice acting.

A very special thanks to **Renee Watkins**, who provided the female voice for the player character.

My meager attempt to create an immersive simulation is only possible because of the last 30 years of boundary-pushing from game designers like **Warren Spector**, **Harvey Smith**, **Raphael Colantonio**, **Randy Smith**, **Ken Levine**, **Hideo Kojima**, and developers like **Looking Glass Studios** and **Arkane Studios**.

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CHAPTER 1

Description of Game

TMU takes place inside a single apartment building in the NYC borough of Queens. The player awakens in a unit with the building. A strange event has led to the player being locked inside of the building with no clear means of escape. This event is somehow connected to a mysterious artificial intelligence who communicates with the player through various intercoms in the game space. The player must figure out how to escape the building—in doing so, they will reveal a nefarious plan hatched by shady NYC real estate developers. The player can either aid the developers or attempt to disrupt their operations, but the methods available in order to achieve either goal are many and varied.

TMU utilizes mechanics/concepts popularized in point and click adventure games, but situates them in a dynamic 3D environment. The player can explore the game space, find hidden passages and items, utilize tools to clear obstacles, engage in branching dialogues with the AI character, and manipulate a variety of systems within the game (to both their advantage and detriment).

CHAPTER 2

Statement of Intent

My goal, in designing and developing *The Machine Upstairs* was to see if it was possible to bring the notoriously complex (and often times difficult to achieve) principles of immersive simulation design to a very small project carried out by a team of 2-3 people. The guiding principles for the *TMU* were as follows:

- facilitate a “play your own way” play-style for players
- allow for flexibility in the game and its challenges are experienced and/or completed
- attempt, in some small way, to allow for emergent possibilities within the experience
- weave a dynamic, branching narrative throughout the experience

CHAPTER 3

[Rules and Instructions] OR [Link to the Game and Inputs]

<https://jakob-free.itch.io/tmu>

Password: depaul2022

APPENDIX 1

Supporting Documentation 1

[Game Design Document](#)

[Narrative Design Document](#)

REFERENCES/INSPIRATION

[GDC 2004 - Would the Real Emergent Gameplay Please Stand Up?](#)

Prey, Arkane Studios

Deus Ex, Ion Storm

Myst, Cyan

Emergence, Steven Johnson