Searching For……

Lu Yang, Mengqi Gao, Yunci Guo, Yamiao Liu

Short Description

Searching For… is a narrative game where the player plays as a detective story writer who uses imaginary mystery scenes to write a novel while finding her missing high school friend at the same time. Everything seems promising, however, the harder she works, the worse it gets: the protagonist will never win the prize, and neither will she find her friend. Through this game, we want to emphasize the difficulties and cruel optimism creators are usually facing, and the idea that a perfect creation never exits outside one's hallucination.

Features

In this game, the player plays as an unappreciated and unfulfilled detective story writer trying to win a highly-prized literary award. With the help of a neuroscientific project called Oneiros, players can explore imaginary murder mystery scenes and record the investigations in a form of literature. Meanwhile, they also need to look for clues to find the protagonist's missing high school friend who starts to haunt her in those imaginary scenes.

- Double Layers of Story: As the game develops, the player will discover the inextricably connected relationship between the imaginary story and the disappearance of her friend in real-life. There are 2 parallel gameplay loops. One is writing a mystery novel as the novelist, two is deducing one's own writing, and therefore psyche to figure out what happened to the friend. The further the player dives into the story, the closer they get to the truth of the friend's disappearance.

- Mixing Literature with Games: Each player gets to write their unique novel with Oneiros. The game system will parse the player's actions into texts, and show it to the player in real-time.
- Multi branches: The player will decide how the murder mystery unfolds. The novel, as well as the following imaginary murder mystery scenes, will change based on their choices.
- Point and click investigation mix rogue-lite randomized game scenes: High replayability.

Design Goals

Cruel Optimism

This game aims to address the cruel optimism, which exists when something one desires is actually an obstacle to one's flourishing, experienced by artists (Berlant, 1). Focusing on the perspective of a beginning detective story writer, we want to show why the current situation makes the optimistic optimism cruel (for example, censorship, corruption, one's own physical and mental state, etc.), and what are the possible ways one can deal with this cruelty. Maybe one should switch to another path that is more optimistic, or maybe one should follow what Confucius said about "Knowing Ming" [知命], which means that one should do what one ought to do regardless of any external considerations (Feng, 44). The game does not provide an answer to this dilemma; rather, we hope that it can provide some insights that can lead to discussions about this topic.

- **Censorship**

  When you want to express yourself freely, you find that you start censoring yourself to avoid being censored.

- **Corruption**

Less qualified people with higher social status can also win a literary award. In fact, they even have a higher chance of winning than those who are more qualified but less famous.

- **One's own Physical and Mental State**

  "Fearing that I might not be a jewel, I made no effort to polish myself; but half-believing that I might be a jewel, I could not rest content among the common clay. So I gradually separated and alienated from the mundane world, and the result was a period of resentment and shame that increasingly contributed to my inner self-esteem". (*The Moon over the Mountains*, written by Atsushi Nakajima)

- **The English-centric culture**

  As international students studying in the U.S., we start to think about the English-centric culture or the western-centric culture we experienced here. When we are trying to make this game, is it a must for us to make an English version since we are studying here? If this is so, does that mean that there is a hidden requirement for our thesis—that the thesis must be in English. However, some of the terms we are used to in our own culture are hard to translate into English. This is a problem our protagonist also faces if she wants to win an English literary award. If we try to blend into American culture, does this mean that we are abandoning our own?

Story Brief

The main story in Searching For… is about three friends. One is missing, the other two are searching for her.

Two years after her college graduation, the protagonist, **Gin**, is still having a hard time finding a job and sustaining herself. Decided to take writing serial **detective stories** as a career, and trying to win a literary award, she is worried about her writing talent and skills.

Thus, she plans to join the "**Oneiros Project**", which can stimulate the participants' brain activity to help them produce high-quality creative works through monitored dreaming. She asks her high school friend, **Fang Mian**, who is now a Ph.D. student majoring in neuroscience to be her facilitator in this project. Trying to finish her story about the mysteries behind a college

girl searching for her missing friend, she starts dreaming. However, an unexpected person repeatedly appears in her dream, reminding her of a **missing high school friend**...

This story has **two layers**: one is the writer(Gin) and her missing friend, the other is the story that she writes in this game, which is about a detective working with a case to search for a missing girl.

Character Brief

Gin (饭尽街穷士, **Mx. Poor on Starvin St.**)
- The protagonist
- The story happens two years after she graduated from college
- Studied game design in college
- She failed to find a job during her senior year
- She tried to apply for graduate school to study literature but failed
- Has been living in her parents' place after graduation
- Met A and B at freshman year in high school. The three of them stated to write detective stories collaboratively (接龙, exquisite corpse).
- Tells her family that writing novels can earn a living
- Decides to take writing serial detective stories online as a career

Fang Mian (方冕)
- The friend
- A PhD student studying neuroscience
- Started an internship at a neuroscience research Institute recently.
- The protagonist wants to participate in the "Dream Project" and asks Mian to be her facilitator. Mian was hesitant about this first but the protagonist finally managed to convince her.
- She finds out a research participant in the institute looks like Yang Yi

Yang Yi (阳祎)
- The missing friend
- Her detective stories are very well-written
- Went missing after high school
- Gin and Mian can't recall Yang Yi's face or novels

- Gin and Mian cannot find any photos of her
- Is the representative of perfection in the minds of the Gin and Mian

Gu Gugu (顾谷谷)

- The detective, a protagonist of Gin's novel series.

Zhu Di (祝娣)

- The missing girl in Gin's novel.

Works Cited

Berlant, Lauren Gail. *Cruel Optimism.* Duke University Press, 2011, *ProQuest Ebook Central*,

  http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nyulibrary-ebooks/detail.action?docID=1172993.

Feng, Yu-Lan. *A Short History of Chinese Philosophy.* Macmillan, 1958.