



Videogames for Humans

Merritt Kopas (Editor), Imogen Binnie (Contributor), Zoe Quinn (Contributor)

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Behind the fluorescent veil of modern big-business video games, a quiet revolution is happening, and it's centered on a tool called Twine. Taken up by nontraditional game authors to describe distinctly nontraditional subjects—from struggles with depression, explorations of queer identity, and analyses of the world of modern sex and dating to visions of breeding crustacean horses in a dystopian future—the Twine movement to date has created space for those who have previously been voiceless within games culture to tell their own stories, as well as to invent new visions outside of traditional channels of commerce.

Videogames for Humans, curated and introduced by Twine author and games theorist merritt kopas, puts Twine authors, literary writers, and games critics into conversation with one another's work, reacting to, elaborating on, and being affected by the same. The result is an unprecedented kind of book about video games, one that will jump-start the discussions that will define the games culture of tomorrow.

Videogames for Humans Details

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From Reader Review Videogames for Humans for online ebook

Snawlz says

This book lets you experience Twine games - each contributor plays a game, writing out the text of their playthrough and their immediate reactions to the stories that unfold before them.

A lot of these games come from trans or queer authors, and the contributing writers are often from the same community. I find it valuable not only to read/play games from diverse creators, but also to read analysis from diverse authors. I played Aevee Bee's "Removed" months ago, because I'm a hopeless fan of anything she does. I enjoyed it, but my enjoyment was on a surface level. But when I read Lydia Neon's playthrough and saw the way Bee's writing affected Neon, I had to catch my breath.

Videogames for Humans is good to break off and read a bit at a time. If you're curious about Twine games or you like to see how other people think, this is a great book.

D.J. Sylvis says

A really great way to acquaint yourself with what's being done in Twine games - a series of combination playthrough/essays that allow you to see the text from the games themselves, as well as someone's thoughts and experiences while playing. What the book showcases most of all is the personal side to these creations, and the relationship that emerges between the writer and player each time - things that you see far less often with big commercial gaming. Highly recommended if you're interested in text adventures, and absolutely necessary if you want to write them.

Vanessa Raposo says

Sete meses depois de começar, eu finalmente termino esse bendito livro! A demora se deveu não a uma falta de interesse, mas ao fato de que, bem, são MUITOS jogos, alguns dos quais requerem um tempo maior de digestão antes de se passar para os seguintes. Além disso, eu sempre tive dificuldades em manter o interesse numa obra completa de antologia, sem a linha lógica e temporal de um romance para me guiar até o final. Dito isso, eu gostei de ter lido "Videogames for Humans"; mais pelo que ousa fazer do que pelo que de fato faz. A escolha dos jogos é variada e rica, mas o livro em si poderia ser mais. A ideia aqui é que ele funcione como um complemento para cada um dos games feitos no Twine: em cada capítulo, uma figura ligada à cultura underground do videogame joga um deles e faz comentários a respeito. A pessoa está livre para falar o que lhe vier à cabeça, desde aspectos técnicos do que está jogando até compartilhar experiências pessoais de sua vida.

Em tese, é esse tipo de abordagem pessoal e íntima o que mais me interessa quando se fala de videogames: afastá-lo de seu caráter puramente mecânico, dos gráficos aprimorados e das notas de review ~imparciais~. No entanto, na prática, a abordagem livre de "Videogames for Humans" entrega diversos comentários que saem simplesmente... sem-graça ou, pior, condescendentes, no final das contas. Talvez alguns dos autores tenham interpretado muito livremente a coisa do "descrever" o que se está jogando ou talvez não tivessem nada para dizer, mas eu mais de uma vez tive de resistir ao impulso de fechar o Kindle quando um autor me descrevia minuciosamente uma imagem que eu já vi enquanto estava jogando. Ou quando dedicava três

parágrafos para falar de um detalhe sem qualquer importância para o resto da narrativa, exceto para talvez satisfazer um pouco o seu próprio ego intelectual.

O que me leva a meu outro problema com o livro. "Videogames for Humans" denuncia o elitismo na indústria tradicional de videogames, voltada para o entretenimento e feita pelas mesmas vozes brancas, cis, masculinas e heterossexuais. O Twine, uma ferramenta gratuita e baseada em hipertexto, acaba sendo a porta de entrada para grupos com pouca voz nos meios tradicionais. Lindo!

Talvez eu esteja lendo demais nas entrelinhas, mas me incomoda a defesa frequente e incessante de que o "for Humans" só pode ser alcançado num meio que se utiliza quase que exclusivamente texto. Eu provavelmente não deveria estar dizendo isso no Goodreads, mas isso me cheira a um tipo diferente de elitismo. Uma carteirada academicista, if you will. Eu reaaaaaalmente não gosto desse tom "os textos salvarão os videogames de se tornarem homúnculos robóticos e sem alma".

De qualquer forma, estou feliz de ter lido e jogado cada um dos games nesta coletânea. Precisamos de mais vozes se quisermos que os videogames floresçam como mídia, e "Videogames for Humans" é certo em dar sua contribuição.

Shaun Welch says

Videogames for Humans is a diverse collection of text-based games made in the Twine engine, and the commentary and insights of people who play them. Each one provides different insights into the creator of the game, the person playing it, and in a way ourselves. I'm uncertain what more to say: it is unique, it is good, and if you like collections of essays or enjoy internal dialogue or video games, you ought to check it out.

Matilde Park says

Conflicted. The book feels unfinished, or rushed, and a number of the pieces are called in favours with their immediate impressions of a particular work — people who have no experience with Twine at all, which doesn't really give much in the way of insight. Other pieces are incredibly strong and weave creative works with the authors' personal experiences. That Kopas does not discard or curate the weaker pieces is a little disappointing. Regardless, it was an introduction to Twine in an informal way that got me to experiment with it, so it did its job, right?

Chris says

It's all about Twine games... so I'm a wee bit biased.

Aiden says

This book was my doorway into the world of twines and videogames i never thought could exist. I'm totally grateful for it!

Robin Zeno says

Such a unique book & a cool idea! Personally am familiar with Twine as a medium so the format was easily accessible to me, which is great because there are so many diverse, insightful perspectives from both the authors of the games & the contributors. Really wonderful mix that shows both the possibilities of Twine & the range of people who play & make them!!

Though I do have a physical copy of the book I found it easier to read on my phone, something about the stories originally existing in a digital space might've contributed to my preference, I think! This also made it easier to read in sections, game by game, a little at a time.

Favorite were: *SABBAT* by Eva Problems as played by Imogen Binnie, *Removed* by Aevee Bee as played by Lydia Neon, *Your Lover Has Turned into a Flock of Birds* by Miranda Simon as played by Bryan Reid, Austin Walker's playthrough of *There Ought to be a Word*, & *Electro Primitive Girl* by Sloan as played by Aevee Bee.

Really good book of essays!! Feel like i really got something out of everything I read.

Anna Glassman says

Videogames for Humans incorporates a lot of my favorite things: In-depth analysis of how games function, indie weirdness, and minority representation on media. The linear mix of game and review allows the reader to experience the game from both their own eyes and the eyes of the reviewer, and some of these playthroughs are as lovely to read as the games themselves.

Anthony says

Ayyy this was good. There were definitely some less interesting reviews but those tended to be shorter. Some were really good! Imogen Binnie's was so good! Riley Macleod's was great! Leigh Alexander??? are you shitting me

I kind of wanna give a piece by piece review cause I'm tired of reading anthologies and being like "it was good but uneven" and i will do that if i reread this but i probably won't reread it

probably should play some twine games first to see if this is really your bag.

Thomas Hale says

The rise of Twine games is one of the more interesting parts of the increased access folks have to the tools of game creation. For those who don't know, Twine games are text-based games, usually rather short, usually covering personal and abstract topics and developed by only one or two authors. In this collection, merriitt

kopas (a writer, game dev and podcaster) brings together game creators, critics and writers to play through one Twine game each (curated by kopas) and comment on their playthrough. Since Twine games are primarily text-based, the game texts are reproduced in full on the page, separated from player commentary by font. It's a really great idea and one that effectively turns Videogames For Humans into a book-length collection of Let's Plays.

Full review here: <https://mediagluttony.wordpress.com/2...>

Kalin says

~ I literally squealed with joy when I found out what *Videogames for Humans* is about. An entire book on Twine! And Twine games! And the people who make them! Why, welcome to Wonderland! :)))

Thing is, I have a friend who's been thrusting Twine onto me for the past couple of years; yet I, partly disappointed by the low tide of people's interest in pure text reading, partly excited about the new opportunities offered by visual novels, have been neglecting it, probably thinking thoughts like, "What can another textual tool bring to our waning medium?" Who knows? Sometimes, I can't quite trace my own thinking.

Anyway, finally I've found something that will guide me through Twine without (I hope) all the pain of trial-and-error, excitement-and-disenchantment, hit-and-miss. I hope. ;)

~ The opening essay, Eva Problems' thoughts on *Rat Chaos*, both thrilled and terrified me. And it did both for one and the same reason: its honesty. I love to see people open up like this. But then I hate to comment on their words. They feel ... too personal. In some way, sacred.

So see me smile instead, and nod.

~ Riley MacLeod's stroll through *Fuck That Guy* had me smile a lot, too. Sometimes incredulously ("C'mon, they can't be *all* that bad"), sometimes with great sympathy (especially at this part: "*I tend to arc toward sleeping with people instead of sleeping with bodies*"), and sometimes with bafflement (is Riley pulling our collective leg here or is this observation dead serious?).

At any rate, if the going's going to be that good, I'm holding on for dear life.

~ Emily Short's experience of *Anhedonia* is another instance of too personal, too sacred. In fact, here I'd have appreciated if Emily had said more, included more screenshots. Being bipolar myself, I'm deeply curious about others' version of depression and other ways to cope with it. So yes, I want moar. ;)

Also, so far I've been enjoying the essays far more than the game texts themselves. Hmmm.

~ And seemingly to compensate me, the book then offers me Imogen Binnie's thoughts on Eva Problems's *Sabbat*. Where, while I do enjoy Imogen's thoughts, I squeal with laughter (or shudder with this tiny bit of visceral terror) at Eva's writing. It's luscious, lascivious, ludicrous. It makes fun of itself. What more could I ask for?

~ Tom McHenry's *Horse Master* is the second game whose narrative excites me. There's a type of jigsaw

fiction (speculative or not) where the thrill is in discovering what world we are in. Naomi Clark's notes accentuate the discoveries--so much so that sometimes they feel like the log of certain quests.

Yes, a part of me hates the ending; another part hates the randomness. But the rest of me have been too thrilled (and moved) to nitpick.

~ Elizabeth Sampat's *Nineteen* reads like a non-suicide note: summing up all the things that we wouldn't have been able to tell our loved ones if we had gone through with the act. Which is perhaps a tribute to interactive fiction itself, the "what if--but *also* what if" aspect that makes it far more satisfying than linear fiction for a vast number of themes and situations.

And one of its conclusions resonates with one of my foundations, why I am still alive too:

It took a decade, maybe longer, to realize that no matter what I did it would be impossible to handle these feelings on my own. I joined a church in high school, I wrote, I tried therapy. All of these things helped, some more than others, but the only consistently valuable tool I have found has been my friends.

Depression convinces you that you have no power. Sometimes you need friends to lend you some of theirs.

~ My first reaction to Michael Brough's *scarfmemory* was, "WTF? A dirge about a stupid scarf?!" Now, after going through it along with Anna Anthropy, I feel ashamed. Stereotyping has many faces. I should know better. :(

(And, Michael, I'm sorry about your loss too.)

~ Aevee Bee's *Removed*: another very personal journey. Across the densest jungle so far: each sentence needs its own untangling.

I wish it were longer, though.

~ In Bryan Reid's *For Political Lovers, a Little Utopia Sketch*, I didn't enjoy the game but really sympathized (and often empathized) with Avery McDalndo's experience of it. In fact, the game text made me gulp uncomfortably a few times: I, too, am prone to these impenetrable layers of abstraction and having too much fun at the expense of my readers. (I don't always do it on purpose, I promise.) But there was a thought at the very conclusion of Avery's reflections which points to a possible interpretation: that *Little Utopia Sketch* starts as a muddle and ends as a mirror in order to demonstrate the quality of the transition that it hints at. Sounds good.

~ Bryan Reid's (literally) poetic response to Miranda Simon's *Your Lover Has Turned into a Flock of Birds* was eloquent, multi-layered and, well, impenetrable. (To me.)

Miranda's *Lover* was short. (But I do hope their love was longer.)

~ Jeremy Penner's *There Ought to Be a Word* is deceptively simple, yet perhaps the most mature and explorational essay so far. Or at least it becomes so when you supplement it with Austin Walker's analysis. (Also, is "essay" the word I'm really looking for? How 'bout "analysis"? Yes, *There Ought to Be a Word* has

that effect on ~~you~~me.) I see all my relationships--intimate or not--in a similarly ambivalent, between-and-beyond-the-words way, so I was the third man in the company, silently pondering, asking and answering and asking again.

So ... what do you call a friend to whom you go when all your words have failed? What about the one whom you call when you've bashed in your own door and can't fix it? The one that shares with you the most amazing visions of the future, kindling the fire to come up with your own? The one you've never seen in person, she who writes the tenderest reviews and sounds just this bit broken and makes you want to make the whole world *whole*?

(view spoiler)

~ Musing on Olivia Vitolo's *Negotiation*, Katherine Cross wrote this.

I rest my case. ;)

~ Soha Kareem's *reProgram* was, so far, the most uncomfortable piece for me. Had I been left to read~play it on my own, I most likely wouldn't have been able to complete it. There're chambers I'd rather not enter; there're choices that make me feel like slapping everyone involved. (And not in the kinky sense.)

Amazingly, Mattie Brice's commentary made the experience completely comfortable. She sounds calm, understanding, supportive throughout the journey. A voice that I can trust won't let me down.

Here's another reason why I enjoy listening to people who cherish something rather than people who criticize it.

~ Nina Freeman's *Mangia* throws you in the middle of digestive disorders. It's deeply personal. Highly instructive.

And I found Lana Polansky's commentary another welcome hand-holder. (Says the boy out of his depth. :)

~ Cara Ellison's *Sacrilege*: :D & <333

Soha Kareem's commentary: :DDD & <3

~ Anna Anthropy's writing in *And the Robot Horse You Rode In On* feels the most delicious so far, and her future of cowgirls and cyberhorses, the most detailed. (But is the whole story really a family drama? Some of me shake their heads incredulously. *C'mon, there should be **moar** to it*)

I also loved listening to Cat Fitzpatrick's commentary. "Listening" here reflects the tangible quality of her voice. And her sympathy.

~ Zoe Quinn's *Depression Quest* may be the most realistic depression simulator I've ever encountered. The fact that for any decision you face, you can see all those good, constructive options in your head but cannot act on them, is telling enough. (Toni Pizza, the commentator, asked if there could be any other game mechanics representing this state of anxious passivity. I had an intriguing idea ... but let me try my hand at it before I tell you more. ;)

Considering my own experience with depression, I wonder about the purpose of the two "stat meters",

"You're not currently seeing a therapist" and "You are not currently taking medication for depression." Is there any path where these statuses change? To what effect? If I weren't afraid that spending so much time in such a depressive environment (no pun intended) wouldn't drag me down, I might have given the game a shot. The website says that choices do matter and there're five different endings, so one day I still may.

While this may be the most realistic representation of depression I know of, the most moving one (also in the sense that it made me move my ass while in a very depressed state: no small feat in itself) was the beginning of *Dreamfall: The Longest Journey*.

~ Kayla Unknown's *3x3x3* was sweet. To each mermaid, her own mermate. :)

~ While I shuddered at the beginning of Michael Joffe's *Eft to Newt* (I find Kafka's *Metamorphosis* deeply disturbing), I smiled at its endings. (view spoiler) Quirky structuralist humor is my cup of tea.

~ Rokashi Edwards's *I'm Fine* was an instructive counterpart to *Depression Quest*. It helped me understand my sister better. (She used to get aggressive in her depressive periods; I get passive.) And John Brindle's analysis highlighted the depth and details I'm bound to miss, in my present exhausted-agitated state.

Thank you both, guys.

~ Lydia Neon's *Player 2* is an interesting tool, a sort of vent-your-hurt assistant, but it's too abstract for me. Stories with concrete plots and fleshed-out protagonists have always worked better in my case.

Which brings me to a general observation about *Videogames for Humans*: If I consider it as an anthology of literary fiction, I won't rate it very highly as a whole. However, I choose to consider it as a much-needed introduction to a new medium, blending fiction and non-fiction, narrative and interactive devices, distancing and self-identification. Twine transcends traditional approaches, so we need new yardsticks for rating it.

You won't be surprised by my rating, will you?

Rachel says

This is a collection of playthroughs of notable Twine games with excellent commentary. Twine games are essentially interactive fiction, only with things like variable tracking (so it can remember what choices you've made). That's how it's possible to put complete playthroughs of them in a book.

The range of games was excellent. There were some I had played, like *Depression Quest* and *Even Cowgirls Bleed*, and a bunch I had never heard of. Some of the games I probably never would have played on my own, like the one about gay hook-up culture and the one about a Satanist ritual. I enjoyed expanding my knowledge about the types of Twine games out there, although I did feel uncomfortable at times. I thoroughly enjoyed reading some of the games and their commentary, like the one about a pregnant mermaid (*3x3x3*), and the one about raising a futuristic race horse (*Horse Master*).

Sometimes I have a hard time focusing on Twine games when I just have them up in my browser. I like the idea of downloading them as HTML files and sitting down just to play them, rather than having them up in a browser tab as something to "get done." I really enjoyed reading the ebook on my ereader (as opposed to reading it on my computer or something). The commentary helped me to slow down and enjoy the poetic

language too--sometimes I have a hard time with reading things slowly and imagining everything that's going on, and the commentary/analysis helped me savor the experience.

There were some times when my daughter woke me up in the middle of the night and I didn't feel like being awake, but having this book to read made it less of a bother. I feel like I want to play more Twine games, but I don't really want to go to the trouble to curate them. Maybe someone is already doing that! I should go see. Here's a list from 2013. I wish Free Indie Games still updated!
