

# Game Narrative Review

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**Month/Year you submitted this review:** December 2019

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**Game Title:** Interrogation: You will be deceived

**Platform:** PC

**Genre:** Visual novel, Mystery, Adventure

**Release Date:** December 5th, 2019

**Developer:** Critique Gaming

**Publisher:** Mixtvision

**Game Writer/Creative Director/Narrative Designer:** David Moscovici

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# Overview

Interrogation is a psychological noir detective game about ethics, morality, radicalisation and the nature of authority. The player is an unnamed Agent of unknown gender, who finds themselves at the heart of a complex case of terrorism striking their city. They must interrogate several people connected to the extremist organization known as the “Liberation Front” - a group of people with seemingly disjointed ideologies who somehow overcome their differences and band together to bomb different areas of the city. As the lead in this case, the Agent holds responsibility for allocating the monthly budget, motivating their team, and above all, getting confessions out of the interrogees... No matter the cost. The Agent may choose to pursue lines of questioning to slowly corner their interrogee into a confession. However, one of the options available to them is to turn off the tape recorder during the interview and torture the interrogees, in case they need a little bit of... *extra convincing*. Breaches in ethics come at a cost though, as the crueler the Agent is, the more jittering insanity **creeps into their dialogue options. After all, these terrorists are going to get what's coming to them, right? Paint the walls in their blood, no one would miss 'em !**

A single playthrough of the game averages about 8 hours of play time. With over 35 complex and realistic characters and branching consequences depending on the player's actions, this game offers decent replay value for players who seek to gain new insight into political ideology. *Interrogation* plants seeds for new perspectives to sprout as players consider how the game parallels relevant political issues prevalent in today's society.

# Characters

*[The author writes the following paragraph.]*

Descriptive lines such as the one above are directly displayed through UI in game - they are not subjective descriptions from the author of this paper. Additionally, every character in the game can technically be treated as a main character, and thus, only the ones relevant to this review's Breakdown will be listed here.

## Interrogees

Alex Novak

*Agent: I have some more questions about some other people.*

*[They mutter with staggered cadence.]*

*Novak: **Think of yourself before thinking about other people.***

Alex Novak is a troubled young man. Not much is known about his past, as he has had several name changes over the years. He suffers from a form of schizophrenia, which eventually presents itself as he grows increasingly distressed from the interrogation. Due to his mental illness, he was taken advantage of by Gabriel Adams, and it is revealed that he was the one who purchased the nitromethane used in Adams' bombing. His deterioration during the interrogation is particularly memorable, bringing attention to how the interrogation process can be even more harmful to those who are psychologically vulnerable.

Gabriel Adams

*Agent: Gabriel, if you had anything to do with this bombing, you need to tell me now. Confession absolves the soul, as you know!*

*[They shift in their seat, their gaze intense.]*

*Gabriel: Please, officer, you are implying a very strong accusation. I didn't open up my heart and tell you about my belief that the world needs a strong change so that [the Agent can ignore their] responsibilities and put an innocent man in jail. I am but a mere priest. How could I have orchestrated such an operation? [...] I*

*am a man of God. I have dedicated my life to saving people. How could you think I would be capable of such an act?*

Priest Gabriel Adams was responsible for planting one of the three bombs that explodes in the beginning of the game. He is the founder of *Humanitas*, a religious charity organization dedicated to helping those with special needs or disabilities, his case file details him to be a well-known and respected priest. However, his interrogation is riddled with subtleties of hostile attitude before he explodes into his confession, calling the Agent an “unwitting agent of Satan”, and proclaiming that the Front will help to bring about the New Flood, thereby cleansing the souls of the wicked.

Cassandra Higgs

*Agent: You're an intelligent woman with an M.A. in Political Sciences. You're not a terrorist.*

*[There is some wavering of the voice before it becomes decisive again.]*

*Higgs: Terrorist's just a political label, jackwad. It doesn't mean anything.*

A 26 year old with a Master's Degree in Political Sciences, Higgs is a young recent graduate who has been participating in the Liberation Front's plans. During the game, she flees into a Veterinary Clinic, taking the staff hostage. The Agent negotiates with her over the phone, attempting to persuade her into returning the hostages to safety. Her case file details that she has volunteered for several NGOs, which is proof of her commitment to a noble cause; to make the world a better place by volunteering to help those in need. However, this contrasts with how she is initially presented to the player - as just another member of the Front, wreaking havoc and doing everything in her power to perpetuate the Front's ideology.

Amatis Garcia

*Agent: How much did you know about [Cassandra Higgs's] dealings with the Liberation Front?*

*[They shrug and shake their head.]*

*Garcia: I had no idea. I knew she was into politics and all that, but nothing like this...*

Unlike his significant other, Garcia is not a member of the Front. He is brought in to assist with the negotiation process with Higgs, providing the player with an opportunity to weaken Higgs' resolve. Prior to the hostage incident, he was not aware that Higgs had any involvement in the Front at all - something he says was likely hidden from him in order to protect him. His role in the narrative allows for the player to gain a deeper insight into Higgs's motivations and actions, and subtly hints for the player to think before judging her too harshly despite her holding two innocent veterinarians at gunpoint.

Helene Koufos

*Agent: Interesting. You're probably the first deaf terrorist I have ever met.*

*[They frown during a brief exchange with the interpreter.]*

*Interpreter: She says you're neither the first nor the last to focus on her disability.*

A 29 year old yoga instructor-turned Front recruiter, she was the one who initially recruited Cassandra Higgs to the Front. Her relationship to Higgs is one of the ways that players can coax information out of her. Although she is a recruiter, she and Higgs confided in each other as close friends. She is deaf and mute, and the player interviews her just like how they would interview the rest - she lip reads, and she has an interpreter who translates her sign language to you. She, among other characters that belong to marginalized groups and/or other groups typically not represented in games, will call the player out for focusing on her disability instead of the matter at hand.

Lynda Bailey

*Agent: Greetings Lynda. Looking at your file, other than the terrorism thing, you sound like the perfect mom.*

*Bailey: Thank you, dear. "The terrorism thing," as you call it, is also part of being a good mom.*

The mother of three young children, Bailey supplied the Front with one of the three bombs that detonated in the beginning of the game. She persuaded a young security guard to place the bomb in a shopping mall in exchange for funding treatment for his chronically ill mother. She presents herself as a compassionate mother who hopes to make the world a better place through her actions with the Front. Even her case file indicates that the police were surprised that she matched the description of the suspect they were looking for, and that materials to build several more bombs were present in her basement. Yet, she is not at all sympathetic to the mothers that lost their children during the explosions caused by her bombs, nor to the security guard that she blackmailed. Her actions leave the player wondering how someone could be so hypocritical, saying that she cares about making the world a better place without considering the emotions of other mothers and children. The reality is that just as Bailey is impossible to understand without viewing her through an inherently cynical lens, so are the people that are seen in our day-to-day lives that she reminds us of - a topic that is especially relevant in current-day political events.

## **Police Department**

### **Agent (The Player)**

The unnamed agent is never referred to by name or gender. This fosters empathy between the Agent and the player, allowing each player to act as though they were themselves. Based on the player's choices and their actions during interrogation, their mental stability and the dialogue options presented to them will change. For example, if they have been torturing the interrogees in order to force them to confess, it will reflect in the player's future interrogations, as they will be forced to pick **threatening, disturbing, or just plain strange** text which jitters uncontrollably onScreen. The audio grows slightly muted, as if listening to people speaking underwater, and the entire room darkens, as if the player is experiencing tunnel vision. These changes in the appearance of UX reinforce the consequences of the player's actions, and their influence of the player's game experience is amplified by the fact that many players will identify as the Agent themselves through the aforementioned empathy.

Tab Thompson

*Agent: Does not fitting well within the gender binary make you depressed?*

*[They cross their arms.]*

*Tab: No. I have been at peace with my gender identity for a long time. It is a bit weird, though, when people just assume that those who do not fit within the mainstream must be suffering from mental health problems.*

A member assigned to the Front case, due to unfortunate coincidental circumstances, they must be questioned during a time sensitive interrogation. During this interrogation, they will call the player out for focusing on their gender identity instead of the matter at hand.

Elias Hall

*[They draw a knife, placing it on the table.]*

*Hall: I'm still not convinced you're innocent, not convinced you can be in charge of something so big. So, we'll have to go the extra mile to make sure.*

*Agent: What are you doing with that?!*

*[They stare into the glint of the blade.]*

*Hall: Merely pursuing the truth.*

Elias Hall is a member of Internal Affairs. Depending on the player's actions up to this point, Elias will interrogate the Agent for any or all of the following reasons: collaborating and/or sympathizing with the Front, lacking in team leadership skills, or stopping the tape recording to torture the interrogee. As the ability to advance past this interrogation will vary in difficulty, it is a classic but effective way to make the player acknowledge the consequences of their actions, giving them more incentive to play the game a different way next time.

## Breakdown

### Narrative Mechanics

Before discussing *Interrogation*'s narrative impact, it is important to first understand how it immerses the player in the game through its mechanics and UX design. This paper will focus

only on the interrogation sequences in the game, though it is worth noting that there are other mechanical systems that strengthen the game experience.

*Interrogation*'s main mechanic is exactly what it sounds like - players must click through different interrogation questions to try to extract information from their interrogees. Typically, this involves interrogating several people at once, and using information learned from each of them to chip away at the given suspect's defenses. Many interrogations are also timed for various plot reasons - stopping bombs, getting information before a lawyer is present, etc. In these cases, each question and follow up question that the player asks counts as 5 seconds on the clock. This constraint invokes a sense of risk and offers meaningful choice - does the player really need to know what the interrogee's views on religion are? How relevant is that information to the investigation at hand? What about the names of their children? Does that matter? Maybe, maybe not.

Each interrogee has two stats - the dilation of their pupils, indicating how much they like/trust the Agent, and their heart rate, indicating how intimidated they are. During questioning, depending on what the Agent says, the interrogee's stats will change, which will either present new information or lock certain answers away. Notably, these two stats are represented in a subjective fashion (unless the player upgrades the Agent to be able to quantify exactly how much of each emotion the interrogee is feeling), contributing to the situation feeling more organic. Ultimately, it is up to the player to determine how to use these questions to their benefit. This is a strong gamification of a real-life conversation, as playing with the interrogee's emotions is how the Agent can extract the information required.

Using non-diegetic components to reveal information to the player is a common, arguably necessary component of game design. This is an issue that impacts narrative design, as every interaction the player has in a game contributes to that player's own journey through the narrative. A common and widely accepted example of this is that in many (especially AAA games), players may press a button to "exit" out of a conversation. This is a compromise made to simplify the functionality of how the players interact with the game - a valid concern in delivering a solid experience. *Interrogation*'s way of implementing this feature keeps the same level of narrative interactivity consistent through their UX design. When exiting out of a line of questioning, the Agent says, "let's talk about something else", or "let's change the subject". Though this may seem insignificant, small details such as these contribute to the player's flow



state, maintaining their focus and not breaking their engagement with the narrative; this is what turns the player's experience from clicking through a menu of questions to feeling like they are really speaking to someone.

This applies to the game's art as well. Though it is mostly monochromatic, the characters are animated using captured footage of real people which were drawn and shaded over frame by frame. By using this method, the actors' quirks are brought to life in their respective characters. The contrasting ways in which they are animated also speaks volumes about their emotions and which character is dominant during a conversation. For example, during interrogations, characters will cycle through "idle" frames - as if they are living, breathing. When they answer, they will look around, laugh, throw their hands in the air, look down in shame, etc. This perpetual movement establishes that the Agent must heavily scrutinize differences in body language, and this sense of close examination gives the player a sense of power over their interrogee. In contrast, when the player is being interviewed by a journalist, they are completely stationary. There is no idle animation - just the journalist leaning forward, or perhaps sitting back with a slight tilt of the head. Whenever the journalist is answered, they will change poses once, sometimes not even replying before moving on to the next question and assuming a new stationary pose, forcing the player to acknowledge the sudden change and wonder if they just said something wrong. Here, a lack of movement shows the player that they cannot read the journalists' emotions using the same strategies subtly taught to them in the interrogation room. Instead, they must use their instincts to say something that won't be used against them - an act that strips power away from the player as they no longer have control over the outcome of the event. This uncertainty fluxuates the player between a state of having control and a state of losing control, contributing to the emotions that the player feels. Giving context to this game-player interaction by placing it in the narrative makes the player feel as though they are a direct part of *Interrogation*'s world.

### **Subverting Player Expectations**

Politically charged plots such as the one present in *Interrogation* can easily fall victim to predictability, especially when players attempt to analyze the political opinions of the developers. This is very dangerous for games that strive to create change; players who disagree with the ideologies presented become guarded against the very views that the developers wish

for their players to consider. *Interrogation* avoids this danger by subverting player expectations in several ways, ultimately opting to bring awareness to the weaknesses in the current justice system without force feeding players a left-wing-vs-right-wing narrative. It suggests that the player draw their own conclusions from their experience within the game, and inspires them to think critically about their where their own biases lie.

Players can review the case file of each interrogee before they are brought in. Within these case files are the police's first impressions of each suspect, carefully hidden as supporting information that the Agent may want to consider while interrogating them, making them very important for assembling the player's expectations of how the case will end. Whether or not the player realizes, these case files are cleverly used to subvert player expectations, reflecting how in the real world, it is impossible to judge someone solely based off their actions and not any stereotype that they may represent. Using word choice to influence the player's perception of each suspect is one of the many ways that *Interrogation* highlights the lack of objectivity in the real world; despite one's best attempts, subjectivity will always seep into these situations, creating a gap in advantage between those who are positively and negatively perceived in society.

One instance of this is in the case with Alex Novak and Gabriel Adams. Novak is presented as a man who's "not quite all there" - with his history of mental health issues, the PD considers his "mental instability [to make] him a possible suspect". On the other hand, Adams, who runs a charity organization and is a well-known and respected priest, "cannot be ruled out" from the suspect list. Ultimately, it is Adams who is responsible for the bombing, yet this subtle use of language in the player's first interaction with the characters suggests that their focus should be on one suspect and not another. During the interrogation, the dissonance between what the player was initially told to believe and the reality presently unfolding before them is further amplified. Adams, aware of how Novak is perceived by the rest of society, uses the advantage gap to throw suspicion on Novak, attempting to incriminate Novak and use him as a scapegoat. As his strategy begins to fail, his attempts to decrease the credibility of Novak's statements become more obvious - at a certain point, he states that "we both know neither [the Agent] nor a court should listen to what a person with a mental illness has to say".

Another example of this is in Lynda Bailey's file, where the officer writing the suspect bio comments that they were surprised to find a loving mother of three who matched the

description of the bomb manufacturer they were looking for. She is discovered to be the leader of one of the terrorist cells responsible for the bombings - but again, this initial presentation of her character turns the player away from thinking that she could be a ring leader. One of the people being interrogated at the same time as her is a porn director with sexual abuse cases opened against him - a clear instance of the game subtly informing the player where their suspicions should lie. This case is a strong example of how society's perception of people creates a gap in advantage between them. All signs in-game point to Bailey being a loving mother who dabbles in extremism - compared to a sexual predator and adult film producer, it is very clear who the game wants the player to target. However, pressing Bailey for more details reveals that she is not the simple loving mother assumed by the PD. When questioned, she presents a lack of empathy for other mothers, claiming that the mothers and children who died as a direct result of her bombs "should have taken better care of their kids". This, among other eccentricities that manifest while interrogating her, create a severe impact on the player; the better the player's initial impressions of the character, the harder subversions of the player's expectations hit.

The game reverses this pattern in Cassandra Higgs' hostage situation. The case file outlines her to be a radical recent politics graduate, stereotyping her as a passionate young fool who strives to create change in the wrong way. It discusses that she has past charges of radical activity, including participating in protests. With this information taken into account, the player prepares to speak to her, assuming her to be a crazed terrorist. However, tacked on and presented as seemingly less important is Higgs's previous involvement with NGOs and her active volunteering to help those in need - easily disregarded given the focus placed on her negative previous actions. The player may choose to highlight her youth and belittle her the first time they speak to her, asking her to "let go of the nice veterinarians, they haven't done anything wrong". However, while trying to reason with her, it is clear that Higgs is not the radical terrorist she is stereotyped to be in the case file. As her resolve wavers, the player breaks down her motivations, learning that she is simply following orders and believes herself to be actively working toward positive change. She loves her boyfriend, Amatis Garcia, and has hidden her Front identity from him in order to protect him. Speaking to her about their relationship reveals that she is anguished by the pain she causes him. The best way to talk her down is to empathize with her fears, realizing that she is acting out of desperation and fear rather than radical extremist ideology. This reinforces that every person has reasons behind their actions, and while their reasons may not

excuse the damage they cause, they should be considered before labelling them as an evil terrorist.

Similarly, once Higgs is captured, Helene Koufos is brought in for questioning. Koufos was the character that initially recruited Higgs to the Front, and they confide in each other, considering each other to be close friends. During this segment of the game, the player may mock Higgs' situation, insinuating that Higgs is being sexually abused while in jail, which provokes a strong emotional reaction in Koufos. Alternatively, they may tell her that Higgs is being treated well because she complied, to which Koufos will state that she is relieved and happy that her friend is safe. At this point, Koufos has already admitted to being part of the Front, so if the Agent chooses empathize with her, extracting necessary information becomes much easier. The complexity in Higgs' and Koufos' characters is the medium through which *Interrogation* asks its players to take pause before judging others so harshly. It showcases the concerns of radicals, and how neglecting to try to understand them only exacerbates the situation. The player's expectations are subverted when they realize that empathizing and understanding will get them further than intimidation, a clever lesson that is taught through how the player chooses to use the game's mechanics.

The way that *Interrogation* uses its complex characters is incredibly effective, especially for a game with such political themes. What brings these characters to life is that none of them are flat - not even the ones that have no connection to the Front and are never brought up again. Each character has their own views on the Front - whether they think the Front is right, wrong, or somewhere in between. The political nuances of reality are not lost in the gamification of this tale; the characters are not tropes, but rather real stereotypes present in our society. This makes it a powerful narrative that is extremely relevant to current day events. Subverting players' expectations is the game's way of also subverting society's expectations, forcing the player to disassemble stereotypes and acknowledge the intricacies of different political views.

The Agent's potential descent into madness is a different facet of how *Interrogation* subverts player expectations. Though the player is warned at the beginning of the game that stopping the tape recorder to torture their interrogees will have consequences later in the game, it is not made clear exactly how these consequences will manifest themselves. Typically in games with different ethical routes, the majority of the consequences are reflected in the game's ending. We can assume this to be the expectation of a player who enjoys playing branching-narrative

games. In *Interrogation*, ethical choices do not influence the final outcome, but rather they contribute to how ruthless or insane the Agent is during interrogations. The distortion of reality increasingly disturbing as the game goes on, and otherwise normal situations are plagued with jittering text that blocks out the originally polite choices. The best examples of this take place during Elias Hall's interrogation of the Agent. If the player has not been ethical, the entire room around Hall darkens with the tunnel vision effect described earlier. This table is a comparison between how the Hall interrogation changes depending on the choices the player has made:

| Ethical route taken   | Unethical route taken  |
|---|--|
| <p><i>[They lower their voice slightly]</i></p> <p><i>Hall: Let's talk about your management of this operation.</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>I'm pretty sure we've been talking all about it so far, but okay.</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>Certainly.</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>I do my best to stick to protocols.</i></p>  | <p><i>[They lower their voice slightly]</i></p> <p><i>Hall: Let's talk about your management of this operation.</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>I'm pretty sure we've been talking all about it so far, but okay.</i></p> <p>-&gt; <b>Better not to speak of the higher spheres of being?</b></p> <p>-&gt; <b>Fine, but know that I have Secrets in my nest.</b></p>   |
| <p><i>[They slam the table and get in your face loudly, anger filling every word and gesture]</i></p> <p><i>Hall: I will not be the fool that allowed the Liberation Front to flourish, as a cancer to be spread by an incompetent or traitorous idiot who refused to end them!</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>You're keeping me from my work, against the Front, you madman!</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>Mr. Hall, I need you to calm down.</i></p> | <p><i>[They slam the table and get in your face loudly, anger filling every word and gesture]</i></p> <p><i>Hall: I will not be the fool that allowed the Liberation Front to flourish, as a cancer to be spread by an incompetent or traitorous idiot who refused to end them!</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>You're keeping me from my work, against the <b>Worldbenders</b>, you <b>cuckoo baby boy</b>!</i></p> <p>-&gt; <i>Let's play nice, little Elias, shall we? <b>There's enough bloody justice</b> to go around.</i></p> |

-> *Alright, I confess! To whatever you want!  
Torture, collaboration with the Front, sure. I did it  
all!*

**-> I AM THE TORTURE LORD OF THE  
LIBERATION FRONT AND SHALL NOT  
BE MADE TO BOW!**

In a non-ethical playthrough, this is perhaps the most impactful point that makes the player realize their poor choices in choking, tasing, or otherwise torturing their interrogees - at the very least, even if the player does not internalize the weight of their actions, they are forced to acknowledge the negative consequences through restrictions of their in-game choices and the way the choices are presented to them.

Unfortunately, this is where one of the game's minor drawbacks presents itself. Some players will complete their first playthrough without torturing their interrogee, then complete a second playthrough torturing liberally. Comparing the descent into insanity to the original game without quirks is jarring and effective in sending its message. However, for players who complete their first playthrough torturing liberally, the jittering text appears too suddenly, and without context. This leads to the player being confused, and not associating the insanity with their previous unethical choices, frustrating them because they are being forced to pick a dialogue option with which they do not agree. A very easy way to remedy this issue is through the presentation of the UX during torturing; when the player examines their torture options, descriptive text appears on screen. If the first time the player interacted with jittering text was while examining torture options, they would naturally associate any later jittering text with their torture actions, thereby justifying the game forcing them to pick disturbing dialogue choices. This would greatly simplify how the game communicates the results of players' actions, instead of waiting for them to piece the puzzle together later in the game - a topic that will be discussed further in the "Unsuccessful Element" section.

## Strongest Element

One of *Interrogation*'s greatest strengths is its representation of marginalized people who wish to be considered equal in narrative. In many forms of media today, proper representation of different groups is a highly debated topic. Questions and statements such as "why do all of the

characters have to be gay?” place content creators in an awkward position, fighting to increase representation yet afraid of being labelled as “pandering” to the marginalized. This is a valid concern; though representation of marginalized groups is necessary for the betterment entertainment industries, alienating the majority of one’s audience and “choosing a side” is not the optimal way to do so. *Interrogation* shows players and content creators alike how unnecessary it is to fear using underrepresented characters in media - no justification is necessary for including them, and the story should not revolve around their differences from neurotypical/able-bodied people. A prime example of this is Helene Koufos, who is deaf-mute and requires an interpreter during her interrogation. Her disability changes nothing about her extremist ideology, and when asked, she gives testily brushes off any correlation between her deafness and her radical activities. Similarly, Tab Thompson, a gender-fluid officer, comments on how silly it is that people automatically assume their genderless state contributes to a sense of depression. The player is prompted by these characters to focus not on their unique circumstances, but on their similarities to everyone else - What role do they play in the Liberation Front? What are their thoughts on matters at hand? The presence of these characters in a larger narrative stops us from “othering” people who are different than us, bridging the gap between players who do not identify with their interogeers, which is an increasingly important common goal to be addressed in future narratives.

## Unsuccessful Element

Though *Interrogation* is successful at delivering its message on a high level, it struggles with relaying the precise influence that player choices have on the narrative. For example, players must write press releases to the public. Depending on what the player chooses to type in said press release, they may find themselves dead and be forced to rewind their campaign to an earlier save. In other words, players will unexpectedly have their game end due to being murdered, without any feedback to suggest what actions they much change in order to move past that point; they are only showing a newspaper reporting on their death with a vague statement about how no one knows why the Agent died. Given that the weight of player actions is the medium through which *Interrogation* showcases the complexities of political issues, this lack of feedback to the player is detrimental to their understanding of the game - they focus on figuring

out “what the game wants” to advance instead of navigating through the thought experiments otherwise present in the game.

Along the same lines, though the UX in the game is generally well implemented, there are a few difficulties in finding where new information has been unlocked. Though *Interrogation* is advertised to be a difficult experience, communicating where new information has been unlocked is a necessity, at least in a “normal” difficulty setting. Although part of the game’s challenge comes from remembering what each interrogee has had to say and knowing where to press further questions, the player’s cognitive load is too high to do this without UX aid, particularly in sections of the game that involve heavy political jargon and deeper characters with several branching layers to their dialogue. Though it is arguable that showing the player exactly where a new options “pops up” would undermine the intricately designed conversation web, again, communicating to the player where a change has occurred in the game is a critical part of presenting the player with a logical puzzle to solve, instead of reducing them to clicking through every dialogue option to find exactly what they missed. This does partially exist in-game already; new text appears in yellow and references new information discovered by the player. However, it could be improved upon further to decrease the current barriers against players’ use of their intuition.

## Highlight

Regardless of whether the player chooses to play ethically or unethically, without a doubt, the highlight of *Interrogation* is when the player watches Alex Novak slowly degenerate. He appears normal at first (though perhaps a bit eccentric), but as the player presses into his triggers and his symptoms, he begins to deteriorate in mental stability. For players who chose to remain ethical, this is the first time the jittering text appears, and it is accompanied by a complete change in Novak’s animations - he hunches forward with a disturbed look in his eyes, speaking in the third person, reminding the player that **the walls have eyes, we have to rip them out in order to be free and free will and destiny are not mutually exclusive** speaking in riddles and reminding us **that there has to be a reason for it there has to be a reason for it, let’s go home Alex**



The way Novak reacts showcases how the interrogation process is inherently more damaging to some (neurodivergent) individuals than others, reinforcing the theme of the vulnerable being taken advantage of by the powerful.

# Critical Reception\*

*Interrogation* was the winner of the 2019 Montreal Independent Game Award for Narrative Design, and is listed as “the game that has the most potential for storytelling” out of the other indie games submitted.

Athanasios Aravositas offers a mixed opinion in his *Cubed3* review, stating that “*Interrogation* has its issues, like how annoyingly precise you have to be with your moves, or how it's sometimes hard to understand why you failed, leading to plenty of trial-and-error (...) Having said that, it's a very good interrogation sim, features a great noir art style, and is deeply immersive.”

Jess Clayton-Berry from Gameluster rates the game “Jess Recommends”, offering her opinions by stating that the game is “thoroughly enjoyable (...) offering up enough challenge to keep the heavy amount of dialogue interesting (...) plenty of replay value with branching paths based on your decisions, and the offering to choose between building your character based off different questioning approaches.”

Nicholas Montegriffo from PCInvasion gives the game a 7/10, stating that though “*Interrogation* is upfront about being a political video game (...) that doesn't mean it's preachy or partisan. For the most part, it's ”just asking questions” and putting the player in a position to examine their own beliefs and prejudices.”

*\*As Interrogation was released on December 5th, 2019, there are a limited number of reviews available for reference at this time.*

# Lessons

## **Representation of marginalized groups is not the beast that many creators consider it to be.**

*Interrogation*'s incorporation of characters from marginalized groups is a great example of how developers can address the diversity issues in current day games. By including marginalized individuals in our games, creators can promote a sense of empathy in the player by having them interact with a character that may not be as different from them as they think.

## **Narrative delivery can make or break the player's user experience.**

The UX design in *Interrogation* is, for the most part, a major contributor to the player's state of flow while playing the game - but can break the player's immersion if it becomes a barrier to advancing the story. *Interrogation* teaches game narrative designers that an easier access to information results in a deeper experience.

## **Branches in narrative games don't have to affect only the ending.**

Though the ending the player reaches in *Interrogation* is not mechanically influenced by the actions they take, the player still considers their choices to be meaningful because the journey leading up to the climax is directly affected by what they do. Having several endings dedicated by a series of player choices is not the only way to create a memorable experience in narrative-driven games - so long as the player is aware of the influence their actions have on the grand narrative scale, it can be just as effective.

# Summation

*Interrogation* features a complex web of realistic characters who fight for their own definition of justice. As a successful gamification of deep and gritty political issues, *Interrogation* forces the player to acknowledge their own biases and judgements, posing difficult questions and letting the player come to their own conclusions. The cast of young, passionate, and sometimes marginalized people who are taken advantage of by the powerful brings up many questions extremely relevant to today's political situations, offering a perspective on why radical groups form and how to combat them. It is clear that *Interrogation* acts as a medium for players to see society from several different perspectives, pushing them to strive for the change they wish to see. Though the text-heavy nature of the game may not be for every gamer, *Interrogation* delivers a powerful narrative that strikes at the heart of society's many issues, and has the power to create change.

# Citations

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