

FMS 394 – Final Project (Fall 2019)

Game Title: TIME CLASH: YEAR ONE

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1. Game Description/Summary

Time Clash: Year One is a choice-based interactive story combined with a time-management simulator. The player gets to create a character and live the life of a high school student training to be a peacekeeper in a world where medieval times, modern day, and the future coexist. The player's choices will have consequences throughout the story – both explicit choices and their gameplay style affect the story's outcome.

A mysterious event has split the world into different “Time Zones” (a phrase which has taken on new meaning) – and only technology from a certain time period functions in each Time Zone. In a country split into three parts – Medieval (1020 A.D.), Modern (2020 A.D.), and Future (3020 A.D.), peacekeepers, the higher-rank police of this country, must learn how to fight and survive in each of their country's Time Zones. The School for Peacekeepers was built where the borders of the three Time Zones intersect, so the students can practice switching between Time Zones.

The player, as a high-school student, must survive their first month at the School for Peacekeepers. Navigating from a pixelated, top-down perspective, the player walks their character through their classes and daily activities – or chooses to skip them. The player also will choose different storylines to interact with, which will sometimes progress with or without the player's involvement. The main storyline involves a mysterious attack on the school the player learns about, and can work to stop with their friends. Side storylines will involve making friends, dating, and sports. The player will engage in many dialogue trees, and their choices will ripple throughout the game's story. Not only explicit choices, but how the player interacts with the world as their character in gameplay will have an effect on the story.

This game has four primary selling points:

1. Your Choices Matter

- Major choices, Dialogue choices, and even **Gameplay** choices all factor into your story and other characters' perceptions of you.

2. Every Moment is a Choice

- Stories will often progress with or without you. So when you have to choose between helping your friends save the school or keeping your date with your crush, choose wisely.

3. Live and Breathe as your Character

- Time-Management and Interactive Storytelling combine to create a highly immersive role-playing experience. From the moment you wake up to the moment you go to sleep – you are your character.

4. Explore a Unique Sci-Fi World

- Discover a fantastical world where cultures and technologies clash. Probe the depths of its mysteries to protect the innocent – or uncover its weaknesses to increase your social standing.

2. Target Audience/Platform

This game can be released on every major platform – PC (Steam), Playstation 4, Xbox One, and even mobile, with the interface adapted for smaller screens and touchscreen. The hardware requirements are not going to be very high, so people will be able to play this game on whatever hardware is most convenient for them.

The target audience is primarily teenagers and secondarily young adults who want to be immersed in a fantastical sci-fi story. This audience will enjoy this game because its setting of a high school will feel familiar and close to home, despite its fantastical sci-fi elements. The characters will be of a similar age to the target audience, so it will be easy for the target audience to relate to the characters. And it will allow them to role-play as whoever they want to be and experience decision-making in a stress-free environment, which will resonate for them as they are becoming adults.

3. Game Story and Characters

The theme of the game is that what we do and how we spend time matters. Even the decision to not act is a decision that will have consequences. And we need to make sure we have our priorities straight – because we don't have time for everything. What do we really value in life? Our friends? Romantic partners? Helping strangers? Our own money or power? Or doing the right thing? Is that reflected by how we spend our time?

The story is made up of many different storylines that will play out over the course of one in-game month. The game is designed so that the player will not have the chance to complete all of these stories in one play-through. Players will have to make tough decisions about which stories are most important to them.

The game will take players through every day of the week except Sunday (which the students spend at home) for four weeks – 24 days total. Each day will take about 20 minutes in real time, so the total gameplay length will be about 8 hours. The player will control their character from the moment they wake up in the morning to the moment they go to sleep at night (if the player doesn't choose to stay up all night). The player will

walk around the school grounds and will go to all of their classes (though they will have the option to skip class). Their classes will have some standard subjects, but will also include subjects like horse-riding, sword-fighting, archery, driving, shooting (guns), fist-fighting, flying with jet-shoes, and future weaponry.

In-between classes and after classes, the player can choose which characters to talk to and meet up with – these conversations will progress the story. There will also be times that the characters agree to meet up to progress the story, and the player has to keep these appointments, or else the story will carry on without them and the player will have to deal with the consequences.

The player will meet 6 other student characters at the beginning of the game (the other students will be extras). The player will then choose two of these students to be the player's main companions throughout the game. The other characters will still remain present in the story throughout the rest of the game.

Characters:

Students:

1. A social-climbing wealthy girl from 3020 A.D.
2. A fun-loving wealthy guy from 3020 A.D.
3. A nice, but prideful Protestant evangelist middle-class girl from 2020 A.D.
4. An artist jock middle-class guy from 2020 A.D.
5. A brave but mean poor guy from 1020 A.D.
6. A shy poor girl from 1020 A.D.

Teachers:

1. A cynical history teacher from 2020 A.D.
2. An enthusiastic physics teacher (and inventor) from 3020 A.D.
3. A skilled former peacemaker and teacher from 1020 A.D.
4. The Dean of Students – from 1520 A.D. (from a different country)

The player's customization options at the beginning of the game will have a huge effect on how each of these characters sees the player character at the beginning of the game. The player will choose whether they come from a poor, rich, or middle-class background. This will determine which students will accept the player right off the bat, and which will be prejudiced against the player. The player will also choose which skills they are strong in, and which they need to work on. One player might have little need to study because of a natural aptitude for academics, but another player might be very skilled with the weapons from their time period.

Storylines:

A Story: The player character and their two companions stumble into the room of the school that contains the place where the three borderlines that divide all the three Time Zones meet. Something goes wrong, and the three characters are caught in a blast of energy that leaves them with the power to catch glimpses of the future once a day. They catch a glimpse of an attack on the school that will take place in one month. They need to solve the mystery and figure out how the attack will happen, and what will prevent the attack before time runs out.

Alternative A Stories: The player can also decide to use their powers to help their friends, or for their own gain, instead of protecting the school.

B Story: There will be a big, comprehensive test in one month – and only those who pass the test will be allowed to participate in the school dance that takes place afterwards. The player has to decide how much time to devote to studying and practicing to make sure the test goes well.

C Story: There will be 3 romance options for the player to choose from – the C story will be about the player meeting and eventually asking out their crush.

D Story: The player will deal with interpersonal drama between their friends.

E Story: The player can attempt to rise through the school's social ranks.

F Story: This school has a sports team – and the player can try to get onto the team and lead their school to victory.

The player will interact with the stories by choosing where to go at what time each day. The player will also interact with dialogue trees whenever they talk with other characters – this is the primary method through which the player will experience the story. The player will go and find or meet the character/s they need to for their chosen storyline, and then select them to talk with them in a dialogue tree.

There will be no cutscenes – the player will always have control of their character. The player can even choose to break off in mid-conversation and run away from the character they were just talking to (though the other character will not like that very much). The dialogue trees will be within in-game time, so conversations may be interrupted with the bell ringing for class, but most of them can be continued later. All the dialogue will be conveyed over text, via speech bubbles above each character's head.

The player will be able to perform some actions which will be specific to the situation. For example, in class, the player can select their desk to get the option to pass a note, throw a paper airplane, or raise their hand to go to the bathroom. Some major story decisions will use this action interface, and some will be made by the player moving their character to one of two possible places.

There will be mini games for each class, which will be designed to be fun, so that they player doesn't see them as a chore or even grinding for points (though each class as well as studying will increase the player's skills in that area).

4. Gameplay and Interaction

The player's goals will usually involve finding people and talking to them. The player interacts with the game mainly through dialogue choices, but also through their character's movement throughout the school and through mini-games which will portray classes.

I will analyze how this game will cater to Bartle's player types (Kumar et al., (2019) "Bartle's Player Types for Gamification"). I will also analyze it with Boller's types of fun (Boller, (2013) "Learning Game Design: Play and Evaluate Games"). This game is catering primarily to Bartle's Socializer and maybe Explorer player types – more specifically, players whose goal is Boller's Role-playing or Imagining type of fun. This is because the game focuses on dialogue trees (which Domsch classifies as active story elements (Sebastian Domsch, (2013) Storyplaying: Agency and Narrative in Video Games - Ch. 2 "Video Games and Narrative")), character development, and story. Bartle's Socializers who enjoy Boller's Collaborating won't be able to collaborate with other real players, but they will be able to interact with lots of NPCs. Bartle's Achievers who strive for Boller's Achieving Goals as well as Problem Solving and Strategizing will have some elements of the game which they will enjoy. The player can choose a number of goals to strive for, like asking their crush to the dance, winning a game for their sports team, passing a test, or saving the school. The player will then choose to devote time to their choice of these goals (like devoting time to study for the test). The player must make these choices strategically, weighing the importance of each, because some of them must be neglected. This will pay off in the end if they are successful. Bartle's Explorers who

enjoy Boller's Exploring and Collecting will like exploring the environment of the school and finding little story elements around. Some stories may require exploration to find. However, none will use event triggers (another active story element Domsch talks about). These are not fitting for the theme of this game, because they would break the illusion that this world continues on with or without the player being there and that it really matters where the player chooses to spend their time. Bartle's Killers and those who enjoy Boller's Winning or Triumphant will not be much satisfied with this game; but they are not the intended audience.

Resources, which are a game element Boller names, will factor into this game in a way (Boller (2013), "Learning Game Design: Game Elements to Consider"). The player will have statistics that keep track of their skill levels, how much different characters like or dislike them, how people generally see them, and what they prioritize. Devoting time to activities to improve these statistics will allow the player a better chance of success in a certain area. For example, a player can train with their sword fighting every night for a week, which might increase their sword fighting skill to 70%, which will allow them to pass a skill check when they need their sword fighting skills to defend themselves or pass sword fighting class later on.

There won't be much traditional gameplay – most of the game will be walking around and engaging in dialogue trees. However, each class period will have a mini-game section, which will attempt to make the player *feel* like they are actually doing the same activity as their character. For example, in a programming class, the player might play a logic puzzle game that aesthetically looks similar to code on a computer screen. These

sections will be optional – a player can just rely on their “Booksmarts” character statistic to determine how well they do in a programming class, but playing the mini-games well will always improve the player’s grade in that class. These games within the larger game are a type of “game atom” that Koster mentioned (Raph Koster, (2010) "The Fundamentals of Game Design").

I will examine these using Koster’s questions for game atoms:

“Do you have to prepare for the challenge?”

...where prep includes prior moves? ...and you can prep in multiple ways?”

The mini-games themselves will not require preparation. However, they will get progressively harder as you go on, and you will need to know what you have learned in the previous games to solve the games later on.

“Does the topology of the space matter?”

...does the topology change?”

This may vary depending on the mini game.

“Is there a core verb for the challenge?”

...can it be modified by content?”

The verb for intellectual mini-games will be “Solve.” Some mini-games that are made to imitate physical training, like sword fighting training, could be described with the verb, “Time.” These ones will use Quick-Time events (referenced by Domsch) or similar timed button-pressing to determine success or failure. Finally, some will use the verb, “Maneuver.” And will involve the player moving the character into the right place at the right time or around obstacles.

“Can you use different abilities on it?

...will you have to in order to succeed?”

The player’s success or failure in the class will still depend on their stats (what percentage their corresponding abilities are at) even if they do play the mini-game, but how well they do in the mini-game will affect their score on top of that. For example, a player with 80% Booksmarts will get an A in Science class if they skip the mini-game. But if they play the mini-game, they will have a chance of getting an A+ or, if they fail, a B. A player with 40% Booksmarts might get an F in Science class if they do not skip the mini-game, but if they play the mini-game and do really well they might have a chance at a C.

“Is there skill to using the ability?

...or is this a basic UI action?”

There will definitely be a skill to playing each of these mini-games. Players will get better as they go on.

“Are there multiple success states?

...with no bottomfeeding? ...and a cost to failure?”

There will be no set win or lose split, but how well you do will change how much the game will affect your grade. There will be a middle cutoff where the mini-game begins to lower your grade instead of raise it.

These mini-games will be the main place in the game where Koster’s definition of boredom and theory of fun can be utilized (Raph Koster, (2005) A Theory of Fun - Ch. 3 "What Games Are"). These mini-games have to have a very steady learning curve that goes neither too

fast nor too slow, or else players will either get confused at the “noise” or bored at having a full understanding of how the mini-games work and will think they are too easy.

Koster’s theory of fun will have more difficulty applying to the story-centric core of the game. Other than a sparse amount of basic tutorial at the beginning (left stick to move, arrow keys and enter to select a dialogue choice) the main part of the game will be easy to “grok” gameplay-wise (Ibid.). However, as some of the people from Telltale Games pointed out, in the case of story-centric choice games, the characters themselves become the puzzle (GDC, (2016) “How Telltale Makes Narrative Led Games”). Likewise, all the decision-making that the player does, including choosing what to spend time on throughout the game, will be a puzzle in a sense as well. *Time Clash: Year One* should always strive to make the decisions the player has to make difficult, as well as keeping the number of decisions frequent, so that the player doesn’t ever think the decision-making process is too easy, or get bored due to lack of agency.

In decision-making, I should also focus on Salen and Zimmerman’s *Anatomy of a Choice* (Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, (2004) *Rules of Play* – Ch. 6, "Interactivity"):

1. “What happened before the player was given the choice? (internal event)”

Major choices will be preceded by dialogue, usually, explaining a choice before it is made. Minor choices will be simply preceded by another line of dialogue which the player is responding to, usually.

2. “How is the possibility of choice conveyed to the player? (external event)”

This will usually be obvious, with the options appearing in text on the screen. At other times, it will be defined by where the player moves their character. A choice must be made obvious visually in this case; if this fails, it could be delineated with text that

appears on the ground in-game. When the player is exploring the school, an arrow will point to the class period that the player has next or should be at (though they have the option to skip class).

3. “How did the player make the choice? (internal event)”

Players will usually make choices by selecting a dialogue option, or an action, which will be selected with a similar interface. Other choices will be made by moving the character to one place instead of another.

4. “What is the result of the choice? How will it affect future choices? (internal event)”

I need to make sure most choices are meaningful in some way (most, because the player will not likely notice a few fake choice thrown in with the meaningful ones).

Statistics will make this a lot easier. If many dialogue choices have small effects on statistics, and then there are statistics checks later in the game, all those dialogue choices will have had an effect on that later part of the game. I should make sure that most choices, especially major choices, have consequences that are both Immediate and more Long-term consequences (Abhinav Narian, (2016) "The 9 Types of Player Choices (with Examples)"). This will prevent the players from feeling like their choices are arbitrary at any point, which Salen and Zimmerman warned against (Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman, (2004) Rules of Play – Ch. 6, "Interactivity").

5. “How is the result of the choice conveyed to the player? (external event)”

Through dialogue references by the characters to past choices. A character might say “You never helped me out,” before refusing to help the 8. Other times it will be more evident; if a character’s life was saved by a player, that character being in a scene would show the consequences of their actions.

I will also use Morrison's advice (Bryce Morrison, (2013) "Meaningful Choice in Games: Practical Guide & Case Studies"):

“Meaningful choice requires the following four components:”

-“Awareness - The player must be somewhat aware they are making a choice (perceive options)”

The same answer as my answer to Salen and Zimmerman's question #2 above.

-“Gameplay Consequences – The choice must have consequences that are both gameplay and aesthetically oriented”

Player choices will have consequences that affect how other characters treat them later.

-“Reminders – The player must be reminded of the choice they made after they [sic] made it”

I will use variables to allow the characters to remind the player of the choices they made, so they feel their affects.

-“Permanence - The player cannot go back and undo their choice after exploring the consequences”

Choices will be permanent.

This game will use many of Narain's types of choices (Abhinav Narian, (2016) "The 9 Types of Player Choices (with Examples)").

Hollow choices: there will be some customization options which won't have any affect on the game other than aesthetic.

Obvious choices: the player will be unable to leave the school grounds, at least usually. This isn't a real choice; just an option the player doesn't have.

Uninformed choices: there will be none of these. These can be very frustrating - when a player looks up the guide at the end and finds out that a character died because they did not pick up a flashlight they did not even know that they were supposed to look for in the first place, for example.

Informed choices: all choices will be informed in some way; the player will have the ability to at least make a decent guess what the consequences could be.

Dramatic choices: these will be the major choices in the game. Some will be clearly major by portraying different dialogue or action options in text onscreen. Others will be made through gameplay – when the player is forced into double-booking themselves, they have to choose which story and characters they find the most important.

Weighted choices: dramatic choices will also be weighted. The player will have to weigh what is most important to them and try to make the best decision they can.

Immediate choices: most choices will have some of their results occur immediately. For example, the player has to choose between two other characters to stay alive, and one dies immediately after they make their choice.

Long-term choices: Most choices will have some consequences come back much later in the game. But the game will also have true long-term choices – the characters the player devotes the most time to, the characters the player is usually nice to, and the characters the player is usually mean to, will all have big effects on how these characters treat the player, especially near the end of the game.

Orthogonal choices: This game features a semi-orthogonal choice near the beginning. The player chooses which Time Zone they come from; this will have a big effect on their skills and how the other characters treat the player. The game also features some real orthogonal choices. The player can choose which stories to experience, and which to ignore. The player will be forced to miss some stories in one playthrough, and depending on which stories they choose, will have wildly different experiences.

The emergent gameplay that Bycer describes is not usual in story-centric games (Josh Bycer, (2015) "Examining Emergent Gameplay"). However, since this game is also a time-management simulator, this game will have a few systems that allow a bit of emergent gameplay to emerge. This game will have systems that will keep track of how much the player sleeps, how much the player eats, etc. If the player neglects these things, it will pay off in way that would impact the story (the player passes out from lack of food and misses an important meeting with their friends, or the player is too tired from staying up all night studying to do well on their sword-fighting test). Story-creating systems like this could add some extra interest to the player's time management.

Finally, I will go through Schell's problems to see how my game will answer them (Jesse Schell, (2008) The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses - Ch. 15, "One Kind of Experience is the Story"):

#1 - "Good Stories Have Unity" and #3 - "Multiple Endings Disappoint" – this game will feature multiple storylines that will all tie together at the end. The main theme, that how we spend our time matters, will tie together all the different possible endings so that they will all be

satisfying. This theme will work for both happy endings and sad endings – if you spend your time well, you will be rewarded, if you spend your time poorly, you will reap the consequences (but will be a satisfying tragedy story).

#2 - “The Combinatorial Explosion” – This game will use a branch and bottleneck structure, but this will be prevented from destroying lasting consequences through statistics and variables which will come back later in the story. For example, if a player pulls a prank on a character one day, the next day that character might come back and pull a prank on them. Or, much later, that character will still be holding a grudge.

#4 - “Not Enough Verbs” – Dialogue trees being such a large part of this game means that the player will spend most of their time in conversations, not with action verbs.

#5 - “Time Travel Makes Tragedy Obsolete” – This game will periodically autosave, so that the player cannot go back and change their decisions without replaying through the whole game. However, the player will be given a limited number of “emergency” saves in case they make a decision accidentally or because of a misunderstanding and need to go back and fix it.

5. Game Design

https://www.team17.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/TE2_13-1.jpg

The above image is from *The Escapists 2* by Team17. It has a lot to unpack:

1. *Time Clash: Year One* will also have a top-down perspective on a pixelated environment and characters. The player will move in the same way.
2. There will be a similar box in the Heads Up Display that says what time it is and if the player has any appointments, like a class, going on at this time (like where in this screenshot it says “Breakfast Time”).

3. There will also be an arrow (or two or three), like the yellow arrow towards the bottom left corner in the screenshot, which will point towards the player's appointments, be it class or a date. The player can choose for the arrow to be in the mini-map instead, however.
4. Characters that the player can talk to will have an icon over their head, similar to the green exclamation point over a character's head in the screenshot.
5. There will be icons which show the player's energy (for sprinting), hunger, tiredness (for staying awake), and thirst at the bottom left, similar to the player's health, etc. in the screenshot.

<https://youtu.be/eprOhiWql6E?t=51>

This clip is a review by IGN of *Oxenfree* by Night School Studio (the relevant part is 0:51-0:56).

1. This screenshot shows how dialogue will be portrayed in *Time Clash: Year One* - with a speech bubble with options over (or next to) the character's head.

<https://steamcdn->

[a.akamaihd.net/steam/apps/206440/ss_0a25120991ec89dc4272d5020dc08d9de1e42156.600x338.jpg?t=1579718439](https://steamcdn-a.akamaihd.net/steam/apps/206440/ss_0a25120991ec89dc4272d5020dc08d9de1e42156.600x338.jpg?t=1579718439)

The above image is from *To the Moon* by Freebird Games.

1. This clip displays how different action options would be portrayed onscreen near the player character, which could be clicked or selected.
2. Also, the environment of this screenshot is more accurate to the visual style of *Time Clash: Year One*. It is less intentionally blocky than *The Escapists 2*, where the blocky design fits the arcade-game tone. In *To the Moon*, the environment is more

crafted to feel as real as possible (within the limits of pixelated graphics), so that the player forgets that they are playing a game and engages in the story.

<https://steamcdn->

[a.akamaihd.net/steam/apps/206440/ss_edee6b77fa9948845500b14af3db7c887a8f5819.1920x1080.jpg?t=1579718439](https://akamaihd.net/steam/apps/206440/ss_edee6b77fa9948845500b14af3db7c887a8f5819.1920x1080.jpg?t=1579718439)

Also from *To the Moon* by Freebird Games.

1. This further elaborates on the last point. The environment is created to show depth, so that it feels more like a real house, rather than an arcade-game version of a house.

This will be the art style *Time Clash: Year One* should shoot for.

<https://youtu.be/uFcYXvH4FCg?t=426>

The above clip is a gameplay video of *Marvel's Spider-Man* by Insomniac Games (the relevant section is from 7:06-8:20).

1. This is a good example of how mini-games can be successfully used to give the player the feel of doing something like programming while keeping things entertaining. The aesthetics of the mini-game the player is playing match the activity the player's character is doing. The game is also designed to give the player a taste of what it is like to do what the character is doing. In the clip, the player has to use some logic to solve the puzzle, which correlates with Peter Parker using extensive logic and knowledge to solve the programming problem. This is how mini-games for classes should work for *Time Clash: Year One*.

<https://youtu.be/ntSOXMwil7A>

This is a trailer from *Finding Paradise* (the sequel to *To the Moon*) by Freebird Games (the relevant part is 0:00-0:50 or so).

1. This is a good example of the type of sound design that *Time Clash: Year One* should have. All the sound effects should be naturalistic (not sound “arcadey”) and the music should sound like a movie score. This is to get the audience emotionally invested with the characters and the story despite the pixelated graphics.

Competitors:

The Escapists games have similar visuals, similar movement, and a similar time management system; however, *Time Clash: Year One*’s story-centric focus makes it a totally different genre, so it is not a competitor. *Disco Elysium* by ZA/UM, a heavily branching dialogue-heavy game, might be the closest competitor (I have not played it, so I’m not sure), though it does not have time limits in the same way. Interactive novels may also be competitors.