

***The Void*, Ludo-Psychological Ruin, and Ecological Self Destruction**

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Abstract

Playable ruins that reflect a character's mind appear in many games. In *The Void* (Ice Pick Lodge 2008), however, the world is not just an explorable mental model. It's a commentary on resource extraction and overuse. *The Void* is a collapse game (Chang 2019): an extended metaphor for self-destruction that questions the desire to perform both selfish and selfless acts in video games. It showcases the cost of pushing oneself to the absolute limits while moving through a hostile, embittered world. Echoing Espen Aarseth's notion of cybertext (1997), it shows how we can configure the very idea of ecological ruin in different ways.

Using the frameworks of ludoarchaeology and ecogaming, I examine *The Void* as an important literary artefact of our time. It engages questions of gender essentialism and political disenfranchisement as much as impending ecological collapse. I argue that it tells an increasingly relevant story through play, where a player's choices affect the mental landscape around them. It also allows players to recognize their own beliefs in various characters. These characters represent distinct philosophical concepts and ways of living. Letting players choose which philosophies to follow enables introspection in an age of climate catastrophe. That introspection then prompts players to consider how our ways of thinking shape not only our perceptions of the world but also the state of our environments.

Bio

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“This is a desert on the threshold of death. I think it's somewhere underground - but not deep. And around it - emptiness... You see how cold and still it is here, how desolate. But this is not yet your death. That awaits below, in the cold, when the last drop of Color leaves your soul. We call it Absolute Death. Remember this always - here in the Void, nothing is more precious than Color. Color is life. It is our food, our strength, our hope. It is the essence and meaning of our suffering. And now yours.”

– Sister Death, *The Void* (2008 Ice Pick Lodge)

The world is dealing with a resource crisis. The exploitation of resources has a connection to almost every aspect of our modern, digital lives, and the World Economic forum identifies that “exploitation is the main driver for the triple planetary crises, which are defined by the United Nations as the climate crisis, biodiversity loss and the pollution crisis[2]” (2024). Systems Change Alliance writes that we “are currently experiencing a very grave resource crisis, an ecological “credit crunch” caused by our overuse of the world’s natural elements. And for the future of humanity, this is a far more serious problem than any financial crisis. Yet most people living in industrialized countries are oblivious to the fact that we are living beyond our means[3]” (2020). In 1972 scholars Nazli Choucri and James P. Bennett were already observing that “finite resources are being utilized at exponential rates; and technological advances are contributing to negative ecological outcomes” (175). Knowing that we face it, how then can we deal with the resource crisis? How can we understand it in ways that do not involve abstract charts and figures, or for us to wait for supply chains to collapse?

There is a virtual world that also deals with a resource crisis, albeit one that is even more extreme than our own situation. The game that deals with these pressing questions is *The Void* (also known as Turgor in the original Russian, or also alternatively known as Tension, but hereafter referred to as *The Void*). Russian art game studio Ice Pick Lodge developed *The Void* in 2008, and the game offers a playable version of entropy and decay that is more relevant today than it has ever been. Over at least twenty four hours of trial-and-error gameplay (<https://howlongtobeat.com/game/10248>), players find themselves struggling with the ethical dilemmas that result from living in a decaying, ecologically ravaged world. The world’s finite resources are all directly managed by the player, and it is only with the careful stewardship of the world’s ecology that a player’s survival is even possible. The game continually tantalizes us with the prospect of our own self-destruction by setting up easy ways to survive temporarily but that results in long-term failure. *The Void* was paid some attention on release, notably by gaming outlet “Rock, Paper, Shotgun”, which called it “the most important game you are GOING TO FUCKING PLAY” in Quintin Smith’s review in 2008. Eurogamer was one of the few other gaming outlets to cover it at the time, with reviewer John Walker writing that “*The Void* is so far outside of the realms of helpful description that I might as well phone you up and make animal noises at you”. It defies conventions, and, as Walker correctly identifies, “there's this unavoidable nagging thought in your mind that the game might be lying to you”. As I will demonstrate, the game *is* lying to you, and that is essential to creating its deeply relevant sense of a world on the brink of annihilation, facing ecological destruction.

The world of *The Void* is a playable ruin, what I dub a ludo-psychological ruin. A ludo-psychological ruin is a ruin representative of a character’s mind or mental state, whose mental state is shaped in some way by the player’s decisions. I will return to this concept and how we play in it in more detail very soon. For

now, it is important to recognize that this kind of ruin is one that is mediated by choice, and agency. *How* we are allowed to make choices is integral to our decision making process.

Game studies scholar Espen Aarseth says regarding hypertext fiction that “the use of some texts may be described in terms of [...] the explorative function, in which the user must decide which path to take, and the configurative function, in which [strings in the text] are in part chosen or created by the user” (1997, 64). The player transforms the world of *The Void*, exploring it and then configuring it using Color. The player then subsequently deconstructs it on several levels, including both ecological destruction and in a more meta fashion, in terms of traditional video game design, as I will demonstrate. The ruin itself is a provocative image, one used time and again for storytelling purposes. As art critic Brian Dillon writes, the “ruin is not the triumph of nature, but an intermediate moment, a fragile equilibrium between persistence and decay”. In *The Void*, both the human-constructed buildings *and* nature are in a state of ruin, sliding ever further towards decay. Media scholar Matthias Fuchs argues that video game players and designers have a taste for decay. We want to see an imperfect world, and the ruins in it. Referencing the German term “ruinensehnsucht”, the longing for decay, he writes that “Computer games could then be a way of dealing with trauma. It could well be that one of the psychological aspects of playing with ruins is what Sigmund Freud's theory describes as the trauma of repeatedly reliving creation and destruction via play to get relief from this circle” (7). The trauma of the psychological ruin is excavated *and* given additional depth by the player's interaction with the world.

The Void takes place in the eponymous Void, a “desert on the threshold of death” (Ice Pick Lodge 2008), according to a character known as the “Nameless Sister”, or “Sister Death”. It turns out The Void belongs to the Sleeper, a being who is dying, implied to be a person on their deathbed. The characters that inhabit the world of *The Void* operate on an unusual moral code that emphasizes the apocalyptic nature of the world – “[g]iving is an unquestionable evil, therefore consumption is an unquestionable good”, says Triumphator, one of the game's monstrous Brothers. This echoes presently familiar notions of patriarchal or capitalistic growth at any cost.

The Void divides its characters into two highly gendered roles – Brothers and Sisters. Brothers are hideous monstrosities that pulled themselves up out of the Nightmare, a realm below the Void, where unspeakable darkness reshapes their bodies. This calls to mind what editor and writer Dorothy Yamamoto argued about monstrosity and the boundaries of the human, writing that “all bodies are not of equal value” (2000, 3). The traditional masculine-feminine power dynamic is in play in the world of *The Void*, but in ways that emphasize the repulsiveness of hierarchical power, brought to extremes by resource scarcity. For example, the Nightmare twisted Brother Mantid's appearance, his limbs enormous metal spikes impaling his body, and he walks on those stilts many meters off the ground. His skin is withered and grey, stretched over a visibly brutalized torso.

So, compared to the Brothers, the Sisters initially seem to reinforce ideas of the essential feminine. As Mariana Pinho and Ruth Gaunt write, “traditional gender ideologies allocate tasks and roles along traditional lines such that the father takes on the role of breadwinner while the mother is the primary caregiver” (2024) – the Brothers are out harvesting, hoarding resources, while the Sisters remain at home. They all have varying personalities – much like the Brothers – but are all traditionally attractive women that slowly undress the more of the game's currency, Color, you give them. Chains breaking represents

this undressing. The traditional power fantasy reward – that of the presumed heterosexual male getting to claim ownership over the woman – is slowly turned on its head as the Brothers frame the act of giving Color to the Sisters – which is needed to progress the game – as a severe evil. The Sisters, in fact, are the prime movers of the narrative, with probably the most important role in the game as representations of potential futures.

The player always takes the role of the “Hero”, variably known by other names like “Taboo Breaker”, “Guest”, or “Golden Eyes” - the Hero figure is always male. As such, the Brothers expect the player to perform masculinity to survive at the beginning of the game. But there is an androgynous quality to the Hero as well, as when inhabited by the player the Hero can give Color to the Sisters, an act that is alien to the Brothers. The Guest interacts with the Sisters in a way that breaks the traditional gender split in *The Void*, and thus the player has agency in this rigid society because of their potential androgyny. Consequently, not conforming to rigid gender roles allows the player character to shape the spaces around them. Agency, the ability for the player to shape the ruin they play in, makes the ruin a psychological one, a reflection of one’s playstyle and thus to an extent their worldview.

The interplay between agency, resource hoarding, gendered factions and the ecological imbalance, all link together to create what I call a psychological ruin, or in the case of videogames, the ludo-psychological ruin. The psychological ruin is underexplored. As Jonathan Patterson identifies: “[t]he link between physical ruins and psychological forms of ‘ruination’ is a relatively new concept of spatial theory that has yet to be used in the study of literary form” (2018, 75).

The psychological ruin melds physical ruin with psychological distress and decay. *The Void*’s extreme difficulty, forcing the player to exist at subsistence level, lets the player experience the Sleeper’s nightmare but shape it through their own actions. Spending Color in a wasteful way harms you and pollutes the environment and can even poison a Sister to death. At the end of the game, the Brothers will begin to persecute and kill Sisters themselves. Choosing to abandon a Sister to die at the hands of Brothers desperate to stop the Void’s destruction means that the Chamber she owns becomes inaccessible.[4]

I argue that players explore ruins in video games through a method I call *ludoarchaeology*. I define ludoarchaeology as a form of gameplay that “encourages the perception of the world as a space in which we document, categorize and otherwise complete the world by discovering it”. Games give players gameplay tools through which to explore a world and learn about their world using the ludo-archaeological tools. In my thesis, I also demonstrated that “[l]udo-archaeological play exists on a spectrum of player engagement. On the one end, violent ludo-archaeological play encourages play with a colonialist mindset and allows a player to inhabit various power fantasy roles. [...] But on the other end there are other forms of ludo-archaeological play, where the world is not seen as a place to be conquered, completed, or used up. [...] Ludo-archaeology can therefore encourage both meditative play and violent looting. [...] Ludo-archaeology [...] is characterized by a player engaging with ruins or artefacts, regardless of genre of game” (Cone 2025, 18 - 19). The process through which we document and colonize the nightmarish ruins of the world, farming the land and bringing Color back to the world, is ludo-archaeology. A player unearths Color by exploring the environment, navigates a hostile world, and then uses what they learn about that hostile world to survive inside of it. A player often reaches the failstate in

The Void due to engaging in initially hidden violent ludo-archaeological play, which is not always obviously the wrong choice. Nonetheless, short-term overconsumption results in a player losing the game. *The Void* obfuscates the best uses of the ludo-archaeological tool, Color, often frustrating players. A player overuses Color to interact with a world by drawing over-powerful glyphs. Poor play results in a longer drawing time, which spends more Color.

It is worth noting that it is not just ecological disaster that is simulated by *The Void*. It is the resulting political and social collapse that is also rendered with genuine care. *The Void*'s political structure seems to discourage players from participating. The world of *The Void* is hostile, gendered, and violently exclusionary. If you make a mistake, the Brothers will attack and attempt to kill you. At any early stage of the game, defeating them is almost impossible with a lack of resources to draw on. As scholar Peter Mair argues in his book "Ruling the Void: The Hollowing of Western Democracy", "control over political decision-making might lie beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen", and what we are left with is, in his words, non-sovereignty, or "a notion of democracy that is being steadily stripped of its popular component—democracy without a demos". In *The Void*, it is dangerous to express oneself openly, until you have the resources to back it up. The Sisters are continually prohibited from actually engaging in the substantive politics of the game, outside of having to use their bodies or their knowledge as lures, hoping the player will align with them – either out of desire, or perhaps pity. *The Void*, far from just depicting a society devolving into economic ruin, showcases one that also suffers from political deprivation. With half of the society's voices left unheard, the player becomes the mediator, but the player can also become one of the power-hungry monsters. This is possible through short-sighted play, which punishes the player frequently.

A player is punished by short-sighted actions in various ways. Players paint different kinds of symbols with Color in order to produce different effects, such as planting trees, or giving oneself a shield to reflect damage. In the immediate term, a player can waste Color by painting symbols slowly, thus wasting Color, as every second you hold down the mouse button, Color is being spent. Additionally, killing monsters that oppose you in the short term means that the realm becomes poisoned in the long term, as spending Color in this way harms the environment, and draws worse monsters towards the region.

The game forms an important but often overlooked link of the chain of "un-fun" or "art games", and players use both terms interchangeably as either a compliment or an insult, depending on who is talking. *The Void* is a hard game to categorize, acting as a fusion between a point-and-click adventure game, a resource management game, and a survival horror game. For the purposes of this video essay, I shall say *The Void* is closest to a survival horror game, where the world itself is hostile and one must juggle different resources to live through various monster attacks or survive the environment's progressing decay.

Despite this foreboding description, survival horror games often still aim to be fun, and to provide a satisfying experience. Queer game studies scholar Bo Ruberg writes that the right way to play video games, "the normal way to play, is to maximize normative enjoyment" (2015, 109). When games give us traditional power fantasy options, like a big gun, survival horror is often still normatively fun. However, in the case of what Ruberg calls no-fun games, "no-fun gives voice to new perspectives", quite frequently by queering the play experience. In this case, *The Void* opts to queer traditional structures of the survival

horror genre by making information itself unreliable. No one tells *Resident Evil 4* (Capcom 2005) protagonist Leon Kennedy how to shoot a gun while simultaneously withholding crucial game mechanics hidden within the firing of that gun. *The Void* withholds a lot. For example, the Nameless Sister suggests that you should kill Color-eating Predators – monstrous looking bats or fleshy pods with rows of sharp teeth. It is an early objective in the game to clear her Chambers of Predators, and so you do. To do so, a player must spend precious Color. This has the unintended knock-on effect of poisoning the realm, attracting more predators, and of course needlessly squandering the player's supply of Color, likely spelling the player's death. The tutorial lying-by-omission helps to reinforce the game's theme of ecological and psychological decay, where we can no longer trust even the foundational laws of the universe any longer. Ecology game studies scholar Alenda Chang calls these kinds of games "collapse games", whereby "success may be defined in the barest of terms, such as procuring adequate food, water, and shelter, and personal downfall awaits even minor mistakes" (188). This term slots neatly alongside "un-fun". She also observes, rightly, that it is defeatist to frame collapse games as apocalyptic; instead using the term failure. This is the term I will also be using. As she writes: "Failure is certainly more apropos for the kinds of environmental challenges we are facing in the present, which are crises of our own making" (189).

The idea that the game is "lying to you" serves to destabilize the reality in which you play, making it hard to make informed decisions. A lack of informed decision making then leads to various disasters which can force a player to abandon hours of actual-time progress. Psychology and business scholars Dario Natale Palmucci and Alberto Ferraris explain psychologist Herbert Simon's theory of bounded rational choice. They explain that "it is not possible for the individual to know all the alternatives of action nor to foresee all the consequences of the decisions taken, since these are sometimes remote and indirect, and that the decision-making process is influenced by important cultural, personal [...], as well as temporal [...] limitations" (02). Environmental editor for *The Guardian*, Damian Carrington backs this up when he writes, that "[r]ampant climate misinformation is turning the crisis into a catastrophe". We cannot make truly informed decisions in an environment of misinformation, which in the case of the environment, subsequently leads to ruin. My first playthrough of *The Void* was in fact made up of at least twelve separate mini-playthroughs. Despite believing I had made the best decision at the time due to the information I had, I would be unable to complete a later objective, having run out of time or Color. Subsequently I realized I had made a mistake, sometimes as little as ten minutes ago, but once I had to reload a save from around six hours ago. I had to rewind that far back to avoid setting off the chain reaction of decisions that led to me failing. These were personal decisions that had long-running ramifications.

The game's psychological ruin became layered – as I understood all the ways I could fail, I became increasingly aware of the desperate nature of the game's environment. *The Void* forces the player to play optimally while also giving them just enough resources to operate at a subsistence level. In so doing, it effectively simulates existing in a world that has practically succumbed to climate disaster, and at the same time can force the player to easily fall prey to feelings of hopelessness. But players can also push on through brutally difficult tasks to introspect and thus comprehend what they believe in. The embittered fragments of the world are an opportunity for a player to identify what ideas, people, and places that they value most in the world. This is the *psychological* element of the game's ecological ruin writ large. Knowing that we cannot restore our world to how it was in the past, that old methods of overconsumption

and waste the game teaches us would merely doom the world to an even more complete extinction. Thus, we must decide what values we hold most dear and get them out of the Void. We must have the bravery to define a new world.

The threat of the psychological ruin in *The Void* lies in how the player engages with the world in front of them. If we consider that agency is what separates video games from other mediums (Bódi 2023), we should understand how *The Void*'s ruin is shaped by player action. That player action is modelled on a kind of subsistence living whereby a person must constantly make difficult, high-risk decisions to survive, modelling what life is like for many farmers in the climate crisis right now. The risk of such a difficult approach to gameplay is that the player becomes apathetic. Some players might find that the systems the game puts in place prevents them from being able to save anyone, thus buying into the Brothers' rhetoric, and cementing the ecological self-destruction of *The Void*.

This is a frequent theme in online discussions about the game – that it is “barely possible” to stay ahead of running out of resources means that you are thinking only about your immediate survival. In my first playthrough of the game, this “survival-first” ethos meant that I was frequently making decisions that only benefited myself in the short term. This fits with certain models of decision-making constructed by various fields, including economists (Luce and Raiffa, 1957), psychologists (Koehler and Harvey, 2007), evolutionary ecologists (Hammerstein and Stevens, 2012), and neurologists (Padoa-Schioppa, 2011). Anthropologist Bram Tucker writes that “[m]ost approaches start with some version of rational choice theory, which assumes that all organisms seek to maximize pleasures and avoid pains” (2025, 44), and *The Void* leans into this kind of decision making, wherein we are forced to make hard decisions to minimize pains and allow continued play. Why?

In a 2009 interview with Rock Paper Shotgun's Quintin Smith, the developers of *The Void* explain what drives the studio to make unfun games: catharsis. They say that

“Catharsis always assumes a vivid death experience. Always. And if you remember Aristotle, the meaning of catharsis is in metamorphosis, in this case the metamorphosis of the gamer. The metamorphose is a “ritual” event that assumes a ‘small death’ of the person that went through it. For a new, enlightened [person] to be born, the old one has to ‘die’.”

No-fun games like *The Void* act as a kind of catharsis. Completing them is often a trial; something arduous, depressive, and harrowing. Game and screen studies scholar Tanya Krzywinska reinforces this when she says that traditionally “[g]ame pleasure is homeostatic, tying into the drive towards closure or resolution – showing the symbiosis of representation and affect. The sense of affirmation promised by games works with, and against, the fear of failure or stasis. As such, we might place the feeling axis of many games on a continuum between frustration and elation” (2015, 295). She also notes that horror, like *The Void*, “defer, undermine or diminish the sense of [mastery over the gameworld]” (296). As the developers observe, *The Void*'s psychological ruin urges frustration through death. Death is at the heart of *The Void*. A player will almost inevitably die early and often. Game studies scholar Miguel Sicart refers to this kind of punishing design as “abusive game design” (100). Sicart, alongside game scholar Douglas Wilson, writes that “Abusive game design subverts the systems-centric design paradigm and calls for an approach to game design that aims to establish a personal dialogue between player and designer, by

means of a game. The game is only the mediator in this dialogue. ... As such, abusive game design understands games as a personal affair between individuals. Abusive games recast play as a dialogic interplay between player and designer” (Wilson and Sicart 2010). Through frustrating ludo-archaeological play, whereby a player is haunted by their inability to “complete” the game by saving everyone, collecting all the Color, and saving the realm, *The Void* leads us towards greater revelations about the world in which we live, creating a space for introspection. As Sicart argues, abusive game design is conversational, and “it is in a conversational space of peers where the [game] is no longer central but just one element, perhaps even the least important, in the network of actions and meanings” (105 – 106). *The Void* is also persuasive, as in the case of game studies scholar Ian Bogost’s influential framework of procedural rhetoric, “a technique for making arguments with computational systems and for unpacking computational arguments others have created” (2007, 15). *The Void* puts forward a coherent argument through both its narrative and its mechanics, creating ludonarrative harmony. With all this taken together, *The Void* creates a persuasive digital space in which the player is in full conversation with the game about the impact of their actions on the world around them. The game emphasizes this outside of gameplay with its various conversations, which are very much doom-and-gloom:

“The Sleeper, who they call The Void, is *mortal*. Our duty as Brothers is to protect the Sleeper’s life at all costs. He gave us shelter and a home. He graced us with Color. Yet you can see what’s happening. He’s dying. *Dying* because his last drops of Color are being wasted on inanimate matter.”

– [Montgolfier \(1:16\)](#)

Brother Montgolfier illustrates how the denizens of the Void perceive the world around them. Montgolfier tells us that the void is in a state of ruin – that ‘desert on the threshold of death’. He is aware of its impending demise. Similarly, climate scientists like the late James Lovelock have made us more aware of the fact we live in a mortal world (Lovelock 2025[MC5]), while acknowledging that the world’s demise is also not inevitable in our lifetimes, granted we “keep the Earth as cool as possible to ensure it is less vulnerable to accidents that might disable Gaia’s cooling mechanisms.”. The ecological ruin responds to a player’s misuse, just as the world’s plants change phenology in response to climate change[MC6]. *The Void* spawns more predators in corrupted realms and even sends creatures called *Scorpions* to destroy trees if a realm is sufficiently damaged. The damage done to the world tells a story about the human being that inhabited it. In *The Void*, the ludo-psychological ruin gives us a chance to tell our own story about ourselves and our place in the world. The characters in *The Void* are the environment – and so each ruin signifies something important about a character – such as the melancholic Uta reclining forever in a hammock, staring at a moon that returns her gaze. We come to understand that the environment is a character unto itself, but it also reflects a character, much as a person’s own living space can reflect their mental state.

The Sisters each represent various philosophical constructs. While these are not always abundantly clear, there are nonetheless aesthetic clues placed within the environments they choose to live in. In other words: players form relationships with each Sister in part based on the psychological ruinspace that they inhabit. New Zealand media studies scholar, Kevin Veale, says that “since the player’s decisions have an impact on a world and characters”, it means that “the player is already invested in treating [them] as if they were real” (2017, 655). In other words, we can use space as a lever to further our understanding of characters. In *The Void*, spaces called Chambers perform the act of characterization just as much as

dialogue does. Spatial characterization defines ruin. Cognitive literary studies scholar James Paul Gee argues that “as a player, you must – on the basis of what you learn about the game’s story and the game’s virtual world – attribute certain mental states (beliefs, values, goals, feelings, attitudes, and so forth) to the virtual character. You must take these to be the character’s mental state; you must take them as a basis for explaining the character’s actions in the world” (2008, 258). *The Void* has the characters’ mental states reflected in the environments they choose to inhabit – and in each case, *The Void* shows us that each character is living in a state of deprivation. In the case of the Sister, Yani, for example, her Chamber is a decrepit apartment, in a state of obvious disrepair – broken, abandoned, nonetheless full of noises that indicate something monstrous lives here. The childlike Yani hides in a fortress of pillows and blankets, sheltering from her own house. The world of *The Void* is permanently haunted, a ruin that we never get to see restored. In fact, the player abandons the Void at the end of a successful playthrough, where we imbue one being, the playable character or a Sister, with enough Color to transcend the Void and reach the Surface, a town lit by sunshine. Nonetheless it initially appears hollow and empty, devoid of anyone living there besides the mysterious angel “Godsend”, who helps to transform the Surface according to who reaches it. The promise of the Surface is that it can become something new, something better, than the Void below. However, *The Void*’s abusive game design frustrates a player wanting to send someone to the Surface, to live outside of the ruin. It takes an obscene amount of preparation and an act of selflessness to take any of the Sisters above the Void. The act of transcending the psychological ruin still necessitates, however, that the ruin continues to exist below. We take all the Color with us when we ascend - the Void dies beneath The Surface. There is no way to *un-decay* a ruin, no simple reversal of ecological damage. In this way, *The Void* is the ultimate collapse game, as it acknowledges the scars that psychological and ecological trauma alike leave on a person and their environment – scars that we can build on top of but never erase, a series of collapses we are forced to survive time and again just for the promise of a better future.

The Void uses ludo-archaeological exploration to deepen one’s connection to the world, allowing the player time to introspect. The game’s utilization of abusive game design and un-fun makes for a deeper, more persuasive experience. While we start as an outsider to this strange society, we take the role of a cataloguer. We document more of the world, putting down more gardens of Color and mapping it, and categorizing people and places within the in-game journal. We can certainly make *harmful* ludo-archaeological decisions, wherein we act as a colonizer that overuses resources, which ultimately leads to futile ecological self-destruction. But we can make *benevolent* ludo-archaeological choices, wherein we are making decisions that serve not just ourselves, and not just the Sisters, but the continued existence of the world. As with many games, the world of *The Void* only exists for as long as we play within it. And the Void will always become Colorless – it is a key plot point that the Void’s death is inevitable. However, I believe that the metaphor of the Surface allows us to take lessons from the Void – an unsustainable and broken system – and use those lessons to build a fairer, more hopeful society in the future, built atop the ruins of the old.

The game effectively simulates making decisions in a world that has succumbed to climate disaster and can cause the player to fall prey to feelings of hopelessness. *But* a player does not have to succumb. Players can force themselves to fight on through brutally difficult tasks to comprehend what it is that they truly believe in. Close to twenty years have passed since the release of *The Void*, and the game still provides a bold experiment in gameplay. The game simulates ecological disaster in a way that provides

direct playable feedback through frustrating, confounding ludo-archaeological play. Through this play, we are allowed to shape the psychological ruin around us and are led to introspect on our relationship to the wider world. In so doing, we are granted, in the end, a compelling catharsis. If we learn how to treat the world with respect, we are rewarded with the chance of a new dawn, a world both familiar and strange.

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