The game I played was called To The Moon, it was made by Freebird Games, and I played it on Steam ([Link to Steam Page](#)). I think that game was intended to be for players who care a lot about the stories in their game, in particular, I think this game was intended for adults. I only played around two hours of the game, and was able to reach the point where Joey first asked River to go to the movies.

I think one important narrative strategy that was used was embedded storytelling, the physical space of the game had a lot of interesting detail, and was as involved in the storytelling as the actual dialogue. I explored the house a fair bit at the start of the game, and was able to piece together details that I saw pay off as I continued through the narrative. The embedded narrative also applies to the way that the player uncovers the story of Joey and River. Instead of us being there chronologically, we are scientists going backwards through Joey's memories. We slowly uncover the bits and pieces of their story as we go, unraveling cause and effect, even for events that took place in the past. It was really cool to sort of visit the past, since we got to see how the world of the game evolved, and how it ultimately led to the present world of the game. The environments themselves were also very visually pleasing.
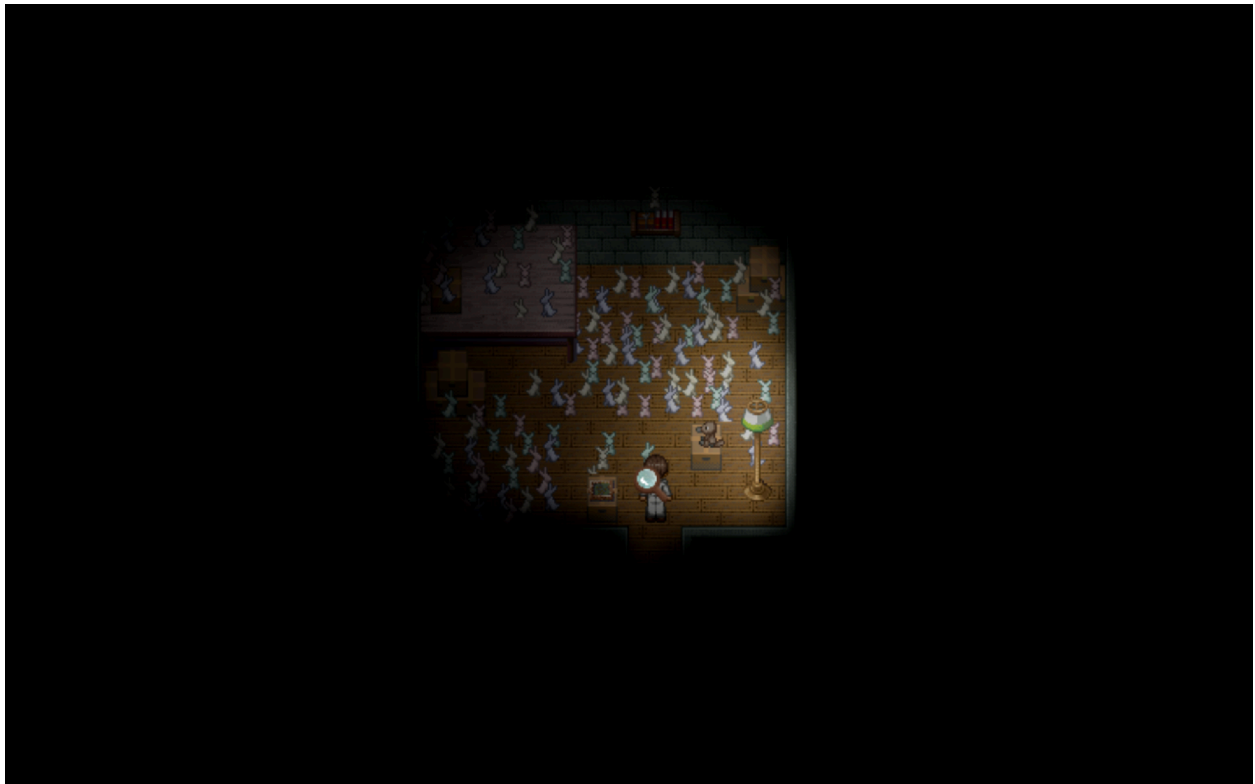
The game also had a lot of evocative storytelling, showing us different portions of the people's life. Since I'm only 22, I think a lot of it was lost on me, but things like their first date really resonated because of my prior experiences.

This game fit the model of a Kinetic Novel, in that the narrative itself (did not seem) to be affected by the choices we make. This actually made a lot of sense in context of what I played, since we were going into the past memories of characters, and it wouldn't make a lot of sense for us to be able to change the outcome of events. There were also some fun puzzles between each memory, and I had a good time solving them in the optimal number of turns. Travelling backwards "in time" felt really unique because the kinetic structure didn't feel restrictive at all, and instead made a ton of sense. The kinetic structure really emphasized the slow change that the characters went through in their relationship.

This game was also made in RPG maker! So there were quite a few techniques for level design I wanted to avoid (any many more I wanted to include!), for one, it was sometimes hard to understand how the tiles were working and traversal was difficult. Narratively I think there were lots of the personal dynamics that felt similar to things I want to pursue in my game. The biggest of these was the sense of calm that was instilled before the memory hopping shenanigans began. That sense of normalcy and familiarity the game instilled at the very start is one that will be very important to the beginning of my interactive fiction. One of the biggest gut punches came in a moment where a character mentioned "The incident". At this moment, there was also a shift in the music in the game which really highlighted the moment.

For one, I think the game is trying to draw empathy towards people at the end of their life, the whole premise of trying to fulfill people's dying wishes in their memory definitely

evokes a lot of sympathy. Specifically the character we follow is Joey, a widower who's wife passed away, and I think a great deal of empathy is created towards people whose spouses have passed away or whose spouses are very sick. The game does this by showing us the whole process of River and Joey's relationship. We see them meeting in high school, we see their first date, we see them find out River is sick. Most heartbreakingly we see River tell Joey that she would rather he use their money to finish their dream home by the lighthouse, instead of on her surgery. This moment on its face is sad, but I think where the emotional heavy lifting is being done, is through Joey's reaction to this. Joey talking about how all he wanted was for her to be okay, but that not being what River wanted was so incredibly sad. That moment was just heartbreaking and it was very effective, I definitely found myself moved.

Additionally, the game created empathy for those with Asperger's Syndrome. I don't think I got far enough for this to be explicitly stated as the syndrome River was diagnosed with, but based on why I played this seems to be what the game is intending to portray. Isabelle is another character who also has the same syndrome, and she has a beautiful speech about how while she may seem more neurotypical than River, it's only because she lives her whole life acting as though she is. This portrayal of the syndrome is also very moving, and overall I'd say that the dialogue in this game is incredibly moving, and it is probably its greatest strength in terms of creating empathy.

Below are the notes I took on the reading for this week:

Game Design as Narrative Architecture

- Rel between Games & Story controversial
  - ↪ Ludologists → all abt mechanics/gameplay
  - ↪ Narratologists → all about narrative
- Truth somewhere between
- Some points
  - → not all games tell story
  - → Many games try to tell narrative
  - → No universal way to have a narrative.
  - → Experience of a game can't be reduced to just a story
  - → Stories games tell, not told same way as film/books.

- Spatial Exploration → reminds me of logy bbg *world design, not just narrative*
  - *comparing theater + GO*
  - → spaces can have "micro narratives"
- Games can enhance other stories, or stand alone
- Enacting Stories → playing through them ourselves
- Embedding Narratives → uncovering them ourselves in world of game. For example, detective game.
  - ↪ story as body of info rather than linear narrative
  - ↪ & can be combined w/ trad narrative as well.
  - ↪ want to "stage" moments players can draw their own conclusions from. → can be multimodal!

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- Emergent Narratives → like the sims, games where the player creates their own story.
  - ↳ full of narrative possibility → player doesn't control every aspect though, sims can take actions themselves.
  - ↳ Could also be procedurally generated game/ narrative.
- ☆ Want to design worlds/spaces where stories can take place, even if we don't control every aspect of the narrative.