

History of Escape Games

examined through real-life-and digital precursors and the
production of Spygame

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The focus of this master's thesis is on forming an image of history of modern escape games based on real world-and digital precursors of this genre of games and on recording what escape game phenomenon is like in late 2010s, roughly a decade after these games first started appearing. The research is based on previous work on the topic mostly by Dr. Scott Nicholson, to which I add my own insight and build a broader, more in depth portrayal of the history through presenting examples of each precursor and linking the precursor's features to features of modern escape games.

The most important academic background of this thesis is Dr. Scott Nicholson's white paper *Peeking behind the locked door: A survey of escape room facilities* (2015). Other academic background of this thesis comes from research regarding the different precursors and from the field of game design, such as *Fundamentals of Game Design* (2010) by Dr. Ernest Adams. Since the history of escape game genre has to my knowledge not been researched and recorded to this extent earlier, a big part of the references used in this thesis consists of non-academic sources: escape room related websites, -blogs-posts and -videos, which I used to collect and analyze information.

I use the production of Spygame, which is a modern escape game with influences of especially interactive theater, as a case study to illustrate ways the history of escape games can be concretely seen in modern escape games. I worked as the project manager in the production of Spygame in 2017 and hence have access to large amount of unique data regarding the production of the game, including notes from game testings, internal emails, notes from game development meetings etc. I analyze this data and connect the history with this modern game through examples of how the influences of history can be seen in our game design choices and expectations of the game testers.

According to Nicholson, precursors of escape rooms include live action role-playing, point-and-click adventure games, puzzle- and treasure hunts, interactive theater and haunted houses, adventure game shows and themed entertainment industry. I divide the precursors to digital-and real-life precursors and add themed restaurants, team building activities, pervasive games and alternate reality games to this list of precursors of escape rooms. I also state that the escape room-name of these games likely originates from digital escape-the-room games, which is a subgenre of point-and-click adventure games.

Keywords: escape room, escape game, game history, game design, live action games, roleplaying, live action role-playing, interactive theater, haunted house, themed entertainment, team building, pervasive games, treasure hunt, puzzle hunt, point-and-click adventure

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1. Introduction

1.1. What are escape rooms?

Telling stories is part of our culture and heritage as humans. Games as a medium of expression offer a great platform to tell intriguing stories that immerse the players into the world of the story being told in a different way from other storytelling methods such as books or movies.

Jamie Antonisse, a game-and narrative designer who has worked for Disney among other companies, summarized the relationship between game narrative and the player well in his talk at 2014 GDC¹-conference. According to him, the player is performing the actions, which influence events in a game's narrative. They are learning to master a set of rules and a system, which is put in front of them, to achieve a goal. In a game narrative structure, this basically makes the player the hero. Many games put a lot of effort into attempting to create an association between the player and the avatar they are controlling in the game. Their aim is to make you feel as if you are this collection of pixels presented to you in the game; you *are* Super Mario, or you *are* Batman. However, the avatar is not the hero. The story of the avatar is completely directed by an outside force and it is the player who is chasing a goal that is in their head, overcoming challenges that feel real to them and taking the action. The player is the hero of the game narrative. ²

Antonisse talks about digital games, but the same game mechanics core feature of having the player be the actual hero of the game can be applied to the real-life games and is especially true in the game genre of escape rooms. Scott Nicholson, who is a professor of game design and-development at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada, has studied escape rooms as a game genre and his work lays a big part of the academic foundation of this thesis at hand. According to him, the aspect that makes escape rooms different in comparison to most other genres of gaming is exactly this

¹ GDC stands for Game Developers Conference. It is the world's largest conference for game developers and has been organized annually since 1986, <http://www.gdconf.com/>.

² GDC, 1.10.2016, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

strong connection between the player and the avatar she or he is controlling when playing the game.³

Unlike in screen-based games where there is a separation between the controlled avatar that exists inside the game world and the player, in real-life escape games the player and the avatar are one and the same. Due to this unique connection that is distinct for escape game genre, the players become more sensitive to elements in the game that are not consistent with the game world, setting, genre or narrative of the game. They seek an immersive real experience and can get frustrated if they face cognitive dissonance between who their character is supposed to be in the game and what they are doing within the game.⁴

Escape game genre can be defined as usually live action team-based games where the objective for the players is to aim on discovering hints, accomplishing tasks and solving puzzles inside a defined space to accomplish a specific goal and thus, “win” the game. One team normally consists of two to ten players. This set goal is usually escaping from the room or the set of rooms within a pre-set limited amount of time. Despite the name “escape rooms”, that goal can also be any other pre-set goal that the players must accomplish within the game time to consider the game “won”. For example, the goal of one of the escape rooms where I work in is to destroy the Evil Rain Machine, which is making it rain in the city where the game takes place.

In a regular 60-minute escape room, once the time runs out the game is over, and the players are normally asked to leave the room even if they still have some tasks and puzzles left. Some facilities allow the games going over the time limit, but normally this is a question of scheduling the games effectively; *gamemasters*⁵ need time to reset the room between the teams and they do not want to make the next group wait.

³ Nicholson 2016, 1.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Gamemaster’s job description includes greeting and briefing the players before the game, monitoring the game through cameras installed in the escape room and providing the players with additional hints regarding the game if the players need that, as well as monitoring and maintaining the technical infrastructure of the game including lights and audio. The gamemasters also debrief the players after the game and can walk them through the rest of the puzzles that they have not been able to solve within the time that the games last.

Despite the differences and variation in the final goals of the games that are part of this game genre and not all of them aiming for escaping the room, the commonly used umbrella term for the games that share this kind of similar game mechanics is “escape rooms”. Other commonly used term to describe games of this sort, which I will be referring to these games as throughout this thesis is *escape games*, as the defined game space does not necessarily have to be a room and the term “escape game” also covers different variations of these games. Hence, I will be using both “escape game” and “escape room” terms mixed in this thesis to describe this genre of games.

Escape room and escape game are established terms to describe this type of games. A token of the established nature of these words is that for example, in 2015 the Institute for The Languages of Finland added the words escape game⁶, escape room game⁷ and room escape game⁸ to the official list of defined new words. They bundled all these three words to mean the same thing and defined them as *an experience game, where a group of people are locked inside a small space from which they attempt to get out by using logical thinking and cooperation with each other within a pre-set time limit.*⁹

The game experience typically begins with meeting a gamemaster, who works at the game location, briefs the players of the rules of the game before the game, and debriefs them after the game. The gamemaster usually monitors the game from either within the room or more commonly, through camera surveillance that is installed to the room. They can also provide the players extra hints to get forward in the game in case the group hits a wall and is unable to solve something essential for the game by themselves.¹⁰

If there is a background story to the game, the players usually hear or read that before the set game time starts running. One game typically lasts for one hour. The players are encouraged to look around the space they are locked in for any clues, which are typically symbols, numbers, pictures or letters with no apparent guide to understand why they are there. The first part of the game experience is normally searching

⁶ “Pakopeli” in Finnish.

⁷ “Pakohuonepeleli” in Finnish.

⁸ “Huonepakopeli” in Finnish.

⁹ Institute for The Languages of Finland 2015, <https://www.kotus.fi/sanakirjat>.

¹⁰ Nicholson 2015, 1-2.

through the room and then starting to discover connections between those above-mentioned clues and possible locks. Some puzzles can have clear instructions, whereas some can be more difficult to solve and require solving other puzzles first to get to the final solution that opens the lock and lets the group get forward in the game. ¹¹

Internal communication of the team of players is essential for succeeding in these types of games. During the game, the players should share information about the puzzles and what they have found in the room. Playing escape rooms requires communication, teamwork and delegation of tasks as well as ability to think critically and laterally and to pay attention to details. The games are accessible to a broad range of players from different demographics such as various age groups and do not favor any gender. According to Nicholson, the most successful teams are often those made up of players with a variety of different backgrounds and skills as different kinds of people bring different ways to look at the tasks and the puzzles to the table. ¹² This has also been true in my empirical experience when playing escape rooms. The times I have played an escape room and gotten out in time, the group I have played with has been 2-3 people bigger and from wider range of different backgrounds in comparison to the times when I have not gotten out in time. The best divide of different backgrounds in my experience has seemed to be having people who are talented in mathematical subjects and people from humanities such as language- or history studies to cover wider range of potential puzzles, tasks and riddles.

Some rooms also have items/symbols that can lead the players towards a direction that does not help them to achieve the final goal of the game. Those are called *red herrings*¹³. It is up to the game designers and -producers to test their game before launching it to identify problems such as clues being misleading to majority of the players. After identifying the problems, the designers should modify the game so that the experience is enjoyable for the players and they do not generally waste time on things that do not benefit achieving the goal of the game and/or the experience of enjoying playing the game.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Nicholson 2015, 2.

¹³ The earliest use of this idiom dates back to 1697 and the practice of training animals (horses and dogs) for hunting. Nowadays, the word is used figuratively to mean something that distracts someone from their an intended target, for example numbers that are not part of any puzzle in an escape room.

I widen Nicholson's definition of what escape rooms are in this thesis to include digital escape games. Nicholson does mention a couple of digital precursors of escape games but focus of his research is solely in real-life escape games. This means the cultural phenomena around these games I discuss in the thesis does not necessarily have to be taking place in a real-life setting. This is due to that one function of this thesis is to preserve history of what aspects modern escape game phenomenon consist of. Since a rather big part of modern escape game culture consists of digital escape games, I would not be documenting and preserving a full picture of what escape games are in 2018 if I chose to only focus on the physical real-world versions of these games.

The basics of digital and often *virtual reality*¹⁴-technology based escape games are similar with their real-life counterparts except for these digital versions usually being single-player games rather than multiplayer team games. The basic game mechanics described earlier of solving puzzles, riddles and finding keys to unlock parts of the game in order to achieve a pre-set goal within the given game time are the same in both real-life and digital versions of escape games. However, digital games usually do not have a time limit to finish the game like real-life escape rooms. "*The player is the hero*"-design thinking can also be seen in the way these games are usually played from first-person point of view to enhance immersion and make the player feel as if they were in the space, solving the tasks etc. like in a real-world escape game.

Escape games that use virtual reality or VR-technology have been coming out increasingly during the past years and one can be found from for example, Cosmos VR in Helsinki¹⁵ and Space Mission in Oslo¹⁶. However, in these kind of escape games, the players must usually physically go to a place to take part in the game and use the venue's technical infrastructure (VR glasses) to play the escape game. This is similar to the way game arcades which were popular internationally especially in the 1970s-1980s worked; players come to the venue to purchase time to play a digital game that is tied to the infrastructure of that venue.

¹⁴ Computer-generated, interactive experience, which takes place within a simulated virtual environment, and incorporates visual, auditory and sometimes other sensory feedback.

¹⁵ Cosmos VR game Helsinki, <https://escaperoom.fi/en/>.

¹⁶ Magerøy 2016, <https://www.gamer.no/artikler>.

1.2. Research questions

The focus of this thesis is to research escape games as a cultural phenomenon and the history of these games; how this game genre has evolved and from what kind of precursors and influences. I aim on forming an image of what escape games are like in late 2010s and how the influences from the genre's history can be seen in these modern escape games. I will also offer suggestions on what the game genre can to evolve to in immediate future based on these findings of the history of the genre and the current state of these games and on potential future research topics regarding these games.

I will tie this history research to a case study of producing *Spygame*, which was an interactive real-world game that I was project managing in 2017. We in the production team took the strongest influences to producing *Spygame* from escape games and interactive theater, which is recognized in this thesis as one of the precursors of escape rooms. However, as escape games evolved from a number of different precursors influencing them, the production of *Spygame* was also influenced by these precursors and the history of escape games as a whole. When developing *Spygame*, we made both conscious decisions as well as design choices we did not actively think about as part of the influences of the history of these games. I use *Spygame* in chapter three to illustrate how the influences of the history can be seen in modern escape games whether it is in conscious design choices or in things we take for granted and view as our own unique ideas while there is actually historic reasoning that can explain why we made the decisions we did when designing the game.

The research questions of this thesis are *What cultural phenomena has affected the evolution of escape game genre and how can these influences be seen in modern escape games?* and *How does the production of Spygame relate to the history of the escape game genre?*

The findings from this research can be used in for example, producing new escape games or similar immersive and/or pervasive games. The research is also useful for documenting these types of relatively young game genre's history and status and help future game designers and -researchers understand these types of games better.

1.3. Researcher position

For understanding the topic of this thesis and its practical approach that utilizes past research and methods from fields of digital culture, game culture studies, game design studies and data gathered from cultural management, it is important to explain my researcher position thoroughly. This thesis at hand has more practical approach than master's thesis for digital culture usually do, and it leans a lot on my observations and experience in working in game-industry in various roles, but mostly as a project manager and a gamemaster in escape rooms.

I have been working in cultural field as a producer or a project manager for over five years in different kinds of projects (theatre, festivals, games etc.). Other projects I have worked in on top of Spygame which is playing a big part on this thesis include for example, working as a drama facilitator in Leikkiteatteri¹⁷-acting courses multiple years and working as the head of content-and storyline production team for Zombie Run Pori 2015¹⁸ pervasive game event.

For this thesis, I have narrowed down the researched project to just one real life game project and the process of designing that game from the beginning of May 2017 until the game was released in October 2017. This period was what we in production referred to as the *start-up-phase* of the project. The set goal for the start-up-phase was to *produce a low-tech, but functional version of the game*. I will not be going into detail about how things went after the game was released to public, as for deeper analysis on that, I would need to collect more material such as statistics of visitors from a longer period and it is not part of the focus of this thesis – the relation between design choices in an example of a modern escape game such as Spygame and the history of escape games is.

¹⁷ Leikkiteatteri translates to «Play Theater» from Finnish. These courses revolve around changing themes and involve acting exercises, building props and costumes, as well as games such as treasure- and puzzle hunting games.

¹⁸ Zombie Run Pori was a pervasive one-day game event that combined elements from Zombie walks where people dress up as zombies and survival-games. The participants were able to sign in either as zombies or as survivors. The survivors would compete in finishing the assigned route in different categories like finishing the fastest, finishing with the most lifelines etc. while the zombie participants were competing in trying to get as many lifelines as they could from the survivors etc. All participants were also competing in best costumes for their parts.

I am from Finland, but I have been living in Bergen, Norway for roughly two years at the time when I am writing this thesis. Aside from finishing my student exchange at the University of Bergen, I have been working at a local room escape games company called *Escape Bryggen* since May 2017. I started at the company as a consultant for business development, but after working there for a month, the owners of the company transferred me to work as a project manager in their new company, *Immerse*. The goal of forming this new company was to start producing immersive real-world games that shift focus from conventional escape rooms main focus of solving puzzles, riddles and finding keys to locks because you must, but do not always really know why, to the narrative and storyline of the game and aim on immersing the players to it more.

My job as a project manager for Immerse included taking part and managing the production of their new game, which at the time of the launch was referred to as "*The Spy you'll become*". The working name was later changed to simply "*Spygame*", which is the name I will be referring to the game with in this thesis. Other tasks that my job as the project manager included were organizing and attending in game development meetings, following up on the work of the team-members and maintaining communication so that everyone was on board on the project's stages, scheduling, staging the physical rooms and drawing concept art of the rooms. This job was based on a project-contract that ended soon after a project launched in December 2017.

On top of managing the production of *Spygame*, I have been working as a gamemaster at *Escape Bryggen's* existing four rooms for over a year. The gamemasters are the customer service employees of the company. I have also worked as a social media marketing manager for the said company while writing this thesis and will start working as a location manager for another escape room-company in fall 2018. It is safe to say, that I have worked and seen the escape game industry from within through several different roles that are included in this form of entertainment.

On top of being a researcher and an active worker in escape games industry, my position is also influenced by being *a gamer*. I have played several different escape games in Finland, Norway and the UK and developed a passion for these types of games.

I believe this insider of the industry-stance is a strength when doing this type of research. I will be reflecting my empirical experiences from working in the industry and playing games that belong to this genre to the findings and taking advantage of that knowledge rather than consciously setting it aside.

Rather than suppressing it and aiming for a completely objective researcher position, I will lean on the practical knowledge I have gained through my work and through being a player myself. I recognize the potential threat of not being completely objective researcher might have, such as not reviewing the potential flaws of the industry critically enough. I will actively work on taking this to account and providing a critical point of view in my writing despite looking at the industry from within and explaining my own position in relation to the topics in this thesis thoroughly.

1.4. Research methods, -material and previous theory

There is not a lot of academic research conducted about escape rooms as a cultural phenomenon, much less of the processes of designing these types of games as case examples. The existing case studies have mostly focused on educational use of escape games rather than commercial games. This is likely because many of the escape games depend on people not knowing what is in their games beforehand and hence being reluctant to offer any “behind the scenes” peeks on how they make these types of games. This makes the data I have collected while working in Spygame unique and exceptionally interesting. I am using this data as the primary source in chapter three when I link elements of Spygame as an example of modern escape games and its design to the history of escape rooms in general. In my work contract as the project manager of Spygame, I reserved the right to use all the data collected during game development for research purposes.

This material consists of:

- 12 anonymous replies from the testers of the last version of the game before its release to a short online-questionnaire of their thoughts/feelings about the game after they tested it.
- 12 files about the script of the game and the different versions of that between the first version and the last version which got launched.
- 15 meeting notes considering the game development.
- A collection of plans and schedules regarding the game development.

- Internal communication emails and messages within the development team between April 2017-October 2017.
- Notes from 14 game test groups (1-10 people per group).
- Notes from observation research of decision-making when playing Wolf Among Us by Telltale Games in a group of 8, 30.7.2017.

The ethics of collecting research material largely through observing people was taken to account throughout the process of developing Spygame. The players who took part in game testings were informed either verbally or in writing, that the notes taken from the testing would be used for academic research purposes anonymously and for developing the game further, and they were given an option to ask for the material collected about them to not be part of the research. However, none of the testers requested to not be part of the research.

Everybody in the development team was also made aware of my work contract allowing me to document and use the data collected of the production of Spygame for research purposes and nobody requested to leave their contribution to the game production out of the materials. The team was aware of that the material I was collecting for research purposes would be used anonymously for this thesis on top of the parts that were used for developing the game itself such as pointing out flaws in the design when testing the game.

It is important to note that the material gathered from game testings was done by group interview method on top of observing how the players interact with each other and the game. Since some of their opinions were gathered in a group interview setting with part of the development team of the game being in the room, it is fair to assume some harsher opinions etc. might not have been voiced because of some testers potentially feeling social pressure to “be nice”. This is the main reason why we felt the need to create an anonymous questionnaire to be sent to the testers on top of the interviews- and observation research. However, very few (12) testers replied to that questionnaire and the replies were aligned with what people had told us during the group interviews, which was a good indicator of the validity of the interview notes.

I am aiming on constructing an image of how escape rooms have evolved as a game genre and a cultural phenomenon based on the limited existing previous academic research combined with analyzing other sources such as articles, blog posts, videos

etc. on relevant parts of the evolution of the phenomena. A big part of these sources consists of the non-academic sources such as blog posts, videos and escape room-related websites and -blogs. I have individually evaluated the reliability of each source based on factors such as the backgrounds of the authors to determine the sources reliable to use in this thesis. As the history of escape games is still widely lacking academic research at the time when I write this thesis, I had to resort on constructing that history based on these fragments of information from secondary sources. I will be analyzing this qualitative research material and relating that on the limited existing academic research of history of escape rooms from chapter two.

One of the most prominent figures in researching escape rooms and the only “big name” in that field for that matter is Scott Nicholson, who is a professor of game design and development at Wilfrid Laurier University in Ontario, Canada. He has studied escape rooms as a game genre and his work lays a big part of the academic foundation for my thesis. Examples of his work include the papers *Ask Why: Creating a Better Player Experience through Environmental Storytelling and Consistency in Escape Room Design* and *Peeking behind the locked door: A survey of escape room facilities*.

By building on Dr. Nicholson’s work, following his leads and researching fragments of relevant information such as articles, blog posts and videos around the topic, I aim on constructing a more complete image of the history of escape rooms through the cultural precursors that have affected evolving of this game genre. To my knowledge, this is the first time such longer academic study on the history of escape rooms has been conducted.

Despite escape games specifically as a game genre lacking academic research at the time of writing this thesis, there is a large amount of academic research regarding game cultures in general and especially digital game cultures. I relate my research and observations in this thesis with some of those academic studies. Good examples of this would be Jesse Schell’s *The art of game design; A book of lenses* and *Fundamentals of Game Design* by Dr. Ernest Adams.

2. History of escape rooms

Escape rooms as a cultural phenomenon and a game genre are somewhat young with the earliest well-documented activity calling itself an “escape game” dating back to Kyoto, Japan in July 2007. The game was called *Real Escape Game*, teams of 5-6 players could play it and a company called SCRAP, which was founded by Takao Kato, published it. The company later became known running other escape rooms and a large-scale escape game called *Real Escape Game Event*, in which hundreds or thousands of players were participating in a game in a massive space.¹⁹



Figure 1. Precursors of escape rooms according to Dr. Nicholson (2015). Image used with permission of the author.

The history of escape rooms has previously been somewhat scattered around without larger academic studies focusing on the topic. This is likely due to the game genre itself being so new and still growing and developing further. The aim of this part of the thesis is to continue and build on the leads set by Dr. Scott Nicholson mainly in his 2015 paper *Peeking behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities* in which he briefly describes the history of escape rooms under the header “A brief and incomplete History of Escape Rooms”. His observations about the precursors of escape rooms in the paper are based on a survey he conducted in 2015 to escape room business owners and questions about the inspirations for the games they have created. All together 175 escape room facility owners from all over the world replied to his survey, 52% of the participants being located in Europe, 25% in North America,

¹⁹ Nicholson 2015, 3.

10% in Asia and the remaining 13% in multiple- or other places such as Australia or South America.²⁰

Escape rooms as a game genre started to become increasingly popular in late 2000s-2010s, starting in Asia and spreading from there to Europe where Hungary became an especially important hub for escape rooms. From there, the games reached Australia, Canada and the US rapidly.²¹ The escape-businesses have increasingly started to look to each other for reference and guidance and currently there are several active groups online on Facebook for example for Escape room owners (1718 members 2.6.2018)²² as well as for the active players who refer to themselves as Escape room enthusiasts (13 859 members in 2.6.2018)²³.

In the 2015 survey Dr. Nicholson conducted, 65% of the respondents stated that the inspiration for their escape rooms came from learning about or playing other escape rooms. The remaining 35% were not aware of other escape rooms when they started and got inspiration from a variety of sources and these different sources were where he extracted his theory on the precursors of modern escape rooms. These precursors as illustrated in figure 1, were *live action role-playing, point-and-click adventure games, puzzle-and treasure hunts, interactive theater and haunted houses, adventure game shows and themed entertainment industry*.²⁴

In this part of the thesis, I follow the short descriptions of escape rooms precursors Nicholson wrote about in his paper, which was the only reliable source on the history of these games by an academic author I could find. I will build on Nicholson's theory, add my own input on the matter, and widen the description of the history of this game genre to involve other possible precursors; *themed restaurants, team building activities, pervasive games and alternate reality games*.

²⁰ Nicholson 2015, 1–12.

²¹ Nicholson 2015, 3.

²² Facebook group - Escape Room Owners 2.6.2018.

²³ Facebook group - Escape Room Enthusiasts 2.6.2018.

²⁴ Nicholson 2015, 3.



Figure 2. Escape game precursors with my additions to Dr. Nicholson's theory. The digital precursors are marked with blue while the real-life precursors are marked with red. Alternate reality games combine elements of both even though I placed them under real-life precursors rather than the digital in this thesis and are hence marked with blue and red.

Unlike Nicholson whose work I base a large part of this chapter on, I have chosen to divide the precursors into *real-life- and digital precursors of escape rooms* in this thesis. As there are so many different types of precursors to these games, I saw categorizing them as necessary for the sake of keeping the thesis clear and accessible when finding information on these different precursors. The division between the real life and the digital seemed appropriate as there are clear links between the history of escape rooms and both real life games and culture such as live action role-playing as well as the digital world like point-and-click online games and movies as inspiration for escape rooms.

According to Thomas Apperley's article *Genre and game studies: Toward a critical approach to video game genres*, the players of the games, who are the audience of the game developers are not necessarily satisfied with endlessly repeating the same

conventions in games. They expect the stability of the genre getting tempered with innovation, which can be either stylistic or technical. He states that it is crucially important for critical understanding of genre across all mediums to recognize that each individual game can belong to multiple genres at once.²⁵ In the case of escape games, the games can have a varying combination of different elements from game genres from the history of these games. When these elements that may be viewed as typical to certain older game genres are combined in a new way, they can form a new cultural product such as escape games are.

Game genres generally form an important part of game cultures. According to Jaakko Kemppainen, genres are widely used as a tool in discussing and categorizing cultural products for example, in marketing, press and every day life of the consumers of these cultural products such as gamers. This creates a need for studying and understanding genres.²⁶ Escape games being a relatively young game genre which is evolving and growing but has also achieved status as its own established game genre, creates demand for researching this topic and where it came from.

While escape games in 2018 continue to be mainly real-life games, the digital cultural roots to this game genre continue to have an impact on these games and there seems to be an increased interest to utilize the newest digital interfaces such as virtual reality-technology in escape room games. On top of using this categorizing as a tool to clarify the history of escape games, it serves as a reminder of that *escape games evolved as a result of several different kinds of cultural products influencing them*. They are not directly just the evolved end product of live-action role-playing or puzzle-solving TV game shows, but rather a nuanced entity of a large number of cultural factors melted together to create something new.

The lack of academic research on these topics was also confirmed by my several attempts on asking my peers in escape rooms-related Facebook groups (Escape Room Enthusiasts and Escape Room Gamemasters) if anyone knew of such previous research and the replies were consistently that this kind of research does not exist yet. I also reached out to Dr. Nicholson himself to ask about it through an email (*"I'm especially interested in knowing if you would have some leads on history of escape rooms as you*

²⁵ Apperley, 9-19.

²⁶ Kemppainen 2012, 56-60.

discuss it in your research papers a bit as that forms a big part of the beginning of the said thesis of mine.”). He kindly referred to his own research article in the reply, of which findings I am involving in the thesis in the history research. ²⁷

According to Daniel Muriel and Garry Crawford’s book *Video Games as Culture*, video game culture can be defined as the institutionalization of practices in video games, meanings and experiences in contemporary society, which places video gaming and video games as an important part of our social imaginary. Video games are a culture that extends beyond the screen or the machine and the act of gaming is not isolated into the act of playing a game. Gaming is also a source of dreams, memories, identities, storytelling and much more. ²⁸

Even though Muriel and Crawford are talking about video games in their book, the same principles can be true also in other games, such as real-life escape games. There is an existing culture that has already formed around escape games and parts of that culture are being explored in this thesis. In chapter 3.4, I demonstrate how this culture which is deeply rooted in the history of escape games and their precursors, can be seen in the expectations of gamers who play modern escape games.

The goal of this chapter is to make that history more complete and binding the findings together with Spygame as an example of a modern escape game, which I will be discussing more in detail in chapter three. I have divided the part into two main sections, giving voice to both real-life precursors and digital precursors of escape rooms with a goal to also help understand where this game genre is heading now, and what kind of potential future adaptations these games have.

2.1. Real-life precursors of escape rooms

Escape rooms as a game genre have evolved from several different cultural phenomena, several of which can be placed in real life settings rather than digital games and other digital popular culture. The heart of the escape game industry remains in the real-life games and many escape room facilities want to keep their

²⁷ Email correspondence between the researcher and Dr. Scott Nicholson 28.-30.3.2018. The correspondence is in the possession of the researcher.

²⁸ Muriel & Crawford 2018, 19.

business strongly rooted in the real-world games rather than leaning towards the digital despite the use of digital gadgets etc. in their games.

Several escape room companies market their services through “do something in real life”, “no phones allowed”-kind of rhetoric, underlining how strongly several escape rooms view themselves as a primarily real-world activity in 2018. This real-world aspect is also what makes escape games different from a lot of other types of gaming; the players *are* the avatar in the game. Even in most of the digital escape games, the games are usually played from a first-person perspective, aiming to make the players feel more immersed in the game.

In this section of the chapter, I will be focusing on the real-life precursors of escape rooms. Each precursor is examined through the lens of its similarities and links to escape room games in general and re-visited in chapter three through how their heritage can be seen in the production of the case example Spygame.

2.1.1. Live action role-playing

According to Nicholson, one of the game genres directly linked to the history of escape rooms is role-playing games and more specifically, *live action role-playing games or larp-games for short*.²⁹ There are different styles of larp-games that vary in how “live” the “action” is according to Brian Morton’s article *Larps and their cousins through the ages*: a genuine sword fight is still more “live” in comparison to a scripted fight, but a scripted fight is still more “live” than for example, rolling a dice. Larps also vary in how much and how the players immerse themselves into the characters played. For example, in an educational rescue-larp, the players can take roles of a victim or a lifeguard without real characterization, but in a themed fantasy-larp, players can immerse themselves into very detailed characters inside the game.³⁰

The modern live action role-playing games brought the popularity of tabletop role-playing games (TRPGs) such as *Dungeons and Dragons* (1974) into more immersive settings as players of the tabletop games wanted to experience the games in a more involving way. Some of these precursors of escape rooms in the 1980s involved having

²⁹ Nicholson 2015, 4.

³⁰ Morton 2007, 245–246.

the players search for clues and solve puzzles inside locked spaces, much like in the escape rooms we see now.³¹

This kind of games were organized by active groups of people, who formed organizations such as *International Fantasy Gaming Society (IFGS)* in the 1980s to create these games and play with each other.³² The researched history of modern live action role-playing in the form I relate it to escape rooms in this thesis can be placed to have originated in the 1970s-1980s.³³

Research on the topic does not seem to have a consensus on the exact time and place of the origins of modern larp-games as for example, similar games such as spectacle larps have already been played as early as in ancient Rome. According to some of the research around this topic such as R.W. Mitchell's *Theory of play*, wide variety of mammals engage in such complex play behaviors, which involve enough rules to count as games.³⁴

Brian Morton states that it would be surprising if early hominids did not engage in such role-playing such as play hunting, play mating or play fighting. Having said that, no concrete evidence of this prehistoric world has survived recorded and earliest recorded histories do not focus much on the play behaviors of children. Hence, the history of live action role-playing games in general and close relatives of games like these can actually be seen as a far wider and older phenomenon than originating in just the tabletop role-playing games³⁵ like Nicholson suggests.³⁶

Morton lists other examples of early larps such as theme party larps, which Roman Caesars used to host for the upper class and usually revolved around themes like re-creating series of mythological or historical events. Romans, Cherokee-tribe in the US and early Egyptians also participated in what Morton refers to as ritual larps; often part of a religious ceremony was that a shaman would adopt a role of a storytelling spirit or a priest could adopt the role of Anubis during funeral. He does mention that

³¹ Nicholson 2015, 4.

³² Ibid.

³³ Hansen 2016, 12.

³⁴ Mitchell 1990, 197–227.

³⁵ Morton 2007, 246.

³⁶ Nicholson 2015, 4.

often religious rituals are not playful enough to come across as games.³⁷ However, they do have cultural similarities with larp-like activities such as adopting the character through playful role-playing and the narrative that specific character is supposed to be telling and living while in that role.

It is important to note that the people attending for example, a religious ceremony do not normally view it as a game, but truly believe in for example the role taking over their body, making it questionable to compare this kind of activities to live action role-playing. I do not intend to disrespect anybody's religious beliefs and the point I want to come across from including these examples as precursors of live action role-playing is that cultural activities with similar elements to some modern escape games date back even thousands of years. This is not a new thing that just appeared in 1990s-2000s. The elements these games have taken influences from have been there for much longer.

In 2000s, more escape room-like features started to emerge from larp-culture. In 2003, a role-playing company called *True Adventures* took the concept of live action role-playing and formatted it into a game called *True Dungeon*, which was presented in a game event called Gen Con in 2003. In *True Dungeon*, the players would all play a character like in regular larps and fight monsters through a shuffleboard-system without any live-action combat like you would see in standard larp-games, all while working through rooms solving puzzles under a limited time.³⁸

2.1.2. Interactive theater and haunted houses

Nicholson names interactive theater and haunted houses as a precursor of escape rooms. In both of these forms of entertainment, the participants are encouraged to engage with the interactive environment they are placed in which lets them to take an active role in the experience. When Nicholson studied escape rooms through an online survey targeted for escape room business-owners around the world, several of the creators of escape rooms mentioned interactive theater experiences such as *Then She*

³⁷ Morton 2007, 249–250.

³⁸ Sjöberg 2008, <https://www.wired.com/>.

Fell (2012) and *Sleep No More* (2011) which are located in New York City, as an inspiration for their escape rooms.³⁹

Interactive theater as a genre of theater has been around for centuries. It was used in for example, Soviet Russia to spread political ideology to people in 1920s.⁴⁰ However, it became more popular in late 1900s-2000s as artists started to embrace the immersive storytelling dimension interactivity in a play. Some plays such as *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, which is based on an unfinished novel by the same name by Charles Dickens and premiered in 1985, has seven possible endings depending on the interaction between the audience and the actors.⁴¹

Nicholson also mentions haunted houses as a specific entertainment experience, which is closely related to interactive theater; a small group of participants move from space to space while engaging with actors and immersing to the story. Horror-themed escape rooms are also among the most popular and most used escape rooms and several of these rooms combine elements of haunted houses with puzzle elements. In some escape rooms, players can be for example, chained to the wall at start of the game, trapped in a dark room or there can be a zombie actor taunting them inside the room. The lines between haunted houses and escape rooms continue to blur with specifically interactive haunted houses.⁴² A good example of this is *Trapped* which is located at Knott's Berry Farm in Los Angeles, California. Each year around Halloween, the theme park transforms into a massive interactive haunted house-experience, where players take on tasks and solve simple puzzles in order to find their way out.⁴³

In theater setting, themes and characters related to horror such as demons and characters getting murdered have been used in plays for centuries. In early 1800s a French woman who later moved to the UK called Marie Tussaud who later became known from still up and running Madame Tussauds wax museums, started making wax sculptures of decapitated people from the French revolution.⁴⁴ She later opened a permanent gallery for these scary wax sculptures called *Chamber of Horrors* in 1835 in

³⁹ Nicholson 2015, 5.

⁴⁰ Prokhorova & Shamina 2014, 59–62.

⁴¹ StageAgent 2018, <https://stageagent.com>.

⁴² Nicholson 2015, 5.

⁴³ Knott's Berry Farm's website, scary farm-section 2018, <https://www.knotts.com/>.

⁴⁴ Eschner 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/>.

London. This exhibition is still open for public in 2018.⁴⁵ The modern haunted houses were first introduced in early 1900s Orton & Spooner's haunted house from 1915 being one of the first properly documented ones.⁴⁶ In a larger commercial scale, it was not until 1969 when Walt Disney popularized haunted houses through opening Haunted Mansion in Disneyland.⁴⁷

Horror-theme is very popular in modern escape games and the basic idea of entering a themed setting with possibility of interacting with actors, eventually finding your way out of the place etc. is similar to escape game. What differentiates this precursor from modern escape rooms is that it is not a given that a haunted house would have a puzzle-based game inside the setting, though some haunted houses might have incorporated game elements to their design.

Josephine Machon states in her book *Immersive Theatres - Intimacy and Immediacy in Contemporary Performance*, that when actual immersion within a performance experience occurs, it blurs the traditional roles, boundaries and definitions between the audience and the performance. She refers to the "rules of engagement", which are even if tacit, clear guidelines (either unspoken, verbal or written contracts understood by the participants), which make the immersive world a safe space for the participants to embrace the possibilities of the event itself. The unique qualities of each group of participants affects how the performer-audience relationship plays out.⁴⁸

The similar rules of engagement Machon describes often apply for game design as a set of rules are often a fundamentally important part of a game. Meaningful play as described by Katie Salen and Eric Zimmerman in their book *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals* in a game environment emerges from the relationship between the system outcome and the player's actions. It is the process of the players acting within a designed system and that said system responding to the actions. The meaning of that action inside the game resides in the relationship between the outcome and the action. Not all outcomes are immediate; some of them be *discernable*, which means

⁴⁵ Fernandes 2009, <http://mentalfloss.com>.

⁴⁶ Warner 2014, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com>.

⁴⁷ Bennett 2016, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com>.

⁴⁸ Machon 2013, 40–41.

that the player can see the outcome of an action immediately whereas some actions are *integrated* into the larger context of the game and thus the outcome of an action does not necessarily give an immediate visible response when playing.⁴⁹

A good example of blurring the lines between interactive theater, live action role-playing games and escape rooms are murder mystery dinner games. It is considered its own genre of larp-games (“Interactive Murder Mysteries”) and has grown popular during the past few decades. In these games, one participant of the party is either a murderer or a thief and other participants who do not know which person playing has adapted that role, attempt to determine who committed the murder or theft. In some forms of these types of games, there is a mix of professional actors as “ringers”⁵⁰, sprinkled between the ordinary players.⁵¹ In these games, the players are attempting to gather clues on who the delinquent is and ultimately solve a type of puzzle of who that person is usually within a pre-set amount of time in order to end the game and escape the situation, like in escape rooms.

2.1.3. Themed entertainment

According to Nicholson, escape rooms are at the intersection of themed entertainment and games. This creates challenges to those who run or are planning to run escape room games as a business. Escape rooms are by no means the first commercial ventures built to revolve around live-action puzzles.⁵²

Examples of precursor enterprises for escape room-like entertainment include *Entros*, which started in 1992 in Seattle, US. Their vision was to turn spectators into participants and audience into players. Entros was essentially a restaurant, in which the diners would participate in mystery games and solving puzzles and riddles while others continued to dine.⁵³

Another good example is *5 Wits*, which is a US franchise based around providing immersive experiences where people work in teams to solve physical puzzles in an

⁴⁹ Salen & Zimmerman 2004, 37.

⁵⁰ A contestant in a game who has been entered with the intention to cheat. «Undercover» person, who poses as a regular player, but in reality, has more knowledge of the game/is part of the story in murder mysteries’ case.

⁵¹ Morton 2007, 247–248.

⁵² Nicholson 2015, 6.

⁵³ Andy Roo Forrest’s website, Entros-section 2018, <http://www.rooforrest.com/>.

immersive environment with a set amount of time to escape to the next room. 5 Wits debuted already in 2003.⁵⁴ However, 5 Wits clearly wants to differentiate their services from regular escape rooms as they clearly state on their website that “5 Wits adventures are similar to an escape room, and involve using teamwork to solve puzzles and challenges, but 5 Wits adventures also showcase higher quality environments, special effects, and more compelling storytelling”.⁵⁵

Other themed entertainment includes for example, theme parks. Don Carson states in his article *Environmental Storytelling: Creating Immersive 3D Worlds Using Lessons Learned from the Theme Park industry*, published in 2000 several years before escape room-phenomenon that the physical space does a lot of the work of conveying the story, which designers are aiming on telling in theme parks. Details such as textures, color and lighting play a vital role in evoking emotions in the audience. When creating this type of themed world through the physical space, it is important to keep the “bigger picture” narrative of the place in mind.⁵⁶

2.1.4. Themed restaurants

A big part of themed entertainment are specifically themed restaurants such as Entros, which was described above. Unlike Nicholson, I want to highlight the importance of them and suggest that they have also played a significant role in popularizing the idea of a social activity in a clearly themed environment, like escape rooms are. Alan Beardsworth and Alan Bryman state in their article *Late Modernity and the Dynamics of Quasification: The Case of the Themed Restaurant* that the concept and narrative of these restaurants is often drawn from widely known cultural resources.⁵⁷

The narrative is then made tangible and visible in the physical structures of the restaurant’s interior and exterior and eating is not necessarily the central defining feature of a restaurant like this; the consumption of the ambience of the place and the theme itself is key in why people enjoy eating in such places. Dining conventions in this kind of restaurants are also essentially informal, thus permitting variations in the way customers dress and are interacting with the space. There is an emphasis of

⁵⁴ Nicholson 2015, 6.

⁵⁵ 5 Wits website, about-section 2018, <http://5-wits.com/>.

⁵⁶ Carson 2000.

⁵⁷ Beardsworth & Bryman 1999, 235–237.

accessibility in two senses of the word; firstly, in terms of cultural accessibility of the thematic motif as it has to be something easily comprehensible to big sections of the prospective target audiences. Secondly, literal geographical accessibility as this type of restaurants is usually located within close proximity of large population centers.⁵⁸

This type of themed entertainment is not a new phenomenon as prototypes of themed restaurants have existed for several decades. For example, themed restaurants in Disneyland opened first already in 1955. The origins of chains of themed restaurants at least in the United States can be traced back as far as the 1930s to Howard Johnson's chain of roadside restaurants were built in New England in "colonial" style in attempt to echo and exploit traditional American family- and domestic values. However, themed restaurants grew in popularity in 1980s-1990s with chains such as Hard Rock Cafe.⁵⁹

Time-wise this is in line with the rising popularity of other escape room precursors such as live action role-playing and TV game shows depicting teams playing in themed environments. This makes it plausible that the normalization of themed restaurants and hence normalization of themed entertainment as a nice group-activity also played part in eventually rising popularity of escape games we see now.

When escape rooms first started gaining popularity around Asia in early 2010s especially in Japan and China, early escape rooms such as *Beijing Takagism Club* that was founded in China 2012, was inspired by online escape games called "Takagism", in which the players find out clues to escape from digital escape rooms. This type of games were first popularized in Japan where they were often played in bars and restaurants.⁶⁰

I hypothesize that themed restaurant business is likely to have affected especially the business-side of cultural phenomenon such as escape rooms becoming popular. Several of the precursors covered in this thesis are based on being able to participate for free or paying a fee just to cover the costs of equipment needed to play with no intention of the game's creators making a financial profit. Themed restaurants showed

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Beardsworth & Bryman 1999, 236–239.

⁶⁰ Scherker 2013, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com>.

a concrete example of a functioning business model, in which groups of people would engage in real life in a social activity in a themed environment. It served as an example of this kind of activity being a viable business.

2.1.5. Team building activities

It is good to keep in mind that on top of groups such as friends, date nights, tourists etc., escape games have been used for educational purposes and for team building since these games started to appear. According to Nicholson's survey for escape room facilities in 2015, 19% of the customers playing escape games were corporate groups and 19% are groups of young adults (under 21). They are also played roughly equally by all genders unlike some forms of gaming. About 30% of game facilities in Nicholson's study had learning outcomes designed in their games.⁶¹

Even though team building can mean several different kinds of activities, from the point of view of culture around escape games evolving and there being a demand for this type of activity, team building in general can be seen as a precursor that helped create demand for escape rooms. The idea dates back to late 1920s to early 1930s and the classic Hawthorne Studies, where one of the original researchers was Elton Mayo (1933). In these studies, the idea was to examine in-depth what happened to a group of workers under different conditions. The studies showed that the most significant factor was to build a sense of group identity, a feeling of cohesion and social support through increased worker interaction.⁶²

History of team building can be seen as linked to "T-groups" or sensitivity training in 1940s to 1960s US. Groups of strangers were put together with objective to understand team dynamics and individuals to improve performance of the team.⁶³ Team building became more mainstream in 1970s and 1980s when the focus of American organizational practices shifted to team performance from individual performance. Around this era, team building started to emphasize frontline workers rather than the managers, who had been highlighted previously. Some of the most important functions of team building such as collecting and analyzing data to identify

⁶¹ Nicholson 2015, 8–26.

⁶² Dyer 1984, 290–310.

⁶³ Highhouse 2002, 277–288.

problems and design and implement solutions to them started to emerge.⁶⁴ From 1990s on, team building methods started to embrace the elements of fun through gameplay and competitions.⁶⁵

I argue, that these competitions and gameplay elements, shift for companies looking for increasingly “fun” and “different” activities to attend to for team building, played a role in creating a natural demand for an activity like escape games in early 2000s. As most escape game companies have cameras inside the rooms to monitor the player during their game, the infrastructure is already in place to for example, evaluate group dynamics and people’s roles in an activity of solving puzzles, riddles and other tasks in an escape game. Since the exact same game can be played by different groups, escape rooms are also a good structured and predictable activity to test the participants; how fast did the team do? What kind of puzzles and tasks were easy and what were difficult? Who took initiative and lead the team, who was more of a bystander? These are all the kind of things that can be evaluated to an extent from observing player’s behavior in escape game, which naturally takes a lot of team work to complete, hence making it ideal for team building.

2.1.6. Pervasive games

Another addition I make to Nicholson’s theory about escape room precursors is pervasive games. The family of what can be considered pervasive games is diverse and includes games ranging from politically charged mixed reality events to single-player mobile games.⁶⁶ Markus Montola defines pervasive games in his, Jaakko Stenros’s and Annika Waern’s book *Pervasive Games Theory and Design* as “a game that has one or more salient features that expand the contractual magic circle of play spatially temporally, or socially”.⁶⁷

In pervasive games, the magic circle⁶⁸ is expanded as the game takes place in certain places or at certain times and the participants of the game are no longer certain.

⁶⁴ Wesner 1995, 106–162.

⁶⁵ Smartsheet: The biggest and best resource for team building questions 2018.

⁶⁶ Montola et al 2009, 7.

⁶⁷ Montola et al 2009, 12.

⁶⁸ Classic game studies theory by Johan Huizinga (1938). According to his theory, play is a ritual activity which takes place under its own rules that are separated from normal reality. Hence, playing is something that happens inside its own magic circle where the own rules of the game/playing apply. (Montola et al 2009, 7.)

Hence, pervasive games bend, blur and pervade the traditional boundaries of game. Pervasive gamers inhabit a game world that is present in the ordinary world and thus, take the magic circle with them anywhere they go. This expansion of game space can be done both in real life or digitally.⁶⁹

One of the first researchers to study pervasive games was Jane McGonigal from University of California at Berkley. According to McGonigal, pervasive play consists of “mixed reality” games that utilize ubiquitous, embedded and mobile digital technologies in order to generate virtual playgrounds in ordinary real-life spaces.⁷⁰

Although prominent feature of pervasive games is not having the game in confined space unlike in escape rooms, where the players are typically locked inside a room for an hour with the objective to get out, early pervasive games share the same characteristics with escape rooms when it comes to solving puzzles and riddles. Pervasive games also have the feature of playing with outsiders⁷¹, which is sometimes adapted to escape rooms and several escape room facilities provide an option to book a room for a cheaper price if you allow strangers to join the same game in your team.

Montola et al. recognize eight established pervasive game genres. *Treasure hunts*, which Nicholson also recognizes as a precursor of escape games, are among the oldest of these genres. Other genres include *assassination games*, which emerged already in the mid-1960s when university students in the United States begun playing games inspired by the movie *La decima vittima* (1965). Some versions of this type of games are close to pervasive live action role-playing games, while others are faster paced variants closer to street sports.⁷²

A good example of an assassination game is *Killer* (1953) in which the player adapts the role of an undercover assassin. They stalk their assigned target (another player) in secret and always keep a hidden weapon at hand. The “murder” can take place by for example, “poisoning” the target’s coffee in a way which the rules of the game state. The assassin is also somebody else’s assigned target. When playing *Killer*, you know there is somebody out there intending to “kill” you as well, but there is no way of

⁶⁹ Montola et al 2009, 12–14.

⁷⁰ McGonigal 2003, 1–3.

⁷¹ Montola et al 2009, 16.

⁷² Montola et al 2009, 32–34.

knowing who that person is or how or when they are going to strike. When you score a kill, the referees assign you a new target, who is typically the person who was your previous victim's target. The last person standing is the winner of Killer, or in some instances, the player with the most kills at the end of the game.⁷³

Other established genres of pervasive games Montola et al. list include *Pervasive LARPs, Alternate Reality Games, Smart Street Sports, Playful Public Performances, Urban Adventure Games and Reality Games*.⁷⁴ As pervasive games continue blurring the lines between the reality and the digital, one good example of recent very successful location-based pervasive games is *Pokémon Go*.⁷⁵

2.1.7. Treasure- and puzzle hunts

According to Nicholson, one of the game genres that acted as a source of inspiration for escape room creators was puzzle hunts. In this type of game, players solve series of puzzles in teams. The puzzles could be either paper-based real-life puzzles, or digitized versions of these real-life puzzles. Typical goal of this kind of game would be to solve a meta-puzzle which the other puzzles feed into.⁷⁶

This genre has been around for decades, one of the best-known games of this type being *MIT Mystery Hunt*, which dates back to the beginning of 1980s. The game takes place once a year at MIT and was originally created by a student called Brad Schaefer, who studied there in 1979. The idea of this game is to have a whole university-wide complex puzzle game with the end goal of finding a hidden coin from the campus. Students would form teams to participate in this game and playing would take hours or even days to complete the game, the prize for winning being getting to create the hunt for the following year.⁷⁷ According to Nicholson, puzzle hunt-games and escape rooms are different in terms of the difficulty of their puzzles. While escape rooms draw inspiration from the structures of puzzle hunts, the focus is on the physical puzzles in a limited space for just one team at a time to solve.⁷⁸

⁷³ Montola et al 2009, 3.

⁷⁴ Montola et al 2009, 39–44.

⁷⁵ Colley et al 2017, 1179.

⁷⁶ Nicholson 2015, 4.

⁷⁷ Albert 1991, <http://www.mit.edu>.

⁷⁸ Nicholson 2015, 4–5.

One of the oldest forms of treasure hunting games is *letterboxing*. Letterboxing is essentially treasure hunt for hikers. The game originates from nineteenth century England, where a hiker chose to leave his calling card hidden inside a bottle in Dartmoor countryside in 1854. People who found it left their cards as well and eventually walkers started to bury waterproof boxes with stamped postcards for the finders to send back to them to signal that box had been found.⁷⁹

More modern puzzle hunts include games such as *geocaching*, where the players get GPS coordinates or a puzzle which they need to solve in order to acquire those coordinates and once at that location, search for a hidden box. Another version of this is the over 160-year-old game of letterboxing, which is otherwise similar, but starts with either multimedia, or textual hints instead of coordinates. Nicholson states that this same combination of puzzle solving and hunting for clues can be seen in escape rooms, but in a confined space.⁸⁰

2.1.8. Alternate Reality Games

One of the pervasive game genres that I want to highlight as a precursor of escape rooms in its own right in addition to Nicholson's existing theory, is Alternate Reality Games or ARGs. Laura E. Hall, who is an experienced escape room designer, briefly mentions ARGs specifically in a talk she gave at Game Developers Conference in 2017 titled *Lessons from escape rooms: designing for the real world and VR*, when she talks about the kind of games that inspired her before starting to play and design escape rooms.⁸¹

Alternate Reality Games are one of the better known pervasive games. ARGs can turn anything into interactive games through weaving additional layers of meaning into the real world and have often been used in viral marketing campaigns. These games typically feature sophisticated puzzle-based gameplay and give players very difficult tasks to complete with transmedia storytelling. ARGs sometimes develop "a life of their own"; for example, television series *Alias* featured two web puzzles in 2001-2002

⁷⁹ Donaldson-Evans.2002 <http://www.foxnews.com>.

⁸⁰ Nicholson 2015, 4–5.

⁸¹ GDC 1.5.2017 <https://www.youtube.com>.

and the fans of the series created their own ARG called *Omnifam* in 2005 based on that.⁸²

One of the earliest examples of alternate reality games is *The Beast*, which was an unofficial title for the game that was created by Microsoft's team to promote Steven Spielberg's movie A.I. The game play of *The Beast* started in the summer of 2001 with three related but separate entry points to the game and clue titled "rabbit holes" by alternate reality gamers. ARGs such as this differ from other forms of games because they incorporate physical elements and narrative which aim on disguising the fact that a game is being played at all. In a way, ARG designers try to change the player's existing world into alternate reality rather than create an alternate reality by using rhetorical techniques.⁸³

Earliest known precursor of alternate reality games can be traced all the way back to 1905 and specifically to G.K. Chesterton's short story labeled "*The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown*". In this story, a retired military officer unwittingly starts playing an adventure game which is staged to make him feel alive one more time. In this prototype ARG-game the protagonist plays in the story, there are staged events where hired actors play villains and side characters in the game world. These characters give the protagonist messages and clues throughout the game without ever revealing the whole thing is a game until the very end.⁸⁴

2.2. Digital precursors of escape rooms

Many escape games share game design elements which are similar to digital games and other popular culture like movies and TV shows from the 1980s to 2000s. According to Nicholson, point-and-click adventure games⁸⁵ as well as escape-the-room digital games especially were precursors of real-world escape rooms.⁸⁶

⁸² Montola et al 2009, 37–39.

⁸³ Kinsella 2011, 60–63.

⁸⁴ Alexander 2011, 154.

⁸⁵ Games, where the playable character is normally controlled through a point-and-click interface by a pointing device, such as mouse of a computer. The player can click around the screen to for example, move, examine objects, interact with other characters.

⁸⁶ Nicholson 2015, 4.

Digital escape games can be distinguished as a subgenre of point-and-click adventure games. However, I chose to include digital escape games also as a part of escape games in general in this thesis as they are a relevant part of this game genre in general. Digital escape games however have a few of their own characteristics that differentiate them from their real-life counterparts, such as them normally being single-player games and real-life escape rooms being team-based games. These digital games became especially popular in the 1980s-2000s and digital escape games within the genre of escape games in general remains popular still in the 2010s.

The rising trend in 2010s in escape room-industry has also been to experiment with virtual reality thus blurring the lines between the real world and the digital escape rooms. This can be seen as the escape games looking forward to the future by actually returning to their vastly digital roots.

2.2.1. TV game shows in 1980s and 1990s

Big part of the earliest history of escape rooms can be traced back to TV game shows such as *The Adventure Game*, *Takeshi's Castle* and *Now Get Out of That!* from the 1980s as well as *Crystal Maze* and *Fort Boyard* from the 1990s. A common theme in these gameshows was that a group of players were put in a situation where they were usually presented with a set of challenges such as physical obstacles and/or puzzles to solve within a set amount of time to escape that situation. They also had a common factor of having a usually quite eccentric/theatrical host to lead the show sometimes along with other actors playing different characters in the games.

The Adventure Game was first broadcast in 1980 in BBC in the UK and it ran until 1986. It incorporated the idea of the popular *Dungeons and Dragons* fantasy tabletop role-playing game on screen. The basic background story of the show was that in each episode, two celebrity players and one member of the public had traveled in space to a planet called Arg and were completing tasks there in order to find a crystal needed to return to Earth on their spaceship. The show featured several logic puzzles and tasks and proved to be so popular that it had to be moved to air from Saturday mornings to early evening weekdays.⁸⁷ The Adventure Game was also using interaction with a computer in several 1D-and 2D-based puzzles and tasks the players had to solve to get

⁸⁷ McEwan 2016, <http://metro.co.uk>.

ahead in the game.⁸⁸ This kind of mixing of digital game elements in real world puzzles is something that is often used in modern escape game settings.

Takeshi's Castle was a Japanese game show which was originally airing on Tokyo Broadcasting System between 1986 and 1990. This show was a comedy-game show, where a Japanese actor Takeshi Kitano was featured as a count who owns the castle where games take place and he sets up difficult challenges the players must clear before getting to him.⁸⁹ There was even a video game-version of this game produced called *Totsugeki! Fuuun Takeshi Jou*, which was the 8th game developed and published by a game production company called Bandai in 1987. This game was using NES system and could run on Family Trainer pad, which was known in the US as the Power Pad although it was only ever released in Japan.⁹⁰

Now Get Out of That! was shorter lived than these other examples and only ran for four five episodes long seasons between 1981 and 1984 in BBC2 in the UK. The game show followed two teams going through a series of obstacles revolving around a theme of a top-secret mission. Each of the tasks in the game was designed to challenge the players' problem-solving skills, physical abilities and critical thinking. This show also had a colorful host called Bernard Falk, a BBC newscaster who provided lively commentary on the show.⁹¹

Crystal maze was a big-budget adventure game show which launched in 1990 on Channel 4 in the UK. The show was very theatrical and presented by Richard O'Brien, who is famous for writing and starring in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. The show was a massive success with up to 6 million viewers and became an international cult classic. At the start of the series, they developed 48 different games, had 6 game-zones with 6 cells in each of those zones and normally had a contestant play 12-13 of these games during one episode of the game-series. They designed each of the games to be playable in two to three minutes within a small 4m x 4m space.⁹²

⁸⁸ Brew & Shepherd 2016, <http://www.denofgeek.com>.

⁸⁹ Challenge UK - Takeshi's Castle, <http://www.challenge.co.uk>.

⁹⁰ StrategyWiki – Totsugeki! Fuuun Takeshi Jou, <https://strategywiki.org/>.

⁹¹ TvTropes - Series/Now Get Out Of That, <http://tvtropes.org/>.

⁹² Smith 2015, <https://www.buzzfeed.com>.

Fort Boyard also originates from 1990 in France. It ran for 27 seasons in the French television and 5 in English television and had versions made in several different countries including for example Finland, Russia, Sweden, Netherlands and Algeria. In this game, the contestants (4-6 people depending on the version) took part in different physical and mental challenges under a pre-set time limit to acquire keys to a treasure room and clues for getting a password to release a load of coins inside that treasure room. In some versions of this show, the contestants compete to win actual money, but in the original French version, the players are celebrities competing for charity causes.⁹³

According to O'Brien, Crystal Maze was created as a British version of *Fort Boyard*.⁹⁴ Crystal maze and Fort Boyard were both originally created and filmed in 1990 despite Fort Boyard being the first show of this type. When Channel 4 in the UK wanted to create a version of Fort Boyard, the filming schedule of the French original series in the actual set of the fort meant that they could not use the place and that is why they decided to build The Crystal Maze instead. Once Channel 5 in the UK created a version of actual Fort Boyard in 2003, it did not do well and was considered as a "poor man's Crystal maze" by the British public.⁹⁵

These early game shows were precursor to reality shows such as *The Amazing Race* and *Survivor*. Several of these shows had puzzles and large-scale games in which the players had to cooperate in order to achieve their goal and win the game. They have since provided inspiration for escape game designers to aim on the sense of spectacle these shows provide. Popular shows such as the ones mentioned in this thesis earlier helped to raise cultural awareness of the activity of working as a team in order to solve a series of puzzles and tasks in a physical world.⁹⁶

2.2.2. Escape rooms in TV series and movies in 2000s and 2010s

After escape rooms gained more popularity in 2000-2010, escape rooms have appeared in other popular culture products like several TV series and movies. Vice versa, a lot of escape rooms have taken influences from movies and TV series

⁹³ Tv Tropes - Series/Fort Boyard, <http://tvtropes.org/>.

⁹⁴ Smith 2015, <https://www.buzzfeed.com>.

⁹⁵ Tv Tropes - Series/Fort Boyard, <http://tvtropes.org/>.

⁹⁶ Nicholson 2015, 5.

according to a survey Scott Nichols conducted on escape room facility-owners. Popular escape room-themes include movie franchises such as *Indiana Jones* (1981), *Saw* (2004) and *Cube* (1998) where the storyline often already revolves around characters being trapped in a space and having to rely on their minds to escape the place.⁹⁷ Other movies that have inspired several escape rooms include *Da Vinci Code* (2006) and *National Treasure* (2004).

As illustrated in earlier chapters, movies have also inspired several escape game-precursors such as alternate reality game *The Beast*, which was inspired by the movie *A.I* and assassin-games, which were inspired by the movie *The 10th Victim*. In this thesis, I am focusing on the precursors of escape games, but it is good to note that movies have been an important influence on various different forms of culture.

The biggest influence escape rooms have gotten from movies and TV series in general has likely been taking inspiration for the themes, puzzles and tasks in the games and other creative aspects of game design. This chapter is slightly different from the other precursors as I also include examples of how modern escape game culture can be seen in series and movies-entertainment. I chose to do this to illustrate the change in the relationship between escape games and this type of entertainment as well as to document examples of how these games are seen in other popular culture in 2010s. Escape games no longer just take influences from movies and TV series, but also give influences back to them.

Some movie franchises have also produced their own escape rooms often as creative marketing events. For example, *Resident Evil*-series, granted that it is loosely based on the Japanese video game-series by the same name, built a travelling escape room in the US in 2017 around the movie's theme called *Resident Evil - Escape Experience*. The same concept of the room was available to play for a limited time in San Francisco, Los Angeles, Portland, Boston, Austin, New York and Chicago.⁹⁸ Other examples include *Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation*'s marketing as they released a promotional escape

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ William & Yuan 2017, <https://escaperoomtips.com>.

room built around the movie's theme in selected AMC IMAX movie theaters in Boston, Los Angeles and San Francisco before the movie's release in 2015.⁹⁹

Examples of escape rooms being featured in popular TV series include *The Big bang Theory* and *2 Broke Girls*. In the comedy-series Big bang Theory, a group of the main characters play an escape room in episode 16 of season 8 - "The Intimacy Acceleration".¹⁰⁰ In the episode, escape rooms are portrayed as a fun activity for a group of friends, but as the main characters are a group of geniuses, they solve the puzzles and tasks in the room too fast and end up escaping the room in just 6 minutes. The characters state that 200\$ which is a quite average price to play an escape room for a group of 4 people is too expensive for something like that. The escape room played in the episode also makes use of a lot of escape room-clichés such as using a blacklight, the theme of the room revolving around zombies and a lab-setting, having a "bad" actor in character inside the room and the workers at escape rooms being very concerned about reviews online such as in a service called *Yelp*.

Similar escape room-clichés are used in another comedy series called *2 Broke Girls*. The use of actors inside the escape room is a common factor in both and the actors being exaggerating their roles, not being very convincing in their role work and the series main characters who are playing the rooms reacting to their acting in a condescending way. Both of these two examples aired in 2015.¹⁰¹ In a more recent example from 29.4.2018, in episode 18 of season 29 of *The Simpsons*, Homer and his dad are arguing and the rest of the Simpsons' family lures them inside an escape room "to solve your problems".¹⁰²

Escape rooms have also inspired movies. In 2017, there was even a horror movie titled *Escape room* released. The movie directed by Will Wernick, shows a group of six friends going to intentionally play a horror-themed escape room, which then turns out to be real sick game with no escape instead of a fun escape game.¹⁰³ The movie was not a massive success, but interestingly by 2017 escape rooms as a game concept and a cultural phenomenon seem to have reached a point of being well-known enough

⁹⁹ Imax News 2015, <https://www.imax.com/>.

¹⁰⁰ Petros Drakoulis 14.3.2015, <https://www.youtube.com>.

¹⁰¹ That Daniel 24.12.2015. <https://www.youtube.com>.

¹⁰² Springfieldspringfield, <https://www.springfieldspringfield.co.uk>.

¹⁰³ IMDB-profile of Escape room-movie 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/>.

that it makes sense to create a movie meant for international box office-distribution in which the whole main-storyline revolves around playing an escape room.

In late 2010s, the trend seems to have turned so that whilst escape games continue taking influences on TV shows and movies, increasing amount of TV shows and movies want to adapt escape games in their script in some way as these games gain popularity. A notable trend regarding video-entertainment and escape games online in 2018 are *the box fort prison-videos* in YouTube. These videos seem to be interestingly targeted mostly to children, which is not the typical target audience for regular escape games. In box fort prison-videos, vloggers¹⁰⁴ such as *Papa Jake* and *Shot Of The Youngers* escape from home made “escape rooms” made from cardboard and other easily accessible materials. In 3.7.2018, there are about 32,400 results for YouTube-search “box fort prison” and the most popular videos titled as Box fort prison/Box fort prison escape room or a variation of these have 1-10 million views.¹⁰⁵

2.2.3. Digital escape rooms and point-and-click-adventure games

According to Nicholson, point-and-click adventure games as well as escape-the-room digital games can also be counted as precursors of escape games. The text-based interactive fiction games were most popular in the 1980s. In these games, the players would combine items they found when searching different locations and solve puzzles with text commands to the computer. These types of games evolved into point-and-click adventure games when computer graphics and mice became more common¹⁰⁶ in 1990s-2000s.

These games required logical thinking to solve puzzles and occasional fighting with enemies to continue the story and explore the game world. One direction this genre of games developed to was web-based games (which later evolved into mobile apps), where players would be trapped inside a room with an objective to discover and combine items in order to break out and escape. This kind of games became known as

¹⁰⁴ Video bloggers, people who create and post video content on online platforms such as YouTube regularly.

¹⁰⁵ YouTube search for “box fort prison” 3.7.2018 <https://www.youtube.com/>.

¹⁰⁶ Nicholson 2015, 4.

Escape-The-Room games and according to Nicholson, some of the game designers of physical escape rooms we see today were inspired by these digital games.¹⁰⁷

A text-based adventure game *Behind Closed Doors* (1988) by John Wilson is one of the earliest examples of virtual escape-the-room games. In this game, the players had to enter written commands in order to escape a restroom.¹⁰⁸

One of the most famous virtual escape-the-room games is the Flash game *Crimson Room*, which was created by Toshimitsu Takagi in Japan in 2004. The Japanese term *takagism* used to refer to this type of games originates from his name.¹⁰⁹ Modern escape room games originated from Japan before spreading around the world, making this game very influential in popularizing the idea of this type of games with the basic idea of the game being the player being locked inside a room, discovering hints and solving puzzles in order to escape the room. Unlike 2010s real-world escape rooms, which are normally team-based games, *Crimson Room* was a first-person single-player game.

Following the popularity of *Crimson Room*, Takagi released another less known virtual escape room titled *Viridian Room* also in 2004.¹¹⁰ The original *Crimson Room* got up to 800 000 000 views, which proves how massively popular the game was in early 2000s. Degica Games created a tribute new version of the original game in 2016 titled *Crimson Room Decade*.¹¹¹

Another important example of popular digital games that affected the evolution of escape rooms was a game called *Myst*. According to Nicholson, escape rooms are even described by some as “Live-action *Myst*”.¹¹² *Myst* is a puzzle adventure game designed by brothers Robyn and Rand Miller. The game was developed by their company Cyan, which later became known as Cyan Worlds and was first published in 1993 by Brøderbund for Apple Macintosh computer platform. *Myst* was one of the first games released on CD-ROM format. After it got released for IBM-compatible PCs in 1994, the game grew to be the best-selling PC game ever. It held this position for over a decade

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Breakout Games, <https://breakoutgames.com/>.

¹⁰⁹ Lock Academy, <https://lockacademy.com/en/>.

¹¹⁰ Escape Fan: Play *Viridian Room*, <http://escapefan.com/play-iridian-room/>.

¹¹¹ Degica Games 3.6.2016, <https://www.youtube.com>.

¹¹² Nicholson 2015, 4.

up until 2002, when *The Sims* broke their record.¹¹³ The gameplay in *Myst* is the same as in *Crimson Room* and *Viridian Room*; first-person point-and-click to explore the game world.

Based on my research in this chapter of the thesis, *I argue that this is also the most likely origin of the name of escape game/escape room game genre*. Escape-The-Room game subgenre of point-and-click adventure games online appears to be the first mention out of all the precursors of escape rooms, where the words “escape” and “room” are used to describe a game with very similar rules to what we see in escape rooms in 2010s.

2.3. Modern escape rooms in 2000s-2010s

I define modern escape rooms as the escape rooms which were published after 2007, when SCRAP first launched the first well-documented escape game called *Real Escape Game*. In this chapter about the history of escape rooms, I have shed light on different precursors of these modern escape rooms that have taken influences from these said precursors. Games such as the digital point-and-click adventure game escape rooms were strictly precursors of these modern games despite having similar characteristics with the modern games as they were developed and published before escape rooms as a widely known game genre of its own was established.

In this chapter, I aim on summarizing what the escape room game genre has developed to be in roughly ten years after the first games of this kind started to emerge. To illustrate my point that *modern escape games have evolved in cultural dialogue with these games precursors*, I end this chapter by pointing out the influences of history of escape rooms that can be seen in modern escape rooms. In a larger context, I believe it is important to document and preserve not only the history, but also the current state of escape game genre in 2018 for future researchers and link this current state to that history.

2.3.1. Categorizing modern escape rooms in 2000s-2010s

Different types of modern escape rooms can be divided into *generations I-IV*, a method of categorizing the different types of rooms often based mainly on their use of

¹¹³ Giant Bomb: *Myst*-wiki, <https://www.giantbomb.com/>.

different technologies. This form of sorting escape rooms to different categories is commonly used by the escape room owners and -enthusiasts. The differences in these categories are important to understand as part of the nearest history of modern escape games despite the origins of the games themselves dating far before the late 2000s when escape rooms started to appear.

Generation I escape rooms (late 2000s-early 2010s) refer to the earliest escape rooms and/or similar games with them. The use of technology in the setting, puzzles and props is humble and modest and this type of rooms rely heavily on simple mechanisms such as magnets, padlocks and locked boxes. Since the use of complex technology in these rooms is next to non-existent, the rooms are quite easy to install and maintain. The simplicity of gen 1 rooms sets challenges to escape rooms owners to use the limited tools and props in an appealing and creative way.¹¹⁴

Generation II escape rooms (early 2010s-now) started to appear soon after escape rooms became more popular around the world and players started to demand more from the games. These rooms often have different electronic sensors and controllers, more complex sound-and light systems inside the room in comparison to generation I-rooms. The use of more advanced technologies also enables setting up a “master puzzle” which only gets activated at a late stage of the game and builds up to a spectacle-like finale of the game. These rooms tend to be highly automated, making the employees (gamemasters) more like spectators of the game rather than having them in an active role during the gameplay.¹¹⁵

Generation III escape rooms (mid 2010s-now) integrate even more sensors, electronics and other new technologies to their games. Padlocks get replaced by computers and the game designers think of automating the games even further, thus making the puzzles and story scenarios more immersive. The props are combined with different phases of the game, consisting of automated triggers when players do certain things at certain times in the game for instance. The rooms become increasingly smart,

¹¹⁴ Pleskacz 2017.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

detecting which scenario the players are taking part and when and require minimum help from the moderators of the game.¹¹⁶

Generation IV escape rooms are anticipated to be the next step in the evolution of escape games. This term refers to full automation of the games with several mechanics such as adaptable strategies and replay ability adapted from video games. The games will likely consist of chapters similar to video games and programmed “smart” systems will oversee seamless transitions between those chapters. Augmented- and virtual reality are also likely to make their way into the generation IV escape rooms.¹¹⁷

This categorizing of escape rooms to different generations purely based on their use of technology is a good tool in illustrating the rapid evolution of games belonging to this game genre. However, it easily leaves out any other but technological nuances of escape games such as storytelling and immersion. While escape game genre continues to evolve and grow, I believe that it would be beneficial in the future to incorporate more elements such as how the theme and the story of the game are being exhibited in the game into the generations categorizing.

According to Lisa Spira’s interview with Shaw Fischtein, who works in development and management in *Escape Games Canada* and has background in engineering and Game Theory, the terminology of dividing escape games into generations originated from escape room owners discussing about ways to classify the technology inside their games. Categorizing different games according to technology used in them is also important when developing and maintaining new escape games for other companies as a game developer. Different escape room owners have different backgrounds and technical skillsets to maintain the technology their games require, and the generations-terminology helps charting what kind of games he can help develop for owners with different skillsets. For example, to develop a Generation III game, the owners need background in computer software and/or hardware engineering, mechanical engineering, and experience with set design and fabrication.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Spira 2016, <https://roomescapeartist.com>.

According to researchers Markus Wiemker, Errol Elumir and Adam Clare's paper *Escape Room Games: "Can you transform an unpleasant situation into a pleasant one?"*, the First Generation of escape rooms was characterized by the theme not being attached to the game and the main goal of the game being purely to escape. The Second Generation brought more immersive elements and added narrative to enhance that immersion and to help getting players more involved in the game. According to them, at the time their paper was written in 2015, there was ongoing debate on characteristics of Third Generation of escape rooms. Some of the elements they suggested the Third Generation of these games might hold included more immersion through inclusion of smell, sound, touch and taste, using more complicated props in the games and using actors for more social interaction within the game. ¹¹⁹

Spygame lands in generation III-category in terms of the use of sensors and other technical infrastructure of the game. However, it differs from typical generation III escape games as the actors/gamemasters play a crucial part in moving the story of the game forward and human interaction with the players has been adapted as a vital part of the game-mechanics on purpose. This is not aligned with the trend of automating the game experiences as we believed that the said active human interaction and having actors playing characters inside the game world adds value to the experience for the players. This aligns well with what Wiemker et al. predicted in 2015 about the Third-Generation escape rooms¹²⁰; actors and social interaction in game is crucial for gameplay in Spygame.

2.3.2. Digital escape rooms in 2010s

Escape games are not bound to just the physical games in 2010s. Games that got inspiration from early 2000s takagism point-and-click adventure-games are still being developed and played in 2010s. Unlike their precursors such as *The Crimson Room*, which was a Flash-game meant to be played primarily on the player's computer screen with a mouse, a lot of escape games in 2010s are mobile games players can download from *App Store* or *Google Play* and play anywhere with your phone or tablet. This can be seen as a token that while technology has evolved, so has the escape game genre

¹¹⁹ Wiemker et al 2015, 17–18.

¹²⁰ Wiemker et al. 2015, 18.

and the escape game designers have done well in adapting to the newest technology available.

Popular digital room escape games include for example, award-winning *The Room*-series. The Room-games were developed by Fireproof Games-studio and the first part was launched already in 2012. The game won a lot of awards such as BAFTAs, TIGA awards for game design and Game Developers Choice Awards. According to Barry Meade, who is a co-founder of Fireproof Games, the game was originally developed as a mobile game out of financial necessity; they simply could not afford developing a console- or a PC game at the time.¹²¹

Virtual reality-games in general have been an ongoing fad in 2000s-2010s. As the technology is developed further to better accommodate gaming-needs, new possibilities help inspiring new kind of games. VR escape games are one of those type of games. In 2018, there are several fairly popular virtual reality escape games available on VR platforms such as Oculus Rift and HTC Vive, most of which have been released after 2015. Examples include *Belko VR: An Escape Room Experiment* by Top Right Corner, which was released in Steam 3.3.2017¹²² and *Obduction* from the creators of *Myst* in Cyan game-studio, which I discussed earlier in chapter 2.2.3. Digital escape rooms and point-and-click-adventure games. *Obduction* was released in Steam 24.8.2016.¹²³

Some escape room facilities in 2010s can be placed in the intersection of virtual reality/digital escape games and the real-life games. These companies have physical real-life escape facilities where people can play for a game like in regular escape rooms, but instead of interacting with a real-life escape game, they get to play a virtual reality-game. This works much like the arcade game facilities in the golden age of arcade games in late 1970s-1980s; the company buys the game equipment and players must physically come to their facility to pay for a round and play. Such virtual reality

¹²¹ Allen 2018, <https://www.gamasutra.com>.

¹²² *Belko VR: An Escape Room Experiment* by Top Right Corner (2017) on Steam, <https://store.steampowered.com>.

¹²³ *Obduction* by Cyan Inc (2016) on Steam., <https://store.steampowered.com>.

escape room facilities can be found so far for example from *Riddles Escape Room*¹²⁴ in Myrtle Beach, US and from *Escape Room Helsinki*¹²⁵ in Finland.

Some game developers have also been experimenting with the use of augmented reality¹²⁶ in escape games. For example, a company called *ROAR Augmented Reality* provides a development platform, which escape room designers can use to create AR escape games experiences.¹²⁷ While this is an interesting direction for these games and holds potential for creative approach in the evolution of escape games, AR escape rooms are yet to break through in the consumer market in 2018.

2.3.3. Escape game trends in 2010s in relation to the history of escape games

Some of the biggest trends in escape game industry in 2010s have to do with the use of technology such as virtual- and augmented reality as discussed in the previous chapter of this thesis. In order to document and preserve a better image of what stage escape games have evolved to in 2010s, I believe it is necessary to briefly discuss some of the current trends in escape game business and how they relate to the history of this game genre.

In 2010s, franchising physical escape games seems to be a growing trend. One of the biggest escape room franchises in 2017 was called *Claustrophobia* and in 2017, it was operating in over 150 locations worldwide, all united under one brand. The company was founded in Moscow in 2013. According to Bogdan Kravtsov, who is one of the founders of the company, when they opened their first escape room in 2013, the demand was so high they made their initial investment to the company back in just six weeks. Encouraged by this, their first franchise escape rooms opened just three months after their initial launch and the demand kept on being so high, some of their rooms had to be kept open 24/7.¹²⁸ Another good example of massive and successful international escape room franchise in 2018 is *Escape Hunt*-company. Like *Claustrophobia*, they also first opened in 2013. *Escape Hunt*'s first branch was based in

¹²⁴ Riddles Escape Room-website, <https://riddlesecaperoom.com/>.

¹²⁵ Escape Room Helsinki-website, <https://escaperoom.fi/en/>.

¹²⁶ Interactive experience in a real-world environment where the objects in the real-world are "augmented" by added computer-generated information such as added images, which are visible when the real-world environment is viewed through a digital interface.

¹²⁷ Zaitsev 2017, <https://blog.theroar.io>.

¹²⁸ Bulgarina 2017, <http://blog.nowescape.com/>.

Bangkok, Thailand and in 2018, they have branched out to every continent and have opened over 250 game rooms in total worldwide. ¹²⁹

The franchising-trend can be seen as a continuum of escape games themed entertainment and themed restaurant-roots. For monetizing on themed entertainment business such as the themed restaurants, companies have been using franchising as a business model for decades so there is clear evidence from the precursors of escape rooms of this being a profitable model to work with when it comes to this type of entertainment.

In 2010s as escape rooms have gained popularity and become an established game genre of its own, some game companies have published escape room board games. For example, *Escape Room The Game* mimics the basic game mechanics of escape rooms. In this game, the players are “locked” in a board game- “room” for one hour and must solve series of logical puzzles to make it “out” in time. Instead of having a gamemaster available like in a normal escape room, the players can get additional hints through playing cards if they so choose. ¹³⁰

The board game escape rooms started to gain popularity in late 2010s, but they are not as popular as playing actual physical escape rooms or digital escape games. They have not been around for much more than a couple of years and from developers’ point of view, it is much more cost-effective to manufacture and distribute digital escape games in comparison to physical board games. However, from escape rooms history point of view, the escape room board games are an interesting direction escape game genre has branched out to while it has evolved as it has cultural ties to tabletop role-playing, which links in with the culture of live action role-playing that is one of the precursors of escape rooms.

Another trend in 2010s is combining the game genre’s alternate reality game-roots with the modern escape room-elements by having physical subscription-based mystery games players can order online and get delivered on their doorstep. This kind of games cleverly use the time limit of being locked in a room for an hour to solve mysteries by having new clues delivered at certain times and assuming the players have solved the

¹²⁹ Escape Hunt official website About-section, <https://escapehunt.com>.

¹³⁰ Escape Room The game official website, <https://escaperoomthegame.com/en-gb/>.

previous puzzles and tasks by that time in order to move ahead in the game. One of the better-known games like this is called *Dispatch*. In this game, “The story begins with the first delivery, or dispatch, if you will. In it, you’ll find physical clues that lead you to the web and back to the real world to unravel a mysterious crime”. *Dispatch* is developed by an escape room-company called Breakout.¹³¹

Especially in the Japanese market, the influence of themed restaurants can still be clearly seen in for example, *Nazotomo Cafes* which are created by the globally known digital game development-and publishing company NAMCO. In these cafes, visitors have a public space to eat and drink as well as “mission cube”-rooms, where players aim on clearing missions by solving puzzles of varying difficulty in under 765 seconds (12.75 minutes). These games are essentially mini escape rooms. They first opened in Tokyo in 2014 and have since branched out to for example, China and England.¹³²

While regular modern escape rooms can usually facilitate between two and ten players at a time, in late 2010s massive multiplayer escape games have been gaining popularity. Good example of such game is *Prison Escape*, which is a 3-hour long immersive experience with 80 interactive actors and theatrical scenes. The gameplay has several storylines the players can pursue in attempt to escape from the prison and they can host up to 400 players per game. The add to the immersive setting, the game in Netherlands is built inside an actual old prison.¹³³

This kind of massive multiplayer escape games are often event-based, which is a business model originally introduced by the game company SCRAP that released the first well-documented escape game in 2007. Event based escape games are especially popular in the Japanese market in late 2010s.¹³⁴ Having big game productions available only during certain periods of time/event-based can be very clever from marketing point of view as it creates urgency for the players to book and participate in the newest games that are only available for a pre-limited time. This is also a marketing model familiar from the world of theater productions as shows normally run for a certain limited season. Interactive theater being one of the precursors of escape

¹³¹ Dispatch official website, <https://dispatch.breakoutgames.com/>.

¹³² Wasabi blog 2016, <https://wasa-bi.com/>.

¹³³ Prison Escape official website, <https://prisonescape.nl/en/>.

¹³⁴ Chiu 2018, <https://www.slideshare.net/YolandaChiou/>.

rooms, it seems likely that seasonal theater productions might have been used as a reference model to creating event-based seasonal escape rooms originally.

This trend of multiplayer-games can be seen as a continuum of escape games' live action role-playing roots where the game's group sizes would normally be considerably more than in a standard modern escape game. This kind of games that cater for a large number of people at once are also more accessible from team building point of view as it allows even bigger companies to participate in playing escape games as a team building activity all employees at once. Cynically it can also be seen as an indicator of game companies discovering that a growing amount of people are interested in playing this type of games and hence it would naturally make more money to the company to be able to have a hundred players play at the same time than two.

Escape game developers in general in 2018 tend to be taking the business side of developing escape games to account fairly well and often aim on doing that through taking their specific target audiences to account throughout their game design processes and user centric design. For example, several companies aim on developing games for different age groups like games suitable for children, educational escape games as well as special games for corporate team building-purposes. The educational aspect of these games can be seen in for example, the theme of the game and/or the objective of the game aiming on teaching something to the players through puzzles and tasks. In some escape game rooms that are often targeted towards corporate audiences that tend to want to play in larger groups for instance, it is possible to divide your group into smaller teams that are competing against each other.

2.3.4. Escape rooms as an established game genre in 2010s

In 2017, there were over 1 950 escape room facilities in the US alone and the amount of the game locations seemed to be steadily growing. At the end of 2014, there were only 22 escape room companies in the US, so the amount of companies had increased by almost 2000 in just three years. This number reflects different escape room companies specifically and it is important to note that each company usually has multiple games. The number does not take to account that some companies have

franchised their games and hence have their games in multiple locations; each individual escape room location is calculated as its own company.¹³⁵

According to my email exchange with Escape Room Artists-bloggers Lisa Spira and David Spira in June 2018, who have been keeping record on the escape game market in the US and will release updated statistics later this year, at the time when I am writing this thesis there are approximately 2,350 escape room facilities in the United States. This number is a count of facilities and most facilities are independent companies. Others are part of chains or franchises and each facility offers between 1-10 games.¹³⁶ This reflects that the steadily increasing amount of escape game facilities is not showing signs of the growth stopping in 2018. It proved to be difficult to find reliable estimates on the amount of escape room-companies in other parts of the world. However, I was able to find estimates on certain areas that shed light on how big the industry is outside the US. It seemed that several European countries have their own independent websites tracking the different escape game facilities. As the amount of different games in several countries and even in some individual cities such as Budapest was so high, there had been a demand to create different ways to manage and sort the information on different games.

The following table illustrates some of those findings to help form an image of how big this game phenomenon is in 2018 through estimates on the amounts of escape game facilities and individual games in late 2010s. It is based on latest estimates I found from escape game-related blogs and -websites and as this game-scene is constantly growing and evolving, some of the numbers might not be accurate at the time this thesis is published. I chose to include the table to this thesis as even though these numbers are advanced estimates as they illustrate how big this game industry has become in just about a decade it has been established as it is. As a researcher, I found some estimates such as the one listed for Hungary suspiciously low, but for the lack of more accurate data decided to still include them in this table. These estimates are likelier to be too low than too high in general as escape games is a growing industry in 2018 when this table was created.

¹³⁵ Spira 2017, <https://roomscapeartist.com>.

¹³⁶ Email correspondence between the researcher and Lisa Spira and David Spira 11.-15.6.2018. The correspondence is in the possession of the researcher.

Australia – 94 companies, 260+ games ¹³⁷
Belgium, Luxembourg and Netherlands-area – 451 companies, 874 games ¹³⁸
China – 4340 game locations ¹³⁹
Finland – 44 companies, 278 games ¹⁴⁰
France – 326 companies, 800+ games ¹⁴¹
Germany – 209 companies, 817 games ¹⁴²
Greece – 450+ games ¹⁴³
Hungary – 180+ games ¹⁴⁴
Israel – 373 games ¹⁴⁵
Poland - 344 companies, 934 games ¹⁴⁶
South Korea – 100+ companies ¹⁴⁷
Spain – 1150+ games ¹⁴⁸
UK and Ireland – 302 companies, 1180 games ¹⁴⁹

Table 1 - The figures are estimates regarding the amount of escape game companies and escape games in some parts of the world outside the US. The numbers are not completely accurate as the industry is constantly growing and there is no reliable single database that would store information on the different escape games across the world in real time. However, the estimates provide an idea of how large business escape games are in late 2010s in different parts of the world.

¹³⁷ Escape room hunters 3.7.2018, <http://www.escaperoomhunters.com/>.

¹³⁸ EscapeTalk.nl website 3.7.2018, <https://escapetalk.nl/en/>.

¹³⁹ Escape game association of China report, June 2018, <http://www.chinaega.com/>.

¹⁴⁰ Pakopelit.fi website 3.7.2018, <https://www.pakopelit.fi/en/games/>.

¹⁴¹ Wescap.fr website 3.7.2018, <https://www.wescap.fr/escape-game/>.

¹⁴² LockMe.de website 3.7.2018, <https://lockme.de/escape-room-rangliste/>.

¹⁴³ Escapology.gr website 3.7.2018, <https://www.escapology.gr/etairies/escape-rooms/>.

¹⁴⁴ Exitgames.hu website 3.7.2018, <http://exitgames.hu/jatekhelyszinek>.

¹⁴⁵ Room Run website 3.7.2018, <http://room.run/en/rooms>.

¹⁴⁶ Lockme.pl website 3.7.2018, <https://lockme.pl/en/escape-room-ranking/?page=1>.

¹⁴⁷ Asiaescapegame.com 2017, https://asiaescapegame.com/2017/05/04/korea_industry/.

¹⁴⁸ Escaperadar.com website 3.7.2018, <https://www.escaperadar.com/room/map>.

¹⁴⁹ Exitgames UK website 3.7.2018, <http://exitgames.co.uk/exit-games/>.

*TripAdvisor*¹⁵⁰ which is a popular travelling-website, where different kinds of companies can list themselves and people who have visited those companies/used their services can rate them for other users to see, has its own category called “Room Escape Games” under “Things to do”-header’s “Fun and games”-section. Other activities in this category include for example, “Game & Entertainment Centers” and “Scavenger Hunts” separately under their own headers. This is a good indicator towards that in 2018, escape games have gained an established enough status that they are worldwide recognized as their own game genre, which is relevant enough to be suggested as an activity for people who travel. There are also so many of them; it is justified to present these games as their own category in TripAdvisor to help potential players find these games easier.

In some markets, there is more monitoring regarding escape games than in others in 2010s. For example, in China escape games have official communication with the government through *Real-life entertainment association* that operates under China’s official Culture and entertainment association. The association was founded in December 2017 in Beijing.¹⁵¹ Having this kind of regulation and communication with the government is a quite new thing in the business side of escape games, but also goes to prove how established the game genre has become as the Chinese government would see this as necessary.

Towards the end of 2010s, escape games do not seem to show signs of slowing down. For example, energy drink company *Red Bull* that is known for sponsoring sports and games, organized the first escape room world championship in Budapest in March 23-25, 2017 and titled escape rooms as “a booming new sport” in their website-announcement about the event.¹⁵² I stand with Wiemker et al. in their statement: “*escape rooms are part of gaming’s future*”.¹⁵³

¹⁵⁰ US-based self-proclaimed world’s largest travel-website. Has 455 million average monthly unique visitors and 630 million user-generated opinions and reviews, <https://tripadvisor.mediaroom.com/>.

¹⁵¹ Chiu 2018, <https://www.slideshare.net/YolandaChiou/>.

¹⁵² Collins 2017, <https://www.redbull.com>.

¹⁵³ Wiemker et al. 2015, 18.

2.3.5. Influences of history of escape rooms in modern escape rooms

History of escape rooms is very vivid and diverse when it comes to precursors that influenced escape rooms evolving into the game genre we know it as in 2018 as I have illustrated in this chapter about the history of escape rooms. Despite modern escape games having only existed for roughly a decade, the game elements, fractions of ideas, inspiration and above all, people's drive to access entertainment like this has existed for a much longer time.

Most of the precursors of escape games can be placed on a timeline between 1900-2000. It is important to note that even though the seeds of precursors such as live action role-playing were planted already in ancient times and each precursor on its own has cultural precursors which likely date back centuries, the focus of this thesis in hand is in forming an image of the history of escape rooms and reflecting that to modern escape games in chapter two and observing that history through a case example of Spygame in chapter three. Hence, I made a conscious decision to avoid going too much into detail on each escape room precursor's precursors, but to just acknowledge their existence and focus mostly on precursors mentioned in this thesis directly.

Out of the escape game precursors I cover in this thesis, live-action role-playing, point-and click adventures, puzzle- and treasure hunts, interactive theater and haunted houses, adventure game shows and themed entertainment industry were originally based on Scott Nicholson's observations about precursors of escape rooms. In chapter two, I researched the history of these precursors further and provided a more detailed description of each of them with more links to modern escape games than were mentioned in Nicholson's original paper *Peeking behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities* (2015). On top of these, I added themed restaurants, teambuilding activities, pervasive games and alternate reality games as escape game precursors in their own right.

The earliest precursors date all the way back to adapting roles during religious rituals in ancient Egypt and spectacle larps in ancient Rome.¹⁵⁴ Having said that, it is likely that even the earliest hominids engaged in live action role-playing of sort such as play-

¹⁵⁴ Morton 2007, 249-250.

fighting or play-hunting.¹⁵⁵ Live action role-playing or larp for short, has since grown to include games like escape room-like games in 1980s, where the players looked for clues to solve puzzles inside locked spaces.¹⁵⁶ In early 2000s live action role-playing games such as True Dungeon (2003) by True Adventures started to have more escape room-like features.¹⁵⁷ This forms one of the basis of modern escape rooms, which is engaging players in an immersive often real-world game through elements of role-playing such as sometimes having characters to interact with in the game. The trend of having group sizes of some escape games in 2010s considerably larger than in early escape rooms and accommodating tens or even hundreds of players at once can also be seen as a continuum from the game genre's live action role-playing roots. The group sizes in those games are often larger than two to ten players, which would be considered a standard group size for a regular modern real-world escape game.

The origins of themed restaurants and alternate reality games can be traced to early 1900s. Alternate reality games or ARG-games for short are a form of pervasive play. Pervasive games are an umbrella term to for example, treasure hunts, assassination games and alternate reality games. One of the first documented references to what is considered to be an alternate reality game is from G.K. Chesterton's short story published in 1905 labeled "The Tremendous Adventures of Major Brown".¹⁵⁸ Other pervasive games like assassination games date back to 1950s-1960s, when especially university students in the US started playing them.¹⁵⁹ The aim of creating a game, where the players are fully immersed into the game world, which is often partly digital and partly happening in real world, as well as using transmedia communication links pervasive-and especially alternate reality games and treasure hunts to modern escape rooms.

ARG games have also often been used for marketing purposes like for TV series Alias in 2001-2002 and The Beast which was released in 2001 to promote Steven Spielberg's movie A.I.¹⁶⁰ In late 2010s, a creative marketing trend has been to use modern escape

¹⁵⁵ Morton 2007, 246.

¹⁵⁶ Nicholson 2015, 4.

¹⁵⁷ Sjöberg 2008, <https://www.wired.com/>.

¹⁵⁸ Alexander 2011, 154.

¹⁵⁹ Montola et al 2009, 16-34.

¹⁶⁰ Kinsella 2011, 60-63.

rooms as marketing tool for movies such as Mission: Impossible - Rogue Nation (2015).¹⁶¹ These ARG games used in marketing in early 2000s has provided valuable cultural examples of how this type of marketing through real-life puzzle-games has worked in the past, encouraged and provided inspiration for using modern pop up-escape rooms as a modern marketing tool.

One of the oldest forms of treasure hunting games is Letterboxing, which was first played in 1854 in the England.¹⁶² More recent and better known examples of such games include MIT Mystery Hunt which originates from early 1980s as well as a more modern version of letterboxing, geocaching, that people first started playing in early 2000s.¹⁶³ A lot of modern escape games use elements of treasure- and puzzle hunts such as puzzle ideas and having players navigate their way based on the clues given to them to a certain place or area in the room in order to find the next hint and get further in the game.

The culture around themed restaurants is also where several early escape games took inspiration to their business models from. For example, Beijing Takagism Club opened in China in 2012 and was inspired by online “Takagism” escape games. In places such as this, the players would eat and drink while solving the “Takagism” escape game.¹⁶⁴ Good examples of US-based themed entertainment and early commercial escape game-like entertainment are 5 Wits US franchise, which was first opened in 2003 and Entros, which opened in 1992 and was not only providing immersive games, but was also a restaurant¹⁶⁵ Some escape game-restaurants are still up and running in late 2010s, one of the newest chains being the chain of Nazotomo Cafes created by game publishing and-development company NAMCO. They have venues in Japan, China and the UK.¹⁶⁶

Themed restaurants started appearing the US in 1930s but started gaining more popularity after 1955 when Disney opened its first themed restaurants. However,

¹⁶¹ Imax News 2015, <https://www.imax.com>.

¹⁶² Donaldson-Evans 2002 <http://www.foxnews.com>.

¹⁶³ Geocaching.com, *The History Of Geocaching*-section, <https://www.geocaching.com/about/history.aspx>.

¹⁶⁴ Scherker 2013, <https://www.huffingtonpost.com>.

¹⁶⁵ Nicholson 2015, 6.

¹⁶⁶ Wasabi blog 2016, <http://wasa-bi.com>.

themed restaurants were the most popular in 1980s-1990s with chains such as Hard Rock Café.¹⁶⁷ People being used to consuming themed entertainment such as haunted houses and themed restaurants can be seen as a big factor of modern escape rooms as a form of entertainment blooming. Based on my findings, consumers are used to participating in an activity that is meant to be entertaining to them in a themed environment since forms of themed entertainment have been available since 1930s. Themed restaurants and other themed entertainment also work often with a franchising business model, which several modern escape room-companies have adopted.

The rise of team building activities can also be seen as a shift in culture that also had a fairly big impact in escape games by creating a need for activities like escape games are. The earliest ideas modern team building is theoretically based on date back from late 1920s to early 1930s and the classic Hawthorne Studies, but team building became more mainstream in 1970s and 1980s. Since team building is something that the majority of companies are paying attention to and want their employees to take part in, it is likely that escape game developers saw a business opportunity in team building. This is likely to have affected for example, varying player group sizes and possibilities to compete against other groups in modern escape games to cater better to team building needs.

According to Nicholson's study, several escape room creators mentioned interactive theater experiences such as Sleep no More (2011) and Then She Fell (2012) as their inspiration to creating escape rooms. As a theater genre, interactive theater has been around for centuries. A good example of branching narrative storytelling, where the storyline has multiple possible outcomes in interactive theater is The Mystery of Edwin Drood-play from 1985. The play has several possible endings depending on the interaction between the viewers and the actors.¹⁶⁸ Influences of interactive theater can be seen in the way some of the modern escape games use actors the players in their games. The actors inside escape games can be either active; players are encouraged to interact with them and they need to do so in order to proceed in the game, or more static; actors double as gamemasters and the players do not need to

¹⁶⁷ Beardsworth & Bryman 1999, 236-239.

¹⁶⁸ StageAgent 2018, <https://stageagent.com>.

interact with them, but they can if they so choose. Branching narrative storytelling is not very common in modern escape games, but some newer games such as Spygame have chosen to use it in their game.

A form of themed entertainment closely linked with interactive theater are haunted houses.¹⁶⁹ Haunted houses as a form of interactive theater originate from early 1900s one of the earliest recorded example being Orton & Spooner's haunted house which opened in 1915.¹⁷⁰ The first themed wax horror museum Chamber of Horrors opened in London already in 1835.¹⁷¹ Horror-theme is popular in modern escape games and escape game entertainment in general has similarities with haunted houses; the customers enter a themed setting with the objective of eventually finding their way out of there. The main difference between haunted houses and escape games is that haunted houses are not necessarily games, even though some of them may incorporate game elements to create their immersive experience.

Influences from early TV game shows from 1980s-1990s such as The Adventure game and Crystal Maze can be seen clearly in inspiration for puzzle-and task ideas of modern escape games, inspiration set design for the game venues and aiming on providing that sense of spectacle these shows were thriving for. These popular TV shows also played a role in raising cultural awareness of the game activity where players are working as a team to clear tasks and solve series of puzzles in a real world setting.¹⁷² The Adventure Game was also using interaction with a computer in several simple 1D and 2D-based tasks and puzzles the players had to solve to get ahead in the game.¹⁷³ Mixing digital game elements in real world puzzles is often used in modern escape game-settings and can be linked especially to modern escape games starting from generation two and up.

In 2018, the trend regarding video-content on escape games online seems to be creating and publishing videos on YouTube about escaping from homemade "box fort prison"-escape rooms made out of cardboard and other common household items. The most popular video of this kind had over 10 million views 3.7.2018.¹⁷⁴ The box fort

¹⁶⁹ Bennett 2016, <https://www.theodysseyonline.com>.

¹⁷⁰ Warner 2014, <https://www.nbcbayarea.com>.

¹⁷¹ Eschner 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/>.

¹⁷² Nicholson 2015, 5.

¹⁷³ Brew & Shepherd 2016, <http://www.denofgeek.com>.

¹⁷⁴ YouTube search for "box fort prison" 3.7.2018 <https://www.youtube.com>.

prison escape game-phenomenon is interesting as it shows the culture within the escape game genre and puzzle games as a form of TV show-like entertainment that people enjoy watching evolving. This entertainment at least online seems to have shifted from the big-budget spectacle game shows from 1980s-1990s to homemade low budget one-man shows in 2018, which is worlds apart from the wow-factor of the early game shows.

Popular themes for modern escape rooms and inspiration behind the rooms is often linked to television series and movies. Such themes include several films like Cube (1998), Saw (2004) and Indiana Jones (1981).¹⁷⁵ Since escape games have gained popularity and developed in 2010s, the games have been featured in a vast amount of TV series such as The Big Bang Theory in 2015.¹⁷⁶ Digital escape-the-room games and point-and-click adventure games evolved from text-based interactive fiction games which were the most popular in 1980s. The golden era of point-and-click adventure games was in 1990s-2000s, when computer graphics and mice became more common.¹⁷⁷ One of the earliest text-based adventure games that can be classified as a virtual escape-the-room game was Behind Closed Doors, which was published in 1988 by John Wilson. The basic idea of the game was to enter written commands to escape from a restroom.¹⁷⁸

Modern escape games originate from Japan and one of the most influential digital escape-the-room games was a Flash game called Crimson Room. It was published in 2004 by Toshimitsu Takagi in Japan¹⁷⁹ and was followed within the same year by a sequel game called Viridian Room by the same creator.¹⁸⁰ Toshimitsu Takagi's name is also where the Japanese term takagism which refers to escape games originates from. I argue that the most likely origin of the name of modern escape room/escape game genre is escape-the-room game genre, which is point-and-click adventure game subgenre. These games were the first to use the words "escape" and "room" in this

¹⁷⁵ Nicholson 2015, 5

¹⁷⁶ Petros Drakoulis 14.3.2015, <https://www.youtube.com>.

¹⁷⁷ Nicholson 2015, 4.

¹⁷⁸ Breakout Games-website, <https://breakoutgames.com/>.

¹⁷⁹ Lock Academy, <https://lockacademy.com/en/>.

¹⁸⁰ Escape Fan: Play Viridian Room, <http://escapefan.com/play-viridian-room/>.

kind of context to describe a game with similar rules to the modern escape games in 2010s.

In this chapter, I have covered the history of escape games and their precursors and given examples of how the influences of this history can be seen in modern escape games. These games did certainly not evolve in a void as illustrated in this chapter, but the designers and the developers of these games absorbed plenty of influences and ideas from a rich and varying cultural background to create escape rooms. Escape game genre is still relatively young after roughly ten years of having these games and there is still room to grow further.

To further illustrate how history of escape games can be seen concretely in modern escape games, I aim on relating my research in chapter two to a case example of Spygame (2017) in chapter three. Evaluating the development of Spygame through the lens of history of these games and linking the game testers' expectations of the game to history through the question of why they expect certain things from this modern escape game will provide more in-depth insight on both the history itself and why modern escape games are the way they are in late 2010s.

3. Production of Spygame in relation to the history of escape games

We describe the final product of Spygame on our website like this:

(It is) a game inside a story and a story inside a game. You will be surrounded by a carefully crafted theater play, set into motion by your very presence. Our charming actors and a specially designed set will help you breathe life into this truly personal experience.

Our game is a unique blend of theater and gameplay, where you have the power to shape the story. You will face a number of tasks and quests tightly woven into the plot. It is up to you to use all of your skills and wits to successfully untangle the story and avert catastrophe. All you have to do is to let your imagination run free. Become the heroes of your own movie.¹⁸¹

The main story of the game is that the players are undercover agents sent on a mission to acquire intel needed to prevent the escalation of The Cold War. A spy-organization who sends them on this mission has recently lost an agent while retrieving a safe, which holds vital information inside of it, but they have not been able to open the safe despite their hard efforts. The players are told they must infiltrate a notorious gathering place of the underworld called The Royce Club and get the safe combination without raising any suspicion and compromising the mission.

The final name of the game formed to be *Spionspillet* in Norwegian and *The Spy Game* in English, but in this thesis, I refer to it by its simpler name we used while developing the game, Spygame. When we first launched the game officially by opening it for paid bookings on October 13th 2017, we called the game *The Spy You'll Become* as the production team agreed that that was a nice poetic name and it communicated the player character evolving to ultimately immersing themselves and becoming a spy during the game.¹⁸² However, we ended up rebranding the name already in November

¹⁸¹ *The Spy Game* website 2018, <https://www.spionspillet.no/spionspillet-immense-english>.

¹⁸² Emails exchanged within the team 5.8.-9.8.2017, other name suggestions we discussed at this stage included "The spy who was you" and "Become the spy".

shortly after launching in October as we found that people did not seem to know what that name meant and it did not give good enough associations for potential players.¹⁸³

According to McGonigal, immersive games are a form of pervasive play with their element of “this is not a game” rhetoric. Immersive games aim in erasing temporal, physical and social game boundaries and other indicators stating: “this is play”.¹⁸⁴ This is the type of game we were consciously aiming on developing; to create a player experience, where they would feel so immersed into the game they would forget they are playing at all and start living the story.

Laura Ermi and Frans Mäyrä state in their DiGRA paper *Fundamental Components of the Gameplay Experience: Analysing Immersion*, that immersion into a game and the gameplay experience are multidimensional phenomena. Different aspects can appear and get emphasized differently in different games and for different players. They mention *challenge-based immersion* as one of immersion that is particularly central for games. This form of immersion is the most powerful when the player can achieve a satisfying balance of their abilities and challenges that can require skills like strategic thinking and logical problem solving, or motor skills. They also identify *imaginative immersion*, where the player becomes absorbed with the stories and the game world that surrounds them and begins to identify as or feel for a game character, as a separate form of immersion.¹⁸⁵ Challenge-based- and imaginative immersion which Mäyrä and Ermi refer to are the closest to the types of immersion we were knowingly aiming to create for the players when making design choices for Spygame.

The primary source on Spygame in this chapter are the documents, email correspondence, notes taken from team meetings, drafts of different stages of the game development regarding the game mechanics and script versions as well as notes and group interviews of testers conducted after the game testings. I worked as the project manager on development of Spygame and reserved the right in my work-contract to document the processes of developing the game as well as using those documents for research purposes.

¹⁸³ Emails exchanged within the team 5.11-6.11.2017.

¹⁸⁴ McGonigal 2003, 2-3.

¹⁸⁵ Ermi & Mäyrä 2005, 100-102.

When developing the game, we knowingly took most of our influences from escape games, interactive theater and digital games with branching storyline. There are two actors inside the game, who play the two main characters. One of them is *Harley*, who is the bartender of the Royce Club and the other is *Red/HQ*, who is a head of the spy-organization that sends the players on this mission to infiltrate the Royce Club. In a later version of the game, those same actors play a couple of other smaller roles within the game as well in different characters. All roles in *Spygame* were knowingly written to be gender-neutral so that we would be able to hire more diverse group of actors to work in the game without discriminating people in the hiring-process.

In this chapter, I will be discussing some of the game development-processes behind *Spygame* and expectations of the people who tested the game before launch and how the development and expectations relate to the history of escape room game genre which I researched more in detail in chapter two of this thesis. I will open the curtain to discuss what happened behind the scenes of developing this game in question and tie that unique data to the historic context of creating such a game.

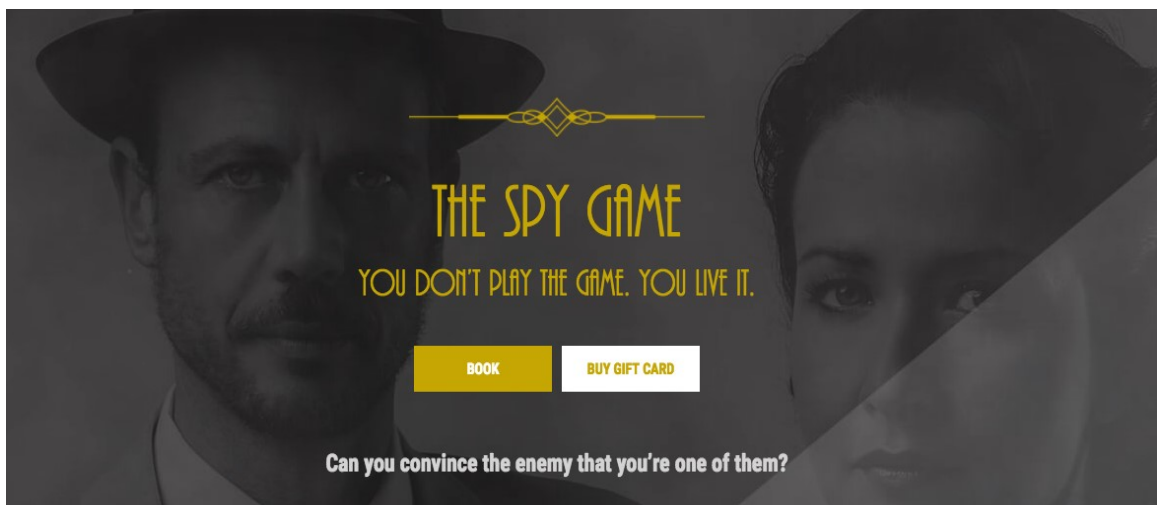


Image 1. Screenshot taken from *The Spy Game's* website, 3.7.2018. <https://www.spionspillet.no>.

3.1. Development team behind Spygame

According to Ernest Adams, the smallest game design teams often consist of anywhere between 3 and 20 people. He notes that the actual development team is usually much bigger and the suggested three to twenty people team only includes the core design team.¹⁸⁶ According to Adams, documenting the game structure details while designing it is very important for the development.¹⁸⁷ Even though Adams is focused on production of digital games, similar basics can be used in production of a real-life game as well.

The main design-and development team which I refer to as the core team in this thesis is on the smaller side of a game design team in comparison to 3-20 which Adams suggested. The core team that was working on Spygame consisted of four people. On top of these four, we were consulting 3-4 other people on specific aspects of the game such as the set design, marketing, puzzle-development and acting/characters in the game. To protect everyone's privacy, I will not be naming any of the team members except for myself. Instead, all team members will be referred to simply by their job title. This decision is also meant help in other game developers who might look for inspiration from this thesis to relate our work to their own team.

My own researcher position is described more in depth in chapter 1.3. Researcher position. However, I believe it is important to note that I worked as a project manager in Spygame but am also the author of this thesis. I recognize the potential threats in having this kind of multi-layer position towards my own research. I aim on providing an

¹⁸⁶ Adams 2010, 29.

¹⁸⁷ Adams 2010, 44.

insider point of view on the development of this type of games using my own hands on-knowledge from working with this game combined with the academic sources. I will refer to myself just as the project manager in this part of the thesis.

Since Spygame was produced with a relatively small team out of which most people were working on other jobs while being involved in creating this as a side project, a lot of times everyone was involved a little bit in all different fields of development. All the team members had their own main points of focus (as listed in table 2) based on their previous experience and what they had indicated they wanted to do in the project at the beginning of development. These job roles also changed a little during the course of creating

<h1>THE TEAM BEHIND SPYGAME</h1> <p>Core team who were working on the project included <i>project manager, writer, puzzle designer and composer</i>. On top of these four, several people were consulted for specific areas of expertise. Most important consultants were <i>actor, marketer and set designer</i>. I specify each team member's role in this table.</p>	
<p>COMPOSER</p> <p>Composing, playing and creating background music-score for the game. Spygame has its own eight tracks long original score that was vital in creating the atmosphere for the game. The composer also created the videos, which were used within gameplay. He was involved in writing the script, puzzles and character design of the game as well.</p>	<p>WRITER</p> <p>Writing the final script of the game with final character designs and set design implemented. Consulting especially the puzzle designer, but also the project manager and the composer on the gameplay-aspects of the script.</p>
<p>SET DESIGNER</p> <p>Being consulted for creating the atmosphere and the setting for the game including costumes, props, lighting etc.</p>	<p>PUZZLE DESIGNER</p> <p>Presenting ideas on different tasks and puzzles that could be implemented in the gameplay of Spygame as well as being involved in development of the script for the game. Puzzle designer was also in charge of the backend technical infrastructure.</p>
<p>MARKETER</p> <p>Social media marketing of Spygame. She was involved in creating the look and feel of the marketing materials of the game.</p>	<p>ACTOR</p> <p>Being involved in character development and casting and managing the actors to play those characters in the game.</p>
<p>PROJECT MANAGER</p> <p>Scheduling, planning, having an overview of the project at all times, steering and directing the project forward towards goals and deadlines. In this particular project, project manager also consulted other professionals on their relevant fields (set design, acting etc.) and was involved in making decisions especially on set-and character design of the game as well as early ideas of the script of the game.</p>	

Table 2. Members of the production team and their tasks

Spygame as for example, the composer was initially meant to do the writer's work while the writer was meant to be more involved in the puzzle designer's work, but this ended up changing in August 2017 as the writer wanted to be more involved in creating the script.¹⁸⁸

Everyone in the team had varying relevant background in fields such as cultural management, directing, game design, information sciences, theater, escape rooms and music. However, this was the first big project with this kind of concept combining those backgrounds into one game that any of the team members had ever participated in.

According to Adams, the ability to bring different ideas together and construct something new from them, which he refers to as synthesizing, is vital in game design. Different team members in different stages and parts of the game design process can have concerns regarding their own areas of expertise, which in Spygame's case were for example, acting, music and technological knowledge. These opinions push and pull the design in different directions. Adams writes that it is the game designer's responsibility to synthesize a holistic, consistent vision of the game based on this variety of different opinions.¹⁸⁹

In Spygame's case, especially at the beginning of the design process it was often the project manager who was expected to have that overall view of all the team member's opinions, discuss and pull them to the same page.¹⁹⁰ Towards the ending of the development and getting close to release of the game, the writer however took a more dominant role in this game design process as the script part of development was specifically assigned to be his responsibility and the script was essentially meant for capturing all the design elements of the game.¹⁹¹

Adams makes a good point of synthesizing and game design requiring compromising. He sees game design as a process in which nobody should try and claim the sole ownership of the intellectual property and the visions of the game and insist

¹⁸⁸ Emails within the team 12.7.-16.8.2017.

¹⁸⁹ Adams 2010, 61-62.

¹⁹⁰ Internal notes on the delegation of responsibilities 12.6.2017: *"I'd suggest that you (project manager) have the responsibility of delegating these tasks to other people and keeping the communication with them, but that you wouldn't be the one doing the tasks themselves"*.

¹⁹¹ Internal meeting notes 26.7.2017.

everything done by the way they imagine them being done. According to him, this affects motivation or enthusiasm for the project.¹⁹²

We were consciously aiming on keeping the core team small because of this synthesizing in management of the development. We felt strongly that growing the core team of people who are most involved in all aspects of the game would easily end with us having a lot of ideas but nothing concrete implemented. With just a few people, we were able to rotate ideas and discuss more effectively, giving everyone in the team a chance to feel like they are being heard at one point or another.

According to Annakaisa Kultima's PhD dissertation *Game Design Praxiology*, no game design project is identical as each project seeks to change something. The projects are conducted within the context of technologies, user values and cultures and tools that shift, that makes it a changing field for the designers. The game design itself is always influenced in some way by the personal beliefs and values of the makers, which guide the design decisions and have an affect on the final forms the artefacts take.¹⁹³

This combination of different sets of skills in the team places Spygame from the very moment we started designing the game in an interesting intersection of different influences on escape game genre's history. While some core skills included specifically escape room game- and puzzle solving-skills, the team had a strong knowledge also from the world of theater as well as in designing treasure-and puzzle hunt-games. This is unusual as conventional escape room-production teams tend focus more around the puzzles and the digital games-background.

3.2. Development techniques used in Spygame

According to Adams, documenting the game structure details while designing it is very important for the development. For documenting the structure, he suggests creating a list of modes and menus in the game as well as including a list of when and why certain events take place in the game.¹⁹⁴

Adams also suggests creating a flowboard which combines a storyboard and a flowchart when documenting the design. His suggested flowboard would have been

¹⁹² Adams 2010, 61-62.

¹⁹³ Kultima 2018, 21.

¹⁹⁴ Adams 2010, 44.

physical with different scenes of the game labeled and visualized with clear camera angle and notes about what actions are available for the players at that given point and what the structure of the game is. ¹⁹⁵

This kind of flowboard but as a digital version shared on Google docs to everyone in the team was the approach we took on the story design of Spygame. We had separate files for brainstorming at the beginning of the development where we would comment and develop on each other's ideas as well as separate game flow-documents to illustrate the parts of the game that had been agreed upon. We wrote down different "scenes" of the game as different "acts" that the game was divided into, in gameplay these acts were separated by short videos projected on a big screen in the main game room.

According to an article titled *Structuring Content in the Façade Interactive Drama Architecture* by Michael Mateas and Andrew Stern, the process of building a first-person, real-time, one-act interactive drama involves three big research efforts. Those include "*Designing ways to deconstruct a dramatic narrative into a hierarchy of story and behavior pieces; engineering an AI system that responds to and integrates the player's moment-by-moment interactions to reconstruct a real-time dramatic performance from those pieces; and understanding how to write an engaging, compelling story within this new organizational framework.*" ¹⁹⁶

The game flow was documented for example, in a table titled *TSYB – Game Flow*, which was last edited in September 23.2017 by the composer. The table is read in letter-order, having the scenes appear in the game in order from (A) to (P). The blue boxes represent technical parts of the game, the red boxes represent the parts where the story is actively being moved forward according to the script and the yellow boxes represent the tasks that players have to complete in order to move forward in the game.

¹⁹⁵ Adams 2010, 57.

¹⁹⁶ Mateas & Stern 2005, 1.



Figure 3. This type of flowcharts were used for internal communication when designing Spygame. The blue boxes represent technical parts of the game, the red boxes represent the parts where the story is actively being moved forward according to the script and the yellow boxes represent the tasks that players have to complete in order to move forward in the game.

3.3. Spygame and experience-driven story-centric game design

The core driving ideology behind creating Spygame was the desire to turn the dynamic of conventional escape rooms, which tend to be more puzzle-than story-driven games upside down. This thought was rooted in the core team members' own experiences in both playing several escape room games around the world as well as working at escape rooms and even owning escape room facilities.¹⁹⁷

The consensus the team had on this matter as a starting point was that usually escape games have a theme or a background story of some sort, but that story is just sprinkled on top of the room, puzzles and props rather than having the theme at the center of the game. The focus behind designing Spygame since the beginning was to immerse the players into the game world and to do so through having the spy-theme and the mafia-club setting always in our minds when making design choices.¹⁹⁸

Jesse Schell lifts this type of experience-driven game design in the center of creating games. According to him, the experience of the player should be what the game designer cares about and without that experience, the game is worthless. He clarifies, that the game is not the experience itself, but an enabler of the experience. The game and the player are real, but the experience is imaginary as everyone's experience of the said game is subjectively different.¹⁹⁹

Schell lists feelings as a central part of creating the experience to the players. Feelings such as feeling of friendship, accomplishment, having choices and responsibility, can be offered through a game-based medium. He sees this as a core motivator for game designers regarding why we want to go through all this trouble to build worlds and create complex systems behind a game - to generate experiences to the players, which they could not have any other way. Rather than having a game genre, narrative, the technology in use or the setting in mind, the game designers should first focus on the experience they are aiming on creating and designing the game around how can they move the players to have that experience.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁷ Internal meeting notes 12.5.2017.

¹⁹⁸ Internal meeting notes 12.5.2017 and 31.5.2017.

¹⁹⁹ Schell 2008, 10-12.

²⁰⁰ Schell 2008, 12-14.

According to Nicholson, there is an ongoing argument in the escape room community regarding the role of puzzles versus the role of narrative of the games. Some players prefer having good puzzles while others want the game space to come with an immersive narrative to explore.²⁰¹ This also aligns with my observations on the topic in for example, conversations in Escape Room Enthusiasts-Facebook group and *2017 Escape Room Enthusiast Survey* by Lee-fay Low and Errol Elumir. According to the survey, the element that was mentioned the most when enthusiasts described their best escape game experiences was game or puzzle design (147 mentions), immersion came as second (68 mentions), but theme (22 mentions) and story (21 mentions) were far behind in terms of how many people mentioned them. It is worth noting this survey was targeted specifically to people who identify as escape room enthusiasts and hence is not representative of escape room players in general.²⁰²

This debate between narratology and ludology²⁰³ has been ongoing throughout different game cultures and game culture studies since the late 1990s.²⁰⁴ I recognize its impact on this discussion, but as a topic it has already been researched and discussed so much that I choose to leave any broader discussion around this topic outside this thesis. However, to us in the core development team of Spygame, this type of experience-and narrative-driven design-thinking was present from the start.²⁰⁵

In escape room design, this kind of experience-driven game design logic can be simply implemented by consistently asking yourself “*Why is this here?*” when deciding on the tasks, puzzles and setting of the game.²⁰⁶ Everything should be consistent with the room and its theme, much like in other themed entertainment like theme parks and themed restaurants which are precursors to escape room games. In regular escape room games for example, black light is often used as a prop to solve puzzles. However, if the theme of the room is for example ancient Greece, modern electronics and props like that can feel out of place and break immersion to the game.

²⁰¹ Nicholson 2016, 3.

²⁰² Low & Elumir 2017, 1-6.

²⁰³ According to narratologists, games should be used primarily as a device for storytelling, whereas according to ludologists, the focus should be in games as a set of play engines and mechanisms and stories should be secondary.

²⁰⁴ Nicholson 2016, 3-4.

²⁰⁵ Storyline brainstorm-document for Spygame 6.7.2017.

²⁰⁶ Nicholson 2016, 4-5.

Nicholson states that looking at concepts such as the game world, setting or characters through the lens of environmental storytelling and answering the “Why?” is a good starting point at this type of design thinking. In contrary, approaching game design and the question “Why?” just from the perspective of wanting to fulfill genre expectation or because of unwritten rules of escape room game logic can lead to the game design being inconsistent or lack logic. Since completing challenges is the primary way of getting ahead in an escape room game, these challenges should be also incorporated in the game world consistently.²⁰⁷

We approached the development of Spygame from the perspective of combining interactive theater with elements of escape rooms, live action role-playing, themed entertainment and technical infrastructures of digital precursors such as TV game shows and movie-settings.

One of the clearest themed set design choices we made was the way we solved the dilemma of not wanting to have actors in the same room with the players all the time and yet, having communication that feels spy-like between the players and HQ²⁰⁸. At the beginning, the players are given a mission to



Image 2. After the players complete a mission to get to the backstage, the old radio on the table starts to make noise and HQ contacts the players through it. Image was taken by the researcher 20.6.2018.

²⁰⁷ Nicholson 2016, 5.

²⁰⁸ HQ is the head of the spy-organization which sends the players on an undercover-mission at the Royce club at the beginning of the game, but since the criminals there know his/her face, he cannot be inside there himself/herself.

trick the bartender-character, who is with them in the room to let them into a locked backstage area of the club.

Once the players get there and are alone, an old radio in the room starts making noise and HQ begins to talk to them through that, telling them that the spy-organization was able to hack the electronic system of the club partly and can communicate with the players through lights and one-way through the old radio, but he/she cannot see or hear them. Since it is a backstage area, there is a green and a red light next to the door as there would be in for example, a theater to indicate for the performers when to go on the stage, which answers to why those lights are there. This was a natural prop to use for yes and no-questions in communication: turning on the red light means no and turning on the green light means yes.

The puzzle designer, who was also in charge of the backend-technical infrastructure of the game, designed it so that the actor who plays HQ can turn those lights on and off from their technical interface easily. Once the players push a button, it stays on until the actor turns it off. This design choice was made to prevent the players from pushing the buttons recklessly and changing their minds; once yes or no is being pressed by players, it is the final answer and the storyline of the game moves forward taking that answer to account.

3.3.1. Influences from interactive graphic adventure game *Wolf Among Us*

The clearest digital game influencer for us was the game studio *Telltale games* and their game *Wolf Among Us* (2013), which is a single-player graphic adventure-game in which the players make tough choices throughout the game and the players get the experience of being able to influence the final outcome of the game through those choices. The experience we were looking to deliver for the players was that they would feel like their decisions have a real impact in the game world and that would ultimately get them more immersed in the game.

When developing *Spygame* and looking into the possibilities regarding branching narrative design in game in the brainstorming-stage, project manager organized a

game night for a group of 8 players on 30.7.2017 to play Wolf among us and observe how the players make decisions in a group when playing that game.²⁰⁹

This observation study that project manager conducted of decision-making when playing a game with branching narrative in a group led to a number of changes in game mechanics. The summary of things we should take to account when designing Spygame based on the test, which project manager emailed to the writer, puzzle designer and the composer after the test stated:

-It would be good to have a pre-set way of making decisions in quick-pace such as voting-system of options, otherwise we risk the loudest player calling all the shots

-There should be a pre-set combination of fast-pace and slow-pace decisions, for example fast-fast-fast-slow-slow-fast.

-Fast decisions need to be timed somehow (for example clock/hourglass/actors pressuring/music or sound effects/lights)

-The longer time there is to decide, the longer they also debate and disagree more/seemed less happy with the option they chose as a group. On the other hand, it is good to encourage healthy discussing and debate and "force" the players to communicate with each other from the social point of view/teambuilding-aspect of the game

-Avoiding red herrings is important, try to keep in mind that items have a meaning/possible use in game (sidenote: I really loved (the composer's) idea of having players choose some "spy-items" to help in game at the beginning and them later having possible use in some quests in game. This could also help teambuilding as they would need to decide say, 2-3 items out of possible 5 as a team)

-Some kind of a scoreboard of how big % of previous players have made similar decisions with your team is a nice add-on, which could be implemented in phase 2. For example, keeping a "scoreboard" on the website (would have to be somehow hidden though so that people who haven't played can't see the node points) or updating a physical one in here and showing it to players after the game. The players of Wolf among us seemed to be very interested in looking at this kind of a scoreboard after the game.²¹⁰

²⁰⁹ Wolf test-document, 30.7.2018.

²¹⁰ Email chain between project manager, composer, writer and puzzle designer 3.8.-4.8.2017.



Image 3. The countdown-timer players see and hear when they are required to make fast decisions. It was created by the composer of the production team. Image was taken by the researcher 20.6.2018.

According to the email discussion of the core development team after this summary, especially the observation that *“The longer time there is to decide, the longer they also debate and disagree more/seemed less happy with the option they chose as a group”* was seen as interesting. This later affected our design decision-making as we implemented visual and auditory timers of 15-60 seconds to some parts of the game where players are required to make decisions.

Creating pressure for the atmosphere and ultimately making people feel happier with the fast decisions they made were the reasons why we decided to implement the timer in the game when the players are asked to make decisions. We concluded that if they had unlimited amount of time to use to discuss about the decisions in game, they would likely end up being less engaged and immersion would suffer. The timer was done through projecting a countdown-clock that looked era-appropriate on the screen with a loud ticking-noise similar to a clock.

Good example of how the pressure element is visible with the timer within the game is a moral dilemma that was designed to evoke emotions in the players. Towards the end of the game, HQ tells the players that the spy-organization has captured a criminal who has vital intel and him and his family are being held captive. The players are told that the criminal is refusing to talk and give any intel on the operation. But he has the criminal’s kid as a hostage. HQ tells the players that he is certain the criminal would talk if he killed the child. His reasoning behind that is that if he kills the kid and they get

the needed information because of that, the child died for the greater good of stopping the Cold War so killing one person should not matter in comparison to killing thousands in war.

Interestingly, we did not implement a picture of a child to the first game testings. When the players were merely told that they need to kill a child to get the criminal to talk, they chose to kill the kid faster and more often than after we started showing the players a black and grey picture of a sad-looking child after they were asked to make this decision.

This part of the original script illustrates the pressuring tone in which the actor talks to the players throughout the game. In the role of Red/HQ, there is a lot of emphasis in voice acting:

HQ: We need a decryption key to be able to read the safe combination. Bad news: I don't have this decryption key. Good news: I do have an Atlas member that we've captured, under interrogation. He knows the decryption key, of course. But: he is refusing to say a word.



Image 4. Adding showing this picture of a child to the players altered their behavior; they were more likely to save the child and defy HQ's orders when they were shown a picture of the child when asked to make the decision. Image was taken by the researcher 20.6.2018.

Here's the ugly truth: he had his family with him. They are also in our custody. There's no doubt: if I go in there and kill his kid...

VIDEO A2S4: Image of kid

HQ: ...he will talk. Do you understand what I'm saying here?

(wait)

This needs to be your call. I'll give you a minute to decide. If you just press YES, I will make sure what needs to be done is done. I'll make sure he talks. Remember, "Always for the greater good." ²¹¹

At first, the players get a timer with 60 seconds to decide what to do. If they do not want to kill the kid, Red asks them to re-consider and they are given an extra 30 seconds to come back with an answer. If the players end up killing the child, the criminal talks and they receive an easier puzzle, making it more likely they finish the game faster and praise from Red for being good agents who are not afraid to get their hands dirty. If the players choose to spare the kid's life, Red becomes very displeased with them and instead beats up the thug. After this, the players receive a more difficult puzzle since the thug is only willing to give part of the encryption key this way.

The whole moral dilemma-scene of the game is similar to the classic *Milgram experiment* from the field of social psychology. It is one of the most famous studies of obedience in psychology and was carried out by Stanley Milgram in 1963 in Yale university. The aim of the study was to see how easily ordinary people could be influenced to committing atrocities such as what happened in world war two in Germany. According to the study, normal people are likely to follow orders given by an authority figure up to the extent of killing an innocent human. ²¹² In *Spygame*, that authority figure is HQ giving the players orders and suggesting killing the child.

From moral perspective, the ethics of deciding to implement a game task of deciding to end or save a child's life can be questioned. It can be argued that players are desensitized to violence like this in digital games as killing and/or injuring other characters in digital games is a rather normally occurring task and there are even game genres that largely revolve around that, such as first-person shooters²¹³.

Implementing such tasks in real-life games can be slightly different. We justified the design choice despite it being a rather brutal turn of events as it being fitting for the HQ's character and them turning into a more of an antagonist character after that point in the game. *Spygame* is also not targeted to children or youth as a game and the

²¹¹ TSYB v5.4 EN – manus-document.

²¹² McLeod 2007, 1-6.

²¹³ Digital game genre that is centered around weapon-based combat from a first-person perspective.

players are required to be 14 or older to be able to play. All the groups that play must also have at least one adult to sign a waiver before the game and take full responsibility of the potential underaged players.

3.4. Horizons of expectation of game testers in relation to history of escape games

According to Kultima, an experiential product must be developed through the iterative process of testing the game and tweaking it according to the findings from the testing. The creators experience their own artefact differently from the players. Asking the users directly what they expect from the game experience might not be that helpful since people do not always understand their own behavior and often disagree with each other. Player typologies, playtesting and user metrics can help the



Image 5. Having the game-venue in a historic building staged as a dark club is designed to meet the players' internal horizon of expectation regarding what an exclusive speakeasy-type of club for criminals in the 50s might have looked like. Image was taken by the researcher 20.6.2018.

designers, but when we create subjective experiences such as games, the designers cannot base all their decisions only on testing and metrics. The game is ultimately subjective piece of art and the science should not take the art away from the practice of game design.²¹⁴

²¹⁴ Kultima 2018, 51-75.

We conducted multiple game testings when developing Spygame and collected data from the testings through observation study, group interviews and anonymous online survey-feedback. In this chapter, I relate expectations of game testers to the history of escape games. These expectations came up during the game testings and we made some changes to the game according to the findings, but like Kultima suggests, not all the design choices or changes in the design were made purely based on the metrics collected from testing the game and there was room for artistic interpretation.

Since Spygame, like any other modern escape game, has been developed as a result of several cultural influences from precursors and the history of this kind of games, it is natural that the players would have certain expectations about what kind of game it should be. A cultural product like escape games are cannot escape its own history and the expectations consumers of that product, the players, have for the games. These expectations can be either based on having played similar games before and hence having an idea of “how the game is supposed to work” or to for example, the theme of the game and what kind of meanings are associated with that theme subjectively by each specific player.

This is one of the reasons why understanding the history of games is so important; to develop engaging and enjoyable games in the future, us developers can look into what has been done in the past and what kind of elements have been enjoyed and hence potentially expected from games now. Alternatively, we can of course aim on creating something entirely new and discard the past. However, odds are that the potential players of your game have been playing other similar games previously, liked them and that is what makes them interested in the game your game. Or they are a fan of TV shows like *Sherlock* or a certain type of movies, such as war movies. If you are making a promise to them that your game is built around a theme they know and have expectations of, steering the development off from meeting those expectations and not getting influences from those things will likely influence how much the players enjoy playing your game.

According to Adams, when the game is representational and takes place in an at least somewhat familiar game world, the player enters the game with certain hopes and expectations. These representational games are about fulfilling dreams about

achievement, of creation, of power, or of having certain experiences or doing certain things.²¹⁵

These expectations can be explained through *horizons of expectation*, which is part of literary history theory by Hans Robert Jauss. It refers to the way that a person understands, decodes and evaluates texts based on cultural conventions and rules that are specific for their time in history. The emphasis in horizons of expectation is on the receiver (the reader) as an important part of processing written language.²¹⁶

When we were testing Spygame, the expectations of the game testers regarding escape rooms became very obvious fast. Since the game was not strictly speaking an escape room despite having some tasks that could also be found in escape rooms like finding a key, the players who came into the testing and stated before the game that they had played escape rooms before and were expecting the game to be similar to that, were consistently the most disappointed with the experience. The players who had not played escape games before said before the game that they had either no special expectations or that they were expecting “something spy-like” like sneaking around, spying gadgets etc. things that they associated with what spying is to them.²¹⁷

Expectations from game testers who had played escape rooms before:

1) *Expecting to have more freedom inside the room* to just explore the space on their own rather than to follow a largely scripted story and being able to explore the space on their own in only certain parts of the script.²¹⁸ This expectation can come from the way modern escape rooms tend to be “open world” inside the room, like for example point-and-click adventure games and pervasive games like alternate reality games and puzzle-and treasure hunts out of the precursors.

2) *Expecting there to be consequences to their actions*; players seemed familiar with the branching storyline and their actions in the story to have consequences and were disappointed to find out that ultimately the decisions lead to similar outcomes. They had generally felt like their decisions matter within the game, which was the illusion we wanted to create despite their decisions ultimately leading to the same ending-

²¹⁵ Adams 2010, 47.

²¹⁶ Eds. Machor & Goldstein 2001, 7-13.

²¹⁷ Testing notes 14.9.-20.9.

²¹⁸ Game testing notes 14.9.-10.10.2017.

outcomes just through slightly different routes.²¹⁹ This expectation can come from for example, live action role-playing, point-and-click adventure games and adventure game show-precursors. In all these kinds of entertainment, there tends to be clear consequences to actions taken when participating in those said activities.

3) *Expecting more mathematical/logical puzzles* rather than completing tasks and having to interact with the actors and the space.²²⁰ Expectation to have more puzzles like these is aligned with what kind of puzzles most modern escape rooms have in them. The clearest precursor to have affected this expectation and why modern escape games have such math-orientated logical puzzles are puzzle- and treasure hunts. This kind of games have a long history of having mathematical/logical puzzles, good example of such a game with this kind of puzzles being MIT mystery hunt.

4) *Expecting the game-time to be cut short if they did not complete all the tasks in time and finish the game.* One of the important reasons to have the script and follow it was to ensure all groups would finish the game in roughly one hour no matter how they play. In any scenario, the actors would improv and carry the game to the finish rather than cut the game time short like a gamemaster usually does in a regular modern escape room if the players do not finish the game within the pre-set time.²²¹ The pre-set limited time expectation is likely to come from the more structured business-side of precursors such as team building activities, themed entertainment industry and interactive theater. All of these kinds of activities tend to have pre-set time limitations unlike for example, digital games; theater plays last for a certain pre-set time, you can book a ticket to participate in a themed entertainment-activity in a certain date and time and team building activities can be monitored and timed for research purposes.

After discovering all this, we made the conscious decision to try and alter the player's expectations through giving them more information before the game specifically about that this game is not strictly an escape room, but it also involves elements from for example, interactive theater. We aimed on doing this by referring to movies as entertainment as it became evident in the testings that our testers, who were representative of our target audience, had negative preconceptions regarding

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Ibid.

interactive theater and role-playing. A direct quote from a game tester from testing notes on 20.9. states: *"I would be repelled by ads saying "interactive theatre" or implying that it is interactive and there are actors but now that I came here without knowing it and was told that it is that way right before the game (Project manager told that this is a game test and it is rather a "become a hero in your own life's movie"-kind of thing than a conventional escape room), it was actually fun and not that bad even for an introverted person like me".* ²²²

3.5. How Spygame relates to the history of escape rooms

Spygame, like other modern escape games, is a product that has evolved from a number of precursors that have left their marks, which can still be seen in these games. In this chapter, I relate the precursors from chapter two to Spygame and draw links between the history and the present of this game genre through using the production of Spygame as an example.

3.5.1. Live action role-playing

The basic idea of a live action role-playing game such as True Dungeon (2003) is very similar to the work we did in Spygame. In True Dungeon, the players were in character when playing, like in regular larps, and they were able to fight monsters by using a shuffleboard-system unlike in normal live-action combat larp-games. The biggest difference between larping and playing Spygame is that in Spygame, the players are not necessarily "forced" to adapt a role of any sort. They rather get suggested that they could adapt a role *if* they want to. In actual larp-games, a big part of the game often revolves around the players getting into character of their roles within the game. We also did not use a shuffleboard-battle system, but rather let the players create their own path by yes/no/maybe-type of choices made within the game.

3.5.2. Interactive theater

From the start, Spygame's production was very influenced by interactive theater on top of the general escape room-influences from the production team's previous experience and expertise. The game has two actors who play different roles each while interacting with the players with the aim of immersing them into the game world.

²²² Test1 on 20.9.2017-document.

However, we did not want to label the game as either escape room or interactive theater as neither seemed to quite fit the gameplay precisely. We were also trying to be cautious of not evoking false hopes and images for potential players on what the game is like. Later, this proved to be tricky from marketing point of view, as finding the correct words to reach our target audiences, describing the game accurately and not scaring any potential players away ended up being tough.

Similarly, to the mystery of *Edwin Drood* (1985) by Charles Dickens, we originally wanted *Spygame* to have several different endings depending on the players' interaction with the actors during the game. However, as the design evolved, we became aware of how difficult it was for the two actors to maintain several different scenarios at once. Hence, we changed this idea to the final outcome always being the same. Despite this, we created an illusion of having a choice and power to affect the outcome to the players. This was done mainly through providing them with options that have seemingly different outcomes but writing the story so that it would eventually circulate back to the same final ending of the game regardless of their decisions. In short, the players can take a few detours that affect variables such as how the in-game characters relate to them, but ultimately all those decisions lead to the same ending.

3.5.3. Themed entertainment

The setting of *Spygame* is revolving entirely around the theme of spies in early Cold War historical era in the 1950s. All the props, costumes and images used both in-game as well as in marketing of the game to start creating that immersion to this theme take inspiration from the theme. *Spygame* is set in a 50s exclusive club where the underworld scum gathers to plot for war. The building where the physical game is set up is the old Gestapo-headquarters of Bergen, Norway, making it a prime-location for a spy/war-themed game.²²³ However, a lot of people here do not know the history of the building and we wanted to stay away from the Nazis in the theme consciously as we felt it is slightly inappropriate to just use as "a prop" in a commercial entertainment game. Had we chosen to do that instead of a fictional criminal organization, I believe we would have had to be very historically accurate and aim on creating a more

²²³ Rydland.2015, <https://www.nrk.no>.

educational game rather than pure entertainment/the focus being on the players as spies and their experience.

People have certain expectations regarding what certain themes should include based on their previous experiences and for example, interaction with popular culture products such as TV shows and movies. Bending these rules creatively is acceptable, but the storytelling within the game should be consistent with the rules of how certain items for example work and what type of music do people associate with certain themes and events within that theme's world.

On top of putting in a lot of effort to making Spygame's props look and feel correct for the theme, we also worked together with a theater set designer to consult on lighting and details of the setting. To develop the atmosphere further, the composer also created and recorded a full 8 tracks long original score²²⁴ for the game to perfectly fit to each part of the game and the feelings we wanted the players to experience in different parts of the game.

At one point of the design process, we even discussed having essential oil diffuser in the room to have some era-appropriate smell in the room but concluded that some players might be put off by any unusual smells or get migraine because of it, so we dropped the idea. All these design choices we made were based on how they would fit in the themed experience to enhance the players' immersion to our game.

3.5.4. Themed restaurants

The whole setting of Spygame is a club/restaurant called The Royce Club with a bar counter, restaurant tables, a custom-built big stage and one of the main characters the players interact with being a bartender. We were discussing the possibilities of partnering with a restaurant and getting the bar functioning with an alcohol license when developing the game but determined that for opening of the game and the first stages after that, it was not necessary. There were also potential issues with that idea with for example, too intoxicated players and having to hire security, if we were to serve alcohol during the game, which we wanted to knowingly avoid.

²²⁴ Soundcloud - The Spy You'll Become score, <https://soundcloud.com/rodneill/>.

From themed restaurants influence in escape games in general such as franchising business model, Spygame was not designed with the mindset of building the game as easily moveable to other locations/for franchising. This varies a lot in different escape game companies, but we treated the whole design process and the game as something unique and custom-made to this particular venue we built the game in. The building and the history of this particular building was a big inspiration for us and hence it would require a similar location to work well.

3.5.5. Team building activities

When developing Spygame, we were very conscious about involving all the players throughout the game experience and having the players immersed in the game through different roles they could adapt to within the game world. We were also consciously developing the game for bigger than usual escape game groups of two to ten as the space where the game takes place in is much larger than a regular escape game would be.

For example, one task at the beginning of the game is for the team to pick “communicators” who are tasked with maintaining communication between the character Red/HQ and the team through the radio-and lights system described earlier. It is not a coincidence who is using these commands and taking charge. We wanted to encourage the players to choose a person from within the group to take on this task in a bid to avoid accidentally forcing someone very uncomfortable with taking a more active leader role in a group setting to get assigned to be a communicator. When we were testing the game, most of the groups chose the communicator by someone volunteering and the other members of the group pushing for a specific person of the group to take that role. In case nobody would volunteer, the actor would just randomly assign two people to this task. It was also a conscious design choice to have two communicators instead of one so that the task would feel less terrifying/pressuring to be the only one given that special task even if a more introverted person was to get assigned to it.

We were very cautious about the audience we were designing the game for as the company is based in Norway. When making decisions regarding the design and different roles of the players within the team, we wanted to pay special attention on

taking different kinds of people to account. As Spygame's production was heavily influenced by interactive theater and involves actors, we were worried that more introverted players would feel threatened, withdraw and not enjoy the game. This perception we had was based largely on stereotypes of the Norwegian audience and how they would react to being asked to take an active role in the game; the social culture here can be easily seen as quite introverted and closed.

A good example of how the fact we kept this in mind when designing the game can be seen in Spygame is a scene where the players are challenged to lie their way into the backstage area of the club. They have been told by Red that they have to get there and proposed that they could tell Harley the bartender that they are performers of some sort and need to see the backstage because they have a performance coming up in the venue soon. When the players tell this to Harley, he/she does not believe them and instead, asks the players to prove it by giving him/her a performance on the stage.

When designing the game, we were quite worried of this part going terribly wrong easily and it being difficult to get the players to engage. However, our worries were proven wrong in the game testings; we had instructed Harley's actor to adjust the role and how hard to push the players based on their subjective evaluation on who is taking a more active role or is anyone doing so. Harley would never force anyone on stage or drag the introverted seeming people on limelight against their will. This part of the game was consistently mentioned as one of the most memorable and fun parts of the game throughout the testings and even though some people mentioned it as "slightly uncomfortable", they also stated that it was a positive experience to be pushed out of the comfort zone and made them feel more involved in the game. ²²⁵

3.5.6. Pervasive games

The basic idea behind the assassination-game Killer (1953) of the players being undercover assassins who are assigned a specific mission when the game begins is exactly the same as what we had in Spygame. When the players arrive to the set of Spygame, the very first thing that happens is that they are assigned roles of being undercover agents sent on a field mission inside a notorious mafia club to gather information to prevent the Cold War from escalating. Although they are not directly

²²⁵ Testing notes 14.9.-20.9.

told the try and assassinate a target inside the club, they receive and are expected to adapt this assigned role which involves their played character being undercover in the game just like in Killer. The goal of blurring the lines between what is the game and what is “real” and aiming for a full immersion is similar with pervasive games in general and Spygame.

3.5.7. Treasure-and puzzle hunts

We were originally contemplating on implementing a game feature like geocaching in Spygame through starting the game by sending the players an email with coordinates to a location. In this location which would have likely been a hotel close to the main game location, they would have been asked to pick up a suitcase with spy equipment and a clue to the main game location. However, we deemed this idea too impractical to scale if or when we want to scale the game bigger in the future and difficult to communicate to inexperienced players effectively.²²⁶

The basic game mechanics-idea of asking the players to search an area to find something is familiar from letterboxing and geocaching. One task of Spygame is to find the key to turn on a wooden Rolls Royce-car to distract Harley the bartender. HQ tells the players to search for a hidden key inside the room while part of the group is given a task to distract Harley so that he/she would not notice that they players are actively looking for something in the room. We made this choice in order to create atmosphere fitting with the mental image of what spying is; the players get to sneak around behind a character’s back to look for a secret key.

The key itself is hidden behind a secret hatch on the stage in a box with a picture of Rolls Royce. If the players fail in finding the key fast enough for the story to move forward within the set timeframe, HQ provides them with an additional hint to “search the front of the stage”. This task is very closely related to puzzle- and treasure hunts.

3.5.8. Alternate reality games

Alternate reality games have the same basic principle of aiming for immersion in a real-life game like in escape rooms. ARGs tend to use an array of transmedia communication platforms to do this, which is something a lot of escape games

²²⁶ Spygame meeting notes 7.8.2017.

especially in generations III and IV tend to do as well. In Spygame for example, we used interactive video communication to move the story forward; depending on the players' choices in the game, different videos get shown. When designing Spygame, we wanted the players to immerse themselves into the game through game design choices like using interaction between the characters in the game and the players and using videos that respond to the players' choices. These elements can also be found in ARG games.

3.5.9. TV and movies

Movies and TV shows were in a role of influencing our ideas of things such as what the props and the set should look like as well as how we directed the actors to move and talk in certain ways based on inspiration from old spy movies. This all plays on the horizons of expectation we were expecting the players to have about what being a spy should be like as it was fair to assume popular culture like this has influenced their perception of spies and hence their horizon of expectation on a spy-related game.

3.5.10. Point-and-click adventure games and digital escape-the-room games

The yes/no/maybe-choices given to the players were heavily influenced by digital precursors of escape games. For example, early text-based adventure games relied on the players typing simple commands to the game to for example, go left/right, pick an item up yes/no. This was a knowingly made design choice we wanted to implement in Spygame since it fit well with the branching storyline narrative we were inspired to create largely because of the core development team's experiences in playing video games with such narrative design. This inspiration is discussed further in chapter 3.3.1. *Influences from interactive graphic adventure game Wolf Among Us.*

In larger scale, the game setting of having players inside a confined space and instructing them to search the area to find more clues and/or useful items has not changed from digital point-and-click adventure games and escape-the-room games such as Crimson Room. In Spygame, the players are instructed and encouraged to explore the space they are locked inside of to find items and clues.

Unlike in regular escape rooms where the locked room is usually an open world that players can explore and interact with without being interrupted, in Spygame, the game follows a specific script and players are only allowed to explore the space freely at certain times of the game. Not having the space open at all times was a game design

decision based on the branching storyline, time limitation and the space being larger than in normal escape room. Unlike in a conventional escape game, we wanted all players to win the game by successfully ending the escalation of the Cold War.

Point-and-click adventure games or early escape-the-room games did not have a set time limit to play like real world modern escape games do. Even the modern digital escape games tend not to have a time limit. This is likely mostly due to the limitation having a game take place in real world sets for the design; a digital game can be paused, and the player can get back to it later. In a real-world game, designers face a challenge of engaging the players, keeping them interested and immersed and creating excitement through making the players feel like they succeed and achieve something always throughout the intense game experience, which cannot be paused and returned to later to continue from exactly the same point in game as other people will have played the same game in the same space in between.

Spygame is a good example to illustrate the different ways various precursors of escape games can affect modern escape games because of Spygame's versatility. However, Spygame is not necessarily a representative example of what an average modern escape game is like in 2018 and it is not trying to be that. For example, it is not massively common for regular escape games to lean this heavily towards influences from interactive theater. Despite this, other elements of the game such as completing series of tasks and puzzles in a confined space within a pre-set time in a themed environment place it to the spectrum of modern escape games.

4. Conclusion

The research questions of this thesis were

- 1) *What cultural phenomena has affected the evolution of escape game genre and how can these influences be seen in modern escape games?*

And

- 2) *How does the production of Spygame relate to the history of the escape game genre?*

As demonstrated in this timeline about the history of escape games, multiple different forms of entertainment and games have played part in and given influences on the evolution of what we now perceive as modern escape games in 2018. The

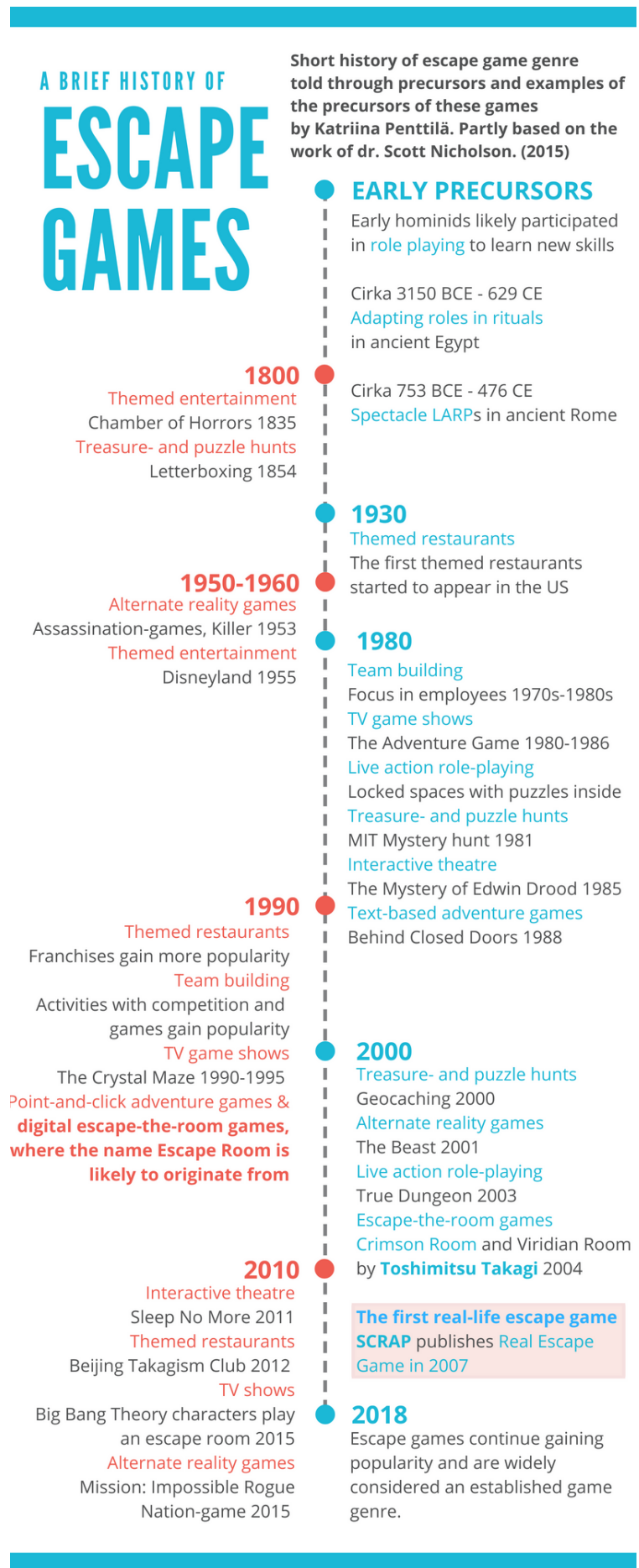


Figure 3. Timeline of the history of escape rooms

precursors of escape games have been both digital and real life and modern escape games can also be found in both real life-and digital forms.

The escape game precursors covered in this thesis include live-action role-playing, point-and click adventures, puzzle- and treasure hunts, interactive theater and haunted houses, adventure game shows and themed entertainment industry. These were all based on Dr. Scott Nicholson's paper *Peeking behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities* (2015). Pervasive games, alternate reality games, team building activities and themed restaurants are my additions to Nicholson's suggested precursors.

I define modern escape games as escape games that have been published after 2007 when SCRAP first published what is widely considered the first well documented escape game called Real Escape Game. Modern escape games can be categorized into different generations based mainly on their use of technology and how advanced the setting of the game is; Generation I (late 2000s-early 2010s), Generation II (early 2010s-now), Generation III (mid 2010s-now) and Generation IV, which is an anticipated next step in the evolution of escape games.

In a basic real life modern escape game, a group usually varying from two to ten players is locked inside a confined space for a pre-set amount of time which is often 60 minutes. They have to solve a series of puzzles, riddles and find keys and other items to locks in order to accomplish a mission, which is normally to escape from the room, and thus win the game. The game is monitored and guidance, hints etc. are provided by an employee of the escape game facility, and this employee is referred to as the gamemaster. There are different creative variations of this foundation of the game and the objective can be something else than to escape from a room.

Digital modern escape games also tend to follow the idea of being confined in a space, where you need to solve riddles, puzzles and find items such as keys to escape and win the game. The difference between the digital and the real life is that the digital games are normally single-player first person perspective games, they have no set time limit to complete the mission and gamemaster is replaced with set of hints that the players can use if they so wish or there is no hinting system.

The influence of live action role-playing and interactive theater can be seen especially in the varying use of actors in some of the modern escape games and in a number of games, such as Spygame, being quite story-driven with a scripted narrative. Despite the most common group size of these games varying from two to ten players, some of the modern escape games can accommodate even hundreds of players at once, which can also be seen as similar to live action role-playing, where the number of participants can be very big. The big group sizes and real-life escape games normally being team-based has also likely been influenced by the rise of team building activities. Having a group of people in a confined, monitored space where the participants complete tasks and puzzles, is a great setting to learn about people's behavior from employer's point of view and to bond over succeeding together in a game from employee's point of view.

Legacy of pervasive games such as alternate reality games and treasure- and puzzle hunts can be seen in the way escape game designers often aim on blurring the lines between the real world and the game. Some of the modern escape games use transmedia communications in their design such as mixing multimedia elements to their real-world games and aiming for providing fully immersive experiences to the players, which is all similar to pervasive games. Alternate reality games have also been used in marketing since the early 2000s, in a similar way pop up escape games are used as a marketing tool in late 2010s.

The basic game mechanic of being instructed to navigate your way to a certain place in order to find something based on hints given to you is familiar from treasure-and puzzle hunts such as letterboxing and geocaching. The difference being that those are both open world games whereas in escape games, that same activity of searching for something based on hints you have found and/or are given is happening inside a confined space and within a limited amount of time.

Themed entertainment-industry including themed restaurants and haunted houses, has left its mark on modern escape games especially through making general public familiar with the idea of participating in different activities in real-world themed environments. From escape game developers and -owners point of view, themed entertainment industry has also proven that this kind of entertainment can be a viable business. Franchising, which seems to be an increasingly popular business model in

modern escape game companies, has been used in themed entertainment and especially in themed restaurant-business for a long time, where it has been proven effective.

Out of the digital precursors of escape games, point-and-click adventure games and escape-the-room games such as *Crimson Room* (2004) by Toshimitsu Takagi, have been the most influential as the games require logical thinking, solving puzzles and exploring the game world. Digital modern escape games have been experimenting with technologies such as augmented-and virtual reality and continue developing as mostly single-player games that are played from first-person perspective, like these precursors. I argue that the digital escape-the-room games are also the likely origin of why the name of this modern game genre formed to be escape games.

Other digital precursors, TV game shows and movies, have been mostly in the role of influencing and shaping the horizons of expectation regarding what the players and the developers expect games with different themes to have in them. They can be seen as influential for inspiration to different themes, puzzles and tasks in escape games.

Spygame relates to the history of escape game genre through all the precursors covered in this thesis in different ways. The most important influencers to the production of Spygame were interactive theater through the use of actors and creating a theater play-like script to the game as well as point-and-click adventure games which can be seen in asking the players to explore the space to find items and the use of yes/no-type of questions in moving the narrative of Spygame forward. In Spygame, the players can adapt different roles like in live action role-playing and it can be played by up to 12 people simultaneously and people are encouraged to engage in teamwork, making it a good team building activity.

When developing Spygame, we were very mindful about crafting the game to fit the theme of 50s spies from the custom-made background music-soundtrack to the setting and props, like in any good-quality themed entertainment. Pervasive games such as alternate reality games and treasure-and puzzle hunts' influence can be seen in our conscious goal of creating a game that the players would immerse into and thus blur and expand the lines of the magic circle. Movies and TV series provided a lot of

inspiration to how to create suitable atmosphere around the theme and what kind of puzzles and tasks would be seen as “spy-like”.

As illustrated through the case example of Spygame in this thesis, both our players and us developers have pre-existing expectations regarding what escape games are. Those horizons of expectation are closely tied with the history of this genre of games. In the end, us game developers are in the industry of creating and selling exciting experiences for people, and making these games is a creative job. Hence, modern escape games vary in style, use of narrative, puzzles and tasks as developers take the elements of escape games and input their own ideas mixed with their subjective perception of what these games should be like. Those ideas and expectations come from both conscious and unconscious influences from what different people know and associate with escape rooms.

The focus of this thesis was to collect and organize previously scattered information regarding the history of escape games in order to construct and preserve a coherent image of how this young game genre came to be, what modern escape games are like, and how do they relate to their history. Some areas in need of more careful preserving and future research regarding these topics include charting how many escape games are there worldwide and what kind of games are they as that information remains fragmented and constantly changing.

The culture around escape games is fairly young despite the roots of some of the precursors extending far back in time. As a young game genre, it is important to document and preserve the culture as it is happening so that it would not be forgotten, and future game designers would have a chance to learn from the past. As I built this research partly on Nicholson’s paper regarding precursors of escape rooms, I believe there is plenty of room for other researchers to build on this thesis and continue preserving the culture around these games in the future.

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All pictures taken from Spygame were taken by the researcher 20.6.2018.

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- 12 files about the script of the game and the different versions of that between the first version and the last version which got launched.
- 15 meeting notes considering the game development.
- A collection of plans and schedules regarding the game development.
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Appendices

(1/2) Game test-template

Testable combinations:

- Individual: A, H, J
- Individual game tasks (with preceding info)
- AB
- CD
- ABCD
- A-H
- JK
- A-P (full game)

A. OUT-OF-CHARACTER BRIEFING

1. Retention: What information do they remember?
-The cold
2. What kind of questions did they ask? (I.e. what information did they feel they didn't get ahead of time?)

B. VIDEO

1. Retention: What information do they remember?

C. Harley AND Red IN ROOM. STORY EXPO

D. Harley OUT OF ROOM. STORY EXPO.

Convince Harley

1. Retention: What information do they remember?
2. How did the players react when told that they should present themselves as actors?
3. How long did it take before the players got up and start interacting with Harley? Did they require further prodding?
4. How did the players respond to the challenge of their acting skills?
5. How high was the level of discomfort before they started? How did they feel afterwards?

E. TV IS ON. STORY EXPO.

F. INTRO TO GREEN/RED BUTTON

G. Red ON RADIO. STORY EXPO.

Use yes/no with simple task

1. Did the players follow the instructions

2. Was the yes/no representation understood by the players?
3. How did the players receive the task of finding out the name of the organization?
4. Retention: did the players understand why it was important to find out which organization had its base here?

H. Red GIVES INFO ABOUT CRIME ORGANIZATION "ATLAS"

1. Retention: What information do they remember?

I. Harley ASKS FOR SMALL FAVOR

Small task from Harley

To all:

1. How did they react to Harley knocking/asking?

Those who chose not to help:

1. How many players refused to open the door at all?
2. How many refused to help?
3. How many gave a half-hearted response?
4. Why did they choose this?

Those who chose to help:

1. Why did they choose to help Harley?
2. Did they feel that they lost track of the main mission at hand?

J. Red INTERROGATES. MORAL DILEMMA.

Players resolve moral dilemma

Find Atlas' codeword

1. Retention: what information do players remember?
2. Did they relate to the moral dilemma at all?
3. How many chose to kill? How many needed extra convincing, but then chose to kill? How many refused entirely?
4. How did players respond to receiving the Enigma-encoded message?
5. How sure were the players about what they needed to do next?
6. How did they choose to distract Harley?
7. How did they respond to the trap door opening?
8. How did they respond to the task of decoding the message?
9. Did they understand how to use the Enigma, with the instructions given?

Gain Harley's trust

K. Harley TRUSTS THEM.

1. Retention: What information do they remember?

L. MAYDAY MESSAGE FROM Red.

Players find safe combination

Players transmit info to Red

M. Red USES INFO.

N. TV SHOWS TIDE OF DESTRUCTION TURNING.

1. Retention: What information do they remember?
2. How did the players respond to the task that led to them getting the combination?
3. How well did they understand the method of transmitting the combination?
4. How many players entered the wrong combination on purpose?
5. Did they feel a sense of "winning" the game at this point?

O. Red EXPLAINS FINAL TASK.

Decode hit list

P. Red TELLS THAT THEY NEED TO BE SACRIFICED.

To all:

1. Did players need prodding to continue decoding the rest of the document?
2. How did they react to discovering their own names?
3. Did the ending make sense to the players?
4. Retention: What information do they remember?
5. How did the players react to the ending?
6. How many remembered the mayday message that came a few minutes earlier, and made the connection?

To those killed at the end:

1. How many of these felt like they "lost" the game?
2. Would they have felt the ending was stronger/weaker if they had been saved by Harley at the end?
3. How did they respond to the idea that if they had helped Harley, Harley would have saved them?

To those not killed at the end:

1. How did they feel about finding Harley's dead body on the stage?
2. Would they have felt the ending was stronger/weaker if they had indeed died?

(2/2) Abstract in Finnish

Suomenkielinen lyhennelmä Katriina Penttilän History of escape games examined through real-life-and digital precursors and the production of Spygame pro gradu - tutkielmasta

Pro gradu -tutkielmani keskiössä on modernien pakopelien historian tarkasteleminen pohjautuen peligenren oikean elämän- sekä digitaalisiin edeltäjiin. Tämän lisäksi dokumentoin työssäni, millainen pakopeli-ilmiö on 2010-luvun loppupuolella, noin kymmenen vuotta sen jälkeen, kun tämän kaltaisia pelejä alkoi ensimmäisen kerran ilmestyä markkinoille. Tutkimukseni perustuu laajasti aikaisempaan pelitutkimukseen ja etenkin tohtori Scott Nicholsonin työhön pakopelien parissa. Tähtään työssäni rakentamaan aikaisempaa tutkimusta laajemman ja yksityiskohtaisemman kuvauksen pakopelien historiasta ja luomaan selkeitä yhteyksiä näiden pelien edeltäjien ja nykyisten pelien välille konkreettisten esimerkkien kautta.

Tärkein yksittäinen aikaisempi tutkimus, johon viittaaan historian tutkimuksessani on Scott Nicholsonin tutkimusartikkeli *Peeking behind the locked door: A survey of escape room facilities* (2015). Muuhun tutkimuskirjallisuuteen sisältyvät esimerkiksi Ernest Adamsin *Fundamentals of Game Design* (2010) ja Jesse Schellin *The art of game design; A book of lenses* (2008). Tutkimusta tehdessäni kävi ilmi, että pakopeleistä ei ole olemassa sanottavasti aikaisempaa akateemista tutkimusta. Tästä johtuen suuri osuus lähteistä koostuu esimerkiksi pakopeleihin liittyvistä verkkosivuista, -artikkeleista ja -videoista, joita analysoin kerätessäni tietoa kyseisistä peleistä.

Käsittelen pakohuonepelien edeltäjiä erityisesti luvussa kaksi ja sitoutan historian nykyhetkeen luvussa kolme esimerkkitapauksen kautta. Käytän esimerkkinä Spygame-peliä, jonka pelikehityksen projektipäällikkönä työskentelin vuonna 2017. Spygame-peliä voi luonnehtia yhdistelmänä erityisesti interaktiivista teatteria ja pakopelejä, mutta esittelen työssäni yhtymäkohtia myös muihin pakopelien edeltäjiin interaktiivisen teatterin lisäksi. Spygamessa pelaajien täytyy pyrkiä estämään kylmän sodan eskaloituminen rajatussa ajassa määritellyn tilan puitteissa tehden yhteistyötä

toistensa kanssa. He selvittävät pelin aikana sarjan tehtäviä ja arvoituksia vuorovaikutuksessa näyttelijöiden esittämien hahmojen kanssa.

Varsinaiset pro gradu -tutkielmani tutkimuskysymykset ovat Mitkä kulttuuriset ilmiöt ovat vaikuttaneet pakopeli-genren kehitykseen ja miten nämä vaikutteet ovat nähtävissä moderneissa pakopeleissä? sekä Miten Spygame-pelin tuotanto suhteutuu pakopeli-genren historiaan?

Työskennellessäni Spygame-pelin parissa, varasin työ sopimuksessani oikeudet käyttää pelin kehityksestä syntynyttä materiaalia parhaaksi katsomallani tavalla myöhemmin tutkimustarkoituksiin. Otin tutkimuseettisen näkökulman huomioon kerätessäni aineistoa pelin kehityksestä ja pidin huolen siitä, että pelin kehitykseen osallistuneet henkilöt, sekä pelin testaamiseen osallistuneet henkilöt olivat kaikki tietoisia siitä, että kerään kehityksestä aineistoa tutkimustarkoituksiin. Annoin heille myös mahdollisuuden halutessaan kieltäytyä käyttämästä heihin mitenkään liittyvää materiaalia tutkimustarkoituksiin ja tein päätöksen puhua kaikista kehitykseen liittyvistä henkilöistä anonymisti viitaten vain ”testaajiin” tai pelikehityksessä mukana olleisiin henkilöihin heidän epävirallisilla työnimikkeillään. Yksikään henkilö ei kieltänyt käyttämästä heihin liittyvää materiaalia tutkimuksessa.

Oma tutkijapositioni suhteessa tutkimuksen aiheeseen on monijakoinen ja tarkastelen aihetta niin tutkijana, kuin pakopelialan työntekijänä ja pelaajana. Olen työskennellyt vuosia kulttuurialalla erityisesti erilaisissa peli- ja tapahtumatuotannoissa, ja erityisesti pakopelien parissa niin pelien kehityksessä, -markkinoinnissa, kuin -asiakaspalvelussakin ja pelannut itse useampia pakopelejä. En pyri varsinaisesti täysin objektiiviseen tutkijapositioniin, vaan käytän tietoisesti hyödyksi tutkimuksessani paljon omaa alan asiantuntemustani ja kontaktejani.

Pakopeleistä käytetään yleisesti myös nimityksiä pakohuonepelit ja huonepakopelit. Kotimaisten kielten keskus lisäsi vuonna 2015 sanastoon virallisena uudissanana. Heidän määritelmänsä mukaan pakopeli, pakohuonepeli tai huonepakopeli on ”*elämyspeli, jossa joukko ihmisiä suljetaan pieneen tilaan, josta he yrittävät päättelykyvyn ja yhteistyön avulla päästä määrääjassa ulos*”. (Kotus 2015.)

Kaikki moderneiksi pakopeleiksi määriteltävissä olevat pelit eivät kuitenkaan välttämättä sijoitu huoneen sisälle tai pelin voittamista varten pelaajilta ei vaadita

suljetusta tilasta ulos pääsemistä. Pakopelien yhdistäviä ja määrittäviä tekijöitä ovat annetun tehtävän (yleensä huoneesta ulos pääseminen) ratkaiseminen ennalta määritellyssä ajassa (yleensä yksi tunti) joukkueessa (yleensä kahdesta kymmeneen henkilöä) ratkaisten ja suorittaen erilaisia tehtäviä ja arvoituksia ja käyttäen erilaisia tilassa olevia esineitä, kuten avaimia. Oikean elämän pakopeliä valvoo yleensä *gamemasteriksi* kutsuttu pelin omistavan yrityksen työntekijä, jonka tehtävänä on ottaa pelaajat vastaan ennen peliä, ohjeistaa heidät pelin säännöistä, valvoa ja tarvittaessa auttaa pelin aikana, ja pelin lopuksi antaa palautetta ja/tai päästää pelaajat ulos tilasta.

Koska pakopelit eivät välttämättä sijoitu huoneeseen, josta täytyy päästä ulos, vaan tilana voi myös toimia esimerkiksi hylätty suuri vankila tai rajattu metsäalue, näen pakopelit kattoterminä, joka käsittää eri variaatioita tämän tyyppisistä peleistä, ja pakohuonepelit tai huonepakopelit nimenomaan suljettuihin huoneisiin sijoittuvina versioina näistä peleistä. Pakopelit, huonepakopelit ja pakohuonepelit ovat kuitenkin yleisessä käytössä vakiintuneita termejä, joita käytetään kuvaamaan tämän tyyppisiä pelejä, joten tein päätöksen käyttää työssäni kaikkia näitä variaatioita käsitellessäni tätä peligenreä.

Nicholsonin aikaisempi pakohuonepelien tutkimus käsittää lähinnä oikean elämän pakohuonepelit, mutta laajennan työssäni määritelmän koskemaan myös digitaalisia versioita pakopeleistä. Koin tärkeäksi sisällyttää digitaaliset pakopelikulttuurin ilmentymät työhöni, sillä yksi tutkimuksen tärkeimmistä funktioista oli dokumentoida, millaista moderni pakopelikulttuuri on, ja digitaaliset pelit, kuten virtuaalitodellisuutta hyödyntävät pelit ja mobiilipelit ovat tärkeä osa tätä kokonaisuutta. Suurin ero digitaalisten pakopelien ja oikean elämän pakopelien välillä on, että digitaaliset pelit ovat yleensä ensimmäisen persoonan näkökulmasta pelattavia yksilöpelejä, joissa ei ole aikarajaa vaan pelin voi keskeyttää ja palata sen pariin myöhemmin jatkaen siitä, mihin kohtaan jäi. Oikean elämän pakopeleissä pelaaminen joukkueessa ja pelistä selviytyminen ennalta määritellyssä ajassa ovat tärkeä osa peliä.

Määritelmäni mukaan modernien pakopelien aika alkaa vuonna 2007, kun japanilainen SCRAP-peliyhtiö julkaisi ensimmäisen laajasti dokumentoidun pelinsä nimeltä Real Escape Game. Aasiasta pakopelit levisivät ensin Eurooppaan ja sieltä Amerikkaan, Australiaan, Kanadaan ja muualle maailmaan. Euroopassa etenkin Unkarista

muodostui 2000-luvun lopulla tärkeä pakohuonepelikulttuurin kiintopiste. (Nicholson 2015, 1-12.) Modernit pakohuonepelit voidaan jakaa neljään eri sukupolveen pohjautuen lähinnä niissä käytettyyn teknologiaan. Tämä pakopelien sukupolvijaottelu on yleisesti käytössä etenkin pelien harrastajien ja -omistajien keskuudessa ja se sai todennäköisesti alkunsa pelien omistajien ja pelikehittäjien tarpeesta jaotella pelejä, jotta omistajien olisi mahdollista tietää millaisia teknisiä taitoja pelien ylläpitämiseen ja huoltamiseen vaaditaan. Sukupolvi I (myöhäinen 2000-luku - aikainen 2010-luku) ja sukupolvi II (aikainen 2010-luku - nykyhetki) sisältävät vähiten teknologiaa ja eniten analogisia lukkoja, ja niitä on mahdollista huoltaa ja ylläpitää ilman sanottavia teknologisia valmiuksia. Sukupolvet III (2010-luvun puoliväli – nykyhetki) ja IV (nykyhetki) sisältävät eniten teknologisia laitteita ja vaativat omistajilta parempia teknologisia valmiuksia pelien ylläpitoon. (Pleskacz 2017.)

Tutkielmassa käsittelemäni pakopelien edeltäjät pitävät sisällään oikean elämän roolipelaamisen, digitaaliset osoita ja klikkaa-seikkailupelit, arvoitus- ja aarteenetsintäpelit, interaktiivisen teatterin ja kummitustalot, televisioidut seikkailupeliohjelmat, sekä teemoitetun viihteen. Nämä pakopelien edeltäjät pohjautuvat Nicholsonin aikaisempaan tutkimukseen *Peeking behind the Locked Door: A Survey of Escape Room Facilities* (2015), jossa hän toteutti kyselytutkimuksen pakohuonepelirytysten omistajille maailman laajuisesti, ja kysyi mistä inspiraatio heidän peleihinsä oli lähtöisin. Nicholsonin kyselyyn vastasi kaikkiaan 175 omistajaa, joista 52% oli Euroopasta, 25% Pohjois-Amerikasta, 10% Aasiasta ja loput 13% muualta, kuten Australiasta ja Etelä-Amerikasta. Lisäsin työssäni Nicholsonin esittämiin pakopelien edeltäjiin myös pervasiiviset pelit, vaihtoehtoisen todellisuuden pelit, team building-aktiviteetit, sekä teema ravintolat.

Oikean elämän roolipelaamisen vaikutteet moderneissa pakopeleissä näkyvät etenkin vaihtelevassa näyttelijöiden hyödyntämisessä pelin tarinankerronnassa. Esimerkiksi Spygame-pelissä näyttelijöillä on tarinankerronnan kannalta suuri rooli. Huolimatta yleisempien oikean elämän pakopelien kahdesta kymmeneen henkeen vaihtelevasta ryhmäkoosta, jotkin moderneista pakopeleistä voivat tarjota pelielämyksiä jopa kymmenille tai sadoille pelaajille kerralla. Massiiviset pelaajaryhmät voidaan nähdä osana jatkumoa niin roolipelaamisesta, kuin team building-aktiviteeteista ja pakopelejä käytetäänkin yleisesti erityisesti yritysten team building-tarkoituksiin. Työnantajien

näkökulmasta pakopelit voivat olla hyvä tilaisuus tarkkailla, miten erilaiset työntekijät käyttäytyvät ryhmätilanteessa ja millaisia rooleja he ottavat pelin aikana, kun taas työntekijöiden näkökulmasta pakopelit voivat olla hauska ja erilainen tapa viettää aikaa ja ystävystyä työkavereiden kanssa.

Pervasiivisten pelien, kuten arvoitus- ja aarteenetsintäpelien, sekä vaihtoehtoisen todellisuuden pelien vaikutteet moderneissa pakopeleissä voi nähdä esimerkiksi tavassa, miten pakohuonepelien suunnittelijat tähtäävät usein hälventämään pelin ulkopuolisen oikean elämän ja pelin taikapiirin rajoja. Jotkin moderneista pakopeleistä käyttävät esimerkiksi multimediaelementtejä peleissään ja pyrkivät tarjoamaan mahdollisimman immersivisiä pelielämyksiä, joissa pelin ulkopuolinen ”oikea elämä” unohtuu pervasiivisten pelien tapaan. Etenkin vaihtoehtoisen todellisuuden pelejä on käytetty myös luovan markkinoinnin tarkoituksiin 2000-luvun alkupuolelta lähtien samaan tapaan, kuin jotkut yritykset käyttävät pakohuonepelejä 2010-luvun loppupuolella markkinointitarkoituksiin.

Pelaajien ohjeistaminen selvittämään tiensä pisteestä A pisteeseen B käyttäen loogista päättelyä ja heille annettuja vihjeitä on saman kaltainen arvoitus- ja aarteenmetsästys, kuten geocaching-pelien kanssa. Suurin ero pakopelien ja tämän edeltäjän välillä on, että pakopelien pelialue on rajattu siinä missä arvoitus- ja aarteenmetsästys-pelit ovat usein avoimen maailman pelejä.

Teemoitetun viihteen, kuten teemaravintoloiden ja kummitustalojen vaikutteet pakopelikulttuuriin näkyvät esimerkiksi siinä, että potentiaaliset pelaajat ovat tottuneet ottamaan osaa oikean elämän kokemuksiin, jotka tapahtuvat teemoitetussa ympäristössä. Pelien kehittäjien ja -omistajien näkökulmasta teemoitettu viihde on myös osoittanut käytännössä, että tämän kaltaiselle kulttuurille ja viihteelle on kysyntää ja se voi kasvaa kannattavaksi yritystoiminnaksi. Franchising, joka on kasvussa oleva pakopeliyritysten liiketoimintamalli, on ollut jo pitkään käytössä esimerkiksi teemaravintoloissa, joissa se on osoittautunut toimivaksi.

Kaikista yksittäisistä pakopelien edeltäjistä osoita ja klikkaa-seikkailupelit ovat olleet kaikkein vaikutusvaltaisimmassa asemassa modernien pakopelien kehityksessä. Digitaaliset escape-the-room pelit, kuten japanilaisen Toshimitsu Takagin vuonna 2004 julkaisema Crimson Room, ovat vaikuttaneet erittäin paljon myös oikean elämän

pakopelien kehitykseen. Väitän tutkimuksessani, että kyseiset digitaaliset escape-the-room osoita ja klikkaa-seikkailupelit ovat erittäin todennäköinen alkuperä koko pakopeli-genren nimelle. Englanniksi ja toisinaan myös suomeksi pakopelejä kutsutaan yleisesti escape roomeiksi.

Muut digitaaliset pakopelien edeltäjät sisältävät erityisesti 1980-1990-luvuilla suositut televisoidut seikkailuohjelmat, kuten Crystal Mazen tai Fort Boyardin, sekä elokuvat, kuten esimerkiksi Saw- ja Indiana Jones-sarjat. Sekä televisiosarjojen, että elokuvien rooli modernien pakopelien kehityksessä on ollut erityisesti muokata sekä pelaajien, että pelien kehittäjien odotushorisontteja siitä, mitä erilaisiin teemoihin sijoittuvien pelien tulisi pitää sisällään. Erilaiset teemat itsessään, sekä jotkin arvoituksista ja tehtävistä ovat myös ottaneet vaikutteita elokuvista ja seikkailuohjelmista.

Spygame suhteutuu pakopeli genren historiaan ja tutkimuksessa käsiteltyihin pakopelien edeltäjiin usealla eri tavalla. Pidän tärkeimpinä vaikutteina erityisesti interaktiivista teatteria, sekä osoita ja klikkaa-seikkailupelejä. Interaktiivinen teatteri näkyy Spygame-pelissä esimerkiksi näyttelijöiden käyttämisen ja pelin näytelmän kaltaisen käsikirjoituksen kautta. Osoita ja klikkaa-seikkailupelien vaikutteet ovat nähtävissä erityisesti pelimekaniikassa, jossa pelaajat voivat vaikuttaa pelin etenemiseen kyllä ja ei-vastauksien avulla ja tutkia tilaa, jossa he pelaavat löytääkseen erilaisia esineitä, joita heidän tulee käyttää voittaakseen pelin. Pelaajat voivat halutessaan pelata erilaisissa rooleissa, kuten oikean elämän roolipeleissä yleensä, mutta erona tavalliseen roolipelaamiseen on, ettei pelaajien ole pakko pelata missään erityisessä roolissa, jos he eivät halua. Spygame-peliä voi kerralla pelata kaksitoista henkeä ja peli on suunniteltu aktiivisesti rohkaisemaan työskentelemään joukkueena, joten se sopii hyvin team building-aktiviteetiksi.

Kehittäessämme Spygame-peliä otimme huomioon pelin 50-luvulle sijoittuvan kylmän sodan salapoliisiteeman läpi koko pelinkehitys prosessin. Pelille sävellettiin ja tuotettiin uniikki teemaan sopiva taustamusiikki albumi, pyrimme käyttämään vain teemaan sopivia lavasteita, tarpeistoa ja puvustusta, ja teema on näkyvissä selkeästi myös pelin markkinointimateriaaleissa. Pervasiivisten pelien vaikutus peliin näkyy etenkin tietoisessa tavassa, jolla purimme luomaan pelaajille mahdollisimman immersiiivisen kokemuksen, joka hälventäisi oikean elämän ja pelin taikapiirin rajoja. Otimme pelin suunnitteluun myös paljon inspiraatiota erilaisista teemaan ja yleisesti

salapoliiseihin liittyvistä televisiosarjoista ja elokuvista. Koimme, että elokuvista ja televisiosarjoista oli mahdollista hakea suuntaa esimerkiksi siihen, millaiset tehtävät ja esineet pelaajat kokisivat todennäköisesti ”salapoliisimaisena”.

Esitän tutkimuksessani Spygame-esimerkin kautta, että sekä pelaajilla, että pelien kehittäjillä on erilaisia olemassa olevia odotuksia sen suhteen, mitä pakopelit ovat. Nämä odotushorisontit liittyvät läheisesti pakopeli genren historiaan. Viime kädessä pelien kehittäminen on melko luovaa työtä, ja modernit pakopelit eroavatkin paljon tyyleissään, tavassa miten tarinankerrontaa on käytetty ja millaisessa suhteessa pelin teemaan erilaisia arvoituksia ja tehtäviä hyödynnetään. Jokainen modernien pakopelien kehittäjä jättää kehittämäänsä peliin oman jälkensä perustuen omaan subjektiiviseen kokemukseensa siitä, millaisia pakopelien tulisi olla. Nämä odotukset vaihtelevat, ja voivat olla joko tietoisia tai tiedostamattomia riippuen jokaisen omasta taustasta ja kokemuksista, jotka he yhdistävät mielessään pakopeleihin.

Tämän pro gradu -tutkielman keskiössä on ollut kerätä ja jäsenellä aikaisemmin melko hajanaista tietoa pakopelien historiaan liittyen. Tämän lisäksi olen halunnut rakentaa ja säilyttää jatkotutkimusta ajatellen aikaisempaa sirpaleista kuvaa täydellisemmän kuvauksen pakopelien historiasta, siitä millainen moderni pakopeli-ilmio 2010-luvun lopulla on, sekä miten historian vaikutukset ovat nähtävissä moderneissa pakopeleissä. Jatkotutkimusta ajatellen ehdottaisin, että erityisesti erilaisten olemassa olevien pakopelien dokumentointi kaipaisi maailman laajuisesti lisää huomiota. Tällä hetkellä juuri mistään on hankalaa saada tarkkaa tietoa siitä, millaisia pelejä on ylipäätään olemassa ja kuinka monta pakopeliä tai pakopeliyritystä on olemassa.

Pakopelien ympärille kehittynyt kulttuuri on suhteellisen nuori huolimatta siitä, että joidenkin pakopeleihin vaikuttaneiden edeltäjien juuret ylettyvät pitkälle historiaan. Nuorena peligenrenä on erityisen tärkeää dokumentoida ja säilyttää tietoa pakopeleistä juuri nyt, kun peligenre kehittyy nopealla tahdilla jatkuvasti. Tämä mahdollistaa lisää laadukasta tutkimusta pakopeleihin liittyen tulevaisuudessa.