THE GAME / OYUN

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THE GAME / OYUN

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ABSTRACT

THE GAME

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Keywords: contrast, hostility, reality, unresponsiveness, addiction

Video games are multimedia products. A multimedia product primarily functions as a communication medium. To transmit preloaded messages to the users is a multimedia product's highest priority mission regardless of the content,. Entertainment aspect is more important in video games compared to other types of multimedia products and interactivity in video games is not simply navigating through the content. That is because video games have game dynamics. A person playing a video game attends more to the visual cover and the game dynamics than the messages implied in the content. Because of the interactive nature of the medium, a player may keep playing a video game even if it contains ideological messages that he wouldn't willingly agree on, keeping himself within the effect of the messages, willingly or not. A movie viewer on the other hand, may stop the viewing process because of reasons related to the content. Difference is between the interactive and passive nature of two media. Prime examples of this are the games that promote prejudiced views on real life war events and transmit militarist messages in their content in order to stir sympathy towards legalized violence and nationalist fanaticism.

This project is an experiment to create an alternative visual language that challenges this situation detailed above by allowing people to feel discomfort through awareness of the militarist messages in such video games.

Game.exe

ÖZ

OYUN

Can Selimoğlu
Görsel Sanatlar ve Görsel İletişim Tasarımı Yüksek Lisans Programı
Tez Yöneticisi: Ragıp İstek

Anahtar Kelimeler: zıtlık, düşmanlık, gerçek, tepkisizlik, bağımlılık

Bilgisayar oyunları çokluortam ürünleridir ve çokluortam ürünleri iletişim araçlarıdır. Etkileşimin olanakları ile yapılabileceklerden bağımsız olarak önceden yüklenmiş bir mesajın iletimi, çokluortam ürünlerinde öncelikli amaçtır. Video oyunlarının eğlendirme görevi diğer çokluortam ürünlerine kıyasla yüksektir. Diğer çokluortam ürünlerimim aksine, etkileşim sadece navigasyon değildir ve eğlendirme işlevini yerine getiren ana unsurdur. Tüm video oyunlarında,etkileşim sonucu ulaşılması gereken bir başarı hedefi vardır. Oyun ortamının etkileşime dayalı doğası nedeniyle bir oyuncu, içerikteki ideolojik mesajlarına bilinçli olarak katılmasa dahi bir oyunu oynamayı, dolayısıyla kendisini mesajların ulaşım alanı içinde tutmayı bilinçli ya da bilinçsizce sürdürebilir, Bir oyuncunun içeriğe dair nedenlerle bir oyunu oynamaya son verebilmesi, bir sinema izleyicisinin izlemekte olduğu filmi aynı nedenle yarım bırakabilmesinden daha zordur çünkü video oyunları pasif şekilde izlenerek tüketilmezler, aktif olarak oynanırlar. Buna örnek olarak gerçek savaş olayları hakkında önyargılı ve taraflı mesajlar yayan militarist video oyunlarının militarizme ve ulusal fanatizme karşı sempati yaratabiliyor olmasını gösterebiliriz.

Bu proje, yukarıda tanımlanan duruma karşı sözkonusu oyunlarda kullanılmak üzere insanların duyarlılıklarını arttırabilecek alternatif bir görsel dil yaratma çabasıdır.

Game.exe

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Although it is possible to count earlier gaming machines like `Electriquiz` electric quiz devices (Pelikonepeijoonit), first true home computers that could run video games became available to public in 1970s.

In April 1977, Apple II home computer was released to public. This machine had 4KB of RAM and a MOS 6502 processor running at 1MHz. Maximum display resolution was 280 by 192 pixels and it was possible to display maximum 4 colors on screen except 40 by 48 pixel display modes which could display 16 colors at once. (old-computers.com Museum ~ Apple APPLE II) Video game programmers had to use simpler graphics in older games because of hardware limitations. This brought the necessity of abstraction and minimalism. Apple II is just an example but not an extraordinary one regarding the capabilities of the computers of that era. Compared to the hardware that is available while this thesis is being written, first home computers are incommensurably weak.

As the hardware evolved, graphic resolutions and maximum number of colors as well as the animation capabilities of machines increased. There are numerous steps in-between modern and first multimedia capable computers and we don't need to mention them all. Today minimalism in game graphics isn't obligatory and is often unwanted. A video game has to attract players with "better graphics" that aren't seen before. It was always like that since the earliest days and every push in the hardware caused a change in what is accepted as standard game graphics. If we define "better graphics" for today, we end up with the modern then of creating photorealistic 3-Dimensional environments.

Looking back to past from today we can easily say that had always wanted to play in a visually believable world to do things they couldn't in real world.

Parallel to this change in the way video games are visualized, they became far more accessible than they used to earlier. Although home computers were marketed for families their price tags were higher than what people are required to pay for home consoles today. Price of an Amiga 1000 was £1700 at release in 1985. (old-computers.com Museum ~ Commodore Amiga 1000) This is several times higher than a modern video game console. Because of increasing accessibility and increased consumability of graphics, the video game is in the evolution process from being an uncommon hobby to a medium of mainstream entertainment.

Now more people are consumers to video games, therefore video game content reaches more people and video game designers have more problems to worry about. What if the content becomes too difficult to consume?

Wizard of Wor was designed for arcades in 1980 but it is ported to home computers later . It featured maze-like dungeons with monsters to kill and players could also kill each other. The graphics were consisted of minimalist representation of soldiers and their enemies who would explode in pixels when shot. Photorealistic violence didn't exist because of hardware limitations but there still was violence and the alienation of the enemy from the protagonist. It's also accurate to say that the ability to shoot the second player who looks exactly like the first player was a bit discomforting in this game because it was the avatar of the person who was standing next to yourself. In that situation it was possible

to feel “pity”. It was impossible to feel pity for the monsters because they weren’t representations of anything present in real world and were there as threat objects meant to be killed. Everything was for a good thrill and implications could be taken tongue in cheek because it was pure fantasy and no references were made to real world events.

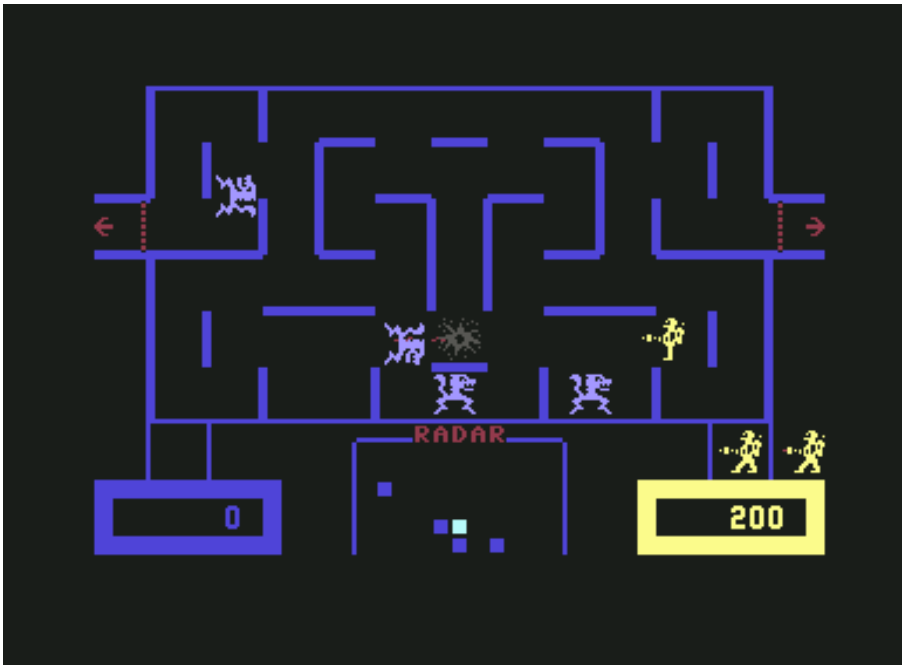

Figure 1: Wizard of Wor

Missile Command is a different story. That game didn’t have humanoid sprites and graphics seemed totally abstract at the first sight but references to real life threats in the content rendered playing it a dreadful experience.

There appeared to be nothing but some colored pixels changing locations across the screen triggering sound effects when they collided with some other pixels in the bottom of the screen but this was only the gameplay part and those events that occur on screen represented real life events. Moving pixels were missiles; colored ones to the bottom were

cities. The game was made in the Cold War period when a nuclear holocaust was considered a possibility.

> "Missile Command is considered one of the great classic video games from the Golden Age of Arcade Games. The game is also interesting in its manifestation of the Cold War's effects on popular culture, in that the game features an implementation of National Missile Defense and parallels real life nuclear war which is also impossible to win due to the Mutually Assured Destruction doctrine. In some sense, the game is rather demoralizing, since it does not matter if you block 10 missiles or 10,000; the 10,001st one obliterates your home town just as easily as the 11th. For this reason, the game was known to have a powerful effect on some of its players with frequent reports of people having nightmares of nuclear holocaust after extended play." (Missile Command - Wikipedia)

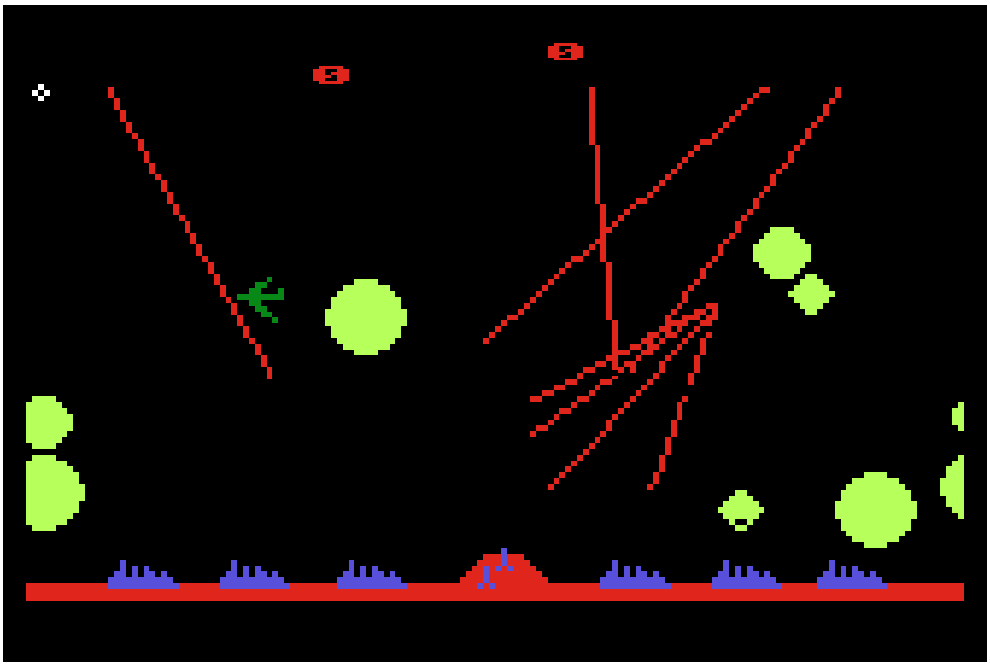

Figure 2: Missile Command

There were limited numbers of counter missiles for each level. If the player could not destroy the enemy rockets in time he had to watch them slowly fall and destroy the home cities. Given the circumstances, it was possible, even unavoidable to feel discomfort

playing missile command. Again, graphics were as stylized as they were in Wizard of Wor but they meant much more then they appeared to the eye. The content was indeed too difficult to consume.

Today we have games that allows the player to take role in past and present war events like Conflict: Desert Storm, a video game about the Iraq war.. Modern games have 3D believable graphics with realistic textures, lighting and simulated physics. Death and destruction isn't implied any more but shown. In contrast to that, players aren't disturbed as much any more. What might have happened?

Figure 3: Conflict Desert Storm

Missile Command was telling a story. Photorealism doesn't tell the real story, rather conceals it behind a hallucinating copy of reality. Photorealism censors itself. Censoring something doesn't remove it, rather makes the whole easier to be consumed. If designers hadn't insisted on making games about things that disturb when shown as they naturally are, there wouldn't be the necessity to censor anything.

Both in Wizard of Wor and Conflict Desert Storm, soldiers were represented as realistically possible as the hardware available at the release of the games allowed. In Wizard of Wor, violence was represented the same way, with as much realism as hardware allowed but not in Conflict Desert Storm nor in other modern day titles. Modern games censor themselves at the point when fidelity to realism is just "too much" when it disturbs. Photorealism bends facts, lies about what really happens.

Real wars are disturbing, simulated ones are not. In the first step, war and death should no longer disturb. They should be made desirable in the next. For that, the player shouldn't be able to understand the reasoning of the enemy character. Enemy may die in a gruesome way but nothing may imply that he was the representation of a real person with reasons behind his actions, beliefs, goals and a past like everyone else; like the player himself. In simulated reality, dead bodies don't stay on the ground. As player is made not to think about the past of the dead character, it's also made impossible to worry about the things that are going to happen afterwards. Dead bodies always disappear as if they never existed in the first place.

Enemies in militarist games are not people, they're anonymous humanoid bodies. Games display bodies as anonymously as pornography does; stripped from their human character without a past and possible future else protagonist might feel guilt. It was never the graphics that disturbed people in Missile Command. It was the honesty. Blood isn't gruesome, reality is and you can remove easily alter reality without removing blood.

Soldier of Fortune is a good example to this. This militarist game uses realistic wounding effects, dismemberment of bodies and blood. It has both references to real life events and high fidelity realistic violence but it's not real enough to allow people feel pity. Shooting a Russian or Chinese soldier in Soldier of Fortune causes the shot body piece blow up in a believable manner but one can't feel pity as long as they aren't characters but voodoo dolls of what American media defines as enemy.

We can never know the drives that made Dave Theurer write Missile Command but it ended up as an anti militarist game. "Nuclear war is mutual destruction" That was the ultimate message. With video game medium now mainstream; can game developers still deliver such messages? They can, but won't because it's more beneficial to create content parallel to expressions of oil greedy governments rather than taking risks. In fact governments, at least the United States government is actively funding some game designers to spread their views. A solid example to this is "America's Army". It's the official video game of United States Army. It is solely made to attract people into joining the U.S. Army and the full version of the game can be downloaded from http://www.americasarmy.com for free. War in America's Army is as real as sex is in

pornography is and this “death porn” is available for free. U.S. Army gives away a piece of manufactured action and leaves the opportunity to experience more by living it.

Prejudice and stereotyping are not new in video games. Before graphics, there were text adventures. An Apple II game named “Kabul Spy” also had references to real world events. In this game the protagonist was a CIA agent sent to Afghanistan to rescue a professor who was captured by KGB. The game didn’t feature graphic violence but parts of it are build on prejudiced views on the eastern world like the scene the protagonist is beaten in Pakistan and thrown in prison where he is required to bribe the corrupt prison guard to escape. (Kabul Spy Walkthrough)

Chapter 2: On Gameplay

Video games aren’t too different from other types of games in nature. Just like sports games video games are built on struggle and success. There are always more than one force in the struggle. The player is either against the challenge computer presents or against other players. In those games player struggles against computer’s challenge, whatever it may be, it has to be achievable, in other words “balanced” even though it may be difficult. Difficult challenges provide better satisfaction than easier ones. What makes gameplay good is the balance of difficulty and achievability. Player versus player games are different. Designing them is more like designing chessboards or stadiums that people challenge each other.

Graphics attract people to video games, screenshots make people buy games but only good gameplay makes games addictive and feed people with the desire to keep playing. For the “hardcore” gamer, importance of content is below these two factors. With the help of increased play time, player is subject to the same content in a repetitive process to such a degree that he/she becomes insensitive and immune to it. As the chess player sees King as a mere unit, a first person shooter player sees enemies as dolls.

> “In a two-player game, the players are also able to shoot each other's Worriors, earning bonus points but causing the other player to lose a life.” (Wizard of Wor - Wikipedia)

An event that would be disturbing to first timers becomes mundane when being exposed to several times. A soccer game is never true simulation of soccer otherwise there wouldn’t be different soccer games and success in real soccer would have direct relation on the success in soccer themed video games. Each video game provides a gameplay challenge on their own and game addicts (which is not used as a critical term here) may be obsessed with the gameplay and success in those challenges so much that they may unconsciously assign alternative meanings to the elements that are present in the content of those games even when they are about war and death. This is the next step after insensitiveness.

Counter-Strike community is a good example to this. It is a player versus player first person shooter game and some people playing this game go through the process of learning about how real life weapons and war engines work, their models, uses, technical details and even one on one close combat in order to understand and use gameplay mechanics better.

> “I'd also add that if you have to move across an area covered by a sniper; make sure to sidestep a lot to make sure you're moving unpredictably, and at a 90 degree angle to his line of fire.” (Forum Planet - Counter-Strike Forums)

> “I was awping into CT spawn when I was a terrorist. right when i zoomed in, i saw something go the the right and I flicked my mouse to the right and got a headshot that did 101 damage” (Forum Planet - Counter-Strike Forums)

> “When he's almost in range for you to get stabbed, let go of walk and when he swings at you, quickly stab him (right click) and run backwards again. If he doesn't die on the first stab, repeat the process” (Forum Planet - Counter-Strike Forums)

These quoted phrases have alternative meanings to those players who posted them as detailed above.

Counter-Strike is an extremely repetitive game. There are “maps”, representation of real life locations such as a generic street in Italy (or the stereotypical view of Italy) or an office floor. Historically themed first person shooters like Medal of Honor feature historical locations like destroyed suburbs of Stalingrad but those locations are as hollow as game characters. They exist so that killing can take place on them. This is made so evident that player never wonders about who is living or used to live in said locations. Playing through the same office room themed artificial location makes it even more different to think deeper into these locations. Maps exist to make war and death possible to happen and what is going to happen will happen. This is how content really works in video games. Gameplay is in fact a minor struggle that isn’t about changing the inevitable.

Chapter 3: Visual Language of the Project

If believable, realistic graphics are decreasing the accuracy of our perception of reality, we don't need them to experience the feelings true reality would give us, disturbing or otherwise. I created a visual language bearing all above statements and conclusions in mind. My world doesn't feature realism. I tried to create the opposite of censored photorealism. My world is unsettling because my characters are pretty yet the whole does not have any comic elements. I created a disturbing atmosphere with the help of abstract graphic violence and psychologically effective elements.

Message of the narrative content of a video game is where the video game really starts and ends, gameplay is the excuse to transmit the carried message therefore all the actors in a game, enemies, protagonist(s) and the player himself float in the illusion of freedom while the story had decided on everything that is to happen before. Regarding content, player doesn't have any more control over the events than the reader of a book. The message that is to be transmitted is there since the beginning

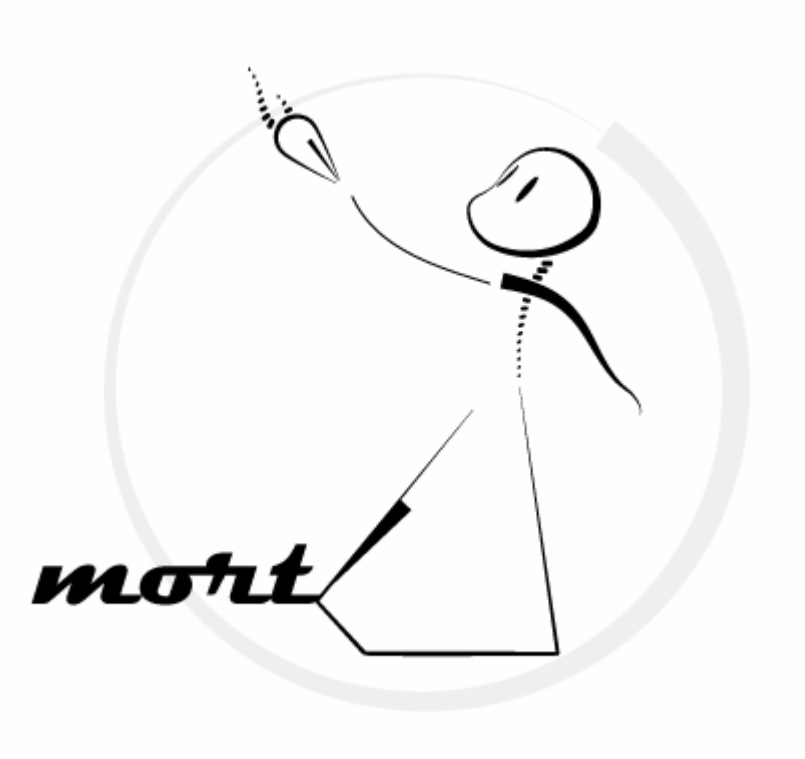

Figure 4: Mort

"Mort" is my main character and he's a doll, representing all the characters in video games without identities and all the real people playing them as the player also doesn't have the choice to change anything. Mort plays multiple roles. He's the protagonist in the narrative. We see him in the first screen playing a handheld, then in the backgrounds of disturbing environments appearing as if he's creating the events taking place on the scene but in a futile attempt to avoiding them at the same time. His second role is the enemy. Player Mort's opposing enemy is none other than himself, wearing a helmet, riding abstract war machines.

Third role of Mort can't be seen by watching the presentation as he is the user running the project. My world is disturbing because the user can view the scenes in the eyes

of the protagonist, the enemy and himself at the same time. There is no predefined evil or good in my world yet there is unavoidable violence. Morts might or might not know what is going to happen but none of them can avoid it. The user can't avoid the random scene he'll find himself in next. I gave the user the illusion of freedom as if actions would matter but all the scenes have to end in violence where the subject of violence on the screen has no importance. Applying enough violence allows all the dolls including the user to proceed to the next step. I wanted to emphasize the repetitiveness of the video game medium by deliberately not avoiding the possibility to replay the same scene over and over.

The player mort in the narrative seems to be playing the scenes while in reality the user is doing them (also with zero control) therefore he can't avoid what is going to happen. Enemy mort has a purpose like dolls in war games do and he can't oppose his role. The scenes are generic and random because it does not matter where the event, shooting, killing takes place. Happening of the event is the only thing of importance. Scenes are only differentiated from each other with color that in fact unifies them. My levels do not have a beginning or and end, a past or future and have no references to time and space. Just like video game characters/dolls and Counter-Strike maps.

Chapter 4: Inspirations and Originated Ideas.

I were inspired from "Lemmings" when creating Mort. Lemmings appear in puzzle games with the same name. They are pacifists and walk towards certain death unless player prevents them from doing so. They don't have the control of their own fates and in some cases their deaths become inevitable so player has to sacrifice them. While Mort has

common features as Lemmings two are unrelated and Mort is not a Lemming. With an unique purpose of existence, Mort is an entity on its own. Mort is not evil nor good, he's neutral but not as neutral can be defined as "between good and evil". Mort is unrelated to these concepts. Mort is pretty and appealing but situations he's portrayed aren't comical. This creates a contrast.

My environment is inspired from mainly two video game genres: first person shooters and 3D war simulations. War engines in my scenes aren't representations of existing specific types and models as I'm not seeking visual fidelity to reality. I wanted to emphasize on underlining the impressions of what makes something a war machine, the fearsome elements like gun barrels.

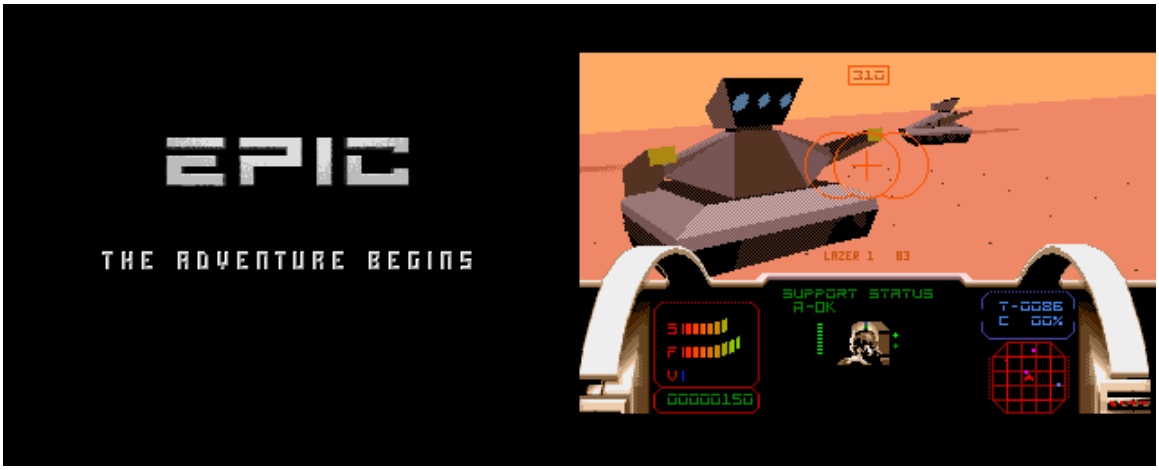

Figure 5: Epic – The Adventure Begins

War simulation games made in early 80s (like Epic) had primitive 3d graphics as opposed to today's detailed flight simulators. I discovered that war planes represented with minimal amount of polygons and colors appeared more disturbing than those in full detail. I

tried to make my planes look like those in old simulation games. In general I tried to apply the anxiety in the cold war propaganda reels and cold war games like Missile Command to my project.

I tried to refrain from using clichés and immediately expectable visualizations of the “video game” theme including pixelized graphics and favored more organic graphic elements for the sake of originality and sustaining uneasiness on the viewer. the game” logo has implicit references to swastika. I used randomly chosen text quotes from Counter-Strike forums as typographical elements because I think they improve the narrative quality of the whole.

CONCLUSION

There are two considerable faces of this project. The presentation itself and the visual language created for the presentation. The visual language of ”The Game” can be applied to video games belonging to multiple genres therefore it is genre independent. While this language will remain as alternative to visual languages of mainstream video games on the market.

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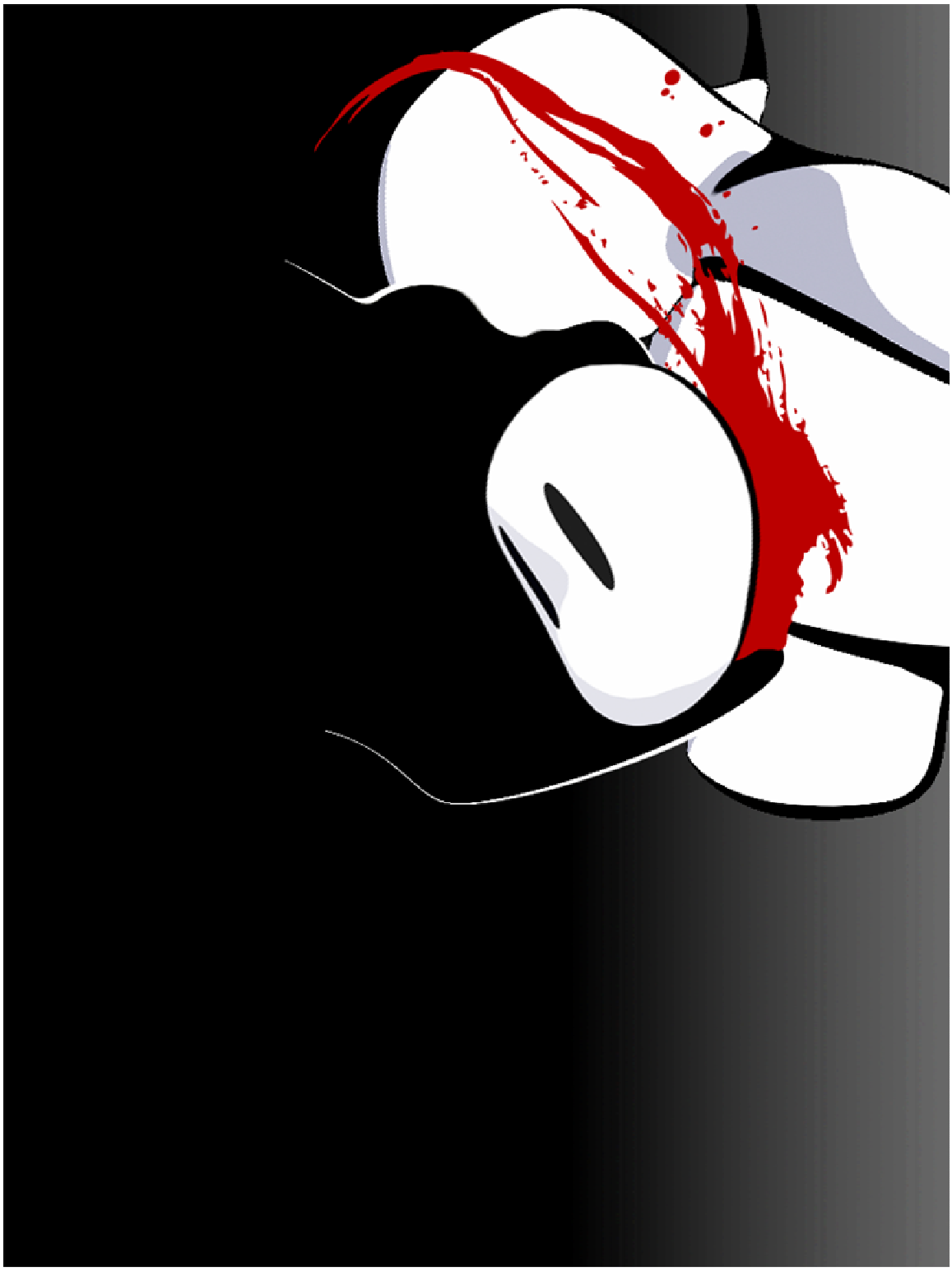
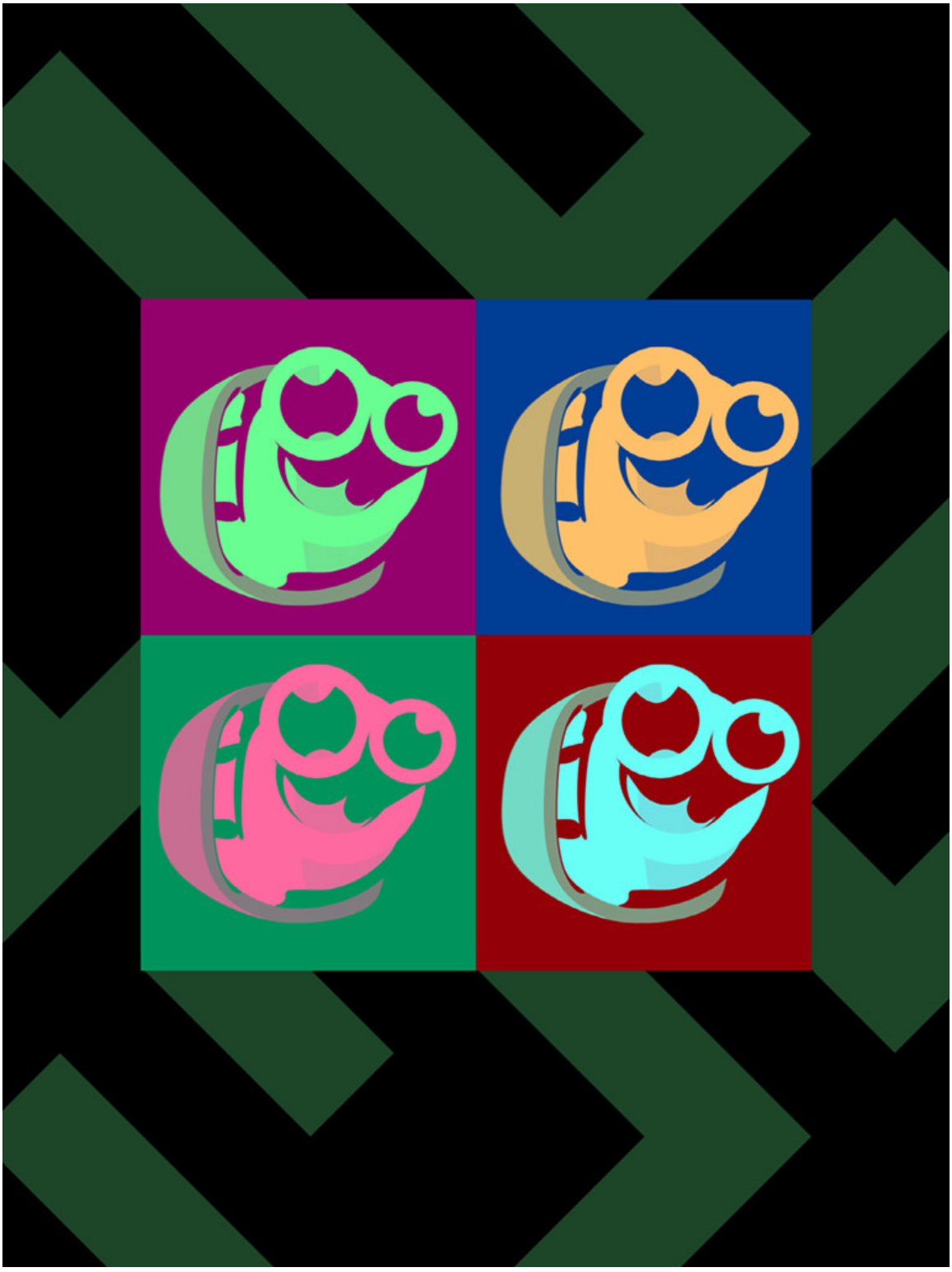
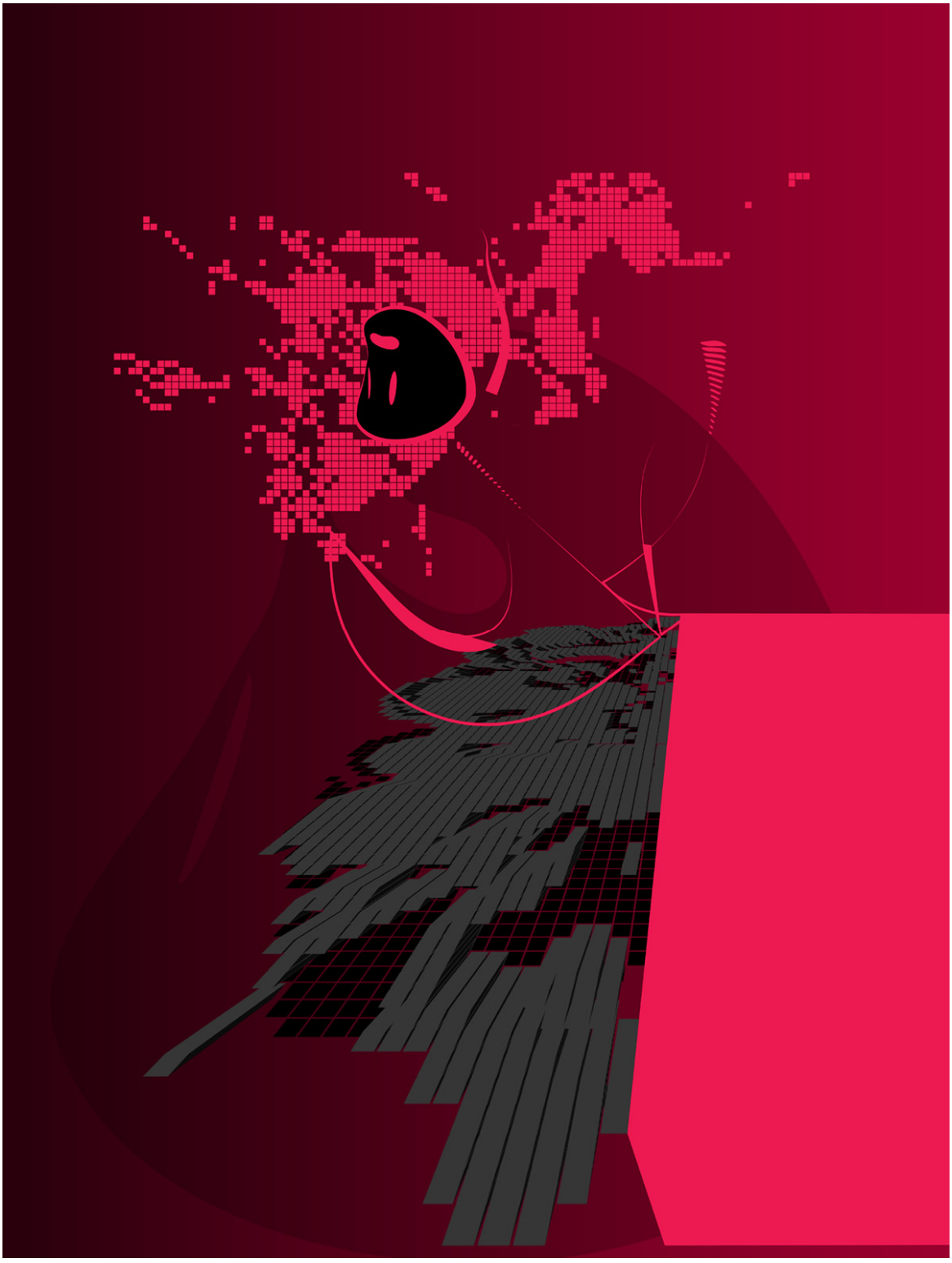
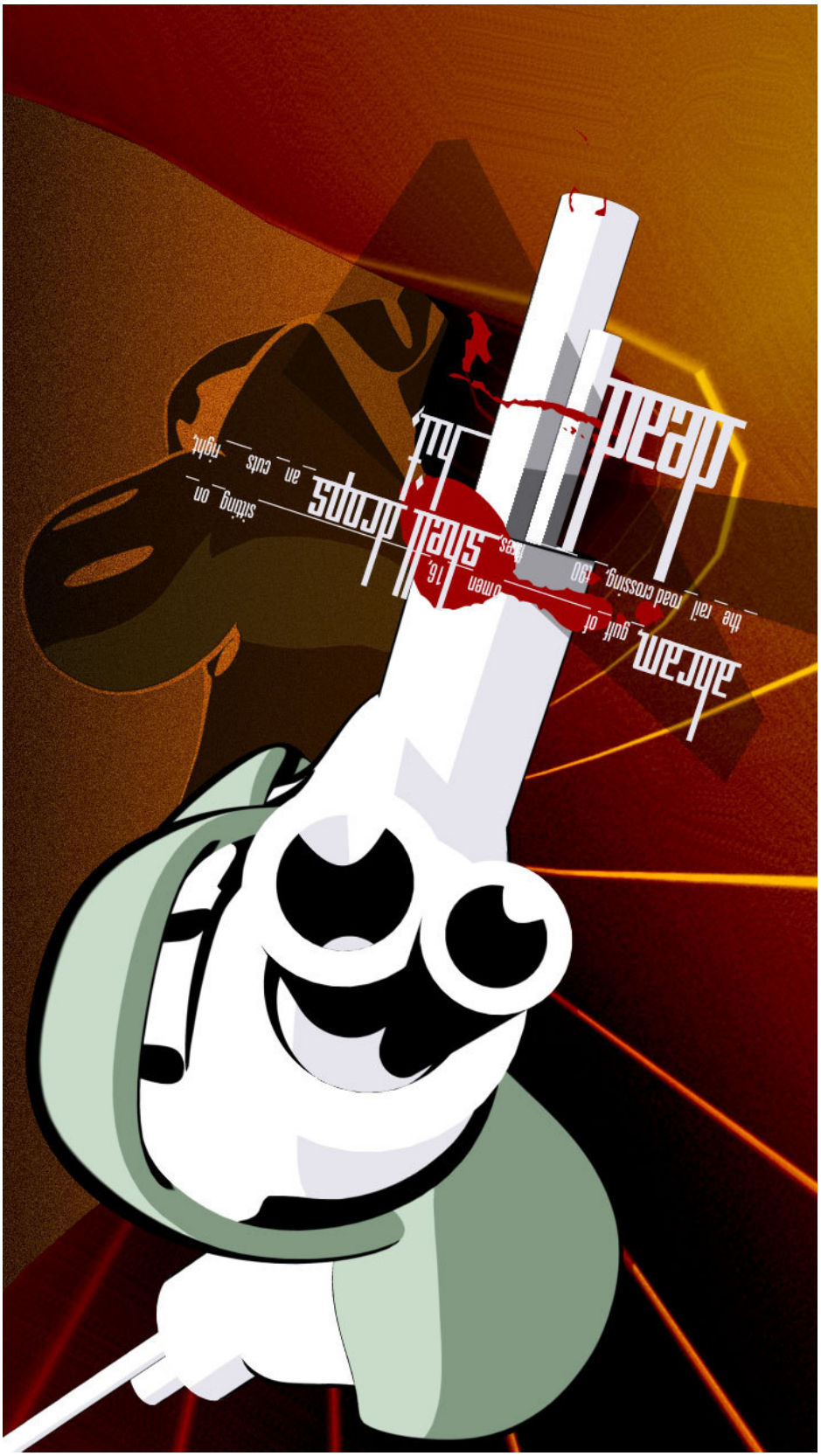
APPENDIX 1: Wallpapers







APPENDIX 2: Project Screens



Risky
or that's a lot trickier.
badge_is_super_easy took me 10 minutes, ___ it's the ___

Hot Weapon
unless the TOW will
in which the tank will
hits it in the tracks,
be instantly
smoke if it's hit by a TOW
Fast Firepower


In the back you should b able to get at least
you
sneak behind the enemy lines.

When_your_enemy_
DO_NOT_FLINCH
You_hear_shots_of_
threes_coming_from_his_gun_


artery_not_thrown
tends_to_contract
and_still_the_bleeding_if_a
Fatalities Marked
main_artery_is
will_quickly_lose_consciousness_and_
the_severed_man
DIE.


yeah thats 1 6 4
fuckin
for the win baby! yea all 15 players on that stuma is for
play source 1


I_hate_to_
but_for_the_knife_you'd need to.
at an enemy_at_close_
in most_likely go_


stupid
tactics
real life
and marksmanship
that doesn't
work. Everything is
sight picture
and
trigger
control.

APPENDIX 3: Presentation CD

- Read information.txt files in “main project” and “unused material” folders for instructions.
- “unused material” folder contains material that is removed from the final presentation and it should not be considered as a part of the main project that is in the “main project” folder. It resides on the CD for reference purposes during presentation.