

ESTONIAN ACADEMY OF ARTS
Faculty of Fine Arts
MA Contemporary Art

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Everyday is Sunday

MA Thesis

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Tallinn 2023

EKA

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ABSTRACT

In my written thesis I will provide more context and expand on the themes present in my artistic project: “Unemployment Simulator 2018”. The first half of the thesis will give a short introduction to the video game project, and give more context to the various themes I am depicting in the project, such as male loneliness, social withdrawal and the Finnish social welfare system. The second part of the thesis is written in a format of a script, supplementing and giving more context to the narrative of the video game. The script consists of fictional daily scenarios, inspired by personal lived experience and supporting research on the thesis topics. While utilizing self-deprecating humor and irony, my intention is to give a nuanced and relatable perspective on male loneliness, and to paint an alternative picture of the Finnish welfare state.

INTRODUCTION

The artistic portion of my thesis is a self developed video game titled “Unemployment Simulator 2018”.

The setting of the game is loosely based on my own experience. The game is an endless loop, where the only real goal is to simply survive the mind numbing boredom of everyday life as an unemployed socially isolated man in his late 20’s. To progress in the game you must complete daily objectives related to home maintenance, self-care, and job searching while managing your anxiety, fatigue, and dopamine levels. The different tasks can be such as taking a shower, sending a job application, washing dishes or checking your mail. These mechanics are meant to simulate the difficulty and lack of motivation of daily life when dealing with depression and the demoralizing effect of long-term unemployment.

The main game loop is focused on completing a number of randomized daily objectives while managing certain statistics related to mental health. You have an anxiety meter that constantly goes up, and performing certain actions can increase or decrease it, while completing tasks increases fatigue level. You can recover from fatigue by resting on your bed. You will not be able to perform the tasks if your anxiety or fatigue is too high. The most critical metric is your dopamine level, which is constantly decreasing, indicating boredom. If boredom reaches critical levels you will start losing health and eventually die, failing the game. Certain activities such as watching porn or playing video games will increase your dopamine levels, but any single activity will have diminishing effects the more it is repeated during the day. You can gain significant boosts to dopamine or anxiety management through certain actions such as consuming alcohol or caffeine or checking your phone, but all these have unique negative tradeoffs in other areas.

The core game loop consists of juggling these metrics to be able to complete the daily objectives, while not dying of boredom. One reason why I wanted to use a video game for the artistic project, is the potential of the medium to provide a more experiential viewpoint to a specific topic or story. As with a game the player not only experiences a story as a viewer with no agency, but the chance of being an active participant in a story can provide a more immersive and ideally more empathetic experience.

While the initial idea for the video game began as a lighthearted concept, using an entertainment-based medium to create a piece of art about boredom. Depicting a specifically uneventful period of my life as an unemployed single man living in Central Finland as a registered unemployed job applicant.

However, as the project progressed I recognized the potential to include larger themes of depression, modern masculinity and male loneliness from the context of the Finnish Welfare system.

Finland has been ranked as the happiest country in the world for six years in a row¹. The criteria for the world happiness report is based on polling data in categories such as healthy life expectancy, freedom for making life choices, perception of corruption, and social support. Actual feelings of happiness are not measured, as the Finnish national identity is still stereotypically based in romanticized melancholy, alcoholism and stoicism. A common reaction from locals of hearing to be living in the happiest nation in the world is often a confused one. While the social welfare system is one of the cornerstones of the welfare state, there is valid debate whether parts of the social welfare system in its current form contributes for part of the population to isolate from society.

Based on my own experience, I would describe the prolonged state of living off the welfare system as a sense of limbo, existing in an in-between space that is expected to be temporary. Getting barely enough social welfare benefits to survive but, at the same time the system is not giving enough incentive to break the cycle. not daring to risk losing my right to social welfare benefits especially when dealing with mental health issues or other complicating factors, made mundane daily tasks and self care challenging. Getting employed starts to seem more unattainable when your resume is not growing. Pressures of the job market and expectations of being a valued member of society, makes one feel inadequate and resentment against the system starts to grow. The mind numbing loop of the game is meant to represent this feeling of limbo.

In Finland the discussion of long term unemployment is often related to the concern over marginalized young people, or so called NEET² youths (not in education, employment or training). According to Finnish Department of Health and Welfare (THL)

The definition of being marginalized is:

1. marginalization is a multidimensional and cumulative process, where the different dimensions of disadvantage reinforce each other

¹J.Whitehead, This country has been voted the world's happiest for the sixth year in a row, 20 march 2023, Independent, <https://www.independent.co.uk/travel/europe/finland/finland-worlds-happiest-country-six-years-b2304295.html>

² Terveystieteiden tutkimuskeskus ja Hyvinvoinnin laitos, Nuorten syrjäytymisen ehkäisy [Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare, preventing marginalization of young people] January 2023, <https://thl.fi/fi/web/lapset-nuoret-ja-perheet/hyvinvointi-ja-terveys/nuorten-syrjaytyymisen-ehkaisy>

2. Marginalization is drifting outside of the quality of life considered normal and generally appropriate in society

3. marginalization is being excluded from the basic institutions of society; about the labor market, family (friends) and social inclusion.³

‘Marginalization or social withdrawal means a situation where a person is left out of the usual life for people of the same age, such as education, work life or social events and relationships. Marginalization is also seen as being left out of society. Marginalization is the biggest problem facing young people in Finland, as it is estimated that more than 60,000 young people have been marooned. Young men in particular are more vulnerable to marginalization.’⁴

SOCIAL WITHDRAWAL

A common environment for a socially withdrawn person living in Finland can be described as; neglected single bedroom apartment, filled with trash, empty beer cans, packaging from microwave meals, sink and kitchen counters overflowing with unwashed dishes, rotting food and swarms of fruit flies. The Curtains are tightly closed from the outside world, preventing any sunlight from causing distracting reflections on the computer screen. The area near the front door is filled with unopened white envelopes, anxiety about all the overdue bills and rising interest rates is too much to even look at. keeping an unblemished credit score, has been long lost with online gambling and unpaid quick loans. The only social contact is a weekly meeting with a store cashier when running out of food. For a socially withdrawn person even that can seem like an almost insurmountable challenge due to the near crippling levels of social anxiety. Some choose to do their shopping in the middle of the night from 24 hour gas stations to avoid as many social encounters as possible. Days are spent in front of the computer. A daily routine of gaming and porn is interrupted only by eating, drinking, trips to the bathroom and an occasional shower. Video games provide escapism from this

³‘Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos (THL) määrittelee syrjäytymisen seuraavasti:

1. syrjäytyminen on moniulotteinen ja kasautuva prosessi, jossa huono-osaisuuden eri ulottuvuudet vahvistavat toisiaan
2. syrjäytyminen on ajautumista yhteiskunnassa tavanomaisena ja yleisesti sopivana pidetyn elämäntavan ja laadun ulkopuolelle”
3. syrjäytyminen on ulosjäämistä yhteiskunnan perusinstituutioista; työmarkkinoista, perheestä (ystävistä) ja yhteiskunnallisesta osallisuudesta’ A.Haasio, Hikikomori p 15.

⁴ ‘Syrjäytyminen tai sosiaalinen vetäytyminen tarkoittaa tilannetta, jossa henkilö jää saman ikäisille tavanomaisen elämän, kuten koulutuksen, työelämän tai sosiaalisten tapahtumien ja suhteiden ulkopuolelle. Syrjäytyminen nähdään myös yhteiskunnasta syrjään jäämisenä. Syrjäytyminen on Suomessa nuorten suurin ongelma, sillä arvion mukaan yli 60 000 nuorta on syrjäytynyt. Etenkin nuoret miehet ovat alttiimpia syrjäytymiselle.’ Mehiläinen, Syrjäytyminen [Marginalization] <https://www.mehilainen.fi/mielenterveys/syrjaytyminen>

depressing reality and a steady drip of dopamine to make the day go by faster as does bingeing on pirated movies and tv shows, falling into youtube rabbit holes.

Romantic aspirations are replaced by compulsive masturbation and online porn, in an attempt to smother any hopes and dreams of an actual relationship, a concept that feels as unrealistic as the worlds of fantasy role playing games one is immersed in. Still the longing for emotional and physical intimacy and tenderness feels agonizing, and can lead to growing resentment and bitterness against the opposite sex.

Some might even describe themselves as social, as they could be communicating to people while gaming, writing on discord servers and imageboard threads, but most are missing any meaningful friendships. Many of these people have grown up as sensitive children, having always felt different. Trauma from being bullied in school has left them with little to no self esteem.⁵ The outside world offers a possibility to get hurt, a familiar apartment offers safety and comfort from mockery and humiliation. Being on the autism spectrum is a common diagnosis among socially withdrawn people, making social interactions even more challenging to begin with.

⁶A term describing a specific form of social withdrawal “Hikikomori” comes from Japan, describing the socially withdrawn part of the population, as individuals who are locked in their apartments or room, only leaving when absolutely necessary. According to a recent report there are currently estimated 1,5 million of these people who fit the criteria of Hikikomori, a total 2% of the population of Japanese people from ages 15 - 64⁷.

A more unofficial term “Hikky” exists in Finland. Coined from the Finnish imageboard “Ylilauta⁸”, a site that provides its own online community of these socially withdrawn people. While the Finnish phenomenon shares similarities to the Japanese, there are crucial differences. In Japan, there exists a strong cultural obligation for parents to take care of their child, allowing them to live in the same household with their parents, isolated in their rooms.

‘One of the principles of Japanese culture is that a mother takes care of her son, no matter how old he is, until marriage. The mother-son relationship is very special and important in Japan. Adult children also traditionally live with their parents until they get married. This is one of the main reasons enabling the hikikomori phenomenon in Japan’⁹

⁵ A.Haasio, Hikikomori, Avain, 2018, p. 37.

⁶ A.Haasio, Hikikomori, Avain, 2018, p. 52.

⁷ Japan Times, 1.5 million people in Japan living as social recluses, many as a result of the pandemic, 1 april 2023,

<https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2023/04/01/national/hikikomori-numbers-pandemic/>

⁸ Ylilauta, <https://ylilauta.org/>

⁹ ‘Japanilaisen kulttuurin periaatteisiin kuuluu se, että äiti huolehtii pojastaan, riippumatta siitä kuinka vanha tämä on, aina avioitumiseen saakka. Äiti-poika suhde onkin Japanissa hyvin erityislaatuinen ja tärkeä. Aikuiset lapset myös asuvat perinteisesti vanhempiensa luona aina siihen saakka, kunnes menevät naimisiin. Tämä on yksi keskeisimmistä hikikomori-ilmion mahdollistavista syistä Japanissa.’ A.Haasio, Hikikomori, Avain, 2018, p. 32.

In Finland the monthly housing support and unemployment benefits can work to enable individuals to live alone in their own rented apartments, providing a chance for even more complete isolation.

As socially withdrawn people are lacking in actual social contacts, this is replaced with online communities, especially imageboards, which are a crucial part of the Hikikomori subculture.

Finnish imageboard Ylilauta provides a community for Finnish self identified Hikikomoris. In the mainstream imageboard culture is most known for rampant misogyny and racism and far right trolling, while all these are visible part of the Finnish imageboard culture, and the Hikikomori subculture, it is not the whole truth.

The discussions in the dedicated “Hikikomero”¹⁰ page in Ylilauta.org can range from anonymous posters seeking and giving support to individuals in similar positions, some wanting help to improve their mental health or social skills. As men still often struggle with expressing vulnerability and sharing emotions, anonymous forums can be the only place for some to be able to do so.

There is a part of the subculture embracing the unemployed lifestyle, despising the lifestyle of the regular “normie” tax payer, they are described as sheep or mindless NPC¹¹:s.

Assimilating to the workforce is a failure, when the possibility exists to take advantage of the social welfare system and to live as a “free man”. These discussions often include sharing advice on how to maintain social welfare benefits, and avoiding work or other mandatory tasks assigned by the Unemployment Office. A much darker side of the image boards also exist related to the Hikky subculture, for example, for most desperate cases there can be occasional threads of sharing tips for most efficient ways to commit suicide, with deaths from suicide still mostly affecting men.

The public discussion surrounding the vulnerability of boys and men to social isolation lacks nuance and often fails to address the structural issues that underlie this problem. Instead, the focus is frequently on blaming individual men for their circumstances.¹²

This can be particularly damaging for young men who may feel aimless and confused by conflicting messaging about masculinity, in the case with Hikikomori men, they often share in common a feeling of not living up to a traditional model of masculinity to begin with¹³.

¹⁰Ylilauta, Hikikomero discussion board, <https://ylilauta.org/hikky/>

¹¹Normie stands for regular people who are following mainstream culture, NPC is originally a gaming term, standing for Non Player Character, in the context of imageboard discussions this essentially has the same meaning as *normie*, people who are mindlessly following mainstream culture and societal norms without any agency of their own.

¹² R.Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do about It*, p 81-82.

¹³ A.Haasio, *Hikikomori*, Avain, 2018, p. 47.

This often one sided and accusatory messaging is counterproductive, and can push vulnerable individuals deeper into so-called manosphere¹⁴ and redpill communities.¹⁵

The second part of the writing is a collection of fictional daily scenarios partly inspired by personal experiences, writings and discussions from Hikikomero imageboards, including specific themes of male loneliness and being stuck in the limbo of the Finnish unemployment system. While I would not consider myself among the most severely socially withdrawn, upon reflecting on this period of my life I can empathize with the many stories of lonely men I encountered during my research. I can recognize patterns how many young men can isolate, end up radicalized on youtube rabbit holes and ultimately isolate from society. The reason to use my own life as the setting for the narrative, my intention is to give a nuanced and empathetic viewpoint on the topic of male loneliness.

Stylistically the script is meant to mirror the narrative format of the video game, describing various tasks as video game objectives, and management of mental health and boredom as video game mechanics. The narration perspective is inspired from role playing games, putting the reader to the position of the main character, in this case a socially awkward man his late 20's barely struggling getting through daily tasks, failing to meet societal expectations of manhood and of a productive tax payer, while desperately trying to connect with the outside world.

PART 2 - VIDEO GAME SCRIPT

CHARACTER

White male, born 1990, dark hair, green eyes, weight: 88 kg, height: 180 cm

Unmarried

Work status: unemployed

MONTHLY INCOME

Unemployment benefit: 540,48 €

¹⁴ ‘The term has been used to describe everything from progressive men’s issues activists dealing with real neglect of male health, suicide and unequal social services to the nastier corners of the Internet, filled with involuntary celibacy-obsessed, hate-filled, resentment fueled cultures of quite chilling levels of misogyny.’ A.Nagle, *The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump*, zero books, 2017, p 55.

¹⁵ In the manosphere context, the term red pill originates from the movie *The Matrix*, where taking the red pill gives you an escape from the fake simulation, allowing you to see how reality actually is.

‘For Red Pillers, genuine reality goes something like this: Female oppression is a myth and men are the ones holding the short end of the stick. That said, men and women are inherently different due to evolution, so each gender should carry out its designated role in society. For example, females should raise children at home and men should work and have sex with women.’ D.Love, *Inside Red Pill, The Weird New Cult For Men Who Don't Understand Women*, Business Insider, September 15, 2023, <https://www.businessinsider.com/the-red-pill-reddit-2013-8>

General housing support: 319,20 €
Income support: 183,84 €
TOTAL: 1043,52 €

SETTINGS

#1: Apartment
#2: Grocery store
#3: The other side
#3: City center
#3: Local bus
#4: Local Bar
#5: Unemployment office

TIMELINE

Date: Sunday, 5th of august 2018.

DAY1: FRONT DOOR

SETTING: APARTMENT

15:00

View of a 30 square meter single bedroom apartment somewhere in Central Finland. You are sitting in front of a computer desk, surrounded by fruit flies and unwashed dishes. Pale skin, dark brown hair, a wrinkly metal band t-shirt and red shorts, no socks. Light is peeking through from the sides of closed curtains. You sips a lukewarm coffee, put it down and continue furious clicking. Hours pass until you are startled by the clanging sound of the mail hatch, followed by faint footsteps of the mailman heading upstairs. Slight increase in anxiety levels, choose to ignore it for now.

OBJECTIVE: INVESTIGATE FRONT DOOR

17:00

Staring at the pile of mail under the door. Few colorful adverts lie on bottom, three standard white envelopes on top. You approach the pile and pick up the envelopes, first letter: electric company, second from a phone company, most likely a reminder for an unpaid bill from last month. Third letter, a significant spike in anxiety is caused by a glance at the stamp of the unemployment office. Fight or flight, make a decision to open the envelopes tomorrow. Put the letters back down in front of the door and walk past them to the bathroom, glance at the mirror, face looking pale. Decide to take a shower. 5 minutes later: feeling refreshed, but lingering terror still remains from the mail episode, decide to watch some porn to mentally recover.

19:00

Sitting in front of the computer, numbness and tingling in right wrist, eyes strained, neck feeling stiff. Stomach makes a rumbling sound. Get up, turn around and start approaching the kitchen. Fridge door is opened with one explosive movement. Front view of the open fridge: two beer cans on the left, on the right a generic microwave pasta dish, half eaten can of tuna, a piece of lettuce turning brown, behind them forgotten unknown packaging. No time to investigate further, right hand reaches for the furthest left beer can. Beer in hand take a sip while staring at the wall, feeling of warmth and acceptance, slight decrease in anxiety.

03:08

Lying on the floor in the space between the living room sofa and computer desk, seemingly lifeless. Multiple empty beer cans and pieces of pineapple are scattered around your body. Brown pizza box is placed on the right side of the man, containing a half eaten pizza. In addition to pineapple it has pieces of ham and jalapenos, a small piece of it is left on your right hand, still making a half fist. Sound ambience consists of loud snoring and sounds from pop up ads of a porn site left open on the computer.

Day 2: GROCERY STORE

SETTING: APARTMENT

06.28

You wake up from an unsatisfying drunken sleep, first noticing an unpleasant taste of cheap metallic beer, ham and cheese, mixed with a hint of bitter vomit. Slowly get back on two feet, pick up the pizza box, take it to the fridge. Look in the bathroom mirror, the room is spinning and your face is looking strange. Wash your teeth to get rid of the unpleasant taste. Crash to your bed fully clothed and resume sleep.

12:00

Holding a coffee cup on left hand, open up the fridge for some milk, reminded of running low on food and beverages, you need to get groceries soon.

12:25

OBJECTIVE#1: MAKE A GROCERY LIST

1. microwave food
2. frozen pizza
3. some fruit, bananas?
4. rye bread
5. between 4-8 beers
6. diet coke
7. Instant noodles

8. coffee filters
9. something sweet with coffee, a pastry or a chocolate bar

OBJECTIVE#2: GET GROCERIES

16:18

Standing on the parking lot of the apartment building, wearing a black hoodie and jeans, preparing for a roughly 700 meter walk to the supermarket. Impatiently wait for the wireless bluetooth headphones to connect to your phone. Scroll down to find an appropriate soundtrack for the journey. Can't think of anything exciting so pick an old classic: Slayer, Seasons in the Abyss full album. Slight irritation having to wait 5 seconds to skip the youtube ad. "War Ensemble" starts playing, the left headphone is broken, so you can only hear Kerry King's guitar. You have to wait until the end of the month for the next unemployment benefit to afford buying new ones, still it's preferable to the silence and your own thoughts.

SETTING: GROCERY STORE

16:30

Walk through the sliding doors of the grocery store, sensory overload. Hordes of people on Monday afternoon rush hour, dramatic spike in anxiety. Perform mental preparation to take the usual route, try to act normally so people don't pay attention, move your hands in sync with your feet, right arm goes forward when left leg moves back. People of all ages, men, women, children. Men with construction clothes on leaving the lunch place, mother with a stroller, teen girls staring at the phones approaching with speed, collision hazard, perform a dodging maneuver and smoothly walk through the automated gates leading inside the store.

First stop, the fruit aisle. Pick up a hand of bananas holding 6 total, 4 feels like the right number. Bread aisle. Pick up the usual package of ready cut rye bread, throw it in the basket. Ready made meals. Scanning the aisle for discount stickers, something orange hits the field of view. Generic pasta dishes with -30% price, pick two packages and throw them to the back of the shopping basket. Walk 50 meters to the pastry section, cinnamon buns look good today, pick 2. Drinks: check prices for bulk beers, Olvi is cheapest today, pick four, put them down to the shopping basket, pick 4 more, notice a new exciting pint sized special edition you haven't seen before, says "premium lager" on the side, must be good. It is out of your general price range, but take it to save for a special occasion. Frozen food aisle, pickup the usual extra large salami pizza. Reminded to go back to get instant noodles, the symmetrical grocery route is interrupted, minor increase in anxiety. Spend 3 minutes choosing between chicken or ham flavor noodles, compromise and pick one of each. Start the walk towards the cashiers, pick up a 0,5 liter bottle of coke zero on the way.

Waiting in line for the cashiers, anxiety increasing steadily. Prepare for the first social encounter of the day, act casual. Groceries are moving on the conveyor, feeling of shame increases steadily as people behind can see what you bought and silently judge, they must think you are a jobless loser. Moment of truth, initiate firm eye contact and nod to the store clerk. They ask if you are paying with a card, nod again. Cashier asks if you want a receipt,

21:20

Lying on a bed staring at the ceiling, eyes fixed on a spider walking across it, hoping it doesn't fall and land on your face. A sudden buzz on the right side pocket. Pick up the phone and open the lock screen. TINDER: "You have a new match!". Rush of dopamine, the last one was months ago and she never replied to your "Hi, how are you doing? :)" -message. Liisa, 26 years old, 4 km away, likes art, video games and is wearing a Slayer t-shirt in one of her pictures. Open up private chat with shaky fingers, try to come up with a clever opener but can't think of anything. Put down the phone for now and decide to try again tomorrow with a clear brain, also you don't want to appear too desperate with an immediate approach. Unusual feeling of lightness takes over, in a mood for celebration. Walk to the kitchen, pick up a beer, start with the not so shitty pint sized premium lager that was meant for a special occasion.

DAY 3: PHONE CALL

10:45

SETTING: APARTMENT

Wake up, feeling groggy and nauseous, a slight hangover. Walk to the bathroom, looking even more pale than yesterday. Condition is shaky, desperate need for caffeine to offset the brain fog and to start up mental functions. Open up the kitchen cupboard, pick up the coffee container, then reach further back for coffee filters, reminded you don't have them, minor increase in anxiety. Decide to use folded sheets of toilet paper instead. The end result is more grainy, but the effect of the caffeine remains the same, so it will do for now.

12:02

Phone at the nightstand starts buzzing. Heart starts racing, you haven't received a phone call in weeks. Glance at the screen, first three numbers: 029, it means something official, governmental, social welfare or unemployment office. Heart races faster, palms getting moist. Hold the phone and stare for a few seconds, decide to mute it and put it back down. Few seconds of silence until a short vibration follows. Text message appears: "Hello, we tried to reach you regarding your status as a job applicant. We will try to reach you again tomorrow between 8-12 am, please be ready to answer. Have a nice rest of your day. Regards, Employment Services, Central Finland Office." Despair takes over your whole body, the next 18 to 24 hours will be miserable with this news lingering in your mind. Game plan for distraction: Play a video game for next 4 hours, watch a pirated movie, masturbate, go for a walk, get mildly drunk.

DAY 4: PHONE CALL PART 2

07:55

Even worse sleep. Anxiety level high.

Sitting on the sofa with your phone lying on the arm rest, a fresh still steaming cup of coffee in your left hand. Waiting and nervously sipping the coffee, right leg is shaking. On high alert for the buzzing to start at any moment.

09:00

Still no phone call. Pacing back and forth. Trying to focus on errands around the apartment, lift a plate and carry it to the sink. Pick up some trash from the floor, wipe dust from the computer screen. +5 for cleanliness. Start tuning the guitar.

10:58

Unaware of time passing, a rare moment of flow while doodling on an improvised guitar solo, it's one of those you wish you had started recording. Blissfully unaware of the ringing phone, until you lift your head and notice the phone screen lighting up on the other side of the apartment. Rip the headphones from your head causing mild pain in your left ear, put the guitar to the floor and perform an athletic leap toward the phone. Pick it up just in time. Utter your name slightly out of breath. Female voice on the other side, approximately in their mid 50's informs to be calling on behalf of the employment office, needing to check up on your status as a job applicant. Her calm and motherly tone puts you slightly at ease, feeling some relief of tension in shoulders and jaw. Lie about actively looking for open positions on mol.fi and LinkedIn, and claim you have updated your online resume. You have done none of these things. The call turns out to be a standard check up, you are not in trouble as of now, you come to an agreement that you will need to apply for 4 different open positions a month from now on. The nice lady offers you an appointment date from a month from now, no choice but to accept. She wishes you a nice rest of the day and the call ends. Mixture of emotions, mostly relief. There is still almost a full month to ignore the appointment. Anxiety level: moderate. Life goes on as usual.

DAY 12: MATCH

15:06

SETTING: APARTMENT

It's been 48 hours since you matched with Liisa with the Slayer shirt, and you still haven't made an opening.

Compliment on her shirt: "Hey cool Slayer shirt :)"

Immediately filled with embarrassment and regret, convinced she will unmatched after seeing that weak conversation attempt. In a split second you consider deleting her from your matches outright, speeding up the process to avoid the inevitable pain of rejection. But you choose not to go do it, for now.

19:07

A game controller flies through the air and hits the wall, the sound of the collision is more significant than expected, get closer to assess the damage and notice a small dent on the wall, more cursing ensues. Sit back down on the sofa, take the headphones out of your head and log off from the game, enough getting slaughtered by Russian speaking children¹⁶ for one night. Pick up the phone and see a notification, a new message on Tinder. Rush of adrenaline. Open the screen lock to see what she wrote.

She thanks you for complimenting her shirt and asks how your day has been. Reply to her: "It's been really busy, I met with some friends, worked out, now just relaxing reading a book." You obviously did none of these things today. End with also asking about her day.

A rare feeling of hopefulness, maybe something nice actually happens sometimes, maybe you won't end up alone forever after all. You don't even feel the need to watch porn for the rest of the day. You go for a walk, listening to music and daydreaming of your future together.

DAY 21: PORTAL TO THE OTHER SIDE

12:34

SETTING APARTMENT

Late morning, you spent an hour in bed watching youtube videos and arguing on reddit. It is time to get caffeinated and start the day. Pick up your favorite mug you had enough energy to wash last night. Pour the coffee to the Empire Strikes Back coffee mug with the handle broken off. Reach for the fridge to get some milk.

The room starts to vibrate and you spill some of your coffee to the floor. A loud noise follows that is hard to define. Deafening low frequency drone with a mixture of banging, metals clanging together, what sounds like bursts of electricity and high frequency hissing.

The source of the noise is a large black rift that has appeared to the opposite wall of the kitchen. A portal of some kind.

OBJECTIVE: INVESTIGATE PORTAL

Despite being a highly unusual event you don't feel any fear, in fact not feeling any emotion at all. This void intrigues you, might as well step in, you don't have much else planned for today, apart from returning empty bottles to the grocery store later. Step towards the rift and reach towards it, you feel a pleasant vibration in your finger, the air is noticeably cooler than in the apartment. The low frequency drone feels now more soothing the closer you get. You

¹⁶ Common experience online shooters games getting trash talked by often young people from a foreign country.

step inside the portal. You are now in a tunnel of light, with purple and black cloud-like formations scattering all around you.

You sense that you are traveling at a high speed, but haven't even spilled your coffee again. Everything goes black for a moment.

SETTING: THE OTHER SIDE

You awake again in a strange environment. First sensation you register is being gently strangled by a tight buttoned up shirt. You look down on your body, it seems approximately 8 kilograms lighter, slim fitting khaki pants and shiny trendy looking leather shoes. You have a wrist watch on your left arm, sleeves are rolled back revealing a veiny toned forearm. You are still holding a coffee mug, but it is not the Empire Strikes Back cup, it is a black matte colored coffee cup with an inspirational quote, something about staying in the grind.

You feel a need to sit down, a computer desk behind you. Facing a laptop screen, email inbox is left open, meetings, business deals. A framed image on the wall "Most sales in 2017", clearly spelling out your full name. Hear muffled chatter in the background. A phone buzzes in your right pocket, take it out. Somehow you know how to open the screen lock from muscle memory, despite never having seen this phone before. A message from an assumed spouse, reminder to pick up the "children" from an afterschool thing at 18:00. It's all too much to take in, what you have gathered so far is having a private office space, enough money to afford trendy shirts, a wrist watch, you have a wife, you have procreated. Rush out of the room, surprised looking office workers turn to look at you, continue to a hallway across the room to find the nearest toilet. Turn to look in the bathroom mirror, you recognize your face, but with a trimmer clean shaven shape, a trendy looking haircut, dead and soulless eyes, but somehow filled with vibrance, ambition and drive. You notice blood starting to leak from your right nostril. Everything goes black again. A more familiar doughy and pale face is now staring back, with a bleeding nose, look down and you appear to also have wet yourself in the process. Strip down and throw your urine soaked pants straight to the washing machine, proceed to take a shower. You reflect on this experience as you wash yourself, what you just went through, it is unclear what was the reason for this, any lessons you should grasp from this travel through dimensions or something like that. Mostly you feel annoyed, they were the last clean pants you had and you had plans to leave the apartment today to return empty bottles to the store, that will have to wait for tomorrow now.

DAY 31: ALGORITHMS

18:46

SETTING: APARTMENT

Blasting away on a M249 SAW machine gun on a war torn middle eastern town square, a terrorist vanishes in a red mist, you notice a reflection coming from the scope of a sniper hiding on the roof, run for cover, bullets whizzing by. Gunfire coming from behind a truck in front of you, throw a grenade next to it. DOUBLE KILL text appears on the screen, rush of dopamine. You feel a headache coming, enough killing terrorists for today, it's good to quit

while you're still on top. Finish your energy drink with one sip and go take a leak, your bladder is bursting after 4 Red Bulls and 3 hours of sitting still.

18:52

Front page of youtube, continue where you last left of, final 22 minutes of Joe Rogan¹⁷ Experience #1070 - Jordan Peterson¹⁸, you feel inspired by this brave man, you attach a post it note on the bottom of the computer screen to remind you to start cleaning your room tomorrow. Next on the autoplay: Jordan Peterson debates on the gender pay gap. You are almost moved to tears hearing Peterson talk about the plight of young men today, he sure made that leftist BBC interviewer look like a fool. Next up: Ben Shapiro owns SJW:s and Liberals¹⁹, this man is just logical too and witty for these brainwashed woke zombies. SJW cringe compilation, you already saw this one, skip to the next one: feminist cringe part 13.²⁰

20:00

Phone alarm starts ringing, it is a reminder to send a job application today. The so-called activity model²¹ came into law this year, meaning stricter conditions for receiving unemployment benefits. Times are hard for jobless white straight men these days. Hit snooze, you still have time for a couple videos. Alex Jones²² talks about pizza gate, this guy is crazy,

¹⁷ Joe Rogan is a famous comedian, MMA commentator and a podcaster, most known today as being the host of one of the biggest podcasts in the world "The Joe Rogan Experience". While the podcaster is famous for interviewing a wide variety of guests across political aisles, he has gained some controversy for platforming famous conspiracy theorists and far right adjacent figures.

¹⁸ Canadian psychologist and author, adopted online father figure for countless young men around the world, made famous by wider audiences from various appearances in "The Joe Rogan Experience". Known for his 2018 best selling self help book "12 Rules For Life"..

¹⁹ "Owning" SJW:s (social justice warriors) was a popular genre of videos at the time. Influenced by the "new atheist" subculture, and related videos where famous atheist figures such as Christopher Hitchens "owning" religious people with logical arguments. Same format was adopted for videos of right wing figures debating feminists and liberals, meant to highlight that feminist and liberal ideologies are irrational and more akin to religion, and can be easily shut down with "facts and logic". A.Nagle, The online culture wars from Tumblr and 4chan to the alt-right and Trump, Zero books, 2017, p 68.

Right wing personality Ben Shapiro is especially famous for this genre, and has coined his own catchphrase: "facts don't care about your feelings".

²⁰ YouTube's recommendation algorithm has been widely criticized for perpetuating the issue of online echo chambers. Countless testimonials exist of young men succumbing to far right ideologies after falling into algorithmically driven YouTube "rabbit holes".

<https://www.thedailybeast.com/how-youtube-pulled-these-men-down-a-vortex-of-far-right-hate>

²¹The so-called active model came into Finnish law in early 2018. Active model means that the unemployed must show activity or else their unemployment insurance will be reduced. The goal of the model is to increase employment and shorten the period of unemployment. In Finland, it was in use in 2018 and 2019.

Aktiivimalli [Active model] <https://fi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aktiivimalli>

²² A known conspiracy theorist and host of the online show "InfoWars". Often platformed by Joe Rogan, Jones has since been banned from most mainstream social media platforms

but you heard Joe Rogan saying he's right about a lot of things, you press play out of curiosity.

00:14

Scrolling Ylilauta, open the "post what cat you are today" thread. You are mostly an imageboard lurker and rarely post anything, but you decide to contribute with a picture of an unusually large cat wearing a cap of a beer brand and cigarette in its mouth. Jump to a thread rating womens tinder profiles, initially you feel bad how mean the comments are, but are reminded by the comments that women have it easy on dating apps so you shouldn't feel too bad about judging them anonymously. Thread of people posting their favorite memes, most of these are pretty lame and don't elicit a reaction, until one gets a few chuckles out of you: A picture of a white man wearing a blue shirt and a tie, leaning back on his office chair hands behind his neck, looking relaxed and happy, the text says: "8 HOURS BEING RACIST ON THE INTERNET, picture below of the same man hunched forward on his office chair, holding his back with the other hand, look of pain on his face, text next to him: "1 MINUTE LISTENING TO A WOMAN TALK". You don't think you are either racist or hate women, you justify laughing because it's so over the top it must be satire, like South Park. You give the meme an ironic upvote.

01:02

Starting to feel sleepy after a full day of terrorist hunting and self education.

It's time to close the shop for tonight, tomorrow you will clean your apartment and need all the rest you can get.

You never sent that job application you were supposed to.

DAY 41: GIRLFRIEND EXPERIENCE

SETTING: APARTMENT

It's been 9 days since and she still hasn't replied, you got ghosted yet again. Probably weren't tall enough, or your chin is not strong enough, most likely not having a job or any aspirations in life, and also being overweight. ²³Turn to the computer for distraction, scrolling down the front page of Pornhub but nothing seems to do the trick, you've seen all these generic titles and thumbnails all too many times. Fresh emotional pain and sexual frustration is getting too much to bear. Land on a page advertising local escort services, with the promise of physical intimacy you are past the point of caring about finances, just take another quick loan to cover

following his far right conspiracy links and defamation case with the Sandy Hook elementary school shooting victims' families.

²³ In incel imageboard discussions the blame for their lack of sex is often blamed on women for being superficial, commonly brought up physical attributes for undesirable males is having a weak chin or not being tall enough. Often a specific male and female archetypes are used to highlight this "stacy's" (basic "normie" women) only wanting to have sex with "chads"(representation of desirable male features, strong ching, athletic, tall, confident.)

it. Scrolling through a catalog of women normally unattainable. Make a pick, you are convinced that the advertised “girlfriend experience” is going to fill this longing inside you. Filled with adrenaline you type down the number. Phone rings for a few seconds, and you abort the call. Too much nerves, wait for a few minutes and try again, write down your lines so you don’t freeze. This time someone answers, a pleasant female voice with an ambiguous accent, she doesn't seem to mind your nervous rambling, I’m sure you are not the first loser that has called her today. You have a date in two hours. Next, make a text message transaction to a familiar quick loan service for 200 €, you’ll worry about paying later, some things are more important than money. Take an extra long shower, however transactional the situation will be, you still want to be representable, choose your finest buttoned up shirt, wash your teeth and head out to the night.

SETTING: CITY CENTER

You receive instructions to a hotel, it's dark and raining. Head covered deeply inside your hood, walk fast so no one suspects anything, you are definitely not meeting a sexworker, just a regular guy going about his normie business, to a late night business meeting perhaps. Waiting behind the hotel room door, there’s still time to turn back, use the money for something sensible, like overdue phone bills or a new video game controller. Door opens, no turning back now.

24

45 minutes later.

Walking back to the bus stop, it is raining even harder, but you are not even registering getting drenched. Tenfold the anxiety you had before. All the things you could have used that money for, all the undue bills, all the video games you could have bought, pay off part of the previous quick loan you took. Anxiety reaching near crippling levels. How could you be so deluded that using another person as a sex doll could have filled a hint of that void inside you, should have just stayed home and masturbated.

DAY 63: INTRUDER

SETTING: APARTMENT

10:03

Woken up by the sound of a doorbell, the most blood chilling sound you know. A stranger wants to enter your home. Split second scan of your surroundings, in no circumstance can you let any outsider see this garbage dumb you live in.

²⁴ Some incel men have stated that lonely men should be provided with tax funded access for services of sexworkers. A self proclaimed incel states in an article by Helsingin Sanomat: ‘Sex, just like food, are vital basic needs for humans, cause pleasure and maintain well-being and endurance. It would be a civil right to have enough sex.’ [translation by the author from Finnish]M. Riiali, Vihaiset Miehet Ilman Seksiä [Angry Men Without Sex]. – Helsingin Sanomat, 17 September 2022

OBJECTIVE: PRETEND TO BE DEAD

Stay still and hope the stranger will leave you alone, seconds go by feeling like hours as you hold your breath. A second ring of the door bell, you wish to wake from this nightmare but it is reality, you just woke up moments ago dreaming of being back in high school Swedish class, even that nightmare would be preferably to this reality. You hear a few muffled steps, hoping the intruder is about to turn away to continue their way. Three loud knocks, 2 seconds of silence followed by 4 knocks. A key enters your door lock, full blown panic.

The last visitor was your mom 8 months ago, only to bring you a new coffee maker, before that you spent two days cleaning and still only prevented her from going further than a few meters from the door.

As the key is turning inside the lock, you rise up from the bed the fastest you have ever moved in your life, grab the nearest shirt from the floor and put it on, hear the door opening, look for the nearest pants and hear footsteps getting louder, pants are too far to reach. This is how the stranger will see you, standing in your boxers, wearing an inside out Danzig t-shirt, now spelling giznaD, with a look of terror on your face. A man in his late 40's with a thick mustache appears behind the wall, he is wearing a jacket and a hat from a generic maintenance company. He is mildly startled from the sight of you. He explains something about a routine check of some meters and pipes that you were apparently notified about, the notification must be somewhere under the pile of mail near the front door. You answer that you were sleeping and forgot.

Left standing frozen from shock as the man disappears to the kitchen where the operation will take place. You feel violated, another person has entered your depression lair, the house of mummified banana peels and masturbation. This man will certainly talk to his work buddies of the most disgusting apartment he has ever seen in his life, what kind of filthy animal can live like that. Dejected and resigned to this humiliation you slump down on the sofa, waiting for the torture to end. 16 minutes later, the man informs you that he is done, and quickly disappears through the front door. Hear the door closing, few seconds later a muffled doorbell sound, on his way to your neighbor who opens the door not long after. Still slumped down on the sofa, you can't even bear to look around and think of what the man witnessed. Trails of dust, pieces of paper and plastic, empty cans and bottles, dishes in the most random places, used coffee filters, a tower of pizza boxes almost reaching the ceiling. The large splash of orange juice that happened months ago but still hasn't been cleaned. A full plate of muesli that you dropped behind the sofa a month ago, too much effort to sort out that mess. You adapted to live with it, you could avoid the broken shards and dried milk with your eyes closed. The kitchen stove is covered with years worth of thick yellow crust of fat. A balcony filled with trash bags.

You strip naked to soak under the shower for 30 minutes.

DAY 68: SANCTIONED

SETTING: GROCERY STORE

At the cashier about to pay your usual, 8 beers, pasta, minced meat, two microwave pizzas and a bag of chips. Card doesn't work, take it out and rub the chip with the sleeve of your hoodie. Try again, same error. Panic increases as people behind are impatiently waiting for their turn. Try again for the fourth time. Humiliatingly you have to leave your groceries and run to the atm to withdraw cash. Bank account 5,43 €, your shopping amount was 14,55€. Confusion and increase in anxiety. It's the first day of the month, and you should have received your monthly unemployment benefit. Walk of shame back to the cashier, inform you can't afford anything, the cashier is nice enough to let you leave the groceries at the counter. Fast pace walk back to the apartment, mind racing what could be the reason for this. You are greeted with a new announcement as you log in to your personal online job seeking profile.

“We are informed that you failed to apply for a position that we recommended for you, therefore you will be withheld from unemployment benefit for the next month. You can give your reasoning in the feedback section below.”

Must have been the one envelope around a month ago you failed to open due anxiety, and eventually forgot about. Go to the pile of mail under your front door and find it. The application in question was for a local IT company, a position you have zero qualifications for, even so it would have been minimal effort to write a generic application letter just to appease the officials and continue life as usual, it is time to accept some blame. Lay down in bed and wallow in self loathing for the next few hours, then think of strategies to survive the month with the budget of 5,43€.

Money options to consider:

Quick loan

A fast loan can save you from a tight spot, just go over the interest rates and billing dates before applying, even though most likely you won't bother.

A good credit rating is overrated.

Gambling

It's not going to hurt to try your luck with grocery store slot machines every now and again. Online gambling is a possibility to get rich fast, but just as with quick loans, be mindful of the risks involved.

Parents

If your parents are well off and loving enough to offer additional beer money, Just remember to ask for cash when you are receiving income support. Downside is the shame of asking money from your parents when you are almost in your 30's.

Bottle recycling

It is always an option to go looking for empty bottles to return to the store, if you feel outdoorsy and don't mind the stigma of being a public bottle collector. If you are industrious enough you can make decent money, but that would require dedicating a lot of hours and resemble an actual job, so what would be the point.

Crime

If you want to be a bad boy, however, this is not recommended. The point of the unemployed lifestyle is to be law abiding and take advantage of the benefits the welfare state has to offer. To live a quiet, unnoticeable life with your video game and online porn, bothering no one.

You decide to go with the first option: quick loan.

Perform a fast google search to choose the least suspicious looking from the top 3 results. After a routine registration process and estimations of your usual income, combined with unemployment benefit, general housing support and income support. Apply for a total sum of 300€ that should last long enough, you probably should read the interest rates and other conditions, but that would be unrealistic. In less than 30 minutes you receive a text message notification that the money has been transferred to your account. Immediate relief and decrease in anxiety, you still don't have much food, but you decide to celebrate your new found wealth by ordering a pizza.

Day 81: THE HUNT

Your local supermarket will introduce a policy to reduce the price of expiring food products with a -30% sale tag, to -60% after 20:00 every day of the week. Huge development for the local unemployed community. Set an alarm for 19:00, tonight you are going hunting.

19:30

SETTING: GROCERY STORE

OBJECTIVE: FIND CHEAP FOOD

Supplied with a backpack, plastic bag in each jean pockets, headphones blasting early 90's death metal. Sliding doors open, enter the store. Immediately notice dozens of fellow financially challenged people with shopping carts, racing across the aisles with blazing speed. Spike of adrenaline, grab a shopping cart and lounge towards the aisles. Jog towards the ready made meals section, the section is looking empty on microwave pizzas and generic pasta dishes, orange sticker right upper corner of the aisle, race towards it. About reach the packaging as it is taken before your eyes, a heavy set male, approximately early 30's, wearing a beanie and a shirt with an anime character on it. Curse at your bad luck and slow reflexes. Next, the meat and sausage section, you find a package of ready cut sausage. It is a strange one with mushroom and cheese flavor but can't ignore the price, throw it in the cart. Head towards the dairy section, furiously scanning the shelves, finally some luck, a 1 liter package of plum yogurt, a strange choice you wouldn't make otherwise, but it's less than 1 euro, and it's good to be adventurous sometimes. Primal satisfaction from your find, but no

time to savor it, the bread aisle is next. You hit a jackpot, a section full of ready cut rye bread, untouched, you grab 5 bags and throw them to the cart, the rest can stay in the freezer.

19:58

At the queue for the cashier. Longest line at this hour you have ever experienced. Fronted by the heavy set man with the anime shirt, with a cart overflowing with products, you can't imagine how much money he saved. Must have come a full hour before and scouted the place beforehand, what a selfish bastard, but you must respect the hustle. Take a mental note to arrive a full hour before next time

Back home, unloading the haul: Plumb yogurt, strange mushroom sausages, 5 bags of ready cut, slightly sweet generic rye bread, cold smoked salmon. Savings: 8,43€.

Brain rewards you with a generous hit of dopamine after a successful hunt, you live another day. You feel like a primal man.

22:00

Sitting at the toilet with an upset stomach, must have been the strange mushroom sausages.

DAY 99: ALONE AT A BAR

SETTING: LOCAL BAR

OBJECTIVE: COURT A FEMALE

Sitting at a corner table at a local bar popular with students, sipping a pint of beer.

Anxiousness and alertness are high due to the overstimulating environment, even despite having a few drinks before.

Scan around for females, but be subtle about it, you don't want to appear that creepy guy at the corner. The pint is empty, immediately go order another one.

Sit back on the same corner spot. You notice a pattern, most women are already with a male companion already, or tight friend groups that seem impenetrable.

You try to think of possible strategies and scenarios how to approach, they all seem completely out of the question. This is Finland, no one just walks up to a stranger and talks to them, that would be insane. Unless of course in a black out drunken state, so that's what you are aiming at. Second pint is finished, go and immediately order a third.

Approximately 3 liters of beer later. Finally some relaxation, head to the toilets before getting more alcohol. Glance at the toilet mirror as you are washing your hands. Eyes are looking vacant, means you are on your way, few more than you just might be able to stare at someone in the eye and smile.

It's time to make some moves and leave the corner table, find a spot close where people are gathered and stand around for starters, perhaps a natural opening presents itself. A girl standing alone at 3'a clock, mid twenties you assume, dark hair staring at a phone while holding a colorful drink in the other hand. Stand 5 meters away, adrenaline spiking, take a

step in her direction and try to come up with a game plan. You freeze as she lifts her head from the phone screen. Stand still for a half a second and open your mouth, she looks aside from you and waves someone, then walks away. You are left standing, hands shaking from the adrenaline. Walk back to the same corner spot and reassess your approach, before that order another one, with a shot of something strong.

Another trip to the toilet, on your way out bump into someone, beer is spilled on your shirt. Spike in anger, but it fades away quickly after noticing the other person is wearing a Demolition Hammer t-shirt. The man is mid drunken apology as you reach for a handshake to compliment his shirt and excellent taste in music.

SUB OBJECTIVE: MAKE A MALE FRIEND

The man answers to your handshake as he notices your now beer drenched long sleeve Malevolent Creation t-shirt. The limp handshake turns into an awkward drunken hug, spilling more beer on both of your metal shirts. You head to the counter, and then to a table together. A rich and nuanced discussion about metal bands, video games and Ultimate Fighting Championship ensues, you never experienced this intense comradery. Maybe you finally found, not just a buddy but an actual male friend. A real friend you can share worries, hopes and aspirations with, not just an occasional text asking tips about a video game boss, or a movie recommendation, a male friend you can hug even when sober without feeling weird. You go to order another round for both of you, as you return your brother has vanished.²⁵

It's hard to define how much time has passed, but your glass is empty, and he is still nowhere to be seen. You didn't even find out his name yet. Moment of grief for a brotherhood that didn't pan out. Anyway fuck that guy, he must have been a poser anyway, probably thinks Heartwork is a better album than Reek of Putrefaction²⁶. Grab the beer meant for him and pour it down your throat.

SUB OBJECTIVE FAILED

Back to the original plan to court a woman, stand up and head towards the dance floor, it's time to get serious. You feel extremely out of place on the floor in the middle of all these beautiful and lively people. Despite heavy intoxication the familiar insecurity and self consciousness comes in full effect. Try to move your body to the rhythm of the horrible song that is playing way too loud. Slowly it gets easier and you are able to let go of some of your inhibitions. Notice a group of women at 4 a'clock and dance your way near them in an uncoordinated fashion. Other men have noticed the group and are swarming around them,

²⁵ 'Men have fewer friends than women and are at a greater risk of isolation. The gap has widened in recent years. A 2021 report from the Survey Center on American Life identified a male "friendship recession," with 15% of men saying they have no close friends, up from 3% in 1990.' R.Reeves, *Of Boys and Men: Why the Modern Male Is Struggling, Why It Matters, and What to Do about It*, p.55.

²⁶ Albums by the British Death Metal/Grindcore band Carcass. Some purist fans believe the band sold out with their 1995 album: Heartwork, where they took on a more melodic style and gained video play on MTV.

you got competition. Feeling dejected you turn back and try to move back to your table, until you feel sudden pressure in your penis, a strange hand is grabbing it. This has barely registered until a strange tongue forcibly enters your mouth. Push the strange face back and a strong cigarette smell hits your nostrils.

The person in front of you is a middle aged woman with pink hair, wearing an aggressive leopard patterned dress, her intense facial expression scares you. While physical intimacy is what you were looking for, this was not quite what you had in mind, make an evasive maneuver as the woman is heading back for more. Stumble back to your table and sit down on a bar chair.

The room is spinning, lower your head between your legs, a strong stream of vomit shoots out directly on your shoes. You feel someone grabbing you by the shoulders and hear the words: "It's time to go home buddy." You make some sounds with your mouth not resembling any known language, you don't even know yourself if agreeing or arguing with the man, either way it is useless to resist. You surrender to the strong arms of the bouncer as he lifts you up like a baby.

Miraculously you find the ticket for your jacket, and are now aimlessly stumbling on the streets of the now emptying city center. A magical yellow M appears at a distance, sign for a 24/7 chain fast food restaurant. An oasis in the middle of a desert.

12:00

SETTING APARTMENT

You wake up in your bed, fully clothed but covered by a bed sheet.

Familiar taste in your mouth, the room feels unstable as you walk to the bathroom, fast food papers are scattered all over. Crash back to the bed. Although you were unsuccessful, you still feel some resemblance of pride in your effort. There's always Pornhub, it will never leave you or reject your awkward approaches.

DAY 321: UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

9:45

SETTING: LOCAL BUS

4th to the last bench on the left side of the bus. It is gray and foggy outside +2 celcius, color scheme monochrome gray. Rectangle apartment buildings going by. People driving to work, taking their children to school, fully assimilated, living out their normie NPC lives in the most boring city, in the most boring country in the world.

Step out of the bus right into a puddle, right foot and sock immediately wet, medium increase in anxiety. Set direction towards the Unemployment office, grab a takeaway coffee from a kiosk on the way to mitigate some of the brain fog you are experiencing.

8 minutes later you arrive at the destination.

SETTING: UNEMPLOYMENT OFFICE

You arrive at a generic office building smell, scent of work in the air. A sign on the wall directs you to the 4th floor. The elevator door opens, but someone is about to enter before you, take the stairs. 7 minutes later, out of breath and sweating you arrive at the 4th floor. Push the door, it won't budge, realize you have to pull it, enter the room with slight embarrassment, not sure how many people witnessed the door episode. Inside, greeted by bright lights and chaotic chattering, a medium increase in anxiety. Scan for an empty seat in the waiting room, sit on a surprisingly comfortable sofa like structure. Coffee is almost done with, stand up to take the cup in the trash, pick up a plastic cup of water on the way. You still have 8 minutes to wait, do some people watching. Approximately 12 people are also waiting. A young man, looking fresh from high school, probably from the outskirts of the city, wearing a backwards cap, skateboarding shoes and a gray hoodie, standing and leaning to the wall behind him, eyes glued to a phone. Next to him an older gentleman sitting down, wearing thick glasses and a light blue wool beanie, breathes with his mouth open. The color of his winter jacket is hard to define due to your partial color blindness, it appears to be brown, but there is a possibility it is green.

There is a family of migrants, assumed from the middle east. They have a baby in a stroller, a slightly older, more independent child is standing near the stroller, staring intensely at the man with the ambiguously colored jacket, also with her mouth open. Take a sip of water. Door opens, a woman approximately 36 years old appears, hear your name being called, stand up and start walking towards the woman. Reach for a handshake, nod and step inside the office. Sit on the uncomfortable generic office chair, and hand over your social security card. The official politely asks how your day has been, you mutter something about the bad weather, she agrees with you, small talk delivered successfully. Bonus points for social skills. She types down your social security code, you feel exposed as she is intensively scrolling your humiliating employment and job searching history. Medium increase in anxiety.

Employment official: "So you're an artist I see?"

You: "Ah yes, I like to draw and stuff."

Employment official: "Is is something you do as an hobby, or professionally? I see you have a bachelor degree in fine arts."

Your thoughts: "Is this a trick question?"

Your thoughts: "Don't mention about the exhibition you had last year, or any paintings you have worked on for the past year."

You: "Well, it's more of a hobby at the moment, I haven't been active lately and I am seeking a job."

Employment official: "I see, I suppose it is not easy to find a job as a visual artist, I think you should widen your scope."

You: "Yes I am open to it."

She starts suggesting suitable jobs to apply for.

Employment official: "How about graphic design?"

You: "Yes, I suppose."

Employment official: "Something in advertising?"

You: "Sure."

Employment official: “Do you have experience in the service industry? Do you have a hygiene proficiency certificate?”

You: “No, and no.”

Employment official: “Would you see yourself working at a warehouse?”

You: “I’m open to it I guess.”

Employment official: “Do you have a car?”

You: “No.”

Employment official: “Do you have access to a car that is not your own?”

You: “Well maybe sometimes, my parents.”

Employment official: “How about cleaning? Office spaces and so forth.”

You: “Yeah, maybe, I guess.”

She does some more typing and declares that your job searching profile has been updated, she gives you homework to update your online CV, and to keep applying for work and to update your progress on your profile. Another meeting in person is 2 months from now.

SETTING: CITY CENTER

You arrive outside, emotionally drained and exhausted.

Walk to the nearby store to get a chocolate bar and an energy drink.

The bus back home leaves in 22 minutes, walk to the video game store near the bus station to pass time. Scrolling through the sale section, daydream of buying some of these titles when you have extra cash, perhaps from your first paycheck as an office space cleaner.

CONCLUSION

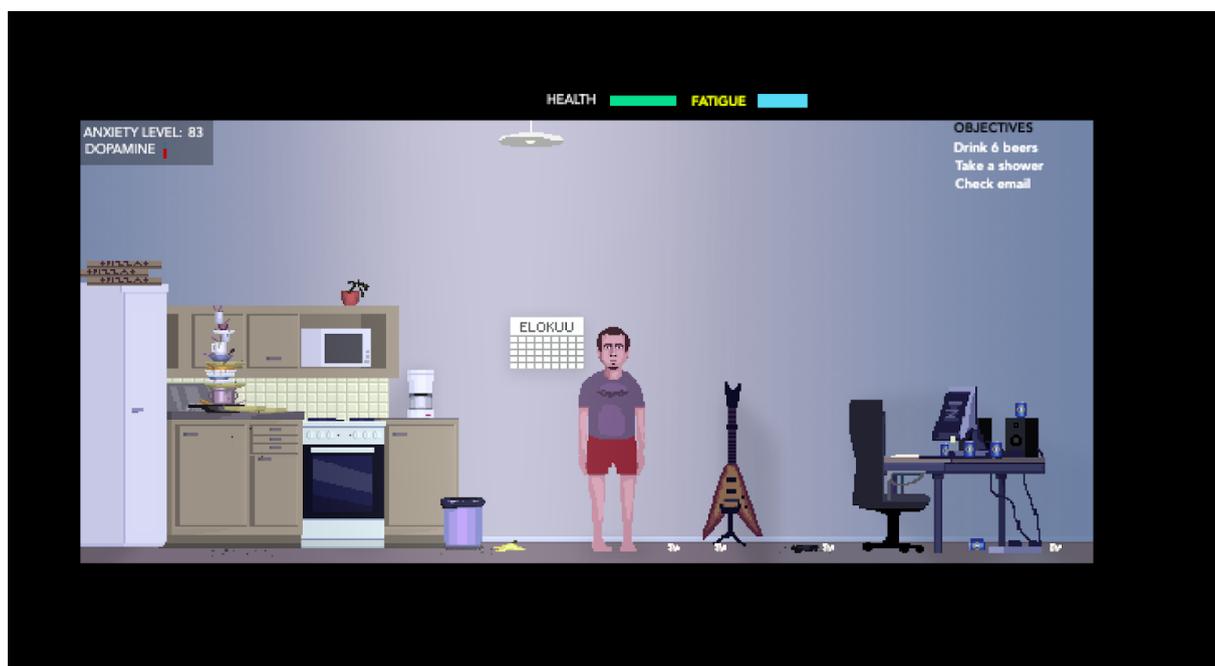
In conclusion, the thesis writing process has been a rewarding experience. Using my personal lived experiences as a template to explore the topics of masculinity and mental health has been a surprisingly therapeutic process, and has provided me with a more emphatic view on these issues. Another unexpected aspect of this process was the fresh perspective and insight my studies abroad and writing in English provided me regarding various cultural and societal issues related to my home country. I feel that the theoretical work enriched my artistic project, and I have gained new ideas and concepts to be implemented on the video game. More generally I feel the artistic growth I have gained during this process has been the most valuable part. Working with a new medium alongside theoretical research has allowed me to learn new tools on how to conceptualize and present real life topics in my artistic work. I now see even more potential in making engaging and thought provoking art with the medium of video games, and I look forward to continuing to experiment with artform as a significant part of my artistic practice.

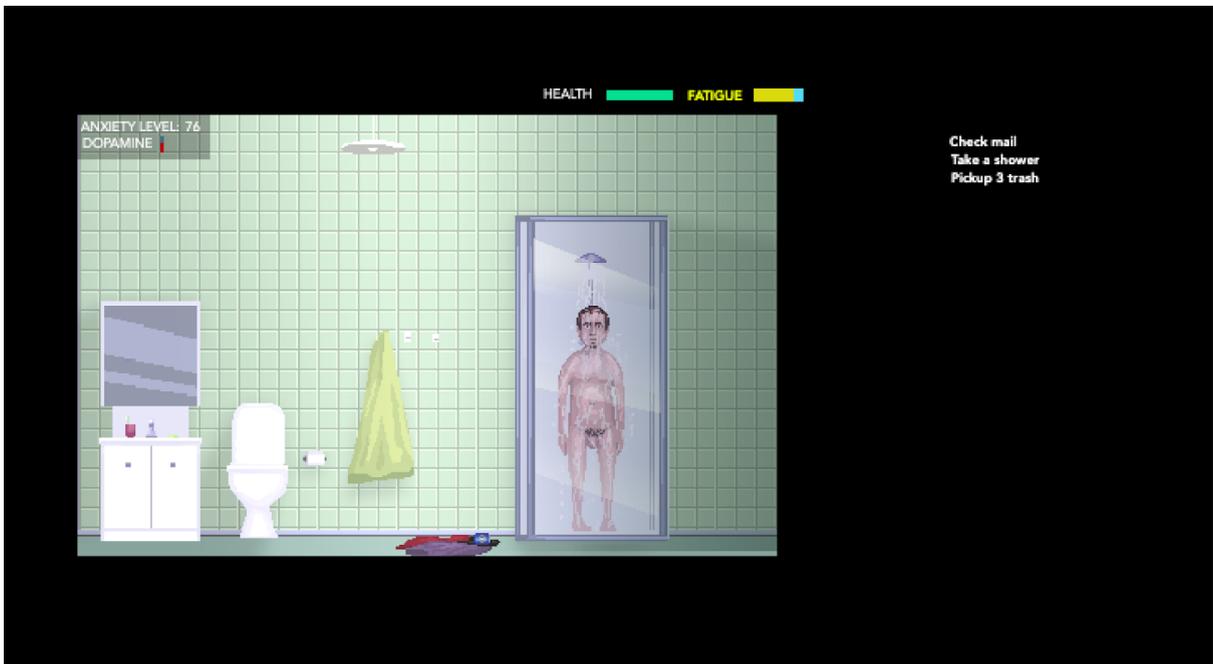
KOKKUVÕTE

Oma lõputöö kirjalikus osas arutlen kunstiprojektis “Töötuse simulaator 2018” esinevate teemade üle. Lõputöö esimene pool tutvustab lühidalt videomänguprojekti ja pakub konteksti erinevatele projektis kujutatud teemadele, näiteks meeste üksindus, sotsiaalne eemaletõmbumine ja Soome sotsiaalhoolekandesüsteem. Lõputöö teine osa on kirjutatud stsenaariumi (käsikirja) vormingus, mis avab ja täiendab videomängu narratiivi konteksti. Käsikiri koosneb fiktiivsetest igapäevastest stsenaariumitest, mis on inspireeritud isiklikest läbielatud kogemustest ning seda toetavast uurimustööst lõputöö teemadel. Minu eesmärgiks on läbi enesekriitilise huumori ja iroonia pakkuda nüansirikast ja isiklikult suhestutavat vaadet meeste üksindusele ning maalida alternatiivne pilt Soome heaolusüsteemist.

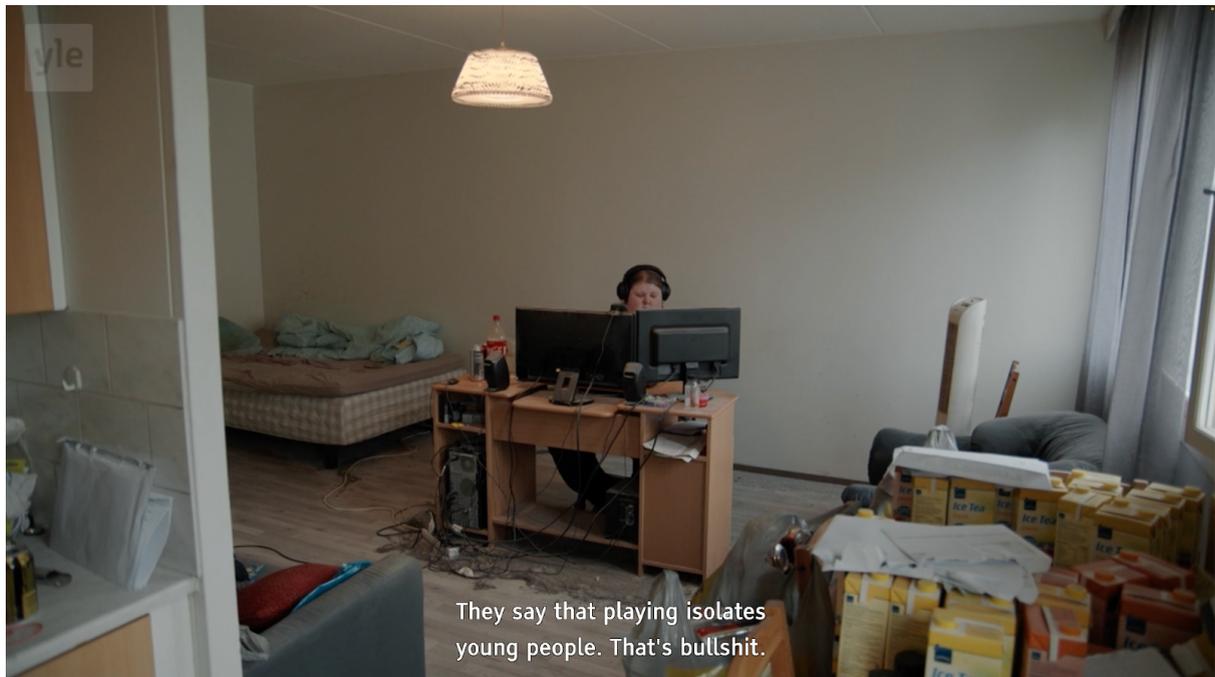
APPENDIX

Screenshots from “Unemployment Simulator 2018”

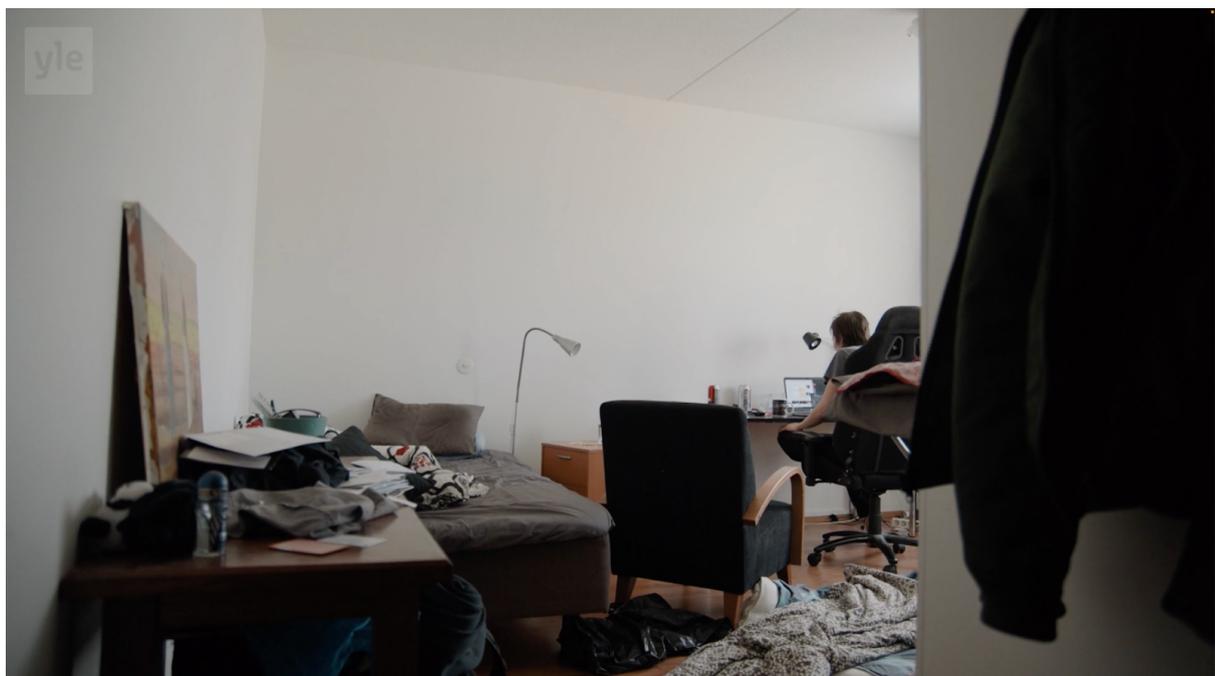




Screenshots from the Finnish documentary series “Logged In” premiered 3.2.2020 on the streaming service Yle Areena. The series followed the daily lives of five young marginalized Finnish men living their daily lives. The series provided a refreshingly human and honest view of the topic and was one of my inspirations for the video game “Unemployment Simulator 2018”. While all of the men had differing stories and circumstances, most shared common experiences of childhood bullying, mental health or substance abuse issues and gaming being an important part of their lives. <https://areena.yle.fi/1-50409258>



Screenshot from Logged In, episode 2 0:30s,



Screenshot from Logged In, episode 3, 3:01s,



Screenshot from Logged In, episode 5 0:30s,

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CV

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ART EDUCATION

Estonian Academy of Arts, Contemporary art, MA, Tallinn, EE 2021-
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UPOMING EXHIBITIONS

2024 Viiva, Jälki, Väri, Jyväskylä Art Museum, Jyväskylä, FI 2023

TASE '23, Tallinn Art Hall, Tallinn, EE

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2022 Strange Questions, Malmitalon Galleria, Helsinki, FI

2021 Plasticity, Galleria Becker, Jyväskylä, FI

2018 Dark and Shiny Things, Galleria Uusi Kipinä, Lahti, FI

2017 Asleep Through It All, Galleria Patina, Jyväskylä, FI

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023 NarniArt 2023, Galleria La Fiaba, Jyväskylä, FI

2022 Koherenssi, Varikko Galleria, Seinäjoki, FI

2022 Ideations of the World, ULM, Tallinn, EE

2022 Liminal Path, Vent Space, Tallinn, EE

2022 Sininen Hetki, Jyväskylä Art museum, Jyväskylä, FI

2021 Wiurilan Kesä 2021, Katseen Kääntöpiiri, Halikko, FI

2021 3. aalto, Jyväskylän Taiteilijaseuran 73. vuosinäyttely, Museum of Central Finland, Jyväskylä, FI 2020

Yksi3, Porvo Art Hall, Porvoo, FI

2018 Art of Basware 2018, Hotel Clarion, Helsinki, FI

2018 Juuripaine, Höyry Galleria, Korpilahti, FI

2018 Jyväskylän Taiteilijaseura Juhlatauulella, Jyväskylä Art Museum, Jyväskylä, FI

2017 Demolition Party, purkutalonäyttely, Vapaudenkatu 28, Jyväskylä, FI

2017 Jyväskylän taiteilijaseuran 71. vuosinäyttely, Museum of Central Finland, Jyväskylä, FI

2016 Konstitt, Galleria Rantakasarmi, Helsinki, FI

2016 Veistoksia ja maalauksia, Kankaanpään Galleria, Kankaanpää, FI

WORKS IN COLLECTIONS Jyväskylä Art museum

MEMBERSHIPS

Finnish Painters Union

Jyväskylä Artist Association

GRANTS & AWARDS

2020 Finnish Cultural Foundation, 13 000 €