



# GAME ON!

## El arte en juego

### **MIND ALONE: AN EXPERIMENTAL MOBILE GAME**

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#### **1.Introduction**

*Mind Alone* (2017/2018) is an experimental mobile game, created by Sioux, a Brazilian gaming publisher. The main mechanics is puzzle-based (ADAMS, 2014) and most part of the gaming interface is built using alphabetical characters, only. Narrative is the main feature in this case and puzzle mechanics create the perfect blend for the gameplay. The main idea of the game is to follow the notion that “story, dialogue, character profiles, etc., should all be created in a way that add to the design of the gameplay” (INCE, 2006, p.36).

Based with slight modifications on the “High Concept Document” proposed by Adams and Rollings (2009, p.63), in this brief paper we aim to discuss some main features from *Mind Alone*’s game designing process, its business model conception, and how an experimental mobile game can be used to promote a gaming studio and become an example for game designing classes.

It is important to highlight that the “High Concept Document” (HCD) is an interesting exercise of “elevator pitch”; in other words: the document must be brief, objective, take no more than 10 minutes to read, and contain the essential features from the game. This kind of document is a good tool for game designers to register ideas for further consulting, and to explain ideas to studios/publishers/gaming companies.

Below we present the main features from *Mind Alone* described in the HCD format.

#### **2.Mind Alone’s High Concept Document**

**Name of the game:** Mind Alone

**Team:** Vicente Martin Mastrocola (game design, sound design, information architecture); Gabriel Romano (user experience, Unity programming); Guilherme Camargo (business model; planning strategy).

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**Publisher:** Sioux

**Country and year:** Brazil (São Paulo), 2017/2018

**Game summary:** *Mind Alone* is a non-competitive single-player game based on plot/story-related. The player embodies the role of a character trapped in his own mind. It is impossible to say if they are dreaming, lying in a coma or dead. To reach the answer for this mystery, the player must solve a series of puzzles; each puzzle is a memory that brings hints of what happened. The memories start in the character's childhood and advance until actual days. The player must solve all the puzzles to reach the surface of the conscience. *Mind Alone* is an authorial game and does not demand special licenses.

**Gaming references:** *The Witness* (Thekla Inc., 2016); *Dark Room* (Doublespeak Games, 2013); *Lifeline* (Three Minute Games, 2016). Games with a focus in narrative features and a clear invitation to players become “co-creators” of the plot.

**Player's motivation:** the character needs help to wake up from the prison of their mind, in which they are confined in an infinite loop of disconnected memories. Players must solve the puzzles, which have different difficulty levels, to reach the surface of conscience.

**Keywords:** puzzle game; mystery; terror; enigma; mobile, transmedia; immersive; narrative

**Target audience:** 16+ year-old players, fans of puzzle/enigmas, escape the room games, and horror/terror literature.

**Highlights:** game 95% created using only alphabetical characters with interesting artistic interface. Freeware. Some puzzles offer transmediatic features inviting players to explore blogs and sites. Fast. Dual language: Portuguese and English.

**Platform:** mobile game developed for iOS and Android systems (created with Unity programming).

**Game designing goals:** through dark/mysterious narrative and puzzle-based gameplay, offers the players an experience of immersion, fear and tension. Generates thought-provoking puzzles with a simple interface.

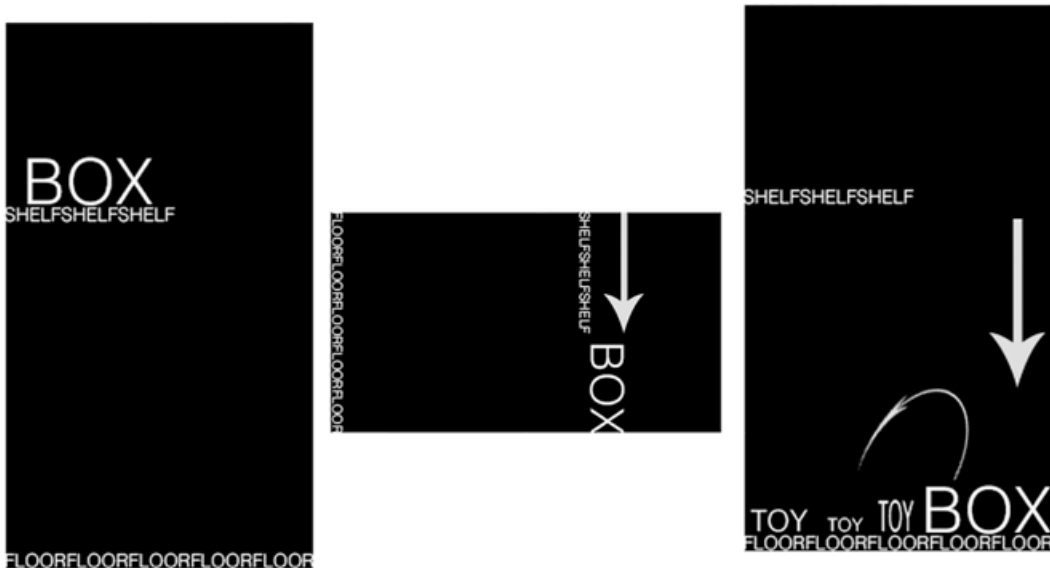
**Music and sound design:** dark ambient soundtrack with incidental sounds (doors opening, moans, screams, piano notes, etc.). Some sounding references come from projects like *Lustmord*, Robert Rich and Zoät·Aon.

**Business model:** freeware. The goal of the game is to participate in game designing contests, festivals and gaming fairs to promote Sioux studio. As a freeware game, another goal is to use *Mind Alone* in game designing classes.

**Mechanics examples:** *Mind Alone* uses various smartphone features to constitute its gameplay. There are puzzles that use touch screen, assembly of elements, movement of the device (through accelerometer and gyroscope) and puzzles with textual responses. Below, we can analyze some puzzle wireframes with mechanics:

### Puzzle example 1:

There was a big box full of toys on top of my room's shelf. I loved to spread the toys across the floor.

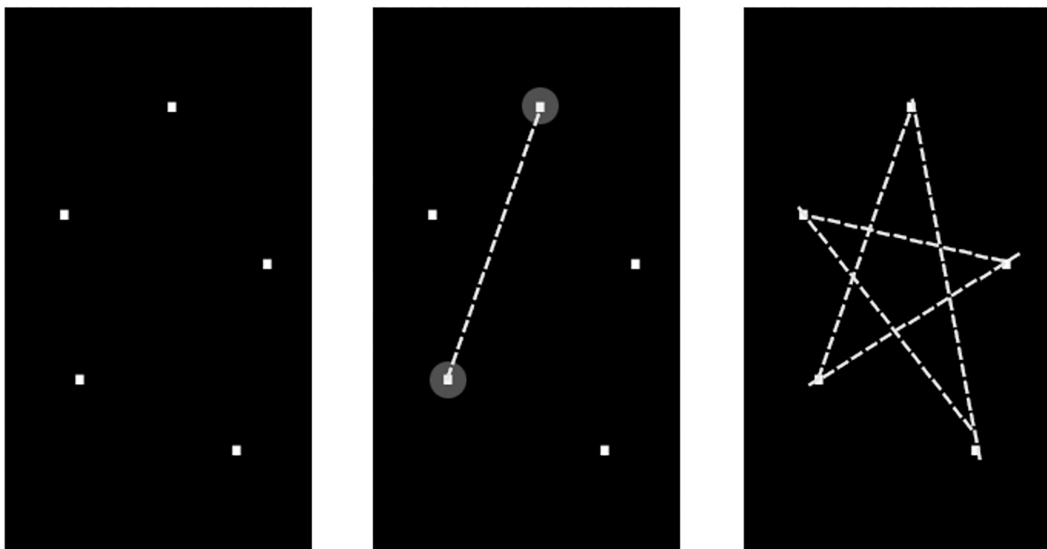


**Solution:** turn the smartphone to 90° to move the words from the shelf to the ground.

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### Puzzle example 2:

Our house was far away from the city and I liked to see the stars in the sky. I pointed my finger to the distant small dots to create bigger stars.



**Solution:** touch the dots in order to create a star pattern. If the player does not touch in the right sequence, the lines will disappear.

### Puzzle example 3:

With my mind full of evil thoughts and my body full of psychotropics, I could only sleep with the lights on. Fear and anxiety were my companions in that time.



**Solution:** the player must search and touch the word “ON” in the middle of the characters. The screen will become white and the next puzzle will appear.

### Puzzle example 4:

I started to write a blog on the internet following the advice of my psychiatrist. It had only one post. What was the picture in the post? It's hard to remember. URL >> <http://imoldforthis.blogspot.com.br/>



**Solution:** this puzzle is a transmedia enigma; the answer is outside of the game. Players must access the URL <https://imoldforthis.blogspot.com.br/> to verify the image of some trees and type the answer in the blank field.

### 3.Final thoughts

Despite being a free mobile game, *Mind Alone* is one important tool for Sioux studio to present its work and participate in game designing contests and gaming fairs. The game is also a case to be used in the classroom and to discuss how to create independent experimental/artistic games, and to digress on how the gaming industry is plural in this sense. The strategy of distributing a free game could guarantee other profits like posts in specialized gaming websites, discussions in academic articles, and prizes in gaming contests etc.

Following the thoughts of Fullerton et al. (2008, p.15-16), *Mind Alone* used one very synthetic game design process based on stages: 1) conceptual stage: to define the game's theme; 2) brainstorm stage: to think how the theme will materialize on the gaming interface; 3) Physical prototype/pre-prototype stage: to create a fast pre-visualization of the game using paper, pen and simple components; 4) Layout stage: to establish the initial concepts of the interface; 5) Digital prototype and test stage: with the previous mechanics and first layouts, it is possible to develop a simple version to be played on browser or in smartphones. In this stage, it is possible to start the beta-testing sessions; 6) Production stage: the feedbacks from the digital prototype beta-test sessions are the main information to produce the final version of the game; 7) Evaluation stage: to make the final tests to assure it is error-free; 8) Launching stage: to put the game available for download in mobile platforms (Android and iOS). It is important to highlight that, during this whole process, the game is documented using specific files (like the "High Concept Document" discussed previously).

By discussing the creative process and the business model structuration of *Mind Alone*, we hope to demonstrate how strong is the relationship between players and gaming companies in the contemporary digital gaming ecosystem. We claim it is of utmost importance to use a methodological process, even for small productions. We can see the importance of working with a consistent methodology and it is possible to imagine the iterative process applied in bigger projects. We hope we can contribute to the field of gaming studies and that this paper earns future developments and inspire new relevant discussions.

The Brazilian gaming market, as an emergent market, reveals itself as a privileged ambient to observe these game design processes. We welcome the opportunity to present this relevant discussion as a means of contributing to the on-going efforts in exploring the gaming market in contemporary culture.

### References:

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