

Doomscrolling

Artists' Statement v1.0.2 | Andrew Phelps

During the pandemic, we watched as friends and family were both riveted by the news and turned away from it in an effort to retain some sense of positivity. We've watched as national political discourse has devolved from policy debates or even mudslinging to schoolyard insults, racial and ethnic slurs, and worse. We've observed friends glued to social media and cable news to an ever-increasing degree, and also numerous friends and colleagues bowing out, turning off the tube to save themselves. This strikes at the core of a balancing act, a need to stay informed (because an uninformed population allows for drastically bad things to happen in a democracy), but simultaneously a need to limit the intake of information, to temper the maelstrom, in some semblance of sanity.

Returning to our roots in using classic arcade game forms to reflect on subtle issues of balance and decay, *Doomscrolling* examines this delicate balancing act in the form of a constantly scrolling platformer in which the player must jump from platform to platform in a constantly scrolling world, staying on-screen to stay alive. But each platform is a live tweet, pulled at random from the feed of a politician, news organization, national pundit, or tech celebrity - and there's a twist: step on a tweet without substance, say from Trump, or Musk, or MSNBC, and you might find there's *really no substance there* and plummet right through as the platform vanishes in a cloud of nonsense.

As a visceral, anxious, and tactile form of computational interactive narrative, we invite players to balance skimming Twitter with calculating video game strategy, finding pathways and power-ups in the midst of the madness. We invite you to another quest for a *Fragile Equilibrium*, another action game of melancholic balance.

Coming 2023(ish)

Doomscrolling was conceived by Professor Andrew Phelps and his class of graduate students at the American University Game Center in a collaborative brainstorming session in fall of 2022. Additional support for development is provided by the Applied Immersive Gaming Initiative at the HITLabNZ at the University of Canterbury in Christchurch, NZ, and the Department of Game Design at Uppsala University, Gotland Campus, Sweden.