How to build serious games

(and not lose your mind while doing so)

Yngve Eßing

GENTLE TROLL

About me:
- B.A Mediadesign HsH
- Project Lead Serious Games
- Lecturer HsH 2022/23
- **Gentle Troll, since 2022**

Yngve Eßing
Producer & Programmer

Gentle Troll

Founded: 2014

Klim:S²¹ — Das Spiel zur Klimaanpassung

Wähle einen Spielraum

Der Klimawandel kommt und wir sollten uns an die zukünftigen Bedingungen anpassen.
Wähle einen Spielraum und hilf uns bei der Klimaanpassung an die unterschiedlichen Klimafolgeereignisse im Sinne der Nachhaltigkeit.
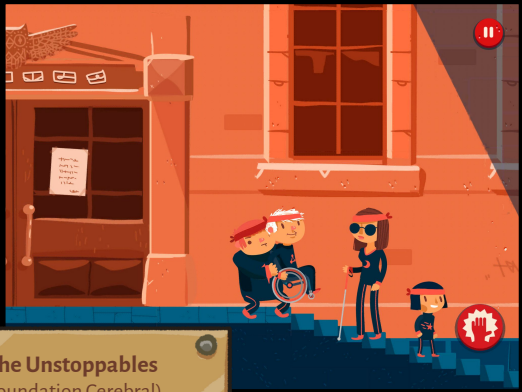

Tavern Talk

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Our Projects

Klim:S 21
(Research Group of Earth Observation (rgeo))

NEPO Missions
(Fraunhofer IAIS)

2P Xploria - German
(Ministry of Education Rheinland-Pfalz)

The Unstoppables
(Foundation Cerebral)

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Our approach

Learning Environment

Should provide a set of fixed rules.

- Exploration of content in safe boundaries
- gives feedback
- No negative consequence in real life

→ **more exploration/trying things out**

- deeper understanding of the subject

→ **Transfer of learned content into own everyday life**

Main Questions

What will work for the content?

What is doable with the budget/time?

What are the clients needs?

What are the players needs?

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Framing

Mechanical Frame

- **mechanical Frame** provides deeper interaction with content itself

- **narrative Frame** can provide the "Why am I here/doing this?"

- it's not either this or that, it's a spectrum
→ **both aspects need to be balanced in a way that makes sense for the content**

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Interaction

Game-y

Task-y

- **Game-y approach** often works a bit better with the target groups

- considering budget, client-needs and time, that's **not always feasible**

- again, this is a spectrum and your project will fall inbetween

→ **make sure that your approach fits your content and is doable**

Task-y

2P Xploria - German

Narrative

Mechanical

Klim:S 21

The Unstoppables

Game-y

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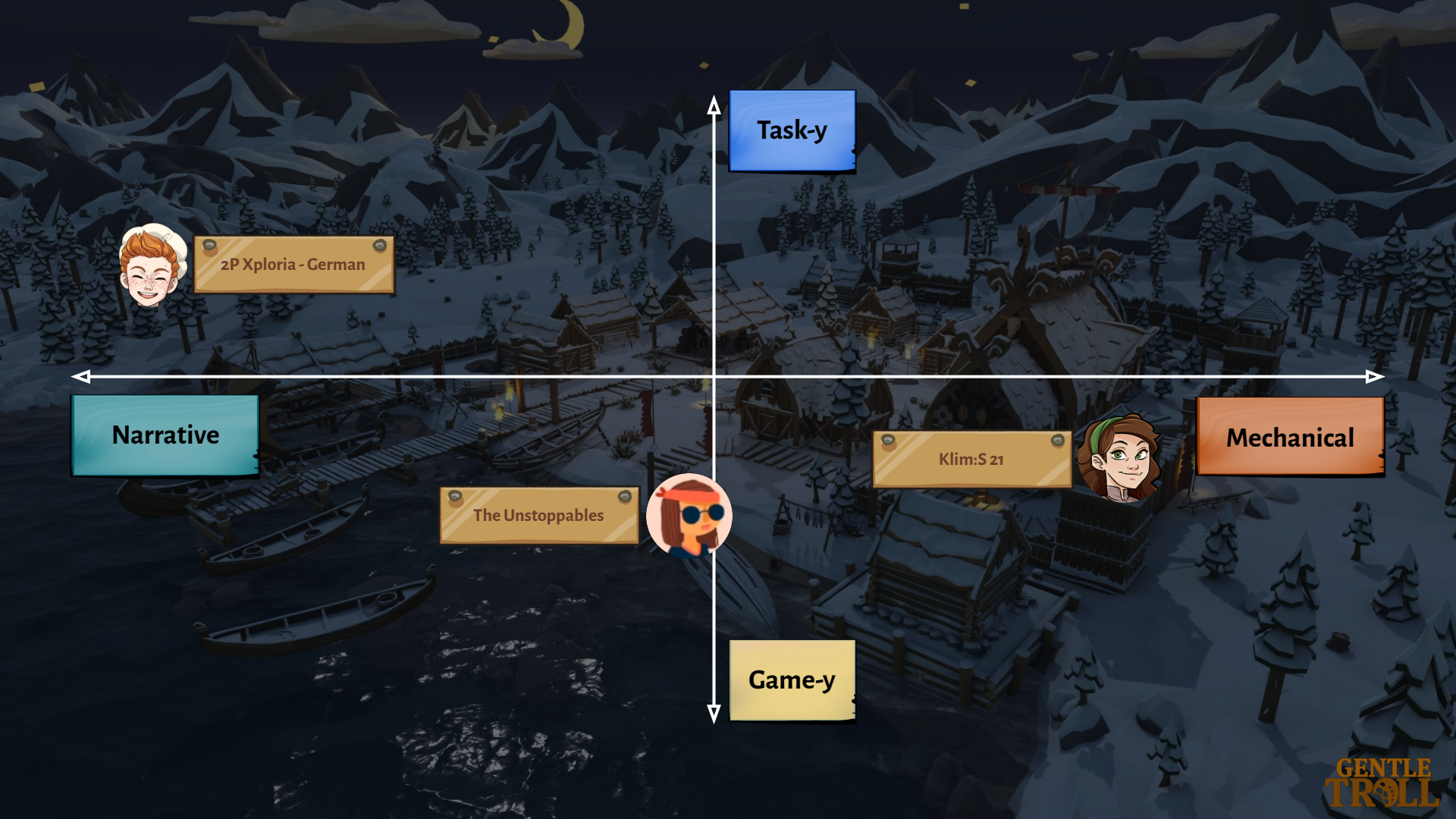
Connection Points

- **Characters**
- Similar **lived experiences as themes / subthemes**
- Interesting **environment**/setting
- **Mechanics** that are fun
    - Fun is hard to facilitate
    - highly dependent on the context this will be played in

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Motivation Types

- **Social - Competition** is less helpful for longterm learning and retention (but can be a big motivator)
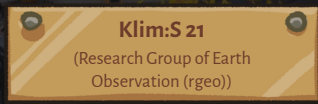- **Creativity**, **Achievement**, **Immersion** all work very well with serious games

→ **be aware of what types of motivations your project can/should cater to**

*"Gamer Motivation Model" - Quantic Foundry

MeisterPOWER
(BWHM - Chamber of Crafts Baden-Württemberg)

Play Context

Where is your game going to be played?

- Museum / Lesson / At home?

How is your game going to be played?

- in a group?
- is there a lead **reflection** round after playing?
- is the **transfer of knowledge** from ingame to real life going to happen internally only?

→ **your game may need to provide feedback to help with transfer & reflection**

Communication, Trust, Expertise

Building Bridges

Bridges you need to build:

- between Client and the Medium itself
- between your development expertise and their subject expertise
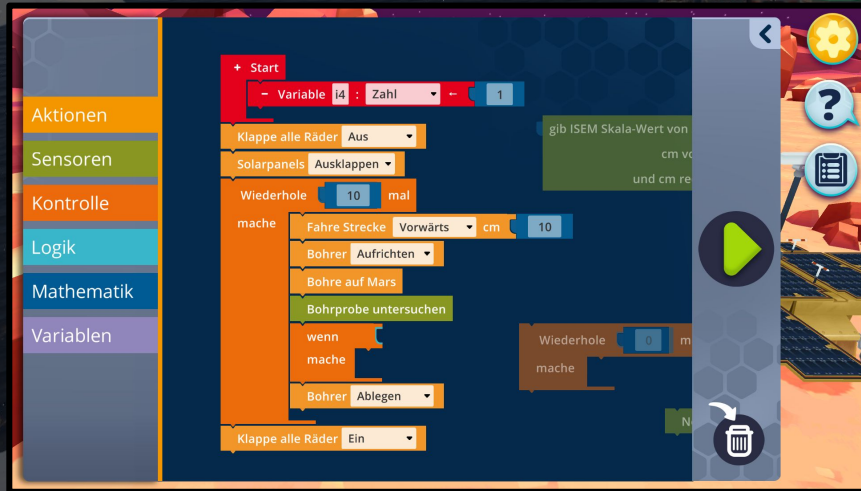- between different work and thought processes

→ your expertise is here to help the client make informed decisions, so you need to communicate it well

You

Your client

Building Trust

Learn about the subject

- so you can find a **fitting frame** for the content to sit in
- enables you to **prioritize better**
- you can benefit from your clients expertise

Transparent communication builds trust

→ **Trust build the needed bridge between your areas of expertise.**

Prioritise

Accept limitations

- budget & timeframe will likely not be kind to your project

- there are things that are more worth keeping than others

Don't let the hill you die on be a discussion about a button's color.

Your needs will sometimes be conflicting

- **your side** will be what the **game** needs

- and **their side** will be what the **content** needs

- find **good compromises**

- be aware on which side might have more expertise on the specific point

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So, to not lose your mind:

Find a good frame that works for your content.

Be open and find a point of interest in the subject for yourself.

Find a good way to communicate.

Pick your battles wisely.

Have fun!

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Questions?