

80 DAYS

Letting the game tell the story

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Creative Director, inkle



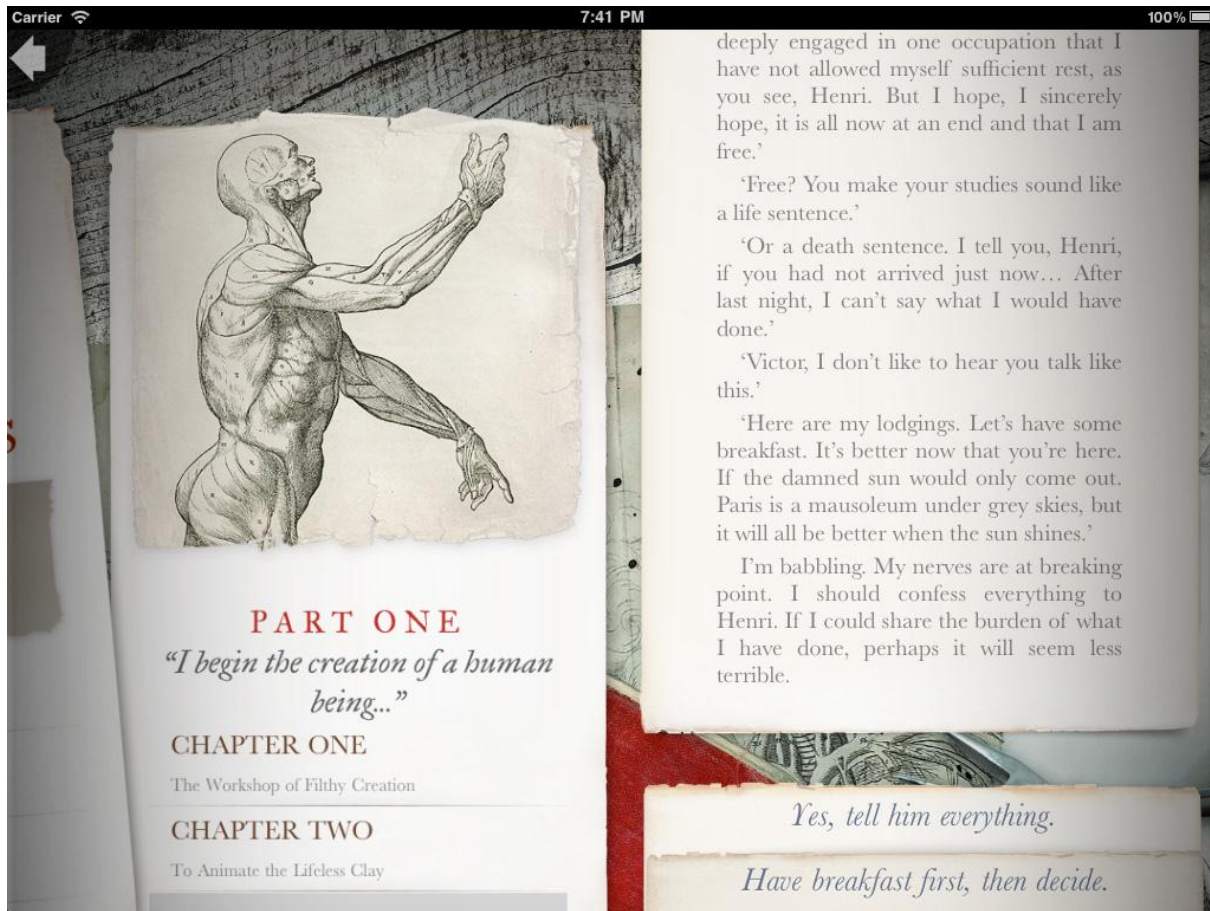
GAME DEVELOPERS CONFERENCE™ CHINA

SHANGHAI INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION CENTER

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Introduction

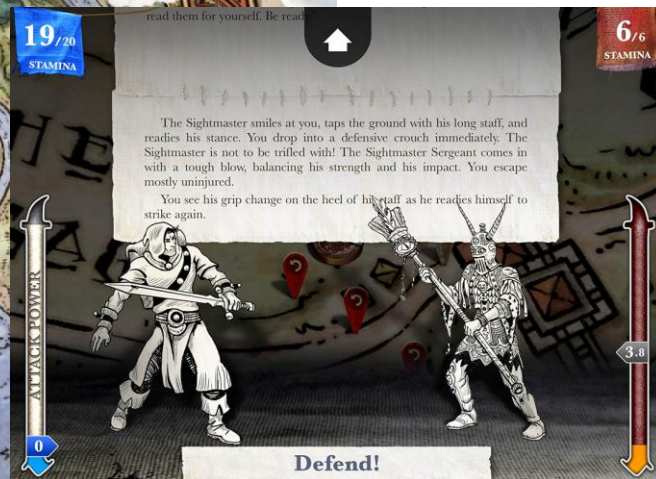
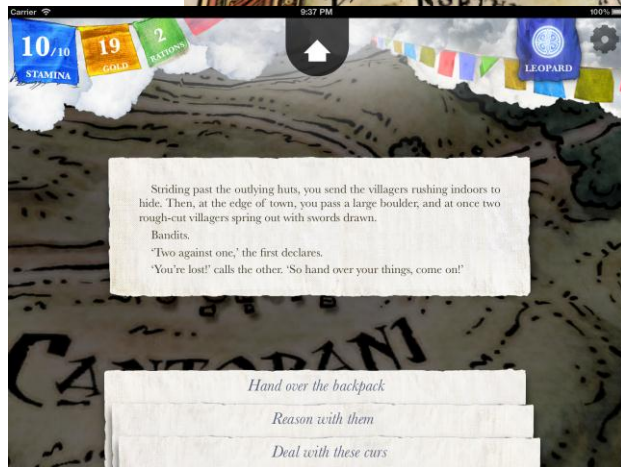
- What is inkle?
 - Founded two years ago
 - Planned to work with book publishers
 - Core technology: an interactive text engine



Sorcery!, Sorcery! 2 (2013)

- First evolution of our interactive stories
- Built around a map
- Light gameplay elements:
 - items, resources, health





Why 80 DAYS?

- Recognizable IP
 - but free to use
- Great affordances for gameplay
 - Audience “gets what they expect”
- Episodic - easy to scale up
- Appeal for both explorers and advancers



Game Design

Initial Design – based on Sorcery!

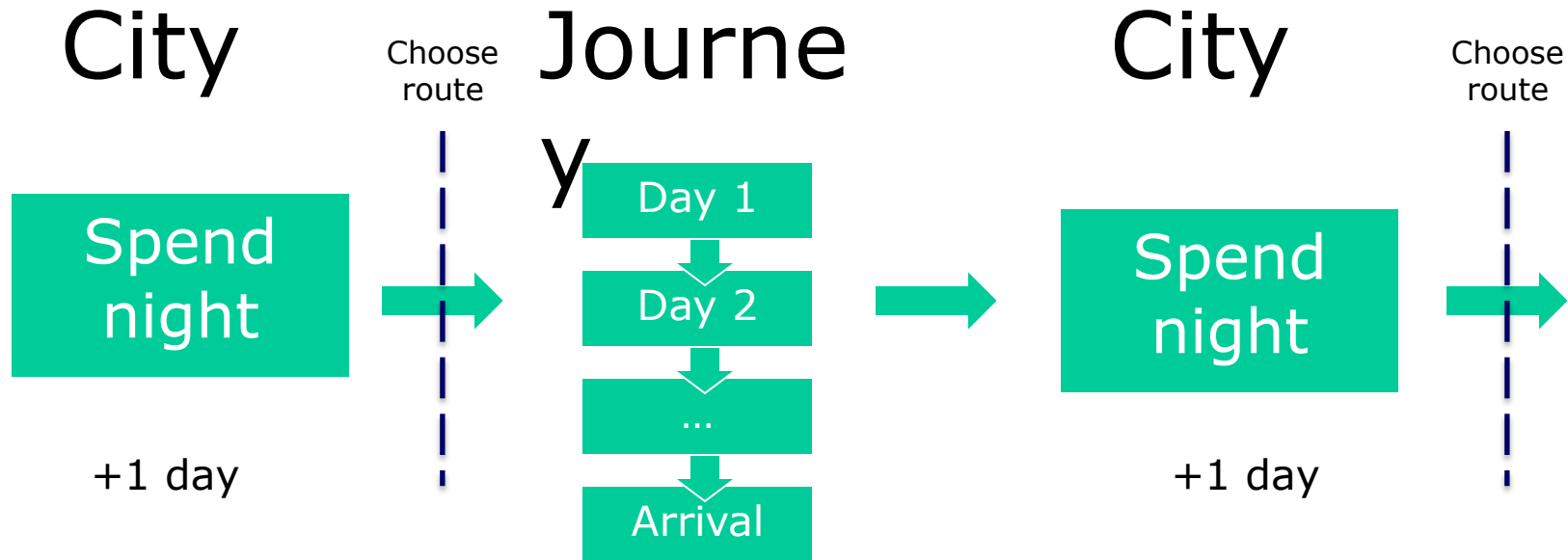
- Story
 - Narrated by protagonist with personality
 - Choice-based content for every game “day”
- Resources
 - Time, money, health
- Items and trade
- Route planning on a globe

Additional Concepts

- Conversation with characters
- Expensive bribes to speed up travel
- “Secret” routes to unlock
- Some kind of live multiplayer feed
- No death! No saves! Design for replay!

Game Flow


Initial Story Flow



Problems

- Very rigid structure
- Text “slows down” gameplay
- Journey choice is most interesting feature
 - but “locked” away behind content!

Iteration: What's important?

- Story
 - Resources
 - Items
 - Route planning
- 
- Time
 - Travel
 - Consequences
 - Conversations

Solution – make stories optional!

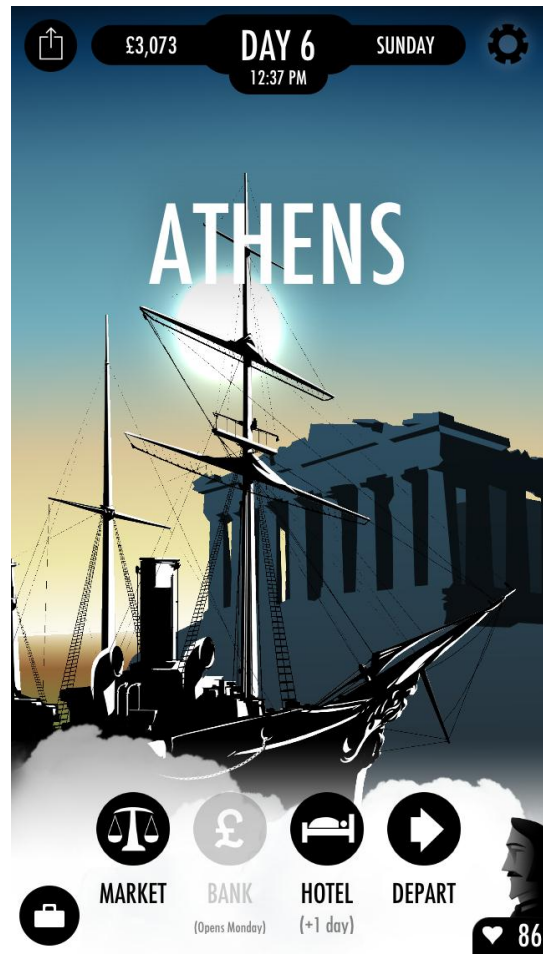
- Story becomes the “heart”, not the “spine”
- Very different than Sorcery!
- 99% of text content stayed the same
- Stories become opportunities, not grind

“Rules are learned, rewards are earned”

- Players learn game rules, then use them
- First design: story as rule-set
 - No way for player to “use” it
- Second design: story as reward
 - Player spends “time” to get a story in return

Second Design

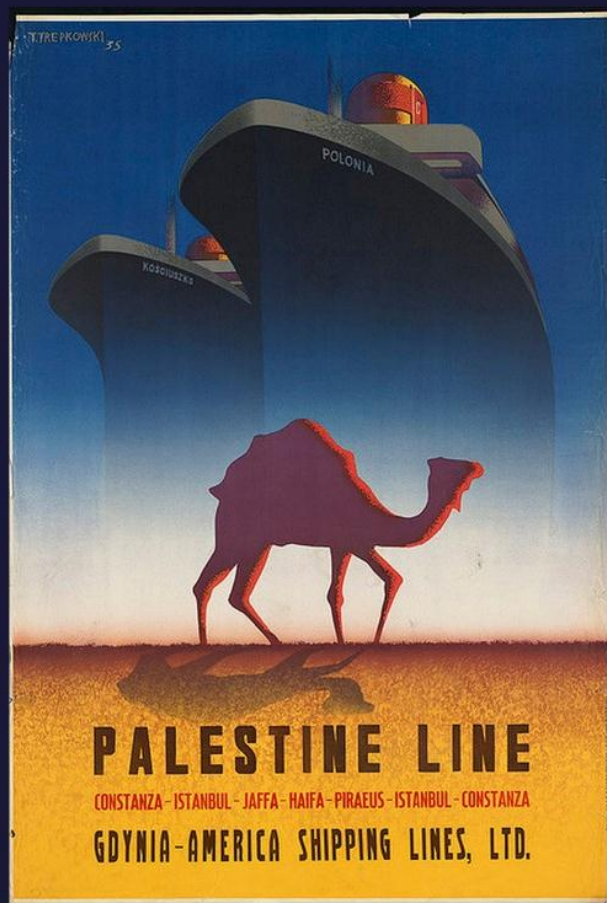
- City as menu hub
 - Market, exploration, journey selection
- Exploration
 - Optional, but unlocks further routes
- Flow is basically the same...
 - But it's player controlled!



Visual Design

Aims

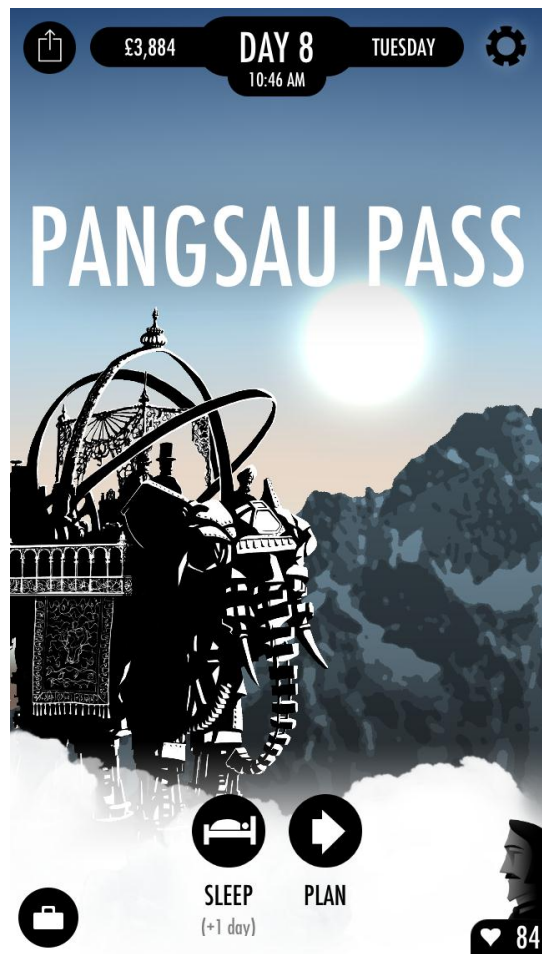
- Clean, minimalist aesthetic
 - Inspired by DEVICE 6, iOS 7
- “Retro-futuristic” feel
 - Avoiding classic steampunk
 - Inspired by 1920s travel posters





We arrived at Dvarka quite exhausted.
A young lady in a bonnet greeted
me...





Journeys

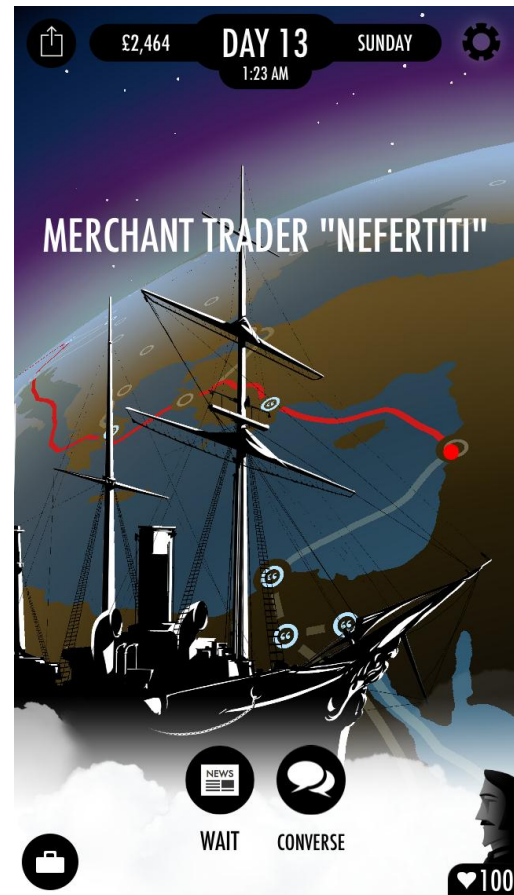
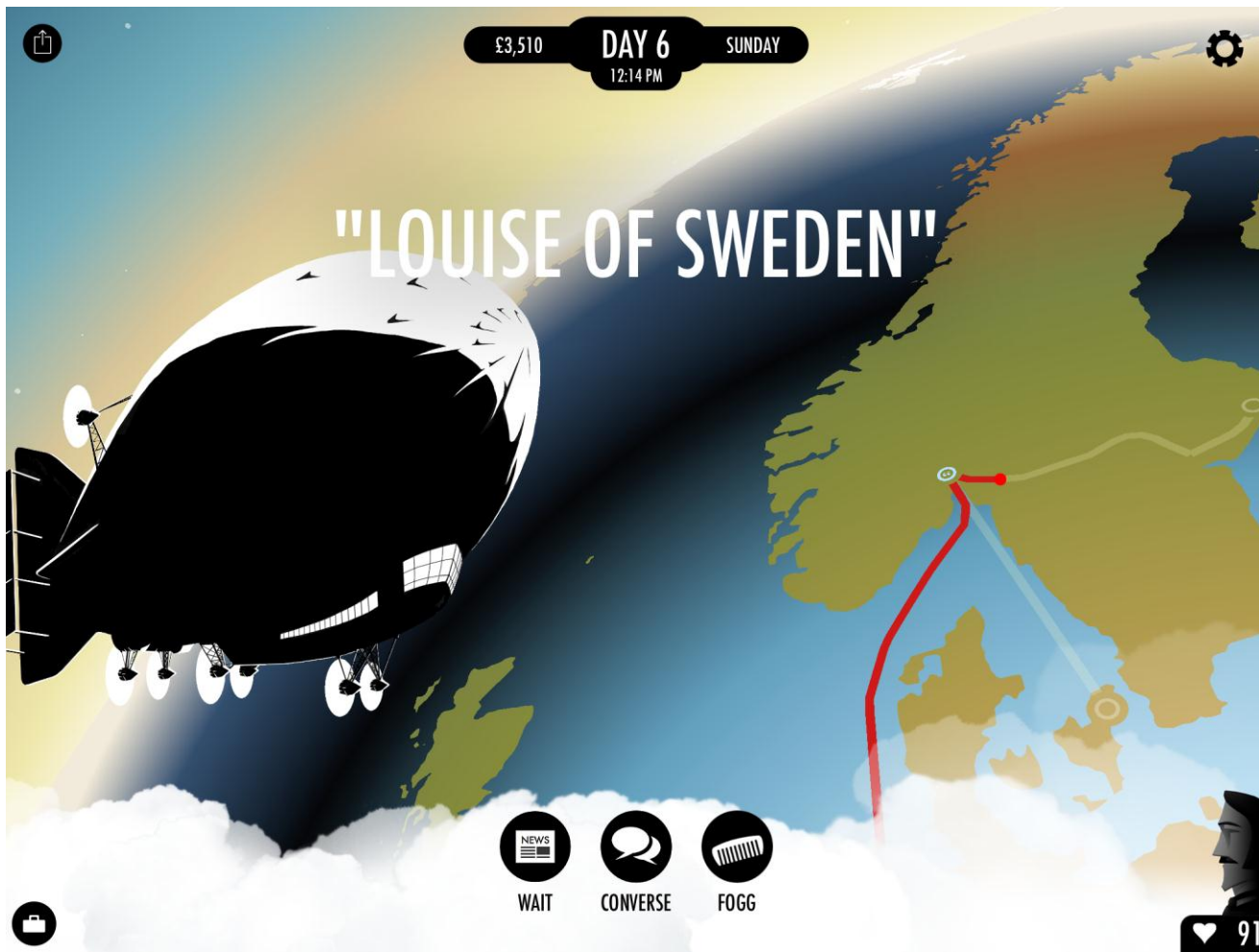
- Most of the game's duration
- Tried various "in the world" viewpoints...



Journeys

- Fell back on a classic: Indiana Jones





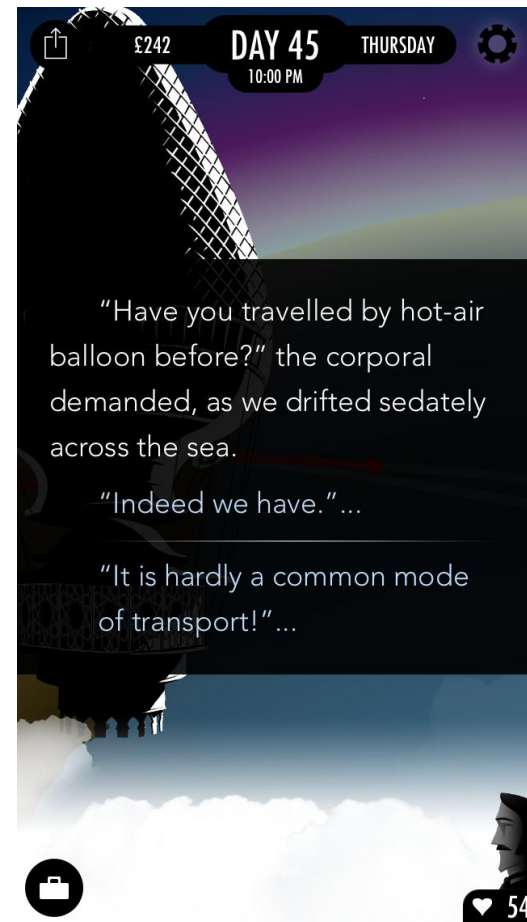
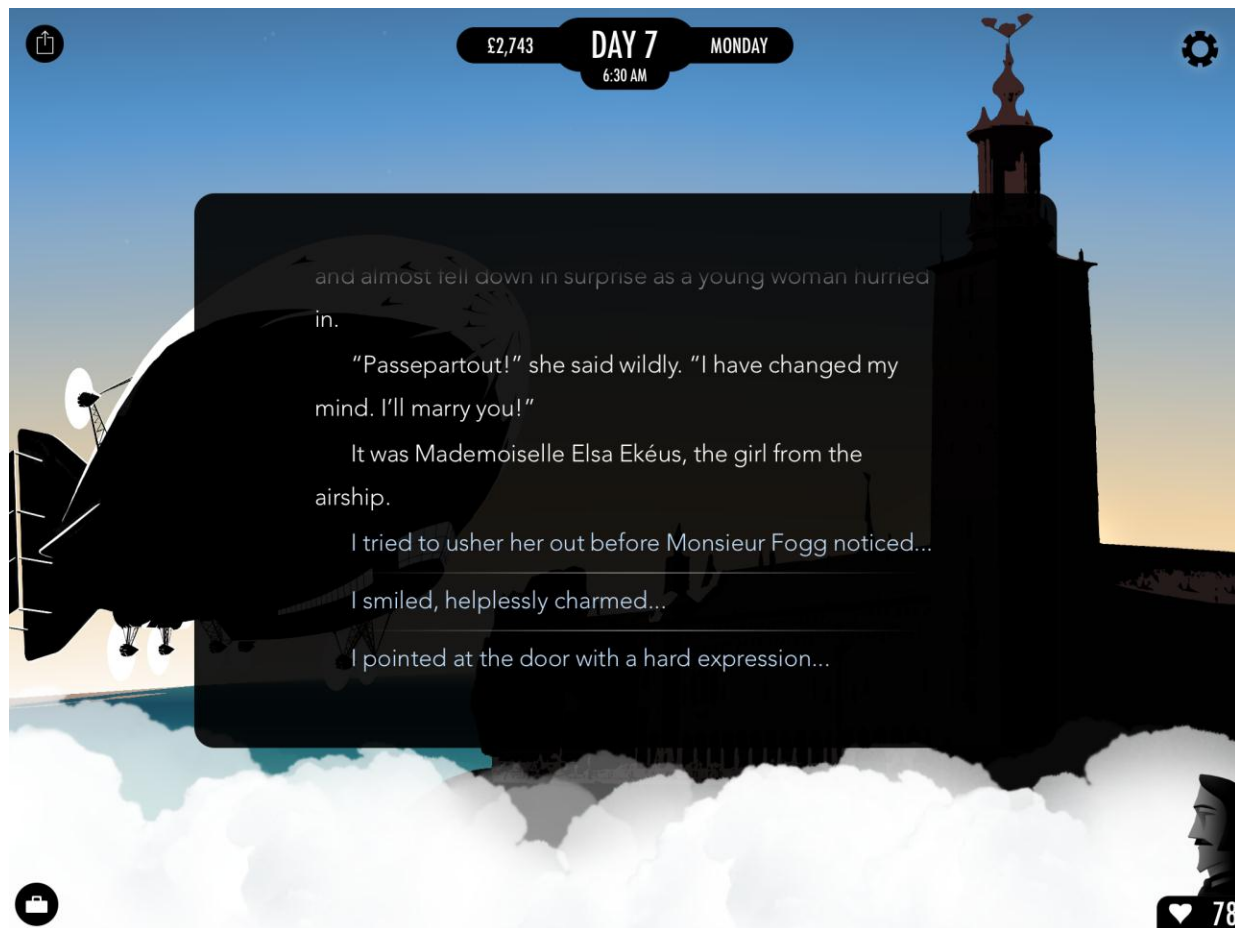
Touches of animation

- Day/night cycle
- Custom motion paths for each transport
- Transitions – vital on iOS!

Text Presentation

- Tried various interfaces for choices
 - Sliders, scrolling
- Straight choices always felt better
- Way text scrolls is important!

Content



Aims

- Capture the spirit of the original
- Challenge Verne's colonialist assumptions
- Light sci-fi for a "sense of wonder"

Writing content

- Hired a writer (Meg Jayanth)
 - started work before us
 - technically skilled as well as creative
- 100+ hours of research
- > 500k words of final content
 - Professional proof-read
 - Edited for both gameplay and on-screen layout

Content Scripting

- Written in “episodes”
 - But any episode can reference any other
- Writer-friendly script format
 - Proof-reader friendly too!
- All “code-reviewed” before going in

beijing.ink

File Path ▾: ~/inkle/80Days/ink/80days/cities/beijing.ink

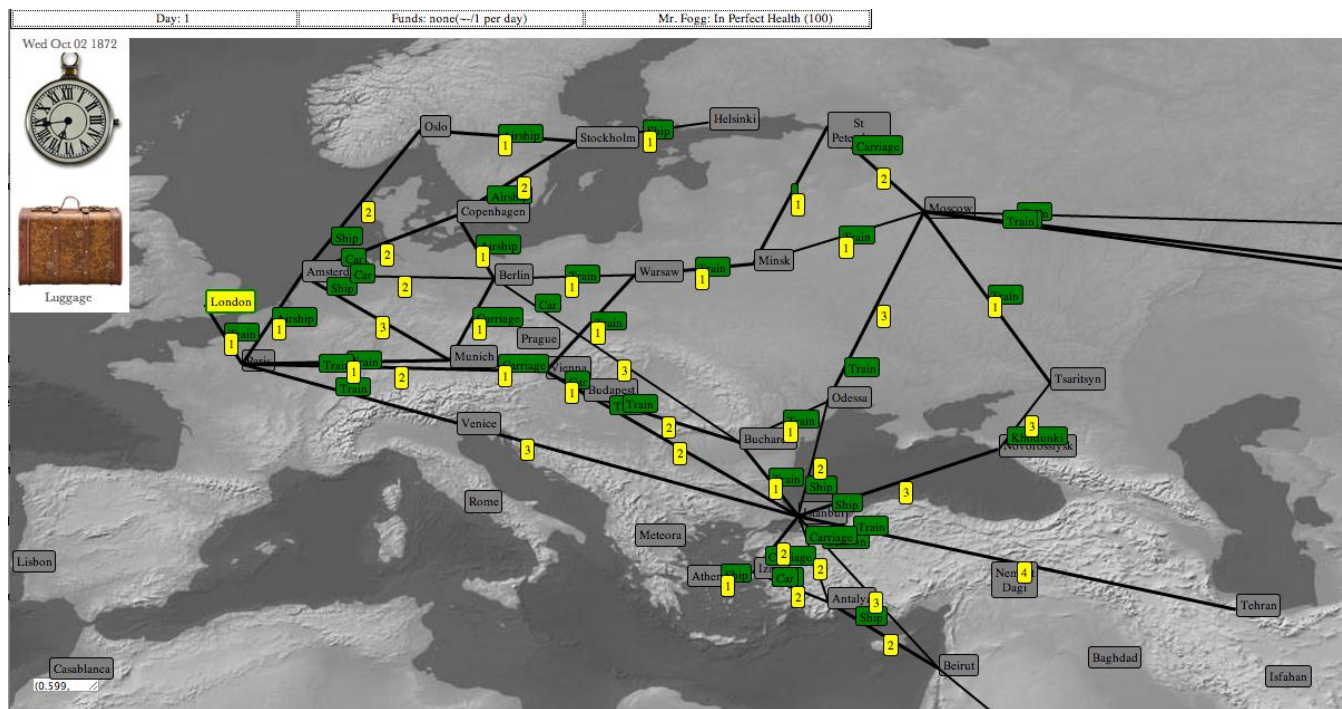
beijing.ink

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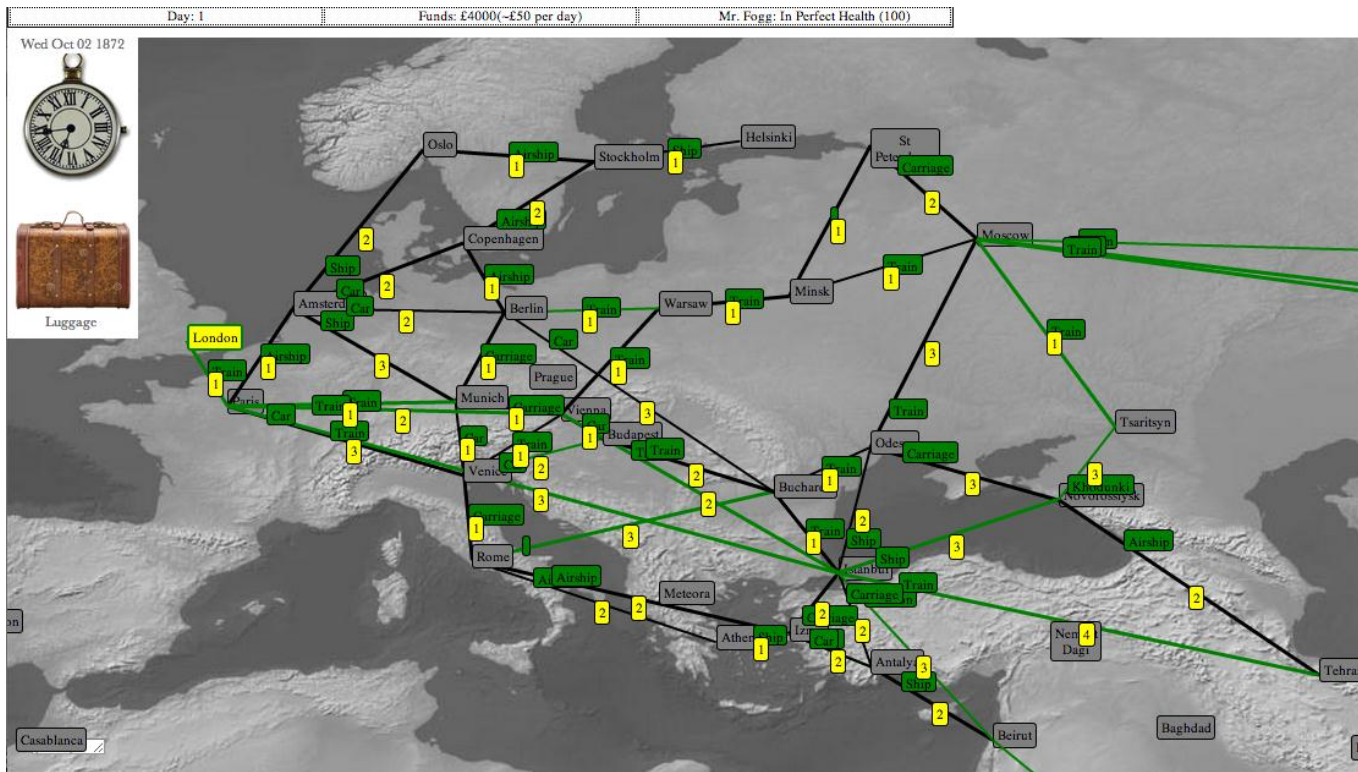
1 //BEIJING, CHINA
2 //VARIABLES
3 //--JOURNEYS-
4 //--CHARACTERS-
5 //--ITEMS-
6
7 weave:beijing
8 - There were no airships sailing across the Beijing sky, nor any evidence of electrification
9   *...though the Chinese did not shun all technology[]. Palanquins were drawn by intricately worked and gilded iron lions as often as human
... servants, and I saw -->
10   *...even in the richer areas[] where a few exceptions to the rule might have been expected. However, I did see a few devices: -->
11 - animated metal-and-jade dragons
12   * ... perched on the gables of imperial buildings[], breathing curls of steam-vapour and flapping their enamel-feather wings.
13   * {herat} ... that would not have looked out of place[] in the Toymaker's shop in Herat - and looked about as vicious as one might have
... expected from that gentleman!
14   * ... that snapped and glared at passers-by[], perhaps to discouraging thieving.
15 - Furthermore, I was lucky enough to catch
16   * ... a performance of the famed Sui Shi Opera[], the cast consisting entirely of "hydraulic elegances": automata by another name.
17   ** I was told it was an ancient tradition[], begun over a thousand years ago by Huang Gun, an engineer who had made Sui Shi wine-pourers
... and musicians, dancing girls and acrobats for his Emperor's court. True? Perhaps so.
18   ** No other nation boasted such a tradition[]; though the Artificers Guild manufactured the bodies and mainsprings of the performers, their
... complex facial mechanisms were built by imperial artisans in strict secrecy.
19   -- -> chinese_opera
20   * {overnight} ... the inside of a most comfortable hotel[], complete with a complex of steam-rooms powered by a cunning arrangement of
... heating underground viaducts.
21   ** My master no doubt wondered if we could sail them in a canoe[] but for myself, I was content to lie back, and sweat a little on the
... tiles!
22   ** Where all the heat originated was a puzzle[] - perhaps it was the dragons, but more likely, the solution lay in the bore-holes in
... the hotel's courtyard, which the proprietor claimed went down nearly a hundred feet.
23   -- ~ heal(MINOR)
24   -- Did the streets of Beijing have sights to offer a traveller? Perhaps. I did not leave my comfortable room. -> DONE
25   * {not overnight} ... a little of the people as well[]: on the walk across the city we passed -> beijing_addicts
26

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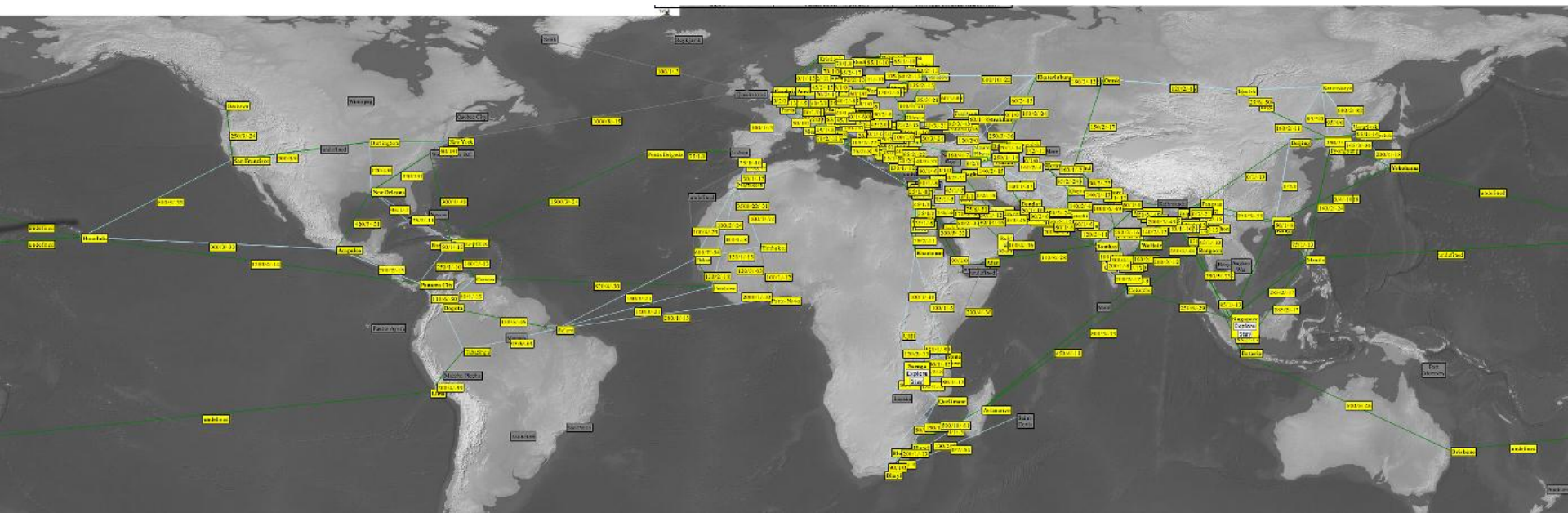
Scaling up From 20 cities, 40 journeys



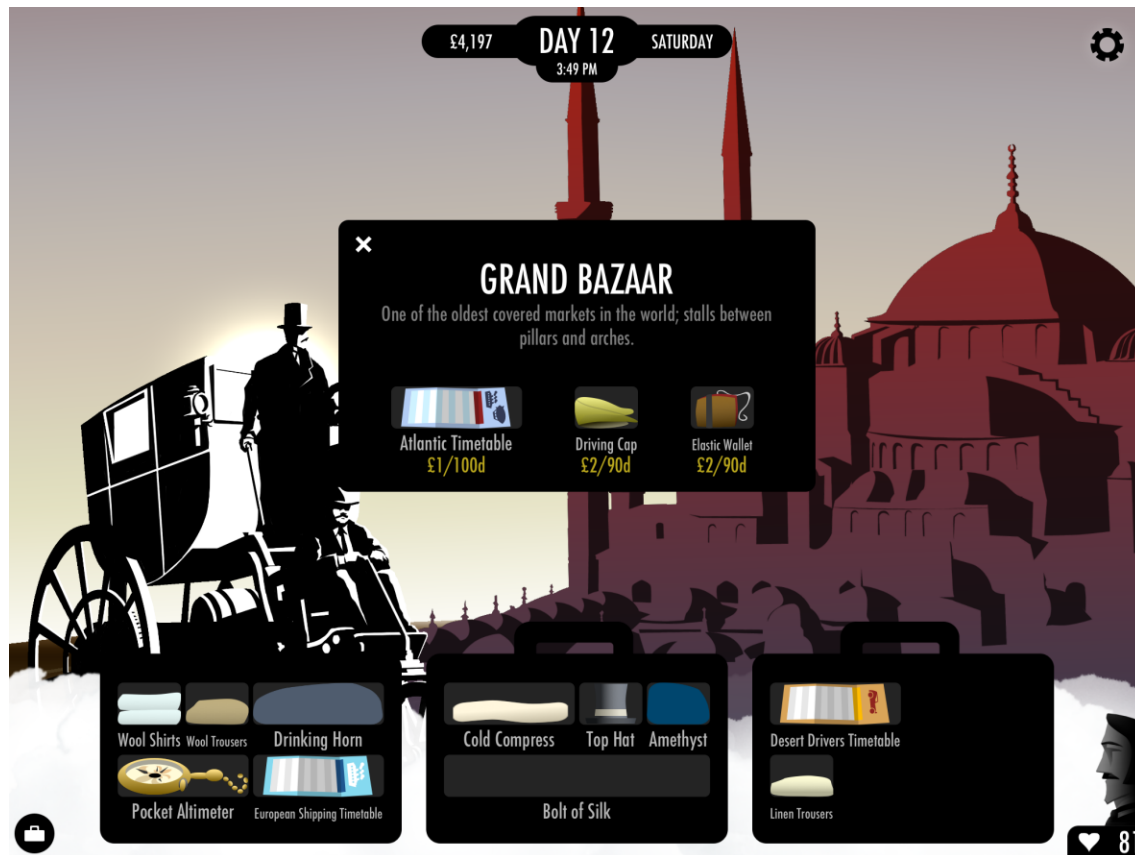
Scaling up



Scaling up 150 cities, 371 journeys



World Economy



Trading game design

- Buying / selling items for profit
- Price algorithm required several iterations
 - Tried random pricing
 - Instead, used “price bands”

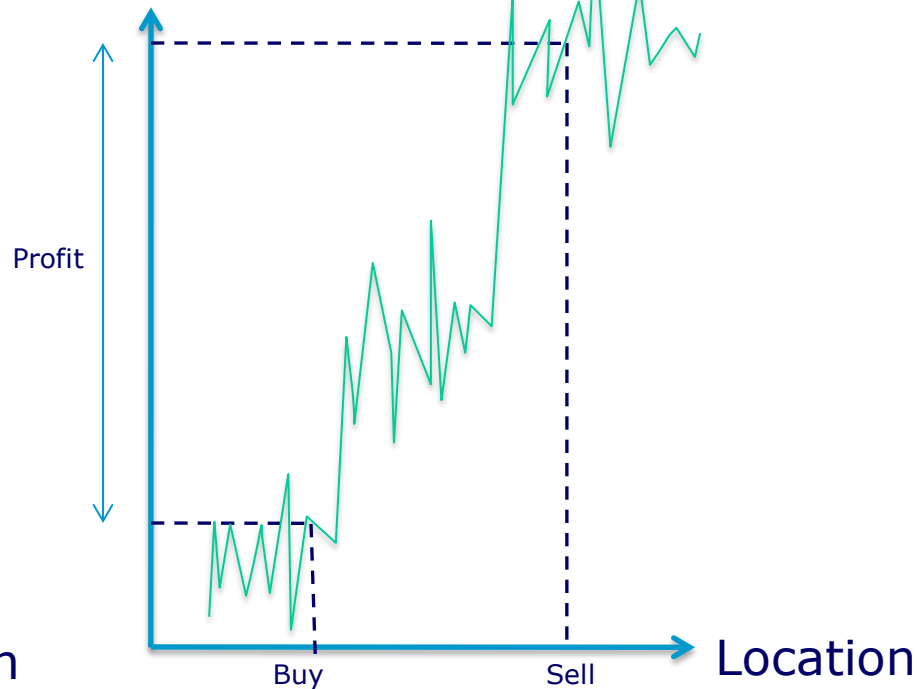
Random model

Price

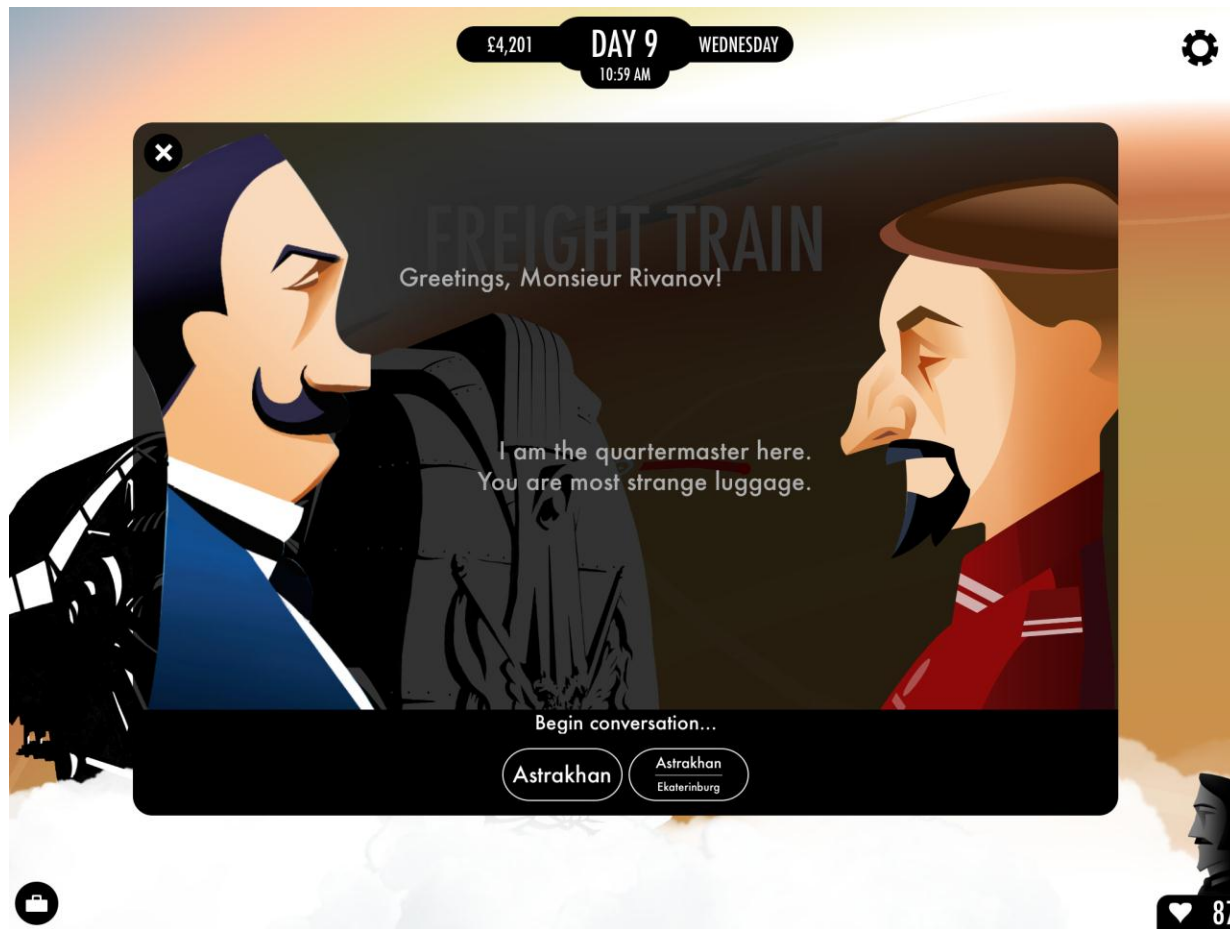


Banded model

Price



Conversations



Conversation Design

- Simple “mini-game” for journeys
- Wanted a “human face” in the game
- Intended for learning about routes

Conversation Design

- Took several iterations
 - Surprisingly difficult to make something simple
- Based on chaining of topics
- ...Not a very serious conversation system





Multiplayer



Multiplayer Aims

- Make the game look “busy”
- Provide “proof of branching”
- “Only positive interactions”
 - Inspired by Journey

Needed a non-synchronous design

- Synchronous connections
 - Very spread-out game-world
 - Match-making is slow and flaky
 - People read at different speeds!

“social” not “multiplayer”

- Eventual design is light-weight
 - Provides gentle competition
 - Activity on world map
 - Makes game “browseable”
- Added better sharing features instead
 - Share & load in routes from friends



In conclusion

Critical Reception!

- Editor's Choice in the UK, US
- 9/10 Edge Magazine
- Metacritic's #1 iOS game for August
- ...We were quite surprised

Main strengths

- One goal that lasts the whole game
- Content feels like “as much as you want”
- Constant sense of progress
 - Real-time clock keeps things moving!
- Highly replayable!

Also...

- Genuinely interactive, adaptive narrative...
- Thousands of detailed choices...
- ... with no AI storyteller narrative Lego drama management nonsense

Main weaknesses

- Basically impossible to translate
- Hard to balance
 - Some player finish in 50 days on first play
 - Others in 130 days
 - ... but the mean is 78
- Reviews apologize for “reading” element

Any questions?

Thanks for listening!
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