

Breaking new ground, video game engages with Holocaust

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Jacquelyne Vargas, 17, plays 'The Light in the Darkness,' a video game about a family of Polish Jews in France during the Holocaust, at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle on February 23, 2023.

Tackling one of the greatest human tragedies, a new video game has

been released in which players adopt roles in a Jewish family torn from their home during the Holocaust and sent to an internment camp.

"The Light in the Darkness" claims to be the first video [game](#) to accurately portray the Holocaust, which took the lives of some six million Jews during World War II.

Numerous games have World War II themes—including the big-selling "Call of Duty" series—but the fact that the Holocaust is barely mentioned troubled 36-year-old Luc Bernard, creator of the new game.

"It's a bit like denying that it ever existed," the Los Angeles-based developer told AFP.

The game is available for play on computers, with versions for consoles to be released soon.

Players follow along with a Jewish family as they endure life under France's wartime Vichy regime only to be arrested in 1942 during the massive Vel' d'Hiv roundup in Paris and sent to the Pithiviers internment camp.

Thousands of Jews were transported from there to death camps like Auschwitz.

"Video games can tell profound, meaningful and universal stories of tragedy and triumph that are more realistic and gut-wrenchingly impactful," reads a title description at the online Epic Games store.

"Our mission is to connect each new generation with the experiences of those who lived during one of the greatest atrocities in the history of the world."

There have long been fears that creating such games could tend to trivialize or oversimplify the atrocity, Bern University of the Arts game history specialist Eugen Pfister told AFP.



'The Light in the Darkness' claims to be the first video game to accurately portray the Holocaust, which took the lives of some six million Jews during World War II.

The blockbuster video game franchise "Wolfenstein," which essentially centers on a hero who kills Nazis, has been an exception, but it makes no claims of historical accuracy.

A 2014 edition called "Wolfenstein: The New Order" has its hero

breaking into a fictional internment camp in Croatia. But it is set in an alternate universe in which the Nazis won World War II.

"You see chimneys, wagons and even the selection of prisoners, but there is never any mention of concentration camps or even Jews," Pfister said of the game.

The genocide horror was addressed more explicitly three years later in a sequel titled "The New Colossus."

No way to win

Bernard, who is originally from France, likened his game to an interactive film, but with players having no control over the ultimate storyline as the family heads for a tragic fate.

"I couldn't make a game where you win at the end," said Bernard.

"That wasn't the Shoah, there was no choice," he added, using the Hebrew word for the Holocaust.

Bernard's research for the game included consulting the archives of Holocaust museums in Los Angeles and Washington.

He also spoke with Holocaust survivors and plans to have some of them recount their experiences in an update to the game.



Gamer Stefan Montgomery plays 'The Light in the Darkness' at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle -- the game is available for play on computers, with console versions to follow soon.

Teaching the young

Bernard set out to make his first Holocaust title about 15 years ago, inspired by the story of his grandmother having been part of an operation to transport Jewish children to Britain during the war.

He abandoned that project due to lack of funding and attacks by critics, who called the concept "disgusting" and "creepy."

But times have changed, Bernard told AFP.

Pfister compared the shift to the way Hollywood is now seen as being able to make powerful history-based films such as the 1993 hit "Schindler's List" by Steven Spielberg.

"The consensus today is that Hollywood is capable of making films about the Holocaust," Pfister said.

"I am optimistic that video games will also find a language to talk about it."

With players all over the world, video games offer a unique platform to reach a wide audience, especially among [young people](#).

"My goal is to get more developers interested to keep the memory of the Holocaust alive," Bernard said.

Along with being available free at "Fortnite" maker Epic Games, "The Light in the Darkness" is currently on display at the Museum of Pop Culture in Seattle, Washington.

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