HAYDEN: Hi all and welcome to another episode of The Longest Rainy Sunday. Today, we are going to talk about Oxenfree, one of the hidden gems provided in the class bundle.

HAYDEN: You may not have heard of Oxenfree, but it has consistently been ranked among the best fifty games since its release by Night School Studio in 2016. People love the complexity and nuance contained in this game.

ANUSHA: In fact, Google describes Oxenfree as "a supernatural mystery graphic adventure game". We know it's a lot. Clearly, there are two things about Oxenfree that we need to decode. First, the supernatural elements of it. Second, the graphic adventure genre. How do these factors make Oxenfree an interesting game?

JIACHEN: Let's start with the basics. Oxenfree features a group of friends scouting a fictional Edward island for a weekend party where they discover unusual/supernatural things on the seemingly unoccupied island. You, the player, is taking the role of Alex, a somewhat sassy and sarcastic character. Other characters include Ren - a bad boy who doesn't know how to make his own decisions, Jonas - Alex's step brother, a trouble maker as he had been to jail before, Clarissa - cynical, annoying, negative, you know how she is, and finally, Nona - somewhat aloof but naive and honest, she is also Ren's crush.

ANUSHA: With this bundle of personalities, it's not surprising that this game revolves around conversations among the characters, which make up an interesting but unpredictable storyline for the game as we follow through. Is this what ticks to you about Oxenfree, Hayden?

HAYDEN: Yeah! Totally. I think what draws me to this game the most is the story element. While playing, I have to pay attention to the conversations, and choosing the thought bubbles I see fit for Alex. I think that is super engaging. It's like watching a movie, you know, except you're not just passively staring at the screen, you're also in charge of the outcome, though partly only.

JIACHEN: I agree. Adding on to that, I think the appeal to Oxenfree lies in the fact that we loose this semblance of control that games are supposed to provide. For example, when the group were bonding at the beach, I didn't expect Jonas to go to the cave and went missing, which caused Alex and Ren to furiously look for him, only to uncover more unusual things about the Island.

ANUSHA: Interesting, interesting point. For me, this aspect of the game makes it relatable to real life. You know, because we are living in such uncertain times in history. Like, for example, we don't know how the election results will turn out, affect COVID afterwards and the economy as a whole. Or I don't know if I will come to campus next semester and how it will look like.

HAYDEN: Actually, I don't even know if this semester will end peacefully let alone next semester (laughter). One thing I notice about Alex, though, the main character, is that she always put herself in a situation where she has to resolve something, whether it's finding Jonas or calming Ren down. What do you guys think about her behaviours ?

ANUSHA: Alex turned on savior complex mode really quickly. She voluntarily became the hero of the group who was trying to get her friends out of trouble. It makes sense because she is the one holding the radio so only she can detect the supernatural sounds at different frequencies on the island. Alex's reaction is understandable because although they don't know what forces are working

against them, they need to be aware and put them in a fight mindset, just like the forces around us in real life at the moment. You know, like we can't individually fight police brutality, or find a vaccine. But playing this game can help us cope with those emotions.

JIACHEN: We have talked a lot about the uncertainties in Oxenfree, but we all know there is an ending to the game. What do you guys think about the map and the end goal of the game?

HAYDEN: The map acts like a direction in the game, but that's almost a distraction from the truth. For the longest time, I didn't quite understand what the characters were trying to do, especially because in the beginning, it seems they voluntarily got themselves involved in all of this. At some point, it finally becomes more clear that there are forces acting on them. The game was technically moving forward, but it all felt like a loop, especially in those moments where we have to rewind time in the game.

ANUSHA: Not to mention, the dialogue doesn't necessarily add to the plot until the end-when you interact with the crew causing different players to have different endings. In one ending, you literally stay in this loop and you just keep replaying the game. The only difference from this game to the pandemic that we're in right now is that in real life, there are many more characters and personalities in this world clashing against one another instead of just 5 teenagers on an empty island.

HAYDEN: That is interesting because Oxenfree, the game title, is an expression that comes from children's games, like Hide and Seek, when one would like to say a truce to end the round. Maybe it points us to the end of the game as achieving freedom or escapism from the horrific island. In this optimistic light, the game gives us hope that there will be a solution to the pandemic. Life will come back to normal. Maybe there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

ANUSHA: It would be incomplete to analyze the game without the critical elements of probing and telescoping, as Steven Johnson has proved. How do you guys find them in Oxenfree?

JIACHEN: Probing is the main aspect throughout the entire game actually since figuring out the rules of the games, how is this game structured, and what am i supposed to do takes a lot of effort. In this game you choose your own dialogue, alex controls the radio thats the main source of communicating, you observe the characters being possessed but you also control the outcomes by interacting with the ship crew. It is an open world: you walk around and decide but the progression in the game is also important. Interestingly, the game is less about the mechanics like other genres such as shooting games or sport games and more about the characters and storyline, we never know what is going to happen next. You have to push your character to say certain things to understand more about the game. It really goes back to the fact that the more we play Oxenfree, the less control we have and less information we know about navigating the game.

HAYDEN: And about Telescoping I think it lies in unlocking tasks along the way. For example, Timeline in the game is very obvious that you can't jump to the end or have different endings that you want. There is a clear progression of the game as the hours progress as well. And as you play the game, Little circles direct you as to how you should proceed and tells you to do certain tasks.However towards the end, the hours can look different depending on how you interact with Clarissa and the crew mates

ANUSHA: That's a really good point. I think at the core of this game, though, are the different personalities. Our human interactions are a core part of who we are. On the surface, Oxenfree is a single person game. You sign up for something that will isolate you but as you play the game, you slowly see the people you love and care about in these characters. You're really reminded to talk to your loved ones and especially cherish the fact that you have them in your life, something that can be so important during these trying times. Hopefully you'll try Oxenfree and come away with a similar message.

HAYDEN: Thank you, Im Hayden, the producer for this episode
JIACHEN: I'm Bob, the assistant producer.
ANUSHA: I'm Anusha, the line producer.