Phillip Thompkins

Hearts: Two Days Remain (Day 65 – 7/31)
Posted on July 31, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

I'm perpetuating the theme of these last few blog titles, but it's also focusing on diving deep and getting to what really matters. I'll be making another blog post tomorrow with my final remarks and some personal things for each of my fellow interns, so keep an eye out for that if you want!

I've been thinking a lot lately about what's at the heart of my actions, my motivations, my goals, stuff like that.

People may or may not know that I'm contemplating going from HCI into a Clinical Psychology sort of direction, but I don't know if that's even possible; let alone what's right for me. It's a weird position to be in, because I feel like if I'm combining the H and C in HCI on a level that hasn't necessarily been done before—most people who investigate the things I'm interested in have their backgrounds heavily in the Human or Computer ends, but not really in both. I have to muster the energy and courage to contact a few Clinical Psych programs to even figure out if they'd accept someone with that sort of background, so that's the main hurdle for now.

Assuming the idea remains afloat, my plan might be to get a Master's in HCI and a Ph.D in Clinical Psych or something like that—or maybe I'll get two Ph.Ds for laughs and so I can be a student for as long as possible.

Many have also seen a variety of different sides of my personality, like the eccentric and enthusiastic Phil, the borderline-arrogant and haughty Phil, the focused and sarcastic and distant Phil, and the tempers and free brand Phil. I've been having a lot of internal debate over which aspects of those are genuine, which parts are used only to cope with the world around me, and which parts are completely and utterly forced to the point of being dangerous. It's a pain, because these sorts of things don't really have a clear-cut answer, or even an answer at all! Knowing my luck, I'll sift through it all and figure it out by the time I've changed enough for the findings to be irrelevant.

And then there's another hearty question: is my heart really in the things I'm spending my time doing? Am I thinking these sorts of things because I'm burnt out, or am I realising that some things might not necessarily be for me? I've already come to terms with the fact that I'm stepping down from my position in my fraternity, and I'm not even remotely sad. I've got my eyes on a few minor side projects as far as my fall semester goes: being a student coach for the winter leadership retreat my school's Student Life office puts on, and getting Highly Exceptional RA Decorations at least once, but I've also realised that I don't really care one way or another, that I'll be just as happy if not happier without aiming for those things. I'm a little worried if that mesh sort of outlook carries over to my academics—I know it's possible. I'm taking quite a few classes that are pretty boring, and I'm only taking because I have to, and I'd really be hard to stay motivated, especially in the spring when I start hearing back from graduate programs.

Maybe I'm just burnt out. Mentally, emotionally, physically, socially burnt out. I hope so.

Mask: Three Days Remain (Day 64 – 7/30)

Today seems like it's all about masks for me.

It's becoming more and more difficult to mask my emotions, like my giddy anticipation for the week to end, or my frustration over the paper that's still not done, or the inspiration in response to our pilot study starting in about an hour. And then of course there's the absolute ideal that's coming with the unending workload and lack of actual breaks, both in the internship and with my classes. My composure is starting to fade, and it's becoming harder and harder to keep the quirky-yet-excitable mask up as we get closer and closer to the end of the program.

Ideally, it's the iteration of the paper will be the last, and I can go into autopilot until Saturday. But that's not likely.

On the subject of the paper, the pilot study looks like it might go pretty well! There's something in the app that reminds me of a certain... Well, I hope so.

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Dawn of the Final Week: Five Days Remain (Days 60 to 62 – 7/26 to 7/28)

Wow, that was a fun weekend! Multiple cuttings and innings and a bunch of all-around good times. We should have had more weekends like that. On the other hand, I almost wish things weren't so social this weekend, because I could have gotten a lot of work done.

Where it stands, we really just have to get our paper figured out. And since our paper's background section is almost done (we just need to rearrange it into something cognizant) we're seriously almost done. Right now, I think Jamie is doing some edits to the current version because looking at the paper just makes my eyes glaze over. And of course, it's when things hit the home stretch that things get particularly unusual. Sharktopus VS Pteracuda is a movie. I cannot make this up. Also Stacey made my morning hilarious by suggesting I watch this video. It's been constant laughter the morning.

It sounds like we're going to get to run a few people in a pilot study in a few days, so that's really exciting! It's not going to be a lot of people, but a few is definitely better than nothing. In the meantime, I'm working on off and on another project for school and just trying to stay focused. Apparently, knowing that I'll be back home with all of my bestest friends in a few days is really doing a number on that laser pointer focus I had in past weeks.

Perish Song (Day 63 – 7/29)

Happy Mask Salesman

On the subject of the paper, the pilot study looks like it might go pretty well! There's something in the app that reminds me of a certain... Well, I hope so.
Rain Dance (Day 59 – 7/25)

Got woken up in the middle of the night to a bunch of ridiculous storminess and wind; or at least I think that happened last night. And then, as if I were a calm and rainy day, I ended up being completely and utterly asleep, which was only problematic because my alarm didn’t go off. So, I ended up being over an hour late to work. I’m not too sad about it because there’s not a lot going on in terms of scheduled stuff, and I stuck around until like 6:30PM yesterday. I’m definitely a fan of the weather today, especially because it was a little chilly and seemed like it was about to start raining like crazy, but it didn’t.

Called home for the first time in like two or three weeks, yesterday. Nice to know that even when I’m a thousand miles away, some things are still pretty much the same. On the other hand, I don’t know how mentally ready I am for the end of the week. The whole “video recorded end of summer interview” thing is exciting, but by that point I probably be too far too real that the next day, I wouldn’t see most of my counselors anywhere near as often, if ever. So that’s kinda saddening.

Since I decided to jump on the opportunity that showed up in our inboxes, I had a meeting with Stephen Gilbert at 2. Seems like meetings at 2 have been a thing this week, since there was the team meeting, the stadium tour, the meeting with Trista Harding, and now the meeting with Dr. Gilbert. We talked about some graduate school stuff, and some of my research interests, and about the program and stuff; it was pretty fun. And then we got to have a brief talk about Academic Social Networking. I’ve always been actively indifferent about LinkedIn and all that, but I’m sure I’ll have to cave sometime eventually. Oh well.

As far as today’s video game reference (am I done yet?) goes, it seems like honestly I’m just so much more relaxed and prepared now than I was compared to earlier in the week. It has to be because rain relieves me. I’m supposed for applying to schools, I’m motivated to work on things for when I have to go back to school in a few weeks, and I’m really ready to knock this whole symposium thing out of the park. Also, I feel like I’m gonna make it rain…progress, that is. =P

Really though, I’m just ready to sleep in for a few days.

Sidequests (Day 58 – 7/24)

It seems like my blog posts have been seeing a definite decrease in content as time has been passing. Looking at how verbose and enthused some of my past entries were, I’m not sure if it’s a good thing or a bad thing.

I love how we had a lot of really nice weather for the first eight weeks, but as soon as week 9 hits, the weather becomes humid and gross. I’m so done with summer weather already. I need to do laundry to have more wearable shorts, because jeans are just too gross. I’m so done with summer weather already. It’s so weird when I pick a blog title that has multiple meanings.

Sunny Day (Day 56 – 7/22)

Laser tag, as I expected, pretty awesome. Slythering was my gun’s preexisting callsign, I knew that it was good luck the moment I pulled up a few videos, and it looks like those stands get absolutely destroyed. It seems like honestly I’m just so much more relaxed and prepared now than I was compared to earlier in the week. It has to be because rain relieves me. I’m supposed for applying to schools, I’m motivated to work on things for when I have to go back to school in a few weeks, and I’m really ready to knock this whole symposium thing out of the park. Also, I feel like I’m gonna make it rain…progress, that is. =P

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Turn() (Day 57 – 7/23)

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Sunny Day (Day 56 – 7/22)

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I love how we had a lot of really nice weather for the first few weeks, but as soon as week 9 hits, the weather becomes humid and gross. I’m so done with summer weather already. I need to do laundry to have more wearable shorts, because jeans are just not happening if this weather keeps up. I’d really appreciate it if the sun could just… not do what it’s doing to make the days so insufferable.

It’s really annoying when things keep messing with my sleep schedule, because then I try to compensate for it. This means I keep accidentally doing things like having 5-hour naps that completely destroy my evenings. It’s gotten really hard to get anything done because of it, which is resulting in me being really irritable and having little to no tolerance for anyone or anything. You’d think “early to bed, early to rise” would play out here, but apparently not. I think I just have to have a self-imposed napping ban for the next week and a half.

And if the terseness of this post is any indication, I’m just not in a good mood today. There’s a lot of fire and intensity on my end, it seems. But I’m not gonna let my mood stop me from having a good day, so I’m going to emulate the gross insensibilities of the sun. Whether this means forcing myself to have a brighter attitude or just moving forward despite my mood, I haven’t decided yet.

Still pretty hype for laser tag. I’m hoping some grad students come along.

Soft Reset (Days 53 to 55 – 7/19 to 7/21)

That sure was a weekend.
Friday… I seriously don’t even remember what happened on Friday night—not because anything happened, but because… at like 6-8 compared to my generic rides’ resistances of 1) was about my third best overall. I was definitely feeling tried to hit at least 7.5 miles, but I ended up going a full 8.67 miles instead. I find it funny that my first foray into biking with resistance (I simulated flat surface”. Turns out one of the exercises in there simulates going up a bunch of hills, and that sure was exhausting. I expected! Maybe volleyball is one of those things I’m just good at.

So, the past 24-ish hours have involved a lot of intense, sudden leaps and bounds that I didn’t quite expect.

Overdrive (Day 50 – 7/16)

Easily. Here’s hoping the afternoon is another burst of progress!

I’m thinking I’ll keep working on the literature review for my Honors Psych project back home, because that can be interrupted pretty easily. Here’s hoping the afternoon is another burst of progress!

Limit Break (Day 52 – 7/18)

Today at the gym, instead of using the bike to try the Hill Climbing run again, I tried the Mountain Biking run, which was much more exhausting. I still made 8.7 miles though!

Then we had a meeting with Vijay to touch base and keep working towards our end goals. And honestly, I expected things to go pretty painfully, since it seems like other teams are running into some rough snags in progress. Instead, things went pretty well, and Vijay gave us a nice laundry list of things to work on over the next few days. From consolidating sprite sheets to reformatting character models to juggling new and existing documents, we have quite a few things on our plate now. And I’m excited. Sure, we have Paintball tomorrow (we won’t have the face-off of the other REU) and then Game Day on Sunday (weeeeww yeeah!) but I’m excited to do work! I’m even excited to come into the lab over the weekend and do work. There’s a light at the end of the tunnel: it starts with a “5” and ends with “zing published.” Apparently getting that end goal reaffirmed was really useful to kickstart my energy levels. I’m so hype, I seriously think I’m gonna spend some huge hours off the clock getting stuff done.

So here’s what today and the rest of the weekend’s workload is going to look like:

1. Get at least one or two sprite arrangements done per day—this means I have five combinations done by Monday, ideally.
2. Write a rough Draft of our Final Paper—this means cackling manically as I Frankensteined together things we’ve already written while metaphorical lightning strikes to bring it to life.
3. Complete one of my personal tasks—either I get through the rest of my Psych Project Lit Review (22 more articles) or I write the 10-page Info Retrieval paper by the end of the weekend (3 articles to read and then I start writing).

Also, I’m going to try to have the rest of my blog posts be references to video game things. I’ve done it for the past three days, I may as well keep it going.

Burst (Day 51 – 7/17)

It seems like most aspects of my day really are coming in short, concentrated bursts lately, because this is the second day I’m starting my posts with such a remark.

Yesterday, we powered through all of our sprite sheets, with special kudos to Jesse for coming in later in the evening to finish off the last one. Today, it seems like we’re with little to do again. We’ve spent most of the past seven weeks constantly working on things, and all of a sudden we have days where we just… don’t really have much to do. It’s disorienting, in a nice way. I’ve been able to redirect my efforts, doing things like renewing scholarship applications, completing ResLife training modules, reading an organization’s constitution, and looking into graduate programs. Last night, I was going to unwind by playing some video games on my laptop. Instead, I ended up over my graduate options again, with a particular focus on which institutions had research that I could match as I’d have hoped. Instead, I ended up getting at least one or two relevant researchers per institution, and a better feel for whose education and research interests hit the vast majority of my own research interests, when I’m asked to come into the lab over the weekend and do work. I’m excited! I’m even excited to come into the lab over the weekend and do work. There’s a light at the end of the tunnel, it starts with a “5” and ends with “zing published.” Apparently getting that end goal reaffirmed was really useful to kickstart my energy levels. I’m so hype, I seriously think I’m gonna spend some huge hours off the clock getting stuff done.

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I mean, look at this face.

Team Game Day got through two whole football teams worth of character models yesterday, which was awesome. Now there's on-and-off work on our poster draft. We got some downtime until our Team Meeting this afternoon, so that's nice. Lunch with Chase was cool, and he inadvertently kicked inner researcher into flailing, screeching overdrive since he was talking about therapeutic uses of VR through the SnowWorld and stuff. I looked up an article that might be used for Journal Club today, and going down its rabbit hole has me seriously contemplating trying to get into Stanford now. I thought I was done making lists of potential grad schools, but apparently not.

Wholesome, we have an hour to kill before our team meeting with Vijay, so I'm just gonna keep on trudging forward. Today, that means suffering through RealLife training videos. And after that, it's not gonna be long before we're done for the day. Then I get to mentally prepare to get my face inevitably covered by volleyball, because sportballs bouncing off my face at high speeds is a recurring facet of my attempts at athleticism.

Here's hoping I can beat at least 8.5 miles today.

These aren't even the textures we're actually going to work with, but this looks pretty dam awesome.

Since I broke 9 miles when biking on Friday, I'm going to attempt to bike 9.25 miles after lunch today. I was actually getting pretty winded by Friday's biking, so I don't want to try and set overly lofty goals- I still have two more weeks to break 10 miles, after all. Since I broke 9 miles when biking on Friday, I'm going to attempt to bike 9.25 miles after lunch today. I was actually getting pretty

When the burnt this time. And in a few hours, we have the Freddy Court Volleyball Tournament. Team Autobaiottobot (Holly, Mitch, Getch, I might get routed in the first round, but at least it'll be entertaining.

I'm more concerned with making sure we can actually get to the user feeling. It looks like we might be hitting that stage pretty soon, the football players are moving along a lot quicker than I expected. Seriously, look at this:

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Today, I'm too brain-dead and sleepless to be very excited. Read the journal article for today- it was interesting that there were way more single women in the PTSD patients, but I feel like maybe the diversity of the traumatic events may make the study harder to generalize, as well as the fact that there was only a single woman in the entire study. They also told us literally nothing about the psychologist doing the treatments or anything about his or her style. Too many variables, but I definitely think it's a step in the right direction. Aside from the article, I got to go to another PT appointment in the afternoon, and I have that haircut after work; but what I'm really looking forward to is getting to see how I do in the gym on one of those workout bikes after lunch.

Goal is to beat 10 miles by the end of the month. **Here's hoping I can beat at least 8.5 miles today.** I pulled off 8.04 miles in 35 minutes, which is a little over a quarter-mile per minute. Go me! 😁!!
Today is UN-Fired (Day 43 – 7/9)

Posted on July 9, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

Ugh, I am so done with today... to subsist on Netflix by finishing the rest of Bob's Burgers and maybe starting Archer in my downtime from the above.

1. I've realized that things started to take a downward turn once I stopped actively tracking everything I had to manage, once I stopped setting goals. I had all of these things I had to do, but I wasn't actually saying “I'm gonna do the thing” and then

2. But then I had a spontaneous meeting with Eliot. He's real good at putting things in perspective (thanks a bunch Eliot!). Due to that, it was titled like “Adapting one model for many characters.” I was so excited! And then the internet decided to implode. It's almost reaching the point where doing work is impossible, because no pages will load. Luckily, I don't last very long; so I was still able to watch the video and take some notes before lunch. Hopefully I can get the football players or the marching band-era progressing towards something resembling diverse body types.

3. ...Maybe Not Quite Yet (Day 42 – 7/8)

Posted on July 8, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

Last night, I was trying to get to sleep early, and I couldn't. There was an excessively loud cricket probably three floors down, on the ground, chirping so loud that I kept me up until at least 1AM. And to top it all off, the internet is doing the opposite of cooperating. If I'm particularly irritable today, that's why. And factoring in that we have our presentations bright and early on Thursday, it looks like this week is going to absolutely insufferable. About three more weeks and it'll be done, and I can relax.

Griping aside, I'm planning on getting a haircut after work today- anyone have any opinions on what I should have done?

4. Looking forward to tomorrow's presentations, but definitely not the whole "getting to the lab at 8:30AM" part. Eewwwwww.

Fresh Start? (Days 37 to 7/3 to 7/7)

Posted on July 7, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

That long weekend was a much-needed respite from everything. It turns out I got a lot more exhausted when my weekends are cut in half by forced socializing. I got some vague work done on Thursday, but unforeseen little snags in everything made progress slow.

A bunch of us went to Holly's lakehouse on Friday, and I got to do some kayaking, which was really nice; nothing was really as soothing as zoning out in a kayak while the wake from larger boats rocked me gently back and forth. I only got sunburnt in one spot, sooothing as zoning out in a kayak while the wake from larger boats rocked me gently back and forth. I only got sunburnt in one spot, so

5. This weekend, while I'm back in the world of the semi-professional young-adult, I might be pulling some long hours in the lab soon, and weirdly enough I'm totally okay with that.

Changes (Day 36 – 7/2)

Posted on July 6, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

It's interesting, how much a few simple reality checks can completely change your outlook.

Over the past week and a half or so, I've been absolutely exhausted and potentially on the verge of a nasty depressive descent. Anyone who paid much attention to my mood and behavior probably picked up on how I was moody, irritable, and all-around vaguely unpleasant. To top it all off, last night, I learned that a figure important to part of my infrastructure back at UMBC is out of the picture, meaning that the entire landscape for my fifth year is going to be thrown on its head even more than I expected, and I still haven't started on most of the random things I have to juggle for the incoming fall semester. It legitimately felt like I was in some sort of grotesque Sisyphean gauntlet taking the form of my first structured 9-5 job.

But then I had a spontaneous meeting with Eliot. He's real good at putting things in perspective (thanks a bunch Eliot!). Due to that, I realized that things started to take a downward turn once I stopped actively tracking everything I had to manage, once I stopped setting goals. I had all of these things I had to do, but I wasn't actually saying "I'm gonna do the thing" and then doing it. I set my hands, and got myself into the situation I'm in now.

6. It's time for a change.

This weekend, while I will be up at the apartments, I'm going to be going into a full-on secluded hermit lifestyle. As much as I love my fellow interns, I need a few days specifically for getting into graduate school.

7. And since I didn't get to it yesterday, I have to force myself to get a haircut today. Fingers crossed that it'll look good.

Learn how to subsist on Netflix by finishing the rest of Bob's Burgers and maybe starting Archer in my downtime from the above.
I’d say to wish me luck, but luck will have little to do with this, so give me encouragement instead.

Post-Lunch Edit: After lunch, I hit the gym and covered 3.5 miles in 16 minutes on one of the bikes. I’d have stayed longer but we had that workshop on conference presentations.

In Circles (Day 35 – 7/1)

Maybe you’re looking for someone to blame
fighting for air while you circle the drain

I’m feeling a growing sense of frustration and irritation with things lately, almost to the point where I want to try and do all of my work in a conference room or the library or somewhere, I’ve never been one to thrive in or concentrate in places where there are constantly people socializing around me— I always do my studying and projects in empty rooms or in neutralize any eddies/eddies. I’ve been able to manage for the past five and a half weeks with no trouble, but I guess being around people so much is so starting to wear on me more than I thought. It doesn’t help that I feel like we’re just going in circles with some of this, like we’re not really making any progress. Just today, I finally managed to set up Unity and run the Game Day Viz app; I haven’t even made any progress towards being able to edit anything or even open up the code yet. Yesterday, I finished my contributions to our literature review (well at least a rough draft to be sure) and today I started articulating my contributions to our Lit Review. Once that wraps up and I get done, I will have hours and hours of work to get through from the spring, and everything else I need to do to prepare for the fall, from meetings to countless emails to planning and planning and more planning. I’m feeling more than a little overwhelmed.

Never be sorry for your little time
It’s not when you get there, it’s always the climb

Even though I’m horribly stressed and grossly overextended, I’m still pretty optimistic. Luncheon Lecture with JO today was nice, he talked about his life trajectory and about some of the intricacies of graduate school. Finally, enough, my short list for graduate programs is already a sad list of top-notch schools: it was only because I liked their programs, not because I knew anything about the associated institutional prestige. On top of that, I’ve learned that I really have nothing to lose, and I’ll be applying to a slew (of maybe six?) PhD programs come the fall. I’m more than a little horrified, but if I defined self-imposed odds to get into a program like this, I might have better chances of getting in than I give myself credit for. More in the present, I’ve been having a ton of fun with video games. Getch and I have been varying amounts of obsession with Transistor, a new game with perhaps one of the best soundtracks ever. Today’s post title and italicized sections are all taken from one of the songs that I’ve really been enjoying. I haven’t gotten to play it for more than half an hour, but I’m really looking forward to logging an afternoon making a bunch of incomprehensible noises because of how good it is.

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Meh.

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Finding it difficult to be mentally invested in anything.

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I feel like things are about to start picking up speed like crazy, and it’s really exciting. It’s also stressful, because we’re already doing a ton of stuff, but that seems pretty reasonable.

LITERATURE REVIEWS

Guess who just finished the last of his 24 articles for the Game Day Lit Review? the answer is me, and I had to resist the urge to start screaming when the realization hit me. Now I get to have the complete and utter joy of diving into summarizing all of this information in the confines of like... not a huge gross essay. Each member of Team Game Day is writing up a summary of all of their articles, and then we’re just going to Frankenstein them together into something hopefully coherent. Each member of Team Game Day is writing up a summary of all of their articles, and then we’re just going to Frankenstein them together into something hopefully coherent. Once that wraps up and I get some downtime, I’m diving into my Psych project’s lit review— those articles look like they might be easier to work with.

IRB DOCUMENTS

We’re so close to done, and even if we lose we win. Stacy came up to us with like five minutes before we could leave and was like “Hey let’s have a meeting with Vijay” and we were all like worried and stuff. Turns out we just wanted to give us some verbal feedback on the IRB stuff on top of what he would be sending us in the near future for edits to make. We have maybe like one or two more iterations of this and I hope I’ll probably be done. We’ve had Stacy’s feedback and Norene’s feedback and Vijay’s feedback and then we’re probably going to end up getting Elisa’s and maybe Stephen’s feedback before we’re finally done. And if you ask me, it can’t come soon enough, all this paperwork is starting to get really tedious.

VIDEO GAMES

After lunch, I hit the gym and covered 3.5 miles in 16 minutes on one of the bikes. I’d have stayed longer but we had that workshop on conference presentations.

In Circles (Day 35 – 7/1)

Maybe you’re looking for someone to blame
fighting for air while you circle the drain

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VIDEO GAMES
We had a lot of an impromptu game night last night. Anton had a mentally exhausting day, so I forced him to come play video games with me for a few hours. It turns out Nintento Land has a really fun Legend of Zelda minigame. That whole game is just unexpectedly great. Later on we played some Mario Kart, and that was as entertaining as always, even though the computer tends to beat all of us. Game Night tonight is going to be really fun, I’m excited for the grad students and mentors who’ll be there to see some of us in mindbend far removed from the workplace. I’ll count the activity as a win if I get to play at least one round of some kind of Super Smash Bros, no matter which version it is. I’m really wishing I’d gotten my copy of Brainl went out here by now because that would be a load of fun.

SPORTSBALL

Today, instead of a lunchtime lecture, we instead got to watch the USA vs Germany soccer game as part of an office-wide thing. That’s totally fine, even though the professor we’d have gotten to meet seems really cool. This is a really funny change of pace though, because I can just sit all day at my workstation and watch the whole game as if I was in the conference room with everyone else, so I can just tune out the game if I feel like working on something... like this blog post. Or eating.

High-Speed Juggling... (Day 29 – 6/25)

Always so much to do! It’s nice to have an unending backlog of things that actually matter, as opposed to during the school year. There are always things to do, and I’m finding it harder and harder to justify any long-term excursions. We did some tweaks to our IRB documents, so hopefully we’ll be ready to finalize those things within the next day or two. It’s also likely that we’ll have to write some scripts for our study, and that’s going to be gross no matter what.

Once we finished working on the IRB documents, I spent maybe half an hour doing some lit review for my Psych Honors Thesis thing back at UMBC. I pulled together over 10 potential sources without any trouble hopefully I can turn them into something useful. It’s absolutely horrible because I’m realizing I’ll never be done with literature reviews for the rest of my life, but it seems like I don’t have to get as intensive with this psychology project, because there’s just not as much to work in the general area that’s actually relevant. If I’ve done all the researching that I’ll need to already, I’ll be so happy.

After lunch, we had an HCI lecture with Dr. Debos Satterfield, and holy s**t she is as cool! She’s on the list for a luncheon lecture on July 17th. Get hyped.

Pumped for the rest of the week, we have a Game Night tomorrow, Mall of America on Saturday, and Dungeons & Dragons can possibly get moving sometime in the next... day or so.

Good Days (Day 28 – 6/24)

Last night after work, I went to a local game store and shopped so hard I got the average price per video game up to under $30, which is cool considering one of them was worth twice that. Then, a bunch of us went out to the local Mongolian Buffet and that was really good. Sam, Mari and I all did the "washboard challenge" and it really wasn’t that bad. I ate so much food though, and there were some ridiculous selfies and whatever. When we went back to our apartments, a few of us sat around playing Nintento Land, this quirky theme-park mini-game monstrously, and it was surprisingly fun. Nothing quite as hilarious as realizing the hubris associated with particularly absurd games of tag. On an octopus-themed "dancing" mini-game. It was good times.

Today was very relaxed. We had a presentation about writing personal statements, that was okay. We had a luncheon lecture with Dr. Larysa Nadolny, who works a lot with education and gaming, and her lecture, research areas, and the subsequent discussions were really engaging and interesting. Mari was really invested in every minute of it, and that was really fun to see.

Tonight we’re going to be touring the Seed Science Lab and that’ll be... interesting. Plants aren’t normally my thing, but we’ll see what happens.

Afterwards, I’m thinking it might be time for some more Nintento Land 😊

Happy Birthday To Me! (Day 25 to 27 – 6/21 to 6/23)

Okay, so what were these past two and a half days even...

Friday night was definitely nice. A bunch of us got together and hung out and it was a well-needed burst of fun. Saturday was an absolute blast. We went on a big ol’ walk around Des Moines while we waited for Zombie Burger to have space for us. We stopped at a little coffee shop and got a mango-apple smoothie and it was great. And then when we got the call, Kelsey and Sam ran over there and saved our table. When we ordered, I ended up getting a Rosa Karpinski Miloshake, an order of Garlic Bacon and Blue Cheese Fries, and most importantly, the "They’re Coming to Get You Barbies" burger, which is stated on the menu as "two grilled cheese-sandwich buns, American cheese, caramelized onion, bacon, Zombie sauce." "I’m not normally the type to incessantly photograph my food, but..."

It was so massive and huge. I also got to watch Sam and Geith and people react to the Germany vs Ghana game in the World Cup or whatever it’s called, and that was fun. Then I got back and slept for like twelve hours.

Sunday consisted of rest and relaxation. I did a bit of nothing for the majority of the day, and bulldozed through a bunch of episodes of Sense8 Art Online with Mitchell and Geith. I think we’re going to move on to Gunmen Lagern afterwards so Mitchell can see it. Mitchell also ended up triggering the smoke alarm- it turns out that we can only turn those off if we get a CA to do it.

Today is my birthday. I’m 22. Half an hour after midnight, Mitchell walks out into the living room playing some game that I didn’t realize was relevant (it was Taylor Swift’s 22) until about a minute later. I’d say I don’t feel older or any more awesome, but it seems like everything’s on the upswing! I’m legitimately driven to start exercising (bring on the arm days!) and eating a little healthier, and the wrinkles and stuff I was told to do in today’s physical therapy appointment are easy enough to incorporate into my life. I’m tired of being grossly out of shape and now I’m all of a sudden energized to do something about it, yay! After work, I’m riding the Blue bus downtown to hit the game stores as a present to myself. Then I’m thinking I might try to go out to dinner to that fancy Italian place that literally everyone keeps talking about, the one with the Actual Italian Guy.

THIS MORNING I GOT TO THE LAB AND THEN
It immediately reminded me of a thing I read on the internet that made birthdays a lot creepier: "a small gathering of people huddling around a cauldron on fire, chanting rhythmically a repetitive song in unison until the fire is blown out and a knife is stabbed into the object.

I just had to share it even though it's kind of unsettling.

Happy Monday!

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Acceleration? (Day 24 – 6/20)

I think Team Game Day is starting to pick up some considerable speed. After a protracted game of Spaceteam (Thanks for recommending it Sam!) between Jesse and I, we sat down and hashed out a large amount of the details for our IRB application in about an hour or so. We pieced together which measures we would be using in little to no time, and we've reached the point where we're hypothetically almost done with the whole thing. I've learned that it's really advantageous to have pre-existing measures and documents that can be used as a starting point. Creating entirely new content for everything would be gross and overwhelming.

I'm actually excited for this weekend. Skyzone sounds really fun and I'm pumped to have some downtime again. Plus, my birthday is on Monday (insert Taylor Swift joke here) and we'll be done with our morning classes. So I get a day of undisturbed fun and a lot more downtime to work on the Game Day stuff. I'm wildly excited to be able to mess around with the character models and stuff in Maya and start seeing the project come together in a more visible way. And then there's the ever-looming Literature Review (maybe I'll end up getting through the last 10 or so sources in a reasonable amount of time?) that has a paragraph due on Thursday. Add on Wednesday's Research Question (what are we going to try to figure out with science?) and Friday's Methods Paragraph (how are we going to go about trying to figure something out) and it's clear we'll be busy. Maybe not as back-to-back-endless-work busy as this week, but still pretty busy. I've got my fingers crossed that between what we've already known and what we've done with the IRB document, next week's milestones (deliverables????) shouldn't be too bad at all.

Also I'm shaving my beard tonight! The rest of the interns saw an old picture of my face from when I went to prom and still tried to be clean-shaven, and they had some really priceless reactions about how I had (and maybe still have) a chiseled jawline and whatnot, so I figured I'd see if that's still the case four years later. It'll be entertaining, at least.

One Step at a Time (Day 23 – 6/19)

We're under 72 hours from Sunday, I really need a full day to myself to do absolutely nothing. We're almost done with all of our morning classes for the rest of the summer, and that's really exciting! I'm ready to be done with all of them and start focusing on the Game Day project more. We sat down late last night and ironed out a very rough draft of our IRB proposal, but we still started making progress. Based off of what we did last night, we still have a lot of ground to cover. I want to sit down and review some write-ups we've had to do, namely a personal comparison of various VFX tech and our Problem Paragraph, because I feel like there's no point in getting feedback if you're not going to do anything with it. And then there's, y'know, the endless pile of research articles I still need to get through for the Literature Review; I've gotten through 15 articles and am ready for another 12, which is assuring that everything is going to be useful and coherent. And then there's, y'know, the still-blooming few assignments from the last semester that are lazily avoiding my motivation.

On the bright side of the massive workload, we get to go to Skyzone on Saturday, I get to go to a Physical Therapy appointment on Monday (my birthday!), to get my leg looked at, it seems like we might have another semi-impromptu Mario Kart night, since Disc Golf got cancelled due to weather, and the Dungeons and Dragons game is getting pretty close to starting. So the work days are calming down, and the non-work things are kind of on an upswing. And that's really nice after the stress of the past two weeks. =)
Here’s hoping tomorrow’s a change of pace. We’ve got a luncheon lecture with Jared Danielson, Assistant Professor of Veterinary Pathology and HGIS, who is bound to be interesting through the professor’s departments alone. And then 30 pages worth of reading to do for Craft of Research, which looks like it’s going to be all about picking good sources, which would have been more useful a few weeks ago. Sigh. So… we’ll see if tomorrow’s any less chastening. Maybe if Disc Golf gets canceled we can have an impromptu game night like we did a few times last week. On the bright side, last night was a blast. For most of it, I was walking people through the moment I get back to Maryland. I even bought a textbook yesterday! If I’m sufficiently motivated and lucky, I should be able to start the fall semester without anything coming over my stress levels.

Hopefully.

That’s what the optimism is for.

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Rejuvenated (Day 18 to 20 – 6/14 to 6/16)

Wow, I didn’t realize how much I needed that weekend until Monday rolled around.

I was irritable, mentally exhausted, and all-around just done with people as a whole until I spent the majority of Sunday all by myself. I mean, don’t get me wrong, there were some nice interactions on Friday, but overall, I was just right side. Caglar was really worried, but I was just anxiously horrified because, y’know, what if something’s going horribly wrong? It’s also entirely possible that I just worked too hard sometime in the past few weeks and I haven’t actually sat down and relaxed yet. I really hope it’s the latter scenario, because that means I’ll be in better mental shape.

OpenGL is really fun for me. I forgot how much I enjoyed similar (although lower-tech) stuff that I did in a C++ Game Design class I took back in High School. I’m working on that Planetary Simulation in my spare time (progress so far: being and [crappy] is a lot more fun than I expected). I’m really pumped to start figuring out how Pong is gonna be implemented, and I’m even more pumped to maybe add features to it if we can get it done quickly enough.

Today, we also had a Luncheon Lecture with a gaggle of grad students who answered our barrage of questions. It was fun, I guess. I was already kind of familiar with the idea of it being stressful and busy and all that. I’m probably gonna email some people and try and get more personalized information on topics like how to pick a professor or what sorts of undergraduate paradigms need to be abandoned. Hopefully that gets me some more information.

Even though I have a TON of stuff to do both in and out of the program (baskin’ at you, old compact projects), I’m finally getting fed up with not being done with some of these that I’m getting all sorts of gung-ho. I moved an entire document repository into my flash drive so I can get a minor little programming project done probably after dinner. Over the past few days I’ve been doing a lot of emailing towards bosses and instructors and professors so that I can keep ups (and, of course, don’t stop) a bit more fun and organized. I’m kind of having a hard time sleeping, and I needed Sunday to be as far away from humanity as possible. I’m still not used to this whole “waking up early” thing, which is a huge pain, but I’m managing well enough. I didn’t douse off even a little during class today!

On the subject of class, we’re starting Computer Graphics using OpenGL. I’m grimmely excited, since one on hand, graphics are cool, but on the other, everything I’ve heard about the graphics course at UMBC is a horror story. We’ll see how things go by the end of the week; regardless I’m excited for the group graphics-y project assignment. I’m super excited about Team Game Day is doing Pong for our project, and we may or may not be adding in some Breakout-like elements to make it cooler.

Hiking trip at Ledges on Saturday was really fun. My leg started acting up within the first three steps when we started climbing a hill, but I already knew that the day wasn’t going to be ideal. After some short bursts of forward progress, Caglar and I decide to head back to the cars for a bit before venturing off to try and find the big river we saw from the Crow’s Nest. What we didn’t expect was for it to be as close as three inches deep of river water, and I drenched my entire right side. I climbed back to the cars for a bit before venturing off to try and find the big river we saw from the Crow’s Nest. What we didn’t expect was for it to be as close as three inches deep of river water, and I drenched my entire right side. Caglar was really worried, but I was just laughing because of course something hilarious like that would happen. I didn’t notice until like a minute after the fall that I’d apparently scuffed up my right arm a bit, and it was bleeding in like three or four places. Oof! For the rest of the weekend, my right arm was somewhat out of commission, but it seems to be back to normal now.

After dinner, we went to the Trestle Trail Bridge, which was another like three miles in all. The bridge was really pretty, between the gorgeous view of the river valley and the fact that the bridge (if you) was incredibly uncomfortable because of the ominous wind mixed with the heights (I can do one or the other, not both: case in point the top of the ropes course tower) so I pretty much just looked across both ways and tried as hard as I could to not be in the middle of all the suitations because I probably would have bit someone’s head off. But it was fun and my leg wasn’t acting up too much.

Sunday was entertaining. My forces into civilized society included oven-ing a pizza and consuming it whole, gawking at fleeting glimpses of the anime Berserk, cackling as Getch grossly underestimated how much pizza I regularly order, and watching some Sword Art Online (another anime) and then Silicon Valley (a hilarious show on HBO).

But in all honesty, this is the most important part of the weekend:

Here’s hoping that the game can actually happen and be an enjoyable experience for the people involved.
I was unintentionally awake until about 3 in the morning, finishing up Orange is the New Black. I was so close to going to bed at a normal time, but then the plot got crazy and I only had two more episodes. And the season finale was two hours long. It was definitely worth it, though, as the show wrapped up wonderfully and in so many ways that it didn’t even remotely expect at the start. This is the third day in a row that I’ve been staying up late and being grossly sleep-deprived. I read in a textbook that after a few days of not getting enough sleep, you’re basically drunk. A Google search turned up this article, which is interesting. I guess I’ve been getting sleep, just not enough, so I wonder if the effects are similar.

Even if they are, it doesn’t seem like it’s all bad. We did some tinkering with Maya today, and apparently the five minutes I spent while nearly unconscious and making a bunch of rectangular prisms actually looked pretty good! Our teacher for today thought that I knew what I was doing; the reaction on his face when I told him I had literally never touched Maya (or really any artistic-y program) and was half-asleep the whole time was honestly kind of priceless. Stout to Sam for telling me that I can apparently get Maya for free by using a valid email address. I’m not going to say that I’m on the verge of maniacal laughter, but I’m excited to learn more about how to do things in Maya. It seems really fun, and… artistically inclined than SolidWorks. The archeology spin on this sort of thing works better for me than the engineering-y perspective.

Excited to do Bowling (and maybe some arcade-ing) at the MJU. It seems like afterwards, we’re all hanging out in Holly’s and Kelsey’s apartment to play Mario Kart and it’s going to be awesome and all of us should be there!!!

I’m starting to feel some burnout, and that’s not okay. I’m getting harder and harder to juggle the high-energy Philip from the first two weeks with all of the things we have to do and all of the unrelated things that I want to do. I think I need to take a leave of absence for a while to myself and just do absolutely nothing.

Exuberation: Yesterday, due to reasons mostly involving me being slow to get from point A to B, I skipped out on the Rock Climbing gym trip, and that was sad because I was pretty gosh damn excited. To compensate for that and the lack of open treadmills at the gym, I decided to just go on a walk instead. In the end, I ended up covering at least 6 miles, which is really impressive, since my aforementioned leg pains were completely and utterly nonexistent! But I went on this walk, I realized that there was something I had to do, given the current circumstances in the world.

I bought a Nintendo Wii U.

So the last 2.5 miles of my walk, I was carrying an awkwardly large five-ish pound box, which I choose to believe gave my arms a bit of a workout. I get back to friendly with timing just perfect enough to pop out of my bedroom with the box in hand within 10 seconds of getting through the door. I think he had a sustained scream of excitement for like five whole seconds. Holly let us hook the console up to her TV (thanks Holly you’re the best) but we had at least half an hour of indecisive system update before we got the chance to actually sit down and play Mario Kart 8. That game is so worth the hype, and there’s something special about watching Mitchell get hilariously lost and get absolutely involving as we all fought for first place.

Excess: While the Wii U was an inevitable purchase (Nintendo’s E3 line-up was pretty killer, don’t mention Super Smash Bros here, I don’t even want to discuss), it was still expensive. I’m trying (and hopefully not failing) at saving my money to ensure that if I need to, I can pay for Winter classes and maybe even Summer classes for my last year, and handle the financial aspects of graduate school applications and visits. I also have to keep my birthday in mind, as I’m the type of person to spend a lot of money on himself when June 23rd comes around. Pinching my pennies will prove to be prudent, I presume. Away yeewat alienation! Money aside, I’ve been trying to balance my usual daily routines with my desire to sleep excessively. I’ve been doing some actual high-notoriety research (so many things that I didn’t know people actually worked with). So the moment I heard it, he had my attention for the rest of the lecture. See, while I said during introductions that I didn’t know people actually worked with. He’s a part of the Berkman Center for Internet and Society at Harvard. I didn’t even know that was a thing, but the moment I heard it, he had my attention for the rest of the lecture. See, while I said during introductions that I think I might want to go into video games, artificial intelligence, HCI, VR, or something like that, I also think it would be really cool to dive into the effects of the Internet and technology on people, on how they see effects of the Internet and technology on people, on how they work and how they think. So in this lecture from Ray, who just started here a short while ago, and how he is doing actual high-notoriety research into things that I’m really interested in and he’s looking forward to working with graduate students AND HE TOLD ME TO KEEP IN TOUCH AND EMAIL HIM.

I know I normally say things like “I literally cannot right now” but I actually just cannot believe that those past two hours just happened. Because I’m in an emphatic mood, here’s another gif relative to my current state.

EDIT:

1) HOLY WOW I just posted the 100th blog post, that’s cool 😊

2) I know that people have been interested in some of the articles and such that I’ve mentioned these past few weeks, so I dug up some links:
   - Nevermind: A Blokeback Horror Game (HuffPost, Kickstarter with info and videos). It didn’t get funded on Kickstarter, but the head person might be trying to make it happen through other means.
   - Universe Recreated in Computer Simulation (link). This isn’t the same one that I mentioned about how the universe might be a hologrammy simulation thing (as similar to that is how) but it’s still kind of crazy to think about.

The weekend was… interesting. Farmer’s Market on Saturday was real nice, I got to try Bubble Tea or whatever it is for the first time. And then my key card to activate rebel against any and all locomotion yesterday, even this morning. Walking any distance longer than like “around my apartment” is actively an inconvenience; if it keeps up I might have to look into seeing a doctor. On the
When I left the Civic Center yesterday, I realized that the closest Best Buy that's offering the chance to play the demo is half an hour south, in Des Moines. If people want to go, we can hypothetically leave on Wednesday after the Intro to HCI course and probably get a fair amount of playtime in. Who's down for that adventure?! 😄

Today, we got to have lunch with Elliot Wilner, who is basically a wizard. He did Industrial Engineering and then he picked up some Computer Science and now he's doing Medical Imaging stuff in Virtual Reality. That's a really wild trajectory, so I'm kind of excited since that means I could end up working with something wildly different than anything I'm used to now. And that's cool.

Yesterday, I went to the gym for the first time in like forever, and that was fun. I think I managed to work out my muscles more than anything, because moving my neck around feels weird. But I survived half an hour on the treadmill and some amount of time doing some pretty intense stretchy ab-y workouts with Sam and Sharniece, and that was cool. I'm kind of pumped to do more exercising and see where I end up by the end of the summer.

Also, apparently my blog posts come up if you google search "Phillip Thompkins Iowa research," which I only know because my little sister found my blog posts and is now reading them. Hello there, little one! 😊

Today, I'm hoping to get through more of my Literature Review for Game Day. I have a good few sources lined up that I have to read and parse out, but I'm hoping that I can contribute substantial things to discussion tomorrow. Ideally, we'll get some more direction on what we want to do with the study through this, so that's exciting!

We learned about inheritance today. I was familiar with it from things like Java, so my mind wasn't, like, blown. We did presentations on our C++ projects, and that was fun. Between then and now, I'm already contemplating alternate approaches to the game Board in Trouble. At first I was like "we'll use a Linked List" but now I'm like "maybe we'll use the std list" or "maybe we'll just use an array," so it'll be fun to actually figure out that Jesse powered through the Player class in like an hour last night, so we're already moving along quickly. Hopefully that momentum keeps and we don't have to fret over it through the weekend.

Yesterday, we had another research meeting with Viyes and Stacy. They seemed pretty impressed by the progress we've made so far, so I hope we can keep impressing them by just keeping pace. We also got to see the Jack Trice aim in the CI, so that was really interesting. We'll have a lot of work to do, once the ball gets rolling. Last night, despite the gross weather, we went to an awesome food place, Hickory Park. Great food, crayons and childish activities, loads of jokes and laughs, and really cheap desserts. I got a milkshake that was like almost as big as my arm for like five dollars. I wanna make it a thing where we go there like once a week or something.

I also called home for the first time since move-in last night, that was nice. Hopefully that momentum keeps and we don't have to fret over it through the weekend.
Mobile User Emotion Study, and that just makes me really excited, because I think that affect and emotion relative to technology use is a really cool area of research.

Rest of today isn’t that busy with scheduled classes or activities, so I’m looking forward to more of a free-form day. If I can make some good progress on my Mobile User Research Board class for Trouble, I’m hoping to dive into a few of the sources I have an interest in and start my review. If I don’t feel like doing that, I can always just start working on a paper from the spring semester that I still have in my backlog.

Computer Programming #2 – (Day 7 – 6/3)

So, my computer at my pod wasn’t working, except then it was once I started programming on another computer. Clearly, I can’t win. Team Game Day has decided that we’re doing Trouble, the old board game, as our project for the C++ class. I don’t think it’ll be too bad.

Downtown to life right now, the closest Bank of America (my bank...) is about an hour away, in either Des Moines or in Marshalltown. Depositing that paycheck is going to be a pain. Another irritating thing is that despite my best efforts, it’s apparently impossible for me to drag myself through the articles that Stacy sent us. I’ve read one, skimmed two, and have a fourth one to go all, but I wanted to make sure I had a deep understanding of all of them. Oh well, such is life.

On the bright side, yesterday Getch and I went on an adventure into Ames to cop a tiny video game and tabletop game store. I managed to find Shadow Hearts, a rare PS2 game, and the first Silent Hill, and even rarer PS1 game, for about $70 in total. For reference, PS2 games used to go for like $40-$50, and those games would’ve been even more expensive because they’re so hard to find. I almost bought a Wii U then and there, but I restrained myself... for now. Give me a week and I’ll cave. In the tabletop game store, I bought a pile of dice for about $25, including a little pouch to hold everything.

I’ve decided that I might end up getting my Wii U (with Brave) and my PS2 (with a few games) shipped out to SU. That means that I’ll almost definitely have to get my TV shipped out, which is a bit less exciting about. My TV is pretty big, and it’d be a lot more money then just shipping out a single box with two consoles and some games and stuff.

In a bit, we have our first progress-oriented research meeting. I’m excited to see ideas coming to the table and things start coming together.

Computer Programming #1 – (Day 6 – 6/2)

So we had our first day of the Computer Programming class, and we got our pre-tests back. I did homewordably because my reading comprehension decided to tank (oops, I read loops wrong and minor boolean operators and all that) and because I forgot or just didn’t know a lot of the class-y and pointer-y minutes of C++! It was kind of frustrating to see that even though I’ve been taking programming classes for almost ten years (yawn, I’m old...) I’m still capable of making Zoe/sem-inducing mistakes. No matter what my surface appraisal of a situation may be, I need to stay on my toes and keep a level head and a careful eye. If I’m not on top of my game I could miss something important and, in worse cases, do some major damage to something. And that’s not okay.

I’m excited to sit down with Jesse and James and iron out our group programming project. If we could do an individual project, I’d have probably made a basic text-based adventure RPG. But since it’s a group project, we’re tentatively planning on Troubling, the old board game (here’s an old commercial). As much as I’m writing to implement it only as a one-player game for now to keep some things simple, I’m thinking we do a LinkedIn for the board itself and then a dice via a random number generator. Should be easy. I’m a little concerned with how well the display of the board, but we’ll figure it out, we have time.

The UX lab was pretty cool, and I really liked how there was an eye tracker in there. I’ve never seen one of those at work, so it was a really neat thing to watch. My mind wandered to if we could somehow connect that with the Game Day project to track which parts of the C8 simulation are getting attention, but that might be a bit beyond the capabilities of the tech. Maybe we can connect the eye tracker up to the C8 and Oculus Rift and get some more data on which one works better for stuff.

Today’s going to be nothing but plowing away on the keyboard, trying to either hash our Game Day’s C++ project or scoping up all the articles for the Lit Review. If I get tired of that, I’ll probably make my rounds through the lab and start snapping pictures of a bunch of the posters. I’m thinking that when the afternoon wraps up, I’m gonna head down into the Campus Town and hit up the game stores to reward myself for doing so much work yesterday. I’m not actively looking to buy anything, but I might pick up a sell of dice (for the hypothetical Dungeons and Dragons game that’s bouncing around a bit) or maybe a video game if I find something sufficiently rare.

And tomorrow, during our Research Team Meeting, we get to see the Jack Trice Stadium Sim within the C8. It’ll be nice to see what we’re working on with such a large scale. It might give me more ideas on top of what came to mind from the basic desktop version.

Ropes Course and Recuperation (Days 4 and 5, 5/31 – 6/1)

First of all, I just looked at the Google Calendar page for the program, and I felt my stomach drop at a fully packed month. It was daunting enough just looking at the first week, but June is gonna be... intense.

Yesterday, we went to the Ropes Course in Marshalltown. Notable landmarks on the drive included wind turbines and Daryl’s Guns. The climb was just fine, the part I was a bit freaked out on was the original tower pretty quickly. I wasn’t too keen on that happening a second time, even though I still had essentially zero climbing experience. The easy climb, with the straightforward wooden hand/foot holes, was really hot in the sun, to the point where I was considering quitting after the first few points in between, but I wasn’t too enthused on

And I did!

But I didn’t take any pictures, because my phone was stuck in my pocket, which was sealed shut from the waist harness. I honestly could have gotten it out if I tried hard enough, but I was too busy freaking out over the wind and the height and the fear from gradually coming back to the ground. Caglar got a video of me up atop the tower from the ground, so I might put that in here when it finds its way to me. Honestly, it kind of taught me a lesson, albeit a rather steep one.

People tend to give encouragement because they think you can actually do whatever they’re encouraging. If Getch and others didn’t think I could make it to the top, they wouldn’t have encouraged me to keep going. If Andrew and Caglar and Vijay and Stacy and everyone else didn’t think we could do those projects we’ve been assigned to, they wouldn’t be working with us, they wouldn’t be helping us set goals, and they wouldn’t be teaching us how to connect the dots between where we are and where we can be. And most importantly, they wouldn’t be helping people need encouragement. It’s easy to get caught up in the circumstances of the situation, in their short-term goals and the associated anxieties. But sometimes, you just need that little push to realize that reaching those long-term goals relies entirely on the ability to progress towards short-term goals, and those short-term goals are entirely within your reach.

I’m gonna have to try and keep that lesson close to me in the coming weeks.

After that, we did some Mein-Girls-esque trust falls and got lunch at a Mexican place. When we got back to campus, I tried to stay awake for a while, but then I ended up sleeping from about 6PM-5AM. I woke up at points in between, but I wasn’t too enthused on
Now, I have to try and get things done when I’m sunburnt and exhausted and want to do literally nothing. The things I want to get done tonight are:

1. Get through at least one indie Blasenprojekt before the weekend ends. I’ve got a tiny assignment from the spring term to get the report due next week. Hell yeah, done with everything.

2. Create a basic how-to on Literature Reviews. My professor, Swedish buddy, and Stan, the grad student, have bled a basic guide.

3. Figure out how to focus the literature review. This refers both to figuring out factors of immersion and the VR environment, and trying to see what elements of the sportsball arena environment that contribute to the excitement and immersion.

4. Install Steam/Unity and maybe other programs. We're using the Steam cloud with the Game DynamiX environment, installed but untested.

5. Run around the VRAC and take pictures of all the posters that I find exciting. I keep saying I’m going to do it, so I might just do it on Monday or Tuesday when we have some downtime.

I’m also excited for the Odyssey of the Mind people to go and see the campus when it’s a lot quieter.

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**Teamwork, Taskwork, Nerdwork, and Getting My Feet Wet (Day 3 – 5/30)**

**Posted on May 30, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins**

The past like 30 hours have been really, really fun. I’ve found myself going really overboard with some of my blogging about this experience, and it’s kind of exciting… until I realize that this is the thing I write about for my friends and end up talking about an hour or two.

Yesterday, after our first blogging experience, we got to take a tour of the VRAC. It was really neat! We got to see Augmented Reality and a control simulator in the Haptics lab, and then we got to mess around in the C6 on a Star Wars Turret Sim made by Ken, one of the grad students. Since then, I’ve actually gotten to interact with Ken, and he showed us that he’s created a way for people to fire the Millennium Falcon by giving him a handshake. I pretty much had to restrain the whole “sucked-up, starstruck, and shrieking” thing that people may or may not be hearing me mention, because my mind was so incredibly blown by that. Apparently, he knows a bunch of HIC guys that are in the know about the video games, so I’m looking forward to interacting with him and seeing if HIC gaming is something I’m interested in beyond the initial shock factor. But the C6 left me a bit confused; I talk about it way out of the initial shock factor. But the C6 left me a bit confused; I’m excited to see what it’s like to work on a grad student’s user study.

When the day wrapped up, I went back to the apartment, and ended up going to the apartment Community Center with Anton, Getch and Malick, and there were just too many Odyssey-of-the-Mind-ers skittering about, so we decided to get out of the way and hit up the arcade in the Student Union. It has bowling alleys, a ping-pong table, pool tables, air hockey, and a few more arcade games. Of interest was this cool mecha-combat game whose control scheme was kind of a tancy thing, with a joystick that had to be manipulated to have any kind of coherent movement, except the mecha also has guns and swords and bombs. We joked about spending any of our food stipend on it for a few hours. It’s a 10/10! Ordered that requires a pair of cooling glasses more than 30 glasses to appreciate. There are a ton of projectors and screens and some really inventive approaches to make it an all-around immersive experience. The game we got to play was the aforementioned Star Wars Turret Sim made by Ken. This was a cool game. Some pictures can be found at these links: one, two, and two.

I could have done into the code to figure out how to align the images and maybe like resize them and give them captions. I’ve got another like nine and a half weeks to be fancy. I was pretty okay at the game, but Mariama killed it. Kudos to her!

Fast-forward to today, and I learn that the frappuccinos in the Hawthorn community center food place near our apartments are pretty lacking; trying to drink it just made me say this morning. We got to see Calgar defend his Master’s Thesis, and that was really cool! It involved cognitive loads, a bunch of surveys, and it was really fun. 10/10, would approve of frappucinos just to keep the element of surprise for the other interns, but at least a few of them will probably enjoy it as much as I did.

We got to see the Star Wars Turret Sim again, this time with a lot more people. It made me think of Ken’s research, which is cool. If Caglar, Andrea, or any of the faculty think I shouldn’t be catapulting that at people or anything, just let me know I guess? I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes by doing this, so hopefully it’s okay for me to write one of these. :c

If Caglar, Andrea, or any of the faculty think I shouldn’t be catapulting that at people or anything, just let me know I guess? I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes by doing this, so hopefully it’s okay for me to write one of these. :c

Today was a bit more exciting; we went to a local restaurant where the food was good, and we had a busy day of meetings and things. We also had a Meyers-Briggs session, which was really cool! I got to interact with some of the grad students. Since then, I’ve actually gotten to interact with Ken, and he showed us that he’s created a way for people to fire the Millennium Falcon by giving him a handshake. I pretty much had to restrain the whole “sucked-up, starstruck, and shrieking” thing that people may or may not be hearing me mention, because my mind was so incredibly blown by that. Apparently, he knows a bunch of HIC guys that are in the know about the video games, so I’m looking forward to interacting with him and seeing if HIC gaming is something I’m interested in beyond the initial shock factor. But the C6 left me a bit confused; I talk about it way out of the initial shock factor. But the C6 left me a bit confused; I’m excited to see what it’s like to work on a grad student’s user study.

And of course, we started adding some personal goals, so we can start checking things off our lists as soon as possible. Since I’m usually excited about the literature review and the user study (I’ma get all psychology up in this team), I got to be the “champion” of the literature review, and we can add even more to it as we go, so it could make the whole “happily get published” thing smoother in the long run. If anyone from the other teams wants a copy of this, let me know. Stacy wants me to have done this by Monday. That said, I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes by doing this, so hopefully it’s okay for me to write one of these. :c

Caglar, Andrea, or any of the faculty think I shouldn’t be catapulting that at people or anything, just let me know I guess? I don’t want to step on anyone’s toes by doing this, so hopefully it’s okay for me to write one of these. :c

Now that things are starting to take form, I’m getting even more excited. Tomorrow is the nipsa course, and that’s exciting, because big savings of all those high in the air. We should record the swing, does anyone have a like a GoPro or something similar? I did one of those swings at the nipsa course for my Reulant Resistant training last day, and it was the funniest experience in all of that week and a half of training. I just hope my scary, anti-physics self can keep up with things. Even though it’s challenging by choice, I’m just stubborn enough to do “hope can’t do that because I am not athletic” or whatever.

Another thing I need to do: run around the lab and take pictures of all of the research posters that give me The Feelings. Worst case, I just take pictures of all of them and then show everyone on Facebook and whatever and be like “this is what I am surrounded by this.” Is this really exciting. Also, I need to figure out how to properly embed the pictures I uploaded of the C6.
First Post! :D (Day 2 – 5/29)

Posted on May 29, 2014 by Phillip Thompkins

Now we get to start daily blogging. I've been recording some of my experiences already, so my pals back home can follow some of my experiences. I'm not sure if I'm going to just copy/paste things over from one to the other or if I'll just write two separate blogs; I guess I'll have to figure that out sooner rather than later.

So far, this has been a really fun experience! All the other interns seem really cool so far, and I'm looking forward to all of the awesome things we're going to get into. There have been talks about gym adventures, which is great because I've been wanting to get more physically active for a few years, and this is the perfect way to force myself to do it. Some of us have talked about seeing movies or having gaming marathons. I think it was Samantha who has the big TV and Super Smash Bros? I mentioned it to some of the guys and they got really excited. On the walk over today, Getch and I connected over RPGs, so I might have my PS2 shipped out with some of my games, and laugh as he raids for stuff. Anton and I have discussed the possibility of maybe setting up a tabletop RPG (go-go-nerding it up with Dungeons and Dragons or an equivalent) which I think would be pretty cool. It's nice to see that I have a good amount of common interests with other interns. I almost expected everyone to be hardcore researchers or super-studious wet blankets, but it looks like everyone's pretty fun people. Also, the apartments up in Freddy Court are really great, much better than anything that's at UMBC. My bedroom is the decades-old West Hill Apartments back home was about as big as my room in Freddy, but it was also a bit darker and older, so Freddy is a really welcome change. The living room furniture is great too. And the bathroom is big. And we have a reasonably large kitchen. The apartment has just kind of exceeded literally all of my expectations and I'm so glad we get to live there.

The only downside so far is that when I googled game stores in and around Ames (because I like my video games and my birthday is in June) it took an extra hour of accidental browsing before I found out that a tiny video game store on Lincoln closed literally the day before we moved in. I was really bummed. Well, there's also the fact that I have a small truckload of assignments to wrap up from the spring (oops) that I really should try to get through before the week is over. I haven't started them though, so we'll see if my motivation holds. Surprisingly, I'm actually managing kind of well with this whole "consistently wake up pretty early in the morning" ordeal, even though I crashed real early (like 8pm) last night. I forgot how much stuff I got done when I woke up real early, I might have to start doing it more often.

I'm looking forward to the research meetings later today. I really wanna start interacting more with Eliot, Vijay, and Stacy. I'm a little daunted by the scale of the Game Day project, but some conversations during arrival dinner with Stacy kind of assuaged them a bit; we'll have to see if that changes once we start getting our feet wet.