**What is Passage?**

Jason Rohrer’s independently produced video game — Passage (2007) — vividly illustrates the potential of video games to mediate transcendence and epiphany through digital play. Passage immerses the player within a five-minute simulation of the life cycle — a quest for intimacy, wealth, fame — and meaning — that finally ends in the player’s death.

Currently, the New York City Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) curates this game along with 14 others. This public domain game may be downloaded online for free.

**Playing Passage**

1. The game begins with no instructions given. The play screen consists of 100 pixels by 12 pixels.
2. As game play begins in youth, the future horizon is blurred. As game play concludes in old age, the past becomes blurry instead.
3. As each five-minute game unfolds, the player searches a maze-like playing field for various rewards.
4. Points accrue with each step, doubling when with a life partner. However, the life partner prevents access to certain rewards.
5. Along the way, the player’s on-screen character ages — steadily, stubbornly, almost imperceptibly — until death overtakes him.

**Reviews of Passage**

Passage received widespread and critical attention from diverse media outlets such as Business Week, Esquire, Slate, The Wall Street Journal, Wired, and a host of blogs and gaming websites. Fagone (2007) hailed Jason Rohrer as a “videogame programmer saving our 21st century souls.”

Thompson (2008) praised Passage as a “fantastically expressive, artistic vehicle for exploring the human condition.”

Montfort (2009) observed that the insights of Passage gradually dawn upon the player throughout gameplay, mediating a meditative experience upon the meaning of life.

**Transcendence and Epiphany in Passage**

Transcendence and Epiphany in Passage: A Religious Educational Analysis

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Faculty Exhibition – MidAmerica Nazarene University – Olathe, KS

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Transcendence and Epiphany


Slattery suggests that **learners can experience transcendence through epiphany** — akin to “the moment in a short story or novel when the reader becomes fully cognizant of the past, present, and future events all in one instant” (2006, p. 84).

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**Transcendence and Epiphany in Passage**

Video games like Passage mediate the experience of transcendence by creating moments of epiphany.

1. No instructions are given. The simplified game screen conveys a sense of symbolic abstraction. In these ways, Passage mediates a quest of wonder and imagination.
2. The future and past horizons are blurred throughout game play, conveying a sense of future mystery and past forgetfulness. In these ways, Passage mediates a quest of wonder and imagination.
3. The game calls for exploration according to a strict time limit. In this way, Passage mediates a quest of wonder and possibility.
4. Points accrue without explicit explanation. Thus, the player must discern the meaning/lessness of game actions and point accrual. In this way, Passage mediates a quest of wonder and meaning.
5. The on-screen character ages almost imperceptibly. At best, the player perceives this gradually — too late to choose any other path. During the first playthrough, the player normally feels surprise, sadness, and stillness as death overtakes the on-screen character and his life partner. Normally, this sparks a moment of contemplation about life’s brevity and life’s choices in the player’s real life — the experience of many students in my January-term class, Understanding Video Games. In this way, Passage mediates a quest of wonder, meaning, awe, and reverence.

**Further research into video games such as Passage might explore the religious dimensions of aesthetics, liminality, myth, neuroscience, symbol, or virtual reality.**