

“No, nothing will be fine” — but could these misinformation games help at least a little? | Nieman Journalism Lab

By Teresa Carr

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One idle Saturday afternoon I wreaked havoc on the virtual town of Harmony Square, “a green and pleasant place,” according to its founders, famous for its pond swan, living statue, and Pineapple Pizza Festival. Using a fake news site called Megaphone — tagged with the slogan “everything louder than everything else” — and an army of bots, I ginned up outrage and divided the citizenry. In the end, Harmony Square was in shambles.

I thoroughly enjoyed my 10 minutes of villainy — even laughed outright a few times. And that was the point. My beleaguered town is the center of the action for the online game Breaking Harmony Square, a collaboration between the U.S. Departments of State and Homeland Security, psychologists at the University of Cambridge in the United Kingdom, and DROG, a Dutch initiative that uses gaming and education to fight misinformation. In my role as Chief Disinformation Officer of Harmony Square, I learned about the manipulation techniques people use to gain a following, foment discord, and then exploit societal tensions for political purposes.

[...]

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