

Sylvain Seccia



DÉSIRÉ – THE MAKING OF
2012-2016

For My Parents



January 2012

After another flop in the field of video games... I was back and ready to start writing the first chapter of « Désiré ». I remember... even back then, I gave myself four long years to meet the challenge. The words: « It's always night in my head » echoed from within me from the beginning and remained with me throughout the project.



To give an honest back story, I have to go back to 2008. Then, I was going through a difficult time... I had written a synopsis for a short film in black and white that was never made. What drove me in that story was the desire to convey, visually, the emotions of the protagonist, through his own eyes. From a philosophical standpoint, the world would be depicted in black and white, and the character would inject colour by distorting reality and masking his own anxieties. In this short film... a man wakes up one morning and he realises that he can no longer perceive colour, as if he were suddenly deprived of passion.

It was not until the end of 2011, when I began to think about the « Désiré » scenario... that I reviewed my own life thus far... my personality... my feelings... and it dawned on me that the synopsis summed me up quite well. So I went back to it and adapted it to emphasise the

causal link between the main character's melancholy and his colourblindness.

Given that I was about to embark on a four-year project, it was essential to choose a subject that mattered to me... otherwise the game would drift, in spite of my total dedication. And, somehow, in order to close the loop... I decided to work on a point & click game, LucasArts style, because the 90's had left their mark on my teenage years and, at that time, I was already intending to create one. It was like a childhood dream waiting to come true.

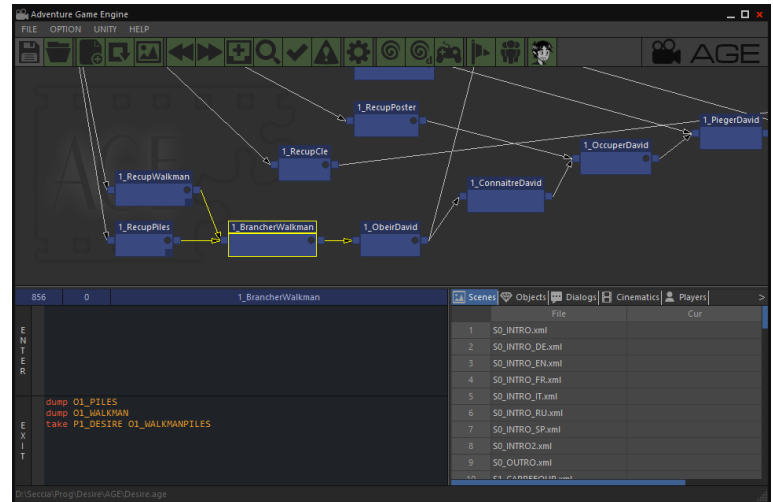
From the first few pages of the script, I needed to make the project known on internet forums... It was a way to formalise my approach and ensure I was committed to completing the task...



The scenario progressed quickly. Two chapters were completed in very little time. In March, I began to develop my point & click game engine, named AGE (Adventure Game Engine). Initially, it had not been my intention to develop AGE. I was looking for an existing tool instead, in order to focus mainly on « Désiré »... without having to write a single line of code. I was considering approaching the game purely from the perspective of script writing and graphics... but I couldn't find a convincing third-party tool to bypass coding. So, once again, I had to get back to coding myself to design that ideal tool.



I developed the IDE in C++. The runtime, based on Unity, would allow me to release a cross-platform game, although my programming experience did not extend beyond Windows



Following the economic layoff of a dozen employees in the video game studio I worked for, I was able to build the foundations of the « Désiré » project by dedicating myself to it on a full-time basis, during my three months' notice period. Then I had to find paid employment elsewhere, both to survive and to fund this adventure. Inevitably, the pace of the project slowed down.

At that time, I contacted Cyril, a former colleague, and sent him the unfinished scenario. With my new job and AGE that was taking shape, I was less focused on programming and more on looking for artists. Cyril advised me to turn to the Café Salé website. No sooner said than done... On June 26, I posted the announcement that I was searching for that rare gem of an artist...



July 2012

Answers to my post did not yield anything concrete. I took some time in the summer to express myself musically and played melodies on my synthesiser. I let myself get inspired by the character to write musical pieces that... to be honest... were cruelly lacking in technique. It didn't matter! I had been able to convey my emotions in a musical score... which I could now entrust to a professional composer to develop further. At that very moment... the protagonist acquired a soul. All he needed to exist now was a body.



November 2012

I resumed contact with Sam, another former colleague, who suggested a model that would serve as a reference throughout the project. He emphasised perspective, something that I felt was too architectural but necessary nonetheless. In November, I was floundering... I only had a vague idea about the style I was after. And so questions were legion:



Should it be cartoonish or realistic?... Or cartoonish for the set and realistic for the characters?... Or the opposite?... Film Noir black and white?... Comic strip style?... Monochrome?... In shades of grey?...

At first, it was necessary to be concise and establish a clear framework for the style of the sets.

With the exception of the well established mechanics of the classic point & click, the influences of « Désiré » came mainly from literature and films. I had gradually moved away from video games and that world became, in my eyes, a very alien one. This is one of the reasons why I wanted to create an atypical game.



I knew the logical approach was to turn to a film that had affected me artistically, for inspiration... one such movie was « A Pig Across Paris ». I really liked the contrast in the outdoor scenes in the middle of the night.

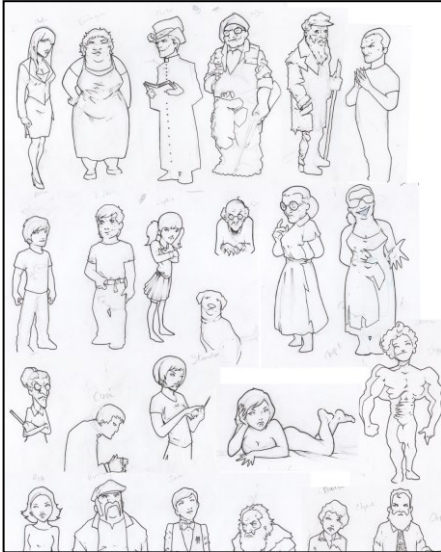
A simple screenshot set the tone I wanted and provided the model for the game's atmosphere.

The difficulty was creating this very atmosphere through illustration alone.

Unfortunately, in 2012... the game's scenery was at a standstill.

Then in November, I decided I had to make a move to prevent the project from stalling. It was an awkward move on my part but it was useful, psychologically. I appealed to David, an independent contractor, to create the forty characters of this modern tale. In the beginning, I asked him to have a go at the metro station scene.

At the time... as satisfied as I was with the characters (when in fact they were mediocre)... I was very disappointed with the other illustrations submitted.



The first tests were not very successful... however, I managed to clear the air. Specifically, I was able to guide the next artists taking up the challenge.

This first experience allowed me to be more precise in my research and to reframe the artistic spec.



December 2012

The scenario is done! I had laid out a document of sixty A4 pages within a year. I was somewhat proud of it. Characters... themes... situations... riddles... game messages... everything was there, except the dialogues that I could not write without a definitive character design.

The end of 2012 was the end of the first round in the challenge I had set for myself, but I knew the worst was yet to come. Because without talented artists... the project had no future.

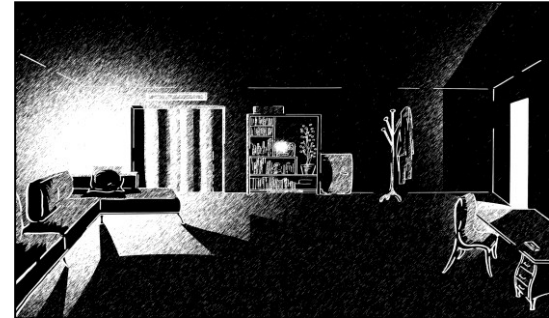


April 2013

The project took a decisive turn in the spring 2013 after a calm start to the year... too quiet, which was not reassuring. It is no coincidence that at the same time, I wrote two short stories published by Edilivre. The situation frustrated me deeply... I really wanted to tell the story of this achromatic child. In search of release, I was trying writing in earnest, for a time.

Then everything started moving... in April I met Laurent on the internet who submitted two illustrations that really helped to zero in on the style I was after.

First, a version of the metro scene that was much nicer than David's... and then, a monochromatic stab at the final scene of the third chapter.



I was more attracted to the comics style of the metro station scene. The apartment scene look reminded me of scratch cards... the rendering I also liked but it didn't match the game's desired look and feel.

Antoine and Sébastien, who had first responded timidly to my announcement in July 2012, came back to me more determined and agreed to work on « Désiré ».

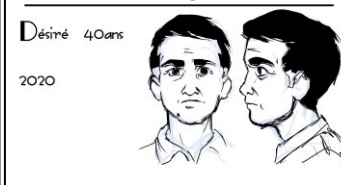
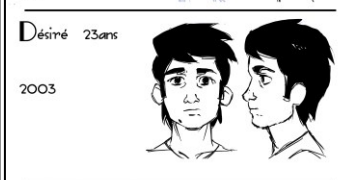
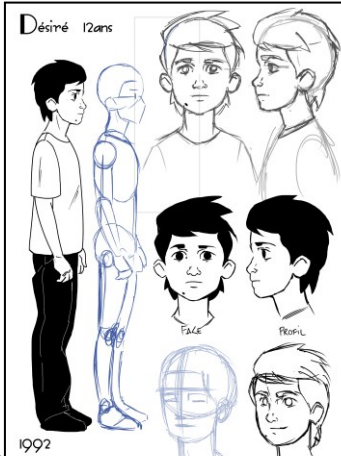
Their proposal was amazing from the start... some of the detail was missing, but I was convinced that we were finally on the right track. I was no longer alone in this adventure. For my part, I coded a shader to add a custom sepia effect to images in order to soften Désiré's vision and make the atmosphere more poetic.



Antoine drew the sketches on paper from the references I had given him and Sébastien took over the inking and the colorising in shades of grey, in Photoshop.



Max replied to the ad posted in June 2012 and looked at character design. The realism angle was abandoned before he started work on animation. Max then had a go at a much more stylised draft...



Max's first attempts were very interesting.

He demonstrated his skills and his indisputable talent in his field in a few drawings.

He could do any style!

But in the beginning, Max just couldn't make the characters his own... instead, he preferred concentrating on animations.

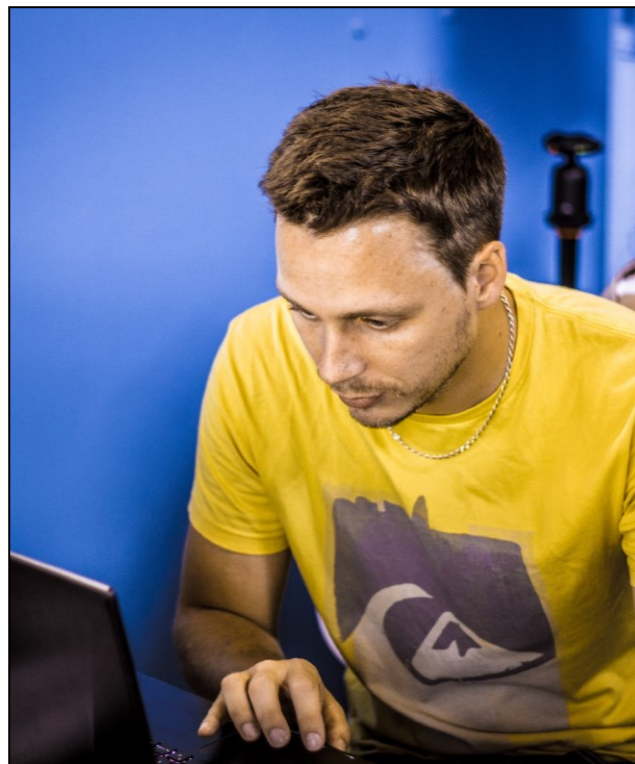


Loïk contacted me off his own back to offer his services as a composer. We had collaborated on a 3D video game project in 2011 and he wanted to repeat the experience. He didn't know what he was getting into but trusted me nonetheless.

When I talked to him about the concept and the minimalist piano music I liked so much... he was on fire and composed many short tracks. His creativity was overflowing. Thanks to my 2012 score, I managed to convey to him the soul of « Désiré ».

From June 2013 to 2016, Loïk composed a full soundtrack of more than eighty minutes, exclusively for the game.

While music is often considered the fifth wheel in video games... « Désiré »'s music is an integral part of the work.



At that time... I had finally found artists who lived up to my hopes... even beyond my expectations...



November 2013

I wanted a song to accompany the scene in the restaurant, in the second chapter. I wrote the first version of the song « Young Boy » in French.

Lorena wrote the melody and recorded a demo that charmed me at the first hearing.

Later... the lyrics were completely rewritten to better match Désiré's personality and the evolving story that was now in full flow...



December 2013

Antoine appealed to art students to concoct a set of vibrant characters... with personality... heart... vices... and whose appearance already said much about their life story.

The students developed a new work process, using a private Facebook group... to exchange content between participants on a daily basis. It was an indispensable communication tool that brought everyone together.



Two years had gone by... that is, I was halfway to the original goal. The components were coming together slowly... it became urgent to accelerate the pace and move on to the next step: the release of a demo in the coming months.

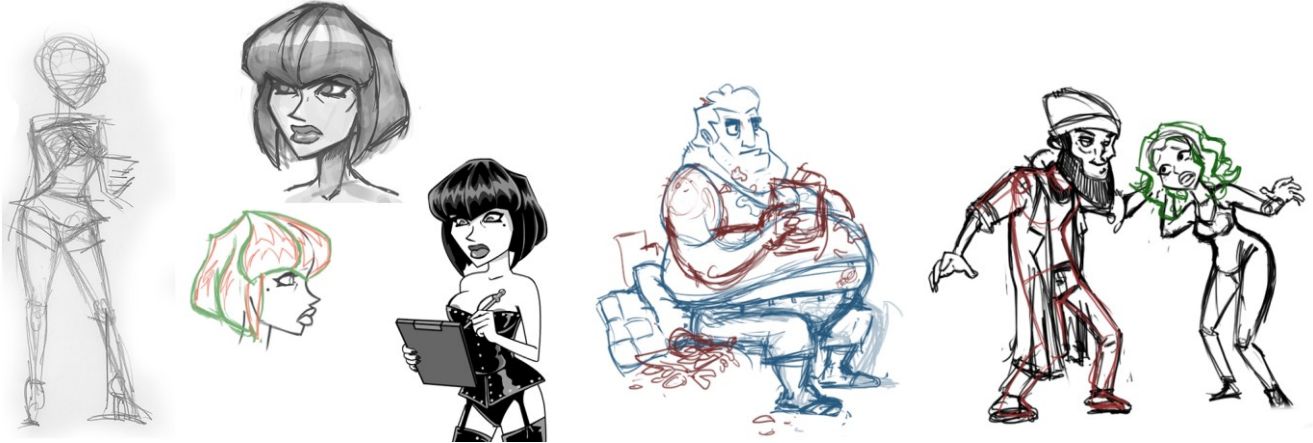
I made the decision to finance the project myself and asked Antoine and Sébastien to draw the background detail from January to April 2014.



The students finished developing the suite of characters and we were all impressed by the results. Anne and Terence did an outstanding job.



And then, thanks to the detail added by Antoine and Sébastien... Max was able to animate the first character: the sailor. His job was to create a Flash version of the character and animate it entirely based on the specs I sent him as he forged ahead.



It was my turn now and I wrote the dialogue for the sailor scene: this is how the scene took shape and was finalised. Ah... the sailor has become alive too!

All that was left to do was finalising the icons and the UI for total immersion.





May 2014

Max and I went back and forth during this laborious and perilous phase. We worked chapter by chapter, character by character. I was waiting for him to submit assets to commit to AGE... to develop the interactions... and finally, to write each dialogue in turn. Some animations required a painstaking frame-by-frame effort in order to avoid, as much as possible, the dreaded puppet effect usually found in Flash games.

The issue of translation into English was becoming pressing and I wanted to plan ahead for the total volume of dialogue to be translated. I reconnected with Christophe, with whom I had co-founded a software firm around 2000... this time to entrust him with a very important mission: translating 35 thousand words into English.



October 2014

Then, lightning struck!... Max decided to quit for personal reasons. Replacing someone as gifted as Max quickly, especially someone capable of getting straight to the core and soul of the game as Max did, seemed impossible; it felt like ground zero all over again. It did not bode well for the future. And when I saw what potential candidates' efforts amounted to... there was ample reason to panic!

Fortunately, there was a happy ending as Max was able to get back to the game relatively quickly.

In hindsight... I think the project had been hanging by a tiny thread.



Antoine introduced me to Thibaut, who was in charge of the IGP Lyon game show scheduled for December. Since we had a good part of the first chapter that was playable, we decided to participate in the event and open up to external feedback.

In parallel, we had set up an Indiegogo crowdfunding campaign hoping to gain sufficient momentum to complete the project with ease.

It was therefore a double opportunity to talk about « Désiré ».



The show was a success. The mechanics worked... the story held up... the style won gamers over... and « Désiré » stood out for its audacity and originality.

On the other hand, the fundraising campaign failed. We did not raise a penny but we had formed a small community of followers that could only grow as development progressed.

It was only the beginning... we did not want to lose sight of our goal... that was out of the question! With Max, we had plenty of work to do for the coming months... chapter 2 became pressing and kept us busy until March.



April 2015

No rest!... Max immediately moved on to Chapter 3, which would prove a real headache until October...

I posted an online video tutorial about forty minutes long, introducing the main features of AGE. Even though I had developed it specifically for « Désiré », I wanted others to benefit from it, free of charge, and to have access to a Getting Started guide.

Lorena recorded the final version of the song « Young Boy » in the studio and when Loïk heard the new, more emotional performance... he decided to recompose the piano piece to complement the vocals...



Loïk mixed the piece and was able to complete the final soundtrack.

The song had grown as the game grew, over the last year and a half, and had finally become an original creation in its own right.



The cinematic intro was made in May 2015 by Antoine for the sets, and Max for the characters and animations. Then Loik composed the music and the sound effects of the cinematic portion.

I organised a voice casting for the dubbing of the two characters featured in the intro... as well as the voiceover for the prologue in French and English.

The voice of « Désiré » at the age of five was interpreted by Olivia and that of the teacher by Alex, both recorded at my place. Then, we recorded the narrator's script, read in French by Lionel, and in English by Krishna.

All I had left to do was to promote via social networks and set up the official trailer. This trailer marked — distinctly and definitely in our minds — the break between the creation and the promotional launch of the work.

It was time to reach a wider audience by introducing « Désiré » to the public and committing to a release date.

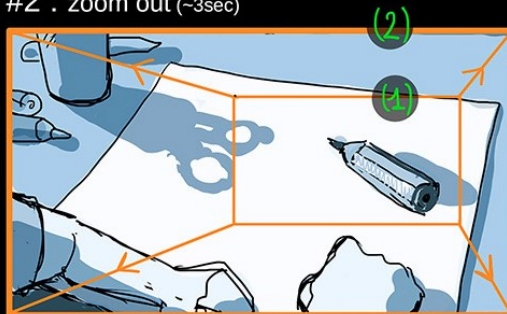
I was struck by the immediate enthusiasm for the trailer as attested by posts on various Facebook groups. We had succeeded in reaching out to the public through our efforts and the talent of the artists.

I was reassured and confident for the future...

#1 : zoom sur l'école (~6sec)



#2 : zoom out (~3sec)



Stop (2) institutrice: « ...Désiré ...? » (~4sec)

#3 (fixe)



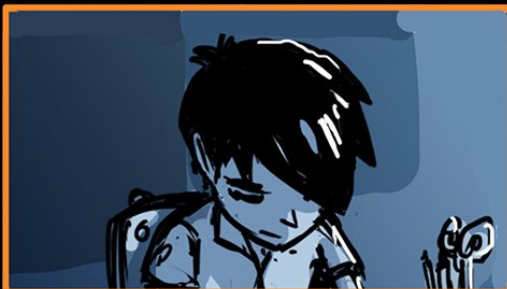
« ...Pourquoi n'as-tu rien dessiné ? » (~3 sec)

#4 Zoom (IN) (~3sec)



Il reste muet

#4 (plan fixe)



« Désiré je t'ai posé une question ! » ...

→ #4



« Je sais pas ! » « Regarde... »

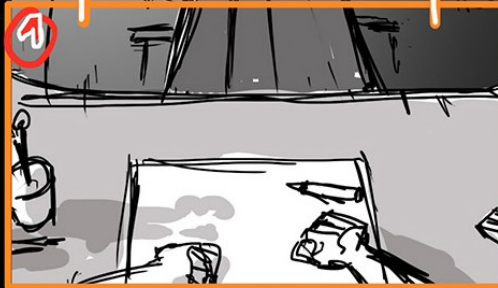
5 (TRAVELLING)

→ # 5 Bis (FIXE)



...un soleil !»

«Tu es le seul à ne pas l'avoir fait !»



..., tes camarades ont tous dessiné...

6 (PLAN FIXE)



«Oui, mais moi j'ai jamais vu le soleil ! »

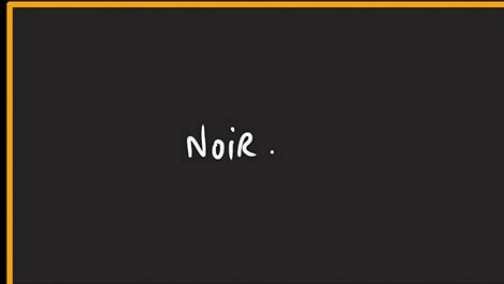
«Pourquoi tu dis ça mon garçon ?»

7 (FIXE)



«Il fait tout le temps nuit dans ma tête . »

8









August 2015

The summer holiday slowed down the pace of development... especially in comparison to our previous frantic efforts.

The IGP was approaching fast and someone had to fuel the action without wavering. The road ahead was still tedious but well worth the challenge.

So to lighten up and motivate us anew, I had to set an intermediate milestone... indispensable for us to keep our focus sharp in the middle of this long dark tunnel.

That milestone was the release of the « Désiré » soundtrack, made available for download on Bandcamp... and the Greenlight success achieved in only eight days.

It was fun!... enough to boost us for upcoming events.





Before taking the plunge into this frantic race... I felt the need to throw myself into the void... literally... a parachute jump a few days before the promotional event was the new challenge.



cinematics. The team met in Paris for the occasion.

At the end of September, I also took part in the indie game contest organised by the Fantastic Film Festival of Strasbourg.

The IGP in Paris took place over two days — Press day on the Friday and open to the public on Saturday — during which I was able to gauge first impressions in earnest... unlike the feedback in Lyon, based only on a partial version devoid of





October 2015

New stand for « Désiré » at the EIGD Paris event, dedicated to industry professionals. This was an opportunity, once again, to be confronted with players' opinions and have a frank exchange with them.



November 2015

Intel Buzz Workshop Paris was the ultimate promotional event before the release of the final version. Participation in these various events prompted me to publish a demo playable on iOS and Android, totally free and without ads, on the respective stores. I wanted to make sure I was ready on D-Day. The « Désiré Prologue » version only included the beach and the Old Man scenes... so as to present only a glimpse of gameplay and storyline.

The reactions were immediate around the world and very positive... And of course this allowed me to address technical bugs and small errors ahead of the final version.

All this was comforting, as long as we crossed the finish line in time... I was thinking about a release date...



December 2015

I devoted the month of December — hard to manage because the year-end holiday — to the epilogue cinematics.

Max animated the character as well as the newspaper carried by the wind... and Antoine implemented the scene and the video sequence. Loïk made a final intervention to close the long musical journey of « Désiré ».

As the holiday got underway, I set a tight roadmap for 2016: the final sprint to the end!

Jan.	Feb.	March-April	May 10
anims chapter 4 (Max)	end of chapter 4 (Sylvain)	finishing works, corrections, translation into Russian & Spanish, tests	release date (steam, iOS and android)







January 2016

The ball was in Max' court: he had to inflict upon himself another dose of pressure to finish the work. His contribution had lasted two and a half years... hats off to the artist!

On the other hand, I had underestimated the usefulness of translation into languages other than English. Thanks to the « Désiré Prologue » version published in November 2016, I had understood the obvious interest in a Russian translation. It was enough to look at the figures... Russian players paid particular attention to story and form. I then decided to commission an urgent Russian translation while keeping in mind the need for a Spanish version as well.



February 2016

I had all the elements in hand to conclude this humongous work. I was alone again approaching the final goal. By pure coincidence or life's little tricks, I experienced emotional upheaval in February... to be succinct... my private life took a real blow a week before the final hurdle. It would have been too easy otherwise! It is the artistic desire that gave me the strength to override and channel my emotions to keep myself together.



Here we are... March 1, 2016, and the mission has been completed. It has taken fifty months of development to come to this point. And for the first time, « Désiré » has become playable from beginning to end... Ah!... The need to close the loop had haunted my fitful sleep.

I had waited for this moment for so long that I felt a tremendous burden lift when the last piece of the puzzle was finally set. It's silly. It is as if I had regained inner peace.

Patience... it was not quite finished yet, as there were still translations and corrections to take into account. Well... compared to the journey so far, the rest was only a formality.

I had a month and a half ahead of me...



All loose ends had to be tied up by April 24... three weeks in advance... so that I could solicit the Apple editorial team for a possible highlighting of the iOS version.



It is 9 am in Paris... it is Tuesday May 10, 2016... I am facing my computer screen, on my Steam account page.

It is time to publish version 1.0.0 available in English, French, Russian and Spanish for Windows and Mac at the price of nine euros... including the original soundtrack. The effect will be immediate across the world. I am still hesitating... the weight of four and a half years is now in the balance. The minutes pass... my index finger rests on a key... a simple click and everything starts... a last gesture and it's over... I click... missed... I click again... it's done... « Désiré » is no longer a home project: it's a work of art.

I can now track in real time the sales that accumulate minute by minute...

During the day, players warn me that the version posted this morning contains a blocking bug in chapter 1... massive panic! A bug that had never occurred during the test phase... and for good reasons, because I had to reorganise some puzzles at the last minute. The problem was solved the next day.

As a reward... a small event was organised that evening in a bar in Paris, to toast the birth of « Désiré ».

Thank you all...



1992



2003



2011



2020

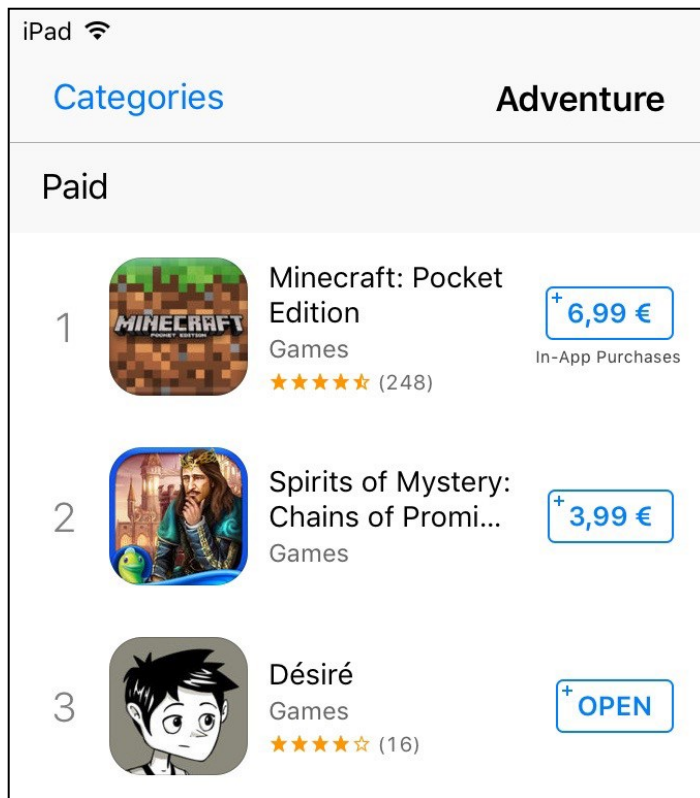


In addition to the general enthusiasm within the team when the game came out... two other excellent bits of news came in May.

First... on Thursday, May 12, Apple's editorial team put forward the iOS version of « Désiré » on the App Store in three or four countries including France... which generated two thousand sales in the first week and an unexpected ranking in several categories.

And second... « Désiré » won the award for Best Game Narrative at the Singapore Indie Prize organized by Casual Connect.

No need to be bashful!... the launch was clearly a success on all levels.



App Store France on May 22, 2016



What a surprise!... On November 3, « Désiré » won both the prize for the best mobile game and the best sound award at the Indie Prize in Tel Aviv organised by Casual Connect.

I think back to the 90s when I was a kid... I would never have imagined living such an experience. I'm sure of one thing now: life is really surprising...



Nadine, Sylvain and Bruno on the evening of November 2, 2016





2017

After one year of operation, sales of « Désiré » made it possible to cover the development costs in full, though not generating a significant profit. Given that the primary objective — from a commercial perspective — was achieved, and that it was becoming difficult to do much better... I decided to make the game free without advertising to reach more players. I do not regret it because the bet paid off. Soon after... downloads on the Play Store soared, proving me right.

In total « Désiré » has been downloaded more than half a million times from the main online stores.



STEAM

57 338



APP STORE

49 040



GOOGLE PLAY

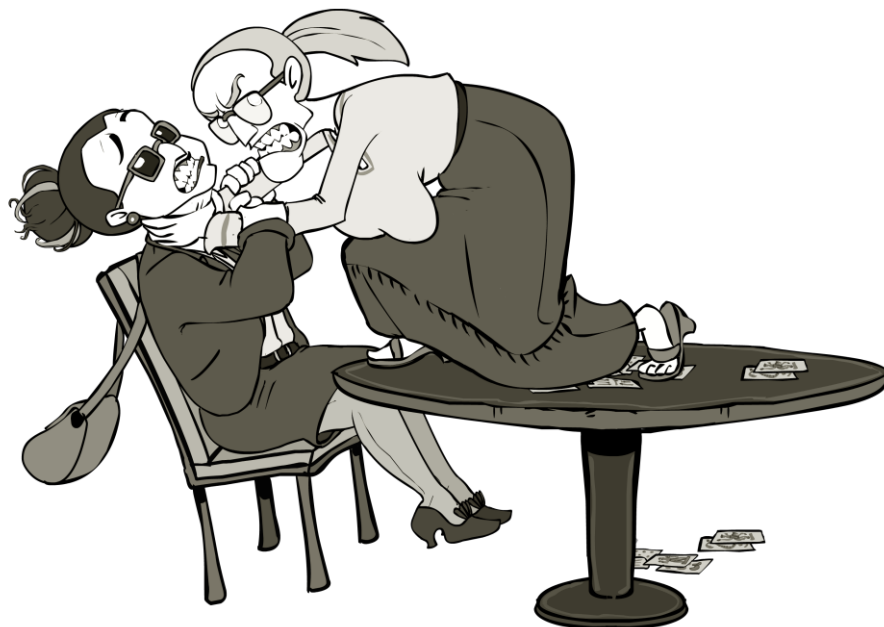
567 089

These are the figures provided by the online stores during the month of October 2017.

These figures include sales and free downloads.



Antoine, Sébastien, Maxime and Sylvain at the IGP in Paris 2015.



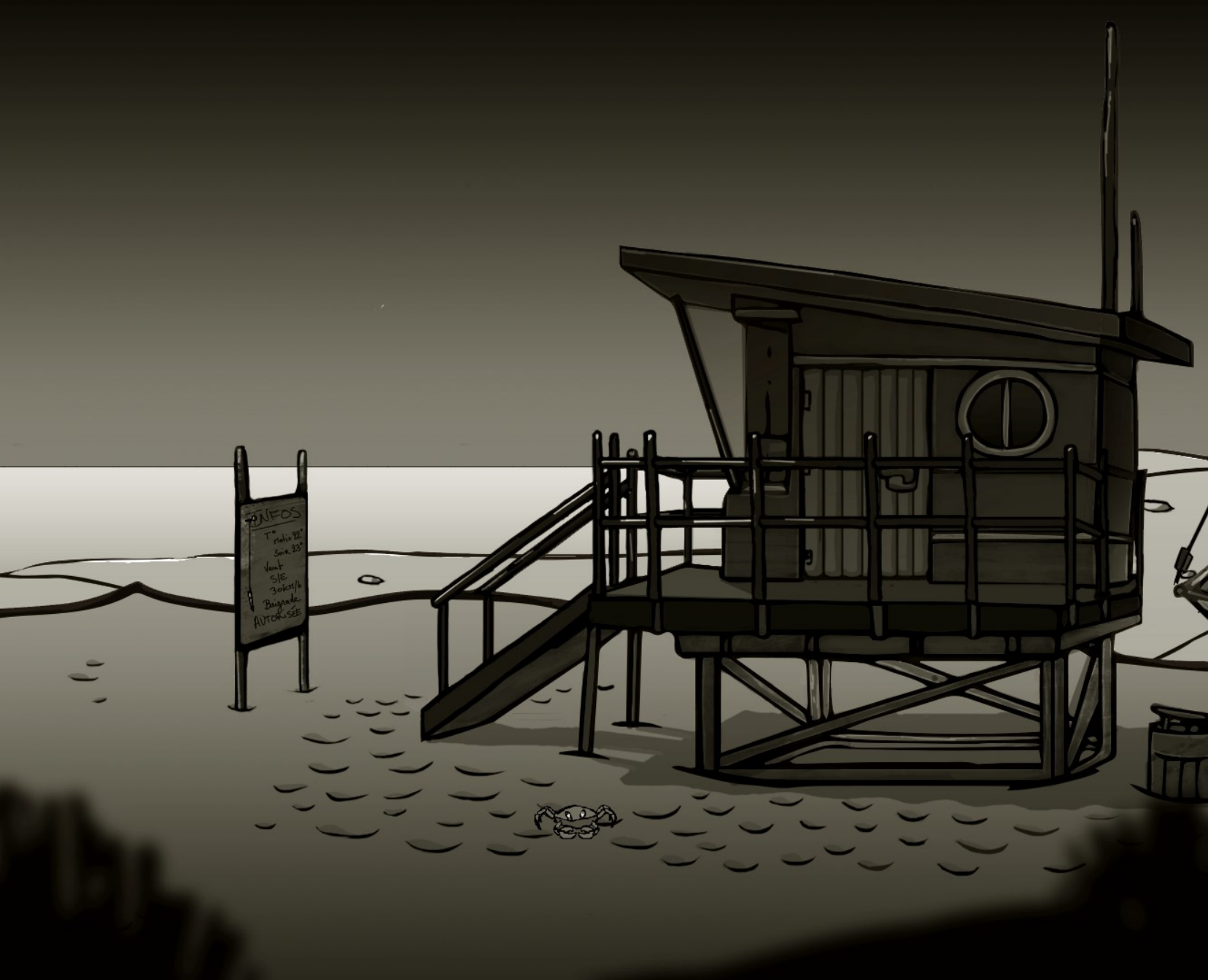
Lucia
1927-2012

Nina
1918-2012

Désiré







Infos

T° matin 22°
Soir 23°

Vent

S1E

30km/h

Brigade

AUTOSSEE





























Johnny
Fallon

Carolina
Ricci

on,
fait toujours
s gros du travail !

LA VIE
ET
TOUT LE RESTE

SENTIER



































































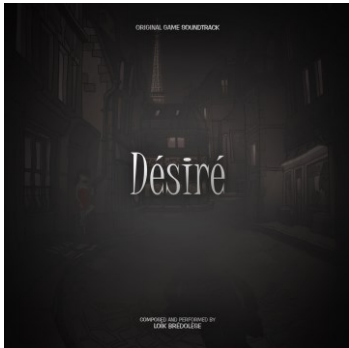




iOS
App Store



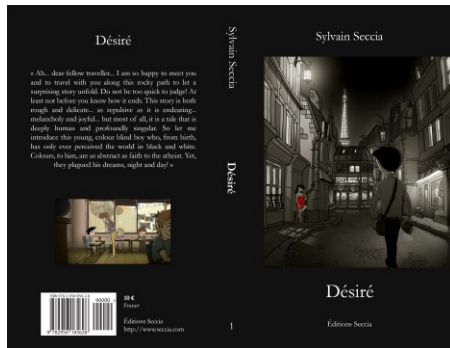
Android
Google Play Store



CD
Amazon



MP3
Bandcamp



English



French



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Translated into English by Sylvie Miller & Christophe Cuny

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ISBN : 978-2-9561856-3-5

Dépôt légal : novembre 2017

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Printed by CreateSpace