

“The Inked Ladies”

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(Working Title) – Version
1.0

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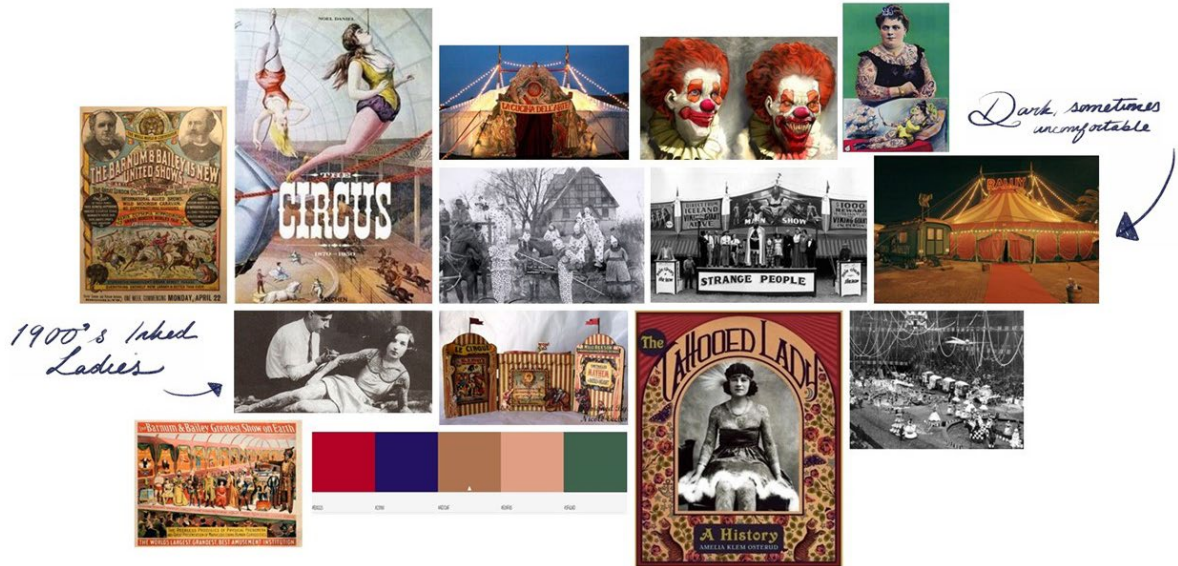
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CHAPTER 1

Abstract

The tattooed ladies is an interactive narrative game set in a 1900's backstage circus dressing room. The player is a runner for the inked ladies and must discover what happened to their mother when one night she was kidnapped. All the player knows is that she was a part of the circus of curiosities. Over the course of one evening when the circus is in town, the player will have opportunities to explore the backstage tent, complete objectives for the inked ladies and sneak around trying to pick up parts of a picture that was left behind the night her mother was taken.



Goals – both personal and professional

Olivia - I proposed this idea as a way of incorporating traditional methods such as hand-sculpting into a game design project to strengthen my portfolio for both the games design industry and to appeal to companies that work in feature film, animation etc. I now aim to expand my skills in this project, both in traditional sculpting and art style as well as taking on challenges I haven't faced before such as coding the game and using photogrammetry to make physical props into 3D assets.

James - I chose to work on this project as I wanted to fulfil a more technical visual role. I want to be able to boost my portfolio with various techniques including stop motion, photography, formatting, lighting and UX design. I am also hoping to create a community management portfolio by building a successful twitter and discord for the game to drum up interest. I will be taking on challenges such as designing UI, figuring out technical details and creating 3d assets with a mixture of real world and computer modelled aspects.

Commercial goals – a full, short, interactive narrative experience in Unity, showing skills in modelling, storytelling, concept art, lighting etc.

Final Deliverables

At the end of semester 2 we will have: an interactive narrative Unity game to be showcased at the arcade event alongside physical character dolls and a physical 3D environment with hand-sculpted props.

Project Goals – To create a playable narrative experience:

- A 3D model of a backstage area in Blender
- A physical model of the backstage area
- 5 x physical characters with working in-game animations
- A variety of hand-sculpted/3D printed assets to fill the backstage area
- 2D UI (Introduction animations, on-screen dialogue options, particle effects when a part of the picture is found etc.)
- 2D art for the visual novel aspects of the game (character expressions)
- Suitable circus audio (1x base melody, 3x overlays for each of the women. Proximity on the audio when nearer to the 'stage' curtain)
- Voice acting
- Stop-motion cutscenes for story development

Target Audience Demographic

The Inked Ladies is a short interactive narrative experience with an underlying disturbing atmosphere. It falls into the same category as Tim Burton films, hand-made physical games and creepy indie games in general. Our game is a fantasy narrative of broad appeal which is independent of race, gender, sexual orientation, geographic location or political views.

- Interests: Our audience may enjoy murder documentaries, true crime stories, dystopian gameplay, narrative stories including media such as books / audio books/ music etc.
- Age: The average gamer is 34 years old, with 70% of gamers being 18 or older (Tech Jury, 2021). As such, our content would appeal to an audience where disturbing content is playable but still interesting and fun.
- Occupation: With a slightly older audience we would expect individuals to have a day job or education commitments (e.g. college or university). We would expect them to spend time playing games when relaxing outside of the workplace.
- Disposable Income: Our target audience has sufficient disposable income for leisure activities such as gaming and social interaction.
- Education: We would expect our audience to be literate, being able to understand and react to the content in English as well as having a desire to understand the motives in the story, decipher the narrative and understand the role each character plays within this.
- Marital/Family status: As we are looking at young adults, they would possibly have a partner but perhaps not too many family commitments which would detract from their time to play games, especially those of an indie status as these generally require more attention and commitment to engage with the narrative/gameplay.

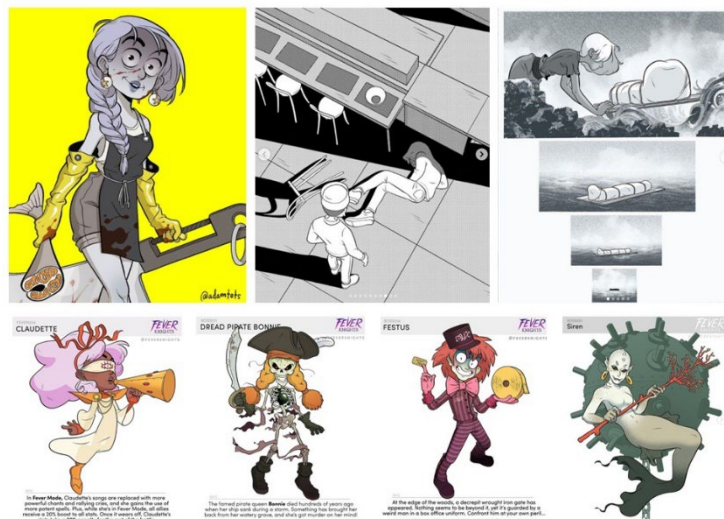
People who would enjoy Inked Ladies may also enjoy – Lumino City, Truberbrook, Disco Elysium, Hollow Knight etc.

In summary, The Inked Ladies is not a horror or thriller game and is not supposed to be scary, only disturbing with implied events (no blood will be seen on screen, there will be no violence or recreational drug use etc. Violent content will be implied and smoking scenes may appear in a cartoon fashion across the game. Strong language will not be present nor will sexual posturing or innuendo. Cutscenes may introduce fearful imagery including kidnap and mild cartoon violence). (Pegi, 2021).



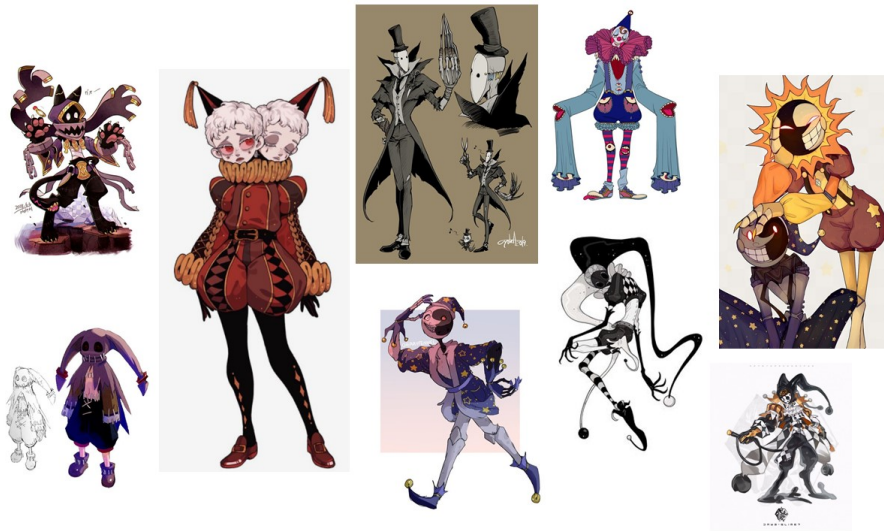
Art Direction (2D)

The visuals for the 2D visual novel sections of the game are to be kept simple with clean line art and basic shading so as not to detract from the main environment but still be visually appealing and convey a dark narrative tone. We looked at artwork from Adam Ellis for inspiration;



(@Adamtots on Instagram, @feverknights on Instagram)

Other images collected from Pinterest informing our art style;



CHAPTER 2

Narrative

After selecting play, the game will open with a short cutscene of when the main character is a child and her mother was taken away. She distinctly remembers large characters with clown masks coming in to take her mother. The player must help the main character to find out what happened to her mother. The cutscene will depict a photograph left behind, a show poster of The Inked Ladies Circus of Curiosities, in which the main character's mother is visible but a lot of the image is torn out. More than a decade after that fateful night the circus is in town and our character has secured a job as a backstage runner for the ladies. She must find out what happened to her mother.

The game will see the player help our character find images to piece into her own photograph to prove to The Inked Ladies that they know what happened to her mother, even though they deny ever having seen her. Once all parts of the photograph are collected, the character can confront the ladies at the end of the game, showing that they have been lying and they knew what happened to her mother. As a result, the ladies tell her the truth, announcing that her mother was branded with tattoos after finding out she could not bear children in her home town. She was welcomed into the circus and sold this act to entertain hundreds of people with her elaborate storytelling. During one summer, the mother had an affair with one of the circus hands which resulted in the birth of a daughter. For years she kept it a secret but the ladies found out after she had been visiting the child after the show every night for months. The ladies couldn't risk damaging their show's reputation, and so they sent in the clowns to take care of her. The show was forced onto the road as a travelling circus so nobody would find out about this dreadful story. The mother was kept hostage, being locked into the circus carts at night so she could never run away to see her child again. She eventually contracted an illness and passed away before she could get back to her daughter.

The final choice of the game gives the player the option to join the circus. Saying yes forces our character into a life of performing and selling her soul to the ringleader. Saying no results in the same fate as her mother, locked away for the rest of time.

Scene-by-scene breakdown

Opening cutscene: It's a dark stormy night. The player sees a first person view of the mother tucking you (her child) into bed. As she goes to leave the room, two clowns in masks burst in, wrestling her to the floor and pulling her out of the room as she screams and fights back. An old photograph is torn and falls to the floor as the voiceover / text explains how her mother was taken and the old photograph is all that she has left.

Introductory narrative with the ringleader: The player is led into the backstage tent as the ringleader explains that the circus of curiosities is in town for one night and you are the runner they have employed from the area. This gives the player their first interactive narrative options with how they want to approach the ringleader (i.e. nicely or being rude), setting the character's tone for the rest of the game.

Player fetches tea: There is a voiceover and text overlay giving the player a new objective which is to retrieve tea for the ladies. This gives the player the opportunity to walk through the tent and see the main environment for the first time as well as introducing themselves to the ladies, again with interactive narrative to determine the types of relationships they will have in the game. This part will introduce the player to the objectives, the inventory system and the symbols on different objects which will relate to each ladies' tattoos. This mechanic will help them determine which objects in the environment belong to which ladies throughout the course of the game.

Snake charmer: The ringleader voiceover and text overlay will explain that the snake charmer's act is first. New objectives will be shown on screen explaining that you must find the objects she needs to get ready for her act and take them to her. This is the main section for the interactive narrative with the snake charmer and so many discussion points will become available when you retrieve these items. She will ask the player to do various other tasks depending on the conversation. It is the first opportunity that the player will get to interrogate the ladies about her mother's disappearance and the inked ladies will deny all knowledge of this throughout the game. Once this conversation is completed she will then be called on stage and the scene ends.

Snake charmer performance: When the snake charmer has left for her act, a voiceover of the main character and text overlay will appear, indicating she is thinking to herself that she must find some evidence of the relationship between the ladies and her mother. This gives the player the opportunity to root around the snake charmer's dressing room and to find the first part of the photograph. When this is found, the next scene will trigger.

Quick-change artist: The ringleader voiceover and text overlay will explain that the quick-change artist is next. New objectives will be shown on screen explaining that you must find the objects she needs to get ready for her act and take them to her. This is the main section for the interactive narrative with the quick-change artist and so many discussion points will become available when you retrieve these items. She will ask the player to do various other tasks depending on the conversation. It is the second opportunity that the player will get to interrogate the ladies about her mother's disappearance and the inked ladies will continue to deny all knowledge of this character. Once this conversation is completed she will then be called on stage and this scene ends.

Quick-change artist performance: When the quick-change artist has left for her act, a voiceover of the main character and text overlay will appear, indicating she is thinking to herself that she must find another piece of the photograph. This gives the player the opportunity to root around the quick-change artist's dressing room and to find the next part of the photograph. When this is found, the next scene will trigger.

Fortune Teller: The ringleader voiceover and text overlay will explain that the fortune teller's act is the final act. New objectives will be shown on screen explaining that you must find the objects she needs to get ready for her act and take them to her. This is the main section for the interactive narrative with the fortune teller and so many discussion points will become available when you retrieve these items. She will ask the player to do various other tasks depending on the conversation. It is the final opportunity that the player will get to interrogate the ladies about her mother's disappearance and the inked ladies will still deny all knowledge of her. Once this conversation is completed she will then be called on stage and this scene ends.

Fortune Teller's performance: When the fortune teller has left for her act, a voiceover of the main character and text overlay will appear, indicating she is thinking to herself that she must find another piece of the photograph. This gives the player the opportunity to root around the fortune teller's dressing room and to find the final part of the photograph. When this is found, the next scene will trigger.

Ringleader cutscene as show ends: the ringleader dashes backstage with a flourish as the audio of clapping crowds dies out. She throws herself onto a spare stool and explains that the show is over. She says whilst the showmen are packing away the circus to move onto the next town that you should look in the boxes for anything exciting whilst you're here. The cutscene ends and the voiceover of the main character's thoughts return, explaining that there must be more photograph pieces somewhere. The player will then be able to go into an upstairs area (the attic) and find the final 3 pieces of the photograph as well the photo album.

Confrontation: Once all of the photograph pieces are found the final cutscene will be triggered. In this the player is given various interactive narrative choices of how to go about confronting the ladies and what they may say in return. She will either hear a gruesome tale of how her mother was taken or a more real, sad version of what happened to her. The player then receives their ending, either a brutal finish, as what they did to her mother or they join the circus of curiosities, indoctrinated into performing and the ladies become her new family.

Location of photograph evidence

6 pieces to collect - 3 whilst each lady is performing and one in each other area except for the most inaccessible part of the attic. When the player reaches this area, they find an old photo album filled with similar photographs of the ladies, each with her mother's face torn out. This is to add to the evidence but doesn't necessarily have to be found in order for the storyline to progress.

Snake charmer's room – photograph is hidden behind the tapestry on the wall

Quick-change artist's room – photograph is wedged into the side of the mirror

Fortune Teller's room – photograph is in bird's beak, only by retrieving another shiny object will the player be able to retrieve this part of the photograph

Back room downstairs – photograph is in a crate of old clothes

Upstairs at the top of the ladder – photograph is in a pile of old posters the player must sort through

Middle attic room – ventriloquist puppets fall from the ceiling as player enters the room, one is holding a piece of the photograph

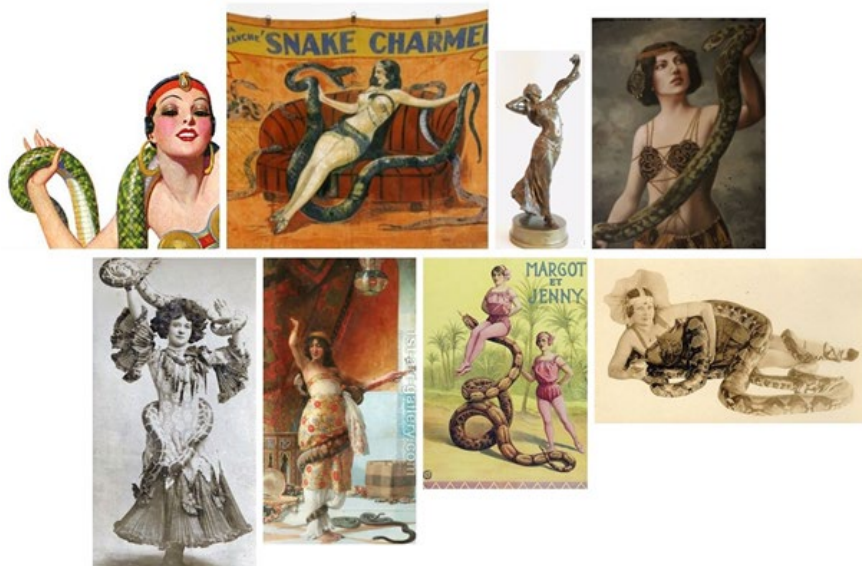
Far left attic room – the room with the torn up photo album in

Chapter 3

The Characters

The snake charmer – Since she was young, this lady had a keen fascination in animals and this obsession led to her being outcast from her home town. Upon discovering the circus, she found that she could become their resident snake performer, shocking people with her fearless nature. Despite her inked success, she still hasn't lost her bitter bite from way back when she was disowned.

- Aggressive and blunt in the way that she speaks. She is impressed when the player gives fierce or bold remarks during the narrative, to show that the player is not afraid of her.
- Visuals – black hair with a short haircut, mid-height, wearing a velvet green dress with gold embellishments. Tattoos are seen on her torso, arms and legs. 3 grey coloured ghost snakes surround her.



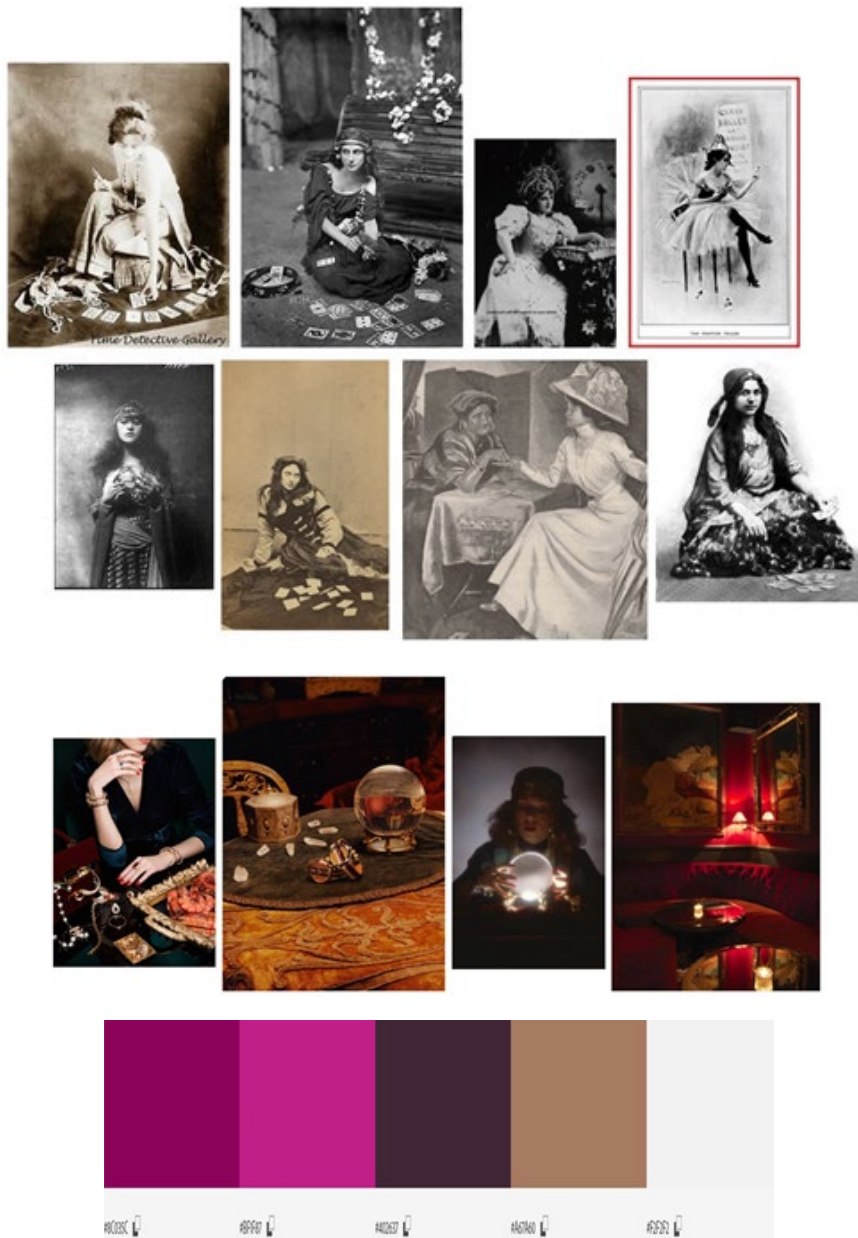
The quick-change artist – This two-headed clown (the twins) is the youngest in the show and can often be dismissed but this bubbly character is often at the forefront. She is welcoming but you shouldn't cross her – the circus are very protective of their own. With a flare for fashion she is the most extravagant of the inked ladies and will most likely be able to give the player some useful information.

- The twins will often argue between themselves during the narrative.
- One is more level-headed and arrogant whilst the other is excitable and overtalkative.
- She is the lady that will hint at their relationship with the main character's mother before the other twin tells her to be quiet. The player should be kind to this character as she will get upset at any rude remarks.
- Visuals – two headed clown makeup but very glamorous, with feathers and extravagant jewellery. One head has long blonde hair tied up and curled and the other has long rich brown hair which is curled. Tattoos are seen on the arms and legs.



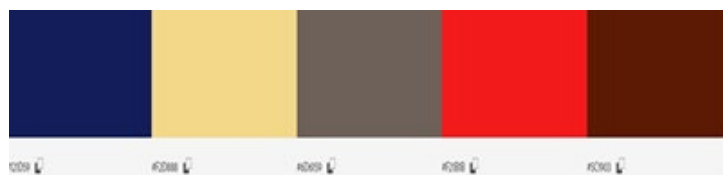
The fortune teller - Nobody knows how she entered the circus but she may be the key to the player's discoveries since she has been there from the start. She won't reveal any information about herself but will make strange remarks about the player's previous conversations and the disturbance she feels in the main character's aura.

- She will often smirk or laugh in a demeaning way if the character shows fear, however if the player is steadfast and determined in finding their relationship to her mother, the fortune teller backs off.
- Visuals – Robed masked creature, third eye imagery, roman numerals and tarot card visuals. She wears a caged skirt with various children's toys alluding to the main character's childhood trauma



The Ringleader – Rarely seen throughout the game, the ringleader acts as the clock for the gameplay, guiding the player as to when the ladies acts are due. As eccentric as she is, the ringleader acts as a constant, continuously being heard entertaining the crowd from backstage.

- If the player is rude to the ringleader she will try to make your experience harder, being blunt in her narrative and asking you to complete irrelevant tasks when she is in the tent before and after the show. If you are kind to her she hints at various interesting items hidden around the tent.
- Visuals - She is dressed in a blue velvet ringleader suit, with a circus cane and top hat to match. She is tall, almost in reference to Jack Skellington (Tim Burton) with a crazy wild smile painted onto a mask she wears for the whole game.



The player – A 17-year old, timid girl with a fiery determination to find out what happened to her mother.

- Visuals - Her image reflects a gaunt, Tim Burton style with her ribs showing through her dress and overly large eyes (similar to that of Coraline or the Corpse Bride). She is dressed in a discrete, bland dress, suitable for the 1900's time period.



Regression visuals

Across the game the environment will slowly deteriorate and the characters appear more creepy in their visuals. Below is an example:



For example with the fortune teller character example shown above the background has developed into a dark red cortex design. The teddy bears may change position, the skulls might begin to glow, various other bad omen tarot cards may start to appear etc. Background scene will get increasingly darker across the game. (I.e. starts as a blurred and coloured version of the background and slowly becomes less saturated until it is dark grey in colour).

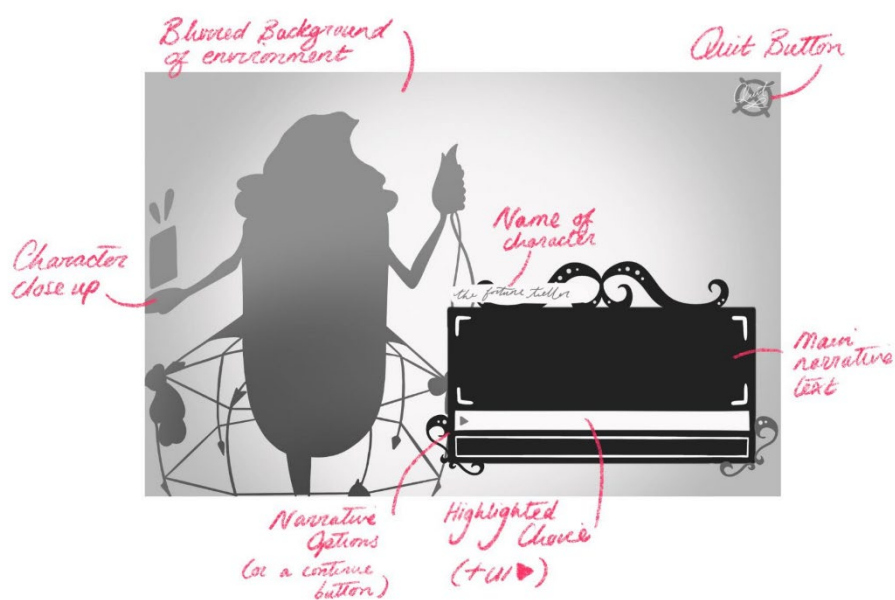
Characters will also need multiple expressions during the story to react to the player's narrative choices. Below is an example of what these may look like: idle, anger, mocking



Programme and mockups

2D visual artwork is made using Procreate on iPad and using an apple pencil. Below is a sample of the 2D narrative UI. This will be coloured in the game but the example is greyscaled to show the different layers in the UI. From back to front;

- Blurred image of the environment which gets slowly darker and desaturated across the game
- Mid-shot of the character to fill half of the screen
- Slight overlap of the UI text box with individual embellishments depending on the character the player is speaking to
- Text box includes: Name tag of character, main narrative segment, multiple choices below this with highlight options and arrow to depict which option is being chosen.



2D Art Process

- Add sketch layer to Procreate document. Document must be at least 960 x 540 pixels at 300DPI (dots per inch).
- Lower opacity of sketch layer to ~ 50% or less. On a new layer trace over using the studio pen brush (under Inking) at 100% streamline in black (make sure line art sizing and colouring is consistent between characters).
- Use multiple normal layers underneath the line art layer to fill in block colours of each area. Make sure each section with a different colour is on a separate layer or grouped into areas that don't touch. Make the line art layer a reference layer if possible to colour drop on layers below. If not, outline and fill the flat colours.
- Alpha lock the colour layers and use the Soft Brush (in airbrushing) to highlight and shadow larger areas of each section in a gradient fashion. Keep colour palettes minimal and adjust opacity and size of brush as needed.
- Add a final layer above the flat colours but below the lineart layer set to multiply. Use the studio brush at 65% opacity to add shadows and any further details.
- Below the multiply layer use the Fine Tip brush at 100% in black to add details such as the tattoos and any other visual imagery.
- Save and export as a jpeg/.png depending on use.

Below: Line art, coloured version, shadowed finished image



3D Printing

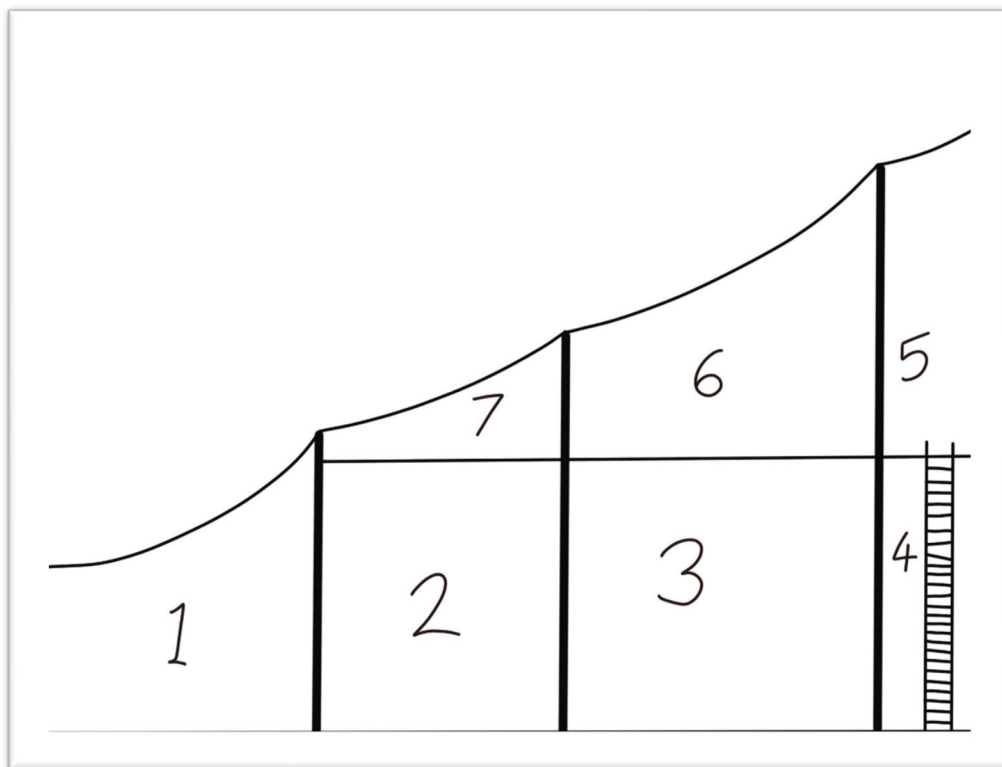
The characters for the 3D environment will be 3D printed using UV resin. The joints will be joined with Allen-key bolts so that we can lock their places accurately. This will then make the joints flexible to be able to animate them for looping animations within the environment and for stop-motion cutscenes. We will use various stitching techniques and fabrics to create detailed outfits for each character as well as felting techniques for details such as the plushies in the example fortune teller design and for the hair wigs.

To create these models we will make detailed character turnaround sheets so we know what the character will look like from every angle in the scene and details we may need to add from various views.

CHAPTER 4

Environment – one room so the details will be very important

A large dollhouse segment of a circus tent.



For ease of design we have split the environment into 7 sections.

Section 1- Quick change artist.

Section 2- Curtain Door to main stage, Snake lady on the left of doorway.

Section 3- Fortune teller.

Section 4- Ladder and Junk.

Section 5- Attic entrance.

Section 6- Attic

Section 7- Secret Attic Room.

Crawlable space

Text In brackets is animation information.

Overall Assets-

Various rugs lining the floor.

Tent background

Lamps (Swinging, Flickering)

Section 1-

2 Mirrors with old orange bulbs around. With photos of their fav celebrity.

Hairbrush

Makeup tray and lipsticks

Nail polishes

Jewellery box with ballerina on spring. (Ballerina spins)

Mannequin with outfit in progress.

Clothing Rail –

12 different outfits

Wall-

Masks (Eyes will move to follow the player subtly)

Seat

Poster of themselves

Misc-

Hat boxes

Boa (Fluffy Feathers)

Gramophone (Spinning Cylinder)

Rose

Section 2-

Curtain Door

Tree for snake combines with table. (snake will climb this)

Locket.

Photos.

Whiskey in a hip flask.

Orchid-Venus Fly trap. (Occasionally eats flies)

Elephant ornaments.

Set of Draws.

Hat Stands and canes

Mice in a cage. (Mice move around)

Misc-

Snake skins.

Crocodile Purse

Heads with wigs

Scimitar

Section 3-

Crystal Ball on stand. (fog in ball)

Tarot Cards.

Taxidermy Crow on a branch. (Picture in beak, Beak open, shiny in beak)

Charms.

Monkeys Paw.

Crystal String bunting. (Occasionally glimmers and chimes)

Dream Catcher. (feathers flutter)

Chrysanthemums.

Misc-

Bones.

Skulls.

Posters for fortune telling readers.

Old Clock. (clock face moves, Pendulum)

Astrology Chart.

Small symbolic ornaments.

Incense (smoke rising from tip of incense)

Section 4-

Ladder

Boxes and crates

Stove top with tea cups (Kettle with steam)

Old Masks

Old Clothes

Section 5 and 6-

Crates

Old Clothes

Tickets

Hoola Hoops

Juggling Batons

Stands

Clown Costumes

Ventriloquist Puppets (fall from ceiling and dangle on strings)

Maquettes

Magicians Boxes (rabbit will duck behind box)

Twirling Batons

Unicycle

Old Freak Show posters

Fun house mirrors

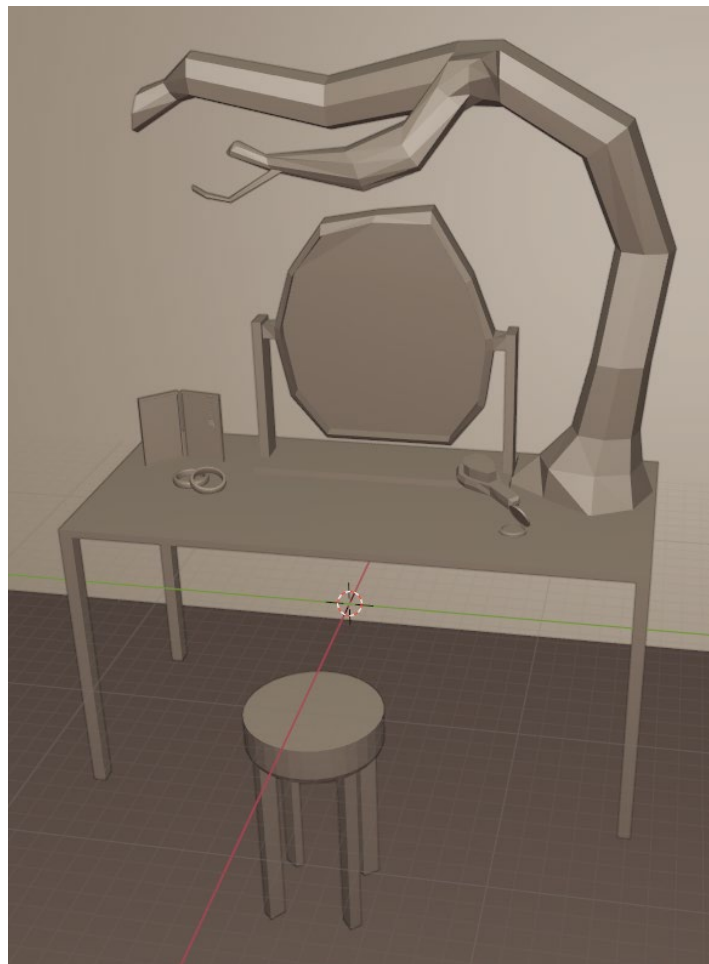
Section 7-

Photo Album

Padlock Chest (opened)



Level Grey box



Grey box design of snake charmers table

Sculpting Test

We intend to hand sculpt the majority of assets seen in the environment using Sculpey modelling clay and acrylic paint as well as an appropriate sealant (plus any other materials e.g. the ribbon attached to the mask sculpt below). We can then use photogrammetry techniques (detailed further in chapter 6.) We will be using a Canon DSLR camera, a green screen and 3 lighting rigs to ensure we get a clean model and the software Meshroom to accurately scan in and fix any meshes before importing these assets into the game. Below is an example of a model we have made:



CHAPTER 5

Gameplay & Mechanics – Interactive Narrative. Can move around in 3D space, jump, climb on boxes to get in rafters, interact with objects.

Gameplay is similar to a walking simulator - finding objects, learning stories, interacting with the ladies by talking to them about their experiences, helping them to fix their costumes and hair for example etc.

When the player interacts with one of the other characters the scene will change to a stylized version of that character with text boxes underneath. The player will be able to pick from several options below the characters text box to respond to what the character has said.

The 3D level will be blurred in the background and in game time will freeze while the player is interacting with characters or objects.

When an item is picked up an overlay will appear on screen with a more detailed visual of the object and a short description.

Player Movements

The player will be able to move left and right using the keyboard and interacting with people and objects by clicking on them. The player will automatically climb the ladder on the right and will automatically crawl in the gap in the attic.

Controls PC or Mac-

A or Left Arrow Key- Player move left.

D or Right Arrow Key- Player move right.

LMB- Interact/Use

Controller input-

Left and Right- Left and right

Interact- A

Control, iPad-

Hold left side of screen- Player move left.

Hold right side of screen- Player move right.

Touch/Drag- Interact/Use

Player Animations

Idle

Move Left

Move Right

Climbing – Up a ladder

Crawling

Interacting with environment

Animations

Stop-frame animations for cutscenes - we will use jointed 3D printed dolls and various props. We will be using three large LCD light screens in front of a green screen and a stationary DSLR camera. The images we take will then be compiled in photoshop and exported to an animation.

The stop motion will be shot primarily at 18 frames per second, with more detailed scenes being shot at 24 fps.

Each doll will have a different set of faces in various sound making shapes so that we can replace the faces to create the illusion of speech in animation.



In-game animations triggered by the player walking past e.g., Venus flytrap snapping at flies, eyes in masks turning towards players, crows squawking, ventriloquist puppets falling from ceiling in attic. These will be animated in adobe after effects or photoshop as needed. We will use stop motion to capture core frames and then digitally edit in between movements to save time.

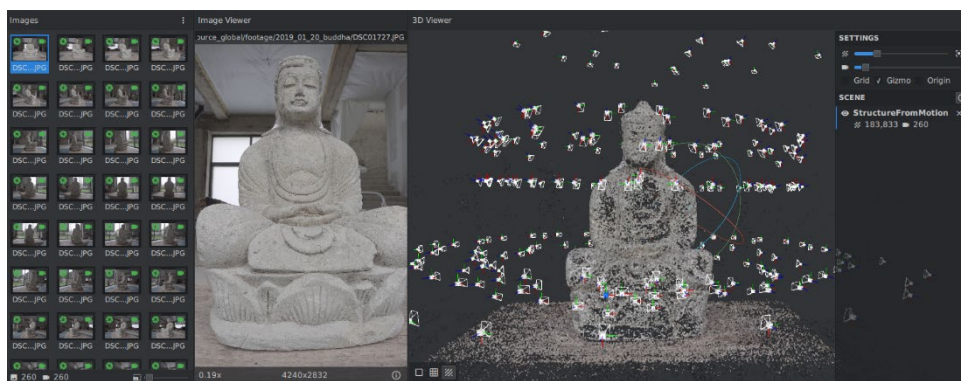
CHAPTER 6

Photogrammetry is defined by the American Society for Photogrammetry and Remote Sensing (ASPRS) as “the art, science, and technology of obtaining reliable information about physical objects and the environment, through processes of recording, measuring, and interpreting imagery and digital representations of energy patterns derived from noncontact sensor systems” (Colwell, 1997:3).

Physical models will be photographed and reconstructed via the software Meshroom. They will then be exported as .OBJ and these will be imported into blender and the meshes will be repaired. The final step is to wrap the texture captured in meshroom around the mesh to finish the object. They will be exported as a .FBX and imported into unity.

Smaller assets will be sculpted in blender and hand textured as they will not 3d model well in meshroom.

The game will be compiled and coded in Unity as there is a very good plugin called Yarnspinner that we will be using to handle the visual narrative aspect of the game.



Photogrammetry being used to capture a large sculpture.



The cup I practised Meshroom with.



Final Meshroom Outcome.

Marketing and Branding

We will be using a mixture of Twitter, Instagram and Discord to promote and manage a community. As we are primarily targeting adults and Indie genres, we will be networking with other small developers and designers to help reach as many people as possible. We will be relying on the characters, narrative and overall atmosphere of the game to create feedback. We will also be doing a behind the scenes documentary and live talk to the Dev sessions to help show what we are doing and hoping to achieve.

We will be using hashtags that developers of similar games use and try to include hashtags that promote creepy material. We will be promoting using images, videos, Gifs and merchandise.

I think that a campaign referencing the creepy aesthetic and soundtrack would attract a lot of attention as it is very visual and interactable. People will be able to comment on the posts on whether they like it or not and this will give us valuable feedback we can include.

Branding will be the same across all three platforms however, Twitter will mainly be used for updates about the project. Instagram will be used to promote behind the scene material and artwork in design. Discord will be used to gather feedback from interested people and to help us create a working and pleasurable UX. We will also be creating a deviant art account to try to promote some fan art that we could include in our process. This a great way to get people involved and hyped for a project.

We will be releasing 3d models that we create onto various websites such as Thingiverse, Cults and Free3d. This is to get feedback but also encourage others to print out these models and respond to our tweets and Instagram posts.

We will know more about when to post and how to brand when we have completed a branding workshop in semester two.

Competitive Analysis

Competitive Analysis

To analyse our competitors we looked at a variety of narrative-based video games and the companies behind them, each with a slightly different perspective; Truberbrook, Lumino City, Monster Prom, What Remains of Edith Finch and A Night in the Woods.

Truberbrook – released March 12, 2019

Name of Company: btf, published by Headup games (<https://btf.de/>)

Games Produced by company: All sorts of tv shows, documentaries and media. Other games include Game Royale, Game Royale 2 and Leon's Identity. Headup games have also published Tinkertown, Pumpkin Jack, Lots at Sea etc.

Awards won: n/a

Team Composition (who works there): 17 core (over 100 stated on website)

Twitter Following: @trueberbrook 2,936 followers (as of 21/01/2021) @BTFcologne 25.6k followers (as of 21/01/2021)

Location: Berlin, Germany

How long they've been in business: established in 2008

Game content:

- Point-and-click, puzzle adventure, single-player, funded on Kickstarter
- Pros: Beautiful style, very smooth UI, clear to use and clear cursor movements for player control, characters and environment areas are all distinctive and well-composed, they reveal themselves to the player gradually over time so as not to overwhelm the player, character recording information gives us an insight into his behaviour, environment objects lead the player to game progression, able to click anywhere and has a 'shot hotspot' selection for accessibility, plenty of narrative options during conversation but with seemingly little consequence
- Cons: Narrative is painfully slow at times. The detail is good but loses the player after a while, lots to explore but player movement seems very slow and some things you can interact with are irrelevant (e.g. posters can visually explain things, we don't need text as well)
- Audience Demographic: Adults, interested in sci-fi, dystopian worlds, detective/mystery-solving.

Overall I felt like the game had a beautiful set of character and environment designs which were executed well, even if it was a little muted and 'samey'. The narrative was disappointing, as some questions felt as if they didn't have consequence and the reactions and behaviours seemed tilted and cold towards the player (e.g. Gretchen is very sarcastic, Trude is not very welcoming etc.). Our game will strive to make the narrative concise and interesting with a balance of engaging narrative and player interactions. We will also aim to make the environment visuals speak for themselves and any assets that the player can interact with will be meaningful to the storyline or give some level of satisfaction or joy to the gameplay.

Lumino City – released in 2014

Name of Company: State of play (<https://www.stateofplaygames.com/games>)

Games Produced by company: Inks, South of the Circle, Lume, Kami etc.

Awards won: BAFTA Artistic Achievement Winner as well as various other BAFTA nominations IGF, GC, DICE (all finalists). Apple Design Award etc.

Team Composition (who works there): 5 stated on website

Twitter Following: @State_of_Play 5,737 followers (as of 21/01/2021)

Location: Not available

How long they've been in business: established in 2008

Game content:

- Point-and-click, puzzle adventure, single-player, indie company
- Pros: Beautiful art style, easy for the eye to be led around the environment, when you understand a puzzle the visuals and sound feedback make it interesting and fun, beginning credits and instruction manual style are engaging, audio makes the experience relaxed
- Cons: seems to be a trial-and-error beginning with no feedback loop on when the player gets a puzzle wrong, unintuitive UI (text is too small, buttons can be missed, text can be skipped through by accident etc.), can't adjust camera angle to help see the environment better, puzzles are too complex and unintuitive for beginners (i.e. not accessible), repetitive puzzles going back and forth to make things work, characters seem unbelievable in their sense of urgency in the storyline
- Audience Demographic: Younger adults with a cutesy bright setting and puzzle-orientated gameplay

Despite the aesthetic, Lumino City was a mildly infuriating experience, with little to no feedback on how to complete puzzles and UI that made the environmental exploration very disjointed (clicking randomly and only hoping that it works in various places at the beginning of the game isn't particularly compelling). For puzzle-minded players this game is intriguing but not very accessible to those looking for a lighthearted and fun gameplay (narrative and style is perfect for that mindset however). We will make sure our objectives are fairly straightforward within the gameplay so the player does not feel tested and can focus on the narrative (this will take consistent and thorough playtesting).

Monster Prom – released in 27 April 2018

Name of Company: Beautiful Glitch, published by Those Awesome Guys (<http://monsterprom.pizza/>)

Games Produced by company: monster prom, monster prom 2

Awards won: n/a

Team Composition (who works there): 4 people

Twitter Following: @btflglitch 16.5k followers (as of 21/01/2021) @monsterprom 51.7k followers (as of 21/01/2021)

Location: Barcelona, Spain

How long they've been in business: established in ?

Game content:

- Choose your own narrative visual novel dating simulation, single or multiplayer, designed for multiple quick playthroughs
- Pros: Interesting and engaging way of incorporating personality tests with quirky questions and answers, UI and voice acting are accessible and work with the narrative and gameplay elements well, the format is easy to understand right from the beginning of the game with bright engaging visuals
- Cons: First playthrough can be confusing for those unfamiliar with dating sims, works better as a multiplayer game with the content and humour the game is trying to achieve, niche target demographic and not that appealing to those not interested in the genre, a lot of the narrative feels like filler without fleshing out the character's personalities, perhaps designed for multiple playthroughs but the satisfaction of 'winning' or achieving getting a prom date is minimal
- Audience Demographic: very niche target audience, the content seems confused between bright colours and fun characters but also very adult content and (cheap?) humour. Leans more towards a younger adult audience.

Monster Prom is an interesting experience in regards to the narrative use. The fast-gameplay and fun conversation is easy to play but not particularly gripping or driving the game forward. This may be a very different experience in a multiplayer scenario but our game will strive to create a stronger connection between the characters and player when developing the narrative whilst still being compelling.

What Remains of Edith Finch – released in 2017

Name of Company: Giant Sparrow, published by Annapurna
(<http://www.giantsparrow.com/games/>)

Games Produced by company: What Remains of Edith Finch, The Unfinished Swan

Awards won: BAFTA 2018 Best Game, GDC 2018 Choice Awards Best Narrative, 2018 SXSW Gaming Awards, The Game Awards 2017

Team Composition (who works there): 13+ people

Twitter Following: @giantsparrow 12.2k followers (as of 21/01/2021)

Location: Los Angeles, California

How long they've been in business: established 2009

Game content:

- Walking simulator heavily focussed on narrative, single-player
- Pros: Narrative is well-written and well-incorporated into the environment as well as being well-paced, environment lighting and use of environment (e.g. crawling through gaps and small corridors) is excellent
- Cons: Can't see where mouse is to know what you're clicking on, perhaps more items should have story to them as it only expands on the main storyline, game got gruesome rather quickly and dwelled on this when it felt unnecessary to get the point across, almost became a personal passion project where in places the narrative purpose got lost, player needs gaming literacy to understand the controls and visual cues
- Audience Demographic: Adults for gruesome visuals but narrative is fairly accessible beyond that as it is so well explained

I was excited to play What Remains of Edith Finch having seen images of the environment and clips of the gameplay however the jump between the main narrative story and the mini narratives felt a little farfetched at times. The disturbing atmosphere of some of these memories felt unnecessary and made me want to return the main storyline and ignore these parts of the game. I think the narrative is extremely well-designed and is cohesive with the environment however this is lost several times due to misjudged gameplay. We will make sure in our own game that the narrative is not disjointed and firmly stays with the one storyline whilst still portraying a rich background to each character.

Night in the Woods – released February 21, 2017 (Longest night was made in December 2013)

Name of Company: Infinite Fall (<http://www.nightinthewoods.com/>)

Games Produced by company: n/a

Awards won: BAFTA Narrative winner 2018, Seamus McNally Grand Prize Independent Games Festival 2018

Team Composition (who works there): 3 people

Twitter Following: @NightInTheWoods 57.6k followers (as of 21/01/2021)

Location: Pittsburgh

How long they've been in business: Kickstarter funded in November 2013

Game content:

- Choices-led narrative, single-player, funded on Kickstarter
- Pros: Clear UI and well-paced introduction to the game, slowly build on mechanics and characters, progression across the environment feels welcoming like it is the player's home town, they can explore with lots of narrative options to build character profiles
- Cons: Perhaps a little old fashioned and not usually with 'x','c','v' controls so a little difficult to get used to at first, can sometimes feel a little aimless and some of the character relationships feel unrealistic and out of keeping with the rest of the game (e.g. Mae's relationship with her parents)
- Audience Demographic: Young adults, again very brightly coloured and appealing, 2D, investment needed for the narrative

Night in the Woods is a game in which you can see the effort that has gone into it. The characters are charming and compliment each other well despite the odd choices of narrative wording at times. It may be a little self-conscious as narratives go but the combination of UI, environment visuals and well-paced narrative is a set of key components we look to implement in our own game by testing the narrative rigorously to better balance the story and narrative choices as well as testing how the player responds to environmental interactions throughout the narrative gameplay.

CHAPTER 7

UI / UX

The UI will be minimal and intuitive. When a player has picked up an object a silhouette of the object will be displayed in the lower left. When they use it that silhouette will be removed from the UI. If the player clicks them or hovers over them a small description box will pop up. An empty photo frame in the lower right will fill up when the player collects pieces of the photograph. When the player interacts with an NPC the level will blur and a text box with the person, they are talking to above it will appear. When the conversation is finished this will fade and the level will come back into focus.

The text will appear character by character as the NPC's voice is played. The player will be able to tap to show all of the text. This will look like a typical visual narrative UI in games but with a creepier edge to it.

The main menu will have a description of controllers and a save and quit button. There will also be an option to add subtitles to general audio within the game and a way to change the brightness.

Interactable objects will highlight with a wisp like light when you hover over them (pc) or when you are close enough (controller).

As the player progresses through the story the level will begin to slowly and subtly morph into something a little creepier. Odd angles and light changes will happen as well as more of a creepier, sinister vibe to the atmosphere.

The game will be made in 1920 x 1080 at 300dpi as that is currently the most used resolution for desktop computers. It will also be compatible with most tablets.



Audio

All of the NPC's will be voice acted and also have a generic set of noises they make when they are not communicating with the player. The background music will be creepy, atmospheric circus music. When the player walks past the ladies the music will change slightly to reflect their personalities. When the player walks past the curtains to the ring the atmosphere will quieten and instead, they will hear the noise of the crowd and ringmaster. The music will also quieten in volume when the player climbs into the attic. Please see below for a YouTube playlist of similar music.

The game will have a consistent creepy circus soundtrack.

List of assets and sounds they will make-

(If not listed from chapter 4 then they are silent)

Gramophone

Snake

Flies around Orchid flytrap

Mice in cage

Clock ticking

Taxidermy Crow

Stove top

Puppets jangling

Squeaky clown nose

Clothes ruffling

Posters being moved

Crystal jingling

Non asset noises-

Walking

Climbing

Crawling

Circus Music Inspiration

[Tattoo Ladies Inspiration](#)



CHAPTER 8

For our pipeline work we have already defined clear areas in which each team member will be comfortable producing the best work however most if not all work will have input from both members as well as guidance from the lecturers and feedback from our research. Below is the most appropriate pipeline process at this point in the project. Our first aim is to make the game playable and usable by first implementing the correct code and a greybox environment. Next we will swap out various assets as we sculpt and model them and we will also add to the code at this point to

make sure every element that is interacted with is fully incorporated. Then we will embellish the project, with stop motion cutscenes, audio and any other finishing touches.

Prior to next semester we will have tested our narrative outline rigorously as well as having a basic selection of assets ready to use (e.g. the grey boxed environment, the character concepts ready to make etc.).

We will also have a music student composing a sound track across the project development for us which will be implemented at the end of the process and we will be consistently posting on social media throughout the process too (so marketing will be ongoing).

Pipeline

FEB 1 – Coding the narrative (Olivia), 3D printing and making the physical character dolls (James)

FEB 8 – Coding the narrative (Olivia), 3D printing and making the physical character dolls (James)

FEB 15 – Code + implementing greybox environment and character movement (Olivia), coding lighting and camera movements (James), playtesting

FEB 22 – Physical asset creation (Olivia and James)

MAR 1 - Implementing physical asset creation (Olivia and James)

MAR 8 – Physical asset creation (Olivia and James)

MAR 15 - Physical asset creation (Olivia and James)

MAR 22 - Implementing physical asset creation (Olivia and James), playtesting

MAR 29 – Week to catch up on any missed objectives, test the game, gather feedback and fix bugs

APR 5 – 2D visual novel imagery creation and implementation (Olivia), UI design and implementation (James), character looping animations in-game (Olivia and James)

APR 12 – Extra UI designed and implemented including main menu, start and quit buttons etc. (James), stop-motion animation storyboarded (Olivia), playtesting

APR 19 – Making the stop-motion animations (Olivia and James)

APR 26 – Making the stop-motion animations (Olivia and James)

MAY 3 – Implementing the final components such as audio, sound effects and recording and implementing the voice acting. Implementing the stop-motion cutscenes (Olivia and James)

MAY 10 – Feedback and tweaking, promotional material and designing the cover art (Olivia and James)

MAY 17 – Feedback and tweaking, promotional material (Olivia and James)

MAY 24 – Feedback and tweaking, promotional material (Olivia and James)

MAY 27 = HAND IN

Promotional Material

For our promotional / marketing material we will look to:

- Post weekly (at a minimum) across social media platforms – Twitter and Instagram with more material potential being posted on Youtube.
- A cinematic/gameplay trailer for the game.
- A dev video to accompany our game trailer of the motivation behind the project and various behind-the-scenes work.
- Cover art for the game, to use as physical promotional material.
- Potential merchandise for the arcade event – e.g. stickers, cover art postcards for the game etc.
- The game itself will be available on an individual website which will also be promoted.

Game Proposal document written by Olivia Gregory and James Cook.

Olivia Gregory – Chapter 1, Chapter 2, Chapter 3 (Chapter 4 Sculpting Test), (Chapter 6 Competitive Analysis) & Chapter 8

James Cook - (Goals in chapter 1), (3D printing in Chapter 3) Chapter 4, Chapter 5, Chapter 6 & Chapter 7