

Prodigal Daughters

Concept Document

Version 2

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Design Brief:

With parents on the brink of divorce, tight-knit sibling pair Sage and Noelle have three days left before their idyllic life in the Appalachian countryside of Maine draws to a close. What begins as a simple hide-and-seek game quickly veers into unknown territory as Sage emerges from her hiding spot only to discover that it won't be as easy to get home as she thought.

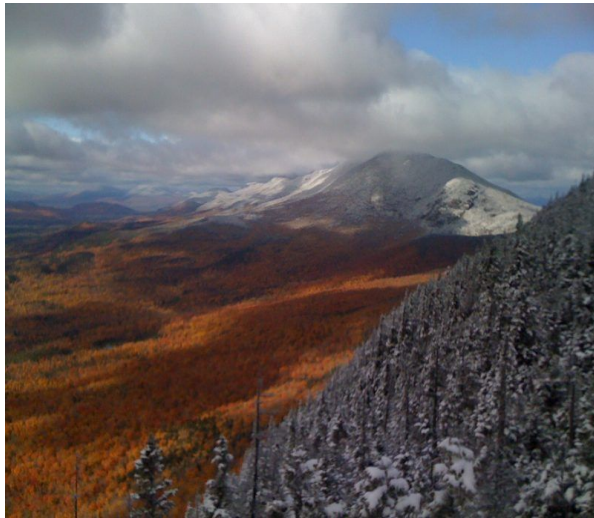
This game is a project for Game Development 115. The goal was to create a top-down 2D game in the JRPG style within 9 weeks using GB studio. As a huge admirer and player of games that heavily constructs narrative to be a driving force of player motivation as demonstrated in the *Life is Strange* or *The Last of Us* series, I became curious if I could make a game that could emotionally move a player with only Game Boy graphics, much like *Undertale* has done to critical acclaim—except the relationship is not between the protagonist and a variety of monsters but a pair of sisters in their last moments of sharing a home together.

Core Mechanics:

In what serves as a short prologue, Sage and Noelle's parents decide to get a divorce, resulting in the inevitable separation of the sisters. Sage's farewell party is a game of hide and seek with her friends and Noelle before she leaves town for good. As gathering her friends in town is the first quest for players, they have to figure out that they must talk to all four friends and then guide Sage to a stump in the middle of town to begin hide and seek. After Sage's speech, players are gently guided to follow her friends, talk to them, and then be motivated to get to a better hiding spot that is across the Appalachians. That serves as quest two. However, the Appalachians themselves serve as maze, and when players have Sage finally make it to the other side, they discover they need to backtrack into the Appalachians to receive help from two of Sage's penguin friends. The only quest left to do is to help Sage find her way into the cave of no return.

Prodigal Daughters does not have a combat system, but what makes it engaging is that the dialogue serves not only as fun worldbuilding exposition but it contains the game's quest lines and reveals to players Sage's objectives throughout the game. In addition, the earnest with a hint of ironic dialogue will hopefully draw players into this game's 2002-inspired world through curiosity or humor and get them to invest in Sage's story.

Look & Feel:



Photos of the Appalachian mountains and Camp Wohelo of Maine. Maine is known for its natural ruggedness and fierce falls that are rich in autumn colors. Although winter and summer are often used to represent the end of something (think Narnia or summer love) fall can also serve this purpose, as the season decays around us. By setting the real world of Prodigal Daughters in fall, there are so many things to “fall” in or out of, such as falling into another world, falling out with each other, and ultimately choosing whether or not to embrace the fall out of childhood.

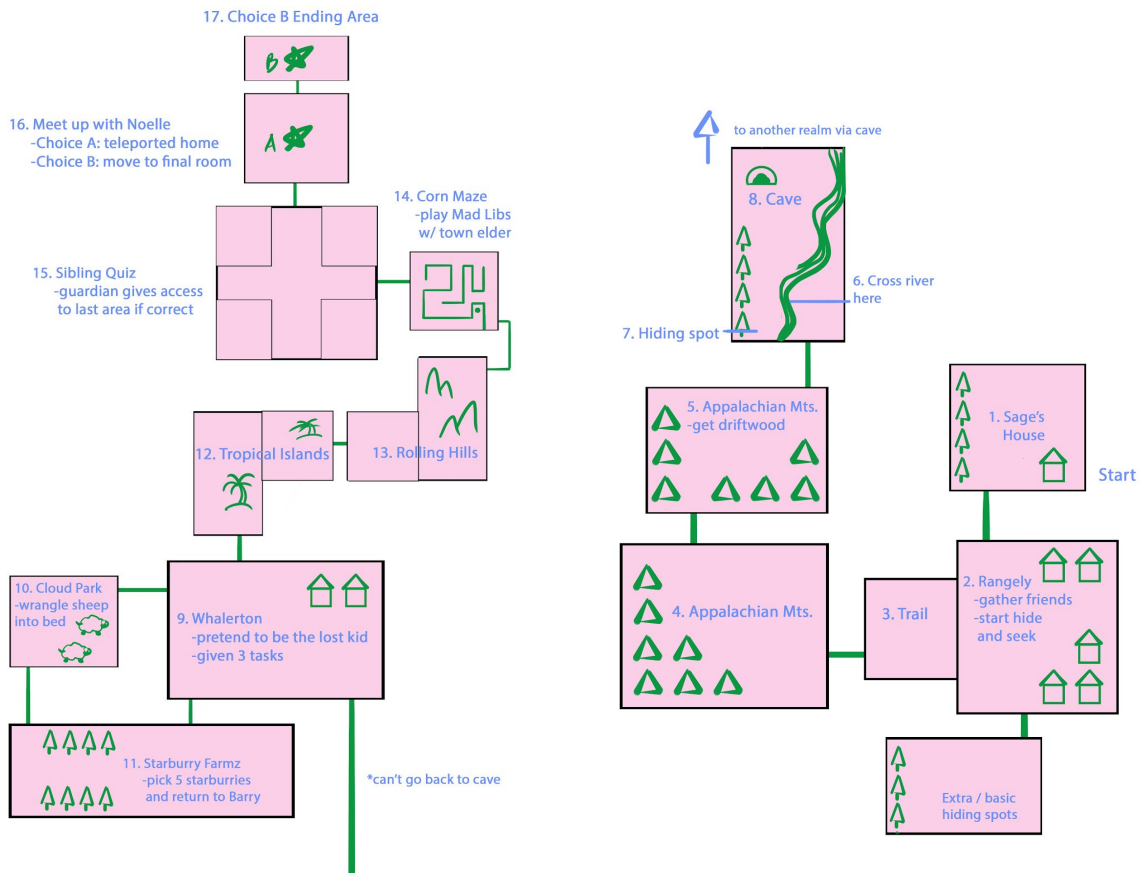


These screenshots are from Mario and Luigi: Bowser's Inside Story, a series known for its zany humor and colorful worlds. Although the Game Boy has limited color capacity, it's still possible to create a "colorful" world through interesting layout design and humorous dialogue.



From Pokémon Yellow, Diamond, and Pearl. Like most games in the Pokémon universe, they have fun map layouts with different environments. Each place has a distinct feel, and it would be interesting to see how elements that aren't usually together combine in a town or area that defies environmental reality (like a tropical but snowy beach).

Maps & Game Flow:



On Left: For reference only. The left map is part II of Sage's journey that had to be scrapped.
 On Right: The course of Sage's journey. There is minimal backtracking to be done, and built in systems that won't let players go to areas that aren't accessible before they do the associated quest line.

Final Gameplay Scenes:



1. Sage begins her journey by getting out of the house.



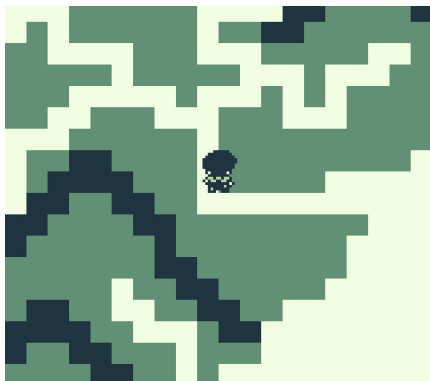
2. Sage is sent on a mission to host a farewell hide n' seek game..



3. Sage successfully gathers her friends and sister.



4. Sage must find a better hiding spot than the lot she's left with.



5. Sage takes a hike through the Appalachians to reach the best spot.



6. Sage arrives, but slowly realizes no one is going to find her.

Post Mortem:

I know I made a game that was too big to be completed by the deadline. I didn't take into account that making pixel art would be such a learning curve and thus take up a lot of time. If I could have done things differently, I would have made a much smaller map with less areas and kept my game flow charts to a single page instead of two. I also believe I added too many quests that I wanted to implement but didn't have time to script. Thus, that is why *Prodigal Daughters* ends on a cliffhanger instead of being an entire narrative experience with a traditional ending. If I had more time I would definitely have liked to script part II's events, as I had already created almost all of the art for the left map. There were simply too many quests for those areas and not enough time. I hope to come back to it after the semester ends, as I want *Prodigal Daughters* to have a proper ending instead of telling just half of the story I had planned out. This way, players could explore the full relationship between Sage and Noelle and be able to experience the story as intended for best emotional impact.

Design Notes:

I decided to keep the left map that is under the Maps and Game Flow section, even though these areas don't appear in the final version of Prodigal Daughters. This way, readers (and the designer) will catch a faint glimpse of the full breadth of the story and gameplay, as opposed to what players actually get to experience in game.