Game Design Document



# Title Page

## Game Name

MountainFell

(name subject to change)

Mountain can refer both to the land and to the titans that roam it.

Fell as in kill / defeat but is often used for felling trees, again leaning into the killing nature / killing titans double meaning.

## Tag line

## Elevator Pitch

Protect a corporation’s colonisation efforts into a hostile land as you fight off the enormous titans roaming there.

## Date of last update

5/12/2022

# Game Overview

## Game Concept

MountainFell is a turn based tactics game in which you manage the security detail for a major sci-fi corporation colonising a new world inhabited by strange monsters of ever increasing scale. This means you have someone to answer to, and they clearly aren’t the good guys, but you’re a professional and you need to get your job done.

The game takes inspiration from other entries in the turn-based tactics genre, some of which are XCOM 2, Invisible Inc. and Into the Breach. In the board game space, Skulk Hollow is an interesting point of reference.

As the corporation you work for develops a new branch in a distant untouched land, you are tasked with protecting it from the otherworldly ecosystem where you find yourself. The land is filled with enemies growing ever larger & stranger as you push deeper in. Along the way, rival corporations and a resistance faction form a nuisance by making various sabotage efforts.

You get to influence the progress of colonisation on two levels.

(strategy layer)

On a large-scale level, you must construct infrastructure to protect the corporate expansion and decide where to push into enemy territory to provide room for more. Here you have less fine-grained control, as you are at the whims of the company. Your main job in this phase is to prepare for threats and orchestrate attacks for the other half of the game. From a design perspective, this part is here as a break between tactical operations, to link them together in a larger context and to measure player success (after all, the only thing the corporation cares about is progress they can make on this level).

(tactics layer)

The bulk of gameplay challenge comes from the other half of the game, the turn-based tactical encounters. Here you get to pick a squad of your trained private militia and equip them with various weapons granted by the corporation. You then take them into battle where the main goal is always about subduing the natural fauna of the land, with other organisations frequently showing up to make things difficult. The difficulty in these missions leans in the direction of Into the Breach and Invisible Inc. more than XCOM: the focus is on resource management throughout the mission, the main threat is lasting collateral damage (as opposed to XCOM being very much about moment-to-moment direct confrontation between units & the risk of losing them). This level of the game is here to show make the threats the player is facing feel real and daunting, especially the local monsters. It is also where the player’s skills are tested, with the results being reflected on the strategy layer of the game, either in progress made or damage sustained to infrastructure & strategic resources.

More details on the mechanics of these layers and the plot & lore supporting them will be given throughout this document.

## Target Audience

There is already an established market for these kinds of turn-based combat games. It is somewhat niche & not very saturated, especially when it comes to more modern games. Because of this, I believe fans of deep tactics (& light strategy) will welcome the game.

To be successful with this audience, MountainFell will need to deliver on two fronts. First, there needs to be depth to the tactics, forcing the player to think carefully and enabling them to come up with clever plans. Second, there needs to be some unique appeal to this game specifically to set it apart from existing successful games.

On a side note, the game has somewhat serious themes (dystopian late stage capitalist corporations, private militia warfare, colonisation & destruction of natural resources) that may be difficult for a very young audience. There is not planned to be any gore, explicit content or other age-restricted material though.

## Genre(s)

Turn-based tactics – specifically the positional, squad-based type present in XCOM and the likes, NOT the JRPG-style of combat. This is the core of the game.

Strategy – while lighter than many grand strategy, this aspect is essential for it’s synergies with the tactics mentioned above.

## Game Flow Summary – How does the player move through the game? Include both the interface and the game itself.

(strategy layer)

the player gets a zoomed-out view of the land that is being colonised, with various structures such as your base, resource gathering buildings, roads and remote lookouts, presented on a hex grid.

Here the player has set up defences such as walls, outposts and turrets on the map by spending “strategical resources” (currency, materials) in a construction menu. They also get to invest into their squad at base by acquiring new weapons, tools and units from the parent company, again spending some resources.

The player is not in direct control over the entire colonisation effort, as they have to constantly adapt to the actions of the parent company.

At the same time the player tries to get an idea of what the other factions are up to: construct outposts to track monsters, monitor the activity of rival companies on the map, send spies to track down the resistance.

On this layer, there does not necessarily exist a rigid turn structure. Some ideas:

* Auto time: Getting equipment is instant, gathering intel waits until you pass time to get results, construction passes time immediately
* RTS style: everything takes various amounts of time but can be done in parallel, player can pause & fast forward
* Company request: every major thing you do is in the form of a request to the colonising corporation that they will respond to at the end of the month.

However it ends up being modelled, it is an important factor that processes take time to allow the (NPC) enemy factions to push their own agenda.

When the time comes for more intense action, you move to the tactical layer. This can be to intercept an enemy attack you’ve found out about (on neutral territory), to minimise the damage from an attack that slipped by (on your territory) or to claim more terrain (enemy territory).

(tactical layer)

Here you get another top-down map view, this time of a much smaller area in a square grid. The player gets to control a squad of private soldiers in grid-based combat, as well as any other defences they may have (vehicles, turrets). On each turn you get to move all your units and have them do one action each. Units can act in any order, but cannot move after performing an action. (note: every aspect of this may need editing for balance & fun)

There are a few different aspects to combat:

* Symmetric direct confrontation: when fighting against other corporations or the resistance, you are on fairly equal footing. Here you move to flank, take cover etc. You want to kill the enemies and keep your own units alive. This is the least unique aspect of combat, so it will usually be combined with one of the others.
* Asymmetric direct confrontation: the monsters of this land are fundamentally different from the humans invading it. The smaller ones can still be directly confronted but here the game is less XCOM and more turn-based monster hunter. A single monster will survive combat much longer than any individual human, creating a real risk of running out of tactical resources for the mission such as limited time, ammo or med kits. This style of combat is a nice in between where the monsters can be the only thing needed for a balanced an interesting fight.
* Indirect confrontation: truly giant monsters will have difficulty attacking your units directly, and attacking them in turn is a much lengthier progress. You will slowly have to work at wounding a titan by targeting weak spots, traversing their body as part of the map etc. They can cause disastrous damage to infrastructure, rippling out into the strategy layer. These are conceptually the star of the show in MountainFell, but they need some smaller-scale backup to make the encounter interesting on a moment-to-moment level. I unfortunately have not thought of a way to make turn-based Shadow of the Colossus work without these supporting grunt enemies. (at least none that 100% fit what I’m going for)

## Look and Feel – What is the basic look and feel of the game? What is the visual style?

The game’s themes are a little serious and the game is constantly putting pressure on the player.

For the visual style, I plan to offset this by going for a stylised 3D look, probably something relatively low-poly. The strange land, especially it’s fauna, should be vibrant and visually striking. The human factions can be much more toned-down near-future sci fi fair, though they do each need a unique visual identity to tell them apart.

An important factor is also that the art should support the gameplay: maps need to fit the (hex or square) grid, as do the climbable areas of large monsters. The game state must be easily readable at all times to allow more easy processing of tactics & strategy.

I also believe a simple but striking stylised 3D look plays into my own strengths as an artist, as well as the strengths of indie games in general – creating a unique identity rather than competing for the greatest fidelity.

# Gameplay

## Objectives – What are the objectives of the game?

(strategy layer)

Your explicit, game-long objective is to simply protect the expansion efforts of the corporation that hired you. This is a constantly changing objectives as the corporations and the enemy factions progress throughout the campaign. Failing this is very much a gradual fail-state with a lot of leeway given to claw back from a bad spot rather than losing an entire campaign.

Some instrumental goals arise from this: building infrastructure to make defence easier, developing your units & equipment and pre-emptively attacking the enemy factions to weaken them. The player is entirely in charge of if & when they want to handle these.

On top of this, the corporation will give explicit orders throughout the game to fight your way deeper into the land, creating more room for expansion and making your job permanently harder. This is the objective that marks actual progress in the campaign.

A final thing to be aware of: most players will soon have the “are we the bad guys?” realisation, creating their own goal to do the right thing instead of helping this dystopic corporation. At least for a large portion of the game, this is simply not an option. How theme will be handled will be discussed later.

(tactics layer)

Each mission has it’s own primary objective explicitly listed. This usually involves killing, weakening or pushing back an enemy / group of enemy units.

Once again, you have to keep in mind the primary objective that you’ve been hired for: keeping the company safe. Because of this, failing a mission often involves damage to the strategy layer. Some missions also have the risk of causing collateral damage even before they are over.

Furthermore, the player will want to protect their own units from lasting injuries.

Lastly, there are always opportunities to gain just a little bit more from a mission by doing better: experience from killing more enemies, permanent injuries dealt to titans, or optional objectives giving extra rewards.

## Game Progression

## Play Flow – How does the game flow for the game player

## Mission / Challenge Structure / Puzzle Structure

# Mechanics

## Rules – What are the rules to the game, both implicit and explicit.

## Model of the game universe. Think of it as a simulation of a world, how do all the pieces interact?

## Physics – How does the physical universe work?

## Economy – What is the economy of the game? How does it work?

## Character / Game Piece movement in the game

## Actions, including whatever switches and buttons are used, interacting with objects, and what means of communication are used

## Conflict: if present, how is this modeled?

## Screen Flow -- How each screen is related to every other and a description of the purpose of each screen

## Game Options - What are the options and how do they affect game play?

## Replaying and saving

## Cheats and Easter Eggs

# Story and Narrative

## Back story

## Plot elements

## Story progression

## Cut scenes -- descriptions include the actors, the setting, and the storyboard or script.

## Accompanying game pieces – story booklets, art work

# Game World

## General look and feel of world

## Areas

## General description and physical characteristics

## How to relate to the rest of the world

## What levels use it

## Connections to other areas

# Characters.

## For each character

## Back story

## Personality

## Appearance

## Abilities

## Relevance to the story

## Relationship to other characters

## Artificial Intelligence Use in Opponent and Enemy

## Non-combat and Friendly Characters

# Levels

## Training Level

## For each level

## Synopsis

## Required introductory material and how it is provided

## Objectives

## Details of what happens in the level

### Map

### Critical path that the player needs to take

### Important and incidental encounters

# Interface

## Visual System

## HUD

## Menus

## Camera model

## Control System – How does the game player control the game? What are the specific commands?

## Audio, music, sound effects

## Game Art – intended style

## Help System / Manual

# 10. Design guidelines