

Vision Statement

The Counsel in the Cave is a collection of playable vignettes for Windows in which a high school senior journeys to find their counselor in the magical labyrinth beneath his school. The player chooses dialogue and direction for multiple characters so that they may engage in role-play, feeling a sense of personal ownership and influence of the characters and the story.

High Level

Players control characters, through which they explore scenes. In doing so, they may prompt text (dialogue, direction, description). Players can then choose their character's reactions. They may also prompt interaction with the scene through character action. Both are avenues to resolve the narrative conflict, which may be interpersonal, intrapersonal, or an external barrier to further exploration.

Narrative

The Counsel in the Cave is a collection of linked narrative vignettes which outline a larger imagined story. The vignettes show scenes from the journey of one high school senior, and of the cast of characters that surround him, as he seeks The Counselor in the Layers of the Labyrinth hidden beneath his high school, believing their guidance will give him post-graduation direction and defeat his growing anxieties, which stem from the imminent ejection from his current life into the unknown world beyond. By the end, however, he and the others must realize and accept that The Counselor cannot be found, and wouldn't be able to give them what they seek. The characters must move on and take ownership of their anxiety and its unsolvability.

Each vignette focuses on a different set of characters, but most characters appear in more than one, in different combinations. This leads the player to consider their interconnectedness, and thus the larger plot, as they play.

Some vignettes are set within The Labyrinth, strange shifting lands made from the confluence of long-forgotten ruins, impossible geography, and the architecture of the high school above. Others are set in the more (but not entirely) mundane world above, before the journey begins.

Gameplay

The game is divided into a number of scenes, each focused on a single setting and a small number of characters. The gameplay is divided into two states.

In the exploration state, the player reads text that describes the scene and offers the player options to explore further description, dialogue, or another kind of interactivity. Choosing an option moves gameplay to the text state.

In the dialogue state, the player reads 'stage directions' and dialogue for the characters. At points, the player must choose between multiple direction / dialogue options.

Over the course of any given scene, the player may choose dialogue for multiple characters. Usually, the effect any choice has on the scene is not obvious. In fact, there usually is very little. While choices made may prompt narrative reactivity later within the text state, the scene, or the act as a whole, they usually do not have further repercussions, such as on major narrative branches or other gameplay.

Instead, each choice simply presents narrative possibilities. Each choice asks the player to further define the character. Each choice should offer the player an interesting opportunity for role-playing.

The choices also allow the player to explore both the scene (through the player character) and the player character themselves (through what reaction to the scene is chosen by the player).

Style

Calm, to allow players to focus on the narrative.

Selectively colorful, to evoke the story's magic and draw the player's focus to the most important part of the scene.

Sketch-like, to imply elements of the scene and allow the player's imagination to color them.

Shifting in prominence, detail, and style, to shift player focus around the scene and the narrative, to give the scene a sense of a magical world.

This project frames the interactive fiction like a stage play, so the style should resemble something you might see or hear in a theater. Scenes will be staged, or framed. The camera is largely static, but may use a dolly / truck / pedestal to draw focus to a particular part of the scene. Within the staged scene, the characters are small. They occupy and traverse a space far larger than themselves.

Touchstones

Games: Kentucky Route Zero | Firewatch | Undertale | Subsurface Circular

Podcasts: Welcome to Nightvale

Books: One Hundred Years of Solitude | Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead | Life of Pi

Interactive Fiction: Zork, Birdland

Art: PeterDraws

Experiences:

- Growing to identify with a place. Spending the long hours of your day there.
- Escaping the regular demands of your future-oriented life to explore wooded paths, and the paths diverging from them that you make yourself.
- Making a multimedia journal entry.
- Imagining the characters of a script as you would play them.
- Taking your time to tell a story.
- Actually getting to know someone long after you first meet them. Growing up with them around.