

Canoeing for Love



A. Margarida Prata Nº 118328

Bernardo Leandro Nº 98652

Gonçalo Reis Nº 120441

Mariana Teixeira Nº 117285

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1. Concept

Canoeing for Love is a **singleplayer dating simulator** where players must seduce one of the **two romantic leads** or suffer the wrath of Poseidon. The game includes **four story endings**, two for each of the romanceable characters. *Canoeing for Love* fills the **niche market of visual novels** and tries to stand out by telling a story that is humorous and absurd. Utilizing the Unity Game Engine, we seek to provide the player a **branching narrative** that allows them to explore the characters they interact with throughout the game.

As a Visual Novel, we will require players to read for thirty to forty-five minutes while making dialogue branching choices. We're striving for **replayability** for players who enjoy **unlocking and collecting** the various story endings available.

Our character falls overboard a luxurious ship. While drowning, they are given a chance by Poseidon: seduce the man of your dreams in four days or be doomed to drown. Now trapped on a small island, the player interacts with the two romanceable characters and chooses the best dialogue options to increase a character's attraction for them. Our narrative spans over four days; the last day will showcase what narrative ending the player was able to unlock: Were they able to seduce one of the characters? Who did they seduce?

Canoeing for Love will allow you to:

- Romance one of two characters: the morally good Ken or the morally gray Allen.
- Unlock four unique endings, two per character: one for successfully romancing them and another for failing to romance them.
- Experience a funny story that will keep you entertained.
- Collect items that will influence the progression of the story.
- Give up agency and allow a narrative conflict to resolve without your input.

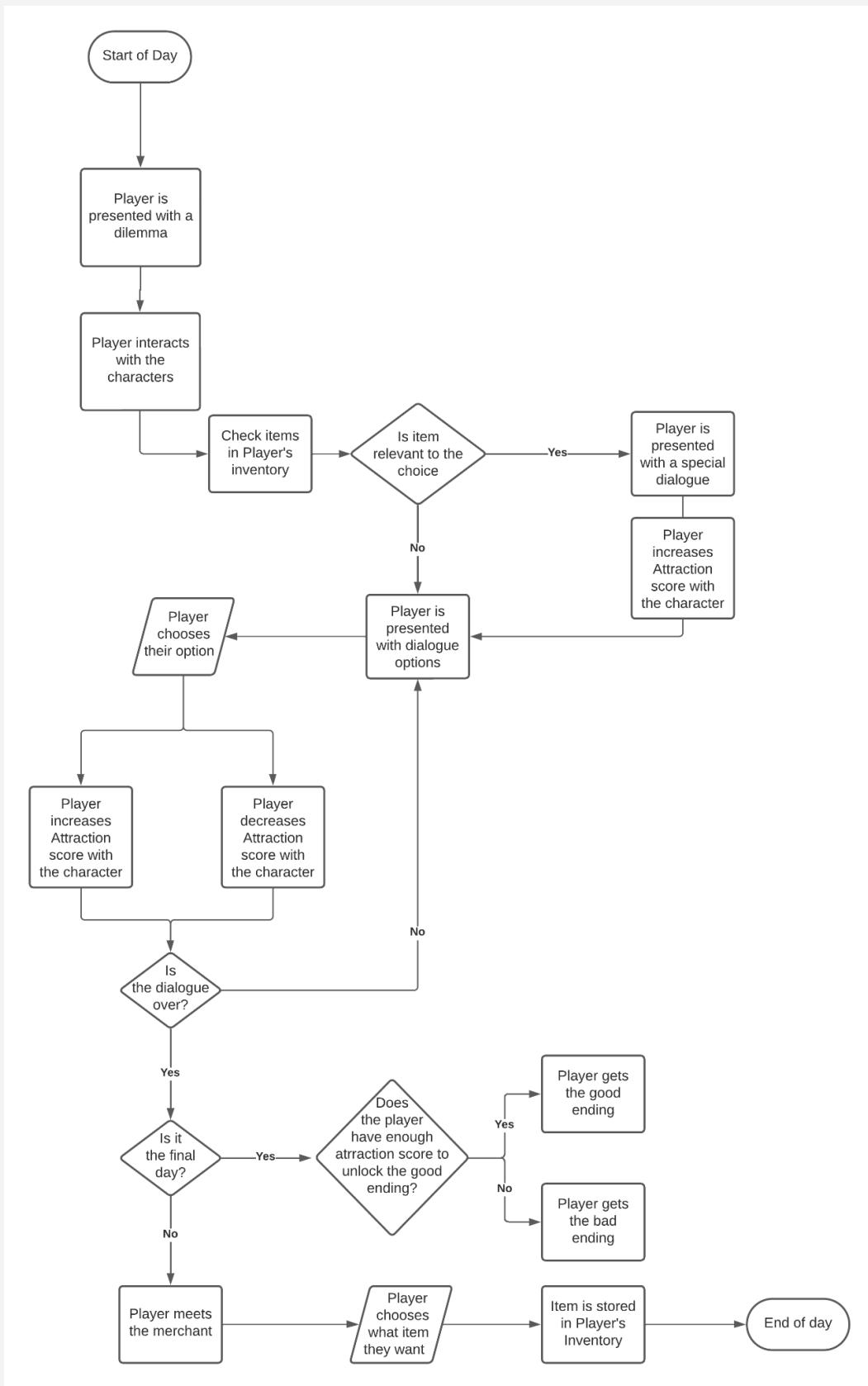


Image 1: Game Flow Chart

2. Market Study

2.1. Target-Audience

The reddit forum, r/visualnovels, conducted an amateur survey with reddit users, about the demographic of visual novels. Over 500 people answered the survey and we took special interest in data relative to age, gender and preferred genre: the people who commonly play Visual Novels are males of ages 18 to 24 who prefer the romance subgenre. There is a substantial lack of female players, only 10% according to this survey. As such, we found an opportunity to fill a gap in the market by appealing to the female audience.

Social-Demographic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 16 to 24 Years Old - Female - Androsexual
Interests	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Awkward Humor - Referential Jokes - Romance Genre

Table 1: Target Audience

We appeal to this audience by introducing male romantic leads and inserting jokes and references that are more common within this age group.

2.2. Market References

During production we looked at other games of the same subgenre to gain an understanding of what our target audience might expect from our game.

2.2.1. Monster Prom

You have 3 weeks to get a date for Monster Prom! Go through absurd and funny situations, raise your stats and seduce one of your classmates. Beautiful art, bold, unapologetic dialogue and hard choices make up this Multiplayer (1-4 players) Dating Sim. Be your worst self.

Steam Page (Beautiful Glitch, 2018)

Monster Prom is a turn-based dating simulator where one to four players compete for the affection of the romanceable characters by picking adequate dialogue choices.

These choices alter the affection score of a character and the player's in-game ability scores; these two statistics, affection and ability, define if the player will succeed at asking their selected monster for prom and winning the game. The game is available on Windows, MacOS, Linus, Nintendo Switch, Playstation 4 and XBox One.

In Monster Prom, we generally have two story endings per character, one for successfully asking them to Prom and another for failing to do the same. This is a detail that we've borrowed for our own game.

2.2.2. TOUCHSTARVED

TOUCHSTARVED is a dark romance visual novel where your choices determine whether the story ends with gothic romance or blood-curdling horror. Explore an enigmatic city and find a cure for your curse by entrusting your fate to 5 love interests, each uniquely monstrous in their own way.

Steam Page (Red Spring Studio, s.d.)

TOUCHSTARVED is an anticipated single-player Dating Simulator in early access. It is a straight-forward approach to the Visual-Novel genre: players will pick options that will lead them to score higher with one of the lead characters and that will branch them through segments of story that expose world narrative and the preferred character's personal story. The game is currently in production and only the Demo is available.

The user interface of TOUCHSTARVED is simple to navigate and requires very little prior understanding of games. Our project borrowed the design behind the HUD and iterated to better fit Canoeing for Love.

2.2.3. The Ratchlor

The Ratchlor is a single player dating simulator where the player participates in a contest to find their soulmate, parodying the *Bachelor* reality show. The player begins by selecting a number of different anthropomorphic mice to go on dates with. In these dates, players are prompted to choose adequate responses to the rats' illogical ramblings, creating a sense of wondrous nonsense in every interaction the player has. Inevitably, and with little understanding, the player will end up attracting one of the mice and unlocking its happy ending. The game is available on the Web.



The Ratchlor is a short game that entertains players and has every quality of “wondrous nonsense” that we wanted our game to replicate.

2.3. Market Research

FEATURES	DD	CFL	MP	PW	R	T
Character Costumization	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓	✗
Several Love Interests	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓	✓
Diferent Endgames	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Choices Matter	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Interactive Animations	✓	✓	✗	✓	✗	✓
Background Diversity	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sound Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Minigames	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗

Label:

DD	Dream Daddy: A Dad Dating Simulator
CFL	Canoeing For Love
MP	Monster prom
PW	Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney
R	Ratchlor
T	Touchstarved

Table 2: Game Features of Competitors

All of our showcased market references are playable on a Windows PC, while only some are available on consoles. This aligns with the referred reddit survey, that appointed computers to be the preferred platform of over 95% of the participants. Thus, we decided to develop our game for Windows PC.

3. Management

We utilized an Agile Development methodology, with concrete use of milestones, timelines and sprints. The weekly sprints serve to review what tasks were completed, what tasks need to be done next, and how to allocate team members to different tasks. These meetings would happen during the project 2D class, where the scrum leader, Mariana, would look at what was done, what problems, if any, occurred during that week, and set goals for the following week.

Bernardo Leandro	A. Margarida Prata	Gonçalo Reis	Mariana Teixeira
Code Developers	Artist Story Writer	Sound Designer Story Writer	Code Developers

Table 3: Team

Collectively, the group dynamically shifted to help someone who fell behind on schedule and every task for the following weeks was agreed upon by the group. To make this process easier, the group used Trello as a tasks organization tool.

3.1. Milestones

In the beginning we developed code architecture diagrams, concept art and concept narrative, in order to help the group figure out the right direction and if the ideas were or not possible and interesting to implement.

This process took a couple of weeks, but helped the group visualize the game we wanted to develop. The Milestones Table helped form concrete dates and development phases for our project; the group agreed on a set of features they wanted implemented by the end of the different phases of production.

MILESTONES			
	Playable	Alpha	Code Release
Deadline	14-11	19-12	18-01
Programação	Building the Vertical Demo: - Iterable Dialogue Tree, - Dialogue Events (Camera Movement), - Main Menu, Option Menu, HUD	- Item Shop System. - IO from .json File. - Save & Load System to save game progress.	- Refactoring code. - Fixing issues.
Arte	- Concept scenes, characters and HUD. - Background Assets. - Testing assets for size and readability.	- Implementing Background Assets. - Implementing Character Assets. - Adding VFX to the Unity Scenes.	
Narrativa	- Design of the Visual Novel. - Create a Twine Prototype of the story.	- Implement dialogue trees in the Unity game engine.	
QA	- Test twine prototype for narrative cohesion and humor. - Testing the vertical demo for gameplay.	- Test the alpha version for accessibility, bugs, visuals and narrative.	

Table 4: Milestones

3.2. Timeline

The timeline created serves as a backbone of the project, providing information regarding setting realistic and clear tasks at a precise date. Thus, the presented timeline is a plan to follow, that would provide time for proper testing, receiving feedback and making the appropriate modifications.

Our timeline is color coded and with symbols to differentiate the phases. The color represents a different month and each circle represents a week. We have in total seventeen weeks to complete the project.

- The one circle in gray is to represent one week off work, due to celebrations happening.
- The diamonds represent reviews made by the shareholders or significant feedback from colleagues.
- The star represents playtesting.

First Playtest (14th of November)	Final Playtest (12th of December)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Test the user interface - check if the player found it easy to use. - Test the gameplay - check if the player understands the mechanics of the game (clicking to advance the game and choosing an option when prompted). - Test the narrative - check if the narrative is interesting and captivates the players. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative - check if the humor used is good and if the story is cohesive and the various paths make sense, - Interface - check if the new design approach is more clear and concise. - Playability - Check for the existence of any bugs or specific errors that passed through quality assurance;

Table 5: Playtesting Schedule

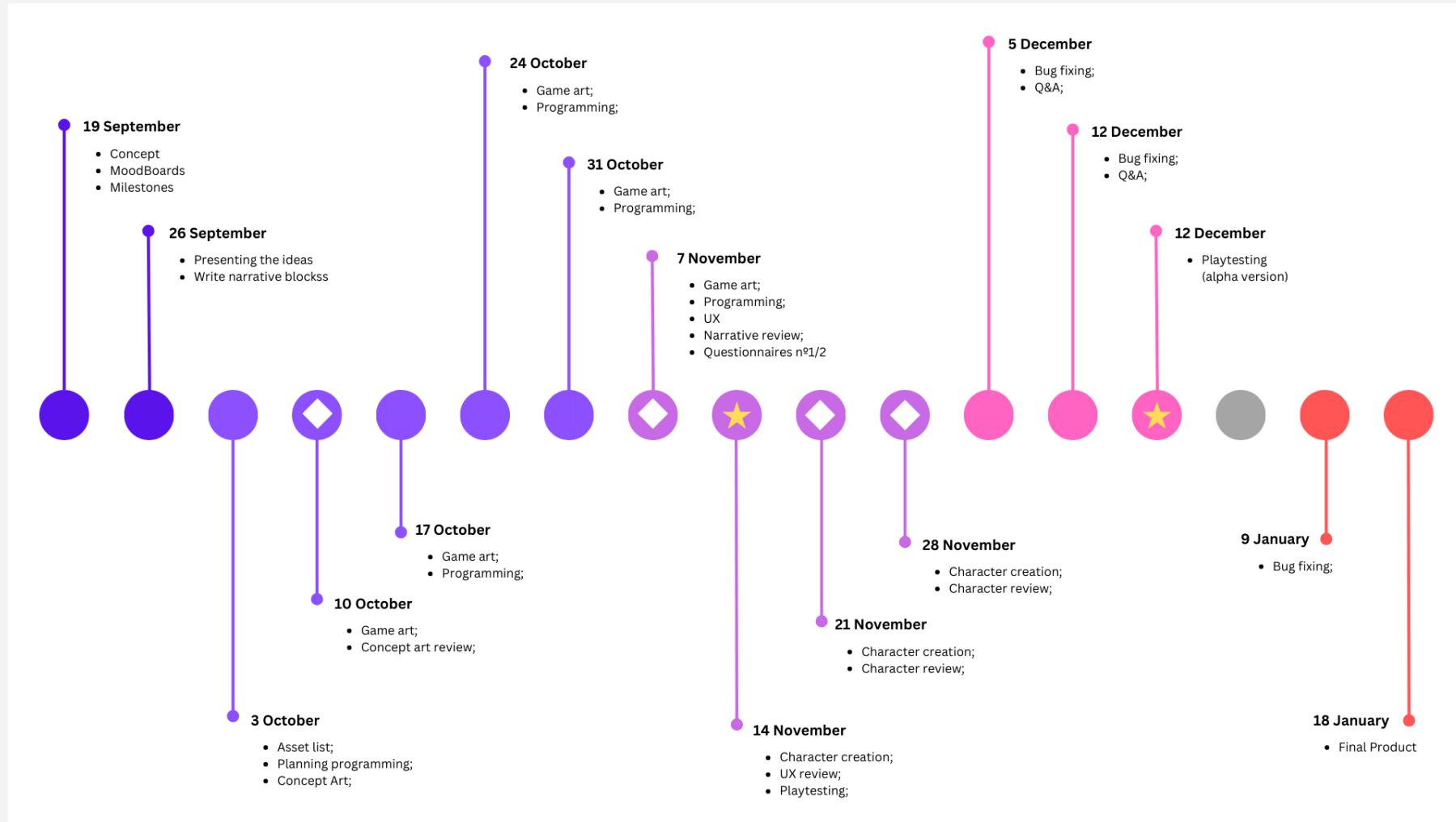


Image 2: Production Timeline

4. Target System

4.1. Windows

We have tested our game on higher-end machines running the 64-bit version of Windows 10 and Windows 11. Our game is displayed in Full HD (1920 x 1800).

5. Development System

5.1. Game Engine

We developed our game in Unity 2021.3.34f, making use of its accessible user interface and the animation system that requires no previous knowledge of coding.

We want to expand our project to use the Unity UI Toolkit, the Experimental GraphView API, the Unity Particle System and the Unity Input System.

6. Tools

6.1. Dialogue JSON Parser

Canoeing for Love relies heavily on interactive storytelling to immerse the player in the narrative; they must be able to explore the consequences of their dialogue choices within the safe bubble of their virtual immersion. We wanted to develop a dialogue branching tool that allowed us to create complex stories driven by player choice; a tool that is capable of parsing a json file as a Dialogue Tree.

The tool iterates through the dialogue tree displaying character dialogue in correct order, allowing players to choose their avatar's dialogue and managing the visual and audio display.

The Dialogue Tree is composed of Nodes, each storing a number of events (such as DisplayDialogue, DisplayChoices, PlaySound, ChangeBackground, etc...). The tool sends these events to the adequate managers. These managers display characters and backgrounds, play sounds and animations, increase or decrease the attraction score and add a game item to your inventory.

Our Dialogue Tool also has the ability to unlock additional branching paths depending on the attraction score of each character allowing the player to experience additional story moments. Some choices use randomized branching, putting the player on a random moment of story.

6.2. External Tools

Google Drive	Provided storage for the files and documents developed so that everybody could access them at any given time.
Git and GitHub	Collaborate and manage the code repository of our project.
Milanote	Define narrative design, develop moodboards and jot down ideas.
Twine	Develop and test game narrative before it is moved to the Unity workspace.
Trello	Appoint and keep track of tasks defined by the weekly sprints, define priorities.
FL Studio	Developing soundspace and music assets.
Photoshop, Illustrator and Krita	Developing UI, Character and Background Assets.
Discord	Maintain communication between group members.

Table 6: External Tools

7. Gameplay Mechanics

7.1. Attraction Score

An attraction system is required to keep track of which ending the player will unlock: who did they attempt to seduce? (Or who has the highest score?) Were they able to seduce them? (Or did the score surpass the threshold?).

Every choice the player makes has a direct impact on these scores. There are special scenes that the player may unlock only if they have a minimum of points with each character. In these special scenes, the player can expand the score with each character and learn about the character's personal story.

7.2. Inventory Management

Every night, before the start of a new day, the local merchant Sello will let the player choose between two items. The player isn't given knowledge on how, if at all, they will affect the story. The items chosen by the player are stored in a pseudo-inventory.

In the climax of our narrative, everyone participates in the slalom race and the player partners with the lead character of their choice. The winning state of the race is managed by the race score: a score that meets the threshold unlocks the victory story moment with the racing partner.

During the race, branching of the narrative and race score are managed by the inventory class that compares the partner character with the item acquired; character and item that match increase the race score and branch the narrative to showcase how the item is used.

The inventory manager and the attraction score create elevated pressure and further consequences to player choice. Thus, if the player replays the game and makes different choices they will read a different story and have a different outcome.

7.3. Choices and Paths

Our game has a branching narrative, each choice made alters the story; unlocking dialogue through choices means the player will miss another piece of dialogue, information, world-building and/or characterization. This common feature is why Visual-Novels have decent replayability. We use a diamond-like path for our narrative

branching: the player begins in-game day with the same story premise, but their choices branch the story such that, by the end of the day, two players can experience completely different dialogues and different scores. By night, the branching converges so every player is presented the same dialogue and the same two items to choose from.

Bonus content is a secretive moment of story that is unlocked by the player if they have a high enough score with one of the characters, each with their unique bonus content. This path in the narrative is available on Day 2 of the game. For completionists, this presents a challenge and motivation to replay the game.

7.4. Save & Load

Also developed by the team, the save and load system allows the player to save in game progression. The objective of this system is very simple, save the data that is needed to maintain consistency throughout the game. The saved game variables are the current node where the player is situated, the attraction score with each character and the items chosen. Furthermore, this system also saves data used in the load menu for visual representation. This data is composed by the thumbnail shown on the slot, the name assigned by the player and the last time there was a save made in that slot. As for the loading part, the system allocates the saved data to the correct variables. This way, the game continues where the player last saved it.

8. Story

Our narrative is divided into four main narrative events, distributed in **four in-game days**. The first day is meant to introduce the player to the characters that they will interact with during play and present the basic mechanics that constitute a visual-novel. Each night of the first three days, a local merchant, Sello, will attempt to sell the player items that influence the branching of the narrative. The last day presents the players with the consequences of their actions: a final moment between the selected love interest and the player and two possible endings, depending on the attraction score of the chosen character.

8.1. Synopsis

Day 1

The Player Character (PC) is introduced to the world by falling off a luxurious ship and nearly drowning, until Poseidon saves them. Poseidon demands from the PC that they must romance the man of their dreams or face condemnation through the waves of the sea. After this Ken saves the PC, providing care and housing. Waking up after a few days on the island, the PC can choose who they want to spend their time with, either Ken or Allen. Ken's interaction consists of going shopping in the village with Ken's canoe. Meanwhile, Allen's interaction consists of checking on him in the forest. After this choice, the PC makes lunch together with one of the characters, from which they can choose. After lunch, the main activity entails a powerpoint presentation night. When the powerpoint night concludes, the PC goes to bed. Sello will barge in from your window to sell you items: **Red Shell** and **Green Shell**.

Day 2

The PC wakes up to an empty house. Investigating it proves no results, and they make their way outside. Once outside, the PC spots the brothers enthralled in what appears to be a "build your own canoe" contest. The brothers ask the PC to be the judge of their competition, where they must decide on what canoe looks the best. Whoever the PC chooses gets to take them on a date on their newly built canoe. The date consists of a canoe ride through the waterways, where the PC gets new insight towards the character of their choosing. After the date, there is the possibility of the PC discovering

bonus/secret content; if not, then the PC goes to rest and, once again, is greeted by Sello. Sello then sells you one of two items: **Beaver Musk** and **Termite Spray**.

Day 3

It's the day before the big race. Ken is getting his canoe and canoe accessories ready and Allen is running through the woods. The PC chooses one of the brothers to check on. Choosing Ken provides insight on Ken's childhood, where Ken talks about a memory that he has of their mother. Choosing Allen, the PC catches up to him and Allen reveals that he is running to charge a device that will give him a competitive edge on the race. After this unfolds, the PC and the rest of the characters go towards the town center to register for the canoe slalom and get their respective competitor's numbers. Arriving home, the PC goes to rest and expects Sello to try to sell them anything. Almost falling asleep, Sello appears and, again, gives you the option between: **Ken Food** and **Allen Food**.

Day 4

The Slalom Race happens. The PC will have the opportunity to choose who they go with in the race. During the race the items bought along the story will have an impact, gaining or losing points and will help decide who will emerge victorious. After the race, the PC will then make the final choice, which of the brothers is their one true love. Depending on the attraction score with the chosen character it will then result in 1 of 4 possible endings.



8.2. Game Items

	Items	Race Score
Day 1	Red Shell	+1 Point
	Green Shell	-1 Point
Day 2	Termite Spray	+1 Point
	Beaver Musk	-1 Point
Day 3	Kens Food	+1 Point if Player canoes with Ken -1 Point if Player canoes with Allen
	Allens Food	-1 Point if Player canoes with Ken +1 Point if Player canoes with Allen

Table 7: Game Items and Effects

9. World



Image 3: Nighttime Background

We started production by building our world: what does the island look like? What kind of biome does it foster? Is it isolated? Is there a community living there? Later in production, while drafting our story, we filled in the gaps of information about our world.

Our story is set during the modern day, the 2020's, on a fictional isolated island. Our protagonist must remain there for four days, while waiting for a means of transportation back to the mainland.

The island is of warm climate and includes a boreal forest with a lot of wildlife and rivers. The community is small and tight and culture revolves heavily around rivers, especially when it comes to the creation and maintenance of canoes, the favorite local sport; there's a yearly slalom race held by the community, *The Grand Slalom*. Since it's a small community, the consecutive winner of the slalom race is regarded as a canoe expert.

10. Characters

The player interacts with two romanceable characters, the brothers Ken and Allen and the supporting character Sello. The brothers archetypes are meant to be complementary; Ken is the Hero, a character who, through passion, is able to rise up to any challenge imposed on him. In opposition to Ken, we find Allen, a Shadow to the Hero, a character whose competitive passion has driven him to act on questionable moralities.

10.1. Ken



Image 4: Ken with a Neutral Expression

Ken Owen is a canoe fanatic, a characteristic he fully embraces. Almost everything about his life revolves around canoes. He restores, repairs and even customizes canoes for all the islanders. Ken is also the current Island Slalom Champion and he participates in the yearly race without fail.

Ken is best known for his skills on a canoe and he currently holds the title of the Grand Slalom Champion. His half-brother Allen and his "friend" Sello live with him in a hut he built himself. Ken cares deeply about his brother Allen and only to see him happy and fulfilled.

Ken is a tall and muscular man with broad shoulders that contrast with a soft face and entralling blue eyes. His hair resembles a soft golden hash brown, which Ken keeps short so it doesn't get in the way of his canoe habits. Ken also has a beard, which is sharp although he doesn't groom it very often.

10.2. Allen



Image 5: Allen with a Neutral Expression

Allen is Ken's half-brother, who thinks himself an underappreciated slalom racer. He has yet to win a race against his brother, but this year he is expanding his options to include scummy tactics.

Allen turns everything into a competition, arguing about the most minuscule of details. Despite the hostility he shows his brother, deep down he cares deeply for Ken. Under all the animosity, Allen is an insecure person, who wants to win the Slalom so people will like him. His actions, although misguided, come from a place of endearing love and care for the people around him, a love that Allen is too embarrassed to admit.

Allen is a tall and skinny man, with a sharp face. He wears glasses and tries to present himself in a sophisticated manner. Allen also keeps his hair short like his brother but he tries to keep it more presentable, which contrasts when compared to Ken's wild hair.

10.3. Sello



Image 6: Sello with a Grin

Sello is a merchant who does most of their sales at night from Ken's home: all they think about is sales. Sello lives with Ken and Allen and shares an interesting friendship with both: as they are always trying to sell things to anyone foolish to buy their stock.

Physically, Sello is a short person, with an eerie childish appearance. Although innocent looking, Sello likes to present themselves as a serious and important "conductor of the business", which is evident in their attire.

11. User Experience

11.1. User Interaction

Our input is flexible and easily expandable, because it only requires a one-key bool input (clicking the mouse, pressing a button, tapping the screen). Our current iteration only uses the mouse left click.

11.2. Interface

Menu buttons are highlighted when the cursor is placed on them or when they are clicked on.

11.2.1. Loading Screen

The loading serves the purpose to have save files for the player to choose which one he wants to use to continue playing. It is structured in a way the player has total freedom to organize them as they please. They can alter the name file, it will show the hour of when it was saved and the screenshot from the game, in order to recognise faster. It has a limit of 6 slots available, when all of them are full the player will receive a warning and can then choose which one to delete in order for the new save.

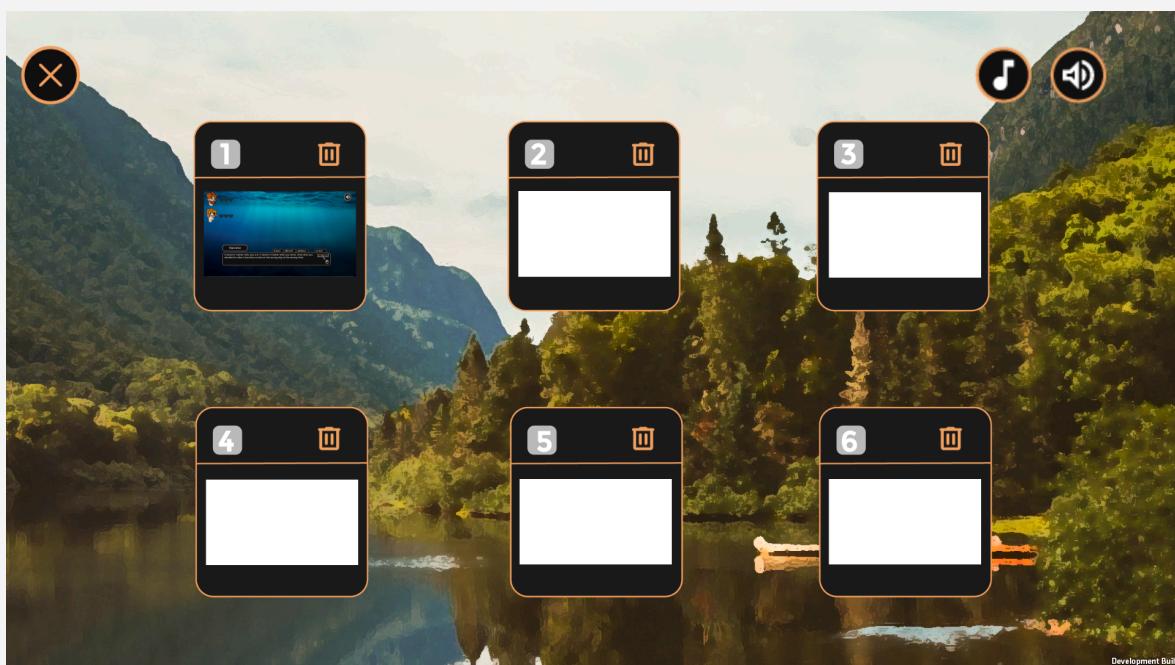


Image 7: Saving and Loading Screen Interface

11.2.2. Ending Screen

For each playthrough, players may trigger one of four endings and will receive a notification about which one they got, so they can replay and try to experience them all.

Each character available to romance, Ken and Allen, can trigger 2 endings, one good and one bad.

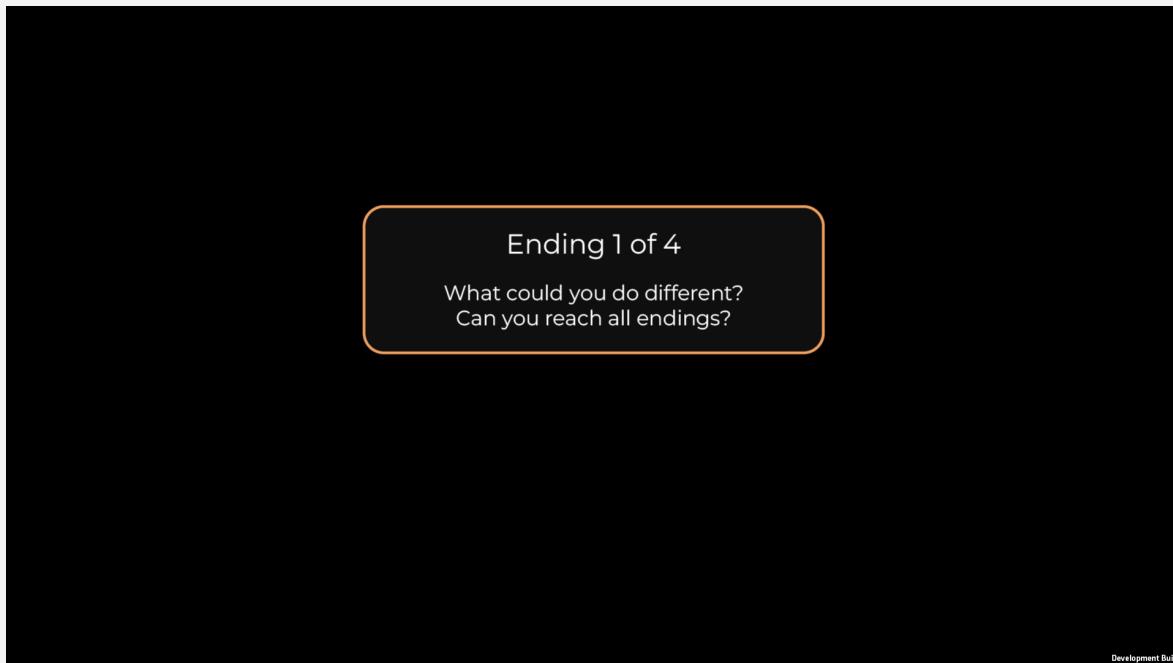


Image 8: Ending Screen

11.2.3. Heads-Up Display (HUD)

Visual Novels rely on their heads-up display for clarity of narrative and come with a set of player assumptions and quality-of-life features.

Some Visual Novels that were played before and during the production of our game had similarities in the presentation of the HUD.

Dialogue boxes are placed lower on the screen, accompanied by a smaller text element that displays the character that is currently talking. Option buttons are placed close near the dialogue box, while dialogue choice buttons are placed higher on the screen.

The option buttons regarding saving, loads, menu and exit are all horizontally aligned at the bottom of the dialogue box, but separated from the story text in order to not have misclicking happening to the player.

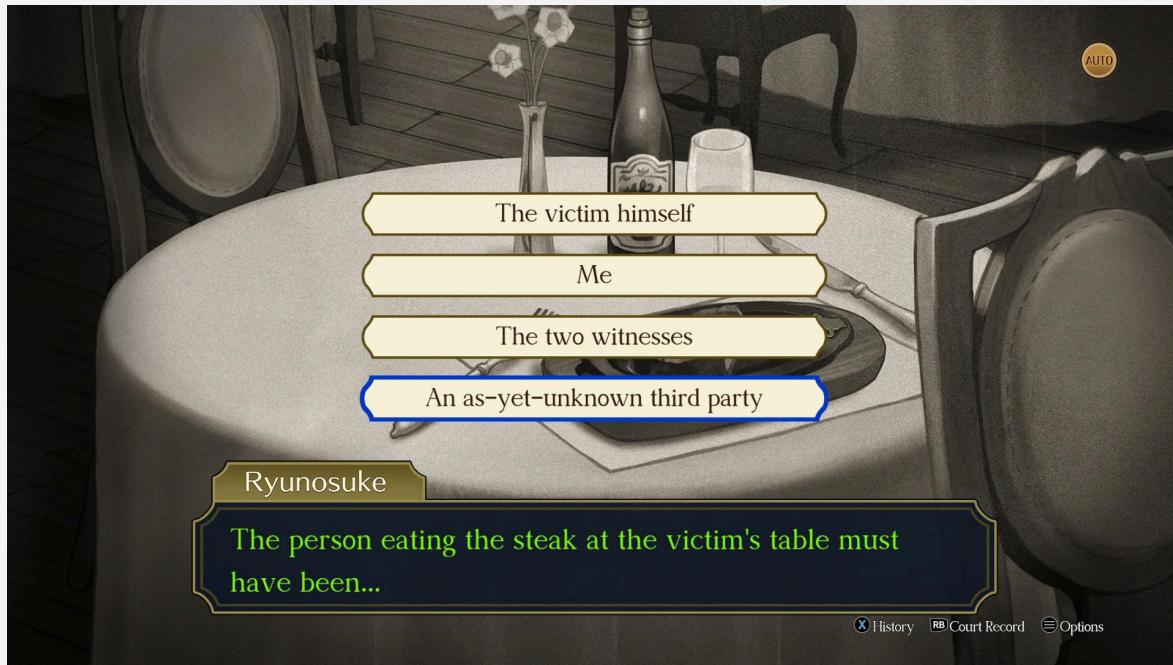


Image 9: HUD for The Great Ace Attorney Chronicles



Image 10: HUD for Cinderella Phenomenon



Image 11: HUD for Doki Doki Literature Club



Image 12: HUD for TOUCH STARVED

We want the player to have fun and not waste time getting accustomed to an unfamiliar interface. It should feel intuitive and require the minimum possible interaction to navigate; users should find what they need easily, allowing players to be immersed in the experience.

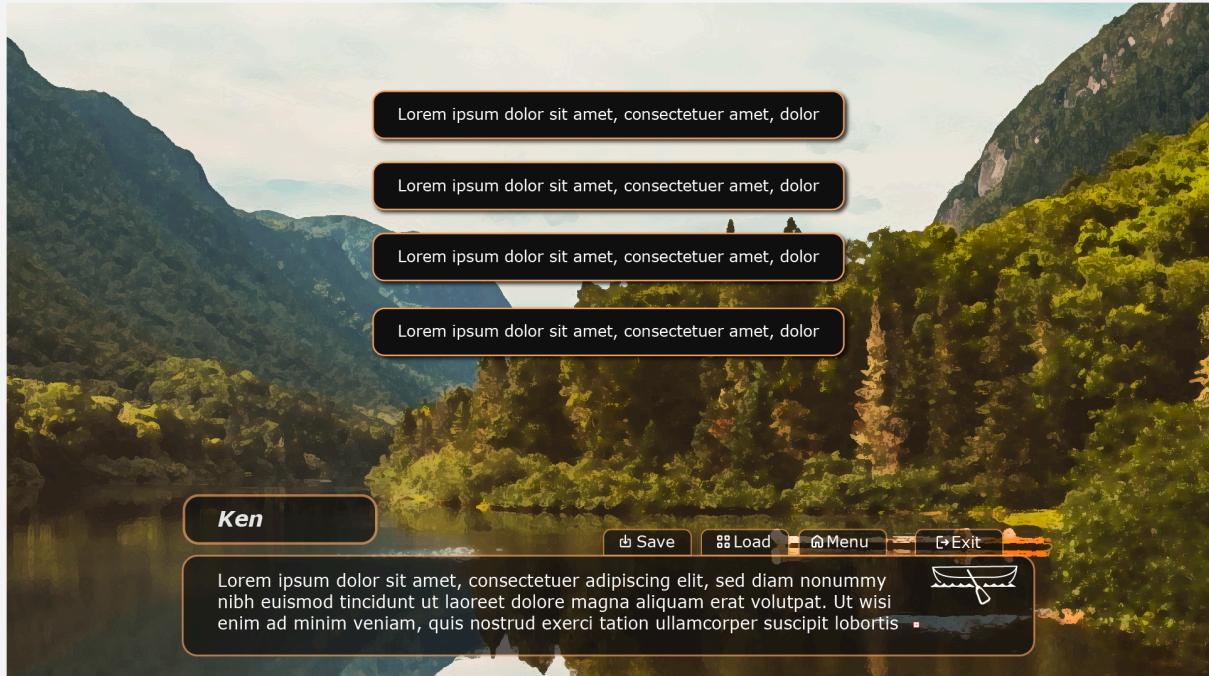


Image 13: Final Iteration of the User Interface

12. Art

12.1. Layers

When arranging the assets, we must keep in mind the three layers of display:

- Background Layer, which displays background assets.
- Character Portraits, which display character assets.
- HUD Layer, which displays dialogue boxes and interactive button elements.

12.2. Style Guide

Backgrounds are currently produced by editing photographs downloaded from Unsplash. When searching for backgrounds it's important to take their composition into account; they must be able to convey a first-person perspective by keeping the horizontal line approximately at eye level. To attempt to create cohesion between backgrounds, our Artists use Photoshop to color correct them, edit their contrast curve and apply a Dry Brush Filter.

When deciding on character drawing styles we heavily referenced the game The Arcana, following an independent artist's [guide](#) on ways to replicate that same character style.

12.3. Moodboards

Our moodboard represents some art styles we would have liked to implement, however, due to restraints of time within our group, we decided to experiment with quicker alternatives for asset production. The annexed file shows a newer version of the initial moodboard. We took inspiration from different cartoon shows due to the nature of the comedy style to the same feeling we wanted our game to have in the player.

The color palette tends to stay to warmer tones but still include some cold tones. This decision was due to the fact our theme is waterways so naturally water and blues should be included, and because it is a romantic game the warmer tones give a more cozy and romantic feel.

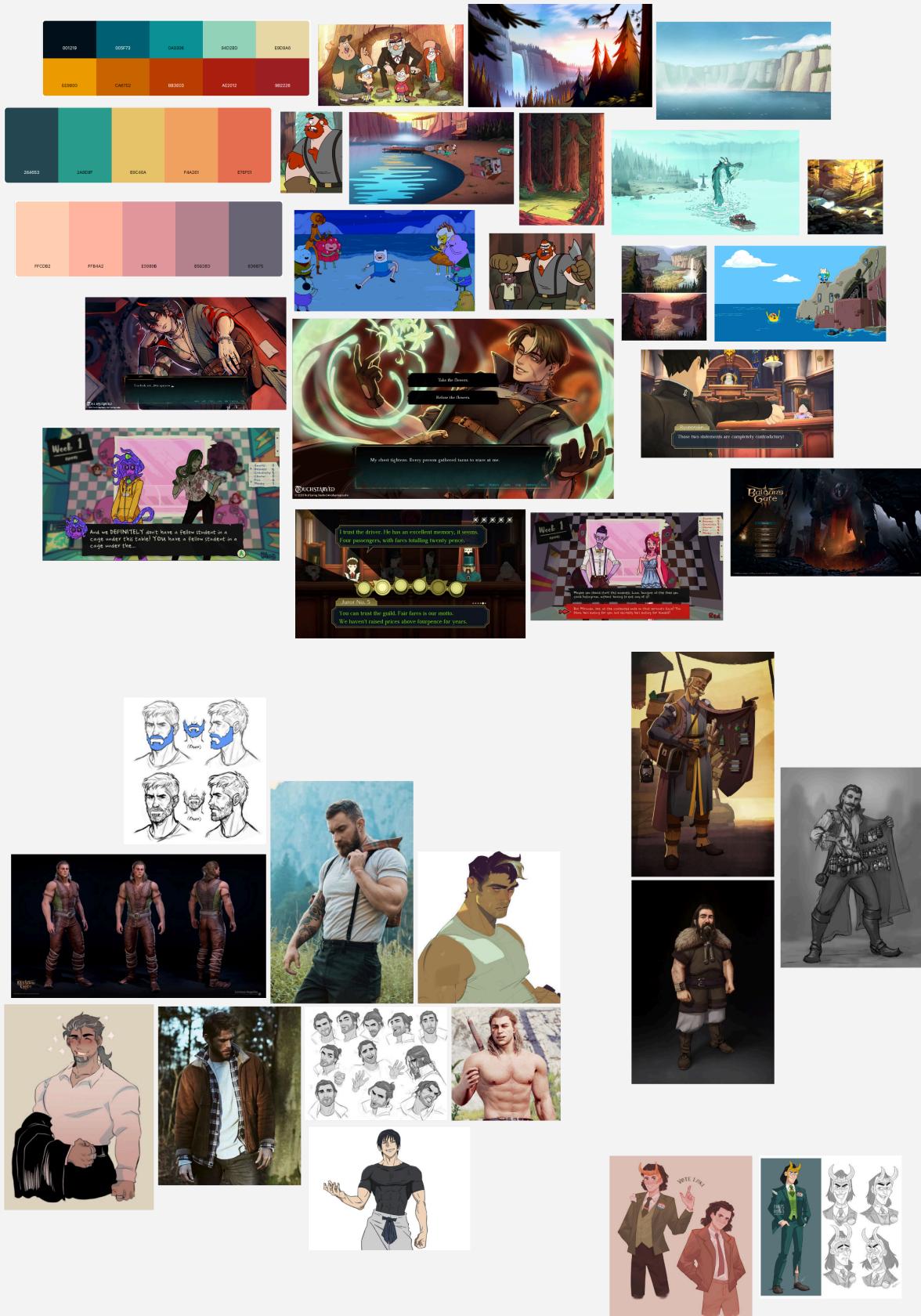


Image 14: Moodboard