Game Design Document

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Rusty Rat
Studios

1. Summary

The game will be built around 3 core design tenets:
1. Psychological Horror
2. Choice
3. Fun

1.1 Gameplay Summary

The player begins each level in the safe bedroom of an old man they are taking care of. Each level the Old Man sends them to find a Key Item, at which point they must enter a randomly generated level of a haunted house. As they travel through the house, they will see or hear clues of ghost presence in various rooms, some of whom may attack the player through possessed items.

As the player takes damage, they change state from "Living" to "Dying" to "Dead" where they can see ghosts more directly, but are at more risk of direct attacks from the ghosts. If the player dies, they must make a high-risk cannonball run back to where they died to repossess their body, at which point they return to the "Living" state and can continue playing as normal. If the player takes damage in the "Dead" state, they lose the game.

When the player successfully retrieves the Key Item and returns it to the Old Man, they move on to the next level. After completing 5 levels, the player has won the game.

1.2 Theme Summary

The game follows the relationship between an obligated caregiver and a toxic care-receiver. The story and dialogue between the two explores the many facets of narcissistic abuse, where the player will find little appreciation and acknowledgement of the hard work and risks they take to satisfy the Old Man. The pallor of the dialogue demonstrates the personal and emotional damage of such a relationship, which is also reflected through the gameplay itself.

The game also explores caregiver burnout and depression, suggesting that as the Old Man clings to life through the caregiver's actions that they are incrementally draining the life out of the caregiver, turning them into a ghost of their former self. This is seen through the gameplay as the player must struggle to maintain their strength and capability as they straddle the boundary between life and death in the face of ever-increasing

demands without recognition. In this way, the game exemplifies the "drain" such a relationship can have on somebody, leading to a diminishment of their own life or even leading them to death itself. This is further implied by mechanics such as the player's spirit returning to the Old Man before venturing to resurrect themselves, suggesting both that their life essence itself has become "owned" by the old man and they must struggle to distance themselves from him to begin feeling alive again.

2. Player

2.1 Player Actions

There are only a few actions that the player can take:
1. Moving
2. Interacting with environment (open doors, etc)
3. Using items

2.2 Player Vision

The player will have a limited field of view depending on where the player character is facing, controlled by the mouse or the right analog-stick on a controller.

2.3 Player States

There are three states the player moves through as they play the game: Living, Dying, and Dead. Each state has their respective strengths and weaknesses. The Living and Dying states are very similar, whereas the Dead state is a very short-lived and different gameplay style.
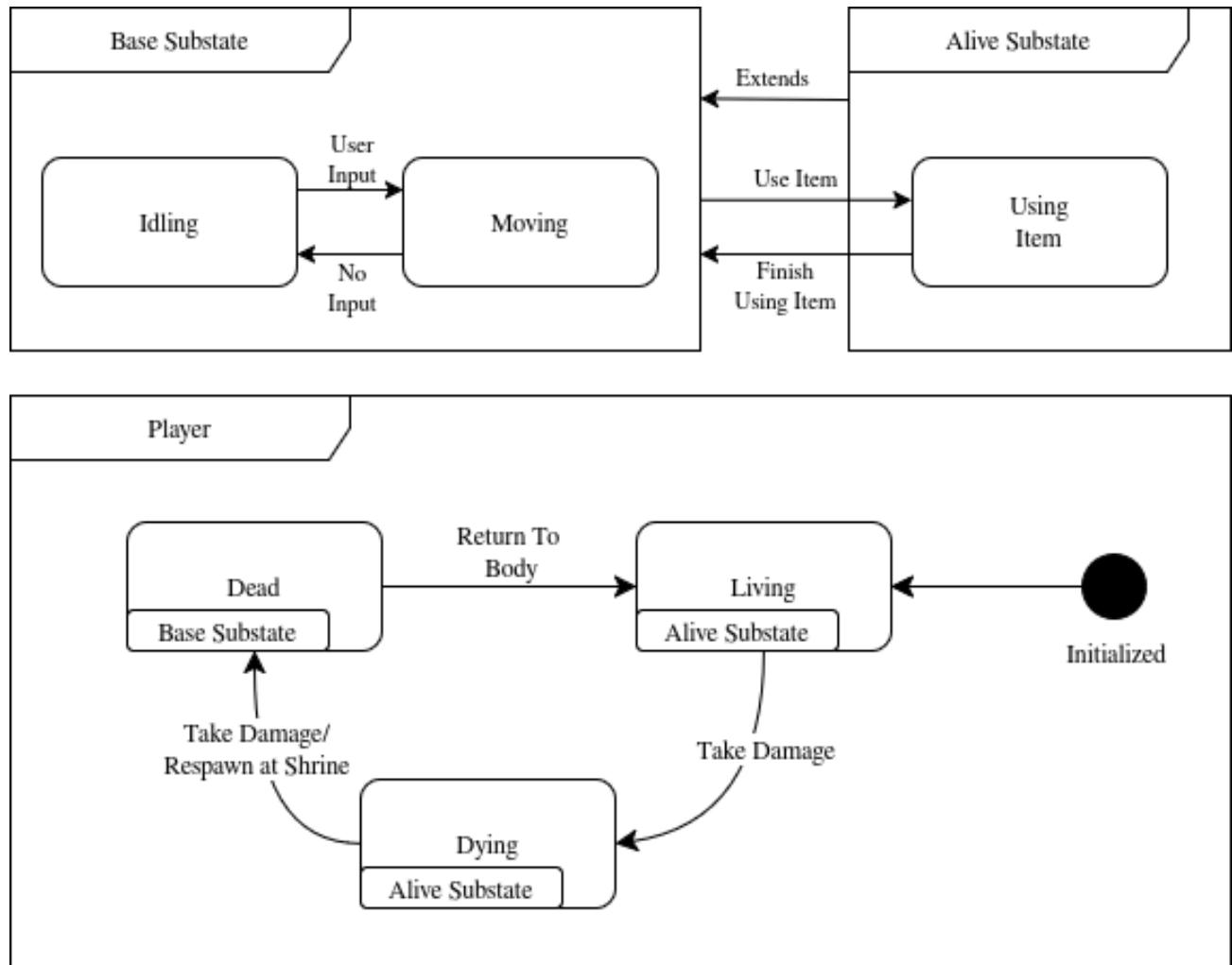
1. **Living**

In this state, the player has full capability and very little risk from direct ghost attacks, but no direct visibility/information on ghosts or what they are doing. Ghosts must possess an object to be able to damage the player, at which point they move to the "Dying" state. While "Living," the player can only see a subtle effect on possessed items (e.g. painting eyes follow you across the room) to identify whether a ghost is nearby or not.

2. **Dying**

In this state, the player has taken damage and has reduced capabilities (e.g. moves slower, shorter vision range, takes longer to do actions, etc). The player is more vulnerable and ghosts can directly "attack" to apply debuffs to the player. However, in this state the player

can see ghosts directly, providing more direct information to the player. If the player takes damage in this state from a possessed item attack, they move to the "Dead" state.

3. **Dead**:

In this state, the player has "died" and their spirit is completely separated from their body, having entered the "spirit world." The player is much quicker and has full vision of all ghosts but is also at the highest risk because now all ghosts can and will directly attack them. The player additionally cannot use any items they have obtained, as well as dropping the Key Item if they were carrying it. If the player takes damage in this state from any contact with a ghost, they are truly defeated and lose the game. If the player manages to find their body where they "died," they can repossess it and return to the "Living" state.

2.3 Death and Revival

When a player enters the Dead state, their spirit detaches from their body and is teleported to the nearest shrine. The player then has to do a "mad dash" cannonball run back to their body to re-possess themselves, at which point they return to the Living state.

Returning to the Living state provides a reprieve after the intense "chase" scene to make it back to the player's body. It would feel bad for the player to be put back into the Dying state only to be very vulnerable to the many ghosts still nearby or that followed you there, including Boss ghosts with specific aggression related to the Dying state.

3. Ghosts

3.1 Ghost Types

There are two types of ghosts: "Normal" ghosts which are common and less dangerous, and "Boss" ghosts which are a single, more aggressive ghost with a unique identity and behavior per floor.

3.2 Bosses

Boss ghosts are unique per level and act as a distinct "stalker" type enemy that is much more dangerous than the normal ghosts. This feature was implemented as a generic boss ghost for the project day build. Below are future possible developments into boss types in a future version of the game.

1. **Bloodhound** - a blind, but scent-driven ghost that pursues the player in their injured state. Watch out if it catches up to you!

a. the Old Man's dog
b. uninterested in the player during the "living" state
c. follows the player's "blood trail" they leave behind in the dying state
d. <u>sounds</u>: sniffing/snuffling as it tracks them, getting louder as it gets near, distant howling, growling if it spots them, barking if it catches up to player

2. **Wailing Siren** - a destitute, hopeless spirit the player can hear crying and wailing from many rooms away.
   a. The old man's daughter or granddaughter
   b. sticks to a very small area, but is highly aggressive if triggered (player gets too close, makes too much noise, produces too much light near it)
   c. may slowly wander from room to room
   d. <u>sounds</u>: soft crying and weeping as they get closer, screaming if triggered

3. **Old Crone** - a corrupted grandmother figure who searches out the player.
   a. the old man's wife
   b. acts very aggressive once it spots the player
   c. <u>sounds</u>: fussing, chattering, cleaning (sweeping, etc)

4. **Creep** - a perverse ghost that gets a kick from stalking the player before pouncing on its prey.
   a. old man's bastard child
   b. mostly non-aggressive until it catches up to the player, spontaneously violent
   c. when spotted from a distance, it runs off to hide before searching out the player to creep up on them again
   d. <u>sounds</u>: snickering to itself, goes quiet when the player goes quiet

5. **Chatterbox** - a loud ghost that follows the player and attracts other normal ghosts to come attack and player.
   a. Old Man's sister - comes around and tells you about all the extra things you should be doing in your care of him

6. **Nurse** - someone a previous family member had hired as a third-party to take care of the Old Man.
   a. Was indoctrinated while taking care of him, chastises player with terrible things the Old Man said to them about you - "He told me you don't really care about him"

3.3 Boss Source

A boss ghost is tied to a "Ghost Source" room that acts as its optional "boss room." Boss ghosts may wander away from their source room depending on their type. A boss ghost's final confrontation is available when the player brings a Key Item to the Ghost Source room. This rewards the player with a powerful item. (future development)

3.4 Ghost Actions
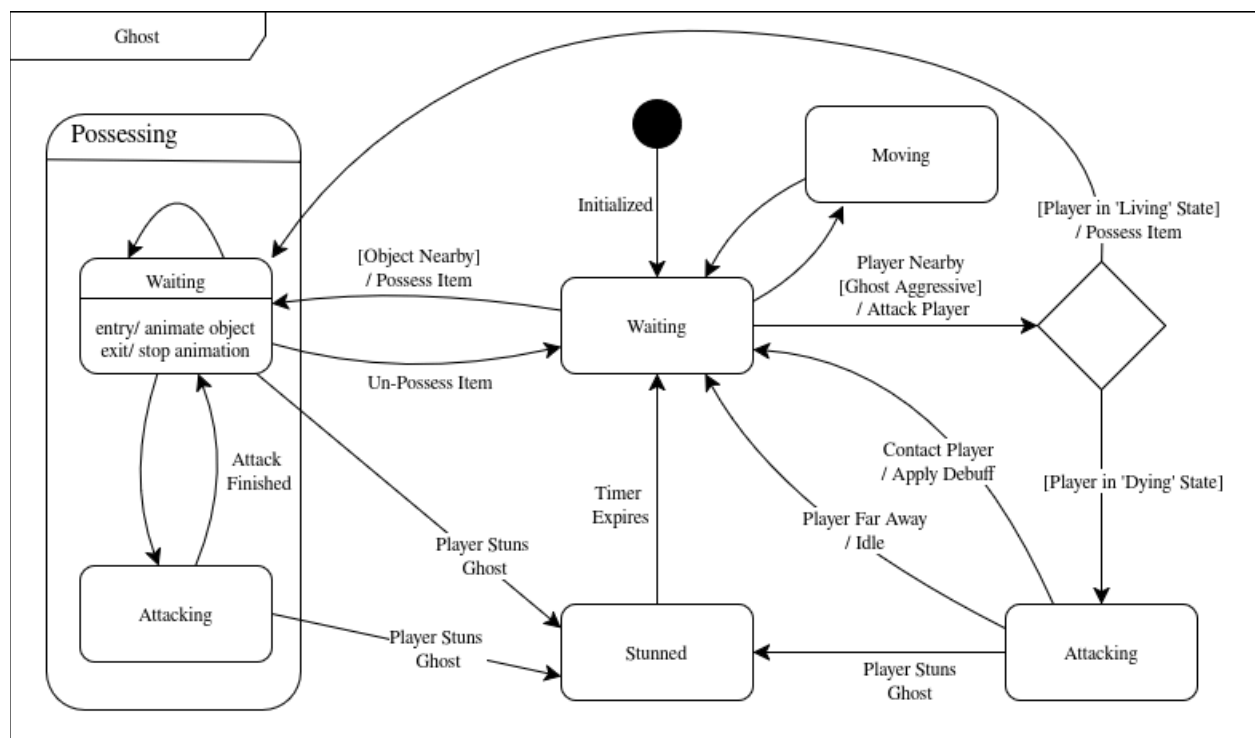
Figure 3.1: Ghost state chart

3.4.1 Possession

Ghosts have an RNG roll on a timer to check if they want to possess an item. If the ghost is going to possess an item, it selects a random item from the environment to possess. Once an item is possessed, the ghost enters a sub-state where they make another RNG check to take an action to wait, attack the player, or depossess the object.

When possessing an item, the ghost may also lock all the doors to the room, requiring the player to find and de-possess the ghost (or wait until it de-possesses on its own) before being able to leave the room.

Possession chance modifiers:
1. Distance from player (decrease possession chance as distance increases)
2. Global aggression modifier (increased if player is carrying a Key Item)
3. Recent state choices (frequent choices become less likely, infrequent choices become more likely)

Item	Location	Possession Clue	Attack
Painting	All	Eyes follow player, Falls off wall	None
Suit of Armor (future implementation)	All, Armory	Armor occasionally wiggles	Follows player and attacks
Bookshelf	All, Library	Books slide in and out	Throws book at player
Kitchen drawers (future implementation)	Kitchen	Drawer is slightly open and cutlery inside is shaking	Throws knives at player
Ornamental Weapons	All, Armory	Item occasionally wiggles	(One time) Weapon is thrown at player
Lamp (future implementation)	All	Lampshade shakes	(Player is near) lamp turns upside down and swings heavy lamp-base at player
Houseplant (future implementation)	All, Greenhouse	Plant tips slightly "float"	(Player is near) grabs and holds player in place
Children's Furniture or Play-Items (future implementation)	All, Nursery		
Box and Crate	All	Box floats	Throws box at the player,

| Vase | All | Vase floats | Throws vase at player shattering it on impact |
| Ignitable(candle, fireplace, sconce) | All | Object glows | Snuffs or ignites the light source. |

Table 3.1: Possessable items

3.4.2 Direct Ghost Attack

A ghost may only "directly" attack the player if they are in the "Dying" or "Dead" states. If the player is in the "Dying" state, a direct ghost attack applies a debuff. If the player is in the "Dead" state, a direct ghost attack will result in the game ending.

3.4.3 Move

If the ghost decides to move, it will simply move towards a different room.

3.4.4 Wait

If the ghost decides to wait, it will simply stay idle for a short amount of time and move around the room it currently occupies.

3.4.5 Stunned

If the player stuns a ghost, it de-possesses any item it may be occupying and is disabled from taking any actions for a short period of time.

4. Items

The player's only tools are defensive ways to protect themselves. The player ultimately has no direct ability to attack or destroy a ghost, but may have many options to make ghosts flee or temporarily disable them. There are five item categories:
1. Defensive/Primary (single slot)
2. Active Ability (single slot)
3. Consumable (single slot)
4. Passive (unlimited amount)
5. Key Item (Old Man requested item, only one per floor)

Item cooldowns are separate for each item (i.e. defense items may have a cooldown of 1 or 2 seconds, but ability items may have a separate cooldown of 30 or 60 seconds). Items as a reward are presented in pairs where the player can only pick one out of the two.

4.1 Defense Items:

Defense items are the player's primary "defense" against the ghosts and provide a more direct way to interact with ghosts with a short cooldown period.

Item	Description	Ability
Crucifix		Creates a temporary shield around character to protect from direct ghost attacks - cannot protect from physical harm (e.g. possessed item attacks) - Any contact with a ghost while under the protective effect stuns the ghost - Any contact with a possessed item causes the ghost to de-possess it and become stunned
Ghost Trap	(future implementation)	Drop a ritual circle that stuns ghosts who enter
UV Light	(future implementation)	

Table 4.1: Defense items

4.2 Active Ability Items:

Active ability items provide a powerful ability or effect and have a longer cooldown period.

Item	Description	Ability
Soul Stone	(future implementation)	Temporarily project the player's "spirit" into the Dead state. Upon running out of time or taking damage as a spirit, return to your previous state where you started - Select an adjacent room to spawn in, can be through walls (but cannot travel through walls after spawning) - Strongly limited vision (to increase

Item	Description	Ability
		jumpscare/risk factor if ghost encountered and increase "search anxiety" as the player is required to get close to objects they want to investigate)
Looking Stone		Create a circular "ping" that briefly reveals ghosts as if you were in the dead state (whole-screen, extends past ordinary vision)
Salt	(future implementation)	Place across doorways to temporarily block ghosts from following you - Also disallows player from crossing threshold in the Dead state
Lamp Oil		Temporarily increases player light levels.

Table 4.2: Defense items

4.3 Consumable:

Consumable items are powerful, single-use items that provide a specific benefit.

Item	Description	Ability
Holy Water		Bless a room to temporarily evacuate all ghosts and prevent them from re-entering
Blood of Christ (wine)	(future implementation)	
Ouija Board	(future implementation)	Placed on the ground to attract ghosts to possess it, but does not allow them to attack from it.
Body of Christ (wafer)	(future implementation)	Absorbs damage for you, consuming one use of the item
Something	(future implementation)	Teleport to nearest/first/last-visited shrine - Resets key item if player is carrying it

Incense		Temporarily de-possesses and stuns all ghosts in the room
Red Marker	(future implementation)	Draw a pentagram to lure and temporarily trap boss ghost - Boss ghost is completely visible in any state

Table 4.3: Consumable items

4.4 Passive:

Passive items provide constant, marginal benefits to the player when acquired.

Item	Description	Ability
Love Letter	(future implementation)	Increase defense item duration
Rosary		Increase defense item area
Black Coffee	(future implementation)	Decrease active item cooldown
Carrots		Increase vision radius
Tea		Increases speed

Table 4.4: Passive items

4.5 Key Items:

These are the primary goal of a level that the Old Man sends the player to collect and return. They provide a random debuff when picked up and increase the aggressiveness of all ghosts when held. Key items can be taken to the boss ghost source room to obtain a bonus item. If the player is holding a key item when entering Dead state, it moves back to its spawn room - this prevents the player from incrementally "creeping" the key item closer to the goal every time they die and revive.

Item	Description	Debuff
Spoon Collection	(future implementation)	

Violin	(future implementation)	
Smoking Pipe		
Monocle	(future implementation)	
Reading Glasses		
Walking Cane	(future implementation)	
Badge/Insignia	(future implementation)	
Fountain Pen	(future implementation)	
Old Weapon	(future implementation)	
Teapot	(future implementation)	
Teacup & Saucer	(future implementation)	
Watch	(future implementation)	
Slippers	(future implementation)	
Journal	(future implementation)	

Table 4.5: Key items

Uncategorized
- Doll
- Bible
- Creepy Book (Necronomicon, etc)
- Bedpan

5. Encounters

The gameplay interaction between the player and ghosts, the information available to the player, and the decisions a player may make are all different depending on the state the player is currently in:

1. **Living**:

   The gameplay largely revolves around exploring the level, looking for clues of ghost activity, and dodging possessed item attacks. The player also has full utility of their item set.

2. **Dying**:

   The gameplay revolves around the player defending themselves more directly as ghosts are now capable of direct attacks as well as possessed item attacks. The player has more information and can make better decisions, but must be more careful as they are at a higher risk of being injured and losing the game.

3. **Dead**:

   The gameplay has a high-stakes "cannonball run" feel as the player has absolutely no defense capability except for avoiding attacks, but a much higher movement speed making avoiding attacks easier. The player may elect to risk "scouting" the map in this vulnerable state before returning to their body for revival.

6. Map Layout

   Each level is randomly generated with an expected completion time of 5-15 minutes depending on the player's exploration decision, combat encounters, and luck. Each map is guaranteed to have a Key Item room, a Ghost Source room, at least one Item Room, and at least one Shrine room.

   6.1 Room Types
   - Key Item Room
   - Ghost Source
   - Old Man + Level Entrance Room
      - Entrance room doubles as permanent Shrine
      - Can be used as infinite Dead-state spawn point
   - Shrine Room
      - Safe space from ghosts that the player gets a single use of resurrection from

- - After reviving, deactivates shrine
- - Can teleport between active shrines (i.e. unable to after used for revival)
- Item Room
- Regular Rooms
- Courtyard/Garden
- Hallway

6.2 Level Types (future implementation)
- Kitchen
- Armory
- Dungeon
- Storage Cellar, Wine Cellar
- Guest Wing
- Library/Study
- Art Gallery
- Nursery

6.3 Map Generation

Do we want it to feel like a maze? And if so, how do we let the player help themselves navigate around?
- map vs. player-dropped markers (i.e. lit torches in rooms visited)

1. Initial skeleton of rooms and hallways
   - ensures pathways between key rooms (i.e. start, key item room, ghost source)
2. "decorate" skeleton with extra rooms
   a. include refactoring basic rooms to be fancy, large (combine multiple rooms), etc
   b. Branches (loops, dead-ends), singleton rooms (1-way in/out)

7. Story

The story revolves around environmental storytelling and the interactions between the player character and the Old Man. The general theme is the abusive relationship where the player acts as the caregiver to an ungrateful, narcissistic elder.

7.1 Environmental Storytelling
- Twist that all of the boss ghosts are the rest of the Old Man's family who was drained by him over time until their bodies decayed and they turned into the haunted spirits they are now - same as he is currently doing to the player

Player is a modern character coming into a "vintage" setting of a manor without any upgrades for many decades. Old Man has vintage ideals, Amish-style "I don't need it"
- source of strain in relationship when player introduces new, helpful things
- maybe some of the horror is the stress of trying to convince someone to take the help they need (e.g. use a walker when they need to but refuse to)

7.2 Final Confrontation (future implementation)
The final moment when you and/or the old man turn against each other. It should follow the theme of exploring the boundary between fully living, slowly dying, and the moment of death. The old man should take some creepy, expectation defy-ing action
- "You've failed me." - the response to the player doing everything right; reinforcement of "never good enough"
- Gets out of bed and starts shuffling after you, hurting you if he reaches you (incredibly slow)
  - Eventually trips and dies
  - Transforms into angry super-boss ghost
- Has a heart attack in bed
  - Transforms into super-boss ghost
  - Maybe player can "revive" him with CPR in a short window of time (or stand and watch them die like Walter White with Jessie's gf :O), but he actually wanted to die and becomes enraged on revival

8. Meta-Progression (future implementation)

8.1 Expected Playtime

Our goal is to develop enough content to achieve 10-15 gameplay hours before the game gets "stale" or the player begins to optimize their decision or develop a meta-strategy.

8.2 Progression
The player can unlock a larger pool of items to discover in a run by completing objectives (hand in key-item, defeat boss ghost, etc)

9. User Experience

The game will be developed such that as few button presses as possible must be executed for the player to achieve an action. For example, to open a door a player must simply collide with it to begin opening it rather than pressing a button to interact with it. An obvious exception to this include using different types of items, which would each require a unique button assignment.

9.1 User Interface
Most importantly, any visual object the player is expected to "consume" (i.e. read or click) must prioritize ease-of-use over any thematic stylization. For example, buttons and other interactables (items, doors, dialogue interactions) must be as obvious as possible.

All items to do with menus may be stylized to match the horror theme, but must not interfere with their interactivity or disguise their purpose. For example, a menu button's text must be readable above all else, but the button background and border may be heavily stylized to match the horror theme since they do not interfere with the button purpose shown through the text.

Appendix

A Asset Inventory

An inventory of all audio/visual components required for the game can be found by following the link: [Asset Inventory](#)

B Business Case

The business case for the game can be found by following the link: [Business Case](#)

C Implementation Details

The implementation details for the game development can be found by following the link: [Implementation Details](#)

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