

SKULD

Frame Narratives, Player Curiosity, and Exploration

Design Document 3.0: Release

Tuna Salad Studios

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1. General Design Outline and Goals

1.1 Game Design

The key design goals for *Skuld* (henceforth, “the project” or “the game”) are to incite a sense of curiosity in the player of the world that they are experiencing this story in. The project will primarily achieve this aesthetic through three key attributes of the game:

I. Compelling Narrative

- A. By creating a strong, grounded narrative, we intend for the player to want to learn more about the world and the characters within.

II. Explorable World

- A. When the player learns more about the narrative and characters of the game, they will be able to find more information in hidden areas and easter eggs scattered in throughout the game for the player to find.

III. Musical Storytelling

- A. The music of the project is going to be a defining aspect of the narrative presentation. The moods of key moments in the game will be defined by the musical presentation. The player will desire to hear more of the musical ambience. The hidden areas and easter eggs might hold some of the interesting musical presentation

These three attributes will create a feedback loop to encourage the player to take the game slowly and enjoy the ambience of the gameworld. Although the game can be completed in 30 minutes (perhaps less), there will be a solid chunk of content for the player to explore outside of the main narrative plot. Content may be found by noticing a crack in the wall in a cave, or by solving one of the main plot puzzles in a certain way to unlock another path. The player will face puzzles and riddles that Father (the player) will have to overcome. They can solve riddles and puzzles through some of the books that they carry with them, or by using basic puzzle/problem solving skills. All in all, the player will not have freedom to influence the story, but in how they choose to experience it by going through it at their own pace.

1.2 Setting and Narrative

First, the document will go over the setting. Relative to our time; the story would take place in the past. In terms of planetary location; the story would take place on post-Pangaea Earth, but in an unnamed country. However, the storyworld is not a direct copy of the Planet Earth. There is no technological development or religious influences from our world on the societies in the story world. The plot will begin with the initial player character walking into a large temple to seek guidance from the Oracle of Skuld. Afterwards, the game will have many interesting events and challenges that are presented to the player in the story of their their father. These events and challenges take place across many different areas, such as:

➤ The Township:

- The home of the main characters (Child and Father). It contains a library that holds many ancient texts. Skuld intrudes upon the narrative by burning down the library. The player must find the proper texts and escape before the building burns down.

➤ The Temple of Skuld/Gauntlet:

- A temple dedicated to the all knowing deity, Skuld, and home to The Oracle of Skuld. Here Child and Father meet Skuld to seek counsel.

➤ The Grove of the Sunwillows:

- A hidden grove that is the only place to find key reagents. Father needs to find a rare flower that cures Ahelioism, but they are only in the Grove of the Sunwillows guarded by a peculiar and powerful guardian that holds an eternal vigil over the Grove. Father must find

his way through the large grove, magical grove and solve a puzzle to find the petals.

➤ **Stein's Tower:**

- The tower of a fabled apothecary who can make almost any potion in the storyworld. Unable to create the cure himself, Father seeks the council of Stein, a renowned apothecary who would be able to make the potion. The tower would have a few floors with simple puzzles. Stein does not normally want visitors and sets up the traps to prevent them from entering. However, after Father solves the puzzles, Stein respects him and his goals and decides to help him. But not for free.

Something important to note is that there are no choices in the game's narrative. It is not a manipulatable narrative. However, the player can decide to read more into the lore of the world if they desire. Then, they may develop their own understanding of the storyworld.

1.3 Characters

In the game, there are three primary characters:

- The Child: The character who seeks answers about his father. Was plagued by sickness and his father went out to find a cure. After being cured of his illness, the Child seeks answers as to where his father went, what he did, and what has become of him.
- The Father: A normally simple man who breaks out of his comfort zone to find a cure for Ahelioism. The father loved only one thing; family. Saving his Child was his only motivation.

- Skuld: an otherworldly being. An oracle of sorts which holds powers and knowledge beyond many people in our world. He is also known to be very dangerous and something of a last resort for favors and aid. Skuld is shrouded in mystery and darkness. Their motivations are not easily determined. They do not follow any form of moralistic compass comparable to ours.

1.4 Beta Storyboard

- Opening scene
- Stage 1
 - Searching for a cure for Ahelioism
 - Escaping the burning library
- Cutscene
 - Teleports player to stage 2
- Stage 2: Grove of Sunwillows
 - Searching Grove of the Sunwillows for Rota Petals and other components of the cure
- Cutscene
 - Teleports player to stage 3
- Stage 3
 - Goes to the Stein's Tower, home of the apothecary, so Stein can make a cure for Ahelioism
- Cutscene
 - Teleports player to stage 4
 - Cinematic of Father's cure failing to cure Child
- Stage 4: Finale
 - A repeat of the beginning stage, but from the perspective of Father

1.5 Gold Storyboard

- Opening Stage
 - Introducing Skuld, Father, and Child as the main characters
- Stage 1
 - Searching for a cure for Ahelioism
 - Escaping the burning library
- Cutscene
 - Teleports player to stage 2
- Stage 2: Grove of Sunwillows
 - Searching Grove of the Sunwillows for Rota Petals and other components of the cure
- Cutscene
 - Teleports player to stage 3
- Stage 3: Stein's Tower
 - Goes to the Stein's Tower, home of the apothecary, so Stein can make a cure for Ahelioism
- Cutscene
 - Cinematic of Father's cure failing to cure Child
- Stage 4: Finale/Gauntlet
 - Skuld reveals he kidnapped Father and now Child must save him
 - Father and Child escape the crumbling temple and

2. Music and audio

2.1 Non-diegetic music

- Situational and mood music
 - A fresh take on the epic journey music

- Each level has unique music that was originally composed and designed to set the mood, help the storytelling and create tension and relaxation as needed.
- Tools used:
 - Varied instrumentation: string orchestra, brass orchestra, synthesizers (subtractive synthesis), percussion (for urgency and intensity)
 - using instrumentation as leitmotifs as opposed to melodic statements (textural composition)
 - Synthesized or digital vs natural instrumentation
 - Music storytelling:
 - The 'endless melody' giving a sense of being lost and confused (in the town scene)
 - Using rhythm to build up tension - from eight notes accents to sixteenth notes accents (in Stein's tower)
 - Skuld 'sound' becomes more prominent, almost poisoning the 'pure' natural sounds as the game progresses (cinematic when Father decides to go to Skuld as a last resort)
 - Distortion effects

2.2 Diegetic audio & sound design

- Realist sound design
 - Imitating the sounds of the real world
 - Footsteps
 - Voices (8-bit inspired)
 - Outside and room noise
 - Any action related trigger (falling bookshelves, sliding boulder, etc.)
 - Realist spatialization
 - Using convolution reverb (footsteps in Stein's tower)
 - Stereo panning (the cinematic where father reads a book by a campfire, the fire crackling sounds is isolated to the right channel)

- Filtering and EQ (using Low pass filters to give the sense of distance)
- Tools used:
 - Foley libraries, sample libraries, recorded soundscapes, synthesized sounds, modulation effects to create spatial variety
 - Effects and mixing plug-ins (EQ, filters, reverbs, bitcrusher, distortion, echo, etc.)
 - *Musique concrète* to create “horror” or “otherworldly” soundscapes (audio manipulation)

2.3 Influences

- Artists: *Disasterpeace, Krzysztof Penderecki, Jean-Claude Risset, Daphne Oram, Morton Subotnik, Brian Eno, Hans Zimmer*
- Specific works: *Hyper Light Drifter, It Follows, Threnody for the Victims of Hiroshima, Sud, Four aspects, Silver apples of the moon, The Lost day, Gone Girl, There will be blood, The unanswered question, Inception, Interstellar*

3. Bureaucracy

3.1 Milestones

1. Milestone 3: Design document - **September 26th 6:00pm**
 - Complete opening scene (by October 2nd)
 - Complete first level (by October 9th)
2. Milestone 4: Vertical slice I - **October 10 12:00pm**
 - Complete prototypes for puzzles in remaining 3 levels (by October 16th)
 - Complete remaining 3 levels (by October 23rd)
3. Milestone 5: Vertical slice II - **October 23 3:00pm**
 - Complete end scene (by October 30th)

- Free week to fix any issues/bugs/make minor changes (by November 9th)
- 4. Milestone 6: Beta release - **November 9 5:00pm**
 - Designing and creating team logo (by November 16th)
 - Creating trailer (by November 30th)
- 5. Milestone 7: Game trailer - **November 30 10:00am**
 - Fixing issues/bugs/making changes (by December 7th)
- 6. Milestone 9: Gold release - **December 7 6:00pm**
 - Celebration and relaxation before realization that finals are coming!
- 7. Milestone 10: Team and course evaluation - **December 8 6:00pm**
 - Saying farewells and fully realize that finals are here and we've spent so much time on this game and really need to study!

3.2 Contingencies and Challenges

If time starts becoming a problem, our contingency plan will be the cutting of puzzles from levels, if a particular puzzle is simply taking too long or we don't have time to put it into the level we will simply cut it. Considering our game will comprise solely of puzzles as its main gameplay mechanic, this contingency plan should suffice.

A few challenges we anticipate is that our puzzles might be too complex to create, which would increase the workload on our part and might distract the player from the story, which is the main focus of the game. In this scenario we would either have to simplify the puzzles or remove them completely. Also the challenge of creating a compelling narrative which is a very core part of our game. The overcoming of these challenges will spring from hard work but also a lot of testing (by us and others).

At this point in our progress, we did have to make use of few of our contingencies. We had to cut one of our levels (the cave level) because it was not able to fit within our narrative scope. Additionally, we had to simplify the narrative because it felt a bit too complex and cryptic. Overall, our project has become more grounded. The

audio design is without a doubt our best quality and something we aim to highlight as we refine the project past beta.