CART 412 – W1NTER 2020

ART1ST DOSS1ER

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BIOGRAPHY

Yasmine Roy lives and studies in Montreal. Being a self-taught artist, her drawing skills originated from the popular anime style, and eventually morphed into more realistic art. Her university studies in Computation Arts at Concordia University, Montreal, also had a strong influence over her art style, pushing her to implement graphic design elements into her illustrative work and pursuing Concept Art as a full-time career choice. She received the “Best Artist” award in her graduating class at the Awty International School in Houston, Texas. Roy also recently participated in the Ubisoft Game Lab Competition in 2020 with fellow Computation Arts students. In addition, she developed a VR project throughout her final year to be featured in the Computation Arts end-of-year show and the Concordia Film Festival 2020. She is currently registered for the Full-Time Intensive Portfolio program at Syn Studio in Montreal, a renowned institution that teaches Concept Art and Illustration.

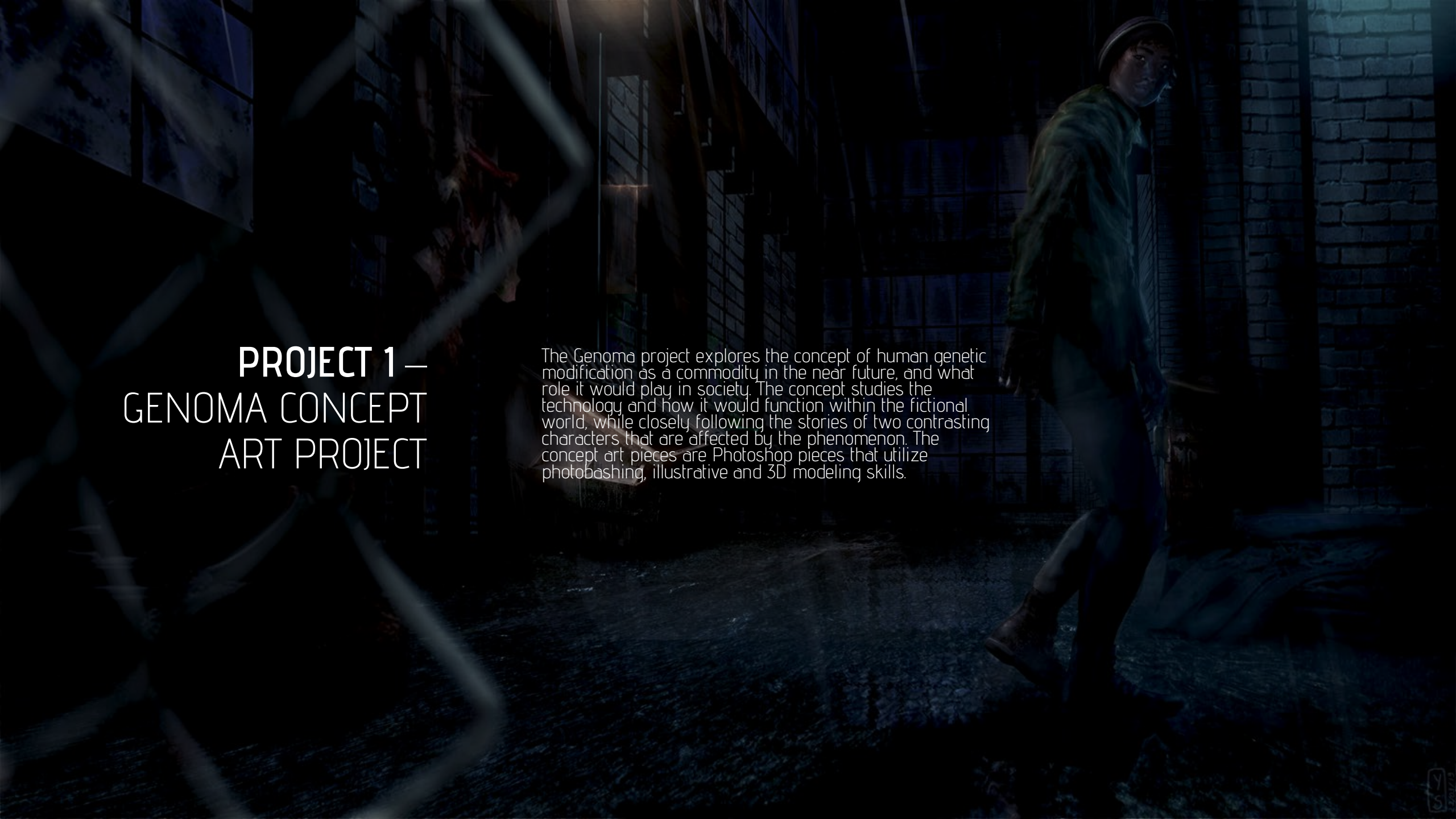
STATEMENT

As an artist who loves storytelling, Concept Art is my main medium. I find that the best way to build your own narrative, to create compelling characters, and to build amazing worlds is through immersive visuals.

My pursuit in professional illustrative and design skills began towards the end of my university career and blossomed from the popular anime and manga styles into elaborate and detailed illustrations. I branch out into different styles, learning new techniques that can be applied into traditional and digital art. In addition, the multitude of influences from my university education, such as graphic design, programming, or 3D modeling, prompt me to think outside the box.
I have developed different Concept Art projects, like the Genoma Project in 2018, which puts into question the socio-political implications of genetic modifications with human individuals. I have also developed a creature compendium called the Flora Project (2020) where flora and fauna gain sentience and become superior creatures.

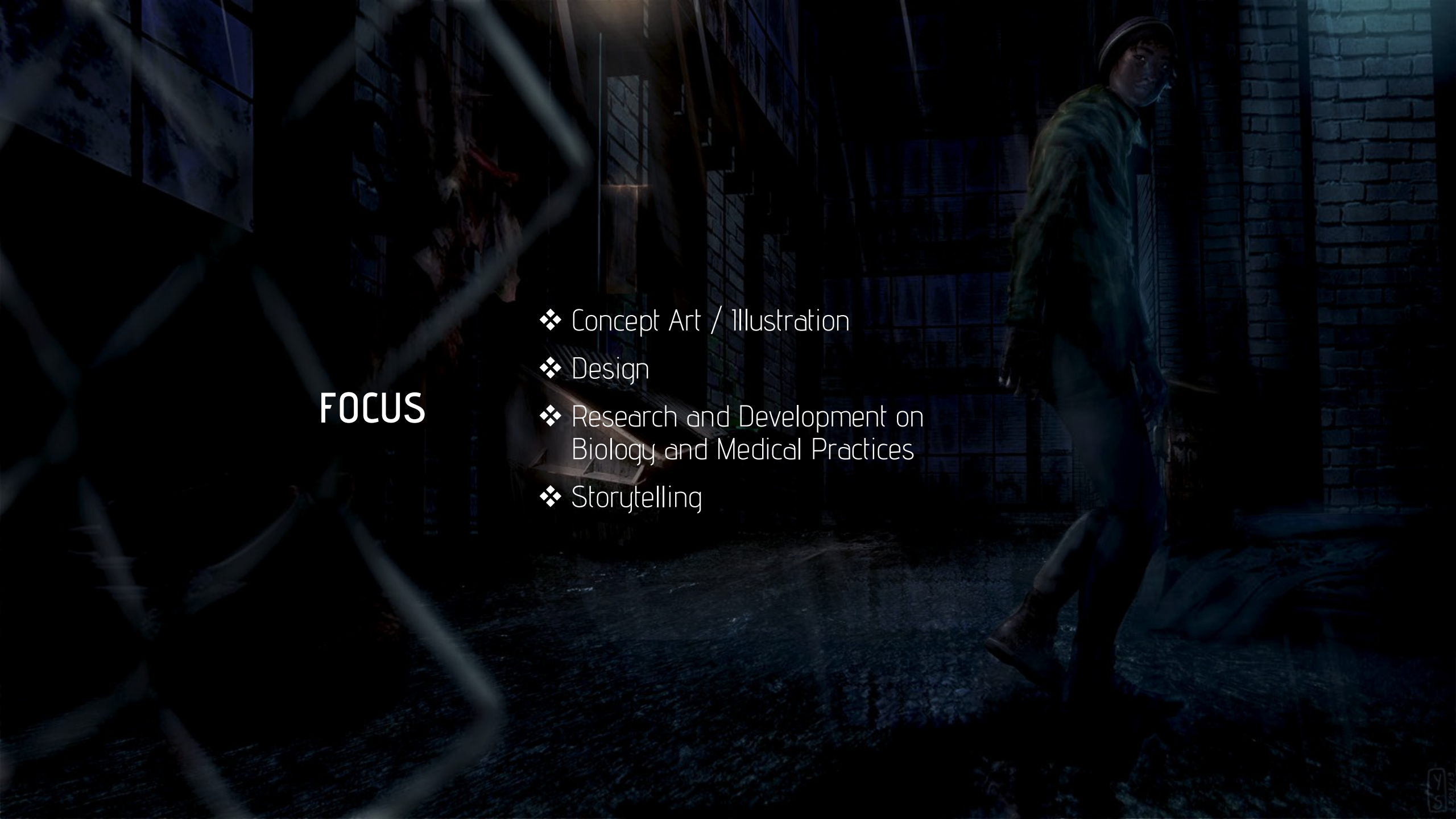
I hope to expand my world and enter the digital realm of art by creating characters that come to life, in games or in movies. By building my artistic experience, and cultivating my creative mindset, I aspire to tell stories that capture people's hearts, and partake in compelling ideas that are brought to life and presented to the world.

WORK EXAMPLES



PROJECT 1 – GENOMA CONCEPT ART PROJECT

The Genoma project explores the concept of human genetic modification as a commodity in the near future, and what role it would play in society. The concept studies the technology and how it would function within the fictional world, while closely following the stories of two contrasting characters that are affected by the phenomenon. The concept art pieces are Photoshop pieces that utilize photobashing, illustrative and 3D modeling skills.



FOCUS

- Concept Art / Illustration
- Design
- Research and Development on Biology and Medical Practices
- Storytelling


XGENOMAX
[DREAM CHANGE]
MODIFICATION
COMPLETE

PROJECT 2 – THE FLORA PROJECT

In this project, I decided to combine procedural 3D modeling with Concept Art. In this universe, Mother nature has taken back the world after years of environmental abuse. Grand human civilizations have been overrun with lush greenery. Many plants have evolved and developed sentience, becoming the most advanced species on earth. These flora and fauna built new civilizations and governments, with humans living as lower-class citizens.


SEMESTER PROJECT
A PINK SKY
CONTINUATION AND EXPANSION

A PINK SKY – 2D PLATFORMER

"You wake up not knowing your name or your face. All you know is that you need to go East."

An open-ended adventure game focused on interaction and discovery. (Link to full documentation here: https://catweng.wixsite.com/cart415-pinksky?fbclid=IwAR3X1X90iKd8peTP7EtkCSwEZ7ADA6qS6_JxQgB483MdKuL_9Td3hgZP5KU)

Catherine Weng: Background/Concept Art & Animation

Yasmine Roy: Programming and Asset Art

Catherine Weng and I worked on this semester project together. The game we designed entails a simple 2D platformer with an emphasis on interactivity and exploration. The artistic design in the game was just as crucial as the core mechanics, with a focus on a colorful 8-bit pixel art style.

ARISING QUESTIONS

How does one use games as a **medium** to create an **immersive universe for the player**? What is an effective way to integrate a **narrative** into a game while giving the player a sense of **discovery and curiosity**?

What makes games unique as a medium compared to other media like film or literature? What are the advantages of using this medium to construct a narrative?

I wish to construct a narrative using games as a medium to better understand the role of games in storytelling. Therefore, I'll develop a game project that was launched in the previous semester. The point of the project is to explore how narrative contributes to gameplay experience. I want to make a game that immerses the player into a unique story where the player can develop an attachment to the characters and the world.

PREMISE

- The game itself would consist of several " villages" located in a diverse set of geographical environments, like forests, canyons, snowy mountains, and so forth. The player would be able to swiftly move through each village, with their ultimate goal to move " east" , or to the right of the screen.
- Interactivity is a major element in the game; however, it is not a required goal. Indeed, the player has the option to interact with other characters or objects to try to learn more about the protagonist and the world around them, but it is never imposed like other open-world games. We made this decision to allow the player some agency in their gameplay, since the game is meant to be slow-paced.
- Having worked on this project last semester, the focus this semester was really on fine tuning specific aspects of the game that already existed. The dialogue system already put in place was basic in comparison to the level of interactivity we wanted to achieve during gameplay.

REQUIREMENTS

- Knowledge in Unity / Programming
- Game and Level Design
- Pixel Art / Animation
- Interactive Storytelling
- Understanding of Game Mechanics

COMPLETED DEVELOPMENT STAGES

- ✓ **Stage 1 – Playtest Game** – The game has been playtested.
- ✓ **Stage 2 – Clean Up Mechanics** – Many coding issues have been resolved.
- X **Stage 3 – Finish Story and Asset Design** – While more dialogues and story have been added, it is nowhere near being completed.
- ✓ **Stage 4 – Add Any Additional Mechanics** – The dialogue systems were complexified for more engaging gameplay
- ✓ **Stage 5 – Finalize Project** – Prepare the project for final playtesting and presentation.

PLAYTEST NOTES

- " **Controls awkward and complicated**. They should be simplified and limited to no more than one button for interaction."
- " Loading times after each interaction are way too long."
- " **Puzzles should be more straightforward and thought-out**: player might accidentally finish the puzzle and not even realize that they did."
- " **Characters seem a bit one-dimensional** – change the focus of the game so that the player gets to know the characters a bit more. Really focus on that aspect of interaction."

RETHINKING DIALOGUE

To create more compelling gameplay, I started thinking beyond the simple " action/response" -type interaction where the player controls their relationship with the character. However, there was a limit: characters are fictional. They will always be limited in terms of their level of interactivity and will always be somewhat scripted. Therefore, one question arose: **how does one replicate the 3-dimensionality of a person with feelings and thoughts, without having to develop a complex AI system?**

In gaming terms, **an Appreciation Meter and a Moral Meter.**

The player can control their interactions with other characters. However, their decisions will affect their moral standing, which will affect the characters level of interaction.

HOW DO CHARACTERS FEEL "ALIVE"?

RETHINKING DIALOGUE

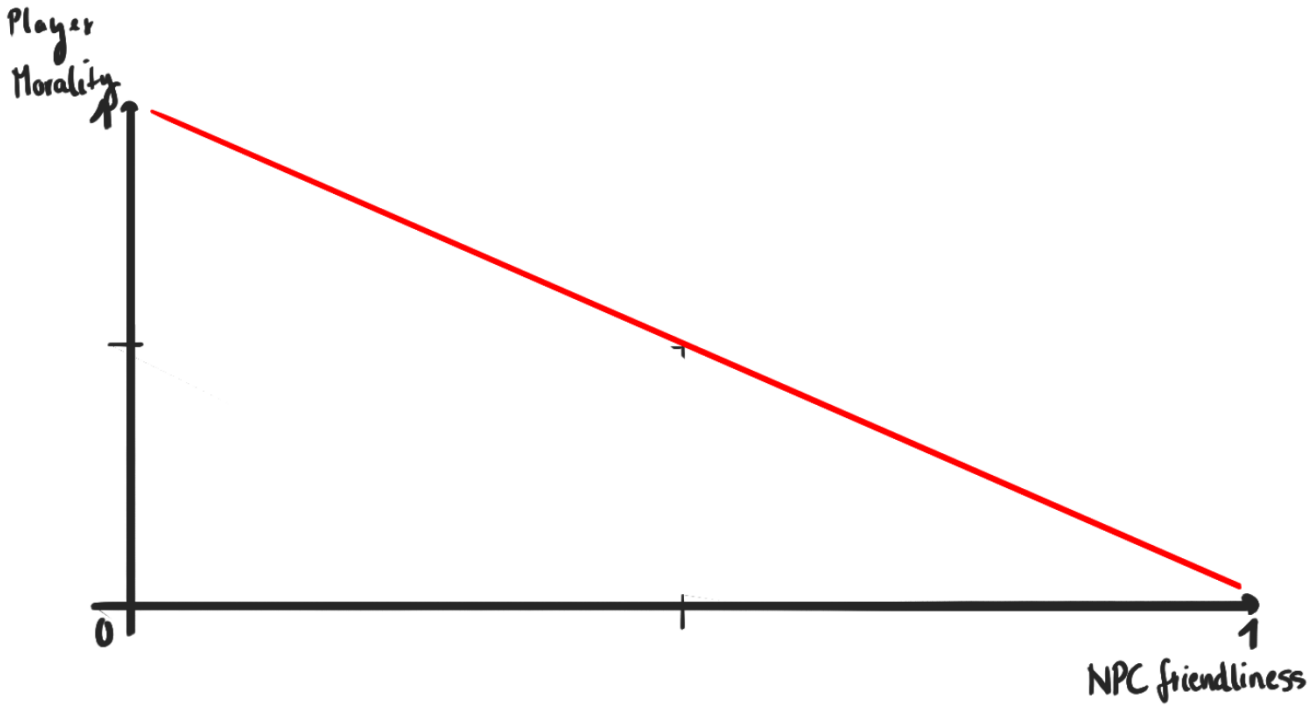
The gameplay needs to be defined as " actions" towards the character that will affect their and trust towards the player. Because of educational and technical limitations, the level of realism must be simplified to also fit time constraints. Therefore, 3 major variables were created:

- Moral Compass → on a scale of 0 to 1
- NPC Friendliness → on a scale of 0 to 1
- Randomness → on a scale of 0 to 1

The average of the three variables will determine how the character will respond to the player. The level of subtlety will contribute to the level of realism in the conversation.

DIALOGUE REIMAGINATION

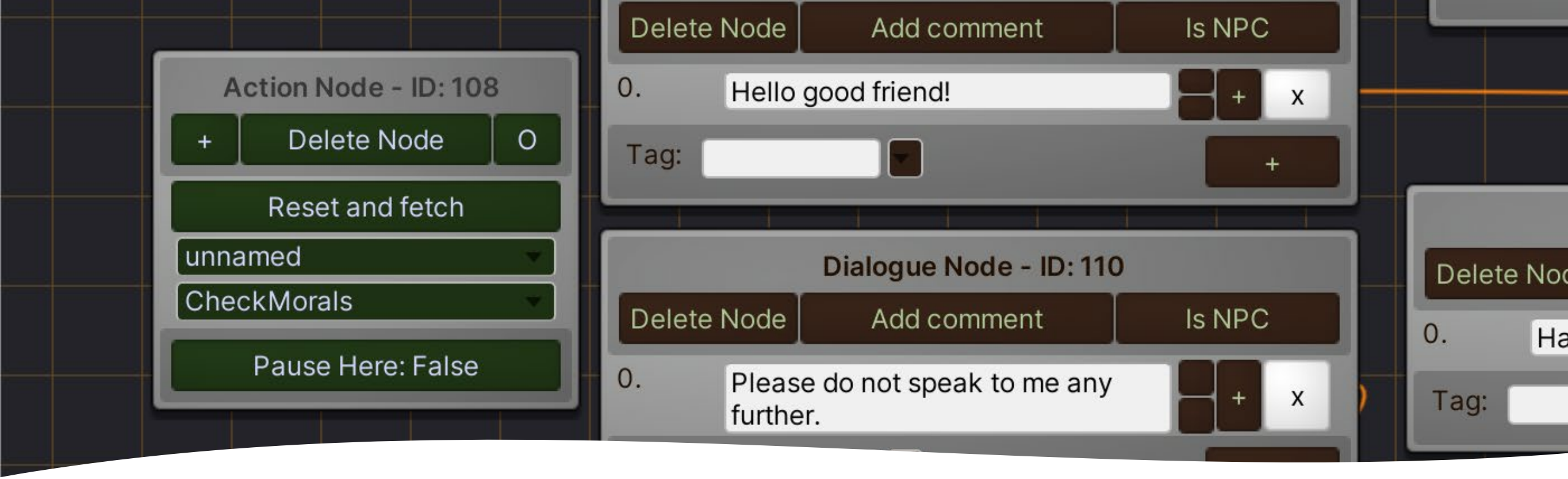
With this system in mind, **the level of difficulty in the game would be associated with how low the NPC's friendship level is in combination with the player's moral compass**. The lower the NPC friendliness, the higher the Player Morality would be in order to successfully interact and receive information from the character. It could be visualized in this graph.



MORAL COMPASS INTEGRATION

The **player morality** variable would determine on a scale of 0 to 1 the player's moral compass throughout the game, with 0 being evil, 0.5 being neutral, and 1 being good. The value would shift depending on the player's choices when interacting with characters and the environment. For example, being rude to another character will lower the player's morality setting. The player morality will also determine how well-received they are with other characters. The lower the morality, the more uncomfortable the character will be when conversing with the player.

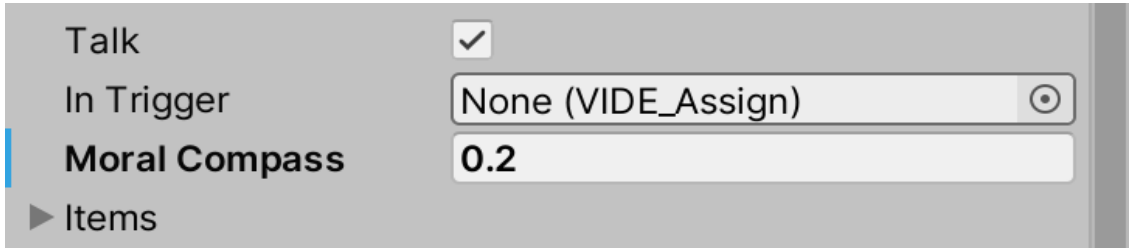
```
0 references
public void CheckMorals()
{
    if(playerMorals > 0.6)
    {
        VD.SetNode(VD.currentActionNode.ID + 1);
    }

    if(playerMorals < 0.4)
    {
        VD.SetNode(VD.currentActionNode.ID + 2);
    }
}
```

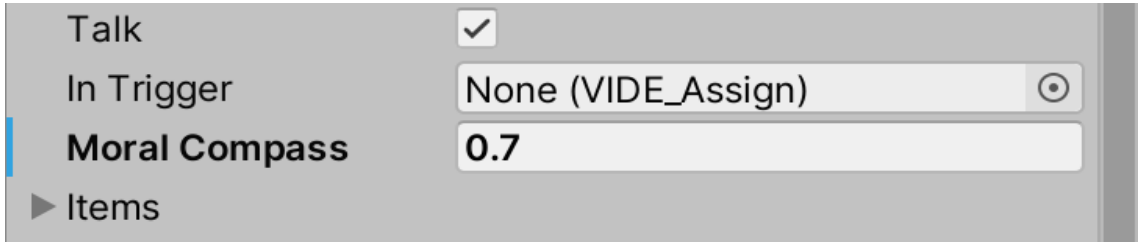


MORAL COMPASS INTEGRATION

In the **Dialogue Tree**, the program runs the "**CheckMorals**" function before the conversation starts to determine how the character reacts to the player. It will then display whatever dialogue corresponds with the moral value. It's a simple yet efficient system that can create a nice dynamic among the game characters.

IN-GAME APPLICATION





ACHIEVEMENTS

The focus shifted from expanding the game to developing the current dialogue system. Therefore, the game now includes:

- **More sophisticated dialogues and dialogue system** – The major gameplay is currently dependent on interacting with the characters and helping them by making specific dialogue choices. The next step was to take this further and make the choices more subtle and impactful on the overall gameplay.
- **More detailed character arcs** – The NPCs needed more depth and dimension in their story arcs. Therefore, the story in the game needed to be more developed.

REFLECTION

How does one emulate the level of interactivity needed to keep the player hooked? Is it combat? Story? Is it mechanics? Throughout this semester, I discovered how curiosity can contribute to a player's level of engagement with a game.

While playtesting, I noticed that the testers continued playing not for the mechanics, but rather because they were interested in finding out more about the game and the characters. However, once the player has a proper grasp of how the game works, and they witness a pattern of gameplay, they will lose interest. After all, curiosity only brings one so far. Once I understood this, I tried to recreate the dialogue system in a way where there could be a dynamic level of variety within the responses.

Building a game is more than presenting a story and mechanics. An interactable experience is also determined by the level of engagement within the player. **Therefore, as game developers, we must figure out how to develop mechanics that grasp the player's attention, all while integrating a good level of mystery to pique the player's curiosity.**

REFLECTION

In terms of interest in the game itself, I believe that the game can pertain to some interesting gameplay. It should be able to hold the attention of the player long enough without them getting too bored. However, one of the major drawbacks of story-based games like these is that once the player has experienced it once, they lose interest in attempting to replay the game. They would already know the locations and the story-line order. In short, since this is a game about discovery, once the player has learned all that there is to the game, they lose their motivation to play it again, which would be this project's greatest downfall. It is meant to be played a certain number of times, until the player either discovers everything, or until they grow bored. To solve this, I attempted to make the dialogue tree systems more elaborate and intricate to allow for a variety of playthroughs. Either way, the project would still need to be more developed. However, the current state of the project serves as a great basis, flexible for any possible changes we could make to it.