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Conceptual Statement

Our group was formed based on the chocolate bear project as it displayed the idea of *'something is not what it seems.'* Personally, I was inspired by a TedTalk about the game 'That Dragon Cancer' because I wasn't aware that games could also showcase the theme of grief and I felt that the concept of making a game about grief will challenge the user's expectations. Therefore, the concept of 'something is not what it seems'. Another reason why I loved the idea of making a game about grief was to help me accept the death of my grandmother and also help others cope with the same grief. Initially, our idea was to make a narrative that about the five stages of grief. We developed the concept of grief only to focus on denial and then eventually the link between denial and acceptance. Our aim was to showcase a story that evoked an emotional response from the player. Along with games like 'That Dragon Cancer' and 'Ori and the Blind Forest' which incorporate grief and beautiful aesthetics, we also took inspiration from films, such as 'Her' - a movie about social isolation, 'Thor: Ragnarok' - a movie with bright colours and humour but has a dark storyline and silent films - since it mostly focusses on using aesthetics to enhance the narrative, like our project. Rather than making a film, the reason why we chose a digital interactive medium like a game is so that the user can also be part of the story. We also chose to incorporate a 'coming of age' sub-theme by choosing a young protagonist. The user gets to experience the feeling of nostalgia and 'moving on' through the protagonist. Initially, the narrative was linear which defeated the purpose of our story being interactive. Therefore, we realised as a group that we weren't using the full potential of gaming mechanics. In order to have an interactive story we chose to make two endings, so that it enables the user to act upon their instinct rather than feeling manipulated or forced into an ending they didn't choose. We wanted both endings to be meaningful, satisfying and provide the user with closure.

Contextual Statement

The main objective of 'After Dark' is to enhance a user's experience by depicting a story about the human experience, such as grief and moving on, through the game medium. The reason why we chose this medium is because unlike books and film, a game incorporates both forms of media and makes an experience meaningful due to interactivity.

While researching into the gaming medium, I found that video games like 'That Dragon Cancer', 'Apart of Me' and 'Life is Strange' are games that help players cope with grief and loss, hence contribute to the popularity of the gaming industry. This shows that books, film and tv shows are not the only medium to express such emotions. According to the writer of 'Life is Strange', *"Death and grief are a part of life. They're hard, brutally hard. But they're also normal. There is no shame to the struggle. It's okay not to be okay."* From this I felt that it was important for our interactive experience to destigmatise grief and moving on. He also stated that, *"You never know when you'll meet someone who will change your life forever."* Our game is not original and does draw inspiration from this game, since Griever is the character that changes the protagonist's life. However, our interactive story still functions as a story that destigmatises grief, moving on and helps the user cope with grief and moving on through interaction.

Initially, the ending of our story was similar to 'That Dragon Cancer' in terms of not branching off the ending and the ending being the same regardless of what decision the user makes. According to Amy Green, *"We subverted that principle of game design, collapsing the choices in on the player so they discover for themselves that there is nothing they can do that will change the outcome for Joel."* We tried to do that in our project, however it differed from 'That Dragon Cancer' because our ending wasn't acceptance or moving on; it was emotionally manipulating the user and making them feel responsible for something they had no control over; whereas, 'That Dragon Cancer' is based on the true story of Joel's cancer and the point of having no control over the end is to accept that Joel died and we must move on. The similarities between our interactive story and 'That Dragon Cancer' is that it's a *'poetic'* and metaphoric story of discovery and moving on.

As a group, each of us had roles to play. Aurora and I worked on the sound design, Victoria worked on the art, Leif worked on the animation and Cristian worked on the programming scripts. All of us worked together as a team on the story. Our ideas would bounce off from one another and although we had disagreements, we were still able to cooperate as a team.

Overall, video games are an effective medium for coping with grief and moving on as it creates various ways to portray difficult emotions. As a society, we don't handle loss and grief very well, but the more we talk about grief, we can normalise grief experiences, hence easier to accept and move on.

References:

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