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English 1102

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Process Documents

Process Document One: Artist Statement Outline

I. Introduction

a. Definitions

i. Afrofuturism and black Science fiction

ii. Text-Based video games

b. “The Comet”

i. “The Comet,” a short black sci-fi work by W.E.B. Du Bois, features a black man and a white woman working together to survive in a post-apocalyptic New York City. After surviving the toxic gases from a comet, Jim and Julia fly through the city looking for loved ones, communications, and a deeper understanding of hierarchy in the dead city.

ii. Within this narrative, Du Bois comments on the clear injustice and limitation Jim is forced to endure as a black man in a society dominated by the racist white male. He provides a unique before-and-after shot of Jim pre- and post-liberation which calls into question the society which limits him.

- iii. From a narrative standpoint, the piece moves quickly, and erratically, but follows a linear progression from beginning to end. Jim's decisions are often made fearfully and rapidly as he pulls the reader along with him.

c. The game

- i. Written in HTML, CSS, and JavaScript, the game version departs from this linearization, allowing its players to act as Jim in an attempt to better immerse them in the story.
- ii. As a video game adaption of "The Comet," this project allows its audience to experience the oppression Jim faces as they play through Du Bois' story and develop an awareness for the struggle of surviving as a black man in the racist 1920's.

- d. **Thesis:** Although the video game features some shortcomings not present in its original narrative form, it allows its audience to better understand the racist denial of choice prominent not only in "The Comet," but also in black sci-fi as a genre.

II. Project shortcomings

a. Limited experience

- i. White guy from NH
 - 1. Limited perspective until recently
 - 2. Inability to know, but ability to sympathize
- ii. Mitigation
 - 1. Stuck close to Du Bois' story
 - 2. Avoided making assumptions about characters

b. Immersion Issues

i. Player effort to remember commands

1. It breaks the flow of a game when players have to stop to remember how to do things
2. I would have liked to make a 2D game, but it wasn't feasible

ii. Story flow

1. The original story moves very rapidly, since the characters spend a majority of their time rushing from one grim scene to another in shock.
2. The game does not feature the same sense of urgency
 - a. It can't use Du Bois' style of rapid, jumpy cuts from scene to scene without disorienting players
 - b. It allows users to explore on their own, meaning that they can be more relaxed than Jim as they play through his experience.

III. Choice in video games and black science fiction

a. Choice limitations in populated environments

i. Rude messages, and the use of the n-word

1. While in the story, racism is often masked by politeness in the bank, error messages show the real meaning behind false words
2. At the end, Fred is the epitome of racism, the first to come right out and call Jim the n-word.
 - a. This should frustrate the player.

- b. The player's actions will be constrained until the end of the game from here.
 - ii. One-dimensional movement
 - 1. In the bank
 - a. Jim clearly got the worst work
 - b. Jim could only make snarky comments.
 - 2. In Metro Tower at the end
 - a. Jim wasn't given an option, just money. He was almost killed.
 - b. Jim can't talk to Julia after.
 - c. Jim can't get back into Metro. Tower.
 - iii. Consequences
 - 1. Say, go, search, all constrained by *people*. Particularly powerful white people.
 - 2. Players have the option to say aggressive things, but these actions lead to a game over lynching scenario.
 - a. Conditions the player to toe the line like Jim has to
 - b. Frustrates the player by forcing them to start over.
- b. Choice freedoms in dead zones
 - i. Isolation throughout the story
 - 1. Jim in the bank vaults-- symbolic treasure
 - 2. Jim on the roof-- power transformation
 - ii. Isolation in the game, and the ability to open things

1. In the bank, before every one dies, you cannot do anything.
2. After, you can do whatever you want.
3. In the streets, surrounded by the dead, you are free.
4. Even with Julia, Jim is relatively free to disagree.

iii. How does this affect the player?

1. Appreciation of alone time
2. Players are used to being the most powerful decision makers in a game; isolation lets them fill that role.

IV. Conclusion

a. Easter Egg argument

- i. Despite the original story, this game features a second ending, and a sense of hope.
 1. Each piece of the Easter egg is built on important pieces of Afrofuturism
 2. The game is a reflection of Afrofuturism, not a piece of it, but a supportive response to its ideals.
- ii. If the player completes a multiple step Easter egg hidden within the game, then they awaken in a future free of the bigotry and hate founds in Jim's world, and today's world, as well.

b. Better representation

- i. In order to achieve such a world, we may not need to dismantle society as Du Bois does.

- ii. Black populations are at the mercy of cultural stereotypes and injustices, especially in media, and especially in video games.
 - 1. Games with black protagonists almost exclusively revolve around crime or poverty.
 - 2. More games should feature black heroes who are just as good as white heroes. We need to change our narrative
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Process Document Two: Game Demo

This is a limited demo of the game so far. It features the bank portion of the game, up until the player exits on Wall St. The player can enter and exit areas, see restrictions (why they can't enter an area), and pick up items to allow access to containers and other areas. The rest of the game is currently a work in progress, as is the discussion mechanic with other characters in the game. For now, all of that dialogue is in room descriptions, and the player cannot respond to it. This will eventually change to be a more fluid, interactive system. I aim to allow players to get themselves killed by saying the wrong things to the wrong people. This will help build the sense of confinement within society that Jim experiences in the story. To see what I have so far, visit the link below.

<http://adamhayward.me/theCometGame/index.html>

For in-depth directions, click on the documentation link in the navigation bar, or click the link below to be taken there directly.

<http://adamhayward.me/theCometGame/docs.html>

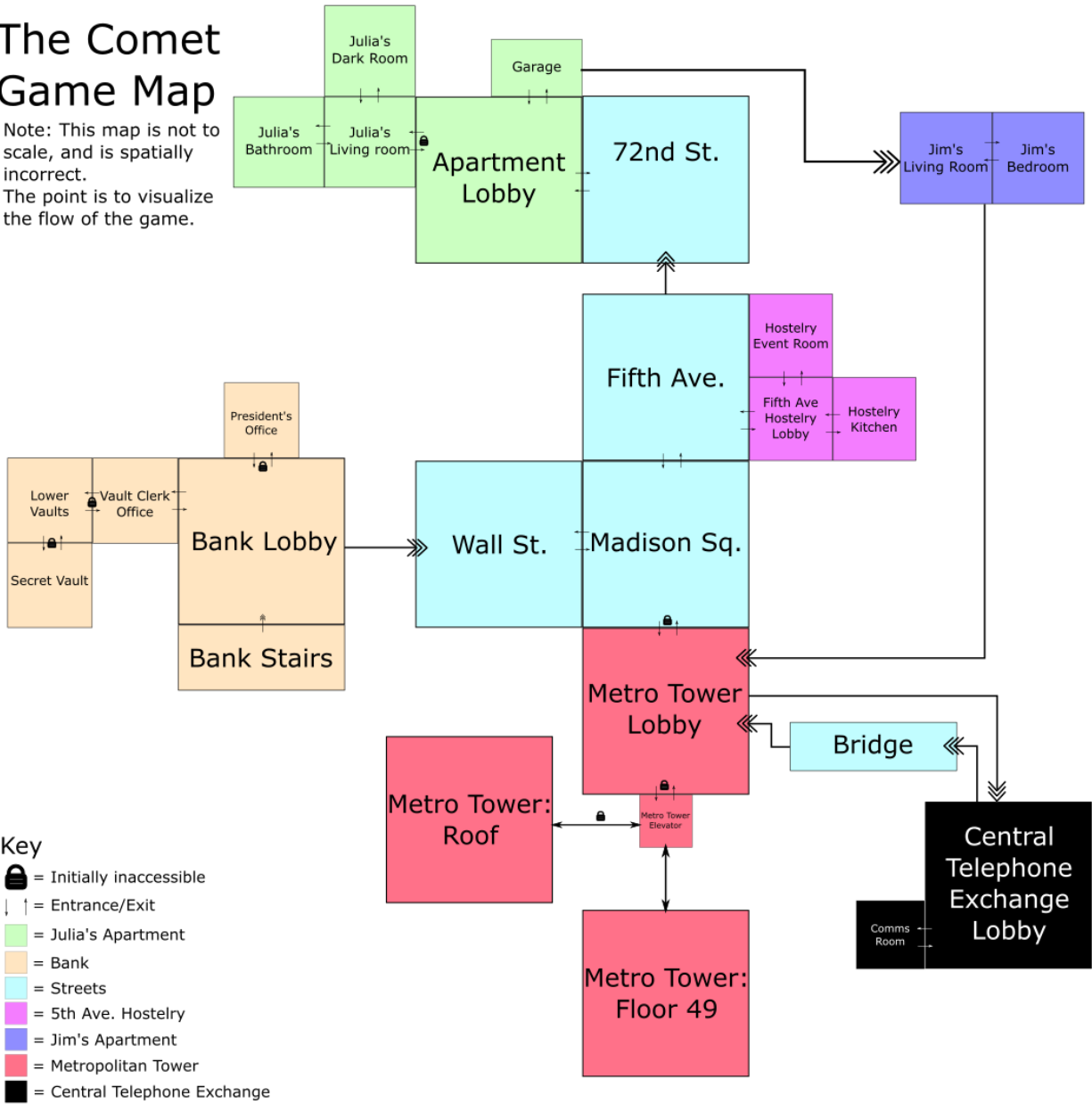
Process Document Three: Game Map

This is a color-coded map of the game which will be used as a reference as I build out and test the rest of the world. Each box represents an area, with a color corresponding to an overall larger area like “Bank” or “Streets.” Connected rooms are shown via arrows. Small arrows in and out indicate movement in and out of the area. The larger arrows with three tips represent one-way travel, meaning that the player will be unable to go back in the direction from which they came. Locks show that an area has certain requirements before the player can enter or leave it. For instance, the player needs to have the “Vault Key” in order to enter the “Lower Vaults” area. I have pasted the map below, but it is also featured on the game’s site under the “Map” tab of the navigation bar. The map is very large, so it takes up its own page.

The Comet Game Map

Note: This map is not to scale, and is spatially incorrect.

The point is to visualize the flow of the game.



Process Document Four: Game Requirements Brainstorming

These are the notes I made to myself as I began thinking about how to design this game. They are a jumbled mess, but my brainstorming usually is. Read through them below.

Okay so with this project I am trying to do a few things:

1. Make a game that is somewhat fun
2. Show how game adaptation of “The Comet” better highlights *lack of control?* black sci-fi protagonist
3. Discuss the implications of black representation in video games today.

These are all general over-arching principles, alright? Well I want to drill down on this a bit more, specifically the aim of the game, and the overall way in which it plays. So let's talk about that.

The Game

1. Follows “The Comet” story line, but allows the player to navigate the world.
 - a. The story should be placed in as excerpted content, with some additionally written content to better adapt the game to a more interactive model.
 - b. The game should allow for decision making, but those decisions should be limited such that they don't change the original flow of the story. For instance, Jim shouldn't be able to just leave the bank in the first scene and go do something else.
 - i. In the cases where he is alone, we can build out the story and exploration more. That would reduce the linear feel of the original piece, and allows me to creatively reimagine/deepen parts of Du Bois' existing world.

- ii. Jim should be constrained by people, not himself. I don't want to put Jim in a box he defines necessarily.
- iii. I also don't want to over exaggerate the choice element of the story.
- c. Allows for basic discussions between the player and other characters.
 - i. This discussion system will be explained in greater detail later.
 - ii. Discussions can act as more interactive/speculative parts of the story. I don't necessarily want to lock the player into saying what Jim says in the story all the time.
 - iii. Discussions can be optional, or not optional, depending on their relative importance
- d. Allows for searching interaction and very, very, basic puzzles.
 - i. Puzzles may include opening things that lead to secret items and whatnot
 - 1. It would be super cool to add lore items into the game to explain more of the story
 - 2. Some Easter eggs would also be fun
 - a. The Data thief's items would be a cool addition to the game.
 - b. They could unlock an alternate ending/teleport Jim to another Afrofuturist story.
 - ii. Searching essentially means you don't always see everything in an area immediately.
 - 1. Searching containers will expose more unlockable items.
 - 2. Searching a room will show any items in that room.
 - iii. **Notable Puzzles-**

1. Iron bar is required to open chest and get artifacts in secret vault
 2. Iron bar is required to open door after it slams shut
 3. The president's vault must be opened using a code found in the secretary's desk in the lobby.
- e. The game should feature some sort of checkpoints which prohibit the character from seeing the same dialogue over and over again despite room reentry.
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Process Documents Five: Game Requirements Table

Here I have one of the tables I made to help me to manage the objects I need in the final version of my game. It is useful in understanding the process I go through to decide how to populate my game with things the player can interact with.

Items Required:

<u>Item #</u>	<u>Item Name</u>	<u>Item Description</u>	<u>Item Location</u>	<u>Item Purpose</u>
0	Vault Key	The iron key was old and worn with use. Covered in rust, it looked as if it would snap off in the lock at any moment	Received from Vault Clerk after discussion	Unlocks Lower Vaults
1	Records(x2)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. It had collected dust for years. The title peeked through the dust covering it: "BANK RECORDS: 1900-1901" 2. It had collected dust for years. The title peeked through the dust covering it: "BANK RECORDS: 1901-1902" 	On shelves in secret vault	Allows passage out of vaults
2	Iron Bar	It was heavy, coated in a thick layer of mildew and slime, but it would certainly come in handy.	In secret vault	Allows opening of chest in secret vault and door of secret vault
3	Gold(x3)	It shimmered in your hand.	In locked chest in secret vault	N/A

4	Black box	Etched into it were the words "DATA THIEF..." Whatever that meant...	President's Safe in President's Office	Step one of Easter Egg
5	President's Code	The Secretary had written something at the top of the note: "SAFE CODE: 12 34 2"	In secretary's desk in Bank Lobby	Used to unlock President's Safe
6	New York Times	"Danger" screamed its black headlines, "Warnings wired around the world. The Comet's tail sweeps past us at noon. Deadly gases expected. Close doors and windows. Seek the cellar"	On newsboy on 5th Ave.	N/A
7	Food platter	It was a gourmet meal. One you never could've gotten before the apocalypse.	In Hostelry Kitchen	Can be eaten
8	National Enquirer	"President Harding A Criminal?" its headline read. "The Federal Bureau of Investigation has recovered a new batch of highly classified mail sent by Harding to fellow leadership from his personal post office! Despite having denied the severity of this blunder, Harding will face criminal charges once the next administration takes office."	In Hostelry Event hall	Can be read for additional lore
9	Photo of Julia	Julia standing and a man about her age. They looked happy...	In Dark Room	N/A
10	Car key	What kind of luxury car did this belong to?	Received from Julia after leaving the apartment	Allows use of car and progression to Harlem
11	Special sunglasses	They were metallic with a small horizontal slit on each metal eye covering. What a strange fashion choice.	Hidden in Julia's bathroom medicine cabinet	Second step in Easter Egg
12	Baby Photo	You and your wife holding your baby boy. You were all so happy.	In bedroom on nightstand	N/A
13	Wife Photo	Your wedding day. You don't have many other pictures together. Never though it would matter so much.	On coffee table in Jim's Living Room	N/A
14	Elevator Key	This key would let you get around the Metropolitan building by elevator.	On dead Lobby boy in	Used to access Elevator in Metro Tower

			Metropolitan Tower Lobby	
15	Note for Julia	"Dear Daughter:" it read. "I have gone for a hundred-mile spin in Fred's new Mercedes. Shall not be back before dinner. I'll bring Fred with me. --J.B.H."	Received from Julia after she leaves her father's office	Required to progress in the story
16	Large Rug	It was an ornate rug, big enough to keep you both warm.	On the floor of the Office	1/4 items needed to move to the roof
17	Blazer	It was a bit small for you, but Julia could use it.	Hanging in a closet in the office.	2/4 items needed to move to the roof
18	Coat	It fit perfectly. No worries about being cold now	Hanging in a closet	3/4 items needed to move to the roof
19	Rockets	These would let you signal for help. There were about four rockets inside, along with a book of matches.	Sitting on floor of Floor 47 in 1/5 cubicles	4/4 items needed to progress to the roof.
20	Mothership connection	"Parliament: Mothership Connection." Never heard of it... The man on the album cover had the strangest outfit-- some chrome colored getup. He seemed to be sliding out of the door of a flying saucer.	In a cabinet next to the record player in Julia's Father's office	Last item of Easter Egg
21	Roll of Bills	It had to be at least 60 dollars.	Received from Julia's father after speaking to Fred and him on the roof	Allows you to leave the roof and take the elevator to the lobby.

Works Cited

Du Bois, W.E.B. "The Comet." *Dark Matter*, edited by Sheree R. Thomas, Warner Books, 2000, pp. 5-18.