Bleak Citizenship Society Design Document

Initial Razor Statement

A masquerade composed of bizarre people in blank spaces where the masks worn are the faces of other characters; the player must learn the 'original' identities of their fellow masquerade attenders through logic puzzles in order to question performativity, gender, physicality, and identity itself.

Rationale

Bleak Citizenship Society will be primarily based on Judith Butler's (1988) themes of identity, gender, and performativity on the backdrop of a masquerade. Specifically, a masquerade composed of bizarre people in blank rooms to emphasize their strangeness. The masks these people wear are the legitimate faces of other characters, leading to a confusion - or rather freedom - of identity and the characteristics it entails. As the player explores this masquerade, speaks with its various members, and solves puzzles relating to their 'original' identities, I want to delve into the intersection of performativity, gender, physicality, and what identity means in a social sphere where it is valued as a costume. Additionally, I want to play ironically into the idea of using masks as a way to hide identity, as well as the concept of identity itself. Ultimately, I plan to get the message that finding the original identity of the other characters in the game is futile as there is no such thing as an original identity - identity, including gender and sexuality expression, is fluid and should be explored in various ways. In this game, it is done by donning the actual faces of other characters.

Butler (1988) states that identity is a performance instituted through a repetitions of acts over time. Performativity can therefore be reconstituted with the implementation of different, repeated actions (Butler, 1988); however, performativity is so tied with gender that the fragility of performance constitutes a fragility of gender. I am expanding on this idea to argue a fragility of identity. Identity overall makes symbols and characteristics we identify with, such as gender and sexuality, more concrete; therefore, there lies an anxiety in the disruption of this concreteness as Butler (1988) describes. I want to explore the meaning of identity, its disruption, and the fluidity of its meaning.

Additionally, there is a variety of literature on identity and its tie to various parts of human experience. I focus on papers relating to race and gender expression/sexuality, as these are sensitive topics that will have to be approached carefully in order for my message to be

expressed in a meaningful manner. Joshua Gamson (1995) states that "fixed identity categories are both the basis for oppression and the basis for political power" when discussing their use in social movement theory, specifically for the identity of those that do not fit the hegemonic majority; in this case, those that do not have heteronormative sexualities.

Furthermore Wolfgang Wagner, Peter Holtz, and Yoshihisa Kashima (2009) define essence and how it represents ingroups and outgroups. Projecting essence onto a social category is defined as "to think, talk, and act as if the category were a discrete natural kind and as if its members were all endowed with the same immutable attributes determined by the category's essence" (Wagner et al., 2009). They go on to argue that two of the ways essentialization can be utilized include using it on members of forced social categories, which easily switches to discrimination and racism; additionally, members of social groups may contest their essentialized identity, such as part of the homosexual movement. I wish to explore these topics through my game by disrupting and destabilizing fixed identity categories and reforming them. For example, having very feminine male characters that identify themselves as heterosexual, or having a non-conforming character that is also asexual. I plan to show cultural and racial differences in a thoughtful and meaningful way, stepping away from the essentializing identity that others would force onto those social groups.

Other media such as *Ghost in the Shell'*s episode DI: Face - MAKE UP (Kamiyama, 2002) have explored identity in an interesting way as one character creates an identical face and body to another character, taking on their personality and coming believe that they are the other person. I pull from this media to deliberately evaluate the idea of identity, how it can be stolen, and more specifically how its expression can be altered fluidly in order to explore various aspects of the self. This is especially explored in a-gendering media which breaks away from stereotypical gender roles and conventions. For example, Emma A. Jane (2014) uses *Adventure Time* (Ward, 2010) to explore the subversion of gender stereotypes and the liberating ways it can be expressed. *Adventure Time* (Ward, 2010) has a large amount of characters who have multiple or indeterminate genders, and the show frames gender and identity as fluid rather than fixed. A key aspect of these representations includes the fact that there is no negative attention draw to them. For example, although BMO has an indeterminate gender,is gender fluid, and is attracted to other indeterminately gendered creatures, they are not ostracized or questioned by their friends. I wish to explore this in my game in the same way.

Players will therefore feel uncomfortable yet also curious while playing this game, as they explore identity in a way they may not have experienced before. This will be emphasized by the surreal aesthetic of the game. Players are a masked participant at a masquerade ball while other characters will have their identities obscured by masks that are the faces - synonymous with the identity (Bogost, 2007) - of other characters. These masks will be a mixture of the person behind

the mask as well as a performance of the mask itself - however, since the mask is of another character, this will essentially be a freeing way for the character to explore different aspects of themselves whether it be gender, sexuality, or their expressions. Players will find the 'true' identity of each character and then have the option to pull off said character's mask, exposing their face, or leave it in order to preserve their newfound freedom. These two aspects will lead to different consequences. Similar to *Dishonored* (Colantonio & Smith, 2012), players will have different endings depending on their decisions throughout the game, with the world altering around them to reflect those decisions; different endings will reveal different aspects of their player-character identity.

Overall, the goal of the game is for players to question the institution of gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity through the physical metamorphosis of its characters in the way Flanagan's critical play (2009) describes. Depending on the player's choices throughout the game, they will either experience a breakdown of identity and thus, an exploration of something more fluid; or, they will experience the anxiety Butler describes (1988) as they push against the performativity of their formed identity. The player experience will be one that leaves the player feeling unsettled, due to the nature of the characters and their masks, and will also lead to the player being self-critical, as they reflect upon their actions and consequences.

Target Audience

Due to themes of sex, sexuality, and violence the game will be rated M for Mature. Additionally, the intended player effect of questioning the fragility of identity against the weight of changing performativity is a concept better understood by mature teens and adults. The overall mood of the game including topics of sex and violence, as well as the intended effect of making the player feel unsettled also lends itself to a Mature rating and therefore, an age range of 18 and older. The game would be translated and culturally researched in order to encompass a wider global audience, such as the large Asian Pacific market (WePC, 2018).

Although not intended for classroom audiences, it could be used a tool of study in universities for topics of gender, performativity, and identity. With these considerations in mind, the game will be short enough that it is feasible to complete for a class, if needed. Additionally, a shorter game will have a lower price point and therefore be more accessible to more people, which would be my goal. The game will be released on a computer platform to make it the most accessible for players; additionally, 40% of players prefer to play games on online platforms versus 26% who prefer to play on consoles (WePC, 2018). Steam would be a good platform to reach a large number of players, as well as increase accessibility and advertisement (WePC, 2018). The game would be generally targeted towards those who enjoy puzzles games, and can overall be enjoyed by a more casual audience.

Game Setting

Mystery will play a large part into the unsettling feeling the game will have. Mystery will therefore be reflected in its setting and time period.

The game will be based in an undisclosed time period; however, it will reflect a time period similar to the games *Bloodborne* (Miyazaki, 2015) and *Dishonored* (Colantonio & Smith, 2012). The game is set in a large mansion with various people inhabiting different rooms, but the rooms themselves will be slightly shy of blank. There will be various objects in the environment near characters that the player can interact with which will relate to the character near that object or relating to some other form of identity (for example, maybe a character will have some BDSM gear near them to explore various aspects of sexuality).This will put emphasis on the characters rather than the environment and will hopefully create a less culturally-oriented and therefore universal space to explore.

Not much is explained about the world itself, except for various pamphlets the player can find throughout the mansion which involve details about the Society itself, the fall of identity, and other clues about the player-character's motivations.

Narrative

The narrative will have a focus on the various characters that the player comes into contact with, as well as trying to figure out the motivations driving the player-character and the world the player is exploring.

The game begins on a selection screen of five masks that look like human faces. Text on the screen reads: WELCOME TO THE BLEAK CITIZENSHIP SOCIETY. PLEASE CHOOSE A FACE. Once the player chooses one of the faces, they put on the mask, shown by the field of view being limited to the slits of a mask accompanied by heavy breathing; so, although the player believes they have chosen a character, it is clear they have only put on a mask. This also establishes a first person perspective for the game.

After the player puts on their mask, they are put into a cutscene where their player-character turns 180 degrees, in which they can see the interior of the mansion they are going to explore. Another character stands before them, and their appearance is very colorful, as described in **Visual Style** below. They are also clearly wearing a mask as their mask is a different color than their skin (for example, green rather than blue). There is additionally blood around where the

seams of the mask would fit around their face. This person welcomes them into the Bleak Citizenship Society, calls them by a name but then quickly corrects themselves and calls them another name, and then allows them to explore around the manor. The player will have access to rooms in the mansion as indicated below in **Level/Chapter Outlines**.

Each character will explore a different aspect of identity, with various characters exploring these different aspects in different ways. For example, one character will discuss their sexuality and how they have explored it in different ways, which will be clues in figuring out their 'original' identity. Another character may talk about exploring their sexuality through the mask that they are wearing in a different way, or exploring different gender expressions, and through these clues the player can deduce who is who.

The player will have a key choice relating to each character they meet during the game. Once the player figures out the character's 'original' identity, they have the choice to either rip off the character's mask or to leave it on as it was.

Finally, once the player has done this in all levels and to all characters, they can enter the final chamber of the mansion and confront the leader of the Bleak Citizenship Society. Through speaking with the leader, the player learns that the leader is wearing the face of the player-character, and that the player-character's original motivation was to have their original face returned to them in order to leave the Society (a new-age society where members are allowed the freedom of donning new faces). There are dozens of masks lining the walls of this room, and they all speak in unison with the leader, as if the leader is speaking through all the masks simultaneously.

Depending on the decisions the player has made throughout the game, they either rip off the leader's mask (their own face) or rip off the mask they are currently wearing. If they rip off the leader's mask, behind the leader's face is an eldritch horror amalgamation of all of the faces of the members of the society. This will represent the player's insistence to hold onto their identity, even though the deconstruction of it is freeing. The amalgamation is the representation of fear the player has due to the fragility of their identity as described by Butler (1988). If the player takes off their own mask, they will see that the back of the mask (that was touching their face) is all bloody and when they turn it in their hands, their voice is still emanating from the mask. The lips of the mask move as the player-character speaks, and slowly the rest of the masks lining the room begin to speak in unison with them. This indicates the acceptance of the player-character into the Society, and is supposed to show a liberation of identity. They now have the ability to explore aspects of themselves they would not think of before.

Game Mechanics

I plan to use the Unity engine in order to create a 3D environment with 2D sprites in the tradition of games like *Doom* (Hall, 1993). Players will be able to move freely around the world from a first person perspective, emphasized by the player's vision being somewhat obscured by the mask their player-character is wearing. The 2D sprites which follow the player's line of vision will emphasize the feeling of cut-out, colorful, paper characters. This style of game would emphasize the player-character wearing a mask from a first person perspective by limiting the field of view to two eye slits, with the addition of heavy breathing.

Players will use the mouse to move their perspective around the environment, the WASD keys to move their character, and the Q button or mouse left-click to interact with characters and objects. When speaking to characters, the player will be able to choose various dialogue options and will be able to do this using the mouse and left-click, or using the WASD to cycle between options and pressing ENTER to choose one.

Rooms will be populated with one or two characters each, moving in a cycle and possibly talking with each other every so often. The rooms will be blank except for a few key items relating to the 'original' identity of the character(s) inhabiting that room - not necessarily relating to the mask/face that character is wearing. These, including hints revealed through character dialogue, will reveal the 'original' identity of each character. Slowly, the player will either reveal or not reveal the 'original' face behind each character, until they reach the climax described above in **Narrative**.

The puzzles will be in the form of logic puzzles, an example of which is outlined below from the game *Dishonored 2* (Smith, 2016):

> The women sat in a row. They all wore different colours and [Madame Natsiou] wore a jaunty [purple] hat. [Doctor Marcolla] was at the far left, next to the guest wearing a [blue] jacket. The lady in [white] sat left of someone in [green]. I remember that [white] outfit because the woman spilled her [Absinthe] all over it. The traveler from [Dabokva] was dressed entirely in [Red]. When one dinner guest bragged about her [Bird Pendant], the woman next to her said they were finer in [Dabokva], where she lived. So [Baroness Finch] showed off a prized [Diamond], at which the lady from [Baleton] scoffed, saying it was no match for her [Ring]. Someone else carried a valuable [Snuff Tin] and when she saw it, the visitor from [Karnaca] next to her almost spilt her neighbour's [Rum]. [Countess Contee] raised her [Wine] in toast. The lady from [Fraeport], full of [Whiskey], jumped up onto the table, falling onto the guest at

the centre seat, spilling the poor woman's [Beer]. Then [Winslow] captivated them all with a story about her wild youth in [Dunwall].

These types of puzzles will reveal more about the world to the player, how identity is viewed, how that identity is absorbed by those that take on the mask of another person, and to reveal what the player believes to be the 'original' identity of characters attending the masquerade.

To make sure that players do not just, for example, try to identify characters through trial and error rather than actual puzzle solving, they have to identify all available characters at once, in a similar manner to *Dishonored 2* (Smith, 2016) below:
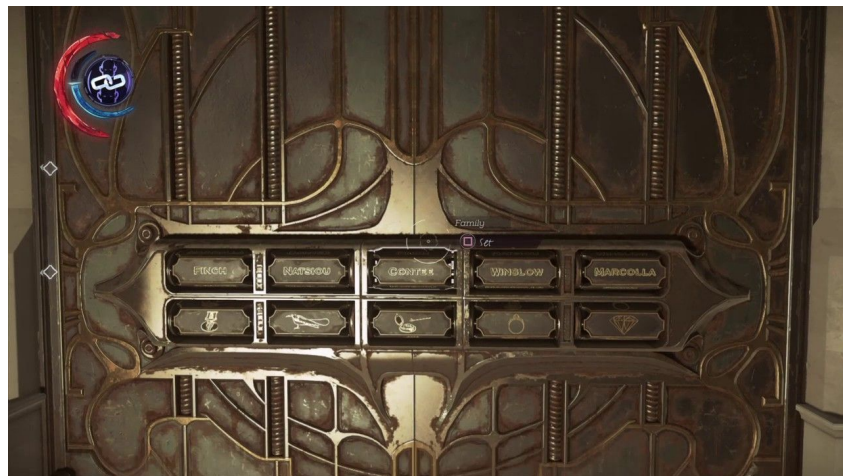
Players must input the proper matching of name and trinket for each character in the riddle at once in order for the door to open. Players will therefore also have access to a notebook where they can decide what information relates to which characters, and if information they have found is relevant at all.

There will be no failure or termination conditions. This will encourage players to move forward in the game as they will not have to redo the same puzzles over and over again. Player feedback will be informed on correctly solving puzzles by an ominous chime ringing out, and then by having the choice to take character's faces off. This continues while the narrative advances and the player works towards the climax of the mystery behind the game.

[1] https://i.ytimg.com/vi/Wr92zUJxFmA/maxresdefault.jpg

Level/ Chapter Outlines

After choosing the mask/face they will be wearing, players will first have access to two rooms with two characters. This will be the introduction level to the mechanics and the story. These are the two newest members of the Bleak Citizenship Society and thus still have a large grasp on their previous identities, and as such, the puzzles will be fairly easy to figure out who is who. This first puzzle should take about 10 minutes to complete to introduce the player to the game. Although players could technically guess their way through this initial puzzle, it will still introduce them to the mechanics of the game, and it they will learn during the next puzzle that it is very difficult to guess their way through it and must learn the mechanics in order to move forward.

The second level will be split into two parts of three characters each that the player can solve one at a time in order to make it slightly less complicated than the final level, which will include 7 characters as part of one logic puzzle.

As outlined in the diagram below, more and more rooms will be opened up to the player which will lead to more complicated puzzles as the player will have to identify many characters at once. Solving all of these puzzles will lead the player to the final chamber, where they will confront the person wearing their face.

With full environmental traversal, it should take the player a total of 1 hour to complete the game.
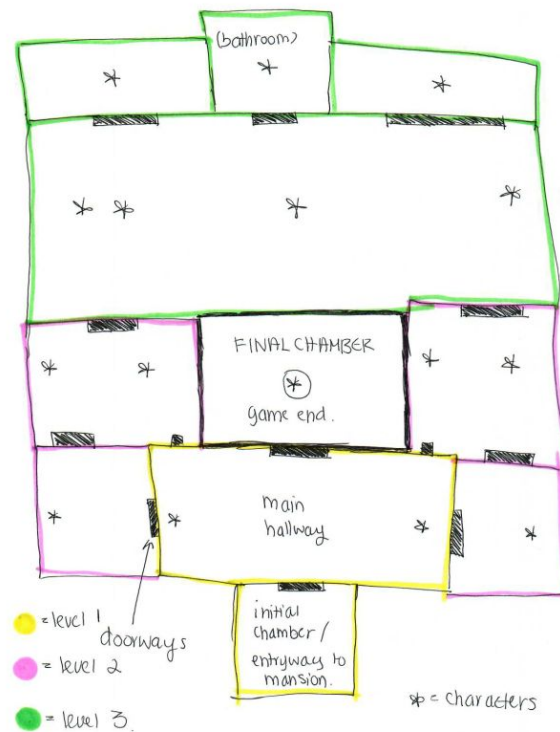
Additionally, here is an example of a logic puzzle the player would have to solve in level 1:

Character:		*Ferino*	*Discard*
Weapon of Choice:	Axe	✔	✘
	Mace	✘	✔
Outfit:	Dress	✔	✘
	Suit	✘	✔
Lover:	Ariel	✘	✔
	Mahogany	✔	✘

The player would have this outline available to them from their notebook. It would initially only have the names of the characters at the top of the notebook page. Players do not know which characters match these names, but through speaking with the characters will find clues matching each of the names to different traits. They will fill in whether a character has that trait or not with a checkmark or an X. Once the player correctly identifies the information for each character, they will hear a chime to indicate they have done so correctly. They can then speak to the characters and make their choices on whether to take off the character's mask or not.

Visual Style

For this game I pull inspiration from the games *Bloodborne* (Miyazaki, 2015), *Dishonored* (Colantonio & Smith, 2012), *We Happy Few* (Provost, 2018), and *HOTEL* (Hoogerbrugge, 2004) for aesthetic inspiration. These games create a murky, as well as in the case of *HOTEL* (Hoogerbrugge, 2004), surreal feeling to their games. This game will be a mixture of absurdity, mystery, as well as the environmental and character aesthetics seen from the above games. Despite this, the game's palette will be a warm, colorful palette to offshoot the strange feeling that the themes, narrative, and audio will evoke, similar to the one seen below:

Each character will have a slight variation of this color palette to evoke a sense of uniqueness and at the same time similarity between the characters, showing the melting pot of all of their identities mixing and changing together. Characters will also have incredibly colorfully painted bodies and masks, and will move in non-human postures and mannerisms to evoke surrealism.

Overall, the art style will be similar to *OFF* (Georis, 2008) for the degree of realism as well as the aesthetic feeling of the characters, with examples shown below:

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[2] https://designshack.net/wp-content/uploads/warm-colors-in-design.png
[3] https://m.gjcdn.net/screenshot-thumbnail/300x300/190758-v3.jpg
[4] https://pathofpins.files.wordpress.com/2013/05/55fate.png

As mentioned before, I also pull heavily *from DOOM* (Hall, 1993) for the 3D environment with 2D sprites. Finally, I pull from *The Legend of Zelda: Majora's Mask* (Aonuma & Koizumi, 2000) for theme-building as that game uses masks to show change, fluidity, as well as a the melding of identity since, when Link puts on the masks of other characters, it is shown as a painful process and other characters confuse him for the person he is masked as. I hope to achieve the same themes in my game.

Audio

The audio will be sombre but also fit for a high class society party. At first, the music will be soft and soothing for the player, making them feel safe and curious as they explore around the first few areas available to them to explore; however, as they learn more about the Society, violin and piano will begin to mix in a cacophony of sounds to create a mood of discomfort, strangeness, and will keep the player on edge as they talk to other characters. The music will still be soft, but it will hint to a feelings of surrealism and absurdity.

Slightly different, but similar, sound effects will be added at the beginning of when different characters speak, almost like a character theme. This will add to the surreal feeling of the game, as well as tying in a unique yet homogenous feeling for the characters. Additionally, sound effects will play when characters interact with objects; however, the sound effect will not match the object it is coming from. For example, if a player picks up a trumpet, the sound of a saxophone will play. Additionally, a sound effect will play when the player successfully completes puzzles in the game, giving feedback on their progress. Most sound effects used will be stock sound effects to add to this outrageous/surrealist mood of the game.

Additionally, voice acting will need to be done for the characters. Various characters will be voice acted by the same person to add to the feeling of melding identities. The player-character will not have an acted voice so that the player can fully relate to their character without having an identity imposed onto them. There will also be subtitles to accommodate those hard of hearing.

Production Details

I will attempt to greenlight the game on Steam for wider audience access at a low price (<$5) in order to make it accessible as well as to entice players to give it a shot since it is so cheap; however, if that is not a possibility, it will be sold directly from the game's website on a donation-based model in order to make it accessible to whoever would like to play it.

There are quite a few anticipated challenges with the game. Identity, gender, and sexuality are all controversial topics with many theories surrounding them and therefore require lots of research to be handled properly. Additionally, being a cis heterosexual woman, I will need to do lots of consulting with people from the various groups I wish to represent through my game so that it is done thoroughly and respectfully. This is also true for the race aspect of the game - I remove actual racial ties by having the characters be various colors such as purple and blue, but research into the ties between identity and race will need to be quite thorough.

The time estimate to create the full game is 6 months full-time, determined by other short game projects I have worked on in the past. The game will require programmers, an artist, as well as other writers who can share their personal experiences with identity deconstruction. Development should not have too many challenges as Unity is thoroughly documented, and has many free online resources on which to build a game off of.

In case time or funding runs short for the game, there are some things that can be cut - for example, some characters can be cut. This would make creating the logic puzzles easier and would require less audio, art, and writing resources. If there is extra time for the development of the game, more detail could be added to the characters as well as the world as a whole. In this situation, other concepts tied to identity could be more fully fleshed out and added in.

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Appendix

Abstract [submitted to DiHuCon 2019]

Butler (1988) states that identity is a performance instituted through a repetitions of acts over time. Performativity can therefore be reconstituted with the implementation of different, repeated actions (Butler, 1988); however, performativity is so tied with identity that the fragility of performance constitutes a fragility of identity. This game attempts to explore the convolution of identity through gender, sexuality, and physicality using the symbolism of masks to facilitate Butler's theory of performativity.

Players are a masked participant at a masquerade ball while other characters will have their identities obscured by masks that are the faces, synonymous with the identity (Bogost, 2007), of other characters. Players will find the 'true' identity of each character and then have the option to pull off said character's mask, exposing their true face, or leave it in order to preserve their performativity. Similar to *Dishonored* (Bethesda Softworks, 2012), players will have different endings depending on their decisions throughout the game; different endings will reveal different aspects of their player-character identity. The goal of the game is for players to question the institution of gender, sexuality, and other aspects of identity through the physical metamorphosis of its characters (Flanagan, 2009).

References

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Examples of Gameplay/Physical Prototype

Below in an example of the opening level of gameplay, outlined with photos of a physical prototype of the game. The player initially begins by choosing one mask to wear, as outlined in the below photos:
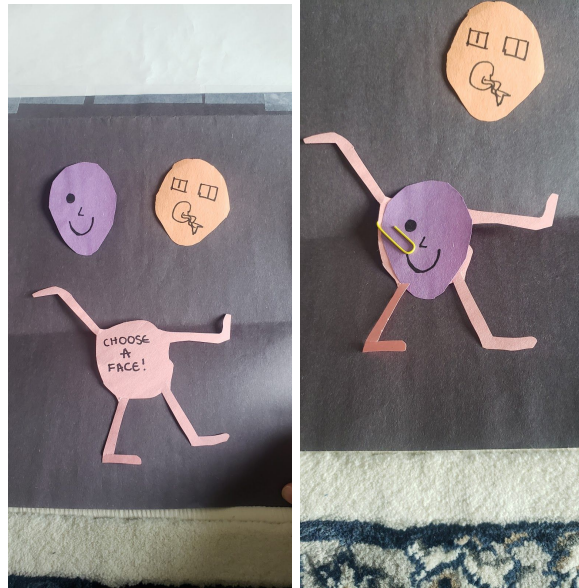
The player is then allowed to explore the now opened area, which has a white background. The player initially goes to speak to the character on the right:

The player has the opportunity to fill in some of the blanks in their notebook for the logic puzzle, and then goes to speak with the other character:

By bringing information they learn from one to another, as well as looking at some items around the room in order to discuss further topics with the characters, the player figures out the entire logic puzzle. They then have the option to either take off or leave on Discard's and Ferino's masks; in this case the player decides to take off the masks:

The next area is then open for the player represented by the green background (although no other characters are present, they will be there as outlined in the photo shown in **Level/Chapter Outlines**):

FINAL
CHAMBER
(LOCKED)