

Game Design Document

WHERE VINES WHISPER LIES

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GAME CONCEPT

GAME ANALYSIS

Conducting the analytical report helped understand the market and the potential target audience. With that and the team's game experience and preference, we decided to work on a narrative-driven puzzle-adventure game that takes place in a Solar Punk setting. Games in this genre use cinematic game & level design.

The scope of our project is to deliver a 30 minute demo with quality close to titles like "Firewatch" and "Portal". Our main focus is to deliver an experience as envisioned in this document.

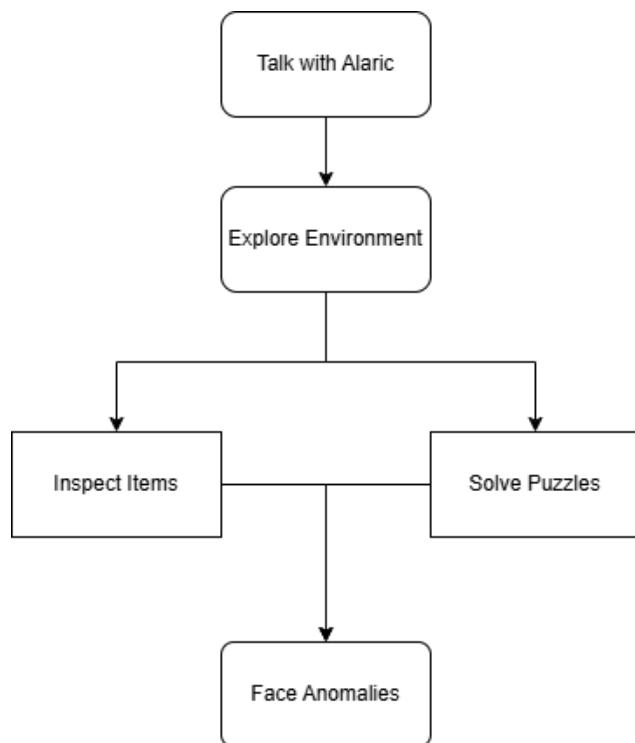
MISSION STATEMENT

Our mission is to create a puzzle-adventure video game that delivers a polished game experience. This foundation empowered with creative puzzles and a well woven story will be a magical experience for the players.

The core idea for this project is to combine nature and technology, delving into a rich story that explores the effect one can have on the other. This is what drives the story and the game

progression. The core game loop is designed to convey the story and keep balance between game elements.

:The diagram on the left showcases the gameplay loop, a more detailed dive is in the "Game Flow" section.



GENRE

3D puzzle-adventure game.

PLATFORM

PC - Steam.

TARGET AUDIENCE

We target the adventure audience that are in age groups between 13-35 years old and of both genders all around the world.

This genre comes with a well and predefined audience that loves exploring and learning about the world that they are in. They adore such experiences and their main focus is on the narrative being told and how it is unraveling, in addition to the game mechanics that have creativity and meaning in them. This is all supported by authentic reports and our own survey that we conducted previously. Out of 30 people, 66% of which are male, 68.9% of them chose “storytelling” or “mechanics” as their favorite feature in video games. This tells us where to put the focus on and how to design our core loop of the game, focusing mainly on exploration and creative endeavors.

However, our research showed us that they are not hardcore players. Unlike players who seek challenging experiences from souls-like games, our audience do not demand extreme challenges. Only 13% of the people answering our survey chose “competitiveness” as their favorite game feature.

Alongside our research and survey, we utilized “The Art of Game Design: A Book of Lenses”, a book by Jesse Schell that discusses various aspects of game design. This book is highly influential to our understanding of the target audience’s mindset.

PLAYER EXPERIENCE

The experience that “Where Vines Whisper Lies” aims to deliver is tension and mystery. This will be accomplished by balancing exploration and dialogue writing, as well as puzzles and anomaly interaction. “Vox” is best explained as the mix of Firewatch and Portal.

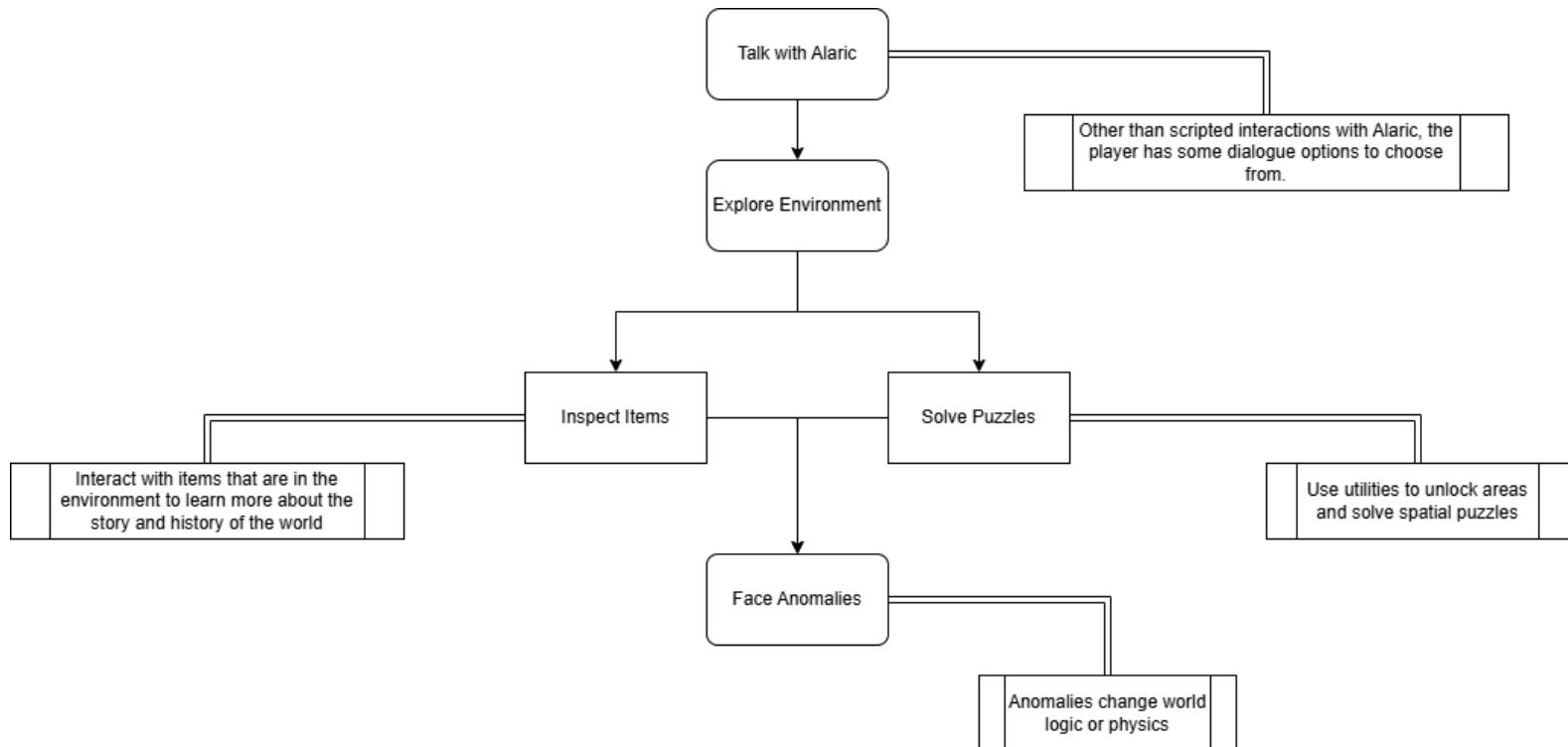
GAMEPLAY

GAME OVERVIEW

Where Vines Whisper Lies is an adventure puzzle game set in a solar punk world where two scientists, Alaric and Orion, are stuck in a loop as they seek to create a perfect environment by mixing natural life with synthetic machines. However, this is deemed impossible to achieve as they keep rejecting one another.

GAME FLOW

The player will explore a non-linear world to discover its secrets by exploring its grounds and interacting with anomalies. The game loop for Vox is simple yet it introduces various mechanics and interactions. The game consists of 5 main actions:



Talk with Alaric: Alaric gives context to the areas we enter. The player can respond to Alaric by choosing between dialogue options.

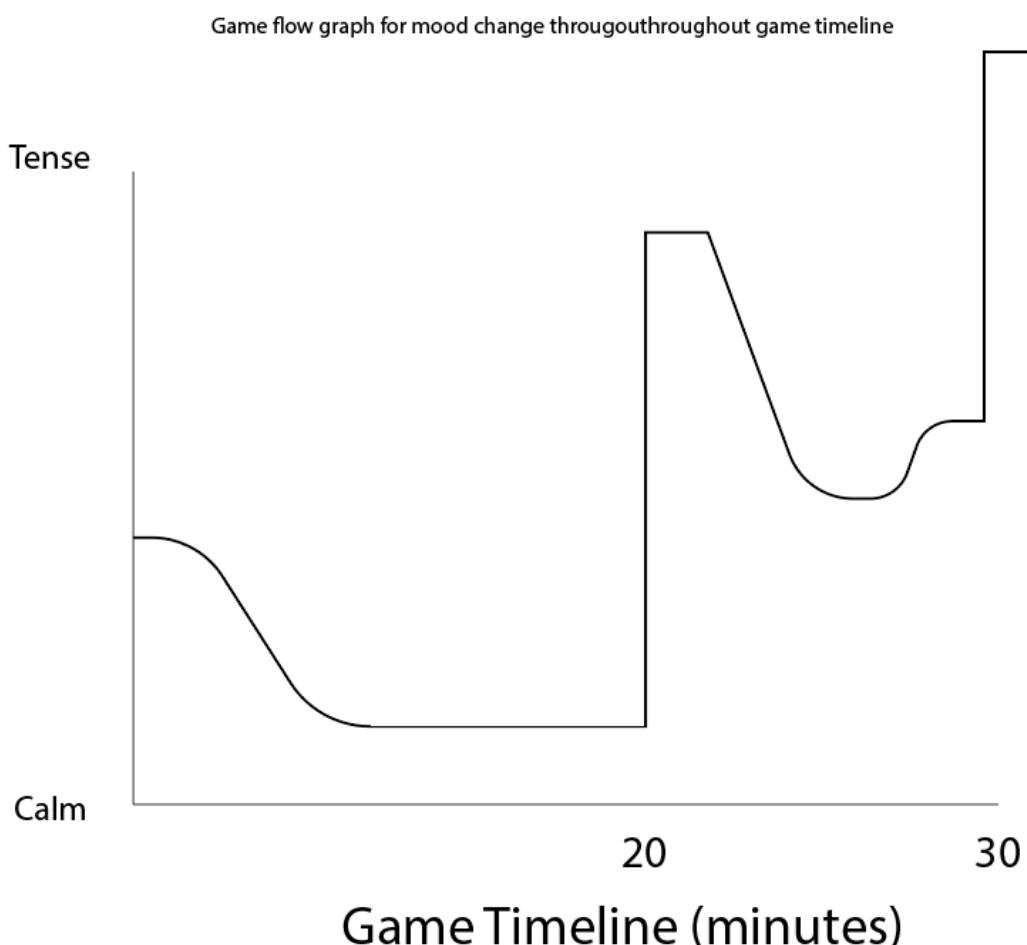
Explore Environment: The player explores the environment to progress in the story. Exploration rewards the player with extra information and access to different areas. The player can use utilities to further explore hidden secrets.

Inspect Items: The player inspects items that help to solve a puzzle or to advance in the story and trigger dialogue.

Solve Puzzles: By using the utilities, the player interacts with minor anomalies and solves puzzles to progress in the game. Puzzles are not complex. They are designed to enhance the player's immersion and contribution in the game world and events.

Face Anomalies: Stumble upon an anomaly and adapt to its logic to progress.

Game events support the game flow by progressing in the story and introduce new game mechanics that encourage backtracking and exploration. Game events are dictated to follow this tension graph:



GAME DESIGN PILLARS

The listed pillars are the parts of the game that all of its mechanics, dialogue, objectives, and events must support at all times. For a feature or element to be added to the game, it has to abide by at least 1 of these pillars. Pillars must not bend for mechanics, it is the other way around.

Pillars

- **Balance between nature and synthetic life.**
- **Exploration.**
- **Fake Companionship.**

GAMEPLAY MECHANICS

The mechanics are focused on supporting a narrative driven experience by giving the player a feel of involvement and contribution to the story's progression and world events. The player can collect and read different notes, interact with the environment, solve puzzles, and choose dialogue options to contribute to the story.

Interactability & Collectables:

The player can interact and inspect objects to learn more about the game's narrative and history. Such interactions can be important for the progression of the story, or they can be used to reward the player for exploration and his effort and interest to learn more. Inspecting different objects may trigger dialogue lines with Alaric.

There are also collectables that the player can look for to unlock certain areas or documents that he can read in a later time.

Anomalies:

Anomalies are irregularities in the world that were created when Alaric manipulated the balance between nature and synthetic life.

There are 2 types of anomalies: Minor, and Major.

- Minor anomalies are small inactive anomalies that have a limited effect on the environment. They can be activated by the "Activator" utility, and by doing so, it would make their effect on the environment active. The effect of activating them can be diverse by its identity. For example, one anomaly controls an elevator, or another that controls a door being shut. This part requires creativity and ways to mix game mechanics to come up with interesting puzzles.

- Major anomalies, on the other hand, are active anomalies that have a big scale effect. Shooting them with the activator will do nothing. They may have connected minor anomalies that, by activating them, you manage the major anomaly and make it inactive. An example of this is an anomaly that screwed up an area's gravity. Interacting with minor floating anomalies would flip the gravity's direction. The player has to figure out his way to escape this area by flipping the gravity over and over again to progress.

Gun & Utilities:

The player uses a gun to effect and interact with anomalies to solve puzzles and open areas.. This gun has 2 different utilities that can be switched between to access different functions: Activator and UV light

- The Activator utility, when equipped, makes small anomalies active.
- UV Light utility exposes hidden objects or texts in the environment. (Similar to Outer Wilds UV mechanic, but this one is more active in puzzle solving)

Dialogue:

When countered with dialogue segments with Alaric, the player is provided with choices to respond to Alaric. While a dialogue is already being played, similar to what Spider-Man 2 did, to provide the player with a valid excuse to cut the conversation, and they will pick it up later on when the important conversation is over. Dialogue segments should be kept short. This way, we can have many short dialogue segments.

OBJECTIVES & REWARDS

Although the game has non-linear exploration and level design, its critical path is linear. Objectives control the pace in which the player progresses throughout the story. Objectives are communicated to the player by dialogue. It is important to note that they are highly connected and influential to both level and narrative design. Objectives advocate for exploration by teaching and familiarizing the player with the mechanics and the game. This helps with level design to give room for the player to explore and create dynamics to reach side areas.

CONTROL SCHEME

We aim to support controllers, but that will depend on progress and development flow. For ease of navigation, control schemes have been divided into 2 different tables.

Control scheme for player's movement & actions:

Action	Movement	Move Camera	Sprint	Fire Gun
Keyboard	W, A, S, D	Mouse Axes	L Shift	LMB
PS5 Controller	L Analog	R Analog	L3	R2

Control scheme for UI & world interaction:

Action	Select Utility	Flip Utility (if applicable)	Interact	Pause
Keyboard	Mouse	Q	E	Escape
PS5 Controller	L Analog	△ Button	X Button	Options

These are the standard controls, but we plan to give the player the ability to customize their controls to their preference.

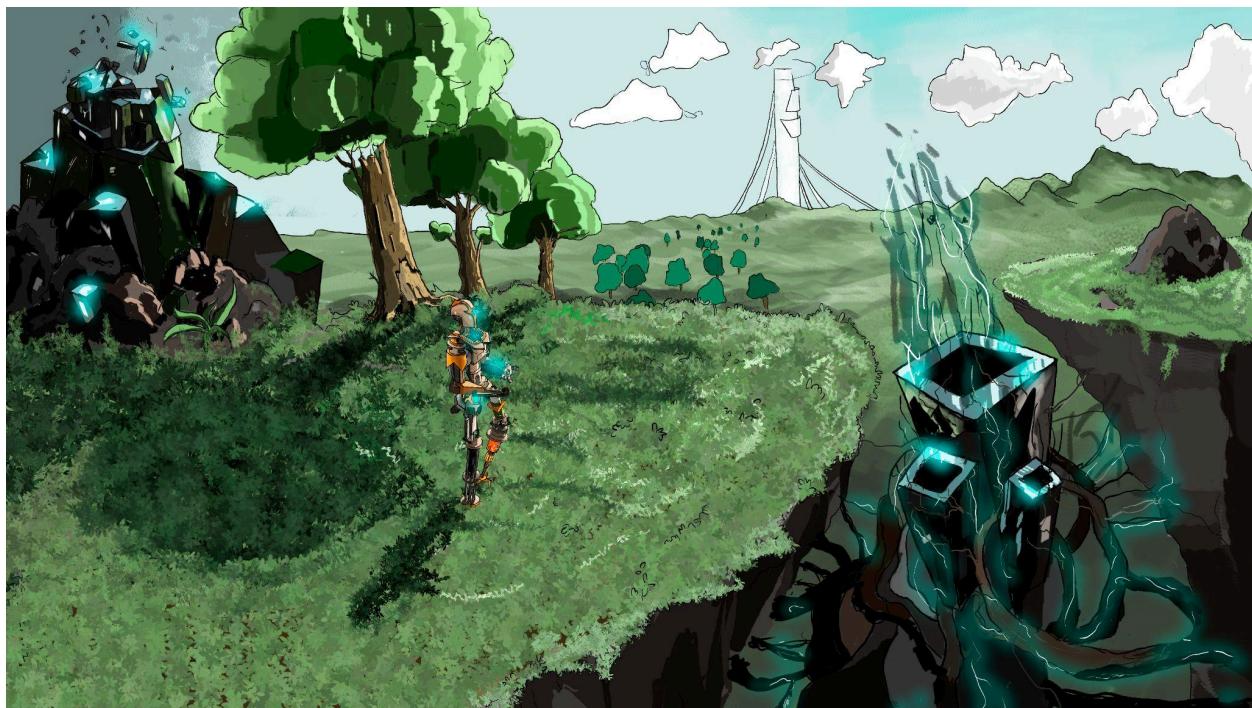
GAME AESTHETICS

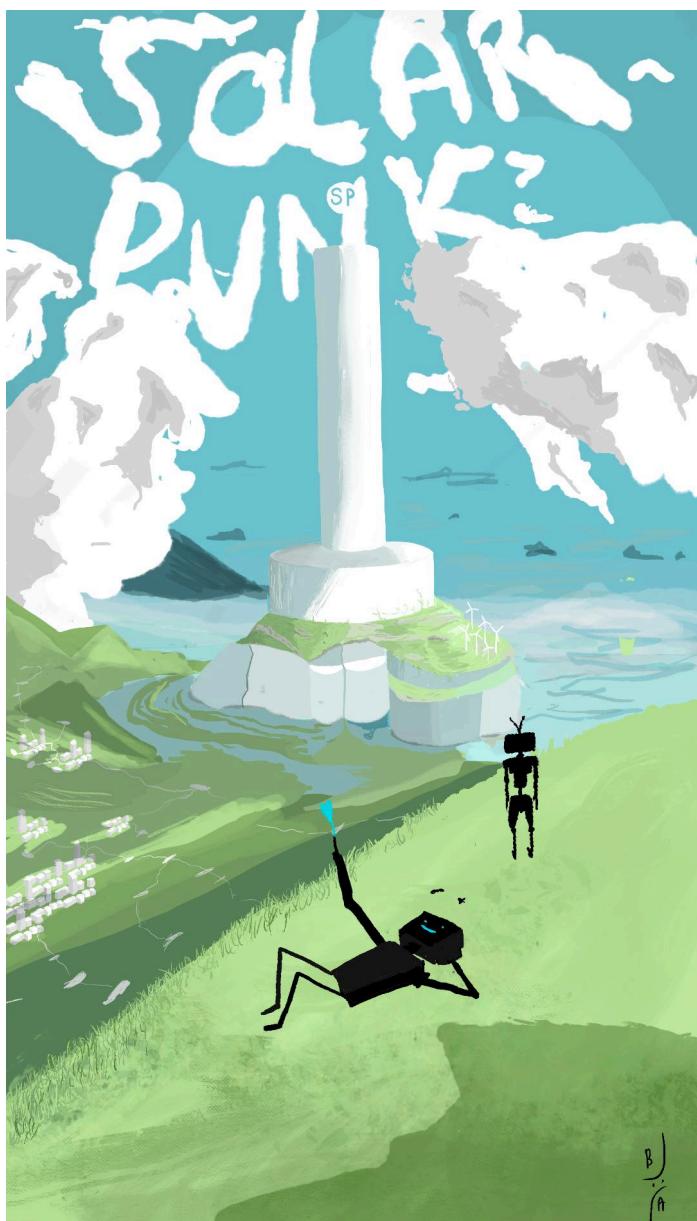
Our game will look vibrant and haunting to showcase a blend of natural life and artifice, its aesthetic rooted in the delicate balance between nature and synthetic dominance. Greens and whites dominate the remnants of the SolarPunk society. Fields once lush and unbroken now bear subtle signs of intrusion, patches of synthetic flowers glowing faintly in an unnatural neon blue.

This artificial vegetation mirrors perfection but feels unsettlingly lifeless, its sheen contrasting sharply with the soft warmth of true nature. As we get closer to the anomaly zone the atmosphere begins to shift and the air becomes heavier, almost suffocating as slowly fog starts to creep in, thickening with every step. The environment feels charged and alive with an unspoken tension. Lighting takes on an ethereal quality. Electric hues of shifting blues and purples pulse through the air, accompanied by faint static crackles.

3D STYLE & ASSETS

Concept Art





Color Palette

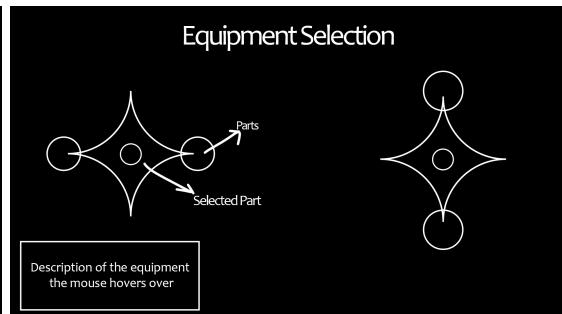
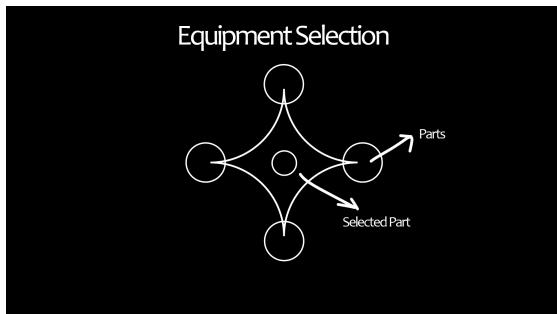


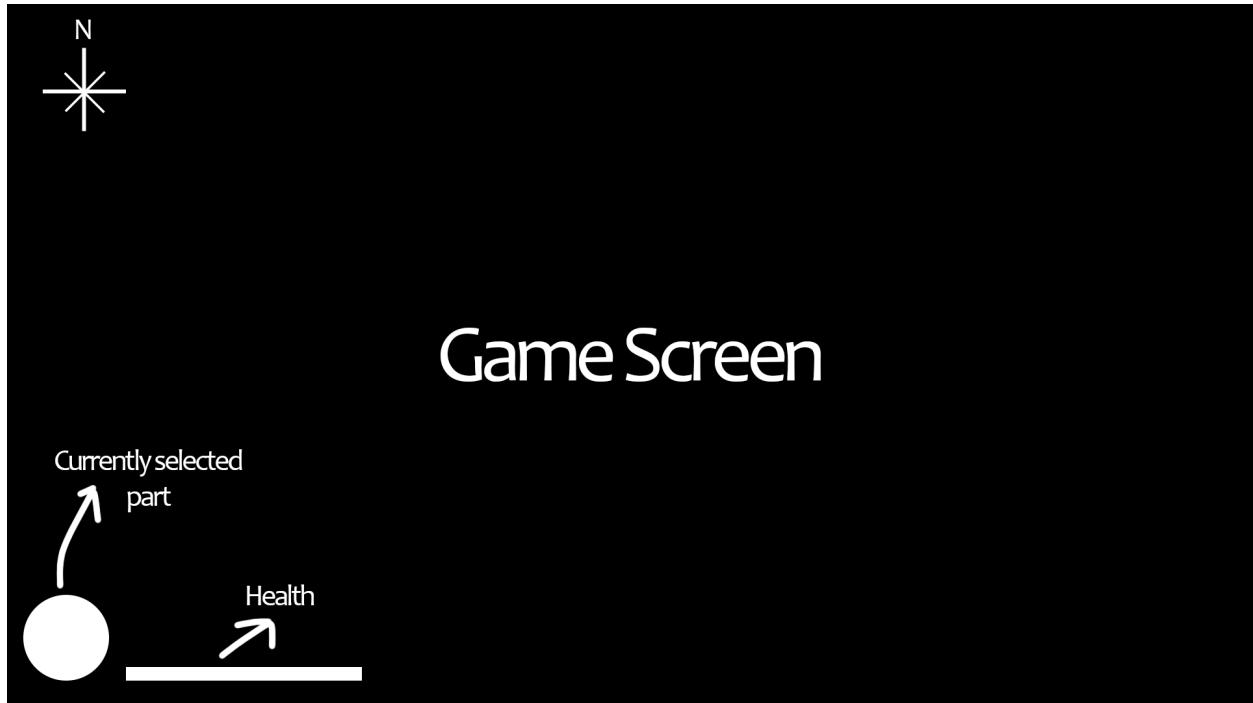
We went green green heavy for more nature heavy levels, red burgundy for factory levels, blue for technological aspects of the world, dark grey, brown and beige for city parts. Since we want our game to have more of a grim feeling we turned down the contrast.

MOCK-UP SCREENS

Some different variations we tried for our main menu. We are aiming for a simplistic look for our ui. We experimented on a few futuristic and naturalistic typefaces. While there are many things we want to implement and add to our ui, these are just prototypes.







Just like our main menu we want our game screen to be as minimalistic as possible. We want our game to be immersive and we like to keep pop-ups, tutorial boxes, information boxes to be as less as possible. You also can see our experiments for our equipment wheels. We want to keep sharp edges mixed with smooth curves to show the mixture between nature and technology.

SCHEDULE & TASKS

SCHEDULE

Tasks to Complete & Schedule				
Tasks	Task Lead	Start	End	% Complete
Pre Production Phase				
Design	Muhammet	Start of Dec	Middle of Jan	
Level Design Blockout		Start of Dec	Middle of Jan	
Narrative Design		Middle of Dec	End of Dec	
Puzzle Design		Start of Dec	Middle of Jan	
Development	Zaid	Start of Dec	End of Jan	
Production Pipeline		Start of Dec	Middle of Dec	
Mechanics Prototype		Start of Dec	End of Dec	
Player Control		Middle of Dec	Middle of Jan	
Art	Baran	Start of Dec	End of Jan	
Environment		Start of Dec	End of Jan	
3D Character Models		Start of Dec	End of Jan	
Special FX		Middle of Dec	Middle of Jan	
UI		Start of Jan	End of Jan	
Animation		End of Dec	End of Jan	
Milestone 1: Mechanics Prototype (Prototype 1 assignment)	Submission date of assignment			
Milestone 2: Proof of Concept (Prototype 2 assignment)	Submission date of assignment			
Development Phase				
Design	Muhammet	Start of April	Middle of May	
Analyze Feedback		Start of April	Middle of May	
Level Mechanics		Middle of April	Middle of May	
Balance Combat		Middle of April	Middle of May	
Development	Zaid	Start of April	End of May	
Dialogue System		Start of April	Start of May	
Prototypes		Start of April	End of May	
Enhance Combat		Middle of April	End of May	

Fix Bugs		Start of May	End of May	
Art	Baran	Start of April	End of May	
Environment		Start of April	Middle of May	
Special FX		Middle of April	End of May	
UI		Start of May	End of May	
Shaders		Start of May	End of May	
Animations		Start of April	Middle of May	
Audio	Berkem	Start of May	End of May	
Sound Design		Start of May	End of May	
Milestone 3: Finished Core Mechanics (Prototype 2 assignment)	Submission date of assignment			
Milestone 4: Dialogue & narrative system	Middle of May			
Deploying Phase				
Test Plan	Full team	Start of Jan	End of June	
Beta Testing		Throughout development		
"Go Live" Plans		Start of March	End of May	
Milestone 5: QA Testing	A QA testing session will be held after each prototype submission			
Milestone 6: Gold Edition (Prototype 4 assignment)	Submission date of assignment			

MILESTONES

Milestone 1: Mechanics Prototype

Our goal here is to have a prototype for the “lego” mechanic and at least 1 puzzle to test. The character model and animation will be placeholders for the most part, with work being divided between character and environment modeling and prop design. Basic UI will be implemented as a placeholder.

Milestone 2: Proof of Concept

At this stage, we should have a prototype that proves the concept and be able to give the feeling and a glimpse of the experience that we are aiming to deliver. We will have enemy designs and basic functionality, basic anomaly interaction and puzzle solving as well as narrative pieces and improved level design. UI will be improved upon and iterated if needed. Sound effects and music can be placeholders for now.

Milestone 3: Finished Core Mechanics

We aim to have finished the “lego” mechanic’s functionality and all of the utilities at this point. It may have bugs and needs more polishing, but the overall functionality is there and the player can go through the level with the 4 utilities applied. UI menus design should be ready for implementation.

Milestone 4: Dialogue & Narrative System

A dialogue system should be put in place, allowing for easy and quick iteration if needed. Player interaction with other characters should be ready at this stage as well as interactions with other narrative elements (like notes or voice messages). The focus will also be directed to animations and giving life to the scene. We should also have sound effects and music in the game to better experience the game. Also, UI menus and design should be placed in the game and implement their functionalities.

Milestone 5: QA Testing

After each milestone, a QA session will take place. This is very important for the development process so the design team can learn if they are moving in the right direction, and if an obstacle is found, it would be tackled as soon as possible. These sessions can take place between friends and families, or we may give public access to get more feedback, but they must be in our target audience. After each session, the team sets down and analyzes the feedback given and draws a line of action for the next month and alters elements that need to be altered.

Milestone 6: Gold Edition

The focus is shifted to polishing the game and fixing bugs. We aim to have 30-90 mins of gameplay. The focus is on quality over quantity, hence the plan and schedule may be altered to better fit our scope and make sure to deliver a game that meets our goals and delivers the experience we aim to deliver.

TEAM ROLES & TASKS

Each team member has his “main” role and tasks. As a team, we will have weekly meetings to stay updated with game progress.

Muhammet Ceylan:

My main role is game & narrative designer. He will be responsible for conveying the story and pacing it as well as balancing game mechanics. He will also work on sound design and make sure it aligns with the game feel.

Zaid Abuzahra:

My main role is game developer and programmer. I am responsible for implementing game loop and logic in the game engine as well as fixing bugs and implementing UI functionalities. In addition, I am in charge of documentation and assisting in environment design when needed.

Baran Avci:

My main role is as a 3D character artist. He will be responsible for creating character models and animations and applying textures and shaders in the game engine. Baran and Berkem are leading the art department for this project, so their work goes hand in hand.

Berkem Karakaya:

My main role is as a 3D environment artist. He will be responsible for creating environment props and setting up the scenes in the game. He will also be responsible for the UI design. As mentioned, Baran and Berkem are leading the art department for this project, so their work goes hand in hand.