DESIGN DOCUMENT

WORKING TITLE and LOGO

ROSETIA
A FIRST CONTACT SIMULATOR

- Unique name for recognition and SEO purposes
- Subtitle ('A First Contact Simulator') optional, though conveys game premise
  - 'A First Contact SIMULATION' for first episode (Triune) may be less misleading
- Portmanteau of 'ROSETTA' (as in the Rosetta Stone—translation and language are core subjects in the game) and 'SETI' (the Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence, a widely used but non-trademarked acronym)

CONCEPT STATEMENT

After centuries of sleep, you awake—alone—in a far-off nebula full of strange, wonderful, and intelligent forms of life. Your job? Talk to them. Explore alien worlds. Experience new cultures, philosophies and ways of being. Make first contact. An artful, story-driven RPG for any sci-fi fan tired of violence, technobabble, and galaxy-ending stakes.

INSPIRATIONS: Contact, The Left Hand of Darkness, Childhoods End, Enders Game, Mass Effect, Fallout New Vegas

MARKETING

ESRB RATING: T (mature themes)
MONETIZATION: One-time purchase at <30 price-point; free demo (first ¼ of game) for exposure
TARGET AUDIENCE: PC users; men and women aged 18 – 42**;** SF fans; Hard SF fans; Trekkies; fans of visual novels and walking/talking simulators
STEAM GENRE TAGS: RPG; Sci-fi; story-rich; single-player; open world; simulation**;** life sim; interactive fiction; adventure; exploration; top-down; indie; pixel graphics; 2D; retro; emotional; visual novel; choices matter; cute; multiple endings
UNIQUE SELLING POINTS: Embodies the bright and optimistic tone of early Star Trek; gameplay is relaxed and contemplative rather than action or violence-based; incredibly detailed conversation trees usually seen only in conventional interactive fiction rather than RPGs; combines the character-driven story of Mass Effect with the freedom and non-linearity of Fallout: New Vegas

PLAYER EXPERIENCE

PLAYER CHARACTER: First Contact Specialist

- Name chosen by player; character is later given other titles by the aliens they interact with (Mediary, Emissary, Messenger)
- Players can assign points to one of several skill categories to facilitate role-play; unlocks unique dialogue options and quest solutions:
  - SKILLS:
    - [Artistry 5]
    - [Philosophy 5]
    - [Psychology 5]
    - [Ecology 5]
    - [Medicine 5]

PLAYER CHARACTER
(with Translator AI, ROSETTA, on chest)

- ▪ [Physics 5]
- ▪ [Engineering 5]
  - ○ OTHER POSSIBILITIES:
    - ▪ [Aesthetics 5]
    - ▪ [Scholarship 5]
    - ▪ [Writing 5]

FANTASY: The freedom of being a star-ship captain alone in a far-off section of the galaxy, free to navigate the diplomatic and ethical pressures of first contact as you see fit. *You* gather the information; *you* solve the problems; *you* make the hard choices.

FEELINGS: wonder, loneliness, optimism, freedom

ENGAGEMENT: Visual splendor of a detailed alien world filled with interesting flora and fauna; emotional connection to several well-developed characters; rewarding choice-agony of making ethical decisions with impactful consequences

VISUAL and AUDIO STYLE

PERSPECTIVE: 2D**;** Dual Top-Down / Side-Scroller gameplay for external and interior areas, respectively

VISUALS: Pixel-art style common to several successful indie projects (Fez, Undertale, Stardew Valley, Hyper Light Drifter, VA-11 HALL-A, etc.)

MUSIC: 8-Bit/Chiptune music with piano, synth drones, and lo-fi motifs (sampling, static)

JUSTIFICATION: Style has proven extremely popular with the target audience; provides an immediate indication of the game's style, type and price-point for prospective buyers; capitalizes on nostalgia for early 8/16-bit hand-held RPGs (e.g. Chrono-Trigger, Earthbound); is cheap and realistic for a small team to produce quickly. These practical benefits greatly outweigh the lack of innovation in design.

SAMPLE IMAGES:

Hyper Light Drifter (2016)

Nykra (TBD)

Coffee Talk (2020)

VA-11 HALL-A (2016)

SCOPE and SPECIFICATIONS

PLATFORMS: PC (Steam); possibility of Xbox, Playstation, and mobile (Android/iPhone) release
ENGINE: GameMaker
DEVELOPMENT TEAM: Trenton (art, design, writing, programming) and Andraya (sound design, score)
FIRST-PLAYABLE: Bare-bones demo complete by end of August 2021
**TOTAL DEV TIME:** Further development conditional upon success of demo release
RISK FACTORS:

- Proposed depth of dialogue risks the combinatory explosion of conversation possibilities (unsustainable)
    - Mitigated more generally by the compartmentalization of planets, areas, quests, and use of state-based player stats
- Ambition in design may surpass the abilities of a first-time development team
    - While the demo hopes to depict only a single race/planet out of several others, the pressures of creating a demo representative of the entire game may encourage the addition of more features, dialogues, etc. than the team has time to produce
- Story may not provide sufficient spectacle and conflict to sustain the player's interest
    - While the lack of action should appeal to the target demographic, it limits the accessibility of the game for casual players more attuned to action-based SF
- Scientific focus (in lore, exploration, worldbuilding etc.) may conflict with the emphasis on interpersonal relationships—the backbone of player investment in a story
    - Must make sure to focus equal attention on both; players only care about worldbuilding if it informs their understanding of the people in that world

GAME-WORLD PREMISE

After two centuries of sleep, you [the player] emerge from cryo-stasis above the planet Triune, a twilight world tidally locked to its dim, red sun. The computer tells you that your mission commander and her translator AI, Rosetta, went down to the surface two years ago to observe the native Tortans. They never returned. Your job is to find them, if possible; locate the source of the transmission that invited your ship here in the first place; and, if called upon, to follow the SETIA procedures for First Contact:

1. Present yourself to the world, unarmed, with offers of peace and friendship.
2. Travel to each nation, befriending rulers and commoners alike, without discrimination.
3. Make detailed observations of local cultures, philosophies and ways of being.
4. Offer medicine, technology and political aid (at your discretion) to generate goodwill towards humanity and the prospect of interstellar cooperation.
5. If successful, help to unify the planet through the shared construction of an FTL transmitter, enabling communication across the stars—to Earth and beyond.
6. Once the transmitter has been built and relations formally established, you are encouraged to scan for

TRIUNE, TWILIGHT WORLD
(depicted in stock sketch)
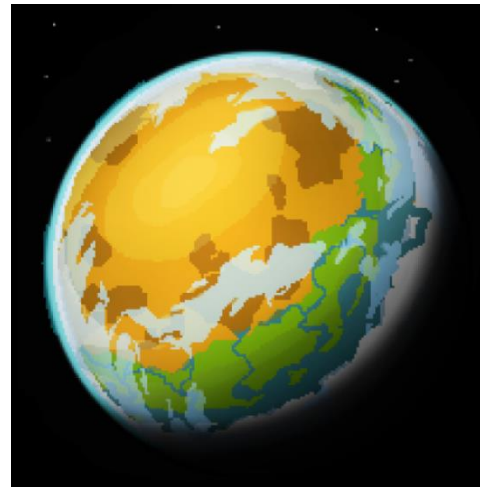
ALIEN CONCEPT ART: TORTAN
(one of many races in the game)

new life, new civilizations, and begin the process over again.

DESIGN PILLARS
[EVERY FEATURE MUST SUPPORT ONE OR MORE OF THESE IDEALS]

OPTIMISM, NOT NIHILISM

Too many games and media franchises rely on violence and destruction, projecting grim visions of the future which explore many of the issues of our modern day (inequality, racism, war, death). While these have their place, the modern SF scene has become saturated with darkness, leaving very little place for consolatory fiction envisioning a positive, enlightened future. Even series which once seemed to embody such sentiments—like Star Trek—have increasingly focused on action over quiet meditation. ROSETIA will address this gap, catering to a disenfranchised SF audience.

- Freedom of Movement
    - Player should not be beholden to institutions, governments, strict rules
    - Feeling of being unburdened: distance from home allows a deep sense of freedom; player should have no one to report to other than themselves
- No Violence:
    - The player is a scientist and explorer, not a space marine
    - No glamorization of violence, no repetitive violence as a gameplay component
    - While death and pain are inevitable realities of life and should be reflected in the decisions the player makes, they should be rare and consequential

TALKING AS AN END, NOT A MEANS

The lack of shooting, puzzles, or other conventional gameplay elements in ROSETIA means that dialogue is the player's primary mode of interaction with the world. It should thus be complex enough to sustain player attention (i.e. some element of strategy, manipulation of branching dialogue systems), while the dialogue itself should be of sufficient quality to be worth reading for its own sake—not viewed solely in terms of an objective or win-state. If there is a 'right' answer among the dialogue options, the player's focus shifts from having a conversation to solving a puzzle, engaging the analytical, calculating parts of the brain. This presents a barrier to both empathy and immersion.

- Ways to Introduce Complexity to Conversations:
    - Create estrangement by drawing attention to differing modes of expression, societal assumptions, and ways of thinking between the character and the player.

DISTANCE AND DIFFERENCE

As the world and its peoples become more connected, differences in race and culture have created fear, anxiety, and xenophobia—a fear of what we do not understand. The current pandemic has only exacerbated this issue, drawing lines between nations as social distancing draws us deeper inside ourselves. As SF, ROSETIA provides an avenue to explore this distance. Players will cross vast gulfs of space and time to experience languages and ontologies totally alien to our own Western sensibilities. Despite the alienation of this difference, the game argues that we are better together than apart.

- Physical Distance:
    - Travelling between worlds will require stasis over long periods of time; you leave a planet knowing that, by the time you arrive at the next one, everyone you knew will be dead.
- Personal Distance:

- o The player's costume will be a decontaminated environmental suit; they will always be separated from others by a glass. Aliens will look different from the player, sometimes radically different, bucking the traditional bipedal humanoid form.
- Emotional Distance:
  - o No character will share the player's value system. Everyone—rich or poor, biological or synthetic—will challenge individualist SF and Western thinking by advocating for novel ways of seeing the world. Despite this, a kernel of fundamental humanity will remain; both character and player should have at least one similarity evoking empathy. It is this common connection which must be nurtured for the player to achieve their mission.
- Communicative Distance:
  - o The player will need to activate their universal translator before they can speak to others; the game will telegraph the active translation of conversation via exposition and alien text; inefficiencies in the translation software will be addressed within conversations, possibly as a source of conflict.

THE ETHICS OF EXPLORATION
Fiction depicting first-encounters between different alien cultures finds its origins in the colonial era and the so-called 'Age of Exploration.' Star Trek and other franchises like it adopt a policy of non-interference for this very reason; while exploration is wonderful, imposing ones will or beliefs onto another culture can be disastrous. However, as countless episodes of Star Trek show, the rule exists to be broken; within Trek's humanist worldview, sufficient moral cause dictates benevolent intervention. ROSETIA will do away with this arbitrary, absolute restriction from the very beginning, leaving the first-contact approach to the discretion of the player, allowing them to live out the fantasy of being a starship captain, forced to judge right from wrong on the edges of known space. Quests will revolve around the ethics of these two approaches.
- Moral Quandaries:
  - o Do you try to impose your moral beliefs on others?
  - o Should you accept the risk of giving human knowledge and technology to alien cultures? Conflict between good intentions and the law of unintended consequences.
  - o Is your survival and well-being more important than others? Do you value human life more than alien life?
  - o Do you treat aliens with respect, or as a tourist?

BIG GALAXY, SMALL STORIES
In modern SF, writers increasingly put the fate of the world, galaxy, or universe at stake. The viewer knows this kind of threat is untenable and artificial: the heroes will inevitably find some last-minute solution to maintain the status quo, killing all sense of suspense. Such a scope is also impossible to comprehend given the limited scope of human empathy. For us, a singe death is a tragedy; ten million dead is a statistic. In ROSETIA, quests should be clear, character-based, self-contained bottles. This limitation will allow for follow-up consequences which communicate the impact of the player's choices without producing exponential changes in the game-world. If these changes would realistically extend beyond an individual, they will be embodied by an individual. While the player in ROSETIA has a world-changing role, they remain a *single person in a vast universe which will inevitably continue without them.*
- No Coincidences:
  - o Stories should take place in a small space and stay confined to it, evoking a sense of the universe as a massive, lonely place. There should be no improbable coincidences or "I can't believe I just ran into you!" moments which make the world feel small.

- No Condensing Spaces:
    - While the scope of what's depicted on-scene will obviously be limited by time and my own abilities, I should avoid condensing all quests and characters into a small, easily traversable area; while this makes for better gameplay, it severely dampens the sense of scale. Use loading screens or animations to break-up flow of gameplay; use several smaller maps separated by long distances, accessible only through use of your personal lander. This will allow for compartmentalization and easy cutting of different spaces while making the world feel bigger than it actually is.

DIVERSITY, DIVERSITY

While many works of SF are creative in their depictions of aliens, the limitations of short-form storytelling make it difficult to explore the complexities of a world which should support multiple different cultures and worldviews. This often results in monocultures or a 'World of Hats,' in which aliens are ostensibly human, differing only in a single attribute (e.g. Vulcans are logical, Klingons are warriors, Ferengi are capitalists, etc.). In ROSETIA, each planet will have at least two nations with conflicting philosophies, and within each there should be differences of opinion, countercultures, and reactionary roles (e.g. Klingon lawyers, cooks; Ferengi engineers, officers).

- People Are Different, But Should Not Be Defined By Their Difference:
    - There should be a great amount of individual variation from character to character. People outcast from society should not exist wholly in reaction to that society, but be represented on their own terms (i.e. 'Girl-power!' and 'Strong Female Characters' are stupid, reactionary, binary; just write good, human characters who happen to be women). If possible, this should be done in a creative way so as to avoid direct analogues with real-life.
    Additionally, if there is character customization, players should be able to choose their race and gender representation.
- Collectivism VS Individualism:
    - Explore ontologies and epistemologies which conflict with the dominant Western culture (materialistic, capitalist, patriarchal, individualist), using the tool of SF to show that culture and society are often artificial constructs, not biological reality; what is 'normal' is a matter of perspective.

DETAIL OVER DRAMA

Many works of SF media—particularly SF video games—lack sufficient worldbuilding. They focus on the immediate needs of gameplay, rather than thinking through questions of agriculture, commerce, scarcity, the why and how of everything displayed on-screen. When writing quests, they ask "What would be fun?" rather than "If this world were real, what conflicts would naturally arise, and how would the player be able to navigate them?" This breaks the immersion of the discerning player, severely limiting their ability to imagine the world as a real, functional place. To ensure consistency between the story and its setting, ROSETIA's worldbuilding will be carried out *first* in accordance with the design pillars discussed previously; the quests will arise naturally from these premises.

- The Codex
    - One of my favourite parts of Mass Effect 1 was the Codex, which featured extensive worldbuilding of a complexity not always represented on-screen. It explained how ships worked, the practicalities of interstellar communication, and the social and political organization of dozens of worlds. This created a sense of a vast universe just outside the confines of my submarine-like ship, igniting my imagination.

- o However, silence is often better than bullshit. The air of realism is more important than realism itself. If you're not confident in any of your explanations, and can't seem to find any existing explanation that fits, don't say anything at all. If people believe you know what you're talking about most of the time, they'll give you the benefit of the doubt and assume the lack of explanation is deliberate, and fill in the blanks on their own.
- In-Universe Literature:
  - o While storytelling and blatant exposition are poorly suited to dialogue, they make perfect sense in the form of found documents ostensibly written by real people within the world (e.g. short stories, creation myths, record-keeping, letters, etc.). This epistolary realism will flesh out the world and give it a sense of history; to this end, every document will have an author with their own individual voice. Excerpts from larger works may contain supplementary descriptions acknowledging the context of the author's time, their biases, etc. For reference, see:
    - Translated literature and record-keeping from the Middle Ages (Bede, Beowulf, Icelandic Sagas)
    - Le Guin's invented Gethenian stories and creation myths
    - DS9: Garak's "The Never-ending Sacrifice," The Repetitive Epic ("you're just a prisoner of Federation dogma and human prejudice")

OPEN EXPLORATION
- Feeling of a gigantic world opening up in front of you; the freedom of movement, of discovery; the power to chose your own direction, knowing that wherever you go you'll stumble on something amazing.
  - o Visiting uncharted worlds in Mass Effect 1; having carte blanche to travel the entire game world from the very beginning in The Outer Wilds and Subnautica, without Quest Trackers dictating your movements.

DEEP CONVERSATIONS
- Mysterious characters who offer unexpected insight into races previously unknown or misunderstood (Legion, Thane); ethical conversations which provide multiple pathways for asserting your own views in the game-world, swaying others to your side (Ashley, Garrus); sublime encounters with threatening, eons-old beings telling tragic stories of far-off, long dead worlds (Prothean VI, Sovereign, Thorian); deep, detailed explanations of history, politics, covert operations, etc. which most games would never think to explore ('How to Kill Jedi').

SIMULATION, NOT CONSEQUENCE
- When you think of a unique, non-binary solution to a quest and find the game *actually* lets you do it. When you're forced to consider every action you take because the game *actually* pays attention to what you do. Players should be able to think of the world as a real place, and themselves as actors in it, rather than disembodied shooting machines following quest-markers.
  - o The Outer Worlds MSI/Iconoclasts quest; sending water to Vault 13 in Fallout 1

PLOT and MISSION STRUCTURE

The player moves through the world of ROSETIA on their spaceship, the ARECIBO, scanning for and traveling to different alien worlds. The lack of light-speed travel within the game's fiction means that these worlds are separated from one another by years, often decades of time, making back-and-forth
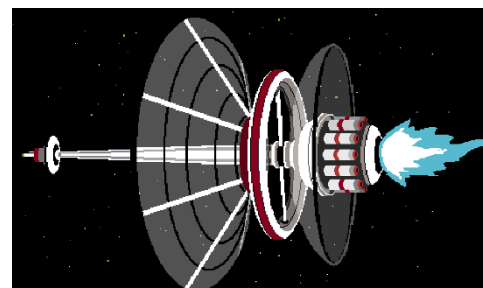

THE ARECIBO
(player ship and home-base)

travel between them impossible; once the player leaves a planet, they leave it forever. This effectively turns each planet into an isolated module, managing combinatory explosion within the game's choice tree—a hybrid structure known as a **QUEST-BOTTLENECK**. In this system…

- Planets will not need to be updated to demonstrate changes over time or the long-term impact of the player's choices on the world
- Lack of choice-tracking and tree divergence will allow for more complex quests with radically diverse branching in each isolated area, facilitating many possible approaches to each situation; this accommodates more player-types, facilitating a wider role-play spectrum

ROSETIA'S BRANCHING STRUCTURE (ROUGH):
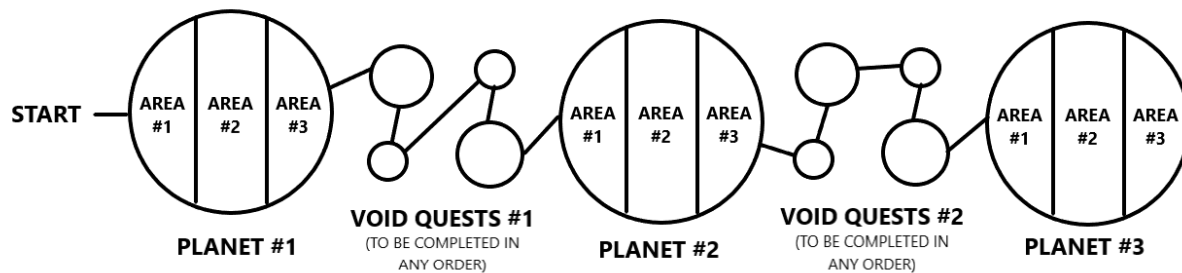
- While each 'area' (including the smaller areas between planets) will feature a massive amount of branching, the branching will be largely confined to that area; the only state-information tracked across the game is the player's inventory and character statistics

REPUTATION-BASED PROGRESSION
EXAMPLE: PLANET #1

- Once the player discovers a planet, they can choose to gather more information before landing (via radio messages, manufacturing crop-circles/UFO sightings to judge reactions to alien visitors), or land directly on the planet's surface in an area of their choosing (cities, rural areas, neutral ground).
  - Choice of starting area (enabled by the compartmentalization of each planet into city-states) instills in players a strong sense of agency compared to the relatively linear openings and plot progression of most RPGs.
  - Each choice has various positives and negatives associated with it, facilitated through the reputation system (see 'Short Term Goals' below); there are no 'right' answers
- After the player has talked with the leader of their chosen landing-spot, they will be free to explore the world (and its quests) as they see fit.

SHORT TERM GOALS:

- Each area of the game is filled with three to five side-quests which explore the problems specific to each nation and the inevitable ethical problems of First Contact.
- By completing side-quests, players have the opportunity to earn '**GOODWILL**' points—a stat-based reputation mechanic which represents the trust they have garnered as a result of their decisions and dialogue choices in each area.
  - These points will be displayed to the player on the bottom-left corner of the screen, and tracked in the diegetic game menu via a progress bar with 'DISTRUST and 'TRUST' as the two opposite ends.
    - While 'FEAR' is a more evocative title for the left side of the bar, more advanced races will likely never be afraid of you

- o Goodwill will not be globally cumulative—there will be independent trackers for each area (Starside, Strip, Sunside); this will allow for difficult decisions which increase goodwill for one group at the cost of another
- o LOADING SCREEN GOODWILL TIPS:
  - "Every action you take in ROSETIA will either bolster or diminish your GOODWILL with the Tortan people."
  - "GOODWILL is not simply a measure of how much people 'like' you, but rather how much they know and trust you. The more GOODWILL you have, the less people see you as an alien invader."
  - "Remember: Actions which grant you GOODWILL in the short term may take it away in the long-term. Before making a decision, consider its potential consequences."
  - "Remember: A high GOODWILL score isn't the only criteria for success. You can achieve your mission objective in any number of ways…"
  - "If you're confused after receiving negative GOODWILL points, ask yourself: how might this action look to other people? For example, if you keep flying up to your alien spaceship to eat alien food, people will continue to think of you as an alien."
- The challenge of the game is in determining what decisions feel 'right' to you (even if there is no 'right' answer), taking into account that the choices which garner the most immediate Goodwill may be ethically dubious in the long-term.
- Goodwill must be largely additive, and only negative a significant amount of time after the choice is made – this will limit immediate reloads / metagaming strategies
- **Possible Goodwill Scores:**
  - o NEGATIVE GOODWILL (<0): **INVADER**
  - o NO GOODWILL (0-20): **INTERLOPER**
    - You're an alien, a strange creature from another world—both threatening and awe-inspiring.
  - o LOW GOODWILL (20-40): **DAY-TRIPPER**
    - While you're still an alien, you've earned some trust among the community.
  - o MEDIUM GOODWILL (40-60): **TOURIST**
    - People are starting to know you, and even trust you.
  - o HIGH GOODWILL (60-80): **IMMIGRANT**
    - People know you and trust you as they would a friend.
  - o EXCELLENT GOODWILL (80-99): **NATIVE**
    - You've earned the complete trust of the community. They have accepted you as one of their own.

LONG TERM GOALS:
- Short-term goals factor directly into the player's long-term goals, as the overarching objective of each area is to garner as much Goodwill as possible before attempting a **high-stakes dialogue sequence** with the area leaders. The higher the player's Goodwill, the easier it will be to convince these characters to join the SETIA interstellar union.
  - o See CONVERSATION ARCHITECTURE for the possible methods of success/progression in a conversation; all of these will factor into the final conversation. The more the player has done, said, learned, etc. the more conversation 'chunks' will be unlocked and at their disposal to convince the leaders to join their union. The player's Goodwill will act as a multiplier for any points earned through these paths.

- The ultimate 'win' state for the planet is to persuade at least one technological nation to join and construct the FTL transmitter.
  - Once built, players can call Earth and speak to SETIA leadership. This will allow players to review their decisions and justify them, if necessary.
- If the player 'fails' in every area, the transmitter will go unbuilt, but they will still be encouraged to continue their save-file and try again on a different planet. The only consequence for failure is their own disappointment.

GOAL JUSTIFICATION:
- Both short- and long-term goals fulfill the core fantasy promised by the game as they allow the player the kind of agency available to an archetypical starship captain: the freedom to decide your own movements; the final say in ethical negotiations; and the power to forever change alien worlds.

CHARACTER MORTALITY SPECTRUM

MORALITY SPECTRUM: INTERVENTIONISM
- As ROSETIA is a game about contact with the 'other,' its morality system is not one of Good VS Evil, but that of interventionism: to what degree does the player try to interfere with alien society? Do they introduce new technologies? Try to dictate right and wrong? The options available to players within the game will revolve around this fundamental problem.

CHARACTER PROTOTYPES:
- To facilitate the writing of choices/dialogue which reflect the interventionist morality scale, there are three character 'types' which will be accommodated for in every interaction
- Due to the optimistic, Trekkian tone of the game, all characters are fundamentally 'good,' with subtle nuances between them reflecting the theme of the game
- Players will likely not conform to a single character but chose options from all three types and invent their own characters accordingly
  - [NOTE: these are all generalizations, especially in the case of Kirk and Picard, who both frequently lean towards Neutral Good]
- **#1) KIRK**: active interference
  - ALIGNMENT: chaotic good
  - LIKES: liberty, truth, individualism, western morality
  - DISLIKES: tyrants, ignorance, rules, no-win scenarios
  - ACTIONS: actively forces their own value system onto others; uses power and technology to influence people into following a 'better' path
  - GAME STRATEGY: immediate increase to goodwill balanced by the possibility of unforeseen consequences; strategy of short-term gains
  - DOWNSIDES: people may become indignant at attempts to judge and direct them
  - QUOTE: "I'll *make* them listen!" "The law doesn't apply to me."

- **#2) DATA**: pragmatic interference
  - ALIGNMENT: true neutral / neutral good
  - LIKES: logic, practicality, curiosity, knowledge, mutual understanding
  - DISLIKES: uncertainty, irrationality, prejudice, mindless allegiance
  - ACTIONS: offers but does not try to force their own values onto others; sometimes exchanges technology and aid for practical and humanitarian reasons

- o GAME STRATEGY: middle-of-the-road approach grounded in situational context that does not greatly engender nor eliminate goodwill; strategy of "if you're doing things right, people won't be sure you've done anything at all"
  - o DOWNSIDES: may distance themselves from others in pursuit of knowledge
  - o QUOTE: "I'll speak if they're willing to listen." "The unjust law should be rewritten."
- **#3) PICARD**: non-interference
  - o ALIGNMENT: lawful good
  - o LIKES: justice, principles, rules, mutual trust, the greater good
  - o DISLIKES: incompetence, rashness, broken commitments, disrespect for authority
  - o ACTIONS: does not force personal mortality onto other peoples; does not waver from principles, even under extraordinary circumstances; believes morality is relative
  - o GAME STRATEGY: mitigates unforeseen consequences by forgoing an immediate increase to goodwill; gains accrue slowly over time
  - o DOWNSIDES: inflexibility may allow unethical practices to continue
  - o QUOTE: "I'll listen to *them*." "The law prevents more problems than it causes."

TRACKING PLAYER CHOICES
- Every choice the player makes in agreement with the 'KIRK/HERO' prototype will earn them 'Interference' points; every action they take in agreement with the 'PICARD/DIPLOMAT' character type will earn them 'Non-Interference' points. These two values will be displayed to the player via the in-game menu as a representation of their actions so far. It will be further accompanied by a short description and title determined by weighing the respective point-values against one another.
- **EXAMPLES:**
  - o Interference > Non-Interference (by at least 100 points): **RIGHTEOUS**
    - ▪ You've instigated change on Triune. While some people eagerly welcome that change, others see you as a meddling foreigner with no business disrupting their world.
  - o Interference > Non-Interference (by at least 500 points): **EARTH-SHAKING**
    - ▪ You've instigated unprecedented change on Triune. While many are ecstatic for this new era, others mourn the past and curse your name. They wonder what might have been were they left to determine their own future.
  - o Non-Interference > Interference (by at least 200 points): **TOLERANT**
    - ▪ You've proven yourself to be mostly non-threatening. While most people are now warm to the idea of alien contact, others are disappointed; they hoped your coming would bring change, but change isn't what you're offering.
  - o Non-Interference > Interference (by at least 500 points): **DETACHED**
    - ▪ You've shown people that they have no reason to fear you. You're not here to disrupt their way of life. While some see that as a good thing, others believe that you've wasted your power and promise.
  - o Interference = Non-Interference (within 50 point differential): **BENEVOLENT**
    - ▪ So far you've towed the line evenly, judging right and wrong based on context rather than principles. As a result, most people see you as a reasonable—if unremarkable—figure.
- The interventionist scale will also be combined with the player's Goodwill score to produce a unique title (Interventionist Adjective + Goodwill Noun) and a unique description for every

possible combination. This reflects the interplay of the two values, demonstrates the impact of player choice, and enhances role-play. Examples:

- o Non-Interference > Interference (by at least 500 points) + Excellent Goodwill = **DETACHED** **NATIVE**:
    - You've shown people that they have no reason to fear you. You're not here to disrupt their way of life. While some see that as a good thing, others believe that you've wasted your power and promise. Nevertheless, you've earned the complete trust of the community. They have accepted you as one of their own.
- o Interference > Non-Interference (by at least 200 points) + No Goodwill = **RIGHTEOUS** **INTERLOPER**
    - You've instigated change on Triune. While some people eagerly welcome that change, others see you as a meddling foreigner with no business disrupting their planet. To the world at large, however, you're still an alien—equal parts threatening and awe-inspiring.

LIFE SIMULATION

- In ROSETIA, players will have to manage two meters (**HUNGER** and **SLEEP**), often through the use of money
- Contrary to most games with such systems, the goal is not to emulate 'survival' as a gameplay component, but to simulate the reality of living in a foreign land. The choices the player makes in response to this reality says something about them. In this way, gameplay systems are used to reinforce the core themes of the story. For example:
    - o **SLEEP**:
        - Your ship has a bed which you can sleep in for free. However, returning to your ship again distances you from others and decreases goodwill. If you pay for a room in each major city, you ingratiate yourself with the locals and gain positive goodwill.
    - o **HUNGER**:
        - Your ship produces unlimited free food; however, leaving the planet because you don't want to eat their food implies a sense of cultural chauvinism. This grants you negative goodwill.
        - Local alien food is limited and costs money; however, exploring alien cuisine and talking to the people who make it ingratiates you to them. This grants you positive goodwill.
    - o **MONEY**:
        - Due to the lack of 'loot' earned through combat, money can only be earned by:
            - Sharing human technology, knowledge, and cultural artifacts (obtained through use of REPLIMAT and CULTURAL ARCHIVE on ship)
            - Mining mineral deposits from the planet (also used as raw material for REPLIMAT)
            - Performing services and completing quests
            - Petitioning Tortan governments
        - All of the above methods bring ethics into consideration, and will increase/decrease the player's GOODWILL and INTERVENTIONIST scores accordingly

- Essentially, the game rewards players who take the more inconvenient path, while those who opt for the easy way out (missing the point of the game entirely) receive no reward except the ease of their experience. The lesson is that 'exploring' new cultures from the outside-looking-in is unethical—you must approach others on equal footing and explore their world from the inside. The goal is to make the player a true inhabitant of a place rather than just a tourist.

CHOICE PHILOSOPHY

(see: Josh Sawyer's GDC talk: *Do (Say) The Right Thing: Choice Architecture, Player Expression, and Narrative Design in Fallout: New Vegas*)

In ROSETIA, all major choices will be:
- **tactical** – what players say should be attuned to their goal and the person they're speaking to
- **strategic** – decisions should affect the player's reputation with major groups
- **forecasted** – players should know what's *likely* to happen once they make a choice (even if these consequences do not fully reveal themselves until much later) so they don't feel cheated
- **validating** – players should be able to succeed no matter their character by doing something *only* their character could do
- **agonising** – players should have to make sacrifices to do what they feel is right / consistent with their character; no binary Good/Bad decisions, no Sophie's Choice situations (two terrible options with no obvious gain)
- **impactful** – sacrifices should produce an emotional response in characters or a narrative impact on the world (best achieved through follow-up encounters)

Such choices will reveal a narrative that is:
- **fused** (information is fused with emotional content rather than pure info dumps or "tell me about X" construction – all plot exposition should be mixed with characters talking about what is important to them)
- **speed-run-able** (optional and critical paths are separated)
- **outlined** (make a map of your narrative branching in advance)
- **isolated** (reactivity should be complex, but localized to a single branch rather than spiraling out to affect the whole tree)
- **communicable in every win-state** (whether you achieve the quest through diplomacy or violence, you get the narrative info you need)

CONVERSATION ARCHITECTURE

Due to the lack of physical combat mechanics, the vast majority of **gameplay will be dialogue-based**, testing your social, emotional, and ethical skills. As a result,
- NPCs will be social rather than functional (if you entertain them and ask questions about their lives, you get new branches; if you go straight to the point with a character that isn't no-nonsense, you'll be rejected)
- Conversations will not have re-playable lines or branches; you cannot talk to an NPC again to exhaust all the possible dialogue they have to offer, or have them repeat themselves
  - In real life, people are not always free for follow-up conversations, and may even be frustrated at having to answer the same things over again
  - Limits metagaming strategies; if all conversations are one-time-only events, the choice of what to say truly does matter.

- o HOWEVER: There should be options to repreatedly ask characters about information that's particularly important to the plot, just in case the player accidently skips over it
- The ability to choose the 'right' dialogue option will not be folded into the game's progression system as an optional, upgradable skill. This flies in contrast to most modern RPGs, in which the real challenge of dialogue occurs not within the dialogue itself, but in the prior choice of which skills to 'level up' as you earn experience points (often by shooting things).
  - o In ROSETIA, the dialogue chunks available will not be determined by skill-points, but by…
    - ▪ **GOODWILL** (how much you've done for the community, i.e. reputation)
    - ▪ **CHARACTER** (whether you trend towards INTERVENTIONIST or NON-INTERVENTION)
    - ▪ **SKILL POINTS** (e.g. having high 'psychology' unlocks options that someone role-playing as an ecologist wouldn't have)
    - ▪ **PAST ACTIONS** (whether you've resolved past quests in ways others agree with)
    - ▪ **PAST WORDS** (admitting your young age may make older characters distrust you later)
    - ▪ **RELATIONSHIPS** (specific characters will have relationship tracking; saying certain things or performing certain actions will increase stats, unlocking new dialogue chunks)
    - ▪ **KNOWLEDGE** (earned by reading books, snooping, discovering places, talking to different people) (e.g. Kate from Life is Strange)
    - ▪ **CULTURAL ITEMS** (holding or giving a particular item may unlock new options, e.g. quoting from a book of Tortan literature in your inventory may convince a poet to share their work; sharing photos of Earth may make politicians more inclined to believe in your good intentions)
    - ▪ **TECHNOLOGY** (sharing replicated technology is a good way to solve problems with brute force, but may have unintended consequences down the line)
- To increase depth and challenge in conversations:
  - o Not all special paths unlocked will lead to a 'win' state; the game will validate your character, but still let that character fail if their response isn't appropriate to the situation
  - o If the player is not carrying a particular item as proof of their knowledge, they will still have the ability to choose the correct response from several seemingly equal choices

ROUGH EXAMPLE QUEST
SCENARIO: A STRIP TORTAN TRYING (AND FAILING) TO FIX AN AQUEDUCT
- If your GOODWILL is too low, the character will be too afraid to engage with you; however, if you also have an Interventionist CHARACTER, he will recognize that you could probably fix it with superior alien technology (nullifying the low Goodwill barrier)
- From there, you can use:
  - o ENGINEERING SKILL POINTS: Easily fix the aqueduct through your own skill
    - ▪ ++ Goodwill
      + Interventionism
  - o PSYCHOLOGY SKILL POINTS: Find a character who can fix it, and convince them to help
    - ▪ + Goodwill
    - ▪ ++ Non-interventionism

- o KNOWLEDGE: If they've read the 'HUMAN AQUEDUCTS' book in the library, they can choose from one of several different approaches which all look equally 'right' (though only one is; player can only succeed if they actually remember what to do)
  - + Goodwill
  - + Interventionism + Non-Interventionism (offset each other)
- o CULTURAL ITEMS: Give the 'HUMAN AQUEDUCTS' book to the character, who is able to read it (with ROSETTA's help) and fix the aqueduct
  - ++ Goodwill
  - + Interventionism
- o TECHNOLOGY:
  - Lend the character a repair tool replicated from the Arecibo (implied to have negative consequences down the line)
    - ++ Goodwill (in present) – Goodwill (in follow-up)
    - + Interventionism
  - GIVE the character the repair tool
    - +++ Goodwill – Goodwill (in follow up)
    - +++ Interventionism
- If you are able to fix it, your RELATIONSHIP stat with the character increases such that you unlock new dialogue chunks about their life, tips to help solve other quests, etc.
- If you used technology to fix it, the character will approach you the next time you're in the hub area angrily saying that they blew off their hand using the repair tool (if you gave it to them) or blew off their finger trying to replicate it (if you didn't)
- IN SUMMARY:
  - o 2 condition checks to access the quest
  - o 3 validations of character skills / role-play
  - o 5 or 6 possible solutions to the quest, each modifying Goodwill and Character in different ways
- ASSETS / WORK REQUIRED TO CREATE QUEST:
  - o 10+ dialogue pathways
  - o 2 environment assets (fixed aqueduct / broken aqueduct)
  - o 1 book excerpt to write (aqueduct book)
  - o 2 inventory drawings + descriptions (aqueduct book and repair tool)
  - o 2 character sprites + 2 character portraits
  - o 3 scripted cutscene encounters (character working on aqueduct; getting other person to help; character done fixing aqueduct)