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ASSESSMENT 2: EXPANDED PROJECT

FM3605 – GAMES DESIGN III FURTHER DESIGN

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Contents

Project Title: Leviathans Cry	3
Overview/Executive Summary	3
Design Focus	3
Design Pillars	4
Empathetic Narrative	4
Exploration	4
Anticipation	4
Frustration	4
Game Loop	5
Core Loop	5
Explore/Discover	5
Hunt	5
Improve/Repair	6
Struggle	6
Combat Loop	6
Track	6
Engage/Kill	6
Harvest	6
Feedback Loops	7
Compulsion Loop	7
Goal Regulation	7
Meta Loop	8
Gameplay Example	9
Narrative	10
Visual Style	11
World Design	12
Character Design	13
User Interface	14
Sound/Audio	15
Colour Palettes	16
Ocean Safe	16

Lurker

Ocean Dangerous.....	16
Day.....	16
Night.....	16
Technical Specifications.....	17
References.....	18
Academic.....	18
Videos.....	18
Music.....	18
Ludography.....	18
References.....	19
Images.....	19



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Project Title: Leviathans Cry

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Document
Ambience.mp3

Overview/Executive Summary

Leviathans Cry is a first-person, Action-adventure, RPG, where the player takes the role of the weathered old sailor and fisherman, Virgil. The player will make use of Virgil's old fishing ship to explore a waterlocked planet which is home to ferocious sea beasts known as Leviathans, that are both feared and prized for their resources. During their exploration of this planet, the player will struggle against numerous obstacles, hazards, challenging enemies, and Virgil's faltering mind as he battles with Alzheimer's disease. The player must help Virgil overcome all of this on his quest to exact revenge on the legendary Leviathan known as Demergat, who destroyed Virgil's family and home.

The game combines elements of combat and adventure from Horizon: Zero Dawn (Guerrilla Games, 2017) and Sea of Thieves (Rare, 2018), with psychological and fantasy horror elements similar to Hellblade: Senua's Sacrifice (Ninja Theory, 2017).

Design Focus

By combining the action-based gameplay with the additional challenge of Virgil's state of mind, the game aims to create an engaging experience for the player that actively challenges them throughout. This unique combination gives creates the game space for the player to feel both frustration as they struggle against the game as well as the feeling of success and empowerment they gain from successful hunts.

This basis for the design draws from the works of Lankoski, P. (2011, pp.291-311), Przybylski, A.K., C. Scott Rigby and Ryan, R.M. (2010, pp. 154-166) for their work on character engagement models in video games, and G. H. Gaspar and H. Schoenau-Fog (2021, pp. 1-5), Gilleade, K.M., Dix, A. and Allanson, J. (2009, pp. 1-7) for their work on negative feedback loops in single-player games.

Design Pillars

Empathetic Narrative

This project is primarily a narrative driven game, with two main themes. The first theme is that of empathy which will be created through both the game's story, which is conveyed through narrative techniques such as dialogue, Virgil's journal, and the hunting of particular Leviathans. The story specifically focuses on the loss that Virgil has known (first his family and now his critical faculties) but also the loss that other NPCs within the game have felt with varying degrees. This aims to create a wide scope of loss that would allow for a variety of player types to engage with on an empathic level.

The second theme is that of isolation. This again will be conveyed by the game's story and the narrative techniques previously mentioned but will also be reflected in the game's environment. This primarily feature a large expanse of water known as the (the something sea), with very little land and even fewer inhabitants, this representing the isolation of both the player and character of Virgil.

Exploration

The world will feature a large, 3D, open world that consists of both ocean and tropical biomes. These biomes will include imaginative and alien species of fauna and flora that can be discovered by the player. During their adventures into new areas of this world, the player will need to search for clues relating to the presence of Leviathans as they hunt them, new materials that may be gathered to improve their ship, as well as new characters that they may interact with through dialogue.

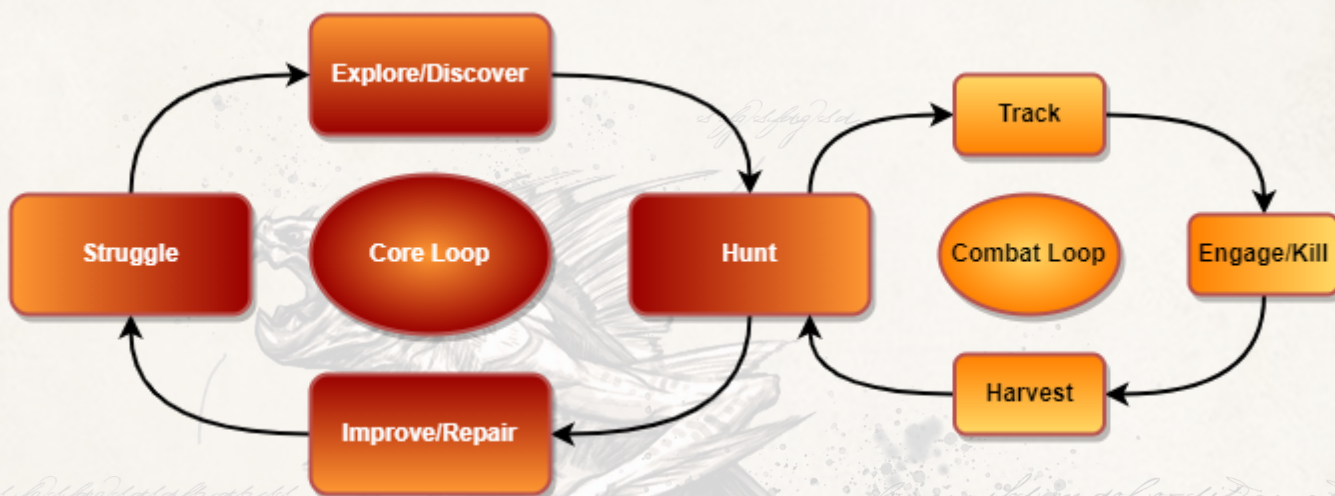
Anticipation

One of the key feelings the game hopes to invoke through its design is that of anticipation. Through the use of a detective structure to the story, each element that the player discovers allows them to piece together Virgil's life, both past and present. These story elements aim to instil a sense of anticipation in the player as they search for the next clue and attempt to uncover Virgil's full story.

This anticipation is also reflected in the game's combat as the player prepares and hunts each sea beast, but never fully knows what to expect for each hunt.

Frustration

The game will rely on negative feedback loops in order to adjust the players experience as they progress. Even when doing well, the game will appear to be actively working against them, potentially creating a frustrating experience for the player. This aims to emulate some of the frustration felt for someone suffering from Alzheimer's disease, or those around them. This frustration will lend both to the gameplay and story as it aims to compound the positive experiences of the player as they conquer the source of their frustration.



Core Loop

Explore/Discover

Exploration and Discovery are at the heart of this project. As the player sails across the map, looking for signs of Leviathans to hunt, they will discover new areas, currents, islands, and coves which will provide them with unique resources. These areas will also be home to unique Leviathans that the player may discover through their hunts. With each unique hunt, the player will unlock new recipes for crafting, as well as new ways in which Leviathans may be hunted (tactics).

Almost all landmasses within the world of *Leviathans Cry* are extensions of colossal sea creatures known as Wavewatch Wanderers (see figure 4, page 12), whose size and tough hides protect them from all but the largest of Leviathans. This means that islands and other landmasses within the game will migrate around the map as time progresses. Once the player has visited the island, the path in which the wavewatch wanderer travels will be tracked on the map and will act as checkpoints for the player in the event of Virgil dying in the game.

Information regarding Leviathans, world areas, and characters will be collected within Virgil's journal. The player is able to refer to this throughout the game and incorporate this information into their gameplay e.g., improving the way in which they find, track, and hunt down Leviathans.

Hunt

During their quest to take down the legendary sea beast known as Demergat, the player will encounter numerous Leviathans and hazards along the way. Each Leviathan presents a unique threat to the player and the Virgil's ship and the player will need to carefully consider whether to engage or flee with each of these Leviathans. Successfully hunting a Leviathan may provide the player with valuable resources, but will require the use of limited equipment on board. The more intense the fight, the more likely it is for the ship to sustain damage, while also requiring the player to use more equipment and running the risk of being left defenceless. Additionally, they will need to account for Virgil's mental state as the effects of his Alzheimer's disease may appear at any point during a hunt. The dynamic combat described here aims to balance both tension and friction in order to maintain engagement throughout each hunt.

Improve/Repair

Using the materials that the player has collected, they may return to specific island ports within the world where they are able to repair and improve Virgil's ship. These improvements include additional hunting equipment, storage, and increases in performance such as handling and speed. Repairing the ship after it has sustained significant damage is crucial. If Virgil's ship has sustained too much damage, it will become inoperable and sink. Leaving Virgil stranded in the ocean, at the mercy of its beasts.

The player can also be able to customise their ship to some degree by adjusting the layout of weapons such as harpoons and cannons to suit their preference.

Struggle

Through the use of both positive and negative feedback loops, the game aims to present a dynamic gameplay experience that works with and against the player as they attempt to reach their goals. Forcing them to not only struggle against the world of Leviathans Cry and all its dangers, but also as they actively struggle against Virgil as his Alzheimer's disease progresses. Specifically, aspects of the disease such as recollection and memory loss, disorientation, and defiance/deviance. This includes some actions such as steering the ship, firing harpoons, and repairing the ship having their controls changed, and NPCs within the world having blurred faces. This will also be reflected in Virgil's journal and fixed events like the Virgil waking up in various places aboard the ship, or even in the ocean.

If the player is killed, Virgil's disease is progressed, and the negative effects become more frequent. E.g., more frequent instances of disorientation or confusion (reflected in controls), in-game text becoming unordered, NPCs becoming more unrecognisable, and hallucinations.

Combat Loop

Track

The player will need to stay vigilant for signs of Leviathans in order to track and hunt them down. These signs would include blood trails, wreckages, and distant screams, and would allude to a specific type of sea beast. As the player progresses, they will become more aware of these signs as well as what specific sea beast they indicate.

Engage/Kill

Using these signs as a guide, the player will need to track down Leviathans and make use of the onboard equipment in order to bring the beast down. This would include the use of cannons, harpoons, nets, and spears to weaken the beast, bring them alongside the ship and deliver a coup de grace. Once a Leviathan has been killed, the water surrounding their corpse will become bloodied and attracts other Leviathans for a period.

Each sea beast will have particular weaknesses and phases that the player will need to learn as they progress through the world, which once discovered will be noted in Virgil's journal. Achievements may be used here to guide the player as well as present an additional challenge.

Harvest

Once the sea beast has been slain, the player is then able to harvest items from the beast such as fins, scales, fangs, and organs. These can be sold and traded to merchants in order to upgrade and repair Virgil's ship.

Feedback Loops

Positive Feedback Loop

- ❖ As the player progresses through the game, they are able to improve their ship and become more competent at hunting down Leviathans.
- ❖ Discovering islands allows the player to track them and more easily find the wavewatch wanderers in the future.
- ❖ Discovering currents around the world will allow the player to travel faster between areas.

Negative Feedback Loop

- ❖ Killing Leviathans will bloody the water and attract other Leviathans for a period. This may be used to hunt Leviathans more efficiently, but also presents a threat to the player if they are unprepared.
- ❖ Each time Virgil is killed, the symptoms of his Alzheimer's disease are progressed. Making them more apparent and frequent with each death. These may negatively impact the player's ability during hunts.
- ❖ The effects of Virgil's disease will also carry over to the notes and journal entries, meaning they may make less sense or handwriting becomes difficult to understand.

Compulsion Loop

In addition to the engagement and experience-focused mechanics, the game will include both game-defined goals but also allow for a number of player-defined goals to be created as well. An achievement system would also be included in this.

Game-Defined Goals

- ❖ **Short-Term Goal:** Keep Virgil alive
- ❖ **Mid-Term Goal:** Explore the world, looking for the legendary sea beast as you improve the ship
- ❖ **Long-Term Goal:** Become strong enough to take down the legendary sea beast

Player-Defined Goals

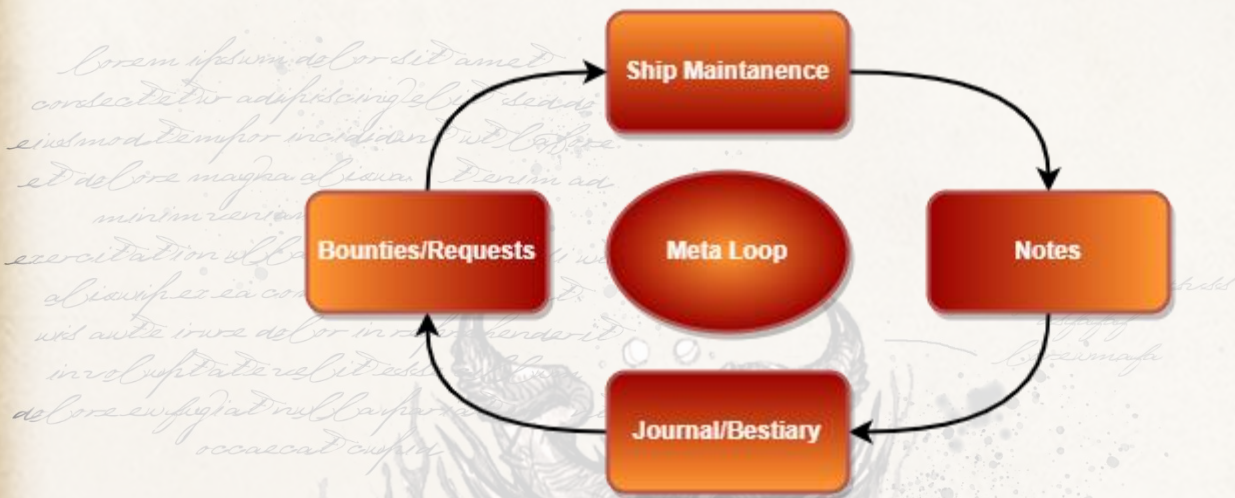
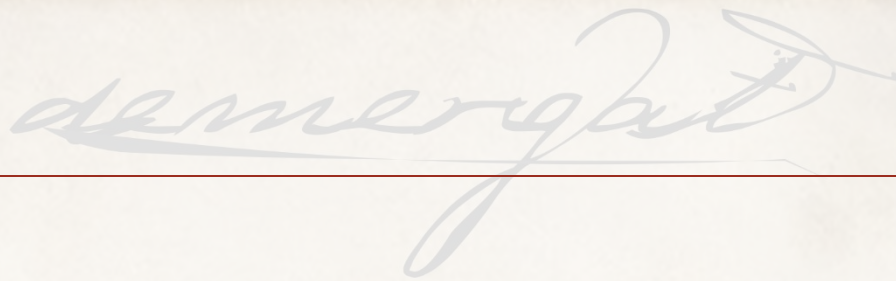
- ❖ Completing the bestiary
- ❖ Unlocking achievements
- ❖ Fully Upgrading the ship
- ❖ Collecting all notes
- ❖ Discover all islands

Goal Regulation

The narrative centres on Virgil's desire for revenge against Demergat and little else matter to him. The goals in the game have been constructed to reinforce this idea and drive player experience in this direction. While the game will include subgoals such as improving Virgil's ship, discovering new islands, and hunting specific Leviathans, these all feed into the overarching goal of defeating Demergat.

The setting for this also aims to reinforce this idea. By isolating the player and Virgil on a large ocean, with little land (which does not remain stationary and therefore conveys the idea of instability), and NPCs that do not seek companionship, the player is left to only ever move forward and help Virgil exact his revenge.

Meta Loop



Ship Maintenance

- ❖ Turning on and off lamps on the ships. (Lamps may attract unwanted attention but does increase visibility for objects on and near the ship.)
- ❖ Cleaning blood and viscera off the deck
- ❖ Removing any small ocean parasites that have attached themselves to the deck (only plays an aesthetic role).

Notes

- ❖ Notes may be found around the ship. These will relate both to hunting Leviathans as well as the story.

Journal/Bestiary

- ❖ This will contain notes from Virgil as well as those found around the ship.
- ❖ Each encounter with a sea beast will update information regarding them in the bestiary (no. killed, resources, hints regarding tactics for killing them, and locations).

Bounty Boards/Hunt (part) Requests

- ❖ Some islands will include a bounty board or NPCs who may request that specific resources be brought to them. The reward for doing so may be additional resources, information, and maps (uncovering part of the world or islands).

Gameplay Example

Siren

Traversing the world

The game opens to black screen with audio clips of a couple arguing. The audio fades away and the screen fades into a set piece from Virgil's perspective as he regains consciousness underwater and clambers to the surface. Once the surface is reached, the player will gain control of Virgil and be prompted with controls in order to make it back to his ship. * The scene takes place during the late afternoon and is illuminated accordingly.

Once onboard, the player will be prompted to interact with items on board like Virgil's journal and map. The player will then be instructed to follow a trail of unsettled water (indicating one of the Wavewatch wanderers). After following the trail, the player will then discover the first Wavewatch wanderer and attach to its dock. Once on the island, the player will meet an NPC that provides some context for the world and gives the player their first request, hunting a common sea beast called a Siren that has been terrorising the island's fishing boat. The NPC will provide the player with information on Sirens regarding their general locations within the world. Using the map and compass, the player will need to travel to one of these general locations, while also scouting for signs of any Leviathans.

Similar to *Assassin's Creed IV: Black Flag* (Ubisoft, 2013)

Hunting a sea beast

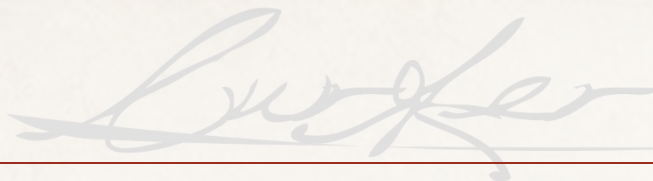
Once they find the beast, the player uses their harpoons and nets to try and capture it. The beast puts up a fight, but the player is able to use their available equipment to defeat it. Once defeated, the journal is updated with any new information from the hunt such as the Leviathans' weaknesses. Having used up most of their equipment, the player must flee as other Leviathans are drawn to the area from the blood. The player returns to the island with the beast's carcass, which they can sell for a profit or use to upgrade their equipment.

Similar to hunting creatures in *Monster Hunter: World* (Capcom, 2018) and the *Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* (CD Projekt Red, 2015)

Effects of Virgil's Disease

Initially, the effects of Alzheimer's disease on Virgil and the player's ability will be minimal so as to not negatively impact the gameplay and create a negative experience. As the game progress so too will the effects of the disease which would also be advanced when the player dies in the game.

Narrative



The game will make use of a detective structure for its narrative, where the player's knowledge is restricted to Virgil's point of view and must uncover the story through gameplay.

Virgil and his family once lived on a small island. He was a fisherman, that provided for his family as they largely lived off the land. While returning to his home island one day, Virgil noticed a massive swell beneath the island and from it emerge the colossal sea beast known in legends as Demergat.

Demergat tore the island asunder and left almost no trace of it. Virgil was left helpless as there was nothing he could do but watch this unfold before him. Years passed as Virgil became a recluse and spent most days drinking his sorrows away, until one day he heard rumours of Demergat being sighted attacking another island. He vowed to prevent this from ever happening to another island, or family again. He would hunt Demergat down even if it meant his death.

However, this world exists only within the mind of Virgil.

The story revealed throughout is show at the end of the game to only exist inside the mind of Virgil, as he sits within a dishevelled house all by himself. This fantasy world was constructed by Virgil's mind as a trauma response to losing his family. The cause of this loss was in fact his own doing.

Virgil was in reality a fisherman and sailor, and one day took his family out to sea with him. Due to negligence or perhaps drinking, Virgil caused catastrophic damage to the ship, sinking it along with his wife and daughter. Due to this loss, Virgil secludes himself to the world of *Leviathans Cry* as in this world he is able to be the hero and is able to place the blame for his loss on something else, Demergat.

Act 1 (3-4 Hours)

Introduction to the world of *Leviathans Cry* and Virgil.

Act 2 (6-8 Hours)

The extent of Virgil's disease is revealed throughout while also revealing more of his backstory (within *Leviathans Cry*).

Act 3 (3-4 Hours)

Virgil defeats Demergat and the 'true' story behind everything is revealed.

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Visual Style



1. Models used within the game will attempt to be as realistic as possible while also maintaining a stylised look that fits the setting.
2. Some stylisations for Leviathans as well as increased scale compared to Virgil.
3. First-person perspective (Virgil's perspective) with all models being scaled around this perspective.

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World Design



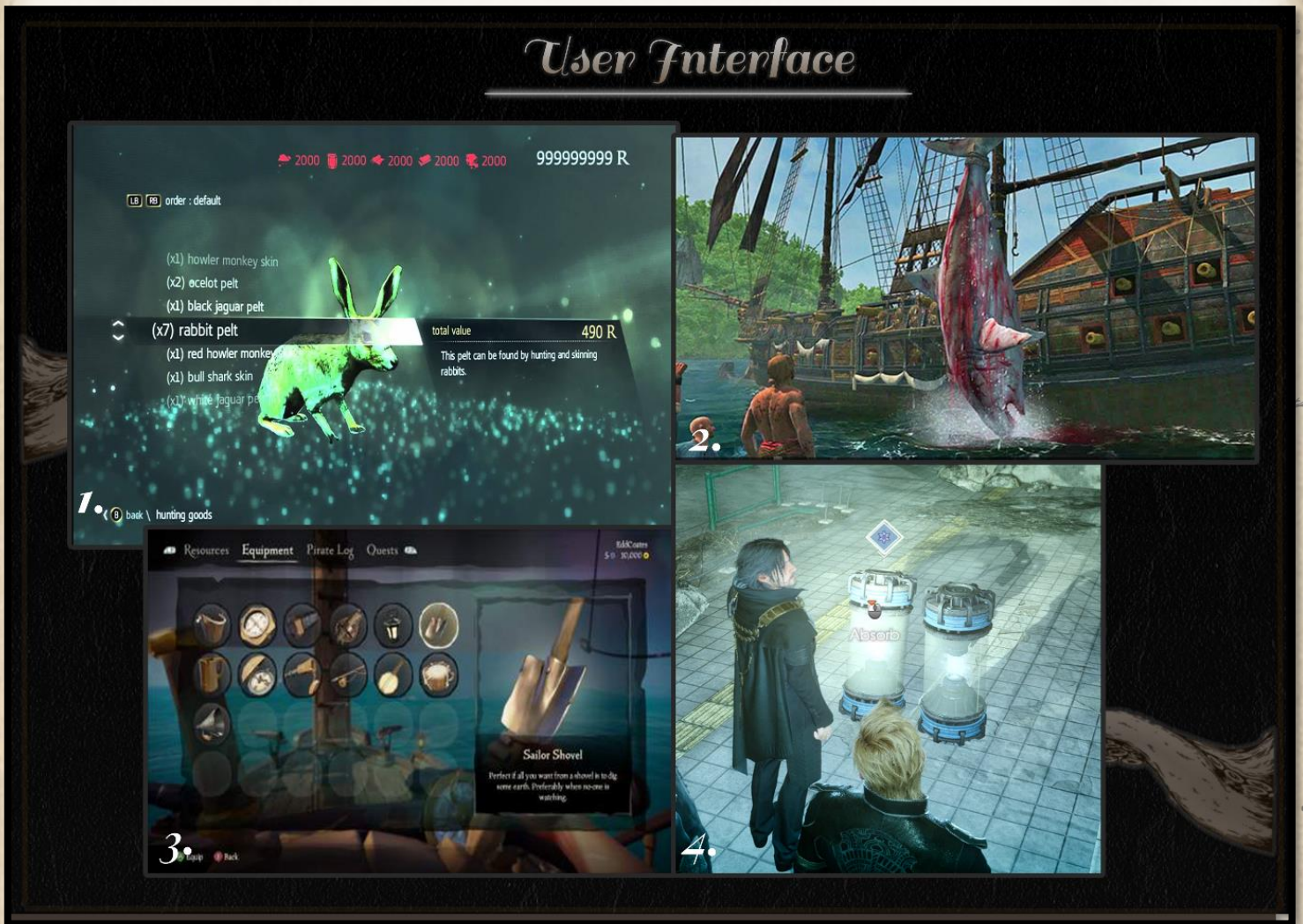
1. Small islands with few inhabitants.
2. Large expanse of ocean which is both beautiful as well as terrifying due to the solitude of it.
3. Calm waters may become perilous during storms and combat.
4. The islands within the world are affixed to the backs of large, peaceful Leviathans (wavewatch wanderers). This means that islands may not be in the same place for very long.
5. Possible inspiration for the design of Virgil's ship which is small enough for him to man by himself.
6. Remnants of structures that may have been destroyed by Leviathans or left to ruin.

Character Design



1. Heavy wrinkling around the eyes from constant squinting as well as age long hair to keep the sun off of the neck
2. Sunken eyes indicating lack of quality sleep as well as minor dehydration.
3. Sunken cheeks, dry worn skin from the sun and salty sea air
4. Harsh tan, lean physique from diet and intense labour
5. Virgil Mock character model front profile
6. Virgil Mock character model side profile
7. Virgil Mock character model animated expression with ominous lighting.

Leviathan

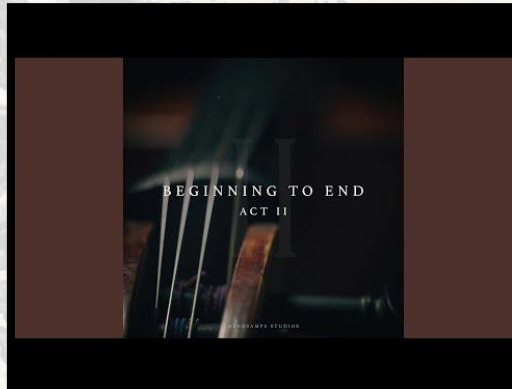


1. Menu system that shows Leviathans/parts of Leviathans.
2. No indicators for health of creatures or characters but rather conveyed through visual information such as gore. This would also be extended to other components like Virgil's health, the structural integrity of the ship, etc.
3. Transparent menu system used for managing items and ship equipment
4. Minimal UI outside of menus as to not detract from immersion in the world.

Sound/Audio

The game will largely make use of ambient noises and soundscapes from the surrounding environment as well as some ambient music (similar to the ambient music included at the beginning of this document), as well as sparse melodic accompaniments. These accompaniments will consist largely of isolated string instruments with few melodic segments. Examples of this have been included below.

This is to fit in with the setting of the game as well as to create emotional engagement with the game during moments of isolation, fear, and excitement. The non-diegetic music used in the game will change based on the weather as well as when the player is in and out of danger (combat).



Example 1: User: Hendyamps. (Sep 26, 2021). Beginning To End: Act II. [online].

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ma8HCJ6z3xM>



Example 2: User: Ben Kutta. (Feb 27, 2014). Rainy Days (Sad Flute Solo). [online].

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nllhL4PbVno>



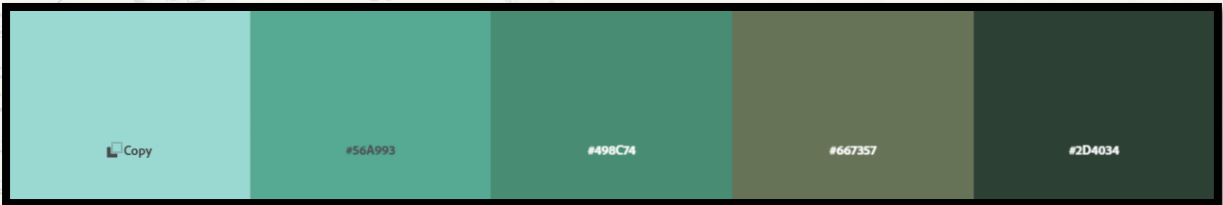
Example 3: User: serendipity_mjkm. (Jun 3, 2021). The Death of Violin. [online].

Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=074NSL9UM&t=3s>

Colour Palettes

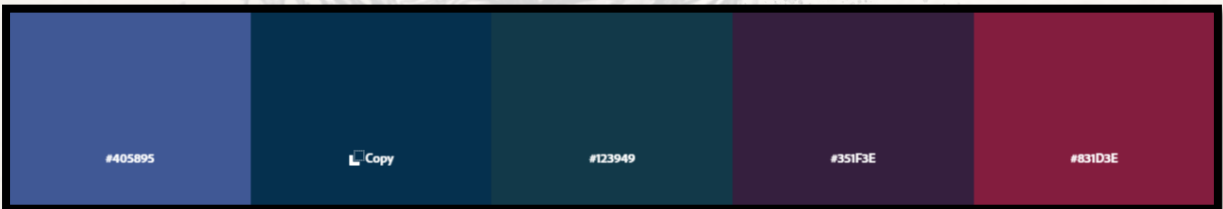
Ocean Safe

The following colours will be used for a large portion of the world's ocean during the day and indicates relatively calm waters with little to no danger. The hue would shift to a darker pallet during the night.



Ocean Dangerous

The following colours will be used for specific areas within the world's ocean and indicates small areas with more dangerous Leviathans.



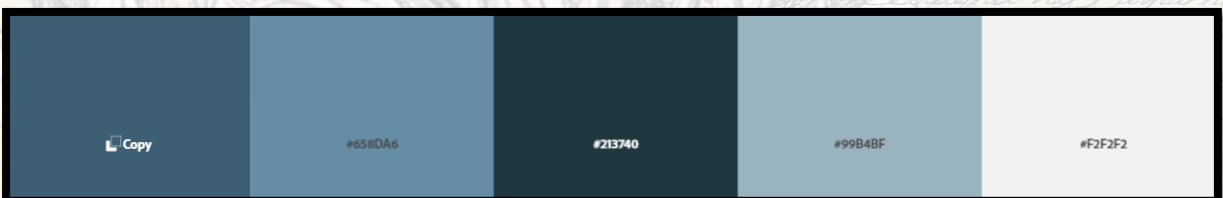
Day

The few islands within the world as well as Virgil's ship would make use of the following palette with more neutral tones that contrast against the vibrant ocean.



Night

At night, the typical colours found within the world would resemble the following colour palette. This shift aims to create a more sombre visual tone within the world.



Technical Specifications *Siren*

Development Engine: Unreal Engine 5

Development Language: C++

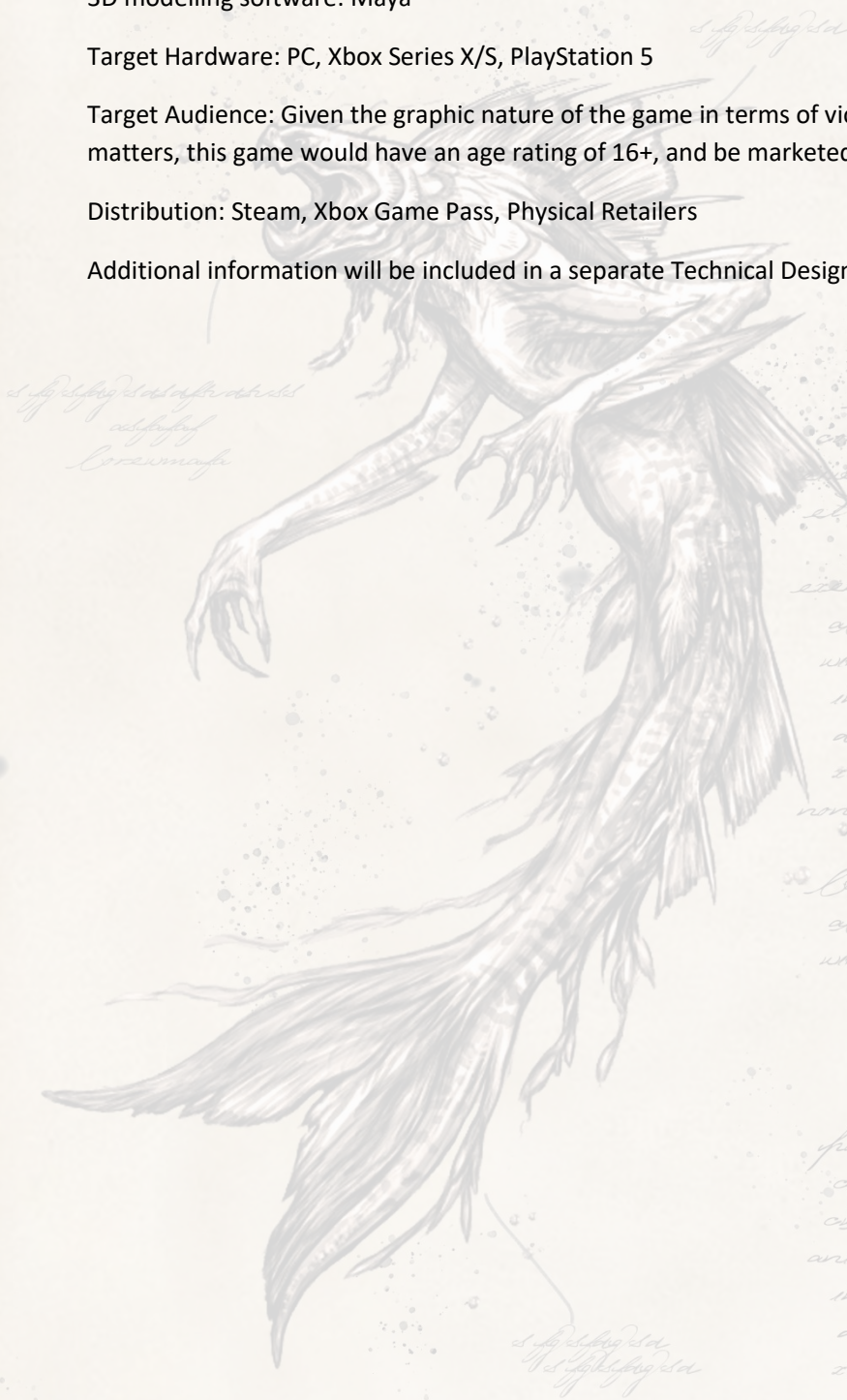
3D modelling software: Maya

Target Hardware: PC, Xbox Series X/S, PlayStation 5

Target Audience: Given the graphic nature of the game in terms of violence as well as the subject matters, this game would have an age rating of 16+, and be marketed towards a more mature audience.

Distribution: Steam, Xbox Game Pass, Physical Retailers

Additional information will be included in a separate Technical Design Document



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Academic

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Music

User: Night Bliss. (n.d.). Sailboat at Night Ambience. Calm Ocean Sounds. Relax, Meditate, Sleep. [online] Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mv8Wf4wnYiA> [Accessed 11 Dec. 2022].

User: Ambient Realm. (n.d.). OCEAN of SERENITY Deep Music for Sleeping, Releasing Anxiety, Stress | Peaceful Underwater Sounds. [online] Available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L_gH2MdVL78 Accessed 11 Dec. 2022].

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