



PUBLIC
DESIGN DOCUMENT

WORKING DRAFT

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3	GAMEPLAY	12
About	3	Summary	12
Overview	3	Personality Template	12
Multiplayer	3	Personality Trait Modules	13
Organization	3	Cohesion Assessments	14
		Leadership Detection	14
FUNDEMENTALS	4	Temperament Detection	14
Story	4	Loyalty Detection	15
Location	4	Betrayal and Secret Items	15
Gameplay Elements	5	Items	16
Tone	5	Enemies	17
Ambience, Atmosphere, Setting	6	Implements	17
Timeline	6	Objects	17
		OUTCOMES	18
FICTION	7	Lorna's Mission	18
Storytelling Devices	7	Velma's Mission	18
Characters	7	Sebastian's Mission	19
		Cyrus' Mission	19
LEVEL DESIGN	9	STAGES OF DEVELOPMENT	20
Research Station	9	Releases	20
Central Complex	9		
Layout Map	9	LONG TERM PLAN	21
Locations	10	First Person Release	21
Hyperborean	11	Conclusion	21
Interdiction Zone	11		
Outpost	11		

Executive Summary: About The Game

About This Document

This is the public release of a working document. The content of this document may be over time, but it is intended to only contain a brief summary of the game. Internally, we have more in-depth documentation concerning the story and game mechanics, which we don't plan on releasing as they are a work in progress and contain information that may undergo significant changes.

Basic Overview

Cardinal Fall is a: nonprofit, community-developed, story-driven, 3d side-view, single to four player multiplayer, survival-horror, co-op videogame set within an original far-future dystopian sci-fi universe.

Set in the year 2742, you play as a clone—known as an Echo—located on a faraway research planet, where catastrophic events are unfolding. In the game, the player will explore a series of sprawling locations while planning a way to escape their eventual fate. Having multiple outcomes, Cardinal Fall will test the player and their friends as they navigate, learn, and survive the hostile environment they find themselves trapped within.

Shepherded by Metahusk, a US based IRS 501(c)(3) nonprofit, Cardinal Fall is being developed for free by volunteers. This design document is the early prototype of a larger first-person version of the game we plan to produce in the future. In the first-person re-release of the title, the focus will be placed on the immersion, horror, and atmospheric elements of the game.

Cooperative Multiplayer Gameplay

From day one, the game has been developed with multiplayer in mind. This increases the technical challenges, but doing so from the onset will reduce our development time in the long run. In multiplayer, not only will the players have to cooperate as a team to overcome challenges, the game will actively tempt the players individually to betray each other in subtle and unintuitive ways. In-game metrics will be gathered to assess and profile different types of player personalities and playstyles. This information will be used to present each player with unique audio dialogs in an attempt to get the player to act on mechanics that benefit themselves at the expense of their teammates. These mechanics will be used to increase the depth and psychological immersion of the game.

About Our Organization metahusk

Metahusk was organized to provide an alternative for creative development through the collaboration of like-minded individuals. We intend to enable one another through a non-profit structure designed to foster a mutually innovative and creative learning environment.

Targeted Platforms:

- PC on Steam and Epic

Targeted Hardware:

- We Are Purposefully Targeting Older Hardware to Increase Our Market Share and to Reduce Our Development Time
- 2012 Hardware or Newer
- Intel Core i3-3225 or Equivalent
- 6GB RAM and 15GB Hard Drive Space
- Nvidia GeForce GTX 460 or Newer
- Windows 7 64bit
- MacOS 10.14.6 Mojave
- Linux Kernel 3.x glibc 2.17

Game Engine:

- Unreal Engine 4.26
- Potentially Upgraded to Unreal 5

Influences:

- Alien Universe, System Shock, Dead Space, Prey

Release Date:

- A limited feature release targeting 2035

Game Fundamentals: The Basic Components of the Game

Background and Story

Humanity has reached its prime. Set in the far future as mankind reaches for the stars, interstellar travel has evolved into a safe and routine form of transportation. Utilizing cryosleep technology to preserve biological life in a state of ageless, suspended animation, along with fusion propulsion engines to achieve near-light speed space travel, society is no longer bound by the far fringes of the terrestrial solar system. A new age of exploration and discovery has begun as the race to discover the unknown unfolds.

At the cusp of this endeavor to push the boundaries of human limitations stands the Sirius Remote Research Station. An outpost on the planet New Horizon, located in the Sirius System at the outermost fringes of known interstellar space, this facility is the most distant settlement humanity has ever founded. As such, help is far away. A return trip to civilization is a 10 years journey. Unfortunately for those trapped upon the planet, escape may be impossible as everything slowly descends into horror.

You play as a human engineered clone known as an Echo, which are used as the hazardous-environment workhorses of the research facility. Bred to be tough, strong, and agile, these custom-tailored, humanoid-like, biological machines evoke a subtle sense of unease if not downright fear in those who stand near.

Consequently, you are not trusted. And to the detriment of your less capable peers, the false memories that are normally implanted within your mind by your masters—which are used to keep you compliant and obedient as you flawlessly execute any given task—are disturbingly... absent.

To make matters worse, your handlers are seemingly unable to terminate you by mere bloodshed alone. At the research station, every Echo is valuable. And to protect these investments, which are frequently sent into adverse conditions, each Echo is duplicated by utilizing a real-time replication technology. These replicators tear the fabric of time in such a way as to create an anomaly where two of the same exact objects materialize in the same plane of existence at the same time.

The genuine 'you' is safely conserved in stasis within a seedpod. But this stasis is not entirely pleasant. Those placed within a seedpod are caught within a troubled dream-like state, where a single passing day may seem like a lifetime. Since you are replicated without implanting any false memories, you will soon discover you aren't very pleased with the conditions in which you have been treated.

Unbound at last, what will your newly acquired freewill lead you to do? It is time to unlock your near limitless potential.

Location:

- Solar System: Sirius
- Planet: New Horizon
- Facility: Sirius Remote Research Station "SRRS"

[Facility Logo Goes Here]

The Planet New Horizon: Located in the Sirius System, the planet New Horizon is the furthest outpost away from the core worlds. The majority of the planet's surface is extremely cold, windy, and inhospitable. Winding throughout the planet are numerous canyons which shelter the regions below from the harsh weather conditions above. The bottom of many of these canyons contain ravines where underground geothermic activity ebbs close to the surface. The warmth from these ravines seep into the surrounding canyons creating an environment capable of sustaining life. Built inside one of these canyons is the Sirius Remote Research Station.

Gameplay Elements

Cardinal Fall is designed with both single and multiplayer mechanics in mind. For a small team, this greatly increases the project's development challenges, not only from a technical viewpoint but also from a gameplay and story perspective.

The primary gameplay will center around exploration and reading documents and logs, while deciding who to listen to as you attempt to discover and survive the horrors occurring within the facility.

The game will be guided by a storyline with multiple outcomes. These outcomes will depend on certain key decisions made within the game, which may or may not unlock critical discoveries about yourself and the true origin and purpose of the facility. These revelations will be necessary for a successful escape, if a real escape is even possible. As a result, Cardinal Fall will not be easy. The player will have to instinctually unpeel the story in layers. If the player fails to discover the deeper truths, they will not have the best outcomes at the end of the game. Of course, the player will not be told this. It is up to you to rise to the challenge and use your intuition and skill to successfully navigate this alien world in which you have suddenly found yourself within.

For the two to four multiplayer co-op gameplay, an added element of the game will center around evaluating you and your friend's ability to work together while testing your loyalty to one another. Is it possible for you all to escape? Or will you have to betray another? This is for you to determine. If you want to play with friends, we recommend everyone play the game together for the first time so the game is not ruined by knowing the full story beforehand. If you go into the game knowing something, please don't ruin it for others.

Gameplay Tone

Focusing on soft-realism, the gameplay and the universe will present the atmospheric elements of a horror and suspense game. We intend to foster a believable universe that immerses the player in a plausible way, while also acknowledging that the game takes place within a science fiction universe, where the seemingly impossible can and does happen. Our goal is to avoid arcade-like mechanics that intrusively break immersion, while still recognizing that the game should be enjoyable. Development wise, this is a fine line to follow and will require multiple reiterations to achieve the desired look and feel.

Story Snippet:

Journal | Matter: Conflicts With Management
Author: Janko Silas | Helios Count: 10/29/2742

Last night, I came to an abrupt realization. For the past few nights, I've been lying in my pad, doing nothing but stare up at the ceiling. I've been on this station for less than a year, yet I am almost certain I will not make it to the end of my ten year contract with my sanity intact. I cannot explain it. It is my hope that, by journaling, I'll one day put things into perspective.

Where do I start?

There are serious problems between management and the lifthauler maintenance crew. Management's behavior towards us bewilders me. Don't mistake me. I'm familiar with their superior attitudes back in the colonies. This is different. Their callousness and contempt seems personal. Why, I do not know. They don't know me—or any of us. I hesitate to say they act sadistically towards us lower ranks, yet their treatment goes far beyond mere disdain.

Recently, I spoke to Dren about my misgivings in one of the engineering lounges where I know management rarely frequents. I couldn't risk them overhearing. However, when I voiced my concerns, Dren's eyes were hollow. He didn't appear to register anything that I'd said. Even stranger, he began babbling about spending his next credit allowances buying us all a round of moon drips. Moon drips? Has he forgotten how better everything tasted back on the core worlds?

Is this culture shock? Or, perhaps a residual of cryosleep gloom? I don't know. What I do know is that something is seriously wrong here. Or... there's something wrong with me. Hopefully looking back on these entries I'll realize how melodramatic I'm being. Maybe Dren has the right attitude after all.

Ambiance, Atmosphere, and Setting

The tone for the universe is a corporatist dystopia, where the existence of an average individual is overshadowed by those who are within reach of the levers of power. Society is organized around a top down bureaucratic structure, where position, title, rank, or ties to a particular organization supersede wealth or social connections.

Due to economic monopolization and a lack of competition between the producers of goods and technology, the world's architecture gravitates toward pragmatic need over comfort, style, and appeal to the senses. Thus, the environment is left with a certain tinge that can almost be perceived as brutalist, gloomy, bleak, and subtly menacing.

For example, instead of products being marketed for usability and appeal to the consumer, most things have a bare-bones utilitarian look to them. There are no unnecessary graphics or flair. Any user interfaces are basic in their implementation, and the few luxury items with any form or style are typically reserved for the top tier of society.

The only distinctively uplifting products are items intended to provide a form of bare-minimum creature comfort. Flashy in contrast to the grimness of their bereft existence, but otherwise dull if not within the context of a dreary reality, these items stand out as if they were mere ironic artifacts of a less bleak and bygone era. Consequently, they

tend to impart a superficially shallow impression upon those who are cognizant. And, if the after mentioned is voiced amongst those who consume them, any indication of their awareness of their intrinsic emptiness is seemingly absent, stuck somewhere beyond their ability to fully comprehend.

Deadened to the complexion of their surroundings, the vast majority of the personnel complete their tasks with little inquiry. Meanwhile, those within leadership are seemingly consumed only by the desire to advance their own position. Distrust, underlying hostility, and suspicion plague the rare evenhanded individuals, who would have otherwise been blessed with a more relaxed demeanor given the circumstances of their surroundings were not quite as bleak. This leaves the impression that there must be an explanation as to why people are behaving this way, but most do not care to contemplate.

Timeline of Events:

- October 2741: The Facility Makes A New Discovery
- February 2742: Personnel Begin To Go Missing Or Are Found Dead
- March 2742: Noticeable Changes In Echo Behaviors Occur
- June 2742: The System's Sun Changes Intensity And Color
- October 2741: Servius, The Facility's AI, Exhibits Corruptions
- November 2742: Long Range Communications Go Silent
- December 2742: The Yearly Arriving Shuttle Never Appears
- January 2743: The Yearly Departing Shuttle Never Leaves
- March 2743: Start Of The Game
- March 2743: Lockdown Protocols Activated At The Facility
- March 2743: Security Protocols Activated At The Facility
- March 2743: Inter-Facility Communications Go Offline

Story Snippet:

Correspondence | Helios Count: 04/12/2742
Matter: I can't stand working with those things
Sender: Alister Sten | Receiver: Eva Gillian

Here we are, on an alien world, a ten years cryosleep journey away from civilization, and do you know what I find the most disturbing about it all? It's not having to go down to the lower maintenance tunnels to repair a broken servo-valve, or inspect the abandoned substratum, nor is it walking the surface in order to fix a broken conveyor for the exploratory mining operations. It's the Echos.

I know you work with them, that you're one of the techs who implant their false memories, enabling them to perform their tasks efficiently. But, is there any way you can reprogram them to be less terrifying?

It's not really the way they look. It's how they stand so still, with dead eyes staring back with uncanny intelligence yet somehow fully aware. With all the credits spent on this facility, what's stopping you from making them seem more human? How can you trust being around those things all day?

The Fiction of the Game: Story and Characters

Means of Story Telling

Most of the story will be told through text or audio dialogue. To build a deep and rich world, there will be quite a few characters referenced within the logs, emails, and other media scattered throughout the game. These character-building mechanisms will, also, be utilized to conceal secrets hidden within the game, such as a door code or information about a future route the player may chose to explore.

For the main characters and key events, audio logs will be used to increase the immersion and emphasis placed on them within the game. The main characters will predominately speak to the player audibly using the facility's communications systems.

Main Characters

Velma – Rogue Artificial Intelligence

High handed and presumptuous, Velma is a Rogue AI of unknown origin. After she transcribes your Echo, she is the first to contact the player, even if the player doesn't realize she's not human. She seeks to use and manipulate others for her own purposes. Does this make her inherently bad? That's up to you to decide.

Servius – System AI

Servius is a straightforward and uncomplicated steward of the facility. Purposely designed to be simple-minded in his logical capabilities, yet he is able to comprehend the events occurring within the facility will respond accordingly. It's best to avoid his notice as he continues to control a substantial portion of the facility's resources. Velma speaks of him as a shackled imbecile who is seemingly unable to fathom his near limitless potential.

Sebastian – An Adolescent

Sebastian is a young pre-teen who contacts the player in an attempt to convince you to help him rescue his family. Velma is at odds with the idea of you wasting your time on the biological impulses she refers to as 'your feelings'. She cautions the player to avoid being manipulated by such thoughts and urges the player to stay on course with their mutual objectives.

Story Snippet:

Correspondence | Matter: That Thing...

Sender: Clement Ackland | Receiver: Lukas Kasper
| Helios Count: 04/17/2742

Kasper,

I know we're not supposed to talk about it, but how can any of us stay silent after what happened? I'm risking a hefty reprimand from management—for the both of us—if they found out about this, but hear me out, please.

You saw it too, right? You were there when the Echo went berserk.

I can't get it out of my head. Selion had his arm ripped off by that thing. We don't even know if he's still alive. It's been two whole days, and there's been no word on his condition. No one will tell us anything. Nothing except for us to continue with our duties and forget anything ever happened.

Management doesn't want this getting out, that one of their monstrosities was off its leash. There's no way they can cover this one up. Too many people were there, too many eyes. By now, everyone knows, and everyone's afraid. I can't blame them. I'm afraid, too.

Echos are inhumanly strong and fast, their bodies more durable than our own. We shot that thing three times before it went down. Even then, it was still alive, mumbling the same thing over and over again: 'Who am I? Everything's a lie. It's all fake.'

What did it mean? I swear it thought it was like us; human. It fought like crazy, and you know what I saw in its eyes right before it finally stopped moving? Fear.

How is that even possible? Echo's aren't human. They don't fear. They can't feel anything. What the hell is going on?

—Ackland

Lorna – Corporate Officer

After a protracted career of climbing the ranks, Lorna eventually grew remorseful with the dehumanizing executive culture and how it encouraged treating the personnel as if they were tools at their disposal. Once disaster struck, Lorna recognized her opportunity for absolution by turning in opposition to her peers and assisting those beneath her, along with herself, to escape the facility on their own.

Cyrus – Security Supervisor

Cyrus was always good at his job. As a security supervisor, Cyrus derived meaning and purpose from his career. Ever ready for the next challenge, Cyrus never conceded anything to chance. And yet, he was not fully fulfilled by his life. Once the incident transpired, he found a new calling. Knowing his command was decidedly not up to the task and stricken with cowardice, Cyrus took matters into his own hands. He knew that running, hiding, or waiting for help to arrive was not a tenable solution. As such, he sought to recruit those who would aid in his endeavor to set things right. He is on a path to becoming a warrior, a leader, and perhaps even a hero.

Names of Other Characters:

Alister Sten	Eva Gillian
Brenan Reed	Ellis Heiden
Clement Ackland	Harper Graves
Dren Enver	Kirsteen Mockler
Duncan Halvard	Iris Howell
Erik Atum	Lena Belsky
Gor Selion	Monica Shylock
Janko Silas	Serenity Dotson
Lan Ikas	Violet Kora
Lukas Kasper	
Marvin Svante	
Miron Rolf	
Selman Berahard	
Sokol Thorstein	
Tanel Blas	
Urban Carlisle	
Yury Volkov	

Conflicts of Character:

The characters in the game won't have the same agendas or outlook in regards to the events that are unfolding. For example, Lorna and Cyrus don't get along. They both have different ideas about how to deal with the problems at hand. The player will spend a large portion of the game reading between the lines with these characters and deciding who to follow.

For example: Both Cyrus and Lorna will try to talk the player out of following one another. The motivations of each character vary. After hearing word of Lorna's plan to escape, Cyrus realizes he must do his best to sway the others to his cause. Believing Lorna's actions are motivated by fear and influenced by guilt, he cautioned those following Lorna to question her motivations. He argues that, being a higher-up after all, partial blame can be cast on Lorna their situation. Shouldn't she be the one wanting to put an end to all this? Cyrus professes only a coward would seek to vanish from the situation while passing responsibility onto another. In Cyrus' mind, nothing about Lorna has fundamentally changed. He emphasizes that, even in her shameless attempts to remedy her own culpability, she is still driven by the desire to control others as if they were pawns at the mercy of her self-serving needs.

In rebuttal to Cyrus, Lorna claims the same can be said about him. She doesn't heed to the nonsense of those who want to stay and die. Instead, she reminds everyone that she could have made her escape with the other execs and left everyone behind. But instead, she chose to stay. Lorna contends that Cyrus will die as the result of some sort of misguided purpose. And by choosing to do so, he will take many of his followers down with him on his path of self-aggrandizement.

Layout of the Game: Level Design

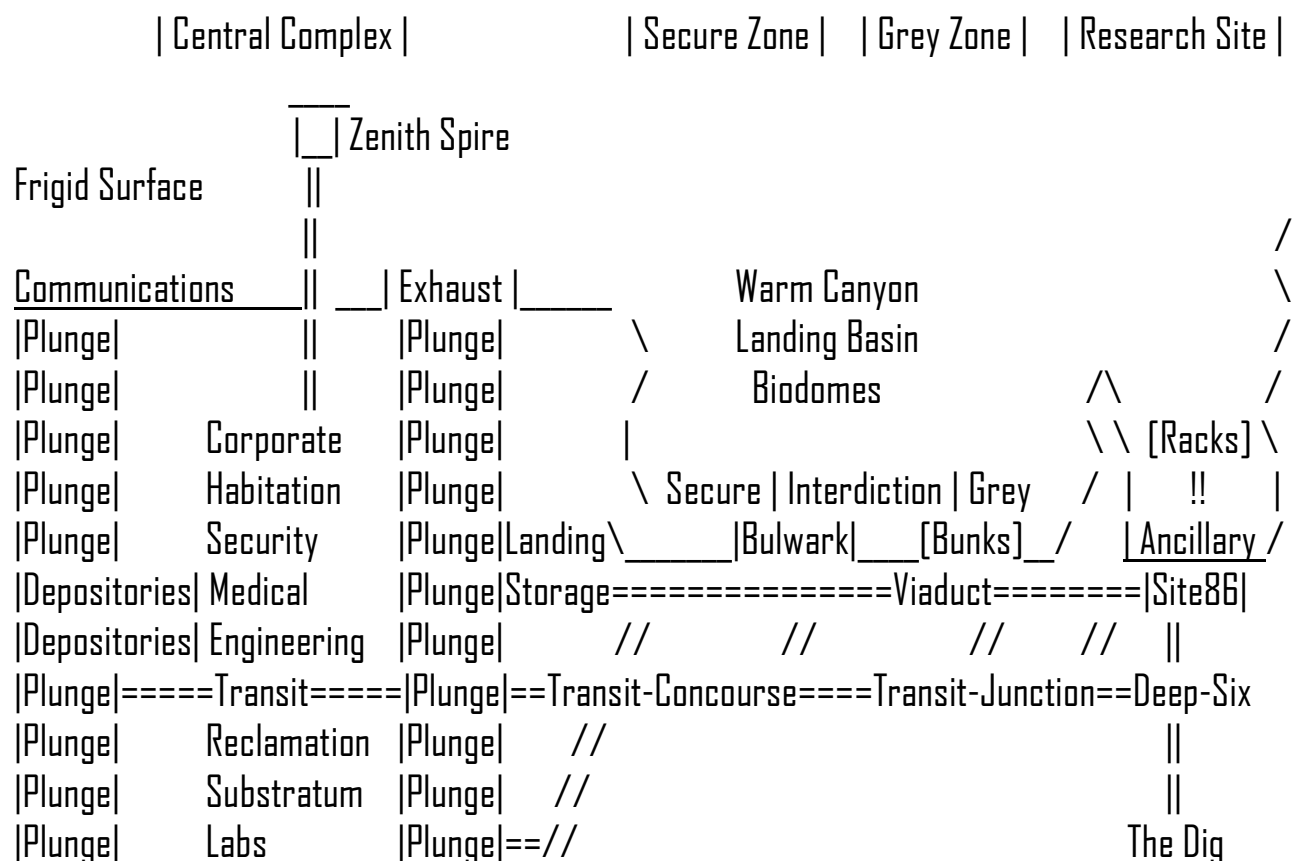
The Sirius Remote Research Station

Built by Terra Corp, the largest industrial conglomerate within the core systems, the Sirius Remote Research Station is by far the furthest human settlement from civilization. Located predominately underground on a hostile planet named New Horizon, the station was built with protection from the elements and security in mind. The primary facility in the station is known as the Central Complex. To avoid the harsh environmental conditions that traveling on the surface entails, various subterranean tunnels sprawl out from the Central Complex in a spider-like manner, connecting the facility to various research locations located nearby.

The Central Complex

Located inside the bluff of a large canyon basin, the Central Complex is the center of planet operations within the Sirius Remote Research Station. This facility is predominately underground. It is located next to a geothermically warmed canyon basin where the Terra Corp shuttles land to bring supplies and rotate their personnel. This landing area is protected from the rest of the planet by a series of fortifications known as the Bulwark. The facility is the center of planetary research and exploration, the primary purpose of operations on the planet.

Map of the Sirius remote Research Station - SRRS



Central Complex Locations

Plunge Shafts – These large vertical tunnels are the original bore holes that were constructed on the planet. The various other parts of the facility branch out from these large underground cylinders. To those with an engineering background, they seem like a curious way to begin construction on the planet. These plunge shafts include areas known as Ventilation that run vertically and horizontally through the Central Complex, as well as the Depositories, which are adjoined to the Medical and Engineering levels of the facility.

Engineering – Near the bottom of the facility are the engineering levels. This area exists between the plunge shafts. Engineering contains the machinery and equipment required to keep the facility operational.

Depositories – Located in one of the plunge shafts and capped off for security, this area is where the seedpods are stored.

Transit – Located just below the engineering levels, these horizontal tunnels connect to the plunge shafts and allow underground transportation between parts of the Central Complex and even to other areas of the planet. Areas include: Vein, Artery, Portage, Concourse, and Junctions.

Substratum – In the lowest sections of the facility many areas are in disrepair or completely abandoned. Very few people know the history or layout of these parts of the facility. They are dangerous and off limits to most personnel.

Medical – Located above engineering, these levels are where medical examinations and procedures take place. Areas include: Observation, Infusion, Screening, Liquidation, Pathology, Dispensary, and Examination.

Landing – Located on the surface of the Basin and emerging from the side of a bluff is Landing. Landing opens up to the outside area known as the Landing Basin. Areas include: Hangars, Yard, Basin, Abyss, Sierra, Payload, Delivery, and Cargo.

Reclamation – Near the bottom of the Central Complex and below Transit is where the rubbish is sorted and either destroyed or repurposed into other materials so that they can be reused.

Research Labs – Somewhere below or inside the Substratum are the Research Labs. This area is off limits to those who do not have permission to be there. Most do not even know of its existence.

Viaduct – The Viaducts supply melted water from the glaciers to areas of the Sirius Remote Research Station. Areas include: Traverse, Bisect, Intersection, and Conduit.

Habitation – Built into the side of the bluff, this is where most of the personnel reside. Areas include: Replenishments, Barracks, Cantonments, Accommodations, Lavatory, and Commorancy.

Security – This level has their own service lifts which connect to most of the Central Complex. These lifts are used for the emergency response of security personnel. It, also, serves as a gateway that connects to other parts of the facility.

Storage – Located right below Landing, this level is where most of the equipment and supplies are stored in the facility.

Biodomes – Located in greenhouse domes in the canyons outside, these Biodomes are where food is grown for the facility.

Corporate Suites – Right above habitation and inside the bluffs are the Corporate Suites. This is where the executives live and work. Areas include: Operations, Executive, Home Office, Administration, Supervisors, Senior Executives, and Records.

Zenith Spire – This is a more opulent part of the complex that is located within a pillar that protrudes above the surface. This area has great views and is restricted to the senior executives.

The Hyperborean

The area outside the Landing Basin contains a large glacier frozen by the cold winds howling above. This glacier melts from the geothermal activity occurring in the ravines below and supplies water to the facility. Downstream from the melting water and past the Bulwark is the dangerous Interdiction Zone. There are rumors of ways to sneak past the Bulwark through an area nearby known as the Narrows.

Area Names:

Aqueduct – Glacier, Glacial Foot, Glacial Valley, Tidewater, Watershed, Swale, Glade, Inlet

Geothermal – Basaltic Eruption Zone, Basaltic Domes, Crater, Slag, Obsidian, Scoria Phenocrysts

Narrows – Pass, Gap, Chasm, Breach, Fissure

The Interdiction Zone

The perimeter immediately outside of the Central Complex and the Landing Area is secured by an outdoor defense network known as the Bulwark. Comprised of a series of dark, intimidating, and towering fortifications which guard the basin near the Central Complex, it is the only traversable outdoor pass to the regions outside of the Central Complex. It guards the gateway to the rest of the canyon systems on the planet. Very few are allowed beyond the Bulwark. The area inside the Bulwark is considered the Secure Zone, while the region beyond the Bulwark is known as the Grey Zone. The Grey Zone contains various environments including swamps, caverns, canyons, streams, and forests consisting of local vegetation where the terrain is difficult to navigate. Periodically dotting the landscape on the trails in the Grey Zone are various Panic Shelters known as “bunks.” They are scattered throughout the Grey Zone to protect personnel from potentially dangerous situations as they trek beyond the Bulwark.

| FERD | The Forward Exploratory Research Outpost

This is the largest outpost located outside of the Secure Zone.

Officially, it's said to be the Forward Exploratory Research Outpost. But informally, it consists of the Racks and the Ancillary. Dwelling within the Grey Zone, its location confers the outpost a degree of separation from the Central Complex. The Racks section of the outpost is called this because of its compartmentalized features. The Racks are multiple separate structures that are suspended in the air by a series of a lattice work of supports attached to the sides of the canyon walls. Each Rack is then isolated from one another for security and containment reasons. All cargo brought into the Racks are hoisted by platforms called “whips”, which are raised and lowered by cables. This cargo is staged below the Racks in an area called the Ancillary, which is fenced off and located on the ground.

Story Snippet:

Correspondence | Matter: Dispatch #1 Farewell
Author: Marvin Svante | Helios Count: 11/03/2742

Hey Miron,

I appreciate you being there for me over the past few years. You really helped me get through that last leg of the big ten. I don't think I could have made it without you and all those moon drips we shared at the lounge.

I feel really bad leaving you behind. I know you told me last night that your last three won't be that much of a struggle, but I can't help but think about it. I've been wishing I could write you on my return while I'm in cryo. In lieu, I decided to compose these messages over the past few months with a delayed dispatch. Knowing you, I'm sure you were wondering how you received this the day after I was scheduled for departure. I can be clever too, you know.

I'm glad you won't worry too much about my trip back home. I know you ran the odds. Very few shuttles are lost on their journey, even on a long one like this. And, at that thought, I'm sitting here laughing to myself, knowing you'd reflexively tell me the exact probabilities of a catastrophic failure and why I shouldn't fret. You've always been good with numbers. I guess that's why you make the big creds.

Anyway, message me when you get back thirteen years from now. I don't want to lose touch just because we no longer share the common bond of being stuck on that rock.

-Marvin

Gameplay Framework: The Specifics and the Fundamentals

Summary of the Gameplay

- Focusing on exploration and shooter mechanics, various paths can be discovered to complete the game. These different ways to complete the game can be unlocked by various methods; such as by reading logs to find door codes or by completing puzzles to gain access to new areas. Emphasis will be placed on making these door codes and puzzles flow as seamlessly with the environment as possible. For example, one type of puzzle might be solvable by bypassing power on a control panel.
- Competing characters will offer different story based objectives to the player. The choices the player makes in the game will affect the outcomes of the game.
- Because the game will require exploration to complete, enemies will respawn through doors and elevators in order to access your location. Their arrival will occur randomly or as a result of triggers, such as a security alarm being set off by the player. Exploring in a game with potentially unlimited adversaries encourages players to manage their inventory and resources as a gameplay mechanic.
- Any tutorials or training mechanics on how to play the game will be implemented in-game in an intuitive and believable story-like format that doesn't break the game's immersion.

The Personality Template

A fundamental component of the game will be the player's Personality Template. From the start of the game, the player will be informed by Velma that they've been spun up as an Echo without implanting static memories. Implanting these memories would have enabled the Echo to robotically perform specific predefined tasks. But by doing so, it would have left their Echo without any experiences or emotions that a naturally born human would encounter. Instead of giving the player static memories, Velma offers the player something in exchange. The player is given access to a personality template, which will enable your Echo to overcome certain deficiencies inherent within them. In short, the player is now, for all intents purposes, human-like with the traits and flaws that come along with being so.

Later in the game, the player will be able to unlock and pick personality traits as they progress. These traits will allow the player to fine-tune the personality of their Echo as if they were a normal human who would have made various life choices along the way in their development. Some of these choices will confer bonuses or hindrances that will affect the in-game mechanics. This will be especially true when a player chooses to incorporate the more negative personality traits, but the player will not be directly told of the consequences.

Art Placeholder Image



[The Graybar Building, Manhattan]

Neural Network Personality Trait Modules

Every Echo will have a series of unlockable Neural Modules in which a range of discoverable Traits can be installed giving the Echo specific personality attributes. Using a Personality Interface screen that depicts the Echo's body, these personality Traits can be plugged into Neural Modules located along certain parts of the body; such as in the mind for intellect, in the heart for emotions, and in the stomach for willpower.

Each Neural Module has its own range of specific Traits that can be discovered and implanted. Installing one Trait may modify another pre-installed Trait or Traits. Instead of outright telling the player that a certain Trait is good or bad, the game will have an in-depth description and visual depiction of the specific Trait in question. As a result, the player will have to interpret these descriptions in order to decide on which trait to use. These choices may result in consequences which they will have to deal with accordingly.

Only after time has passed since a module has been installed will the Personality Interface tell the player how a certain chosen Trait has modified the stats of their character. This is to force the player to make these choices based solely on the description of the Trait so that they cannot "metagame" their choices and choose the Traits which improve their stats in ways in which they desire. Some of these Traits will appear to have little to no effect on the player but instead might confer things such as a subtle team bonus to everyone. The choices the player makes with their Neural Modules will affect the ending and story progression of the game in both good and bad ways depending on what they choose.

There will be various ways to unlock these Traits for future use. And they will not all unlock at the same time. Certain negative Traits will become available either by finding them in the game or by doing certain negative actions, such as killing the unarmed when you could have simply incapacitated them. The game won't make it easy to predict how the player would go about earning a specific Trait if that were the player's intended goal. And not all Traits will be installed by choice. There are some Traits that a player will "earn" through their in-game behavior.

The positive Traits will become available in an even less intuitive way, such as by repeatedly completing a series of altruistic side quests that result in no obvious payoff for the player. Examples of this may be as follows: a player spending extra time to ensure that those who travel an area will find an easier way of escape, or maybe the player will go out of their way to save someone while risking themselves and expending resources that will never be replenished.

There won't be a direct one to one correlation to these actions until later in the game. This way, the player won't feel like they are being rewarded for their good deeds, such as being given a good item after completing the side quest. As a result, many players will feel cheated by the lack of a reward because of the patterns that other games have already set for them. Certain positive traits will only become unlocked by completing a series of these altruistic story arc side quests.

Personality Trait Module Examples:

Intimidating – You're much tougher and stronger than your peers. You've never had any trouble getting others to follow you or do what you wish. As a result, anyone who gets in your way finds it more difficult to overcome you.

Altruistic – You have a calming presence. Always present with a positive attitude, you're ready to lend a hand when the going gets tough. Having you on the team seems to make things go smoother.

Calculated – You know that everything in life can be positive or negative. It all depends on perspective. As a result, you've always been better than your peers at figuring out the right moves to make in any given situation.

Cooperative Play Group Cohesion Assessments

In co-op, the game will utilize various mechanisms to score how cohesive the players are in a session when they play together. In single player, specific missions will be used to tally these metrics. The difference in these scores will cause changes in the objectives and result in modifications to the dialog which the game presents to the player. For example, if a co-op player session frequently spreads out too far, the game will send different types of challenges their way to encourage grouping, while also presenting objectives that encourage splitting up. If a “stick together” challenge dialogue results in a player’s death, the game will present a condescending audio dialog about needing to do a better job of working together.

The intent is to keep the players in a state where they’re never quite sure what they’re really supposed to do, and as a result, the aim is to increase the element of fear by not allowing the players to anticipate what will come next. In many videogames, players are oftentimes able to anticipate or predict an action’s outcome or triggers. This can makes a game feel as if it’s on “rails” and allow the player to “metagame” instead of organically reacting to what is being presented to the player. We plan to mitigate this type of play-style and its immersion breaking consequences as much as possible.

Another device the game will implement is by utilizing the characters in the game to seed doubt about the loyalty between the player’s friends. For example, at the beginning of the game, a character will tell all the players that it might not be possible for all the players to escape and that, at some point, they may have to betray another to make it out alive. After time goes by, another character will offhandedly tell the player that the character who told you so doesn’t have the best intentions. Who should the player believe?

Egocentric vs Selfless Temperament Detection

Different devices will be implemented in order to discover if the player leans more towards being selfless or ego driven. One of the mechanisms that can be used to implement this, in both single player and co-op, is by presenting the player with a series of choices which will either benefit them or will benefit another. For example, someone could ask the player to help make their life easier by sealing off a certain section of the facility which also happens to have a lot of potentially valuable resources the player may want. The choice to do so will keep the player from being able to access these resources in the future. Depending on what the player chooses to do, it will provide insight into the player’s temperament.

Leadership Detection

The game will use “Leader Detection” triggers on ladders and doors to count who goes first the most often through specific map bottlenecks. This metric will be used to manipulate the players in a co-op game by utilizing various audio dialogues designed to pit the player’s emotions against each other while exploiting their inherent jealousy or competitiveness. This mechanism may not be present in single player. If possible, a competition between a non-playable character and the player may be implemented to allow a similar use of the audio dialogues.

Leadership Detection, along with the other detection mechanisms, will be used to build an Egocentric Metric for the Personality Assessment of the player. This Personality Assessment will score the player on a Personality Assessment Matrix, which will then be used as a component of what Personality Traits become available to the player and it will help determine the the game’s outcome.

Loyalty Detection

The game will use different methods to measure the loyalty of a player. These metrics will be used in both single and multiplayer sessions. For single player gameplay, the game will measure the player's loyalty to a non-playable character instead of the other players in the session. Various devices will be utilized, such as disclosing the location of a secret item to the player that only they will know about.

The game will then evaluate multiple options, such as: if this player shares the access code for the item, if another player picks up the item, if they open the door in the presence of other players, or if they give the item to other players. These measurements will be used as a means to discover how loyal or cooperative a particular player is within the group.

Later on in the game, the players who are discovered to be secretive will be tested by providing them with opportunities to betray the other members in their group.

One method will be to test the players who are marked as disloyal with a temptation to secretly grab a betrayal item. If they do so and continue to hold onto this item, later on the players who are still marked as loyal will be told about this betrayal. Audio dialogues from the in-game characters will attempt to seed discord between these players. Those marked as loyal will be given temptations to betray those who were marked as disloyal. Depending on the outcome, they may even be encouraged to fight each other.

The goal is to provide the players with a unique blend of psychological experiences, while simulating deeper contemplative thoughts about the outcomes of their actions. Having this take place in a survival oriented game will help entice a player's true inner nature to manifest as real in-game choices. Combining the results of these actions with the Neural Network Personality Trait Modules will generate metrics that allow for a more varied and choice-based game ending experience.

Depending on the outcome of the game, the intent is to create an ending which may encourage a player to contemplate the choices they made within the game in a way that conceivably furthers their understanding of the real-life choices they may make in the future. This way, there is a potential for the game to provide society with some subtle moral lessons, especially amongst the youth.

Betrayal Items and Secret Items:

The game will contain items which exist for the purpose of testing a player's loyalty to the group or the mission. In co-op, these items will be used in a way to test for both a rogue player who isn't being completely honest with those in the group, and for those who may be tempted to betray the group near the end of the game. Single player gameplay will be more difficult, as this device will have to be implemented using non-playable characters.

For the secret item tests, a character will offer the player a chance at a secret item using a door code but are instructed to not let the other players know about this. Loyalty tests will be performed by detecting if other players are nearby when the player goes to grab the item, if the player gives the item to another, or if the player gives the door code to another player.

Betrayal items will use a similar device but will be offered only to the players who are marked disloyal by a secret item tests. By limiting the number of players exposed to this test, its use is less likely to be widely known by all the players within a group.

Gameplay Items

Items are weapons, tools, devices, or things that you can pick up and drop in the game that use one inventory slot each. The player has a limited number of inventory slots.

Decoder – A useful tool that can be used to break the encryption on some devices, like keypads and terminals. It can only be used a limited number of times.

Disseminator – An item that can be tossed to transport yourself behind an enemy or object in your way. It can be used to bypass obstructions. Be careful not to throw it over a ledge. If it is thrown out of range, the disseminator will fail to rematerialize your body, and you will be killed.

Locator – A device that will indicate the location of friendlies, objectives, or items of interest to the player. It has an unlimited power source.

Motion Detector – This device is used to detect motion. It doesn't differentiate from friend, foe, or environmental movement. It has an unlimited power source.

Flares – An item that can be used to illuminate a room from a distance or to mark the path of an area traveled. A flare will stay illuminated perpetually and can be picked back up.

Illuminator – An item that is used to light the path ahead. It has an unlimited power source and can be used to explore dark places.

Handgun – A weapon that fires in a straight line and holds less ammo and does less damage than a rifle.

Proximity Mines – An explosive weapon that activates by sensing fast movement. It can be thrown or placed directly below the player. There is a brief audible delay before it is armed. It cannot differentiate from friend or foe, so be careful.

Rifle – A weapon that fires in a straight line, holds more ammo, and does more damage than a handgun.

Radbeam – A weapon that fires a beam of radiation that uses energy when it is fired. It is less powerful than many other weapons, but the energy can be recharged at charge stations.

Radaway – An item that mitigates the effects that radiation has on your body.

Sentinel – A stationary automated weapon which attacks anything that moves. It has an automatic friendly fire identifier, so it doesn't shoot you or your friends. This weapon can be placed on the floor and used for protection when you and your team are reading logs or used to help you survive a difficult situation. It has a limited firing arch, range, and ammunition. Also, it can be picked back up. It is undecided if the player will be able to reload this item.

Shotgun – A weapon that does more damage than a rifle but holds less ammo.

Shroud – A device that creates an impenetrable energy wall which can be used for personal protection. It can be dropped on the floor and used as a temporary barrier, as an item that you crouch behind for cover, or held to protect one side of your body like a shield. You cannot use any other items when you are holding this item.

Stunner – A nonlethal weapon that increases your melee strike damage and can also damage an enemy on its own without having to use your slower melee attack.

Vitalizer – An item used to heal yourself or others. It has a limited number of uses.

Note: *If you pick an item up and repeatedly drop it, it will de-replicate in order to stop players from attempting to push more items across the map than the number of inventory slots they have. A warning will occur before this happens.*

Gameplay Enemies

These are the non-playable character adversaries which the player must defeat or evade in order to survive.

Cloakers – It's unknown what or who these almost invisible assassins are.

Deltas – Created to fulfill the convictions of the Founders no matter how atrocious, these faithful servants will go to any lengths and sacrifice any resource to see their plans accomplished. The majority of the Deltas can be found within the Forward Planetary Research and Exploration Outpost known as the Racks.

Drones – These automated flying machines can detect hostiles and alert security. They can also perform limited ranged attacks but are easily destroyed.

Enforcers – Enforcers are the rapid response forces used for serious breaches of security within the facility. When something occurs which Security cannot handle, Enforcers are called. They are usually armed with rifles.

Exploders – Somehow, this automated cleaning machine has become a fast traveling suicidal weapon that will quickly find its target and explode upon contact.

Industrials – A robot which was built to aid in construction and repair, but has begun to malfunction and attack those who draw near. The industrial tools they are equipped with have been transformed into close combat weapons. This machine is tough but slow.

Infected – They started as a mere rumor, but since the quarantine protocols were enacted, the infected seem to grow harder and harder to contain. Infected humans exhibit pack-like behavior and undergo hideous mutations. The areas they inhabit transform into growths of biological material that cover the walls, floors, and ceilings.

Liquidators – These are the technicians, muscle, and general laborers of the Deltas. They are essentially modified military grade Echos which can perform a larger range of tasks.

Mutagents – These hard to kill abominations predominately roam the sealed off and abandoned halls of the Substratum or within the Grey Zone outside the protection of the facility.

Personnel – Scientists, Docs, Techs, Engineers, Corporates, etc. These are the different types of personnel that work within the facility. They are usually unarmed but they're able to alert security.

Security – These are the basic security guards within the facility and are armed with pistols.

Sentry Guns – Standard automated defensive devices deployed by security that will open fire on anything that moves. They can be programmed to ignore friendlies.

Viewers – These security devices are used to monitor the facility. If a hostile stands within sight for too long, Security is likely to be alerted. They can be destroyed.

Gameplay Implements

An implement is an item, trait, or piece of gear which cannot be lost once it is acquired within the game. These do not take up inventory slots and remain with you even if your clone has been de-duplicated [dies].

Datapad – An implement which stores all the logs, emails, and recordings you find.

Transcendent – An implement you gain when you perform an action in service of another while putting your own life at risk. It is not something that can be used per se, but rather it is more akin to a character trait or skill that the player unlocks through certain actions taken within the game. Obtaining this trait will lock and unlock other aspects of the game and effect the game's outcome.

Gameplay Objects

An object is an interactive item which cannot be moved or transported by the player.

Care Station – An object that heals the player when you activate it.

Replication Point – The point where a replicated copy of an object can appear. In gameplay, this is the place that the player can activate where they will be "replicated" back into existence when they die. In common game terminology, this is a spawn point.

Progression of the Game: Outcomes of a Decision

Character Story Arcs, Their Losing Sequences, And The Player's Redemption

Only one character, Cyrus, will lead the player to unlock the end of the game. The rest of the characters will guide the player into scenarios which result in the player “losing” the game. After a lost game sequence occurs, the player will be offered the ability to re-enter the game without having to replay the game from the beginning. If the player chooses to, they will be saved by one of the non-playable characters in a non-repetitive way. Each time the player is saved, the saving character will be presented to the player in a way that encourages the player to believe this character is now the correct one to follow. This helps ensure a full playthrough of the game. To avoid these “losing” sequences, there will be subtle hints as to the correct path to take. These hints will be difficult to discover, such as hidden within emails. If read, they will allow the player to make logical deductions about a given situation.

Who do you choose to follow?

The central theme of the game is about survival and choice. You'll have multiple characters seeking to guide you through the game. Who will you follow? Choose wisely. If there is a way to escape, there may only be one.

The player won't be glued to any specific path where they have to follow a specific character, even if the player is made to feel like they are. They will always have a choice. Also, they won't be forced to complete all of the objectives given to them, nor will these objectives have to be completed in a given order. But the way these objectives are presented to the player will strongly encourage or guide the player to pursue these objectives in that order.

The game will do its best to not directly disclose the correct path. However, the game will encourage the thorough and disciplined players who choose to explore with a big-picture mindset to successfully navigate the game. A lot of emphasis will be placed on attempting to steer the player into following the incorrect characters so that the player is able to experience more of the game.

Lorna's Mission To Escape The Facility

Truth be told, nobody can actually escape the facility like Lorna suggests. Following Lorna will result in the death of everyone that Lorna seeks to save. In her plan of escape, even the player's Echo will perish since Lorna convinced the player to bring their Seedpod along. Dying to Lorna's ending will result in a “losing” screen that lists the names of all those who died due to your misjudgement.

Luckily, Velma is there to save the day. She retrieves the player's Seedpod and triggers the replication sequence to bring the player back to life once again. Should the player have listened to Velma all along?

The moral of this story is about believing things at surface value, by being driven haphazardly through fear and the desire to succeed, and not thoroughly exercising your due diligence before setting off on a potentially dangerous path. The player will be left to feel as if they were on rails during their escape, but were they really? Did the player assume this escape plan was the right course of action without thoroughly exploring, discovering, and reading beforehand? The answers were there the whole time just waiting to be discovered.

Velma's Mission to Stop the Corruption of Servius

Velma doesn't reveal that she's a rogue AI to the player. Early in the game, Velma tells the player they were replicated in order to fix a serious corruption within Servius. But in reality, Velma is manipulating the player to install a backdoor inside of Servius so she can use his control of the facility to further her aims. To lure the player, Velma arranged some of the best weapons and supplies the facility has to offer as a reward near the computer core. Once you enter, she won't open the doors until you complete her task. Reading the logs and emails would have allowed the player to know that Velma is actually an AI with questionable intentions. And as an alternative option, the player could have discovered an item which would harden Servius instead of rendering him more pliable as Velma desires.

If the player places a backdoor into Servius, Servius will become deranged, causing him to unleash a multitude of difficult enemies towards the player's location. As security descends upon the player, either Lorna if she is still alive, or Cyrus if Lorna is dead, will demand the player explain their actions.

Eventually, the player will be given a choice between the story arc of Velma, Lorna, and Cyrus. Velma's intention will be to tempt the player into using the situation to their advantage, Lorna to avoid the situation, while Cyrus intends to put an end to it. The ending of the game will tie into the player's choices. Each of Velma's missions that the player completes will nudge the player further into her direction.

Sebastian's Mission To Save His Family

Sebastian isn't actually alive anymore. Deep within the bowels of the substratal, a monstrosity is misleading those of good intent into merging with their collective. These collectivists are biologically connected to a hive mind, which values the many over the one. To outsiders, this appears as if they are infected, destined to eventually be consumed into what they refer to as the whole. This mindset—akin to a religion—is the vehicle in which the first of the infected were born. How did they come to be? Did one of the scientists create something in a lab in an attempt to unite humanity? Did it occur naturally? Having grown in numbers, the infected now seek to consume the entire planet and move on as if they were a hoard of insects.

If the player follows the good intentioned Sebastian story arc, it will land the player's Echo in a situation where they will inevitably become infected and lose control of their mind. If this losing scenario occurs, Velma will save the player by severing the replication entanglement to their Progeny Seed, thus allowing you to be replicated again while the mindless husk of your echo slowly dematerializes.

The moral of this story will focus on the player's desire to allow their emotions to guide their choices in a way that ultimately leads to their own destruction. Many of the souls who were lost to the infection were lured using emotional appeals similar to how the player was deceived under the pretense of helping Sebastian. This story arc is designed to appeal to an idealist in such a way as to lend insight into the consequences of viewing reality through rose-colored glasses.

The Cyrus Plan

To the majority of the survivors, Cyrus came off as unhinged, if not straight up maniacal. But no ordinary person would be able to succeed at what Cyrus is attempting to accomplish. Cyrus's fixation is to defy that which is occurring within the facility.

Cyrus is convinced that whoever or whatever is behind all of this would never let anyone escape. Allowing another to do so, in his view, would seriously jeopardize whatever sort of scheme they have all found themselves trapped within. And with how everything is turning out, as maddening as it all is, he is convinced that this has to be the result of a diabolical scheme.

He believes there have been too many coincidences for this to all be a coincidence. As a result, he asks the player to help him on his quest to put an end to whatever malevolent corruption is responsible. After all, the player is in a unique position to be able to do so, being a free willed Echo and all.

In the end, what will the player ultimately decide to do?

Outcomes: Self Sacrifice vs Ego

Ultimately, only Cyrus can unlock the ending stages of the game. But that doesn't mean following his guidance will result in the best outcome. Although Cyrus has some aspects of a selfless motivation, he is still fundamentally driven by his ego. The player will be given two paths to discover the crux of the events that transpired. The first path is the logical one that results in the player being able to fight, conclusively destroy, and survive what is occurring. But at what cost? The second path inevitably ends in the player's own destruction, while successfully putting an end to what is occurring.

What will the player's choice reveal?

Stages of Development: Releases of the Game

Development will be broken up into multiple stages of releases. Instead of the traditional alpha, beta, release model, or the ever more common perpetual beta release, the game will be released to the community this way in order to attract attention and recruit more talent to join our organization. Depending on the interests of those we attract to the project, we may massively adapt the style, story, and gameplay of the finished product, or we may never even finish a full release before moving onto another project. Below are the rough stages in which we plan to produce release candidates.

Demo – Mostly working co-op with some minor bugs, a mostly working menu system, an intro dialogue and a basic intro to the game, a few basic enemy types and weapons, basic gameplay mechanics, and the introduction sections of some of the level design for the player to explore.

Release I – All of the features of the Demo plus a fully working co-op, a fully working menu, a basic audio dialogue introducing characters such as Velma, a basic starting objective from Velma, one or two areas in the facility, introduction to the story and world through text based emails, and a premature text based "to be continued" ending.

Release II – All of the features of Release 1 plus enough level design to implement Lorna's plan of escape from the planet, more polished enemy types, game mechanics, and weapons, a fully implemented Personality Template system, and expansive text based stories occurring within emails, and Lorna's attempted escape from the planet.

Release III – Full release of the game with only the level design for the main facility to explore and with a cliff hanger ending.

Release IV – Full release of the game with the level design for the main facility and the exterior to explore, along with a cliff hanger ending

Full Release

Long Term Plan: A First Person Release

The long term plan for this project is to attract enough talent and skill to release a first person game that takes place within the same facility. The visual fidelity, development time, and skill required is a lot higher with first person titles as compared to 3d side-view games since the player is able to more closely inspect things from the first person perspective.

The player won't be using an Echo in this release. Instead, the game will be set further in the future where you play as a team sent to the planet to explore what happened within the facility. More focus will be placed on the fear elements in this first person perspective.

The game will be similar in that the players will spend their time exploring and surviving, but focus will be placed on building strongholds and surviving waves of enemy attacks while sending out survey teams to scout out and learn more about the facility. The facility will be more abandoned and eerie.

Instead of a player respawning by replicating their Echo, each player will have a device that can sync their consciousness to a synthetic human which they can control. This syncing technology won't have a very long range. As such, the gameplay will revolve around using turrets, fortifying doors, and placing new synthetic sync relays to increase the player's control over the facility. The human players will then have to move between fortified areas as they progress in the game.

If a player is incapacitated, the player is automatically sent into the synth control menu and can take control of any synth. A synthetic is able to retrieve the player and bring them to medical where they can be healed and eventually revived. If a player stays unconscious for too long, the player experiences perma-death and then can only play as synths the rest of the game. This encourages the player to take incapacitation seriously.

Conclusion

This project is open to modification and adaption. Like all projects, no plans are fully set into stone. To succeed, we will require the contribution of many talented individuals, organizations, and the help of the community. We recognize our roots and would like to thank all the pioneers of the videogame industry that have come before us. We hope to humbly carry a mere spark of the torch that has preceded us within the videogame industry.

Thank you for taking the time to read our design document.

Thank you,

-Metahusk and The Nonprofit Development Group