Hunt The Witch

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High Level Overview

Design Motivations

Developing a game narrative that highlights and explores real-world issues thoughtfully, without relying on stereotypes or prejudice within its storytelling.

Narrative lead games often follow a hero on a journey to resolve or complete something for 'the good side'. However, a lot of these games follow a hard-headed, male lead as they grow stronger and eventually succeed. I want to look at an alternative storyline that strays from these stereotypes and sheds light on overlooked issues, specifically for women.

By addressing this problem, I hope to:

- Create a unique narrative that resonates with audiences and makes people think about the issues addressed.
- Not use stereotypical character tropes that can lead to prejudice, such as a strong male hero or damsel in distress.
- Produce a narrative game, with mechanics that stem from the chronical and add to the story, rather than disrupt immersion. Gameplay needs to fit in with story progression and feel natural.
- Re-tell the struggles of women through a digestible medium, without taking from their experiences or overwhelming audiences; building an experience around what they went through (specific to the late 18th century - surrounding the Witch Trials.)

The project will focus on telling a fictional story, based on true events of the 18th century Salem Witch Trials. The game will be narrative led and create an immersive and interactive experience through storytelling and small gameplay elements. This will, hopefully, let the player experience a slither of the incidents that took place vicariously in a playable and enjoyable manner.

To fully explore this problem, I have investigated other story games with serious themes and analyzed how narrative and game designers have ensured the game is fun to play while keeping the severity of the narrative topic considered.

Key Elements

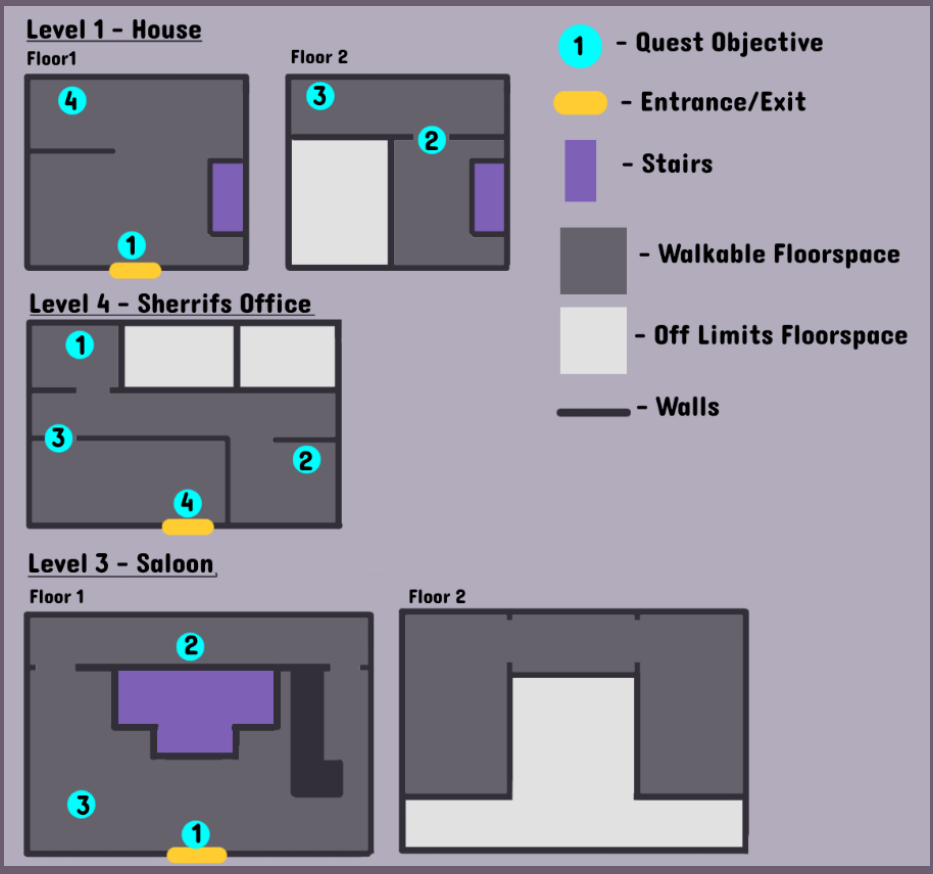
Main elements I am focusing on within the module and solution. Narrative story telling. The projects deliverables and how I plan to achieve them.

Deliverables:

- Completed narrative script of a fictional story written specifically for a game format, to be experienced in a game through gameplay and interaction.
- A playable story game experience with a balance of narrative scenes and interactive gameplay.
- A detailed Design Document communicating research and narrative development.

Level Goals

The game level as a whole is split into 6 sections, with the outdoors town section being the main area and largest to explore. There is also inside the protagonist's house, the interior of the Saloon and the interior of the Sheriffs Officer.



Design Considerations

Key things to consider when designing a narrative game:

- Narrative and Thematic Consistency
    - How historically accurate the game is while having a fictional narrative
    - Ensuring the environment and dialogue align with the 18th century setting
    - Avoiding major stereotypes within the story line
    - Being respectful of the history and victim's stories
- Gameplay Experience
    - A fair balance of dialogue focus and gameplay to keep players engaged
    - Be considerate of the games pacing, so the narrative doesn't feel rushed by gameplay quests
    - Ensuring the mechanics I implement work successfully while supporting the games storyline
- Level and Environment
    - Structuring game levels to reflect historically accurate settings while still acting as an intuitive area for players to explore
    - Visual storytelling is effective and immerses players

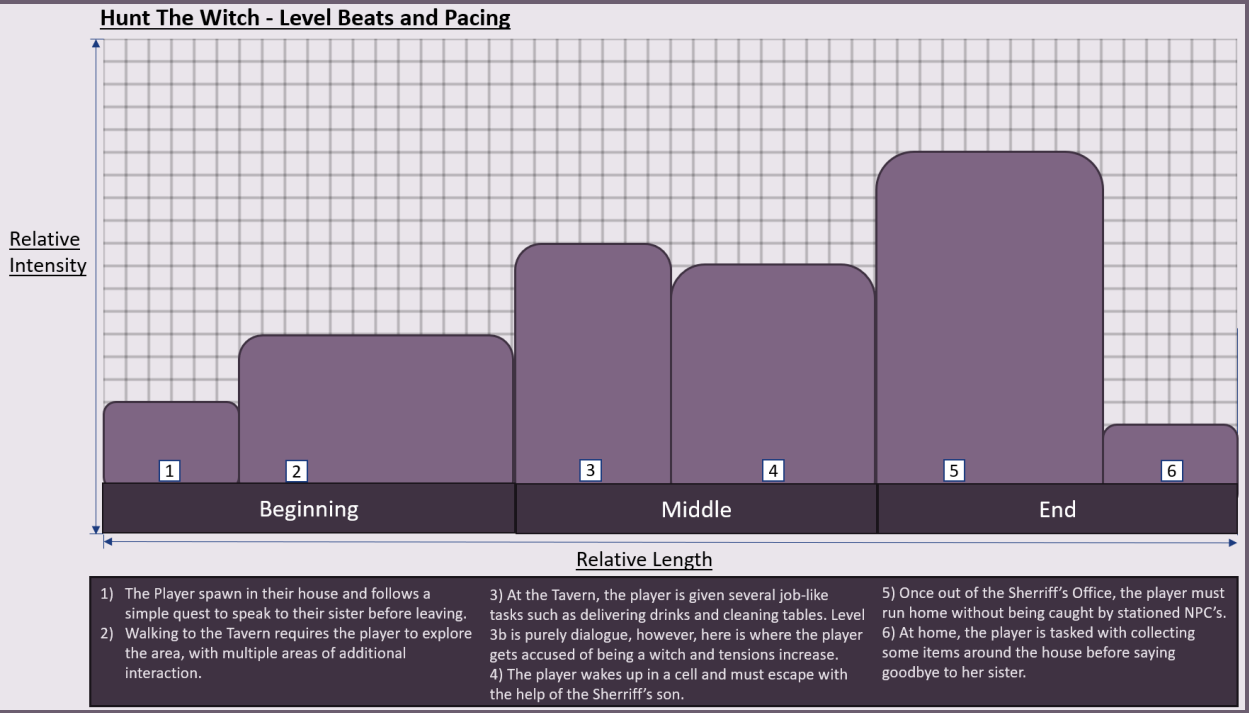
Expected Player Experience

Player experience will be an engaging narrative that is explored through quest progression and dialogue choices with NPCs. I expect emotional engagement from players as the narrative is contrasted to promote empathy for the protagonist unfair treatment and ultimately some empathy for women.

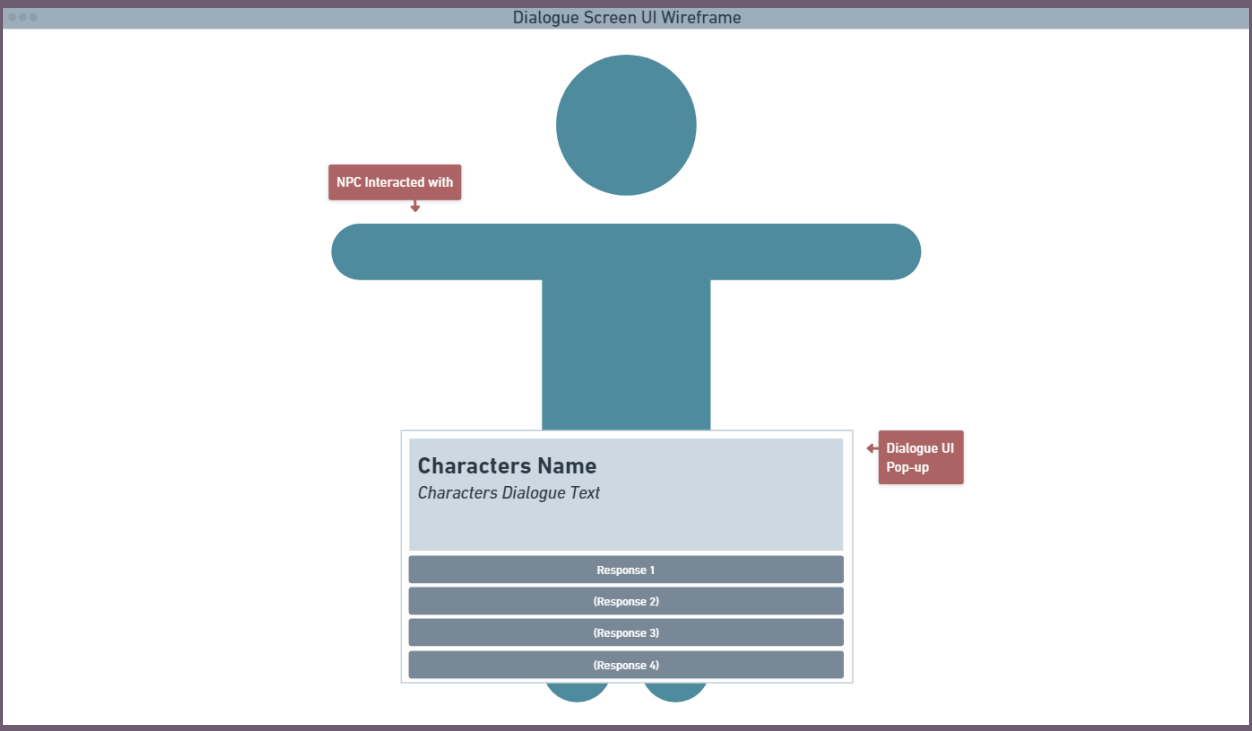
The players' choice of dialogue should drive the experience, providing different knowledge unique to the playthrough and shape the game for them. I also want players to discover more about the historical context of the game and potentially learn some new information surrounding the 18th Century Trials.

Design Diagrams

Beats and Pacing:



UI Wireframe:



Map Overview

Player Paths

This map shows the main level layout and the critical path of the game.

Narrative

Narrative Development

Concept: Story from the perspective of a young girl in the 18th Century who is wrongfully accused of being a Witch.

A key part of ensuring my narrative fits in a game environment it so ensure there are key points or 'saves' where the level can be updated, and the players progress can be saved. I used Freytag's Pyramid as a basic structure to layout these key events in their chronological order.

To make my game more appealing to players, the narrative blends factual information with fictional storytelling. The game begins historically accurate, with the protagonist going to work, getting accused and ending up jailed. It is here, the game turns into a fiction experience, as the main character escapes town and ultimately discovers she is in fact a Witch along with her mother who we previously learn was caught and executed on the same premise. She

meets a coven of women who explains that Witches are born from the mistreatment by men in power and oppressive religious groups praying on the vulnerable. The story can expand further, focusing on recusing other women using the protagonists' new powers and knowledge. The main characters in the story are: Sister (Briar), Father, Tavern Keeper's Wife (Mrs. Smith), Sherriff and Associates, Sherriff's Boy (Wilfred).

Initial Storyboard:

Informed Research

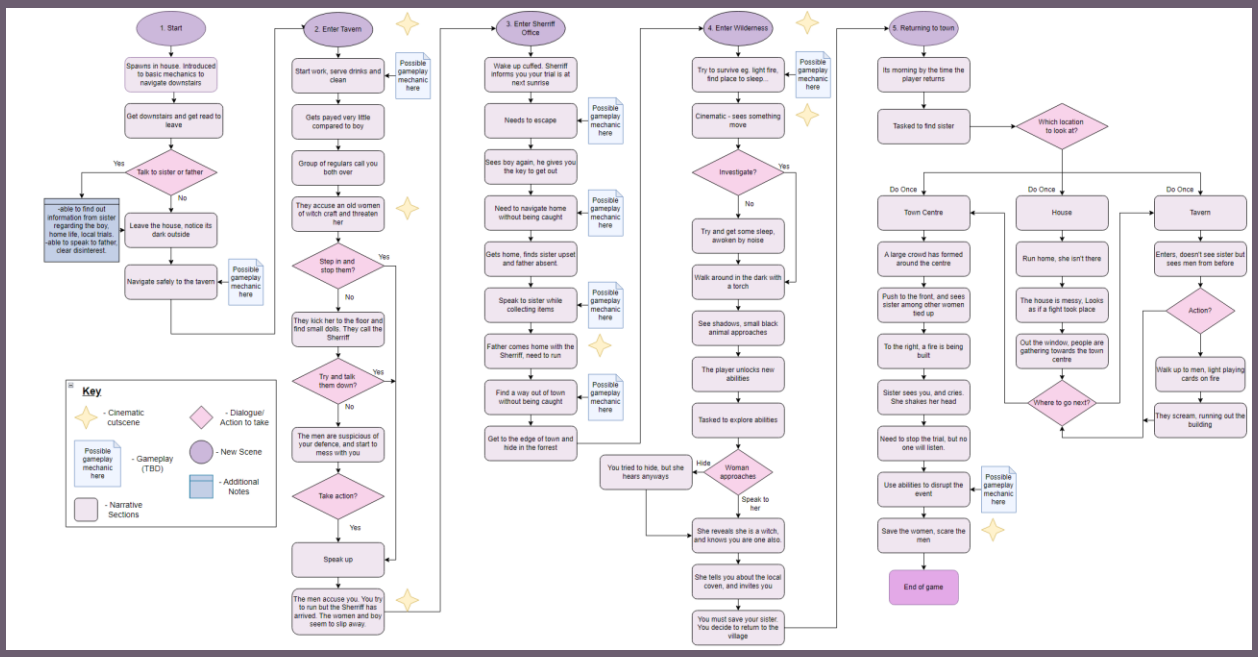
Research is a large factor in my project as the success of the narrative I create will rely on the historical accuracy and narrative impact. To ensure I cover a large range of information to inform my decision for historical and game related choices, I will review historical records and media, qualitatively assess information relevant to my goals and explore industry practises from both a narrative and gameplay standpoint.

Primary Sources: A large part of collecting factual historical information is looking at primary sources related to the event. I used approved libraries (Congregational Library & Archive, Britannica, History) of personal accounts and trial records to explore this information. Some of these texts included 18th century laws, religious guidelines, personal letters, and court transcriptions. Trial records are especially telling as they give context as to what exactly 'witches' were being accused of. Accusations range from having a 'Witch's Mark' that resembled the bite of a small animal to having greater than average strength!

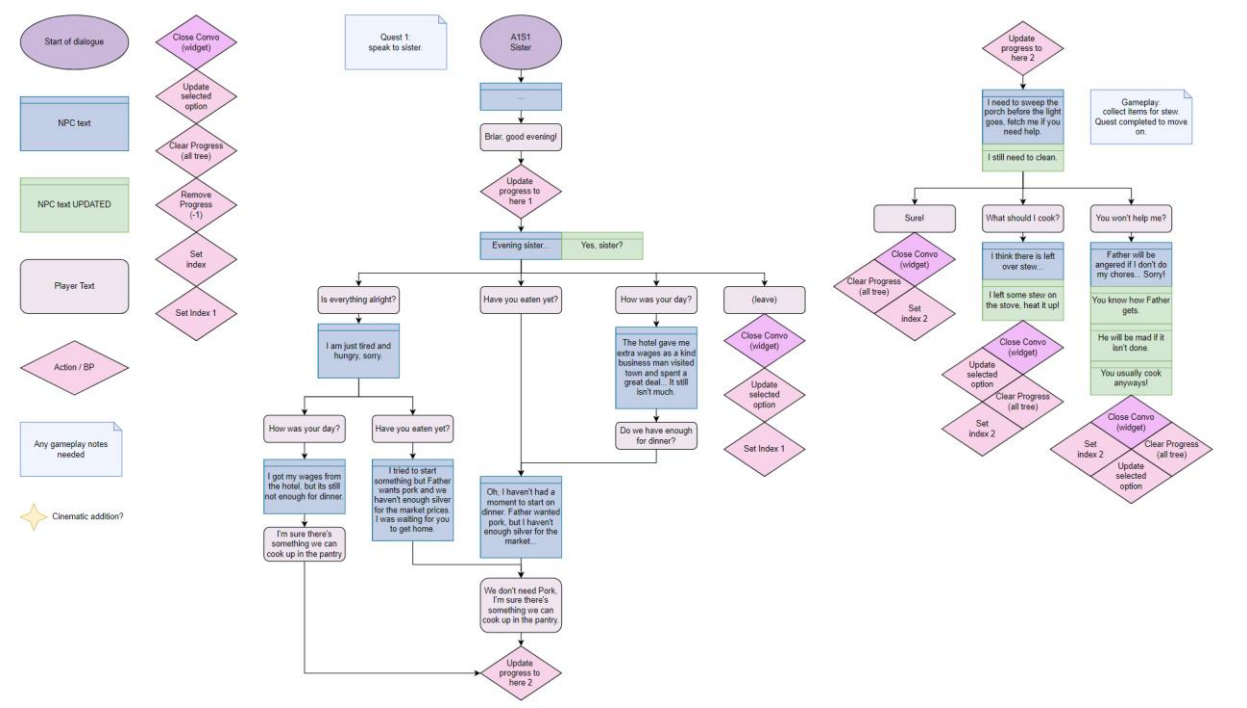
Secondary Sources: It is also imperative to consume other types of media on the witch trials to gain a larger perspective and digest wider knowledge. I watched a range of documentaries covering the trails, with the main one being a feministic coverage of the events called 'The Burning Times' written by Erna Buffie. It features a range of interviews with feminist notables, harshly criticising the events as a "Women's Holocaust" driven by the Christian Churches 'wicked, patriarchal and misogynistic' beliefs. This documentary was my inspiration for the project and informs my approach to exploring these narratives from a woman's viewpoint.

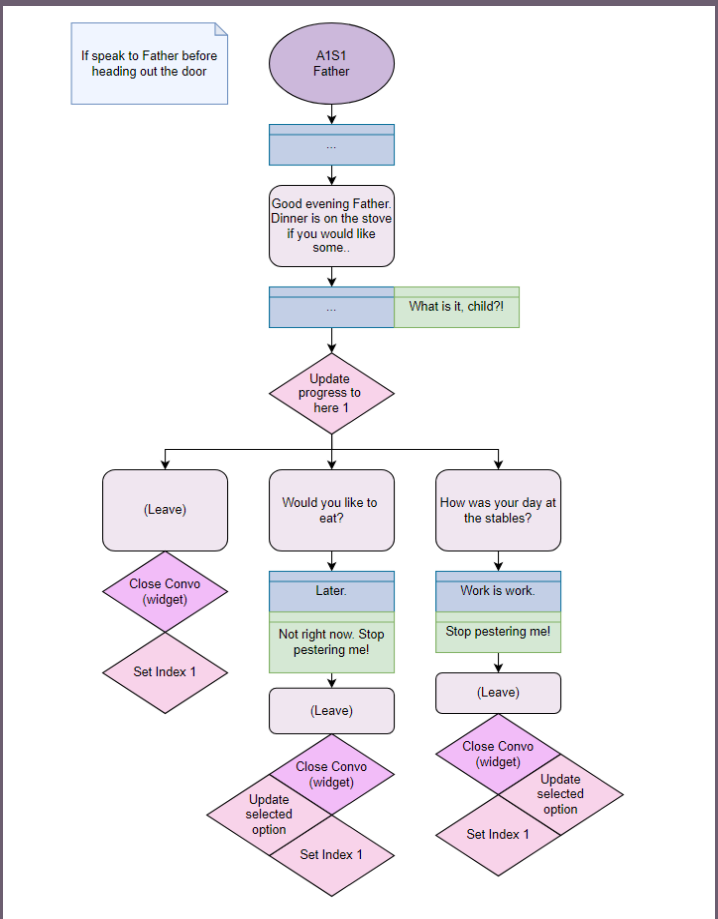
Script Breakdown

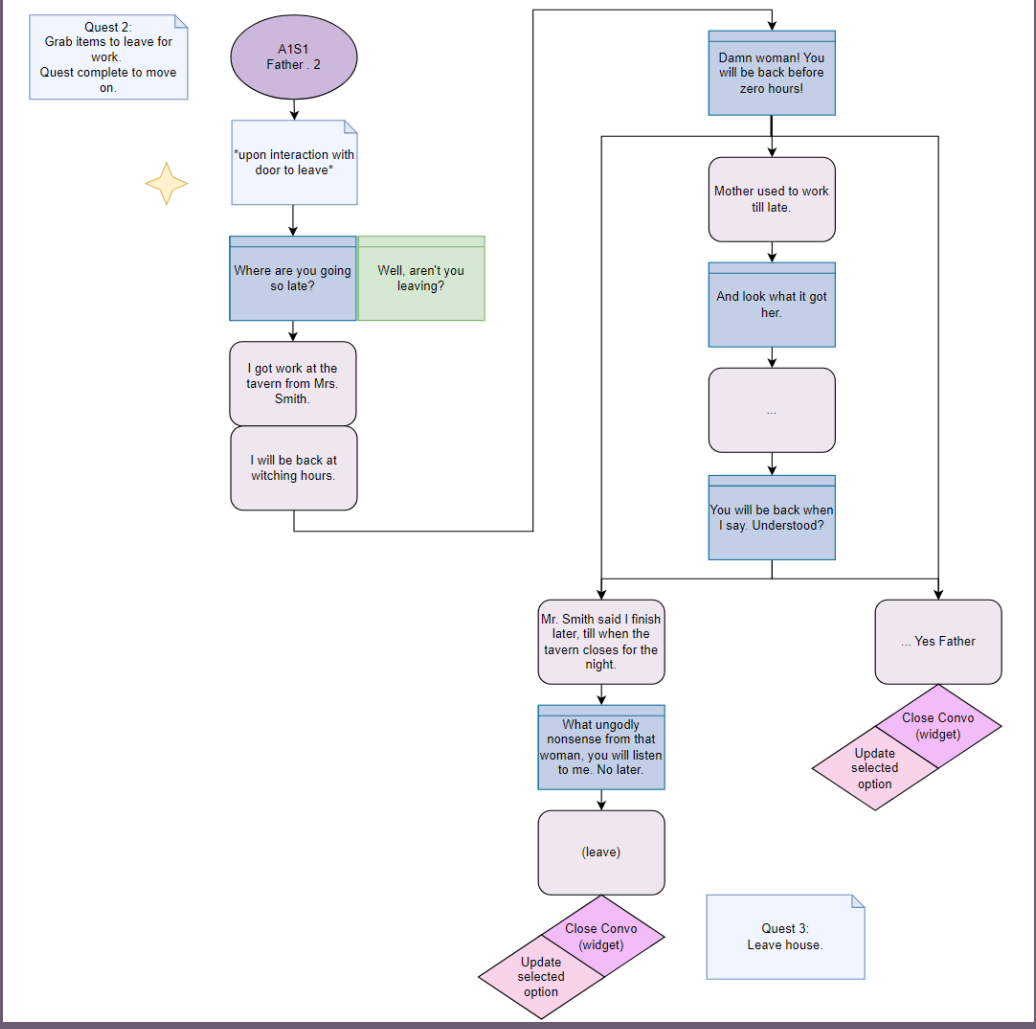
This is the first iteration of the script. From here I broke down each scene into its own chart to track responses and specific dialogue options.



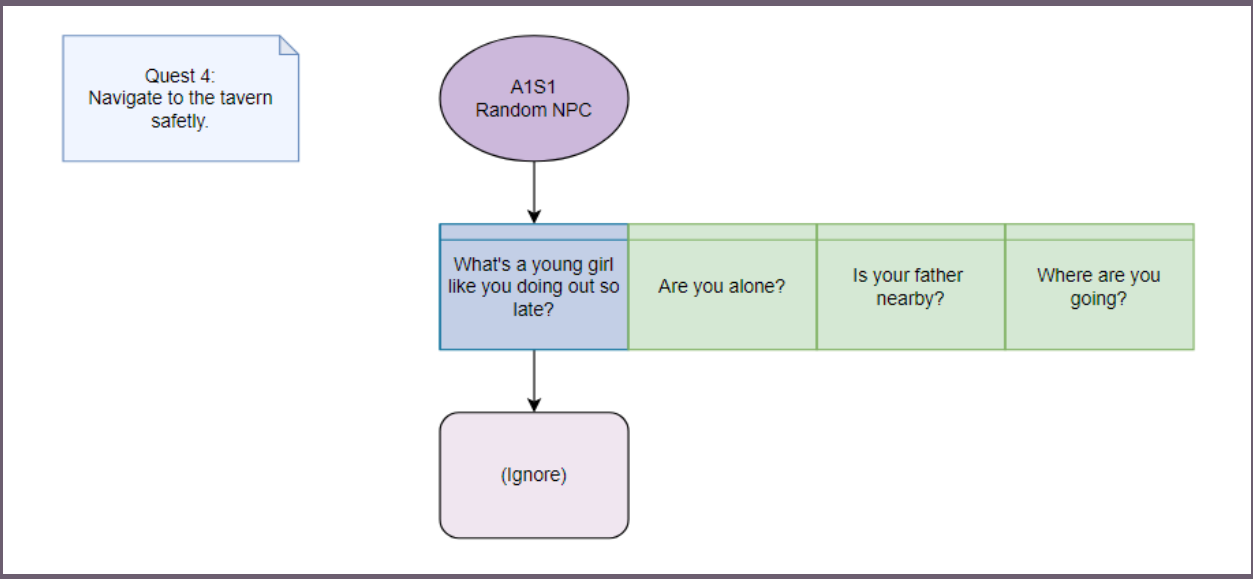
Level 1 - House



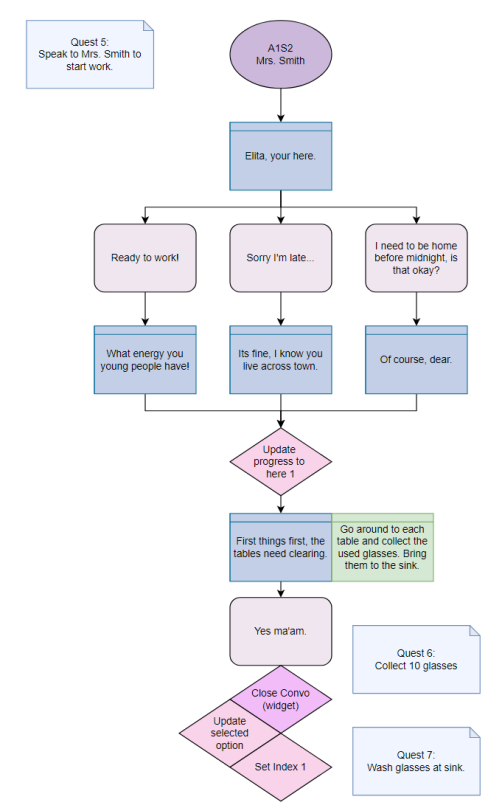


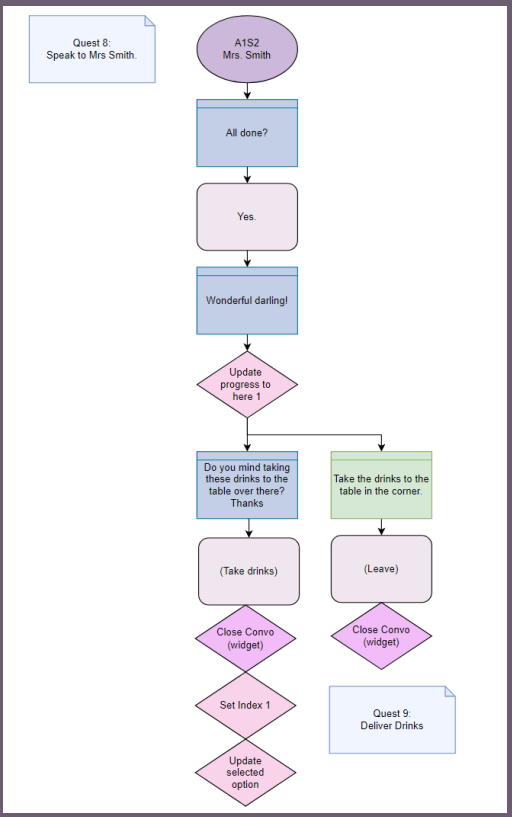

Quest 2:
Grab items to leave for work.
Quest complete to move on.
A1S1
Father . 2
"upon interaction with door to leave"
Where are you going so late?
Well, aren't you leaving?
I got work at the tavern from Mrs. Smith.
I will be back at witching hours.
Damn woman! You will be back before zero hours!
Mother used to work till late.
And look what it got her.
...
You will be back when I say. Understood?
Mr. Smith said I finish later, till when the tavern closes for the night.
What ungodly nonsense from that woman, you will listen to me. No later.
(leave)
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option
... Yes Father
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option
Quest 3:
Leave house.

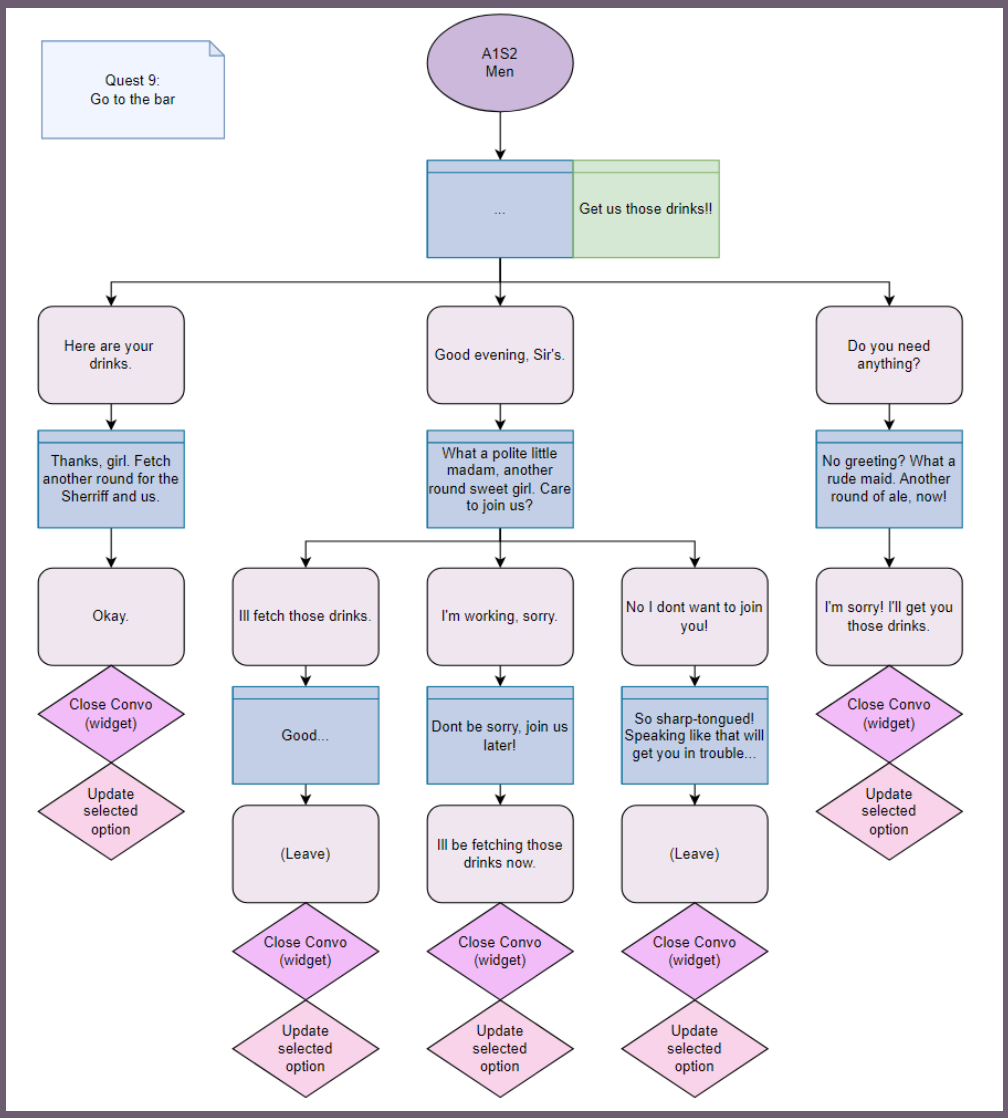
Level 2 - Town

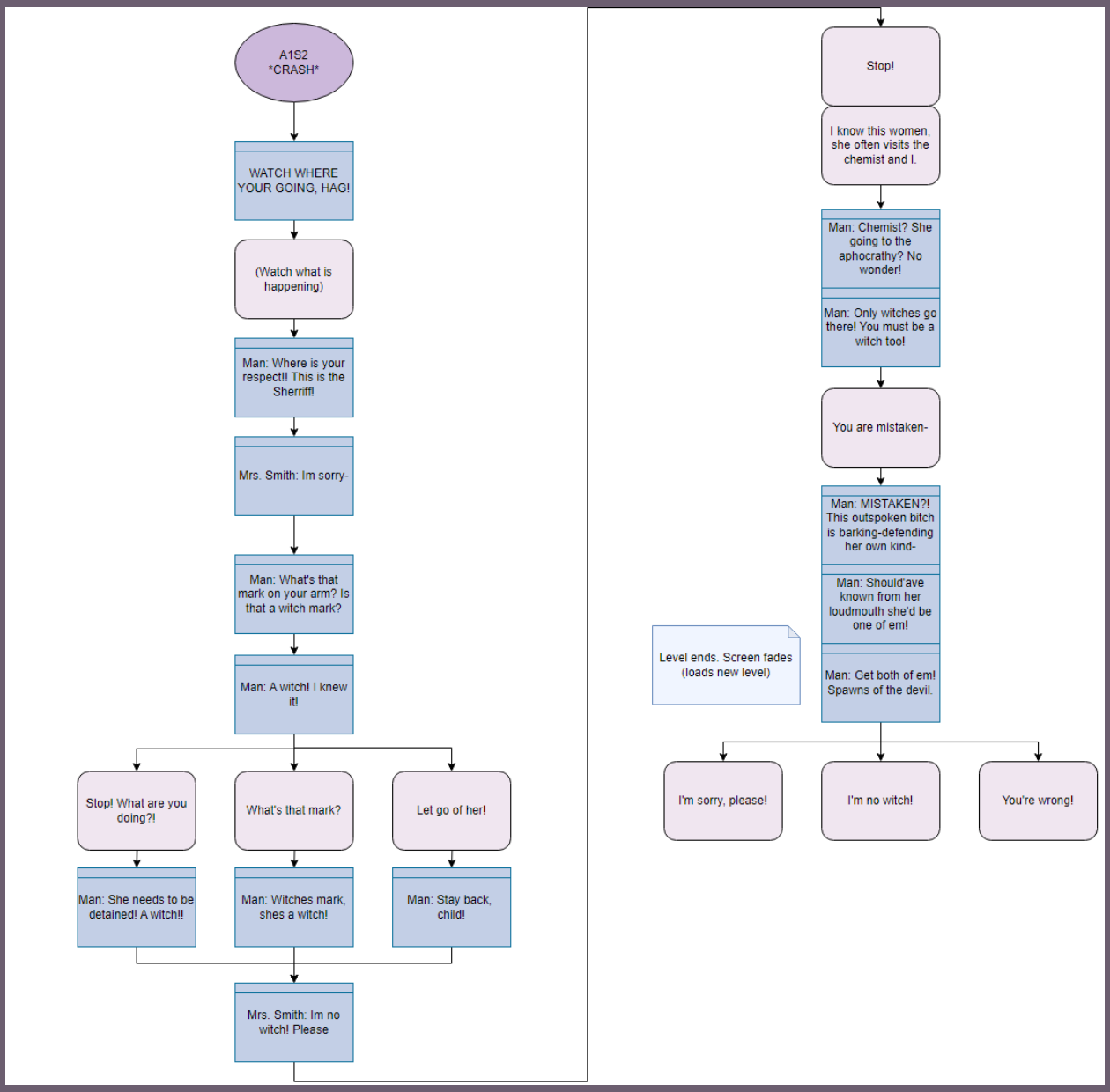

Quest 4:
Navigate to the tavern safetly.
A1S1
Random NPC
What's a young girl like you doing out so late?
Are you alone?
Is your father nearby?
Where are you going?
(Ignore)

Level 3 - Saloon

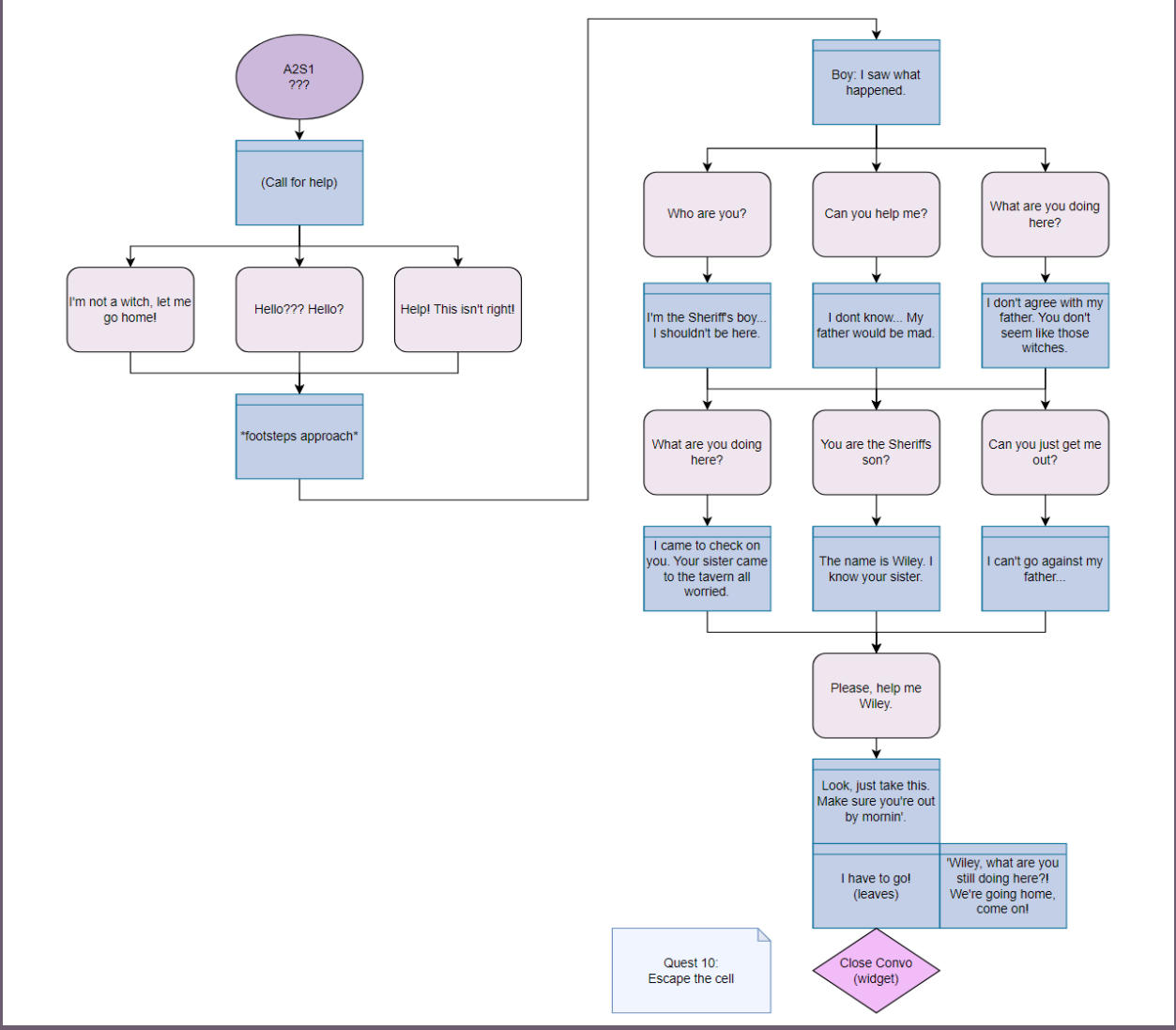




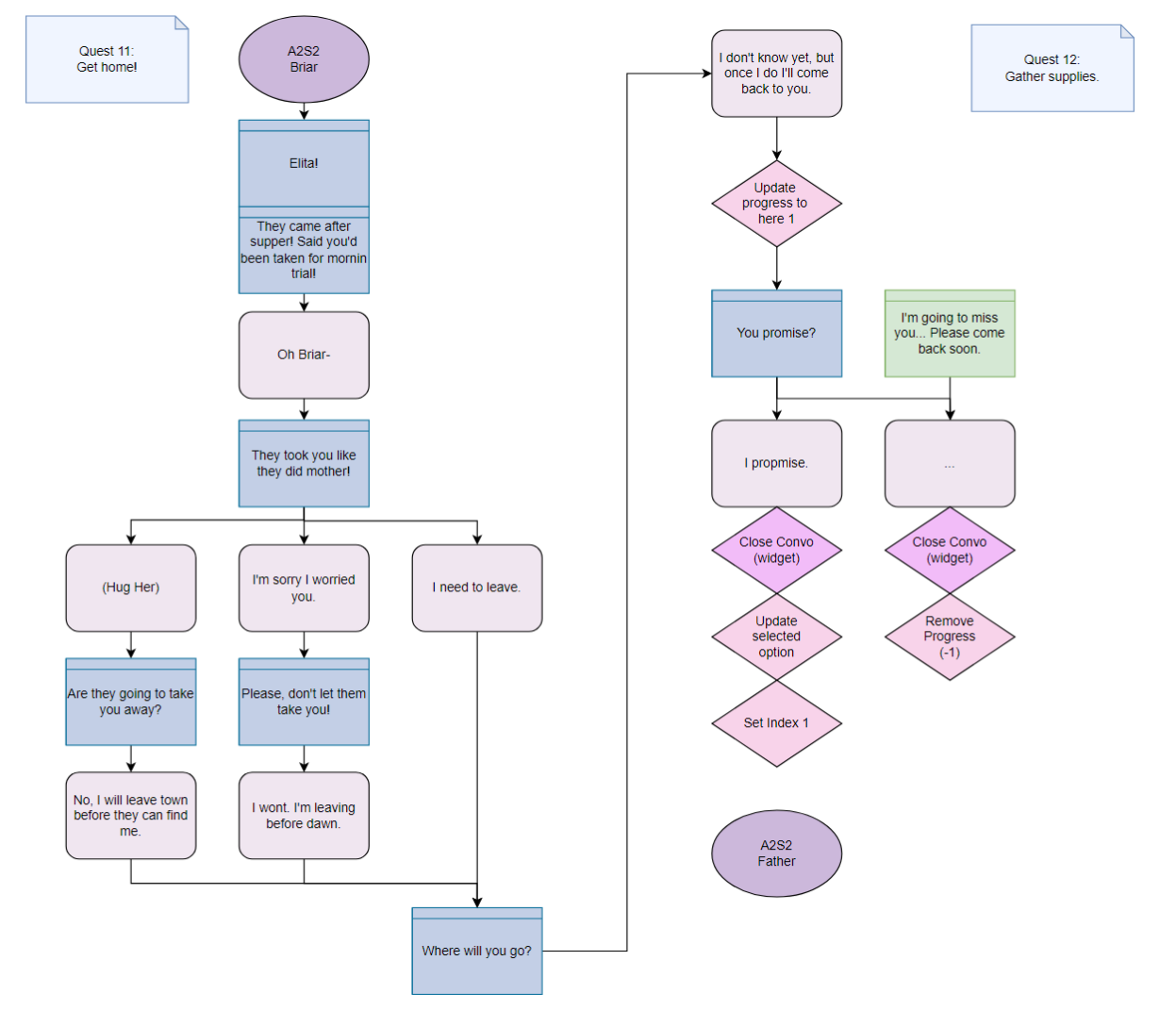

Quest 9:
Go to the bar
A1S2
Men
...
Get us those drinks!!
Here are your drinks.
Good evening, Sir's.
Do you need anything?
Thanks, girl. Fetch another round for the Sherriff and us.
What a polite little madam, another round sweet girl. Care to join us?
No greeting? What a rude maid. Another round of ale, now!
Okay.
Ill fetch those drinks.
I'm working, sorry.
No I dont want to join you!
I'm sorry! I'll get you those drinks.
Close Convo (widget)
Good...
Dont be sorry, join us later!
So sharp-tongued! Speaking like that will get you in trouble...
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option
(Leave)
Ill be fetching those drinks now.
(Leave)
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option
Close Convo (widget)
Update selected option


A1S2
CRASH
WATCH WHERE YOUR GOING, HAG!
(Watch what is happening)
Man: Where is your respect!! This is the Sherriff!
Mrs. Smith: Im sorry-
Man: What's that mark on your arm? Is that a witch mark?
Man: A witch! I knew it!
Stop! What are you doing?!
What's that mark?
Let go of her!
Man: She needs to be detained! A witch!!
Man: Witches mark, shes a witch!
Man: Stay back, child!
Mrs. Smith: Im no witch! Please
Stop!
I know this women, she often visits the chemist and I.
Man: Chemist? She going to the aphocrathy? No wonder!
Man: Only witches go there! You must be a witch too!
You are mistaken-
Man: MISTAKEN?! This outspoken bitch is barking-defending her own kind-
Man: Should'ave known from her loudmouth she'd be one of em!
Man: Get both of em! Spawns of the devil.
Level ends. Screen fades (loads new level)
I'm sorry, please!
I'm no witch!
You're wrong!

Level 4 – Sherriff's Office

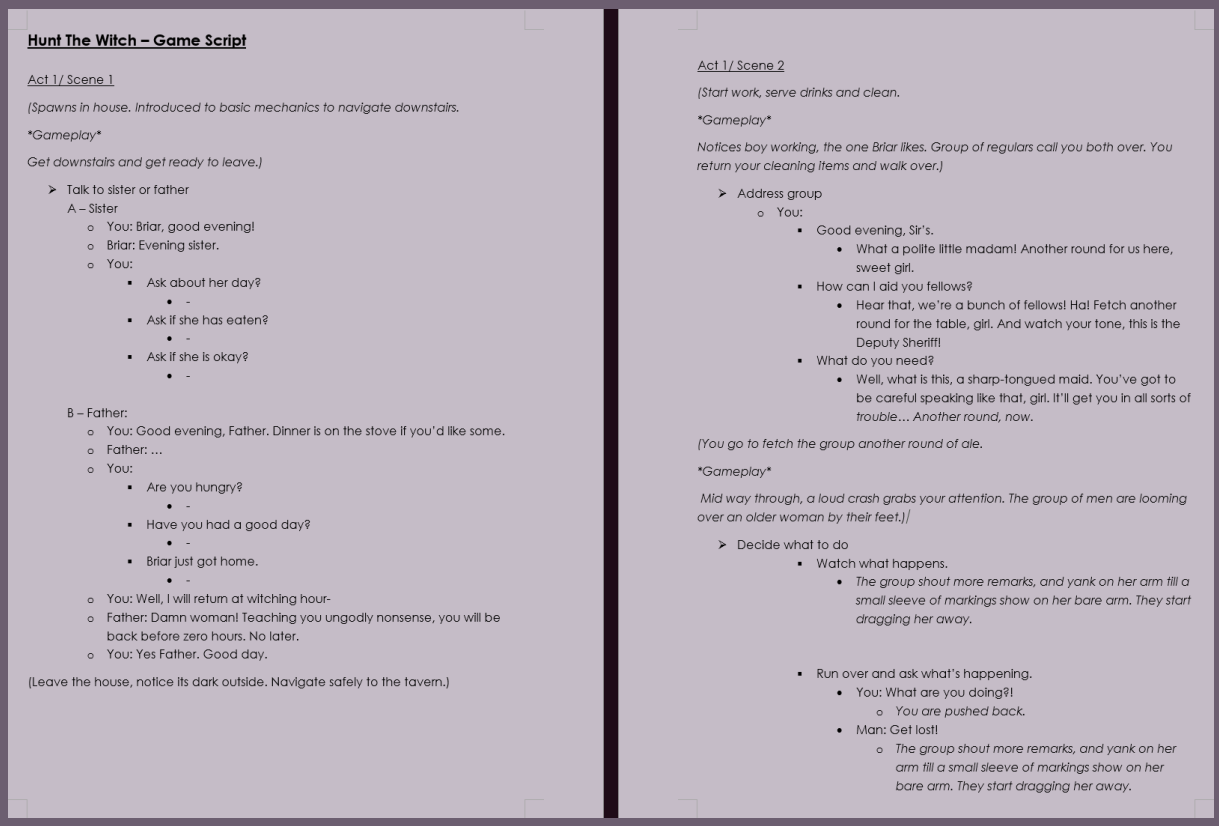


Level 6 - House



Narrative Script:

This is the narrative set out in a script format. I wrote this after planning to give myself an idea of how dialogue scenes would play out from a viewer's point of view. This was helpful as it allowed me to build my dialogue tree diagrams off the plans, and then implement them into the engine, adjusting speech were necessary.



Hunt The Witch – Game Script

Act 1/ Scene 1

(Spawns in house. Introduced to basic mechanics to navigate downstairs.

Gameplay

Get downstairs and get ready to leave.)

- Talk to sister or father

A – Sister
- You: Briar, good evening!
- Briar: Evening sister.
- You:
  - Ask about her day?
    - -
  - Ask if she has eaten?
    - -
  - Ask if she is okay?
    - -

B – Father:
- You: Good evening, Father. Dinner is on the stove if you'd like some.
- Father: …
- You:
  - Are you hungry?
    - -
  - Have you had a good day?
    - -
  - Briar just got home.
    - -
- You: Well, I will return at witching hour-
- Father: Damn woman! Teaching you ungodly nonsense, you will be back before zero hours. No later.
- You: Yes Father. Good day.

(Leave the house, notice its dark outside. Navigate safely to the tavern.)

Act 1/ Scene 2

(Start work, serve drinks and clean.

Gameplay

Notices boy working, the one Briar likes. Group of regulars call you both over. You return your cleaning items and walk over.)

- Address group
  - You:
    - Good evening, Sir's.
      - What a polite little madam! Another round for us here, sweet girl.
    - How can I aid you fellows?
      - Hear that, we're a bunch of fellows! Ha! Fetch another round for the table, girl. And watch your tone, this is the Deputy Sheriff!
    - What do you need?
      - Well, what is this, a sharp-tongued maid. You've got to be careful speaking like that, girl. It'll get you in all sorts of *trouble… Another round, now.*

(You go to fetch the group another round of ale.

Gameplay

Mid way through, a loud crash grabs your attention. The group of men are looming over an older woman by their feet.)

- Decide what to do
  - Watch what happens.
    - *The group shout more remarks, and yank on her arm till a small sleeve of markings show on her bare arm. They start dragging her away.*
  - Run over and ask what's happening.
    - You: What are you doing?!
      - *You are pushed back.*
    - Man: Get lost!
      - *The group shout more remarks, and yank on her arm till a small sleeve of markings show on her bare arm. They start dragging her away.*

- Man 1: A witch! The hag is a witch!
- Man 2: Take her to the Sheriff's Office!

The women wails, looking to you for help. They start dragging her to the door.

- Woman: I'm not witch! These are medicinal marks! Herbs, not magic!

- Decide what to do
  - Help her
  - Help her
  - Help her
- You: Stop! I know this woman; she often visits the chemist! Please Sir's, you are mistaken!

The men are suspicious of your defence and start to accuse with you with amuse faces.

- Man 3: Mistaken? This outspoken bitch is barking like a witch too, defending her own kind. Take them both!
- Man 2: Should'ave known from that loudmouth she'd be one of em. Spawn of the devil!
- You:
  - No, I'm no witch!
  - You're wrong! She is no witch, I swear it!
  - I'm sorry Sir's, please!

The men chuckle, and suddenly everything goes black.

Act 2/ Scene 1

Wake up cuffed. You are in a cell in the Sheriff's office. The deputy informs you your trial is at next sunrise, before locking up for the night and leaving. Your clothes are dirtied and torn, and there is nothing in the cell but some small rocks and dust.

- Call for help
  - Hello? Hello???
  - Help! This isn't right!
  - I need to get home. I'm no witch!

Some light footsteps can be heard outside. You make more noise. The boy from earlier enters.

- Boy: I saw what... happened.
- You: You are the Sheriff's son. My sister knows you.
- Boy: I'm sorry, miss. I should have stopped them-
- You:
  - You should have!
  - I understand, it all happened so fast.
- Boy: I may be no good as a fighter, but at least I can try.

He grabs as set of keys, but before he can unlock the door another set of footsteps approaches from outside.

- You: Quickly, now!

He turns from you to the door and back. His eyes widen, and he throws the keys to the floor before running towards the door.

- Man 3: Wiley, what are you still doing here! Get home, I'm leaving now.

They both leave, and you are alone.

Gameplay

Act 2/ Scene 2

You escape and must navigate home. When you arrive home your father is absent, and your sister is crying by the front door. She gasps and hugs you upon entry.

- Briar: Elita! They came after supper; they said you had been taken and to be trialled! They took you- took you like they did mother!
- You: I must be quick; they will come for me by day.
- Briar: What will we do? Surely father will talk to them-
- You: I cannot stay, sister. Not now. Please, I will have to leave.

You collect items around the house.

Gameplay

Briar hands you some bread wrapped in cloth. Before you can say anything, the door opens. Your father enters with the deputy.

- Father: Their mother poisoned her mind. I told you she would return here.
- Deputy: Girl!

You run out of the back door, your sister trying to block them from following. Find a way out of town without being caught.

Gameplay

Get to the edge of town and hide in the forest.

Act 3/ Scene 1

Try to survive e.g. light fire, find place to sleep, get away from town.

Gameplay

See something move in the surroundings.

- Investigate?
  - No
    - *You ignore it and try and sleep, but get awoken shortly after by more noise*
  - Yes
    - *You leave the light of the fire, grabbing a torch and walking into the nearby woodland.*

See shadows, small black animal approaches. It seems timid.

- Pet the ???
- Speak to the ???
- Watch the ???

A wave of dizziness overcomes the character, and the screen flashes. Abilities appear on screen. Tasks to explore abilities.

Gameplay

The player unlocks new abilities. A woman approaches.

- Hide
  - You duck behind foliage, but she already sees you and gestures forward.
- Speak
  - You:
    - Who goes there?
      - I see you are lost, child.
    - Stay back!
      - I won't harm you.
    - Hello?
      - Welcome.
  - You: Can you help me? I live downstream in-
  - Mystery Lady: Shush child, I know you. I know.
  - You: You… know me? I don't believe we have ever met.

- Mystery Lady: We have not. I can see what you have been through, here.

She hands you a long, black cloak.

Gameplay

You put it on, and she starts leading you deeper into the woods.

- You: Who are you?
- Mystery Lady: Just myself. You look scared, please don't be. It's always alarming at first.
- You: At first?
- Mystery Lady: You don't feel strange? Look at your hand's child, do you not feel your blood flowing, your heart growing.

You look down, your hands glow slightly.

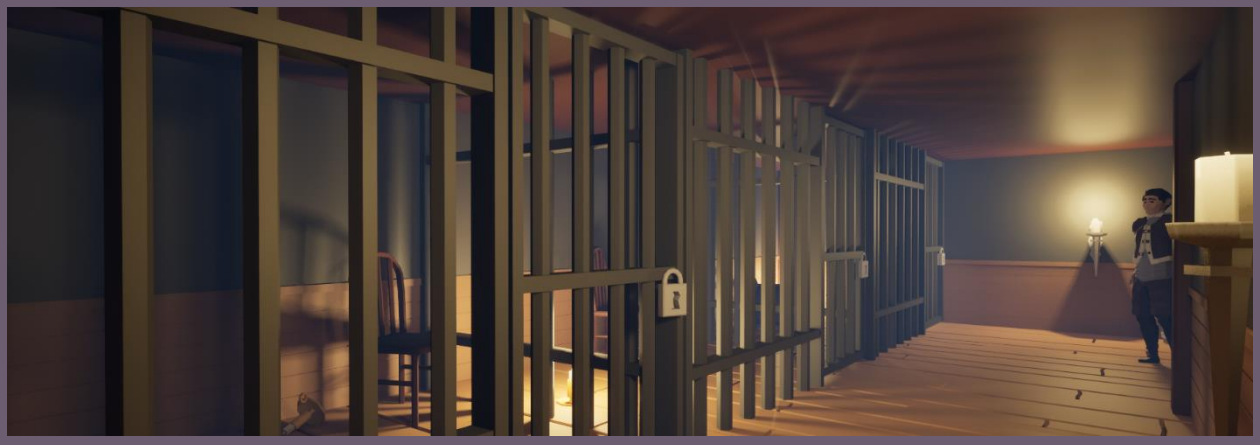
- You: What's happening? What is this-
- Mystery Lady: Every few years there is one like you. All the hate and anger of that town gathers into a storm, and that storm resides in someone. Someone that knows better, that wants better for us.
- You: Us?

You walk into a small opening of several small huts. There are several older women, sat together around a fire whispering.

- Mystery Lady: Don't you feel it, when they call you girl and treat you different. When you see them suffocate anything that dares to differ, and stomp on anyone who resists.

Aesthetics

Visual Development



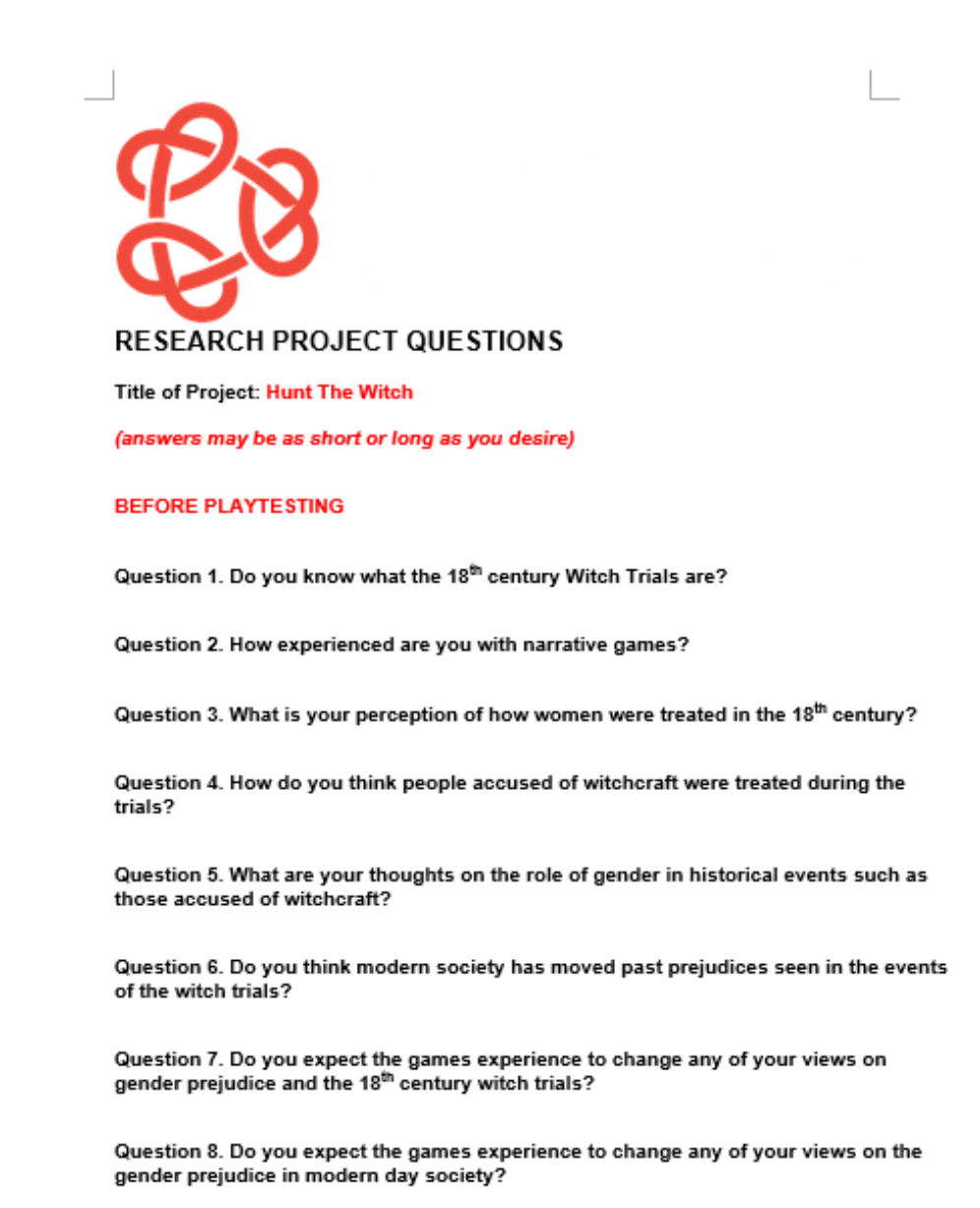
I used a Low Poly asset pack as my main meshes used.

Testing

Testing Plan

I created a Before and After questionnaire to analysis the effectiveness of my solution. I had ppts sign a consent form and read an information sheet. After those players answered the Before questions, they went on to play the game, and after completing answered the After questions.

Before Questionnaire:



RESEARCH PROJECT QUESTIONS

Title of Project: Hunt The Witch

(answers may be as short or long as you desire)

BEFORE PLAYTESTING

Question 1. Do you know what the 18th century Witch Trials are?

Question 2. How experienced are you with narrative games?

Question 3. What is your perception of how women were treated in the 18th century?

Question 4. How do you think people accused of witchcraft were treated during the trials?

Question 5. What are your thoughts on the role of gender in historical events such as those accused of witchcraft?

Question 6. Do you think modern society has moved past prejudices seen in the events of the witch trials?

Question 7. Do you expect the games experience to change any of your views on gender prejudice and the 18th century witch trials?

Question 8. Do you expect the games experience to change any of your views on the gender prejudice in modern day society?

After Questionnaire:

AFTER PLAYTESTING

Question 1. How did the portrayal of the witch trials feel to you?

Question 2. Was the storyline historically accurate or respectful to the themes?

Question 3. Where there any moments you felt the game reinforced stereotypes or prejudices?

Question 4. Where there any moments you felt the game broke stereotypes or prejudices?

Question 5. Did any part of the game resonate with you? Why?

Question 6. Did you feel connected to the character and their motivations? Why or Why not?

Question 7. How did the game's storyline make you feel about the witch trials, and characters involved?

Question 8. Did the game teach you anything new or challenge any prior assumptions you had about the 18th century with trials?

Question 9. Do you think the game was successful in blending entertainment with education? Was the educational content clear without feeling too influenced by fictional aspects of the storyline?

Question 10. Did any parts of the story make you uncomfortable?

Question 11. Did any parts of the story challenge your views? Was this a positive or negative experience?

Question 12. How did you feel after completing the game?

Question 13. How did you feel about the representation of women in the game?

Question 14. Did you feel as though any character or group was misrepresent/ overlooked in the game? If so, why?

Question 15. Is there anything you learnt or will take away from the game experience?

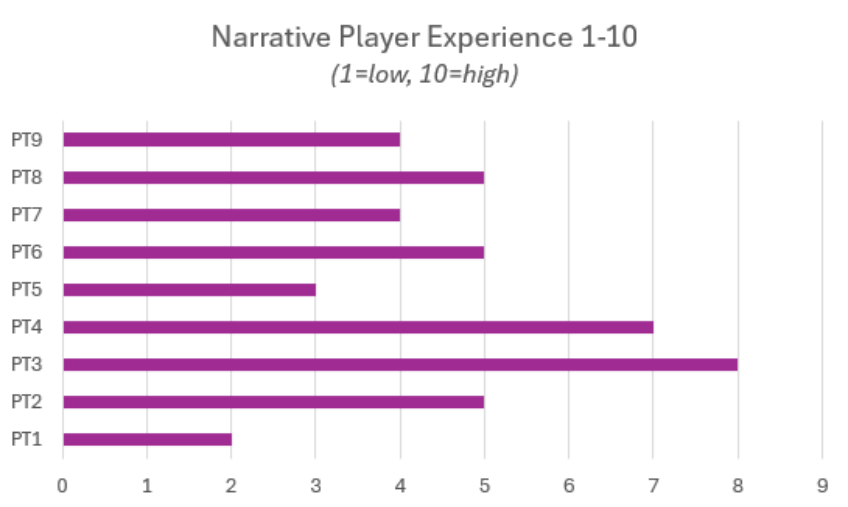
Question 16. Do you believe the atmosphere of the game aligned with the subject matter?

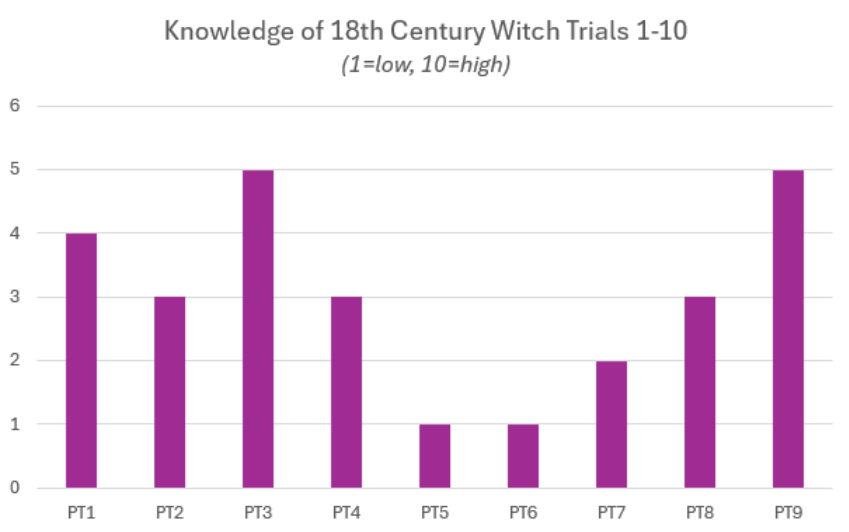
Question 17. Do you think the game was successful as a unique narrative that breaks stereotypes? Why?

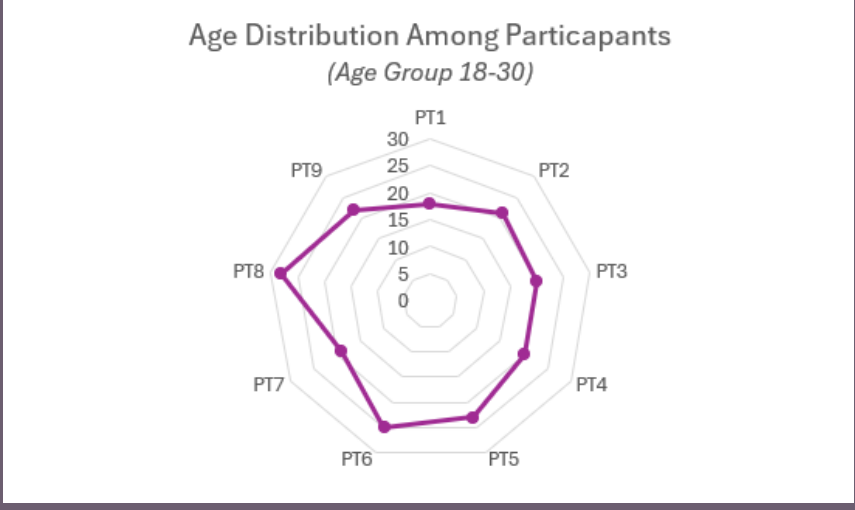
Question 18. Did you encounter any bugs when playing? If so, what where they?

Question 19. Are there any specific changes or additions you think would improve engagement or the impact of the game?

Evidence of Testing







The user responses I will be analysing were conducted on the final build of the project. This is to evaluate the effectiveness of the project's solution, as well as gameplay and any tester opinions. My main point of evaluation is looking at the change of before and after playing the game as industry uses this technique to see narrative impacts, especially for historically accurate games.

There are nine participants taking part in the user testing. The age group is 18-30 as is accurate to the target player base of the game. Experience levels vary for each participant, as does narrative experience and historical knowledge.

Key Findings (Before Playing):

- 55% of pt's did not think the game experience would change their views on gender prejudice and the 18th Century Witch Trials
- 77% of pt's thought women were treated somewhat unfairly in the 18th Century, with 66% adding that women were targeted specifically in the persecution of witches.
- 9/9 pt's thought the game could provide them with additional knowledge surround the Witch Trials.
- Ppt's took between 10-40 minutes to fully playthrough the game demo and were silently observed while playing. I thought it was important I watch how they play and follow the games directive to give insight into gameplay and quest clarity, however I made it clear I would only be observing and would offer no help or support to players while they were testing.

Key Findings (After Playtesting – summarised by me from questionnaire answers):

- 55% of pt's wrote that they learnt something new about the 18th Century Witch Trials from playing the game.
- All pt's answered that the part of the game which resonated the most with them was the moment the protagonist was falsely accused. This seemed like a relatable moment for all players.
- 88% if pt's said the atmosphere of the game aligned with the subject matter.
- Common Player Feedback:
- 'After completing the game demo, I wanted to keep going to see how she makes it out.'

- 'I felt bad for the protagonist and wanted to root for them.' with others commenting they felt more aware of how women were oppressed by experiencing it ***vicariously***.
- 'The game had a good balance of fun and educational elements; however educational areas were more insightful than informationally rich.'
- 'The gameplay elements were good however the game needed more of them.' 'More content needed to be successful.'
- 'The narrative did not include obvious stereotypical character tropes, however the Sherriff's men being 'villains' felt stereotypical.'
- 'I have a better understanding of how women were oppressed through the accusations of witchcraft.'

What Players Liked	What Players Disliked/Suggested Improvements
- Narrative depth: how realistic and immersive the storyline was. - Visual Style: low poly style worked for the style of the game. - Historical accuracy: information about the time was correct.	- Needed more gameplay: very dialogue focused left little gameplay areas. - Some mechanics lacked polish: some interactions required a second attempt to trigger. - Players mentioned adding consequences for dialogue choices, allowing more variation in gameplay.

Regarding improvements, I completely agree with all issues brought up. I think if I had more time, I would be able to further develop mechanics and add additional gameplay which will become a future plan. Mechanics lacking polish such as interactable items related to previous issues I have had with them. I went back into the BP to tweak the range of interactable to hopefully solve this. The idea of player consequences for which dialogue option is also a future goal I can explore and will allow dialogue options to have a lot more importances with added realism.

Level Development Log

Level Development Stages

These GIF's show each stage of building and testing. I took images of the map at each playtest, and progression of world building.