SEAWORTHY

LOGLINE: After an accident on the water which left them injured and traumatized, a swimmer braves the waves to test their skills – and their courage.

GENRE: 1st person rhythm game

MOOD: The experience is tense, focused, and uneasy as the player braves a familiar danger and keeps control of their body and mind.

STORY OVERVIEW:

Until last summer, Alex Vargas lived for the ocean. Swimming the depths, sailing the waves – the water was their home. And then came the storm – choppy waters, an unmaintained dock, a ruptured hull, broken lines… Alex was found on the rocks the next morning, tangled and twisted, sobbing with each wave that lapped at their feet.

Now, five months, three hospital stays, 56 physical therapy sessions, and two pending lawsuits later, Alex is returning to their waterfront home. But before they can settle in, they must take a swim test. The objects of the test are simple in theory – floating, treading water, swimming a length, nothing someone with their experience shouldn't be able to handle. But the events of that day still haunt Alex's mind, the waves they once called home threatening to drag them under. Their nerves must be steeled, their strokes steady, their focus unbroken by panic or pain. This isn't just a test of Alex's body – this is for their courage, their pride, and their right to call the ocean home once more.

ARC BEATS: Frustrated by fear / Confronting past trauma / Reclaiming strength

TECHNICAL DETAILS

ENGINE: Unity 2021.1.10f1

PLAYERS: Single player

PLAY TIME: 10 – 15 minutes

CONTROL TYPE: Keyboard and Mouse

CAMERA: The first-person camera may be controlled by the mouse to have the character look different directions for players to get an idea of their surroundings, though player movement will be on rails.

CONTROL MAP:
W/A/S/D for rhythm action (and menu interaction where indicated)
Mouse to control camera
Left Control to pause
Escape to quit
P to skip dialogue
CHEAT/DEBUG KEYS:
0 (zero) – Disable panic meter/loss of progress, invincibility
1-7 – Load levels (main menu, levels 1-5, credits)

MECHANICS

RHYTHM ACTION: The primary mechanic and interactive method of the game – players must press the correct buttons at the timing indicated in the UI.

>**Progress:** Success with the rhythm action moves the game forward, while failure causes lost progress, with players having to repeat the segment they failed. Progress is shown on a bar on the screen.
>
>**Panic Meter:** Faltering in the rhythm causes the character to become more panicked. Regaining the rhythm can make this go down again, but fail enough and the character will be overcome by fear and the level will end. Fail a level enough times, and it's game over.
>
>**Movement:** Staying within the rhythm keeps the player moving steadily, while breaking from it causes the character to falter.

**CAMERA:** The mouse can be used to move the camera and look around.

USER INTERFACE AND EXPERIENCE
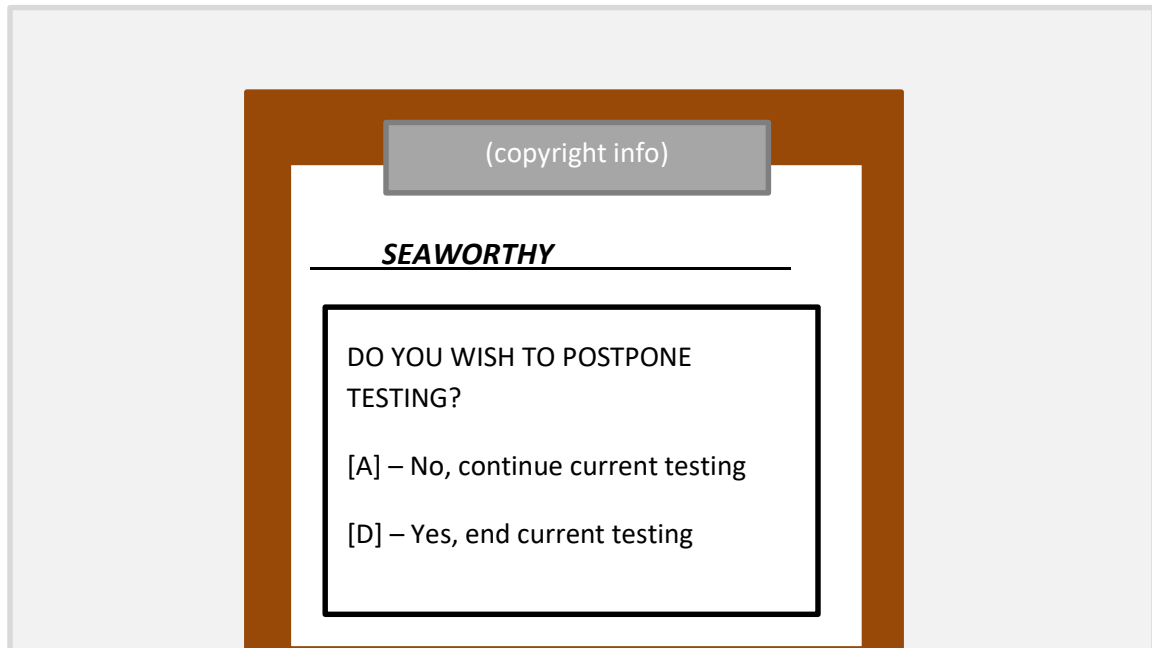
WIREFRAMES:

>**Main Title Screen:** The main menu depicts Alex sitting in their car looking out at the ocean, the menu itself being the official testing form they need to fill out as they complete the swim test to certify their ability to return home. Interactions will be handled with the same buttons used in gameplay.

Background

(copyright info)

SEAWORTHY

BEGIN TEST [W]

(Controls and cheats)

(Flavor text)
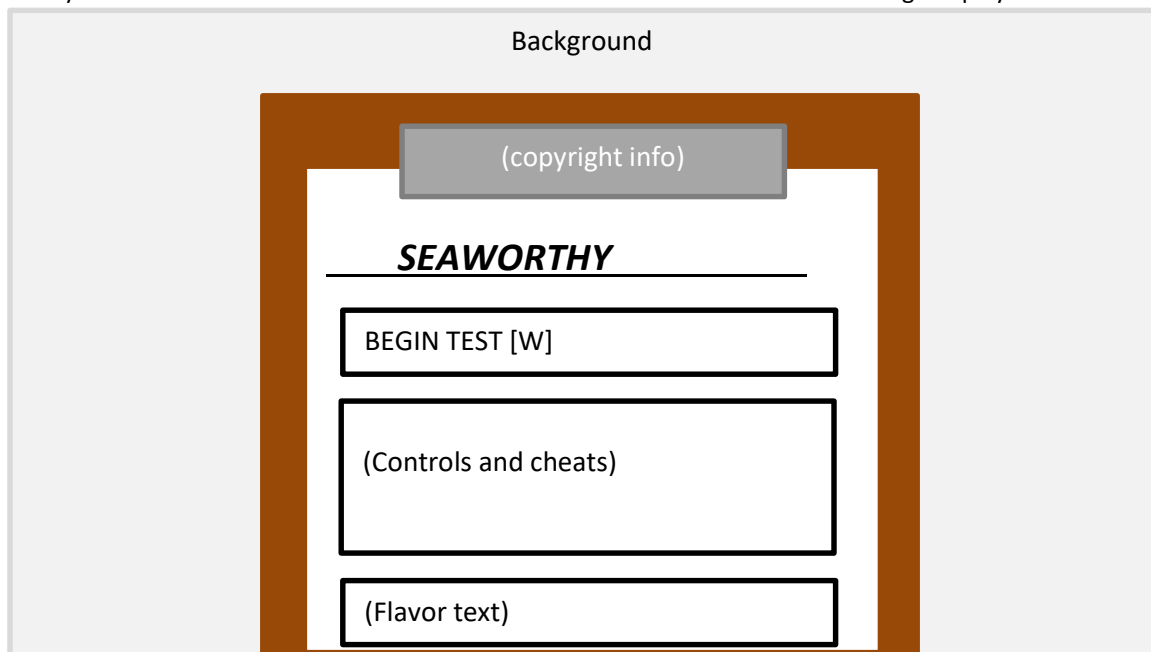
Pause/Controls Screen: The pause screen is built on the same foundation as the menu, popping up at players' request with reminders of the controls and cheats.

Background

(copyright info)

SEAWORTHY

(Controls and cheats)
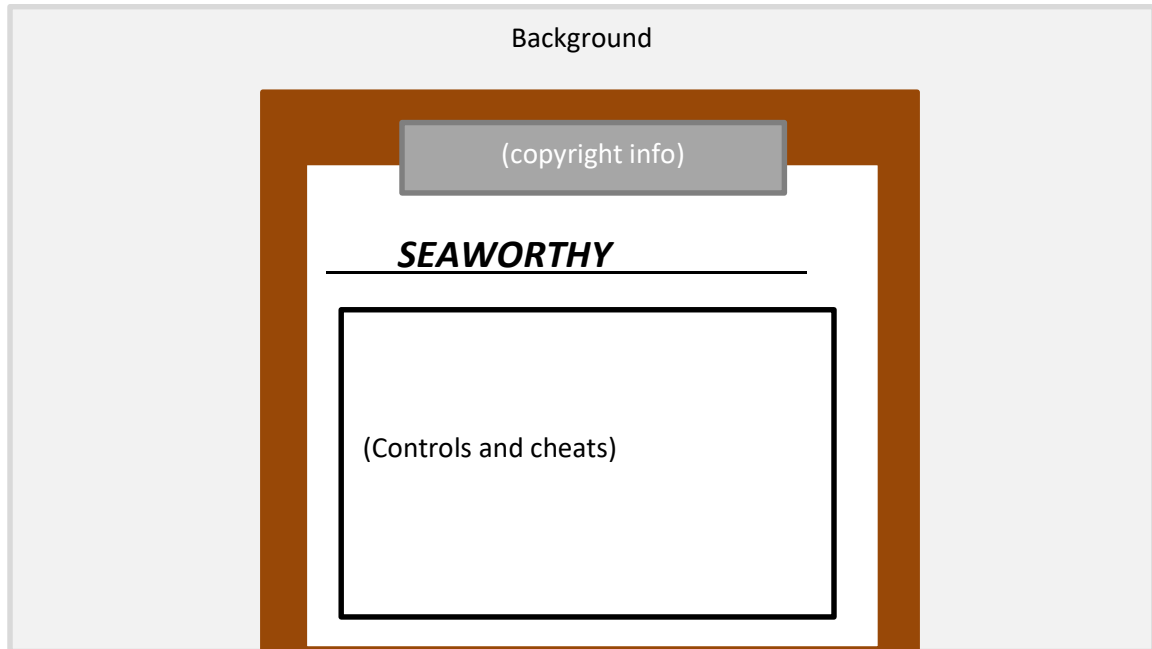
Confirmation of Destructive Action (CODA): If players select Escape, this screen will pop up to make sure they mean to quit the game. If the answer is yes, the game fades out and quits, but if not it returns to the current menu (main or pause – if escape is pressed mid-play, the pause menu will be pulled up as well)

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SEAWORTHY

DO YOU WISH TO POSTPONE TESTING?

[A] – No, continue current testing

[D] – Yes, end current testing

El Schaefer

HUD: During gameplay, the rhythm section will be overlaid over the screen while the progress bar above indicates player progression through the level.

Background

W
A
S
D
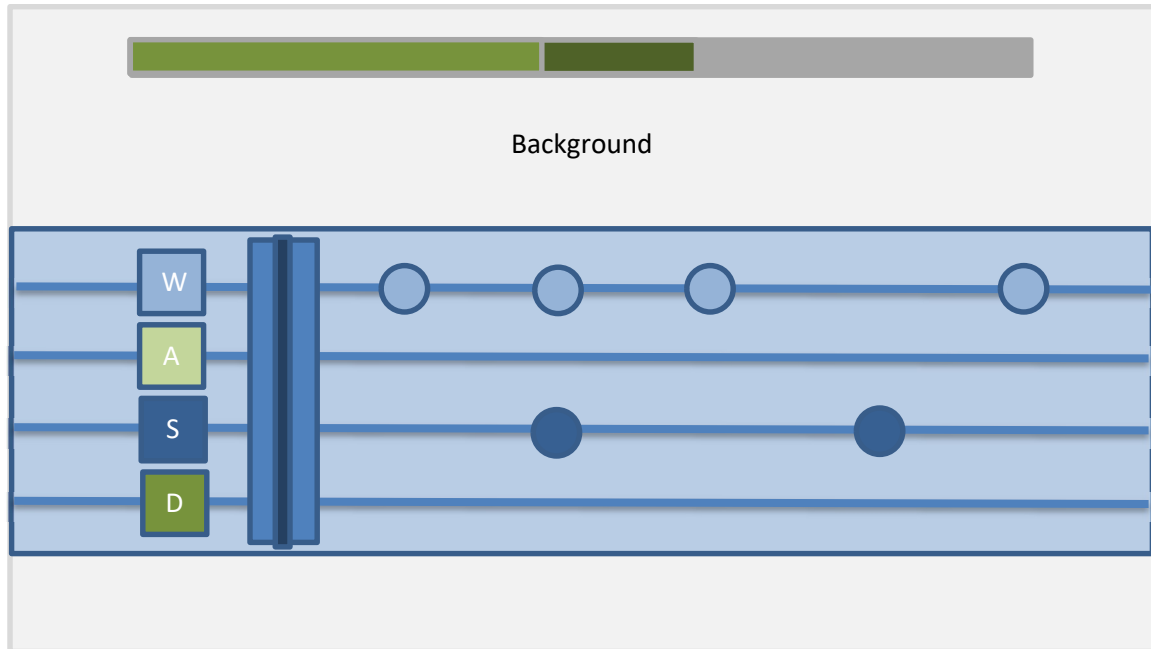
Intertitles: When a challenge is completed, the current scene will fade out, and a sequence of intertitles will flash across the screen before the game fades back into the next segment.

Line of dialogue displays before fading out

Skip [P]
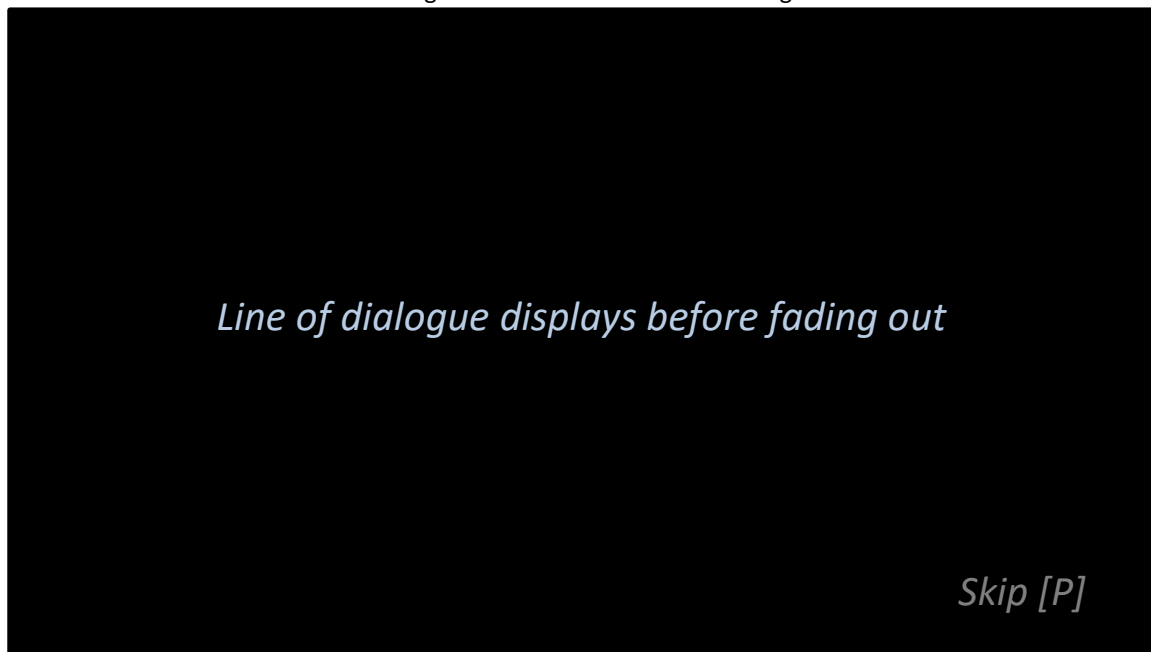
TUTORIALIZATION: The tutorial will be organic play - a short, simple first segment introduces the basics of the rhythm mechanics with single-button rhythms, with more buttons and more complex rhythms being added in gradually during play.

Affordance	Signifier	Feedback
Rhythm action – players interact by pressing buttons at indicated times	Pips traveling in rhythmic patterns along rows corresponding to buttons, toward an area indicating proper timing. Area lights up on contact with pips.	See hitting and missing the rhythm
Hitting button – player presses a rhythm button	Pressable buttons signified on screen	Button indicator expands on correct press, contracts on incorrect press.
Hitting the rhythm – pressing the proper button on the beat	A pip on a button row reaches the timing zone	Pip gives off particles and brief noise as it disappears Progress bar visually increases If panic is active, the effects decrease If a motion-based level, player moves forward.
Perfect hits – beat is pressed on exact central timing	Pip reaches the center bar of the timing zone.	Center bar expands, success sound plays, panic decreases by a greater degree than usual.
Missing the rhythm – failing to press the proper button on beat	A pip on a button row passes the timing line without being pressed	Pip disappears without fanfare Foreground progress bar decreases, while background bar shows the amount of progress lost. Small camera shake Panic takes effect or increases If a motion-based level, player movement briefly stalls
Panic changes – panic meter reduces or increases based on player performance	Most levels start with some level of panic; Player hits or misses pips.	Vignette decreases or increases Panic sound effect volume (heartbeat, breathing, etc.) decreases or increases If panic reaches zero, sigh sound effect plays
Level success – player successfully navigates the level, passing the rhythm threshold	Progress bar fills all the way If a motion-based level, player reaches the end point	Gameplay HUD disappears End of level sequence plays (specific audio, scene transition dialogue)
Level failure – player misses enough beats to fully raise the panic meter	Several pips have been missed Effects of the panic meter reach their fullest	Gameplay HUD disappears Level failure sequence plays (Fade out, panicked sounds, dialogue) Level restarts

| Game over – player fails the same level repeatedly	Player has failed the same level several (4) times	On level failure, game over dialogue plays instead of usual. Player is sent to the main menu.
Pause/Control/CODA screen – player pulls up/puts down a menu screen	Player is informed that pause is available in main menu (and on pause/control menu)	Screen appears, menu sound plays

NOTABLE ELEMENTS:

> **Rhythm:** The rhythm display is built into the HUD – as with most rhythm games, the main interactive segments overlay the surrounding action, non-diegetic to the actual game world.
>
> **Panic:** The panic meter itself will be hidden from the player, but as it changes, the sound and visuals of the game will respond to indicate Alex's mental state.
>
> **Intertitles:** The game will fade out between scenes, displaying short sequences of flashback dialogue to provide story context to players.

LEVEL DESIGN

Levels are broken up not by location, but by challenge. The entire game takes place in a single environment, the waterfront where Alex lives, had their accident, and will be taking their test to allow them to return.
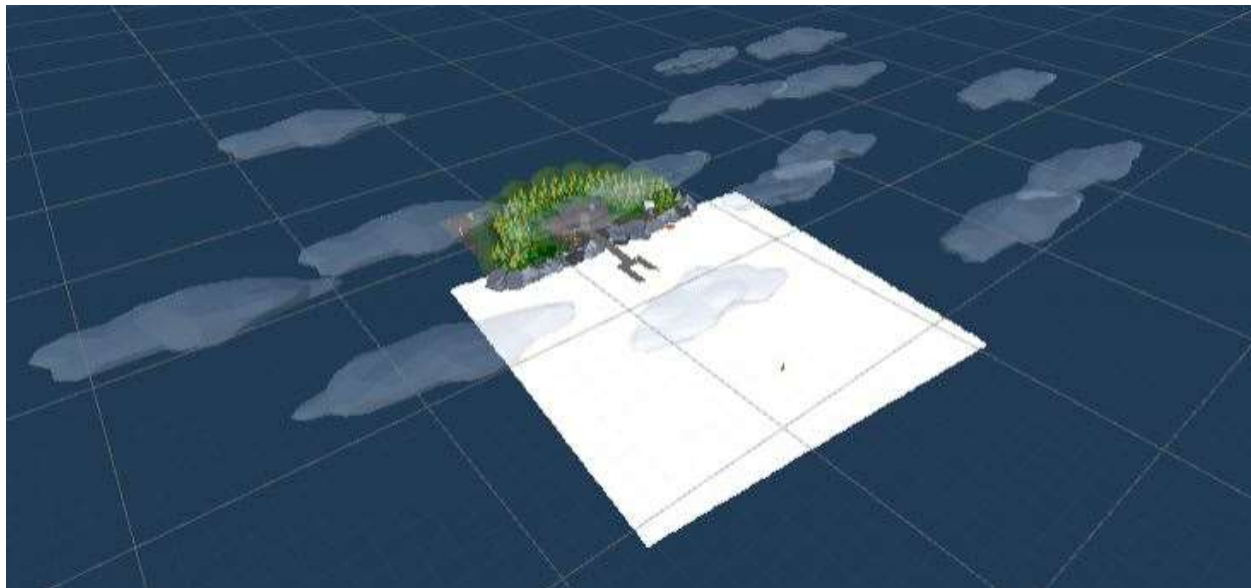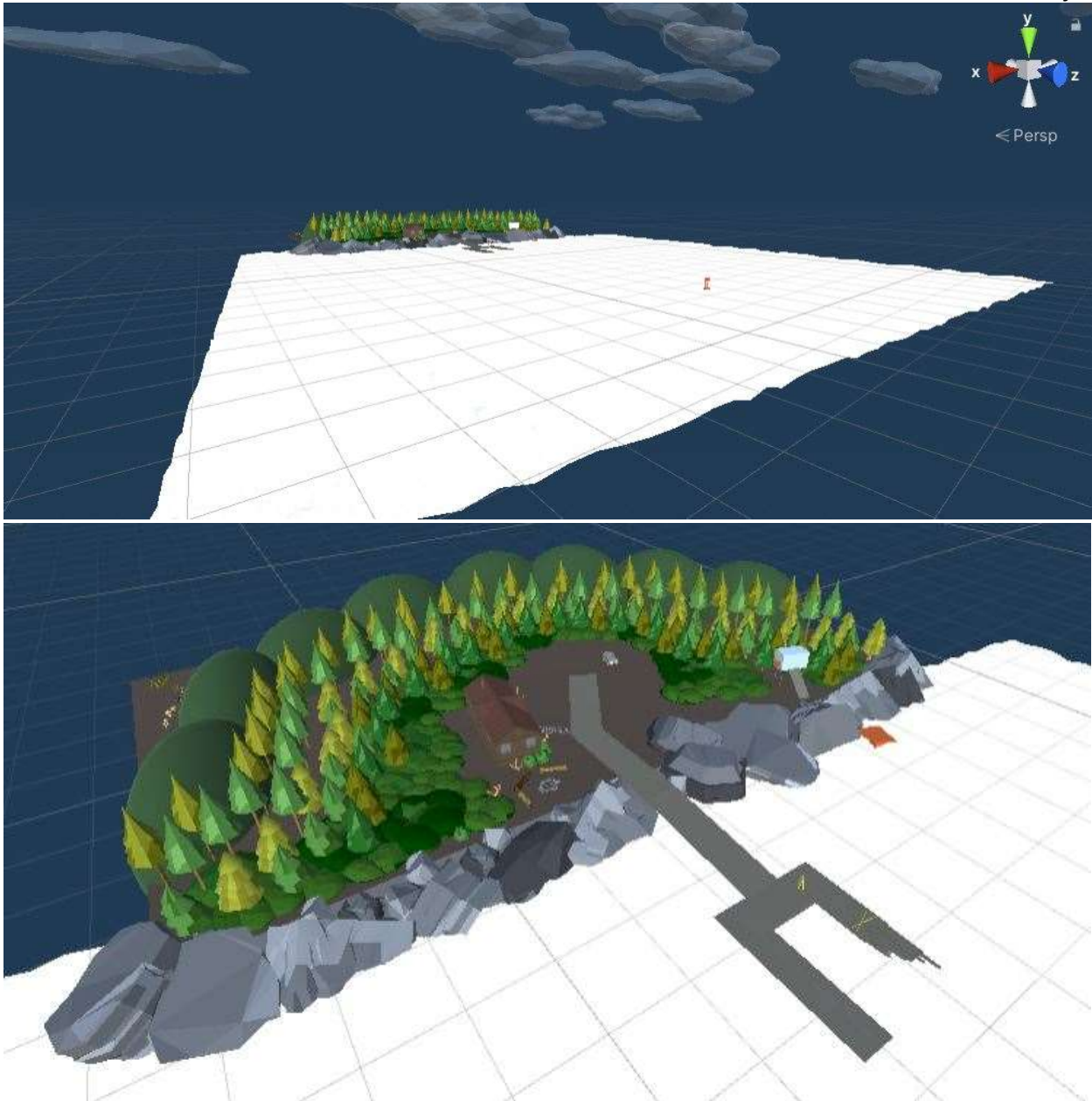
The level model (the white area is the water – the visuals don't load well outside of gameplay).

LEVEL 1 - ARRIVAL
Act: Departure
Theme: Returning to a site of pain, introducing players to the world
Description: This section serves to introduce players both to the mechanics and the character, the slow, basic rhythm section echoing Alex's tentative footsteps toward the ocean.

LEVEL 2 - FLOATING
Act: Initiation
Theme: Establishing safety, fleshing out the experience
Description: At Alex's first true re-exposure to the ocean, while initially panicked and unsettled by memories of drifting through the storm, they begin to steady as they regain their rationality and feel the water supporting them.

LEVEL 3 - TREADING
Act: Initiation
Theme: Remembrance and reconciliation, approaching the peak pf the experience
Description: As the treading brings back memories of the aching, terrified hours spent barely surviving the waves, Alex confronts their history on the water.

LEVEL 4 - SWIMMING
Act: Initiation
Theme: Reconnection and transformation, climactic experience
Description: Swimming out to sea, their past cries of fear ringing in their ears, Alex finally pushes away their doubts and places their trust in themself and their life on the ocean, eventually remembering the good times and reclaiming their strength and their past.

LEVEL 5 - HOMECOMING
Act: Return
Theme: Resolution and rediscovery, rounding out the action
Description: Two weeks later, a more confident Alex, guided by a more experienced player in an echo of the first act, makes their way down and into the ocean, returned to their home.

CHARACTERS

PROTAGONIST – ALEX VARGAS
Purpose in Game: Protagonist
Motivation/Goal: To overcome the events of the accident and return to their home – not just their house, but to the water they once loved.
Overview: Alex is a spirited, strong-willed individual with an abiding love of the ocean, where they grew up, where they live, where they spend every free hour. Or at least, they were until the accident – their confidence dashed to pieces with the dock and their boat, driving rain and wind eating away at their courage and sense of safety, the waves that used to carry them along trying to pull them under. These months since the event have been ones of reconstruction and contemplation as Alex has tried to rebuild their life. Now is the time for the capstone of this effort, to pass this test and reclaim their place on the water both literally and personally – and if they fail, they don't know what will be left of their life.

NPC - DANA
Purpose in Game: Background/character information
Motivation/Goal: To help Alex through their recovery, to ensure that they are safe and happy.
Overview: Dana is Alex's friend and is deeply concerned with the wellbeing of others – they're the one who came to check in with Alex after the storm, and who found them on the beach with the wreckage. They've made it their mission to see Alex through their recovery safely – even if it means coddling them from time to time.

STORY MAP

DEPARTURE: The protagonist is separated from the known world and steps into the unknown world.		
Ordinary World	Alex's history on the ocean and the events of their traumatic accident are implied to the player through dialogue, audio, environment, menus, etc.	Audio cues/flashbacks Level design UI design Scene transitions
Call to Adventure	If Alex wants to return to their oceanfront home, they are required to take a swim test, a prospect they meet with both determination and terror.	
Acceptance of the Call	Going into the first level, Alex expresses their need to return home. The first level functions as the tutorial, as Alex must force themselves to put one foot in front of the other to confront their fear, represented by a simple rhythm segment.	Basic rhythm action – single button, rhythms get more complex as player progresses
Mentor/Guide	While Alex's friend Dana has been supporting their recovery, their role is quite minor.	Scene transitions
The First Threshold	To begin the first test, Alex must jump into the water, which will bring them into direct contact with the source of their trauma.	
INITIATION: By crossing the threshold, the world of the protagonist is changed forever. A mental and physical journey merge to result in a spiritual revelation of purpose and self.		
Enemies	The challenge of this game is represented by the three swim tests Alex must undergo – floating, treading water, and swimming a length – each of which uses more buttons than the last and gradually become more difficult as Alex's troubles bubble to the surface.	Rhythm action – each level introduces more buttons and more complex rhythms
Allies	While Alex has people in their corner, the test (gameplay) itself is very much a personal journey.	
Road of Trials	The floating and water-treading tests see Alex returning to the water and beginning to overcome their fear, coming to grips with the accident.	Rhythm action
The Final Dungeon	A dialogue segment about whether Alex is ready for the test and why they want to take it, with Alex shakily but resolutely refusing to give up before they swim out to sea.	Scene transition
The Great Ordeal/Boss battle	The final swim test, in which Alex swims out to sea, fully reclaiming their strength and kinship with the ocean.	Rhythm action

Catharsis	Alex reaches the swim buoy, their fears subsiding as they feel the water around them, and as the test ends, they look out at the beauty of the ocean and begin to remember the good times over the bad.	
The Prize	Alex has completed the test and can begin the official process of moving back in, but internally they know they've already returned to where they belong.	
RETURN: Through the protagonist's sacrifice of themself, they walk in an enlightened state.		
The Road Home	Alex reports their success to Dana, ready to begin moving back in.	
The Return	Two weeks later, Alex is settled back into their home, and, on a quiet afternoon, decides to go for a swim, walking out onto the dock and joyfully looking out on the water.	Rhythm action – mirrors the tutorial, but now with a much more relaxed, confident tone.