

Narrative Design Document
PageBreak

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~~Core idea~~

In his search for the truth behind his father's mysterious disappearance, Quill is drawn into the pages of a cursed pop-up book, a strange, decaying world filled with secrets, shadows, and a darkness he was never prepared to face.

Story Method: 1. Environmental Storytelling;
2. Worldbuilding narrative;
3. Non-linear/Fragmented;

Game type: Adventure, RPG, Sandbox.

~~Layer 1~~

1. Player emotions:

Curiosity: Players should constantly feel intrigued. The game world is full of secrets, hidden paths, invisible ink, foldable spaces. Discovery is a central reward. Every new clue, mechanic, or location should spark the question: "*What's next?*"

Melancholy and Loneliness: There's a quiet sadness throughout the game. Empty towns, forgotten hideouts and lost people create a reflective, slightly haunting tone. The player is alone, but not abandoned. This emotion gives weight to the small connections they make.

Wonder: The pop-up book world and the fold-and-function mechanic are designed to create moments of surprise and delight. I want players to feel

amazed when they uncover how the world works. The magical atmosphere should feel mysterious, not childish.

Tension and Dread: As the story progresses and ink creatures appear, the mood shifts. Players should feel vulnerable when sneaking past them or navigating dangerous areas. These moments add pressure and contrast to the slower, more thoughtful gameplay.

Hope and Heartbreak: The main narrative arc, searching for the father, then realizing he may be lost, builds emotional tension. Players begin with hope and end with a difficult choice. Even if the outcome is bittersweet, there should be a sense of closure and .

Empowerment Through Understanding: This is a puzzle-based game. I want players to feel accomplished when they figure things out. Whether it's a fold puzzle, an ink trail, or a hidden message, the world rewards observation and thinking. Mastery comes through insight, not combat.

2. Core mechanics:

MDA framework

core	Mechanics	Dynamics	Aesthetics
Cat!!!	A mysterious cat appears at key moments in the game to deliver short, wise messages before disappearing. Its appearances are triggered by specific conditions, serving as brief, non-interactive encounters.	The cat's sudden appearances create surprise and curiosity, encouraging players to pause and reflect. These moments shift the game's pace and gradually build a pattern of quiet anticipation.	The cat adds a sense of mystery, warmth, and wonder. Its presence offers emotional breaks from gameplay and deepens the game's atmosphere through subtle, thoughtful guidance.

core	Mechanics	Dynamics	Aesthetics
Interactions - grab/push/inspect	Players can interact with objects in the environment by grabbing, pushing, pulling, or inspecting them. These actions are context-sensitive and support exploration or puzzle-solving.	These interactions allow players to manipulate the world, uncover secrets, or progress through obstacles. Combined, they encourage experimentation and reward curiosity.	This mechanic creates a sense of agency and immersion. It invites players to engage more deeply with their surroundings and feel like active participants in the game world.
Movement - crouch, jump, run	Players can crouch, jump, and run to navigate the environment. These actions are basic movement mechanics that allow for agility, evasion, and exploration across varying terrains.	These movement options create fluidity in how players approach challenges and obstacles, adding variety to gameplay. They enable quick decisions, such as evading enemies or exploring hard-to-reach areas.	Movement fosters a sense of freedom and control, allowing players to express themselves through their actions. The speed and precision of running, jumping, and crouching provide physical satisfaction and immersion in the game world.
Fold and function	The game world functions like a pop-up book, where players can interact with specific elements to fold, pull, or manipulate parts of the environment. These actions trigger changes, such as revealing new paths, uncovering hidden secrets, or altering the landscape in creative ways.	This mechanic encourages exploration and experimentation, as players manipulate the environment to discover new routes or uncover hidden details. It fosters a sense of discovery and problem-solving, where the world's structure continuously shifts based on player interaction.	The mechanic creates a sense of wonder and surprise, as players reveal and unfold the world around them. It evokes a playful, magical feeling, blending the charm of pop-up books with the excitement of uncovering secrets, making the environment feel dynamic and alive.
Voice of Reason	The character's inner voice occasionally speaks up during key moments in the game. It provides subtle hints or observations that guide the player without directly giving away solutions. These messages are triggered by specific situations but are easy to overlook unless the player is paying attention.	The voice creates moments of reflection and subtle guidance. It encourages players to think critically about their surroundings and decisions, nudging them toward important details or solutions they might otherwise miss.	The Voice of Reason adds a sense of depth to the character, making them feel more self-aware. It also creates a feeling of companionship or introspection, as if the player is not alone in their journey, even if the guidance is quiet and understated.
The Index	The player carries a notebook, called the Index, that automatically tracks key hints, objectives, and progress throughout the game. It serves as both a journal of the player's journey and a dynamic quest/objective tracker, updating in real time based on actions and discoveries.	The Index functions as a safety net for players, ensuring they're always aware of their progress and key information. It promotes a seamless experience by helping players pick up where they left off and clarifying what steps to take next, reducing frustration and confusion.	The Index adds a sense of continuity and organization, grounding the player in the game world while offering a feeling of control over their journey. It subtly enhances immersion, allowing players to reflect on their past choices and progress with a tangible record of their adventure.

core	Mechanics	Dynamics	Aesthetics
Inventory	<p>Players have access to a basic inventory system where they can store and manage items they collect throughout the game. Items can be equipped, used, or examined, and the inventory is easy to navigate with simple controls.</p>	<p>The inventory allows players to manage their resources and plan ahead, encouraging strategic thinking when deciding what to carry or use. It adds an element of preparedness, as players must balance the items they need with limited space.</p>	<p>The inventory provides a sense of organization and control, helping players feel more connected to their environment. It also adds a layer of realism and immersion, making the player feel like they are actively managing their adventure with tangible, useful objects.</p>
Vision Crystal	<p>The Vision Crystal, found in a mine, allows players to see hidden messages, marks, and notes written in invisible ink scattered throughout the environment. Once obtained, the crystal unlocks previously inaccessible information, prompting players to revisit earlier areas and discover new paths or secrets.</p>	<p>The Vision Crystal introduces a new layer of exploration and discovery, encouraging players to backtrack and explore with fresh eyes. It shifts the gameplay flow by expanding the environment's depth, making the world feel more interconnected and full of hidden potential.</p>	<p>The Vision Crystal adds a sense of wonder and curiosity, enhancing the feeling of uncovering hidden truths. It creates an "aha" moment, where players realize their perspective has expanded, and it fuels excitement for returning to old areas with new possibilities.</p>

3. Events:

Key element	Story beats	Thumbnail outline	Overview	Condition	Outcome
Ritual Stones (Beginning)	<p>Quill is pulled into the book world and awakens near ancient stones. This marks the point of no return.</p>	<p>A foggy, open field with glowing ritual stones, one cracked open. Quill lying in the grass, disoriented.</p>	<p>This is the player's first contact with the magical world. It's quiet, mystical and unsettling. Your new journey begins here.</p>	<p>Triggered automatically when the player enters the book.</p>	<p>Establishes tone, controls, and mystery. Hints that the ritual stones are connected to entry and exit.</p>
Inkwell Town	<p>Quill arrives in a quiet, nearly abandoned town. He meets the Town Chief and hears rumors of the Shaman and the mines.</p>	<p>A crooked village square with leaning buildings, lanterns barely glowing, the Chief and a few villagers standing by a cold fire.</p>	<p>This beat anchors the player in the world, introducing limited civilization, story threads, and the idea that others were here before.</p>	<p>Reached by following the only open path after the ritual stones.</p>	<p>Sets the quest in motion. Gives the player a direction (find the Shaman) and hints that time passes differently in the book.</p>

Key element	Story beats	Thumbnail outline	Overview	Condition	Outcome
First Hideout	Quill discovers a secret base left by previous explorers, possibly even his father.	A moss-covered hatch hidden behind a rockslide. Inside: messy bedding, notes, half-finished tools.	A deep personal moment. The world gets more human as there were others who tried to survive. Some clues point directly to your dad.	Solving a pulley-based puzzle unlocks access to the hideout.	Reveals that Quill's father may still be alive, and that there's a deeper mystery. You gain an item or map piece.
Shaman's Hut (Echo of the Shaman)	Quill finds the remnants of a Shaman's home, filled with strange notes and magical symbols.	A crooked hut swallowed by trees and vines. The inside glows faintly with ink-infused items and carved glyphs.	Though the Shaman is long gone, his notes explain the book's magic, folding space, the ink curse, the vision crystals, and more.	Found off the forest path after solving a fold-based navigation puzzle.	Reveals lore and foreshadows the deeper magic. May provide instructions that become useful later (rituals, symbols, prophecy).
Mining Post	A derelict mining outpost that holds clues about entering the dangerous mine below.	Rusted tracks and cracked mining carts. Tools and broken crates scattered under dead lamps.	You learn that mining the crystals awoke something dark. A warning: entering the mine without a cart means death.	Reached by following the main forest trail. You must collect parts and repair a cart.	Grants safe passage to the mine and sets up the tension of entering a corrupted zone.
Inksight Cave (Merged Hideout)	Deep inside the mine, Quill stumbles into a glowing cave of ink and crystal. Here, he finds the Vision Crystal and signs of his father.	A pulsing cave filled with sharp crystals and glowing ink falls. A shattered hideout is half-buried in crystal growths.	This is both a revelation and a gameplay shift. You unlock the ability to see hidden ink and notes. You also confirm your dad was here.	Enter the cave using the mining cart and follow a subtle ink trail or chase the cat.	Unlocks new world mechanics (see invisible ink), adds to exploration, and deepens the mystery of your father's descent.
Old Town	Quill finds the ruins of the original village. Life once thrived here before the ink creatures came.	Faded banners flap in the wind. Broken statues of villagers. Empty homes strangled by black veins of ink.	You witness the aftermath of the ink's rise. Learn that this place was abandoned in fear.	Accessible through a fold-based detour off the main forest road.	Fills in the backstory of the villagers. Adds emotional weight. May contain a side puzzle or memory echo.

Key element	Story beats	Thumbnail outline	Overview	Condition	Outcome
Third Hideout	Quill uncovers the last functioning base. Inside are final notes, tools, and maybe even a recorded message from his dad.	A fire is still flickering. Wall maps with paths crossed out. A shelf filled with labeled ink samples.	This beat pushes the emotional arc. The father's descent becomes clearer, and you gain a vital map fragment or key.	Unlocked after gaining the vision crystal. Hidden ink marks lead you there.	Provides an emotional climax and the clue needed to reach the Dark Fortress. Solidifies your father's darker turn.
Waterfall Pass	A majestic but dangerous mountain pass leading to the fortress. Ink creatures lurk, and a wrong step means death.	Narrow ledges and rushing waterfalls. Huge pages of the book bend upward to form cliffs.	This is a traversal-heavy zone with stealth and tension. You're climbing toward the final truth.	Unlocked after the third hideout. Requires solving fold+timing puzzles.	Grants access to the Dark Fortress and reinforces that the world is collapsing the closer you get.
The Dark Fortress	Quill discovers that his father has become the puppet of the ink. He believes he must finish what he started.	A spiraling tower of ink and paper. Inside, torn pages hang in the air like memories. The father waits in the throne room.	You confront the truth. Your dad caused the ink curse while trying to escape. He's consumed, paranoid, and powerful.	Entered through the pass. A final stealth gauntlet or ink-puzzle prevents reaching the center.	The choice is set up: will you destroy him, or try to save him? Either way, he's not the man he was.
Ritual Stones (End)	The final ritual stones are found, only usable once the curse is lifted.	Deep underground or hidden in a sealed vault of the fortress. Surrounded by ink spires.	They represent the way out, but they won't activate without the final truth. You need something more.	Triggered after the fortress confrontation.	Sends you toward the final secret, the Author's Crypt.
The Author's Crypt	Quill discovers the hidden resting place of the book's creator. It holds the secret to lifting the ink curse.	A chamber carved from the spine of the book itself. Floating ink-glass runes. A preserved writing desk.	You either get here after saving your father (he had the map), or through intense backtracking and exploration. The truth: the ink was the Author's creation, unfinished stories, regrets, emotions.	Only revealed via a full map (piece held by William), or hidden paths unlocked using every mechanic you've learned.	Quill lifts the curse and escapes but he must choose: leave his father, or try to pull him back one last time. Either way, the story ends. And it's yours.

~~Layer 2~~

I. Player motivation:

Theme Statement: At its core, the story explores the idea that “the only way out is through.” The player is placed in a world layered with mystery, emotional echoes, and hidden truths, where progress is only made by confronting the unknown and engaging fully with the environment and the self. This theme drives both the narrative and the gameplay, requiring persistence, observation, and courage to move forward.

Tone: The tone of the game is introspective and somber, with a quiet reverence for the emotional weight of the journey. It’s not about loud action, but about subtle moments, glimpses of memory, scraps of meaning, and the silent tension between hope and despair. As designers, we approach this world with intention, letting atmosphere and detail carry the emotional charge.

Mood: The resulting mood is one of solitude, mystery, and quiet intensity. Players will feel a growing sense of unease and curiosity as they travel deeper, balanced by moments of awe and personal discovery. The world may feel heavy at times, but it’s not hopeless. Each step forward brings clarity, growth, and ultimately, a sense of earned resolution.

2. Player goals:

GFI framework

Goals	Overview	Feedback	Interpretation
<p>1. Global Goal</p> <p>Escape the book and uncover the truth.</p>	<p>The player's overarching goal is to find a way out of the storybook world while uncovering what happened to their father. What starts as a rescue mission slowly becomes a deeper journey of truth, loss, and choice.</p>	<p>Major story beats (cutscenes, new locations, discoveries).</p>	<p>"I'm getting closer to the truth. This world is deeper than I thought."</p>
<p>2. Functional Goals</p>	<p>These drive moment-to-moment progress through the world.</p> <p>Explore new areas through environmental puzzles. Collect notes, objects, and clues that reveal the story.</p> <p>Use fold-and-function mechanics to alter the world. Avoid or outsmart ink creatures. Unlock and use tools like the Vision Crystal. Reach and solve each hideout, cave, town, or fortress.</p>	<p>New map areas revealed, item collection, completed puzzles.</p>	<p>"I'm progressing. I'm solving this world's logic."</p>
<p>3. Immediate Goals</p>	<p>These are the goals constantly shifting as players engage with gameplay.</p> <p>How do I get across this gap? What can I push/pull here? Where did the cat go? What changed when I folded that? How do I avoid that ink creature?</p>	<p>Environmental changes, sound cues, visible ink trails, character reactions.</p>	<p>"My actions have an impact. I'm learning the rules."</p>
<p>4. Emotional Goal</p> <p>Understand your place in the story and choose the right path, even when it hurts.</p>	<p>Understand your place in the story—and choose the right path, even when it hurts. The deeper emotional goal is to <i>connect</i> with the past, with your father, and with the fate of this world. It's about processing grief, letting go, and finding hope in the ruins.</p>	<p>Notes from the father, echoes of other trapped people, choices with consequences.</p>	<p>"This story is mine. I'm shaping what happens next."</p>

3. Conflict:

The central conflict of the game operates on two interconnected levels, external and internal, framing Quill's journey as both a physical escape and an emotional reckoning.

Man vs. Supernatural

Quill is trapped inside a cursed pop-up book where reality folds in on itself, ink creatures stalk the shadows, and an unseen force twists the world into something hostile and strange. This external conflict is shaped by the book's ever-changing environment, the ink corruption spreading through its pages, and the haunting presence of Quill's father, now overtaken by the curse. Survival demands more than cleverness, it requires confronting the supernatural forces that manipulate every corner of the book.

Man vs. Self

Beneath the surface, Quill faces an equally powerful internal struggle. As the mystery deepens, so does the weight of grief, uncertainty, and growing self-doubt. The journey becomes a test of resolve, morality, and identity. Is escape truly possible? And if it is, what must be sacrificed to earn it? Quill must come to terms with the painful truth about his father, and with the possibility that hope itself may be an illusion.

At a gameplay level, these conflicts manifest through environmental puzzles, hidden dangers, stealth encounters with ink creatures, and a psychological atmosphere of doubt and discovery. The game constantly challenges players to look deeper, act bravely, and decide what's worth holding onto when the world begins to fall apart.

4. Stakes:

The stakes begin by being personal and expand with the journey:

Immediate stakes: Quill's survival and escape from the book. Every decision matters, one wrong move, and the curse could consume him too.

Emotional stakes: The possibility of rescuing his father, and the growing dread that he may no longer be savable.

World stakes: The cursed book is more than a trap, it's a sealed, decaying world. If Quill can't lift the curse, it could become a tomb forever, for everyone lost inside.

The tension lies in the choices the player makes, do they search for truth at all costs, even if it means betraying someone they love? Do they escape alone, or risk everything to try and save what's already fading?

Layer 3

I. Player identification:

Quill is a quiet but emotionally layered protagonist whose personality is revealed through the game's unique **Voice of Reason** mechanic. While Quill rarely speaks directly to other characters, the player constantly hears his inner thoughts, his fears, doubts, observations, and emotional reactions

through a voice-over narration that plays throughout the game. This mechanic gives players a direct line into Quill's mind, shaping how they perceive him without relying on heavy exposition.

At the start of the game, players only know the essential facts: Quill found his missing father's studio, opened a strange book, and was pulled into it. Beyond that, the world and Quill's backstory are left deliberately vague. The Voice of Reason slowly reveals more about Quill's emotional state, his past relationship with his father, and how he interprets the strange and dangerous world around him. This encourages players to form a bond with Quill not through direct storytelling, but through exploration, puzzle-solving, and emotional context layered into the narration.

Quill is designed to be **empathetic and human**, rather than a classic, empowered hero. His fears and confusion make him relatable. His growth is subtle but meaningful, players feel it as he reflects on what he sees and experiences. Because players must uncover many of the world's secrets and piece together the lore themselves, their investment in Quill deepens as they discover more. The more they explore, the more personal the story becomes.

Quill is a combination of archetypes:

The Seeker: He is driven by the need to understand: to find out what happened to his father, why he was pulled into the book, and what's really going on behind the story's surface. This desire fuels gameplay that emphasizes curiosity and reward for exploration.

The Innocent: Thrown into a cursed world with no preparation, Quill begins vulnerable, unsure, and idealistic. As the game progresses, he is forced to mature and confront unsettling truths.

The Everyman: Quill doesn't start out as a savior or chosen one. He is ordinary in the best way: emotionally honest, observant, and easy to project onto. His reactions, voiced through the Voice of Reason, guide the player through a deeply personal, relatable lens.

Quill is not a blank slate, but a **quietly evolving character**, shaped by what the player chooses to uncover. Through him, the story becomes both intimate and immersive, building emotional weight without ever breaking the flow of gameplay.

II. Player role:

The player takes on the role of Quill, not just to control him, but to experience the story through his thoughts, choices, and actions. The player is drawn into a layered world where they must uncover truths, solve problems, and navigate both physical and emotional challenges. This fits perfectly with the game's theme, "**The only way out is through,**" as players are constantly pushed to keep going, even when the world becomes darker, more twisted, or more uncertain.

The player's **modes of play**, exploration, puzzle-solving, platforming, and light combat, are designed to reflect the emotional and narrative arc. As the world changes visually and mechanically, the player feels the weight of their journey, mirroring Quill's internal transformation. Exploration supports discovery and meaning, puzzles challenge the player's understanding of the world, and platforming reinforces the idea of navigating something fragile and shifting.

The **GFI hierarchy** is tightly entwined into the experience. Players are guided by personal **Goals** (find out what happened to Quill's father, escape the book), receive constant **Feedback** through world changes, inner monologue, and mechanical responses, and gain **Interpretation** by piecing together narrative fragments and shaping their own understanding of Quill and the cursed world. The game doesn't tell the player everything directly, instead, it rewards curiosity, attention, and emotional investment.

Ultimately, the player's **role** is to step into Quill's shoes and move forward in a world full of mystery and loss. They are meant to feel vulnerable, reflective, and determined. Through the **Voice of Reason** (Quill's inner thoughts), visual storytelling, and interactive discovery, the player becomes deeply tied to the narrative, not just as a witness, but as an active part of how it unfolds.

III. Characters:

William, Quill's father, is a **conflict-creating antagonist**, but not in the usual sense. He doesn't appear or take action through most of the game, and he doesn't even know Quill is in the book. Instead, he's the source of the curse that caused the world to fall apart. In this way, William is more of a **catalyst** than a commander. His obsession with knowledge and the strange ink led to the birth of the Ink Creatures, the main enemies the player faces. These creatures attack anything alive, they aren't after Quill specifically, they're just following the nature of the curse.

This makes William feel more like a mix of different antagonist types. He's a **situational antagonist** because he caused the problem that now threatens Quill. He's also like an **inanimate force**, because his influence is felt everywhere through the corrupted world and the creatures, even if he's not physically present.

When the player finally meets him at the end, William is no longer a clear villain. He's changed, broken by the curse, and no longer fully himself. This moment adds emotional weight: William didn't mean for any of this to happen, but he couldn't stop it either. He's both the cause of the danger and another victim of it.

In the end, William represents a slow, creeping threat, one that came from obsession and loss. He doesn't need to say anything or act directly, the world itself shows the damage he left behind.

I. Eldrick - the Mentor archetype;



Archetype: Withering Mentor

Age: Very old, has lived for centuries, possibly since the book was created;

Height: Short, slightly hunched due to age;

Appearance: Bald with a long white beard. Wears old, faded clothes. Carries a wooden staff for support. His presence feels warm and calm.

Personality: Kind, patient, and soft-spoken. Sometimes seems confused or lost in thought, often talking to himself. Others

think he's starting to lose his mind.

Occupation: Chief of Inkwell Town, the last safe place in the book world;

Intelligence: Extremely wise. He knows more than anyone else, even if his memory sometimes fades.

Relations: Respected by everyone in Inkwell. The only one who knows parts of the book's deeper history and the truth about the Author.

Role in Story: A guide through subtle hints and scattered messages. His words and symbols help players directly and indirectly. He stands for safety, wisdom, and careful resistance.

Symbolism: Eldrick represents knowledge without control, and care without power. A quiet counter to the chaos and danger growing in the book.

2. William - The Fallen Father;



Archetypes: The Fanatic, The Shadow, The Tragic Antagonist

Age: Unknown in real years, time passes differently inside the book. He has aged rapidly, appearing decades older than when he entered.

Appearance: Tall and gaunt, with a sickly, worn look. His skin seems to sag and melt in places, as if he is infected. Patches of floating dark ink cling to his body, slowly merging with his tattered clothes. He looks more like a shadow than a man.

Occupation: Once a book collector in the real world, William was drawn into the cursed book and slowly gave in to the dark forces inside. Blinded by their promises, he searched for a way out, but instead became their vessel, no longer in control of himself.

Location: He is in the Dark Fortress, the heart of the book's corruption.

Sociology: Quill's estranged father. A once brilliant mind with a deep love for books. Lost contact with his family after becoming consumed by his obsession with rare knowledge.

Relations: No known connections left. He doesn't know Quill is in the book.

Temperament: Volatile. Believes he's the only one strong enough to face

the curse. Thinks he's both a victim and a savior. Easily angered when his beliefs are challenged.

Intelligence: Was once extremely sharp and well-read, but now twisted by the curse. Logic is still there, but warped.

Role in Story: William is the unseen force behind the curse. He represents what happens when knowledge is chased without limits. While players rarely see him directly, his influence is everywhere, through puzzles, ruined places, and corrupted beings. He's not fighting Quill personally; he's just so far gone that his presence keeps the curse alive. He's a symbol of what Quill could become if he makes the wrong choices.

3. Quill - The Reluctant Hero;



Archetype: Mainly the Seeker, the Innocent and the Everyman. He didn't choose to be in this world, he was pulled into it. He becomes a hero by trying to make sense of it all and by facing what's in front of him.

Age: 16

Height: Slightly taller than average;

Appearance: A regular teenager, young, unsure, and unremarkable at first glance. No flashy features or heroic look. His expression often shows curiosity or hesitation.

Personality: Quiet, thoughtful, and observant. He doesn't talk much, but his thoughts come through in the Voice of Reason mechanic, where players hear what he's thinking during

key moments.

Role in the World: The main character, shaped through exploration. He doesn't start out strong or brave, players build that with their actions. The more they explore, the more they learn about Quill and his connection to the book.

Backstory: Grew up with his mom after his dad disappeared. Thought that chapter of his life was closed, until he finds his father's old house and gets pulled into the cursed book.

Relations:

- **Eldrick** - A guide from afar, helping through messages and old clues.
- **The Cat** - A mysterious ally who seems oddly interested in Quill, though it's not clear why.

Occupation: He has no special skills or powers at the start, just a regular teen trying to find answers. His strengths come from how the player chooses to act and what they decide to learn.

Internal Conflict: Quill doesn't want to become like his father. He's afraid of making the same mistakes, of getting lost in something he doesn't fully understand.

Design Purpose: A playable character who grows with the player. He's not meant to be a blank slate, but someone whose identity deepens through curiosity and choices.

4. The Cat - The Trickster Guide;



Archetype: A mix of the **Ally**, the **Trickster**, and a hint of the **Shadow**. It helps Quill but also challenges him. It represents uncertainty, intuition, and the hidden truths Quill hasn't faced yet.

Appearance: Just a small black cat, ordinary at first glance, but always showing up in strange places. Its eyes seem too aware, and it never really *walks* in or out; it just appears.

Age: Unknown

Sociology: The living spirit of the book. In this world, every magical place is watched over by a creature like this one. The Cat serves that role here, watching, knowing, and protecting in its own strange way.

Psychology: It sees something in Quill. It doesn't give direct advice, but nudges him toward the right path. It helps without explaining, leaving space for players to interpret what it means or why it helps at all.

Temperament: Playful, mysterious, and a little mischievous. Sometimes it seems helpful, sometimes not. It talks in riddles and half-truths, never fully clear, but never entirely dishonest either.

Juxtaposition:

- Compared to **Eldrick**, who is clear and careful, the Cat is subtle and unpredictable.

- Unlike **William**, who is lost in control and obsession, the Cat embraces change, doubt, and freedom.
- It stands in between a flexible, curious energy in a world shaped by extremes.

Role in the World: The Cat is Quill's only real companion in the book. It appears when needed, challenges the player to think differently, and rewards curiosity and insight. It doesn't hand out answers, it gives hints that open doors.

Layer 4

I. Player presence:

The player experiences this world through carefully crafted layers of immersion and flow, driven by key game pleasures such as **Sensation**, **Narrative**, **Discovery**, and **Challenge**. These elements are not isolated, they are built to support one another and to create a consistent emotional rhythm throughout the game.

From the very beginning, **Sensation** sets the stage. The player enters a world that feels physically real and conceptually strange: a handcrafted pop-up book where every surface folds, slides, or twists in unexpected ways. The bright, eerie colors signal that something is off, yet still alive. As the player moves deeper into the cursed book, the world begins to visually change, the vibrant palette fades into monochrome, reflecting the growing presence of corruption. This slow loss of color mirrors the tone of the narrative and supports the gameplay: when an Ink Creature is near, the

world subtly loses vibrancy, acting as a sensory warning and reinforcing the tension. It's an emotional form of environmental storytelling, reminding the player that something unseen is always watching.

The book itself is more than a setting, it's alive. Pages physically fold to reveal new spaces, puzzles rearrange reality through mechanisms like Fold and Function, and ink stains act as clues or warnings. The visual design, layered puzzles, hidden compartments, and paper-based textures immerse players in a world that feels tactile and strange. Every puzzle solved, every fold unlocked, reinforces the idea that the book is not just a place, but a character, one that can be read, touched, and eventually understood.

Narrative and **Discovery** are entangled. There is no exposition dump, players learn by doing, seeing, and uncovering. Story beats are hidden in foldout environments, obscure puzzles, vision crystal moments, and cryptic notes left behind by others, including Quill's father. The narrative is modular: different paths offer different story fragments, encouraging exploration and replayability. As players navigate the book, they are rewarded with layered meaning, not just lore, but emotional weight.

Key tools like the **Vision Crystal** and **Fold and Function** deepen both gameplay and story. The Vision Crystal, for example, doesn't just reveal secrets, it changes the entire perception of reality, flipping not only visuals but also the player's understanding of what's happening. Fold and Function turns the environment itself into a puzzle, teaching players to look beyond the obvious and engage with the world as something fluid, reactive, and alive.

Challenge plays out on two levels: mechanical and emotional.

Environment-based puzzles, stealth encounters with ink creatures, and timed sequences test the player's skill and adaptability. These challenges are progressively layered, ensuring a steady but increasingly tense rhythm as the player approaches the Dark Fortress. But there's also a deeper challenge at work, the internal conflict. The more the player explores, the more they uncover truths about Quill's father, the curse, and the nature of the book. Eventually, the player is forced to confront emotionally difficult decisions: Do you save someone who's become a monster? Do you risk everything to uncover the full truth, or settle for the comforting half-truths?

This emotional tension is essential to the experience. Discovery isn't just a gameplay loop, it's the emotional driver of the entire journey. The more you discover, the more the story asks of you. The goal is not just to escape, but to understand what escape really means, and what it costs.

Together, these elements ensure the player doesn't just **see** the world, they feel it. The sense of presence is rooted in the constant tension between safety and danger, truth and illusion, color and decay. Immersion and flow are maintained through the rhythm of challenge, the reward of discovery, and the emotional stakes of the narrative. Every fold, every shadow, every choice brings the player deeper into a world that's as mysterious as it is meaningful.

II. Player space:

The environments in this game are designed to feel alive, storied, and full of secrets. Every location, whether it's the quiet safety of Inkwell Town, the eerie silence of the Old Town, or the warped walls of the Dark Fortress, carries a sense of history and consequence. These places don't just exist as backdrops for gameplay; they are storytelling tools in themselves.

This approach ensures that players feel the emotional and narrative weight of each space they enter. Ruins hint at events long past, corrupted pages signal something going wrong, and fading color visually marks the approach of danger. Through layout, atmosphere, and carefully placed objects, the world tells its story even without words.

Supporting this is the **Theory of Omission**. The player is never given the full truth outright, instead, they're encouraged to piece it together themselves. Notes, symbols, collapsed structures, and missing details all leave gaps in the narrative that the player must fill in through exploration and deduction. For example, the disappearance of the townspeople isn't spelled out through direct exposition but implied through abandoned spaces, fading journals, and environmental decay. This subtle storytelling method not only creates mystery but allows players to become more emotionally involved by forming their own interpretations and connections.

Exposition Choices are delivered through layered methods, dialogue, environment, interactive objects, and core mechanics. The Town Chief offers limited but meaningful information. Tools like the vision crystal and the fold-and-function mechanic don't just help solve puzzles, they also

reveal pieces of the world's hidden truths. The game's index system and the voice of reason act as gentle guides, offering optional insight to those who seek it. By tying exposition to curiosity and progress, the game rewards players not only with progression but also with understanding.

Together, these storytelling methods shape a player space that feels immersive, intentional, and emotionally resonant. The world is not simply something the player moves through, it's something they uncover, interpret, and ultimately, make personal sense of.

III. Setting:

Quill and his mother made peace with his father's disappearance a long time ago. William had vanished without a word, leaving behind only questions. But one day, Quill stumbles across an old document revealing his father's last known address. Driven by a quiet need for closure, he visits the abandoned house. It's filled with dust and books, untouched for years, except for one open book sitting clean on the desk. Its title matches the name of the game. As Quill reads the first line, the world begins to fold and twist, pulling him into a strange and cursed storybook.

The world within the book is a **Wounded World**, damaged and decaying due to the growing influence of ink corruption. It was once vibrant and full of life, as the remnants of Inkwell Town and the Old Town suggest. But time flows differently in the book. The landscape is now shadowed by a

long-sleeping curse, twisting nature and paper architecture into something strange and haunted. This is also a Newly Discovered World, as Quill learns the rules as he explores, uncovering secrets hidden by foldable terrain and invisible ink. At the same time, it is a Changing World, constantly shifting, both visually and mechanically, as the story evolves. Areas once safe become deadly, and places revisited hold new meaning with the tools Quill gains. These layered archetypes serve both the narrative and the player experience.

What happened before: The book was created long ago to contain a dangerous magical force. William, Quill's father, discovered the book and was drawn into its world while chasing forbidden knowledge. The book was meant to trap the curse, but by opening it, he reawakened it and slowly became part of it. He now lives within its pages, changed and consumed.

What is happening now: Quill is trapped inside the same cursed book. He explores its world, uncovering hideouts, encountering dangerous creatures, finding clues that reveal how to escape from the book and what happened to his father. The closer he gets to the Dark Fortress, the source of the ink corruption, the more the world loses its color, beauty, and safety.

What might happen: Depending on the player's choices, Quill could uncover the truth and find a way to end the curse, possibly at great cost. The journey leads to a decision between saving what's left of his father or destroying the source of the curse entirely. Only by facing these truths can the book be closed for good.

The world is supported by unique **worldbuilding artifacts** and tools. The most important is the book itself, presented as a large pop-up environment. The folding paper architecture isn't just visual, it is gameplay, allowing the player to transform the space in order to move forward. The Ink Creatures represent the growing power of the curse, acting as both environmental and narrative threats. The Vision Crystal and Invisible Ink tools allow players to see hidden elements and piece together deeper story threads, offering rich narrative discovery. These items reinforce the player's journey from confusion to understanding. The in-game map, presented as the book's table of contents, updates with each visited location, guiding the story organically. Locations and story beats remain hidden until discovered, reinforcing the feeling of navigating a living mystery.

In terms of **research analogues**, the visual and mechanical design draws from games like *Limbo*, *Little Nightmares*, and *Don't Starve*. These titles influenced the tone, puzzle-driven storytelling, eerie atmosphere, and tactile world design. The game similarly focuses on environmental storytelling, limited UI, and a quiet but immersive world where every detail feels handcrafted and deliberate. The folding mechanics and living-book concept offer a unique take, allowing this project to stand apart while still rooted in proven emotional and gameplay traditions.



“Inkwell Town”

·Layer 5·

I. Player progression: Gameplay beats

1. Ritual Stones (Beginning)

The game opens in a quiet place, around the ritual stones. This marks Quill's arrival into the book world.

Player Role: Begin exploring the environment and uncover how navigation works. This is the player's first experience with Quill's Voice of Reason and world tone.

2. Inkwell Town

A quiet, eerie town untouched by ink creatures. It's one of the few safe places left and acts as the story's first hub. Eldrick's legacy can be felt here.

Player Role: Speak with townsfolk, gather initial clues, and get the index from Eldrick. The player learns about the ink's threat and what's at stake.

3. First Hideout

Hidden beneath rubble and vines lies an abandoned shelter used by others before Quill. Lore fragments and personal notes reveal past travelers.

Player Role: Discover the entrance through environmental puzzles. Once inside, collect story clues and the first map piece that points to the Shaman's Hut and a new way of manipulating the environment to find hidden paths(fold and function).

4. Shaman's Hut

A crumbling structure nestled deep in the woods, once home to a mystical figure who studied the book. Its walls whisper secrets about the curse.

Player Role: Use clues from the first hideout to locate it. Search for deeper lore, especially about the magical Inksight Cave and the true nature of the book.

5. Mining Post

The remains of a collapsed mining site. Old machinery and notes reveal that mining magical crystals disturbed something buried beneath.

Player Role: Solve a mechanical puzzle to fix a minecart system. Gain access to the mines and learn about the crystals' role in awakening the ink corruption.

6. Inksight Cave

A dark, dangerous zone crawling with ink creatures. Hidden within it is the Inksight Cave, a surreal glowing area offering a gameplay shift.

Player Role: Follow the Cat to safety while avoiding enemies. Acquire the **Vision Crystal**, a key item that unlocks new world mechanics like revealing hidden ink paths and secrets.

7. Old Town

A haunting look at what the ink has done. Empty homes, corrupted statues, and messages carved in fear show how the townspeople fled.

Player Role: Carefully explore, uncover evidence of the ink's rise, and gather clues that hint at Quill's father's deeper involvement without getting caught by Ink creatures.

8. Third Hideout

A secret lab-like space once used by William. Pages of twisted experiments and half-burnt theories show his descent into obsession.

Player Role: Piece together the map to the Waterfall Pass. Realize that William might not be a victim, but the root of the problem.

9. Waterfall Pass

A breathtaking area of calm beauty, enhancing the danger that follows. This is the final peaceful area before things spiral.

Player Role: Stealthily navigate through the heavily guarded route by ink creatures. Reach the fortress while holding onto the last piece of hope.

10. The Dark Fortress

The heart of the ink's corruption. Inside, you discover the terrible truth: William is alive, but completely changed. He never knew Quill was here.

Player Role: Attempt to confront William. The player must decide: **stop him and save the book** or **try to redeem him, risking everything**. All the hints point toward the Author's Crypt as a final option.

11. Author's Crypt

An ancient underground room, untouched by cursed ink. Floating ink letters and hidden lore pages hold the secrets of the book's origin and how to end the curse.

Player Role: Solve a complex final puzzle. Learn the truth about the book, the curse, and how to finally stop the ink's spread without total destruction.

12. Ritual Stones (End)

An identical pair that represents the way out, the Ritual Stones can now be activated, but only if the curse has been neutralized. Their energy will either close the book forever or rewrite its ending.

Player Role: Revisit this place and make the final choice, informed by everything discovered on the journey.

II. Experiential flow: Beat charts

1. Inkwell Town Area (includes First Hideout & Shaman's Hut)

Time of Day: Early morning to dusk

Story: The player begins their journey, learning this world is wounded but still holds hope. Hints of past survivors and quiet resistance are found. Signs of Eldrick's guidance are scattered.

Progression: Sets the quest in motion. Player moves from confusion to direction, uncovering the first deeper truths about the book and the cursed ink.

Play Time: 30–40 mins

Color Scheme: Warm faded tones, earthy neutrals, soft golden light with mossy greens. Slight desaturation for age.

Mechanics:

- Exploration, interaction and movement.
- Light puzzle-solving (unlocking hideout, piecing together map)
- Fold and function
- Voice of Reason

Things Found:

- First map piece
- Lore about past survivors and the shaman
- Clues to ink corruption
- Setup for next objective (finding the cave via the hut)

2. **The Mines Area** (includes Inksight Cave & Old Town)

Time of Day: Late afternoon fading into twilight

Story: The tone shifts darker. Mining activity disturbed the ink, causing corruption. Old Town is abandoned. The emotional weight rises. Quill uncovers his father's deeper involvement.

Progression: Introduces higher stakes. The player learns about the curse's origin and the father's descent. New abilities are gained through the vision crystal.

Play Time: 45–60 mins

Color Scheme: Cool greys, violets, and dim torchlight. Inksight Cave introduces deep inky blues and soft glowing purples.

Mechanics:

- Environmental puzzles (mine cart repair, pathfinding)
- First true stealth sections with real enemy threats
- Vision Crystal mechanic unlocked (reveals hidden ink paths and lore)
- Clue collection for father's hideout

Things Found:

- Vision Crystal
- Lore on the ink's awakening and experiments
- Second map piece (to Waterfall Pass)
- Emotional weight, direct evidence of William's madness

3. **The Dark Fortress Area** (Waterfall Pass, Fortress, Author's Crypt)

Time of Day: Nightfall through total darkness

Story: The final confrontation unfolds. The fortress is where William has rooted himself. The truth is uncovered: he is the unwilling cause of the ink's rise. The player must make a choice.

Progression: Final test. Confronts the theme directly: knowledge vs. connection, freedom vs. sacrifice. Offers a branching narrative moment.

Play Time: 45–60+ mins

Color Scheme: Black ink tones, harsh whites, deep reds in the fortress. Cold moonlight at the pass. The Crypt glows with haunting light blues and floating symbols.

Mechanics:

- Advanced stealth (tight patrols, increased enemy threat)
- Player choice mechanic (sacrifice vs. salvation)
- Vision Crystal used at full capacity
- Puzzle-solving in the Crypt (truth of the curse)

Things Found:

- Final lore pieces
- Author's message about the true nature of the curse
- The final choice setup (multiple endings)
- Hidden use for the ritual stones

III. Storyline: Tension graphing

This graph shows how I alternate between gameplay tension and narrative tension to keep a balanced, engaging experience. Instead of having both gameplay and story intensity happen at the exact same time, I designed them to **flow in and out of each other**. For example, intense gameplay moments like Inksight Cave, where the player has to avoid enemies and learn a new mechanic, are followed by safe spaces where the story unfolds, like discovering what the Vision Crystal actually does. This back-and-forth rhythm helps avoid overwhelming the player while still pushing the story forward.

Each section is designed so that **gameplay builds pressure**, and then **narrative moments give players time to breathe, reflect, and feel rewarded**. In Old Town, there's less action, but the emotional weight increases as players uncover clues about Quill's father. That narrative tension replaces mechanical tension and keeps the player engaged in a different way.

So while the graph might show both narrative and gameplay tension rising overall, in the actual gameplay they're **staggered**, creating a natural rhythm. The player fights through danger, reaches safety, learns something important, and then uses that knowledge to face the next challenge. This pacing supports player flow by keeping things varied but never dull or overwhelming.

Beat	Number	Narrative	Gameplay	Notes
Ritual stones	1	1	2	Calm discovery, intro
Inkwell Town	2	2	4	Safe zone, mystery hints
1st Hideout	3	4	4	Discovery, light challenge
Shaman Hut	4	6	4	Deeper Lore
Mining Post	5	5	6	Puzzles, revelations
Inksight cave +2nd Hideout	6	8	8	“Combat” heavy, Vision Crystal found.
Old Town	7	7	4	Emotional aftermath
3rd Hideout	8	8	5	William’s implication reveal
Waterfall pass	9	5	7	Stealth tension
Dark Fortress	10	10	9	Climax, choices must be made
Ritual Stones	11	5	6	False resolution
Author’s Crypt	12	9	7	Final story part

