# HOLDING ON

**GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT**
GAME DESIGN MODULE | CI7870
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GAME PAGE: https://zkhan1996.wixsite.com/zkhan/holdingon

BLOG PAGE: https://zkhan1996.wixsite.com/zkhan/post/gdm_zk

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**Game Title:** Holding On
**Intended game system:** PC
**Target Audience:** 16+, Stealth and Serious game lovers
**ESRB Rating:** Teen

*Vision:* *To ensure the emotions faced during difficult times of pregnancy and miscarriage are portrayed accurately.*

## INTRODUCTION

Holding On is a 3rd person stealth-survival game developed using Unreal Engine. The protagonist is Sophie who has depression after recently being diagnosed with a condition where the infant will not survive after being born. The game re-creates the emotions and negativity faced during this phase with the help of light, darkness and enemies.

## GENRE

Holding On is a 3rd person game that is designed to fit the stealth-survival genre. The game requires the player to complete levels without being detected, along with no means to defend themselves. Hence a mix of survival and stealth is the best fit.

## PLATFORM

The targeted platform is PC's where the game will be launched on Steam upon completion and this due to the current control scheme that is designed.

## TARGET AUDIENCE

The target audience for this game is 16+. The reasoning behind this is due to the seriousness of the topic, along with the maturity required to understand the emotions and content that the game intends to provide. Young adults and above are the most suitable for both absorbing the information, along with spreading awareness about the topic.

Since the game has a lot of planning and stealth elements, this game is also targeted towards player bases that love strategy and stealth.

## AWARENESS

"Holding On" is based on a serious topic that many women struggle through. Majority of the people don't quite understand what conditions and emotions revolve around miscarriages. This also leads to women entering a phase of depression, and through this game, the aim is to highlight and showcase those emotions and struggles.

## REPRESENTATION THROUGH SYMBOLISM

"Holding On" intends to recreate a world and a relatable character, along with the emotions and negativity represented through game objects and monsters.

## STORY VIA EXPERIENCE

"Holding On" has a detailed breakdown of Sophie's daily struggles in the same setting, through which she explores her emotions, while dodging the negativity represented in the form of rats.

## GAME OUTLINE

"Holding On" is a 3D third person stealth game that conveys a short story based on the struggles of a young woman, Sophie, who has been diagnosed with a condition that leads to an eventual death of the infant upon delivery. This story is set in the current time period and the level is based in a cozy studio apartment.

The game revolves around letting Sophie battle her negative thoughts and make her way out of her apartment. Each chapter she completes, represents her overcoming each negative emotion successfully. The level in the game has all game elements introduced from the beginning, such as throwing of orbs to distract enemies, tampering light source, story objects, and enemies.

The story begins with Sophie slowly exploring the events of the past, where she discovers a report that explains about her condition. As she absorbs this information, she begins having negative thoughts which soon takes the form of a rat, which instills a sense of fear in her, making her doubt strength regarding handling the situation. She decides to dodge this and progress through the house, eventually reaching the end.

The second chapter brings along another day and new set of emotions. Sophie now observes that the same room looks more cluttered and gets frustrated with the situation. She leaves her bed and walks towards the wardrobe, eventually being hit with the realization, that some of the clothes stored were recently purchased for the baby. She starts having negative thoughts about the situation being her fault and is eventually blocked by rats again.
She manages to overcome these thoughts and moves on.

Third chapter makes Sophie's life slightly more difficult, since the room is now longer and cluttered than usual. This immediately sends her thoughts spiraling downwards, making her feel helpless. Sophie soon realizes that the thoughts will require a lot more patience to deal with this time, but eventually reaches towards the end. She finds a toy that was gifted upon hearing the pregnancy news, which she hugs and leaves.

In the final chapter, the room starts appearing gloomy and red, which gets Sophie worried, since the negativity starts making her wish for things that aren't possible, such as keeping the baby forever. But she finally overcomes everything and approaches a baby placed at the end of the room. Upon comforting the crying infant, she finally accepts that it's time to let go, and the baby hence disappears, leaving the room back to its cozy and tidy self.

## CHARACTER

Sophie is a 32-year-old woman, who works as a collector of antiques. She has always been a cheerful woman, who has loved her independence, and has been fearless throughout her life. She fell in love with her husband and decided to settle down a few years ago.
She got pregnant 4 months ago, but has been diagnosed with Triploidy with trisomy, which is a chromosomal disorder amongst the fetus, that leads to the death of infants upon delivery in most cases. Since then, Sophie has been battling with depression and the emotional roller coaster that the situation has put her into. She has become slightly fearful, and remains upset, leading to having difficulties while going about her day.



**Figure 1: Sophie, the main character**

In the game, Sophie can walk and interact around the world. She is also equipped with light orbs, which are a symbolic representation of her hope.

The character is taken from Mixamo, and best suits the needs of the project.

## ENEMIES

The monsters in this game are a symbolic representation of the negative thoughts that Sophie battles daily. These monsters appear in the form of rats in the setting, that Sophie dislikes, and just wants to avoid at all costs. The rat seemed like the best choice, since houses usually have rat infestations, and hence were most suitable to be found around roaming the house.
The rat model has been purchased from the Epic Games Store.



**Figure 2: Rat, the enemy.**

The rats have a field of vision and a patrol path, and hence they just go about their business. If they spot the player, the rats start chasing the player, and will not stop until they lose sight on the player completely for a few seconds. In case they catch up to the player, the game will end.

The rats can be distracted by light orbs thrown by Sophie. If this light orb lands in the rat's field of vision, they will run towards it, but eventually will continue patrolling on their designated path.

| STATS MEASURED |
| --- |
| Patrol Speed |
| Patrol path length |
| Time taken to complete the patrol path. (depends if all paths are same) |
| Field of vision |
| Time spent around light orb |
| Time spent around light orb |
| Chase Speed |
| Chase time |

# STORY AND GAME PLAY

## PLOT

Holding On is a short story based on the different emotions felt by young women and ways they cope with depression caused by pregnancy and miscarriage related matters. These emotions are unfolded through each chapter, while exploring the same setting, that is, the main character's studio apartment.

### CHAPTER 1: THE SADNESS

The first chapter introduces the main character of the game, Sophie. She wakes up in her bedroom and wants to make her way out of the house so she can continue with her daily activities. Upon getting up, she comes across a table that contains file. She picks it up and reads the contents –

- Patient Name: Sophie W.
- Age: 32
- Gender: Female
- Diagnoses: Pregnancy - Triploidy with Trisomy
- Details: High chances of infant not surviving after a few days of birth.

Sophie expresses her sadness and says, "I can't believe out of all things, this was going to happen to me". She decides to move ahead but comes across some movement. She notices a rat in the distance, and the screen goes dark for a few seconds.

**Cut Scene:** The screen darkens, and a message appears - "How are you going to deal with this Sophie? How will you deal with the infant's departure?"

As Sophie comes back to the real world, she is found hiding behind a small shelf, away from the sights of the rat. She manages to make her way across by distracting the rat and reaches the end of the room.

**Cut Scene:** The screen brightens up and a message appears – "I will remain strong, and I will learn how to let go."

## CHAPTER 2: THE FRUSTRATION

The second chapter begins with Sophie waking up in the same room, but as she looks around, the room appears to be slightly more cluttered, with furniture's lying around in different places.
She makes her way to the wardrobe and observes its contents.

**Cut Scene:** The wardrobe opens and showcases the clothes that she purchased for her unborn child during the early stages of pregnancy. She feels and hugs the clothes, while feeling a tiny bit of happiness, but the clothes disappear soon after, leaving Sophie extremely confused and angry.

Sophie hears the similar movement, and she notices the two rats blocking her way.

**Cut Scene:** The screen darkens, and a message appears – "How could you let this happen? Is this all your fault? You should have taken better care."

Sophie comes back to the real world, and manages to dodge the rats, eventually reaching the end of the room.

**Cut Scene:** The screen brightens up and a message appears – "It was not under my control; how could this be my fault?"

## CHAPTER 3: THE HELPLESSNESS

The third chapter begins with Sophie waking up and realizing that the same room looks longer and more cluttered than usual. She is immediately stopped by two rats and takes cover behind the couch.

**Cut Scene:** The screen darkens, and a message appears – "So you're bearing all this pain for nothing? What are you going to get out of this?"

Sophie tries to make her way across the rats but is eventually stopped after noticing another rat blocking her way.

**Cut Scene:** The screen darkens, and a message appears – "Don't you wish you could do something about it? It's quite sad watching you be so helpless."

Sophie fights off the negative thought and makes it to a coffee table. As she nears the table, she notices a toy that her mother loving gifted her upon hearing her pregnancy news. She picks up the toy and leaves the room.

**Cut Scene:** The screen brightens up and a message appears – "Maybe I can't do anything about it, but I know in my heart, that I want to him once before he leaves."

## CHAPTER 4: THE ACCEPTANCE

The fourth and the final chapter of the game showcases Sophie observing how the room appears more red than usual, with same clutter placed in a long room. She makes her way to a photo frame, which contains a sonography shot of the baby that she is carrying. She observes it and breaks down, while hugging the picture.

**Cut Scene:** The screen darkens, and a message appears – "Oh how you wish you could him forever, and never let go."

Sophie wipes her tears and decides to fight of these negative thoughts once and for all but is overwhelmed by the number of rat's present. She fights off all the four rats and makes her way towards the door. As she nears the door, she notices a small cradle that contains a baby crying. She decides to pick up the baby and hugs it one last time.

**Cut Scene:** The screen brightens up and a message appears – "I guess the time has come for you to leave me, my child." The child slowly disappears from Sophie's arms, and the room gets back to its tidy and cozy self.

## GAMEPLAY

The core gameplay in "Holding On" is about surviving against the patrolling monsters placed around the level and making your way to the end of each level. The player needs to keep moving in the game, since the screen will start darkening, ultimately ending in a game over situation. To accomplish this, players have been provided with several gameplay objects to help them. They are stated below.

## TYPES OF LIGHTS

**Green**
The green light is used as an indication of spawn and end point. This will help guide the player when they're making their way towards the end of a level.
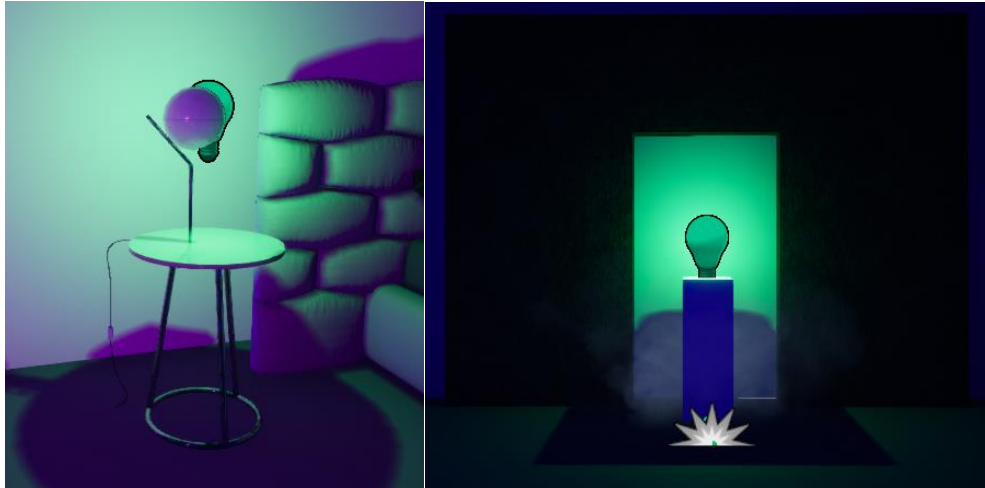
Figure 3: Spawn and Level end

**Blue**

The blue light is used to showcase the light sources that are available around the level. The blue light and the light orbs in the game have the same color, and they both represent hope and positivity in the main character's life.



Figure 4: Light sources

**Pink**

The pink lights are used as a story point in the game, which the player needs to interact with to learn about the character. The game will not let the player proceed ahead until this item has been collected.

Figure 5: Story objects

**Purple**

The purple lights are a risk zone, that contains crucial information about the story, but is not compulsory for the player to explore. These areas in the level will have more enemies than usual.

## COVER SYSTEM

The cover system automatically lets players take cover if they are near it. The player can move near a furniture and take cover automatically.



Figure 6: Table used as a cover

## LIGHT ORBS

The player has 10 light orbs at the start of each level, and these are a representation of the main character's positivity and hope. She aims to distract the negative thoughts through her limited hope. At the beginning of each day, these light orbs get replenished,

Figure 7: Light orb when in environment

## DARKENING OF LEVEL

The game screen will begin to darken if the player remains in one position for too long. This is an indication of the main character's negative thoughts catching up. Once the screen becomes completely dark, the game is over, and the player will need to restart from their last save point.
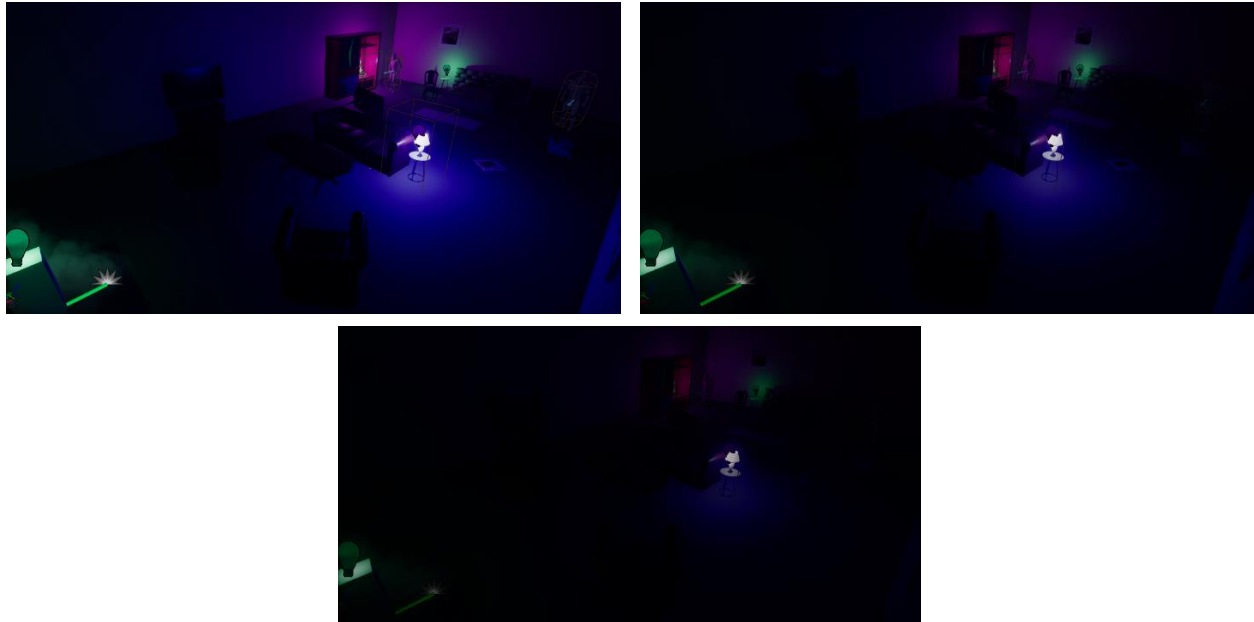


Figure 8: Phases of screen darkening

## PROGRESSION

The game flow quite simple and linear. The player spawns in the level, which is marked by a green light node. To complete the level, player needs to make their way towards the end of the level, which is also marked by a green light node. During their navigation process in the level, they will encounter rats, that are blocking their way. But this can be countered by using the elements provided in the game, such as light orbs (for distracting enemy), cover system (for hiding and strategically proceeding), and the light sources that can be tampered with to distract the enemy.
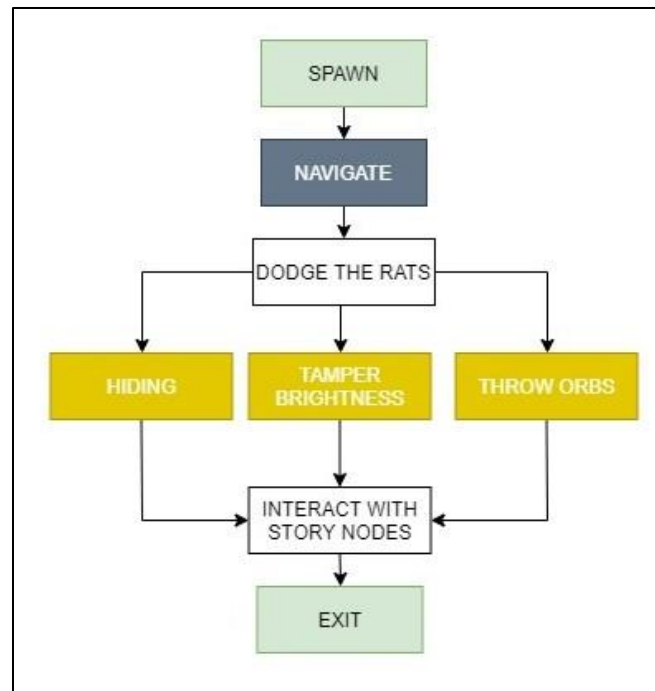
Figure 9: General game flow

The sequence of events under each chapter is presented in the image below. As the player progresses through each chapter, the setting starts physically changing. The physical changes include more clutter, longer room and gloomy lighting towards the end of the game.

The number of enemies present in each chapter also start growing in number, to indicate the rise in level difficulty.
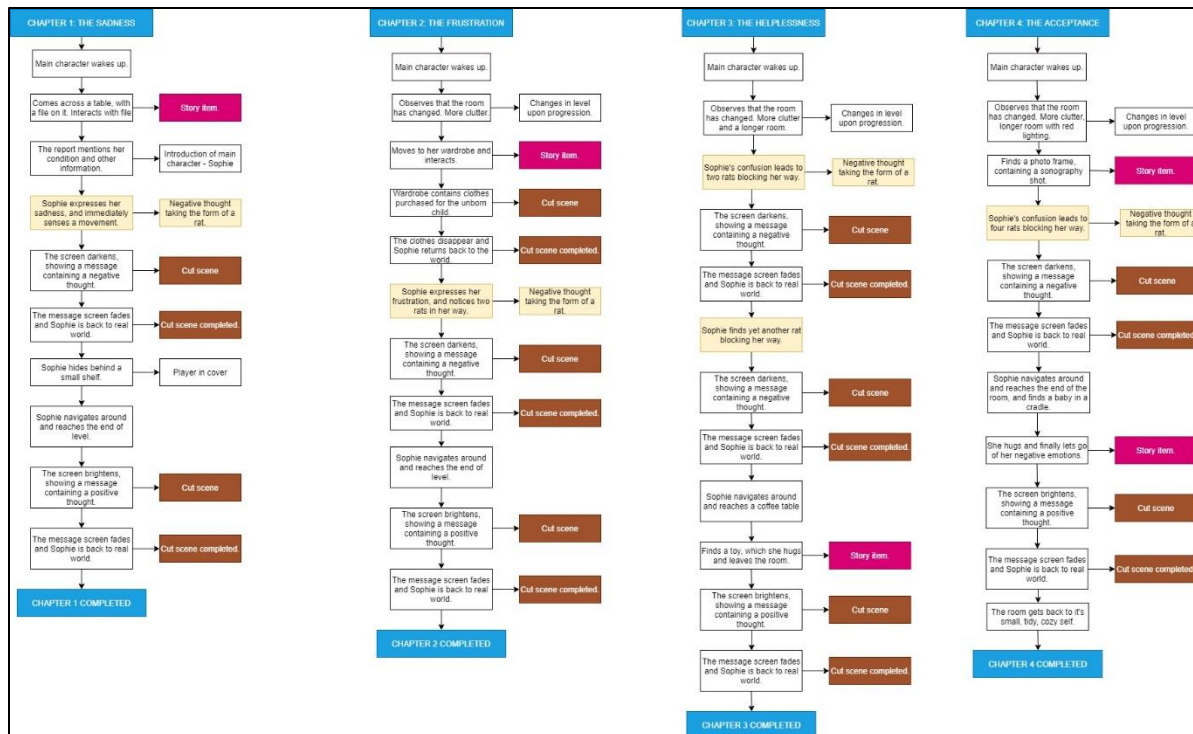
**Figure 10: Overall chapter sequence**

## GAME WORLD – LEVELS

Holding On covers one environment, that physically changes as the player completes each chapter. The location covered in the game is a studio apartment, that showcases furniture's found in bedroom, study and living room.

The first chapter invovles dealing with the initial sadness, hence the room is found with minimal clutter. This minimal clutter is kept for letting player navigate around the level easily while also having enough sight on the rest of the level.
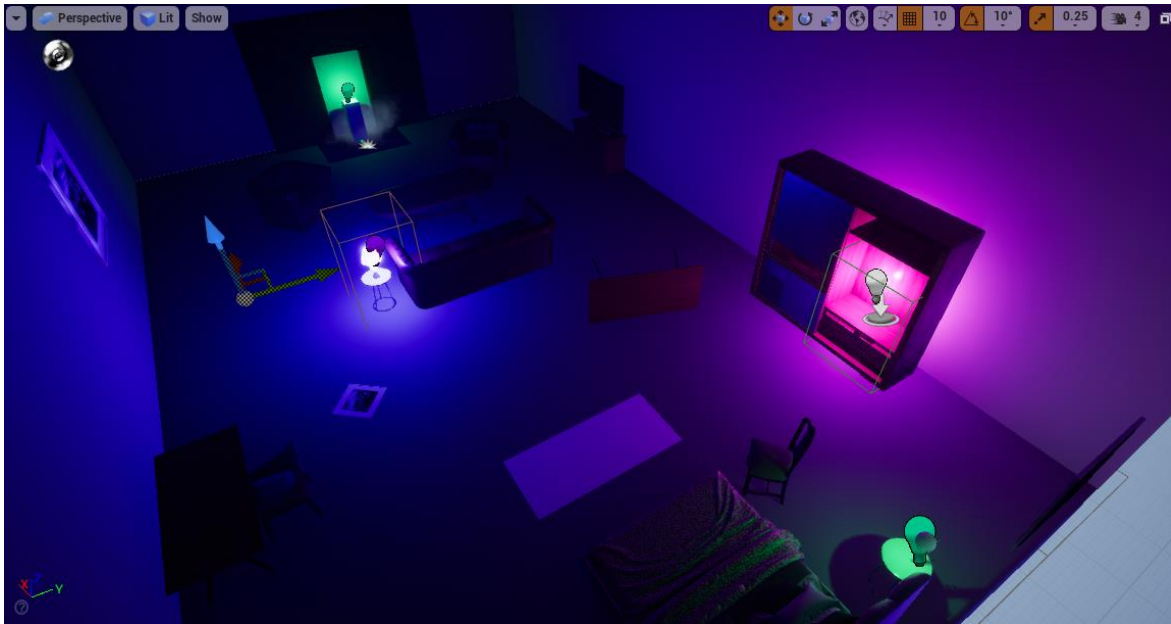
Figure 11: Level for Chapter 1

The second chapter showcases feelings of frustration, and hence, the same room will appear with more clutter. The high amount of clutter will increase the difficulty, since the player will now have to maneuver around more carefully, while dodging the enemies.
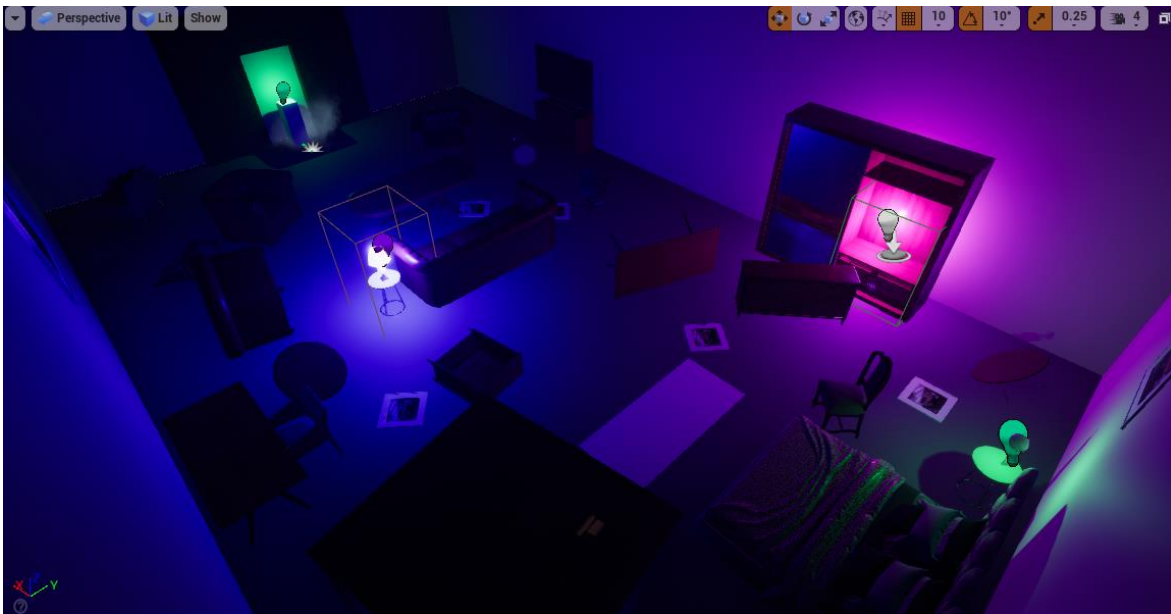


Figure 12: Level for Chapter 2

The third chapter will have the same environment, but a much longer room, which will take slightly longer to complete than the previous level. And the final chapter will have a red lighting, marking the end of the game and all the negative emotions that the main character is dealing with.
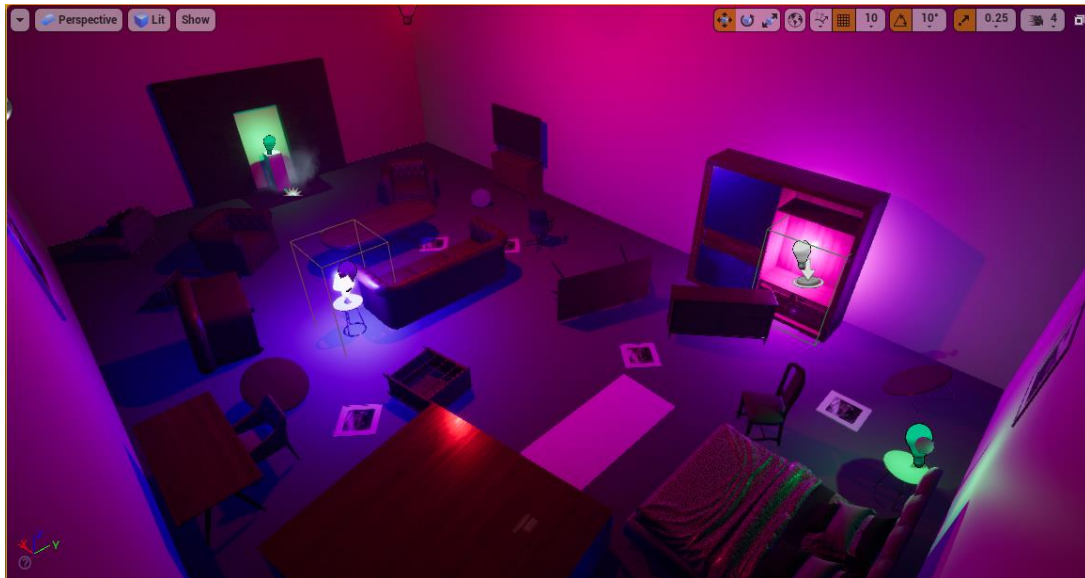
Figure 13: Level for Chapter 4

## GAME EXPERIENCE

The game's objective is to increase awareness about a serious topic, that is, miscarriages and the depression and emotions it brings along with it. Hence, through this game, players will experience a short story of a woman going through several negative emotions, but eventually countering them with her positivity. Having these negative thoughts being recreated in the form of rats, will make the situation creepy, hence ensuring that the player dodges them.

Throughout the game's journey, the setting will instill a sense of gloominess with its darkness and light placements. The stealth mechanics in the game will let players understand that dealing with negative emotions head on may not seem practical every time, and hence dodging them with their positivity is and moving ahead in life is a much better approach.

The increase in clutter and length of the room as the player progresses is another way that the player will understand that dealing with emotions is long process and that it takes time. This includes sadness, frustration, helplessness and then finally accepting the situation.
Additionally, the story items added in the game helps add a more emotional touch to the game, especially when players interact with it, and watching their main character react to it.

## GAME PLAY MECHANICS

### STEALTH

To navigate around the level, the player is required to strategically move around by making use of the game play elements placed around the level. It is important to know that there is no way to defend against the enemy, hence, distracting enemies and moving ahead is the best way to complete the game.

## THROWING LIGHT ORBS

The player can throw light orbs around in the game, which is used to distract enemies placed around the level. When these orbs are thrown around, they dim over time. This is because each light orb has a limited life of 10 seconds. The orbs can be collected back if the player walks over them during that period, otherwise the orb will dim down and disappear eventually.
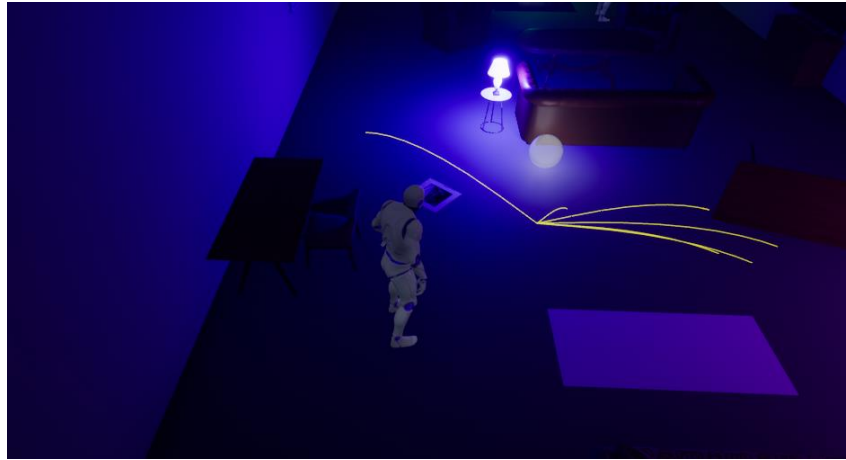


Figure 14: Orbs being thrown

## TAMPERING WITH LIGHT

This mechanic lets players extract or deposit light into light sources. If the player runs out of light orbs, they can interact with these light sources to absorb light from.
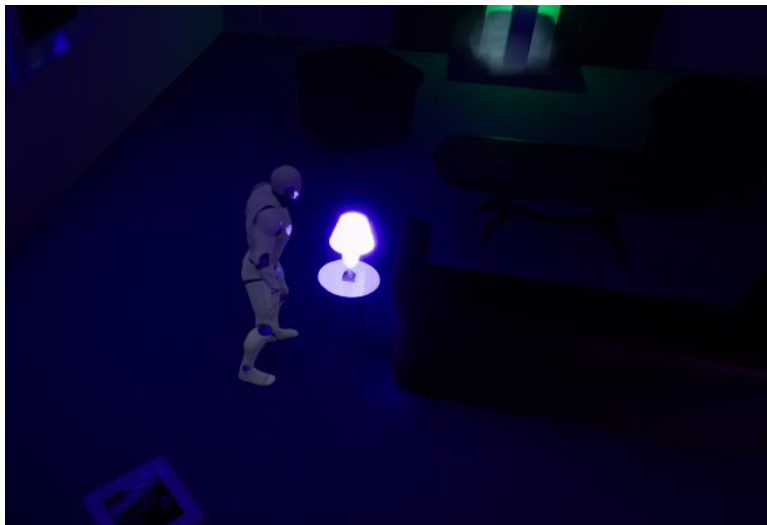


Figure 15: Light source being depleted

In case the player wants to avoid risky play of throwing light orbs, they can increase the brightness of a light source by depositing their light orbs in a light source. Since orbs dim over time, these light sources won't, and hence, player can distract enemies for a much longer duration.

Figure 16: Light source brightness being increased

## INTERACTION WITH STORY OBJECTS

The mechanic is used for interacting with objects that are crucial to the story, and these are indicated with a pink light. Without interacting with these story objects, the game will not let the player proceed ahead.



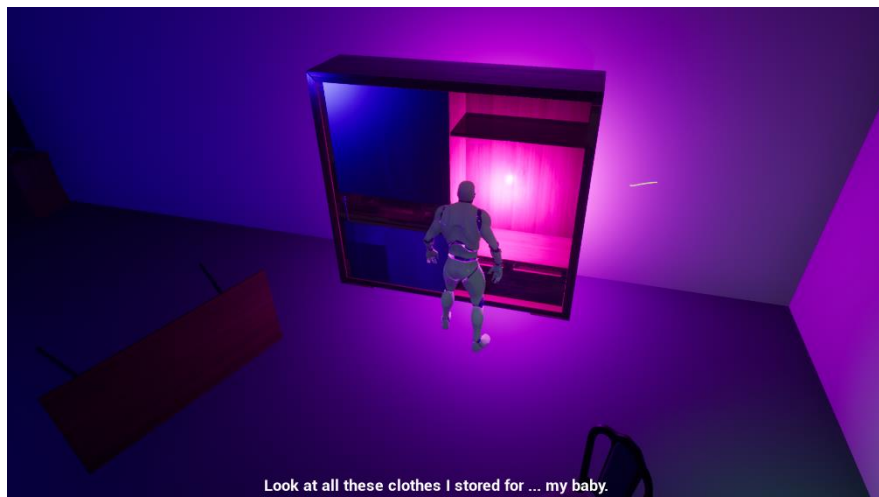Look at all these clothes I stored for … my baby.

Figure 17: Interaction and Dialogue
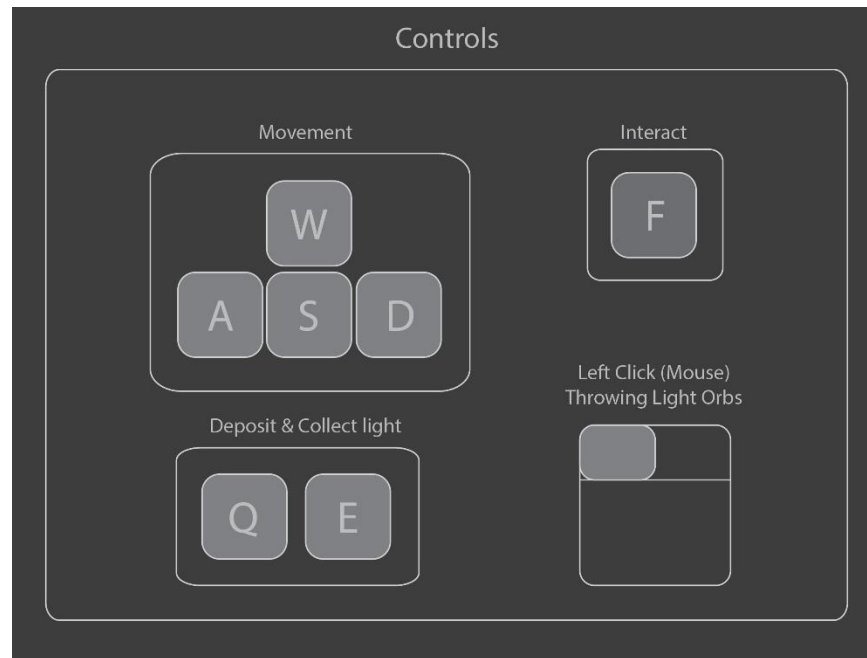
## PLAYER CONTROLS



Figure 18: Player controls

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### MOVEMENT

- W – Move straight
- A – Move left
- S – Move back
- D – Move right

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### STORY NODES

- F to interact with story nodes

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### LIGHT SOURCE

- Q – for taking the light
- E – for depositing the light

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### LIGHT ORBS

- Left click to throw orbs around

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### COVER SYSTEM

- To get in cover, press the movement key in the relevant direction
- To get out of cover, press the movement key in the relevant opposite direction

## FLOWCHARTS - SCREENS

The game "Holding On" has a Main Menu which contains 4 options, with several sub options. There is also an accessibility option to change the display text size.
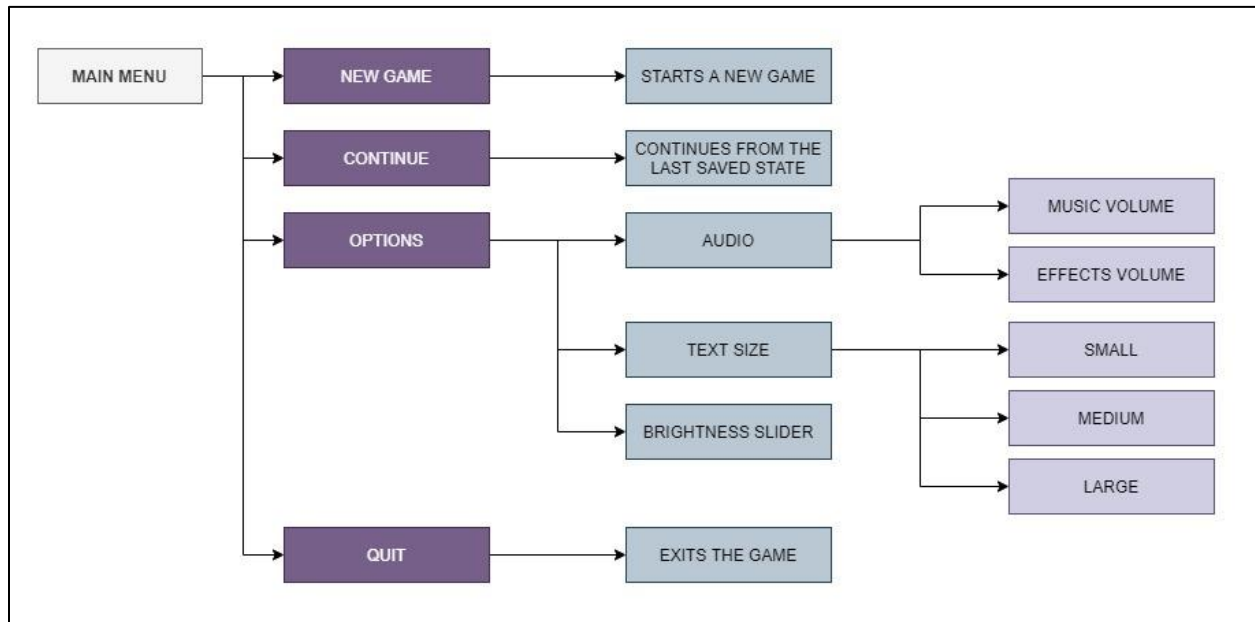


Figure 19: Screen flow

## MOCKUP SCREENS

The game has minimal UI and basic version of this presented in the images below. The first image shows the in-game text placement. The economy is displayed on the top right corner of the screen, and the subtitle text is displayed below in the middle. The three text boxes are displayed here to show the text size difference.
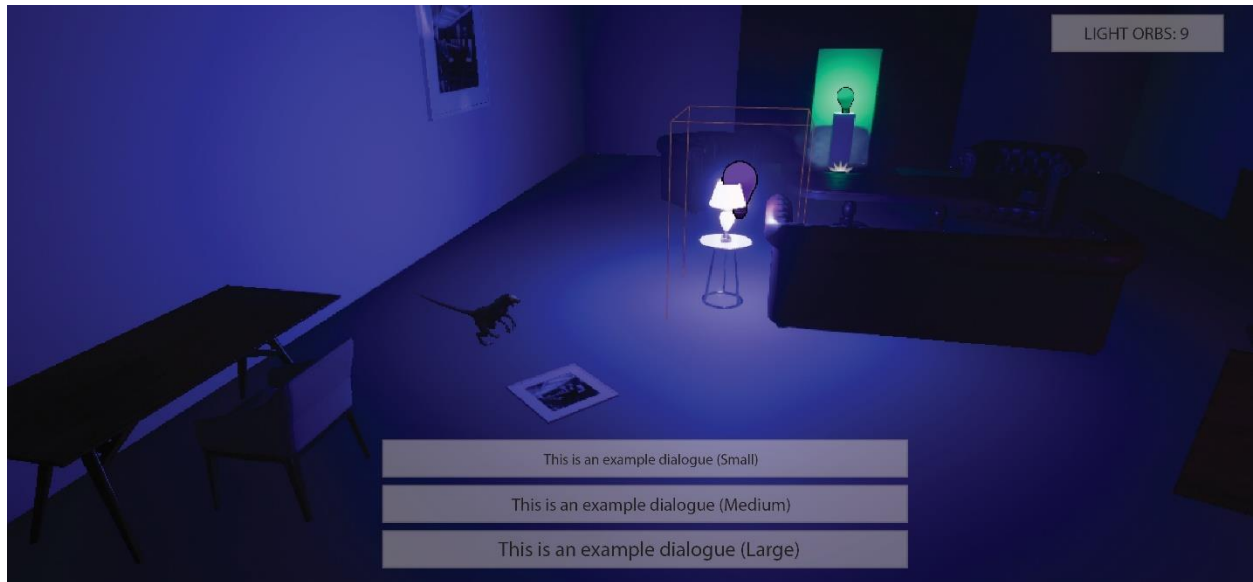
**Figure 20: Text display**

The next image shows the pause menu, which contains an options button to alter the audio and brightness values. The save button will save the current progress of the player, and the later options quit the game and take the player to the respective screens.
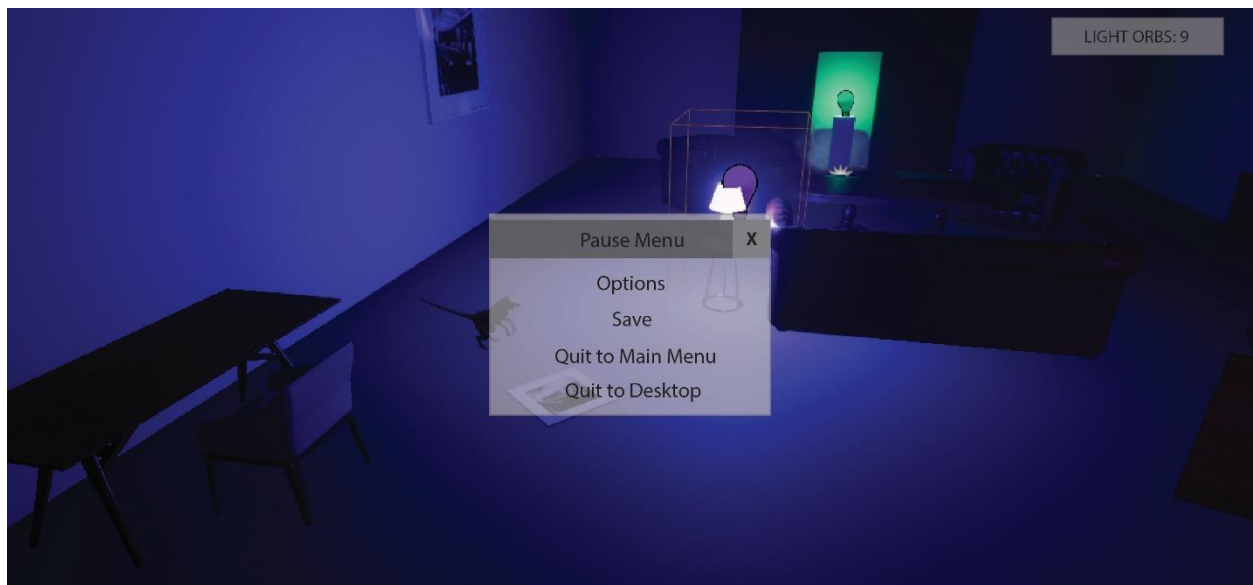


**Figure 21: Pause Menu**

## OVERALL LOOK - SETTING

Holding On is based in the current time period, with the main character being an antique collector. Hence the following references were taken into consideration regarding furniture, placement of items, textures and coziness. The lighting is not taken into consideration from the references, and this is because the game is supposed to be based in a gloomy and dark setting, with heavy usage of lights, unlike the daylight used in reference images here.



**Figure 22: Bedroom furniture**



**Figure 23: Living room furniture**

## GAME'S ON MENTAL ILLNESS

### DEPRESSION QUEST

Depression Quest is a text-based adventure game, crafted to let players experience the day-to-day life of a person suffering with depression. The game tasks players to make it through the day, while maintaining their social circle, and holding their job. The players choices become limited as the game progresses and is an accurate representation of how frustrating the condition can get.



Figure 24: Cover page of Depression Quest

### PRY

Pry is an interesting game that is used to convey challenges faced by veterans living with PTSD. It's a new take on text-based story games, since it lets players zoom inward and away from the text. The longer a player focuses on a memory or a topic, the harder it becomes for the soldier to bear the memory of that event. Towards the end of the game, the memories start blocking out images of real. This provides players an insight on the consequences of suffering with PTSD.



Figure 25: Cover page of Pry

### THAT DRAGON, CANCER

"That Dragon, Cancer" is an emotional game experience created to show what dealing with grief feels like. The child in the game, Joel, is a sick child and players can only watch him struggle with the pain, since they cannot do anything about it. The game shows the amount of strain such grief can put on one's mental health, in this case, the parents. It's an uplifting but yet a heartbreaking experience, since both the player and parents feel powerless.



Figure 26: Cover page of That Dragon, Cancer

## SUMMARY

The game's considered for benchmarking were both used as an inspiration and for feature comparison. The three games focus on different aspects of mental illness, along with the strain it causes on an individual. Different methods are followed to convey the message, which includes text-based adventure, and a simple 3D experience.

Holding On takes inspiration from these games, and intends to adapt the storytelling methods from them, while using a new method of conveying story, that is, stealth mechanics.

## MONETIZATION

The game will be a one-time purchase, available for PC through digital distribution via Steam. Since the current development plan and story is aimed for creating awareness about a serious topic, the prices will be kept preferably lower – in between 10 to 20 dollars. This is can change depending on the asset requirement, and any other future mechanic addition.

Besides the one-time purchase, the game also plans on developing expansions, that will be released upon analyzing the number of downloads. The expansions will come at an extra cost, since it will involve online support.

## EXPANSIONS

The future expansions considered for this game contain interactive online sessions that will help ease the game play, along with providing resources for getting the necessary help.

### MOTIVATIONAL NOTES

This expansion is inspired by the game "Kind Words", where other players leave requests or kind words, that can be answered.
Upon further expansions, "Holding On" can incorporate online interactivity through letting other players leave motivational notes, that will be displayed through online light sources in the level. This will help in building both a strong community and let players feel comfortable while playing this game.

### HELPING AROUND

This expansion is inspired by the game "Blackout Club", where players enter game sessions of other players and try making the gameplay more difficult. Since this is used negatively in this game, it can also be used positively for other games.
Upon further development, "Holding On" can add this feature, that lets other players enter the session, for decreasing the difficulty by helping around.