

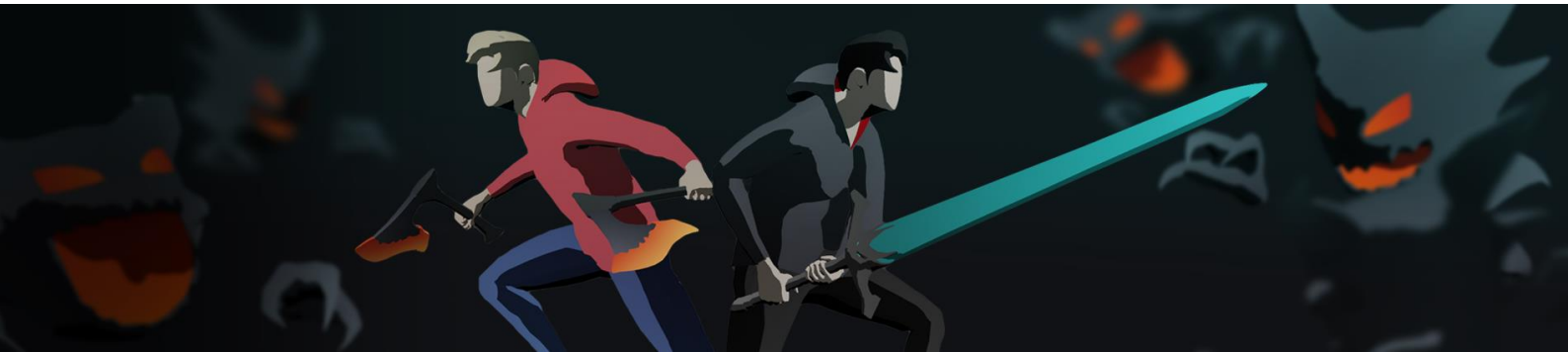
# THE DESIGN OF NIGHTMARE HUNTER

By Aadhitya Ravichandran

*\*This is not a playable game/demo*

## PROJECT OVERVIEW

This document is the brief of a 2 player Isometric ActionRPG in local co-op mode. It has hack n slash mechanics with player choices determining the levels and loot they encounter. The following details the barebones essentials and how the game is played. All the work was done by me.



## PREMISE

Nightmare Hunter is an ActionRPG where two lucid dreamers fight together to escape an endless cycle of nightmarish dreams. Battle fiendish foes born out of imagination with an ever increasing arsenal of weapons and powers that get stronger as you learn to control your dreams and journey deeper into the Dreamlands, to uncover the source of the Nightmare.

# USER RESEARCH

Multiplayer games (including real life sports) are often responsible in forming strong bonds between people, even if they are strangers. If the game requires cooperation between people, even after one game session, strangers would often end up talking to each other comfortably, this would start with the game itself but eventually derail into their everyday lives.

Be it Dota, World of Warcraft or Call of Duty, online multiplayer games are generally more fun with friends than anyone else. That although cannot be said true for local co-op games. This requires physical presence of both the parties, this changes one's attitude towards the other and they're more likely to connect with each other over a collaborative task or activity.

An experiment was conducted by making 2 players play a single-player game (God of War 4) together taking turns at the controller:

These were the observations made:

1. Collective decisions are born. They strategize with each other on the best course of action.
2. Players share their understanding of the game by word of mouth instantly to get better.
3. Players are more motivated as a team. They rarely back down from failure since the other player taking control of the game gives them breathing room to rethink their approach.
4. The wow factor is amplified when its shared (Similar to watching movies together)

\*The 2 players were my friends (**one male, one female**) who rarely played video games and never ever finished a game before. They finished God of War in 5 sittings, total time of over 20hrs\*

But there is a drastic decline in the number of games that support local co-op in the current decade as compared to the previous one when local co-op was very much a norm and most titles, especially AAA games (even Uncharted) then had them as common as online multiplayer in the current age. A Way Out is the first, ever bold move from the AAA gaming industry in a long time to produce a game that has no single player option and **must** be player by 2 players, a rarity. Currently Indie games having the liberty to explore ideas without financial constraints are leveraging this opportunity in the niche market of couch co-op games to produce works such as Overcooked, Gang Beasts etc.

This only leads to the conclusion that this departure reflects society's affinity towards preferring online services. Although it's not a fully negative departure, it diminishes the need to interact with people in real life.

## This led me to the conclusion

If single player story tropes are applied to develop a game where both players can play simultaneously (a local co-op game), their communication frequency would be much higher and this shared experience would build even unexpected levels of chemistry between them which they never had before.

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# 1. CHARACTERS

## LUCID DREAMERS (Image to the right)

The players. Although physically separated in the real world they meet each other in the Dreamlands through their shared dream. They grow more powerful (more conscious in the dream) as they defeat Nightmares.

The player characters are customized by the players, during character creation.



## DREAM WALKER

A mysterious traveller who is the game's merchant. It sells powerful artefacts-weapons, talismans, power ups that cost Dream Essence. It only appears in an area where there are no enemies or when a level is cleared of enemies.

## PHANTOMS (Image to the right)

Common enemy in the game. They have basic attacks such as one hit or occasionally a 3 hit attack. They will often increase in number over time in a level. Swarming the players is a common tactic of theirs. New types of phantoms appear as the players' progress through the game.

If the players die to a phantom, it will evolve and get stronger.

\*This phantom model is only a placeholder asset\*



## DREAM EATER

A large malevolent being that traps lucid dreamers into the Dreamlands. Lucid dreamers cannot escape the Dreamlands until this entity is killed. The second Act of the game starts after this boss is killed.

## TRUE SLAVE

Main villain. Once a lucid dreamer herself, she used Dreams as an escape from her miserable reality, and was successful, in believing that living in one's Dreams is far more fascinating than reality. This being lures those whoever can control their Dreams to live their entire lives there, forgetting that one has a physical body.

## 2. STORY

### 2.1 THEME

**“Fantasized imagination is not the reality one must live in. The longer one lives inside their own mind and dismisses the real world, the more delusional one becomes”**

### 2.2 NARRATIVE / PLOT OUTLINE

1. Two lucid dreamers meet each other in a shared dream. They are attacked by the Nightmarish creatures and they try escaping the dream.
2. They encounter a powerful entity, the Dream Eater. They try to fight it but eventually the Dream Eater kills both of them and they wake up from the Nightmare.
3. From now on, whenever they sleep, they're sucked into the same shared dream until they get rid of the Dream Eater.

**\*\*After defeating the Dream Eater, the revelation, the greater entity who's the monarch over the Dreamlands – the True Slave\*\***

### 2.3 WORLD

The game primarily takes place in a transcendental plane called Dreamlands, but occasionally the players can wake up and visit their homes.

HOME (Image to right)

Each player has their own home. It resides in the player's real life version in the game and not in the Dreamlands. The player can interact with household objects. They can sleep in the bed to enter Dreamlands. The aim is to make the player feel cosy and comforted to give breaks between Dreams.



DREAMLANDS (Image to right taken from internet)

When the players sleep, they enter the Dreamlands. It is full of beauty and opportunities as well as equal amount of terror. The levels are procedurally generated based on player choices. It comprises of floating island-like structures on which the players move about. These can contain mad made structures as well – it's a dream after all. The background has several landforms merging into one another dynamically. One can witness from a Dream's edge, that there is such vast space in all directions like a cosmic sea.



### 3. ARTSTYLE

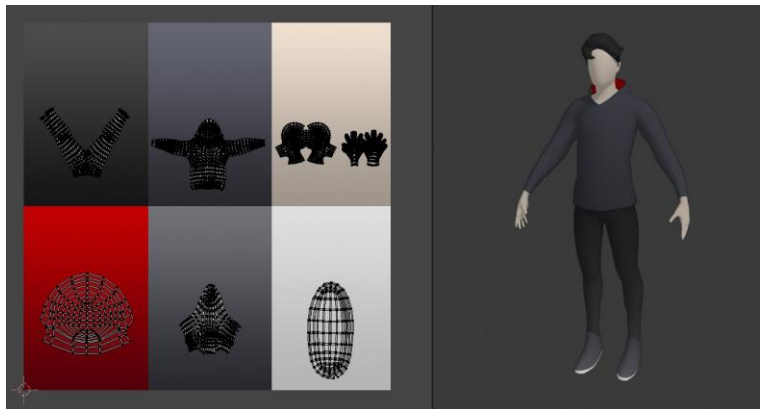
The aim of this artstyle is to mimic the obscure and fuzzy nature of dreams.

The game is in **Isometric** view with the 2 characters always visible on screen (the game is **not in split screen**, instead the camera zooms out to frame both players). Visual style is **minimal** with **cell shading** (Image to right)

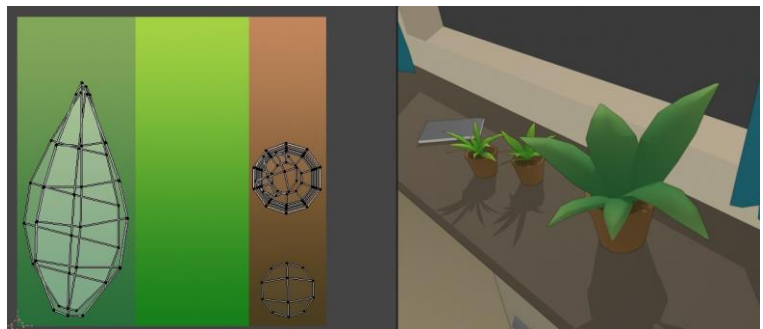


Some important guidelines:

1. Player characters have blank faces, only hair and skin are customizable. (Image to right)



2. 3D assets have only **gradient colours for textures**. Silhouette and forms matter. (Image to right shows UV packing)



Due to the game being relatively light on polycount and texture memory sizes, large number of enemies and effects can be displayed without impacting performance.

## 4. GAMEPLAY

**'Real time combat of fighting for one's dear life against their nightmares'** - moment to moment combat.

**'Traversal and solving puzzles together in sync'** - moment to moment exploration/puzzle solving.

This is a high risk/reward game as death means losing points to the enemy. Therefore the two players must strategize together using weapons and abilities in tandem to gain victory over the enemies.

### 4.1 GOAL

Long Term goal: Kill the Dream Eater to escape the Dreamlands

Short Term goal: Kill enemies and progress to next dream.

### 4.2 MECHANICS

**Standard variables** - HP, Vigil meter (drains while using abilities)

**Locomotive actions** - dodge, jump, double jump.

**Interact actions** - talk, heal, revive, prop interaction.

**Combat actions** - light attack, heavy attack, jump attack, cast ability, block and parry.

#### COMBAT

Players can use a variety of weapons (heavy, light, ranged) and vigil abilities (similar to magic abilities) in combat. The effectiveness is maximized by combining both players' teamwork.

For example: If one player uses a Greatsword to attack in a slow but devastating manner, the other player with a fast weapon efficiently take advantage of the stunned enemies and release a flurry of attacks.

#### EXPLORATION & PUZZLES

Players can jump, climb ledges to reach places in each level, they might find special rewards in a difficult-to-reach-secret-areas obscured from the view, these test **platforming skills**. Puzzles primarily test observational & teamwork skills often through **perfect positioning** and **timing of actions**. Wisp cocoons (act as chest for points) release Dream Essence when hit and they appear in various locations during puzzle sections.

#### NIGHTMARES

**Nightmares are the USPs of the game.** Any enemy that managed to kill the player, becomes a Nightmare that will return at a stage in the game with increased power. Repeatedly failing to kill this enemy will make it stronger. Nightmares roam the Dreamlands and certain actions like not clearing enemies for too long can trigger them to appear in the current level. A Nightmare will always be resilient to those weapons and abilities that the player used on them in the previous encounter.

#### CONVERSATION

Players can talk to each other (only during prompts) and other characters as well.

For example: When one player gets a choice of asking one question from multiple options, the other player replying will also get multiple choices to pick an answer. This could even predict the loot in next level based on the answer. Players could show more of their own selves through this and role play.

**The aim of this system is for the players to get to know each other, or go wild with witty talks.**

## 4.3 PROGRESSION

### LEVELS

Each Level in the game is a **diorama** sized environment called a Dream. Every Dream has its own set of thematic puzzles appropriate for the environment. A Dream Layer (having an overall visual theme) consists of multiple levels (Dreams), and the final Dream in a Dream Layer will have a boss.

**After defeating this boss the players can advance to the next Dream Layer.**

### LOSE STATE

If one player's HP reaches 0, they enter a downed state and will have limited time during which they can be revived. The player who is reviving the other, cannot attack during this duration, hence revival must be planned carefully by using like a shield ability to guard the two. **If both players are downed, they wake up from the Nightmare, losing all dream essence they earned to the enemy that killed the last player.**

### CORE LOOP

1. Enter Dream
2. Defeat enemies, solve puzzles
3. Gain Dream Essence
4. Grow stronger by spending Dream Essence to the Dream Walker
5. Wake up

## 4.4 ITEMS

### DREAM ESSENCE

Points in the game, gained by **defeating enemies** or by **breaking wisp cocoons**. Tougher the enemy, the more essence they give. These can be used to purchase items & upgrades from the Dream Walker – weapon upgrades, new vigil abilities etc.

### WEAPONS

The game has 12 weapons and each one has unique moveset. Weapons are both found in the Dreamlands or purchased from the Dream Walker. Player can carry 2 weapons at a time. Starting weapon is randomly assigned. Greatsword -Bane, and Dual axes –Sunder. (Image to right)

### MEDALS

Medals can be worn to have ability benefits. They cannot be bought, only earned through challenges given by the Dream Walker. They may vary from 'defeat 5 nightmares' to 'break all wisp cocoons' to 'kill number of enemies stunned by the other player'

### MARK OF THE HUNTER

Special upgrade gained after defeating the Dream Eater. Players will gain enhanced powers like double jumping, devastating abilities etc. This is the Act 2 of the game that ends with the True Slave's defeat, and the game's ending.





## 5. MUSIC

**The game's music is 70% dark/terrifying and 30% light-hearted.**

Ambience plays in the background during exploration/puzzle solving.

Combat music plays during fights.

Comforting music plays at player home.

### **Guidelines for music:**

1. Sense of unknowingness in the ambience.
2. Delightful & light-hearted music plays upon every accomplishment, upon clearing a level of enemies or defeating a boss.
3. Upbeat music is sparingly used so that such moments are rare and when they do occur are special.
4. The default ambient music must be sampled differently such that it's never heard in the same way again – To give the sense of eternal nature of the Dreamlands.

**Special music/sound effects will be played during defined moments as stated below.**

### TERROR MOMENTS

1. Appearance of one or more than one Nightmare in a level
2. Killed by a Nightmare
3. Phantoms appearing in cleared levels

### EPIC MOMENTS

1. Earning a medal from Dream Walker
2. Discovering a secret level.
3. Defeating a Nightmare.

### POTENTIAL COMPOSERS

Jim Guthrie – Below (2018) by Capybara Games

Berlinist – Gris (2018) by Nomada Studios

Dahlia's Tear

Creation VI

## 6. TECH

The game will have 3 most challenging technical aspects:

1. **Shaders** for the ever changing landscape and creating the overall 'dreamy look'.
2. **Procedural levels** that change based on player dialogue choices.
3. **AI for the Nightmares**, since they'll have to be stored separately to deploy later in a level and will gain attributes based on the player's abilities used in the previous encounter.

### PLATFORMS

PC / PS4 / Xbox one / Nintendo Switch

### ENGINE

The game will be made in Unity 3D (due to its flexibility in types of games made and coded)

### SOFTWARE

Houdini - Procedural levels

Blender - 3D assets/Rigging/Animation (will make up for Houdini's expenses)

Photoshop - Texturing

## 7. MARKETING

### PUBLISHER

Try publishing deals with Annapurna Interactive, Raw Fury, and Chucklefish etc.

### PROMO

YouTube - Devlog and major updates

Discord - Growing community for fan base

Twitter - Smaller updates and professional exposure/feature to other Indie devs.

Kickstarter – If short on funds, can be an option after making a demo of one Dream Layer.

Steam/Itch.io - releasing a free demo to gain player feedback and early fans.

### **STEAM & ITCH.IO - FINAL RESLEASE**

### MONETIZATION

Base game cost - 30\$

Additional Dream Layers & Nightmares - DLCs (free & paid)

### PLAYER DEMOGRAPHY

Age: 11+ (there is no blood & gore, only Beat 'em up style action)

Sex: Both

Player base: Fans of old school isometric combat, like God of War with high stakes and branching choices, like in RPGs