**Zone Rouge**

A Video Game Design by Mike Pynn

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**Game Logline and Treatment**

**Logline:**

An 8-year-old boy living near the front lines of World War I faces his fears of death and war in his nightmares.

**Game type:**

Third person, open-world, psychological thriller, drama. Downloadable title.

**Characters:**

Porter Bertrand(Avatar) – An 8-year-old boy from a small village in France. He doesn’t say much outside of cut scene dialogue. He mostly gives reactions to being injured. He sounds close to terrified in his dreams, and when he’s hurt, the sound evokes sympathy. During the day, he sounds reserved and worried.

Marie Bertrand (NPC) – Porter’s mother. She has joined the effort to supply the war by sewing and cooking for the soldiers moving in to the area around a nearby fort. She adores Porter, but is sad and distant with anyone but her children.

Rainier Bertrand(NPC) – Porter’s father. He left the family to join the army once war broke out. The family hasn’t heard from him in a year. He’s uncomfortable with violence.

Marianne Bertrand(NPC) – Porter’s 5-year-old sister. She adores Porter and follows him around the village when she can. Porter feels the need to protect her.

Soldiers (NPC) – The many figures with which Porter interacts in the village as well as in his dreams. They provide the mission structures for each level.

**Synopsis:**

In the Northeast corner of France, there are vast areas covered by planted forests. The hills have pits and pockets that you won’t find on similar hills not far away. The landscape has been drastically altered and silenced by human conflict.

100 years ago, though, the scene was very different. These forests were once small villages. People lived at the edges of two powerful nations and found themselves, their homes, and their whole lives destroyed by the Battle of Verdun in World War I. The ruins were declared “Zone Rouge” because gas, shell, and human remains contaminated the land. These villages died, and their populations are now officially zero.

*Zone Rouge* takes us to one such village and walks us through the horrible transformation of the land and people who lived on it. Unlike most games about war, however, this will show us horror and spectacle through the eyes of a non-combatant child. This game is not about the sport of war, but the impact war has on families, communities, and people of all ages.

Porter Bertrand is an eight year-old boy who lives in a tiny village called Fleurimont, which is set among the hills around Fort Dauomont. His family owns a farm on the edge of town where he used to spend his days working with his father and playing on the land. Unfortunately, events much larger than any he might control disrupt his peaceful existence.

Strained systems of alliances and animosity made a powder keg of the greater European continent. World War I began, and it was by far the most costly conflict these people had ever known. Porter’s father, Rainier, joins the military as soon as the fighting breaks out. Now Porter, his mother, and his younger sister struggle with his absence with only correspondence to soothe them.

This is where and when the game begins. Players take control of Porter Bertand as he assumes an uninvited and daunting maturation. With his father’s departure come terrible, vivid nightmares that show Porter the horror of battle.

Rainier’s letters stop coming, and worry grips the household.

All the while, the village around Porter fills with soldiers, supplies, and the machinery of war. The dusty main road is crowded with crates and men, some who cause trouble and some who don’t. Some of them return from the front, others prepare to move forward. During his waking hours, Porter explores the awkwardly populated town, observes soldiers ‘ preparations for and recovery from battle, and seeks information about the war and his father.

When night falls on Fleurimont, Porter experiences a very different side of the war. He is tortured by nightmares that reflect the horrible things he’s overheard in town and his own fear for his father. He is trapped among the trenches and craters of Verdun’s hellish battlefield in these dreams, a prisoner of the violent night. Wounded soldiers cry out for help, and Porter wills himself to assist them.

These are the two distinct worlds in the game: Fleurimont, the peaceful village that becomes each day more important to the arms buildup, and Porter’s nightmares on the cratered, gas-ridden, and splintered landscapes of the battlefields nearby.

As the game progresses, Porter learns about the conflict and the men who fight. He speaks with weathered soldiers and proud recruits. He sees the casualties brought into town, he sees the strain put on his mother, and he recognizes wounded men. He finds himself in complicated situations, making moral decisions that will affect the outcome of the game. He makes enemies and friends of soldiers and civilians. The front lines creep closer.

In each nightmare, Porter sometimes encounters his father. Each of these scenes teaches Porter a new way to cope, to survive, and to comprehend what he sees happening around him. Sometimes he sees things that convince his father will return safely. Sometimes he sees things that convince him hope is lost.

Once the front lines reach an unsafe distance from the village, everyone recognizes the need to evacuate civilians. Porter makes preparations with the villagers, helps his sister cope with the sudden change, and proves himself worthy as a functional leader in the family. Arriving at this maturity, Porter goes to bed to face his nightmares a last time.

At the game’s conclusion, Porter’s father returns to wake him from the final nightmare. The evacuation of Fleurimont has waited too long, and German artillery shells are landing in the area. The villagers and soldiers seek shelter within buildings and cellars. The Bertrands don’t have a cellar and need to reach one on the far side of the village. Porter’s father received wounds in battle and needs help, so Porter must guide the family to safety. This sequence’s finale is a wrenching display of love and sacrifice that will hopefully do justice to the magnitude of loss that these villages represent.

*Zone Rouge* is a dark game. It’s an interactive war drama designed to confront the audience with stark moral contrasts and demonstrations of human cruelty, weakness, and strength. It’s designed to provide an experience that’s as interesting as it is entertaining, rich, culturally literate, and visually arresting. It has moments that resemble horror games and sections devoted to deep emotional experiences.

Despite using a child as the protagonist and primary character, this game will appeal primarily to an educated, adult audience. The two worlds of the game are populated with developed characters and allusions to familiar iconography of the period. The game invites meta-collection and exploration activities, which further enrich the experience.

**World:**

*Zone Rouge* is set during World War I in and around a semi-fictional version of the battle of Verdun. Porter Bertrand lives in a small village in the northeast of France. The front lines come ever closer to the village as the game goes on, and the NPC behavior, clothing, and dialogue reflect the increasingly dire circumstances.

There are primarily two different kinds of game environments at work: daytime, waking life and Porter’s nightmare battlefields.

During the daytime scenes, the game takes place in the village of Fleurimont. It’s an open-world town with lines of soldiers and supplies weaving through its dusty roads. Porter can perform tasks for the soldiers that will earn him information about his father. Additionally, these interactions will inform the player’s choices when Porter reaches the alternate environment (his dreams). The NPCs in the town will be overwhelmingly military, but there will also be some other civilians. No matter what kind of characters Porter sees, though, they all become more desperate and afraid as the game progresses. The wounded return in much greater numbers as time goes on, as do the dead.

When Porter has completed the required tasks in the village, the day ends and he goes to sleep. This transition is handled with a combination of player-controlled and cut scenes.

All cut scenes are rendered in-engine and in a way that resembles game play so that the player can be surprised when control is returned.

The environment for Porter’s dreams is the battlefield around the nearby fort, which is modeled after Fort Douamont. He crawls and runs through the trenches, no man’s land, and foxholes of the front lines just miles away from his actual home. These are also open-world areas. Unlike in the village scenes, however, the geography of his dreams changes for every level.

Porter never fights; he only evades and interacts with environmental puzzles. When he is killed, the player doesn’t lose progress, but must continue his fight for survival on the battlefield. The permanence of the player’s actions will add to the gravity and importance of each encounter.

The dream-world ground consists almost entirely of upturned dirt and piles of smoking ruin. Trees are bent over, there are massive craters from artillery fire, and both armies shoot almost anything that moves. Porter has to find stealthy ways to evade danger to move about the levels. Environmental dangers include machine gun nests, gas attacks, artillery barrages, and infantry charges. As soldiers die around him, their suffering is audible and the usual video-game-glory of war is completely absent. This war is terrifying, not exhilarating.

As he goes, Porter encounters desperate soldiers. Unlike the ones in the daytime village, however, these soldiers are either badly wounded or in severe danger. It is up to Porter to solve an environmental puzzle or navigate a section of the battlefield within a time limit. These interactions will sometimes include moral choices, which will impact the game’s eventual conclusion.

If the player fails to competently perform the task required, Porter and the other soldiers will be killed. Porter will respawn, but those soldiers will remain dead. Once these scenes end, Porter will face an emotional reality of the war that will either reinforce or damage his hopes for Rainier’s safe return.

After he wakes, Porter begins the next day, moving ever closer to the game’s emotional conclusion.

**Mechanics:**

A third-person action/platformer, *Zone Rouge* will rely on evocative art, dialogue, voice acting, and level design to develop its anti-war theme.

The concept blends open world environments with a more traditional, linear level format by using adjusted, evolving, open-world versions of both battlefields and the village of Fleurimont. Once Porter completes enough activities, he goes to bed and experiences a unique nightmare level with its own geography. When he wakes, Fleurimont is not entirely the same place it was before he slept. There are more soldiers, wounded men, coffins, and supplies crowding the streets. The activities available to him change, too. However, the geography and landmarks remain the same.

The most important requirement for the mechanics of the game is that they must not contradict the narrative. In particular, it’s crucial that Porter Bertrand’s movement, activity, and engagement with the environment be peaceful. Otherwise, a dissonance will sink the thematic effort.

A way to manage that feat might include three basic kinds of missions or activities: stealth, environmental puzzles, and evasion. Porter sneaks through both the town and the trenches to accomplish his goals. He may find obstacles in his way that are negotiable by pushing, pulling, or climbing. Variety in these activities comes in the split between the daytime world and the nightmare world.

Failure on a given activity during the daytime results in continuous repeat attempts or a branches in narrative. Failure during the nightmares, however, results in Porter’s harm or death, which would force him to begin the nightmare again, or go back to a checkpoint. This is likely to occur frequently, because the nightmare sequences should be distinctively more difficult than the daytime levels. The primary differences between failures in the two worlds are that Porter’s nightmares place him in physical danger and that his success or failure there will determine the survival of other characters, as well. The daytime scenes offer much less stressful consequences. These levels feature activities that will help Porter learn more about his father’s fate, so his success or failure provides mostly narrative consequences.

There will be a variety of obstacles to Porter’s success during the nightmare scenes. The first nightmare features machine gun fire, barbed wire to be crawled through, and a frantic series infantry charges.

The second nightmare focuses on the use of artillery, which inflicts the heaviest casualties on both sides. Porter’s job will consist mostly of crawling safely through the falling shells and reaching cover safely.

In the third nightmare, the dreaded gas attack turns the battlefield a sickly, fatal green. Porter’s tasks focus on the acquisition of gas masks from fallen soldiers before the creeping wall of gas reaches him and the soldier he tries to save.

In the final sequence, when Porter’s father asks him to lead the family to safety, the mechanics of the two worlds become one. The town is attacked just before dawn, so the sky doesn’t accurately mirror either the daytime or nightmare levels. The violence of the night will surround them as soldiers and civilians flee the falling shells and seek cover. The houses and other buildings along the main road will crumble or burst as the shells land nearby.

What’s most important thing to remember is that Porter should never wield a weapon at any point in the game. This is a game about the horror and misery of war, not one to glorify it or those who wage it. There have been plenty of games to serve those purposes.

Porter’s movements and appearance should reinforce the idea that he is a victim. Even when he saves wounded soldiers in his dreams or accomplishes a goal in waking life, he shouldn’t appear triumphant. He always remembers the ugly truth about his situation, and his fear for his father’s life is completely consuming.**Story Outline**

**Chapter 1:** *The Injured Colt*

(Played Scene – Dream Fleurimont Prewar – Early Morning)

Porter Bertrand is dreaming. He’s walking through moonlit green fields. The credits appear as he walks through the tall grass on the hill overlooking the village. Smoke appears on the horizon, but Porter won’t run if commanded. He just walks to where the player tells him. It’s impossible to reach the source of the smoke before the dream ends.

(Cut Scene – Postwar Fleurimont – Evening)

We float just over the top of a young forest, which grows around the few remaining landmarks of the town. We float into a path cutting through the trees and rest on a white sign. It reads, “Fleurimont – Village morts pour la France.” The forest fades and becomes road into prewar Fleurimont. We follow the road to the Bertrand house and through the window. Porter Bertrand stands in the doorway to the kitchen and cries while his mother, Marie, collects dishes.

She tells him that his father is waiting for him outside, and that he should go so that his father can come in and have some dinner.

(Played Scene – Bertrand House – Continuous)

Porter can explore the house for a moment, but his goal is to walk out the front door, onto the farm where his father waits.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand Farm – Evening)

Porter sees a neighbor boy holding a gun, and tries to get his father, Rainier, to spare his favorite horse. Rainier restrains Porter and asks him if he’d rather not see it done. Porter refuses to leave, but doesn’t watch the when neighbor boy pulls the trigger.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand House – Night)

Porter sleeps in his bed while his parents talk in the kitchen. They discuss the war breaking out Rainier joining the military. Marie is opposed, but Rainier refuses to budge. Porter tosses in his sleep. Marie points out that Rainier couldn’t even kill the horse himself, which offends him.

(Played/Cut Scene – Porter’s Dream Bedroom – Continuous)

This scene offers limited player control. We see porter as he lies on his side. There is a dripping sound. Porter opens his eyes, and the player turns him over. The camera pulls out to reveal the horse standing across the room. Blood drips from its head. Porter cries, and whatever the player does, Porter moves slowly into the corner of his bed on the player’s command. When he reaches the corner, the horse lies down.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand Farm – Continuous)

We cut to Porter tossing in his sleep. We pan up to the window, through which we see Rainier walking in the dark.

We cut to him and see that he carries a large knife. He walks to the pigpen, delays by pacing, and finally murders a pig in the shadows. He emerges covered in blood.

**Chapter 2:** *A Soldier’s Son*

(Played Scene – Bertrand House – Morning)

Porter stands in the kitchen, where his mother and sister, Marianne, sit looking over a torn dress of Marianne’s. His mother asks him if he’ll fetch a spool of thread that she left at the inn.

(Played Scene –Fleurimont – Continuous)

Porter runs outside and up the road, which looks different from the way it did in the opening scenes. There are occasional boxes or trucks in the road. A military presence is now clearly visible.

Porter reaches the inn and speaks to an officer about what’s happening in town. The officer explains that Porter’s mother and other women use the inn for sewing and repairing uniforms and other materials for the war effort. Porter asks about his father, but the officer knows nothing. The officer lets Porter into the sewing area.

Porter must find the missing spool, which requires that he navigate boxes of cloth, doors on cabinets, etc. Finding it, he returns home.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand Farm/House – Afternoon)

Porter approaches the house and sees a letter in the mailbox. He picks it up and runs inside obviously excited. HE drops the spool on the table and hands his mother the letter, which is from Rainier.

(Cut Scene Sequence – Bertrand Farm, Military Camp, Etc. – Various Times)

Marie reads the letter to her children. This becomes a sequence of letters, read as one, across several scenes. See the cut scenes script for complete contents.

At the end of the sequence, Marie sends the children to bed.

**Chapter 3:** *The Mincer*

(Cut Scene – Porter’s Bedroom – Night)

We float above Porter as he turns and tosses in his sleep. Smoke fills the room, we float down toward the bed, and the smoke obscures all view.

(Played Scene – Dream Battlefield – Night)

This is the first major nightmare scene.

The smoke clears, and Porter is standing, shaking, in a darkened trench. The sky is filled with thick smoke, and a thin fog covers the ground. There is debris everywhere. We hear the sound of a wounded man crying out for help. Each time he screams, Porter yells back to ask where he is, but gets no useful response. The sounds of agony are wrenching.

Porter must navigate the trench to find a way up and out, into no man’s land. Once out of the trench, he will find the wounded man among many dead bodies and muddy craters. The following level and interactions are described in the companion file “Branching Dialogue 1.”

**Chapter 4:** *Letters*

(Played Scene – Fleurimont – Day)

Porter walks out of his front door and out to the street. He notices as he passes that there isn’t any mail in the box. He explores the town, which has become much more crowded with trucks, boxes, and even soldiers. The player is free to explore, and comes across the following three NPCs, who offer missions:

1. An artillery spotter

* His mission requires Porter to find a fresh pair of glasses, because his are broken. Upon completion of the mission, Porter will ask the spotter how dangerous the job is. The spotter answers that it’s safer than being with the infantry. (No Cut Scene)

1. A wounded infantryman

* This man cannot hear. He needs Porter to bring him pencil and paper so that people can write to him instead of speaking. (Cut Scene Begins) Upon completion of the mission, Porter writes on the paper: “My father stopped writing letters.” The infantryman shakes his head. (Cut Scene Ends)

1. A neighbor

* The neighbor is the father of the boy who shot Porter’s horse. He cannot find his son and needs Porter to help him by searching. Porter finds the boy behind the inn with several new soldiers, who wear fresh, baby blue uniforms. The soldiers are talking to the boy about joining the fight. They let him hold their guns. (Cut Scene Begins) Porter returns to the neighbor to report what he found. The neighbor grumble about getting his son away from the front, thanks Porter, and goes to collect his child. (Cut Scene Ends)

Once all of those missions are complete, the sun begins to set. Porter must return home.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand Farm – Evening)

Porter stops at the mailbox, but finds no letter from his father. He sighs, lowers his head, and walks inside.

**Chapter 5:** *The Good Doctor*

(Played Scene – Dream Battlefield 2 – Night)

This is the second major nightmare scene.

It begins like the first, in a trench. However, there is no soldier crying out for help. Instead, a stoic medic keeps a watchful eye over the top and into no man’s land. The following level and interactions are described in the companion file “Branching Dialogue 2.”

**Chapter 6:** *Shaking, Breaking, Taking No Breath*

(Cut Scene – Fleurimont – Day)

Porter walks out of his house and down the road toward the inn. The town is completely overrun by the military presence. The new units prepare to leave, and the old ones stream in on trucks and in lines.

Porter walks up to the inn, where an officer directs the incoming traffic from both directions. Porter sheepishly asks about the influx of men, which leads to his learning that casualties are very high. Finally, the officer reveals that the town’s civilians will be evacuated in the morning. Porter will need to inform his family.

(Played Scene – Fleurimont – Continuous)

Porter walks along the road. The soldiers pass through town. Their conversations reveal the hell they’ve been through, and some of them sit against walls or the fences along the way.

The player can explore this area for as long as they choose. The goal on the HUD will be a group of soldiers waiting to enter town. When he reaches them the following cut scene begins.

(Cut Scene – Fleurimont – Continuous)

Porter is shocked to see two soldiers helping a third, the third shaking violently. He can barely walk. Porter asks what happened to him, and the soldiers explain that it’s a bad case of shell shock. Porter makes a mistake in suggesting that he can understand why it would do this, and the soldiers take offense. Porter apologizes and stifles the urge to cry. The soldiers carry on.

(Played Scene – Fleurimont – Continuous)

Porter runs home, sounding as if he’s trying not to cry. The sun is setting. The soldiers long the road are stopping and setting up places to sleep. When he reaches his home, the following cut scene begins.

(Cut Scene – Bertrand Home – Continuous)

Porter stops at the mailbox, where there is again no letter. He walks into the house and directly to his mother. She interrupts him before he can speak, telling him that they’ll be leaving in the morning, and that he should get some sleep.

**Chapter 7:** *The Enemy*

[Played Scene – Dream Battlefield 3 – Night]

This is the third nightmare scene.

This is a shorter nightmare designed as the major moral decision point for the player. Porter finds himself in a trench without a clear purpose. The following level and interactions are described in the companion file “Branching Dialogue 3.”

**Chapter 8**: *The Creeping Death*

(Played Scene – Dream Battlefield 4 – Night)

This is the fourth and final major nightmare scene.

This dream, like the first, requires that Porter find his way out of the trench. This time, though, he calls out for his father periodically. He does this whether still in the trench or over the top in no man’s land. He finds a wounded soldier at the edge of a crater. The following level and interactions are described in the companion file “Branching Dialogue 4.”

**Chapter 9:** *The Veteran*

(Cut Scene – Porter’s Bedroom – Continuous)

Porter wakes to his father shaking him. Rainier’s clothing is tattered and filthy, and his face is gaunt. Porter bolts upright and hugs his father.

Rainier explains that the attack has come sooner than expected. The family must reach the inn’s cellar before the bombardment reaches the town. Porter gets up and meets the rest of his family at the front door. His father gives some directions. He asks Porter to lead the family, because his leg is wounded and he cannot. Marie opens the door.

(Played Scene – Fleurimont – Continuous)

As soon as the door opens, a shell lands outside. The bombardment has reached the town. Rainier yells for Porter to run, and the family sets off.

Porter leads them through the fiery streets as shell land around the town. Plumes of earth launch up, debris flies through the air, and people scream for mercy. Their path leads them around obstacle, through houses, and past the corpses of soldiers and civilians alike.

They eventually reach the inn’s cellar, where several other families also hide. When they arrive, the player’s moral decisions throughout the game are weighed, and one of two endings begins.

[MORAL ENDING]

(Cut Scene – Inn Cellar – Early Morning)

Porter and the rest of the family tumble into the cellar. They spend a few moments checking on each other. The sounds of the barrage continue outside, and dirt falls through cracks in the ceiling.

Porter checks on his father and discovers a wound on the side of his head. Rainier dies in Porter’s arms. We transition to the final scene, which is narrated by **Porter**.

[IMMORAL ENDING]

(Cut Scene – Inn Cellar – Early Morning)

Porter and the rest of the family tumble into the cellar. They spend a few moments checking on each other. The sounds of the barrage continue outside, and dirt falls through cracks in the ceiling.

Rainier checks on Porter, and finds a wound on the back of his head. Porter dies in his father’s arms. We transition to the final cut scene, which is narrated by **Rainier**.

**Chapter 10:** *Zone Rouge*

(Cut Scene – Postwar Fleurimont – Early Morning)

This scene is narrated by either Porter or Rainier, which depends upon what ending the player saw.

We float over the top of the trees, following the same path from the cut scene earlier in the game. The character narrates by explaining what became of the villages that died for France, why they can no longer be inhabited, and how they serve as monuments to the wasteful blight of war.

[Credits Roll]

(Playable Scene – The Douaumont Ossuary – Night)

The character that narrated the final cut scene is standing in a long room made of stone. In alcoves along the sides sit piles of bones. The character cries softly throughout the scene.

The player can explore the ossuary, picking up maps that identify collectibles for all of the previous levels. These maps are buried in the piles of bones. After the player retrieves all maps, the scene fades to black, and the title screen appears.**Character, Item, and Location Descriptions**

**Character Description:** **Porter Bertrand**

The main character is an eight-year-old boy named Porter Bertrand. He lives near the front lines of World War I in Northeastern France. He’s afraid and feels helpless because his situation is desperate and hopeless. His father is in the army, and his family hasn’t heard word of him for a long time. His own situation is heartbreaking, to be sure. However, Porter’s value to the story is that of a model. He serves to highlight the civilian suffering of total war, and he is a sacrificial figure who represents the villages that were declared “Zone Rouge” after the battle of Verdun.

To understand what kind of character Porter is, you first have to understand the world around him. It’s a bleak existence. The French countryside, usually pastoral and serene, is occupied by the mechanisms and machinations of war. Because it’s WWI, the armies still rely on horses when they can’t use rail transport, so the streams of soldiers moving through town leave filth, manure, and trash as they pass. Artillery landing on the lines several miles away can be heard throughout the night, possessing the thoughts of all within earshot. His family’s farm has faded to near-ruin in his father’s absence. Porter spends most of his days without his mother, who works as a seamstress assisting the war effort.

These are serious circumstances for such a young boy. As you might expect, Porter’s fear is the central aspect of his existence. He fears, first and foremost, that his father has been killed or hurt and that there’s nothing he can do about it.

As the front lines creep closer, though, his fear for his safety and that of his family become more immediate. His family, in the same way that Porter is a symbol for the civilian casualty to war, is a symbol for the strain placed on a home by such events. The father is deployed; the mother is working herself sick and grieving a husband she presumes is dead. The children are left without proper care and their fear tortures them.

Porter is a completely innocent civilian, having never felt a violent or hateful urge in his short life; he is a victim of the purest kind. He’s too young to understand the war or the reasons for it. He only knows that his father is gone, the people in the village are increasingly hopeless, and that if the reality is anything like his nightmares, war is the most horrible thing ever to occur.

Porter’s fear manifests itself through those nightmares. During the day, when he’s the closest thing to a man in the house, he tries to maintain a confident, optimistic manner. His suffering mother and young sister benefit greatly from Porter’s attitude, whether any of them realize it or not. All of that changes, though, when Porter goes to sleep.

Porter started having nightmares after his first encounter with death. A horse on the family farm, and one of which he had grown very fond, died as Porter watched. It was a gruesome thing for anyone to behold, let alone a child. That night he dreamed that the horse, his former friend, stood beside his bed. The horse never moved, nor neighed, nor even huffed or stomped. He bled, motionless. Porter heard the dripping of the beast’s blood on his wooden floor, but just lay perfectly still in his bed. He stared at the other wall and cried until he woke and found it had been a dream.

Porter experienced other nightmares after this one, though they never had any themes or ideas in common. They were distinct experiences shaped by whatever he had seen during the day. However, once the war began and the front lines began to tiptoe their way toward and away from his village, the nightmares became regular and shared a very specific theme. This is where the game begins, and those experiences constitute much of the story.

He dreams of the soldiers he meets as he explores his village. They are always in transit to the front, and sometimes they need his helps fetching something or delivering a message. Porter likes meeting them because it gives him a chance to ask about his father. Unfortunately, the news isn’t often good.  
 When he falls asleep, the soldiers he met during the day play parts in his war-fueled nightmares. He finds himself trapped in the trenches and bunkers near the frontlines, and his new acquaintances are strewn about. They are wounded or trapped; they need his help to survive. Sometimes Porter manages to save them. Sometimes he doesn’t. Regardless of the outcome of his attempts, the whole experience is tortuous and emotionally exhausting. Those feelings intensify at the end of each dream, though, when his father appears to him.

In his dreams, Porter’s father saves him and always delivers him from terror of war to the safety waking life. His father is his rescuer when the nightmares become too awful. Porter’s transformation comes when those two worlds are flipped on their heads. His waking life adopts the horrible nature of his nightmares, and his father becomes a victim in need of rescuing by Porter. This forces his transformation into a less fearful, more capable servant to his family and their safety. He evolves from a child who desperately seeks protection into a young man stronger than his own fears.

At the end of the story, Porter’s fate is decided by the actions of the player. Either he or his father will be killed when the front lines finally reach his village. Which dies is irrelevant to the message of the story, since Porter’s suffering is made real through his nightmares. He is a casualty whether he survives the bombardment or not. The war took his innocence, his happiness, and his freedom to live without fear. It twisted his imagination into a hell of awful realizations and horror. The fighting destroys a young boy, completely pure and free of malice. That’s who Porter is and why he’s my protagonist.

**Character Description: Rainier Bertrand**

Rainer Bertrand is also the son of a soldier. His father, unlike Porter’s, was a proud and distinguished warrior. He fought during the Franco-Prussian war, and was as nationalistic a Frenchman as you could find. These virtues are not present in Rainier’s personality, though. Rainier is born 14 years after his father’s military service, so he never learns to glorify it. The majority of what he understands about his father is that the man is stern, unforgiving, and frightening when Rainier makes mistakes.

Rainier is unlike his father in many ways. He’s self-sufficient and capable the way his father is, but that’s about all they share. Rainier finds his mother much more approachable and familiar. They share poetry that they like and work at the same chores on the farm until Rainier is old enough to do the hard work of farming. They are the best of friends, though his father never much likes that fact.

Pressure from his father pushes Rainier to become harder and less emotional. He never loses his tendency to internalize emotion or to connect with the world around him, but he speaks less as he grows older. He takes fewer walks and worries more about practical needs than fanciful ideas. These changes become immediately more pronounced when his father passes away.

Rainier inherits the farm, though his mother continues to live there. She is a matriarch to Rainier’s young family until her death about year after Rainier’s marriage. Rainier is young when he loses his parents. He’s in his early twenties and in charge of the farm, still newlywed and young enough to feel overwhelmed by it all. He’s not comfortable with what he sees as the more barbaric aspects of farm life, and seeks help from neighbors when he must. When an animal needs to be killed or branded, he recruits the son of a neighbor to come and do it for him.

He and his wife, Marie, have a child. It is a boy named Porter, and he is the focus of much love and affection. Rainier is determined to have a stronger relationship with his son than he had with his own father. In some ways, this is easy. Rainier’s father was much older than he is, and was hardened by battle and nationalistic vigor.

Just months after Porter is born, Marie’s parents are killed when their bakery in a nearby village burns to the ground. It’s a terrible accident, and one that changes Marie forever. Rainier suffers as he watches his wife become colder and more distant; she clearly doesn’t take loss lightly. Porter brings her great joy, though, and at times she is able to forget the pain of her loss when the whole family is together.

Their second child, a girl named Marianna, is born a few years later. She is another joy for the family, which experiences several happy years together. It is an idyllic setting and a fine place to raise a family.

However, that peaceful existence is short-lived. France returns to war with the outbreak of the Great War. The area around Verdun is near the border, so it’s impacted from the very beginning. The front lines are never very close, but the buildup of arms is visible form the beginning. Rainier is determined to stay with his family for as long as possible.

When the front lines move closer in, and the nearby fort becomes a target for the advancing Germans, Rainier feels inclined to join the army. He wants to protect his family, his farm, and his father’s beloved land. Unlike his father, though, Rainier is uncomfortable with the idea of violence. Having never killed anything more than a bug in his life, he isn’t sure he has the constitution to fight the way his father did.

After Marianna’s fifth birthday, when Rainier has made up his mind to join the army, he decides to test his fortitude. When the rest of the family is asleep, he creeps out to the farm and finds the weakest, unhealthiest pig he can. He takes it to his shed and stares at it for about an hour as he holds a knife of his father’s in his hand. The pig is unaware of what awaits him, and Rainier dreads the act. He slaughters the pig by stabbing it repeatedly with the knife, and by the end he is covered in the pig’s blood. He stays with the body for a while before cleaning it up and going to bed. To his dismay, the horrible act doesn’t leave him feeling any more prepared for battle. If anything he feels less prepared.

Rainier says his goodbyes to his wife and children before heading off to fight the war. None of them are happy to see him go, and were it not for the sense of duty his father instilled in him, he wouldn’t. He joins an infantry unit and moves out to the front just miles from his home and family. He writes them every day, though he sometimes has to send his letters all at once when he’s been long on the line.

He is unable to keep this practice up for very long, though. While his unit holds a portion of the line on the far side of the river, a German artillery barrage splinters the woods in which they are bunkered down. The overwhelming majority of his unit is killed or incapacitated. In what seems like a miracle, Rainier is unharmed. He is badly shell shocked, however, and the experience haunts him. He doesn’t even try to write home, because even thinking of his family sends him into fits or terrified weeping.

When the tattered remnants of his unit are pulled off of the line, the Germans have advanced almost to the edge of his village. He hears of plans to evacuate the village and, like many French soldiers did, deserts to find his family.

He arrives on his sad old farm just before the German barrage begins. He wakes his family and tries to get them to safety. His son, Porter, proves himself most effective in leading the terrified group to a bunker on the far side of the village. Either Rainier or Porter is killed in the barrage. Which survives is unimportant to the message of the story as the victimization of the whole family, and of all civilians in combat areas, is made clear whatever the outcome.

When the battle ends, the Bertrand’s farm is, like the rest of the village, uninhabitable. The shells, gas, and human remains have tainted the very soil and changed the topography completely. A forest is planted, and the area is declared to have “died for France.”

**Collectibles**

In each level, the player will have several opportunities to explore the landscape in search of collectibles. These items are tied to achievement/trophy rewards that are awarded in the standard, tiered fashion. When the player collects five, he/she will receive an achievement or trophy. With each set of five found thereafter, another achievement or trophy is unlocked. When all collectibles have been found, a final, substantial achievement or trophy is unlocked.

These collectibles are pages of poetry written by the famous warrior poets of World War I, Wilfred Owen and Siegfried Sassoon. While those two authors were not French, they wrote beautiful poetry about the horror and futility of war. They will underscore the game’s theme.

When the player collects a page of poetry, he/she will be able to access one poem from the works these two authors produced. Once selected from the menu, the poem appears on screen, handwritten on weathered paper. A voiceover will read the poem, with two separate voice actors portraying the authors. An achievement or trophy will also be tied to listening to each poem completely before closing it.

Since there are two authors, the rewards for finding these poems can also include author-specific achievements or trophies. For instance, for collecting each of Owen’s poems, an achievement or trophy called “Dulce Et Decorum Est” can be unlocked. **Location Description: The Bertrand Home**

The house Porter’s family lives in is set on a pastoral farmland surrounded by a tiny, quaint village. The house is made of bricks, but it’s been painted beige. It has wooden shingles on the roof, but some of them have been neglected since Rainier went to war.

The house is small with three bedrooms, a kitchen, and a living room. The walls are made of brown wood, and there isn’t much furniture. What’s there is thin and wooden with the distinct look of things that were handmade by the family or a neighbor. There are some painted portraits hanging in the living room, but the walls are mostly adorned with only sewn trinkets or shelves holding relevant household tools.

Porter’s bedroom is very small, consisting mostly of a bed and a wardrobe, which is always cracked open. Inside of the wardrobe, a couple of shirts similar to the one Porter wears have been hung up. There is a shelf on the wall with a toy truck that Rainier gave him as a gift some years ago. The sheets on the bed are always made perfectly. He has a window that looks out on the field outside.

Outside, there is a clothesline near the front porch and a dirt walkway from the front door out to the main road. At the end of the path, there’s a wooden gate with a metal latch. There are wooden fences all along the road to hold the dairy cows.

Out back there is a stable, which stands not far from a pig pen. There is also a chicken coup. As the game progresses, the livestock dwindle. Sometimes they die of disease, sometimes of starvation, and sometimes soldiers who want a fresh meal kill them. The family doesn’t have the time or resources to care for the farm, so it should fall into a general state of disrepair as the game goes on.

**Sample Level Descriptions**

**The Mincer:**

This is the first of Porter’s battlefield nightmares. The term “the mincer of Verdun” was a soldier’s way to describe the futile nature in which the men were fed into the battle, like meat into a processor. They felt like unimportant, replaceable bits of meat to be churned for the sake of the military’s distant, intangible goals.

This level reflects the wholesale slaughter of soldiers on both sides of the conflict. It consists primarily of two sections: the trench lines and no man’s land. The trenches hold an ankle-high layer of fog along the floor. Duckboard and planks of wood hold sections of tunnel up over the trench brace the walls against the pounding displacement of earth that occurs with each strike of ammunition.

Wounded, beleaguered soldiers line the sides of the trenches. Some lie still, either sleeping or killed, along the floor. Porter trembles as he walks through among them.

None of the NPCs on any of the battlefields acknowledge the strangeness of Porter’s presence. The dream-state should be obvious when the player looks at the sky, as well. It should look tumultuous beyond what would be a normal climatic event.

When Porter leaves the trench, several important features mark no man’s land. First, barbed wire serves as a primary obstacle and is strewn in lines across the field. Between the lines of wire, Porter finds craters, debris, and dead bodies. When Porter comes close to a dead body, his persistent whimper should rise to a sound closer to repressed weeping.

In this particular level, the distinctive occurrence that demonstrates the horror of war is the futile infantry charge. When one side or the other goes over the top, the crowd of men emerging is impressive. There is a darkened mass of men moving in Porter’s direction. When the men fall, their bodies stay on the field, not disappearing as they might in combat-oriented games. They become obstacles in Porter’s path.

As the charge reaches Porter’s position, the player’s movement is restricted and slowed significantly. Rumble effects in controllers are activated to simulate the feeling of being trampled.

**The Good Doctor:**

The second of Porter’s battlefield nightmares differs from the first in quite a few ways. First, the trench in which Porter spawns is significantly smaller. The men who populate it are far fewer, and the ones who remain are badly wounded or await burial.

The medic wears a push broom mustache and a deep, concentrated sadness. Once Porter begins the interaction with him, the rest of the level takes place in no man’s land.

No man’s land is also different in the second nightmare. The extensive barbed wire lines from the first nightmare are gone, with the exception of a few lines that have been mostly buried. Sections arch up out of craters and around debris, offering differently shaped obstacles in Porter’s path.

Instead of the barbed wire, craters are the dominating feature in this map. There are also unexploded shells that half-protrude from the earth, and should Porter come too close, the Medic will panic and scurry ahead before it explodes. If it explodes, Porter must crawl his way back to catch up with the medic, who waits for him.

Also different from the first nightmare is the way the fallen soldiers appear in no man’s land. In the first nightmare, charges and sweeping machine gun fire left their bodies in heaps and piles around the place. In this nightmare, however, they are dismembered, buried, and otherwise violently destroyed. It should be clear that the medic resents this fact as he approaches the bodies while he makes his progress across the field. There’s almost no one to save.

At the two outposts, the foxholes resemble the craters, and are clearly dug from craters. This should be obvious, giving the player the feeling that it’s perfectly likely that another shell could land in that spot. In the first outpost, the two dead soldiers emit smoke from their wounds, freshly killed by the last barrage.

**The Creeping Death:**

This is the final battlefield nightmare in the game. The thematic focus of the level is the gas attack. What’s important about that feature is the psychological effect it had on the soldiers. Though the gas in World War I was responsible for far fewer battlefield deaths than artillery or machine gun fire, it was a horrible way to die. The men who were affected were blinded, and the ones who died took days to do so. It’s a terrible fate, and that should be clear in the way the NPCs react to the attack.

The opening trench in this nightmare is more similar to the one in the second nightmare than the first. It’s short and effectively serves as a spawn point more than a narrative location.

In no man’s land, though, this level is distinct. The ground doesn’t have as many craters or barbed wire obstacles as in the other two nightmares. It’s marked by dead or dying soldiers who have been hit by a gas attack. They writhe, choke, and gurgle. Some of them extend hands to Porter as he passes, from which he recoils.

Once Porter puts on the mask, the player’s vision should be drastically impaired by fogged glass and limited peripheral vision. Though the games takes place in third-person, these effects should apply as though a gas mask was placed over the camera’s lens.