

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, LOS ANGELES

THE FORCE THAT BINDS US: A GAME ANTHOLOGY THESIS

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE DEGREE OF BACHELOR ARTS

BY
NICOLETTE BOND
ADVISOR: DANIEL SNELSON

LOS ANGELES, CA
25 APRIL 2025

ABSTRACT
 THE FORCE THAT BINDS US: A GAME ANTHOLOGY THESIS
 BY NICOLETTE BOND

The Force That Binds Us is a game in which players traverse the hyperspace of storytelling, reflecting the unique potential of diverse creative teams. Unlike passive media such as film or literature, games engage players' full bodily attention through active decision-making, requiring immersive storytelling across music, art, narrative, mechanics, and player agency. Throughout my time at UCLA, I have studied and practiced the group storytelling required to collaboratively construct imaginative game worlds. Each project is shaped by the distinct skills, interests, and backgrounds of its contributors. Framed as an intergalactic journey, players receive transmissions calling them to assist fleets across the universe, with each mission representing a different game project of mine from the past four years. Players access four games: *Moments in Mia's* (2022), *Fill in the Way []* (2023), *Upcast Blue* (2024), and *The Pirate King* (2025), alongside two comets symbolizing upcoming journeys: *Your Lola* (ongoing) and an internship at Lucasfilm Games. *Moments in Mia's* is a visual novel reflecting upon social effects and widespread grief of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Fill in the Way []* uses a Mad Libs-style mechanic to encourage players to subvert "home" as something biological through found families. *Upcast Blue* is an open-world game that intertwines fishing mechanics with a critique of colonial narratives. *The Pirate King* reimagines how a captured aristocrat can live a morally improved life as a pirate. *Your Lola* casts the player as an emotional support cat, revealing a narrative of loss, generational and ethnic divide, and a love beyond understanding.

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THE FORCE THAT BINDS US GAME GUIDE

(Warning: this section contains spoilers! Don't read if you'd like to first explore the game with your own deductive skills.)

1. Click on the menu of transceiver messages on the right-side of the console to play messages.
2. Use the messages to click buttons, levers, and coordinates and space travel to the planet sending the distress signal.
3. Click on the enemy entities surrounding the planet.
4. When the enemy count is at zero, the transceiver message on the transceiver will link to the corresponding game.

See the itch.io page for further instruction.

GAME INTRODUCTIONS

MOMENTS IN MIA'S

GENRE: 3D Visual Novel

TOOLS: Unity, Visual Studio, Blender, Google Suites, Discord

DESCRIPTION: When society was still learning how to navigate the ongoing pandemic, a new job at a local store creates an opportunity to learn more about the small community surrounding it. You, the player, will be able to discover the stories of your customers and your coworker as you stock shelves and sell items. From dealing with loss to navigating life's purpose, you can guide people through the perils that they face, often just by lending a helpful ear. All just in a few moments in Mia's.

THE CREW: Christian Romero (3D Character Artist and Writer), Kristen Campbell (Audio Designer/Implementer and Writer), Zachary Benn (Game Designer), Victor Zhou (Programmer and Game Designer), Rae Machado (Producer), Nicolette Bond (Lead Writer/Narrative Designer and Editor), SupriseOrbArt (3D Environment Artist and Production Assistant)

FILL IN THE WAY []

GENRE: 2D Visual Novel

TOOLS: Unity, Visual Studio, Procreate, Google Suites, Discord

DESCRIPTION: "Oh my, how common it is for humans to get lost in the life they're living. Come, I'll help you remember a place worth returning to." Why, hello there! Do you ever feel burdened by navigation applications, deciding to brew up trouble right

when you're headed home after a long day? Might I recommend you try Fill In The Way []! Led by a spiffy (and handsome) chap, it is guaranteed to lead you there on a much more... scenic and original... route than other methods on the market. We even throw a little self discovery in as a bonus! While building the journey is fun for anyone, this story is written especially for those who feel or have ever felt that they lack a place worthy of the word "home".

THE CREW: Alexander (Art/Animation), Nicolette [Writing (story, subtitles, & voice lines)/Design], Aubrey (Programmer), Calvin (Music/Sound, Voice Acting, & Editing)

UPCAST BLUE

GENRE: 3D Open World

TOOLS: Unity, Visual Studio, Autodesk Maya, Blender, Google Suites, Notion, Discord

DESCRIPTION: Enter a strange and colorful world with your journal and trusty fishing rod to reel up the secrets that lurk within. Upcast Blue is a 3D open-world RPG brainchild of UCLA students, designed with a distinctly cozy and mysterious atmosphere in mind. The game prioritizes a non-disruptive narrative that allows the player to choose to learn the history of the island instead of being subjected to it. Instead of following your goals blindly, the game gives you the choice of following or ending the tradition of colonization that has affected the cultures of the diverse biomes across this island. You deduct the effects of colonization and the biased yet dominant voice of the colonizer through an explorer's journal while also filling up your fisherman's log.

THE CREW: Maya Balakrishnan (2D & Concept Art Lead), Nicolette Bond (3D & Narrative Lead), Aubrey Clark (Programming Lead), Kenzie MacDougall (UI &

Production Lead), Anbu V (3D & Tech Art Lead), Schuyler Henry (Programming), Mark Zhang (Programming), Amy He (Programming), Preston Futaba (Programming), Kel Yu (Cutscenes & Concept Art), Trinh Ha (Concept Art), Sophia K (Narrative & Concept Art), Audrey Kim (Narrative & Concept Art), Derek Jiang (Concept Art), Harry Hinman (Narrative & Programming), Chechi Amah (UX), Anna Richardson (Concept Art), Cyrus (Music), Ellis B (Music), Eleanor Kinsella (3D), Michelle (3D), Evan (3D)

THE PIRATE KING

GENRE: 3D Adventure / Puzzle

TOOLS: Unity, Visual Studio, Autodesk Maya, Blender, Google Suites, Discord

DESCRIPTION: Arrr! There's nothing sweeter than tossing royal snot off the plank, but my crew needs some healing witchery from this ol' doctor book and only you damn royals can read. I've got an offer for ye. Forget the easy life and start a new one in service to me crew. Both our hands are bloody, but as a pirate, you'd be keeping good men alive. What do ya say? Can ya stomach a pirates life for yee? *The Pirate King* is a strategy, narrative-driven game where the player is a rising pirate on the high seas, a witch doctor who heals and transmutes their allies to better versions of themselves.

THE CREW: Nicolette Bond (3D Art, Design), Douglas Frattini (Programming, Design, Voice Acting, Sound Design), Justin (Programming, Design), Inkawat Athawibunwong (2D Art, Design)

ITCH.IO AND GAME LINKS

The Force That Binds Us: A Game Anthology Thesis

<https://nico007.itch.io/the-force-that-binds-us>

Moments in Mia's

<https://thatoneparadox.itch.io/moments-in-mias>

Fill in the Way []

<https://jabenero.itch.io/fill-in-the-way-home>

Upcast Blue

<https://ketexon.itch.io/upcast-blue>

The Pirate King

<https://nico007.itch.io/the-pirate-king>

Nicolette's itch.io game page with all created works

<https://nico007.itch.io>

Nicolette's portfolio website

<https://nicoletten007.wixsite.com/nicolettebond>

GAME DEVELOPMENT: MOMENTS IN MIA'S



Page about the process: <https://nicoletten007.wixsite.com/nicolettebond/other-games>

D	E	F	G	H
Speaker Name	Display Name	Speaker Expression	SFX	Speaker Dialogue
MC	Thinking			My favorite duo is back again! I wave at them, but they don't see it. They seem to be distracted by something important, so I let them do their own thing.
MC	Thinking		Bell Ringing	Drew pulls Stella into the store holding her hand, then takes out a list from his pocket. He tells Stella what they have to get, like a general giving orders to a soldier. Well, a soldier pulling off her mask to pick her boogers...
Drew	Drew	drewAngryCute		Stella! Put on your mask!
Stella	Stella	stellaNeutralHappyCute		But! It's itchy!! I don't wanna...
Drew	Drew	drewAngryCute		If you don't do it, I'll make you go on timeout!
MC	Thinking	drewAngryCute		We have a timeout in the store? And, can a kid give another kid a timeout?
Stella	Stella	drewNeutralHappy		Okay, sir!
MC	Thinking			Stella puts the mask back on, but it's crooked; then she salutes him. She wants so badly to make her brother proud. How cute!
Drew	Drew	drewAngryCute		Put your hand down! You're so embarrassing!
Stella	Stella	stellaNeutralHappyCute		Alrighty, sir! Doo Doo sir!
Drew	Drew	drewAngryCute		Stop giving me weird names!
MC	Thinking	drewAngryCute		He takes a deep breath, trying to calm himself down.
Drew	Drew	drewNeutralHappy		Just... Go get some eggs, okay?
Stella	Stella	stellaNeutralHappyCute		Okie dokie! Roger that!
MC	Thinking			She walks off, confident in her ability to perform her duties. Aww, I'm so proud.
MC	Thinking			After a few minutes of each of them getting their own items on the list, I hear a crash. Something crunches and rolls across the floor. Oh god, what happened?
Stella	Stella			Um... Doo Doo...? I need help...
MC	Thinking			Drew walks towards Stella's voice.

Dialogue Spreadsheet for scripting:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1YkUtRAFNnKn6uqAhf7TtBmSfn2FAvMOtD9t0-73A-AY/edit?usp=sharing>

Intro Monologue

MC (thinking)

Today, I'm starting my new job.

Once COVID-19 hit, I was one of the many who got laid off...
This new job is just a last resort, so I can pay back my
landlord, but -

I have hope.

That in this commonplace nine to five, there will be others.
Longing for someone to say hi or ask about their day. And, that
we can help each other move forward. Because...

There are riots in the streets. Voices I once heard everyday
only reach me while I'm plugged in. I miss the ones who never
answer. I miss the ones who can no longer answer...

I want there to be somewhere to go and someone to meet there. I
want to remember people's smiles, but will we ever take off our
masks?

When can I breathe easily again? When can I connect empty "I
love you's" or "I hate you's" to an emotion that cannot be
delivered?

I'm stuck in a world that is waiting for our old normal - to see
one another again - to hold each other. To mourn these past
months. Then maybe... Just maybe... recover.

But, I'm scared because we still keep getting older; and, I
don't want any more wasted time.

RAINA (cont.)

I know I was stupid. You think I didn't know that? I should have seen it coming. Lying in the trunk, a whore.

RAINA (cont.)

I was all alone...

Drew

(Drew starts to look uncomfortable all of a sudden.)

MC

What is it?

(Oh shoot... Maybe I shouldn't be talking about my mom in front of the kid. God, I'm so stupid.)

Drew

Well... I just think you should try harder to find her. Just... I know being close with your mom is... important. I would- I would want mine in my life again if I could.

MC

(The kid's really growing up. I smile.)

Since when did you become the adult giving such good advice?

Drew

Stella! Put on your mask!

Stella

But! It's itchy!! I don't wanna...

Drew

If you don't do it, I'll make you go on timeout!

(We have a timeout in the store? And,
can a kid give another kid a timeout?)

Stella

Okay, sir!

(Stella puts the mask back on, but it's
crooked; then she salutes him. She
wants so badly to make her brother
proud. How cute!)

Drew's Script:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1jCdSTMAXuLnNqsHX4W0D3QoxUHD_ZX1fO--LdnDj2JQ/edit?usp=sharing

Raina's Script:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gBK8wvdhvOysWINu7NUz8y9OgLBiKG6XO7WKBIZUD4A/edit?usp=sharing>

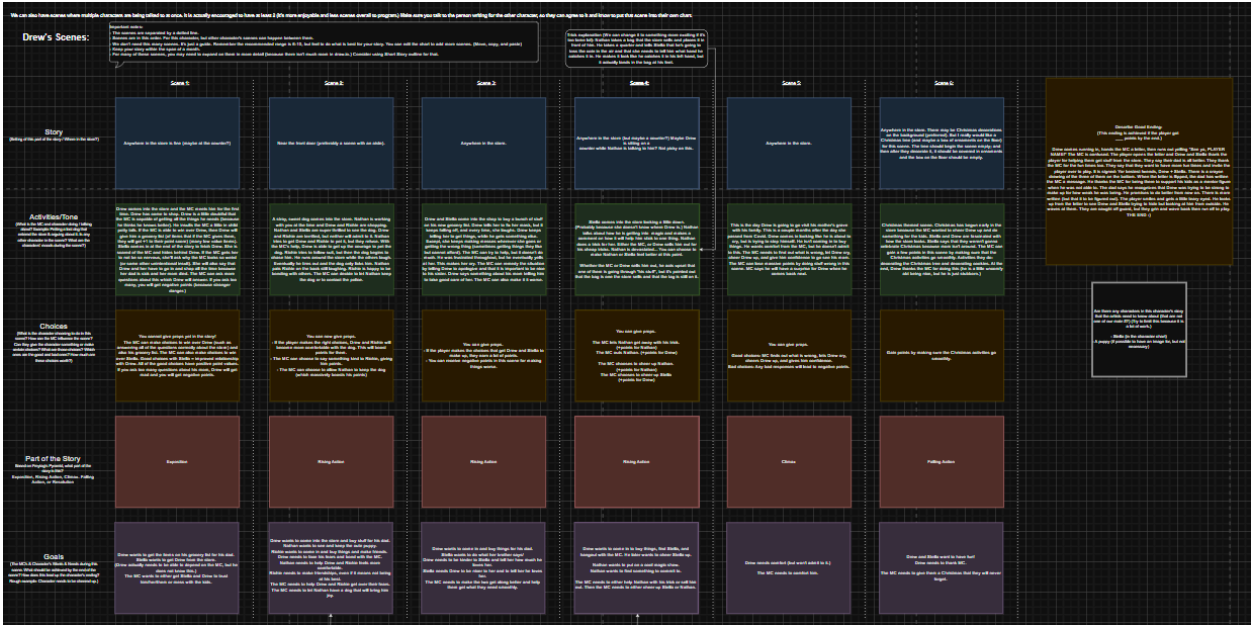
Intro & Closing Scripts:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1hIEr7rmquh4-95Xog8SGb4akgbnTp2Y-Xj_42e-RFog/edit?usp=sharing

[illegible]

Raina	
Wants	To get stuff from the store and get out, not draw any unwanted attention, stay safe, do her job, and just do what it takes to live in peace.
Needs	To learn how to trust again because her constant wariness is making it impossible for her to enjoy doing what she loves.
Problem they are facing / Theme of they're journey (Example: Isolation to Alliance)	A year ago, Raina was sexually assaulted after befriending a customer in the store. They met in the store and she let her guard down. During covid, she found herself alone since her friends were very cautious about social distancing. She was open to getting to know the man because she wanted to make friends. He seemed to like all the same things she did too. They hung out for a couple weeks and the employees would see her going in and out of the store with this man. She was very happy. Then, one night, he offered to give her a ride home & when they got there, he tried to make a move on her. After that experience, she has been just as kind, but she seems to be very quick to flee conversations. Their is a sadness behind her smile (not a real smile.) As the MC, you have to make her smile again & be comfortable with you, but she will resist. Bc she needs someone
Conflict b/t Want & Need	Her preference to flee keeps her from creating genuine connections with others.

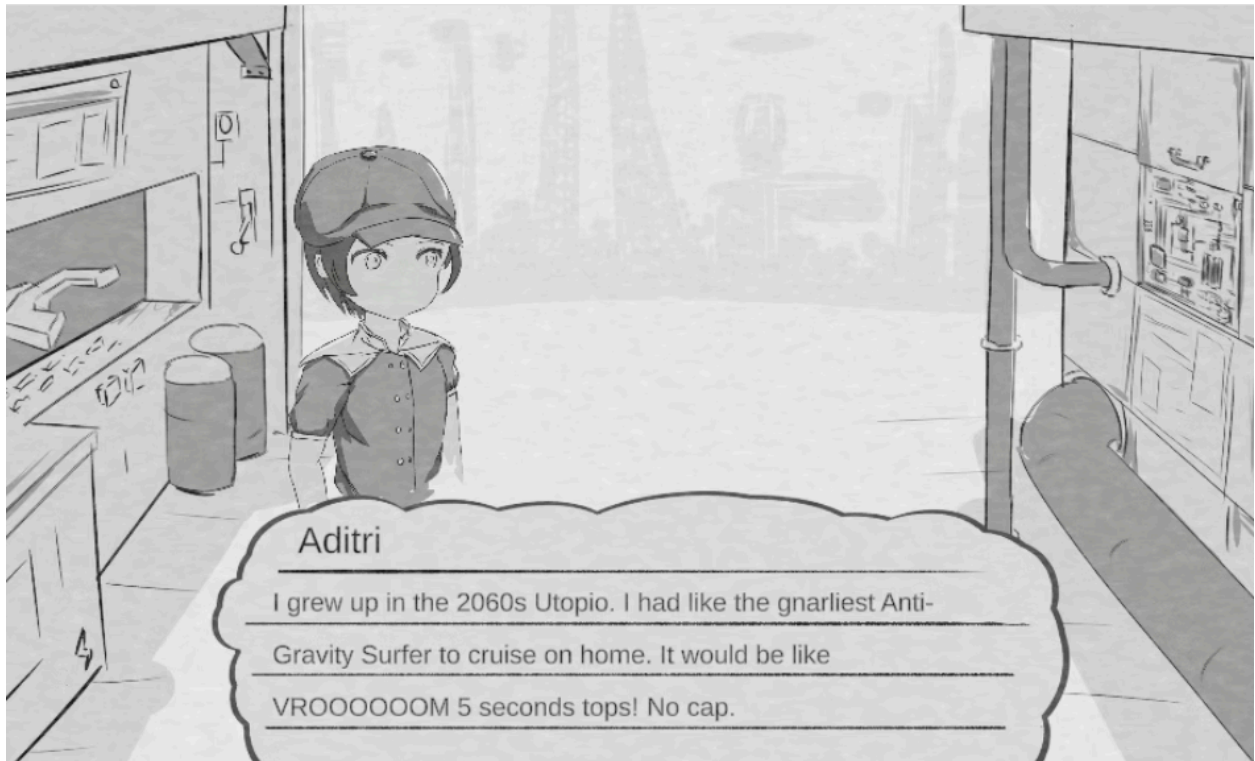
Drew	
Wants	To get items from the store to make his dad feel better, to be a good helper, who his dad can be proud of
Needs	To be a kid again & cry into his parents arms. He needs someone to lean on. He needs to allow himself to mourn & move on.
Problem they are facing / Theme of they're journey (Example: Isolation to Alliance)	His mother passed away a couple months ago from Covid. It's been hard on the whole family. His parents were very in love, so his dad has been very down ever since her death. Drew does everything to make him smile & make him get better (from covid.) Except, Drew needs to be sad in order to eventually be happy again. He is really distraught over losing his mom and afraid to lose his dad.
Conflict b/t Want & Need	He wants to be strong because he thinks that will make his dad happy, but needs to experience weakness to move on.
Personality Traits / Mannerisms	Good: Always smiling, very close to his little sister, kind, smart, independent, very confident Bad: Bossy (but it's kinda cute), he keeps things he's struggling with to himself, he doesn't let others help him, he's messy



Story Charts:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1Sa8pVM7NuXQCbf7Y5-2RNwDgNJ7sHTxq/view>

GAME DEVELOPMENT: FILL IN THE WAY []



Name of Madlibs: On The Way Home

character_name: My name is (typed answer, \$player_name). /dialogue-trigger/
 time_period: I grew up in (time period, \$time_period). /dialogue-&visual-&audio-trigger/
 memory_type: One memory stuck with me... I owe a lot of who I am today to this (adjective, \$memory_type) moment. /dialogue-trigger/
 friend_character: On my way home one day, along strolled a (character, \$friend_character)! /dialogue-&visual-trigger/
 stranded_verb: They needed my help! Of course, I helped them. I couldn't leave them stranded when they were (verb, \$stranded_verb). /dialogue-&visual-trigger/
 clothing: So, I decided to take off my (article of clothing, \$clothing). /dialogue-&visual-trigger/
 song: Together we sang (song, \$song)! /dialogue-&visual-&audio-trigger/
 time_type: The skies felt bluer. The birds chirped along. It was truly a (adjective, \$time_type) time. /dialogue-trigger/
 loud_sound: Suddenly, we were alerted to a (loud sound, \$loud_sound)! /dialogue-&audio-trigger/
 hideout: Grabbing everything we could, we ran to the nearest (location, \$hideout). /dialogue-&visual-trigger/
 sick: I didn't feel so good... As you can tell, I was kinda out of shape... /dialogue-trigger/
 colors: The world started spinning in (color, \$color1) and (color, \$color2) swirls... /dialogue-&visual-trigger/
 drink_type: Thank god, my new friend offered me a refreshing (drink, \$drink). /dialogue-trigger/
 cost: Actually, they had no money, so I had to pay (cost in USD, \$cost). /dialogue-trigger/
 employer: But I was broke, so I asked to be employed by a (character, \$employer) at a street stand. /dialogue-trigger/——
 excuse: My boss was chill, but the work was still tough, so I told them (excuse, \$excuse). /dialogue-trigger/
 home: Feeling tired from the long day, I invited my two friends home! Of course, we brought back souvenirs... /dialogue-&visual-trigger/

Word bank:

- ☐ Time Period: 1920s Britain, 2060s Utopia
- ☐ Character: Shark Out of Water, Pirate
- ☐ Adjective: sick, spicy
- ☐ Verb: sigh-yrating, gaming
- ☐ Article of Clothing: socks, wedding ring
- ☐ Song: Diggy Diggy Hole, Scarborough Fair
- ☐ Adjective: yummy, hilarious
- ☐ Loud Sound: booing, police sirens
- ☐ Location: military base, sports stadium
- ☐ Color: green, blue, pink, purple
- ☐ Drink: milk, unidentifiable liquid in a cup
- ☐ Cost in USD: \$0.01, \$1,000,000
- ☐ Character: Infomercial Robot, anthropomorphic duck girl
- ☐ Excuse: My entire being yearns for you!, I Have to pet the neighbor's cat!

	Shark	<p>“Flop, <u>flop</u><u>flop</u><u>flop</u> p, flop, flop, chomp chomp, <u>flooooooo</u> <u>ooooop</u>”</p>	<p>*flop sound effect*</p> <p>(pause)</p> <p>Excuse me one moment.</p> <p>(whispers angrily) I know it's in the script-</p> <p>But I don't think that'd be quite professional-</p> <p>Why not just play the sound one more time?</p> <p>Oh alright...</p> <p>(normal volume) *sighs*</p> <p><u>Flop</u><u>flop</u><u>flop</u>, flop, flop, chomp chomp, <u>floooooooooooooop</u></p>			23
Shar k Out of Wate	Shark	<p>Floppity, chomp chomp chomp. Flip flop. Floplopflo</p>	<p>(pause)</p> <p>No. You've got eyes. Just bloody read it yourself damnit.</p>			24

Script:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/11gw_87ristv1vD61qumBNx0-VeIUQQlwKY1XKI98tRc/edit?usp=sharing



GAME DEVELOPMENT: UPCAST BLUE

NARRATIVE DESIGN

DIFFERENT HISTORIES:

1. OF THE ISLAND (OVERSEEING FISH GOD)
2. OF COLONIZATION AND FACELESS PLAYER'S HERITAGE (JOURNAL)
3. OF 4 BIOME PEOPLES (1 IN DEMO - NONVERBAL/FISH WORSHIPPING)




NARRATIVE DESIGN

ENVIRONMENTAL STORYTELLING
+
INTRO / OUTSCENE & SCATTERED JOURNAL
ENTRIES
=
OPEN WORLD WITH
NON-DISRUPTIVE NARRATIVE






Game Narrative Structure:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/125XyutQaclkz5FNwGLy5CIgOXJYAaEQ1Cn5DJqCYVyI/edit?usp=sharing>

Game Journal Script:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1DcBdnVJG-e94pz5XaWeDCZzZUDdITDBp671h36NotM/edit?usp=sharing>

GAME DEVELOPMENT: THE PIRATE KING



The Pirate King

Introduction

Game Summary Pitch

The Pirate King is a strategy, narrative-driven game where the player is a rising pirate on the high seas, a witch doctor who heals and transmutes their allies to better versions of themselves.

Themes

Begin anew in story:

Previously, you were a rich, selfish king (morally evil)

Now, you are a pirate, healing people - gross menial task

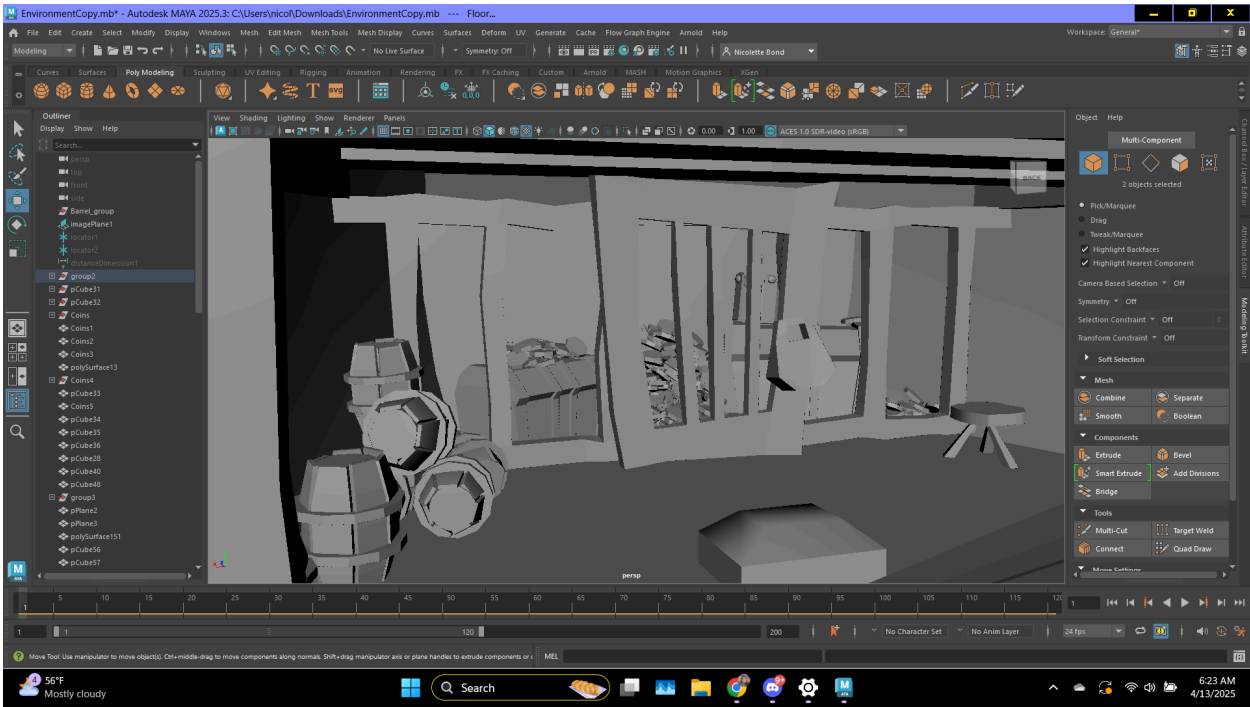
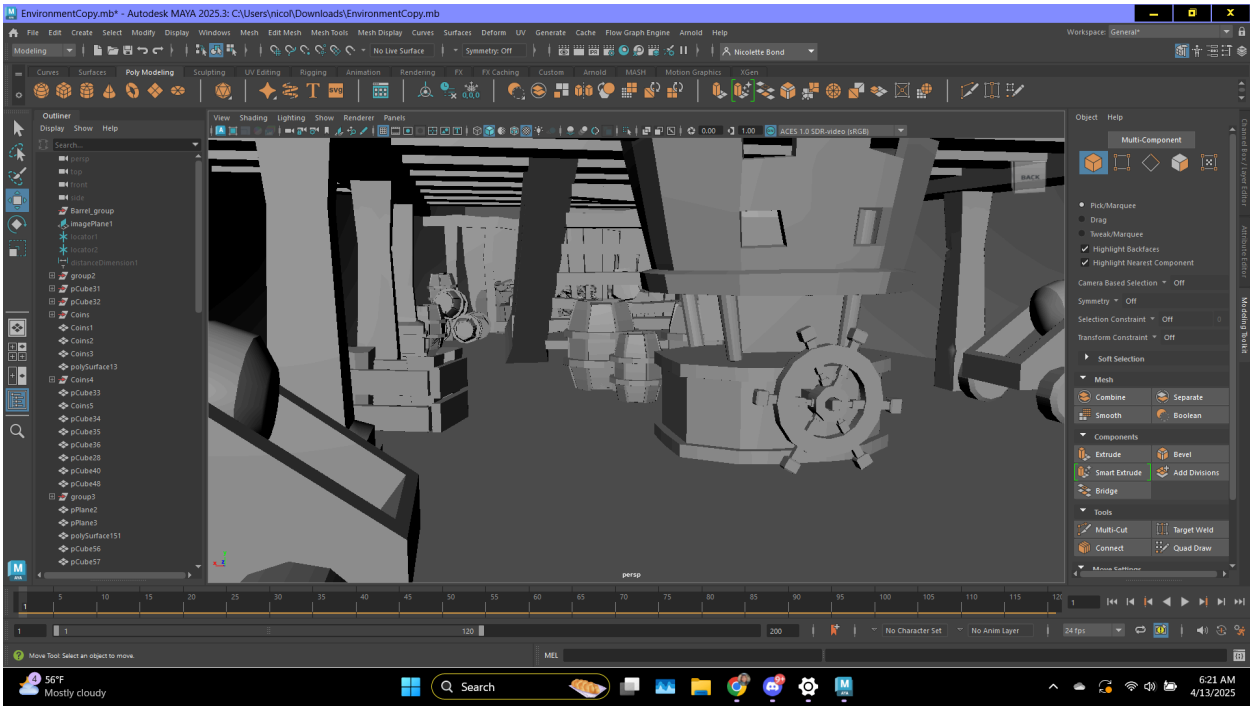
Prove yourself to join the pirate crew family (morally good)

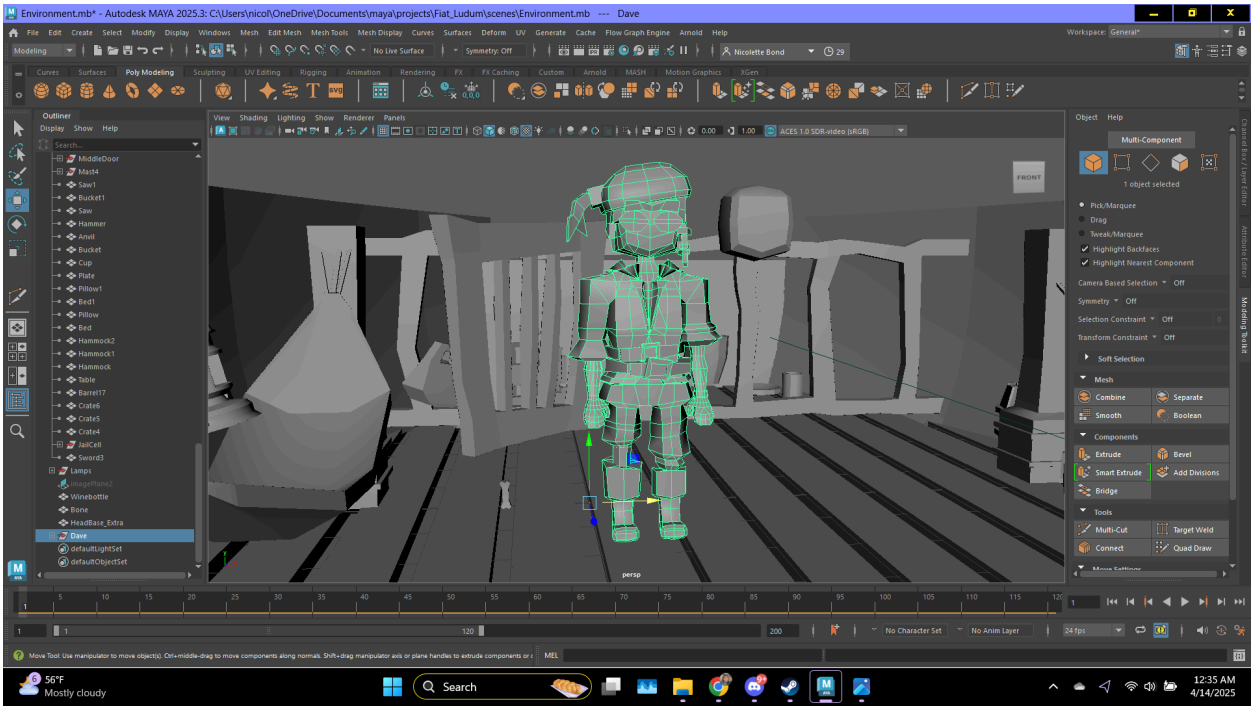
Begin anew in gameplay:

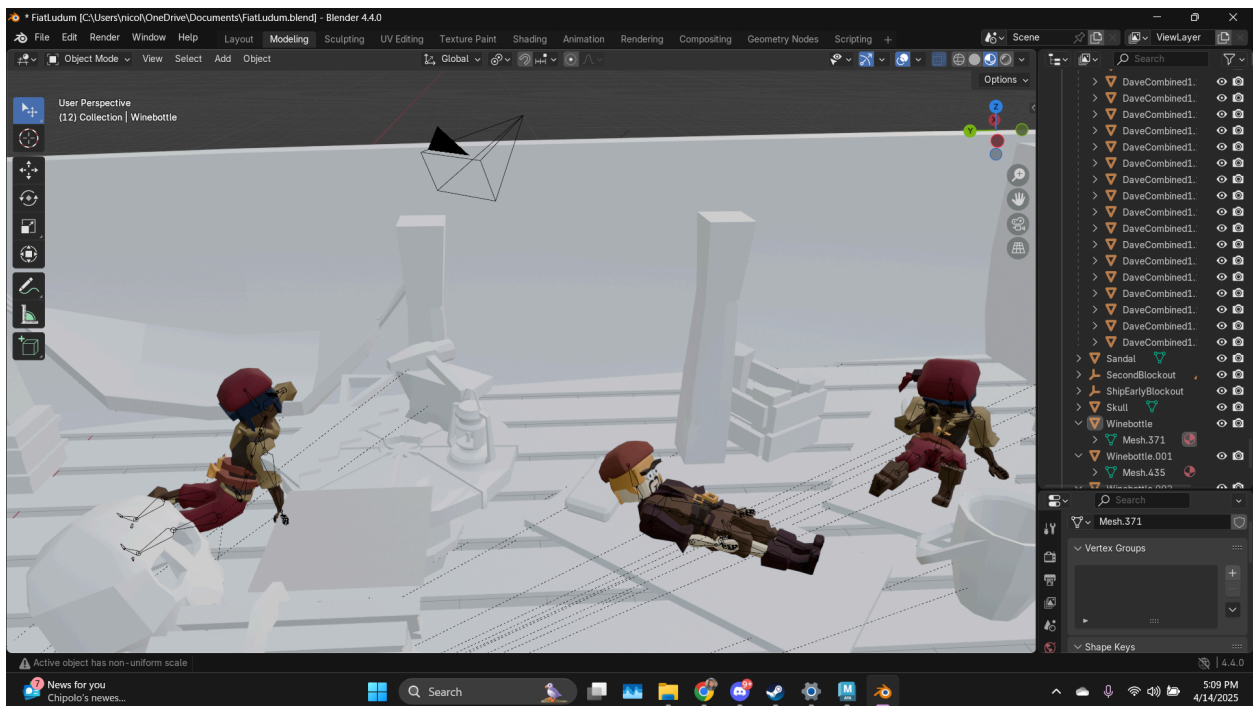
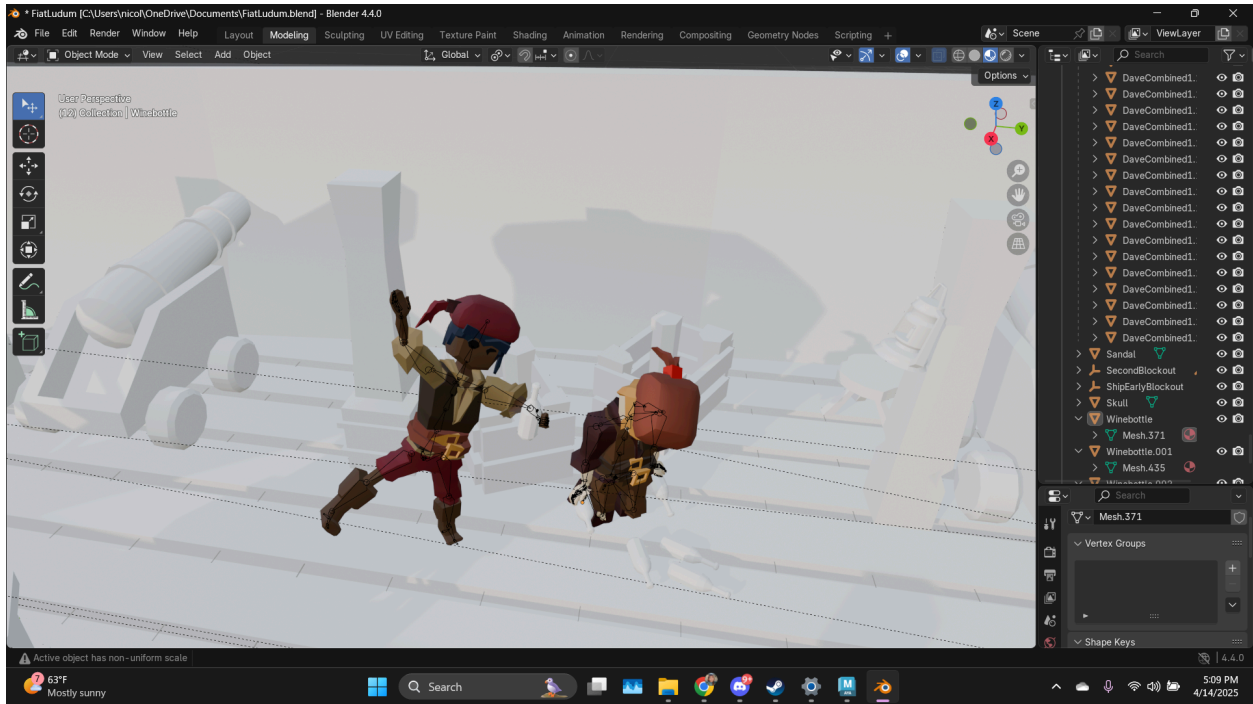
- Building new prosthetics from ship parts
- Building new people out of others (Killing enemies to use them as crafting materials)

Game Design Doc:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1M2qctjH1AR32PU01fBF0WIR2VHd037mN5BiUecb2b3k/edit?usp=sharing>







Asset List:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/16ovwgTG-bt5zLzqtHSzLVbo-pehmq7JSHTtmibLPBsw/ed
it?usp=sharing](https://docs.google.com/document/d/16ovwgTG-bt5zLzqtHSzLVbo-pehmq7JSHTtmibLPBsw/edit?usp=sharing)

GAME DEVELOPMENT: YOUR LOLA

Art Bible:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1UB3JbaRDtyL6mc2aIxfXGYafYiq1TJ0o_fVxoK6V0dY/edit?usp=sharing

MOM

Bahala Na. No, I'm not sad.
Because your lola was sick.
Because her mind was tired, and
it was her time. Right now, it
makes me more sad to look at you
so bony. What, Sofia? Are you
trying to go with her to heaven?

SOFIA

Like you could care.

MOM

Don't put words in my mouth. I'm
thankful to your Lola. When I
called her for help, she would
cook dinner for your lolo then
drop everything else just to
watch you. You will understand
when you get older. That I have
family to take care of.

INT. CAT DREAM

In the sketchy-style comic dream, fragmented memories of the earlier chase flicker to life—the moment before you lunged, teeth closing around the rat.

In the dream, the chase leads somewhere different. The cat follows the rat out of the vent into a sunlit meadow. A series of panels unfold, depicting the cat and rat together. The rat teaches the cat how to ride a tiny bike. They walk a dog side by side, their little paws moving in sync.

10.

Then, the dream shifts. The cat races down the vent to visit its rat friend—only to find it lying still. Dead. The cat hesitates, then curls up beside its small companion, pressing close. The screen fades to black.

SOFIA (CONT'D)

(intrigued)

Dear Sofia, today you move from your grandparents' old home to a new one—one your mom and dad worked hard for. I've been spoiled, really, to have you all so close and to only notice you growing by the notches on our wall. I promise to keep on buying new things for you to play with, and we'll keep measuring. Let's not let those notches get too far apart. Admittedly, I don't know how to play anymore. My mind has aged. But I can still try to imagine. I can picture a continuation of that grade school assignment you sent me years ago. Dear pen pal,

GRANDMOTHER

(voice only)

Don't worry yourself thinking of me because I am made content thinking of you. Your forever pen pal, grandma.