Thin Cities 5

"Suspended over the abyss, the life of Octavia's inhabitants is less uncertain than in other cities. They know the net will last only so long."

Overall concept of the game

Essentially, the game is a race between time and your ability to explore/know what to do to succeed, and then of course, succeeding. "What to do" depends on the level or island or group of islands you are exploring in the game. The islands belong to Octavia, a city suspended in the air with its weight supported by multiple ropes tied onto a great net far above. Its islands (in the sky) are all attached to a rope one way or the other, and the ropes are slipping. You must secure the rope(s) in time, lest the islands plunge into the depths below, taking their inhabitants with them. Through exploring the islands and overcoming their obstacles (e.g., defeating enemies, solving puzzles, figuring out how to navigate through certain areas), you can find the end of the rope: the knot. The goal of each island is to find and secure this knot (or multiple knots) in time before the islands fall into a bottomless pit below. You are a knot tyer employed by the city of Octavia, and your goal is to tie some knots (and save some peoples lives in the process).

Game mechanics

Attacking with the Knot Tyer: It's great just for tying knots!
- ➔ There is only really one big enemy in the game. Most of the time the knot tyer (which is as large as a sword) is used to destroy obstacles like planks of wood blocking your path.
- ➔ Can be upgraded to damage the one big enemy (Giant in the Stolen Island section – see level design below), but without the upgrade: can't damage it.

Flying with the Cloak: can only fly in the direction of the breeze.
- ➔ When the breeze is going straight upwards, you can fly in any direction (except down), but often times the breeze may be going a certain direction, taking you along with it.
- ➔ Can be upgraded to fly for longer periods of time in the breeze and can even be upgraded to double jump by flapping it like wings.
- ➔ Is particularly useful in the Floated Island section (see level design below).

Throwing the Call Staff (may not be in the prototype – perhaps outside of the scope): an item in the "great interior" region (see level design below) can be picked up and thrown, and also be called back (like the Leviathan axe in God of War).
- ➔ Will allow for the breaking of far away objects that may lead to navigating paths more successfully, opening certain doors, and collecting items.
- ➔ The Call Staff can be used to beat sections of the game wherein a certain ability may be required (e.g., the knot tying or the cloak upgrade). It offers an optional or alternative way to beat sections that may be unbeatable if the player does not have that ability (e.g., the stolen island or floater island sections).
- ➔ Levels are designed with the Call Staff in mind as an option to beat them.
- ➔ The staff can be used as a platform for the player to jump onto! When you call the staff back to you, it will go towards the player, but you can release the button that calls it back, and the staff will freeze in whatever location it is at. The player can then simply jump/fly onto it! Very useful for navigation.

Tying smaller Knots: can increase the amount of time you have to save the islands by tying smaller knots on the islands. Smaller knots can also permanently lock an island (that the knot is attached to) in place; not letting it fall away.

Time travel (may not be in the prototype – will only get added if the time limitation proves too hard for players during playtesting, or if there is enough time for them to be added): portals that allow you to be held in time, allowing an alternative version of you to explore around for a solution to the obstacle. Eventually, it will bring you back in time to the point where you went in. Then, the portal is destroyed.

Grabbing and pulling things: Usually blocks to rearrange them in a specific order.
- ➔ Used mostly (if not exclusively) in the "Great Interior" section (see level design below).

Climbing things: Usually blocks, but also, *potentially* (if it ends up that this is not outside of the scope) huge enemies.
- ➔ *May* be used on the "Giant" enemy in the Stolen Island section.
- ➔ Will be used at least once in each section of the game.
- ➔ Climbing and flying combination: flying may run out, and if the player is close to a wall, they may climb onto it, resetting one's flying ability and jumping off of the wall to fly once again.

Narrative

"Below there is nothing for hundreds and hundreds of feet: a few clouds glide past; farther down you can glimpse the chasm's bed."

The inhabitants of Octavia's islands are often seen as outcasts residing in places outside the main city, and because of that, fear to enter the city. You can listen to their fears and speculation about what the city is like (some of which reference or are taken from other chapters of the book). If the scope allows it (which it most likely will not), you can even tell them what the city is like through some dialogue options (which tell you what the truth of the city is, and gives you options to lie to the citizens, because the reality of what the city may be may put them in an even worse mood), changing their attitude towards the city in the process. Most of these citizens, however, have the fear of falling to their deaths to worry about.

The city has an obscure past. Its history was quite literally lost to the wind; the museums and archeological storage buildings have fallen to the depths. Now, there are only wise and old people known as the cane holders, trying to communicate what the city was like, with most not paying any heed; living contently with not knowing why there are such mysterious portions of the city. One portion has a mysterious black hole that no one dare go in. There are also old artifacts with magical properties which are shunned and kept locked away - though, every now and then, someone stumbles onto a new one. Not to mention the literal writings on the walls detailing an old disaster; some outright stating "help!". All this is merely hinted at in the game through the environment and the NPC's. The cane holders have grown accustomed to being ignored. Perhaps you will listen to them?

The knot tyers are a group trained by the city in the art of tying knots and flying in the breeze. These are the saviours of the webbed city. Re-tying its web when it breaks, strengthening weakened portions, and flying high above; unseen by most who are too distracted looking down at the pit they hang so far above.
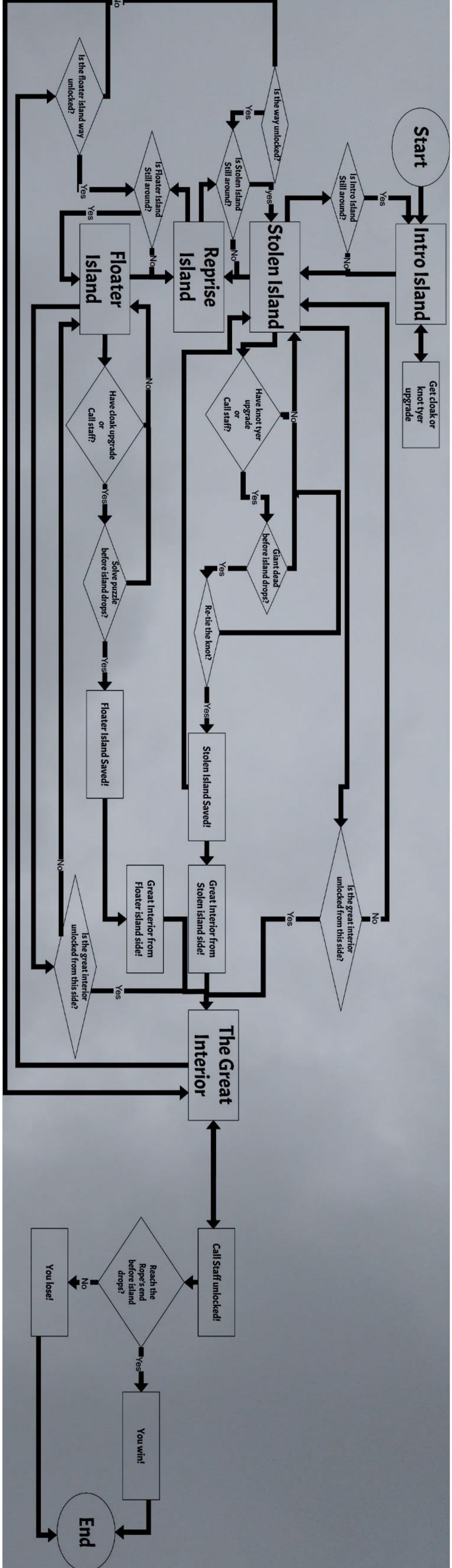
Knot tyers, depending on the island they are trying to save, only have a certain amount of time to reach the island's knot before it falls. The mood of the game will darken the more islands fall; the clouds that surround the city will get darker - perhaps there will be lightning, and the music may change into something sadder, potentially ending in a fade to black as the time runs out.

When an island falls, there is no reset; you simply float in the area where the island once hung, perhaps seeing it fall down, disappearing into the clouds below. The player simply heads to the next island they must save before it too falls away. In a way, the player can't necessarily fail since the narrative continues going on regardless. It is only when all the islands fall that the game/level truly ends. Depending on how many islands are saved or lost, there will be a different ending (for now just narrative text) the player sees. The emotion the player feels depends on how much they care to save the islands and its people.
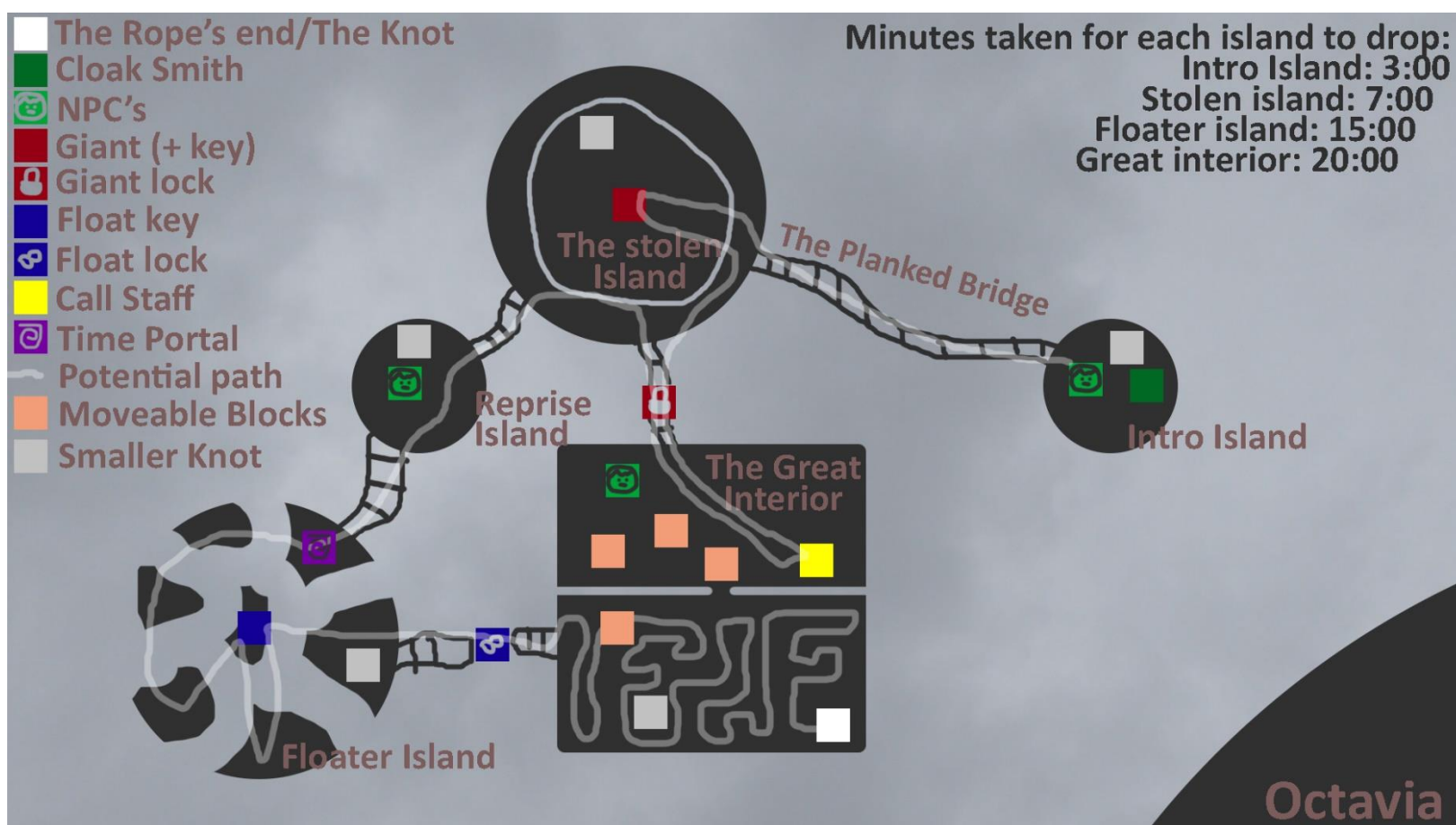
"A net which serves as passage and as support. All the rest… is hung below."

Flow Diagram
Full picture of flowchart and Map of level: https://imgur.com/a/ZgWGVWk

Start

Intro Island

Get cloak or knot tyer upgrade

Is Intro Island Still around? — Yes → No

Is the way unlocked? — Yes / No

Is Stolen Island Still around? — Yes / No

Stolen Island

Is Floater Island Still around? — Yes / No

Is the floater island way unlocked? — Yes / Yes

Reprise Island

Floater Island

Have knot tyer upgrade or Call staff? — No / Yes

Giant dead before island drops? — Yes

Re-tie the knot? — Yes

Stolen Island Saved!

Have cloak upgrade or Call staff? — No / Yes

Solve puzzle before island drops? — Yes

Floater Island Saved!

Is the great interior unlocked from this side? — Yes / No

Great Interior from Stolen island side!

Great Interior from Floater island side!

Is the great interior unlocked from this side? — Yes

The Great Interior

Call Staff unlocked!

Reach the Rope's end before island drops? — No / Yes

You lose!

You win!

End

The stolen Island

The Rope's end/The Knot
Cloak Smith
NPC's
Giant (+ key)
Giant lock
Float key
Float lock
Call Staff
Time Portal
Potential path
Moveable Blocks
Smaller Knot

Minutes taken for each island to drop:
Intro Island: 3:00
Stolen island: 7:00
Floater island: 15:00
Great interior: 20:00

The Planked Bridge

Reprise Island

Intro Island

The Great Interior

Floater Island

Octavia

References / Inspiration

An are in the Great Interior region (which is connected by a bridge) may look very much like this, but with a bottomless pit instead. Also, this minimalistic art style is what I'm going for in terms of the visual aesthetics of the game.

When a city falls, you are left flying in the area where it once was. From here, you can fly to another island that the wind guides you towards. The cloak you wear may look similar to this. I would like the skybox of the game to look similar to this as well (getting darker the more the islands fall).

Each city section (level – not islands – referencing a greater vision of the game) contains a shopkeeper (called a cloak smith) before you begin your job. Here, you can upgrade parts of your character and talk to the citizens. This area has more of a darker tone or a lighter tone depending on how well you are doing in the game. It's a moment of reprise before engaging (or re-engaging) with more robust game mechanics. The folks of the island may be similarly placed like they are here; mostly unmoving but can be walked up to in order to engage in dialogue.

The Call Staff is much like the Leviathan axe from God of War and can similarly be used to change parts of the level from a distance by hitting something. This will especially be the case in the upper section of the Great Interior where there will be navigational challenges for the player that require, for instance, hitting a draw bridge from a distance to lower it.

The way that Ori maneuvers in Ori and the Blind Forest may similarly be used in the Floater Island, with the cloak ability being used (perhaps along with the Call Staff) to reach places. The flight ability can be reset after hitting/climbing a certain obstacle, just like how Ori's ability of jumping gets reset after catching a projectile.

Kind of like the minotaur-labyrinth myth, you will be following a string/rope in a level to know where to go to progress, especially in the Great Interior section, the bottom half of which is conceptualized, for now, as a maze that the rope weaves in and out of.

Pictures Used

Background picture used for both Flow Diagram and Map of Level: www.photos-public-domain.com/2018/05/14/cloudy-sky-2/

Inside screenshot: https://casual-effects.blogspot.com/2016/07/inside-understanding-games-3.html

Sky: Children of the Light screenshot: https://mobilesyrup.com/2019/06/10/timed-apple-exclusive-sky-children-of-the-light-launches-on-july-11/

Hollow Knight screenshot: https://www.koopatv.org/2018/08/hollow-knight-jumping-digital-physical.html

God of War screenshot (thumbnail of video): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HEOdhLy8l8

Ori and the Blind Forest screenshot: https://geekgameguides.com/ori-and-the-blind-forest-walkthrough-part-7/ori-blind-forest-walkthrough-ginso-tree-puzzle-2

Minotaur-labyrinth Picture: https://withaterriblefate.com/2017/06/13/mythology-horror-and-the-unknown-horror-traditions-in-video-games/