

Sounds Like the End

Excerpts from the creative bible of a work-in-progress audio-based horror/comedy game. The game is being developed as a personal project with Unity for iOS and Android.

Plot Summary

In SOUNDS LIKE THE END, a pair of crew members must escape a sinking cruise ship using only their senses of hearing and touch. While also being chased by a murderer.

When the game opens, both players are trapped aboard a pitch-black cruise ship. One person is stuck in the ship's walk-in refrigerator while the other's in the attached walk-in freezer. It isn't immediately clear why they're trapped—just that they need to find their way out.

The pair quickly make contact and help each other escape into the kitchen. From there they fumble on through the ship's labyrinth of rooms and hallways. But then they start to hear strange sounds. Alarming sounds, both literal and figurative. The sounds are capped off by the most alarming sound of all: water rushing in. The ship is sinking.

With renewed urgency, the duo continues towards the top deck. They feel like they're making progress. Their spirits are lifting. That is, until they arrive at the bathroom. The clouds break, letting in *juuuuust* enough moonlight to make out all the dead bodies. They start screaming, generally, at one another. Baseless accusations abound.

Eventually they settle down. They bury their paranoid thoughts. What matters right now is that they get off the ship. They renew their agreement to work together, and to watch each other's backs. But after leaving the bathroom, they get the feeling that someone is following them. Someone like... the murderer.

Fortunately, they manage to elude the killer and finally emerge out onto the top deck. They're surprised however to find the ship is in port.

One of the two, Porter Herrington, Guest Experience Team Lead and Goldensea Cruise Lines employee of 18 years, is immediately tackled and placed under arrest. He protests, insisting it must've been the other. It must've been that dastardly Timothy.

But when he looks over his shoulder there's nobody else there. That's when we realize that it was just him the entire time. Just Porter, driven to unleash upon the cruise after being pushed 0.001 nautical miles too far.

Characters

At the beginning of the game, players input their names. One player is assigned the role of Porter, and the other is Timothy. While the players' names are used throughout the game, the characters and personalities of Porter and Timothy are still very much present. So throughout this document, Porter and Timothy should just be seen as placeholders for Player 1 and 2's names.

Porter Herrington



Porter is a Guest Experience Team Lead at Goldensea Cruise Lines.

It's an especially-thankless position that involves dealing with the highest-level passenger complaints.

He is the only real character in the game.

Reference images

When Porter first started, the job sounded too good to be true. He'd get to move to the West Coast. Travel the world. Meet new people. Besides, was he going to stay in Vaughan, Ontario his whole life? He sent in his application. And with his affable personality, he was hired over the phone the very next day.

He spent the next few years rising through the ranks of the Guest Experience division. The absurdity of the guest complaints, and of the industry in general, started to wear on him. Especially so, 18 years in. How on earth had 18 years passed?

One day, a passenger complained that his apple crumble tasted too much like a crumbly apple pie. That one put Porter over the edge. He proceeded calmly to the kitchen's walk-in freezer and screamed until he was hoarse. Then he sprung into action, turning a very run-of-the-mill cruise into one of the 63-deadliest in history.

As he carries out his heinous crimes, he operates much the same way as he had been during his tenure with Goldensea Cruise Lines: interacting with passengers with a deescalating tone of voice and neutral body language. Except instead of complimentary drinks he offers up grisly death. "I apologize if my hands around your throat is making it hard to continue living," he is heard to say. "Please provide

feedback through the Goldensea Cruise Lines Mobile App.” His behavior is so automatic that he doesn’t realize what he’s doing. In his mind, he’s simply dealing with passenger complaints in the most effective, permanent way possible. So later on, after he escapes, he truly doesn’t understand what’s happened.

Timothy

Timothy is a manifestation of Porter’s. He knows only what Porter knows, and experiences what Porter experiences. He gives advice, “helps” Porter perform certain actions, and frames situations. He’s slightly more thoughtful than Porter, hinting at a conscience long-buried. Throughout the game, Porter fully believes that Timothy is a separate person.

The Narrator

The Narrator is Porter’s inner monologue and is therefore omniscient. No dialogue ever happens between Porter and Timothy—it all comes from the Narrator. (e.g. “they said, you said.”) Since the Narrator and Porter are one and the same, the Narrator’s tone of voice matches the mental state of Porter, which is one of several subtle clues in the game that hints at the final reveal.

On occasion, the Narrator will ask the player, as Porter or Timothy, what’s happening there in the dark. For example, it will say: is this thing in your hand a cymbal? Or is it a discus? And depending on the player’s choice, that object will “materialize.” This is because Porter is delusional to the point of creating his own “physical” reality.

Environments

Porter knows the cruise ship extremely well. In fact he’s been known to boast about it. He used to take pride in offering guests the quickest way to get between any two points on the ship, down to the second. But since the environments are so dark, it’s a case of the familiar made unfamiliar. And why some truly bizarre situations emerge.

Porter’s Quarters

Finally, last year, Porter was promoted to Team Lead of the Guest Experience Division. Aside from a 1% increase in pay and 35% increase in workload, Porter was also given his own quarters. He couldn’t believe it. What would it be like to sleep in a room without seven other people in there with him? It turns out it was quiet. Too quiet. So at one of their Caribbean ports, Porter picked up a particularly-talkative parrot and smuggled it back to his quarters. Whenever he needed help sleeping at night, he’d shine a flashlight at it to get it squawking. In the nights leading up to the attack, he found himself shining that light a whole lot.

The quarters themselves are windowless, and incredibly cramped—the room is the exact length of the short, single bed that he sleeps on. Under that bed is an assortment of unusual weapons. And atop the bed is a pile of towel-animals in half-completed states. In his spare time Porter had taken to trying to assemble towel-animals using the FUN ACTIVITIES tab on the Goldensea Cruise Line Mobile App's video library. He couldn't quite get the hang of it. But he did manage to complete a passable snake, which had an in-app difficult ranking of half of one star.

The Revelatory Lavatory

This is the male employee showers/washroom/locker room (near the middle of the ship) where a key plot point plays out. Skipped over for renovations in favour of “guest-facing” portions of the ship, it remains stuck in 1993, with peeling seafoam green walls, faux-brass fixtures, and childish nautical décor. Faded benches sit between rows of lockers, with mismatched Goldensea-branded flipflops beneath them. The lockers are hard to open and unbearably squeaky. The slightest bout of ocean turbulence sets the lockers off like some kind of mournful avant-garde symphony.

There's a large permanent puddle near the center of the floor, owing to a gradual saturation and warping of the subfloor. This, combined with the humidity from the showers, insufficient ventilation, and improperly-hung towels, makes it a very damp environment. It's also an oppressive one: patronizing signage on the walls remind employees of policies around the length of their breaks, health and safety, and attitudes towards guests.

A central communal “shampoo” bottle contains 70% water, 30% hand soap. Next to it is a small vending machine that's stocked with marked-up name-brand soaps. The showers are barely large enough to turn around in, and their drains are clogged. There's a single, trough-style urinal against the wall opposite too-few toilet stalls. And it is there, in one of the stalls, where our players discover human bodies stacked to the ceiling like bricks.

Gameplay

The game is a co-operative, audio-driven piece of interactive fiction that's meant to be played in the dark. It's controlled by a simple multiple-choice interface interspersed with rhythm, gesture, touch, and audio-based minigames. It regularly switches back and forth between the two players' perspectives as the narrative advances. There's one main source of urgency in the gameplay: the ever-present timer, which is very coincidentally tied to the sinking of the ship. The timer ticks down normally, starting at forty-five minutes. But answering questions “incorrectly,” or failing at minigames, results in time penalties. If time runs out before you reach the top deck and escape, you lose the game and get the “bad” ending.

Minigames

In keeping with the pitch-black motif in the game, these minigames have no visual interface aside from (if necessary) a brief text blurb that tells players what to do. A good example of largely “interfaceless” minigames (where the player intuitively knows what to do) is [WarioWare](#).

ID	Narrative Context	Mechanic
01_de-thaw	Tongue is stuck to a metal freezer rack.	Blow into phone microphone to de-thaw.
02_knock-knock	Banging out a friendly-sounding knock.	Tap on phone screen in correct rhythm.
03_pans	Knocking on pots and pans to determine position in kitchen.	Tap on screen and listen for sound.
04_stairs	Trying to run upstairs in the dark.	Tap screen in alternating rhythm to ascend.
05_de-clog	Removing towel from man's throat.	Tap and drag correct esophageal path to remove the towel.

Narrative Beats

Act 1

Narrative Beats	Wake Up	Ship is Sinking
Plot	Porter and Timothy are trapped in a walk-in fridge and freezer, respectively. They work together to get out and into the kitchen.	They feel their way through the kitchen towards the sound of rushing water. Ship is sinking. They have a feeling they're being followed. They scramble up some stairs into the dining room.
Environments	- Walk-in refrigerator - Walk-in freezer	- Kitchen
Audio	SFX: Cymbals, Knocking on metal, Fridge fan, Biting into onion Speech: Narrator, Muffled narrator	SFX: Crashing pots and pans, Footsteps, Rushing water Speech: Narrator