



1. *Cover Page*

- Game Title: Escapism
- Genre: Indie, Metroidvania, Fantasy
- Platforms: PC
- Target Audience: Anyone aged 12 and above
- Version Date:
- Team/Studio Name:

2. *Executive Summary*

Game concept: Based on the concept of Escapism, the game focuses on a troubled character who escapes from their problems, emotions and life in their head. This is their usual strategy to deal with their problems and escape reality for a bit until one day, the problems become too much to handle for the character since they've been suppressing and ignoring them and eventually, the problems corrupt their fantasy world. They realise that they're trapped in this fantasy world in their mind and can't escape and the only possible way to escape is for the character to confront their issues that they've been avoiding. The issues themselves have taken form into monsters and creatures which must be defeated and ultimately, they must face their inner self (the final boss) to finally escape from this world.

Unique gameplay hook: The player would be playing as the main character of the story and the gameplay will mainly be action based but in a metroidvania style, taking inspiration from successful games such as Hollow Knight. It will also be centred around a fantasy theme that would help to elevate the idea that you're in an unfamiliar world in the character's head where the rules of reality do not make sense so the gameplay would be heavily linked to this.

Unique selling point (USP): It's a game with a story that focuses on real life issues that may be relatable to the player and portrays it in a fantasy action style to make it more unique and fun to explore for the player. It encourages the audience (players or people watching streams of the gameplay) to learn about the issues that come with avoiding to deal with your problems and emotions (as seen with our main character of the game) and that you can't always avoid it; they eventually need to be dealt with.

Player Fantasy (what the player feels like): Since the player would be playing as the main character, the player would get to have an understanding of the character's life and mind, thus allowing them to immerse themselves into this fantasy world and maybe even relate to the main character.

3. *Game Overview*

Escapism is an indie Metroidvania style digital game that explores the psychological phenomenon of escapism as both a coping mechanism and a form of self-imposed confinement. The game is structured around an internal narrative space the protagonist's mind where unresolved emotional struggles, suppressed memories and avoided responsibilities manifest as physical environments obstacles and hostile entities.

The player assumes control of a character who initially retreats into this mental fantasy world to escape the pressures of real life. While the world appears imaginative and comforting at first it gradually reveals its restrictive and oppressive nature. Progression within the game requires the player to confront increasingly direct representations of the protagonist's emotional conflicts. These confrontations culminate in a final encounter with the protagonist's inner self, symbolizing acceptance self-awareness and emotional integration.

Through its mechanics, narrative structure and visual symbolism, Escapism examines the long-term consequences of emotional avoidance and promotes the idea that personal growth requires confrontation rather than withdrawal. The game aims to encourage reflection by presenting psychological struggles in an interactive and experiential form.

3.1 Genre & Style

Primary Genre:

- Metroidvania

The Metroidvania structure supports the game's thematic focus by emphasising exploration, nonlinear progression and backtracking. Areas of the game world become accessible only after the player acquires new abilities which symbolically represent emotional growth, self-

awareness or coping skills. This design reinforces the idea that personal progress is not linear and often requires revisiting past experiences with new understanding.

Secondary Genres:

- Psychological Narrative Game
- Adventure Game

The psychological narrative genre allows the game to explore abstract emotional concepts through environmental storytelling and character interaction. Rather than relying solely on explicit dialogue, the game communicates meaning through symbolism embedded in level design, enemy behaviour and visual distortion.

The adventure elements support curiosity-driven exploration and gradual narrative discovery.

Artistic and Tonal Style:

The aesthetic direction is intentionally symbolic and atmospheric. Visual elements such as colour palettes, lighting, environmental distortion and architectural fragmentation are used to reflect the protagonist's mental state. Early areas may appear vibrant and dreamlike, while later sections become increasingly fragmented, darker and more oppressive as deeper psychological issues surface.

Enemy and boss designs are not arbitrary; each creature represents a specific emotional or psychological barrier, such as denial, fear, anxiety, guilt or self-loathing. This design approach ensures that combat encounters serve both mechanical and narrative purposes.

3.2 Target Audience

Age Range:

- 16 years and above

The game addresses mature themes including mental health, emotional suppression, identity conflict and self-reflection. While no explicit content is presented, the subject matter requires a level of emotional maturity to be meaningfully understood and interpreted.

Player Type (Casual vs. Hardcore):

Escapism is designed for mid-core players, balancing accessibility with depth. Core mechanics such as movement and combat are intentionally approachable, while mastery is encouraged through exploration, optional challenges, and narrative interpretation. This allows a broad range of players to engage with the game at their preferred level of complexity.

Single-player Experience:

The game is strictly single-player, as its themes are deeply personal and introspective. The solitary nature of gameplay reinforces the feeling of internal struggle and self-confrontation, aligning the player's experience with the protagonist's psychological journey.

Intended Audience:

The game primarily targets players interested in emotionally driven indie games, psychological narratives, and reflective storytelling. It is particularly suited for individuals who resonate with themes of avoidance, anxiety, and personal growth, allowing them to see their own experiences reflected within the game's systems and narrative.

3.3 Platforms & Controls

Platforms Supported:

- PC (Windows) as the primary development platform.
- Potential expansion to console platforms (PlayStation, Xbox, Nintendo Switch), contingent on development resources and performance considerations.

Input Methods:

- Keyboard and Mouse for PC players.
- Game Controller support to accommodate traditional Metroidvania control schemes and improve accessibility.

Controls are designed to be responsive and intuitive, minimising mechanical friction. This design choice ensures that player attention remains focused on exploration, narrative interpretation, and emotional immersion rather than technical complexity.

4. *Story and Narrative*

4.1 Story Overview

- **Setting:** The game unfolds in a surreal fantasy world that represents the player character's mind. Divided into various environments, including lush jungles, bustling cities, and dark caves, each setting symbolises different emotional landscapes and fears.
- **Premise:** Players control a character who escapes into their mind to avoid life's challenges. However, they discover they are trapped and must face manifestations of their fears, represented by mini-bosses, to reclaim control and ultimately confront their inner self.

- Main Conflict: The struggle revolves around avoiding emotional confrontation versus the necessity of dealing with fears for true escapism. Players navigate through their mind, facing mini-bosses that symbolise their personal issues while deciphering clues to obtain necessary tools for their final confrontation.

4.2 **Characters**

- Player Character: The protagonist encounters deeply personal fears, requiring them to evolve and grow as they progress.

- NPCs / Enemies:

- Mini-Bosses: Each represents a specific fear (e.g., fear of failure, fear of rejection) that players must overcome.

- Supporting NPCs: Provide guidance and backstory, enhancing emotional depth.

- Abilities and Roles: Players unlock abilities as they confront fears, such as:

- Insight: Reveals hidden paths or clues.

- Tenacity: Increases resilience against fear-based attacks.

5. **Game World**

5.1 Environment

- Locations / Levels: Different areas hold various challenges, offering a mix of easy, medium, and hard mini-bosses:

- Jungle of Doubt: Easy challenges that introduce gameplay mechanics.

- City of Regrets: Medium challenges that immerse players deeper into emotional confrontation.

- Cavern of Anxiety: Hard challenges requiring tactical play and thorough understanding of fear.

- World Rules: Players face a series of consecutive challenges, where successful confrontations yield keys or tools crucial for the final boss. Not all keys will be easy to obtain, keeping the experience engaging.

- Interact-able Objects:

- Clues: Live hints scattered throughout levels that make the gameplay dynamic and engaging.

- Keys/Tools: Collectibles that empower players for their final showdown against the inner self.

5.2 Level Design

- Level Structure: Each level consists of a combination of maze-like structures and emotional challenges. Players can select the difficulty of the mini-bosses they wish to confront, catering to various play styles.

- Progression System:

- Players collect multiple keys/tools from fears they confront, enhancing their skills for the final battle.

- After defeating mini-bosses, players are rewarded with deeper insights into their fears, increasing the emotional investment in the story.

- Win/Lose Conditions: The game does not simply end upon defeating the final boss. Instead, players can choose to continue exploring the world for deeper understanding, new challenges, or even face optimised versions of mini-bosses for enhanced rewards or personal growth.

6. Art & Visual Style

- UI/UX Style The interface is minimalist and seamlessly integrated into the environment. Player health and mental state are represented through immersive indicators like a pulsing heartbeat or visible cracks in the mind, reinforcing the narrative without breaking immersion.

- Character & Environment References are depicted throughout: The protagonist is depicted through distorted reflections, symbolising fractured identity. Environments morph fluidly, resembling shifting thoughts—corridors that twist into shadowed corners, embodying the labyrinthine nature of the mind.

7. Audio Design

- Music Style The soundtrack combines ominous ambient layers with: The soundtrack combines ominous ambient layers with dissonant piano motifs to heighten tension. Reflective moments are underlined by calm yet unsettling tones, maintaining a sense of unease even in quieter passages.

- Sound Effects Monsters emit piercing, unnatural screeches, while: Monsters emit piercing, unnatural screeches, while mind-bending abilities are accompanied by glitch-like distortions. As health declines, the player's heartbeat accelerates, reinforcing urgency and vulnerability.
- Voice Acting : Inner thoughts and antagonistic forces are conveyed through whispers and distorted echoes, creating a haunting auditory presence. The protagonist's voice is intentionally distant, fading in and out to emphasise disconnection.
- Audio Feedback for Actions : Combat interactions are marked by sharp clashes, while evasive manoeuvres trigger haunting echoes, ensuring that every action carries emotional weight and sonic impact.

8. Multiplayer Elements

8.1 Cooperative vs Competitive Modes

- Cooperative Play: While the core focus remains on individual emotional journeys, players can team up to tackle specific challenges or participate in events that require collaboration. This creates opportunities for shared insights into fears.
- Competitive Elements: Players could choose to engage in competition:
- Mini-Boss Challenges: Players can enter each other's worlds as a mini-boss to create an additional layer of challenge.
- Leaderboards: Track players' progress, adding an element of competition as they face their own fears while also challenging friends.

8.2 Player Choices

- Fears and Issues: Each player will personalise their journey by selecting which fears to confront. This choice could influence the order of encounters, providing a unique path for each player.
- Difficulty Settings: Players can decide between easy, medium, or hard mini-bosses, allowing for tailored experiences based on skill levels or preference.

9. Progression & Rewards

Progression in Escapism is tightly linked to emotional growth rather than traditional power scaling. Each reward represents a step toward self-acceptance and awareness.

- Core Progression:

- o Abilities are unlocked by confronting and overcoming emotional manifestations (bosses).
- o Each ability reflects emotional insight rather than raw strength.
- Ability Examples:
 - o Calm: Slows time briefly, allowing careful navigation and combat.
 - o Courage: Enables forward dash through obstacles or enemies.
 - o Acceptance: Allows interaction with previously hostile environments.
- Narrative Rewards:
 - o Short internal monologues or visual memories unlocked after major encounters.
 - o Environmental changes reflecting the protagonist's mental healing.
- Optional Rewards:
 - o Hidden areas representing repressed thoughts.
 - o Collectibles that deepen story understanding but are not required to finish the game.
- Player Motivation Systems:
 - o Emotional curiosity (understanding the self)
 - o Mechanical curiosity (unlocking new traversal options)
 - o Completion incentives for exploration-focused players

10. **Risks & Challenges**

- Thematic Risk:
 - o Mental health themes may be misinterpreted or feel too heavy if not handled carefully.
 - o Mitigation: Use symbolism and visual storytelling instead of direct exposition.
- Design Risk:
 - o Metroidvania maps can become overly complex.
 - o Mitigation: Strong visual landmarks and clear ability gating.
- Technical Risk:
 - o Scope creep due to too many environments or mechanics.
 - o Mitigation: Focus on a small number of highly polished emotional areas.
- Time Constraints:

- o Balancing narrative depth with development deadlines.
- o Mitigation: Lock core mechanics early and iterate only on content.

11. *Development Plan*

Development follows a staged, milestone-based approach suitable for a team.

Phase 1: Pre-Production

- Finalising core concepts and themes
- Decide engine and tools
- Create rough map layout and ability list

Phase 2: Prototype

- Implement player movement and camera
- Basic combat system
- One test enemy and one ability

Phase 3: Vertical Slice

- One complete emotional area
- One boss fight with narrative payoff
- Temporary art and audio

Phase 4: Full Production

- Remaining areas and bosses
- Art and animation polish
- Sound design integration

Phase 5: Polish & QA

- Bug fixing
- Balance adjustments
- Performance optimisation

Tools Used:

- Game Engine: Unity
- Version Control: GitHub

- Art: TBA
- Audio: TBA

12. **Testing & QA**

Play-testing Approach

We will run regular play-tests with team members and a small group of external players. Testers will play through various sections of the game to verify controls, level progression, combat, and emotional storytelling. Special focus will be placed on whether players understand the themes of escapism and personal struggle.

Bug Tracking

All bugs (visual, audio, gameplay, or performance issues) will be documented using a shared bug-tracking sheet or tool. Each bug will include a short description, steps to reproduce it, and its priority level. Critical bugs affecting progression or immersion will be fixed first.

Balance Testing

We will test enemy difficulty, player abilities, and boss fights to ensure the game is challenging but fair. Monsters representing personal issues should feel threatening but not frustrating. Adjustments will be made to health, damage, and checkpoints to maintain smooth progression.

User Feedback

Feedback will be collected after play-tests through short discussions or surveys. We will ask players how the game made them feel, if the story was clear, and whether the final boss felt meaningful. This feedback will be used to improve gameplay, pacing, and emotional impact.

I'll update the GDD with the Monetisation section focusing on in-game advertising and purchases like coins for lives or powerful weapons, as you requested earlier.

13. **Marketing & Monetisation**

- Distribution Platforms: Steam, GOG, Epic Games Store
- Pricing: Free to play with in-game purchases
- Marketing Strategy: Focus on social media (Instagram, Twitter, TikTok) for community building, influencer partnerships, and showcasing gameplay/emotional impact

- Monetisation: In-game purchases using "Mind Coins" (premium currency)
 - Buy lives/respawns in challenging areas
 - Purchase powerful temporary weapons or boosts for combat
 - Buy cosmetic items (skins for protagonist, alternate colour palettes for abilities)
 - Ad revenue from optional video ads for rewards (watch ad for extra Mind Coins or lives)

14. **Team & Resources**

- Team Size: Small indie team (10 people)
- Roles: Game designer/lead, Lead Artist, 2 Programmers, 2 Artists, Sound Designer, Writer/Narrative Designer, QA Tester, Marketing/Social Media Manager
- Tools: Unity (engine), GitHub (version control), TBA (art), TBA (audio)

15. **Timeline & Milestones**

- Pre-Production: 2 months (concept finalisation, prototyping)
- Production: 6 months (core development)
- Polish & QA: 3 months (testing, balance adjustments)
- Launch: Target launch within 12 months of start
- Post-Launch: Community updates, potential DLC

16. **Technical Details**

- Engine: Unity
- Platforms: PC (Windows), potential console ports later
- Performance Goals: Smooth gameplay (60 FPS target), minimal loading times
- Compatibility: Windows 10/11, with controller support

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized, cursive name followed by a long horizontal flourish.