

**PURPOSE STATEMENT:** *The Curtain* explores themes of gender, patriarchy and community. Making use of the Cold War as a backdrop, *The Curtain* reflects relevant contemporary anxieties surrounding invasion, paranoia and senseless annihilation. On the surface, the narrative sees the player fighting a blockbuster, world-ending evil plot. However, diving deeper, the player can reflect on subtler undercurrents in the narrative centering on differing responses to systemic trauma. Through its mechanic and narrative interplay, it plays with the idealism behind communist ideology; insinuating that over heroism, over might, the only way to truly transcend oppressors without becoming them is through courageous, unwavering solidarity, sharing and struggle with and for community, a sentiment poignant to audiences in today's uncertain times.

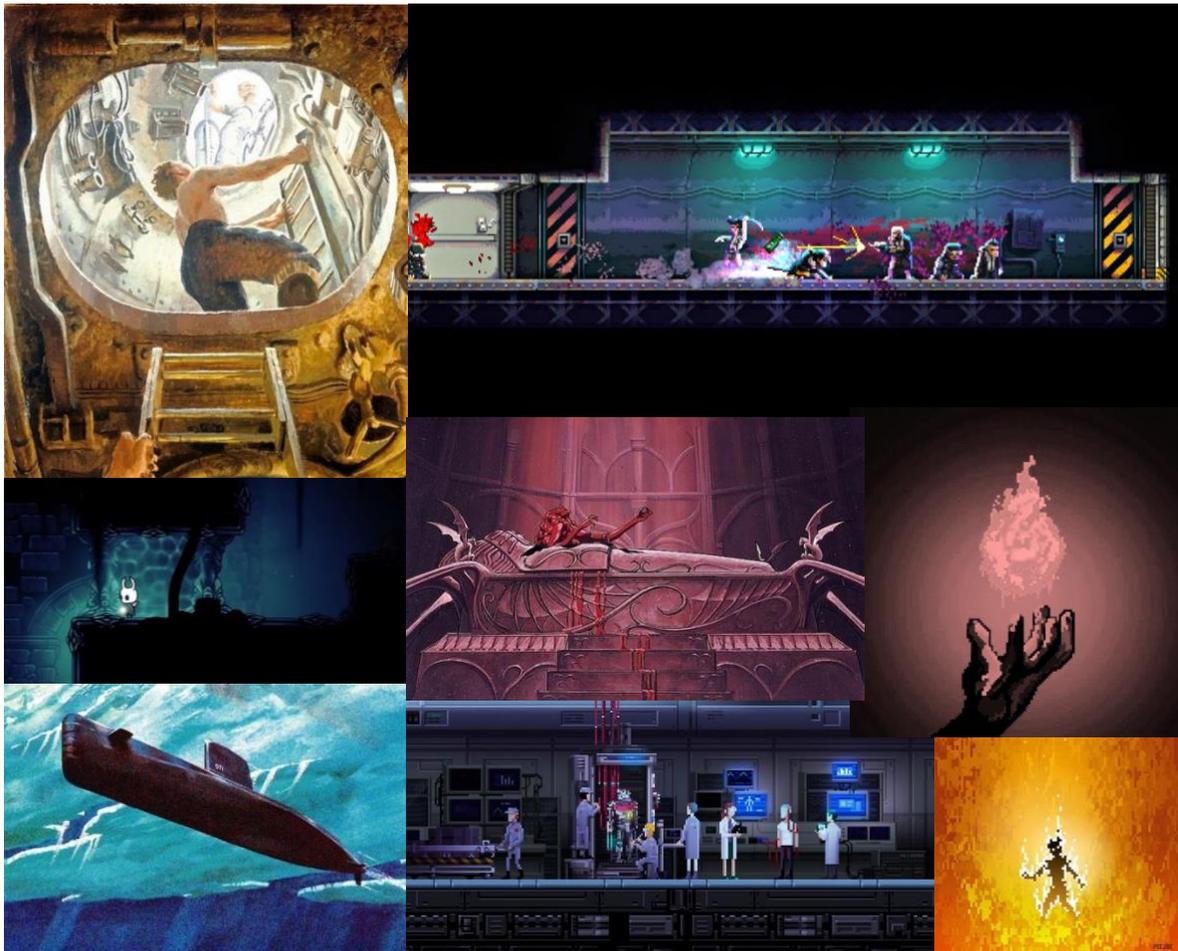
**LOGLINE:** Aboard a Soviet stealth submarine, an unsung hero must unite old comrades to thwart an ancient vampire, her ghastly horde, and her plans to instigate nuclear Armageddon as the vessel speeds towards enemy waters.

**SUMMARY:** *The Curtain* is a campy, side-scrolling Metroidvania game, set during the Cold War, experienced through the eyes of Vlad Vanhelski, a trans WWII veteran, on a top secret mission to probe American deep sea defences. Enroute to Alaska, a strange signal pings the radar on the border of contested waters, the crew unwittingly bringing onboard the sarcophagus of an immortal evil - an Elder Vampire, Countess Zsófia Báthory, who slaughters, turns and enthralls comrades indiscriminately. Vlad, hinted to be a Van Helsing, summons the protective spirit of his Babushka, who bestows on him a divine golden sickle, and with it and allies fights to foil Zsófia's plan to bring about the nuclear apocalypse as part of her dream of a vampiric Age of Darkness.

**Setting/Visuals:** *TK01* (known informally as *The Tigress*) is a fictional secret prototype variant of the real Typhoon class Soviet nuclear submarines, the largest subs ever produced. Designed to stay submerged and undetectable for months at a time, it is fitted with a state of the art tech and amenities. It's main function currently is doing high-risk research and reconnaissance in enemy waters, probing for defensive weaknesses

and hauling up sunken technologies lost during testing to try and stay ahead in the arms race.

Meant to house a large crew for an extended amount of time, *the Tigress* is an expansive hive of interconnecting halls, vents and levels; a moving, underwater facility with many areas for the player to explore. The side scrolling POV and 2D pixel art style follows a long-standing metroidvania tradition, inspired by games like *Katana Zero*, *Hollow Knight*, and *Castlevania*. The visual style plays with camera distance, distinct colours, contrast, and deep shadows, elevating the tense, claustrophobic setting as the relentless hordes stalk the tight corridors. Distinction in lighting and forms also aids game mechanics, affording the player intuitive hints towards secret item stashes, locked areas they can come back to later, and interactable environmental objects. Some areas of the map will contain portholes, or be close enough to the "edge" of the submarine, to allow the player to see the ocean outside, with



the external environment changing as the story progresses in terms of colours, lighting, seascape, and wildlife on display.

### Characters & Bios

**PLAYER CHARACTER: VLADIMIR "VLAD" VANHELSKI** (he/him)

**PURPOSE STATEMENT:** Vlad is a survivor, a stubborn optimist despite being a trans man in a time this was not understood. Made small for many years in a patriarchal world, his belief in people held fast due to the of support of his Babushka, his lover Mislav, and his experiences of true, selfless comradery during the war. Visually, socio-economically and personally a foil to the antagonist; the vampire Zsófia, Vlad represents how systemically inflicted pain and abuse, instead of turning back onto the world, can be alchemized into care and radical love with the help of supportive, safe, communal conditions.



*Concept for Vlad's character sheet  
(platemail to be swapped for Soviet naval uniform)*

**BACKSTORY:** Vlad was a rebellious child, running away from home to Leningrad to live with his accepting, eccentric, worldly Babushka (grandmother). Finding friends, including best friend and lover Mislav, When WWII came, Vlad enlisted with them into the military; becoming a sniper, one of the only combat roles "women" were allowed. Babushka gave him her lucky flaming sun brooch the day he left. That was the last time he saw her. Serving throughout the war, Vlad returned at the end to an empty home too quiet to stay in. Yet he found it hard to stay in the military, the respect he'd garnered amongst the ranks of many soldiers quickly forgotten with the Nazi's defeated and cultural status quo restored. With help of Mislav, he acquired forged documents, and changed his name, gender and appearance. They applied as war veterans for the Naval officer school, soon being

selected for a special forces unit involved in top secret recon missions deep in enemy waters, and assigned to *the Tigress*.

**BIOGRAPHY (Comps: Vi, Arcane/League of Legends):**

<b>Age:</b> 39	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Romani, Russian
<b>Place of Birth:</b> Pavlovo, Russia.	<b>Currently living:</b> Aboard <i>the Tigress</i> , off duty, Leningrad.
<b>Languages:</b> Russian, Romanian, English, German.	<b>Personality:</b> Stubborn, Idealist, Intelligent.
<b>Abilities:</b> Sharpshooter, improvised weapon fighting, hand-to-hand combat, innate divine magic.	<b>Visual Description:</b> Wiry, short, sad brown eyes, cropped blonde hair, sailors tattoos, always wearing lucky brooch.

**LINES OF SAMPLE DIALOGUE:**

"Comrade. I am here. These nightmares enchain you, remember who you are. Your life is no collection of failures, it is a vital thread in the great tapestry of life, a thread diving and rising as one must to weave. Without you, we shall all surely unravel. Wake up brother. We need you."

"Ha! My Babushka hits harder than that, and she's dead!"

"Cyka blyatt, the codes! The parasite seeks to bring about her empire with our very weapons!"

**NONPLAYABLE CHARACTER: COUNTESS ZSÓFIA BÁTHORY, "THE ELDER" (she/her)**

**PURPOSE STATEMENT:** Zsófia is the main antagonist and foil to Vlad. A cruel, power-hungry highborn, Zsófia is intent on dominion, a representation of the horror of unaccountable power borne of cyclical, patriarchal violence. Zsófia's malice is a product of systemic oppression, neglect, and festered trauma. Her conflict with Vlad demonstrates differences, stemming from class and ideology in dealing with the



*Countess Zsófia Báthory, hair colour to be changed to red.*

abuses inflicted on female bodies. One path lonely and (self)destructive, replicates hegemonic patterns, while the other, communal and regenerative, seeks to transcend them.

**BACKSTORY:** Zsófia Báthory was ambitious beyond the constraints of 16<sup>th</sup> century womanhood, refusing to be a plaything and learning dark magic in secret. Disowned and exiled to a convent after embarrassing her father's honour, she committed herself to an unholy ritual of antichristening. She debased her soul with heinous acts, culminating in the seduction and betrayal of her lover, a sister of her convent. Slitting the nun's throat during lovemaking, she drank the hot blood from the throbbing wound. Manifesting from the mist around her, the Prince of Lies appeared, taking her in her dead lover's viscera. The Count's essence corrupting Zsófia as she drank greedily of his cold body. Converting her convent to serve as undead thralls, her planned reclamation of her ancestral throne was only foiled by the ambitions of her younger sister, Elizabeth Báthory. Luring Zsófia into a trap and entombing her in a box of consecrated silver, Elisabeth took a vial of her sister's blood, sent her casket to the farthest corners of the coldest seas, and had her cast into the depths. Healing, yet undying in the depths, Zsafia seethed at her betrayal. Driven to madness on the ocean floor Zsafia, remembers only how close she was to a dynasty of her own; an empire to overshadow the sunrise.

**BIOGRAPHY (Comps: Carmilla, Castlevania animated series)**

<b>Age:</b> 412	<b>Ethnicity:</b> Hungarian
<b>Born:</b> Nyírbátor, Hungary	<b>Location:</b> <i>the Tigress</i>
<b>Languages:</b> Old Hungarian, Old French, Latin, Old Greek.	<b>Personality:</b> Cruel, manipulative, ambitious, mad.
<b>Abilities:</b> Blood Magic, necromancy, super speed, strength and agility, fast healing, flight, gaseous form	<b>Visual Description:</b> Tall, slim, beautiful, very long red hair, noble/nun mixed garb, icy blue eyes.

**LINES OF SAMPLE DIALOGUE:**

"Oh, that looked like it hurt! Shall I kiss it better?"

"Ironic isn't it? Freed from one metal box beneath the waves to be trapped in another. Still, at least this one has nibbles".

**Assignment #6:** Narrative Pitch Doc, Rhys Shurey

**Deadline:** April 1<sup>st</sup> (extension), 11:59 PM BST

"Endless winter, endless night. No more stars that blind, so bright. Only blackness, absent light. No more treacherous sun to bite. An Age of Darkness, of mortal plight, where the cattle tremble at my sight. An eye for an eye, a world made right. My kingdom come, oh endless night".

**DESIGN STATEMENT CHART:**

Mechanic	Description	Narrative Purpose	Example Moments
Exploration	The game features an interconnected map with hidden stashes, rooms, and shortcuts. Players gradually reveal the map as they rest, and certain areas require specific abilities or tools to access, encouraging backtracking.	Early areas feel dangerous and confusing but become more navigable as players acquire new abilities, mirroring Vlad's regained memory and growing strength. Looping through areas can also demonstrate state changes following narrative beats.	In Act 2, after obtaining the Hammer of Justice, the player revisits the mess hall and can break a noticeable but previously impassable weak wall, uncovering a secret KGB lab, a miniboss, and an experimental weapon.
Traversal	Players begin with basic movement abilities (run, jump, slide, climb) that limit exploration. As they progress, abilities will be unlocked like the Spectre's Sickle, Spectral Dash, Old Flame's Light and Hammer of Justice, enhancing mobility, combat and access to previously unreachable areas.	Another aspect creating parity through mechanics, matching player fantasy with narrative reality as Vlad grows stronger, fulfilling the player fantasy of becoming an unstoppable vampire hunter.	A shiny chest on an early-game walkway remains out of reach for hours. Later, after unlocking the Spectral Dash, the player can finally reach it, though the platforming remains a challenge. Their reward is a valuable item fragment for upgrading Vlad's gear.
Combat	Fast-paced, real-time close-quarters combat, similar to Hollow Knight and	Resource scarcity reinforces the submarine setting and Vlad's	The player is cornered, a horde chasing them down tight, winding

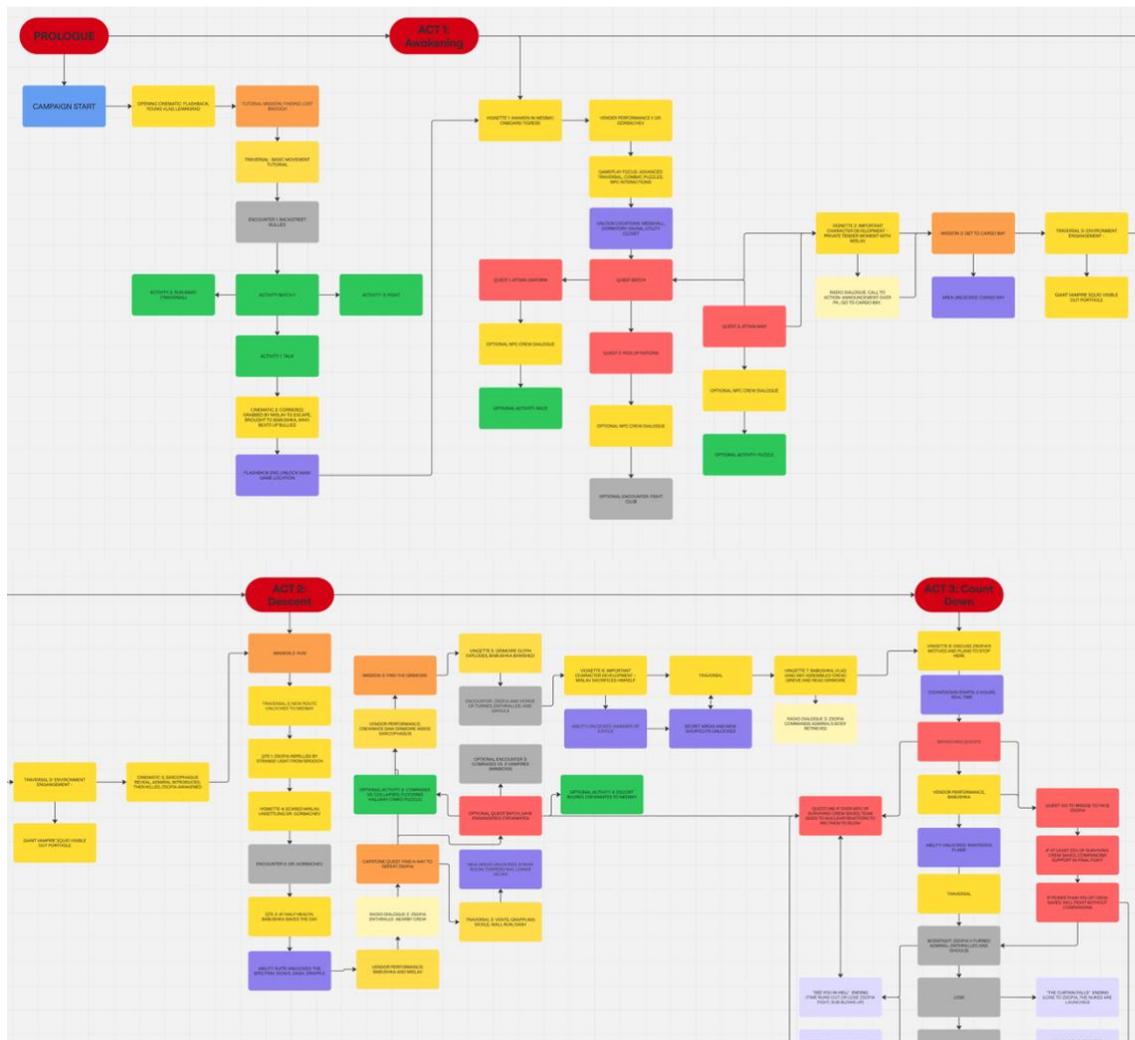
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	<p>Castlevania. Players utilize quick strikes, magic abilities, dodging, parrying, and counterattacks. Environmental hazards can be weaponized. Up to four NPC allies can join the player, changing combat significantly offering unique abilities, tactics and buffs such as healing, ambushes and special tag-team executions. These can also be controlled by other guest players.</p>	<p>survivalist nature. He must adapt and make the best use of what's available, emphasizing strategic decision-making and the balance between self-sufficiency and teamwork.</p>	<p>corridors. They would be overwhelmed - if they were alone. Behind the barricade they flee toward are hidden comrades, left there purposely to ambush the horde blocking their progress. Platforming over the barricade as their comrades open fire, the team make short work of the submarine's scourge.</p>
<p>Collectables and upgrades</p>	<p>Unlike major abilities unlocked through story progression, upgrades for base skills and weapons require collectable materials. These resources are algorithmically distributed and finite, preventing full skill tree unlocks in a single run. Players must strategize on their build, and carefully choose between upgrading Vlad, or sharing resources to enhance the party's abilities.</p>	<p>Resource scarcity reinforces the submarine setting and Vlad's survivalist nature. He must adapt and make the best use of what's available, fulfilling player "action movie" fantasies. This also emphasizes strategic decision-making on finding a balance between self-empowerment and collective distribution, reflecting ideological tensions interesting in a Soviet setting.</p>	<p>Having picked up an item fragment, the player finds potent upgrades for Vlad available and must make a difficult decision. Down each upgrade path, other unique passives and manoeuvres are unlocked. Yet, in another pane, tandem powerful abilities and buffs are available by upgrading the party. The player has a tough choice ahead on how to balance upgrading Vlad with upgrading the party, if indeed a party is what they want.</p>

ends as he lights up a Molotov with a spark of the gauntlets and douses enemies outside. A battle ensues. You run towards an exit, slashing and dodging as Mislav battering rams his way through. Zsofia appears. You battle, but are knocked aside. Though she is injured by Mislav's attacks, Zsofia gets under his guard, disemboweling him and licking her bloody nails. He falls to his knees. Saying he loves you, he short-circuits the batteries in backpack with his gauntlets, detonating them and the Molotovs within. A huge fireball consumes him and Zsofia, who staggers on her feet; a blinded, screaming skeletal figure healing and melting at once. In a moment of despair and rage, a new ability prompt appears, the Hammer of Justice, and you strike the door off its hinges with a boom, escaping.

**GAMEPLAY MACRO:**



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**INT. LOADING BAY, "TIGRESS" USSR STEALTH SUBMARINE, 5PM.**

**NARRATIVE IN:** VLAD, MISLAV AND COMRADES HAVE ASSEMBLED AT THE LOADING BAY TO INSPECT THE STRANGE BOX. PLAYER HAS JUST FOLLOWED DIRECTIVE, "APPROACH THE OBJECT".

Vlad approaches the box, followed by Mislav. Close up on hand reaching out toward the OBJECT.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV  
HALT SAILOR!

Cutscene begins, camera pans back across the room towards the entrance where ADMIRAL ZAKAROV stands under dramatic lighting, tall, slender, upright, decorated with medals, uniformed, huge bushy mustache and long coat billowing majestically despite the fact the scene is in submarine. The assembled sailors stand at attention and salute.

ADMIRAL MOOD: ECCENTRIC, SARDONIC

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV  
Did your mother never tell you not to touch strange objects fished from the ocean floor during a top secret reconnaissance mission in enemy waters?

Vlad and Mislav step back sharply, making room, but the admiral comes to inspect each of them closely, squinting and grunting thoughtfully. He then approaches the box, examining it for a beat.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
As I suspected... I have no idea what the fuck this is. Oh, but it does seem to have a latch of sorts under all this muck.

Snaps fingers at Vlad and Mislav.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
As you two have so generously volunteered, you're welcome to get to cleaning.

Vlad and Mislav look at each other, back to the Admiral, who cocks his eyebrow with only the slightest smirk.

They pull off and hose seaweed, old netting, flotsam and centuries of grime. As the layers come a tarnished silver sarcophagus is revealed, covered in mussels and barnacles, adorned with a relief of a beautiful feminine figure.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
(exclaims in Russian) This cannot be  
the source of the signal.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
(to one side) Lieutenant, be sure to  
remind me to shoot everyone in  
navigation out of the torpedo tubes  
later. (signs) Well, better get it  
open.

Admiral nods to Vlad and Mislav, who use heavy iron tools to break the rusted lock on the latch. Attempting to open it takes much effort, and they employ crowbars. Suddenly the seal is broken, and Vlad catches the heavy lid bodily before it can fall on the admiral.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
Thank you comrade Vladimir.

Inside the sarcophagus a pale, surprisingly well preserved woman, cheeks hollow, eyes shut, red hair tumbling down her sides. She's adorned in ornate medieval finery, a carefully crafted mix between the style of the court and the convent, a blend of black and white materials and gold accents stained with dried, almost black blood emanating from a sharpened cross buried deep within her chest. Some of the sailors begin to mutter.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
Hush comrades, I see an engraving  
upon this cross...

Admiral pulls the stake out with a sharp tug, turning away from the coffin towards the crowd. He nods at Vlad's hands.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
You are bleeding comrade.

ADMIRAL ZAKAROV (cont'd)  
"Dearest Zsofia, may this always hold  
a special place in your heart. Your  
sister, Elizabeth."... I wonder-

A clawed hand grabs the admiral by the back of the neck, nails digging deep into his bleeding throat. He is lifted off his feet into the air, gasping for breath. Behind him, hungry red eyes glow from within deep, emaciated sockets, as a fanged maw grows the twisted smile of ZSOFIA BATHORY.