

VR the World

Yoko

The Art Book

Game World
Design
Spring 2018

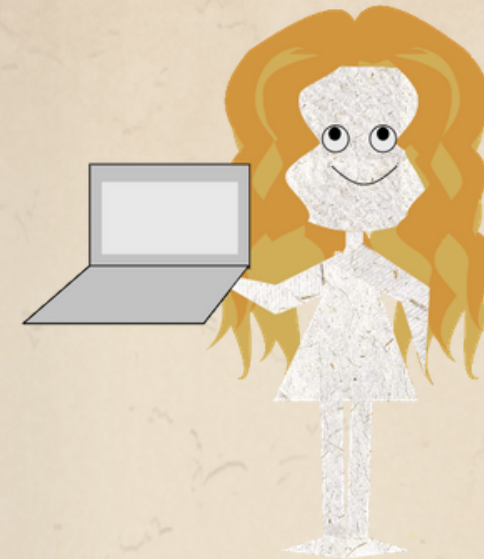


Index

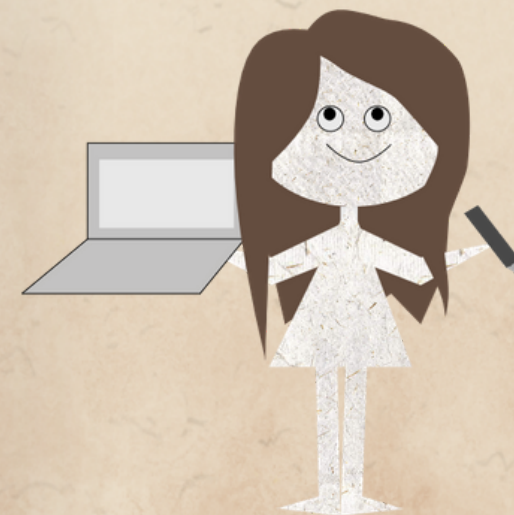
Meet the artists.....	2
The concept behind Yoko.....	3
Art style.....	5
Yōkai.....	9
Communication and navigation.....	11
Nature and seasons.....	13
The ground texture.....	16
Hospital.....	17
Childhood	
Bedroom.....	19
Living Room.....	21
Outdoors.....	23
Frozen Lake.....	25
Adulthood	
Apartment.....	27
Cemetery.....	29
Airport.....	31
Doctor's office.....	33

Meet the artists

Kaela



Sarah



The concept behind Yoko

A world of memories...



Our first-person interactive exploration gameworld invites the player to experience a unified and cohesive personal, emotional story within the realm of virtual game spaces. The game spaces exist within the confines of a diary, presumably belonging to the player-character, Yoko.

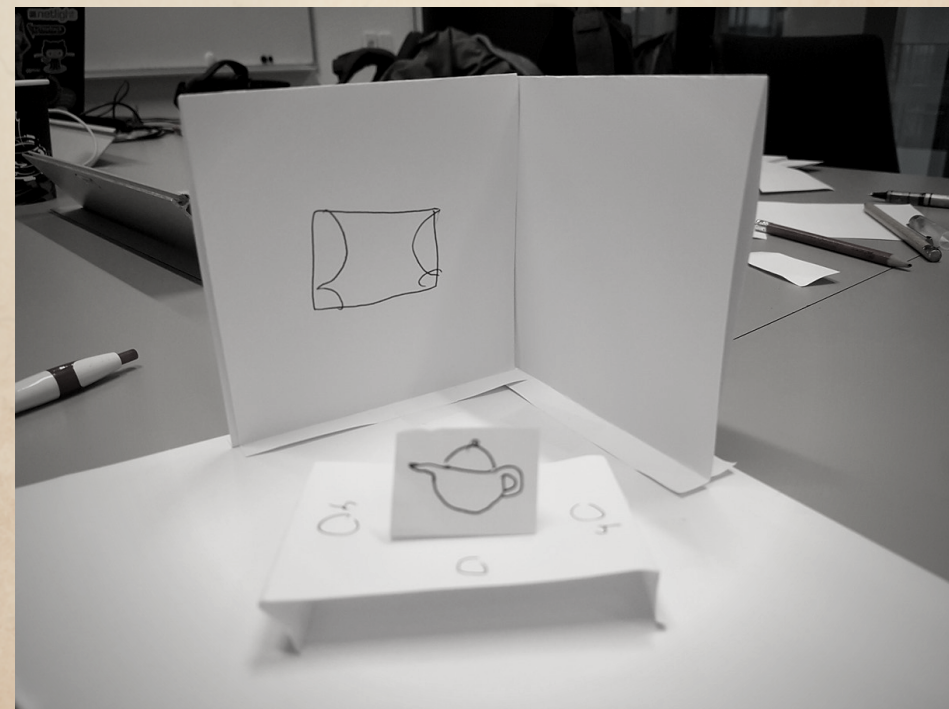
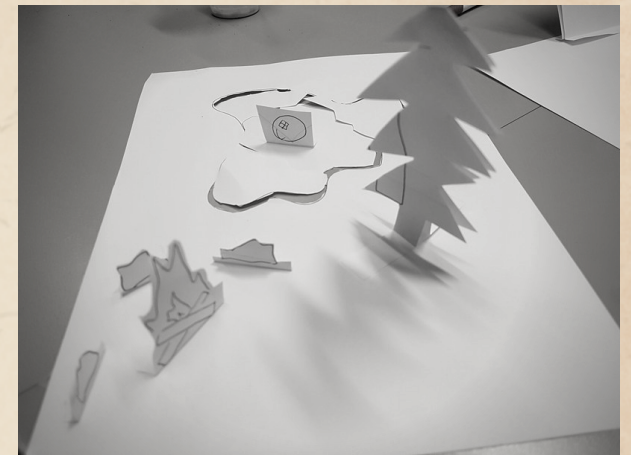
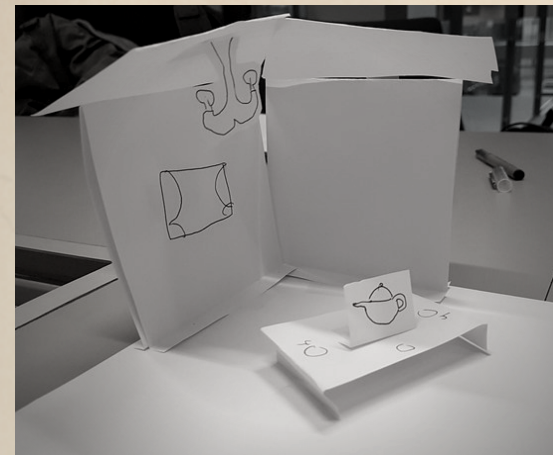
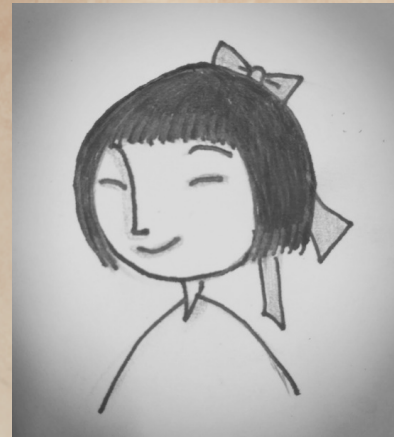
Within the diary, the player's exploration is not constrained and there are no defined goals. Rather, the player is strongly encouraged to follow a sequence and carefully examine the contents of the game spaces to collect useful pieces of information.

It is this interactivity and willingness to be led that contributes to the player's ability to comprehend the components of Yoko's memories and to understand her character and meaningful life events in the order in which they occurred.

The game world of Yoko depends on the intrigue of mystery to motivate the player to continue to explore. The architecture and level design are story-driven, imparting new details and inviting players further into the events that shaped Yoko as a child and young adult.

Art Style

The beginning of the artistic process was ignited by a formulation of the narrative, meaning the art style was driven by the narrative. After discussing a skeletal framework of narrative concepts, we collected inspiring images and created mood boards to communicate the evolving tones and distinctive architectural elements of the world: paper texture and pop-ups.



Pop up art style skillfully represents how memories come to the forefront of our consciousness, whether prompted or seemingly not, and how they disappear when our attention is turned elsewhere. This is an essential connection to our narrative as the player is exploring Yoko's memories of the events that affected her life

While a 2D art style is not typical of virtual reality environments, both artists decided that it better complemented traditional pop-up features they were looking to implement. Positioning each object within the gamespace created a perspective

Additionally, this minimalist approach to design allowed for efficient execution of assets for rapid conception of the first level and as demand increased.

The color palettes were largely based upon paper texture players might expect to find throughout their daily lives

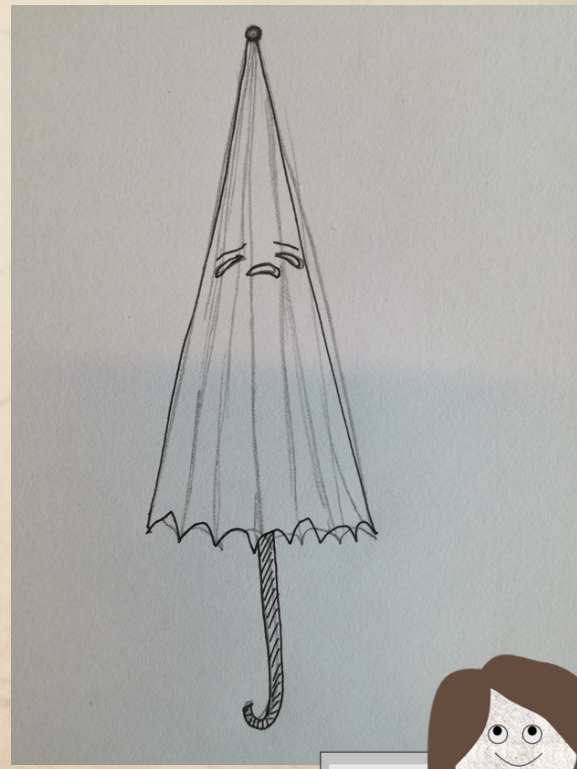
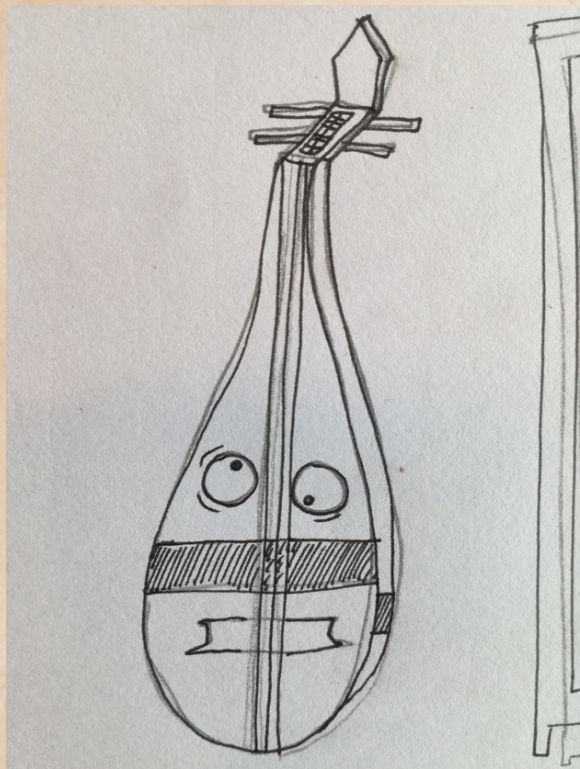


Similarity between soft-hued shades was necessary to commit mundane commonplace and cultural objects to the surrounding and allow special, brightly colored objects to draw the attention of the player toward them.



Yōkai

Instead of real people from her past - whose presence can still be perceived through objects, sound and written text - the characters that inhabit Yoko's memories are Yōkai, supernatural creatures belonging to the Japanese folklore



Some Yōkai sketches



Michael Dylan Foster describes them as monsters, ghosts and phenomena that "inhabit a realm of narrative in which laws of nature are challenged (...) Yōkai themselves are always changing, from place to place and generation to generation (...) they are a kind of communal intellectual property: anybody can play with them, believe in them, change them, and make new versions of them to be sent out into the world." in "The book of Yōkai" (University of California Press, 2015)

Due to their mutable nature, Yōkai perfectly fitted the unstable, tormented and irrational stream of thoughts and feelings that shape Yoko's world.

Yōkai can be found in six of the eight scenes that form the two chapters: each setting hosts one Yōkai shaped by Yoko's feeling and memories linked to that specific place.

Communication and navigation

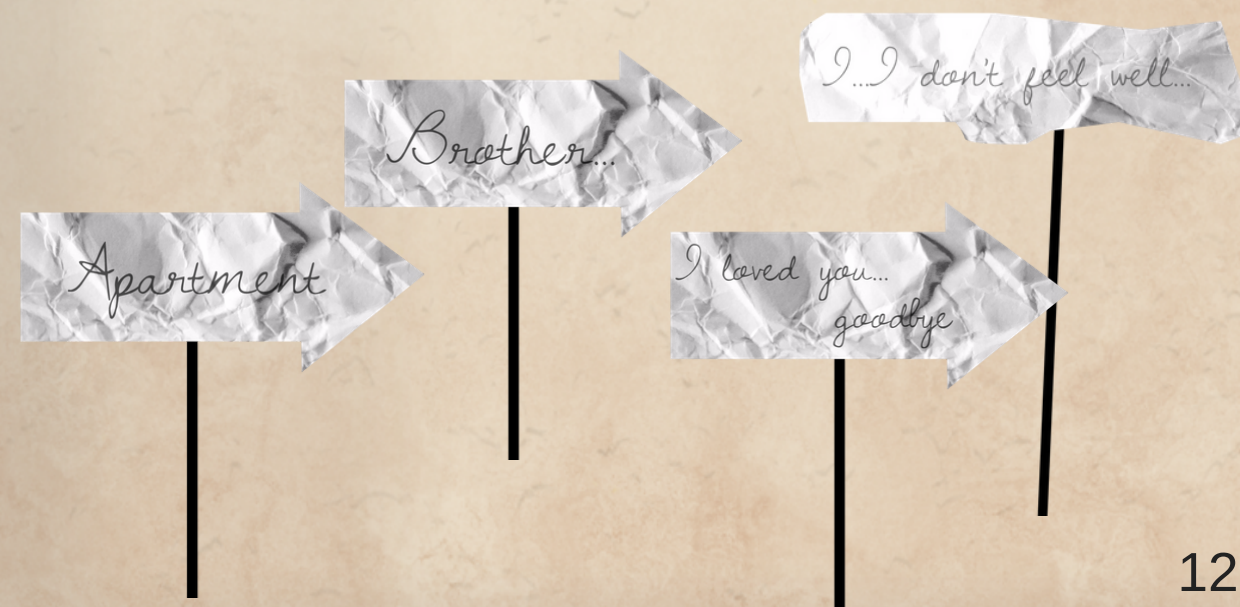
Written, legible dialogue text appears across all levels, most prominently on road signs. Road signs are a crucial navigational component to the game.

Without them, the player would have difficulty exploring the namespaces in the intended order. While road signs are primarily meant to direct, they also are indicative of Yoko's thoughts relating to a particular memory as you walk toward it. Road signs appear between game spaces and act as directional signals to the players for where to proceed next.

The road signs in the Childhood level display both Japanese text and its English translation. The Japanese characters are suited to that of a kid or adolescent age and mindset and are written in an informal context. The presence of English on the road signs is meant to accommodate a wider range of players



The road signs in the young adulthood level display strictly English text. The reason to exclude Japanese text is that we wanted to exemplify the process by which the player-character's educational and cultural reality was being shaped/transformed by her surroundings; It is meant to be symbolic, representing a change in her age, relationships, geographical environment and academic standing



Nature and seasons

The player will be born inside a paper flower made of four petals, which we established as a starting point in both the chapters: in the Childhood, the flower is clean, whereas in the Adulthood it shows water stains and scratches on the petals, which symbolize the effects that traumatic events have had on Yoko's mental and emotional health.



Yoko's childhood chapter takes place sometime during the winter season, in a small, countryside town similar to one that may exist in the Kiso Valley of Japan. The skybox resembles daytime; The sun symbolizes the "early" stage of Yoko's life. Trees, snow and a frozen lake can be found in the two outdoors scenes.

The Adulthood chapter takes place during the Spring season. The skybox reveals it is late afternoon; this change in time of day suggests Yoko has grown up and she is now in her 20s.

Cherry blossoms can be found outside her apartment, on the road to the cemetery and inside of it, creating a contrast between her isolation and the beauty of the outside world. The setting is urban, with a skyline that strongly resembles the city of Tokyo, as she is now living alone due to academic or vocational reasons.





The two types of road that lead the player to the scenes are made of snow and grass



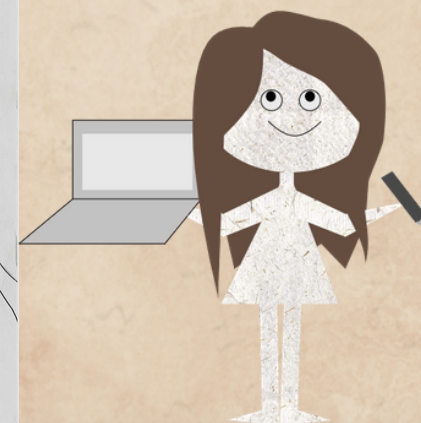
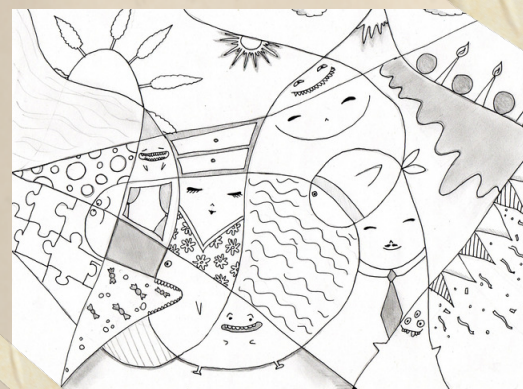
The paper mountains in the Childhood Chapter



The skylines in the Adulthood Chapter

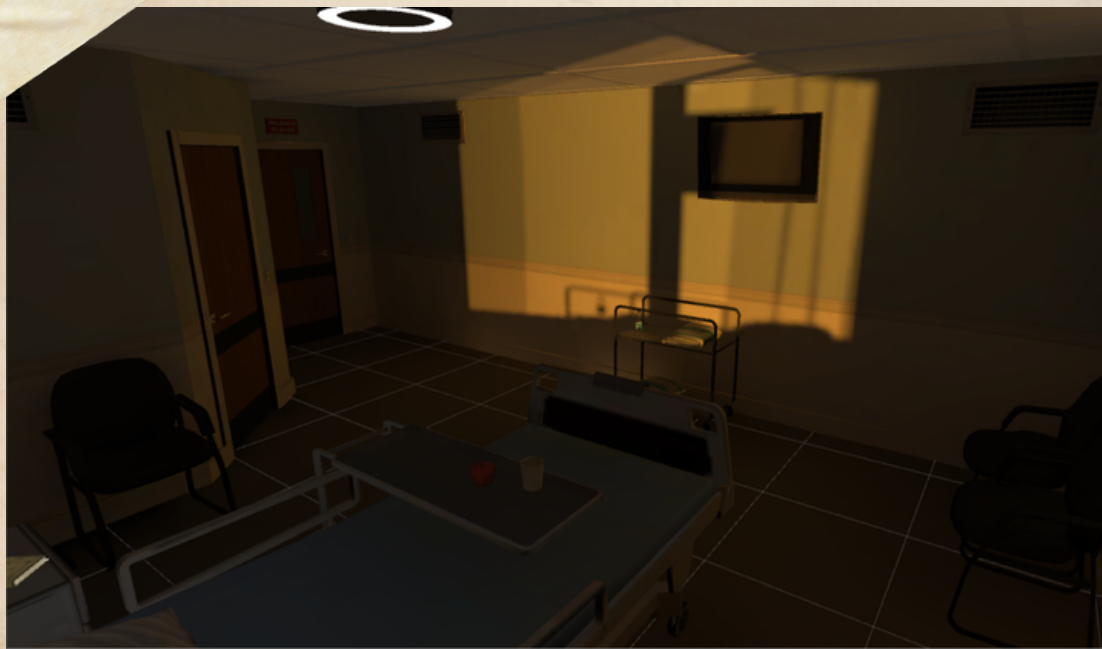
The Ground Texture

Sarah made three different types of drawings for the Childhood chapter's "ground". We eventually opted for the most minimalistic one, that resembles a family picture, and added a layer of rice paper texture to it - we did not use any drawing for the Adulthood ground



Hospital

The hospital setting/environment serves as a cold open narrative tactic; It is what sets the narrative premise for the game world. The players find themselves restrained to a hospital bed with only the ability to look around. There are no signs of having been visited by family nor of doctors. There are no other signs of life: the player is alone. This lends a sense of isolation, a complete absence of connection.

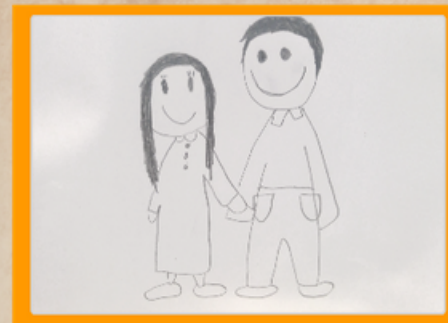
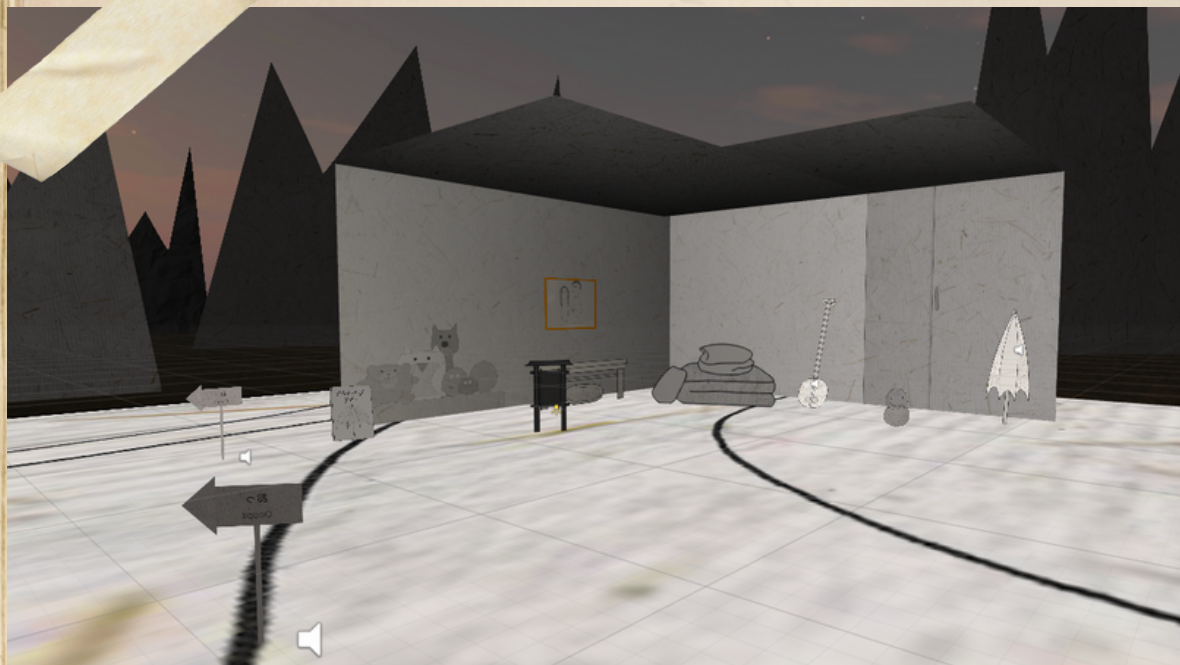


The game world's final level appears when the player returns to the Introduction. Everything remains the same as if it was only a moment that passed between this level and those of Yoko's memories. The player cannot move from the bed and the only noise that can be heard is the heart monitor. If the player looks at the book again in hopes of returning to the past, the heart monitor flatlines, signifying the end of Yoko's life and therefore the end of the game world.



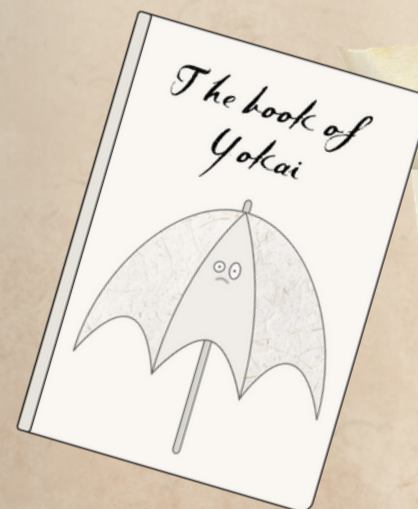
Childhood Bedroom

The bedroom introduces the player to a time in Yoko's childhood where she was happy. She has a relatively tidy bedroom containing objects relative to her young age; she has a smiling doll, a traditional instrument called shamisen, and a small, neatly folded tatami mat. The absence of electronics is temporally significant as Yoko is meant to be a young girl during a time where household electronics were not common and Japanese traditional lifestyle still prevailed.

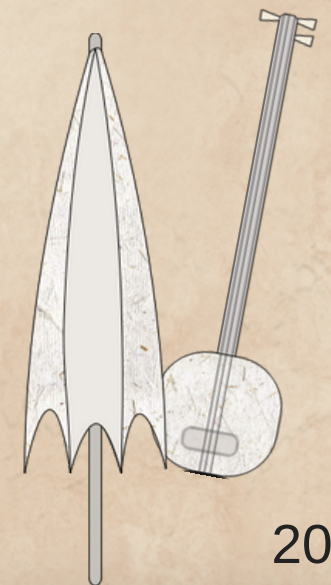


Orange is associated with cheerfulness in Japanese culture, more so than yellow, a color Western cultures value above orange when pertaining to happiness

This is the most important object found in the Bedroom, and the first meaningful object introduced in the world. Its color is drastically different from its surroundings, meant to draw the attention of the player to it. When observing the picture held within the frame, the player will notice a smiling girl and boy holding hands. While this this picture has no identifying names, it is safe to assume was drawn by Yoko and is of Yoko and someone special to her, her brother



The player can download the Book of Yōkai **here**.



Living room

In the living room, Yoko and her brother accidentally spilt tea, and were punished by their mother for not paying attention. Yoko's memory of the event translates into a series of objects she associates with the incident: a kotatsu, a bonsai tree, the spilt tea on the floor - which is, in the scene, the colored object that catches the player's attention - and the very first Yōkai she encounters: the teapot that turns into an furious woman's face whose angry tone of voice can be heard when she (or it!) is approached by the player.

the mother's rage shapes the first Tsukumogami (Yōkai of ordinary tools and objects

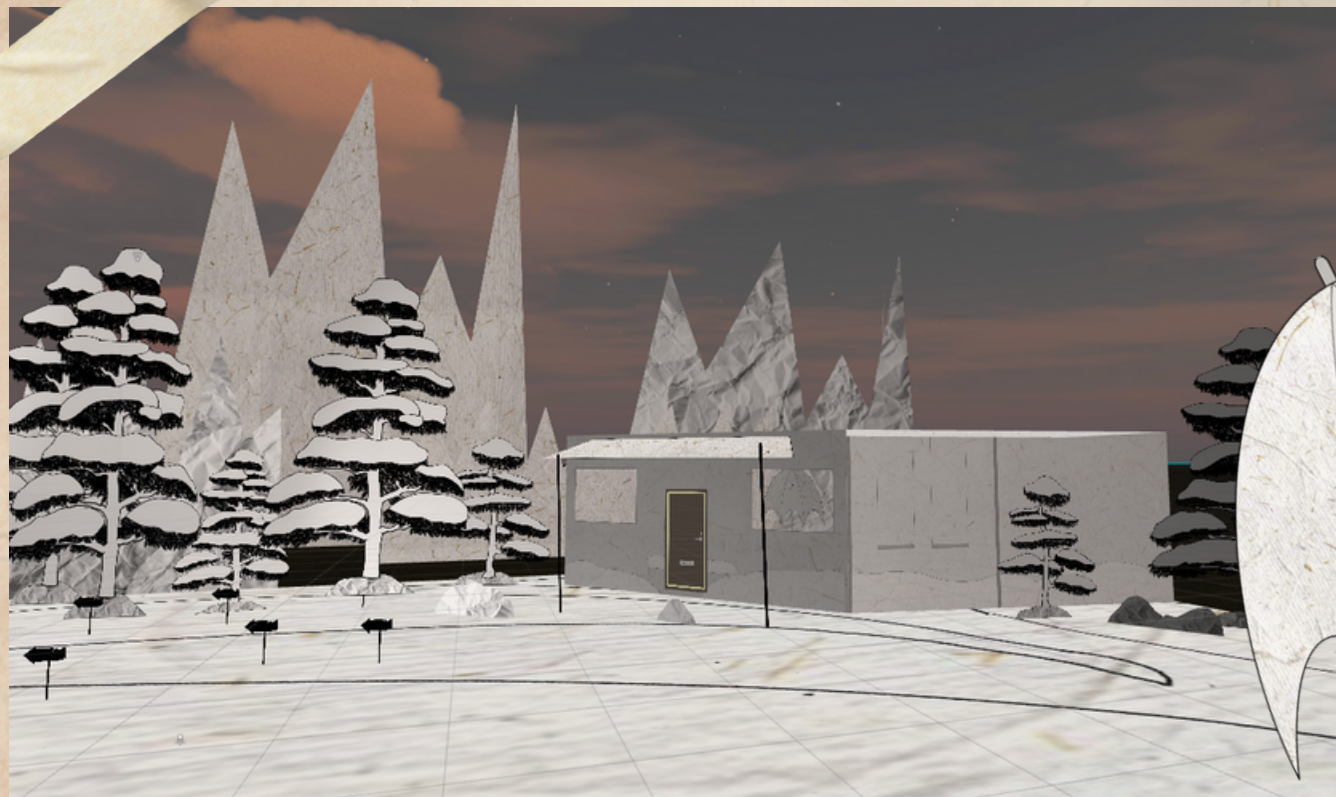


Decorations, pieces of furniture and additional artistic elements were drawn on the walls directly



Outdoors

The players reach a game space where they are outside of Yoko's house. This is meant to convey how the mother responded to her children's misbehavior of spilling the tea; she sends her two children outside to discipline their behavior. The locked brown door symbolizes the temporary banishment of the two children, who are not allowed back into the house until their punishment is over. They are now left alone.



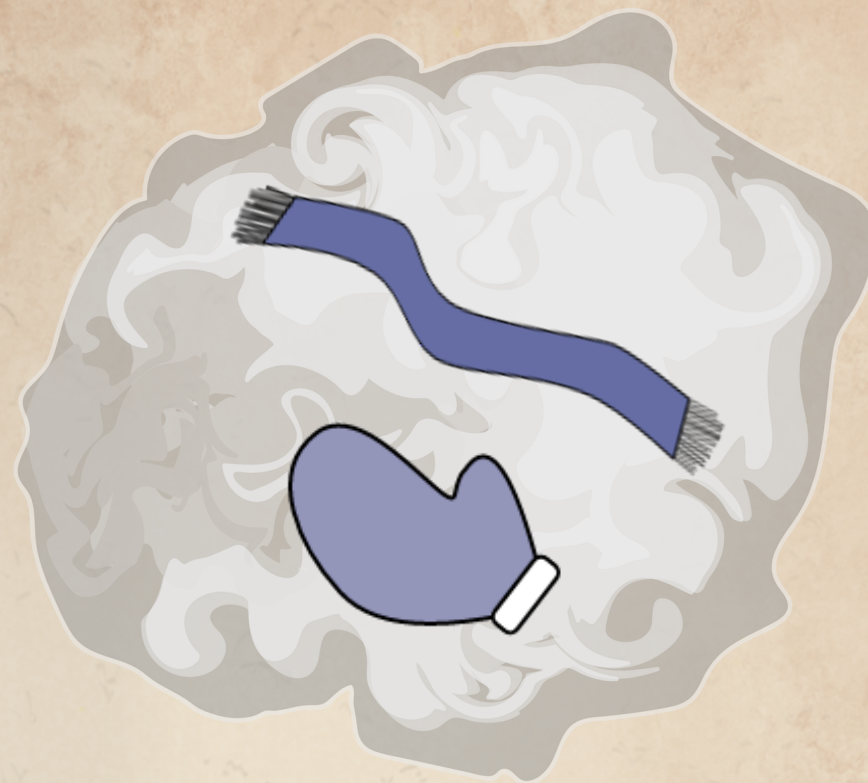
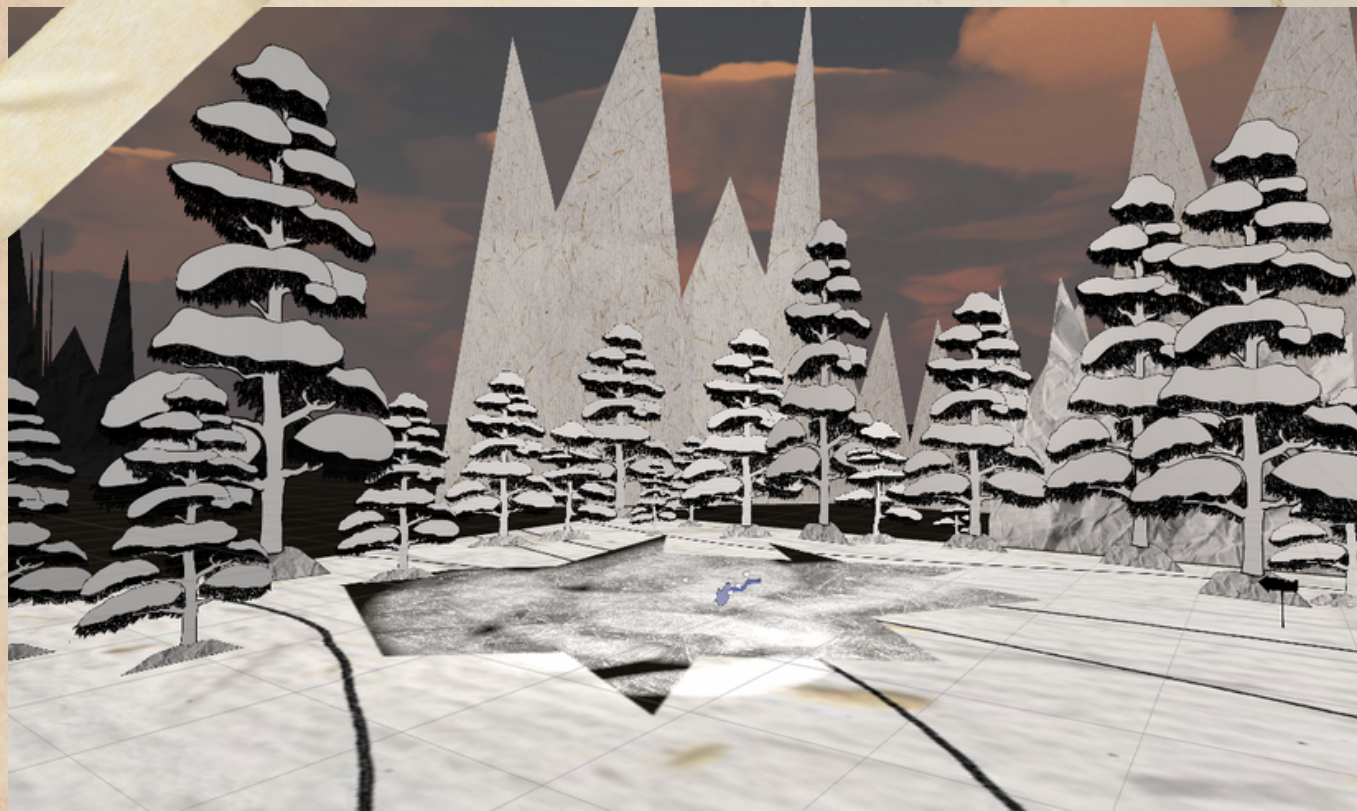
Japanese parents way of disciplining is called "shitsuke", meaning to guide and encourage the development of an appropriate behavior through supervision and instruction. By leaving a child unattended following an inappropriate behavior, Japanese parents attempt to punish him or her. This discipline measure is meant as a threat to exclude them from the safety and inclusivity of their social group. In a society where social grouping is important, forced separation and isolation is punishment.



One of the objects from Yoko's bedroom has now become a Tsukumogami: a concerned umbrella looks at the two kids from inside the house, probably foreseeing a disturbing near future

Frozen Lake

The Lake gamespace is the last place of exploration in the Childhood level and serves as the climax of the narrative. As the player approaches the lake he or she will notice it is frozen over, with a blue glove and scarf centred on top. What are they doing on the frozen lake and what meaning do they hold to Yoko? The player must approach them to reveal why this memory is a defining moment in Yoko's childhood.



The road sign leading to the frozen lake is completely black, and broken: this means the player is approaching the most traumatic experience in Yoko's life

Adulthood Apartment

The player arrives into the Adulthood chapter, realizing they are alive. They must explore the remaining gamespaces within this level to reveal how Yoko's experience at the Frozen Lake has shaped her.



Yonaki Baba
feeds on others'
sadness and pain

The apartment is a drastic change of scenery from Yoko's childhood bedroom; it appears unkempt with a bottle of pills split over, clothes lay in a pile on the floor, and her tatami mat remains unfolded with a pile of magazines on top of it.

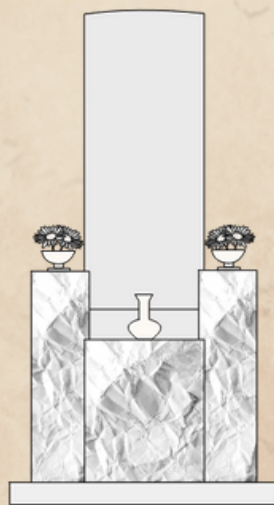


The apartment is the first game space made available for exploration in the Young Adulthood level and first game space following the traumatic experience at the Frozen Lake in the Childhood level.

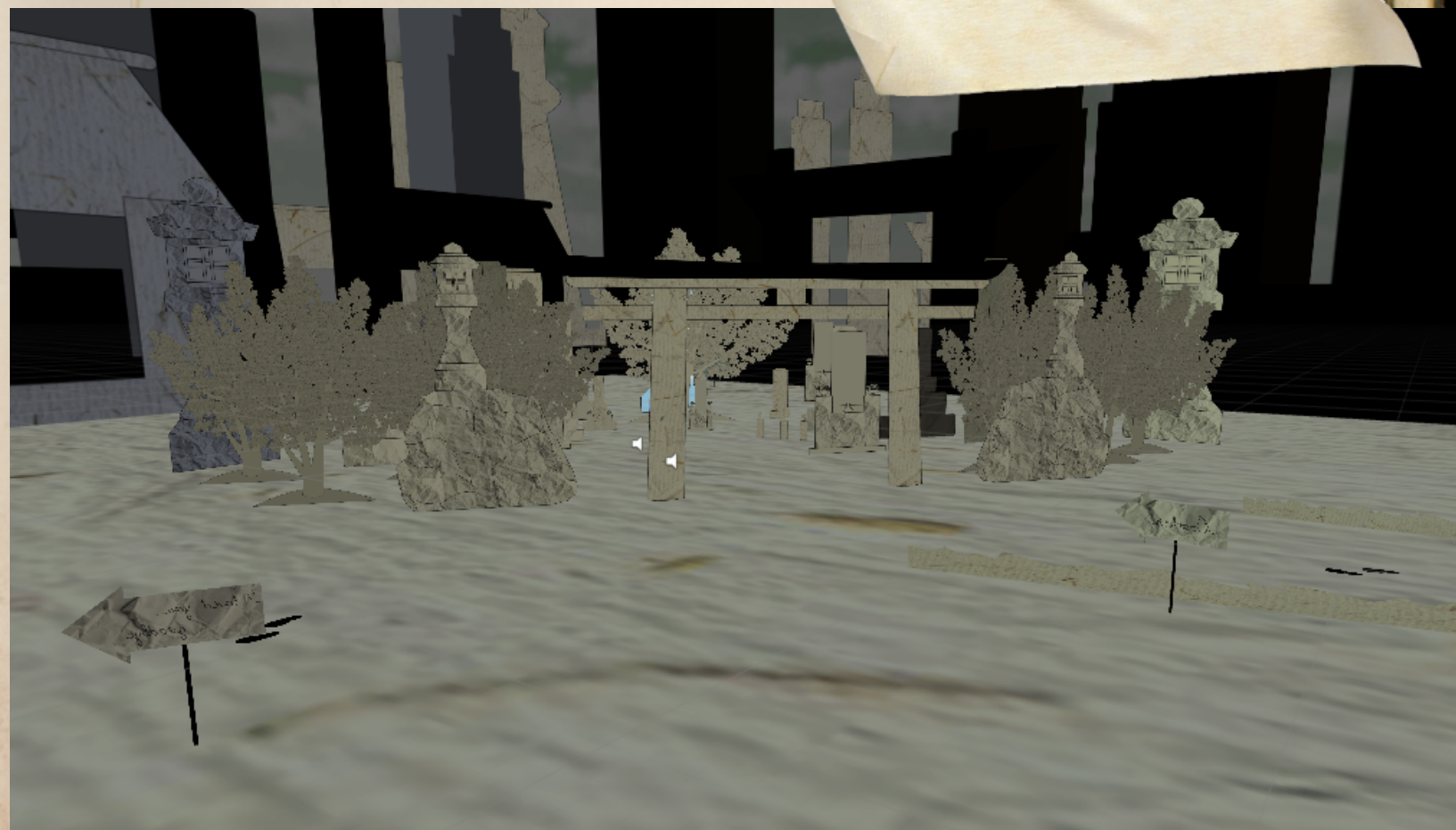
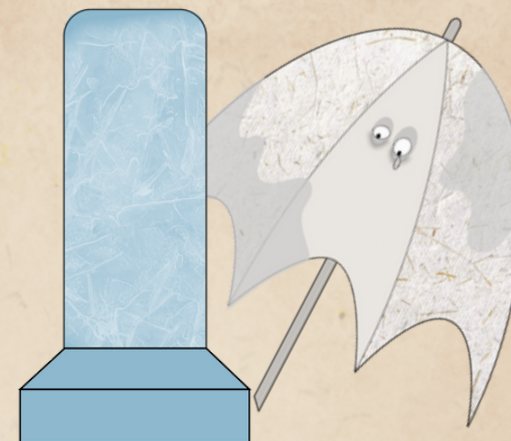


The cemetery

If it was previously suggested or up to the player to assume, it is now confirmed that Yoko's was trying to reach his glove and scarf that had fallen onto the frozen lake, and passed away from drowning. The umbrella Yōkai can be found, one last time, in the cemetery the player visits, right next to the colored object: the brother's grave.

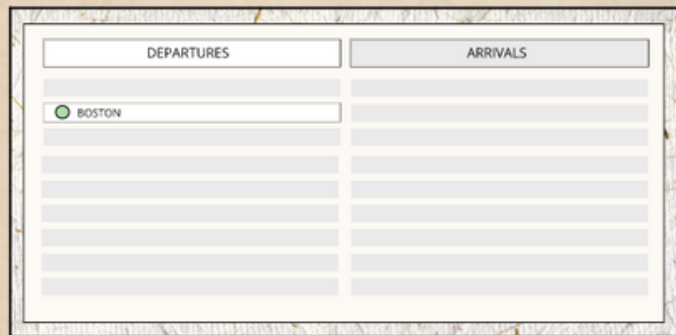


the ice texture was placed over the grave to represent the barrier that separates Yoko from her brother



Airport

The player then comes to a game space resembling an airport. The airport is decidedly barren to convey an eerie sense of loneliness.



The departure screen only has one destination: Boston, MA. Who is going to Boston? Not Yoko, but her former love interest. This memory pertains to the end of her relationship with a man whom she loved and his departure to return home to the States.

The fire-breathing Yōkai encountered at the airport represents Yoko's feelings about her problematic relationship with Tom; Kiyo Hime was a woman who fell in love with a man who later rejected her. Even though Yoko's primary emotion is not anger, this Yōkai manifests due to the similarity of circumstances.

This letter is one of two meaningful objects found in the airport. Scribbled on a piece of paper is a break-up note from Yoko's love interest, Tom. The letter allowed Tom to open up and be more honest with Yoko, letting him convey everything he wanted to say.

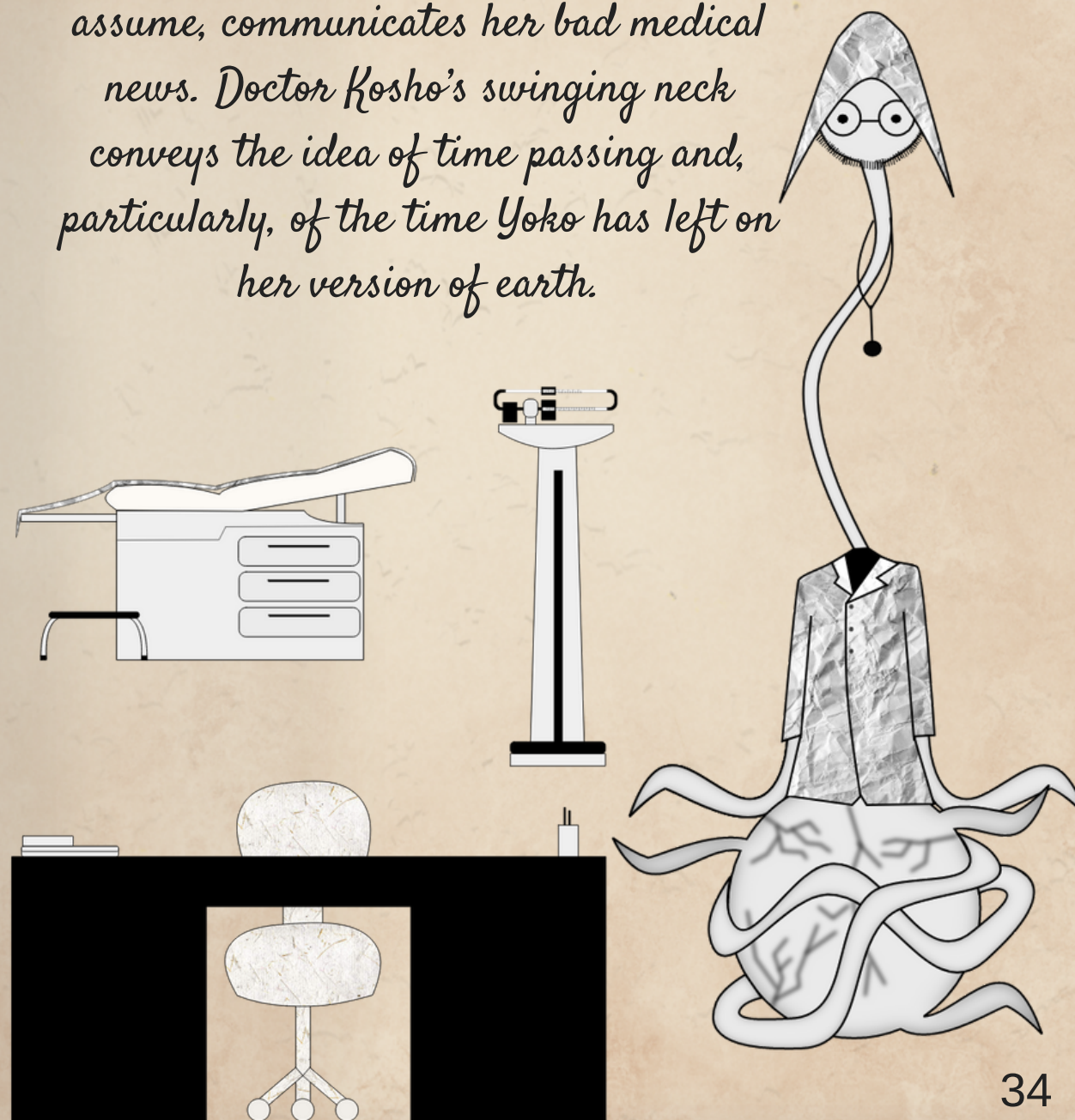
Yoko
I have been worn out and stretched thin. I feel isolated and empty. I know you are not good at communicating your needs but I have been approaching a breaking point for a while.
Of course I yelled and cursed and tried to hurt you when you came. I wanted to make you feel the pain and uncertainty I felt. I had loved you but that made me vulnerable to your suffering. Your depression, your emotional instability - whatever you call it - is intolerable. The smallest, insignificant problems become catastrophic and I can't do anything about it. You don't want help, you don't want to work on your mood or behavior. You just don't want to get better.
Our relationship isn't something special. It's not something that perseveres through all the terrible things because it has some innate value behind it. It's just you trying to fix maintain something dysfunctional because you refuse to let go or you are afraid of being alone or trying to find someone new.
That's the truth
I need to be able to look at myself in the mirror - mirror and not feel worthless or inadequate. I adored you, Yoko, but you need to learn to love yourself too. I hope you can learn to open yourself up to others. I hope you can learn to be kind to yourself.
Tom



The final scene of the Adulthood Chapter reveals the reasons behind Yoko's condition in the intro scene. The doctor's office is presented as a regular examination room with all the common objects one might expect to see during a visit as a patient: an examination table, a scale and the doctor's desk.



The doctor himself is presented in the form of a Yōkai; Kosho is a type of Yōkai that lives inside people's body, close to their hearts, and brings terminal illnesses. This is why Yoko sees "her" Kosho in the guise of a doctor who, the player would assume, communicates her bad medical news. Doctor Kosho's swinging neck conveys the idea of time passing and, particularly, of the time Yoko has left on her version of earth.



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