

# Digital Storytelling

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## Pre-Production Sheet

### My digital Story: In Life and Death

A Top-Down style game where you play as a young grim reaper who begins to doubt the ways of life and death. The character must go through a journey depicting fairness, the laws of the universe and their own self-discovery to develop. The game focuses on themes of life and death, along with other themes regarding mythology and immortality.



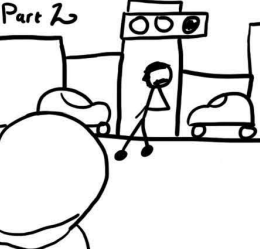
### Storyboard:

Page 1:

<p>Part 1</p> 	<p><b>Two grim reapers stand in an unknown location. Grim is new to their job, and is uncertain that they are doing the right thing. The other reaper tells them they'll get used too it. Scene ends with Grim going too work.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene: Nowhere</b> <b>No music</b> <b>No Sound</b> <b>Dialogue: Reaper and Grim's discussion</b></p>
<p>Part 2</p> 	<p><b>Grim begins to collect the souls of those close to death. It clearly begins to take a mental toll on them. The people they begin to take range from a kind elderly lady too a husband who's gotten into an accident. Then they come to the final soul, a little girl who has fallen into a lake.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene: Forest</b> <b>Music: Claming Piano</b> <b>Sound: Birds singing, Leaves in wind</b> <b>Dialogue: Two conversations between Grim and the human</b></p>
<p>Part 3</p> 	<p><b>As Grim prepares to take the girls soul, they hear her crying out for help. We see Grim get more conflicted until they eventually make the decision to save the young girl. It is clear that Grim know's they've broken the rules, but appear to show little regret towards their actions.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene: Forest</b> <b>No music</b> <b>Sound of birds</b> <b>Dialogue: Grim's inner monologue, girl yelling, girls mother calling out for her.</b></p>
<p><b>Scene 1</b> <b>Page 1</b></p>	<p>Context: The story is told in the format of a Top-Down RPG game, and the entire story will be told in this perspective. As a result, the player is matly in charge of how the protagonist moves.</p>	

The games first act attempts to introduce characters and world building. It showcases the main problem in the story and hints at future conflict.

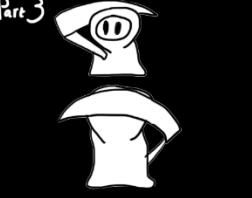
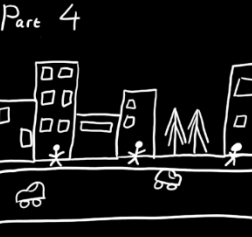

Page 2:

<p>Part 4 - End of Act 1</p> 	<p>The screen goes dark and Grim finds themselves in an empty space, here, they have a conversation with Reaper, who warns them about the dangers of dealing with life and death. Despite not understanding, Grim agrees to stay in line and not interfere again.</p>	<p>Scene: The Unknown Sound: Wind Music: None Dialogue: Reapers warning to Grim.</p>
<p>Part 1- Start of Act 2</p> 	<p>An unknown amount of time later, Grim appears taking the soul of a dying man at a hospital. They can see the man's loved ones around them and feels conflicted, still doubting if they are doing the right thing. As they walk through the city they see many people, and their conflict rises further.</p>	<p>Scene: Hospital/City Sound: Cars in the background Music: None Dialogue: Grim's inner thoughts</p>
<p>Part 2</p> 	<p>Looking back at their list, Grim sees the son of the previous soul running out into a road without looking. Grim is hesitant, knowing the boy is supposed to die, but in the final moment decides to step in, causing the boy to live, but become seriously injured from the accident.</p>	<p>Scene: City Sound: Cars, people talking Music: None Dialogue: Grim's inner thoughts</p>

Scenes 1 & 2  
Page 2

When referring to "Grim's inner thoughts" it means the dialogue isn't heard by other characters.

Page 3:




<p>Part 3</p> 	<p>The screen goes dark again, and Reaper confronts Grim directly. Grim argues that they are doing their job wrong and that good people don't deserve to die. Reaper argues about the unfairness of life and the fairness of death, calling Grim's ideas hypocritical and cruel.</p>	<p>Scene: The Unknown Sound: Wind Music: None Dialogue: Grim and Reaper's discussion</p>
<p>Part 4</p> 	<p>Reaper tells Grim about humanity. How people always want to improve and grow, and how life gets in the way. They say how death is the one true example of fairness, and how it's the limited time that people have on this planet that makes life so important. By getting in the way, they do more harm than good.</p>	<p>Scene: The Unknown Sound: Wind Music: Small calming piano notes Dialogue: Reaper's monologue to Grim</p>
<p>Part 5- End of Act 2</p>  <p>↑ Different frames animated in the same scene</p>	<p>The life span of a human is short, and they only have a limited time. Reaper explains that that time may end differently depending on people, but that the most fair thing they can do is to take them when it's their time. Grim finally begins to understand Reaper's indifference towards individuals and their readiness to fulfil their role.</p>	<p>Scene: The Unknown Sound: Wind Music: Small calming piano notes Dialogue: Reaper and Grim having a calm discussion</p>

Scene 2  
Page 3

The character development happens on this page along with the story's main message. Grim is a naive character, and this scene is bringing them to a bittersweet reality.

The game's second act focuses on the story's main themes and messages, explaining the key conflict in a way that can be understood and helping to begin character development.

#### Page 4:

<p>Part 1 - Scene of Act 3</p> 	<p><b>An unknown amount of time later, we see Grim outside of a cottage in the woods. It's assumed to be the same as the one in the first act.</b></p>	<p>Scene: The woodland Cottage  Sound: The sound of birds and trees  Music: Soft Piano  Dialogue: Grim Inner Monologue</p>
<p>Part 2</p> 	<p><b>Grim approaches an old woman in her bed who is near the end of her life. It's revealed to be the same little girl who they saved at the start of the game. She talks about the life she lives, both the good and bad. She tells Grim not to tell her where she's going cause it'll spoil the surprise. Grim laughs with her, promising her they won't. They congratulate her on living her life to the fullest.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene: Cottage</b>  <b>Sound: A crackling fireplace</b>  <b>Music: None</b>  <b>Dialogue: Speech between Grim and the old woman</b></p>
<p>Part 3 - End of Act 3</p> 	<p><b>Grim takes the old woman's soul, calling her by her real name, Hannah, and wishing her a calm passing into the unknown afterlife. While Grim is still not entirely neutral, they have learned about the importance of their job, and the game will end on a bittersweet note.</b></p>	<p><b>Scene: Nowhere</b>  <b>Sound: None</b>  <b>Music: None</b>  <b>Dialogue: Grim saying goodbye to Hannah's soul</b></p>

#### Scene 3 Page 4

*I think it's more realistic to not have Grim completely change their viewpoint at the end of the game. A single conversation doesn't change someone's personality in most cases, why should it here.*

The game's third act has the result of this conflict and the character development it caused. It portrays the overall message of the story being to accept and not fear death and creates a bittersweet ending to the story.

The storyboard was created with the purpose of outlining the key events within the story along with how the creative narrative would play out. I included the narrative within the second rectangle of the storyboard to guide myself through what was happening during each scene of the game, with the final square reminding me of the atmosphere and tone of the game. The constant lack of elements such as music in most scenes is done to highlight the realistic tone of the game, with most sounds within each scene being diegetic sound.

Since one of the key messages within the game is that you are unable to change your own fate, I have made the decision to not include any optional pathways or alternate endings within the game. Because of this, the story plays more like an interactive film, as the player can interact with the story in front of them but do nothing to change the outcome.

Within this storyboard I made sure to showcase the order of events and the narrative clearly. There are a total of three acts within the story, the beginning, middle and end. The start of the game is meant to show the conflict that Grim has about their role, the middle of the game shows the consequences and is where much of the narrative is explained. The end of the game showcases how the main message has been internalised by the protagonist, and hopefully the player.

Each part highlighted within the storyboard showcases an important piece of the story as a building block for the narrative.

## Script:

Act 1 - Start

\*Somewhere that is nowhere\*

Reaper: There you are. I've been waiting. Come here so I can see you.

You've been doing this about a week right? How are you doing?

Grim: ...Horrible

I don't want to be here any more

Reaper: I see... most feel like that when they first start

You'll get used to it.

Grim: Does it ever get better?

Reaper: No

Grim: Isn't there anything else I can do?

Reaper: No, this is why we're here, it is what we do, all we do and all we are

Grim: There was a mother today

I saw her children, they were crying

She was hit by a drunk driver, it wasn't her time yet

Reaper: I see... those ones do tend to be hard on new workers

You have to deal with them eventually though, might as well be now

Grim: You act like you don't even care

Reaper: I don't

Grim: I don't understand you

Reaper: I'm not asking you too

You have a long list today; I suggest you start working

The more you work the easier it may become for you

Grim: .....

\*Woods somewhere on earth\*

(Grim looks at their list. There are three names, Molly, Richard and Hannah)

After wandering around the woods, Grim finds a cottage. Inside is an old woman who we can assume is Molly.

Molly: Ah, have the angels come for me at last?

Grim: Not exactly

Grim wanders around the woods. They find a man bleeding out in the trees.

Man: Who are you, don't come any closer

Grim: I'm sorry, I truly am sorry

Grim makes a stop in the woods.

Grim: There's just one name left, Hannah Bright. She's supposed to be around here somewhere.

Hannah: screaming

Grim approaches the noise. He finds a little girl about three years old in a lake. It appears that she has fallen through the ice and is drowning.

Grim: .... So this is Hannah

Hannah: N-no, mommy??? Help me mommy please!!!

Grim: She's going to die. Today is the day her time ends....

Hannah: No no no

Grim: .....

Grim approaches Hannah at the lake

Hannah: Please.....

Grim gets Hannah out of the water.

Grim: She appears to be shaking...

Grim: What am I doing?

Hannah: You.....

Woman: Hannah!!? Hannah where are you???????

Hannah: Mommy???

Grim: I should leave.....

\*The screen fades out and goes dark. The text box appears without any pictures, depicting a conversation between two characters\*

Reaper: What did you do?

Grim: It's not right, what we do

Reaper: That's not your decision to make

Grim: She's a little girl, she hasn't properly gotten to live her life yet

Reaper: So that gives her special treatment?

Its not our job to question, its our job to keep the natural order of things, which you have now imbalanced.

Grim: Who are you to say what's natural? Good people deserve to live, how can that be a bad thing?

Reaper: it's not about what's good or bad, its about what is fair. If someone is on your list, their time has come.

Know that I take no joy in what we do, but know that it is necessary

Grim:.....

Reaper: I hope this experience can be a lesson for you. Your actions so far can be forgiven, but I should hope we don't need to have this conversation again.

Do you understand?

Grim:.....

I understand

Act 1 – End

Act 2 - Start

\*In a hospital room in a busy city\*

Unknown Girl: Dad???

Unknown Boy: He's gone, hasn't he

Grim stands unseen in the corner of the room. They have just taken the soul of a man in his hospital bed and is now watching the grieving family in front of them.

Grim: I should probably leave

Player walks out of door and the screen fades to black. When back in focus Grim is seen walking down a sidewalk of a busy city. As they player moves, they can hear the sounds of the city.

Grim: Theres only one more name here, they should be arriving any moment.

Unknown Boy: This can't be happening...

Grim turns around to see the unknown boy from the hospital slowly staggering through the streets.

Unknown Boy: Why does this happen?

Grim: That's the boy from earlier...

Unknown Boy: Dammit, how the hell am I going to take care of Sasha?

Grim: Is that his sister?

Unknown Boy: This cant.... I can't....

The boy begins to yell out and run without looking into the street. Grim knows that the boy is on his list but is still conflicted. Just as the boy is about to be hit by a car, Grim slightly puts the car off course, leaving the boy with some broken bones, but still alive.

Grim: This isn't right

Reaper: But it is what must be done

The screen turns black. Only the sprites of Grim and Reaper are now on the screen. The rest of the scene is entirely black.

Grim: I just don't understand

Reaper: What isn't there to understand?

Grim: These are good people, with lives to live

They're not finished yet

Reaper: I've told you already about the natural order,

Life doesn't care about what is right or fair, sometimes bad things happen to good people,

It is not up to us to decide when someone's life will end, all we can do is make that end comfortable for them

Grim: But why cant it be fair, I've saved two people already, two people who can now live their lives properly, why can't we just do that for everyone?

Reaper: Because that's not fair

Grim: You're contradicting yourself

Reaper: Let me explain it this way

The sprites disappear from the screen and new ones depicting a human in different stages of their life appear.

Reaper: A human's life is unfair. Some people are born into money, some in poverty, some have opportunities handed to them, others work their whole lives without ever living up to their full potential.

For some, they will live long lives, for others, they will be cut short. Life is hard and challenging to them, but it is also beautiful and valuable.

Grim: Then why cut it short?

Why not save peoples souls instead of take them?

Reaper: Because unlike life, death is fair and simple. It doesn't matter who you are, what family you were born into or your influence in life.

When your time is up, you are taken. There is nothing more certain in this universe than the end.

Grim: Then what's the point of it all? Why suffer so much in life if all that waits at the end is death?

Reaper: Its because human life is temporary that its so valuable. The fact that they won't remain in this world is what makes them human. To take that away would be taking away part of their humanity.

We are immortal beings. As long as there is some form of life in this universe we will continue to exist. Tell me, is that the type of life you want a human to live? Never knowing their true purpose, waiting until there is nothing left?

Grim:.....

Reaper: Are you starting to understand now?

Grim: You're not as care-free as you think you are, you know that right?

Reaper: That's none of your concern

Grim: You know, I think I understand you a little better

Act 2 – End

Act 3 – Start

We see Grim walking through the woods again. As they walk, they come across a cottage in a clearing.

Grim: This must be the place

Grim enters the cottage, inside we see an old woman lying in her bed surrounded by family. Grim approaches her.

Grim: Hello again Hannah

Hannah: Oh, you, you look familiar to me

Grim: That's because we met before, once when you were small

Hannah: Oh yes, I remember now, you where the one who saved me

Grim: I apologise for scaring you, only those who are close to the end can usually see our kind

Hannah: And yet here I am

Grim: .....

Hannah: You know, after you saved me, I kept telling people I saw an angel who saved me after I fell in the water

Nobody ever believed me though

Grim: .... I'm sorry

Hannah: Don't be

After that, I made sure to live my best life, being so close to death does that to a person you know

Grim: Your life, did it hurt? Was it unfair to you?



Hannah: Its been.... Hard ..... but beautiful, so beautiful

I worked, I loved, I cried, I did all sorts of things

And now.... I think I'm ready to sleep for a while

Grim: Thank you, Hannah

Hannah: What are you thanking me for? If anything, I should be thanking you

Grim: Thank you for living your life

.....

Aren't you scared at all? Don't you want to know where you're going?

Hannah: And ruin the surprise? I'd never

Grim: .....

Goodnight Hannah

Act 3 – End

End of Game

## Assets:

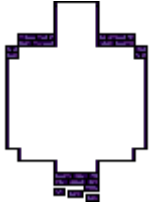
I have created a variety of character and location designs for this game. I have made a series of design choices to fit the narrative of my story and the themes I'm trying to express.



Grim's design has been made deliberately smaller than Reapers to show inexperience and naivety. I wanted the design to clearly show a Grim Reaper, however, I also wanted to keep a cosy atmosphere for the game, so decided to create a game sprite that many could consider to be "cute".



Reapers character design has been designed similarly to Grim's to highlight their species as a reaper and to create a "cute" looking design. I have decided to make Reaper's sprite bigger than Grim's to highlight how they have more experience. I also used a darker colour palette of grey instead of purple to hint at a more pessimistic outlook on life and death compared to Grim.



In this game, the idea of Nowhere isn't fully literal, as it exists as a concrete place that the player can visit. It is shown as a place the Grim Reapers gather, and is in no fixed location. Aspects of the game such as the Nowhere are supposed to be mysteries for the players, hence why they are never fully explained. I decided to use the colours purple for this asset as a stylistic choice and to ensure the game doesn't feel too dark due to it's serious themes. This colour scheme also fits with Grim's character design.



The River Styx is an asset within the game that has the purpose of linking directly to Greek mythology and its ideas about the afterlife. The myths are based on how the ferryman Charon would carry souls to the underworld, and this is something I wanted to replicate. I believe that including these references to history make the game easier to understand, and something users are more likely to enjoy playing through.