

Mission Design Document

01 - "Find Jacques"

Introduction

This is the **intro/tutorial mission** for *Hack and Splash*, a game where the player can run on water, befriend sea animal companions, fight sea monsters, and experience the dilemmas of being a human in the wild.

With this mission's structure, my goal is to make the combat feel as **fun and rewarding** as possible by setting it up with a **suspenseful, mysterious** first half. After the tension reaches a climax, it is paid off with the introduction of the main gameplay mechanics and character dynamics.

Contents:

- [Functional Goals](#)
- [Story Goal](#)
- [Gameplay Sub-goals](#)
- [Mechanics](#)
- [Gameplay Structure](#)
- [Story Synopsis](#)
- [Mission Emotions](#)
- [Themes Explored](#)
- [Remaining Questions and Loose Ends](#)

Functional Goals

The point of this mission is to:

- Introduce the **world** and **main characters**
- Tutorialize **basic movement**
- Tutorialize **interact/inspect**
- Tutorialize **basic melee combat**
- Establish **character motivations**

Story Goal

The main character has to find their missing friend, Jacques.

Gameplay Sub-goals

The player's general goals in this mission are to:

- Find Jacques
- Escape/kill the sea monsters
- Return home

Mechanics

- Movement and traversal
- Interact/inspect
- Melee combat

Gameplay Structure

1. CINEMATIC - intro
 - a. Establish story goal
2. TUTORIAL - basic movement
 - a. Walking (on water)
3. TUTORIAL - interact/inspect
 - a. Inspect dead sea creature
4. Traversal/environmental storytelling
 - a. Follow blood trail to islands
5. Exploration and traversal practice
 - a. Explore islands looking for clues
 - b. Use traversal skills to navigate the islands
6. TUTORIAL - melee strike
 - a. Button prompt to stomp sea creature
7. SKILL CHALLENGE - traversal
 - a. Chase sequence to escape sea monster
8. TUTORIAL - basic melee fighting
 - a. Sword fight against sea creatures
9. Walk-and-talk cooldown
 - a. Establish characters' dynamic and motivations

Story Synopsis

This mission takes place in the middle of the night. A **large, distant growl** wakes up the main character, who is sleeping on a floating driftwood raft in a sea cave. He calls out to someone named "Jacques," and

discovers that **Jacques is missing**. Concerned, he gets up and **steps off the raft** (*revealing that he can walk on water*), and leaves the cave to search for his friend.

He steps out of the cave onto the open ocean, where he finds the **mutilated body of a strange sea creature**. Upon inspection, he discerns that this was Jacques's handiwork. He hears **movement in the water** a few meters away and turns to look, thinking it might be Jacques, but **he sees nobody**; however, he notices a sparse **trail of blood** in the water, leading towards a **nearby cluster of islands**. That must be where Jacques went.

He skates over the ocean waves towards the islands, following the trail; on the way there, he hears **another growl, closer than before** and notices that all the seagulls' nests are empty (which is odd in the middle of the night). He starts to feel like **he's being stalked**. As he gets close to the islands, he sees **more dead sea creatures**, the same kind as before.

At the islands, he **searches for Jacques**. He finds clues and points of interest that indicate where Jacques has been— mostly things that have been slashed and torn up— but they are all dead ends. Finally, he finds another **sea creature** that seems to be dead, but when he inspects it, it **jerks awake and grabs him**. It is clearly wounded, but it has a strong grip on his leg; he struggles, and manages to use his other leg to stomp it to death.

A **large, angry roar** erupts from nearby. Killing this sea creature made something angry. The main character tries to sneak away from the islands, but when he is almost out, the source of the growls and roars reveals itself: **a gigantic, fully-grown sea creature** emerges from the water and smacks the main character away from the islands. He scrambles back to his feet and sees the sea monster chasing after him.

A **chase sequence** ensues, where the main character skates through islands, caves, and whirlpools, dodging the sea monster's attempts to grab him. Finally, the **sea monster catches up and grabs him**, slamming him into a wall and pinning him there. He struggles against the monster's squeeze until he begins to lose consciousness.

Then, just before he passes out, **a swordfish flies in out of nowhere** and pierces the monster's brain, causing it to scream and loosen its grip. "BONJOUR, HUMAN!" the swordfish yells; **this is Jacques**.

The main character grabs Jacques and withdraws him from the monster, **holding him like a saber**, then stabs the monster's head repeatedly until it falls dead and sinks into the water. They exchange some "Where were you?!" type barks, but have to table the discussion as **several of the smaller sea creatures** swim up to attack them. These are likely the sea monster's offspring. The main character uses Jacques as a melee weapon and **kills all of the offspring**, except for one that swims away in fear.

All finished, they skate/swim back to the home cave, having a conversation along the way. **Jacques is in a good mood**, cracking jokes about the fight, but the **main character is upset** that Jacques went out

looking for danger. They argue back and forth, and ultimately Jacques reminds the main character that swordfish belong out here and humans don't, so **he needs Jacques more than Jacques needs him**. This resonates, and Jacques wins the argument.

As they arrive back at the cave, we see that the seagulls have returned to their nests. The main character offers to **help Jacques hunt cool stuff** from now on. He then tentatively **asks Jacques why he sticks around** if he doesn't need this partnership; **Jacques gives a non-answer**, and they go back to sleep.

Mission Emotions

Before Jacques arrives:

- Curiosity – who and where is Jacques?
- Suspense – growls and movements in the water from unknown source(s) nearby
- Fear – getting jump scared by a sea creature and then chased by a big sea monster

After Jacques arrives:

- Surprise/amusement – Jacques turns out to be a swordfish, depicted like a boisterous, French fencing master
- Exhilaration – you are now a badass fish Jedi, killing scary monsters easily
- Relief – monsters are dead, time to go home
- Intrigue – aspects of the characters' relationship are hinted at but not explained

Themes Explored

1. The main character is heavily reliant on his animal companions

- a. This is supported by the gameplay of this section:
 - i. Before the main character finds Jacques, it feels like a survival horror game. You are being jump-scared, chased, and nearly killed by the sea creatures, and all you can do is use traversal to escape
 - ii. When Jacques joins him, it turns into a hack-and-slash where the player feels confident and has fun fighting the sea creatures
- b. It is also reinforced through narrative and dialogue:
 - i. The main character felt compelled to go searching for Jacques in the middle of the night
 - ii. Jacques explicitly points it out in the dialogue at the end, and the main character does not argue

2. The animal companions are wild animals, not pets

- a. This is something Jacques will say directly during their argument
- b. His actions and demeanor in this mission support this:
 - i. He went out and killed a bunch of sea creatures for fun
 - ii. He clearly enjoyed it and is upset at the main character's suggestion that he shouldn't go out looking for danger

- c. This becomes a driver for their relationship and the plot moving forward, and will also be a source of tension between them throughout the game
 - d. As other animal companions are introduced, this theme will be explored with them as well
- 3. Actions have consequences, what goes around comes around**
- a. The giant sea monster is angry because of Jacques killing its children
 - b. It only attacks the main character when he also has to kill one of its children
 - c. Also set up for future payoff:
 - i. The one sea creature that escapes will return as an enemy in the future

Remaining Questions and Loose Ends

- Why is the main character living out here as a human?
 - Even with water-related super powers, it's clearly dangerous, so why doesn't he live among humans?
- Why does Jacques stay with the main character?
 - It's stated by Jacques that he doesn't need this partnership, so why is he here?
- What are the strange sea creatures we saw? And why were they here?