

# Project Proposal - Thomas Nurse

*by* Thomas Nurse

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A Retrospective of Sci-Fi Environments:  
How does the Design of Future Worlds  
Reflect the Hopes and Fears of the  
Present Time?  
Research Proposal

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Preferred Supervisor: Richard Morgan

1209 Words

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## Introduction

This project aims to examine the history of environment design within science fiction media such as films, television shows and video games. With the goal of understanding how science fiction environment design has evolved over time and what influences this change. Part of this project will consist of a deliverable of a pair of animated clips showcasing two different environments designed with influence of different eras in science fiction.

This document outlines the Aim and Objectives of the project to clearly define the scope and provide a clear understanding of the goals and objectives. Additionally, contained is an initial stage of background research, covering the primary areas of focus in the research. Furthermore, breaking down the methodology behind the project and documenting the required resources required to conduct the project and satisfy all the objectives. Finally, a simplified version of the project plan in the form of a Gantt Chart.

## Aims & Objectives

### Aim

- To conduct a retrospective analysis of how sci-fi environment design has evolved over time in respect to the influence of current technologies, society, pop culture and views of the future.

### Objectives

- Investigate a wide range of science fiction media ranging from the late 1960s to present day to explore and understand the design philosophies used in the creation of the environments.
- Analyse and identify key differences in environment design in the selected media while exploring how these differences reflect the evolution of culture, society, and technology over time.
- Synthesise the design philosophies of two eras of science fiction media in order to create an environment for each, respectively. The resulting environments would be constructed from a common foundation but will evolve to reflect the atmosphere and feeling of the respective era. To showcase the environments, a 20-30-second-long animated camera flythrough will be created.
- To perform a critical review of the created environments, evaluating the adherence to the synthesised data and using this information to inform future design decisions when attempting to capture the atmosphere and design motivations of differing eras of science fiction.

## Background to the Proposed Research

Throughout this project, the resources that will be used for data collection will primarily consist of pre-existing media such as popular films, television shows and video games. Due to time constraints, an appropriate extent of media will be selected to fulfil the scope of the project. For instance, films such as *Alien* [1], *2001: A Space Odyssey* [2] and *Back to the Future* [3] would be chosen as they are several of the most notable and popular science fiction films that are topically relevant to the project. Additionally, the films *Blade Runner* [4] and *Blade Runner 2049* [5] provide an opportunity for direct comparison as they both share a setting but were produced 35 years apart.

Likewise, a selection of television shows will be analysed in a similar fashion. For example, *Red Dwarf* [6], *The Expanse* [7] and *Loki* [8]. This sample demonstrates a wide range of thematic environment designs that will be investigated and analysed throughout the project. The previously mentioned *Red Dwarf* [6] is an example of media that can directly represent the evolution of sci-fi design as the show initially released in 1988 with the latest entry releasing in 2020.

Furthermore, Throughout the project, an investigation and break down of existing environments in science fiction video games will be conducted, some of the games included for this research will be *Cyberpunk 2077* [9] and *Starfield* [10].

In addition to this, a deep dive investigation into the background will provide greater insight into the decisions and inspirations behind the environment designs. This investigation will be undertaken by researching secondary source data through the means of books such as *The Making of Alien* [11] and *Back to the Future: The Ultimate Visual History (Updated Edition)* [12], interviews with directors or set designers such as an interview with Denis Villeneuve [13] about *Blade Runner 2049* [5], directors commentaries and concept art.

## Methodology

### Research Methodology

#### Philosophy

The project will be conducted with a phenomenological philosophy. This philosophy is more appropriate as the subject of research revolves around artistic design direction, personal interpretation, and the evolution of design, all of which are influenced by factors such as human experiences and subjective opinions, the result of this is that data will be primarily qualitative in nature.

#### Approach

An inductive approach will be taken with the project. This approach is more applicable as the gathered data will be related to human feelings and meaning resulting in highly qualitative data. Additionally, this approach allows the research direction to shift in response to the data gathered. This allows for adjustment around any identified patterns, themes, or trends in the data.

#### Strategies

##### Literature Review

A literature review will be conducted to identify previous research and writings in the field, understand the data and identify links between various sources.

##### Case Study

A case study will be conducted to perform an in-depth analysis of the phenomenon of the evolution of sci-fi environment design. This would be conducted by studying a wide range of media in the genre to gather data on their environment design to identify patterns and draw conclusions.

##### Software Development

A Software development strategy will be used to create the showcase environments. While Software Development strategies are typically positivist and deductive, as the produced work would be an environment showcase, statistical analysis is not a viable data source, instead a critical review of the environments will be conducted.

#### Risks & Limitations

A significant area of risk throughout the project would be the potential for significant data loss resulting in catastrophic loss of progress. A mitigation strategy that will be employed to minimise this risk would be the use of automated backups of all project data following a standard 3-2-1 backup strategy.

#### Ethical Issues

As the data collection methodology primarily consists of gathering and synthesising publicly available secondary source data or data generated from critical review, there is no expectation of ethical concerns from the conduction of the project.

## Validity, Reliability & Generalisability

### Validity

The validity of the project is high as the approach in research will produce high quality data that is topically relevant to the overall aim.

### Reliability

The reliability of the project would be low as the majority of data gathered would be qualitative by nature and influenced by subjective opinion.

### Generalisability

The project would not produce generalisable data as the expected findings would not apply outside of the field of environment design, in particular science fiction themes.

## Data Evaluation Methods

### Data Collection

To collect data for the Case Study, an observation focused strategy would be employed, by closely observing the sample media, identifying features such as environmental storytelling, similarities between certain media and trends.

To gather data for the Software Development, a critical review will be performed, in this review, Qualitative data relating to factors such as adherence to design philosophy and aesthetics would be produced.

### Data Evaluation

To evaluate data, thematic analysis will be used. This method will allow for the identification of themes and trends throughout the range of media. This can be directly compared to the data from the critical analysis of the environments, the results can then be presented, examining the findings, and identifying key successes and failings in replicating the themes observed in the Case Study.

## Resources & Planning

### Hardware Resources

- High End PC capable of Rendering an Unreal Engine Scene in Real-Time.
- Graphics Tablet.

### Software Resources

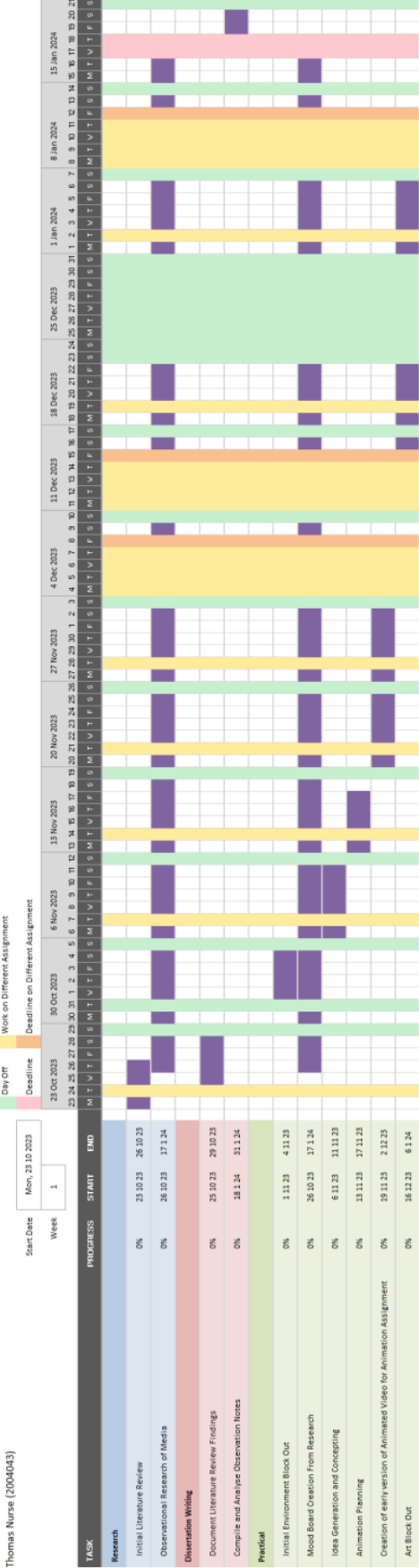
- Blender 3.3.
- Unreal Engine 5.3.
- Adobe Substance 3D Painter 8.1.3.
- PureRef 1.11.1.

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Project Plan

Initial Gantt Chart documenting the first phase of the project until the Interim Viva

A Retrospective of Sci-Fi Environments: How does the Design of Future Worlds Reflect the Hopes and Fears of the Present Time?



## References

- [1] R. Scott, Director, *Alien*. [Film]. United States of America, United Kingdom: 20th Century Fox; Brandywine Productions; Scott Free Productions, 1979.
- [2] S. Kubrick, Director, *2001: A Space Odyssey*. [Film]. United States of America, United Kingdom: Stanley Kubrick Productions, 1968.
- [3] R. Zemeckis, Director, *Back to the Future*. [Film]. United States of America: Amblin Entertainment, 1985.
- [4] R. Scott, Director, *Blade Runner*. [Film]. United States of America, United Kingdom: The Ladd Company; Shaw Brothers; Warner Bros., 1982.
- [5] D. Villeneuve, Director, *Blade Runner 2049*. [Film]. United States of America: Alcon Media Group; Columbia Pictures; Bud Yorkin Productions; Torridon Films; 16:14 Entertainment; Thunderbird Entertainment; Scott Free Productions, 2017.
- [6] R. Grant and D. Naylor, *Red Dwarf*, United Kingdom: BBC Two, 1988.
- [7] M. Fergus and H. Ostby, *The Expanse*, United States of America: Penguin in a Parka; SeanDanielCo; Alcon Television Group; Just So; Hivemind; Amazon Studios, 2015.
- [8] M. Waldron, *Loki*, United States of America: Marvel Studios, 2021.
- [9] CD Projekt Red, *Cyberpunk 2077*, Warsaw: CD Projekt, 2020.
- [10] Bethesda Game Studios, *Starfield*, Rockville: Bethesda Softworks, 2023.
- [11] J. W. Rinzler, *The Making of Alien*, London: Titan Books, 2019.
- [12] M. Klastorin and R. Atamaniuk, *Back to the Future: The Ultimate Visual History* (Updated Edition), London: Titan Books, 2020.
- [13] D. Villeneuve, Interviewee, *Director Denis Villeneuve Proved to Us He Loves Blade Runner More Than Anybody*. [Interview]. 3 October 2017.

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## GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

GENERAL COMMENTS

72/100

| Intro / A&O (400 words)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |    |    |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|
| Project title; Identification of a specific problem to be investigated; Well-defined aims and SMART objectives; Explaining why this project is worth doing; Discussion of what the project needs to do in order to be a success; Description any deliverables that will be produced at the end of the project                                             | 20 | 14 |
| .<br>A clear introduction with defined aims and objectives has been presented.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |    |    |
| .<br>The project theme has been defined and deliverables have been clearly stated that are linked to the core research topics.                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |    |    |
| Background to the Project / Literature Review (400 words)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |    |    |
| Description of how the work to be done by in the project relates to the work identified in the literature review; Discussion of any ethical issues raised by the project Identifying what has already been done within the field; Topic familiarity; Brief literature review using appropriate sources – 6-8 journal papers and book chapters rather than | 20 | 16 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |           |    |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----|
| <p>just websites;<br/>Selection of relevant models &amp; concepts</p> <p>.</p> <p>Literature review contains entries for film and media – this is relevant for the research theme as an analysis of visual styles across culturally different times and themes is to be conducted. Several publications such as books have also been included in the research bibliography alongside other sources.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Justification for analysing specific sources has been given. Perhaps a little more reasoning to be given for why these decades in pop culture are relevant but this may be something to present and explore in the full report.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Word count falls within the budget allocated for this section.</p> |           |    |
| <b>Project Design (500 words)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |           |    |
| <p>Clear statement of which development methods are to be used and why they are appropriate; Clear statement of which tools are to be used and why they are appropriate; Clear description of how data collected will be analysed</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <b>30</b> | 21 |

- .  
Research philosophy has been identified and justified – this is good to see.
- .  
A critical review is stated to be conducted as part of the methodology – this should be good if comparisons are drawn to cultural phenomena of the time and location of each production, and links are identified as a result.
- .  
Some risks have been identified with solutions offered with regards to data loss – make sure these are acted upon throughout the duration of the project.
- .  
Ethical concerns have been acknowledged but there is a minimal impact with this specific project and as such no extra steps need to be taken in this area.
- .  
Reliability issues have been highlighted due to the reliance of qualitative sources, which is a fair point to raise. This may be helped by extending the research to other sources such as those that are historical or cultural in nature as claims may be backed up by additional findings.

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |           |    |
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| <b>Resources / Planning (200 words)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |           |    |
| <p>List of any deliverables; Clear diagram showing both timing and resource use; Completed ethics form; Limited and relevant appendices</p> <p>.</p> <p>Hardware and software requirements have been listed and specified as part of the submitted proposal showing an understanding of processes involved.</p> <p>.</p> <p>A project plan/Gantt chart has been developed and supplied as part of the work covering the first phase of the project. The initial literature review may take a little more time to compile but this will serve as valuable research to feed into the practical elements – don't be concerned if this end up taking much longer.</p> <p>.</p> <p>A bibliography has been supplied that adheres to IEEE formatting guides.</p> <p>.</p> <p>A little more description about the deliverables here may be good to see, building upon your original outline in the Aims and Objectives and how this could link to the hardware and software requirements specified.</p> | <b>15</b> | 10 |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------|----|
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |            |    |
| <b>Document Presentation</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |            |    |
| <p>Correct spelling, grammar and punctuation;<br/> Flow of narrative/fluency;<br/> Coherence; Word processed ;<br/> Correct use of referencing with bibliography; Strict word limit</p> <p>.</p> <p>The proposal has been word processed and presented well with clear section headings and a good level of written coherence.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Referencing conventions for IEEE have been followed and applied.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Sections are clearly separated and marked which helps with the assessment of the work – good job.</p> | <b>15</b>  | 11 |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | <b>100</b> | 72 |

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