

High Concept Design Doc

Game Overview & Summary

(in)VULNERABLE is an action RPG with back and slash style combat and a special focus on resource management.

In order to gain moves and abilities in battle, the player must control their output meter. Based on how full the meter is, the player can gain powerful new abilities, new options to maneuver themselves, or even game-changing passive qualities. However, there are many negative things you gain too, like debuffs or something that obscures part of the screen. It's up to the player to decide if the risk of those debuffs is outweighed by the rewards they can gain.

In game, the player must manage their output carefully, finding the right balance of positives and negatives in order to fight Invincibles, horrific manifestations of one's worst qualities.

For example, the player may find themselves taking cover from attacks from an aquatic-looking Invincible, increasing their output in order to grow wings! Even if your new bird brain makes it difficult to tell friend from foe (blurring models and censoring names, for example), you're now able to wreak havoc from the skies!

Gameplay Loop

Gameplay can be separated into two distinct sections, in battle, and out of battle.

Out of Battle

- This is where the majority of exposition and dialogue takes place, along with it being where the player can more freely interact with party members.
- This is also where a lot of exploration takes place. The player is able to move freely, and swap between party members.
 - Outside of combat, you can also buy equipment at shops and equip it onto the party members.
- While out of battle, your output steadily decreases, but you are still able to charge it manually.
- You can't use any attacks out of combat, but attributes and passive changes do still have effects! (E.G: Oro's darkvision, or Ria's flight).

In Battle

- This is where the action takes place, with dialogue still happening occasionally. Combat is entered upon getting an enemy's attention.
- You cannot swap party members in combat, unless they are defeated.
- Your output steadily increases to 20% on its own, and you can press a button to charge it yourself up to 100%.
- You can also release output in set intervals.
- You have up to 3 abilities you can use, and a variety of passive attributes. You gain/lose/change these based on your output.
- The core gameplay loop in battles sees the player taking on enemies - either groups of weaker enemies, or stronger full Invincibles in solo boss battles - managing their output to defeat them without overwhelming themselves.
- In normal encounters, there's typically a few weaker enemies, such as a group of guards. Combat isn't over until they're all defeated.
- You can still move freely during combat, but you cannot move out of a certain radius from the start of the encounter.
- In boss fights, you have much more freedom of space, and the encounter will end when the boss is defeated, regardless of other enemies being present.

Output Mechanic

The output mechanic is the single most important aspect of the gameplay. It's relevant both in and out of combat, and is critical to the narrative.

How it Works

- Each party member has their own output meter.
- *Charging*
 - In battle, it will passively charge to 20%.
 - Taking damage will increase it a little, but will stop after 45%.
 - It will also passively increase again, starting at 80%, until 100%.
 - You can hold down the charge button to increase your output. You can move while charging, but if you take damage while charging, you instantly gain 15% output.
- *Output Use*
 - You can release output in bursts, with it going down to the previous multiple of 10.

- Ex: A release would bring a 38% down to 30%, or a 52% to 50%.
- When at a multiple of 10, you can release back down to the next lowest at the cost of hit points.
 - Ex: at 50%, you can go down to 40% by spending 5% of your HP.
- At certain output percentages, abilities or attributes will be unlocked.
 - Characters start with $\frac{1}{3}$ of their abilities, but gain more by charging their output.
 - Ex: Mari gains their String Whips at 10%, giving them new abilities.
 - They can also gain passive attributes, such as Oro's ability to see in the dark.
 - These upgrades can also come in handy outside of battle, both the passive attributes and abilities potentially adding more ways to interact with the game environment.
 - There's also downgrades that come with increasing your output, such as stat debuffs, information obscuring, or even being locked out of using certain abilities.
 - When you reach 100% output, you become Lost, and that's treated as a Game Over.

Sample of Gameplay

As an example of gameplay, take a hypothetical mission from the middle of the game, once you've recruited your whole party.

You are given a mission from the Organization, asking you to take control over a port, where an Invincible was recently spotted. Before leaving, you go to the shop and buy some consumables. You also have your party members talk to each other, discussing the mission and explaining their thoughts. Then, you depart.

You, controlling Mari, the main character, begin to explore a warehouse by the port, after some dialogue. Inside the warehouse, you see there's something on the second floor, but the ladder is broken. You charge some output with Mari, and get their strings, which you can use to climb up. As you get to the second floor, you are spotted by guards, and combat begins. You try to charge a bit more output, but you need to stop as you're being attacked! You made it to 20%, but after passing 15%, you've slowed significantly, which makes dodging attacks harder. You decide to get hit while charging, which rockets you up to 45%, and gears pop out of your back, which you can swing at enemies to deal heavy damage and take them out. Back to exploring, you notice piles of boxes. You switch to another party member, Malga, and release enough output

with her to grow tons of arms that she uses to move the boxes with ease. Behind the boxes, there's a child, who jumps off and runs to a boat. As you follow the child, there are more puzzles and enemies to fight. You eventually corner the child and, in a panic, they jump into the ocean. Mere moments later, a terrifying sea monster emerges, matching the description of the Invincible you've been tasked with defeating. And so, the boss fight begins.

The boss fight is a much more difficult and long encounter, but when the boss is defeated, the mission concludes.

Game Aesthetic

Many elements of this game are inspired by the musical artist Jhariah, and the album *“The Great Tale of How I Ruined it All”*, specifically in the aesthetic area. There are many dark reds and blacks present in game, a reddish tint being visible whenever any output is used.

Beyond that, the game takes place in a world mostly identical to ours, so most architecture and environments look like something you would find in modern-day cities.

Monster design takes lots of cues from various horror styles, mainly body horror and some more eldritch or cosmic horror. It is also inspired by Awakened Beings from the manga series Claymore.

Technical Requirements

To capture the extent of the body horror with the Invincibles, models would realistically be more complex. In addition, many filters or other potentially intense effects may take a heavier toll too, so the game would be pretty technically difficult. This can be balanced by using a less realistic/simpler art style.

Backstory & Setting

(in)VULNERABLE takes place in a world mostly identical to our own, however this world is host to the **Invincible Phenomenon**.

The Invincible Phenomenon, while uncommon, is a constant threat to everyone. What the phenomenon is, is that some people - mainly those with intense anxieties - have the potential to become overcome with their feelings and transform into a monstrosity, embodying their biggest fears. For example, the game's main character, Mari, has a fear of losing control. As a result, their Invincible is a large clockwork puppet, embodying the lack of control that they fear so much. The Invincibles are almost all aggressive and destructive, and therefore need to be taken out. Unfortunately, when someone transforms into an Invincible, they lose their sense of self,

effectively dying. There are very few recorded cases of a full Invincible ever being brought back to human.

There are some people, though, who can control their own feelings very precisely, finely managing their emotional **output**. By managing their output of anxiety and stress, they can let out parts of their Invincible, granting them changes that slowly turn them into their Invincible, such as transforming their arms or legs. Those who are able to control their output like this are known as “**Vulnerables**”.

The storyline that the players follow throughout the game takes place in the not too distant future, 2031. After an attack by a fiery Invincible, much of New York had to be rebuilt. Many cities ravaged by these attacks merged during their reconstruction, into Ash City.

In the wake of this attack, an organization was formed, aiming to gather Vulnerables together in hopes of preventing disasters such as the one that resulted in Ash City’s formation. The actual founder of the organization was never identified, but it still managed to spread throughout Ash City, and has been operating smoothly for the last few years. This organization, simply known as “**The Organization**”, has been successful in preventing large scale destruction, and has also gotten vulnerables to be able to connect with each other, forming partnerships and providing support.

The game follows the main character, Mari, who is a Vulnerable living in Ash City. They work a calm 9-5 job, which is where the game begins. The game’s several missions take place across Ash City, visiting various important landmarks or otherwise important spots, such as ports or factories.

The Organization, whose origins remain unknown for much of the game, is central to the plot. The Organization was actually founded by Mari’s own Invincible, The Marching Doll, in an attempt to put certain pieces into place. It also staged the awakening of the Invincible that attacked what ended up becoming Ash City. The Marching Doll is also responsible for getting the party members to have joined the organization in the past. The Marching Doll remained active until the end of 2030, where it was able to become Mari once more.*

*This will be explained further in the Plot section

Plot

The game starts off with Mari going to their corporate 9-5 job, and running into the new hire, Oro. Upon first seeing him, Mari feels this sudden urge to protect him, that’s the most important thing in the world to them. They watch Oro throughout the day, and see him struggle, clearly an anxious mess. When lunchtime comes around, Mari hears a voice, eerily similar to their own, telling them to go walk up to Oro. And so, Mari walks up to introduce themselves, and

this startles Oro, causing him to spill his drink on Mari. Oro freaks out, blaming himself for causing so many problems, saying he's a coward, that he never should've come to work.

As Oro spirals into this panic attack, his Invincible, **PRESSURE BOMB!!!!** awakens. Mari, as the only Vulnerable in the office, decides that they should do something about Oro, since they were - in their own eyes, at least - the one that caused him to awaken. After the office is evacuated, this triggers the first combat of the game!

Upon getting Oro to low enough health, Mari hears the same voice from earlier, saying "Save him". Mari takes **The Marching Doll**'s string, and wraps it around Oro, while the words "Save him" echo through their head, and the doll's strings glow red. Suddenly, **PRESSURE BOMB!!!!** quiets down, and reverts back to being Oro. Mari explains what happened, and Oro realizes he's now a Vulnerable. Mari offers to walk Oro to his car, and they begin to walk out. Right at the door, however, they're stopped by a man in a red suit who hands them a letter, signed the day before, thanking Mari for saving Oro, and formally inviting them both into The Organization.

That's the opening mission of the game, and it just picks up from there. The next day, when Mari arrives at work, they find Oro waiting for them, alongside a woman in a red suit. She tells them their next mission is to find Malga, a former member of The Organization who has been avoiding all communication. The mission is only to subdue and befriend her, get her to join your group. She can be found in an abandoned supermarket, according to The Organization's intel.

When Mari and Oro arrive, there are tons of disfigured, headless "people" with legs for arms, vice versa, and much more wrong with them. After fighting through some, an Invincible can be seen in the back of the store. A mess of limbs and heads and eyes, this is **Whose Eye Is It Anyway????** Upon seeing it, Mari hears the voice from yesterday saying "Save Her". Mari and Oro fight Whose Eye, and upon getting her to low enough health, Mari almost subconsciously takes out The Marching Doll's string and restrains the Invincible, the same way she did with Oro. Whose Eye calms down, and it reverts into Malga. Mari once again explains what happened, and tells Malga to stay with them, in case she loses herself again. Malga reluctantly joins the party.

The next mission is to find the final party member, Ria. The current party gathers at the market where they found Malga, and that's where they get their next mission. They're told to find a man named Flick. He's been unable to be spotted by The Organization for years now, but Mari's group has been trusted to continue the search. When he was part of The Organization, he had flight powers, so The Organization recommends searching from a higher ground, such as on the rooftops of a nearby apartment complex. They search there, and manage to find absolutely nothing. The party is getting ready to leave when a storm of feathers rains down on them all. After the feathers lodge themselves into the party, a horrible, crow-like, monstrous Invincible is revealed above them. This is **Flight of the Crows**. Once again, Mari hears the same voice saying "Save Her," and the pattern repeats. Flight of the Crows is defeated, Mari subdues them without

thinking much of it, and Flight reverts to a woman named Ria. Oro and Malga are confused, since they expected Flick, and Mari would've been too if it wasn't for the voice saying "You have the right person, and the final person." This leads Mari to ask Ria if she is Flick. Ria reveals that she actually transitioned, and took advantage of that to silently distance herself from The Organization. And so, things are explained, and she ends up joining the group, knowing that The Organization will keep pursuing her if she doesn't.

With that, the party is now complete. In future missions, the voice in Mari's head is gone, and they can't subdue Invincibles anymore. They have to fully defeat them. The rest of the missions are targeting Invincibles in critical areas of Ash City. There are missions in a factory, a delivery warehouse, a port, an airport, a government building, and a TV broadcast station.

Throughout the missions, the party begins to grow suspicious of The Organization, wanting to find out what's running it. After they take out the Invincible in the broadcast station, the party talks about how they want to find The Organization and take them out, to try to find out what's happening. Shortly after this conversation, an Organization member walks up to the party, and hands them a letter, signed on the same day as the first letter Mari and Oro received. The letter tells them to go to the park at midnight tomorrow, where "all will be revealed".

Midnight tomorrow comes, and the party arrives at the park to find a bunch of red-suited Organization members gathered. As soon as midnight hits, the Organization members attack the party. The party fights back, and soon enough, there's tons of bodies on the ground, perfectly human, none of them Vulnerables. This realization doesn't sit well with the group, and leads Malga to finally ask, "are we the bad guys?". While Oro and Ria are quick to agree, Mari is hesitant. They fear not having control, so knowing that they've been manipulated? That they're doing bad? They were trying to be good, so that can't be right. . .right?

As Mari's stress rises, they begin to transform, and a bunch of red strings flow out. Instead of hanging loosely, though... The threads are all connected to the red suits. Mari sees this, and looks back at the party. The party is staring at Mari. Realization hits. Unknowingly, The Marching Doll, Mari's Invincible, was behind this. It's been controlling The Organization from the start. Mari cannot handle this revelation. This whole time, they've been manipulated, controlled. They haven't been in control at all. This sets them off, and their Invincible awakens. The Marching Doll is here. It explains to the remaining party members that everything has been planned from the start.

It first awakened earlier that very day with an insatiable desire for control over everything. It wanted- no, it *needed* a whole city to itself, a state, a country, the world. But, with the way things were? The circumstances weren't optimal, things needed to be in the right places. It needed someone who could help put bodies on the ground, make an army. It needed to eliminate threats, like an invisible assassin. It needed its host to open up to someone, to be willing to accept people into their life. And, most importantly, it needed an organization. Something to put pieces into position. All this in mind, all The Marching Doll needed was time.

So, hey - if it can control so much already, why can't it control time? It has a clockwork heart after all.

The Marching Doll ripped out its own clockwork heart and crushed it, allowing it to go back in time 10 years. It forced a fierce Invincible to awaken, causing untold destruction. It also planted the idea of forming an organization in response. It went and altered the course of Oro, Malga, and Ria's lives. It controlled everything.

With The Marching Doll awakened, the party tries to fight it, but it beats them easily and captures Malga with its string. It forces her to awaken, producing countless monstrosities to carry The Marching Doll's string to the areas the party has previously captured, spreading its influence through the whole city. This gives The Marching Doll the control it craves, ending the game. Oro and Ria are the only ones able to escape.

Story Bible

Mari Character Profile

Name Origin: Marionette

Pronouns: They/Them

Mari is a 31 year old non-binary person with a pretty nondescript appearance, apart from their pure white hair. They try to maintain a well-regulated and routine life, just to have as much control over it as they can. They know that bad things happen when they're not in control, they can't prepare for those, or anticipate those situations. They counter this feeling by planning and scheduling out as much of their life as they can.

When they were young, spontaneity was the norm for Mari. Their parents were very impulsive, always trying new things, bringing Mari along a lot of the time. The parents were risk takers, and would often get hurt, but they loved the danger. They said it was part of the fun of their risk-taking. Mari was always worried about their parents' well-being, but what can you do? You can't control other people, after all. Eventually, the day came where their parents bit off more than they could chew, and were killed by their impulsiveness, right in front of Mari. This was the nail in the coffin for Mari. From this point on, they knew that things, when left up to fate, could only go terribly, terribly wrong. From that day, their intense need for control became deeply rooted.

Mari's core drive throughout the game is their intense desire for control, and crippling fear of losing it. They need control because without it, there's no telling what's gonna happen. To Mari, no reward is worth even the slightest of risks, because if something can go wrong they must be able to anticipate the worst. **Mari needs control.**

Even beyond that, the idea of not being in control terrifies them. They need to have agency in their life. If they don't have agency, are they truly living? This philosophy haunts Mari. Their parents died from a lack of agency, in Mari's eyes, so how can they risk losing it for even a second?

Of course, this fear culminates in their Invincible, The Marching Doll. A clockwork puppet, bound by its own strings, while also able to use its strings to control and manipulate others. A being so obsessed with controlling others, while still never able to escape the fact that it itself is just a puppet, still wrapped in the red strings of fate.

Oro Character Profile

Name Origin: *Ouroboros*

Pronouns: He/Him

Oro is a 22 year old man. He's kinda short, very disheveled-looking and fidgety. In general, he just looks like a nervous mess. He's very easily startled, and gets lost in thought very easily. Oro's driving fear is actually a fear of fear itself. He hates being afraid or nervous or anything like that, but he's unable to manage his fears.

Throughout Oro's whole childhood, he's been treated as the "baby". He's been coddled, and treated as if he needs to be protected, like he couldn't possibly fend for himself. Oro internalized this treatment, to the point where he genuinely became convinced that he wasn't capable. He believed he was weak, and that he needed protection. So, he never learned how to cope, or how to handle stress.

This brings us to the Oro of today, someone so anxious about anxiety, afraid of fear, stressed about stressing. No matter what he tries to do, he falls into a self-fulfilling prophecy of things going wrong, since he has no confidence in himself. If even a single thing goes wrong for Oro, he's bound to spiral into self-hatred and anxiety. However, now freshly out of college, in the "real world", Oro is driven to improve and be better at managing himself. He wants to be better, he just struggles, you know?

Of course, the road to self-improvement has many bumps, and Oro, in trying to face his fears, gets extremely overwhelmed. This leads him to awaken his Invincible, PRESSURE BOMB!!!! PB! is a large ouroboros, with swarms of insects, rats, and snakes decorating its body. It also absorbs any light nearby, leaving itself cloaked in darkness. This mess of the most common fears, with a snake eating itself at its core, is a perfect depiction of Oro. A self-fulfilling cycle of fear, constantly feeding into itself, and trying to remain concealed, hiding the depths of Oro's issues.

Malga Character Profile

Name Origin: *Amalgam*

Pronouns: She/Her

Malga is a 27 year old woman. She's tense, kinda cold and stoic. She purposely tries to make herself not very approachable, since the last thing she wants is somebody's help, or to have to rely on anyone else at all.

A few years prior to the start of the game, Malga and her sister were both Vulnerables, working for The Organization. They fought alongside each other, and made sure to always have each other's backs. At one point, Malga and her sister were sent on a mission that was far too

difficult, there was no way that they expected Malga and her sister to survive. Malga was cornered, on the verge of death, and she called out to her sister for help. Her sister unleashed more output than Malga had ever seen, even so barely managing to save Malga and take down the Invincible attacking them. Malga, however, is terrified of the brutality her sister showed, and upon seeing the fear in Malga's eyes, her sister awakened. Malga then had no choice but to take her down. All because Malga asked for help, she had to kill her own sister. She decided that she never wants to see others get hurt because of her, ever again.

This brings us to Malga now. She's afraid of asking for help, she knows what can happen if she asks for help again. She wants to work alone. She can't hurt her partners if there are no partners to worry about. However, she does feel driven to protect others, and does want partners. She wants someone to hang out with, to understand, to befriend.

Her fears of asking for help manifest as *Whose Eye Is It Anyway????* This is an amalgamation of limbs, heads, and eyes, with tons and tons of hands on the outside, reaching out as if asking for help. It has the ability to make disfigured "people," with limbs in the wrong places. All these bodies and arms reaching out, begging for help, these "people" being mass produced, worthless, disposable sidekicks all tie into how Malga feels about asking for help. It's scary, confusing, messy. Anyone that helps you can just as easily get hurt, help is disposable.

Ria Character Profile

Name Origin: Dysphoria

Pronouns: She/Her

Ria is a 25 year old trans woman who looks like she's been hiding away; a very secluded and isolated look to her. She'd been stuck as her Invincible for a long time, so she's easily confused.

Ria has wished for freedom for the longest time, freedom from what she was expected to be as a man. She was never able to meet those expectations, nor did she even want to. She felt so trapped, so restrained by those boundaries, but she didn't know why. She also had gotten herself into a bunch of bad relationships and bad groups of people. There were many problems in her life beyond just her own feeling of being trapped.

Eventually, Ria figured it out. She was trans. Her feelings of being outcast, being restrained by expectations, it made much more sense now. So, she quickly began to transition, both socially and medically. She was so excited, so happy! By figuring this issue out, she thought, everything would soon work out and become better. She stopped putting in effort to fix her bad relationships, she ignored those unsavory groups she was a part of, and she was ready to have all the pieces fall into place. Of course, that's not how things worked out. Things didn't magically get better. Sure, it felt that way at first, and she doesn't regret her choice, but she was

still trapped. Trapped by her poor choices, by her neglect. Restrained by her thinking that things would fix themselves, that solving one issue would fix everything else.

With the realization that she wasn't able to escape her issues, her Invincible, Flight of The Crows awakened. Flight is unique, in that although it has a hideous, grotesque and monstrous form, it is also completely invisible, unless it attacks someone first. Flight is a massive crow monster, as free as a bird, never needing to worry about its problems. In fact, it never needs to worry about being seen at all, thus avoiding any problems that would otherwise be a bother. However, it can pull people in, and they can see what horrible things lie underneath.