



ILLUSTRATING SENTINELLA: THE VISUAL ADAPTATION OF MENTAL HEALTH ADVOCACY POSTERS FOR INTERACTIVE ENVIRONMENTS

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Abstract. *This report addresses the visual adaptation of mental health advocacy posters for the virtual reality video game Sentinella. The design methodology used a stylized 1990s and 2000s "bootleg" aesthetic to enhance the game's atmosphere and cultural connection through parody and popular references. Beyond their aesthetic role, these visual elements are integral to environmental storytelling, providing narrative context and integrating supportive mental health messages like "ask for help" and "express yourself." This research analyzes their dual function as both aesthetic and narrative components that strengthen the interactive experience.*

Keywords: *virtual reality, environmental storytelling, mental health, bootleg aesthetic, video games.*

This report addresses the visual adaptation of mental health advocacy posters for the virtual reality video game Sentinella. The creation process involved developing stylized posters with an old-school aesthetic inspired by the 1990s and 2000s, which serve to enhance the game's atmosphere, identity, and personality through popular cultural references. Beyond their decorative function, these elements serve as tools for environmental storytelling, allowing the game setting to convey context, narrative details, and supporting messages. This research presents the methodology behind the creation of these stylized posters, analyzing their dual function as aesthetic and narrative elements that strengthen the overall atmosphere and interactive context of Sentinella.

From the beginning, the goal was to emulate visual references from the 1990s and 2000s to evoke nostalgia (Figure 1). For this purpose, images of classic video games, album covers, and period posters were reviewed to capture their compositions, colors, and graphic styles. The initial step in the project was to define specific series, bands, or video games to be referenced.

In addition, several of the posters were designed with an aesthetic inspired by "pirated" or "bootleg" products, similar to those that could be found in street markets, flea markets, or informal stalls during the 90s and early 2000s. The term bootleg is used to describe unofficial products that reinterpret well-known characters, brands, or franchises through visual changes, altered names, or strange combinations. Often, these objects have errors, improvised compositions, or odd imitations that give them a very unique, and in many cases, humorous visual identity. This led to ideas such as altered characters like Goku or Mario, accompanied by humorous references such as "Goku vs. Salinas," "Sin Lana" referencing Nirvana, or "Power Plebes," as a nod to the Power Rangers.



Figure 1 – Visual comparison between the original Nintendo 64 inspired poster (left) and the stylized parody adaptation for the VR project (right)

According to an article from *El Universal* [1], bootleg products function as cultural reinterpretations that transform popular references into new versions with distinct identities. In this project, this aesthetic was intentionally used to reinforce nostalgia and humor within the world of *Sentinella*. Consequently, many posters feature characters from well-known franchises that have been visually altered or paired with parodic names to simulate the appearance of pirated merchandise. This design strategy makes the game environment feuses parody to reinterpretulture, where such products were prevalent for decades.

The work also utilizes parody as a reinterpretation of familiar cultural elements. According to García-Rodríguez [2], parody employs imitation and exaggeration to create new visual and narrative readings. In this project, the posters transform popular references into stylized versions that remain recognizable to the player while establishing a unique identity within *Sentinella* (Figure 2).

This blend of classic and comedic styles strengthens the cultural connection with the player by paying tribute to well-known references. This personality helps the world of *Sentinella* feel less generic. The intention is for players to recognize the references and immediately understand the game's nostalgic, humorous, and parodic tone.



Figure 2 – Comparison between the original Super Smash Bros. promotional artwork (left) and the reinterpretation made for the fictional “Super Punch Club” poster (right)

The process for each poster is divided into several stages. First comes the idea briefing, where the reference or theme to be worked on is defined. Then comes the initial sketch, which is made in Krita to establish the overall composition, the position of characters, text, and other key elements. At this stage, the visual parody is also tested and the proposal is adjusted so that it works clearly. Then the process moves on to clean art, where the lines are refined and proportions and details are corrected. After that comes the review and refinement stage, in which readability and visual coherence are checked in order to make the final adjustments needed. Finally, the finished poster is exported as a PNG and delivered to the development team to be integrated into Unity.

Krita was the primary tool used, allowing for a non-destructive workflow across multiple layers for sketches, line art, color, and shadows. This flexibility enables the iteration of ideas and facilitates late-stage adjustments without requiring a full reconstruction of the image.

The posters are integral to the game’s environmental storytelling, conveying narrative details without explicit dialogue. According to Mulholland [3], environmental visual elements like signs allow a narrative to expand through the setting itself. Similarly, titles like *BioShock* [4] use environmental clues to provide context about the game world.

In this project, the posters suggest cultural references that players recognize while exploring. This identification adds personality to the levels and fosters a more immersive environment. Additionally, some posters serve practical functions, such as



indicating specific locations or conveying supportive messages like “ask for help”; or “express yourself” Integrating these elements improves the emotional connection with the virtual setting.

In conclusion, the methodology for creating the mental health advocacy posters for Sentinella successfully achieved the research's aim of analyzing their dual function as aesthetic and narrative elements. By intentionally adopting a stylized 1990s and 2000s "bootleg" aesthetic, the posters serve as powerful tools for cultural connection, invoking nostalgia and a parodic, humorous tone that grounds the game in a specific, authentic Latin American popular culture context. More significantly, beyond their decorative role, these visual elements are integral to the game's environmental storytelling, providing subtle narrative context, reinforcing the setting's personality, and directly integrating supportive messages such as “ask for help” and “express yourself.” The process's flexibility, enabled by tools such as Krita, made it easy to integrate these elements into the virtual environment. Ultimately, the posters demonstrate how intentional visual design, even in small, seemingly decorative details, can be strategically leveraged to communicate narrative depth, enhance immersion, and convey meaningful subtext within an interactive experience.

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