

Toxic

By Susan Albershardt



Personal photo by Susan Albershardt

SUMMARY

Game Title

Toxic

Genre

Action-adventure FPS

High Concept

A female surfer/doctoral student (Sara a/k/a “Shaka”) and her brother (Ben), a small-town cop, bring down a powerful government agency and the scientist (Dr. Rhiner), who is responsible for killing their father and poisoning the ocean in their beach town, turning its creatures into bloodthirsty killer mutants.

Play Mechanic

Players control Shaka and Ben as they move through the levels. Both characters can surf, swim, scuba dive, run, walk, climb, fight, shoot, use items, manipulate props, solve puzzles, and interact with other characters. Learning, exploring, hiding from security officers, gaining access to secret files and laboratories, and killing mutant, ocean creatures are the major components of the gameplay. Most of the interaction will be in a third-person perspective, although there will be a “look” function where the player can switch to their own, first person point of view in order to battle the mutant sea creatures, security guards, and, ultimately, bring down the evil Dr. Rhiner.

Plot Summary

Shaka and her brother Ben are on a quest to find out what is poisoning the reef and turning the normally harmless ocean life into aggressive man-eaters. In order to prove that the Ocean Research Facility (ORF) is causing this toxic environment, Shaka and Ben must successfully complete different stages in the game without getting stung or bitten by a mutant fish, captured by the security guards at the ORF, or, worse, becoming one of Dr. Rhiner’s experiments. The characters can gather objects to help them avoid, unlock, or challenge these setbacks, or learn to solve puzzles. The objects include scuba gear, wetsuits, test tubes, their father’s journal, passwords, and a speargun, which are all used in this first-person shooter game.

Platforms

PS4 and Xbox

Target Audience

The target audience is 16 to 35-year-old males and females who enjoy visually stunning ocean environments, science, a strong female central character, exciting gameplay, and a quick learning curve. Ancillary audiences will be anyone who enjoys a good story and cinematic films like *Avatar*.

Competition

The competition for this game will be other story-driven games that have a cinematic approach to the way they weave the story into the game. These include *God of War*, *Final Fantasy*, *Bioshock*, and *Halo*.

ITEMS AND LORE

Key Item 1: Speargun

Short Description: The speargun looks like a standard pneumatic speargun used by divers when spear fishing, although this gun has been adapted to fire great distances with great force, or to deliver a dose of a paralyzing drug.

Function: The speargun is used to collect or kill mutant sea life so the players can learn from the sea life, or access the ORF by sea without getting stung, or bitten.

Appearance: The spear gun will look like a typical pneumatic spear gun. The shaft can be fitted with a hypodermic needle, sharp spear tip, or multi-prong tip, depending on if the diver wants to kill or collect a specimen. There is a reel on the side of the gun to reel the spear back to the diver.

Key Item 2: The Journal

Via the journal, the players will get to travel back in time to view the original facility, learning in bits and pieces how it came to be, hearing the story of Dr. Rhiner (via Dr. Herman's voice in his own pre-recorded words), and the origins of the ORF (they originally began the facility to study sharks). Each drawing in the journal will come to life as their father's voice over explains the history and experiments at the ORF. The journal points the players in the direction of Dr. Rhiner and allows them to understand what lies behind the bad blood between Doctors Herman and Rhiner. This gradual backfilling of story, both through the game's writing and in the environment, itself, complements the puzzles, leading them to passwords to unlock doors to laboratories, desks, and filing cabinets. This gives players a chance to solve something more than just what went wrong.

Lore: Dr. Will Herman (Shaka and Ben's father) worked at the ORF in the years leading up to his death by a mysterious illness. After searching their mother's house, the siblings learn that their father kept a password-protected, digital journal and a high-tech speargun. As the siblings find the appropriate passwords hidden in their father's house and former office at the ORF, the passages in the journal are gradually unlocked. Via passages in the journal, the players learn the backstory of the ORF, what Dr. Herman did at the facility, how things went wrong, and the power of the speargun. As the game progresses, they learn how to use the speargun (stun, tranquilize, or kill) and why their father invented it.

Barks:

- Tagline/Idle: "One more sea creature has become mutant since your last mission." Each minute the number of mutant sea creatures will increase by one

- Alerts: When a threat is evident, alerts will indicate “Security approaching!” or “Mutant approaching!” When a journal entry is available for information and learning, an alert will indicate “Journal entry unlocked.”
- Success: “Stoked, mission complete!”
- Failure: “Wipeout! Time to paddle out again.”

CHARACTER PROFILE

Player Character Profile: Shaka Herman

Purpose: Shaka is the daughter of Dr. Will Herman and the sister to Ben Herman. Following in her father's footsteps, she is a doctoral student specializing in veterinary science and new technologies in treating animals. She is determined to find out what is polluting the ocean in her hometown.

Lore: Shaka is 25 years old, a surf fanatic, and doctoral student in veterinary science. Because she is studying to be a veterinary doctor, she is familiar with all of the fish in the ocean and immediately recognizes something is wrong with them. She is brave and brazen. We learn about Shaka because she is running most of the missions alone, or with her brother. Shaka is also a computer and science geek and can access codes for locks, run experiments, and analyze and learn information to make choices.

Her brother also runs his own missions. Their father's journal provides insight on the history of the ORF.

Shaka and her brother Ben were very close to their father, who taught both of them to surf, all about the ocean's creatures, and to love the ocean. They both tend to use surfing lingo to communicate with each other.

Shaka and her brother keep their own journals to store the information they find in their quest to discover who killed her father, who is poisoning the ocean water in their town, and what experiments the ORF is conducting, and why.

Appearance: Shaka is athletic in appearance because she has been a surfer her entire life. Her shoulders are broad and she is a great runner and swimmer.

LEVELS AND LOCATIONS

Major Location 1: The Oceanic Research Facility

Short Description: The Oceanic Research Facility is a large five-story building with a maze of laboratories, aquariums and offices on each floor, exterior holdings tanks, and biohazard zones. Access to each area depends on the level of the player's security clearance.

Appearance: The Oceanic Research Facility is an all-white, five-story building with a large glass façade in the front and a few windows on the sides of the building. The feeling and vibe is reminiscent of Greece's Santorini Island. There are six round, also white, holdings tanks, each as big as a house, in the back of the building. The ORF is located just past the sand dunes, adjacent to a white, sandy beach and the turquoise ocean.

While the outside of the building is sunny and bright, the inside of the building is dark and lit by occasional LED lights. When the player enters the building, there is a security checkpoint and reception area, which prevents anyone from getting on the elevator and the other floors without a security badge. Each floor of the building houses different research teams and laboratories. There are experiments on different sea creatures in large aquariums.

The top floor of the building houses the office of Dr. Rhiner and the former office, now empty, of Dr. Will Herman. Both offices are filled with journals, computers, aquariums and a large desk.

Contents: There are three separate areas of the ORF: the ocean, the actual building, and the holding tanks outside the building. The ocean is populated with mutant fish that can sting, stun, and kill in a highly cinematic, beautiful world under the sea. The player must conquer these challenges in order to access the ORF from the beach.

The holding tanks on the back of the building hold clues to what is poisoning the ocean's water. The only way to access a holding tank on the back of the building is to climb a dangerous stairway that wraps around the tank and is guarded by security guards.

The building is populated with security personnel that the player can speak to and the security personnel can detain players and have them ejected from the building, or arrested. The building also has areas that can't be entered without a security pass granting access to that level or floor. Each floor of the building is a different level that must be conquered in order for the player to make their way to the top floor and understand what is going on and solve the mystery of who murdered Will Herman.

There is also an employee ID in one of the rooms that will give the player easy access to one of the floors in the building. The player will also learn that one of the shipwrecks is Russian and that Dr. Herman is responsible for sinking it, which led to him being killed by his partner, Dr. Rhiner.

The holding tanks on the back of the building hold clues to what is poisoning the ocean's water. The only way to access a holding tank on the back of the building is to climb a dangerous stairway that wraps around the tank and is guarded by security guards.

Major Location 2: The Ocean

Short Description: One of the main levels in the game is the second one, which is swimming through the terrifying and cunning mutant, sea life, in the ocean waters, to access the ORF from the beach.

Appearance: This will be a visually stunning level with bright colors from the flora and fauna and mutant, sea life with big teeth, large stingers, and large mouths that can eat the player whole, or inject enough venom into the player to kill them instantly.

Contents: The player will combat progressively larger, bloodthirsty sea life in several different ways. They will be able to hide behind coral reefs and shipwrecks, shoot and kill the smaller creatures with a special speargun, stun the larger creatures so they can sneak by, or tranquilize a creature for collection in order to research and learn.

Careful examination of the shipwrecks will uncover clues to how the reef was originally poisoned many years earlier.

There is also an employee ID in one of the rooms that will give the player easy access to one of the floors in the building. The player will also learn that one of the shipwrecks is Russian and that Dr. Herman is responsible for sinking it, which led to him being killed by his partner, Dr. Rhiner.

Major Location 3: Shaka's Family Home

Short Description: The player's home base is Shaka and Ben's actual family home, which is a typical single-family beach home. It is a single story, blockhouse with Flamingoes in the front yard, a rustic wooden ship's wheel mounted on the front, a white picket fence, and a garage full of surfboards, paddleboards, and skateboards. A yellow Labrador Retriever waits for them when they enter the house and follows them around like Velcro when they're at home.

Contents: This is where they will review the evidence, read journal entries, and equip themselves with a speargun to fight the mutant sea creatures.

Lore: Via Will Herman's journal, we learn that the ORF was built in the 1980s to study the effects of global warming on the ocean and figure out how to preserve the ocean's reefs from dying. Over the years, the federal government cut back on its funding and the leadership at the ORF (Doctors Rhiner and Herman) had to come up with creative way to keep their research alive. Unbeknown to Dr. Herman, Dr. Rhiner made a deal with some nefarious Russian entities to conduct other, much more dangerous research. The further up the player goes in the building, the more extreme the experiments become.