

KOEL

The island remembers.

Karthi Keian · Narrative RPG · Reactive World · PC & Console · UE5

A medieval Indian Ocean port city that changes in response to what you do — not through a morality meter, through the world itself.

Draft v5.6.8
WIP (add ingame SS)

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T H E C O N C E P T

What if a world remembered — without telling you it did?

Koel is a narrative RPG set in a dense medieval port city on a single island in the 10th-century Indian Ocean. You arrive with a pirate crew to navigate a city fractured between Chola authority, Srivijayan merchant guilds, Anjuvannam traders, and a Shaivite temple. Everyone has memory. Everyone has interests. The island has neither space to hide in nor room to escape from.

Genre

Narrative RPG
Reactive World Simulation

Platform

PC & Console
Unreal Engine 5

Setting

10th-c. Indian Ocean
Single island · Dense port
city

Status

In Dev — Demo at
IGDC 2026, Chennai

C O M P S

Disco Elysium · Pentiment · 80 Days · The Banner Saga · Sunless Sea

The most connected point in the 10th-century world.

The Indian Ocean trade network in 900 CE was the most sophisticated economic system on the planet — five centuries before European exploration. Koel's island sits where four trade routes intersect. Which is why everyone wants it, and why no single power has ever held it for long.

The player arrives with the crew and has no history here — yet. No alliance. No enemies. The city will remember everything from the moment they step off the ship.

Chola Administration

Imperial authority — taxes, courts, guards. Recent and resented.

Srivijayan Guild

Merchant pragmatists — will trade with anyone who isn't a liability.

Anjuvannam Traders

Ancient guild. The longest memory on the island.

Shaivite Temple

Controls water rights and the poor quarter.

The Pirate Crew

Your employers. Their interests are not yours.

You are a stranger. The city does not start as your friend.

The player is a new arrival — competent, perceptive, without faction. That neutrality is an asset: every faction can use someone unaligned. It is also a liability: no one owes you anything yet.

Dialogue & Negotiation

Three approach styles per conversation: pragmatic, principled, deceptive. The NPC's response depends on what they know about you.

Observation

The city is dense with information. The system rewards attention — details seen become intelligence used.

Action & Consequence

Combat, theft, sabotage, and exposure are all options. None are free. Every public action is witnessed by someone who remembers.

Faction Brokerage

Working between factions is possible — until both of them know you are. Managing information is the meta-game.

No morality meter. The world changes. It doesn't explain why.

Every reactive world eventually reaches for a morality bar. Koel deleted the bar. The moment a player sees a meter, they stop asking "what should I do?" and start asking "which way does this move the bar?" Koel's system makes consequence legible through the world's behaviour, not through a UI element.

01 Faction Disposition

Float -100 → +100 per faction. Never shown. Changes via events, not accumulation. Five behavioural tiers expressed through world behaviour alone — closed stalls, changed greetings, new routes through districts.

02 World State Variables

Permanent flags. A burned warehouse stays burned. An exposed route stays exposed. These are facts about what happened, not a running personality score.

03 NPC Memory

Per-character, fades without reinforcement. A guard who saw you will remember — until he doesn't. A faction captain with a grudge keeps the memory alive. Or doesn't.

04 District Evolution

Physical spaces change as events accumulate. Fewer open stalls. Private conversations that stop when you approach. Food left on your path. The feedback is spatial before it is legible.

The city is the protagonist. You are a variable.

Koel is a single dense island. The geography is the politics. The Chola administrative quarter sits above the market — literally higher, with sightlines into every commercial exchange. The temple controls the water infrastructure, so it also controls who gets dry season access. The poor quarter is the only part of the city the administration cannot efficiently patrol. That is not an accident.

The Docks

The first space — open, surveilled, transactional. Authority is visible. Information moves here fastest.

The Temple Complex

Non-combat zone (unless you make it one). Knowledge and water. The Shaivites are the only faction with real long memory.

The Lighthouse

Chola signal post. Whoever controls it controls which ships know it's safe to approach.

The Market Quarter

Guild territory. Dense, three-dimensional, full of private spaces. The fastest place to make and lose reputation.

The Poor Quarter

Unpatrollable. Allies here are genuinely safe — and genuinely dangerous to be seen visiting.

The Underground

Pre-Chola. Nobody currently claims it. That makes it useful — and contested.

Dense. Warm. Old before it knew it was historical.

Koel draws from manuscript illustrations of the medieval Indian Ocean world — Chola bronzes, Srivijayan temple carvings, the architecture of Pondicherry and Nagapattinam. Not a stylised abstraction of history, but a world that looks like it was built by people who did not know future historians would find it interesting.

Architecture

Stone, wood, and woven materials. Buildings that grew in response to use, not master plans. The Chola additions are visually recent and administratively correct — therefore wrong.

Characters

Distinct faction silhouettes. Guild merchants wear layers; temple priests wear white; the poor quarter wears what it can. Costume is social data.

Colour

Hot ochre and rust for the market. Cool stone-grey for administration. Deep green for the temple. The poor quarter is the most chromatic — it has the most life.

UI Philosophy

The world is the interface. Faction reputation is read through NPC behaviour and spatial change, not a HUD element. The only numbers are in the code.

MARKET

An underserved setting with an overserved appetite.

Three distinct audiences — each gets a complete experience:

Narrative RPG Players

The Disco Elysium and
Pentiment audience.
Consequence simulation
without hand-holding.

Historical Fiction Readers

Underrepresented in
games. Medieval Indian
Ocean = uncharted
gaming territory.

South Asian & Diaspora Players

Massive and underserved
market hungry for games
set in their history —
not their mythology.

90M+

South Asian gamers
(India alone, 2025)

47M+

narrative RPG players
on Steam (2025 est.)

0

comparable games set
in medieval Indian Ocean

S T A T U S & T E A M

One designer. Full documentation. Demo this October.



Jul 2025

Project start.
Koel reactive system
documented and
designed.



Jun 2026

Public announcement.
Dev diary and case
study live at
keian.org.



Oct 2026

IGDC 2026, Chennai.
Playable port city
exploration demo.
Oct 28–29.



Nov 2026

Kickstarter campaign
launches with
IGDC demo footage
and press.

T E A M

Karthi Keian

Game & Narrative Designer · B.Arch. · UE5 Blueprints
Level, Systems & World Design · Bengaluru, India

Seeking

Programming partner or publisher co-development support
Art direction, 3D city environment, and character artists

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR

The island is ready. Let's build it.

Publishing Support

Funding to move from system documentation to playable vertical slice — city environment, working faction reactivity, two complete quest lines.

Co-Development

A technical co-founder or small team — programmer and environment/character artists — to build alongside.

Studio Placement

A narrative or systems design role within a studio, with Koel developed in parallel as an IP.