

These Walls That Listen
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1. Name

These Walls That Listen

1.1. Subtitle or high concept sentence

Who will listen behind closed doors?

2. Game Overview

2.1. Game Concept

You play as Irene Thomas, an investigator tasked with finding a missing family. As Irene goes through the family's house, she finds mysterious cassette tapes of conversations from the family and their neighbor, Robert Clark. The cassettes reveal parts of the family's life over the past decade. The player must find and listen to them to piece together the events and figure out where the family members went.

2.2. Genre

A 2D top down exploration game.

2.3. Target Audience

This game is for young adults aged 18 - 30 who are comfortable with themes of loss and domestic abuse.

2.4. Objective

This game was made as part of a double independent study course for the Fall 2023 semester at West Virginia University. This project assisted in further learning of 2D asset creation, story writing, character development, and Unity programming.

2.5. Game Flow Summary

The game starts with the player being shown the case file. After the file is closed, the player, Irene Thomas, is in front of the family house that is to be investigated. Irene is able to speak to the neighbor, Robert Clark for an introduction to controls and inventory functions. Irene finds the first cassette and realizes there's something odd about them and the situation. After collecting a number of cassettes, Irene can choose how she reports the case back to the Chief which leads to different endings.

2.6. Aesthetic

The style is simplistic with cel shading.

3. Gameplay and Mechanics

3.1. Gameplay

The player moves with WASD.

3.2. Mechanics

Click objects in the house to have Irene comment on it/investigate. Click on cassette tapes to add to the inventory. Click on items in the inventory to play the corresponding audio.

4. Story, Setting and Character

4.1. Story and Narrative

Stephanie and William Morgan are a young couple that move into a house beside Robert Clark. After a traumatizing experience where Stephanie lost her daughter, Stephanie hallucinates that their daughter, “Olivia,” is still alive by sewing doll bodies and caring for the doll. William lets her fantasize because he knows it's her way of coping. Once their son, Timothy, is born, William is upset that Stephanie prioritizes a doll of their dead daughter over their real living son. Stephanie then accuses William of cheating because he asks her to care for their son. The argument puts a heavy strain on their relationship. Stephanie's parents decide to visit the family but no one but William and Robert know that Stephanie is hallucinating the existence of her daughter. Stephanie's parents, Sandra and Daniel, are outraged that she faked having a daughter and neglected her son. Sandra takes Olivia's doll body and clothes to throw out which causes Stephanie to mentally break, seeing it as her daughter being kidnapped and killed. Stephanie runs away and William disappears with Timothy shortly after.

A few days later, Irene Thomas is sent to investigate the scene and find more clues on the family's whereabouts. After finding mysterious cassettes of private conversations, Irene reports her findings to the Chief who will act a different way depending on Irene's findings.

What actually happened:

Stephanie ran off to chase after her parents and found Olivia's doll body in a nearby river. She jumped in and drowned with the doll in her arms. William went to his parents house the day Stephanie disappeared. He dropped Timothy off there and went camping for what was meant to be a weekend getaway.

Different endings based on how Irene reports the case:

- Stephanie disappeared but the family is okay
 - The police find Stephanie's body. The police go to William's parents house and find Timothy and find out William is out camping.
- Stephanie is in a care facility
 - Police go to William's parents house and find out he's camping. When William gets back, they question him and find out she isn't in any care facility. They find Stephanie's body and arrest William but he's released after questioning.
- William is suspicious
 - The police go to William's parents' house and find Timothy which leads them to find him at his campsite. The police arrest William and find Stephanie's body. William is sent to jail and William's parents get custody of Timothy.
- Robert is suspicious

- Robert is arrested when William gets back. William tries to intervene but also gets arrested. Robert is let go but William goes to jail after Stephanie's body is found.
- The family went traveling
 - The police don't act until a few more days when William returns and Stephanie still isn't back. William files another missing person report. A stranger finds Stephanie's body. William and Robert are questioned but the case is ultimately closed. Irene loses her job for not investigating well enough.

4.2. Game World

The game takes place in suburban America in the 1980s - 1990s.

4.3. Characters

Irene Thomas - Player character, investigator. She is serious about her job but tries to be optimistic.

Stephanie Morgan - Mother. Lost her daughter at birth and became traumatized from the event. Hallucinates that her daughter is still alive and sews new bodies for her daughter as if she's growing. Neglects her husband and son in favor of her non-existent daughter. Claims her daughter is very sick and that's why she's never out and can't go to school. Finally breaks after her parents throw out her daughter's doll body.

William Morgan - Father. Tried to help his wife cope with the loss of their daughter at first and even supported her. After about a year, he thought it was too much to pretend like their daughter was still alive. After their son was born, he got fed up with it and got into a huge fight where he was accused of neglecting their daughter.

Olivia Morgan - "Daughter." Died at birth. Mother sewed new bodies for her as if she was growing, ghost child, given the personality of a quiet but fun girl who fights through her illnesses.

Timothy Morgan - Son. Neglected by his mother and primarily taken care of by his Father.

Robert Clark - Neighbor and Landlord. Laid-back personality but cares a lot about his friends. He was always concerned about William and Stephanie after she disappeared for a few months but didn't pry out of respect. He knows there's something odd about the house.

Daniel Turner - Stephanie's father. A retired man who just wants to travel the world. He just wants his daughter to be happy.

Sandra Turner - Stephanie's mother. She believes her way is the best way. She believes in tough love and that you just have to do it regardless of what you think is right. She is very stern with her daughter and believes that Stephanie should take after her.

5. Levels

- 5.1. Front of house
- 5.2. Dining Room
- 5.3. Kitchen
- 5.4. Living Room
- 5.5. Olivia's Room
- 5.6. Parent's Room
- 5.7. Timothy's Room
- 5.8. Bathroom 1
- 5.9. Garage
- 5.10. Back of house

6. Interface

6.1. Visual system. HUD, Menus, camera model

6.2. Control System.

Uses a normal keyboard and mouse. Uses WASD to move and mouse left click for inventory selection and UI navigation.

6.3. Audio, music, sound effects

Speaking characters are voiced.