

Night at Northwood

A game about a detective who has his morals challenged in a grey case.

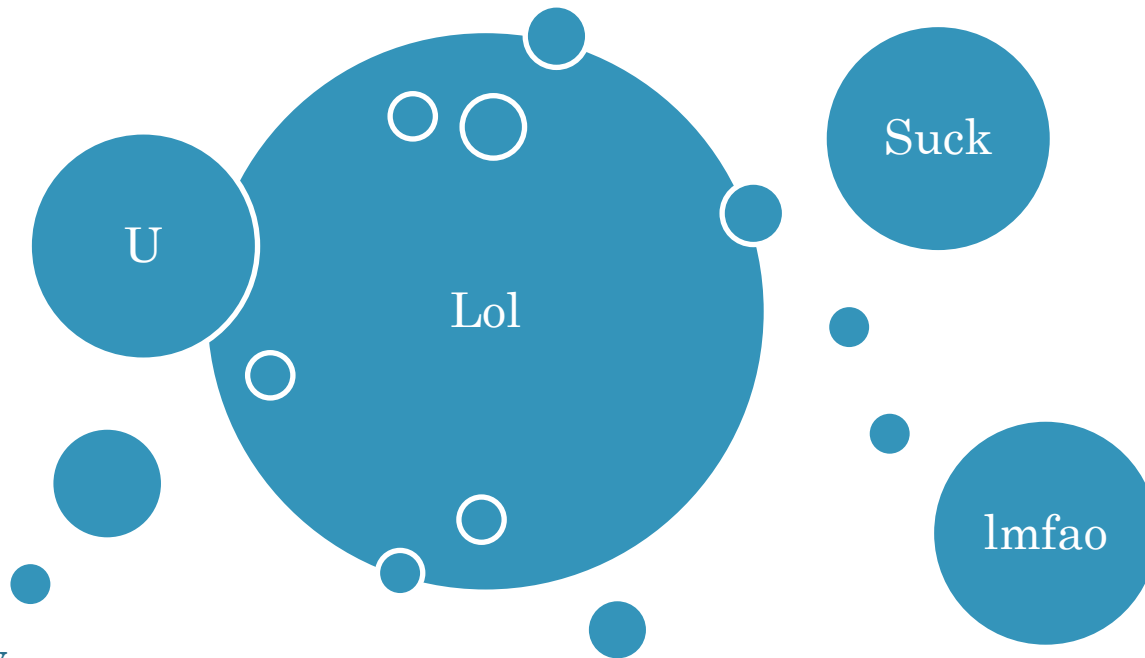
Goals

- Making myself known to the world, even if it's just a start
- Having a fallback if money can't be made in markets
- Experience with a full release of a game
- Confidence in developing

Gameplay

Gameplay consists of two components: information gathering and decision making. The player is given free time to investigate as they please on a time limit. As time progresses, so too does the information available. When that time limit is up, the player will be prompted to make a decision. Some clues may go away or appear with time, so the player must choose wisely what to investigate as well as when and in what order. The game will begin at dusk and end at dawn, so the player must consider two time limits: the time limit for their current objective, whether self-directed or given by the game, and the macro time limit of the night.

The player should be motivated by a desire to influence the story and characters to their liking. This of course implies that the player cares about the story, so making the concepts and characters likeable is the most important challenge for development, otherwise the gameplay fundamentally fails.



Story

Chapter 1 (0 Branches)

The year is 1978. In a small wooded town, on a rainy evening like any other, a triple homicide at Northwood Elementary has disrupted what should've been a peaceful beginning to summer break. Mackerel, the area's resident detective, parks down the street of the school. Even from there, the atmosphere beneath the dimly lit school felt heavy. The school had been completely cordoned off and some townsfolk who Mackerel hadn't the care to know were conversing with an officer guarding the street. He made his way down the sidewalk and waved for the officer, who quickly excused himself from the onlookers.

"Hello sir, can I help you?", the officer said with a bit too much enthusiasm. He was a lean, young man with an eager light in his eyes. His uniform was soaked from the rain and he was shivering like a dog.

"Name's Mackerel Frank, I'm a detective from the next town over. Your chief called me over about a half-hour ago to assist in the case."

Mackerel handed the officer a faux-leather slip with his badge inside.

"Mackerel? Like, the fish?"

There was a momentary silence.

"Yes, like the fish.", replied Mackerel.

"Should I call you Frank?"

"Mackerel is fine, thanks."

Mackerel swiped his badge back from the officer with an intentional aggravation.

"Should I call you greenhorn?", asked Mackerel with a wry smile.

"Harvey is fine, thanks."

"Well, Harvey, it was very nice to meet you. I'll be checking out the crime scene for a while should you need me."

Mackerel swiftly paced toward the school's parking lot.

“S-sir, please wait!”, huffed Harvey as he jogged up beside Mackerel.

“Hm?”

“It would probably be best if I accompanied you to get you up to speed.”

“Oh, I’ll get acquainted with your friends when I get there, don’t worry. You can continue keeping guard.”

“But I’m the only officer here, sir”.

...

“What!?”

Harvey jumped from Mackerel’s exclamation.

“Ah, what is it?!”

“What is it? What do you mean you’re the only officer here!?”

“W-well...”

Harvey fidgeted with the collar of his uniform.

“The chief sent me here and told me to secure the area, detain any suspicious people, and wait for backup.”

“How long ago was that?”

“I’d reckon about two hours ago, sir.”

“Two hours! And he hasn’t contacted you since?”, Mackerel exasperated.

Harvey whipped a pager out from his breast pocket and held his pen light up to the screen.

“I’m afraid not. Is that bad?”

“How many dispatches have you got under you belt?”

“This is my first.”

Chrissake. Also, are these fools relying pagers for communication? Mackerel knew this town was a backwater, but this was a bit beyond his expectations. He wanted to collect himself before continuing, but his overcoat was soaking and his teeth were starting to chatter.

“Ok, ok, just follow me.”

Harvey obliged without question and followed behind Mackerel as if on a leash. They walked in silence for some moments.

“I was told it was a triple homicide when I got the call. Is the situation still the same?”

“Yes, no new developments.”

“And have you found any suspects?”

“Yes, three of them, but they’re all... uh... uncooperative.”

“Mhm, well that’s more than you usually get in a case like this.”

They rounded the corner left onto the school lot illuminated by warm sodium lights. Taking shelter under an overhand, Mackerel spotted what must’ve been Harvey’s police car, as well as a figure through the rear window.

“Is that one of the suspects?”

“He’s a known character around here. Everyone just calls him Wino. He’s got no family or home, at least I don’t think he does. I found him stumbling about the lot when I arrived and I tried to speak to him. Could hardly get him to respond, and when he did, there was a lot of yelling. Couldn’t even get a name out of him.”

Mackerel headed for the steps leading up to the school and motioned for Harvey to follow.

“Has he been in that car for the whole two hours you’ve been waiting?”

“Mostly, yes. I’ve been trying to ask him if he needs anything or if he needs to use the restroom, but it’s no use.”

“And what of the other two?”

“Well, one’s a teacher, specifically the teacher of the class where the murder took place. She’s in the classroom above the aforementioned class.”

“The third?”

“A kid. He was in the classroom where it happened, at least when I got here...”

Harvey’s voice trailed off and he paused before the steps. Mackerel turned back from the tops of the steps to face him. Harvey’s face was pallid.

“Is that all?”

“...It’ll probably be easier to explain things once you see the crime scene.”

With those words, a small, dark seed of worry settled in Mackerel’s stomach.

Endings

1. Kid goes to jail
2. Kid commits suicide
3. Innocent framed (successfully)
4. Innocent framed (unsuccessfully); kid goes to jail
5. Detective runs away
6. Detective frames himself

Specifications

- Size
 - Max 1gb
- Playtime
 - ~1.5 hours
- Platforms
 - Windows only
- Price
 - For steam, free if able to make money by release, \$2.99 otherwise. For itch.io, free regardless
- Deadline
 - By the end of March
- Performance
 - Target 60fps igpu

Tools

- Documents: Word, Photoshop 25.5
- Engine: UE5.5
- Modeling: Blender 4.2
 - Meshes will be exported with gltf

- Textures: Substance Designer 13.1.2, Photoshop 25.5
- Animations: Blender 4.2
- Painting: Blender 4.2
- IDE: UE5.5 Blueprints
- FX: UE5.5 Niagara
- Audio: Reaper 7.16, Freesound
 - Downlo

Artstyle

Focus on realism for everything except the following:

- Human faces will have no details such as hair, eyes, mouths, et cetera. Ideally, faces would be included, but realistic faces aren't feasible. The next best option is to avoid it altogether so as not to distract the player. This also applies to shading, so no subsurface scattering. Another option would be for the faces to be stylized, but that would clash with the targeted realism.
- Dialogue will be conveyed through text due to obvious limitations. For consistency's sake, humans won't make any verbal noises at all. This means no grunting, no breathing, no yelling, and so on.
- Rain intensity will be used to emphasize the intensity of the story. Use volume, gravity scale, and refraction pixel normal offset maps.

Whiteboard

--characters

Mackerel

Harvey

Wino

The Gardners

--memorable events

meeting harvey

entering the crime scene classroom

meeting gardner

meeting wino

body in the storage room

body in the bathroom

police siren

harvey suspicious

gym play

rising sun in parking lot, final answer

retrieving something from car

*gathering at pavilion

"I'm just not much for drinking, probably since I had a Catholic upbringing."

"Well thank God for that. Would've had a hell of a time if I showed up and no one was here."

Not that he's much for elucidation, but the company's nice.