

General Project Summary:

The "Rail Transit Line 4" project is an interactive game with some horror elements. Its artistic and narrative styles draw various inspirations from different media like "Calendula," "Twin Peaks," "What Remains of Edith Finch," and "Silent Hill P.T." It intends to create a unique, unsettling, and immersive experience with a captivating narrative.

In the experience, players would navigate an endless subway in the first-person perspective, walking and engaging in some puzzle-solving. Interaction with objects is the key as some of them would trigger narrative-revealing cutscenes that also serve as a hint to the puzzle solution. Players need to carefully observe the clues provided in the scene and translate them into the passcode for the level. The game employs an infinite loop mechanic, trapping players in three connected subway carts, requiring puzzle resolution to progress to the next level.

The narrative centers around a horror-themed subway setting, unfolding through a stream of consciousness and montage, reminiscent of "Calendula's" abstract style. It is inspired by Xu Lizhi, a poetic Chinese factory worker who committed suicide. Post-suicide, the protagonist, like Xu, finds themselves in a coma, riding a subway toward the afterlife. With the memories gradually unfolding, he has regained his courage and faith in living, resulting in awakening in the hospital. The story is an allegory of Xu's life, with symbolic items related to his experiences playing a crucial role in gameplay.

The interactive elements, crucial for narrative and puzzle-solving, include items like a TV (an indication of memory playing through, a work card (representing the protagonist's factory life and work attendance), a pair of shoes (symbolizing the suicide attempt), and a pen and paper with family photos (reminding family of the good things that has happened in life) are instrumental in breaking the endless loop and aiding progression.

As players advance, they encounter cutscenes and items loaded with symbolic meanings and hints at the solutions, enhancing the game's abstract and strange atmosphere. The final stage of the game shifts to a peaceful, religious experience, contrasting with earlier parts, as the player nears the door to heaven. This project aims to deliver a captivating interactive experience, blending horror with deep narrative elements and symbolic interactivity.

Jessica's Working Experience:

Personally, Xu Lizhi, the archetype of the main character, is one of my favorite poets, and thus, I poured a lot of emotion and effort into this game. I was primarily responsible for narrative design and the arts. This is the first 3D game I have ever made, and it is also the first time I have been in charge of narrative design. It was a fantastic experience! I loved the process of creating and integrating all my favorite elements (subways, retro TVs, retro camcorders, poems...) into a game.

In the narrative design, as a big fan of surreal works, I incorporated numerous symbols and dream-like designs into the game. For instance, in the first cutscene, the main character looks around in an assembly line factory. Instead of using models of factory workers, I used models of the Terracotta Army, which symbolizes the workers in one of Xu Lizhi's poems, "Terracotta Warriors at the Assembly Line." There were many other ideas I came up with, but due to time constraints, they were not implemented in the game.

For the art part, I utilized the subway I created for the blender comic and made many new assets. Since loops and infinity were important elements in our game, I frequently used the array modifier to create numerous workers and infinitely long assembly lines. Moreover, in the cutscene, I created a day-night cycle that spins very quickly to symbolize the seemingly endless and infinite time spent on the assembly line. I really liked the final effect of the spinning sun and the moving light and shadows. In the second cutscene, there is a scene of apartment buildings that appear infinitely large. I used fog blocks to obscure the details in the distant apartment planes to reduce computational costs.

Overall, working on this game was a deeply enriching experience that allowed me to design narrative and art. The opportunity to bring all my favorite elements together in a 3D game was both challenging and rewarding, offering a unique platform to explore and express artistic ideas.

Yiming's Working Experience:

My primary role in this project is to handle the Unity implementation. I take all the amazing art assets from Jessica and add interaction and logic to them. It has been a great journey, with both of us playing to our strengths to find the perfect balance between technical skill and artistic vision.

One of our initial tasks was creating the endless subway environment, a key feature of the game. This required intricate programming to simulate an infinite loop, giving players the sensation of being trapped in a never-ending journey. Although a YouTube tutorial provided a solid foundation for what we wanted to achieve, there was still work to be done to adapt it to our project. Our first challenge was to make the teleportation work as smoothly as possible. I am pleased that we eventually overcame this with Unity's physics and collision systems, along with some creative tricks. The trick we devised involved placing a fake train at the end of the real train to create the illusion of seeing the actual train. Then, we teleport the player at a very specific angle so they collide with an invisible portal, making the process seamless.

Our process for implementing the password box was quite similar. We found a really useful keypad asset on the Unity Store, but we had to adapt it to our needs. For example, Jessica edited its texture to transform it into an arrow keypad. I then had to combine it with a box, creating a separate keypad object in front of the camera that allows the player to click on it to open the box and retrieve the item.

In creating this eerie yet abstract subway atmosphere, we also experimented a lot with lighting and post-processing effects to achieve the best results. We explored various forms of lighting, skyboxes, and especially the bloom effect to achieve a disorienting effect. The three levels of the subway also undergo lighting changes, leading you from underground/darkness to the ground level, and then into the sky, symbolizing the gradual ascent to heaven.

Overall, I think our collaboration went well, and we mostly achieved the effect we aimed for in our vision. The experience was challenging and fulfilling for both of us, allowing me to contribute to a game that weaves a haunting narrative with engaging gameplay.