Story Beats

DESIGN PHILOSOPHY: House is a metaphor for living with anxiety. Many things in the house do not make sense, spatially or otherwise, to give this effect.

The game is structured in acts – there will be an enclosed act, most likely a single room, in which a special event will occur that the player interacts with. Connecting these acts will be the winding, nonsensical hallways of the house.

-Game starts with an alarm clock beeping and the player lying in their bed, trying to get up in the morning. The chirping of birds and a light breeze can be heard from a window that is out of sight. Pressing a certain key, perhaps the spacebar, snoozes the alarm. They have to mash a key or a bunch of keys several times in order to get up. As they come closer and closer to standing up, the chirping fades out. When they successfully stand up, the chirping shuts off completely, and a low tone marks the completion of the task. The player then walks out of their room to start their day by leaving their house.

-If the player waits for long enough (~20 seconds) the alarm will start beeping again. It can be snoozed indefinitely in this way. However, in addition to snoozing it, the player also has the option to shut off the alarm entirely by pressing a different key. If they do this, the screen starts to go black very slowly, and in as much time as it would’ve taken for the player to have to snooze the alarm again (~20 seconds), the screen will go completely black, the audio will fade out to silence, and the player will fall asleep and lose the game.

-A phone rings at the opposite end of a hallway. Said hallway has landline phones lining each side. Player walks to the end of the hallway, finds a darkened room with a single overhead light in the middle illuminating a landline phone on a small, round, wooden table that reaches up to about hip height. The player is prompted to use a button to pick up the phone, but it doesn’t work. (What could a good indication be for letting the player know that it isn’t working?) The player doesn’t pick up the phone, and it goes to voicemail. The person at the other end of the line explains that the protagonist hasn’t been to school in a while, and they’re starting to get worried about them. The one-sided conversation continues until the person on the other end starts questioning whether or not the voicemail is even going through. This continues until they start questioning whether or not the protagonist can hear and is just not picking up the phone. In addition, as the conversation goes on, more and more phones start ringing from behind the player, in the hallways that they came from. Temp dialogue below:

*“Hey, how’s it going? I don’t know when you’ll get this but, uh, you haven’t been to class in a while, and I just wanted to check in and see how you were doing. It hasn’t been* ***too*** *long, but people are starting to say thiiings…! (sing-song) Plus, any more and the professors’ll start penalizing you. So, uh, stop being lazy and come to class already! Ha, ha… (Attempt at a joke, laughter trails off awkwardly) Well, that’s basically all I wanted to say. Just call me back when you hear this voicemail.*

*“You…****can*** *hear it, right? Maybe not now, but you’re going to check your messages. And then you’ll hear it for sure, right? Or maybe you won’t have to check your messages…because you* ***can*** *hear me. Right now. (First phone starts to ring)*

*“Is that what’s going on? Are you listening to me right now? Well…I didn’t take you for* ***that*** *kind of a person. But if you are, then stop being difficult and pick up already. First you don’t come to class, then you inconvenience me by making me have to call you, and* ***then*** *you don’t even pick up the God damned* ***phone****. (Second and third phones start to ring)*

*You don’t even have it in you to walk away. You just stand there, hoping I’ll stop or that someone will come by to pick it up* ***for*** *you. (All phones start ringing)*

*“But that’s not how the world works. Lazy, inconsiderate people like you…they never get anywhere. The sooner you grow up and realize that, the better.”*

*(Person stops talking, all hallway phones fall off their hooks and dangle, their ringing stops, being replaced by a collective tone which signifies that the phones are, indeed, off their hooks.)*

The final version of the above dialogue will appear as text floating above the phone. It’ll turn to face the player no matter where they are, but it can’t physically move, so the player does have the option of looking away from it if they want to.

-The final challenge of the game is nothing more than exiting the house. It’s a hallway with the exit door at the very end. Said door should probably be made to stand out from all other doors – i.e. there should be something about it that signifies that it’s a door to the outside world and not just a door to another place in the house. Maybe it has see-through glass on it? In that case, the Sun outside the door would have to be bright enough such that the tint of its light through the glass should be too bright for the player to see outside the door from the inside. In any event, as the player approaches the door, the music ramps up. The camera here can distort or perhaps contract, heightening a feeling of claustrophobia? Perhaps heavy breathing can be heard as the player character pants, on the verge of a panic attack? But finally, once they reach the door, they open it, and all sounds fade away as the screen fades to white. Given the plan for the rest of our game, I think it would be good to use the hand here to open the door.

If we do something like this for the final area of our game, it gives the programmers something interesting to experiment with through the camera, Kirsten something interesting with the door that light needs to be able to pass through as well as the hand, and me something interesting with making the music fit the scene well. That’s what I thought, anyways. My one worry about this scene is that there is too little going on for it to be worthy of the game’s final challenge, but upon further review, I actually think that I like that. Then it can be, like, there are all of these symptoms of anxiety (having trouble waking up in the morning, having trouble talking to people over the phone), but the root cause is something that is quite small and unassuming, like simply leaving one’s house. Well, we’ll talk about it more when I share this idea with you all. Which might be happening right now, as you’re reading this…? That’s funny XD