

THE TELL-TALE HEART GAME DESIGN DOCUMENT

ESSENCE STATEMENT

Do not call me mad! What I did was not done out of malice or accident. Nay, every element of it was planned, every detail thought through. My methods were exact and executed to perfection. This horrible crime will never be discovered, as I left no clues to visit justice upon the act. Even the police, who now roam this house, are completely unaware of what lies beneath their feet. If only they don't hear that beat, beat, beat... that ever-louder heartbeat.

GAME OVERVIEW

In this dark, surreal adventure based on Edgar Allan Poe's the *Tell-tale Heart* short story, the player takes on the role of the murderer trying to cover up his crime. Evidence must be hidden, questions must be answered convincingly, and behavior must remain calm. All of this must be done as the player's experience slowly descends into madness.

Through simple point-and-click exploration, potential clues must be found and hidden without drawing attention of the police in the room. As the game progresses, it will become harder to gauge what elements in the surrounding environment are real, and what are merely manifestations of the player's guilty conscience meant to draw their behaviour and actions away from a proper semblance of propriety, thus attracting further police scrutiny.

The police will investigate in a methodical pattern, interrogating the player in turns, following the clues they uncover or letting conversational threads go cold as the player successfully evades the line of questioning. Player patterns will be assessed to simulate the police watching for unnatural behavior, such as moving around too much or picking up the same objects repeatedly.

This will be an adaptive story, where the actions of the player will directly affect the outcome of the ending. A successful ending will have the player get away with murder. There will be multiple failure endings which will result in the player being arrested based on the evidence and actions they failed to control.

GAME GOALS

Branching Gameplay: Your behaviour will affect gameplay, thus acting rashly or erratically can give you away- temperance is key!

Criminal Cover-up: Hide the evidence and evade each beat of police questioning before you descend into total madness!

Deceptive Distractions: the manifestations of your guilty conscience in the game world will conspire to confuse what is real and illusory; can you maintain your grip on sanity?

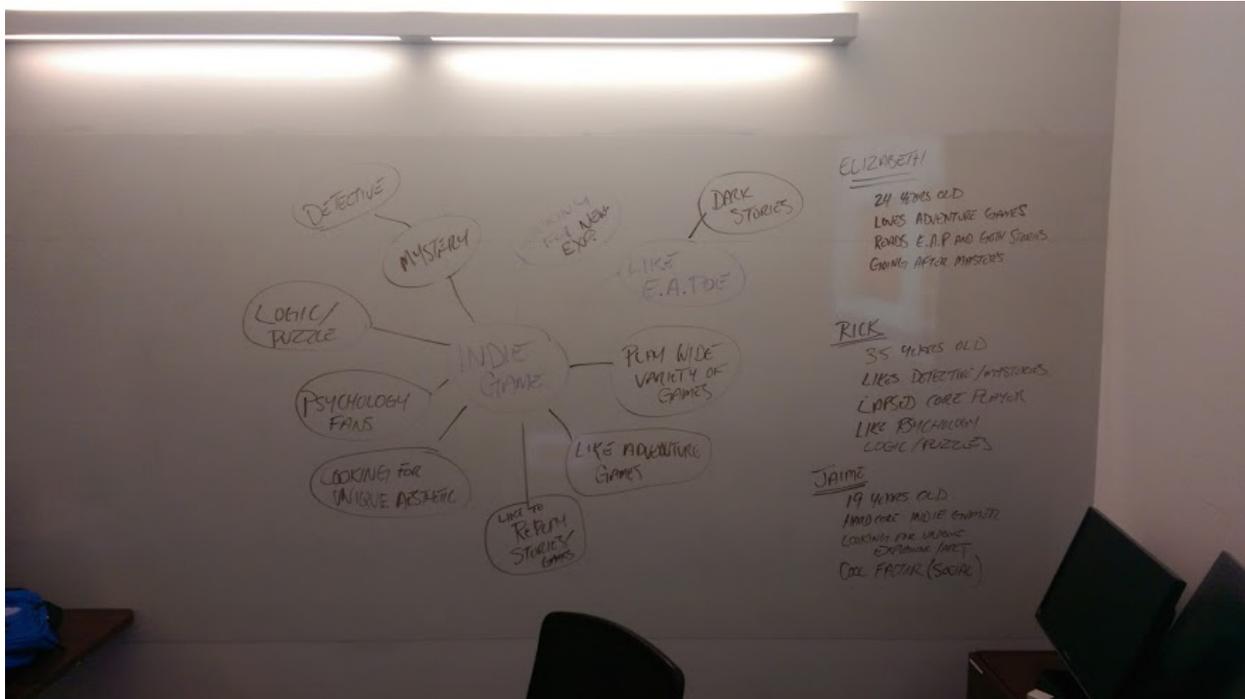


MISSION STATEMENT

The goal of this prototype is to explore an interactive narrative by adding in branching gameplay through the use of deceit as a mechanic. Players will have to be aware of their answers, their actions, and the clues located around the world.

TARGET MARKET

This game is primarily aimed at mid-core to core gamers that are interested in indie adventure games, unique aesthetics / experiences and like dark stories / mystery.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS

- [Deception: The Awakening](#)
- [Amnesia: Dark Decent](#)

GAME ELEMENTS

CONTROLS

The controls in the game use standard FPS keyboard and mouse configuration.

Movement: WASD (primary) or Arrow keys (for left handed people).

Mouse: Rotates the player direction on the horizontal plane. Can look up or down ~[60] degrees.

Left Click: Can select items to look at and place them back down.

Right Click: Can hide an item you have picked up.

Middle Mouse Scroll: Can choose a text prompt.

CAMERA

The camera is a first person view with a default lens of [35]mm.

The camera lens should be able to adjust in real time from a 10mm to 180mm which will allow for fisheye and telescopic views. This will be used as a visual effect.

The camera can rotate horizontally in all directions, but will be limited vertically to + or - [60] degrees.

SUSPICION

Suspicion is a metered system that determines whether the player will get caught by the police. The meter allows up to [5] points of suspicion which can be increased through two different methods: Lies and Actions. Once the suspicion meter is full, the cops will arrest the player, ending the story.

LIES

Lies are a conditional form of suspicion, in that it is not applied at the time of the first lie but after the follow up question and the presence of evidence. During gameplay the player will be asked a series of questions by one cop and will be followed up later by the other cop. The answers to the questions can be discovered by investigating items around the house. Any of these items can be hidden (pocket the Evidence) to prevent conflicts in the answers.

Maximum suspicion will be applied if the player gives a false answer to both cops and does not pocket Evidence by the time of the second question. A lower value of suspicion will be applied if the player gives a false answer to one of the cops only, regardless of the evidence.

To get no suspicion at all the player will either have to tell the truth to both cops OR lie to both cops and hide the evidence.

Answer 1	Answer 2	Evidence Pocketed	Suspicion Level
True	True	N/A	0



False	False	True	0
False	False	False	1
True	False	True	1
True	False	False	2
False	True	True	1
False	True	False	2

ACTIONS

Actions are based on things the player does or doesn't do in game. If the player is requested by the cops to do something and they don't do it, suspicion will be raised. If the player pockets [5] or more items, it will also raise suspicion.

SUSPICION VISUALS

Everytime suspicion is raised, the depth of field should blur at the edges. There should also be a slight screen shake effect.

SUSPICION AUDIO

Everytime suspicion is raised, the sound of a heartbeat should be increased in volume and intensity. It should start with a spike in the values and reduce down to the suspicion level rate.

INSANITY

Over time the player will slowly go insane. There are two factors that affect the insanity, suspicion and time. Time is the baseline which will increase incrementally over time and ranges from 0 to 100% insanity. The ranges can be broken down into smaller levels which is what is used for suspicion. An increase in suspicion moves the player into the next level of insanity.

CAMERA VISUALS

Visual effects applied to the camera will be the primary indicator for level of insanity. The desired goal is to make the player feel as though they are having trouble seeing and keeping balance. Around the edges of the screen there should be a vignette effect that will make the edges darker like tunnel vision. Motion Blur will give a sense of tracers where we can see blips of the past. Bloom effects will come in the latter stages to make bright colors glow a bit. The Twirl effect skews and bends the scene and we will want the effect to shift between positive and negative value very slowly over time to give a slightly rocking feeling.

Effect	Sanity 0	Sanity 1	Sanity 2	Sanity 3	Sanity 4	Sanity 5
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Vignette	2	3	4	5	6	8
MotionBlur	0	0.1	0.25	0.4	0.6	0.8
Bloom	0	0	0.25	0.4	0.6	0.9
Twirl (X/Y = 0.8)	0	2	6	12	15	20
Noise Effect	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
HeadBob	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

BLOOD

Blood plays a big part in the narrative, but it should never be used in the "real" world. It should only ever be a hallucination. The blood should be a vibrant red so that it pops out from the background. It should only be seen in the dark and should dissolve away when a light is turned on.

- Blood on a piece of clothing
- dripping from ceiling, pooling on floor (actually water)
- On the walls in the bathroom and on bed. Once lights turn on it dissolves away
- On a letter in the bedroom, actually candle wax

BLUE EYE

One of the other haunting elements is the blue eye of the old man. Various items in the world that have eyes, such as pictures, should have one blue eye. At the start of the game this effect should not be noticeable and as the player becomes insane it should be more prevalent. If the player stares at one of these items for too long, the effect should slowly fade in.

TAUNTING

The old man's voice will taunt the player by accusing, commenting, and trying to scare them. If a police officer is in another room for too long without the player, the voice will bring up concerns, surprise and accusations.

AMPLIFIED SOUND

The various sounds of everyday life should increase in volume, reverb, and impact as the player is near them. The clock should tick louder, sound of fire in the stove sound like a bonfire, etc.

DISTORTED OBJECTS

All objects in the game should be able to be distorted and scaled to various sizes. This should only come into effect after the mid point of insanity. This could include things such as the police hands and faces, the stove getting larger, the room stretched, etc.



INVESTIGATING

The entire house is full of items that can be picked up and looked at. When an item is picked up the player will no longer be able to move around the world and the item will move closer to the camera. The player will be able to place the item back where it came from or pocket it to remove it from the world.

These items can be broken into four categories: Normal, Memories, Evidence, False Evidence.

NORMAL

Normal items (such as plates, socks, etc) have no additional value other than to add a sense of reality to the world. This should also include objects such as drawers and doors which can be interacted with but cannot be collected.

MEMORIES

Memories are important objects that help tell the story of the world. These items will have the voice of the old man recalling what the item is all about. For example, a painting of the old man's dead wife from when she was young will play a story of the old man remembering her. Others will be voices related to that item, such as the sounds of a stageplay in a bar when a ticket to that event is picked up.

EVIDENCE

Evidence are important objects that will directly relate to the questions that the cops will pose. These items must be found and pocketed if the player has lied to either cop on the matter it is related to.

FALSE EVIDENCE

False Evidence are objects that tell a story that appear to be potential evidence, but are not related to any of the questioning.

POCKET INVENTORY

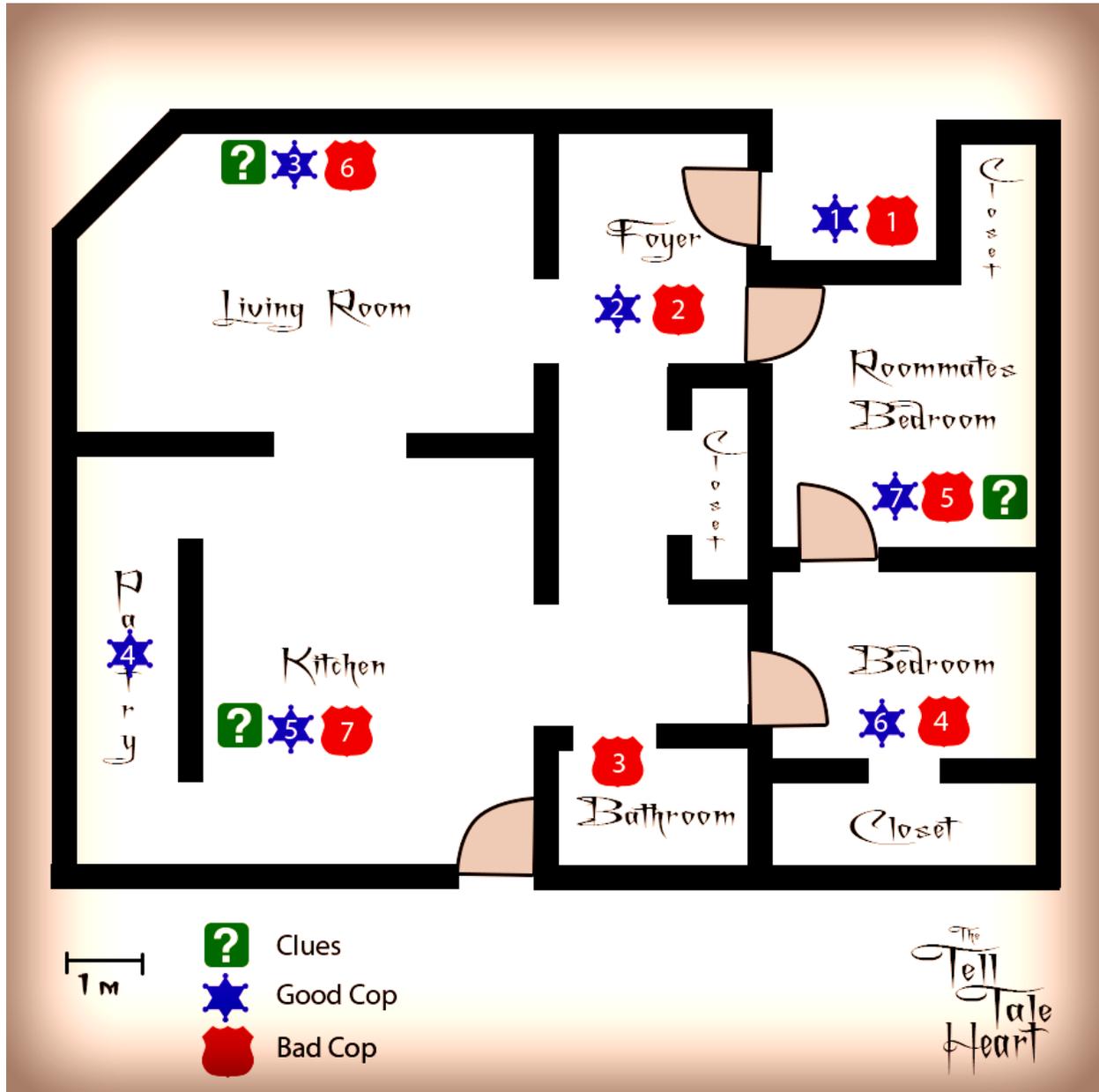
The player is able to "pocket" items, in which they can remove objects from the world. Once an object has been pocketed, it is no longer accessible to the player. If the player confesses or is caught by the police, all items that were pocketed will be revealed, with the damning evidence highlighted to the player. There is no limit to how many items the player can pocket, though if there are more than [5] items in the inventory it should raise the suspicion of the police.

POLICE INVESTIGATION

The police will conduct an investigation looking for anything suspicious. This will be achieved by wandering around the house going from one point to another. If the police officer stops at a node where some Evidence is located, that cop will have "knowledge" of that content. At



some nodes the police officer will call out to the player to come and talk. If the player fails to respond, it will increase suspicion. If the player does come up to the police officer they will be engages in questioning. The police officer will ask a series of questions which the player will have to answer. Based on the choices the player makes and whether the evidence is present or not, suspicion will be increased. At the end of the conversation the player will be dismissed. If the player tries to talk to a police officer out of turn they will be dismissed.



The two police officers will start the game outside of the house and will knock on the door. If the player doesn't answer the door, they will kick it in and be very disgruntled. From this point on, each police officer will follow their own route through the house. This will cause the player



to have to move from room to room when called. If the player survives the game, the two police officers will get together in the Foyer and then leave.

Police officers will also need to be aware of doors and be able to open them as they move throughout the house.

SCROLLING DIALOGUE WHEEL

Whenever a police officer engages in questioning of the player, they will ask the question and then a cloud will form and a dialogue wheel should appear. The wheel consists of all the possible answers the player could give and by using the mouse wheel, the dialogue wheel will spin to display the next answer. All of the other answers, when not the currently highlighted choice, will change what they say to confess. As the player progresses through the game, the answers on the wheel will start to be populated by more and more options of Confess. If the player choose to Confess, they will end the game with the Confession Ending.

STORY

OVERVIEW

This game takes place on Friday, November 11 1887, in Baltimore, Maryland at 4AM. The house is located on a quiet street full of townhouses. It is a dark and dreary night with rain and a lightning storm adding to the horror like atmosphere. The player's character murders the home's owner by suffocation and then proceeded to chop the body up and buries it beneath the floor boards in the kitchen. They took great care to hide any evidence of a crime. All of this occurs during a blackout of the player's memory, so when they awake, they are not clear as to what has happened during the night.

SPLASHSCREEN

Everything is black. A very faint squeak is heard from an old lantern's hinge as the flaps are opened to shine a small ray of light. A light that falls upon the one blue eye (One Blue Eye Studios Logo). The eye blinks a few times and a gulp of air is breathed in as the light goes out. In the darkness, all that can be heard is the sounds of a struggle and some muffled screams. It last only a few seconds before fading off.

MAIN MENU

It's still dark, but there is enough light to indicate that we are indoors looking towards the ceiling and wall. The sound of rain can be heard in the far distance with an occasional crack of thunder. Everything is blurry and no detail can be clearly identified. A dark vignette shrouds the out edge of vision and pulses everytime the sound of heart beats. The logo for the game dissolves in like smoke forming in the center of the screen.

Once the player clicks



The logo dissolves away and the camera pans down until it is looking straight ahead and everything comes into focus. The sound of the heart fades away into nothingness. The rain becomes slightly louder and clearer.

STAGE 1 - WHERE AM I?

You look around in the dimly lit living room and see a grandfather clock in the corner. There is a desk on one side of the room, full of papers. There are a variety of paintings on the wall, a book shelf half filled with books and a few knick-knacks. You walk around a couch and coffee table and make your way to the foyer area which has a dim light, the only light seen in the rest of the very dark house. Looking at the various items, we can hear the voices of the items owner recite a memory about it. Some thoughts are happy, others sad and mournful. The clock chimes four times, indicating the early hour of the morning. Suddenly a knock is heard at the door and the sound of the heartbeat comes back pounding.

Outside the door, a police constable loudly calls through the door

Good Cop

Police! Is there anybody home?

A whisper far in the distance hisses

Old Man

Confesssssss.....

If you answer the the door go to Stage 2A

If you ignore the door, go to Stage 2B

STAGE 2 - IT'S THE POLICE

Stage 2A

You open the door and see two police officers and see them walk on in. The heart beat fades away.

Good Cop

Sorry to wake you, but we have have recieved a complaint about a shriek and a possible violent altercation. Do you mind if we come in and look around?

If Yes, go to Stage 3A

If No, go to Stage 2E

Stage 2B

You stay away from the door, hoping that they will go away. A few moments pass before another harder knock is heard. The heart beat grows louder and a bit faster.

Bad Cop

Open up! We know someone's home!

If you answer the the door go to Stage 2C



If you ignore the door, go to Stage 2D

Stage 2C

You open the door and see two police officers and see them walk on in. The heart beat fades away slowly.

Bad Cop

About time, it's raining out here! We have report about a possible violent altercation. We need to look around, OK?

If Yes, go to Stage 3A

If No, go to Stage 2E

Stage 2D

A few moments pass, when suddenly the door flies open and two police officers come in. The wind howls and a flash of lightning fills the room. The heart beat is now pumping hard and fast. An audible gasp of air being breathed in is heard.

Bad Cop

So you are awake! You afraid or something, you look nervous? We're here on suspicion of foul play and need to look around the premises.

Go to Stage 3A

Stage 2E

The police look as though they are quite frustrated by the lack of an agreeable answer.

Bad Cop

I'm afraid you don't have much of a choice.

Go to Stage 3A

STAGE 3 - THE INVESTIGATION BEGINS

The good cop heads into the living room while the bad cop walks down the hall.

Stage 3A

The cops slowly make their way around room they are each in, looking at various items and chat between each other and the player.

Good Cop

Do you live here alone?

If No, I have a roommate, go to Stage 3B

If Yes, I live here alone, go to Stage 3D

Stage 3B

The good cop continues to look around the room while the bad cop makes his way to the back bedroom.

Good Cop

Is your roommate home?



If No, he went out drinking, go to Stage 4A

If No, he is off visiting his son, go to Stage 3C

Stage 3C

The good cop continues the questioning.

Good Cop

His son? When do you expect him back?

If He didn't say, go to Stage 4A

If He'll be back in a few days, go to Stage 4A

Stage 3D

The cop looks around from where he is standing

Bad Cop

A lot of stuff around here looks like it was meant for an old man. Can you explain that?

[[It's from the previous tenant|Stage 3F]]

[[Oh, that's my roommates stuff|Stage 3E]]

Stage 3E

The bad cop looks perplexed.

Bad Cop

I thought you said you live here alone?

[[Sorry, I thought you meant right now|Stage 4A]]

Stage 3F

How can you afford living in such a large house?

[[I have a company pension|Stage 4A]]

[[I've owned it a long time and rent out a room|Stage 4A]]

STAGE 4 - BAD COP IN THE BEDROOM

The bad cop is in the Bedroom at the back of the house, looking at various items.

Stage 4A

Down the hall, in your bedroom the Angry police officer is looking at your personal items.

Bad Cop

Can you come here?



[[You come to the bedroom|Stage 4B]]

[[You stay away from the bedroom|Stage 4C]]

Stage 4B

The cop is over by the closet, looking inside.

Bad Cop

Where were you earlier tonight?

[[I was at a play, then home|Stage 4E]]

[[I have been home all night, alone|Stage 4D]]

Stage 4C

The cop grows even angrier

Bad Cop

Hey, you deaf? I said come here.

[[You come to the room|Stage 4B]]

[[You stay away|Stage 4F]]

Stage 4D

The cop paces the room

Bad Cop

Home all night you say. Can you explain the shriek that was heard?

[[I screamed from a dream|Stage 5A]]

[[I didn't hear any shriek|Stage 5A]]

Stage 4E

The cop wanders the room

Bad Cop

Interesting. Did you happen to hear a scream at any point?

[[I screamed when I stubbed my foot|Stage 5A]]

[[Been silent all night|Stage 5A]]

Stage 4F

The cop continues his investigation, but is visibly frustrated.

Bad Cop

Fine, don't bother. Just tell me, were you home all night?

[[No, I was at a play earlier|Stage 4E]]



[[Yes, I've been home all night|Stage 4D]]

STAGE 5 - COP IN THE KITCHEN

The good cop has explored the pantry and is now standing in the kitchen area.

Stage 5A

In the kitchen, the Good Cop walks out of the pantry and begins to snoop around

Good Cop

This roommate of yours, how can he afford living in such a large house?

[[He's owned it a long time and I pay rent|Stage 5C]]

[[I think he has a government pension|Stage 5B]]

Stage 5B

The cop looks at the kitchen table and see a bunch of papers and mail.

Good Cop

Pensioner, hmmm. Military or Company?

[[I've never bothered to ask|Stage 5E]]

[[I believe he was a lieutenant|Stage 5D]]

Stage 5C

The cop looks at the kitchen table and see a bunch of papers and mail.

Good Cop

Do you pay your rent on time?

[[Not lately, been sick lately|Stage 6A]]

[[Of course, I got a good deal here|Stage 6A]]

Stage 5D

The cop walks by the stove

Good Cop

An officer. Good to see he's being taken care of.

[[Cop Ends his questions| Stage 6A]]

Stage 5E

The cop walks by the stove

Good Cop

Never mentioned it...Interesting.



[[Cop Ends his questions|Stage 6A]]

STAGE 6 - SECOND LIVING ROOM INQUISITION

Stage 6A

The Bad cop is now wandering around the living room.

If the postcard is still on the table:

Bad Cop

So your roommate is visiting his son?

[[What? As far as I know he is out at the pub| Stage 6B]]

[[Yeah, for a few days|Stage 6C]]

Otherwise:

Bad Cop

Where did you say your roommmate was?

[[As far as I know he is out at the pub| Stage 6B]]

[[I don't have a roommate|Stage 7A]]

Stage 6B

Bad cop looks at the book shelf

Bad Cop

Does he drink often?

[[No, just enjoys the people at the pub|Stage 7A]]

[[Pretty much everyday|Stage 6E]]

Stage 6C

Cop moves to the next item

Bad Cop

Did he ever mention a niece?

[[I believe she is coming to visit soon|Stage 7A]]

[[I know he has one, but that it|Stage 6D]]

Stage 6D

If the cop suspicion level is above (5)



[[Goto |Arrested]]

If it is less

[[Goto |Stage 7A]]

Stage 6E

The cop looks at a pile of bottles and moves on.

If the cop suspicion level is above (5)

[[Goto |Arrested]]

If it is less

[[Goto |Stage 7A]]

STAGE 7 - END GAME

Stage 7A

As the cop looks through the roommate's room

Good Cop

What time did you say you got home?

[[A short while ago|Stage 7C]]

[[I've been home all night|Stage 7B]]

Stage 7B

If no ticket, but the player said he was home all night

[[Goto |Escape]]

If the ticket is still there and suspicion is above (5)

[[Goto |Arrested]]

If the ticket is still there and suspicion is below(5)

[[Goto |Escape]]

Stage 7C

If player said he was at play both times

[[Goto |Escape]]

Said at home, and no ticket and suspicion is above (5)

[[Goto |Arrested]]

Said at home, ticket is there

[[Goto |Arrested]]



ENDINGS

There are three endings that can occur in the game and each looks and acts differently.

CONFESS

If the player decides to confess during gameplay (a selectable option) the screen should brighten and fade to white. The audio becomes uplifting and in the distance we can hear the police talking about the confession, sending the player to a mental hospital, having pity on the madman, finding the body as told, etc

ARRESTED

This occurs if the player's suspicion level is too high. In this case the room should be in full insanity of visual effects, duplicates of the cops start filling the room around the player, cops are heard accusing the player, placing under arrest, disgusted by what they saw, threatening. After a few seconds there are a few blinks, the camera tilts and lands sideways on the ground, fade to black quickly

ESCAPE

The cops leave out the front door, the door shuts. The voice of the old man mentions that this is just the start, go on and kill again, and slowly fades out, heartbeat slows and fade, vision comes into perfect clarity and the sound of the rain slows to a stop. One final heavy breath and a sniff. Cut to black.

ADDITIONAL CONTENT

Game takes place on November 11, 1887.

THE LETTER

Thomas,

I write in hopes that you may come visit soon. If not to see my only son, but I require your help. Times have been tough as of late, my pension hardly covers the bills anymore. I have, in fact, had to bring in a border to help make ends meet. All seemed well at first, but as of late I have grown leary. I cannot say for sure, but something is not quite right. I feel as though I am being watched. I swear I can hear them breathing in my room at night, standing over me. I do not feel safe. Please come help me as soon as you can.

Hurry,
Edgar



POSTCARD FROM NIECE

Uncle Edgar!

I so look forward to visiting you on the weekend. Mother and I are scheduled to arrive Saturday morning. We will stop in the city square to shop before taking a carriage to your place.

Love your niece,
Morella

TICKET TO PLAY

Clip 1

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered weak and weary,
Over many a quaint and curious volume of forgotten lore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly there came a tapping,
As of some one gently rapping, rapping at my chamber door.
'Tis some visitor,' I muttered, 'tapping at my chamber door -
Only this, and nothing more.'

Clip 2

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy into smiling,
By the grave and stern decorum of the countenance it wore,
'Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, thou,' I said, 'art sure no craven.
Ghastly grim and ancient raven wandering from the nightly shore -
Tell me what thy lordly name is on the Night's Plutonian shore!
Quoth the raven, 'Nevermore.'

Clip 3

And the raven, never flitting, still is sitting, still is sitting
On the pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door;
And his eyes have all the seeming of a demon's that is dreaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted - nevermore!

