

GDD

Pillars, Synopsis

Synopsis: A college student returns home after his estranged father's untimely death. His familiar home becomes increasingly unfamiliar as he deals with grief and his father's suspicious death.

Pillars:

- Solve a mystery in a closed space which changes along with the main character's mental state (familiar spaces become increasingly warped as the character's sanity degrades)
- Psychological elements and exploration of mental illness
- Voicemail messages and letters provide clues and story elements
- Unreliable narrator(MC) may deliberately mislead player
- Dark 90's gothic feel leaning towards depression and psychedelic
- Multiple endings (2)

Story

Before beginning his masters of literature, a university student receives word that his estranged father has died of an apparent drug overdose. Returning home, he takes a twisted walk through memory lane. Read memoirs, peruse through family photo albums and investigate your home to search for clues as to how and why your father died. Talk with family, friends and strangers that come to your door and through the telephone. As he explores his familiar home, everything seems slightly off, at least in his mind.

Outline Note: Story is structured into Three Acts, Cutscenes and Gameplay sections are outlined

Act 1

(Cut Scene 1)- The Drive Home- Main character takes a cab home, reads Hamlet on the drive. First look at house

Gameplay 1- Entrance- First pickup- Newspaper about Father's death, has some details. MC Bedroom (player is taken there by default)- Drops off Bags, can inspect bookshelf.

First exploration session occurs. Some clues are found that lead to suspicion of Uncle and next door neighbour. He notes that his uncle, a failed entrepreneur, is now living quite luxuriously. The Father's study is notably locked and will not be accessible for act one. Voicemail mechanic is introduced through a message from Mother and a friend.

Dialogue section: The neighbor comes to the door and is very acting rather questionable and wondering why the MC is at the house, but overall appears friendly.

Dialogue Section: He receives a call from his mother asking how he is doing and to make sure he is taking care of himself, he is happy his mother cares for him but also quite annoyed as he is an adult (This would be the start of the player maybe realizing something is a bit off about the MC.)

Cutscene 2: As he settles in for the night he sees the 'ghost' of his father. He is shocked and frightened, even more so when his father reveals that his death was in fact murdered. (This is the start of his hallucinations, this particular one is a manifestation of his suspicions.)

As the hallucination disappears the MC is notably frustrated and shaken up, but now has a deep desire to find out what happened to his father. (The next morning Act 2 commences.)

Notes: Most linear section of the game, serves to introduce player to the environment and exploration of the space. The Father's study will remain locked, and will be a major plot point later on. Dialogue sections are triggered when a certain threshold of game interactions are completed.

Notable Clues: Pill bottles are full (no sign of Drug abuse), Threatening Mail, Learns more about the Uncle. Talks to Neighbour

Act 2

(Cut Scene 2)- Father Appearance

- During this act the MC discovers more of the reasons and motivation behind the suspects and clues to why his father's death would benefit them. His house begins to become more unfamiliar during this portion (slight changes to scenes and color palettes, objects appear to have changed or moved).
- He finds a copy of his father's will and notices that he had left quite a bit of money to his uncle which would explain the rich lifestyle the uncle is living now.

- In one of the aggressive letters it is revealed to be from an ex-employee his father fired. It left the employee in ruins. In the letter the employee threatens to tell the public about his father having an affair to damage his company's reputation and swearing revenge on him.
- The MC is not surprised that his father would be someone to have an affair but is angered that he would do that to his mother.
- He finds a picture of his father with his mother's best friend implicating she is the woman he had an affair with, thus more than likely crossing the line to his mother.
- Dialogue Section: The neighbor comes to the door again asking how the MC is doing. He reveals that the uncle lived with the father for some time before his death and that they seemed to get along well. He then tells about seeing a woman drive up to his father's house, get out of the car and demand to be let inside, then later hears arguing over at the house and the woman leaving. The MC figures this is his mother confronting his Dad about the finding out about the affair during their marriage and after their divorce since she felt betrayed by him and her best friend. Then the neighbor talks about seeing a car reappearing near the house prior to his father's death and one time a police officer having to take the man away after screaming at his father when he opened the door to the man.
- While the MC is happy to receive such information to uncover his father's murder, the neighbor seems to know too much and more than he leads on.
- After the neighbor leaves, the MC searches for more clues around the house.
- He starts to see his father again and gets hints as he searches for clues. His father tells him that he would need to get into his study as there would be more evidence there (notes, letters, etc.)
- Dialogue: As he tries to speak to his father's apparition, he gets a phone call from his mother. She sounds much more concerned than the last time she calls and ask if he "has been taking them?" implying his medication.
- He coldly tells her not to worry about it and hangs up. (Leading into Act 3 – perhaps the next day.

Notes: This is where the main character starts to develop his suspicions. His father's ghost lead him to clues, but never directly tells the player where they are. This is a more exploration and problem-solving focused section of the game.

Act 3

This is when the house takes a severely dark turn and becomes very surreal. Many things are notably different and dark, main character is clearly tired and pale.

- The MC's sanity is questionable and demented, Literature (Hamlet)-inspired hallucinations appear.

- Becoming obsessed with finding out the murderer as he believes maybe it will provide him with a piece of mind and make up for the lack of relationship he had with his father.
- He continues to get calls and voicemails from his mother (possibly a friend as well) asking him and reminding him if he has taken his medication.
- MC concludes that not taking his medication will allow him to see his father's ghost and help him solve the mystery.
- Dialogue: Calls uncle to ask him questions, while uncle is nice to him, it only deepens his suspicions
- As he gathers more evidence of where to find the key to the study he sees his father and he tells him where the key is. (Basically, confirming what he already knows, but feels he needs to hear.)
- After going into the father's study, he finds more evidence that condemns all the suspects (depending on what time in the 90's, it could be a computer.)
- (This could be an option where the player makes a choice on who the culprit is, and depending on the answer, will result in a good or bad end.)
- Good: He discovers the actual culprit (most likely the uncle since the idea was inspired by Hamlet. The uncle had poisoned a drink he made for the father hence the 'drug overdose'.) He calls the suspect to the house to visit him and confronts them. (Perhaps having the police waiting for the arrest with the evidence provided.) He then finally feels closure and decides to move on from the past and work on himself.
- Bad: The innocent suspect is called to the house; the MC accuses them of the murder. When the person denies it and proves their innocent the MC could either hurt the person and they run off to call authorities, or for an even darker ending, kills the person as he is consumed by his own insanity and police sirens are heard in the background (or the friend comes to check up on him and finds him in his unstable state.) Another ending involving the friend could be the friend simply comes to check up on him to find his friend unstable and kills the friend in that state then realizing the monster he has become and believing himself to have been the culprit the whole time.

Notes:

Character Backgrounds

Main Character

MC/Player (Henry Halems? Harvey Halems?)

- Estranged from his father.
- Majoring in English literature.
- Bad relationship with father because he chose to pursue English rather than take over the family business.
- Suffering from Schizophrenia (gets increasing worse as he strays away from his medication throughout the game.)
- Quite causal but poised and intelligent. While he is quite friendly, he gets suspicious and does not trust others easily (to the point of paranoia.)
- Very liberal especially compared to his father.
- Good relationship with his mother and lived with her when his parents divorced.
- Shakespeare fanatic.
- Very good and promising student, most likely working on an essay thesis during the game.
- Wanted to be close to his father growing up but he was always away on business and running his company, so their relationship suffered. His want of a father figure is very evident as his lack of a father is present throughout the game.
- Feels guilty at not being close to his father but also has big resentment towards his father.

Side Characters

Father (Markus Halems? Or Henry or Harvey Halems making the MC's Name + Jr)

- The father is dead when the game starts, the police and media claim it as a drug overdose since it was found in his system (could be other potential causes and identification depending on the technology of the time?)
- Disappointed in his son for not taking over the family business that he worked so hard to make successful from previous generations. Even more so when his son wants to pursue English and arts.
- Quite an authoritative figure as he is very wealthy, so he would be of high status and possibly involved in the community politically (on more of the conservative side.)
- His son and him could never see eye to eye (different political views, interests, lack of communication.)
- Despite feeling ashamed of his son, he still did love him very much.
- Money and power are quite important to him, but he is more concerned about public opinion and his company staying successful.
- Since he lacked presence at home, there was a severe disconnect from his wife and son. Thus, he pursued other women when away on business trips.

- He always had a soft spot for his brother and let him stay with him when he was broke.

Mother (Elizabeth Marres?)

- Very close with her son and very concerned about him being on his own despite being an adult. (Big reason why she will be the most prominent caller.)
- Quite a mild-mannered woman, friendly and loving.
- Happy with her husband at the start of the marriage but became increasingly unhappy as he focused more on his business.
- Eventually could not handle the father never being around his son and his extreme pressure he put onto his son to pursue business, so she divorced him.
- She became aware of his affairs on business trips and when upset by it, but not enough to divorce him because she wanted her son to have a father, but when she realized he would only have a negative impact she finally filed for it.
- She was not bothered too much by the affairs because the father kept it out of the house and away from their son. But when she gets an anonymous letter from someone with pictures of her best friend at the house during times of their marriage and after, she became livid and felt betrayed.

Uncle (Robert 'Bobby' Halems?)

- Very peculiar man and weird taste of interests.
- Loved his brother but got jealous very easily of him since his brother was always more capable than him.
- He is an entrepreneur often making useless projects making him bankrupted despite his family's wealth. This caused him to live with his brother.
- He always wanted the life his brother had, so when his life went downhill, he secretly relished in it.
- He was often disregarded by the family and called a failure, so his brother was always better suited to run the business. But he was always next in line because of the family tradition.
- Bad with money and spends it in weird ways.

Neighbor (Ted Planders?)

- The neighbor is friendly and gives off "Ned Flanders" vibes to the point it is quite off-putting (could potentially be a religious man as well or even a priest.)
- He always seems to know everything that goes on in the neighborhood, 'the eyes of the community'.
- He also seems to know a lot more than he leads on, making the MC quite suspicious of him.

- He is the one who will most often come to the door to chat or 'see how things are going.'
- Often provides exposition to the MC and in turn the player.
- He does not appear to like the father as he felt the father was always doing something wrong (i.e. Cheating on his wife, absent from his son, perhaps some corruption within the company or political standing. This would make sense if he was religious and felt the father was sinning and judged him for it.)

Friend (Matthew Rorke?)

- The friend is quite a stereotypical friend. He deeply cares for the MC and has known him since childhood. He considers him like brother to him and they stayed close after the MC's parents divorced and moved.
- He calls the MC throughout the game, at first just some friendly banter and then over the course of the game getting very concerned. Often telling the MC to call his Mom and that she is very worried.
- A voice of reason throughout the game (quite literally.)
- Energetic, playful, and artistic personality (Pictured him as a musician or singer of some sort.)
- Same interests as the MC but more down to earth and casual.

Genre

Story Rich, Mystery, Over the shoulder Third-Person, Point & Click Adventure, Psychological Horror

Technical Aspects

Unity Game Engine. Art team will use various programs such as Blender and Maya, Digital Art programs, and Drawing tablets to complete tasks.

Core Gameplay Elements: The player will control the main character in a third-person view as they explore the character's family house. They will be able to look for clues in the house. These take the form of character interactions, voicemail messages, and readings. The clues will be recorded in the player's notebook for easy viewing. The notebook will also serve as a secondary menu. The exploration element remains the same throughout all three acts, but the sanity system may influence the character's perception of reality and may mislead the player. Visual storytelling will be a heavy element of the game, and the player will be encouraged to unravel the mystery through the placement of visual elements in the environment and cutscenes.

Player actions / Character abilities

Actions

- Walk
- Look around
- Open doors
- Pick up objects
- Read
- Listen to voicemails
- View notebook
- Take Medication

Obstacles, power-ups, special abilities

Obstacles:

- Maneuver through familiar spaces that have become warped as the character's sanity degrades
 - Sanity system- Can either choose to take Meds or not to influence perception of reality. A lower sanity can help find clues, but can more easily lead to a bad ending
- Music and other distractions to cause deception towards the player's perception of the main character's perspective

Special abilities: Hear the narrator/See father's ghost (the ghost does not actually exist, it is a schizophrenic hallucination).

Note: The main character is an entirely normal person other than his mental illness

Sanity System

The Sanity system is a gameplay mechanic that helps determine the endings of the game, as well as how Henry reacts to certain events and conversations. The sanity system is intended to enhance the psychological horror of the game. While it is not possible to keep Henry completely sane, the player can try to guide him towards a happier ending, but may be misled by Henry's hallucinations.

The Player can choose or not choose to take medication.

Take Medication

- Harder to find clues, Less information in notebook
- Game actively encourages you not to take meds

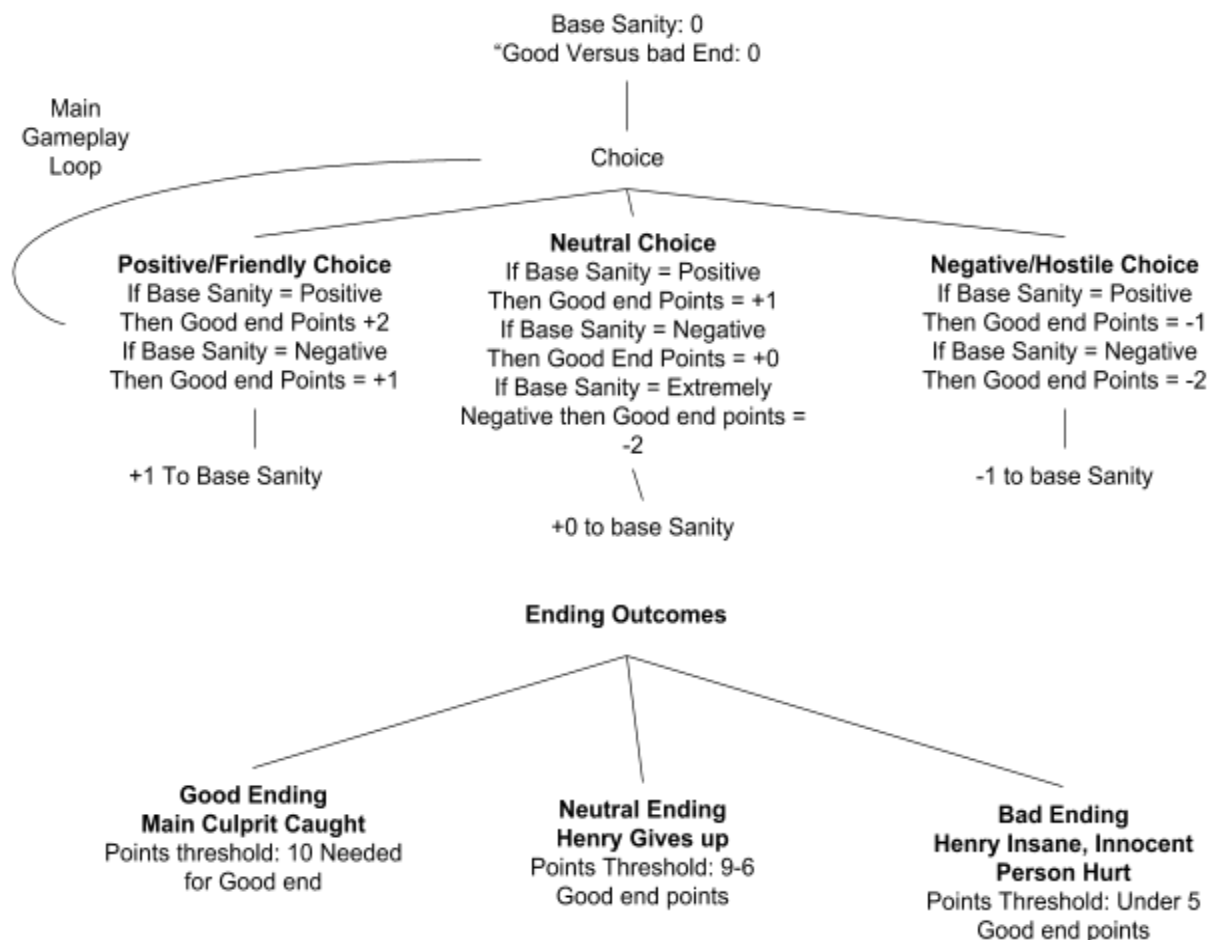
- “Point of No Return”- consistently avoiding meds will lessen their effect- meaning that meds may not have effect late in the game
- Hallucinations (Father’s Ghost) Help point out clues

Avoid Medication

- Clues are easier to find
- Audio/visual hallucinations
- Character’s appearance becomes disheveled
- Bad end is easier to get, but can be avoided
- Only Neutral/Negative Choices may be available at extremely low sanity

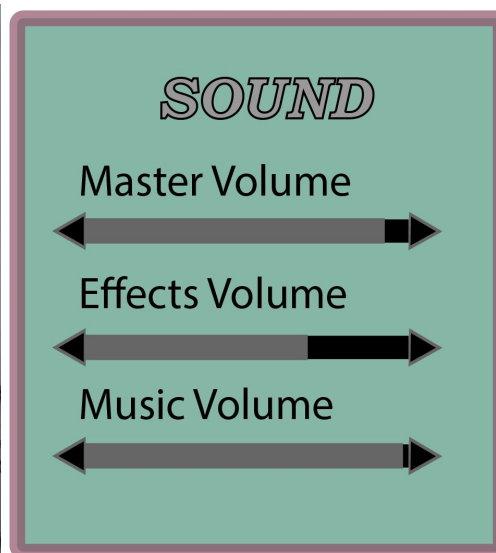
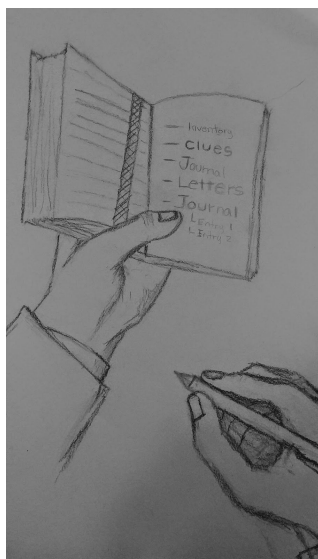
How Sanity Reduces

- Picking Negative/Hostile choices



HUD

The Heads-up Display will look like that of most Telltale games. It will be very minimal and clean, with only the guided, low opacity crosshairs as the only regularly visible aspect. Much like Telltale HUD's, the crosshair will be dynamic, as it will change to indicate that the player can interact with an object in the environment. The HUD will also have the player's objective indicated, most likely in one of the top corners. The HUD will also feature audio and visual pings that indicate when new clues have been added to the notebook, or the player's objective has been completed or updated.



Environments

Rather than have the game be divided into multiple levels, I'll Be Here will feature one seamless level that is the character's childhood home. This will prevent the use of loading screens, for the most part. The character will be able to access every room in the house, to find new clues to further progression. In terms of aesthetic, the house will take on a Victorian style appearance and floor plan, and the interior design choices reflect this style, except for the main character's childhood bedroom. The childhood bedroom will look like that of a teen growing up in the 1990's. The house will be equipped with modern technology, such as computers, televisions, phones and answering machines.



First Floor (include birds eye view, floor plan)

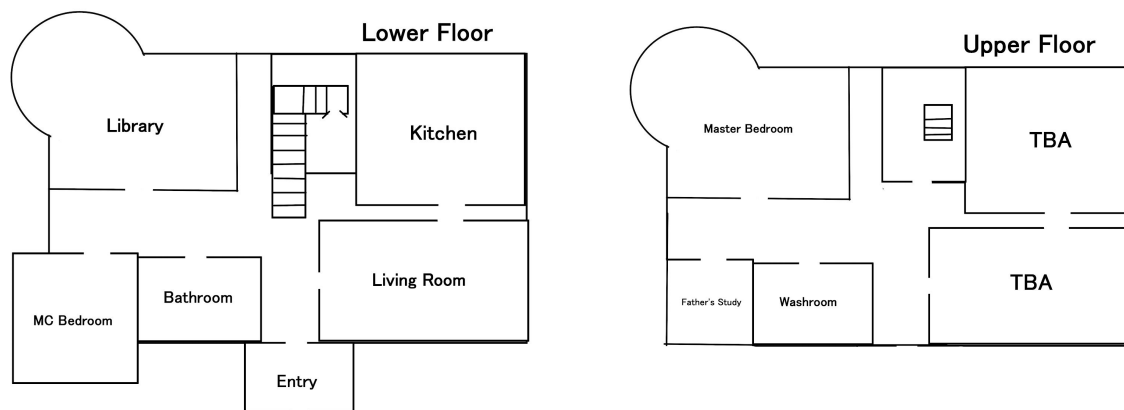
- Entry
- Kitchen

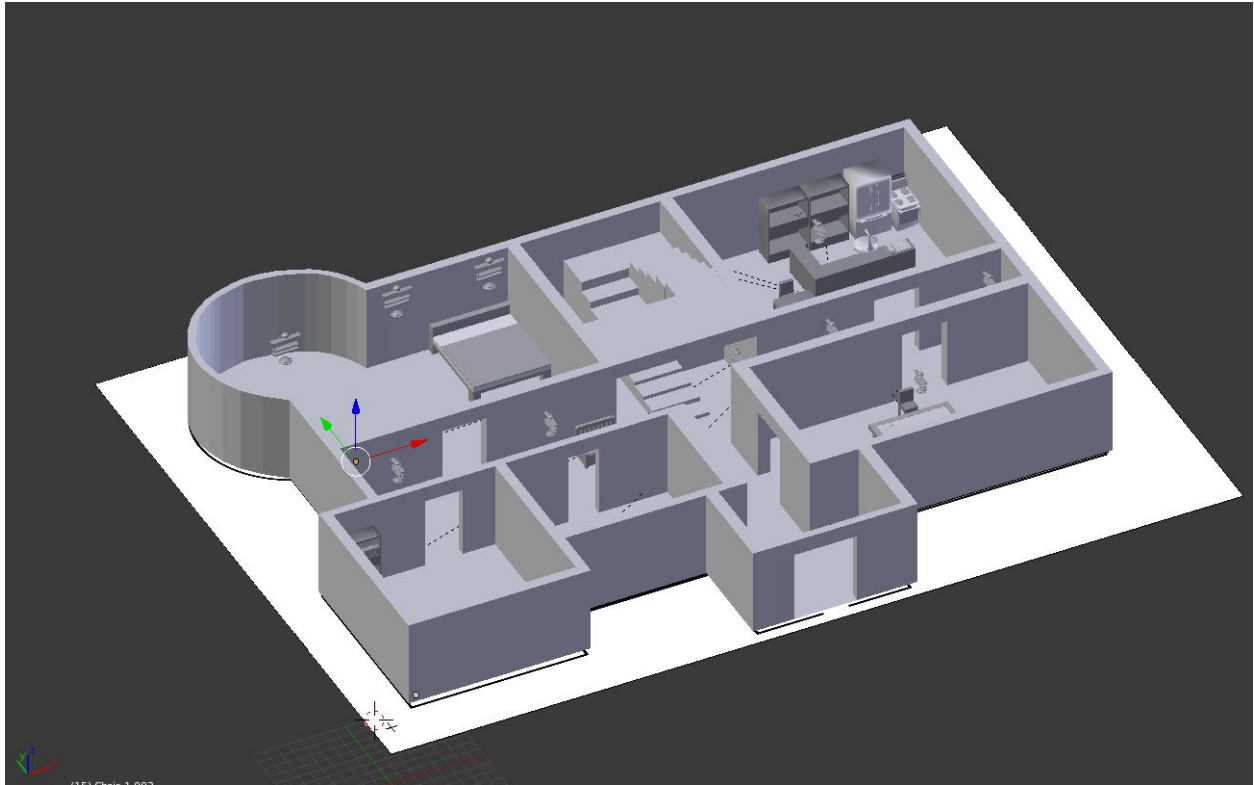
- Library
- Living Room
- Bathroom
- Main Character's Bedroom

Second Floor (include birds eye view, floor plan)

- Parents bedroom
- Fathers study (locked)
- Halls

Exploration is largely open, with clues being placed around the environments. Once a “clue threshold” has been reached, the game will trigger a waypoint that leads to a part of the house containing a cutscene or dialogue section. **Update**





Menus

There will be a few menus to be used in our game. There will be the main menu, where players can choose to change settings or start/continue their adventure, and access save files to return to specific points in the game. The in-game menu will be designed as the players notebook. When the game is paused, the player will pull out and open their notebook. In this notebook, basic start menu options are found, such as the ability to continue, save/load, change settings on the fly, and exit to the main menu. On top of this, players can access, and review clues found throughout the house, and a dedicated section of the notebook will be for players to write their own notes pertaining to the mystery inside. Another menu will be found in the answering machine that the player can interact with. Here, the player can review for audio clues, and pieces of the backstory/lore of the world.