

Image Credit: "Evil Eyes" by Tobias Frieze

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Narrated and Animated Presentation: <https://youtu.be/SNtH10nfxKw>

THE CHALLENGE

- "Design a game feature that reflects the experience of your morning routine."
- Experience = CATS
- Inspire gameplay in a different context
- *Gothic Survival Horror*



- My interactions with my cats are what make my morning routine unique -> Perfect as an inspiration
- I decided to use this in a different context, and picturing my cats as malevolent spirits in a horror game both amused me and made me eager to start working on the idea



"The Domains of Play" is a design tool created by Jason VandenBerghe (Ubisoft Creative Director, 2008 - 2017) to more accurately describe what kinds of players a game is being designed for

("Applying the 5 Domains of Play: Acting Like Players":

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uX6ye66NK0>)

- Based on the Big Five model of personality from psychology
- Uses four of the five personality groups and two of six facets in each group to create the player square

- The player square describes the type of games and mechanics that players with those personality types will like to play (predictive model)

I have blocked off the areas of each quadrant such that the closer you are to the midpoint, the less extreme that mechanic has to be in the game

- Midpoints capture the most players (bell curve distribution), but the extremes capture the most dedicated and interested players

Target players:

1) Openness to Experience (Novelty) -> Adventurer/Investigator

- Enjoy fantasy in their games but do not mind if the fantasy exists in the "real" world
- Must have exploration mechanics in their games and do not need building mechanics at all

2) Conscientiousness (Challenge) -> Perseverance Players

- Do not particularly enjoy difficult games, the fun is not in overcoming difficulty
- Enjoy being sent on quests, will persist through their fear and anxiety, I also interpret this as "enjoy directed gameplay"

3) Extraversion (Stimulation) -> "Lone Wolf" Player

- Are fine (or even happy to!) play alone [A caveat: Many players of horror seem to enjoy playing for an audience]
- Game must be exciting; horror is perhaps a medium thrill level, so it doesn't touch the midline here

4) Agreeableness (Harmony) -> Knight

- Want to know about the game world, why the game works that way in that context, what is at stake, why do they have to do the thing
- Player versus the environment – no team play; this is a stretch of the original definition, which is PvP play, to PvE(nvironment) play

Bottom Line: I want to take the Adventurous, Investigative, perseverant, Lone Wolf Knight player types and have them experience feeling trapped in a place that has supernatural aspects. I want them to feel that they are desperate to escape the temple.

PLAYER TAKEAWAYS AND SUCCESS CRITERIA

- Player Experience of Need Satisfaction (PENS) – Scott Rigby and Troy Skinner (GDC 2013)
- Measuring Success
 - Player Interest
 - Player Understanding of the Mechanic
 - Usability (of Game Controls)
 - Familiarity with similar games (Comparison of expectations, removal of comparison bias)

Takeaways		
Competence	"I escaped."	-
Autonomy	"I have control."	Exploration for interest
Relatedness	To the hostile spirits	To the protective spirits

The Player Experience of Needs Satisfaction (PENS) model is based on the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) from applied psychology

- Bases player experience on core human drives (Competence, Autonomy, and Relatedness) described by SDT

- Targets long-term player engagement and motivation

- Referenced by VandenBerghe to describe the player takeaways – what should they retain when they put the game controller down?

(“

”:

<https://www.gdcvault.com/play/1017784/The-Applied-Value-of-Player>,

“Engines of Play: How Player Motivation Changes Over Time”:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lg2GndSat1E>)

I want the player to walk away with:

1) Competence (What skills do they walk away with?)

- Escaping the temple

- requires puzzle-solving and exploration skills

- Outwitting and escaping the detection of the enemies roaming the temple halls

2) Autonomy (What effects did the player’s decisions have on the world?)

- Control, i.e. only the player’s actions drove the game forward; no or few aspects of the game took control away from the player

- Exploration for interest, i.e. choosing to take the extra time and effort to explore more parts of the temple should have an impact on the game

3) Relatedness (Does the player know how they relate to other entities in the game?)

- Relation to hostile enemies, that they are always there and will kill you

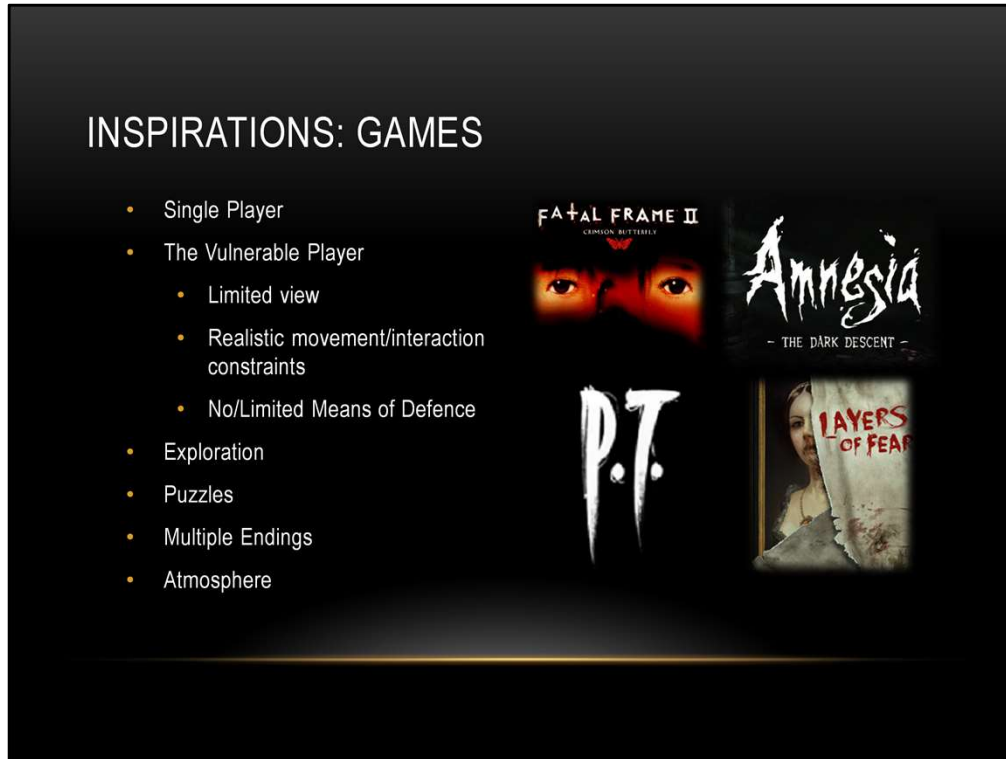
- Relation to the unhostile entities, that they are apathetic to the player and their well-being

Measuring Success

During play testing, players will be asked:

- If they are interested in playing this type of game -> general measure of interest in concept
- If they understand how the mechanic works -> understandability (What don't they understand and why; indication of tuning and refinement)
- The usability of the game controls (are they as simple as I intended?)
- Their familiarity with comparable games
 - Familiar players will be able to indicate if the mechanic is on par with existing ones (Does it match their expectations? Deviating too far from them tends to be ill-advised)
 - Unfamiliar players will have no comparison bias
 - Value in both types of players

Deliver as questionnaires (Likert scales, free answer questions)



Fatal Frame II: Crimson Butterfly (Tecmo, PS2, 2003) – “among the scariest games ever made”

Amnesia: The Dark Descent (Frictional Games, PC, 2010)

Layers of Fear (Bloober Team, PC, 2016) inspired by **P.T.** (Konami - 7780s Studio/Kojima Productions, PS3, 2014)

Common elements:

- Single-Player games
- 1) The player is intentionally left vulnerable in dangerous and unsettling environments
 - Limited field of view and camera effects that alter the viewing space (e.g., insanity effects in Amnesia)
 - Tend to be first person; Outside of the View Finder mode, Fatal Frame is an exception
- doesn't let the player control the camera
 - Movement and interaction mechanics are on par with realistic movements (e.g. limited walking speed)
 - No or limited means of defence -> left to the mercy of the nightmares roaming the game world

Relevant to:

- a) Competence: Player skill, wit, and bravery required to best enemies
- b) Autonomy: -
- c) Relatedness: Shows player vulnerability in relation to enemies

Many horror game enemies are memorable because they cannot be defeated or are difficult to fight (e.g. Sae in Fatal Frame, Lisa from P.T., demons in Amnesia,

the wife in Layers of Fear)

This could be part of their appeal as horror game enemies

2) Exploration, Puzzles, and Multiple Endings: Overcoming fear to progress through the game

Relevant to:

a) Competence: Mapping and puzzle solving, bravery

b) Autonomy: Player decisions determine which ending they see

Few cutscenes (Amnesia deliberately has none, P.T. and Layers of Fear are close to having none) such that the player has full control over game and story progression

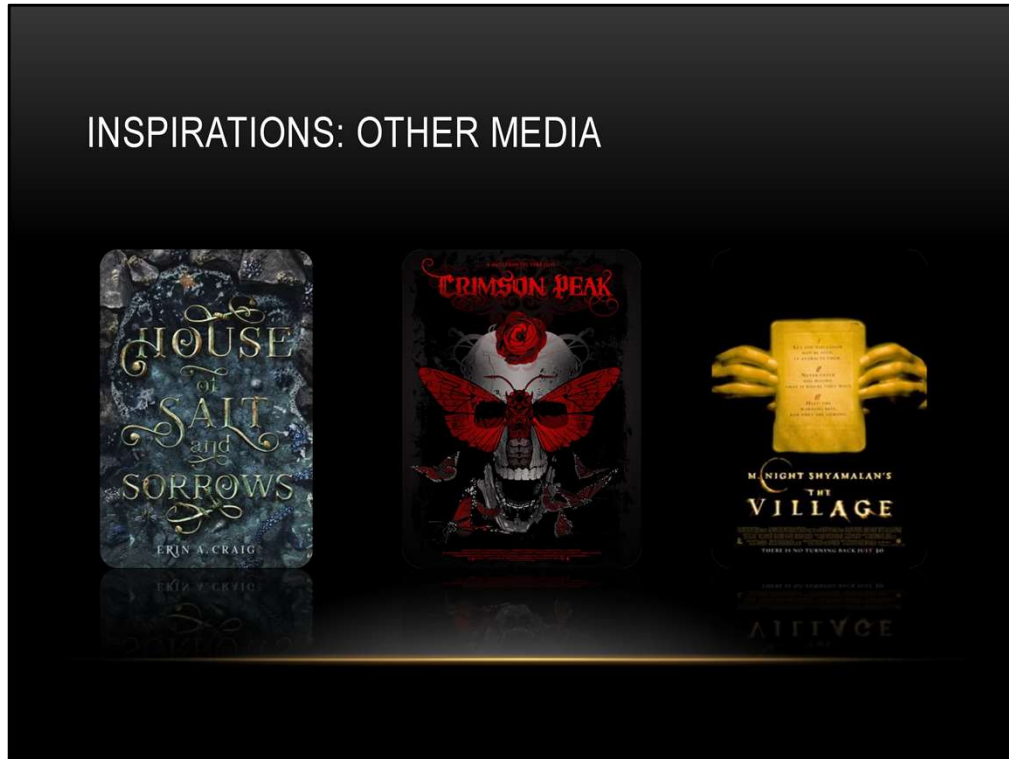
c) Relatedness: Weakly relates players to enemies

Want to escape, fear of running into them in the dark

3) Atmosphere: Extremely important to horror games

- Lighting and sound design can be used to frighten and unsettle the player in big ways

- Makes it easier to achieve the intended player takeaways



Gothic stories and settings

House of Salt and Sorrow (Erin A. Craig, Delacorte, 2019)

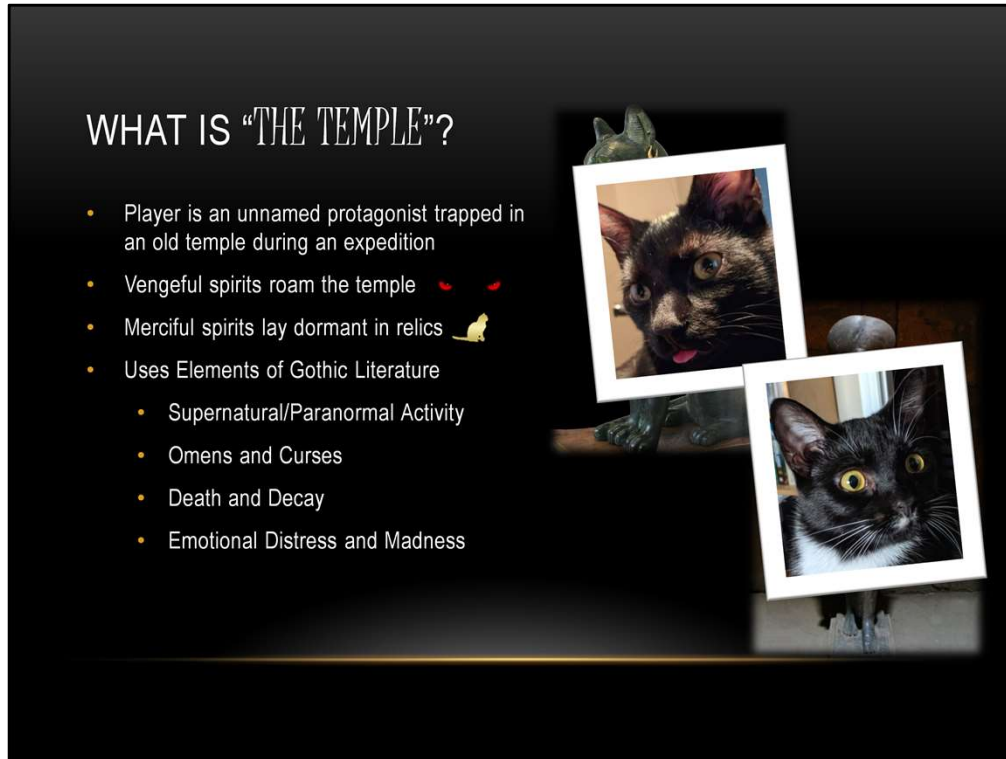
- Creates an unsettling atmosphere with textual descriptions alone
- Inspiration for visuals and setting

Crimson Peak (Guillermo Del Toro, Universal Pictures, 2015)

- Inspiration for visual and sound design, especially the ghost scenes
- Timing of supernatural events

The Village (M. Night Shyamalan, Buena Vista Pictures, 2004)

- Inspiration for sound design RE: use of silence
- Pacing and delivery of information (possible to put it together before the end, but requires the viewer to observe and remember details)
- Mixing of the known and unknown
- Human stories and beliefs informing fear



You play an explorer that has become trapped in a centuries old temple when the entryway collapsed. You are alone – you have no idea where the rest of your team has gone. Rumor tells of vengeful spirits (represented as red eyes in the following slides) that roam the temple halls, devouring trespassers in their paths. The temple's deity is a dual aspect goddess – the vengeful spirits are one half of the whole. The other half are more merciful - lying dormant in relics (represented as gold cats in the following slides) – and might aid you in escaping the detection of the vengeful ones.

Original inspirations are my two cats, but they are too silly and cute to strike fear in the heart of anyone

- Replaced with Sekhmet and Bastet from Egyptian lore, who are sometimes referred to as dual-aspects of one divinity
- This also retains the "feline" influence -> Sekhmet is depicted as a lioness and Bastet as a domestic cat in their full animal forms

Pulling in elements of Gothic Literature

- Supernatural activity -> Vengeful and merciful spirits
- Omens and curses -> Temple is "cursed", i.e. can, and likely will, result in the death of those who enter
- Death and decay -> temple left untouched and uncared for for centuries, in variable states of falling apart
- Emotional distress and madness -> Is the player going mad or are the spirits real?

Aim to build and expand upon the key elements identified from the game inspirations

Photo Credits

Photo of the Gayer-Anderson cat By Einsamer Schütze - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=19518769>

Statue of Sekhmet in a very small chapel of the temple of Ptah in the Precinct of Amun-Re at
Karnak Temple. By Asavaa - Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0,
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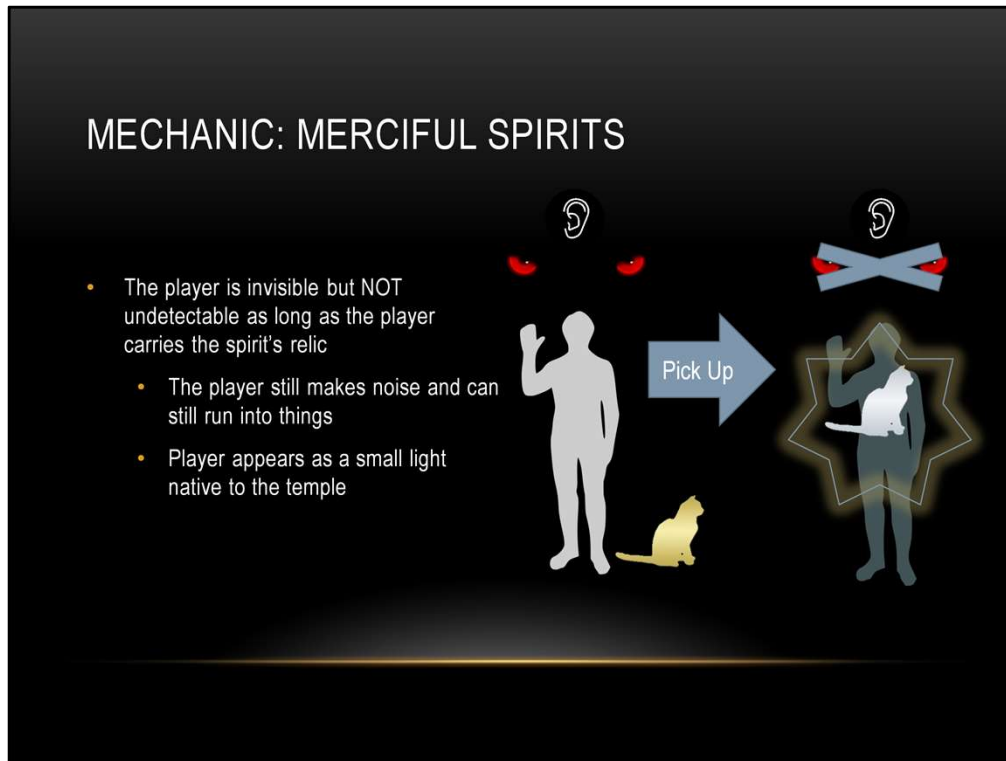


My approach involved:

- Identifying elements from my favourite horror games and stories
- Matching them with elements in my morning routine that involved the cats
- Taken from the scenario from my pitch document

Surprisingly, I found a one-to-one mapping between them:

- Leaving for the day means escaping the temple
- Performing morning tasks as navigation and puzzle solving
- I don't want my tights ruined, therefore I don't want the cats to catch me
- I don't want the cats to dislike me, so I don't want to have to reject them -> I won't be able to fight them
- I can't stop them from grabbing my tights with their claws -> if they see me, I WILL be caught (Line of sight, visual detection, they know where I am based on the noises I make); my tights will be done for (i.e. I will die)
- The cats cannot be controlled (Good luck trying) -> the spirits don't answer to the player; they follow their own rules



Having some measure of protection in horror games might be unique -> I have not come across any/I can't recall any examples

- Tends to go against the idea of the vulnerable player

The core idea is that the merciful spirits are dormant in relics around the temple

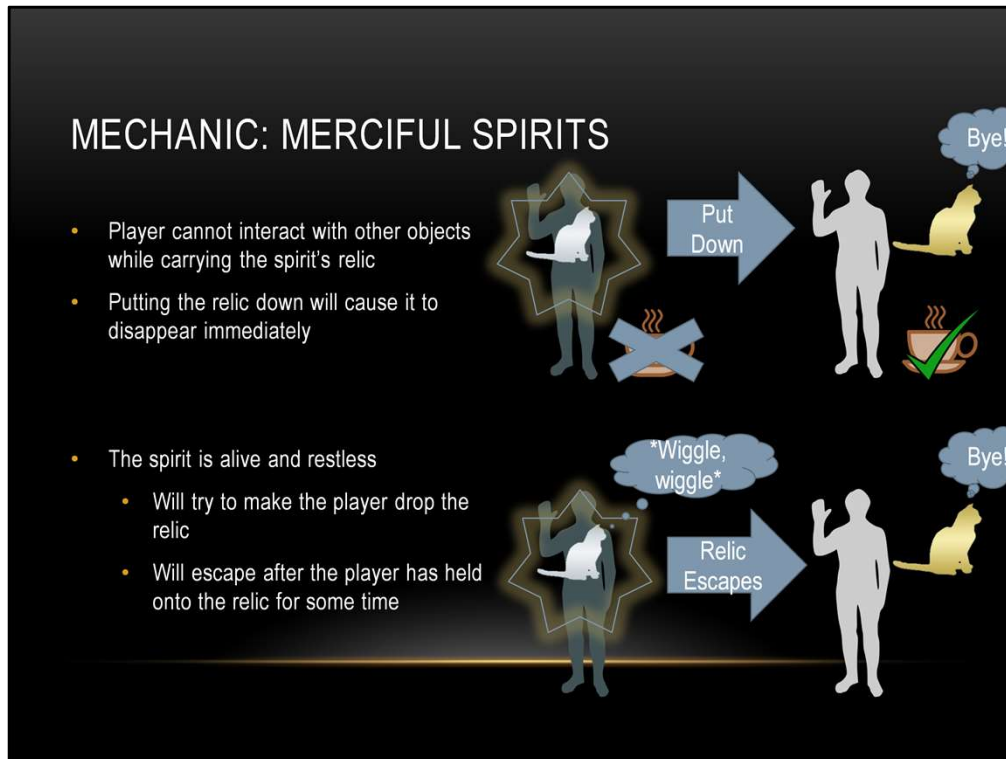
- The vengeful spirits can detect the player via sight, sound, and feel (i.e. if you bump into them, they'll eat you)

- Picking the relic up will grant the player invisibility for as long as they carry the relic (i.e. removes the vengeful spirits' ability to detect the player by sight)

- The relic does not mask player noise -> the vengeful spirit can still detect the player from sound

- The player still has a corporeal form -> they can still run into things, potentially making noise that way

- I might have the player appear as a small "light" that is not unusual for the temple -> still uninteresting to the vengeful spirit, but might make a good indicator to the player as to their current invisibility status



I have one limitation and a catch:

- 1) Limitation: The player cannot interact with other objects while they are carrying a relic
 - The relic is heavy and requires two hands to carry
 - If you know cats, you know they don't really like being held -> Releasing the relic will cause it to disappear
 - So, if you need to pick up your morning tea, you have to put the relic down and be at the full mercy of the vengeful spirits again
- 2) Catch: The spirit is restless and doesn't want to be held onto
 - Again, if you know cats...
 - It will periodically try to escape from the player by trying to make them drop the relic
 - The player can prevent the escape a few times, but the spirit will always win out eventually and leave the player alone again

MERCIFUL SPIRITS: MEETING DESIGN GOALS

- Spirit does not make the player invincible
 - Player is less fearful of the vengeful spirits OR have a false sense of security
- Cannot perform other tasks while carrying the relic
 - Anxiety of choosing if or when to pick up the relic
- Don't know when the spirit will try to free itself
 - Panic when it tries and the player is attempting to retain their hold on its relic
- Spirit WILL escape
 - Fear of being vulnerable returns

Reinforces that the player is alone. They are still trapped and need to escape.



Exploring the “vulnerable player” aspect of horror games

- The relic does not make the player invincible, but it might make the player feel less fearful or have a false sense of security
 - When the relic eventually does escape the player, they will be abruptly reminded of their vulnerability
 - Not being able to perform other tasks while carrying the relic could prompt a decision dilemma in the player -> do they give up the small amount of security they have in order to progress in the temple? Even the thought of having to make that decision could give the player decision anxiety
 - Not knowing when the relic will try to escape can behave similarly to jump scares without completely blind-siding the player -> less of a “cheap scare” fell
 - Evokes panic in the player when it does begin to move -> are they safe enough now to be ok?
 - Panicked scramble to regain control of the relic
- In the end, the spirit WILL force the player to drop the relic and escape
 - A constant reminder that the player is vulnerable, even when they have a small measure of “protection” -> they cannot stop the inevitable escape

Bottom Line: The merciful spirit mechanic constantly reminds the player that they are alone. They are trapped and need to escape because nothing and no one in the temple cares about their survival.



Since the vengeful spirits cannot be fought, sneaking around is necessary to the player's survival

- The relic provides another means for stealth without removing the threat of being killed...alone...where no one can hear you scream

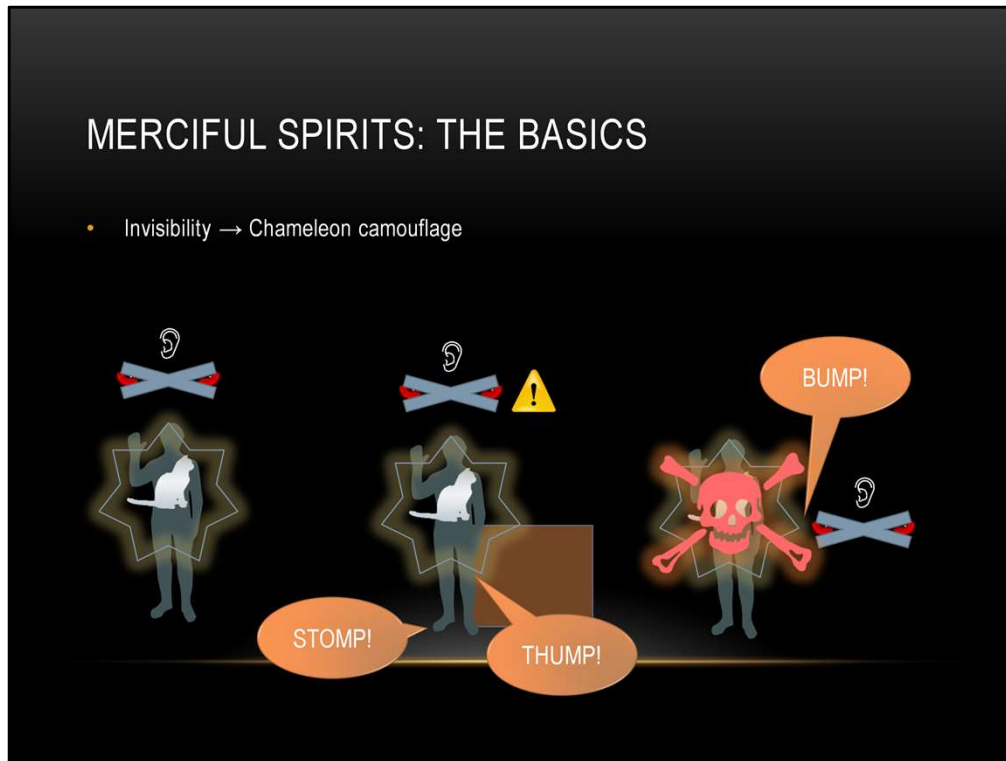
Even though they are "friendly", the merciful spirits do not care what happens to the player

-> will leave no matter what is happening around the player

- The player has zero control over, or allies in, the temple

Simple game controls reduces the chances of player frustration, which can undermine the "horror" aspects of the game

- e.g. In Fatal Frame, combat can become frustrating when you lose multiple times and can undermine the scariness of the ghosts



Functionally, only the vengeful spirits' ability to detect the player visually is nullified by the relic -> acts like chameleon camouflage

- Noise made by player movement (e.g. running is typically louder than walking) and bumping into objects that make noise when they move will alert the vengeful spirits and prompt them to investigate

- * The spirits are still to be feared, so tread lightly...

If the player bumps into the spirit...they are as good as dead because they cannot outrun them and the spirit will take a blind swipe at whatever ran into them/they ran into that they cannot see

- There is no hope of recovery from this misstep, so it still encourages the player to stay away

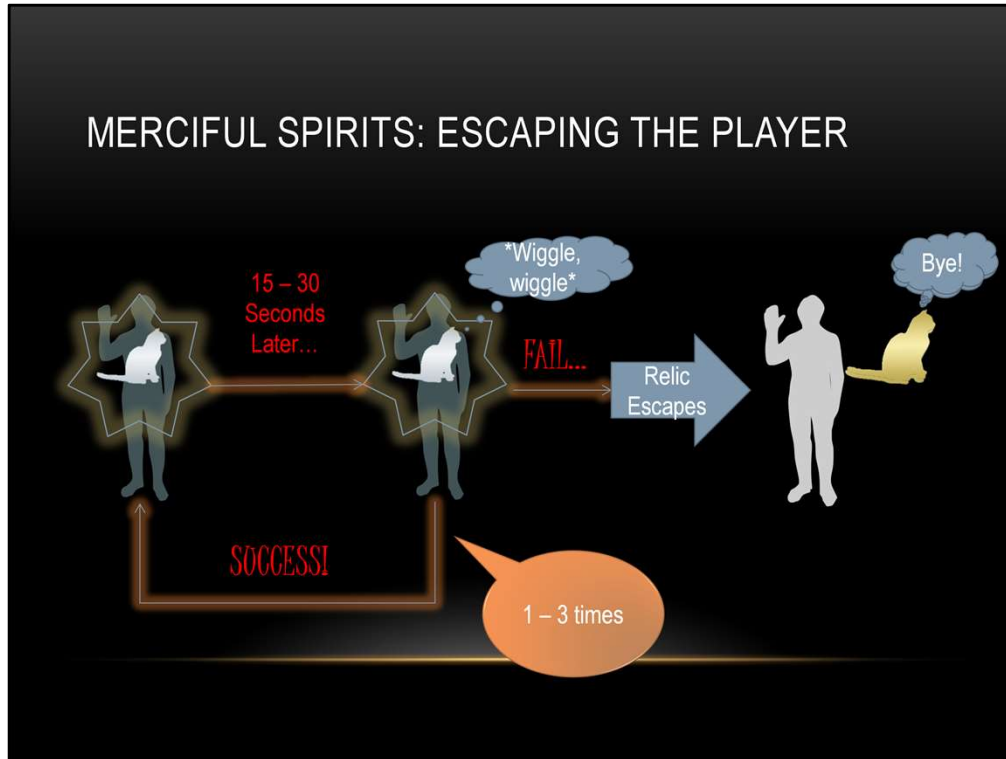


The spirit's relic is a heavy statue that is awkward to walk with
- In order to keep it steady, the player needs both hands to carry it

If the player tries to carry anything else, the relic will fall
- Mechanically prevent this from happening so that the player doesn't think the game "cheated"
- Putting the relic down is now a deliberate decision -> Do I give up my camouflage for this item? Is this REALLY what I want to do? I'd better make sure this is EXACTLY what I want to do...

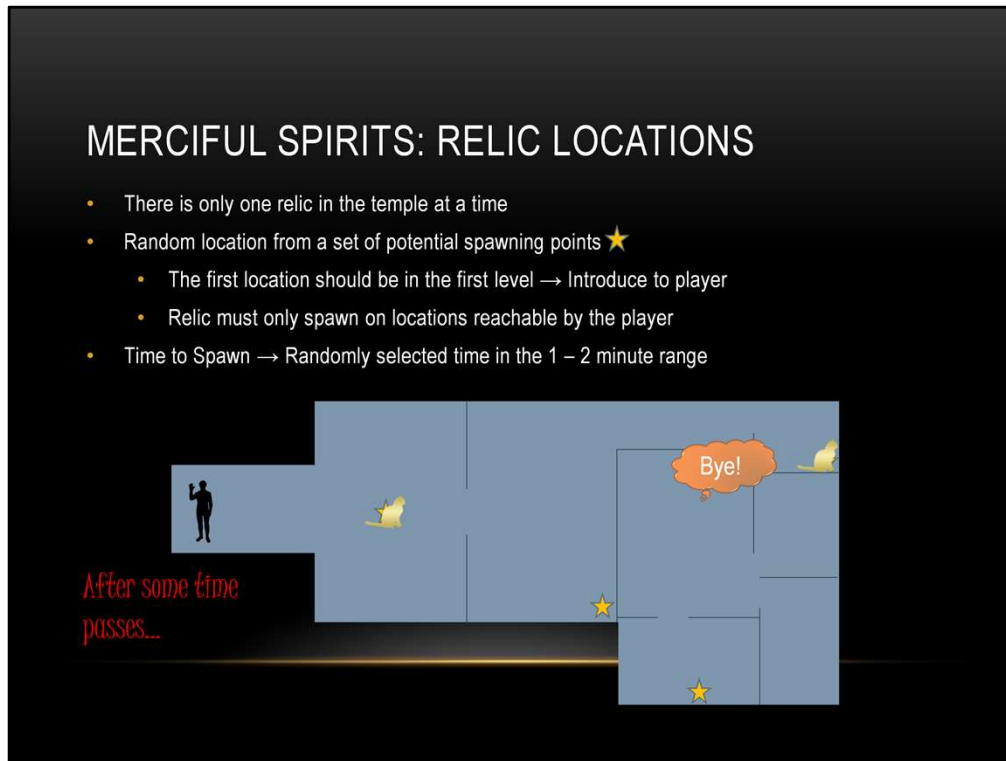
An animated visual guide to this mechanic:

- 1) Say there are two items – the relic and my morning tea.
- 2) If I pick up the token, I can't have my tea. But the vengeful spirit who wants to kill me can't see me now. Excellent!
- 3) But wait...I need to be carrying my tea when I leave. But when I put the relic down...
- 4) It disappears and I can be visually detected again. I'd better grab my tea and leave ASAP before I become spirit fodder.



Cats don't usually like being held and carried around, and they will want to leave when they've had enough

- The token will periodically try to free itself from the player's grip
 - Randomly selected period of time in the range of 15 – 30 seconds, so the player doesn't know exactly when this will happen
- Player has the opportunity to prevent the token from escaping
 - Reaction challenge -> notice and hold the "Interact" button
 - * Controls require minimal deliberative thought from the player -> even when the player is terrified, they still have a chance to succeed
 - Failure causes the player to drop the relic and the spirit disappears
- If the player is successful, they can continue on as if nothing happened
- ...until another 15 – 30 seconds elapse and the spirit tries to escape again
- As long as the player is successful, they retain their hold on the relic
- ...but only for 1 – 3 escape attempts. Cats are not about being told no.
 - If the player is successful every time the spirit tries to escape, it will escape for sure on the next attempt
 - * The player cannot indefinitely stop the spirit from escaping
 - * The number of loops that the player goes through is randomly selected (the "strength" of the spirit)



There is only one Bastet, so there is only one “active” relic in the temple at any given time

- Bastet doesn’t care what happens to the player, so she doesn’t feel the need to leave extra “safety” favours lying around

- Besides, she’s busy. She just wants to be left alone.

The relic will appear on one of several potential spawning points

- The initial spawn point or points will be in the first level so that the player can be introduced to the mechanics of the relic

- After this, the relic must only appear on points that are reachable by the player

- If this is not maintained, we might as well not have the relic at all for all the use it will be to the player

The time between relic disappearing and reappearing is a randomly selected period in the range of 1 – 2 minutes

- Gives Bastet enough time to pick a new perch

- The player cannot precisely determine when or where the relic will reappear

A visual guide with animations:

- 1) The player approaches and picks up the relic
- 2) They wander the temple together for a time before the relic is dropped, either by deliberately putting it down, dropping it, or the spirit’s inevitable escape
- 3) Some time passes...
- 4) And the spirit has found a new favourite spot and reappears in the temple

MERCIFUL SPIRITS: WHY RANDOM?

- Remember: The spirits follow their own rules
- Emphasises the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of the spirits
- Emphasises that the player has no reliable allies in the temple
- Heightens player thrill/anxiety
 - When will the relic struggle next? WILL it struggle? Where will I be when it escapes? Will I find the relic again?

Even the merciful spirits don't care if you live or die.

The randomness of when the relic moves or escaped, and where the relic appears is characteristics of cats – they follow their own rules at their own pace. The temple deals in feline deities, so it makes sense that they behave as cats would.

- The essence of a cat is captures in the uncontrollable and unpredictable nature of randomly selected values

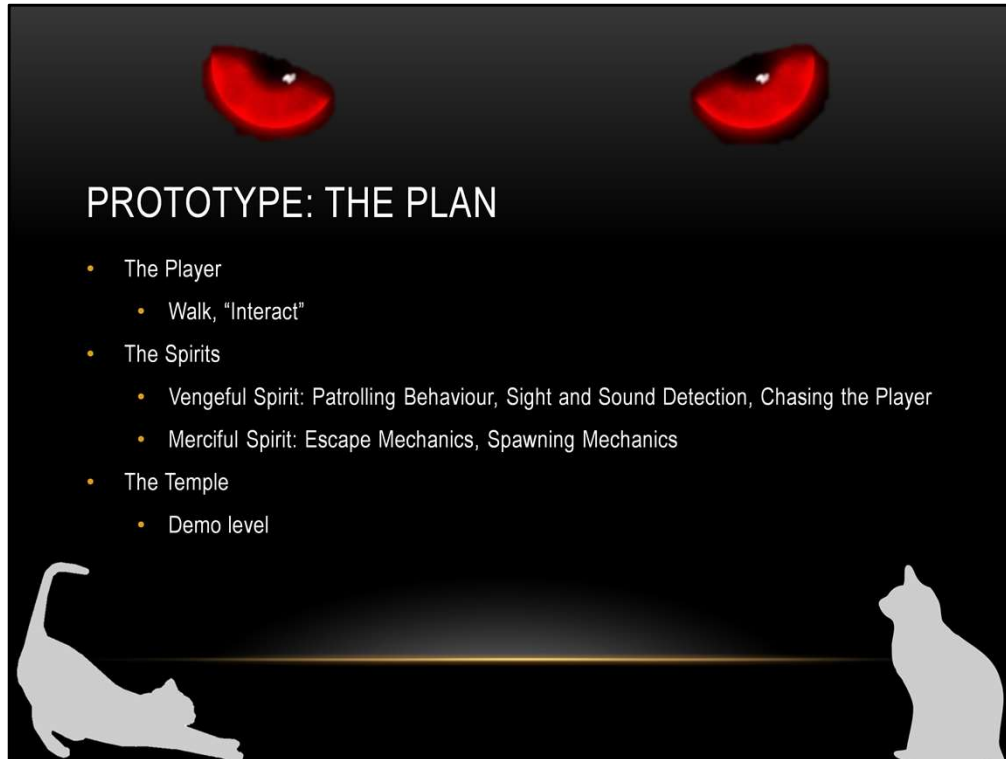
This also emphasises that the player has no reliable allies, or any allies at all really

- Can assume that the spirits are humouring the player while they are being picked up and carried

The unpredictability also lends itself to player thrill and anxiety – When will the relic struggle next? WILL it struggle? Where will I be when it escapes? Will I find the relic again?

Bottom Line:

Even the merciful or “friendly” spirits don’t care what happens to you. You are alone and no help is coming.



- I need three actors to test the "Merciful Spirits" mechanics: the player, the vengeful spirit, and the merciful spirit
- I also need a demo level for these actors to interact in; helpful to include some visual and audio design to better convey the intended experience

Player minimal functions: Walk and "Interact"

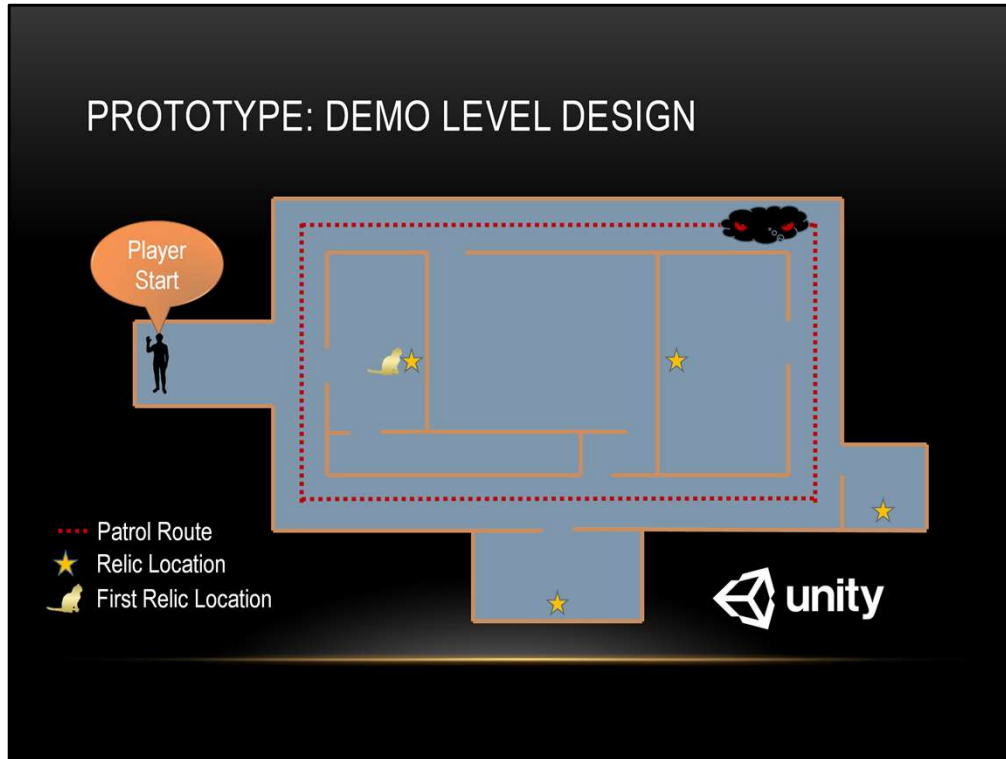
- Move around the level and pick up objects (includes the relic)

Vengeful Spirit minimal functions: patrolling behaviour, sight and sound detection, chasing the player

- Functions enable the testing of "invisibility" protection – its effect on sight and how the spirit reacts to noise from invisible sources
- Also conveys some of the intended "being hunted" player experience

Merciful Spirit minimal functions: escape and spawning mechanics

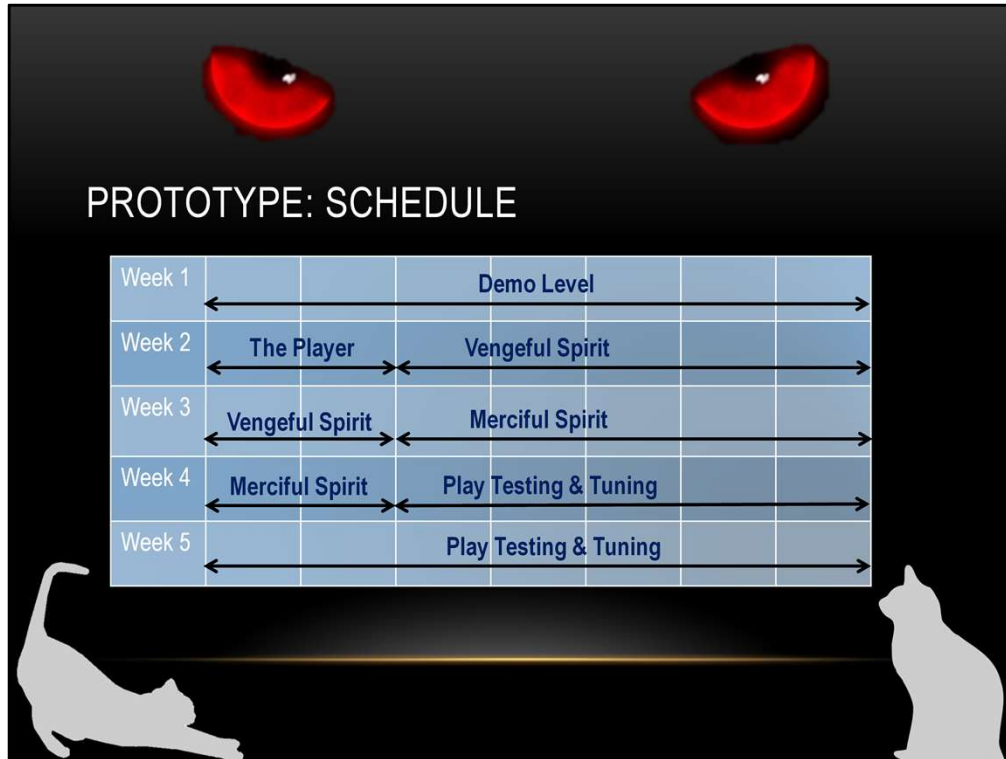
- Completely defines relic behaviours
- Ties together player "Interact" and relic benefit



This is my proposal for the demo level

- Vengeful Spirit patrol route is a simple four-waypoint, circular path
- Four potential relic locations; initial location is set to be directly in the player's line of sight when they start the level
- A few rooms to explore
- Pathways to aid in avoiding the vengeful spirit -> player needs to discover them (no map)

Intention is to build the level in Unity3D



Estimated times include design, build, and modular testing of each component

Demo level = 1 week

- Allows time for finding textures, object models, sound effects, ambient audio
- Aim for impression of intended experience and atmosphere; does not have to be completely polished/as envisioned

The Player = 2 days

- First person view -> no model required (except maybe hands)
- Elements of the UI that indicate interaction points (e.g. moveable objects, extra information)
- Test player controls

Vengeful Spirit = 1 week

- Mainly for testing and tuning visual and audio detection mechanisms

Merciful Spirit = 1 week

- Test and tune end points of randomized selection ranges (e.g. time to escape attempt, time to respawn)
- See how the two spirits interact -> tune detection ranges of vengeful spirit if necessary

Play Testing and Tuning = 1 week 5 days

- Give the game to potential players

Geneva Smith—"The Temple" Design Solution Presentation

- Create questionnaires described by the success criteria to locate points to tune, refine, or redesign
- Implement and retest any changes that come from play testing