Stanford Elementary

Introduction

You are a loved and adored toy, but one day, you get dropped off in a donation bin and before you know it, you are sitting on the shelf of a storage room in Stanford Elementary – away from your friends and owner. You're tired of this place and want to go back home. You begin your escape, discovering that there's more to learn about the other toys than you had initially thought…

Synopsis

This game is an escape room adventure and mystery where the player is both trying to escape while uncovering other toys' stories to do so. You are a toy who was donated to Stanford Elementary but left abandoned and unplayed with along with all the other donated toys. Your goal is to leave this boring, dreadful place, learning about the lives of other toys along the way to figure your way out.

Initially, you start in a storage room, where you are told that you have been sitting there, collecting dust for weeks on end. You've had enough, so you start your adventure by asking the toy next to you how to get out of here. This interaction will lead to a series of hints, stories, and puzzles that lead the player out of the storage room.

Once you escape the storage room, to your demise you're still not out yet! Uncover the mysteries and clues of the playroom to finally – not escape? Just when you thought you reached the end, you find out that you've been getting played all along by the evil mastermind behind all the toy negligence and abandonment:

Put all the clues you've collected throughout your adventure together to unveil the evil mastermind's story and finally make your way out.

Stories

The Forgotten Bear. Bear was beloved by his owner Lila. They played together every single day, and he always got the best seat at Lila's tea parties. As Lila grew older, she started inviting Barbies to the tea parties, and suddenly Bear was demoted to the back of the tea party circle. Eventually, Lila grew out of tea parties all together. She traded Bear and her Barbies for lipgloss and her new iPhone 14. Bear moved from his coveted spot on the bed to collecting dust in the corner of the closet. Eventually, Lila's mom donated Bear to Stanford Elementary, the local elementary school. He wants you to be reunited with your owner, but any mention of tea parties and he becomes quite uncooperative.

The Lonely Dog. Rex was a stuffed dog at the local library. During the weekly reading circle, he was brought out alongside other stuffed animals for the kids to squeeze and cuddle while they were listening to the weekly story. When "Go, Dog. Go!" was the book of the week, he got a special spot at the front of the circle. In the COVID-19 pandemic, reading circle's were shut down abruptly. At the beginning of 2022, the city decided to shut down the library all together, as people had become even more attached to their devices and less interested in checking out physical books. Rex, along with all of his friends from the library, were taken to Stanford Elementary. He's an excellent reader with a sharp mind, so he's one you'll want to keep close.

Tone

We want the tone of our game to be a whimsical, childlike mystery while also capturing the bittersweet emotions associated with abandonment and loss, feelings most people can relate to. In the toy's journey to escape, we hope to capture feelings of longing and vulnerability, highlighting the toy's desire to be loved. As the toy tries to escape Stanford Elementary, we want to introduce moments of connection between the main character and the other toys– driving the theme of empathy home. At the same time, we want to bring in moments of darkness where the evil toy tries to sabotage our main character to provide a balance between positive and negative mood. Overall, we want an adventure-driven game that captures elements of perseverance, empathy, and hope.

Settings

Room 1: Storage Room

The escape room starts in the storage room of the elementary school. This is where toys that are less popular are stored along with school supplies. It's a dark and small room full of overflowing storage bins. The toys that are stored away here are worn and dusty, showing that they haven't been played with in a long time. The player will uncover sad stories about the stored away toys as they attempt to open the door.

Room 2: Play House

After the player successfully opens the storage room door, they are led to the play house where the elementary school students can play with toys during break time. This room is full of all types of toys, such as plushies, dolls, cars, legos, and robots, so it will have a colorful tone with colorful decorations.

Room 3: Classroom

This is the final room that the player will escape out of. The evil toy shows up here and the player must leverage previous puzzles to fight the evil toy. This room has chairs, tables, and whiteboards, as well as wall decorations for teaching the alphabet. The evil toy will be in a strong and vibrant color to emphasize its presence.

We plan to set up the rooms in a series of rooms (303, 310, and 307) in Durand.

Gameplay and Types of Fun

Our escape room is designed for a single player but can be played as a team. We hope to embed puzzles and challenges in the escape room in the form of a narrative; each puzzle will be tied to a story of a stuffed animal. Our target audience is teenagers and older due to the somewhat creepy tone of the escape room.

The primary types of fun are **narrative**, **fantasy** and **challenge**. The players will learn and engage with the stories of the neglected stuffed toys as they try to escape the room. At the same time, the premise of the escape room is based on fantasy as toys come alive. Finally, players engage in challenge by solving puzzles to complete the escape room. Additionally, if players choose to play in a team, they will also experience fun in the form of fellowship as they work with their team members to escape.

Our game takes on the form of an **embedded narrative** – the player is constantly reformulating mental maps and being forced to act on them. They are acting as a "detective" by discovering and solving for clues. In addition, our game is an **evocative narrative.** Even though it is not directly based on a particular movie or book, the idea of toys coming alive and toys being nefarious is a pre-existing story repeated in various movies throughout time. Though players are reformulating mental maps of how to escape, they have a pre-existing mental map of how to interact with other characters.

Tone references

We are aiming for an eerie and haunting tone – one made especially poignant with the contrast of the dark content and childhood themes. In particular, we want to take advantage of how uncanny it can be to corrupt seemingly innocent childhood items. Even though the tone is intended to be unsettling, it is not meant to be scary in the way horror movies may be.

Media Inspiration

Toy Story 3
Annabelle
The Boy, 2016
Secret Life of Pets
Coraline
Where the Wild Things Are (book)

At the same time, we want our narrative to convey a strong sense of trying to make your way back home. Many of the characters the player encounters are simply lost and yearning for their old home.

Screengrab from Toy Story 3

Puzzles, Hints, and Inspiration

Our story is loosely inspired by the plot line of Toy Story 3. Each toy that the player encounters will have a story that informs the player of their past. How did they get to Stanford Elementary? What was their life like before? Stories will contain clues that help players find the next locked up toy. Clues will come together at the end of the escape room to help the player escape Stanford Elementary.

Puzzles, Hints, and Inspiration

Toys will be locked inside of boxes throughout the escape room. Inside of each box will be a story detailing the toy's past life. All of the toys are filled with resentment over being abandoned by their previous owners, so the clues hidden within their stories may be difficult to uncover. Stories could include a physical puzzle that reveals a picture of the toy's home, with a number hidden inside the picture. For our technical component, we want to play around with distance sensors and color detectors. For the latter, players could try and match swatches to the toy they're meeting, and the RGB value of the correct swatch will be the number answer. We are still brainstorming the exact details of all of the puzzles, but for now, we have decided that all puzzles will have number answers that help players unlock the lock to the box with the next toy. This is a clear way to physical connect all of the puzzles, and help the player progress throughout the physical space.

Towards the end of the game, players will discover a hidden mini-narrative within all of the previously uncovered stories. All of the stories will have some subset of words that is **written in red**. Upon first reading the stories, it will not be obvious why some words are in red. Putting these words together from all of the stories will reveal a hidden story — the backstory of an evil mastermind toy that does not want you to escape. Discovering this backstory will be critical to escaping Stanford Elementary and returning to your owner.

Key challenges for design and tech

RGB Sensor. For one of our challenges, we want to create a box that uses an RGB sensor to give the player a clue. The RGB sensor can be unreliable at times and depends heavily on the lighting of the room. This presents a challenge in testing this puzzle because the RGB values can differ per iteration.

Puzzle Creation. Since none of us have made an escape room before, we anticipate that it will be difficult to make each puzzle connect with one another as opposed to designing them in isolation. It will also be a challenge to connect the puzzles with physical movements like people moving within and between rooms.

Limited Resources. The limited space in Durand will require us to think critically about how we will manipulate and use the space to best fit our game. We must constantly think about the room's real estate and ask ourselves what's necessary, what's not, what's best to include, what can we remove, etc.

Acquiring Materials. Since most of the escape room requires physical objects and puzzles, we might have to spend additional time and money creating/finding the materials necessary to build our vision.

Appendix: Individual Brainstorm Blog Posts

Sreya Guha: https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2023/05/07/checkpoint-1-individual-deliverable-3/

Lisette Malacon: https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2023/05/07/checkpoint-1-individual-ideation-2/

Jaylene Martinez: https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2023/05/07/checkpoint-1-individual-deliverable-2/

Jasmine Rodríguez: https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2023/05/07/checkpoint-1-individual-deliverable/

Jasmine Shih: https://mechanicsofmagic.com/2023/05/07/team-3-cp-1-jasmine-s/