

01. Introduction

Artist's Statement

November 12th, 1977. A young child is traveling on a long train with their guardian. The train car is filled with characters, all traveling for a different reason, and all doing different things on the train. There's a chef, a bartender, a doctor, and many more passengers. But the one thing that unites all of them is the train crash. Who knows how it happened? Has the track been rusting? Did the conductor make a mistake? Was there foul play involved?

Earlier in the ride, the child had been taking a nap. As they slept, they dreamt about the newest addition to their toy collection: A junior parapsychology kit. The child had been fascinated by ghosts for a long time, and now, they were finally going to be able to meet some. As the child wakes up, their mind is churning. Excitement courses through every vein. They reach into the box on the seat next to them and put on the Junior Parapsychology Glasses, not bothering to read the instruction manual, and especially not bothering to read the fine print. The child looks around, and sees a young ghost child sitting a few rows down.

Our game is designed to take the player on a mysteriously emotional journey to help a lost child find their guardian in a supernatural setting. Playing as the lost child, the player travels through multiple train cars, including a spa, bar, and kitchen, talking to ghosts, completing challenges, and collecting clues. All aboard! Please scan [your ticket](#) to board the train:



Our vision for the story is that the child begins the journey unaware of anything wrong. The train is populated entirely with ghosts, missing any living humans. This fact doesn't seem to concern the child, because they are so enthralled with the paranormal abilities supposedly bestowed upon them by the Junior Parapsychology Glasses. As the child moves through the train, they solicit help from the various ghosts, requesting information on whether or not they have seen a human guardian. The child discovers that most of the ghosts haven't seen any humans, most of the ghosts haven't been dead for long, and even that the glasses don't really work!

First the player realizes, and soon after the child realizes, that the child died during their nap. The train crashed, and now the passengers are ghosts on a ghost train. As the child begins to freak out, they are finally reunited with their guardian, who calms them down and reminds them that familial love transcends the realms of the living and the dead.

A Long Train Ride is a slice of a narrative and exploration based walking simulator.

Initial Decisions: Formal Elements and Values

Using a brainstorming activity where we generated apart and combined together, our team came up with a starting point for our game.

[CHECKPOINT 1 BLOG](#)

[FIRST CONCEPT DOC](#)

Emotions to Invoke

Awe, Wonder

Setting

Long train ride

Potential Characters

Passengers, ghost passengers, conductor

Level Map

Train Cars

Types of Fun

Discover, Narrative

Vibe

Spooky, Cute

Initial Premise

You are on a long train ride. There are ghosts. You interact with the ghosts and develop a friendship with them. By creating relationships with ghosts, you can progress deeper into the train.

Mechanics

TALK TO GHOSTS

Learn their story and who they are.

Build your friendship with the ghosts by answering them in a friendly way that shows you are listening.

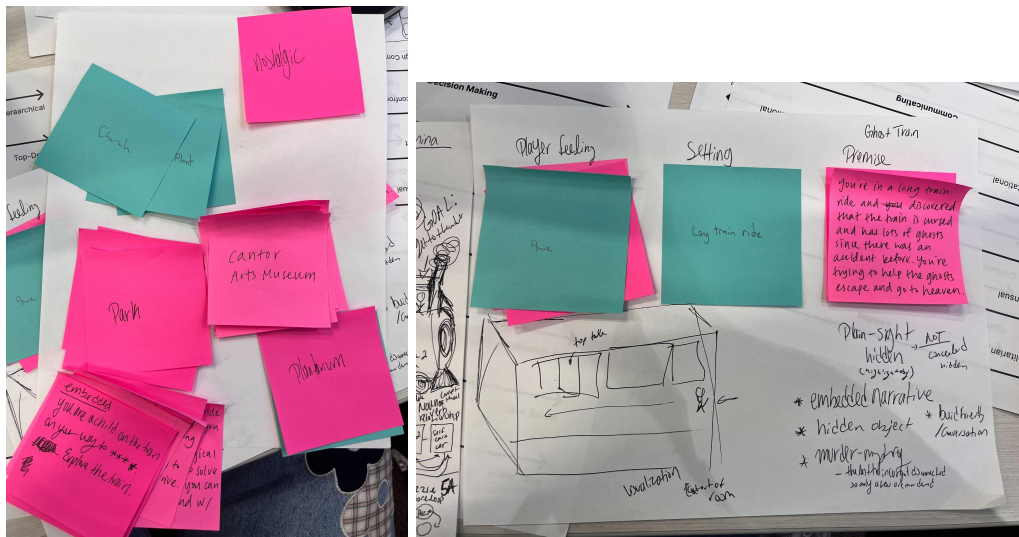
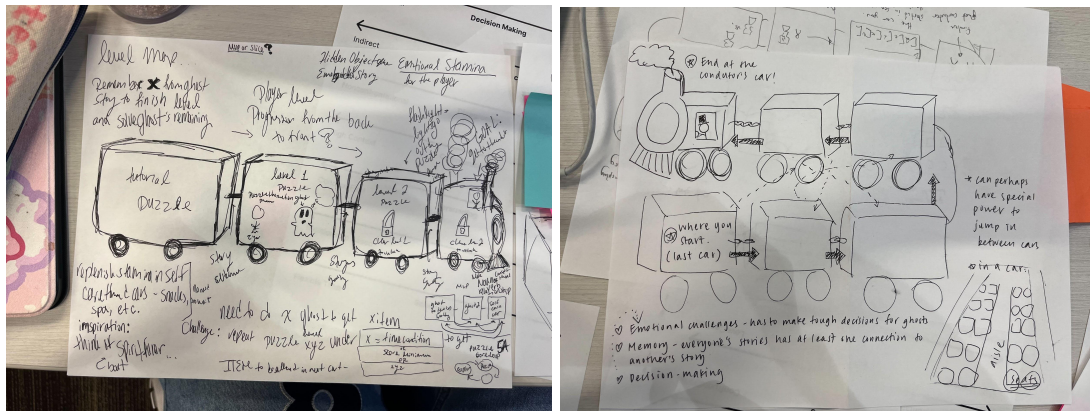
Give ghosts hugs and gifts found hidden around the train.

EMOTIONAL STAMINA

Use to talk to ghosts

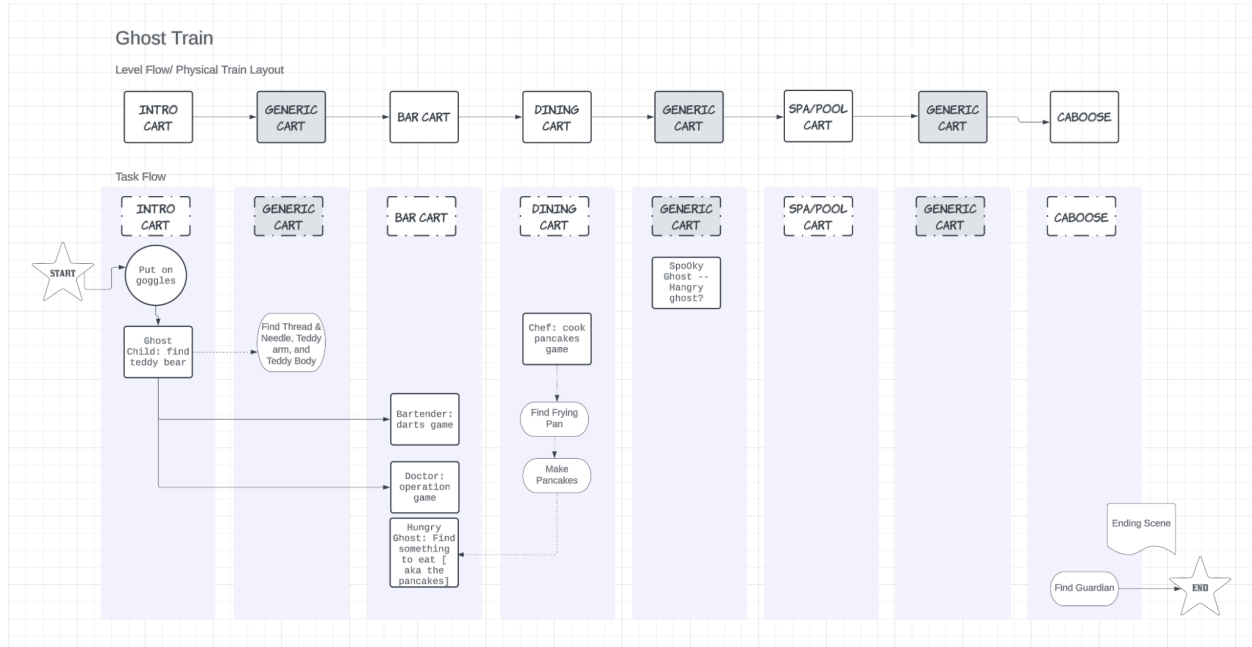
Refills by visiting self care cars (spa and lounge).

We abandoned emotional stamina because it wasn't fun and added a chore.



02. Course Concepts

Models



Level Flow and narrative points

Intro car	Intro car	teddy car	kitchen	spooky	bar	generic	spa	balcony
narrative intro scene	hint: ghost child mentions that it is interesting that the player would say ghosts are surprising		hint: gordon mentions something about not cooking for humans anymore or something i forgot		hint: bart was on their way to the NOVEMBER 1977 convention hint: doctor mentions leaving the clinic yesterday and how they need to figure out how to get dr licesned as a ghost noe indicating they havent been a ghost very long		hint: sees a ghost in the mirror when you walk past	narrative ending scene

CHARACTER CHART

Playable Characters



Guardians



Ghost



Passengers



Formal Elements

OBJECTIVES

Exploration players gain information from interacting with the world
Solution

RESOURCES

Inventory System helps the players keep track of items they need in the game. There is no economy or scarcity in the game.

PROCEDURES

Open World no requirement to speak to any ghosts to proceed through the train cars until you find your guardian.

OUTCOMES

Win by finding the guardian
Endless Play players can keep roaming the train, talking to ghosts, and playing microgames

PLAYERS

Single Player v Game

BOUNDARIES

Train Cars you can't leave the train!

Types of Fun

SENSATION

Audio Elements ambient sounds (such as the train running along the tracks)

Visual Elements many elements of lighting and scenery contribute to the vibe. Also we added details such as a shaking camera to immerse the player in the train ride.

DISCOVERY

Train Cars each train car contributes to a sense of progression and fulfillment of curiosity.

SUBMISSION

Puzzles provide a sense of progression and achievement to the player

NARRATIVE

Heartwarming Story the narrative is designed to enthrall the player from the start, and the player (hopefully) becomes invested in helping the child find their guardian!

CHALLENGE

Puzzles allow players to test their mettle in fun challenges!

FANTASY

Ghosts the game provides an escapist fantasy into a world where ghosts are real, and death is only the beginning.

Onboarding

Our onboarding process uses hint systems & active learning (lecture 8B). We try as much as possible to make onboarding part of the actual game; the game starts with the character select screen and then goes straight in. [At GDC in 2012](#), George Fan gave a number of onboarding tips, which we incorporated into our game:

#1 Blend into your game so your tutorial learning is fun

We never say tutorial, the player just experiences the game from the beginning.

#3 teach game mechanics when needed

Mechanics such as our task list are only added when appropriate, such as after the first task is given.

#7 use adaptive messaging

Our hints and messages are adaptive based on the situation. For instance, when the player leaves the first cart without putting on the ghost glasses they are shown a message.

examples of adaptive messaging



There are also a number of these tips we would want to add to improve our onboarding in the future:

#9 use visuals to learn & #10 Leverage what people already know

Images of the teddy bear with missing arm, the separate arm, and the thread and needle would help the player understand to sew it together and imply that if they get one part of the teddy bear they need the others. We already use highlights over items to indicate clickability

#5 use eight words at most on screen at a time

This would be very difficult to incorporate into our text-based game, but the premise of reducing instructional text is something we could improve in our game given more time.

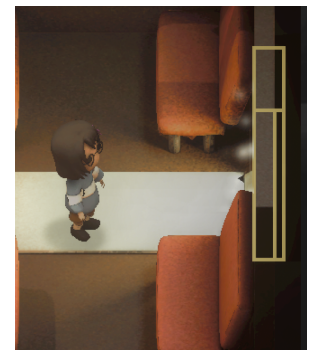
Physical Architecture

Physical architecture supports our game in a variety of ways. Referencing “The Role of Architecture in Video Games” by Ernest Adams (2002), the primary functions are exploration and concealment:

Exploration challenges the player to understand the shape of the space they are moving through to know where each pathway leads.

For instance, we use particle lights in the doorways to subtly tell players where to go (pictured right).

The mirror in the spa cart was meant to hint that the player is a ghost (unfortunately in our final version this feature is not working yet).



Concealment architecture is used to hide valuable items from the player, such as in the teddy bear puzzle.

Additionally, architecture is used to *inform and entertain* the player in its own right.

New worlds require new architecture: the spa cart, and a number of other architectural aspects of the train is pretty unrealistic but fits in our world!

Target Audience & Atmosphere/Mood

Our target audience values a chill game, a relaxed and non-scary spooky theme, and a minimal conflict experience. We were aiming for a player who wanted to play a game that is cute, relaxing, and stress-free. Based on these attributes, we crafted a story with a chill and slow paced atmosphere.

03. Development Process

I. Platforms Used

- Technical: Unity3D, Visual Studio (C# Scripting)
- 3D Modeling: Blender (we modeled every 3D object on our own)
- Narration: Ink Studios with additional C# Scripting
- Version control: GitHub
- Final playtest platform: Itch.io

II. Initial Brainstorms

- [Link to concept doc](#)

III. Overview of Technical Setup

1. Player Scene

- All the consistent managers throughout the game including dialogue manager, inventory manager, and task manager.

2. Looped narrative in using Ink Studios

- Customized with Dialogue Manager and utilized tags (ex: #task to add certain tasks to task manager).

```

20
21     I did watch you just put on a pair of ghost glasses though, so you
    could've been expecting it a little bit.
22     ** [I guess not really]
23     Well that's good. I wouldn't want to be going around surprising people
    forever.
24
25 - Have you seen a teddy bear anywhere around here? It was sitting on the table
    next to me just recently, and it can't have gone far.
26
27 * [No I haven't.]
28
29 * [Yeah, I've seen one.]
30     That's so good to hear. Where?
31     ** [Well,]
32     Hm?
33     *** [Okay I guess I didn't actually see one. I lied.]
34     Why would you do that? This teddy bear is important to me, you
    know.
    **** [I'm not sure]
35
36
37 - Oh. Okay.
38 * [I could help you find it though!]
39
40 You could? Well, that would be really nice of you.
41
42 I'll just be here waiting. #task teddybear
43 ->END
44
45 ▾ ===replay===
46
47 - {completedQuest: Thank you for finding my teddy bear! -> END}
48
49 - {not completedQuest: Have you found my teddy bear yet?}
50
51 * { not hasnoArmTeddyBear } { not hasfullTeddyBear } [No I'm still looking] -> END
52
53 * { hasnoArmTeddyBear } { not hasrightArmOfTeddyBear } [I found this!] -> noarm
54
55 * { hasrightArmOfTeddyBear } { hasnoArmTeddyBear } [ I've got the pieces] -> pieces
56
57 * { hasfullTeddyBear } [Here it is!] ->foundit
58

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Use of Puzzles

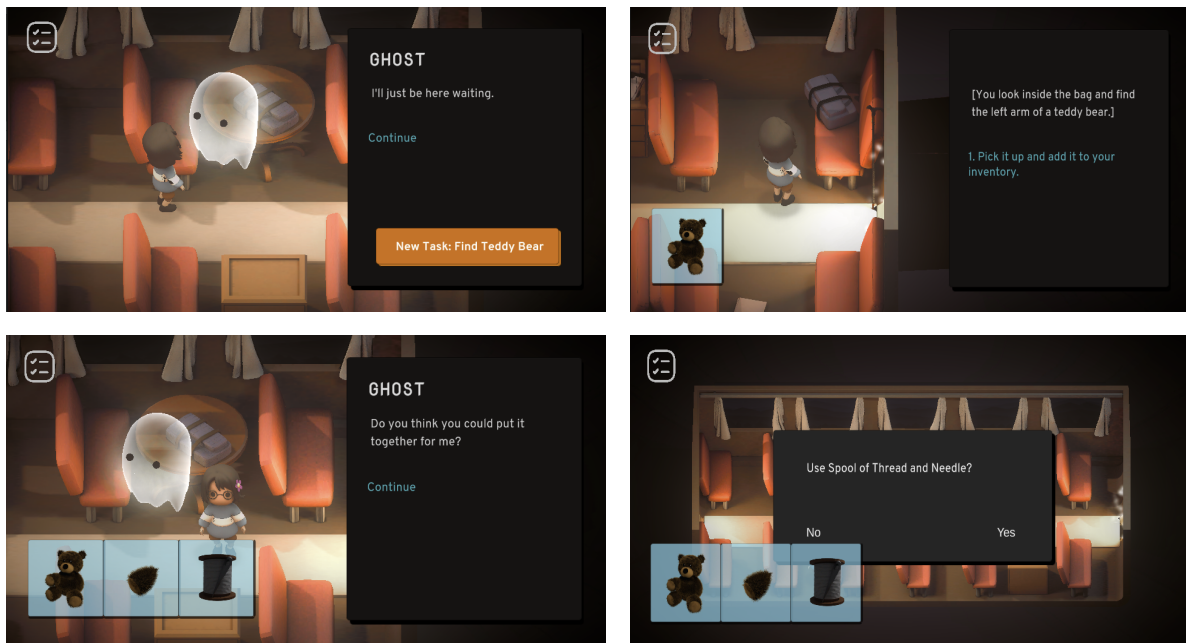
Puzzle 1: Teddy Bear Quest

Overview: Once the player puts on the ghost glasses and connects with the first ghost child, they are assigned the task: "Retrieve the Teddy Bear and return it to the ghost child." This sets the player on an exploratory quest around their surroundings for a teddy bear. Upon moving to the train cart next door, the player stumbles upon a number of containers to engage with. Hidden within a suitcase and a bag are pieces of a teddy bear. The player collects these teddy bear parts into their inventory as they interact with these objects. Also located within the same cart is a spool of thread and a needle, which the player is guided to find. The ghost child instructs the player to fix the bear if the player attempts to return the incomplete bear. Once the teddy bear is repaired using the spool of thread and needle, it is returned to the ghost child, concluding the task.

Difficulty Level: This teddy bear quest is a beginner-level puzzle, meant to familiarize the player with the game's fundamental mechanics, without a progression in difficulty. The main mechanism is just to interact with the interactable objects in the world. Through this puzzle, we also bring out

a lot of our tutorial elements in which it will be the first time that the player is introduced to the inventory system at the bottom and the task list system on the top left.

Role in the Game: The initial puzzle teaches the player basic interactions with the game's objects within the train carts. The design of this puzzle delivers several key gameplay lessons: 1) Interacting with environmental artifacts, 2) Identifying usable objects that enable unique actions, 3) Understanding the ability to move between train carts, and 4) Learning to utilize the inventory system.

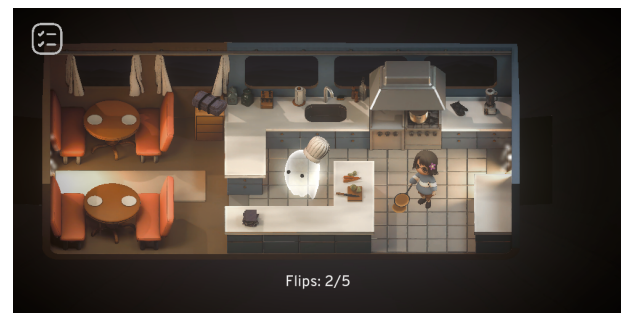
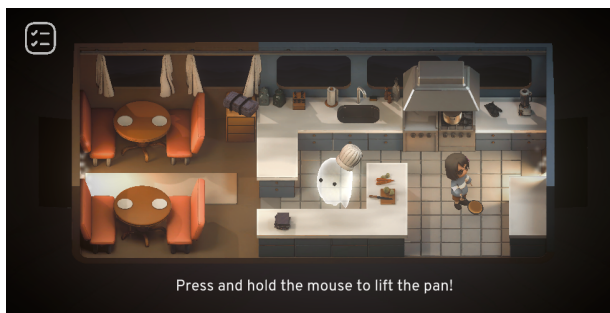
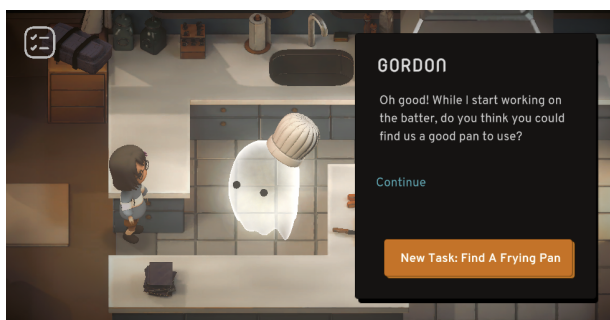


Puzzle 2: Pancake-Catch Challenge

Overview: The pancake-catch challenge commences with finding a pan in the kitchen train cart for the ghost chef, "Gordon." Upon delivering the pan to Gordon, the player must accurately flip and catch a pancake five consecutive times. The player initiates the flip with a click and estimates the pancake's landing trajectory to position the pan correctly. The location of the cursor on the game screen dictates the pan's positioning. Each pancake flip varies in trajectory, requiring the player's complete attention to accurately position the cursor/pan for each flip. The puzzle concludes once the player successfully catches the pancake five times consecutively.

Difficulty Level: This challenge is of medium difficulty, with a random element of variable pancake flip trajectories. This mechanic encourages players to stay alert and focused on each catch. The requirement of five consecutive successful catches also adds to the puzzle's difficulty.

Role in the Game: This puzzle first reinforces the player's understanding of the inventory management learned in the Teddy Bear quest. Moreover, the Pancake-Catch challenge introduces a more intricate layer to the one-click interactions in the game. It demands an anticipation of the pancake's fall trajectory and the accurate positioning of the pan in response to it. Through this, players learn about the game's dynamics of object interaction and the implications of their cursor's positioning on the game screen. The pancake-catch challenge's role is essentially integrating the narrative context of the kitchen cart setting, enhancing the gameplay experience. It adds an enjoyable aspect to the players' journey as they explore their larger objective of finding their guardians.

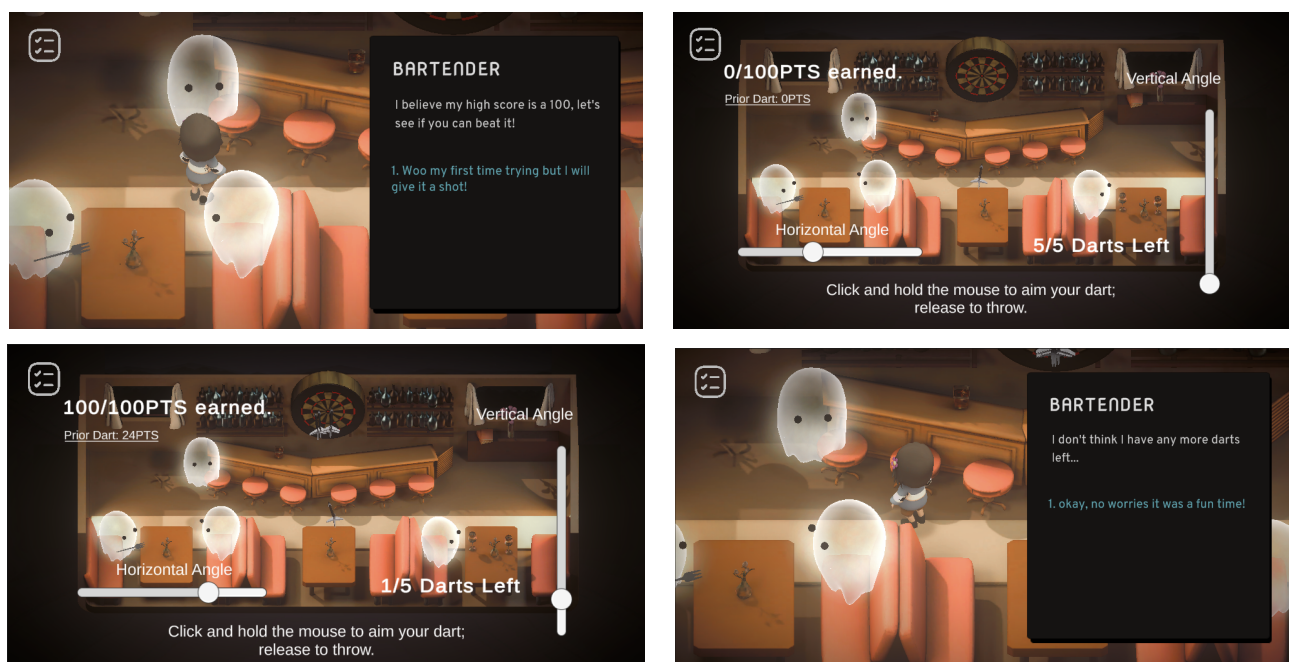


In the future, we would integrate the pancake minigame into the game and give it a bigger role by connecting it to the narrative. The player will earn a pancake in their inventory that they would give to a hungry ghost who would then reveal more information about the mystery and allow them to pass into the next cart.

Puzzle 3: Dart Challenge

Overview: Interacting with the "Bartender" ghost in the bar train cart initiates the dart challenge. The "Bartender" ghost provides the player with five darts, and the player must accumulate a minimum of 100 points in the dart game to beat this challenge. The player controls the dart's oscillating horizontal and vertical angles by timing their mouse clicks and releases to determine the dart's trajectory. The score for each dart throw is derived from the distance between the center of the dartboard and the dart's landing point. The puzzle is completed after completing a total of 5 dart throws and scoring a score above 100 points.

Difficulty Level: The dart challenge is a medium-difficulty puzzle. The complexity of the puzzle increases progressively, as the speed of the dart's oscillating horizontal and vertical angles increase after each throw, requiring the player's constant attention and responsiveness. However, unlike the pancake-catch challenge, the player is free to proceed with the gameplay experience without scoring the highest score.



Role in the Game: The dart challenge introduces a new type of one-click interaction mechanic. Unlike the pancake-catch challenge, which involves positioning the cursor correctly, the dart game requires the player to time the press and release of the cursor accurately to hit close to the dartboard's center. The dart challenge's role is essentially integrating the narrative context of the bar cart setting, enhancing the gameplay experience. It adds an enjoyable aspect to the players'

journey as they explore their larger objective of finding their guardian. **In the future, we would integrate the dart minigame into the narrative by requiring the player to beat the bartender's score in order to earn a lemonade for a thirsty ghost. The thirsty ghost would then reveal more information about the mystery.**

Although the pancake and dart microgame serve no real purpose in furthering the narrative right now, it was still important for us to include in our slice. We wanted to demonstrate the fun kind of microgames we could incorporate into our game and narrative. The microgames also further the fun in discovery because the player never knows what they will get out of a ghost interaction!

Testing and Iteration History

PLAYTEST OF ITERATION #1

Lois (5/17)

Testing: Base mechanics (movement, interaction, dialogue, teddy bear task)

Questions

Is the movement and interaction system intuitive? Does the beginning of the narrative engage the player?

Insights

- Issues with clicking on objects to interact, but successfully clicked on the blue box at the beginning
- Dialogue boxes structured weirdly: bad visual hierarchy; options vs. npc lines.
- Hard to tell where the player is supposed to walk.
- Hard to remember the player's current goals.
- Game is super cute and really exciting!

Changes

- Adding task list
- New design for dialogue boxes
- Objects that are interactable now glow (including doors).

PLAYTEST OF ITERATION #2

Cevi (5/24)

Testing: Additional puzzles and cars

Questions

Does the narrative and game progression through the first 3 cars work well and flow intuitively?

Insights

- Some items are hard to pick up.
- Hard to hand back the teddy bear in the first task.
- Pancake puzzle is challenging but fun.

Changes

- Bug fixes relating to interactions
- added pot on stove and vacuum hood thing to obscure the stove and make it look like background. Added general props to the kitchen.
- New content! (Cars, ghosts, etc).

PLAYTESTS OF ITERATION #3

Various Players (In class 5/25)

Testing: everything except the ending of the narrative

Questions

Is it clear to the player when the game first starts that they need to click the blue package? Does the player understand there are doorways they can go through?

Insights

- One player thought they should take the frying pan to the stove instead of back to the chef.
- Inventory system is hard to see.
- It is difficult to tell if you can go through doors.
- One player didn't realize the teddy bear was in the second car.
- Need some way to force players to look in the box.

Changes

- New visuals for inventory system.
- Now a message to say that the teddy bear is in the next car.
- Also a message to tell you to look in the parapsychology box.

PLAYTESTS OF ITERATION #4

Camilla (6/4)

Testing: the entire game!

Questions

Is there anything glaring we really need to fix before submission?

Insights

- Some characters are missing.
- Dart puzzle test character still in the game.
- Loved the design of the game and the visuals specifically.
- Keeps missing the task texts.

Changes

- Dialogue bug fixes.
- Object bug fixes.
- Added task manager so players can explicitly be made aware of the task text if they only want to skim the narrative

Ethics Considerations

In *Play like a Feminist*, Shira Chess notes that “Video games are too often associated with masculinity. There are reasons for this, and masculine voices have long owned the output, boundaries, and culture of the video game industry.” As soon as we decided that our game would center around a young child, we knew that we were not going to use gendered pronouns to reference them. As discussed in class and readings, games have long defaulted to male playable characters. For example, the technical director of *Assassin’s Creed* once justified only including a male character by stating that: “It was a question of focus and a question of production.” We believe it is the responsibility of designers, and anyone else involved in the process, to remove the idea of male as a default and to normalize the usage of non gendered pronouns to describe characters whose gender should be of no concern to the player.

Accessibility

We paid careful attention to as many accessibility concerns as we could within the scope of the project. While there are certain areas where we would like to improve given more time to develop this game (and especially if we were to look to publish it), there are also a number of areas in which we made sure to make our game as accessible as possible. First of all, our game has very simple controls that require nothing other than a mouse. It is therefore accessible to people who would be playing on all sorts of different systems and who have a variety of different motor capabilities. Additionally, as a text based game, it was important that we provided enough visual contrast not

just in our fonts but also with our characters and interactable objects so that players with different visual abilities would be able to play. Given enough time, we would have also liked to include voice overs so that the game would be accessible to blind players (we tried to find an easy to implement way to include a screen reader in unity to no avail).

Future Direction

Given unlimited time, there are many aspects of our game we would love to continue working on. First is the linearity of the story. Our initial intention was to allow the player to choose from a large number of different dialogue options to progress through the story. But building out a whole dialogue tree would have been incredibly complicated to develop, with each new option causing an exponential cascade of new lines, scenes, and characters that would need to be added. Our current iteration therefore offers relatively few dialogue options, allowing us to tell a more sculpted and compelling narrative. The dialogue options that are offered tend to lead to paths that converge back to the main storyline relatively quickly.

Next, we would also want to develop more puzzles, especially puzzles that connect back to the central narrative. Each puzzle is built on a different mechanic, so adding additional puzzles were quite difficult to develop. For instance, the code developed for darts would be hard to use at a different point in the narrative. Additionally, many of the puzzles serve as a way to give a clue to the player through dialogue, and the outcome of the puzzle isn't particularly related to the central storyline of the game. Given more time, we would love to add additional puzzles that might be highly impactful for how the child finds their guardian.

Finally, we had a number of great ideas about additional things to add to flesh out the game, such as more customizable characters and voice acting for the NPCs.

Thank you for reading, and thank you for a wonderful quarter! The game and playtest video are linked on the next page.

04. Game

Hosted on <https://spaaace.itch.io/trainride>

Playtest <https://youtu.be/JKMxY1PR4gM>

Still want to learn more about ghosts? Read the foreword to the Junior Parapsychology Kit!

JUNIOR PARAPSYCHOLOGY GUIDE*

Welcome, young human! My name is Ghastly Ghostfield, former parapsychologist extraordinaire, and current ghost. Before you begin your endeavors into the paranormal, there are a few things you need to know.

Ghost

Noun

an apparition of a dead person which is believed to appear or become manifest to the living, typically as a nebulous image

You've probably heard before that ghosts aren't real. In a way, that's true. Ghosts are not "manifest to the living." Living people cannot see them. Perhaps a better word would be spirit, but for the sake of simplicity, we'll stick with ghost, just as long as you understand that under any normal situation, you can't see them. With that out of the way, here are some important facts about ghosts.

1. Ghosts are the essence of humans whose bodies have died.
2. Ghosts retain their personalities and knowledge during the journey from the living world to the dead world.
3. For a period of time since the body's death (us ghosts call it our birthday), we tend to stay in the same spot we died, or slightly nearby. My theory is that it takes time for our essence to become fully disconnected from the living world.

Before you embark on your journey, I want to address one final thing. Many people think ghosts are 'scary.' They can be! If a ghost was malicious in their life, they may be malicious in their death. You may encounter a poltergeist who attacks you, or a vengeful spirit bent on revenge. If you do: run and good luck! But since ghosts are just dead people, you are just as likely to encounter any malicious ghost as you are to encounter a malicious human.

This kit includes my magnum opus, my life's work, and my pièce de résistance: parapsychology glasses. These are the only model of normal spectacles on the market that actually let you see and interact with ghosts*. Please put them on, use the responsibly, and treat any apparitions you see with the utmost respect. Remember, you are a visitor in our world!

*Legal notice: Under §4.12.1 of the International Charter on Science Education (ICSE), parapsychology is considered a pseudoscience. We are required by law to inform you that there is no evidence that ghosts are real, nor evidence that the parapsychological equipment included in the Junior Parapsychology Kit™ have any functional purpose relating to the paranormal or aberrational. Ghastly Ghostfield is an original, created character, and all aspects of his discussions on parapsychological research are original, created discussions.

*Consumer notice: Under §1 of this guide, the ICSE is a bunch of lame-o's. Happy ghosting!