

Apr. 18th

## **Game Prospectus**

*The Black Pages* started as a story idea I had in which someone discovers a device called "The Reality Check" and through use of this device encounters a creature called "The Seer" a tall and bony humanoid creature spotted from head to toe in tiny black eyes. I have actually been struggling with the proper form for this story to take and I'm starting to think a Twine game is an excellent medium for presentation.

**The Argument:** I may not yet have a full grasp on what I am trying to say with this game, but I definitely have an idea of what I'm getting at. The player is introduced to these concepts through a website called The Black Pages. This is a job site for paranormal job listings. Most of the jobs listed are obviously easily explainable with non-paranormal explanations. One job listed, though, offers an extraordinarily high pay and seems to be written in "all-business" language. This is the only job that seems to have some legitimacy to it. I introduce the player this way because immediately it will make them question reality. Not only within the game but within real life. Whether or not ghosts exist is a common topic of discussion. My relation to the concept of ghosts is kind of a complicated one. I don't believe in ghosts on principle. Realistically speaking there's no actual evidence or reason to believe that invisible intelligent entities skulk around abandoned mental hospitals waiting to scare ghost hunters. However, I *do* believe in ghosts for fun. When the mood is right entertaining certain possibilities that I would normally consider fictional can be both exciting and terrifying. Yes, I don't believe in ghosts but when I'm alone at 3 AM and I hear strange noises my skepticism does little to protect me.

That is something I want to capture with *The Black Pages*. The Reality Check is a device that allows you to see "true reality" and as it turns out "true reality" is populated by The Seer. I want the player character to struggle with reality and ultimately use The Reality Check strategically. When would it be beneficial for the player character to see "normal reality" and when would it be beneficial to see "true reality?" With these concepts I want to express a certain point about reality and what that concept means to us.

I also see connections to mental illness. When debating "what is reality" people often bring up the concept of hallucinations. Those who experience hallucinations are typically thought of as people who are experiencing a reality that is "less real" than what most people experience. But couldn't it be true that the majority of people are experiencing a reality that is "less true" than the reality that involves "hallucinations?" This question forces us to come to an uncomfortable truth: reality as we perceive it is subjective. There *is* an objective reality but whether or not anyone is actually experiencing it is something no one can know for sure.

Getting back to mental illness though, reality occurs on a spectrum and in hindsight people can recognize when they experienced something that was "less real." Anxiety and depression, for example, won't make you see any disturbing images but it will implant false thoughts into the mind of its sufferer. The general situation the sufferer finds themselves in will seem worse to the sufferer than someone in the exact same situation but without anxiety or depression. I think this is my inspiration for this game and this theme in general.

I do have a mild anxiety disorder. I don't suffer from panic attacks or anything like that but it's present enough that I know how it feels to be in a spiraling false logic that leaves me questioning whether my worries are legitimate or not. I've always thought it would be nice to know in an instant what is real and what isn't. That's where the concept for the Reality Check comes from. And lo and behold it reveals a horrific monster.

**The Characters:** I don't think my game needs to be particularly populated. Right now I can think of three characters that really matter.

1. The Player Character – Right now I don't plan on giving this character a name or even a design. I want the player character to be the player. Though I will likely guide them toward skepticism so that the encounter with The Seer is more impactful. Still I want their real beliefs and their real superstitions to play a part in how they experience the game.
2. The Mysterious Boss – This is the person that hired the player character to investigate the abandoned apartment building. I don't think they will have much of a role other than being a mysterious figure who watches them from afar and provides payment when the job is complete. In my mind the Boss' motives are merely to force an unsuspecting skeptic to encounter something they have difficulty rationalizing. The Boss already knows The Seer exists, they just want a "normal person" to encounter it.
3. The Seer – This will be the central antagonist of the game. A monster that is opposing the player. The Seer is a reality bending entity that the player can only interact with for a

limited time after they use The Reality Check. I haven't quite worked out how the player will be fight this creature but I imagine it won't be directly. Physical damage against The Seer will likely be ineffective or incredibly difficult. The Seer's motive is simply that it doesn't like to be seen. It is keenly aware when the player is able to see it and The Seer hates it. So when the player is aware of The Seer's presence, The Seer wants to make the player disappear, literally. The Seer, as a reality bending entity, can cease the player's existence if given enough time. It has to make direct contact with the player and it takes some time but this is within The Seer's power. To add to that, The Seer's motivation as a creature is essentially greed. Not material greed but greed for knowledge. The Seer has the ability to see "true reality" all the time without need for something like a "reality check." It also has the benefit of being unseen by most things. Being in the presence of another entity that can see the "true reality" and see The Seer makes The Seer uncomfortable. The Seer wants to see but doesn't want to be seen. So it has three primary goals:

1. Scare the player so much that they will never play around with reality again.
2. Make contact with the player long enough to make them disappear so that their existence is reduced to a void where they can no longer enact change on reality
3. Bend reality such that the player ends up accidentally killing themselves thus rendering them as a non-threat.

The Seer will be constantly trying to accomplish at least one of these throughout the game.

**The Story:** The story is pretty straight forward. The player wants to make a quick ten thousand bucks. They believe exploring this abandoned apartment building will be a bit spooky but more or less easy money. The Seer removes their only exit and that is when the player gets the idea to use The Reality Check. After using it, they see that indeed the window still exists, but that also causes them to see The Seer.

From this point the player has some influence over what the character's motivations are. Perhaps the character has seen more than enough and has decided payment is not enough to keep them in that apartment building. They have the option to leave then and there.

Perhaps the player wants that money more than anything and they stay out of stubborn capitalist desire.

Or maybe it's more personal than that, the money is a nice incentive but the player has an intellectual interest in figuring out this horrifying creature.

Ideally all of these options would be available in the game leading to distinctly separate paths.

### **The Game Design:**

As I was designing The Black Pages I hit on a pretty simple mechanic that I really enjoyed.

There was a "Panic" option that I repeated multiple times as the player character became more horrified. Clicking any of these would lead the player to the same end-screen but the repetition

gave the player insight into what the character was feeling. I wanted to create the feeling that it was becoming more and more tempting to just give in to the overwhelming emotion.

I would like it to be possible for the player to "Panic" on accident so I may add a mouse-over feature that automatically makes the player Panic if their mouse so much as touches a panic button. Similar to *Even Cowgirls Bleed*.

For now I like the simple style of text followed by player choices. I may add clickable body text as I progress but for now I prefer as I've already designed it.

**The Aesthetics:** The default Twine coloring is already pretty fitting. "The Black Pages" website should obviously have a black background with white text. If possible I would like to make the "website" look more like an actual website but it depends on how difficult that would actually be. Font changes might also be a good way to represent certain actions by certain characters, or give the player an idea of the consequences should they make a choice that is a certain font. The wingdings fonts could also be an interesting mechanic for puzzles and it would fit in nicely with the "reality bending" concept of the game. Colors will probably change with different lightings and environments as well. I can think of several aesthetic choices that denote when the player is experiencing "true reality" and "normal reality."

So that covers most aspects of the game. I think I have a good idea of what I want here. As always I may have some ideas that are too ambitious for the time frame we have so I'll be conscious of that and opt for simpler features rather than amazing feats of game design.