Occult Game Design: An Initiation into Secrets and Mysteries

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Game Magic
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Arcana: A Ceremonial Magick Simulator
forthcoming
• **Mystery** = an overarching effect of something *hidden* but decipherable about a game *world*

• **Secrets** = individual *hidden elements*

• **Initiation** = the gradual revelation of *mystery*, achieved by players through the attainment of *skill* and *understanding*
Secrets can contribute to **cult** following.
But not all secrets are created equal (Ovaltine . . .)

Son of a bitch ...
Lists of best Easter eggs
No, they’re not.
Cute
Fourth wall breaking
Meta

There are no Easter Eggs up here. Go away.
The Cursed *Pokemon* cartridge
Haunted *Majora’s Mask*

YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE DONE THAT
BEN will keep hunting you!

[Image: Very Demotivational]
The ultimate Easter Egg
• Seemingly arbitrary action
• Apparently gratuitous reward
• Outwardly random mechanism for delivery

Not arbitrary, gratuitous, or random
By performing some strange set of actions in the right time at the right place, an absolutely unique play experience will be unveiled.
Actually **unlocks a secret world**
Unlocking a **secret world** beyond the world
Occult = magic, mystical, esoteric
Occult = secret, hidden
READY PLAYER ONE

A NOVEL

ERNEST CLINE
Atari 2600 Adventure
Key unlocks door, reveals message
Mystery and initiation

from *mystes* "one who has been initiated"
myein "to close, shut" the lips or the eyes
Initiation

The Masonic structure.
Players discover secrets by putting the game into an unusual state, controlled by variables of the game (time, space, player action, player status), resulting in an illuminating narrative payoff.
Cryptic mechanics resonate with narrative themes

1. Hidden gameplay systems and subsystems
2. Obscure goals/quests
3. Puzzling control schemes
4. Obscured range of actions

Hidden locations (space)
Hidden events (time)
Obscure mechanics: player actions with uncertain effect on variables with uncertain effect on narrative
Mysterious lore resonates with obscure mechanics
Hidden gameplay sub-systems (e.g. a secret school of magic)

Eternal Darkness
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Runo Chart

Spells List
1. Enchant Item = Project + Item
2. Recovery = Absorb + Self
3. Reveal Invisible = Absorb + Area
4. Damage Field = Protect + Area
5. Dispel Magic = Dispel + Area
6. Summone Trapper = Summone + Creature (3)
7. Shield = Protect + Self
8. Summon Zombie = Summone + Creature (5)
9. Magic Attack = Project + Area
10. Summone Horror = Summone + Creature (7)
11. Magic Pool = Summone + Area
12. Blind Creature = Protect + Creature
Recursive unlocking
(gameplay and narrative)
Cryptic Objectives
Puzzling control schemes to reach objectives
Uncertain range of actions

You are standing at the end of a road before a small brick building. Around you is a forest. A small stream flows out of the building and down a gully.

>enter building
That's not something you can enter.

>east

Inside Building
You are inside a building, a well house for a large spring.

There are some keys on the ground here.

There is tasty food here.

There is a shiny brass lamp nearby.

There is an empty bottle here.
The Pendant

DEVELOPER ADVISES TO CHOOSE PENDANT AS STARTING GIFT

PENDANT IS USELESS THROUGH THE WHOLE GAME
The Pendant
Hidden locations
The most difficult RPG of all time
Hidden events
(time and place triggered)
An overarching effect: mystery
Twin Peaks: Fire Walk with Me
Red Room and Judy
Cult Classics

Surreal, strange, disorienting
Surreal ≠ Random

This is not the same thing as being random
Puzzles pervasive and organic
Puzzles are often symbolic and Players gain understanding of world.
Initiation entails cumulative understanding
Deadly Premonition: secret dog(s)
Sometimes, apparent attraction to horror is a desire for initiation.
XXII: THE EYE OF NIGHT

The being that sleeps inside the holy mother... is this truly God?

At the end of the game, the creature called "God" appears. However, the form that it assumes seems too sinister for it to be the same being that is supposed to bring paradise to this world. One possible explanation for this is that the town of Silent Hill holds the power to materialize delusions and immortal thoughts from one's subconscious. "God" is the result of someone's delusions, just like the other creatures.

And did the soul of The God that was growing inside Heather truly disappear? That is left to the player to interpret.

The form of The God that is born to the earth changes depending on those who summon it.

The god that sleeps inside Alice has appeared in various forms throughout the series. The fact is that there is no one form of The God because the form it takes is governed by the minds of those who summon it.

Innubus
Innubator
Incubus

In the original novel, there is no Eye of Night card. The idea is that the card is added corresponding to a Hebrew word, even though there are similarities from the Hebrew alphabet which have only letters that are consonants. The card suggests The God.

Creator's Commentary
In the novel, the Eye of Night card is not present. In the novel, the Eye of Night card is not present. The card suggests The God.

Materials for solve

A book in the church revealing the form of the god. It notes that the form of the god is based on a woman with white hair.

Innubus
Innubator
Incubus

A manifestation of the mental image of the god that Alice herself had.

God is only really a reflection of Alice's mind.

Stick and Treat Special: On a poster in the shopping mall, the words "The All" are written, which means "every world."
The immortal Aessa repeats an infinite loop of birth and death. In addition to "terror" motifs that have to do with life such as "birth" and "reincarnation" also become major themes in Silent Hill 3. It may fairly be said that like relating objects and the area which is forced as a save point, a "cycle of rebirth" motif is played throughout the game and Silent Hill 3 is thoroughly filled with this "loop." It is worth contemplating the proposition that this "cycle" is clearly linked not only to the work itself, but also to the act of playing the game.

The hidden meaning of rotating objects

Beginning with the story, you find in the opening, and then the handle that Valtiel operates as well as great electric fans, rotating objects appear everywhere in the game. It can be thought that these objects suggest the circular passage of time.

Even the development of the story is inevitably similar. The story of the first game begins with a nightmare, passes through an amusement park and concludes in "nowhere." The third game also starts from a nightmare and finally comes to an end in a church. One should reach an understanding if one imagines that even the story development which is similar in a surprising degree is a phenomenon that "loops."

Save & Load

Save points = the crest of the religious organization which signifies resurrection and the flow of time

According to a book that can be read in the church, the crest of the religious organization is known as "the Halo of the Sun." The three circles drawn in its inner part signify creation, past and future. Could it be that there are two meanings in the fact that this crest appears as a save point, namely that "Heather regains her memories as a result of looking at the crest" and "her tone is mangled by the player."

Gameover & Restart

Valtiel, who drags Heather away, is an angel that governs the cycle of rebirth.

Upon receiving "game over" in places such as the church and amusement park, a demonstration of Valtiel dragging Heather's body away occurs. Although his purpose is to restore life to Heather, whose body is where The God resides, if one shifts one's attention to the real world it is possible to interpret "game over" as a kind of "death and rebirth." Regardless of Heather's own will, she is brought to life again by the player and the story must continue.

Creator's Commentary

In the religious tradition native to Silent Hill, Valtiel is a being that is closer to The God. In other words, he is established as an entity simultaneously with acting as an agent of The God, Valtiel takes on the role of watching over the body of this mother until The God's revival. For this reason, he continues to observe Heather without harming her. When a "game over" occurs, he takes Heather away to restore life to the body of the mother of The God. In this case, there are two meanings to Heather's rebirth. One is that she is recovered as Alasim's reincarnation in the game world. The other is that she is restored when the player retries the game another time.

There is a save point in the art gallery in the other side office building, but if one investigates the painting that is in this spot in the "right side" art gallery...
Tarot = simple surface, mystical interpretations
Howard’s Law

For secret significance:

power $\propto$ innocence $\times$ simplicity
Nanashi No Game
(The Nameless Game)
Communities that form naturally, driven by interpretation
Initiatory **self-discipline:** don’t spoil for yourself

... once you get into the actual puzzles, solve them for yourself and do not use a walkthrough!

**All the puzzles in Braid are reasonable.**

They don’t require you to do anything random; they don’t require guessing. They don’t require trial and error. The solutions tend to be simple and natural. They flow directly from the rules of gameplay in each world.

**If you are having problems solving a puzzle, don’t give up!**

Some of the puzzles will be hard. But when you manage to solve those hard puzzles, you will feel very good about it. The game will feel very rewarding. Don’t rob yourself of that feeling by reading a walkthrough!
Communicate without spoiling for others
Let’s create secret knowledge fantasies, not power fantasies
The two meanings of occult merge (hidden and magical)
Initiates protect and communicate the mysteries.
Questions?

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