

Jamie Ahman and The Mystery of Walker Vale

A "paradox mystery" detective game, TMoWV is a narrative-heavy text-based RPG, centred on paranormal investigator Jamie Ahman, and how their investigation of a sleepy Cheshire village unfolds in wyrd and wyld ways.

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Core Game

Design Pillars

The Player is Always Right

Feeding into the [paradox mystery](#), whatever conclusions the player comes to should point to some kind of truth, and all mysteries in the game should be constructed around it.

High-Fidelity Narrative

If there's a minor callback to something that the player did, a character said, or a small event that can be made, it should be made.

Britain is Awful

The context of the game is, primarily, on Britain being awful in almost every aspect, and the good that can happen in spite of it.

Game Loop

Progression in TMoWV follows other RPGs of a similar genre on a day-based cycle:

- Day begins at 8am
- Time is a resource
- Time is spent travelling to locations, investigating points of interest, talking to people in the area
- Day can be ended after 10pm when reaching a base to sleep
 - If a base is not reached by 4am, Jamie passes out and the next day starts later, with possible narrative consequences

As the investigation progresses, there's the secondary loop of looking for clues to the main mystery:

- The player begins a minor mystery
- Progression through going to locations, speaking to characters
 - The player may be blocked, requiring progression in other mysteries to continue another
- Based on what they find, and how they want to shift the narrative, the player can declare the mystery to be supernatural or mundane
- The minor mystery is solved
- The player may find a clue to the main mystery; after enough clues are gathered, they can solve it

Motivation

Primary Motivation

The player's primary motivation is to solve the mystery behind Walker Vale. This will be their motivation in seeking out new locations to investigate, finding new people to talk to, and running back to previously explored areas and conversations once they find a new clue to bounce off of.

Secondary Motivation

TMoWV is intended to be highly replayable with many routes and optional pieces of content. On progressive runs, there's a motivation for the player to find things on runs they didn't previously, either through failed (or succeeded) skill checks, or by simply not engaging with a specific character or location.

Features

RPG Skilling

Taking a similar approach to Disco Elysium, certain dialogue choices and exploration are behind skill checks, which succeed on a combination of skill level and dice chance. Some checks can be retried several times, or blocked off entirely after one attempt. There are also passive skill checks that run in the background, and fire without the player's intervention.

Note: Skills are yet to be finalised, with the current draft looking at skills that focus on physical strength, emotional maturity, and social skills. At most, there would be 3-5 skills, as the main gameplay focus is on Jamie's detective abilities and intelligence, which are narratively set in stone, rather than optimising how well they can jump over fences.

Also like Disco Elysium, the skill system discourages min-maxing by having adverse effects happen if a skill is too low or too high. A scratch-pad example is a skill in empathy, where too low empathy will cause Jamie to care little about other people's problems, possibly locking off certain branches when talking to people, but too high empathy will cause them to care for every minor issue someone talks about, possibly taking on problems without player prompt. Skilling "wrongly" will not block the player's attempt to solve the mystery and finish the game. In some cases, the player may want to intentionally fail a skill check.

Paradox Mystery

The primary driving force behind TMoWV is a "paradox mystery", this being a story that has two correct resolutions based on the player's choices.

TMoWV's content is split into two halves, the supernatural branch, and the mundane branch. If the player deliberately seeks out supernatural events, people who have occult inclinations, and comes to supernatural conclusions to [minor mysteries](#), more supernatural content will be presented to the player. The opposite is also true, and if the player seeks mundane solutions to issues in the village, more mundane (but just as, if arguably, more horrifying) events begin to happen.

This culminates in a content gate, where the main antagonist behind the village's misfortune, Bethany, has her identity set. In the supernatural branch, she is a powerful witch set on killing the land spirit of Walker Vale to cleanse it of its xenophobic history, or is a wealthy landlord seeking to, with dubious legality, purchase rights to the village and bulldoze it flat, for similar motivations. Before this point, threads and clues can plausibly point to both of these outcomes. If the player finds clues to one branch and finishes on the other, the "incorrect" evidence is seen as lies and fabrications made by others that still ultimately help point the player to Bethany and her plans.

The Extreme Ends of Supernatural/Mundane

If the player fully commits themselves to either branch without any attempts to look at the other, Jamie will fall into some form of mania. On the extreme supernatural branch, Jamie will start seeing hallucinations and believe the town itself is trying to harm them. On the

extreme mundane branch, they will be heavily depressed at the state of Britain and believe there's no point trying to help the village.

Several warnings will be given to the player, either through the subtle hints of the game interrupting their attempts to solve the mystery, or more explicit hints like dreams explaining the state Jamie is in, how they got there, and how to help them. Mania can be broken by engaging with the supernatural on the extreme mundane branch, and vice versa. If the player persists, the game ends shortly after the content gate, with a bad ending.

Minor Mysteries

Similar to games like Professor Layton which have several smaller mysteries to solve before the primary one is complete, TMoWV has multiple minor mysteries that the player can investigate. These can be directly related to the main mystery, tangentially, or not at all as extra content to flesh out certain characters or the history of Walker Vale.

Minor mysteries are set on a storylet system, meaning that the player can pause and return to a minor mystery as and when they wish. In some cases, a minor mystery has to be paused in favour of another, as the player exhausts everything they can get out of it until another clue is found.

After a certain amount of clues from minor mysteries are gathered, the player can solve the main mystery, and confront Bethany before she enacts her plans on the village. These clues are found in multiple minor mysteries, meaning the player does not have to replay the same content on another run, or solve the mystery in the same manner as someone else.

Visual Novel Exploration

Keeping focus on writing and narrative being the main driver of TMoWV, exploration to different locations is done through a map and hyperlinks. The map shows an estimate of how long it will take to reach a new location, with definite times for routes travelled on before.

While travelling, extra random events can occur. These are minor, and usually serve as a way to minorly shift the supernatural/mundane balance. A scratchpad example is a magpie standing in the way of a path. Saluting the magpie gives a small shift to supernatural, and ignoring it gives a small shift to mundane.

Phoning For Hints

A built-in hint system is present in the form of Jamie's phone. Their primary line of contact, an employee at the unnamed institution that gave them the case, gives the most direct hints to the player. Calling villagers can also be used for hints or progressing minor mysteries, to variable success.

As narrative needs, or in defined locations, Jamie's phone signal can be diminished, restricting access to hints at certain points.

Website Epilogue

After finishing the game, the player is given an Epilogue in the form of a website link, which is an in-universe blog post by Jamie to Countryside Gothic, giving a recap on the choices they made on the case. This is done in the form of a dynamic page that changes based on url arguments, which the game generates based on player choices. This adds a diegetic ending in the form of Jamie's blog being updated, in an easily shareable format that players can send to others.

Content

World Summary & Context

Jamie Ahman, paranormal investigator, is tasked with the investigation of a rural village in Cheshire. The only lead given is the unexplained disappearance of several homes and community buildings, and based on their approach to the case, finds themselves neck-deep in the mundane psychological horror of rural England, or in supernatural dealings that escalate beyond human comprehension.

The main context of TMoWV is centred on the life and society of those living in rural England and their responses to outsiders, Northern (particularly North West) culture, the North/South divide, and the failure of the "Northern Powerhouse". These are not spelled out explicitly as the main focus of the game, and are the backdrop that the investigation is flavoured by.

Narrative Summary

Following the "[paradox mystery](#)" outlined above, the player can land on one of two outcomes to the mystery behind Walker Vale, that homes and buildings are disappearing because of the motivations of Bethany Archer, who is trying to destroy the village for what she believes to be for the better good.

A gate is reached after a certain amount of content is seen. From here, the identity of Bethany is determined based on the path the player is on. Based on her identity, the player can either interrupt a mass ritual intending to kill the land spirit of Walker Vale, or controlled detonations to escalate landslides in the valley, burying the village. It's possible for this to happen before the player can collect enough clues, putting the player in a bad ending where Jamie does not solve the investigation.

Based on the player's actions, the narrative branches further:

- The player helps Bethany after agreeing with her goals; they both end up trapped in an alternate, desolate version of Walker Vale, and have to find a way to escape
- The player refuses to help Bethany; she is trapped in an alternate, desolate version of Walker Vale. Jamie is ejected to an empty field, Walker Vale apparently never existing, where they can try to find out what happened to Bethany and save her

The frame story of TMoWV is that, no matter the player's choice, there are supernatural happenings in Walker Vale. Unbeknownst to Jamie, they are capable of influencing the state of Walker Vale as an outside observer. In effect, because Jamie believes in an outcome, that outcome will happen, even if it's apparently mundane. Bethany, paradoxically both versions of herself at the same time, is collapsed to one state by Jamie's investigation, causing the village to be erased from time to solve the historical paradox. This has minor effects on the rest of the North West, due to the remote and isolated nature of Walker Vale. The institution that tasked Jamie with the investigation is aware of this, and tells Jamie the truth in good endings where the player solves the mystery and saves Bethany.

Characters

Jamie Ahman (they/them)

Jamie Ahman is a paranormal investigator who likes to catalogue their cases on an online blog Countryside Gothic, primarily contracted by an unnamed institution, along with some private clients. They have a small but dedicated following, and make enough to support a modest living alone. They were born in Leeds to first-generation Afghani-Jewish parents, but like to keep their cultural background private. They're mostly estranged from their parents due to their queer identity and career choices.

Due to being the player character with variable skills that can change their dialogue options, Jamie's personality can vary on each playthrough, and even as a run progresses. Despite that, they always have a dedication to their job (either as a sceptic or a practitioner), extremely sharp observation skills, and even with estrangement from their cultural background, a bittersweet nostalgia for it and a want to defend it from slander and appropriation.

Bethany Archer (she/her)

Depending on player choice, Bethany is either a powerful witch attempting to destroy Walker Vale, or a landlord with old money, buying up land to cause similar effect. Villagers disclose little about her, or speak of her in reverence and/or fear with the power she holds over the village.

As a landlord, Bethany realises the colonial and exploitative source of her family's money, and the village at large, and believes destroying and rebuilding the village is the only way to make amends with the past. As a witch, she comes to similar conclusions after an intense ritual experience, and a perceived need to rebuild all of England, and wants to start with Walker Vale. In either version, Bethany is disillusioned and uses her influence to reimagine the village, which backfires on her horribly.

Villagers of Walker Vale

Various villagers are the main drivers of the story, some with more story prominence than others. The villagers are primarily Northern white British and traditionalist, with some minorities. Most are subtly xenophobic, bigoted, and nationalistic, but are amiable enough to have conversations with and collect clues from. Some are more overt.