Egregore Game Design Document

ver 1.2.0

Contents

Concept

Experience Goals

Pillars

Thesis

Prior Art

Target Audience

Platform

Technology

Narrative

Gameplay
- Mechanics
- Gameplay Loop
- Sequences

Art

UI

Audio

Genre

First-Person Point-and-Click Adventure Game

Concept

Egregore is a **first-person adventure game** inspired by hysterical realism, lo-fi aesthetics, and Egyptian culture in which the player must investigate the impending summoning of an egregore in a Cairo café. As they learn more about the shop and its patrons, the player character is led to question the motives of everyone involved, whether the cult they believe exists is real, and their own sanity.

Egregore uses **graph theory** to explore possibility space in adventure games, letting players connect different entities and test different lines of logic with unique results instead of using inventory items, fill-in-the-blanks puzzles, or a set of contextual actions to progress. Progression in Egregore is advanced by **possession and synthesis of information**.

Experience Goals

At its core, Egregore is about intriguing the player and enabling them to pursue their intrigue. Egregore inspires paranoid pursuit of truth and wonder at the information the player discovers.

Mystery

- Ambiguity in narrative is a driving motivator and consistent theme
- The player is rewarded for using information by gaining additional information/navigational access
- Subjective versions of reality are suggested/come into conflict with one another and are often treated as equally valid; paranoia and uncertain truth are prominent themes

Personality

- Egyptian culture is depicted and celebrated in a way that defies US filmic tropes and conventions around its depiction as a setting
- Characters and setting are compelling and distinct to players

- Audiovisual style is unique, vibrant, and supports tone/character

Usability

- Graphing, navigation, and conversation are easy and intuitive to use
- Acquisition of information and solutions to progress never rely on “moon logic”
- Progression and core sequence are clear; alternate solutions and reactions to different non-essential graph/conversation states are supported

Pillars

Actively Sorting and Using Information
Organizing and recontextualizing what the player knows is key to progress. Solutions are intentional and not overtly combinatorial or handed over to the player.

Player Tools vs. Ambiguity
The player’s actions are all tools to resolve ambiguity around them/often complicated or open-ended objectives. The tools themselves are easy to use and manage. Ambiguity in narrative and challenges is abundant and solutions are often non-linear.

Vibrant Expression of Egyptian Culture
The setting is grounded in Egyptian culture and portrays it outside of stock Hollywood tropes and aesthetics - the setting has a life of its own and is aesthetically vibrant. Egyptian culture provides context to actions, characters, challenges, and locations in the game.

World is Dynamic and Character-Centric
The player can cause active change in the world and small-scope content is delivered with personality and depth via characters.

Thesis

Egregore experiments with how players gain and use information in adventure games, aiming to create a **usable graphing system and challenge sequence** to smoothly onboard players and allow them to actively seek and sort information.

By using the affordances of a node-based system, providing ample feedback, and

giving the player agency over how they manage information, Egregore encourages active engagement in its narrative and challenges.

Prior Art

- A Hand With Many FIngers
- The Case of the Golden Idol
- Return of the Obra Dinn
- Myst
- The Crying of Lot 49
- Foucault's Pendulum

Target Audience

Ages 17+; players with light to advanced familiarity with adventure games

Platform

PC, Mac via Steam

Technology

Unreal Engine 5 - Core Implementation
Perforce - Version Control
Jenkins - Build Automation
Not Yet Dialogue Plugin

Narrative

(BEAT SHEET)

(CULTURAL PILLARS)

(WORLD DOC)

Summary:

The player receives a package in the mail from their estranged friend Sama, which introduces them to graphing and instructs them to meet Sama at Café Ramses in Cairo. Sama uses a coded message to imply that Ramses is a meeting place for a cult, and that he's being held hostage; upon arriving at the Café, the player investigates the cult and is ultimately involved in their plot to summon a "thoughtform" known as the "Egregore".

Core Characters:

Sama

The player's enigmatic estranged friend, with an unknown relation to the Cult of the Egregore.

Player Character

A foreigner to Egypt called to Cairo by Sama.

Salim

The proprietor of Café Ramses, a patriotic middle-aged man who strives to keep his café a center for culture and authentic cuisine.

Ramses Patrons

Two shady figures with a penchant for esoterica. They give Salim a steady supply of headaches and may or may not be occultists.

Ammon

A market stall owner in Cairo and an alleged firsthand witness to the Cult of the Egregore's existence.

Fatima

A paranoid regular of the markets next to Café Ramses. Makes similar statements to Ammon.

Cult of the Egregore

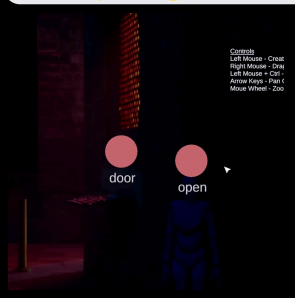
A group of young-adult new-age delinquent spiritualists with an incoherent ideology deriving from a pick-and-mix of Hermeticism and Pharonism. They're affluent, secretive, and identify with arcane and esoteric concepts and symbology.

Egregore

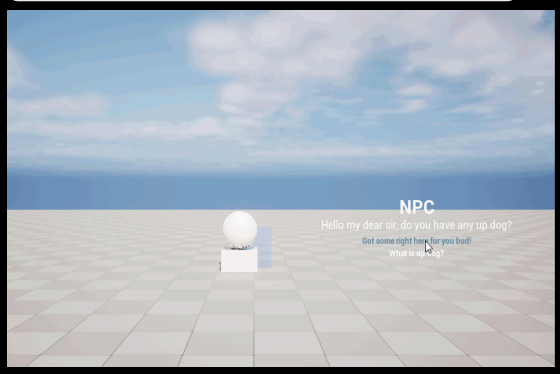
An entity the cult is believed to be attempting to summon. Accounts of what the Egregore is, was, or will be, as well as accounts of whether it does or does not exist, conflict on numerous levels.

Gameplay

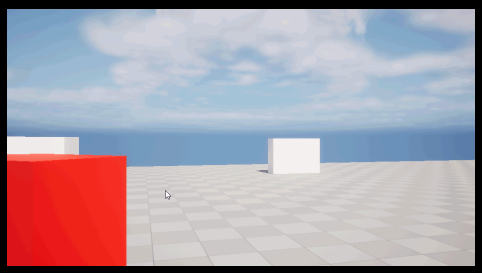
Mechanics **(note: Master Docs are linked in underlined headers)**

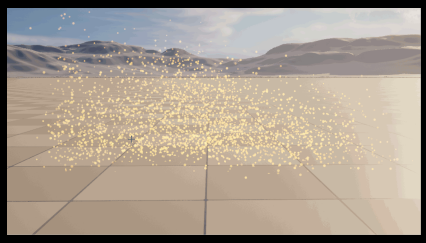
- **Graphing**:
- Graphing Master Document
- 

    - The player can access a **graph** containing **nodes** gained throughout gameplay.
    - The player can **link** nodes at given points to impact **conversation** (opening new dialogue options) and **navigation** (altering layouts and placing actors).
    - The player is shown **visual feedback** to indicate the effects of each Link.
    - The player is able to **annotate and arrange** their graph.
    - The player can link 3 or more valid nodes together to create a **compound link** with a different effect than any combination of its constituent nodes.
    - When not in active use, the Graph is retained as a UI sidebar.

- **Conversation**:
- Conversation Master Document
- 

    - The player can have text conversations with NPCs by clicking on them.
    - The player can gain nodes for use in graphing through these conversations, often tied to specific dialogue options.
    - The player can respond during conversation, with alternate dialogue options relating to their current graph state.
    - Conversation rarely goes beyond one text exchange to a dialogue option.
    - Conversation can trigger changes in the environment and character behavior.

- **Navigation**:
- Navigation Master Document
- 
    - The player can move between set points and camera angles (frames) throughout the game by clicking regions of the screen.
    - Given points let the player converse with NPCs, interact with interactable objects, change the angle of the camera, or move to another area.
    - Certain frames let the player turn around or back away.
- **View States:**
- View States Master Document

-
    - The player can change the layout of the environment with given links, making different characters or interactables accessible.
    - The player can make links that give or remove access to dialogue options for given characters.
    - The player can make links that change the look of their entire field of view.
- **Hints:**
    - **TBD**
    - One suggestion: The player can press a “Think” button to get a diegetic hint for each flag in gameplay
- **Miasma:**
- 
    - Particle systems indicating the locations where items will appear when graphed in connection with an Embedded Node.
    - Miasma particles clear away when an object is present in their related Embedded Node.
- **Embedded Nodes:**
    - Nodes representing places, which can only be accessed on the graph when they’re within the player’s line of sight.
    - **When nothing is placed in an Embedded Node**, the Embedded Node is represented in Navigation View by the **Miasma**, a diegetic particle effect showing where elements can be placed.
    - Drawing connections between Embedded Nodes and others can change the environment layout.
    - Ex. I’m facing the Back Bar in Café Ramses, and the Back Bar’s Embedded Node is visible. Once I connect the Patrons Node to the Back Bar Node, the Patrons appear in the Back Bar.

Gameplay Loop

Player navigates an area -> Player converses with NPCs -> Player gains new nodes -> Player graphs -> Player reaches alternate dialogue branches and gains new nodes -> Player graphs -> Player gains access to new area by conversing with an NPC

(LINK TO GAMEPLAY LOOP)

Sequences

Void/Package -> Market/Streets -> Café Ramses w/Storage Area -> Inner Sanctum

(MACRO)

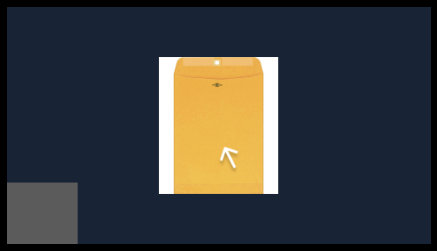
(SEQUENCE DOC TEMPLATE)

Opening - Parcel from Sama

Mechanics/Skills Involved

- **Graphing/Graph View**
- **Sidebar**
- **Observation**
- **Flags**

Gameplay



- The player is introduced to graphing and observation puzzles in an isolated environment, only needing to connect given sets of the items provided to clear the puzzle.
- By examining each item, the player can easily deduce their connections.
- Once all required connections have been made, the player uncovers a final element which is used to advance to Cairo.

Narrative

- The player receives a package from Sama, an estranged friend, and believes something about the package is amiss.
- After examining the contents of the package, they surmise that Sama is being held hostage by a powerful cult in Cairo, and that the package is a coded ransom message.
- In a surreal transition, the player steps through a photo of a Cairo street they find placed under a false bottom in the package.

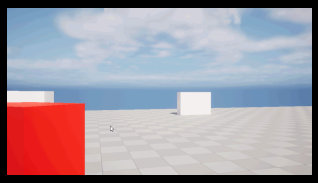
Cairo Streets

Mechanics/Skills Involved

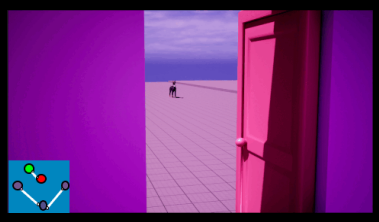
- Graphing/Graph View
- Sidebar
- Observation
- Flags
- **Conversation**
- **Navigation**

- **Interactable Objects**

Gameplay

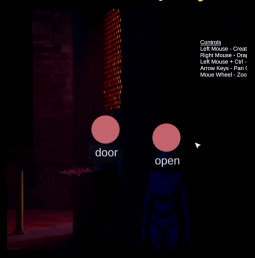


- The player is introduced to the navigation system and the streets surrounding Café Ramses in Cairo.



- The player is introduced to interactable objects.

- The player is introduced to conversation in an environment with only one character.



- The player is required to graph Nodes gained from conversation and/or navigation to progress to Café Ramses.

- More than one solution exists for this sequence.

Narrative

- The player explores the streets of Cairo, and learns from **bystanders** that once-famous neighborhood cafe Café Ramses is now an isolated occultist haunt.
- The door to Café Ramses seemingly has no handle, but one appears when the player asks a bystander about it, letting them enter Café Ramses.

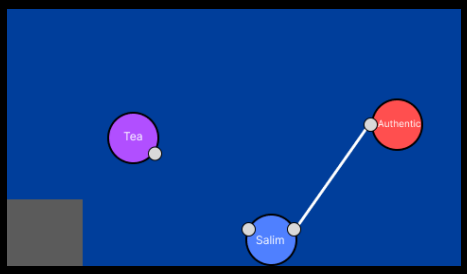
- The bystander alludes to the player's newfound abilities to "expand their perspective" and "change their point of view".

Café Ramses

Mechanics/Skills Involved

- Graphing/Graph View
- Sidebar
- Observation
- Flags
- Conversation
- Navigation
- Interactable Objects
- **Cross-Checking Information**
- **Compound Links**
- **View States**
- **Embedded Nodes**

Gameplay



- The player is (officially) introduced to Compound Links.

- The player is introduced to View States.
- The player must cross-check environmental details and statements from multiple characters.
- The player must use Embedded Nodes, View States, Interactables, and Compound Links to progress.
- More than one solution/path exists for this sequence.
- The player's ultimate goal is forming the entrance to the cult's Sanctum.

(Layout Draft)

Narrative

- Café Ramses is revealed to be a tacky, inauthentic establishment, with manufactured depictions of ancient Egyptian monuments covering the walls.
- The player questions Café Ramses' owner (**Salim**) and **patrons** about the occultists, discovering the young, affluent patrons are those same occultists.
- The player learns about the occultists' influence over Salim and the **gradual change in Café Ramses' identity**.
- The player learns of the occultists' influence over Cairo and how the entrance to their Sanctum is "hidden in plain sight"
- The player gradually assembles the Back Bar of Café Ramses, clearing the Miasma and opening the way to the **Sanctum**.

Inner Sanctum

Mechanics/Skills Involved

- Graphing/Graph View
- ~~Sidebar~~
- ~~Observation~~
- Flags
- ~~Conversation~~
- ~~Navigation~~
- ~~Interactable Objects~~
- ~~Cross-Checking Information~~
- ~~Compound Links~~
- ~~View States~~

Gameplay

- The player now must form simple links to progress.
- The player can no longer navigate of their own accord, and now can only move forward by forming links.
- The player can no longer speak with any NPC in the sequence unless spoken to.
- The player can no longer annotate their graph.
- The sequence ends once the player reaches the final room with the altar.
- The player is diegetically informed of all of the above prior to the start of the sequence.

Narrative

- The player makes their way to the cult altar, where **Sama** introduces himself and the plan to summon the **Egregore**.
- Sama says that if the Egregore is truly real, it will appear, and that its reality is **founded on mutual belief**.
- The screen abruptly cuts to black and the credits roll.

Art

(ART OVERVIEW)

Overall:

- **Colorful, broad palette** for **realistic** 3D environments to express **personality and Egyptian culture**
- **Fixed perspectives with deliberate compositions, moving elements** to enhance sense of place
- **Stylized, realistic** 3D character models for added humor and **personality**
- **Impressionistic** 2D character portraits for dialogue

Moodboard:
(include moodboard image here)

UI

(FLOW/LAYOUT PROTOTYPE)

Style

- Used to **enhance the fantasy and intrigue of graphing and conversation**
- Uses **abstract, impersonal aesthetics** to increase **feeling of unease and disconnect**
- Often employed to **surreal** effect
- Player is given a **consistent interface and feedback** via the **Sidebar**

Structure

- Gameplay UI
    - Navigation View
    - Conversation View
    - Graphing View
    - Sidebar
    - Situational Elements
- Dedicated Screens/Menus

    - Title Screen
    - Save/Load Screen
    - Options Screen
    - Pause Screen
    - Credits Sequence

References

- NORCO conversation UI
- NORCO Graph UI
- Case of the Golden Idol item indicators
- Case of the Golden Idol Item UI

Audio

Style

- High emphasis on **ambient sound** to enhance **sense of place**
- **Soundtrack is grounded in the setting**
- Voiced lines are sparse and used during **important critical-path moments**