

Maintenance

Game Design Bible

“Take your Self, you’ll be okay.”

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Quick Questions and Quicker Answers

What is Maintenance?

Developed for PC using the Unity Engine. Maintenance is a narrative-driven survival horror game featuring bouts of puzzle solving, meaningful character interactions, narratively harmonizing mechanics, and strong themes of psychological horror.

Bulletpoints

- Singleplayer Experience
- 3D World Exploration
- Fixed Camera Perspective
- Multipath Progression
- Narrative-Driven
- PSX Visual Style

What is Maintenance's story?

Maintenance's core inspirations are gender transition, the fear of losing control, and dysmorphia in all of its forms

Maintenance's protagonist is Evangeline, Eva for short. She's a woman of an early adult age and a victim of The Musk; a widespread curse that transforms its host into a shape they least desire.

It feeds off the resulting terror, depression, and grief; spreading through the viscous black tears that are wept by its host. These transformed people are called the Remolded.

Eva manages to keep the Musk at bay with the bidaily intake of Self; a rare and expensive drug. Long psychological evaluations and heavy scrutiny gatekeep access to it, and it soon becomes too late for numerous victims of the Musk.

Eva is close to becoming one of these people. On the last of her doses and unable to purchase more, as her plug was hit by a police raid, she seeks out the Reformed Campus of DeHoft Pharmaceuticals.

With little information and even less experience or knowledge in the field of infiltration, she makes her way to this strange and secluded campus that lies deep in the woodlands. With nothing but two doses of Self and her wits she will make her way inside, make the campus her own, and get what she so desperately needs, whatever that might be.

What Is The Core Gameplay Loop?

Central at the core gameplay loop lies the desire to remain human and, eventually, the desire to unravel the mystery of the Reformed Campus of DeHoft Pharmaceuticals. This is achieved through interactive storytelling, rewarding exploration, creative puzzle-solving, and heart-thumping moments of fright and/or danger.

Difficulty Curve

A lot of the game's difficulty is modifiable by the player, shaping the experience to their liking and/or ability.

By default the difficulty ramps up gradually, and the floor of this ramp is set higher at higher difficulties. Modifications made avoid changing values like health or damage, and instead opt into covering weaknesses and making resource management more of a priority.

Additional Notes

- Save stations are generous, but require the expenditure of a limited resource. Non-threatening if the player thinks ahead.
- Camera behaviour and level design is heavily curated in order to handcraft special narrative moments.
- Multipath progression and a special difficulty modifications add to replayability.
- Each area has its own visual style, soundscape, entities, and narrative themes. They are worlds in and of themselves.
- Treading into the darkest corners is a rewarding endeavor, and goes either with or without a challenge.

How Long Is The Game?

Session / Sitting Length: 1-3 Hours.

Playthrough Length: 5-10 Hours.

Full Completion Length: ~30 Hours.

All endings, all collectibles, Very Hard and Challenge difficulties completed

Difficulty and Gameplay Experience

Maintenance consists of 4 base difficulty options that alter the difficulty of both the combat and the puzzles.

Combat is modified by making attack patterns more erratic and less exploitable and predictable. Additionally, some enemies may have additional attacks that cover their weaknesses.

Puzzles are made more difficult by modifying the number of elements, limiting information given to the player, or making the puzzle rely more on its surroundings. They will still be breakable, but will ask of a more lateral form of thinking.

They also modify the commonality of Self and other resources, as well as the hardness of Eva.

Easy

For those looking for a story, rather than a challenge.

- *Enemies are slower and tend to be distracted*
- *Puzzles have an auto-solve function, same difficulty as medium*
- *Start with a stash of healing items*
- *x1.5 resources, Self always comes in packets of two*
- *Eva has 150% HP*

Medium

The intended experience.

- *No combat modifications*
- *No puzzle modifications*
- *x1 resources*
- *Eva has 100% HP*

Hard

A slightly tuned up version of the intended experience.

- *Enemies are more erratic and unpredictable*
- *Puzzles are slightly harder, usually by adding more moving parts to them*
- *x0.8 resources*
- *Eva has 80% HP*

Very Hard

A heavily tuned up version of the intended experience.

- *Enemies are more erratic and unpredictable, some enemies have additional attacks that make up for their weaknesses*
- *Puzzles are hard, the environment is always a part of their solution*
- *x0.5 resources*
- *Eva has 50% HP*

(Secret) Challenge Difficulty

A secret difficulty unlocked by beating the game on Very Hard.

The Self clock is extended, but there's no Self to be found in the level. You have two doses, a pistol, and not a lot of time on your hands.

- *Enemies are more erratic and unpredictable, some enemies have additional attacks that make up for their weaknesses*
- *Puzzles are hard, the environment is always a part of its solution, variable per playthrough*
- *x0.5 resources, no Self*
- *Eva has 50% HP*

Game Design Tenets

Tank-Controlled Tension

Eva is a normal person, one without extensive combat or athletic experience. As such, controlling her in this unfamiliar environment should feel clumsy and tense; every move should be done with deliberance.

As such, she is controlled using tank controls, and to support this in a cinematic and easy to control manner she is viewed by fixed-position cameras placed throughout the game's locales.

Movement Options

- Strafing (Z & C)
- Quickturn (Q)
- Turning (A & D)
- Walking forward (W)
- Walking backward (S)
- Running (SHIFT+W)

Lock and Key Design

Most areas connected to the centralized DeHoft Campus Grounds are locked off at the start. Gradually the spaces open themselves up to the player, by acquiring an item and/or completing a (series of) task(s).

Dynamic Backtracking

Due to the lock and key design pattern prevalent throughout Maintenance backtracking is required sometimes. To alleviate boredom these sections of backtracking are altered in ways that greatly influence the experience of these spaces. Quiet hallways become bustling with life, factory machinery kick into gear, friendly reformed make way for hostile ones; the campus is a place of change and dynamism.

Obstacles

Obstacles are the things that stand in Eva's way, keeping her from achieving her goals. These generally fall under either *Puzzles* or *Enemies*.

Puzzles

Puzzles are passive roadblocks that wait for Eva to solve them. At times they might be mysterious and occult, at other times they might be straight-forward but tough. Most are highly diegetic, but sometime are contrived rituals more magical and less practical in nature.

Enemies

Enemies are interactive agents that aim to block or halt the progression of Eva.

Each has their own unique background, threat level, attacks, weaknesses, and potential Very Hard modifiers. Most will be reformed who have lost their mind, humanity, or are wary of Eva's presence at the campus.

This means that not all enemies aim to kill Eva, instead impeding her progress through non-lethal means. The way Eva deals with these enemies will have an effect on how Eva is seen by the other reformed of DeHoft Campus. Word tends to travel fast in such a tight-knit community.

Each enemy being their own character makes these encounters highly engaging, almost as if they're living breathing puzzles for the player to solve. The easy answer oftentimes isn't the most preferable though.

Manual Saving System

Saving is done manually by the player at landline telephones and payphones spread throughout the campus. Sigils are scratched in the plastic and patterns are painted with strange occult mixtures, turning these ordinary objects into vessels of magic.

For these phones to work as a tool for saving, the player needs to pour a vial of reformed blood down the phone's receiver. This will prompt gurgling and chanting sounds, and saves the game. These vials can be found throughout the campus, and are abundant enough so that the average player can save when it's necessary.

The diegetic backing for these phones is that they anchor Eva's consciousness to the phone's time and place. If her heart should ever stop beating she is sent back to the moment when she saved at the most recent phone. It is assumed that she kills herself if she should transform. This also means that she remembers every single death she experiences, so this can be plot-relevant at times.

The Ever-Present Pressure of Time

Every 12 hours of in-game time Eva must take a dose of Self; a drug that delays the effects of the Musk by another 12 hours. Not taking this drug will trigger a game over, and the progress of time is displayed with a HUD element.

Coming close to your transformation triggers a crescendo of whisperings, music, and a thumping of the heart. The internal panic of Eva must be felt by the player as well.

A Home Base

At any time Eva can return to her apartment from the campus grounds. Here she displays the collectables she finds at the DeHoft Campus, passes time using her accrued stash of Self, and is able to go to Cafe The Rat.

Collectibles are gifts from friendly reformed or objects found at the campus. They grant insight into who the reformed are, how the world works, or what makes the campus tick. Apart from this they have no utility.

Passing time using Self helps improve Eva's position on the waiting list. Passing this waiting list is a requirement for one of the endings.

Cafe The Rat is a place where Eva can speak with her friends, old and new. It is a fluid location that changes with every visit, granting new conversations and encounters whenever a new visit is possible.

The User Interface (UI)

The Heads-Up Display (HUD)

The HUD only shows when the information it provides is necessary. It aims to be unintrusive yet in line with the game's overall aesthetic.

Self Clock

The self clock shows how much time is left until Eva's current dose of Self loses its effect. The clock is a hard deadline, and ticks down with tense regularity, except for when navigating the pause menus.

The clock temporarily shows up when it reaches the halfway point and the quarter point, and shows until Self is taken from the quarter point onwards.

When the clock has only 10 seconds left and Eva possesses no Self, the game spawns a dose of Self in a nearby container; possibly even in one that was already looted.

Health Bar

The health bar only vaguely indicates the well-being of Eva. This enables the game to create tense moments by occasionally granting a small HP boost, where Eva survives a hit that would've normally killed her.

The health bar is integrated into the Self Clock. When Eva takes damage cracks begin to show on the clock's face, and death is indicated by the face completely cracking through and a shattering sound effect playing.

Pause Menus

The pause menus are a safe haven of sorts, completely pausing the game in the background so the player can take their time looking through their inventory, their notes on enemy types, or change the settings of their game.

Inventory

The inventory displays Eva's melee weapon, melee weapon modification, available firearms, and a grid where she can view looted items such as ammo, consumables, doses of Self, blood vials, and key items. Some items might take up multiple inventory slots, and using an item requires time and relative peace. Being hit while using a consumable will knock it out of Eva's hands, requiring her to pick it up again.

Key items can be taken up for observation, where the item's 3D model can be spun around to inspect its details and potential hints.

Diary

The diary is modeled after a notepad, wherein Eva makes notes on the locations, NPCs, objects, and enemies she encounters. They are written down quickly and tend not to go too much in-depth; the entries gradually expanding as Eva becomes more familiar with their subjects.

Settings

The settings menu contains tabs of graphical, sound, gameplay, difficulty, and accessibility settings.

The aim is to make the experience adaptable enough so that anyone who wants to play it can play it in an enjoyable way. Part of this is the ability to remap buttons, controller support, text readability, and options to improve visual legibility.

Difficulty is also modifyable during a playthrough, though the Very Hard difficulty will be locked when the player switches away from it or starts the save on a lower difficulty.

Dialogue Interface

The dialogue interface is sectioned into a letterboxed window. The top part is reserved for NPC dialogue and the internal thoughts of Eva. The bottom section is reserved for dialogue choices.

The window in the middle is left open to place the focus on something or someone. Most of the time this will be the speaker.

Saving Interface

If requirements for saving are met the player enters the saving interface after a short sequence. Here the player can choose to either overwrite an existing save slot or save to a new slot. There's no limit to save slots, mostly because there is a limit to blood vials.

A save slot shows the slot's playtime, difficulty, save location, health, Self clock, and the number of found collectibles.

An Introduction

The Locales of Maintenance

(contain the order of events, maps, dialogue snippets, encounterable NPCs, enemies, acquirable items and collectibles)

The Apartment

A home worth returning to

The apartment is Eva's home, where she eats, sleeps, works, spends her time online, and engages with her hobbies. This is where the game starts, and a place to which Eva can return during her efforts at the DeHoft Campus.

Map

1. Entryway
2. Living room
3. Kitchen
4. Bathroom
5. Balcony

Location Background

Eva lives in APT024 of the Pluimers Complex. It's pretty sizeable compared to her previous places, and with some decorating it has become a pleasantly cozy space. Eva is a bit of a collector, and as such her spaces are filled with relics from her past.

Event 1: Tutorial and Introduction (Unique)

Eva sits at her PC. An alarm beeps and she looks over to a drawer in her desk. She rummages through it and produces an ornate pillbox, and takes a pill from it. She closes her PC, stands up, and control is handed over to the player.

A dialogue window pops up where Eva's thoughts make their first appearance.

Eva's Thoughts: I haven't been to the Rat in a while, a good drink couldn't hurt.

- Go now
 - *Eva's Thoughts: yeah, socializing a bit will do me good. Been cooped up for too long.*
- Go later
 - *Eva's Thoughts: they can wait, I'll mess around for a bit longer.*

If the player chooses to go later they can move about the apartment and interact with a wide array of objects, giving the player some insight on what kind of person Eva is.

Event 2: Return From The Rat (Unique)

x

Event 3: Return From the Campus (Repeatable)

x

Cafe The Rat

Socialize with humanity

Cafe The Rat is a gathering place for the local alternative scene, and home to many of Eva's dearest friends. These friends can be found here randomly, functioning as a sort of hint system that provides vague clues depending on the player's progress. Besides this feature these NPCs also provide extra background information and characterization for not only Eva and her friends, but the world at large.

Encounterable NPCs

John Bigman

This is just a test for formatting, not an actual guy or girl or enby. Filler text aplenty heehoo very funny and laugh!

Ideals. The NPC's ideals go here, what drives them and what are their goals in life, can be both long- and short-term.

Bonds. The NPC's bonds go here, who do they love, are there people they hate to an exceptional extent, et cetera.

Flaws. The NPC's flaws, do they have shortcomings such as mental blindspots, or perhaps an irrational fear or hate.

Quirks. Oddities about the way they speak, act, present, anything that is irregular for the dominant cultural expectations and outwardly visible.

The Fear. What would they become if they'd become reformed?

The Rough Road

An ever-changing wilderness

- first combat and puzzle obstacle

DeHoft Campus Grounds

A historic place of learning and esotericism

The campus grounds is a relatively open hub area, which connects the campus' different buildings.

Map

1. The Barracks
2. The Health Clinic
3. DeHoft Academy
4. The Factory
5. DeHoft Labs

Location Background

Adriaan De Hoft was a student of Cornelius Agrippa, the German polymath and occult writer. They met during a lecture at the University of Dole, quickly fostering a close bond as student and mentor. In 1510 Agrippa was forced to leave Dole due to a denouncement from the Franciscan prior Jean Catilinet. Adriaan left with him, studying while under his wing. They parted ways sometime in 1514, the terms of which were described by Adriaan as *"mutual, but pained nonetheless."*

Somehow, a mere year after, Adriaan founded the DeHoft Academy in 1515, within the borders of a duchy then known as Guelders. It is well known that this year was chosen for its angel number meaning of 'new beginnings and opportunities'. Both the year and its meaning are emblazoned all over the campus. *"Mira in novis initiis et occasionibus reperiuntur"* even became the campus' slogan, roughly translating as *"wondrous things are found in new beginnings and opportunities."*

What went on during the academy's early days is largely unknown due to its secluded location, the secretive manner in which its students were recruited, and the ongoing Guelders Wars that took away attention from the young academy. Due to DeHoft's current position as a pharmaceutical giant though, it is believed that the academy's foremost discipline has always been alchemy; specifically the field of (esoteric) medicine.

The Barracks

A place of learning, turned into housing

The barracks were repurposed from a classroom building, housing the campus' workers in relative comfort. Some might have strange sleeping requirements due to their form, but these are nearly always able to be met by DeHoft.

The Health Clinic

Care given is autonomy taken

x

DeHoft Academy

For those showing great promise and utility

x

The Factory

Work that distracts from reality

x

DeHoft Labs

The truth behind DeHoft

x

Endings

- Defeatist Ending
 - Chose to stop taking Self and let your transformation take place
- Sycophant Ending
 - Passed the waiting list, never entered DeHoft labs
- Ascendant Ending
 - Entered DeHoft labs, became your best self
- Martyr Ending
 - Entered DeHoft labs, ended the production
- Rat Ending
 - Entered DeHoft labs, left with a life-long supply of doses