

Reincarnation: A Ghost Story – Narrative Design Document

STORY SUMMARY

Bilan Higgins, who is an orphan that was bullied throughout school by the three same boys, Nilli, Frew, and Broan Yellins (triplets). One day when Bilan is a young adult, a god-like being, [Demiurge 2], shows up to his world and changes the laws of life and death. Now when someone dies, their soul enters the spirit realm where they await to be reborn with all their memories. However, one can forfeit their memories and have their soul wiped clean so that they are reborn with no memories. This turn of events in the world leads to Nilli, Frew, and Broan (as young adults now, who have grown from bullies to being prejudiced gangsters) taking over the village. Bilan finds himself in a situation where he finds kind souls to counteract the hatred that the triplets have created. Along the journey, [Demiurge 2] appears to Bilan alone and tells him that it has created a special blade for Bilan and has scattered the pieces of it in the forest. The Demiurge says it created it so that Bilan can fight Nilli, Frew, and Broan and force their souls to be wiped clean, thus ending their bigoted reign over the village. Bilan collects the pieces of this blade and then goes to wipe the Yellins' souls clean. On the way there, the Yellins have Bilan's friend (or lover, if the player makes choices for that to happen), ErLOW, kidnapped. Bilan chases after ErLOW's kidnappers and finds ErLOW tied to a post with Nilli, Frew, and Broan circling him, with the remaining village residents watching the Yellins in support. Frew uses a special blade, very similar looking to Bilan's special blade, to wipe ErLOW's soul clean, just as a pregnant woman gives birth, sending ErLOW's clean soul into the newborn baby. Bilan fights the triplets and wins, and then realizes that [Demiurge 2] had set him up against the triplets as a fight to see who would determine the outcome of the world.

CHARACTERS

Bilan Higgins is the player character. Bilan is an orphan taken in by the Wilkens family to be one of their groundskeepers. The Wilkens family comes from a long lineage of wealth and are the second wealthiest family in the village. Their wealth does not extend to Bilan, however, as Bilan is more of their servant. The Wilkens family treats Bilan well, but Bilan still has always yearned for a true loving family. At the starting cutscene, Bilan is a young 7-year-old boy and ages up throughout this cutscene, from 7 to 9 to 13 to 16, 18, and then finally 22. He has a gothic vibe to him, but that is contrasted by his blue hair. He always wears his hair in a disheveled look. He is slim in stature, and tall compared to the average citizen in this world. He wears a dark brown plaid button-up work shirt, black pants, and

black boots. Bilan's sexuality is never defined, however the player has the option to kiss Erlow at a certain point in time, so it is up to the player to determine/interpret Bilan's sexual orientation

Erlow Mullens is a major NPC. He can be seen in the starting cutscenes with Bilan, aging up at the same rate. Erlow was raised by his Uncle Yenney Mullens and learns carpentry from him. Erlow encourages Bilan throughout the game to become the best that he can be and assists Bilan by building houses and buildings for their new village. He has dusty light blue hair and dark eyes, dark and thick facial hair that he shaves daily, but always has the appearance of a 5-o'clock shadow. His eyes always have a sense of wonder in them. He tries to keep his hair swept back, but it is always falling on his forehead and eyes. He can typically be seen with his ornate hammer. When he fled Black Rouge Village, he made sure to bring his tools with him. Whether or not he is wearing his work apron, he always makes sure he carries a special hammer with him that used to be his father's.

Nilli, Frew, and Broan Yellins are triplets that serve as the main villains within the game. They can be seen in the beginning cutscenes aging up alongside Bilan, but they are always bullying Bilan, Erlow, or some other kid in these cutscenes. They come from the wealthiest family in town, but their family's wealth was obtained through power and corruption. Nilli, Frew, and Broan start off as bullies, but as they age up, they take on the role of gangsters that will terrorize the citizens to pursue their own goals. Their victims are chosen based upon their internalized prejudices. Their goal is to usurp their parents' control over the town and seize it for themselves. They see Bilan and Erlow as a threat to full control over the village, which is why they capture Erlow to wipe his soul clean.

Nilli likes to wear his hair long, as opposed to his brothers. Despite being triplets, his hair is a slightly different shade of red than the other two, with his being slightly orange and also the lightest in hue compared to his brothers. His favorite color is brown, so his attire will always be from that color scheme. He can always be found with a pocket watch, with its chain hanging from his vest. He uses this pocket watch as a weapon to choke his victims. Nilli likes to look and sound menacing, be it with his expression or tone of voice.

Frew's hair is always sleek and slick backed, though sometimes a tuft or two will flop forward. He has the darkest hair of the three boys, but there is still a red tint to it. His suits are usually black with a dash of red. He always carries a secret dagger with him in his suit, and this dagger has an upgraded look to reflect a new power it has received by [Demiurge 2]. Frew tends more to silence, but when he does speak, he is very haughty.

Unlike Broan's brothers' straight hair, he has wavy and curly hair. His hair is also a darker shade red, but not nearly as dark as Frew's hair. He always has an imperial handlebar

mustache. The color scheme of his outfits rarely change, as he always uses brown, black, and red of varying shades within his attire. He always has a fancy walking cane with him wherever he goes and this is his weapon of choice to use to beat his victims. He tends to be more playful than his two brothers and loves to taunt his victims.

[Demiurge 2] is a god-like being from an unknown dimension. It appears to the citizens of Black Rouge Village in the form of a bearded face in the sky, with the beard flowing into the clouds joining as one. Later, it appears to Bilan in the form of a human with this same bearded face, however the beard flows into the ground. [Demiurge 2] alters the life-death cycle by making it a continuous cycle where the soul never fully stops existing. This cycle is what helps Bilan come to his full potential. [Demiurge 2] only appears in cutscenes and dialogues and alters the course of the story each time. Its motivations are not clear throughout the story, but at the end Bilan reveals that he has realized that it was pitting him against the triplets as complete opposites in order to change the direction of the world (love and acceptance vs hatred and prejudice). [Demiurge 2] wanted to meddle in the affairs of this world by first causing chaos and then choosing two complete opposite personalities that could emerge as leaders amongst the chaos to establish further new rules within the world. Bilan with his kindness and hidden leader potential was a perfect match to the triplets and their narcissistic ways that were already on their way to controlling the village.

SETTINGS AND LOCATION DESCRIPTIONS

The game is set in an alternate universe that has a Victorian Gothic aesthetic and can be likened to a British Victorian era. There is a medium-sized village (approx. 7,000 residents) near a cliffside where the game starts out. The village is called Black Rouge Village. Below the cliff is a clearing nearby. This clearing is where Bilan and Erlow create their own village. Five paths wind from this clearing up to the village atop the cliff. A sixth path is hidden and it too winds from the clearing to Black Rouge Village atop the cliff.

Black Rouge consists of houses and buildings that have a Victorian Gothic theme. Slightly outside this village to the North (on the opposite side of the cliff) there is a much larger Victorian house. This is the house Bilan where he works and lives. On the West edge of the village is another much larger house. This is where the Yellins grew up.

The pathways that wind from the clearing to Black Rouge Village are dark and forested with dark red-leaved Japanese maples, eucalyptus trees, thorny honeylocust trees, bloodwood trees, and bald cypress trees. Beehives can occasionally be found exclusively on the Japanese maples. Dark purple rose bushes can be found within the forest and near the

pathways. The beehives, thorny honeylocust trees, and purple rose bushes all serve as hazards that damage the player. The ground is covered in a clover-like plant, except where the paths are, and that is just dirt. There is a dense fog in this forest that covers these paths as well as within the clearing. The fog reaches Black Rouge Village but is very thin and low to the ground at that atmospheric height.

The forest surrounding the village consists of the same vegetation as that found where the pathways are.

FACTION BREAKDOWN

On the side of Bilan is Erlow. Erlow is Bilan's biggest supporter and helps build the buildings for the new village. There are 30 miscellaneous NPCs with blue soul flames (with similar shapes) that Bilan recruits/finds to join the new village. Each one has a small story and dialogue to go along with it as part of the process of recruiting them. Their gameplay also consists of following Bilan back to the new village while Bilan keeps them safe. A minimum of 25 of these NPCs must be recruited in order to do the boss fight against the Yellins.

On the side of the villains (Nilli, Frew, and Broan) are mobs and riots of various sizes. These are composed of miscellaneous NPCs with red soul flames (not necessarily of similar shape). Their gameplay serves as enemies that will chase Bilan and attack him, potentially killing him. Depending on the size of these mobs and riots, and on Bilan's skill level, Bilan can attack back and run them off. These people target any person that they have formed a prejudice against. While it is not explained what exactly these prejudices are and is open to interpretation, it is shown through the color and shape of the souls being different than theirs.

Other enemies include wildlife that can be found in the forest, such as stray cats, foxes, racoons, badgers, and wolves. They do not belong to any side other than their own. Each type can attack and potentially kill Bilan. Depending on Bilan's level, he can attack and/or shoo them away.

[Demiurge 2] is in a faction all on its own. It does not take a side, rather it watches the chaos and meddles when it wants to. Though it is implied that it will take the side of whoever is victorious in the boss fight.

THEME

Reincarnation: A Ghost Story follows the theme of how hatred and prejudices can be formed for those people that are different from you. Nilli, Frew, and Broan have this hatred to their core, but they influence others to come to have this same hatred and prejudices... be it about race, sexuality, skin color, gender, or even social status. The theme delves into these issues that we experience in the real world today, how it affects Bilan and others, how one loud voice full of hatred can amass a following, revealing that even others have prejudices deep inside them. With the idea that there is no real death in this world, the solution to the core hatred that stems from Nilli, Frew, and Broan must be tackled by having them relearn their ways (via being reborn with their souls/memories wiped clean). Beyond the core of theme of hatred and bigotry, Bilan and Erlow have created a new village filled with kind souls to counteract those with hateful souls.

TONE

The tone of the game has a very haunted, spooky, and eerie feeling to it. Elements that bring this out are the house styles, the dense fog, the types of foliage, and even color choices (dark red, dark purple, shades of black). Through the gameplay, the player should feel compassion for the victims of the Yellins. The story should evoke feelings of apprehension when the Yellins start influencing people, with this being compounded when the player learns just how much power they have gained. The story should also provoke the player to be reflective, about themselves and what their own true nature is. And there should always be an undertone of grimness, as this reinforces the theme.

NARRATIVE SYSTEMS

The life-death-rebirth/possess endless cycle is a narrative system that ties directly into gameplay. It is the catalyst that ignites the tension felt in the world and supports the story by assisting Bilan to realize his true potential (by only being able to collect the points to level up while a ghost in the spirit realm). Possession allows the player to keep all the collected skill points and then some, while rebirth will dock off some of those points.

Dialogue supports the narrative, allowing the player to choose options that show Bilan's timid side and more empowered sides as Bilan is leveled up, thus showing Bilan's personal journey throughout the story.

Cutscenes will be used intermittently to convey major story moments that cannot be done through gameplay. The first cutscene at the start of the game shows the backstory of Bilan, Erlow, and the triplet bullies, showing how these bullies escalate their bullying as they get older to the point of becoming gangsters by young adulthood. This first cutscene will set the stage for the catalyst of the Demiurge arriving and changing the laws of life and death and turning it into an endless cycle. A cutscene will be used before the boss fight to show Erlow's soul being wiped clean and being reborn and how the Yellins purposely did this to get at Bilan. Miscellaneous cutscenes may be incorporated to better convey emotions and story elements as needed.

The mechanic that allows the PC to see the color and shape of other people's souls plays into the narrative because it allows the player to see which souls may be kind or hateful. It also allows the player to distinguish between who the triplets like to target as victims as well, further supporting the story of the Yellins being bigots.

LORE

There are many "stray" cats in this world, which is why Bilan keeps encountering them throughout gameplay. All these cats are black, but unlike our world, they are not considered to be unlucky. Rather, they are just a nuisance. Cats are rarely kept as pets because they are not domesticated enough to be good pets. This is why Bilan can be hurt by them and must shoo them away when they are encountered.

Nilli, Frew, and Broan's parents have power and influence over the town. Their father is a banker that is in bed with the politicians, and their mother sits on the board for the local school and leads the monthly village meetings. Nilli, Frew, and Broan are narcissistic in their nature, and they want to usurp their parents, which is why when Frew gains the special blade from the Demiurge, they unanimously decide to wipe both of their parents' souls clean. Their house maid, Vena, would try to correct their narcissistic behavior as they grew up, but Vena only ended up being a target herself, as their parents would belittle Vena for her differences.

Nilli, Frew, and Broan are also bigots by their upbringing. They target anyone that they don't like because of this bigotry. The three of them together feed on this and support one another like an echo chamber, which is why they escalated to becoming gangsters by young adulthood.

Erlow was raised by his Uncle Yenny Mullens because his parents died when he was 5 years old. At a young age, he was friends with Bilan until they became teenagers, and they were

distanced from each other because Erlow didn't want Frew, Nilli, and Broan (the three bullies) to find out that he was gay and in love with Bilan (although the triplets already pegged him as such).

Bilan Higgins never knew his parents as he was given up at birth. He was taken in by a local rich family, the Wilkens, to work as a groundskeeper. At school, he was always bullied and had a hard time making friends. His name was given to him by the Wilkens family.

Everyone's last name always ends in -ins or -ens. There is no gameplay effect of this, rather this is just a way to distinguish which village someone is from (as there are other villages in this world, they just are not in the game).

This does not affect gameplay, nor is it ever even revealed in the story, but [Demiurge 2] is one of three siblings that have received a world to manipulate as they wish as a "coming of age" present. [Demiurge 2] is like a god and can manipulate any laws of the universe that it wishes. [Demiurge 2] appears as a humanoid bearded male, but it does not actually have a physical form or gender.