Summary

Forest Ritual is a survival exploration game about performing ancient rites without ever knowing for sure if you're doing them right. Players take on the role of Sammy, dutiful grandchild tasked by their grandmama with banishing a dark force rooted deep within a cursed forest.

The journey to the forest's center takes three in-game days, with players stopping each night at a unique location — a cave, a ruined chapel, a wooden cabin — where they must interpret cryptic clues, environmental signs, and scattered notes to perform protective rituals and survive until morning.

During the day, players explore the forest under the pressure of a ticking clock, collecting ingredients and information needed for that night's ritual. If they fail to reach the next location before sunset, they become hunted, forced into a desperate escape and last-minute rite to survive the night.

Each ritual is a puzzle of the player's own belief, their intuition, and keen observation — with no clear feedback until it's too late. Missteps lead to mental degradation and increase in supernatural attacks that make progressing through the forest and completing the final ritual harder.

Forest Ritual is a game of slow-burning dread, ambiguous mechanics, and mounting tension — where survival depends not on skill, but on faith in your own decisions.

What Makes *Forest Ritual* Unique

Forest Ritual reimagines survival horror through the lens of ritual, ambiguity, and psychological tension. Instead of relying on combat or traditional monster encounters, the game challenges players to **interpret incomplete and often misleading information** to survive supernatural threats. Every ritual is a puzzle of observation, intuition, and belief — with no clear feedback until it's too late.

What truly sets *Forest Ritual* apart is its commitment to **fear through uncertainty**. Players are never told exactly what to do or whether they did it correctly. Clues are scattered, sometimes deceptive, and the forest itself becomes an active presence — watching, misleading, and punishing failure through immersive consequences rather than jump scares or death.

With its blend of **exploration, resource management, ambient dread**, and **ritual logic**, *Forest Ritual* offers a slow-burning horror experience where players must trust their instincts, face the unknown, and uncover the truth hidden deep within the woods — or risk being consumed by it.

Design pillars

Unclear Rituals and Hidden Rules
Players are never given complete instructions. Understanding how rituals work requires logical inference, observation, and trust in uncertain choices.

Scattered and Time-Limited Resources
Essential ritual ingredients are spread throughout the forest. Players must explore carefully while racing against the setting sun to gather what they need.

Fear Without the Monster
Threats in *Forest Ritual* are mostly psychological. The true horror comes from atmosphere, tension, and the constant fear of doing something wrong — not from monsters themselves.

Core game loop
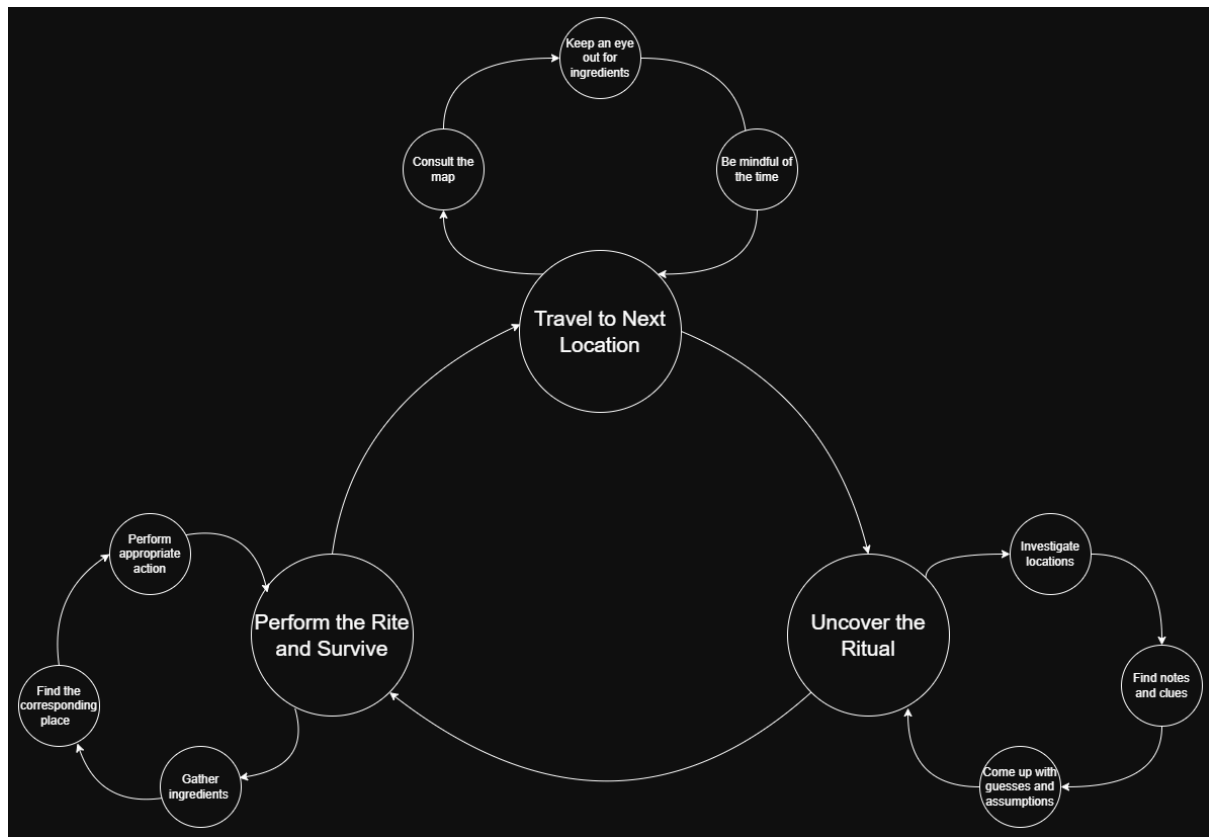
Travel to the Next Location
Explore the forest to reach the next overnight stop, collecting ritual ingredients and scattered notes before sunset.

Uncover the Ritual
Investigate the environment and clues at the resting place to determine the correct protective ritual.

Perform the Rite
Carry out the ritual with the materials gathered — then face the consequences of your choices, whether you were right… or wrong.

Secondary loops

Perform the rite and survive the night
Gather ingredients
Find the correct place to use them
Use the ingredients

Travel to the Next Location
Consult the map
Keep an eye out for ingredients
Be mindful of the time

Uncover the Ritual
Investigate the locations
Find clues and notes
Come up with guesses and assumptions

Player motivation and progression

Motivations

Primary Motivation
- Survive the journey and complete the final ritual.

Secondary Motivations
- Uncover the hidden lore behind the forest and its ancient rituals and your place in all of it.
- Interpret cryptic clues to perform each rite correctly.

Progression
Tutorial ritual with a smidge of information missing and all resources provided → Frantic search and rush to the next location → A ritual requiring careful interpretation of vague clues → Another trek deeper into the forest, gathering rarer ingredients → A complex and tricky ritual with high risk of failure → A deceptively calm walk through a quiet stretch of forest → Final ritual — most instructions are clear, but there's an unexpected twist

Gameplay POV

Arriving at the old two-story cabin on the edge of a shadowed forest wasn't how Sammy imagined spending their holidays. But after inheriting the house—and the land around it—from their late grandmother, they had little choice but to make the long journey through the woods. By the time they arrived at dusk, the sun was already slipping behind the trees.

Inside, Sammy found only the basics: dusty furniture, fading family photos, and an old notebook—exactly where their grandmother said it would be.

The notebook was filled with strange, hand-written rituals meant to ward off something described only as "the dark between the trees." The first page mentioned a protective rite, along with a note: **"Everything you need is in the attic."** Sammy remembered how, in her final days, their grandmother had insisted the rituals *had* to be done. Somewhere deeper in the book, they found instructions for a much larger ritual—one meant to seal away an ancient evil buried beneath the forest's heart.

Before they could read further, a long, guttural howl rose from the woods. Not a coyote. Not a wolf. Something is *wrong*. Cold unease crawled up Sammy's spine as faint whispers filled the air, slipping between the cracks in the walls. With no time to waste, they rushed to the attic, gathering ingredients as described.

Back downstairs, they flipped open the notebook and began the rite.
- **Step one:** salt lines across every door and window, each frame marked with a half-moon pierced by a cross. The symbols were rushed, uneven.
- **Step two:** a chalk circle drawn on the floor, surrounded by five smaller ones—each with its own symbol, each holding a candle.
- **Step three:** stand inside the main circle and burn a leaf of juniper until it smolders.

Just as the chalk met the wood for the final circle, footsteps echoed outside.

They sound too heavy and too uneven to be human.

Snarling followed. Then slow, deliberate pacing around the cabin—pausing at every window, every door. Something was out there, trying to get in.

Sammy fumbled through the final steps, lighting the candles, burning the leaf. The smell was thick, earthy. They stood in the center of the circle as the thing prowled outside, letting out bursts of furious sound. Every instinct told them to run. But they stayed.

The creature never got in.

By morning, the silence was worse than the noise. Sammy stepped outside and found prints—dozens of them—pawed, cloven, human. Something had circled the house all night and had even tried to dig under it. But it stayed away, It was *kept* away.

Sammy should've left. But their grandmother's last words echoed in their mind:

"It has to be done. We owe it to have it done."

Owe *what*?

To *who*?

Only the forest knows. But Sammy intended to find out.

Game Systems and Mechanics

Ritual System

Each overnight location requires the player to perform a ritual to survive the night. These rituals vary from place to place and are never fully explained. Players must rely on environmental observation, found notes, and a mysterious notebook left by Sammy's grandmother to determine the correct steps.

Each ritual includes up to **three components**:

1. **Protecting Entryways**

2. **Protecting the Self**

3. **Banishing the Evil** *(optional but high-reward)*

The first two parts are required to survive. Completing the third grants significant benefits — including **no sanity loss**, **more time** for exploration the following day, and **extra time** for the final ritual. However, if the banishment ritual is performed incorrectly, it provokes a violent supernatural response.

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1. Protecting Entryways

This involves two steps:

- **Lining entry points** (doors, windows) with a protective substance such as salt, pepper, or ashes.

- **Carving protective symbols** into the door and window frames.

Players must deduce which substances and symbols to use by examining the location, reading scattered notes, and referencing the notebook.

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2. Protecting the Self

This ritual has three parts:

- **Choosing an appropriate space** for the protection circle or seal.

- **Drawing or building the protective seal** using chalk, string, herbs, etc.

- **Burning a specific substance** near the seal to activate it.

Correct execution depends on location-specific clues, the surrounding environment, and cultural or symbolic logic hinted at in the story materials.

3. Banishing the Evil *(Optional)*

This powerful but risky ritual includes three steps:

- **Drinking a special concoction**, made from rare ingredients found in the forest.

- **Reciting a prayer or ward**, located in the notebook or notes.

- **Drawing blood** with a ritual knife to finalize the rite.

Players are limited to **two banishment rituals** per playthrough, due to the scarcity of ingredients. Success rewards the player with greater freedom and protection; failure results in powerful spiritual retaliation.

Clue System

Clues for rituals can appear in subtle or obvious forms:

- Types of **trees**, **insect behavior**, or **spiderweb patterns**

- **Writings on walls**, **symbolic carvings**, or **ritual diagrams**

- Environmental hints that change based on the forest zone

Players must interpret these clues, often with limited context, to survive the night. Some clues are outright fabrications and lies of the evil forces dwelling in the forest, so players also need to be vigilant and attentive

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Resources and Notes

While traveling between ritual sites, players explore the forest to gather:

- **Ingredients**: herbs, roots, mushrooms, insects — each with unique ritual uses.

- **Tools**: ritual knives, chalk, herbs, candles, matches, etc.

- **Notes and Clues**: documents, scribbles, and diagrams that expand the lore and offer critical hints for rituals.

These can be found along the main trail or in **sub-locations** like caves, abandoned huts, shrines, and other points of interest. Sub-locations may offer rare items or crucial information but often come with greater risks or time pressure. Time to explore each location and surrounding area is limited and, if not careful, can leave players with not enough time to complete the protective ritual.

Player Wellbeing

Sammy's survival depends on managing several interrelated wellbeing systems:

Sanity
- The most critical stat.
- Decreases with exposure to fear triggers: unsettling noises, failed rituals, traps, or spiritual interference.
- Mistakes during a ritual don't cause immediate sanity loss — instead, **attacks from spirits** inflict **psychic damage** when protections fail.

Health
- Represents physical injuries from environmental hazards like traps or mishaps during travel.
- Can also be affected by indirect spiritual attacks or accidents.

Food
- Players start with **2.5 days of rations**.
- Poor decisions or events (e.g., spoiled food, vomiting due to sanity loss) can waste these resources.
- Food is needed to maintain stamina and avoid other stat penalties.

Carry Capacity
- Limits how many ingredients, notes, or tools Sammy can bring with them.
- Forces players to prioritize what's most valuable and plan efficiently.

Monsters and Spirit Attacks

When a ritual is **performed incorrectly** or left **incomplete**, players are not attacked directly by monsters in a traditional sense — instead, **entities slip through the weakened protections**.

The creature is never fully seen. Instead, tension builds through:
- Distant howls and footsteps around the building
- The atmosphere growing unnaturally still
- Sudden footsteps inside the house
- A climax where control shifts, and the player is pulled into a distorted space

At the height of the encounter, players are thrown into a **short maze sequence** — a twisted version of the location, haunted by the entity they failed to repel.
- **Escaping the maze** results in a **small sanity loss**
- **Failing to escape** causes a **greater sanity loss** and loss of **some ingredients or notes**

This indirect, atmospheric approach reinforces the game's psychological horror tone and discourages ritual failure through immersive consequences rather than traditional jump scares or death.