



Level Design Document: The Crow House

Half-Life 2

Version 1.0

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Document Revisions Table

Version	Description	Requestor	Date
0.1	Initial document creation; first draft material on almost all sections of the document.	Professor Ouellette	09/05/15
0.2	Continued development, fleshing out detailed overview, level progression chart, and narration, map polish, etc.	Professor Ouellette	09/06/15
0.3	Final document polish and appendix.	Professor Ouellette	09/07/15
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Level Abstract

Quick Summary

“The Crow House” is a small level designed for the game *Half-Life 2*, a single-player (SP) first-person shooter (FPS). The setting of the level is not intrinsically part of the *Half-Life* universe or mythos, though it uses assets from it, and instead it takes inspiration from a collaborative horror fiction website called [The SCP Foundation](#). The Foundation is a secret organization protecting the world from paranormal artifacts that operate outside of the standard rules of science or even logic. A key aspect of The Foundation is their use of Class-D subjects, individuals who are on death row and used as experimental guinea pigs when interacting with the various SCP artifacts.

In “The Crow House,” the player acts as a Class-D subject in one of these experiments. They possess a radio headset that allows them to hear the voice of their “handler,” Agent Yellow Fisk, a man who verbally records the results of the experiment as the player proceeds. The experiment involves interacting with an object, SCP-2674-A, codenamed “The Crowbar.” Holding The Crowbar turns any real-world door into a portal to the location SCP-2674-B, codenamed “The Crow House.” This location is a strange building that changes every time a subject enters it, and, for reasons unknown to The Foundation, the rooms inside tend to test the subject with puzzles or strange occurrences, as well as reflect key aspects of the subject’s psyche more and more as the subject gets further in.

The gameplay of “The Crow House” focuses mostly on environmental exploration highlighted by voice acting, while offering a few basic puzzles using *Half-Life 2*’s physics, object interaction, and scripting systems. Using clues from Agent Yellow Fisk and the environment, the player proceeds through a series of rooms that more and more attempt to frighten or confuse them.

Hooks

- **Environment:** While using assets from *Half-Life 2* and other Source games, “The Crow house” puts a unique twist on them with environments that use these assets in increasingly strange ways. Lighting, BSP construction, and object layout offer visuals that are fun to look at and interact with, while still instilling a sense of discomfort or dread as the level progresses.
- **Storytelling:** The SCP Foundation website, the inspiration for “The Crow House,” is full of compelling and mind-bending stories about unique paranormal artifacts. They have a focus on a Lovecraftian style of terrifying things that are, in a sense, “unknowable.” This level brings to life an interactive version of the tone that the SCP articles tend to evoke, leaving the player both excited by their experience and left wanting to know more.

Gameplay Highlights

- **Exploration:** The player uses the flashlight and crowbar given to them at the start of the level to explore the environments and figure out what to do next.
- **Interaction:** The player experiments with things in the environment (switches, buttons, and objects) to unlock blocked passages and proceed to the next room.

Setting Summary

Theme	<i>Paranormal “haunted” house.</i>
Mood	<i>Tense, dreadful, strange.</i>
Setting	<i>Modern period, testing facility, door to another dimension.</i>
Time of Day	<i>Evening.</i>
Season	<i>Unknown.</i>
Weather	<i>Overcast.</i>

Mission Difficulty

Position	Difficulty	Reasons
Beginning	2	Basic environmental interaction to open doors.
Middle	4	Basic puzzle that requires a bit of effort to figure out.
End	2	Simple exploration and environmental interaction.

Scale: 1-10 (1 is Easiest and 10 is Hardest)

Mission Metrics

Play Time	~11 Minutes at medium-paced progression
Critical Path	3840 Hammer Grid Units (128hgu = 8ft)
Physical Area	1664hgu x 1792hgu (128hgu = 8ft)

Characters

Character	Description
Subject D3671	This is the player character, a Class-D subject of The Foundation. In the eyes of The Foundation, they are expendable, though there is no effort to try to end the subject’s life if avoidable. They are a silent protagonist.
Agent Yellow Fisk	This agent of The Foundation acts as the overseeing handler on the experiment. As opposed to talking directly to the subject, they simply narrate key actions that the subject performs in the environment and their results, as well as explains some of the phenomena and environments observed. This narration, however, offers information to the player on how to navigate the level and some knowledge of what is happening in The Crow House and why.
SCP-2674-C (Headcrab Model)	These strange creatures appear throughout The Crow House, often through vent grates or in inaccessible rooms. Until the last room of the level, they appear docile as opposed to hostile to D3671.
Foundation Guard (Metro Police Model)	He appears at the end of the level after D3671 exits The Crow House. He is present to take The Crowbar from the subject, or kill the subject should D3671 not comply with those orders.

Visual Themes

Theme	Description
1. Foundation Testing Chambers	<i>Fluorescent lighting, concrete walls, bare decoration, security cameras. An area of The Crow House also mimics the Foundation testing facility, with a bit more slightly off-kilter decoration.</i>
2. Paranormal House	<i>The Crow House is dank, chilling, and strange, often poorly lit (requiring use of the flashlight), with bizarre architecture almost resembling a normal house, decorated by abnormal arrangements of furniture; features a hallway, home office, dining room, flooded bedroom, and staircase.</i>

Key Theme References

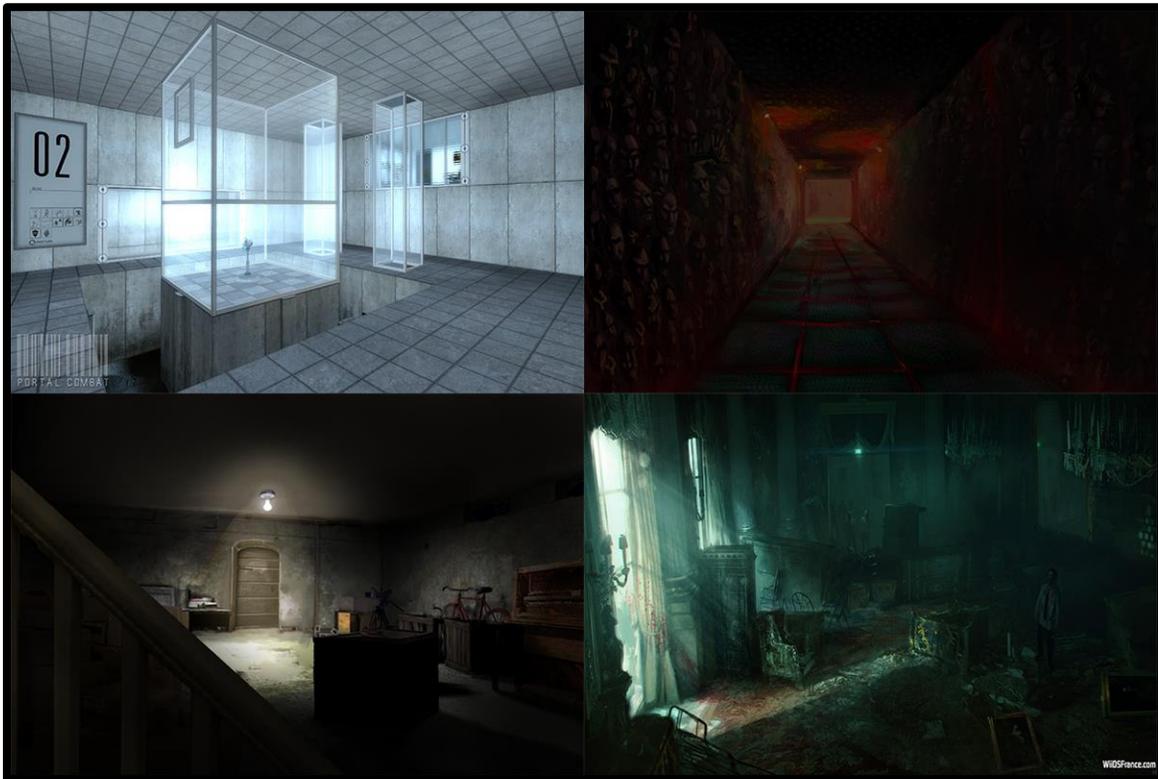


Figure 1: Key Theme Image References

Level Summary

Campaign

Context

This level is not technically a part of the main *Half-Life 2* game universe, though the possibility remains open that the dimension The Crow House occupies is the same as or similar to the one featured in the *Half-Life* franchise. The level is a standalone experience that players can enjoy without knowledge of the *Half-Life* or SCP Foundation mythos, though interest in either would be relevant.

Backstory

The Foundation is a worldwide agency that follows the motto “Secure, Contain, Protect”—thus titling the objects that they find “SCP” artifacts. They have existed for over a century, both containing and utilizing a vast array of paranormal objects, individuals, and locations that vary from terrifying, to innocuous, to humorous, to potentially world-ending. How SCP-2674-A (or “The Crowbar”) came into The Foundation’s possession is confidential, why The Foundation sees fit to experiment with the location SCP-2674-B (or “The Crow House”) is confidential, and the results of other experiments with SCP-2674 are also confidential. All that the player knows about this scenario presents itself within the level.

Aftermath

If the player chooses to give up The Crowbar after the experiment is complete, then a guard incapacitates D3671, the screen fades to black, and guards return Subject D3671 to custody, with merit points that offer them a somewhat more comfortable life in their holding facility. If the player attacks the unnamed guard with The Crowbar, a series of doors appear in the walls through which several creatures come flooding out before the screen fades to red—ultimate consequences unknown.

Objective(s)

- Explore The Crow House
 - Avoid breaking anything in the house, if possible
 - Progress through each of the four rooms successfully
 - Room 1: Find the code and input it into the wall patterns to unlock the door
 - Room 2: Figure out how to use the gravity field to press the button on the ceiling to unlock the door
 - Room 3: Figure out how to manipulate the gravity field and get the heavy boxes into Room 2
 - Room 4: kill the headcrabs using the switches
 - End the experiment
 - Give back the crowbar or kill the guard

Overview Map

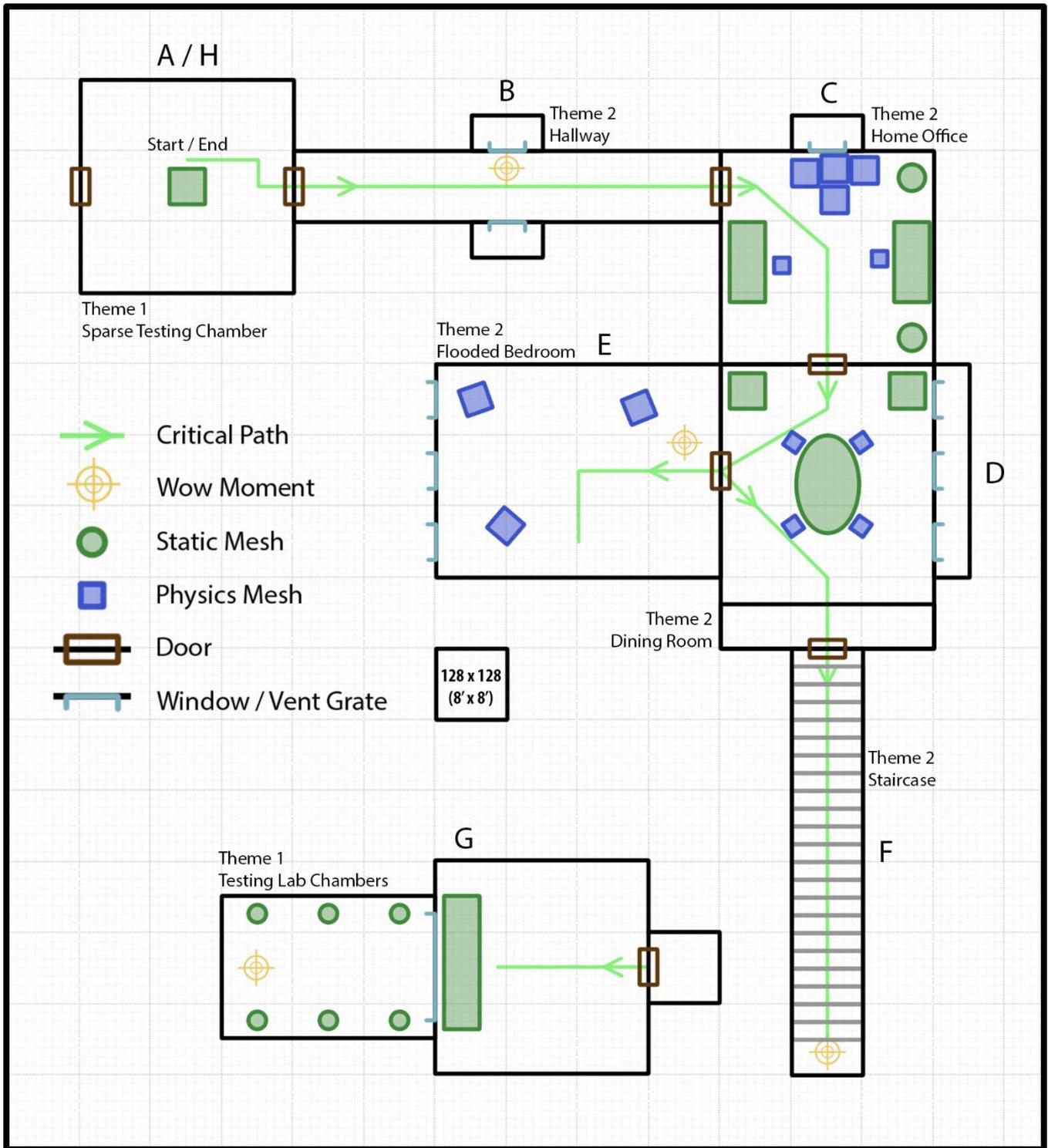


Figure 2: Overview Map and Key

Level Flow

Flow Summary

- A. The player starts in the facility's testing chamber. The Crowbar rises up on a platform from the ground, and the player equips it. Doing so opens a portal on the other side of the red door across from them (portal only appears if the door is closed while opening it while holding the crowbar).
- B. A long hallway introduces the player to the tone of The Crow House, with the lighting becoming progressively dim as they approach a second door to The Crow House proper.
- C. In the first room of the house, the player must explore to find a pattern corresponding to symbols on the wall. Striking the symbols in the order of the pattern unlocks the next door.
- D. In the second room, the player encounters a localized gravity field pointing at a wall next to an unreachable ledge. They must use objects in the third room to reach the ledge to the next door.
- E. The third room is full of water, and the player must swim to turn a wheel to rotate the gravity field in both rooms, as well as figure out how to get a heavy box to the second room.
- F. The locked door in the second room leads to a set of stairs that go on for a while, and when the player reaches an illuminated button, pressing it makes the stairs disappear, causing the player to slide down into the final room (through teleport). Radio connection to handler dies.
- G. The final room features a set of switches and several headcrabs behind a window. Interacting with the switches unleashes the headcrabs on the player; screen fades to black, return to first room.
- H. Back in the testing chamber, the player must return the crowbar, and the experiment is over.

Level Progression Chart

Time (min)	0:00	0:30	1:00	1:30	2:00	2:30
Terrain/Objective	Area 1A		Area 1B	Area 1C		
Opponents						
Challenges	Pick up Crowbar			Find code, unlock door		
Wow Moments			Intro to Tone			
New Skills/Weapons	Crowbar					
Cinematics						

Time (min)	3:00	3:30	4:00	4:30	5:00	5:30
Terrain/Objective	Area 2D			Area 2E / 2D		
Opponents						
Challenges	Investigate		Alter gravity field, use teleporter to move blocks			
Wow Moments			Gravity Fields / Water Room			
New Skills/Weapons						
Cinematics						

Time (min)	6:00	6:30	7:00	7:30	8:00	8:30
Terrain/Objective	Area 2D	Area 3F			Area 3G	
Opponents						
Challenges	Push button	Climb stairs into darkness, push button			Pull levers, kill headcrabs	
Wow Moments			Slide into darkness			
New Skills/Weapons						
Cinematics						

Time (min)	9:00	9:30	10:00	10:30		
Terrain/Objective	Area 3G		Area 1H			
Opponents	Horde of Headcrabs					
Challenges	Try to fend off headcrabs					
Wow Moments	Headcrab Attack					
New Skills/Weapons						
Cinematics						

Legend
1 square = 15 sec.
Sparse Testing Chamber
TCH Hallway
TCH Office
TCH Dining Room
TCH Flooded Bedroom
TCH Stairway
TCH Testing Chamber
Challenge Highlight
Wow Moment
New Weapon/Skill
Cinematic

Figure 3: Level Progression Chart

Detailed Design

Level Details

Gameplay Area Breakdown Map

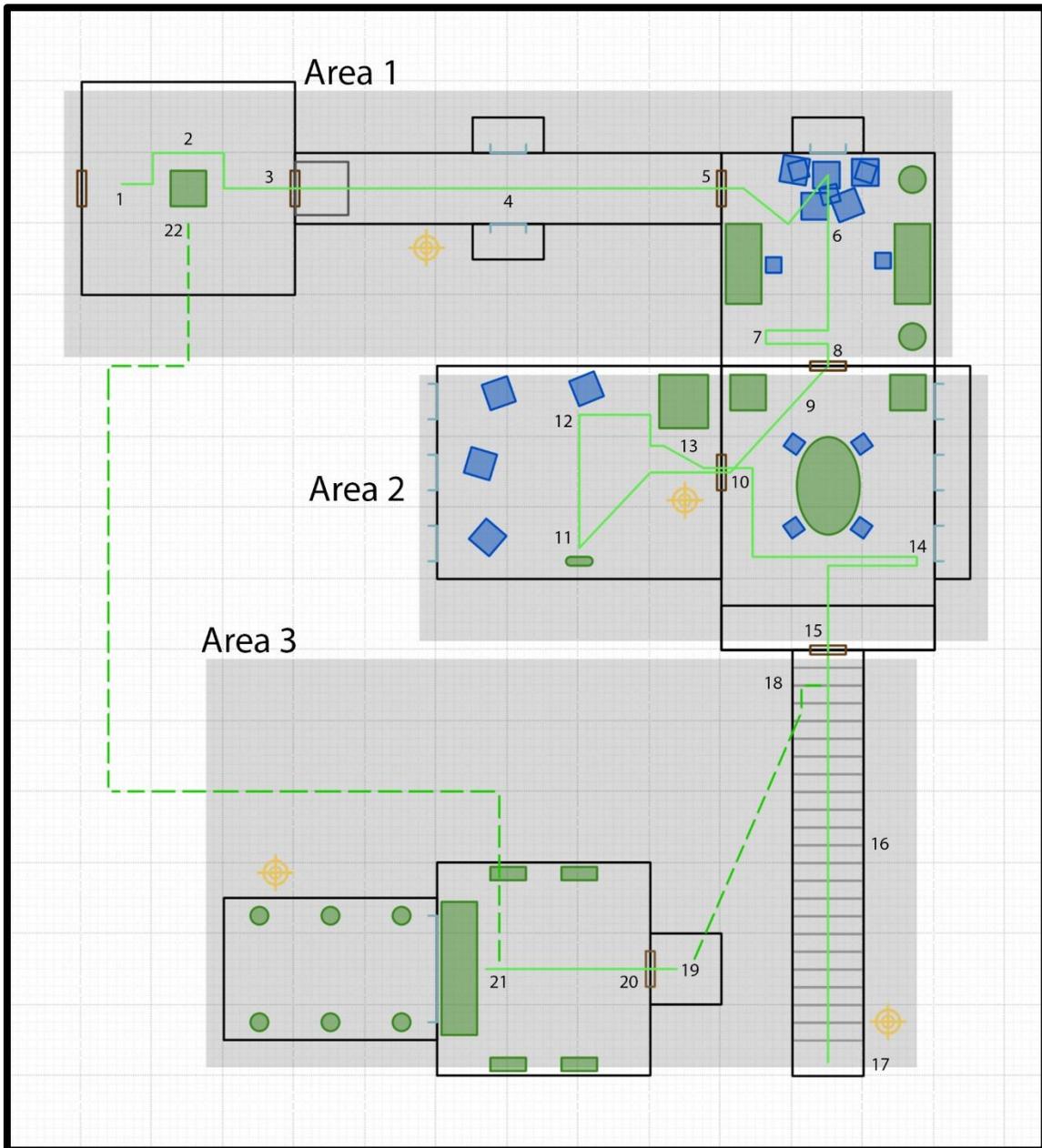


Figure 4: Area Breakdown Map

Detailed Walkthrough

Area 1: Test Chamber / Hallway / Room 1

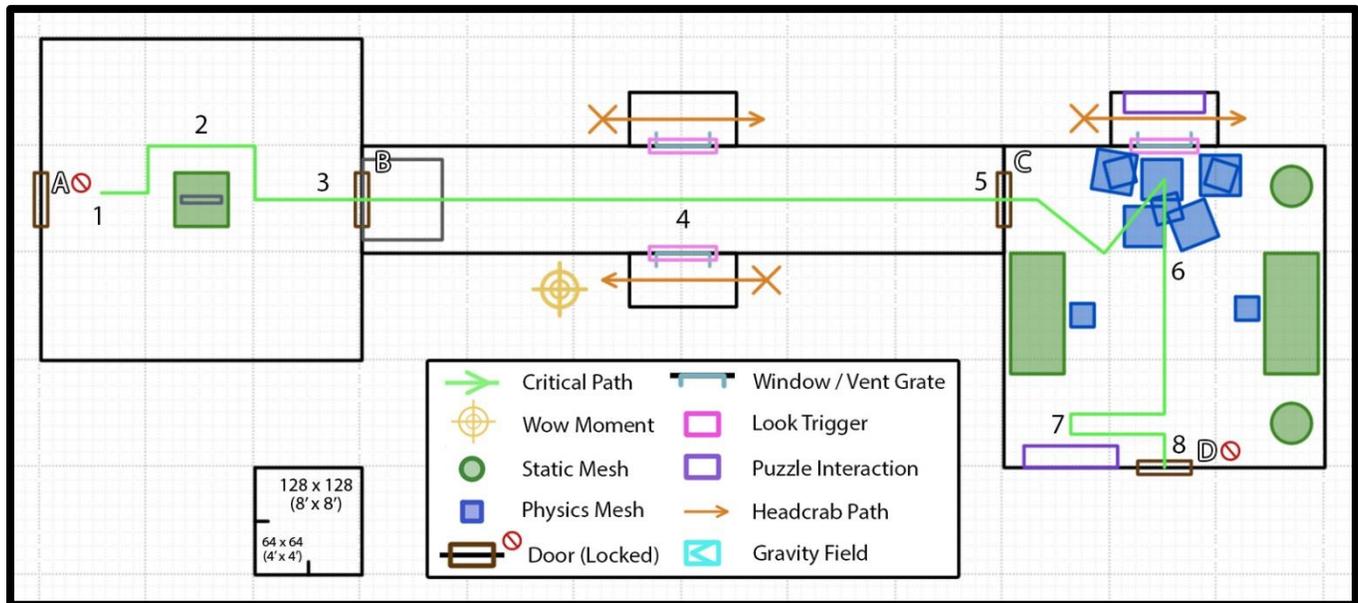


Figure 5: Area 1 Detail Map with Keys

Initial Loadout

- The player starts with the standard *Half-Life 2* environmental suit, which gives them access to a flashlight and oxygen supply when swimming. Equips Crowbar at start.

Gameplay/Story

- The player starts in the testing chamber, and Agent Yellow Fisk customarily introduces the experiment over their headset. (All narration lines and triggers described in next section.)
 - It becomes clear to the player that Yellow Fisk is not talking to them directly, but rather recording logs of the experiment they are participating in, and there is no means for them to communicate with Yellow Fisk directly.
 - The player is free to explore the room. Opening Door B before possessing The Crowbar leads to an empty closet.
- The player gets The Crowbar from the rising podium.
- On opening Door B while holding The Crowbar, the closet inside is no longer present and instead Door B leads down a dark hallway. The player enters the corridor into The Crow House.
 - Door B closes and locks behind the player after entering.
- (Wow Moment)** The player walks down the corridor into the house, lighting gets progressively dimmer as they progress, fog starts to appear, and a dreadful atmosphere is established.
 - Looking through vent grates triggers headcrabs to scuttle past.
 - To see all the details at the end of the hallway, the player must activate their flashlight.
- The player enters the first room through Door C.
- The player explores the room and discovers from Agent Yellow Fisk's narration that they must find a code to input into symbols on a wall. Moving objects away from the vent to the north of the room reveals such a code inside a vent grate.

- Yellow Fisk warns that the player should be careful not to break anything. Breaking objects in the house causes paranormal events to occur (levitating objects, fires starting, strange gases emitted).
 - Thus, the player carefully moves boxes and objects out of the way of a vent. Through the vent grate can be seen the code to input.
 - The symbols of the code show mirrored backwards from those seen on the wall, prompting the player to input it in the reverse direction of what they might assume.
7. The player inputs the code seen within the grate.
 - Inputting the code wrong does nothing but cause a strange rumbling sound.
 - Inputting the code right (backwards from the order seen in the grate) unlocks Door D.
 8. The door unlocks, and the player proceeds into the next room.

Narration Script for Area 1

- 1 - (On level start) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** This is Agent Yellow Fisk, overseeing Experiment two-six-seven-four-dash-four. We have Subject D3671, equipped with a standard Foundation environmental suit—headset, oxygen supply, emergency rations, wound healing, flashlight. In a few moments, SCP-2674-A will arise on a podium from the floor.
- 1 / 2 – (On player entering triggers throughout the room several times) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject is pacing the room and appears agitated.
- 2 – (On Crowbar platform raise) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Platform has raised.
- 2 – (On Crowbar pickup) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject has picked up SCP-2674-A, The Crowbar, appears at ease with the object.
- 2 – (On taking too long to open door) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject appears hesitant to open prop door while possessing Crowbar, as per debriefing instructions.
- 3 – (On Door B open) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject has revealed entry passage to SCP-2674-B, The Crow House.
- 4 – (On viewing grates) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Instances of SCP-2674-C seen moving in air vents.
- 5 – (On Door C open) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Décor of first room resembles home office, abnormal in presentation. Subject advised not to break any objects in the house.
- 6 – (On first viewing wall symbols before vent code) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Unrecognizable script on the walls, matches no known dialect. Subject should be able to find a code of these symbols.
- 6 – (On viewing wall symbols after vent code) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Using crowbar to input code should unlock door.
- 6 – (On picking up objects) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Again, Subject advised not to break anything in the house.
- 7 – (On first viewing vent code after seeing wall symbols) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject has located the code, symbols of code appear mirrored in presentation to those seen on the wall.
- 7 – (On first viewing vent code before seeing wall symbols) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject has found what appears to be some form of code, unrecognizable script, matches no known dialect.
- 8 – (On inputting correct code) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject has successfully input the code.

Visual References

Theme

- Foundation Testing Chamber
- Paranormal House – Hallway, Home Office

Characters and Items Introduced in this Area



Figure 7: Screenshot of SCP-2674-C (Headcrab)



Figure 6: Screenshot of SCP-2674-A (The Crowbar)

Environment References

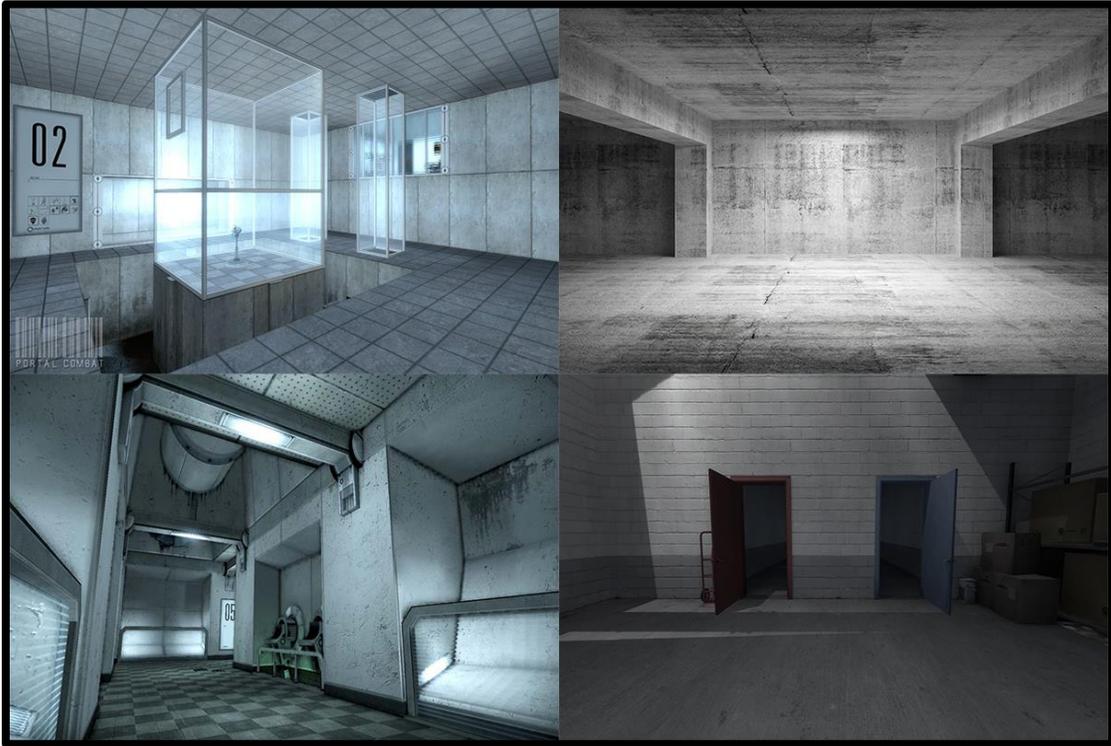


Figure 8: Foundation Testing Chamber, Reference Images



Figure 9: The Crow House, Hallway Reference Images



Figure 10: The Crow House, Home Office Reference Images

Area 2: Room 2 / Room 3

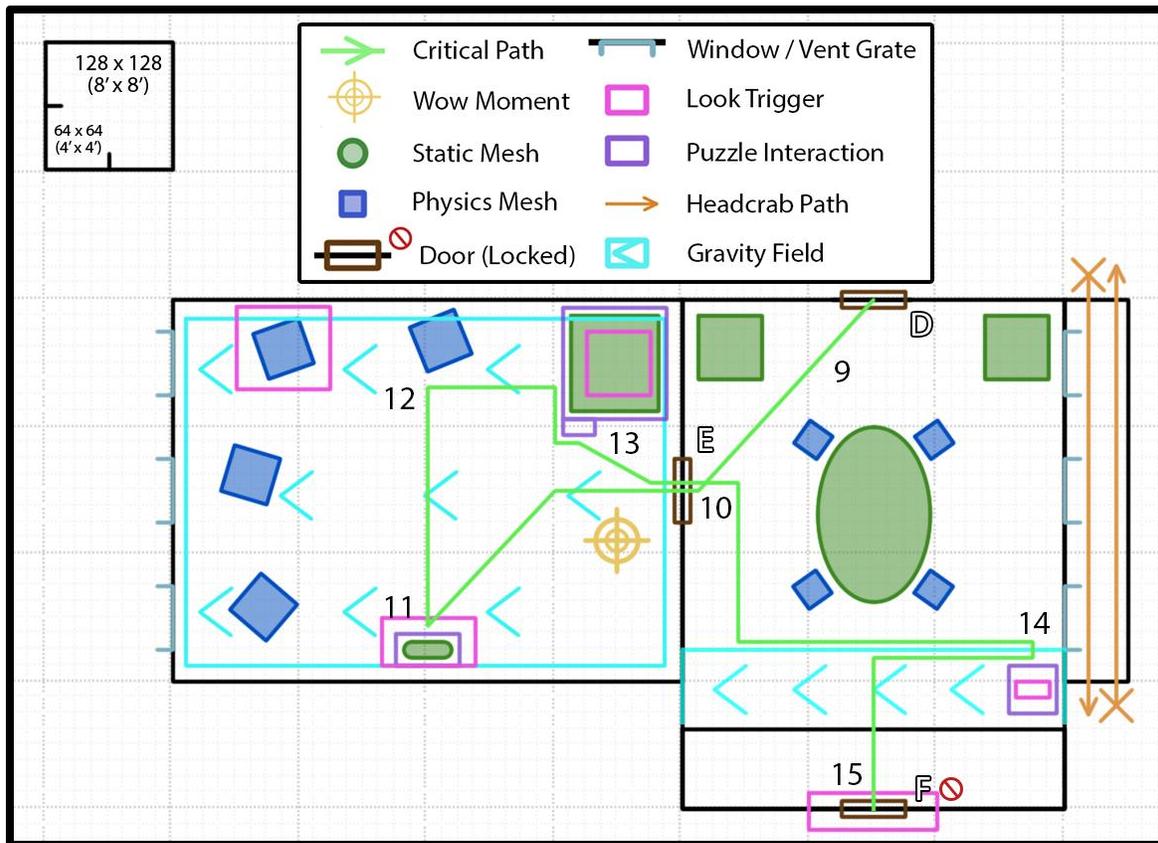


Figure 11: Area 2 Detail Map with Keys

Gameplay/Story

9. The player enters the second room and investigates their options.
 - Across the room is an unreachable ledge, and in front of that is a gravity field pushing toward the wall.
 - The player can see Door F covered in a layer of glass as well as a series of metal bars.
 - On the ceiling is a button.
 - To the east are a set of grates looking into the vents.
10. The player moves into the third room through the unlocked Door E.
 - The door is noticeably smaller than other doors.
 - On opening the door, the player sees a wall of water, and that the room is flooded, though for some reason the water is not pouring out (**Wow Moment**).
11. The player swims through the third room. There is a wheel that when turned, turns the force of the gravity field in both rooms.
 - This room also possesses a gravity field, revealed by the heavy cement blocks moving when the player turns the wheel. The water allows the player to move freely.
 - If the player goes back and presses the button on the ceiling using physics objects from earlier in the level and an upside-down gravity field, they can find nothing heavy enough.
 - Standing on the ceiling button with an upside-down gravity field lifts the metal bars on Door F, but it closes again if the player steps off it.

12. The player can move one of the heavy cement blocks, but it is too large to fit through Door E.
 - To the west of the room are windows looking out on a barren, unflooded street.
13. A strange device rests on the ceiling, placing one of the blocks in it and hitting a button causes the block to disappear, reappearing on the other side of the wall.
14. The player can pick up the cement block and drop it into the upside-down gravity field, which effectively holds the button down, opening the bars to Door F.
15. Using the upside-down gravity field, the player reaches the ledge to Door F. They must break the glass in front of the door to get through using the crowbar.
 - Breaking the glass causes all lights to go dark for a moment. When they come back on, room behind the player is flooded with water up to the ledge, and it appears as if the gravity field holding the water in the other room has broken allowing this to happen.

Narration Script for Area 2

- 9 – (On entering second room) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Second room resembles a dining room, deviation from previous experiments.
- 9 – (On entering gravity field) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Localized gravity field present.
- 9 – (On looking at button) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Button on ceiling, should open next door.
- 10 – (On opening door) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Next room appears flooded, some force is keeping water contained within room.
- 11 – (On entering room) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Resembles bedroom. Cross-reference with Subject history reveals trauma, family lost to tidal flooding. SCP-2674 communicating?
- 11 – (On turning wheel) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject turning object that resembles ship's wheel, unknown function.
- 11 – (Following gravity field shift) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Local gravity appears shifted after wheel turn. Complex physics manipulation observed.
- 11 – (On light objects entering button trigger) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** The button must be kept down by a heavy object.
- 12 – (On picking up cement boxes after having attempted button push) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** These should be heavy enough to hold the button down.
- 12 – (On attempting to push cement box through door) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject must find another way to move these to the other room.
- 13 – (On viewing device) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Device on ceiling, striking resemblance to SCP-1672, teleportation array. Presence confounding.
- 13 – (On teleporting first cement box) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Appears to teleport objects. SCP-2674 potentially possesses awareness of Foundation resources.
- 15 – (On standing near glass) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Glass must be broken to proceed...Subject is cleared to break glass, despite concerns.
- 15 – (During darkness after broken glass) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** *static* broken *static* ... hello?
- 15 – (On lights back on) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** Subject clear to proceed to next room.

Visual References

Theme

- Paranormal House – Dining Room, Flooded Bedroom

Environment References



Figure 12: The Crow House, Dining Room Reference Images



Figure 13: The Crow House, Flooded Bedroom Reference Images

Area 3: Stairway / Testing Lab Chamber

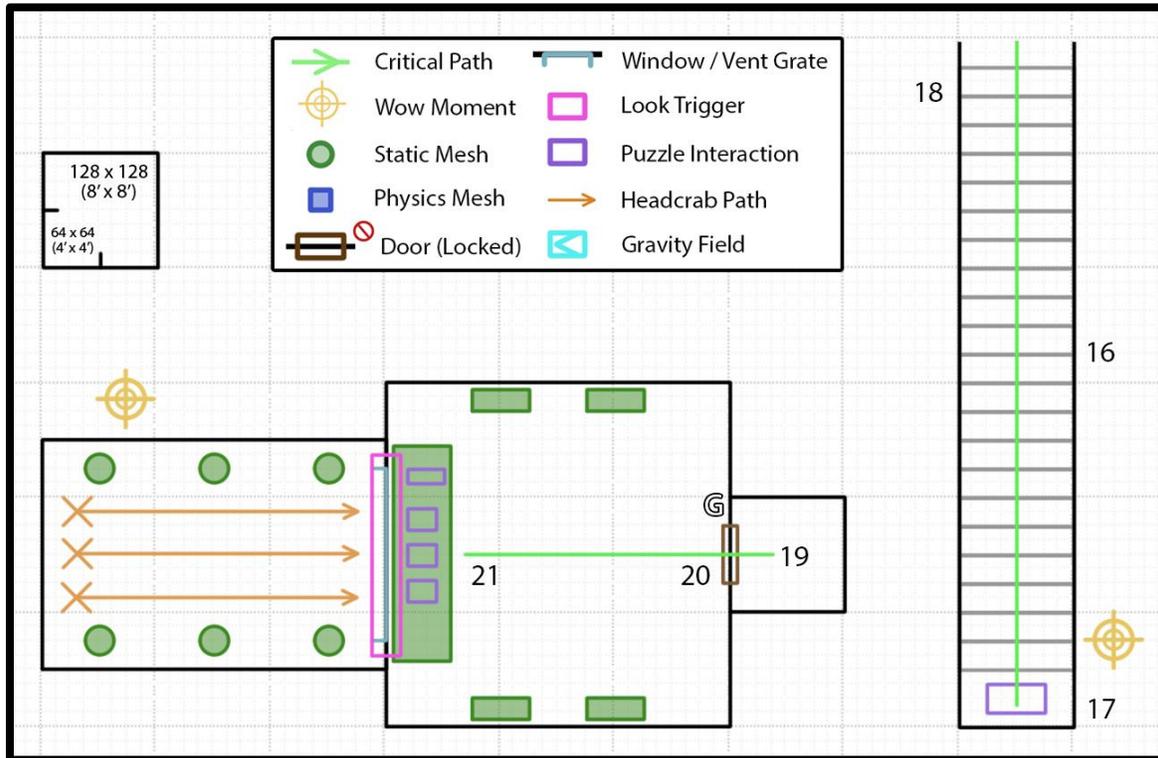


Figure 14: Area 3 Detail Map with Keys

Gameplay/Story

16. The player climbs a long set of dark stairs, and their flashlight dies halfway up. A dim light in the distance guides them to the top.
 - As the player climbs the stairs, their radio link to Agent Yellow Fisk starts to descend into static. They can only hear intermittent words and messages.
17. At the top, the player hits a button, turning the stairs into a slide. They slide down into the darkness, unable to stand or hold onto anything (**Wow Moment**).
18. At the bottom of the slide, the player is teleported to a small room.
19. Their flashlight turns back on, giving them sight on Door G.
 - By the time the player reaches this room, their radio connection to Yellow Fisk is dead.
20. Entering the last room, the player finds it resembling the first testing chamber that they started in, with fairly more decoration, like a more robust room of The Foundation facility.
 - Door G locks behind the player.
21. At the end of the chamber is a series of switches and levers. Above this is a window looking in on a more barren testing chamber.
 - On first looking through the window, lights turn on. At the end of the second chamber are three headcrabs that begin pacing up and down the chamber.
 - Flipping the switches kills each of the headcrabs in a different way. The first sets one on fire, the second electrocutes one, and a turret shoots the third.
 - The final lever is large and red, locked until the player pulls the others. Pulling this causes the glass to shatter and a horde of headcrabs to fly out at the player (**Wow Moment**).

22. The player wakes up in the original testing chamber. Agent Yellow Fisk concludes the experiment and asks the player to return the crowbar.
- If they press a keyboard button, they lose the crowbar from their inventory and the guard knocks them out, ending the level.
 - If they attack the guard with the crowbar, the guard turns into a zombie, the walls become covered in blood, and several doors appear from which scatter hordes of headcrabs.

Narration Script for Area 3

- 16 – (On entering the staircase) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** **static* darkness *static* ascending...*
- 16 – (Halfway up the stairs) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** **static* ascending *static* testing SCP-2674 for *static* experimental *static**
- 17 – (On pushing the button) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** **static* malicious intentions.*
- 22 – (On waking up in testing chamber) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** **static* concludes Experiment two-six-seven-four-dash-four. Subject will now return The Crowbar.*
- 22 – (On not returning Crowbar within fixed time) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** *Subject refuses to return the SCP artifact. Non-lethal force authorized.*
- 22 – (On returning Crowbar) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** *Artifact returned, Subject will now be sedated.*
- 22 – (On attacking the guard) **Agent Yellow Fisk:** **static* alert level *static* Subject behaving erratically, lethal force authorized *static* Oh, oh God *static* What have they done?! *static**

Visual References

Theme

- Paranormal House – Strange Staircase, Foundation Testing Lab Chambers

Characters Introduced in this Area



Figure 15: Screenshot of Unnamed Guard (Metro Police)

Environment References

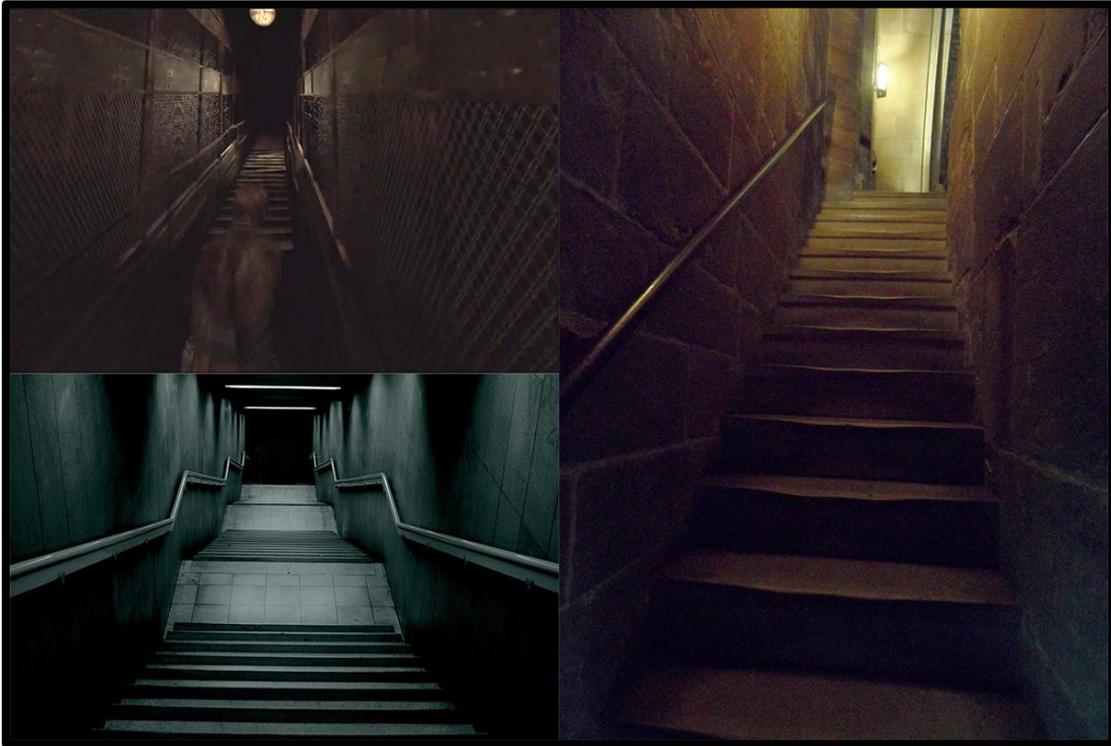


Figure 16: The Crow House, Dark Staircase Reference Images

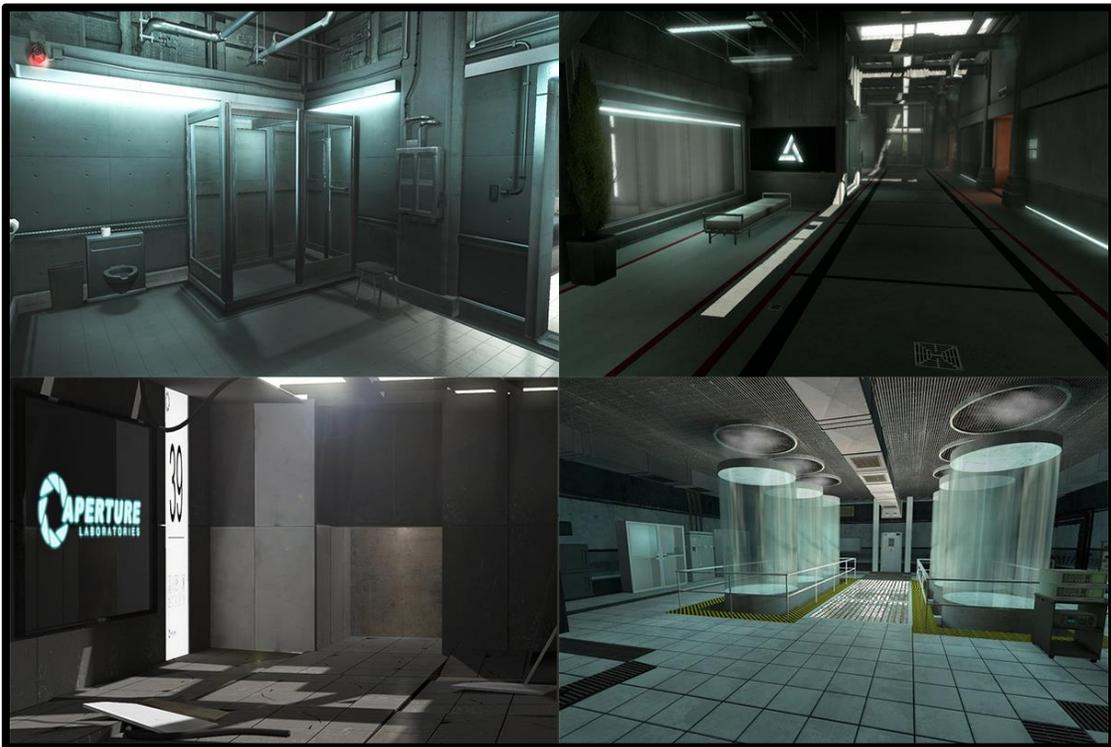


Figure 17: The Crow House, Testing Lab Chamber Reference Images

Critical Asset List

Asset Name	Type	Use	Exists?	Location/Pic
Crowbar	Dynamic	Main object used by player	Yes	See Figure 6
SCP-2674-C (Headcrabs)	Actor	Background and enemy actors throughout the level	Yes	See Figure 7
Unnamed Guard (Metro Police)	Actor	Guard at the end of the level	Yes	See Figure 15
BSP Architecture and Decoration	Meshes/BSP	Decoration of level, creation of all non-existing geometry assets	No	
BSP Physics Objects	Physics	Physics objects made of BSP due to lack of existing meshes	No	
BSP Dynamic Objects	Dynamic	Buttons, levers, switches, doors, windows, etc.	No	
Custom Decals	Material	Needed for communicating first puzzle of the level	No	
Voice Recordings	Audio	Narration for entirety of level	No	
Sound Cuing System	Scripting	System used to cue narration audio in sequence if other lines are triggered when one is playing	No	

Appendix

1. Why is this fun?

“The Crow House” serves to establish a tone similar to that found in *Half-Life 2*—stark, cynical, intense, and off-putting. The experience of the level engages the player mentally with basic puzzles, filling out the experience with the background narration of Agent Yellow Fisk, who functions to add more powerfully to the tone of the level. The player finds most of the fun in the atmosphere created and watching the strange story unfold.

2. What makes it memorable?

While the level draws inspiration from an existing collaborative fictional work, it sets itself apart by bringing the fiction of The Foundation universe to life in an interactive medium. The SCP Foundation stories stand out as memorable due to their strangeness and intensity, and “The Crow House” takes the concept further by putting the player in a three-dimension view of this universe and its strangeness. There are no jump-scares, but the player should remember the tone and atmosphere of a world where what is frightening is more nuanced and insidious.

3. How does it communicate what to do?

The use of the narrator Agent Yellow Fisk is the second-line guiding force that helps the player to contextualize the majority of the level. However, everything that the player must do in the level to successfully progress they can determine by basic experimentation with the world. The puzzles are not overtly complex, relying on basic cause-and-effect interactions and a linear structure. Even if the player muted their audio, progress is feasible through observation and action.

4. How can a player break it?

The only major system the player should be able to break is the audio narration system. If the player moves through the world too quickly for audio cues to finish, then the delivery of narration could become problematic. To mitigate this risk, the level uses a “cuing” system to prioritize audio clips, play them in order, and cue out lower-priority clips if necessary. The content of the lines is mostly innocuous, meaning some could easily be skipped, cut off with static (contextually relevant in the level), or delayed until the previous one finishes.

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