

Eye.exe

I have always loved horror games. I like playing them with all my lights turned off, trying to immerse myself in the story. I often find myself searching the internet for free crappy horror games I can play. Occasionally you can find a well-made game that someone has published for free. But mostly they are pretty bad. You can normally get a good scare out of them anyway, and I enjoy playing even the worst ones.

Eye.exe was one of these games. I found it on a small website I occasionally checked and decided to download it. The description stated that it had been a pet project and they didn't feel it was good enough to go on any of the more well-known sites like Steam. It said it was a short game about a young girl who was exploring her grandmother's mansion in search of a lost glass eye.

I started up the game. The grainy pixel art game title filled my screen as slowed-down music groaned from my computer's speakers. I chuckled lightly to myself as I turned off the lights and settled into my chair.

I played the game for the next hour, occasionally getting a jump scare or an eerie trill of music. But for the most part, the game seemed to be more puzzle than horror. You had to walk your way through the mansion solving small puzzles to access rooms and open draws. Eventually, I found the elusive glass eye and returned it to Grandma.

"Ending 1 of 4."

Now that was intriguing. More endings meant there were choices in the game, choices I was not aware I had made. I replayed the game three more times before I resigned to go to bed. I had not found a single other ending.

The next week was very busy for me. With work and friends, I found I had no time to re-visit eye.exe and solve the mystery of the three other endings. However, I was still enraptured by it. I spent a lot of my time thinking about where I could make a different choice, what each ending could be and secrets I could have missed.

Eventually, I found myself with enough time to play again. With all the contemplation I had done, I felt like I had a game plan, and I was not going to give up before I found at least one other ending. So, I played. I played that game for hours making small changes each play through. Sometimes I would make sure to complete puzzles first try, sometimes I would make sure to take longer to complete puzzles, I tried interacting with every object and one time I specifically avoided anything that would cause a jump scare. Nothing changed that ending screen. "Ending 1 of 4." It felt like it was haunting me.

It was about three in the morning, and I was about to give up when something new happened. I had just solved the puzzle allowing you to enter

the dining room when I got a new cutscene. In this cutscene, I watched as the young girl I had been playing as faced the camera, brought a knife to her face, and cut out her left eye. Even in the pixel style of the game, it was disturbing to watch. And the sounds that accompanied it heightened the disgust I felt.

Then the game continued with a newly one-eyed heroine. I kept playing, although the idea of just shutting down my computer, deleting the game and going to bed was a very tempting one. The sound of her eye being gouged out kept replaying in my mind as I solved the remaining puzzles and found that glass eye. However, once it had been found, I got a new option. "Replace eye".

I was excited, finally something new. I eagerly clicked on the option and watched my character pull out the glass eye and place it into her freshly empty socket with a small squelch.

"Ending 2 of 4."

I had finally done it. I had found a new ending. The excitement of it pushed the exhaustion that clawed at my mind away and I re-started the game.

This time it was different. The colours were brighter and one of the main character's eyes had changed colour. The game played the same but some of the puzzles now had hints to different answers than before. I followed the hints and played the game as normal. Nothing strange happened. And before long I had reached the attic where the glass eye was found. But as I clicked to search the draws all that was found was a small silver key. I had played this game well over ten times by this point and couldn't think of anywhere the key would go.

I searched through the house clicking on anything that looked like it could be remotely connected to this key and found nothing. That was until I ended up in the very first room of the game, the children's bedroom. There in the corner was a small jewellery box that I had never noticed before. As I clicked on the box the option to "use key" was displayed and I readily agreed.

A new cutscene was played. The jewellery box slowly opened as slow melodic music played. A ballerina pirouetted in the centre of the box, its face charred and burnt. And finally, as the box lid was fully opened, I saw a face in the mirror. It was my own. I saw the look of shock on my face mirrored back at me as a rushing sense of fear enveloped me. I exited the game as quickly as I could but not before seeing "Ending 3 of 4".

It was difficult to sleep that night, the fear on my face was etched into my mind. What scared me the most was how clear the image had been. I had been playing in the pitch dark and yet the image in that mirror looked as if there had been professional lighting with how clear it had been.

Eventually, I managed to sleep. It was fitful and I still felt exhausted but the sunlight that entered my room comforted me slightly. I got up and busied myself with some menial household chores in an attempt to distract

myself from that game. But by mid-day, everything had been finished and I found myself back at my desk.

I saw the shortcut for the game on my homepage. The sun shone through my window glancing off the screen. There was one more ending left.

I caved. The curiosity overtook me, and I opened the game. But this time I was playing with my lights on.

The game was back to normal now. The game visuals were back to their original muted colour, the game's heroine's eyes both the same. It felt comforting and well-known. The game continued like this. No new hints, no strange puzzle solutions and no new cutscenes. By the time I had reached the attic, I felt both relieved and annoyed. Nothing strange had happened but I was back at square one with the first ending. The annoyance was quickly replaced by confusion. When I went to search through the final draw two items were found. A glass eye and a key card. I had never seen a key card or even a place where a key card might be used. The theming of this game set it in an old-fashioned mansion, not a place where you would expect to find the level of technology required for a key card.

I turned to leave the attic and search the house just like with the small key but as I reached where the trap door that led out of the attic was located, I found that it had been replaced. What looked to be a heavy metal door was in its place. This was the final ending. I clicked on the door and used the key card.

My screen went black. Slowly boxes with heavily blurred images appeared on my screen. Eventually, the images became clearer and clearer.

I was looking at my room. What was displayed seemed to be CCTV footage of my room. I could see myself leaning toward my computer, I could see half made bed and the plate that contained my lunch that had been left at one side of my desk. I looked around my room and saw it mirrored back to me on my computer screen.

Panic bubbled up inside me and I started to frantically search for the cameras. I started to tear apart my room looking at every spot on the ceiling, every crack in the wall, at anything, anything at all that could contain a camera. I kept looking back at my screen hoping I could use it to locate them, but it was no use. After hours of looking, I had found nothing, and the staring of those invisible eyes had not changed.

I sat down on the floor defeated when another image showed up. The camera would have been a foot away from my left shoulder floating in mid-air. But it wasn't. That was what the video was of but there was most definitely not a camera there. I started to flail around at that spot my addled brain thinking that maybe it was just invisible, and I could still knock it out of the air. Unsurprisingly, it didn't work. But I could feel it there. I could feel the gaze of something.

I've tried to forget about it. I deleted the game, but it just came back. And that feeling of being watched is constant. But I know what ending four is now. And I know I will never live to see that final screen.