

Forum:[Hack Forums](#)

Thread: [What Truly Makes a Horror Game Scary? My Thoughts in Detail.](#)

Effexion - January 4, 2017, 5:57 am

With so many games being released and at such a fast rate we find ourselves with an abundance of horror titles adorning the shelves of our game stores worldwide. It would be a great gaming world where one could say all these titles were the cause of a change of trousers, a few sleepless nights or petrification, but sadly this is not a gaming world in which we dwell. So many horror titles promise us the scare of a lifetime yet fail to induce even the slightest creeping of the flesh or cause us to nervously stalk around the next corner in sheer dread of what may lay ahead of us. So, what exactly is it that makes a game scary? What is it that inspires the fear we crave in to our very hearts? Let's break it down and take a look.

Graphics and Audio, Maybe?

Granted, a finely detailed world would go a long way to create a creepy atmosphere in a game, just as a HD ghoul, monster or ghost would be a lot scarier than their 8-bit counterparts. That being said, we only need to take examples like the early Silent Hill games and the likes of Crimson Butterfly: Project Zero (which to this day are still available to purchase on sites like G2A and G2Play) and compare them with later-generation Silent Hills and Resident Evil offerings to realize that graphics are far from the key to a truly scary game.

Earlier games of the genre were the very definition of fear and they mastered this without fancy graphics or high frame-rates. So, that being said, while graphics can go a long way to make a game a real over-the-shoulder-peeper, they aren't exactly the be all and end all.

The same can be said for audio. Sound effects have come a long way since the days of yore. With creatures in the older games sounding like their noises are being played in to a microphone from a Dictaphone and musical scores akin to retro Nokia ringtones, classic games still managed to deliver scares-a-plenty over the much more sophisticated audio of the games of today.

Jump Scares?

Whilst jump scares are great for a quick burst of the coveted "ARRRGHHHH-Factor" (patent pending) it feels that game developers have come to rely on them in a bid to scare the pants off us. The consequence to this is games full to the brim of monsters jumping out from every available corner, leading the player to become immune to their ways as they come to expect the inevitable. I feel the real approach to jump scares was perfectly executed in the later-day title, Outlast, where early in the game you are forced to walk past a semi-comatose lunatic in a wheelchair. You can feel the anticipation building up inside you as you approach, your mind is geared up for a scare and as you nervously walk past....absolutely nothing happens. The game cleverly guides you past this entity a number of times until you are lulled in to a false sense of security. And then it happens, and when it does, it works an absolute dream.

Conclusion

In conclusion it can be said that graphics, audio or jump scares don't define a true horror game. In fact, it's a perfect blend of everything that can send players hiding behind their couches. Graphics aren't a must, but can go a long way in creating a more realistic world and therefore adding to

atmosphere and immersion. The same is said for jump scares where overuse can dilute the effect causing the player to become quickly bored or suspecting. What a game truly needs is the perfect balance and a skilled team able to build up suspense that succeeds in hanging over the player from beginning to end. Sure, a scare a minute can be pretty effective for about 5 minutes, but that constant sense of foreboding is what truly creates a masterpiece.

Hello.v4.0 - January 4, 2017, 6:38 am

Graphics definitely do matter in horror games, but it's not the end-all be-all of horror. They should be more to set the mood than anything; a world that's photo realistic has the potential be a lot more immersive than a world that looks like something made at the dawn of 3D graphics. However; there is some merit to having bad graphics in horror games because it causes your imagination to fill in a lot of the blanks instead of just saying "here it is, that's what it looks like." While in older games what you'd see in the concept art would completely differ from what you see in the actual game itself, so you can see something entirely different from what was intended.

To me, audio design is probably the most important part of what makes a good horror game. Again going back to Silent Hill, you hear basically nothing the entire game but once that radio static starts up, you're shitting your pants. Another good game to point to would be Fatal Frame 2/Project Zero, there's a very quiet ambient soundtrack to the game that causes a lot of suspense. You basically only hear your own footsteps for most of the game. Then, the moment you hear the heartbeat sounds from a ghost walking by or you go into your camera mode to see that there's a ghost staring at you through the window, it definitely makes you afraid to go further. Playing these games with headphones turn them from somewhat scary games to absolutely terrifying games.

Jump scares can be very effective, but only when the mood has been set. It's cheap, yeah, but it works extremely well in some cases. As you mentioned, Outlast stands out as one of those games where the jump scares just work. While other games, like Doom 3, just fall flat on their face trying to do jump scares.

Just putting it out there, but I think Fatal Frame 2 is the most perfect horror game we'll ever get.

Effexion - January 4, 2017, 12:23 pm

(Jan 4, 2017 07:38 AM)Hello.v4.0 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Graphics definitely do matter in horror games, but it's not the end-all be-all of horror. They should be more to set the mood than anything; a world that's photo realistic has the potential be a lot more immersive than a world that looks like something made at the dawn of 3D graphics. However; there is some merit to having bad graphics in horror games because it causes your imagination to fill in a lot of the blanks instead of just saying "here it is, that's what it looks like." While in older games what you'd see in the concept art would completely differ from what you see in the actual game itself, so you can see something entirely different from what was intended.

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do jump scares.

Just putting it out there, but I think Fatal Frame 2 is the most perfect horror game we'll ever get. Thanks for a great answer and I wholeheartedly agree with your thoughts on Project Zero. An absolutely sterling game with scares galore. I did refer to it in the OP.

2077 - January 4, 2017, 2:46 pm

The atmosphere of a game makes a game scary, nothing much really

Twenty - January 4, 2017, 3:14 pm

[Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weTznIEkzfk>]

There are a few videos in this series. They're pretty interesting.

Effexion - January 5, 2017, 2:16 am

(Jan 4, 2017 03:46 PM)2077 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) The atmosphere of a game makes a game scary, nothing much really

There's plenty of elements that make that atmosphere what it is.

(Jan 4, 2017 04:14 PM)Twenty Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) [Video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=weTznIEkzfk>]

There are a few videos in this series. They're pretty interesting.
Definitely interesting. Thanks for the share.

entz61 - January 5, 2017, 11:31 pm

Not a popular opinion, but soundtrack does it for me.

test - January 5, 2017, 11:36 pm

There's a difference in Horror and 'Scary' in my opinion.

I personally associate Horror with Creepy. This generally derives more-so from the story telling and atmosphere. A perfect example of this would be SOMA, the latest game from the Amnesia developers. While it does not excel in the extreme scares that make you jump from our seat, it does an excellent job of telling a story and the entire game just has a creepy undertone to it.

On the other hand you have 'Scary'. These are your jump scares and being chased by a weird monster that makes your blood rush.

That's just how I personally see it.

Effexion - January 8, 2017, 8:29 am

(Jan 6, 2017 12:31 AM)entz61 Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) Not a popular opinion, but soundtrack does it for me. Definitely a key factor, but not what actually makes a game, IMO.

(Jan 6, 2017 12:36 AM)testaccountplsignore Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) There's a difference in Horror and 'Scary' in my opinion.

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Yes, we have always preferred supernatural horrors to monster horrors. They are a whole new kettle of fish and so much better than the 43593948653 slasher movies and games out there.

Annoited - *January 8, 2017, 9:18 am*

It's definitely the audio in my opinion, it just has to give you the goosebumps!

Effexion - *February 6, 2017, 8:16 am*

(Jan 8, 2017 10:18 AM)Annoited Wrote: [\[CITE\]](#) It's definitely the audio in my opinion, it just has to give you the goosebumps!

Yes, and then it's essential to have a good headset for added 'crap-you-pants' factor.

Ace of Knaves - *February 6, 2017, 4:49 pm*

If you haven't already seen it I strongly suggest you watch the episode of Black Mirror called "Playtest". I'd love to know what you think

mushyplastic - *February 12, 2017, 9:54 pm*

(01-05-2017 11:31 PM)entz61 Wrote: ?