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FEARZINE

ISSUE #1

YOUR SOURCE
FOR
INDIE HORROR
GAMES

10 DEAD DOVES

ALIEN ANT FARM!



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Caffeine-fueled Canadian connoisseur of all things gaming. Designer, developer, article writer, and eternal critic of games that rely on jump scares.

FOREWORD

WELCOME TO FEARZINE.

We are a group of games journalists, developers and enthusiasts who have grown tired of seeing great indie horror projects go under the radar or release to little fanfare. We are here to try to combat that.

Expect to read about a mix of great low-poly/PSX-style horrors, modern indies, horror games from the past you either played or missed out on, upcoming indie horror, and more. We'll also be diving into some more in-depth topics towards the end of each issue, and chatting with developers and studios behind the games we're covering as well.

Hopefully there is something here for everybody, but if not - let us know - we are eager to make this magazine as good as it can be for as many people as we can.

Reader beware, you're in for a scare.



SAM MARSHALL
FEARZINE

FEARZINE HQ

DEV Q+A

We spoke with James, CEO of Malformation Games about some of the cool quirks of their project, get the scoop below!

WHY WAS SOUTH KOREA CHOSEN FOR THE SETTING? IS IT ONE ACTRESS WHO PLAYS SEO-YEON AND IF IT IS, SHE'S AMAZING.

I feel like we see a lot of the same sorts of locations within horror, particularly within the US, and I wanted to create something that deliberately moved far away from that while still being grounded. South Korea is a beautiful country with very strong ties to the horror genre in its media, whether it be the supernatural thrillers to modern day zombie adrenaline fests. It also has a distinctly unique alphabet, architecture and culture, making it the perfect setting for a horror that feels familiar yet different.

The actress, Christine, is a bilingual actress so she provides both the Korean and English voices. I felt it was important to weave in her own language naturally when speaking to herself or to her HQ, but we deliberately paired her up with an English speaking partner to ensure that those who don't speak Korean could feel her performance too.

WHAT WERE SOME OF THE INSPIRATIONS FOR THE CREATURE DESIGNS?

We wanted the game to have a lot of freedom with what we could do with our monsters and make animal mergings and parasitism presented in a somewhat unconventional manner. So rather than just being "a monster man" we did some "What ifs" - The tentacle faced monster can be found near a wet market, so what if the DNA of his corpse got fused with the catch of the day? In the hospital, we don't have many animal fusions so instead what if 2 doctors got fused together?

The idea is "How might a fungus with no idea of what it's doing combine DNA in a somewhat 'realistic' manner?" - This gives us a lot of freedom within some somewhat rigid constraints - Does the fusion make sense, is it cool, can it be a viable threat to the player? They should tell a little story about the world before the meteor hit, and after too. A pack of stray dogs died, and got all fused together into one giant beast. A body eaten by maggots fused them and became a giant maggot with a human face. A tumorous patient passed away and the plant rapidly accelerated the growth of his tumors, turning him more tumor than man. And so forth.



G R O U N D Z E R O

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MALFORMATION GAMES · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

When it comes to horror games and, more specifically, survival horror, there are vital elements that I look for and desire. Many of these were established with the classics of the 90's horror titles. In those games, there are many standard features like inventory management, tank controls, fixed camera angles on pre-rendered backgrounds, and a parade of puzzles to solve while surviving the hellish nightmare surrounding you. Please give me a gun and maybe enough supplies to survive the night so that by the end of each encounter, I genuinely feel like I survived the horror.

What you will see in Ground Zero looks like it was made using those prerequisites as a roadmap, and it feels like it, too. As of this writing, Ground Zero is still in early production, but god damn does it hit just right. I was impressed with the trailer, but even more so when I got hands-on with an early build that developer Malformation Games says is "... not representative of the final game." Suppose this indicates they've only just begun and that Ground Zero will continue to evolve. In that case, this may be one of the best retro survival horror games ever made!

Ok, that's a bold statement, so let's dial it back and establish some "ground" work. Ground Zero takes place in South Korea several weeks after a meteor fell, leaving the city in ruins. You play as elite Korean operative Seo-Yeon on her mission to look for survivors and discover why the city has gone dark since a meteor impact has left the city in ruins. You arrive by helicopter with your partner, a Canadian agent named Evan, and you decide to split up to be more effective. Immediately, you see there is a bizarre organic growth that has spread everywhere, and it appears to be consuming living creatures. Seo-Yeon then comes face to face with a pair

of dog-like creatures that appear inside out, and they attack. After putting down the pesky pair with her magnum, Seo-Yeon radios her partner to warn him of what happened.

At this point, the atmosphere has been established, and the visuals look gorgeous. Beautiful character models on what have to be some of the best-looking environments I've seen in a game like this. There is an excellent use of lighting and color in what is ultimately a dark and grizzly space. The layout and design of the South Korean streets feel alive and lived in. There is a lot of attention to detail in each fixed camera frame. You have a helpful flashlight, but it casts some gnarly shadows that will make you do double takes. As you run down the streets, you can see lights glimmering in the background from the other side of the city or maybe a smaller village area. The organic growths look chunky and visceral, leaning into the feeling that NO ONE should touch it and somebody should burn it until nothing is left but ash.

The creature designs look like a combination of monsters from Dead Space's Necromorphs and the horrid transformed humanoids of The Thing. Expect a lot of body horror, deformed mutations, and lots of broken and exposed bones. I want to see a lot of explicit cinematography of mutations that show people or other creatures going through violent metamorphosis into ever more grotesque monstrosities. You will battle said horrors using an arrangement of firearms, like Seo-Yeon's magnum and a shotgun. The weapons all feel very good, and you can even move while aiming but need to stop to shoot. You also lose the ability to aim up and down, so there is no chance for a sweet head popping from a well-aimed critical. There is a laser dot that helps you see where the shot will land and occasionally audio cues to criticals, but no specific animation as of now.



In true retro style, you find various colored serums that can be combined for added effects. Collect keys with emblems to unlock doors that match and key cards for electronically locked doors.

Some serious cleverness. The bits that stood out to me as fresh and new involved evolving the classic formula. First, and most notably, Seo-Yeon is bilingual, speaking English and Korean as needed and respectively. This was a much-needed and respected aspect of any character and culture in a game, rather than glazing over the language differences where everyone conveniently speaks English. Another piece that made my jaw drop was the scenes with a panoramic background that turned the camera as it followed the character through the set. It's like when Silent Hill had a rotating camera, but this feels different; it feels better. Some excellent, more modern puzzle mechanics involve hacking cell phones to extract information, requiring simple mini-games and math! Why do you make me Math?! Which is needed to open the storage safes for storing items.

There is another unique element where you can collect DNA data after felling a foe. After killing enemies, you scan the bodies to earn genome points of varying amounts. You can then use these points to purchase items, weapons, and weapon parts from a kiosk. It shares some similarities to the points you earned in Dino Crisis 2 and RE Revelations BP.



PREVIEWS

EARLY BIRDS



HOTEL ROOM HAUNTING

Dread Passage Studios are making a 1408-inspired game in which you need to survive for an allotted time. You can currently lose by pausing the game, screaming or shouting, and soon - an increase in heart rate. HRH is stunning and chock-full of scares, and a story mode is on the horizon too. This is a great game to throw your loved ones into.



RED'S REVENGE

Red's Revenge takes Power Wash Simulator and ups the ante by adding a twisted Red Riding Hood-inspired narrative and some sinister psychological horror elements. The more you clean, the scarier the game becomes, and we can't wait for the full release. PixelGoat Games have something special on their hands.



WOODSIDE

Paper Flower Games' Woodside is a mix of Sherlock Holmes and Fatal Frame, set in a rural British village and featuring non-linear exploration, investigation mechanics, and combat reminiscent of Ghost Vibration from the PS2. This looks like a deep, lore-heavy title that warrants a place upon your wishlist.



HE CAME FROM BEYOND

Made in GZDoom and drawn on post-it notes, He Came From Beyond should scratch that Mundaun itch a fair bit! Really looking forward to sinking our teeth into this supernatural horror!



SAMURAI UNICORN

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: ITS GOT STEALTH · WRITTEN BY: HURCAN KOSE

Do you remember the PlayStation era? Were you there for it? It was certainly a magical time period. These days when our nostalgia keeps us sane and gives us hope for people's creativity, it is important to note indie game developers' desire to imitate PSX aesthetic from way back in the day. Even though most developers rarely manage to hit the mark imitating that aesthetic, some, even rarely so, manage to create the perfect throwback. Much like this article's topic: Samurai Unicorn.

I've been following Samurai Unicorn's development ever since I started the horrorvisuals Project. I was there for every new update and been eyeing their profile time-to-time, in order to not miss a single beat. Recently I had a chance to play their gameplay demo to have a small taste of what's to come. And let me tell you, they know damn well what they're doing.

Samurai Unicorn is a third-person action-shooter that blends horror, sci-fi, and the 80's cyberpunk aesthetic in a unique way. Taken place in the megacity of Sydney3, you play as Kio, who somehow bonded with Samurai Unicorn: A parasitic, spiritual entity with mysterious powers. As Kio, a young detective in the Sydney3 Police Force (S3PF) you will be able to control these powers.

Samurai Unicorn is on the darker side of the cyberpunk spectrum. Even though it has the usual, colorful LED lights we're used to seeing in similar games and films, the Its Got Stealth team still manage to make the game look contemporary and retro at the same time. Its dark world is run by mega-corporations and factions while its citizens are drowned in poverty and crime.

Goliath Research Division is a secret organization focusing on acquiring new technology by any means necessary. After years of success, they are now researching the immense power the Dream Eaters carry. Throughout her journey in Sydney3, Kio will be tasked with hunting down these Dream Eaters that are invading the city. These are powerful, grotesque creatures with unique attributes.

Even with all this, Samurai Unicorn manages to become bigger and more ambitious than your regular video game. But what's better is, this does not even scratch the surface.

Samurai Unicorn has unique factions controlling different parts of the city. Goliath Research Division and Sydney3 Police Force are only two of these factions. There are also Faux/Pass, Hornsby Devils, Tusk Motor Club, Mechanised Workers Union, Hi-Lifers, and Doomerz. All these factions have unique characters, storylines, and aesthetics that you'll discover as Kio. Samurai Unicorn has a massive universe.

When it comes to gameplay, Samurai Unicorn plays in a third-person over-the-shoulder shooter view. Aside from the unique abilities given by Samurai Unicorn, Kio can also use a wide variety of weapons provided by S3PF.

One of the main threats Kio has to face in Sydney3, are the VRmins. Born from parasitic VR devices, these creatures were once humans. But now they are mindless husks that attack anything in close proximity.

Fighting these creatures isn't as simple as you might think. They are quick, smart, and deadly. But what's unique about Samurai Unicorn's combat, is your ability to dismember these creatures. Depending on where you shoot them, you can cut off their limbs and make them easier to fight against. Shoot off their legs to make them crawl, or get rid of their arms so they can't do as much damage. It's up to you.

In terms of horror, it's hard to say how much of it the full game is going to have. But from the amount I've seen in their promotional material, and the demo I played, they seem to understand survival horror pretty well. VRmins can be pretty terrifying to face in claustrophobic corridors where you'll have to run away in order to conserve ammo.

When all of these combined and with more to come, Samurai Unicorn easily manages to become one of my most anticipated games. I'm eagerly looking forward to its release and can't wait to explore Sydney3 myself.



KANPEKI

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: STREELIGHT GAMES · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

After learning her makeup is smudged at school, perfectionist and fashionista Hoshi Morimoto has a mental breakdown.

An intriguing premise from French developer Streetlight Studios' upcoming fixed-camera survival horror, Kanpeki. From the demo's beginning, through its writing, voiceover and animations, we immediately get an idea of who this character is - a superficial, high-achiever with disdain for many of her fellow students.

Hoshi faces off against both zombie-like and frenzied students with her trusty taser, which must be recharged after limited usage. This recharge mechanic requires precise timing to avoid jamming the taser, adding tension and an element of pressure to combat.

Visually, there is a clear retro PS1 influence but, while its art style definitely evokes nostalgia, Kanpeki has a uniqueness that makes it stand out beyond the retro aesthetic. Most striking is the psychedelic colour-swap VFX observed while engaging with one of its most interesting mechanics.

Notes and other documents can be found while exploring the high school. Many of these findings reference a 'choking game' - an unsettling practice of self-asphyxiation taken up by students seeking a 'high'. What's interesting is how this 'choking game'

shows up in gameplay. At any time, Hoshi can hold her breath to reveal hidden elements in the environment.

This ability proves vital in a boss fight later in the demo. What starts out as a difficult, somewhat frustrating, encounter, becomes an engaging combat puzzle through use of the hold-your-breath feature. It's an interesting mechanic that could make for some compelling environment puzzles and I hope to see it explored in greater depth in the games' full release.



BECROWNED

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: 13TH STREET STUDIO · WRITTEN BY: JAY KRIEGER

Becrowned from 13th Street Studio is the latest to describe itself as "surreal survival horror." Now, if there were ever a descriptor that feels as if it were made in a lab based on my horror interests, it'd be exactly that. And yet, few games attempting this specific subgenre that tries to echo Silent Hill fail to capture the level of dread-inducing atmosphere to live up to that inspiration.

This is where Becrowned differs from its crowded competitors.

A picturesque picnic with your significant other, Jane, is interrupted when you awaken to her missing and discover you have awoken in a dreamscape filled with twisted monsters. Becrowned's structure and play style do not drift far from what you'd expect from survival horror classics, tank controls, and all. You'll collect keys, uncover lock combinations, and re-install power fuses. It's standard stuff, but it gives Becrowned a straightforward but sturdy foundation that allows the game's occasional combat instances to shine. Combat that is refined and gory in just the right ways, which was odd given how difficult it can be to nail classic survival horror combat.

But the most promising aspect of Becrowned is its atmosphere. The game features a variety of creepy and well-constructed environments supported by solid camera direction, which manipulates each set piece, revealing its most unnerving angle.

Further capturing the hellish dreamscape are environments boasting dynamic lighting and a plethora of creepy set dressing from gothic architecture and bizarre dreamscape residents.

As promising as Becrowned is, the game still has a ways to go before release. A good amount of polish is needed, both technically and narratively (voice acting, text errors, etc), but this was a promising first look at a game that could very well join the lonely ranks of solid Silent Hill homages.



HOLSTIN

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SONKA · WRITTEN BY: TOM CROFTS

Holstin is set in the winter of 1992, in a small, isolated town called Jeziorne-Kolonia in easter Poland where the town has been overrun by a "Cthulhu" style protoplasmic slime which is infesting it's way into every crevice of the now twisted and horrid town. You play as Tomasz searching for his friend Bartek who is missing in this horror story.

Holstin, as previously stated, is set in late 1992 in the eerie and distant Polish town of Jeziorne-Kolonia. The main character Tomasz is searching for his friend Bartek who's last known whereabouts was in the town of Jeziorne-Kolonia before he stopped answering your calls. The foul slime is everywhere to be seen and is making not only the environment change but also its inhabitants who are slowly succumbing to isolation.

This game is a fantastic blend of both isometric and third person over the shoulder shooter with the game seamlessly moving between both when required. The isometric elements allow for problem solving in order to manoeuvre the landscape and when you are forced to fight the twisted and depraved monstrosities within the town then the third person over the shoulder shooting action is easy to handle without making the experience any less terrifying.

The art style is a joy to behold, the pixel and drawn aesthetic is very chilling as every character is struggling in the environment. The dynamic lighting as you attempt to battle the slime is fantastic and really allows a level of depth that shows how good this game is.

Holstin is looking to be a fantastic addition to the horror space and certainly adds a different flavour compared to a lot of games currently available. With fantastic voice acting and also a blended gameplay style, the town of Jeziorne-Kolonia will certainly cause many people to second guess every move they make as the slime infests them all.



ECHOES OF THE LIVING

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MOONGLINT · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Echoes of the Living is shaping up to be one of the best love letters to classic Resident Evil available. Complete with fixed camera angles, tank controls, and lots of zombies. You can play as two characters to traverse a maze of city streets and museums while solving puzzles and collecting key items. The presentation is solid with modern graphics while maintaining that old-school feel. Some fun new features include melee weapons that can be useful and satisfying, like knocking a zombie's head off with a baseball bat.

You start the game's demo in an all too familiar way. Waking near wrecked vehicles with zombies surrounding you and a mystery to solve. You will collect floppy discs to use at computers in safe rooms to save your game. The safe rooms also have a storage box to manage your limited carrying space for items you'll need for puzzles and gunpowder to make extra ammo. Collect colored plants of RGB colors with varying effects to restore health and remove infection. You start with a pistol and a knife but will find some melee weapons, a shotgun, and even bonus weapons for completing the demo.

Echoes is being developed by a two-person indie studio called MoonGlint, who have even created their own engine for survival horror games. The developers have done a masterful job of capturing the atmosphere of RE 1 and combining it with the intensity of RE2. The demo you can play now is quite long and allows you to play as both characters, Laurel and Liam.

Echoes is one of the best and closest to a spiritual successor of Resident Evil 2 out there. I look forward to what this team can do, as they truly understand what makes this era of horror special. Let's hope it doesn't turn into a Jill sandwich.



PERISHED TRUTH

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DEVOID STUDIO · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

Perished Truth is an ambitious blend of survival horror, visual novel and escape room style puzzle game developed by DeVoid Studio. While at an early stage of development, the game's itch.io demo is a compelling showcase of its potential to hit the mark down every avenue it takes.

Perished Truth follows 10 characters trapped on an abandoned island. The demo follows 'Number 3', a fully voiced character with strong morals and terrible posture. As soon as the demo begins, No. 3 wakes up in a dark and grungy, prison-like room complete with soiled furnishings and a creepy mannequin missing its head.

With no clue how he arrived here and an ominous device strapped to his wrist, No. 3 needs to find a way out. This introduction and the gameplay that follows - exploring and investigating your immediate surroundings for a means to escape the room - is evocative of the Zero Escape game series.

Things get kicked up a notch when No. 3 is contacted by a mysterious hooded figure who shares the reality of his situation. He will be injected with a deadly virus unless he unlocks the bracelet before time is up - a setup that wouldn't feel out of place in a Saw movie.

The heavy Resident Evil inspiration can be seen in the virus premise, door opening animations, fixed-cameras and even the introduction to the game's first enemy - a clear homage to the original Resident Evil. Equipped with an old revolver, No. 3 will have to defend himself against the zombie-like enemies he encounters. If he is caught by an enemy, you'll be thrown into a struggle mini-game to free him from their grasp.

A visually impressive game, effective at creating an intimidating atmosphere, Perished Truth is absolutely one to watch for survival horror enthusiasts.



HOLLOW BODY

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: HEADWARE GAMES · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Hollowbody is an upcoming survival horror game being developed by a single person. Developer Nathan Hamley, under his studio Headware Games has been working on Hollowbody - a Silent Hill inspired horror game - for a few years now. I was allowed to play an early teaser for the game so I can tell you what to look forward to. You play as Mica as she explores an abandoned city that is also home to some bizarre creatures. Corpses of residents of the town are scattered throughout and there are mysterious paranormal events. The city seems to have also been bombed from an unknown war. Hollowbody takes place in the near future

The story revolves around Mica, a shipper working for a black market group. She's taken a job that requires her to fly through the Exclusion Zone. A post war area, 20 miles wide that has been sealed off with giant walls. The perfect route to avoid detection, but mind the electrical storms. Mica suddenly loses control caused by some unknown source. She crash lands in the exclusion zone with no hope of escape. She must do everything she can to scrounge for resources, weapons, and means to escape, as she learns that she is not alone.

A unique take on the genre, Hollowbody is set in the near future, but retains the look and feel of 2000' gritty and grimy survival horror games. Mica has to rely on improvised weapons like a wooden plank with nails in it and the few bullets she can

find for a revolver. Inside the exclusion zone, time has come to a standstill from when it was abandoned. There are signs of modern technology that are ancient from Mica's perspective. You find a video phone which Mica refers to as "practically an antique" and bodies of residents that were born in the 2020s. Every citizen has an ID chip which stores personal data. Allowing Mica the ability to identify bodies when she approaches them, seeing their names, DOB, and even cause of death. I also noticed in the preview that there was an unexploded bomb sitting in a pile of rubble on the first floor of the main building. Wonder if that has anything to do with what's going on here?!

While the game is still in early development, the full release will include fully voiced characters, an original soundtrack and new game plus features. Developer Nath, is building a dynamic and terrifying world while still respecting the player's time. Implementing a save point system that maintains suspense but removes the more archaic manual save systems of old. Combat is looking promising as you will utilize melee weapons to bash monsters and a stomp to finish them on the ground. In the current build there is a revolver that feels and sounds good when you fire it. Aiming is more automatic akin to Silent Hill games where you can move and shoot, so you don't have to worry about missing too much.

Like you would expect in a retro-inspired survival horror game, puzzle solving and exploration are key. You will run into locked doors and blocked passages that require items that you find while exploring those eerie environments. Applying logic and problem solving to work out items to clear an obstacle or utilizing clues to find the code for a safe. Careful inventory management to ensure your survival as you face the terrors within the zone. Hollowbody will focus on narrative and story, so combat will be limited as you learn about this dystopian future and Mica.

Fans of Silent Hill will immediately draw comparison as the look and feel of Hollowbody emulates the fan favorite style with a new twist. The opening title screen shows Mica in her futuristic apartment ready to set out, but we soon see a very different side to this techno future. As you make your way through the exclusion zone, you find strange gray growths covering larger parts of the landscape. Moving about the world is done with more modern directional controls, so no tank controls for those that prefer. The camera also changes on the fly from dynamic to static in certain areas, much like Silent Hill. Much of the music and ambiance has a similar feeling. During combat you hear the very reminiscent chorus of banging metal and static that really unhinges your nerves and adds to the dread. If you like what you see and hear, be sure to wishlist Hollowbody to support its development.



DEV Q+A

We spoke with Nath, the sole developer of Hollowbody to get some cool information about the project! Get the scoop below!



IT'S WELL KNOWN THAT HOLLOWBODY IS INSPIRED BY SILENT HILL, BUT WHAT OTHER MEDIA AND GAMES WERE SOURCES OF INSPIRATION?

I find myself drawing inspiration from all sorts of things. It might be an interesting narrative beat in a TV series, a feeling whilst walking home after a late night or a particular song on an old CD. I find these inspirations come and go as I'm working on a project and I like to keep my design ideas fairly loose so I can incorporate these ideas where appropriate. Hollowbody's environments are mostly inspired by British cities and towns I grew up around, a lot of the architecture is directly referenced from places I've visited. To name some media that has been an influence, I think a big one was Blade Runner 2049. I love how that film explored a larger piece of the BR world without falling prey to the usual modern sci-fi formula that is heavily driven by spectacle. I also really wanted to capture some of the atmosphere seen in anime like Ergo Proxy and Ghost in the Shell, those are two I can always go back to and find inspiration from. Of course video games have also had a hand in inspiring the project although I tend to look towards them more for mechanical and design inspiration than visual or narrative. Kuon has been influential in that regard as I feel they handled the fixed/dynamic camera setup really well there.

THERE SEEMS TO BE AN UNDERLYING THEME RELATING TO WHAT HAPPENED IN THE CITY, HOW HAS THAT BEEN INCORPORATED INTO THE NARRATIVE?

There are two core narrative elements to Hollowbody that develop as you progress

through the game. There is Mica's story, that is her reasoning for being there with personal motivations for exploring the city, and then there is the city's story itself. As you explore you will discover hints to the truth behind the tragedy that led to the mass evacuation of the city through written notes, documents, environmental clues and firsthand accounts of events that took place. There's a mystery to uncover there and I'm looking forward to players experiencing this and hearing their interpretations of the clues provided.

YOU DESCRIBE THE GAME AS FOCUSED ON NARRATIVE AND WORLD BUILDING, LESS ON COMBAT. WHAT WAS THE THINKING BEHIND THAT?

Honestly I have only really made narrative driven games previously! I feel this is where the core of my skills lie and an area I am most passionate about. The game does feature combat but it is not a primary focus, it is more there to help immerse the player in the world and reinforce the narrative. It also aids in adding a sense of danger to these environments, giving the player something to worry about in the moment to moment gameplay between narrative beats and puzzles. Similar to how Silent Hill 2 handles it, the combat is simple but can be quite punishing if not approached with caution.

WHAT LED YOU TO MAKE A SURVIVAL HORROR GAME OF THIS STYLE AND AESTHETIC?

My first commercial game, Guard Duty was a 2D pixel art adventure game, inspired by LucasArts classics like Monkey Island and Full Throttle. Following that I made a

'walking simulator' style narrative horror called Chasing Static which was visually inspired by Playstation 1 era 3D graphics. I wanted to challenge myself to try and capture the PS2 era of visuals this time. Genre-wise I guess I am just going through all my favorite genres of games.

BONUS QUESTION: ANY FEARZINE EXCLUSIVE INSIGHT YOU CAN SHARE ON THE PROJECT?

Exclusive insight, hmm. Well I don't know how insightful this is but the game has actually been a huge learning project for me, every one of my games is. In the space of 6 years I've gone from making a 2D pixel art game, to a 3D first person game and now a 3D third person title. With each new game I'm crawling closer to finding my ideal workflow for making a game, that sweet spot where I feel comfortable with the technical aspects and can just focus on the creative ones. Each project I feel like I'm constantly learning about what things are possible and not possible in relation to the scope of solo development. I'd say the biggest lesson to be learnt here (for anyone who is reading and has an interest in game development) is to try out your ideas in smaller projects first, short games that you can ship in 6-12 months and reflect upon the process. Hollowbody and Chasing Static have each taken me 2(ish) years to develop, had they been half that time I feel I would have still learnt the same lessons but (crucially) I'd have shipped twice the amount of games. Thankfully my games have done well enough to continue creating but I think if your main goal is to hone your skills as a developer, shipping short games is the quickest way to achieve that.

EARLY BIRDS



CRYOSPACE

Metal Mantis and Kuklam Games are making top-down Dead Space - there, I said it. This title is drenched in a spooky sci-fi atmosphere and has some great gore to go along with its eerie setting. This is a slow-paced shooter, so don't play it expecting Hotline Miami, expect to be afraid.g a full game sometime soon too!



BUTCHER'S CREEK

In David Szymanski's first-person action/horror game, you'll travel to Butcher's Creek in 1993. Your goal was to find real snuff videotapes, but things go south when a gang of sadistic killers capture you. Fight to survive and create your own snuff tape in the process.



BLOODY HILLS

Bloody Pitchfork Games are basically working on an unofficial Friday the 13th game in which you are hunted by a hockey-mask adorned killer known only as The Hiker. You'll need to complete various tasks whilst evading the killer, which should lead to some very tense encounters!



ENGRAVING

Engraving is stunning - it looks like CULTIC's horror game cousin! Developed by Raffaele Picca, this title has you exploring a forest graveyard whilst mapping out your surroundings on a hand-drawn map. Fall asleep and your surroundings change, and you can only take so many steps before needing to sleep. Should be brilliantly eerie!



THE BRIDGE CURSE 2: The Extrication

DEVELOPER: SOFTSTAR ENTERTAINMENT · PUBLISHER: GAMERA GAMES · WRITTEN BY: ROBYN/ELVENGORE

University; a place where you may chase your dreams, make new friends, learn new things and... try to escape vengeful spirits as they yearn for your soul?

The Bridge Curse 2: The Extrication is the upcoming sequel to the ever-successful Bridge Curse: Road to Salvation, an immersive paranormal experience that delves into a world of spirit-infested universities & daring (or very unfortunate) students. Those who have not yet played the first game, fret not, as the second instalment is a standalone story, set in the same spectre filled world as the 1st game.

Like its predecessor, you will play from the first-person perspective of multiple characters. Students are attempting to attract new members to their film club & are holding "The Carnival of Horror", an event where they will re-enact a mysterious case that happened on campus decades prior. However, once night has fallen, strange events begin to unfold. At the same time, a reporter finds herself at the haunted university to investigate a mysterious past missing person's case, after receiving a concerning & eerie letter.

Using stealth & survival mechanics you will control these characters & navigate the twisted halls of Wen Hua University. Solve unique puzzles to uncover terrifying truths, and explore the beautiful, haunting environment in search of clues and key items that will aid you in unravelling the mystery of the campus.

Stunning, atmospheric visuals paired with fantastic voice acting, captivating story & lovable characters, the game is set to bring us a tantalising experience filled with a perfect blend of terror & humour, whilst teaching us a bit about Taiwanese folk superstitions, lifestyle & architecture.

The Bridge Curse 2: The Extrication has a free demo available on Steam now, play at your own risk...



HOPE IS GONE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: HELEMON · WRITTEN BY: TOM CROFTS

Hope is Gone is a first person action horror game created with a PSX Retro art style. You play as Zoe, who wakes up in a dark, decaying parallel dimension where everything and everyone is out to kill you.

The story begins with the main character Zoe, who is travelling to the hospital after being informed her husband has been hospitalised. She falls asleep on the bus and wakes up in a "Silent Hill-esque" dark and disturbed parallel dimension where monsters are rife and oozing with horrid twisted intentions. Your aim is to survive and try and find your way back but the beings in this world will stop at nothing to end you.

Hope is Gone is a first person shooter but with a big emphasis on survival horror where collecting items is key as you attempt to survive the heinous environment you woke up in. Whether directly or indirectly inspired by Resident Evil and Silent Hill, the game has clear influences which invoke fond memories of flickering CRTs and pure unbridled terror. Personally, I found the controls to be very solid and easy to grasp with a familiar feel.



ManneKIN HESSLER STORAGE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DREAD PASSAGE STUDIOS · WRITTEN BY: TOM CROFTS

ManneKin - Hessler Storage is a first person psychological horror game developed by Dread Passage Studios which follows the journey of Professor Tobias Shaw, who is searching for a symbol within a stone that he's been looking for his entire life.

Centred around the character Professor Tobias Shaw, who is heralded as an expert in history, archaeology, symbolism and the occult, the aforementioned Shaw is on the hunt for an artefact containing a symbol. The titular Hessler Storage, is a repository of the world's rarest and most exotic artefacts. However, a malevolent force stands in his way as he is relentlessly pursued by "weeping angel-esque" mannequins who stalk you at every turn.

Developer Dread Passage Studios have coined a system within the game called F.E.A.R. (Not to be confused with the game of the same name). This system is called First-Person Emotional Arc Response, which is a moniker for the main character's fight or flight response. In the dark, you can only run and hide and pray your sanity recovers. If you attempt to open doors in this state, the doors take longer to unlock as you fumble with keys. However in the light, you feel empowered and can fight back by shoving or kicking your way through.

Visually the starkness between light and dark can be initially

jarring but after time you'll learn to appreciate any time in the light you can get. The mannequins are creepy and their movement style is very similar to the mannequins in "Resident Evil 8 Village". The sound design is also very good with periods of quiet being extremely tense followed by audible spikes where you are either being chased or scared.

"ManneKin - Hessler Storage" is a game I am very much looking forward too and after playing the demo, I cannot wait for the full release. It looks to be a very faithful look into the supernatural psychological horror genre without being overly complicated.



TENEBRIS SOMNIA

DEVELOPER: ANDRES BORGHI, TOBIAS RUSJAN · PUBLISHER: SAIROT STUDIOS · WRITTEN BY: ROB DAVIS

Tenebris Somnia is a 2D survival horror game with a pretty nice 20 minute demo, or in my case 48 minutes because I like to click on everything I see.

Completing small tasks reward you with some high-production live-action cutscenes, all taking place within this apartment complex, but how did you end up being chased by this bloated monster thing?

Well, it all starts with our main Protagonist waking up from multiple nightmares of her ex-boyfriend being murdered by a creature not of this world. Out of concern for his safety, you travel to his apartment embarking on a horror-filled journey involving puzzle solving in strange areas of the apartment. This gives you more to explore in your ex-boyfriend's demon infested apartment haunted by your past and a bloated demon lady. I can't wait to see what the creator of Tenebris Somnia does with a full release on the horizon.

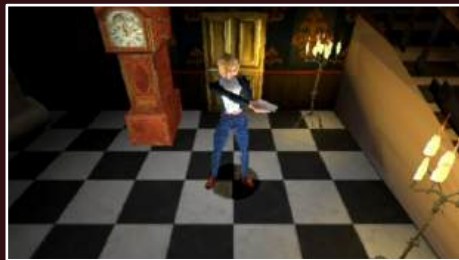


EARLY BIRDS



THEY SPEAK FROM THE ABYSS

Nikki Kalpa's TSFTA has one of the most unsettling and gruesome art styles I have ever seen. The whole game is drenched in a very pungent stench, and that should help this dungeon crawling horror RPG stand out among its peers. We're excited to see this one grow.



HOUSE OF NECROSIS

Warkus' HoN is about as close as you can get to the original Resident Evil without being the original Resident Evil. This game will feel eerily familiar, yet throw some RPG mechanics your way as well. There's procedural generation here too, so each playthrough should feel different!



POVEGLIA

INTI Game Productions are working on this awesome project that blends survival and psychological horror elements to create a very cinematic, yet tense and gameplay heavy experience. Expect third-person melee combat, puzzle solving and more in this Peruvian-made, Italian themed project.



ROGUE MANSION

Almenara Games are currently working on this roguelite survival horror with a strong narrative emphasis and obvious inspiration taken from classic RE. This game is absolutely stunning, with the developer's aiming to capture PS2-esque visuals, something I hope we see a lot more of!

Heartworm

DEVELOPER: VINCENT ADOLFINI · PUBLISHER: DREADXP · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

Playing Heartworm takes me back to a time when unique horror games were few and far between. The game made me feel something I haven't felt in many recent titles. I wanted to kick the dust off my PS1 and fire up all my old, spooky games. I felt like I was a kid again, playing a game I had stumbled across at the video store or at that one kid's house who's just as weird as me. It's like that demo you played as a kid and never got to finish. It's nostalgic, full of ambiance, and unapologetically wears its survival horror roots on its sleeve. The soundtrack and setting pull you into the world of Heartworm and perfectly set the scene for this retro PS1-style survival horror experience. There were moments in the demo where I had to actually stop playing and just take everything in for a moment. The details, such as the fixed camera, inventory system, and other classic survival horror elements, will make any retro horror game fan feel right at home in front of the blue light.

You play as Sam, a girl who is obsessed with the deaths of the ones who were closest to her. Sam is eager to connect with the dead. And after delving into the darkest corners of the internet, she stumbles across an eerie message board. Sam learns of a house in the mountains that has been rumored to have a connection to the afterlife. She then sets out to discover the secrets of the house on her own. Even though no one who has visited the house has ever returned.

"Heartworm is a game about memories " as described by developer Vincent Adolfini, as well as stating that the game's theme is partially autobiographical and it being a " platform to express my feelings from dealing with mental health" . With a focus on atmosphere and the environment , you feel the "Silent Hill" inspiration. And with the classic tank controls and an inventory system that

requires management, you feel the Resident Evil inspiration too. Adolfini has stated that after playing a puppet combo game (which is always a good move) he was inspired to create Heartworm , gaining an urge to create a game that didn't need high quality graphics to deliver scares and ambiance.

Adolfini describes the game as a "lo-fi retro horror" with elements of survival and psychological horror with a retro spin. With callbacks to games like Silent Hill, Resident Evil and even Dino Crisis(a personal favorite of mine) the game is rooted in classic survival horror. With a fixed camera perspective, classic tank controls, and a manageable inventory system, Heartworm is sure to make horror fans of old feel right at home, and scratch the itch for a retro survival horror experience.

An interesting mechanic that developer Adolfini has introduced into Heartworm is the over the shoulder perspective for combat. If you are using your Polaroid camera to snap a picture of an enemy or using a weapon to defend yourself, the over the shoulder perspective adds an extra touch of immersion to the world of Heartworm . Which is a nice touch and is sure to welcome some new age survival horror fans. The fixed camera and tank controls, though niche these days, add to the nostalgia and will keep the player on edge and determined to survive the challenges ahead. An inventory system similar to what classic survival horror fans know of from resident evil is essential to Heartworm. You will use your inventory to manage items and solve puzzles found around the house the game is set in. The game also features interactive notes to further the story and immerse you into the suburban world the game is set in. These notes are sure to be key in uncovering the mysteries and progress through the world of Heartworm.



This game will test your knowledge of survival horror with puzzles that are sure to put any seasoned horror fan to the test. They may even require the use of a pen and paper as the intro before the title screen to the demo suggests. Again, this is unapologetically, survival horror.

One piece of the game that can't be understated is the original soundtrack. I myself am a huge fan of listening to OSTs, like background music, so if you are anything like me, this will become a great addition to your OST playlist. The soundtrack for Heartworm is chilling, nostalgic, charming, and sets the vibe for the experience and mystery that is about to unfold.

Heartworm and its developer, Vincent Adolfini, stand tall in a sea of FPS and new-age survival horror. This time machine of a game is a fresh take on survival horror and horror games in general. Heartworm is here to help us remember. To bring back the memories of classic survival horror. To make us get out of our comfort zone and what we, as fans of horror games, have not seen enough of in many years.

Heartworm aims to invoke nostalgia and fear, as well as give us a challenge. With there being a bit of a resurrection of this retro survival horror genre, Heartworm is a breath of fresh air for us to delve into. We shouldn't expect countless jump scares or a walking simulator. What we should be expecting from Heartworm and developer Vincent Adolfini is a fresh take on the days

of horror's past. A nostalgic and chilling survival horror experience that is sure to satisfy any horror fan's urge to seek out the scares and mystery of the horrors we used to know.



ENDLESS BLUE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MR DIV · WRITTEN BY: HURCAN KOSE

We are living through a renaissance of survival horror games these days and Endless Blue is one of the more recent examples of how it's such a lively, strong subgenre still.

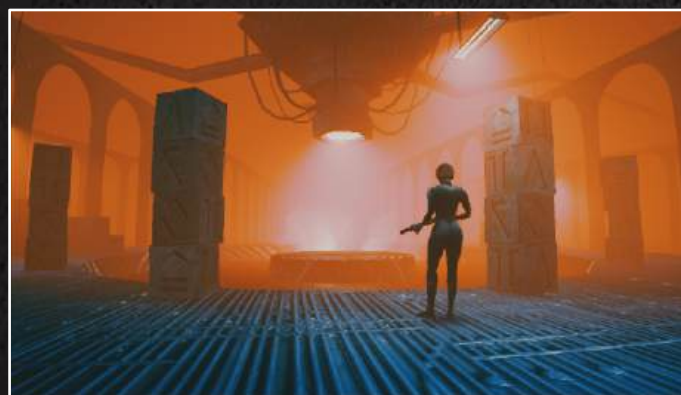
Endless Blue is a survival horror game with classic mechanics of the subgenre such a puzzle solving, inventory management, fixed camera angles, static pre-rendered backgrounds and tight corridors. Inspired by some of the classics like Dino Crisis and Resident Evil, it has a great blend of sci-fi and horror.

You play as Reina, who is on a special mission to get into a facility under the ocean. Once she goes there however, she quickly realizes that things have gone extremely wrong and now she has to survive against the deep, dark terrors of this oceanscape. She has to solve the mystery of this facility and find a way out. You can find notes and other clues around the facility to have a taste of its story.

Taking place inside tight corridors and similar claustrophobic environments, Endless Blue plays from a fixed-camera point of view. It has the usual lock-on target system making it easier for you to nail down your targets. Even though the ones in the demo aren't that strong, I can see how threatening they may be when there is two or more in a room. These once human researchers got afflicted with parasitic creatures turning them into mindless zombies.

If you are a fan of classic survival horror games, especially the ones from the PSX era, you're going to love Endless Blue. It wears its inspirations on its sleeves and manages to become the perfect spiritual successor to some of the classics such as Dino Crisis, OverBlood and Martian Gothic.

The Endless Blue demo takes around 30 to 45 minutes to finish and it's currently in development by mrdv. You can follow them on Twitter for the latest updates about the game. I am eagerly waiting for its full release.



THE LACERATOR

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: FERNANDO TITZ · WRITTEN BY: MARIA KINNUN

It was just another sexy job with another sexy woman until everything went wrong! Cue the cheesy porn music... Bo Chicka Wow Wow! As Fernando Titz brings us... The Lacerator!

You play as Max: the guy who loves sex! Whilst on a job filming a porno the movie crew was captured by the Lacerator! Max wakes up in a prison cell, still wearing his pink hot pants and with a cigarette still smoking in his mouth, he must find a way to escape without being murdered by the masked psycho who stalks him.

This game has a goofy story with classic survival horror mechanics tropes. Tank controls, fixed cameras, puzzle solving, limited inventory, note reading, and things to murder (and be murdered by). Shoot, slash, and kick the baddies! But be careful of traps in this game or you will be lacerated... a mechanic that I found genius. You can lose a limb. Literally. I found out early when I lost my arm in a trap and had to survive the rest of the demo without it! It changed the way I had to finish my run. Let me tell you, it's hard to open some doors without both arms so it's best to hold on to them.

The visuals are grungy with a real VHS feel. With the fixed camera I got the sense that I was watching the action on camera like some weird smutty internet video! The classic Playstation

One style graphics add to that rough around-the-edges vibe too. I kinda felt dirty playing it!

I knew I would enjoy this game just by its premise and I was right! The Lacerator was a ton of fun to play and I can't wait to see how much crazier the world gets when it is finished.



JAWBREAKER

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: VINCENT LADE · WRITTEN BY: JAY KRIEGER

There are few sub-genre balancing acts as challenging to maintain as that of stealth horror. Retaining the inherent fear of being hunted by enemies while facilitating a multitude of creative means for the player to avoid death is as complicated as it gets. Developer Vincent Lade attempts this onerous juggling act with their latest grimy survival horror game, Jawbreaker.

After the great economic collapse of 2028, the world has been plunged into a crime-riddled dystopian where gangs of psychopaths roam the streets. As a scavenger, the player finds themselves in an untouched police station, but this looters paradise quickly reveals itself as a psycho gang hunting ground.

Jawbreaker should be commended for its world's grimy, tetanus aesthetic as environments reflect the killers that call these halls home. Taunts are crudely scrawled on walls, and needles and blood cover the floors, creating an oppressively hostile environment before the mask-wearing, knife-wielding killers reveal themselves.

The brunt of the demo involved the player navigating corridors in search of power switches that must be thrown to proceed to the next area while avoiding patrolling psychos. The stealth options ran a standard gambit of hiding in lockers, luring enemies with bottles, leaning around corners, and utilizing a motion tracker to monitor enemy patrol patterns. While not the most unique approach to stealth gameplay, the mechanics are sound enough

to support Jawbreaker's dystopian world, which I wanted to continue exploring.

Like Jawbreaker's world, the rogues gallery of psychos are equally repugnant. Not unlike Rockstar's Manhunt, the killers feature distinctive DIY personalities through their masks and wardrobes, providing a disturbing edge to their pursuit of the player. While Jawbreaker's horror vibes did the trick for me, more variety is needed to allow the gameplay to succeed in its arduous balancing act of stealth and horror.



SCARLET LAKE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: NOCTURNAL · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

As a classic survival horror fan, I've often dreamt of what a Resident Evil-Silent Hill hybrid might look like. How might a developer take some of the best aspects of these classic horror game series and morph that into something with its own beating heart.

Nocturnal Interactive's upcoming retro survival horror, Scarlet Lake, has shown a lot of early promise as a game with the potential of meeting this criteria.

The game follows detective Ben Murphy as he investigates strange occurrences in a small town. Murphy is soon swept up into a nightmarish adventure of survival as he fights off ravenous zombie-like creatures. After his wife fails to return from a project in Scarlet Lake, Detective Murphy heads to the town in search of truth. Scarlet Lake's introduction feels like a loving callback to Silent Hill 2.

The game has an impressively slick retro-inspired isometric art style that works in perfect harmony with classic third-person, fixed-camera survival horror aesthetics. The attention to detail in its environment is equally as impressive. From small scene details like curtains blowing in the wind to focused, atmospheric lighting, immersion was a simple matter.

Story is told through environment interaction with some voice-acted cinematics. Readable items that are left around drop

narrative bits and pieces are intriguing and I'm certainly interested to see where the developer takes this story.

As for gameplay, puzzles are straightforward and objectives clear. The demo only showcases one type of enemy, which feels like the classic zombie you might find in an early Resident Evil game. There's some absence of feedback for combat in this early build, where enemy and weapon SFX/VFX could feel a little more satisfying. Overall, for a short demo, the pacing was spot on and left me excited to see what's on the Scarlet Lake horizon.



EARLY BIRDS



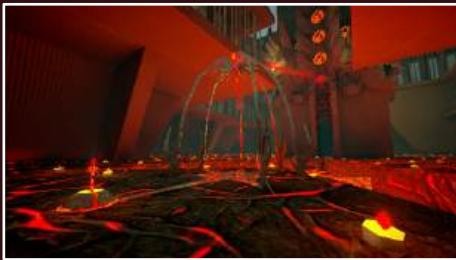
EVIL RAID

HappyBoi's Evil Raid looks so cool. This isometric survival horror looks to focus on the occult, and takes place on a cruise ship. We don't know too much about this one, but we really feel it's worth keeping an eye on. Follow @HappyBoi_TH for updates.



RISU

222's Risu is stunning. Crunchy pixelated textures make the Asian school environment feel claustrophobic and tense, and the simple adventure mechanics feel very smooth, lulling you into a sense of comfort before slamming you into a boss fight. The demo is great, and we can't wait to see more.



BLESSED BURDEN

Blessed Burden is crazy good. It's a first-person platforming adventure by Podoba Interactive, and doesn't fit the usual horror tropes too well, honestly. It instead fills you with dread as you slide, jump and collect artefacts across Quake-looking levels. Its difference from everything out there is what makes it special.



CATECHESIS

A new title from the creators of The Count Lucanor and Yuppie Psycho? Sign us up! Announced this past November by Baroque Decay, this one looks to feature RPG elements and anime style cutscenes!

THE MUTE HOUSE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DECEMBER BLUES GAMES · WRITTEN BY: MARIA KINNUN

If you need your survival horror nostalgia tickled, December Blues Games is bringing us "The Mute House"... a creepy mansion in the forest with puzzles to solve, fixed camera angles, tank controls, and zombies! Does this residence sound evilly familiar?

The year is 1999. For the past few months, the town of Ashtown has been plagued with strange disappearances. Emily, a county policewoman, goes rogue and conducts a personal investigation without the sheriff's approval to uncover the mystery of her own sister's vanishing. Her mission, of course, leads her to the creepiest house in the woods, and she must enter to uncover the truth within. While exploring, it is clear that things are not quite what they seem... reading diary entries will uncover evidence of experiments and things that have gone wrong here. Bodies litter the rooms and hallways and corpses lay half mutilated, mid-autopsy, on tables. Once the demo progresses, some of these corpses will hunt you in the hallways and you will have to take them out with your trusty sidearm.

The Mute House feels like an admiring love letter to the classic Resident Evil game of 1996. Everything from its in-game location to its controls, and its fixed third-person perspective. This demo is short but it gives a full experience of what we should expect. The first thing I noticed is that this game looks great! The Unreal Engine 4 is shining here with high-polygon graphics. Literally. The reflections and the dynamic shadows make the game atmospheric and moody when accompanied by subtle but impactful sounds like the zombies shuffling and groaning in the hallways.

The game can be played on the keyboard but I played on the controller. Even though it doesn't have the classic tank controls, the return of fixed camera angles can take a little

time to get used to. As a fan of the classic, old-school Resident Evil I found it a charming throwback to those good old days but also a reminder of how janky those days could be. I could imagine a young gamer finding it frustrating as even I missed a doorway or an item a couple of times trying to get Emily to face the right direction. But the game does give you time to get orientated before you need to be quick on your feet. I was exploring, reading inscriptions and diaries, trying to find clues to puzzles for a good chunk before any combat was required. Even then the player is eased into it, facing just the odd zombie in the hallway before encountering multiple in one room. Luckily the aiming is decent so targets were easy to take down without the fear of wasting too much ammo which is nice as there is not a whole lot of it around. This brings in some challenges later on...

What would a survival horror game be without its inventory management? The Mute House gives another nod to the genre and limits what you can carry. A few times I found myself with far too many paintings, leeches, and lighters to carry and no room for ammo so the player has to leave this crucial item and come back to it later when there's room to carry... if you can remember where you left it. I didn't! So I found myself ammo-less a couple of times and running from zombies! I had to be more tactical with what I picked up during my game.

The Mute House is gearing up to be a strong entry into the survival horror library but it will appeal more to those who are fans of the old-school survival horror games. I found it charming as the slower pace and exploration appealed to me. Even though it was my first playthrough, it felt familiar like I had been here before. You should check this one out if you're itching for classic gameplay with high-end graphics!



WHILE WE WAIT HERE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: BAD VICES GAMES · WRITTEN BY: CHRIS PARSONS

In the vast gaming world, where action and mechanics sometimes overshadow a good story, Bad Vices Games' upcoming horror title While We Wait Here is a refreshingly narrative-driven experience. Currently available only as a demo, this "choices matter" horror game features engaging dialog with interesting characters against the backdrop of a looming apocalypse.

Set in a diner near a mountain range, the player takes the role of Cliff as he, along with Nora, is serving what are purportedly their diner's last ever customers. The gameplay is simple - taking orders, cooking, dishwashing, and handling payments - but seamless and intuitive, ensuring the focus remains on the unfolding narrative.

The demo tantalizes with unanswered questions and an overall sense of unease, teasing a rich story that will undoubtedly be further explored in the full release. Throughout, you encounter varied characters, from farmer Hank to a despondent stranger drowning his sorrows in whiskey. The demo provides just enough background to make you care about these characters and want to find out what is to become of them.

Throughout the demo, you get the clear sense that something isn't as it seems - the atmosphere is heavy with an unsettling mix of the ordinary and the ominous. An apparent crime scene is slowly revealed, with forensic investigators at work. Cliff's

missing eye and his desperate plea to Nora, "Stay with me a little longer," adds additional layers of mystery and suspense. Your departure at the end into an encroaching storm, presumably part of the apocalypse, leaves players with an intense cliffhanger and eager anticipation of the full game's revelations.

While We Wait Here is far more than a kitchen management game; it's a narrative journey set against a dark and mysterious backdrop. The demo sets a high bar for storytelling, and leaves players yearning for more, curious about the fate of Cliff, Nora, Hank, and the world at large.



BEASTWATCH

MEAT & MAYHEM

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SOMNAMBULIST GAMES · WRITTEN BY: SAM MARSHALL

I wasn't too sure what to think when I first saw the Steam page for Somnambulist Games' Beastwatch. The environments looked pretty basic and there was only one enemy type seen in the screenshots. I figured it was either really early, or perhaps a bit too primitive to stand out. Nevertheless I hit the wishlist button and waited, hoping to check in on the project a while later and see more potential.

When I found out a demo was available, I jumped on it, and to be frank - it is early, it does only have one enemy type, the environments are basic, but it's good. Combat is very satisfying, with good ol' fashioned head pops and decent blood effects present. The tension is on point, with flickering lights and dark sections only lit up by your rather weak flashlight. Beastwatch relies on its basic appearance to create something solid and twisted, and the story is great so far. You're working security in some offices above a slaughterhouse, and some experiments have gone haywire, leading the pigs to rise up and try to kill everyone. It's cheesy and it's fun, whilst also leaving room to be a bit scary, and to subvert your expectations.



EARLY BIRDS



LIGHTS, CAMERA, SLAUGHTER

I'm already really enjoying Disrate Studios' Lights, Camera, Slaughter. The demo leads you into an abandoned abattoir, in search of some missing kids. Before you know it, you're searching through toilets for door handles and crawling through air vents. It's all very atmospheric and exciting.



AFTER CORRUPTION

Can you say Resident Evil meets procedural levels? THORSDAYORIGIN's After Corruption has some awesome blocky enemies for you to take on, and seems to be host to a decent chunk of playtime. We can't wait to get our hands on this one!



FINAL GIRL

A turn-based horror adventure inspired by the golden age of slasher movies? I'm in. Solo dev Jonathan Lorenz is putting together this pretty novel effort, which ties point and click games with pure horror nostalgia. I am beyond excited to see where this goes.



NARIN: THE ORANGE ROOM

RedSensation's Narin features a stunning cozy anime aesthetic, whilst incorporating some gruesome monster designs which are fairly unique! This looks like it could be one of the bigger horror hitters in development at the moment, and we're highly anticipating giving it a try.

HORLA

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MR. DEV STUDIO · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

As a fan of cartoons, comics, and all things horror, I have to say that my excitement meter was at an all time high when I first saw the trailer for the upcoming indie horror adventure game Horla . And it is now at the top of my Steam wishlist. Developer and publisher, Mr. Dev Studio is set to deliver a 3D first-person gothic horror game set in a mysterious haunted house. With a story inspired by The Horla by French author Guy De Maupassant, and artwork inspired by Mike Mignola, the legendary author, and artist of Hellboy, Horla is shaping up to be a terrifying and trippy horror experience.

You will play as Marcio Goncalo, a bankrupt private investigator, who has been hired to find some missing documents inside of a house that is rumored to be haunted. And after filing for bankruptcy, he takes a job he thinks is easy money, but soon finds the horrors that are waiting for him. Throughout his investigation, Marcio is haunted by past traumas, and an ancient entity called Horla that can seemingly manipulate time and the environment around you. The game will not necessarily have a monster that will chase us like most horror games these days. In this game, the house is the monster. With environments that seem to change and other obstacles to overcome. The house and the environment are what's trying to take you down. The game will tackle some sensitive subjects such as PTSD and War, and other psychological horror themes. It seems that Marcio is haunted by his past and hard decisions he had to make, which is perfect fuel for Horla's fire.

The original story The Horla is said to be an early inspiration for HP Lovecraft's works. Personally I am a huge fan of Lovecraft as I'm sure many of us are, and Horla fits right into that uncanny lovecraftian universe. It is a brutal and scary story about a man who is

haunted and tormented by an entity that is relentlessly trying to drive him crazy. The story has many twists and terrifying moments, and an absolutely brutal ending. So with that said, I feel that we can expect a fresh interpretation of the story as well as a genuinely terrifying game with a unique art style. The gothic and hellboy-esque artwork of the haunted house and outdoors is so satisfying to look at. The color pallet of the game is very limited and has a heavy focus on black, which adds to the gothic setting and the horrors that are unfolding around you. It genuinely feels like you are playing a graphic novel, which is unique these days, as most games with hyper realistic graphics are meant to provide more immersion in game, but Horla is unique and wants to be recognized as such.

Horla may be very early in development, but the demo gives us a taste of something truly unique in the world of horror games. Something new, we don't see much of that in this scene. We mostly see games with cutting edge graphics and first person shooter mechanics, or retro games that give us a nostalgia boost. And don't get me wrong, I love the nostalgia and in your face horror as much as the next fear fiend. But this psychological and lovecraftian tale is a breath of fresh scares with artwork straight out of a comic book. This game will stand out among the rest just based on the visuals and ambiance. We need more games like that these days, the game you can instantly recognize just from the visuals, the kind of game that gives us that lets just keep on playing. So if you asked me, Horla should definitely be on your wishlist. The demo should definitely be played multiple times and you should definitely be expecting Horla to shake up the scene when we see the full release.



CONSCRIPT

DEVELOPER: JORDAN MOCHI, CATCHWEIGHT STUDIO · PUBLISHER: TEAM17 · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

Conscript is an upcoming World War 1 survival horror game being developed by a self taught and solo developer named Jordan Mochi, of Catchweight Studios. You will play as a lone, French soldier who is in the thick of the endless trenches at The Battle Of Verdun in world war 1. While searching for your brother who is missing in action, the player will scavenge for resources, solve challenging puzzles, and fight for survival against enemy soldiers as you navigate through the maze of the trenches, and overcome the horrors of the Great War.

Developer Jordan Mochi has set out to make a game that would capture the horror of World War 1. And Conscript is delivering on all fronts. The game has a heavy focus on looting and combat, as well as solving puzzles and managing an inventory system. All the makings of a good survival horror game. The survival elements in the horror games we all know and love, games like resident evil and silent hill, are big inspirations for Jordan and the game itself. It's those horror elements and inspirations, when combined with the harsh reality of war and the trench warfare that makes this game such a genuine horror experience. The player is constantly on the move and scavenging for anything that can help progress through the journey. The top down perspective and unique art style adds a nice retro touch to the game and gives the player a terrifying look further into the maze of the trenches. The player will manage an inventory and storage system

similar to Resident Evil, and should have classic horror fans feeling just as stressed out as the first time they played a survival horror game. So be ready, and keep track of the loot you will gather along the way.

Conscript manages to be just as much of a fresh take on a horror game as it does feel nostalgic. Developer Jordan Mochi, majored in history and has a particular passion for World war 1. And set out to develop a game that didn't just capture the time period of The Great War, but fit right in with all of our favorite retro horror games. The game is broken down into chapters, which personally is a great touch in my opinion. Chapters in certain games add a cinematic and structured element to the story and can keep the player more engaged in the current section of the game. Some modern survival horror games can be overwhelming when there is such a focus on running away and looting, but conscript lets the player decide when to run or stay and fight. Decisions we make throughout the game will affect the story, so we can be sure to expect multiple endings which is great considering the low replay value of most games these days. There is a really engaging story being told in the world of conscript, one that does a great job of capturing the brutality and true horror of the battle of Verdun and the time period of the Great War.

Conscript is still in development with no official release date set just yet, but a highly praised demo is available on steam,



10 DEAD DOVES

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DUONIX STUDIOS · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

10 Dead Doves might just be the game we have all been needing. Developers Mark Byram II, Sean Michael Mill, and publisher Duonix Studio are set to deliver a frightening and funny adventure that is set in the heart of the Appalachian wilderness. With fully voiced and animated cutscenes, a compelling and original score, retro PS2-inspired graphics, with beautiful and frightening environments, 10 Dead Doves is sure to deliver the scares and laughs. This game will put your wits to the test with puzzles to solve and mysteries to uncover along the Appalachian Trail. With a fully funded kickstarter that doubled its intended goal, it's safe to say this is a highly anticipated and cinematic story that we, as indie horror fans, are eager to get on our monitors.

You will play as Marcus Stetson, dubbed as the "most pathetic man on earth." He is accompanied by his longtime hiking buddy, Sean. Together, they have set out on an adventure through the trails of Appalachia, hoping to relive the glory days one last time. They are on the hunt to find the location of an urban legend, a mythical place that's known only as "the ant farm". During the journey, Mark is put to the test

when he is haunted by a bird-like figure with cryptic and twisted messages that invade his dreams. You will solve puzzles and mysteries while interacting with the strange locations and locals that reside there. While constantly being haunted by a forest that hates you.

A 3rd person fixed camera perspective and classic tank controls may be daunting to some gamers these days, but the developers have balanced everything perfectly to bring the player a truly retro and cinematic experience. The game sets out to deliver a psychological horror experience with a road trip comedy feel to it. Mark and Sean's chemistry comes through like a classic 2000's buddy comedy film while still managing to deliver all the scares, suspense, and mystery you could hope for. The dialogue between the two characters is funny and engaging, and at times it feels like a real conversation that two great friends would be having. The PS2-era 3D graphics are as nostalgic as they are chilling and beautiful. With many interactive pieces in the world and mysterious locations to discover, the color palette mixed with the cinematic Appalachian setting and an original score,

will set the scene for this retro horror experience.

Developers Mark Byram II, Sean Michael Mill, and publisher Duonix Studio are determined to deliver a story-rich narrative experience that is set to transport us back to the early 2000's. The kickstarter page for 10 Dead Doves describes itself as a "retro Appalachian horror story." As hard as it is for me to admit that the early 2000's can be considered "retro," I couldn't help but feel waves of nostalgia while I played the demo and explored the world of 10 dead doves. The gameplay is heavily inspired by classic survival horror titles we all know and love, such as Resident Evil, Silent Hill, Fatal Frame, and even a touch of Grim Fandango. (Please give us another Grim game!!!!). The dialogue is hilarious, relatable, and suspenseful. The chemistry between Mark and Sean really shines through and works well with the setting of the Appalachian wilderness. The original score is nothing to scoff at, as an original score for an indie game such as this is impressive for just two developers. The score pulls you into the world just as much as the compelling narrative will. Developers Mark Byram II and Sean Michael Millard are cooking up



something truly special. With nearly 300 backers on Kickstarter and nearly 21,000 dollars funded, 10 Dead Doves is slated to release sometime in 2024, and the short demo has already been received incredibly well by fans and critics of this charming retro horror story.

It's always exciting to see a small project brought to life by passionate developers and passionate fans. With a compelling and frightening tale of two friends in the Appalachian wilderness, 10 Dead Doves is looking to give us a fresh take on the games we used to know. I, myself, am such a fan of games that give me that nostalgic

feeling that bring me back to playing games as a young kid. Anything that can give me the feeling of being young and playing a new game for the first time. 10 Dead Doves blew through its kickstarter goal because of its fans and is being made by passionate developers. The indie horror scene is eager to get our hands on this retro and nostalgic trip that is sure to find the funny in the horror and the mysteries in the Appalachian wilderness.

We have been getting used to walking sims and survival horror, which is more or less an FPS game. And don't get me wrong, I love shooting monsters and zombies. But

something in me craves a game like this. A nostalgic game that can be made in today's day and age of 4K graphics, repetitive and intense jump scares, and a lack of dialogue. This game actually feels like the time it represents. The 2000's, the PS2 era, our childhoods. The time when we had relationships of our own, like the protagonists Mark and Sean. This game and its developers are eager to deliver a game with retro graphics, a fixed camera, tank controls, and funny dialogue, ready to give us that nostalgia drip we as indie horror games crave.



A magician never reveals their secrets.



Aren't you guys a rest stop? Who makes a man pay for a bathroom?



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MINI REVIEWS



CODE: DINO-H

Ever have a nightmare about being alone and trapped in the Arctic with Dinosaurs?! Well, now dreams come true in this short but sweet nod to the Thing and Dino Crisis. Enjoy solving puzzles to escape a derelict research station while avoiding hungry raptors in Code: Dino-H.



THE NIGHT OF THE SCISSORS

Selewi's The Night of the Scissors is a gruesome short game that leans heavily on hide and seek mechanics, and collecting items to progress. There are some horrifyingly tense sequences in the game, and the main villain is a great callback to Clocktower with his weapon of choice. Check this one out!



LAUNDRY KILLER

Not the rip-off of Bloodwash that you think it is, TurtleTerra's Laundry Killer is a semi-short title reminiscent of Nun Massacre. You're trapped in the basement of a laundromat, trying to collect items and solve puzzles whilst avoiding the titular killer. It's high-intensity and big on the jump scares. It's also free, so go download it!



RUSTY BARREL

Rusty Barrel, developed by KenForest, immerses players in the intense and claustrophobic world of submarine navigation. Piloting a rickety, confined sub through narrow crevices on the ocean floor, you're tasked with hunting mineral clusters. The game's palpable tension escalates with each collision, requiring on-the-fly repairs. Rusty Barrel features a haunting yet beautiful journey of survival.

STAY OUT OF THE HOUSE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: PUPPET COMBO · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

So I may be biased because I love Puppet Combo games. I'm gonna do my best to not get all sentimental and talk about how Puppet Combo games remind me of my childhood and make me feel like I'm watching an 80's Grindhouse horror film. But god dammit, if Puppet combo games don't make you feel like a 10-year-old watching a movie you aren't supposed to be watching, then clearly your parents were cooler than mine.

Stay Out of the House is one of the latest releases developed by Puppet Combo. The game first went into early access in 2018 and was eventually fully released in October of 2022. With gameplay inspired by the DVLOper game Granny and characters and settings inspired by horror films like The Hills Have Eyes and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre, Stay Out Of The House, is sort of a two-for-one in a way. With "Night Shift" acting as a prelude to Stay Out Of The House. The game is broken down into four chapters. Each has its own vibe and setting. This game, for me, is a culmination of everything that makes Puppet Combo games so damn rad. This game isn't for the faint of heart or easily disturbed. This is a rugged, raw, retro badass horror game, and I live for this shit.

Stay Out Of The House is a first-person perspective game featuring stealth and combat mechanics. Items are stored in a classic inventory system that we all should be comfortable with by now. With different puzzles and obstacles to power through, the game is full of tense and terrifying moments like the classic and effective jump scares you would expect from a Puppet Combo game. Loud, and chaotic. The sound design added to the tension and really made me feel like I was being stalked throughout this game. I highly recommend headphones and a dark room for this one.



You are given three days to escape the house. Each day acts as a life in the game. You have two chances with the butcher. If he catches you a third time, it's game over. Every time the butcher catches you the game changes slightly. So keep your wits about you and use the tools the game gives you to progress. You are given a sound meter to monitor your sound to help stay clear of the butcher. And a radar to help warn if the butcher is approaching. You have a pistol to help defend yourself, but don't count on it, ammo is scarce and the butcher will only flinch at those measly bullets. But you may have time to find a hiding place.

There is a great story that unfolds throughout the game, from the Night Shift intro to the very last chapter, the tension is at an all-time high. I genuinely felt as if I was watching a classic horror movie. And the filters puppet combo features on their games just add to that nostalgic vibe that I'm such a fan of. With multiple endings to achieve you have replay value and an opportunity to use a different filter and see how it changes the vibe and ambiance of this grindhouse horror game.

For me, this game is a bloody good time. I can't recommend this game enough, as well as every other puppet combo game. These games are proof that high-end graphics and a high price tag aren't what classifies a game as good or scary. Stay Out Of The House brings the scares, blood, and nostalgic horror in a way that not many games can. Completely original, while still paying homage to the media that made us love this type of horror. If you haven't had the pleasure of delving into puppet combo games. Stay Out Of The House is a perfect place to start if you have the guts to escape the butcher.

AFTERDREAM

DEVELOPER: JESSE MAKKONEN · PUBLISHER: GAMERA GAMES · WRITTEN BY: JAY KRIEGER

With greater emphasis being placed on photorealistic first-person horrors, games such as Afterdream from developer Jesse Makkonen prove that there is still plenty of compelling psychological horror potential in 2D side scrollers. Afterdream begins with the most nightmarish of scenarios, divulging one's vulnerabilities in a therapy session. As our protagonist attempts to process her father's passing, she begins experiencing nightmarish, lucid dreams in which the line between reality and fantasy becomes blurred.

In routine psychological horror fashion, the brunt of Afterdream's gameplay is spent navigating a ghostly dream world filled with quirky ghosts, haunting symbolism, and logic puzzles. The puzzles themselves are both clever and fitting for the world in which they are found, and while they may give momentary pause, they never become a detriment to the game's superb narrative pacing.

The most distinctive element of Afterdream's gameplay is a magical camera. The camera allows the player to scan environments and impose objects into the protagonist's reality. In one instance, I found a door with no handle, trapping me in an apartment. A quick camera scan made a handle appear, seemingly from the void. Later on, as I was waiting for an elevator, SOMETHING attempted to

break through a nearby door. Defenseless, I used my camera to summon boards to barricade the door, keeping the entity at bay while I safely waited for the elevator.

Likewise, Afterdream's surreal world strikes a complementary balance of psychological and quirky horror. One moment, I encountered a ghost chastising me for not knowing where his hat was; the next, I was an unwilling participant in an occult ritual surrounded by shrouded figures. For only a two to three-hour experience, Afterdream serves as a strong exemplar of horror, balancing a haunting atmosphere with a heart-wrenching narrative in an equally unique world.



恐怖の世界 WORLD OF HORROR

DEVELOPER: YSBRYD GAMES · PUBLISHER: PLAYISM · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

World of Horror developer Panstasz describes the game as a "1-bit love letter to Junji Ito and H.P. Lovecraft" and this could not be more accurate.

As soon as World of Horror begins, you're greeted by its eerie (and impressive) chiptune soundtrack and MS Paint graphics. Yes, you read that correctly, everything seen in the game has been created within the constraints of Paint and this direction pays off. The visual details are striking and enemy designs leave just enough space for the player's imagination to fill in the horrifying gaps.

The game takes place in "198X" in a fictional version of Shikawa, Japan. Players get started with a tutorial mission "Spine-Chilling Story of School Scissors" that provides a light introduction to the game's systems. We learn from this mission that World of Horror will be pitting us against some most unsettlingly creepy, Yokai (and Ito) inspired enemies with its turn-based combat encounters.

Careful strategy is your friend here, with a number of options available - preparing and boosting attacks, making use of allies or even fleeing combat entirely. Combat actions must be queued up and every action adds up in your turn meter.

While the combat options offer a variety of approaches, the interface in general can be somewhat overwhelming at first. There's a lot going on and the tutorial mission only scratches the surface. However, brief experimentation of the UI quickly makes the interface much simpler to navigate.

Post-tutorial is when the game and its roguelike qualities really shine. Each run requires 5 random mysteries be solved, each telling a haunting tale that fills you with dread. Each mystery has random events, Old God effects, optional quests and multiple endings that result in high replay value - if the Shiba Inu merchant wasn't enough to sway you!



CANINE

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: PUKO · WRITTEN BY: SAM MARSHALL

Oh boy, did CANINE tug at my heartstrings. This little forty minute project by Puko begins with you travelling to a dog shelter to collect your dog, Tomy, who has been missing for a while. You'd think that it would just be an in and out job, sign some paperwork and what not, prove ownership - but you arrive to find the place abandoned, with a mutant dog-human hybrid, Reuben, stalking the premises. It's up to you to find and rescue Tomy, whilst avoiding the towering monstrosity that is Reuben.

What follows is effectively a game of hide and seek, tied together with some minor mechanics such as finding switches and keys, and throwing tennis balls to distract Reuben momentarily. Expect to be hiding and crouching a lot, and sprinting away as fast as your legs will carry you for the remainder. There are also some minor puzzle elements present, such as locating the final switch, moving forklift trucks out of your way, but for the most part the game leans on its stealth system.

Reuben is a terrifying character, and when you first encounter him it is truly chilling. Standing at about 8ft tall on two legs, he skulks around menacingly, and if you're hiding around a corner as he walks past, expect an increased heart rate - tension is very well handled here and the dynamic OST works a treat here.

CANINE is not the most elaborate game in the world, but it is one that tells the tale of how much our canine companions need us, and ends with a reel encouraging players to adopt dogs from rescue shelters, rather than from breeders - an honourable message for a pretty terrifying little indie gem.



WE NEVER LEFT

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: Fyre Games · WRITTEN BY: CHRIS PARSONS

Within the horror genre, Conner Rush's We Never Left is a trailblazer, combining the nostalgia of a text-based adventure with tried and true first-person horror gameplay to create a uniquely eerie experience. It's set in 1983, and begins with a phone call that thrusts you into a chilling narrative - your reclusive game developer cousin has vanished, leaving behind a cryptic message: "FINISH THE GAME".

This premise alone is compelling, but what really makes We Never Left stand out is its masterful blending of genres. It crafts an environment of escalating dread through seamlessly merging the interactive storytelling of a text-based adventure with an immersive and visceral first-person horror experience. You're not just an observer of this story; you're an active participant in a narrative that ends up feeling disturbingly close to reality.

The genius of We Never Left lies in its subtlety; it lays a foundation of unease that grows stronger with every clue you discover, every door you open, and every command you enter. From the moment you step through the front door of your cousin's house, a sense of foreboding grips you, which is then slowly but steadily enhanced through environmental storytelling.

As you progress, the fine line between the virtual world and reality begins to blur, as actions within the game start to echo in your own surroundings. By the time you piece together the truth,

it's already too late; you've become ensnared in its narrative, making for a climax that is equal parts impactful and hauntingly inevitable.

We Never Left is without a doubt one of the most inventive horror experiences I've ever seen. It doesn't just scare you; it truly immerses you in a narrative that is both compelling and unnerving. For horror fans looking for something that genuinely stands apart, We Never Left is a must-play.



HOW TO BUILD A SNOWMAN

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SIRTARTARUS · WRITTEN BY: CHRIS PARSONS

Sirtartarus, a developer already well-recognized for their uniquely imaginative horror creations, has once again impressed with How to Build a Snowman. This game, a seemingly innocent journey into a child's winter day, morphs into a dark, twisted narrative that both captivates and instills fear.

The game initially presents a serene and picturesque winter setting where Toby Stevenson, following his grandpa's instructions, embarks on the traditional task of building a snowman. This calm start, featuring a unique and somewhat novel mechanic for rolling snowballs, followed by the task of adorning them with classic decorations like a carrot, hat, and scarf, sets a light mood coupled with peaceful music. But this tranquility is but the calm before the storm.

After Toby delivers the snowman its heart, the game takes a startling turn. The snowman comes hauntingly to life, leading to the disappearance of Toby and the player assuming the role of Martha, his mother, as the new protagonist. Her quest to rescue her son takes her to a haunting, inscription-lined cave beneath the house, labeled as belonging to the ominous "Order of the Flake."

Here, we're formally introduced to Ons'Thasnou - our "snowman", and Sirtartarus's mastery of creative and engaging horror storytelling truly shines. Revelations about Martha's father's past with the "snowman" add layers of personal tragedy and a legacy

of fear to the story; and Ons'Thasnou's declaration of himself as harbinger of humanity's doom intensifies the already well-established sense of dread.

The conclusion of the game is a blend of heroism and yet more haunting revelations. I won't spoil the ending, but it's safe to say that it leaves players with a deep-seated unease, particularly around something as innocuous as building a snowman with your family in the winter. In this charming and brilliantly crafted short adventure, Sirtartarus has skillfully leveraged a childhood winter pastime as a vessel for a chilling narrative that leaves a lasting impact.



DISMANTLED

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: PRODUCTIONS PLUIE DE SANG · WRITTEN BY: RYAN SCULLY

Oh yeah, here's the nasty stuff. Riding on the new wave of exploitation horror, Dismantled's debts to the likes of Martyrs, The Human Centipede and Hostel are laid all-too bare in its schlocky and shameless first-person horror. Torture, genital mutilation, and - in one especially gruesome scene - a less-than-celebratory approach to childbirth; Dismantled treats trigger warnings like trophies, not tools.

The decision to code the game in GZDoom certainly takes it that extra mile. As capable as the ageing engine may be, Dismantled has made little use of its more advanced graphical options, the rustic results lending proceedings that extra layer of grime. That's not to say that no effort has been made here, and there's a convincing argument for more horror games to be made in the software. An inventory system has been included, the typical limited save system means quicksaves are no longer a crutch, and interconnected levels mean we're free to get lost and alone in this virtual playground. Dismantled proves that slower-paced experiences can prosper on an engine more renowned for rapid-fire demon shooting.

But unlike Doom, Dismantled has a long road to maturity. The underlying plot, complete with cackling madman antagonist and chainsaw-grafted half-man half-tiger beasts, sends proceedings cartoonishly overboard. Coupled with its sophomoric shock value and angsty writing, it goes just far enough over the line to resemble a teenager's idea of edginess. Some puzzles, such as

an early one involving the ingenious use of bloodstains, are surprisingly smart - but the circuitous level design, dearth of save points and a reliance on enemy closets too often undo long stretches of progress.

Dismantled can occasionally be a slog, its over-reliance on shock value often diluting the experience rather than supporting it. Yet it's hard to deny there's something here, something worth iterating on and encouraging. As one of Pluie De Sang's earlier game releases, one can only imagine that whatever monstrosity they stitch together next, it'll be one of their more seamless creations.



DEV Q+A

Here is a short Q+A with Comp-3 Interactive delving deeper into the influences behind Rewind or Die and what we could see in the future.

PRIOR TO CREATING REWIND OR DIE, WHAT SORT OF GAMES DID YOU ENJOY AS A FAN?

Since being a kid I've always loved a good horror game, that comes from my dad who let me play games and watch movie I probably should have at that age... I grew up in the PS1 era so the original Resident Evil trilogy and Silent Hill are where it all started for me and many other horror fans and funnily enough those are 2 franchises I'm still eagerly awaiting even more from to this day.

DID THESE INSPIRE YOU TO CREATE REWIND OR DIE?

Rewind was heavily inspired by the original Resident Evil 2 with it's environmental intractables to give minor lore or story to the item heavy gameplay and puzzle elements. I really enjoyed those games and it was really fun to get to put my own spin on that genre and style. I didn't want it to be too much of a clone of RE2 but I definitely took a lot of inspiration from it and didn't mind having to dust off my PS1 to play through it again for research purposes.

WHAT ARE YOUR INFLUENCES REGARDING REWIND OR DIE?

The modern day revival and reimagining of the PS1 style horror game has been hugely influential. Seeing Puppet Combo, Black Eyed Priest and countless other talented devs bring life to retro styled games has really shown that photorealistic graphics aren't the cornerstone of a good game, all you need is an interesting story and a good gameplay mechanic.

WHEN IT CAME TO CREATING SLAW, WHAT FILMS/GAMES DID YOU DRAW INSPIRATION FROM?

It's going to come as no surprise to people that there's definitely some Piggsy from Manhunt inspiration in there, but also quite a bit of Farmer Vincent from the movie Motel Hell too. The idea of a psychotic butcher type character who kidnaps victims to harvest and sells human meat wasn't something I'd seen done before in a game.

WOULD YOU POTENTIALLY LOOK AT CREATING A SEPARATE GAME EXPLORING THE BACKSTORY OF SLAW?

Maybe in the future. I would be open to creating a prequel game at some point but I really wouldn't want to just "phone it in" and make one for the sake of it. If I can come up with a decent enough idea to tie in the story properly then I'm all over that, in the mean time I'm working on some things that are completely different in terms of theme and gameplay but those aren't ready to be shown off just yet.

REWIND OR DIE

DEVELOPER: COMP-3 INTERACTIVE · PUBLISHER: TORTURE STAR INTERACTIVE · WRITTEN BY: TOM CROFTS

Rewind or Die is a first person horror title set in a video rental store in an unassuming northern town in the UK. However, you will quickly learn that this night might be your last as you are ominously told by a hobo on the way to work. You play as Tony, a shop assistant, drafted in at short notice because people have called in sick at work. In this tale, you end up dealing with a lot more than just late fees and dodgy films. Reminiscent of other VHS torture style horror games, this game is filled with a lot of nods to pop culture and also a lot of blood & gore.

Graphically, the game is very solid with a CRT/VHS filter being a big part of the aesthetic which can be turned off although I wouldn't recommend it. Otherwise the character design of Slaw is stark and really creeps you out especially as his voice brings a shiver down your spine.

The video store itself and the street outside take me back to my younger days when I visited my local video store to rent VHS tapes which is a welcome sight. The remaining sections of the game really set the mood with lots of gore and blood which puts you on edge and makes you keep alert.

Sound design as a whole is very well done with nice satisfying ambient tones to keep you creeped out, paired with awesome chase music and also inventory music which makes me feel like I'm back playing an old school survivor horror.

Gameplay is a key factor in games like this, and I was very much pleased with how Rewind or Die handled, its simple and easy to use controls paired with satisfying movement mechanics made it a joy to play. The inventory system for items was easy to use and understand with straightforward puzzles which do not detract from the horror element.

On playthrough, I found that a lot of things

require exploration and it is not always a linear path to the end which is satisfying but also can be slightly confusing if you do not pay attention to the prompts in your objectives tab. During my playthrough, I also encountered one slight bug which is regarding a later game puzzle which is not game breaking and only requires you to re-enter the puzzle which is a non-issue.

It was a pleasure to explore the world created by Comp-3, with a litany of titles competing against Rewind or Die, the gameplay does put it above most and is something I would replay again.

The story is centred around the main character Tony, an reluctant protagonist, considering this isn't his shift. He turns up to work at Video2Go where there has been a spate of missing people all centred around the shop. The nightmare then becomes real as Slaw, the main antagonist, kills a reporter in cold blood just next to the shop.

Unbeknownst to Tony, Slaw is now stalking him as during the closing of the shop, he shows up and after a chase sequence, you are captured and put into dank, horrible sewers and forced to find (and fight) your way out against the horror that is Slaw.

In the Sewers it almost turns Doom-esque towards the end which is a nice shift of pace and tone but overall the story and characters offer enough for players to keep engaged and entertained throughout.

In essence, Rewind or Die is a brilliantly distilled version of VHS torture style horror with all the right elements to create an engaging and fun to play game. The story holds up well with the same over the top elements as many of the over the top films it portrays. The main character is the everyman who is forced to fight or die and this is very well portrayed in their voice acting too. Rewind or Die is a fantastic title which you should definitely purchase and play to experience the horror of Slaw.



YOU WILL DIE HERE TONIGHT

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SPIRAL BOUND INTERACTIVE · WRITTEN BY: SAM MARSHALL

There's no two ways about it, Spiral Bound Interactive's You Will Die Here Tonight is a very cool game. Taking obvious notes from classic Resident Evil, as well as the House of the Dead series, this team set out with one hell of an ambition, especially as it is the debut project from the studio. So how did it turn out? Is You Will Die Here Tonight any good?

Short answer, yes. The isometric sections are great fun - exploring the mansion, solving puzzles, interacting with the environment. The combat is brilliant, whether that's against bog-standard zombies or against intimidating bosses, and the storytelling is stellar - I found myself sucked into the narrative very early on, and couldn't stop playing as I needed to know what was going to happen. I wasn't expecting the storytelling to be such a huge part of this game, and I wasn't expecting it to be one of my favourite aspects, but here we are.

Kicking things off, you're thrust into an office, taught the ropes - how to shoot, how to defend yourself, so on and so forth. You're also introduced to all of your teammates here, who you'll play as for the majority of the game's runtime once you get to the mansion the main campaign takes place in. That's right, you effectively have six chances to solve the mystery of the mansion, as there are six members of the team - you'll play as one until you die, whether that's to zombies or to death traps, then you'll embody the next character.

Once you learn the ropes, it becomes pretty hard to die in normal combat, but bosses will really test your mettle, and death traps will kill you unless you come into them equipped with above-average IQ.

I had a great time, honestly. Every corner of the mansion brought new interesting activities or hidden items like a Magnum or weapon upgrades. I found myself scouring every area I could for more items, and the puzzles were solid, though not impossibly difficult. I had plenty of time with each of the characters to find a favourite, as they all behaved slightly differently, whether that's carrying more health packs, faster movement speed, or just having a winning personality - so many of them stood out as individuals.

I did have some issues with You Will Die Here Tonight though, mostly to do with backtracking, as well as very unclear signposting. I ended up completing the main story multiple times as I had missed a very important interaction that softlocked the story. I had to resort to the community Discord for assistance here, only to realise what I needed to do was a ten minute job, and I'd effectively wasted a couple of hours on unnecessary repeat playthroughs. The signposting was really the only issue though, as the core game and story are so gripping and so good, I've fallen in love with this game and am now hoping that it does well enough to warrant a follow-up - You Will Die Here Tomorrow isn't as catchy a title, but I know I'd love it.

When I finished the game, I wasn't entirely sure I'd be able to recommend it due to the hardships I mentioned above, but after a few days of reflection - and thinking about how it'll be for most players - without the unnecessary repeated playthroughs, I think this is pretty close to a masterpiece. Despite playing the game multiple times, I really enjoyed it each time, I was happy playing it, I was thrilled to discover new things each time - and I don't think that I will be leaving it alone for too long. I see another playthrough in my near-future.

If you're into classic Resi, or House of the Dead, then this is a no-brainer. It feels modern enough to not put off players perturbed by old-school presentation, yet it also feels traditional enough to make nostalgic players happy as well. It's the perfect middle ground. I'm very excited to see what Spiral Bound do next, as if it is anywhere near as cool as this, we are all in for a treat.



GHOST at DAWN

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: BLUE AND RED GAMES · WRITTEN BY: SAM MARSHALL

Ghost At Dawn is an anime noir survival horror title from Blue and Red Games, and is one hell of a debut effort. The game is tense, dark and full of scary moments, both in the form of quick jump-scares and long-lasting eerie scares. It's a top-notch effort and a game that's hard to put down due to many twists and turns in the narrative, great pacing, and deep mechanics. Every time you think you've figured out Ghost at Dawn, it shows you another mechanic, or throws something else cool your way, like a new weapon or enemy type. There's a lot to unpack here, and I think you'll like what's in store.

So the visuals are of course the most striking aspect of Ghost At Dawn, they are by and large the first thing you notice about the game, and for good reason. Ghost At Dawn is stunning, and pretty unique in its presentation. Sure, there are a plethora of anime games out there, but how many of them also feel at home with a horror aesthetic - especially outside of the Visual Novel space? You can also activate a noir mode, which puts the game in black and white, for those of you who want an even more striking look.

So what about the gameplay? Ghost At Dawn is a third-person, fixed-camera title with ranged combat, resource management, a sanity system, and some puzzles. It's quite varied throughout, and due to this the pacing is solid. Combat is a case of using a gun to shoot at ghost enemies. There's a lock-on system that comes in handy especially during boss battles, and at least three different weapons with varying fire rates and damage output. Ammo is quite limited, but stronger weapons like the M1 Garand can take a common enemy out in one or two hits. Should an enemy get close enough to touch you, you're gone - you're dead. Die five times and you're dead for good.

You can keep enemies at bay by lighting incense sticks around the environment, or by lighting matches, as foes are more likely to try and approach you in the dark, when your sanity is in danger. You monitor your sanity by smoking cigarettes, taking pills and swigging from a flask of alcohol - great ways to relax. You need to stay on top of this or face increased jump-scares, slower movement and potentially even death.

The story is the real seller here, it gets real dark and unsettling, especially towards the end. You are a Private Investigator hired to look into a missing girl by her sister. That leads you to the Pines Hotel, which acts as the setting for the game. You need to find out if she is still alive, as well as what happened. Narrative mostly occurs through fully voice-acted notes, but there is also plenty of environmental storytelling too, which keeps you looped in. Expect many moments of heartbreak, shock, anger and determination to see you through this title. Ghost At Dawn's narrative is one that will stick with you for a long time, and we all know that experiences like that are very few and far between, especially in gameplay-focused titles.

Chances are that you'll fall in love with Ghost At Dawn pretty quickly into your playthrough. It's not the longest game in the world, but multiple endings should make sure this is worth the price of admission. The developer has also patched in a Challenge Mode, and intends for this to be the first in a long running series, which we couldn't be more excited about. Give this game a chance and I doubt you won't be disappointed. The reviews are pretty positive for the game right now, it just needs a bit more visibility to really take off.



LIMERICK CADENCE MANSION

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: JENITO STUDIOS · WRITTEN BY: JARED BAIR

Some games just feel like home to a horror loving gamer. Limerick: Cadence Mansion is one of those. It's a fantastic indie horror experience that is somehow both familiar and unique at the same time. Influences ranging from Myst to Outlast with a little bit of classic first person shooter and survival horror. It's a bit of an everything game that knows how to lock each type of play down so they don't spoil each other, and because of that makes a memorable experience that is easily worth the price of entry.

Limerick's greatest strength is in its "Limerick Encounter" levels where the pressure of the haunting hunting puppet is felt while the player has to solve puzzles across a complicated maze. Remembering codes and patterns that are solutions while running away from certain doom is one of the most enjoyable experiences I've had in a horror title. Reaching the far side of the map and realizing you have forgotten the symbols above the door or the color pattern of lights keeps the pressure high. You'll find yourself mumbling words out loud only to forget them because of a jump scare. The feeling of success is unmatched.

In between those delightful panic inducing segments you'll find a rich story driven world with enjoyable combat. Balancing ammo and health is of course part of the game, and well executed.



YUPPIE PSYCHO

DEVELOPER: BAROQUE DECAY · PUBLISHER: NEON DOCTRINE · WRITTEN BY: RYAN SCULLY

Set aside your Silent Hills and your Spencer Mansions, we've got scarier places to be; real world places, where humanity dies, the pure are condemned, and the weak serve the devil with grovels and gratitude. Welcome, all ye damned, to the corporate office.

Yuppie Psycho revels in this alienating world, exaggerating those disenfranchised feelings to twisted effect. Our protagonist, Brian Pasternack, is a baby-faced newcomer to the world of work, his confusion heightened by his baffling new role of 'Witch Hunter' - a position he doesn't recall applying for. It seems his new employer, Sintracorp, is cursed by a malevolent force that keeps employees prisoner, and while his colleagues bleakly accept the fact with a defeatist shrug and a sip of coffee, it's his job to seek out and destroy her.

Yuppie Psycho's weirdness is effortless, and to pigeonhole it as a survival horror simply feels diminutive. It is by turns funny, disturbing, surreal and heartwarming, flitting between each with baffling frequency and success. It's here that the simplistic pixel art pulls a surprising amount of weight, providing equal parts visual humour and provocative chills. Meanwhile, the writing favours character over comic-book melodrama, your attachment to this diverse cast of colleagues keeping stakes effectively raised.

In gameplay, however, those stakes are surprisingly subdued. This is not a game where ammo management is a concern, with environmental puzzle-solving presenting the bulk of the challenge,

and moral dilemmas determining the game's conclusion. It's not without threat, with chase sequences and stealth sections surviving the cull of traditionalism, but for the most part Yuppie Psycho would have you live in, rather than outlive, the moment.

It's a game that gives itself licence to be what it wants, when it wants to, and the fact that it captivates rather than alienates means it earns that confidence. Sacrificing blunt-force scares for its own incomparable vision, Yuppie Psycho is nothing less than a cult masterpiece.



DEV Q+A

We spoke with John Szymanski about their project, get the scoop below!

HOW DID YOUR TEAM COME TOGETHER?

Evan and I have been working on projects together since we were kids. Actually, of the four games I've released on Steam, Evan has done work on three of them. When it came to choosing who I wanted to work with on MFN, Evan was an obvious choice.

HOW DID YOUR TEAM EXPAND AS THE PROJECT PROGRESSED, AND WHAT CHANGES OCCURRED AFTER SECURING A PUBLISHER?

Evan and I were the only main players on the team with Evan being half time and me being full time. At this point we had also had some help from a concept artist, Jesse, a voice director Jello Apocalypse, and a character modeler Kira. After that point, our publisher agreed to let us hire some extra help to try to make the game the best it could be.

WHAT'S NEXT FOR TEAM SZYMANSKI?

What's next? Unsure right now! Evan and I have two projects we're toying with, but we're unsure what direction to go with yet.

MY FRIENDLY NEIGHBORHOOD

DEVELOPER: JOHN + EVAN SZYMANSKI · PUBLISHER: DREAD XP · WRITTEN BY: ROB DAVIS

Letting loose and diving into the crazy side of gaming is a must for keeping your sanity intact. So, I present you My Friendly Neighborhood if you're into stories like Candle Cove and Five Nights at Freddy's.

This game cooked up by John Szymanski and Evan Szymanski throws you right into everyone's favorite Saturday morning puppet show. Picture this: the once forgotten studio springs back to life and starts beaming out to the world. Now, what's the catch you wonder? Well, the puppets pulled a night at the museum stunt and decided to stir up some trouble by coming to life.

At the start of the game you're greeted by Ricky, a sock puppet with one goal to dissuade Gordon, the main protagonist from disconnecting the antenna broadcasting nationwide. And as witty and charming as this little guy can be, I don't mind his clever ways of trying to talk me out of things. I actually found it a welcome addition to the story; it never got annoying or repetitive.

I'd also like to mention that he is just a small part of the MFN family because We have Norman, the game's first puppet to be showcased and soon blasted in the face with my Rolodexer! His dialogue is great and so is the rest of the MFN cast. When Norman starts talking to his own echo due to his loneliness I almost thought he was talking with somebody in the same room.. but nope! he's just crazy and alone with thoughts of murder in his head. all of the dialogue you will hear completes the experience in the most joyful and scary way!

I stuck around all of the major areas just to see what everyone had to say next in their murder-filled conversations with themselves. Also adding it's Resident Evil style gameplay with doors that seamlessly creak open and let

you enter a new area while also giving you inventory slots just like RE4, I fell in love right away!

Your collection of puzzles in this game are pretty simple and straight to the point for a casual gamer. Nothing is ever way too challenging, and save stations are always close by if you choose to find them, with at least 2 tokens in each area for a panic save when you're on the verge of death. Using duct tape comes in handy when you need to permanently clear an area by taping up your puppet friends and giving you full freedom of that zone. You won't be able to do that in every zone, so use your resources wisely. Now onto weapons.

I hope you know the English alphabet because you will literally be shooting letters from all your guns! Yeah, you start off with a pistol called the Rolodexer and it makes a pretty cool sound when firing. I think this game might have the most original starter gun I've seen in a while. also find all the cheat codes scattered around the world and go for a second playthrough with them activated you won't regret it.

Now that you have beaten the game and hopefully played for a second time with cheats enabled, you should go for Neighborhorde Mode allowing enemies to come after you from all sides of the map and giving you a heavy machine gun for your puppet killing fantasies as icing on the cake!



The Witch's House *mv*

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DANGEN ENTERTAINMENT · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

Beginning its life as a free RPG Maker game by Japanese solo-developer Fummy, The Witch's House is proof that you don't need flashy graphics (or a big budget) to make great horror.

In this 16-bit adventure, you play as a young girl named Viola. Lost in the woods, you've nowhere left to venture – except into the dark and foreboding manor ahead. As gleefully stated by a suspiciously talkative black cat that likes to hang around, the only way to push forward is to enter this house. Upon entering, you very quickly realize that there is something wrong here.

Death is plentiful in The Witch's House, where it seems everything is trying to kill you. There are a lot of ways for Viola to die. Trial and error is key in a way that is reminiscent of Playdead's 'Limbo'. Be prepared for numerous death traps and clever hauntings.

The game boasts multiple endings and a deep story that has since been adapted into a prequel novel and nine-part manga series.

Puzzle solving in The Witch's House is more akin to old-school adventure games than what we're used to in the modern horror genre. Gameplay is straightforward 'pick-up and play' but the game won't hold your hand, with no guided objectives in the traditional sense.

I adore the game's soundtrack. So simple, yet incredibly effective within this style of game – from the eerily soothing title music to the viscerally gruesome sound effects. One sequence in particular is made even more terrifying by the use of some of the most panic-inducing music I've heard since the 'Drowning' theme in Sonic 2.

This little horror gem left a big impression on me. For a short and memorable horror adventure, the 2018 remake of 'The Witch's House MV' is available on Steam and consoles.



Devil inside us roots of evil

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MR SKULL GAME STUDIO · WRITTEN BY: MARIA KINNUN

The power of Christ compels you... to exorcise all those freakin' demons! In this first-person story-focused horror game from Mr. Skull Game Studio, you play as Father Aughust Heylel, an exorcist legitimized by the Vatican but in doubt of his faith. While writing a letter he recalls his worst mission, the Root of Evil, where he investigated a house to remove the evil within. Still troubled 30 years later, Father Aughust is returning to the scene to finish the job.

You start by reliving the events of 1984. Armed only with your trusty crucifix and your faith you must explore the scene of the hauntings, learn some controls, and evaporate some demons whilst witnessing some horrors yourself that test your faith. This aging priest moves slowly. Old man slow. He has a sprint but it consumes stamina. It doesn't last too long and needs to be replenished with caffeine pills. You also have limited faith that must also be replenished via rosemary. Unfortunately for you, the demons move very quickly and are terrifying so getting over come and out of danger can get tricky, especially in the second act when things start ramping up!

The game looks great! The visuals are smooth and atmospheric with some real creepy graphics. The game can be dark. I cranked the brightness on my screen way up because I got stuck in a room a couple of times. The sounds are very

atmospheric, purposely cranked up in certain places to help with the "crap your pants experience" and jump scares.

The Devil Inside Us is a short game that can be completed in a couple of hours but is worth the time spent. I enjoyed the story. The game mixes it up enough to keep it interesting and keeps my horror senses tickled.



SLAY THE PRINCESS

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SONKA · WRITTEN BY: TOM CROFTS

Shut up, stop what you are doing, and play Slay the Princess. This game is offensively good, and I will tell you why. Slay the Princess is a surreal horror visual novel and RPG, which is oozing with style. It is also fully voiced, so for those of us with short attention spans who zone out after reading too much, you are in luck. The voice-over is also phenomenal and easily one of the game's best and most entertaining aspects.

This game is undoubtedly not terrifying by any means, as it has no jump scares, loud noises, or environments to creep your way through or risk painful death. What it lacks in sheer terror, it makes up for in storytelling, narration, presentation, discovery, and an overall sense of mind-blowing realizations with each new playthrough.

So, how is the game played? You may ask. Everything in the game happens from the perspective of your character, "The Hero," who is being instructed by "The Narrator." The Narrator is very much like a DnD Game Master in that he explicitly explains every detail of a scene and advises you on what to do and where to go. The funny thing, though, is you don't have to listen. Almost like a choose-your-own-adventure game, you are presented with choices after every main dialogue. Your decisions directly affect the next scene into a continuous series of branching paths. The very first thing I did when starting the game was follow the most direct route to "Slay the Princess," and I did. In only 10 minutes. Yay! Go me. But then you find yourself back at the start, hearing the Narrator giving the exact exposition, only this time, you remember what happened. You can question the Narrator about what happened, but he has no memory of it.

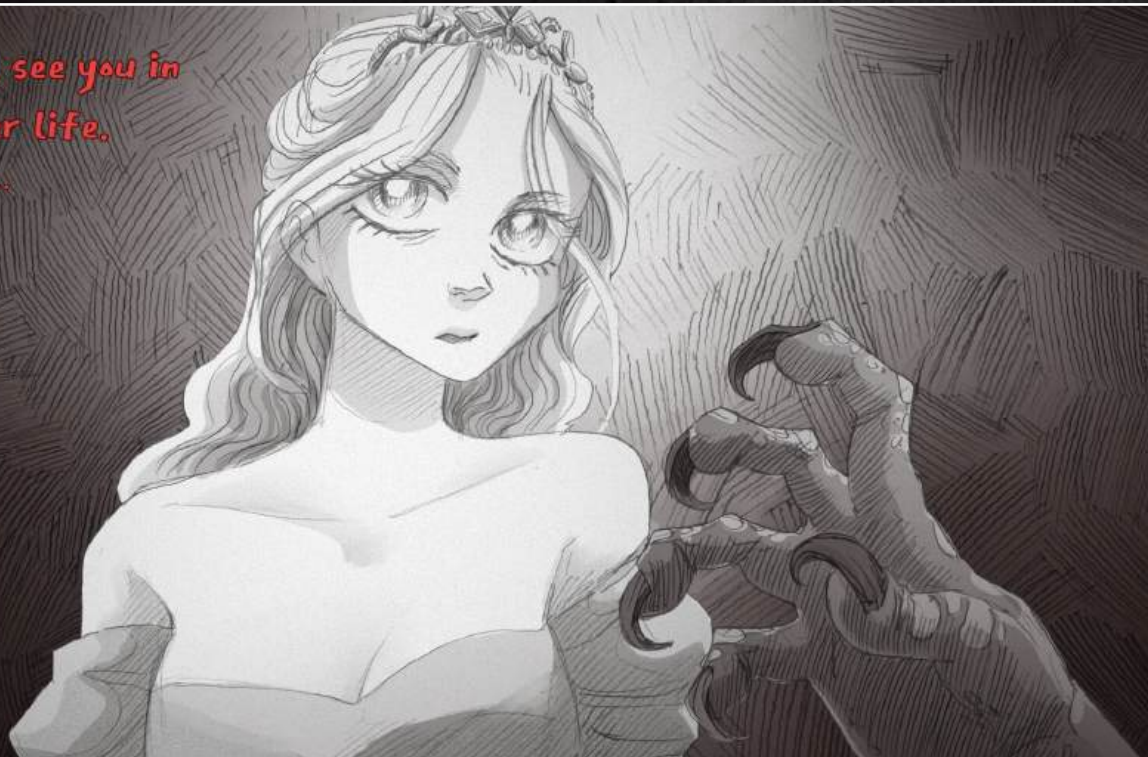
This is where things get interesting. As you try different options, you experience more of the story and more of the

crazy, weird, and utterly spooky versions of this world and the Princess. It became my goal to see the most F'd-up versions of everything the game has to offer. Each new attempt kept surprising me with unique elements that I absolutely loved. At this point, I am doing my damndest not to spoil anything; sadly, I need to share. One of the most insane aspects of the game is the alternate personalities of The Hero that manifest with different approaches. These show up as new voices with entirely different personas and opinions on each scenario, which affect the outcome and options to choose.

For my fellow horror aficionados, there are many, many brutal and visceral scenes to be experienced in this game. They take a little work to get to. In the meantime, you can bask in all the amazingly detailed and beautiful hand-drawn sets throughout the game. Every element in the game is hand-illustrated by award-winning graphic novelist Abby Howard, one of the co-founders of Black Tabby Games. Part of the charm and what makes this game so brilliant is the dark comedy writing and sense of ease that can then be shattered in a moment by a sudden jarring turn of events, like watching the Princess gnaw at her wrist like a trapped animal. Or have giant blades shoot out from her limbs, leaving the skin flopping around them and looking like one of the monsters from the Suffering.

I don't want to say much more for fear of spoiling or robbing you of the pure brilliance of this game. You really need to experience it for yourself to truly feel the charm and get sucked into the rabbit hole. You may think you are making mistakes as you play, only to learn there are no mistakes, just different paths. Often, this leads to new and bizarre outcomes that have to come back for more. Some of them are hilarious, and some of them are terrifying, but all of them are amazing.

Maybe I'll see you in
another life.



PROTOTYPE MANSION

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: MOONGLINT · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Prototype Mansion has a charmingly "Game Jam" feel to it. Short, experimental, and oh-so rudimentary, this scrappy little number from developer Jupiter Lighthouse is a respectable bite-sized tribute to Resident Evil's Spencer Mansion.

It's also outwardly silly. Perhaps in acknowledgement of its chunky amateurism, Prototype Mansion pays homage to the survival horror greats as often as it goes completely mental, referencing vegan cannibals, wobbly-headed children, and an insistent hatred of cats. Dialogue goes beyond Resident Evil's clumsy tone and commits fully to giving our two (and a half) protagonists some Whedon-esque banter.

It all works, albeit in debt to the game's rudimentary presentation. The slightly deformed, chibi-esque character models are full of cartoonish charm, even as some effective camera angles and lighting effects keep the horror theme on-point. Prototype Mansion embraces its limitations, and prioritises fun over fear. At least, to an extent.

Perhaps owing to its short run-time, the game seems all-too eager to create unwinnable states. Taking a diversion early into the game allows the player to forgo some crucial ammo supplies, and eventually creates a fail state where dwindling ammo and respawning zombies force a game restart. There are also instances where entering a room can see the zombies hungrily waiting in the doorway, the player taking a fatal zombie-noshing

with zero room for reaction.

It's a welcome change of pace when the game's latter half injects a first-person stealth section, showing off its Burton-esque locations with greater clarity and confidence. It also allows the game to amp up its previously muted tension - a rewarding payoff to an otherwise understated package.

Prototype Mansion's price point is more than fair, and clocking in at a breezy hour or two, it's the perfect choice for a lazy Sunday evening session. It's as modest as it is flawed, but in the shadow of its pitch-perfect tone, that's surprisingly easy to forgive.



HARTHORN

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: DEVOID STUDIO · WRITTEN BY: ALICE WINTER

As if going back to school wasn't scary enough. Harthorn and its developer Vincent Lade will send you down the hallways of Harthorn High School and into a psychological nightmare. This short, story-driven, and immersive exploration game is just as scary as it is self-aware. It feels like a 90s slasher film that hits all the nostalgia points. The spooky high school setting, the dialogue, and the score for this game set the mood for this high school horror show. The game has many features of old survival horror games but with modern high-quality graphics and great dialogue. Harthorn is a gem among indie horror games and will have fans of the genre walking the halls and feeling the pressure of returning to high school and facing a terrifying antagonist. So be ready to solve puzzles, explore every room, and fight for your life in Harthorn.

Developer Vincent Lade released Harthorn back in 2020, and the game has since developed its own cult following. The game may be somewhat short, but considering how cinematic the game is and the horror film inspirations, it works well with a shorter runtime. There is a heavy focus on the story-driven psychological horror, with great dialogue and seemingly endless exploration. You will play as a part-time security guard who is hired to patrol the halls of Harthorn High School during the winter break of 1994. Throughout the game you are aided by April, your radio dispatcher. Together, the both of you will investigate some strange happenings at Harthorn after a sudden change in security, the new locks and alarms were meant to keep intruders out but may have trapped something worse inside of Harthorn High School.

Almost every room in the high school the game is set in can be explored, adding to the immersive environment and the heavy focus on exploration. The player can spend a lot of time exploring and looking for notes in classrooms at Harthorn High. The game features puzzles like finding codes and backtracking similar to classic survival horror games. I'm a big fan of nostalgia in video games, anything that takes me back to my childhood gets extra points in my book. So the 90's slasher flick inspirations like *Scream* and *I Know What You Did Last Summer* are on full display and the antagonist pursuing us feels like they are taken right out of one of those films. The game feels very cinematic, the dialogue, setting, and score all work together to deliver that 90's slasher vibe. Even the runtime works in that cinematic sense, everything is wrapped up together for us to play one of the movies we loved as kids.

Harthorn is a fun and tense game that is full of exploration and delivers a fulfilling story. It's impressive that a short game can have such great dialogue and a compelling story. The classrooms are full of detail and the hallways feel like a genuine high school. I really enjoyed my time with Harthorn and I'm definitely going to be checking out Vincents' other games. I would like to see this game someday get an upgrade someday to include some cutscenes and maybe even a little more gameplay. I had such a great time playing and I guess my only complaint could be that I just wanted a little more of it. There is so much to explore and plenty of lore to uncover that the player can spend plenty of time in Harthorn, but be prepared because you are not alone, and Harthorn is easy to lose yourself in. I had a great time playing this game and would recommend this game to any horror fan, especially for slasher fans. Developer Vincent Lade was inspired to make Harthorn by the 90's horror films we all love and developed a game that would fit perfectly on a shelf with those old VHS tapes.

GREG'S DEADLY DRAFT

Version 2

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SILVERCITY SHARKS · WRITTEN BY: SAM MARSHALL

Sometimes, horror games don't have to be scary. They can instead rely on horror themes whilst making the player laugh, look at movies such as Leprechaun, Shrunken Heads, or Troll 2 for instance - these are beloved movies that are not scary, but fall under the horror umbrella. Silvercity Sharks' debut title, Greg's Deadly Draft, is another quirky, charming little horror game, which left me smiling by the end of its unfortunately short runtime.

You've been tasked with trying out for the Silvercity Sharks football team, and it's down to their mascot, Greg, to show you the ropes. Greg is very hard to please though, and is pretty mad about it. What follows is a crash course in stealth, mild combat, and platforming. It's pretty varied, but sadly once you're used to a mechanic it seems to not crop up again for the rest of the game.

That being said, what is here is fun, it's weird and lovable and the characters all make you laugh (for the right reasons too), and you'll undoubtedly remember the game for quite some time afterwards. What's in here is done right, and feels solid. Greg's Deadly Draft's main strength lies in just how unique it is, sure we've seen some sports horrors before, with Gone Golfing and The Curse of Nordic Cove, but this is I think the football horror, and I am happy to have been among those to witness this first. Hopefully Silvercity Sharks can keep working on their sports horror ideas and create something even cooler next time, with a

bit more to it.



THE UPTURNED

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: ZEEKERSS · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Ever want to take a break from super serious spooky horror games but still want horror elements? Then you should play The Upturned, a dark comedy take on the horror genre with a wacky blend of cartoon violence and almost Nintendo esque sensibility. The Upturned will make you laugh as you run in terror and frantically throwing everything in reach at monsters in the hopes of surviving.

As you make your way up the tower you will get a call from the host, Ik. Informing you that the elevator has broken again and that you will need to venture out on the current floor in search of power "nodes" to get the elevator moving again, Sure enough as soon as you collect the item you need you get visited by one of the other guests, a hulking brute that is hell bent on punching you in your squeaky face until it squeaks no more. After successfully escaping being squeaked to death, Ik assures you that it won't happen again, boy is he wrong.

So begins your journey up the tower, stopping every so often to retrieve a new power node and face the horrors that lay within via a twisted albeit hilarious puzzle of platforms, switches, doors and "residents" that seem keen on your murder. Your only defense is the ability to pick up and throw whatever you can find lying around at your would be attackers, stunning them and or killing them. Each floor is unique with different obstacles to overcome. Like a section of hallway covered in spikes and the

only way across is to make a pseudo bridge out of boxes, shelves, chairs, your grandmother, or anything to throw on top of them.

The Upturned is a laugh out loud hilarious but also still terrifying experience you shouldn't miss.



WELCOME TO KOWLOON

DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: N48A, A1ESSKA, NOTEX, ADMIA · WRITTEN BY: KATHERINE BASKIN

Welcome to Kowloon is a self-professed walking simulator that says up front that it takes roughly an hour to complete. I admired their honesty, as many generously pad their game length and disguise a walking simulator as an "exploration puzzler." And Welcome to Kowloon isn't having it: it's short and sweet and does exactly what it says on the box.

You play an unnamed protagonist who has rented an apartment in Kowloon, inspired by the famous walled city in Hong Kong that was demolished in the 90s, and you must navigate the empty, dark alleys to your building. Once inside, you realize your new landlady has trapped you in the building and now you must find a way to escape.

The plot is more of an afterthought that holds the exploration together: loose and unobtrusive to give center stage to the horror. The tight and twisting hallways are atmospheric and the ultrawide FOV helps sell it. Since the game, true to its inspiration, is mostly narrow passages, the wider field of view distorts the walls and ceiling to make them taller and narrower, as though closing in on you. There are some gruesome visuals here and there, and the finale is quite surreal.

That said, it is heavy on jump scares. They serve as welcome tension breaks to the overall sense of dread, but you have enjoy that to have a good time in Welcome to Kowloon.

My criticism is partly a compliment: it's not enough. It's good level design, but it feels like a slice of a larger game, rather than a complete experience. This could easily be expanded and polished into a longer campaign, but as it is, it's enjoyably scary and costs as much as a couple of venti lattes.



BUCKSHOT ROULETTE

DEVELOPER: MIKE KLUBNIKA · PUBLISHER: CRITICAL REFLEX · WRITTEN BY: CHEESECAKE JAKE

You wake in a dingy bathroom, dirt on the mirrors, and pills on the countertop. As you walk out the door into the dark and industrial nightclub, the sound of electronic music bouncing off the walls, you make your way through one last door. You enter a small room with cameras and lights, and a contract on the center of the table. The dealer reveals themselves and asks you to "please sign the waiver". The dealer isn't quite human, with a mouth full of sharp teeth and hollow black eyes. The game is simple, Russian roulette with a twist. The dealer loads the shells in a random order, you can shoot yourself and hope for a blank round, or shoot the dealer and hope to blow his face off. After three rounds, only one will be left standing and able to walk away with the prize.

Buckshot Roulette is a tabletop indie horror game developed and published by Mike Klubnika. Mike also created the original score for the game, which has recently been released on vinyl. The game was originally released in December of 2023 and has since received high praise from indie horror fans and live streamers.

The player is in for a challenge against the dealer. You are given several items that can assist you along the way, each with its own unique way of helping you keep your face intact. You will play three rounds against the dealer, with the first two rounds being a sort of a build-up to the finale "sudden death" round.

The game is a fast-paced brutal strategy game of Russian roulette against a demonic dealer, with tons of replay value. Buckshot roulette is a hell of a fun time and shows how a small game can make i big impact on the horror scene.



DEV Q+A

We spoke with Darnell Williams, Art Director at Square for the Parasite Eve project.

WHAT WERE YOUR FIRST IMPRESSIONS OF THE PROJECT?

I'd just left Disney Imagineering and was offered a chance to work with the Final Fantasy VII creators on SOny's newest console and help establish Square's US studio. I was extremely excited. Parasite Eve, as a property, was unique in its horror theme for Square, at the time.

WHAT SPECIFIC ASPECTS WERE YOU INVOLVED IN?

My duties were primarily artistic direction of the game cinematics and map screens, as well as, pipeline and technical direction. Hironobu Sakaguchi's goal was to have "Hollywood" quality cinematics, as the key aspect of Parasite Eve.

HOW MUCH INFLUENCE DID YOU HAVE ON THE LOOK OF THE GAME?

My influence was fairly strong. I developed the overall lighting tones and level of "realism" for the cinematics and maps.

ANY ANECDOTES YOU CAN SHARE FROM WHEN WORKING ON THE GAME? SPECIFIC TO THE GAME'S DEVELOPMENT IE STRUGGLES, CHALLENGES, OR FUNNY TURNOUTS.

Following the completion of Parasite Eve, I was given the position of Director of Motion Capture for Final Fantasy Spirits Within. Unfortunately, I had to fly bi-weekly to and from LA and Hawaii, since I'd been unable to relocate. After five months, I was exhausted and left Square. It was and is a really great company with amazingly talented people. I miss it.



DEVELOPER/PUBLISHER: SQUARE · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Parasite Eve is one of the first games to blend Survival Horror and RPG and do it very well. This is a game that also comes off the heels of the release of Square's much bigger titles, Final Fantasy 7, and just before Final Fantasy 8. Released in 1998, the same year as Resident Evil 2, the developers attempted to do what Capcom did (to much success) and make a horror game. Adapting the sci-fi horror novel Parasite Eve by Hideaki Sena, which was released in 1995 to much praise, the team applied their expertise in RPGs and storytelling to the Resident Evil style of gameplay. What they came up with is still one of the best blending of the genres to date.

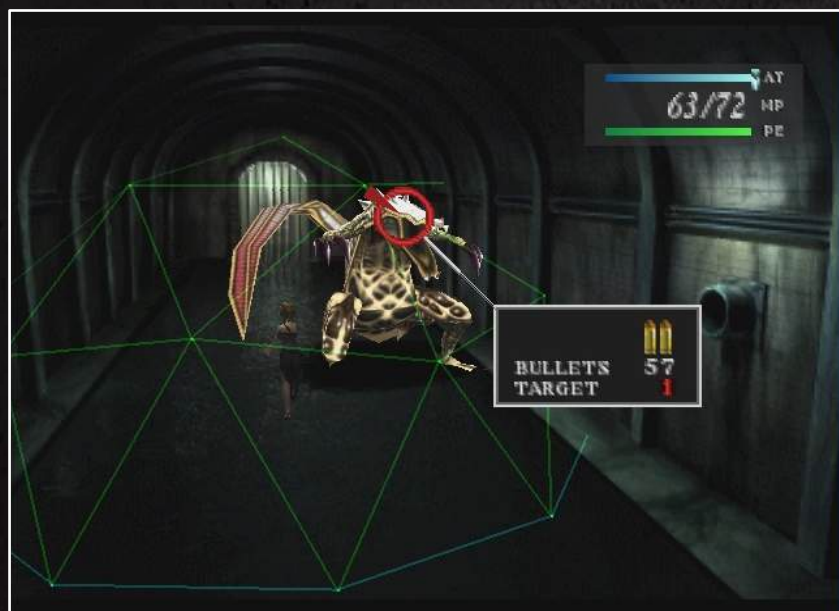
Parasite Eve, like classic survival horror games, uses fixed camera angles, resource management, and an onslaught of nightmare-inducing monsters. What it did differently was present all of those elements with high-quality cutscenes and a really deep story that acts as a sequel to the original novel. Add on top of that a semi-real-time but still turn-based combat system that does out experience points that level up your character, who earns magic spells, and you have a staple RPG.

The story centers around rookie NYPD cop Aya Brea, who decides to go on a date to the opera. Shortly after the show begins, people begin spontaneously combusting, and all hell breaks loose. Aya, not being affected, rushes the stage to confront the person who seems to be behind the carnage. The woman, now mutated with elongated arms, tells Aya that her name is Eve and she is the embodiment of Mitochondria, an organism that lives in human cells. She is trying to release the mitochondria to take their rightful place as the dominant organism on the planet and has the ability to control beings as well as "heat up" their cells, causing combustion.

In your pursuit of Eve, you will travel all over the city of New York and unravel a terrifying mystery about the human genome and evolution. Being the RPG that it is, there are long portions of dialogue delivered via text. This was before voice-over became a standard in video games. The story is not only brilliant but also terrifying as you watch events play out. If you played Final Fantasy 8 you will see a lot of similarities in PE, most prominently the character models and creature designs.

The gameplay often feels like normal horror games of the era. Fixed camera angles on pre-rendered backgrounds while you explore and battle monsters. Battles are random and transition the game from exploration to combat. During this, you can move around freely and even avoid enemy attacks. You have an Active Time bar that allows you to perform actions, shooting enemies with various firearms or using items like medicine or using Parasite abilities (aka Magic).

Where this game differs is in a lack of puzzle-solving to progress, a staple of most horror games. Parasite Eve keeps the player moving forward, delivering its particular blend of mutated monster rats along with its off-time bizarre narrative. It's all very Japanese in that way, and I mean that in the best of ways. If you like your horror weird, you will like this one. I personally feel this is an under utilized blend of genres and hope to see more horror RPGs or maybe a remake of Parasite Eve. Thankfully, there is a sequel and it's even better than the first.



DEVELOPER: SURREAL SOFTWARE · PUBLISHER: MIDWAY · WRITTEN BY: MARIA KINNUN

Following in the sadistic shadow of games like Silent Hill, The Suffering from Surreal Software crawled its way out of the depths of hell in 2004 and gave us a new take on the horror gaming experience.

Playing the role of Torque, an inmate serving time on death row at Abbot State Penitentiary for the brutal murder of his wife and children, a crime that he has no memory of, he must fight his way free from his incarceration when an earthquake unleashes supernatural threats from Carnate Island's cruel history.

We are given little information about the lead character Torque. Richard Rouse III, creative lead and writer of the game, noted that it was an early decision to keep Torque a mystery, giving him almost a Neanderthal appearance. Primal, so that his strength shone through. I see this as a way for the player to look at Torque as a blank canvas and for us to make our own decisions on how we choose to play his story.

Never before had a game teased my moral compass like The Suffering did. The horror junkie in me reveled at the idea that I was in control of being cruel to an NPC that was walking just a little too slow for my liking. The demon's voice... "he will only slow you down... kill him..." matched my intrusive thoughts so I was happy to oblige. Pulling the electric chair lever on a poor innocent guy strapped to a chair and watching his head smoke was kinda satisfying!

Of course, the game is supposed to test your moral stability and most people agree that murder shouldn't be fun. Resisting the urge to paint the town red opened up different endings for Torque's story based on the choices you made. Your angel decisions would reward you with the voice and your late wife telling you what a good boy you are but I found it a challenge to follow this road and get a perfect good ending. I accidentally shot an innocent NPC a few times due to clunky controls or pressed the monster button by mistake, instantly disappointing my wife...

What is a horror game without its monsters? The Suffering pulled out all of the stops bringing in Stan Winston to help design some of the most iconic creatures I have ever seen in a horror game, rivaling Silent Hill's own Pyramid Head... Being incarnations of many forms of executions that were a part of Canate Island's cruel past... Hermes T. Haight, a former executioner, haunts Abbot State as a cloud of green gas after committing suicide in his gas chamber and teases Torque with how much he enjoys seeing his victims suffer. Horace P. Gauge is a victim of the electric chair and a tormented soul who identifies with Torque's dark path and his inner demons. Torque can become a monster himself.

Giving another element of choice The Suffering allows you to play fully in first person! It was nice to see the game from another perspective. Because the game

was a lot more combat-heavy than other horror games at the time, the first-person mode was good for faster enemies but the controls were a little clunky, and with traversal around the level it was hard to maintain it throughout.

By the time the sequel Ties That Bind came, Midway, the publishers behind the series were already on a downturn, and unfortunately, even though it was a success at launch, The Suffering franchise was unable to save the company. Maybe The Suffering suffered from being a new IP at a time when more established horror franchises were dominating the limelight. We will never know... It is a shame that The Suffering is a cult classic with so much to offer but has been sentenced to life without parole in the archives of time with no mention of a re-release or remaster on the horizon.



MOBILE HORROR

Older mobile phones from the mid-2000s had quite a large subset of horror games developed for them. We want to use the magazine to shine a light on some of these experiences that are either forgotten or went under the radar due to the medium. These are easily emulated on PC and Android toolid.g a full game sometime soon too!



NOWHERE

Nowhere is a candidate for best classic mobile game that deserves a Steam port. Made by DeValley in 2007, this Silent Hill-esque project is heavy on the narrative, and pretty varied in terms of gameplay too. An absolute must-play if you even have an inkling of wanting to try classic mobile horror.



TERROR'S SEED

Developed by PlayWireless, this little gem is a Resi clone, complete with boss fights, mansion environments and minor puzzles. This is a gorgeous game as well, and has quite the depth to it! Be sure to take this one slow or risk a gruesome death!



DARKEST FEAR

Darkest Fear is a great puzzle horror by the creators of Angry Birds. In DF, you need to stay within the light in order to avoid monsters, whilst working your way through a series of levels. This is the first in a trilogy, and super creepy. Definitely worth checking out or emulating!. Should be brilliantly eerie!

SIREN BLOOD CURSE

DEVELOPER: PROJECT SIREN · PUBLISHER: SONY · WRITTEN BY: ROB DAVIS

Siren Blood Curse is a survival horror stealth game unfolding as an episodic nightmare comprising 12 episodes, each lasting around 20 minutes ensuring it doesn't overstay its welcome. It serves as a reimagining of the first game, immersing players back into the same setting where Siren on PS2 began. They are immediately pursued by Shibito, the antagonists of the game. The story alternates between characters from an American TV crew initially seeking to explore the paranormal. Chaos erupts as their curiosity leads them to witness a human sacrifice unfolding before them. they must discern whether these events are staged or actual paranormal occurrences.

The game offers numerous improvements to its mechanics enhancing player engagement. Sight Jacking, looking much cooler than in the last few games, allows you to see through the eyes of both friends and Shibito enemies. While using various weapons can be effective against enemies and might make the game seem easy at times, rushing through it may diminish the experience by bypassing puzzles and collectibles also architectural elements that add depth. However, that's just the explorer side of me speaking.

Sight Jacking proves incredibly useful in evading Shibito and navigating maze-like environments. A layered map helps with a stylistic approach to navigation highlighting how Siren Blood Curse retains the freedom of its predecessors without altering the core of its new version. This isn't so much a review as it is a recommendation: pick up this game and show the old Project Siren team some love. Games like this may not come around in the future.

Moving on to the soundtrack with over 31 tracks, mostly consisting of throat singing and rock music, which when done right, can be terrifying when you're playing in a dark room like I was. I'll leave it to you to experience it all for yourself. The sound design is fantastic, not overwhelming me with noise but appropriately intense when

necessary!

Gameplay-wise, Siren Blood Curse resembles a blend of Resident Evil 4 and Metal Gear Solid, heavily focusing on stealth. The townsfolk chase you until you hide or escape, reminiscent of the gameplay dynamics. You can swiftly switch between first and third-person perspectives but don't expect the controls to be amazing at first. The game remains true to the series offering initially challenging controls that become more manageable once you get accustomed to them. The inclusion of collecting archives and weapon logs adds a neat touch providing the game with replay value after finishing it or while still playing. Upon reaching the end of this game, I felt that each area has its own soul not letting me feel like it was reusing assets. Instead, it extended the world even more with color shifts and a perfect palette of dark brown and gray. This game should be perfect for people in love with film-grain, low-color-tone movies like 28 Days Later and The Texas Chainsaw Massacre.

After finishing my playthrough, I realized how awesome the soundtrack was, especially the final song set in the credits. This game never let me down in storytelling or sound design.

As a trophy hunter myself, this game lacks trophy support. However, this fact speaks volumes about how cool the game was, as it never once crossed my mind to collect them. Allowing oneself to love old-school horror and reminisce about what we once had is the most important thing when playing Blood Curse. It truly was something special, and I refuse to let it be forgotten among other amazing horror games of our past.

In the end, I'm left wanting more. Siren Blood Curse never made me feel stupid or marked things with yellow markers or held my hand all the way until the end. I felt accomplished so that being said give this game a shot, boot up your PS3 and have fun.



BLOODRAYNE

DEVELOPER: TERMINAL REALITY · PUBLISHER: MAJESCO/VIVENDI · WRITTEN BY: DAN MORRIS

Vampire games suck! You run around sucking. Suck Nazis, zombies and even Nazi zombies. Or zombie Nazis? One of those. BloodRayne is very much a game of its time. An action shooter horror themed romp where you play a sexy dhampir (half human, half vampire) redhead murdering Nazis and other demonic creatures because of course those silly Nazis are up to their old tricks. Digging up old relics, summoning evil spirits from the beyond. All in the pursuit of world domination and damn the consequences.

BloodRayne is a third person shooter slasher action horror game developed by Terminal Reality and originally released in 2002 for the PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and PC. You play as Rayne working for the Brimstone Society during the 1930s. After losing your mentor during a mission you learn about a Nazi plot to find relics of power by the G.G.G or Gegengeist Gruppe. Basically a supernatural focused SS unit of Hitler's. She is then sent to stop the GGG from collecting these relics of power and hunt down all the members of the unit. The driving narrative is very shallow but honestly, how much of a reason do you need to chase after and murder nazis? Much of the story is forgettable and or poorly delivered. You'll be too busy either looking at Rayne's ass or the chaos you are creating anyways to notice.

I have fond memories of playing BloodRayne as one of the more violent and to my adolescent memory "scary" games of my youth. Upon revisiting the game via the recently released ReVamped edition my expectations were put in check. BloodRayne is very much a mindless action game, focusing on blasting and slashing hordes of enemies. It thankfully does have some solid creepy moments and twists in the story that felt akin to meeting the Flood for the first time in Halo. The moment in the story when the "evil" is released and you hear Nazi soldiers screaming in terror is incredibly foreboding. Then you have to face that evil and even eat it, for health reasons. You are a vampire after all, fighting Nazis and evil. EVIL, ok I'm done.

Rayne wields two absurdly long blades attached to her arms that unfold out as she strikes. She can also wield any of the numerous weapons that enemies drop upon death for some shooty fun. As a vampire, Rayne has the ability to slow down time, active heat vision, "zoom" view and of course, suck the blood of her enemies to refill her health. The feeding is both awesome and hilarious as you listen to the sounds of soldiers screaming "Get her off" and Rayne slurps and moans with delight. Enemies GIB in the best ways when you get a critical or an explosion blows them to bits, which when paired with the "slow time" ability leads to some glorious moments. You will face a variety of enemies, mostly Nazis, but also plague monsters, werewolves, other vampires, and

these weird flying heads with the spine still attached that gnash at you. The later missions have you tracking down the GGG members but then a greater threat arises and Rayne herself has to utilize the power of relics to stop them.

If you are keen to play or revisit this game, here is a word of warning. The version I played on Xbox suffered from game crashes and a lot of them. Which wouldn't be the worst thing, but the game itself has a terrible checkpoint system and some awful difficulty spikes. So, you know, the best of combinations. If that doesn't scare you or you can get a hold of the original game, then enjoy this mindless slaughter fest with some tongue in cheek witticism and Indiana Jones but as an overtly sexualized female vampire heroine storyline. There is fun to be had and some good creepy, albeit, not scary, parts of the game.



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A STAR IN THE DESERT THE GAMES OF DESERT FOX

WRITTEN BY: KATHERINE BASKIN

Early on in my ownership of my Switch, I was surfing the storefront and lamenting a lack of good horror when I saw a game with a unique title: *Bad Dream: Coma*. I was drawn to it because I've always been interested in media that explores the nature of dreams and altered states of consciousness. It had a clever hand-drawn style and spooky vibes that stood apart from anything else in the Nintendo store. I took a risk, bought it, and not to spoil the rest of this piece, but it turned me into a massive fan.

Bad Dream: Coma from developer and now self-publisher Desert Fox is a point-and-click adventure title made in GameMaker Studio 2, in which you play an unnamed protagonist wandering through a drawing come to life as you attempt to solve the mystery: Why is everyone asleep, and how can we all wake up?

The puzzles are simple and the storytelling is as surreal and dreamlike as the visuals. At times, the game is surprisingly dark and somewhat macabre, though the player never feels in significant danger. The game is more atmospheric, like flipping through

an Edward Gorey book, rooted in a sort of gothic appeal. You meander through the landscape solving object puzzles and interactables and can easily wrap up a session in an evening. Replaying provides some subtle changes, but these are not games focused purely on choices.

I found the game so delightful that I bought the other available titles from Desert Fox. All of them have a similar PnC vibe with light puzzle solving and exploration and all of them have creepy, unsettling horror vibes, with the standouts being the rest of the *Bad Dream* series (*Coma*, *Fever*, *Stories*, and *Purgatory*) and Desert Fox's new series called *Faded Stories* which already has two entries in it.

There's also a set of other games with similar gameplay, but with a photo composite style. They're slightly more traditional horror than the hand-drawn games, especially *Darkness Under My Bed*, in which you navigate passages made of items under said bed. It's probably the truest horror effort of his collection.

As I began to collect and work my way

through his games, I found myself curious about this developer and his seemingly endless well of creativity. Fortunately for me, Desert Fox, whose real name is Robert Gąsiorowski, was willing to chat with me about his work.

"I've been making games since I was a kid," he said. "I started with board games and when I got my first PC at the age of 13, I moved to the digital arena." Now at age 35, Gąsiorowski's years of experience are in the double digits, which might explain his skill and breakneck development cycle, releasing two games—*Faded Stories: Full Moon* and *Bad Dream: Purgatory*—in 2023 alone. "That puts me in a nice position, where I feel natural and comfortable in this field, and I'm still relatively young to have enough energy and passion for my work."

Desert Fox games communicate that passion wholeheartedly, no doubt this has helped build his following. He released some smaller games that gained enough traction to pull him out of a slump. "I published [*Bad Dream: Butcher*] on Gamejolt and—true story—I went to bed crying because I had no ideas for myself



outside of gamedev. I felt like I lost the last four years of my life chasing wind. When I woke up, Butcher was featured on the main page."

Gąsiorowski is part of a burgeoning Polish game dev community, though he doesn't think it's too different from the rest of the global industry. He also believes that developers around the world have adjusted to the industry's demands in a somewhat negative way. "We work with passion, but more cynical people can sense that and they use this against us." Perhaps this explains why he now prefers to self-publish his games.

Much like the gold standard survival horror games of the late 90s and early 2000s, Robert creates horror games not with the goal to scare, but to provoke something deeper. "Other than *Darkness Under My Bed* it's never

my goal to make my games scary. I struggled with depression for my whole adult life and that strongly affected my approach to world building and topics I want to discuss. Because of that my games resonate with a more mature audience."

Gąsiorowski's brand of thoughtfulness reminds me of why games like *Silent Hill* stick with players in a similar way to something like *Bad Dream: Coma*: they're not trying to scare you. The horror emerges from their closeness to those darker parts of the self—the parts obsessed with loss, grief, loneliness, the visceral depths of the human experience.

It was an honor to be able to talk about Desert Fox games and find out more about Robert Gąsiorowski. It's rare now that I feel strongly about a developer's entire suite of games to the extent that they become

automatic buys for me. They're clever, beautiful, bespoke creations deserving of all the praise I can heap on them.

Robert is, however, as humble as they come: "I'm always hesitant to talk about my work because I don't want to shine through my games. I put a lot of effort into them so I always think it's better if they speak for themselves." For me, they are loud and clear.



Our Little Nightmare

PREVIEWS

BANNED TO THE BONE

WRITTEN BY: MARIA KINNUN

For as long as I can remember, as a horror fan, censorship has been wagging its mom finger at us whenever our favorite genre played a little too hard and showed us the gruesome goodness we really wanted to see. Okay! I get it! We really shouldn't want to see people torn apart horrifically or enjoy playing a character brutally bludgeoning someone to death... but we do... We are horror fans.

Understandably there are points where a line has to be drawn as the crazies of the world like to spoil it for the rest of us by getting ideas and taking things beyond just entertainment. This causes games to push the boundaries of... classification! Here games are rated for their appropriate audiences or denied to be released at all when classification is refused. But when did pixels and polygons become too hot for TV? I wanted to take a look into the world of horror games that pushed the limit to get banned to the bone!

The early days of horror gaming weren't causing anyone to crap their pants with indistinct blocky figures poking one

another to release a red pixel. Understandably then game developers were looking at new ways to bring a better horror experience to their players. In the 90's came FMV or Full Motion Video in video games. FMV games were often point and click style adventures with pre-rendered backgrounds and sometimes live action video put in place for cutscenes. Games such as Night Trap and even the classic Resident Evil of 1996 used the technology to invoke a realistic feel if you can look past the campy acting. However, there was one game in particular that caught my eye when looking into the era of FMV games... Phasmagoria.

Phasmagoria by Sierra On Line in 1995 is a point and click style horror game that included scenes of gore, sex, and violence in FMV form that drew a lot of eyes. Despite being marketed as an adult game and coming with a password system to censor the content, it was not saved from the censorship guillotine. With the games industry mostly being for kids at the time, there was a concern that any gore-curious computer-literate 10 year old could bypass the security measures. Even if the password system was not defeated, the

pixelated/censored scenes left the imagination to conjure something worse than actually depicted.

Some retailers declined to carry it, religious organizations and politicians condemned it, and it was refused classification altogether in Australia... Boo. It got the big chop down under!

As computer technology advanced so did the quality of graphics. Games no longer needed FMV to show the good stuff and now we could act out the depravity for ourselves! And that is why Manhunt 2 from Rockstar got slammed for "Gross, unrelenting, and gratuitous violence".

In Manhunt you played as a death row prisoner who is forced to kill in a series of snuff movies. The game allowed the player to execute characters and be rewarded for brutal killings. Already pushing the limits of classification for its violent imagery, things took an even darker turn when Manhunt was blamed for influencing a murder in the UK. Here a teenager, who obsessively played the game, bludgeoned his friend to death with a hammer. Thus, after the



announcement of Manhunt 2, critics opened fire at the idea of a release of a sequel. Despite the executions being censored and the kill score system being removed before the game was released... Manhunt 2 was banned in multiple countries (United Kingdom and Ireland) and many US retailers such as Target, Walmart, and GameStop refused to sell it.

Thrill Kill by Paradox Development was an unreleased and eventually canceled horror fighting game from 1998. Passed around my school yard like a dirty porn mag, I was able to get my hands on a playable copy. The sadistic fighting game had 10 fighters

sent to hell and must fight to the death for a chance of reincarnation. It featured all kinds of crude and demonic fighters such as the mad surgeon, who would slash at players with his scalpel, and the tormentor (reminiscent of pinhead from Hellraiser), who would impale you with his chains! As you fought you would fill up a meter that would allow you to do a "Thrill Kill" finisher. And for pure mayhem, it supported up to four fighters at a time.

Sure, this game was gory! But it was probably the suggestive sexual themes that got the game controversy and then eventually canceled. Murder and mutilation

okay! Boobies? Absolutely not! It was pretty much Mortal Kombat with bondage. Lady characters often had moves that involved breaking necks with their crotches while making orgasmic moans... try explaining those sounds coming from your room to your parents!

Playing Thrill Kill, I feel that it was weak sauce compared to today's standards as is the case with many banned games these days. It wasn't as taboo as its reputation has it to be... And to be honest it was kind of jank as the controls were bad and it just wasn't that good of a game but did live on as Wu Tang: Taste the Pain/Shoalin Style minus the gory assets. Thrill Kill goes down in history as being one of those games that was just too hot for TV, which also made it more desirable to own.

One thing we can say about people is they will always want what they are not supposed to have. And banned games have always had that certain appeal, because you just know they gave the gory goods that feed our soul. Yeah... I'm weird like that and will always be fascinated by those games that were banned to the bone!



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