

BA Illustration Hons- Research in Practice (ADAD5004/C)

Proposal for independent project

Name: Anais Gauci

Word count: 2,486

Lecturer: Delyth Lloyd-Evens

Introduction

Noticing a pattern, I noticed great enjoyment is experience when people play horror games, interestingly some of the most popular being those with children as protagonist. I will be using three key words: **Character**, **Mood/atmosphere** and **Horror**, to explore why these types of games are so popular among so many. It will also help me understand what elements are used to make these games all the more appealing to their audiences.

Character

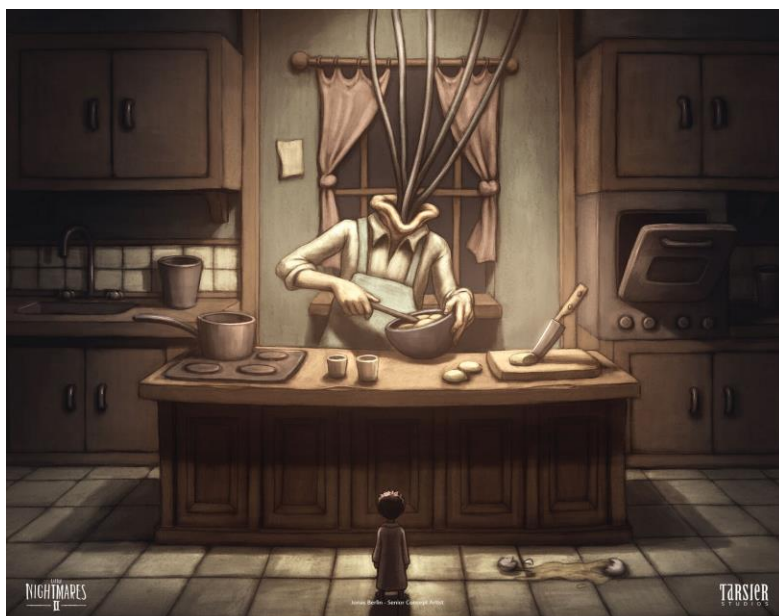


Fig. 1- Jonas Steinick Berlin, (2021), *Little nightmares II*

Character can mean many things; It was initially derived from Greek 'Charassein' but was given its now known meaning in the 17th century which is used to, 'apply to one of the people found in a novel, movie or play, to a person marked by conspicuous traits' (Merriam-Webster, 2023). It's here I decided to look into the designs of character's, specifically that of a child characters placed into a horror setting, due to many modern horror games including a child as it's protagonist, leading to the question of why are they so popular? Design of the characters in games, especially their protagonist are important, for they are who the audience needs to connect to, have reason to stay alive for as long as they can.

When appearance serves this purpose it relates to the rule of form following function. It is the rule of thumb by which aspects of the character's appearance have a reason to exist. The form of a character serves a purpose (Marika Nieminen, 2017, pg. 37).

A Good example for character design would be Tarsier studios, the creators of the horror platform game series, '*Little Nightmares*'. Younger characters in dark media tend to draw us in, weather it be their youthful appearance or personality in such a gloomy environment. Game designers for "*Little Nightmares*" state, 'We have always been drawn to the idea of a youthful character taking on a world that was never meant for them'. (Tarsier studios, 2017, pg. 61). This led to the lead designer Dennis Talajic to design a character that's placed in a fish-out-of-water situations, (David Merik, 2017, pg. 61), So in this instance, making them very small compared to the world around them. As shown in fig. 1, Having the protagonist be so small effected the way the whole game was to be developed and allowed some 'Tactile, wacky control scheme' (Talajic, 2017, pg. 63). Talajic further elaborates that by having such a small protagonist 'We can reframe traditional elements such as platforming- now you platform against furniture. And that's something that only becomes possible

because of the exaggerated size differences' (Talajic, 2017, pg. 63). Therefore, the design indeed has an impact, not only on the audience but also the game whole development.

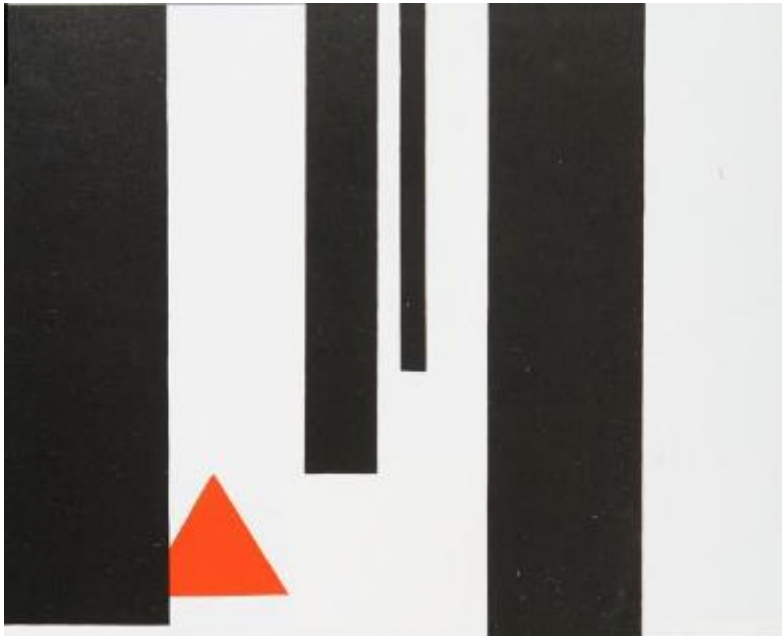


Fig.2 Molly Bang, (1991), *Picture this: How pictures work*

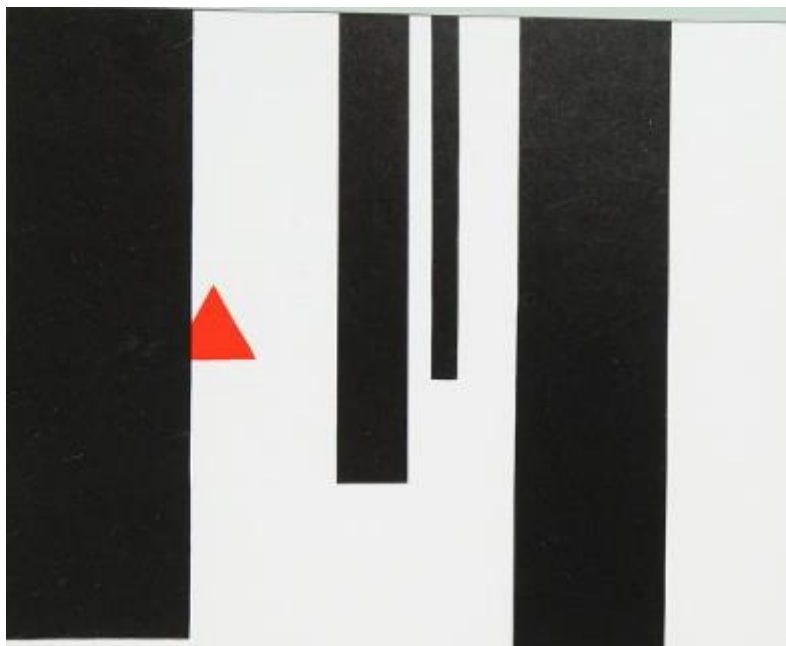


Fig.3 Molly Bang, (1991), *Picture this: how pictures work*

Bang further investigates this concept of very small characters with the use of semiotics.

Semiotics can be applied to many things, sight being one of them and shaping of the environment (Martin Krampen, 2013, pg. 13) Much like how Talajic talks about making the character smaller can affect the overall design, bang does the same process by making the heroine proportionately smaller (Bang, 1991, pg. 18). We have to ask ourselves, why is it scarier when the protagonist is smaller? Especially when they are a child. Bang gives an answer to this question,

We feel more scared when we are little and an attacker is big, because we're less able to overcome the danger or control it physically. When we are little, we are weaker and can't defend ourselves as well in a physical fight (Bang, 1991, pg. 18).

Therefore, the size of the character plays a major role in affecting the audience, making them feel more concerned for the protagonist.



Fig. 4 Tarsier Studios, (2017), *Six*

The main character Six, presented in fig. 4, takes on this design choice in being very small with an oversized rain mac covering most of her body, but allowing her little arms and legs to give visual feedback to the audience (Talajic, 2017, pg. 63). Therefore, making her seem even smaller than she already is, appearing weaker.

There are many other things to take into consideration when designing a character,

Which category does this character belong to? What's unique about this character? Who are his friends or enemies? What will happen to this character? What changes will happen to this character at Last? (Haitoa Su, 2011, pg. 28).

It's essential that the characters design conveys a type of feeling to the audience- We discussed how the size can play a part in this, but another aspect can really help along with character design: colour theory. Colour can really affect how we view and see a character, by changing the saturation, the hue or tint, the whole perception of colour can have drastic changes (Bradley, 2010). Six's iconic bright yellow raincoat helps her stand out in the bleak world that she explores, it gives a sense of appearing pure, adding on childlike sense of innocence (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Ruprecht Matthaei, 1971, pg. 79). You can see this trope of the yellow raincoat used in media, especially horror such as, Steven Kings 'IT' and the animated movie 'Coraline'. Yellow is often viewed as a symbol of hope but a sign of caution towards the viewer (Shannon Lewis, 2021). 'Yellow is the color of... things that say "continue on at your own pace but be alert and be ready. Things are about to change..." (abitfrank, 2022)

So, a character and its design can really affect how we as the audience feel when playing these games, heightening the horror factor with having such a small and vulnerable protagonist, exclaiming why such young character's appeal so much in horror games.

Mood/atmosphere

Mood, originating from Proto-Germanic *mōda* and Atmosphere, the word originating from Modern Latin *atmosphæra* and from Greek *atmos* (Merriam-Webster, 2022). Both mood and atmosphere can come hand-in-hand with characters, as they can affect how the characters themselves interact with the world around them and set the tone for the audience, “a setting can be powerful enough to affect how every character in the story acts and reacts with every other character, how every event is determined.” (Noble, 2012, p. 56). Mood and atmosphere are essential for setting the tone of the world your character is put in, as it helps enhance the horror, therefore both the characters and the mood and atmosphere can affect each other. It is very important that the worlds created give you an instant feel on what the game is about. The developers for “Little Nightmares 2” went through something similar,

“

Ever since the release of the first game, we've had many questions about how we came up with the look of Little Nightmares. The simple answer is iteration; a long and painful process where we work to find the personality of this world and everything in it. Getting this right is essential, not only for the players, but also to inspire us as developers and keep our minds focused (Tarsier Studios, 2021)



Fig. 5 John Sweeney, (2013), *The Last Of Us*



Fig. 6 Playdead, (2010), *LIMBO*

Mood/Atmosphere is what gives a game its mark and uniqueness to it, especially in horror games. As shown in both fig. 5 and 6, they have very strong but different types of atmospheres and mood. Video games are a form made up of visuals, sound, and gameplay (Hatfield, 2010). *The Last Of Us* takes a more realistic approach with its game design, with 3D and more realistic detailed visuals, while *LIMBO* takes on a more simplified approach with a 2D scrolling puzzle and platformer, using only black and white visuals. Both of these

games tell their stories with their visuals, sound and gameplay, speech not always being needed, as stated by Blake on *The Last Of Us*,

This game is every bit as powerful with its world-building as it is its script and VO performances. It is a masterclass in environmental storytelling ... And along with the literal death that litters the streets and staggers after you in spore-filled hallways - I still, genuinely, have nightmares populated with that clicking sound. (Blake, 2019)

The structure used to create a good horror atmosphere and mood can be called back to the creation of the gothic genre in English literature. What is the gothic exactly? Gothic fiction is the question of power. It is often drawn towards the very powerful-often supernaturally powerful, or obscenely powerful figures or takes a focus upon people who are completely vulnerable (Bowen, 2014). This again links back to characters, and how young and vulnerable characters can enhance the horror of the game to the audience.



fig.7 Tomonori Takan, (2021), *Resident Evil Village*



fig. 8 Tomonori Takan, (2021), Resident Evil Village

The video game series '*Resident Evil*' utilises many of the themes that are in the Gothic, especially the latest game, Resident Evil Village, with its use of a dark, moody and supernatural elements, run down villages, and ancient castle. It has a great variety of supernatural antagonist, four of them being vampires, one of the biggest tropes in the Gothic due to the popularity of Bram Stokers '*Dracula*'. So, mood/atmosphere plays major key roles with enhancing the horror aspect of the game through its use of its supernatural elements and use of sound, design and visuals.

Horror

Horror, coming from horrur, borrowed from Latin horrōr. Many people love horror games, but it does beg the questions, why do so many love them? When fear is seen as a negative emotion? It is an unexpected answer, as horror essentially provide a safe way for many to mentally process how we would cope with dangers. (Jarrett, 2023). The more negative emotions a person experience during anything in the horror genre, the more likely they are to enjoy it. Generally, more suspenseful movies are more successful movies for example,

because suspense produces enjoyment (M. Perse, 2017, pg. 214). This likely has the same effects on those who love horror games, therefore explaining why people love them so much.

I further investigated more 'extreme' elements of horror such as gore, and how much can that effect a whole game, the horror genre itself and why it is included. Each game previously mentioned uses gore in some kind of way, whether it be characters losing limbs, killing enemies, or simple depictions of blood. Between the 1960s and early 1980s, gore was considered a taboo subject. (Vierra, 2022). Gore is huge part in many modern-day horror.

Gore, and the pain associated with it, is hard to ignore" ..." Gore will always be a part of the horror genre and be an effective tool in the cinema to make the cinema to make the audience feel the characters' pain and make a lasting impression long after (Vierra, 2022).

A reason behind this could be because gore can have an uncanny valley aspect to it, something that screams 'something is wrong' but we cannot figure out why. This phenomenon was first introduced in 1978 by robotics professor Masahiro Mori, a Japanese expression she changed, translating into the 'Uncanny Valley'" (Braun, 2019)

Uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind, and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression. (Freud, 2003, pg. 224).



Fig. 9 Killmonday Games, (2016), *Franbow*



Fig. 10 Jonas Steinick Berlin, (2021), *Little Nightmares II*

Fiction is great way to present different types of gore, allowing us to be more creative with our ideas and how we use them. Freud states, “fiction presents more opportunities for creating uncanny feelings than that are possible in real life” (Freud, 2003, pg. 17). This is

likely why the uncanny works so well in the horror genre in general, especially in games, because fiction allows players to dig in and appreciate what the game is about (Valentinelli, 2009). Both fig. 9 and 10 present the uncanny use of gore in different ways. '*Franbow*' giving us the option of switching between the real world and another dimension that like the real world but filled with horrors and secrets that help progress the game, while '*Little nightmares 2*' uses it for the enemies that we encounter in the game, making it a lot more stressful and scarier when e counting these enemies. This all explains why people have such an appeal for horror games and the whole horror genre in general, because these elements draw people in, despite being afraid- enjoying the thrill.



Fig. 11 Scott Cawthon (2014), *Five Nights At Freddy's*

Looking back on to the origins of the 'Uncanny valley effect', it could explain why games such as the 'Five nights at Freddy's' series has become so popular over the years for what was initially a very simple indie horror game. Despite the characters being anthropomorphic animal robots, a 2011 study at UC San Diego showed a mismatch between the appearance of a humanoid robot and its non-human-like movements is what causes many to feel a sense of creepiness towards the machinery (psychneuro, 2015). So overall,

there are many elements that make horror in general appealing to many people and that these elements also apply to video game horror, explaining why horror is loved so much.

Conclusion

Through my research of my three chosen words, it has helped me come to a conclusion on what practice I should take in my third and final year on this course. With the information investigated, I have found that child characters and their designs can really affect how people react to the games. Similarly, Mood/atmosphere relies on similar aspects such as use of themes, style and use of sound. Horror in general is very popular and beloved to many people, especially in the gaming space. This has led me to come to this key question: What specific characters and elements enhance the horror game experience?



Fig. 12 Naughty Dog, Dark Horse, (2013), *The art of The Last Of Us*

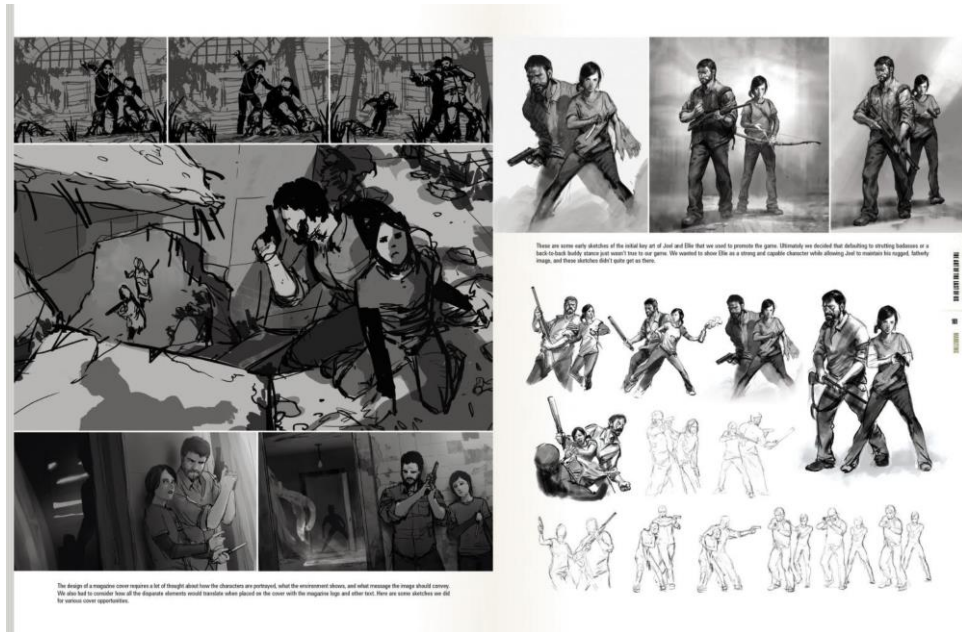


Fig. 13 Naughty Dog, Dark Horse, (2013), *The art of The Last Of Us*



Fig. 14 Tarsier Studios, (2021), *Little Nightmares II*

My Proposed practice-base project will consist of a concept art book based on a hypothetical horror game where the main protagonist are children, set in world filled with many horrors, challenges and enemies that they will face along their journey. The book will have the title of the game on the front cover and the inside will contain various pages filled concepts/developments of the characters and their designs and will roughly be lay out like

figs. 12. 13 and 14. This will include facial expressions and alternate clothes that they can potentially wear or find throughout the game. Background designs and props will be included along with the designs of the enemies they will encounter too.

Figures

Fig.2 -Bang, Molly. *Picture This: How Pictures Work*, (1991.)

Fig.3- Bang, Molly. *Picture This: How Pictures Work*, (1991.)

Fig.1- Berlin, Jonas Steinick. *Little Nightmares II*, (2021.)

Fig.10- Berlin, Jonas Steinick. *Little Nightmares II*, (2021.)

Fig.11- Cawthon, Scott. *Five Nights at Freddy's*, (2014.)

Fig.9- Killmonday Games. *Franbow*, (2016.)

Fig.12- Naughty Dog, and Dark Horse. *The Art of the Last of Us*, (2013.)

Fig 13- Naughty Dog, and Dark Horse. *The Art of the Last of Us*, (2013.)

Fig.6- Playdead. *LIMBO*, (2010.)

Fig.14- Studios, Tarsier. *Little Nightmares II*, (2017.)

Fig.4- Studios, Tarsier. *Six*, (2017.)

Fig.5- Sweeney, John. *The Last of Us*, (2013.)

Fig.7- Takan, Tomonori. *Resident Evil Village*, (2021.)

Fig.8- Takan, Tomonori. *Resident Evil Village*, (2021.)

Bibliography

Bang, M. (1991). *Picture this : how pictures work*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, p.18.

Blake, V. (2019). *Games of the Decade: The Last of Us is a masterclass in silent storytelling*.

Eurogamer.net. Available at: <https://www.eurogamer.net/games-of-the-decade-the-last-of-us-is-a-masterclass-in-silent-storytelling>.

Bradley, S. (2010). *Color Theory, The Color Wheel And Color Schemes*. [online] Vanseodesign. Available at: <https://vanseodesign.com/web-design/color-theory/>.

Braun, M. (2019). *Scientists identify possible source of the 'Uncanny Valley' in the brain*.

[online] University of Cambridge. Available at: <https://www.cam.ac.uk/research/news/scientists-identify-possible-source-of-the-uncanny-valley-in-the-brain> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Definition of ATMOSPHERE. (2018). In: *Merriam-webster.com*. [online] Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/atmosphere> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2023].

Definition of CHARACTER. (2009). In: *Merriam-webster.com*. [online] Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/character> [Accessed 2 Mar. 2023].

Definition of HORROR. (2019). In: *Merriam-webster.com*. [online] Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/horror> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2023].

Definition of MOOD. (2019). In: *Merriam-webster.com*. [online] Available at: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mood> [Accessed 12 Apr. 2023].

Freud, S. (2003). *The Uncanny*. Penguin Books Limited, p.224.

Hatfield, D. (2010). *Limbo Review: Hell is for children*. IGN. Available at:
<https://www.ign.com/articles/2010/07/19/limbo-review-3> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2023].

Jarrett, C. (2023). *Why do some people love horror films?* [online] BBC Science Focus Magazine. Available at: <https://www.sciencefocus.com/the-human-body/why-do-some-people-love-horror-films/> [Accessed 20 Apr. 2023].

Krampen, M. (2013). *Classics of semiotics*. Springer-Verlag New York, p.13.

Lewis, S. (2021). *The Meaning of Yellow in Horror*. [online] Slow Burn Horror. Available at:
<https://slowburnhorror.com/2021/11/05/the-meaning-of-yellow-in-horror/> [Accessed 3 Mar. 2023].

Merik, D. (2017). Dischord. *EDGE*, p.61.

Nieminen, M. (2017). *psychology in character design*. [online] p.37. Available at:
https://www.theseus.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/126784/MarikaNieminen_Thesis.pdf?sequence=1 [Accessed 18 Feb. 2023].

Noble, W. (2012). *Make that scene : setting, mood, and atmosphere*. The Write Thought, p.58.

Perse, E.M. (2017). *Media effects and society*. London New York Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, p.214.

psychneuro (2015). *Why Freddy Fazbear Freaks You Out*. [online] On Psychology and Neuroscience. Available at: <https://psych-neuro.com/2015/04/08/why-freddy-fazbear-freaks-you-out/#:~:text=Researches%20concluded%20that%20this%20was> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Studios, T. (2017). Dischord. *EDGE*, p.61.

Studios, T. (2021). *The Art of Little Nightmares II*. Bandai Namco Entertainment, p.1.

Su, H. (2011). *Alive character design : for game, animation and film : character design course by Haitao Su*. Harrow: Cypi, p.28.

Talajic, D. (2017). Hearts of Darkness. *EDGE*, p.63.

The British Library and Bowen, J. (2014). *The Gothic*. YouTube. Available at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNohDegnaQQ>.

Valentinelli, M. (2009). Game Fiction: Why It Works (and Why It Doesn't). *Apex Magazine*.

[online] Available at: <https://apex-magazine.com/nonfiction/game-fiction-why-it-works-and-why-it-doesnt/> [Accessed 21 Apr. 2023].

Vierra, E. (2022). *A look into the gore horror genre*. [online] Videomaker. Available at:

<https://www.videomaker.com/how-to/directing/film-history/a-look-into-the-gore-horror-genre/>.

Wolfgang von Goethe and Ruprecht, M. (1971). *Goethe's Theory of Colours*. London : Studio Vista, p.79.