

Shadows of Wuhan: The Aesthetic of Horror Videogames

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Abstract

This paper explores the design and conceptual aspects of "Shadows of Wuhan," a horror video game influenced by the literary perspectives of Bernard Perron, Clive Barker, and Souvik Mukherjee. Drawing inspiration from the fusion of fear and play, the narrative complexities of characters, and the art of storytelling in video games, our game ventures into a post-pandemic Wuhan, China. The protagonist, Lin Huowang, navigates a world transformed by a viral mutation, turning survivors into hybrids of humans and bats. Informed by Barker's narrative depth, Perron's insights into fear, and Mukherjee's exploration of storytelling elements, we delve into the conceptual framework and characteristics of 3D game environment design. The immersive realism, depth, and dynamic lighting of our environments contribute to world-building, creating a chilling atmosphere where the lines between humanity and monstrosity blur. The game's narrative intricacies, interactive elements, and user navigation align with the amalgamation of literary inspiration and 3D design principles. As players traverse the decaying city, the seamless transitions and textured landscapes tell a haunting story of survival and transformation. "Shadows of Wuhan" emerges as a testament to the transformative potential of horror gaming, pushing the boundaries of narrative depth and emotional engagement. This paper sheds light on the considerations behind the design choices, providing insights into the amalgamation of literary inspiration and 3D environment design principles, ultimately contributing to the evolving discourse on horror game innovation.

Keywords

Narrative Complexity, Fear and Play, Video Game Storytelling, Spatial Dualism, Emotional Impact, Familial Bonds, Investigative Gameplay, Supernatural Entities, Conceptual Framework.

Introduction

This paper delves into the conceptual aspects of designing a horror video game, drawing inspiration from literary insights provided by Bernard Perron and Clive Barker [1] in "Horror Video Games: Essays on the Fusion of Fear and Play," as well as Souvik Mukherjee's [2] exploration of storytelling in video games in "Video Games and Storytelling: Reading Games and Playing Books." The conceptual framework outlined herein serves as the foundation for the development of a unique horror gaming experience, with specific reference to the narrative complexities found in the reference games.

Our game narrative is influenced by the prototype character Ji Jinsheng from "Beat Ghosts" and the distinct world-building of "Eating Incense." Informed by Barker's and Perron's discussions on fear and play, our design aims to fuse these elements seamlessly, creating an immersive and emotionally charged horror experience. Mukherjee's insights into the art of storytelling in games guide our approach to weaving a narrative that transcends the conventional boundaries of fear and humanity.

The protagonist, Lin Huowang, mirrors Ji Jinsheng's leadership role in the Eight Family Generals, navigating the eerie landscape of Yuedian, Gushan District, Kaohsiung, Taiwan. Lin's tumultuous life, inspired by Barker's narrative depth, explores the emotional complexities of familial bonds and the impact of abandonment on the human psyche. The police's involvement in locating Lin's estranged mother posthumously, as referenced in "Beat Ghosts," introduces an investigative element, adding layers to the horror experience.

In "Eating Incense," the conceptual framework draws from Mukherjee's exploration of connecting and distinguishing between humans and ghosts. The game utilizes spatial separation as a thematic device, echoing Mukherjee's ideas on dualism in-game narratives. Lin's relationships with his ghostly brother and living mother, influenced by the dichotomy presented in "Eating Incense," add layers to the narrative, exploring promises fulfilled and the darker aspects of human nature.

This conceptual exploration aims to contribute to the evolving discourse on horror game design by synthesizing literary perspectives with the unique narrative elements found in our reference games. By integrating the insights provided by Perron, Barker, and Mukherjee, our game seeks to redefine the boundaries of fear and storytelling in the realm of video games, offering players a captivating and thought-provoking experience.

Set in the hauntingly atmospheric Yuedian, Gushan District, Kaohsiung, Taiwan, "Eating Incense" follows the journey of Lin Huowang, a character inspired by Ji Jinsheng, the leader of the Eight Family Generals. Lin's tumultuous life mirrors the struggles of his prototype, navigating a bumpy path of parental abandonment and relying on his veteran father for support. Lin's story takes a poignant turn after his death in 2017, as the police, in their quest to notify his family, uncover the whereabouts of his estranged mother.

The game intricately weaves the boundaries between the living and the dead, portraying a world where humans and ghosts coexist in two distinct realms yet share striking similarities. Lin's deceased brother, a ghost, becomes a poignant symbol of fulfilled promises, contrasting sharply with the morally questionable actions of his loving mother. The narrative unfolds against the backdrop of Kaohsiung's rich cultural tapestry, adding depth to the horror experience.

"Eating Incense" explores the complexities of human relationships, with a focus on the protagonist's camaraderie with good friends. The game's emotional core lies in the touching friendships formed amidst supernatural horrors. However, as players unravel the stories hidden behind these bonds, they discover that the true terror lies in the human nature concealed beneath seemingly trustworthy connections.

"Eating Incense" emerges as a testament to the fusion of fear and kinship within the horror gaming genre. This paper aims to shed light on the unique storytelling elements, cultural influences, and emotional depth embedded in the game, contributing to the ongoing discourse on the immersive and terrifying potential of video game narratives.

Conceptual and technical notes of Shadows of Wuhan

In your horror game project, creating immersive realism could involve designing environments that evoke a sense of dread and fear. Realistic lighting and detailed textures can heighten the tension, immersing players in a world that feels unsettlingly authentic. Utilizing 3D environments allows for the creation of layered and expansive spaces. This can be particularly effective in a horror game, where unexpected twists and turns in the environment contribute to a sense of unpredictability and suspense.

Implementing dynamic lighting in your horror game can play a pivotal role in setting the mood. Shadows and flickering lights can create an eerie atmosphere, enhancing the overall horror experience for players. Incorporating interactive elements in the 3D environments allows players to engage directly with the world. This could involve manipulating objects, solving puzzles, or triggering events, all of which contribute to the immersion and depth of the horror narrative.

Paying attention to high-resolution textures is crucial in a horror game. Detailed textures can bring out the horror elements in the environment, whether it's the decaying walls of a haunted mansion or the subtle nuances in the surroundings that heighten the sense of unease. Leveraging the 3D environments for environmental storytelling is key in a horror game. Every detail should contribute to the narrative, providing players with clues, hints, and a deeper understanding of the unsettling world they're exploring.

Smooth transitions between different areas of the game world can enhance the sense of continuity. In a horror game, this can be used to build suspense as players move seamlessly from one terrifying setting to another.

Ensuring your 3D environments are scalable is important for reaching a broader audience. Whether players are experiencing your horror game on high-end PCs or less powerful devices, the scalability of the environment ensures a consistent and engaging horror experience. Clear and intuitive design is crucial for guiding players through horror-filled environments. Effective navigation ensures that players can explore the world without frustration, maintaining a sense of suspense and fear. Maintaining a cohesive aesthetic is vital for a horror game's success. The visual elements of the 3D environments should align with the overall theme and tone, contributing to a unified and visually striking horror experience.

World-building: Shadows of Wuhan

Title: Shadows of Wuhan

Plot:

In the aftermath of a devastating pandemic that swept through Wuhan, China, a once-thriving city now stands as a haunting landscape. The virus, originally believed to be contained in bats, mutated unexpectedly, fusing human and bat DNA. Those who survived the initial outbreak now navigate a world where the boundaries between humanity and the creatures of the night blur.

As the protagonist, a survivor named Lin Huowang, awakens in the desolate city, it becomes evident that the virus has given rise to a new breed of beings – hybrids with both human and bat characteristics. These hybrids, now ruling the remnants of Wuhan, have established a complex society with its own rules and hierarchies.

Haunted by a mysterious past and driven by a desire for answers, Lin embarks on a perilous journey through the decaying city. Along the way, he encounters both allies and adversaries among the hybrids, each with their own stories of survival and transformation. As Lin delves deeper into the heart of Wuhan, he unravels the dark secrets behind the viral mutation and the enigmatic leaders orchestrating the hybrid society.

The game unfolds as a narrative-driven horror adventure, blending elements of survival and exploration. Players must navigate the eerie streets, abandoned buildings, and mutated landscapes, all while facing the constant threat of hybrid creatures and the remnants of a once-thriving city. The choices made by Lin during interactions with other survivors and hybrids shape the unfolding story, leading to multiple possible outcomes.

As Lin seeks to understand the origins of the viral mutation and grapples with his own transformation, Shadows of Wuhan explores themes of fear, survival, and the blurred lines between humanity and monstrosity in a post-pandemic world. The game promises a gripping narrative, atmospheric environments, and a sense of impending horror as players navigate the shadows of a city forever changed by the convergence of human and bat.

Final Considerations

The design and development of our horror video game, "Shadows of Wuhan," have been deeply influenced by the rich literary perspectives provided by Bernard Perron, Clive Barker, and Souvik Mukherjee. This paper has explored the conceptual aspects and characteristics of 3D game environment design, emphasizing its role in world-building within the context of our unique post-pandemic scenario in Wuhan, China. The fusion of fear and play, the interplay between humans and hybrids, and the immersive realism of our game contribute to an experience that goes beyond conventional horror gaming.

Informed by Barker's and Perron's insights, the narrative complexities of our protagonist, Lin Huowang, have been carefully crafted to evoke emotional responses and provoke player engagement. The dynamic lighting, detailed textures, and seamless transitions within the 3D environments amplify the horror elements, creating an immersive experience that aligns with Mukherjee's exploration of storytelling in video games.

"Shadows of Wuhan" stands as a testament to the transformative power of horror gaming, pushing the boundaries of fear and humanity in the aftermath of a viral pandemic. The game's environmental storytelling, interactive elements, and user navigation mechanisms contribute to the overall cohesion of the world-building endeavor, offering players a chilling and thought-provoking journey through the shadows of a city forever altered by the convergence of human and bat.

As the game aims to redefine the horror genre by embracing the complexities of our post-pandemic narrative, it contributes to the ongoing discourse on horror game design. The paper has provided insights into the considerations and intentions behind the design choices, shedding light on the amalgamation of literary inspiration and 3D environment design principles.

"Shadows of Wuhan" not only endeavors to terrify players but also invites them to ponder the deeper implications of a world where the boundaries between human and hybrid blur. The conceptual foundations laid out in this paper provide a framework for future discussions and innovations in horror game design, pushing the genre toward new heights of narrative depth, emotional engagement, and immersive world-building.

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References

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Author Biography

JiaAo YU, born in 2003 in Jiangsu Province, China, is currently a third-year undergraduate student in the Roy Ascott Studio Technoetic Arts advanced program in Shanghai. Yu is dedicated to integrating artistic expression with a profound concern for contemporary societal issues. A strong interest in these issues has led JiaAo Yu to expand his focus to themes such as trauma and family problems. Yu aims to draw attention to these crucial issues and present them in the form of a horror game. As a student of Technoetic Arts, Yu employs a multidisciplinary approach to convey messages and explore the interconnectedness of technology, art, society, and the mind. As JiaAo Yu progresses through the advanced program at Roy Ascott Studio, his work becomes a testament to the power of artistic expression in addressing pressing societal and family concerns, leaving a lasting impact at the intersection of art, human rights, and environmental responsibility.