

Factors of Fear and *Masochist's Humor*: In the middle of *The Evil Within* (2014)

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20220575 Jayeong Im

Highlights

In the survival horror genre, *The Evil Within* has uniquely incorporated narrow, maze-like maps and intricate traps to create elements of fun. Paradoxically, these elements satisfy the player's desire for self-determination and become a major motivator for gameplay. This mechanism is explained through the theory of masochism in this document.

Contents

1. Case Game
 - i. *The Evil Within*
 - ii. The success of survival horror games
2. Case Game Experience
 - i. Heroes
 - ii. Villains in Chapter 10: *The Craftsman's tools*
 - iii. Environments in Chapter 10:
The Craftsman's tools
 - iv. Game Playthrough in Chapter 10:
The Craftsman's tools
3. Analyzing
 - i. *Self-Determination Theory (SDT)*
 - ii. Interaction between players and horror element
 - iii. *Masochist's Humor*
 - iv. Conclusion
 - v. Limitations
4. Predicting
 - i. *The Evil Within 2*
 - ii. *The Evil Within 3* and *Ghostwire: Tokyo*
 - iii. Future of *The Evil Within* series
5. References



1.[Case Game] Introduce case game and write down the relevant background information about the case game, including the social and cultural context.

i. *The Evil Within*

The Evil Within (2014.10.13 released) is a survival horror TPS game developed by *Tango Gameworks*, where the player controls detective *Sebastian Castellanos* to survive in a gory world filled with strange creatures and uncover its secrets. The game requires the player to develop various strategies with different weapons

(explosives, matches, etc.), disarm traps, defeat enemies, and navigate a maze-like environment.

Due to these elements, *The Evil Within* progresses with a somewhat mysterious storyline and narrow gameplay. The developers wanted to constantly immerse players in the feeling of being trapped in a maze through narrative signs along with gameplay. While this report will not focus on narrative devices, a brief introduction will be provided. The main story, (which is finally revealed through DLC), remains vague even after the ending regarding why

Sebastian has to suffer in such a bizarre world and what the true nature of this world is.

Ruben Victoriano had an incomplete mental state due to the death of his older sister Laura when he was young and had been conducting unethical research. His goal was to resurrect his sister in the virtual world of STEM based on the human brain. He received support from the evil organization 'Mobius', but Mobius was not interested in Ruben's sister and continued to extract Ruben's brain, which was the key to STEM's locking mechanism and control of the virtual world. However, control of STEM was transferred to Ruvik (Ruben Victoriano), the owner of the brain, STEM became an uncontrollable world, and detective Sebastian Castellanos, who was manipulated by Mobius, became an experimental subject and turned hostile against Ruvik.

ii. The success of Survival horror games

The director of *The Evil Within*, *Shinji Mikami*, is a Japanese horror game designer who has a large fan base in the survival horror game genre. He is credited with establishing the survival horror genre with his game *Resident Evil*. In *Resident Evil*, players must fight mutated organisms using various weapons and means to survive in a contaminated city. The success of the *Resident Evil* series led to the release and success of many horror action games based on the survival element. *The Evil Within* was also born in this context, and interestingly, it is evaluated as the 'spiritual successor' to *Resident Evil4*, which was the last game in the *Resident Evil* series directed by *Shinji Mikami*.

So why has the survival horror genre, including *Resident Evil*, gained attention? The emphasis on procedural elements, which are different from traditional passive horror media, and the pursuit of stimulation more than traditional adventure action games are the appeal of the survival horror genre. According to research, users gave higher scores to gameplay immersion when horror elements were added to adventure-action games¹. In the later discussion, I will explore what desires the survival horror genre fulfills.

2.[Case Game Experience] Describe case game experience that you are interested in. Explain why you are interested in the case game experience (including your personal game experience)

Overall, it would not be an exaggeration to say that *The Evil Within* is a torture device designed specifically for *Sebastian*. It certainly persistently provides him with complex trials. Especially while playing Chapter 10: *The*

Craftsman's Tools, known for its difficulty, the traps seemed endless to the point where it made me shudder. As a result, the gloomy atmosphere encountered within the naturally formed tension of this enormous torture device is more impressive than in other survival horror genre games. The grotesque design of the enemy creatures adds a unique atmosphere that touches on various human pains.

Furthermore, I felt psychologically drawn in while playing, experiencing a sense of being continuously compelled forward. The more I immersed myself in the protagonist *Sebastian*, the more frustrated and tormented I became, yet I was still caught up in an indescribable thrill. Moreover, in a game where it is difficult to find a human form, the attractive protagonists stood out even more, and although they were fictional, my attachment to them grew, bringing a sense of relief when encountering them.

In the following paragraph, I will briefly introduce the character and Chapter 10 designs, and write about the emotions I felt and the reasons why they left a lasting impression.

i. Heros



Sebastian Castellanos / the protagonist of the game, is the only playable character in the story. He appears as a bulky middle-aged detective of South American descent with a thick beard and hair. Although his appearance showcases his physical abilities and proficiency in firearms, his dark expression and disheveled appearance were designed to reflect his psychological state, highlighting his human side.

Joseph Oda / *Sebastian's* colleague and a Japanese-American character with a neat appearance, wearing

¹ Li, Jin Jun, Cho, Dong Min. (2021). Effect of the Horror Complex Elements of AVG Zombie Game on Player Immersion. The Korean Society of Science & Art, 39 (4), 355-366.

glasses and a slender build, responsible for the logical and cool-headed aspects of the team. His actions and words are calm.

Juli Kidman / American detective heroine who wears a t-shirt and jeans, appearing to fit the stereotype of an American heroine. However, her personality and true identity are difficult to discern. It is later revealed that she is a Mobius agent, and as an agent, *Kidman* gives off an elite impression.

ii. Villains in Chapter 10: *The craftsman’s tools*



Haunted / the basic enemy in *The Evil Within*. They at least have a human-like appearance and are the most basic victims of the *STEM* experiment, synchronized with *Ruvik*.

Alterego / when the dominant personality of a patient with an antisocial personality disorder is expressed outwardly when connected to *STEM*.

Description of Body parts	Items	Appearance
Scars, mutilation, multiple heads	axe, gun, knife, crossbow, etc.	naked, police, prisoner, civilians, etc.
Horror conveyed while playing		
Fear of bodily harm and mutilation, transformation	Hostility	The widespread inhumane experiments

Trauma / a boss created from the trauma experienced by *Ruben* during his childhood, where he was subjected to his father's oppressive behavior and forced religious practices. When damaged, the suppressed cross is released, and it attacks by swinging chains.



Description of Body parts	Items	Appearance
Scars Penetrated wounds	Cross Chains Large nails	naked
Horror conveyed while playing		
Fear of body harm	Transcendent pain Forced martyrdom	shame



Laura / a creature that embodies *Ruben's* grief over the death of his sister. It is characterized by a combination of the form of a maiden ghost and a spider. Since *Laura's* sister died in a fire, she is covered in burn scars. She can move through space and kills instantly upon contact.

Description of Body parts	Items	Appearance
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Burns, body structures similar to spiders, long hair	Long Fingernails	naked
Horror conveyed while playing		
Fear of bodily transformation Traditional Eastern Horror	Traditional Eastern Horror	Shame



Amalgam Alpha / a giant creature created from the anger of *Ruvik* and his experimental subjects. It kills instantly upon contact.

Description of Body parts	Items
Deformed bodily combination	Chains Torture devices
Horror conveyed while playing	
Fear of deformed bodies Helplessness in the face of the enormity	Hostility

iii. Environments in Chapter 10: *The Craftsman's tools*

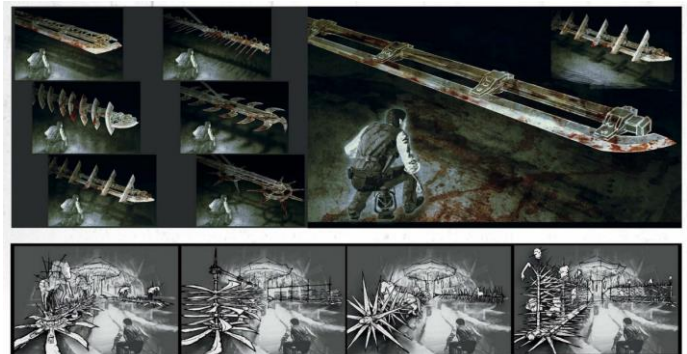
Space in *The Evil Within* is typically a place where light is blocked, and it is primarily composed of underground indoor areas. Sometimes, there are places so distorted that it is impossible to understand the original intent of the space, known as Horror Zones in the game.

Narrow Space	Dark Space	Dirty Space
Cellar	Cracks	Parking lot
Gas chamber		Incinerator

² The term refers to a trend in some horror films that depict extreme violence, nudity, torture, dismemberment, sadism, and other graphic and

Sewer, pipes, psychiatric ward, basement
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Among the various elements in *The Evil Within*, the traps are particularly prominent in Chapter 10. The trap mechanisms and their scale are so huge and unimaginable that they maximize discomfort.



Appearance	Object	Material
1900s Abandoned fallacy	Iron fence Rotating saw blade Rotating knife blade Spring trap Basic electrical device Gas valve Heating wire Incinerator	Metallic Rusted Rudimentary Bloodstains
Horror conveyed while playing		
Covered up crimes <i>Torture-porn</i> ² -like-space	Confusion	Torture Oldness Execution

iv. Game Playthrough in Chapter 10: *The Craftsman's tools*

Summarization of the gameplay flow of Chapter 10. As a longtime fan of the game, I was able to have this experience because I knew the characteristics of the game creatures like how they are weak against certain types of damage.

In the first section, the goal is to find a way to escape from a circular map with a rotating giant blade (instant death trap) while avoiding tripwire traps and fighting against *Haunteds*. The recommended play style is long-range sniping and luring the enemies to be cut by the giant blade.

In the second section, the player must find a way to escape a narrow underground room filled with rotating saw traps while being chased by two *Traumats*. Recommended play style is avoiding and using explosive bolts.

disturbing elements. It originated from a review by film critic Eli Roth, who referred to *Hostel* (2005) as "torture porn."

In the third section, the player must fight against Laura in a narrow and vertical incinerator and pipeline. Various gas devices can be operated to damage *Laura*, but the player can also catch on fire. Closed gas incineration chambers (instant death trap) appear intermittently, and sometimes the player must run from Laura while not avoiding tripwire traps, damaging himself. Recommended play style is evasion.

In the fourth section, *Amalgam Alpha* appears in the underground parking lot. It cannot be assassinated and has the ability to remove obstacles, making it difficult to deal with. Recommended play style is using the large size to hide under pillars and snipe with shock bolts. It is an unavoidable creature.

If you play the game without knowing these details, the maps can be quite challenging. Even though I thought I knew the mechanics well, I died repeatedly and took two days to finish Chapter 10. When the player is caught in a trap, a death cutscene appears, and the map, filled with corpses and darkness, can be quite painful to play. However, on the other hand, these experiences stimulated unknown emotions and created a sense of fun, making it an impressive chapter. I will analyze what were these emotions later.

3.[Analyzing] Analyze the case game experience using the concepts, theories, and frameworks discussed in the class.

i. Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Before we begin, what discussion points can be obtained by applying SDT theory to *The Evil Within*? *Self-Determination Theory* (SDT) is a theory used to understand human motivation and growth, characterized by focusing on human natural needs. According to SDT, human satisfaction, and achievement can be maximized when promoting internal motivation. The three key elements of internal motivation are 'relatedness' and 'competence', and 'autonomy'. These needs determine the reason and way for an individual's behavior. In other words, by looking at the needs highlighted in SDT, we can understand 'the process by which narrow maps and traps are fun and motivating to play'.

First, relatedness needs are the human desire to form and maintain relationships with others. This is satisfied through interaction with others, a sense of belonging, empathy, and support. In *The Evil Within* and other survival horror genre games, sections that can rescue colleagues or family members in the middle of the game and fight together appear in common. A fellow detective *Joseph*

appears in chapter 6 of *The Evil Within* and a fellow detective *Kidman* appears in chapter 11, continuing emotional interaction with the main character. If so, it can be seen that survival horror games generally give people feel of satisfaction and fun by satisfying relationship needs in these sections. However, it is unlikely that this can explain the reason for the existence and effect of a narrow map full of fear elements.

Second, the desire for competence is the desire for humans to demonstrate their abilities and capabilities and feel a sense of achievement. This means that humans use their abilities and capabilities to accomplish difficult tasks and feel a sense of achievement. Survival horror genre games, including *The Evil Within*, commonly include the process of strategically killing enemies, the process of escaping a crisis, and the process of collecting items as a medium for achieving those desires. However, it still seems difficult for this process to explain the elements of *The Evil Within's* characteristic game design. Due to a narrow map and supernatural creatures, sometimes the gameplay of *The Evil Within* is un-fight-able (the player must avoid Sentinel, Laura, and The Keeper to escape and grow. It is recommended that most creatures quietly handled in the form of concealment and hiding.) It is induced in a way that avoids insurmountable traps, and it is acting in a somewhat ambiguous direction to meet the desire for competence and achievement.

Third, the desire for autonomy is the desire to freely choose and act. This is a desire to allow humans to set goals on their own and pursue them. If it is not for the previous two desires, it is necessary to consider whether the game design of *The Evil Within* satisfies the desire for self-determination. At first glance, the element of *The Evil Within* is undermining the player's autonomy and thus fails to satisfy the desire as opposed to the direction of our discussion. The game is causing psychological distress, instilling a situation where you can't do anything and physiological fear. But then why does the player want to face this situation on their own? So, isn't the fear from this core fear factor actually fulfilling the player's desire for self-determination? (Similar discussions include the *paradox of fear*³ concept, which has been covered in many pieces of literature.) In this report, I would like to address this question by introducing *Deleuze's interpretation of masochism*.

ii. Interaction between players and horror element

How does a fear emotion work? Before thinking about it, it is necessary to point out whether the player felt scared.

³ This is a discussion in philosophy about why we seek out horror films or other media that elicit unpleasant and difficult-to-endure emotions.

The feeling of fear in the fictional fear element is being explained by various solutions to the puzzle proposed by *Radford*, and intuitively, it is considered natural. For the easy discussion, let's assume that all three premises of the following *Radford puzzle* are true in some way, and ignore the somewhat irrationality of our emotional responses discussed in this puzzle.

- (1) We only feel about it if we believe that the object of our emotion is real, that is, it exists.
- (2) We know that a fictional character or situation is not real, that is, it does not exist. Therefore, we do not believe that a fictional character or situation is real, that is, it exists.
- (3) We feel for a fictional character or situation.

Since the above premise is assumed to be true, it is a basic proposition and will not be denied that the player feels fear while playing *The Evil Within* in our discussion. (If denied, it will flow to another discussion.)

iii. *Masochist's Humor*

Interestingly, according to *Masochist's Humor*, which comes from *Deleuze's anti-psychoanalysis interpretation of Mazohism*, a Masochist's feeling of pain and discomfort from imaginary stimuli leads to an expansion of psychological autonomy, and thus can be enjoyed. The process of expanding autonomy is not a strange process for masochists. "*Masochist, who reverses the logic of his father's law, which threatens to be punished in return, to the logic that he was punished first, is now okay to sin.*" (Chon Hyun-soo, 2013) The masochistic humor that reverses punishment (pain) and pleasure can be understood as a form of self-realization, by enduring pain and nullifying punishment. Then, it can be considered that the core horror factors of *The Evil Within* satisfy the player's self-determination drive through masochistic emotions.

iv. Conclusion

Through examining SDT, we have discussed how the traps in *The Evil Within* can act as motivation and have explored the fulfillment of the need for autonomy through the interpretation of masochism. As the core horror factors fulfill the need for autonomy through masochistic emotions, they can function as internal motivation, continuously engaging and delighting players in playing *The Evil Within*.

v. Limitation

However, the limitation of this discussion is that we cannot know which players of *The Evil Within* share masochistic emotions, so it is ambiguous whether psychological autonomy is actually being expanded. While my personal experience can be explained in the above manner, for a more general discussion, it may be more

appropriate to discuss the reward theory which is used in psychology to resolve the paradox of fear.

4. [Predicting] Based on core aspects of case game, imagine the case game experience evolving in the future. What might it look like if it continues to develop in the future?

i. *The Evil Within 2*

The Evil Within 2 (2017) is the sequel to *The Evil Within* developed by *Tango Gameworks*, and it also uses the same *STEM* system as the first game. The reason for mentioning *The Evil Within 2* is that it was designed to be the opposite of what the maniac players of *The Evil Within* considered important. In *The Evil Within 2*, the linear open-world town of Union appears within the *STEM* system. Players fight against creatures in expansive spaces, leading to confusion during gameplay. The existence of enemies that could appear at any time and place was interesting, but it reduced the feeling of being trapped and oppressed which was a core aspect of the first game and instead focused on the action element. The difficulty and sense of horror were also reduced compared to the first game, which had received a lot of criticism from maniac players. This is probably due to the fact that the narrow spaces and bizarre torture devices that induced feelings of oppression were not present in *The Evil Within 2*. However, the creature designs in *The Evil Within 2* have also received praise like the first game from maniac players, which suggests that the developers understand that core aspect well. Fortunately, in some scenes, the giant creatures were able to provide a sense of helplessness when they appeared.

ii. *The Evil Within 3 and Ghostwire: tokyo*

We should also consider a possible third game in the series. *The Evil Within 3* has not been announced, but *Ghostwire: Tokyo* (2022), a survival horror game developed by *Tango Gameworks*, was revealed that it was planned to be *The Evil Within 3*. When playing *Ghostwire: Tokyo*, I saw a lot of similarities with *The Evil Within 2* in terms of game systems. It was also a game that was made for the open-world system, and *Tango Gameworks* seemed to have no intention of incorporating the core aspect that stimulates masochistic emotions, which I have emphasized.

Of course, we, players, must respect *Tango Gameworks'* choices, even if it is regrettable. The elements that induce oppression, which I claim to be the core aspect of *The Evil Within*, are not elements that everyone praises. Think about it: what if a player doesn't have masochistic emotions? The starting point would be different, and the game would ultimately become frustrating and tiring for someone. Reducing such divisive elements can certainly (while not helping a game find its unique place) help it survive.

iii. Future of *The Evil Within* series

It's just a weak guess, but it seems that *Tango Gameworks* is considering using *The Evil Within* IP again, possibly because *Ghostwire: Tokyo*, which was an attempt to create a new IP, failed to succeed. Personally, I would like to see more closed spaces and torture devices, like in *The Evil Within* 1, but as mentioned above, *Tango Gameworks* seems to be focusing on minimizing divisive elements and appealing to the creatures and characters in the *STEM* world through an open-world format. They will also likely pay close attention to the creature designs that have received consistent praise. With further research, they might also be able to extract the core aspect of oppression and torture from the creatures. For example, the Quell creature in *The Evil Within* was a collective organism that was able to capture the essence of oppression as a single creature. I hope they consider this direction in the long run. Anyway, regardless of what *The Evil Within* becomes, I welcome it because I already love *STEM* world itself.

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